

Peter Ustinov: *Qualis artifex Neronianus!*

In the history of film and television, several noteworthy actors, among them Emil Jannings, Charles Laughton, Peter Lorre, and Klaus Maria Brandauer, have portrayed Rome's "baddest" bad guy on screen. In retrospect, however, all are eclipsed by Peter Ustinov in M-G-M's super-production *QVO VADIS* (1951), directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Repeated viewings reveal a surprisingly subtle, if at the same time appropriately histrionic, performance by someone at the start of a long distinguished and versatile career as actor, playwright, director for stage and screen, and entertainer.

This paper will attempt to do some measure of justice to Ustinov's Nero. Emphasis will be on Nero as would-be Homeric *aidos*, megalomaniac mastermind of Neropolis, and pyromaniac. His unhistorical death scene contains what might be called a clever instance of Hollywood intertextuality. The paper will close with a charming tribute to Ustinov from an unexpected source: Spanish horror director José Ramón Larraz.

Bibliography

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