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JULY 16,

The Phantom of the Opera (1925)

USA

As absolute a contrast as could be found in humanity to Colleen Moore's "Sally" is Eric, the Phantom, played by our double-jointed friend, Lon Chaney.

An ambitious spectacle adapted from Gaston Leroux's story, a weird and morbid tale, it is nevertheless an intensely entertaining picture. Lon Chaney seems to delight in such horrible roles as the Hunchback of Notre Dame and the Phantom. Certainly, there is no one on the screen who can play such roles so convincingly.

There is not a ray of sunlight, a spark of tender passion or a real vivid comedy relief in the whole production and yet the atmosphere of mystery, the tense coil of suspense, the morbid quality of the story, the lavishness of the whole production is such we pronounce excellent screen entertainment. In his production, Rupert Julian has carefully avoided extremeness in his depiction of horror and for this he deserves great credit.

It is a story of a great musician cursed with a face so hideous that he is a monster. He haunts the labyrinthine cellars of the Grand Opera and wreaks his monstrous vengeance on managers and performers who dispute his unseen domination. Christine Dane (Mary Philbin) has the misfortune to inspire his love. She has never seen him but he has made a great singer of her and demands her love as his reward. This terrible menace keeps Christine and the man she loves, Raoul de Chagny (Norman Kerry), apart. Foiled, the musician brings death and destruction but, in a series of exciting episodes, Christine is rescued. The monster plays his own requiem and dies.

[Photoplay, May 1925]

The work of reconstructing France has gone on in Universal Studios at a prodigious rate. Two years ago, a considerable portion of Paris was rebuilt for use in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and now the remaining districts of that illustrious city are added in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

If Carl Laemmle had only extended his vast resources on the devastated areas of France itself instead of in Southern California, there would be no trace of the Great War left.

The Phantom of the Opera is not nearly so magnificent in scale, nor so stirring in theme, as *The Hunchback* but, as represented on the screen, it is a more consistently thrilling story. It is spook melodrama at its wildest and weirdest and it is beautifully done.

The scene is the Paris Opera House and the principal character is a shadow who doesn't turn out to be Lon Chaney until the story is almost over. This strange phantom is employed as a threat, and a darned potent one he is, too; he terrorises the opera house from property room to gallery and maintains an exceedingly taut state of suspense. When he finally emerges from the shadows, the initial strain breaks and the story develops into an orgy of wild, blood-curdling action.

Rupert Julian's direction is excellent; he has emphasised his pictures rather than his drama and has thus achieved an optical illusion which could never have been gained by any direct appeal to the intelligence.
[Robert E. Sherwood *Life* , September 3, 1925]

Director: Rupert Julian; production: Universal Studios; running time 101 mins.