

Lon Chaney

a thousand faces (2000)

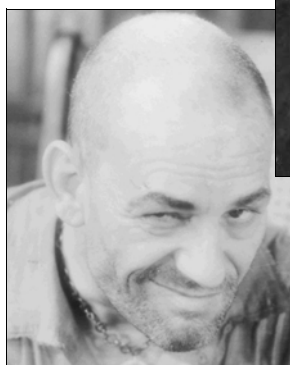
A PHOTOPLAY PRODUCTION for
TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES
In association with
UCLA FILM and TELEVISION ARCHIVE

Executive Producer **HUGH M HEFNER**
Directed and Edited by **KEVIN BROWNLOW**
Produced by **PATRICK STANBURY**
Special Consultant **MICHAEL F BLAKE**
Original Music **NIC RAINE**
Associate Film Editor **CHRISTOPHER BIRD**



Narrated by **KENNETH BRANAGH**

INTERVIEWEES INCLUDE: Forrest Ackerman, Michael Blake, Ray Bradbury, Lon Chaney Jr, Ron Chaney, Jackie Coogan, Arthur Gardner, Sara Karloff, Patsy Ruth Miller, Edward Montagne, Malcolm Sabiston, Budd Schulberg, Willard Sheldon, Orson Welles, Loretta Young



including clips from:

ALAS AND ALACK (1915)
THE BLACKBIRD (1926)
DOLLY'S SCOOP (1916)
HE WHO GETS SLAPPED (1924)
THE HOLLYWOOD REVUE OF 1929
THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME(1923)
LAUGH, CLOWN, LAUGH (1928)
THE MIRACLE MAN (1919)
MOCKERY (1927)
THE MONSTER (1925)
MR WU (1927)
OUTSIDE THE LAW (1921)
THE PENALTY (1920)
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA (1925)
RIDDLE GAWNE (1918)
THE ROAD TO MANDALAY (1926)
SHADOWS (1922)
THE SHOCK (1923)
TELL IT TO THE MARINES (1927)
THUNDER (1929)
THE TRAP (1923)
THE UNHOLY THREE (1925)
THE UNHOLY THREE (1930)
THE UNKNOWN (1927)
WEST OF ZANZIBAR (1928)
THE WICKED DARLING (1919)
WHILE THE CITY SLEEPS (1928)

RUNNING TIME: 85minutes



Lon Chaney a thousand faces

As movie stars go, there is no modern equivalent to Lon Chaney. Physical contortion and misunderstood madness were his stock in trade. So famous was he for being unrecognisable that people joked, 'Don't step on that spider! It might be Lon Chaney' and the Hollywood Revue of 1929 featured the number, 'Lon Chaney's gonna get you if you don't watch out!'. Chaney's films exaggerated the everyday horrors of poverty, illness and crime but were fantastic enough to be entertaining. Chaney grew up with hardship. His parents were both deaf and his family poor. This documentary covers his life from childhood to grave and includes interviews with his son and great grandson. Film clips are taken from the finest surviving materials and include the 'lost' titles, *The Fascination of the Fleur de Lys*, *Riddle Gawn* and *Thunder*. Hollywood make-up artist and Chaney biographer Michael Blake, provides expert insight into the essential factor of Chaney's miraculous transformations: his make-up.

It takes a light touch to turn gruesome subjects into entertainment. Chaney learnt his trade as a traveling vaudevillian, taking with him to film 16 years experience of lighting, props, make-up, stage craft, comic-timing and mime. Chaney's unique ability both on stage and screen was to capture the essence of a character in a few gestures. The documentary explains that he developed this talent as a child when he would act out the day's events to his deaf parents.

When he started in film Chaney played a kaleidoscopic array of characters. His first lead was as Frog, a bogus cripple, employed to feign a cure in *The Miracle Man* (1919). His transformation scene is electrifying even to a modern day audience. Wallace Worsley's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) made Chaney an international star. Outshining the spectacular production, his Quasimodo draws us into the agony of this lonely, misunderstood creature. His next super-production was *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) in which Eric, the Phantom, is evil and controlling. Chaney cuts a suave, elegant figure in dress suit and cape, darting with dancer-like grace through subterranean labyrinths. But, like the portrait of Dorian Grey, his face hideously manifests his misdeeds. Michael Blake explains the intricacies of Chaney's make-up, self-administered yet painful in the extreme. Chaney's artistry is such that, even through the Phantom's mask, he makes us feel that this is a monster with a conscience. Contracted by MGM, the Rolls Royce of production studios, he makes a series of films with master of the macabre, director Tod Browning. Their films pushed to the limit stories of physically broken and vengeful characters. The most extreme is *The Unknown*, in which Chaney plays a knife thrower who has his arms cut off to attract the woman he loves – a young Joan Crawford. It is a relief to see Chaney in a 'straight', make-up-less role in *Tell it to the Marines*. His portrayal of a hard-boiled captain was so recognisable and appealing that in recognition he was made an honorary member of the US Marine Corps.

As with all silent movie stars, the coming of sound pictures was a milestone in Chaney's career. Like Garbo and Chaplin, Chaney refused to 'talk'. A canny businessman, he did not care to be a pioneer and held out until he knew that the new medium was popular. In 1930 he embarked on a remake of *The Unholy Three*, in which he spoke in five different voices, all of them his own. 'The man of a thousand faces' was billed as 'The man of the thousand golden voices' – it presaged well for his future. But Chaney's days were numbered. His suffering during the making of the film was obvious to his co-stars, but he soldiered on through the final stages of lung cancer, completing the film only seven weeks before his death at age 47.