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What Next?

UK : 1974 : dir. Peter Smith : Children's Film Foundation : 53 min
prod: : scr: Derek Hill : dir.ph.:
Peter Robinson
Perry Benson; Derek Deadman

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ☞ Z ⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Clairvoyant in Hackney? Whatever next.

Source: 18th London Film Festival programme

18th London Film Festival (1974) programme review:

“The Children's Film Foundation, headed by Henry Geddes, has been producing British films specifically for children for the past 23 years and has acquired an enviable world-wide reputation for quality on a small budget. It was felt especially important to include a new CFF film in launching this children's section of the London Film Festival and, with the kind agreement of Mr Geddes, we are able to premiere the Foundation's latest film.

Like most CFF productions, it is a film made to appeal primarily to children under the age of 12

and very good fun they should find it. "WHAT NEXT?" is an inventive story about a small boy who gets bumped on the head and finds he can predict the future in verse, although rather erratically. With two friends and a newspaper reporter, he becomes involved in tracking down the missing loot from a robbery. As the money is buried under the ghost train at Battersea Fun Fair, both crooks and children have a lot of trouble and misadventures before justice is done.

The script, by Derek Hill (of the New Cinema Club) and Carol K. Smith, very nicely makes the chief villain a property developer while director Peter K. Smith shows a fine ability to

handle child actors. A film that young children



will surely enjoy."

- Ken Wlaschin

OK son, who won the 3.15 at Doncaster next Friday?

Source: NFT Bulletin

NFT monthly bulletin - April '76 - review:

"Premiered in the London Film Festival, **"WHAT NEXT?"** is one of the liveliest of films for young people made in recent years. Peter Smith, who also directed **"A PRIVATE ENTERPRISE"**, handles the young players with genuine understanding. The screenplay is by Derek Hill, and he has the novel idea - with just the right element of fantasy - of a boy, accidentally knocked on the head and able (occasionally) to predict the future. Enter the local newspaper, cops and crooks."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Film Review 1973-74", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "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:

"Children's Film Foundation adventure. ** "

No further information currently available. This title is later than the Children's Film Foundation catalogue (1972) held in the archive. Nothing else is known of Peter Robinson. "The Moving Picture Boy" gives only this title for him.

The NFT were being somewhat over-gracious to Henry Geddes and his Foundation, who were no doubt pleased as punch to premiere their latest offering at the prestigious London Film Festival. More honestly assessed, for 23 years they have turned out, in the main, a diet of complacent, highly derivative children's "adventures" with precious little to say about kids' lives in the real world, or the problems and challenges they face – this in very stark contrast to the output of, say, Scandinavia, or the better children's films from mainland Europe.

The CFF's output is innately conservative by instinct; as remote from, and patronising of, its audience as a "favourite uncle" who takes the kids out for a treat once or twice a year. This is not to say that some of their films may not be entertaining (though rarely screened even on British television) but that their horizons are too narrow, their notion of what will interest children too "safe" and banal.

But can they be blamed too harshly for this, when mainstream film critics are themselves so aloof and uncritical when children's material comes before them? To write, as Wlaschin does, that these productions are aimed primarily at an audience under 12, and in the same breath describe a 12-year old as "a small boy" illustrates the point only too well. There are no "small boys" in good children's films. There are only children, and – somewhere in the background – there are adults, but the film identifies itself clearly with the former. That identification does of course demand a level of insight, and all the best children's film-makers have it.

So we have "**WHAT NEXT?**", and how do Peter Smith and Derek Hill play with the idea of a boy's serendipitous gift of prescience? They tangle him with a gang of crooks and steer the action towards the funfair at Battersea Park. It could be a "Just William" script from the 1940s or, worse yet, a Disney programme-filler. If this sounds unduly harsh, it isn't meant to be. I daresay all involved had a smashing good time. The point, surely, is that cinema for children should aim rather higher than that.

See subject index under **CHILDREN'S FILM & TV FOUNDATION, CIRCUS / CLOWNS / FAIRGROUNDS, PRODIGIES / GIFTED CHILDREN** and – yaaawwwn – **KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS**.