

# Request Concert (Wunschkonzert)

Germany | 1940 | 103 minutes

## Credits

<b>Director</b>	Eduard von Borsody
<b>Screenplay</b>	Felix Lützkendorf / Eduard von Borsody
<b>Photography</b>	Günther Anders/Carl Drews/Franz Weihmayr
<b>Music</b>	Werner Bochmann

## Cast

Hedwig Bleibtreu	Frau Wagner
Joachim Brennecke	Helmut Winkler
Heinz Goedecke	Himself
Paul Hörbiger	Himself

## Review

Starting out as a cinematographer, Eduard von Borsody later moved into editing, cutting films such as the 1933 U-boat drama *Morgenrot /Dawn*, before becoming a writer/director in 1935. By 1940, he had more than a dozen films under his belt, and was making WWII programmers with obvious wartime propaganda content.

The screen story of *Wunschkonzert* is anything but special: a couple meet, fall in love, and are separated when secret missions and heavy military service takes the man away from a woman willing to wait for his return.

Mucking up their chances is a third wheel, who's also in love with the girl, but ultimately steps aside so three years of yearning finally pay off with a full blown romance, marriage, and sex with the once-distant love. (Naturally all that's implied before the quick "ENDE" credit and fadeout.)

One of the peculiarities some historians have noted regarding Third Reich dramas is the nature of the heroine - physical contact is often polite, kisses are brief but efficient, and there's no ribald behaviour because the heroine possesses a special kind of virtue: faithful, devoted, motherly, and bereft of erotic attributes. That pretty much sums up Inge (played by actress Ilse Werne), a puppy dog who never shows any anger even when stood up for the umpteenth time in a restaurant by Herbert (Carl Raddatz), her beloved lieutenant.

In *Wunschkonzert*, the drama starts light - with von Borsody's editorial skill coming in handy by cleverly editing footage from Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* with the actors during the film's first 10 mins. - and still manages to stay fairly buoyant when soldiers visit their families during a short leave. The film's tone shifts when a local G.I. plays an elegant piano solo that even quiets his G.I. buddies, and makes them realize there's a civilized and cultured guy under that formal uniform.

That's certainly one of the undercurrents - tying an appreciation of fine arts to the men at the battle front - and it pays off when the pianist plays a church organ to marshal his men away from advancing enemies they can't see from the ground level. Of course, he sacrifices

## In Brief

Nazi Germany's Most Popular Radio Program Goes to the Cinema!

At the Eleventh Olympiad in Berlin, lovely Inge Wagner (Ilse Werner) and Lieutenant Herbert Koch (Carl Raddatz) meet, fall in love, and plan to marry. Three days later he is sent on a secret mission to Spain and forbidden to communicate with anyone. Three years later, Germany invades Poland and the Second World War begins. German radio begins broadcasting its *Wunschkonzert für die Wehrmacht* series, which plays soldiers' requests. Herbert asks for the Olympic fanfare, a reminder of the girl he'd loved and lost. The inspiration for Eduard von Borsody's *Wunschkonzert* (Request Concert) came from Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. Ufa, Germany's leading studio, produced the picture as a *Staatsauftragsfilm* ("state-produced film"). The film was designed to exploit the success of the popular radio program that provided an emotional bond between troops on the front and those they left behind at home. The radio show demonstrated the power of German radio in Goebbels' propaganda war. The theme of separation during wartime is a common one. What distinguishes *Wunschkonzert* is its clever blend of fiction and, through newsreel and documentary footage, contemporary events. The film includes footage of Adolf Hitler arriving at the Olympic Games, Spanish Civil War newsreels, and a rousing battlefield montage of soldiers listening to the Request Concert. The musical interludes feature numbers by some of Germany's leading stars—Marika Röck, Paul Hörbiger, and Heinz Rühmann. *Wunschkonzert* was the second biggest box-office success of the war, seen by over 20,000,000 viewers, grossing RM 7,200,000, and earning a profit of RM 4,239,000 even before foreign sales were figured in.



# Film Title

Year | Country of Origin | Running Time



his own life for the good of his unit (and manages to die and drop his head on the right key, so the fugue has proper closure, and doesn't end a lovely theme rendition with unwarranted dissonance). Being a melodrama, the dead soldier's wish to have a special song played at the military wunschkonzert is granted, and "Good Night, Mother" is transmitted via radio to his mum, as she sits stoically by a window, and her son's picture stands near the now-silent piano the lad once tinkled.

It's all pretty familiar, except with most available WWII product being anti-German (or showing a lone, sympathetic dissenter among a mass of war zealots who obey nothing but the rules), it's unique to see how Third Reich dramas employed melodrama with their own brand of archetypes. The uniforms have swastikas, a picture of Hitler hangs faithfully on the wall as two soldiers discuss a secret operation in Spain (Guernica?), and local kids give a vacationing soldier a lighthearted Sieg Heil.

Not dissimilar to American war pics, comedy relief comes from country-bred or blue-collar soldiers, and there's a sub-thread involving a local butcher who manages to bring a confiscated French swine all the way to Berlin as an offering before attending the concert that signals the film's denouement.

Uncharacteristically, the musical numbers are lumped into one big scene, with each set - comedic, song, orchestral, classical - delivered in highlights, and some of the sequences include the huge audience swaying and singing, as a singer crooners a folk song; and wide shots of the hall closely patterned after the Nazi party halls from newsreels, with a pair of swastika drapes flanking the stage.

It's a fascinating peek into the idyllic celluloid world of the Third Reich, and an uneasy one; the concert clearly associates culture and appreciation for refined works by the likes of Mozart as a virtue of the wartime folk and military men, and yet the lack of heavy jingoism and longer patriotic song interludes in Wunschkonzert makes the film all the more eerie; it's a depiction of a nation coping with the realities of controlled if not manageable war - call it a distant fracas, happening beyond the borders of Germany - but historical hindsight realigns things a bit: as a Mozart serenade evokes deep, meaningful thought, unspeakable atrocities were being committed on a national and international level.

In addition to Wunschkonzert, actor Carl Raddatz also appeared in the wartime programmer Stukas (1940), Veit Harlan's Immensee (1943) and Opfergang / The Great Sacrifice (1944), and the wartime anomaly, Unter den Brücken / Under the Bridges (1945). Ilse Werner later appeared in U-Boote westwärts (1941), and in the classic production of Münchhausen (1943), as Prinzessin Isabella d'Este. Co-and writer/director Eduard von Borsody continued to direct several films, until he retired in 1963.

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