



## THE JOKER

### *Cesar Romero on being Crime's Clown Prince.*

By Bob Garcia

"I never thought very much of Batman because I never saw the comic strip," said Cesar Romero, who was called on by producer William Dozier to play the Joker after episodes had been filmed with Frank Gorshin as the Riddler and Burgess Meredith as the Penguin. Dozier screened the first episode for Romero at Fox. "It was just great," said Romero. "I thought 'My God. This is really fun.' When I read the script I said, 'Why sure I'll do this. I'd love to do it.'"

"Why he wanted me for the Joker I will never know," said Romero. "His wife Anne Rutherford said he saw me in something that made him want to cast me. I can't imagine what it was. I'd never done anything like that before."

Duplicating the look of the comics, the Joker as he appeared at the time of the TV show, in July 1965.



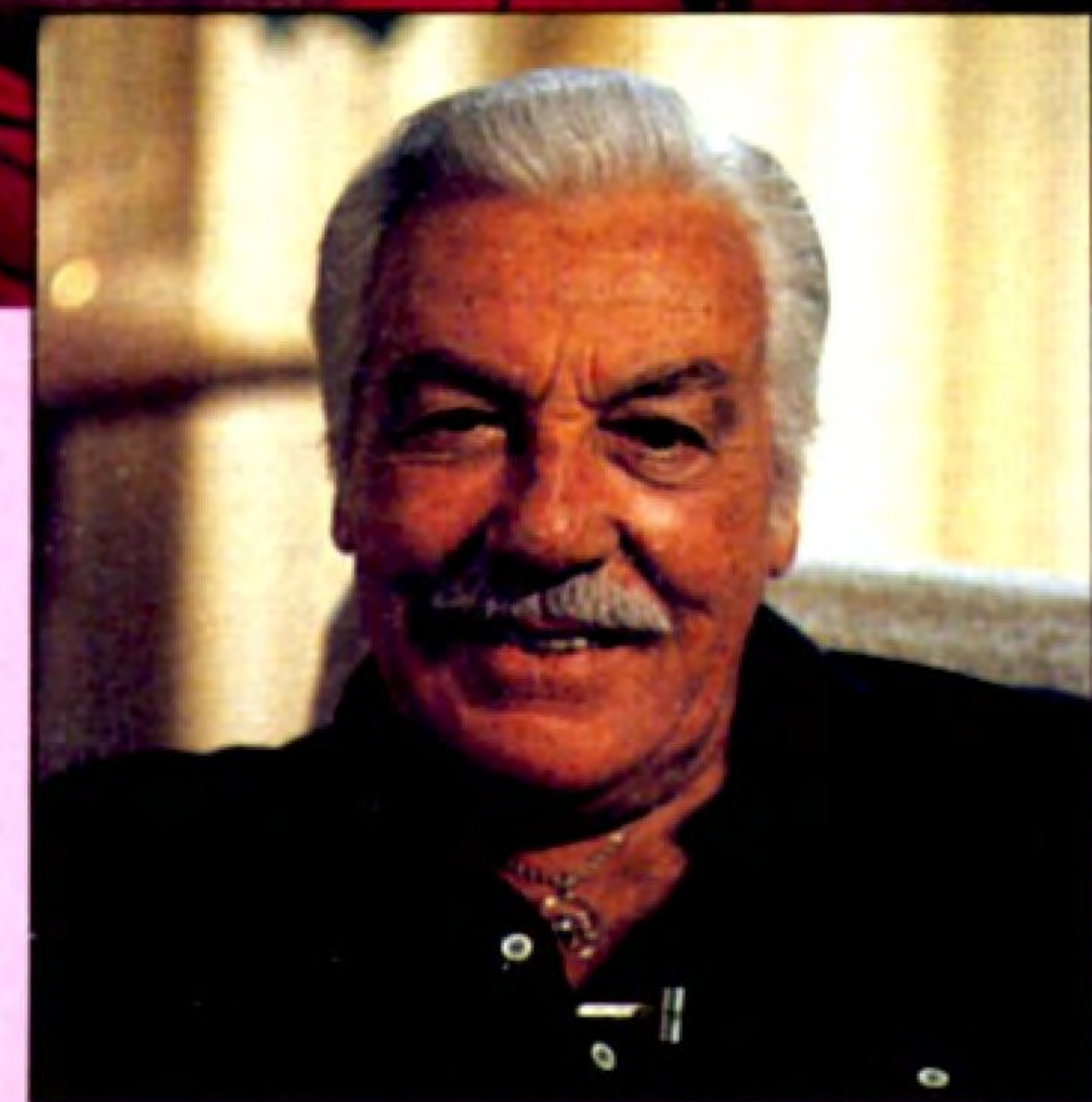
Jan Kemp the costume designer for the show, remembered Romero's first reaction to his costume. "Cesar Romero was always the epitome of the well-dressed gentleman," said Kemp. "At our first meeting, I said to him that I would like to preserve that image in his costume and planned to give him a smartly tailored dress tail suit. He approved. I explained further, 'Of course, it will be a burgundy color with black stripes on the pants. You should have a green shirt and a floppy black silk tie with white face makeup and green hair, not forgetting green socks!' He started to giggle with this insane cackle. The producers were there, and he had us all in stitches with his hysterical laughter. He decided to keep the laugh in the show as his trademark."

Romero loved playing the Joker. "It was a very easy character to go into," said Romero. "I didn't prepare for it in any way at all. Once you get into that costume and get the wig and makeup on, you change completely. It was a ball to whoop it up, laugh and scream. It was a hammy part. You see, I was never a straight leading man in pictures. Far and few between were the pictures where I ended up with the girl. I was always sort of a second banana. When I first started in pictures I played a lot of gangsters."

Romero cited CAPTAIN FROM CASTILLE, in which he played Cortez, as one of his favorite roles. "I've thoroughly enjoyed making a tremendous variety of pictures, said Romero. "The Joker was just another character that came along, but I hope I'm not only



As The Joker, Romero refused to shave off his trademark moustache, makeup by Bruce Hutchinson, costume by Jan Kemp. Inset: On the show's 1986 20th anniversary.



going to be remembered as the Joker."

Like with Meredith, Gorshin and Julie Newmar as Catwoman—the directors stayed out of Romero's way and let him do his stuff. "I didn't get any direction from any of the directors," said Romero. "They let me alone. There was nothing to change."

The producers also stayed out of Romero's way when it came to the makeup and his famous mustache, which he refused to shave off for the show. "I grew my mustache when I was 23-years-old, because I was very much in love with a lady ten years older than I," said Romero. "She wanted me to look older. I've had it ever since. The Joker was just one week's work at the time. I wasn't going to shave it off and told them that. I told them to just pile makeup on it. That was perfectly all right with them."

After an hour of makeup in the morning, Romero was transformed into the Clown Prince of Crime. "I think it was one of the

show's best villains," said Romero. "And from the reaction I get, I think the audience did to. I think they were more attracted to the Joker, Penguin and Catwoman than many of the characters."

But by the third season, even that excitement began to wear thin, for the actor as well as the audiences, mainly because the scripts were weaker. "I think that after 2 1/2 years they didn't know where to go with it," said Romero. "It seems as if they were doing the same thing over and over again. There wasn't enough variety in the stories. I guess, they went about as far as they could go with it."

For Romero the role was just another acting job. "You're an actor and you go out and act," he said. "I like to keep busy. But is there anything of the Joker in me? I don't think so. That was just a character to play." □