

**Title: The Movies**

**Subtitle: Phantom Fan Store**

**Second Subtitle: #0 The Phantom of the Opera has seen many incarnations on the big screen (and little screen), most of them having little in common with Leroux's story other than the name. Those currently available are introduced below.**

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Links are to DVD versions except where only video is available. Please remember that different countries use different formats (PAL in the UK, NTSC in the US for video; different regions for DVD), and make sure you can play the format you're buying.

**The Phantom of the Opera, starring Lon Chaney (1925)**

If it hadn't been for Lon Chaney, who held out for this first ever film version of Phantom to be made by Universal, Gaston Leroux's novel might well have sunk into obscurity beyond Ken Hill or Andrew Lloyd Webber's view. The film remains one of the most faithful movie adaptations of the story (though of course that isn't saying much...). Of course to modern audiences not used to silent movies the acting seems odd, but Chaney was the most subtle and accomplished actor of the silent era, and once you accept the conventions of films of the time he gives a truly moving, emotion-filled performance. Compare him with some of the other, rather hokey performances in the film - his is by far the most real.

[UK - The Phantom Of The Opera \(1925\)](#)

[US - The Phantom Of The Opera \(1925\)](#)

**The Phantom of the Opera, starring Claude Rains (1943)**

Universal's second version of the Phantom story was geared towards taking advantage of the widescreen Technicolor technology, full of opera and operetta sequences, which now tend to drag (unless you're into the 1940's version of that kind of thing). The story doesn't just make radical departures from the book, it pretty much ignores it. Rains is a charismatic actor with a beautiful voice, and he has some moments of good emotion. Unfortunately the story changes really ruin it as a version of Phantom. This "Phantom" is a musician when he falls in love with Christine, whose singing lessons he pays for. He loses his position, tries to sell his compositions only to have them stolen, then is scarred by acid in a fight. There's a sad ending, but no kiss - this Phantom is entirely a father figure. Rains gives an excellent performance in his anguished disfigurement scene, but really this film has nothing to do with the original story or characters as we know them.

[UK - Phantom of the Opera \(1943\)](#)

[US - Phantom of the Opera \(video, 1943\)](#)

**The Phantom of the Opera, starring Herbert Lom (1962)**

Hammer's 1962 version is another than pays no heed to the original story, with a Phantom disfigured by fire and acid, camping out under the London Opera in a rather grotty mask. In fact this Phantom is more of a shabby aging composer than the perfectly-attired, passionate genius of the novel. There's nothing wrong with Herbert Lom's performance given the constraints of the role as written, but this movie doesn't have a lot to recommend it to Phantom fans (again, no kiss) except for

completist value.

[UK - The Phantom Of The Opera \(1962\)](#)

[US - The Phantom of the Opera \(1962, video\)](#)

### **The Phantom of the Opera, starring Maximilian Schell (1983)**

This version appears to be unavailable in the US, but it's not much of a loss. Again, a fine actor is put in the role of the Phantom, but a Phantom who bears scant relation to Leroux's. He was disfigured in a fire, Christine (Jane Seymour) is the spitting image of his dead wife. Michael York is their version of Raoul. I found this version slow and tedious in the extreme, and it's pretty much my least favourite of the lot. My husband says I should praise Stan Winston's make-up... but I don't remember liking it much myself.

[UK - Phantom Of The Opera \(1983\)](#)

### **The Phantom of the Opera, animated (1988)**

Although the animation in this 50 minute film is crude compared to what we're used to (no hint of an attempt to make their lips move as if they were really talking), it's surprisingly cute and surprisingly faithful to Leroux - perhaps the most faithful of all the film versions so far. The script uses liberal quotations from the novel, and Erik even looks as Leroux described. Apparently the first time since 1925 that anyone making a film of Phantom bothered to read the book.

[US - Phantom of the Opera \(animated, 1988\)](#)

[UK - Phantom Of The Opera \(animated version, 2002\)...](#) - I am not 100% positive that this is the same version; it could be a reissue, but the picture on the cover looks different in animation style.

### **The Phantom of the Opera, starring Robert Englund (1989)**

Aka the slasher version. Robert Englund is most known for playing Freddy Kreuger, and this version capitalizes on that by being out and out horror, with graphic deaths and a gory make-up. Oh, and a sex scene with a prostitute. (On the good side, their version of Raoul dies, and what Phantom fan hasn't secretly wanted to see that?) In fact, if you can look past the slasher movie (and time shifting) aspects of the film, it has some beautiful scenes, particularly the scene at the graveyard. The cinematography, sets and costumes are excellent, the music written by the Phantom appropriately haunting, and it uses the music (and story elements) of Faust. Until the end, where all sympathy for him is lost, Englund's performance does have some nice emotion and touching moments.

[UK - Phantom of the Opera \(REGION 1\) \(NTSC\)](#)

[US - The Phantom Of The Opera \(1989\)](#)

### **The Phantom of the Opera, starring Charles Dance (1990, miniseries)**

Acclaimed director Tony Richardson shot this version, based on the Kopit/Yeston musical but without the songs, at the Paris Opera House itself - so needless to say, it's a treat to look at for Phantom fans. Dance's Phantom is romantic, sympathetic, gentlemanly and attractive, so many fans love this version, but at nearly 3 hours it really drags. It also makes dramatic changes to the story which effect the characters, most notably Dance's Phantom having been brought up in the depths of the opera house by his father, which rather ruins the whole never been loved, lifetime of abuse and rejection aspect of the character. We also never get to see his actual face! I find this version just too sappy and soppy, and Teri Polo's Christine gets on my nerves, but some fans love it so it's worth checking out and deciding for yourself.

[UK - The Phantom of the Opera \(1990, miniseries\)](#)

[US - The Phantom of the Opera \(miniseries, 1990\)](#)

### **The Phantom of the Opera, starring Julian Sands (1998)**

Dario Argento's film is stylish, psychologically fascinating, and utterly weird. This is definitely not a version that will be enjoyed by people who aren't already partial to Argento's work; it's weird. The Phantom was raised by rats. The most majorly weird bit of it would be too much of a spoiler for me to give away, but suffice it to say I was left with a very different interpretation of the story in this version than in any other. It is perhaps best read as a story where the Phantom is entirely in Christine's head, a fantasy or delusion grown from the status of women, particularly women in the theatre, at the time. As I said, unless you already like Argento, it's not going to be popular amongst Phantom fans.

[UK - Dario Argento's Phantom Of The Opera \(1998\)](#)

[US - Dario Argento's Phantom of the Opera \(1998\)](#)

### **Andrew Lloyd Webber's Phantom of the Opera, starring Gerard Butler and Emmy Rossum (2004)**

You already know this one. Joel Schumacher's movie takes us a world away from the stage show or novel, into a fantasy Paris with a young and sexy cast, ornate scenery, and soap opera emotions. Singing ability was less important to him than looks, and the changes made the the characters ages and backstories completely alter the dynamics and psychological motivations of the story. Still, it's pretty to look at, and many people adore Butler's Phantom even though he couldn't pass as an Angel of Music to a deaf monkey. Emmy Rossum is as doe-eyed as Sarah Brightman ever was. The rest of the cast is mostly excellent. Have a supply of rotten tomatoes to throw at the TV when Andrew Lloyd Webber disses the original novel in the extras. Who does he think he is, Frederick Forsyth?

[UK - ALW/JS Phantom Of The Opera \(2004\)](#)

[US - ALW/JS Phantom Of The Opera \(2004\)](#)