

DER KONGREß TANZT: REVISITED*

Horst Claus, Anne Jäckel, University of the West England, Bristol

“*Congress Dances* Revisited.” Why “revisited?” Our title requires an explanation!

This is not the first time we are looking at *Der Kongreß tanzt* (1931, Erik Charell) and its French and English versions *Le Congrès s’amuse* and *Congress Dances* (or rather *Old Vienna* as the film was re-titled, after its re-release in a revised version a few months after its UK-premiere). Approaching the subject from different angles, we previously presented our findings at the 1995 CineGraph-Conference in Hamburg¹ and, the following year, at “The Musicals’ Conference” at the University of Southampton,² focussing this time on the musical traditions in a European context, i.e. the relationship between film, operetta and the emerging American musical. On both occasions, we did not have access to the amount of material we have today, had not been able, for example, to consult the film’s original German and French shooting scripts.³ As new evidence and previously unknown documents emerge and new technologies develop, analysing and writing about film history is a constant process of revisits, re-examinations, and revisions. Taking a bottom-up approach to film-Europe of the early sound period, this presentation constitutes a critical reassessment of our earlier findings – one that is by no means fixed, definite, or final. We would indeed very much welcome critical comments and challenges as we try to reassess the significance of one of the most successful German musical films in the context of efforts by its production company Ufa to maintain and extend its position as a leading player in the global film business at a time when the introduction of sound would appear to drastically limit such aspirations.

Aspects of Ufa’s Production Policy, 1930-31

Since Ufa’s take-over in spring 1927 by Alfred Hugenberg, Germany’s most powerful, ultra conservative newspaper tycoon, rigorous streamlining and money-saving measures were introduced by the Head of the Hugenberg-Group’s Scherl Publishing House Ludwig Klitzsch who later became Ufa’s General Manager. Under his leadership the company severed its links with expensive, individualistic directors (such as Fritz Lang and Joe May) and established financially strictly controlled production units for a small number of prestige films (e.g. under Erich Pommer) and inexpensive *Mittelfilm*-productions (e.g. under Bruno Duday) with individual film budgets of up to 750.000 Reichsmark (RM), respect 200.000 RM. The new regime insisted on strict adherence to long-term production plans that were discussed and tightly controlled by the company’s Board of Directors at their regular meetings twice a week. In early December, 1929,

they allocated a budget of 5.100.000 RM for 15 feature films to be made during 1930/31 (the season for which *Der Kongreß tanzt* had originally been planned). Three of these were to be produced by Pommer in a German and an English version, one costing 500.000 RM, two 750.000 RM each. If made at all, other language versions were to be financed by third parties interested in the films' distribution.⁴

In a further attempt to improve the company's financial situation, Alexander Grau, the Head of Ufa's Cinema Circuit, suggested at the end of January, 1930 to boost the income of Hamburg's Ufa-Palast during the (notoriously slack) summer months by importing successful life theatre productions of plays and operettas from Berlin. Assuming daily operating costs of between four and eight thousand pounds he estimated potential profits to be as high as 15.000 RM a day if performances were sold out – excluding income from films shown during the afternoon.⁵ Shortly afterwards the Theatre Department signed a contract with the ensemble of the former dancer turned choreographer and director Eric Charell,⁶ whose spectacular revue- and operetta-productions had been the talk of Berlin since 1924 when he first began to lease the Großes Schauspielhaus (rescuing Max Reinhardt's theatrical folly from financial disaster).

Though aiming to produce films as economically as possible, Ufa remained the only serious challenge to Hollywood's hegemony on the World Market – and the company was determined not to surrender its position as a leading player. Unable to place its products through links with "partners" in the USA, it began to establish or sign agreements with cinemas in areas with large communities of German descent (e.g. in New York). Of the fifteen films planned for 1930/31, the five big budget films were earmarked for English and German versions, while the remaining ten – all with a budget-allocation of 200.000 RM – were first and foremost destined for distribution at home. Ufa's decision to concentrate on English language versions was clearly prompted by the desire to break into the American market. Thus, shortly after the opening night of *The Blue Angel* (1930, Joseph von Sternberg) the Board of Directors agreed to wait for American reactions and proposals for possible changes before going ahead with further work on its English version (which some considered unsatisfactory at the time).⁷

The main reason for the Board's initial lack of interest in making foreign language versions for France may be traced back to the ideological position of its members. They all were World War I veterans; all, except one, had been officers; all of them adhered more or less strongly to Hugenberg's *deutsch-nationale* (German nationalist) political convictions. They pursued a policy of producing at least one *nationaler Film* a year, i.e. one film with strong national tendencies (which in their understanding should not just appeal to German nationalists but to nationalists of any country). Thus, in summer 1930, they agreed to finance a "first class" film about the liberation of the Rhineland to the tune of 120.000 RM. Six months later, they cancelled a contract to show Fritz Kortner's production of *Danton* (1931, Hans Behrendt) in their cinemas for "reasons of political concern."⁸ Regarding the French as *Erbfeinde* ("hereditary enemies") they also were strictly anti-French. They refused to sign up Abel Gance as potential director on grounds of his nationality, were furious when learning that – without their knowledge – *Sous les toits de Paris* (1930, René Clair) had been shown in its original French in one of their cinemas,¹⁰ and insisted when screening the French version of their own *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* (1930, Wilhelm Thiele) in Berlin's Gloria-Palast that it be made clear beforehand that this was done only for reasons of demonstrating their company's ability to produce foreign language versions.¹¹

However, business came before ideology, once they remembered that France constituted their most important export market and noticed that – because of the vast range of different Spanish dialects – French versions were more successful in Spanish-speaking countries than those addressing audiences in a rarely spoken “national” tongue used in theatre productions (which in many regions caused spectators to burst out in laughter). As early as May, 1930, Ufa’s production plans indicate a shift away from English when the Head of its *Auslandsabteilung* (foreign department) Berthold von Theobald manages to obtain advantageous credit conditions in France for the production of French versions.¹² From then on, Ufa aims to have all its French versions entirely financed with French money. Interest in English versions declines further as the management realises that their French counterparts guarantee safer and better returns than those aimed at English speaking countries already dominated by Hollywood.

The switch of emphasis from English to French versions does not come overnight. Amongst others, this is reflected by the internal debates about signing up French actor Henry Garat. In appearance and popularity, he is “the French equivalent” to Willy Fritsch, one of Ufa’s most popular stars. Having established links with French sources for the finance of French versions, the Board members consider giving him a one-year contract for 6.000 RM a month, but, at the beginning of September, postpone the decision until a clearer picture emerges of how many French versions they will actually produce.¹³ On the very last day of the year, members decide that the number of films involving Fritsch justifies negotiations with Garat on the basis of 80.000 RM for four films.¹⁴ By comparison: Fritsch’s income, which has been steadily rising during this time, is about to reach 192.000 RM.¹⁵ Aware of his value for Ufa’s French business interests, Garat insists – and in the end gets – 100.000 RM as Paramount is also interested in him.¹⁶ The same meeting that authorised signing up the French actor also established that English versions of big budget films such as *Der Kongreß tanzt* can only be made if “certainty can be established that sufficient income can be generated on the English [i.e. the UK!] market.”¹⁷ In other words, Ufa’s prospects for profitable returns from the US are rated so slim, that – in order to justify investing into English versions – it has to rely on income from (European!) Britain. A year later almost to the day, its Head of Distribution Wilhelm Meydam presents the Board with a soul-searching written analysis of the company’s involvement and prospects in the US-market. Asking “Is Ufa able and should it continue to produce English versions, in order to make money in America?” he himself replies: “No, it is too great a risk.” Given the lack of interest in Ufa’s films on the other side of the Atlantic, he even questions if it is worth the effort and investment to launch already existing English versions of *Bomben auf Monte Carlo* (1931, Hanns Schwarz) and *Der Kongreß tanzt* in the States.¹⁸ As a consequence, 1932 sees the production of only four English (in contrast to more than a dozen French) versions before Ufa abandons them altogether in early 1933 – a decision that also relieves the Board of the vexed question of whether the language spoken in these films should be European or American English.

The Film’s Production History

The Board of Directors’ choice of subject matter, genre and creative personnel for

Der Kongreß tanzt was first and foremost guided by financial considerations. In Germany during the late 1920s and early 1930s, “Wien-Filme” (i.e. films set in Vienna, celebrating young, occasionally bitter-sweet love affairs, the city’s melancholy charm and relaxed atmosphere, its wine, and above all its music – usually in form of the waltz) were “flavour of the month.” *In Wien hab’ ich einmal ein Mädel geliebt* (1930, Erich Schönfelder), *Die lustigen Weiber von Wien* (1931, Géza von Bolvary) and *Walzerparadies* (1931, Friedrich Zelnik) are just three examples of the genre, that opened in April, 1931 in Berlin. Though the management took a considerable risk when it agreed to entrust the project to Eric Charell, a newcomer who never before had directed a film, it also banked on the former dancer-turned-choreographer-director’s reputation as Berlin’s undisputed king of spectacular revues and operettas and the “talk of the town.” Frequently sneered at by intellectuals for his colourful but superficial extravaganzas, as leaseholder of the Großes Schauspielhaus since 1924, Charell had turned Max Reinhardt’s loss-making theatrical folly into a goldmine, which subsidised the great director’s theatre ventures. In terms of financial (if not critical) success, his activities matched those of Erich Pommer in the world of film production. Indeed, in May, 1930, the trade press speculated about the two men forming a production company of their own.¹⁹

Charell’s inexperience in the world of filmmaking must have been one of the main reasons for the Board’s long drawn-out debates about the pros and cons of realising *Der Kongreß tanzt*. The idea for the film originated (probably some time in 1929) with Norbert Falk, an established specialist for spectacles set in an historical or oriental environment who, amongst others, had once worked on *Anne Boleyn* (1920, Ernst Lubitsch), *Madame Dubarry* (1919, Ernst Lubitsch) and more recently on *Casanova* (1927, Alexandre Volkoff) and *Secrets of the Orient* (1928, Alexandre Volkoff). In early January, 1930 the management authorises Pommer’s production unit to start script development.²⁰

At the end of February, it agrees to purchase Falk’s ideas for a sum of 20.000 RM on condition that he collaborates with Ufa’s chief *Dramaturg* (literary advisor) Robert Liebmann (with more than eighty film scripts to his credit an even more experienced veteran in the business than Falk) on the development of the treatment and the shooting script.²¹ By early May, it transpires that just the German version will cost at least 1.000.000 RM, and the Board decides to abandon the project. Three weeks later, further negotiations lead to Falk giving Ufa an option on the subject.²² Rumours surfacing at the time that star producer Erich Pommer plans to leave Ufa and join forces with Charell may point towards tensions that might have arisen over the realisation of the film. This impression is reinforced by (a) Charell’s decision to turn *Der Kongreß tanzt* into a revue for the stage, and (b) the Board’s refusal to release its popular star Willy Fritsch (who later will play the male lead in the film) for this production.²³ By early October, Charell has abandoned it as a stage show in favour of the operetta *Im weißen Rössl am Wolfgangsee*, while Ufa takes up the option of acquiring the rights under the conditions negotiated at the beginning of the year. In a complete u-turn of their previous decision not to make the film at all, board-members are now determined to turn it into *the* big film operetta of the 1931/32 season, and underline their intention by considering appointing a composer of the status of Franz Lehár for the music even if this means that they will have to increase the film’s budget by 40.000 RM.²⁴ In the end, they settle for Werner Richard Heymann who, with his music for *Ihre Hoheit befiehlt* (1931,

Hanns Schwarz) and *Die Drei von der Tankstelle* had just demonstrated his knack for creating popular hits.

Though many critics point towards the flimsiness behind the lavish production's outer appearance, opening night of *Im weißen Rössl* on November 8, 1930, in the Großes Schauspielhaus is an overwhelming success. Given that audiences are queuing up to see the show, Ufa is ready to appoint Eric Charell as director of *Der Kongreß tanzt* for the princely sum of 70.000 RM (provided he also supplies the film's costumes from the stores of his theatre).²⁵

At the end of February, 1931 (days before the Board will actually give the go-ahead!), the trade press announces the successful conclusion of the negotiations between Ufa and Charell. Not only will there be three language versions, but in view of the director's reputation for rich and exuberant decors, large sections of the film are also to be shot in colour (though these plans are subsequently abandoned, as film technology is not yet ready for such visual feasts). While there is never any question or discussion about the making of a French version, in mid-March (and in view of its earlier decision that an English version can only be made if this is financially viable, either through guarantees or advances by foreign distributors), the Board decides to go ahead with a version for the English-speaking market, though, for the time being, only within the constraints of the overall budget already approved.²⁶ In anticipation of a success similar to the one in Berlin, this guarded change of mind may have been influenced by the prospect of the impending opening, in early April, of the English production of *Im weißen Rössl* in the London Coliseum. To be certain to repeat Charell's theatre successes on screen, Ufa subsequently signs up Ernst Stern²⁷ whose designs are such an intricate part of Charell's spectacles that, in his review of *White Horse Inn*, the critic of *The Times* totally ignores the director and only refers to Stern's contributions.²⁸ Another member of Charell's team whom Ufa assigns to the film is the co-author (with Charell) of *Im weißen Rössl* Hans Müller.²⁹ Prominent actors and singers from the operetta's original cast who are signed up for the film are Paul Hörbiger (Heurigen-Singer) and Otto Wallburg (Bibikoff).

On May 21, 1931, Ufa's Head of Production Ernst Hugo Correll presents to the Board the film's set and costume designs, shooting script, and an estimated budget of 1.639.950 RM. Though members postpone their comments to the next meeting, they authorise Correll to proceed with set construction and casting for three language versions. Six days later, following discussion of the film's script, designs and casting of foreign language versions, as well as having listened to the music, the Board approves the budget and its allocation of 843.950 RM (German), 408.000 RM (French), and 388.000 (English) to each respective version.³⁰ Shooting starts in early June and runs through to mid-August. Though the final film adheres closely to the script, three changes are made during this time. The first – a spectacular dream sequence set in the Vienna *Hofreitschule* – was almost certainly cut for reasons of cost. The second (in which – following his afternoon-tea-visit to Christel – Uralsky requests never to be sent to her again as the Tsar's Double, because he has fallen in love with her) was probably eliminated because it imbued the slightly simple-minded Uralsky with a romantic touch and human emotions. The most significant alteration involves the ending. In the film, Alexander and Christel disappear from the final ball with an exuberant waltz and end up in a *Heurigen-Lokal* where Bibikoff separates them to take the Tsar back to Moscow. In a bitter-sweet final shot a devastated Christel is left

behind, while the *Heurigersänger* sings “This only happens once in life ... It will never happen again ... Let bygones be bygones.” In the script, Christel and Alexander are dancing when the news of Napoleon’s return reaches them. The Tsar leaves with Bibikoff and a happy Pepi accompanies them to the city borders. Meanwhile a desperate Christel is dragging herself home where she collapses on her bed crying. Suddenly Alexander enters, delighted Christel falls into his arms. Accompanied by the rousing fanfare that signals his entrances throughout the film Alexander exclaims: “Eine Nacht stehl ich der Weltgeschichte!” (“This one night world history has to do without me!”).³¹

Given the film’s subject and setting, Ufa uses *Der Kongreß tanzt* to raise the company’s profile in Austria and stages the world premiere in the Austrian capital in the former home of the Viennese operetta, the Johann Strauss-Theater, which had recently been converted to a cinema with the name of Neue Scala. Prior to the opening night of their most prestigious and expensive film of the season on September 29, Ufa’s money pinching directors argue for more than a week about giving approval to spending 10.000 RM for special arrangements to be made on the occasion – first asking for the sum to be halved, and subsequently suggesting the cancellation of a festive dinner arranged for promotional reasons for Austrian cinema owners. In a “flurry of generosity” they also authorise that invitations be given to two English and two French journalists.³² The Berlin opening night (with an advertising budget of 30.000 RM)³³ takes place on October 23 as a black tie affair in aid of the Berlin Press Association. Premieres in Paris and London follow respectively on October 30 and November 30. While the film is doing well in Germany (where it is the financially most successful film of the 1931/32 season) and France, sluggish business in Britain leads to a request for assistance to improve business. At the beginning of December, the Board agrees to support an advertising campaign to the tune of £ 300 per week, provided exhibitors raise rental payments to thirty-three and a third percent on income exceeding £ 3000.³⁴ This apparently did not improve attendance figure, for the film is subsequently withdrawn from circulation to be re-released in April, 1932 in a re-edited version as *Old Vienna*.

What Are We Looking At?

The German versions of *Der Kongreß tanzt* as seen in Vienna and (following minor revisions) initially in Berlin, must be considered lost, for Ufa submitted the film three times to the censor – the last time eight days after the first screening in the German capital. According to censorship records, the three dates of submission are:³⁵

- September 28, 1931; card nr. B.29993; submitted length: 2773 m, after cuts: 2764 m. Adults only.
Presumably relating to the print shown the following evening at the gala premiere in Vienna
- October 9, 1931; card nr. B.30102; submitted length: 2770 m, after cuts: 2768 m. Adults only.

Presumably relating to the print shown at the Berlin premiere

- October 31, 1931; card nr. B. 30283, submitted length: 2770 m., after cuts: 2754 m.
Open to all.

Presumably relating to the version as it survives today

Of these, only the last censorship card (number: B 30283) seems to have survived in form of an apparently unaltered reissue, dated November 7, 1935.³⁶ In the context of our analytical comparison of the three language versions it served as point of reference to establish the relationship between the film as shown in 1931 and two different German prints in circulation today: one that served as basis for a commercial video issued under the “Ufa Video”-label (running time: 81’15”), and one that was broadcast by stations of the ARD television network in 1995 (running time: 93’52”, in this case, shown on March 16 by NDR). Shorter by approximately 13 minutes and containing no material not found in the “ARD-version,” the different style of its credit sequence



Fig. 1a. Original German title 1931



Fig. 1b. German title 1951

revealed the “Ufa-Video” as a cut-down version of *Der Kongress tanzt* edited during the 1950s which, if shown at a speed of 24 frames per second, would have run for just under 85 minutes. In all probability, the two videos are based on two versions passed by the “Voluntary Censorship Board of the German Film Industry” (FSK) on August 7, 1951 (nr. 03069, length: 2315 m) and on February 10, 1994 (nr. 03069, as video, duration: 94 minutes) [Fig. 1a-1b].

Comparing the “ARD-version” with the information of the censorship card and the dialogues of the German shooting script we reached the conclusion that the print used for this transmission comes close to that seen by the censor on October 31, 1931. This was confirmed by the fact that, except for a longer sequence showing Napoleon’s return from Elba in the French print, the videos of the French and English versions did not contain any visual materials not found in this version. Using the information available to us, the following list gives an idea of the approximate length of the prints that served as basis for our work, figures in brackets () are deductions based on the length of the individual recordings:

	Length (submitted)	Length (after cuts)	Running at 24 fr./sec	Running at 25 fr./sec
Card B. 30283 (dated October 31, 1931)	2770 m ³⁷	2754 m	101'00"	~97'07"
<i>Der Kongreß tanzt</i> "ARD-version" (Murnau-Stiftung) (FSK: February 10, 1994)		(~ 2700 m)	(~98'41")	93'52"
"Ufa-video" (FSK: August, 1951)		(~ 2315 m)	(~84'30")	81'15"
<i>Le Congrès s'amuse</i> (Official length unknown) Commercial video		(~ 2435 m)	(85'30")	~80'00"
<i>Congress Dances</i> ³⁸ Official length: 8288 ft. =		~ 2562 m	~94'10"	~92'20"
<i>Old Vienna</i> Video (source unknown)		(~2100 m)	(~77'00")	74'00"

To ascertain what might have been eliminated from the 1931-version, we also consulted (besides the French and German shooting scripts) Ufa publicity material and film programmes from 1931, production reports in the trade press, reviews, biographies and autobiographies related to people involved in the production. A detailed description of Napoleon's landing in a review by Herbert Ihering in the *Börsen-Courier*, dated October 24, 1931,³⁹ reveals that the full length of this shot as it survives in the French version was actually shown at the Berlin Premiere on October 23, 1931. Its description in the censorship card⁴⁰ (dated October 31, 1931) corresponds to the shorter (by 30 seconds) as contained in the two German versions listed above. Lyrics published in the original Viennese and Berlin film programmes (which frequently had permission to reprint these texts to promote a film's music) indicate that, besides the film's evergreens "Das gibt's nur einmal" and "Das muss ein Stück vom Himmel sein," there once was a third song, "Schön ist das Leben," the elimination of which might account for the remaining two and a half minutes by which the "ARD Version" is shorter than the one related to the surviving censorship card.

Comparison and Analysis

"Except for a number of scenes, and bits and pieces missing due to the ravages of time, there hardly seem to be any differences between the three language versions!" This was our initial reaction after viewing the videos for the first time. Following transcription of the dialogues, the French text appeared a verbatim translation of the original German (a conclusion confirmed later by a comparison with the two shooting scripts). Listening to the *Old Vienna* -dialogues, this observation also applied to the English script. Though there were clearly differences in the interpretation of some of the char-

acters, especially Metternich (Conrad Veidt, Pierre Magnier) and the *Heurigersänger* (Paul Hörbiger, Tarquini d'Or), plot and main characters appeared to be the same – an impression reinforced by Lilian Harvey (Christel) and Lil Dagover (Young Countess) playing the same parts in all three versions, and the similarities in physical appearance and performance between Willy Fritsch and Henry Garat as Tsar Alexander and his double Uralsky. In addition, a few minor roles (such as an officer flirting with Christel in her shop, or servants serving tea during the “tête-à-tête” between Christel and Uralsky) are also seen throughout in the same roles. To a considerable degree, this feeling of “sameness” is the result of the professionalism of the creative and technical personnel behind the scene. Especially cameraman Carl Hoffman, costume designer Ernst Stern, as well as set designers Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig count among the best in their respective professions. With rare exceptions that are hardly noticeable, shots, camera movements, positions and angles are identical. This holds true even in those instances where the shooting script suggests a multi-camera set-up. Staging is so precise, that the same shots seemed to have been used in all sequences without dialogues, few or no close-ups, and, above all, in crowd scenes where individual characters cannot be identified. Especially the music with its unifying powers seemed to be the same across the three versions.

Under these circumstances it came as a considerable surprise, when a close scene-by-scene, shot-by-shot examination revealed that not a single shot has been used twice across all three versions, that big musical sequences like the Russian ballet and the festive crowd dancing in the ball room (interrupted by Napoleon's return from Elba) are not only made up of different shots, but (though based on the same melodies) have also been choreographed to different musical arrangements. As a consequence, we stated in our previous analyses that *Der Kongreß tanzt* represents indeed an attempt to create an “international film” which deliberately avoids national characteristics and idiosyncrasies in order to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Having had yet another, even closer look at the material, we have to qualify our previous conclusions – and, at some point in the future, may possibly have to do so again, should we have an opportunity to examine the three versions in their original 35mm format on a Steenbeck, preferably one which allows a frame-by-frame comparison of two prints.

Practical Considerations and Contractual Obligations

Despite their initial hesitations in going ahead with production for reasons of cost, the politically and financially conservative members of Ufa's Board of Directors must have perceived the Vienna Congress as an ideal background for a musical film for the international market. Its historical context – the attempt by the participants in the historical Congress to suppress liberal tendencies and return to the pre-revolutionary order of a Europe dominated by monarchies – certainly conformed to their *deutsch-nationale* beliefs, which hoped for a return of the Kaiser. More importantly though, the international gathering of Kings, Princes, Ministers of State and their female companions in lavish dresses and costumes offered an opportunity to introduce an assembly of characters from various European Nations in visually impressive surroundings. It also justified the (in the end, barely noticeable) accents of those who, in the foreign versions, had to speak a language that was not their own.

While the spectacle clearly appealed to audiences on the Continent, it flopped in Britain (and apparently in the States as well). Ufa minutes indicate that this might have been partly due to distribution problems on the British Isles (where it was handled by Gaumont) and conflicting contracts preventing worldwide marketing in English speaking countries by one distributor (Paramount).⁴¹ The rather crudely styled, longwinded “Foreword” which precedes *Old Vienna*, however, suggests that, as a historical, socio-political, or cultural event, the Congress of Vienna meant very little to English or American audiences:

In 1815, after the fall of Napoleon, there remained the difficult task of reorganising the world. The hopes of the victorious powers and personal aims of the ambitious represented a confusing medley of conflicting interests.

To find a solution, Kings, Princes and Ambassadors gathered in Vienna. For five months the city became a moving panorama of gaiety and splendour.

This eventful time of magnificence is the background against which is woven the delightful musical romance which we now have the honor to present.

The spelling of ‘honour’ suggests that this information may have been specifically aimed at North American audiences not familiar with the history and politics of early 19th Century Europe. The text was almost certainly written by Carl Winston, who – together with his brother Sam, Josef von Sternberg’s regular editor – had come from the States to Berlin in August, 1929 where he became one of Erich Pommer’s trusted assistants and Ufa’s supervisor of English language versions.⁴² In contrast to Jean Boyer who took responsibility for *Le Congrès s’amuse*, but in the film is only credited as author of the French dialogue and lyrics, Winston is given prominence as “Supervisor” of *Old Vienna*. While such differences are mainly the result of each individual’s contract with Ufa, the placing of stars within the credit sequence reflects audience recognition and their popularity in the countries where these versions were shown. In Germany top credit is given (in that order!) to Lilian Harvey, followed by Willy Fritsch and Conrad Veidt, in France it is Lilian Harvey and Henry Garat, and in Britain it is Conrad Veidt and Lilian Harvey. As director, Charell (who, according to several sources, did not have a clue about film direction, was frequently absent, and left much of the work to cameraman Carl Hoffmann) is given far less prominence in the French than in the other two versions – possibly because he had a name in Berlin, and his English production of *White Horse Inn* was about to open at the time *Congress Dances* resurfaced as *Old Vienna* in London.

Political, Ideological and National Sensitivities

The suggestion that the subject of the Congress of Vienna may have appealed to Ufa’s Board of Directors for ideological reasons is, of course, speculation. However, it can hardly be accidental that, immediately after studio work on *Der Kongreß tanzt* had finished – quasi as counterpart to this light-hearted approach to European politics of the Napoleonic Era – Ufa started production on *York* (1931, Gustav Ucicky) a serious historical film with a nationalist perspective on events leading up to the 1812 “Treaty of Tauroggen.” The latter resulted in an alliance between Prussia and Tsar Alexander’s

Russia against Napoleon and France – a nationalist subject close to the hearts of a management who in its minutes expressed strong anti-French convictions on several occasions. The only film produced by Ufa's Head of Production Ernst-Hugo Correll, *York* was directed by Gustav Ucicky (who subsequently was responsible for *deutsch-nationale* films like *Morgenrot*) with a script by Robert Liebmann and Hans Müller, who had previously worked on *Der Kongreß tanzt*.⁴³ Werner Krauß, who at one point had been announced for a guest appearance as Napoleon in the film operetta, played the title role. The film – which unfortunately is considered lost – received its gala premiere on December 23, 1931 in Berlin's prestigious Ufa-Palast am Zoo (i.e. shortly after *Der Kongreß tanzt* had finished its run). It is in the context of *York* that the cut made to an already brief appearance of Napoleon must be perceived as having been made for ideological reasons – especially as it had already been shown in its full length at two widely celebrated premieres. In both German versions, the shot opens with the bright fireball of the sun in front of which a silhouette of Napoleon standing on the deck of a sailing boat slowly moves into frame from left to right with a musical accompaniment of the opening of the *Marseillaise*. Having passed the sun, the image fades into sea waves. In the French version it continues for the full length of one strophe of the anthem: A sailor ties the boat to the shore, Napoleon leaves the ship as a Tricolore is waved in the background, while two officers come up and, kneeling down, greet him. The Emperor drops his coat, mounts a horse and rides off into the distance. The idea of having to listen (especially in their own cinemas) to the rousing tune of the French national anthem while watching a French soldier waving a clearly discernible French flag was apparently considered too much for German national feelings, so, following its Berlin opening, the shot was cut down from 40 to 12 seconds. In our video of *Old Vienna* it is missing altogether for reasons we were unable to identify. [Fig. 2a-b]

While the reduction of Napoleon's return to France may be regarded as a most obvious and blatant interference for ideological reasons, the handling of historic personalities suggests that authors and translators kept national sensitivities in mind when working on their scripts. Though figures such as Talleyrand and Wellington are minor characters (reduced almost to extras), references to them show interesting variations. In a sequence near the beginning of the film, Metternich secretly listens to conversations in the Diplomats' Chamber, as a speaker says: "Whenever there is an



Fig. 2a. In all versions



Napoleon's landing

Fig. 2b. Cut from German & English versions

important session, we are invited to a new party. Metternich wants to entertain us to keep us away from politics... He is a dangerous man!” In the French version, it is Talleyrand who makes this sharp analysis of the politician’s motives for organising festivities. In the English version, it is an Englishman. A similar example can be found in a scene in which servants in their quarter talk about Wellington. Only the English version contains the line “Wellington is a good soldier.” As this line does not appear in the German and French shooting scripts it must have been added in the course of production. *Old Vienna* also contains what might be regarded as a slight snipe against Napoleon. His name is first mentioned when Metternich is listening to the conversation in the Diplomats’ Chamber: With reference to Napoleon, an Englishman is heard saying diplomats are “better informed in London.” The French and German dialogues follow on with the statement: “Napoleon is in Elba, but he dreams of returning to Paris.” (“Il rêve de rentrer à Paris” - “Er träumt zurück zu gehen nach Paris”) By contrast, in the English version, the English speaker continues: “He is scheming to return to Paris ...”

On the other hand, *Der Kongreß tanzt* also operates with national stereotypes of which the scene in the servants’ quarter offers a further example when the men gossip about Metternich’s affairs with women. One of them tells: “That poor old Metternich pounced on her like an ox. ... And just when he thought he’d won her, what do you think she did? – She sang him the latest most popular song: ‘Why should I worry with Metternich, pray?! My cousin can kiss in a far better way!’” whereupon the rest break into loud laughter. In *Old Vienna*, the servants are shown as a relaxed, motley crowd lounging around a table, while in the German version, they are well groomed in their spotless uniforms; lined up on a bench against a wall they seem to laugh to order and doing so maintain a disciplined, upright body postures as if reacting to commands by an officer on a military exercise field. [Fig. 3a-b]



Fig. 3a. English version



Fig. 3b. German version

Servants gossiping and laughing

Though it certainly was part of the original French version, this scene is missing from the commercial video – not because of the ravages of time, but because a self-appointed moral guardian considered even the slightest reference to the love life of any of the film’s characters offensive.

Censorship, Moral Guardians and Personal Prejudices

At the time of its premieres in Vienna and Berlin, *Der Kongreß tanzt* was banned for exhibition to young people. The short intervals between the film's three submissions to the censor, together with the cuts eventually made, indicate Ufa's determination to get the film released for exhibition not just to adults, but to young people as well. All contentious scenes apparently involved Lilian Harvey in various stages of (from the perspective of 1931) undress. This is indicated by the cuts ordered by the censor before the film was finally given a "clean bill of health" allowing it to be shown to young people. The first two affect the sequence in the glove maker's shop: the image of the young foreign officer looking up Christel's dress as she climbs up a ladder as well as a shot of – in the words of the censor – "the salesgirl opening her legs widely" as she sits on top of it had to go. A short time later, when Christel gets dressed in the morning in anticipation of the Tsar's arrival, a shot of her putting on stockings while in her underwear was considered unsuitable for youngsters, but slipping into two other garments was not. Finally, the lifting of her petticoats was cut after she has been tied to a bench in order to be whipped. From the French video even the shots leading up to these "offensive bits" have disappeared. The foreign officer is allowed to address Christel with pleasant words, but when Pepi enters the shop (and in the German version admonishes the officer for having looked up in the direction of her position on the ladder) his character is simply dropped from the film. The next sequence opens with Christel already dressed, and the preparations for the whipping have been cut altogether, including the young man who is looking forward to the job of having to carry out the punishment.

Already familiar with *Der Kongreß tanzt*, we were convinced after seeing *Le Congrès s'amuse* for the first time that the French version was "sexier" than the German, but after closer examination of the new material had to admit that we had fallen victims to our own preconceived ideas. Automatically assuming that a "French" film is more erotic than a German, and were convinced we had seen shots and scenes that in reality were contained only in the German, but not in the French video. Of course, we realised there were gaps, but we did not associate these with the "sexy bits." Only when we began a detailed analysis did we become aware that far from being more sexually charged, all materials hinting even slightly at sexual aspects had been carefully removed from *Le Congrès s'amuse*, including a totally innocent, singing couple who lie under a bush in the grass while a jubilant Christel (in the film's most famous sequence) passes in the background singing "Das gibt's nur einmal..." [Figg. 4-9]

Numerous splices confirm that these cuts had not been made at the instigation of an official censor. The print used for the production of the French commercial video had at one time fallen into the hands of a local moral guardian who (like the priest in Giuseppe Tornatore's Oscar-winning *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*) was set on protecting his fellow citizens from the corrupting images of intimate approaches and relations between human beings of different sexes.

Our initial prejudice that a French version was more sexually charged than its German or English counterparts is not the only example of the danger of prejudices clouding our interpretation of the different versions. Looking at visual references and variations in our first study of the film, we noted the example of an unusually large shadow of a hat on the wall as Bibikoff gives Uralsky his instructions of how to behave when impersonating Alexander during the afternoon tea he is about to have with

Christel and then with the Young Countess. We suggested that the shadow of Napoleon's hat in *Le Congrès s'amuse* had been replaced by that of a Prussian helmet in *Der Kongreß tanzt*. After consulting the script and seeing a qualitatively superior video, we've realised that this is not the case, that the shadow seen in both versions is simply just that – the shadow of the hat worn by Uralsky, the form of which changes slightly as he moves while responding to Bibikoff's orders. What we had seen was yet another

Cut by a French moral guardian:



Fig. 4. Christel on ladder



Fig. 5. An officer looking up her skirt



Fig. 6. Getting dressed



Fig. 7. About to be whipped



Fig. 8. A pile of fighting sales girls



Fig. 9. A couple relaxing in the grass

figment of our (respective *French* and *German*) imagination. Researchers, like any other spectator, also carry a cultural baggage that is not free from national expectations and/or prejudices. Our mistake is a clear example of the extent to which a person's cultural background can colour the reading of film.

Actors and Their Contributions

In an interview he gave to a reporter of the German trade paper *Film-Kurier* when studio work on *Der Kongreß tanzt* was about to come to an end in August, 1931, Eric Charell insisted that the fundamental differences between the German, French, and English versions are to be found in the film's atmosphere and acting.⁴⁵ To create an atmosphere that would appeal to national tastes and expectations, Pommer and Charell deliberately chose actors who in their estimation would be popular with the audiences the different versions aimed to capture. Dressed in a light costume, the popular Austrian actor Paul Hörbiger with his warm, gentle voice, kind face and friendly gestures conveys an atmosphere of good humouredness and sympathy in the German version (and subsequently became the epitome of the Viennese *Heurigensänger*). Tarquini d'Or, by contrast, though he moves in the same way as Hörbiger and uses similar gestures, is more serious, and in his dark outfit refers in the French and English versions to the tradition of the French *chansonnier*. As for the role of Metternich, French actor Pierre Magnier⁴⁶ in *Le Congrès s'amuse* brings to the part of the older statesman the laidback performance of a professional sure of his charm with persons of the opposite sex. A *connoisseur* in every sense of the word, his confident simplicity combined with his obvious pleasure for indulging in the good things in life – he is blissfully enjoying a late breakfast in bed – stands in sharp contrast with Conrad Veidt's far younger, more cynical Metternich in the German and English versions. [Figg. 10a-b]

However, it is in the character of the Tsar's adjutant Bibikoff that the most pronounced differences occur, in the physical appearance of the actors as well as in their interpretation of the role. Otto Wallburg's Bibikoff in the German version is all fun and smiles. An Oliver Hardy-like figure, he draws on his considerable size for comical



Fig. 10a. Pierre Magnier



Fig. 10b. Conrad Veidt

Metternich enjoys breakfast in bed



Bibikoff worried and watching over Uralsky's "tête-à-tête" with Christel

Fig. 11a. Otto Wallburg



Fig. 11b. Armand Bernard



Fig. 12a. Otto Wallburg



Fig. 12b. Armand Bernard

Peeping Tom

effects. Always surrounded by an air of conviviality, he is far more sympathetic towards Christel as she waits for the Tsar, than his French and British counterparts. As an individual, he is much closer to the Tsar than they are – a closeness verging on familiarity. In their outer appearance the French and English Bibikoffs, Armand Bernard and Gibb McLaughlin are the opposite of Wallburg. Their elongated silhouettes and peculiar diction give them a distinction not found in the German actor's performance.

It is open to debate whether the scene showing Bibikoff peeping through the keyhole plays on national stereotypes (i.e. the fat German versus the tall and thin British character) or not. [Fig. 11a-b. 12a-b] However, there is ample evidence that careful consideration on the part of both, the production team and the performing actors was given to both the representation of national characteristics and the specificity of each language. Indeed, the way the actors make use of the specificity of each language to obtain the best effect possible is at times remarkable. For example, the humorous declination of the present tense of the verb *être* in the French exchange between Metternich and Bibikoff (as the latter presents the Austrian politician with an order of merit) is extremely effective when Armand Bernard emphatically repeats Metternich's sour (he does not welcome the gesture) expression of gratitude "Je suis charmé" in the form of

“Excellence, vous êtes charmé, je suis charmé, nous sommes charmés, tout le monde est charmé.” The comical repetitive effect is rendered differently in English, as the same linguistic device cannot be used. Making the most of his peculiar, upper-class mannerisms, Scottish actor Gibb McLaughlin repeats: “Your Excellency is delighted, His Majesty will be delighted. In fact, everyone will be delighted.” Repetitions, but with minute variations in order to obtain the maximum effect in each language, are often used in the film to provoke laughter and such attention to small details is extremely effective.

At this point, it might be worth noting that particularly in productions of the scale of *Der Kongreß tanzt* not every actor is able to contribute what he would consider his best, but that circumstances and pressures beyond his control can seriously affect a performance. In his memoirs, Carl-Heinz Schroth, who plays Pepi in the German version (and is clearly the weakest of three weak performers in a not particularly rewarding role), reports how, as a newcomer to film, he had been hired for very little money on the basis of tests for a different picture. Believing being cast was his big chance, and overawed by the assembly of stars, he did not dare put up any resistance to Eric Charell who – a novice himself in the medium – was not courageous enough to give instructions to his stars, but instead had decided to demonstrate his authority by directing inexperienced actors like Schroth in ways totally unsuited for the screen. His confidence was shattered even further when on one occasion he overheard producer Erich Pommer as he made inquiries about him, and with a look expressing utter disdain, said: “That man can’t be any good. He is much too cheap.” According to Schroth, the experience not only affected his performance, it also put an end to his film-aspirations for a very long time.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Time-consuming – yet thoroughly enjoyable – textual analysis has taught us that research into MLVs not only requires careful handling of the material under investigation but also extreme attention to detail. When analysing appearance and production conditions of films produced at the beginning of the sound film era, data has to be handled with great care when it comes to making generalisations and identifying trends as far as MLVs are concerned. We are talking about practices determined by their historical context, the cultural background and the economic climate of the time, and, perhaps most importantly, by the production background, which includes having to pay attention to individual/specific circumstances and the personalities of individual participants. However tempting (and useful) interpretations may be, they should – at best – be presented as mere suggestions. Arguably, the same goes for generalisations. The assumption that in multiple language versions “crowds and street scenes were generally presented in long shot and used for all versions”⁴⁸ has been widely accepted. Close analysis of one of the most popular films of the 1930s shows otherwise. The standardisation of lavishly expensive productions made to appeal to a wide audience should not be over-emphasised.

The market such productions were aimed at was certainly wide but it was not homogeneous. In our previous studies, we stated that the film’s cross-over appeal was rooted mainly in the genre, and that it was difficult to conclude that *Der Kongreß tanzt* was

particularly German, *Le Congrès s’amuse* particularly French or *Old Vienna* particularly British. During the work in Gradisca there has been much talk of over-determination. However, rather than being over-determined by national – and other – considerations, the different versions seemed not determined enough: A close textual analysis of the prints we have suggests that the film did not have enough determinants as far as national agencies were concerned. Whether intentional or not, differences and subtle adjustments are to be attributed to the various individuals involved in the production, interpretation and, as the cuts show, exhibition of the films. Ultimately, MLVs are determined – and have much to gain by being studied – as much from below as from above.

- * Special thanks are due to all those who on this or on the two previous occasions assisted us by providing materials without which we could not have undertaken this project: Hans-Michael Bock, Guy Borlée, Mathilde Gotthardt, Renate Göthe, Kevin Gough-Yates, Hannelore Grusser, Barbara Schütz, and Lydia Wiehring von Wendrin. We also extend our gratitude to the excellent team of the MAGIS Gradisca International Film Studies Spring School for their constant support throughout our stay in Gradisca d’Isonzo.
- 1 Published as “Ufa, Frankreich und Versionen,” in Sybille M. Sturm, Arthur Wohlgemuth (eds.), *Hallo? Berlin? Ici Paris! Deutsch-französische Filmbeziehungen 1918-1939* (München: text + kritik/CineGraph, 1996), pp. 141-154.
- 2 Published as “*Der Kongreß tanzt: Ufa’s Blockbuster Filmoperette for the World Market*,” in Bill Marshall, Robyn Stilwell (eds.), *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond* (Exeter-Portland: Intellect, 2000), pp. 89-97.
- 3 The German shooting script is in the Library of the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen “Konrad Wolf” in Potsdam-Babelsberg, the French shooting script in the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
- 4 Minutes of Ufa’s Board of Directors (December 12, 1929).
- 5 Ufa-minutes (January 27, 1930).
- 6 Ufa-minutes (March 1, 1930).
- 7 Ufa-minutes (April 9, 1930).
- 8 Ufa-minutes (January 23, 1931).
- 9 Ufa-minutes (January 4, 1929).
- 10 Ufa-minutes (October 2, 1930).
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Ufa-minutes (April 16, 1930) and (July 1, 1930).
- 13 Ufa-minutes (September 5, 1930).
- 14 Ufa-minutes (December 31, 1930).
- 15 Cf. Ufa-minutes (November 7, 1930), (November 25, 1930) and (January 27, 1931).
- 16 Ufa-minutes (January 20, 1931).
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Discussion paper attached to Ufa-minutes (January 22, 1932).
- 19 “Pommer verläßt Ufa,” *Lichtbild-Bühne* (May 19, 1930).
- 20 Ufa-minutes (January 6, 1930).
- 21 Ufa-minutes (February 26, 1930).
- 22 Ufa-minutes (May 23, 1930).
- 23 Ufa-minutes (July 1, 1930).

- 24 Ufa-minutes (October 7, 1930).
- 25 Ufa-minutes (January 13, 1931).
- 26 Ufa-minutes (March 13, 1931).
- 27 Ufa-minutes (April 24, 1931). Stern received 16.000 RM.
- 28 Review in *The Times* (April 9, 1931).
- 29 Müller's original contract with Ufa actually precedes the opening of *Im weißen Rössl* by more than a month.
- 30 Ufa-minutes (May 27, 1931).
- 31 Shooting script, p. 168, Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen "Konrad Wolf," Potsdam-Babelsberg.
- 32 Cf. Ufa-minutes (September 17, 1931), (September 22, 1931) and (September 25, 1931).
- 33 On October 21, 1931, the Board approves the following strategy plan for the launch and exploitation of the film:
Der Kongreß tanzt opens October 23 at Ufa-Palast am Zoo (2267 seats, Berlin's largest cinema) where it is to run as long as it makes money. From appr. November 21 onwards it will be moved for a one-week exclusive run to the Kammer-Lichtspiele. (Actual run in the Ufa-Palast: 34 days, until November 25). From appr. November 27 until December 3, in addition to its extended run in the Kammerspiele, it will be shown in 7 Ufa cinemas and 20 non-Ufa first-run cinemas. The following week it will continue in the Kammerspiele as well as in 2 Ufa-cinemas, 4 first-run cinemas and 11 non-Ufa secondary cinemas ("Zweitaufführungstheater"). Afterwards it moves into the non-Ufa secondary cinemas, unless its run has reached December 11, in which case the film will be withheld until December 24 so that all non-Ufa cinemas will be able to show it from December 25 onwards.
- 34 Ufa-minutes (December 4, 1931).
- 35 German censorship decisions: <http://www.deutsches-filminstitut.de/filme/fo01564.htm#zensur>. Information in the trade press of the time (and subsequently reprinted in other sources) that the film was open to young people from the start is incorrect. The first two versions submitted to the censor were classified as "adults only."
- 36 NS-legislation passed earlier that year required a reassessment of all older films in circulation. Two years later, the film is one of five on a list banned on October 1, 1937 on the grounds of being an affront to national socialist sensitivities and a threat to public order.
- 37 According to *Paimann's Filmlisten* (1931, p. 111) the print shown in Vienna was 2790 m. long.
- 38 A print of this – the original English – version has not been available to us for analysis. Held by the Library of Congress in form of a 16 mm print, we have only been able to see it once when it was shown at the 2004 Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna. It appeared to use the same materials as *Old Vienna*. The print was in a fairly good condition. Based on its running time, it is approximately 100 meters short of its original length.
- 39 Herbert Ihering, "Meereswogen, Napoleons Schiff und Gestalt als Schatten, Pferd, Fahne, gezückter Degen," *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (October 24, 1931).
- 40 "Das Meer. Man sieht im Nebel ein Schiff, auf dem die Silhouette Napoleons erkennbar ist." *Censorship Card B 30283*.
- 41 Cf. Ufa-minutes (December 4, 1931).
- 42 Biographical information from: Ursula Hardt, *From Caligari to California - Erich Pommer's Life in the International Film Wars* (Providence-Oxford: Berghahn, 1996), p. 122, p. 166.
- 43 Other members of the creative team who had also worked on *Der Kongreß tanzt* include cameraman Carl Hoffmann and set designers Robert Herlth and Walter Röhrig.
- 44 Censorship card B 30283.

- 45 Charlott Serda, "Zum ersten Mal Tonfilmregie," *Film-Kurier* (August 15, 1931).
- 46 Previously, he had already played the part of "the seducer" in *La Roue* (1922, Abel Gance) and in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1923, Augusto Genina).
- 47 Carl-Heinz Schroth, *Keine Angst vor schlechten Zeiten* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992), pp. 122-126.
- 48 Ginette Vincendeau, "Hollywood Babel," *Screen*, Vol. 39, no. 2 (Spring 1988), p. 35.