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## CAST

**James Cagney** Lon Chaney  
**Dorothy Malone** Cleva Creighton Chaney  
**Jane Greer** Hazel Bennet Chaney  
**Marjorie Rambeau** Gert  
**Jim Backus** Clarence Locan  
**Robert Evans** Irving Thalberg  
**Celia Lovsky** Mrs Chaney  
**Jeanne Cagney** Carrie Chaney  
**Jack Albertson** Dr. J. Wilson Shields  
**Nolan Leary** Pa Chaney  
**Simon Scott** Carl Hastings  
**Clarence Kolb** Himself  
**Danny Beck** Max Dill  
**Philip Van Zandt** George Loane Tucker

## CREW

Directed by **Joseph Pevney**  
Written by **Ralph Wheelright, R. Wright Campbell, Ivan Goff, Ben Roberts**  
Produced by **Robert Arthur**  
Edited by **Ted J. Kent**  
Director of Photography **Russell Metty**  
Music by **Frank Skinner**  
Art Directors **Alexander Goltizen, Eric Orborn**  
Set Decorators **Russell A. Gausman, Julia Heron**  
Unit Manager **Edward Dodds**  
Costume Designer **Bill Thomas**





## LARGER THAN LIFE REVISITING MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES

by Vic Pratt

“Made it, ma! Top of the world!” So shouted James Cagney, in one of numerous screen-immortal moments, playing mixed-up crook Cody Jarett in the fiery climax of the late-gangster classic *White Heat* (1949). A decade down the line from this key screen performance, Universal-International were no less triumphantly vocal in their promotional puff for his latest vehicle, which saw Cagney as Lon Chaney in *Man of a Thousand Faces*. The bumper press-pack touted big blow-ups of Cagney in character in 12 different Chaney make-ups and only capital letters would do when it came to telling cinema managers that they should be positioned “side by side to form a banner display TEN FEET LONG.” For, as the accompanying publicity fearlessly foretold, ahead of actual public opinion: “MAGNIFICENT CAGNEY MAKES A CLASSIC. Now and again, but all too seldom, a film is made that, by the depth and sensitivity of its treatment, illuminates not one period but the whole of human experience. Such a film is *Man of a Thousand Faces*.”

No pressure, then. But whether or not we now concur that this brisk biopic account of the life of silent-screen great Lon Chaney was absolutely successful in illuminating the whole of human experience, we can at least acknowledge that it represented the culmination of an exciting acting challenge for James Cagney. For he and his subject were somewhat akin to chalk and cheese. Chaney, with all those titular faces of his, was a player devoted to an acting aesthetic built upon the visually grotesque; a silent-screen legend who imposed character upon himself from the outside in, via the adoption of countless external details, and oft-painful physical affectations. Cheerfully suffering for his art, he would think nothing of strapping a limb away, in a strange semi-sadomasochistic position, to affect the air of an amputee more convincingly; an artiste who famously and painstakingly crafted secret, complex make-ups, drawn from his precious box of tricks. He even, studio publicity suggested, hired policemen to guard his dressing room so nobody should discover his transformative methods. James Cagney, by way of contrast, described by Graham Greene as “Mr. Cagney, of the bull calf brow,” built great characterizations from the inside out – that “bull calf brow” never hidden. No make-









up needed here; that famous face, pugnacious demeanor and nervous energy remain familiar – iconic, even – to fans of Hollywood’s golden sound era.

Still more contrasts: Chaney was a great mime, a master of gesture; his stage-hewn style the slow, mannered, wordless expression of mental and physical torment. He was adept in that beautiful visual language of the later silent cinema so rudely curtailed by the clunky coming of sound. He would die, with a croakily bitter irony similar to that off-encapsulated in his more tragic roles, of throat cancer, just as he’d begun to make his transition into the talkies, speaking for the first time in *The Unholy Three* (1930), just as his voice began to fail. Cagney’s power, on the other hand, as befitted a star who’d made his way in the crisp crime pictures of the new sound era, was talkatively tied to the relentless rat-a-tat machine gun delivery of dialogue, his voice crucial to his fierce cat-on-a-hot-tin-roof energetic thrust. As Cagney noted: “There’s not much to tell you about acting but this: never settle back on

your heels. Never relax. If you relax, the audience relaxes. And always mean everything you say.” Speech was the key.

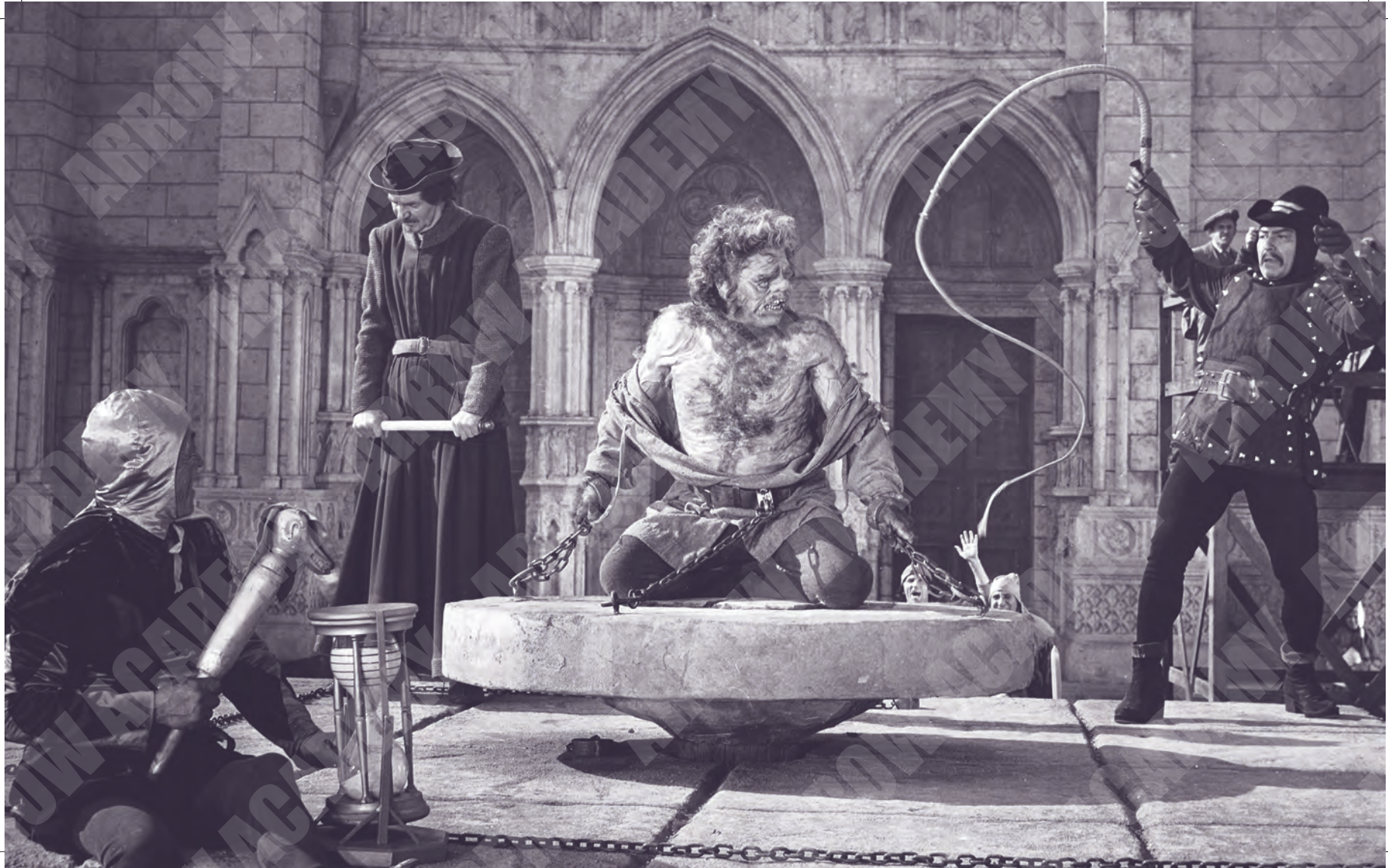
They didn’t look the least bit alike, either. “On the surface, Cagney is just about the most unlikely actor in Hollywood, or anywhere else, to portray the late Lon Chaney,” *The New Yorker* review noted when *Man of a Thousand Faces* was released in 1957. The *Saturday Review* agreed. “Physically Cagney is far from ideal for the part. He is smaller, heavier and somewhat older than Chaney was at the time of his death, while Cagney’s own features are so familiar that it is difficult to superimpose Chaney’s upon them.”

Yet despite the differences, there was common ground: immovable commitment to the acting job at hand; a similar career-long conviction to achieving as effective a performance as possible in every picture. Both the aforementioned reviews ended up marveling at Cagney’s portrayal. “Cagney pulls off a minor miracle,” suggested *The New Yorker’s* reviewer, “projecting himself into the troubled life of Chaney and making it believable.” “He etches a personality,” echoed Bosley Crowther over in the *New York Times*. “‘Lon’ Cagney makes the grade,” wrote Robert Kennedy in the UK’s *Daily Worker* – singling out the film as Cagney’s best since *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942).

It was considered quite a comeback: Cagney’s acting career had been in a lull for a while. Perhaps he had been considering retiring; he’d grown increasingly fond of farming, having purchased, two years earlier, a 711-acre spread in Dutchess County, New York. Yet something intrigued him enough to take the job. “It belabors the obvious to say that I found it a challenge,” he confessed in his autobiography, *Cagney on Cagney*, but “the Chaney family was a fascinating one.” Cagney was fascinated particularly, it would seem, by Chaney’s troubled upbringing, as the son of deaf-mutes, a key factor – according to this version of his life story, at least – in the shaping of his unusually expressive performance style. Cagney was further intrigued by Chaney’s troubled marriage, and the actor’s distinct separation of private and public. Famously, Chaney was disdainful of interviewers, insisting that his personal life remain just that.

No attempt is made to make Cagney look like Chaney (other than when he’s in one of those famous make-ups). Cagney was never going to be able to absolutely replicate Chaney’s hang-dog screen-air of pain and tragedy – who could? – but he skillfully telegraphs some impressive Chaney-esque silent-era-style changes of mood and emotion. Note, for







example, a beautifully registered moment of mime when he realizes he ought really to have told new bride Clevea about his poor old Mom and Pop *before* the Christmas visit. A brisk gamut of emotions, from doubt, anger and heartbreak to hopeful resolution flashes quickly across his face – conveyed clearly, wordlessly, instantaneously. No make-up required for this portrayal.

And that's a good thing – for this movie is, for the most part, a highly-strung melodrama in full-on 1950s-modern register. Despite the ostensibly celebratory tone of the production, and its implied intent in revisiting the 'good old days' of kinemas with rinky-tink piano accompaniment, less time is spent celebrating Lon and the old flicks than in exploring the difficulties of Lon's relationship with his first wife and the turmoil that followed their parting. The first – and best – highly-charged third of the film centers firmly upon her inability to cope with the discovery that Lon's parents are deaf-mutes; Lon's film career seems like a side issue. But no wonder that it's something of a highly charged soap opera: master of the melodrama Douglas Sirk was doing his great work at Universal-International around this time, and various of his trusted associates worked also on this. *Man of a Thousand Faces* saw release midway between Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956) and his *Imitation of Life* (1959). It co-stars Dorothy Malone, star of the 1956 tear-jerker; showcases the astonishingly agile camerawork of Sirk's favored cameraman, Russell Metty, who worked on both these classics; and features a sugar-sweet score concocted by Sirk's regular collaborator Frank Skinner.

Lon had a thousand faces, we're repeatedly told; but it is the singular faces of the women around him we end up focused upon: the striking Dorothy Malone as his first wife and Jane Greer as his second – both wonderful – threaten to thoroughly steal our attention throughout. The aforementioned press brochure, covering all bases, and just in case this was, in fact, a "women's picture," advised cinema managers to "play up the heartbreak angle": encouraging local newspapers to run a sob-story of "a thoughtless young mother, neglecting her child to further her career" to plug the film.

The Lon of this film was no saint either; but cast and crew were well aware that it could not tell the full story. Some truths had to be omitted. In his autobiography, Cagney recalled one of them: Chaney's son's search for his mother – which ended poignantly in her refusal to acknowledge her identity to him, even when she inadvertently opened the door to him at

her remote desert ranch. The writers on the picture (two of whom, incidentally, had worked on *White Heat*) could not use such an "infinitely sad" tale, wrote Cagney; "that story seemed both crueler and larger than life itself." Lon's boy Creighton – busy acting, by the time this film was released, as Lon Chaney Jr. – does not appear in his Pop's biopic. According to the press pack, it was because "the real-life Lon Chaney Jr. was too old to play himself."

*Man of a Thousand Faces* was heralded as Universal-International's Golden Jubilee Film, released to commemorate the company (formerly plain old Universal) and its 50 years of film production in Hollywood. Intriguingly, this old-school slice of studio celebration was in fact served up at a time of radical reorganization for the American cinema industry. Following post-war legislation that eventually curtailed the stranglehold of the "Big Five" production companies (RKO, Paramount, Loew's/MGM, Twentieth Century-Fox, and Warner) and broke up the affiliated cinema circuits that block-booked their product, smaller companies – amongst them Universal-International – were increasingly able to snag a greater share of the market. Designed to capitalize on this, *Man of a Thousand Faces* was intended to be a lavishly staged spectacular, demonstrating U-I's growing capability as a producer of











blockbusters. Yet director Joseph Pevney (later to shoot fourteen episodes of the classic sci-fi TV show *Star Trek* [1966–1967]) nonetheless complained that he had to cut corners.

“When we shot the recreation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* [1923], I wanted it to be very important. I requested a large number of extras, and the morning we shot it on the back lot, I had only 75 extras! Well, I couldn’t shoot this big scene with only 75 people. I mean, I have this big square and I wanted to fill it up just like the Chaney picture had done. So I went to the unit manager and said, ‘Look, I can’t shoot his scene without more extras.’ He asked me how many I wanted, and I replied 300 or 500. Well he almost had a heart attack!”

Pevney made it work somehow. Such set-pieces – as shot by Metty – do manage to evoke an echo of Chaney’s greatest triumphs; and this one in particular is especially effective. An absurd but poignant air is added to the proceedings as we witness Chaney breaking off mid-shot from that famous whipping scene for a monstrous family row, in full Quasimodo make-up, in front of cast and crew.

As far as Chaney’s filmic back-catalogue is concerned, though, this is no deep dive; but primarily a nostalgic piece, a general harking back to a vaguely remembered time, rather

than an exhaustive exploration of Chaney’s craft, or the screen-era in which he worked. The costumes of the cast, while 1920s-inspired in their look, have unmistakably rigid 1950s lines; and the recreations of the legendary Chaney make-ups, while impressively rendered, have the distinctly late-1950s “rubber mask” look of the “atomic era” horror film. Of course, the secrets of the hand-crafted Chaney originals died with Chaney, when he closed his make-up box for the last time.

*Man of a Thousand Faces* wistfully looks back on a Hollywood era at the time only a few decades distant, yet already impossible to recover; and at a time before the detailed analysis or serious study of this new art, The Cinema, had become fully enshrined. Not for some years yet would the film version of *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) be widely reassessed by academics as a “classic” in the way a book or a painting might be. This was a time in which such films were, for the majority, still – as the *Daily Mail* wrote in its review of this biopic – something to be referred vaguely back to as “silent spine-chillers.” Hence, this biopic was, according to the *Daily Mirror*, “a picture mainly of appeal to Mum and Dad... a movie to bring back memories.” “Do you remember Lon Chaney?” chimed in *The Observer*. If you didn’t, hard luck. None of his films would be coming back around again any time soon. They didn’t even have sound. Chaney was as yet an old-time “horror man,” according to the *Sunday Express*, with the inevitable “tombstone teeth,” who worked, according to the *Star*, “back in the dear, dim days of the early cinema.”

Those days were gone. TV was beginning to revive the old movies, but who knew for sure that one day those old silent films would be reappraised, discussed other than for the purposes of nostalgia? Hence, *Man of a Thousand Faces* hedges its bets somewhat. It is 1950s-styled melodrama that takes center stage, with Lon, his screen work and “the early cinema” remembered with genuine pride yet left silhouetted in the shadowy soft focus of ancient history. The time for serious study of the “horror man” and his art – who, audiences would gradually rediscover, was actually rather more than that – was still to come. Before widespread filmographic reappraisal was wholly an option, this was a film that gestured – with considerable style – towards an as-yet embryonic, new, deeper reconsideration of film history, and the lives of the people who made it. And the publicity didn’t lie about “MAGNIFICENT CAGNEY” – he is.

*Vic Pratt is a film archivist, writer and historian, and a Blu-ray/DVD producer for the BFI. A co-founder of BFI Flipside, he has written on film and television history for a wide range of books, magazines and video releases, as well introduced screenings and film seasons in the UK and abroad. With William Fowler he is co-author of The Bodies Beneath: The Flipside of British Film and Television (Strange Attractor Press).*









## ORIGINAL REVIEWS

Although this is possibly the best of the current cycle of Hollywood “biographies”, impressing as a sincere and human tribute to the silent screen’s *monstre sacré*, yet its gloomily reverential air, its sentimentality, and a novelettish story-line do not inspire much confidence in its authenticity. There are definite inaccuracies. Chaney, for instance, was not an extra when Charles Loane Tucker “discovered” him for *The Miracle Man* [1919]: he had been a featured actor for some five years previously. A rather glib effort is made to explain Chaney’s career in terms of his early bitter experiences, but there is no hint of the post-war moral temper and social conditions that made his films topical and, indeed, possible. James Cagney performs energetically, wisely making no attempt to resemble his subject except in the accurately re-staged extracts from Chaney’s four most popular films. Here he captures the temperament of the character actor as well as communicating a good deal of the excitement implicit in Chaney’s work. But that, ultimately, is the trouble. One’s appetite is whetted for the films themselves, and can hardly be gratified by the synthetic Chaney.

(Peter John Dyer, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1957)

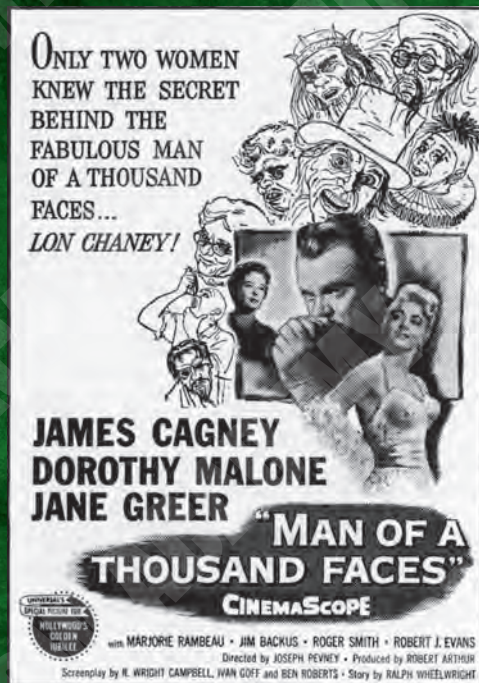






James Cagney makes his third movie come-back as Lon Chaney in *Man of a Thousand Faces* (Odeon, Leicester Square). Last time the "Hollywood Half-pint" made the grade was in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* [1942]. Then he showed he could sing and dance as well as fight. This time he does it again – with some magnificent mime thrown in for good measure. It is another film biography of one of the great stars of silent pictures. Anyone old enough to remember the "Silent Days" remembers Lon Chaney and the series of super-horror films that put him on the map with his sensational make-up. They've all been remade recently with other actors. Most of them suffer in comparison with the originals.

(Robert Kennedy, *The Daily Worker*, August 24, 1957)









**THE TRUE STORY  
OF THE LIFE  
AND LOVES OF  
LON CHANEY!**

**JAMES CAGNEY  
DOROTHY MALONE  
JANE GREER**

**"MAN OF A  
THOUSAND FACES"**

CINEMA SCOPE

*Man of a Thousand Faces* is a moist-eyed biography of the man whose dexterity with the make-up box brought him fame through title roles in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* [1923], *Phantom of the Opera* [1925], and many other silent spine-chillers. Chaney's own suffering in childhood and marriage gave him a sympathetic insight into the deformed and disabled characters which were his theatrical speciality. A publicity blurb calls him "one of the greatest actors the screen has ever known"; but the film gives Mr. Cagney little chance to prove this to the generation of cinemagoers which has grown up since Chaney died 27 years ago this month.

(Edward Goring, *The Daily Mail*, August 24, 1957)

It is curious that the film industry has waited 27 years to memorialize this strange, reclusive man. New generations have invaded the movie houses, people who never heard of Lon Chaney – or if they have, think rather of his son who uses the same name. But we are now well-launched on a cycle of film biographies; and we can be pleased that Universal, the studio where the senior Chaney got his start and made many of his most notable pictures, has chosen to recall his career in detail. For in *Man of a Thousand Faces* we are granted far more than just another cinematic success story. It is also a fascinating account of an earlier era in Hollywood, recreated with a degree of verisimilitude altogether too rare in films of this genre.

(Arthur Knight, *Saturday Review*, August 17, 1957)

Lon Chaney used his make-up box as a Chamber of Horrors and made a bizarre reputation for himself in films like *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Phantom of the Opera*. But once one gets behind the popping eyeballs, the warped spine, the fake scars and the tombstone teeth, we find that Chaney's life was just another series of domestic crises with a wife who did not understand him. [...] Chaney's career moves unexcitingly from one film to another with sporadic rows in between him and his family to staunch the monotony. James Cagney makes a brave try in his interpretation of a brooding, introspective, difficult man but he only makes him plausible when he is weighed down with grotesque make-up.

(Milton Shulman, *The Sunday Express*, August 25, 1957)





# ABOUT THE RESTORATION

*Man of a Thousand Faces* has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with mono audio.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution on an Arriscan at NBC Universal. The film was graded and restored at Dragon DI, Wales. Picture grading was completed on a Pablo Rio system and restoration was completed using a combination of PFClean and Revival software. The audio was remastered from the three channel dialogue, music and effects dubbed master track by NBC Universal.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Dragon DI:  
Mylene Bradford, Paul Wright, Owain Morgan, Khristian Hawkes

NBC Universal:  
Peter Schade, Tim Naderski, Jefferson Root, John Edell

All materials for this restoration were made available by NBC Universal.

# PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Blackford**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**  
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**  
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**  
Artist **Graham Humphreys**  
Design **Obviously Creative**

# SPECIAL THANKS!

Alex Agran, Tim Lucas, Magdalena Medved, Kim Newman, Vic Pratt, Jon Robertson







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