

be exactly where he is and not let people try to fix him has been a study in maturation. "It seems ridiculous in a way for me, at my age, to be saying I'm growing up now," he admits, "but it's true."

This personal growth is at least partially due to his experience making *The Majestic*, a film that has yet to be mentioned without the adjective *Capraesque*. Carrey plays both Pete Appleton, a slightly self-involved victim of the McCarthy blacklist, and Luke Trimble, a loving son (to Martin Landau) and boyfriend (to *The X-Files*' Laurie Holden) who devotes his time to reviving the town's long-dormant Majestic movie house. Almost from its first shot, the performance had people talking the half-dreaded O-word. (His publicist has even requested that questions about said award be avoided.) Despite what those who hand out the little gold men might think of him, he's certainly garnered some enthusiastic fans along the way. "I absolutely, with every ounce of conviction in my body, will tell you that it is [his best performance yet]," says *Majestic* director Frank Darabont, who's broken out of jail after making *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile* back-to-back. "It's the first opportunity that Jim's had to really operate from sea level as an actor, from a completely organic, honest place, and the guy has absolutely blown me away."

Some could say that the two characters Carrey inhabits represent diametrically opposed aspects of his own psyche. "Luke has the pride that comes from having the unconditional love of a whole town, while Pete is begging for scraps and willing to be what-

ever he has to be to make it in the world," says the guy who spent 15 years honing his act in comedy clubs before breaking into the public consciousness. "If I was going to liken them to animals, Pete would be the hyena and Luke the lion."

While "Sybil-izing" isn't an entirely new concept for Carrey (think Stanley Ipkiss and *The Mask*, Andy Kaufman and Tony Clifton—actually, think of many films in the Jim Carrey oeuvre), this time he was able to deliver without a lot of bells and whistles. "The fact is, I started out with a ton of tricks—like a juggler or a magician," he says. "I can still use those tricks, but I've also learned a lot more about my interior life, and I'm using that more and more."

Instrumental in helping Carrey access that interior life was acting coach Larry Moss, the guy Helen Hunt, Hilary Swank, and Michael Clarke Duncan have all thanked from various award-show podiums. Moss's technique, by all accounts an extremely therapeutic and emotional one, seems to win raves from most who experience it. Carrey is no exception. "He basically clued me in to a lot of real technical ways to approach a script and break it down," Carrey says. At times, the two would exchange heated words—often before Carrey had to shoot an emotional scene. Perhaps this was all part of the Moss mission? "No," Carrey responds. "I just think he's a guy who doesn't back down. And so am I."

Carrey, 39, certainly has taken on every challenge that Hollywood, potentially the world's biggest bully, has handed him. "When Frank came to my house to discuss the project, he said, 'Well,

you're a home-run hitter, I know that. We're just going to have to change your swing,'" recounts Carrey. Perhaps it's his willingness to go to the plate and alter the game time and time again that makes him so hard to classify. On his character's amnesia, Carrey

offers, "A lot of actors may have played it differently, but I looked at it as a relief, permission to finally let it all down." A tiny pause, then he adds, "Because if you don't know who you are, you don't have expectations to fulfill."

—Anna David