

PRESS RELEASE: GEOFF SMITH

Häxan Witchcraft through the ages (Sweden 1922, Dir. Benjamin Christensen)

The new live score composed & performed on hammered dulcimers & voice

Following GEOFF SMITH'S internationally acclaimed scores to *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Faust* which proved to be most successful live cinema events since the end of the 'silent' era, he now returns with his new live film sound project: *Häxan - Witchcraft through the ages*.

Häxan - Witchcraft through the ages is a truly legendary and infamous film. It was banned in every country in Europe when first released in 1922.

Häxan was one of the first drama-documentaries, integrating fact, fiction, objective reality, investigation, delusion and hallucination. The film's mixture of narrative methods is astonishing for its freedom and audacity. Christensen's uninhibited and experimental style endeared *Häxan* to the Surrealists: it's transfused with humour - a witches' brew of the horrific, gross, and darkly comedic.

Grave robbing, perversion, repressed eroticism, torture, possessed nuns, ritual sacrifice and a satanic Sabbath: the director uses a series of dramatic episodes to explore the hypothesis that the 'witches' of the Middle Ages suffered the same mass hysteria as did the mentally ill in the early 20th century. Moreover, *Häxan* has a freshness and timelessness that retains a powerful and shocking resonance in the 21st century: this is a moving, disturbing but also ultimately liberating study of the persecution of the mentally ill, women, the poor and the elderly.

Geoff Smith's new score for *Häxan* further explores his pioneering approach to composition, performance and design that was exemplified in *Faust* and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*. As well as a composer, performer, orchestrator, inventor, vocalist, songwriter and percussionist Geoff Smith is acknowledged both as a world-leading virtuoso and a unique innovator in composition, technique and performance on the hammered dulcimer. He is also a pioneer in Dulcimer design.

Geoff's new score has been inspired and led by Christensen's genius. The director is simultaneously painter, historian, political psychoanalyst, horror guru and pioneering filmmaker. *Häxan* comes alive as few attempts to recreate the past on film have. There is a palpable atmosphere of excitement, evil, temptation and perversion enabled by inspirational direction, virtuoso

camera work, innovative lighting techniques as well as absolutely astounding special effects that were decades ahead of their time and which are all the more impressive when viewed from a 21st century perspective.

For the performance of *Häxan* Geoff uses numerous prototype hammered dulcimers, one being the first microtonal dulcimer incorporating his revolutionary 'Microtonal Fluid Tuning Mechanism' patent: It would have been impossible to compose and perform the soundtrack for the film without this invention. For further information regarding this invention, its wider applications and some of its historic implications please refer to a Guardian newspaper article '[Composer Reinvents the Piano](#)'.

The hammered dulcimer is an ancient percussion instrument struck by small wooden hammers, sticks or mallets. The largest dulcimers have well over 100 strings. Each country has its own indigenous dulcimer which peculiarly reflects its respective culture - England, Scotland, Hungary, Greece, Italy, Iran, Iraq, India, Germany, Egypt, Tibet, China, Korea, Mexico and so on. Until today the dulcimer has been seen as a traditional instrument and has usually been used in 'folk' and 'classical' musics in respective cultures.

Geoff Smith's new score for *Häxan* is a revelation in the composition and performance of live music for film. Now for the first time. '*Häxan - Witchcraft through the ages*' a classic of world cinema, has a musical soundtrack worthy of its place in the history of film. This immensely dynamic score illuminates Christensen's aesthetic obsession, his wildly imaginative investigation of the paradox of the persecution of superstition by superstition, the juxtaposition of horror with dark humour and the ultimate triumph and liberation of the spirit.

"The witch no longer flies away on her broom over the rooftops. But isn't superstition still rampant amongst us? Is there an obvious difference between the sorceress and her customer then and now? We no longer burn our old and poor, but do they not suffer bitterly? And the little woman who we call hysterical, alone and unhappy, isn't she still a riddle for us? Nowadays we detain the unhappy in a mental institution or - if she is wealthy - in a modern clinic."
Benjamin Christensen (1922)



"It's a tribute to Smith that his music was able to bring this wonderful movie to life."
The Financial Times

"The musical equivalent of splitting the atom."
The Guardian

"This isn't just an innovative soundtrack, as its echoes positively enhance the melancholic and menacing moods of this intense, psychological masterpiece."
BBC Radio Times

"A fascinating combination of disturbing images and otherworldly sounds which yanks the tradition of silent movie accompaniment spectacularly back to the future. Smith is a virtuoso percussionist who has revolutionized a forgotten instrument."
The Sunday Times

"The Hammered dulcimer has been waiting for someone like Geoff Smith to come along."
Fiona Talkington, BBC Radio 3.

"Like the famous Roy Budd theme for 'Get Carter', or the zither music from 'The Third Man' but stripped down and fed through a haunted house, the music draws out the peculiar textures and angularities of the story with real precision."
The Big Issue

Critic's Choice
Time Out

*"A wildly atmospheric soundtrack..." ******
The Scotsman

"Caligari's protagonists convey a barely suppressed horror, which Smith's eerie and exotic score perfectly complements."
The Wire



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