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FORBIDDEN PARADISE

(USA, 1924)

DIRECTED BY ERNST LUBITSCH. FROM THE PLAY, "THE CZARINA," BY LAJOS BIRO AND MELCHIOR LENGYEL. SCENARIO BY HANS KRALY AND AGNES CHRISTINE JOHNSTON. PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES VAN ENGER. SETS BY HANS DREIER. WITH POLA NEGRI (CATHERINE, THE CZARINA), ADOLPHE MENJOU (COURT CHAMBERLAIN), ROD LA ROCQUE (CAPT. ALEXIS CZERNY), AND PAULINE STARKE (ANNA). 80 MINS. SILENT (24 FPS) 35mm

Lubitsch reunited with the star of his best German films, Pola Negri, in this brilliant comedy inspired by the amorous intrigues of Catherine The Great of Russia. The setting is updated to a time when bobbed hair and sporting motor cars are in vogue: parallels to other than royal queens are obvious, but despite the satire of movie stars and their off-set activities (most of the scenes are played in the bedroom) Hollywood voted it one of the ten best films of the year. In his book *The Lubitsch Touch*, Herman G. Weinberg notes the following of the main actors and their director's famous signature:

Negri made a very regal queen who was at the same time a very feline woman; Menjou was purest sarcasm as her cynical chamberlain, all too aware of her frailty where men were concerned; Pauline Stark was the most virginal of ladies-in-waiting to the czarina; Rod La Rocque was the most handsome and stalwart of Her Majesty's lieutenants, affianced to the virginal lady-in-waiting, *bien entendu*. Reams have been written about the 'touches' in this one: the goldfish that darts suddenly across a moonlit pool, beside which sit the young lovers, their kiss blurred in the pool's reflection by the impulsive movement of the tiny creature; the officers' revolt against the czarina put down in three quick film shots: the general's hand moving to his sword, the chamberlain's hand pulling out a check-book, the general's hand loosening from his sword with an "in that case" gesture; the lieutenant bursting in upon his queen with the news of the revolt, panting and disheveled, but loyalty to her personified, and her silent awe of his zeal (not to mention his handsomeness), her buttoning up an opened buttonhole on his tunic followed by his proudly expanded chest which pops the button right off his uniform; the queen's attempt to kiss him but, being so much shorter than he, slyly moves a small stool nearby with her foot so she may be able to reach him; the medal that the lieutenant receives, being the queen's new favorite, which is duplicated on the chests of all the rest of the officers who once also enjoyed that distinction; finally, the French ambassador, who has been waiting all this time to be received, now that the queen has been forbidden her paradise with the lieutenant (because he loves only his fiancée) is received and emerges afterwards with a medal, too, as the chamberlain and he exchange smiles, the ambassador a shy one, the chamberlain an all-too-knowing one.