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# Also Starring...: Forty Biographical Essays On The Greatest Character Actors Of Hollywood's Golden Era, 1930-1965



## Synopsis

You know Billie Burke was the Good Witch in The Wizard of Oz, but did you know that she had a small zoo in her backyard that included a baby elephant and two lion cubs? You know Claude Rains as the suave Louie in Casablanca, but did you know he began life with a debilitating speech impediment? You know S.Z. "Cuddles" Sakall as Felix the jolly cook in Christmas in Connecticut, but did you know he fled Germany after Hitler personally attacked one of his films? In this book, readers will discover the unknown stories of Hollywood's greatest character actors and meet the men and women behind the characters they played onscreen. Through the use of rare interviews and articles from dozens of archives and autobiographical excerpts, this book provides an inside look into these supporting stars' stories and shows how type casting in such roles as flibbertigibbet matrons, wisecracking dames, or eccentric butlers could be a blessing and a curse in their personal and professional lives. The book includes favorites such as Thelma Ritter, Eve Arden, and Charles Coburn as well as stars who became character actors in later life like Joan Blondell, Shelley Winters, and Claude Rains. Also meet lesser known actors who nonetheless have familiar faces—such as Roland Young (of "Topper" fame), Elsa Lanchester (the Bride of Frankenstein), and 1940s deadpan singer Virginia O'Brien.

## Book Information

Paperback: 492 pages

Publisher: BearManor Media (April 25, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1593932960

ISBN-13: 978-1593932961

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars— See all reviews (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #427,746 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #104 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Television > Reference #256 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Video > Reference #308 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Reference

## Customer Reviews

Book featuring essays on 40 "character" actors of Hollywood's Golden Age. I'm not quite sure how the people profiled were selected. To me both Claude Rains and Shelley Winters were featured players - not necessarily character actors. Even Frank Morgan had leads in many films and strong

supporting parts in many others. Then there are those who are not mentioned - why profile Roland Young and Charles Winninger but not Charles Ruggles? Others who are missing include Frank McHugh, Donald Meek, C. Aubrey Smith, Guinn "Big Boy" Williams, Alan Hale, Donald Crisp, Sara Allgood, Mary Gordon, and many others. I realize not everyone can be included but the choices were somewhat usual. The profiles were good and I learned some things about people I had not known previously. However, there was an error in the profile of James Gleason which said he starred in a 1931 film called Puttin' on the Ritz with Clark Gable and Norma Shearer. Gable and Shearer did not appear in a film called Puttin' on the Ritz. Gable sang that song in the 1939 film *Idiot's Delight* which co-starred Shearer but Gleason was not in it. When I see one error that stands out like this one, I wonder how many other errors there are.

Many of the actors listed are very familiar as they have been featured in other similar books. Mary Wickes is new and there is one discrepancy that stands out like a sore thumb. Mary died in 1995 and it is written, "Mary's funeral was so well attended there was standing room only. Lucille Ball spoke at the service and rallied those in attendance to rise for one last ovation." If I recall, Lucille Ball died in 1989. I wonder who this mystery person was unless it was the ghost of Lucy. An interesting read nonetheless.

This book was a real treat. As a lover of old movies, it is relatively easy to find information regarding the top tier stars of the golden era of movies. Between the Internet and published biographies, etc there is a wealth of information out there that is readily accessible. However, when it comes to supporting actors this is usually not the case. Normally what is out there is fairly basic and not detailed. Also *Starring* looks at 40 extremely popular supporting actors and their careers. These are the people who were never stars but who became fixtures in the movies. Their faces were familiar to moviegoers even if their names weren't always. While this book might have taken the easy way out and provided minimal biographical information with a filmography and reviews or comments by their contemporaries, the authors took a different approach. They clearly researched their subjects and provided information that went beyond the norm. The individual profiles provided a sense of who these people were and what their interests were away from the screen. For me, it was interesting to learn that film's perennial elderly mother Beulah Bondi didn't cook, never married, was an avid world traveler, and a voracious reader who spent a lot of money each month on books. Charles Bickford was mauled by a lion and almost died. It scotched any chance of a leading man career, but launched him on an enormously successful and long career as a versatile supporting actor. Each of

the forty profiles are interesting as well as intimate and I can guarantee that you may never view these actors in the same light after reading this book. This is a well written and engaging book that left me wanting more. I hope the Bridesons tackle other like projects in the future. This was a great read.

I watched dozens of classic films with my daughters when they were growing up and came to recognize many actors, famous and obscure, through the movies we watched over and over again. I even began quoting some of the character actors I saw most often, such as Marjorie Main in "Meet Me in St. Louis" when she declares, "My sister's having trouble with her husband, him being a man!" This book gives intimate portraits of unforgettable "small" actors and actresses like Marjorie Main, or Chill Wills, who also appeared in "Meet Me in St. Louis." Rather than give perfunctory career summaries of these actors, Cynthia and Sara Brideson give views into what they were like as people and not the characters we know on screen. I especially loved the biographies on Charles Bickford, Thomas Mitchell, Edward Everett Horton, Nancy Walker, and Eve Arden. Even for someone who is not a classic film lover, this book is fascinating just for its human interest and glimpses into culture in twentieth century America. You'll love the fact that there are photos of every actor, too-- a wonderful plus!

It is amazing that 22 year old twins wrote this book. It is jamb packed full of wonderful biographies and tidbits about those "also starring" movie characters. It is a must read for old movie fans and new ones as well.

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