



DRAMA · ROMANCE

Casablanca

1942 · Directed by Michael Curtiz

Classical Hollywood

Melodrama

War Film

Casablanca, December 1941: a neutral outpost where refugees wait for scarce exit papers and everyone passes through one nightclub. Its American owner insists he takes no sides, until a woman from his past walks in. A romance, a thriller and a wartime fable in one.

DIRECTOR	Michael Curtiz
YEAR	1942
RUNTIME	1h 42m (102 min)
COUNTRY	USA
GENRES	Drama, Romance
CAST	Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains, Conrad Veidt
MUSIC	Max Steiner
IMDB	8.5 / 10 (656,718 votes)
ROTTEN TOMATOES	99% (critics)
METACRITIC	100 / 100
TMDB SCORE	8.1 / 10 (6,255 votes)
WHERE TO WATCH	Stream (US): HBO Max Amazon Channel, HBO Max Rent: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home, Spectrum On Demand Buy: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home

Part one is spoiler-free. Part two, "After watching", reveals the story, scenes and ending.



Before watching

Spoiler-free

WHY WATCH THIS?

1 The Hollywood studio system at its most polished

Casablanca won the Oscars for Best Picture, Director and Adapted Screenplay. It shows what Warner Bros. contract stars, writers, designers and a composer could achieve together, and it remains the best-known Golden Age romance.

2 A cast where every part is memorable

Bogart, Bergman, Rains, Veidt, Greenstreet, Lorre and Dooley Wilson all land sharply defined roles, many played by real European exiles. Even minor characters feel lived in.

3 Dialogue and music you already half know

So many of its lines and its song have entered everyday speech that watching it feels like meeting the source. The writing is quicker, funnier and more political than its reputation suggests.

WHY IT MATTERS IN CINEMA HISTORY

A defining film of the Hollywood studio era and of wartime American cinema, showing how genre formula, topical politics and star charisma could be fused into a single, unusually cohesive entertainment.



WATCH WITH INTENTION

YOUR LENS

Watch it as a machine for making an enclosed room feel like the whole world: everyone's story arrives at one nightclub.

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE

- How Bogart's Rick is introduced: the framing, the lighting and how other characters talk about him before and around him.
- The lighting on faces, especially close-ups of Ingrid Bergman, softened and glowing against the harder shadows used elsewhere.
- How music works: the café's songs, the piano and the orchestral score all carry meaning, sometimes while characters say something different.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

What is Rick's café for: what does it give the people who come, and what does it give him?

CINEMA AT THE TIME

- **Industry:** Warner Bros. made it as a routine prestige picture on studio sets, with contract players and staff writers. The studio system was at its peak of efficiency.
- **Audience:** The United States had entered the war weeks before shooting began. Audiences expected stories that spoke to exile, loyalty and sacrifice, and Hollywood was rapidly turning toward the conflict.
- **Dominant styles:** Black-and-white studio lighting, tight scripts and star-driven genre films ruled. Romance, crime and war-themed intrigue were routinely mixed within one picture.
- **Director's moment:** Michael Curtiz, a Hungarian émigré, was a fast, versatile Warner staff director known for action, melodrama and musicals, valued for keeping stories moving.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

FILM

Algiers (1938)

An earlier Hollywood romance set in an exotic colonial city, with a fugitive hero, a crowded native quarter and a shadowy cast of local characters. A close model for Casablanca's atmosphere.





FILM

Confessions of a Nazi Spy (1939)

An earlier Warner Bros. picture that openly opposed Nazism, part of the studio's tradition of topical, politically engaged films that Casablanca continued.



TRADITION

The Warner Bros. studio style

A house style of fast pacing, urban toughness, shadowy lighting and social awareness, perfected in gangster films and melodramas, shapes Casablanca's rhythm and look.



THIS FILM

Casablanca (1942)

NEW AT THE TIME *It folded a love story, a political thriller and sharp comedy into one tone, with a world-weary hero set against real current events.*

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Made in 1942, just after Pearl Harbor, when the US had newly entered the Second World War and Hollywood was being mobilised for the war effort.

- **Country and moment:** The film reached cinemas while America was newly at war. Its story of European refugees stranded in Vichy-run North Africa spoke to an American public still absorbing the shift from isolationism to open conflict.
- **Politics and censorship:** The Production Code Administration reviewed scripts, and the Office of War Information encouraged films that supported the Allied cause. The Code also limited how the film could treat sexuality, adultery and cynical politics, so these were handled by implication.
- **Society and audience:** Allied forces landed in North Africa in November 1942, and Casablanca was in the news. Warner Bros. released the film shortly afterwards, and the Casablanca Conference followed in January 1943. Audiences were already invested in the region.
- **The filmmaker's situation:** Michael Curtiz was a Hungarian-born émigré who had worked in Europe before settling in Hollywood. Much of the cast and crew were also European exiles, including refugees from Nazism, so they knew the film's subject at first hand.



WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Pace:** Brisk and dialogue-led. It is short by modern standards, with a lot of plot carried in conversation, and it rewards close listening.
- **Style:** Classic studio filmmaking: elegant continuity editing, expressive lighting, constructed sets and a sweeping orchestral score. Emotion is shown through glances and close-ups rather than action.
- **Tone:** A mix of wit, cynicism, romance and wartime seriousness. The comedy is frequent and dry, not just a break from the drama.
- **Format:** Black and white, standard 1.37:1 frame, sound film.
- **Language:** Mostly English, with French, German and other languages and accents spoken naturally. Some French and song lyrics are untranslated, but the meaning is always clear.

WATCH WITH KIDS?

8+ SUGGESTED AGE

Ratings range from GB U and US PG to German 6/12 and French all-audiences; 8 suits children who can cope with a black-and-white, dialogue-heavy film about wartime adults.

Official ratings: US PG · UK U · Germany 6/12 · France TP

- **Good for:** Witty dialogue, glamorous settings, memorable songs and a classic love story. Older children and teens who enjoy old films may like its mix of romance, humour and wartime suspense.
- **May unsettle, violence:** Occasional gunfire and killings, mostly brief and not graphic, with some threatening behaviour from officials.
- **May unsettle, mature themes:** Adult romance, heartbreak, desperate refugees, corruption and wartime oppression run through the story, with some innuendo.
- **May unsettle, pace:** Talky and slow in places, in black and white, so younger children may lose interest.
- **May unsettle, dated attitudes:** Some period attitudes toward women and national stereotypes, plus heavy smoking and drinking throughout.
- **Explain first:** The film is set in 1941, early in World War II, when Nazi Germany controlled much of Europe and many people were trying to flee.
- **Explain first:** Casablanca is a city in Morocco where refugees wait for travel papers. Officials there are under pressure from the Germans.
- **Explain first:** It is in black and white and has dialogue-heavy scenes; some French and German is subtitled.

Talk about it after: *Which characters seem to hide their true feelings behind a tough or cynical manner, and what do you think they are protecting?*

Cinespective's own guidance, a draft. Check it against the official ratings and your own judgement.



After watching

CONTAINS SPOILERS

THE FILM, UNPACKED

CENTRAL IDEA

The film can be read as a story about the cost of staying out of things. Rick insists on neutrality in a world dividing into sides, and the film tests whether private feeling and public duty can be kept apart.

THEMES

- **Neutrality versus commitment:** Rick's refusal to take sides is both a pose and a wound. Casablanca, officially neutral and full of bargaining, becomes a stage on which every character must eventually choose.
- **Love and sacrifice:** The central romance asks what love is worth when something larger is at stake. The film values the choice made over the relationship kept.
- **Exile and waiting:** The crowd in the café is stranded, buying time, hope and papers. Casablanca is shown less as a place than as a waiting room.
- **Cynicism as armour:** Rick, Renault and others present as self-interested. The film keeps showing how thin that surface is.
- **Corruption and decency:** Petty bribery and moral commitment coexist, often in the same person. Renault embodies the contradiction with charm.

Key scenes

The Marseillaise

The patrons drown out German officers' singing with the French anthem. It stages political resistance as a musical contest and gives the film its most directly emotional, collective moment.

The Paris flashback

It supplies the backstory of Rick and Ilsa with a warm, bright, romantic look that contrasts with the dark Casablanca. Seeing what Rick lost explains his later bitterness.

Ilsa confronts Rick after closing

Here the romance and the political plot collide. The scene tests Rick's pose against his actual feelings, and the lighting and close-ups carry what the dialogue withholds.



The airport finale

Fog, shadow and spare staging make the ending feel both stripped down and mythic. Rick's decision resolves the neutrality theme, and Renault's response resolves the comic cynicism one.

Filmmaking

- **Screenwriting:** The script, by Julius and Philip Epstein and Howard Koch, balances several plots and a large cast with economy. Lines serve double duty as jokes, characterisation and political statement.
- **Cinematography:** Arthur Edeson's black-and-white photography uses hard shadows for Rick's world and soft glow for Ilsa, often with light picking out the eyes in close-up.
- **Music:** Max Steiner's score works with the song As Time Goes By and the French anthem, turning music into memory and into protest.
- **Design and setting:** A studio-built Casablanca of arches, fans, shutters and a single bar gives a cohesive, theatrical world, and its artificiality helps give the film a mythic quality.
- **Performance:** Bogart underplays, Bergman is luminous and Rains steals scenes with ease. The ensemble of émigré actors gives the political backdrop real weight.

THE FULL STORY

The full plot, including the ending.

Casablanca, December 1941. The Vichy-controlled Moroccan city is a transit point for European refugees desperate to reach Lisbon and then America. Many depend on Rick Blaine, an American who runs the most popular nightclub in town and claims he sticks his neck out for nobody.

Two German couriers are murdered and their stolen letters of transit, which allow free passage, are left with Rick by the small-time crook Ugarte, who is then arrested. Major Strasser arrives from Berlin. So does Victor Laszlo, a Czech resistance leader, with his wife Ilsa, who is also the woman who left Rick in Paris without explanation as the Germans closed in.

Rick refuses to sell Laszlo the letters. Ilsa comes to him and eventually explains that she believed Laszlo dead when she and Rick met, and that she learned he was alive just before the Paris departure. Rick and Ilsa realise their love hasn't ended.

Rick pretends he will leave with Ilsa and sets up Captain Renault, the corrupt local police chief, to help. At the airport he tells Ilsa she must go with Laszlo, shoots Strasser as he tries to stop the plane, and is covered by Renault, who has had a change of heart. The two men walk away to join the Free French.

BEHIND THE FILM

- **From unproduced play:** The film derives from *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, a play by Murray Burnett and Joan Alison that was never staged in its original form. Warner Bros. bought it, and the screenplay reshaped its characters and politics for wartime audiences.



- **Script on the run:** Several writers worked on the screenplay, and pages were reportedly revised during shooting. How the love triangle would resolve was not fixed early, which adds to the uncertainty and tension the cast brought to their scenes.
- **A cast of exiles:** Many actors had themselves fled Europe, among them Conrad Veidt, Peter Lorre and Marcel Dalio, while Curtiz was Hungarian-born. Their real histories give the refugee crowd a weight studio casting could not otherwise provide.
- **Built in Burbank:** Despite its setting, Casablanca was made on the Warner Bros. lot. The airport finale used a studio set, and fog helped disguise its limits, turning a practical need into one of the film's most atmospheric images.
- **The song stays:** As Time Goes By was written years earlier, in 1931. Max Steiner reportedly wanted to replace it with his own music, but reshooting was impractical, so the song became the film's emotional signature.
- **Myth:** Someone says "Play it again, Sam" in the film. **Reality:** No one says it exactly. Ilsa says "Play it, Sam," and Rick later says "You played it for her, you can play it for me." The misquote spread afterward and became a title in itself.
- **Myth:** It was filmed in Morocco. **Reality:** It was shot at the Warner Bros. studio in Burbank, California, with sets standing in for Casablanca, its café and the airport.
- **Myth:** It was made as an instant, acknowledged classic. **Reality:** It was a studio prestige picture made in the usual way. Its extraordinary reputation grew in later decades.

LEGACY AND CONNECTIONS

Its place in the lineage before → after

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THIS FILM

Casablanca (1942)



FILM

To Have and Have Not (1944)

Howard Hawks's wartime adventure reunites a weary Bogart with a leading lady in an exotic French colonial setting, and openly echoes Casablanca's formula.



FILM

The Third Man (1949)

Another story of a cynical outsider in a divided, morally compromised city, with expatriates, black-market dealing and divided loyalties.



FILM

Play It Again, Sam (1972)

Woody Allen's comedy features Bogart as a ghostly adviser, showing how completely Casablanca's image of masculine romance entered popular culture.

Reception and reputation

Casablanca premiered in New York in late November 1942, soon after Allied landings in North Africa, and opened widely in January 1943 as a Casablanca conference of Allied leaders took place. It was a strong commercial and critical success, praised for its cast, writing and mix of romance and intrigue.

Its reputation grew through television and repertory screenings, as audiences rediscovered Bogart and the studio era. It is now one of the most quoted and beloved American films, admired as much for its craftsmanship as its sentiment, with its improvised-seeming ending seen as part of its charm.

Awards Oscars and Cannes

Academy Awards: 8 nominations, 3 wins (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay).

Other nominations: Best Actor (Humphrey Bogart), Best Supporting Actor (Claude Rains), Best Cinematography (Black-and-White), Best Film Editing and Best Score.



Cultural impact beyond cinema

- **Everyday phrases:** Lines such as "Here's looking at you, kid" and "We'll always have Paris" became common shorthand for romance and sacrifice. "Round up the usual suspects" is used for lazy or routine suspicion. "Play it again" is a standard misquotation of the piano request.
- **"As Time Goes By":** Herman Hupfeld's 1931 song was little known before the film. Afterwards it became a standard, tied for good to Dooley Wilson's performance and often used as shorthand for nostalgic, enduring love.
- **Bogart's persona:** Humphrey Bogart's trench coat, fedora and weary Rick Blaine became an emblem of the cynical idealist. The image is widely impersonated, and Bogart is often regarded as a screen icon partly through this role.
- **Rick's Café:** The fictional nightclub has inspired real-world imitations, most notably Rick's Café in Casablanca, opened in 2004 and modelled on the film. It is a fixture on visitor itineraries, though the film was shot entirely on Hollywood studio sets.

Its lasting influence

It became a template for romantic melodrama set against global conflict and for the cynical hero redeemed by duty. Its lines and music turned into shared cultural property, and homages such as Play It Again, Sam show how thoroughly it entered popular memory.

WHAT NEXT?

CONTINUE THE DIRECTOR

Yankee Doodle Dandy (1942) COMING SOON

Michael Curtiz's patriotic musical, released the same year, shows his range and the Warner Bros. efficiency behind Casablanca.

EXPLORE THE ERA OR MOVEMENT

Double Indemnity (1944)

Another Hollywood classic from the war years, with shadowy lighting and sharp dialogue, showing the studio system moving toward film noir.

FOLLOW THE IDEA

Doctor Zhivago (1965)

A sweeping romance in which war and revolution intrude on love, extending Casablanca's mix of private feeling and world events to epic scale.

COMPARE ANOTHER APPROACH

Citizen Kane (1941)

Made the year before, it shows what a different, more experimental route within the same studio era looked like, set against Casablanca's polish.

FULL CAST AND CREW



Michael Curtiz
DIRECTOR



Humphrey Bogart
ACTOR
as Rick Blaine



Ingrid Bergman
ACTOR
as Ilsa Lund



Paul Henreid
ACTOR
as Victor Laszlo



Claude Rains
ACTOR
as Captain Louis
Renault



Conrad Veidt
ACTOR
as Major Heinrich
Strasser



Max Steiner
COMPOSER

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