

RARE CINEMA EUROPE

Presented at The Cinema Museum

Wednesday 7th December 2022

PYGMALION

(Netherlands 1937 – Ludwig Berger)



THE CINEMA MUSEUM
LONDON

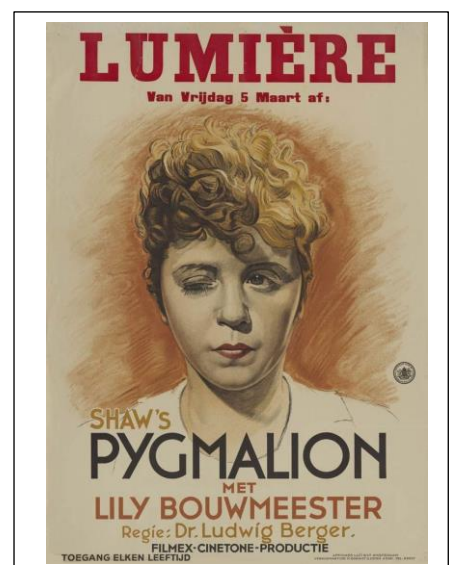
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George Bernard Shaw, the writer of the play, sold the rights in 1935 to several film studios from different countries, including the Netherlands. The Dutch company NV Filmex bought the film rights for a sum of 500 guilders. The first film was the German version from 1935, to which Shaw gave very little praise. The star of the Dutch version was Lily Bouwmeester. The name of the main character Eliza Doolittle was changed in the Dutch version to Elisa "Liesje" Doeluttel. Bouwmeester was formerly known as a stage actress and had not been active in the film industry since 1921. When her name first came up in connection with the role, the idea was not seriously considered, but she did end up being awarded an audition. The director was impressed and Bouwmeester was cast on site.

The film was completed in 1937. Shaw spoke condescendingly about the film because he thought it outrageous that the ending was changed. Never the less, it was a huge success and was even screened in cinemas internationally. It was one of only two films from the Netherlands between 1934 and 1940 to be praised by both critics and audiences. This was remarkable, because during this period, 37 films were released. Bouwmeester, whose first name was spelled incorrectly in the credits, was immediately a star and even had to hire a secretary to handle her fan mail. In addition, she was offered a film contract in Hollywood, after filmmakers saw the actress in this film. In 1938 the British film starring Leslie Howard was released in the Netherlands as *The English Pygmalion*. Ludwig Berger, whose work was forbidden by Joseph Goebbels, was specially brought in from Germany for shooting. After the film's release, Berger departed for America to find his luck. He wanted to be the first director to make an American version of the film, but Shaw refused an offer to sell the film rights to Hollywood for \$200,000.

Cast

- Lily Bouwmeester as Elisa Doeluttel
- Johan De Meester as Higgins
- Emma Morel as Mrs. Higgins
- Eduard Verkade as Pickering
- Matthieu van Eysden as Doeluttel
- Elly van Stekelenburg as Mrs. Doeluttel
- Nel Oosthout as Juffrouw Snijders
- Sara Heyblom as Mevrouw van Heteren-Hill
- Wim Kan as Mevrouw van Heteren-Hill's zoon
- Tous Sigma as Mevrouw van Heteren-Hill's dochter



Lily Geertruida Maria Henriëtte Bouwmeester (28 September 1901 – 12 July 1993)

Dutch theater and film actress, who was crowned with a Golden Calf for being "the best actress in Pre-War Dutch cinema. In 1916, Bouwmeester started acting in silent films as well. She debuted in the film *Majoor Frans* (1916), which starred Annie Bos. In 1917, she landed a contract with a prestigious theatre in Amsterdam and performed at the Stadsschouwburg. She was praised by theatre critics and gained more acting experience. While working on a play in 1920, she met actor Theo Frenkel Jr., whom she married to in 1921. She produced her own plays with her husband. They moved to the Hague in 1923 and performed in Rotterdam, where she became more famous.

Through the years, Bouwmeester developed in theatre and decided she was on her best at comedic roles. She and her husband divorced in 1933. Two years later, she married Cor van der Lugt Melsert, with whom she moved to Rotterdam. He had the desire of her becoming a housewife. Bouwmeester, needing a break from acting, did what she was asked to and left the theatre. However, she didn't give up acting. In 1935, when the sound film had just been introduced in the Netherlands, she auditioned for the lead role in *The Cross-Patch* (1935), but had no luck. However, she was noticed by director Ludwig Berger, who cast her in *Pygmalion* (1937). It would be her first film since 1921.

Pygmalion grew to be the most successful Dutch Pre-War film. She became an instant star and was offered a five-year contract with Paramount Pictures. She declined, however, because her husband was unwilling to travel to the United States with her. Instead, she remained acting in the biggest Dutch movie productions of the 1930s. Her following films all became box office hits, with only one exception. Despite nearing the age of 40, she usually played teen girls or young women. In 1940, her career ended abruptly, when World War II broke out.

During World War II, Bouwmeester secretly took in two Jewish children in her home. After the liberation in 1945, she was offered movie roles again, but declined all offers. She decided to return to theatre instead and played in the famous stage production of *Pygmalion*. She was also remembered for playing the lead role in the play *Het Hemelbed* in 1952. In 1969, she resigned from acting completely. After the death of her husband in 1990, she moved to Sliedrecht, where she spent the rest of her life in complete loneliness. She died in 1993, at the age of 92.



Lily Bouwmeester as Elisa Doeluttel, the flower seller, in an early scene from "Pygmalion" (1937)

