

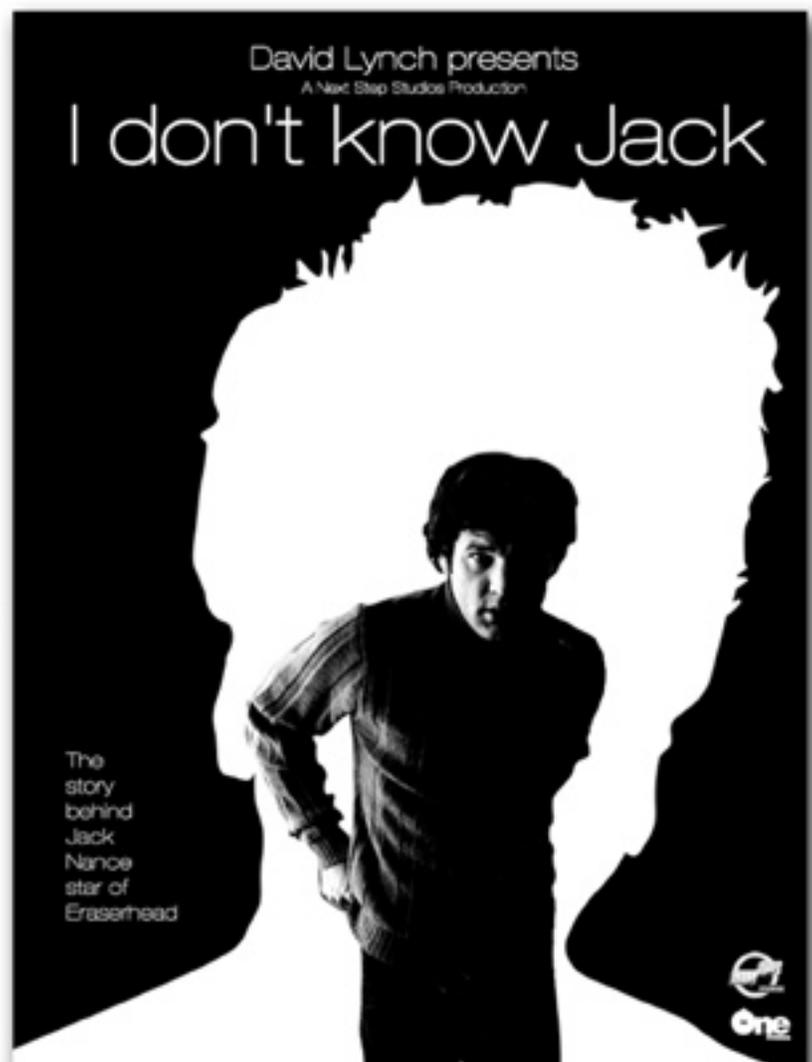
I Don't Know Jack (2001)

The Jack here is Jack Nance, perhaps the quirkiest character actor to exist in the last 25 years. Nance is certainly best known for his appearances in David Lynch's film and TV work. He will almost assuredly be remembered by most as the skyscraper-haired title character of Lynch's "Eraserhead," or that characters exact opposite, the sober and naive Pete Martel in Lynch's groundbreaking TV series, "Twin Peaks."

This documentary features clips of Jack in numerous film roles. It also features interviews with those who knew and loved him including Lynch, actress Catherine Coulson ("Twin Peaks" Log Lady and Nance's first wife), musician Brantley Kearns, director Bob Logan ("Meatballs 4") and also the director of "Ticks and Bruises," some video Nance was working on close to his death. . Many of Nance's brothers are also interviewed for the film.

Often times the film is segmented, rather drearily, by title cards of Bible scripture that seems to relate to Nance's life. This effect is used because, early in the film, it is mentioned that Nance was quite knowledgeable about the Bible and quoted it of ten, especially in his early days. This effect generally only serves to make the rather slowly paced film seem longer.

The early days of Nance are touched on only briefly. His college life and early theatrical career get a bit of attention but it is Nance's first appearances in film, including an odd performance art piece called "The Doh Dah Gang" which begin to really delve into Nance as an actor and person. We are perhaps 45 minutes or so into this 100+ minute film before his groundbreaking performance in "Eraserhead" is really explored. Here is where Nance really begins to come to life for us. Lynch's interviews and those from the Lynch circle (Coulson, Charlotte Stewart, Dennis Hopper) are particularly interesting. ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



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Nance's wallowing in alcoholism and his subsequent sobriety come next. We learn that it was Hopper, who met Nance on the set of "Blue Velvet", that actually flew Nance to LA and got him set up in a clinic which helped him "dry out." Nance's work on "Twin Peaks" is discussed and the film also uses a recorded audio interview with Nance (for the Lynch fanzine "Wrapped in Plastic") to allow the actor to occasionally speak for himself. What is sad here is the absolute lack of video footage of Nance being interviewed. There is none. This is a real shame.

Nance died a few years ago and his final departure into alcoholism and illness is also discussed. The filmmakers include several poignant and painful interviews with those who knew and loved Nance to show what a remarkable effect he had on his friends. It is touching and sad.

Jack Nance is an American icon. His appearance as Henry in "Eraserhead" in 1977 assures him a place in film history for eternity. Like Max Schreck from "Nosferatu," Nance's image, with hair towering and eyes agape from "Eraserhead" will not be quieted.

He will become more a cinematic God as time progresses. "I Don't Know Jack" is just the first step in solidifying his remarkable screen presence. It is doubtful that we will have to wait years for a biopic of Nance, his story is riveting, the stuff of legends. Until then, this video biography of the man serves him quite well.

Note: At the screening of the film I attended, at the Alamo Drafthouse, as part of the Austin Film Society's Texas documentary Tour, the director, Chris Leavens, and one of the producers of the film, Richard Green, discussed the theft of several tapes by one of the females interviewed. A \$2,000 ransom was paid to retrieve the tapes and several of the tape boxes were returned containing only brown rice. The rough cut of the film was returned, however, and the final cut comes from this. Nance spent some time as a youth in Texas. At Cannes, in 2001, when Lynch was showing "Mullholland Drive" (he won Best Director), the producers ask him to put "David Lynch Presents" on the film. He agreed.

Presented in Austin by the Austin Film Society, UT Department of RTF, and SXSW, among others.

Report Card

Content: A+ Completeness: B+ Cinematography\Lighting: C

Special Effects\Make Up: C Music: C

Final Grade: B+