



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

It Happened One Night

It Happened One Night

Directed by: Frank Capra

Production Company:

Columbia Pictures Corporation

Screenplay: Robert Riskin

Based on the short story by:

Samuel Hopkins Adams

Director of Photography: Joseph Walker

Film Editor: Gene Havlick

Musical Director: Louis Silvers

uncredited

Executive Producer: Harry Cohn

Assistant Director: C.C. Coleman Jr

Art Director: Stephen Goossón

Costumes: Kalloch

Orchestration: Howard Jackson

Sound Engineer: Edward Bernds

General Press Agent: George Brown

Cast:

Clark Gable (*Peter Warne*)

Claudette Colbert (*Ellie Andrews*)

Walter Connolly (*Alexander Andrews*)

Roscoe Karns (*Oscar Shapeley*)

Jameson Thomas (*King Westley*)

Alan Hale (*Danker*)

Arthur Hoyt (*Zeke*)

Blanche Friderici (*Zeke's wife*)

Charles C. Wilson (*Joe Gordon*)

uncredited

Ward Bond (*first bus driver*)

Eddy Chandler (*second bus driver*)

Harry Holman (*third auto camp owner*)

Maidel Turner (*auto camp manager's wife*)

Irving Bacon (*station attendant*)

Wallis Clark (*Lovington*)

Charles D. Brown (*reporter*)

Harry C. Bradley (*Henderson*)

Harry Todd (*flag man*)

Frank Yaconelli (*Tony*)

Henry Wadsworth (*drunken boy*)

Claire McDowell (*mother*)

Ky Robinson, Frank Holliday, James Burke, Joseph

Crehan (*detectives*)

Mickey Daniels (*vendor*)

Oliver Eckhardt (*Dykes*)

George Breakston (*boy*)

Bess Flowers (*secretary*)

Neal Dodd (*minister*)

Edmund Burns (*best man*)

Ethel Sykes (*maid of honour*)

Thomas Ricketts (*prissy old man*)

Eddie Kane (*radio announcer*)

Eva Dennison (*society woman*)

Fred Walton (*butler*)

Matty Roubert (*newsboy*)

Milton Kibbee, Sherry Hall (*reporters*)

Earl Pingree, Harry Hume (*policemen*)

Ernie Adams, Kit Guard, Billy Engle, Allen Fox,

Marvin Loback, Dave Wengren, Bert Starkey,

Rita Ross, Kate Morgan, Rose May, Margaret Reid,

Sam Josephson, Ray Creighton, John Wallace,

Mimi Lindell, Blanche Rose, Jane Tallent,

Charles Wilroy, Patsy O'Byrne, Harry Schultz,

Bert Scott, Emma Tansey,

Marvin Spector, William McCall, S.S. Simon

(*bus passengers*)

USA 1934

105 mins

A runaway socialite clashes with a blunt, down-on-his-luck reporter when they are required to pose as a married couple. Colbert and Gable ooze star power as they bicker and flirt their way through an unlikely road trip. The genesis of countless tropes and gags that came to define the genre, this stands as one of the great romantic comedies, built on sparkling chemistry and buckets of charm.

Ruby McGuigan, bfi.org.uk

In 1932 Frank Capra predicted to *Variety* that 'someone is going to evolve a great film out of the Depression' – and promptly created several himself. From the viewpoint of our own rapidly deepening Great Recession, his famously scrappy little 1934 screwball 'bus picture' *It Happened One Night*, which dunks runaway heiress Ellie Andrews (Claudette Colbert) and unemployed reporter Peter Warne (Clark Gable) into America's everyday hardships, signals an interesting development in that evolution. Though it addresses the Depression indirectly compared to the wealth sharing of Capra's later *Mr Deeds Goes to Town* (1936) or the head-on engagement of *American Madness* (1932) and *Meet John Doe* (1941), it crackles with the sound of a society on thin ice, both economically and socially, and of male and female roles stretched to breaking point.

It's a road-trip masquerade about playing poor, where real life breaks in via road thieves and starving bus passengers, where a dollar has to stretch and shunning a scavenged carrot is a sin. Perhaps it's the only sin in this movie, which is constantly playing with the idea of transgression in cohabitation or adultery, but which otherwise obeys Capra's maxim: 'There are no rules in filmmaking. Only sins. And the cardinal sin is dullness.' In fact if anything the film's sparkling qualities – along with its mythic trappings as the inauspicious Columbia picture that grabbed a groundbreaking five Oscars, and its status as the sacred source of screwball – have kept us from seeing what a tough little cookie it is. Watching the film again, the pert and appropriately jaundiced romance seems a nod to troubled times rather than the salve of frothy escapism that it's become in public imagination. Despite the soft-focus interludes and languorous sequences (the haystack sleep-out, Peter's dreamy outline of his ideal girl) that Capra allows himself, it's far less sentimental than one remembers. The romance comes late, after real and imagined dupings and betrayals, and the narrative mercilessly mocks the idea of 'a perfectly nice married couple' in Peter and Ellie's shrieking pantomime of white trash marital bliss, put on to evade her father's detectives. Screenwriter Robert Riskin serves Gable's dialogue medium if not hard-boiled – full of grandstanding male pride as well as whip-smart teasing – while Colbert's is as punchy as it is playful ('I just had the unpleasant sensation of hearing you referred to as my husband'), despite her kittenish delivery.

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

It Happened One Night

Sun 2 Jun 13:00; Mon 17 Jun 12:10; Tue 25 Jun 20:30

Badlands

Sun 2 Jun 20:45; Mon 10 Jun 12:20; Wed 26 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions)

Sullivan's Travels

Mon 3 Jun 18:10; Mon 10 Jun 20:50; Fri 14 Jun 14:45; Mon 24 Jun 12:10

North by Northwest

Mon 3 Jun 20:20; Thu 6 Jun 14:30; Tue 18 Jun 14:30

Easy Rider

Tue 4 Jun 12:40; Fri 7 Jun 21:00; Sun 16 Jun 20:35; Sat 22 Jun 13:20

The Searchers

Tue 4 Jun 20:30; Thu 20 Jun 12:10; Sat 29 Jun 15:20

Where Is the Friend's House? Khaneh-je Doost Kojast

Wed 5 Jun 12:45; Sat 8 Jun 15:40; Wed 19 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Wed 26 Jun 21:00

Cléo from 5 to 7

Wed 5 Jun 18:10 (+ intro programmer Jelena Milosavljevic); Fri 14 Jun 20:50; Fri 21 Jun 12:10

Apocalypse Now: The Final Cut

Sat 8 Jun 19:40; Sat 15 Jun 19:40; Sun 23 Jun 19:20

Alice in the Cities

Alice in den Städten
Sun 9 Jun 20:20; Thu 13 Jun 12:00; Fri 28 Jun 12:20

The Wages of Fear

Le Salaire de la peur
Tue 11 Jun 20:15; Wed 19 Jun 14:20; Sun 30 Jun 14:40

The General + Cops

Wed 12 Jun 12:10

Gun Crazy

Wed 12 Jun 18:20 (+ intro by Josephine Botting, BFI National Archive Curator); Mon 24 Jun 20:30; Thu 27 Jun 12:20

Wild Strawberries

Smultronstället
Mon 1 Jul 11:50; Tue 9 Jul 20:50; Sun 21 Jul 14:20; Tue 30 Jul 18:20

Point Blank

Tue 2 Jul 12:20; Wed 17 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Sat 27 Jul 18:30

Pierrot le fou

Tue 2 Jul 18:10; Fri 12 Jul 20:40; Mon 15 Jul 12:10; Mon 29 Jul 20:45

Taxi Driver

Wed 3 Jul 17:50 (+ intro by Chantelle Lavel Boyea, BFI Assistant Curator of Television); Sat 13 Jul 18:00; Tue 16 Jul 12:15; Tue 23 Jul 12:20

The Passenger

Professione: reporter
Thu 4 Jul 20:40; Sat 6 Jul 12:00; Mon 15 Jul 18:10; Fri 19 Jul 12:20

Au hasard Balthazar

Fri 5 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 12:20; Fri 19 Jul 20:45; Wed 31 Jul 18:10 (+ intro)

The English Patient

Sat 6 Jul 17:15; Sun 21 Jul 19:20

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie

Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie
Sun 7 Jul 17:10; Thu 11 Jul 12:20; Sat 20 Jul 16:10

Then, of course, there's the disconcerting reek of sex. Any movie whose meet-cute introduction to defend a Greyhound bus seat is 'Excuse me lady, but that upon which you sit is mine' is stoking its sexual tension from the get-go. Released only months before the more exacting 1934 Production Code restrictions came into force, *It Happened One Night* has a pre-censorship sizzle, but also the post-Code smirk, displacing the raunch of early sound cinema into breezily suggestive bedroom encounters. For the well-read viewer these scenes have been so fruitfully pored over – in Cavell's elegant philosophy, Shumway's adulterous accusations, feminist insights from Kendall and Mizejewski, readings by Leff, Sklar, Gehring, Harvey et al – that the auto-camp cabin feels as crowded as Groucho's in *A Night at the Opera*. Once you've shooed the critics out, however, what's fresh and heady is the sheer exhilarating playfulness of Gable's chatty striptease, Colbert's pyjama-clad vulnerability and the joint fantasy about the blanket 'Wall of Jericho' – still compelling enough to shock when Ellie subsequently breaches it.

After 76 years [at time of writing, now 90], the film's playfulness is as potent as its toughness is surprising, mostly because play vanished from contemporary romantic comedy when it morphed into the salacious Apatowian bromance or the materialistic chick-flick in which women get the good one-liners and the designer goods. Like the original audience of *It Happened One Night*, we're looking for escapist distractions from economic uncertainty. But when *Sex and the City 2* had the audacity to feature Colbert's hitchhiking scene (echoing it with a puerile copy of its own), it only served as a sharp reminder that while the giddy adventures, gender skirmishes and aural seductions of Capra's masterpiece can still be savoured, they can't be replicated.

Kate Stable, *Sight and Sound*, December 2010

Theorem

Teorema
Mon 8 Jul 12:20; Wed 10 Jul 18:15 (+ intro); Wed 17 Jul 12:30; Sun 28 Jul 20:30

Gloria

Sat 13 Jul 13:10; Tue 16 Jul 20:35; Sat 20 Jul 13:30; Tue 30 Jul 20:30

Unforgiven

Sun 14 Jul 19:50; Tue 23 Jul 20:30; Thu 25 Jul 14:40

Bitter Victory

Thu 18 Jul 20:45; Sun 28 Jul 12:00

Daughters of the Dust

Mon 22 Jul 12:20; Wed 24 Jul 18:10 (+ intro by Arike Oke, Executive Director of Knowledge, Learning and Collections); Sat 27 Jul 20:45

F for Fake

Mon 22 Jul 18:20; Wed 24 Jul 12:40; Fri 26 Jul 20:50

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