

***Whistle Down the Wind* is an April, 2024 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Library of the Heritage Methodist Church. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.**

18 of a possible 20 points = a minor film classic

United Kingdom 1961 black-and-white 99 minutes live action feature drama

Producers: Richard Attenborough and Jack Rix

Allied Film Makers / Beaver Films

Key: *designates an outstanding performance or technical achievement

(j) indicates a juvenile performer

Points:

2 Direction: Bryan Forbes*

2 Editing: Max Benedict*

2 Cinematography: Arthur Ibbetson*

Still Photography: Harry Gillard*

1 Lighting

**1 Screenplay: Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall from the novel by
Mary Hayley Bell**

2 Music: Malcolm Arnold*

2 Art Direction: Ray Simm*

Wardrobe: Laurel Staffell

2 Sound

Sound Recording: Bill Daniels*

Dubbing Editing: Alistair McIntyre

Casting: Maureen Goldner*

2 Acting

2 Creativity

18 total points

Cast: Hayley Mills (j)* (Kathy Bostock), Bernard Lee (Mr. Bostock), Alan Bates* (Arthur Blakey), Norman Bird (Eddie, Mr. Bostock's hired hand), Diane Clare

(Miss Lodge, Sunday School Teacher), Patricia Heneghan (Salvation Army Girl), John Arnatt (Superintendent Teesdale), Elsie Wagstaff (Aunt Dorothy), Hamilton Dyce* (Reeves, the Vicar), Howard Douglas (The Vet), Ronald Hines (P.C. Thurstow), Gerald Sim (Detective Wilcox), Michael Lees (First Civil Defense Worker), Michael Raghan (2nd Civil Defense Worker), May Barton (Villager), Diane Holgate (j) (Nan Bostock), Alan Barnes (j) (Charles Bostock), Roy Holder (j)* (Jackie Greenwood), Barry Dean (j)* (Raymond, the bully), Christine Ashworth (j), John Boden (j), Doreena Clark (j), Keith Clement (j), Pamela Lonsdale (j), Judy Ollerenshaw (j), Robert Palmer (j), Lois Read (j), Nigel Stafford (j) (Disciples), Anne Newby (j) and Julie Jackson (j) (Latecomers), Charlotte Attenborough (j) and Sarah Forbes (j) (Children in Final Crowd Scene), George Hilsdon, Frank Howard, and Arthur Howell (Police Constables)

Looking for a film that's decidedly off the beaten path, yet immensely rewarding? Well, *Whistle Down the Wind* admirably fits the bill. On one level, it's a British Christmas film. Yet certainly not family entertainment. At another level, this superbly acted drama is a definite minor classic of world cinema, probing deeply into childhood imagination and beliefs.

Directed by Bryan Forbes from Mary Hayley Bell's book of the same title, *Whistle Down the Wind* is set in and near a bleak industrial village of Lancashire, where rain, fog and snow seem almost perpetual weather elements. An escaped convict named Arthur Blakey, serving time for murder, is somewhere in the area. Unshaven, bloodied, wearing ragged clothes that make him a suitable double for tramp or Traveler, Blakey makes his way to a barn owned by the Bostock family. There he collapses in the hay, losing consciousness shortly after finding tentative refuge from police patrols.

In the film's opening, viewers spy Eddie, Mr. Bostock's hired hand, engaged in taking three unwanted kittens inside a burlap sack to a pond for drowning. Unknown to him, a trio of Bostock adventurers is following him at a distance, staying hidden behind tree, bush, or any accessible man-made structure capable of blocking adult sightlines.

They, too, are on a mission. One not only possible, but also compassionate and blessed. They will preserve the lives of adorable felines, saving them from certain death when Eddie departs the premises.

This their leader and eldest quickly accomplishes once opportunity to do so unseen arises. Kathy hands out two kittens, one apiece to younger siblings Nan and Charles. She conceals the remaining animal inside her own coat, then sets off to home with a pair of furtive helpers trailing behind her according to age. While the two girls pass nonstop through a village, brother Charles can't resist stopping to converse with buddy Jackie Greenwood.

Charles first tries to give away his newly-acquired possession to a pal. Jackie isn't interested. His family already has a mouse-chaser. Then the younger boy attempts transferring ownership to a Salvation Army testifier who stands a few feet away. She likewise rejects his proposal, assuring the lad Jesus will take care of his cuddly companion.

At this point, exasperated Kathy calls out for the laggard to get moving and all three animal-lovers resume their homeward trek as Charles grudgingly obeys.

Once arrived safely inside their family barn, a comfortable box of straw is quickly prepared for kits. The only potential marplots around are Dad, Aunt Dorothy, and trapping-obsessed Eddie. All of which the kids expertly find ways to evade.

Sometime later Blakey enters their animal sanctuary. Weary, gashed, and starving, he fails to pay any attention to other inhabitants. He has no intention of bothering locals anyway. Unless circumstances require preemptive assault.

Later that evening after tea Kathy sneaks out to the barn to check on presumably famished furballs. She finds more than she bargained for there. With mother cat Lucy in possession, intending to reintroduce her to rescued progeny, she instead finds herself in a complex dilemma. For Lucy, detecting an intruder adjacent to her babies, hisses in a combination of terror, guardianship, and malice.

Blakey is jolted up to a sitting posture. He stares uncomprehendingly into Kathy's face.

The astonished schoolgirl gazes back at him for a few moments. Then she asks who the stranger is.

Blakey responds with an oath: "Jesus Christ."

Kathy takes that response at face value, believing Jesus has returned to earth specifically to punish her for prior expression of disbelief in his miraculous power. She returns home mystified and mortified. Ransacking through

illustrated religious literature, she comes upon a page with a picture of Jesus. His bearded facial features strongly resemble those of the man in their family's byre.

This revelation is too much to handle alone. She awakens an extremely drowsy Nan, informing her Jesus has indeed come back to life and is occupying space in the cowshed.

The next day being Sabbath, all three children are shipped off by bus to Sunday School. There they meet up with peers, including *Wagon Train* fan Jackie Greenwood. During the question period following their lesson, the question of what children should do for Jesus if he should return is posed by Kathy. The only answer provided by their instructress is "praise him."

This is most unsatisfying to the questioner, who leaves no more enlightened than before.

Returning home, the junior trio exits a bus on the highway just as a police car leaves the muddy drive down to their rural address. Dad and Aunt have been apprised a murderer is on the loose. He might show up anytime in their vicinity. Extreme caution is warranted; a tight rein should be kept on roaming children.

However, no such restrictiveness is applied to younger Bostocks. Nor to any other kids in the community. It's the early 1960s. Free ranging schoolchildren are still the norm rather than exceptions. So back to their new acquaintance travel Kathy and Nan with nourishment for "Jesus."

The following day, the pair again abscond with supplies for Blakey cadged from the breakfast table. They have made quite clear to Charles that he is excluded from their company at present. He, in return, calls them cows, and declares he will never play with them again.

Instead, while they make haste back to their unexpected wayfarer, younger brother lops about sheds and silo, eventually espying Eddie checking a snare set for a bird. Eddie's been told by misdirecting Kathy his prey is inside it, something she most likely hopes is false.

So the laborer leaves a calf he had been taking to shelter with the older girl and hurries off to see if her report is true. Well, it is almost accurate, he finds. A few more seconds and then ...

Something interferes with his plans. It's a stone thrown by Charles, which sends the prey fluttering hastily away and leaves Eddie luckless as usual.

Retreating quickly into the same building his sisters now occupied, Charles observes Blakey poorly obscured behind their screening bodies. He demands to know who that is. They tell him it's Jesus and manage to convince him that is so.

Eventually, the younger girl presents an Arabian charm bracelet to Blakey, one acquired as a free gift inside the Sunday edition of a British tabloid. The newspaper itself is included as part of her offering.

Charles, representing the final member of this latter-day Magi set, places Spider – his share of Kathy's recovery project – under the custodial care of "Jesus." Then the charity team departs.

Coming home from school the next day, Bostocks find themselves being shadowed by the totality of their Sunday school class. It seems Charles shared their secret with Jackie Greenwood, who passed along the information to at least one other child. Soon everyone connected through their unique social grapevine had been made aware of divine visitation gracing Mr. Bostock's farm. As one girl pointed out to Kathy, Jesus was not a Bostock family private matter. Not any longer! He was meant to be shared.

So Kathy arranges for the entire outfit to come and see the refugee themselves. Only none of those kids should mention that meeting to adults. Jesus must be kept safely out of adult hands.

When the larger bunch does encounter Blakey, one member devoutly pays respect with an appropriate sacrifice of "His book," a Bible. Then they clamor for a Biblical story to be told them, yet cannot agree on which tale that should be. One look at small print and challenging vocabulary inside the Bible decides Blakey on substituting a piece of probably risqué fiction from inside Nan's lurid scandal sheet.

His "Air Stewardess" reading is interrupted by Mr. Bostock and accompanying vet, the pair coming to inspect a possibly sick calf. The property owner finding his stables already densely crowded and not with the usual cattle alone, quickly commands all children, including his own, to promptly leave.

Kathy successfully pleads to remain.

While this transpires, Blakey tries to camouflage himself in hay fodder, ineptly leaving one hand exposed. This gets trampled upon by an unaware farmer. Despite surging pain, the victim maintains silence, to a girl witness's utter astonishment. Surely no mere mortal could resist outcry against such brutal treatment.

Once other adults clear out again, Kathy counsels Blakey to find a better covert. He does so, moving to a less frequented loft.

The next day Burnley's local bully, while canvassing a playground, extorts from Jackie Greenwood retraction of a confession he had seen Jesus in the flesh. Kathy, undaunted by Raymond's belligerence, reinforces the recanted claim. As finally do other schoolmates present. After slapping his impassive challenger, Raymond leaves. Though not before insisting on a privilege of also being given access to "Jesus."

Matters further complicate when Spider is found dead in the straw by Charles. Grief-struck, the boy asserts Jesus let his pet die. Something hardly consonant with the merciful nature of a supreme deity supposed to preserve all animal life, someone specifically entrusted with preservation and care of Spider. Charles's belief in their visitor's benevolent divinity being badly shaken, he flings away Spider's corpse and runs from the outbuilding in frustrated agony. Nan picks up the dead creature, caresses it, then asks Blakey if Spider has gone to heaven. She's sure that must be the case.

He chooses not to reply.

Kathy, unable to otherwise restore Charles's confidence in Jesus's compassion, hauls him off to the vicar. She presumes he can explain satisfactorily why suffering organisms die. That individual, though, shows far greater concern about vandalism of his church, being completely unable to stay focused on Kathy's inquiries. The children exit no wiser.

In a later private conversation about what she could do to help Blakey, he asks Kathy to obtain a package hidden in Castlewood Tunnel. She was not to unwrap it. This the eager youngster was only too pleased to undertake. Ignoring a patrol dragnet operating at the tunnel's opposite end, Kathy locates what her instructor requested, pries it loose, then dashes off, purposely ignoring calls from adults to identify herself. Taking the mystery item back to Blakey, she unwittingly supplies him a revolver.

The following day at Charles's birthday party, Nan lets slip she took an extra piece of cake "for Jesus." This admission tips off her dad that someone unfamiliar is on their farmland. He realizes the mystery man must be one bluecoats are seeking and orders his impish offspring to stay inside. Rounding up hapless Eddie, Mr. Bostock goes to the ramshackle structure housing his livestock and bars the main door.

Meanwhile, Aunt Dorothy hastens downhill to the village in order to call detectives and update them on what is happening. After reaching a dead-end at the nearest pub, which is closed for half-holiday, she finally resorts to an outdoor telephone booth more favorable to her efforts.

As law enforcement arrives at the Bostock cottage, Kathy makes another delivery to Blakey, this time a pack of Dad's cigarettes minus overlooked matches. She assures the man help is being recruited from all child believers that can be unearthed and brought in for assistance.

A preceding brief observation journey outside his hideaway has persuaded Blakey no safe escape can be made without allies. Lawmen swarm over the hills. And only a sort of juvenile posse is positioned to aid him.

Should he attempt a shootout, rely on a real miracle, or surrender himself?

Kathy protests she and other underage believers love him. They will do all they can to keep authorities from making an arrest. Yet she herself isn't even alertly adult enough to pair matches with cigarettes. Her confederates are unlikely to prove any more capable in this emergency.

How will this suspenseful drama conclude? You'll have to watch the dvd yourself to find out.

Malcolm Arnold's score makes extensive use of the carol "We Three Kings of Orient Are," keeping the Magi prominently in auditors' minds. It also effectively expresses the innocence of this film's central trio of imaginative youths.

Sound recording is acute to the point of impeccably capturing shrilling train whistles, cow moos, squishing Wellingtons treading through mud, and clock ticks.

Photography and editing are equally accomplished. A profusion of black-and-white images highlight faces just as memorably as a Rembrandt or Velazquez painting. Scenes of skipping figures retreating from view as they ascend towards sparsely timbered crests in joyful play recall the terminating dance of Bergman's *Det sjunde inseglet* (*The Seventh Seal*). Arthur Eddison's camerawork is adept in both interior and exterior framings. Point-of-view angles maximize audience familiarity with both subjects and objects inside painterly compositions. A great deal of praise should be given also to lighting here, which renders backgrounds in considerable clarity despite obstacles of fog, rain, shadows from miscellaneous agricultural implements, and absence of electrical sources inside rustic structures.

Editing cuts sharply between scenes, with little evidence of any unnecessary lingerings. Jumping from cottage to barn, or from hill to railway without intermediate shots keeps rhythm and suspense both mounting at high speed as the final act unfolds.

Acting is highly commendable, of course. Hayley Mills and Alan Bates, respectively as ever-helpful adolescent Kathy and taciturn escapee Arthur Alan Blakey, rivet audience attention. Neither is guilty of resorting to mere shtick. Instead, both allow their characters to intertwine in a realistically guarded, yet intense collaboration. Elsie Wagstaff's crusty Aunt Dolly, Bernard Lee's accommodatingly lax Dad, Roy Holder's rather surly Jackie Greenwood, Barry Dean's sadistic Raymond Patto, Hamilton Dyce's totally materialistic Vicar, and Norman Bird's sarcastic comedy relief role of hapless Eddie all add considerably to the credibility and engagingness of this motion picture.

Nor should intermittently hilarious dialogue and underplayed one-liner deliveries built into the screenplay be slighted. Especially entertaining are under-the-tablecloth conveyance of food back and forth among the Bostock trio intent on dodging pointed queries without violating truth-telling requirements and the vicar's turning serious theological discussion into a cautionary tale of mundane petty crime and threatened civil punishment.

Though children and their perceptions are spotlighted in the film, it's absolutely not fit entertainment for them. On the other hand, as adult probe into childhood behavior, conversations, and fantasies *Whistle Down the Wind* is a remarkable achievement. One well worth repeated viewings.