

John Qualen Biography



John Qualen - Class of 1920, (born Johan Mandt Kvalen, 12/8/1899 – 9/12/1987) was a Canadian-American character actor of Norwegian heritage who specialized in Scandinavian roles.

Qualen was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, the son of immigrants from Norway; his father was a Lutheran minister and changed the family's original surname, "Kvalen" to "Qualen". Qualen grew up in Elgin, Illinois.

His acting career began when he was at Northwestern University which he attended on a scholarship from having won an oratory contest. Eventually making it to Broadway, he got his big break as the Swedish janitor in Elmer Rice's "*Street Scene*". His movie career began when he recreated the role in the film version. This was followed by his appearance in John Ford's "*Arrowsmith*" (1931) which began a more than thirty year membership in the director's "stock company", with important supporting roles in "*The Searchers*" (1956), "*Two Rode Together*" (1961) and "*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence*" and "*Cheyenne Autumn*".

Appearing in well over one hundred films, and acting extensively on television into the 1970's, Qualen performed many of his roles with various accents, usually Scandinavian, often intended for comic effect. Three of his more memorable roles showcase his versatility. Qualen assumed a Midwestern dialect as Muley, who recounts the destruction of his farm by the bank in Ford's "*The Grapes of Wrath*", and as the confused killer Earl Williams in Howard Hawks' classic comedy "*His Girl Friday*". As Berger, the jewelry-selling Norwegian Resistance member in Michael Curtiz' "*Casablanca*", he essayed a light Scandinavian accent, but put on a thicker Mediterranean accent as the homeward-bound fisherman Locota in William Wellman's "*The High and the Mighty*", and appeared in nine films with John Wayne.

Qualen was treasurer of The Authors Club and historian of The Masquers, Hollywood's famed social group for actors.

John Qualen was blind in his later years. He died of heart failure in 1987 in Torrance, California and was interred in the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale. He was survived by his three daughters, Elizabeth, Kathleen, and Meredith.

Film Credits:

- *Street Scene* (1931)
- *Arrowsmith* (1931) (uncredited)
- *Upper World* (1934)
- *Our Daily Bread* (1934)
- *One More Spring* (1935)
- *Black Fury* (1935)

John Qualen Biography

- The Farmer Takes a Wife (1935)
- The Three Musketeers (1935)
- Meet Nero Wolfe (1936)
- Wife vs. Secretary (1936)
- The Bad Men of Brimstone (1938)
- Stand Up and Fight (1939)
- Thunder Afloat (1939)
- His Girl Friday (1940)
- The Grapes of Wrath (1940)
- Babies for Sale (1940)
- Angels Over Broadway (1940)
- Ski Patrol (1940)
- Knute Rockne All American (1940)
- The Long Voyage Home (1940)
- Out of the Fog (1941)
- The Great Awakening (1941)
- The Shepherd of the Hills (1941)
- The Devil and Daniel Webster (1941)
- Tortilla Flat (1942)
- Casablanca (1942)
- Swing Shift Maisie (1943)
- Dark Waters (1944)
- The Fugitive (1947)
- Song of Scheherazade (1947)
- Hollow Triumph (1948)
- Hans Christian Andersen (1952)
- The High and the Mighty (1954)
- The Sea Chase (1955)
- The Searchers (1956)
- The Gun Runners (1958)
- Anatomy of a Murder (1959)
- *Elmer Gantry* (1960) (uncredited)
- North to Alaska (1960)
- Two Rode Together (1961)
- The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence (1962)
- 7 Faces of Dr. Lao (1964)
- Cheyenne Autumn (1964)
- A Patch of Blue (1965)
- I'll Take Sweden (1965)
- A Big Hand for the Little Lady (1966)

