



Emilie Sannom

Also Known As:

Mille, Emilie Kristine Valborg Sannom

Lived:

September 29, 1886 - August 30, 1931

Worked as:

film actress, screenwriter, stunt designer, stunt person, theatre actress

Worked In:

Denmark, Germany, Italy

by Isak Thorsen

“Frygten for Døden var ikke så stor/Større var Frygten for Livet på Jord” [Trans.: The fear of death was not too great/Larger was the fear of life on earth]. These lines, written on Emilie Sannom’s headstone, are from a commemorative poem composed by the famous Danish author Tom Kristensen at the time of Sannom’s tragic death in 1931. Sannom died in front of an audience of 8,000 people when her parachute did not unfold while performing an aerial show in the Danish town of Grenaa. Her early death—she was only forty-four years old—marked the end of a remarkable life and career.

Sannom was born in 1886, in Copenhagen, to Fritz Emil Sophus Sannom (1854-1935), a first mate and furnace stoker on a ship, and Johanne Kamilla Hansen (1861-1936). In 1887, the entire family immigrated to Florida where they unsuccessfully ran an orange plantation. After seven years abroad, the Sannom family returned to Denmark and settled down in Copenhagen, where Sannom’s mother dreamed of seeing her daughters on the stage. According to Sannom, she made her theatrical debut as an extra at the age of nine, and her sisters, Charlotte (1884-1954), Thora (1893-1954), and Ragnhild (1896-1953), acted on the stage and in films as well (Nielsen 2003, 914). Sannom continued to perform in Copenhagen theaters, and also toured the Nordic countries before making the leap to the new medium of film.

According to Sannom, she first appeared onscreen, between 1907 and 1909, in small parts in productions by the leading Danish company of the silent era, Nordisk Films Kompagni (Nørgaard 1992, 116; Nielsen 914). However, the first film that we can be certain that Sannom participated in was *Gøngehøvdingen/The Partisan Chieftain* (1909), made by Biorama. In the company Kosmorama’s famous *Afgrunden/The Abyss* (1910), which launched [Asta Nielsen](#)’s career,

Sannom played a supporting role as the flirtatious Lilly, who tempts Nielsen's lover and gets into a fight with Nielsen. Nielsen and Sannom also appeared together in *Balletdanserinden/The Ballet Dancer* (1911), produced by Nordisk. In another of the company's productions, *Hamlet* (1910-11), Sannom played Ophelia, Hamlet's wife-to-be. In a spectacular scene, Sannom throws herself into the castle moat, and thereby became the first stuntwoman in Danish cinema and laid the groundwork for her reputation as a daredevil.

It was Sannom's engagement with the Danish film company Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus/Filmfabriken Danmark that led to her fame. The company specialized in the genre known as *sensationsfilm*—films featuring spectacular action scenes and stunts. Sannom signed her first contract with the company in 1912, at the same time that the French film company Pathé Frères offered her a lucrative contract of 2,000 francs a month. However, Sannom chose to stay in Denmark. From 1912 to 1919, she was part of the company's core staff and became its main attraction, marketed as “Danmarks Vovehals Nummer Et,” or “The Number One Daredevil of Denmark.” In numerous films, she performed her own dangerous stunts: participating in wild car or motorbike chases, performing balancing acts across a dangerous abyss, or hanging on the rotating blades of a windmill. “I'm born with the conviction that whatever will happen to me, I'll make it,” Sannom once said about her stunts. “I'm never going into panic, never clueless, never senselessly flustered” (qtd. in Debora 4). Besides doing her own stunts, Sannom also worked as stunt double for the company's other actors (Nielsen 914). It is unclear if Sannom designed her own stunts, but as Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus/Filmfabriken Danmark worked with a small central staff, a plausible assumption would be that she collaborated in the staging of her stunts. Hardly any of Sannom's films have survived, but a short compilation of her films, *Filmens Vovehals/Daredevil of the Movies* (1923), gives an impression of Sannom's spectacular stunt work.

Her increasing popularity led to two series of films about bold female detectives with Sannom playing the main character. Four films were made in the *Nattens Datter/Daughter of the Night* series (1915-1917), and four films were made in the detective serial *Panopta* (1918-1919). The *Panopta* episodes were probably the most successful of Sannom's films, and also the last that she made in Denmark.

As a member of the core staff at Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus/Filmfabriken Danmark, Sannom was also involved in the creation of two scripts during her time there. The extent of her contribution is uncertain, but she is credited for the script of *For Barnets Skyld* (1915), in which she also had a role. It also seems very likely that Sannom came up with the scenario for the film *Elskovsbarnet* (1916), which is now lost (Nørgaard 73; Nielsen 609). More research is necessary to better understand Sannom's possible screenwriting endeavors.

In 1919, Skandinavisk-Russisk Handelshus/Filmfabriken Danmark ceased production of fiction films, and Sannom went back to the stage, performing in Denmark, Norway, and Germany. Sannom returned to the screen in the early 1920s, making two films in Germany: *Die Frau im Delphin* (1920) and *Das Land der Finsternis* (1921). Additionally, invited by a fellow-countryman,

director Alfred Lind, Sannom shot *La fanciulla dell'aria/Mistress of the Sky* (1923) in Italy, which was ultimately her last film. From then onward, she earned her living performing on the stage and in the circus, as well as performing parachute jumps from airplanes, sometimes only wearing a bathing suit and high-heeled shoes. In 1929, she tried in vain to get a pilot certificate, pretending she was six years younger than her actual age. In an interview from 1919, Sannom, unwittingly prefiguring her own untimely death, explained: “Life is not worth living without danger, and if death arrives, well then it arrives...” (qtd. in Nørgaard 107).

In her time, Sannom stands out as a modern, emancipated woman. During her career, she supported herself and her family economically. She gave birth to a daughter, Grethe, out of wedlock in 1912, and never hid the identity of the father, the actor Axel Schultz (1890-1974), whom she considered a good friend. Though she had many admirers, Sannom never married. In an interview from 1925 with the headline: “What would you have done if you had been a man?” Sannom replied: “I would have been a really wild cowboy” (“Hvad vilde De gøre” 14).

Bibliography

Debora. “Pigen, der ikke kan Gyse.” *Tidens Kvinder* [n.d]: 4.

Hending, Arnold. *Filmens Vovehalse*. København: Urania, 1948.

Hove, Peder. *Mille*. København: Gyldendal, 1992.

“Hvad vilde De gøre, hvis De var Mand?” *Eva* (October 1925): 14.

Nielsen, Jan. *A/S Filmfabriken Danmark*. København: København: Multivers, 2003.

Nørgaard, Erik. *Mille–mændenes overmand: Den eventyrlige beretning om skuespillerinden Emilie Sannoms liv*. København: Holkenfeldts Forlag, 1992.

Sundholm, John, et al. *Historical Dictionary of Scandinavian Cinema*. Kanham, Toronto, Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2012.

Archival Paper Collections:

Emilie Sannom folder. [The Danish Film Institute](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Emilie Sannom as Screenwriter and Actress

For Barnets Skyld. Dir.: William Glückstadt, sc.: Emilie Sannom (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1915) cas.: Karen Sandberg, Alfred Sjøholm, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 2,395 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 37 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

2. Emilie Sannom as Actress

Fra det mørke København. Dir.: Carl Alstrup, sc.: Carl Alstrup (Biorama Denmark 1910) cas.: Carl Alstrup, Emilie Sannom, Arvid Ringheim, si, b&w, 2,132 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Afgrunden. Dir./sc.: Urban Gad (Kosmorama Denmark 1910) cas.: Asta Nielsen, Poul Reumert, Robert Dinesen, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 2,460 ft. Archive: [Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv \[DEB\]](#), [Svenska Filminstitutet \[SES\]](#), [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Münchner Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive \[USB\]](#), [Österreichisches Filmmuseum \[ATM\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

Mormonens Offer. Dir.: August Blom, sc.: Alfred Kjerulf (Nordisk Films Kompagni Denmark 1911) cas.: Valdemar Psilander, Henry Seemann, Clara Wieth, Carlo Wieth, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 3,543 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Dyrekøbt Glimmer. Dir.: Urban Gad, sc.: Palle Rosenkrantz, Otto Gulmann (Nordisk Films Kompagni Denmark 1911) cas.: Johannes Poulsen, Fredrik Jacobsen, Elna From, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 2,726 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Archivo Nacional de la Imagen y de la Palabra - SODRE \[UYS\]](#).

Den store Flyver. Dir.: Urban Gad, sc.: Christian Nobel (Nordisk Films Kompagni Denmark 1911) cas.: Poul Reumert, Christel Holch, Einar Zangenberg, William Bewer, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 2,559 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Balletdanserinden. Dir.: August Blom, sc.: Alfred Kjerulf (Nordisk Films Kompagni Denmark 1911) cas.: Asta Nielsen, Valdemar Psilander, Johannes Poulsen, Valdemar Møller, Karen Lund, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 2,625 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Münchner Stadtmuseum \[DEI\]](#), [Filmarchiv Austria \[ATF\]](#).

Dødens Brud. Dir.: August Blom, sc.: Otto Gulmann (Nordisk Films Kompagni Denmark 1912) cas.: Augusta Blad, Agnete Blom, Robert Dinesen, Aage Hertel, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 3,067 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Guldhornene. Dir.: Kay van der Aa Kühle, sc.: Palle Rosenkrantz (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1914) cas.: Emanuel Gregers, Emilie Sannom, Jens Trap Walther, Hakon Ahnfelt-Rønne, si, b&w, 3,812 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 820 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Zigo. Dir.: Kay van der Aa Kühle [uncredited], sc.: unknown (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1914) cas.: Valdemar Møller, Rasmus Ottesen, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 978 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 26 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Pigen fra Hidalgo-Fyret. Dir.: Kay van der Aa Kühle, sc.: unknown (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1914) cas.: Rasmus Ottesen, Emilie Sannom, P.S. Andersen, Charles Løwaas, si, b&w, 3,395 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 102 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Zigeunereren Raphael. Dir.: unknown, sc.: Richard Lund (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1914) cas.: Waldemar Wennerwald, Zanny Petersen, Else Weng, Thorleif Lund, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 3,825 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [Deutsche Kinemathek \[DEK\]](#).

Diligencekusken fra San-Hilo. Dir.: Kay van der Aa Kühle or Emanuel Gregers, sc.: unknown (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1914) cas.: P.S. Andersen, Zanny Petersen, Rasmus Ottesen, Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 2,732 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 16 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Panopta II. Dir.: Kay van der Aa Kühle, sc.: Richard Lund (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1918) cas.: Emilie Sannom, Victor Montell, Hertha Rindom si, b&w, 4,028 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 85 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Panopta IV. Dir.: Kay van der Aa Kühle, sc.: Richard Lund (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1919) cas.: Emilie Sannom, William Jensen, Jon Iversen, si, b&w, 2,719 ft. [**Note:** surviving fragment approx. 85 ft.]. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#).

Filmens Vovehals. Dir.: unknown, sc.: unknown (Filmfabriken Danmark Denmark 1923) ca.: Emilie Sannom, si, b&w, 501 ft. Archive: [Danske Filminstitut \[DKK\]](#), [EYE Filmmuseum \[NLA\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Emilie Sannom as Actress

Gøngenhøvdingen, 1909; *Faldgruben*, 1909; *Apachepigens Hævn*, 1909; *Den skæbnesvangre Opfindelse*, 1910; *Skarpretterens Søn*, 1910; *Mellem Pligt og Kærlighed*, 1910; *Døden*, 1910; *København ved Nat*, 1910; *Lægens Hustru*, 1910; *For hendes Skyld*, 1910; *Spaakonens Datter*, 1911; *Hævnen hører Mig til*, 1911; *Lad være at blinke*, 1911; *Naar Hr. Bessermachen arbejder*, 1911; *Vildledt Elskov*, 1911; *Hamlet*, 1911; *Gadeoriginalen*, 1911; *Privatsekretæren*, 1911; *Knap og Hægte*, 1911; *Det mørke Punkt*, 1911; *Skibsrotten*, 1912; *Dagen før – Dagen efter*, 1912; *Den hvide Kloun*, 1912; *Gift dig – gift dig ikke*, 1912; *Konfetti*, 1912; *Zigeunerorkestret*, 1912; *Bryggerens Datter*, 1912; *Dødsridtet*, 1912; *De to Brødre*, 1912; *Pigen fra det mørke København*, 1912; *Den Undvegne*, 1912; *Den sorte Bande*, 1913; *For evigt*, 1913; *Balloneksplosionen*, 1913; *Ægteskabelig Lykke*, 1913; *Den sorte Varieté*, 1913; *Den sorte Pierette*, 1913; *Krigskorrespondenter*, 1913; *Ungdomssynd*, 1914; *En rædsom Nat*, 1914; *Mælkedrengen paa sjov*, 1914; *Mirzi*, 1914; *Lykkeligt Ægtskab*, 1914; *Letsind*, 1914; *Hans Faders Ære*, 1914; *En bevæget Bryllupsnat*, 1914; *Zatansteins Bande*, 1915; *Skuddet fra Toldstationen*, 1915; *Selma fra Øen*, 1915; *Nattens Datter*, 1915; *Kærlighed gør stærk*, 1915; *Gennem Flammerne til Lykken*, 1915; *Fra Dybet*, 1915; *Britta fra Bakken*, 1915; *De Unævnelige*, 1916; *Nattens Datter II*, 1916; *Ledestjernen*, 1916; *Et Hjerte af Guld*, 1916; *Elskovsbarnet*, 1916; *Barnet fra Skovsøen*, 1917; *Søstrene Morelli*, 1917; *Nattens*

Datter III, 1917; *Nattens Datter IV*, 1917; *Panopta I*, 1918; *Had og Kærlighed*, 1918; *Panopta III*, 1919; *Die Frau im Delphin*, 1920; *Das Land der Finsternis*, 1921; *La fanciulla dell'aria*, 1923.

C. DVD Sources:

Filmens Vovehals. DVD. (Danish Film Institute DK 2003)

Afgrunden. DVD. (Danish Film Institute DK 2005)

Balletdanserinden. DVD. (Danish Film Institute DK 2005)

D. Streamed Media:

[*Fra det mørke København*](#) (1910)

Filmens Vovehals (1923)

Balletdanserinden (1911)

Mormonens Offer (1911)

Credit Report

Although unconfirmed, it is very likely that Sannom came up with the idea for the lost film *Elskovsbarnet* (1916).

Some of the film lengths in this filmography differ from their listings in [Asta Nielsen's](#) filmography due to the fact that the length of the same film often varies by country. In the case of *Balletdanserinden* or *Afgrunden*, for example, the length of the German intertitles are longer than the Danish ones since individual national censorship alterations, depending on national laws and regulations, influence the length of a film in individual countries.

Citation

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<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/emilie-sannom/>>