

RAY HARRYHAUSEN: SPECIAL EFFECTS TITAN.

Review by Ross Campbell - FVFS



Your Image is Our Focus

This two-disc DVD supplied by Umbrella Entertainment celebrates in great detail the enormous achievements of American-born animator, artist, model maker and special effects innovator, Ray Harryhausen.

Disc One, the more appropriate for film society use, is a comprehensive chronological account of his films, both in the US and the UK. It is supported by many clips and testimonials from a wide variety of modern directors of feature films inspired and influenced by this prodigious master, best known for Jason and the Argonauts, Clash of the Titans and The Golden Voyage of Sinbad. Written and directed by French documentarian, Gilles Penso, the film traces Harryhausen's chain of influence that began with Georges Melies, King Kong of 1933 (which inspired the young Ray) thence to present-day directors James Cameron, Steven Speilberg, Peter Jackson, Nick Park and Peter Lord of Ardman (and by implication, although not included) our own Adam Elliot. In today's world of computer generated images, CGIs, where anything is possible, Harryhausen's stop-frame animation of three dimensional models have a gravitas, a soul, as it were, not shared by the super-slick images of today, for all their so-called perfection. Peter Lord, director of the Wallace and Gromit films sums it up: With modern CG effects the sophisticated audience (from three years of age) now knows that nothing is true. It's all a wonderful, absolutely convincing fake. Like Avatar. With the Harryhausen films we watch them in a different spirit, marvelling at their craftsmanship. That's part of the joy.

Disc Two consists of many interviews (and outtakes from Disc One) with modern directors of fantasy and horror films, plus details of the 2013 London exhibition: "Myths and Legends". The documentary is extremely detailed and at 93 minutes could well be the basis of a bonus screening associated with a feature screening of an animated film, e.g. King Kong, an Ardman Studios film, or Adam Elliot's Max and Mary.