

The Train (1964) Frankenheimer

P Michell, 2019

As the Allied forces approach Paris in August 1944, German Colonel Von Waldheim (Paul Scofield) is desperate to take all of France's greatest paintings to Germany. He manages to secure a train to transport the valuable art works even as the chaos of retreat descends upon them. The French resistance however wants to stop them from stealing their national treasures but have received orders from London that they are not to be destroyed. The station master, Labiche (Burt Lancaster), is tasked with scheduling the train and making it all happen smoothly but he is also part of a dwindling group of resistance fighters tasked with preventing the theft. He and others stage an elaborate ruse to keep the train from ever leaving French territory.

An earlier version of *The Monuments Men* (2014). About the intended looting of French art by the Nazis. Mme Villard inventoried the collections and is portrayed in both films.

An early action film starring – steam trains. Great to see on a large cinema screen.

American funded French action film made in France with terrific cast. Produced by Burt Lancaster. Wonderful cast of French co-stars in Jeanne Moreau and Michel Simon.

One of the striking aspects of this film is 'the look' in widescreen B&W.

John Frankenheimer (Director) (52 films, inc some 107 live TV dramas)

Burt Lancaster involved with launching his directorial career. Up to that time was a cinematographer and live TV director. Famous for innovative camera angles.

The camera work of most directors in "The Golden Age" of TV drama was static, reflecting most TV directors' backgrounds in the theatre. Frankenheimer was one of the first TV directors to use multiple camera angles, a moving camera, quick editing and close-ups.

Made five films with Burt Lancaster inc *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962)

Trivia - Frankenheimer was initially set to direct [Breakfast at Tiffany's](#) (1961), but was taken off the film because star [Audrey Hepburn](#) had never heard of him. Ironically that gave him the opportunity to do [The Manchurian Candidate](#) (1962).

Spoke French and was a gourmet chef, and Cordon Bleu (France) graduate.

Quoted on Alfred Hitchcock: *When I say I have been influenced by Hitchcock, I think every director in a certain way has been influenced by Hitchcock, because in many of his films, you find those marvellous moments; but I've never been fulfilled by a Hitchcock film. I would certainly never want to be Hitchcock, and would never want to make films*

like his because I think they're meaningless. I think all those kind of "after the fact" and "in depth" studies of Hitchcock are ludicrous. If ever there was a commercial director, it was Hitchcock. He's terribly good, but also terribly glib and really a very surface director. I don't think his films contain deep motivations. It's very easy to read things into certain films. He's a clever man and gifted and I often think of what he could have achieved if his talents had been directed toward something more meaningful.

Burt Lancaster

One of the big name actors of the 1950s and 1960s. Made some interesting and critically acclaimed 'art' films inc *The Leopard* (1963) , *1900* (1976) and *Atlantic City, USA* (1980). Made arguably one of the best (and least known) anti-Vietnam War Films – *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978). About US 'specialists' in Vietnam before the full commitment.

Burt Lancaster, one of five children, was born in Manhattan, to Elizabeth (Roberts) and James Henry Lancaster, a postal worker. All of his grandparents were immigrants from Northern Ireland. He was a tough street kid who took an early interest in gymnastics. He joined the circus as an acrobat and worked there until he was injured. It was in the Army during WW II that he was introduced to the USO and acting. His first film was [The Killers](#) (1946), and that made him a star. He was a self-taught actor who learned the business as he went along. He set up his own production company in 1948 with [Harold Hecht](#) and [James Hill](#) to direct his career. He played many different roles in pictures as varied as [The Crimson Pirate](#) (1952), [From Here to Eternity](#) (1953), [Elmer Gantry](#) (1960).

Lancaster often turned down roles that might have changed his career - in 1965 alone, he turned down [Charlton Heston's](#) role as Major General Charles Gordon in [Khartoum](#), and [Richard Burton's](#) role in [The Spy Who Came In from the Cold](#).

Known for his liberal political sympathies, he was one of the Hollywood movie stars, along with [Marlon Brando](#), [Sammy Davis Jr.](#), [Charlton Heston](#), [Judy Garland](#), [Eartha Kitt](#), [Harry Belafonte](#), [Sidney Poitier](#) and [Paul Newman](#), who participated in [Martin Luther King's](#) March on Washington in August 1963. He flew home from Europe, where he was making a film, to participate. He was a financial supporter of King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Was forced by United Artists to make four films for \$150,000 a picture in the 1960s: [The Young Savages](#) (1961), [Birdman of Alcatraz](#) (1962), **[The Train](#) (1964)** and [The Hallelujah Trail](#) (1965) rather than his normal fee of \$750,000, because of cost overruns at his production company, Hecht-Hill-Lancaster, for which he was personally responsible.

His production company, Hecht-Hill-Lancaster, produced such films as [Paddy Chayefsky's](#) [Marty](#) (1955) (Oscar winner 1955) and [The Catered Affair](#) (1956). In the 1980s he appeared as a supporting player in a number of movies, such as [Local Hero](#) (1983) and [Field of Dreams](#) (1989).

Personal Quotes:

I woke up one day a star. It was terrifying. Then I worked hard toward becoming a good actor.

We're all forgotten sooner or later. But not films. That's all the memorial we should need or hope for.

[on being a director] It's the best job in the picture business because when you're a director, you're God. And you know that's the best job in town.

Life is to be lived within the limits of your knowledge and within the concept of what you would like to see yourself to be.

Paul Scofield

British Shakespearian stage actor. This is only his third film. Toured Moscow with Hamlet in 1950s. Starred in Man for All Seasons (1966) after The Train. This cemented his stature as a highly regarded actor in both cinema and theatre.

Scofield's voice has been described as ... a rich, sonorous voice compared to a Rolls Royce being started up, in one instance, and a great sound rumbling forth from an antique crypt in yet another, he was quickly compared to [Laurence Olivier](#).

Trivia

[Burt Lancaster](#) took a day off during shooting to play golf when the shooting was about half completed. On the links, he stepped in a hole and re-aggravated an old knee injury. In order to compensate for the injury, [John Frankenheimer](#) had Lancaster's character shot in the leg, thus enabling him to limp through the rest of the shooting.

[Burt Lancaster](#) performs all of his own stunts in this movie. [Albert Rémy](#) also gets into the act by performing the stunt of uncoupling the engine from the art train on a real moving train.

In real life the museum's paintings were indeed loaded into a train for shipment to Germany, but fortunately the elaborate deception seen in the movie was not really required. The train was merely routed onto a ring railway and circled around and around Paris until the Allies arrived.

[John Frankenheimer](#) said of this film, "I wanted all the realism possible. There are no tricks in this film. When trains crash together, they are real trains. There is no substitute for that kind of reality."

The air raid on the yards was filmed at Gargenville yard, outside Paris. More than 50 people under [Lee Zavitz](#) needed six weeks to plant and wire all the charges, which were

blown up in less than a minute. This was done by a special arrangement with the French National Railway, which had been seeking to modernize the yard, but lacked the funds to do so.

In the final confrontation between [Burt Lancaster](#)'s Labiche character and the Nazi colonel played by [Paul Scofield](#), the shooting conditions were so cold that Scofield reportedly had to talk whilst inhaling, so clouds of warm breath wouldn't appear on film. His voice was looped in later.

Initially director [Arthur Penn](#) oversaw the development of the film and directed the first day of shooting. The next day was a holiday. [Burt Lancaster](#), dissatisfied with Penn's conception of the picture, had him fired and replaced by [John Frankenheimer](#). Penn envisioned a more intimate film that would muse on the role art played in the French character, and why they would risk their lives to save the country's great art from the Nazis. He did not intend to give much focus to the mechanics of the train operation itself. Lancaster told screenwriter [Walter Bernstein](#) the day Penn was fired, "Frankenheimer is a bit of a whore, but he'll do what I want." What Lancaster wanted was more emphasis on action in order to ensure that the film was a hit--after the failure of his film [The Leopard](#) (1963) -- by appealing to a broader audience.

Not film related - When Sen. [Robert F. Kennedy](#) was shot at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles on June 5, 1968, it was his good friend John Frankenheimer who had personally driven him there that day. In the initial confusion following the shooting Frankenheimer was mistakenly identified as one of the other people shot that night.

Reviews

John Cornelison, 2016
(ex Podcast – classicmoviereview.com)
Good summary of the terrific co-stars ...

I think it was William Faulkner speaking on "As I Lay Dying" said you set up a task for people to do and put obstacles in their way. I am going to embark on a series of films where the people are trying to go somewhere or get something done and there are obstacles in the way.

The first of these movies is [The Train](#) (1964) where a group of Nazis are trying to move a train of stolen art from Paris and are opposed by the French Resistance. Ranked No. 1 in Trains Magazine's special issue, "The 100 Greatest Train Movies."
[Burt Lancaster](#) played the role of Laiche, train station manager and member of the French Resistance.

Paul Scofield played the role of Nazi and French art thief Col. Von Waldheim. Scofield was born in England in 1922. He began training for theater in 1939 at the age of 17. When World War II broke out he was ruled to be physically unfit for military service. He

entertained troops during the war. By 1946, he was on the way to becoming a great Shakespearian actor.

Scotfield was only in about 30 movies but his talent just leaps off the screen. His first role, for which he received great praise was *That Lady* (1955) where he played King Philip II of Spain with Oliva DeHaviland.

Of course, Scotfield was so convincing in [The Train](#) (1964) as Nazi Col. von Waldheim that he could pass for a German. In *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), as Sir Thomas More, Scotfield shows the range from pride, to fear, humility, and redemption. During this role, he is taken from counselor to the king, outcast, heretic, convict, and condemned. However, his poise always shown through. It is, in my opinion, his greatest role. Scotfield was great in *Scorpio* (1973) pairing again with Burt Lancaster in this spy thriller.

Scotfield paired with younger Shakespearean actor Kenneth Branagh in the wonderful *Henry V* (1989) in a small part as Charles VI of France. He played the ghost in *Hamlet* (1990) along with substandard actor Mel Gibson. In *Quiz Show* (1994) Scotfield played the role of Mark Van Doren, the academic and father of the man caught at the heart of the quiz show "Twenty One" scandal. Then he turned in a masterful role as Judge Thomas Danforth during the Salem Witch Trials in *The Crucible* (1996). Of course, this story is an anti-McCarthy tale. A private man, he accepted a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), but he refused knighthood three times. He died in 2008 at the age of 86.

Jeanne Moreau played the role of Christine, a hotel proprietor that helped the resistance. Moreau was born in Paris in 1928. She began in the theater in 1947 and began taking movie roles in 1949. Moreau is one of the most popular actresses in France. She has worked with all of the major international directors. The great Roger Ebert thought she was one of the greatest actresses of his generation. I found this quote from iMDB.com to be very accurate: "This lack of artifice revealed Moreau's "essential qualities: she could be almost ugly and then ten seconds later she would turn her face and would be incredibly attractive. But she would be herself"." She is still active and had turned to directing.

Suzanne Flon played the role of **Mademoiselle Villard**. Mademoiselle Villard inventoried the art at the Nazi distribution point. This character and the Claire Simone (Kate Blanchett) in *The Monuments Men* (2014) are based on the life of Rose Antonia Maria Valland. Valland was born in France in 1898. She graduated from a teachers college in 1918 and planned on being an art teacher. She continued her graduate level education until 1932 when she became a volunteer assistant curator at the Jeu de Paume Museum. In 1941, following the Nazi occupation of Paris, she was paid and placed in charge of the museum. The Nazi began to loot the treasures of occupied Europe. The museum where Valland worked was selected as the distribution point for these works of art. Valland never let the Nazi know she spoke German as she secretly recorded the stolen artwork and its destination. She recorded over 20,000 pieces of art. Valland regularly informed the Director of the National Museum of the status of the thief and let

the French Resistance know which trains were carrying art so they would not be destroyed.

On August 1, 1944, almost three weeks before the liberation of Paris, Valland found out that five boxcars of modern art were being shipped out by the Nazis. She notified the French Resistance and they kept the train from leaving Paris. Later the train was recovered by the French Army.

Following the war, Rose Valland worked for the Commission for the Recovery of Works of Art and was made the chair in 1954. She wrote her memoirs in 1961 and retired in 1968.

For her work, Rose Valland became one of the most decorated women in French history and she was awarded the Légion d'honneur, the Médaille de la Résistance, the Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the Medal of Freedom the United States. Rose Valland died in 1980 at the age of 81.

Now back to the actress that played this short but important part. Suzanne Flon. Flon slowly became active in theater and had her first role in *Captain Blomet* (1947). This led to an almost 5-decade career that included such films as *Moulin Rouge* (1952), *Confidential Report* (1955), *The Trial* (1962), *Thou Shalt Not Kill* (1961), [The Train](#) (1964), and *One Deadly Summer* (1983). Flon remained active on stage, in film, and on television until her death at 87 in 2005.

Michel Simon played the role of French train engineer Papa Boule. He had a large face and nose and his face was partially paralyzed in the 1950s in a makeup accident. This and his age really gave him a devil-may-care look in this role.

Simon was the son of a sausage-maker. He was drafted into the Swiss Army at the beginning of World War I. He was discharged because of tuberculosis and a generally bad attitude. He worked as a handyman, a boxer, photographer, and right-wing anarchist. At last, he became a stage actor and moved to Paris in 1923. His first film was in 1925. With the coming of sound films, Simon became one of the best-known character actors in France. Simon slowed his work after the makeup accident in the 1950s but he continued to work until his death in 1975.

Wolfgang Preiss played a subordinate German officer Herren who was the conscience of German Col. Von Waldheim. Preiss was born in Nuremberg, Germany in 1910. He studied philosophy, dance, and theater science. He had his first stage role in 1932, which it would seem to me, to put him on a collision course with the Nazis. However, it did not seem to be so. He was exempt from military service and made his first film in 1942. Following the war, he worked in German films until he was noticed by the international community. In an odd irony, he like other German actors of his age band was continually cast in films as German/Nazi officers. Some of the films include: *The Longest Day* (1962), *The Counterfeit Traitor* (1962), *The Cardinal* (1963), [The Train](#) (1964), *Von Ryan's Express* (1965), *Is Paris Buring?* (1966), *Anzio* (1968), *Raid on Rommel* (1971), and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977). He was also in two American mini-series, "The Winds of

War” and “War and Remembrance” in the 1980s. He stopped acting in the late 1990s and died at the age of 92 following a fall.

A personal favorite and semi-overlooked classic

29 November 2001 | by [ggh6](#) –

A standout WWII drama, loosely based on a true story. In 1944, as the Allies spread across France from the Normandy landings, the Nazis looted Paris art museums and loaded the works onto a train, with the intention of carrying them back to the Fatherland and selling or bartering them for scarce war materials. A fairly hare-brained scheme, to be sure, and in reality the train never made it further than a siding just east of the city, but that shouldn't hinder one's enjoyment of what turns out to be a classic action film.

The centerpiece of the movie is a clash of wills between Von Waldheim, a cultured but iron-backed Nazi colonel (well-played by Paul Scofield) charged with getting the stolen artworks to Germany, and a taciturn railway troubleshooter named Labiche (Burt Lancaster). Von Waldheim first enlists Labiche as 'insurance' against any monkey business during the train's journey. Labiche, though, happens to have Resistance connections and, with serious reservations, is drawn into a desperate, improvised plot to stop the train, preferably without damaging the precious artifacts inside.

Although easily enjoyed as a straight action flick, what gives the film weight is the supporting story, in which Labiche at first argues against wasting precious lives on a few crates of paintings he's never seen, then gradually comes round as he begins to understand that the Nazis are effectively carrying off a large piece of the heart of France. Beautiful deep-focus black and white photography, and solid supporting performances by a mostly French cast (of which Jeanne Moreau may be the best-known), convincingly evoke the bleak misery of the Occupation. John Frankenheimer's economical direction manages to present highly-charged action scenes without glossing over the human cost, as Von Waldheim exacts savage reprisals against escalating efforts to hinder the train's passage.

Lancaster, who performed his own stunts, is excellent, furiously athletic as he slides down ladders, leaps onto moving locomotives, and charges over ridges and fields in pursuit of the train. At the same time, he manages to effectively bring a subtle authenticity to his portrayal of the weary, fatalistic railwayman.

Finally, the action set-pieces are nothing short of stunning, and include the train's mad dash through an Allied carpet-bombing attack, a strafing raid on a speeding locomotive, and several wrecks and derailments, all staged full-scale with period equipment donated by the French national railway.