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Une histoire immortelle (The immortal story), Welles, Orson, 1968

Macbeth, Welles, Orson, 1948

Othello, Welles, Orson, 1952

F for fake, Welles, Orson, 1975

The magnificent Ambersons, Welles, Orson, 1942

Citizen Kane, Welles, Orson, 1941

MAGNIFIC

THE F

WELLES, ORSON

CENT SORCERY

FILMS OF ORSON WELLES

May 6th, 1985, marks the 70th anniversary of the birth of Orson Welles. It would be the slightest of exaggerations to say that the world hasn't been the same since. He was on stage at the age of 3, presented a one-child version of *King Lear* at 9, and had directed 30 plays by the time he left school. Trained in the arts of magic by Houdini himself, the Great Orsino was unusual even among infant prodigies for remaining prodigious as he gatecrashed adulthood. He hustled Dublin's Gate Theatre at 16, circled Europe as

bullfighter, artist and writer at 18, was the most celebrated director on the New York stage at 21, and terrified the entire nation with his *War of the Worlds* broadcast at 23. The next step was nearly jail, but instead he went to Hollywood and made *Citizen Kane*.

The one inescapable focal point for world cinema, *Citizen Kane* has both immortalised and ensnared its creator. As by a magnificent sorcery, the film captured the seven ages of Orson Welles for an eternity of random resurrections, from old man to proud politician to young boy to eager journalist to wounded lover to reclusive giant, ancient one minute, vital and vibrant the next. Thanks to *Citizen Kane*, everything Welles was and is and could be seems already revealed to us. And all we've had to do in the years that have followed has been to sort out the pieces of the jigsaw and to identify the real man. And all that Welles has had to come up with has been an encore. We're all still trying.

Of the many faces the fugitive magician has shown us, three are most easily recognised. The Charles Foster Kane face bears an expression of beleaguered genius, lined with the knowledge that inconceivable power and wealth have been devoted to the purchase of nothing more than loneliness, betrayal and despair. It seems to fit, all too closely, the identity of the man who once owned Big Sur (but sold that piece of coastline before it became worth billions), who was

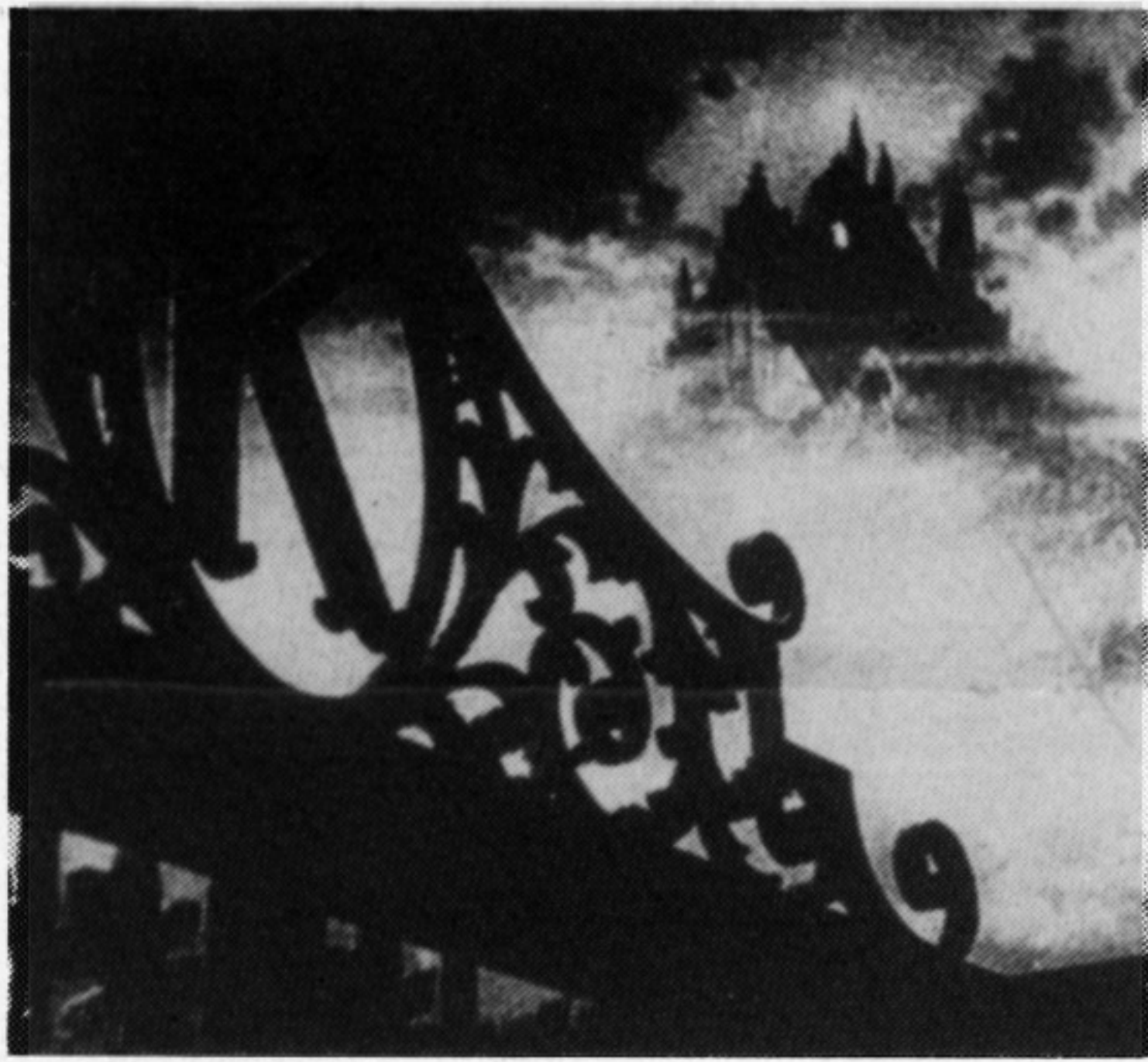
discarded in mid-production by the very studio he'd made wealthy, and whose later films, beset with obstacles, delays and compromises, all read like copies of a single masterpiece.

The face of Welles the star is a different matter. It has become increasingly avuncular over the years, conveying a conspiratorial enjoyment, strictly between the two of us, that mankind persists in so much empty foolishness. With its layers of make-up which never quite disguise the wrinkles of incredulity on the Welles forehead, it signals the charlatanism of popular cinema, those enduring fictions by which we choose to conceal reality. More honestly than Kane's, this is the face that would make us world-conscious; it challenges us to resist other impulses than our own, to distrust the features of tyranny, to practise our right of free will, perhaps even to try another brand of sherry if the mood takes us. 'I couldn't put my name,' says Welles, 'to a work that implies man's ultimate surrender.'

And there's the face of Welles the director, a portrait compiled from serpentine camerawork, abrupt editing, unpredictable apparitions among great vistas of light and shade, inquisitive close-ups, intricate long-shots, and tremendous symphonies of sound and



speech. Just as Welles himself dislikes it most because it can't be changed, this aspect of his conjury we can, perhaps, place most faith in for the same reason. The staircase shot in *Ambersons*, the mirrors of *Lady from Shanghai*, the breathless leaps in time and space for *Othello*, these are as close to the 'real' Welles as we ever need to get. What does it matter, after all, what you say about people? Many happy returns, Orson.—Philip Strick.



**Fri 3 May
8.15**

**The Orson
Welles Story**

In an extended BBC2 *Arena* programme in May 1982, Welles discusses his career, his handling of actors and his views on Shakespeare, and talks in detail about the making of *Touch of Evil*. Among many surprises, he describes a meeting with Hearst and some of the extreme methods used to discredit Welles after *Citizen Kane*. Contributors to this unique profile include John Huston, Charlton Heston, Jeanne Moreau, Anthony Perkins and Robert Wise. *BBC 1982/Dir Leslie Megahey. Prod Alan Yentob. 155 mins.*



**Sun 5 May
8.45**

Citizen Kane



After 'Rosebud', Kane's first words are: 'Don't believe everything you hear on the radio.' A neat joke – Welles was already notorious – it introduces another manipulative fantasy, woven around an elusive, larger-than-life phenomenon. Among the perpetually influential use of sets, sound, editing, deep-focus, and the Mercury Players, is the still-potent and prophetic story of an enigma who, always trying to prove something, 'lost almost everything he had'. *USA 1941/With Joseph Cotten, Everett Sloane, Dorothy Comingore.*



**Wed 8 May
6.30**

**The
Magnificent
Ambersons**



Its first half containing some of the most beautiful shots in cinema history, its second brutally reduced to incoherent gabble by studio interference, the film is as much about the desperate jealousies of Agnes Moorehead as about Tim Holt's toddling, autocratic mini-Kane, determined his mother will never remarry. Welles's gently ironic nostalgia for a timeless era of perfection is substantiated by the enchanting snowscape, the magical dance sequence, the levitating camera. It was never to be so easy again. *USA 1942/With Anne Baxter, Joseph Cotten.*



**Thu 9 May
6.30**

**Journey Into
Fear**

Supervised by Welles, *Journey Into Fear* is based on an Eric Ambler spy novel, frequently resembling a 1930s Hitchcock thriller with its imperturbable hero and eccentric cameos. Welles is chief of the Turkish secret police, looks like Stalin, and enjoys a spectacular duel in the rain. *USA 1943/Dir Norman Foster. With Joseph Cotten, Dolores Del Rio, Everett Sloane. Also: La Ricotta, the Pasolini episode from Rogopag (1962).* Welles plays director of cheap Italian epics, his bland corpulence contrasted with the unscrupulous energies of his film crew.

'He has his little peculiarities,' observes the housekeeper after Jane's first brush with her employer. Welles had played Rochester twice on radio, only accepted the film to help with tax debts, but was a huge hit as the haunted Brontë playboy in his Yorkshire Xanadu. It's tempting to see his guiding touch in the lighting and decor, and child-stars Elizabeth Taylor and Margaret O'Brien are additional splendours. *USA 1944/Dir Robert Stevenson. With Joan Fontaine, Henry Daniell.*

Fri 10 May
6.30

Jane Eyre



Made for Sam Spiegel 'to prove I could put out a movie as well as anyone else', this much-maligned curiosity teams Welles's restless style with Metty's gliding camera to embroider a plodding narrative with sequences of astonishing elegance and foreboding. As a secret Nazi in the mid-West, Welles is deranged rather than furtive, but the part's consistent with his interest in vulnerable visionaries, and Edward G Robinson makes a smoothly ambiguous hunter. *USA 1946/With Loretta Young, Philip Merivale.*

Thu 9 May
8.45

The Stranger



'When I start out to make a fool of myself, there's nothing can stop me,' observes the professional drifter in this dazzling assembly of *film noir* themes: passion, greed, murder, betrayal, and fall-guy innocence. The Irish accent's a touch foolish, maybe, but the operatic sequences at the aquarium and the fairground are Welles at his astonishing best; he had decided, unjustly, that his own script was so tedious it needed the most beautiful images possible. *USA 1948/With Rita Hayworth, Everett Sloane, Glenn Anders.*

Mon 13 May
8.45

The Lady from Shanghai



Welles had tackled the subject before – an all-black production in 1936, and at a theatre festival just before filming – but he had to create the movie in 23 days on a single sound stage and without the Lady Macbeth of his choice. The result is uneven, but always spectacular, its craggy, poisoned settings and rough, distorted visuals the outward expression of Macbeth's interior journey of darkness and guilt. *USA 1948/With Jeanette Nolan, Dan O'Herlihy, Roddy McDowall.*

Tue 14 May
6.10

Macbeth





Mon 13 May
6.30/
Tue 14 May
8.30

The Third Man



It wasn't a part he wanted, but Harry Lime suits Welles to perfection; gliding vampire-like among the ruins of Vienna, Lime contrives to be both demonic and angelic ('Lucifer,' Welles called him), a mysterious lost soul whose hour has passed. Unimpaired by Carol Reed's angled camera and fondness for left profiles, the anything-but-evil Welles, by his sheer presence, creates a fresh myth of the Kane variety. *GB 1949/Dir Carol Reed. With Joseph Cotten, Alida Valli, Trevor Howard, Bernard Lee.*



Fri 17 May
8.45

Othello

Loving not wisely but too well, the Moor is already dead at the start of Welles's version as Iago, architect of his downfall, is hauled aloft in a cage. As with *Kane*, the facts behind the great man's tragedy are then investigated, a torrent of words and actions among Trauner's settings where the *motif* of the net hangs everywhere. Created piecemeal over four years, the film combines ingenuity with eccentricity, a hauntingly cruel fable of emotional collapse. *Morocco 1952/With Micheál MacLiammóir, Suzanne Cloutier, Robert Coote.*



Sat 18 May
6.30

Mr Arkadin

(aka Confidential Report)

Extravagant paraphrasing of *Kane*; the tycoon, still alive, conceals himself and his past beneath bizarre Wellesian masks. Arkadin hires a young man to trace events prior to his 'loss of memory', his aim to obliterate the guilty secret he's hiding from his daughter. Overdue for reappraisal, this is Welles's most scathing condemnation of a man who 'created himself in a corrupted world; he doesn't try to better that world, he's a prisoner of it'. *USA 1955/With Paola Mori, Akim Tamiroff, Michael Redgrave.*



Fri 17 May
6.15

Moby Dick

Melville's novel of titanic struggle, one of Welles's most cherished projects (he adapted it in the 1940s for the theatre, performed it in London, as *Moby Dick - Rehearsed*), was brought to the screen instead by John Huston. Gregory Peck is Ahab, and Welles is confined to the role of Father Mapple, pastor of the whalers' church, whose thunderous sermon seems to echo for the rest of the film. One of the most charismatic sequences of his career. *GB 1956/Dir John Huston. With Richard Basehart, Leo Genn, Harry Andrews.*



Fri 3 May
6.15/
Sun 19 May
6.30

Touch of Evil

With its bravura opening, which tracks a bomb from priming to explosion across three blocks of milling townsfolk, this accidental project (Welles was supposed to perform, not direct, but did both for no extra fee) is packed with memorable audacities: Dietrich as fortune-teller, McCambridge as drug-pushing biker, Weaver as motel psychopath. Its finest coup is to make Welles's shambling, lump-faced Falstaffian villain a monster to be both enjoyed and pitied. *USA 1958/With Janet Leigh, Akim Tamiroff, Charlton Heston. 105-minute version.*

The opportunity for a major declaration against capital punishment ('If there's any way of killing evil, it's not by killing men') provides Welles with one of his most eloquent and persuasive roles. Defence attorney in Richard Fleischer's reconstruction (derived from Meyer Levin's novel) of the 1920s Leopold-Loeb 'thrill killing' case, Welles makes an electrifying appeal direct to the conscience, based on his own, often stated, distrust of an impoverished legal system. *USA 1959/Dir Richard Fleischer. With Dean Stockwell, Bradford Dillman, Diane Varsi.*

Sun 12 May

8.30

Compulsion



From industrial fairground and disused railway terminal, Welles rebuilds Xanadu as Alphaville, a cavernous maze in which the right of Joseph K to be an individual is demonstrably irrelevant and needs a violent defence. Kafka's innocent victim becomes, on film, a self-pitying avenger; he's 'not guilty as accused, but guilty all the same'. As the Advocate, Welles interrogates this new Kane himself, and dubs eleven other voices. *France-Italy-W Germany 1962/With Anthony Perkins, Romy Schneider, Jeanne Moreau.*

Mon 20 May

8.45

The Trial

(*Le Procès*)



His first Falstaff was at 12; after two later productions, he pronounced himself ready for 'the character in whom I believe the most, the most entirely good man in all drama'. Role-playing, self-indulgent, clownish and tragic, Falstaff haunts the fringes of political history in the hope of easy pickings. It's all told in a rush of speeches and banners and a battle numbering only 175 extras, and it's the best lament since *Ambersons* for the glories of a fading world. *Spain-Switzerland 1966/With John Gielgud, Keith Baxter, Margaret Rutherford.*

Wed 22 May

6.30

Chimes at Midnight

(*Campanadas a medianoche*)

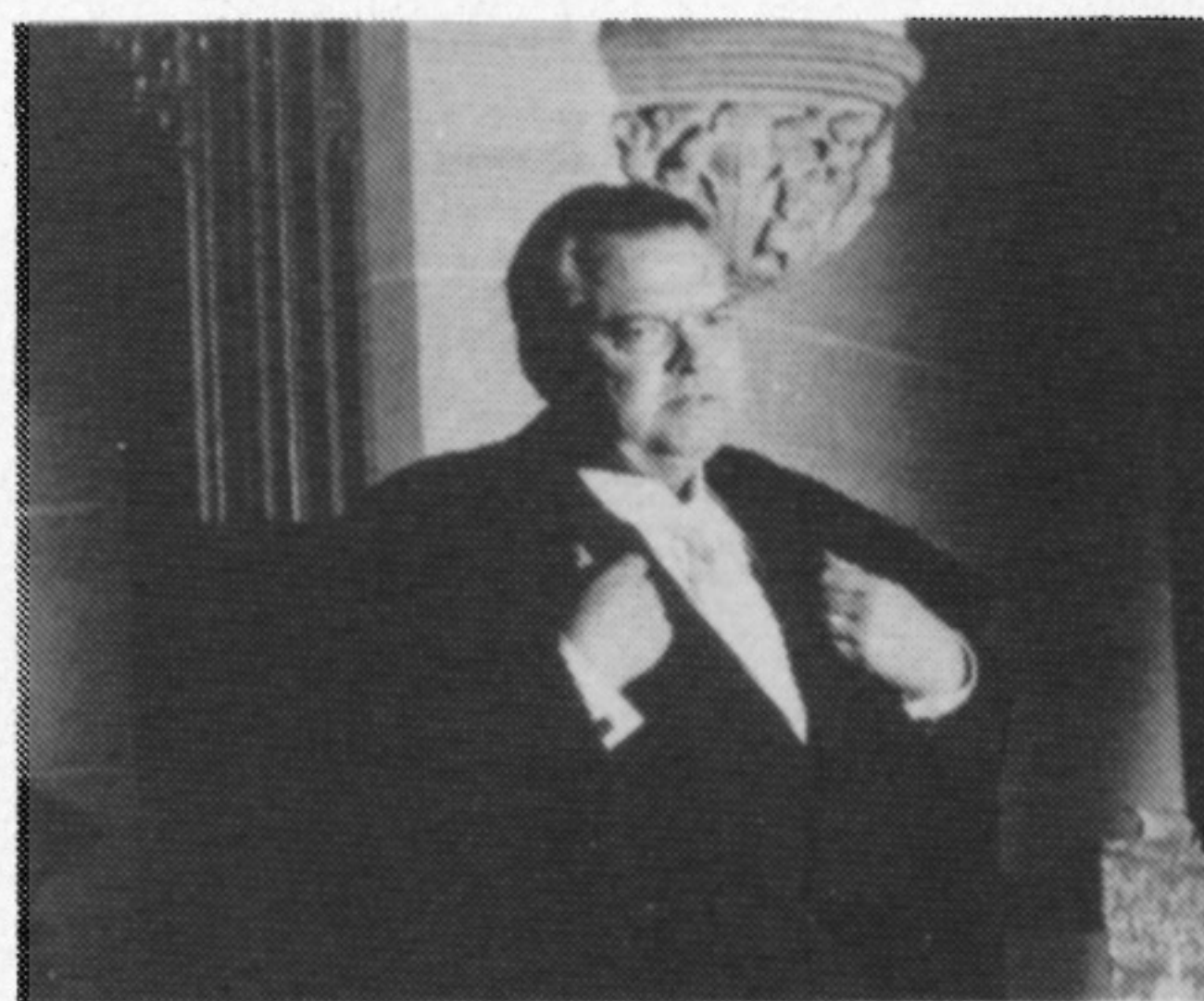


Set in the Swingin' London of the 1960s, Michael Winner's savage satire attacks the false and empty values of the time ('with false and empty weapons,' accused one critic), so successfully it got itself banned in the States. Head of an advertising agency, Welles lampoons his own breakfast-cereal commercials, gets camp with Oliver Reed, and rises blandly from his coffin. A cynical good time is had by all. *GB 1967/Dir Michael Winner. With Carol White, Wendy Craig, Marianne Faithfull.*

Sat 25 May

6.15

I'll Never Forget What's 'is Name



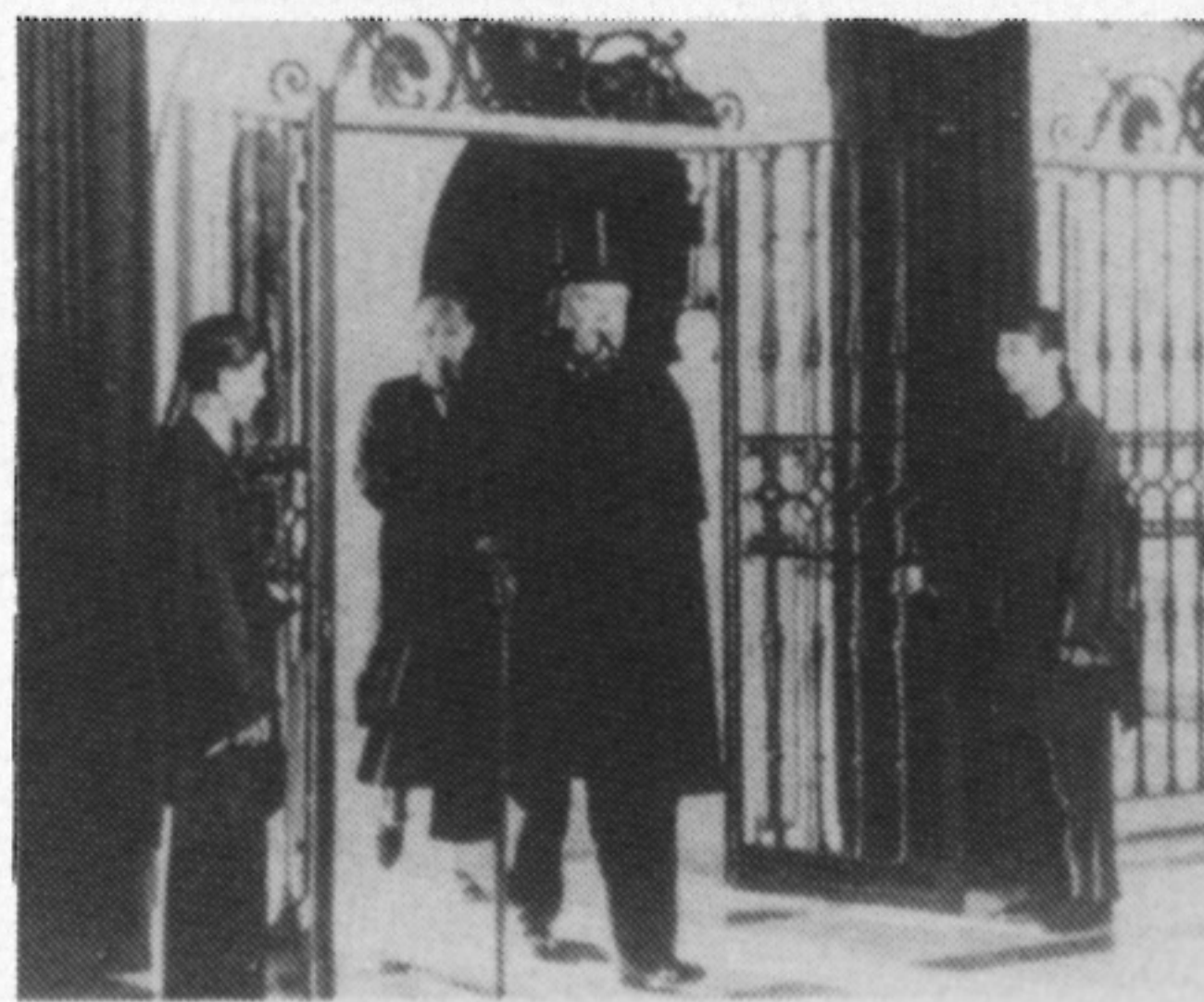
Essential Welles, filmed with poetic dignity and precision. A merchant millionaire, alone in his echoing mansion, stages for real the maritime legend of a sailor being offered financial reward for spending the night with a beautiful girl. Shaping destinies, recounting fables, making movies – the god-like pursuits derive special poignancy from their association with Welles as he strives to bring the world of imagination under control. *France 1968/With Jeanne Moreau, Roger Coggio, Norman Eshley.*

Wed 29 May

6.30

The Immortal Story

(*Une histoire immortelle*)





Wed 29 May
8.20

Catch-22

Another pet project for Welles, who attempted to buy the rights to Joseph Heller's novel but had to settle for the role of General Dreedle in the blockbusting Mike Nichols version, all shock and overkill with flashes of piercing lunacy. Welles too would probably have created a film more sombre than its source, although without allowing his anti-war message to stray into Fellini territory. As the General, his tone of bewildered military orthodoxy is superbly judged. *USA 1970/Dir Mike Nichols. With Alan Arkin, Richard Benjamin, Anthony Perkins.*



Thu 30 May
6.30

Ten Days' Wonder

(*La Décade prodigieuse*)

From Ellery Queen's mystery thriller of lost memories, stolen letters, blackmail and bloodshed, Chabrol lifts style, camera and text to Olympian heights, interweaving Greek mythology with Christian doctrine with Wellesian omnipotence. A structural delight, paying tribute to all aspects of the Welles image, the film employs Michel Piccoli to delve into the mystery of yet another Kane, manipulative and fascinating. *France 1971/Dir Claude Chabrol. With Anthony Perkins, Marlène Jobert.*



Fri 31 May
8.30

A Safe Place

No film that contains Orson Welles, Jack Nicholson and Tuesday Weld can be all bad, and although Henry Jaglom has moved on to better things *A Safe Place* has its special compensations. Fractured like its heroine's memories, it offers Welles as a magician cheerily convinced that past regrets and future fears are no reason to live in present disarray. Telling fables or pulling rainbows out of boxes, he makes a jovial icon of unexpected normality. *USA 1971/Dir Henry Jaglom.*



Fri 31 May
6.30

F for Fake

A richly quixotic essay in fictional documentary, probing the careers of master art forger Elmyr de Hory, the Howard Hughes 'biographer' Clifford Irving, and the Hungarian actress Oja Kodar who once staged a fake Picasso exhibition in Paris. Adding some tricks of his own to the stories he tells, Welles lays claim to all and nothing, parodies the idea of auteurism, and answers his critics by praising all forgers as jesters at the court of art. Shuffling its images like a pack of cards, some of the film might even be true. *France-Iran-W Germany 1973.*



Sat 11 May
6.15

Orson Welles at Large

An affectionate compilation programme of Wellesiana. Among the television gems is the 'Press Conference' he gave for the BBC in 1955; William Hardcastle heads a team of interrogators neatly outwitted by their urbane guest. Also one of the *Orson Welles Sketchbook* series (directed by Huw Weldon) in which he outlines a scheme for passport abolition. Plus extracts from some outrageous screen appearances, featuring some of his weirdest noses, and, we hope, a fragment of Welles on stage in the all-black *Macbeth*, and footage from unfinished features.