



Big Screen Classics

Hôtel du Nord

Hôtel du Nord

Director: Marcel Carné

Production Companies: Impérial Film, SEDIF

Production Manager: Jean Lévy-Strauss

Assistant Directors: Claude Walter, Pierre Blondy

Shooting Script: Marcel Carné

Adaptation: Henri Jeanson, Jean Aurenche

Dialogue: Henri Jeanson

Based on the novel by: Eugène Dabit

Directors of Photography: Armand Thirard,

Louis Née

Camera Operators: Roger Arrignon, Roger Fellous

Stills: Roger Kahan *

Editors: Marthe Gottié, René Le Hénaff, Henri Rust

Art Director: Alexandre Trauner

Costume Designer: Lou Tchimoukof

Make-up: Vladimir Tourjansky *

Music: Maurice Jaubert

Sound: Marcel Courmes

Studios: Paris Studios Billancourt, Francoeur

Cast:

Annabella (Renée)

Arletty (Raymonde)

Louis Jouvet (Edmond)

Jean-Pierre Aumont (Pierre)

Jeanne Marken (Louise Lecouvreur)

André Brunot (Emile Lecouvreur)

Paulette Goddard (Ginette)

Bernard Blier (Prosper)

André (Kenel)

Henri Bosc (Nazarède)

Marcel André (surgeon)

Jacques Louvigny (Mimar)

Armand Lurville (police inspector)

René Bergeron (Maltaverne)

Génia Vaur (nurse)

François Périer (M. Adrien)

Raymonde (Jeanne)

René Alié (Marcel)

Albert Malbert, Marcel Pérès (restaurant customers)

Marcel Melrac (police agent)

Charles Bouillaud (police sergeant)

France 1938

95 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

Become a BFI Member

Enjoy a great package of film benefits

including priority booking at BFI Southbank

and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

Sight and Sound

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine.

Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription

(UK only). More info:

sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk/subscribe

**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

The film of *Hôtel du Nord* was inspired by a book written in 1928 by Eugene Dabit, a gifted young writer who died in 1936 in tragic and mysterious circumstances. Dabit's *L'Hôtel du Nord* is a collection of anecdotes about a hotel's motley collection of working-class residents and its neighbourhood, and a tribute to Dabit's parents who owned the real Hôtel du Nord. Awarded the *Prix populiste* in 1929, it records and celebrates the 'little people' of this north-eastern Parisian area. Marcel Carné kept both the location and the characters (using some of their names). However, with scriptwriter Jean Aurenche and dialogue-writer Henri Jeanson (Jacques Prévert being unavailable), he created a quartet of characters – Raymonde and Edmond, Renée and Pierre – who both stood for and stood out of that community, and who made the fortune of the film.

Today, Arletty (playing Raymonde) seems to be the star of *Hôtel du Nord*, but it was Annabella (Renée) who was the top French female star of the period. It was she who made the project possible, even though Carné had achieved prominence with *Le Quai des brumes*, released earlier that same year. She came back from Hollywood especially to take the part, and her role in *Hôtel du Nord* is a French view of Hollywood stardom. She is pure image. A stunning beauty, Annabella walks into the hotel like an alien. Even as a maid, she is glamorous – glossy lips, plucked eyebrows, impeccably groomed hair. In the scenes where she and Pierre talk suicide, the dialogue is bland and the argument existential doom and, nominally, poverty – seems forced. This could be because, as Carné claims in his memoirs, Jeanson deliberately sabotaged their lines because he disliked Annabella. At the same time, though, Carné frames them with hauntingly beautiful shots: overhead views of their heads on the bed, or the well-known image of them looking out of the window.

If Annabella is a codified vision of evanescent femininity, the life and zest of the film and 'the people' reside in Arletty's Raymonde. From the lowest cliché – the tart with a golden heart – Arletty creates an unforgettable woman. This is partly because Jeanson gives her his best lines but also because of her electrifying performance, just as the brilliant Jouvet makes Edmond more than a mere pimp. Where Renée is all death drive, Raymonde is life-embracing. When Edmond drops her, instead of killing herself, she moves in with Prosper (Bernard Blier, as one of the first of a long line of cuckolds).

Arletty gives Raymonde the unique mixture of beauty, intelligence and risqué humour which had made her such a success on stage, while her peerless voice is unforgettable. Renée and Pierre are visually glamorous, but Raymonde and Edmond form a great vocal duet. Jouvet's fatalistic drawl is a perfect foil for Arletty's high-pitched squeaks and Parisian slang, immortalised in the 'Atmosphère!, atmosphère!' scene where the two argue on the bridge over the canal. The lines have become part of French folklore, and when Arletty launched a perfume late in life for charity it was called *Atmosphère*.

In the Carné canon, *Hôtel du Nord* is usually eclipsed by *Le Quai des brumes*, *Le Jour se lève* (1939) and *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945), largely because of Prévert's absence. Jeanson's dialogue is indeed broader, the film more comic. In this respect, *Hôtel du Nord* is 'theatrical realism' rather than 'poetic realism'. But in the interaction of set, camerawork and Maurice Jaubert's restrained,

Big Screen Classics

The Grand Budapest Hotel

Sat 1 Aug 12:10; Mon 24 Aug 18:10;
Sat 29 Aug 20:45

Grand Hotel

Sat 1 Aug 14:45; Tue 11 Aug 14:30;
Fri 14 Aug 20:30; Wed 19 Aug 14:30

Somewhere

Sat 1 Aug 20:40; Sun 16 Aug 18:10;
Thu 20 Aug 14:40; Mon 31 Aug 18:40

The Last Laugh Der letzte Mann

Sun 2 Aug 15:10; Mon 10 Aug 20:45 (+ intro by
programmer Margaret Deriaz)

Key Largo

Mon 3 Aug 20:45; Sun 23 Aug 11:55

Hôtel du Nord

Tue 4 Aug 18:20; Fri 21 Aug 20:35

In the Mood for Love Fa yeung ninwah

Tue 4 Aug 20:45; Sat 8 Aug 18:10;
Mon 17 Aug 20:50; Thu 27 Aug 17:50

Waiting to Exhale

Wed 5 Aug 18:00 (+ intro); Tue 11 Aug 20:30

To Catch a Thief

Thu 6 Aug 20:30; Fri 14 Aug 14:30;
Sat 15 Aug 20:50; Sun 30 Aug 18:10

The Shining (Extended Version)

Fri 7 Aug 18:00; Thu 27 Aug 20:15

The Silence Tystnaden

Fri 7 Aug 20:40; Thu 13 Aug 18:10;
Sat 22 Aug 12:15

I Am Cuba Soy Cuba

Sun 9 Aug 12:00; Wed 19 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by film
curator and writer Jonathan Ali); Fri 28 Aug 20:20

Hotel Monterey

Wed 12 Aug 18:20 (+ intro by scholar and critic
Erika Balsom); Tue 25 Aug 20:35; Sat 29 Aug 15:20

Nightshift

Tue 18 Aug 20:50; Wed 28 Aug 18:30 (+ intro by
writer and film programmer Sophia Satchell-Baeza)

BFI Player

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

25 & Under

We want to open up great independent and classic film and TV for all, making it as accessible as possible. If you are under the age of 26, you can get discounted tickets for BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. BFI Southbank cinema tickets are £4, with festival tickets £6, so you can enjoy the very best of cinema from around the world at an affordable price.

Sign up today and verify your age online, and you can start enjoying discounted tickets immediately.

moody music, *Hôtel du Nord* is typical of poetic realism. Its poetry is embodied in the superb set designed by Alexandre Trauner, a replica of one side of the Canal Saint-Martin, complete with bridges, punctuated by location shots of the canal and barges. The set is plainly artificial, yet still a microcosm of Paris which we enter with the young couple, the camera following them down the side of the bridge. (A reverse of this movement takes us out at the end of the film.)

Graham Greene, who loved French cinema for knowing ‘the immense importance of the careful accessory’, once wrote: ‘in *Hôtel du Nord* we believe in the desperate lovers and the suicide pact on the brass bed in the shabby room, just because of the bicyclists on the quay, the pimp quarrelling with his woman in another room, and the First-Communion party.’

Hôtel du Nord was shot during the Munich crisis and Carné lost technicians and cast members as they were drafted. Yet the resulting film is less historically grounded (and less bleak) than Dabit’s novel. Social events such as strikes are a faint echo, as is the international situation (a young Spanish refugee is marginal to the story). Carné was more daring on the gender front. Characters may take the hackneyed appearance of pimps and prostitutes, but they are free of conventional morality. Edmond and Renée’s brief interlude is clearly sexual. When it is over (and although Edmond is smitten), they both shrug it off without guilt Adrien is a (for the time) rare sympathetic portrayal of a gay character. According to Edward Baron Turk, one scene (cut from most prints) shows a male resident molesting a child.

But *Hôtel du Nord* had a positive social role in an unexpected way. Dabit’s novel ends bitterly: the hotel is demolished by speculators. Carné’s film, on the other hand, prevented the real Hôtel du Nord from being demolished. It is now a restaurant in what has become, alas, a fashionable area, offering ‘traditional French food’ and a show bearing the inevitable title *Atmosphère! Atmosphère!*

Ginette Vincendeau, *Sight and Sound*, March 1999