

Talk About a Stranger

US : 1952 : dir. David Bradley : M-G-M : 65 min
 prod: Richard Goldstone : scr: Margaret Fitts : dir.ph.:
Billy Gray
 George Murphy; Nancy Davis; Lewis Stone; Kurt Kasznar

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Kbytes	Ω	□	≠	Z	⊗	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Billy Gray gives a desk sergeant the third degree

Source: original front of house still

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 1996 review:

"Boy tries to find out more about a mysterious neighbour in OK programmer. ** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above, but as usual mistranslating "OK" as "good". The equivalent terms in Dutch would be "redelijk", "matig" or "niets bijzonders"

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In a small town, gossip is unjustly aroused over a mysterious stranger who is suspected of various crimes. Unusual though rather naïve second feature, directed for more than its worth. * "

The M.G.M Story review:

"The acting phase of George Murphy's extraordinary career ended in 1952 after 15

M.G.M years. A Broadway hooper in the Twenties, he became a politician in the sixties (after much experience of industry politics as Screen Actors Guild president, Academy vice-president and Metro's ambassador at large) and was elected as senator from California - one up on Governor Ronald Reagan¹. The latter's wife, Nancy Davis, played Murphy's wife in **"TALK ABOUT A STRANGER"** with Billy Gray as their son. This "B"-minor drama about a family's mysterious neighbour was written by Margaret Fitts from Charlotte Armstrong's original, produced by Richard Goldstone, directed by David Bradley, and featured Kurt Kasznar and Lewis Stone."

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Gray:

"...From his movie debut at seven, Billy proved to have one of the strongest personalities of all Hollywood's children, and to be equally adept at comedy or drama. With a formidable scowl, he had an impatient honesty that marked him out from the normal run of ingratiating studio kids. He was bolshy and argumentative, a natural for the Penrod-based character he played in the Doris Day musicals **"ON MOONLIGHT BAY"** and **"BY THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON"** (His name, as Doris's kid brother, was "Wesley" - surely in homage to the first **"PENROD"**, Wesley Barry). Choked by dust or food in these well-loved films, he would come up with a graveyard cough of which he was justly proud.

His most often-seen performance, nowadays, is in **"THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL"**, one of the most moral and seminal of flying-saucer movies. His hero-worship fighting with deep suspicion of Michael Rennie (Klaatu, alias Mr Carpenter) gives the formula story one of its most human elements, and few could have delineated the basic expressions of scepticism, alarm and wonder as Billy did - all this while incarnating the normal American kid worried about his homework..."

¹ Ah, but have I got news for you!

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "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", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times note:

"..Mystery about a boy obsessed with a neighbour."²

Source: *A Pictorial History of the Talkies*



² Well at least it's not the other way around..

No further information currently available. A little side-dish of Cold War paranoia for the hometown cinema patrons. Suspicion of strangers, or of men living alone, took a rather different shape in the US of the Fifties, did it not. Today's "red under the bed" is of course the "paed under the bed", but the hysteria, self-righteousness and finger-pointing are in all other respects identical. Mistrust of neighbours, the drawing up of lists and registers, the public naming of suspects, these all sound only too familiar. Sadly, America has had more success in exporting the 1990s variant of witch-burning frenzy than it ever did with the Cold War "commies in our midst" theme.

For an interesting reversal of this tale, try "**The Twilight Zone**" episode "**Monsters!**", in which a suspicious boy obsessed with horror comics spies on a solitary new neighbour he's convinced is a vampire. The real "monsters" of the title transpire to be the community at large, of "decent, normal" families, including the boy's own. Food for thought indeed.

Billy Gray, here 14 (no relation to Gary, who played with Nancy Kelly in "**THE NEXT VOICE YOU HEAR**"), moved to television in the mid-fifties for the sitcom "**Father Knows Best**", but his other films included "**THE STRANGE AFFAIR OF UNCLE HARRY**" (45), "**FATHER IS A BACHELOR**" (50), "**THE OUTLAW STALLION**" (53) and "**THE SEVEN LITTLE FOYS**" (55).

No relevant subject index categories suggest themselves.