

# SAMSON AND DELILAH

USA                      1948                      131 minutes

Director                      Cecil B. De Mille  
Writers                      Fredric M Frank; Vladimir Jabotinsky; Harold Lane; Jesse Lasky Jr  
Music                      Victor Young  
Cinematography              George Barnes  
                                    Dewey Wrigley (holy land photography)

## Cast

Samson	Victor Mature	Miriam	Olive Deering
Delilah	Hedy Lamarr	Hazel	Fay Holden
Semadar	Angela Lansbury	Haisham	Julia Faye
Prince Ahtur	Henry Wilcoxon	Saul	Russ Tamblyn

I have fond memories of this film as one shown on the Saturday Night at the Movies spot, when I was much younger. The feats of strength of Samson were most impressive to a callow youth unaware of the tricks of the movie industry!

Samson and Delilah, is an enjoyable romp, which both stars appear to have relished. Whilst not a profound film, it is a fitting tribute to two stars who were interesting individuals at a period when the studios ruled the lives of their contracted stars extremely closely.

**Cecil B De Mille** directed the film, and it is of course one of the numerous spectacularly lavish and colourful biblical epics he made.

Another reason for selecting this film was simply to show that our Committee has a good sense of humour and does not consider itself too seriously!

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**Hedy Lamarr** passed away on 19 January 2000. In this film, she was an impressive attraction to any young teenager. Her allure was heightened by the startling news of her early nude acting role.

Born Hedwig Eva Maria Kiesler in Vienna on 9 November 1914, she enrolled in Max Reinhardt's acting school and he was so convinced of her potential that he took her on as a personal pupil. While still at school, her curiosity led her to the set of the film Geld auf der Strasse, whose director, Georg Jacoby, was so taken with her that he gave her a bit part in the film.

Her first leading role was in Wir Brauchen Kein Geld in 1931. After major success in her next film, she was offered the lead in a film being prepared by Czech director Gustav Machaty. The project was initially known as "Symphonie der Liebe", but eventually made Lamarr famous under its alternative title of Ekstase.

Lamarr was taking a calculated risk, as it required her to appear nude, in extreme long shot for two brief scenes. She reckoned that the film was likely to be an artistic success, and thus could do her only good. However in the period between making the film and its screening at the Venice Film Festival of 1934 she married the prominent munitions manufacturer, Friedrich Alexander Mandl.

Outraged that his wife should be seen in the nude by anyone, who had the price of an admission ticket, he failed to have the film withdrawn from Venice. His subsequent attempt to buy and destroy every copy of the film only added to the film's reputation for daring. Incidentally the "two brief scenes" of nudity are in fact 10 minutes, not that I have timed it myself!

Her husband's obsessive jealousy, which it was said extended to not permitting her to appear on stage in circumstances of utmost respectability, resulted in her fleeing in 1937.

In London she met a Hollywood scout, who persuaded her to meet Louis B. Mayer. Having signed with MGM, she had a success with her first Hollywood movie, Algiers. Thereafter she became rather typecast as a woman of mystery and her career faltered. She did not help her situation by turning down the role of Ilsa in Casablanca, which eventually went, of course, to Ingrid Bergman.

Just when her career was in need of a kickstart, she landed the role of **Delilah**. As we will see, she looked gorgeous and used her experience playing femme fatales to play one of history's greatest seductress. Apparently Betty Hutton was considered for the role.

De Mille offered her a role in his next picture, the circus epic The Greatest Show on Earth, but she turned it down and her career never reached the heights again. Her final film was The Female Animal in 1957.

Whilst her career may have been one of largely undistinguished films, her beauty will, I am sure, be remembered. If her fate is to be remembered for her looks, it could be argued that there are worse fates for a star – such as not being remembered.

However Hedy Lamarr will also be remembered as an inventor!

At a party in 1940 she met the avant garde composer George Antheil and began talking about the radio-controlled torpedo, a device she had suggested to her husband, but which was susceptible to jamming.

With Antheil, she hit upon the idea of changing the frequency at random intervals synchronised between the transmitter and receiver. Because of the composer's background, they used player piano rolls to synchronise the signals. This is also why the number of frequencies used, 88, matches the number of piano keys.

Antheil and Lamarr were granted a patent in 1942.

Although never used for the intended purpose, the principle of "spread spectrum" or "frequency hopping" is used in many secure communications today, including computer modems, satellite transmissions and mobile phones.

Who said you never learn anything at Woking's New Cinema Club!

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I was saddened when news of **Victor Mature's** death on 4 August 1999 was announced. This was because it was my birthday and also because having read up on him over the years, he clearly was someone from Hollywood who had "his feet on the ground". The critics may have made derisive comments such as "a beautiful hunk of junk", however Mature never took himself too seriously, repeatedly joking to interviewers "I'm not an actor, and I have the reviews to prove it!"

**Victor John Mature** was born on 29 January 1913 to immigrant parents. After a rudimentary education, which ended aged 14 he arrived in Hollywood penniless in the late 1930's. He learnt the rudiments of acting at Pasadena Playhouse, appearing in more than 60 plays, while washing dishes and greasing cars by day.

The Vice President of Hal Roach Studios spotted him, and he was offered a contract. He made his debut in The Housekeeper's Daughter (1939), playing Lefty, a member of a racketeering gang.

After a successful role in a Broadway musical in 1940, he signed with 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, where, for thirteen years "I did what I was told to do and kept my mouth shut."

The Hollywood publicity machine went into top gear, dubbing him "Mr Beefcake" and "The He-Man of the Year", constantly trumpeting his vital statistics.

Immediately after the war, he played two significant roles. First he was a consumptive, heavy drinking Doc Holliday in John Ford's My Darling Clementine (1946). In assessing this role, one critic

has said that this performance gave an indication that had he been less compliant to studio demands, Mature might have had more parts of a similarly tragic dimension. In Kiss of Death (1947) he gave a fine stoical performance as a small-time crook who has unwillingly become a police informant.

In 1949 he was loaned to Paramount Pictures, and made tonight's film. He won the role of **Samson** over Burt Lancaster who had a bad back.

Thereafter, despite a number of roles in lounge suits, he became synonymous with a toga. In the first Cinemascope feature, The Robe, he was imposing and touching as a Greek slave to Richard Burton's Roman centurion. Apparently this was the only role he latter enjoyed seeing himself in.

In 1962 he officially retired. He was financially well settled, and developed his business interests with a chain of Los Angeles retail stores selling electrical appliances.

Occasionally a film job lured him away from the golf course and his ranch, such as in the 1966 film After the Fox, when he made fun of his image by portraying a ham actor on the skids, in sunglasses, trenchcoat and slouch hat.

Despite a remarkable set of heavy eyebrows, his physical expressions were limited, especially after a car accident left him with drooping eyelids. Asked to look a tower of strength, he sometimes only looked a tower, and a smile tended to emerge as something of a strange leering grin. However he readily and cheerfully admitted his limitations.

Interviewed in 1965, he described himself as less an actor than a "marvellous freak", someone "who knew how to grab a sword and look devout". He said his face was "a big, screwed-up, peasant heap of brick-dust and spit". "I just have the kind of expression which makes me look as though I smell something bad", he once said, disarmingly.

Apparently the film composer, William Alwyn, used to tour film societies showing a clip from a western, in which Mature played a settler who had just found his family massacred by Indians.

According to Alwyn, the director had spent multiple retakes, trying to conjure grief from Mature's rocklike expression. The actor became the joke of the set. However, when the film was previewed, audiences apparently wept, moved by the contrast between the scene and its music against the apparent stoicism of the star's face.

Alwyn said "That man knew something about acting which we didn't". (I am not sure whether or not that was a compliment!)

The role of **Samson** is his most famous, and sees him dressed in a loincloth, with his hair in a pony tail. By preferring Angela Lansbury to Lamarr some critics thought that his Samson had gone prematurely blind! Nominated for 5 Oscars, it won for Costume Design and Art Direction/Set Direction. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the following extract, the script received no awards!

In a famous point in the film, when he comes across a lion, Samson says, "I don't need that spear. It's only a young lion", and proceeds to tackle it with his bare hands!

However, despite all De Mille's attempts to reassure Mature, it was a double that fought the animal.

"He's a very sweet old lion", said the director. "When you fight him, I'd like you to put your head in his mouth. Now don't worry, he has no teeth".

Mature replied "Mr. De Mille, I don't even want to be gummed." He wrestled with a lion skin!

I leave you with a comment on the film by Groucho Marx: "No picture can hold my interest when the leading man's bust is bigger than the leading lady's!"

Iain McGlashan  
CHAIRMAN