

= Rod Steiger =

Rodney Stephen " Rod " Steiger (April 14 , 1925 ? July 9 , 2002) was an American actor , noted for his portrayal of offbeat , often volatile and crazed characters . Cited as " one of Hollywood 's most charismatic and dynamic stars " , he is closely associated with the art of method acting , embodying the characters he played , which at times led to clashes with directors and co @-@ stars . He starred as Marlon Brando 's mobster brother Charlie in *On the Waterfront* (1954) , the title character Sol Nazerman in *The Pawnbroker* (1964) , and as police chief Bill Gillespie opposite Sidney Poitier in the film *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) . His *In the Heat of the Night* performance won him the Academy Award for Best Actor .

Steiger was born in Westhampton , New York , the son of a vaudevillian . He had a difficult childhood , with an alcoholic mother from whom he ran away at the age of 16 . After serving in the South Pacific Theater during World War II , he began his acting career with television roles in 1947 , and went on to garner critical acclaim for his portrayal of the main character in the teleplay " Marty " (1953) . He made his stage debut in 1946 , in a production of *Curse you , Jack Dalton !* at the Civic Repertory Theatre of Newark , and subsequently appeared in productions such as *An Enemy of the People* (1950) , *Clifford Odets 's Night Music* (1951) , *Seagulls Over Sorrento* (1952) and *Rashomon* (1959) .

Steiger made his film debut in Fred Zinnemann 's *Teresa* in 1951 , and subsequently appeared in films such as *The Big Knife* (1955) , *Oklahoma !* (1955) , *Across the Bridge* (1957) and *Al Capone* (1959) . After Steiger 's performance in *The Pawnbroker* in 1964 , in which he played an embittered Jewish Holocaust survivor working as a pawnbroker in New York City , he portrayed an opportunistic Russian politician in David Lean 's *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) . *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) won five Academy Awards , including Best Picture and Best Actor for Steiger , who was lauded for his performance as a Mississippi police chief who learns to respect an African @-@ American officer (Poitier) as they search for a killer . The following year , he played a serial killer of many guises in *No Way to Treat a Lady* .

During the 1970s , Steiger increasingly turned to European productions in his search for more demanding roles . He portrayed Napoleon Bonaparte in *Waterloo* (1970) , a Mexican bandit in Sergio Leone 's *Duck , You Sucker !* (1971) , Benito Mussolini in *Last Days of Mussolini* (1975) , and ended the decade playing a disturbed priest in *The Amityville Horror* (1979) . By the 1980s , heart problems and depression took its toll on Steiger 's career , and he found it difficult to find employment , agreeing to appear in low @-@ budget B movies . One of his final roles was as judge H. Lee Sarokin in the prison drama *The Hurricane* (1999) , which reunited him with *In the Heat of the Night* director Norman Jewison . Steiger was married five times , and had a daughter , opera singer Anna Steiger , and a son , Michael Steiger . He died of pneumonia and complications from surgery for a gall bladder tumor on July 9 , 2002 , aged 77 , in Los Angeles , and was survived by his fifth wife Joan Benedict Steiger .

= = Early life and acting background = =

Steiger was born on April 14 , 1925 in Westhampton , New York , the only child of Lorraine (née Driver) and Frederick Steiger , of French , Scottish and German descent . Rod was raised as a Lutheran . He never knew his father , a vaudevillian who had been part of a traveling song @-@ and @-@ dance team with Steiger 's mother , but was told that he was a handsome Latino @-@ looking man , who was a talented musician and dancer . Biographer Tom Hutchinson describes him as a " shadowy , fugitive figure " , one who " haunted " Rod throughout his life and was an " invisible presence and unseen influence " .

Hutchinson described Steiger 's mother as " plump , energetic and small , with long auburn hair " . She had a good singing voice and nearly became a Hollywood actress , but after a leg surgery permanently impaired her walking ability , she gave up acting and turned to alcohol . As a result , she quit show business and moved away from Westhampton to raise her son . They moved through several towns , including Irvington and Bloomfield , before settling in Newark , New Jersey . Her

alcoholism caused Steiger much embarrassment , and the family was frequently mocked by other children and their parents within the community . At the age of five he was sexually abused by a pedophile who lured him in with a butterfly collection . Steiger said of his troubled family background : " If you had the choice of having the childhood you experienced , with your alcoholic mother and being the famous actor you are today , or having a loving , secure childhood and not being famous , which would you take ? A loving , secure childhood in a New York minute " . During the last 11 years of her life , Steiger 's mother stayed sober and regularly attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings . Steiger recalled : " I was so proud of her . She turned herself around . She came alive again " .

During his childhood , and owing to his considerable strength and bulk , Steiger became known as " The Rock " . Despite being mocked over his mother 's alcoholism , he was a popular figure at school and an able softball player . He displayed an interest in writing poetry and acting during his adolescent years , and appeared in several school plays while at West Side High School in Newark . Tired of fighting with his mother , he ran away from home at age sixteen to join the United States Navy during World War II .

He enlisted on May 11 , 1942 , and received his training at the U.S. Naval Training Station in Newport , Rhode Island . He joined the newly commissioned USS Taussig (DD @-@ 746) on May 20 , 1944 . While serving as a torpedoman on destroyers , he saw action in the South Pacific , including the Battle of Iwo Jima . Steiger later commented : " I loved the Navy . I was stupid enough to think I was being heroic " . His experiences during the war haunted him for the rest of his life , particularly the loss of Americans during the Battle of Iwo Jima , as well as the sinking of vessels by the Taussig which were known to have women and children aboard . On December 17 , 1944 , Steiger and the Taussig encountered a severe typhoon , which became known as Halsey 's Typhoon , that created winds reaching one hundred knots (115 mph) and 80 foot (24 m) waves off the coast of Luzon in the Philippines . As a result , three U.S. destroyers were lost , but the Taussig survived , with Steiger tying a rope to himself on deck and flattening himself as waves engulfed the ship .

After the war , the GI Bill of Rights paid for his rent at a room on West 81st Street in New York City , an income of just over \$ 100 a month , and four years of schooling . He initially found a job oiling machines and washing floors . He decided to attend a drama class , primarily because of its membership of attractive young women . Known as the Civil Service Little Theater group , it was conducted by the Office of Dependents and Beneficiaries , where he was employed at the time . This led him to start a two @-@ year course at the New School for Social Research , run by German émigré Erwin Piscator . During one audition , Steiger was cast after barely uttering a few words , the director exclaiming he had a " fresh , wonderful quality " . Another talented pupil at the time was Walter Matthau , who dubbed the institution " The Neurotic School for Sexual Research " . Steiger was surprised to discover his own talent as an actor , and he was encouraged to pursue further studies at the Dramatic Workshop . One of the main reasons he wanted to be an actor was to regain public respect for his family name , which had so humiliated him during childhood . Another important factor was his belief that he did not " have the temperament for a regular job " , and would have ended up a miserable , violent alcoholic . His only role model as an actor was Paul Muni , whom he thought was " the greatest " , though he also had a deep respect for French actor Harry Baur and , according to biographer Hutchinson , he admired Charlie Chaplin " to the point of adoration " .

= = Career = =

= = = Early career and breakthrough (1946 ? 1956) = = =

Steiger made his stage debut in a production of Curse you , Jack Dalton ! (1946) at the Civic Repertory Theatre of Newark . Subsequent to this , he received an invitation from one of his teachers , Daniel Mann , to attend the Actors Studio , established by Elia Kazan in October 1947 . It was here , along with Marlon Brando , Karl Malden and Eli Wallach , that he studied method acting ,

which became deeply engrained in him . Lacking *matinée* idol looks , much like Malden and Wallach , he began pursuing a career as a character actor rather than as a leading man . Steiger 's stage work continued in 1950 , with a minor role as a townperson in a stage production of *An Enemy of the People* at the Music Box Theatre . His first major role on Broadway came in Clifford Odets 's production of *Night Music* (1951) , where he played A. L. Rosenberger . The play was held at the ANTA Playhouse . The following year , he played a telegraphist in the play *Seagulls Over Sorrento* , performed at the John Golden Theatre beginning on September 11 , 1952 .

Steiger 's early roles , although minor , were numerous , especially in television series during the early 1950s , when he appeared in more than 250 live television productions over a five @-@ year period . He was spotted by Fred Coe , NBC 's manager of program development , who increasingly gave him bigger parts . Steiger considered television to be what repertory theatre had been for an earlier generation , and saw it as a place where he could test his talent with a plethora of different roles . Soon afterward he began receiving positive reviews from critics such as John Crosby , who noted that Steiger regularly gave " effortless persuasive performances " . Among Steiger 's credits were *Danger* (1950 ? 53) , *Lux Video Theatre* (1951) , *Out There* (1951) , *Tales of Tomorrow* (1952 ? 53) , *The Gulf Playhouse* (1953) , *Medallion Theatre* (1953) , *Goodyear Television Playhouse* (1953) , and as Shakespeare 's Romeo in " *The First Command Performance of Romeo and Juliet* (1957) " episode of *You Are There* in 1954 , under director Sidney Lumet . He continued to make appearances in various playhouse television productions , appearing in five episodes of *Kraft Theatre* (1952 ? 54) , which earned him praise from critics , six episodes of *The Philco Television Playhouse* (1951 ? 55) and two episodes of *Schlitz Playhouse of Stars* (1957 ? 58) . Steiger made his big screen debut in 1953 , with a small role in Fred Zinnemann 's *Teresa* , shot in 1951 . Steiger , who described himself as " cocky " , won over Zinnemann by praising his direction . Zinnemann recalled that Steiger was " very popular , extremely articulate and full of remarkable memories " , and the two remained highly respectful of each other for life .

On May 24 , 1953 , Steiger played the title role in Paddy Chayefsky 's " *Marty* " episode of the *Goodyear Television Playhouse* . The role had originally been intended for Martin Ritt , who later became a director . " *Marty* " is the story of a lonely and homely butcher from the Bronx in search of love . The play was a critical success that increased Steiger 's public exposure ; Tom Stempel noted that he brought " striking intensity to his performance as Marty , particularly in giving us Marty 's pain " . As Steiger refused to sign a seven @-@ year studio contract , he was replaced with Ernest Borgnine in the film *Marty* (1955) , which won the Academy Award for Best Picture , as well as the Best Actor Oscar for Borgnine . 1953 proved to be Steiger 's breakthrough year ; he garnered Sylvania Awards for *Marty* and four other best performances of the year ? as Vishinsky and Rudolph Hess in two episodes of *You Are There* , as gangster Dutch Schultz in a thriller , and as a radar operator in *My Brother 's Keeper* .

For his role as Charley " the Gent " , the brother of Marlon Brando 's character in Elia Kazan 's *On the Waterfront* (1954) , Steiger was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor . Film writer Leo Braudy wrote that the " incessantly repeated images of its taxicab confrontation between Brando and Rod Steiger have made the film iconic " . The taxicab scene took eleven hours to shoot and was heavily scripted , despite Brando fuelling the popular myth in his autobiography that the scene was improvised . Brando stated that seven takes were needed because Steiger could not stop crying , which Steiger found to be unfair and inaccurate . Though Steiger retained great respect for Brando as an actor , he disliked him as a person and frequently complained during the production of Brando 's " predilection for leaving the set " immediately after shooting his scenes . Steiger later remarked : " We didn 't get to know each other at all . He always flew solo and I haven 't seen him since the film . I do resent him saying he 's just a hooker , and that actors are whores " . Steiger also responded unfavorably when he learned that Kazan had been awarded an honorary Oscar by the Academy in 1999 . In a 1999 interview with BBC News , Steiger said he probably would not have done *On the Waterfront* if he had known at the time that Kazan provided the House Un @-@ American Activities Committee with names of performers suspected of being Communists .

Steiger played Jud Fry in the film version of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma !* (

1955) , in which he performed his own singing . It was one of the biggest location film productions of the 1950s , shot near Nogales , Arizona with a crew of 325 people and some 70 trucks . Steiger portrayed a disturbed , emotionally isolated version of Jud , which television channel Turner Classic Movies (TCM) believed brought a " complexity to the character that went far beyond the stock musical villain " . Steiger observed that James Dean , who auditioned for the role that went to Gordon MacRae , was a " nice kid absorbed by his own ego , so much so that it was destroying him " , which he thought led to his death . Dean reportedly gave Steiger his prized copy of Ernest Hemingway 's book *Death in the Afternoon* , and had underlined every appearance of the word " death " .

Later in 1955 , Steiger played an obnoxious film tycoon , loosely based on Columbia boss Harry Cohn , opposite Jack Palance and Ida Lupino in Robert Aldrich 's film noir *The Big Knife* . Steiger bleached his hair for the part , sought inspiration for the role from Russian actor Vladimir Sokoloff , read a book about the Treblinka extermination camp to understand his character thoroughly , and visited the perfume department of a store in Beverly Hills , California , to try to understand his character 's contempt for women . Steiger and Palance did not get along during the production , and in one scene Palance threw several record albums at Steiger in frustration , feeling that he was trying to steal the scene . Steiger earned critical acclaim later that year for a role as a prosecuting major in Otto Preminger 's *The Court @-@ Martial* of Billy Mitchell , alongside Gary Cooper and Charles Bickford .

Steiger portrayed the character " Pinky " in Columbia Pictures ' western , *Jubal* (1956) , which co @-@ starred Glenn Ford and Ernest Borgnine . Steiger 's character is a rancher , a " sneering baddie " , who becomes jealous when his former mistress becomes attracted to Ford 's character .. Ford noted Steiger 's deep commitment to method acting during production , considering him to be a " fine actor but a real strange fellow " . Steiger disliked the experience and frequently clashed with director Delmer Daves , who was more favorable to Ford 's lighthearted take on the film . Upon its release in April 1956 , a writer for *Variety* was impressed with the " evil venom " displayed by his character , and remarked that there had not " been as hateful a screen heavy around in a long time " . In Mark Robson 's *The Harder They Fall* , Steiger played a crooked boxing promoter who hires a sports journalist (Humphrey Bogart in his last role) . Steiger referred to Bogart as " a professional " who had " tremendous authority " during filming .

= = = Struggling actor (1957 ? 1963) = = =

Steiger apperared in three films released in 1957 . The first was John Farrow 's film noir *The Unholy Wife* , in which he played a wealthy Napa Valley vintner who marries a femme fatale named Phyllis (Diana Dors) . In its original review of the film , *The New York Times* described Steiger 's performance as " curious " further stating that the actor 's voice modulation " ranges from Marlon Brando to Ronald Colman and back . " During the production of Samuel Fuller 's *Run of the Arrow* , in which he played a confederate veteran who refuses to accept defeat following the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox at the end of the American Civil War , Steiger badly sprained his ankle before shooting one of the battle scenes and was unable to walk , let alone run . Fuller instead got one of the Native American extras to run in Steiger 's place , which is why the scene was shot showing only the feet , instead of using close @-@ ups . Steiger had researched the history behind the film and decided to play the character as an Irishman , becoming " the first Irish cowboy " as he put it . Later that year , Steiger took the lead role in the British thriller *Across the Bridge* , in which he played a German conman with British citizenship who goes into hiding in Mexico after embezzling company funds . Film critic Dennis Schwartz stated that Steiger gave " one of his greatest performances " .

Steiger portrayed a mastermind criminal seeking to obtain a \$ 500 @,@ 000 ransom , opposite James Mason and Inger Stevens , in Andrew L. Stone 's *Cry Terror !* (1958) for Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer . Paul Beckley of the *Herald Tribune* had thought Steiger " superbly laconic " , but Dennis Schwartz dismissed the film as " an ill @-@ conceived attempt " with " too many coincidences and contrived plot points to sustain interest " . The following year , Steiger appeared

with Claire Bloom (whom he later married) in a Fay and Michael Kanin stage production of Akira Kurosawa 's 1950 film , Rashomon , where he enacted the role of the bandit originally played by Toshiro Mifune . A major success , it was lauded by critics and nominated for three Tony awards . Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror described Steiger 's performance as " magnificently animalish " , while Kenneth Tynan of The New Yorker thought the acting helped set new standards for Broadway . The same year , Steiger portrayed iconic mobster Al Capone in the film of the same name . Steiger was particularly keen on demonstrating the showiness of Capone , speaking thunderously , slinging a camel @-@ hair coat over his shoulders and wearing his hat at a jaunty angle . The film , noted for its deglamorized portrayal of the subject , earned Steiger a Laurel Award for Best Male Dramatic Performance nomination . Though Hutchinson , author of Rod Steiger : Memoirs of a friendship , perceived Steiger 's portrayal of Capone to be more of a caricature , George Anastasia and Glen Macnow , authors of the book The Ultimate Book of Gangster Movies , described it as one of the best screen portrayals of Capone .

Following the success of Al Capone , Steiger played sophisticated thief Paul Mason , who masterminds a caper to steal \$ 4 million in French francs from the underground vault of the casino of Monte Carlo , in the Henry Hathaway heist film Seven Thieves (1960) . Bosley Crowther of The New York Times gave a positive review of the film , praising the " nerve @-@ rackingly delicate plot " and the " most elaborate roles " of Steiger and his co @-@ star , Edward G. Robinson . The following year , he took the part of a prison psychiatrist who tries to cure the psychological demons of Stuart Whitman 's character in The Mark . Steiger 's performance was so convincing that , after the film was released , he received a call from a psychiatric institution asking him to attend one of their board meetings . The Mark was followed by a role in the European film production of World in My Pocket alongside Nadja Tiller . Steiger increasingly played in films in Italy and France during this period . Not only did he believe he had greater credibility and esteem as an actor in Europe , but he approved of the more relaxed filming schedule prevalent there at that time .

In 1962 , Steiger appeared on Broadway in Moby Dick ? Rehearsed , at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre , as well as playing a detective searching for a scientist 's (Alan Ladd 's) mugger in Philip Leacock 's 13 West Street for Columbia Pictures . Steiger played the role of a destroyer commander in the large ensemble cast of The Longest Day , which included John Wayne , Richard Todd , Robert Mitchum , Richard Burton , Sean Connery and Henry Fonda . According to co @-@ star Richard Burton , Steiger had admitted to him that he was in financial trouble at the time and had had a face lift , which Burton thought made him look like " one half of a naked ass @-@ hole " . The following year , Steiger played ruthless Neapolitan land developer and city councilman Edoardo Nottola , who uses his political power to make personal profit in a large scale suburban real estate deal , in Francesco Rosi 's Italian production , Hands over the City (1963) . According to biographer Francesco Bolzoni , Rosi had cast Steiger in the Italian language film because he had wanted " a rich interpreter of great capacity " in the part of the land developer .

= = = Mainstream film acclaim (1964 ? 1969) = = =

Shortly after Hands over the City , Steiger agreed to appear in another Italian film , Time of Indifference (1964) , in which he starred opposite Claudia Cardinale and Shelley Winters . Though Steiger 's powerful performance was unaffected , the production was marred by a dispute between director Francesco Maselli and producer Franco Cristaldi , with one wanting it to be a purely political film and the other wanting emphasis on the erotic subplot and his relationship with Cardinale . In Sidney Lumet 's gritty drama The Pawnbroker (1964) , Steiger played an embittered , emotionally withdrawn survivor of the Holocaust living in New York City . Richard Harland Smith of TCM notes that Steiger 's career was waning at the time , and he had to " scramble for paying gigs for a decade " . Steiger agreed to a reduced fee of \$ 50 @,@ 000 . He read Lumet 's novel and the script many times to develop an intimate understanding of the character , and insisted on reducing his lines to make his character more realistic and alienated from society . Lumet noted that during the production Steiger had a tendency to be overly dramatic , stating : " Sure , Rod has weaknesses of rhetoric , but you can talk them through with him . I explained that this solitary Jew could not rise to

heights of emotion ; he had been hammered by life and by people . The faith he had to find was in other people , because God had betrayed him . " Steiger remarked of the film : " I think my best work is in *The Pawnbroker* . The last scene , where I find the boy dead on the street . I think that 's the highest moment , whatever it may be , with my talent . " He drew upon inspiration for this climactic scene , in which he appears to show his frustration through a silent scream , from Picasso 's " *Guernica* " , which depicts war @-@ ravaged villagers . Cecil Wilson of the *Daily Mail* wrote that Steiger 's character " seems to encompass all the agony ever inflicted on man " . Although the film attracted controversy and was accused of anti @-@ Semitism , Steiger was widely acclaimed for his performance , which garnered him the prize for Best Actor at the Berlin International Film Festival and his second Best Actor nomination at the Oscars . Steiger was so certain that he had produced an Oscar @-@ winning performance that he was shocked when he lost to Lee Marvin .

In 1965 , Steiger played an effeminate embalmer in Tony Richardson 's comedy *The Loved One* , about the funeral business in Los Angeles , based on the 1948 short satirical novel by Evelyn Waugh . His curly @-@ haired appearance in the film was modeled on a bust of Apollo he once saw while meeting Richardson . Steiger offended Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* , who found his character repellent . His next role , as Komarovsky , a Russian politician and " villainous opportunist " who rapes Julie Christie 's character in David Lean 's *Doctor Zhivago* (1965) , was one of his favorites . Steiger , one of only two Americans in the cast , was initially apprehensive about working with such great British actors as Ralph Richardson and Alec Guinness , and was pleased when the film was completed that he did not stand out as an American . The film was the biggest international box office draw of the 1960s , grossing \$ 200 million worldwide . It has since been acclaimed as one of the greatest films ever made , and in 1998 was selected as the 39th best American film in the original AFI 's 100 Years ... 100 Movies list by the American Film Institute .

Steiger had intended returning to the stage , and had signed on to play the title character in Bertolt Brecht 's *Galileo* , at the Lincoln Center Repertory Company in April 1967 , but the production was cancelled when he became ill . Steiger won the Best Actor Oscar for his portrayal of Chief of Police Bill Gillespie in *In the Heat of the Night* , opposite Sidney Poitier . He played a Southern police chief searching for a murderer . Prejudiced against blacks , he jumps to the conclusion that the culprit is Virgil Tibbs (Poitier) , an African @-@ American man passing through town after visiting his mother , who later turns out to be an experienced homicide detective from Philadelphia . The film deals with the way the two men interact and join forces in solving the crime , as Steiger 's Gillespie learns to greatly respect the black man he initially took to be a criminal . Steiger drew upon his experience in the Navy with a Southerner named " King " , remembering his accent . Poitier considered Steiger and Spencer Tracy to have been the finest actors he had ever worked with , remarking in 1995 , " He 's so good he made me dig into bags I never knew I had . " A. D. Murphy of *Variety* described Steiger 's performance as " outstanding " , writing : " Steiger 's transformation from a diehard Dixie bigot to a man who learns to respect Poitier stands out in smooth comparison to the wandering solution of the murder . " Steiger won a plethora of other awards , including a BAFTA , a Golden Globe , a Laurel Award and awards for Best Actor from the National Society of Film Critics and the New York Film Critics Circle .

In 1968 , Steiger played a deranged serial killer opposite George Segal in Jack Smight 's black comedy thriller *No Way to Treat a Lady* . During the course of the film , he adopts various disguises , including those of a priest , a policeman , a plumber , and a hairdresser , to avoid being identified , and to put his victims at ease , before strangling them and painting a pair of lips on their foreheads with garish red lipstick . The film and Steiger 's performance were critically acclaimed , with Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* highlighting Steiger 's " beautifully uninhibited performance as a hammy " , and a writer for *Time Out* describing him as " brilliant as a sort of Boston strangler , son of a great actress who has left her boy with a mother fixation " . Later in 1968 , Steiger played a repressed gay non @-@ commissioned officer opposite John Phillip Law in John Flynn 's *The Sergeant* for Warner Bros.-Seven Arts , which earned him the David di Donatello Award for Best Foreign Actor . Despite the award win , film critic Pauline Kael of *The New Yorker* was particularly critical of the casting of Steiger as a homosexual and felt that he was " totally outside his range " , to which Steiger concurred that he was ineffective .

Steiger was cast as a short @-@ tempered tattooed man with soon @-@ to @-@ be ex @-@ wife Claire Bloom in the science fiction picture *The Illustrated Man* (1969) . The film was a critical and commercial failure , and Ray Bradbury , who wrote the screenplay , said : " Rod was very good in it , but it wasn 't a good film ... the script was terrible " . Steiger had better luck alongside Bloom later that year in Peter Hall 's British drama *Three into Two Won 't Go* , playing an Irishman who cheats on his wife with a young hiker . It was entered into the Berlin International Film Festival and became the 19th most popular film at the UK box office in 1969 .

= = = Historical roles and declining fortunes (1970 ? 1981) = = =

Steiger was offered the title role in *Patton* (1970) , but turned it down because he did not want to glorify war . The role was then given to George C. Scott , who won the Best Actor Oscar for his performance . Steiger called this refusal his " dumbest career move " , remarking , " I got on my high horse . I thought I was a pacifist . " Instead , he chose to portray Napoleon Bonaparte opposite Christopher Plummer in *Sergei Bondarchuk 's Waterloo* (1970) , a co @-@ production between the Soviet Union and Italy . One commentator wrote : " I watched with extraordinary respect , no , that is not the right word , with enthusiasm , the acting of Rod Steiger in the role of Napoleon in *Waterloo* , " while literary critic Daniel S. Burt describes Steiger 's Napoleon as an " unusual interpretation " , finding him less convincing than Plummer 's Wellington .

In 1971 , Steiger played a chauvinistic big game hunter , explorer and war hero opposite Susannah York in Mark Robson 's *Happy Birthday* , Wanda June , before agreeing to star alongside James Coburn as Mexican bandit Juan Miranda in Sergio Leone 's *Duck , You Sucker !* , which was alternatively titled *A Fistful of Dynamite* . Leone was initially dissatisfied with his performance in that he played his character as a serious , Zapata @-@ like figure . As a result , tension grew between Steiger and Leone , including one incident that ended with Steiger walking off during the filming of the scene where Juan 's stagecoach is destroyed . After the film 's completion , Leone and Steiger were content with the final result , and Steiger praised Leone for his skills as a director . Steiger auditioned for the role of Michael Corleone in Francis Ford Coppola 's *The Godfather* (1972) , a film adaptation of Italian American author Mario Puzo 's 1969 novel of the same name , but Puzo felt that Steiger was too old for the part and rejected him .

Steiger played a rural Tennessee patriarch and brother of Jeff Bridges , at odds with Robert Ryan 's character , in Lolly @-@ *Madonna XXX* (1973) , which received mixed reviews . Later that year he was cast as the turban @-@ wearing German officer Guenther von Lutz in Duccio Tessari 's Italian war comedy *The Heroes* , opposite Rod Taylor , and appeared as " foul @-@ mouthed Sicilian mobster " Eugenio Giannini opposite Gian Maria Volontè 's Lucky Luciano in Francesco Rosi 's film of the same name .

In 1975 , Steiger portrayed Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in Carlo Lizzani 's *Last Days of Mussolini* , which received a positive critical reception . He appeared in Claude Chabrol 's French picture *Innocents with Dirty Hands* , playing the role of Louis Wormser , the wealthy alcoholic husband of Romy Schneider 's character Julie Wormser . It was poorly received by critics , and Steiger found the director , whom he had admired , a bitter disappointment . He was highly critical of Chabrol 's lack of communication and aloofness from the production , and preference for playing chess on set instead of talking through scenes . Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* dismissed it as " little more than a soap opera " , writing : " The performances are of a piece ? uniformly atrocious . Mr. Steiger surpasses his own earlier records for lumbering busyness . Within his first few minutes on screen he (1) gets drunk , (2) whines , (3) pleads for understanding , (4) weeps and (5) goes to bed alone . " Later that year , Steiger starred as an Irish Republican Army terrorist who plans to blow up the Houses of Parliament in Don Sharp 's British thriller *Hennessy* . John Simon of *New York Magazine* wrote : " This fellow *Hennessy* , as played by Rod Steiger , is about as interesting and likable as a Guy Fawkes dummy . "

The following year , Steiger portrayed the comic actor W. C. Fields in an Arthur Hiller biopic , *W. C. Fields and Me* , for Universal Pictures . The screenplay , which was based on a memoir by Carlotta Monti , who was Fields ' mistress for the last 14 years of his life , was penned by Bob Merrill .

Steiger read extensively about Fields in preparation for the role , and developed an encyclopaedic knowledge of his career and personal life . He concluded that he would base his characterization around his performance in *The Bank Dick* (1940) . One day , Fields ' mistress Monti turned up on set , and watched the scene where he briefly thanks everybody . Nervous that she might not approve , he broke down in tears after Monti met him after the scene and fondly said " Woody , Woody , Woody , My Woody " , a nickname used only by those very close to Fields . Despite the energy Steiger put into the picture , like the actor 's previous recent films , it was poorly received by critics . Canby called it " dreadful " and described Steiger 's portrayal of Fields as a " wax dummy of a character " . Lucia Bozzola of *The New York Times* later referred to Steiger 's portrayal of Fields as " superb " , but noted that his Hollywood career had " undeniably fallen from his 1950s and ' 60s heights " .

Steiger played Pontius Pilate in Franco Zeffirelli 's TV miniseries *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) . Stacy Keach , who portrayed Barabbas , expressed his joy at the opportunity to work with Steiger , describing him as " generous and opinionated " . In 1978 , Steiger played a senator in Norman Jewison 's *F.I.S.T.* , opposite Sylvester Stallone , who played a Cleveland warehouse worker involved in the labor union leadership of the fictional organisation named *Federation of Inter @-@ State Truckers* . *Love and Bullets* , later that year , in which Steiger appeared as a mafia boss , was poorly received ; Roger Ebert dismissed it as a " hopelessly confused hodgepodge of chases , killings , enigmatic meetings and separations , and insufferably overacted scenes by Steiger alternating with alarmingly underacted scenes by [Charles] Bronson " . The following year , Steiger was cast as a general opposite Richard Burton and Robert Mitchum in Andrew V. McLaglen 's war film *Breakthrough* , set on the Western Front . In *The Amityville Horror* (1979) , Steiger appeared as a disturbed priest , who is invited to perform an exorcism on a haunted house . Again Steiger was accused of overacting ; Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* wrote : " Mr. Steiger bellows and weeps and overdoes absolutely everything . He won 't even pick up the phone before it 's rung 12 or 15 times . " Pauline Kael thought that Steiger 's " spiritual agony was enough to shatter the camera lens " .

In 1980 , Steiger received two Genie Award for Best Performance by a Foreign Actor nominations for his roles in *Klondike Fever* and *The Lucky Star* , both Canadian productions . *Klondike Fever* is based on Jack London 's journey from San Francisco to the Klondike gold fields in 1898 . Steiger revisited his role as Mussolini in *Lion of the Desert* , a production that was financed by Muammar Gaddafi , and which co @-@ starred Anthony Quinn as Bedouin tribal leader Omar Mukhtar , fighting the Italian army in the years leading up to World War II . The Italian authorities reportedly banned the film in 1982 , as it was considered damaging to the army , and it was not shown on Italian television until a state visit by Gaddafi in 2009 . It received critical acclaim in Britain , where it was praised in particular for the quality of its battle scenes . Later in 1981 , Steiger won the Montréal World Film Festival Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of white @-@ bearded Orthodox rabbi Reb Saunders in Jeremy Kagan 's *The Chosen* . Janet Maslin commented that Steiger 's " slow , rolling delivery " was more " numbing than prepossessing " , though a critic from *Variety* thought it an " exceptional performance as the somewhat tyrannical but loving patriarch " .

= = = B @-@ movies and criticism (1982 ? 1994) = = =

After his open @-@ heart surgery in 1979 , clinical depression and health problems during the 1980s directly impacted Steiger 's career , and he often turned to B @-@ movies , low @-@ budget , independent productions and TV miniseries . He admitted that during this period he accepted " everything I was offered " , and knew that many of the films he appeared in were not great , but wanted to demonstrate his strong work ethic despite his issues . He later regretted the poorer films in which he appeared during the 1980s , and wished he had done more stage work . He sank into an even deeper depression when he was not involved in acting , but it bothered him more that his acting career had taken a turn for the worse and was no longer challenging . The major studio producers were wary of his problems and considered him a liability . Steiger spoke about the experience to a younger colleague while advising : " Never tell anyone if you 've got heart problems ,

kid . Never . " His reputation as a fine character actor remained intact , and Joel Hirschhorn at the time considered his talent to be " as strong as ever " .

In 1984 , Steiger starred as a detective assigned to investigate the murder of a Chicago psychoanalyst (Roger Moore) , a man whom he detests from a previous case , in Bryan Forbes 's *The Naked Face* . Richard Christiansen of the *Chicago Tribune* referred to it as a " wimpy suspense movie shot in Chicago in the fall of 1983 , [that] doesn 't do much good for the city or for anyone connected with it " , and considered Steiger to be " acting in his high hysteria gear " , who " snarls and whines and overacts " . Steiger took a break from cinema in the mid @-@ 1980s , during which he appeared in the Yorkshire Television mini @-@ series *The Glory Boys* (1984) with Anthony Perkins , and *Hollywood Wives* (1985) with Angie Dickinson . Steiger and Perkins were at loggerheads during the production of *The Glory Boys* . Perkins resented the fact that Steiger insisted on a bigger trailer and felt that Steiger was trying to steal scenes from him , while Steiger had thought Perkins " so jittery and jinxed by the chemicals he was taking " that he felt sorry for him and believed that he was jeopardizing the success of the film . Steiger also performed on Joni Mitchell 's 1985 album *Dog Eat Dog* , where he provided the voice of an evangelist in the song " Tax Free " .

Steiger appeared in the Argentine @-@ American film *Catch the Heat* (1987) , a martial arts picture about a Brazilian drug baroness who smuggles drugs into the United States inside her breast implants . According to director Fred Olen Ray , it was pulled from distribution within a week of release . In 1988 , Steiger and Yvonne De Carlo played a spooky elderly couple with developmentally delayed children in John Hough 's horror film *American Gothic* . Universally panned by the critics , Caryn James of *The New York Times* wrote : " Mr. Steiger addresses the camera as if he were reciting Shakespeare , he is truly , straightforwardly , hilariously bad . " During the last year of the decade he played authority figures , including a mayor in *The January Man* , and as Judge Prescott in *Tennessee Waltz* . Although Steiger admitted that his performance in *The January Man* was " way over the top " , he enjoyed the experience , thereby marking a positive turning point after a period of clinical depression .

In 1990 , Steiger starred in *Men of Respect* , a crime drama film adaptation of William Shakespeare 's play *Macbeth* . He played a character based on King Duncan , opposite John Turturro as Mike Battaglia (*Macbeth*) , who plays a Mafia hitman who climbs his way to the top by killing Steiger 's character . The film was critically panned , with Roger Ebert awarding it one star out of four , describing the concept as a " very , very bad idea " . Steiger played another mobster , Sam Giancana , two years later in the miniseries *Sinatra* (1992) .

Steiger portrayed a reverend living in a small town in the American South in the macabre Merchant Ivory film production *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1991) , co @-@ starring Vanessa Redgrave and Keith Carradine . The film met with generally lukewarm reviews , though it was entered into the 41st Berlin International Film Festival . Steiger auditioned for the part of an elderly Irishman in Ron Howard 's *Far and Away* , starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman . Steiger , who had long been bald , was ordered by Howard to wear a wig to the audition . He resented the fact that Howard insisted on taping the audition , which he believed to be a form of humiliation for actors , serving as after @-@ dinner entertainment for the Hollywood executives . Steiger never forgave Howard , whom he referred to as a " cocksucker " , for rejecting him for the part and giving it to Cyril Cusack .

In 1993 , Steiger portrayed an aging gynaecologist who terrorizes his urban neighbors in a rural community in Burlington , Vermont in *The Neighbor* . Dennis Schwartz considered it to have been one of Steiger 's creepiest roles , though he thought that the poor script had rendered the role awkward and " mildly entertaining in the sense that Steiger is asked to carry the film and hams it up " . The following year , Steiger agreed to play a Cuban mob boss opposite Sylvester Stallone and Sharon Stone in Luis Llosa 's thriller *The Specialist* , citing its purpose as a " \$ 40 million commercial " to show a new generation that he existed . Critics panned the film , which has a four percent approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes based on 27 reviews as of July 2015 . The role earned Steiger a Golden Raspberry Award for Worst Supporting Actor nomination , and the film was listed in *The Official Razzie Movie Guide* as one of " The 100 Most Enjoyably Bad Movies Ever Made " .

= = = Later work and final years (1995 ? 2002) = = =

Following *The Specialist* (1994) , Steiger appeared in Tom Clancy 's *Op Center* (1995) , a film that was edited down into a TV miniseries , and featured in a Columbo television film , *Strange Bedfellows* . The following year , he took a minor role as Doc Wallace in the Dale Rosenbloom family drama *Shiloh* . He reprised the role three years later in the sequel . Also in 1996 , Steiger played a " jingoistic top general " who " petitions the president to go nuclear in the middle of a global crisis " in the ensemble production of *Mars Attacks !* .

In 1997 , Steiger played Tony Vago , the mob boss of Vincent Gallo 's character in Kiefer Sutherland 's *Truth or Consequences* , N.M. , a gritty noir about a drug heist gone wrong . Steiger played judges in Antonio Banderas 's comedy @-@ drama *Crazy in Alabama* and in the prison drama , *The Hurricane* , both in 1999 , the latter of which tells the story of former middleweight boxer Rubin Carter , who was wrongly convicted of a triple homicide in a bar in Paterson , New Jersey . *The Hurricane* reunited Steiger with Norman Jewison , who had directed him in *In the Heat of the Night* . Steiger portrayed H. Lee Sarokin , the judge responsible for freeing Carter . Sarokin thought it was a " marvellous film " that was Oscar @-@ worthy , but found Steiger 's portrayal as overacted and a " little arrogant and pompous " .

After a minor role as a " bombastic priest " in *End of Days* (1999) , Steiger was one of the lead actors in Burt Reynolds 's *The Last Producer* (2000) , a film about a washed @-@ up , veteran producer (Reynolds) who tries to re @-@ enter the movie business by producing a new film . Steiger 's last film role was as the billiard hall manager , Nick , in *Poolhall Junkies* (2002) ; it was poorly received by critics .

= = Personal life and death = =

Steiger was married five times : he married actress Sally Gracie (1952 ? 1958) , actress Claire Bloom (1959 ? 1969) , secretary Sherry Nelson (1973 ? 1979) , singer Paula Ellis (1986 ? 1997) and actress Joan Benedict Steiger (married 2000 until his death) . He had a daughter , opera singer Anna Steiger (born in 1960) by Bloom , and a son , Michael Steiger (born in 1993) , from his marriage to Ellis . In an interview with journalist Kenneth Passingham , Steiger stated that Bloom was " all I ever wanted in a woman " , and that " maybe our marriage was better than most because we were both established when we met " . The couple bought a home in Malibu , California , a community that appealed to Steiger but which Bloom found boring . They also purchased an apartment in Manhattan and a cottage in County Galway , in close proximity to John Huston 's home . Financial considerations led Steiger to sell their New York apartment in the mid @-@ 1970s . It upset him greatly when his marriage with Bloom ended in 1969 and that she quickly remarried Broadway producer Hillard Elkins the same year , a man whom Steiger had entrusted to care for her while he was away shooting *Waterloo* . Steiger was also close friends with actress Elizabeth Taylor .

Steiger was outspoken on McCarthyism . He was particularly critical of Charlton Heston 's stance on weapons , and publicly referred to him as " America 's favorite fascist " . In one clash in a column in the *Los Angeles Times* , Steiger responded to a letter sent by Heston saying that he was shocked that the American Film Institute had not honored Elia Kazan because of his testimony to the Un @-@ American Activities Committee . Steiger wrote that he was " appalled , appalled , appalled " at actors and writers who had been forced to drive cabs because they were blacklisted and had even committed suicide as a result . Heston did not reply .

Steiger suffered from depression throughout much of his life . He described himself as " incapacitated for about eight years with clinical depression " before his Oscar win for *In The Heat of the Night* . His career problems from the 1970s onwards were often exacerbated by health issues . He underwent open @-@ heart surgery in 1976 and 1979 and struggled with obesity , though certain roles , such as Napoleon , required him to intentionally gain weight . After the decline of his third marriage in 1979 , a deep depression , partly a side effect of his surgery , during the 1980s negatively affected his career . He became increasingly reclusive during this period , often confining

himself to his apartment , watching American football for several hours . He said of the experience : " You begin to lose self @-@ esteem . You don 't walk , you don 't shave and if no one was watching you 'd go to the bathroom right where you were sitting " . He would lie in bed at night thinking " You 'll never act again . Why bother ? You 're no good " . Despite these challenges , Steiger continued to act into the 1990s and early 2000s . In one of his final interviews , he stated that there was a stigma wrongfully attached to sufferers of depression and that it was caused by a chemical imbalance , not a mental disease . He commented : " Pain must never be a source of shame . It 's a part of life , it 's part of humanity . "

Steiger died of pneumonia and complications from surgery for a gall bladder tumor on July 9 , 2002 , in Los Angeles , and was buried in Forest Lawn ? Hollywood Hills Cemetery . The film Saving Shiloh , released in 2006 , was dedicated to his memory .

= = Acting style = =

Steiger was one of Hollywood 's most respected character actors ; Hutchinson described him as " one of Hollywood 's most charismatic and dynamic stars " . Yet for Hutchinson , Steiger remained " out of sympathy with Hollywood " during his career , believing that accomplished actors often struggle to find challenging films as they got older . Steiger was an " effusive talent " according to Lucia Bozzola of The New York Times , and was particularly noted for his intense portrayal of offbeat , often volatile and crazed characters . After On the Waterfront (1954) , Steiger became somewhat typecast for playing tough characters and villains , and grew increasingly frustrated playing the " Mafia heavy or a near @-@ psychopath " during the 1970s , roles which he could play menacingly , but provided little opportunity for him to showcase his talent . Gossip columnist Louella Parsons hailed him as " the Screen 's No.1 Bad Man " , while the newspaper London Evening News referred to him as " the man you would love to hate if you had the coverage " . A 1960 publication by Dean Jennings of The Saturday Evening Post referred to Steiger as an " angry , hot @-@ tempered newcomer of prodigious acting talents , [who] works best only at emotional white heat " , and remarked that he found it " stimulating to carry theatrical fantasy into his private life " . Pauline Kael found his performances so powerful that she believed he " often seems to take over a picture even when he isn 't in the lead " . The journal Films and Filming , surveying his career in 1971 , noted that his talent " developed steadily through films good and bad " , and that the secret of his success was that he stayed grounded , citing a 1956 interview where he said " I pity the player who can 't keep his feet on the ground . It 's too easy to trade on success and forget that no performer can stand still . "

A product of the Actors Studio , Steiger is closely associated with method acting , embodying the characters he played . Writer James F. Scott notes that during his career , he " many times put aside his own personality to think his way into an alien psyche " . Steiger once said :

" I don 't like the term Method , but for the sake of argument method acting is a means to an end . It is something that helps you get involved in the part personally so that you can communicate with the audience . No matter what , the American actor of the fifties changed acting the world over . Montgomery Clift was perhaps the actor who started it , Brando caused the sensation and [James] Dean made it a cult " .

Steiger was so devoted to his craft that during the 1970s he turned to many foreign productions , especially in Italy , to obtain the sort of roles he desired , but often clashed with directors over his method acting techniques . In one of his last interviews , Steiger said : " What is the greatest thing an artist in any profession can give to a person ? ? that would be a constructive , warm memory . Because that gets into your brain and therefore into your life , so to speak . And that 's it , when somebody says to me ' I 'll never forget ' , that 's worth more to me than five Academy Awards , I 'm in that person 's life " .

Film writer Paul Simpson notes how closely Steiger prepared for his roles , and how he " effortlessly " recreated the mannerisms of figures such as Mussolini , in a " compelling take on an enigmatic figure " . Judith Crist of New York Magazine , reviewing Duck , You Sucker ! , commented that Steiger was " totally without mannerisms , always with manner " , and noted that his " silences are

stunningly effective " . Roger Ebert later echoed this statement , concurring that Steiger lacked mannerisms , writing , " When he gets a character worth playing with , he creates it new from the bottom up , out of whole cloth . I don 't know how he does it . It 's almost as if he gets inside the skin of the guy he 's playing and starts being that person for a while " . Steiger said : " I always tried to do things different . If I got a role which was similar to another I 'd try to do it a little different . " His explosive screen performances were an influence on many later actors , including Robert De Niro , who used Steiger 's portrayal of Al Capone as a reference for his own performance in *The Untouchables* (1987) . Elvis Presley was highly impressed with Steiger 's " powerful and wrenching performance " in *The Pawnbroker* .

Despite Steiger 's acclaim as an actor , he was frequently accused of overacting and won his fair share of critics , particularly during the 1970s and 1980s . His acting was so dynamic at times that critics found him excessive and overbearing , and even uncomfortable or laughable to watch . Steiger once clashed with Armenian director Rouben Mamoulian , during a theatrical production of *Oklahoma !* , as he was intolerant of Steiger 's " unusual acting technique " . Steiger ignored the director 's concerns that he was mumbling his lines , and when he began chomping loudly on an apple during a scene with Gordon MacRae , Mamoulian exclaimed : " Get out of my theater . Get out of my life ! " , and fired him . Even Kazan found several of the Actors Studio 's techniques disagreeable , preferring " more humor and verve and less self @-@ indulgence , self @-@ pity and self @-@ awareness " . Kazan felt that Steiger often displayed a competitive edge as an actor and tried to steal scenes from his co @-@ stars . Steiger rejected these claims , insisting that he was merely " trying to take the medium of acting to as far as I can go , and that why I sometimes go over the edge " .

Several co @-@ stars found Steiger difficult ; Warren Oates , according to director Norman Jewison , viewed Steiger as " somebody who had a tendency to go over the top " during the making of *In The Heat of the Night* . Writer Richard Dyer highlights the contrast in the film between the acting styles of Steiger and Poitier , with " Poitier 's stillness and implied intensity " and " Steiger 's busy , exteriorised method acting " . Humphrey Bogart , Steiger 's co @-@ star of *The Harder They Fall* , referred to Steiger 's method acting as the " scratch @-@ your @-@ ass @-@ and @-@ mumble school of acting " . Director Robert Aldrich notes that Steiger had a habit of changing his lines , which often confused his co @-@ stars . Aldrich stated : " Usually I lie awake at nights trying to think of ways to improve an actor 's performance . With Steiger , the problem is to try and contain him " . Steiger was particularly aggressive towards director Kenneth Annakin during the making of *Across the Bridge* , insisting on rewriting most of the script and changing many of the lines to better fit Steiger 's idea of the character . Annakin stated that he had " never known an actor to put so much thought and preparation into a performance " as Steiger . Hutchinson revealed that Steiger often suffered from panic during filming and that fear of failure haunted him throughout his life , but fear also provided him with a source of strength in his acting .

= = Filmography and theatre credits = =

Rod Steiger on screen and stage