

Adventures of Casanova

ADVENTURE! ROMANCE!

Adventures Of Casanova presents the legendary womanizer as not only a legendary womanizer but an expert with the blade (sword, that is), champion of the oppressed, and hero for the ages. In other words, Eagle-Lion's 1948 release is a standard-issue programmer, one of about fifty titles they released that year.

Adventures of Casanova stars Arturo de Cordova as Casanova, Turhan Bey as his friend Lorenzo, John Sutton as his enemy, the Count de Brissac, and fetching Lucille Bremer as Lady Bianca and Noreen Nash, as Zanetta, her servant. Shot in Mexico, the film was directed by Roberto Gavaldon, who only directed a couple of American films, but was quite prolific in the Mexican cinema with over thirty films to his credit. Crane Wilbur, who wrote some excellent noirs, including the classic *He Walked By Night* and *The Phenix City Story*, provided a screenplay that was fanciful and historically almost completely inaccurate. From the TCM website, here is a synopsis of *Adventures of Casanova*.

"In Palermo, Sicily, in 1793, the powerful armies of the Emperor of Austria have virtually crushed a local rebellion. Bernardo D'Anneci, patriarchal leader of the insurgents, admits that a younger man is needed to carry on the fight and sends his aide, Lorenzo, to find Jacques Casanova, the great warrior and lover. Casanova is in Malta, preoccupied with his romances, but after Lorenzo tells him that the allied armies of Austria and Spain have confiscated his estate and hanged his father, he agrees to become their new leader. Meanwhile, Governor D'Albernasi informs his daughter, Lady Bianca, that she is to marry Count Julien de Brissac, emissary of the Austrian emperor, but she refuses and is confined to her quarters. Upon Casanova's return, the patriots rally to his side and stage daring guerrilla attacks against D'Albernasi's forces. When the governor increases the price of bread, Casanova kidnaps the prefect of police, the Marquis De Gaetano, along with the governor's brother and a cavalry troop. Then, under a flag of truce, he goes to the governor's palace with D'Anneci and Lorenzo and negotiates the release of a month's supply of food to the people in exchange for the hostages. With the help of her servant, Zanetta, who expects to marry Lorenzo, Bianca plans to escape to the patriots' stronghold and dons a page boy's outfit to disguise herself. Lady Adria, the governor's favorite, is impressed by Casanova's bravado, and de Brissac decides to use her to trap him when she invites him to visit her boudoir. However, under the spell of Casanova's ardent love-making, she reveals the plot and helps him to escape. Bianca and Zanetta then join Casanova and Lorenzo as they return to the stronghold. When forced to re-

veal her identity, Zanetta states that she is Bianca D'Albernasi and that the pageboy is her servant. Although she is the "governor's daughter," the rebels accept Zanetta. As Bianca is still posing as the page boy, she is chosen to be Casanova's servant and complications ensue. She nonetheless arranges to dine with him in the guise of a local lady named Zanetta, and appears before him in women's clothes. After dinner, Casanova reveals to his guest that he has known all along that his servant was actually a woman. After de Brissac suspects that Bianca has been captured by the patriots, he orders the governor's arrest and takes his place. Later, hoping to trap Casanova, de Brissac challenges him to a duel, but Lorenzo, unwilling to have Casanova's life endangered, races ahead of him and takes his place, but is fatally wounded, dying just as Casanova arrives. While the real Zanetta mourns Lorenzo's death, she reveals her identity to D'Anneci and tells him that the woman they know as Zanetta is actually Bianca. Casanova, unaware of "Zanetta's" true identity, falls in love with her, but both are taken prisoner by de Brissac and charged with treason, which carries the death penalty. In order to save Casanova's life, Bianca denounces him and agrees to marry de Brissac, but tricks him into delaying Casanova's execution until after their marriage. Jacopo, a patriot disguised as a priest, visits Casanova in his jail cell and tells him that Bianca is trying to help him. After the oft-delayed marriage ceremony takes place, Casanova faces immediate execution. However, on the wedding night, Jacopo and Zanetta, posing as Casanova's wife, are permitted to visit Casanova in jail. She takes bottles of drugged wine with her, knowing that they will be confiscated and drunk by the guards on duty. After the wine has taken effect, Casanova escapes and races to Bianca's boudoir, where he finds de Brissac about to consummate the marriage. After a sword duel, Casanova kills de Brissac. The governor, whom de Brissac has had imprisoned, is released and, no longer under the evil influence of de Brissac, proves to be a benevolent leader. He informs the citizens that the king has granted them representation, and that Casanova, who plans to marry Bianca, will be their new ambassador to Naples."

So, mostly the film is a swashbuckler, filled with swords flashing, intrigues, double-crosses, switched identities, cowards, an oily villain, and a hero who can out-duel and out-love anyone. The fact that the real Casanova was, at the time of the film's events, a librarian in his 60s, well, why let that stand in the way of a good, old-fashioned yarn. The film had good production values for a low-budget programmer, and while there's no Errol Flynn or Olivia de Havilland or Basil Rathbone in sight, the cast does very well, especially Turhan Bey as loyal friend Lorenzo and John Sut-

ton as the dastardly de Brissac. But what really makes the film come to life and even occasionally lifts it from its B-movie roots, is the superb score by Hugo Friedhofer.

Friedhofer had spent years as an orchestrator for Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold, so he knew this type of film scoring intimately. By 1948, he'd been composing for films for years and had already won the Academy Award for his brilliant score to William Wyler's *The Best Years Of Our Lives*. He'd also written *The Bishop's Wife*, Fritz Lang's *Woman In The Window* (credited with Arthur Lange, and an Academy Award nomination), *Body and Soul* and others. How Eagle-Lion could afford him after he'd won his Oscar is anyone's guess, but they could and they did and Friedhofer provided the film with a lusty, full-bodied, and wonderful score, very much in the Korngold mold, but unmistakably Friedhofer. Friedhofer would score many big-budget films subsequent to *Adventures Of Casanova*, but occasionally still did lower-budget stuff. He eventually ended up doing some television scoring, and went back to low-budget films towards the end of his career.

That career resulted in some of the best film scores ever written, with such Friedhofer classics as *Ace In The Hole*, *Hondo*, *Vera Cruz*, *Violent Saturday*, *Soldier Of Fortune*, *Seven Cities Of Gold*, *The Rains Of Ranchipur*, *The Harder They Fall*, *Boy On A Dolphin*, *An Affair To Remember*, *The Young Lions*, *The Barbarian and the Geisha*, *This Earth Is Mine*, *One-Eyed Jacks*, and many others, including his wonderful and macabre score to William Castle's *Homicidal*. Friedhofer passed away in 1981.

This is the world-premiere release of *Adventures of Casanova*. All that existed from this film were a set of acetates that Friedhofer had, a professionally made tape copy of which was given to me before he died. Our great mastering engineer, James Nelson, has done wonders in cleaning up the sound and the result is a classic Friedhofer score finally available for all to hear. Most of the acetates were in really good condition – only a couple of cues were in lesser condition, but we've done our best to make those sound as good as they can sound. We have put the cues in film order, which makes for the best listening experience.

— Bruce Kimmel