

## The sound of silence



PHOTO BY TOM WATSON

Like silent film pianists of yesteryear, David Drazin sits in darkened theaters and interprets what he sees. From his home in Chicago, Drazin travels to film festivals throughout North America, playing sensuous, romantic music to accompany Rudolph Valentino or sprightly, light-hearted themes for Charlie Chaplin.

In many cases, Drazin, like the audience, is seeing the film for the first time. That means improvising. If the characters are on a roller coaster, he duplicates the ups and downs of the ride. If a trumpet "sounds," his fingers find keys to match the tones.

Drazin is a stickler for detail; when a now mostly forgotten song was mentioned in a film's dialogue, he tracked down a recording so he could learn the melody and play it during the film. He weaves 1920s jazz and blues into his accompaniments as well, using skills he picked up as a jazz studies major. "The whole point of getting an education is to learn to study," he says. "Well, I study!"

One of Drazin's earliest gigs came at what's now the Gene Siskel Film Center at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he has accompanied films since 1985. He appears regularly in his hometown of Cleveland and at the annual Cinevent in Columbus.

Two years ago at a festival in Italy, Chaplin's son was in the audience and invited Drazin and his wife, Carol Seymour, to call on him at the family home in Switzerland. They did, and Drazin had the honor of playing Charlie Chaplin's own piano for the family.

Drazin also plays in a rock band. In his Ohio State days, he was in the jazz group Seeds of Fulfillment. In contrast to those hat-passing days, when getting paid meant depending on the audience's generosity, Drazin is pleased to be working now as a full-time musician. He aspires to become a headliner, but vows to also continue his work in the dark and at the keys, making the silent screen less silent. **RICH WARREN**