

The Artist

A Review by Tom Sims, Executive Director, Cape May Film Society

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Review at a Glance

Must-See if you are a fan of movies (especially the silent ones!).

Take a Look if you're intrigued by how silent films can still be relevant.

Skip It if you think reading a few captions will deplete your brainpower.

In this age of computer generated imagery, of elaborate sets and high celebrity payrolls, it is good to see films that stick to the basics of sound storytelling, superb acting, and beautiful cinematography. A new film called *The Artist* not only sticks to those basics, but to the fundamentals of filmmaking in its most rudimentary format. *The Artist* is a silent film. Yes, you heard me correctly, it is not a talkie—and it is as captivating and endearing a film as you will see in theaters today.

The Artist tells the story of silent film star George Valentin (played by Jean Dujardin) and a young protégé he helps to discover named Peppy Miller (played by Berenice Bejo). The time was 1927 Hollywood (then the town was called “Hollywoodland”), and the talkies were the latest rage. Valentin refuses to have any part of the new format, while Peppy uses same to become a rising star. The two cross paths many times as she is on the rise and he falling in a miserable descent.

This is a story that could only be properly told on film. Its subtly, charm, and nuance needs to be captured in well-planned close-ups and high concept sequences. The two stars are wonderfully expressive and deliver performances in silence that beat many of today's talkies (even the ones up for awards).

The supporting cast in this film deserves recognition as well. We all know John Goodman, who plays the producer at Kinograph Studio. Even in silence, he plays his gruff, barking studio executive perfectly. And while you may not know his name, James Cromwell is one of the most beloved character actors of our time. He plays Valentin's limo driver Clifton.

As far as tributes go, this movie does more to capture the essence of early filmmaking than *Hugo*, a very good work this year from Martin Scorsese (visit capemayfilm.org for a review). So many predictions are surfacing about how *The Artist* will sweep the Oscars this year that you almost feel like they're a jinx. And while I'm not the biggest fan of the Golden Globes, this film has topped the nominations including one for Best Movie in the Comedy/Musical category (and unlike *My Week with Marilyn*, it actually belongs in this section). Suffice it to say you will likely see this film's title all over Oscar night—all well deserved.