

# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

THURSDAY  
APRIL 30, 2015  
7:00PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

## THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI

PRESENTED WITH SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW '70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.



About midpoint in *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI*, the naïve protagonist Michael O'Hara (Orson Welles) and the oily schemer George Grisby (Glenn Anders) climb a hill overlooking the ocean. After Grisby gives an unsettling hint of his bizarre plan, he seems to enter a trance and then abruptly vanishes beneath the frame. As James Naremore describes the moment: "O'Hara seems to be hanging vertiginously in midair, his image twisted out of shape by the camera to a degree few Hollywood films of the period had attempted."

It's a hallucinatory scene in a film filled with them, including one in an aquarium where monstrous sea creatures background a lovers' furtive rendezvous, and the crazy house/mirror-maze denouement, justly celebrated as one of cinema's greatest tours de force.

Grisby's disappearance resembles the magician's trick of having someone vanish through a trap door, and reminds us of the director's lifelong interest in magic. In addition to performing extensively as a stage magician, he was the illusionist who convinced millions that Martians had landed in New Jersey, who orchestrated numerous optical tricks in his debut feature, *CITIZEN KANE*, and whose final major film, *F FOR FAKE*, is simultaneously a study of fakery and a dazzling piece of deception itself. Naremore's major 1989 study of Welles is aptly titled *The Magic World of Orson Welles*, Chuck Workman's 2014 documentary is called *MAGICIAN: THE ASTONISHING LIFE AND WORK OF ORSON WELLES*, and Welles famously stated,

"The camera is much more than a recording apparatus, it is a medium via which messages reach us from another world, a world that is not ours and that brings us to the heart of a great secret. Here magic begins...A film is a ribbon of dreams."

Welles worked his magic in *THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI* to create a deliriously excessive film noir, a genre that is often over the top to begin with. Welles has great fun (and so do we) with extreme versions of the fall guy/narrator (Welles), the femme fatale (Rita Hayworth), the despicable wealthy and powerful husband (Everett Sloane), expressionist cinematography and use of setting, an overriding sense that we have a tenuous control over our destinies, and a plot far more convoluted than even that of *THE BIG SLEEP*. The twists and turns, which include not just a double-cross but a triple-cross, are explained to us in a sequence in which the visuals are as distracting as possible, exemplifying Welles's emphasis on funhouse spectacle over decipherable plot.

Principal photography took place between October 1946 and February 1947 and Welles's editing was completed by March 1947, but the film did not open until June 1948. The delay was caused by Columbia Pictures head Harry Cohn's insistence on additional filming (particularly studio inserts) and, following unsuccessful previews, on extensive re-editing (most of it not supervised by Welles) that eventually reduced Welles's rough cut of 155 minutes to 87 minutes. Although much of the budget overrun was due to the studio, the film's failure to recoup its cost contributed to its director's unjustified reputation of profligacy, causing him to travel the world—and to appear on talk shows, celebrity roasts and wine commercials, and in other people's inferior movies—in search of money for film projects, many of which were never financed or never completed.

*THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI*, even though not in the form Welles had intended, is a masterpiece. We are proud to present it in 35mm, to celebrate the centenary of George Orson Welles (May 6, 1915–October 10, 1985): actor; writer; director; innovator in theater, radio, film, and television; raconteur; poet; and...magician.

**DID YOU KNOW:** IN 1948 THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL ASPECT OF THE FILM WAS RITA HAYWORTH'S APPEARANCE. WELLES HAD PERSONALLY SUPERVISED CUTTING HER TRADEMARK LONG RED HAIR AND DYING IT BLONDE. HARRY COHN, FURIOUS ABOUT THIS TRANSFORMATION OF COLUMBIA'S BIGGEST STAR, REPORTEDLY SAID, "THE SIX PEOPLE WHO SAW WHAT ORSON WELLES DID TO RITA WANTED TO KILL HIM, BUT THEY HAD TO GET BEHIND ME IN LINE."

No. 11

DIRECTED BY **ORSON WELLES** (1948) 87 MIN.

SCREENPLAY BY **ORSON WELLES**

FROM THE NOVEL *IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE*

BY **SHERWOOD KING**

CINEMATOGRAPHY BY **CHARLES LAWTON, JR.**

PRODUCED BY **COLUMBIA PICTURES**

STARRING **ORSON WELLES, RITA HAYWORTH, EVERETT SLOANE, AND GLENN ANDERS**

**NEXT UP:** JOIN US FOR RIAN JOHNSON'S THRILLING NEO-NOIR **BRICK**, EQUAL PARTS DASHIELL HAMMETT, BLUE VELVET, AND HIGH SCHOOL ANGST, STARRING JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT, LUKAS HAAS, AND EMILIE DE RAVIN, SCREENING **WEDNESDAY, MAY 13 AT 7:00 P.M.**