

# Algiers (film)

*Algiers* is a 1938 American drama film directed by John Cromwell and starring Charles Boyer, Sigrid Gurie, and Hedy Lamarr.<sup>[2]</sup> Written by John Howard Lawson, the film is about a notorious French jewel thief hiding in the labyrinthine native quarter of Algiers known as the Casbah. Feeling imprisoned by his self-imposed exile, he is drawn out of hiding by a beautiful French tourist who reminds him of happier times in Paris. The Walter Wanger production was a remake of the successful 1937 French film *Pépé le Moko*, which derived its plot from the Henri La Barthe novel of the same name.<sup>[3]</sup>

*Algiers* was a sensation because it was the first Hollywood film starring Hedy Lamarr, whose beauty became the main attraction for film audiences. The film is notable as one of the sources of inspiration to the screenwriters of the 1942 Warner Bros. film *Casablanca*, who wrote it with Hedy Lamarr in mind as the original female lead. Charles Boyer's depiction of Pepe le Moko inspired the Warner Bros. animated character Pepé Le Pew. In 1966, the film entered the public domain in the United States because the claimants did not renew its copyright registration in the 28th year after publication.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Contents

### Premise

### Cast

### Production

### Box office

### Awards and honors

Academy Awards

National Board of Review Awards

Others

### Adaptations and remakes

Radio

Film

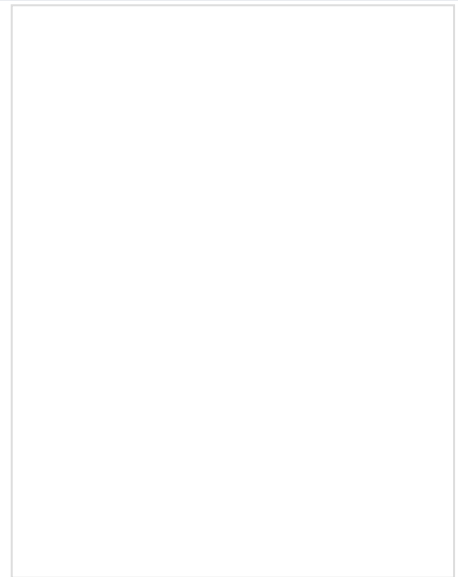
### In popular culture

### See also

### References

### External links

## Algiers



theatrical release poster

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Directed by</b>    | John Cromwell   |
| <b>Produced by</b>    | Walter Wanger   |
| <b>Written by</b>     | James M. Cain (additional dialogue)   |
| <b>Screenplay by</b>  | John Howard Lawson  |
| <b>Based on</b>       | <i>Pépé le Moko</i> (1937 novel) by Detective Ashelbe <i>Pépé le Moko</i> (1937 film) |
| <b>Starring</b>       | Charles Boyer<br>Sigrid Gurie<br>Hedy Lamarr  |
| <b>Music by</b>       | Vincent Scotto<br>Mohamed Ygerbuchen  |
| <b>Cinematography</b> | James Wong Howe   |
| <b>Edited by</b>      | Otho Lovering   |

## Premise

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Pepe le Moko (Boyer) is a notorious thief, who, after his last great heist, escaped from France to Algeria. Since his escape, le Moko became a resident and leader of the immense Casbah, or "native quarter", of Algiers. French officials who arrive insisting on Pepe's capture are met with unfazed local detectives, led by Inspector Slimane (Calleia), who are biding their time. Meanwhile, Pepe begins to feel increasingly trapped in his prison-like stronghold, a feeling which intensifies after meeting the beautiful Gaby (Lamarr), who is visiting from France. His love for Gaby soon arouses the jealousy of Ines (Gurie), Pepe's Algerian mistress.

## Cast

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- Charles Boyer as Pepe le Moko
- Sigrid Gurie as Ines
- Hedy Lamarr as Gaby
- Joseph Calleia as Inspector Slimane
- Alan Hale as Grandpere
- Gene Lockhart as Regis
- Walter Kingsford as Chief Inspector Louvain
- Paul Harvey as Commissioner Janvier
- Stanley Fields as Carlos

Sigrid Gurie, Charles Boyer, and Hedy Lamarr

|                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
|                           | William H. Reynolds       |
| <b>Production company</b> | Walter Wanger Productions |
| <b>Distributed by</b>     | United Artists            |
| <b>Release date</b>       | August 5, 1938 (US)       |
| <b>Running time</b>       | 99 minutes                |
| <b>Country</b>            | United States             |
| <b>Language</b>           | English                   |
| <b>Budget</b>             | \$691,833 <sup>[1]</sup>  |
| <b>Box office</b>         | \$951,801 <sup>[1]</sup>  |

- Johnny Downs as Pierrot
- Charles D. Brown as Max
- Robert Greig as Giroux
- Leonid Kinskey as L'Arbi
- Joan Woodbury as Aicha
- Nina Koshetz as Tania

### Cast notes

- Austrian actress Hedy Lamarr made her American film debut in *Algiers*, although she was already known for her appearance in the 1933 Czech film *Ecstasy*, in which she appeared nude.<sup>[3]</sup> Howard Dietz, the head of MGM's publicity department, quizzed her about this, and she admitted to having appeared nude. "Did you look good?", he asked. "Of course!" "Then it's all right", he said, "no damage has been done."<sup>[2]</sup>

## Production

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Walter Wanger, the producer of *Algiers*, purchased the rights to the French film *Pepe le Moko* in order to remake it, and bought all prints of the film to prevent it from competing with his film in the U.S. Wanger used most of the music from the French film in this remake as well as background sequences.<sup>[2][3]</sup>

The first version of the script for *Algiers* was rejected by the Breen Office because the leading ladies were both portrayed as "kept women," and because of references to prostitution, the promiscuity of the lead character, and his suicide at the end of the film, which was directed to be changed to his being shot instead of killing himself.<sup>[3]</sup>

Backgrounds and exteriors for the film were shot in Algiers by a photographer named Knechtel, who was based in London. These photographs were integrated into the film by cinematographer James Wong Howe.<sup>[3]</sup>

MGM had considered Ingrid Bergman, Dolores del Río, and Sylvia Sydney for the female lead, but, as Boyer tells it, he met Hedy Lamarr at a party and introduced her to Wanger as a possibility for his co-lead. Cromwell says about Lamarr that she could not act. "After you've been in

*Algiers* Play media

the business for a time, you can tell easily enough right when you meet them. I could sense her inadequacy, Wanger could sense it, and I could see Boyer getting worried even before we started talking behind Hedy's back...Sometimes the word personality is interchangeable with presence although they aren't the same thing. But the principle applies, and Hedy also had no personality. How could they think she could become a second Garbo?...I'll take some credit for making her acting passable but can only share credit with Boyer fifty-fifty."<sup>[2]</sup>

Boyer did not enjoy his work on *Algiers*. "An actor never likes to copy another's style," he said, "and here I was copying Jean Gabin, one of the best." Director Cromwell "would run a scene from the original and insist we do it exactly that way — terrible, a perfectly terrible way to work." Cromwell, however, said that Boyer "never appreciated how different his own Pepe was from Gabin's. Boyer showed something like genius to make it different. It was a triumph of nuance. The shots are the same, the dialogue has the same meaning, but Boyer's Pepe and Gabin's Pepe are two different fellows but in the same predicament."<sup>[2]</sup>

## Box office

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The film earned a profit of \$150,466.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Awards and honors

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### Academy Awards

- Best Actor (nomination) – Charles Boyer
- Best Supporting Actor (nomination) – Gene Lockhart
- Best Art Direction (nomination) – Alexander Toluboff
- Best Cinematography (nomination) – James Wong Howe

### National Board of Review Awards

Joseph Calleia received the 1938 National Board of Review Award for his performance as Slimane.<sup>[5]</sup>

Joseph Calleia (right) in *Algiers*

## Others

The film is recognized by American Film Institute in these lists:

- 2002: AFI's 100 Years...100 Passions – Nominated<sup>[6]</sup>

## Adaptations and remakes

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## Radio

In the autumn of 1938, *Hollywood Playhouse* presented a radio adaptation of *Algiers* starring Charles Boyer.<sup>[7]:222</sup>

*Algiers* was adapted for the October 8, 1939, presentation of the CBS Radio series *The Campbell Playhouse*. The hour-long adaptation starred Orson Welles and Paulette Goddard,<sup>[8][9]</sup> with Ray Collins taking the role of Inspector Slimane.<sup>[7]:222</sup>

The film was dramatized as an hour-long radio play on two broadcasts of *Lux Radio Theatre*. Charles Boyer and Hedy Lamarr reprised their roles in the broadcast July 7, 1941.<sup>[10]</sup> Boyer starred with Loretta Young in the broadcast December 14, 1942.<sup>[11][12]</sup>

## Film

*Algiers* was remade in 1948 as *Casbah*, a musical produced by Universal Pictures, starring singer Tony Martin and Yvonne De Carlo. The film was directed by John Berry. A 1949 Italian parody titled *Totò Le Moko* featured the comedian Totò.<sup>[3]</sup>

Newspaper advertisement for *The Campbell Playhouse* presentation of "Algiers" (October 8, 1939)

## In popular culture

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The 1938 film *Algiers* was most Americans' introduction to the picturesque alleys and souks of the Casbah. It was also the inspiration for the 1942 film *Casablanca*, written specifically for Hedy Lamarr in the female lead role. However, MGM refused to release Hedy Lamarr.

Charles Boyer's invitation to "Come with me to ze Casbah," did not appear in the film, but still became comedians' standard imitation of Boyer, much like "Play it again, Sam" for Humphrey Bogart, "Judy, Judy, Judy" for Cary Grant and "You dirty rat" for James Cagney— all apocryphal lines. Boyer hated being reduced in that way, believing that it demeaned him as an actor.<sup>[2]</sup>

In some part, the lampoon of Boyer spread owing to its use by *Looney Tunes* cartoon character Pepé Le Pew, himself a spoof of Boyer as Pépé le Moko.<sup>[2]</sup> The amorous skunk used "Come with me to ze Casbah" as a pickup line. In 1954, the *Looney Tunes* cartoon *The Cat's Bah*, which specifically spoofed *Algiers*, the skunk enthusiastically declared to Penelope the Cat, "Do not come with me to ze Casbah. We are already here!"

## See also

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- *Casbah* (1946)
- *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)
- List of American films of 1938
- List of films in the public domain in the United States

## References

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1. Bernstein, Matthew (2000). *Walter Wagner: Hollywood Independent*. Minnesota Press, p. 439.
2. LoBianco, Lorraine. "Algiers" (<http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/19052/Algiers/articles.html>). *TCM.com*. Retrieved March 16, 2013.

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4. Pierce, David (June 2007). "Forgotten Faces: Why Some of Our Cinema Heritage Is Part of the Public Domain". *Film History: An International Journal*. **19** (2): 125–43. doi:10.2979/FIL.2007.19.2.125 (<https://doi.org/10.2979%2FFIL.2007.19.2.125>). ISSN 0892-2160 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0892-2160>). JSTOR 25165419 (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25165419>). OCLC 15122313 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/15122313>).
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6. "AFI's 100 Years...100 Passions Nominees" (<http://www.afi.com/Docs/100Years/passions400.pdf>) (PDF). Retrieved 2016-08-18.
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11. "Lux Radio Theatre 1942" (<https://archive.org/details/Lux07>). Internet Archive. Retrieved 2015-11-16.
12. "The Lux Radio Theatre" (<http://radiogoldindex.com/cgi-local/p2.cgi?ProgramName=The+Lux+Radio+Theatre>). RadioGOLDINDEX. Retrieved 2015-11-16.

## External links

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- *Algiers* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029855/>) on IMDb
- *Algiers* (<http://www.tcm.turner.com/tcmdb/title/title.jsp?stid=19052>) at the TCM Movie Database
- *Algiers* (<https://www.allmovie.com/movie/v1457>) at AllMovie
- *Algiers* (<https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/7907>) at the American Film Institute Catalog
- *Algiers* ([https://archive.org/details/Algiers\\_](https://archive.org/details/Algiers_)) is available for free download at the Internet Archive

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