

Casablanca

Eden Court Cinema, 19th March, 7:15pm

Director: Michael Curtiz

Writers: Julius J. Epstein (screenplay), Philip G. Epstein (screenplay) & 3 more credits

Stars: Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains, Peter Lorre



Casablanca: An Appreciation by Mike Noble and 10 fascinating facts about one of the most famous films of all time

An appreciation by Mike Noble, original member of InFiFa

“Casablanca” is such a ‘corny’ pastiche of a film in so many ways; from the very opening, obviously a Hollywood set, the cartoon German couple who are rehearsing their English for life in America, the inadequate gangster who craves approval from Rick, the café owner, the discarded lush, the devoted piano player and the croupier and in fact all the characters, notably the local police chief, all adore Rick, the enigmatic central character. Even his moving emotional entanglements with the stunningly beautiful Elsa are tied up in a bundle labelled “There’ll always be Paris.” Together with the unsubtle ‘cinema noir’ techniques which the director employs - all adds up to a hugely enjoyable film which, while so strongly rooted in its time and place still retains a universal and everlasting appeal. I love it.



Fascinating Fact #1: The story was purchased for \$20,000

Playwright Murray Burnett co-created expat café owner Rick Blaine, piano player Sam, Czech resistance fighter Victor Lazlo and fresh-faced Ilsa Lund when he and his writing partner Joan Alison penned a play called "Everybody Comes to Rick's" in 1940. Having watched the political change that was sweeping across Europe, the pair intended it as a cautionary tale about the perils of fascism.

The play was meant for Broadway, but never made it reportedly in part because of the implication that Ilsa had slept with Rick in order to get letters of transit. But Warner Brothers certainly saw its potential: they purchased the script and all rights for a record \$20,000. (By comparison, the studio paid \$8,000 for *The Maltese Falcon*.)

Fascinating Fact #2: Originally the story was set in Lisbon

The movie title definitely wouldn't have had the same ring if the creators had stuck with the original setting — Lisbon. But they later moved it to Casablanca, a place that Burnett had never seen, and never did in his lifetime, despite the sweeping success of the story he created.

Fascinating Fact #3: There was a height issue

Like most film stars, Bogart seemed larger than life, but in person he stood 5' 8" tall. Bergman, however, was almost two inches taller. As a result, director Michael Curtiz had Bogie stand on blocks or sit on cushions to make him seem taller than Bergman



Fascinating Fact #4: It was shot almost entirely in Burbank, California

As exotic as it looks, the entire film was shot at Warner Brothers Studios in Burbank, California. There was one exception: the opening scene, which sees Nazi villain Heinrich Strasser flying past an airplane hangar, was shot at Van Nuys Airport in Van Nuys, Los Angeles. The final farewell tarmac scene, however, was filmed at Warner studios in Burbank.

Fascinating Fact #5: The release of the film was rushed

The release of Casablanca was rushed because of real-life world events. Originally the film was slated for release in early 1943, but the film premiered at the Hollywood Theater in New York City on November 26, 1942. Why? The publicity people moved it forward to coincide with the Allied invasion of North Africa and the capture of Casablanca. The film then went into wide release on January 23, 1943, to coincide with the Casablanca Conference, a high-level meeting between Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt in Casablanca.

Fascinating Fact #6: Many of the actors were themselves victims of the war

Many of the actors had first-hand experiences of the war and of Nazi brutality. S. Z. Sakall, who played the waiter Carl, was a Jewish-Hungarian who fled Germany in 1939 and lost his three sisters to a concentration camp. Helmut Dantine, who played the Bulgarian roulette player, spent time in a concentration camp and left Europe after being freed. Curt Bois, who played the pickpocket, was a German-Jewish actor and refugee. Conrad Veidt, who played Major Heinrich Strasser, was a German film star and refugee, and even though he fled the Nazis, he was often cast as a Nazi in American films.

Fascinating Fact #7: Nobody expected it to be a hit

Even though it featured a stellar cast and top writers, nobody working on the film expected it to be anything special — just one of dozens of films to come out of Hollywood each year.

But favourable reviews and Academy Awards for outstanding motion picture, best director and best screenplay propelled the film into the limelight.

Fascinating Fact #8: "Play it again, Sam" is not a line in the movie

The line "Play it again, Sam" is one of the most widely quoted lines from Casablanca — but it never appears in the film. In the famous piano scene, Ilsa leans on the piano and says, "Play it once, Sam" and "Play it, Sam." Rick also says, "Play it" — but nobody says, "Play it again, Sam." Most attribute the phrase, and the misunderstanding, to Woody Allen's stage play of the same name, which became a major motion picture in 1972

Fascinating Fact #9: There is still confusion about who wrote what

Brothers Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch are credited with writing the screenplay for the film - and they were behind many of the most famous lines, including "Round up the usual suspects," "This could be the start of a beautiful friendship" and "Here's looking at you, kid." But the script passed through many hands, and wasn't even

complete when the film began shooting, so the screenplay's true authorship remains blurry. Producer Hal B. Wallis reportedly wrote the final line, "Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship" after shooting was complete, and Bogart had to be brought back to dub it in.

Fascinating Fact #10: The song "As Time Goes By" almost didn't make the cut

The music for the film was written by Max Steiner, an Austrian-born, Hungarian-Jewish composer and arranger who gained fame for his score of *Gone With the Wind* and *King Kong*.

The classic song "As Time Goes By" was included in the original play, but Steiner didn't like it and wanted it excluded from the film adaptation. But Bergman had already shot the scenes with the song and cut her hair for her next role, so they couldn't be re-shot, and the song stayed.

After the movie was released, "As Time Goes By" spent 21 weeks on the hit parade.

Steiner later admitted that the song "must have had something to attract so much attention."

Jennifer Van Evra, 2017

Our next Film, *The Royal Tenenbaums* Eden Court Cinema, 3rd April, 8:15pm

