

David
NIVEN

Kim
HUNTER

Raymond
MASSEY

Roger
LIVESEY

Marius
GORING

"A
romantic,
daring and beautiful
allegorical fantasy
- one of the best of the
Powell/Pressburger movies."



MARTIN SCORSESE

A Matter of Life and Death

Written, Produced and Directed by
MICHAEL POWELL and EMERIC PRESSBURGER



THE RANK ORGANISATION Presents A Production of The Archers
DAVID NIVEN • ROGER LIVESEY • RAYMOND MASSEY
"A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH"
with KIM HUNTER MARIUS GORING

ABRAHAM SOFAER KATHLEEN BYRON ROBERT COOTE BONAR COLLEANO JOAN MAUDE RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH Colour and Eye-microchrome processed in TECHNICOLOR Colour Control NATELIE KALINOS

Associate JOAN BRIDGES Photographed by JACK CARROFF FRAPS Music composed by ALLAN GRAY Conducted by W. L. WILLIAMSON Editor REGINALD HILLS Camera Operator GEOFFREY UNSWORTH Sound Recorder C. C. STEVENS Cillian Editor JOHN SEADOURNE Jr. Make-Up Billa Sharp

MICHAEL CHORLTON Costumes HEIN HECKROTH Special Effects DOUGLAS WOOLSEY & HENRY HARRIS and TECHNICOLOR Ltd. Additional Effects PERCY DAVE Assistant Art Director ARTHUR LAMPSON Chief Electrician W. Wolf Assistant Producer GEORGE BUSHY Unit Manager ROBERT C.

FOORD Assistant Director PARRY JONES Jr. Make-Up GEORGE BLACKLER Hair Stylist (UK) BILLIE P. Hair Stylist (USA) JUDITH W. Hair Stylist (USA) HEARD JUDGE Writers, Produced and Directed by MICHAEL POWELL and EMERIC PRESSBURGER

Distributed by RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS LIMITED

**MEMBERS'
CHOICES
SEASON**

Eden Court Cinema
Monday 3 Nov. 2015
at 7.15pm



A Matter of Life and Death

1946, U.K., B&W/Colour, Romantic fantasy, Running time: 104 mins.

Cast: David Niven, Kim Hunter, Roger Livesey, Robert Coote, Marius Goring, Raymond Massey, Kathleen Byron, Richard Attenborough, Bonar Colleano, Joan Maude.

Director: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger

Screenplay: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger

↓ Roger Ebert (rogerebert.com)

"Stairway to Heaven" (1946) is one of the most audacious films ever made - in its grandiose vision, and in the cozy English way it's expressed. The movie, which is being revived at the Music Box in a restored Technicolor print of dazzling beauty, joins the continuing retrospective at the Film Center of 15 other films by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, the most talented British filmmakers of the 1940s and 1950s.

"This is the universe," a voice says at the beginning of "Stairway to Heaven." "Big, isn't it?" The camera pans across the skies - but the story, as it develops, is both awesome and intimate, suggesting that a single tear shed for love might stop heaven in its tracks.

The story opens inside the cockpit of a British bomber going down in flames over England in the last days of World War II. The pilot, Peter (David Niven), establishes radio contact with a ground controller, an

American named June (Kim Hunter). Peter is unflappable in the face of death, and an instant rapport springs up between the two disembodied voices ("I love you, June. You're life, and I'm leaving it"). Then Peter jumps out of the plane before it crashes.

What follows is a breathtaking pastoral moment, as the pilot, somehow alive, washes ashore and sees a young woman, far away, riding her bicycle home. It is, of course, June, and soon they are deeply in love. But there is a problem. Peter was not intended to live. Heaven has made an error, and an emissary, Heavenly Conductor 71 (Maurice Goring) is sent to fetch him back. Peter refuses to go, and a heavenly tribunal is convened to settle the case. This fantasy is grounded in reality by a brain operation the pilot must

spirits leave their bodies.

The film's most audacious leap is to the trial in heaven to decide whether Peter will be allowed to stay on earth. Junge creates a heavenly amphitheater that fills the sky, and fills it with infinite ranks of heaven's population. Standing on one precipice, the prosecutor, an American played by Raymond Massey, argues against the British pilot. In one of the comic touches that deflates any excess profundity, he argues that Peter and June could never be happy together because they come from different cultures. First, we hear a radio broadcast of a cricket match; then an American big band broadcast. He asks the jury: "Should the swift current of her life be slowed to the crawl of a match of cricket?" But of course the question is not whether Peter and June will be happily



undergo; perhaps his heavenly trial is only a by-product of the anesthetic.

The British title of this film was "A Matter of Life and Death," and when the Americans retitled it "Stairway to Heaven," Powell wrote in his autobiography, he felt they had missed the point. But "Stairway to Heaven" may be a more expressive title, and certainly there is a stairway in the film, part of the incredible contribution of production designer Alfred Junge, who also provides one of the most spectacular shots in movie history, a view of heaven's underside: Vast holes in the sky with tiny people peering down over the edges. The heavenly scenes are shot in black and white, and the movie is filled with technical tricks, as when "real life" freezes while

married, but whether they will be married at all, and here the tear of love, captured on a rose petal by the Heavenly Conductor, becomes crucial evidence.

"Stairway to Heaven" has as its subtext the jockeying for power between Britain and America that took place after World War II.

British critics, at the time, sniffed that the film was too pro-American. What today's audiences will find amazing is the sheer energy of its invention. Powell and Pressburger (who always shared the writing, directing and producing credits, and whose production company was known as the "Archers") were not timid in reaching for new visual effects, and among the many startling sights in "Stairway to Heaven" is an eyeball's point-

-of-view of its eyelid closing, before the brain operation.

There's also sly humor. Heaven has a Coke machine for the arriving Yanks; newly appointed angels are seen carrying their wings under their arms in plastic dry-cleaner bags; the dialogue at the trial includes complaints like, "Would you repeat the question? It has 'enamored' in it." Today's movies are infatuated with special effects, but often they're used to create the sight of things we can easily imagine: crashes, explosions, battles in space. The special effects in "Stairway to Heaven" show a universe that never existed until this movie was made, and the vision is breathtaking in its originality.

POWELL and PRESSBURGER

The British film-making partnership of Michael Powell (1905–1990) and Emeric Pressburger (1902–1988) — together often known as *The Archers*, the name of their production company — made a series of influential films in the 1940s and 50s. Their collaborations — 24 films between 1939 and 1972 — were mainly derived from original stories by Pressburger with the script written by both Pressburger & Powell. Powell did most of the directing while Pressburger did most of the work of the producer and also assisted with the editing, especially the way the music was used. Unusually, the pair shared a writer-director-producer credit for most of their films. The best known of these are *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948).

In 1981 Powell and Pressburger were recognised for their contributions to British cinema with the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award, the most prestigious award given by the British Academy of Film and Television Arts.



FILMOGRAPHY

Contraband (1940)
49th Parallel (1941)
One of Our Aircraft Is Missing (1942)
The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943)
The Volunteer (1943)
A Canterbury Tale (1944)
I Know Where I'm Going! (1945)
A Matter of Life and Death (1946)
Black Narcissus (1947)
The Red Shoes (1948)
The Small Back Room (1949)
The Elusive Pimpernel (1950)
Gone to Earth (1950)
The Tales of Hoffmann (1951)
Oh... Rosalinda!! (1955)
The Battle of the River Plate (1956)
Ill Met by Moonlight (1957)
They're a Weird Mob (1966)
The Boy Who Turned Yellow (1972)



Eden Court Cinema
Tuesday 17 November
2015 at 7.15pm

Marcello Clerici, a member of Mussolini's secret police, travels to Paris on his honeymoon with orders to assassinate his former college professor, an outspoken political refugee. But Marcello's loyalty is tested when he is attracted to the professor's young wife, challenging his need to belong to the ruling party, a desire that will ultimately lead to his downfall. Bertolucci's stylish direction, Trintignant's strong central performance and Vittorio Storaro's sumptuous camerawork create an edgy and beautifully crafted film, reflecting a dark chapter in Italian history.

Our next screening...
Bernardo Bertolucci's

The Conformist

The second film in our
Members' Choices Season



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