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## MUSIDORA

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A complete artist (music hall, literature, painting, etc.), pioneering filmmaker, muse of the Surrealists and unforgettable Irma Vep, Musidora became the accomplice of Henri Langlois (a great admirer of Feuillade's films) and worked at his side in enriching La Cinémathèque française, joining the Cinémathèque's 'Historical Research Commission' in 1943. Thanks to her numerous acquaintances in the profession, she contacted and brought together cinema pioneers and, with the help of historians such as Georges Sadoul and Jean Mitry, helped in collecting their precious testimonies, sometimes even convincing them to donate their archives. She also ran the press office of La Cinémathèque française from 1946 up until her death.

Initially an actor at Gaumont, Jacques Feyder very quickly switched to directing. In 1916, he carried out a curious exercise in style, *Heads...and Women Who Use Them*, before embarking on shooting a serial in four episodes, *Le Pied qui étreint*. A pastiche of *La Main qui étreint*, a serial published in the daily *Le Matin*, the film was also meant to be parody of Louis Gasnier's *The Mysteries of New York* (1914, aka *The Exploits of Elaine*). The fourth episode presents a caricature of celebrities of the time (Musidora, Max Linder, Charlie Chaplin), interpreted by Biscot, already author of an imitation routine of Chaplin's character at the Folies Bergère. Musidora kindly went along with the exercise and, even though she appears only fleetingly at the very end of the episode, she proved once again her status as a vamp, which did not, for all that, exclude a certain tongue-in-cheek humour.

An independent, obstinate, stubborn woman, Musidora had her own production company, Les Films Musidora. In 1921, she discovered the fascination of Andalusia and fell in love with the region and with Cañero, a *torero rejoneador* from Cordoba. In 1922, she shot, produced and starred in *Sol y sombra*, filmed in Toledo (Castile) and Ecija (Andalusia).

*Love, Spain, bull-fighting, the beautiful blond foreigner, rich and flirtatious, whom she also portrayed in curious splitting, infidelity, jealousy, eyes behind fans, the rival 'puntillero-ed', stabbed like a bull, the sun glinting on knife blades, blood, redemption through religion... No cliché was lacking to prevent Ernesta Stern's short story 'l'Espagnole from giving birth on the screen to one of those trashy films in which the excess of local colour, under its concrete of trimmings, sinks the silent, bare intensity of Spain in general, bull-fighting in particular and, even more, Cordovan gravity. Yet, no.*

*The elliptical sobriety of the realization and the rigorous density of the images gives this Sun and Shadows the strange and, as if in mourning, severity of paintings by the Cordovan Julio Romero de Torres. (By the way, this friend of Cañero's would paint a portrait of Musidora, which was purchased by the National Museum of Buenos Aires.) To what can be attributed this absence of complacency and refusal of the picturesque that does honour to the woman to whom André Breton threw a bouquet of red roses one day? Doubtless to the force of her passion for Spain, discovered in 1921 on the occasion of the shooting of Pour Don Carlos, to her amorous feelings for Cañero and her love at first sight of bull-fighting, which she would defend, in France, even in newspaper articles. To her, Spain, where she would live until 1926, appeared as 'astonishing in its gravity, sobriety, and grandeur', unlike the Spain 'described by our French literary hacks'<sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Durand, *La Brune brûlante, La Persistance des images*, La Cinémathèque française, 1996

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## THE FILMS OF THE SHOWING « MUSIDORA »

Running time : 62 min.

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### Le Pied qui étreint / épisode L'Homme au foulard vert

France, 1916 – 20 minutes

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**Direction and script:** Jacques Feyder

**Production:** Gaumont

**Cast:** André Roanne, Kitty Hott, Georges Biscot, Suzanne Delvé, Marcel Levesque, Musidora



The scientific detective Justin Crécelle and his faithful secretary, Walter Jymson, must face up to constant attacks by the 'Pied qui étreint' gang, whose leader does his utmost to persecute Hélène, Justin's fiancée, by all possible and unimaginable means.

**Le Pied qui étreint** was restored in 2004 by Gaumont and La Cinémathèque française from a nitrate negative. Only the beginning of the intertitles appears on the trailers of this element, so the restoration consisted of recreating the intertitles by completing the unfinished phrases,

thanks to the period script, deposited at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Performing Arts department.

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## Sol y sombra

France, 1922 – 42 minutes

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**Direction:** Jacques Lasseyné and Musidora

**Author of the original work:** Maria Star

**Adaptation:** Musidora

**Production:** La Société des Films Musidora

**Photography:** Frank Daniau-Johnston

**Editing:** Nini Bonnefoy

**Cast:** Musidora, Antonio Canero, Simone Cynthia, Paul Vermoyal, Miguel Sánchez

A fortune-teller predicts love for Juana. Precisely, Jacana, the young torero with whom she is in love, calls her. She goes running and does not see the old woman turn over the next card: death... Jacana prefers a foreign woman, as blond as Juana is dark-haired, thereby sowing the seeds of discord and jealousy.

The film was restored in 1995 from a period release print in the collections of La Cinémathèque française. The titles and insert titles were reconstructed by Christine Laurent.

