

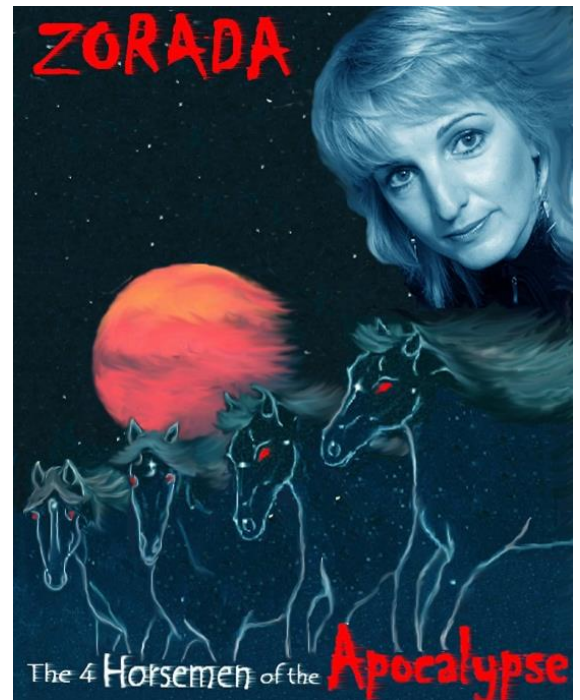
# The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1921)

Silent movie with organ improvisation

Zorada Temmingh (organ)

Tuesday 25 June  
18:30

DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH  
(MOEDERKERK)



## The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

References to the Four Horsemen (of the Apocalypse) have appeared frequently in popular culture over the past 100 years. The English translation of Spanish author Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's seminal 1916 novel *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis* became the best-selling novel in the US in 1919. Director Rex Ingram's stirring anti-war film, based on the book, was the first major film to be made about the First World War and became the biggest box-office hit of 1921. The film also catapulted actor Rudolph Valentino to stardom - he became known as Hollywood's original 'Latin Lover'.

The title refers to the four horsemen of the Bible's Book of Revelation (chapter 6:1-8). In the film, they become a powerful symbol of the devastation that war brings to humanity.

The story begins in Argentina just before the First World War. The wealthy patriarch, Madariaga (Pomeroy Cannon), rules his family and employees with equal fervour. His two daughters marry foreigners: Luisa (Bridgette Clark) to the Frenchman Desnoyers (Josef Swickard) and Elena (Mabel van Buren) to the German Von Hartrott (Alan Hale). After the death of the patriarch, the two families return to their husbands' home countries.

The German sons quickly climb the ladder of success in the army, while life in Paris becomes more complex for the French family; the father becomes increasingly materialistic, and the spoiled brat, Julio (Rudolph Valentino), becomes an increasingly accomplished womaniser and tango instructor, and a less accomplished part-time painter. Julio begins an affair with Marguerite Laurier (Alice Terry, the real-life wife of director Ingram), the frustrated young wife of Desnoyers's friend (John St. Polis). As the family intrigues reach a climax, war breaks out, dividing the two families into two opposing camps.

While most men are called to war and patriotism is strong, Julio meets 'The Stranger' (Nigel de Brulier), a Russian exile who 'sees' the Four Horsemen of Revelation and explains their symbolism to Julio through an artwork by Albrecht Dürer. "It is the age of fulfilment. The Angel of Prophecy is revealed. The voice of the Beast shall be heard, commanding the Four ill-omened Horsemen as they ride forth - to scatter desolation throughout the world! The first

Horseman to lead Prophecy's devastation is - *Conquest!*" (on a white horse, carrying a bow and crown). "The second - *War*, in all his hideousness!" (on a red horse, holding a sword). "The third, trailing in their wake - *Pestilence*, carrying the Scales of Famine!" (on a black horse). "And in relentless pursuit, the fourth Horseman - *Death!*" (often depicted with a scythe in his hand). "The agony of humanity under the brutal sweep of the Four Horsemen has already begun!"

Little by little the characters lose everything dear to them – for Desnoyers, his earthly treasures, for Von Hartrott, his sons. Marguerite, torn between her love for Julio and her responsibility to her husband and country, joins the medical corps as a nurse. Julio, at first indifferent to the drama around him, is gradually drawn into the conflict and joins the French army, not out of conviction for the cause, but out of shame for his useless life in the midst of tragedy. His character eventually grows into maturity throughout the film.

The climax of the film comes when the French and German cousins face each other on the battlefield.

*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is Zorada's third silent film with an improvised organ soundtrack. It follows in the footsteps of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Phantom of the Opera*, both of which were performed at the BIF. Zorada's soundtrack is both narrator and character. She imbues every visual nuance with meaning through the music, thereby weaving a narrative thread that runs throughout the film. As in *Hunchback*, Zorada creates a recognisable theme for each main character, which is heard when the character appears on screen, and develops as the character faces different situations. Apart from some sensual tangos there are also original themes for Love, Loss, War, Paris, and of course, the ominous Horsemen. Fragments of well-known Great War songs might also be recognised. These elements are all used by Zorada to convey the emotional journey of the characters.

**Zorada Temmingh**, renowned organ improviser, was the first South African to release CDs (six) with organ improvisations. She was also the first to do soundtrack improvisations for silent films: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (which she will be performing at the Buxton International Festival in July this year). She has performed throughout South Africa, and internationally in the UK, the USA, Switzerland, Belgium, Israel and Namibia. Zorada has received a number of awards for her groundbreaking contribution to the South African music scene. She has been organist of the Stellenbosch Moederkerk since 1986. Since 2015 she has presented the popular annual Moederkerk Organ Week, showcasing local and visiting organists. She has also presented two series of classical music programmes for radio. Zorada freelances in a number of fields: as pianist (piano duo *Blondes*), examiner, adjudicator, national moderator for Music (secondary education) and teacher.



With thanks to PTFS Europe for sponsoring the Tuesday concert.