

► Movie screenings that recall the golden age of cinema

# SILENCE IS GOLDEN

By Hu Bei

The French pioneering filmmaker Georges Méliès's 1904 science fiction movie *The Impossible Voyage* (*Voyage à travers l'impossible*) tells the story of a group of scholars from a geographic society who take a train journey in the Alps and that ends up with them traveling by both air and sea.

And now, more than 100 years later, and almost in the same place, another "impossible" voyage is taking place. This voyage can be regarded as a homage to Méliès's silent film.

This time the travelers comprise a group of silent movie lovers and musicians. They are all members of a non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Zurich called the Institute of Incoherent Cinematography (IOIC).

## Live music

"Founded in 2011, IOIC arranges free public screenings of silent films with live music, not only in Switzerland, but all around the world," Pablo Assandri, one of the founders of IOIC told the Global Times. "The name IOIC is a homage to *The Impossible Voyage*. I think the seriousness of 'institute,' and the playfulness of 'incoherent,' are well-combined with each other." Assandri said.

IOIC is holding a number of events in Shanghai until Sunday at the Minsheng Art Museum and an outdoor space at the Red Town in Changning district.

This is IOIC's first overseas tour, and the theme and title of the exhibition is *Lo-Fi Sci-Fi*, which refers to "low-fidelity" (meaning poor production values) science-fiction films. For this China tour, IOIC will screen 21 such films that were made between 1895 and 1929. During the screenings, 18 musicians and sound artists from

Switzerland and China will provide a musical accompaniment.

"Silent film marks the first 30 years of the history of cinema and it is the perfect way to get to know about the not-so-distant past of the beginning of the 20th century," said Assandri.

He explained further that, "this year's theme, low-fidelity science fiction is clearly ironic. Today, when you show a film from the 1980s to a teenager, he will tell you it's not 'realistic.' We want to show that film is actually never like real life, but is always colored by the ideological, social, cultural, and economic circumstances of the time. And we believe that one way of doing this is to bring back to life the films that heralded the beginning of the film industry."

Assandri said that his mission to uncover these silent films was made much easier by using the Internet. "Today, you can find a lot of silent films in electronic versions such as DVDs or even Blu-Rays. There is a lot of information about the silent era of movies online," he said.

The live-music accompaniment is also an important part of this IOIC event. "Music is absolutely central to bringing these films back to life. It makes the films more accessible for audiences. In the past silent films were usually backed up by a pianist at the very least," Assandri said.

Switzerland-born Simon Berz is the music director behind these screenings and his aim is to build bridges among people in the fine arts, music, dance and film.

"All sorts of different musical styles and various instruments will be improvised during the film screenings of

IOIC," he said.

## Personal favorite

Berz said that *Metropolis* (a 1927 German expressionist science-fiction film directed by Fritz Lang) being screened on Sunday is his personal favorite. "I formed a music workshop, called the 'lo-fi sci-fi impro committee' consisting of 11 Swiss and Chinese musicians just in order to perform music to accompany this film."

Assandri and Berz said that they were very excited about sharing a stage with Chinese musicians during the IOIC tour. "Silent films are an international medium conveying messages via pictures and music in the first place, and written language only in the second," said Berz. "None of the Swiss musicians can speak Chinese and most of them have never been to China before, but everyone can still communicate with each other."

Assandri added that another purpose of the project is to encourage cultural exchanges between Swiss musicians and musicians abroad.

The IOIC China tour is sponsored by the Swiss Embassy in China and Pro Helvetia, a Swiss arts council based in Zurich. "But the institute only exists because of the huge dedication of everyone involved. And participants have had to bear their own expenses during the tour," said Assandri.

For detailed schedules of IOIC China tour in Shanghai in the following days, please visit [www.ioic.ch](http://www.ioic.ch).



A poster for the IOIC China tour Photos: Courtesy of Michelle Ettlin

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