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Classic silent movie showing at Sunrise Theater

By Brian Dukes
Staff writer

Tim Lussier loves silent films. He has studied and collected them for more than three decades, and he speaks about them in reverent tones.

Lussier wants to share his passion with moviegoers Saturday with the third annual

silent-movie event at the Sunrise Theater in Southern Pines.

“Safety Last,” a 1923 comedy starring Harold Lloyd, will be shown at 2:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Dave Drazin of the Chicago Silent Film Society will play piano as the film is shown, providing the mood, feel and special effects. Drazin is the accompanist for the Gene Siskel Center in Chicago.

“Dave’s an amazing performer, and this is a great film for him to accompany,” Lussier said. He said he found the inspiration for starting the film festival after meeting Drazin at a silent-film convention.

“I’d seen the live performances (of silent films) and wanted to bring that experience here,” Lussier said. “I think that people forget what an art form it is. Because of Dave’s talents, people are going to be so wrapped up in the story that they won’t even know it’s a silent film.”

Drazin, who has been performing silent film accompaniment since 1985, said his job can be very improvisational.

“If I have the chance to see the film ahead of time, I can try to prepare something,” Drazin said. “Even if I do plan ahead, I can be forced to make things up on the fly. The entire movie, to me, is one huge piece of music that I’ve got to write as I go along.”

Drazin will perform on a platform next to the screen, where audiences can watch him work. His accompaniment has earned him a following in Southern Pines.

“I think that people sometimes are paying more attention to him than the film,” said Lussier. “Just because someone can play a piano doesn’t mean they can accompany a silent movie. Dave provides the tone and mood. He’s really talented.”

The film series has sold out each year at the Sunrise, a small movie theater that shows films like “The Queen.” The series’ first film was “Wings,” the first film to win an Academy Award for Best Picture. Last year’s film was Buster Keaton’s “The General,” which was named to the Top 100 Films of All Time by the American Film Institute.

'SAFETY LAST'

When: Saturday, March 31, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Where: Sunrise Theater, 250 N.W. Broad Street, Southern Pines

Tickets: Adult tickets are \$10 (for the afternoon performance) and \$15 (for the evening performance). Children’s tickets are \$8 (both shows).

Information: Call 692-3611 or visit www.sunrisetheater.com

Lussier said Lloyd, the star of "Safety Last," shared top billing with Keaton and Charlie Chaplin during the heyday of the silent movie.

"Safety Last" tells the story of a young man looking to strike it rich in the big city so he can marry his girlfriend. Through a series of misadventures, the lowly hero must risk his life in a publicity stunt that threatens to go horribly wrong.

The film's evening performance will be followed by a wine and cheese reception and an opportunity to speak with Drazin.

Lussier recommends buying tickets in advance. There are only 365 seats for each performance.

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