



**UFA** - Universum Film AG, better known as Ufa or UFA, was the principal film studio in Germany, home of the German film industry during the Weimar Republic and through World War II, and a major force in world cinema from 1917 to 1945. After World War II, UFA continued producing movies and television programmes to the present day, making it the longest standing film company in Germany.

History - UFA was created during November 1917 in Berlin as a government-owned producer of World War I propaganda and public service films. It was created through the consolidation of most of Germany's commercial film companies, including Nordisk and Decla. Decla's former owner, Erich Pommer, served as producer for the 1920 film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which was not only the best example of German Expressionism and an enormously influential film, but also a commercial success. During the same year, UFA opened the UFA-Palast am Zoo theatre in Berlin.

During 1921 UFA was privatized. It became the leading production company in an industry that produced around 600 films each year and attracted a million customers every day. In the silent movie years, when films were easier to adapt for foreign markets, UFA began developing an international reputation and posed serious competition to Hollywood.

During the Weimar years the studio produced and exported an enormous, accomplished, and inventive body of work. Only an estimated 10% of the studio's output still exists. Famous directors based at UFA included Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau, producing landmark films such as *Dr. Mabuse* (1922), *Metropolis* (1927), and Marlene Dietrich's first talkie, *The Blue Angel* (1930).



Writer-director Fritz Lang and his wife, writer Thea von Harbou, who together created many of UFA's most noted films, in their Berlin apartment in 1923 or 1924. In addition to avant-garde experiments and lurid films of Weimar street life, UFA was also the studio of the bergfilm, a uniquely German genre that glorified and romanticized mountain climbing, downhill skiing, and avalanche-dodging. The bergfilm genre was primarily the creation of director Arnold Fanck, and examples like *The Holy Mountain* (1926) and *White Ecstasy* (1931) are notable for the appearance of Austrian skiing legend Hannes Schneider and a young Leni Riefenstahl.

The studio over-extended itself financially during the late 1920s, partly as a result of the expensive production of *Metropolis*, and was taken over by Alfred Hugenberg in March 1927. Hugenberg was connected to Krupp and sympathetic to the Nazis, and the company became a producer of Nazi propaganda films after Hitler became gained power in 1933. Joseph Goebbels' ministry of propaganda essentially controlled the content of UFA films through political threat. Because of this, Lang, like many of his UFA colleagues, would soon leave Germany to work in Hollywood.

During the 1930s UFA produced both lighthearted musicals and comedies (starring such genuine talents as Truus van Aalten) – and, as the Nazi Party gained power, odious examples of anti-Semitic propaganda. During 1937 the Nazis bought 72% of UFA's shares, and in 1942 the company was nationalized totally by the Third Reich as the monopoly parent company of the German state's film industry, under which were absorbed all other production and distribution companies and studio facilities active at that time. The studio's design was also an inspiration to the newly constructed Manchukuo Film Association. After the end of the Second World War UFA ceased activity, and initially was so associated with the Third Reich that even reissues of its non-political product were possible only by removing all reference to the company from the credits. Furthermore, the UFA studios were located in the Soviet Zone of Germany and were incorporated subsequently into the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). The new studio, DEFA (Deutsche Film AG), carried on the UFA tradition with many directors returning from exile, while actors and technicians were recruited from the old company. During the 1960s, the UFA name and logo were co-opted by a West German chain of movie theaters. DEFA went out of business soon after German reunification in 1990, but the UFA studios in Babelsberg now house a number of independent production companies as well as a theme park and museum devoted to the history of German film. Attempts were made in West Germany to resurrect UFA as a production company, but failed to produce more than a few films. During 1991, UFA was re-established as a major producer of television programs. Now it is part of the transnational Bertelsmann corporation.