



*Dracula* (1931) Starring Bela Lugosi

*Frankenstein* (1931) Starring Boris Karloff

**Pomona Fox Theater** (1931)

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To Two of Universal Studios' Greatest Monster Films,

## *Dracula* & *Frankenstein*

**B**oth films were released in the same year that the Pomona Fox Theater was opened to the public (1931), and it seems fitting that this 80-year-old theater play host to two 80 year-old classic films.

This program is made possible through the generous assistance of our program sponsors. Special thanks to Scott Essman for putting together this program and to all of our volunteers who work tirelessly to ensure a quality program. Also thank you to Universal Pictures for donating copies of the two films for our raffle and to Art In Clay Sculpture Studio, Famous Monsters of Filmland, and Creature Feature for bringing in the lobby displays.

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# DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN – 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Legacies

By Scott Essman

**T**wo films released the same year, 1931, have defined the horror genre for the 80 ensuing years since they first appeared. Unquestionably, they shocked, horrified, and thrilled unsuspecting audiences in the dawn of the sound film era. Certainly, their leading actors, Béla Lugosi as Count Dracula and Boris Karloff as the Frankenstein Monster though the latter was originally billed with a question mark became immediately immortalized as their most famous characters. Each man had lengthy turns on stage and in other films before and after the 1931 films, but their performances were so iconic in appearance, body language, mannerisms, intonations, and screen presence, audiences would forever identify the actors by the titles of these first breakthrough horror films.

## THE DRACULA LEGACY

The success of *Dracula* and its legacy in films is undoubtedly due in part to Béla Lugosi's genius for playing the character, director Tod Browning and cinematographer Karl Freund's combined genius for filming the movie, and Jack Pierce's makeup concepts. The story of Pierce is relevant to the success of all of the Universal films.

Janus Piccoulas - a Greek immigrant, born on May 5, 1889 - must have been shattered when, having moved from his first American city, Chicago, to Los Angeles to play professional baseball, he was told that he was too little. Not long after his dream of a career in sports faded, Janus chose to Americanize his name and move to Southern California. 20-ish Jack Pierce quickly began his ascent in the fledgling motion picture industry. Pierce's first real jobs were as a theater projectionist and later a theater chain manager for Harry Culver in the early 1910s. Culver had founded Culver City, offering land to any entrepreneur



who pledged to build a studio-one who took his offer was producer Thomas Ince. Pierce fit in well amongst these early 20th century dreamers, and began to work on movie sets for Ince and other studios including Vitagraph and a new studio formed by another ex-Chicagoan, Carl Laemmle. Pierce wore many hats, serving as a camera loader, assistant director, bit player and stuntman. He once claimed that his going price was \$1 per fall! By 1915, Pierce was employed on a regular basis at the biggest studio in existence, Universal City. Established by Laemmle, Universal City produced many silent "shorts" in the 1910s, and Pierce often worked on their skeletal crews. But Jack Pierce was only starting to make his way in Hollywood.

Jack Pierce's first attempt to create an unforgettable screen character in the new sound era of filmmaking was essentially thwarted by the star of the first project "greenlit" by Junior Laemmle in 1930. While *Dracula* afforded Pierce the chance to bring a vampire character unlike any seen before to the screen, Béla Lugosi arrived in California with different plans. As Lugosi had always applied his own makeups on stage, including a famed 1927 production on Broadway, he assumed the same situation would occur in Universal's film version.



Steadfast that Lugosi make himself into the cinematic version of Count Dracula, Jack Pierce was relegated to designing a green greasepaint for the character (through Max Factor's organization), and likely designed the widow's peak hairstyle in concert with hairstyling department head Lily Dirigo. Instead of working on the title character, Pierce, Dirigo, and costume designer Vera West collaborated to create the looks for Helen Chandler as Mina and the Count's brides. Nonetheless, when it was released in February of 1931, *Dracula* was an unqualified smash, and the Universal brass clamored for a follow-up. Though Lugosi was originally cast as the Monster when screenwriter-director Robert Florey was putting together the next Universal horror effort, *Frankenstein*, Junior Laemmle dismissed the test footage, claiming that the Lugosi Monster was too derivative of the title character in the German classic *Der Golem* (1920). When both Lugosi and Florey were subsequently assigned to *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), an incalculable opportunity arose for Jack Pierce, Universal, and fans of horror film when Pierce went on to create the Frankenstein Monster makeup with Boris Karloff. One can only speculate what has happened to the 1931 test footage of Lugosi as the Frankenstein Monster. And

most obviously, the appearance of Lugosi in character as Count Dracula in full makeup, costume, hairstyling stands as one of the indelible images in cinema history.

Alas, in 1936, Carl Laemmle Senior and Junior put their final Universal pictures into production. Just before cash problems forced the Laemmles to sell the studio in 1937, they managed to make *Dracula's Daughter*, featuring a stunning and yet simple Jack Pierce makeup on Irving Pichel but no Lugosi in the cast. A sequel to 1931's *Dracula*, the film was the last horror picture that the Laemmles produced but did not feature Lugosi either. Pierce also worked on James Whale's *Showboat* that year, a final bow for the father-son production team. Sadly, Senior Laemmle passed away in 1939; Junior passed forty years later, never having produced another film after leaving Universal (though he dabbled at MGM for a time in the late 1930s).

In 1943, Universal cast Chaney, Jr. as the lead character in the atmospheric horror thriller *Son of Dracula*, oddly, a dozen years after the first *Dracula* and a full seven years after *Dracula's Daughter* - an atypical practice for the release of sequels in that time period. Though *Son of Dracula* did not offer Pierce the challenge of creating a completely original monster character in



the same stead as his other horror creations, it allowed him the chance to use his considerable hair work skills.

Though he had briefly been considered to play *Dracula* in 1931, it took John Carradine until 1944 to play Count Dracula,

and he did so working with Pierce in *House of Frankenstein* and again in 1945 in *House of Dracula*. In *House of Dracula*, Pierce again demonstrated his hair work abilities, making a mad scientist of actor Onslow Stevens.

Béla Lugosi would don the cape only one more time to play Count Dracula, for

Illustration by Ray 'SPOOKY' Santoleri



Universal Studios *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* in 1948, a full 17 years after his unprecedented success in *Dracula*. Oddly, those two screen appearances are the only two times Lugosi actually played the character, though he also played in numerous stage versions of *Dracula* and in vampire films including 1935's *Mark of the Vampire*. By 1948, after a merger with International Pictures, Universal's key department heads, including Jack Pierce, had been replaced.

Nonetheless, based nearly in total on the 1931 film, Lugosi's thick Hungarian accent, fluid bodily movements and hand gestures, and pallid facial stares and smiles cemented his performance in the minds of viewers for the past eight decades as the definitive Count Dracula. Moreover, Lugosi's idiosyncratic vocal stylings in the film remain unforgettable touchstones in American popular culture. In the end, Count Dracula, though the character and numerous spinoffs, extractions, and parallels have appeared since, is certainly remembered most



strongly as a Béla Lugosi creation and the best of all time.

## THE *FRANKENSTEIN* LEGACY

With *Dracula* debuting in February of 1931, it would only be a matter of time before Universal tried to reproduce its tremendous success. The result was a production of *Frankenstein* which would be initiated mid-year and be released by year's end. With Béla Lugosi and director Robert Florey out and nascent director James Whale getting the assignment, he began casting about for a suitable actor to play the Monster. According to legend, he spotted a little-known supporting actor in the Universal commissary during lunch, suggesting that his face had possibilities. Of course, that performer, then already into his early 40s, would be Boris Karloff. Soon, Whale would bring many other Britons into the cast with whom he had worked on various productions.

Into pre-production of *Frankenstein*, Whale immediately put Jack Pierce to work to establish the makeup for Boris Karloff's monstrous character. What they came up with together, working after hours three hours per day for three weeks in Pierce's makeup bungalow, is one of the most recog-

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nizable icons in cinema history.

Still lauded by numerous makeup and effects artists who have come since, the original *Frankenstein* from 1931 remains a benchmark for movie makeup. “I believe this character has been the greatest of all monsters portrayed in motion pictures,” said Jack Pierce in 1962. Pierce described in great detail what inspired his classic character conception after he read the novel—given to him by Carl Laemmle Junior—three times in 1930. “I did research work for six months before I created the Frankenstein monster,” he said. “It was a lot of hard work, trying to find ways and means, what can you do? Frankenstein wasn’t a doctor; he was a scientist, so ... he had to take the head and open it, ... and he took wires to rivet the head. I had to [add] the electrical outlets to connect electricity in here on the neck. I made it out of clay and put hair on it and took it in to Junior Laemmle’s office. He said, ‘you mean to tell me you can do this on a human being?’ I said, ‘positively.’ He said, ‘all right, we will go the limit.’”

For Pierce’s first *Frankenstein* film — there were six eventual sequels for which he would create a monster — he described the process of assembling the character.



“The wig was made with a cotton roll on the top to get the flatness and the circle that protrudes out from the head,” he revealed. “Instead of giving [the character] a round head, you get a different edge around the sides. The entire head was built new every day. The large gash on the top of the forehead, that’s where you open the head to put the brains in there, the artificial brain. It took three hours each morning. Then the electrodes were put on his neck. The makeup was sky gray, originated by me through Max Factor’s organization.”

Graciously, Pierce reserved his final comments regarding James Whale’s landmark *Frankenstein* for his friend and longtime colleague, Boris Karloff. “For Boris, the coat was cut down so the length of arms and the fingers would look long,” he explained. “Everything was in black to give him the height. Also, I padded him to look eight feet tall. I didn’t really teach him how to walk. Boris and I would talk, but the man is, I think, the greatest of them all as far as playing these parts.”

Though it took Universal four years to bring the long-rumored sequel to *Frankenstein* to the screen, the second film in the cycle, *The Bride of Frankenstein* introduced one striking new Jack Pierce creation to Mary Shelley’s world. In addition to a new frontally-burned version of the monster, again Karloff, Pierce brought a




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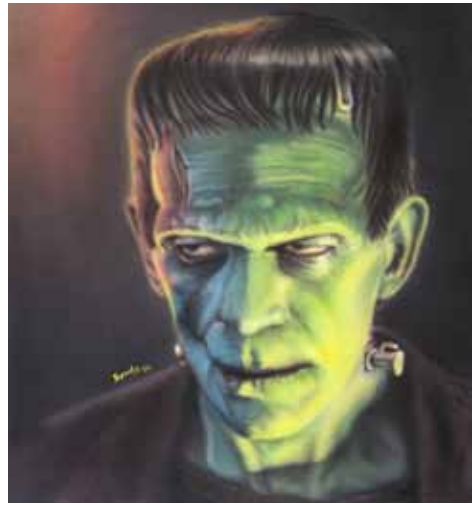
“bride” to the screen in the form of actress Elsa Lanchester. Only appearing at the end of the film, and then for only a few minutes, the image of Lanchester as the Bride of Frankenstein remains as iconic as the 1931 visage of the first Monster. With augmented lips, eyebrows, and eyelashes, plus her amazing shock of hair - ostensibly put up in a wire cage with asymmetrical electric wisps of gray - the Bride, with her bird-like motions and subtle chin scars, manages to simultaneously attract and repel. Both beautiful and horrifying, Lanchester’s brief, quirky appearance on film as the Bride is one of Pierce’s simplest but most clever manifestations.

Although Whale had left the studio and Colin Clive had passed away in 1937, Pierce and Karloff re-teamed to create a third



modified version of the Monster and a new character Ygor with Béla Lugosi for *Son of Frankenstein*. The Monster would make appearances with new actors Lon Chaney, in *Ghost of Frankenstein*, Béla Lugosi, in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, and Glenn Strange, in both *House of Frankenstein* and *House of Dracula*. In the last film in the classic horror cycle, the aforementioned *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* was released in 1948 which also featured Strange in the title role.

In fact, the character which legions of fans will physically imitate if asked to portray the Frankenstein Monster is often the hulking, silent, arm-extended Strange version.



But undoubtedly, it is Karloff’s startling performance in the first 1931 film, and to some extent his dialogue-riddled portrayal in *Bride*, which stand as all-time classic horror roles. Karloff would go on to excellence in many films, stage work, and voice work over the next four decades, but it was *Frankenstein* that launched his starring career and stamped a classic character in the memories of the millions of horror fans who have come since.

Lugosi and Karloff, in one magical year, became instantaneous movie royalty, and both men, European emigrés, gave America its greatest two horror characters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and likely for eternity.



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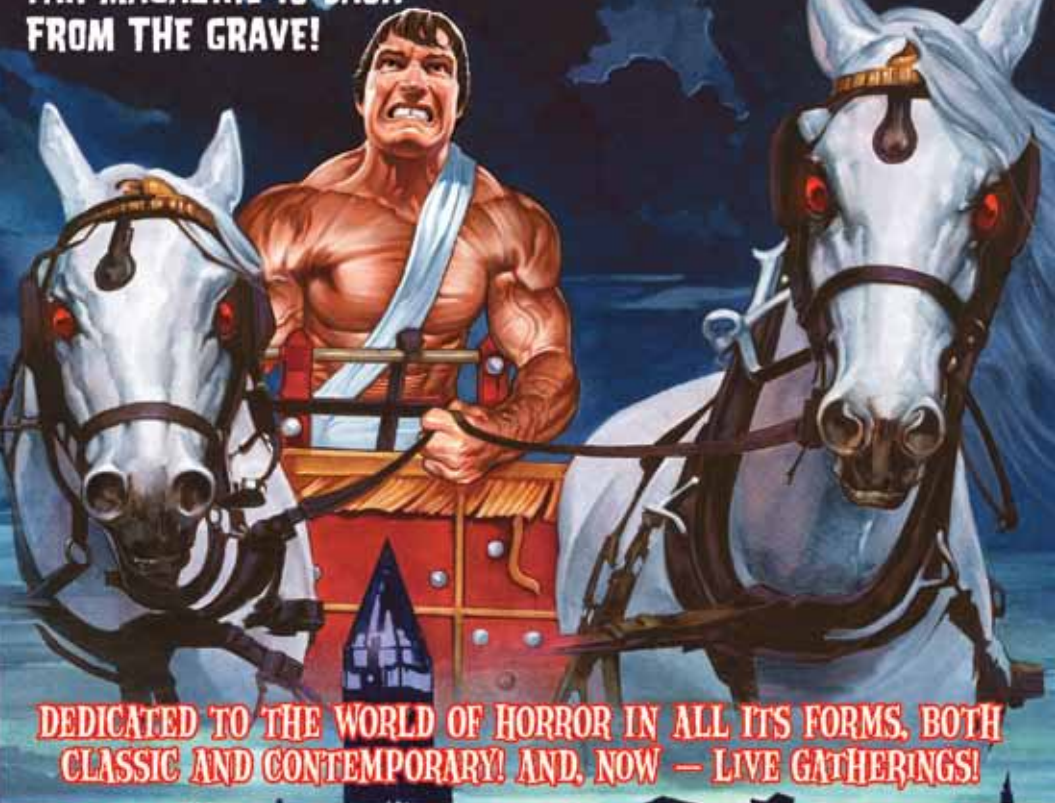
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