



Miracle in Soho

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Directed by: Julian Amyes

©/Production Company:

The Rank Organisation Film Productions Ltd

Presented by: The Rank Organisation

Executive Producer: Earl St. John

Produced by: Emeric Pressburger

Associate Producer: Sydney Streeter

Production Manager: Charles Orme

Production Controller for Pinewood: Arthur Alcott

Assistant Director: Robert Asher

Continuity: Gladys Goldsmith

Written by: Emeric Pressburger

Director of Photography: Christopher Challis

Camera Operator: Austin Dempster

Editor: Arthur Stevens

Art Director: Carmen Dillon

Set Dresser: Vernon Dixon

Dress Designer: Julie Harris

Make-up: George Blackler

Processed by: The Rank Laboratories

Music Composed by: Brian Easdale

The Song 'The Miracle' Words by: Jack Fishman

The Song 'The Miracle' Sung by: Ronnie Hilton

Sound Recordists: John W. Mitchell,

Gordon K. McCallum

Sound Editor: Arthur Ridout

Made at: Pinewood Studios

uncredited

Production Secretary: Jeanette Green

2nd Assistant Director: Charles Hammond

3rd Assistant Director: Dennis Lewis

Assistant Continuity: Loreley Stephens

Focus Puller: Steve Claydon

Clapper Loader: Leon Davis

Stills: Norman Gryspeerdt

Portrait Stills: Cornel Lucas

1st Assistant Editor: Jack Gardner

Assistant Editor: Norman Wanstall

Chief Draughtsman: Terence Marsh

Draughtsman: Peter Lamont, Michael Lamont

Music Conducted by: Frederic Lewis

Music Recording: Ted Drake

Sound Camera Operator: Ron Butcher

Boom Operator: Danny Daniel

Boom Assistant: Roy Charman

Dubbing Crew: Gordon K. McCallum,

John Woodiwiss, C. Le Messurier

Dubbing Assistant: Graham Harris

Unit Publicist: Jean Osborne

Cast:

John Gregson (*Michael Morgan*)

Belinda Lee (*Julia Gozzi*)

Cyril Cusack (*Sam Bishop*)

Peter Illing (*Papa Gozzi*)

Rosalie Crutchley (*Mafalda Gozzi*)

Marie Burke (*Mrs Gozzi*)

Ian Bannen (*Filippo Gozzi*)

Brian Bedford (*Johnny*)

Barbara Archer (*Gwladys*)

John Cairney (*Tom Nichols*)

Lane Meddick (*Steve*)

Billie Whitelaw (*Maggie*)

Julian Somers (*Potter*)

Harry Brunning (*Ernie*)

Douglas Ives (*Old Bill*)

George A. Cooper (*Sid, foreman*)

Cyril Shaps (*Mr Svoboda*)

Junia Crawford (*Delia*)

Betty Shale (*Mrs Coleman, pet shop owner*)

Richard Marnar (*Karl*)

George Eugeniu (*espresso owner*)

In a Rank publicity hand out, Emeric Pressburger summarised his intentions of *Miracle in Soho*: 'The more I saw of the district the more extraordinary it began to appear to me. But soon I noticed that, as with most places in the world today, the unusual events and happenings of life were taken for granted. Then I began to realise that no matter how commonplace a thing might be there are always one or two people closer to the events who see it in a different light. For them these ordinary happenings are small daily miracles.' (Paraphrased from Kevin Macdonald's book, *Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter*, Faber and Faber, 1994)

Pressburger's script for the film was written in 1934 as *The Miracle in St. Anthony's Lane* and existed largely as a lucrative unfiled story. Despite constant selling and re-selling during the 1930s, the script found itself in Pressburger's touting suitcase as an unrealised project, until 22 years later. At the time, it was the first project Pressburger made without Powell in five years but went on to mark the beginning of the final split between the Archers.

The film is of great interest because of this combination of production history and the ambition of the drama. Nowhere is this combination signified greater than in the setting of the film: the busy street in Soho and its population of émigrés. Carmen Dillon designed the sets for the production and through them brought out the lively character of the district. The production, filmed in only eight weeks was dominated by Dillon's huge street set in Stage A at Pinewood. Almost two thirds of the action reputedly occurred on this set, forming a suitable feeling of the community and the importance of the street locale to the running of their lives. The sets were initially criticised for their lack of authenticity, a complaint often hailed in a time when 'social realism' was taking hold. But Pressburger's script favours a more 'poetic' tinge to the realism. His story is about the magic that comes in the everyday and the colourful sets helped draw this out.

Almost all the main people in the cast are characterised by their familial relationships and their success in love. But Pressburger's script questions these relationships on two levels. Initially, we are introduced to the two romantic leads, whose family lives differ greatly. Julia Gozzi (Belinda Lee) comes from a close family unit who are planning to emigrate to Canada en masse, despite the fact that the children are now adults. Julia, more than anyone, longs for the family to stay together. In contrast to this, her lover Michael Morgan (a cheeky but likeable John Gregson) comes from a father-son relationship that is strained and awkward. The two find a love that depends on their being close to one another, and when Morgan's work is finished, the relationship is over. But beyond this idea of togetherness, dramatised through the love between Julia and Michael and emphasised through the use of the street set, the script hints at a state of unity that transcends the physical. It is this spiritual 'miracle' that the film celebrates, a spiritual quality that may also be cynically understood as a shrewd marketing ploy.

Raymond Durnat in *A Mirror for England* classifies this film in a cycle of religious films. He comments that Rank's religious Methodism was complicated by a bid to appeal to a Catholic audience. The film came at a time when the importance of the international market was of increasing value to the Rank organisation. The wide diversity of nationalities in the film may be attributed to the profitable Italian market, an appealing market to our shrinking domestic industry that was downsizing due to the onset of television and changes in the regular audience.

In light of these cynical marketing ploys, it seems bizarre that the athletic girl from Budleigh Salterton, Devon, should be playing a fragile Italian. Indeed, her

Michael Collins (*Michael, lorry driver*)
 Colin Douglas (*supervisor*)
 Lucia Guillon (*Dolores*)
 Gordon Humphris (*Buddy Brown*)
 Fred Johnson (*priest*)
 Freda Bamford (*Mrs Mop*)
 Paul Stassino (*Paule*)
 Lynn Tracy (*tall girl*)
uncredited
 Mr Witham (*French black man*)
 Isabelle Lucas (*French girl*)
 Andy Ho (*Chinaman*)
 Eddie French (*Berce, Johnny's assistant*)
 Wilfred Lawson (*Mr Morgan, Michael's father*)
 Gisela Birke (*Lottie, with telephone trouble*)
 Eileen Forbes (*staff nurse*)
 Golda Casimir (*Mrs Bellucci*)
 Rupert Puritz (*German schoolboy*)
 Helene Bevan (*dressmaker*)
 Anthony Sagar (*Billy*)
 Peter Taylor (*1st German on street*)
 Charles Ross (*2nd German on street*)
 Joan Hooley (*black girl*)
 Meadows White (*Allan, postman*)
 Cyril Chamberlain (*policeman*)
 Keith Pyott (*house surgeon*)
 Mervyn Blake (*man in mac*)
 Toni McDonald (*1st girl*)
 Sheree Winton (*2nd girl*)
 Marguerite Brennan (*3rd girl*)
 Franklyn James (*blind man with dog*)
 Frazer Hines
 Peter Whitmarsh
 David Franks
 David Tilley
 Ray James
 Anthony Sadler
 Leslie Slysz
 UK 1957©
 98 mins
 35mm – A BFI National Archive Print

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performance lies in the starkest contrast to the busty girl associated with most of her photos and off-set appearances. Despite some acknowledgement of the disparity between Lee's look and the image of the character, most reviews were favourable, the *Monthly Film Bulletin* even being taken by a certain charm in her performance.

The conservatism Lee displays in this role was ironic in light of the shape of her developing career in the years that followed this film. Later in 1957 she was loaned to Italy to film *La venere di Cheronera* (*Aphrodite Goddess of Love*), a move that eventually marked a shift in the development of her career. Whilst there, she began a passionate affair with Vatican official Prince Filippo Orsini, which resulted in a huge scandal and ultimately the termination of her Rank contract.

Dylan Cave, BFI National Archive Curator

Pressburger sometimes saw his pension in the continual optioning of stories that went unmade. If they were turned down, as was his third novel, he relegated them not to the wastebin but to the drawer of his desk, where like wine, he would wait for them to mature. Sometimes he misjudged it and the ideas went flat, as with *The Miracle in St. Anthony's Lane*, which he had written in Paris in 1934.

A few years earlier he had slept rough in a famous Berlin synagogue, planning to creep out just before morning service. Too late, he heard the congregation chanting, and crept down, only to be welcomed as a member of the quorum; the service had not started, and the sounds he had heard had been in his imagination. 'Surely,' he claimed, 'a miracle.' A René Clair-like idea, full of character, with a number of interlocking stories, *The Miracle in St. Anthony's Lane* was another story of exile, only a step away from this anecdote. It reached the screen only in 1957, directed by Julian Amyes, converted into *Miracle in Soho*. Originally a story of the German exiles in Paris, it had now become one about Italian immigrants in London.

In England Pressburger's original story had been widely admired, but no one wanted to make it and Powell thought it lacked 'substance' (a curious observation from the man who chose to direct *Honeymoon*). A postman is at the centre of the web of stories, linking the locals – but the miracle, if there is one, takes place in the church, when Julia (Belinda Lee) prays for her lover, the Lothario of London's roadworkers, to return. The water-main explodes and brings him back.

Powell recognised it as too close to *A Matter of Life and Death* and didn't want to tread old ground, but he might, just as readily, have thought it too similar to 'I Know Where I'm Going!' or to *Blimp*. If *A Matter of Life and Death* was for Powell 'the most perfect film', he is talking about technical perfection; for Pressburger his finest script, although not his most personal one, is *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, into which is introduced another component from *The Miracle in St. Anthony's Lane*.

The 'miracle', the hopeless dream of a girl in love, is close to the shifts that Pressburger was making in his narratives during the 1930s and 40s: the question is less whether the 'miracle' is actually a miracle, conjured up by a prayer in the church, but more whether it exists in the imagination of a lovesick girl. Is it another case of the Indian Rope Trick, as with the Roger Livesey syndrome of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*? An event that only occurs for those who want to see or dream it in the first place? By the time that *Miracle in Soho* was made, in 1957, the central creative ideas had been plundered by the Archers and only the bones remained.

Kevin Gough-Yates, *Sight and Sound*, December 1995