

A Letter from the Publisher

Since 1963, when she first saw Peter Sellers in *I'm All Right, Jack*, Paris Correspondent Sandra Burton has been haunted by the actor's zany alter egos. "His portrayal of a stupidly arrogant British shop steward kept creeping into my college thesis on Britain's Angry Young Men," she recalls. "In 1974, when I was interviewing an M.I.T. disarmament expert for TIME, I couldn't help thinking of Sellers' Dr. Strangelove. And his Inspector Clouseau defined my first encounter with a French police detective." But when Burton interviewed Sellers in Paris for this week's cover story, written by Contributor Richard Schickel, she found her subject to be maddeningly elusive. "He doesn't like to talk about himself, and when he does, his manner of expression often does not translate into print. Generally, he is a reporter's nightmare."

Sellers answers questions with physical enactments and stand-up impressions, Burton found. "He thinks with his body and voice as well as his mind." When asked to explain the process by which he created the anonymous voice of Chance the gardener for the film *Being There*, the actor "began to transform himself into a computer," Burton says. "He pretended he

was a machine reading a tape of several voices and rejecting one after another until the right voice registered." Over the course of the interviews, Sellers managed to imitate human voices as well, ranging from Lord Snowdon's uncle (who inspired the accent for Fu Manchu, his next role) to Movie Mogul Walter Mirisch, a favorite target in Sellers' sniping at Hollywood. While Burton was spared the savage imitations Sellers sometimes does of his interviewers, she admits, "I detected a sprinkling of my sloppy American filler phrases ('sort of' and 'stuff like that') when I went over his taped responses later."

Sellers' chameleon-like transitions and ineffable gestures made him the most difficult star Burton has encountered in eleven years of interviewing celebrities, a list that includes Richard Burton, Diana Ross and John Travolta. Concludes Burton: "In terms of challenge, he ranks with three of my favorite TIME cover subjects: Anthropologist-Guru Carlos

Castaneda, who wouldn't even be photographed; Cartoonist Garry Trudeau, who despises any form of media event; and Opera Maestro Sarah Caldwell, who, like Peter Sellers, is a master of elusive cooperation."



Burton with Sellers in his Paris hotel suite

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Who Is This Man?

The Many Faces of Peter Sellers



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