

The Man Who Was Sherlock Holmes (Germany 1937)

Director:

Writers: [Robert A. Stemmle](#), [Karl Hartl](#)

It's easy enough to buy into this film's conceit: that, back in the day, there were many people in the world who believed that Sherlock Holmes was a real person. THE MAN WHO WAS SHERLOCK HOLMES tells of two down-and-out men who stop and board a train one dark night, one of whom is garbed in a deerstalker hat and checkered coat (instead of an inverness cape) and sports a pipe and a commanding presence. The clever thing with this is that the two men from the outset never actually claim to be the Great Detective and his biographer/assistant Dr. Watson, relying instead on people's assumptions.

So the word spreads that Sherlock Holmes is out and about, and the two men - real names, Morris Flint (Hans Albers) and Macky McPherson (Heinz [Ruhmann](#)) - end up reaping the benefits, receiving deferential treatment and raking in the best that society has to offer. In very short order, they gain free passage on the train, room and board and adulation in a posh hotel, and elicit consternation from various of the criminal-minded. So successful is the charade that even the police end up requesting their services, presenting Holmes and Watson with a baffling case involving invaluable stolen stamps. To make it even less elementary, the duo find themselves also mixed up in secret codes and hidden caches of money, and tangling with young heiresses, counterfeiters and deadly bank robbers. Can the fake famous detective solve his cases before everyone (but especially the police) learn that Sherlock Holmes doesn't really exist?

This movie is a lot of fun. THE MAN WHO WAS SHERLOCK HOLMES (or DER MANN, DER SHERLOCK HOLMES WAR) is a lighthearted 1937 mystery film with a bit of farce thrown in. It stars Hans Albers ([Munchhausen](#)), one of the biggest actors in Germany in the 1930s and early '40s, and he is fabulous as the Holmes impersonator (the man has got that piercing stare down), deftly comic when called for, but then turning up the intensity in the taut moments.

The first half hour or so plays it light and frothy, and there's almost an Ernst Lubitsch airiness to it, especially with the two scoundrels singing it up whilst they bathe in their own respective tubs. That

scene would fit right in with Lubitsch classic operettas. As the mystery develops, the tone becomes more serious, although the lightheartedness never does entirely go away. It turns out that Morris Flint's pretense at being a great detective isn't wholly a sham, as he readily pieces clues together throughout the course of the film.

It all climaxes with our two underhanded heroes facing insurmountable odds, followed by a breezy courtroom scene as they then try to talk their way out of imprisonment for their impersonations. Luckily for them, that old guy, who'd been showing up sporadically and loudly chortling onscreen, shows up one last time.

Just goes to show that, back in the pre-World War II era, German cinema wasn't quite all doom and gloom and propaganda. **THE MAN WHO WAS SHERLOCK HOLMES** is a lost cinematic gem that doesn't get old with repeated viewing. If you're a fan of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, then you should savour this little gem.