## George Coulouris

## Actor



1903 - 1989

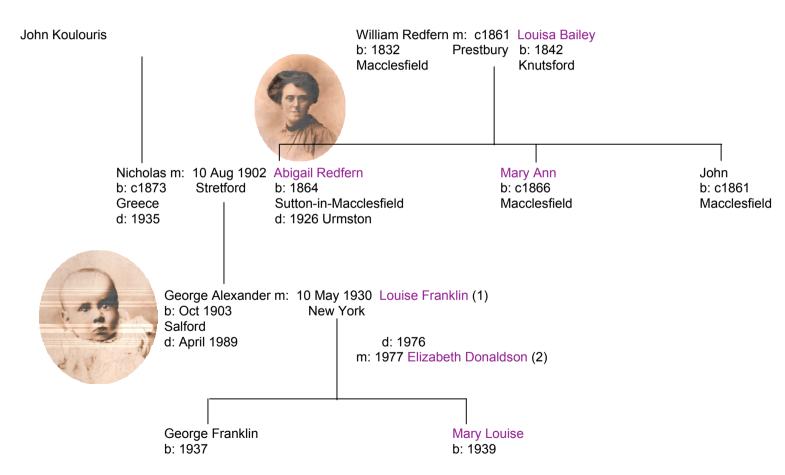
### George Coulouris - Biographical Notes

- 1903 1<sup>st</sup> October: born in Ordsall, son of Nicholas & Abigail Coulouris
- c1908 c1910: attended a local private Dame School
- c1910 1916: attended Pendleton Grammar School on High Street
- c1916 c1918: living at 137 New Park Road and father had a restaurant in Salisbury Buildings, 199 Trafford Road
- ❖ 1916 1921: attended Manchester Grammar School
- ❖ c1919 c1923: father gave up the restaurant to become a merchant with offices in Salisbury Buildings. George worked here for a while before going to drama school. During this same period the family had moved to Oakhurst. Church Road, Urmston

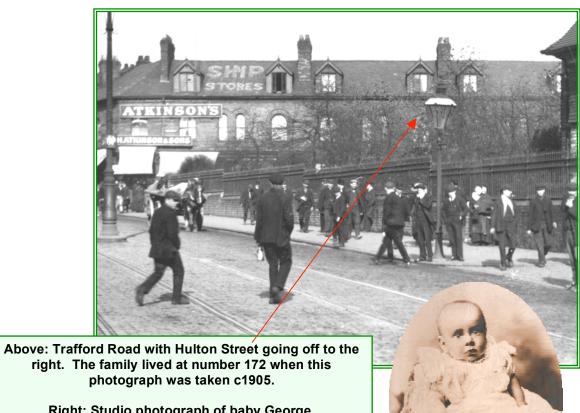
  Portrait of George aged four Portrait of George aged fo
- ❖ c1923 c1925: attended London's Central School of Speech and Drama
- ❖ 1926 May: first professional stage appearance, in the Rusholme (Manchester) Repertory Theatre's production of *Outward Bound*
- ❖ 1926 October: London debut in Henry V at the Old Vic
- ❖ 1929 9th Dec: Broadway debut in The Novice and the Duke
- ❖ 1933: First Hollywood film Christopher Bean
- 1937: played Mark Antony in Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre production of Julius Caesar
- ❖ 1941: appeared in the film Citizen Kane
- ❖ 1950 Jan: returned to England to play Tartuffe at the Bristol Old Vic and the Lyric Hammersmith
- ❖ 1951: first British film Appointment With Venus
- ❖ 1974: played Dr Constantine to Albert Finney's Poirot in Murder On The Orient Express. Also played Dr Roth, alongside Robert Powell, in Mahler
- ❖ 1989 25<sup>th</sup> April: died in Hampstead



# George Coulouris' Family Tree



## Where George Coulouris was born

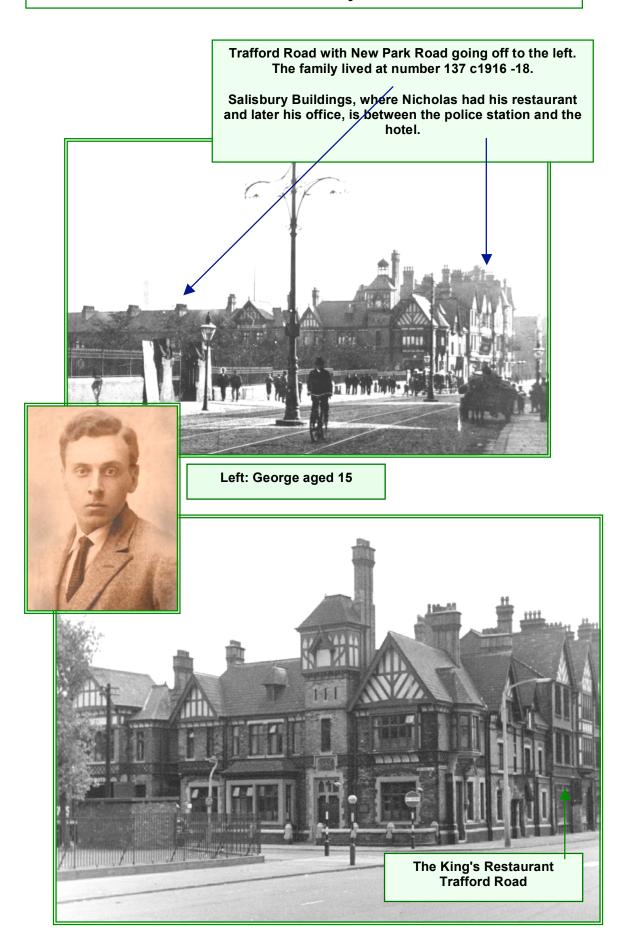


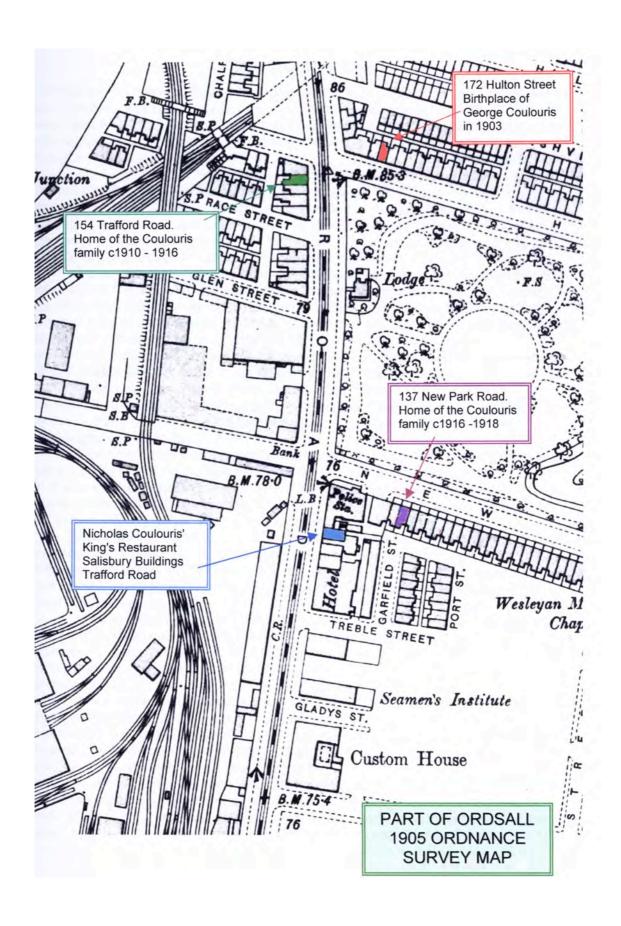
Right: Studio photograph of baby George.

Below: Hulton street seen just prior to demolition in 1976. Trafford Road and the Grain Elevator on the Docks can be seen in the background..



## Where the Coulouris family lived and worked





#### **Childhood Memories**

If I'd woken up one day very early and asked my fairy godmother how I happened to be in Salford, she could only have replied, "Your father was a gutsy little Greek who was not satisfied to starve in a little mountain village in the Pelopponesos but made a zig-zag way which ended him up running The King's Restaurant, Trafford Road, Salford. That's why you're here!"

My father had landed in Liverpool with not a word of English, started work as a dock labourer, became the head chef in a Blackpool hotel, opened his restaurant opposite No 8 Dock Gates, and proudly described himself as "late Chef, of the County Palatine and Lane Ends Hotel". But father really came into his own when, tired of the limited money that came in from the restaurant he began to go into the docks, talk to the captains and buy any junk they were glad to get rid of.

Money for old rope? Old rope was only the beginning. When the first world war started, my father's purchases of junk became monumental and wildly varied. A lot of the stuff had been at the bottom of the sea, torpedoed by the Germans, all brought back to Salford to be refurbished, most of it in a ramshackle yard Dad built of old timber in Aubrey Street, off Trafford Road, a few hundred yards from his restaurant. How I wish I'd kept the photograph which showed the whole front of the King's Restaurant, the name in big letters overhead and, smiling in the sun underneath, two waitresses in white bib aprons, in between them, my mother standing by the big blackboard on which was chalked day after day "Oxtail Soup 2d, Steak Pudding 6d". I forget the rest of the menu, but I've no doubt it, too, was unchanged day after day.

While my father was buzzing around collecting old rope or drinking ouzo in the cabins of the Greek captains in the docks, my mother was running the restaurant. Just about the time my father was fleeing starvation, my mother was setting off from home in Macclesfield with her little tin trunk at the age of 14 to go into service. She fell in love with my father when she was a chambermaid and he a chef.

I was born in Hulton Street, just above Ordsall Park in 1903. When I was six we moved to Trafford Road. I remember musical evenings there. The customs officer sang "Asleep In The Deep". My grandmother, half full of stout, yelled, "You can't sing it, you bugger," and the humoured Mr Furse agreed, "You're right granny, you're right," and gave up.

I first realised what junk could mean when, at the age of six, I found myself on the top of a huge mountain of horsehair dumped by my father in a deserted warehouse opposite the shop. He'd bought tons of the stuff, and I found I could leap safely from twenty feet high into a soft valley of it. For three days I arrived home anthrax-ridden and filthy, to be cleaned up by my long suffering mother.

When I was 12 we moved to New Park Road; a few steps from the restaurant. It was in the bed there on Sunday mornings in between my father and mother that I first heard the Greek legends about Polyphemus and Ulysses. "*Eccy messa katty koussa...*" sent mother and me into fits of giggles and my father into a rage, as it was the Greek national anthem he was trying to teach us.

All my life till I left home I was called a dirty dago, a greasy Greek and asked why I didn't go back home where I came from. One day, when I was 13 I was looking after Dad's yard. A few tatterdemalion kids came mooching around at the door. I pushed one of them back who was halfway in and closed the gate in his face. In a short time there was a howling mob outside, mothers and older kids, calling for my dago blood. I came out, locked the door behind me, pushed my way through them, and ran for my life for home with them chasing me.

Written by George Coulouris for The Guardian, 15 February 1986, inspired by an exhibition at Salford Museum and Art Gallery.

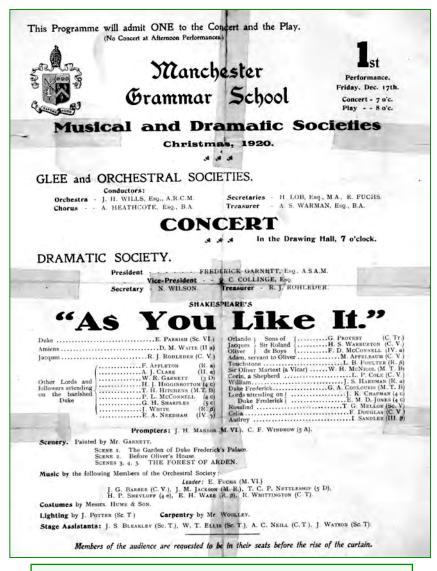
#### Education

After attending a local 'Dame School', of which there were several in Saford at this time, George attended Pendleton Grammar School on High Street, where, he later recalled, the headmaster was Mr William S Moir. No photographs of the Grammar School seem to have survived.

He went from there to Manchester Grammar School in 1916 and matriculated in 1921.

At the end of his first term he came 3rd out of 31 though by the summer of 1918 he had dropped to 17 out of 28. Two years later he had regained his status, coming 3rd out of 20.

He earned his cricket colours in the 2nd XI and was a member of the Drama Society, playing Duke Frederick in the Christmas 1920 production of 'As You Like It'.



Above: Programme for 'As You Like It'
We are grateful to J T Bever, Manchester Grammar
School Archivist for George's academic details

#### Actors in Their Stride - ROSAMOND GILDER

... Shakespeare could provide such fare. He could also provide other things, but that is a different matter and should not too much concern the theatregoer attending **George Coulouris'** spectacular Richard III. For this Richard is in Shakespeare's less subtle vein. Richard III's stage history is as honourable as his actual history was dishonourable. Every actor with a voice and a stage presence, every actor with a desire to be for once the ultimate in cold, calculating and unredeemed deviltry claps on Richard's hump and storms his way from London's Tower to Bosworth Field.

For a good section of the time that Richard has held the boards, he has spoken both Shakespeare's words and Colley Cibber's... **Mr Coulouris'** version is Shakespeare, not entirely 'as he is writ' (or supposedly writ) but largely so. The changes introduced are mainly omissions and concentrations, some of which are perhaps not entirely happy but many of which are helpful. **Mr Coulouris** also uses a bit from Henry VI, Part 3 - the murder of the King - by way of getting things under way in a properly homicidal manner.

Mr Coulouris, who directs as well as acts this Richard, has a fine stage structure designed by Motley on which to work. As Shakespeare's vicious Punchinello he

gives a consistently malign performance. He makes no attempt to romanticise the character but plays it for the pure Machiavellian type that it is. He is particularly good in Richard's moments of macabre fun - and in the outburst against Buckingham when the still insatiable King, enthroned at last, seems to contemplate with sick eyes the flood-tide of blood that laps at the foot of his throne. In a certain kind of piercing deviltry, of suave and courtly ease, this Richard is lacking. Though he speaks of himself as deformed, uncouth and rough, the text gives ample proof that Richard had a way with women and children that he could exercise a certain kind of charm even on the men who knew him for what he was.

Richard III is undiluted melodrama, a holocaust of bleeding corpses - yet though this type of play is dated, its qualities of vigour and imagination are eternal.



George Coulouris and Helen Waren in Richard III

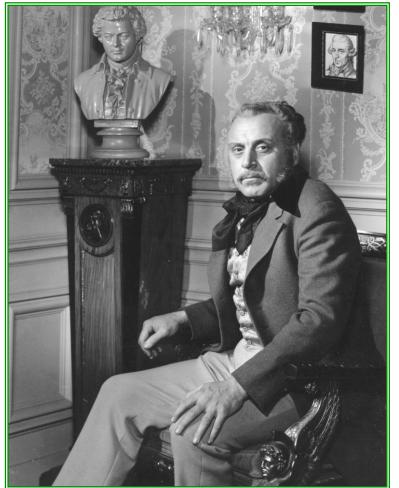
Broadway owes **Mr Coulouris** a debt, if for nothing more than that he rolled his curtain boldly to the very top of the proscenium arch and turned loose on a noble theatric structure, the lights, the colours, the poetry, the epic movement, that make for a greater theatre.



In his fourth film, George Coulouris (centre) as Walter Parks Thatcher in 'Citizen Kane' - 1941







Above: As Captain Joachim Helm in 'Hotel In Berlin' with Faye Emerson (courtesy of Warner Bros)

Left: As Louis Pleyel in 'A Song To Remember'.

**Both 1945** 

#### THE OBSERVER, MARCH 2, 1958 KENNETH TYNAN

At Lincoln last week I saw the British stage premiere of Arthur Miller's adaptation of Ibsen's "An Enemy of the People" (Theatre Royal, Lincoln). A sane and tonic evening: Mr. Miller has sharpened Ibsen, curtailed and compressed him, slimming the overweight Archer to fighting shape. Its theme, that of the lifelong democrat who begins to doubt the infallibility of the majority, is always topical; and the approving shouts at curtain-fall demonstrated that Ibsen, aided by Miller and John Hale's gripping production, had made his point to the contemporary hilt. ... George Coulouris, the visiting star,

was an ideal Stockmann, bursting with enthusiasm and never for an instant priggish. Not since "Citizen Kane" has this burly actor hit so full a stride. In the early passages he trod warily, approaching the play with genial mistrust as if at any moment it might rush him; and towards the end he tended to address his family as if it were a specially convened public meeting. But the spirit of the part was there all the way, the reckless exuberance of a man whose last care is for what the world thinks. This harebrained, uncalculating benevolence is exactly what the role needs; and what, in my memory, it has never got. The Royal Court must bring the play to London (with Messrs Coulouris, Hawksley and Hale) as soon as possible.

## The devil and all his works

THE DEVIL, so far, has all the worst films. Perhaps he should turn his attention to musicals. 'Seven Bribes for Seven Brothers' might go well, given 210 pieces of silver and the famous hell-raising scene.

Anything but The Anti-prist (Odeon, Haymarket christ (Odeon, Haymarket X), an unsung Italian production still bobbing in the putrid wake of 'The Exor-cist.' How many more actresses. I wonder, are going to have to put on the crazy wig, the glaucous contact lenses, the plastic blotches, and learn to let loathsome chocolate blancmange dribble down their chins? Will it eventually be part of every ingenue's range of talents to spew a yard of Thick Green Pea in the faces of her fellow contractees? Not until the special effects men get bored, we may assume, will the list of victims cease to grow.

At all events, the latest lady At all events, the latest lady to make a spittoon of her co-stars is Carla Gravina, a tense, freckled actress now picking up the kind of parts Monica Vitti used to get out-side the Antonioni circle. Miss Gravina spends half the picture pinned, by an ancient psychological lesion (a car crash), to wheelchair. She treats the part with great

#### CINEMA

by RUSSELL DAVIES

patience, and the essential

minus quantity of humour.

Around her tlap a ludicrous family per hene, accommodated in a shockingly set-dressed Roman palazzo. Dad, just a frown on legs, is Mel Ferrer. The maid Irene, a frown on bigger legs, is Alida Valli, alas. There is a 'house guest,' played by one of those Scandinavian ice maiden Scandinavian ice maiden that Cinecittà has kept a place for, ever since the days of Anita Ekberg. This one's of Anita Ekberg. This one's called Anita Strindberg. And there's Arthur Kennedy, once a heavy in Westerns, now a Vatican bishop, and looking about as comfortable as St Francis of Assisi on Boot Hill

A formal exorcism is finally proposed. 'Couldn't you have come to this conclusion before?' pipes the son of the house. (The very worst films always go in for these bafflingly self-subverting lines.) It is George Coulouris who arrives to perform the spiritual surgery, and for a few odd seconds director Alberto De Martino formal exorcism



Gravina in Antichrist.

has something worth while to linger on. Decades of strong, undervalued acting have left Mr Coulouris with a face of monstrous tribal wisdom, an agreeable focus of interest, for once, amid reeking, plagiaristic trash.

For something less naive and exploitative, one would not necessarily look to Hong Kong, but the Electric Kong, but the Electric Cinema Club has organised a double bill designed to raise our expectations of the Chinese fringe. Not all the Hong Kong arts are martial, it seems.

Russell Davies writing in The Observer Review, Sunday 25 April 1976



Left: George (as Superintendent John Buckley) with son, George, on the set of 'The Verdict' 1946. (Courtesy of Warner Bros)

Below: With wife, Louise, and son and daughter George and Mary Louise, on the set of ABC television's 'Pathfinder To Mars' 1962



#### THE INDEPENDENT Saturday 29 April 1989 - OBITUARIES

**GEORGE COULOURIS**, although best known for his range of sly or scary rascals in American films, was in fact a thoroughly British stage (and sometimes stagy) actor.

He liked nothing better than the chance to grapple in the theatre with Ibsen or Shaw, Strindberg, Molière or Shakespeare. His heavy frown and menacing manner were invaluable in Hollywood or Hammer horrors, and as the highly sceptical financial lawyer in Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*, or as the blackmailing Count in *Watch on the Rhine*, he made his presence felt. Although he spent much of his life before the cameras (he had a low opinion of television's value to the player), he could never quit the theatre for long; but he never stayed anywhere for long enough to build himself a proper stage reputation.

Coulouris was at heart a classical actor. He had no time for the frolics of the era into which he was born, though he found himself, after a spell at the Old Vic as a youth, being booed with the rest of the cast in Noel Coward's famous flop, *Sirocco*. He had made his first appearance on the stage in Sutton Vane's *Outward Bound*, a "difficult" play in its day, For the most advanced producing methods of that time, the company to join was the Cambridge Festival Theatre, which numbered among its talents Tyrone Guthrie, Peter Godfrey and Norman Marshall. Coulouris played Shakespeare there in modern dress and later, the Yank in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.

He could not, however, resist the chance to go to New York, since every young ambitious London actor of the time was bound to dream of Broadway and of Hollywood. What he went without, however, was the experience which, for example, another Briton, Maurice Evans, had taken with him when he went from the Old Vic to conquer New York in Shakespeare. Evans had won his spurs in London, but Coulouris could not wait.

He found his repertory training in stock companies on the cast coast of the United States after playing Shakespeare and Shaw on Broadway: but it was not until he joined Orson Welles's Mercury Theatre for more Shaw and Shakespeare that he began to make headway, both on the screen and the stage. By 1943 he felt confident enough to produce and act the title role of *Richard III* in New York, but in 1950 he returned to Britain. It was as if he was doing what he should have done 20 years earlier - acting the classics in a first-class English repertory company, the Bristol Old Vic.

His Tartuffe was judged good enough to transfer to Hammersmith. Then, at the St Martin's, he gave a marvellous portrayal of the old tutor Ulric Brendel in Michael MacOwan's revival of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. His *King Lear* at Glasgow and his Malvolio and Claudius at Swiss Cottage typified the way in which his talent never rose as high as his theatrical taste. He was better cast as Smiley Coy in Odets's *The Big Knife*, and, as Detective Hawkshaw in The *Ticket Of Leave Man*, he was superbly able not to overplay for cheap laughter Tom Taylor's Victorian melodrama.

In the 1950s and 1960s George Coulouris remained the stalwart stage actor in spite of his movie reputation. Whether he was as "good" on the screen as on the stage is a matter for argument, but there is no disputing that the stage gave him better roles - such as John Pope senior in *A Hatful of Rain*, Doctor Stockmann in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Peter Flynn in O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, the father in Sartre's *Altona*, Edgar in Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* the weary and heroic General Sikorski in Hochuth's *Soldiers*, Big Daddy in Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Shylock - all parts to swell a scene, and Coulouris had the flourish to fill them, sometimes to overflowing, always compellingly.

George Coulouris, actor, born Manchester [sic] I October 1903, died London 25 April 1989. Adam Benedick

#### Some of the Stage Performances of George Coulouris

#### Great Britain:

1926 May: debut Outward Bound Rusholme Repertory, Manchester as Rev. William Duke

Oct: Henry V Old Vic, London as Sir Thomas Grey

1927 Nov: Sirocco Daly's as Giuseppe

1928 Oct: The Hairy Ape The Cambridge Festival

Theatre as Yank

Romeo and Juliet *The Cambridge Festival Theatre as Mercutio* 

1929 Apr: The Theatre of Life Arts, London as Petronius

Broadway:

1929 Dec: The Novice and the Duke Assembly as Friar Peter. A modern dress version of Measure for Measure

1934 Dec: Valley Forge *The Guild Theatre as Lieutenant Cutting by Maxwell Anderson* 

1936 Mar: Saint Joan *Martin Beck Theatre as John de Stogumber* 

1937 Nov: Julius Caesar *The Mercury Theatre as Mark Antony - The Shakespearean play in modern dress* 

1941 Apr. 1: Watch on the Rhine *Martin Beck Theatre* and tour as Teck de Brancovis

1943: Richard III Forrest as Richard III also produced and directed

#### London:

1950 June: Tartuffe Lyric, Hammersmith as Tartuffe

#### Edinburgh Festival:

1950: The Man in the Overcoat

#### London:

1953 Jan: Fool's Mate Criterion as King James I

1954 Spring: The Soldier and the Lady toured as the Genera

1957 Mar, Aug: A Hatful of Rain *Prince's as John Pope - With Sam Wanamaker* 

1959 Feb: An Enemy of the People *Arts, Cambridge as*Dr.Stockmann - Arthur Miller's version

1962 Aug: Lock Up Your Daughters *Mermaid as* Squeezum

#### Richmond, Yorkshire

1963 May: Scenes from Tartuffe and The Way of the World. *Georgian Theatre*.

#### **Broadway:**

1964 Oct: Beekman Place Morosco as Sam Holt

1966 Feb: The Condemned of Altona *Vivian Beaumont*Theatre as the Father

#### London:

1968 Mar: The Outcry Arts as the Earl of Theign

Dec: The Soldiers New as Sikorski

#### London:

1970: Cat on a Hot Tin Roof as Big Daddy

#### Brighton:

1973 Aug: The Merchant of Venice *Gardiner Arts Theatre as Shylock* 

#### Some of the Films of George Coulouris

1933: Christopher Bean <i>as Tallant</i>
1940: All This and Heaven Too as Charpentier
1940: Lady In Question as Defence Attorney
1941: Citizen Kane as Walter Parks Thatcher
1943: For Whom the Bell Tolls as Andre Massai
Watch on the Rhine as Teck de Brancovis
1944: Between Two Worlds as Lingley
The Master Race as Von Beck
None But The Lonely Heart as Joe Mordinay
1945: A Song to Remember as Louis Pleyel
Hotel Berlin as Captain Joachim Helm
Lady on a Train <i>as Mr Saunders</i>
1946: The Verdict as Superintendent John Buckley
California as Captain Pharaoh Coffin
1947: Mr District Attorney as James Randolph
Where There's Life as Krivoc
1948: Sleep My Love as Charles Vernay
Joan of Arc as Governor of Vaucouleurs
1951: Appointment With Venus
Outcast of the Islands as Babalatchi
1952: Venetian Bird / US: The Assassin as Spadoni
1953: The Heart of the Matter as Portuguese Captain
A Day to Remember as Captain
The Runaway Bus as Schroeder
1954: Doctor in the House as Briggs
Duel in the Jungle as Captain Malburn
Mask of Dust / US: Race for Life as Dallapiccola
1955: Doctor at Sea as Carpenter
1956: Private's Progress as Padre
The Big Money (released in 1958) as The Colonel

1957: Doctor at Large as Pascoe Tarzan and the Lost Safari as Carl Kraski I Accuse! as Colonel Sandherr 1958: Spy in the Sky as Colonel Benedict Law and Disorder as Bennie Son of Robin Hood as Alan a Dale 1960: Conspiracy of Hearts as Petrelli Bluebeard's10 Honeymoons (US) as Lacoste Surprise Package as Dr Hugo Panzer 1961: King of Kings as Camel Driver The Boy Who Stole a Million as Bank Manager 1963: In the Cool of the Day (US) 1965: The Skull as Dr Londe Too Many Thieves (US: TV /GB: cinemas) 1966: Arabesque (US/GB) as Ragheeb 1969: The Assassination Bureau as Swiss Peasant 1970: Land Raiders (US) as Cardenas 1971: Blood From the Mummy's Tomb as Berigan 1972: Tower of Evil as John Gurney 1973: The Final Programme as Dr Powys Papillon as Dr Chatal 1974: Mahler as Dr Roth Percy's Progress as Professor Agatha Christie's Murder on the Orient Express as Dr Constantine The Antichrist as Father Mittner 1976: Shout at the Devil as El Keb The Ritz

1979: The Long Good Friday

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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For more information on the life and work of George Coulouris visit:

www.coulouris.net

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