

Holiday Affair

US : 1949 : dir. Don Hartman : RKO : 87 min
 prod: Don Hartman : scr: Isobel Lennart : dir.ph.: Milton Krasner
[Gordon Gebert](#)
 Janet Leigh; Robert Mitchum; Wendell Corey; Henry (Harry) Morgan; Griff Barnett;
 Esther Dale; Henry O'Neill

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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"Well-done Christmas season story about widow Leigh, her small son, two contrasting men courting her. Remade in 1997. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review – identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review

"A young widow falls for an easy-going boat builder. Flimsy star-shaped romantic comedy with nice touches."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

"War widow with a small son is faced with having to choose between two suitors. Mildly amusing comedy-drama. **1/2 "

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Two highly different men court a pretty widow with a young son in this Christmas season story. A warm and friendly film for devotees of romantic melodrama. *** "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"Romantic drama, the first of three films today starring Robert Mitchum. A war widow meets a California drifter who proceeds to woo her away from the reliable man she intends to marry. **** "

"An absolutely charming yet little known Christmas movie, with widowed single mother Janet Leigh torn between Robert Mitchum and Wendell Corey. There's a sweet opening sequence and a nice sense of New York at Christmas time that's a touch reminiscent of "MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET". Mitchum reveals what a subtle actor he could be and Leigh proves yet again to be one of the most delectable of cinematic charmers¹. **** "

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Gordon Gebert:

"Gordon Alan Gebert III, a sly moppet [sic] with an almost prehensile pout, is most often seen nowadays riding pillion to a medieval Burt Lancaster in "THE FLAME AND THE ARROW". He is undeniably charming. Gebert returned in 1958 for a teenage role in "SUMMER LOVE".

¹ Delectable to whom?? Mitchum is a "subtle actor", but Leigh is a "delectable charmer"? That's sexism, is it not?

Many a decent little film from smaller studios like RKO are ignored or overlooked by commercial film guides, which studiously review for us even the most worthless dross from M-G-M or Warner Bros. This is one such, a modest, pleasing film with the lightest of Christmas frostings – neither over-sweet nor doused in seasonal sentimentality. And although the on-again-off-again romance between Leigh and Mitchum is the pivot of the story, little Gordon Gebert appears fourth on the cast list, and certainly makes his presence felt.

Widowed Connie (Leigh) is on the verge of consenting to marry dull but thoroughly decent city lawyer Carl (Wendell Corey) when the fascinating but down-on-his-luck Steve (Mitchum) crosses her path. Son Timmy, 6, is in no doubts where to cast *his* vote, particularly when Steve brings him the costly gift of a train set, which then becomes a central plot device. Worried the gift will make her lawyer boyfriend jealous, Connie meets with Steve in Central Park and tries to pay him for the toy, but he refuses. Later that day a policeman arrives at her house to say that Steve has been arrested on suspicion of a mugging, so Connie, Carl and Timmy troop down to the station to clear up the misunderstanding, and Carl immediately offers his services to defend his rival. Asked by the desk sergeant why he was trying to hide from police in the park, Mitchum replies that he was not hiding, but feeding an orphaned squirrel he'd semi-adopted, and all of Connie's answers to questions sound similarly loopy.

Steve is released (he'd actually given a necktie to a passing hobo, and moments later a little girl with rollerskates and balloons had come along bearing an oddball return gift from the hobo – no wonder the desk sergeant thought they were all drunk) and Timmy insists they invite Steve to Christmas dinner. Connie is unable to extricate herself from the invitation, but at the family dinner, after her father and Carl have made their festive speeches, Steve is pressured to say a word, and comes right out that Carl seems the most decent sort of fellow one could wish to meet, but that Connie should be marrying himself instead, not Carl, and he'd be a fool not to say so. He gathers his hat and coat and leaves.

After Christmas, knowing that Steve is penniless and unable to get to a prospective job in California, Timmy takes it on himself to return the treasured train set to the department store for a refund. It gets trampled in a crowded elevator, and Timmy presents himself at the door of the store manager to demand a refund all the same. When Carl drives Connie to return the money to Steve, with Timmy's fondest devotion, she hesitates at the door just long enough for Carl to understand where her true affections lie. With quiet chivalry he sums up the situation like a prosecutor at the end of a trial, and by new year Connie and Timmy have joined Steve on his train ride to California.

Recounting the plot in this way gives little inkling of the film's charm. No Capraesque whimsy in the style of "**MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET**" or "**THE BISHOP'S WIFE**", it's simply a light love triangle comedy, with Mitchum cast against type in a Cary Grant role. No-one in the film is mean or loud, it has no scenes of screwball comedy or slapstick, and it holds together very nicely. It's probably closer in spirit to "**THE COURTSHIP OF EDDIE'S FATHER**" and similar matchmaker-kid comedies. It has the smack of unselfish good manners about it, and that's a refreshing eccentricity these days.

Perky [Gordon Gebert](#) was 7, in the year he appeared as Bruce Lancaster's son in "**THE FLAME AND THE ARROW**", a kind of Robin Hood/William Tell retread. He never had the opportunity of a lead role, but was decorous and serviceable in "**SADDLE TRAMP**" (50), "**THE HOUSE ON TELEGRAPH HILL**" (51), "**SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR**" (51) and others.

See subject index under **CHRISTMAS / THANKSGIVING, COMEDY, MATCHMAKER KIDS / MATCHBREAKER KIDS, TOYS / DOLLS** and **TRAINS / RAILWAYS**.