Silent film masterpiece screens with live music at Astor

Since 1895 when the Lumière brothers used live piano music to accompany the first-ever public film screening, music has been an integral part of the cinema experience. From then through the age of ‘talkies’ to today’s computer-generated films, music has remained an essential part of the film-making process.

Now Perth composer Christopher de Groot is giving a modern musical twist to a classic French silent film. Ménilmontant, a 1927 silent film by Dimitri Kirsanoff, will be screened in the beautiful art deco setting of Mt Lawley’s Astor Cinema on Saturday 8 August at 8pm, accompanied by the 19-piece Annexia Ensemble performing an original score by de Groot.

Hailed as a striking, disturbing masterpiece, Ménilmontant follows the lives of two young sisters who witness the brutal murder of their parents in the family home. Fleeing to Paris, the sisters struggle to survive in the seedy neighbourhood of Ménilmontant.

“Kirsanoff’s experimental film-making style brilliantly serves the tragic nature of this story,” says de Groot, who is currently completing his Masters at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. “I’ve tried to create an evocative and moving musical accompaniment to the film by using manipulated found sounds and electronics in combination with the live musicians.”

Annexia Ensemble, formed by de Groot this year, combines some of Perth’s finest and most diverse musicians including violinist Ashley Arbuckle (former concert-master of the London Symphony Orchestra), accordionist Cathie Travers, percussionist Callum Moncrieff and a host of other talented musicians.

The Ménilmontant screening is the latest venture for de Groot who, in addition to his original compositions for ensembles and orchestras, is garnering accolades as a composer of film soundtracks. De Groot won the award for Best Original Soundtrack Composer at the 2007 Perth International Film Festival for the student short film Party for One and was the recipient of the 2008 Tura New Music Commissioning Prize. This year, he won a 2009 West Australian Screen Award for Best Original Soundtrack for his score to the feature film The Director’s Cut.

“Chris de Groot is a Western Australian composer who represents the new breed: a jazz and classical background, moving into film and electronic music – Chris’s music is exciting, interesting and rewarding,” says Cat Hope, Lecturer in Classical Music (Composition) at WAAPA.

Performance Information: Ménilmontant
Saturday 8 August at 8.00pm. Astor Cinema, 659 Beaufort St, Mt Lawley. Tickets are $25 flat fee. Bookings through WAAPA Box Office on 9370 6636.

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For further information, interviews or photo opportunities, please contact:
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