

Vice Versa

US : 1988 : dir. Brian Gilbert : Columbia : 98 min
 prod: Dick Clement & Ian LeFrenais : scr: Dick Clement & Ian LeFrenais
 : dir.ph.: King Baggott

Fred Savage; Ajay Naidu
 Judge Reinhold; Corinne Bohrer; Swoosie Kurtz; David Proval; Jane Kaczmarek;
 William Prince; Gloria Gifford; Beverly Archer; Harry Murphy; Kevin O'Rourke; Richard Kind

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	☺	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: Distributors' promotional flier



Letting the kids get their hands on your wallet – one of the primary angsts of parenthood, apparently. But even in this still one can see Reinhold making some effort to capture the body language and postures that are native to boys, not men.

Source: Film Review 1989-90

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001 review:

"An ill-gotten mystical Thai skull enables a department store workaholic and his 11-year old son to become each other. Not up to "BIG", but better than it ought to be; Reinhold and Savage appear to be having a whale of a time in their roles. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A father and his 11-year old son find their minds transplanted into the other's body by a magic skull. One of the last and certainly the least of the mid-1980s cycle of role-swapping movies."

City Limits review:

"It's a Freudian nightmare complains divorced workaholic Marshall (Reinhold) when he swaps bodies with his eleven-year old son. But instead of exploring this angle, the film concentrates on far less interesting subplots involving a pair of bungling smugglers and boardroom back-biting at the office."

Film Review 1989-90 review:

"A reasonably amusing comedy built on a theme that in one way or another has served the cinema well over the years. This time

around it's a story about a father and son whose minds, spirits and personalities become magically switched so that the son's youthful mind and attitude is implanted in dad's body and... well... *vice versa*, with the fun coming from their resulting unlikely behaviour. A pity about the needless profanity [*sic*] in the script, though."

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"An uptight department store executive (Reinhold) and his 11-year old son (Savage) temporarily switch bodies in this strained comedy, imitative of other films from this same sub-genre ("LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON", "18 AGAIN"). Each then assumes the other's daily roles and routines; a tall, gangly Reinhold attends school, while the diminutive son conducts business at the office. These awkward circumstances lead to a few funny moments, but the film is ultimately contrived and silly. Also with Corinne Bohrer, Swoosie Kurtz, Jane Kaczmarek, David Proval and William Prince. **1/2 "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Divorced workaholic department store executive Reinhold and his 11-year old son (Savage) both wish they could lead each other's lives; a magical skull, mysteriously come into Dad's possession during a trip to Thailand, makes the wish come true. After a tedious

prologue, Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais' role-reversal script settles for bland farce, with son (in Dad's body) forced to negotiate the executive boardroom, while Dad (in son's body) takes on school bullies. Moments of rather tasteless complexity arise



Fred Savage's forte is a subtle look of startled discomfiture, combined with a becoming air of modesty. Compare the above with Macaulay Culkin's famous two-handed mugging shot.

Source: Distributor's promotional flier

with Dad's girlfriend (Bohrer), but mostly the hoary gags give rise to less tantalising ideas¹. Reinhold does his darnedest, but both script and direction are instilled with a numbing predictability."

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"Another of the late Eighties' 'role reversal' comedies in a period that could have been called the invasion of the body switchers. Judge Reinhold holds centre stage in this one (a loose remake of the 1947 British film of the same title). In this version the fun is a little less naïve and sex rears its head along with other foreseeable complications. Reinhold clowns

around like mad, but it's young Fred Savage from **"The Wonder Years"**, stuck in school as a 35-year old, who gets the best stuff to do. Corinne Bohrer is a sweet love interest, and the film is pleasant to have around if pretty forgettable – sometimes amusing, occasionally embarrassing. *** "

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Young Fred Savage nearly steals the show from Judge Reinhold in this surprisingly entertaining comedy about a father who changes bodies with his son. We've seen it all many times before in lesser films such as **"FREAKY FRIDAY"** and **"LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON"**. However, the writing of Dick Clement and Ian De Frenais and the chemistry of the players make it seem almost fresh. Rated "PG" for profanity [sic]. ***1/2 "

Distributors' promotional flier synopsis

"Written by Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais (the team also responsible for **"Whatever Happened to the Likely Lads?"**, **"Porridge"** and **"Auf Wiedersehen, Pet"**) and directed by Brian Gilbert, **"VICE VERSA"** is the ultimate role-reversal comedy.

Judge Reinhold stars as the quintessential "yuppie" – a fastidious. Divorced workaholic who has little time for his boisterous 11-year old son Charlie (Fred Savage). However, both father and son are forced to view things differently after inadvertently becoming involved with a mystical religious artefact which has the power to grant their wish of changing places... literally!

¹ "Tantalising but tasteless ideas" translates into English as "sexual situations". And to think Time Out started off as an underground magazine!



Judge Who??

What ensues is a delightful account of each trying to lead a normal life in an alien environment – and their desperate search to reverse the process. Can the perfect office executive handle the reality of pre-pubescent school life with bullies, heavy-metal music and hockey practice? And can the innocent young Charlie *[sic]* cope with board meetings, backstabbing office politics and dating his father's girlfriend?"

Biographical note on Fred Savage:

"Fred Savage, now eleven years old, lives in Chicago with his parents and a younger brother and sister. He started doing commercials at the age of six, with no formal acting training. As Fred explains: "I got started in the 'biz' when my mom took me down to an audition at the local community centre, because she thought it would be fun. The commercial was for Oscar Meyer. Well, I didn't get it, but six months later the same director called me for a Pizza Hut commercial. I didn't get that either. But six months later the director called again for a Pac-Man vitamin commercial and I got it! So people just started calling me and here I am!"

Fred has now appeared in 27 on-camera TV commercials and 36 voice-over radio spots, including a host of major national advertisers.

At the age of 8, he landed his first starring role in a feature film, **"THE BOY WHO COULD FLY"**. That film was followed by an appearance in **"THE PRINCESS BRIDE"**, where he played the grandson who critically listens to his grandfather read a fairy tale, commenting frequently on what he thinks of the story. In **"VICE VERSA"**, he had his biggest challenge to date: playing the dual role of a child and an adult trapped in a child's body.

To figure out how to perform the adult role, Fred took a lot of cues from Judge Reinhold. "A lot of times, to get the right emphasis on lines and stuff, I'd ask Judge if he could please say the line," Fred explains, "and then I'd copy his ups and downs, tone of voice and stuff like that." Fred also found he had to be a teacher, by instructing Reinhold on performing like an eleven-year old boy.

Fred Savage's television credits include **"CONVICTED: A MOTHER'S STORY"**, **"The Twilight Zone"**, **"Morningstar / Eveningstar"** and **"Video Madness"**.

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Films of the Eighties", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]



*It's true – there **IS** someone called "Swoosie" alive on the planet, but there is no immediate cause for panic.
Source: Distributors' promotional flier*

Sunday Times review:

"For no particularly credible reason, workaholic department store executive Judge Reinhold and his lonely 11-year old son Fred Savage swap bodies after wishing they could lead each other's lives. Inevitably, this leads to fun and games at school and at work. Like **"18 AGAIN!"** And **"LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON"**, this was a bit swamped by the Tom Hanks hit **"BIG"**. There are only so many gags to be made about role reversals but, thanks to an amusing script by **"Likely Lads"** Dick Clement and Jon La Frenais and winning performances by the two talented leads, this is by some distance the best of the **"BIG"** also-rans. *** "

Radio Times reviews:

"Although it lacks the charm of the 1947 British film of the same name (directed by Peter Ustinov), this was a better-than-average entry in the cycle of body-swap movies that gripped Hollywood in the late eighties. Edited [sic] for language. *** "

"Comedy-fantasy starring Judge Reinhold and Fred Savage. Store executive Marshall Seymour and his 11-year old son, Charlie, are granted their wish to lead each other's lives by swapping bodies. *** "

"Body-swapping comedy starring Judge Reinhold and Fred (**"Wonder Years"**) Savage as a father and son who become each other."

TV Quick review:

"Another from the fad Hollywood had for intergenerational body switches. Here it's Judge Reinhold and Fred Savage as a father and son who see each other from the other body's point of view."

TV Times review:

"Judge Reinhold holds centre stage in this role reversal comedy (a loose remake of the 1947 British film of the same title). The complications are foreseeable and it's young Fred Savage from **"The Wonder Years"**, stuck in school as a 35-year old, who gets the best stuff to do. *** "

What's On TV review:

"Inter-generational comedy. Judge Reinhold and Fred Savage are the father-and-son duo who see each other from the other body's point of view."

"Comedy. A father and son swap bodies, and learn a little about each other as a result."



Let's try and get through this without the cliché “workaholic”, shall we? Oh! damn..!

Okay, so dad comes back from a vacation in Thailand and gets stuck in his son's body, I'm right so far? Forgive the jibe, but all that mid-80's unease about the (hetero)sexual possibilities implicit in the situation is coyly revealing. The sex abuse industry was just beginning to impact on the general public awareness about that time. Indeed the story – like all body-swap fantasies – has just as many subtle implications of homosexual incest, if we really want something to fret about, but audiences (and critics) seem chiefly to have squirmed about son heavy petting with dad's girlfriend. Oedipus revisited, or something.

“**BIG**” (released the same year) skirted that situation very adroitly by having Tom Hanks (a boy who wakes up with an adult body) invite a woman back to his flat for the night – and spend the evening teaching her how to use his trampoline. But why the anxiety? After all, the principal distinction – both for adults and children – that separates these two mythic states is the *ability to have sex*. Such an exciting new possibility is the first inevitable concomitant of the premise. The unease arises from audiences watching a whimsical comedy sail so close to the social tabu of all tabus. Which is **not** children having sex with adults, but on a far deeper level, children having sex at all, thus negating the primary kudos of adult status.



Source: *Sunday Times*

That observation aside – and one can certainly see how it could be tactlessly handled – it's surprising to see such a mainstream American title emerge from the pens of a scriptwriting

team who cut their teeth on such quintessentially British sitcoms as **“Porridge”** and the sequel to **“The Likely Lads”**. Wouldn’t an American comedy writer find it hard to readjust to the British mode of speech and behaviour?

Fred Savage was kept too busy with TV’s cod sixties nostalgia sitcom **“The Wonder Years”** to sign up for more than the occasional movie. He was the original choice to play **“RICHIE RICH”**, but was passed over when Macaulay Culkin expressed an interest in the role. He starred in the forgettable comedy fantasy **“LITTLE MONSTERS”** in 1989 (which was highly derivative of **“BEETLEJUICE”**) and **“THE WIZARD”**, a lacklustre video game road movie. Other titles were **“RUNAWAY RALPH”** (88), **“WHEN YOU REMEMBER ME”** (90) and **“CHRISTMAS ON DIVISION STREET”** (91). None of these, I suspect, showed him to his best advantage. A pity, because he had a very personable manner – in the Corey Haim / Elijah Wood vein – and a deft comic touch. It’s not known if he’s related at all to Brad Savage (**“SALEM’S LOT”**, **“ISLANDS IN THE STREAM”**), but Ben Savage, also of **“LITTLE MONSTERS”**, is his younger brother.

Ajay Naidu had a significant role two years earlier in **“WHERE THE RIVER RUNS BLACK”**, and in 1987 was in **“TOUCH AND GO”**. Other boys listed in the cast include Jeff Kahn (**“Music Kid”**), Garrett Hohimmer (**“Kid playing football”**), and Steve Cohen (**“Burly kid”**).

See also the 1947 original, the 1980s TV serial, Disney’s **“FREAKY FRIDAY”**, **“BIG”**, **“LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON”**, **“18 AGAIN”** and subject index under **BULLYING, COMEDY, SCHOOL** and **TWINS / LOOKALIKES / SWITCHED IDENTITIES**.