



The Crowd

M-G-M 1928

Directed by King Vidor

CAST

John Sims James Murray

Mary Eleanor Boardman

Bert Bert Roach

Jane Estelle Clark

Jim Daniel G. Tomlinson

Screenplay King Vidor, John V. A.
Weaver, Harry Behn

Photography Henry Sharp

Editor Hugh Wynn

Titles Joe Farnham

Settings Cedric Gibbons,
Arnold Gillespie

Duration: 103 minutes
Projection speed: variable
Aperture : Sound Academy

Score by Carl Davis (45 players)



LIVE CINEMA

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Reviewing *The Crowd* in 1928, Photoplay magazine said, 'No picture is perfect, but this comes as near to reproducing reality as anything you have ever witnessed.' Escapism was the name of the game in Hollywood, but in the late 1920s the head of MGM, the most glamorous production company in the world, saw fit to invest some of their profit in an uncommercial picture. In contrast to his smash hit, *The Big Parade*, a war epic, King Vidor focused on a common man and his humdrum existence in the big city.

John Sims was born on Independence Day and from an early age bragged he had 'a line on something big.' He gets a job as a clerk. He marries Mary and they honeymoon in Niagara. So far so wonderful, but back in the city and living on John's meagre salary, the young couple's life is confined and stultifying. It is enlivened by the birth of their two children but shattered irrevocably by the loss of their little girl. The real pain of this tragedy cuts through the deadening roar of the city and John is incapable of blocking it out. His life spirals downward...

Rather than choose an established star to play the lead, Vidor chose an actor from a line of extras, James Murray. Much of the film was made on location on the streets of New York, Vidor filming real life with hidden cameras. In addition to this realism, Vidor experiments with German expressionism creating the soulless office and menacing maternity ward using exaggerated scale. Rhythmic montages express the dehumanisation of modern life and a brief interlude of sheer fun at Coney Island. The camera itself becomes mobile, swooping up skyscrapers, over the heads of the rush-hour crowd and riding with the actors down a fairground slide. It plays a part in the film's ambiguous ending: John's little family are seen having fun in a vaudeville audience. The camera retreats, abandoning them to their future as part of the crowd.

For his score Carl Davis has augmented the usual orchestral ensemble to include jazz elements which enable him to reproduce the Dixieland sound of music in the 20s. A New Yorker himself, Davis emphasises the alienation of big city life, and uses a soulful trumpet to echo the chasms between tall buildings.