

Laughter in Paradise (1950) Zampi

P Michell, 2023

Synopsis

Famed practical joker Henry Russell leaves 50,000 pounds to each of his four surviving relatives. But his will has one last joke - they each have to undertake a task completely out of character within a month. As each sets out on their objective they find that quite apart from the promised riches, they are unexpectedly getting a lot out of the challenge. All except caddish Simon Russell, that is.

This film was the fourth-most popular film at the British box office in 1951 - according to the Wikipedia article on the film. However, [Ben Mankiewicz](#), in his introduction to the film on TCM, stated this was the top box office draw of the year.

Someone commented - The direction and production values were top notch; the sets were so beautifully wooden, the acting certainly was not.

A typical British film of the early 1950's. Tail end of their Golden Age (1930s-early 1950s). Soon to be replaced with 'realistic' films such as 'kitchen-sink dramas' and gritty stories. Great actors, great lines. Wonderfully humorous and satirical. Typical low budget fare of the time. A film not seen for many decades. Blessed with some of the best British actors of the time ... and full of gorgeous silly lines like - "*I couldn't possibly burgle somebody I didn't know.*" Alistair Sim dictating his crime novel to his wife is great.

Creative Personnel

Mario Zampi – Director (15 credits)

Rome-born director Mario Zampi moved to Britain in 1923, starting out as an actor before turning editor in 1930 and producer in 1937, when he founded Two Cities Films with fellow countryman Filippo Del Giudice. As director, he specialised in comedy, *Laughter in Paradise* being followed by *Top Secret* (1952), *Happy Ever After* (1954), *The Naked Truth* (1957) and *Too Many Crooks* (1959), all of which display a surprisingly acute grasp of the British sense of humour.

Production - Associated British Picture Corp.

Interestingly this film was not released by the above Two Cities Films but by Associated British Picture Corp at Elstree Studios.

Trivia – Elstree Studios now owned by the local council and has a fantastic long history - 'Hollywood in England': Hitchcock's *Blackmail*, *Moby Dick*, 2001 – *A Space Odyssey*, *Star Wars*, *Indiana Jones*, *The Saint*, etc. all made here.

Insightful Youtube interview with Morris Bright. Stick around when he talks about the snakes from *Indiana Jones* ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tu4PwGnzgQI>

and another interesting one... brief dull introduction only lasts a couple of minutes ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPEvWKc30Xo>

Michael Pertwee / Jack Davies – Script – 81 credits / 49 credits

Michael's original story. Pertwee family of actors. Roland (the father) and younger brother John (Dr Who). Plays a small roll in the film.

Known for *Curtain Up* (1952), *Mouse on the Moon* (1963) [companion to *Mouse that Roared*, 1959]. Much television work inc *The Saint*, *Secret Agent*.

Jack Davies producing scripts from the 1930s. Known for *Doctor at Sea* (1953), *Gambit* (1966).

Alastair Sim – Deniston Russell (69 credits)

Late career in film acting, His first stage appearance was as Messenger in *Othello* at the Savoy Theatre, London. He went on to create some of the most memorable (usually comedic) roles in British films from 1936 until his death in 1976. It was after the war that he found his true forte - comedy - in particular playing a series of Dickensian eccentrics, rogues and pathological assassins although the sinister element often remained.

Quote – *“I stand or fall in my profession by the public's judgement of my performances. No amount of publicity can dampen a good one or gloss over a bad one.”*

Known for: *An Inspector Calls* (1954), *Hitchcock's Stage Fright* (1950), *A Christmas Carol* (1951)

Fay Compton - Agnes Russell (82 credits)

She was an actress, known for [The Haunting \(1963\)](#), [Othello \(1951\)](#) and [Laughter in Paradise \(1951\)](#).

Favourite actress of playwright Sir [J.M. Barrie](#). He wrote the play, "Mary Rose", especially for her.

Had her own drama school, Fay Compton's Studio of Dramatic Art; one of the pupils was [Alec Guinness](#).

George Cole – Herbert Russell (130 credits)

Prolific actor both in film and TV.

Known for his role in TV series *Minder* (1979). Close friends with Alistair Sim living with Sim's mother in the country.

He appeared in nine (actually ten inc LIP) films with Alistair Sim inc *A Christmas Carol*, *An Inspector Calls*, *St Trinian's* films. Was in *Cleopatra* (1963).

Joyce Grenfell – Elizabeth Robson / Fluffy (28 credits)

Toothy, oval-faced Britisher Joyce Grenfell with her stark, equine features charmed and humored audiences everywhere on radio, stage, film and TV for nearly four decades. Lovingly remembered as a delightfully witty revue artist, monologist and raconteur, she inherited her bold talents from her eccentric socialite mother, who just so happened to be American and the sister of Lady Nancy Astor.

Known for *Stage Fright* (1950), *St Trinian's* Films, *The Old Dark House* (1963), *Yellow Rolls Royce* (1964).

Hugh Griffiths – Henry Augustus Russell (103 credits)

Griffith started his film career proper in 1948 with films like [Dulcimer Street \(1948\)](#), followed by the wonderful black comedy [Kind Hearts and Coronets \(1949\)](#) at Ealing

in 1949. A portly, thickly-bearded character with bushy eyebrows, ruddy complexion and a resonant voice, Griffith made a lasting impression for his many portrayals of eccentric, bucolic and, sometimes, raucous types. In 1959, he won the Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor for his "Sheikh Ilderim", who supplies [Charlton Heston](#) with the chariot race-winning white stallions in [Ben-Hur \(1959\)](#).

Known for Tom Jones (1963), Oliver (1968),

Trivia - Griffith was a lifelong friend (and drinking companion) of Welsh poet [Dylan Thomas](#).

[Audrey Hepburn](#) was originally offered one of the major female roles in this film, but was committed to a stage play and had to turn it down. She ended up with a bit role (30 secs) playing a sexy cigarette girl instead.

Reviews

[The People's Movies Film Review Website](#) ([thepeoplesmovies.com](#))

James Macnaughton, 2020

Whilst perhaps best known for being an inferior Ealing inspired comedy, and more recently for **Audrey Hepburn's** first role in an English language film. *Laughter in Paradise* is much richer than this superficial prerequisite suggests. *Laughter in Paradise* is a subtle, light and at times heartfelt comedy in which its plot elevates the actors comedic capabilities. Whilst at times it feels heavy handed in trying to find a profound and insightful message and a lesson for its characters

The story follows an eccentric millionaire, who on his deathbed can still be seen playing practical jokes, shown by lighting his maid's newspaper. His escapades continue from the grave too. His loved ones gather for the reading of his will, all waiting in excited anticipation for their share of his supposed large fortune. Although the reader of said will, leaves them with their challenge from their deceased relative to grant their entitlement to his fortune. The pulp crime novelist Deniston played by **Alistair Sim** has to spend 28 days in jail, playboy bachelor Simon suavely played by **Guy Middleton** must marry the first unmarried woman he speaks to, the shy and bashful Herbert embodied by **George Cole** is forced to try and rob his bank and the extremely snobby Agnes; **Fay Compton** must work as a housekeeper for month in a middle class home

The film shines with its use of subtle physical comedy, and Zampi's moments of competent direction. Whilst these set pieces can often be abrasive in similar comedies here they are nuanced and well worked. The film effortlessly blends a feeling and tone of a lighthearted easily digestible comedy as well as farcical and amusing comedy. Without a doubt the best scenes and dialogue are gifted to **Alastair Sim** and with good reason. His comedic timing and ungainly manner make his scenes memorable and amusing. His characters ironic nature as a pulp crime author is at times hilarious with some great set pieces. That being said the supporting cast particularly the main three characters play well against and as supporting to Sim.

The blu-ray transfer is very clean and **studio canal** have done an admirable job of the preservation and clean up of the film in the video and audio department.

Laughter in Paradise is a light, amusing and confused British comedy. The comedic set pieces afforded to Alistair Sim and to a lesser extent **George Cole** is where the film shines with its farcical nature. However, the film struggles with balancing its central characters regarding entertainment value, Zampi's direction means it lacks the high pace, sharp wit of many earlier comedies and lacks the truly subtle and clever notions of other comedies of the period. Meaning *Laughter in Paradise* unfortunately finds its self-stuck in the middle with a failure to establish its tone.

BFI Screen Online

Michael Brooke (c2000s)

Although over half a century old, *Laughter in Paradise* (d. Mario Zampi, 1951) is based on a situation that's bang up to date - if anything, in the era of *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000-) and *I'm A Celebrity - Get Me Out Of Here!* (ITV, 2002-), its premise, whereby four people abjectly humiliate themselves for money, is rather more believable now than it was then.

And, as with recent 'reality TV' shows, the 'contestants' span a wide range of backgrounds and character types. Alastair Sim's Deniston beautifully judges the contrast between a naturally fastidious persona and the indignities he has to perform to keep afloat, whether dictating sleazy thrillers or having not only to commit a crime in the first place but also suffer being caught, tried and sentenced.

Given the farcical tone of the rest of the film, Fay Compton's Agnes is a surprisingly moving study in late middle-aged loneliness and by some measure the most convincingly rounded character. By contrast, Guy Middleton and George Cole's roles as Simon and Herbert Russell rarely rise above the stereotypical, and they're given noticeably less screen time.

Although often mistaken for an Ealing comedy, *Laughter in Paradise* doesn't quite fit that particular template. It's a little too schematic to sit comfortably alongside its contemporaries, and the overall moral message - that certain things are rather more important than vast wealth - is delivered with even less subtlety than Deniston's attempt at shoplifting.

But it offers plenty of compensating pleasures in both the lead performances and a familiar supporting cast: Joyce Grenfell as Deniston's priggish fiancée; John Laurie as a wild-eyed Scotsman (a clear precursor of Private Frazer in *Dad's Army* (BBC, 1968-77)); Ernest Thesiger as Henry Russell's bewildered friend Endicott, charged with reading the will and the follow-up letter; co-writer Michael Pertwee (son of Roland, brother of Jon) as Herbert's hated rival Stewart - and, in one of her first screen appearances, Audrey Hepburn as a cigarette girl.