



CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU, is a First Quarter 2017 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Australian classic.

18 of a possible 20 points

******½ of a possible *******

**Australia 1983 color 110 minutes live action feature drama
New South Wales Film Commission / Syme International Productions /
Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation Producer: Jill Robb**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Carl Schultz***
- 2 Editing: Richard Francis-Bruce**
- 2 Cinematography: John Seale***
Still Photography: Antony Potts*
- 2 Lighting: Reg Gasside***
Special Effects: Brian Cox*
- 2 Screenplay: Michael Jenkins* from the semi-autobiographical novel by
Sumner Locke Elliott**
Continuity: Pamela Willis
- 2 Music: Ray Cook***
- 2 Production Design: John Stoddart***
Art Direction: John Carroll* and John Wingrove*
Set Dressing: Jock McLachlan*, Clarissa Patterson*, and

Sandy Wingrove*

Props: Igor Lazareff* and Jock McLachlan*

Model Making: Lewis Morley*

Costume Design: Bruce Finlayson*

Makeup: Anne Popischil*, Rochelle Ford*

0 Sound

Sound Editing: Andrew Steuart

Sound Recording: Syd Butterworth

Sound Mixing: Roger Savage, Julian Ellingworth

Casting: Faith Martin*

2 Acting

2 Creativity

18 total points

Cast: Wendy Hughes* (Aunt Vanessa a.k.a. Ness), Robyn Nevin* (Aunt Lila), Nicholas Gledhill (j)* (P.S. a.k.a. Bill), John Hargreaves* (Logan, father of PS), Geraldine Turner (Aunt Vere), Isabelle Anderson* (Aunt Agnes), Peter Whitford* (George, husband of Aunt Lila), Colleen Clifford* (Cousin Ettie), Edward Howell (Judge), Jacqueline Kott (Miss Pile, a very affected teacher), Julie Nihill (Diana, a housemaid), Michael Long* (Child-snatcher Mr. Hood), Len London (Mr. Gentle), Beth Child (Mrs. Grindel), Colin Croft* (Magician), Virginia Portingale (Miss Colden, music teacher), Steve Fifield (Chauffeur), Pega Williams (j) (Winnie Grindel), Kylie Burgess (j)* (Cynthia, snobbish bully), Tony Blanchard (j) (Ian, Cynthia's younger brother), others

CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU is set in Depression-Era Sydney, Australia where two sisters battled over custody of a quasi-orphan boy. One was wealthy, an Anglophile bitterly envious of her deceased sibling's erstwhile marriage to quintessential "yobbo" Logan. She wished to refine motherless P.S. by sending him to a swank private day school. Vanessa hoped to win the child over by scheduling and bankrolling dance, riding, and piano lessons.

Her involuntary adversary was Lila, inveterate worrier but quite capable homemaker. Lila and spouse George tried to raise P.S. in suburban Bexley on a union worker's scanty salary. In the same economic canoe were two of her sisters, Vere and Agnes. The former performed as a chorus girl. Agnes had metamorphosed into a Salvationist doomsday zealot.

None of that trio could be termed remotely affluent. Whereas parental money and education had been lavished preferentially on Ness by her mother, enabling her to attend boarding school and move abroad, putting behind her an unhappy brief infatuation with handsome country youth Logan Marriott.

Later on that same young man met her sister Sinden, married her, and sired P.S.

Sinden died in childbirth, Logan having already deserted to northern gold fields. Care of the infant was jointly made out at that juncture to Lila and Sinden's editor friend, Ernest Huxley.

This complicated arrangement was simplified in the film version, Huxley being one of two lovers of Sinden dropped as tangential to the main plot. Charlie Seay, the other one, had been responsible for introducing Sinden and Logan in the first place, much to his eventual dismay.

For six years no one seriously challenged guardianship provisions. Then a lonely, dissatisfied Ness decided to contact Logan. Would he sign over at least partial custody of his son to her? Being the natural father in spite of behavior suggesting the contrary, Logan still had legal authority over disposition of his offspring's education. He assumed in a depressed economy Ness's money would insure a better quality of education for his son than George and Lila could afford. If she were willing to take on that task, he would certainly not impede her.

In paternal imagination, two cooperating sisters would share the job of raising P.S. Lila could entertain him during school breaks and on weekends. Ness would take charge during academic terms.

That neat plan rested on an unfounded assumption both women were equally firm in character. Not so. Pampered Ness, though junior to Lila, had far greater initiative. More to gain and disastrously little to lose. She had already traded comfort for love. Now she set out to reap the consequences.

Buying fashionable clothes for dependent six-year-old, Ness indulged a yen for extravagant shopping. P.S. allowed her an excuse to engage in conspicuous consumption while ostensibly practicing familial charity in a socially respectable manner. Using allowances from elderly cousin Ettie, she took a long-term lease on sprawling property in a blatantly upscale Sydney neighborhood, Point Piper, one far removed from unpolished Bexley where George and Lila resided in relative penury.

Thus began a tug of war for the loyalty and affection of a child too young to realize what was happening. His life of liberty gradually gave way to the restricted code imposed by Aunt Ness. P.S. had to reinvent himself as a proper young gentleman, letting go grudgingly of boyhood street cricket. Hours not spent directly in school were devoted to acquiring upper class skills. Lessons continued long after the final bell rang for school dismissal. At poolside, stable, piano bench, meal table. Ness drilled relentlessly into him a more elegant vocabulary shorn of anything proclaiming the presence of some yabbo.

Just how sadistic this better society could be was exposed in an incident depicting initiation into private school snobbery. Class prefect Cynthia Lawson made the newcomer on his first day fork over all loose change, a kind of perfunctory dues owed fellow sufferers tormented by overbearing Miss Pile and her contortionist elocutions. Still not content, she and kid brother Ian shamed their victim into dropping shorts and underwear, accusing him of being too cowardly to submit to exhibitionism for their entertainment. Then the girl ordered her patsy to bend forward. Upon acquiescence, she applied a rosebush switch vigorously to his bottom. What a fine welcoming.

Ness that evening accepted without question P.S.'s explanation for cuts: he had a toilet emergency and used a convenient shrub. Sure.

The returning Ozzie had been running away from childhood miseries like her nephew's. Ever since the death of her father. She sought to clamber over class battlements in order to evade the downward pull exerted so destructively on her siblings. She alone acquired a luxurious lifestyle, earned mention in society columns, educated herself in the speech and pastimes of an idle wealthy class of disdainful elitists. The other Scott females were stuck in a sunken rut.

Agnes, for example, though fallen prey to evangelical madness, retained staggering insight into motivations of relatives around her. Such as Ness and Lila. She occasionally served as sitter for P.S., thereby offsetting a little her otherwise free board at Lila's place. An inclination to lapse into spiritual revelation caused an enormous ruckus when Sinden's inheritance and playmate Winnie used unmonitored time to color items in George's prized scrapbook, ruining it and severely damaging the bond between substitute dad and junior vandal.

Vere, plummeted into ignominious chorus girl status, played clown and beggar, trying to mask lack of talent and ambition behind indifference and tawdry pleasures. Of necessity, she periodically applied to Lila for cash supplements.

Neither of those two was positioned to stop Ness from realizing her schemes.

Over time, the returned grand lady grew ever more possessive of her human toy, using him as comforter when lightning and thunder, bore down upon her, pretending it was the adult Logan she crushed in her arms. A habit totally incomprehensible to an involuntary houseguest who wanted only to be returned to familiar customs, people, and places.

Then an invitation came the way of Lila, asking if she could bring Sinden's child to what turned out to be a lugubrious commemoration of the deceased woman's two modest achievements: publication of a book titled Marmon and birthing of a son. Centerpiece of Elliott's novel, unused by the film's adaptor, this prolonged conversation piece introduced Charlie and Pony, two career losers, former intimates of Sinden making no headway whatsoever solo in acquisition of creativity or wisdom.

This expedition into the lower depths of Sydney's literary milieu Ness found unpardonable. She decided to wrench P.S. completely away from the grasp of an incompetent caregiver whose poor judgment brought the innocent lad into despicably decadent company. Over the younger woman's protests and explicit instruction not to do so.

In the aftermath of that fiasco, George lost his union job. Taking advantage of that financial setback, Ness hauls Lila into court, bent on gaining complete control over her besieged nephew. The presiding judge remorselessly

sidestepped testimony of witnesses to the plaintiff's slapping of her charge, choosing to place the minor with the money rather than in an affectionate home environment.

But the embattled urchin had acquired a formidable new weapon against his smothering oppressor: icy politeness. Turning the tables by employing the very device favored by Ness, he sabotaged each effort she made to accommodate and buy him off. Finally, at a seventh birthday party, he hit upon ultimate payback: inciting peers to mimic their hostess at her most vulnerable moment. They danced mockingly around inside her house replicating P.S.'s parody of Ness's thunderstorm huggings, accompanying their movements with chanted entreaties to absent Logan.

This childish ridicule proved insufferable to the party's organizer, causing her to unwisely administer a near-fatal shaking to their instigator in the presence of stunned celebrants.

No one was finding happiness, only grief, confusion, and pain.

The following day, an emotionally exhausted benefactress reluctantly admitted defeat, pledging to restore her victorious prisoner to former lodgings. A pyrrhic triumph.

For an accident loomed ahead, bringing about an astonishing ironic closure.

The upshot won P.S. a real name and identity.

Was it worth the price exacted?

Director Carl Schultz's film made extensive wholesale pillagings of dialogue from the original novel of the same name by Sumner Locke Elliott, retaining bitter insightfulness and penetrating aphorisms.

Fortunately for audiences, Hollywood's earlier foray into adaptation never achieved realization. Wendy Hiller's Hibernian aunt offered true aristocratic bearing in scene after scene, something Elizabeth Taylor, by the early 1960s an overdressed greasepaint queen, could never have managed to pull off. Nor would an American marquee idol have passed muster as caddish Logan, a quintessential Down Under wandering spirit. John Hargreaves embodied the suave charm of habitual irresponsibility to perfection. He also looked the role admirably. A notion of filming the story in Spain, as potential lead actress Taylor

desired, was ultimately jettisoned. That would have made very little sense and robbed the film of essential floral luxuriousness befitting disparate histrionics.

In the key role of P.S., Nicholas Gledhill operated believably shorn of distracting cute mannerisms. His belligerence, taciturnity, and creepy starings were positively devilish, more than a match for adult manipulations.

Robyn Hargreaves made an ideal Lila, fretting and asthmatic, alternating between over-protectiveness and strident demands as her cautiously constructed home idyll exploded into incessant sniping and subterfuge.

While Ray Cook's music at times journeyed across the boundary of tastefulness into borderland overkill, it generally accented raw domestic tensions underlying Elliott's tale of a house divided within. Lush and unapologetic melodies matched verdancy of indigenous flora.

Impressionistic lighting harmonized with story protagonist's restricted point-of-view. This produced a fragmented reality, as P.S. was often unable to interpret maneuverings of adults in his world.

A literate screenplay by Michael Jenkins allowed listeners to taste repeatedly the tangy flavors of the source novel. Key lines in the book repeat verbatim as critical speeches in the film. A wise choice.

Crowning glory of elements comprising CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU, John Seales' cinematography privileged upward shots of adults and downward lensings of children, keeping firmly in place their relative positions of power. Until those were reversed at film conclusion when auditory jubilation in dazzling sunlight transcended gloomy, soon-to-be-vacated interiors.

Precisely timed editing insured a rhythmic intensity building incrementally in a series of smaller climaxes to two towering passionate outbursts. Richard Francis-Bruce utilized somewhat unconventional framings, frequently offering partial side views rather than full-on frontals, a pattern creating heightened mystery and suspense.

Immaculately accurate reproductions of Depression Sydney lent You Are There immediacy to the film. Costuming of both upper and lower class characters accurately mirrored colors, textures, wrinkling, and the unimaginative starchiness typical of the era.

The only real weakness evident in this production is its sound recording, particularly during eavesdropping sequences where the volume level drops into near inaudibility.

Due to unremitting drama and suggestions of sexual improprieties, CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU is not suitable for viewers under the age of eighteen. It's extremely worthwhile screening for all adults.

This Image Entertainment dvd unfortunately comes devoid of any enlightening bonuses.

CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU won eight Australian Academy Awards following its domestic release: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress in a Leading Role (Wendy Hughes as Ness), Best Actor in a Supporting Role (John Hargreaves as Logan), Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Achievement in Production Design, Best Achievement in Costume Design, and Best Achievement in Cinematography. Robyn Nevins, Nicholas Gledhill, and Ray Cook were additional nominees for their work here.

A picture whose core messages have not grown stale, CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU is a preeminent drama to savor during repeated viewings.