



Algiers â?? Stay out of there!

Description

Reviewed by Larry Gleeson during TCM 31 Days of Oscar

February 3rd brought out the criminals for TCM 31 Days of Oscar featuring fan favorites, *The Sting* (1973), *Bonnie & Clyde* (1968), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) and the lesser-known *Algiers* (1938), directed by John Cromwell and introduced Heddy Lamarr, portraying Parisian Gabby, to the big screen. Lamarr was proclaimed to be the most beautiful woman to appear before a camera. Not to be outdone, Charles Boyer turns in a tantamount performance in the lead role of Pepe le Moko, a jewel thief hiding out in the Casbah, a terraced labyrinth of interconnected walkways and living spaces in Algiers â??where drifters and outcasts from all over the world have come. ..Criminals come to the Casbah find a safe hiding place from the long arm of the law.â?•



Heddy Lamarr as Gabby

Algiers opens with non-diegetic, tense-inducing music and scrolling text informing the viewer of the Casbah quoted above. A landscape image of the Casbah is visible behind the text. Rod Crawford's storyline on IMDb reads: "Pepe Le Moko, a thief who escaped from France with a fortune in jewels, has for two years lived in, and virtually ruled, the mazelike, impenetrable Casbah, 'native quarter' of Algiers. A French official insists that he be captured, but sly Inspector Slimane knows he need only bide his time. The suave Pepe increasingly regards his stronghold as also his prison, especially when he meets beautiful Parisian visitor Gaby, who reminds him of the boulevards to which he dares not return and arouses the mad jealousy of Ines, his Algerian mistress."



Charles Boyer as Pepe le Moko

What Crawford leaves out is what makes *Algiers* the film it is. For starters the cinematography is exquisite with a multitude of shots and camera angles. Vignetting is seen in portraiture close-ups of the characters. And when Pepe and Gabby meet the cinematography and editing move into extreme closeups with reverse angles culminating in a screen full of Pepe's smoky eyes and Ines's luscious lipstick-red lips. The energy from the cinematography and editing was quite palpable. Furthermore, as the French Police Commissioner and his team of twelve are in pursuit of Pepe in the Casbah, Cinematographer James Wong Howe juxtaposes a series of high and low angle shots to great effect. Furthermore, the use of shadows and light seemed like a precursor to the early 1940s noir style that will come to the forefront of the film industry in just a few years.



Sigrid Gurie as Ines

There is a lot going on in this character-driven narrative. While the story surrounds Pepe, the orbital characters and their relationships to Pepe are well-developed and add depth. In addition to Lamarr's beautiful Gaby, Sigrid Gurie portrays the jealous Ines with a firecracker temperament and a steel cold, penetrating gaze. Joseph Calleia embodies and personifies with costume specificity the cunningly patient, Inspector Silmane. Gene Lockhart, turns in an Oscar-nominated Best Supporting Actor in a rather macabre performance as Regis. In addition to the stellar acting, costuming, cinematography, and Arabesques musical score, *Algiers*'s production design augmented and aided my suspension of disbelief. The film had a fast runtime of one hour and thirty-six minutes and was nominated for four Academy Awards for Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Actor in a Supporting Role, Best Cinematography and Best Art Direction. Personally, I really, really enjoyed the artistic presentation of *Algiers*. Highly recommended!

Category

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Author

hollywoodglee