



Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice (Screen Classics)

David J. Skal, Jessica Rains

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Late in Claude Rains's distinguished career, a reverent film journalist wrote that Rains "was as much a cinematic institution as the medium itself." Given his childhood speech impediments and his origins in a destitute London neighborhood, the ascent of Claude Rains (1889--1967) to the stage and screen is remarkable. Rains's difficulties in his formative years provided reserves of gravitas and sensitivity, from which he drew inspiration for acclaimed performances in *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Casablanca* (1942), *Notorious* (1946), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), and other classic films. In *Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice*, noted Hollywood historian David J. Skal draws on more than thirty hours of newly released Rains interviews to create the first full-length biography of the actor who was nominated multiple times for an Academy Awards for Best Supporting Actor. Skal's portrait of the gifted actor also benefits from the insights of Jessica Rains, who provides firsthand accounts of the enigmatic man behind her father's refined screen presence and genteel public persona. As Skal shows, numerous contradictions informed the life and career of Claude Rains. He possessed an air of nobility and became an emblem of sophistication, but he never shed the insecurities that traced back to his upbringing in an abusive and poverty-stricken family. Though deeply self-conscious about his short stature, Rains drew notorious ardor from female fans and was married six times. His public displays of dry wit and good humor masked inner demons that drove Rains to alcoholism and its devastating consequences. Skal's layered depiction of Claude Rains reveals a complex, almost inscrutable man whose nuanced characterizations were, in no small way, based on the more shadowy parts of his psyche. With unprecedented access to episodes from Rains's private life, Skal tells the full story of the consummate character actor of his generation. *Claude Rains: An Actor's Voice*, gives voice to the struggles and innermost concerns that influenced Rains's performances and helped him become a universally respected Hollywood legend.

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