

Review #85 : *The Bachelor and Bobby Soxer* (1947)

Cary Grant, Myrna Loy and Shirley Temple

TRAILER

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=teUp1jwEjdQ>

This film is one of the most copied in the history of Hollywood, I claim. It is **clever without being profound**, its characters are unusually believable and well-developed ; and it is light-hearted from beginning to end at a very interesting plot question : **the precocity of young people who lack categorizing definitions**, life-experience and therefore the context to make prioritized value decisions ; in a word, it's about the problems adults have with children who want to act as grown-ups without having the means to do so successfully.



The central character of this film is a **successful bachelor** named Richard Nugent (**Cary Grant**). He is depicted as debonair and slightly naughty but on the whole, he is a charming, urbane, and witty playboy who suddenly finds himself the victim of a fanciful high-school girl's (**Shirley Temple**) crush.

SYNOPSIS

Richard Nugent is a **charming artist who is always finding himself pulled into court by trouble** he never intended to cause. Trouble finds Nugent everywhere, because he is a magnet to women, *and men get jealous*. He is brought to court for just such an occurrence : the judge (**Myrna Loy**) recognizes his innocence but warns him not to appear before her again on a similar charge, caused by a lady in a night club. She indeed allows Nugent's lawyer to convince her to let him off with a lecture.

However, soon after, Nugent **delivers a lecture on the pleasures of a career in art** to the local high school. Unfortunately he attracts the attention of a high school senior, Susan (**Shirley Temple**). **Temple manages to go to Nugent's apartment and get inside** – she feels they are made for each other. But she falls asleep, and Nugent returns home without noticing her. He gets into his pyjamas and dressing gown and makes himself a drink, planning to read a book before bed. He puts on the music, waking up Susan.



She says hello to him while he looks totally confused – and then there is pounding at his door. It is the police, the D.A. (**Rude Vallee**) along with Temple's sister Margaret (**Myrna Loy**)... the judge.

Nugent is arrested on a very sticky charge. However, Margaret is convinced by her uncle Ray Collins, to be easy on Nugent – if she isn't, Susan will always think of Nugent as a martyr. **Nugent has to help Susan get him out of her system.** Margaret's idea is to have him continue to see Susan, in the hopes the girl will eventually realize she belongs with someone nearer her own age. So Nugent is given a suspended sentence in exchange of his cooperation. The result is **merriment that takes many forms**, including physical contests at a picnic where Nugent finds himself the rival of Margaret's boyfriend while trying to lose for Susan's sake ; a basketball game where he must champion her erstwhile beau from the bleachers ; and family occasions where the dialogue turns frequently hilarious.

REVIEW

It really does seem almost impossible for a film to get any cuter or more feel-good than *The Bachelor and the Bobby Soxer*. First of all, **much of the comedy is fantastic** — from Susan's starry-eyed image of Dickie as a literal *knight in shining armour*, through to her attempt to pass herself off as both Dick's mother when trying to help him escape from jail. The dining scene at the club is brilliant fun, especially as more and more people arrive at the table to disrupt Dick and Margaret's privacy. Watch Cary Grant's reactions in this scene – truly a fantastic comedic performance that has, thankfully, been captured on film to the great benefit of future generations ;) You just can't help laughing throughout the film — at Susan's misguided passion for Dick, Dick's helpless bewilderment when he gets landed in jail for nothing he can remember, the attempts at match-making Uncle Matt subtly tries to pull off, and much more. The situation builds pretty well, leading up to a **complicated, entertaining set of hilarious tangle-ups**. The screenplay manages to simply enough **combine light-hearted humour and creativity**.

With three appealing stars and a silly but interesting story, this is an **enjoyable light comedy that moves at a good pace and makes you feel at home** with its believably flawed yet engaging characters. Cary Grant, Myrna Loy, and Shirley Temple all get plenty to work with, as each of their characters is pretty well-suited to their talents.

The best thing about this screwball comedy is the **gradual development of relationships** between charming Nugent, intelligent Margaret, a fast-growing Susan, Nugent's rival and long-suffering Bessie (**Lillian Randolph**) as the family's maid and confidant-adviser.

The cast is really excellent. **Cary Grant** is a good comic actor in his later period, and he lends his considerable talent and boundless charm to the character without reservation. It's always the little throwaway touches that count with his performances, tiny things that make him appear **so natural on the screen**, and his Dick Nugent is remarkably true to life. I especially love it when Dick trades his car in and turns up his trouser cuffs to act 'young' around the Turners. The performance of Cary Grant as the gentleman involved is one of the **brightest and sharpest** of his many light-comedy jobs.

Myrna Loy is likewise attractive and delightful as the solemn but flexible judge who is the reason why the baffled hero must submit to the wilful child's designs. It's not hard to believe her as a fully **professional, modern woman** ; nor is it difficult to believe that the judge might have a **sweeter, human and very feminine side**. It's a shame that there aren't more scenes between Cary Grant and Myrna Loy, as they doubtlessly have **great chemistry** together.



Face to the suave, womanizing and exasperated Nugent and her strict sister, **Shirley Temple** shows her **natural charm as a clear-eyed, imaginative, persistent and overpowering 17-year-old**. There is just no denying how cute she is, and how well she plays the role of the flighty, passionate Susan. The character as written is rather annoying, but Shirley Temple makes Susan sweeter and more tolerable, and she definitely has a presence of her own.

Ray Collins plays Margaret's confidant, a great listener and a man with a wisecrack or sage advice to the perfection ; and **Lillian Randolph** is fair enough as the understanding friend. Others in the cast include Rude Vallee, Veda Ann Borg, Dan Tobin, Harry Davenport and Ransom Sherman. All the younger people in the film are well chosen by my standards.

The **happy ending** in this storyline is the result of the common sense shown by the characters of Loy and Grant ; the '*screwball*' aspect (which is not a exactly a genre, but rather a way of handling social mores) is here made to serve a plot that involves several **hard-working normative people in a situation that should never have happened** but has *in fact* happened. The production values of this bright comedy are **far above average in every respect**. **Leigh Harline's** music is understated and very useful, and the cinematography by **Robert de Grasse** in high contrast B/W is very good in a number of types of scenes. Director Irving Reis and writer Sidney Sheldon keep the film's **pace and style very swift and consistent**. Art direction and set decorations also add to the **elegance and fun** of the production. Edward Stevenson provided the gowns. The film introduces the non-sensical 'You remind me of a man' mnemonic, which became the springboard for *The Power*, **Frank M. Robinson's** sci-fiction classic, and a fine film of the 1960s. This is a dialogue and situation comedy with elements of satire and more. Civilized angst about the younger generation never seemed to be funnier than in this movie ! ++

NOTES

- 1) **The Judge** : For those who are having trouble with the *lady judge* in the 1940s : lots of young male lawyers had gone off to war and left opportunities for women in legal careers as in other fields ; besides, Loy seems to have relatives in the system (her uncle and a retired judge)
- 2) **The bobby-soxer** : At the time, the term refers to young girls wearing **sox** with the tops turned down ('*bobbed*' which means shortened). About the reviewers who mentioned a hint of *pedophilia* here, calm down ! This is just a silly schoolgirl crush here. In fact, there's also an interesting parallel between Shirley day-dreaming that Cary Grant is a knight in shining armour and the romantic reveries of Reese Witherspoon's character in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Our teen heroine is a bit of a '*drama queen*'.