



## Ernst Lubitsch

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Ernst Lubitsch, the "King of Comedy"

**Ernst Lubitsch** ( [Berlin, January 28, 1892](#) – [November 30, 1947](#) in [Hollywood](#)), was a [German-born](#) [film director](#).

His movies are witty and sophisticated, with a fine and malicious sexuality: in all of them there is the famous "Lubitsch touch", that is an unconventional way to make a picture, based on his sarcastic sense of humour and his scornful view of life.

Lubitsch had turned his back on his father's tailoring business to enter the theater, and by [1911](#) he was a member of [Max Reinhardt's](#) Deutsches Theater. His first film work came in [1912](#) as an actor. Gradually, he abandoned acting to concentrate on directing and in [1918](#) he made his mark as a serious director with *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* (The Eyes of the Mummy), a tragic drama starring [Pola Negri](#). Lubitsch subsequently alternated between escapist comedies and grand-scale historical dramas; he enjoyed great international success with both. His reputation as a grand master of world cinema reached a new peak after the release of his spectacles *Madame Du Barry* (Passion, 1919) and *Anna Boleyn* (Deception, 1920).

Lubitsch left [Germany](#) for [Hollywood](#) in [1922](#), invited by [Mary Pickford](#). She

allowed Lubitsch to sign with [Warner Bros.](#), where he established his reputation for sophisticated comedy with such stylish and delightful films as *The Marriage Circle* (1924), *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925), and *So This Is Paris* (1926). In 1928, when sound arrived in [Hollywood](#), Lubitsch joined [Paramount Pictures](#).

With his first talkie, *The Love Parade* (1929), starring [Maurice Chevalier](#) and [Jeanette MacDonald](#), Lubitsch hit his stride as a maker of worldly musical comedies (and got himself another [Oscar](#) nomination). With the beginning of the sound era, he created witty and sarcastic dialogue, and malicious and bizarre comedic situations. *The Love Parade* (1929), *Monte Carlo* (1930), and *The Smiling Lieutenant* (1931) were hailed by critics as masterpieces of the newly emerging musical genre.

But whether with music, as in [MGM's](#) opulent *The Merry Widow* (1934), or without, as in [Paramount's](#) delicious *Trouble in Paradise* (1932, certainly his best film), *One Hour With You* (1932) and *Design for Living* (1933), Lubitsch continued to specialize in sophisticated comedy. He made only one other dramatic film, an antiwar picture, titled *Broken Lullaby* (aka *The Man I Killed*, 1932).

In 1935 he was appointed that studio's production manager and subsequently produced his own films and supervised the production of films of other directors.

In 1939, Lubitsch moved to [MGM](#), and directed the divine [Greta Garbo](#) in *Ninotchka*, a satirical and scintillating comedy in which the great actress laughed for the first time on the screen. Then he directed the delightful *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940), with [James Stewart](#) and [Margaret Sullavan](#) as a pair of secret admirers. He went independent to direct *That Uncertain Feeling* (1941, a remake of his 1925 film *Kiss Me Again*), and the cynical anti-Nazi comedy *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), the [Carole Lombard's](#) last picture.

Lubitsch spent the balance of his career at [20th Century Fox](#), but a heart condition curtailed his activity. The last great picture made by the director is certainly *Heaven Can Wait* (1943), an elegant and ironic comedy. The plot is about Henry Van Cleve (played by [Don Ameche](#)) who presents himself at the gates of Hell only to find he is closely vetted on his qualifications for entry; surprised there is any question on his suitability, he recounts his lively life and the women he has known from his mother onwards, but mainly concentrating on his happy but sometimes difficult twenty-five years of marriage to Martha (played by the beautiful [Gene Tierney](#)).

In March of 1947 he was awarded a special [Academy Award](#) for his "25-year contribution to motion pictures". He died later that year of a heart attack, his sixth. His last film, *That Lady in Ermine*, with [Betty Grable](#), was completed by [Otto Preminger](#) and released posthumously in 1948.

At the director's funeral, the great [Billy Wilder](#) said, "No more Lubitsch,"

and [William Wyler](#) responded, "Worse than that. No more Lubitsch pictures".

[\[edit\]](#)

## Selected Filmography

- *The Love Parade* (1930) - a [musical film](#) and Lubitsch's first [sound film](#);
- *Monte Carlo* (1930)
- *Trouble in Paradise* (1932)
- *One Hour with You* (1932)
- *Design for Living* (1933)
- *The Merry Widow* (1934)
- *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* (1938)
- *Ninotchka* (1939) - starring [Greta Garbo](#)
- *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940)
  - *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) - satirized the [Nazis](#) through the tribulations of a troupe of actors in occupied [Poland](#).