



PROJECTING THE ARCHIVE

This Man Is Mine

+ intro by film historian Carole Sharp

This Man Is Mine is based on the hit stage play *A Soldier for Christmas* which opened in the West End from 3 February 1944 and ran for most of the year. It was written by the character actor Reginald Beckwith, who at that time was also a BBC war correspondent. A comedy with a strong political theme about the potential change in the power balance between the classes after the war, it also muses on whether an educated woman can ever be fulfilled unless she puts her intellect second to love. Unsurprisingly, in the film, the politics is more peripheral and the romance is central. A crime element is added to allow for more exterior scenes and to add some action for the two young male leads.

Columbia (UK) Limited purchased the film rights during the run of the play, Joseph Friedman, the managing director of the studio in the US, stated that it would be a good scale production but asserted 'I am not going to attempt to make a big picture for the American public at this time.'

Studio space was at a premium in 1944 and 1945, as much of it had been requisitioned for war purposes and many technicians were in the forces. Due to this, shooting did not begin until December 1945. The interiors were shot at Islington and the village exteriors at Pinewood. Sound equipment had to be moved from Islington to Pinewood, as Columbia used the British Acoustic system whereas Pinewood was equipped with Western Electric.

The main players were all well-known. Beatrice Lillie was initially scheduled to play Mrs Ferguson, but she was replaced by Jeanne de Casalis. De Casalis was famous on radio for playing the aptly named Mrs Feather and played several featherbrained women in films, perhaps most famously in *Cottage to Let*. Tom Walls plays her husband; he was a great audience favourite in farce in the 1930s, then became a strong character actor in the war years. Here he has an uncharacteristically subdued part and his career was winding down.

The two love rivals were both notable talents. Glynis Johns was becoming a big film star in Britain and successfully moved to Hollywood in the 1950s, later starring on Broadway. Nova Pilbeam was a star at Gaumont-British in the 1930s while still a teenager. She had not made a film for nearly three years prior to *This Man Is Mine*, having last appeared in a couple of scenes in the Anna Neagle film *Yellow Canary*. She had joined the precursor of the Arts Council during the war years and toured in many plays. Whilst *A Soldier for Christmas* was having its West End run, she also spent most of 1944 in the West End, co-starring with Sonia Dresdel in *This Was a Woman*.

Hugh McDermott had been in films since 1936 and often played North American parts. Fans tended to believe he was from across the Atlantic, but he was in fact Scottish and had played professional golf before becoming an actor. Barry Morse, possibly the least known of the cast at the time, would eventually move to Canada where he played a big part in the pioneering days of television; his biggest successes were on the small screen in *The Fugitive* and *Space 1999*.

This was the last film directed by Marcel Varnel. The Frenchman had directed many of the most popular comedy films over the previous ten years, working with George Formby, the Crazy Gang, Arthur Askey and most famously, Will Hay. He was killed in a car accident in the summer of 1947, whilst preparing his next film, *The Last Gentleman*.

A Christmas film is not complete without snow. The snow on the ground was simulated by salt which meant that all the cabling on the ground had to be enclosed in old bicycle tyre inner tubes to prevent corrosion. At least one crew member complained that the salt was eating away at his shoes, which was not appreciated as clothes rationing was still in force. For the snow on the roofs and trees, the art director, George Provis, pumped air through a secret mixture that he invented, which was based on a shampoo powder, which even worked well enough to successfully make snowballs.

When he saw a rough cut of the film, Joseph Friedman deemed it 'one of the most delightful screen comedies produced by a British studio' and took out a full-page advertisement in *Kine Weekly* to promote it. The film was trade shown on 12 September 1946 and premiered on 25 October at the Plaza Piccadilly.

Reviews were mixed. *Kine Weekly's* critic wrote that the 'skilful interplay of lifelike characters leads to an irresistible mixture of laughter and tears. Everything points to its success with popular suburban and provincial audiences.' However, some uncredited newspaper reviews in the BFI archive are more cynical. '(The cast) do their best to pretend that the dialogue is not as full of traps as a haunted house at a fun fair' opines one, while another deems the film 'only spottily amusing'. The familiar criticism of adapting stage plays for the screen also reared its head: 'Fifteen years ago, I had to regretfully complain that instead of telling film stories in the film idiom, British producers were too often content to buy any old stage piece and make a transcript reeking of the footlights. Of *This Man Is Mine*, I can only say, a trifle sourly, that this is where I came in.'

However, *Kine Weekly* knew the public better than the critics and the film was still playing at provincial cinemas in 1949.

Carole Sharp, film historian and researcher. Currently working on a biography of Nova Pilbeam.

THIS MAN IS MINE

Directed by: Marcel Varnel

Production Company:

Columbia (British) Productions

Produced by: Marcel Varnel

Unit Manager: Tom Payne

Assistant Director: Alf Keating

Continuity: Peggy Singer

Screen Play by: Doreen Montgomery, Nicholas Phipps, Reginald Beckwith

Adapted for the Screen by: Doreen Montgomery

Additional Dialogue by: Mabel Constanduros

From the play A Soldier for Christmas by: Reginald Beckwith

Photography: Philip Grindrod

Camera Work: Dudley Lovell

Film Editor: Douglas Robertson

Film Cutter: May Dennington

Art Director: George Provis

Set Dressings: Alex Waugh

Dress Designs: Dorothy Broomham

Make-up: George Claff

Hair Styles: Nora Bentley

Music Compositions: Allan Gray

Canadian Army Orchestra directed by: Capt. Bob Farnon

Music Conductor: Walter Goehr

Sound Supervisor: B.C. Sewell

Recordist: M. Hobbs

Sound System: British Acoustic Film

Made at: Gainsborough Studios, Pinewood Studios

Cast

Tom Walls (*Philip Ferguson*)

Glynis Johns (*Millie*)

Jeanne De Casalis (*Mrs Ferguson*)

Hugh McDermott (*Bill MacKenzie*)

Nova Pilbeam (*Phoebe Ferguson*)

Barry Morse (*Ronnie*)

Rosalyn Boulter (*Brenda*)

Ambrosine Phillpotts (*Lady Daubeny*)

Mary Merrall (*Mrs Jarvis*)

Agnes Lauchian (*Mrs Jones, the cook*)

Bernard Lee (*James Nicholls*)

King Whyte (*Canadian colonel*)

Charles Victor (*hi-jacker 1*)

Bryan Herbert (*hi-jacker 2*)

Leslie Dwyer (*van driver*)

Charles Farrell (*Canadian sergeant*)

John E. Coyle (*constable*)

Natalie Lynn (*Mrs Mackenzie*)

Olwen Brookes (*spinster*)

Peter Gawthorne (*business man*)

Cyril Smith (*taxi driver*)

Canadian Army Orchestra (*band at camp concert*)

Wally Patch (*policeman*) [uncredited]

UK 1946

104 mins

A BFI National Archive print

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