

SCREEN

# Actor

## To the Actors

It is with great pleasure that we present you with the 75th anniversary commemorative issue of *Screen Actor*.

This issue is dedicated to you, our members, with gratitude for your support and solidarity and with admiration for your commitment to your art and your Guild.

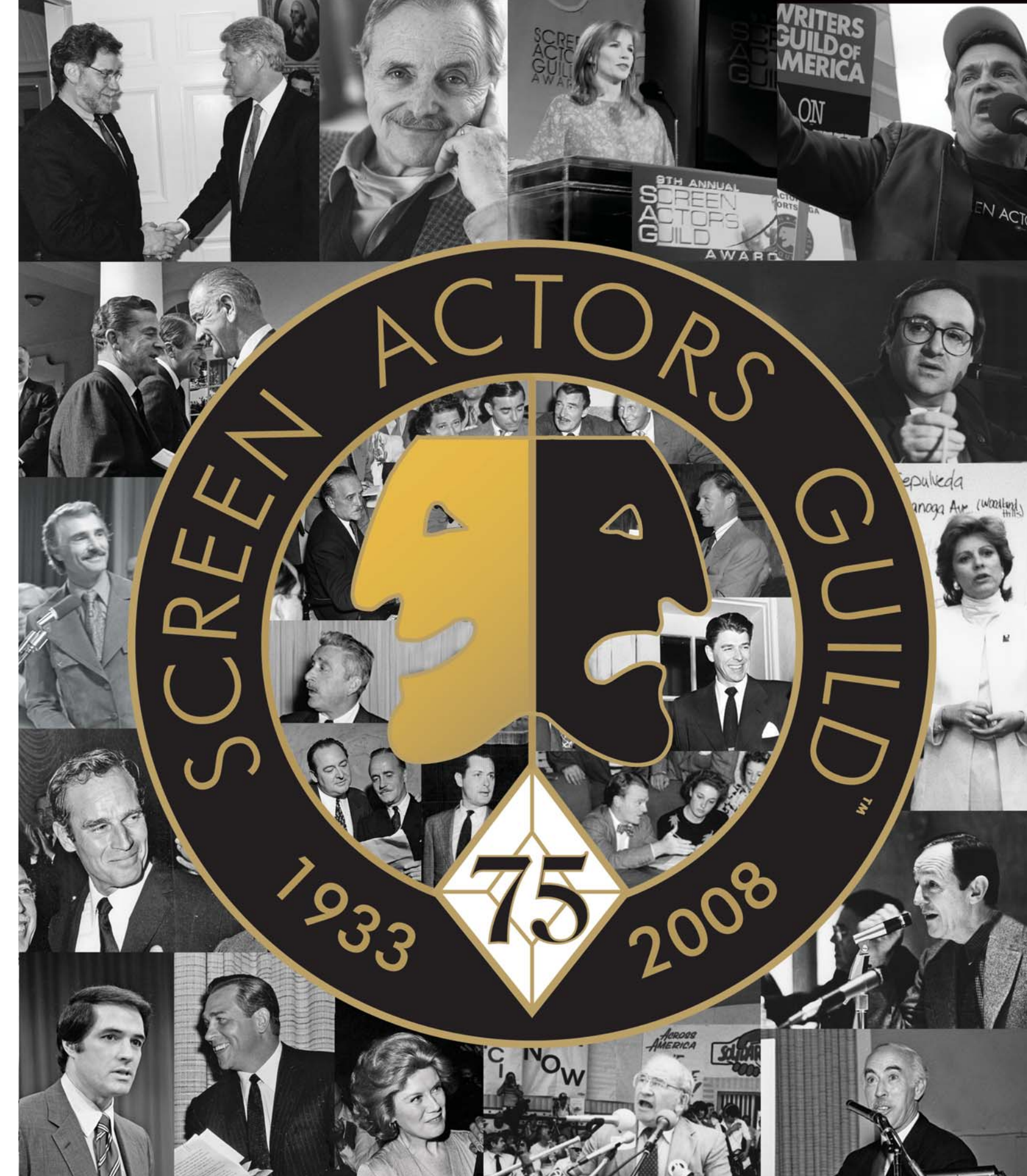
Our anniversary journey began with the formation of the Presidents' 75th Anniversary Task Force. Guided by Presidents Alan Rosenberg, William Schallert, Ed Asner, Barry Gordon, Richard Masur, Melissa Gilbert, Patty Duke and Chair Kathleen Nolan, the task force played a key role in 75th planning.

Screen Actors Guild will be honoring the history of the union throughout the year. In future issues of this magazine, you will find further installments of our "In their Words" quotes, round-table interviews with elected leaders and a special pull-out featuring the first 75 members.

We wish you great enjoyment of your magazine and all of the special celebrations throughout the year.

**Happy 75th Anniversary  
Screen Actors Guild Members.**

National Communications Committee  
National Editorial Subcommittee



**SAG PRESIDENTS**  
Outside logo, clockwise from top left: Richard Masur with President William J. Clinton, William Daniels, Melissa Gilbert, Alan Rosenberg, Barry Gordon, Patty Duke, William Schallert, George Chandler, Edward Asner, Kathleen Nolan, Howard Keel, John Gavin, Charlton Heston, Dennis Weaver and Dana Andrews with President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Inside logo, clockwise from top left: Eddie Cantor, Walter Pidgeon, George Murphy, Ronald Reagan, James Cagney, Robert Montgomery, Edward Arnold with first SAG President Ralph Morgan and Leon Ames.

# James Cagney



## FORMER SAG PRESIDENT; ENDURING HOLLYWOOD LEGEND

“He was the best, greatest gangster who ever lived,” writes a fan in response to a YouTube clip of James Cagney’s speech as he accepted the American Film Institute’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 1974.

Clearly, Cagney’s appeal bridges generations of fans over 75 years after his 1930 film debut. He was never a real-life gangster, of course, but an actor who played his roles so distinctively that he became a legend. In 1999, he was memorialized on a U.S. postage stamp as the fifth motion picture figure in the “Legends of Hollywood” series, after Marilyn Monroe, James Dean, his fellow Guild board member Humphrey Bogart and director Alfred Hitchcock. The board room at the Guild’s national headquarters is named for him with good reason: he was a tough advocate for actors’ rights, and he was among the first group of major stars to join the Guild in 1933, as member No. 50. He was a board member or officer from 1933 to 1947, including serving for six terms as 1st vice president and two years as president from 1942 to 1944. He returned to the board from 1955 to 1958.

Born and raised in New York’s tough and gritty Lower East Side, he started his career as a dancer, choreographer and actor in plays, Vaudeville and on Broadway. He made his film debut in 1930, but his leading role in *The Public Enemy* a year later made him a star. Though often typecast as a sympathetic “bad guy,” he proved his versatility in comedic, musical and even Shakespearean roles.

Cagney established the power of the walkout, and was eventually able to insist on doing no more than four films a year. Production conditions before Screen Actors Guild formed in 1933 could be nearly intolerable. Only the bigger stars had any control over their hours, breaks or working conditions, including the all-important rest period. One hundred-hour work weeks were not unusual, even for teenagers. In exchange

for the relative security of a contract, studios controlled the player’s roles, hours, publicity and often even their private lives. But they didn’t reckon on the defiance of a star like Cagney.

As a leading Guild member, Cagney was an agent of change years before his Guild presidency. Upon joining the Guild in 1933, he dove in as a leading contributor, serving on the Membership Committee, then being appointed to the Executive Committee. 1934 was an even busier year: he was elected 1st vice president and joined four additional committees charged with considering the issue of “Guild shop” recognition, investigated the possibility of publishing a magazine (the birth of today’s *Screen Actor* publication), consulted with the Screen Writers Guild on policies for dealing with the trade publications, and hashed out terms within the Motion Picture Code of Fair Competition. He helped raise funds for the Guild’s first annual ball, which was a stellar success, but when the Guild’s “Film Stars Frolic” wiped out the treasury in May of 1934, he stepped in with a generous loan to help cover the deficit.

In 1936, Cagney stunned the film community by walking out on and filing a successful lawsuit against Warner Bros. He joined the Guild’s first Labor Day Parade venture, too. Cagney continued using his influence to recruit new members to the Guild and offered the use of his home for special meetings, so by the time of his election to the Guild presidency in 1942, he was as “seasoned” as he could be.

He starred in more than 70 films, including *The Roaring Twenties*, *Taxi!*, *G-Men*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Here Comes the Navy*, *Angels with Dirty Faces* and *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. (*Dandy* won him the Academy Award for Best Actor of 1942.)

Cagney died March 30, 1986, at age 86. His legacy lives on as one of cinema’s and one of the Guild’s true legends.

PICTURED ABOVE (L-R), CAGNEY WITH PRISCILLA LANE IN *THE ROARING TWENTIES* (1939), CAGNEY WITH CAST IN *YANKEE DOODLE DANDY* (1942) AND CAGNEY WITH LORETTA YOUNG IN *TAXI!* (1932).