

Document Citation

Title	Abdul the damned
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Source	<i>New School for Social Research (New York, N.Y.)</i>
Date	
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Abdul the damned, Grune, Karl, 1935

ABDUL THE DAMNED (British International Pictures-Capitol Pictures, 1935)
U.S. release: Alliance Pictures; Directed by Karl Grune; produced by
Max Schach; Screenplay by Ashley Dukes, Warren Chetham Strode and Roger
Burford from a novel by Robert Neumann; Camera, Otto Kanturek; Art
Direction, Clarence Elder, John Mero. 111 minutes.

With: Fritz Kortner, Nils Asther, Adrienne Ames, John Stuart, Esme Percy, Walter
Rilla, Charles Carson, Patric Knowles, Eric Portman, Clifford Heatherley, Annie
Esmond, Arthur Hardy, Robert Naylor, Warren Jenkins, Alfred Woods, Ralph Truman,
Valentine Dyall, Henry Victor, George Zucco, Mathew Boulton.

While "The Nineth Guest" opened at the Roxy, poor Abdul had to settle for the
Rialto, and none too flattering reviews. However, the NY Times' criticism -
based largely on the film's interweaving of fiction with fact - seems a little
churlish considering the heinous things that Hollywood was doing in the same
area at the same time. In any event, it's a fascinating film - proof positive
that the German influence that had so dominated British film in 1927-29 was
still there with a vengeance. Fritz Kortner made a quartet of starring vehicles
in Britain at this time, and why anybody should have thought him a boxoffice
draw - especially in a film like this - is one of the many enigmas of British
film-making in the thirties. This is an extraordinarily handsome film: despite
occasional economies with back projection and miniatures, it is full of
magnificent sets, photography and superb trickery via glass shots and double-
exposures. One scene of the two Kortners (he plays a dual role) looking into a
mirror is an absolute stunner, and could never be done as well today. (Or perhaps
it could; but it wouldn't be because of the time involved). It must have cost
a fortune, and probably had a good deal to do with the demise of British
International Pictures not too long afterwards.

Its story is of Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of Turkey from 1876 to 1909 -- the last
of a line of tyrants, and notorious for never sleeping in the same room on two
consecutive nights, so great was his fear of assassination. (The film ends with
his being deposed: for the record, he died in 1918, a prisoner in his palace
until that time). In a sense, the film is Turkey's "The Birth of a Nation" --
and coincidentally, when we previewed it about six months ago, that same night
there were radio reports of new uprisings in Turkey along not dissimilar lines!
It starts off on the Orient Express, and keeps going at a rapid rate. True,
Kortner and Asther do rather play it along Karloff-Lugosi lines, revelling in
their own machinations and lechery. Kortner's is a marvellous bravura
performance of the old school, acting with every tone, nuance and body movement
at his disposal. The dialogue is a joy, though its ripe theatricality is not
always helped by an abundance of British accents beneath those Turkish fezzes.
Hans Eisler's always interesting music and the incredible visuals make it a
film of real artistic interest & merit - but it's that dialogue, and Kortner
of course, that make it, as an entertainment, a Turkish delight of the first
order. The print is superb, fully complete, and the film itself hasn't been
seen here in some 35 years. (Don't confuse it, by the way, with Veidt's
British "King of the Damned" of the same year). --- Wm. K. Everson ---

(Program Ends: 11.17) The New School Film Series 29 Prog #3