

Review #32 : *Midnight* (1939)

Claudette Colbert and Don Ameche

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yNLZrS-bo0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXvfPzBfoDM>

Midnight, one of the liveliest, gayest, wittiest and naughtiest comedies by Mitchell Leisen, is strikingly reminiscent of that of the old Lubitsch. Its cast, led by Claudette Colbert, Don Ameche and John Barrymore, is in the best of spirits. Its script is a model of deft phrasing and glib narrative joinery...

The title is an allusion the fatal hour that strikes for every Cinderella, the moment when the coach will change back into a pumpkin, the ballroom dress will fall into rags and the prince charming discover the smudge of soot, or fried egg, on the changeling's cheek. But the clock doesn't strike when the film's midnight comes. Things go hilariously to smash, but not Cinderella. Even the fairy godmother (John Barrymore) blinks amazedly at his protégée's carryings-on...

SYNOPSIS

It begins with the arrival in Paris on a rainy night of a young woman dressed in an evening gown. In a matter of moments she has met a cab-driver named Czerny, crashed a society musicale and has been set up in the Ritz by a prankish, yet practical, millionaire with instructions to break up the affair between his wife and an irrepressibly romantic Parisian. Claudette Colbert's 'Baroness Czerny' — a title invented by courtesy of the cabby — is a beautiful bait for the Parisian lover, and everything goes smoothly until midnight...

Usually such scripts have flaws in their complications, yet this one is marvellously original and unpretentious : there is the business of Cinderella being baffled by the godmother's magic wand; there is the business of Cabby Czerny's heroic attempts to expose the fraud and being considered a lunatic; there is the bit in which Mr. Barrymore impersonates a 3-years-old on the phone; there is the complication attending the discovery that the non-wed Czernys will have to be divorced... and the lot is immensely fun. Most of the credit, of course, belongs to Miss Colbert. She has superb command of the comic style, can turn a line or toss a vase with equal precision. Mr. Barrymore is also very good. Pictures like *Midnight* should strike more often. +++

