

# SF WEEKLY

26 SF WEEKLY FEBRUARY 27-MARCH 4, 2008 [sfweekly.com](http://sfweekly.com)

## Nights of *Cabiria*

When Giovanni Pastrone's three-hour, effects-laden masterpiece *Cabiria* burst onto Italian movie screens in 1913, some clever fellow coined the phrase "cinematographic opera." Nowadays we'd say "epic extravaganza" or some such hokum, but that doesn't begin to cut the *senape* either. Shot on humongous three-dimensional sets with thousands of extras and a slew of technical innovations, the breathtakingly restored *Cabiria* — the highlight of the three-day **Cinema Piemonte** series — is an unequivocal jaw-dropper. During the Second Punic War (218-201 B.C., for those who went to public school), in the chaos accompanying the eruption of Mount Etna, Carthaginian pirates snatch the daughter of Roman aristocrats as a splendid sacrifice to Moloch. Can someone, anyone, rescue her? The lovingly photographed festivities include the volcano (naturally), the torching of the Roman fleet, and all the pomp and ritual attending human sacrifice. What a feast! Even the singularly ambitious and talented D.W. Griffith, a man who didn't like coming in second to anyone, admitted watching *Cabiria* before embarking on *Birth of a Nation*. Nearly a century later, *Cabiria* still has the power to amaze and thrill.

*Cabiria* starts at 4 p.m. ("Cinema Piemonte" runs Feb. 29-March 2) at Cowell Theater at Fort Mason (Marina and Buchanan), S.F. Admission is free; call 345-7575 or visit [www.fortmason.org](http://www.fortmason.org).

— MICHAEL FOX