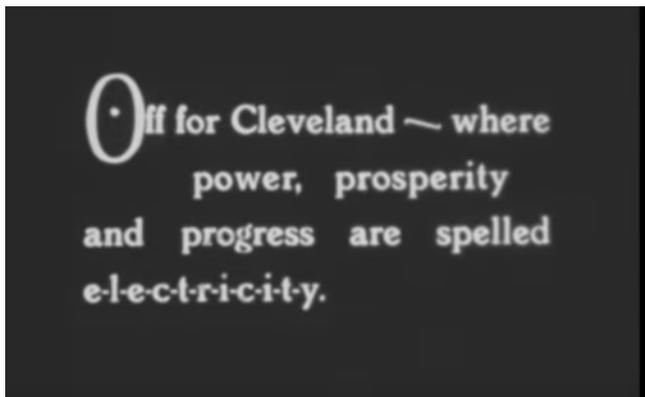


**Cleveland Silent Film Festival 3:  
*Heart of Cleveland* (1924) &  
*Man With a Movie Camera* (1929, Sept. 8)**

by Daniel Hathaway



The third of four evenings of soundless cinema presented by the Cleveland Silent Film Festival featured a charming industrial propaganda piece and an exuberant compendium of filming and editing techniques, both from the 1920s and both screened with live underscores by the excellent and indefatigable Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra.

Now in its second season, the Silent Film Festival has obviously attracted a following. The crowd gathered on Friday evening September 8 in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art so far exceeded expectations that attendees were asked to recycle their programs for the Saturday screening.



*The Heart of Cleveland* was commissioned by the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company and produced by Chicago's Rothacker Film Manufacturing Co. in 1924 at the height of the city's industrial development.

Two farm children living off the grid are flown to the big city by

a friendly pilot and shown the wonders of power generation and distribution by a CEI executive, and the household application of electricity by the pilot's sister, who has all the available mod cons at her disposal. (The aerial scenes enroute to the city are breathtaking.)



The children return to the farm, which is soon to be transformed by electricity, a subject about which the boy has won an essay contest. They learn about that while listening to the radio at the dinner table, and a visit to the kitchen finds the mother proudly announcing that she cooked the whole meal using electricity.

The 29-minute film and its characters are blissfully unaware of the future consequences of rampant industrialization.



Colorado's Mont Alto Orchestra, repurposed by Rodney Sauer from a Ragtime and Tango ensemble specifically to accompany silent film, provided beautifully played, period-sounding music that fitted so seamlessly with this brief industrial tour that you often forgot there were live musicians onstage.

Mont Alto had "a long blow" ahead of them in the 68-minute Soviet film, *Man With a Movie Camera*, released in January of 1929, but before that, Sauer had a big problem

to solve. Although director Dziga Vertov had made extensive notes about the character of music and when it should happen, there was no actual score to play from. So Sauer turned to popular music from the period and arranged a brilliant set of pieces for his ensemble to play.

Violinist Britt Swenson, cellist David Short, clarinetist Brian Collins, and trumpeter Dawn



Kramer often sounded like twice their number in full arrangements, and nailed some impressively virtuosic solos besides. At one point, Sauer switched convincingly to the accordion for an episode of ethnic folk music.

The film itself is a non-stop collection of vignettes of Soviet life randomly captured by the man with the movie camera (Vertov's brother Mikhail Kaufman) and

amusingly edited by Vertov's wife (Yelizaveta Svilova), much of it filmed in Ukraine. Its zaniness might have been the model for Godfrey Reggio's 1982 film, *Koyaanisqatsi*, with its famous Philip Glass score and cinematography by Ron Fricke.

Engaging as it is, *Man With a Movie Camera* begins to repeat itself two-thirds of the way through. How many urban crowd scenes with criss-crossing street cars and beach scenes of workers on holiday trying desperately to have a (drunken) good time can you take in one sitting? Some of the best moments occurred when Sauer's music thinned to a single thread along with the images onscreen.



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