

'Here's Looking At You, 80' – Casablanca Completes Eight Decades This Year



Casablanca, the 1942 Hollywood film, which nobody thought would create even a ripple, went on to become an all-time classic, clinching the Oscar for Best Picture.

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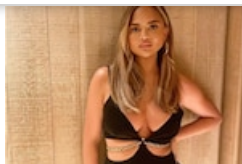
Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman's Casablanca is a classic Hollywood film that completes 8 decades this year.

Here's Looking at You, 80! If Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman were to have been alive today, the "salon keeper" at Casablanca, who ran a nightclub and gambling den during World War II, would have quipped.

"Here's Looking at You, Kid" was one of the most memorable lines from the 1942 Hollywood film – which nobody, just nobody thought would create even a ripple. But it went on to become an all-time classic, clinching the Oscar for Best Picture and for its director Michael Curtiz. It completes eight decades this year.

Set against the backdrop of the great war, the hauntingly beautiful love story between Rick Blaine (Bogart) and Ilsa Lund (Bergman) unfolds in Paris and in the northern African city of Casablanca, which was then under French rule. It was there that men and women hunted down by Adolf Hitler and other Axis powers made their way hoping to buy – at insanely high prices – exit passes that would take them to the New World, America. It was not easy to get on to the plane which left Casablanca once a week.

After a brief but passionate romance in Paris, Ilsa and Rick were to meet at the railway station hoping to escape the advancing Nazi army. But she never shows up. And months later, when she enters Rick's Cafe Americain along with her husband Victor Laszlo, (Czech Resistance fighter essayed by Paul Henreid), and pleads with the pianist, Sam, to play "As Time Goes By", Rick arrives furious that the song should have been sung. "I told you never to play that again", he shouts at Sam, but catching sight of Ilsa, calms down.

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Later, that night, a completely drunk Rick rues to Sam: "Of all the gin joints, in all the towns, in all the world she had to walk into mine."

Curtiz and his writers (adapting the movie from a unpublished stage play, *Everybody Comes to Rick's* by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison) could not decide how to end *Casablanca*. And they were in a hurry, and had to finish to time it with the Allied invasion of North Africa. What is more, Curtiz kept Bergman in the dark about whom she was to have been in love with – Rick or Victor! Well, the director himself was clueless, and so he made two climaxes. In the first she would leave *Casablanca* with her husband, and in the second, she would stay back with Rick.

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And since the first was ready and there was no time to shoot the second, the team went along with what we see in *Casablanca*.

The end is just touching with Rick walking away with French Captain Louis Renault (a magnificent performance by Claude Rains; in fact, it is easier to forget Henreid, not Rains) and telling him, "Louis, this is the beginning of a beautiful relationship".

I do not think there was ever an attempt to remake *Casablanca* (incidentally, there is still a cafe there and is called Rick's Cafe Americain, and I have seen posters and photos from the movie there)

A new Netflix work, Curtiz, weaves around *Casablanca*, telling us all about the production of the film. A elegant monochrome feature debut by Swiss-Hungarian director Tamas Yvan Topolánszky tries to let us have a peek into the actual shoot, which takes place, not in *Casablanca*, but in California. Obviously, the production team could not possibly travel to Africa in wartime conditions, and in an amazingly unreal scene, we see a huge cardboard plane surrounded by smoke to recreate a foggy night at the *Casablanca* airfield. A unit hand can be heard saying another that this way no one can make out that it is not a real plane. A few dwarfs were also employed to stand around it!

Michael Curtiz (Ferenc Lengyel) is shown as arrogant, pompous, even cruel, and, above all, as a womaniser. His estranged daughter, Kitty (Evelin Dobos), lands on the sets creating further complications and getting the helmer angrier – a part of all this stemming from his being unappreciated in Hollywood.

The movie begins with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, and how Curtiz tackles political intervention from Johnson, an American Government officer, who wants the film to follow the country's ideals. He wants the Nazi SS officer in *Casablanca* to be killed!

However, Curtiz and others wanted *Casablanca* to represent hope, but ultimately took into consideration

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ground reality. In fact, his fear of losing his sister in the war and his relationship with Kitty influenced how the classic wound to its end.

Although, the movie is a great tribute to director Curtiz, lifting him from the depths he had been pushed into, and also to the classical style of Hollywood, I was a tad disappointed, because the work contained little of the actual shoot. We hardly saw Bogart or Bergman or Rains. Actors could have portrayed these legendary characters, and the Netflix offering could have been a far more satisfying watch.

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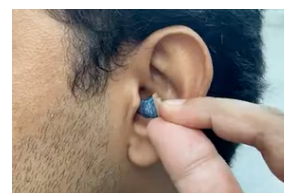
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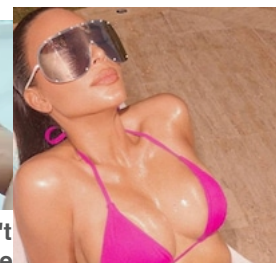
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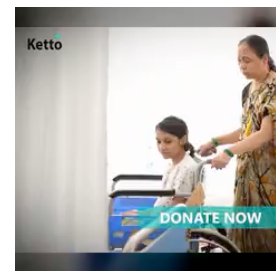
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