

Der Tanz auf dem Vulkan



Credits

Director:	Hans Steinhoff
Screenplay:	Peter Hagen, Hans Rehberg
Cinematography:	Ewald Daub
Production year:	1938
Language:	German with German subtitles

Summary prepared by Ed Cohen

Paris, 1830. The misrule of King Charles X is in its last days. Revolution and subversive handbills are in the air. If Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orléans, the king's nephew and second in line to the throne is not the most popular man in France, then that man is the star of the *Theatre des Funambules*, Debureau (Gustaf Gründgens). Unbeknown to the king, Debureau is his rival for the illicit affections of Heloise, Countess Cambouilly (Sybille Schmitz).

Heloise narrowly escapes Count Cambouilly detecting her presence at the theater. Debureau crashes the king's masked ball, disguised as Count Cambouilly. A few nights later, the king, himself, goes to the theater, and discovers Heloise hiding in Debureau's wardrobe. Right afterwards, Louis-Philippe also calls on Debureau in his dressing room, leaving his opulent overcoat behind before going to his seat. Thus, the king, Heloise, and Louis-Philippe all end up at the same Debureau performance.

Debureau ad libs different lyrics to his signature song, directly mocking the king, and rambling on almost incoherently about stabbing him in the heart—not with a dagger, but with words. Debureau flees in Louis-Philippe's carriage, using the royal overcoat as a disguise.

Instead of making good his escape, Debureau goes to Heloise's home, and pleads with her to run away to England with him. She refuses. Debureau surrenders himself to Count Cambouilly. A day is set for Debureau's execution by guillotine. That sets off a riot, forcing the king to flee, and paving the way for Louis-Philippe to ascend to the throne. The ecstatic crowd carries Debureau off, on their shoulders.

A revolution did take place in France in 1830, wherein King Charles X was deposed, and King Louis-Philippe was crowned. The actual Louis-Philippe had participated in the French Revolution. He lived in exile from 1793 to 1815, returning when the first Bonaparte rule ended and the Bourbons had been restored. While in exile, Louis-Philippe resided in the USA for about three years, spending some time in Philadelphia. His reign ended when he was deposed, in 1848. He died in exile in England two years later.

Gustaf Gründgens (1899-1963) was the subject of Klaus Mann's barely fictionalized novel, *Mephisto*. Born in the Rhineland, he went from being a regional actor in Hamburg, to Germany's foremost actor and a movie star. "Dance on the Volcano" apparently reflects the Third Reich's effort, before embarking upon WWII, to put on a good public relations face and to humor an important artist who might still have emigrated.

Sybille Schmitz (1909-1955) was a stage actress who broke into films during the last years of silents. She evolved from young heroine roles, to elegant costume drama noblewomen, like the one in tonight's film. It is unclear to what extent her career's decline was the cause of her alcoholism and other problems, or to what extent, their effect. After WWII, she was occasionally cast as a mature woman who had lived hard. Her last, troubled years were the inspiration for Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1982 film, *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss*.