

Tiger Bay

UK : 1959 : dir. J. Lee-Thompson : Rank / Wintle-Parkyn : 105 min
 prod: John Hawkesworth : scr: John Hawkesworth & Shelley Smith : dir.ph.: Eric Cross
[Hayley Mills](#) [d]; [Brian Hammond](#)
 John Mills; Horst Buchholz; Megs Jenkins; Anthony Dawson; Yvonne Mitchell;
 George Selway; Shari; George Pastell; Paul Stassino; Marne Maitland; Meredith Edwards;
 Marianne Stone; Rachel Thomas

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ∅ M ☼	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3420a	4.5	15	1	2,243	7 7 7 7 7	No	Dec 2001



The story was patently written for a boy, and Hayley Mills had to project herself as a "tomboy" to make narrative ends meet, but she wooed critics and public in the process, and some would argue it was her best juvenile performance by a long sea mile.

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Lonely Cardiff child witnesses a murder and is abducted by the Polish sailor-killer. A poignant, sensitive, and very different police

chase story. Hayley steals the film in first major acting role. *** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A Polish seaman in Cardiff kills his faithless girlfriend and kidnaps a child who proves more than a match for him. Generally very proficient police chase melodrama with strong characterisations: a considerable box office success of its time. ** "

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"Lonely Cardiff child (Hayley Mills) witnesses a murder and is abducted by the killer (Horst Buchholz). Suspenseful chase drama with outstanding performances, especially from 12-year old Hayley Mills in her first screen role. It made her a star. 7/10 "

"Hayley is not just another child in a picture. She is an actress with terrific talent... It's a good story, which works up to an exciting climax."
- Pearson Phillips, **Daily Mail**

"John Mills is unpunchingly good... Buchholz excellent"
- Isabel Quigley, **Spectator**

"Hayley Mills... steals the film from right under the nose of her talented father... [This] is a brisk, well-directed film with some slick performances."
- Dick Richards. **Daily Mirror**

"The film... is Hayley's, and whether she is being funny, sly or touching - the child has it almost all her own way."
- Charles MacLaren, **Time and Tide**

"Basically it is another murderer-on-the-run story. But the wise and lively eye of director J. Lee Thompson makes it a thriller out of the ordinary."
- Ivon Adams, **Star**

"Hayley Mills... responds without self-consciousness to direction... succeeds not by mere cuteness but by a feeling for timing which enables her to stand up to established players (among them John Mills himself, agreeably wry as the police superintendent). There is a passage in which she describes her accidental view of the murder: deliberately theatrical and self-caricaturing, the re-enactment flowers into ironic comedy. One hopes that her talent, so clear within the limits here imposed, will prove to have range."
- Dilys Powell

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Superb suspense yarn with a great plot twist. Hayley Mills is perfect in the role of a little girl who witnesses a murder and ends up protecting the young killer (effectively portrayed by Buchholz) from the authorities. **** "

The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television review:

"J. Lee Thompson's taut 1959 thriller which launched twelve-year old Hayley Mills upon us. As a pinched and plain dockland waif she spies on Horst Buchholz committing murder and then protects him. John Mills as the law, sees justice done. * "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"The brilliant thriller, both tense and touching, in which Hayley Mills burst on the film world with her superb portrayal of a hoydenish nine-year old Welsh girl¹ who becomes involved with a murderer. Hayley and her co-star, Horst Buchholz, both give tremendously human performances. John Mills is a steady foil as the determined police inspector. Atmosphere is excellent, and the suspense generated is tremendous. You'll be held to every second. **** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"A disarming, snub-nosed youngster makes her debut in **"TIGER BAY"**, and registers a sock impact. She is Hayley Mills, 12-year old daughter of actor John Mills, star of the film. Young Mills gives a lift to a pic which, anyway, stacks up as a lively piece of drama. The story concerns a Polish seaman who, returning from a voyage, finds that his mistress has moved in with another man. In a burst of anger he kills her. The slaying is witnessed by the child, who also rescues the gun. She is a lonely youngster whose attachment for the killer seriously complicates police investigations. Mills is authoritative as the detective whilst Horst Buchholz brings charm to a rôle which could easily have been played by a British actor. Lee Thompson and cameraman Eric Cross capture the dockland area of Cardiff arrestingly. The screenplay by John Hawkesworth and Shelly Smith is taut and literate."

¹ *Aged eleven...*

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Young Hayley Mills began her film career - in a part originally written for a boy - as an imaginative girl who witnesses a murder and then befriends the killer. Since the child is a known liar, nobody believes her until events escalate to the point of desperation. Horst Buchholz is excellent as the remorseful murderer. A thoughtful drama for all ages. Unrated; suitable for family viewing. *** "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"A Polish sailor on leave, Korchinsky (Horst Buchholz), heads into Tiger Bay to visit his girlfriend Anya (Yvonne Mitchell). He finds that she is now living with another man and guns her down in a fit of anger. Their noisy argument attracts the attention of 12-year old Gillie (Hayley Mills), a lonely tomboy who witnesses the murder through a mail slot. She gets hold of the murder weapon, convinced that having a gun will make her popular with her peers when they play cowboys and indians². In time the precocious youngster³ is confronted by a police detective (her real-life father, John Mills), but she frustrates him by reciting a convincing string of lies that get her deeper into the situation than she ever imagined.

"**TIGER BAY**" operates on several levels, creating a thriller of varying intensity with the warm relationship that develops between Gillie and Korchinsky at its centre. Korchinsky's interest in the girl grows from a desperate need to keep his crime secret into genuine affection. Likewise, Gillie sees this as an adventure which will make her popular with playmates⁴, until she develops strong feelings for the sailor. This was Hayley Mills' film debut, and she gives quite a performance for an actress of any age. *** "

Great Movies on TV review:

"The Story: At a slum dock area in Cardiff, Wales, called Tiger Bay, a young Polish seaman (Horst Buchholz) kills his unfaithful sweetheart in a fit of rage. Gillie, a neighbourhood child (Hayley Mills), has witnessed the killing. But because she has no playthings or toy guns like

her friends, she is more interested in finding where the seaman hides the gun, rather than the crime itself. In the end, Gillie helps protect the killer against the efforts of Police Superintendent Graham (John Mills).

Behind the scenes with "**TIGER BAY**": Done somewhat in the style of "**THE THIRD MAN**", "**TIGER BAY**" profits greatly from the fine use of the Cardiff waterfront. But most of all, there was Hayley - Hayley Catherine Rose Vivien Mills; and it was she who, because of the picture, became the idol of teenagers all over the world⁵. "I stopped playing with dolls when I was twelve," Hayley was to say, "so I had to find something else to do. " That "something else" was her very first picture, "**TIGER BAY**". Hayley gave what was described as "a shockproof performance". Virtually every review bubbled with praise.

German-born Horst Buchholz - "they keep calling me 'that fellow Buckles', or 'Horse something or other'" - did not even know English when he began the picture. "England was a mystery to me, or rather the language," Horst recalled, "So I had to learn my lines like a monkey - phonetically. I'd get someone to read the lines to me, then I'd repeat them just as they had been said. That's how I learned to speak with a British accent. Then, when I went to Hollywood, I had to learn all over again! " "

[no listing in "50 Years of the Movies", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Time Out Film Guide"]

Radio Times reviews:

"The 12-year old Hayley Mills's debut, as a Cardiff dockland waif who spies on Polish seaman Horst Buchholz killing his unfaithful girlfriend. He kidnaps her, but she tries to protect him from John Mills's long arm of the law in J. Lee Thompson's taut, carefully-scripted, well-acted thriller. Attractive black and white photography by Eric Cross. A big hit for the Mills father and daughter team, and for the Rank organisation. The fair-haired, blue-eyed Hayley was so appealing she was snapped up by Disney, and won a special Oscar for "**POLLYANNA**". *** "

² *Sheer invention on the reviewer's part*

³ *Idiot! Must they attach that insult to every child?*

⁴ *Sheer invention again*

⁵ *Oh? Did she?*

“Police hunt for a young girl from Cardiff after she witnesses an argument between a gun-wielding man and his girlfriend, who is then murdered.”

“Hayley Mills gives an assured performance in her film debut, playing a young girl who befriends a murderer and hinders detective John Mills’s investigation at every turn. Director J. Lee Thompson surrounds 12-year old Hayley with credible characters and faithfully captures the sights and sounds of Cardiff’s docklands area. *** ”

“Thriller. A lonely girl witnesses a sailor murder his girlfriend, after which a strange relationship grows between her and the killer. *** ”

TV Times note:

“Gillie, a hoydenish nine-year old Welsh girl, peers through the letterbox of good-time girl Anya’s flat, where Anya and Korchinsky are having an argument. A gun is produced, there is a fight, and Anya falls down dead... Screenplay by John Hawkesworth and Shelley Smith.”

“Thriller starring Hayley Mills as a girl who witnesses a murder. With Horst Buchholz, John Mills. ***** ”

What’s On TV note:

“Kidnap thriller starring Horst Buchholz and Hayley Mills.”

Daily Mirror review:

“Young tomboy Hayley Mills takes to the Welsh hills with fugitive killer Horst Buchholz. Dour cop John Mills fears the worst. Tense little thriller dominated by Hayley’s dazzling freshness. With Yvonne Mitchell. *** ”

Excerpt from assessment of Mills’s career in **Hollywood Lolitas**, by Marianne Sinclair:

“... Was Hayley Mills a movie nymphet [*sic*], or a true Hollywood Lolita for that matter? Some of the vital ingredients were there and some were not. To begin with, she was English and the daughter of a quintessentially British actor, Sir John Mills.

Adapted from a Noel Calef novel, “*Rudolphe et le Revolver*”. Forty years on, and “**TIGER BAY**” does not disappoint at all. It has lost nothing of the freshness and emotional sincerity which registered on audiences and critics of the 1950s, and Hayley Mills is totally beguiling as the pert tomboy whose loyalty to desperado Buchholz becomes ironclad by the film’s close. In this instance it does not matter at all that the role was so clearly intended for a boy (Gillie is even lead soloist in the all-boy choir) because she makes her character completely plausible, and measures out her emotions with a subtlety far excelling her age and experience. All credit too to father John Mills for his professionalism – Hayley does not so much “steal” the film from him, he gives it to her. Horst Buchholz is genuinely sympathetic as the sailor Korchinsky, doomed by a crime of passion some way short of murder. There is a telling moment where he and Gillie are escaping on a ferry, and a gate slips open behind the girl while she’s absorbed in their conversation. She sidles backwards toward the gap, chattering away, and the camera sees the moment of decision play quickly across the Polish sailor’s face. He reaches forward, and pulls her away from the drop. It’s an economy of suspense worthy of Hitchcock.

Many comparable British films of the period – **"YELLOW BALLOON"**, **"THE FALLEN IDOL"** – look rather stilted now, but it is surprising, given that the plot development follows such predictable lines, how easily one is pulled into the current. Gillie Adams is pestering neighbours with a cap-bomb on the stairwell of their tenement block when she overhears a quarrel in a top floor room between the young Polish sailor and his mistress. Gillie watches through the letterbox. The woman impugns the man's masculinity, he strikes her, she pulls a gun on him, he wrestles it off her, but she continues to mock him, and he fires. Startled, Gillie drops her bomb, alerting the man to her presence. He hides the pistol, but doesn't see her crouched in the dark nearby. She retrieves the weapon, and rushes off to sing in the choir at a Caribbean wedding, showing her trophy to one of the boys in the choir. Korchinsky has followed her to the church, but she manages to elude him.

A succesful hybrid between eyewitness films like **"EYEWITNESS"** (Mark Lester), **"THE WINDOW"** (Bobby Driscoll) or **"WITNESS"** (Lukas Haas) and the children-befriending-convicts-on-the-run films such as **"HUNTED"** (Jon Whiteley) and **"MARTIN'S DAY"** (Justin Henry). It comes as no surprise at all then, that the part was originally intended for a boy.

See subject index under **DESPERADOES / ESCAPED CONVICTS, EYEWITNESSES TO MURDER / BOY-WHO-CRIED-WOLF**, [RASCALS & SCALAWAGS](#), **RECOMMENDED TITLES**, **RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS**, [SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS](#), [WOMEN AS BOYS / GIRLS AS BOYS](#) and under [ALL IN THE FAMILY](#) for other father/daughter, father/son, uncle/nephew double acts, etc. See **HUNTING / SHOOTING / GUNS** for other dramas involving children and firearms.

Hayley later sheltered another fugitive from justice in **"WHISTLE DOWN THE WIND"**. She received a special Oscar in 1960, after **"POLLYANNA"**.