



Silent Treatment New soundtracks for old movies

The audience waits for the lights to dim at the Zeughaus Kino, which sits across the water from Berlin's Museum Island. A man in a red velvet jacket rises from the front row, walks toward the grand piano underneath the movie screen, and sits. The theater goes dark, the man's eyes look up to the screen, and he begins to play.

The film is *Frau im Mond* ("Woman in the Moon"), a 1929 silent sci-fi classic by German master Fritz Lang. It's one that the cinephiles in the audience know well, but the movie isn't the only draw: The man in the jacket is Carsten-Stephan Graf von Bothmer, and he is not your average film accompanist, as evidenced by his lack of sheet music.

"The Graf" ("The Count"), as he's known, has improvised music for hundreds of silent films, his favorites being *Nosferatu* and *Metropolis*. "Most silent film musicians don't even want to do it anymore," he says of the latter, in German. "But I've already done it 35 times." He may be partial, because a decade ago, Bothmer, who was a piano student at the time, was asked by a movie theater to accompany Fritz Lang's futuristic German expressionist masterpiece. After failing to write music that he was happy with, he improvised a performance that enthralled the audience and got him rehired. Berlin was at the beginning of a silent film resurgence that continues today, and Bothmer's exhilarating improvisations set him apart.

Perhaps one of Bothmer's most memorable—if not talked-about—performances was in July 2010 at Berlin's Emmaus Church, during the last four games of the World Cup. He improvised a commentary on the players and their moves, interspersing it with familiar riffs like Darth Vader's theme from *Star Wars*. "It was like there was a zoom on the ball," he says. "[The audience] had never experienced a game so intensely before."

Although no such feats are planned for the future, Bothmer has just returned from a tour of South America and a performance in the Philippines. Which film will get the musical treatment next? "I'd really love to do *Lord of the Rings*," he admits. — Giulia Pines