



THE BIG PARADE

MGM 1925

Directed By King Vidor

Cast

James Apperson... John Gilbert
Melisande... Renée Adorée
Mr Apperson... Hobart Bosworth
Mrs Apperson... Claire McDowell
Justyn Reed... Claire Adams
Harry... Robert Ober
Bull... Tom O'Brien
Slim... Karl Dane



Original story... Laurence Stallings
Scenario... Harry Behn
Story... Laurence Stallings
Photography... John Arnold
Art direction... Cedric Gibbons,
James Basevi,
Editor... Hugh Wynn
Titles... Joseph W. Farnham



Duration: 138 minutes plus interval
Projection speed: variable
Aperture: Movietone



Score by Carl Davis
(45 players)



LIVE CINEMA

THE BIG PARADE

The Big Parade was not the first anti-war film but it was the first American film to show war through the eyes of ordinary people. 'I wanted to make an honest war picture,' recalled director King Vidor. 'Until then, they'd all been phoney, glorifying officers and warfare. There hadn't been a single American picture showing the war from the viewpoint of ordinary soldiers and privates, not one that was really anti-war.' The film's writer, Laurence Stallings, had been a marine and had lost a leg in the war.

When America enters the war in 1917, Jim Apperson enlists, leaving his comfortable middle class home for the battlefields of France. He makes friends with Bull and Slim and, despite their differing backgrounds, the three become inseparable. In France, he falls for a local girl, Mélisande, but leaves her when his division moves up to the front. An interminable battle leaves Bull and Slim dead and Jim wounded. In hospital, he learns that Mélisande's village has been destroyed. Desperate to find her, he escapes but collapses and is invalided home. Instead of a hero's welcome he finds he no longer fits in with his old friends. Bitter and disillusioned he returns to France in the hope of finding Mélisande and starting life a new.

Vidor hired two ex-soldiers as technical advisers. No expense was spared in making the film. One sequence involved three thousand men, two hundred trucks and a squadron of aeroplanes. When it didn't turn out as Vidor planned, he ordered a retake. Vidor used a metronome to give tempo to a scene in which soldiers inch their way through a wood crawling with enemy snipers. Every move, every gunshot, every death was on the steady beat of the metronome. 'They thought I had gone completely mad,' recalled Vidor. 'One of them asked if he was in some bloody ballet. I didn't say so at the time, but that is exactly what it was – a bloody ballet, a ballet of death.'

Despite the huge battle sequences, it was John Gilbert's performance as Jim that dominated the film and is considered one of the finest of the silent screen. In a memorable scene, Gilbert is trapped in a shell hole with a German whom he has wounded in revenge for the death of his friends. He and his enemy share a cigarette. The scene was copied five years later in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

The film went on to break box office records, and played for two years continuously, receiving rave reviews. But the highest praise came from ex-soldiers. 'This is no picture,' said one. 'This is the real thing.' Carl Davis' score echoes the film's authenticity by using French and American popular songs throughout. But the score's most striking characteristic is its expressiveness. The fusion of film and score is at its most astonishing in the film's most emotional sequences: the departure of the army for the front, the advance on to the field of battle and Jim's return to