

I. The Black Pirate

A wealthy young man survives the taking of his vessel by a band of pirates but loses his father in the incident, and then in disguise joins the pirate crew. The setting may be the **English Caribbean**. They take another prize and the young man works to save the vessel and ship's company surreptitiously before being unmasked and made to walk the plank. Will he survive?

At the time this silent was made, **Douglas Fairbanks** was the biggest star in cinema, on the incredible success of a string of costumed action-adventure movies including treatments of **ZORRO** and **ROBIN HOOD**. He was celebrated for performing his own stunts, and there are one or two in **THE BLACK PIRATE** that remain as eye-popping today as they were on release in **1926**.

The film is also the first full-length feature shot *entirely in color!* So us, it really won't look a whole lot like that because it uses an early two-strip process that does not capture the full spectrum of visible light, skewing instead to red and green. *Fairbanks* also wrote, directed, and produced this film, which was very successful on release. Primary production was based on and near **Catalina Island**, as with so many maritime silents.

It was released in several versions in the 1920s including a version recut for sound for which *Fairbanks* is said to have provided voiceover for dialog and narration, replacing the intertitles. *Fairbanks'* career did not survive the transition to soundies, however, only working for five more years after the transition to sound in 1929. He died of a heart attack in 1939 at the age of 56 and is interred in one of the largest memorials at the **Hollywood Forever cemetery**, very near to the memorials for **Johnny Ramone** and **Chris Cornell**.

This, or really any of *Fairbank's* swashbucklers, make wonderful introductions to silent cinema because they remain intensely accessible today with great timing, interesting visuals, and simple, exciting storylines. Down fiddle! Up pipes! *Set us now away*, aloft the catlines, coil any hawsers! *Grease the weasel* and crick the neck of the old giraffe, sharply now! *Secure the bow chaser there!* Up and fast the bumpers, cast off, weigh anchor, set sail, and join—
THE BLACK PIRATE!