

Film Close-Up: Jim Carrey

by Joey_Berlin

Occasionally, big-screen comics like to take on more serious movie roles that allow them to flex their acting muscles in new ways. Jim Carrey has done those kinds of films, but right now he is working with his funny bone, starring in the family comedy "Horton Hears a Who!"

JIM CARREY - Jim Carrey is the voice behind Horton in the new animated movie 'Horton Hears a Who!' CNS Photo courtesy of Blue Sky Studios. If the title doesn't ring a bell, then it is likely you have never had kids and were not one yourself any time after 1954, when Dr. Seuss first published the classic children's book. Carrey previously starred in the live-action adaptation of another book by the good doctor, "The Grinch."

But the Canadian-born actor only had to provide his voice for the completely computer-animated "Horton Hears a Who!" Horton, a gentle elephant, discovers and protects the tiny world of Who-ville, which is the size of a speck and is populated by tiny inhabitants called Whos. Carrey's co-stars in the voice cast include Steve Carell, Seth Rogen and Carol Burnett (incidentally, Carrey tried to get hired as a cast member on "The Carol Burnett Show" when he was 10).

Now 46, Carrey enjoyed a decade-long tear as filmdom's top comic with a nearly unbroken hit streak stretching from 1994's "Ace Ventura: Pet Detective" through his 2005 hit "Fun with Dick and Jane."

Q: Did you improvise much while making this film?

A: Sure. I guess that's why people like me and Steve and people like Robin Williams get the call. The animators have an idea of where they want to go but they want us to bring spontaneous moments to the picture and to fill in the gaps and make it fun.

Q: How difficult is it to just do a voice, when you are such a physical actor?

A: I would go home sore some days, I swear to God. It was very physical for me. I had to act it out. And I would go home with this raunched-out throat and sore from head to foot going, "What is this, an action movie?" The challenge is that it's all in your imagination. Everything's in your head.

Q: Did making this movie change your view of the world? Like, do you avoid killing flies?

A: I haven't been on a good fly-killing rampage in a while, I've calmed down a lot. To me, I always had that perspective on the world anyway. I always thought we were a speck. It's really all in your perspective. There are ants on my property that think they own it, that they have the deed. I always thought it was such arrogance that human beings think we're the point.

Q: What is the most difficult aspect of doing a voice for an animated movie?

A: Creating it. When I came in I thought to myself, "How am I going to do an elephant? Surely there has to be a big booming voice." But when you think about the soul of Horton you realize he doesn't think he's bigger than anything. He doesn't think he's bigger than the mouse who's his best friend. His soul is much more gentle than you'd imagine. And I asked them if they wanted a crazy characterization, and they said, "No, we just want it to be you." So I was a younger version of myself.

Q: Had you read Dr. Seuss?

A: Oh yes, it was huge for me. I'd think, like, what is this? This is pure creativity here, this is not someone just using the natural elements. This is someone using new elements. To me, it's a child's version of punk. It's alternative for kids, as cool as you get. Dr. Seuss will never be unhip. It's just "out there." I love the idea of

introducing a whole new generation to "out there." Just in case you thought there were any limitations to what you can do in this world and create in this world, forget it.

Q: What films are you most proud of?

A: I'm proud of all of them, but proud is not really the word. It's like having children. You can't take credit for them, you know, God makes great kids. If you're part of something that's really beautiful, like "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," you don't feel a sense of ownership about it. You just go, "I was really lucky to be there."

Q: Any others?

A: I loved "The Truman Show," and I love the comedies in a different way. "Ace Ventura" was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I had a dinner with Anthony Hopkins and we started talking about our different approaches to acting. Like, I'm talking about approaches to acting with Anthony Hopkins! He asked me about "Ace Ventura" and I said, "What I was trying to do was be a bird, a smart bird, a parakeet or a cockatiel, a fancy, cocky, male bird. The hair was a cockatiel. I walked like I was pecking. I ate sunflower seeds."

The movie becomes a whole other level of entertainment when you know that I literally was not trying to be human. And he told me, "Oh my God, that's what I did with Hannibal! I was a tarantula and a crocodile. I would sit back with infinite patience waiting for my perfect moment to strike." Exactly the same approach, two completely different characters.

Q: What do you like most about acting?

A: I was just talking to Gary Oldman about it. What's great about what we do is that we get to murder somebody if the part requires it. We get to express all of the darkest emotions in the world and the lightest emotions in the world. We get all of it, and mostly all of those extremes are rejected in society. If you're happy, nobody likes you. And if you're too sinister nobody likes you. In movies you get to be the extreme.

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