

The invisible man behind Caligari

The life of Robert Wiene

Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg

Although *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920) has remained a film classic and continues to be screened all over the world, little is known about its director, Robert Wiene. Ever new interpretations about this film appear in film journals and books but the director is treated as an invisible man. Recently, however, several of his films have been reconstructed, not only *Caligari* but also *Raskolnikov* (1923) and *Die Jagd nach dem Tode* for which Wiene wrote the script in 1920. Moreover, film archives have restored three more of his films: *Die Rache einer Frau* (1921), *Die Geliebte* (1926) and *Unfug der Liebe* (1928), all of which are now available for public screenings. Consequently, in European film circles at least, there is a new interest in Wiene and it is, therefore, high time that this director become more visible.

Robert Wiene's birthday usually has been cited in the film dictionaries and encyclopaedias as 16 November 1880, or 1881. His place of birth, if specified at all, is given as Dresden or Saxony. However, we have been able to learn from various registration forms that Wiene filed to establish residence in Vienna¹, that he must have been born earlier. In fact, he was born on 27 April 1873, in Breslau in what was then Prussian Silesia. Apparently he held Hungarian citizenship due to his family's place of origin, Neutra², a town at the Hungarian-Czech border that became Czech after World War I, thereby granting Wiene Czech citizenship at that time. Wiene's grandfather was a goldsmith in Vienna before he moved to Budapest³. Robert's father, Carl was born on 5 May 1848, in Neutra⁴.

As a child Carl came to Budapest with his parents. It was their wish that he be an engineer, but

his first encounter with a theatre performance inspired him to become an actor⁵. His highly successful acting career began in 1871 with regular engagements in Breslau, Hannover, Vienna (Burgtheater), Stuttgart and finally Dresden where he was appointed an actor in the Royal Saxony Court Theatre, a post which he held for 18 years until 1907. At that time his reputation was good enough to allow for starring performances in other large cities. In 1895 and 1896, for example, he appeared in Vienna while his son Robert was a student of law at the University of Vienna⁶.

Carl Wiene was considered one of the finest actors of his day both in respect of the wide range of classical and modern roles he could play and the unique quality he brought to each part. He was especially known and praised for his successful interpretations of roles from the contemporary theatre. His contributions to the theatre also consisted of translations of contemporary works in which he had a personal interest. Most notable among these is his translation of José Echegaray's *Wahnsinn oder Heiligkeit* from the Spanish. In the preface to the translation he indicates his interest in this play about a man who gradually succumbs to insanity, a role he himself interpreted on the stage⁷. In his last years Carl

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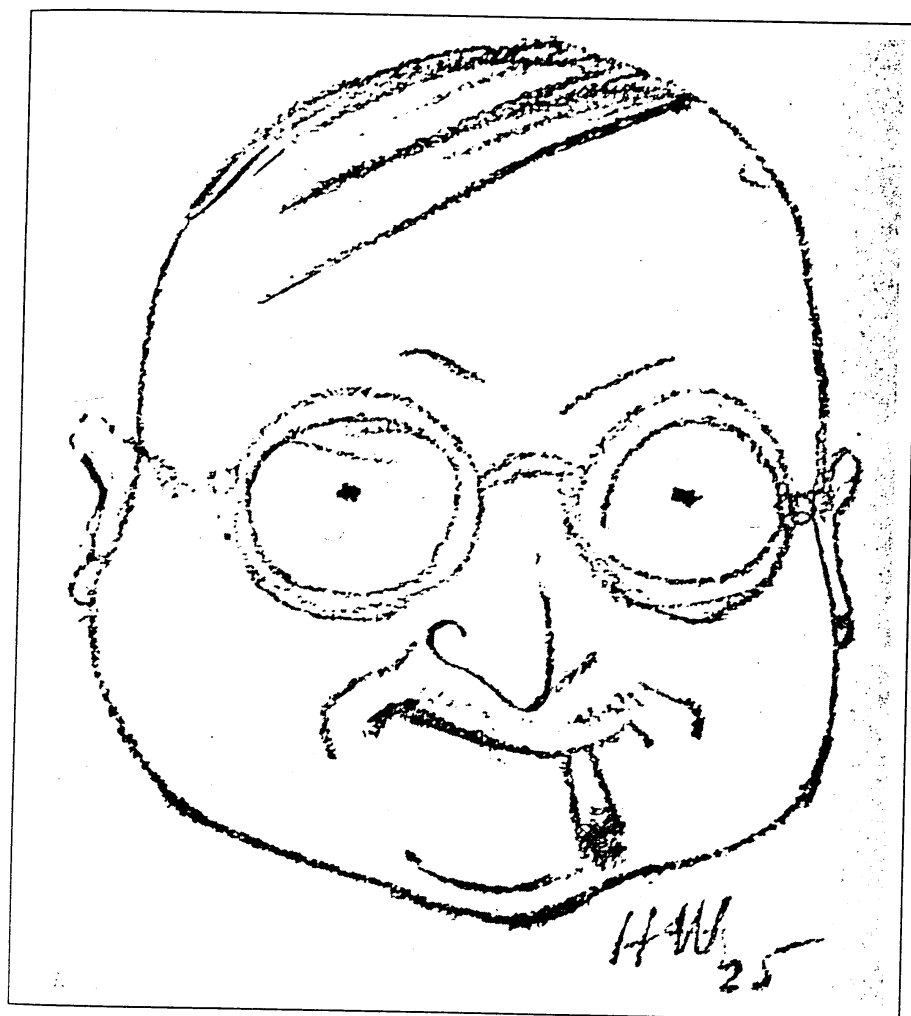


Fig. 1. Robert Wiene, caricatured by H.W. in *Mein Film* (Vienna), 1926, no. 15 [All illustrations from authors' collection].

himself suffered a nervous condition and loss of memory which forced him to retire in 1907⁸. He died in Berlin on 10 February 1913.

Little is known about Carl's private life except that he was married to a Pauline Loevy from Bratislava and had two sons, Robert and Conrad. The latter was born in Vienna on 3 February 1878. Following his father, Conrad began a fifteen year acting career in 1900 of which the last 10 were spent with the Schiller Theatre in Berlin. From 1915 on he was active in the film industry as a director and script writer in Berlin and Vienna. Throughout their film careers Robert and Conrad occasionally worked together, with Robert providing film scripts for his brother's films. Conrad was married to Lily Josephine Radamsky, born in Vienna on 26 June 1876. Hardly any other biographical information is available for him.

Law studies in Vienna (1894–96) and law practice in Weimar (1901–?)

No biographical data could be found about Wiene's early childhood and upbringing. According to his father's various employments with German theatres it is most likely that Robert attended elementary school in Stuttgart and high school in Dresden. Most probably he earned his diploma there. Whether he had to do military service is not known.

He must have taken up his university studies in the spring term of 1894 at the Humboldt University in Berlin, and it was apparently law that he had chosen to study. When he enrolled at the University of Vienna on 20 October 1894, Wiene indicated that this was his second semester and that he had taken a previous semester at the University of Berlin⁹.

His schedule for the subsequent three semesters of law studies at the University of Vienna are pretty

much mainstream. His registrations include intensive courses in history of law, civil law, and canon law. Besides this he registered for one class of cultural studies each term: one hour per week on German literature of the 19th century in the winter semester 1894/95 and two hours per week on the question of immortality in the summer semester 1895. In the winter semester 1895/96 he restricted himself to only four courses, all of them on the law.

However, in the summer semester 1896 we find indications of a crisis. Although he continued to be enrolled in law, Robert Wiene did not register for any law classes. He registered for only two courses in cultural studies amounting to no more than four hours per week altogether. He selected a course in 'Psychology and Aesthetics of the Works of Art of Richard Wagner' and a course in 'The Problem of Form in the New Fine Arts'. After this semester Robert Wiene left the University of Vienna. According to the university archives there is no hint where he might have gone¹⁰.

It is only in 1901 that Robert Wiene appears in the official city directory of Weimar where he is listed with the title 'cand. jur'. In 1902 and 1903 the records list him as 'Jurist' (attorney) which implies that he had completed his law studies and most likely had earned his doctorate¹¹. It has not been possible to confirm the date or place of Wiene's doctorate, nor do we know the theme of his doctoral dissertation.

Though he apparently practised law in Weimar at this time there are some indications he continued his cultural interests. In a letter to Engelbert Humperdinck dated 21 April 1903¹², Wiene requested permission to send the composer his recently completed libretto of a popular opera in three acts. Unfortunately we have no evidence that Humperdinck received the libretto and if so what his response was.

There is more evidence, however, that Wiene had strong ties to the theatre world while he was living in Weimar. There is a letter by his father to the dramatist Ernst Hardt, dated 21 November 1902, in

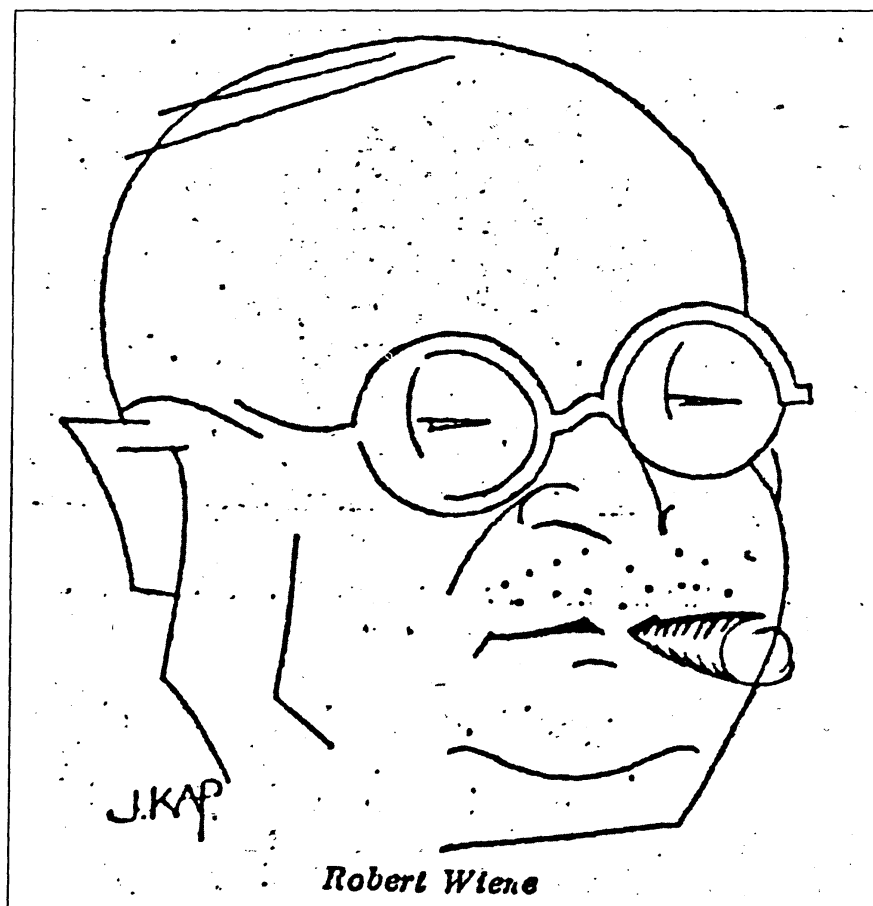


Fig. 2. Robert Wiene, caricatured by Jacques Kapralik in *Die Buehne* (Vienna), 12 August 1926.

which the father cites Robert's opinion about a play that Hardt had sent to the actor for his evaluation. Apparently, father and son had discussed the play in detail; it is moreover clear from the letter that Robert himself had been in contact with the playwright¹³. There is an even earlier letter from 1899 which Robert wrote on behalf of his father where it is evident that Carl considered him competent to deal with theatre-related matters¹⁴.

It is likely, therefore, that through his father's fame in the theatre world and his contact with writers, actors and agents Robert would have a continued association with that world. It is even reasonable to speculate that with his legal training and his father's contacts Robert may have functioned as an agent for theatre people.

The Neue Wiener Bühne (1908–09)

In the following years Wiene apparently chose Weimar as his home base working as a lawyer and at the same time maintaining his cultural interests. In 1908 we find him in Vienna again, and it was the theatre world that brought him back. According to the *Fremden-Blatt* 7 August 1908, Wiene had taken over the directorship of the Kleines Schauspielhaus at Johannessgasse 4. Soon thereafter the ensemble needed a new location and Wiene negotiated the rental of a theatre at Wasagasse 33, the former Danzers Orpheum which had been a vaudeville theatre. Furthermore, the new theatre was to be named Residenz-theater and was to develop a repertoire consisting of modern as well as classical plays.

Wiene obtained a 10 year lease for the theatre and managed the Neue Wiener Bühne (as the theatre was eventually named) together with Adolf Steinert, an experienced stage director from the Berlin Lessing Theatre. When the Neue Wiener Bühne opened on 31 October 1908, it was a major cultural event for Vienna. However, the partnership of Wiene and Steinert broke up soon: on 5 May 1909, Steinert announced that Robert Wiene had left the management of the theatre, but that the theatre nevertheless would carry on as usual. The tone and style of this letter are harsh and convey a bitterness which gives the reader the impression that the two partners did not part on good terms¹⁵.

As far as can be proven Robert Wiene's involvement with the Kleines Schauspielhaus and the Neue

Wiener Bühne were his only professional involvements with the theatre. There is no evidence that he ever acted nor that he was engaged as a dramatist by the Lessing Theatre in Berlin, as is claimed by numerous film encyclopaedias and handbooks. It is noteworthy that in contrast to his younger brother Conrad his involvement with the theatre was in a managerial and administrative role, for which his legal training apparently prepared him.

Transition from theatre to film (1909–1914)

We do not have sufficient data as to when or under what circumstances Wiene turned to the film industry. It is generally known that by 1913 theatre people were flocking to the film. Wiene's letter to Humperdinck and his plans for the Neue Wiener Bühne show a strong orientation toward popular culture and contemporary plays. The widespread interest in raising the artistic level of film at this very time may have also induced Robert Wiene to turn his focus to the new and developing medium.

Wiene's first contribution to film that we know of was as early as 1912 with his script for *Die Waffen der Jugend*, a two reeler which passed censorship in December 1912. Possibly, Wiene also directed the film¹⁶. By the time the Messter Film Company was expanding into the production of popular feature films, Wiene seems to have had a steady contract with the firm working on 30 Messter films either as script writer or director before he made *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* in 1919/20. His affiliation with Messter, though, must have provided him with the option of working for other companies at the same time. Consequently, Wiene wrote scripts and directed films for the Deutsche Bioskop in Berlin and Sascha Film in Vienna as well as for a few smaller companies. It was in this period between 1914 and 1919 that Wiene acquired a reputation as a skilful and versatile script writer. Especially his scripts for fourteen Henny Porten films must have made Wiene's name known within the German and Austrian film industry.

At this time Henny Porten was by far the most popular star on the German screen. Through his participation in so many of her films, Wiene's name became known to a wider movie going public. Porten's appreciation for her work with Wiene emerged when she explained her hesitation about shifting



Fig. 3. Caricature by Trier from *Die Lichtbild-Buehne*, 8 August 1919. The film *Um Das Lächeln Einer Frau* was an unrealized project.

to a new director, Ernst Lubitsch: '... because I was so used to working with Rudolf Biebrach and also because I had such a strong personal and artistic affinity with Robert Wiene with whom I made so many films'¹⁷.

Wiene's expertise as a script writer was apparently well known in the pre-*Caligari* period. For example, his friend Emil Lind had requested his evaluation of a film script by a certain Mr. Friedmann. On 15 September 1915, Wiene responds with a devastating critique of the script which allows us to perceive his strong commitment to the art of script writing. According to him, the basic requirements for a good script are fantasy, motivation of characters and dramatic impact on the audience¹⁸.

Another request for his expert opinion pertaining to a film script came from a certain director Meinhard¹⁹. From Wiene's letter of 10 May 1919, we gather that Meinhard had asked his advice about preparing a film version of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*. Wiene warns against the project as follows:

'As we agreed, I read through *Miss Julie* once again with great care and came to an unexpected conclusion. I am convinced ... that the play is not at all suitable for an adaptation to film. The most delicate and the most profound qualities of the play's content can not be salvaged for the film version. The adaptation would turn into a wooden, artless film without any literary or artistic merit. In good conscience I can advise you only to give up the idea'²⁰.

Although this letter does not reveal the precise obstacles which militate against a film adaptation, it becomes clear that Wiene advocates a high degree of artistic and literary value for a film. His attitude here should be understood within the framework of the debate over the respective merits of theatre and film which was raging at this time. Advocates of film, and Wiene by this time was one, contended that film should not merely be theatre for the masses but be seen as a unique medium whose artistic qualities

must be developed²¹. It is interesting to note that Wiene maintains this just a few months before he begins shooting *Caligari*.

A part of Wiene's pre-*Caligari* film career was spent in Vienna where he wrote two scripts and directed two films for Sascha Film in 1918/19. At that time Sascha Film was the dominant film company in Austria, having been founded by the famous film pioneer Count Alexander 'Sascha' Kolowrat. There are two possible reasons as to why Robert Wiene made films for Sascha at this time. On 4 April 1916, possibly because of the war, the Messter Film Company and Sascha Film established the Sascha-Messter Filmfabrik as a joint venture for the purpose of increasing the production of films for German language lands²². Since Wiene had been under contract to Messter his temporary sojourn in Vienna may have been part of a cooperative exchange between the two firms.

At the same time Wiene took part in organizing the Austrian film directors. The Austrian veteran film director Heinz Hanus maintains in a historical reminiscence that he and Robert Wiene founded a film directors' guild for Vienna in 1919. The *crème* of Austrian directors were among the membership: Joe May, Michael Kertesz, Fritz Freisler, Fritz Feher, Conrad Wiene, and others. The leadership of the guild stayed in the hands of Hanus and Robert Wiene until 1922²³. Since Wiene started shooting *Caligari* in Berlin, in September 1919, and directed five films there in 1920 he must have commuted between Berlin and Vienna for quite some time.

When Wiene arrived in Vienna on 22 May 1918, he was accompanied by his wife, Henriette (née Trinks) who was born on 28 April 1894²⁴. We know nothing about her background, only that she was 21 years younger than he. They had no children; the marriage lasted until Wiene's death in 1938.

The enormous success of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* was certainly a turning point in Wiene's career. The critical discussion of the film that started right after its première on 27 February 1920 at the Berlin Marmorhaus has not abated ever since; indeed, it is a story by itself. The account of the making of *Caligari* given in Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler* has been a continuing source of controversy²⁵.

The post-*Caligari* period (Berlin, 1920–23)

In his post-*Caligari* period Wiene wrote relatively few film scripts for other directors and concentrated instead on his own directorial work. He made fewer films but some of them became more ambitious, more expensive, more daring. Undoubtedly, the success of *Caligari* made Wiene more independent in attracting funding and major stars for his film projects. At the same time he ventured some highly interesting film experiments: In 1920 he again collaborated with script writer Carl Mayer to make the strikingly eccentric *Genuine*; he directed the Moscow Art Theatre Players (the Stanislavskij ensemble), in their first film appearance in *Raskolnikov* (1923); and in his monumental biblical film, *INRI* (1923) he assembled the outstanding stars of the day.

Another characteristic feature of Wiene's post-*Caligari* period is that he began to participate in the production aspect of his films. Between 1922 and 1924 three of his films were produced by the Lionardo Film Company, Berlin which according to Gerhard Lamprecht belonged to him²⁶. *Die höllische Macht* (1922) and *Der Puppenmacher von Kiang-Ning* (1923) were produced by Lionardo Film which indicates that Wiene produced those two films independently. *Raskolnikov* was produced as a 'Lionardo Film der Neumann Produktion'. It is not clear precisely what that meant in terms of Wiene's financial risk and decision making power. What we can conjecture is that Wiene had negotiated a contract with Neumann as an independent producer in which he retained more independence of action than he would have had as a director in the employ of a large film production firm like Ufa. Indeed, Wiene never made a film for Ufa.

In Vienna (1924–26)

The next significant stage in Wiene's career was back in Vienna during the years 1924 to 1926 when he made five films for Pan Film, Vienna. It is important to note that he made these films for Pan at a time when there was such a crisis in the Austrian film industry that its annual film production figures had sunk to five²⁷. At Pan Film Wiene obtained the position of 'Oberregisseur' (senior director)²⁸ which suggests that again he had negotiated a situation where he maintained maximum participation in the direction and production of his films. Moreover with three of his films he was

Fig. 4. Cast and crew of *Orlacs Hände*. In the foreground: Conrad Veidt, Robert Wiene and Alexandra Sorina.



his own producer with the 'Robert Wiene Produktion der Pan Film': *Orlacs Hände* (1924/25), *Der Rosenkavalier* (1925/26) and *Die Königin von Moulin Rouge* (1926). The first two attained international acclaim, proving that the Austrian film crisis was not just a crisis of finances but of talent.

During this period in Vienna Wiene was at the peak of his career. Certainly in Vienna he was the dominant film personality at this time. Accordingly we encounter him in some rare interviews which give us eye-witness accounts of him in the film studio. A journalist for *Die Bühne* after observing Wiene at work on *Die Königin von Moulin Rouge* at the Vita studios wrote an entertaining account of his restless, intensive, driving work tempo which hardly left any time to answer even the simplest questions:

'Hovering over the whole scene was Robert Wiene with his lightning reflexes in all directions. At one moment he is in an arm chair catching his breath, at another he is climbing all over the set. He looks here, has consultations there and while rushing on deftly catches a ladder he had run into²⁹.

In the same article we see a caricature of Wiene by J. Kapralik who indicates with a few strokes the familiar Wiene traits, the moustache, the cigarette butt, and the round eye-glasses.

In contrast to the above image of Wiene we have his brief appearance in Friedrich Porges's documentary *Der Film im Film* (1923), in which we see a number of directors at work in their Berlin studios. Robert Wiene is filmed on the set of *INRI* at the gigantic Staaken studio, a former Zeppelin hangar. He is introduced with the intertitle, '... another director with his calm manner (Dr. Robert Wiene)³⁰ and, indeed, in the film we see him standing next to the camera – obviously aware that he is being filmed – calm, gently smiling, watching and without histrionics guiding the action.

Another striking characterization of Wiene on a film set occurs in connection with *Orlacs Hände* which he made in Vienna in 1924. In an interview which Alexandra Sorina, the female lead, gave to the popular Viennese journal, *Die Filmwoche*, she spoke enthusiastically about Wiene's artistic skill and human sensitivity:

'Robert Wiene is the director with the delicate artistic sensibility, constantly seeking new artistic challenges. He knows the psychological depth of his actors and during the filming manages to create a hypnotic atmosphere for his entourage³¹.

Wiene received by far his widest publicity through the making of *Der Rosenkavalier*, a film

version of this most typical Viennese opera. The collaboration of Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, two established stars of the Viennese art world, generated an enormous interest in the film and by extension in the director. Numerous photos appeared in the journals showing Wiene with Richard Strauss either on the set or at the première³². On the occasion of the Viennese première of the film on 30 March 1926 *Mein Film* printed a short biographical sketch of Wiene illustrated by a caricature highlighting his characteristic features, the round face, the glasses, the cigarette butt and the wily smirk. The biographic note concludes with a laudatory description of Wiene's contributions to the Viennese film world:

'Robert Wiene is one of the few representative of Viennese film art. At a time when the Viennese

film industry was floundering he succeeded in making films that acquired international recognition. We are in his debt for having rediscovered Vienna as film territory'³³.

A most interesting report about Wiene's film career appeared in an American theatre journal, *The Billboard*, in November 1925, while Wiene was at work on *Der Rosenkavalier* in Vienna. According to an editorial note introducing an article by Barnet Braverman, 'The writer when in Vienna had considerable first-hand contact with Dr. Wiene'³⁴. Braverman gives the following description of Wiene:

'Wiene, the cinema fanatic, is about 45, amiable but matter of fact in manner, over medium height and sturdily built, and has keen features indicative of a man who has overcome resistance. At his home in Berlin his sympathy with new efforts is represented in drawings and paintings belonging to the experimental in form and colour. Before he undertook movie directing 10 years ago he had been regisseur at the Neue Wiener Buehne, Vienna and at the Lessing Theater, Berlin. In Germany, Italy, France, England and Switzerland as well as Austria, directors invariably show the highest regard for the name of Wiene'³⁵.

Auf dem Wege zur Dresdner Rosenkavalier-Premiere



Dr. Richard Strauss, der Komponist
im Gespräch mit Robert Wiene, dem Regisseur

Fig. 5. Robert Wiene, Ludwig Nerz, Richard Strauss and Th. Bachrich on their way to the première of *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Dresden Opera House, 11 January 1926.

The last Berlin years (1926–33)

During the last years of the silent film era Wiene, back in Berlin, wrote one more film script for his brother, a biographical film about Johann Strauss, and directed six more films. They were society melodramas and comedies using major film stars with attractive outdoor shots in Barcelona, Paris, the French coast and Vienna. We can perceive a continuity from the Viennese to the Berlin years in the titles of his films: *Die Königin von Moulin Rouge* (1926), *Die Geliebte* (1927), *Die berühmte Frau* (1927), *Die Frau auf der Folter* (1928), *Die grosse Abenteuerin* (1928), which highlight that the plot of each film is dominated by a central female protagonist. The time for film experiments such as *Orlacs Hände* and *Der Rosenkavalier* seemed to have passed by then. Wiene's major achievement with his last silent films consisted of entertainment films of a high standard. He drew on scripts based on popular plays by dramatists such as Georges Feydeau, Alexander Brody and Melchior.

Lengyel. His directorial style was light-handed, uncomplicated, subtle in working out details and sometimes successful in conveying a Lubitsch-like touch. Independent as always as a film businessman, Wiene signed separate contracts with different film companies for each film, a strategy which was consistent with his entire post-*Caligari* career.

The year 1929 must have been a year of transition from silent to sound films for Wiene as well as for the entire German film industry. He did not make a single film during that year³⁶, but in the subsequent few years he directed four sound films which reveal a very conscious attempt to integrate sound in the film narrative. As was characteristic of his entire film career here, too, he experimented with a variety of genres: a psychological thriller, *Der Andere* (1930), a love and adventure comedy, *Der Liebesexpress* (1931), a gangster milieu film, *Panik in Chicago* (1931), and an espionage melodrama, *Taifun* (1933).

Once again he signed separate contracts with different film companies for each film and for *Taifun* established his own company, Camera Film Productions GmbH³⁷. The films were effective as popular entertainment with big name stars such as Fritz Kortner, Heinrich George, Liane Haid, Victor De Kowa, Olga Tschechowa, Veit Harlan and Valeri Inkischinoff.

Exile and death (1933–38)

The last film Wiene was able to complete in Germany after the Nazi rise to power in January 1933, was *Taifun* which, however, was never screened in Germany because it was banned on 3 May 1933³⁸. The next piece of news comes from the Hungarian film journal *Filmkultura* from which we learn that Wiene arrived in Budapest on 26 September 1933 to begin shooting *Eine Nacht in Venedig*³⁹. At this time the Hunnia Film Company, for which Wiene made his film, was inviting German directors to use their studios on the condition that Hungarian versions be made along with the German films. Wiene did precisely that with both a German and a Hungarian cast of actors and with the assistance of the young Géza von Cziffra who translated Wiene's script for the film and co-directed the Hungarian version⁴⁰.

Wiene never returned to Germany, but we do not know exactly why. There is no evidence that he

was affiliated with any left wing political activity. On all the University of Vienna matriculation forms between 1894 and 1896 as well as on the Viennese residence registration forms between 1909 and 1925 Wiene stated his religion as protestant. However, after his death an obituary in the Berlin journal, *Der Film*, stated: 'He had always denied ... being a Jew until the very end, although there can be no doubt about it'⁴¹. Moreover, in an official list of the Reichsfilmkammer (Reich Film Chamber) of 26 July 1938, Wiene is mentioned with the designation, 'non-aryan'⁴².

Wiene spent a part of his exile in London but we do not know exactly when he arrived there. During the filming of *Eine Nacht in Venedig* in 1934 he allegedly had plans to move on to London according to one of the actors, György Tarján⁴³. First, however, he went to Paris where he had apparently established a temporary residence as we learn from a letter to Hans Janowitz dated 20 July 1934 about his plans for a sound remake of *Caligari*⁴⁴.

Whatever his plans in Paris may have been, he spent the years 1935/36 in London. There is a note in *World Film News* of April 1936 which states that Wiene had, 'formed his own company in England'⁴⁵. According to Andor Krasznai-Krausz and Hans Feld, who knew him personally in London at this time, he had an office with Concordia Films Ltd. on Regent Street and was a highly paid consultant for that company for the filming of Friedrich Feher's *The Robber Symphony* (1936)⁴⁶. In *The Catalogue of British Films* Wiene is listed as a producer of that film.

Hans Feld, who himself had arrived in London only in 1935, met with Wiene frequently and in a letter of 27 March 1987 painted a most vivid portrait of him:

'He was the centre of a small circle and we met once a week on an afternoon in his comfortable flat in Maida Vale. There was Viennese Café, cakes and stimulating conversation. Not to mention the Havana Cigars – for us a dreamed of luxury. Wiene and his wife offered a home from home. He took personal interest in the daily lives of his guests and with his smiling skepticism he created some balance. His art collection – mainly Benin sculptures – was a reminder of a world which most of us had forgotten⁴⁷.

One of Wiene's film projects at this time, dating back already a number of years, was a sound remake of *Caligari*. In Paris in 1934 he had undertaken vigorous preliminary steps to acquire the film rights for his own company, Camera Film Produktion, as well as to find backing to realize the project⁴⁸. As a partner he found Rex Films in London at 14 St. James's Place which guaranteed him the right to direct the film.

In a letter to Oskar Fischinger of 7 January 1936 he says of his *Caligari* plans, 'By the middle of March I will start shooting a big *Caligari* film, in case that is of interest to you. Thereafter, I will make another film which will be as interesting'. Apparently Wiene was well established in London at this time because not only was he ready to start shooting his *Caligari* remake, but, as we note from the letter, extended help to Fischinger in distributing his films in England:

'I am very interested in your films and I believe I can do something for them in England. Kindly let me know whether they are available for England

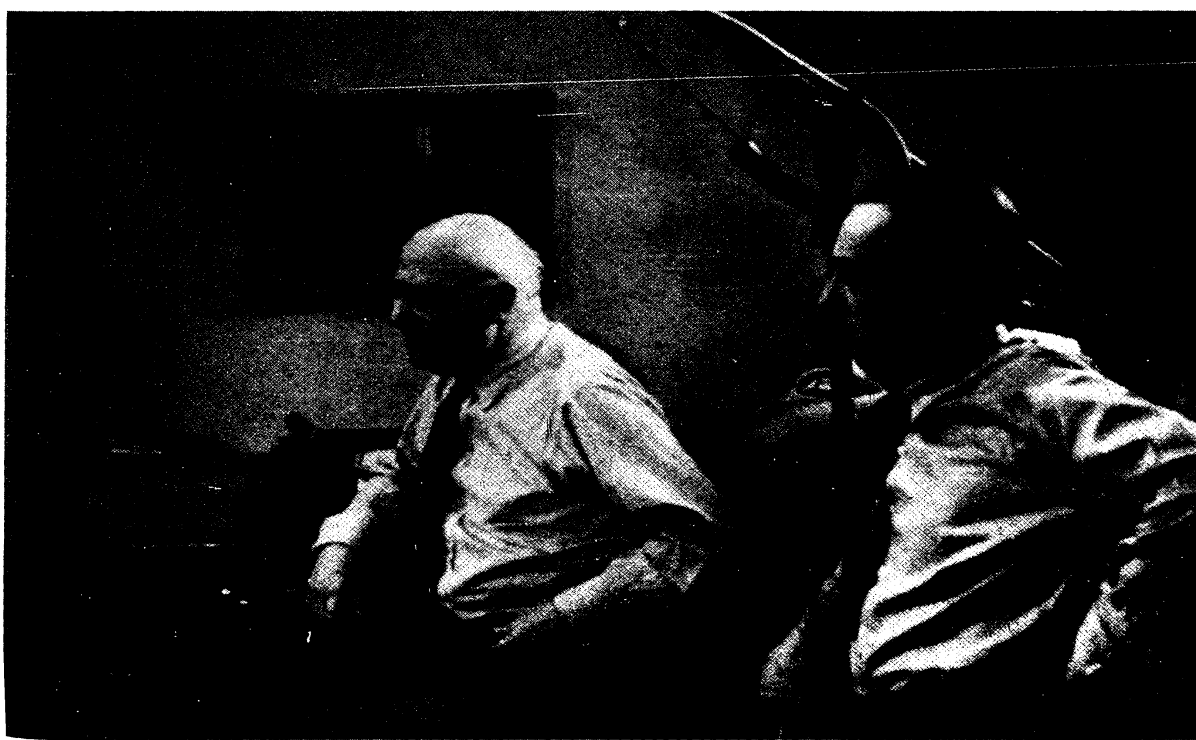
and how you think they should be marketed here'⁴⁹.

It is striking that Wiene showed interest in Fischinger's avant-garde short films; moreover he was considering them for a soon to be established company for modern films. We see a most optimistic Wiene in London with plans for new and risky film ventures. It is all the more astonishing, therefore, to find him in Paris at least five months later⁴⁹.

We have no idea why he left London so suddenly and what happened to his ambitious plans, especially the sound remake of *Caligari*. The Cinémathèque Française in Paris preserves a shooting script in French of a sound version of *Caligari*⁵¹. The author is not named; however, Concordia Films Ltd., London is cited as the owner of the text. The French language script might suggest that Wiene came to Paris in the hope of completing his project there. Nothing came of it.

Almost nothing is known about Wiene's state of mind during these last two years of his life in Paris. All

Fig. 6. Robert Wiene and Geza von Cziffra shooting *Eine Nacht In Venedig* at the Hunnia Studio in Budapest, 1933.



we have is a journalistic essay which he wrote for the emigré journal *Die Neue Weltbühne* on the occasion of the Paris World Fair in 1937. Most striking is his description of Picasso's 'Guernica' at the Spanish Pavilion. Wiene expresses empathy for the sufferings of the Spanish people, but it is clear that his sympathies lie with the Republicans and their struggle for freedom⁵². There must have been more pieces like this because the essay reveals a style of high literary mastery.

Wiene completed only one more film during his last two years in Paris before his death. The film *Ultimatum* is ostensibly a melodramatic spy story, but it is also much more than that. On the eve of World War II Wiene takes us back to the tense situation in Central Europe preceding World War I. The plot involves the conflict between Austrians and Serbs in which the struggle between the two peoples is presented more humanistically than nationalistically.

For the film Wiene had obtained Erich von Stroheim and Dita Parlo to lead the cast. Both were

well known in France at the time for their many films and especially for Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937), a film with a similar theme, in which they had also starred. Although Wiene had always been able to find well known film stars for his films, this was the first time that a leading Hollywood actor appeared in one of his films.

A few days before the completion of the film Wiene collapsed on the set and had to be hospitalized. For some time he had been seriously ill, and had undertaken this last film production against the advice of his physician. He was brought to the Maison de Santé Rémusat at 21 rue Rémusat, a hospital close to his home at 6 rue Corot, Paris 16. He died in that hospital on 15 July and was buried the following day⁵³. During the next few weeks Wiene obituaries appeared all over the world, but the one that captured the man's spirit best was the one by Alexandre Arnoux who had written the dialogues for *Ultimatum* and became close to Wiene during the shooting of the film:



Fig. 7. Robert Wiene during the filming of *INRI* at the Staaken Filmstudios, 1923.

'He was a conscientious worker deeply committed to his work. With stubbornness and patience, he gave himself to his work without restraint. He expressed himself in every image, in every detail. He consumed his life's last flame with a tragic heroism because he knew the end was near. He wanted to complete his film. He did complete it except for a few details – at the expense of his life'⁵⁴.

Robert Wiene was survived by his wife. She went to Czechoslovakia after his death and was known to have been there at the outbreak of the war. We do not know what became of her⁵⁵.

References

1. These registration forms refer to seven of Wiene's stays in Vienna between 1909 and 1925. They are available at the Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv.
2. In the documents we find numerous spellings for the place: Nitra, Nytra, Nyitra, even Nontra; since Neutra is the most frequent spelling we shall use it.
3. Ludwig Eisenberg, *Großes Biographisches Lexikon der deutschen Bühne im 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: P. List, 1903) 1121.
4. To be sure, there are sources which claim he was born on 5 May 1852 in Vienna; Paul S. Ulrich, *Theater, Tanz und Musik im Deutschen Bühnen-Jahrbuch*, Vol. 2 (Berlin: A. Spitz, 1985) 1663 lists both dates and places of birth without taking a position.
5. From Carl Wiene's own report as quoted in Bodo Wildberg, *Das Dresdner Hoftheater in der Gegenwart: Biographien und Charakteristiken* (Dresden, Leipzig, 1901) 115–120.
6. Eisenberg op.cit. 1121f.; *Neuer Theater-Almanach*, Vol. 25 (Berlin, 1914) 165.
7. José Echegaray, *Wahnsinn oder Heiligkeit*, aus dem Spanischen übersetzt und für die deutsche Bühne bearbeitet von Carl Wiene und Gustavo Kirem (Leipzig: Reclam, n.d. [1889]).
8. *Neuer Theater-Almanach*, Vol. 25 (Berlin, 1914) 165. Hans Janowitz later reported: 'I must add that Robert Wiene, the director, was also familiar with the workings of the deranged mind; his father, a famous actor, had gone slightly mad when he could no longer appear on the stage. He forgot his identity, and wandered aimlessly through the streets of Berlin'. *The Story of a Famous Story*, unpublished manuscript, New York Public Library, 16.
9. 'Nationale der Juridischen Fakultät der Universität Wien', 1894–96, available at the Archiv der Universität Wien.
10. *Ibid.*
11. City Directories of the city of Weimar, 1901–03; we owe thanks to Ullrich Kasten for this information.
12. This letter is preserved by the Library of the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe University, Frankfurt/M.
13. Carl Wiene in a letter to Ernst Hardt, dated Dresden, 21 November 1902; Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, Handschriften-Abteilung. Apparently father and son had a close relationship as is indicated by an earlier letter to Hardt, dated Vienna, 3 July 1902, in which Carl relates that he was in Vienna on a visit to his family in the company of his two sons and that he was about to leave on his summer vacation in Tyrol with Robert.
14. Robert Wiene in a letter to certain director Guttenbrunn, dated 19 April 1899; Stadtbibliothek, Vienna.
15. The source for this information is the Viennese newspapers *Fremdenblatt* of 7–23 August, and of 6 October 1908; and *Wiener Journal* of 11 August 1908 and 28 May 1909; a more detailed account of the history of the Neue Wiener Bühne is given by Gotthard Böhm, 'Geschichte der Neuen Wiener Bühne', diss., U. of Vienna, 1965.
16. Ilona Brennicke and Joe Hembus, *Klassiker des Deutschen Stummfilms 1910–1930* (München: Goldmann, 1983) 240; Gerhard Lamprecht, *Deutsche Stummfilme* (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 1970) cites Friedrich Müller along with Robert Wiene as possible directors of the film.
17. Quoted from Helga Belach, *Henny Porten: Der erste deutsche Filmstar, 1890–1960* (Berlin: Haude und Spener, 1986) 57.
18. This letter is available at the Freie Universität Berlin, Theaterhistorische Sammlung Walter Unruh.
19. Presumably, it is Carl Meinard, the co-owner and director of the Meinard-Bernaerschen Bühnen in Berlin.
20. This letter is available at the Theatrumuseum der Universität zu Köln. We owe thanks to Roswitha Platz for making this document.
21. See Anton Kaes ed., *Die Kino-Debatte: Texte zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Film 1909–1929* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1978); see also Rudolf Kurtz, 'Film und Kultur', *Illustrierte-Zeitung*, 4 September 1919, special issue on 'Der deutsche Film'.
22. 30 Jahre Sascha-Film: Festschrift der Sascha-Film Ver-

- leih-und Vertriebs-Ges.m.b.h. (Vienna, 1948) unpag. (p.11).
23. Heinz Hanus, *50 Jahre österreichischer Film* (Vienna, 1958) unpag. brochure. For a more detailed account see Herbert Edler, 'Heinz Hanus – Filmschaffender und Begründer einer Berufsvereinigung für Filmschaffende in der ersten Republik: Ein Beitrag zur (Sozial-) Geschichte des österreichischen Films', Phil. Diss., U. of 1983.
 24. Residence registration forms (Meldezettel), Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv.
 25. We have dealt with this crucial issue in Uli Jung and Walter Schatzberg, 'Caligari: Das Cabinet des Dr. Wiene', *Filmkultur zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik*, Jung/Schatzberg, eds., (München: K.G. Saur, 1992) 71–89.
 26. Gerhard Lamprecht, *Deutsche Stummfilme*, Vol. 7: 1921–22 (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, 1968) 491.
 27. See Friedrich Porges, ed., *Mein Film-Buch: Vom Film, von Filmstars und von Kinematographie* (Berlin: Mein Film-Verlag, 1928) 254f; see also Ludwig Gesek, *Filmzauber aus Wien: Notizblätter zu einer Geschichte des Österreichischen Films* (Vienna, 1965) p. 41f. and 51f.
 28. See Anonymous, 'Meister der Filmszene: III. Dr. Robert Wiene – Ober-Regisseur der Pan-Film A.G.', *Mein Film*, (1926) No. 15: 2.
 29. Leonard, 'Paris in Wien: Bei Robert Wiene im Vita-Atelier', *Die Bühne* 3 (1926) no. 92 (12 August 1926).
 30. Quoted directly from the 16 mm fragment which is preserved by Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
 31. Anonymous, 'Ein Besuch bei Alexandra Sorina', *Die Filmwoche* (1924) no. 39: 9 (24 September 1924).
 32. The earliest photo we found is in *Der Film Spiegel* 6 (1925) no. 7: 112 (15 November 1925); it shows Richard Strauss sitting at the piano and accompanying Richard Bohnen, the opera star. Wiene is in the background, leaning against the piano, cigarette butt in his mouth and in shirt sleeves watching the scene. Another photo shows Robert Wiene, Richard Strauss and Pan Film representatives, Th. Bachrich and Ludwig Nerz on their way to the Dresden opera house premiere (*Mein Film* [1926] no. 4: 10); *Der Film-Kurier* 8 (1926) no. 14 (16 January 1926) shows Wiene, Strauss and Bachrich at the same location.
 33. Anonymous, 'Meister der Filmszene', op. cit.
 34. Barnet Braverman, 'Courage in the Movies: Concerning Dr. Robert Wiene, Creator of the Famous Film, Dr. Caligari's Cabinet', two parts, *The Billboard*, 14 November 1925: 49, and 21 November 1925: 49; selections of this article appeared in German in *Licht bildbühne* 19 (1926) no. 1: 22–27 (2 January 1926).
 35. Braverman, part II, op. cit.; According to what we have been able to verify, Wiene was 52 at that time. We have not been able to obtain any verification that he was ever engaged by the Lessing Theater.
 36. According to documents at the Cinémathèque Française, Wiene was at work in 1929 on a French-German co-production entitled, *Selfridge*. However, the project was never completed.
 37. Alexander Jason, *Handbuch des Films, 1935/36* (Berlin: Hoppenstedt, 1936) 216 lists 'Camera-Film-Prod. GmbH, Berlin SW 68, Kochstr. 18' as a firm founded in 1931 with a capital of 20000 RM and jointly managed by Robert Wiene and Adolf Noé; according to this reference work the firm was no longer in existence.
 38. Minutes of the decision by the Film-Oberprüfstelle, No. 6593, 3 May 1933; Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde, Frankfurt. The dates given by Alfred Bauer, *Deutscher Spielfilmalmanach, 1929–1950* (Berlin, 1950) 252 are apparently false.
 39. *Filmkultura* 6 (1933) no. 9: 9 (1 October 1933).
 40. Conversation with Geza van Czipfra on 16 December 1987.
 41. 'Zum Tode Robert Wienes', *Der Film* (1938) no. 33 (13 August 1938); Hans Feld, who knew Wiene personally included him in his essay, 'Jews in the Development of the German Film Industry: Notes from the Recollections of a Berlin Film Critic', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook XXVII* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1982) 344.
 42. 'Reichsfilmkammer – Abstammungsnachweis: Liste der Juden, Mischlinge und jüdisch Versippten vom 26 Juli 1938', Berlin Document Centre. We owe thanks to Jan-Pieter Barbian for making this document available to us.
 43. Tarján had played the role of Antonio Crivelli in the Hungarian version of the film. In a conversation of 22 October 1987 Tarján claimed that Wiene had invited him to join him in London for a film venture.
 44. This letter is quoted in a legal statement by Hans Janowitz in 1945. Papers of Hans Janowitz at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.
 45. *World Film News* (April, 1936) no. 1: 28. We owe thanks to Kevin Gough-Yates for this information.
 46. Conversations with Kraszna-Krausz and Hans Feld in 1987. The former had been editor of *Die Film-Technik* in Berlin and the latter was editor of and film and theatre critic for the *Berlin Film-Kurier*.
 47. Letter by Hans Feld to Walter Schatzberg of 27 March 1987. In a letter to Oskar Fischinger of 7 January

- 1936, published in *Dif-Mitteilung* 2 (1969) no. 3 (19 September 1969), Wiene gave his full address: 66 Maida Vale, London W9, a most respected upper middle class neighbourhood.
48. This as well as other details about acquisition of the legal rights to the remake of *Caligari* are found in the Janowitz Papers at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin. Wiene's company Camera Films, with which he had produced *Taifun* in Berlin in 1932/1933, was apparently reestablished by him in Paris in 1934 at the following address: 56, rue de Laborde.
49. Wiene's letter to Fischinger, op. cit.
50. On 27 June 1936 Wiene applied for an identification card for alien residents; original application form from the Préfecture de Police, Paris for which we owe thanks to Frank Kessler.
51. The Cinémathèque Française has a receipt for the document signed 'Escoffier' (that was Lotte Eisner's pseudonym during the Nazi occupation). The document had been given to the Cinémathèque by Leo Gergely in 1946.
52. *Die Neue Weltbühne* (Zürich) 33 (1937) no. 37: 1171f. (9 September 1937).
53. Confirming information about Wiene's death is found on his death certificate. We owe thanks to Frank Kessler who obtained it from Paris.
54. Alexandre Arnoux, *Du Muet au Parlant: Mémoires d'un Témoin* (Paris: La Nouvelle Édition, 1946) 159.
55. The solicitor Julius B. Salter in a letter to Ernst Matray, dated 1 June 1946; Janowitz papers, Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin.