



MURIEL BOX: A WOMAN'S TAKE

Good-Time Girl

Good-Time Girl

Directed by: David MacDonald

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Production Companies: Gainsborough Pictures, Triton Films *

Produced by: Sydney Box

Associate Producer: Sam Goldwyn Jnr

Production Manager: Billy Boyle

Assistant Director: H. Attwooll

2nd Assistant Director: Dennis Rose *

3rd Assistant Director: Albert Bailey *

Continuity: Paddy Girdlestone *

Assistant Continuity: Margaret Taylor *

Screenplay by: Muriel Box, Sydney Box, Ted Willis

Adapted from a novel by: Arthur La Bern

Director of Photography: Stephen Dade

Cameraman: Gordon Lang

Focus Puller: John Harris *

Clapper Loader: Steve Claydon *

Floor Electrician: S. Forster *

Stills: Bert Chapman, John Jay, Laurie Turner *

Back Projection: A. Davis, H. Allen *

Special Processes: George Hill *

Models: P. Guidobaldi *

Editor: V. Sagovsky

Assistant Editor: May Dennington *

2nd Assistant Editor: H. Taylor,

Leslie Hodgson, Rita Murison, W. Martin *

Supervising Art Director: George Provis

Designs and Art Direction: Maurice Carter

Set Dresser: John Jarvis *

Chief Draughtsman: Jack Maxsted *

Draughtsman: Peter Murton, Tim Bryan,

Roy Dorman, Iris Newell *

Prop Master: H. Rumsey *

Dress Designer: Julie Harris

Wardrobe Mistress: Dolly Smith *

Wardrobe Master: William Neale *

Make-up: W.T. Partleton

Hairdresser: Elsie Alder *

Music Composed by: Lambert Williamson

Played by: The London Symphony Orchestra

Conducted by: John Hollingsworth

Director of Sound: B.C. Sewell

Sound] Recordist: Al Rhind *

Sound Camera Operator: Gerald Sinnott *

Boom Operator: Cyril Swern *

Boom Assistant: R. Judd *

Sound System: British Acoustic Film

Dubbing Editor: Bob Wilson *

Assistant Dubbing Editors:

Christopher Lancaster, Bill Bouvet *

Stunt Arranger/Stunt Double: Jock Easton *

Made at the: Gainsborough Studios

Studio: Shepherd's Bush Studios *

Cast:

Jean Kent (*Gwen Rawlings*)

Dennis Price (*Michael 'Red' Farrell*)

Flora Robson

(*Miss Thorpe, Chairman of Juvenile Court*)

Griffith Jones (*Danny Martin*)

Herbert Lom (*Max Vine*)

Bonar Colleano (*Micky Malone, American deserter*)

Hugh McDermott

(*Al Schwartz, 2nd American deserter*)

Peter Glenville (*Jimmy Rosso, the waiter*)

Nora Swinburne (*Miss Mills, reform school matron*)

Elwyn Brook-Jones (*Mr Pottinger*)

Jill Balcon (*Roberta*)

Beatrice Varley (*Mrs Rawlings*)

Margaret Barton (*Agnes*)

Diana Dors (*Lyla Lawrence*)

Garry Marsh (*Mr Hawkins*)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot

Good-time Girl, made during the period when Sydney Box was in charge of production at Gainsborough, seems – superficially at least – very different from the ‘classic’ melodramas produced under Maurice Ostrer’s supervision. Indeed, with its contemporary focus on juvenile delinquency and the practices of courts and approved schools, it could be seen as a precursor of the spate of social problem films of the late 40s and 50s which worked through post-war anxieties about the shift in the social climate towards greater individual freedoms, social mobility and consumerism. Maurice Ostrer’s *Root of All Evil* (1947) deals with similar questions within the ‘escapist’ women’s picture format – the story of the rise of its heroine (Phyllis Calvert) from poverty to power and wealth and her fall from grace is set in the self-consciously fictional world characteristic of popular romance. Its anti-realism was, as usual, derided and patronised by contemporary critics. While the same critic disliked the ‘squalid’ subject matter of *Good-time Girl*, they were prepared to admire its realistic treatment of a serious social subject.

From today’s perspective, such a response seems surprising. The film’s ‘realism’ resides almost entirely in two short sequences framing the main story, which is told in flashback. In these, a runaway teenage girl (Diana Dors) is brought by a fatherly policeman before the chairwoman of a juvenile court (Flora Robson) who attempts to set her back on the straight and narrow with the moral tale of another girl, Gwen Rawlings (Jean Kent), whose efforts to control her own destiny met with disastrous results. The story of Gwen’s descent into the underworld is filmed in expressionist *noir* style, which is very different in tone from the framing sequences (although certain scenes are clearly meant to boost the authenticity – Gwen’s unjust sentencing by the juvenile courts, for instance, or the speech given by the head of the approved school about the lack of resources which accounts for the inadequacies of the juvenile penal system). These scenes of social realism (the result of careful research into Royal Commission reports by the filmmakers) sit uneasily with the brooding chiaroscuro of Gwen’s transformation from gutsy, independent young woman into thief and murderess, seen as the result of exploitation, injustice, and institutional blindness. The film’s endorsement of Gwen’s refusal to knuckle under to an unjust system is then sabotaged by a moralistic conclusion which has none of the ambiguities characteristic of the women’s picture.

In spite of its moralism, *Good-time Girl* is interesting as a film trying to negotiate conflicting ideological and institutional pressures at a time of transition. In the context of the shift from wartime to post-war social and sexual mores, the problem posed by the film is one of social control – the need to draw boundaries to contain the potential excesses contingent upon the new sexual and economic emancipation of women (the breakdown of the family unit, the desire for wealth and consumer goods after a period of austerity, and so on), without sacrificing the qualities essential to a civilised society – compassion, freedom of choice, independence of spirit, etc. In order to accommodate these changes, social institutions have to be redefined – the authoritarian patriarchal family and a repressive legal system must give way to a softer, liberal paternalism. In *Good-time Girl*, Gwen’s downfall is shown to be less the result

Orlando Martins (*Kolly, club doorman*)
 Amy Veness (*Mrs Chalk, the landlady*)
 Jack Raine (*Detective Sergeant Girton*)
 Michael Hordern (*Seddon, detective*)
 Renee Gadd (*Mrs Parsons, probation officer*)
 George Carney (*Mr Rawlings*)
 George Merritt (*police sergeant*)
 Joan Young (*Mrs Bond*)
 Harry Ross (*Fruity Lee*)
 Vera Frances (*Edie Rawlings*) *
 June Byford (*Joan Rawlings*) *
 Jim O'Brady (*Max's attacker*) *
 Dennis Harkin (*a pug*) *
 Danny Green (*Smiling Billy*) *
 Dorothy Vernon (*Mrs Chudd*) *
 Phyl French (*Sonia*) *
 Noel Howlett (*clerk*) *
 Edward Lexy (*Mr Morgan*) *
 Iris Vandeleur (*2nd woman lodger*) *
 Rosalind Atkinson (*woman doctor*) *
 Mollie Palmer (*reform school girl*) *
 Zena Marshall (*Mrs Farrell, Red's wife*) *
 John Blythe (*Art Moody*) *
 Phyllis Stanley (*Ida, first blonde*) *
 Betty Nelson (*Connie, 2nd blonde*) *
 Jane Hylton (*Doris*) *
 Lionel Grose (*Silver Slipper doorman*) *
 Tommy Duggan (*MP*) *
 Bob Usher (*MP*) *
 Ilena Sylva (*blonde*) *
 Wally Patch (*bookie*) *
 UK 1947
 93 mins

* Uncredited

A BFI National Archive print

MURIEL BOX: A WOMAN'S TAKE

The Seventh Veil + The English Inn

Mon 1 May 13:00; Thu 11 May 18:10 (+ intro by Lucy Bolton, Reader in Film Studies at Queen Mary)

Good-Time Girl

Mon 1 May 15:40; Fri 12 May 18:10 (+ intro by Television Producer and Director, Rebecca Towers)

Muriel Box: The Odd Woman Out

Tue 2 May 18:15

The Passionate Stranger (aka A Novel Affair)

Tue 2 May 20:30 (+ intro by filmmaker Carol Morley); Thu 18 May 18:20; Tue 30 May 20:30

Easy Money

Wed 3 May 18:20; Mon 8 May 16:00

Holiday Camp

Sat 6 May 15:30; Wed 17 May 20:30

The Lost People (aka Cockpit)

Sat 6 May 18:30; Sun 21 May 13:40

The Happy Family (aka Mr Lord Says No/Live and Let Live)

Sun 7 May 18:10; Sat 20 May 15:15

Street Corner (aka Both Sides of the Law/Gentle Arm/The Policewoman)

Mon 8 May 13:30; Tue 30 May 18:20 (+ intro by season curator Josephine Botting)

Simon and Laura

Mon 8 May 18:10; Sun 28 May 16:00

Philosophical Screens: The Seventh Veil

Thu 11 May 20:15 Blue Room

Rattle of a Simple Man

Wed 17 May 18:10; Tue 23 May 20:30

The Truth about Women

Thu 18 May 20:40; Sun 28 May 18:10

of her lack of moral fibre than of an intransigent society's failure to recognise her good qualities. As a result, she moves beyond rebellion into cynicism and social irresponsibility, culminating in the death of the man she loves and a fifteen-year prison sentence. When told this story, Diana Dors' young runaway decides to return home to her family rather than follow Gwen's path.

Taken together with the opening sequence in which the chairwoman and the policeman discuss how to deal with the young 'offender', this resolution suggests that the relationship between the representatives of social order and the potential delinquent is no longer as authoritarian as they were in Gwen's story. Seen in this light, *Good-time Girl* falls more into line with other Gainsborough melodramas: conflict and excess are shown to be things of the past; balance, harmony and unity the characteristics of the present. And it is also typical of the sense that the violent excesses of the past are more powerfully and seductively presented than the constituents of the new enlightened order, which is treated rather perfunctorily as though in a token gesture of civilised British values.

This was certainly due partly to an economic motive, for in spite of Box's pretensions to artistic merit, to serious social subject matter, he (like other Gainsborough producers before him) had more than an eye on the box-office value of sadism and violence. (The film incurred the censor's wrath for some of its more violent scenes, justified by the filmmakers in terms of their realism – Muriel Box interviewed in *Gainsborough Melodrama*, BFI Dossier No.18.) The underworld sequences of *Good-time Girl* are exotic and glamorous: the drabness of institutional life is set against the stylishness of the world to which Gwen is attracted. The 'moral' of the story is clear (excessive consumerism is wrong), but the fantasy of unbridled consumption and 'good times' is activated to appeal to audiences (particularly women) tired of wartime austerity and looking forward to greater economic freedom. Box's *régime* at Gainsborough may have seemed to herald a different kind of product from the more blatantly escapist costume dramas and women's pictures; none the less, *Good-Time Girl* shares more with those films than is immediately apparent.

Pam Cook, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, September 1985

Eyewitness (aka Point of Crisis) + A Ride with Uncle Joe

Sun 21 May 18:20; Fri 26 May 18:10

This Other Eden

Thu 25 May 18:20; Sat 27 May 13:45

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Three restored Muriel Box titles (*The Passionate Stranger*, *The Truth about Women* and *Rattle of a Simple Man*) are being released on Blu-ray and DVD by StudioCanal in May and will be available from the BFI Shop.

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