

# The Sounds of **Early Cinema** in Britain

## Conference I

About 60 delegates attended the first Sounds of Early Cinema in Britain conference in June 2009. Silent film specialists such as Professor Ian Christie (Birkbeck), Professor Andrew Higson (Warwick), Prof Toulmin (Sheffield), curators from the Bill Douglas Centre in Exeter (Phil Wickham) and the British Film Institute (Bryony Dixon), the specialist librarian in Moving Image at the British Library (Luke McKernan) were among those who, along with numerous film musicologists, turned their minds to the sonic dimension of early film exhibition.



## Issues examined:

- the textual, material and technological sources of the sonic dimension of the exhibition of 'silent film' in the UK
- contributors included musicologists, film historians, curators of relevant archives, even a restorer of cinema organs.
- the event was jointly hosted by the Barbican Cinema, where delegates heard a reconstruction of William Frederick Peters and Horace Silvers' original score to *Way Down East* (D. W. Griffith, 1920) and Albert Cazabon's original score for *The Flag Lieutenant* (Maurice Elvey, 1926).



## Sound Effects Workshop

Here we addressed a variety of approaches to "sounding" silent cinema via historical and practical investigation, such as the role of the "film describer" and the practice of providing live foley sound. A well-attended programme of short silent films showcased the practices at Edinburgh's Cameo Cinema.

## Issues examined:

- *How to go about producing live sound effects?*
- *What constraints does 'liveness' place upon performance?*
- *What contemporary approaches to supplying live effects to early film are there?*
- *How do other sonic practices (eg. lecturing to screen) function as part of a 'live' programme?*
- *How was the understanding of silent films shaped by differing sonic practices?*

