



Lighter than air and utterly charming



The Bishop's Wife (1947) is enchantment personified. For it presents the eternally handsome Cary Grant at his ethereal best as Dudley – an otherworldly answer to a very concrete prayer. How does a frustrated Episcopal bishop thwart divine intervention and win back the affections of his wife? This was just one question answered in Henry Koster's romantic fantasy. The film was Samuel Goldwyn's personal production; a modestly budgeted holiday film that ultimately developed into so much more than initially planned. In the embodiment of Cary Grant, there was a genuine sense of divine inspiration. Veering between his usual naughtiness, but on this occasion viewed through a saintly veneer, Grant was utterly believable as the angel with an agenda.



Two of the film's most poignant scenes illustrate Dudley's supernatural presence; the first; Dudley's recanting of a Biblical proverb to Bishop's young daughter, Debbie; the second, a poignant bit of wish fulfillment as Dudley literally wills a wayward boy's choir into the exalted hymn

'Hearts of Gladness' with great sincerity. Inspired and engaging in every way, the story was remade in 1996 by Penny Marshall as the all black **The Preacher's Wife** but without the magic or spark that continues to linger inside the original.



PLOT

Bishop, Henry Brougham (David Niven) has been working for months on plans for a new cathedral. But the funding for the project has reached an impasse when stoic widow, Mrs. Hamilton (Gladys Cooper) demands that the religious icon take on the flavor of a shrine to her late husband. Losing sight of his commitment to both his family, wife Julia (Loretta Young) and daughter, Debbie (Karolyn Grimes) and his flock of parishioners, Henry needs to be taught a lesson.



Enter the charming and somewhat devilishly playful angel, Dudley (Cary Grant). Revealing his true identity, only to Henry, Dudley sets about seemingly to wreak havoc on Henry's already chaotic life. He rekindles a spark of romance in Julia – but more for him than for Henry, takes over the reigns of providing patriarchal guidance to the family and even assumes the helm of the rectory's daily operations, before tackling the widow Hamilton and ultimately softening her heart. The premise of Dudley, having no place on earth, only out to make Henry jealous by courting Julia is never entirely dismissed as a rouse, creating an interesting romantic dynamic that permeates the entire story.



THE TRANSFER

MGM DVD doesn't rate a very high opinion from this reviewer. Their product consistently ranks near the bottom and this transfer is no exception. Though the image is generally free of age related artifacts the gray scale has been rather harshly contrasted and suffers from considerable edge enhancement and shimmering of fine details. Overall, this image rates a bare pass to the indiscriminating eye. Previously made available through HBO Video – in a transfer that was no less problematic – MGM has imported the Chase Stereo Mix for the audio. However, the audio is not a remix of the original mono stems but a re-channeling of full mono, spread over five channels of sound. There is an awkward and tinny echo to the stereo track that, happily, is not evident in the mono also made available on this DVD. There are NO extras.



BOTTOM LINE: The film comes highly recommended. The transfer is less than. Weighing both, the overall sincerity of the story wins out. Perhaps one day MGM will revisit this film with the transfer it so definitely deserves.

