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## TO BE OR NOT TO BE

1942 99 min.

*Directed and produced by Ernst Lubitsch; screenplay by Edwin Justus Mayer; photography by Rudolph Mate; music by Werner Heyman. With Carole Lombard, Jack Benny, Robert Stack, Lionel Atwill, Felix Bressart, Stanley Ridges, Sig Rumann.*

One of the funniest American comedies, **TO BE OR NOT TO BE**, directed by Ernst Lubitsch, tells of a Polish theatrical troupe outwitting Nazis during the German invasion. Carole Lombard, in her last screen appearance, gives a captivating performance as a ham-actor's footsy-playing wife; Jack Benny's unique rendition of Hamlet's soliloquy is worth the price of admission alone; and lines such as "So they call me 'Concentration Camp' Ehrhardt" have already become classics.

For setting its farce in the midst of recent and tragic events, **TO BE OR NOT TO BE** became the subject of intense controversy: "callous," "macabre" and "irresponsible" were adjectives frequently used by outraged reviewers. But, as Andrew Sarris has written, "For Lubitsch, it was sufficient to say that Hitler had bad manners, and no evil was then inconceivable." Peter Bogdanovich, recalling the film in *Esquire*, cited these lines by Thomas DeQuincey: "If once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination." We can now see that **TO BE OR NOT TO BE** was one of the few films really to understand Nazism, and a trailblazing black comedy made in the days before the term had even been invented.

*"TO BE OR NOT TO BE survives not only as satire but as a glorification of man's indomitable good spirits in the face of disaster — survives in a way that many more serious and high-toned works about the war do not."*

*—Peter Bogdanovich, Esquire*

*"One of the 10 Best American Sound Films."*

*—Jean-Luc Godard, Cahiers du Cinema*



*To Be or Not To Be*