

## Casablanca (1942) Curtiz

P Michell, Feb 2018

*An incisive, witty and enchanting film that is certainly Curtiz' best. It represents the ultimate in Bogart myth: his Rick Blaine is cynical and tough, hardened by life's misfortunes, yet still sentimental and idealistic. The dialogue is full of quotable Bogart lines ...*

George Sadoul –Dictionary of Films, 1965, 1972.

Our first film is a near perfect example of the 'movie factory' type of film making that made Hollywood justifiably world famous. Made efficiently and with experienced staff and actors from a studio well know for its 'grittiness' and realism. Yet ... Its all fake.

Filed in basically shot in two locations – Primarily Studio 7, Warner Bros & Van Nuys Airport. Stage 7 is a big stage, where My Fair Lady, The Big Sleep, Yankee Doodle Dandy, Captain Blood (1935) all filmed. More recently used for TV - 'ER' TV series, 'Ellen' TV Show, etc.

Imdb.com

Arguably no other popular film has had so much written about it. We all love this film – don't we? OK ... Perhaps some don't ... What about as we've matured. What do we feel about it now?

Though most think this is a love story there are plenty of other themes.

Film is famous for having bit parts played by recent Jewish immigrants famous either in theatre or cinema in home country. Eg: 'What Watch' sequence. Another element is due to censorship by the Hays Office. So much is 'obvious' ... how did they get away with it.

Good new book:

We'll Always have Casablanca: The Life, Legend and Afterlife of Hollywood's Most Beloved Movie (2017) Noah Isenberg, Faber & Faber.

Normally there is trivia section. However there is so literally much trivia connected to this film, snippets included everywhere! One useless piece – the art director, Weyl, designed the famous Brown Derby restaurant in LA.

Synopsis:

*Casablanca* is a 1942 American romantic drama film directed by Michael Curtiz based on Murray Burnett and Joan Alison's unproduced stage play Everybody Comes to Rick's. The film stars Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Paul Henreid; it also features Claude Rains, Conrad Veidt, Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, and Dooley Wilson. Set during contemporary World War II, it focuses on an American expatriate

who must choose between his love for a woman and helping her and her husband, a [Czech Resistance](#) leader, escape from the [Vichy-controlled city of Casablanca](#) to continue his fight against the [Nazis](#).

Although *Casablanca* was an [A-list](#) film with established stars and first-rate writers, no one involved with its production expected it to be anything out of the ordinary, just one of the hundreds of pictures produced by [Hollywood](#) every year.<sup>[5]</sup> *Casablanca* was rushed into release to take advantage of the publicity from the [Allied invasion of North Africa](#) a few weeks earlier. [Pearl Harbour was bombed three days after producer had original play.]

Exceeding expectations, *Casablanca* went on to win the [Academy Award for Best Picture](#), while Curtiz was selected as [Best Director](#) and the Epsteins and Koch were honored for writing the [Best Adapted Screenplay](#) – and gradually its reputation grew. Its lead characters,<sup>[7][8]</sup> memorable lines,<sup>[9][10][11]</sup> and pervasive [theme song](#)<sup>[12]</sup> have all become [iconic](#) and the film consistently ranks near the top of [lists of the greatest films in history](#).

Wikipedia

### Other Contributors

A Warner Bro ‘mass production’ movie made with many other significant contributors apart from the famous actors and Director. All with fantastic work before and after.

**Hall Wallis** – Producer. 376 films! From 1928 - 1944 worked at Warners. Many significant films in *Rainmaker* (1956), *Maltese Falcon* (1941). Elvis films! Famous Western – *The Furies* (1950).

**Michael Curtiz** – Hungarian Director. (178 films) Famed Warner director. Trained in German tradition. Came to US in 1926. Spoke ‘mangled’ English. S Z (Cuddles) Sakall quipped that “You think his English is bad ... You should hear him speak German!” Long career at Warners. Directed (and made) many Errol Flynn films inc *Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). Many memorable films – *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936). Famous quote ‘I want more empty horses!’ Meaning he wanted more horses to increase the spectacle. David Niven’s autobiography ‘Bring on the Empty Horses’ pays homage. Described a group of extras as ‘separate together in a bunch’. Famous ‘poodle/puddle’ story. An assistant took too long getting a script ‘The next time I have to send a silly fool ... I’ll go myself!’. (Isenberg, p 193, 4)

**Max Steiner** – music score. 396 films! Worked for Warners between 1936-65. Legend has it that he scored almost all the fanfares for the big studios. Possibly most famous film composer. Musical genius – aged 15 won a medal for completing an 8 years music course in one year in Vienna. Never told Hollywood he studied under Mahler. Father was friendly with Brahms. Latter taught him piano. Strauss was his godfather. Prolific worker. In 1934 scored 37 films, a year later 37 films! Many famous films – inc *Gone with the Wind* (1939). *King Kong* (1933) written in two weeks. TV work inc *77 Sunset Strip* (111 episodes) (1958-63) and *Maverick* (1957-62).

**Leo Forbstein / Ray Heindorf** (Musical Director)

Whilst most of the music is Steiner there is this ... In the late 1970s I met Albert Johnson, Prof of cinema at UCLA Berkeley. An expert on Hollywood Musicals. He suggested that Heindorf arranged much of the music at Warners, mostly uncredited. Officially took over at Warners when Forbstein died in 1948. He was one of the few who allowed black musicians to play. Strong jazz connection. Highly likely the Dooley Wilson material has connections with Heindorf. He worked on Yankee Doodle Dandy too.

I have contacted Yale University for clarification. (They hold a Heindorf 1976 interview.)

**Arthur Edeson** – Cinematographer. American. One of 15 who founded the American Socy of Cinematographers in 1919. Retired in 1949. Famous films: Three Musketeers with Fairbanks (1921), Lost World (1925) [first feature film using stop motion animation], All Quiet on Western Front (1930), Frankenstein (1931), Invisible Man (1933). From 1936 - work at Warners inc they Drive By Night (1940), Maltese Falcon (1941), Three Strangers (1946).

**Carl Weyl** – Art Director (German). 48 films. Trained as an architect. Designed Brown Derby restaurant and Hollywood Playhouse theatre both in LA with Henry L Gogerty – at least 8 other building still extant. . Films inc Robin Hood (1938), The Letter (1940), Kings Row (1942), Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942), the Big Sleep (1946). Sadly died in 1948.

**Orry-Kelly** – Costumes. 300 films. Australian. Chief costume designer at Warners from 1932-1944. Worked for other film companies too inc MGM. Past local Exhibition – ‘Dressing Hollywood’ at ACMI 2015/2016 featured many of his designs. Recent documentary on SBS.

Famous Actors:

**Conrad Veidt**. Plays Maj Strasser. German actor who played Caesare in Cabinet of Dr Caligari. Expressionist German silent of 1920. Sadly died a year after the film was made.

**Peter Lorre**. Plays Ugarte. Cast by Fritz Lang as psychopathic child killer in ‘M’ (1930). Famous for his wok in Maltese Falcon (1941) as well as Casablanca. Learnt English in the US. Convinced Bogart to marry Bacall – ‘Five good years are better than none.’ Ren from Ren & Stimpy (cartoon) is based on him. In Vienna was a student of Freud. Testifying at the House of Un-American Activiites when asked to list suspicious people. He named everyone he knew!

Many other actors are mentioned in links below.

Quotes:

Arguably, cinema’s greatest ‘accidental masterpiece’, it still amounts to some hill of beans.”

*Time Out* (London)

‘Masterpiece of light entertainment.’

Kenneth Tynan

‘First women’s picture made for men.’

David Thompson

‘Casablanca is not one movie; it is *movies*.’

(Below is a link to Eco’s essay.)

Umberto Eco

### **The screenplay is the thing ...**

There were seventy to seventy-five writers at Warners ... it was like an assembly line.”

Julius Epstein (Isenberg, p 44)

One of the writers that looked at Casablanca was Frederick Faust, a contract writer. Reputed to have written 500 (!) novles and as many short stories. Wrote under a swag of pseudonyms inc Max Brand (Westerns & Dr Kildare). Wrote 14pp / day.

Note – Julius & Phillip Epstein were twins and their significant work includes ‘Four Wives’(1939, No Time fo Comedy (1940), Strawberry Blonde (1941 and The Man Who Came to Dinner (1942).

Casablanca’s famously hotch-potch screenplay written by a number of people including: Original play by Burnett & Alsion – ‘Everyone Comes to Ricks.’ Epstein Bros (comedy), Howard Koch (politics), Casey Robinson (romance – though unclear how much is left. Advised on casting), Hal Wallis, the producer – apparently penned ‘Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship’, Bogart – ‘Here’s looking at you, kid.’

Screenplay has always been highly acclaimed – ranked #1 in 2001 by Writers Guild of America. Most frequently taught script at aspiring writers an actors. First championed by American screenwriter guru Syd Field. His 1979 best selling handbook – ‘Screenplay: Foundations of Screenwriting long considered the screenwriter’s bible ... Devotes significant attention to Casablanca ...” (Isenberg, pp 61, 2)

“Great Script Tease of 1982 where aspiring screenwriters Chuck Ross sent a complete text under the title ‘Everybody Comes to Ricks’ with minimal changes (Same becomes ‘Dooley’). Submitted to 217 agencies – 90 refused to read an un solicited MSS; 7 never responded (18 additional copies lost by US Postal Service);, 8 noticed a certain similarity to Casablanca,; 33 recognised it outright. The rest apart from a few who expressed tentative interest are unaccounted for. One of the telling responses:

“I strongly recommend you leaf through a book called Screenplay by Syd Field, especially the section pertaining to dialogue ... Too much dialogue, not enough exposition , the story line is weak and in general doesn't hold my interest ... I think the dialogue could have been sharper and the plot had a tendency to ramble .” (Isenberg, p 64)

Hal Wallis paid \$20,000 - the most ever paid by Hollywood for an unproduced play. More than twice the price paid for Dashiell Hammett's 'The Maltese Falcon' a year before. Soon after receiving the script, Wallis sent a memo saying that it would be known as Casablanca. (Isenberg, p 35, 36).

The Script

<http://www.vincasa.com/casabla.pdf>

Critical:

General overview:

<http://thefilmspectrum.com/?p=13664>

Including famous quotations.

Analysis:

We'll Always Have Paris? Fighting the People's War in Popular Memory.

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/feature-articles/paris/>

Scott Myers –

Includes link to Umberto Eco essay.

<https://gointothestory.blcklst.com/movie-analysis-casablanca-864cfe9548e2>

Bright Lights Film Journal

Essay by Tanfer Emin Tunc

<http://brightlightsfilm.com/casablanca-romance-propaganda/#.WnqXPmZ7ERY>

## **Documentaries & Exhibition**

Cinema's Exiles – Jews in Hollywood –

Very good doco. Should appear on SBS.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/cinemasexiles/>

Timeline:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/cinemasexiles/featured/timeline-cinemas-exiles/7/>

Exhibition: Light & Noir: Exile & Emigres in Hollywood 1933-1950.

Skirball Cultural Centre

<https://www.skirball.org/exhibitions/light-noir>

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-noir-germany-hollywood-ent-1008-20151007-column.html>

Another Casablanca Book :

Encountering Cinema: Casablanca: Movies and Memory by Marc Auge.

<http://sensesofcinema.com/2010/book-reviews/encountering-cinema-casablanca-movies-and-memory-by-marc-auge-2/>

[This is a typical review from imdb.com](#)

### **The Fundamental Things Apply...**

[Bill Slocum](#) 16 January 2005

"Casablanca" remains Hollywood's finest moment, a film that succeeds on such a vast scale not because of anything experimental or deliberately earthshaking in its design, but for the way it cohered to and reaffirmed the movie-making conventions of its day. This is the film that played by the rules while elevating the form, and remains the touchstone for those who talk about Hollywood's greatness.

It's the first week in December, 1941, and in the Vichy-controlled African port city of Casablanca, American ex-pat Rick Blaine runs a gin joint he calls "Rick's Cafe Americaine." Everybody comes to Rick's, including thieves, spies, Nazis, partisans, and refugees trying to make their way to Lisbon and, eventually, America. Rick is a tough, sour kind of guy, but he's still taken for a loop when fate hands him two sudden twists: A pair of unchallengeable exit visas, and a woman named Ilsa who left him broken-hearted in Paris and now needs him to help her and her resistance-leader husband escape.

Humphrey Bogart is Rick and Ingrid Bergman is Ilsa, in roles that are archetypes in film lore. They are great parts besides, very multilayered and resistant to stereotype, and both actors give career performances in what were great careers. He's mad at her for walking out on him, while she wants him to understand her cause, but there's a lot going on underneath with both, and it all spills out in a scene in Rick's apartment that is one of many legendary moments.

"Casablanca" is a great romance, not only for being so supremely entertaining with its humor and realistic-though-exotic wartime excitement, but because it's not the least bit mushy. Take the way Rick's face literally breaks when he first sees Ilsa in his bar, or how he recalls the last time he saw her in Paris: "The Germans wore gray, you wore blue." There's a real human dimension to these people that makes us care for them and relate to them in a way that belies the passage of years.

For me, and many, the most interesting relationship in the movie is Rick and Capt. Renault, the police prefect in Casablanca who is played by Claude Rains with a wonderful subtlety that builds as the film progresses. Theirs is a relationship of almost perfect cynicism, one-liners and professions of neutrality that provide much humor, as well as give a necessary display of Rick's darker side before and after Ilsa's arrival.

But there's so much to grab onto with a film like this. You can talk about the music, or the way the setting becomes a living character with its floodlights and Moorish trceries.

Paul Henreid is often looked at as a bit of a third wheel playing the role of Ilsa's husband, but he manages to create a moral center around which the rest of the film operates, and his enigmatic relationship with Rick and especially Ilsa, a woman who obviously admires her husband but can't somehow ever bring herself to say she loves him, is something to wonder at.

My favorite bit is when Rick finds himself the target of an entreaty by a Bulgarian refugee who just wants Rick's assurance that Capt. Renault is "trustworthy," and that, if she does "a bad thing" to secure her husband's happiness, it would be forgivable. Rick flashes on Ilsa, suppresses a grimace, tries to buy the woman off with a one-liner ("Go back to Bulgaria"), then finally does a marvelous thing that sets the whole second half of the film in motion without much calling attention to itself.

It's not fashionable to discuss movie directors after Chaplin and before Welles, but surely something should be said about Michael Curtiz, who not only directed this film but other great features like "Captain Blood" and "Angels With Dirty Faces." For my money, his "Adventures Of Robin Hood" was every bit "Casablanca's" equal, and he even found time the same year he made "Casablanca" to make "Yankee Doodle Dandy." When you watch a film like this, you aren't so much aware of the director, but that's really a testament to Curtiz's artistry. "Casablanca" is not only exceptionally well-paced but incredibly well-shot, every frame feeling well-thought-out and legendary without distracting from the overall story.

Curtiz was a product of the studio system, not a maverick like Welles or Chaplin, but he found greatness just as often, and "Casablanca," also a product of the studio system, is the best example. It's a film that reminds us why we go back to Hollywood again and again when we want to refresh our imaginations, and why we call it "the dream factory." As the hawker of linens tells Ilsa at the bazaar, "You won't find a treasure like this in all Morocco." Nor, for that matter, in all the world.