

Remaining silent: The ongoing presence of silent films on cinema programmes in Brno between 1930 and 1936

ABSTRACT. Večeřa Michal, *Remaining silent: The ongoing presence of silent films on cinema programmes in Brno between 1930 and 1936*. "Images" vol. XXXII, no. 41. Poznań 2022. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 65–78. ISSN 1731-450X. DOI 10.14746/i.2022.41.04.

The production of silent films in Czechoslovakia ended shortly after the advent of sound technology at the very end of the 1920s. The number of available silent films steadily decreased from that point on, yet some cinemas decided to continue to include them in their programming, even though they had sound equipment. The article analyses the scheduling of silent films in the specific case of two cinemas from the periphery of Brno, the second-largest city in Czechoslovakia. On the exhibitors' side, there was a visible tendency to screen films 1) approximately two years from the premiere and 2) older with renowned stars or plot. This surprising presence of silent films in cinemas leads to the question: "Why were they still scheduled"? The answer lies both in the cinema owners, for whom silent films were a cheaper commodity, and in the audiences, who did not necessarily demand screenings of new sound films.

KEYWORDS: silent cinema, distribution system, city peripheries, 1930s, cinema of small nation, film stars

The introduction of sound technology was one of the most revolutionary changes in the history of cinema. In the early 1930s, it became an immediate success, even among audiences in Czechoslovakia. All producers started to make talkies instead of silent films, and most prestigious cinemas in big cities preferred to screen sound films. Despite the popularity of the new technology, silent films were still commonly screened until the second half of the 1930s. Advertisements offering silent films for sale were common in periodicals of the time, and there were even distributors specializing in selling them.[1] Until the second half of 1930s, silent films were often scheduled by venues on city peripheries or in the countryside. The continuing presence of silent films leads to several questions: What was their position on the market? How were they circulated in cinemas? Were there any identifiable strategies behind their scheduling?

The research presented here aims to find answers to the above questions by using the case of Czechoslovakia's second-largest city,

[1] For example, Anonymous, *Beda Heller – Film ve znamení němých filmů*, "Filmový kurýř" 1930, vol. 4, no. 35(29.8.), p. 1; Anonymous, *Půjčovna němých*

filmů F. Čvančara, "Filmový kurýř" 1932, vol. 6, no. 12(17.3.), p. 2.



Image 1: Map of cinemas in Brno before 1945^[5]

Brno.^[2] Out of 38 cinemas in Brno in 1933, 22 were located in the inner city – 6 of them first-run venues, and the remaining 16 in the suburbs.^[3] More specifically, I will focus on two suburban cinemas – Bio Sibiř in Zábřdovice and Bio Slávia in Židenice. The programmes of these cinemas show that silent films were commonly screened until the second half of the 1930s, even in the period when both cinemas were equipped with sound projectors. The explanation for the persistent distribution of silent films lies in the interaction of several socio-economic factors, such as the speed of diffusion of the new technology^[4] and factors specific to the perspective of cinema in a small nation, the particular taste of the local audience and problems of the language

[2] To give an overview of Czechoslovakia cities at that time, in 1935 Prague had a population of 925 000 people and 104 cinemas with 56 480 seats were located there, while Brno had 221 758 inhabitants and 36 cinemas with 15 543 seats. Similar statistics for other cities are as follows: Plzeň 114 704 inhabitants, 10 cinemas with 7 938 seats, Moravská Ostrava 113 709, 11 cinemas with 6071 seats and Bratislavawith 93 189, 13 cinemas and 7 341 seats. Other cities were significantly smaller. J. Havelka, *Čs. Filmové hospodářství 1935*, Prague 1936, p. 35.

[3] There were even 8 of them in 1930, but the number of first-run cinemas decreased after estab-

lishing the contingency system in 1932. Anonymous, *Brněnská kina v číslech*, “Filmový kurýř” 1933, vol. 7, no. 5(3.2.), p. 3.

[4] According to Douglas Gomera, the diffusion rate relates to the 1) potential profits, 2) necessary investments and 3) marketing strategies. R.C. Allen, D. Gomery, *Film History. Theory and practice*, New York 1985, pp. 113–115.

[5] Circle no. 1 indicates the inner centre of Brno, no. 2 Židenice district with a dot for Bio Slávia and no. 3 Husovice with a dot for Bio Sibiř. For more see Cinematic Brno database, <<https://cinematicbrno.phil.muni.cz>>, accessed: 30.03.2022.

barrier.[6] The end of silent films in cinemas also has another explanation – censor's approval was valid for 5 years, which means that most films would need its renewal in the second half of the decade.

When examining the available programmes, we find two different strategies used for scheduling. The first is deeply rooted in the contemporary distribution system, in which films usually moved from luxurious cinemas in city centres to less prestigious venues in the suburbs or countryside. – 1) there was a stable system for film circulation, which resulted in scheduling films on peripheries about 1–2 years from their premieres in the centre, or 2) choosing individual films according to their specific qualities (e.g., story, genre, cast, etc.). When considering the programming, it is necessary to take into account the context in which individual cinemas operated - their social environment with a distinct group of cinemagoers or a specific attitude to the programming.[7]

The analysis of film programmes could be carried out thanks to the existence of the database of cinema programmes in Brno, compiled as part of the long-time *Cinematic Brno* project.[8] The available data allowed us to ask questions about the programming – types of films, length of individual runs, the way in which films were advertised, and contextualising the areas where individual cinemas operated. Bio Slávia and Bio Sibiř were chosen as examples, because there were sufficient available programmes, and they were both located in districts with similar social structures. The scope of research was limited by the lack of data for some cinemas, so it was not possible to carry out a detailed comparison with other cinemas on the city peripheries or in the city centre, where sound films prevailed.[9]

The process of transition to sound cinema shared similar characteristics across Europe. Basically, the production of silent films usually stopped abruptly, and the spread in cinemas lasted for many years. Such asymmetry even led to the decreasing supply of silent films; this was not changed by the renewed distribution of old films.[10] During the first years of the 1930s, the proportion of sound cinemas multiplied globally. Compared to other countries, in 1930 the transition in Czechoslovakia was the fourth fastest in Europe, after Great Britain (2 500),

Diffusion of sound films in Czechoslovakia and ongoing presence of silent films

[6] According to Hjort, two other characteristics are the size of the market and the number of cinemagoers. M. Hjort, *Small Nation, Global Cinema*, Minneapolis 2005, p. ix.

[7] Terézia Porubčanská wrote about cinemagoing in the workers' quarters of Brno. T. Porubčanská, *Plátňa medzi komínmi: význam návštevy kina v brnenskom robotníckom prostredí v druhej polovici 30. Rokov*, [in:] *Filmové Brno*, eds. L. Česálková, P. Skopal, Prague 2016, pp. 273–292.

[8] The database was compiled by the Film Studies Department at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. For Bio Sibiř, there are data available only for one year (25th March 1933 – 3rd March 1934). In the case of Bio Slavia, the programme is available for the whole of the 1930s.

[9] It would seem obvious to compare cinemas located in the same district. Unfortunately, there are only fragmentary programmes available for those cinemas.

[10] C.G. Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema, 1930–1960*, Bloomington – London 1991, pp. 101–102.

Germany (1864) and France (552).[11] Instead of 14 sound cinemas in 1929, suddenly there were 148 operating in the following year. In the next year, this number rose to 490. This means that nearly 25% of cinemas could screen sound movies at the beginning of the third sound season. The fastest increase of this process took place in big cities including Prague, Olomouc, Ostrava, Bratislava and Brno.[12] The diffusion of the new technology lasted until the second half of the decade, when only a minority of silent cinemas remained; from the perspective of their economic importance, they were insignificant.

Table 1. Development of cinema network in Czechoslovakia (1929–1936)[13]

	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936
Total number of cinemas	1 513	1 817	1 966	2 024	2 002	1 955	1 833	1 847
Sound cinemas	14	148	490	848	1 025	1 273	1 343	1 608
Proportion of sound cinemas	0.9 %	8.1 %	24.92 %	41.9 %	51.2 %	65.1 %	73.3 %	87.1 %

The speed of sound diffusion differed in individual regions of Czechoslovakia. The process was slightly slower in Moravia than in Bohemia, because of the minor concentration of financial capital.[14] Moravia even had 1) a lower proportion of daily operating cinemas and 2) a higher number of smaller cinemas. This, in the final outcome, means a lower potential for financial profit. The cinematic centre of the whole region was always Brno, although there were a few other local hubs in other cities, such as Ostrava and Olomouc, among others.[15]

The Czechoslovakian cinema structure in big cities during the 1930s is reminiscent of the run-clearance-zone system.[16] In Czechoslovakia, the distribution life cycle started in premier cinemas and after that, they moved into less prestigious theatres. They could even appear in projections after the end of their usual distribution life cycle, but without greater expectancy for the profitability.[17] Most of the luxurious cinemas, which generated the highest profits, were in big cities. In Prague, these cinemas were organised in their own union – *Sdružení premiérových biografů*,[18] whose main purpose was to organise cooperation between cinemas, including the price for tickets and the maximum length of

[11] J. Blažejovský, P. Skopal, P. Szczepanik, *Brněnská kina v souvislostech distribučních praktik a podmínek uvádění (do roku 1989)*, [in:] *Filmové Brno. Dějiny lokální filmové kultury*, eds. L. Česálková, P. Skopal, Prague 2017, p. 24.

[12] There are no precise data on the topic, but, in the case of Brno, it was evident that even peripheral cinemas could usually screen sound films by no later than 1932. Cinematic Brno database, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=25&o=1>>, accessed: 26.10.2021.

[13] J. Havelka, *Kronika našeho filmu*, Prague 1965, p. 102.

[14] For the map of Czechoslovakia see the following link: Czechoslovakia, Wikipedia, <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovakia#/media/File:Czechoslovakia01.png>>, accessed: 30.03.2022.

[15] P. Szczepanik, *Konzervy se slovy. Počátky zvukového filmu a česká mediální kultura 30. let*, Brno 2009, pp. 156–158.

[16] D. Gomery, *The Coming of Sound: A History*, New York – London 2005, pp. 130–131.

[17] P. Szczepanik, op.cit., p. 90.

[18] Translated as Union of First-run Cinemas.

individual runs in cinema schedules.[19] Less prestigious theatres were usually located outside the city centre and were mostly cheaper venues, where films were screened with a significant delay after the premiere. Such a hierarchical structure was also visible in the ticket prices, which were highest in premier cinemas and lowest on city peripheries and in the countryside. According to Jiří Havelka, the average price for tickets in the 1930s for first-run cinemas was more than 8 crowns, while the average for the whole Czechoslovakia was 4 crowns.[20]

We can consider two basic arguments when thinking about the decreasing supply of silent films – the cessation of sound film production and the 5-year-long validity of censorship approval.[21] When examining the statistical data,[22] we see that in 1931 sound films made up the majority of newly distributed films and that the last 5 silent films were introduced in 1933. Also, there were approximately 1 060 silent films available in that year,[23] which was the same number as sound titles.[24] There are no available data for subsequent years, but from that point onwards sound films dominated. We can expect that there was a breakdown in supply in the next half of the decade, which correlated with the end of the validity of censorship approval.[25]

Silent films premiered after 1930 had difficulties with organising a premiere screening in prestigious cinemas, and some of them were not even able to do that. Cinema programmes show that first-run cinemas screened silent films only on rare occasions.[26] Some first-run cinemas did not schedule any silent films after 1930, which is also the same time when they bought sound projection equipment.[27] Most of the silent films distributed during the sound era were films produced during the second half of the 1920s. Only a few movies proved the exception to this rule; there always had to be the motivation for the distributor for getting new censorship approval.

[19] P. Surová, *Sdružení premiérových biografů (1928–1938)*, Prague 2013 [diploma thesis], p. 33.

[20] J. Havelka, *Kronika našeho...*, p. 107; P. Szczepanik, op.cit., p. 87.

[21] I. Klimeš, *Kinematografie a stát v českých zemích 1895–1945*, Prague 2016, p. 138.

[22] Precise data about silent films are not available, statistical yearbooks edited by Jiří Havelka cover only sound films. Other sources usually provide contradictory information. Some of them do not even differentiate between different types of films (fiction and non-fiction, long and short, etc).

[23] Anonymous, *Bursa němých filmů*, “Filmový kurýř” 1932, vol. 6, no. 12(17.3.), pp. 27–29; Anonymous, *Bursa němých filmů*, “Filmový kurýř” 1932, vol. 6, no. 13(25.3.), p. 4.

[24] J. Havelka, *Kronika našeho...*, p. 78.

[25] Not all movies left the market, since they would have had to go through the censorship process again.

[26] If there were some screenings, they were only occasionally organised screenings, for example, *Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potemkin, 1925)* screened in the cinema Scala in Brno on 29th January 1932 and a film called *Afghanistan*. But even with this film, there is no guarantee that it was a completely silent version. In the contemporary press, a sound version was offered in the end of 1930. Scala – programme, *Filmové Brno*, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=145424&o=1>>, accessed: 26.10.2021; Anonymous, *Biopodniky FANTA od 25/12 1930*, “Studio” 1930, vol. 2, no. 12, p. 288c.

[27] V. Novák, *Historie brněnských kinematografů 1896–1981*, (manuscript), pp. 367, 393, 425. Archiv města Brna, fond T68.

Local space in which both cinemas operated

Bio Sibiř and Bio Slávia share similar characteristics – they were located in a specific space within the city cinema structure, shared a similar target audience and rivalled other cinemas in the neighbourhood. This section aims to discuss two elementary questions, namely, the co-existence with other cinemas located in the same district and target audiences.

Both these cinemas operated in a competitive environment in which rival cinemas were able to screen sound films. Bio Sibiř in Husovice was in the neighbourhood of Bio Jas. According to amateur historian, Václav Novák, they were both equipped with sound projectors almost at the same time – Bio Jas in February and Bio Sibiř in April 1931.[28] Having two cinemas close to each other did not mean that they could not collaborate to some degree. As one of the cinemagoers remembers, exhibitors in the Husovice district coordinated the scheduling of their cinemas. When one of the projections ended, the audience had enough time to move to the second cinema.[29] In Židenice, there were three cinemas operating: Bio Slávia, Světozor and Hvězda.[30] Bio Slávia started screening sound films as one of the earliest cinemas to do so in the first sound film season, on 11 April 1930 with the MGM studio's sound film, George W. Hill's *The Flying Feet* (1929).[31] Bio Hvězda bought sound equipment as a reaction to Bio Slávia and organised the first projection on 25 December of the same year. The third cinema, Bio Světozor, bought new equipment somewhere between 1933 and 1934.[32]

While examining the target audience of both cinemas, we need to consider the social status of the local residents as a reason for their willingness to pay to view silent films. Local people were mostly from the lower social classes, especially workers from local factories, who did not usually go to cinemas in the inner city. It would have been too complicated for them to travel from their homes to the centre, buy expensive tickets for the prestigious cinemas and travel by public transport to reach them across the city.[33] The target audience was also to some degree distinctive in the level of its education. Some of the spectators in Brno in the second half of the 1930s had problems watching the film and simultaneously reading the subtitles. Interviews with cinemagoers prove that the willingness to read the subtitles was

[28] Ibidem, pp. 193, 360.

[29] Rudolf (*1920), interview, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?src=1&id=185964&o=1>>, accessed: 28.11.2021.

[30] List of cinemas in Brno, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=25&src=1&o=32479>>, accessed: 6.11.2021.

[31] *Flying feet* (1929), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=27967&o=32479>>, accessed: 6.11.2021.

[32] V. Novák, op.cit., pp. 302, 405; According to available programmes, the first sound programme included G.W. Pabst's *Westfront 1918* (1930), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?src=1&id=130516&o=1>>, accessed: 6.11.2021.

[33] The lower social status of residents corresponded with the quality of the cinemas; they are remembered by their audiences as cheap, with a low standard of provided comfort and hygiene. Marie I (*1921), interview, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=182293&o=1>>, accessed: 28.11.2021.

relatively low; instead, they chose Czechoslovakian films or movies that did not contain much dialogue.[34]

In attempting to analyse the scheduling of silent films in Bio Sibiř and Bio Slávia, it is necessary to mention that scheduling silent films was not inevitable, because both cinemas had the equipment for sound film projection from early 1931 at the latest. We find two major existing patterns – 1) cherry-picking specific titles and 2) screening films with a stable delay between 1 and 2 years from their premieres. This interval did not change during the analysed period. Between 1932 and 1933, most of the scheduled films had been released between 1930 and 1931. Two years later, most films were again two years old on average, meaning that most silent films were naturally out of circulation; this rule was valid even for sound films. The standardised delay has another significance: it is also the length of the average distribution life cycle.[35] The cinemas in question could not obtain film copies until they had circulated around more prestigious venues.

If there could be some similarity to Bio Sibiř, it was the same length of the delay before the film's premiere and the screening in Bio Slávia. Until 1936, the cinema mostly screened 1- to 2-year-old films.[36] This indicates that both cinemas had a similar position in the distribution system. If we closely examine the available fragments of the programme of Bio Sibiř, there is a visible change during the autumn of 1933. Out of 62 movies screened between March and August 1933 in Bio Sibiř, only one-third consisted of sound films, one-half were silent, and the rest unidentifiable.[37] Silent films almost disappeared in autumn 1933. From the beginning of September until March the following year, there were only three silent programmes.[38] In Bio Slávia, the transformation progressed slowly for several years until 1936; there were only a few silent films after that date. At this time, the programme became more prestigious, as the cinema started to shorten the delay mentioned above. We can illustrate the low prestige of silent films by the fact that 1) most of them were screened on weekdays, from Tuesday to Friday, the least profitable time and 2) all films were quite old - the newest was more than 3 years old, the oldest was 10 years old.[39] The constantly

Cinema programming

[34] It was not uncommon for some audience members having to read the subtitles for others.

T. Porubčanská, op.cit., pp. 273–292.

[35] P. Szczepanik, op.cit., p. 88.

[36] The change could also have been motivated by the rise of the technical quality of contemporary film production. According to available programmes in 1936 and later, no films were produced earlier than in 1933/1934. For example, *Public Not Admitted (S vyloučením veřejnosti, 1933)*. *Public Not Admitted (S vyloučením veřejnosti, 1933)*, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?s-rc=1&id=39082&o=1>>, accessed: 10.11.2021.

[37] Of the rest of the movies, there were 2 part-talkies of Czechoslovakian origin and 10 unidentifiable films. Since sound films are well documented by the statistical yearbook edited by Jiří Havelka, these 10 titles were silent with a high degree of probability.

[38] Bio Sibiř, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=303&o=1>>, accessed: 10.11.2021.

[39] *Maciste and Chinese Box (Maciste und die chinesische Truhe, 1923)*, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?s-rc=1&id=20780&o=1>>, accessed: 8.11.2021.

declining number of available silent films is also visible via the rising number of double-feature programmes from 1935 onwards.

Even though there was a usual delay after the premiere, this was not an unbreakable rule. All the earlier scheduled films were popular titles, which became the biggest hits of their season. In the case of *Bio Sibiř*, we cannot see any titles belonging to the most successful films of the season, *Bio Slávia* was on the contrary sometimes able to obtain copies of relatively new films which were the biggest hits of the season. The delay usually varied from case to case for these popular films, but between 1930 and 1932 it was approximately 6 and half months on average. In the case of G.W. Pabst's film *Westfront 1918* (1930), the screening even took place a month and a half before Prague.^[40] These films were diverse in terms of country of origin, stars or genre. But most of them refer to an acting star; across the years, for example, we see films featuring the popular comedian Vlasta Burian (e.g. *Imperial and Royal Field Marshal* [*C. a k. polní maršálek*, 1930] *Him and His Sister* [*On a jeho sestra*, 1931], and *Anton Špelec, Sharp-shooter* [*Anton Špelec, ostrostřelec*, 1932]). The most plausible explanation is the wealth of the cinema owner and his contacts with other agents involved in the contemporary cinematic business in Czechoslovakia.^[41]

There was also a difference in the length of the run in the programme compared to premier cinemas. Prestigious cinemas in the centre changed their programmes weekly. Programme changes were much faster on the peripheries – one title was usually scheduled only for one or two days, four being the maximum. Such a process was related to the lower price for the exhibition rights of older titles.

By analysing the countries of the films' origins, we cannot see whether any of the national cinemas significantly dominated the schedule. According to the overall statistics in the late 1920s and early 1930s, newly distributed Czechoslovakian films accounted for between 10–15% of all premieres every season. In the programmes of the cinemas analysed here, the proportion is slightly higher, because the number of available titles was significantly higher than the annual production output.

One of the commonly used practices was scheduling the movies as double features. For the price of one ticket, a cinemagoer could see two feature films – 1) two silent films or 2) one silent and one sound film. Such a strategy is reminiscent of presenting B movies in the USA: this scheduling method was used mainly for less attractive titles attached to one more desirable film. In Czechoslovakia, exhibitors used this method in the same way for the interwar period; during

[40] Here I use data obtained by Petr Szczepanik, who compiled lists of the TOP 10 film titles according to the length of their first run in Prague's first-run cinemas. P. Szczepanik, op.cit., pp. 315–322; J. Havelka, *Čs. Filmové hospodářství 1929–1934*, Prague 1935, pp. 35–86.

[41] We can speculate whether their scheduling could be influenced by the fact that the new trade season started in September. In addition, new films appeared on the market, and old films were available.

the 1920s, one fiction film was usually combined with a documentary. Such a combination was not so common in the 1930s among all the analysed programmes. These included only fiction films, but in general the double-feature method was not something distinctive for silent films, but instead put into circulation older movies that had ended their standard distribution life cycle. At the beginning of the decade, silent films usually featured alone on the programme. However, during the following years, their number increased. There is no generally valid key for combining films. The more important factor is that the scheduling of double-features was used to attract the public when the supply of silent films was continuously decreasing.

Besides silent films, both cinemas incorporated part-talkies and films made partly without sound in their programmes. In most cases, these were low-budget projects by smaller producers. However, in the early sound era, even major producers incorporated silent passages in their films. The best illustrations are some of the Czechoslovakian films produced between 1930 and 1933 by the director Oldřich Kmínek. Most of his films were scheduled repeatedly, including the adaptation of a girl's novel, *The Summer Camp of Young Dreams* (*Osada mladých snů*, 1931), and one of the Czechoslovakian part-talkies, *For His Native Soil* (*Za rodnou hroudu*, 1930). Some of these films released in 1932 and 1933 did not reach the premier cinemas in the city centre until later, e.g., *The Gingerbread House* (*Perníková chaloupka*, 1933) was shown in Brno for the first time in 1935.^[42]

When scheduled films were older than two years, there was a visible tendency to schedule films with a high production value and stars. In the case of foreign titles, there are two examples of silent blockbusters distributed during the 1930s – Fred Niblo's *Ben Hur* (*Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, 1925) set in Ancient Rome, and the WWI movie by William A. Wellman – *Wings* (1927). The former film, *Ben Hur*, was one of the titles circulated with a synchronised soundtrack, a not uncommon practice during the early sound era. *Ben Hur* was screened in Brno for the first time in February 1927, simultaneously in two cinemas in the city centre uninterrupted for three weeks. After several other screenings during the 1920s, it was introduced as a renewed premiere in 1932 in the sound version in the Scala cinema, one of the most prestigious cinemas in Brno. After some other screenings in the centre, it moved to the suburbs, where it was screened mainly in Bio Slávia three times within one year.^[43] Another example of silent films synchronised with music at these times was the Czechoslovakian film *Erotikon* (*Erotikon*, 1929) by Gustav Machatý.

[42] *The Gingerbread House* (*Perníková chaloupka*, 1933), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?src=1&id=20780&o=1>>, accessed: 8.11.2021.

[43] Its run there ended after 10 days, a longer time than many of the newest films. The last time it was screened in Brno was in January 1938. *Ben Hur* (*Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ*, 1925), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=28107&o=1>>, accessed: 13.11.2021.

The case of *Wings* highlights the importance of stars in foreign films. We can deduce its popularity not only from the circulation of the film across Brno (it having been repeatedly scheduled in Bio Slávia) but also from the published adverts. Even mentioning the film's name could serve as an attraction in published programmes, e.g., the advert for Clarence G. Badger's *Red Hair* (1928) announced Clara Bow as the "girl from *Wings*". William A. Wellman's *Young Eagles* (1930) used the name of Charley Rogers similarly.[44] In a similar way to *Wings*, we can identify a few other titles with this promotional strategy. In Bio Sibiř, films were repeatedly screened, starring actors such as Harry Piel, Bartolomeo Pagano, Lon Chaney and Charlie Chaplin. The names of these stars were repeated in both cinemas. Bio Slávia screened films featuring many other stars, such as Douglas Fairbanks, Buster Keaton and others.

There was an expected similarity in scheduling films with stars compared to imported movies. This is shown by the example of two Czechoslovakian female film stars - Suzanne Marwille and Anny Ondráková.[45] Marwille became famous thanks to her roles in the first half of the 1920s. The press in the 1930s promoted Marwille in the same way as was visible in the case of *Wings*. The interconnectedness is evident in the films on which she collaborated with director Václav Binovec. One of her movies, *The Girl from the Podskalí* (*Děvče z Podskalí*, 1922), was referred to as a movie with the actress from *Irča in Her Little Nest* (*Irčin románek*, 1921).[46] The other example, Anny Ondráková, started her career at approximately the same time as Marwille and became an internationally renowned star within a few years, mainly due to films produced in Austria and Germany in the 1920s.[47] During the early 1930s, her career in Germany was at its peak, while in Czechoslovakia audiences could see several of her German sound titles, and also one Czechoslovakian film, Karel Lamač's *Him and his Sister* (*On a jeho sestru*, 1931). Her importance can clearly be seen in examples of films from the beginning of her career. Even though she played only supporting roles, these films were scheduled thanks to her participation. In 1933, Bio Slávia scheduled a silent film directed by Josef Rovenský, *The Mystery of the Old Book* (*Setřelé písmo*, 1920). The film had not been screened in Brno before and, since its premiere in

[44] *Young Eagles* (1930), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=27155&o=1>>, accessed: 13.11.2021.

[45] Both of these were different from other actors since they did not have a career in the theatre, but their stardom was based only on film acting.

[46] For some reason, the advert points to one of her oldest films, not to the titles produced at the end of the 1920s, which could still have been in the living memory of the audience. For example, *Poor Girl* (*Chudá holka*, 1929) was screened between 1930 and

1933 in several cinemas in Brno, including Bio Slávia in Židenice. *Poor Girl* (*Chudá holka*, 1929), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=36653&o=1>>, accessed: 14.11.2021.

[47] There are several diploma theses which analysed these actresses, e.g., M. Nedvěďová, *Anny Ondráková: evropská kariéra začíná ve Vídni*, Brno 2014 [Bachelor's thesis]; or V. Chytilová, *Diskurz o českých filmových hvězdách v českém filmovém tisku 20. let*, Brno 2007 [Bachelor's thesis].

Prague, had almost been forgotten.[48] But this was an exceptional case, for most of the chosen films were quite successful when distributed in the 1920s – *Saxophon-Susi* (*Saxofon Suzi*, 1928)[49] and *Anny, pozor, policajt!* (*The First Kiss* [*Der erste Kuß*, 1928]), again both directed by Lamač. All of these were shown in both cinemas analysed here.[50] In this way, we can mention some other names - the famous film star of the 1920s, Vladimír Ch. Vladimirov, the internationally known actor and director Karel Lamač and the actor Theodor Pištěk, whose career had its roots in the famous family theatre. Nevertheless, if their personalities served as an attraction, they must have achieved a certain degree of stardom.

The reason for scheduling many silent films could also lie in their subject matter; most of the best-received films usually exploited the popularity of a well-known literary work. Since both categories are interconnected, it is generally impossible to say that only one is the main reason. When considering literary adaptations, one of the most prominent fictional films was *The Good Soldier Švejk* (*Dobrá voják Švejk*) series, based on the book by Jaroslav Hašek.[51] Four silent films with this character were produced between 1926 and 1927, three of which were re-edited in 1930, with the sound remake being produced in the following year. Thanks to their popularity, all these silent movies circulated in cinemas until the half the 1930s; Bio Slávia scheduled all of them in 1934. The popular topic did not have to be connected to contemporary literature, with some films exploiting national traditions. At least two films in this category may be mentioned here - *Grandmother* (*Babička*, 1921)[52] by female director Thea Červenková, based on the book by Božena Němcová, a famous female Czech author from the mid-19th century, and *The Man Who Built the Cathedral* (*Stavitel chrámu*, 1919), directed by Karel Degl and Antonín Novotný, which adapted the folklore legend about the construction of St. Vitus Cathedral at Prague Castle, with famous theatre actors in the cast.[53] This relationship to national traditions and cultural heritage also influenced the specifics of film distribution. Since both films movies were considered as suitable for children's education, both

[48] The screening of this title is quite surprising, since it went through a complicated production process without sufficient financial resources. The final version was completed in a hurry, which caused significant inconsistencies to be left in the plot. *The Mystery of the Old Book* (*Setřelé písmo*, 1920), Filmový přehled, <<https://www.filmovyprehled.cz/cs/film/395235/setrele-pismo>>, accessed: 14.11.2021.

[49] *Saxophon-Susi* (*Saxofon Suzi*, 1928), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=29400&o=1>>, accessed: 14.11.2021.

[50] *Anny, pozor, policajt!* (1928), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index>

[.php?id=28943&o=1](https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=28943&o=1)>, accessed: 14.11.2021.

[51] One part of its success was also connected to the fact that it was successfully introduced as a theatre play with the same actor in the leading role – Karel Noll. K. Šťastná, *Švejk literární a filmový*, Olomouc 2016 [Bachelor's thesis], p. 17.

[52] *Grandmother* (*Babička*, 1921), Filmový přehled, <<https://www.filmovyprehled.cz/en/film/395236/grandmother>>, accessed: 17.11.2021.

[53] *The Man Who Built the Cathedral* (*Stavitel chrámu*, 1919), Filmový přehled, <<https://www.filmovyprehled.cz/en/film/395204/the-man-who-built-the-cathedral>>, accessed: 15.11.2021.

were scheduled in the afternoon, and the advert announced “affordable ticket prices.”[54]

When thinking of other reasons for scheduling silent films, we find ourselves on speculative ground. At least we may speculate that films were similar to each other due to their topics, the most visible case being F.W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) and Tod Browning’s *Dracula* (1931). Both films were adaptations of the same story written by Bram Stoker. They appeared in Brno cinemas in the first half of the 1930s, *Dracula* as a cinematic novelty in Apollo cinema in the city centre in November 1931, where it stayed for two weeks. Thereafter, it was shown twice in Bio Slávia, the first time being at the end of June 1933. The second showing was on 21 December 1934. *Nosferatu* was screened in Bio Slávia twice in 1933 – before *Dracula* on 9 May 1933 and after *Dracula* on 8 August 1933.[55] A similar case concerns the two films starring Douglas Fairbanks – Fred Niblo’s *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) and its sequel directed by Donald Crisp – *Don Q, Son of Zorro* (1925), which were systematically scheduled together in Bio Slávia.[56] Both movies were screened three times within 13 months from June 1933, with a stable delay between both titles ranging from one to two weeks.[57] It is more than probable that many more films were scheduled together, since this could include films that were not sequels, but were connected only through the cast.

Conclusion

The transition to sound films in the 1930s in Czechoslovakia, like every other similar technological change, required some time to overcome the phase of diffusion. In this specific case, the change occurred within the conditions of small national cinemas with established fiction film production. The slowness of change correlated with the persistent demand, but this was not the only reason for scheduling silent films. Even some cinemas in the city centre occasionally screened some silent films, due primarily to the unique characteristics of specific films.

In districts where both analysed cinemas were located, there were scheduling dynamics different than in the city centre. Firstly, cinemagoers who attended these cinemas usually had a lower degree of education and limited financial resources to spend on entertainment. Such an audience often preferred watching silent films, since they were easier to understand than films in a foreign language. Secondly, the difference was also in scheduling, which combined several factors.

[54] *The Man Who Built the Cathedral* (*Stavitel chrámu*, 1919), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=29990&o=1>>, accessed: 30.03.2022.

[55] *Nosferatu* (1922), Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=15953&o=1>>, accessed: 15.11.2021.

[56] Such a combination raises the question of whether the two films could have been sold as part of the same package. Unfortunately, due to the lack of sources, such a hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

[57] Bio Slávia, Filmové Brno, <<https://www.phil.muni.cz/filmovebrno/index.php?id=314&o=32479>>, accessed: 15.11.2021.

Compared to the premier cinemas, the usual run of a film in a suburban cinema was much shorter. Instead of a standard week, it ranged between one and three days. Faster changes in the programme also necessitated the purchase of cheaper films, which would have been the reason for choosing silent films. Scheduling older films also allowed cinema-owners to choose from a wider supply of films than if they selected new titles. Within the structure of cinema programmes, this resulted in a higher proportion of Czech films.

The context of a small national cinema draws attention to general patterns of film scheduling. It would be expected that most silent films shown in cinemas consisted of the latest possible titles, but such a claim would be inaccurate. Cinema programmes included the latest silent movies or part-talkies. However, the novelty was less critical than other specific characteristics of individual films, e.g., the cast and the type of story. Even among these films, there emerges a difference between local and foreign productions. In the 1930s, cinemas often screened the most ambitious foreign films of the previous decade, but rarely any less prestigious productions. In Czechoslovakian production, we see that cinema-owners scheduled films of all types and genres, without special attention to the specifics of individual films. According to the available data, the presence of famous actors or locally specific stories were usually more important. Although the language barrier was not so significant in the case of silent films, the preference for local films featuring local actors or topics was clearly visible.

The situation of Brno cinemas can be applied to the general situation in other Czechoslovakian cities. Although not much known is about their cinema programmes, there were similarities in exhibition site structure and the structure of population types in individual districts. First-run cinemas were usually located in the wealthy city centres, whereas some of the city suburbs were connected to industry and inhabited by low-income social classes. Such audiences probably shared similar habits to the audiences of Bio Sibiř and Bio Slávia quarters.

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