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The Super Stars

Adam's Rib

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Directed by George Cukor

1949; 102 minutes

Cast

Adam Bonner	Spencer Tracy
Amanda Bonner	Katharine Hepburn
Doris Attinger	Judy Holliday
Warren Attinger	Tom Ewell
Kip Lurie	David Wayne
Beryl Caighn	Jean Hagen
Olympia La Pere	Hope Emerson
Grace	Eve March
Judge Reiser	Clarence Kolb
Jules Frikke	Emerson Tracy
Mrs. McGrath	Polly Moran
Judge Marcasson	Will Wright
Dr. Margaret Brodeigh	Elizabeth Flournoy
Mary, the Maid	Janna Da Loos
Dave	James Nolan
Roy	David Clarke
Court Clerk	John Maxwell Sholes
Reporter	Tommy Noonan
Emerald	Paula Raymond
Mrs. Bonner	Madge Blake
Mrs. Pynter	Anna Q. Nilsson

Credits

Director	George Cukor
Producer	Lawrence Weingarten
Scenarists	Garson Kanin, Ruth Gordon
Based on original story by	Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon
Photographer	George J. Folsey
Art Director	Cedric Gibbons
Assoc. Art Director	William Ferrari
Set Decorator	William Ferrari
Assoc. Set Decorator	Edwin B. Willis
Editor	Henry Grace
Sound Recorder	George Boemler
Musical Score	Douglas Shearer
Costumes	Miklos Rozsa
Special Effects	Walter Plunkett
Assistant Director	A. Arnold Gillespie
	Jack Greenwood

Notes

Hepburn and Tracy were undoubtedly the best romantic team in the movies. This reputation was based on both their vibrant personalities and their ability to play off and against each other so well. Added to this is the fact that they were frequently in evidence on the screen over a period of 25 years, appearing together in nine films between 1942 and 1967. They occasionally had to overcome their vehicles, which ranged from awful Sea of Grass, Keeper of the Flame, and mediocre Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, Desk Set, to good Without Love, State of the Union, and great Woman of the Year, Pat and Mike. But their very best effort was the delightful Adam's Rib, which offered them the full range of their high sense of comedy and timing coupled with a script with a hard edge. The success of the film also boosted Tracy's sagging career, and marked his last real romantic lead before he made the graceful transition to older character roles, beginning the following year with Father of the Bride.

Adam's Rib usually winds up being an entry in symposiums and film programs on Women in Film, but actually it did not start a trend and was not really 20 years ahead of its time. It did not break new ground, nor was it meant to create dialogue among a 1949 audience. Much has been read recently into the material, but the truth was that it did not take itself that seriously. However, its depiction of the classic battle of the sexes did hit harder than its surface-level companion piece Woman of the Year. The latter film, though funny and clever, copped out at the end with its conclusion of the woman's submissive acceptance of her role of dutiful housewife. Rib is more brittle, and offers a more satisfying denouement.

Like Woman of the Year, Adam's Rib delights in reversing the traditional sex roles, and the two performers, especially Tracy, carry it off superbly. In Woman of the Year, it is he who desires a church wedding and eagerly shows off his new hat to an indifferent, slacks-clad Hepburn. In Rib, he goes this one better with his fabled crying jag. Tracy is one actor who can pull it off without relinquishing one drop of masculinity.

The team is backed up both before and behind the camera by an impressive display of talent. The film introduced or further showcased four new faces (Holliday, Ewell, Hagen, Wayne) to excellent advantage, and the Kanin-Gordon script remains fresh and appealing after 26 years. Cukor's direction is, as always, tasteful and entertaining (his transvestite sequence is hilarious), and the film is further assisted by the recurring Cole Porter ditty, though we share Tracy's feeling that if David Wayne sings it once more we're going to make him eat his music!

Notes by Christopher J. Warren



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The American Cinema: A Survey 1896-1976

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