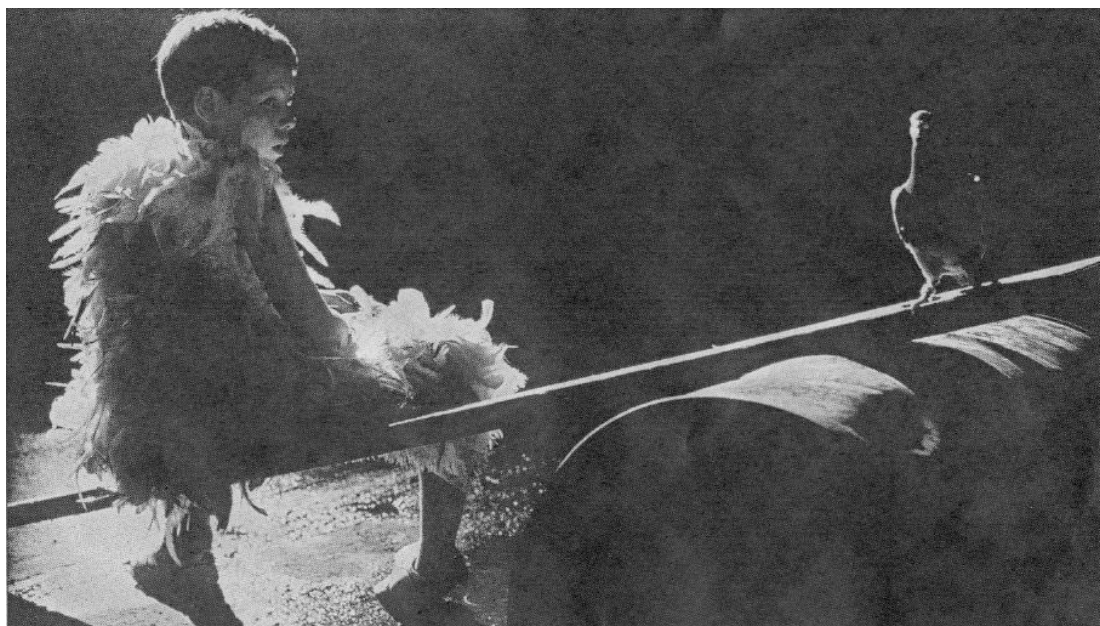


Gabriel and Me

UK : 2001 : dir. Udayan Prasad : : 87 min
 prod: : scr: Lee Hall : dir.ph.:
[Sean Landless](#); [Jordan Routledge](#)
 Billy Connolly; Iain Glen; Rosie Rowell; David Bradley

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⌘	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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*Jimmy Spud – Bird envy? Flamboyant dresser? Or would-be angelette? The film seems to answer, all three.
 Source: Evening Standard*

Evening Standard – 1/11/01 – review:

"Of all the source material for movie screenplays, radio plays might seem to be the least fertile. The fact that Lee Hall has adapted his original radio play *"I Luv You Jimmy Spud"* for the screen with partial success is some kind of achievement. The legacy is the voice-over from Jimmy (Sean Landless) who sets the scene and this encourages the possibility that the events are a product of a child's fantasy.

Constructed around a similar thematic structure to that of his most acclaimed screenplay, **"BILLY ELLIOT"**, **"GABRIEL AND ME"** is both less successful and more ambitious. It adds a spiritual dimension to the well-worn tale of an imaginative young boy hemmed in by a stultifying environment who attempts to make life better for himself. The

essential difference between Billy Elliot and Jimmy Spud is that the latter is more concerned with helping other people than helping himself, a wannabe Samaritan dreamer conducting a somewhat underexplained spiritual quest. In short, he wants to be an angel.

To this end he composes a letter to the Archangel Gabriel applying for the job of seraph and is rewarded by a visitation from a heavily mascara'd Billy Connolly in the school changing rooms. Gabriel is not altogether helpful, however, informing Jimmy that he must perform a few services to mankind without angelic assistance before his application can be processed.

Undeterred, Jimmy sets to work sewing feathers onto an oversized vest which he

considers appropriate attire for an angelic vigilante. Thus caparisoned he rather unexpectedly saves a Boy Scout from drowning. "Thanks for saving me life, like," says the grateful Scout. "Perhaps I could show you a few knots sometime."

Meanwhile, Jimmy's family life slips from bad to worse. His dad (Iain Glen) has been laid off at the Newcastle docks and is diagnosed with lung cancer (if nothing else the film is one of the best anti-smoking commercials I've ever seen), his mum (Rosie Rowell) is the only breadwinner, who works at the chippie while trying to hold the family together, and his socialist grandfather (David Bradley) keeps racing pigeons.

They all live in a weird kind of flat above the docklands, almost a shack in the air. This airborne apartment, plus various other symbols (pigeons, feathers, fallen angel statues and Jimmy's memory of being tossed into the air by his dad in his healthier days), keep the theme aloft.

There are other concerns – when Jimmy is caught in his feathered costume with his Boy

Scout pal (Jordan Routledge, the parka'd poppet [*sic*] from "**EAST IS EAST**") while playing with his (apparently) celestial trumpet, his dad imagines the worst. The light homosexual subtext recalls the sublime "**MA VIE EN ROSE**", and while Udayan Prasad's movie is nowhere near as cohesive, it manages several fine moments amid its symbolic posturing.

One scene in particular has young Jimmy repeatedly jumping from the arm of a sofa, half watched by Mum in the background. Shot from his knees downwards the boy steps out into space twice and falls to the ground. On his third attempt his feet hang in the air for a second or two longer than is usual for a mortal boy. Mum's reaction mirrors that of the viewer – momentarily foxed, she shakes her head as if she had imagined it. It's a perfect moment in a movie whose aspirations slightly outclass its execution. * ”

No further information currently available, but sounds intriguing. Interesting to see David Bradley, of "**KES**" fame, resurfacing now as a grandfather. Director Udayan Prasad may well also have made "**EAST IS EAST**", but certainly one of his earlier works was in the second batch of Alan Bennett's "**Talking Heads**" monologues on BBC2 – "Playing Sandwiches", or the confessions of a melancholy paedophile park-keeper. But it's precisely because of prevailing neuroses on *that* subject that any hint at homosexual inclinations among young boys would need to be quickly discounted. Homosexuals, as we all know, spring magically into existence at the age of 16.

If the fantasy as a whole misfires, perhaps it was a mistake to drag in Christian concepts which have very little currency today – especially in the UK, that most doggedly **non**-churchgoing country. The USA has more of a fetish for angels, with its strong Catholic traditions and penchant for the weird and wonderful, but British films rarely do well there.

Child angels – or children growing wings, at the very least – crop up from time to time in the archive, and are generally heavy on the allegory, maudlin sentiment, or both. Examples would include Spain's "**TOBI**", starring 6-year old Lolo Garcia (a boy), "**LAKKI – GUTTEN SOM KUNNE FLY**" (Norway 92) with Anders Borchrevink as a bullied 14-year old sprouting wings, and an American sitcom, "**The Littlest Angel**".

See subject index under **ANGELS & DEVILS** for more, and under **FANTASY, FLIGHT** and **GRANDPARENTS**.