

## Nazi Film Review: “The Audience is by No Means as Foolish” (August 26, 1934)

### Abstract

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One significant component of the Nazification of German art was the complete rejection of “cosmopolitanism,” or what the Nazis saw as the cultural decadence of the Weimar period, not only in Germany but also throughout Europe and the rest of the world. According to the Nazi worldview, the uncritical indulgence of popular (and specifically urban) culture—from jazz music to Hollywood films, to abstract and modernist visual art—was a direct threat to the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*].

One especially significant target of Nazi criticism was the supposed “Americanization” of European and German society through film. Accusing Hollywood of diluting its films with glitz and glamor and the promotion of “showgirl kitsch,” National Socialists urged the public to watch films that presented what they viewed as a more “authentic” portrayal of the world. In this excerpt, a National Socialist critic writes in support of an Austrian film, *Maskerade*, which starred Paula Wessely, an Austrian-born actress whom they prized as a serious talent precisely because she did not conform to the American standard of beauty, but instead represented a more authentic “German” approach to cinema.

### Source

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At Berlin’s Gloria-Palast one can experience something very strange at the moment; a film is being shown there whose leading actress resembles nothing less than a film beauty. And whenever this leading lady, who lacks all the charms of Hollywood, appears, the audience goes into raptures and applauds at the end of each scene. One could only advise all film producers to come to one of the usual evening performances. They would be able to see there that the usual answer that **moviegoing audiences** demand platinum blond girls with fly legs around their eyes giving looks ranging from vamp to toothpaste advertisement, is a bad answer. — This is the excellent film *Maskerade*, and Paula Wessely, by far the most outstanding actress of the female stage newcomers, who appears here for the first time on the screen, and who quite simply and immediately with an amazing power of human representation portrays a simple young girl. There is a movement going through the auditorium—this is how much people are gripped by her performance. Why? Because they see a great actress in a good film. — It is not the first time one can experience something like that. But it is at least a very rare case, even in German films, that one does not rely on the more or less charming actress in a role, but on the great actress. The success proved the Viennese film company right. The audience is by no means as foolish as we are always led to believe. They sometimes have quite good instincts, for example, when they interrupted the deadly serious parts of a new movie drama, which was set to machine hype and whose banality found a shocking expression in the spoken word, with loud laughter. Or when it applauds the performance of a real actress and leaves the theater visibly moved at the end. In Germany today, we should reflect on this and, instead of sensational effects, let the real artistic performance have its say, as is unfortunately quite rare. This can be done seriously, but also—and this is especially important for film—with humor. Thus, we would once gain the leading place among the sophisticated people of the world that we deserve.

Source: *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Reichs-Ausgabe. Berlin, 26. August 1934, p. 1.

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