

Kurt Gerron



Born May 11th 1897

Gerron was born into a wealthy Berlin merchant family and was an only child. After he had successfully graduated from high school at 17 years of age, he wanted to study medicine, but had to move instead as a front-line soldier in the First World War. Due to a serious injury, he was unable to fight and could now start his studies. These were curtailed and he was found fit enough to serve but this time as a hospital doctor.

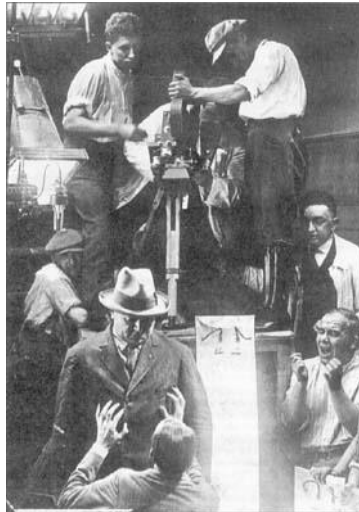
A start in entertainment

After he had been wounded several times during his military service in World War I and later gave up his work as a doctor, he turned to acting in 1920. Without having enjoyed any special lessons, he made his debut in the small cabaret where Trude Hesterberg discovered him. At the opening of the Wilden Bühne Gerron appeared next to Bertolt Brecht, Joachim Ringelnatz and Walter Mehring on the program. From 1920 to 1925 he was, with others, engaged in the Berlin Reinhardt stages. He also appeared in revues and cabarets. The critic Pem characterized the cabaret artist in 1926 as follows:

"He shoots sentences. The words whip. The rhythm pulls along, allowing no resistance. The rush, the tempo at the nape of his neck, sits there. The verses mercilessly fall, scourging the time. The weakness, the half-measures, the indifference. No sentimentality at all. Razor-sharp and icy cold, he shows people in their smallness and brutality. You do not come to your senses. Underlying the verve of the attack smoothly."

From the early 1920s Gerron was also seen in supporting roles in the silent film. Due to his war injury, which resulted in a physiological illness, he suffered from increasing obesity. His thus massive and externally grotesque-looking physical appearance contributed significantly to the fact that he was filled to his chagrin only for obscure or questionable characters.

From 1926 Gerron also directed and mastered in 1931, the sound film. He gained notoriety through his performances and singing lectures in the 1928 sensationally successful premiere of the Threepenny Opera by Bert Brecht and Kurt Weill. He played in the showman, who recited "The Morality of Mackie knife", as well as the role of London Chief of Police Tiger Brown. He was supplanted by Ernst Busch in the 1930 Film by Pabst.



The sound film

Gerron's probably biggest role was that of the magician Kiepert in Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* together with Marlene Dietrich (1930), he also worked in the film operetta *The Three from the gas station* (1930), which for the still unknown Heinz Rühmann was a breakthrough in Movie business. Gerron also got good reviews as a director of popular films like "It's getting better" with Heinz Rühmann or "The White Demon" with Hans Albers.

After the National Socialists came to power, Gerron was forced to give up his directing work on the UFA film "Kind, I'm Looking Forward to Your Coming" (1933). Up until 1933 he had participated in 60 films.

Flight and exile

With his wife Olga in 1933, following the National Socialist seizure of power, he fled to Paris, from there via Austria and Italy to Amsterdam, where he was offered work. After the occupation of the Netherlands Gerron played for a while at the *Hollandsche Schouwburg* with Rudolf Nelson, which was now called "Joodsche Schouwburg".

In 1943, Gerron and his wife were deported to the Dutch transit camp Westerbork and on February 25th 1944 to Theresienstadt on Transport, XXIV/4 as number 247. (His parents had been sent to Sobibor on May 5 1943)

Gerron's friends Peter Lorre and Marlene Dietrich had still tried to get him to Hollywood in time. But Gerron refused, probably because the German language required him to work as an extra? Perhaps he also hoped for a turnaround in Germany, as did many of the Jews who did not emigrate beyond the neighbouring Netherlands. His niece

from his wife's side, Lore Koppel de Moos, believed he was affronted when backers in Hollywood would not pay 1st class fares.

Theresienstadt and Auschwitz

Excerpts from Gerron's film roles had been used in the Nazi propaganda film "The Eternal Jew" as examples of the "inferior Jew", who had a negative influence on the German people. This realisation hit Gerron, unsuspectingly, confronting him brutally. Later, Commandant Rahm ordered Gerron to perform on the stage in the ghetto cabaret "[Carousel](#)".

In August 1944 Gerron was co-erced by the SS to stage the sham documentary film "Theresienstadt". This film was later titled by Jews, "[The Fuhrer gives the Jews a city](#)". Gerron sought advice from the Jewish Council – do what is necessary to survive.



Some survivors accused Gerron of his involvement in this propaganda film, others, especially those whom he sought to rescue by casting for the film before being deported to Auschwitz, were sympathetic to his pseudo-collaboration. Gerron himself seems to have believed that only his theatrical and cinematic skills and his ready participation in the film could save him from being murdered by the Nazis. However, Gerron's artistic input into the film lessened as his main role came to be the encouragement of participants to smile for the camera. The film had been commissioned by Hans Günther, director of the SS Central Office for the Settlement of the Jewish Question in Bohemia and Moravia, a section of the Reich Main Security Office. It was produced by Aktualita, a Czech film company. Jindřich Weil, a Jewish prisoner, had been ordered to write a script for a film in 1943, but this was never completed. It was this script that was used for this "new" film. František Zelenka, Jo Spier, and Hans Hofer were classed as assistant directors. Karel Pečený and his company Aktualita provided the cameramen, and halfway through filming, Pečený effectively took over as director, with Gerron relegated to mundane tasks. Everyday he suffered degradation and insult. Even before the film was completed Kurt Gerron and most of the prominent contributors were transported to Auschwitz and gassed. Gerron was number 1284 on train Ev which left on October 28th 1944, along with many of the children used in the filming. He was murdered on **30th October 1944**.



Filmography

- 1914: Fräulein Puppe, meine Frau (Regie: [Danny Kaden](#))
- 1920: Spuk auf Schloß Kitay (Regie: [Paul Legband](#))
- 1921: Die Präriediva (Regie: [Carl Boese](#))
- 1921: Die Apotheke des Teufels (Regie: [Bruno Eichgrün](#))
- 1922: Der Held des Tages (Regie: [Rudi Bach](#))
- 1922: Wege des Lasters (Regie: [Franz Hofer](#))
- 1922: Frau Sünde (Regie: [Fred Sauer](#))
- 1925: Die Schmiede (Regie: [Martin Berger](#))
- 1925: O alte Burschenherrlichkeit (Regie: [Helene Lackner](#), [Eugen Rex](#))
- 1925: [Variété](#)
- 1925: [Halbseide](#)
- 1925: [Vorderhaus und Hinterhaus](#)
- 1926: Der goldene Schmetterling (Regie: Michael Kertesz – der spätere [Michael Curtiz](#))
- 1926: Wien – Berlin (Regie: [Hans Steinhoff](#))
- 1926: Die drei Mannequins (Regie: [Jaap Speyer](#))
- 1926: Die Kleine und ihr Kavalier (Regie: [Richard Löwenbein](#))
- 1926: Annemarie und ihr Ulan (Regie: [Erich Eriksen](#))
- 1926: [Im weißen Rößl](#)
- 1926: [Als ich wiederkam](#)
- 1926: Der Soldat der Marie (Regie: [Erich Schönfelder](#))
- 1926: Der Mädchenhandel (Regie: [Jaap Speyer](#))
- 1926: [Eine tolle Nacht](#)
- 1927: [Die Tragödie eines Verlorenen](#)
- 1927: Die schönsten Beine von Berlin (Regie: [Willi Wolff](#))
- 1927: Einbruch (Regie: [Franz Osten](#))
- 1927: Die Dame mit dem Tigerfell (Regie: [Willi Wolff](#))
- 1927: Üb' immer Treu und Redlichkeit (Regie: [Reinhold Schünzel](#))
- 1927: [Sein größter Bluff](#)
- 1927: Glanz und Elend der Kurtisanen (Regie: [Manfred Noa](#))
- 1927: Pique Dame (Regie: [Alexander Rasumny](#))
- 1927: [Feme](#)
- 1927: Gefährdete Mädchen (Regie: [Heinz Schall](#))
- 1927: Die weiße Spinne (Regie: [Carl Boese](#))

- 1927: Ein Tag der Rosen im August... da hat die Garde fortgemußt (Regie: [Max Mack](#))
- 1927: [Ein schwerer Fall](#) (Regie: [Felix Basch](#))
- 1927: Gehetzte Frauen (Regie: [Richard Oswald](#))
- 1927: Die Pflicht zu schweigen (Regie: [Carl Wilhelm](#))
- 1927: [Das Frauenhaus von Rio](#)
- 1927: [Ramper, der Tiermensch](#)
- 1927: [Das tanzende Wien](#) (Regie: [Friedrich Zelnik](#))
- 1927: [Der große Unbekannte](#)
- 1927: Wer wirft den ersten Stein (Regie: [Erich Eriksen](#))
- 1927: [Dr. Bessels Verwandlung](#)
- 1927: Benno Stehkragen (Regie: [Trude Santen](#))
- 1928: Manege (Regie: [Max Reichmann](#))
- 1928: Liebe und Diebe (Regie: [Carl Froelich](#))
- 1928: Heut' tanzt Mariett (Regie: [Friedrich Zelnik](#))
- 1928: [Vom Täter fehlt jede Spur](#) (Regie: [Constantin J. David](#))
- 1928: [Casanovas Erbe](#) (Regie: [Manfred Noa](#))
- 1928: Die Yacht der Sieben Sünden (Regie: [Jakob Fleck](#), [Luise Fleck](#))
- 1929: Unmoral (Regie: [Willi Wolff](#))
- 1929: Die Regimentstochter (Regie: [Hans Behrendt](#))
- 1929: Wir halten fest und treu zusammen (Regie: [Herbert Nossen](#))
- 1929: [Nachtgestalten](#)
- 1929: [Aufruhr im Junggesellenheim](#)
- 1929: Die Flucht vor der Liebe (Regie: [Hans Behrendt](#))
- 1929: Adieu Mascotte (Regie: [Wilhelm Thiele](#))
- 1929: [Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü](#) (in der Originalfassung)
- 1929: [Tagebuch einer Verlorenen](#)
- 1929: [Menschen am Sonntag](#)

Sound Films

- 1930: [Liebe im Ring](#)
- 1930: [Der blaue Engel](#)
- 1930: Die vom Rummelplatz (Regie: [Carl Lamac](#))
- 1930: [Die Drei von der Tankstelle](#)
- 1930: [Dolly macht Karriere](#) (Regie: [Anatole Litvak](#))
- 1930: [Einbrecher](#)
- 1930: Die Marquise von Pompadour (Regie: [Willi Wolff](#))
- 1930: Ihre Majestät die Liebe (Regie: [Joe May](#))
- 1931: [Der Weg nach Rio](#)
- 1931: Salto Mortale (Regie: [Ewald André Dupont](#))
- 1931: [Bomben auf Monte Carlo](#)
- 1931: Eine Nacht im Grandhotel (Regie: [Max Neufeld](#))
- 1932: Vater geht auf Reisen (Regie: [Carl Boese](#))
- 1932: [Man braucht kein Geld](#)
- 1932: Zwei in einem Auto (Regie: [Ewald André Dupont](#))

As director

- 1926: Der Liebe Lust und Leid
- 1931: Der Stumme von Portici
- 1931: [Meine Frau, die Hochstaplerin](#)
- 1932: [Es wird schon wieder besser](#)
- 1932: Ein toller Einfall
- 1932: [Der weiße Dämon](#)
- 1933: [Heut' kommt's drauf an](#)
- 1933: [Kind, ich freu' mich auf Dein Kommen](#) (beendet durch [Erich von Neusser](#))
- 1933: Une femme au volant
- 1933: Incognito
- 1934: [Bretter, die die Welt bedeuten](#)
- 1935: [Das Geheimnis der Mondscheinsonate](#) (*Het mysterie van de Mondscheinsonate*)
- 1936: [Merijntje Gijzen's Jeugd](#)
- 1936: Een dag bij de A.V.R.O.(Dokumentarfilm)
- 1937: [De drie wensen](#)

Recordings

1929 [Die songs der "Dreigroschenoper"](#) Electrola EH 301

1930 [Boxer Lied](#) – Max Schmeling, Hugo Fisscher-Koeppe & Gerron Electrola EG 1765

[Potpourri aus "Der Rote Faden"](#) mit Gretl Berndt Electrola EH 476

[Das Nachtgespenst](#) (Der Rote Faden) Ultraphon A 388

[Die Grosstadt Infanterie](#) (Der Rote Faden) Ultraphon A 388

[Die Ballade von Seemann Kuttel-Daddledu](#) – Ultraphon A 573

[Mein Bruder macht beim Tonfilm die Geräusche](#) – Ultraphon A627

[Herr Doktor! Herr Doktor!](#) – Ultraphon A 627

[Abschied und Zweites Finale](#) mit Erika Helmke und Willy Trenk-Trebitsch – Ultraphon A 754

[Moritat und Schluss-Choral](#) mit Lotte Lenja und Willy Trenk-Trebitsch - Ultraphon A755

[Liebeslied & Kanonensong](#) mit Erika Helmke & Willy trenk-Trebitsch – A 752

[Zuhaelter-Ballade](#) und [Lied von der Unzulaeniglichkeit menschlichen Strebens](#) mit Lotte Lenja & Willy Trenk-Trebitsch und Erich Ponto – Ultraphon A 755

[Die Seeraeberjenny](#) mit Lotte Lenja – Ultraphon A 753

[Moritat & Ballade vom angenehmen Leben](#) mit Willy Trenk-Trebitsch – Ultraphon A 752

[Erstes Dreigroschenfinale mit Lotte Lenja](#), Erika Helmke & Erich Ponto – Ultraphon A753

[Barabrasong & Eifersuchduett](#) mit Lotte Lenja & Erika Helmke – Ultraphon A754