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Who is Ninotchka? Greta Garbo

Description

Written and reviewed by Larry Gleeson during the annual TCM 31 Days of Oscar

Ninotchka, is a black and white, 1939 American romantic comedy film made for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer by producer and director Ernst Lubitsch (*The Shop Around the Corner*) and starring Greta Garbo (*Camille*, *Grand Hotel*) and Melvyn Douglas. Billy Wilder was one of the writers along with Charles Brackett and Walter Reisch. One of the filmâ??s best lines came in the form of a question and answer. When Ninotchka was asked how things were in Russia, her response was, â?• Very Good. The last mass trials were a great success. There are going to be fewer but better Russians.â?•

Lubitsch and Garbo

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The film featured a rare comedic performance by Garbo. It was also the first time I have seen Garbo onscreen. Posterâ??s advertising the film read â??Garbo Laughs.â?• Garbo received an Oscar nomination for Best Actress for her depiction of the lead character, â??Envoy Extraordinaryâ?• Nina Ivanovna Yakushov, known simply as Ninotchka.

The film has special relevance as it was the first film to depict a stolid and rigid Stalinist Russia in juxtaposition to the free and open lively Pre-war, Parisian backdrop. The film itself is much lighter and is regarded as a light satirical romantic comedy. Garbo portrays a stern and cold-hearted Russian woman, set to Paris to oversee the sale of jewels stolen from the Russian nobility after three Russian comrades muff the sale and are held to task for staying at a luxurious French hotel instead of a cheap one. Not that the film needs it but these three comrades add refreshing comedic relief.

Comrades

While waiting for the sale Ninotchka busies herself visiting and studying the architecture and engineering in Paris. Enter Count Leon, Melvyn Douglas, a suave and sophisticated Westerner, who is also the retainer of the Russian Duchess , the rightful owner of the jewels who is refusing to let the jewels go without a fight willing to forego the her jewels if Ninotchka leaves Paris.

Garbo, Douglas, and Claire

But Leon and Ninotchka have chemistry. It is undeniable. Hats off to Douglas and Garbo. Yet Ninotchka represses her attraction as she epitomizes Walter as a representation of Western cultural demise. While Leon pursues Ninotchka full force and even manages to steal a few kisses with full force. It isnâ??t until Leon falls off his chair in a humorous moment that causes Ninotchka to laugh hysterically allowing her to open up psychologically. Nevertheless, Ninotchka is a dutiful soldier and returns to Russia. The time the film was made, 1939, Hollywood demanded happy endings and more often than not, Hollywood got its way. And *Ninotchka* is no exception.

Garbo and Lugosi

Ninotchka was nominated for four Oscars; best Picture, Best Actress in a leading role and two for writing, Original Story and Screenplay. The film was shot at the MGM Studio in Culver City, Calif. A 1960 television movie remake starring Maria Schell as Ninotchka and Gig Young as Leon Dolga, featured Zsa Zsa Gabor, and an appearance towards the end of the film by Bela Lugosi (*Count Dracula*)

With a runtime of one hour and fifty minutes, *Ninotchka* is fun and wholeheartedly entertaining with that sweet and endearing Lubitsch touch. Warmly recommended unless you havenâ??t seen Greta Garbo onscreen in which case itâ??s a â??must-see!â?•

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