KINONIK

DUCK SOUP (1933)

WEDNESDAY November 4th 7PM

SATURDAY November 7th 2pm / 7pm





The polls close Tuesday night. Whatever the count looks like on Wednesday, we'll meet it the way the sharpest people of 1933 did: by laughing at whoever's in charge. Two films from that year, two kinds of laughter; one so cynical it disappointed its own studio, the other so joyful the French government banned it for twelve years.

In **Duck Soup**, a wealthy widow agrees to bail out the bankrupt nation of Freedonia on one condition: Rufus T. Firefly runs it. Groucho takes the job, promptly insults the ambassador next door, and marches the country into war over his own wounded pride, while Chico and Harpo spy for both sides and torment a lemonade vendor for sport. In a nutshell: the house buys the government, hires a clown to front it, and acts surprised when the shooting starts. Leo McCarey, who cut his teeth on Laurel and Hardy, gave the brothers their tightest picture, mirror scene and all. Mussolini, so the story goes, banned it as a personal insult; Groucho insisted they were just four Jews trying to get a laugh, in the year Hitler took power.

Jean Vigo's father, the anarchist Miguel Almereyda, died in a French prison cell in 1917, officially by his own hand; his son was packed off to boarding school under a false name. Fifteen years later, sick with tuberculosis and nearly broke, Vigo found a backer for **Zéro de Conduite** and filmed the school as he remembered it: a tiny, fussy headmaster, masters who spy on the dormitory, and a mark of "zero for conduct" that cancels your Sunday. Four boys plot a revolt and pull it off. Their pillow fight turns into a slow-motion procession through drifting feathers, under a cue Maurice Jaubert had played backwards and then reversed, so it floats forward like a hymn from somewhere else. The Interior Ministry banned the film as a threat to public order until 1945; Vigo died the year after it premiered, at 29.

The Marxes knock down the ballroom and walk off; they never pretend to have a better idea. Vigo's boys do. They make a plan, keep faith with each other, and run their flag up over the roof. Two raspberries from 1933: one for the morning after, and one for everything after that.

Duck Soup (Leo McCarey, 68 min) + Zéro de Conduite (Jean Vigo, 44 min) · on 16mm

Zéro de Conduite • In French with English Subtitles