

L.A. OFFBEAT

STARLOG INTERVIEW

Edward Andrews A Character of an Actor

After almost 50 years in show business, this bespectacled veteran is still "inventing himself"—whether undergoing the trials of "The Twilight Zone" or the terrors of "Gremlins."

By JIM GEORGE



She wants his little dog Barney, too. Befuddled banker Edward Andrews watches as evil Mrs. Deagle (Polly Holliday) menaces Billy (Zach Galligan).

It's not braggadocio. It's fact. Veteran character actor Edward Andrews knows he is talented, and, refreshingly, he's not afraid to say it. Hold the humble pie.

"I'm cocky enough, still, to say that the things I do best, there isn't anyone in the business that can do them better than I," Andrews says evenly. "There are roles that *nobody* can play better than I. It seems awfully immodest, but I have no doubt about it in the world."

One year shy of celebrating his 50th anniversary as an actor, the burly, bespectacled 68-year-old Andrews isn't likely to draw any argument over his frank self-critique. His screen career, preceded by 20 years of stage work, has encompassed 53 films, most of which—classics and clinkers alike—are worth watching, if only for the moments Andrews is at work. "I always figure," he says, "any fool can learn lines, but what they pay you for is to say 'em better than anybody else can say 'em."

He'll certainly get no argument from director Joe Dante (STARLOG #85).

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30 STARLOG/October 1984

When Dante had a casting eye out for someone to portray the town banker in his summer blockbuster *Gremlins*, he knew just the actor who could say those lines better than anyone else.

"I had never met him before, let alone worked with him," says Andrews, "but he called and wanted to talk to me. He's a relatively young man, but a real movie buff. He said, 'You're one of those people I grew up with. When I was a kid in school...' and he went back and started to name movies. I said, 'A kid in school?! You were in kindergarten when you saw that!'"

"He said, 'I've always wanted you in a picture of mine, and now I've got a part for you, and I hope you do it. I'm not going to ask you to read anything for me, I just want to know if you would like to do this.'"

"Of course, from that moment on, what are you gonna do—when a man says that to you and has done his homework on you and gives you chapter and verse? And he wasn't kidding, because he would mention specific scenes I had done, and specific lines of dialogue!"

"He had to con me some, because the part is not all that much. There ain't no use in kidding, it's a small role. But I enjoyed myself thoroughly and had a chance to play it for its

comedy value. Joe has an off-the-wall sense of comedy that really appeals to me. He likes to make something up at the last moment, and he loves to have actors invent themselves."

Although Andrews began his screen career playing heavies—in 1956 in *The Phoenix City Story* ("I think I did six or seven films the first year. One heavy after another."), comedy has always been his first love. He juggles his theatrical masks masterfully, frequently bringing subtle comic nuances to otherwise dramatic roles.

Beyond the ever-present trademark black frame glasses is a mischievous eye-twinkle which can shift from playful to nefarious literally in the bat of an eyelash. The slightest curling in the corners of one of those wonderfully wicked tight-lipped smiles can completely alter the tenor of a characterization. Andrews may look like your Uncle Ed, but one is never quite certain what's truly happening behind the sly smirk.

Under Dante's direction in *Gremlins*, Andrews managed to have his banker role padded. Revealing one of his favorite tricks, Andrews says, "My device is to say, 'Hey Joe, I just thought of something—Oh, no, I don't guess that would do it.' And the directors say, 'Well, what? What? What?' 'No, I'm not sure it would work.' And they say, 'Well, let's see it! Let's try it!' It's a terrible, childish device, but it works. It's the way I work all the time."

"By the time we finished, as I remember, Joe gave me six or seven added scenes. He said, 'Now, we gotta shoot these early in the morning, because if you shoot 'em late in the day, somebody's always gonna bitch, 'Come on, you're shooting something that's *not* in the script!'"

"But I can't say enough about Joe Dante. There's a big generation gap between us, but it made no difference at all. I found myself absolutely crazy about him, kidding with him all the time, and he with me and everybody else. But boy oh boy, did he get the work done. Joe Dante is a wonderful director, awfully good. I would like to work with him again."

Andrews also expresses a desire to work under Steven Spielberg's direction, calling every facet of his films first class. As an executive producer of *Gremlins*, Spielberg did not obtrusively peer over Dante's shoulder during the shooting, Andrews confirms. "He was not in evidence on the set," he says.

"Not while I was there anyway. Although I'm sure he watched every bit of the footage that was shot, I only just met him."

"Twilight Zone" Fun

Gremlins is Andrews' first fantasy film ("Unless you want to call the current *Sixteen Candles* fantasy," he says, laughing), and he has never appeared in an SF movie ("Science fiction always kind of leaves me cold.").

Ah, but there were those two classic *Twilight Zone* TV episodes: "Third from the Sun" (1960), with Andrews delightfully sinister as Carling, a Big Brotherly government worker, and "You Drive" (1964), in which he starred as remorseless hit-and-run driver Oliver Pope.

"There was one that people still talk about," Andrews says, "and that's the one about the car. I go into a supermarket or somewhere, and the check-out girl will say, 'Oh gee, I just saw you on *Twilight Zone*!' That was great fun. It was a wonderful idea, really well done."

In the episode, written by Earl Hamner, Jr. (who would later create *The Waltons*), Andrews is pursued by his own car—an auto possessed of the conscience he lacks. Fleeing, he trips and falls. The speeding vehicle jerks to a halt just short of his head.

Asked if he recalls the scene, Andrews says, "Yeah, sure I do, but that wasn't me. That was a guy named Bill Clark, who doubled me (as well as Dan Blocker). They cut to a close-up of my face, of course."

"At first, they said, 'Now listen, Ed. Don't worry about this. We're gonna put the car in reverse and it will back up real fast, and we'll reverse the camera so it looks like the car's coming up on you.' I said, 'Yeah, but how do I know it's in reverse?' 'Well, you get to put it in reverse.' I said, 'No, no, call Bill Clark.' Bill came over and picked up a quick \$300 for lying down there."

Andrews laughs his easy, husky laugh and adds, "I'm terribly cowardly about that kind of thing. I just won't do it."

Being stunt-shy resulted from a rather painful experience while shooting a Western earlier in his career. Admittedly not at home on the range, Andrews was nonetheless prodded to "trot into town" on horseback.

"I did the trot into town," says Andrews, "and they wanted to do another take, for insurance, so we shot it again. This time, the damn horse shied at something, and I fell off and broke my wrist. It's absolutely stupid, and I realized right then that you should get some nice double who'll do that for you. Otherwise, what you're actually doing is taking a check away from them."

Another vintage TV series Andrews remembers fondly is *Thriller*, hosted by Boris Karloff. He recalls, "I did three or four segments. There was a wonderful guy—he's dead now—named Sobleman, and he wrote one for me. Then, it was so successful, they wrote a few more. I wish they did that kind of tongue-in-cheek stuff now."

Episodic television today holds no interest for Andrews, but he does pop up in commercials, sales-pitching for the phone company.

Besides providing him with "a terribly pleasant annuity," the spots are succinctly classic Andrews fare. In seconds flat, with a scant few words and expressions, he breathes life into the character and turns in a memorable mini-performance as a company boss.

Gremlins and *Sixteen Candles* notwithstanding, the actor admits that he's offered fewer and fewer scripts as the years pass. "And the parts begin to get a little smaller," he says good-naturedly. "I have to play pretty much my age and what I am, and there aren't that many parts written. And Burgess Meredith plays all the good ones! The rest of us are sort of sitting

Fall. I had a wonderful relationship with him. He had heard I was a sailor and had a boat, so he invited me out on *Santana*, his ocean racing yawl, for the weekend with a couple of other guys. I had never met the man in my life, and just worked with him for a few days. Bogart said, 'Well, if you're a sailor, you can't be all bad.' It was terrific."

A partial list of Andrews' other credits includes roles in *Advise and Consent*, *The Young Savages*, *The Unguarded Moment* ("The only film Esther Williams did dry."), *Kisses for My President*, *Youngblood Hawke*, *Send Me No Flowers*, *Tora! Tora! Tora!* and *Avanti!*



He's a Babbitt. That's Edward Andrews making a point to evangelist Elmer Gantry (Burt Lancaster) in the Oscar-winning 1960 film.

around."

The exposure as grandfather in *Sixteen Candles* and the banker in *Gremlins* could change all that. Is Andrews, once conductor on *Supertrain*, ready to be part of a pop phenomenon?

"Of course," he says. "Who in the world would say 'no' to that? If you hit a real good one, everyone connected with it profits. Your stock in the business always goes up when you're associated with a box-office hit. We all long for those."

The roles he is proudest of have come in a number of films. "I really loved playing George Babbitt in *Elmer Gantry*," he says.

"Just the idea of actually playing a character where a word has come into the language—you know, 'He's a Babbitt.' It all stands for something. That I thought was fun and challenging. That's one of my favorites. *Tea and Sympathy* is another."

"My daughter dug up some old stills and gave 'em to me for Christmas. There's a courtroom scene in one from *These Wilder Years*, and I'm cross-examining Jimmy Cagney on the stand. And in the background of this four-shot is Walter Pidgeon and Barbara Stanwyck. It's just a treasure to me."

"And I worked with Humphrey Bogart in the last film he ever made, *The Harder They*

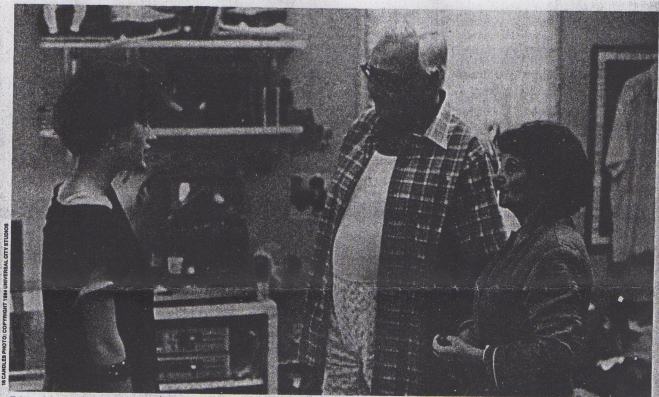
Like Dante, most directors no longer request readings from Andrews. One notable exception was Billy Wilder during the casting of *Avanti!* Andrews explains: "I thought that there was a man who was so distinguished that if he wanted me to read, I would."

Assuming a verbal equivalent of that devilish glint he gets in his eyes, Andrews continues. "I said, 'Now, if I'm gonna read, I'm gonna read the whole thing.' Which was the last third of the picture. And I did, and got the job. He wanted Walter Matthau, of course, but the part wasn't big enough for Walter."

"That's one of my lines—occasionally, somebody will ask, 'Would you mind reading for us?' And I say, 'Well now, you know, nobody's asked me to do that since Billy Wilder.' And very often, they say, 'Oh well, it's not necessary.'"

Rock 'n' Roll Rubbish

Edward Andrews differs from the majority of his acting brethren in that he has never earned a dollar doing anything but acting. He is, justifiably, proud of that fact. Born in Griffin, Georgia in 1915, he joined a stock company at age 20, fresh from the University of Virginia, hitting the boards for a two-decade stretch of stage acting.



Edward Andrews makes a rare appearance without pants in *Sixteen Candles*. He's Grandpa Howard with Grandpa Dorothy (Billie Bird) to young Sam (Molly Ringwald) of *Spacehunter*, (left).

There is a small asterisk to his clean record: that one season many years ago when he wore a producer's hat at a summer theater. "I hated that," he adds. "It's terrible what you must go through if you're trying to run a theater. I found myself worried more about what happened when the johns overflowed in the women's toilet than what was going on on-stage."

If anyone qualified as a mentor to Andrews it was the late Clay Clement, a well-established New York actor whom Andrews met when he first began acting.

"I love to tell young actors this," Andrews says, "when I'm fond of them and think they're talented. I was rehearsing a play in New York, and Clay and I met for lunch. I was very disturbed. I said, 'Clay, this morning I asked the director—' He said, 'I beg your pardon?' I said, 'I asked the director—' He said, 'You asked the director?!' 'Yes. He said, 'Dear boy, the only thing you ever ask a director is 'When do we break for lunch?'"

"Then, he continued, 'In the first place, it's bad manners. He's the director, and must answer you. But how would *he* know, dear boy? Chances are that if he could play the part, he would be playing it himself!'"

"This mustn't be taken the wrong way, but I *have* found through the years that it's best *not* to ask the director something. Just go ahead and do it, and he'll tell you quickly enough if he *doesn't* like it. But if you ask him, you open a whole big can of peas, and now he *must* make a decision."

Andrews illustrates the validity of this policy in recounting an incident that occur-

red while shooting *Sixteen Candles*. The gentle juvenile comedy is not his "cup of tea," although he did enjoy himself during the six-weeks' location filming in Illinois.

The somewhat raunchy language uttered freely throughout the movie is something Andrews adamantly feels should not cross the lips of *his* characters. "It's very popular these days," he says, "but it somehow doesn't fit the way I look or the way I act or anything else."

"I had a line—it was simple, but it was vulgar, and I didn't want to say it: 'I can't stand that rock 'n' roll crap!' That was my line. I never discussed it with John Hughes, the writer-director—and a very nice guy. When we got to shoot it, I just said, 'I can't stand that rock 'n' roll *rubbish!*' And it gets a laugh. 'Crap' wouldn't. John bought it."

"If I find it in a line, I simply drop it out. And the *amazing* thing is that *no one*—no director—has ever corrected me. I have never had an unpleasant experience by simply skipping it. Now, I can visualize situations in which vulgarity would be absolutely essential, where it was a real point. Usually, I don't get those kinds of roles."

Andrews' roles are invariably men of power or authority, like the town banker in *Gremlins* or professionals (doctors, lawyers). While he looks the part(s), the ultimate test of any actor's worth is his believability, and Andrews' characterizations always ring true. Believability, he would agree, consists of innate talent and experience in equal parts.

He says, "Everything hasn't been roses, and it took a long time coming, but much of

it was learning my business. And when the opportunities came, I was *ready*. By the time I got a chance to play a role like Babbitt in *Elmer Gantry*, I knew *exactly* how to do that."

"Sometimes I'll be playing comedy with young actors and they'll say, 'You do that bit and it's so funny—how did you know it would work?' I tell them, 'I'm really not taking any chance at all, because I played on the stage for so long, and I've done some variation of that particular piece of business, that I know that it works for me. You just learn what works.'"

And the best piece of acting advice he ever received? Andrews pauses, then says, "Clay Clement told me one time: 'Are you ready for an absolute truism? I've been working on this for about 40 years and I'm finally ready to pass it on to you.' He was doing a picture with Elia Kazan at the time, and he said, 'Just two days ago, I did it again, and it worked beautifully. I'll tell you what to do in *one sentence* when *any* director says *anything* to you at *any* time: You do just what you were doing, except a little bit louder.'"

"And if you substitute for the word 'loud,' *conviction*, I think you've got it made," Edward Andrews explains. "I think that's a lovely piece of advice. He used to always say, 'Remember, it's conviction, conviction, conviction. Sweeps all before it. If you're ever in a situation where you're stuck and the theatrical tradition or your own technique doesn't tell you what to do, just make up *anything*—within reason—and then do it with all the conviction in the world, and believe me, it'll work.' "