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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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## Sixty-Five Years of British Cinema

September 9 - November 12, 1971

Thursday, October 14 (2, 8:00)

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN, U.S. title). 1946. Production by The Archers. Written, Produced and Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. Production designed by Alfred Junge. Assistant Producer: George Busby. Photographed by Jack Cardiff. Music composed by Allan Gray. Conducted by W. L. Williamson. Edited by Reginald Mills. Colour and dye-monochrome processed by Technicolor. Colour control by Natalie Kalmus. Associate: Joan Bridges. Camera operator: Geoffrey Unsworth. Sound recorded by C. C. Stevens. Liaison Editor: John Seabourne, Jr. Motor bike shots by Michael Chorlton. Unit Manager: Robert C. Foord. Assistant Director: Parry Jones, Jr. Make-up by George Blackler. Hair styles by Ida Mills. Costumes by Hein Heckroth. Special effects by Douglas Woolsey and Henry Harris and Technicolor Ltd. Additional effects by Percy Day. Assistant Art Director: Arthur Lawson. Chief Electrician: W. Wall. Courtesy The National Film Archive, British Film Institute, and The Walter Reade Organization. 104 minutes.

Cast: David Niven (Peter Carter), Kim Hunter (June), Robert Coote (Bob), Kathelen Byron (An Angel), Richard Attenborough (An English Pilot), Bonar Colleano (An American Pilot), Joan Maude (Chief Recorder), Marius Goring (Conductor 71), Roger Livesey (Dr. Reeves), Robert Atkins (The Vicar), Bob Roberts (Dr. Gaertler), Edwin Max (Dr. McEwen), Betty Potter (Mrs. Tucker), Abraham Sofaer (The Judge), Raymond Massey (Abraham Farlan).

"Had you harked you would have heard the herald angels singing an appropriate paen of joy over a wonderful new British picture, STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN, which came to the Park Avenue Theatre yesterday. And if you will listen now to this reviewer you will hear that the delicate charm, the adult humor and visual virtuosity of this Michael Powell - Emeric Pressburger film render it indisputably the best of a batch of Christmas shows.

If you wished to be literal about it you might call it romantic fantasy with psychological tie-ins. But literally is not the way to take this deliciously sophisticated frolic in imagination's realm. For this is a fluid contemplation of a man's odd experiences in two worlds, one the world of the living and the other the world of his fantasies - which, in this particular instance, happens to be the great beyond. And the fact that the foreword advises, 'any resemblance to any other worlds, known or unknown, is purely coincidental,' is a cue to the nature and the mood.

We've no time for lengthy explanations - other than to remark that, by all the laws of probabilities, Squadron Leader Peter Carter should have been killed when he leaped from a burning bomber without a parachute over the Channel on May 2, 1945. And that is the natural assumption which revolves in the back of his injured mind. But, still alive after a freakish salvation and in love with a thoroughly mortal American Wac, he resists the hallucinary 'messenger' who keeps summoning him to the beyond.

That gives you a slight indication of the substance and flavor of this film - and we haven't space at this writing to give you any more, except to say that the wit and agility of the producers, who also wrote and directed the job, is given range through the picture in countless delightful ways: in the use, for instance, of Technicolor to photograph the earthly scenes and sepia in which to vision the hygienic regions of the Beyond (so that the heavenly 'messenger,' descending, is prompted to remark, 'Ah, how one is starved for Technicolor up there!').

We haven't space to credit the literate wit of the heavenly 'trial' in which the right of an English flier to marry an American girl is discussed, with all the subtle ruminations of a cultivated English mind that it connotes, or the fine cinematic inventiveness and visual 'touches' that sparkle throughout, notably in the exciting production designs of Alfred Junge..."

-- Bosley Crowther, The New York Times, December 26, 1946.