

The Prince and the Pauper

UK : 1962 : dir. Don Chaffey : Disney : 89 min
 prod: : scr: Jack Whittingham : dir.ph.: Paul Beeson
Sean Scully; Jane Asher; John Moulder Brown
 Guy Williams; Laurence Naismith; Donald Houston; Niall McGinnis; Geoffrey Keen;
 Walter Hudd; Paul Rogers; Nigel Green; Dorothy Alison; Peter Butterworth;
 Reginald Beckwith; Sheila Allen; Derek Godfrey; Geoffrey Bayldon; Charles Heslop;
 Diarmid Cammell; Meurig Wyn-Jones; Andrew Faulds; Katya Douglas; Martin Boddey;
 Bruce Seton; Michael Ripper; Richard O'Sullivan

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ♀ Z ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Give 'em half a crown apiece? – The coronation presents difficulties when two identical scamps turn up for the do. One of them has better dress sense though, which counts for a lot in Kings. Source: original front-of-house still

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

“Well-produced, badly-acted (too many accents, including Australian) 1962 version was directed by Don Chaffey. Sean Scully, Guy Williams, Jane Asher 7 ”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

“A zestful, well-staged and unjustly neglected Walt Disney version of the Mark Twain classic, also filmed in 1937 (with Errol Flynn and the Mauch twins) and again in 1977 (with Oliver Reed and Mark Lester). Photographed in



Jane Asher as Lady Jane Grey, and some boy or other scarcely worth mentioning. She has four or five lines. He's on screen in virtually every shot. She is "fetching", he is not. Still, that's film critic sexism for you.

Source: original front of house still

excellent colour by Paul Beeson, this is certainly the equal of the Flynn film and some way ahead of the Reed version.

Director Don Chaffey has always done well at the Disney studio with adventure films aimed at younger audiences and he grips the attention throughout here, even with the old familiar story of the beggar boy who swaps places with his double, who happens to be Edward Tudor, the future king of England. Vigorous performances from the predominantly British cast, notably Donald Houston as the pauper's scurrilous father, Jane Asher makes a fetching Lady Jane Grey¹ and Guy Williams (then a big star for Disney on TV in the "Zorro" series) acquits himself pretty well as the boys' dashing and unlikely protector. *** "

¹ Perverse, surely, to compliment Jane Asher, who has a very minor role, yet omit even to mention its film's star, Sean Scully, who is on screen throughout? Which of the two is more "fetching" is a question of taste, after all, and has no bearing on their performances.

Halliwel's Filmgoer's Companion general note:

"Mark Twain's mediaeval story, about a prince and a commoner who change places, was filmed in 1909, in 1915 with Marguerite Clark; in 1923 with Tibi Lubin; in 1937 with the Mauch twins (and Errol Flynn); and in 1962 with Sean Scully."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Films and Filming incidental note:

"...Walt Disney continues to re-work the old Errol Flynn vehicles, with his production of Mark Twain's **"THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER"** with Guy Williams of **"Zorro"** fame. The eight-week schedule involves director Don Chaffey's use of the story-board technique..."

Still caption:

"Don Chaffey, one of Britain's most versatile directors, has a word with Sean Scully, Australian newcomer playing the dual lead in **"THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER"**, watched by Guy Williams."

Radio Times review:

"One of the many screen versions of Mark Twain's classic tale about the urchin boy who swops places with Edward, Prince of Wales². This workman-like attempt stars Sean Scully in a dual role as the two lookalikes. A good yarn adequately told. ** "

"This is an entertaining adaptation of Mark Twain's classic story about the humble street urchin who trades places with a lookalike prince. The tale had already been told to more lavish effect with Errol Flynn and Claude Rains in 1937, but Donald Houston and co do well enough here. *** "

"Historical adventure. Two boys, who look identical, swap places. *** "

What's On TV note:

"A beggar boy trades places with a young prince when both yearn for a different life."

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Sean Scully:

"During much of his childhood, this highly intelligent young Australian lived with his mother in London, where he trained as an actor and was seen on the stage, notably in *"Treasure Island"*, playing a spunky Jim Hawkins to the Long John Silver of Bernard Miles. ("A bright-eyed squirrel of a boy who spits delightfully," said the New Statesman.) Then he

was spotted and signed up by the Disney organisation.

In **"ALMOST ANGELS"**, a kind of **"ALL ABOUT EVE"** rethought in terms of the Vienna Boys' Choir, Sean played the Bette Davis part of the supplanted prima donna, and Vincent Winter an innocent version of the Anne Baxter. It's a hilarious exercise, saved from total fatuity by Winter's all-conquering niceness and by Scully's angry grief when his voice breaks at the school concert...

Scully was in fact an unusually clever fellow. A year or two before **"ALMOST ANGELS"**, he had stood up on the spur of the moment and addressed bystanders at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, London. "An hour later," reported the Evening Standard, "twelve-year old Sean from Sydney, Australia, was still talking. The audience had swelled to more than 100, and jostled around Sean to hear his views on religion, politics, racial prejudice – the lot. Then he calmly thanked them for their attention, and went home two hours late for tea." This was clearly someone who would have few problems with a mere symphony orchestra.

In his stint for Disney, Scully starred in a British remake of **"THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER"**, playing both parts without the aid of a twin, and doing so with enormous spirit. He had the lordliness, malice and humour – reminiscent of the young Katharine Hepburn – to make the dual role convincing and interesting, and the film should be revived more often. His last performance for Disney, and his last as a boy, was a rather thankless one in **"DR SYN"** as sidekick to the clerical smuggler.

Sean Scully – no connection, incidentally, with an artist of the same name – returned to his native Australia, where he became a valuable member of the acting community. His Antipodean films have included **"A CITY'S CHILD"** (71), **"SUNDAY TOO FAR AWAY"** (74), **"THE ROLLICKING ADVENTURES OF ELIZA FRASER"** (76), **"CACTUS"** (86), and many others."

² *Edward was never invested Prince of Wales, Henry dies before the title can be conferred.*

I'm puzzled why this perfectly acceptable Disney film – the first **"PRINCE AND THE PAUPER"** to be shot on location in England – should be ignored by almost every commercial film guide. It was not a TV movie (which are often included now anyway) and nor was it released in the US under a different title. A modest but colourful production positively bristling with familiar British talent, the producers nonetheless took a lad with a mild Australian twang, Sean Scully, for their lead. Six years previously, Australian Colin Petersen had starred in the equally all-British **"SMILEY"**. Was it such a lean time then for British boy actors of talent? Or was this more a reflection on the relative health of the Australian film and TV industry, which was filling British TV screens of the day with series like **"The Adventures of Skippy"**, **"The Magic Boomerang"**, **"The Adventures of Long John Silver"** and **"The Terrific Adventures of the Terrible Ten"**? At all events, Scully is a delight in the dual role, and if he was indeed 15 he looks and sounds a year or two younger.

This sixth known film version of Twain's favourite story is actually superior in some ways to the better-received 1937 version, which traded heavily on the star drawing power of Errol Flynn. It is certainly a long way better than the misbegotten Panamanian (!) remake **"CROSSED SWORDS"**, which teamed a geriatric Mark Lester with a less than dashing Oliver Reed. The previous year Sean Scully had been seen in **"HUNTED IN HOLLAND"**, and in 1958 he'd made a film back in Australia with the unpromising title of **"SOUTH SEAS ADVENTURE"**. The usual criticism holds true as for most boys essaying this story in that he's not able to make sufficient differentiation in his performance as two boys from diametrically opposite social backgrounds. Whether playing the heir to the throne clad as a mudlark, or the mudlark cowed by the presence of the King, the distinction is only measured by the genuine prince's aura of self-importance. Where Scully really scores over the Mauch brothers is in this confident self-possession, making both boys the driving force of the story, rather than helpless urchins adrift in the tide of adult affairs. I suspect that reading is closer to the spirit of Twain's writing (though I haven't read the book) than the 1937 Hollywood take on it. Even the mudlark, Tom Canty, settles down in no time and begins applying a leveller's sense of natural justice to the lists of those condemned to execution.

Guy Williams too is very engaging as the long-suffering Miles Hendon, a young adventurer who takes the headstrong urchin under his wing and for his trouble earns the right to seat himself in the King's presence. He cuts a fine swash, as one would expect of television's **"Zorro"**, although it's far from apparent what his motivation is meant to be. Finding this stropky ragamuffin haranguing a crowd on the steps of a Guild Hall banquet, he rescues the boy from a thrashing. Later he runs into the lad's angry father and orders him at swordpoint to make himself scarce, then calmly takes the boy (whom he assumes to be deranged) back to his room at the inn, where the boy promptly commandeers his bed. Hendon continues to indulge this lad's whim of being "the true prince", at much indignity to himself – waiting on him at table, filling the washbasin for him – and next day, though nearly penniless, measuring him up for a new suit of clothes. When the Canty's brutish father, on the run from killing a priest, abducts his "son" from the inn, Hendon anxiously scours the countryside for him, and wades into a den of cutthroats to rescue him, still ostensibly not crediting his claims for a moment. If he's taken a shine to this boy, all one can say is it must have been a powerful one, for all the pains it costs him. Of course, Hendon is the classic maverick adventurer, righting wrongs where he finds them and befriending the weak, but a more scurrilous deconstruction is there for the asking. Hendon's long-suffering courtship of the headstrong Edward is hilariously redolent of Bothwell's courtship of Mary, Queen of Scots. Such illogicalities of plotting are by no means uncommon in ripping yarns for boys, and only add another level of amusement.

The supporting cast is well leavened with British theatricals to add the necessary gravitas, notably Laurence Naismith, Nigel Green (as the Ruffler) and Niall McGinnis. Only the score in places making an annoying reminder this is a Disney production, but since I have criticised that studio's output so roundly in other reviews, it's agreeable to find the occasional film of theirs deserving of praise. This is certainly one of them. **Recommended.**

Jane Asher was 16, though again she scarcely looks it. She had been in British films from the age of 5 – notably “**MANDY**” (52) or “**THE GREENGAGE SUMMER**” (60) – and in 1959 also recorded an excellent reading of “*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*” and “*Alice Through the Looking Glass*” (available on Argo audiocassette). There are other boys in the film, chiefly Prince Edward’s whipping boy at the palace, who has a dialogue scene with him but is unidentified in the credits. John Moulder Brown, 9, is present somewhere among the street urchins Edward teams up with, though I’ve not identified him, while the youth who tags along with Tom Canty’s father to the den of thieves is none other than Richard O’Sullivan, here 19. He was seen earlier in films like “**IT’S GREAT TO BE YOUNG**”, “**THE WEBSTER BOY**”, “**SPARE THE ROD**” and “**CARRY ON TEACHER**” (all school films), as well as a guest appearance in TV’s “**The Adventures of Robin Hood**”.

See also the 1909 Edison original, the Austrian silent “**PRINZ UND BETTELKNABE**” (20), remakes in 1915, 1932 (India) and 1937, TV versions in 1957, 1975 and 1996, “**CROSSED SWORDS**” (77), “**P.J. AND THE PRESIDENT’S SON**” (76), and “**DOUBLE SWITCH**” (87), all based to a greater or lesser extent on the Twain story. See subject index under **ARISTOCRACY / ROYALTY, DISNEY, EYEWITNESSES TO MURDER, HISTORY, ORPHANS / ADOPTION, RECOMMENDED TITLES, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS, SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS, STREET KIDS, MARK TWAIN ADAPTATIONS** and **TWINS / LOOKALIKES / SWITCHED IDENTITIES**.