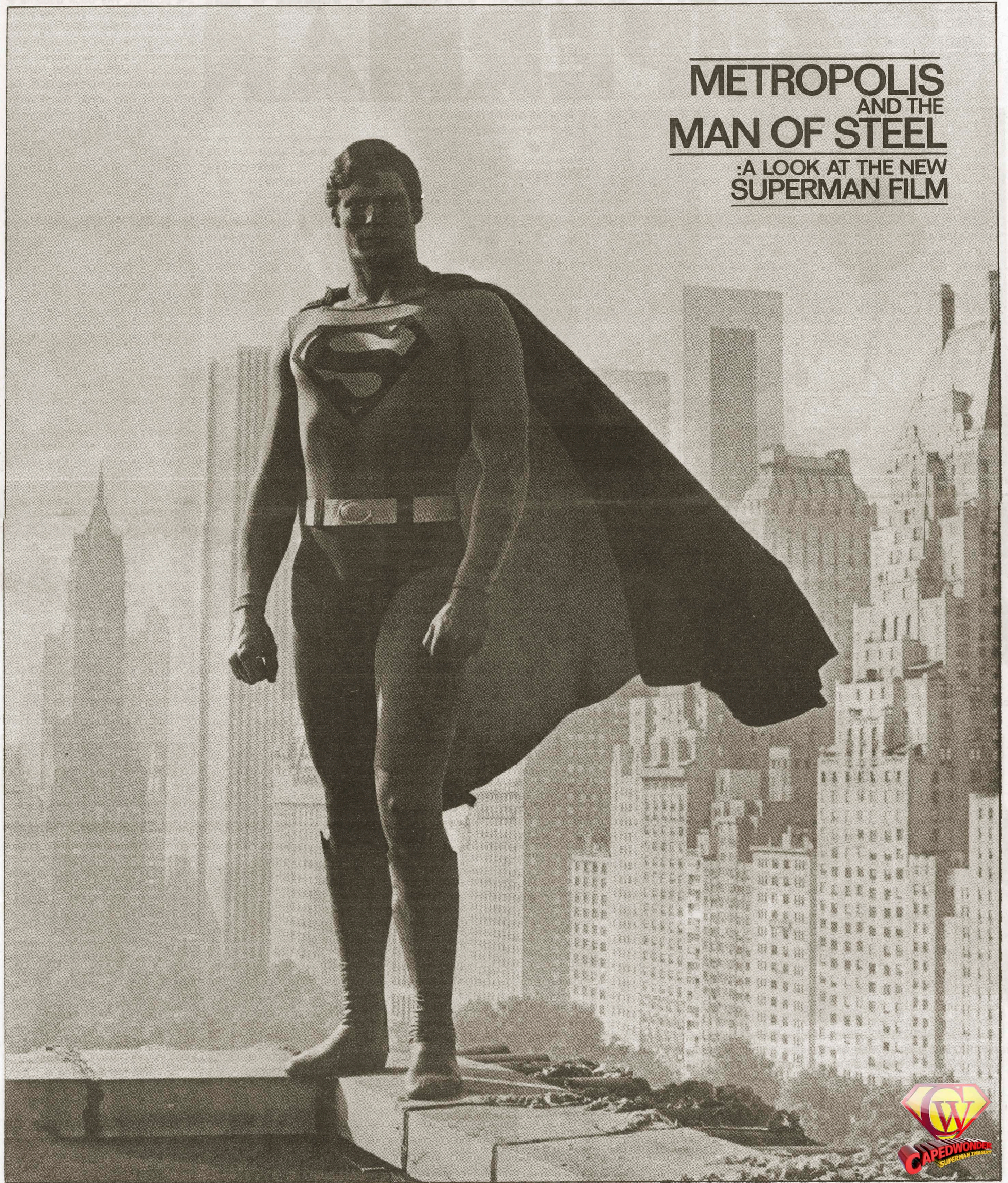


AMERICA'S NEW MAGAZINE OF POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT

MEDIA SCENE

METROPOLIS AND THE MAN OF STEEL

A LOOK AT THE NEW
SUPERMAN FILM



PERSONALITY PROFILE "I HAVE THE LOOK"

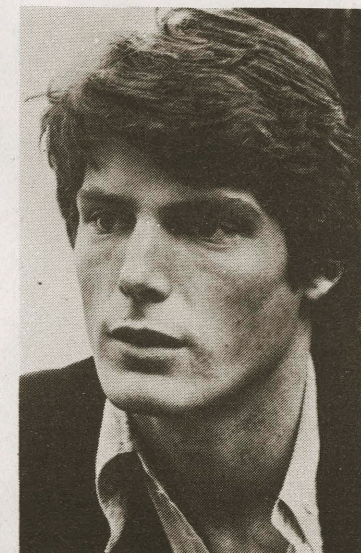
CHRISTOPHER REEVE: SUPERMAN

There is a time when one needs power. To be powerful. To look powerful. Christopher Reeve had to change the shape of his body. 188 pounds. Six feet four. The posture of a post. What Christopher Reeve needed was POWER!

For six weeks he pumped iron, ate four meals a day and gulped protein. His weight expanded to 242 pounds. His back became a wedge of muscle. Then he went to work on his mind so that mentally he could accept the changing into a cape and leotards in a phone booth. So he could fly through a brick wall. So he could drill steel doors with



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his fingers. And so he could traverse the heavens, sans aircraft, to save the Planet Earth from doom. All of this while looking deadly serious. Thus for an 24-year-old New York stage actor, who had dabbled in soap operas, playing Superman could be demanding stuff. But Christopher Reeve insists that he is ready. He is fully aware that after the film is completed people are saying he'll never work again, or he'll never work again for less than a million dollars.

Handsome, angular-jawed, he says: "I believe that it is better to gamble, to go for high risk, than to stand around testing the water. After all, I run on high-test gasoline. The acting rewards of the part are such that it's worth doing. Anybody in my position would have done it. It's a class act."

Considering the \$2.25 million laid on Marlon Brando for 12 days in the same movie, the financial rewards alone make any gamble reasonable. Roping Reeve ended a three-year international search by movie producers Ilya Salkind and Pierre Spengler, who considered everyone from Steve McQueen ("too fat") to Paul Newman ("too old"). Even as shooting of the \$30 million project was underway, the word in Hollywood was that decathlon gold medalist Bruce Jenner was being offered \$2 million to play Superman/Clark Kent. At that time, Reeve was in California finishing up *Grey Lady Down* with Charlton Heston and David Carradine.

"Somebody asked me if I had tried for the part and, I have to admit now, even the question surprised me. Playing Superman just never occurred to me. I put it out of my mind, specially when I heard they were testing Jenner, a real athlete!"



PHOTOS: *Top left*—In the editor's office of the Daily Planet, left to right, director Richard Donner, Marc McClure as Jimmy Olsen, Jackie Cooper as Perry White, Margot Kidder as Lois Lane, and Christopher Reeve as Clark Kent.

Top right—Christopher Reeve. *Bottom left*—Sussanah York as Lara, Lee Quigley as baby Kal-El, and Marlon Brando as Jor-El. *Bottom right*—Kirk Alyn, the serial Superman, and Noel Neill, the TV Lois Lane, portray the parents of the 70's Lois Lane.



But back in New York, Reeve did get a call from Salkind, who invited him over for coffee. He arrived to find director Richard Donner also there. They sat around "talking about everything except Superman." The only real cue Reeve picked up was when they asked him to try on Clark Kent's glasses. As he recalls: "Ilya looked kind of excited and swapped a couple of quick glances with Dick."

From there he was called to Shepperton Studios, London, for screen tests. Driving back to the London airport, Reeve's chauffeur said, as studio driver's are inclined to do, "You got the part." Two weeks later it was confirmed. "That," says Reeve, "was when I started to get excited—and also nervous. At the testing stage, you've got nothing to lose; you haven't got a part. But once I was in, everybody expected me to be Superman." Already cast were Brando as Jor-El, Superman's father; Gene Hackman as arch villain Lex Luthor; Valerie

Perrine, Ned Beatty, Jackie Cooper, Marc McClure, Susanah York, Terrance Stamp, Trevor Howard and Glenn Ford, amongst others. Recently Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill were signed to appear as Lois Lane's parents.

Deep into production now, Reeve is consumed by the role, walking around the streets of Manhattan in his Clark Kent outfit: loose-fitting grey suit, slicked back hair and large horned-rimmed glasses. Not seen is Reeve as Superman, in cape and leotards, rocketing up out of a phone booth to save a cat stuck up a tree, or pluck some frightened wee thing from the grasp of Luthor or The Ultra-Humanoid.

And if the producers have their way he'll never be seen offscreen as Superman.

As a company spokesman said: "We wouldn't want some lucky photographer snapping Superman eating a hamburger, or smoking, or sitting there with his tights crinkled around his ankles. Everybody has his own

idea about Superman, and whatever is done in still photography would not do him justice. A moving image is something else."

Despite their enormous investment, the producers are confident they'll turn up a box office fortune, pointing to a built-in Superman audience they claim is 6.5 billion in 38 countries and 14 languages.

The way Reeve sees it, his most severe challenge will be taking the legend and turning Superman into a *credible human being*, while leaving his special character unchanged. Reeve is indeed playing a man who is a mild-mannered reporter, getting himself caught in revolving doors and stammering under Lois Lane's steady gaze.

As Superman he will waste villains and deliver the innocent, but as Clark Kent he will ask himself: Why me?

Which is a question still occurring to Reeve.

Finally he admits: "The part

came to me because...I have the look. If I didn't look like the guy in the comic book, I wouldn't be here. The other 10 per cent is talent."

Certainly Reeve has a deep well of experience to draw from, starting back when he stood in empty grocery boxes on the porch of his New Jersey home, and, with brother Benjamin, pretended he was a pirate on the Barbary Coast.

By 14, he was apprenticed to Williamstown, one of the better summer theaters in the U.S., and by high school he was working in a professional repertory company. The son of a novelist, poet and Russian scholar, he grew up in a house with no television, his parents dismissing it as "the boob tube." His mother, a newspaper feature editor, encouraged him to play with words.

The make-believe world of the theater provided a strange tranquil reality for Reeve. He looks back on growing up as a challenge. At home his parents

were divorcing, and at Cornell, where he was a freshman, students were occupying the premises in protest against the Vietnam War.

When the pressure became too much he fled to the hills of Scotland, where he lived for several months, "cooling out." Another time, he dug a hole in Paris.

Drugs were coming in, hard work was going out, and it was popular to have no idea who you were or where you were going.

Reeve was touched by none of this, admitting: "I am very old fashioned and, I guess, very lucky that early I found something to attract me, something I really wanted to do. I am an actor because I'd never wanted to do anything else. I compare it to the fine art of competitive sailing. I take it seriously, but not grimly. Ultimately I act for my own pleasure, but I am aware of my responsibility to give a performance that people will enjoy."●

Joel Thingvall

