

## Trudy Gold - Catherine the Great

- We are looking forward to a wonderful presentation. So, over to you. Thank you very much.

- Good evening everyone, and I guess we didn't expect to be spending New Year's Eve this way. So all of you on the course may I wish everyone of you a really happy and a healthy new year and let's hope that it's a better one, a better year next year. And I just want to say that I think what Wendy has done is magnificent. I want to thank my colleagues, I want to thank Judy, because she pulls it all together. But above all tonight is actually for Frances, Frances Kirsh. What we wanted to do was to give her a birthday treat in October. Unfortunately she was travelling.

*Visual slides are displayed throughout the presentation*

So the reason we chose Catherine the Great is that Catherine is in fact one of Frances' favourite figures from history and actually it's an extraordinary choice. So Catherine the Great, and it's especially for you Frances, so I hope you'd like it. And what I'm going to explain to the audience, what I'm going to do is the first part of the lecture, a presentation, I'm going to talk about the figure of Catherine, but because it's New Year's Eve and because it's so dark and gloomy, certainly in London, I thought that we better look at a few movies, because she's also one of the most portrayed women in history. So we're going to look at some of the clips from the movies and also look at some of the extraordinary characters who've been involved in making films about her. So that's the project for this evening.

And before I actually get onto Catherine, I think there's quite a lot to say about the role of women in history. If you think about it, women didn't really have a voice unless they happened to be rulers or something incredibly exceptional. And I was thinking yesterday actually, when Janet gave her magnificent presentation on Cleopatra and she very much pinpointed that, that in a way women's history is something that's very shrouded. Quite often when I'm lecturing, people will phone up and say, "Well, where were the women?" Well, the problem was the women very seldom were given prominence. If you think for example, in Victorian England, if you think of great novelists, George Eliot, obviously, that was Mary Ann Evans, even the Bronte sisters changed their names to masculine names to sell their books.

But so the other point about Catherine, Catherine has come down to us with an extraordinarily mixed reputation. She had a voracious sexual appetite, which in most male rulers is seen as something rather wonderful. And Catherine is besmirched her reputation. So those are the kind of remarks I want to make. And also obviously in a 20-minute, half hour presentation on the life of Catherine, I can't go into huge depth, but I am relating it to Jewish history, because Catherine the Great is going to be very important in Jewish history as well. So can we please see the first picture of the young girl, Catherine? There you are, she's very pretty, she was 15 years old when she first went to Russia.

So let's talk about it. Remember, she's not Russian, she was in fact German. She flirted with the liberalism of the Enlightenment. In fact, she was in deep correspondence with Voltaire. She was fascinated by modern ideas. She was furiously clever, and she spoke many languages. She starts out as a figure of the Enlightenment, but the fear of the French revolution made her into an arch reactionary. As I said, she was completely sexually liberated and was famous for what they called the Night Empress, the gentleman of the guard who would spend a night or two with her. But the most important was an extraordinary man called Grigory Potemkin.

And he founded for her an empire in the south, which really was very important in Jewish history. And after her death, her son hated her so much that he ensured that no female would ever sit on the Russian throne again. So she was German by birth. She was the daughter of Prince Christian August von Anhalt-Zerbst and Joanna Elisabeth of Holstein-Gottorp. She was born in Stettin. And it's important to remember that Germany at this stage was made up of over 360 separate city states. Some of them were Protestants, some of them were Catholic. Of course, the rulers of Russia were Russian Orthodox.

They found it much easier when they're looking for brides to turn to the Protestant princesses of Europe, who in the main came from little kingdoms, because they would make, they would convert easily and make great rulers of Russia. So, can I see the next slide please, Judy, she was chosen as a bride by a formidable woman called the Empress Elizabeth of Russia. Her dates were 1709-1762. She was looking for a wife for her son Peter, who tragically was actually, well, he had huge mental problems, to put it mildly. Now she had a great lineage, because she was the daughter of Peter the Great, and she lived under a very confused succession of her father's descendants. There were lots of half-brothers, she actually was illegitimate.

She was the daughter of Peter the Great by a peasant girl. But later on she was legitimised and she herself was figure of the Enlightenment, very, very strong woman. You had to be strong to rule Russia. Just think of the size of Russia. Russia isn't really codified as a country until the 1550s in the reign of Ivan the Terrible. So this woman ruling over a vast mass of land where the majority of people are tied to the land as serfs, but she also saw herself as a figure of the Enlightenment. There's a real dichotomy here, because you have her and her daughter-in-law who want to think about the liberal ideas, but at the same time, they are going to rule as autocrats. She encouraged the foundation of the University of Moscow.

She held a splendid court. Just look at the materials on that gown of hers. Just look at the incredible beauty of the lace. The wealth of the aristocracy and the nobility compared with the poverty of the peasantry is beyond imagination. And she encouraged the foundation of the Imperial Academy of Arts. She was responsible for the Peterhof Palace, the Winter Palace, and the Smolny Cathedral and much of the buildings in St. Petersburg are inspired by her. She loved architecture, she loved art, and she really promoted them. And not only that, she was a very astute politician. This is the mother-in-law. She led the country through two wars. Russia enjoyed several victories against Berlin, which they briefly occupied in 1761.

Frederick II, the great Frederick II was actually prepared to surrender when the message was sent that she had died. So, and her son, who becomes Czar was himself a German and adored Frederick II and had very little time for his mother. So let's go now into a bit of detail on Catherine the Great herself, please, if you don't mind, Judy. And I've got a picture of her later in life with her greatest lover who many think she actually married. That's her in later life. So having mentioned her background, her father belonged to the ruling German family of Anhalt, the capital of which was Dessau.

Now Catherine the Great was born in 1729. Those of you who love Jewish history will know that in Dessau, another man was born, a man called Moses Mendelssohn. What different paths they took the accidents of birth. She was educated by a French governess. I've already told you that she spoke the language very well. She had a very interesting education. She was a tomboy and she was a very good swords person. She learnt how to wield a sword and she was very adept at fencing. She wrote to her correspondent Baron Grimm, to give you a clue of her childhood, "I see nothing of interest in it, although I'm born a princess."

You see, the family were not very wealthy. And in fact she first met her future husband, Peter III, at the age of 10. And she kept a diary. And we know from the diary that she found him absolutely detestable already by the age of 10, he was going down the path that was going to lead him to total destruction. He played with toy soldiers, his governess encouraged him to drink. He was a very weak, and today we would've considered him mentally unwell. There was huge intrigue, because his mother needs to find him a wife. And even though she doesn't get on with Catherine's mother, she decides that Catherine, who's 15 years old, pretty would be a suitable, malleable wife.

So she is chosen and she arrives in Russia in 1744, when she is 15 years old. She learnt Russian very quickly, both to please the Empress and the Russians. And her father didn't want her to convert to Russian orthodoxy, but as another famous king of France, Henry IV said, "Paris is worth a mass." And Russia obviously was worth a conversion to Russian orthodoxy. And that's when her name is changed, she becomes Catherine. There's a formal betrayal, it really was a tragic marriage and he treated her incredibly well, incredibly badly actually. But evidently the wedding night, he just wanted to play with toy soldiers and throw them at him. And she was having a really, really bad time with him. And it's at this stage that she begins to develop more and more of her intellectual pursuits.

She reads the classics and she learns state craft from reading Tacitus, she reads the Greek text, the Latin text. And what she said was, "I'm interested in hidden and interested motives." This is perhaps the, well, it's certainly the best group of people I've ever taught. And tonight I had a message from one of our group who is a brilliant scientist and he gave me a bit of information that I didn't know. She was also interested in mathematics. And there was a man called Leonhard Euler from Switzerland. He was a genius and one of the great mathematicians of his age. And evidently he couldn't get a job in Switzerland, she sent for him and he persuaded her to buy Isaac Newton's notebook.

So it gives you a great notice, a kind of notion of her incredible scholarship. And this is from Alexander Herzen, the great Russian writer and journalist who edited Catherine's memoirs. Catherine had her first affair with a man called Sergei Saltykov who was probably the father of her son Paul. She had a very long liaison with Stanislaw Poniatowski, who later became king of Poland. And then of course, when she begins to realise that it's going to be her or her husband, she makes sure that the palace guard are on her side and she becomes very involved with a man called Orlov who was the captain of the guard. Now Elizabeth, the relationship with Catherine and Elizabeth was quite fractious, but nevertheless, she does produce an heir. And most historians believe that the heir was not the son of her husband, but as far as Elizabeth is concerned, the succession is assured.

So there's a kind of *modus vivendi* by the time that Elizabeth dies and Peter succeeds to the throne with Catherine as the Empress consort. Now Peter was already very unpopular. He had huge excesses, he had many strange mistresses. And as I said, he spent most of his time playing with toy soldiers and he had huge admiration for Frederick II of Prussia. That's why the war was stopped. And that of course alienated many groups at the court and Catherine was a very skilled diplomat. And what she had done was to make sure that she had all sorts of important allies. And of course, in the Seven Years War of 1756 to 1763 where the Russians had actually reached Berlin, Peter ceased his opposition against Prussia, because he adored Frederick of Prussia. By 1762, they held separate courts.

Catherine was conspiring to take the throne. She realises how unpopular her husband is. She's also worried for her own life, because she's produced the heir. He has a favourite mistress now and he's totally mentally unbalanced. So what she does is she appeals to the regiments to protect her. She actually then basically, they captured her husband, they arrested him and forced him to sign an edict of abdication. And she becomes Czarina of Russia. You know her critics would say that she slept herself into power, but she was a very, very shrewd character. I mean, eight days later, Peter died, probably murdered by Orlov who was the younger brother of Catherine's favourite. And she was pregnant by him at the time. And now she is Empress. She was crowned in Moscow in 1762. There was a wonderful imperial crown made for her, which was the centrepiece of the Romanoff collection.

Catherine said of herself, "I will never be beautiful, but I please, that is my long suit." She was obviously very attractive to men. As I said, her detractors accused her of unsavoury sexual practises, even bestiality. But the truth seems to have been that she just had a good sexual appetite at a time when it wasn't considered proper for women, certainly not a woman who was Empress of Russia. And we know that her lovers, as she got older, her lovers got younger and younger and I've already mentioned how much she was a patron of the Enlightenment. And at the beginning of her reign, she had great admiration for reform.

But after she takes power, the reality was very different. You see, how on earth could you apply the ideas of the Enlightenment? Just think of the Enlightenment, which a few years later, 1786,

the French Revolution, liberty, equality, fraternity, how can you apply that to a country like Russia, which is so backward and so ungovernable? And also, who were her supporters, the reactionaries? The church, those who loved mother Russia, the army and they are against any kind of change. And how on earth do you go against the landowners when they're wealthy was actually measured by the number of serfs that they possessed. I think it's almost staggering to imagine the kind of estates and wealth of the Russian nobility.

I first went to Russia under Communism and I remember going to the Sheremetev Palace, which was a summer palace, just about 20 miles from Moscow. It was never actually lived in except for six weeks in the summer. And there was a pavilion decorated in seashells and it had taken serfs six years to actually create that. You see, the serf population, they weren't considered human by the landowners, by the nobility. So these are her power base. And Catherine was nothing if not pragmatic. Anyway, in 1772, something happened that could have threw all liberalism out of the window.

And that was the actually dismemberment of Poland. We've looked at this in the past because of course, this is where you have the largest Jewish community in the world and think where it's placed, it's between Prussia, the Hapsburg Empire and Russia. And beginning in 1762, culminating in 1815, it's carved up and it's swallowed up. Even though one of her lovers was king of Poland, that doesn't stop her. So basically, she takes a huge chunk of Poland and by 1773, all the pretensions of the Enlightenment were really shattered by suppression of the Polish regime. Both Diderot and Voltaire, who she entered into so many correspondences with, they were absolutely horrified.

And this is what Catherine records in her diary, she was nothing if not honest, "I told him, frankly, 'I have listened with great pleasure to everything you have told me, with admiration for your brilliant mind. In your plans for reform, you forgot the difference in our situations. You philosophers are fortunate, you only write on paper, which is smooth, obedient to your commands and does not raise any obstacles. Why I, the poor Empress have to write on ticklish and easy irritated skins of human beings.'" So the pragmatic Catherine now in 1774, she begins an affair with one of the most fascinating men I've ever read about, Grigory Potemkin. His dates are 1737-1791. Catherine first saw him on the night she took power and she was only 22 years old. When they remeet she wrote this, "He was one of the greatest, most amusing and original personalities of this Iron Age." They became incredibly close.

He matched her both physically and intellectually and they had a dream the expansion of Russia and Potemkin becomes her major general. And he delivers Catherine the Crimea, she makes him Prince of Tauris which is the ancient name of the peninsula. Some historians believe that they married. Later on she certainly addressed him as husband. And although as they grew older that they were very close, but they both moved onto younger lovers and he was very much the dominant force in her life until he died. So when he dies, she's prostate with grief. A little bit about Potemkin, because he is an absolute fascinating individual.

As he develops into the south, into the Ukraine, they build Odessa, they build Kherson some of the great cities of Russia are built by him. He wants that Port Odessa, it was a Turkish stronghold. It's taken by him for Catherine. And of course, she then sends for a French architect and they developed the city that we know today, which actually Sandra was mentioning when she gave that fantastic lecture the other day on Reilly Ace of Spies, because he came from Odessa. Now also many Jews come into the area, he encourages this. We first see Jews on in his world, on his greater estate, which is part of the old Polish lands.

And he actually invites them. He adds a coda that the Jews can settle and he also allows them to settle in the Zaporozhye region and the empty lands of the Cossacks. So basically he also allows them to trade in wine in spirits. He is very much unlike the majority of people of his age. He promised them protection, he adjudicated their disputes. And one of his greatest followers and friends was a rabbinic scholar called Joshua Zeitlin. He'd been born in Shklov in Belarus, moves to Kherson, which is of course part of the realm, I'm going to call it the realm of Grigory Potemkin. And on Grigory Potemkin's estate, you would find mullers, emirs, you would find rabbis, you would find all sorts of interesting people, because this man had a mind as big as his size. You know that wonderful line from Julius Caesar and I quote it sometimes, because some of the characters we talk about, they are like that.

You know that wonderful line where Mark Antony says, "He doth bestride the narrow world like a colossus." Now, Zeitlin becomes a very close associate of Potemkin and he's even introduced to Catherine. And during the Turkish-Russian Wars, he furnishes the troops with supplies and he managed the business so well. He was actually appointed an imperial court counsellor. So he becomes a court Jew, but he's also a close friend of Potemkin. And he had an estate, Potemkin gave him an estate and 500 serfs. You see, these people are commodities. He was also very learned this Joshua Zeitlin. He was consulted by rabbis on Halachic questions. He financially aided many Talmud discs and he supported Jewish scholars.

And he was right up until Potemkin's death, he was contractor in all the lands that Potemkin himself owned. And he got involved in the great power struggle between the Vilna Gaon and the Hasids and the man of the rational mind, he actually supported, of course the Vilna Gaon. So that's just a really a sort of illustration of the lives of two extraordinary people, an extraordinary Empress and then her lover. When Catherine died, she was of course succeeded by her son Paul. Paul unfortunately, was also mentally ill and he only lived for five years and he was the... And then of course, the man who takes the throne, Catherine's grandson, Alexander I. And he is the man who of course, goes against Napoleon. Catherine outwardly did not favour Jews, because she had to keep in with the Orthodox church and also very much with the upper nobility. But on the other hand, she and Potemkin did nothing against them.

And as I said, they did allow Jews to settle down into the Ukraine. And this is fascinating, because she needs to settle those areas, they're vast areas and to encourage Jewish settlement, she forgave them huge taxes. So if you settled in those areas, you didn't have to pay tax. And just to one of those lovely little circles of history on one of the families that's going to

settle there is the Bronstein family. And I've already spent a session with you on Bronstein's grandson, Lev Davidovich Bronstein Trotsky, who was one of the most important figures in bringing down the whole of the Czarist regime. But as I said, the story of Catherine continues to fascinate and there have been so many films made on Catherine. The first one was actually Catherine the Great by Reinhold Schunzel in 1920.

But the one I'm going to start with is actually a film made by Alexander Korda, because what I'm trying to do is to show you down some of the byways of history. So I'm going to give you a bit of biography. This is a film that's going to be made in 1934 by the extraordinary Alexander Korda, who is going to become one of the most important filmmakers really in certainly in Britain, but he's also going to be quite important in Hollywood. And his great propaganda film "Fire Over England" is the film that actually Churchill shows on his boat when he has a fascinating meeting with Roosevelt. Churchill adored that film and Korda's going to become a very good friend of Churchill's and he's going to be knighted for his wartime efforts.

So who was Alexander Korda? Really, he is the Louis B. Mayer of British film. I think one of the stories that we don't explore enough is that the British motion picture industry is almost as dominated by Jewish families as is the American. And here you see the Hungarian Sandor Laszlo Kellner. He was born in the northeast of Hungary in a tiny little village. His parents were Henrik Kellner and Ernesztina Weisz. He had two younger brothers watch for their names, Zoltan and Vincent and his father died young, so very bright. To support his family he began to write film reviews. Think where we are. Come on, this is the era of the motion pictures. He changed his name to Korda. Now this is after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many with German-sounding names. After the Empire is dismembered, they are now in Hungary, huge Hungarian nationalism. So what do they do? They make their names more Hungarian. He becomes very important.

He's got a huge personality, he's got a restless personality. He writes and he becomes very important in the Hungarian film business. He starts writing film magazines that leads to screenplays and he goes on to build one of the largest film companies in Hungary. But this is under the Hungarian Socialist Republic of Bela Kun, a Jew, we talked about him a few weeks ago. He continues making films. The Soviet regime is of course replaced by the Whites. And during the White Terror, he is arrested, he's released, but he leaves Hungary. He's never going to go back there. And where does he go? He goes to Vienna. In Vienna, an interwar Vienna, interwar Berlin, it's fascinating for all the new kind of art, music, film. And you see Jews at the forefront of modernity. We discussed this the other day, why?

And I think it's fascinating. It's from country to country to country. And he goes to work for one of the most important film companies in Vienna. His first big international success, was the "Prince and the Pauper". And he decides what he's got to do. He needs to make films with global box office success. Remember, we are in the era of silent films, so we don't have the language problem. He goes to Berlin where he becomes part of UFA. Now UFA was the brilliant German film industry. Weimar Cinema was amazing and we're going to do separate sessions on this.

And he makes for UFA "Tragedy in the House of Hapsburg", which is the story of Mayerling, many of you will know the opera which is the story of Crown Prince Rudolph and his murder of his mistress in the hunting lodge.

He also makes "Dancing Mad". He has a wife called Maria and he actually makes her the lead in all his German films. He makes a film called "The Modern Madame Dubarry" the screenplay by one of his greatest, the man who's going to become his greatest collaborator and greatest friend, Laszlo Biro along with his brothers. And he made his last German film "Madame Wants No Children" for the Berlin-based subsidiary of 20th Century Fox, which is of course controlled by the Hungarian Jew Adolph Zukor. More about that later on. And it's in December 26, he sails for America. He doesn't have much time for the studio system. And also, the coming of the talkies destroyed his wife's career.

He goes to France, but in the end he comes to London where again working for Paramount, he produces "Women Who Play". And that's when he decides to form his own theatre company, London Films. And a lot of important films. He co-directs with his brother Zoltan. In London, one of his, "That Night in London", starring Robert Donat, his big hit "The Private Life of Henry VIII", which establishes Korda internationally and made a star of Charles Laughton, "The Private Life of Don Juan" with Douglas Fairbanks. And in 1934, "Catherine the Great", and I'm going to show you a clip from that in a minute.

And also that same year, he makes "The Scarlet Pimpernel", "Sanders of the River" with Paul Robeson. I hope I'm bringing memories to some of you. And that's directed by Zoltan. "Moscow Nights" brings in Laurence Olivier. He sees the potential in the brilliant young Olivier. "Rembrandt" with Charles Laughton in 1936. "Things to Come" H.G. Wells. And then of course, he buys Denham Studios, a huge studio which is very modern, becomes a community in itself and is actually reviewed in the New York Times. They talk about this amazing cinema, this amazing studio. Then he makes "Fire Over England" in 1937, "Dark Journey" with Conrad Veidt. And he begins to bring over talent from Europe. Conrad Veidt, who wasn't Jewish but his wife was.

And tragically he's going to spend much of his time later on playing Nazis. You will remember he is the villain in "Casablanca". Vivien Leigh of course was in "Fire Over England". He makes "Elephant Boy" stars Sabu, the "Divorce of Lady X", Olivier and Merle Oberon who he falls in love with and later marries and World War II propaganda films, "O Planes" with Olivier, "Lion Has Wings", "The Four Feathers". And then he begins to work with a couple of other interesting men, Powell and Pressburger. Of course, Pressburger, they are also Hungarian Jews. He then gets himself into financial difficulties and he has to merge with Pinewood. Anyway, he goes to Hollywood where he makes "That Hamilton Woman", which is also an incredibly important war film, because of course, Lady Hamilton played by Vivien Leigh is who? She's the mistress of Nelson and the great sea victory and that really captured Churchill's imagination. And in as a response to that, Korda was actually knighted by the king.



So he had an incredible interesting life and I'm bringing him into the picture. There'd be more about him later on, because he's the man who produces, he is the producer and the brains behind this important film, which was very well-reviewed on Catherine the Great. Can we see the next slide please? Judy, does it work? Thank you. There you have the very handsome Douglas Fairbanks Jr. You might be interested, his dates were 1909-2000. You might be interested to know that his grandfather's name was actually Ullman and he was a German Jew. He looked basically, I'm not going to give you the lives of all the stars, I'm just saying how they relate. He became a huge star in Hollywood.

He comes to England to star in "Catherine the Great". And of course, then he goes back to Hollywood where he stars in Selznick's "Prisoner of Zenda". He's a hero in World War II. He goes on acting 'till 1887. He had a fascinating private life, those of you who want to read his autobiography, his first wife was Joan Crawford when he was 19 and she was 23 and he was one of those named in the Profumo scandal. And can we go on please? And there you have Elizabeth Bergner. She plays Catherine 1897-1986. She was born in the Hapsburg Empire in a little town, which is now part of the Ukraine. Again, from a Jewish family. Her father was a merchant. She started acting when she was 14 years old.

She had an incredible career, first in Vienna, then in Berlin. And she actually toured Germany with a Shakespearean company and she made her film debut at UFA. But of course, 1933 time to get out, she came to London. And I was talking to Patrick the other day and he mentioned a very close friend of his Spoliansky, whose father was Mischa Spoliansky was a very important musician and who was brought up by Korda. Characters like Korda, with their film empires could actually bring talent over to London. And she comes to London in 1933 with her boyfriend, the director Paul Czinner, who's actually going to direct this particular film. And he actually also was a Jew from Budapest, clever man.

He'd studied philosophy and literature and goes into the film business. So he is the man who's going to direct Elizabeth Bergner in "Catherine the Great". He had a big career. Both of them were up for Oscars in Hollywood. And ironically, she is buried in Golders Green Crematorium. And there's an interesting story attached to her obituary. Those of you who love the movies, I'm sure "All About Eve" is one of your favourite stories. And evidently, that particular screenplay, which was written by Joseph Mankiewicz, one of the greatest of the Hollywood writers, that particular screenplay was based on something that happened to her.

Those of you who know the film, it's the story of Eve Harrington who lays in wait for her actress who she admires. She worms her way into her life and finally takes out, takes over her life. And evidently this happened to Elizabeth Bergner. And the story was recounted, which was the, if you like, the pattern for Mankiewicz's film. Now this is what Goebbels was had to say about Elizabeth Bergner, in "Catherine the Great". "It is to be understood that no British film in which there is a Jewish actor and actress will be committed to be shown in Germany." Can we go on? There you have Flora Robson. I'm just showing her picture, because she was such an icon of the cinema. Her most famous part was Elizabeth I.

She was actually Scottish, an interesting woman who really stayed on, she was on both the stage and screen and was a stalwart of London pictures. But I want you to see another of the major actors in this film, because he's got an extraordinary background and touches Jewish history. If we could just go on quickly, Judy. Here you have Gerald de Maurier. Sir Gerald Hubert Edward Busson du Maurier. His dates 1873-1934. He was the son of George du Maurier. George du Maurier was a very famous writer, and he wrote a book called "Trilby". And the villain of "Trilby" is this Jewish figure of Svengali. And there is a film version of "Trilby". You can get it on Prime television where Donald Wolfelt plays Svengali.

So Gerald came from a very upper-middle class background. He went to Heath Mount School in Hampstead. I know many of our London viewers will know that. He then goes to Harrow, but he wants to be a thespian, doesn't want a business career. He starts with small parts. He's well-connected, Garrick Theatre. Funnily enough, the first play he ever acted in was a sympathetic Jewish play called the "Old Jew". He went on to become a very important theatre manager, at Wyndham's and St. James, and in "Catherine the Great", he acts as Catherine's valet. And his last role, he dies in 1934, he's got one more role after Catherine was in Michael Balcon's production of "Jud Suss", "Jud Suss", the story of Jud Suss Oppenheimer. And we'll be dealing with that later on. So that is, if you like the cast. And now if you don't mind, Judy, can we just see a tiny little extract from London films?

And you should recognise many of the names. Thank you. Okay, I don't think we need to go any further. Unfortunately, there isn't a really good print of it. But I just wanted to give you a feel. And I'm sure as you noticed all the characters, some of whom I've told you about, you will notice how many of them just from the names are foreign born. And this is one of the real craziness of both British and American cultural life, because ironically, it's that appalling catastrophe that is going to hit not just the Jews of Europe, but the liberals, the left-wingers, the people who thought for themselves, all the chaos of Europe is going to catapult many of these talented people first to Paris onto London, many of them then onto America.

And Patrick actually went as far as to say that he believed that London was a real backwater before all these immigrants came to the country. And they really took the cultural life of Britain by the throat, which is fascinating. Anyway, I'm going to go on now to another film that was made at the same time, and it was called "The Scarlet Empress". And that was made actually by a man called Josef von Sternberg. There you have the great Josef von Sternberg. Again, the von is a later edition. His dates are 1894-1969. He came from a poor Jewish family in Vienna. When he was three, his father moved to America to seek work. His mother and her children, they join him when the young Josef was seven years old. He goes to school in America in New York 'til he was 10. And then Moses stays behind, the family returns to Vienna. It was a very, very unhappy family life.

And there's a very dark side to Josef von Sternberg, which is going to come out in his movies. And he says it's in Vienna when he's just with his mother and the other children that they are the

happiest childhood moments, because evidently his father was the very rigorous man. Not only did he insist that his son have a rigorous education and a Jewish education on top of his regular schoolwork, he seems to have been a bit of a tyrant. And that's going to become very much a theme in his work, the sort of the tyrannical man, the abuse, et cetera. Anyway, he leaves school when he was 14. The family they go to America. And from then on he goes from one job to another in popular taste to industry, becomes an apprentice to a milliner, then he becomes a trinket salesman, clerk at a lace company.

He becomes very familiar with the ornate textures. And those of you who know his films, he was very interested in costume. His film sets, and I'm going to show you a clip later in a minute, are so ornate and elaborate. In the end, 1911, he's very smart, he will work and work and work. He's employed at the World Film Company in Fort Lee, New Jersey. He becomes a projectionist. He's in the American Army where he's involved in training films for recruits. And after the war, he has this peripatetic existence in America and in Europe. He goes from film company to film company. He earns his bones. He's a cutter, he's an editor, he's a writer. He works himself up to assistant director. And his idol is Erich von Stroheim. Can we see his picture?

Yes, I'm not going to talk about him, because I'm running out of time, but I will be talking about him later on. In fact, he also, the von is added and he's also a nice Jewish boy from Vienna. Anyway, going back to Sternberg, he's finally taken up by United Artists through Mary Pickford. And from then on he goes to MGM in 1925. In 1926, he's sent for by Max Reinhardt. Max Reinhardt, who is the great theatre director of Berlin and Vienna, he owns 31 theatres. And he brings him to actually work on some of his productions. It doesn't work.

And then he's working for Paramount, because Paramount, you've got to remember the great Hollywood studios, they have an arm in Germany and it's UFA. And Paramount employs him to work with a man called Emil Jannings. And it's produced by Erich Pommer, who was the head of UFA. And they were both on loan from Paramount sister studio. So Paramount and UFA are very close together. Erich Pommer, who is the head of UFA, who is also a Jew. When I say these people are Jews, they're not interested, they are international figures. They're going to be made into Jews by the Nazis. Now, of his films, only four exist today. And the others have been lost. He was summoned then in 1929, his great hit was in fact Emil Jannings in "The Blue Angel".

And if you haven't seen "The Blue Angel", you really, really must. And he cast the little known Marlene Dietrich as Lola. And he falls madly in love with Marlene, it leads to a huge scandal with his wife. And, but artistically, it's going to lead to an incredible cooperation. They're going to cooperate on six films together. They're excessive, they're over-stylistic, but they're period pieces and they're really worth looking at. So what I think, 'cause I'm running out of time, can we please see an extract from "The Scarlet Empress" starring Marlene Dietrich? And basically, it's the story of the early years when she goes to Russia as the young bride. So if we could see, and Sam Jaffe, who many of you will know, makes his film debut as Peter. So if we could just see that.

*Video clip plays*

- You want to know why I sent your mother away? Well, I'll tell you. I sent your mother away, because she didn't bring you up properly. I was told that you were an obedient, respectful child. Well, you nothing of the sort!

- [Alexei] Your husband doesn't mean a thing to you.

- He does, I'll always be faithful to him.

- [Alexei] Don't be absurd, those ideas are old-fashioned. This is the 18th century.

- I love that line. Anyway, look, it wasn't a great film, but what is interesting, I think you saw the incredible work on the gowns, it's a period piece. And of course, Marlene Dietrich went on to have the most extraordinary career and became a great humanitarian. In the war, the Germans desperately wanted her to come back. But no, she was very much, became an American, very much then an international figure. She did all sorts of interesting humanitarian work. She was given the huge honours by the Israelis. So a very, very special woman and a very interesting woman. Okay, there were many other films about the Empress Catherine, I'm going to now show you just a playbill. Can we see?

Now, Mae West, the extraordinary Mae West, her dates are 1893-1980. A couple of wonderful quotes, "You only live once, but if you do it right once is enough." And her most, I suppose her most famous were, "I used to be snow white, but I drifted." I mean, she had, it's a completely different background. She was born in Brooklyn. Her father was a prize fighter. Her mother had been a model, a corset model actually. She was always a performer. She won prizes from early years. And she's discovered by the time she's 18 years old. She's actually on the stage, she's vaudeville. The New York Times said, "Grotesque and snappy way of singing and dancing." She began writing her own plays. 1926, a play called "Sex". She was prosecuted on a morals charge and she spent 10 days in jail. She could have paid a fine, but in fact it gave her so much publicity that it was worth it.

You see, there are two Americas, think about the prohibition. Back in 1871, the Comstock laws had forbidden even talk of basically of abortion or of sexual protection. So basically, she's up against the current, she was always a woman who fought for women's rights. And Catherine appealed to her. And it was a great success on the stage. And here you see her extraordinary costumes. She also fought for the rights of other minorities for people of colour. She was really against her time. And by 1935, she was the second highest paid person in America. And her story, "Catherine Was Great", is in fact a spoof, of course, it's a spoof. Well, there were lots and lots of other versions of Catherine. There was Jeanne Moreau did a version in 1963, that was a mini-series. Catherine Zeta Jones did the series. There are about 10 attempts at Catherine, but I'm actually going to finish with the last years of Catherine The Great in what I think is probably for us the best film, because of course it's stars, the amazing Helen Mirren.

But you can see if you go onto Prime television, you can find lots of different versions, there's a Russian version. So let's have a look at "Catherine the Great" with Helen Mirren. And this is the last years of her life.

*Video clip plays*

- [Catherine] You know who I am.

- [Crowd] Catherine, Catherine!

- [Catherine] I have survived in a world that does not want me. When I first came here from Germany, I did not even speak the language.

- She's a very clever and well-read woman.

- [Catherine] But I fell in love with this country, its passion.

- She loves a lot of things.

- A lot of men.

- I'm for expansion, I'm the for empire.

- Does she love anything apart from power?

- Do you think she even likes men? She eats them, and spits them out.

- Sounds like an interesting proposition.

- [Catherine] You are a very attractive man.

- [Grigory] Coming from the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, that is indeed a compliment.

- [Catherine] Come up to my private apartments. You may do whatever it is you think I want, but I will not share my throne with anyone.

- [Countess Bruce] You are the empress and he can be your devoted servant.

- You think it's as simple as that. Men want power.

- [Grigory] I want what man wants to make his own way to find love.

- The crown was never hers by right?
- [Grigory] Russia must be ruled by a man.
- [Catherine] This is my country. It would be a terrible mistake to go against me.
- [Grigory] You love nobody but yourself.
- I would like to remind you that you owe all of your advancement and all of your military power to me, I own you.
- [Grigory] I remind you, I waded through blood for you!
- [Catherine] I did what I did and I wouldn't have had any of it any other way.
- You can actually see it on Prime. Anyway, thank you very much. Should we see if there are any questions? There's some very nice thank yous to all of us from Yvonne. Happy New Year. Thank you Wendy, Trudy, Judy and all.

#### Q&A and Comments:

Q: "What year was Catherine born?" Is from Jay.

A: She was born in 1729, she died in 1796.

Now again, we are having lots of lovely thank yous and this is from Faye Feldstein, which is an interesting comment, "I had just finished a course on Catherine and St. Petersburg. She had 20 lovers and remained on good terms with all, 'cause when she finished with them, she gave them grand merchants or land. She collected artists. She believed it gave her great power over the people and showed the world, she wasn't trivial." Yes, I believe she had more than 20.

Yes, and this is from Jonathan. This is fascinating. "She had the first smallpox vaccination in the empire as an example." And this is from Ellie. "There is a Zeitlin Street in Tel Aviv." Thank you for that, this is why I love our group.

Q: And this is from Marion. "Where did the aristocracy get their wealth from?"

A: Land, land. The serfs would cultivate... Look, there are estates the size of England and the serfs would be working the land, the produce of the land. Raquel Marks, "Remembering Merle Oberon in "Wuthering Heights"."

Yes. Oh, this is Ellie, "My Viennese mother used to rave about Elizabeth Bergner and told me so many stories." And this is from Judy, "What is my take on the mini-series with Helen Mirren?" I

think it's pretty good. Look this, it's not deep. It depends what you want. And frankly at this time of the year when everything is so dark, I think it's quite important that we have a little light as well. Look, it's a wallow. It's the kind of film that you sit with a nice box of chocolates and if you're allowed to drink, which I'm not anymore, you can have an ice glass of wine and you'll have a good wallow evening.

Those of you who are in the sun don't bother. But those of you who are in the dark and cold of England or Canada, not a bad idea. And yes, of course this is from Dale. Gerald du Maurier, of course I didn't mention that. How silly of me. He's the father of the famous Daphne du Maurier. And of course, many of her books were brought to the screen. "Rebecca", and I'll be talking about that next week, because I'm going to talk more about Selznick. He made "Rebecca" with Joan Fontaine and Lawrence Olivier, and he won an Oscar for it. So yes, Gerald du Maurier father of Daphne, fascinating writer.

And I suppose lots of her films, it's not just "Rebecca" that's brought to the screen. "My Cousin Rachel" "Frenchman's Creek". There's a new version of "My Cousin Rachel" with Rachel Weisz. But the original version is with Olivia De Havilland. Oh, this is from Rochelle, "Love these old movies from my childhood." Yes, but I must admit, I must admit, when I was looking through the films to show you, even though I wanted to show you the London films, because of the people who were in it, it's a very bad film.

This is from Ron. This is interesting. Thanks Ron Bornstein, "James Christie, the founder of Christies. Sold a vast amount of great art to Catherine, including the bulk of Robert Walpole's Houghton Hall collection, which went on to St. Petersburg. It was the greatest art sale of the period and secured Christie's reputation. The rest is history." Thank you Ron. As I said, I just love our group, because you've all got so many different areas of knowledge. "

Q: Wasn't Bernstein an important UK film product?"

A: Yes, the Bernstein family, of course are absolutely crucial. Not just in the film business, they had Granada television, but I suppose today their greatest fame would be "Coronation Street". And of course, Sidney Bernstein, he's also very important in Jewish history, because Sidney Bernstein was a cameraman working for the BBC in the war. But he also was working with Hitchcock. And the first Jewish doctor into Belsen was his brother-in-law. And he phoned him and said, "You've got to come and film this, because no one's going to believe it." And Hitchcock gave him the advice to film it in the round.

And the sixth reel has just been discovered. A film came out a couple of years ago by Andre Singer. So that's a much more serious line. But the Bernstein Brothers, yes. And look, Jewish families dominated British show business as well. But we've got to be careful here. What do we mean by Jewish? I keep on using that word, because they had to come to this country, into America, because basically where they came from became so dangerous for them.

Ah yes, this is from Marla, "If you're interested in something fun Hula has a one season series called "The Great", a spoof on Catherine the Great from the same writer of the recent Academy Award film "The Favourite". Thank you for that. And again, Wendy and Judy we're having lovely compliments. Thank you so much. Yes, can I spell the name of the rabbi in Potemkin?

Let me make sure I can, I'm very bad at spelling here. Is it Joshua Zeitlin. And we've just heard in fact that there's a street name for it in Israel. I love the streets of Tel Aviv. That would be a great course Wendy. Z-E-I-T-L-I-N, Joshua Zeitlin. "Who first called her Great?" I don't know. That's a very, very good question. Bernie Stern, "She called Jews Christ Killers."

It was her mother-in-law who was totally anti-Semitic. She went along with it, but I don't believe she was... Look, there's a terrible line on anti-Semitism in the old world of Christianity. It was actually coined by an Israeli academic. Anti-Semitism is to dislike Jews more than is absolutely necessary. Unfortunately, look, there's not a positive image anywhere until 1729. Yesterday, when I was talking about "Gone With the Wind", and somebody asked a very important question, which I'm thinking about a lot. What do you do with a film which has today totally racist connotations?

And I was thinking about this a lot. Is it possible to still appreciate something and realise how racist it is or realise how prejudice is against one group or another? Because you can also, if you think about homosexuality and how that was such a terrible, the way homosexuals were treated through history, the way all sorts of different peoples, does that stop us appreciating art, I mean, I suppose, or music? I mean, when Patrick looks at the impressionists, 50% of them were deeply antisemitic.

Do we stop loving their art? I don't know. I suppose we've all got our lines. And as I said when I was talking about this, I believe passionately in freedom. And obviously, there are certain things that are beyond the Pale, but in the main, they are covered by the incitement to racial hatred. "Did she develop the Pale of Settlement?" No, it's codified by her grandson. She allowed Jews to settle outside the Pale, but it's gradually extended down. The Pale was almost the size of Europe that it wasn't just Jews who lived in the Pale, they made up 12% of the population. But after 1835, they couldn't go into Russia proper. And this is some lovely Happy New Year.

"What was Catherine's legacy?" Ah, that is a very, very good question. And I'm not going to give you a trivial answer. Let me think. "Who created the incredible costumes that Catherine would've worn in her time?" I presume you would have the most incredible seamstresses. And of course, where were the fabrics bought? We know that the silk would've come from China. A lot of the jewels would've come from India. So the courts, all the courts of Europe wanted beautiful things, but they had reams and reams of people working for them. And you've got to remember that look, the history, the history of most centuries, right up until the 19th century is really the history of the famous and the rich.

We don't really know what went on with ordinary folk, because they didn't write it down. So I



would imagine it's not an area I studied, but the history of costume, a friend of mine is very into that, I'll ask her, but I really think it's probably, there's just all the armies of seamstresses. And I know where the fabrics come from though. Again, we are having so many nice messages, Wendy and Judy, I don't know if you can see them all. Oh, this is interesting from Pamela, "So Alexander's private secretary immigrated to South Africa in the 1950s and worked for my father," only on our Zoom, it's unbelievable. "She told me about Merle Oberon's Indian heritage before it was public knowledge." Yes, Merle Oberon had a very mixed background. That's one of the reasons I think she was so very, very beautiful. Yes, that's interesting, that is very interesting. Thank you for that Pamela.

- Trudy, I'm going to jump in now just to say a million thanks for a brilliant, brilliant presentation. That was truly awesome. I know how much work went into that presentation and you are one special lady.

- And so, you are one special lady, Wendy Fisher. Never forget that.

- And I really want to say a huge, huge thank you to you. You've made you together what the rest of our team have made this wonderful university a huge, huge success. And I'd also like to say to our participants, very happy, healthy, wonderful New Year. Please God, 2021 will be a thousand times better than the year that's just passed.

- Yes.

- And yeah, and for those of you who are feeling, thinking that it's so lovely on this very windy cold beach, don't be jealous. Don't be jealous, because in five minutes when I say goodbye, I'm going to have to go and swim in a wheezing cold sea. Just what don't we do for our children? So what I want to say-

- Have you got your grandchildren with you?

- No, thank goodness I managed to persuade them to leave the little baby at home. So on that note, I was successful. So Trudy, and to all of you, a huge, huge thank you. A happy, healthy, and wonderful New Year and a big, huge universal hug to everybody that's with us tonight.

- Thank you Wendy, and thank all of you. And thank you Judy, for keeping me sane. And I just wish you look, look, as Wendy said it, let's have as happy a New Year as is possible. Keep close to the people who we care for. And we're back again very quickly, aren't we? When are we back, Judy? What date?

- [Judy] Oh, we'll see everybody on Saturday.

- Of course, we're back on Saturday. Yeah, we're back for the Marx Brothers. You see we're going to have the Marx Brothers over the next few days. So God bless everybody.

- And I just want to send a special hug to my parents who I know who are watching in Cape Town.

- And I hope Frances, I hope you enjoyed that. And lot's and lot's of love.

- Sorry, she did. She did Trudy. Trudy, she sent me a message to say, please, I should say, how much she enjoyed it and thank you so much for this very special presentation.

- God bless.

- That was dedicated to her. Thank you so much. Thank you Judy and thank you to everybody.

- God bless.

- Take care.

- Bye everybody.

- Thanks, bye.

- Bye.

- Bye.