

THE  
WEEK

## NONFICTION

**ORSON WELLES: THE ROAD TO XANADU**

**Simon Callow** (Viking, \$32.95) Mercurial, brilliant, charming, and testy, Welles did groundbreaking work in radio, theater, and movies, only to suffer a sad, slow decline in a cruelly public manner. Even better for the biographer, Welles' life is both marvelously well documented (articles began appearing about the boy wonder when he was only 10) and teasingly contradictory (thanks in no small part to his own prodigious gifts for storytelling and stretching the truth). Callow, an actor (*A Room With a View*, *Four Weddings and a Funeral*) as well as the author of a well-received biography of Charles Laughton, has produced a splendidly entertaining, definitive work that traces the protean talent from his childhood to the release of *Citizen Kane*. His tone is that of an admiring mentor who brooks no nonsense: Callow chides Welles here for sloppy thinking, praises Welles there for imaginative work, and pulls him up short when his tales seem a tad too fantastic or his manner too petty. A second volume will complete the tale. If documenting Welles' last decades of misdeeds and missed opportunities doesn't turn Callow into a nag, he may very well settle once and



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**DOUBLE VISIONARY:** *The Road to Xanadu* tracks Welles' early life

for all the question of what went awry in his subject's confounding career. **A+**

—Michael Giltz