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"TALL, DARK AND HANDSOME" From Clown to Leading Film Star: The Career of Cary Grant

(Special to the "N.Z. Listener" from the U.S. Office of War Information)

FROM knock-down comic, clown, eccentric dancer and stilt-walker to one of Hollywood's highest-priced actors; a leading man in constant demand by stars like Irene Dunne, Rosalind Russell and Katharine Hepburn; his performances frequently praised by the critics; the husband of a fabulous heiress—that is the career of Cary Grant, who will be heard on August 30, 1943, in the series "America Talks to New Zealand."

Born Alexander Archibald Leach in Bristol, England, he submitted, not without protest, to an education until the age of 15, when he ran away to join Bob Pender's Acrobats. For five years he lived the hard life of an acrobatic comic troupier in training, and in 1921 went to New York with the troupe to do an act in a Fred Stone show. After a few months, the Pender acrobats went back to England, but Alexander Archibald Leach (now shortened to Archie Leach) stayed in America.

There were times when he wished he hadn't. He played in third-rate theatres, walked stilts in a carnival show at Coney Island, and at one time is reputed to have sunk to painting neckties with the

now famous motion picture dress-designer, Orry-Kelly. After two years of not much better than this, Archie Leach returned to England, where without much trouble, he landed small parts in musical-comedies. An Arthur Hammerstein scout saw him and signed him up to sing the juvenile lead in a New York show, and for five years he worked in Hammerstein musicals, and for the Scuberts, and though he had been getting along all right, he had hardly set the world, or much of Broadway, afire.

Tall, Dark and Handsome

He set out for Hollywood in a second-hand car, lived for a while in cheap hotels, and finally found himself a job in motion pictures with the name of Cary Grant. His debut was in *This is the Night*. Other parts followed fast—including *She Done Him Wrong*, with Mae West who, in speaking of him, made famous the phrase "tall, dark, and handsome."



CARY GRANT: Mae West spoke a famous line

Grant was under contract with Paramount Studios during these years, though he was occasionally lent out to other studios. After his sessions with Mae West, his assignment were mostly run-of-the-mill ones. Then in 1936, he was borrowed by RKO for *Sylvia Scarlett*, playing opposite Katharine Hepburn. When the favourable comments began rolling in, Cary Grant decided to become a free-lance after his contract with Paramount expired in 1937.

Along came *Topper*, *The Awful Truth*, and *Bringing Up Baby*, and within 12 months after he went on his own, Cary Grant was accepted as one of the screen's leading light comedians. But he didn't stick only to comedy: there were "serious" pictures like *Gunga Din*, *Only Angels Have Wings* and *The Howards of Virginia*.

Advantages of Free-lancing

Grant is very satisfied with his free-lancing status. "Working for more than one company has its advantages," he commented. "You are able to get staple assignments, and often a studio will buy a story with you in mind." The studios have paid him well, too, reputedly 125,000 dollars for his role in *The Philadelphia Story*, which he devoted to British War Relief.

In his years in Hollywood, Cary Grant (six-foot-one, black-haired, dark-eyed), has played in more than 40 films—parts that include everything from the mock turtle in *Alice in Wonderland*, Pinkerton in *Madame Butterfly*, and sophisticated comedy leads. In 1941 he was even being suggested for the role of Sheridan Whiteside in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. He went to work on other films instead, among them Alfred Hitchcock's psychological thriller, *Suspicion*, in which critics applauded him in a new kind of role. Cary Grant likes his reputation for versatility, because he still ruefully remembers the days when he was a stock player at Paramount—a period when "I was just the nice young man who knew how to put his hands in his pockets and smile broadly at the girl."

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