



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# The Lady from Shanghai

### The Lady from Shanghai

Production [Director]: Orson Welles

Production Company:

Columbia Pictures Corporation

Production: Orson Welles

Associate Producers: Richard Wilson,  
William Castle

Assistant Director: Sam Nelson

Screen Play: Orson Welles

Story based on a novel by: Sherwood King

Director of Photography: Charles Lawton Jr

Stills: Robert Coburn, Eddy Cronenweth

Editor: Viola Lawrence

Art Directors: Stephen Goossón, Sturges Carne

Set Decorations: Wilbur Menefee,

Herman Schoenbrun

Gowns: Jean Louis

Musical Score by: Heinz Roemheld

Song 'Please Don't Kiss Me' by: Allan Roberts,  
Doris Fisher

Musical Director: M.W. Stoloff

Sound Recording: Lodge Cunningham

uncredited

Executive Producer: Harry Cohn

Script Supervisor: Dorothy Cormack

Fill-in Director of Photography: Rudolph Maté

Camera Operator: Irving Klein

Assistant Camera: Donald Roy Cory

Assistant Cameraman: Richard Kline

Grip: Don Murphy

Special Effects: Lawrence Butler

Make-up: Robert J. Schiffer

Hair stylist: Helen Hunt

Orchestration: Herschel Burke Gilbert

Studio: Columbia Studios

Cast:

Rita Hayworth (*Elsa Bannister*)

Orson Welles (*Michael O'Hara*)

Everett Sloane (*Arthur Bannister*)

Glenn Anders (*George Grisby*)

Ted De Corsia (*Sidney Broome*)

Erskine Sanford (*judge*)

Gus Schilling (*Goldie*)

Carl Frank (*Galloway, district attorney*)

Louis Merrill (*Jake Jorgenson*)

Evelyn Ellis (*Bessie*)

Harry Shannon (*hansom cab driver*)

uncredited

Won Show Chong (*Li*)

Sam Nelson (*yacht captain*)

Elizabeth Jones (*woman*)

Peter Cusanelli (*bartender*)

Joe Granby (*police lieutenant*)

Al Eben, Norman Thomson, Eddie Coke,

Harry Strang (*policemen*)

Gerald Pierce (*waiter*)

Maynard Holmes (*truck driver*)

Jack Baxley, Edward Peil, Heenan Elliott (*guards*)

Dorothy Vaughan (*old woman*)

Philip Morris (*port steward/policeman/Peters*)

Steve Benton, Milton Kibbee (*policemen*)

Philip Van Zandt (*toughie/policeman*)

William Alland, Alvin Hammer, Mary Newton,

Robert Gray, Byron Kane (*reporters*)

John Elliott (*clerk*)

Charles Meakin (*jury foreman*)

Jessie Arnold (*school teacher*)

Mabel Smaney (*woman*)

George 'Shorty' Charello, Vernon Cansino (*men*)

Doris Chan, Billy Louie (*Chinese girls*)

Joe Recht (*garage attendant*)

Jean Wong (*ticket seller*)

The older I get, the more convinced I am of Orson Welles's genius. That may not sound particularly worthy of comment, but I should explain that I've always believed he was one of those rare beings who deserved to be described with that much-overused word; so to be even more convinced about it now is saying a lot.

Even when I first encountered his work as a filmmaker (as opposed to a chat-show guest) in my teens, it was immediately evident that he somehow stood head and shoulders above most of the rest of the pack; with his conspicuously bold assurance, he even looked the part of a 'genius'. Still, that was different: in those days, when Welles was still alive, people simply called him a genius as a matter of course. It was what he'd always been known as. It wasn't necessarily a particularly positive epithet; sometimes one could even detect an element of inverted snobbery, resentment or mockery in the term. And of course he'd long been regarded with some suspicion as the 'boy genius' who, having shaken up the American theatre and radio drama in the 30s, had been given carte blanche – or so, at least, it was believed – to make a film in Hollywood. What's more, he'd gone and made *Citizen Kane*, which was viewed in some quarters – the Hearst empire, anyway, which exerted no little influence over what people saw in their cinemas – as a case of the spoilt boy-genius biting the hand that had fed him.

But it's not that sort of 'genius' I'm talking about now: not the easily applied epithet, intended to confer some sort of half-crazy outsider status on the person in question. It's something deeper, more substantial, of more lasting value. It's not so much about the aforementioned 'bold assurance' – all too commonly found these days – as about creative ambition, audacity, intelligence, wit, open-mindedness and vision. All of which Welles had in spades. And all those qualities keep impressing themselves on me whenever I go back to watch one of his films again.

Despite the many obstacles to creative freedom he encountered during his filmmaking career, the majority of his movies are quite startlingly brilliant; even works like *Othello*, *The Trial* or *The Chimes at Midnight*, made under conditions so trying most other filmmakers would simply have given up the struggle, are endlessly intriguing and rewarding. And then there's *The Magnificent Ambersons*, mutilated for all time by RKO so that its last half hour or so feels horribly rushed and sketchy after all that has preceded it; yet the film still strikes many, myself included, as a bona fide masterpiece, unrivalled in American filmmaking except by a handful of towering achievements – one of which, of course, is *Citizen Kane*.

When I first saw *Kane*, I was, of course, enormously impressed, but in comparison to *Ambersons* or even the deliriously daring *Touch of Evil* I found it a little cold and a touch too clever for its own good. Next time around I revised my opinion; I'd clearly been so distracted by the complexity and pace of the film's narrative, the brilliance of the dialogue and acting, and the sophistication of the direction, that I'd failed to take proper note of its deep, dark emotional core. And that was it: each time I've watched the film – and I think I must have seen it at least a dozen times now – it gains in depth and I notice something new.

Artane Wong (*ticket taker*)  
Grace Lem (*Chinese woman*)  
Preston Lee (*Chinese man*)  
Joe Palma (*cab driver*)  
Richard Wilson (*district attorney's assistant*)  
Edythe Elliott (*old woman*)

USA 1947©  
87 mins  
Digital 4K

Introduced by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-large  
(Wed 17 Jan)

## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

**Lift to the Scaffold** Ascenseur pour l'échafaud  
Fri 5 Jan 18:35; Sun 14 Jan 11:50; Tue 23 Jan  
20:45

**Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans**  
Sat 6 Jan 12:15; Wed 10 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by  
freelance film programmer Margaret Deriaz); Fri 19  
Jan 18:15

**The Lady Eve**  
Sun 7 Jan 12:20; Thu 25 Jan 18:30

**California Split**  
Mon 8 Jan 20:45; Mon 22 Jan 18:10  
8 ½ Otto e mezzo

Tue 9 Jan 17:30; Sun 28 Jan 18:00

**Madame de...**  
Thu 11 Jan 14:40; Sun 21 Jan 12:10; Wed 31 Jan  
17:50 (+ intro by film critic Phuong Le)

**The Portrait of a Lady**  
Fri 12 Jan 14:30; Sat 27 Jan 18:00; Tue 30 Jan  
20:15

**Psycho (Original Theatrical Cut)**  
Fri 12 Jan 20:50; Thu 18 Jan 18:20

**Shoot the Pianist** Tirez sur le pianist  
Sat 13 Jan 12:10; Tue 16 Jan 14:30

**Charulata**  
Sun 14 Jan 17:45; Thu 18 Jan 14:30

**A Serious Man**  
Mon 15 Jan 18:10; Mon 29 Jan 20:45

**The Lady from Shanghai**  
Wed 17 Jan 18:30 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,  
Programmer-at-large); Fri 26 Jan 18:10

**The Bigamist**  
Sat 20 Jan 11:45; Wed 24 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by  
Foster Hirsch, author and professor, Brooklyn  
College of the City University of New York); Sat 27  
Jan 21:00

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AND  
SOUND**

A few years ago, for example, I suddenly realised that the way Welles used architecture and décor in the film was extraordinarily rich and resonant – so much so that I felt moved to deliver an entire lecture on his metaphorical use of architecture. More recently, I decided to do a talk about dance scenes in films that aren't musicals or about dance; sure enough, when I revisited the scene of the celebratory party in Kane's office, I discovered that Welles had packed far more thematic substance and nuance into a couple of minutes than most other directors could achieve in an entire reel.

And that's true of most of his films. Take *The Lady from Shanghai*. Made in 1947, during the heyday of film noir, the film is famous for a plot so complex that it's virtually unintelligible, and for its virtuoso climax in a fairground's hall of mirrors. But it is also sometimes dismissed as a bit throwaway, a little too tongue-in-cheek, as if Welles were to be faulted for having a sense of humour. That feels unfair to me: one of the marvellous things about the movie is that it works very effectively both as a traditional if faintly baroque film noir – it has the requisite loser (Welles) falling for the requisite femme fatale (his then wife Rita Hayworth, giving one of her finest dramatic performances) and tumbling fatalistically into the requisite maelstrom of greed, twisted desire and deadly intrigue – and as a sly, witty commentary on noir conventions.

Indeed, *The Lady from Shanghai* is especially impressive on two fronts. First, like all his best work, it's notable for how Welles simply packs so much more into any scene than we've come to expect and accept from other directors; at one given moment, due to the sheer density of the image and the soundtrack and to the subtlety of their relationship to one another, there's so much more to take in and think about. Second, the film finds Welles at his most playful. Famously, in 1940, having been invited by RKO to make his first feature, he exclaimed: 'This is the biggest electric train set any boy ever had.' Watching a Welles film, one is constantly aware of his deep love of his medium, but with *Lady* it feels as if he's completely intoxicated by his passion for cinema and its enormous expressive potential; he's high on being in love with a hugely popular and still young and developing artform that allows him to work whatever magic and indulge in whatever mischievous trickery he likes. And that love is wickedly contagious. See the film – repeatedly, if you can – and I think you'll see what I mean.

Geoff Andrew, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk), 22 July 2014

## A contemporary review

Such is the outline of a plot enriched by the complexities, the turns and twists, the feeling for atmosphere conveyed by a driving force behind the camera that are characteristics of an Orson Welles picture. Tropical settings, a brilliant court-room scene, the bunt in a Chinese theatre, build up the tension. Above all, the shadowy photography, a revealing close-up, a love scene silhouetted against the tanks of an aquarium, or the macabre climax reflected in distorting mirrors, achieve visual effects which cannot fail to stimulate the imagination.

The acting is on a high level, led by Welles himself as O'Hara – his Irish brogue is soon forgotten – Rita Hayworth a dazzling figure as the lady, Glenn Anders as Grisby, and rounded off with a haunting study in malevolence by Everett Sloane as the crippled lawyer.

*Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1948