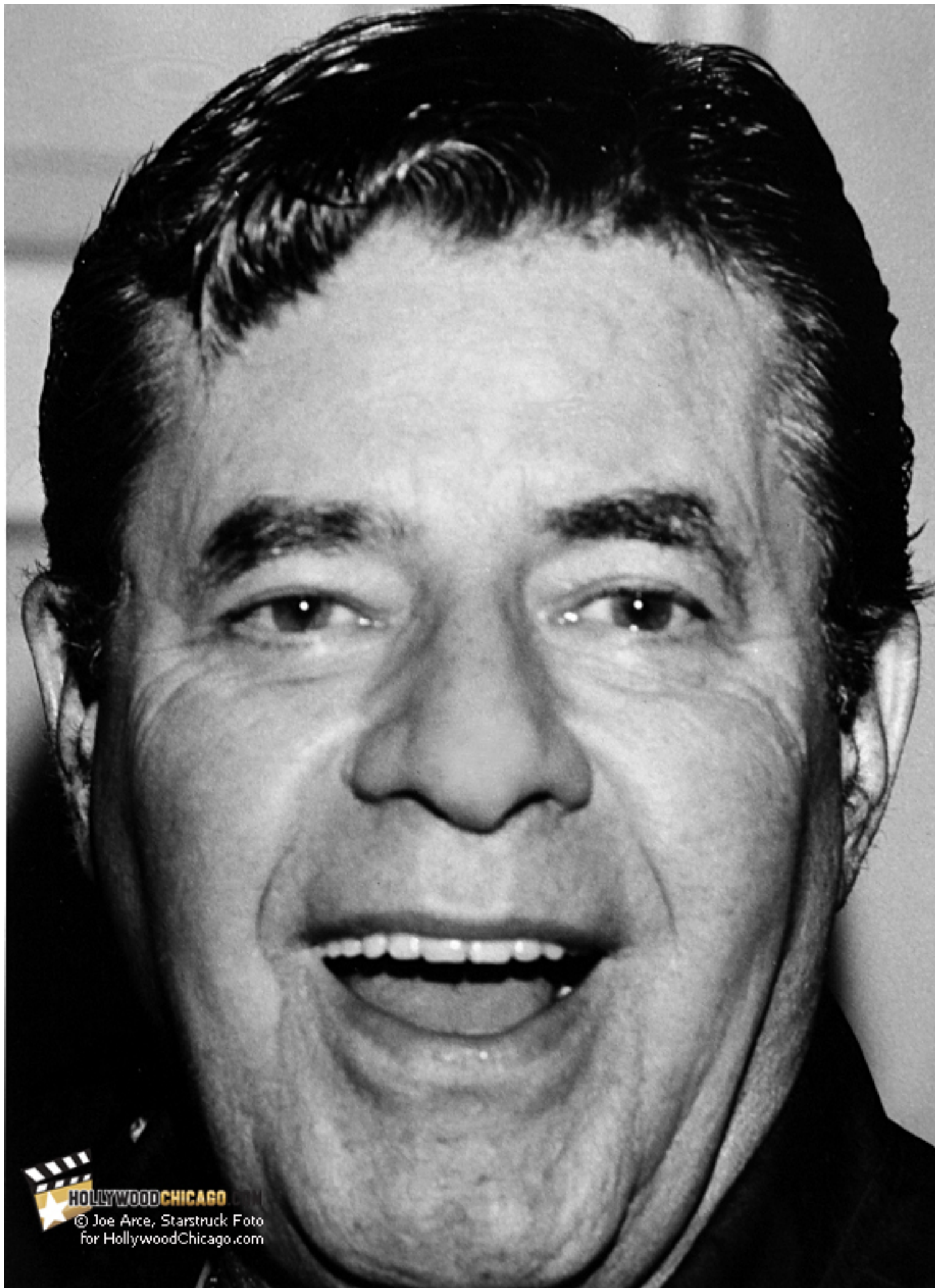


Film Feature: HollywoodChicago.com Remembers Jerry Lewis

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 30, 2017 - 8:59pm

- [Dean Martin](#) [2]
- [Film News](#) [3]
- [Gary Lewis & the Playboys](#) [4]
- [Hollywood or Bust](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Jerry Lewis](#) [7]
- [Jerry Lewis is Dead](#) [8]
- [Jon Espino](#) [9]
- [Las Vegas](#) [10]
- [Michael Spike Walters](#) [11]
- [Muscular Dystrophy Association](#) [12]
- [Obituary](#) [13]
- [Passed Away](#) [14]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [15]
- [Telethon](#) [16]
- [The Day the Clown Cried](#) [17]
- [The King of Comedy](#) [18]
- [The Nutty Professor](#) [19]

CHICAGO – Jerry Lewis had a long and winding life, dying last week at the age of 91. Through that life he had many show business lives – including the inevitable addictions – surviving all of the them with his signature comic style. He also was featured in over 70 films, and HollywoodChicago.com remembers three of them.



Jerry Lewis in Chicago in 1996

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

When the gawky 19 year-old Lewis met the suave singer Dean Martin in 1946, little did they know that they would become the most popular act in America for several years, and make 16 films together between 1949 through 1956. Their box office draw was white-hot, so much so that neither of them could keep up with the blur of what happened to them. “Martin & Lewis” eventually broke up at the height of their fame in 1956, during which Martin famously said, “Jer, when I look at you, all I see is a dollar sign.”

The second act of Lewis’s career would be about his prolific filmmaking (as performer and director), his representation of the Muscular Dystrophy charity, the fog of his pharmaceutical addiction and his final years of film character roles and standing as a revered comedy lion. To read the rest of the HollywoodChicago.com obituary, [click here](#). [20]

Patrick McDonald, Spike Walters and Jon Lennon Espino of HollywoodChicago.com have their favorite Jerry movies, and pay tribute to the “King of Comedy” through three essays – with a bonus – about the man-boy who made us laugh.



THE STOOGE (1952) by Patrick McDonald



The Stooge

Photo credit: Warner Home Video

It's impossible to understand the popularity of the act known as Martin & Lewis. Singer Dean Martin and comic Jerry Lewis got together as a team by accident, in an Atlantic City nightclub, and from there the act took off like a rocket ship. With Beatles-like popularity, they made an astounding 16 films in seven years for Paramount Pictures, and "The Stooge" reflected their relationship more than any of them. Dean portrays Bill Miller, an arrogant performer whose act needs a boost. Enter Ted Rogers (Lewis), who acts as the "stooge" (an audience plant that plays off the stage act). The duo takes off, but Miller never acknowledges Rogers' contribution. The parallels to the real-life pair is obvious, but the film has a layer of poignancy that had Jerry later calling it his favorite of all the Martin & Lewis pictures. Another nice surprise in the film... a pre-Mayberry Frances Bavier (Aunt Bee) as Jerry's mother.

LAAAY-DEEE!: Early Jerry Lewis was the comedian type who would do anything for a laugh, and "The Stooge" shows him off at his manic best. If only the real life partnership of Martin & Lewis had the same happy ending as the film.



THE NUTTY PROFESSOR (1963) by Jon Lennon Espino



Please do not reveal the middle of this picture! Jerry's a mousey chemistry prof who invents the greatest drink since Dracula discovered bloody marys.

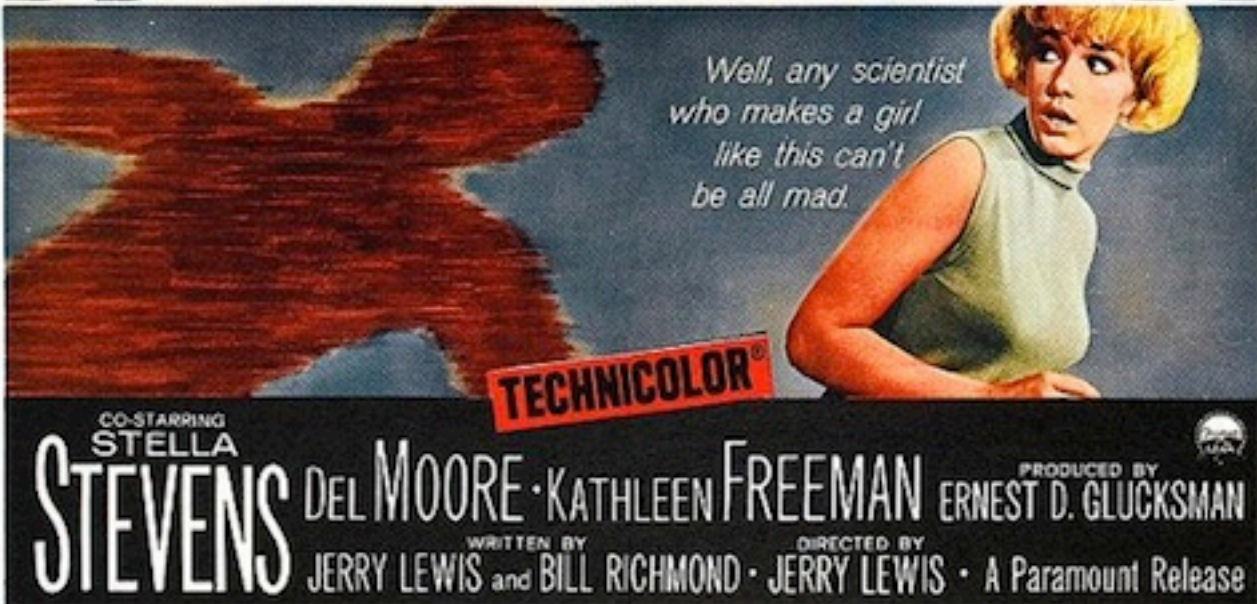
PARAMOUNT PICTURES presents

JERRY LEWIS as

"THE NUTTY PROFESSOR"

(A Jerry Lewis Production)

What does he become? What kind of monster?



The Nutty Professor

Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Jerry Lewis was a master of comedy who could fill a room with laughter with a single well-timed expression. Although many of his character choices would prove to be questionable (verging on offensive), one thing that is without question is how great his performance was in "The Nutty Professor." As co-writer, director and lead actor in this film, we see a completely new side of Lewis than had ever been seen before. No longer restrained, he shows us his full comedic scope, delivering scene after scene of jokes, gags and all manners of hilarity. After he delivers one punchline, he is right back to building up the scene to deliver another one. In this Jekyll and Hyde tale, we get to see Lewis' range not just behind the camera, but in front of it. He shows us two distinctly different characters, each with a specific set of mannerisms and an endless variety of jokes that fit their personalities. People may have seen him in films before this, but "The Nutty Professor" was the start of an audience getting introduced to the real comic Jerry Lewis, and the true extent of his craft.

LAAAY-DEE: When Jerry's character Dr. Julius Kelp goes to the gym and got elongated arms instead of muscles, and the bed scene following it. Seeing him fumble around at the gym for the first time proved to be all too relatable.



THE KING OF COMEDY (1982) by Spike Walters



The King of Comedy

Photo credit: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment

Jerry Lewis thought of himself as an auteur. He rose to fame as a squeaky voiced pratfall comedian but he was so convinced of his own cinematic talents that he started directing his own projects. While some stars become directors to gain a greater understanding of the work it takes to make a film, and grow as a filmmaker, in Lewis' case it only swelled his massive ego and deep-seated insecurities even further... he always thought he knew better. That happened so much that when he – for the one and only time – encountered a real auteur in Martin Scorsese, Jerry Lewis proved to be a difficult pupil. While Scorsese managed to use Lewis' natural prickliness to his advantage for the character as Jerry Langford, a Johnny Carson-like late night talk show titan, Lewis admits that he had a hard time taking direction.

In his book "Dean and Me: A Love Story," Lewis recalled that he was constantly questioning Scorsese on the set and taking issues with the improvisational and freewheeling way Scorsese was directing the picture. But to Scorsese's credit he managed to make the man, who believed himself to be a genius, finally come around to someone else's point of view. "The King Of Comedy" is Lewis' greatest role because it not only frees him from the tired, annoying manic schtick he had wedded himself to, yet in a way he would never achieve again, but also brilliantly underlined the menace, fear and toxic sense of self importance lurking just under the wafer-thin public facade. He's great almost in spite of himself, but it works perfectly for the character.

LAAAY-DEE: Jerry Lewis had heard it all over the years from fans, so he passed along a story that they used in the film. When Jerry Langford passes a woman on a public phone, and he refuses to talk to her husband on the other end, the woman spits out, “You should only get cancer.”



BONUS: THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED (1972) by Patrick McDonald

Who ever thought that Jerry Lewis, by not releasing a film, would generate as much notoriety as any film he did in his whole career? “The Day the Clown Cried” is one of the most famous unreleased films in cinema history, up there with the lost Orson Welles edit of “The Magnificent Ambersons.” The history of the film is a tortured one, tied to Jerry like an albatross that refused to fly away. It began when Jerry was offered the script, on the condition that he star and direct, with a promise of full financing. Accounts vary as to whether the film was completed as written – by Joan O’Brien and Charles Denton – but the main obstacle was that the film ran out of money and the “finished” product was apparently so bad that O’Brien (the rights holder) and Lewis himself refused to release it.

The story is of a clown named Helmut Doork (Jerry) who is down-and-out in Germany around the rise of Hitler. Fired from his circus job, he is arrested at a bar while insulting Der Führer. He is taken to a concentration camp, where he finds his antics entertain the Jewish children there. The guards realize that they can use this ex-clown as a lure for the children, and he could lead them to the gas chambers and their death.

The subject matter is ludicrous, but admittedly Jerry might simply had been ahead of his time. Years later, films like “Life is Beautiful” and “Jakob the Liar” had similar thematics, and Holocaust films themselves are prevalent every year at film festivals. But it was the combination of Jerry, and his interpretation of the script as performer and director, that caused Harry Shearer – who was privileged to see the rough cut – to exclaim, “With most of these kinds of things, you find that the anticipation, or the concept, is better than the thing itself. But seeing this film was really awe-inspiring, in that you are rarely in the presence of a perfect object. This was a perfect object. This movie is so drastically wrong, its pathos and its comedy are so wildly misplaced, that you could not, in your fantasy of what it might be like, improve on what it really is. ‘Oh, My God!’—that’s all you can say.”

Jerry Lewis has had to answer for this film almost every year since it was shelved. His usual answer was dismissal (“None of your goddamn business!” was a typical reply to inquiries regarding release), but he did talk to some potential documentary makers in 2012, and the trailer for that project can be seen by [clicking here](#). [21] Until then, we only have this quote from the Jerry Lewis himself, “You had to not run from it, and don’t be frightened by it. But I did run from it, and I was frightened by it. And you stay there, and you beat that, because you have more important stuff to do.”

LAAAY-DEE: As far as the future for “The Day the Clown Cried,” Lewis (before he died) donated a cut of the film to the Library of Congress, with the stipulation that it will not be shown until June of 2024.

Source material for this article is from Wikipedia. Jerry Lewis, the King of Comedy, 1926-2017



[22]

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