

Review #47 : *To Be or Not To Be* (1942)

Carole Lombard and Jack Benny

TRAILER

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HK2Man04C4>



The last picture in which the late **Carole Lombard** played, *To Be or Not to Be* (1942) is a fast-paced spy-thriller of fantastic design and great ingenuity telling a macabre yet highly spiritual story contused by frequent doses of shock amid the ruins and frightful oppressions of Nazi-invaded Warsaw.

SYNOPSIS

Lubitsch is telling a fabulous tale about a company of Polish actors caught in Warsaw when it fell in the Fall of 1939 and of the way in which these enterprising thespians outsmart the dumb Gestapo. Conveniently, the company had been rehearsing an anti-Nazi play, so they are able to jump into roles and costumes which the exigencies demand.



REVIEW

Overlook the locale, you will still relish the **burlesque bravado** of this film and laugh at Nazi generals with pop-eyes and dim wits. Perhaps you will fancy Jack Benny, disguised behind goggles and beard, figuratively tweaking the noses of the best Gestapo sleuths. Many more will enjoy the glib surprises and **suspense of the plot**. Sometimes however Mr. Lubitsch has

an **odd sense of humour** and it is hard to imagine anyone take a shattering air raid upon Warsaw for a farce, nor is the spectacle of Mr. Benny playing a comedy scene with a Gestapo corpse entirely funny. It's rather... shall we say... *humour noir*, and **grim excitement**.

As stars of the company, Mr. Benny and Miss Lombard are called upon to assume the leading roles and the **perils of the plot** : Miss Lombard recklessly entices the Nazi wolves and Mr. Benny, in a couple of disguises, pulls the wool right over their eyes.



Miss Lombard, in this her last role, is **very beautiful and comically adroit**. This is indeed a tribute to her **glowing personality**. Benny, despite a successful endeavour to alter his style, unfortunately gives out too much of **I* Jack Benny, the radio comedian*, to be just right. Too many times does he bridle at reflections upon his talent. Too often does he pout or grow indignant. Of course, the script encourages the old Benny legend. Once a German officer comments with a loud laugh : "*What he did to Shakespeare we are doing now to Poland.*" That gives you a couple of ideas about Jack Benny.

In lesser roles, Sig Rumann is thick and blustering as a Nazi colonel, Stanley Ridges is suave and sinister as a Gestapo agent, Robert Stack is pleasantly youthful as a Polish flier and Tom Dugan is funny to behold as a burlesque Hitler. Too bad a little more **taste** and a little more **unity of mood** were not put in this film. As it is, one has the strange feeling that Lubitsch is a Nero, fiddling while Rome burns...