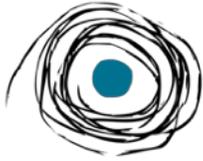


THE "LOST" CLASSIC NEWLY RESTORED!



PETER  
SELLERS

# MR. TOPAZE



FILM MOVEMENT<sup>®</sup>  
CLASSICS

*presents*

**PETER SELLERS**

# MR. TOPAZE

**“Essential viewing for all Sellers fans.”**  
-BFI

**United Kingdom | 1961 | English Language  
97 minutes | 2.35:1 | Mono**

**NEW 2K RESTORATION  
OF THE “LOST” CLASSIC**

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## SYNOPSIS

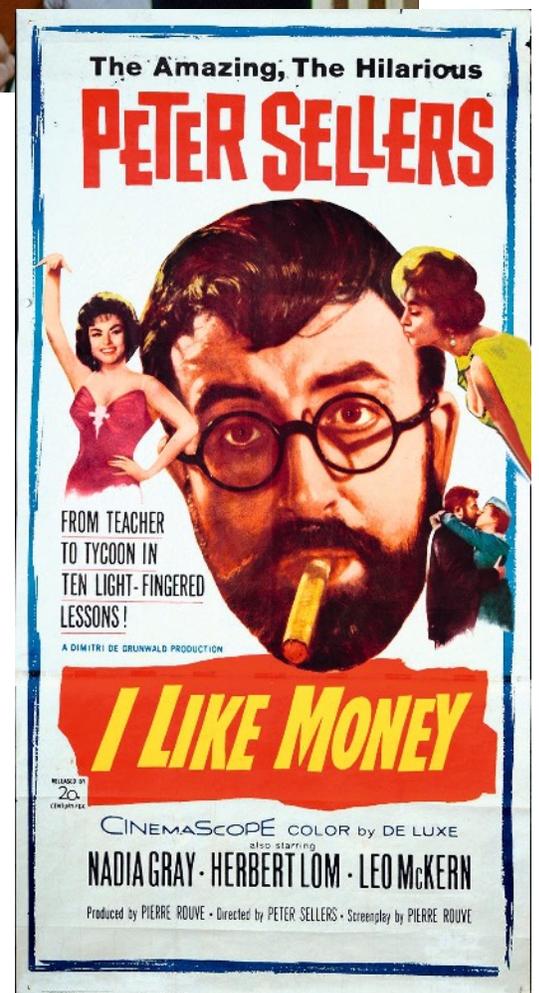
Unwilling to sacrifice his principles, Albert Topaze (Peter Sellers), a poor but proud French schoolmaster, loses his job after he refuses to alter the failing grades of one of students. Seizing the opportunity to exploit his well-known honesty, actress Suzy Courtois (Nadia Gray) convinces her lover, the corrupt city council member Castel Benac (Herbert Lom), to hire Topaze as a managing director for one of his shady businesses. But when Topaze learns he is being used, he cunningly turns the tables on Benac and ends up with all the money.



## ABOUT THE FILM

Seller's first and only credited directorial feature, MR. TOPAZE displays the British comic genius at the peak of his powers alongside his former "Ladykillers" cohort and future "Pink Panther" nemesis Herbert Lom in addition to a stellar supporting cast that includes Nadia Gray, Leo McKern, Billie Whitelaw and Michael Gough.

Based on a play by Marcel Pagnol and long considered a "lost" classic, MR. TOPAZE was digitally restored in 2K at the request of the British public from the last known surviving 35mm prints held in the BFI National Archive. A disappointment for Sellers at the box office, the film has rarely been seen since its 1961 UK debut and subsequent 1962 U.S. release under the alternate title *I Like Money*.





## LONG SYNOPSIS

Albert Topaze (Peter Sellers) is a highly honorable, self-effacing and earnest schoolmaster. He rooms with a colleague, Tamise (Michael Gough). Both men are poorly paid but enjoy an ardent enthusiasm for their work.

They teach in a French provincial school under the headmaster Muche (Leo McKern), a man who put social status and financial gain before the well-being of his pupils. His attractive daughter Ernestine (Billie Whitelaw), with whom Topaze is in love, is also a teacher in the school.

To supplement his income, Topaze gives private lessons to Gaston (Michael Sellers), the young nephew of the beautiful Suzy Courtois (Nadia Gray), a musical comedy actress who lives in an opulent chateau, the home of her admirer Castel Benac (Herbert Lom).

Ernestine shows some jealousy over Topaze's relationship with Suzy Courtois and, explaining his position, he takes the opportunity to confess his love for her. After kissing her ardently, to which she at first responds, Ernestine suddenly smacks him hard across the face. Topaze is overjoyed. This is surely a sign that she returns his love.

However, when the Baroness Pitart-Vergnoilles (Martita Hunt) calls on the headmaster, all is lost. Topaze's integrity forbids him making a dishonest report on her grandson and that, coupled with the fact that the headmaster has now discovered Topaze's affection for his daughter, leads Muche to dismiss Topaze immediately.

Meanwhile, Castel Benac, a wealthy, suave and crooked Paris City Councilor, is outraged when Roger de Berville (John Neville) refuses to continue to lend his aristocratic name as a front for Benac's shady financial deals.

Suzy arrives at a solution to the problem. She introduces Topaze to Benac as the man to take Roger's place.

Knowing nothing of the world of finance, Topaze is overwhelmed by what he considers to be Benac's generosity. For a handsome monthly income, he is made Managing Director of Topaze Ltd. and ensconced in magnificent offices in Paris.

Mr. Topaze, one-time schoolmaster, becomes Mr. Topaze, city gentleman and financier.

Roger loses no time in calling on his successor. Mockingly he points out the illegalities of the business to which Topaze has signed his name.

Topaze is outraged and informs Benac of his intention to go to the police. Suzy cleverly uses her wiles on Topaze, convincing him that Benac is the executor of her father's will. If Topaze reveals all he has discovered to the police, she will lose everything.

The sensitive Topaze willingly agrees to continue in his position to save the beautiful Suzy Courtois.

By this time, the name Topaze is famous in Paris.

Back in his provincial school, Muche is overwhelmed by the success of Topaze and is quick to react. He goes to Paris and craftily explains how proud he would be to have Topaze as a son-in-law. Ernestine throws herself into the wealthy and successful arms of her one-time suitor only to be firmly rejected.

A journalist, attempting to blackmail Topaze, is frustrated when his victim appears willing to commit suicide.

Speedily, Benac copes with the blackmailer, returning threat for threat. The situation is saved. But Benac is worried. The time has come for Topaze to leave his employ. But Topaze successfully begs to be allowed one more chance.

With the conclusion of yet another business success conducted in Benac's absence on holiday, Topaze has become a changed man. Suzy has taught him to dress well, acquire a taste for good food and to live expensively. The unsuccessful, honest Topaze has become a dishonest but highly successful financier in his own right.

He refuses to relinquish Topaze Ltd. The company papers are signed in his name and the frustrated and angry Benac can do nothing. Arrogantly Topaze tells Suzy that what Benac has done is nothing to what he can achieve.

Determined to have everything and more than his erstwhile employer, he takes Suzy to live with him in the chateau which he acquires from Benac.

When Tamise comes to visit his old friend, he is shocked to hear Topaze admit that he is a crook. Tamise asks if Topaze is happy. Topaze replies, "My friend, I am buying happiness." Sadly, Tamise leaves his friend to continue his shopping.



## NOTES ABOUT THE REDISCOVERY OF *MR. TOPAZE*

Vic Pratt (BFI)

1960 ended up being a pivotal year in the life and career of Peter Sellers. In February, visiting the National Film Theatre (now BFI Southbank) to hold court with an enthusiastic throng of admirers – many of whom were *Goon Show* fans, despite his more recent shift towards screen prominence, with such remarkable portrayals as toothbrush mustached trade unionist Fred Kite in *I'm Alright Jack* (1959) – he could still be summed up by the *Evening Standard* film critic in attendance in a piece entitled *Mr. Sellers in Disguise* as looking like “a diffident civil servant trying to be forceful.”

On that occasion, sporting an understated suede jacket and a modest man-of-the-people checked shirt, he had unassumingly informed his audience at the outset: “I have nothing to lecture about. I am a completely uneducated nit.”

By the end of the year, though, his circumstances had changed somewhat. His ego and ambitions had been bolstered by his somewhat unexpected emergence as an internationally regarded light leading man in *The Millionairess*. Here he'd played an Indian doctor, amorously entangled with a wealthy heiress (Sophia Loren).

This very-slightly-steamy starring role made a serious impression at home and abroad, especially across the pond. He'd become an unlikely sex symbol, some folks said. Before the year was out, he'd even directed and starred in his own full-color Cinemascope feature, *Mr. Topaze*, ready for release in 1961. Goodness gracious me, indeed.

The nit was gone. Sellers was undergoing the transformation that he'd perhaps always dreamed of: from podgy radio voice man into a glamorous, attractively enigmatic, self-consciously nebulous film star figure; a faceless comic chameleon, of his own devising; even, all being well, an auteur filmmaker/performer in the Chaplin/Tati mold.

Encouragement to self-direct had come from *The Millionairess* co-producer Dimitri de Grunwald. Fuelled with growing ambition, Sellers had severed recent ties made with its scriptwriter Wolf Mankowitz (rudely bailing out on the company they'd only just set up together, Sellers-Mankowitz Ltd). He focused his energies fully on the producer's suggestion for his directorial debut feature, Marcel Pagnol's prewar play *Topaze*, the tale of a meek provincial school teacher corrupted and transformed by big business.



Peter Sellers reading Pagnol's *Topaze* in a publicity photo.

Certainly such a vehicle suited Sellers' then-current mood, its tale of a shabby-genteel teacher who awkwardly but successfully reinvents himself as a sharp-suited, wealthy rogue eerily echoing Sellers' own off-screen shift towards a new, shiny, super-glam self, intentionally unburdened with that eternally problematic stumbling block, personality.

As he'd already announced to the *Daily Mail*, also in 1960: "I haven't a personality. I sometimes wonder whether I really exist at all. Chaps like Cary Grant and David Niven impress themselves on every part they play. But in my case there's just nothing there, and so I impress the part on me."

But however he impressed it, Sellers' masterful portrayal of little-man-turned-crook Topaze didn't cut the mustard with critics or audiences at the time. "Disjointed despite its smoothness, brilliant in spots," summed up William Whitebait, writing in *The New Statesman*. "Mr. Sellers, the actor, has played Mr. Topaze ... with just the right blend of pathos and humor; but Mr. Sellers, the director, has either given quite wrong instructions to his very distinguished cast ... or has, at least, totally failed to prevent them from turning their large shares in the proceedings into farcical burlesque. *Mr. Topaze* is, alas, a misuse of talent."

He's wrong, I'd argue, and Sellers' stellar array of supporting players – including Nadia Gray, Herbert Lom, Leo McKern, Michael Gough and Billie Whitelaw, are all brilliant, just as the star/director is. But sadly, few came to find out for themselves. Audiences stayed away in their droves. Perhaps producer Dimitri de Grunwald was right when – realizing the flaw in Pagnol's play, certainly in terms of audience identification and sympathy – he later noted "the public wanted to see Peter in love with a woman and chasing her with utter incompetence." Not, it would seem, as a callously successful, silver-tongued villain.



Peter Sellers in character as *Mr. Topaze*.

Sellers took the failure of *Mr. Topaze* deeply to heart. He never directed – officially, at least – again. He told people he was no longer interested. Yet he didn't want to forget the experience: soon after it flopped, Sellers took delivery of a 16mm reduction print of the film. Safely stowed away, the cans neatly Dymo-labelled, it would reside in his personal film collection for the rest of his life. What's more (as the tape repairs on his copy would suggest) he did run it for himself, more than once, on his projector.

The print was donated, after his death, to the BFI National Archive collection, where it is now preserved alongside two robust but faded 35mm prints of the film. Those precious prints, scanned and with color correction undertaken, constituted the only available film sources for the new release on Blu-ray and DVD. Finally revealed again, well overdue for reappraisal, *Mr. Topaze* constitutes essential viewing for all Sellers fans.

Hopefully, it will reaffirm that, despite his oft-repeated protestation that there was "nothing there," quite the opposite was in fact the case.



Peter Sellers directing a scene with Herbert Lom (top) and relaxing on set with his first wife, Anne Howe, and their son, Michael Sellers, who played the role of Gaston (bottom).

## PETER SELLERS BIOGRAPHY

Master impressionist Peter Sellers was born Richard Henry Sellers on September 8, 1925 in Southsea, Hampshire, England. His parents, Agnes (Peg) and Bill Sellers, called him Peter in memory of his stillborn older brother. Sellers' parents were vaudeville entertainers, and at two days old, Sellers was carried onto the stage at King's Theatre. He spent his childhood traveling the vaudeville circuit, where he gained a fondness for entertaining and a desire to succeed beyond the realm of vaudeville.

As a youth, Sellers attended Miss Whitney's School of Dancing in Southsea and Madame Vacani's Dancing Classes in London before enrolling in St Aloysius' Boarding and Day School for Boys. In the early 1940s, Sellers played the drums with touring jazz bands and also learned to play the banjo and ukulele. Just after his 18th birthday, Sellers was drafted into the British Royal Air Force. He became an official RAF concert entertainer, and between 1943 and 1946, Sellers spent his free time performing comedy sketches and playing the drums for the other servicemen.

After returning home from the war, Sellers pursued a position with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). By 1948, he had taken part in a few moderately successful auditions, none of which had resulted in an invitation to join the BBC. Having grown impatient for stardom, Sellers chose to take matters into his own hands. The comic made a telephone call to Roy Speer, producer of the BBC radio program, *Show Time*. Sellers posed as a popular radio star and recommended himself to Speer. The producer, impressed with Sellers' "acting," gave him a spot on the air. Following his initial appearances on *Show Time*, Sellers became a sought-after radio personality.

On the long-running BBC radio show, *Crazy People* (later called *The Goon Show*), Sellers established himself as a master impressionist. The show's zany collection of skits and Sellers' outrageous characters, including Major Bloodnok, Bluebottle, and Henry Crun, have been recognized as the predecessors to *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. *The Goon Show* provided Sellers with a showcase for his improvisational skills as well as an outlet for life's frustrations.

By the time *The Goon Show* was canceled in January 1960, Sellers had earned the exposure necessary to begin a career in film. After appearing in several British pictures, Sellers achieved success in the U.S. with *The Mouse That Roared* (1959). In 1960, he received international attention for his role in the film *The Millionairess*, in which he co-starred with Sophia Loren.

The incredibly versatile Sellers could slip in and out of characters with surprising speed. His genius was displayed through his depiction of multiple characters in *Mouse* as well as in several other films throughout his career. *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), considered Sellers' best film, earned him his first Oscar nomination in 1965. In 1963, Sellers introduced the world to his best-known character, Inspector Clouseau, *The Pink Panther's* bumbling master of disguise. There were four sequels to this successful comedic film: *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), *The Return of the Pink Panther* (1974), *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (1976), and *Revenge of the Pink Panther* (1978). 1982's *Trail of the Pink Panther* is a posthumous collection of outtakes from the previous Panther films combined with new footage of other cast members.

Sellers garnered his second Oscar nomination for the critically acclaimed film, *Being There* (1979), in which he played the childlike Chance, a gardener mistaken for an economic guru. Sellers' controlled performance was key to the success of this subtle comedy. The comedian's film career ended just before his death in 1980, with *The Fiendish Plot of Fu Manchu*.





## CAST

Topaze.....	Peter Sellers
Suzy.....	Nadia Gray
Castel Benac.....	Herbert Lom
Muche.....	Leo McKern
Baroness.....	Martita Hunt
Roger.....	John Neville
Ernestine.....	Billie Whitelaw
Tamise.....	Michael Gough
Colette.....	Joan Sims
The Blackmailer.....	John Le Mesurier
Lilette.....	Pauline Shepherd
Gaston.....	Michael Sellers



## CREDITS

A Dimitri de Grunwald Production

Produced & Written for the Screen by.....Pierre Rouve  
 Directed by.....Peter Sellers  
 Based on the play Topaze by.....Marcel Pagnol  
 Music composed by.....Georges Van Parys  
 Conducted by.....Leighton Lucas  
 "I Like Money" music by.....George Martin  
 Lyric by.....Herbert Kretzmer  
 Director of Photography.....John Wilcox  
 Production Designer.....Don Ashton  
 Editor.....Geoffrey Foot  
 Recording Supervisor.....A. W. Watkins  
 Sound Recordist.....Cyril Swern  
 Nadia Gray's dresses.....Pierre Blamain  
 Furs by.....Calman Links  
 Additional Costumes.....Anthony Mendleson  
 Production Administrator.....Leonard Urry  
 In charge of Production.....Roy Parkinson  
 Assistant Director.....Kip Gowans  
 Camera Operator.....Austin Dempster  
 Continuity.....Rita Davison  
 Make-up.....Stuart Freeborn  
 Hairdresser.....Anne Box  
 Wardrobe Supervisor.....Felix Evans  
 Sound Editor.....Alastair McIntyre  
 Dubbing Mixer.....J. B. Smith  
 Set Dresser.....Pamela Cornell  
 Script Associate.....John Speight  
 Lenses by.....Bausch & Lomb



### PROMOTION NOTES

In the short space of six months producers Dimitri de Grunwald and Pierre Rouve along with star PETER SELLERS have combined to bring a second British comedy to the screen.

With MR. TOPAZE, PETER SELLERS achieves his ambition of becoming a feature film director—he has waited just such an opportunity since his Award-winning short 'Running, Jumping, and Standing Still'

There is an exciting air about the names surrounding PETER SELLERS in his role of Mr Topaze. It will undoubtedly be seized upon by the film-going public to an extent that assures another box-office triumph for this successful production team.

There is lovely NADIA GRAY as the witty, sophisticated musical comedy actress and mistress of the suave Castel Benac played by HERBERT LOM. Well known British actors LEO MCKERN as the headmaster, MICHAEL GOUGH as a schoolmaster, BILLIE WHITE-LAW special favourite of the T V fans, with MARTITA HUNT and JOHN NEVILLE, complete with PETER SELLERS in the title role a cast that will prove a powerful magnet at the Box-office.

PETER SELLERS as MR. TOPAZE sports a beard. Taking 4 weeks to grow the star was delighted with the results.

Although bringing him a much desired anonymity off came the beard within three months—the novelty had worn off.

Excerpts from the original UK press book

## RESTORATION DETAILS

MR. TOPAZE has been scanned and remastered at 2K by the BFI National Archive from one of the few film elements known to exist and held by the BFI: a 35mm theatrical print. It is presented in its original theatrical aspect ratio of 2.35:1. Unfortunately this rare element has suffered from cyan and yellow layer fading which has led to a magenta bias in the color palette. Every effort has been made to minimize the magenta bias but unfortunately the image inevitably has a somewhat desaturated appearance. The optical audio track from the same 35mm element was scanned and remastered by the BFI National Archive.



BEFORE



AFTER



## ABOUT FILM MOVEMENT

Founded in 2002, Film Movement is a North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films based in New York City. It has released more than 250 feature films and shorts culled from prestigious film festivals worldwide. Its catalog includes titles by directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Maren Ade, Jessica Hausner, Andrei Konchalovsky, Andrzej Wajda, Diane Kurys, Ciro Guerra and Melanie Laurent. In 2015, Film Movement launched its reissue label Film Movement Classics, featuring new restorations released theatrically as well as on Blu-ray and DVD, including films by such noted directors as Eric Rohmer, Peter Greenaway, Bille August, Marleen Gorris, Takeshi Kitano, Arturo Ripstein, Sergio Corbucci and Ettore Scola. For more information, visit [www.filmmovement.com](http://www.filmmovement.com).

