

If any actor was perfectly cast for the role of the swashbuckling D'Artagnan in a big screen adaptation of the Alexandre Dumas adventure, it was silent screen icon Douglas Fairbanks. With his kinetic athleticism and vibrant charisma, Fairbanks created the concept of the movie action hero in this opulent 1921 production, which is being offered in a new DVD release with a digital restoration by Marcus Johnson and a new theater organ score by Ben Model.

This version is faithful to the Dumas text, so be forewarned that there is a surplus amount of scheming by various members of the French court before D'Artagnan and the Musketeers (including a young and slender Eugene Pallette) arrive to engage in some of the most entertaining swordplay ever captured on film. And while Fred Niblo's direction encourages some wonderfully broad acting - Adolphe Menjou's emotional Louis XIII, Nigel de Brulier's sinister Cardinal Richelieu and long-forgotten vamp Barbara La Marr's dangerous Milady de Winter - the film belongs to Fairbanks, who embodies D'Artagnan with a youthful recklessness and sublime physical prowess that turns the character into a force energy that is astonishing to behold.

While there have been numerous screen versions of *The Three Musketeers*, Fairbanks still owns the role of D'Artagnan - and this silent classic is still a joy to behold.

(95)