



Dearth of a Salesman

Director: Leslie Arliss
Production Company: Park Lane Films
Producer: Jules Simmons
Script: Lewis Greifer, Mordecai Richler
Cast:
Peter Sellers (*Hector Dimwiddle*)
UK 1957
30 mins
Digital 4K (restoration)

The Wrong Arm of the Law

Directed by: Cliff Owen
©/Production Company:
Robert Velaise Productions
Presented by: Romulus Films
In association with: M. Smedley Aston
Executive Producer: Robert Velaise
Produced by: Aubrey Baring
Associate Producer: Cecil F. Ford
Production Secretary: Golda Offenheim *
Assistant Director: Roy Baird
2nd Assistant Director: John Stoneham *
3rd Assistant Directors: Brian Lipman *,
Ross Devenish *
Continuity: Angela Martelli
Casting: Dorothy Holloway *
Written by: Ray Galton, Alan Simpson,
John Antrobus
From a Screenplay by: John Warren, Len Heath
Original Story by: Ivor Jay, William Whistance Smith
Director of Photography: Ernest Steward
Camera Operator: Godfrey Godar
Focus Puller: David Kelly *
Stills: Ray Hearne *
Back Projection: Charles Staffell *
Film Editor: Tristram Cones
Assistant Editor: Graham Harris *
2nd Assistant Editor: Edward Rooth *
Art Director: Harry White
Assistant Art Director: Jean Peyre *
Draughtsmen: Nigel Curzon *, David Mintey *
Scenic Artist: Peter Melrose *
Wardrobe: Jimmy Smith
Make-up: Stuart Freeborn
Hair Stylist: Eileen Bates
Titles Designed by: Robert Ellis
Music Composed by: Richard Rodney Bennett
Conducted by: John Hollingsworth
Sound Recordist: Bill Howell
Sound System: RCA
Boom Operator: Tony Cripps *
Re-recording: Anvil Films
Sound Editor: Allan Morrison
Assistant Sound Editor: Wally Nelson *
Publicity: Maureen Gregson *
Made at: Beaconsfield Studios
Cast:
Peter Sellers (*Pearly Gates*)
Lionel Jeffries (*Inspector Fred 'Nosey' Parker*)
Bernard Cribbins (*Nervous O'Toole*)
Davy Kaye (*Trainer King*)
Nanette Newman (*Valerie*)
Bill Kerr (*Jack Coombes*)
John Le Mesurier (*assistant police commissioner*)
Irene Browne (*dowager*)
Martin Boddey (*Superintendent J.S. Forest*)
Arthur Mullard (*Brassknuckles*)
Ed Devereaux (*Bluey May*)
Reg Lye (*Reg Denton*)
Dermot Kelly (*Misery Martin*)
Graham Stark (*Sid Cooper*)
Vanda Godsell (*Annette*)

In Character: The Films of Peter Sellers

The Wrong Arm of the Law

The set-up for *The Wrong Arm of the Law* is a familiar one, with comic thieves conflicting with an equally comic police force. Nevertheless, this is a genuinely imaginative film, upholding a brisk comic pace with the aid of astute direction and a sharp script, which plays to the talents of the cast.

Distinctively British in its humour, with a dash of Ealing (particularly *The Lavender Hill Mob*, 1951) and the energetic absurdity of the Goons, *The Wrong Arm of the Law* combined the writing talents of *Hancock's Half-Hour* creators Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, *Goon Show* scriptwriter John Antrobus and John Warren and Len Heath, who had scripted another Peter Sellers vehicle, *Two-Way Stretch* (1960). As the underworld and law are brought together in a mutually suspicious alliance against the unwelcome incursion of an Australian gang, there is ample scope to create memorable characters in the madness. Lionel Jeffries excels as a bumbling Inspector eager to please his superiors. Jeffries and Peter Sellers – as the quick-witted gang-leader Pearly Gates – strive to upstage one another, resulting in some outstanding moments, while Bernard Cribbins is a riddle of anxieties and tics as Pearly's anxious rival, Nervous O'Toole.

With international celebrity waiting just around the corner in the form of *The Pink Panther* (1963), this would be Sellers' final role aimed specifically at his British fan base. Pearly Gates treats his criminal gang as employees, doling out generous benefits including luncheon vouchers and paid holidays on the Costa Brava. He even shows them 'educational films' such as *Riffifi* (1955) and *The Day They Robbed the Bank of England* (1959). His alliance with rival Nervous O'Toole leads to one of the film's highlights, as the two bosses hold a general meeting of the crime syndicate as if it were a democratic trade union.

Although Sellers felt Jeffries had the stronger part, he still turns in an exhilarating performance, effortlessly switching between the sophistication of his alter-ego, costumier 'Monsieur Jules' (a dry run for Sellers' French accent a year before *The Pink Panther's* Inspector Clouseau made his debut), and Pearly Gates' steely intelligence. Although Jeffries' Inspector 'Nosey' Parker undoubtedly has some of the best material, Sellers, with lines like (pointing to his head) 'I've got things going round in 'ere that'd make Maigret drop his pipe,' had little to complain about.

David Morrison, BFI Screenonline

Contemporary reviews

Perhaps the first thing to be said about *The Wrong Arm of the Law* is that it is genuinely funny, that it actually manages to find a few new jokes, and some brisk variations on old ones, in exploring the whole desperately over-worked terrain of comic crooks and comic cops. Seven writers have been involved, at one stage of the proceedings or another, and the final script hints at all kinds of curlicues of character and plot-work decorating a structure itself somewhat jerry-built.

It's a good idea to stage a gang conference on the lines of a union meeting; to show Nervous O'Toole crouched among safety belts in the back of his Rolls; to devise a staged hold-up in which the gang's car breaks down, so that the van to be rammed has to back gently on to it. The fantasy of a meeting of police and criminals at Battersea Funfair is attractive, though the director doesn't make much of the setting; the South Sea Island finale, on the other hand, suggests the scriptwriters fighting for a way out of the picture. Cliff Owen's considerable competence shows in the way he takes good and bad jokes equably in his stride, cutting sharply as soon as a comedy point has been made, getting pretty well every ounce of value out of his script.

Tutte Lemkow (*Siggy Schmoltz*)
Barry Keegan (*Alf*)
Cardew Robinson (*mailman*) *
John Junkin (*Maurice*) *
Marianne Stone
(*woman in front row at the meeting*) *
Dennis Price (*Educated Ernest*) *
Dick Emery (*man in flat 307*) *
Gerald Sim (*airfield official*) *
Michael Caine *
UK 1962
94 mins
Digital 4K (restoration)

* Uncredited

In Character: The Films of Peter Sellers

The Ladykillers

Sat 2 Aug 12:30; Mon 11 Aug 20:35;
Tue 19 Aug 20:45

The Smallest Show on Earth

Sat 2 Aug 18:15; Sun 17 Aug 15:30

The Naked Truth

Sun 3 Aug 15:00; Wed 13 Aug 20:30

Being There

Sun 3 Aug 18:10; Tue 26 Aug 18:00;
Sat 30 Aug 20:25

Peter Sellers in Context

Tue 5 Aug 18:20

I'm All Right Jack

Tue 5 Aug 20:20; Sat 16 Aug 12:20

Two Way Stretch

Wed 6 Aug 20:45; Wed 13 Aug 18:10

Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

Sat 9 Aug 12:15; Fri 22 Aug 20:50;
Mon 25 Aug 18:10; Thu 28 Aug 20:45

Heavens Above!

Sat 9 Aug 14:50; Mon 18 Aug 20:25

The Wrong Arm of the Law

Tue 12 Aug 18:10; Sat 23 Aug 18:00

World Premiere of 4K Restoration:

Only Two Can Play

Fri 15 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by Vic Pratt, Producer,
BFI Home Entertainment); Mon 25 Aug 15:00

Peter Sellers: Oddities and Rarities

Mon 18 Aug 18:15

A Shot in the Dark

Sun 24 Aug 12:20; Wed 27 Aug 18:20

The Return of the Pink Panther

Sun 24 Aug 14:50; Wed 27 Aug 20:40

Become a BFI Member

Enjoy a great package of film benefits
including priority booking at BFI Southbank
and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

Sight and Sound

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**,
the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine.
Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK
only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

**SIGHT
AND
SOUND**

And the players respond both to this agile timing and to the script's TV-edged sense of character. Lionel Jeffries, desperately eager and despairingly confused in the pursuit of crime, John Le Mesurier, a Scotland Yard official lightly disguised as an ice-cream salesman but still clinging to the dignity of his Whitehall hat, Peter Sellers, training his gang by way of home movies and pampering them with paid holidays on the Costa Brava, are at their accomplished best. *The Wrong Arm of the Law* might be described as by Ealing out of TV comedy: still, in the right hands, a good formula.

Penelope Houston, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1963

For the first few minutes of *The Wrong Arm of the Law*, with Peter Sellers doing his 'Monsieur Jules' routine – Cockney gang-leader masquerading as a French couturier – it seems that one may be in for yet another of those dispiriting British comedies where a star comedian is encouraged to overplay his welcome, or a tolerably funny script is uneasily allowed to take care of its own momentum. Wonders, though, will never cease, and *The Wrong Arm of the Law* quickly reveals the unmistakable hand of a director. This is Cliff Owen's third film (his second, *A Prize of Arms*, received quite a lot of praise), and he is obviously a name to reckon with.

Admittedly, he has an excellent script, with a fine line in characteristically eccentric additional dialogue by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson (Hancock's ex-writers) and John Antrobus (*Goon Show*), which plays happily with the idea of Soho gangs as an organised social unit, complete with luncheon vouchers, holidays with pay and a welfare service. 'Who fixed for your son to go to Gordonstoun?' Sellers reproachfully asks a recalcitrant member of his gang; and, after the gang has enthusiastically applauded a screening of a home-movie revealing the combination of a jeweller's safe, 'Next week we have some educational films, starting with *Riffifi*,' he proudly announces.

Essentially, the script (by John Warren and Len Heath) is a comic variant on the police-underworld alliance against the child-murderer in *M*. Three Australians, working on the principle that it's about time some criminals were shipped back to the Old Country, come to London, get inside information on underworld plans so that they are on the spot disguised as policemen, arrest the thieves and make off with the loot. Distressed by the resulting upset to their economic system, the gangs join hands with an equally indignant police force to trap the unsporting Australian trio.

Miraculously, the invention never flags as absurdity piles on delicious absurdity, and the film fairly bristles with genuine comic creations: Lionel Jeffries' obliging and hopefully zealous police inspector in charge of investigations; Bernard Cribbins' worried gang-leader, riddled with nervous tics and safety-belts in his Rolls; John Le Mesurier's patiently melancholic Assistant Commissioner; Tutte Lemkow's curiously neanderthal visiting German cracksman. Peter Sellers, too, is fine, matching the restraint which Kubrick imposed on him in *Lolita* (though imagination toys happily with the idea of Hancock's ingratiating panache in a part that seems tailor-made for him). But it is Cliff Owen who keeps the film literally bouncing along, perfectly timing his effects so that even jokes one is waiting for (the repetition of the phony policeman gag, for example) are rendered unexpectedly funny. Even at the very end, just as one is settling down to a routine finish, Owen brings off a beautiful twist with one of the best lines in the film, when ... but it would be unfair to spoil your fun.

Tom Milne, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1963

Dearth of a Salesman

Another outing for hapless salesman Hector Dimwittie.