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The lost interviews: Deborah Kerr
on men, marriage, divorce & nerves



Yours

ISSUE 81 // November 2024

RETRO

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On the cover

06 James Stewart fully embraced late fatherhood but the death of his stepson was devastating.

15 The hidden sadness of a Western TV star.

32 Making monsters: how terrifying creatures are brought to life for the big screen.

36 Exclusive 'lost' interview. Deborah Kerr talks about men, marriage and overcoming nerves.

40 Clashing egos and genuine danger on the set of *The Towering Inferno*.

48 The secret sorrow Margaret Rutherford hid from the world.

54 Hitchcock's heroines: the muses who helped shape his films.

68 How alcohol and fast cars led to William Holden's tragic end.

70 Yes Minister's best lines.



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50

This issue

04 You'll have a Dickens of a time with the seven best screen Scrooges.

12 News, views, reviews and your questions answered.

18 Subscribe and save with our latest special offer.

20 What was behind Bette Davis's feud with Miriam Hopkins.

23 The story behind Marilyn's look in Bus Stop.

24 Celebrating 100 years of Elstree Studios.

28 Remembering comedy hero Florence Desmond.

29 Elton John, from Pinner prodigy to pop stardom.

35 The shocking shooting of JFK.

39 Action Man: now boys could play with dolls too!

46 How TV show Pipkins taught children about loss.

50 Retro gifts for your festive wishlist.

52 The story behind Irving Berlin's White Christmas.

57 Why Peter Finch's Oscar bid may have cost him his life.

60 Mike Batt, The Womble that rocked.

62 Frank Sinatra's problem with TV's The Untouchables

66 Fast facts about Christmas blockbuster Home Alone.

74 How Mel Brooks turned taboo into comedy gold.

78 Reel Obsession: One reader's favourite films.

79 Test your wits in our quiz

80 Barbra Streisand and Elliott Gould, two kids against the world.

83 Free festive film poster.

Hello again...

There's a slight festive feel to this month's issue – not least because our cover feature celebrates 50 years of The Towering Inferno (p40). Now I know what you're thinking, that's not a festive film! But to me it is, because the TV schedulers of my childhood seemed to associate Christmas with danger, disaster and war (not sure what that says about their homelife!). Every Christmas you could guarantee the TV schedules would include The Towering Inferno, Jaws, The Poseidon Adventure or The Great Escape.

We also explore the tragic story behind Irving Berlin's famous seasonal classic (p52), uncover facts about Christmas comedy Home Alone (p66) and offer our pick of the best cinema Scrooges of all time (p6).

See you next issue

Sharon

Sharon EDITOR



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RETRO

3

Seven scenes

...with Scrooge

A Dickens of a tale that's been told on film and TV more than 80 times – here are seven of the best miserable misers



Scrooge (1951)

For many Alastair Sim gives the definitive version of Scrooge. Curmudgeonly at the start, then transformed into the ecstatic benefactor at the end, Sim's touch of humour makes the character more sympathetic than other portrayals. The supporting cast included Mervyn Johns, Michael Hordern and George Cole.

RETRO says: Sim-ply perfect!



Scrooged (1988)

Bill Murray is a mean-spirited TV executive who is forced to learn the meaning of Christmas when visited by three spirits. Murray ad-libbed most of the dialogue, much to the frustration of director Richard Donner, who described the experience as, 'like standing on 42nd Street and Broadway, and the lights are out, and you're the traffic cop!'

RETRO says: Look out for M*A*S*H star Jamie Farr as Jacob Marley.



Mickey's Christmas Carol (1983)

A cavalcade of Disney favourites sees the titular mouse and wife Minnie as the poorly treated Crachits, Goofy as Jacob Marley, Donald Duck as Scrooge's nephew and Daisy as his lost love Belle. Scrooge McDuck's voice was provided for the first time by Alan Young who is more famous for being Mr Ed's long-suffering friend Wilbur.

RETRO says: This was the first Mickey Mouse film in 30 years.



Scrooge (1970)

Who could forget Albert Finney grumpily singing I Hate People while storming through crowded Victorian Streets? Following the success of Oliver! (1968), another musical Dickens' adaptation was an obvious winner. The film attracted a stellar cast including Alec Guinness, Edith Evans and Kenneth More, but it was only Finney who spent hours in make-up every day being made to look older than his 34 years.

RETRO says: These ghosts are acting royalty.



The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992)

It might not be the most accurate retelling but it is definitely fun! Michael Caine plays it straight opposite Jim Henson's puppet creations as the Cratchits, led by Kermit and Miss Piggy.

RETRO says: Never blink! was Caine's only acting advice for Kermit.



A Christmas Carol (1938)

When crippling arthritis confined Lionel Barrymore to a wheelchair it was his friend Reginald Owen who took over as Ebenezer Scrooge, securing the first starring role of his career. Mr and Mrs Cratchit were played by husband and wife Gene and Kathleen Lockhart along with their daughter June, who made her debut as one of the Cratchit children.

RETRO says: It's a Christmas cracker – not a turkey!



A Christmas Carol: The Musical (2004)

It's not too much of a stretch to imagine TV's famously peevish psychiatrist Frasier stepping into the slippers of the irascible Ebenezer Scrooge. Three Christmas spirits prescribe some soul searching accompanied by the songs of Alan Menken and Lynn Ahrens.

RETRO says: Charlie Chaplin's daughter Geraldine is one of the host of ghosts.



Twice the fun
with twin girls
Kelly and Judy

JAMES STEWART FAMILY MAN

Fatherhood came late to James Stewart, first with two stepsons and finally, at the age of 43, twin girls. Steve O'Brien reflects on how important family life was for the man once dubbed the 'Great American Bachelor'...

DID YOU KNOW?

Before meeting Gloria, James Stewart had been romantically connected to many Hollywood starlets including Ginger Rogers, Norma Shearer, Marlene Dietrich and Olivia de Havilland.



Any cinemagoer watching *It's a Wonderful Life* over the Christmas of 1946 would have seen in its lead actor James Stewart the epitome of the all-American patriarch, so assured was his performance as the doting dad of four in Frank Capra's festive favourite. Yet at the time of making that movie, the 38-year-old had yet to settle down with a family of his own, and his single status was so notorious that gossip columnist Hedda Hopper had called the actor the 'Great American Bachelor'.

He'd nearly been married once, to the singer Dinah Shore, but the woman who finally stole Jimmy Stewart's heart was a former model, with whom he'd been set up by his friends Gary Cooper and his wife, Rocky. Luckily, the Coopers proved eminent matchmakers and, at a star-studded party the couple had laid on at their home, Jimmy Stewart and Gloria Hatrick McLean finally met, bonding immediately over a love of golf and sailing. It was, the actor would recall, 'love at first sight'.

Unlike Jimmy, however, Gloria was already married, albeit separated from her husband, newspaper heir Edward McLean

Jr. The union had produced two children, Ronald (born in 1944) and Michael (1946), but having recently moved to Los Angeles, singledom was not working for Gloria. She'd told her friends, Gary and Rocky, that she was looking for 'a decent man with a strong character [and] a proper father who could raise her sons.'

And raise them he did. After his and Gloria's nuptials on 9 August 1949, Jimmy became Ronald and Michael's full-time dad, taking them on as if they were his own.

STEPPING UP

'It was my impression that Jimmy came along at the right moment to fill a void for the boys,' the socialite Mignon Winants reflected in Donald Dewey's biography of the actor. 'Neddy [Gloria's ex-husband] liked all his sons, but from some distance. He spent most of his waking hours being the playboy that he was. With Jimmy, the boys had a real father, and one who really took to the role as well as anyone could.'

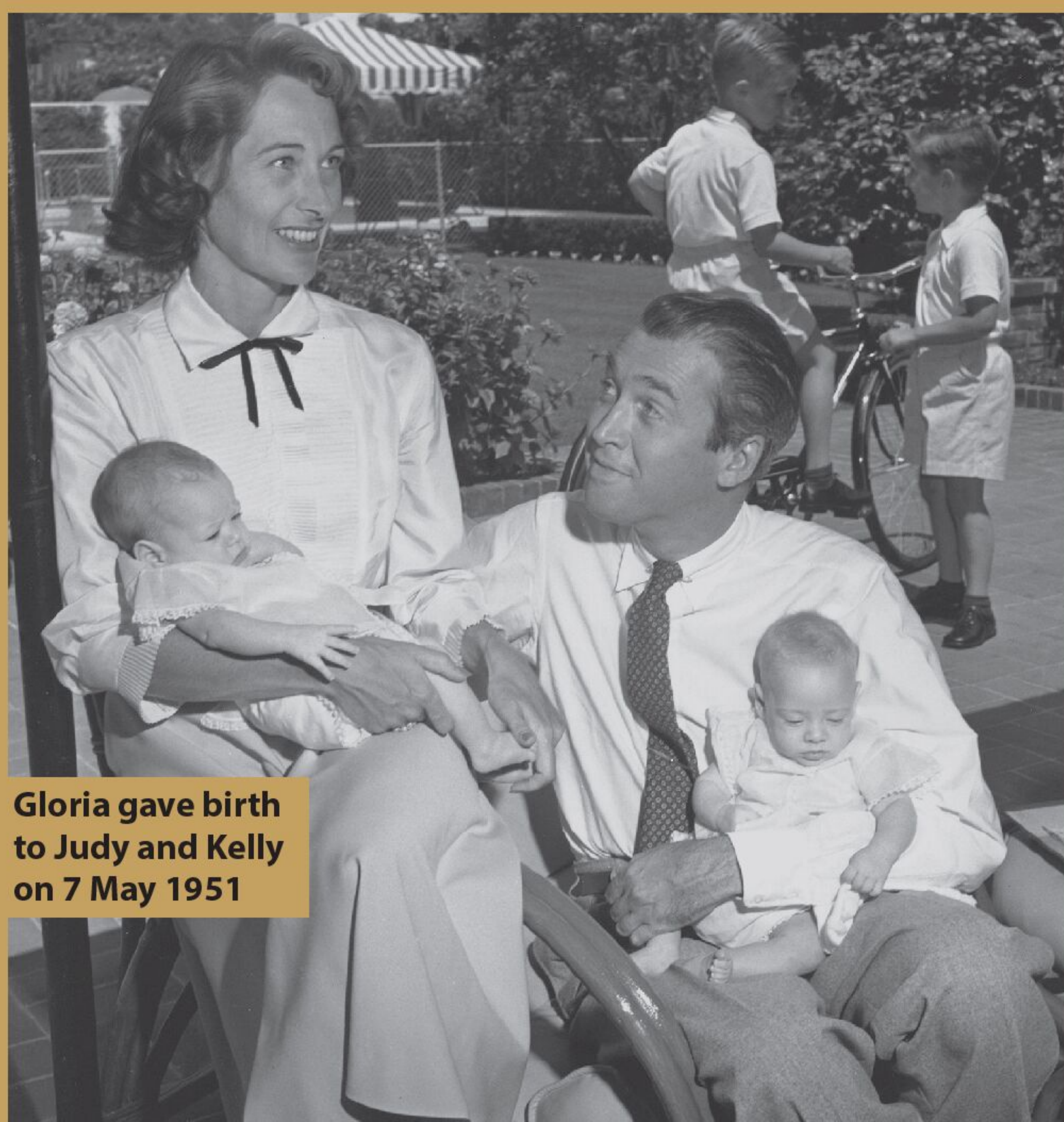
Though Gloria would later tell *Photoplay* magazine that Jimmy, 'was used to seeing the boys around the house', she admitted that she had, 'a twinge or two' about how her new husband would cope being around the children 24/7.

She needn't have worried. Jimmy, she said, 'was never bored or annoyed' with Ronnie and Michael, although, as she found out, disciplining them was not something that came naturally to the actor.

One day, Michael had been playing with his pet lizard and had, in typical little boy fashion, squashed it, causing its tail to come off. An enraged Gloria yelled at him, 'You're going to show that to your daddy, and he'll see to it you're properly punished!'

When Jimmy returned home, Gloria explained what had happened and a stern-faced 'Daddy' took Michael by the hand and walked him to his room.

'The minutes flew by, no sound was to be heard,' Gloria recounted. 'Finally, bursting with curiosity, the governess and I tiptoed upstairs and listened at the door.' ➔



Gloria gave birth to Judy and Kelly on 7 May 1951



In 1950 the family visited the UK for the London premiere of *Harvey*

'Now, Michael,' they heard Jimmy say. 'I want you to remember something. Think how embarrassed that poor lizard is going to be without its tail.'

'That was it! Some punishment!' Gloria recalled. 'The door opened and out they came, Michael grinning like an imp and Jimmy practically swaggering like a conquering hero.'

It was in 1950, a year after they'd married, that Gloria discovered she was pregnant and on 7 May 1951, the Stewarts welcomed twins Kelly and Judy. 'Where Gloria and I got so fortunate,' the actor would say, 'was that we got twin girls to go with two boys.'

MILITARY MAN

By all accounts, Jimmy was as devoted to his daughters as he had been, and continued to be, to his stepsons. 'Once my dad dressed as Santa Claus and came into our bedroom – my sister and I were astounded,' Kelly recalled in 2020, about one Christmas when she and her sister were little, remembering how, even though she knew it was her dad, he never broke character. 'I slapped him on the back and nudged him, but he just carried on as Santa,' she said.

If Jimmy was naturally paternal, Gloria's temperament, it seems, was less suited to parenthood. The writer Leonard Gershe told Donald Dewey that Mrs Stewart was 'certainly never maternal in



Ronald and Michael were just five and three when James Stewart married their mother Gloria

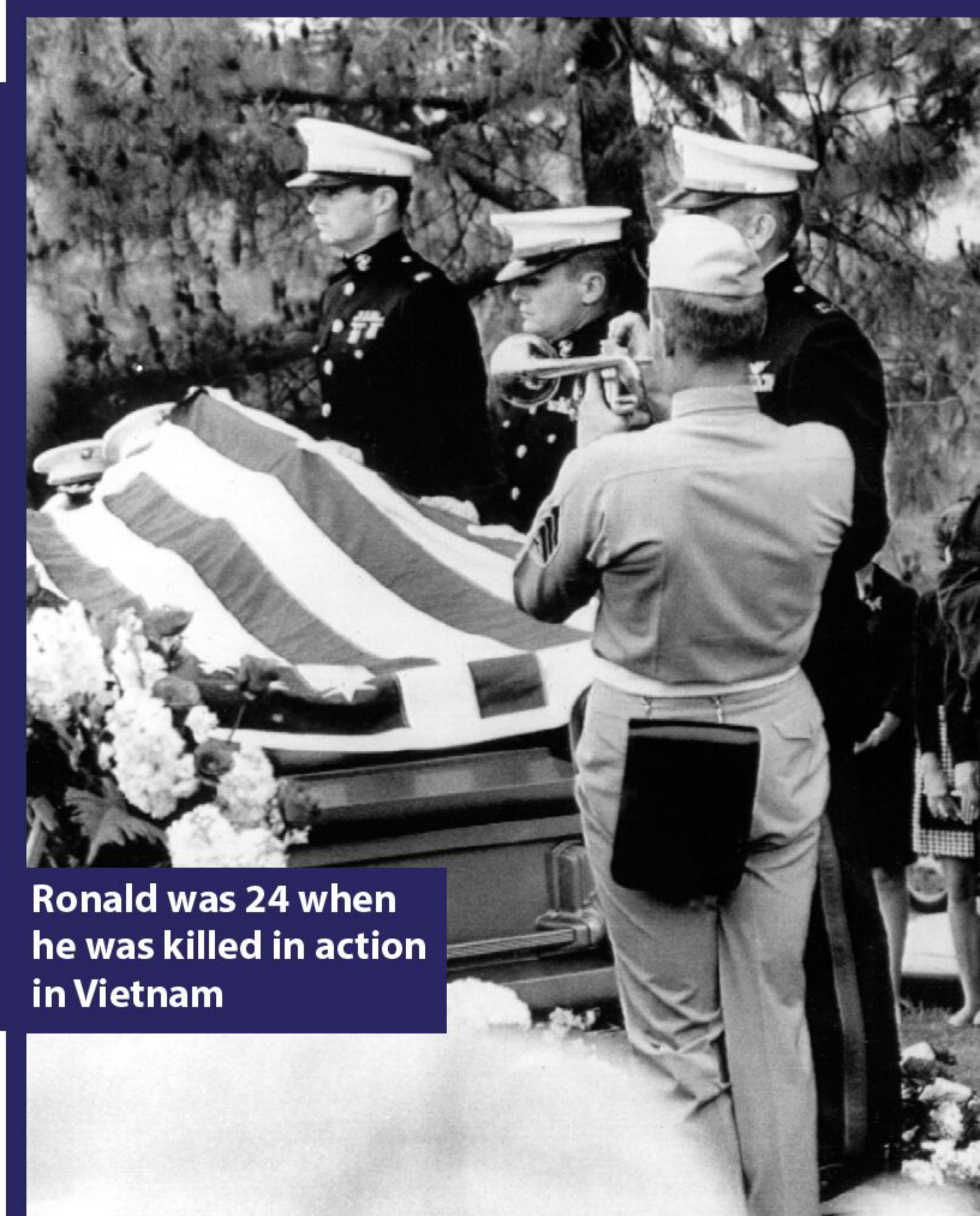
any Mother Earth sense', even to the point of grumbling about her children in interviews. 'Kelly follows Judy except in devilment,' Gloria told one reporter in 1954. 'Kelly makes my blood run cold sometimes. They adore each other. But when you take Judy on your lap, she completely relaxes. Kelly stiffens.'

But while Jimmy was, by nature, the more placid parent, there were some things that provoked him. When in the Sixties, America found itself at war in Vietnam, the Republican-leaning Jimmy had firmly held pro-war views about the conflict in South-East Asia, a stance that caused much friction

A traditional father

In the book *Raised by the Stars*, published in 2011, Kelly Stewart-Harcourt painted a picture of her father as a gentle, if traditional, figure. 'Dad sat in a big comfy armchair that had a matching footrest and no one else ever sat in that chair when he was home!' she told author Nick Thomas. 'When he was working on a movie, he would sit with the script in his hands and his lips moving, saying his lines to himself. He never said anything out loud. I have that image of him burned into my mind. We never read any of the lines with him. Except for that, he rarely brought his work home with him.'

She went on to reveal that he wasn't 'a hands-on dad' but was instead a man fashioned by the traditions of the time, when the father went out to work, leaving much of the day-to-day parenting to Gloria and the children's governess. 'He didn't help us with our homework and I doubt he ever changed a diaper,' Kelly explained. 'But he taught by example and just had a very quiet way about him.'



Ronald was 24 when he was killed in action in Vietnam



within the family. 'I hate them,' he said when asked by an interviewer some years later about draft dodgers. 'Whether right or wrong, their country was at war and their country asked them to serve, and they refused and ran away. Cowards, that's what they were.'

Like many American families at the time, fierce arguments about the rights and wrongs of that conflict would often erupt around the dinner table. Michael's abhorrence of the war was so great,

he'd go on protests, much to the disgust of his father. Kelly, too, was sympathetic to the anti-war cause, even if she was less militant than her older brother.

Ronald's position, however, was more aligned with his dad's and, following his graduation, he enlisted in the Marines. When the 22-year-old was inducted, his bars were pinned to his uniform by one Brigadier General James Stewart (a veteran of the Second World War, he'd been promoted in 1959, becoming the highest-ranking actor in American military history). Shaking Ronald's hand, the proud father pulled his stepson close and told him he would visit him the first chance he got, wherever in the world he ended up being stationed. In 1967, however, there was only one place that was likely to be – Vietnam.

In early June 1969, everything seemed to be going well for the Stewarts. Kelly and Judy were about to graduate, and Michael was newly engaged and readying himself for married life. But then, on 8 June, Jimmy

and Gloria received the knock on the door every parent of a serving soldier fears. Marine 1st Lt Ronald McClean had been killed in action in the Quang Tri province of South Vietnam. He was just 24 years old.

Ronald's death devastated the now 60-something actor and he would spend the next months engulfed in grief. His depression was so overwhelming that production on the movie he was shooting at the time of his stepson's death, a comedy-Western titled *The Cheyenne Social Club* (1970), was shut down. When filming resumed, Jimmy's co-star Henry Fonda did his best to support his friend. 'He and I avoided talking about the war before the tragedy,' Fonda said. 'Now I did everything to take his mind off it. We chawed about old times at the Madison Square Hotel in New York, and our early bachelor days together in Brentwood.'

HEARTBREAK

Jimmy would work through his grief, but sadness remained at how fractured his beloved family now was. Not only was Ronald gone, but Michael was married and the girls were at college. The family nest that had meant so much to the actor in the Fifties and Sixties was no more.

The following decade, however, would see Jimmy and Gloria become grandparents for the first time, when Michael (whose relationship with his stepfather had healed, in the aftermath of Ronald's death) and his wife Barbara had a baby boy. Then in 1979 Judy married Steve Merrill, a venture capitalist from San Francisco. Kelly, meanwhile, had become hitched to Cambridge University professor Alexander Harcourt and was embarking on a career as a primatologist.

At the dawn of the Nineties, Jimmy would need the emotional support of his children and ➔



DID YOU KNOW?

In her career as a primatologist, Kelly Stewart-Harcourt worked closely alongside the late Dian Fossey, who was the subject of the 1988 feature *Gorillas in the Mist*.



Kelly married Alexander Harcourt in 1977



Jimmy was relieved to have the support of his best friend Henry Fonda to help him through his grief while filming *The Cheyenne Social Club*

grandchildren even more when Gloria succumbed to lung cancer at the age of 75. After more than 40 years together, her death hit Jimmy hard. 'It's just wrong,' he told Gloria's niece, Karin Lopp, at her funeral. 'It's absolutely wrong that it happened this way.'

In the aftermath of his wife's passing, Jimmy retreated from public view, spending most of his time in his bedroom, emerging only for meals or for visits from Michael, Kelly and Judy. In June 1997 he suffered a pulmonary embolism, which in turn caused a fatal heart attack. He died, aged 89, on 2 July with his children by his side.

A TEACHER BY EXAMPLE

In the years since James Stewart's death, his three children have been the gatekeepers of his legacy. In 2007, all three appeared together when the US Postal Service issued a stamp featuring their father's image, with Kelly saying, 'Our family is so honoured. I'm sure my father would be humbled as well. He received many awards throughout his life and I'm sure he would view this as one of the most cherished.'

Kelly was also on hand to slam White House staffer Natalie Harp at the Republican National Convention in 2020, when she likened then-President Donald Trump to the character of George Bailey from *It's a Wonderful Life*. 'Given that this beloved American classic is about decency, compassion, sacrifice and a fight against corruption,' Kelly told *The New York Times*, 'our family

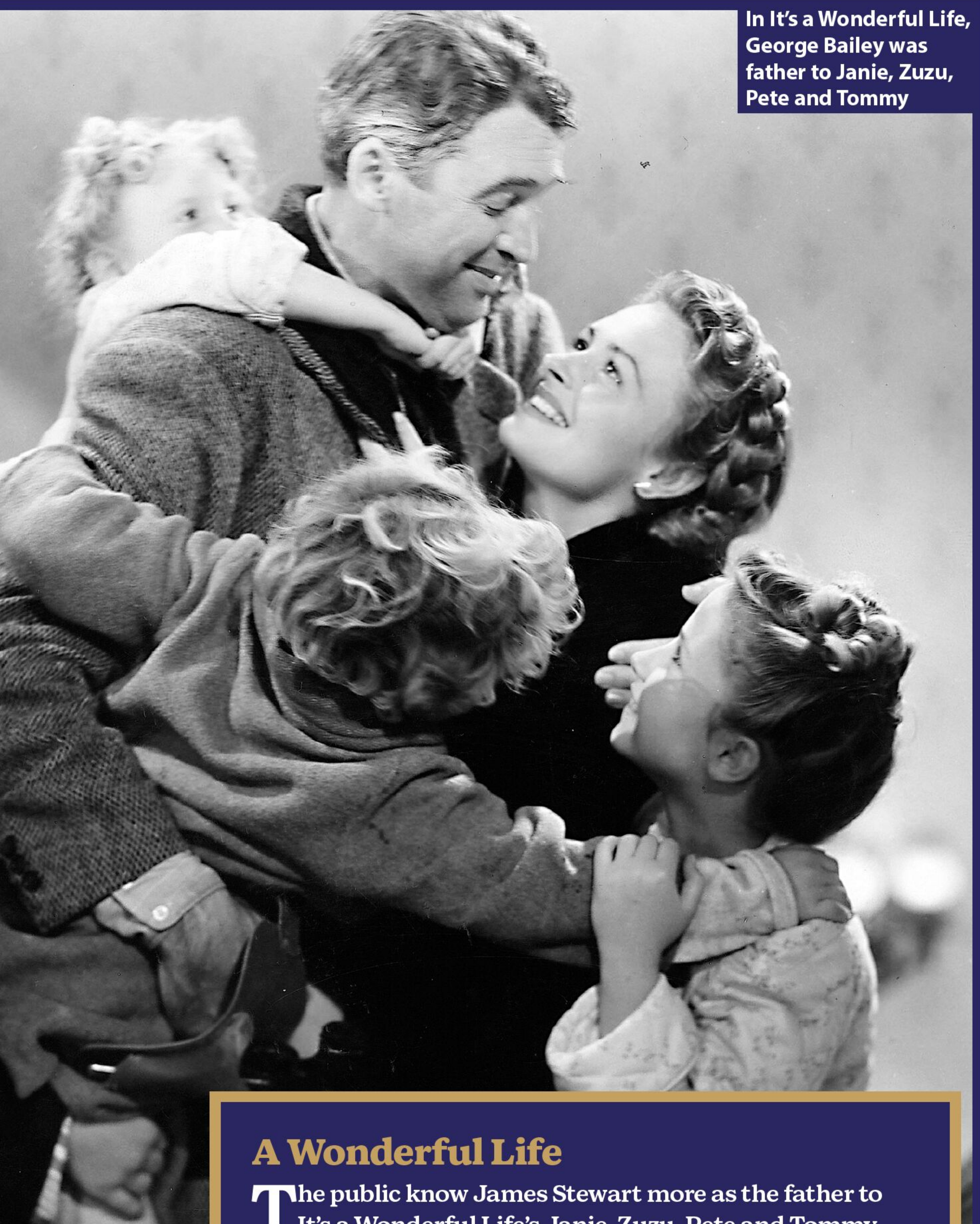
considers Ms Harp's analogy to be the height of hypocrisy and dishonesty.'

Even now, 27 years after his death, James Stewart's legacy as a father continues to make a difference. Kelly has said it was the holidays her parents took her on that inspired her to become a naturalist (she specialises in Africa's rare and endangered mountain gorillas) and the example he set as a father would provide a moral framework for her and her siblings that they would carry into their adult lives.

'Dad as a father was great,' Kelly told ABC News in 2022, 'because he never lectured us on how to be good... He taught us by the way he lived.'

'Gloria and the children continue to bring me enormous pleasure,' Jimmy once gushed in a 1985 interview. 'On the whole, it's been a darn wonderful life.'





In *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey was father to Janie, Zuzu, Pete and Tommy



A Wonderful Life

The public know James Stewart more as the father to *It's a Wonderful Life*'s Janie, Zuzu, Pete and Tommy than they do Ronald, Michael, Kelly and Judy, but that may change soon, with the news that a big-screen biopic of one of the silver screen's greatest actors is in development, with Kelly Stewart-Harcourt acting as its executive producer.

'I am so honoured Kelly and her family are trusting us with their father's legacy,' producer Aaron Burns said in a statement earlier this year. 'We are excited to take moviegoers on a journey to discover the real Jimmy, and how his father's prayers and his collaboration with Frank Capra guided him through his darkest hours. Jimmy came to truly embody the characters he played, as husband, father, and citizen.'

'Our family is thrilled that Aaron and his team approached us about bringing Dad's story to life on the big screen,' added Kelly. 'Everyone loved him as George Bailey. Now they can learn how that movie intertwined with other parts of his life in so many important ways.'

I know the face...

BARBARA LOTT



Born: 15 May 1920, Surrey, England

Died: 19 December 2002, London, England

Screen debut: Mr Ketley's Granddaughter in *Look Up and Laugh* (1935)

Screen credits: 115

Best known for: Barbara trained at RADA but her film career as a child actor was helped by her father William, who managed Ealing Studios before the Second World War. She was a familiar face on TV from the Forties onwards with many appearances in *ITV Television Playhouse* (1958-59), *Dixon of Dock Green* (1967-70), *Crown Court* (1973) and *Coronation Street* (1968-72). She played Nana in the mini-series *Ballet Shoes* (1975) and found fame in later life with comedy series *Rings on Their Fingers* (1978-80). However, she will always be best remembered as Ronnie Corbett's overbearing mother in *Sorry* (1981-88).

You've got MAIL

LETTERS+OPINIONS+DILEMMAS



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■ Reading the 'lost' interview with George Raft (**Retro** 79) I find it incredible that he couldn't have got a divorce if he wanted to. The first time I saw him I thought he was Humphrey Bogart, so I'm not surprised they once played brothers. Indeed, Raft might be said to have helped make Bogart a star by turning down *Dead End*, *High Sierra*, *The Maltese Falcon* and *Casablanca*.

Mark Taha

Auction watch

A poster from the 1938 film serial *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* sold recently at auction for \$4000 (£3098). The film was Larry 'Buster' Crabbe's second outing as everyone's favourite space ranger.



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■ I'm curious to know what happened to the Italian actor Stelio Candelli. I remember him as Danny Scipio in the Sixties BBC series *Vendetta*.

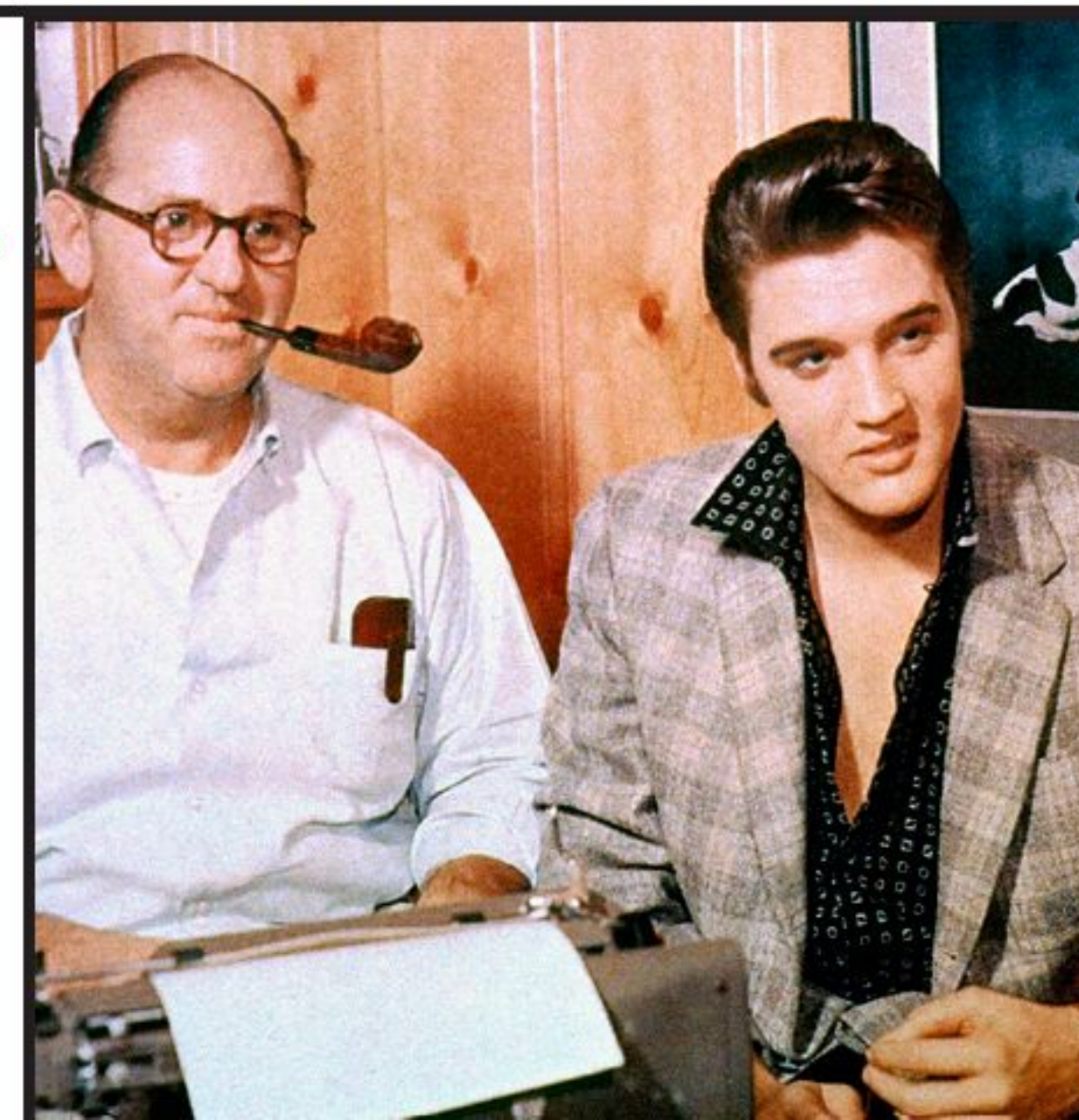
Phil Hall

Retro says: Born in Trieste and educated in Rome, during the Sixties and Seventies Candelli played main roles in numerous genres of film, sometimes credited as Stanley Kent. In addition to *Vendetta* in the UK, he's best known for his role as a sinister scar-faced Gestapo agent in *The Winds of War* (1983) and the cult horror film *Demons* (1985). His final appearance was TV movie *Mussolini's Daughter* (2005) before his death in 2017.



69 years ago... 21 November 1955

RCA Records made a shrewd investment when it paid Sun Records' Sam Phillips an unprecedented \$35,000 to buy Elvis Presley's recording contract.





■ How about a feature on the London-born actress Carol White? She had a promising career in the Sixties, starring in *Cathy Come Home* (1966) and *Poor Cow* (1967), but after she left the UK for Hollywood things spiralled downhill and she died at the age of 49.

J Adams

Retro says: Her tragic story was immortalised in the 1994 TV film *The Battersea Bardot*.

■ I would love to find out more about the actor Richard Bradford.

Christine Strong

Retro says: Texan-born Richard studied at the famous Actors Studio in New York and, after just a handful of stage and small film roles he came to the attention of Lew Grade who brought him to Britain to star in *Man in a Suitcase* (1967-68). He was a regular face on TV throughout the Seventies and Eighties, guesting on shows such as *Gunsmoke*, *Mannix*, *Kojak*, *The Waltons* and *Cagney and Lacey*. His film credits include *An Enemy of the People* (1978) and *The Untouchables* (1987). He died in March 2016 aged 81.

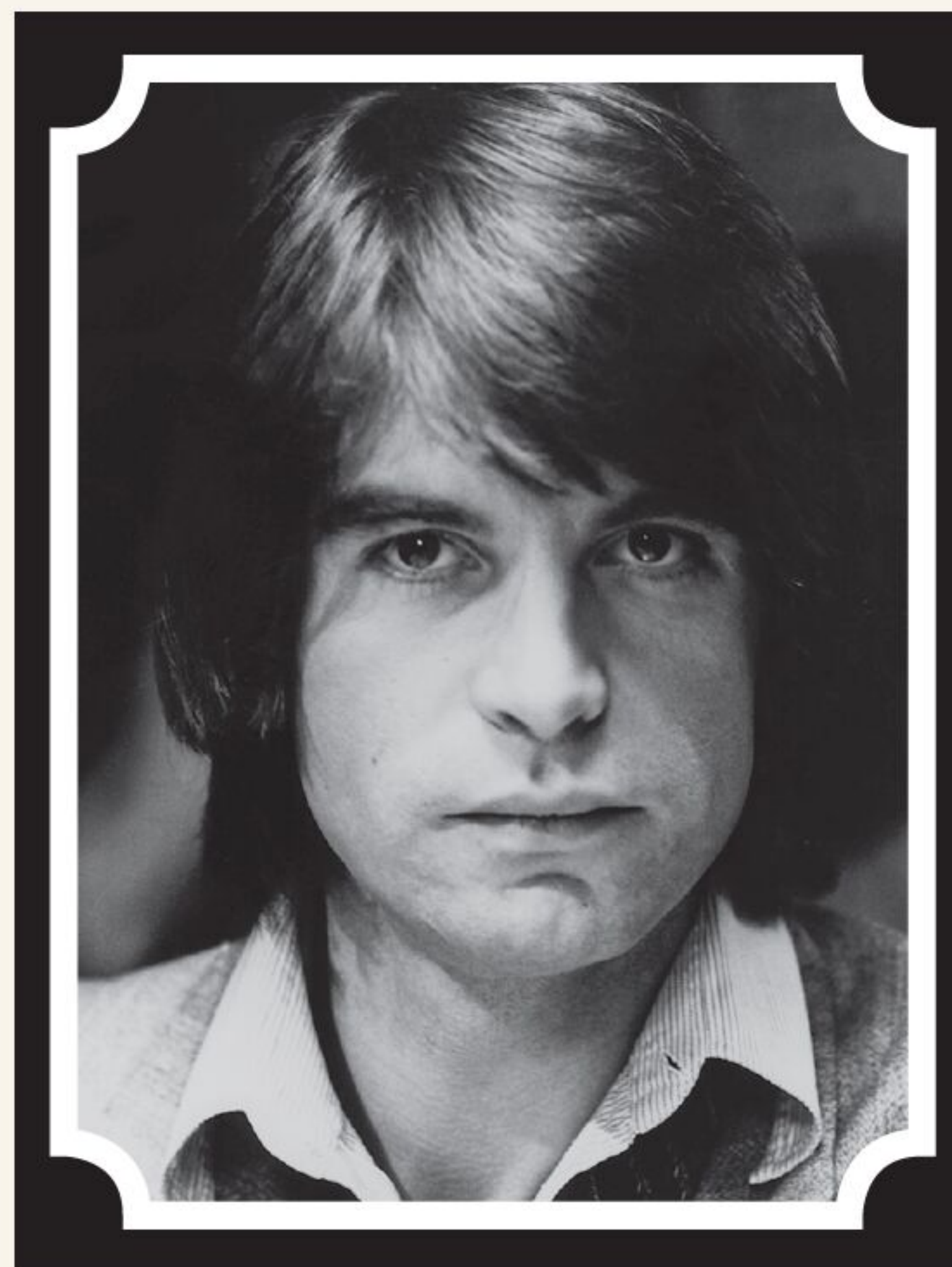


■ Thank you for the feature on Juke Box Jury (**Retro 79**). I was puzzled to find no mention of the 'Oi'll give it foive' girl, Janice Nicholls, but I think I may have muddled up Juke Box Jury with Thank Your Lucky Stars. The two shows were required viewing when I was a teenager and have become inextricably linked in my memory.

Maggie Cobbett

Retro says: We're happy to confirm that West Country office clerk, Janice, was indeed on *Thank Your Lucky Stars* (1961-66).

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?



I enjoyed the recent mention of the stage play *Hair*! (**Retro 79**) because I've been a long-term fan of its star Oliver Tobias. Can you tell me what happened to him?

Sharon Smithers

Born on 6 August 1947 in Zurich, Switzerland, to actor parents, Tobias became known for his charismatic and intense performances across stage, screen and TV. He grew up in England and trained in dance. In addition to being part of the original London production of *Hair* in 1968, he also played Judas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Tobias' film career included *Romance of a Horsethief* (1971) and *The Stud* (1978). He earned TV fame in the Seventies and Eighties in *Arthur of the Britons* (1972) and *Dick Turpin's Greatest Adventure* (1981). Recent work includes appearances in *Dad's Army* (2016), *Open My Eyes* (2018), and Swiss TV series *A Fistful of Karma* (2022). He is currently in the process of writing a tell-all biography.

Retro says: Is there a little-known star you'd like us to find out more about? Write to ask us to find out what happened to your favourites.



77 years ago... 24 November 1947

The US House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities voted to find the 'Hollywood 10' in contempt for refusing to reveal their political affiliations.

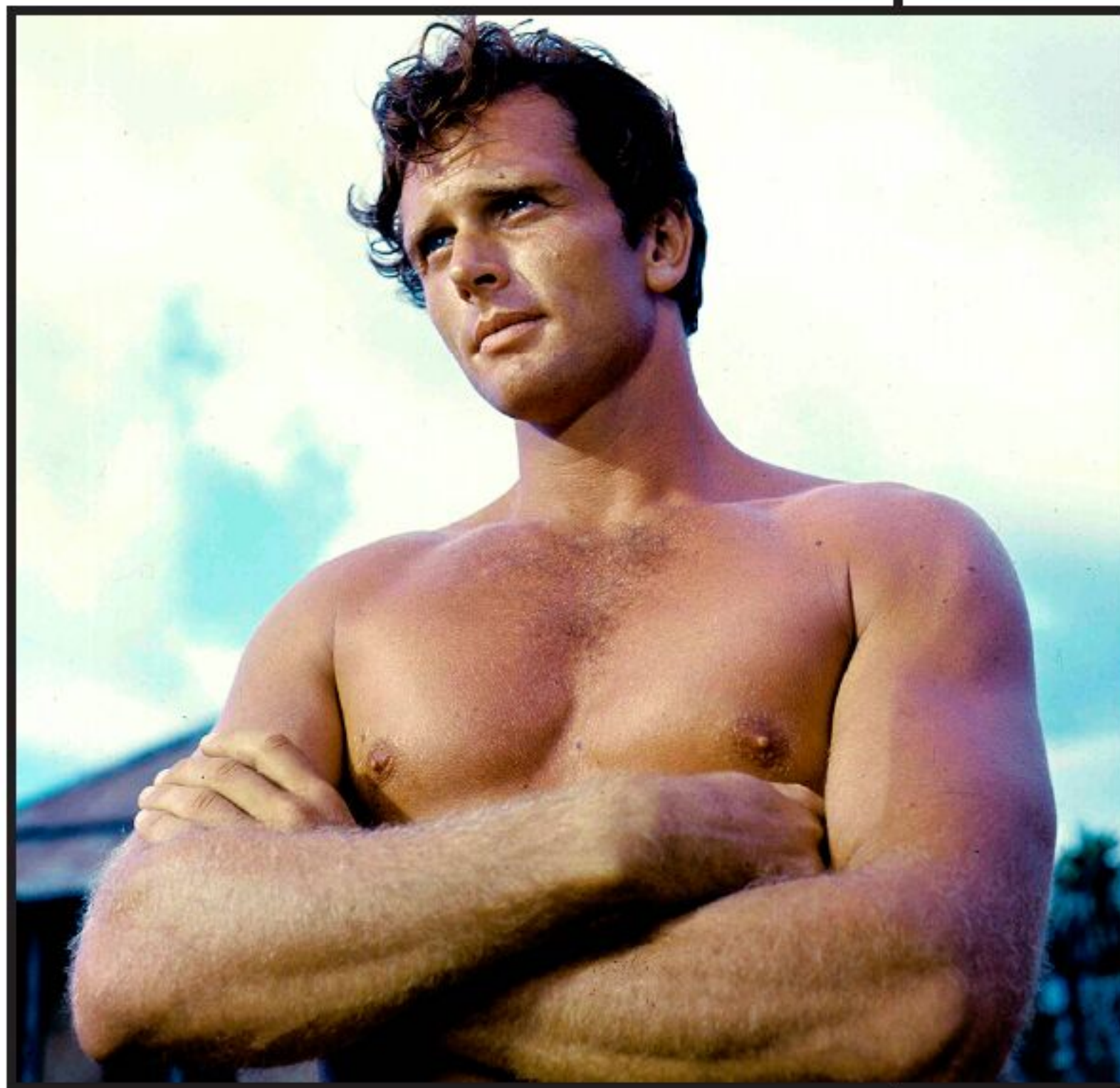
You've got **MORE MAIL**

■ I was sorry to hear that actor Ron Ely has died aged 86. **Retro** readers will remember him as television's Tarzan, in the popular US series, which ran for 57 episodes from 1966-68.

Ron made his film debut in *South Pacific* (1958) but worked mostly in TV, playing Mike Madison in *The Aquanauts* (1961-62), but it was the role of Tarzan that brought him worldwide recognition.

What many may not know is that Ron suffered a terrible double tragedy when his second wife Valerie Lundeen (1981's *Miss Florida*) was stabbed to death aged 62, at the couple's Santa Barbara home, by their youngest son, 30-year-old Cameron Ely, who was then shot dead by police at the scene.

John Rutherford



REEL LOCATION



■ I'm a big fan of the 1991 film *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*. Can you tell me where it was filmed and whether the Sheriff of Nottingham's castle was real or a film set?

Janet Prior

Retro says: Who could forget the incomparable Alan Rickman's dastardly Sheriff threatening to cut his enemy's heart out with a spoon? Many of the scenes depicting Nottingham and the castle were filmed in Carcassonne a fortified medieval hilltop town in the Languedoc region of France. The castle has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1997 and is visited by more than four million tourists a year. Wardour Castle in Wiltshire stood in for Locksley Castle while Hulne Priory in Northumberland became Maid Marian's manor house.



OUT NOW....

BUY THE BOOK

Featuring previously unpublished interviews with three of the Fab Four, Patrick Humphries' new book *With the Beatles* takes fans back to the beginning in Liverpool and Hamburg, and reveals the very last words John Lennon ever said to Paul McCartney. **RRP £25**



WATCH ON BLU-RAY

Featuring an all-star cast including Richard Harris, Anthony Hopkins, Omar Sharif and Ian Holm, *Juggernaut* (1974) is a tense suspense thriller directed by Richard Lester. A packed cruise liner is caught in a race against time when a ransom demand reveals explosives are planted on board. Everyone must work together to avert certain disaster.

Out now £17.99



BUY THE BOOK

Others have written about the films of Sergio Leone but now it's the turn of the man himself. In *Sergio Leone: By Himself*, film expert Christopher Frayling has collected interviews and essays (many translated into English for the first time), previously unseen photographs and artwork to create a tribute to the legendary director's body of work.

Out 26 November RRP £39.95



WATCH ON TV

For a nostalgic treat tune in to Seventies variety show *The Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club* (1974-77). Set in a fictional working men's club the show features comedy and songs from the likes of Colin Crompton and Bernard Manning. **10.05pm every Sunday from 1 December on Talking Pictures TV.**





How the **WEST** WAS FUN

Chris Hallam travels back to the glory days of the Old West to uncover the tale of two pretty good, bad men and the single, devastating tragedy that occurred behind the scenes...

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Although the subject matter was very different, the show inspired the name of the British comedy sketch show, *Alas Smith and Jones* starring Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones (1984-88).

He was not really called Joshua Smith. He was Hannibal Heyes (Pete Duel and later Roger Davis). Meanwhile, he was not really called Thaddeus Jones. He was Jedediah 'Kid' Curry (Ben Murphy). Together, they were professional lawbreakers, robbers and thieves, members of the notorious Devil's Hole Gang and, reportedly, 'the two most successful outlaws in the history of the West'.

But now they were in trouble. Times were changing and the duo were finding it harder than ever to relieve the trains and banks of the loot as they once had. Could it be time to think the unthinkable and consider giving it all up and taking up the governor's offer of an amnesty?

Such was the premise of *Alias Smith and Jones*, the light comedy Western that ran across three series and 50 episodes between January 1971 and January 1973.

In 1969, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* opened in cinemas and quickly became the most successful movie Western of all time. The film's success made a big impression on Glen A Larson, a Western history fan

who happened to be a member of a successful pop group, The Four Preps. Larson also had a day job as a TV writer/producer at Universal and soon began work on a lighthearted Western series that drew heavily on the recent film for inspiration. 'Television is always very influenced by motion pictures and by the media...' Larson admitted. 'You generally can sell what they want to buy.' He would later go on to create many series including *Battlestar Galactica* (1978-79) and *Magnum P.I.* (1980-88). Those who thought he was sometimes unoriginal would nickname him 'Glenn Larceny.'

DYNAMIC DUO

However, it was Larson who came up with the idea of Hannibal Heyes and Kid Curry. The premise of them seeking an amnesty came from a real incident in Butch Cassidy's life the film had not explored. Unlike Butch and Sundance, the stars of *Alias Smith and Jones* would prove to be entirely fictional although they would occasionally cross the paths of real-life historical figures from the 1880s, such as Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday.

A crucial aspect of the show's early success was the casting of the



Ben Murphy said he and Pete Duel had 'an effortless chemistry' when it came to acting



The show attracted high-profile guest stars such as Cesar Romero and Ida Lupino





young actors, Pete Duel and Ben Murphy as the two 'pretty good bad men'. Both men had an air of Paul Newman and Robert Redford about them, reinforcing the Butch and Sundance link, and quickly developed a popular fan base.

On the very last day of 1971, the production of the second season of *Alias Smith and Jones* was struck by a sudden, devastating tragedy. Actor Pete Duel was dead at the age of 31. The actor had shot himself at home. His suicide came at the end of many years of suffering with alcoholism and clinical depression. Despite this, the news came as a tremendous shock to everyone who knew him. Duel had been working, apparently happily on the show, only the day before.

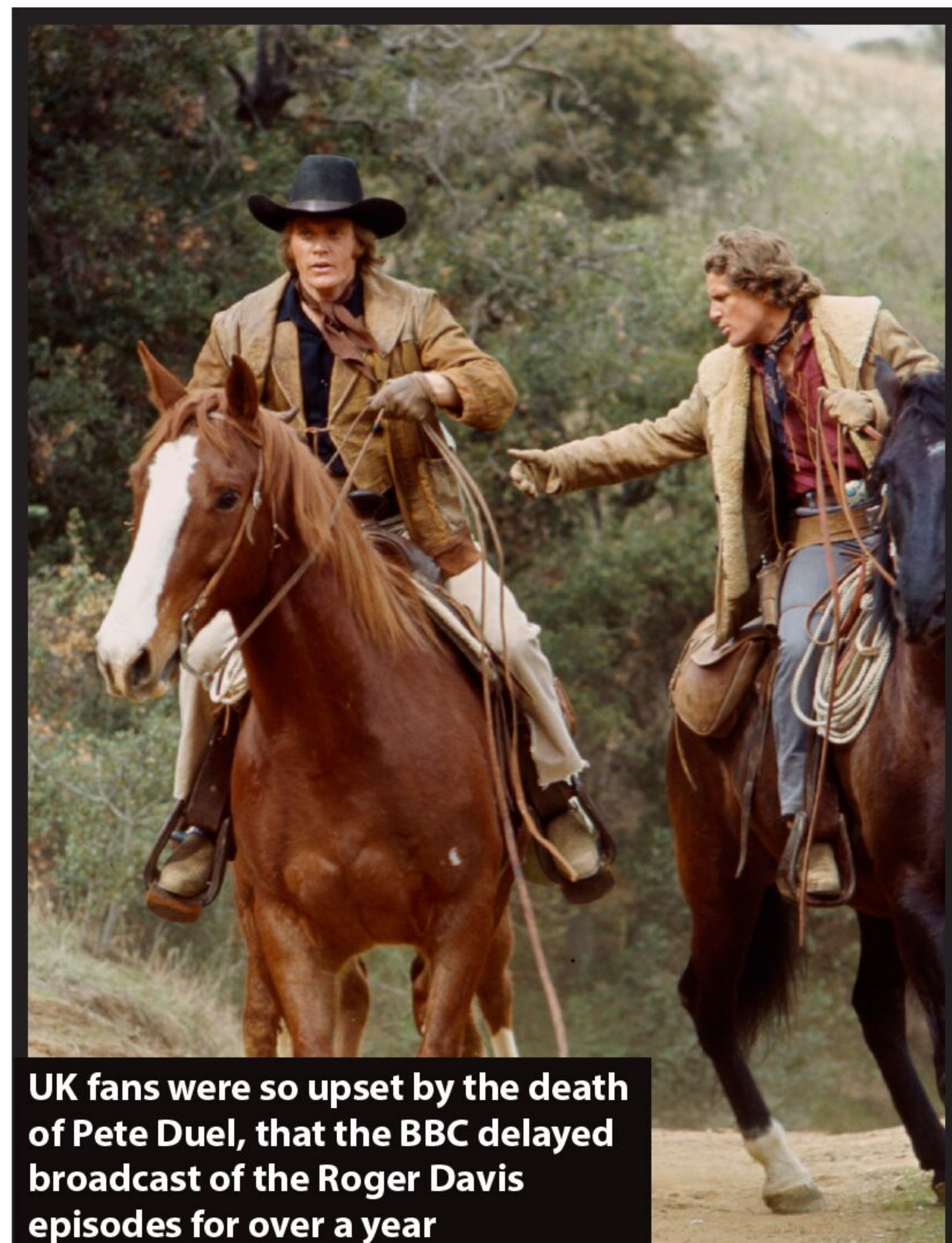
Terrible as the death of such a promising young man undeniably was, thoughts inevitably quickly turned to the future. On hearing the news, producer Roy Huggins had initially wanted to cancel the show immediately, but after pressure from the ABC network, it was decided to continue with actor Roger Davis now taking the role of Hannibal Heyes opposite Ben Murphy.

A NEW HEYES

Davis had acted with *Duel* before in the 1970 Western pilot, *The Young Country* and had already guest starred in an episode of *Alias Smith and Jones*, as the villainous Danny Bilson: the only man Kid Curry had ever killed. But his link to the series went further still: Davis also provided the voiceover narration that began every episode. Now he would play Heyes for the remaining 17 shows which would make up the series' 50-episode run.

Alias Smith and Jones was always a likeable and very watchable show. Despite this, from the outset, a number of factors ensured the odds were stacked against it. First up, was unfortunate scheduling. In the US, it was shown at the same time as the incredibly popular *Flip Wilson Show* (1970-74).

Another difficulty was that Westerns had fallen into decline and were becoming much less popular on TV. Where there had been 30 Westerns on US TV during the 1959-60 season including the likes of *Wagon Train* (1957-65), *Cheyenne* (1955-63) and *Rawhide* (1959-65), by 1970 this number had fallen to just four. Added to



UK fans were so upset by the death of Pete Duel, that the BBC delayed broadcast of the Roger Davis episodes for over a year



that, while always perfectly good in the role of Hannibal, Roger Davis was never as popular with audiences as Pete Duel had been.

Alias Smith and Jones was cancelled in 1973, at a time when a number of old favourites such as *Bonanza* (1959-73) and *Gunsmoke* (1955-75) were also going to the happy hunting ground in the sky.

Alias Smith and Jones was not the last TV Western by any means: *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-83), *Lonesome Dove* (1989) and *Dr Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1993-98) still lay in the future. But, as with the Old West itself, there was a sense that a bygone age had now moved into the past.

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Future double Oscar-winner Sally Field appeared twice in the series playing con artist, Clementine Hale.

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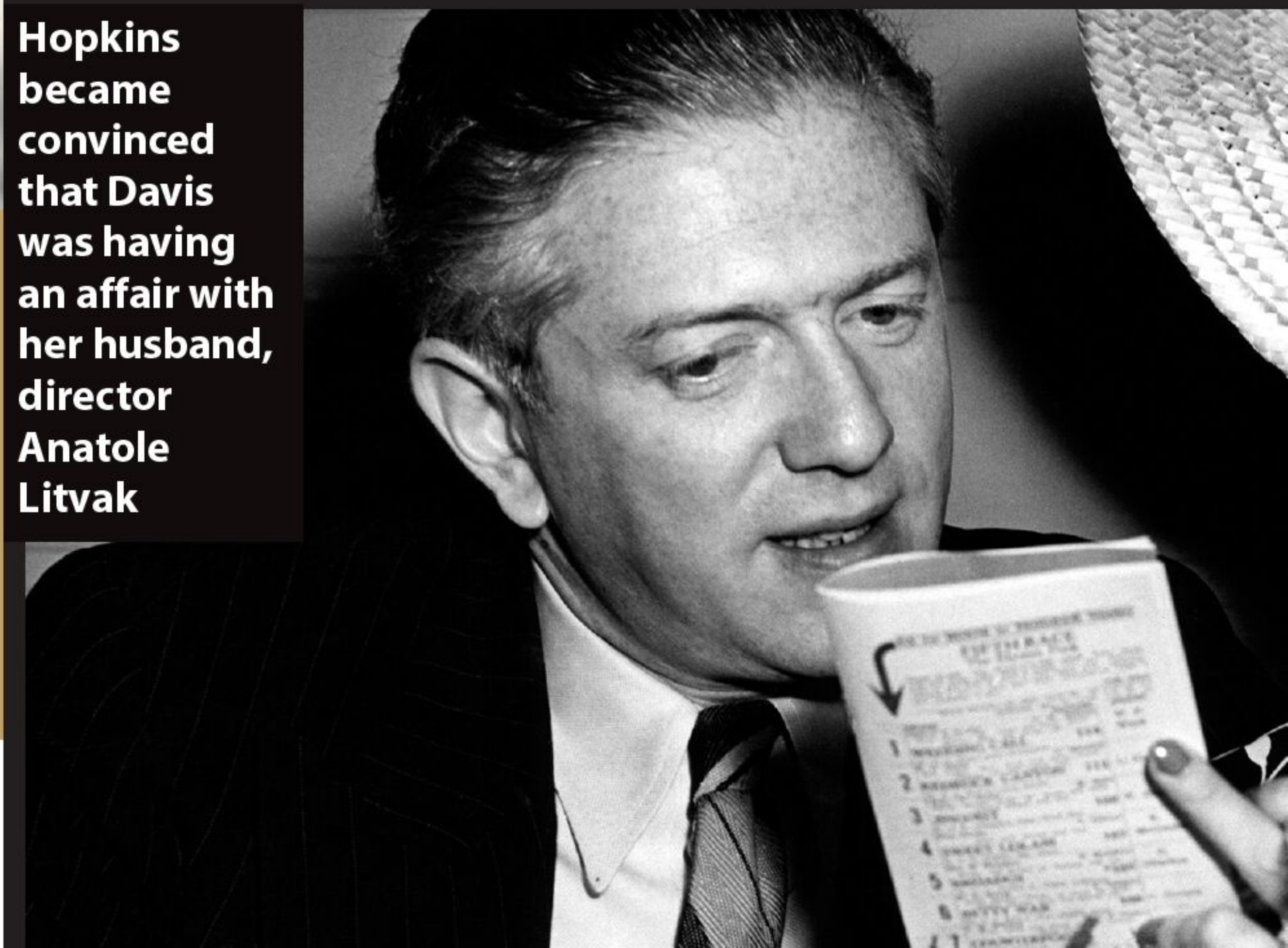
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Davis and Hopkins' smiles didn't last long on the set of *Old Acquaintance*

Duelling DIVAS

Bette Davis and Miriam Hopkins fought a battle of wills in their two films together. Brian J Robb explores the roots of their long-running feud...

Hopkins became convinced that Davis was having an affair with her husband, director Anatole Litvak



DID YOU KNOW?

For *The Old Maid*, Bette Davis wanted to play both cousins; she'd later play dual roles in *A Stolen Life* (1946) and *Dead Ringer* (1963).



When it comes to Hollywood feuds, few are better known than that between two grand divas of the golden age: Bette Davis and Joan Crawford. However, Davis didn't stop at one long-running battle with a rival actress. She also took on Miriam Hopkins, who was happy to give as good (or bad) as she got. It was a battle of wills that took in stolen movie roles, stolen Oscars, a stolen husband, and an on-screen rivalry that spilled over into off-screen publicity.

Davis and Hopkins met in summer stock theatre and then on Broadway in the Twenties. They were opposites – Massachusetts-born Davis was a Yankee, Georgia-born Hopkins a proud Southerner. When they appeared on stage together in the 1928 play *Excess Baggage*, Hopkins was the star, Davis the support. Hopkins was six years older than Davis, but it was Davis who first made it to Hollywood.

Aged 22, Davis made her screen debut in 1931's *Bad Sister*. Hopkins followed, playing a victim of Fredric March's title characters in the same year's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. She prospered, appearing in several Ernst Lubitsch films, including *Trouble in Paradise* (1932) and *Design for Living* (1933), both

playing up Hopkins' pre-code sex appeal. Davis fared less well initially, and didn't reach her breakthrough film – 1934's *Of Human Bondage* – until after she'd made more than 20 movies.

It was the 1938 film of stage play *Jezebel* that kicked the Davis-Hopkins feud into a higher gear. The play had starred Hopkins as the strong-willed Southern belle Julie Marsden. Hopkins co-owned the movie rights and sold them to Warner Bros., understanding she'd play the role. Instead, the part went to Davis, under the direction of William Wyler – winning the actress her second Oscar.

MARKETING GOLD

Hopkins was furious over her betrayal by both Warner Bros. and Davis and vowed to get even. Aware of their clash of personalities, showman studio boss Jack Warner couldn't resist casting them together in *The Old Maid* (1939). Based on an Edith Wharton novella, they played jealous cousins whose competition over Clem Spender (George Brent) dictates their lives. Hopkins was initially reluctant to take a role opposite Warner's biggest star, 'knowing she would get all the publicity'. The pair's antics on set hit the press, each upstaging the other, with Hopkins particularly adept. Director Edmund Goulding ➔

Bette Davis beat Miriam Hopkins to the role of Jezebel opposite Henry Fonda



The boxing gloves were for publicity purposes, but director Edmund Goulding (centre) knew all too well that the animosity was real



was driven to distraction dealing with his leading ladies. 'Whatever respect they had for each other as professionals was quickly thrown out when one or the other didn't get her way,' claimed Goulding.

Hopkins perfected the art of blocking Davis, using props such as a cigarette holder or simply standing in her light. In her autobiography *The Lonely Life*, Davis recalled, 'On our first day of shooting, she arrived on the set wearing a replica of my Jezebel costume. It was obvious she wanted me to blow my stack.' Davis was amazed the lengths Hopkins went to upstage her. 'Miriam used and, I must give her credit, knew every trick in the book. I became fascinated watching them appear one by one. She never looked at me. When she was supposed to be listening to me, her eyes would wander off... awaiting her next line. Once, in a two-shot, favouring both of us, her attempts to upstage me almost collapsed the couch we were sitting on.'

Producer Hal Wallis said, 'It was an incredible feud, just fantastic. They would each prolong their arrival on the set, trying to make the other wait. It was the real thing.'

Those girls hated each other.' Adding fuel to the fire was Hopkins' suspicion that Davis had a weekend fling with her third husband, Anatole Litvak, when he directed her in *The Sisters* (1938). Warner Bros. publicity cashed in on the stars' animosity. A staged photo saw the pair in their period finery wearing huge boxing gloves, with an apprehensive Goulding between them.

A few years later Hopkins and Davis were paired for a second and final time in *Old Acquaintance* (1943). Like *The Old Maid*, the film charted the ups and downs between childhood friends across several decades. When Millie's (Hopkins) husband Preston (John Loder) leaves her, he declares his love for Kit (Davis), only for her to reject him.

THE STUFF OF LEGEND

This was a second chance to humiliate Davis – Hopkins delivered a wildly over-the-top performance dominating the picture. The *Old Maid* director, Edmund Goulding, was to helm *Old Acquaintance*, but he didn't want to deal with 'Davis, Hopkins, moods, fads, and nonsense'. He faked a heart attack to avoid working with them again (or so studio boss Jack Warner believed)! Now, *Voyager* (1942) director Irving Rapper joined the US Navy rather than accept the project. Vincent Sherman directed the two divas, noting peace between them 'lasted approximately 12 minutes!'

According to *Time* magazine, Davis



The New York Times critic Bosley Crowther, slated *Old Acquaintance*, saying he found the friendship between Davis and Hopkins' characters 'implausible'

complained that Hopkins' dressing room was closer to the set. The portable dressing rooms were repositioned exactly the same distance away. During one squabble, Sherman exclaimed, 'Ladies, sometimes I feel I'm not directing this picture, I'm refereeing it!' By the end, neither actress was speaking to the other. When her hairdresser pointed out that Davis had a grey hair, the actress deadpanned, 'Let's name it Miriam, because I'm sure she's responsible for it.'

One of the last scenes saw Davis violently shake Hopkins. Word got around and a crowd turned up to watch. 'It was like a prize fight,' recalled Davis. To sabotage the scene, Hopkins went limp when Davis shook her. Sherman insisted on a second take. Davis looked back on the event saying, 'I can only report it was an extremely pleasant experience.'

Hopkins and Davis never worked together again, but their feud became legendary. Hopkins, having turned 40, took several years off from movies, returning to character roles in the Fifties. Davis prospered as a freelance actor for the next two decades. Hopkins died in 1972, aged 69. Davis, who was 81 when she died in 1989, had criticised Hopkins on the *Dick Cavett* show in 1971. 'She was a tragic girl, because she was a really fine actress. She was just eaten with jealousy.'



Hopkins was nominated for a single Oscar, for *Becky Sharp* (1935), while Davis won twice from 11 nominations

DID YOU
KNOW?

As a native Georgian, Miriam Hopkins auditioned for the role of *Gone with the Wind*'s Scarlett O'Hara, only to lose out to the British Vivien Leigh.

SCREEN CHIC MOVIE STYLE



FILM: BUS STOP (1956)

ICONIC COSTUME: A jade green satin leotard embellished with a black net overlay and jet-like sequins in a fish scale pattern. Worn with elbow-length green gloves and black fishnet tights.

SHE WORE IT WELL: Marilyn Monroe as Cherie

DESIGNED BY: Travilla

SHOWSTOPPING SCENE: Chanteuse Cherie performs That Old Black Magic and puts Bo under her spell.

■ Although Travilla is credited as costume designer, much of Cherie's look was dictated by Marilyn herself. A devotee of Method acting, Marilyn felt she knew what suited the character and, rejecting most of the original designs, she rifled through the costume department for things she thought fitted a saloon singer.

■ Marilyn felt strongly that Cherie should look slightly shabby. Although she accepted the studio's design for the That Old Black Magic scene she insisted they should, 'shred it up, pull out part of the fringe, poke holes in the fishnet stockings, then have 'em darned with big, sprawling darns. Oh, it's gonna be so sorry and pitiful it'll make you cry!'

■ She also opted for almost-white facial and body make-up to make Cherie look washed out and faintly unhealthy, as if she slept all day and avoided the sun. Hairstylist Helen Turpin turned Monroe's platinum-blond hair to a more subdued honey-blond colour to contrast better with the pale make-up.

■ Hollywood was not averse to recycling costumes. The black-lace blouse Marilyn wears in the early scenes was originally worn by Susan Hayward in *With a Song in My Heart* (1952), while the leotard was later worn by Leslie Caron in *The Man Who Understood Women* (1959).

DID YOU KNOW?

The leotard sold at auction in 2011 for \$100,000 while the black pencil skirt and blouse also worn in the film sold in 2021 for \$399,000.

George Lucas's
Star Wars
helped rescue
Elstree



ELSTREE

A studio *(not that)* far away



DID YOU KNOW?

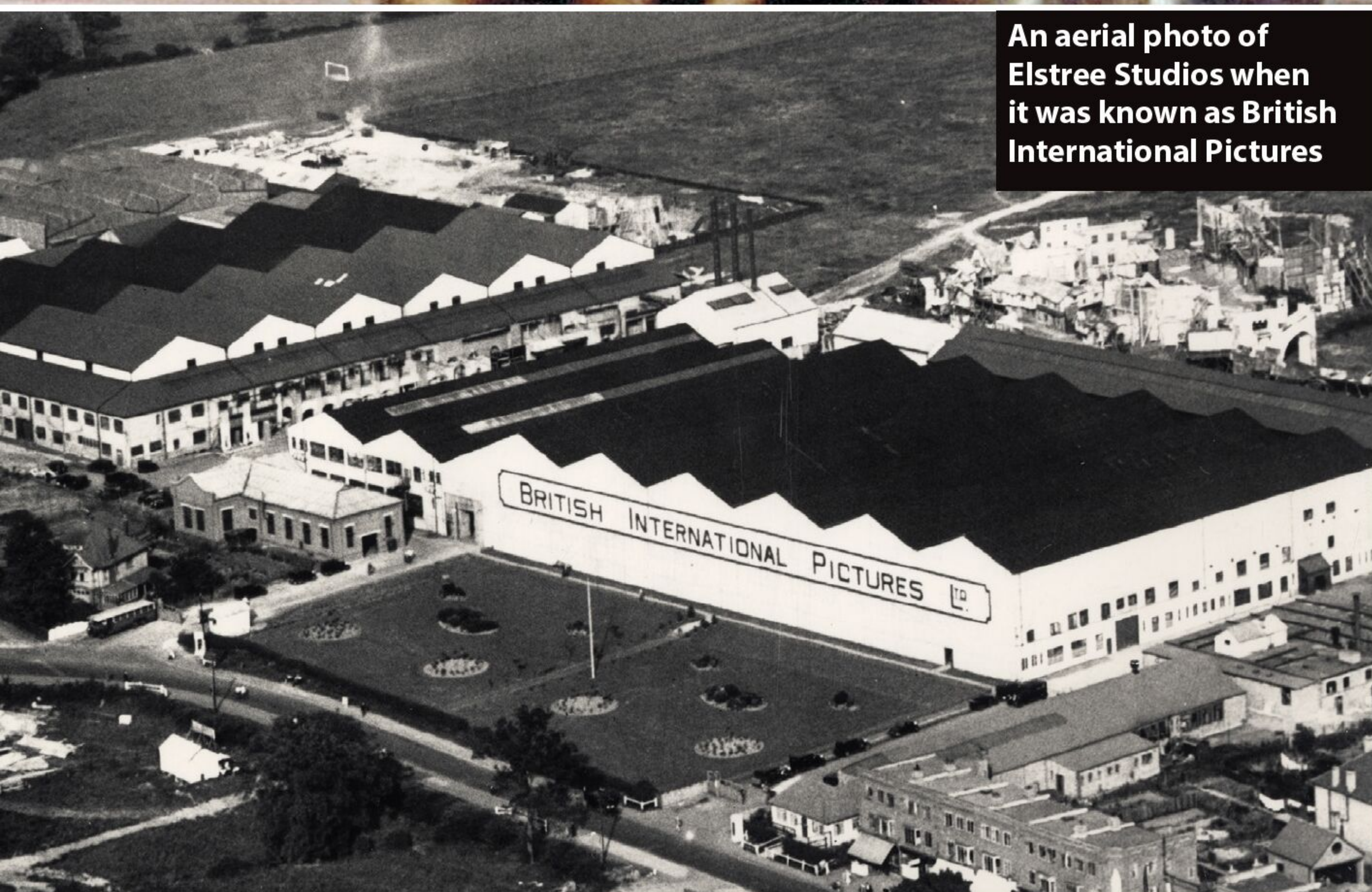
The rock band Queen filmed its iconic video for Bohemian Rhapsody at Elstree.



Home to box office hits including Star Wars, The Shining and Paddington, and modern TV ratings winners such as Strictly Come Dancing and The Crown, Elstree Studios has a fascinating history says entertainment historian Paul Burton

Where did Indiana Jones track down the Arc of the Covenant? Where did Luke Skywalker learn the art of the Jedi? Where did Superman defeat Nuclear Man? And where exactly was Roger Rabbit when he was framed? They were all in the same place. Nestling in leafy suburbia, some 5500 miles from Hollywood, lies Elstree, one of the world's most pioneering film studios. Now marking its 100th anniversary, Elstree helped put British filmmaking on the map.

From humble beginnings, Elstree is now home to Strictly Come Dancing, Netflix's The Crown and recent box office smash Paddington in Peru. It has been at the forefront of filmmaking and innovation for 10 decades. From Britain's first 'talkie', Alfred Hitchcock's Blackmail (1929), Elstree has pioneered breakthroughs in colour film and ➤



An aerial photo of Elstree Studios when it was known as British International Pictures

Alfred Hitchcock and the cast of Blackmail, which can rightfully claim to be the first full-length British 'talkie'



blue-screen technology. They've supported innovative filmmakers like George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Stanley Kubrick, Danny Boyle and Guy Ritchie, and played host to some of the most fondly remembered TV programmes of all time.

The studio has weathered many a crisis, maybe not flood and famine, but fire and repeated financial ruin have threatened to bring Elstree to its knees – but 'the little studio that could' bounced back again and again.

BOOM TIME

It all began in 1925 when Hollywood producer JD Williams and entrepreneur W Schlesinger invested in two stages on a smog-free site in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire and Herbert Wilcox took the directing reins for the studio's first film, *Madame Pompadour*.

When their business relationship collapsed, Scottish cinema owner John Maxwell stepped in as the studio's saviour. It was a peak period for cinema and Elstree helped launch the careers of stars such as Charles Laughton, Laurence Olivier, Anna Neagle and Stewart Granger. In 1938 alone they produced more than 200 pictures. The Second World War saw the

Harrison Ford spent a lot of time at Elstree filming both the *Raiders* and *Star Wars* franchises



studios commandeered by the Royal Ordnance Corps. When it was returned to public ownership, Warner Brothers stepped in and began an extensive rebuild of the studios. One of the first stars taking to the new stages was the then future US president Ronald Reagan in his only British movie, the war drama *The Hasty Heart*.

Reagan's (recently) ex-wife Jane Wyman was

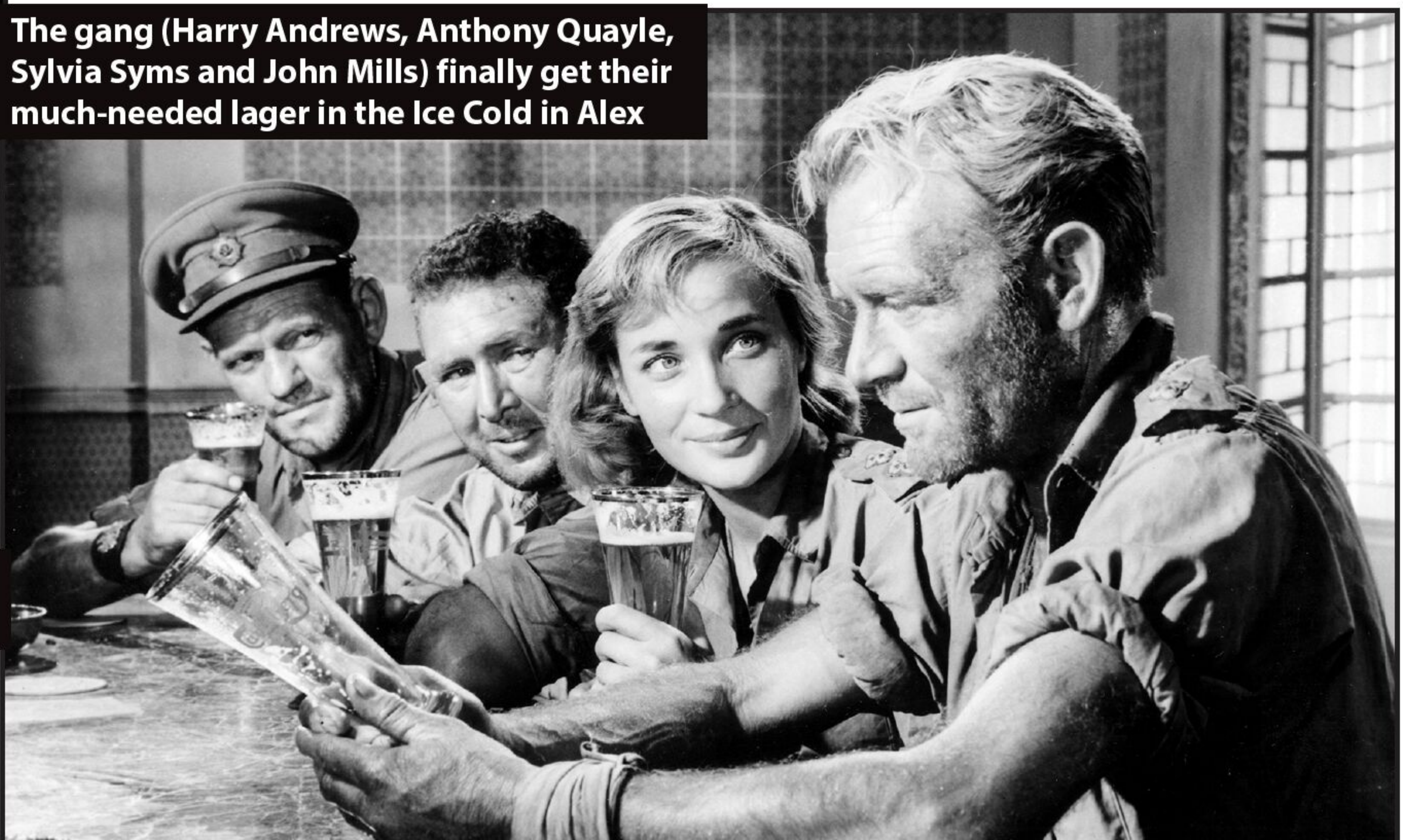
also over here for the Hitchcock thriller *Stage Fright*, while Brits Richard Todd, Michael Redgrave, John Mills and Sylvia Syms were busy with the classic war films *The Dam Busters* and *Ice Cold in Alex*.

Musicals became the big money-spinners in the Sixties when Cliff Richard came to the studios to make *The Young Ones*, *Summer Holiday* and *Wonderful Life*. Melvyn Hayes appeared with the ageless singer in all three films. 'I owe my



Richard Todd and Ronald Reagan during the filming of *The Hasty Heart* (1949)

The gang (Harry Andrews, Anthony Quayle, Sylvia Syms and John Mills) finally get their much-needed lager in the *Ice Cold in Alex*





The iconic poster from the 1963 Cliff Richard musical, Summer Holiday

1977's Star Wars: A New Hope and for its sequel Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (1980) a new stage (Stage 6) was built.

EMBRACING CHALLENGES

The same year, Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of Stephen King's novel, The Shining, starring Jack Nicholson and Shelley Duvall, took over the site. Its production was not without drama though. The lighting used to recreate sunlight pouring through the windows of the Overlook Hotel was so hot the set caught fire. Fortunately, the scenes had already been filmed but the stage had to be rebuilt.

Despite big-budget productions such as fantasy film Labyrinth and Who Framed Roger Rabbit shooting there, Elstree changed hands twice more in the Eighties. British company Brent Walker purchased the estate promising to invest in building modern viable studios on the understanding that they would also be allowed to develop part of the site for other purposes. A number of buildings, including six stages, offices, archive and cutting rooms were demolished and then,

in 1993, Brent Walker announced that the studios were to close.

The local Hertsmere Borough Council took Brent Walker to court and won. They took over the control of the studios, agreeing to invest in a huge renovation programme building two new sound stages. Just 18 months later, on 29 January 1999, The George Lucas Stage was opened by HRH Prince Charles, now King Charles III.

The Nineties saw dozens of popular television productions made at the studios from drama Kavanagh QC, to sitcom Birds of a Feather and game show Who Wants to be a Millionaire?.

Films made at the studios in the first few decades of the new millennium have included the Oscar-winning The King's Speech, Guy Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows, the first feature-length film version of Paddington, and Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith. Meanwhile, Elstree welcomed TV reality shows Big Brother, The Voice and Dancing on Ice, as well as popular quiz shows The Chase and Pointless.

It's clear that over Elstree's first 100 years, the studio has had to continually adapt to survive. A multimillion-pound development is now under way to build two huge 'super stages' which just goes to prove that, despite ongoing difficulties, there's no doubt Elstree will continue to succeed.

career to Elstree Studios,' says Hayes. 'It was fun being kids, being paid, although not a lot, to make the films, and we had fun.

'It was so exciting to go to the studios,' he enthused. 'I once saw Victor Mature while I was in one of the corridors. On another occasion, I saw a lady wearing a fur coat – it was Elizabeth Taylor.'

TV production became big business in the Sixties too. Popular action series such as The Saint, The Avengers and Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased) were all filmed at Elstree. While the Seventies saw an era of sitcom spin-offs – popular TV shows given the big-screen treatment included On the Buses, Man About the House and The Likely Lads.

But financial difficulties still threatened to close six of the nine sound stages. That was until George Lucas and a band of rebels from a galaxy far, far away saved the day. The stages were reopened for



Elstree has played host to Strictly Come Dancing for the past 20 years

DID YOU KNOW?

The exterior set for the Overlook Hotel in The Shining (1980) was built on the backlot at the studios.

Comedy historian Robert Ross pays tribute to some of the finest and funniest, but often overlooked, names in showbiz

Forgotten Heroes of Comedy...



Nothing dates quicker than the latest fashion, they say and, in terms of comedy, that's satire and, most precisely, popular culture references. This was the pitfall for impressionist extraordinaire Florence Desmond, whose expertise lay in pitch-perfect recreations of the Hollywood stars of the day. Her day. The Thirties.

Some of the great and the good Florence could impersonate have – just about – stood the test of time, notably bulbous-nosed vaudeville comedian Jimmy Durante, and Lancashire lass Gracie Fields, but others, such as German tragedian Elisabeth Bergner and scatty comedienne Zasu Pitt linger in the recesses of history.

All were showcased in Florence's double A-side record *Hollywood Party*, released on the His Master's Voice label.

Florence had made her West End debut in 1931 in the Cambridge Theatre revue, *Charlot's Masquerade*, before making a triumphant return to the stage, at the Palace Theatre, as the

star of *Why Not Tonight?* By this time, the Queen of Crime, Agatha Christie, had used Florence's widely acclaimed talents as inspiration for duplicitous cabaret impersonator Carlotta Adams, in the fiendish 1933 novel, *Lord Edgware Dies*.

Florence's own love of mysteries saw her accept *The Apples of Fire*, a 1952 production at the Comedy Theatre. A murder investigation in an institute for the insane, there were five key suspected inmates... and Florence played them all!

A free spirit and determined adventurer throughout her life

Despite constant offers from Hollywood, she preferred to stay in England, notching up co-starring feature film appearances opposite star comedians George Formby in *No Limit* (1935), and *Keep Your Seats*,

Please (1936), Gracie Fields in *Sally in Our Alley* (1931), and the Cheeky Chappie, Max Miller, in *Hoots Mon!* (1940). This film cast Florence as Scottish comedienne Jenny McTavish, and she's so convincing you may find it hard to believe she was a Londoner. It's unsurprising that she was swiftly back alongside Max Miller, for

the 1941 London Palladium spectacular, *Apple Sauce!*

Traces of the outrageous innuendo of Miller obviously stuck, for during the war years Florence released a number of ever more suggestive recordings, culminating with the claim that she's got *The Deepest Shelter in Town*. Ooh!

A free spirit and determined adventurer – she married two aviator aces, one died young, the other enjoyed old bones. Soon after publishing her memoirs, in 1953, Florence announced her retirement. However, she couldn't help returning to television to reminisce about her glory days, and made her last film, as the charmingly haughty Lady Manderley, in the tongue-in-cheek *Bulldog Drummond* romp *Some Girls Do*, in 1969. A dazzling beauty until the end, she died in St Luke's Hospital, Guildford, in January 1993, at the age of 87. The ward was subsequently renamed in her honour. What an impression she made!

■ Visit the website of Robert Ross, Britain's Comedy Historian, at robertross.co.uk

The rise of Rocket Man

Sean Egan charts Reg Dwight's journey from Pinner prodigy to pop stardom as Elton John

Young Reg began playing on his grandmother's piano



Elton's elaborate stage costumes were auctioned earlier this year including a pair of silver platform boots that alone raised \$94,500



By the age of 20, Reg Dwight seemed to have done pretty well for a boy from the London backwater of Pinner, yet he was despondent.

The band in which he played keyboards, Bluesology, not only had a recording deal but had sporadic work backing visiting American artists such as The Drifters and Doris Troy, as well as regular work with indigenous warbler Long John Baldry. However, dismayed at his increasingly low profile in the group, Reg couldn't help but feel he was going backwards.

It was this that made him respond to a New Musical Express advertisement placed by Ray Williams, European A&R head of Liberty Records, seeking 'talent' to 'form a new group'. Williams wasn't much ➤

impressed visually by the shortish, plump, myopic and thinning-haired figure who visited his office, and he was positively startled when he vouchsafed to him that he felt 'lost'. However, he was taken with the talent evident when he sat at the piano. Nor was he put off by his assertion that he was hopeless at lyrics. He put him together with another respondent to his advert, a would-be songwriter from Lincolnshire named Bernie Taupin, who had no facility for writing melody but exhibited a remarkable way with words. The path was set for scrimping songwriter and musician Reg Dwight to transmogrify into international superstar Elton John.

Reginald Kenneth Dwight was born in 1947, the only child of homemaker mother Sheila and airman father Stanley, a pair who divorced when he was in his mid-teens. The fact that his family possessed an upright piano was

not unusual. What was uncommon was that the boy showed such proficiency on it that, at the age of 11, he won a Saturday morning scholarship at London's Royal Academy of Music.

BIG BREAK

His earliest musical heroes were Liberace and Winifred Atwell but his tastes switched to grittier stylings with the arrival of rock 'n' roll, so enamoured of which he became that he ultimately started bunking off his stuffy Academy lessons. His first regular gig came aged 15 as a bar pianist and singer. A local band with which he took up, The Corvettes, morphed into Bluesology.

In his new partnership Reg sometimes disregarded Taupin's suggestions about tempo and occasionally swapped his verses around or even ditched them, but in all other respects they were yin and yang: Reg found he could

sometimes devise tunes to Taupin's lyrics within as little as ten minutes. Although Williams couldn't get

Liberty interested in recording Reg, he did at least obtain the pair a berth as songwriters under the umbrella of Dick James Music, publisher of The Beatles' songbook.

Dick James Music had its own label and, when it offered Elton a recording deal, he left Bluesology and Long John Baldry behind with some relief – but not before purloining the first names of both Baldry and the band's saxophonist Elton Dean. The newly rechristened Elton John made his solo debut in March 1968 with the single I've Been Loving You, but Reg's gloominess returned when it made few waves, just like the scattering of songs John/Taupin managed to place with minor recording artists. It was manifested in a suicide attempt. Thankfully his efforts to end it all by gas were scuppered by him leaving the windows open.

Things began turning around when, following Elton's impressive 1969 solo album Empty Sky, he was paired with producer Gus Dudgeon, who gave his and Taupin's florid creations a fittingly majestic framing. The resultant eponymous April 1970 album



Bluesology: Rex Bishop, Reg Dwight (Elton John), Terry Patterson, Stewart Brown and Mick Inkpen



Bernie Taupin and Elton John won an Oscar for the song (I'm Gonna) Love Me Again from the biopic Rocketman (2019)



A low-key outfit for an appearance on the Cher show in 1975



John's parents divorced when he was a teenager and his mum, Sheila, married painter Fred Farebrother

brushed the UK top ten and made it to No.4 Stateside.

With a contract that dictated two albums per year, Elton's third album *Tumbleweed Connection*, the cowboy-mad Taupin's love letter to the Wild West, quickly followed in October. Elton worked just as prodigiously on the road and began acquiring stagecraft previously alien to such a modest and polite man, learning the rabble-rousing qualities of kicking over piano stools and pounding keys like Jerry Lee Lewis. Meanwhile, his feathered accoutrements, winged boots and huge, decorated spectacle frames took even rock to unknown levels of flamboyance. 'It's a reaction against everything I wasn't allowed to do as a kid,' he explained.

HELLO YELLOW BRICK ROAD

Your Song from his second album was belatedly issued as a single. A shy, humble love anthem with the staccato timbre of conversation ('If I was a sculptor... But then again, no'), it went top ten both sides of the pond and the man who was originally only an albums artist was suddenly a hitmaker and teen idol.

Following the March 1971 film soundtrack *Friends* and April 1971 live LP 17-11-70, a fourth proper studio album *Madman Across the Water* (November 1971) provided another lovely hymn to romance in the shape of *Tiny Dancer*. *Honky Château* (May 1972) featured the chilly outer space anthem *Rocket Man*. *Don't Shoot Me I'm Only the Piano Player* (January 1973) span off the delightful Fifties pastiche *Crocodile Rock* and, in complete contrast, the haunting tribute to male friendship *Daniel*.

Astoundingly, his next effort cranked up the prolificness and success even further. Elton wrote the music to 21 Taupin lyrics in three days and recorded them in 12. *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, a double album released in October 1973, featured 17 of them. Housed in a resplendent comic book-like gatefold sleeve, its contents ranged from the tremulous Marilyn Monroe

tribute *Candle in the Wind* to the raucous, anthemic rocker *Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting* to the celebration of stardust *Bennie and the Jets* to the rejection of stardust of the title track. The set was Elton's second successive album to top both UK and US charts and is widely considered his masterpiece.

In the over half-century since, Elton has experienced many ups and downs, not least the commercial fall-out from a 1976 *Rolling Stone* interview in which he declared himself bisexual. He is now, though, firmly established as a musical legend and national institution – one who surely looks back with wry amusement at the uncertain young man who wandered that long ago day into Ray Williams' office and declared himself lost.

DID YOU
KNOW?

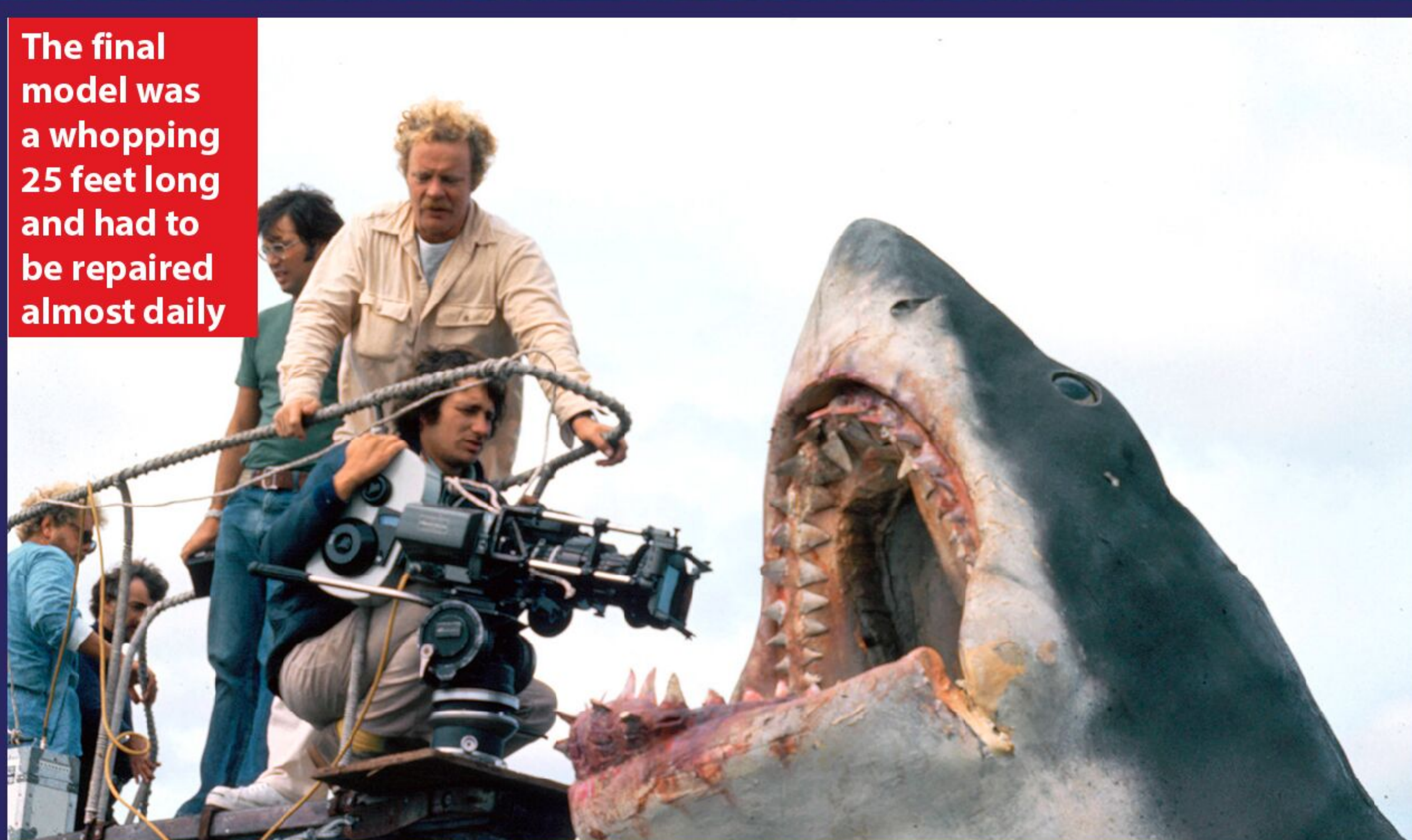
The same NME advert that put together Elton and Bernie Taupin was also responded to by the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, Jeff Lynne (later of ELO) and Mike Batt (later *Wombles* and *Bright Eyes* songwriter).

The shark was nicknamed Bruce by the Jaws cast and crew after Steven Spielberg's lawyer, Bruce Ramer

Making monsters

Animatronic creatures have been responsible for some of the most terrifying moments in movies. Jeff Billington peeks through his fingers to examine their history...

The final model was a whopping 25 feet long and had to be repaired almost daily



DID YOU KNOW?

The animatronic snake from *Anaconda* was nominated for a Razzie award for Worst New Star.

Early attempts at portraying monsters on screen involved putting actors in suits, using puppets, or the painstaking and expensive technique of stop-motion animation, used to great effect by Willis O'Brien in *King Kong* (1933) and the films of Ray Harryhausen. Stop-motion, however, had to be done after the film had been shot, so the actors on set had nothing to interact with. A solution came with the development of animatronics, a combination of puppetry and robotics in which realistic-looking creatures are operated through electric motors, controlled by off-set puppeteers or computers.

One of the first films to employ the technology in a significant way was *Jaws* (1975). When it became clear that a real great white shark could not be trained to perform, director Steven Spielberg had three mechanical sharks made under the supervision of special-effects pioneer and former Disney employee, Bob Mattey. Mattey created a full-body version that could only be viewed from the top as its belly was missing, and two side-view sharks, one with just a left side, the other with a right side.

ROCKY START

They were a disaster. The 'waterproof' skin let in water, causing them to bloat. The pneumatic tubes continually let in salt water, and the frames from which they were constructed fell to pieces. One shark sank to the bottom of the sea and had to be retrieved by divers. Spielberg estimated that up to eight hours of each 12-hour day was spent fixing the sharks, a problem compounded by his insistence on filming in the middle of the ocean rather than a studio tank. Worst of all, they didn't look realistic. Spielberg had to rethink his



Director John Guillermin with the model Kong which was controlled by 20 operators and cost \$1.7 million

approach, concentrating more on the reaction of the actors, building suspense by keeping the shark off screen as much as possible, with the less-is-more approach making the shark's eventual appearance genuinely shocking

The year after *Jaws*, Italian producer Dino De Laurentiis also turned to animatronics for his big-budget 1976 remake of *King Kong*. Special effects maestro Carlo Rambaldi realised the producer's dream of a full-size moving Kong, creating a 40ft-high model which weighed six and a half tonnes! For close-ups, he made hands with mechanical fingers that could grab star Jessica Lange, as well as complex moving face masks to express different emotions. However, the life-size model caused so many problems that it ended up only being on screen for a total of 15 seconds, with much of the ape's screen time instead being performed by Rambaldi's right-hand man, fellow FX supremo Rick Baker, wearing a heavy suit.

Rambaldi's work on *Alien* (1979) would win him an Oscar, and Spielberg, who hadn't given up on animatronics, employed him to work on *E.T.* (1982). It was essential for the director that *E.T.* be ➔

a believable character with whom humans could interact. While the body of E.T. was a suit, the head was fully animatronic, able to express a large range of emotions, with the eyes being given special attention to make them believable. The result was astounding, adding to the film's emotional heft, and gaining Rambaldi another Oscar.

MOVING WITH THE TIMES

Rambaldi's former assistant Rick Baker, meanwhile, was making waves with his contributions to several ground-breaking horror films. For *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), he combined make-up and animatronics to show the transformation of star David Naughton into a werewolf in front of our eyes, something earlier films had only hinted at through sounds and shadows. Baker was borrowed by Michael Jackson to replicate his werewolf transformation effects in the video for *Thriller* (1983).

Muppet creator Jim Henson was also keen to build animatronics into his creations, opening Jim Henson's Creature Shop in London in 1979. Henson envisioned the same kind of emotional connection between humans and creatures that he had developed in *The Muppet Show* (1976-81), but for his 1982 fantasy, *The Dark Crystal*, he went even further and omitted humans altogether, populating the world



Kong's hands were six feet across and the arms weighed 1650lbs (750kg) each

solely with the Creature Shop's creations. Most impressive were the Skeksis, a species of 'part-reptile, part-bird, part-dragon' characters. Four humans were required to operate each of the nine creatures, all with fully articulated faces and hands. Henson would re-use the same techniques for the equally dazzling *Labyrinth* (1986), while the Creature Shop would design animatronics for dozens of films and TV shows over the decades.

Henson's creations in the above films could be a little scary for younger fans, but they were tame in comparison to Gmork, the terrifying wolf creature from *The NeverEnding Story* (1984). Effects artist Brian Johnson, who also worked on the *Alien* series, produced the growling, glowing-eyed monster, which fought so realistically with his human

co-star, Noah Hathaway, that rumours have spread (denied by Johnson) that Hathaway was hurt.

One of the greatest creators of animatronics was the late four-time Oscar winner Stan Winston, brought on board by Steven Spielberg for *Jurassic Park* (1993). Spielberg, remembering the difficulties he faced on *Jaws*, was initially reticent to have life-size dinosaurs, but Winston created a 20ft-tall, 40ft-long, eight-tonne

T-Rex. The scene in which it attacks a car took two months to complete, not least because the rubber skin absorbed water, causing it to become dangerously overweight and potentially collapse. During one take, it broke its tooth off when it got too close to the car. The largest creature ever created by Winston, Spielberg declared it the 'star of the movie'.

CUTTING EDGE

Not all giant animatronics were as successful. A scene involving a human-size bat (made by Rick Baker) was cut from *Batman Forever* (1995), while audiences reportedly laughed at the 40ft-long snake made for *Anaconda* (1997).

Along with the T-Rex, *Jurassic Park* also broke new ground with Spielberg's use of Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) for many of the dinosaurs. As the cost of CGI decreased and the quality increased, animatronics found itself on the decline, with Rick Baker closing his studio in 2015, claiming, 'I like to do things right, and [Hollywood] wanted cheap and fast.' But, despite the popularity and low-cost of CGI, some filmmakers still prefer the human interaction possible with animatronics, with Baby Yoda in recent *Star Wars* spin-off *The Mandalorian* being portrayed by a \$5 million mechanical puppet.



Stan Winston's T-Rex gets just nine minutes of screen time in *Jurassic Park*

DID YOU KNOW?

The first use of animatronics on film were the robins in *Mary Poppins* (1964), with Walt Disney pioneering the technique for Disneyland attractions back in the Fifties.

MOMENT IN TIME

• 22 November 1963 •

**JFK
SHOT
DEAD**

The 35th President of the United States was assassinated by a gunman in Dallas, Texas. The presidential motorcade had been travelling through Dealey Plaza when John F Kennedy was hit in the head and throat as three rounds were fired into his open-topped car.

The presidential party had been driving from Dallas airport to the city centre. The President collapsed into the arms of his wife Jackie, and the limousine immediately rushed to Parklands Hospital where he underwent emergency surgery, but was pronounced dead at 1pm.

Texas Governor John Connally was also seriously injured when one of the sniper's bullets hit him in the back. Jackie Kennedy and Governor Connally's wife, who were also in the vehicle, were both uninjured. A little under an hour after the shooting, a policeman was also killed after he approached a man he believed matched the description of the gunman.

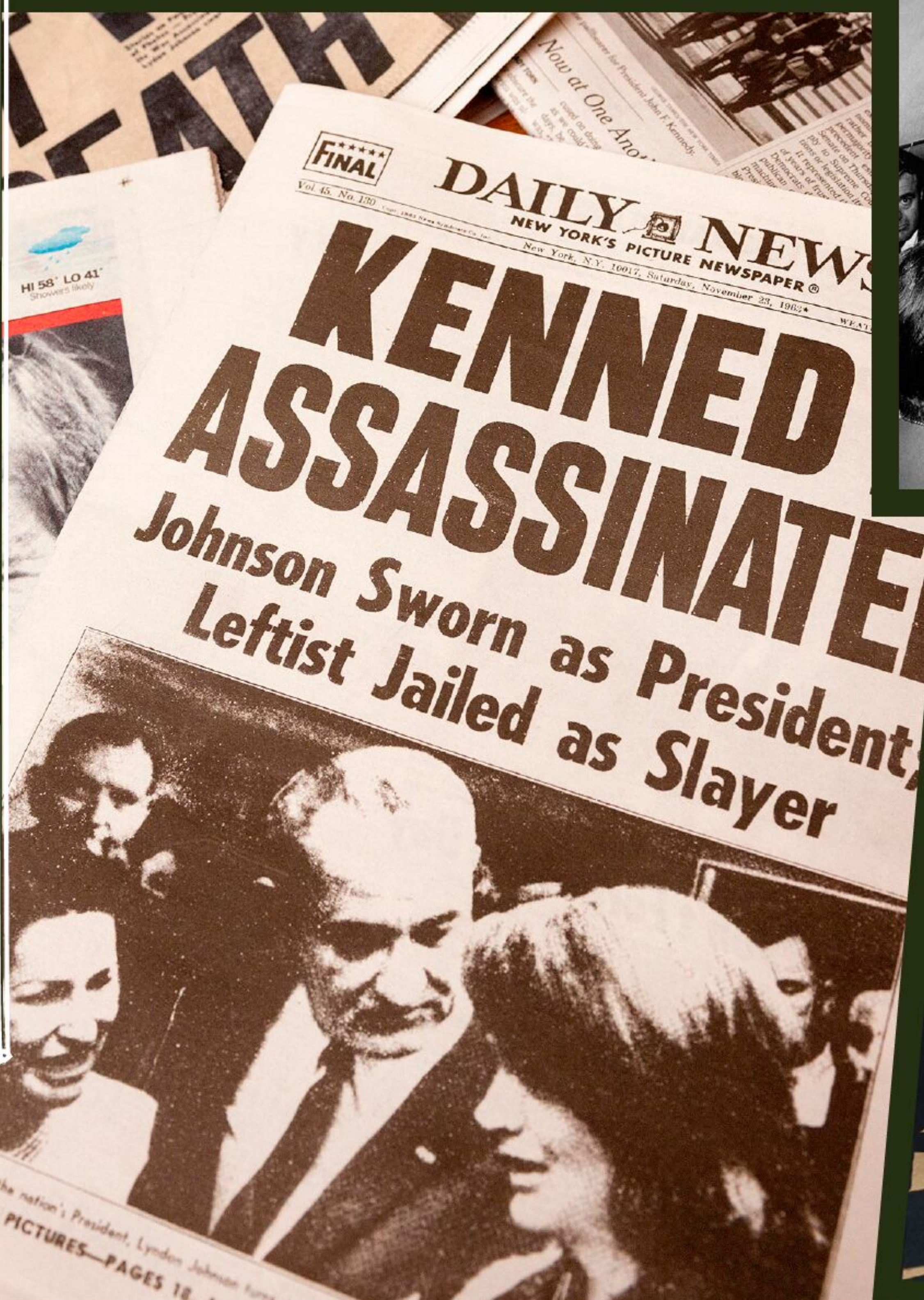
Lee Harvey Oswald, a 24-year-old former Marine, was arrested under suspicion of murder and later charged with the assassination of President Kennedy. However Oswald never made it to trial as he, too, was shot dead two days later while being transferred to jail. Nightclub owner Jack Ruby shot Mr Oswald at point-blank range because he wanted to spare the President's widow the ordeal of a trial.

Did you know?

In the UK, after a sombre newsflash announcement, the BBC returned to scheduled programmes; including Here's Harry and Dr Finlay's Casebook.



'I didn't want to be a hero – I did it for Jacqueline Kennedy.'
Jack Ruby



HOLLYWOOD'S
LOST
INTERVIEWS



Retro is privileged to publish the never-before-seen 'lost' interviews of renowned entertainment journalist Roderick Mann. This month, in a chat from the late Sixties, Deborah Kerr chats about men, marriage, ageing and nerves

'It's insanity for a girl to marry young'

I don't know what it is that Deborah Kerr does to look so attractive, but whatever it is she ought to market it.

She'd make a fortune. How dare she look that good? The nerve of it!

Part of her secret, I suspect, is that Miss Kerr is a fulfilled woman. Somewhere along the way she must have come across that line of Coco Chanel's, 'Take life like a toboggan. Don't look back – look forward. And enjoy the ride.'

And because she enjoys the ride, the astonishing fact that she is celebrating her 28th year in films falls into proper perspective. She is married to a tough, talented writer, Peter Viertel. 'The trick,' she says, 'is to know when to leave a writer alone. Like all the time.'

She has two teenage daughters, Melanie and Francesca, by her first marriage to Anthony Bartley. And she has many friends, most of whom, like writers Jimmy Jones and Irwin Shaw, who live nearby in Switzerland, are intellectual rather than introspective.

The more intriguing, then, to discover that beneath that charm

and gaiety Miss Kerr has the most forthright views on marriage.

'Personally,' she said, 'I think it is insanity for a girl to marry too early. For what a girl wants at 18 isn't what she wants at 22; or then again at 27. One changes more during those years than at any other time. Yet girls still seem to be besotted by the idea of getting married.'

'Look how many bright and clever girls chuck up everything to get to that kitchen sink; never giving themselves a chance to find out anything about life, or what their feelings really are. Hundreds of girls still seem to feel that they're on the shelf if they haven't met the right man by the time they're 21.

'I'd say if they haven't met the right man by the time they're 24 they're darned lucky!

'I know very well that what I wanted at 24 wasn't what I wanted or needed 14 years later. (She was divorced from Bartley in 1959).

'When I came to the point in my life when I knew I couldn't go on, I made a decision and I've never regretted it. It was hard for me, with my strict Scottish upbringing. I can see how a lot of women just couldn't do it; couldn't go through with something as emotionally disturbing as a break-up. So to the detriment of their own happiness they just put up with things.

'But at that time it was borne in on me quite violently that I had only one life to lead so I went ahead. All around me now I see women, disappointed and discontented, who haven't been able to take such a step. All right. I know it's tough for a woman to be left alone at 50. But if she's reached 50 – dammit, she's had a damn good go.

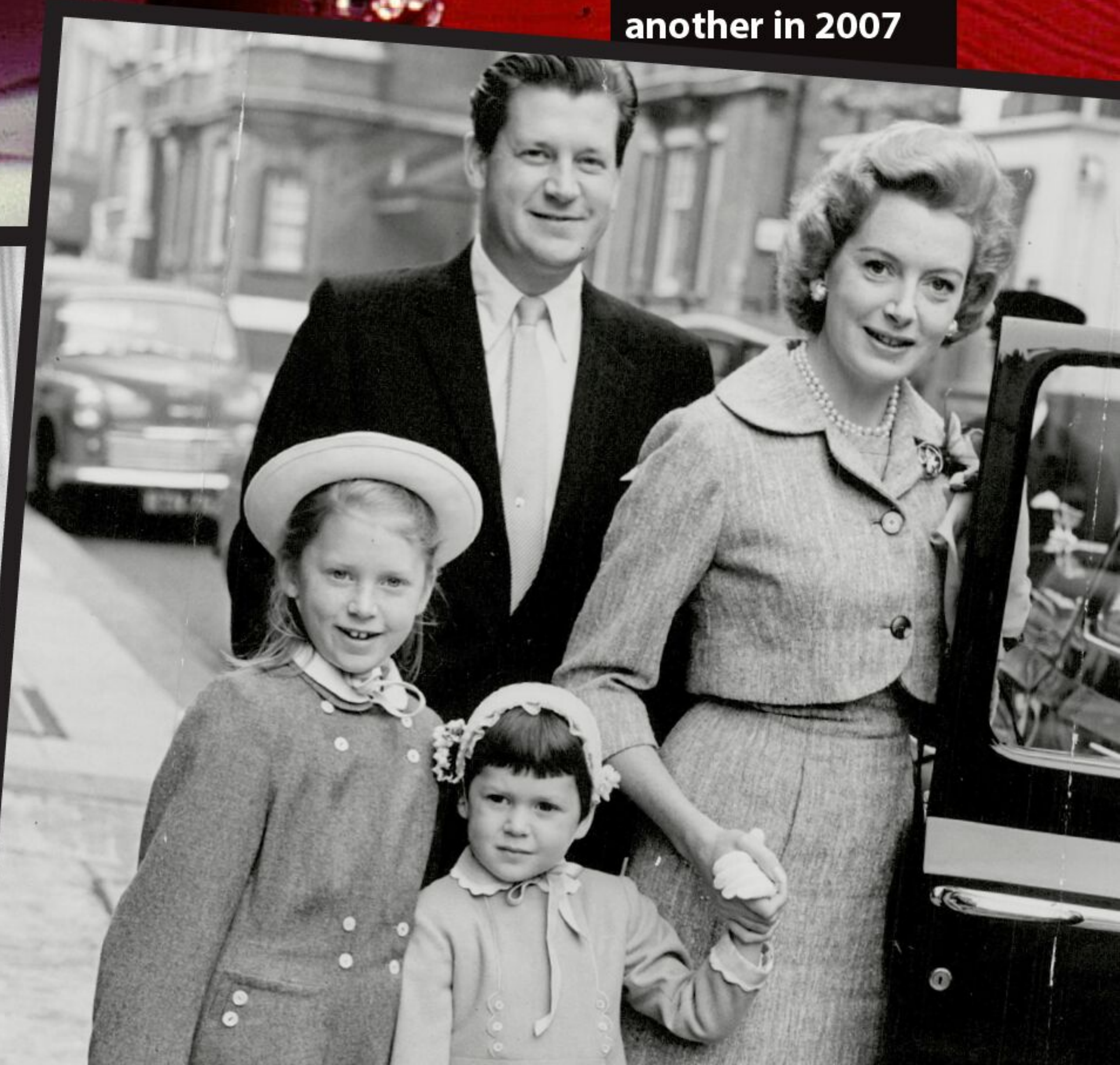
'I see no point in recriminations. I can never understand how people who presumably liked each other enough to get married act as they do when things go wrong; indulging in bitterness and jealousy. There ➤



Deborah and second husband Peter Viertel died within three weeks of one another in 2007



Deborah's daughters were both Christmas babies, Francesca (left) born 18 December 1951, and Melanie, 27 December 1947



can't have been much affection in the first place for people to behave like that.

'If you love a man, and he falls out of love with you – how can you blame him? I never would. Any man. I'd be sorry, but I wouldn't blame him.

'Perhaps if you're going to have a bash at making marriage last forever, the thing is to start by not expecting it to. It makes one's attitude to one's partner more reasonable; you don't take them for granted.'

A frank look from those very frank eyes.

'When I divorced I'm sure it was a shock to some people. Sedate old me. It's understandable. It upsets people to see the myth of marriage being chipped away. But just as a man needs different things at different stages of his life, so too do women. Many women in their late 30s need men more mature than the ones they married. There comes a time when a woman thinks, "I just can't go on like this." She wants more out of the relationship itself.

'It isn't just a question of sex, though that's important, of course; it's that the time comes when the relationship has to be more important than merely saying "This is my husband". Saying that gives young girls a great kick. But you need more when you're in your 30s.

'It's different for a man. As he gets older he looks for reassurance of his virility, not necessarily for a more mature woman. He wants to prove he can still knock them cold.

'The truth is, of course, that there's nothing a woman can do once a man has gone off her. She must settle for it, or quit, depending on what's at stake. Once sex is turned off it can turn to revulsion, and there's no way of rekindling it. It's quite useless for a woman to slip into a black nightie and meet her husband at the door, hoping to attract him again. That will only put him off more. But I like to think that if the relationship is sufficiently deep, sex will always be there.'



Deborah Kerr and Cary Grant improvised many scenes throughout filming *An Affair to Remember* (1957)



Deborah frequently had bruised shins from the hoops in her skirt while filming *The King and I* (1956) with Yul Brynner

'I talk frankly to my daughters about marriage. Though I don't go opening personal suitcases unless I'm asked. But I want them to realise that the legend about getting married and living happily ever after is a lot of nonsense.

'I tell them that when they get back from Ibiza, or wherever it is, with that gold band on their finger that's when the problems really start – crash, bang, wallop.'

She got up to hand me some tea. She was wearing a pink linen dress and two strands of pearls, and she looked cool and collected.

'I'm in my mid-40s,' she said. 'And, to be truthful, it's unimportant to me. Being 30 worried me more. It's a more critical age, because it means you're no longer a girl.

'However, I'm all for women doing things to make themselves look better. I'd have my face done

if I developed dewlaps, or anything. If I could overcome my fear of anaesthetics, that is.

'Another thing; when I look at most of the women I know who've had their faces done, it doesn't seem to have made that much difference. They look a little stretched, that's all.

'I've often wondered what's the point? You know you've had it done; so either you pretend you haven't – and your friends know you're a liar – or you tell everyone. Oh, maybe if one wanted to fascinate some

18-year-old boy, perhaps. But then again, presumably an 18-year-old boy, would be intrigued by the fact that you were an older woman, and want you the way you were?'

She finished her tea.

'I had very strict grandmothers when I was a girl,' she said. 'Both unrelenting Puritans. One of them used to make me lie for two hours on the floor after lunch every day because she thought I was becoming round-shouldered. Thanks to her, I've got very flat shoulder blades today. And if I told the tiniest fib they'd lock me in my room.

'It sounds terrible today, but that kind of upbringing gave me a code of behaviour which has helped me enormously in life. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

'Outwardly I look cool enough, but deep down I'm terribly nervous and very shy. I can do anything if I'm playing a part, but when I have to be just me, I'm stiff with nerves.

'Walking on a stage as me is agony; going on as Laura Reynolds, or whoever, is no problem at all. I once tried hiding behind a character to see if it helped, but I couldn't keep it up. I don't know what I'd do if I couldn't fall back on the rules I was brought up by...'

Thus, Miss Deborah Kerr, a lady with no illusions. Her toboggan is running just fine, it seems, but she won't forget she's been off the slopes once. No matter; no recriminations. She picked herself up. And the view from here is pretty good.

OBJECT of desire

ACTION MAN

Whether you had ambitions to be a soldier, sailor or pilot, the launch of Palitoy's Action Man in 1966 meant that for the first time it was OK for boys to play with dolls too!

Action Man was launched by Palitoy in the UK in 1966, copying the success of GI Joe in the USA which was introduced in 1964. To begin with the Action Man range was near identical to his American cousin, but over time he developed more British characteristics and new accessories and vehicles were introduced.

To incentivise brand loyalty Palitoy introduced a scheme encouraging children to collect 'stars' from the packaging to be redeemed for free gifts. As a result, boxed examples of the toy are rare and sought after by collectors, selling for upwards of £200.

For many little boys Action Man's hands were a source of frustration because they couldn't successfully hold any of the guns or other accessories. New 'gripping hands' were introduced in 1973, after being sculpted by Palitoy's chief designer Bob Brechin based on his own left hand.



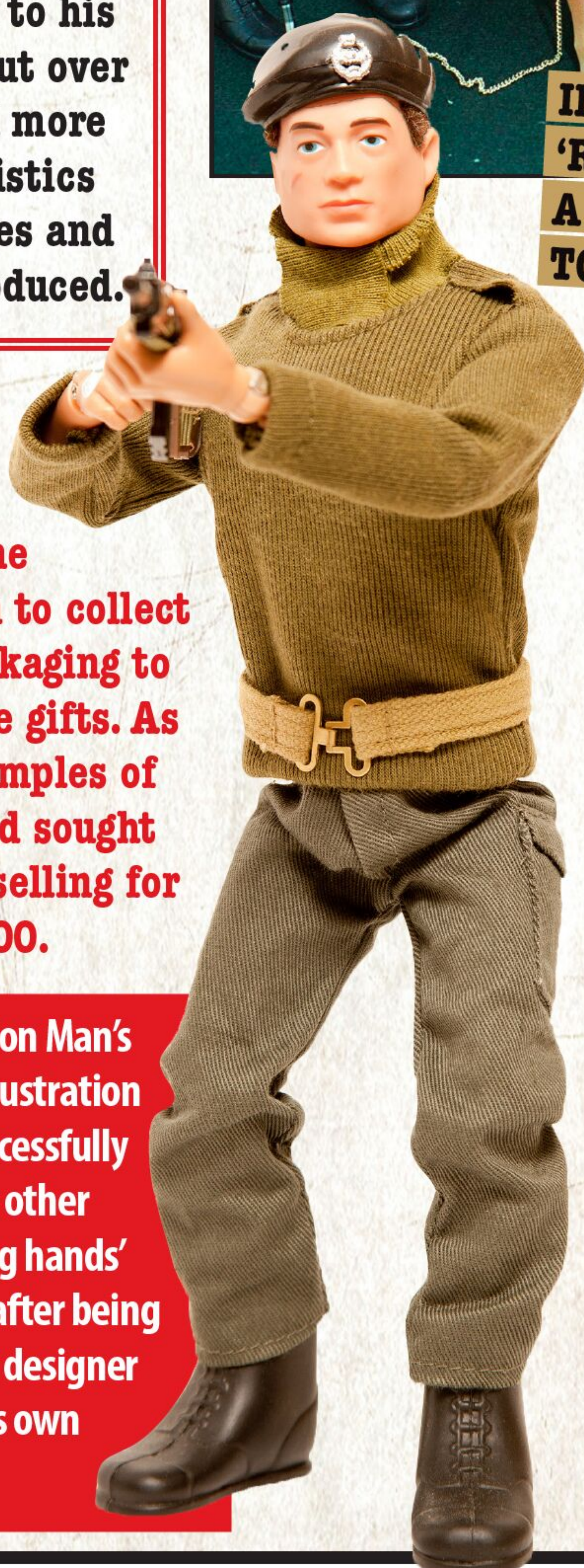
Early Action Man figures came with a choice of four painted hair colours, blonde, auburn, brown and black.

IN 1970 PALITOIY INTRODUCED 'REALISTIC HAIR' CREATED USING A FLOCKING TECHNIQUE SIMILAR TO BARBIE'S KEN DOLL.



At launch Action Man cost 32s 11d (around £28 today) but what every boy really wanted for his mini military man was a vehicle. By the Seventies you could choose from an armoured car (£3.10), a jeep (£4.75), a helicopter with moving rotor blades (£3.75), a Scorpion tank with swivelling turret (£5.35), or an assault craft complete with working outboard motor and paddles (£2.50).

The first Eagle Eye dolls were introduced in 1977, featuring a small lever at the back of the neck that could shift Action Man's eyes left and right.





**DID YOU
KNOW?**

The young fireman in *The Towering Inferno* is played by Paul Newman's son Scott. Burdened by his father's fame, he had just begun to make a name for himself as an actor and stuntman when he died of a drug overdose in November 1978, aged just 28.

A towering epic Peril death & egos



A 70ft-tall tower model and radio-controlled miniature helicopter were used to rescue a Steve McQueen doll

The Towering Inferno is considered the ultimate Seventies disaster movie. Allan Hunter celebrates its 50th anniversary with the story of its construction

The disaster movie dominated the Seventies like no other genre. From *Airport* (1970) to *Avalanche* (1978), audiences were gripped by tales of life and death struggles in which stellar casts found themselves at the mercy of earthquakes, killer bees, freak weather conditions and human failings. The biggest of them all was *The Towering Inferno*, released in America 50 years ago on 14 December 1974. It took its inspiration from not one, but two novels, required the resources of two major Hollywood studios to make it a reality and featured a staggering cast of Hollywood greats that spanned the generations, from Fred Astaire and Jennifer Jones to Steve McQueen, Paul Newman and Faye Dunaway.

The story of *The Towering Inferno* begins in early 1973 when Hollywood executives were given ➔

first sight of a novel scheduled for publication in October of that year. The Tower by Richard Martin Stern was set during the grand opening of an expensive New York skyscraper when a raging fire leaves the VIP dignitaries trapped and fearing for their lives.

A bidding war ensued that was eventually won by Ted Ashley at Warner Brothers who paid \$390,000 for the screen rights. A few months later, many of the same executives received the outline of a forthcoming novel by Thomas N Scortia and Frank M Robinson called The Glass Inferno. The story bore a striking similarity to The Tower and this time 20th Century Fox won the bidding war for the screen rights, coughing up \$400,000. Both novels had been inspired by the opening of the World Trade Center in April 1973 and both highlighted the hazards of tall buildings beyond the reach of conventional fire services.

Warners set a budget of \$4 million for its film and Fox planned to spend \$5 million. The rival projects seemed certain to damage each other at the box office. There might be an audience for one blazing skyscraper disaster movie but probably not for two. Wise heads prevailed and the studios decided to join forces and make one blockbuster epic.

The obvious person to take control of the project was 'master of disaster' producer Irwin Allen. Allen had made a splash on television with popular science-fiction series like Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea (1964-68) and Lost in Space (1965-68) but he really struck gold with The Poseidon Adventure (1972) in which Gene Hackman tried to lead survivors to safety after an ocean liner is turned upside down by a tsunami. Allen made disaster his business, once remarking, 'Pick up the daily newspaper, which is my best source for crisis stories, and you'll find 10 or 15 every day... People chase fire engines, flock to car crashes. People thrive on tragedy. It's unfortunate, but in my case, it's fortunate. The bigger the tragedy, the bigger the audience.'

PERFECT PITCH

In July 1973, Allen made his pitch. He had ideas for every stage of the production from early storyboards to a version of the poster and an advertising campaign. The film was his, along with a budget of \$14 million, the modern equivalent of around \$95 million (£72 million). In dividing the spoils, Fox would distribute the film in America and Warner Brothers would hold the international rights.

Allen immediately turned to screenwriter Stirling Silliphant to



McQueen and Newman got on well with Faye Dunaway but she clashed with William Holden who was angry over her repeated lateness on set

work on the screenplay for what would become The Towering Inferno. Silliphant won an Oscar for the Sidney Poitier thriller In the Heat of the Night (1967) and had previously adapted Paul Gallico's novel The Poseidon Adventure for Allen. It was Silliphant who combined the best elements of the two source novels into one seamless story about the launch night for a fictional 138-storey skyscraper in San Francisco. The combination of cost cutting, corruption and incompetence sparks a fire that places every VIP guest in danger.

Silliphant's research took him to the Occidental Tower, the tallest structure in Los Angeles where he had lunch at the Tower Restaurant on the 32nd floor. The biggest challenge for Silliphant was to advance the story and jeopardy while providing enough complexity in the characterisation to attract the big-name cast that Allen had in mind. There was almost a mathematical formula to the way



Paul Newman, William Holden, Robert Wagner made up only a small fraction of the film's stellar cast



Who gets top billing?

Steve McQueen made his film debut as a humble extra in *Somebody Up There Likes Me* (1956). The lead actor playing boxer Rocky Graziano was Paul Newman. Things were very different by the time of *The Towering Inferno*. Newman was now a screen veteran with four Best Actor Oscar nominations to his credit, but McQueen had become the coolest star on the planet thanks to films like *Bullitt*, *The Thomas Crown Affair* (both 1968) and *Papillon* (1973).

Each would be paid the same salary of \$1 million plus 10% of the gross box office takings. The question of who deserved top billing became a major bone of contention. William Holden thought he might merit the top spot. He was actually an Oscar-winner after all and had been a movie star when McQueen was still at school. A string of recent flops put paid to any of his hopes. After careful negotiations, compromise meant that McQueen's name appears first, but Newman's is at a higher level on the other side of the screen allowing them both to feel that they had come out on top.



An epic film required an epic cast. From left: OJ Simpson, Robert Vaughn, Richard Chamberlain, Paul Newman, Fred Astaire, Jennifer Jones, William Holden, Faye Dunaway, Robert Wagner and Steve McQueen

he ensured everyone had a moment to shine or an emotion to convey, even as the deadly fire starts to rage out of control. His final shooting script was completed by March 1974.

Steve McQueen was Allen's first choice for the role of Doug Roberts, the architect who designed the doomed building. Ernest Borgnine was a possibility for the role of the heroic fire chief, Michael O'Hallorhan. When McQueen read the script, he decided he was better suited to the action man role and preferred to play the fire

chief. Needing an actor of similar stature to portray the architect, it was McQueen who suggested Paul Newman.

Like *The Poseidon Adventure*, *The Towering Inferno* assembled a star-studded cast that would grow to include Faye Dunaway, William Holden, Robert Wagner, Richard Chamberlain and Robert Vaughn. Olivia De Havilland was originally approached to play the lonely Liselotte but didn't want to be away from her Paris home.



Neither Fred Astaire nor Jennifer Jones had worked for several years before *The Towering Inferno*

DID YOU KNOW?

Three of the Picasso paintings in Liselotte's apartment are genuine and were loaned to the film by businessman, art collector and philanthropist Norton Simon who was married to Jennifer Jones, and also on the board of Twentieth Century Fox.

when her teenage daughter was sitting her baccalaureate exams. The role instead provided a screen comeback for Jennifer Jones. The part of charming con man Harlee Claiborne provided a rare dramatic role for Fred Astaire, although it was reported that both David Niven and Peter Ustinov were also considered for the part.

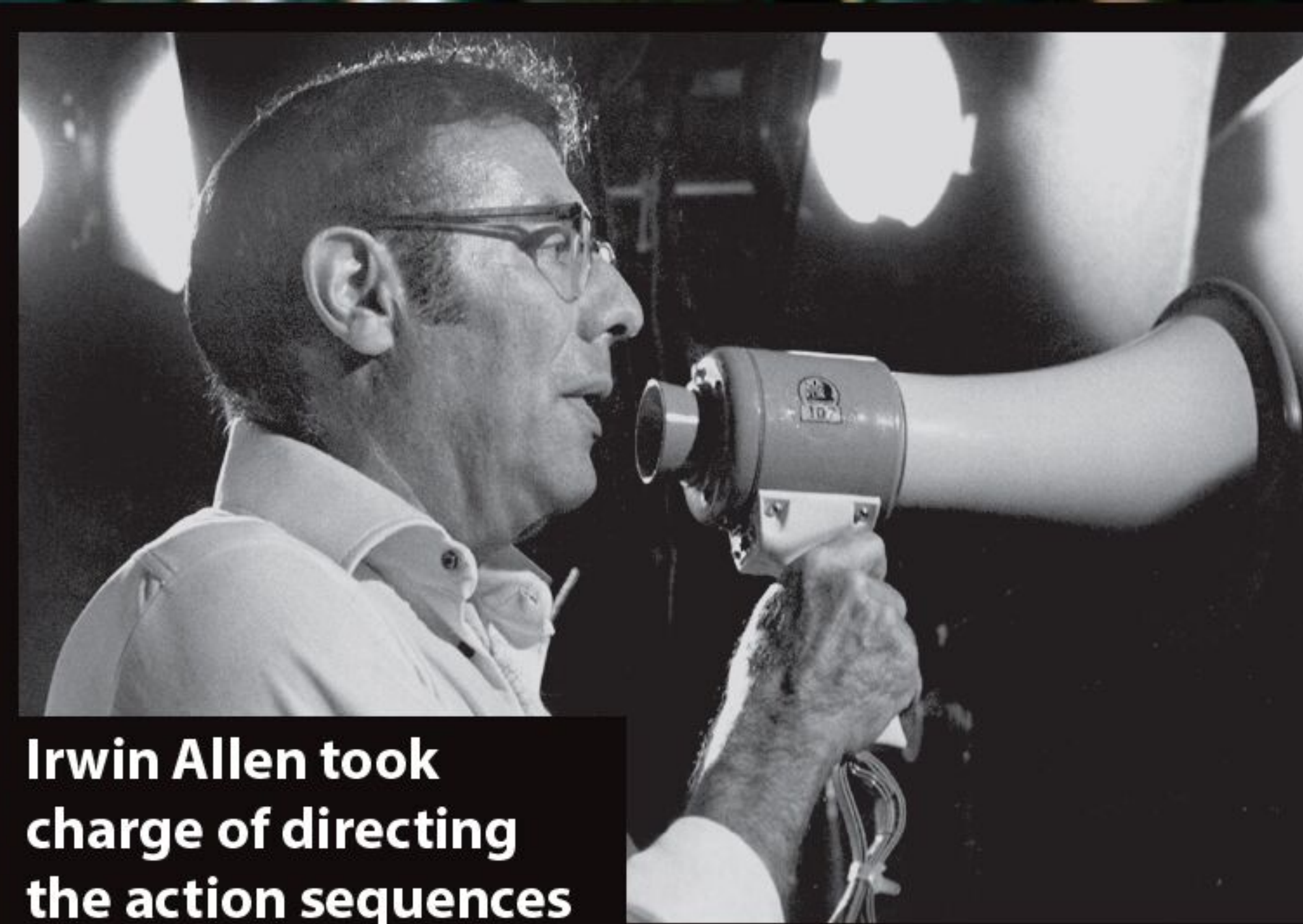
IT'S THE SMALL THINGS...

Fourteen weeks of principal photography began on 8 May 1974 and Allen was working under the pressure of a strict deadline as the film was scheduled to be released in America on 14 December. Allen planned his production with military precision and was intent on making his deadline by using four different crews. British director John Guillermin, whose career stretched from Margaret Rutherford comedy *Miss Robin Hood* (1952) to First World War adventure *The Blue Max* (1966), would direct the dramatic scenes involving the big-name cast.

Allen himself would direct the action sequences involving controlled fires, explosions, water and any risk to life. LB 'Bill' Abbott handled the special-effects unit and Jim Freeman commanded the aerial unit capturing the helicopter rescue efforts. The four teams shot simultaneously, using anything from three to eight cameras to give as much coverage as possible for an individual scene.

The film was shot for three weeks in San Francisco where the Hyatt Regency hotel's glass elevators doubled as the lobby for the film's Glass Tower. The Bank of America World Headquarters in Los Angeles served as the plaza and base of the Glass Tower. Matte paintings were used to gain the necessary height for the building and scale replicas helped create the illusion of its existence.

In total, 57 sets were built on eight sound stages at Twentieth Century Fox. Only eight were left standing by the ending of filming,



Irwin Allen took charge of directing the action sequences

The largest set, costing \$300,000, was used for the Promenade Deck on the 135th floor where the opening party takes place. It was 25ft high and surrounded by a 340ft cloth painting resembling the San Francisco skyline. The set was also 10ft off the ground so the water could drain away at the film's climax. The moment the overhead water tanks (with a capacity of 12,000 gallons) explode, dousing the flames and soaking the cast, was the most difficult to film, taking nine days and nine cameras according to Allen.

Attention to detail became the key to the film's success. Scenes before the fire strikes were filmed first so the pristine sets could then be damaged. There were at least two copies of every costume so that one could be ruined as the action advanced. Hidden pipes around the sets allowed kerosene to be fed into the location and, more importantly, shut off, to fuel the fire effects. Acetylene emitters were used to create yellow, smoky flames and butane emitters for the blue, smokeless flames. Allen seemed to have thought of everything.

The filming was completed on time and on budget and the finished movie was ready in time for its December release date. *The Towering Inferno* became the biggest box office hit of the year. It was nominated for eight Oscars,



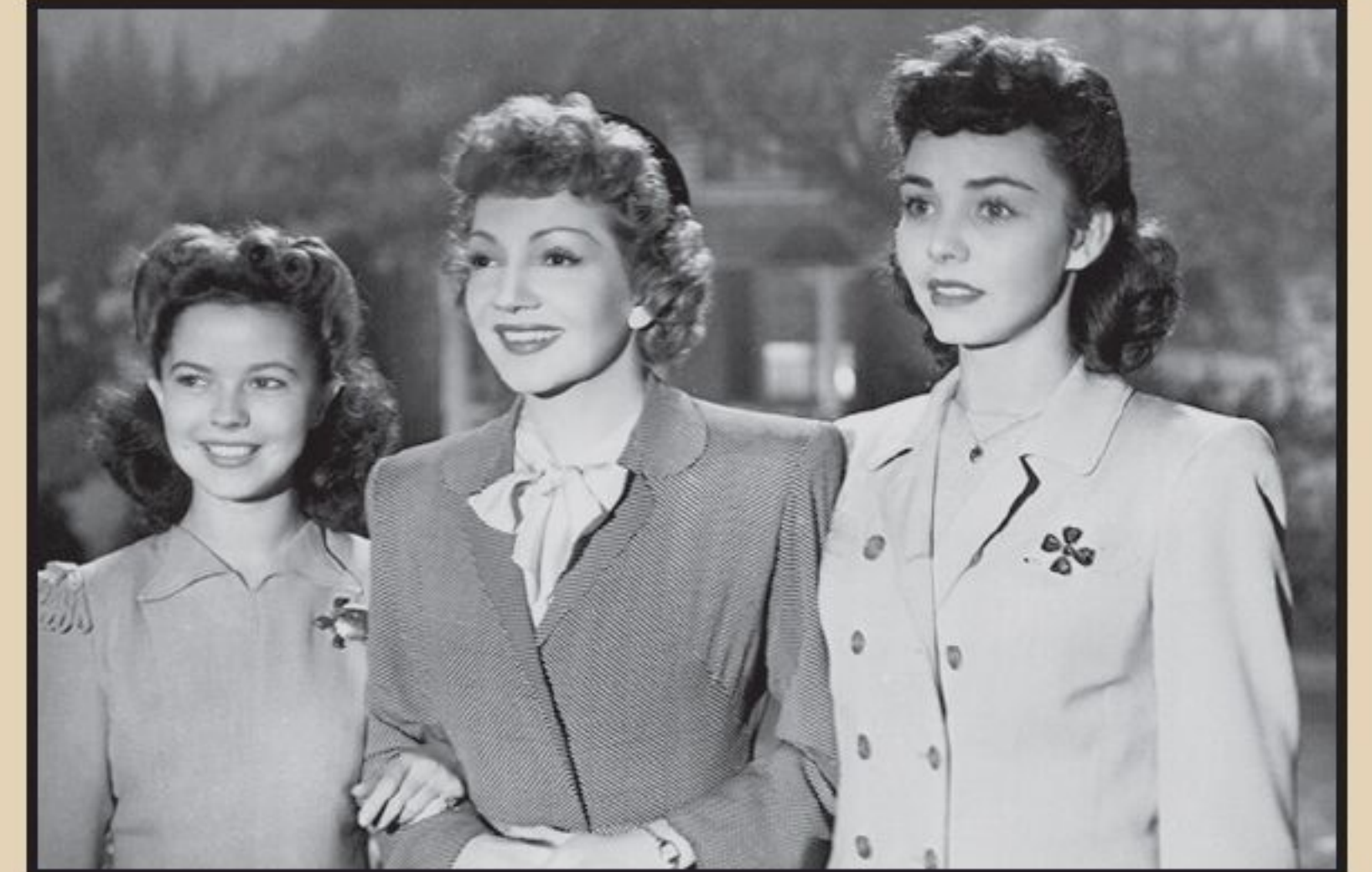
including Best Picture, and won three for cinematography, editing and Best Original Song, *We May Never Love Like This Again*, sung in the film by Maureen McGovern.

It was Allen's greatest triumph and recognised as the most thrilling disaster movie of the decade. Allen would never achieve a similar success. Three years later, *Star Wars* (1977) was released and audiences wanted to experience the thrill of adventures in galaxies far, far away rather than the all too real dangers of life on Earth.

TOP 5

BOX OFFICE GOLD...

SHIRLEY TEMPLE FILMS



Since You Went Away (1944)
\$459.1m



The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer (1947) \$376.9m



I'll Be Seeing You (1944) \$318.4m



Little Miss Broadway (1938) \$273m



Bright Eyes (1934) \$267.3m

* Adjusted domestic box office gross using current movie ticket price (in millions) according to ultimate-movie-rankings.com

Safety first

The challenge for Irwin Allen and John Guillermin was to make it appear as if everyone in the stellar cast was in danger without harming anyone. During the filming, members of the local fire department were on hand and each star was assigned a firefighter to guard them. None of the fire scenes could last longer than 30 seconds because the heat would trigger the sprinkler system on set.

Both Paul Newman and Steve McQueen were keen to do as many of their own stunts as possible. It is Newman climbing the bent railing in the stairwell. It is McQueen on the helicopter as it flies to the scenic elevator at the side of the skyscraper although it is a mock-up a matter of feet from the ground.

When a fire did break out on one of the sets, McQueen, still in character, pitched in and helped to bring it under control. Fellow firefighters only realised who their colleague was after the event. 'My wife will never believe this,' said one of them. 'Neither will mine,' replied McQueen who was married to Love Story star Ali MacGraw at the time. Allen was more than satisfied with the film's safety record, declaring, 'Despite the fact we successfully burned down the world's tallest building for motion picture purposes, we wound up with no fatalities, thank God, and very few cuts and bruises.'

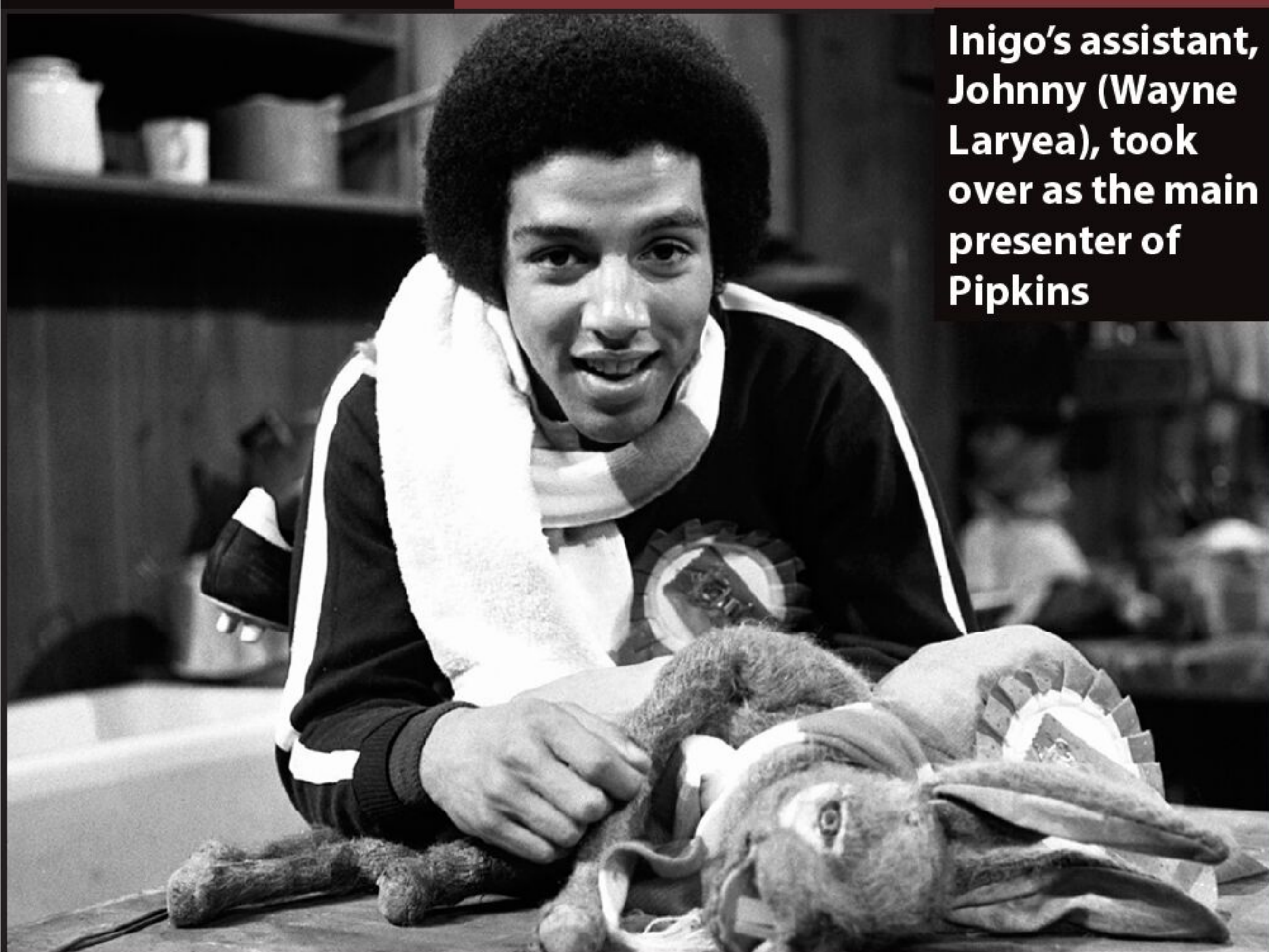
The jaw-dropping cinematography won the film a much-deserved Oscar





George Woodbridge was 66 when he took on the role of Inigo Pipkin. He died five weeks into the filming of the second series

Finding comfort in sadness



Inigo's assistant, Johnny (Wayne Laryea), took over as the main presenter of Pipkins

Hartley Hare and Tortoise were bought to life by Nigel Plaskitt



Jeremy Colman takes a look at how the classic Seventies children's show Pipkins was the first to talk to youngsters about death and loss

The Seventies were a golden era for children's television. British living rooms were filled with whimsical characters, catchy jingles, and bright colours. For those who grew up in this decade, programmes like Inigo Pipkin hold a special place in the heart. Though the puppet-led series was filled with charm and fantasy, it also led the way in approaching serious topics.

For many fans, Inigo Pipkin evokes fond memories of simpler times. Produced by ATV, and premiering in 1973, the show revolved around a puppet maker, Inigo Pipkin, who ran a shop with the help of his talking animals, and Johnny, his assistant.

Inigo engaged his young audience with tales of friendship, curiosity, and discussions about life's many lessons. Although the puppets were undoubtedly the stars of the show, it was the gentle and wise presence of



The animals all had different regional accents including Topov the Cockney monkey (so named because he liked to be on top of things)

Mr Pipkin, played by actor George Woodbridge, that anchored the series in human warmth.

Most people, when asked about Pipkins, remember Hartley Hare, Topov the monkey, or Pig's love for cream buns declared in his fabulous Birmingham accent!

In an era when children's TV avoided confronting the harsher aspects of life, Inigo Pipkin broke new ground by addressing the real-life death of its main human character. It was a bold move that predated similar ventures by international counterparts such as *Sesame Street* by years.

George Woodbridge, the actor who played the title character, died of kidney failure during production of the second series. Rather than recasting or glossing over his absence, the producers made the courageous decision to weave the reality of his death into the show's storyline. His death was announced in the first episode of the third series, and the show was renamed *Pipkins*. The programme remained popular across the UK for the next nine years. Woodbridge's death, and the forthright way the show tackled it, remains a poignant moment in television history, marking one of the earliest instances where

a children's show directly addressed the concept of death.

The storyline unfolded with remarkable compassion. The puppets, alongside their young viewers, were guided through the experience of loss and grief, learning that, although Mr Pipkin was no longer with them, his love and teachings would endure. The decision to embrace such a difficult subject within the format of a children's programme was a radical choice, particularly at a time when death was largely considered a taboo topic for young audiences.

LEADING LIGHT

In tackling Mr Pipkin's departure, the show's creators ensured the topic was handled with sensitivity and care. They allowed the series' characters and, by extension, their viewers, to express grief and acceptance. This helped children to understand loss as a part of life, providing a tender yet honest narrative about saying goodbye.

Inigo Pipkin's approach to portraying death was both original and brave. It predated the famous *Sesame Street* episode *Farewell, Mr Hooper* by nine years, where a similar storyline was employed following the death of actor Will Lee. This episode, aired in

1983, and is often credited with setting a precedent for addressing difficult topics in children's television; however, Inigo Pipkin deserves recognition for having ventured into this territory almost a decade earlier.

The decision to address death on Inigo Pipkin was met with both praise and concern. Some worried about exposing children to such an adult theme, while others applauded the show for its honest portrayal of a universal experience. Ultimately, the programme's handling of Mr Pipkin's death succeeded in treating its young audience with respect, acknowledging that children are capable of understanding and processing complex emotions when guided appropriately.

For those who grew up watching Pipkins, the show's willingness to tackle such a weighty subject left a lasting impression. It paved the way for future children's programming to explore difficult topics with warmth and care. By including real-life experiences within its storylines, Inigo Pipkin showed that life is a tapestry woven with joy and sorrow and understanding both is part of growing up.

Today, as we reflect on the legacy of the show, it is important to celebrate the courage of its creators. They dared to venture beyond the confines of conventional children's storytelling, providing a touchstone for honesty and empathy in entertainment. For fans of Seventies children's television, the show's blend of whimsy and reality stands as a testament to the power of storytelling, and its role in guiding young minds through the complexities of life.

In revisiting the memories of Inigo Pipkin, we pay homage not only to a cherished programme but also to the timeless lesson it imparted – that even in the face of loss, love remains, and it is this love that ultimately shapes our understanding of the world.



Margaret Rutherford's SECRET SORROW

She brought joy to millions but, as Steve Green reveals, Margaret Rutherford's own life was visited by tragedy, sorrow and loneliness

Interviewed on the BBC's long-running chat show *In Town Tonight* in October 1959, Margaret Rutherford confided, 'My great delight in being an actress is to escape from myself into some other person. It's a sort of translation and it fascinates me.'

Pressed by presenter Alex Mackintosh to discuss the intermittent bouts of depression and anxiety she'd suffered throughout her career, she replied, 'Every great clown has been very near to tragedy, you know? Comedy springs from it, I think. There I am reminded of a dictum that came from a very much-loved director of my early days. His name is Gerard Neville. He once said to me when I was playing in farce in repertory, "You must play this as if it was tragedy".'

Few, if any, listeners that evening could have realised just how much real-life tragedy was hidden behind the persona her close friend Robert Morley described as 'everyone's Maiden Aunt'.

Margaret's entire adult life was overshadowed by the knowledge that her father, the journalist and poet William Rutherford Benn, had murdered his own father and attempted suicide in March 1883, while on supervised release from Bethnal House Lunatic Asylum. He had been there receiving treatment for a nervous breakdown. Now certified insane, Benn spent seven years at Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum before being discharged in July 1890 and reuniting with his wife. Margaret was born in May 1892, emigrating to India several months later with

her parents, but returning to South London alone aged three, following the suicide of her mother. Now in the custody of her maternal aunt Bessie, Margaret was told her father had died of a broken heart, but in reality he'd been readmitted to Broadmoor and remained there until his death in 1921.

Finally learning the truth aged just 12, it's little wonder Margaret would spend the rest of her life haunted by the spectre of mental illness, and the fear she herself might one day succumb. Indeed, Margaret was diagnosed with manic depression (now known as bipolar disorder) and over the years was prescribed both medication and electroconvulsive therapy.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Margaret's 'escape' began relatively late in life. Aunt Bessie had suffered a fatal stroke in 1923 and left her niece a small legacy, which the 31-year-old determined would fund training for the theatre, having been stage-struck as a little girl. She'd already taken elocution lessons while working as a music teacher (she was a talented pianist), and managed to arrange an audition with Lilian Baylis, whom Margaret regarded as 'the Queen of the Old Vic'. It went well, and September 1925 saw Margaret make her theatrical debut, playing Portia's attendant in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Unfortunately, her nine-month probationary period ended without renewal, and she was forced to temporarily return to teaching, with occasional detours onto the amateur stage. It was not as though Margaret had a choice in the matter, 'To me acting is my life. It is as necessary for my survival as breathing.'

Another kind of escape presented itself in the form of a fellow actor Margaret spotted outside the



Stringer Davis and Margaret, rehearsing for the play *The Noble Spaniard* in 1958

Oxford Playhouse in 1930, while answering an invitation to join the cast of Ben Travers' farce *Thark*. As she recalled in her 1972 autobiography, co-written with Gwen Robyns, 'I noted his clear blue eyes, debonair dress and courtly style. I could not take my eyes off him. His name was Stringer Davis.'

Her attraction to Davis, seven years her junior, grew rapidly. Sadly, Davis' mother Ethel strongly disapproved of the romance and, out of deference to her, he delayed proposing to Margaret until Ethel died in 1945. As soon as he could arrange leave from the Army, the marriage could finally take place.

Although Margaret was famous for playing oddballs and eccentrics – Madame Arcati in *Blithe Spirit*, Miss Prism in George Bernard Shaw's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1952), four movies as Agatha Christie's Jane Marple (1961-64), the Duchess of Brighton in *The V.I.P.s* (1963), scoring both an Academy Award and a Golden Globe – she shunned parts that involved actual mental illness, no doubt always conscious of the family secret which only became public knowledge following her death in May 1972.

Laurence Olivier was among the many who paid tribute, 'Dame Margaret was one of the sweetest, warm and gentle ladies it could have ever been anyone's happiness to know. Her unique talent exercised itself with eccentric comedy but it could well have endowed more serious work.'



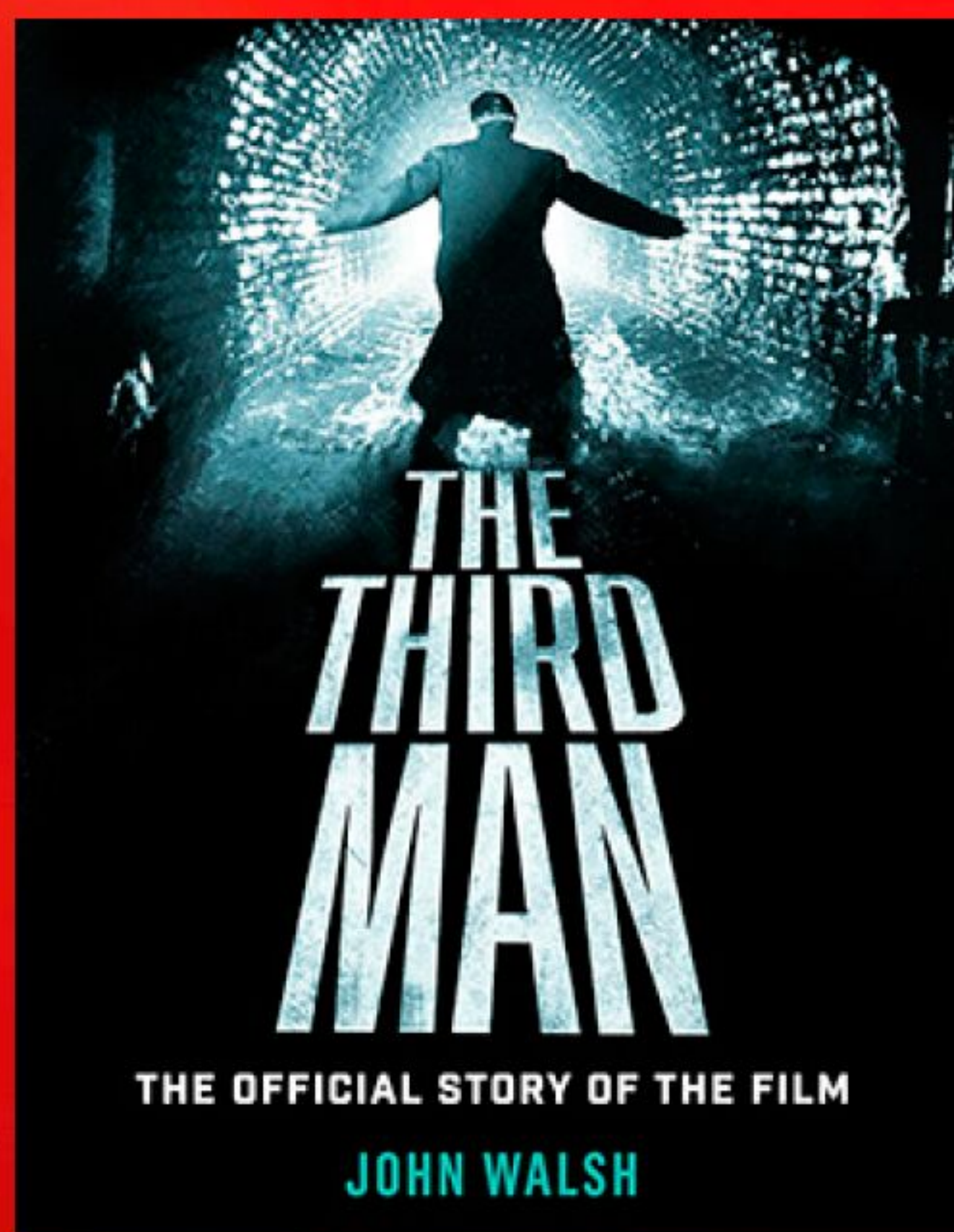
Margaret Rutherford played Miss Marple in four films directed by George Pollock between 1961 and 1964

DID YOU KNOW?

Following Margaret's death, Stringer Davis became increasingly reliant on their housekeeper, Violet Lang-Davis (no relation), and even proposed marriage, but he died in August 1973 before this could take place. It was later discovered Lang-Davis had stolen several personal items, including the Oscar Margaret received for *The V.I.P.s*, and forged a will in an attempt to inherit her employer's cottage.

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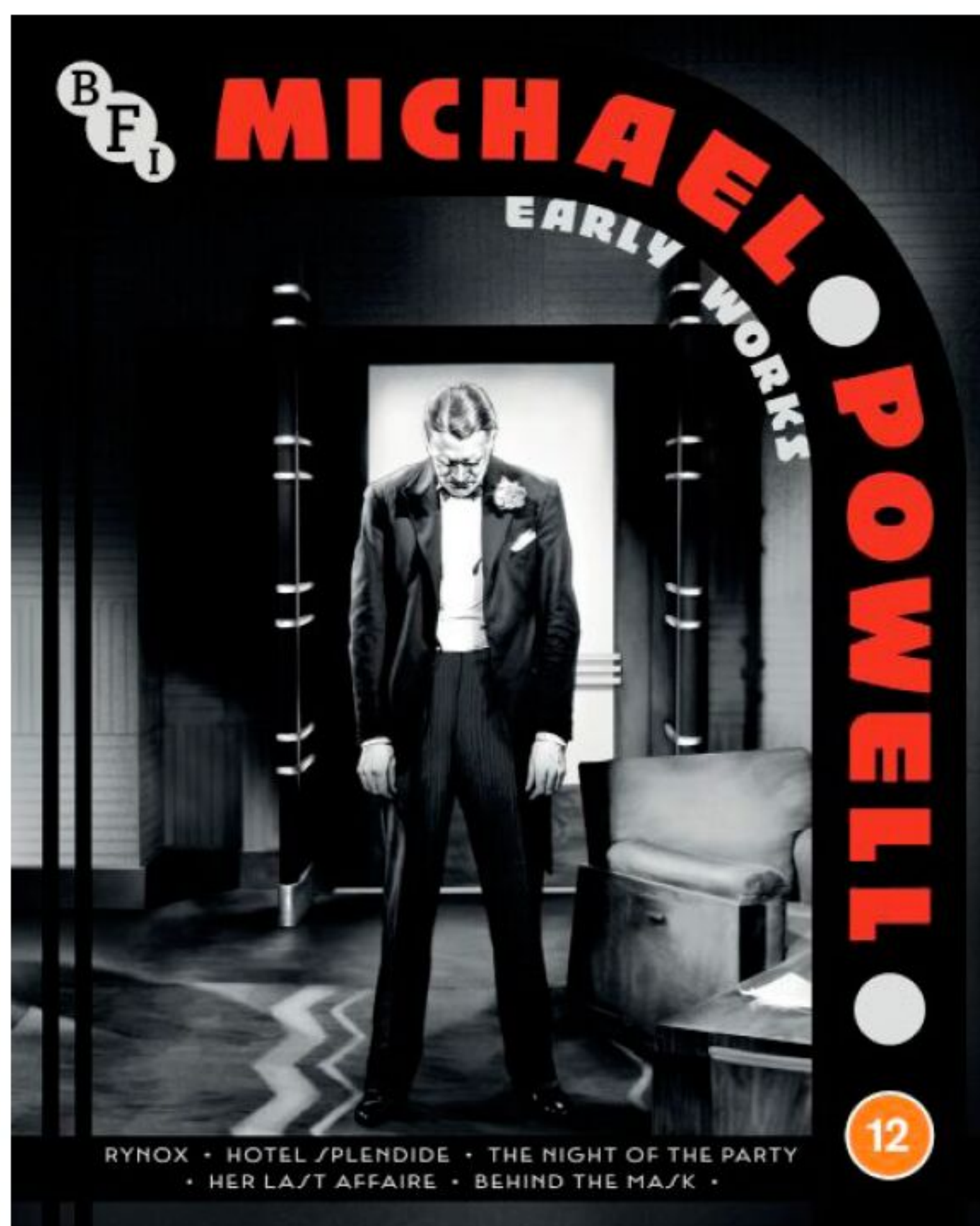
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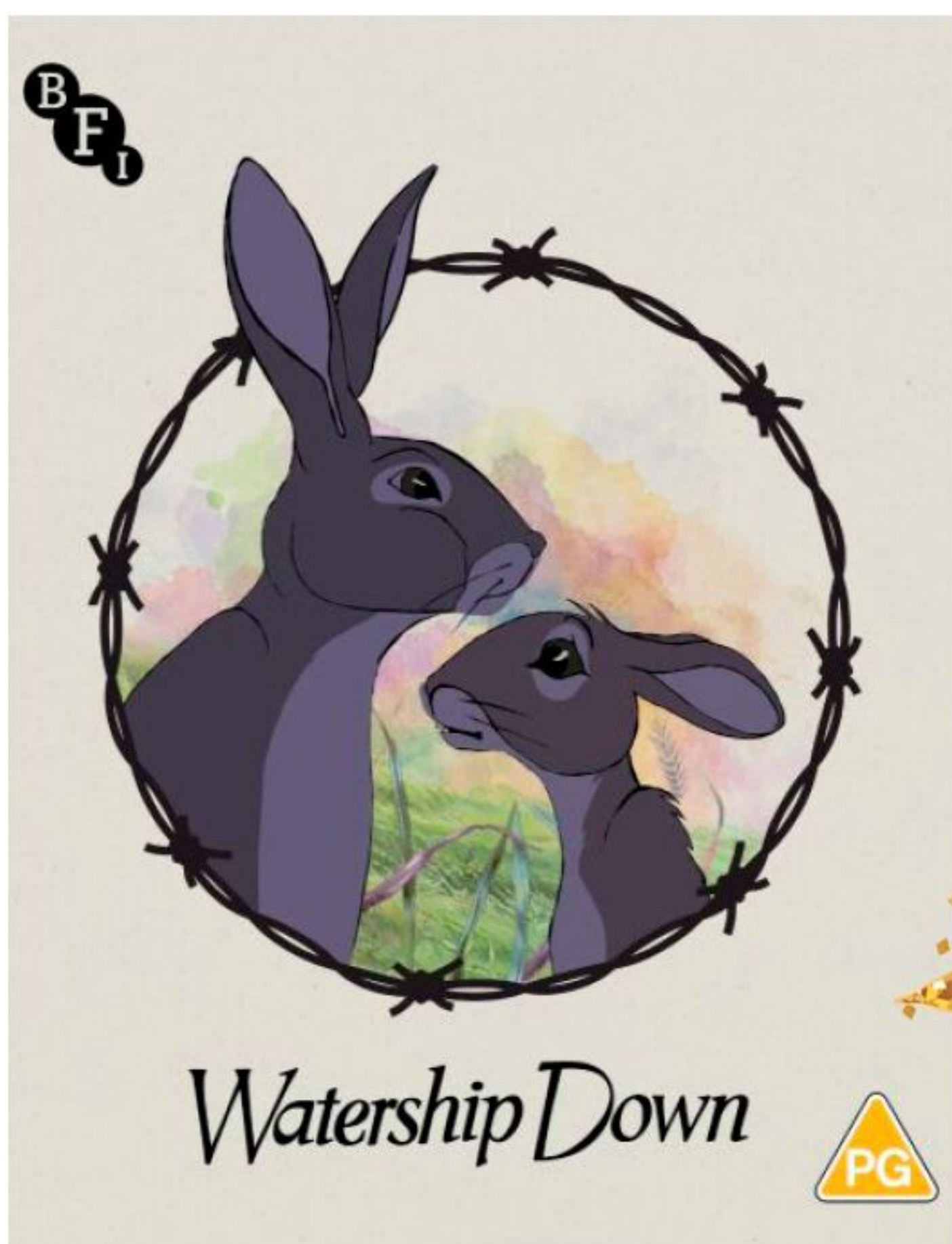
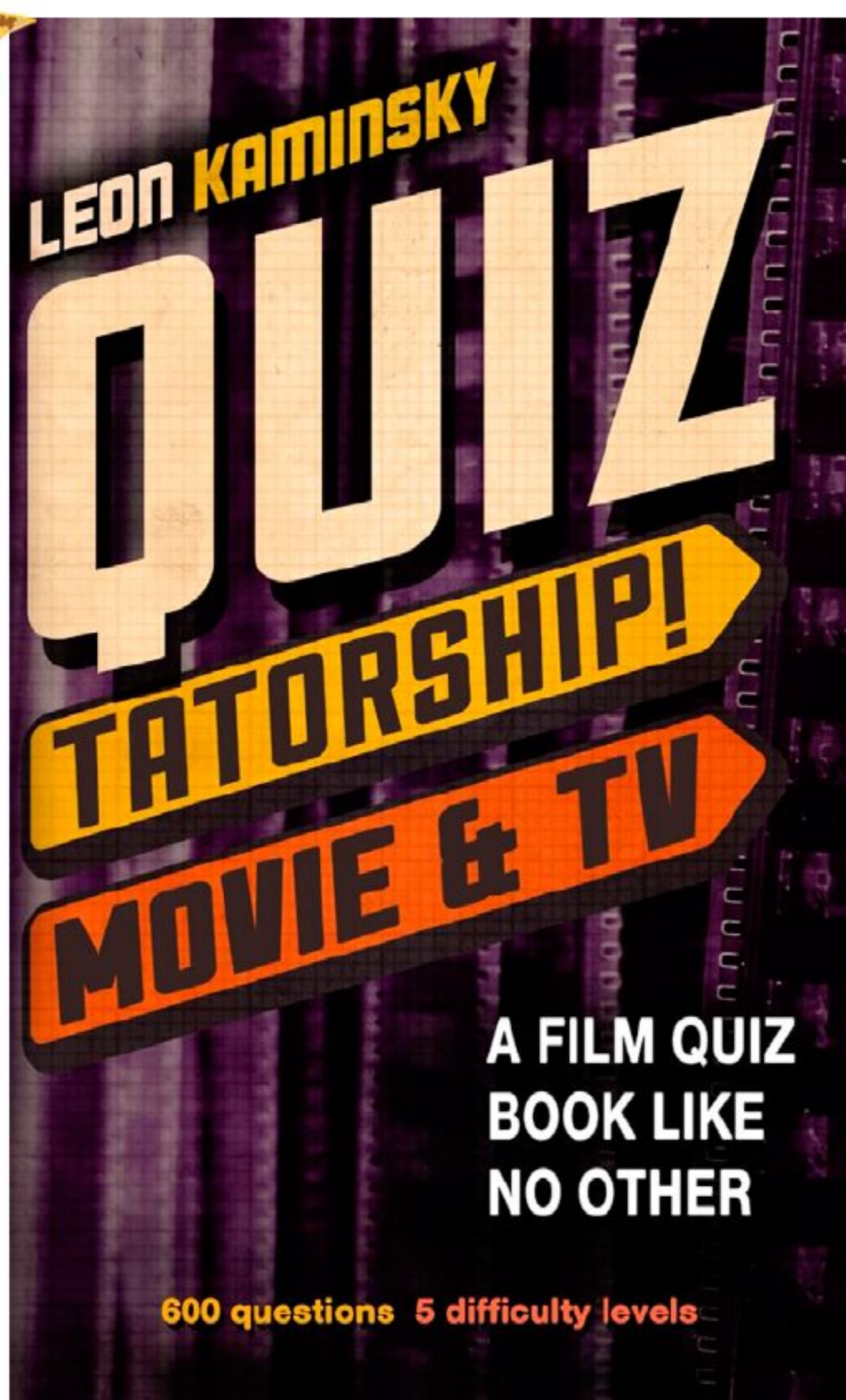
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Bing Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, Vera Ellen and Danny Kaye wishing all their Christmases were white

Irving Berlin wrote some of the greatest American songs, but *White Christmas* remains his crowning achievement. Allan Hunter examines the life of the man behind the Yuletide classic

The King of Christmas

Irving Berlin won his only Oscar for *White Christmas*. At the Coconut Grove ceremony on 4 March 1943, he was both presenter and nominee which meant he opened the official envelope to reveal his own name. 'I'm glad to present the award. I've known him for a long time,' he remarked.

In the bleak midwinter of 1942, there was one song that seemed to be playing on every radio station and jukebox. The world was at war and Irving Berlin's *White Christmas* captured all the melancholy emotions of homesick soldiers and home front longing. Bing Crosby first introduced the song on his radio show and then in the film *Holiday Inn* (1942). Bing's plaintive rendition became a Yuletide staple and the bestselling single of all time. Berlin wrote more than 1500 songs during his long career but there was something special about *White Christmas* that spoke to the hopes and dreams of successive generations. When he completed *White Christmas* in 1940, Berlin is reported to have told his secretary, 'I want you to take down a song I wrote over the weekend. Not only is it the best song I ever wrote, it's the best song anybody ever wrote.'

LIVING IN POVERTY

Berlin's rags-to-riches story is the embodiment of the American dream. Born Israel Beilin in 1888 in Imperial Russia, Berlin and his family fled the vicious religious persecution of the Jewish population for a better life in America. His early years in New York were spent in abject poverty and were filled with tragedy. Berlin was nine when his older sister

Sifre died, and just 13 when he lost his father Moses. Berlin was one of eight children and left home after his father's death to ease the burden on the family finances. He scraped a living selling newspapers and busking. Later, he became a singing waiter-earning \$7 a week. His first composition, *Marie* from *Sunny Italy*, was written in 1907 and one of his earliest hits came with Alexander's Ragtime Band and sold more than 500,000 copies in 1911.

Berlin would become one of the great American songwriters, composing for the Ziegfeld Follies, creating landmark Broadway shows from *As Thousands Cheer* (1933) to *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946) and devising unforgettable music for some Hollywood classics. When Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers danced cheek to cheek in *Top Hat* (1935), they did so to the music of Irving Berlin.

Berlin's professional success often came with personal sadness. In February 1912, as his career began to flourish, he married Dorothy Goetz, the younger sister of fellow songwriter Edward Ray Goetz. The couple spent their honeymoon in Havana where Dorothy contracted typhoid fever. She died in July of the same year. A devastated Berlin poured all his grief into the haunting ballad, *When I Lost You*.

Many of the important relationships and events in Berlin's life became the inspiration for a song. In 1926, he married society heiress and writer Ellin Mackay, much to the horror of her

millionaire father Clarence Mackay, a Catholic deeply prejudiced towards Berlin's Jewish faith. To guarantee his wife an independent income and express his abiding love, Berlin gave her a wedding gift of the song *Always* and the rights and royalties in perpetuity.

Irving and Ellin's only son Irving Berlin Jr, was born on 1 December 1928 and died of infant cot syndrome a few weeks later on Christmas Day. Christmas was forever a time of sad remembrance in the Berlin household and some of those emotions seeped into the song *White Christmas*. It was released as American troops were far from home, never knowing if they would ever again experience a Christmas like the ones they used to know. It is sad and wistful, nostalgic but hopeful.

BERLIN AND BING

Berlin continued to write songs well into his 70s, opening his last Broadway musical *Mr President* in 1962. He grew increasingly reclusive once he turned 80, rarely appearing at the many award ceremonies held to honour a lifetime of unforgettable achievements. His wife Ellin died in 1988 aged 85 and Irving quietly slipped away the following September, aged 101.

Over the decades, *White Christmas* would be recorded by a gallery of greats, from Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley to Otis Redding and Lady Gaga. The song found a second wave of success as the title track for the Crosby film

White Christmas (1954) which is re-released in British cinemas this December to mark its 70th anniversary. In 1967, Berlin wrote to Crosby, saying 'It's a little late – almost 27 years – to send you a fan letter about *White Christmas*. But I heard you sing it last night on the Hollywood Palace show. Not only were you the first, but you remain the best.'



Following the death of his first wife Dorothy, Berlin had a single white rose placed on her grave every second day for 12 years



Puttin' on my top hat: Irving Berlin with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers

GRACE KELLY

Often thought of as Hitch's greatest leading lady, Grace Kelly was the benchmark for his ideal blonde. She had beauty, talent and the right combination of fire and ice. 'She's sensitive, disciplined and very sexy,' he said. 'People think she's cold. Rubbish! She's a volcano covered in snow.' Dial M For Murder (1954) was their first partnership and her first leading role. Hitch liked that she wasn't a pushover and she took his odd humour with a pinch of salt. They worked together twice more for Rear Window (1954) and To Catch a Thief (1955).

Hitchcock's heroines

Alfred Hitchcock surrounded himself with women who assisted, collaborated and advised him. But he also had a complex and controversial relationship with some of his leading ladies...



DID YOU KNOW?

Hitch allowed Carole Lombard to direct his cameo in the *Mr & Mrs Smith*. She rose to the occasion making him perform it over again until it was just right.



INGRID BERGMAN

When Hitchcock and Bergman worked together on *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946) they quickly developed an intense and lasting friendship based on mutual respect. She loved his 'Delicious sense of humour'. 'My husband and Ingrid had a very special bond, mutual admiration and a love of practical jokes,' said Alma Reville. 'Of all the actresses he worked with, Ingrid was the one he had the greatest rapport with.'



CAROLE LOMBARD

Hitchcock adored Carole Lombard, she was a strong and forceful personality and they shared a bawdy sense of humour. His affection was such he agreed to make *Mr & Mrs Smith* (1941) despite it being so unlike any other Hitchcock film! She and Hitch enjoyed sparring with one another; he chalked a mark on an 'idiot' board every time she fluffed a line. She, in response to his infamous 'actors are cattle' comment brought three young calves on set and decorated them with ribbons bearing the stars' names.



JANET LEIGH

Janet Leigh described Hitch as a 'loveable rascal' and he enjoyed her company because she would laugh at his jokes. He enjoyed scaring Janet by placing the disturbing Mrs Bates mannequin, from *Psycho* (1960) in her dressing room when she was at lunch.



KIM NOVAK

Often considered to be Hitchcock's most autobiographical film, *Vertigo* (1958) is a hypnotic story of obsession and control. Kim Novak clearly understood the character's feeling of being moulded, having been groomed in real life by Columbia boss Harry Cohn. 'I could really identify with Judy,' she said. 'Being told what to wear, how to walk, how to behave... that's how Hollywood treated its women in those days.' ➔



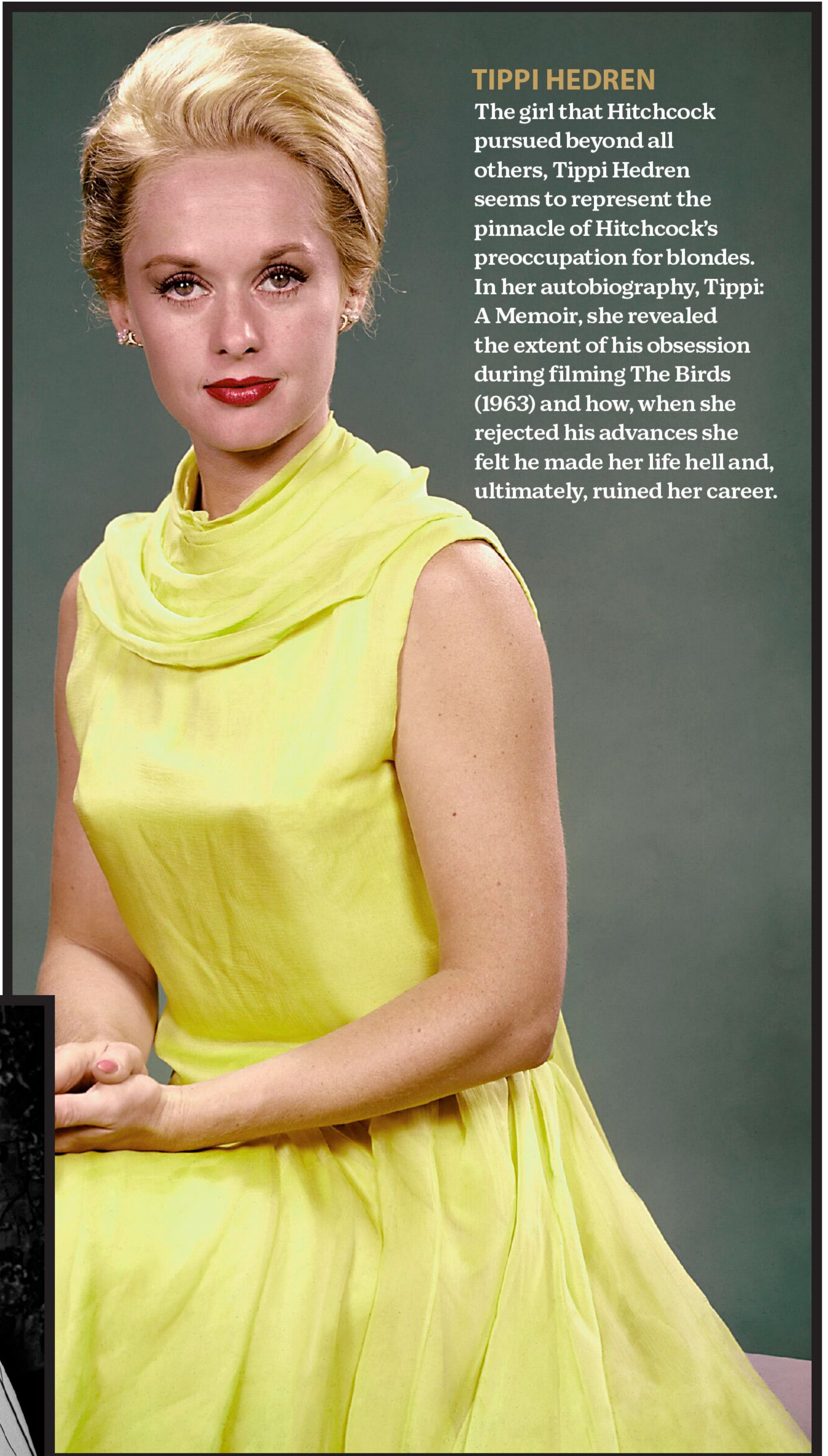
JOAN FONTAINE

Not a typical Hitchcock heroine, Joan Fontaine specialised instead in weak, haunted, romantic characters such as Mrs de Winter in *Rebecca* (1940) and Lina in *Suspicion* (1941). Fontaine found Hitch manipulative and domineering. 'He wanted control over me,' she said. To help her act nervous and insecure Hitch deliberately isolated Fontaine from the rest of the crew. Fontaine was, however, the only actor ever to win an Oscar for a Hitchcock film.



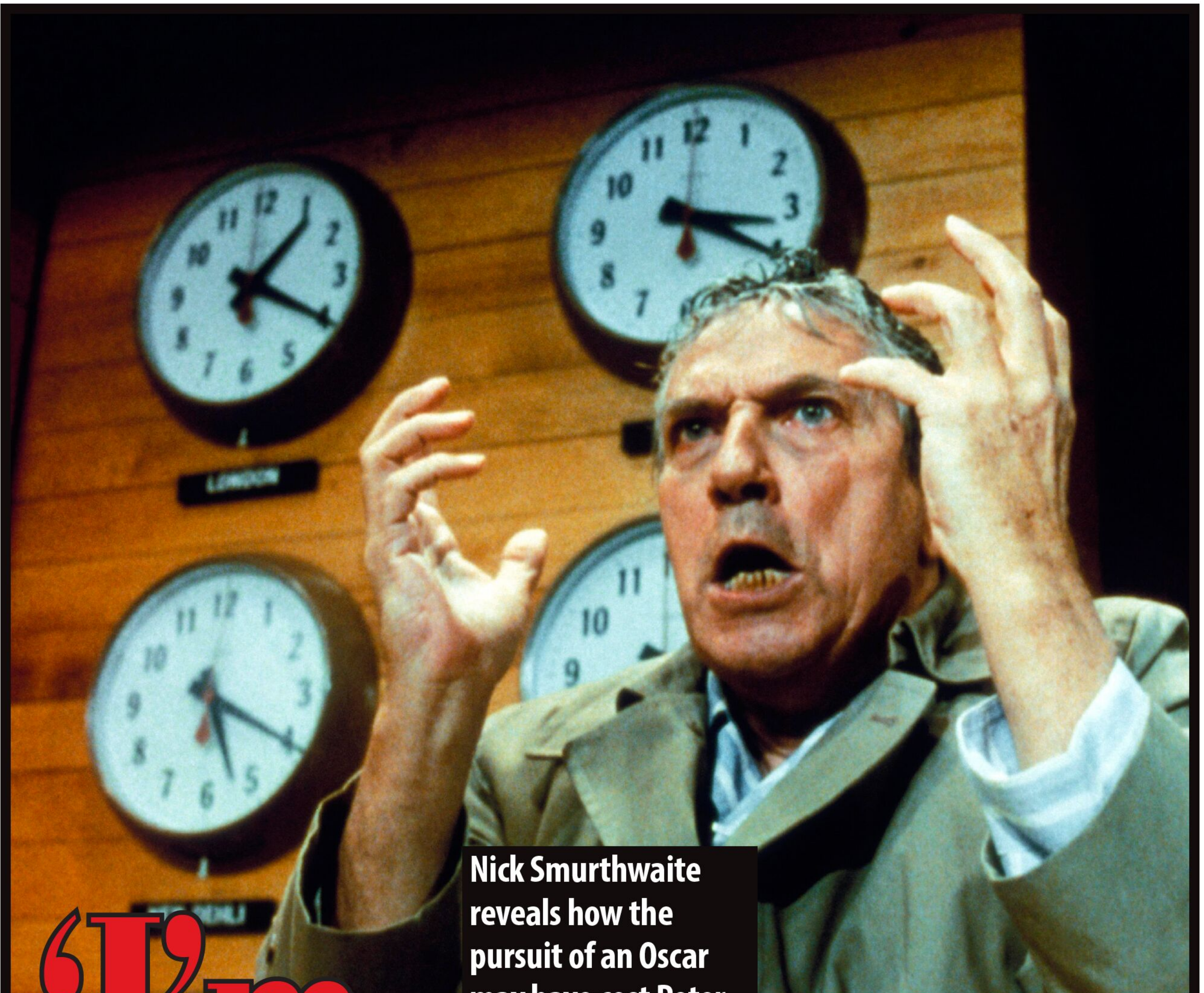
TALLULAH BANKHEAD

Lifeboat (1944) was Tallulah Bankhead's first film in 11 years and it was an uncomfortable shoot; she caught pneumonia twice! A great match for Hitchcock; she liked a drink, was witty and 'had the mouth of a sailor'. Hitch may have admired the glacial beauty of Hedren or Kelly but he enjoyed spending time with women like Tallulah who could match wits with him.



TIPPI HEDREN

The girl that Hitchcock pursued beyond all others, Tippi Hedren seems to represent the pinnacle of Hitchcock's preoccupation for blondes. In her autobiography, *Tippi: A Memoir*, she revealed the extent of his obsession during filming *The Birds* (1963) and how, when she rejected his advances she felt he made her life hell and, ultimately, ruined her career.



Nick Smurthwaite reveals how the pursuit of an Oscar may have cost Peter Finch his life

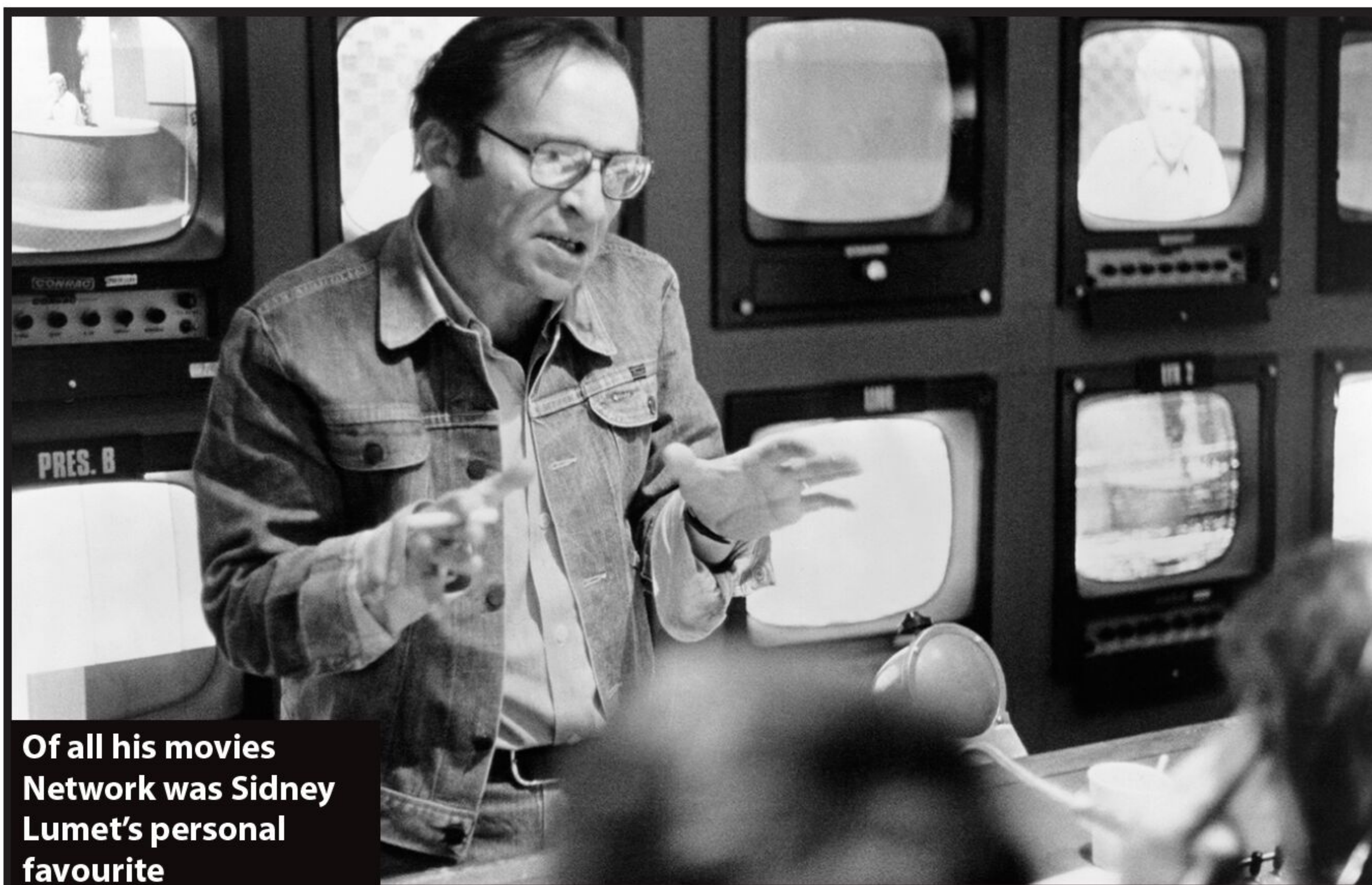
‘I’m talented as hell!’

For Peter Finch, it was the pinnacle of a career brimming with peaks. At last he’d been nominated for a Best Actor Oscar for his towering performance as Howard Beale, the crazed TV anchorman with suicidal tendencies in the brilliant 1976 film, *Network*.

The role itself was hard won. Director Sidney Lumet and screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky had originally wanted William Holden to play Beale – dubbed ‘The Mad Prophet’ by the TV network in order to achieve better ratings – with Finch as the sympathetic network boss, Max Schumacher, an old friend of Beale’s. They ➤

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Handsome, funny and self-deprecating, Finch was attractive to many women, not least Vivien Leigh who told her husband, Laurence Olivier, that she was in love with him. She cast Finch as her leading man in the 1954 film *Elephant Walk* before being replaced by Elizabeth Taylor because of her poor mental state.



Of all his movies *Network* was Sidney Lumet's personal favourite

doubted Finch, who grew up in Britain and Australia, was American enough to play the lead.

When he read Chayefsky's Oscar-winning screenplay, Finch decided straight away Beale was the role he wanted. With the help of tapes of the best American anchormen, the actor honed his vocal skills for two months before he agreed to a meeting with Lumet.

The director recalled, 'When Peter came over to America to see me and began reading to me from the script, what I heard was all the British quality of his speech marked out. But more

than that, I heard that he had been clever enough to understand that our best news commentators speak un-accented English... mid-Atlantic if you like, so he didn't try to reproduce some travesty of a regional American accent as many English actors do. The part was Peter's.'

Network is a film in which language is key, so Lumet needed someone with a great command of the spoken word. Finch's background in the London theatre

and his natural authority made that a given. 'We needed someone who could convey the fact that, although Beale is a madman, he makes the most sense of all the characters in *Network*,' said Lumet.

Finch always brought humanity and compassion to every role he played, which helped to make Beale a more sympathetic character than he might otherwise have been.

Despite its dark, slightly sinister feel, *Network* proved to be a very happy shoot, largely because the four main players – Lumet, Chayefsky, Holden and Finch – all got on as if they'd known each other for years. In her 1980 biography of Finch, Elaine Dundy quoted someone who worked on the film as saying, 'Bill [Holden] and Peter took to each other instantly. I have never seen such mutual respect. Both men had been there and back in their lives, and both had been away from films for a long time.'

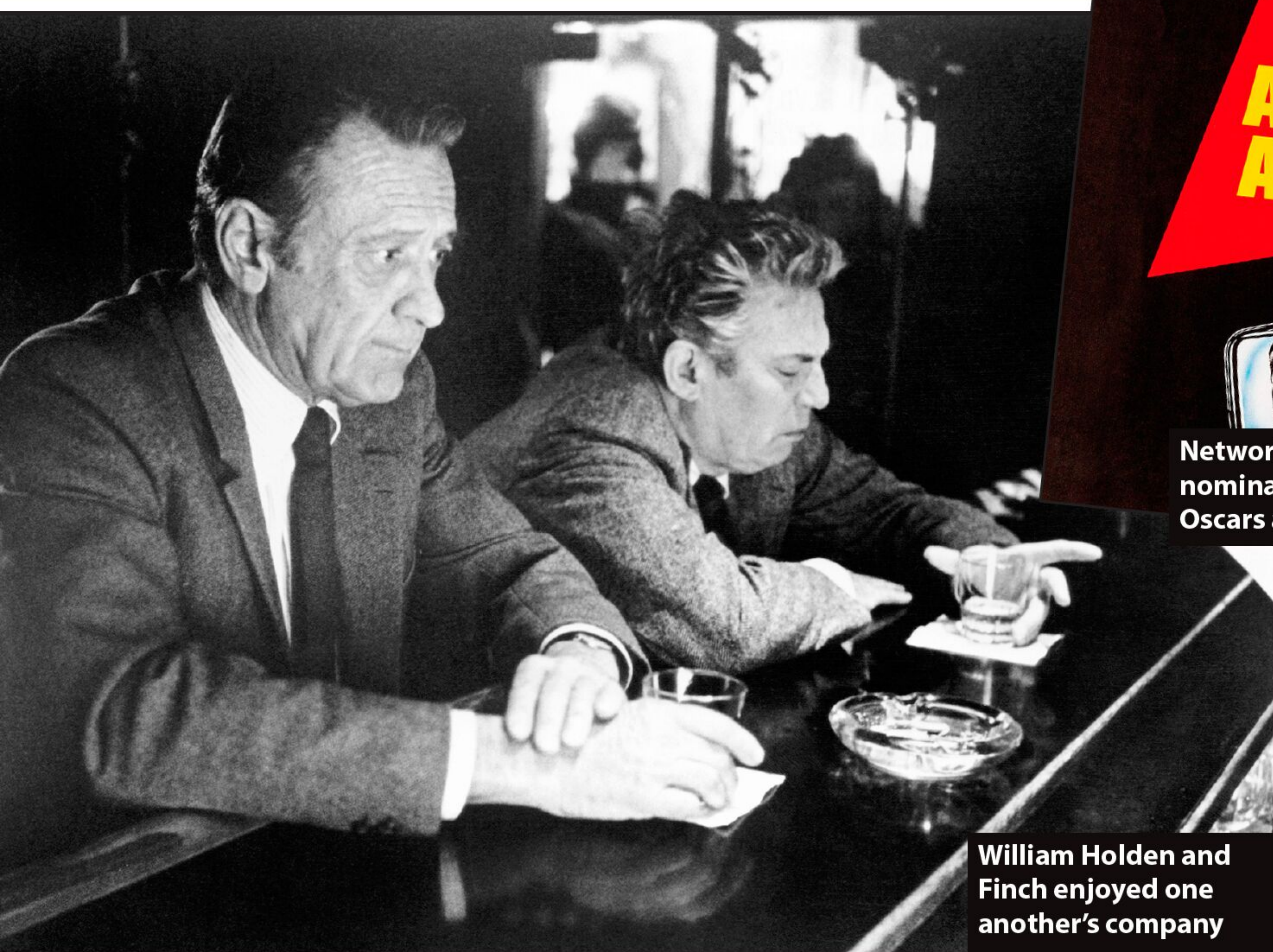
Paddy Chayefsky, too, was enormously respectful of Finch the actor and Finch the man. He told Dundy, '[Peter] didn't have to be directed. He had already done his work. He loved everything



Collecting the Oscar Finch's widow Eletha said, 'I wish he was here tonight to be with us all, but since he isn't here I'll always cherish this for him.'

Peter Finch was the first actor to receive a posthumous Oscar. Faye Dunaway triumphed in the Best Actress category the same year





William Holden and Finch enjoyed one another's company

about acting. He hung around the set all day whether he was working or not.'

Dundy, who knew Finch personally, regarded Howard Beale as near perfect casting for the actor because there were so many overlaps in their life experiences. Finch was inclined to rant about the evils of the movie industry, the way Beale does about television. He was histrionic without being overbearing. And he'd always valued his close male friendships, the way Beale does with his old pal, Schumacher. Many actors baulk at playing a role close to themselves, but Finch was sufficiently comfortable in his own skin at 59 to relish a character so close to his own personality.

In her summation of his performance, Dundy wrote, 'Peter's performance owed nothing to anything or anyone but himself and the unique way he saw and felt and did things. It was unique and un-derivative.'

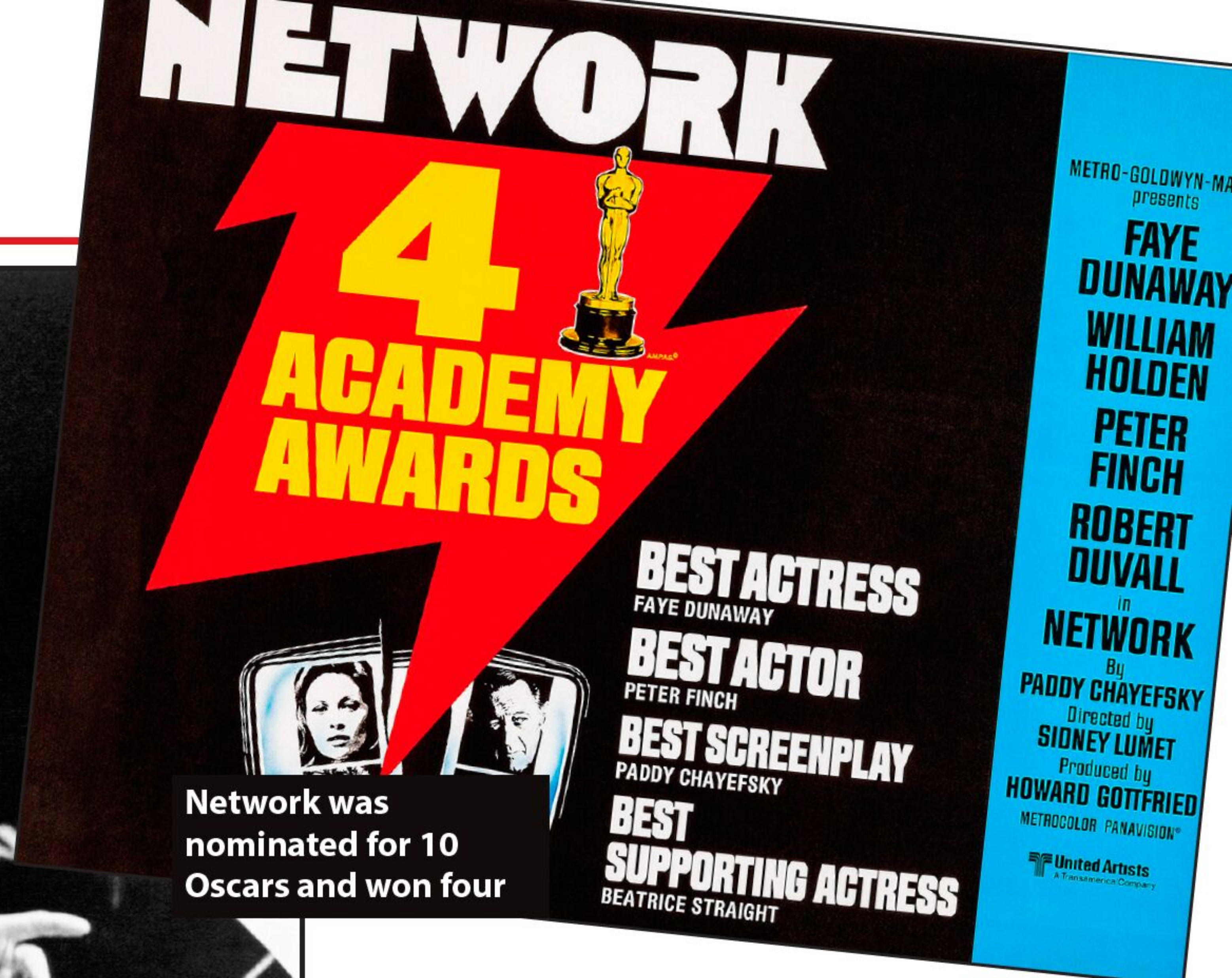
The day after Finch finished the *Network* shoot in Toronto he flew to California to start

work on *Raid on Entebbe* (1976), a recreation of a real-life rescue of hostages on a plane in Uganda, in which he played the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin. Though he was only employed on the film for three weeks, he was often working as much as 14 hours a day.

CHASING AN OSCAR

Soon after the completion of *Network*, rumours started to circulate about the possibility of Oscar nominations for Finch, Holden and Faye Dunaway (who played the ruthless head of programming). Unusually for Finch, who never enjoyed playing the huckster in real life, he hired a press agent, Mike Maslansky, a friend, to help plan his Oscar campaign. Clearly if there was an Oscar in prospect, the actor was prepared to set aside his distaste for self-promotion.

When he was released from *Raid on Entebbe*, Finch embarked on a punishing round of 300 press interviews for *Network*, including two trips to New York from his home in southern California. He was accompanied everywhere by his agent, Maslansky, and



his third wife, Eletha. On one of the New York trips he and Eletha went to the theatre to see *The Royal Family*, starring his old friend Rosemary Harris. So smitten was he with the play that he told Malansky he wanted to do it in London. At that time many producers would have given their eye teeth to book the great Peter Finch for a London run.

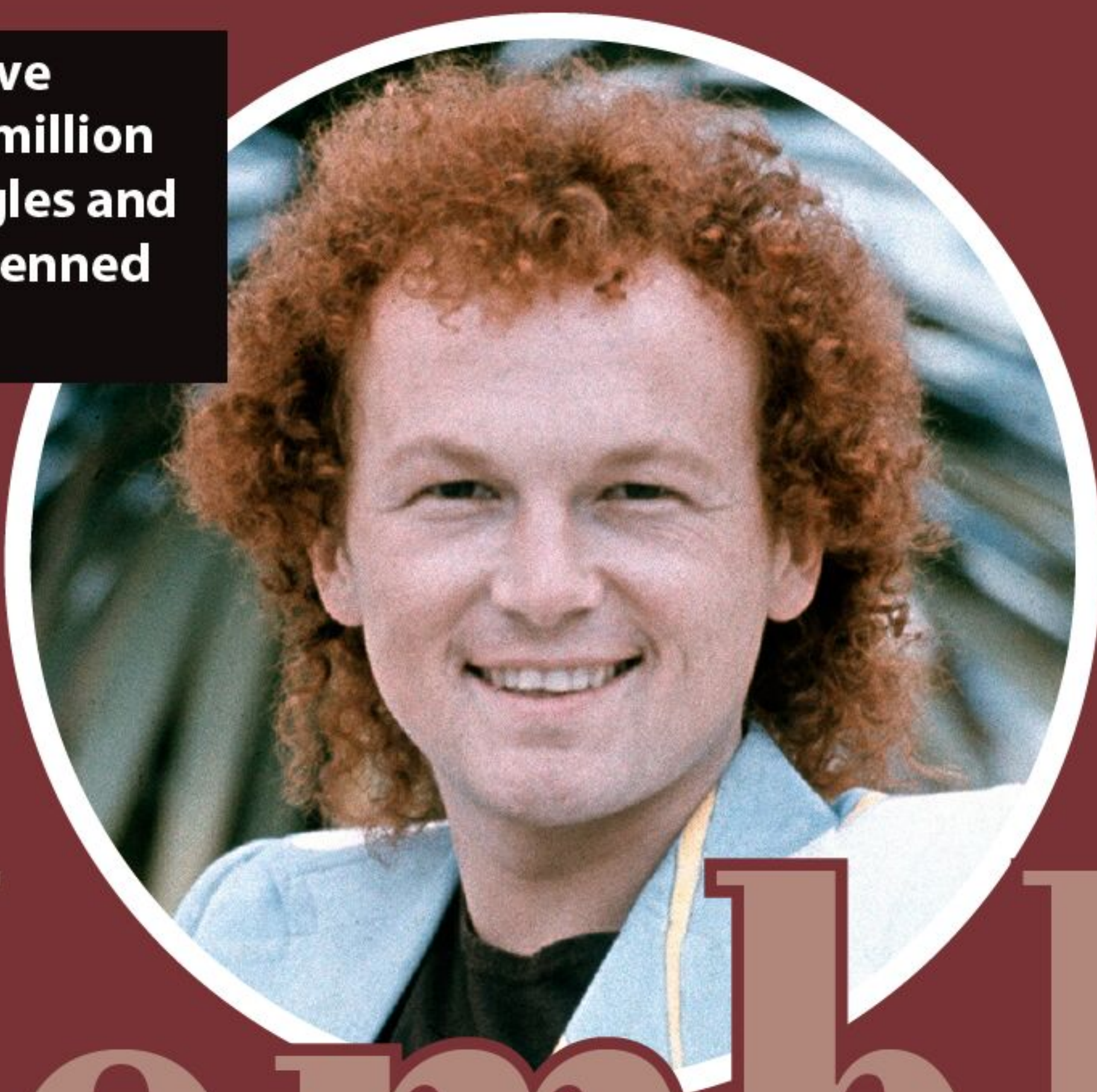
On the day he died, Finch was due to appear on the *Good Morning, America* breakfast show with *Network*'s director, Sidney Lumet, having recorded an interview with Johnny Carson the previous day. A great walker, the actor strolled alone from his hotel down to the Beverly Hills Hotel, where Lumet was staying, and felt unusually tired when he arrived. Noticing that he had collapsed in a chair in the lobby, the hotel staff called an ambulance and at 10.19am on 17 January 1977, Peter Finch was declared dead of a heart attack.

It would be another six weeks before the Academy Awards but everyone knew Finch was a shoo-in for Best Actor. Presenter Liv Ullman called Paddy Chayevsky – himself an Oscar-winner – up on stage to collect the award on behalf of Finch, and Chayevsky unexpectedly called Eletha on stage to receive the statuette. Still obviously stunned by her husband's dramatic and premature departure, she struggled to get the words out but her appearance on his behalf was both brave and dignified.

DID YOU
KNOW?

When Peter Finch played Iago opposite Orson Welles as Othello in 1951, it was the lesser-known Finch who received the most praise from the critics.

Mike Batt is said to have earned more than £1 million from the eight hit singles and four gold albums he penned as The Wombles



The Womble who ROCKED

Half a century after Womble Mania gripped the nation, singer-songwriter Mike Batt remembers when he was a Womble. Douglas McPherson hears how he steered the furry recyclers to the top of the charts

One night in 1974, a policeman who thought he'd seen it all pulled up at traffic lights beside an electric blue Rolls-Royce. He glanced over and saw a Womble looking at him from behind the wheel of the Rolls.

Mike Batt, driving home from a gig, with his Womble head on the passenger seat, had decided to put it on to prank whoever pulled up beside him, never dreaming it would be the police.

'All right, Mr Batt,' the officer sighed. 'Take the Womble head off, drive home safely and we'll say no more about it.'



While other pop stars were ruined by drink and drugs, that was the extent to which a bunch of furry creatures from Wimbledon Common took over Batt's life in the year that Womble Mania gripped the nation, with songs like *Remember You're a Womble* ruling the airwaves for weeks at a time.

'I don't think I presented as an eccentric child,' Batt reflects, 'But it wasn't far from the surface. I got my fun side from my mum and my sensible side from my dad.'

As a pre-teen, he would arrange his parents' dining chairs as an orchestra, put a record on and practise conducting Schubert's *Symphony No.9*. He acquired a 'free-to-collect' full-size concert grand piano that filled his bedroom so completely he had to crawl under it to get into the room.

Despite getting a grade E in his music A-Level, Batt broke into the music business by playing the organ in a strip club at night and hounding



The Wombles made 17 Top of the Pops studio appearances between 1974-75

record executives by day, hustling for a deal as a singer or songwriter.

Soon, he was eking a living as a record producer, string arranger, talent scout for Liberty Records, and composer of advertising jingles.

The 23-year-old, newly married Batt was living on a houseboat in Surrey when he was asked to write the theme tune for *The Wombles* (1973-75), a stop-motion animation children's TV series narrated by Bernard Cribbins, based on the books by Elisabeth Beresford.

Offered £200, he asked instead for music rights to the characters.

Batt made a record of the theme, *The Wombling Song*, at his own expense and leased it to CBS. He then launched a one-man promotional drive. Having got his mum to make a Womble costume, Batt says, 'I wore it all day every day, on trains and in taxis...'

He travelled the country, calling unannounced on regional radio stations and, everywhere he went,

the record began to sell. Tony Blackburn started playing it on Radio 1 and an appearance with Cribbins on Cilla Black's TV show pushed *The Wombling Song* into the charts at the start of 1974.

HEADY HEIGHTS

The record reached No.4, swiftly followed by *Remember You're a Womble* (No.3) and *Minuetto Allegretto* (No.16) with Batt's swiftly assembled furry-suited band cavorting on *Top of the Pops* seemingly every other week.

Batt's life as a Womble was ultimately undermined by the fact that he didn't own the rights to the characters, he only leased them from *Wombles Limited*. He had to get every lyric approved by Beresford's husband Max Robertson. He also felt that *Wombles Limited* was cheapening the brand by using the image on everything from chocolate bars to soap, while hiring actors in Womble

costumes to open shops and garden fetes.

The last straw was when Bill Kenwright produced what Batt calls a 'dreadful' Christmas musical – or, rather, nine stage shows running simultaneously in different cities. A tabloid ran a picture of a woman donning a Great Uncle Bulgaria costume, breaking the illusion that theatre-goers would be seeing the performers who appeared on *Top of the Pops*.

'It was as if Father Christmas wasn't real and there were lots of pretend ones,' says Batt. *Wombling Merry Christmas* had looked set to be the Christmas No.1 but a backlash against the stage show 'halved our weekly sales', says Batt, and the song halted at No.2.

The Wombles' musical success continued into 1975 with *Wombling White Tie and Tails*, but their singles could no longer crack the Top 20.

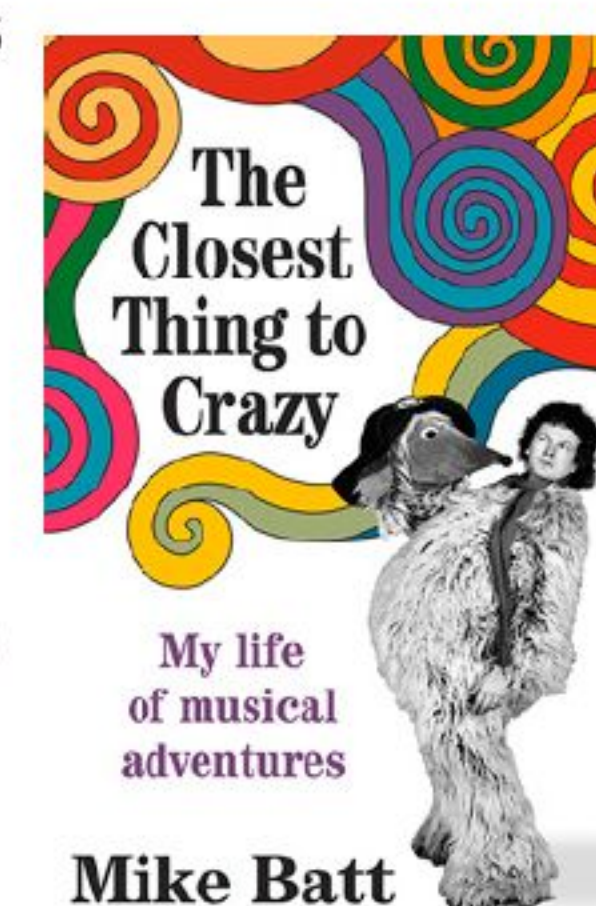
'Superwombling was, in my view, the best album,' says Batt. 'But I'd lost interest in taking *The Wombles* into 1976. I had to move on.'

Steeleye Span admired his work with *The Wombles* and engaged him to produce their 1975 hit *All Around My Hat*. Batt also scored a solo hit with *Summertime City*, the theme to TV variety show *Seaside Special*.

He went on to write and produce smashes ranging from Art Garfunkel's *Bright Eyes* in 1979 to Alvin Stardust's *I Feel Like Buddy Holly* in 1984 and Katie Melua's *Nine Million Bicycles* in 2005. In 2011, he dusted off his Womble costume to play Glastonbury.

'I never once regretted doing *The Wombles*,' says the singer, who proudly sports his costume on the cover of his new autobiography, *The Closest Thing to Crazy*. 'Sometimes it overshadowed other things I did. One article called me *The Wombles' dad*... but, hey, I am *The Wombles' dad*!'

■ **The Closest Thing To Crazy by Mike Batt** is published by Nine Eight, an imprint of Bonnier Books UK



These are the Untouchables

MOB RULE!

Keenan Wynn was Joe Fuselli opposite Stack's Elliot Ness in the pilot episode



Steve Green investigates *The Untouchables*, set on the violent streets of Prohibition-era Chicago, and reveals how the show's producers received an offer they couldn't refuse

Few Hollywood power couples were as ambitious as the actress Lucille Ball and her bandleader husband Desi Arnaz. In 1950, the couple had co-founded Desilu Productions, to launch their sitcom *I Love Lucy* (1951-57) and handle its syndication. The show was a massive hit and, when CBS bought Ball and Arnaz out in 1957 for a reported \$4 million, the duo purchased the former RKO facilities in Hollywood and Culver City for \$6.15 million. With their company rebranded as Desilu Studios, the pair began searching for another

hit – and found it in the story of one man's crusade against crime.

NIGHT TALES

Eliot Ness might have been the poster boy for Prohibition policing during the bloodiest days of Chicago's gangland violence in the early Thirties, but his days running the elite squad nicknamed *The Untouchables* were long behind him when Ness first met journalist Oscar Fraley in 1956. After two failed marriages, an unsuccessful bid to become Mayor of Cleveland and a series of misfiring business ventures, Ness had lent what



The *Untouchables*' gang-busting squad changed over time – only Robert Stack and narrator Walter Winchell appeared in all 119 episodes of the series

remained of his fame to a company launching a process for watermarking documents. An old college friend of Fraley's asked him to help set up a product launch in New York and introduced Ness to a selection of the local press. This evolved into a late-night party at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, with Fraley eagerly jotting down notes as Ness regaled stories of his gang-busting activities back in the Windy City. Sensing this would make a great book, Fraley wrote two chapters on spec and was rewarded with an enthusiastic thumbs-up from his agent.

Once again short of cash, Ness was more than happy to collaborate, and the pair spent two weeks nailing down the fine details of *The Untouchables*' more notable assignments at Ness's home in Coudersport, Pennsylvania. Interviewed by United Press in 1987, Fraley recalled his host as, 'a nice guy and a good lawman. He had a couple of scotches now and then. He didn't drink very much.'

All proceeded well until Fraley returned with galley proofs of the completed memoir in May 1957. 'I wanted the man to read it. I gave him the proofs. He read them all. Then he went out into the kitchen to get a drink of water and fell over dead.' Sadly, Eliot Ness, having eluded many a mobster's bullet, had suffered a fatal heart attack aged 53, and never got to see the book's massive success when released a month later, with a cover which promised 'The thrilling story of the handful of incorruptible men who smashed the bootleg empire of "Scarface" Al Capone'.

RUFFLING FEATHERS

Little wonder, then, that Desi Arnaz grabbed the rights and ordered a two-part pilot, which aired in April 1959 under the banner of the CBS series Westinghouse Desilu Playhouse. The lead role of Ness was initially offered to Van Johnson, but Evie Wynn Johnson (who managed her husband's career) reportedly scuppered any possibility of a deal by demanding Arnaz double the proposed salary, so it went to the relatively unknown Robert Stack. Surprisingly, CBS, which had previously screened all of Desilu's output, passed on a series, so *The Untouchables* duly moved to rivals ABC for its four-season run (1959-63).

The real-life squad might have disbanded shortly after Capone's conviction for tax evasion in 1931, but the fictional version's 118 episodes had Ness and his team fight crime until 1935, with guest appearances from the likes

of Robert Vaughn, Telly Savalas and Elizabeth Montgomery (who received an Emmy nomination for the season two opener, *The Rusty Heller Story*).

In his 1980 memoir *The Last Mafiosi*, former Los Angeles mob boss Jimmy 'the Weasel' Fratianno claimed Arnaz was marked for death by infamous Chicago gangster Sam Giancana and fellow members of the Cosa Nostra 'commission', incensed by the show's negative portrayal of such criminal luminaries as Al Capone and Frank Nitti. However, in a 1981 interview with Associated Press, the retired producer dismissed Fratianno's story as 'a bunch of bull', pointing out he went to school in Miami with Capone's son Albert, and felt certain his friend would have heard of any such plot and tipped him off.

Regardless of whether Arnaz was actually targeted by the Mob, his show incurred the wrath of a group of 'A-list' Italian-Americans, foremost among them Giancana's pal Frank Sinatra, who considered the depiction of many of the criminals to be racist (in his famous 1965 *Esquire* profile, Frank Sinatra Has a Cold, Gay Talese described the singer as 'a kind of one-man Anti-Defamation League for Italians in America'). The show was even sued by the family of Al Capone, who had died in 1947, although their writ for defamation sank like a pair of cement shoes.

The most successful campaign was launched in 1961 by union racketeer Anthony Anastasio, an associate of the Gambino crime family, who picketed the manufacturer of the show's main advertiser, Chesterfield Cigarettes. The company pulled its sponsorship, prompting Arnaz to issue a memo that included a promise to highlight the contribution of Italian-Americans to crime-fighting and the national culture. Eliot Ness might have been untouchable, but Desilu Studios and CBS certainly weren't.



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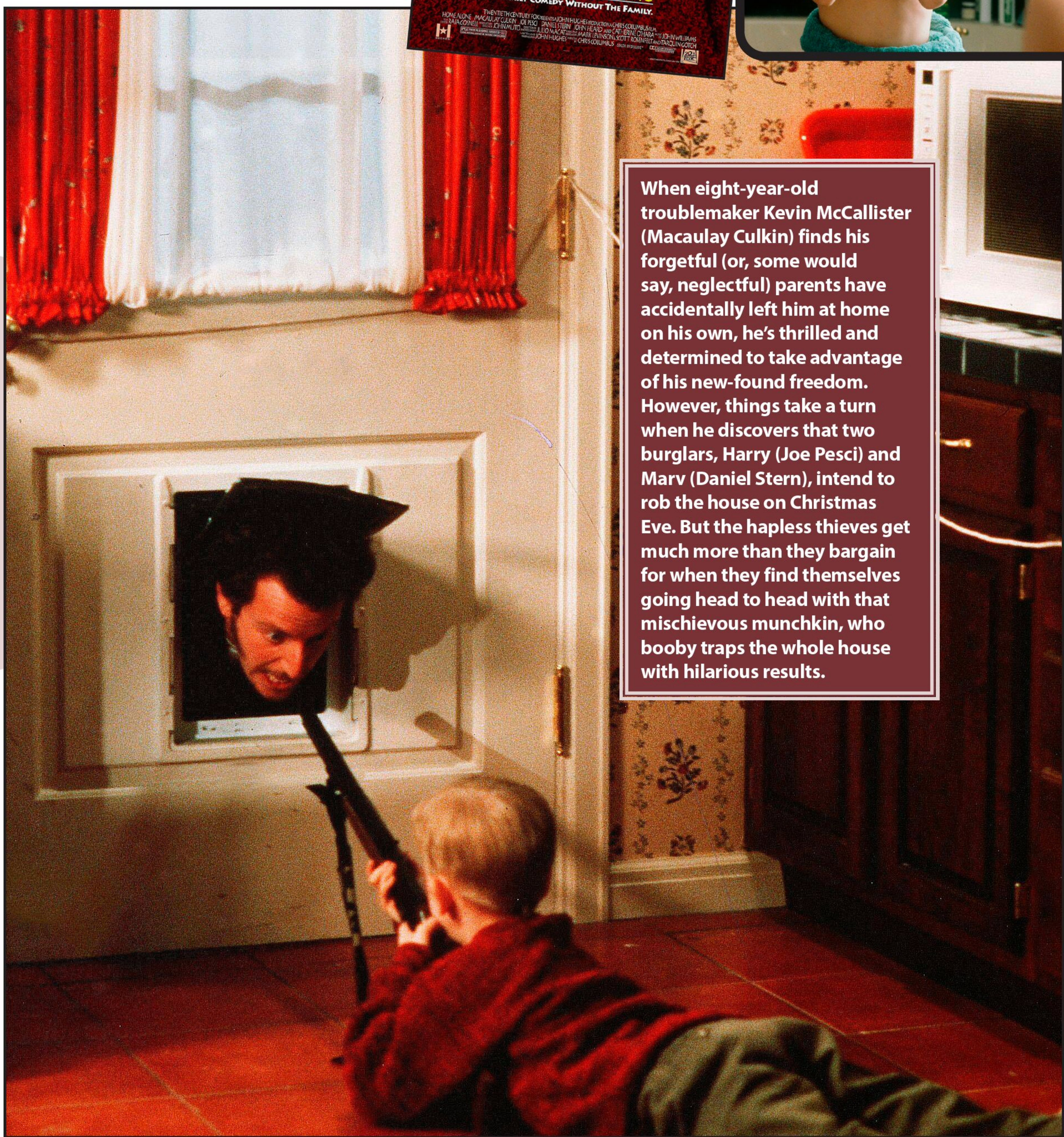
WISE WORDS

“ **The only thing I regret about my past is the length of it. If I had to live my life again, I’d make the same mistakes, only sooner.’**

Tallulah Bankhead

>>> MOVIE MASTERCLASSES No.37

Regarded by many as one of the best Christmas films of all time, *Home Alone* (1990) brought classic slapstick humour to a new audience and made a star of young Macaulay Culkin



When eight-year-old troublemaker Kevin McCallister (Macaulay Culkin) finds his forgetful (or, some would say, neglectful) parents have accidentally left him at home on his own, he's thrilled and determined to take advantage of his new-found freedom. However, things take a turn when he discovers that two burglars, Harry (Joe Pesci) and Marv (Daniel Stern), intend to rob the house on Christmas Eve. But the hapless thieves get much more than they bargain for when they find themselves going head to head with that mischievous munchkin, who booby traps the whole house with hilarious results.



Macaulay Culkin had been acting since the age of four, but *Home Alone* was only his second starring role – his first was in *Uncle Buck* (1989). For several years, Culkin was the highest paid child actor in the world, securing a record \$8 million for 1994's *Richie Rich*. In 1995 his parents separated and started a greedy and very public legal battle over the custody of their children and Macaulay's substantial earnings. He took a break from acting, when he was 14, but made a return with the biographical drama film, *Party Monster* (2003).

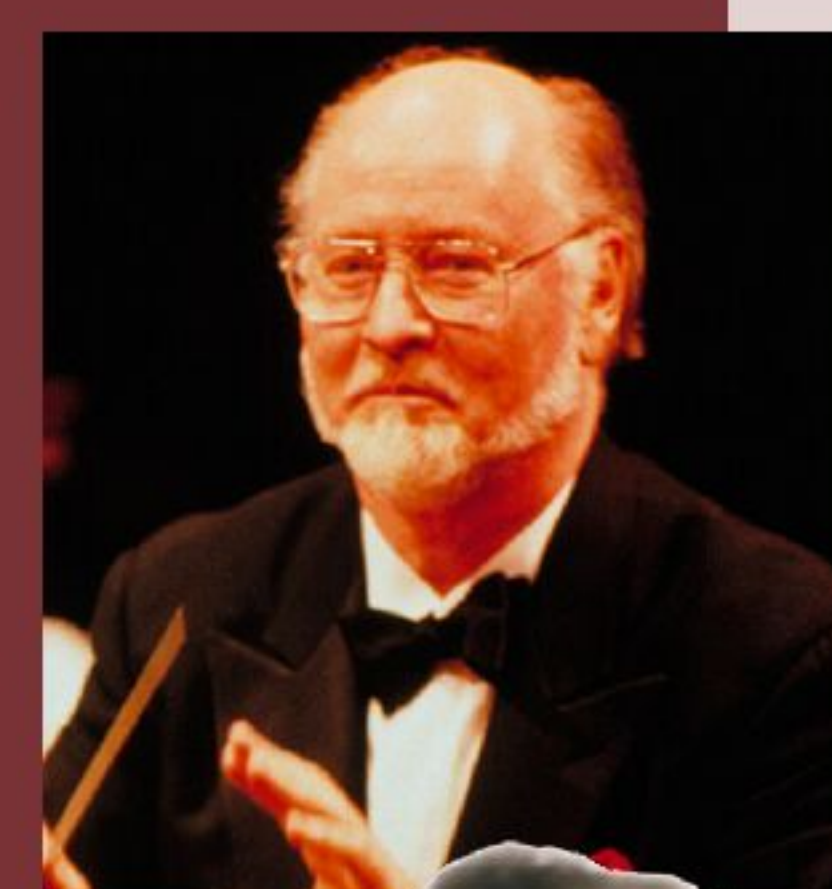


Home Alone is hugely popular in Poland and has been a traditional part of their Christmas TV schedule since 1990, with around five million people watching the film every year. When it was missed from the schedule in 2010, more than 90,000 people protested and it was reinstated the following year.



One pervasive legend is that Elvis Presley made a cameo appearance in the film, despite having died in 1977. Fans insisted that he can be seen in the background as Mrs McCallister (Catherine O'Hara) shouts at a desk clerk. The story was finally debunked in 2016 when an investigative journalist identified bit-part actor Gary Grott as the extra in the scene.

John Williams secured the film's only Oscar nominations. When the original composer backed out, the filmmakers suggested the legendary Williams as a joke, thinking he'd never agree, but he happily stepped in after seeing an early cut of the movie which he described as 'enchanted'.



Joe Pesci, more used to tough-guy roles in gangster movies, struggled not to swear during his character's on-screen outbursts. Director Chris Columbus advised him to say 'fridge' instead of his preferred profanity, but much of Pesci's dialogue is unintelligible – his way of avoiding cursing.



The movie was entered into the Guinness Book of World Records as the Highest Box-Office Gross Comedy, securing \$477 million worldwide from a budget of \$17 million.





Driven to destruction

Chris Hallam explains how William Holden's love of alcohol and fast cars led to his tragic downfall

By 1966, William Holden was not at his best. True, the actor was not yet 50 and was still a handsome and world-famous Hollywood star. But his career had peaked with the likes of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *Stalag 17* (1953) and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and was now in decline. After years of affairs with famous beauties including Audrey Hepburn, Grace Kelly and French star, Capucine, his 25-year marriage to one-time actress Brenda Marshall was all but over, and he had moved to Switzerland.

He looked older than his years and was developing puffy eyes and deep creases along his forehead and around his mouth. He had been drinking heavily since the Thirties, and rumours about alcoholism swirled around him.

That summer, he drove his Ferrari to the Hotel La Pace in Montecatini Terme, Tuscany in the hope of sorting himself out. It was not his first visit. Under medical supervision, he underwent a spa treatment that included a controlled diet, hot baths and mineral water. While there, he met Sarah and Susan West, two sisters in their early 20s who were on holiday from New York

with their family. Both were in fact granddaughters of a famous American writer, Anita Loos.

On 26 July, Holden offered the West sisters a lift to the nearby village of Viareggio where they hoped to meet up with friends. That night, Holden drove them in his Ferrari at over 100 miles per hour along the Firenze-Mare highway. At 10.15pm, while attempting to overtake a slow-moving car, he collided with a small Fiat 100 coming in the opposite direction.

Holden and the sisters escaped the crash unscathed. The Fiat driver, 42-year-old Giorgio Valerio Novelli, who had been on his way to join his family on holiday, was not so lucky. He died on his way to hospital, and Holden soon found himself at the centre of a major scandal.

A SECOND CHANCE

Traumatised, Holden withdrew to his hotel. He told police he had had two glasses of wine on the day of the crash. More than two weeks later, he was formally charged with vehicular manslaughter. He was allowed to return to his home in Switzerland but was warned he could face anything from six months to five years in jail.

Alcohol had been a major feature of Holden's life for decades. Shelley Winters, another actress with whom he'd had an affair, recalled having to 'hose him down' before he could drive home to his family for Christmas in 1949.

Talking to Ryan O'Neal many years later, Holden admitted he had no memory of making the film *Submarine Command* (1951) as he had been drunk throughout. There were many other such stories. 'Warm up the ice cubes!' Holden would often shout at the end of a shoot, an indication that when the work finished, he was ready to start drinking.

More than a year after the accident, Holden was sentenced to eight months in jail. However, the Italian court suspended the sentence owing to extenuating circumstances: it was decided that the slow-moving driver had not made sufficient room for Holden to overtake. Holden was banned from driving in Italy for eight months. Still in Switzerland, he was told about the verdict over the phone. Some speculated that Holden's past work with the CIA may have helped make the scandal go away.

All in all, things could have been worse. However, feelings of guilt,

DID YOU KNOW?

Holden was involved in a number of road accidents even before 1966. As a young man he crashed his motorbike into a car driven by a local farmer, while in the early Sixties he broke his arm after apparently driving his Ferrari into a brick wall.



Director Billy Wilder had initially been reluctant to cast Holden in *Sunset Boulevard*, but the pair became close friends and worked on several films together



Holden and Powers were together for three years. After his death, she founded the William Holden Wildlife Foundation to honour his commitment to conservation

amplified by the grief of losing his father, soon ensured Holden was drinking more than ever.

In fact, Holden's career enjoyed something of a renaissance in the Seventies. He delivered memorable performances in the violent *The Wild Bunch* (1969), disaster movie *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and media satire *Network* (1976). His divorce came through and he began a relationship with the much younger actress, Stefanie Powers. He drank less and

developed a passionate interest in animal welfare.

Sadly, this period didn't last. He began drinking again and his relationship with Powers grew turbulent. In the fullness of time, alcohol would lead him to become involved in one more fatal accident.

TRAGIC END

In November 1981, Holden, who was by then aged 63, tripped over a throw rug in his fifth-floor luxury Santa Monica apartment and hit his head on the sharp edge of a teak nightstand. He was undoubtedly drunk at the time of the fall. A report later found his blood alcohol level to be 0.22%, suggesting

he had downed between eight to ten drinks, something that seemed to be confirmed by the presence of several empty and half-empty bottles nearby.

He had a working phone and could easily have called for help during the five to 10 minutes he remained conscious. Instead, apparently not realising how serious his injury was, he lay on his bed, watching TV and attempting to staunch the flow of blood with tissues. Eventually he fell off the bed, dying on the floor where police found his body four days later.

It was a desperately sad and lonely end for an Oscar-winning actor from Hollywood's golden age.



POWER PLAYS

Hugely influential and hilariously funny, *Yes Minister* was Eighties political satire at its very best – taking down Whitehall brick by brick. Here we share some of our favourite quotes that still feel relevant today...

When the Right Honourable James Hacker (Paul Eddington) is appointed Minister of Administrative Affairs, he seizes the opportunity to implement reforms, but his efforts are constantly thwarted by the clever and manipulative permanent secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby (Nigel Hawthorne), who is adept at using bureaucratic red tape to maintain the status quo. Caught between the two is Bernard Woolley (Derek Fowlds), Hacker's well-meaning but conflicted private secretary, who must balance loyalty to his boss with obedience to his civil service superior. As Hacker navigates the complex world of politics he quickly learns where the real power lies.



JIM HACKER: 'Humphrey, do you see it as part of your job to help ministers make fools of themselves?'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'Well, I never met one that needed any help.'

JIM HACKER: 'So when this next comes up at Question Time, you want me to tell Parliament that it's their fault that the Civil Service is too big?'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'But it is the truth, Minister.'

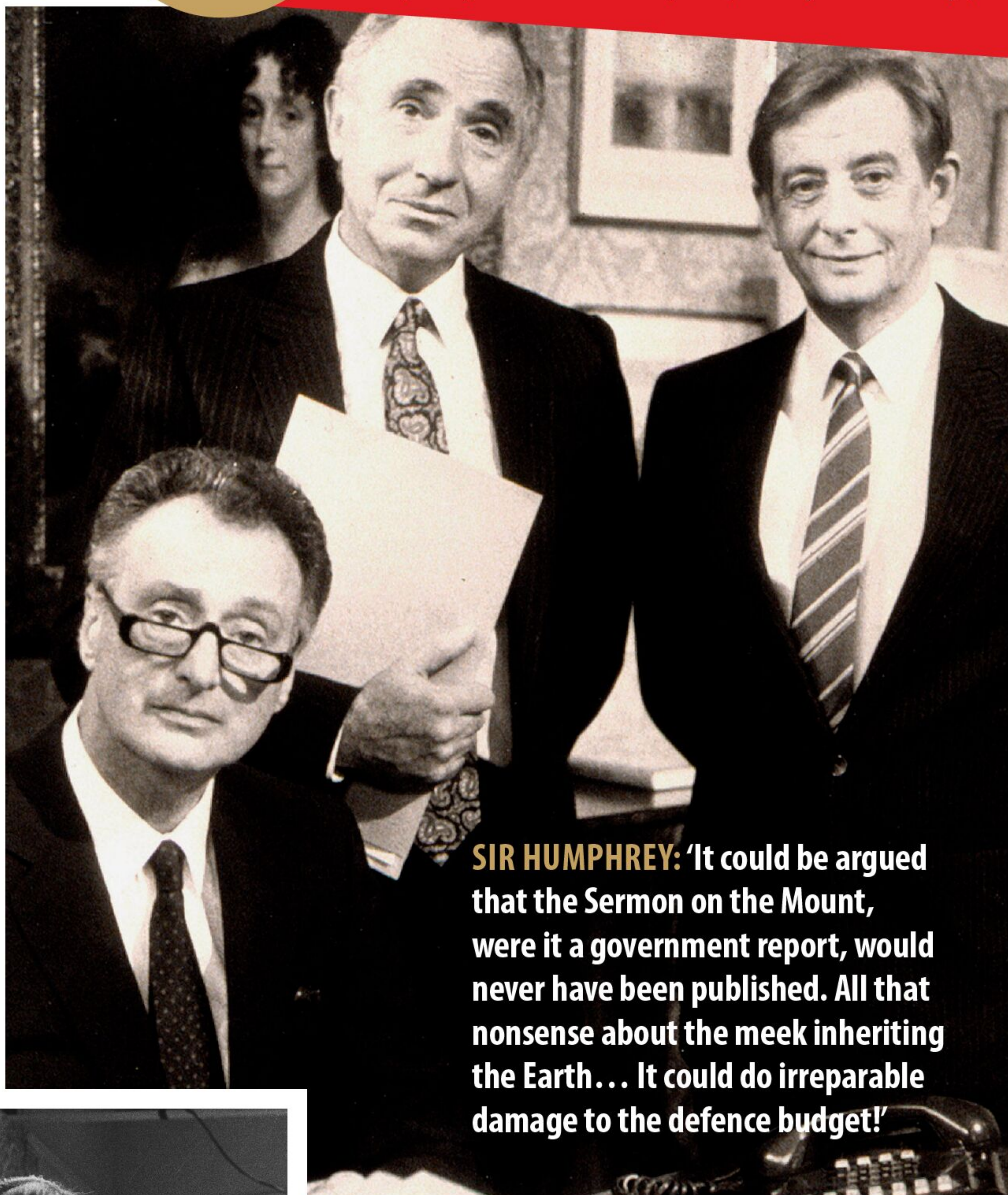
HACKER: 'I don't want the truth. I want something I can tell Parliament!'

DID YOU KNOW?

The series was written by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn. Jay worked for the BBC from 1955 and was a founding member of the *Tonight* (1957) team. Lynn began as an actor with roles in *Doctor in the House* (1970) and *The Liver Birds* (1972-74). He went on to direct comedy films including *Clue* (1985), *Nuns on the Run* (1990) and *My Cousin Vinny* (1992).

SIR HUMPHREY:

'Minister, Britain has had the same foreign policy objective for at least the last 500 years: to create a disunited Europe. In that cause we have fought with the Dutch against the Spanish, with the Germans against the French, with the French and Italians against the Germans, and with the French against the Germans and Italians. Divide and rule, you see. Why should we change now, when it's worked so well?'

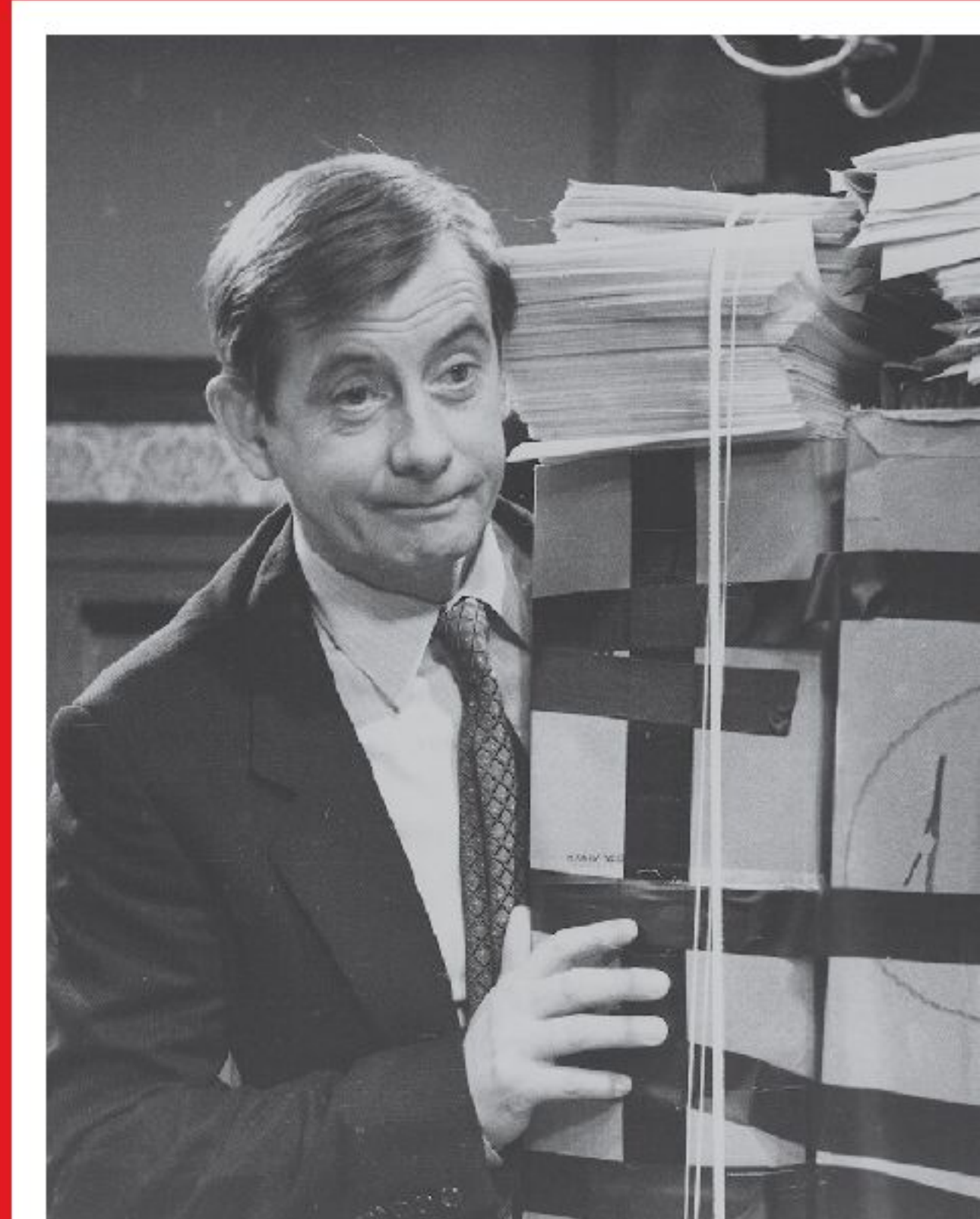


SIR HUMPHREY: 'It could be argued that the Sermon on the Mount, were it a government report, would never have been published. All that nonsense about the meek inheriting the Earth... It could do irreparable damage to the defence budget!'



JIM HACKER: 'Education in this country is a disaster. We're supposed to be preparing children for a working life. Three-quarters of the time they're bored stiff!'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'Well I should have thought that being bored stiff for three-quarters of the time was an excellent preparation for working life.'



JIM HACKER: 'We need to do a time-and-motion study, see who we can get rid of.'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'Ah, well, we did one of those last year.'

HACKER: 'And what were the results?'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'It turned out that we needed another 500 people.'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'Ministers should never know more than they need to know. Then they can't tell anyone. Like secret agents, they could be captured and tortured.'

BERNARD WOOLLEY: 'You mean by terrorists?'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'By the BBC, Bernard!'

JIM HACKER: 'They have the right to know!'

SIR HUMPHREY: 'No, they have the right to be ignorant. Knowledge implies complicity, ignorance has a certain dignity.'

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Teenage swimming champion Esther Williams found fame demonstrating incredible aquatic feats in spectacular MGM musicals such as *Neptune's Daughter* (1949) and *Million Dollar Mermaid* (1952). She acted entire scenes under water and performed death-defying stunts with grace and poise, always rising from the water with a perfect smile. For a decade from the mid-Forties Esther's films were some of the biggest box-office hits, but by the mid-Fifties audiences were tiring of the Technicolor extravaganzas.

In 1956 she came to the UK to star in a live show, *Aqua Spectacle*. Hosted by Esther, the show featured more than 100 swimmers, water skiers, dancers, singers and tumblers performing both in and out of the water. The centrepiece was an 'aqua ballet', retelling the story of *The Princess and the Frog*.

Reviews were mixed, especially when a recording of the performance was broadcast on American TV with Jack Gould of *The New York Times* saying, 'as might be expected, Miss Williams in the water was grace itself but the program's drier interludes were tediously contrived'.

Retiring from performing in the early Sixties, Esther continued to lend her name to a swimwear line and commentated on the synchronised swimming events at the 1984 Olympics.





**DID YOU
KNOW?**

'Master of disaster' Irwin Allen offered Esther roles in both *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974) but she turned them down.

RETRO

Behind the lens

In *To Be or Not To Be* (1983) Mel plays a bad Polish actor trying to escape the Nazis

Master of bad taste

Although his career got off to a shaky start, Mel Brooks found a way to transform taboo subjects into comedy gold, says Adam Smith

DID YOU KNOW?

Mel Brooks is one of a handful of entertainment legends who are known as EGOTs, having won all four major entertainment awards – an Emmy, a Grammy, an Oscar and a Tony. Other EGOTs include Audrey Hepburn, John Gielgud and Mike Nichols.

During the summers of the Forties, when the sweltering heat baked the New York sidewalks, fermenting the garbage and making the cramped tenements of the Lower East Side unbearable, upwards of a million city dwellers, most of them Jewish, would regularly flood out of the city, taking the train 100 miles north to the Catskill Mountains in search of fresh air, escape and fun.

Also known as the Borscht Belt, the region was home to a vast network of hotels, resorts, boarding houses and bungalows. It provided an affordable respite from the daily grind of life in one of the toughest cities on Earth.

As an added attraction, the biggest comics of the day would perform there – Sid Caesar, Jack Benny, Don Rickles and Buddy Hackett all featured on the Catskills' starry playbills.

And if you happened to be staying there in the summer of 1941 you might have caught the stage debut of a funnyman who was about to transcend them all. However, it wasn't an auspicious start.

The play was the now almost forgotten Uncle Harry, a dark psychological drama. Shortly after the curtain rose, the absurdly young actor playing the role of the district attorney (in fact a busboy

from the sour cream station who had received a last-minute field promotion) attempted to pour a glass of water, but instead dropped both glass and carafe, shattering them.

Instead of trying to rescue the scene, the young man, with his wiry hair and broad, beaming face, stepped forward and didn't so much break the fourth wall, as take a sledgehammer to it. 'Waddya expect! I'm only 14. I've never done this before!' he declared to the horror of his fellow performers.

There was a shocked pause, and then the audience roared. The young man was Melvin Kaminsky. And that ability to puncture the moment, to head fearlessly for the biggest of belly laughs, would, in the years to come, become his trademark. 'I'd found my true profession,' he would write 80 years later. 'I wasn't an actor. I was a comedian.' And by then his name would be Mel Brooks.

A LEGEND IS BORN

Melvin Kaminsky was born in the summer of 1926 on the kitchen table of a Brooklyn tenement. 'We were so poor my mother couldn't afford to have me, the lady next door gave birth,' he would later inform Playboy Magazine. His father died of tuberculosis when he was just two. He was the baby of the family, doted on by his mother and three brothers.

'I was adored. I was always in the air,

hurled up and kissed and thrown in the air again. Until I was six my feet didn't touch the ground. Giving that up later in life was very difficult,' he remembered.

After service in the Second World War, he found himself writing for Sid Caesar, whose roster of comedy writers included soon-to-be-legends such as Neil Simon and Woody Allen. But by the mid-Sixties he was on his uppers, the \$5000 a week he'd got for working with Sid Caesar had plummeted to just \$85. His first marriage had unravelled. His bacon was saved professionally with Get Smart (1965), a TV spy-spoof, and personally by Anne Bancroft, who would become his second wife.

The pair met during a rehearsal for The Perry Como Show. 'She's wearing a white gown and she has jet black, shiny hair and the most beautiful eyes,' said Brooks. 'And it was just like kismet? Luck? Anyway, I'm in love.'

'He would say, "Where ya goin'?", Bancroft remembered. 'And I'd say, "To William Morris." He'd say, "So am I". It just went on and on, the man never left me alone, thank God.' The pair married in 1964 and would remain so until Bancroft's death, from cancer, in 2005.

The idea for what would become his first feature, The Producers (1967), began appropriately enough as a gag. At a press conference, he'd been asked what was next. 'Springtime for Hitler,' he'd joked, nodding to the forgotten 1934 comedy Springtime for Henry. ➔

Lee Meredith was just 19 and fresh out of acting school when she took the role opposite Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder in The Producers



Mel Brooks showing Zero Mostel how it's done



But the idea stuck. He'd loved Broadway since he was a kid and had, in his early days, worked with a permanently struggling producer named Benjamin Kutcher.

'He lived in the office,' remembered Brooks. 'He washed out his shorts, he hung everything out on a line. And little old ladies would come up to his office – he would make love to them – the last fling they'd ever have on a cracked leather couch. They'd make out a cheque and they'd say, "What's the name of the play? Who should I make it out to?" He'd always say, "The name of the play is cash".'

SETTING THE STAGE

Shooting *The Producers* was a trial, the egos were as large as the budget was small. Zero Mostel, who starred as seedy producer Max Bialystock opposite Gene Wilder's nervy accountant Leopold Bloom, was a comedy genius – but also a troubled and complicated man. He had been blacklisted and was in constant pain from a back injury. 'Zero had a mind of his own,' Brooks remembered. 'I was a first-time director, he was a big Broadway star. I got everything out of him by shaming him. I'd do the part almost as well as he did, then he'd get angry and top it.'

With *The Producers*, Brooks had delivered a copper-bottomed classic, and arguably his greatest film. Certainly, it's riotously funny and bathed in Brooks' affection for Broadway and its characters. But the engine that powers it is the story of an unlikely friendship, of two



During the dance sequence for *Springtime for Hitler*, Mel Brooks's voice is dubbed in for lead dancer Tucker Smith

souls lost amid Broadway's glitter of money and success. And it was this template – deep, knowledgeable affection bolted to enthusiastic, taboo-breaking vulgarity – that would see Brooks become one of the most successful comedy directors in Hollywood history.

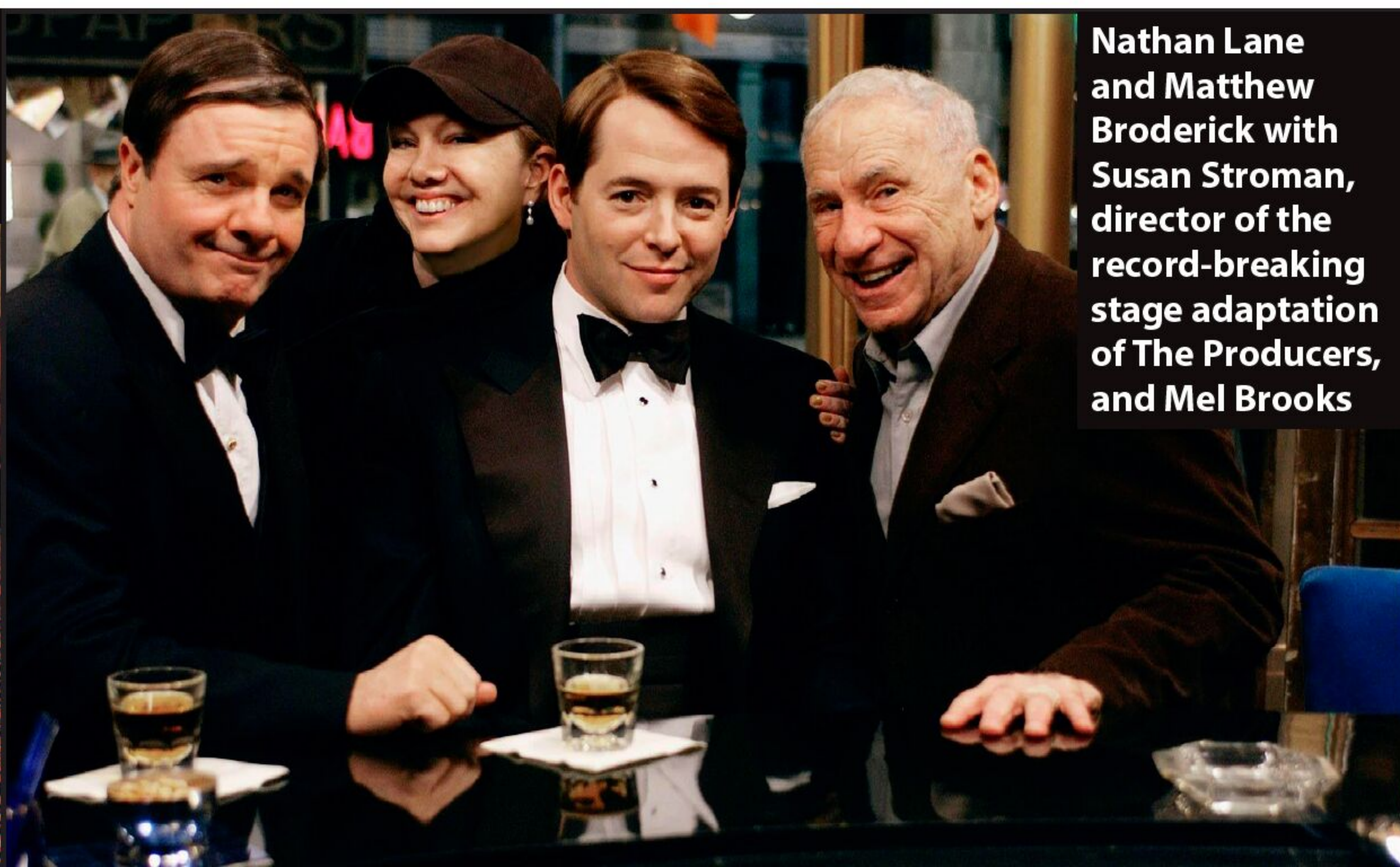
Despite its mixed critical reception, *The Producers* won an Oscar for Best Screenplay. After

a slight misfire with *The Twelve Chairs* in 1970 he began a run of smash hits that rivalled any of the more 'serious' directors of the era.

Blazing Saddles (1974) had its roots in a screenplay titled *Tex X* by Andrew Bergman. Brooks was attracted by the central idea but wanted to push the movie further, to take no prisoners when it came



Governor Lepetomane (Mel Brooks) consistently misnames Hedley Lamarr (Harvey Korman) in *Blazing Saddles*



Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick with Susan Stroman, director of the record-breaking stage adaptation of *The Producers*, and Mel Brooks



Gene Wilder was a last-minute replacement to play opposite Cleavon Little in *Blazing Saddles*



to the story of a bigoted town's reactions to a black sheriff.

'I just wanted to exorcise both my angels and demons,' he said. 'I told the other writers, "Look, fellas, don't worry, this movie will never get released. Never. The studio will see it and they'll bury it. So let's go nuts. Let's write things that we never would dare write." And we did.'

Filming was almost derailed by the casting of *The Waco Kid*, eventually played by Gene Wilder. Having approached, of all people, John Wayne ('This is one of the funniest things I've ever read,' Wayne told Brooks. 'But I just can't do it. It's too dirty.') he cast Gig Young, having been promised his alcoholism was under control. On the first day's shooting, Young turned green and vomited on set. Brooks put in a call to Wilder, who took the role at 24 hours' notice.

paid tribute to the pre-talkies, and his sublime, underrated, Hitchcock spoof, *High Anxiety* (1977).

MORE MISSES THAN HITS

But the Eighties and Nineties were less kind. The era was crasser, its comedies hung not on ideas or affection but on brash superstars such as Eddie Murphy and then Jim Carrey and Mike Myers. The *History of the World Part One* (1981), not much more than a series of sketches, has its moments, not least its lavish musical number, *The Inquisition*. But the spoofs lost... something. *Spaceballs* (1987) pulled faces at George Lucas's *Star Wars*, *Robin Hood: Men in Tights* (1993) was lost to audiences half a century after Errol Flynn had donned the green leggings. His final film *Dracula: Dead and*

Loving it (1995) borrowed Leslie Nielsen from the *Airplane!* and *Naked Gun* franchises but failed to channel the success of his earlier work. It was as if he had run out of things he really loved, and that affection had been the key to his work's success.

But in 2001 he returned to Broadway, the home of the hit that had launched his movie career, by transforming *The Producers* into a stage musical with Nathan Lane and Matthew Broderick in the lead roles and scored one of the biggest hits in Broadway history. The show ran for 2502 performances, toured the world and won 12 Tonys, breaking the record set 37 years earlier by *Hello, Dolly!*

Now 98, he's still active. His autobiography, *All About Me!* was published in 2002 and he made an appearance in the hit dramedy *Only Murders in the Building* in 2023.

But his greatest achievement is that incredible run of films from the late Sixties to the Eighties, movies in which, like a demented alchemist, he transformed poor taste into great art.

DID YOU
KNOW?

A new stage production of *The Producers* opens at the Menier Chocolate Factory, London for 14 weeks from 26 November, 2024. Visit book.menierchocolatefactory.com to find out more.



Reel obsession

John Sweet of St Ann's Chapel, Cornwall, shares the films he fondly remembers and will always watch again

I sometimes like to picture myself in my mind's eye taking part in an imaginary television programme called Desert Island DVDs where the host invites his guest to list their favourite films and then shows excerpts from them.

The first film I can remember seeing is **THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939) (1)**. This was just after the war when we travelled from Bristol to Scotland to stay with one of my father's Navy shipmates. The scene that vividly stuck in my memory for years afterwards was the one where the Wicked Witch of the West stands on a cottage roof hurling fireballs at the scarecrow.

For a first date I took my then girlfriend (now my wife of 50 years) to see **THE RAILWAY CHILDREN (1970) (2)**, Lionel Jeffries' heartwarming saga about the trials and tribulations of the Waterbury children. I still get misty-eyed when I hear Bobbie (Jenny Agutter) exclaim, 'Daddy, My Daddy!'

Another film that made me cry – this time with laughter – was **MONSIEUR HULOT'S HOLIDAY (1953) (3)**. This mad-cap slapstick comedy starring Jacques Tati and Nathalie Pascaud had a

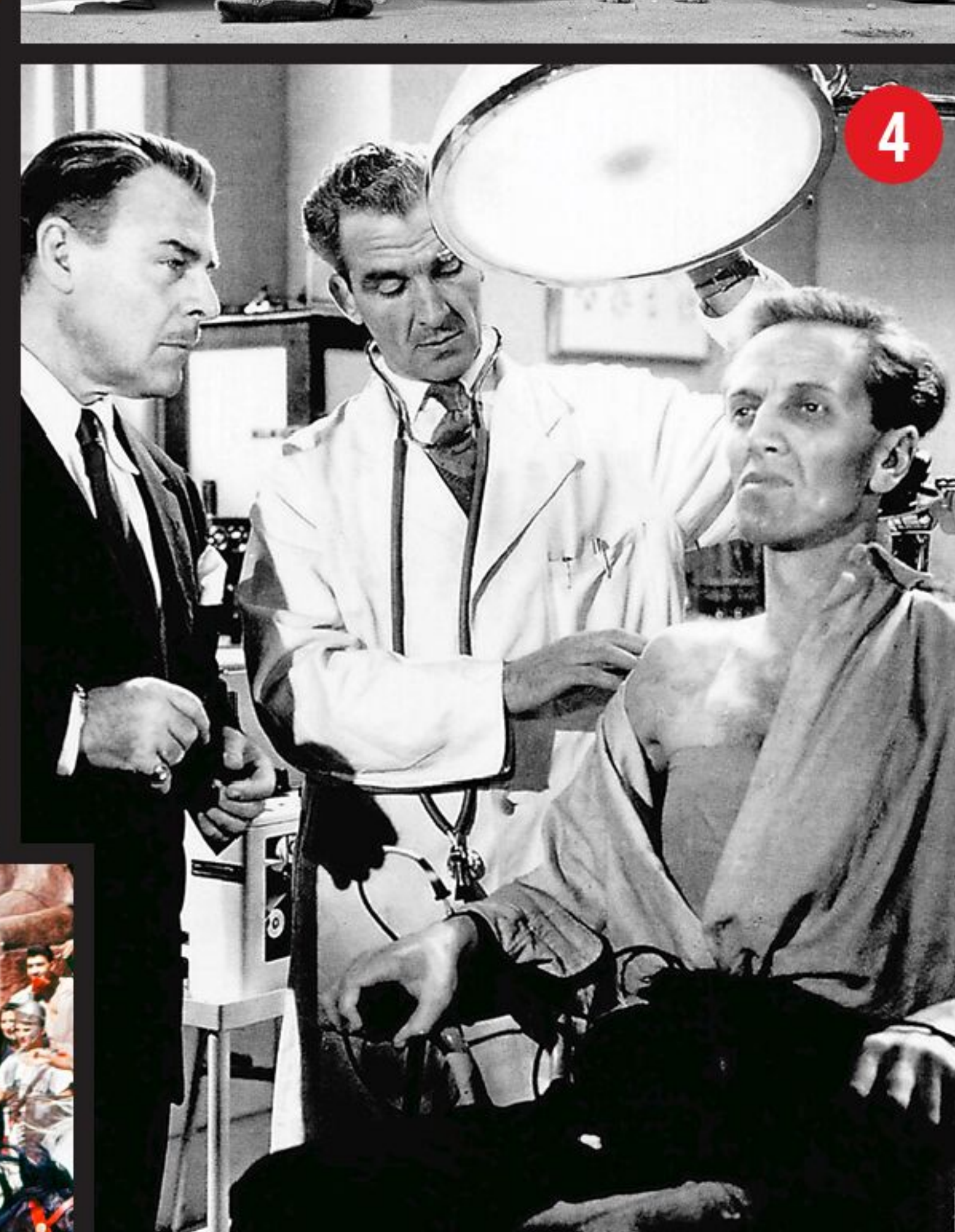
packed cinema rocking with laughter. My eyes watered so much my glasses misted up!

I am a big fan of the black and white sci-fi films of the Fifties but my favourite is **THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT (1955) (4)**. I believe Richard Wordsworth's performance as a man being taken over by an alien force is without equal among numerous similar themes. I was 14 years old when I first watched it and had a sleepless night thinking he might be wandering around in our back garden.

The daddy of all historical epics must be **BEN-HUR (1959) (5)** with its awesome chariot race and superb performances, particularly from Charlton Heston and Stephen Boyd.

Talking of epic performances Lee J Cobb's turn in **12 ANGRY MEN (1957) (6)** as a bigoted bully who is finally forced to face his inner demons, surely deserved that year's Best Supporting Actor Oscar.

As did Richard Attenborough's performance as the alcoholic pilot in Robert Aldrich's version of **THE FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX (1965) (7)**.



Who could forget his terrified hysterical laughter in the doorway of the stricken plane when he thinks all hope is gone? Incredibly neither of them were even nominated.

They're all winners in my book though, and I can't wait to watch them again!

Tell us your magnificent seven films and why they mean so much to you. Contact details on page 3

IT'S 80 YEARS SINCE MEET ME IN ST LOUIS (1944) OPENED IN CINEMAS, BUT HOW WELL DO YOU REMEMBER THIS FESTIVE MUSICAL?

Are you a movie buff?



1 How many children does the Smith family have and what are their names?

2 Who played boy-next-door John Truett?

3 Which actress won a Juvenile Oscar for her part as Tootie?

4 Judy Garland sings which moving Christmas Song to

cheer up her sister?

5 The film was directed by Vincente Minnelli. Which of the film's stars did he go on to marry?

6 The Smith family matriarch was played by Mary Aster. In which other family saga did she play the mother?

Who am I?

How many clues do you need to identify this star?

1 I was born in Cambridge, England on 29 August 1923.

2 After studying at RADA my film career began with In Which We Serve (1942).

3 My breakthrough role was as a psychopathic gangster in Brighton Rock (1948).

4 My wife, Sheila Sim, and I were among the original West End cast of The Mousetrap.

5 I played Squadron Leader Roger Bartlett in The Great Escape (1963) and Hammond in the Jurassic Park films.

6 In my later career I focused more on directing, including the Oscar-winning Gandhi (1982)

Time to test your film knowledge.
It may be just for fun but pride is at stake...

Screen Test

QUIZ

IN A SPIN

Can you unravel these anagrams to reveal the titles of five Tony Curtis films?

SEEK MOTH TO LII
HET SKIVING
ATE THINNED
FOES
GET CHEAT RARE
LOB HORNET
STRANGEST



PIXELLATE

Can you identify this suspect train passenger from Murder on the Orient Express (1974)?

Are you a movie buff? 1 Five, Lon Jr (Henry H Daniels Jr), Rose Esther (Judy Garland), Agnes (Ludille Bremer), and Tootie (Joan Carroll) and Tootie (Margaret O'Brien). 2 Tom Drake. 3 Margaret O'Brien. 4 Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas. 5 Judy Garland. 6 Little Women (1949).
Who am I? Richard Attenborough.
In A Spin: Some Like it Hot, The Vikings, The Defiant Ones, The Great Race, The Boston Strangler.
Pixelate: Lauren Bacall as Mrs Harriet Hubbard.

ANSWERS



'Two kids against the world'

Barbra Streisand and Elliott Gould's marriage didn't last but, as David Reid reveals, they formed an unbreakable bond that's stood the test of time

DID YOU KNOW?

Elliott married his second wife, actress and writer Jennifer Bogart, in 1973. They divorced, remarried and divorced again (Dec 1973-Oct 1975 and Jun 1978-5 Sept 1989). They had two children together.

The phone rang, and a voice on the other end said, 'I'm Elliott Gould. I was there this afternoon, and I thought you were brilliant.' And then he hung up.

Barbra had no idea who he was. Earlier that day, 19-year-old aspiring actress Barbra Streisand had auditioned for a supporting role in new Broadway musical, *I Can Get it for You Wholesale*.

'Before I left the audition, I remember standing on the stage and announcing, "I just got a new phone, so somebody please call me!" ...and somebody did.'

When she got the part she discovered that her mysterious caller, Mr Gould, was playing the lead. Elliott was just four years her senior but had already been performing in theatre for more than a decade.

Brooklyn-born Barbra had made her professional stage debut, in an off-Broadway production three years earlier. After winning a talent contest, she'd found regular work as a nightclub singer, while still pursuing theatrical opportunities.

As rehearsals proceeded, Barbra and Elliott became 'pals'. They spent time together, and enjoyed playing games in the penny arcades along 42nd Street. 'These weren't really dates...' Barbra recalled in her autobiography, *My Name is Barbra*, 'I wasn't really attracted to Elliott, until one day when I happened to see the back of his neck... and that did it. I'm not sure why.' She added, 'It was as if I were seeing him through new eyes... he was already tall

and dark, and now he became handsome.'

I Can Get it for You Wholesale opened in Philadelphia and Barbra's featured song stopped the show. Rave reviews followed for Barbra, but Elliott's performance received mixed reactions.

While the show was still running, Barbra signed a deal with Columbia Records. Her debut LP, *The Barbra Streisand Album* was released on 25 February 1963. Her career was taking off, but Elliott was not doing so well.

FOREVER FRIENDS

After *Wholesale* closed both Barbra and Elliott were offered parts in a production in London but this clashed with Barbra's upcoming concert tour. She was torn, but Elliott was supportive and insisted she should go ahead with the concerts and that he'd go to London.

By the end of the tour Barbra was selling out the 6700-seater Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. Elliott's time in London was less successful and, when the couple reunited, they had a fight. Barbra wasn't sure she wanted to settle down, realising she hadn't much experience with men.

Regardless of her conflicted feelings, the pair married on 13 September 1963.

The newlyweds had their first taste of Hollywood when they stayed at the Beverly Hills Hotel courtesy of a photoshoot for *Glamour* magazine.

Barbra sang with Bob Hope and Dean Martin on TV and appeared on *The Judy Garland Show*. Then they headed back to New York where she would star in a major new Broadway musical, *Funny Girl*.

The show was a triumph and the production moved to London in April 1966, which is where Barbra discovered she



When Barbra won the Oscar for *Funny Girl* she shared the award with Katharine Hepburn for *The Lion in Winter* – the only Best Actress tie in Academy history

was pregnant. Jason Gould was born 29 December 1966 and Barbra recalled, 'Elliott was with me almost the entire time, and I had that first feeling of being a family... I couldn't believe that Ell and I had made this little human. He was, and always has been, the best gift.'

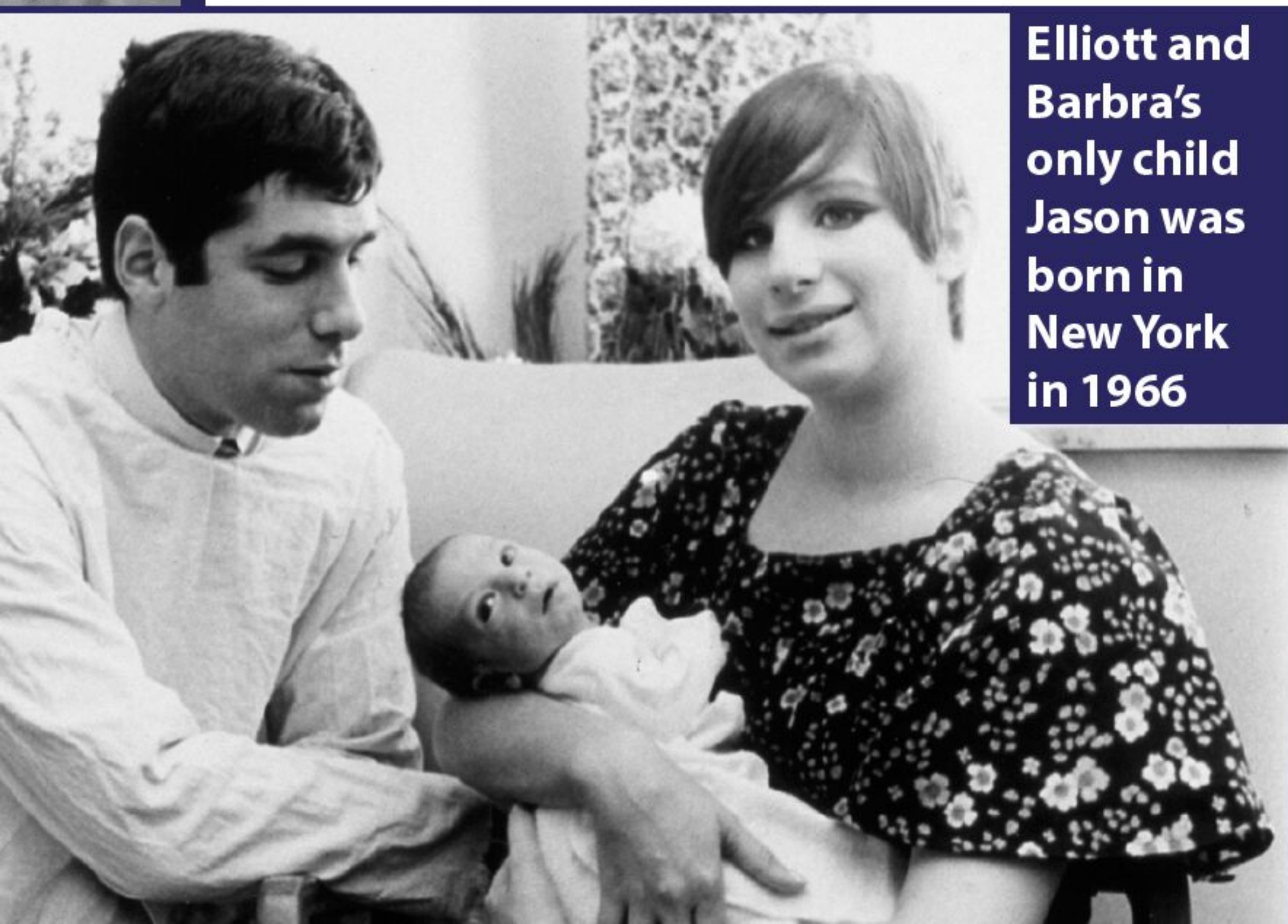
In 1967, as Barbra was about to start filming the movie version of *Funny Girl*, Elliott was cast in his first major film, *The Night They Raided Minsky's* (1968). He had to head back to New York for the shoot and, while they were apart, Barbra began to realise their relationship had changed.

By the time Streisand was nominated for a Best Actress Oscar in April 1969, she and Elliott had separated. Regardless, one year later she proudly accompanied Elliott to the Oscars, where he had been nominated for Best Supporting Actor for his breakthrough movie *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (1969).

Their marriage was over, but their shared parenthood and great friendship has endured for more than 50 years.

Barbra said, 'We were so innocent when we met... like two kids against the rest of the world... And then we succumbed to convention and got married... I hadn't been ready for marriage.'

Elliott added, '...we didn't grow together and the reason for that was because she became more important than us.' But he continued, 'We did great. We made it very fast, and nobody has what we have.'



Elliott and Barbra's only child Jason was born in New York in 1966

NEXT ISSUE



Battling Bette Why the Hollywood star had to fight every step of the way for roles and respect

Hollywood's lost interviews Diana Dors reveals her struggles with fame, her looks and the casting couch

Auction watch The most weird and wonderful costumes and props to come up for sale this year

Did Star Wars kill the Western? How our passion for sci-fi changed the shape of cinema

Robin Hood's secret mission The blacklisted writers using TV to spread their political messages

On sale Dec 19

Cut-out-and-keep posters to collect...

FREE CLASSIC POSTER

For many of us Edmund Gwenn is the definitive screen Santa Claus. His Oscar-winning performance in *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947) came at the end of a long career for the 70-year-old former Londoner.

The part of a department store Santa was originally offered to Gwenn's cousin, Cecil Kellaway, but he turned it down saying, 'Americans don't like whimsy.'

Delighted to get the part, Gwenn went to work turning himself into Santa Claus. Though already rotund, Gwenn gained 30lb, adding nearly 5in to his waistline. But it was more than his looks that allowed Gwenn to embody the spirit of Santa and the cast and crew were unanimous in their affection for him.

Gwenn's co-star Maureen O'Hara explained, '...by the time we were halfway through the shoot, we all believed Edmund really was Santa Claus.'

I've never seen an actor more naturally suited for a role.' In her autobiography O'Hara revealed, 'Everyone felt the magic on the set and we all knew we were

creating something special. I am very proud to have been part of a film that has been continually shown and loved all over the world for nearly 60 years.

'I don't think I will ever tire of children asking me, "Are you the lady who knows Santa Claus?" I always answer, "Yes, I am". What would you like me to tell them?'

DID YOU KNOW? When the film was released Macy's closed for half a day to allow the store's 12,000 employees to be the first to see it.



The parade Susan (Natalie Wood) and Fred (John Payne) watch from the window was the actual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade held on 28 November 1946, in which Edmund Gwenn played Santa Claus



**MAUREEN
O'HARA**

**JOHN
PAYNE**

IN

Miracle on 34th Street

EDMUND GWENN

Gene Natalie Porter William Jerome Philip
LOCKHART · WOOD · HALL · FRAWLEY · COWAN · TONGE
STORY BY VALENTINE DAVIES

20th
CENTURY-FOX

WRITTEN FOR THE SCREEN
AND DIRECTED BY

GEORGE SEATON

PRODUCED BY

WILLIAM PERLBERG

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