

AFTERLIVES

Remakes and Adaptations:

The Blue Angel, Edward Dmytryk (1959)



'The Blue Angel': Remake of Classic Has Debut at Paramount

By BOSLEY CROWTHER

Published: *New York Times*, September 5, 1959

SO memorably did Marlene Dietrich project her personality and so forth in the German film "The Blue Angel" when it was released in this country some thirty years ago, sentimental old-timers may tend to forget that the film was mainly about the degeneration of a middle-aged male schoolteacher. They may even forget that it was fashioned as a vehicle for the late Emil Jannings, the great German star.

But they'll be reminded of it if they see the ponderous remake of this film that Jack Cummings, producer, delivered to the Paramount yesterday. And they may be provoked to wonder whether this was the drama that Miss Dietrich was involved in, after all. For so obviously does Curt Jurgens, as the teacher, monopolize the show as the masculine center of interest that it is clear for whom it was prepared, while wraps are virtually thrown on his seductress, played genteelly by May Britt.

The curious restraint placed on this actress, who is plainly expected to achieve the same momentum as did Miss Dietrich in the performance of this role, is difficult to fathom, unless it was motivated by a desire to keep her from appearing too sleazy, sordid and cheap. Got up in a long flaxen hair-do, green eye-shade and opera hose, which neatly but none too amazingly reveal the shape of her limbs, she looks and behaves like a normal ballet dancer in a Broadway musical show not like a slinky sex-pot in a smoky night club in Berlin. And she might as well sing "Who'll Buy My Violets?" as the sketchy "Falling in Love Again."

Anyhow, the force of the attraction whereby she is supposed to lure a pompous teacher away from his schoolroom and onto the road to ruin is considerably subverted and devitalized by this aura of smart gentility. And the underlying cravings of the old coot are thereby distorted and confused.

Indeed, the nature of the teacher is also rendered vague by a sort of zombie-like quality in Mr. Jurgens that keeps a person from coming through. He plays the lecherous schoolmaster in such a heavy-paced, pop-eyed, low-voiced way that it is hard to feel any passion or ardor behind this facade.

And the whole irony of the drama, which originally had him going mad and returning to die in his old schoolroom, is destroyed by a grotesque "happy ending." The old boy is rescued from degradation by a kindly principal who takes him back to teach again.

Under these circumstances, which must collectively be blamed en masse on Mr. Cummings, Nigel Balchin, scriptwriter, and Edward Dmytryk, director, it is no wonder that Cinemascope and color make the whole thing look too bizarre. And the placing of the drama in the present emphasizes its old-fashionedness.

Theodore Bikel as a floorshow impresario and John Banner as the school principal perform with conventional competence among a cast of mostly callow boys.

The Cast **THE BLUE ANGEL**, screen play by Nigel Balchin, based on an original screen play by Karl Zuckmayer, Karl Vollmoeller and Robert Liebmann, from a novel by Heinrich Mann; directed by Edward Dmytryk and produced by Jack Cummings for Twentieth Century-Fox. At the Paramount Theatre. Broadway and Forty-third Street. Running time: 107 minutes. Prof. Immanuel Rath /Curt Jurgens, Lola-Lola / May Britt, Kiepert / Theodore Bikel, Harter / John Banner, Rolf / Fabrizio Mioni, Professor Braun / Ludwig Stossel, Clown / Wolfe Barzell, Gussie / Ina Anders, Keiselsack / Richard Tyler Mueller / Voytek Dollnski, Ertzum / Ken Walken, Lohmann / Del Erickson, Emille / Edit Angold

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MOVIES



May Britt, as Lola, plays Marlene Dietrich's (insert) great role

BEHIND THE SCENES:

The New 'Blue Angel'

When Twentieth Century-Fox first began talking seriously about remaking the 29-year-old German film classic "The Blue Angel," its famous star, Marlene Dietrich, whom the picture introduced, told a NEWSWEEK reporter: "Hollywood people have talked about doing it so many times... Well, they have delusions of grandeur. They just think they can make it."

"Coffee, Professor?"

The scene, as millions who have seen the old "Blue Angel" will recall, is the cold-water flat of a music-hall voluptuary named Lola. Dressed in a silk negligee, Lola is speaking to Professor Rath, the bachelor schoolteacher who has just awakened in her bed for the first time. Although the professor does not realize it, he has begun a love affair that will eventually destroy him and send him into the night insanely crowing like a rooster.

With the ghost of the late Emil Jannings, who played the original professor, hovering overhead, this key scene from "The Blue Angel" was being shot in Hollywood last week on Stage 14 at Fox. The principals involved in the remake were a new girl from Sweden, May Britt; an internationally established German actor, Curt Jurgens, and one of Fox's most experienced directors, Edward Dmytryk. (The original version was directed by Josef von Sternberg.) Although the classic was indeed being remade, each participant more or less agreed with Miss Dietrich that theirs was an impossible enterprise. Even if the new version is as good as the original, the remakers

were saying, nobody is likely to admit it. "You can't compete with a classic," said Dmytryk. "It was a fine picture and still is. I'm making it again because 90 per cent of the people who see it either won't have seen the old picture or, if they have, won't remember it that well."

"We have left the plot pretty much alone, except that we're shooting it in a contemporary German setting. Lola is still a low-class night-club entertainer, but May Britt has a different quality than Dietrich's. Although May is a very sexy girl and we're trying to make the picture as lusty as the original, she plays a typical German girl of today who accepts sex normally and naturally, instead of the sophisticated and self-conscious sex of German girls in the '20s. May did

Periscoping Movies

After 41 howling years, Tarzan no longer yells for himself. In the upcoming "Tarzan's Greatest Adventure," the apeman's cry will be an electronic blend of six sound tracks: Five screams and a grunt. This will be the fourth Tarzan film for George Scott, the eleventh musclemann to portray the Edgar Rice Burroughs hero... Maurice Chevalier will take Ezio Pinza's role and Fredric March will play Walter Slezak's when Warner Bros. films the Broadway musical hit "Fanny" next year in Marseille... There will be no foreign-language dubbing for export versions of Sam Goldwyn's production of the classic Negro musical, Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess."



Adaptations continued



Nana (Dorothy Arzner, 1934) with Anna Sten



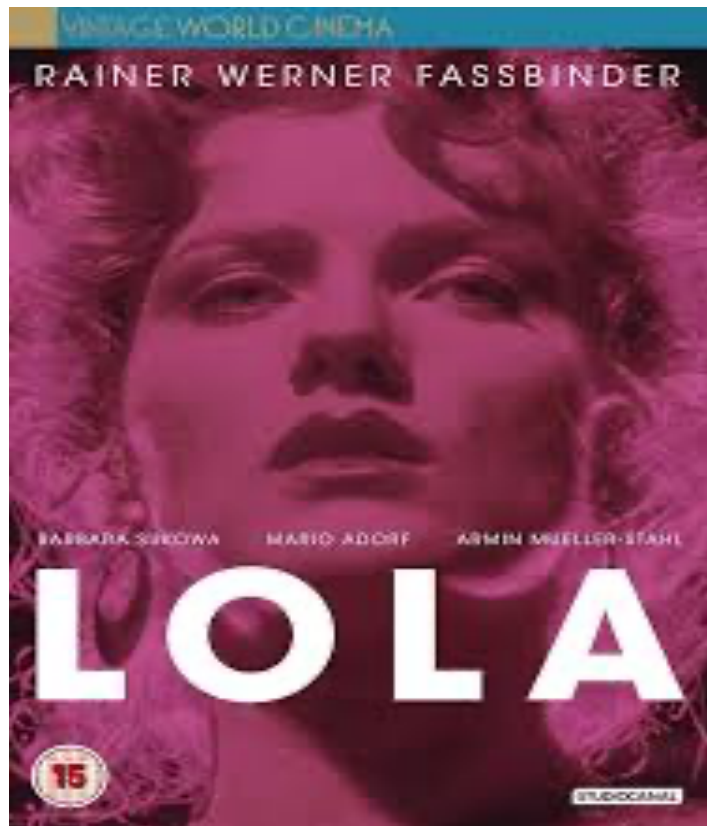
Lola (Demy, 1961)



Cabaret (Fosse, 1972)



Anjo Loiro (Sternheim, 1973)



Lola (Fassbinder, 1981)



Blue Angel Café (D'Amato, 1989)



Moulin Rouge (Luhrmann, 2001)



Black Swan (Aronofsky, 2010)

Films



Director: Maximilian Schell, *Marlene* 1984 documentary. Trailer: <https://youtu.be/vAwySztcrqQ>



Scene from Joseph Vilsmaier's *Marlene* (2000)
Trailer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7lDsO0Dzbo>

Erich Maria Remarque, longtime friend of Marlene Dietrich, characterizes her in his novel *Arch of Triumph*:

“The cool, bright face that didn’t ask for anything, that simply existed, waiting — it was an empty face, he thought; a face that could change with any wind of expression. One could dream into it anything. It was like a beautiful empty house waiting for carpets and pictures. It had all possibilities — it could become a palace or a brothel.”



Director: Cecilia Baraga

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/product/meeting-two-queens>

Drag and Performance Art

Lola-Lola's image (top hat, stockings, androgynous sex appeal) is iconic in drag culture. Performers like **Ute Lemper** and **Joey Arias** channel Dietrich's persona in cabaret and performance art.

<https://www.utelempir.com/repertoire/rendezvous-with-marlene/>

Music Videos

Madonna ("*Open Your Heart*") and Christina Aguilera ("*Candyman*") borrow the burlesque/cabaret aesthetics that *The Blue Angel* popularized.

Music

"Falling in Love Again" (Dietrich's signature song from the film) has been covered by artists ranging from Nina Simone to David Bowie and Marianne Faithfull—each reinterpreting it through their own lens of melancholy or irony.

Fashion

Dietrich's image in the film—masculine tuxedos, fishnet stockings, top hat—has been a recurring influence in fashion photography (e.g., Helmut Newton), haute couture (Jean Paul Gaultier, Yves Saint Laurent), and gender-fluid collections.

Art Photography

Cindy Sherman and other artists working in gender performativity often use *The Blue Angel* as a touchstone for interrogating identity, power, and performativity.

Gender and Queer Theory



Critical essays and books on gender performance (e.g., Judith Butler's work) reference Dietrich's gender-bending performance as pivotal in early cinematic queer iconography.

Theater



Pam Gems, *The Blue Angel* (1991)

Royal Shakespeare Company, the Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon 1991.

Dance

New York Times, May 6, 1985.

Makarova in 'The Blue Angel'

THE BLUE ANGEL (U.S. premiere). Full-length ballet choreographed by Roland Petit, based on Heinrich Mann's novel "Professor Unrat," for the Berlin Opera Ballet. Starring Natalia Makarova and Petit. Music by Marius Constant. Wednesday night at the Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. Through Aug. 3.

By Janice Berman

"The Blue Angel" is now a Roland Petit ballet; first it was a book, then it became the Josef von Sternberg movie that rocketed Marlene Dietrich to idolism. The dance is visually stunning and dramatically static.

Its sets, by Josef Svoboda, are reflective of the pre-World War II era, their darkness like the darkening mood that was all over Europe, but nowhere more than in Germany. We see the skyline; peaked roofs and steeples glimmer in a grayish, silvery light, as if awaiting an impending thunderstorm.

But this is a ballet that fails to take on the weight of its surroundings. That urgent sense of doom is supposed to color the story unfolding here, about a miserable old professor who falls in love with a young, unhappy woman, with the inevitable tragic results. However, somewhere along the way to telling the tale of Professor Raat (Petit) and Rosa Frolich (Natalia Makarova), "The Blue Angel" had its wings clipped.

The simplification of the story, of the central characters and of their relationship to each other has hurt the choreography. It is portentously (and sometimes pretentiously) slow to no effect. There is a flat blandness at work here — a reflection, perhaps, of that between-the-wars anomie — that does not play well on the stage.



Kranichphoto

Natalia Makarova and Roland Petit

It is clear that the dozens of young men who are Professor Raat's students and who march onstage when the curtain rises will become soldiers when the war arrives. Already they have military-style hats and move in lockstep.

Throughout the ballet there will be other such parades, other formations. Whenever there are masses of people, we expect they're a backdrop against which something can happen. But nothing does.

For instance, the professor walks through town en route to the Blue Angel, Rosa's cabaret, past dozens of black-coated pedestrians (the fine costuming is by Franca Squarciapino), all marching, one

presumes, to the same drummer. He walks endlessly past them and we keep waiting for these smartly suited anonymous masses to do something. Nothing ever happens.

In the second act, the couples frozen in tangeros are there, you would think, to frame Rosa as she does something flamboyant. But when her husband catches her with another man, it is a moment that nobody can really care about. The other couples roll their eyes as if inviting us to do likewise, but such phony apprehension is not contagious.

In terms of precision marching and dancing to the tap of a foot, the Berlin Opera Ballet looks terrifically well-disciplined. But there is little in the way of showcasing, save for the dancers who play two students (Tim Almaas and Tomas Karlborg).

The central figures each get a chance to shine once, which isn't nearly enough. Makarova's moment comes in her sensual first-act pas de deux with a student, Lohmann, danced by Jean-Pierre Aviotte, of Petit's Ballet de Marseilles troupe. Petit, in his 60s, remains a fine character dancer. He has a masterful solo near the end of the second act, when Rosa, now his wife, has grown bored with him and made him up as a clown.

It is Rosa Frolich who will remain a strong memory in a weak ballet. Makarova commands center stage with the natural hauteur, mingled with charm, that is as much a part of the character as of the dancer herself. Wisely, Petit has given her two dance vocabularies. As the cabaret dancer, onstage, she is flashy and a little tacky and not very good on her toes. As Rosa backstage, dancing with the schoolboys who adore her, she is exquisitely supple and compelling. ■



Display of Marlene Dietrich Materials at the Film Museum Bookstore in Berlin (1992)