

## Document Citation

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Author(s)	William K. Everson
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"THE TESTAMENT OF DR. MABUSE" (Nerofilm, Germany, 1932) Directed by Fritz Lang; Produced by Seymour Nebenzal; script by Thea von Harbou; photographed by Fritz Arno Wagner; Art Direction, Karl Vollbrecht and Emil Hassler; music, Hans Erdman; American dubbed version edited by Gregg Tallas; 7 reels

With: Rudolph Klein-Rogge, Otto Wernicke, Gustav Diessl, Oscar Beregi, Vera Liessen, Camilla Spira, E.A. Licho, Karl Meixner, Theodor Loos, Theo Lingen.

"THE RETURN OF DR. MABUSE" (CCC Films Berlin, in collaboration with Cinematografica Films of Rome and Criterion Films, 1961) Directed by Harald Reinl; Screenplay by Ladislaus Fodor and Marc Behm; Camera, Karl Lob; produced by Arthur Brauner; Music, Peter Landloff. 9 reels  
With: Gert Frobe, Lex Barker, Daliah Lavi, Rudolf Forster, Wolfgang Preiss, Fausto Tozzi, Werner Peters, Rudolph Fernau, Joachim Moch, Laura Solari.

(There will be a ten-minute intermission between the films, and a question and answer discussion period will follow).

In order to cover the highlights of the full saga of Dr. Mabuse, we will open tonight's program with the closing sequence of Lang's first (1922) Mabuse film, which of course we have shown in its full 20-reel entirety on an earlier occasion. There is hardly room in our brief space here to do more than skim the surface of the career of Germany's favorite villain - and Lang's most colorful character - but in the pre-screening talk and post-screening discussion, we can fill in some of the gaps. We also refer you to two movie books - "From Caligari to Hitler" and "The Bad Guys" - for detailed information on the Mabuse films, and of course to the recent books on Lang by Peter Bogdanovich and Paul Jensen.

"The Testament of Dr. Mabuse" became something of a cause-celebre when it was banned by Dr. Goebbels, who promptly discerned its anti-Nazi propagandistic elements, though it is doubtful that the average German would have recognised it as more than high-powered crime and horror melodrama. This late American release version is reasonably well dubbed, and at least sensibly cut. Much of the boy-girl byplay is missing, but if anything this tighter concentration on the melodramatic story-line is an asset; Lang deliberately made his films long so that they could not be double-billed, and the original full-length "Testament" (not that we wouldn't love to show it were it available) did tend to be slowly-paced in its early portions. The only serious damage done is in the addition of a totally unnecessary "updating" opening foreword, which among other things tells us outright that we are looking at a counterfeiting plant. Originally that information was revealed only much later, and the film's opening image of terror - a man cringing in a thumping, vibrating room - was all the more effective because we didn't understand it, and shared his fear. But for the rest, the dubbing and editing has hardly affected the film's unique blend of crime melodrama and expressionistic supernatural horror.

In 1960 Lang was persuaded to return to Germany to make another sequel, "The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse". It was a surprisingly vigorous film for a man in his seventies to have made in the sixties; thus far it is also his last film, and one rather hopes that it will so remain, for it makes a fitting climax to his career. A big success, it revitalised Dr. Mabuse, and led to a whole string of follow-ups, most of them directed by Harald Reinl, an efficient if uninspired action-melodrama specialist. He also made many of the German Karl May westerns and Edgar Wallace thrillers. The new Mabuses tended to be either conscientious but stodgy - as in a straight remake of "Testament" - or wildly gimmicky in the James Bond manner. "The Return of Dr. Mabuse" however, by far the best of them (and one not released theatrically in the U.S.) chose instead to be a kind of Fritz Lang mosaic, borrowing specific incidents, characters and images from earlier Lang movies. In its homage, it automatically points out Lang's superiority in creating his own unique and thoroughly black nightmare world. There's a moment towards the end of his "Testament" when a policeman looks out of a window and for the first time in the entire film one sees a normal world outside; sunshine, trees, streetcars, pedestrians. So completely has Lang convinced us of his own night-shrouded and claustrophobic world that we have completely accepted it as normal! Yet for all the invention and colorful characters, "The Return of Dr. Mabuse" identifies specific menaces too easily, and worse, shows much of it happening in broad daylight on location-filmed city streets -- the day-to-day world of Alfred Hitchcock rather than Fritz Lang. Nevertheless, the writing is by a couple of old veterans, the dubbing could be far worse, and if "The Return of Dr. Mabuse" inevitably points to the superiority of the Lang of three decades earlier, it is also a film that he wouldn't have been ashamed of had he made it himself.

--- William K. Everson ---