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A Fine Romance

It Happened One Night
Columbia Pictures, 1934
Directed by Frank Capra; 105 minutes

Cast:

Peter Warne	Clark Gable
Ellie Andrews	Claudette Colbert
Oscar Shapeley	Roscoe Karns
Alexander Andrews	Walter Connolly
Danker	Alan Hale
Bus Driver	Ward Bond
Bus Driver	Eddy Chandler
King Westley	Jameson Thomas
Lovington	Wallis Clark
Zeke	Arthur Hoyt
Zeke's Wife	Blanche Frederici
Joe Gordon	Charles C. Wilson
Reporter	Charles D. Brown
Henderson	Harry C. Bradley
Auto Camp Manager	Harry Holman
Manager's Wife	Maidel Turner
Station Attendant	Ircing Bacon

Credits:

Producer	Harry Cohn
Director	Frank Capra
Based on story "Night Bus"	Samuel Hopkins Adams
Screenplay	Robert Riskin
Art Director	Stephen Goosson
Assistant Director	C. C. Coleman
Photography	Joseph Walker
Editor	Gene Havlick
Sound	E. E. Bernds
Costumes	Robert Kalloch
Music Director	Louis Silvers

Notes

Columbia Studios in the early 1930's was the poverty row of the Hollywood film industry. Being "exiled to Gower Street" was the standard punishment meted out by the major studios to recalcitrant stars. It was one such exile that helped contribute to the creation of one of the best-remembered and best-loved films of the '30's.

It Happened One Night, directed by a relative newcomer, had been intended by Columbia to be the last of a cycle of cross-country bus films. But Frank Capra, with his fresh new insights into the artistic possibilities of film, saw the film as a vehicle for making a mocking assault on the things he disliked - artifice, ostentation and the undeserved superiority of the rich. Through the development of natural, easy characters in a (reasonably) realistic setting, Capra successfully created what was to become the Capra specialty - the earthy, morally pure hero brings the frothy but basically resourceful heroine down to earth through a series of delightful human incidents that ultimately serve as proof of the essential goodness of honest men. Falsity is pricked, independence is triumphant.

The casting of Gable as the "Everyman" Pete Warne and Colbert as the fugitive heiress (of the pre-Hearst variety) was a lucky break. Gable was loaned to Columbia in an attempt to "humble the King"; and with such a high-powered leading man, Colbert was persuaded to co-star. Gable was a delightful surprise in a whimsical, good-natured role.

Although the film opened to lukewarm critical reviews, the vox populi of American film-goers soon made It Happened One Night a smash hit among the general audience. With little promotion, the film won its audience. The American people could identify with Ellie Andrews and Pete Warne. Capra acknowledged that the plot wasn't an original one. In a 1934 film magazine interview, he is quoted as saying: "...the story developments were disguised by the incidents which took place. Any audience can guess ahead of flat plot scenes. But by entertaining them, making them forget the plot and stick with the characters through a wealth of incident, you will bring them to a surprise turn in the story - a pleasing surprise." It was through this ability to see the comedic potential in very human incidents that the screwball comedy was born. It Happened One Night represents the first of this genre. Screwball comedy offered a new formula for a Depression-ridden nation, in which poor is morally better than rich and the basic goodness of man can



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triumph over superficiality. In this respect, Capra's films were not significant simply in terms of commercial success; they added a new dimension to American entertainment - a naturalistic counterpart to the far-out fantasies of Busby Berkeley.

It Happened One Night is a film with wide-ranging significance. In 1934, it captured the top five Oscars, including "Best Picture" (the first time for Columbia Studios), and rescued Columbia from "Poverty Row". Beginning with It Happened One Night, the films of Frank Capra elevated Columbia Studios from a subordinate, second-rate organization to a major film studio. Capra's freshness and innovativeness would change movies forever, just as the technical genius of his contemporaries (like Mamoulian) made major breakthroughs in the art of the cinema.

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