

Jeremy Spenser

Titles: 9 Sources: 3 Stills: 22

Born: London, July 16th 1937
Younger brother of David Spenser [\[qv\]](#)



A Mantovani in short britches – in **"PRELUDE TO FAME"**

Source: *The Moving Picture Boy*



Left: winsome publicity shot. Right: **"ANNA KARENINA"**

Source: *Picturegoer Film Annual 1957-58*

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"British leading man, former child actor, also on stage."

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

"Jeremy's father was Sri Lankan and his mother, a musician and teacher, Italian. His elder brother David (born 12 March 34) was a fine boy actor, largely on radio, but also in the film **"MR PERRIN AND MR TRAIL"** (48). After a sporadic adult career in theatre and cinema, David became one of Britain's best radio drama directors, winning two Pye Awards.

It was David who suggested Jeremy for two child parts he was too old for, in **"ANNA KARENINA"** and **"KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS"**. But Jeremy shot to overnight fame as a boy conductor in **"PRELUDE TO FAME"**. This was a straight crib of a French film of 1949, **"PRÉLUDE À LA GLOIRE"**, which had starred a real-life prodigy called Roberto Benzi. (Another, Pierino Gamba, had already done virtually the same in Italy: there was a general European craze for boy conductors at the time.)

Jeremy Spenser was no musical prodigy, but he was a keen mimic. The highpoint of **"PRELUDE TO FAME"** is his conducting of a symphony orchestra in Weber's entire **"Oberon"** overture - laughable as musician-ship, but irresistible as a portrait of a temperamental little boy having a ball. With his brooding dark looks, Jeremy was like a twelve-year-old Orson Welles, every inch the mini-maestro.

He remained Britain's leading boy actor for the next two or three years, and was sinisterly memorable on the London stage in 1952, his hair dyed blond, as Miles in **"The Innocents"**, a version of Henry James's **"The Turn of the Screw"**. (Later filmed, with Martin Stephens in the part.)

In his late teens Jeremy Spenser continued in **"THE DEVIL ON HORSEBACK"** (54), **"SUMMER MADNESS"** (55), **"ESCAPADE"** (55), **"WONDERFUL THINGS"** (57) and **"THE PRINCE AND THE SHOWGIRL"** (57), in which he repeated his stage role (with Laurence Olivier) as the young King Nicholas of Carpathia.

Then, after **"FERRY TO HONG KONG"** (59), he was an Italian teenager dogging Vivien Leigh in **"THE ROMAN SPRING OF MRS STONE"** (61), a temperamental young painter

in "VENGEANCE" (GB/DE 62), a soldier in

after "HE WHO RIDES A TIGER" (65) an



Above: with Janette Scott
and Mandy Miller in
"BACKGROUND" (53)

Right: with Margaret
Johnston in **"PORTRAIT
OF CLARE"** (50)

Below: with Jack Hawkins in
"THE PLANTER'S WIFE"
(52)

Source: Picturegoer Film
Annual 1957-58





In **"PRELUDE TO FAME"** he plays Guido, a humble Italian peasant boy introduced to classical music by a British psychologist on holiday. The psychologist has an eye for talent, and Guido has an ear for music..

Meanwhile Guido and the psychologist's son (Robin Dowell) conduct a wave of terror on unsuspecting passers-by...

Source: Collins Film Book for Young People c1950



emblematic personage in Truffaut's **"FAHRENHEIT 451"** (68).

An actor good enough to work with Losey and Truffaut should have faced the future with confidence - but Jeremy Spenser abandoned his acting career at this point, in favour of drama teaching and directing, and later antique dealing."

Picturegoer Film Annual 1957 - 58

4-page profile "Jeremy Spenser - a Veteran Youngster":

"One film did it. One film, a light, frolicsome item called **"IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG"**, has rocketed Jeremy Spenser up and up to the position of a bobby-sox idol.

Young Spenser was only eighteen when he made that film with John Mills. In it he played a schoolboy - hardly the kind of rôle to give the

girls goose-pimples. But he proved that, from being a child star of cuddly brilliance, he has now developed into a promising contender for screen romance.

The army claimed Spenser after that. His acting career marks time while he sports the pips of a subaltern in the Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry. But he was given time off to re-create his stage part in **"The Sleeping Prince"**, with Laurence Olivier and Marilyn Monroe.

Who is this homegrown Lothario, the youngster I confidently tip as one of the big stars of 1958 and the 1960s? Well, he went to school in Victoria, London - nothing high-falutin', just plain London County Council education.

Then he made a fleeting appearance in **"KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS"**, playing Dennis Price in knickerbockers. It happened like this. Jeremy's elder brother, David Spenser, was

already a fifteen-year-old veteran of five hundred broadcasts. He was suggested for two parts – in "ANNA KARENINA" and "KIND HEARTS" – but he was too big for both of them.

So David immediately suggested his kid brother. And Jeremy was then launched on his movie career. He followed up with "THE DANCING YEARS" (he was Dennis Price's son in that one), "THE SPIDER AND THE FLY" and "PORTRAIT OF CLARE".

But his biggest break was to have been "PRELUDE TO FAME" – the lead part of a musical prodigy who makes a name for himself as a conductor of symphony orchestras.

Publicity-wise, this brought the name of Jeremy Spenser to the notice of picturegoers. Career-wise, it took him no place – for the film wasn't exactly a box-office sizzler.

Meanwhile, Jeremy's astute mother made very sure that the small, olive head of Jeremy Spenser didn't outgrow his hats. He has always led a normal, unpretentious life. He's kept an engaging hesitant modesty throughout his career in show business.

Almost the only exceptional thing about him, when he was a boy of twelve, was that his favourite tippie was a pint of brown ale. And he was allowed one every lunch-time.

At that time, remember, Jeremy was competing with youngsters like John Howard Davies and Bobby Henrey. He's the only one to survive his growing pains. Why? Because he's learned acting the hard way – on the stage.

"Making people shudder is smashing!" exclaimed the fifteen-year-old Jeremy after he'd scared the living daylights out of audiences in the play, "The Innocents."

He was a malevolent little boy, hair bleached Monroe-colour, and he gave an amazing performance of poised wickedness. In between plays, he spent his time writing thrillers – all about murder, love and sudden death.

But would Spenser survive the loss of his baby looks? First hint that he would came in the stage version of "The Sleeping Prince". Only sixteen then, he produced so much subtle polish that Sir Laurence Olivier insisted that he was vital for the film version and badgered the

War Office to release him as "a matter of national importance".



Spenser c1957 – all grew up and hotly tipped (not least by himself) to be British Cinema's new sex god, or "heart-throb" as the euphemism has it. These lofty ambitions came to nought, and he became a drama teacher instead. Source: Picturegoer Film Annual

Already Jeremy had acquitted himself nobly in his first screen kiss – with Moira Shearer in "THE MAN WHO LOVED REDHEADS". He kissed her six times before the scene was finished. "A chap has to do the job properly," he explained.

And he went to the premiere of "IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG", his first semi-grown-up film, with a girl friend draped elegantly over the arm.

Yes, Jeremy Spenser has arrived – and he's beginning to know it. "I want to be passionate on the screen," he declares. "The usual romantic hero in British films is such a bore."

So take a sedative, girls. You're in for a whale of a time with Spenser."



"PRELUDE TO FAME" – realising he has spawned a *Frankenstein* monster, the crazed psychologist attempts to fling his protégé from the roof of the Albert Hall (Guido was displaying a fondness for Wagner)

Source: Collins Film Book for Young People



"IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG" – a worried Spenser (right) replies

"I think you'll find you're supposed to do that with one of the GIRLS, Benson!"

Source: Picturegoer Film Annual 1957-58



Striking a "moody and magnificent" pose in "**THE DEVIL ON HORSEBACK**" (54)
Source: Picturegoer Film Annual 1957-58

FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
47	10	ANNA KARENINA	
49	12	THE DANCING YEARS	
49		KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS	
		with Cavan Malone	
49		THE SPIDER AND THE FLY	
50	13	PORTRAIT OF CLARE	
50		PRELUDE TO FAME	in central role, Guido
		with Robin Dowell, William Simons (?)	
51	14	APPOINTMENT WITH VENUS	
52	15	THE PLANTER'S WIFE	
		with Peter Asher	
53	16	BACKGROUND	
54	17	THE DEVIL ON HORSEBACK	
55	18	SUMMER MADNESS	
		with Gaetano Autiero	
55		ESCAPADE	
		with Peter Asher, Sean Barrett, Andrew Ray	
56	19	IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG	
		with Richard O'Sullivan	
57	20	WONDERFUL THINGS	
57		THE PRINCE AND THE SHOWGIRL	
59	22	FERRY TO HONG KONG	