



TV PREVIEW

# The Life and Deaths of Christopher Lee

## The Life and Deaths of Christopher Lee

Directed by: Jon Spira

©: Dead Charming Ltd

Production Companies: Canal Cat Films

In association with: BFI, HH5, Trigger Films

Executive Producers: Jonathan Ford,

Piers Holdsworth Hunt, Jack Oliver,

Jonathan Rigby, Reinhard Besser,

Francesco Capussela, Amer Hilal

Walter Mair, Carsten Vollmers, Pat Wintersgill

Produced by: Hank Starrs

Producer: Adam F. Goldberg

Associate Producer: Chloë Hancock

Line Producer (LA Unit): Candace Cason

Archive Producer: Kathy Manners

Written by: Jon Spira

Heart Surgery Sequence Designed and Directed by:

Dave McKean

Director of Photography: Simon Vickery

LA Unit Director of Photography: Michael Tedford

Camera Operator: Dan Starborg

Featuring Original Animations by: Andrew Gill,

Astrid Goldsmith, Dave McKean, Cornelia Skrok

Animations: Elissa Lenoir Ajaka, Andrew Gill,

Astrid Goldsmith, Reid Jameson Potts,

Cornelia Skrok

Motion Graphics: Andrew Gill

Puppeteers: Oily Taylor, Lynn Robertson Bruce

Marionette Designed and Built by:

Arch Model Studios

Supervising Model Maker: Andy Gent

Editor: Alex Barrett

Hair & Make-up: Katherine Thomas

Original Score by: Jamie Hyatt

Original Score Performed by: Jamie Hyatt,

Richard Brincklow

Heart Surgery Sequence Music & Piano:

Dave McKean

Cello: Matthew Sharp

Music Produced by: Ashley Slater

Sound Recordist: Sherylee Anne Houssein

LA Unit Sound Mixer: Logan Smith

Stills Photographer: Daisy Starrs

Consultant: Jonathan Rigby

BFI National Archive Curatorial Consultant:

Josephine Botting

BFI National Archive Consultant: John Carino

Dedicated to the memory of: Dan Auty,

John 'John Vaults' Rivett

Narration Performed by: Peter Serafinowicz

Featuring:

Juan Aneiros

Corrado Canonici

Joe Dante

Peter Jackson

John Landis

Paul Maslansky

Caroline Munro

Juan Ramirez

Jonathan Rigby

Harriet Walter

Heart Surgery Sequence:

Simon Storer (*Christopher Lee*)

Garth Haythornthwaite (*J.R.R. Tolkien*)

UK 2023

90 mins

Total running time 140 mins

Courtesy of Sky Originals, BFI, Trigger Films, HH5, Canal Cat Films

Q&A with Peter Serafinowicz, director Jon Spira, producer Hank Starrs and Christopher Lee's biographer Jonathan Rigby

Produced in association with the BFI, this unique documentary features exclusive interviews, previously unseen archive material and multiple forms of animation to bring one of the world's leading actors back to life on screen. Peter Jackson, John Landis and Joe Dante, as well as Lee's niece, actor Harriet Walter, join his family, friends and professional collaborators in exploring his work and life.

[bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

For eight decades and across almost 300 films, one man defined what it was to be a screen villain for generations of cinema-goers. Despite being instantly familiar to, and beloved by, film fans from 10 to 100, the unbelievable true story of the man behind the macabre has never really been told. Until now.

*The Life and Deaths of Christopher Lee* is the new feature length documentary from the makers of *Hollywood Bulldogs*, *Elstree 1976* and *Reel Britannia*. Once again, director Jon Spira and producer Hank Starrs have found an already fascinating film-related subject and then crafted a documentary of unexpected emotional depth, engaging style and good humour around it.

Christopher Lee's story would be fascinating, even if it only went as far as audiences already know; that of an iconic actor who defined the role of Dracula and went from being the star of the 1960s Hammer horror films to a distinguished career encompassing the 007, *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises. But there is so much more to the life and career of Sir Christopher Lee – and who better to tell that story than the man himself?

Despite being dead for the past nine years, there could be no better candidate for narrator than the Prince of Darkness and Master of Macabre himself. Taking the form of an elaborate string puppet, Sir Christopher will guide us through the wild and unlikely story of his 93 year journey from Italian aristocratic roots through his wartime experiences in the Finnish and British military, his post-war Nazi-hunting spy adventures (which just might have influenced the storytelling of his cousin Bond-creator Ian Fleming) and his bizarre and unequalled, acting career which culminated in a Guinness World Record for highest number of screen performances.

## Director's statement

I've been fascinated by Christopher Lee since I first became aware of him at 8 years old watching his bad guy turn in the little-seen 1983 superhero musical *The Return of Captain Invincible*. It wasn't long until I was introduced to his Dracula and Bond villain Scaramanga and I understood that he was a real film star. But it was when I was older and working in film curation that I really started to notice that he not only cropped up in more films than anyone else (he holds the Guinness World Record for this) but that he cropped up in more types of film than anyone else. He didn't seem to mind whether the budget was in the high millions or low thousands. He would appear in Spanish,

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German, Italian, films always speaking in the fluent native tongue. One year, he'd be in one of the greatest Westerns as a gunmaker, the next he'd be back in London as a haughty MI5 agent. And despite seemingly always playing the bad guy, his range was stunning.

My interest in making a film about him began a few years ago when I stumbled upon his episode of *This Is Your Life* on youtube. Within thirty minutes, it seemed to be that this confident, erudite giant of a man was anxious and uncomfortable when presented with a narrative of his life that he, perhaps, wasn't in control of. I read his autobiography shortly thereafter and his enigmatic references and self-deprecation very much planted the seed in my head.

My suspicions were very much confirmed when we began to shoot interviews for the film – warm reminisces and great behind-the-scenes stories from filmmakers such as Peter Jackson, John Landis and Joe Dante along with revealing and unexpected tales and insights from family members such as his son-in-law Juan Aneiros and niece, the actor Harriet Walter. Things got even weirder when we started conducting interviews about his career as a heavy metal singer in his nineties. The one theme that seemed to connect all of these interviews, however, were the unexpected stories of Lee's quite endearing deep insecurity. Ultimately, this became an underlying theme for the whole documentary, revealing Lee to be no less impressive but warmly relatable to a very broad audience.

The biggest challenge in making this film was working out the narrative format. Lee had such a distinctive spoken voice that I had hoped to capture it either through stitching together old interviews or creating a digital version of him and using a vocal impersonator to bring it to life. Early tests proved unsatisfactory so, after brainstorming with producer Hank we decided to take a road less travelled and to commission Andy Gent of AMC Puppets to produce an 18 inch marionette of Lee. Gent's previous work with Tim Burton on *The Corpse Bride* and *Frankenweenie* and Wes Anderson on *Isle of Dogs* and *The Fantastic Mr Fox* assured us that we were in good hands and the footage we produced at Gent's AMC studio, working with Peter Serafinowicz to provide the voice is utterly unique, dramatic and enchanting.

I love that the finished film manages to be unexpected and quirky whilst still being a very satisfying documentary story and relatable, empathic journey through the life of a subject who becomes even more beloved at the end of the process.

Production notes