September 13, 2022 (XLV:3)
Michael Curtiz: **CASABLANCA** (1942, 102 min)
URL for Introduction Vimeo : https://vimeo.com/748377120
URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom:
https://vimeo.com/748377120https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/93763641566?pwd=YS96cVh5c0EwS3lCcENDYzIyWm9Rdz09

Academy Awards (won):
Best Picture (Hal B. Wallis)
Best Director, Michael Curtiz
Best Writing, Screenplay: Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein, Howard Koch

Academy Awards (nominated):
Best Actor in a Leading Role: Humphrey Bogart
Best Actor in a Supporting Role: Claude Rains
Best Cinematography, B&W: Arthur Edeson
Best Film Editing: Owen Marks
Best Music: Max Steiner

National Film Registry, 1989

Directed by Michael Curtiz
Written by Julius J. Epstein, Philip G. Epstein, Howard Koch, Casey Robinson (screenplay); Murray Burnett and Joan Alison (play)
Produced by Hal B. Wallis, Jack L. Warner
Music Max Steiner
Cinematography Arthur Edeson
Film Editing Owen Marks
Art Direction Carl Jules Weyl
Costume Design Orry-Kelly

CAST
Humphrey Bogart…Rick Blaine
Ingrid Bergman…Ilsa Lund
Paul Henreid…Victor Laszlo
Claude Rains…Captain Louis Renault
Conrad Veidt…Major Heinrich Strasser
Sydney Greenstreet…Signor Ferrari
Peter Lorre…Ugarte
S.Z. Sakall…Carl
Madeleine Lebeau…Yvonne
Dooley Wilson…Sam
Joy Page…Annina Brandel
John Qualen…Berger
Leonid Kinskey…Sascha
Marcel Dalio…Croupier
Curt Bois…Pickpocket

MICHAEL CURTIZ (b. December 24, 1886 in Budapest, Austria-Hungary [now Hungary]—d. April 10, 1962, age 75, in Hollywood, Los Angeles, CA) began acting in and then directing films in his native Hungary in 1912. The next year he went to Denmark to study the newest achievements of film art in the studios of the then-flourishing Nordisk company. He

shot a total of 38 films in Hungary. He was one of the most productive and educated artists in Hungary at the beginning of the silent film era. After WWI, he continued his filmmaking career in Austria and Germany and into the early 1920s. Curtiz moved to the US in 1926 and began making films for Warner Brothers. His father, brother and sisters died in Auschwitz. Only his mother came to the USA, thanks to Jack L. Warner. He directed such classic films as *Casablanca* (1942), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *Dodge City* (1939) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945). His two most fruitful collaborations were with Errol Flynn (they did 12 films together) and Humphrey Bogart (they did 8 films together). However, it wasn't always smooth sailing with his favorite actors. Curtiz was assigned to direct *Adventures of Don Juan* (1948) in 1947, but he and Flynn had a falling-out and Vincent Sherman wound up directing the picture. Curtiz is also credited with "discovering" Doris Day, whom he heard sing at a Hollywood party. At the time he was about to direct *Romance on the High Seas* (1948) and was seeking a singer/actress to replace Betty Hutton, who had become pregnant and had to back out. Through interviews with those that worked for him, many mention the director could be intensely absorbed, to the point of distraction. Once he fell out of a moving car because he wanted to write down an idea. He was driving at the time. When he worked on the set, he never had lunch, explaining that disturbed the pace of work. His thick Hungarian accent often made it difficult for cast and crew to understand him when he spoke English. During the filming of tonight's film, he asked a set dresser for a "poodle", and when the dresser brought him a small poodle dog, Curtiz exploded at the man. He had meant that he wanted a "poodle" of water.

MAX STEINER (b. May 10, 1888 in Vienna, Austria-Hungary [now Austria]—d. December 28, 1971, age 83, in Hollywood, Los Angeles, CA) was astonishingly musically gifted, composing complex works as a teenager and completing the course of study at Vienna's Imperial Academy of Music for only one year, at the age of sixteen. He studied under Gustav Mahler and, before the age of twenty, made his living as a conductor and as composer of works for the theater, the concert hall, and vaudeville. After a brief sojourn in Britain, Steiner moved to the USA in the same wave as fellow film composer Erich Wolfgang Korngold and quickly became a sought-after orchestrator and conductor on Broadway, bringing the Western classical tradition in which he had been raised to mainstream audiences. He was soon snatched up by the film studios with the advent of sound and helped the fledgling talkies become musically sophisticated within a brief few years. He worked with the images on-screen and to score individual scenes for their content and create leitmotifs for individual characters, as opposed to simply providing vaguely appropriate mood music, as evidenced in *King Kong* (1933), which set the standard for American film music for years to come. From the 1930s to the 1960s, he was one of the most respected, innovative, and brilliant composers of American film music, creating a truly staggering number of exceptional scores for films of all types. Worked on 36 films in 1934 and 37 the next year. It is doubtful anyone will ever approach that record again. He was nominated 24 times for Academy Awards, winning three Oscars, for *The Informer* (1935), *Now, Voyager* (1942) and *Since You Went Away* (1944). His best-known work is his mighty score for *Gone with the Wind* (1939). His name is now remembered in the annual "Max Steiner Award" for film music which recognizes Steiner's pioneering role in the early

development of the craft. His score for 'Gone with the Wind' is ranked by the American Film Institute as the second greatest American film score of all time. Once said, “I never run out of tunes. Music is always in my mind. Sometimes I wake up at three in the morning and begin tossing. My wife will say, ‘Why don't you write it down?’ So I get up, put it on a paper, and go back to sleep.’”

ARTHUR EDESON (b. October 24, 1891, New York, NY— d. February 1970, age 78, in Agoura Hills, California) was barely making a living as a portrait photographer in 1910 when he decided to try his hand at the movies. “I went to the old Éclair Studio in Fort Lee, New Jersey, and applied for a job. While I was waiting in the outer office, a man came in and stabbed his finger around the crowded room, saying: ‘I’ll take you - and you - and you. Come with me.” I couldn't tell whether I was one of those selected, but I joined the group anyway. Once inside the mysterious recesses of the studio, I found I'd been hired—as an actor.” Edeson never lost his interest in photography, however, and began to shoot portraits of his fellow actors. His photos caught the attention of John van den Broek, and when a cameraman fell ill, van den Broek suggested that Edeson fill in. “In those times, flat lighting was the rule of the day,” Edeson wrote. “However, I began to introduce some of the lighting ideas I had learned in my portrait work - a suggestion of modeling here, an artistically placed shadow there - and soon my efforts tended to show a softer, portrait-like quality on the motion-picture screen. This was so completely out of line with what was considered good cinematography in those days that I had to use my best salesmanship to convince everyone it was good camerawork.” In 1920, Douglas Fairbanks saw *For the Soul of Rafael* (1920), one of Edeson's films for Young, and signed the cinematographer for three of his biggest pictures: *The Three Musketeers* (1921), *Robin Hoo*d (1922) and *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924). He worked on over 130 other films, many of them truly memorable. He did *My Wild Irish Rose* (1947), *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944), *Casablanca* (1942), *Across the Pacific* (1942), *They Drive by Night* (1940), *Each Dawn I Die* (1939), *They Won't Forget* (1937), *Gold Diggers of 1937* (1936), *Satan Met a Lady* (1936), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Frankenstein* (1931), *Doctors’ Wives* (1931), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *Stella Dallas* (1925), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), *Robin Hood* (1922), and *The Three Musketeers* (1921). He was nominated for three best cinematographer Oscars: *Casablanca* (1942), *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and *In Old Arizona* (1929).

HUMPHREY BOGART (b. December 25, 1899 in New York City, NY—d. January 14, 1957, age 57, in Los Angeles, CA) was sent as a young boy from NYC to Phillips Academy in Andover in MA in preparation for medical studies at Yale. He was expelled from Phillips and joined the U.S. Naval Reserve. After getting out, he started acting in local NY production. In 1930, he gained a contract with Fox, his feature film debut in a ten-minute short, Broadway’s *Like That* (1930), co-starring Ruth Etting and Joan Blondell. Fox released him after two years. After five years of stage and minor film roles, he had his breakthrough role in *The Petrified Forest* (1936) from Warner Bros. He won the part over Edward G. Robinson only after the star, Leslie Howard, threatened WB that he would quit unless Bogart was given the key role of Duke Mantee, which he had played in the Broadway production with Howard. The film was a major success and led to a long-term contract with WB. From 1936 to 1940, Bogart appeared in 28 films, usually as a gangster, twice in Westerns and even a horror film. His landmark year was 1941 (often capitalizing on parts George Raft had rejected) with roles in classics such as *High Sierra*

(1941) and as Sam Spade in one of his most fondly remembered films, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). These were followed by *Casablanca* (1942), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Key Largo (*1948). Bogart, despite his erratic education, was incredibly well-read and he favored writers and intellectuals within his small circle of friends. In 1947, he joined wife Lauren Bacall and other actors protesting the House Un-American Activities Committee witch hunts. He also formed his own production company, and the next year made *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948). Bogie won the best actor Academy Award for *The African Queen* (1951) and was nominated for *Casablanca* (1942) and as Captain Queeg in *The Caine Mutiny* (1954), a film made when he was already seriously ill. He died in his sleep at his Hollywood home following surgeries and a battle with throat cancer. When recounting tonight's film, Bogie stated that off the set, he and Ingrid Bergman hardly spoke. She said later, "I kissed him, but I never knew him." Bogart's coolness towards Bergman was later revealed to have been caused by the violent jealousy of his wife at the time, Mayo Methot, whose fears were realized when Bogart entered an affair with future wife Lauren Bacall. The actor, who was only 5'7", didn't want to look short against Bergman (who is 5'9"), and wore 5" lifts throughout the entire film. On Christmas in 2000, the *New York Times* reported that Bogart's birthday was actually January 23,1899, but "WB publicity decided that a Christmas birthday would be far more advantageous because 'a guy born on Christmas can't be all bad.'"

INGRID BERGMAN (b. August 29, 1915 in Stockholm, Sweden—d. August 29, 1982, age 67, in London, England) lost her mother when she was only three years old. Her father, who had a camera shop, adored her and photographed her constantly, often in costume. He died when she was 13. At 17, she auditioned successfully for the government-sponsored Royal Dramatic School, and her film debut came shortly thereafter, as an uncredited role of a girl standing in line in the Swedish film *Landskamp* (1932). It would be three more years before she would have another chance at a film. Her next film was *Munkbrogreven* (1935), where she had a speaking part as Elsa Edlund. After several films that year, Bergman appeared in *Intermezzo* (1936). American producer David O. Selznick saw the film and immediately signed Bergman. She visited California and starred in United Artists' 1939 remake of her 1936 film, *Intermezzo: A Love Story* (1939), reprising her original role. The film was so successful that Selznick, convinced he had found "another Garbo," persuaded her to move to Hollywood. However she refused to change her name, wear layers of makeup, fix her teeth or pluck her eyebrows and told Selznick that if he insisted, "I'll take the next train and go back home." Her early American film work presented Bergman as a woman of virtue. She played a devoted governess in *Adam Had Four Sons* (1941) and portrayed a loyal wife in *Rage in Heaven* (1941). According to the *L.A. Times*, "In her first nine years in Hollywood, she made 14 movies and a running Hollywood gag of the mid-1940s was, 'Do you know, last night I actually saw a film without Ingrid Bergman in it?' Married and with a small daughter, she tried to live as privately as possible. But her work enthralled the public. When she cropped her hair to play Maria in "For Whom the Bell Tolls," thousands of women rushed out for haircuts. When she played a cheerful Sister Mary Benedict in *The Bells of St. Mary's*, so many girls rushed to take the veil that their parents wrote to her, complaining that her sympathetic portrayal of the religious life was depriving them of grandchildren. She was then cast in her career-defining role in tonight's film won an Academy Awards for her role in *Gaslight* (1944). In 1949 she fell in love with Roberto Rossellini, the

Italian film director, and had a child by him before she could obtain a divorce from her husband and marry the director. Before the scandal, millions of Americans had been moved by her roles that had made her, somewhat to her annoyance, a symbol of moral perfection. Suddenly, in 1949, the American public that had elevated her to the point of idolatry cast her down, vilified her and boycotted her films. She was even condemned on the floor of the United States Senate. A few old friends stuck by her, among them Ernest Hemingway, director Alfred Hitchcock, and actors Cary Grant and Gregory Peck. But the magnitude of the scandal surprised and shook Bergman. She did not return to the United States until 1957, after what she called her "watershed" film, *Anastasia*. She sat in a bathtub in New York, sipping champagne and listening to the radio as Cary Grant accepted the Oscar for her. Bergmans' final victory over the scandal was when Senator Charles H. Percy, Republican of Illinois, entered into the Congressional Record, in 1972, an apology for the attack made on her 22 years earlier in the Senate by Edwin C. Johnson, Democrat of Colorado. Her best supporting actress Oscar came in 1975, for *Murder on the Orient Express*, but her performance as a successful pianist but disillusioned mother in lngmar Bergman's 1979 film *Autumn Sonata* was her last movie—and one of her most critically acclaimed.

PETER LORRE (b. László Löwenstein, June 26, 1904 in Rózsahegy, Austria-Hungary [now Ruzomberok, Slovakia]—d. March 23, 1964 in Los Angeles, CA) ran away from home as a child, working odd jobs until making his acting debut in Zurich. He remained unknown, traveling for several years and acting in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, until Fritz Lang cast him as the psychopathic child killer in *M* (1931). Prior to this he had only one uncredited screen-role as a dentist's patient in *Die Verschwundene Frau* (1929). When he arrived in Great Britain, his first meeting with a British director was with Alfred Hitchcock. By smiling and laughing as Hitchcock talked, the director was unaware that Lorre had a limited command of the English language. Hitchcock cast him in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) and Lorre learned much of his part phonetically. Lorre's first American roommate was another German ex-pat, Billy Wilder. The roommates helped each other learn the English language. He is probably best known these days for his performances as Ugarte in *Casablanca* (1942) and Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), often cast as the sinister villain. So pronounced were his characters, that in 1949 the British Broadcasting Corp. advised parents to send their children to bed before Lorre's image appeared on their television screens. Later, somewhat heavier, he played in a string of not-so-stellar efforts, one exception being his role as a clown in *The Big Circus* (1959). He died the year he made his last movie, playing a stooge in Jerry Lewis' *The Patsy* (1964). Some of his other 87 films were *The Raven* (1963), *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1961), *Silk Stockings* (1957), *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1956), *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954), *Beat the Devil* (1953), *The Chase* (1946), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944) and *Crime and Punishment* (1935). While known for his villainous roles, Lorre also had quite a dry sense of humor. According to Vincent Price, when he and Peter Lorre went to view Bela Lugosi's body during Bela's funeral, Lorre, upon seeing Lugosi dressed in his famous Dracula cape, quipped, "Do you think we should drive a stake through his heart just in case?" Speaking figuratively to a reporter, Lorre once said of his horror roles: "You know I can get away with murder. The audience loves me."

PAUL HENREID (b. January 10, 1908 in Trieste, Austria-Hungary [now Trieste, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italy]—d, March 29, 1992, age 84, in Santa Monica, CA) worked initially as translator and book designer for a publishing outfit run by Otto Preminger, while

training to be an actor at night. Preminger was also a protégé (and managing director) of Max Reinhardt. After attending one of Henreid's acting school performances, Preminger introduced him to the famous stage director and this led to a contract. Henreid made his English-speaking motion picture debut in the popular drama *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939), as the sympathetic German master Max Staefel. After that, however, he became incongruously typecast as Nazi henchmen in *Mad Men of Europe* and *Night Train to Munich*, both in 1940. He finally escaped the stereotypical Teutonic image and began to play heroic or romantic leads, his first being *Joan of Paris* (1942) and *Now, Voyager* (1942), which defined his new screen persona: debonair, cultured and genteel. While the actor shone in tonight's film, he struggled to find his footing with subsequent productions. After several dull romantic leads, Henreid reinvented himself yet again. He played a memorably colorful swashbuckler *The Spanish Main* (1945). Another of his best later performances was as a sadistic South African commandant in the underrated film noir *Rope of Sand* (1949), which re-united him with his former *Casablanca* co-stars Peter Lorre and Claude Rains. Just as his anti-fascist character in this film, Henreid was an outspoken activist in real life. His opposition to McCarthyism and adhering to his rights under the First Amendment, he was subsequently blacklisted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Despite the damage to his career, he re-emerged as a director of second features and television episodes for Screen Gems, Desilu and other companies. In 1957, Alfred Hitchcock (in defiance of the blacklist) hired him to direct several episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955). Towards the end of his career, Henreid directed his former *Now, Voyager* co-star Bette Davis in the camp melodrama *Dead Ringer* (1964).

CLAUDE RAINS (b. November 10, 1889 in Clapham, London, England—d. May 30, 1967, age 77, in Laconia, NH) had much to overcome—poverty, cockney birth, indifferent parents, and a dreadful accent. It was show business that saved him. He became a stage manager in London where the legendary Herbert Beerbohm Tree took an interest in him—particularly in reforming his voice. Before serving in WWI, which cost him his sight in one eye, Rains mostly was cast in small roles. After the war, the parts got larger and he became a teacher at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. What had been a flaw, his voice, became his glory. Silky, often pensive, sometimes touched by nameless rue, it was equally suitable for realism and irony, though not for high tragedy. When he finally came to America to try his luck at Hollywood, he flunked his screen test for *The Invisible Man* (1933). The actor called it "the worst in the history of moviemaking", but director James Whale hired Rains anyway, remarking, "I don't care what he looks like; that's the voice I want." It would ultimately be Rains' most memorable role. Today, people seem unaware of the extraordinarily diverse group of pictures he starred in: the prosecutor whose political ambitions lead to a lynching in *They Won't Forget* (1937); Napoleon III as Hitler stand-in in *Juarez* (1939); the openly Jewish [a rarity in movies of that time] investment banker in love with Bette Davis in *Mr. Skeffington* (1944), a role that earned him an Oscar nomination. Not to mention the many sympathetic father figures he played. Or perhaps what may be his greatest role, as the Nazi spy hopelessly in love with Ingrid Bergman in Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946). It is a part that, unlikely as it seems, generates our sympathy and not solely because he competes—talk about hopeless—with Cary Grant for her favors. In real life, Rains was equally unlucky in love. Married six times, when he had had enough of his fifth marriage he had the locks changed on their house while she was out shopping. Much like Bogart in tonight's film, while filming *Notorious* with Ingrid Bergman, Hitchcock suggested

Rains wear platforms in his shoes. Although embarrassed, Rains agreed to this. One day while Rains was talking to Bergman, Hitchcock came by, lifting Rains' pant leg and revealing his platforms, commenting "The shame of Rains." Of his performance in tonight's film, the *L.A. Times* wrote: "His insouciantly cynical but ultimately redeemable Captain Renault in *Casablanca* has many of the film's best lines, delivered with insinuating ease. Resolutely unaddled by romantic posturings, political and sexual, that preoccupy the rest in the movie, he is the audience's perfect surrogate. 'What fools these mortals be,' he seems to say, but aren't they pretty? And aren't they capable of infectious nobility, despite

the darkness of their historical moment?'

From *World Film Directors, V. I.* Ed John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987. "Curtiz, Michael" by Philip Kemp

Mihaly Kertesz
American director and producer, [Curtiz/Kertesz] was born in Budapest, Hungary, of Jewish parentage, the eldest of three sons. Later in life, Curtiz enjoyed creating mystery about his origins and upbringing and sometimes maintained that his father was "a poor carpenter." The generally accepted account, though, is that his family was comfortably off, his father being an architect and his mother an opera singer. Curtiz himself is said to have made his stage debut, aged eleven, in an opera in which his mother was starring. At seventeen, he ran away to join a traveling circus, performing with them as strongman, acrobat, juggler, and mime. He is also reported to have been a member of the Hungarian fencing team at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics.

It seems certain, at any rate, that Curtiz studied at Markoszy University in Budapest and then at the Royal Academy of Theatre and Art. Having completed his studies, he joined the National Hungarian Theatre, whose repertoire consisted mostly of "boulevard comedies" like those of Molnar, several of which Curtiz would later film. He began his theatrical career in traditional style, taking on all the dogsbody jobs from candyseller to cashier. Curtiz soon graduated to acting roles and before long was established as one of the company's most promising young directors.

Masholnap (*Today and Tomorrow,* 1912) was proudly announced as "The First Hungarian Dramatic Art Film." Curtiz took one of the leading roles and is generally believed to have directed as well, although no director was credited. He was certainly named as the director of *Az utolsó bohém* (*The Last Bohemian*, 1912), and he made at least two more pictures before setting out for the Nordisk Studios in Copenhagen, at that time the preeminent center of film production in Europe. Curtiz spent six months at Nordisk, learning all he could about filmmaking and working with leading Scandanavian directors like Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjostrom. He assisted August Blom in the direction of a big-budget epic, *Atlantis* (1913) and is supposed to have directed a film of his own for Nordisk, although no record of it has survived.

Back in Hungary, adorned with the prestige of his Danish experience, Curtiz found himself much in demand. From 1914 to 1919 he directed at least thirty-seven films, many of which—following the contemporary Scandanavian example—showed a preference for outdoor locations. *Bánk bán* (1914),

based on a popular Hungarian folk story, was the first of several major successes. On the outbreak of war, Curtiz was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian artillery, but through shrewd use of personal connections got himself first transferred to the Army film unit and then in 1915 discharged.

Early in 1917, Curtiz was appointed director of production at Phoenix Films, the leading studio in Budapest. He worked exclusively for them until he left Hungary. None of his Hungarian films has survived intact, and most are completely lost; but the fragments that remain suggest that Curtiz's talent for fluid narrative and vivid composition was already well-developed. So, too, was his notoriously autocratic attitude to filmmaking: in a 1917 article for the periodical *Mozhihét* he stated "An actor's success is no more than the success of the director whose concept of the whole brings into harmony the performance of each character on the screen."

In April 1919, Bela Kun's short-lived socialist Republic of Councils announced the nationalization of the film industry. This was little to Curtiz's taste. Abandoning his current project, a version of Molnár's *Liliom*, he left Hungary for good. According to some sources, he visited Sweden, where a persistent but improbable legend has him directing a film featuring the fourteen-year-old Greta Gustafsson (Garbo) as Marie Antoinette. No trace of any such work has survived, nor of an early episode of Fritz Lang's serial *Die Spinnen* (*The Spiders*, 1919), which Curtiz is said to have directed in Germany. With or without detours, he ended up in Vienna, where he and Lucy Doraine [his actress wife] were signed up by Count Alexander Kolowrat, owner of Sascha Films.

While working for Sascha, Curtiz later wrote, he "learned the basic laws of film art, which, in those days, had progressed further in Vienna than anywhere else" (thus apparently dismissing as negligible the experience gained on his forty or so Hungarian films). The pictures that he directed for Sascha—twenty-one at least—fall mainly into two categories: sophisticated light comedies and historical (in the loosest sense) spectaculars....

His own reputation...was established be his DeMille-style biblical spectaculars, notably *Sodom und Gomorrha* (1922) and *Die Sklavenkönigin* (*Moon of Israel*, 1924), with their cannily commercial mixture of sexual display and moral deprecation. *Sodom und Gomorrha*, though at the time the most expensive film ever made in Austria, more than recouped its cost; thanks largely to Curtiz, Sascha was fast becoming the leading Austrian studio and establishing lucrative connections with the mighty UFA company of Berlin.

Moon of Israel, produced by a fellow Hungarian exile, Sandor (later Sir Alexander) Korda, achieved wide international distribution. Jack Warner, scouting for talent in Europe with his brother Harry, saw it in Paris and was "laid in the aisles by Curtiz's camera work. . .[by] shots and angles that were pure genius." Warners, lean and ambitious, had already snapped up Lubitsch, and now decided to sign Curtiz for their planned superproduction, *Noah's Ark*—a film intended to beat De Mille at his own game....

In 1926, when Curtiz arrived in Hollywood, Warner Brothers was still a small and financially shaky studio; the jackpot of Vitaphone and *The Jazz Singer* was a year in the future. Kertész now became Curtiz; but before letting their newly-christened director loose on *Noah's Ark*, the studio cautiously assigned him to a batch of programmers, beginning with a melodrama, *The Third Degree* (1926). Curtiz, with some sixty films already to his credit and obsessively dedicated to his work, slid effortlessly into the Hollywood system, rapidly proving himself capable of making a smooth, professional job out of even the least promising material. He was to stay with Warners for the next twenty-eight years and directed eighty-six films for them, including all his best work.

...His first commercial failure, *The Mad Genius* (1931), starred John Barrymore as a meglomaniac dance impressario; the film, which marks an early appearance of Curtiz's recurrent theme of cynicism versus idealism, was probably too similar to the recent *Svengal* (also with Barrymore) to impress the public. *The Strange Love of Molly Louvain* (1932), a social drama, rates in John Baxter's opinion as "among the earliest of his masterpieces....The milieu of the slum streets and hotel rooms is recreated with chilling detail, the story told with a pitiless intensity."

Warners were now the fastest-growing studio in Hollywood, and Curtiz's stock rose with them. *Cabin in the Cotton* (1932) was an early example of a Warners specialty—hard-hitting social (near-) realism. Is this case enlivened by the first of Bette Davis's rich gallery of malicious Southern belles. She appeared in a more sympathetic light in another "message picture," *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1933), playing the girlfriend of Spencer Tracy; in a wildly romantic gesture of self-sacrifice, Tracy goes to the chair for a murder she has committed. Curtiz's realistic portrayal of the dreariness and squalor of prison life may now seem commonplace, but was found fresh and revelatory at the time.

All through the 1930s, Curtiz tirelessly hammered out four or five movies a year, seemingly as ready to take on low-budget programmers as more prestigious assignments. By the middle of the decade, though, he was established as Warners' top director, increasingly assigned to the studio's major stars (Davis, Cagney, Muni, William Powell) and more expensive productions—at least by Warners' notoriously parsimonious standards. The studio's financial stability was now assured, but old habits died hard—especially those of Hal Wallis, Warners' formidable and tight-fisted production chief. Curtiz, versatile, industrious, and supremely adept at creating lavish results on minimal budgets, fitted the studio philosophy perfectly. "Curtiz never gave second-hand treatment to as assignment once it was accepted," commented William Meyer; "he went ahead and graced plot and character with fluid camera movement, exquisite lighting, and a lightening-fast pace. Even if a script was truly poor and the leading players were real amateurs, Curtiz glossed over inadequacies so well that an audience often failed to recognise a shallow substance until it was hungry for another film a half-hour later."

Equally well established by this time was Curtiz's reputation as one of the most detested directors in Hollywood, second only perhaps to Josef von Sternberg. Jack Edmund Nolan (*Films in Review*, November 1970) described him as "a manic-depressive sort of a man, up one day and down the next. In the euphoric phase he would appear on the set splendidly accoutred, even flamboyantly (scarf, costume jewelry), and be full of extroverted, self-confident assertiveness. In the depressed phase he would be unkempt and would refuse to talk even about things that were of

concern to him. In both states he was mindful of the feelings of others only occasionally."

Autocratic and overbearing on the set, Curtiz clashed constantly with his actors; thriving under pressure, he expected them to do the same. Many actors, including Errol Flynn, eventually refused to work with Curtiz. Bette Davis, never one to be dominated, fought with him ceaselessly. (Curtiz is said to have referred to her, in her presence, as a "goddamned nothing nogood sexless son of a bitch.") Joan Blondell described him as "a cruel man, with animals and actors, and he swung that whip around pretty good. He overworked everyone. But he was also amusing, and he turned out some good pictures."

All his life Curtiz retained a strong Hungarian accent, and his creative mishandlings of the English language deserve to be as famous as those of Sam Goldwyn. He once stormed at a confused propman: "Next time I send a damn fool, I go myself!" He expressed dissatisfaction with a child actor by remarking scathingly: "By the time I was your age, I was fifteen." A scene in one of his films, he predicted, would "make your blood curl."

For all his unsympathetic treatment of actors, Curtiz showed a knack for detecting and fostering unknown talent. Among the actors who achieved stardom under his direction were Walter Slezak, John Garfield, and—rather unexpectedly—Doris Day. His most famous discovery, though, was undoubtedly Errol Flynn, who in Curtiz's hands rose from minor bit parts to become one of the great romantic heroes of the cinema, the first (and perhaps only) true successor to Douglas Fairbanks. The first of their dozen collaborations, *Captain Blood* (1935), defined the most enduring aspect of Flynn's screen performance: the dashing, devil-may-care swashbuckler, sword in hand and heart on sleeve....

Curtiz, William Meyer maintained, "is to the swashbuckler what John Ford is to the Western." *Robin Hood* alone might well serve to substantiate such a claim....

Curtiz won the first of his two Oscars for a patriotic short, *Sons of Liberty* (1939) . It starred Claude Rains, exceptional among actors in that he generally got on well with Curtiz and enjoyed working for him.

With the start of the 1940s and the ending of the ebullient Flynn cycle, a darker, more pessimistic tone gradually seemed to suffuse Curtiz's output—although many critics would argue that in this, as throughout his career, Curtiz the archetypal studio workhorse was merely reflecting an overall shift in Hollywood's—and America's—mood.

Moral despair...was conspicuously absent from the first of Curtiz's wartime hits, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). Davis and Flinn considered it "the finest musical biography ever filmed"; it was without any doubt the most energetic. As George M. Cohan, composer, showman, and superpatriot, James Cagney strutted superlatively, earning himself an Oscar; his performance, and that of Walter Huston as his father, did much to ensure the film's lasting appeal, despite the deafening blare of nationalistic bombast.

A year later, Curtiz directed a further exercise in national propaganda, of a rather different kind: *Mission to Moscow* (1943), an amazingly overt Stalinist apologia, based on the memoirs of Joseph E. Davies, ex-US Ambassador to the USSR. In it, Russia was depicted, as James Agee put it, as "a great glad two-million-dollar bowl of canned borscht, eminently approvable by the Institute of Good Housekeeping." The film, which went so far as to endorse the 1937 show trials, caused much embarrassment a few years later when the wind changed: a twitchy Jack Warner informed HUAC that it had been made at the express

request of President Roosevelt. *Mission to Moscow* was suppressed for some years, becoming available again during the 1960s. Higham and Greenberg, commending "its epic sweep, its magnificently lavish studio pastiche recreation of Russia, its brilliant, well-nigh irresistible propagandist verve," classed it "with *Triumph of the Will* and *Ten Days That Shook the World*, as one of the great propaganda pieces of the screen."

Also in 1943, Curtiz was assigned to what had originally been planned as a low-budget melodramatic programmer, to star Ronald Reagan and Ann Sheridan. For some reason, the project was upgraded to major-budget status, Bogart and Bergman were brought in to play the leads, a new scriptwriter was drafted (Howard Koch, who also scripted *Mission to Moscow*) and one of the great cult movies was born. *Casablanca* (1942) is undoubtedly Curtiz's best-known film, more written about than any of his others (quite possible more than all his others put together); it won him his only Best Director Oscar; and it established, more decisively even than *The Maltese Falcon* or *The Big Sleep*, the iconographic Bogart persona. Its low-key, nostalgically romantic appeal has not diminished; in August 1983 a British Film Institute Members' poll voted it, by a wide margin, top of a list of all-time favorite films.

As Rick, jaded and world-weary proprietor of a night spot in Vichy Casablanca, Bogart embodies perfectly the moral choice that lies at the heart of so many Curtiz films: public versus private morality, cynical detachment versus commitment. In the easy-going 1930s, the choice had been largely a formality; Errol Flynn's reluctance to become a sheriff and clean up Dodge City had been little more than a momentary hesitation. In *Casablanca*, though we sense that ultimately Bogart will do the right thing, the choice is more drawn-out, more agonized: not until the very last moments of the film does he relinquish Bergman to resistance leader Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) and ally himself irreversibly to the cause of freedom and democracy. This ambiguity no doubt stems partly from the uncertainty of the actors (and even of the director) as to how the film would end; most of the script was apparently written as shooting progressed. "That picture was made good on set," Curtiz remarked later. "I have three writers working on set every day as we shoot."

Besides the principal actors, Warners assembled an exceptionally fine supporting cast: Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, Conrad Veidt, Dooley Wilson (as Sam, playing it again), and "the ambiguous emotional center of the film, the human embodiment of Casablanca's mystery and corruption," as Richard Schickel put it—Claude Rains as the Vichy police chief, Louis Renault.Together with MaxSteiner's score, (incorporating, of course, "As Time Goes By"), Weyl's sets, and Arthur Edeson's evocative camerawork, they enabled Curtiz to create, Kingsley Canham suggested, "one of the most distinguished works ever to emerge from a Hollywood studio," a distillation of the style and aspirations of wartime America.

Bogart's Rick, wrote Sidney Rosenzweig, "is an irresistible identification figure for that urge in all of us for a splendid and noble martyrdom." "Isolationism is no longer a practical policy, my dear Rick," remarks Sidney Greenstreet blandly. Underlining the political parallel between the man and his country (the film is set in 1941); a hero for his time, Rick somberly but inexorably heads towards the foggy nocturnal airfield where he shoots the Nazi Colonel Strasser, hands over Bergman to Henreid, and strolls off arm-in-arm with Rains to join the Free French over the next hill. The film was

enthusiastically acclaimed, barring a grumpy dissenting note from James Agee ("The camera should move for purposes other than those of a nautch dancer"), and showered with Oscars; over the years its stature as a cinematic classic has become unassailable.

Yet, as Richard Schickel admitted, "objectively speaking, the film...remains what it always was—a somewhat better-than-average example of what the American studio system could do when it was at its most stable and powerful." The plot is often shaky and implausible. Though much of the dialogue is witty and memorable (Rains, inviting an increased kickback: "I'm only a *poor* corrupt official..."), much more is unadulterated schmaltz. Bergman to Bogart, in mid-tryst as the Germans invade Paris: "Was that cannon fire or was it my heart pounding?" Bogart to Bergman, recalling the same events: "I remember every detail—the Germans wore gray, you wore blue." Several film actors, notably Lorre and Greenstreet, are largely wasted. *Casablanca*, by any standards, is not great art. But it is, beyond all doubt, superb cinema….

By this stage in his career, Curtiz had to some extent modified his cinematic style and toned down the vividly dramatic expressionism of his earlier years. His camera remained fluid, but the angles were becoming less startling, the compositions less crowded and complex, though he retained his taste for stark contrasts in lighting. "I have progressed too," he remarked around this time. "I was too European, too stagey, too sentimental. Now at fifty-six I do better work." Most critics would say that, on the contrary, at fifty-six Curtiz had almost all his best work behind him and was about to direct his last major film.

Mildred Pierce (1945), adapted from a novel by James M. Cain, was intended as a vehicle for Joan Crawford, recently ousted from MGM and badly in need of a boost for her flagging career. She got it; the film won her an Academy Award (her first and only) for her performance as the drivingly ambitious housewife who works her way up from waitress to owner of a chain of restaurants, and in doing so destroys her life and her family. But *Mildred Pierce* transcends its origins as a Crawford vehicle; a model *film noir*, it presents an icily graphic picture of the souring of the American dream of success. "The family and mother love are both undermined,"

observed David Thomson. "Suburbia inextricably confuses happiness and the dollar."

Michael Wood cited *Mildred Pierce* as one of the few *films noirs* in which the action of the movie lives up (or perhaps down) to the lowering menace of the atmosphere: "The unrequited love of Joan Crawford for her stuck-up daughter dominates even the film's murky, compelling mood, converting that mood into a metaphor for the stormy, tortured confusion of her feelings." The opening has become deservedly famous: in a remote night-bound beach house shots are fired, shattering a mirror; a man slumps to the lamplit floor, gasping a woman's name with his last breath; a car revs off into the night. "The film," wrote Higham and Greenberg, "conveys Curtiz's love of the American night world, of piers shining under rain, of dark beaches, the Pacific moonlight seen through a bar's windows; and the tough direction of the players at all times pays dividends."

By way of total contrast, Curtiz's next two films offered optimistic, upbeat Americana. *Night and Day* (1946) purported, without much justification, to be a biography of Cole Porter, represented by Cary Grant at his most debonair, casually scribbling snatches of the title song in the World War I trenches. *Life With Father* (1947) was a sunlit period piece, set in 1880s New York, with William Powell perfectly cast as the irascible but finally soft-hearted paterfamilias; the film made up in charm for what it lacked in pace.

In 1946 Frank Capra, George Stevens, and William Wyler had formed Liberty Pictures, a directors' cooperative aimed at achieving freedom from studio tyranny, and had invited Curtiz to join them. Alarmed, Jack Warner offered his star director a nominally autonomous unit within the studio, Michael Curtiz Productions. Considerably hampered by having to seek the studio's final script approval on all projects, the fledgling company finally produced *The Unsuspected* (1947), a stylish Gothic murder story which handed Claude Rains a bravura role as a megalomaniac, and eventually homicidal radio personality. Perhaps encouraged by the frank improbability of the plot, Curtiz pulled out some of his best UFA-style camera tricks, and one sequence (according to Higham and Greenberg) "remains the quintessence of Forties *film noir*. The camera moves out of a train window, across a narrow street filled with neon signs, and up to a room where a killer lies smoking, terrified in the dark, listening to the story of his crimes related by Victor Grandison [Rains] on the radio."

After a couple of vapid musicals, notable only for giving Doris Day her start in movies, Curtiz's outfit produced its final film, *Flamingo Road* (1949). This was in many ways a companion piece to *Mildred Pierce*, substituting steamy Southern locations for rain-washed California, with Joan Crawford as a cabaret singer encountering small-town political corruption. As the venal sheriff, Sydney Greensttreet in his penultimate role exuded soft-spoken evil with practiced skill. Curtiz now sold his company back to Warners, tired of exercising an independence that was barely more than nominal.

Those critics who regard Curtiz purely as a creature of the studio system have pointed out that the two flourished and declined together, and that by the ends of the 1940s both were evidently past their best….

As Warner Brothers' top director, Curtiz had been earning $5,000 a week. In 1954 Warners, along with the rest of Hollywood, was running into financial difficulties, and Jack Warner asked all the studio's highest-paid personnel to accept a fifty percent cut in salary. Curtiz refused, and quit the studio where he had worked for twenty-eight years. His decision may not have resulted entirely from wounded pride; that same year he was cited by a young actress in a paternity suit, and the judgment went expensively against him.

During the remaining eight years of his life, Curtiz freelanced for all the major studios (especially Paramount), directing a further fifteen films. They were a mixed and largely mediocre bunch, though Curtiz could still command big budgets and top box-office acting talent, and his technical competence remained impressive. Ironically, one of these late films, *White Christmas* (1954), a saccharine musical with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye, proved the biggest commercial hit of his career. It would be difficult to imagine a less typical Curtiz movie—if such a thing exists.

The general critical consensus on Michael Curtiz has been that he was a studio director par excellence, bringing a high degree of technical mastery to whatever Warners threw at him, undoubtedly at his best with fast-pace action drama, but lacking any overall personal vision or directorial signature. In other words, Curtiz was not an auteur, unlike the almost equally versatile if less prolific Howard Hawks. "Perhaps more than any other director, Curtiz reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the studio system in Hollywood." Andrew Sarris wrote, going on to describe *Casablanca* as "the happiest of happy accidents, and the most decisive exception to the *auteur* theory." Still more dismissively, Richard Roud suggested that "perhaps there is little to say, except that his films have given much mindless pleasure."

Ephraim Katz, though, observed that "his forceful personality frequently broke through the most routine material, and it was often difficult ot tell who was subservient to whom, Curtiz to the studio system or the studio system to Curtiz." Describing Curtiz as "the ultimate professional," John Baxter commented that such an atrribute has seldom been regarded as more than a poor second best to the more sporadic pursuit of the feeblest personal vision." Despite the implication that Curtiz wholly lacked any such vision, Baxter added that he brought to all his films "a sly and highly sexual Viennese humour," and elsewhere remarked that he "lays a substantial claim to being the best director of the Thirties....Curtiz seems the embodiment of a European tradition totally opposed to the elegance and sly wit of a Lubitsch....His films are among the most pitiless grotesque and erotic in the history of the cinema."

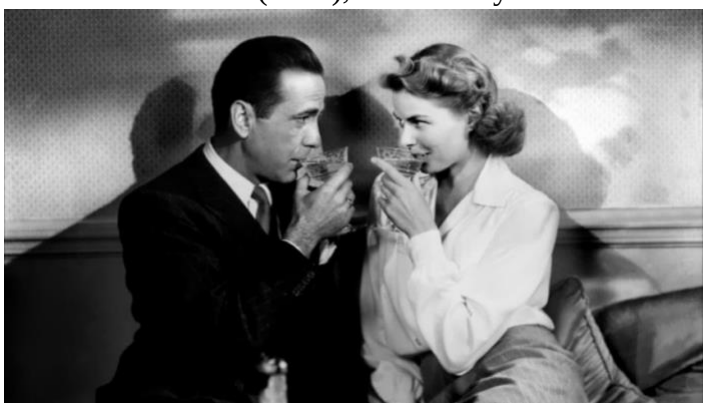
Curtiz certainly displayed a "personal vision" in the purely physical sense, in that the bulk of his films share a distinctive and identifiable "look," a deliberate visual approach. John Davis, writing in *Velvet Light Trap* (June 1971), remarked that "Curtiz always knew exactly how far from the action, and at what angle, to place the camera to achieve maximum emotional identification from his audience. Paul Henreid, whom Curtiz directed in *Casablanca,* also noted his "instinctive visual sense....Every now and again he would stop the camera and say, 'There's something wrong here, I don't know what it is.' By and by he'd realize what it was and we'd begin the scene again."Sidney Rosenzsweig identified Curtiz's visual style as the key aspect of his directorial signature, with its "unusual camera angles and carefully detailed, crowded, complex compositions, full of mirrors and reflections, smoke and fog, and physical objects, furniture, foliage, bars, and windows, that stand between the camera and the human characters and seem to surround and entrap them."

Rosenzweig further suggested that Curtiz's personal attitude to his material can be deduced from this visual approach: "Curtiz seems to define his characters by their environment. In fact, environment becomes a form of fate, and Curtiz's characters often struggle against fate, trying to mold their own lives, shape their own destinies. The typical Curtiz hero is a morally divided figure, forced...to make a serious moral decision." Paul Leggatt (*Focus on Film*, Winter 1975-76) identified similar thematic preoccupations. "Time and again Curtiz presented a cynical yet idealistic hero in conflict with the society around him…No matter how absurd and degenerate the world….there still existed a moral base that could be appealed to and could even be made effective in a hostile world—if a man were willing to pay the price for taking a moral stand."

Curtiz himself tended to deflect with irony any attempt to delve beneath the polished surface of his films. "I put all the art into my pictures I think the audience can stand," he once remarked; and, again, "I don't see black-and-white words in a script when I read it. I see action." If he hardly qualifies, as John Baxter conceded, as "an artist of ideas," the bittersweet romanticism that suffuses all his best films would still make him something more than the impersonally efficient studio filmsmith he has sometimes been taken for. "One must allow Curtiz the credit," wrote David Thomson, "for making melodrama and sentimentality so searingly effective and such glowing causes for nostalgia...*Yankee Doodle Dandy, Casablanca,* and *Mildred Pierce* are an unrivalled trinity of inventiveness transforming soppiness to such an extent that reason and taste begin to waver at the conviction of genre in full flow."

Michael Curtiz never retired. Indefatigable to the last, he continued to direct a regular two films a year well into his seventies. Almost his last movie, bringing him full circle to his starting point, was an

adaptation of a play by Molnar, *Olympia* (filmed as *A Breath of Scandal*, 1960). Curtiz died of cancer in a Hollywood hospital a few months after completing *The Comancheros* (1961), a John Wayne Western.



The Great Movies. Roger Ebert. Broadway Books NY 2002 "_Casablanca_"

If we identify strongly with the characters in some movies, then it is no mystery that *Casablanca* is one of the most popular films ever made. It is about a man and a woman who are in love and who sacrifice love for a higher purpose. This is immensely appealing; the viewer is able to imagine not only winning the love of Humphrey Bogart or Ingrid Bergman but unselfishly renouncing it, as a contribution to the great cause of defeating the Nazis.

In her close ups during this [last] scene, Bergman's face reflects confusing emotions. And well she might have been confused, since neither she nor anyone else on the film knew for sure until the final day who would get on the plane. Bergman played the whole movie without knowing how it would end, and this had the subtle effect of making all of her scenes more emotionally convincing; she could not tilt in the direction she knew the wind was blowing.

When this plot remade in 1990 as *Havana*, Hollywood practices required all the big scenes to feature the big stars (Robert Redford and Lena Olin) and the film suffered as a result; out of context, they were more lovers than heroes.

Seeing the film over and over again, year after year, I find it never grows overfamiliar. It plays like a favorite musical album; the more I know it, the more I like it. The black-and-white photography has not aged as color would. The dialogue is so spare and cynical it has nor grown old-fashioned. Much of the emotional effect of *Casablanca* is achieved by indirection. As we leave the theater, we are absolutely convinced that the only thing keeping the world from going crazy is that the problems of three little people do, after all, amount to more than a hill of beans.

"Humphrey Bogart Gentleman Declassed" in _Schickel on Film_. Richard Schickel. Wm. Morrow & Co. NY 1989

Unquestionably his [Bogart's] authority as a screen presence, both during the rest of his career and posthumously, radiates outward from *Casablanca*. It is certainly not his best performance—he stretched more in others, revealed more of himself in still others—but it is good. And it is good not because he is embodying that congeries of modern philosophical ideas that have since been imputed to Rick/Bogie, but simply because Humphrey Bogart, the actor, is easeful here, instinctively at home with his character in a way that he only rarely had been before, and never as fully as this.

That kind of comfort with a character, that kind of blending of a factual self with a fictive creation, in which neither the performer nor the audience I entirely aware of where one ends and the other begins, is extraordinarily rare. But it is a basic requirement for screen actors working at the star level and hoping to stay there for a while.

All the imputations to the contrary, all the attempts to claim Rick Blaine and Humphrey Bogart for the party of Camus and Sartre needlessly complicate what turns out to be, on not-too-arduous examination, a fairly simple identification between actor and part. These claims and imputations are rationalizations for the fad that was created around *Casablanca* and (to a slightly less impassioned extent) Bogart himself. This began, not long after the actor died, in the sixties at Harvard, spread outward from thereto other American campuses, attaining cult status on its way to becoming what it now is, a rite of passage for many. (Howard Koch, who shares credit for the film's screenplay and now accompanies it as a lecturer at colleges, reports audiences chorusing the dialogue with the actors on the screen as if it were *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, meeting students who have seen it upwards of twenty times; he particularly

recalls one girl who was introduced to him as "a curiosity on exhibit" because she was seeing *Casablanca* for the first time the night of his visit.)

Throughout the film he grapples with two issues every more or less sensitive individual standing on the brink of adulthood must confront for the first, but not the last, time in life. One is the attempt to weigh personal desire against traditional moral imperatives and public need and strike the correct balance between them—the one you can live with the rest of your years. (Shall Rick, in short, keep Ilsa for himself now that he has regained her or shall he relinquish his claim in favor of those presented by her legal mate and by the world struggle against fascism, which she can serve by devoting herself to this allegedly inspiring leader?)

These carefully encoded messages [of growing up, nostalgia, hope], of course, permit *Casablanca* to transcend the simple wartime metaphors, aimed at mobilizing the conscience of the audience in which they were cloaked. They are what give it continuing relevance to young people when most pictures of the time, peddling similar inspirationalism, appear at best dated, at worst ludicrous. Naturally the artfully glamorous context in which these messages were presented helps: the exotic locale; the colorful minor characters; the seductively shadowed film noir atmosphere. So do the highly stylized dialogue, blending the tones of tough rue and cynical wit, and the serviceably suspenseful narrative, rusing everyone aong past its own several improbabilities. Indeed, in his very acute essay on the movie Umberto Eco makes the point that its success depends on the fact that it is an almost perfect compendium of the conventions (or cliches) of the adventure-romance film as they had developed to date. He claims there is not a single one of them that the picture fails to evoke, with the result that its manic generosity simply overwhelms disbelief. It is, in short, one of those rare cases where less would have been...less.

This is not to discount Bogart's contribution to the initial and continuing success of *Casablanca* but to place it in perspective. It is his presence, persuasively weary, persuasively wary, that grounds a movie always in danger of flightiness and unconscious risibility in a recognizable reality. Indeed, at this point one must pause to pay tribute to the concentrated power of personality he so subtly mobilized in this film. It was late in his career—this was his forty-fifth movie—and late in his life—he turned forty-four the month it was released—for him to unloose a force that would travel with undiminished velocity down the corridors of time. And he was, as the press of the time never tired of observing, an unlikely figure of romance; a small man (five feet nine inches, 155 pounds), balding, with a scar on a nerveless upper lip the most prominent defect on a face already showing the wear and tear of alcohol and life's disappointments. He was, moreover, as compact emotionally as he was in stature. He did not permit his feelings, in this film or any other, to slosh about and spill over in a way that elicits instant regard, especially nowadays, when men who "surface" their feelings are much esteemed. Clearly there was something about this role that spoke deeply to him, permitting him to transcend the obvious handicaps he brought to it.

Was it a sense that as a kind of emotional outlaw, with perhaps an anarchical admixture in his temperament, he found an objective correlative in Rick, treading reserved and uncommitted among the many shady factions of a raffish, amoral, and entirely alien environment? . . .Bogart was never the man Belmondo's character or those who followed him thought he was.

What I'm saying is: Forget tough guy. Forget existential hero. What Bogart found in Rick Blaine was something more interesting than his first

misnomer, no less complex than the second, but much more appealing—to some of us at least—than both. Above all, and most important to him in establishing emotional connection with it, was the fact that his screen character as it finally evolved was but a minor variation on the role he'd been playing off-screen most of his adult life. And had taken up with particular relish when he took up permanent residence in Hollywood.

That role was...declassed gentleman, a man of breeding and privilege who found himself, as a result of circumstances not entirely of his making, far from his native haunts, among people of rather less quality, rather fewer standards morally, socially, intellectually than he had been raised to expect among his acquaintances. To put the matter simply, Rick Blaine should not have ended up running a "gin joint" in *Casablanca*, and Humphrey Bogart should not have ended up being an actor in Hollywood.

"I don't trust anyone who doesn't drink," Bogart often proclaimed.

Ronald Haver: "Casablanca: The Unexpected Classic" (Criterion notes)

Thursday, March 2, 1944—the United States is in its third year of war with the Axis powers. More than 12 million Americans are fighting on various fronts; the German armies are being repulsed at Anzio and the newspapers have large headlines about the bombing of Wake Island and the battle of Truk in the Pacific. The tide of war has turned decidedly toward the Allies, and people are much more optimistic about the outcome of the struggle. At Sing Sing prison in New York, convicted murderer Louis Lepke is making dramatic revelations about the operation of Murder, Inc. In Los Angeles, Charlie Chaplin is being blood tested in the sensational paternity case brought against him by starlet Joan Barry . . . . Listening to the radio in the Los Angeles area that night, you had your choice of "I Love a Mystery," evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, and "The Aldrich Family." As an added novelty, at 10:16 P.M., you could hear for the first time a live broadcast of the 17th Annual Academy Award presentation from Grauman's Chinese Theater. (Two stations in the city would broadcast it: KNX and KFWB. The NBC network affiliates had turned it down as not having enough appeal.) For the past seventeen years, the awards had been given out at a banquet, resulting in affairs that sometimes lasted until two in the morning. Criticism had been leveled at the idea of holding lavish dinner parties in the midst of wartime economies, so this year it had been decided that the awards would be strictly an informal affair.

The films in nomination this night had all been released in the period from December 1942 through December 1943. Their titles reflect the mood and anxieties of the country during its first real year of the war: *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* a lavish romantic version (some said perversion) of the Hemingway Spanish Civil War novel; *The Human Comedy,* a gentle film from William Saroyan's novel about the homefront; the Ernst Lubitsch fantasy *Heaven Can Wait;* a British war film, Noel Coward's *In Which We Serve; The More the Merrier,* a George Stevens comedy about war-time Washington; *The Ox-Bow Incident,* a stark, somber film about a Iynching; the heavily reverential *The Song of Bernadette*; the strongly anti-Nazi *Watch on the Rhine;* and *Casablanca,* the romantic melodrama which was one of the most popular films of the year. Since the proceedings were being broadcast overseas to the troops as well as locally, winners were urged to keep their acceptance speeches under three minutes. Outside the theater, wartime fears of a possible Japanese attack on Los Angeles had subsided to the point where searchlights were permitted to be used for the first time since the war began. Their light revealed a mass of low-hanging clouds, threatening an eleventh straight day of rain, further dampening the spirits of several hundred fans, who had been filling the bleachers and lining Hollywood Boulevard since 6:30 p.m. They were disappointed at the noticeable lack of glamour and color which usually characterized

the awards. The continual roar of enthusiasm which normally prevailed at these functions was noticeably lukewarm except for the arrival of Humphrey Bogart, a nominee for Best Actor for his performance in *Casablanca.*

As he stepped out of his car, the crowd surged forward, almost engulfing him and his wife, Mayo Methot. It took 12 police officers to rescue the two, and a red-faced, startled, yet smiling Bogart heard a chorus of cries of "good luck" and "here's looking at you, kid" as he was rushed into the theater. Bogart had been in Hollywood off and on for the past fourteen years, but he had never been mobbed before, and he was a bit shaken by the experience. Coming into the theater directly behind Bogart were the head of production at Warner Bros., Hal Wallis, and his wife, actress/comedienne Louise Fazenda. They had seen the excitement surrounding Bogart, and Wallis took it as further vindication of his judgment in casting Bogart as a romantic lead in *Casablanca*—a decision he had to defend to Jack Warner, head of the studio, who did not consider Bogart any kind of a romantic hero. If Warner had seen the commotion around Bogart's entrance, he did not comment on it to Wallis. There was a growing tension between Wallis and Warner, stemming from Warner's feeling, rightly or wrongly, that his head of production was receiving more credit and publicity than he deserved.As head of production, Wallis was chiefly responsible for the decisions which had resulted in Warner Bros. receiving more nominations that year than any other studio: 28, of which eight were for Wallis' own personal production of *Casablanca.* Additionally, Wallis had been nominated for the Irving Thalberg Award for "the most consistent high quality of production" for the past year; if he won, it would be his second Thalberg, as he had been awarded the prize in 1938. Warner, a proud, possessive man insofar as the studio was concerned, felt that this was "too much Wallis and not enough Warner" and had made his unhappiness known. There wasn't much Wallis could do about it, but it did add to an already tense evening.

It was going to be a close race. *The Song of Bernadette* had a whopping twelve nominations. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *Casablanca* were tied, with eight each. *Casablanca* had the advantage of having been in release longer than any of the other films, meaning that most of the rank and file of the Academy membership had seen it. They were largely the craftsmen in the smaller earning brackets who did not usually see the pictures until they played the neighborhood theaters. Also, an informal poll taken around the studios earlier that week had given *Casablanca* the edge as seemingly everyone's favorite of the year. Everyone, that is, with the possible exception of the three screenwriters nominated for adapting it: Philip and Julius Epstein, and Howard Koch.The pressures under which the script had been written were such that they had all been mildly flabbergasted when the film was nominated for best screenplay. This was a first nomination for young Howard Koch and for Philip Epstein. Philip's brother Julius had been nominated for his work on *Four Daughters* in 1938. All three considered their chances of winning minimal, considering the competition, which included George Seaton for *The Song of Bernadette* and Dashiell Hammett for *Watch on the Rhine.* However, they were there, sitting in the same row as Max Steiner, nominated for his *Casablanca* scoring; and Owen Marks and Arthur Edeson, nominees respectively for the editing and photography of the film. Four rows behind them, Wallis was watching for the arrival of the last of the major nominees and one of Wallis' closest friends, the picture's director, Michael Curtiz. Curtiz also had not thought much of *Casablanca*'s chances. The film had been a troublesome experience for him. This was to be his third directing nomination, and he was so certain

of not winning that he had not taken the time to prepare a speech, something he had done on the two prior occasions. He and his wife, screenwriter Bess Meredith, slipped quietly into the darkened theater ten minutes after the ceremonies began. They arrived just in time to hear M.C. Jack Benny complaining to the audience about the lack of dinner, saying that in a place named Grauman's Chinese he expected at least chop suey.

Two hours later, Wallis listened in anxious anticipation as the nominees for Best Director were read by singer Dinah Shore. Up to this point in the awards ceremony *Casablanca* had lost in almost all of the categories for which it had been nominated: Editor Owen Marks' work had been bypassed in favor of George Amy's editing of Air Force, another Wallis production; Max Steiner's score had been passed over in favor of Alfred Newman's music for *The Song of Bernadette,* which had also won the black-and-white cinematography award for Arthur Miller. However, the Epsteins and Howard Koch had won the best screenplay adaptation award much to the delight of Wallis. Still to come were the major awards of the evening: Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor and Actress and Best Director. With the exception of Best Actress and Supporting Actress, *Casablanca* had been nominated in all these categories, and Wallis felt that they still had a chance to win at least one of the major awards. When Dinah Shore opened the envelope and announced Michael Curtiz as the winner, Wallis watched with great satisfaction as Curtiz made his way to the stage and listened in affectionate amusement as his friend accepted the Oscar, saying in his charmingly imperfect English: "So many times, I have a speech ready, but no dice. Always a bridesmaid, never a mother. Now I win, I have no speech."

After this win, Wallis's hopes were high for the remaining awards, but ironically, Bogart lost to Paul Lukas for another Wallis production, the film version of Lillian Hellman's antifascist play *Watch on the Rhine,* while Claude Rains was passed over in favor of Charles Coburn in the George Stevens comedy about wartime Washington *The More the Merrier.* Finally it was time for the Best Picture Award and the tension grew palpable as Academy President Walter Wanger read the nominees: *For Whom the Bell Tolls; Heaven Can Wait; In Which We Serve; Madame Curie; The More the Merrier*; *Casablanca; The Human Comedy; The Ox-Bow Incident; Watch on the Rhine* and *The Song of Bernadette.* (This would be the last year in which ten pictures would be nominated in this category. Thereafter, the number of nominees would be stabilized at 5.) As Wanger opened the envelope and announced, "the winner is *Casablanca*," Hal Wallis, in his autobiography *Starmaker* (1980), remembered vividly what happened next: "After it was announced that *Casablanca* had won the award for Best Picture, I stood up to accept when Jack [Warner] ran to the stage ahead of me and took the award with a broad, flashing smile and a look of great self-satisfaction. I couldn't believe it was happening. *Casablanca* had been my creation; Jack had absolutely nothing to do with it. As the audience gasped, I tried to get out of the row of seats and into the aisle, but the entire Warner family sat blocking me. I had no alternative but to sit down again, humiliated and furious. . . . Almost forty years later, I still haven't recovered from the shock." Wallis received his second Irving Thalberg Memorial Award that evening for "The most consistent high quality of production," but even that honor did not make up for the slight by Warner.

Soon afterwards, Wallis left Warner Bros. and became an independent producer, releasing his films through Paramount and later, Universal. Over the next thirty years he produced another seventy-one films including: *Love Letters, The Strange Love of Martha Ivers, Sorry Wrong Number, Come Back, Little Sheba, The Rose Tattoo, Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, Wild Is*

the Wind, Summer and Smoke, Becket, Barefoot in the Park, True Grit, Anne of the Thousand Days, and *Mary, Queen of Scots*. When asked by an interviewer in 1978 what film he would most like to be remembered by, Wallis replied "*Casablanca*." Of all the films produced in the United States during World War II, only two could be said to transcend their origins and truly to reflect the popular Zeitgeist: one is David O. Selznick's 1944 epic of the homefront, *Since You Went Away,* and the other, of course, is *Casablanca*. Over the years, *Casablanca* has developed a devoted following and has been transmuted from just a highly-regarded melodrama into one of the classics of the Romantic genre. More has been written about it than any other film, with the possible exception of *The Birth of a Nation, Citizen Kane,* and *Gone with the Wind.* Its central image, that of Bogart in a trench coat and hat, holding a gun, with a cigarette dangling from his lips, has become a popular icon of sorts.

The film has spawned any number of books, master's theses, and been the inspiration for Woody Allen's hit play and film, *Play It Again, Sam,* a popular misquotation of one of the film's memorable lines. What exactly transpired over the years to transform Casablanca's status has been endlessly debated, discussed and otherwise analyzed. *Casablanca* is unique because it crystallized and encapsulated an entire generation's idealistic view of itself. There is scarcely anyone in this country over the age of forty-five who can remain unmoved by the film. It provides tangible evidence of not necessarily the way we were, but more importantly, the way we wanted to be. It is this sense of the more positive beliefs and virtues of another time that gives the film its timelessness. *Casablanca* bridges the generations, giving us a sense of the hopes of an earlier decade and reminding us that a heritage need not be lost to the passage of time.

The Cinephiilia & Beyond entry on *Casablanca* contains several interesting interviews with and a shooting script.

Two stills from Ted Turner's reviled colorization of *Calcutta:*

Turner said, "[*Casablanca*] is one of a handful of films that really doesn't have to be colorized. I did it because I wanted to. All I'm trying to do is protect my investment."

THE FALL 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XLV:

August 30 William Wellman ***Wings*** 1927
Sept 6 Jean Renoir ***Rules of the Game*** 1939
Sept 13 Michael Curtiz ***Casablanca*** 1942
Sept 20 Nicholas Ray, ***In a Lonely Place*** 1950
Sept 27 Luis Buñuel ***Viridiana*** 1961
Oct 4 Orson Welles ***Chimes at Midnight*** *1966*
Oct 11 Mel Brooks ***Young Frankenstein*** 1974
Oct 18 Arthur Penn ***Night Moves*** 1975
Oct 25 Sydney Pollack ***Tootsie*** 1982
Nov 1 Akira Kurosawa ***Ran*** 1985
Nov 8 Martin Scorsese ***Goodfellas*** 1990
Nov 15 Hiayo Miyazaki ***The Wind Rises*** 2013
Nov 22 Ava Duvernay ***Selma*** 2014
Nov 29 Pedro Almodóvar ***Parallel Mothers*** 2021
Dec 6 Ang Lee ***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*** 2000

Casablanca, Morocco

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