



## The Main Feature

### Season 35 - Issue 5 (screening 13.11.14)

USA 1930  
Original running time 152 minutes

**Director** Lewis Milestone  
**Cinematography** Arthur Edson  
**Writers** Del Andrews, Maxwell Anderson,  
George Abbott  
**Music by** David Broekman  
**Edited by** Edgar Adams

#### Stars:

Lew Ayres as Paul Bäumer  
Louis Wolheim as Stanislaus Katczinsky  
John Wray as Himmelstoß  
Arnold Lucy as Professor Kantorek  
Ben Alexander as Franz Kemmerich  
Scott Kolk as Leer  
Owen Davis, Jr. as Peter  
William Bakewell as Albert Kropp



*“This story is neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war”*

So runs the prologue that introduces the film, which was taken almost verbatim from the foreword to the best-selling 1929 novel by Erich Maria Remarque.

The film, which was the first major anti-war film of the sound era, was unflinchingly faithfully based upon the timeless novel, whose writer had experienced the war first-hand as a young German soldier. The film was advertised with the brooding face of one of the young German recruits sent into World War I. The landmark, epic film, made on a large-scale budget of \$1.25 million for Universal Pictures and studio production head Carl Laemmle, Jr. used acres of California ranch land for the battle scenes, and employed over 2,000 extras.



It was historically accurate even down to the tiniest detail. From the machine guns to the hand grenades to the chemical warfare, everything displayed in the movie was as it was really used on the battlefields of the western front.

From four Academy Award nominations, it won the Academy Award for Best Picture (the third winner in the history of AMPAS) and Best Director (Lewis Milestone with his first sound feature), and it was also nominated for Best Writing Achievement (George Abbott, Maxwell Anderson, and Del Andrews) and

Best Cinematography (Arthur Edeson). It was a critical and financial success, and probably the greatest of pacifist, anti-war films. The episodic film is still one of the few early sound films that modern audiences watch as it has not dated too much and maintains its initial impact. However, it was criticized as being propagandistic and anti-militaristic. For its perceived anti-German message, it was denounced by the Nazi government in Berlin of the 30s and subsequently banned.

The film was made only a dozen years following the end of the Great War, and the memories of the war were still fresh. Before it, other war films in the silent era had done very well: King Vidor's *The Big Parade* (1925), Raoul Walsh's *What Price Glory?* (1926), and William Wellman's *Wings* (1927). Coming as it did with the dawning of sound pictures, its directors and producer, and at least one cast member went on to future fame: Fred Zinnemann, who was to become the director of such films as *High Noon*, *From Here to Eternity* and *A Man for All Seasons*. The film's dialogue director, George Cukor, went on to direct *Camille*, *Holiday*, *The Philadelphia Story*, *A Star Is Born* and *My Fair Lady*. Milestone himself, who died in 1980, directed *The Front Page* the following year and went on to make *Mutiny on the Bounty* with Marlon Brando..

Later re-releases of the film were substantially cut and the film's ending scored with new music against the wishes of director Lewis Milestone. Before his death in 1980, Milestone requested that Universal fully restore the film with the removal of the end music cue. Two decades later, his wishes were finally granted when the United States Library of Congress undertook an exhaustive restoration of the film, which is vastly superior in sound and picture quality to most other extant prints, but because all existing complete prints of the film were lost and no longer exist, the final "complete" version now available is only 133 minutes long.

The film had a re-release in 2003 when *The Guardian* interviewed the last surviving cast member, Arthur Gardner (who I found in doing this research is still alive aged 104):

"The special effects men were superb," says Gardner. "They had explosives all over the field and they warned us where they were. They were impeccable, these guys. I got to be very honest with you, I was scared stiff! When Lewis Milestone said 'charge!' and we rose out of those trenches and charged, I was 'shot' within five feet of the trench. I fell dead immediately. In my mind, I thought, 'I'm going to get killed early.' I was a very canny kid, I can tell you!"

No one found it odd that an American film was being made in which all the main characters were German. "I don't think people thought of them as Germans or Americans - it was more about the utter futility of war, young people being exposed to it and dying and the beautiful way that Milestone finished the picture. The book had been so well received and I think, by that time, the first world war had been forgotten and nazism was only just starting."

Gardner experienced for himself the first manifestations of nazism on the set. "I'm Jewish and my real name is Goldberg. To become an actor I changed it to Gardner because I didn't see any actors named Goldberg, but on the picture I still used Arthur Goldberg. He [Laemmle] brought a man over from Germany who trained all of us in the German military drills for two weeks on the back lot. That man was an early Nazi. I was a very happy-go-lucky kid, had a sense of humour which thank God I still have, and played practical jokes. One day, I played one that he didn't appreciate and he lost his temper, and said, 'Goldberg, you goddam Jew, I warned you not to do that - you're fired.'"

Gardner did not remain sacked for long. "The man was an idiot. Lewis Milestone, the director, was Jewish. George Cukor, the dialogue director, was Jewish. They called him up and fired him on the spot and put me back on the picture. But from then on, I was not quite so playful."

He remembers, too, what the salaries were. "All the German students were paid \$75 a week. Lew Ayres [who plays Paul Bäumer, one of the leads] only got \$250. I think Louis Wolheim, who was a very well known New York actor [who played Katcsinsky], got \$1,000. There were no secrets in those days, everybody knew what everybody else was getting. I think the cost of the picture was around \$1m."



Ayres was a handsome young musician who had been discovered by a talent agent when playing at the Hollywood Roosevelt hotel. The film elevated him to international stardom.

"Lew was very anti-war," Gardner says of his old friend, who died in 1996. "He was a very serious young man. I think it hurt his career but he was very, very serious about it and very principled." They had kept in touch, meeting up again when Ayres was romancing Ginger Rogers, whom he later married.

In the second world war, Ayres became an outspoken conscientious objector, serving on the front lines in the medical service as a non-combatant. His stance led studios to shun him and exhibitors refused to screen his films.

"We were all friends, there was a lot of camaraderie on the set," says Gardner, regretting that he is the last of them left. "All these people went too early." In the evenings, after shooting, the two older lead actors, Slim Summerville and Louis Wolheim, would entertain the cast. "They were old men to us - they were in their 40s!" He recalls his own reaction to seeing the completed film for the first time. "I was really overcome. Everyone I talked to who saw the picture at the time was moved. I thought it was the greatest thing I had ever seen."

I trust members will agree that tonight's film is a fitting tribute to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the Great War.

Iain McGlashan

*Our next film:*

**8pm on Thursday 27 November 2014**



"Clever suspense cinema with a gleam in its eye and ice in its heart from an emergent Spanish A-lister. Hitchcock himself would be proud, and maybe shocked."

*I'm sure Members will be relieved to note the following review:*

"Sleep Tight" makes a sounder case for nocturnal Webcams than the "Paranormal Activity" franchise ever could."

# Reactions to **Wadjda**

23 October 2014

<b>Score</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Votes</b>	~	~	1	2	2	8	17	12	5	1

**Total received – 48      Average Score – 7.06**

*Note: In keeping with the film, only the men's votes were counted – joke!*

## Your Comments

A nice little film: very enjoyable  
Good choice for one world week  
Definitely a case of spirit over matter!  
Very touching film but a little too slow  
Educating, low key and very well acted  
A wonderful film – extended our horizons  
So many emotions all around a bike – brilliant  
I am glad – being female – that I don't live there  
A slight but fascinating film, but what happens next?  
A nice little film but what a dreary lifestyle for women  
Wheelie good but why did she not wear the cycling helmet?  
A fascinating insight into life in Saudi Arabia – really enjoyed it.  
What an interesting film and it must have been so difficult to make  
A very interesting peep into the repressive society the film portrays  
We girls have to stick together; and the occasional male ally is useful  
"God is great" but greater for some. What a good film – makes you think!  
Provocative film which immerses one in the life of a remarkable young girl  
A fascinating insight into another world – a man's world! Loved the bike race ending.  
My 10 year old granddaughter would have said "That is so interesting". This film has reinforced my desire to visit an Arab country.  
Should be seen as part of the curriculum in schools. People don't know enough about this. Perhaps we would all be happier with our lives.  
A remarkable film which showed the injustice and double standards in Islamic life in certain countries.  
Very interesting and thought provoking, but hard to watch. What inequality in that society! It made my blood boil.  
Terrific insight into Saudi life in general, particularly the situation of women. Inspiring, moving, captivating.  
The choice of film for One World Week is often one of the highlights of the season, and tonight is no exception.

Position	Film	Average Score
1 <sup>st</sup>	Saving Mr Banks	7.78
2 <sup>nd</sup>	A Royal Affair	7.76
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Wadjda	7.06
4 <sup>th</sup>	Behind the Candelabra	6.47

*The printing of the notes for each film is undertaken by Repropoint free of charge*

**Repropoint**

15 Poole Road, Woking  
Tel: 01483 596280