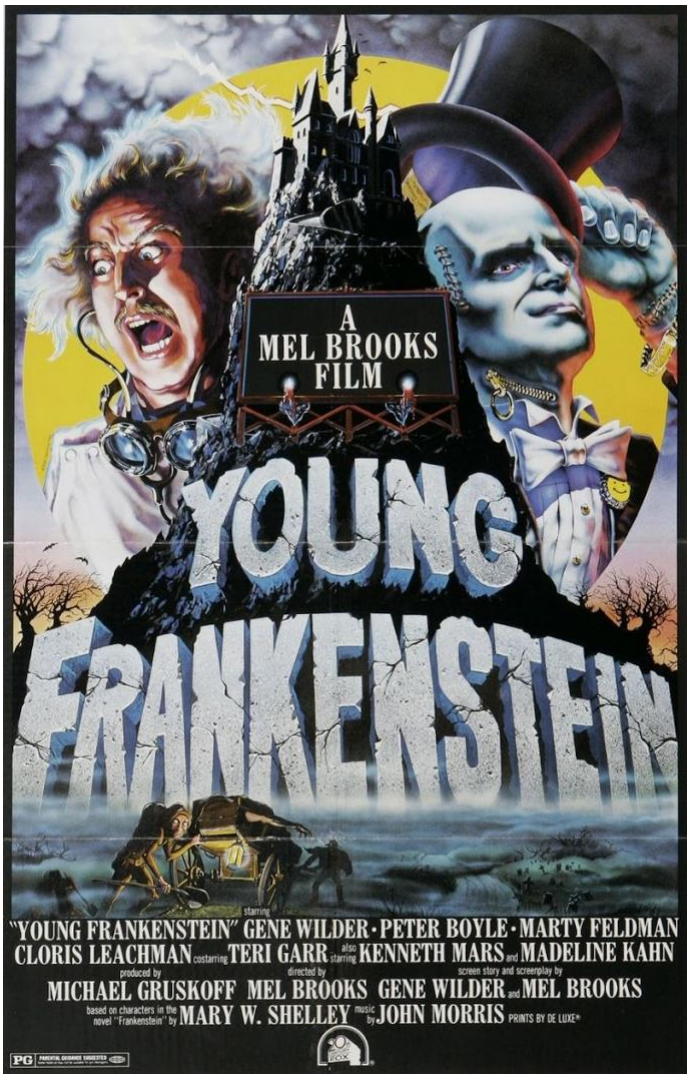
October 11, 2022 (XLV:7)
Mel Brooks: **YOUNG FRANKENSTEIN** (1974, 106 min)
URL for Introduction Vimeo: https://vimeo.com/758332258
URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom: https://vimeo.com/748377120



Director: Mel Brooks
Writers: Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder
Producer: Michael Gruskoff
Cinematography: Gerald Hirschfeld
Music: John Morris

National Film Registry, 2003

Young Frankenstein was nominated for two Academy Awards in 1975: Best Writing - Screenplay Adapted From Other Material (Gene Wilder and Mel Brooks) and Best Sound (Richard Portman and Gene S. Cantamessa). It was also nominated for two Golden Globes: Best Actress in a Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical (Cloris Leachman) and Best Supporting Actress - Motion Picture (Madeline Kahn).

CAST
Gene Wilder...Dr. Frederick Frankenstein
Peter Boyle...The Monster
Marty Feldman...Igor
Madeline Kahn...Elizabeth
Cloris Leachman...Frau Blücher
Teri Garr...Inga
Kenneth Mars...Inspector Kemp
Richard Haydn...Herr Falkstein
Liam Dunn...Mr. Hilltop
Danny Goldman...Medical Student
Oscar Beregi Jr....Sadistic Jailor (as Oscar Beregi)
Arthur Malet...Village Elder
Richard A. Roth...Insp. Kemp's Aide (as Richard Roth)
Monte Landis...Gravedigger
Rusty Blitz...Gravedigger
Anne Beesley...Little Girl
Gene Hackman...Blindman
John Madison...Villager
John Dennis...Orderly in Frankenstein's Class
Rick Norman...Villager
Rolfe Sedan...Train Conductor
Terence Pushman...Villager (as Terrence Pushman)
Randolph Dobbs...Third Villager - Joe
Norbert Schiller...Emcee at Frankenstein's Show
Pat O'Hara...Villager (as Patrick O'Hara)
Michael Fox...Helga's Father
Lidia Kristen...Helga's Mother

MEL BROOKS (Melvin Kamisky, b. June 28, 1926 in Brooklyn, New York City, New York) began his career as a comic and a writer for the early TV variety show *Your Show of Shows*. With Buck Henry, he wrote the hit television comedy series *Get Smart*, which ran from 1965 to 1970. Brooks became one of the most successful film directors of the 1970s, with many of his films being among the top 10 money makers of the year they were released. Of the 11 films he has directed, his best- known are *The Producers*** (1967), *The Twelve Chairs* (1970),

*Blazing Saddles*** (1974), *Young Frankenstein*** (1974), *Silent Movie*** (1976), *High Anxiety*** (1977), *History of the World, Part I*** (1981), *Spaceballs*** (1987), and *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*** (1993). He also directed *Life Stinks*** (1991) and *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*** (1995). He won an Oscar for Best Writing, Story and Screenplay - Written Directly for the Screen for *The Producers*. With Gene Wilder, he was nominated for an Oscar for Best Writing, Screenplay Adapted From Other Material, for *The Young Frankenstein*. He has acted in films and television series (61 credits), such as: *The Milton Berle Show* (TV Series) (1951), *Putney Swope* (1969), *The Twelve Chairs* (1970), *The 2000 Year Old Man* (TV Movie) (1975), *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975), *The Muppet Movie* (1979), *To Be or Not to Be* (1983), *Look Who's Talking Too* (1990), *The Silence of the Hams* (1994), *The Little Rascals* (1994), *The Simpsons* (TV Series) (1995), *Screw Loose* (1999), *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (TV Series) (2004), *Robots* (2005), *The Producers* (2005), *Mr. Peabody & Sherman* (2014), *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation* (2018), and *Toy Story 4* (2019). He has produced 23 films, and he has written for 45 films and television series, including: *The Admiral Broadway Revue* (TV Series) (1949), *New Faces* (1954), *Caesar's Hour* (TV Series) (1955-1957), *Sid Caesar Invites You* (TV Series) (1958), *The 2000 Year Old Man* (TV Movie) (1975), and *Spaceballs: The Animated Series* (TV Series) (2009-2009).

*Also wrote
**Wrote and acted in

GERALD HIRSCHFELD (April 25, 1921, New York City, New York-February 13, 2017 (age 95)) was an American cinematographer. He was self-taught, developing an enthusiastic interest in film and photography at a young age: "By going to the movies, I gradually learned the styles of all the top Hollywood cameramen," he told *American Cinematographer*. Joining the army at 19, he would gain experience studying under Hollywood cinematographers (including Leo Tover, who would later become his mentor) at the Signal Corps Photographic Center during World War II, where he also shot training videos. “I entered the service as a still photographer and came out a cinematographer," he said. After shooting his first feature-length film, the crime drama *C-Man* (1949), Hirschfeld began a career filming commercials. Alongside this career, he would amass 44 credits as cinematographer for film and television productions, among them *Secret Sins of the Father* (1994), *Child in the Night* (1990), *The Neon Empire* (1989), *Malone* (1987), *The House of God* (1984), *To Be or Not to Be* (1983), *My Favorite Year* (1982), *Neighbors* (1981), *The Bell Jar* (1979), *The World's Greatest Lover* (1977),*The Car* (1977), *Two-Minute Warning* (1976), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1970), *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970, *Last Summer* (1969), *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969), *The Incident* (1967), *Fail-Safe* (1964), *Two Gals and a Guy* (1951), *Mister Universe* (1951), *With These Hands* (1950), and *Guilty Bystander* (1950).

JOHN MORRIS (b. October 18, 1926 in Elizabeth, New Jersey–d. January 25, 2018 (age 91) in Red Hook, New York) was an American composer, conductor, pianist, and dance arranger best known for his collaborations with Mel Brooks and Gene Wilder. After a broad education that included study of piano at Juilliard, he wrote music for Joseph Papp’s Public Theater’s Shakespeare in the Park and contributed to a number of musicals, including a pre-Broadway production of *Hair* and two Broadway productions in collaboration with Mel Brooks: 1957’s *Shinbone Alley* and 1962’s *All-American*. With Brooks, Morris would compose the music for *The Producers* (1967), *The Twelve Chairs* (1970), *Blazing Saddles* (1974), *Young Frankenstein* (1964), *Silent Movie* (1976), *High Anxiety* (1977), *History of the World, Part 1* (1981), *To Be Or Not To Be* (1983), *Spaceballs* (1987), and *Life Stinks* (1991), as well as David Lynch’s *The Elephant Man* (1980), for which Brooks worked as an uncredited producer. Brooks referred to Morris as his “emotional right arm”: “Music tells you what to feel and he knew what I wanted you to feel,” he said, quoted in the New York Times obituary for Morris. “He composed it and made it happen.” His work for *Blazing Saddles* and *The Elephant Man* earned him two Academy Award nominations. He has 61 credits as film composer, including *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes’ Smarter Brother* (1975), *The World’s Greatest Lover* (1977), *The Woman in Red* (1984), *Haunted Honeymoon* (1986), *Clue* (1985), and *Dirty Dancing* (1987).

GENE WILDER (b. June 11, 1933 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA—d. August 29, 2016 (age 83) in Stamford, Connecticut, USA) was an American actor (37 credits), screenwriter (9 credits), and director (5 credits). Although his first film role was portraying a hostage in

the 1967 motion picture *Bonnie and Clyde*, Wilder's first major role was as Leopold Bloom in the 1967 film *The Producers* for which he was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. This was the first in a series of collaborations with writer/director Mel Brooks, including 1974's *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein*, which Wilder co-wrote, garnering the pair an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. Wilder is known for his portrayal of Willy Wonka in *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971) and for his four films with Richard Pryor: *Silver Streak* (1976), *Stir Crazy* (1980), *See No Evil, Hear No Evil* (1989), and *Another You* (1991). Wilder directed and wrote several of his own films, including *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother** (1975), *The World's Greatest Lover** (1977), *Sunday Lovers* (segment "Skippy") (1980), *The Woman in Red** (1984), and *Haunted Honeymoon* (1986). These are some of his other film and television appearances: *Play of the Week* (TV Series) (1961), *Armstrong Circle Theatre* (TV Series) (1962), *The Defenders* (TV Series) (1962), *Start the Revolution Without Me* (1970), *Quackser Fortune Has a Cousin in the Bronx* (1970), *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex * But Were Afraid to Ask* (1972), *Rhinoceros* (1974), *The Little Prince* (1974), *The Frisco Kid* (1979), *Hanky Panky* (1982), *Funny About Love* (1990), *Alice in Wonderland* (TV Movie) (1999), and *Will & Grace* (TV Series) (2002-2003)
*Also acted in

PETER BOYLE (b. October 18, 1935 in Norristown, Pennsylvania—d. December 12, 2006, (age 71), in New York City, New York) spent his early childhood in Philadelphia, where his father was a sought-after local TV personality and children's show host. Boyle initially considered becoming a priest, joining the Christian Brothers religious order at one point while attending La Salle University in Philadelphia. He left the monastery after only a few years when he "lost" his calling. The tall (6' 2"), hulking, prematurely bald actor wannabe struggled through a variety of odd jobs (postal worker, waiter, bouncer) while simultaneously building up his credits on stage and waiting for that first big break. Things started progressing for him after appearing in the national company of *The Odd Couple* in 1965 and landing TV commercials on the sly. Peter's breakout film role did not come without controversy as the hateful, hardhat-donning bigot-turned-murderer *Joe* (1970) in a tense, violence- prone film directed by John G. Avildsen. The role led to major notoriety, however, and some daunting supporting parts in *T.R. Baskin* (1971), *Slither* (1973) and as Robert Redford's calculating campaign manager in *The Candidate* (1972). During this time his political radicalism found a visible platform after joining Jane Fonda and Donald Sutherland on anti-war crusades, which would include the anti-establishment picture *Steelyard Blues* (1973). This period also saw the forging of a strong friendship with former Beatle John Lennon. Following a superb turn as Billy Bob Thornton's unrepentantly racist father in the sobering Oscar-winner *Monster's Ball* (2001), the remainder of his films were primarily situated in frivolous comedy fare such as *The Adventures of Pluto Nash* (2002), *The Santa Clause 2* (2002), *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed* (2004), and *The Santa Clause 3: The Escape Clause* (2006), typically playing cranky curmudgeons. Perhaps his most famous late-career role is that of the gruff and grouchy Frank Barone in *Everybody Loves Raymond*. He was nominated 7 times at the Primetime Emmy's for this role—and never won He did, however, win a Primetime Emmy 1996 for his guest role on *The X-Files.* In addition to the above roles, Boyle acted in 94 films and television series including *My Profile Story* (2009, TV Movie), *All Roads Lead Home* (2008), *Doctor Dolittle* (1998), *Cosby* (1997, TV Series), *The X-Files* (1995, TV Series), *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1994-1995, TV Series), *While You Were Sleeping* (1995), *Born to Be Wild* (1995), *NYPD Blue* (1994-1995, TV Series), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Cannonball Fever* (1989), *The Dream Team* (1989), *Red Heat* (1988), *Cagney & Lacey* (1988, TV Series), *Walker* (1987), *Yellowbeard* (1983), *Hammett* (1982), *Outland* (1981), *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1980), *The Brink's Job* (1978), *Tail Gunner Joe* (1977, TV Movie), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Crazy Joe* (1974), *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973), *Kid Blue* (1973), *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1970), *Joe* (1970), *The Monitors* (1969), *The Virgin President* (1969), *Medium Cool* (1969), and *The Group* (1966, uncredited).

MARTY FELDMAN (8 July 1934 in East London – 2 December 1982 (48 years) while filming *Yellowbeard* in Mexico City) was a British actor, comedian, and comedy writer. As the self-proclaimed "world's worst trumpet player," he had dreams of becoming a jazz musician but switched his focus to comedy by the age of 20. As part of the comedy group Morris, Marty and Mitch, he appeared on the BBC series *Showcase* in April 1955. He wrote for a number of programs, including *Bootsie and Snudge*

(1960-62) and *The Army Game* (1960) before serving as the chief writer and script editor for *The Frost Report* (1966-67), a pioneering British comedy program that would launch the careers of John Cleese and others. As a performer, he gained prominence in *At Last the 1948 Show* (1967) alongside Cleese, Graham Chapman, and Tim Brooke-Taylor. He would then star in his own show, *Marty,* which aired from 1968 to 1969; the show's second season was given a new title, *It's Marty,* leaving behind any question if *that* is Marty. Shortly after, he starred in *The Marty Feldman Comedy Machine* (1971-1972). As a film actor, he is identified with his roles in *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975), *Silent Movie* (1976), and *Yellowbeard* (1983), as well as those he also wrote and directed: *The Last Remake of Beau Geste* (1977) and *In God We Tru$t* (1980). He is known for his protruding eyes, a result of his Graves' ophthalmopathy.

MADELINE KAHN (b. September 29, 1942 in Chelsea, Massachusetts—d. December 3, 1999 (age 57) in New York City, New York) was an American actress, comedian, voice actress, and singer, known for comedic roles in films directed by Peter Bogdanovich and Mel Brooks, including *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *High Anxiety* (1977), *History of the World, Part I* (1981), and her Academy Award–nominated roles in *Paper Moon* (1973) and *Blazing Saddles* (1974). She began her career as a singer: following a stint as a singing waitress at a Bavarian restaurant in Hudson Valley, her professional lead debut was inexplicably a special concert performance of the operetta *Candide* in honor of Leonard Bernstein's 50th birthday in 1968. Equally unlikely, her film debut, also in 1968, was in Ingmar Bergman's Oscar-nominated short *The Dove.* Here are some of the other films and television series she appeared in: *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (1973), *At Long Last Love* (1975), *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975), *Won Ton Ton: The Dog Who Saved Hollywood* (1976), *The Cheap Detective* (1978), *The Muppet Movie* (1979), *Simon* (1980), *Happy Birthday, Gemini* (1980), *Wholly Moses!* (1980), *First Family* (1980), *Slapstick of Another Kind* (1982), *Yellowbeard* (1983), *Scrambled Feet* (1983), *City Heat* (1984), *Clue* (1985), *An American Tail* (1986), *Mixed Nuts* (1994), *Nixon* (1995), *Ivana Trump's For Love Alone* (TV Movie) (1996), *A Bug's Life* (1998), and *Cosby* (TV Series) (1996-1999).

CLORIS LEACHMAN (b. April 30, 1926 in Des Moines, Iowa—d. January 27, 2021(age 94) in) was an

American actress and comedian. After studying under Elia Kazan at the New York City Actors Studio, she began a stage career, notably starring alongside Katharine Hepburn in a production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* Starting in the 1950s and 1960s, she primarily worked in television, often starring in single episodes of shows like *Gunsmoke* and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. She acted in three Mel Brooks films: *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *High Anxiety* (1977), and *History of the World, Part 1* (1981). She has appeared in 288 films and television shows, working up until her 2021 death at the age of 94. Some of the films and television programs that she has appeared in include *The Bronx Bull* (2013), *Adult World* (2013), *Raising Hope* (TV Series, 61 episodes, 2010-2013), *Expecting Mary* (2010), *New York* (2008)*, Scary Movie 4* (2006), *The Longest Yard* (2005), *Spanglish* (2004), *The Twilight Zone* (TV Series, 2003), *The Ellen Show* (TV Series, 18 episodes, 2001-2002), *Ferris Bueller* (TV Series, 1990), *Texasville* (1990), *The Facts of Life* (TV Series, 48 episodes, 1986-1988), *The Oldest Living Graduate* (TV Movie, 1980), *The Muppet Movie* (1979), "Backstairs at the White House" (TV Mini-Series, 1979), *Long Journey Back* (TV Movie, 1978), The Mary Tyler Moore Show (TV Series, 34 episodes, 1970-1977), "Phyllis" (TV Series, 48 episodes, 1975-1977), *Wonder Woman* (TV Series, 1975), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *Dillinger* (1973), *Rod Serling's Night Gallery* (TV Series, 1972), *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *The Steagle* (1971), *That Girl* (TV Series, 1970), *Marcus Welby, M.D.* (TV Series, 1970), *WUSA* (1970), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Big Valley* (TV Series, 1967), *77 Sunset Strip* (TV Series, 1961-1963), *Laramie* (TV Series, 1962), *Route 66* (TV Series, 1962), *The Twilight Zone* (TV Series, 1961), *Outlaws*

(TV Series, 1960), *Johnny Staccato* (TV Series, 1960), *Alcoa Presents: One Step Beyond* (TV Series, 1959), *Lassie* (TV Series, 28 episodes, 1957-1958), *The Rack* (1956), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), *The Clock* (TV Series, 1950), and *The Ford Theatre Hour* (TV Series, 1948).

TERI GARR (b. Terry Ann Garr, December 11, 1947 in Lakewood, Ohio) is an actress, dancer, and comedian known for her comedic roles. She began her career as a

go-go dancer, appearing uncredited in films and television programs in the mid 1960s, including six Elvis Presley feature films. Her first significant television role was in "Assignment: Earth" (1968), a *Star Trek* backdoor-pilot episode that didn't take. However, her acting career soon flourished. She appeared in 148 films and television shows before retiring due to worsening multiple sclerosis symptoms in 2011. She has appeared in *Kabluey* (2007), *Unaccompanied Minors* (2006), *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* (2005), *Life Without Dick* (2002), *The Sky Is Falling* (2001), *Dick* (1999), *Batman Beyond: The Movie* (TV Movie, 1999), *Changing Habits* (1997), *Men Behaving Badly* (TV Series, 1996), *Frasier* (TV Series, 12 episodes, 1995), *Dumb & Dumber* (1994), *The Larry Sanders Show* (TV Series, 1993), *Dream On (*TV Series1992), *Good & Evil* (TV Series, 6 episodes, 1991), *Full Moon in Blue Water* (1988), *Miracles* (1986), *After Hours* (1985), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (TV Movie, 1983), *Mr. Mom* (1983), *The Sting II* (1983), *Tootsie* (1982), *The Escape Artist* (1982), *One from the Heart* (1982), *Witches' Brew* (1980), *The Black Stallion* (1979), *Won Ton Ton: The Dog Who Saved Hollywood* (1976), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *The Conversation* (1974), *The Sonny and Cher Comedy Hour* (TV Series, 13 episodes, 1971-1972), *The Moonshine War* (1970), *It Takes a Thief* (TV Series, 1969), *Changes* (1969), *The Mystery of the Chinese Junk* (1967), *Red Line 7000* (1965), *Roustabout* (1964), *Viva Las Vegas* (1964), and *A Swingin' Affair* (1963).

KENNETH MARS (b. April 4, 1935 in Chicago,Illinois—d. February 12, 2011, age 75, in Granada Hills, California) was an off-the-wall, over-the-top actor/farceur whose broad schtick was smartly utilized by 1970s directors Mel Brooks (*The Producers* (1967) *and Young Frankenstein* (1974)) and Peter Bogdanovich (*What's Up, Doc?* (1972). The son of stand-up comic and radio star Sonny Mars, Kenneth began acting as early as 1961 when he was with the first national company of the *Sound of Music* as Baron Elberfeld and understudied the role of Max. He acted in an impressive 207 films, TV shows and video games, including *The Land Before Time* (TV Series, 2007-2008), *Hannah Montana* (TV Series, 2007), *Malcolm in the Middle* (TV Series. 2002-2004), *Will & Grace* (TV Series, 2001), *The Legend of Tarzan* (TV Series, 2001), *Nash Bridges* (TV Series, 2000), *Police Academy: The Series* (TV Series, 1997), *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (TV Series, 1996), *The Real Adventures of Jonny Quest* (TV Series, 1996), *Citizen Ruth* (1996), *L.A. Law* (TV Series, 1994), *Thumbelina* (1994), *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (TV Series, 1994), *Rugrats* (TV Series, 1993), *Shadows and Fog* (1991), *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color* (TV Series, 1990), *Police Academy 6: City Under Siege* (1989), *Rented Lips* (1988), *Radio Days* (1987), *The Twilight Zone* (TV Series, 1986), *Remington Steele* (TV Series, 1985), *Fletch* (1985), *Murder, She Wrote* (1985), *Magnum, P.I.* (1981-1985), *Yellowbeard* (1983), *The Fonz and the Happy Days Gang* (1980-1981), *The Apple Dumpling Gang Rides Again* (1979), *Fernwood Tonight* (1977), *Columbo* (1977), *Police Woman (*1975-1977), *Black Sheep Squadron* (1977), *Wonder Woman* (1975), *Night Moves* (1975), *Young Frankenstein* (1974), *The Parallax View* (1974), *Ironside* (TV Series, 1973), *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), *Viva Max* (1969), *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), *The Producers* (1967), *Get Smart* (1967), *Gunsmoke* (1967), *Car 54, Where Are You?* (1963).

GENE HACKMAN (b. January 30, 1930 in San Bernardino, California) would be over 30 years old when he finally decided to take his chance at acting. Yet this late start has ended up working to Hackman's advantage. His characters belong almost entirely to middle age. Because they've been around long enough to experience failure and loss, but not long enough to take it easy, Hackman could play them with a distinctive mix of shadow and light. He began his career by enrolling at the Pasadena Playhouse in California. Both Hackman and friend Dustin Hoffman were part of the Playhouse and were voted "least likely to succeed." His first role was as Norman in *Lilith* (1964), starring Warren Beatty. When Beatty was casting for *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), he chose Hackman as Buck Barrow, Clyde Barrow's brother. That role earned Hackman an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor, an award for which he would again be

nominated in *I Never Sang for My Father* (1970). Hackman is a versatile actor who can play comedy as the blind man in *Young Frankenstein* (1974) or villainy as the evil Lex Luthor in *Superman* (1978). His career roles have swung equally as wide: He was the first choice to play Mike Brady on *The Brady Bunch* (1969) and the sixth choice to play one of his most famous parts, Popeye Doyle in *The French Connection* (1971). He was also the first choice to play Hannibal Lector in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). After initially turning down the role of Little Bill Daggett in Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992), Hackman finally accepted it, as its different slant on the western interested him. After the film, he swore he'd never again work in Westerns. His performance won the Oscar and Golden Globe. The actor must have decided that he wasn't tired of westerns after all. He has since appeared in *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993), *Wyatt Earp* (1994), and *The Quick and the Dead* (1995). Deep into his career, in 2001 it was his quirky patriarch in Wes Anderson's *Royal Tenenbaums* that opened Hackman up to an entirely new audience of fans. In 2003, Hackman won the Cecil B. DeMille Award for lifetime achievement to acting at the Golden Globes. Then in 2004 Hackman quit acting altogether. He has published several novels, his latest *Pursuit* was released in 2013. He continues to lead a quiet life writing and painting in Santa Fe with his wife.

Paulene Kael: "A Magnetic Blur" (*New Yorker*, Dec 22, 1974)

Gene Wilder stares at the world with nearsighted, pale-blue-eyed wonder; he was born with a comic's flyblown wig and the look of a reddish creature from outer space. His features aren't distinct; his personality lacks definition. His whole appearance is so fuzzy and weak he's like mist on the lens. Yet since his first screen appearance, as the mortician in "Bonnie and Clyde," he's made his presence felt each time. He's a magnetic blur. It's easy to imagine him as a frizzy-haired fiddler-clown in a college production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," until he slides over into that hysteria which is his dazzling specialty. As a hysteric, he's funnier even than Peter Sellers. For Sellers, hysteria is just one more weapon in his comic arsenal—his hysteria mocks hysteria—but Wilder's hysteria seems perfectly natural. You never question what's driving him to it; his fits are lucid and total. They take him into a different dimension—he delivers what Harpo promised.

Wilder is clearly an actor who can play serious roles as well as comic ones, and he's a superb technician. Yet he also seems an inspired original, as peculiarly, elusively demented in his own way as the greatest original of them all, Jonathan Winters. You can't tell what makes clowns like this funny. The sources of their humor are split off from the technical effects they produce. (With Chaplin, there's a unity between source and technique—which isn't necessarily preferable.) Like Winters, Wilder taps a private madness. In "Start the Revolution Without Me," he played a French nobleman who was offering a tidbit to the falcon on his wrist when his wife pointed out that the falcon was dead. With the calm of the utterly insane, he said to her, "Repeat that." Reality is what Wilder's weak stare doesn't take in.

Wilder plays the title role in Mel Brooks' "Young Frankenstein," and in the first fifteen minutes or so—especially in a medical experiment on skinny, excruciatingly vulnerable Liam Dunn—he hits a new kind of controlled maniacal peak. The movie doesn't take Wilder beyond that early high, but it doesn't need to. It's a silly, zizzy picture—a farce-parody of Hollywood's mad-scientist-trying-to-be-God pictures, with Wilder as the old Baron Frankenstein's grandson, an American professor of neurology, who takes a trip to the family castle in Transylvania. Peter Boyle is the Frankenstein monster, and Madeline Kahn is the professor's plastic-woman fiancée, who becomes the monster's bride. It isn't a dialogue comedy; it's visceral and lower. It's what used to be called a crazy comedy, and there hasn't been this kind of craziness on the screen in years. It's a film to go to when your rhythm is slowed down and you're too tired to think. You can't bring anything to it (Brooks' timing is too obvious for that) ; you have to let it do everything for you, because that's the only way it works. It has some of the obviousness of "Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein," and if you go expecting too much it could seem like kids' stuff—which, of course, it is, but it's very funny kids' stuff, the kind that made pictures like "Kentucky Moonshine" and "Murder, He Says" into

nutbrain classics. You can go to see it when you can barely keep your eyes open, and come out feeling relaxed and recharged.

Wilder wrote the screenplay with Brooks, and he has a healthy respect for his own star abilities. Confidence seems to be making him better-looking with each picture; this time he wears a romantic, droopy mustache, and in full-face, with his eyes outlined and his long chin prominent, he gives a vain, John Barrymore-ish dash to the role. I could have done with less of his pixie hunchback assistant Igor—the English comic, Marty Feldman, who's done up like Barrymore as Richard III. The camera picks up the glints of Wilder's madness; Feldman projects to the gallery. He's too consciously zany; he's funny at times (and he uses a Groucho turn of phrase like a shiv), but he's heavy-spirited and cunning, in the Anthony Newley manner. He emphasizes the picture's worst defect: the director tends to repeat—and exhaust—effects. In the opening sequences, Wilder does a startling spinoff of Sellers' performance as Dr. Strangelove, but then, later on, Kenneth Mars, the Nazi playwright in "The Producers" and the Transylvania police inspector here—equipped with an artificial arm, like Lionel Atwill in the role in the old days—does a full-dress variation on Strangelove. Like Feldman, Mars seems meant to be funnier than he is; his impenetrable accent is one of those Brooks ideas that don't pan out. Sometimes Brooks appears to think he can force something to be a scream if he pounds away at it. Cloris Leachman makes a magnificent entrance as the castle housekeeper, but then, having a one-and-a-half-gag role, she has nothing left to do but make faces. However, Peter Boyle underplays smoothly; he suggests a puckish cutup's spirit inside his monster's bulk, and he comes through with a great sick-joke strangled voice in a musical number that shows what Brooks can do when his instinct is really working. He can make you laugh helplessly.

The picture was made in black-and-white, which holds it visually close to the pictures it takes off from, and Brooks keeps the setups simple. The details are reassuring: there's a little more Transylvanian ground fog than you've ever seen before, the laboratory machines give off enough sparks to let us know that's their only function, and the ingénue (Teri Garr, as Frankenstein's laboratory assistant) is the essence of washed-out B-movie starlet. The style of the picture is controlled excess, and the whole thing is remarkably consistent in tone, considering that it ranges from unfunny hamming (the medical student at the beginning) to a masterly bit contributed by Gene Hackman as a bearded blind man. (Hackman's inflections are so spectacularly assured I thought there was a famous comic hidden under the beard until I recognized his voice.) The movie works because it has the Mary Shelley story to lean on: we know that the monster will be created and will get loose. And Brooks makes a leap up as a director because, although the comedy doesn't build, he carries the story through. Some directors don't need a unifying story, but Brooks has always got lost without one. (He had a story in "The Twelve Chairs," but he didn't have the jokes.) Staying with the story, Brooks even has a satisfying windup, which makes this just about the only comedy of recent years that doesn't collapse. Best of all, "Young Frankenstein" doesn't try to be boffola, like Brooks' last picture, "Blazing Saddles," yet it has that picture's prime attractions: Wilder and Madeline Kahn. When she parodied Marlene Dietrich in "Blazing Saddles," it wasn't the usual Dietrich imitation, because she was also parodying herself. Madeline Kahn has an extra dimension of sexiness; it's almost like what Mae West had—she's flirtatious in a self-knowing way. And everything that's wrong about her is sexy. You look at her and think, What a beautiful translucent skin on such a big jaw; what a statuesque hourglass figure, especially where the sand has slipped. She's so self-knowingly lascivious that she convinces you she really digs the monster. Madeline Kahn is funny and enticing because she's soaked in passion; when you look at her, you see a water bed at just the right temperature.

Jason Bailey: "'Young Frankenstein' and the Enduring Appeal of the Horror Comedy" (Flavorwire, 2014)

The familiar 20th Century Fox logo and fanfare begins the film — but in black and white, segueing into a dramatic orchestral theme and a title that hits with a bolt of lightning and a crack of thunder, in front of the moody image of an ornate castle on a distant hilltop. With those familiar images, audiences were welcomed to *Young Frankenstein*, Mel Brooks' affectionate parody of the Universal horror masterpieces. The movie, which is out on Blu-ray today in a new anniversary special edition, hit

theaters 40 years ago — in the same calendar year as his equally successful *Blazing Saddles* , a one-two punch that's all but unprecedented among comedy filmmakers. Yet for all of *Saddles*' influence, *Frankenstein* may be even more beloved, for its place within both the filmography of Brooks and the surprisingly venerable cross-genre of horror comedy.

The combination has been around a long while — dating clear back to silent pictures like Harold Lloyd's *Haunted Spooks* and Wallace Reid's *The Ghost Breaker*. But the real table-setter, in terms of the horror comedy's style and appeal, was the 1948 smash *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*. It was a bit of a double Hail Mary at the time for Universal — the comedy team of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello had seen slowly but steadily decreasing box office, as had the Universal monsters. By fusing the two franchises, and the two genres, the studio managed to revitalize both (at least for a time).

But what's interesting and instructive about *A&C Meet Frankenstein* is that it is a genuine merging of those two sensibilities, as opposed to an all-out parody of the monster movie. It's not a serious film, as no Abbott & Costello picture can be, yet it *takes* its monsters seriously. But don't take it from me; here's one of the picture's biggest fans, on its genius: "The Abbott and Costello stuff was funny, but when they were out of the room and monsters would come on, they'd kill people! When was the last time you saw anybody in a horror-comedy actually kill somebody? You didn't see that. I took it in, seeing that movie." That fan is Quentin Tarantino, who would take its lessons on tonal shifts and the interspersing of comedy and gore to heart.

Young Frankenstein operates in much of the same spirit. Unlike some of his other works (like *Saddles*, *Spaceballs*, or the later, and far less successful, *Dracula: Dead and Loving It*), the Brooks of *Young Frankenstein* isn't really skewering the conventions of the horror movie — he's paying tribute to them, and using them as scaffolding for his particular brand of goofy, Borscht Belt burlesque. When it comes to his ostensible target, the key is the notion of "affectionate parody." He seems to genuinely love these old movies, and takes joy in appropriating their look and feel, from the evocative black and white photography to the Gothic settings to even the original *Frankenstein* laboratory equipment, for which designer Kenneth Strickfaden is thanked with prominent placement in the opening credits.

And this, I think, is the key to the popularity of the great horror comedies that have followed those two classics. Horror fans are a touchy lot, and don't care for movies that tell them what they love is stupid. So the truly successful horror/comedies of the past 40 years — films like *An American Werewolf in London, Evil Dead 2, Shaun of the Dead, The Cabin in the Woods, Scream, Gremlins, Ghostbusters,* and so on — have merged those two sensibilities, rather than sacrificing one for the other. Laughter and fear are two of the most visceral reactions we can have to events on a movie screen — and are, handily enough, the two most enjoyable in a darkened theater, full of strangers. So when a film can do both simultaneously, watch out; it's a potent, long-lasting brew.

Roger Ebert: "Young Frankenstein" (January 1974)

The moment, when it comes, has the inevitability of comic genius. Young Frederick Frankenstein,

grandson of the count who started it all, returns by rail to his ancestral home. As the train pulls into the station, he spots a kid on the platform, lowers the window and asks, "Pardon me, boy; is this the Transylvania Station"?

It is, and Mel Brooks is home with "Young Frankenstein," his most disciplined and visually inventive film (it also happens to be very funny). Frederick is a professor in a New York medical school, trying to live down the family name and giving hilarious demonstrations of the difference between voluntary and involuntary reflexes. He stabs himself in the process, dismisses the class and is visited by an ancient family retainer with his grandfather's will.

Frankenstein quickly returns to Transylvania and the old ancestral castle, where he is awaited by the faithful houseboy Igor, the voluptuous lab assistant Inga, and the mysterious housekeeper Frau Blucher, whose very name causes horses to rear in fright. The young man had always rejected his grandfather's medical experiments as impossible, but he changes his mind after he discovers a book entitled How I Did It by Frederick Frankenstein. Now all that's involved is a little grave-robbing and a trip to the handy local Brain Depository, and the Frankenstein family is back in business.

In his two best comedies, before this, "The Producers" and "Blazing Saddles," Brooks revealed a rare comic anarchy. His movies weren't just funny, they were aggressive and subversive, making us laugh even when we really should have been offended. (Explaining this process, Brooks once loftily declared, "My movies rise below vulgarity.") "Young Frankenstein" is as funny as we expect a Mel Brooks comedy to be, but it's more than that: It shows artistic growth and a more sure-handed control of the material by a director who once seemed willing to do literally anything for a laugh. It's more confident and less breathless.

That's partly because the very genre he's satirizing gives him a strong narrative he can play against. Brooks's targets are James Whale's "Frankenstein" (1931) and "Bride of Frankenstein" (1935), the first the most influential and the second probably the best of the 1930s Hollywood horror movies. Brooks uses carefully controlled black-and-white photography that catches the feel of the earlier films. He uses old-fashioned visual devices and obvious special effects (the train ride is a study in manufactured studio scenes). He adjusts the music to the right degree of squeakiness. And he even rented the original "Frankenstein" laboratory, with its zaps of electricity, high-voltage special effects, and elevator platform to intercept lightning bolts.

So the movie is a send-up of a style and not just of the material (as Paul Morrissey's dreadful "Andy Warhol's Frankenstein"). It looks right, which makes it funnier. And then, paradoxically, it works on a couple of levels: first as comedy, and then as a weirdly touching story in its own right. A lot of the credit for that goes to the performances of Gene Wilder, as young Frankenstein, and Peter Boyle as the monster. They act broadly when it's required, but they also contribute tremendous subtlety and control. Boyle somehow manages to be hilarious and pathetic at the same time.

There are set pieces in the movie that deserve comparison with the most famous scenes in "The Producers." Demonstrating that he has civilized his monster, for example, Frankenstein and the creature do a soft-shoe number in black tie and tails. Wandering in the woods, the monster comes across a poor, blind monk (Gene Hackman, very good) who offers hospitality and winds up scalding, burning, and frightening the poor creature half to death.

There are also the obligatory town meetings, lynch mobs, police investigations, laboratory experiments, love scenes, and a cheerfully ribald preoccupation with a key area of the monster's stitched-together anatomy. From its opening title (which manages to satirize "Frankenstein" and "Citizen Kane" at the same time) to its closing, uh, refrain, "Young Frankenstein" is not only a Mel Brooks movie but also a loving commentary on our love-hate affairs with monsters. This time, the monster even gets to have a little love-hate affair of his own.

Bruce Jackson: "*Frankenstein:* The Believable Absurd," from *The Story is True: The Art and Meaning of Telling Stories*, rev. ed., SUNY Press, 2022

Mary Shelley uses three narrative voices to tell *Frankenstein*: the explorer Robert Walton's in his letters to his sister, Frankenstein's in his conversations with Walton, and the creature's in his conversation with Frankenstein as Frankenstein reports that conversation to Walton. The most lucid of the three is also the most improbable: the long first-person autobiographical account, a fifth of the novel, told by the creature.

Hardly anyone questions the creature's story of how he acquired language, his ability to read and write, and his familiarity with technology. Shelley embeds his narrative within the other two. The effect is rather like what they say about a frog in a pan of water over a fire: if you increase the heat slowly, the frog never notices what is happening, even to the point of death. Shelley moves us farther and farther from the ordinary. By the time we are reading about the utterly fantastic and improbable, we don't notice it at all; we only notice the conflict between the characters, which is why the novel works so well.

The novel begins with four letters—dated December 11, March 17, July 17 and August 19—from Robert Walton to his sister back in England about his attempt to reach the North Pole to study magnetism. Presumably, the first three letters are given to ships sailing south, or they're posted at ports where Walton's ship stops for supplies. The August 19 letter cannot be mailed because by the time he writes it, he is beyond civilization and in a world of Arctic ice.

Everything he writes seems reasonable enough. He's a rich young man off on an ambitious expedition to a place no one knows. The novel is set in an unspecified year in the eighteenth century. In Shelley's time, as in antiquity, people thought that once you got past the Arctic ice the world turned tropical. It would be more

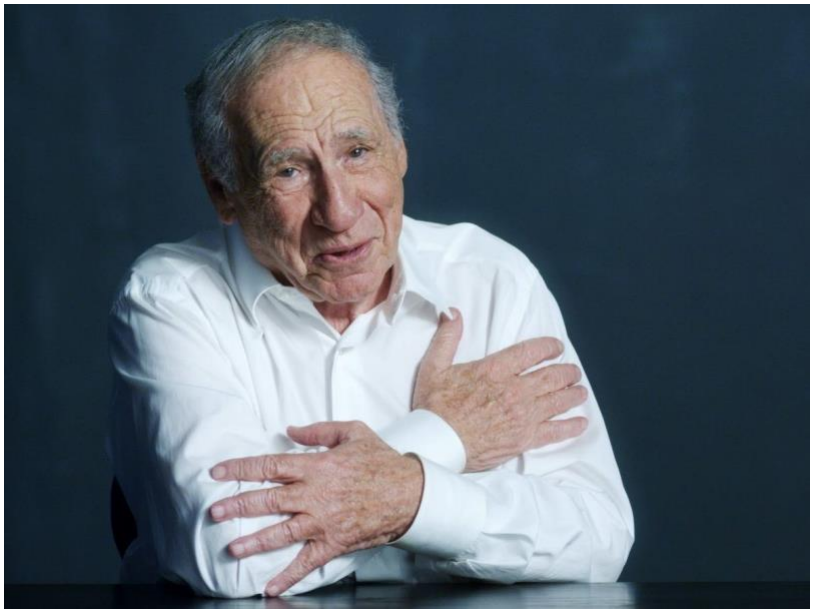
than a century before the first European reached the North Pole and told people back home what a brutal clime it was, that it just kept getting colder all the way up.

In the fourth letter Walton tells of picking up a man stranded on the ice, which also seems reasonable enough. He then reports the story the stranger, Frankenstein, told him about his creation of and relationship with the creature. If the story had begun in Frankenstein's voice, we might have dozens of questions, we might cavil at what was obviously left out ("How did you DO it?"), but we're getting the story via Walton. If any questions are to be asked, they are to be asked by Walton, not us. Walton is a firewall protecting Frankenstein's plausibility. Frankenstein talks in his own voice for ten chapters, then we get the creature's story. It is imbedded in Frankenstein's story, long past the point where we ask questions about technical possibilities. The creature talks for six chapters, then Frankenstein picks up the narrative for another eight.

After that, Walton resumes his unfinished letter to his sister with passages dated August 26, September 2, September 5, September 7, and September 12. Walton reports Frankenstein's death and his own encounter with the creature. With that, the two embedded narratives are grafted and ratified; nothing in them is questionable because the most trustworthy and ordinary narrator in the book sees the creature with his own trustworthy and ordinary eyes.

The stories, folded in upon and wrapped around one another, become mutually validating. The epistolary frame is a common convention and easily accepted. We don't question the most fantastic part not because it is believable, but because by the time we encounter it we are at home with the narrative.

56 Frankenstein Films Ranked from Best to Worst *(IMDb).* **The first 10 are:**
James Whale, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, 1935
James Whale, *Frankenstein*, 1931
Victor Erice, *The Spirit of the Beehive*, 1973
Mel Brooks, *Young Frankenstein,* 1974
Rowland V. Lee, *Son of Frankenstein*, 1939
J. Searle Dawley, *Frankenstein*, 1910
Terence Fisher, *Frankenstein Created Woman*, 1967
Kenneth Banagh, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein,* 1994
Bill Condon, *Gods and Monsters*, 1998
Howard W. Koch, *Frankenstein 1970*, 1958
The 58th (worst) is Stuart Beattie, *I, Frankenstein* 2014
Some of the others are: Roy William Neill, *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man,* 1943; Jesús Franmco, *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein*, 1973; Tim Burton, *Frankenweenie*, 2012; Frank Henenlotter, *Frankenhooker*, 1990; Charles Barton and Walter Lantz, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*, 1948; and William A. Levey, *Blackenstein*, 1973.



THE FALL 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XLV:

August 30 William Wellman ***Wings*** 1927
Sept 6 Jean Renoir **R*ules of the Game*** 1939
Sept 13 Michael Curtiz ***Casablanca*** 1942
Sept 20 Nicholas Ray, ***In a Lonely Place*** 1950
Sept 27 Luis Buñuel ***Viridiana*** 1961
Oct 4 Orson Welles ***Chimes at Midnight*** 1966
Oct 11 Mel Brooks ***Young Frankenstein*** 1974
Oct 18 Arthur Penn ***Night Moves*** 1975
Oct 25 Sydney Pollack ***Tootsie*** 1982
Nov 1 Akira Kurosawa ***Ran*** 1985
Nov 8 Martin Scorsese ***Goodfellas*** 1990
Nov 15 Hiayo Miyazaki ***The Wind Rises*** 2013
Nov 22 Ava Duvernay ***Selma*** 2014
Nov 29 Pedro Almodóvar ***Parallel Mothers*** 2021
Dec 6 Ang Lee ***Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*** 2000

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