

BACKGROUND

A chronicle of the trial of Jeanne d'Arc on charges of heresy, and the efforts of her ecclesiastical jurists to force Jeanne to recant her claims of holy visions.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

"You cannot know the history of silent film unless you know the face of Renee Maria Falconetti. In a medium without words, where the filmmakers believed that the camera captured the essence of characters



through their faces, to see Falconetti in Dreyer's "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1928) is to look into eyes that will never leave you. Falconetti (as she is always called) made only this single movie. "It may be the finest performance ever recorded on film," wrote Pauline Kael. She was an actress in Paris when she was seen on the stage of a little boulevard theater by Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968), the Dane who was one of the greatest early directors. It was a light comedy, he recalled, but there was something in her face that struck him: "There was a soul behind that facade." He did screen tests without makeup, and found what he sought, a woman who embodied simplicity, character and suffering."

Roger Ebert

'One of three silent movies featured in Sight & Sound's latest poll of the 10 greatest pictures of all time, The Passion of Joan of Arc was made in France by the Danish master Carl Theodor Dreyer. To play the 19-year-old "Maid" he chose the 35-year-old Renée Falconetti, a French stage star specialising in light comedy. In keeping with his devotion to realism and austerity, his screenplay was based largely on a contemporary transcript of Joan's trial for heresy that concluded with her execution in 1431. Carefully framed in claustrophobic settings, the picture is most notable for its close-ups, though Dreyer insisted on a whole town being built to represent medieval Rouen. This was Falconetti's only major film, and over a period of a year under Dreyer's direction (a combination of cruelty and patience) her extraordinarily expressive face made for one of the greatest, most harrowing screen performances.'

Philip French

BLOGS, PODCASTS AND ARTICLES

PODCASTS

- **Criterion Cast Episode 3: Carl Theodor Dreyer's The Passion Of Joan Of Arc**
<http://criterioncast.com/podcast/episode-3-the-passion-of-joan-of-arc>
- **Flixwise Episode 9: The Passion of Joan of Arc**
<http://flixwise.com/2014/05/13/episode-9-the-passion-of-joan-of-arc/>

BLOGS/ARTICLES

- **The Criterion Contraption #62: The Passion of Joan of Arc (Matthew Dessem)**
<http://criterioncollection.blogspot.com/2006/11/62-passion-of-joan-of-arc.html>

RECOMMENDED FURTHER WATCHING

The Trial of Joan of Arc, Robert Bresson

The Trial of Joan of Arc is Bresson's version of Joan of Arc's tragic story. Released 34 years after Dreyer's silent masterpiece, the two versions share many properties, but are also vastly different. Both films are black and white depictions of the same historical event, and even both use the exact words recorded from Jeanne's trial. However, Bresson aims for a minimalist and subtle aesthetic, in stark contrast to Dreyer's

theatrical and 'grotesque' style. *The Trial* makes for an extremely interesting comparative viewing with Dreyer's silent masterpiece.

Ordet, Carl Theodor Dreyer

One of three Dreyer films to be included in Sight & Sound's top 50 greatest films of all time, *Ordet*, like *the Passion of Joan of Arc*, explores the limits of religious devotion. The film is based around a family in rural Denmark, in which a devout widower must balance his faith with his family and community's happiness. Like most of Dreyer's filmography, *Ordet* has a spiritual quality that makes for an emotionally intense viewing.

Man with a Movie Camera, Dziga Vertov

Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* is, along with *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, one of the most influential silent films of all time. Blurring the lines between fiction and fantasy, this experimental documentary provides a historical document about Russian life in 1929 whilst simultaneously exploring the medium of cinema.

