



***The Little Prince* is a 1974 mostly live action feature musical based on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's novel. Below is Kino Ken's review of the Zeus dvd release of Stanley Donen's film.**

**9 of a possible 20 points = \*\*1/2 = a middling film**

**Tunisia / United Kingdom 1974 color 88 minutes  
mostly live action feature musical fantasy Paramount Pictures  
Producers: Stanley Donen and A. Joseph Tandet**

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

**Points:**

- 1 Direction: Stanley Donen**
- 1 Editing: Peter Boita and George Hively**
- 1 Cinematography: Christopher Challis 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit DP: Paul Wilson  
Stills Photography: Keith Hamshere**
- 1 Lighting**

**Special Visual Effects: Tom Howard**

- 1 Screenplay: Alan Jay Lerner, based on the novel *Le petit prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

**Script Supervision: Sally Jones**

**Continuity: Pamela Carlton, Marjorie Lavelly, Kay Mander**

**Music Editing: Thelma Orr**

- 1 Music: Frederick Loewe and Angela Morley**

**Orchestrations / Arrangements: Angela Morley**

**Choreography: Ron Forella and Bob Fosse\***

- 1 Production Design: John Barry**

**Art Direction: Norman Reynolds**

**Costume Design: Tim Goodchild and Shirley Russell**

**Makeup: Ernest Garser**

- 1 Sound: Jim Groom, Vernon Messenger**

**Sound Mixing: Bill Rowe and Jim Willis**

**Animation: George Dunning**

- 1 Acting**

- 0 Creativity**

**9 total points**

**Cast: Steven Warner (j) (The Little Prince), Joss Ackland (The King), Clive Revill (The Business Man), Victor Spinetti (The Historian), Graham Crowden (The General), Richard Kiley (The Pilot), Donna McKechnie (The Rose), Bob Fosse\* (The Snake), Gene Wilder\* (The Fox), Peggy Ann Clifford ("It's a Hat" Lady)**

**Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's oft-filmed masterpiece, *Le petit prince*, seems to defy bringing successfully to the screen. Whether as live action musical or animation, its blend of dream and reality resists facile adaptation to cinematic treatment. Stanley Donen's attempt to translate it into an integrated visual narrative respected the writing much more than did an utterly wrongheaded 2015 feature animation. However, it fails to overcome the problem of capturing a mirage atmosphere enveloping this story. Even filming in Tunisia's Sahara desert didn't quite manage to convince viewers that though the dream itself is illusion, the character of the little prince is somehow real.**

Playing the title character was Steven Warner, seven or eight years old at the time and decidedly English rather than French. That constituted major error number one. Cheesy animation by George Dunning light years removed from detailed precision of French masters, such as Jean-François Laguionie and Paul Grimault, removed any sense of timelessness, replacing disciplined drawing with overtones of Penny Lane currency. Error number two.

Error number three was employing music by Austrian-born Frederick Loewe and British native Angela Morley. Neither Straussian operetta nor English pastoral set a proper Gallic tone.

The fourth misstep consisted of reducing appearances by the king, business man, historian, and general to a few throwaway lines, none of which was adequately stressed. Casting insisted on making these characters, too, quintessentially English. Not a brilliant idea.

As for plot, the picture begins with the pilot as a boy drawing pictures invariably misconstrued by adults. He doesn't understand grown-ups and they don't comprehend him. This alienation from society increases as he ages, though the pilot learns to hide his scorn of convention through socially acceptable chitchat about sports, fashion, the weather, and other safe topics. He only feels comfortable flying solo, well removed from all other adults.

Thus the flight over Africa minus a copilot. Which ends badly with a non-operative radio, damaged wing, and crash into desert nowhere. Then dreams begin as he faces potential death through starvation, exposure, and dehydration. Something replaying an earlier experience of the author himself in Egypt.

Surprisingly, as hope diminishes, he meets the self-styled prince of an extraterrestrial asteroid, brought to earth by a flock of birds. This aristocrat has problems, too: how to keep a sheep from eating the single lovely rose on his cosmic snowball, B612 and how to return to his home since carrier birds vanished long ago.

After encounters with tutelary snake and fox on planet Earth, the former offering death and the latter friendship and love, this planetary wanderer comes upon the stranded narrator of this story, eventually leading him serendipitously to a well. The message of living through hope and faith is obvious. When the star roamer has told all his backstory to mortal companion, both draw optimistic conclusions about living from shared experiences. Then

the boy departs to find consolation and apotheosis through fatal bite from talkative counselor Snake. Leaving behind a weighty body on Earth, his unfettered soul flies off to B612. Or some similar tiny orb in space.

Finding himself alone again, the aviator, who has managed to repair his damaged plane, searches for a missing child philosopher. He finds instead one dying orphan. The languishing lad informs him there will be an afterlife in which laughter of a revived boy's spirit will be heard coming through space. Sort of "from my mouth to your ears."

Accepting inevitable mortality, the airman climbs into his plane, starts up the engine, then flies up and off, leaving behind the desert. He's presumably wiser for meeting with the alien.

What distinguishes this film are two elements: (1.) Bob Fosse's choreography and enactment of The Snake and 2. the low-key kindness of The Fox, who teaches the boy about friendship while itself learning about love. Gene Wilder's performance was complex, emotionally stirring, easily the most sensitive in this film. It had the unfortunate consequence of overshadowing Richard Kiley's harsher, angrier characterization as the misanthropic narrator.

Trying to meet expectations of children caught between nursery and puberty with vibrant colors reminiscent of 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*, this later production overshoots the mark. A more subdued palate with less hyperactive acting by minor characters would have worked much better here.

Still, Donen's treatment of the text is more palatable than 2015's animated disaster, one which thrust rampant feminism into the spotlight, something Saint-Exupéry had no desire or interest to promote.

Okay for family viewing, this 1974 movie does a better job of telling the author's original story. It's torpedoed by faulty production decisions enumerated earlier in this review.

There are no bonus features on the Zeus dvd release.

