

The Blue Bird

US : 1940 : dir. Walter Lang : 20th Century Fox : 98 min
 prod: Gene Markey : scr: Ernest Pascal : dir.ph.: Arthur Miller & Ray Rennahan
Shirley Temple; Johnny Russell; Scotty Beckett; Billy Cook; Dickie Moore; Douglas Scott; Gene Reynolds
 Spring Byington; Nigel Bruce; Gale Sondergaard; Eddie Collins; Sybil Jason; Jessie Ralph; Helen Ericson; Russell Hicks; Al Shean; Cecilia Loftus; Laura Hope Crews

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	☺	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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"But can't you get nasty diseases from birds, grandma?" Shirley mutters, underwhelmed with the film's payoff moral. "Well dear, they do carry lethal viruses on their teeth – or was that monkeys?" says grandma, somewhat pixilated.

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
 2001 review:

"Released one year after **"THE WIZARD OF OZ"**, this lavish Technicolor fantasy (based on the famous play by Maurice Maeterlinck) has everything but charm. Even Shirley seems stiff. Filmed before in 1918, remade in 1976. ** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Overwrought Temple number from a classic tale about a girl who seeks true happiness; slow of tempo, but beautifully filmed. The fire in the woods is a high point. **1/2 "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"In a Grimm's Fairy Tale setting, the two children of a poor woodcutter seek the bluebird of happiness in the past, the future, and the Land of Luxury, but eventually discover it in their own back yard. An imaginative and often chilling script clarifies Maurice Maeterlinck's fairy play, and the art direction is outstanding, but the children are necessarily unsympathetic and the expensive production paled beside the success of the more upbeat **"WIZARD OF OZ"**, which was released almost simultaneously. Slashed for re-release, the only existing prints now open with confusing abruptness and no scene-setting before the adventures begin. (Gale Sondergaard plays the cat, Eddie Collins the

dog.) Academy Award nominations: Arthur Miller, Ray Rennahan. *** ”



“Is this a bluebird I see before me? I have thee not and yet I see thee still”

Source: indeterminate

“One of the most deliciously lovely productions to be brought to the screen.”

– MFB

The Films of 20th Century Fox review:

“Visually beautiful and full of imaginative sets, splendidly photographed in rich Technicolor, **“THE BLUE BIRD”** was the first Shirley Temple film to flop at the box office. It did not allow for the Temple image, being confined by its strict fantasy-fable framework, and confused youngsters with its allegory of the search for the bluebird of happiness. The plot visits the future and the past and deals with the wide range of human nature. The Germanic, gingerbread story, somewhat like *“Hansel and Gretel”*, did nothing to help Temple’s gradually sagging public appeal.”

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

“Fox’s answer to **“THE WIZARD OF OZ”** has Shirley Temple as the little girl who, having searched through a number of whimsical heavens, finds happiness in her own back yard.

Eddie Collins is the dog, Gale Sondergaard the cat and Jessie Ralph the fairy. The sequence of the storm and forest fires is magnificent and worth all of the other two major versions of Maeterlinck’s story – 1918, directed by Maurice Tourneur, and 1976, directed by George Cukor... Tourneur’s version, much admired in its time, is now primitive, but it is to that era that the story really belongs. ** ”

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

“Maeterlinck’s classical fantasy about a little girl’s search for true happiness receives an elaborate screen treatment. **1/2 ”

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

“Temple and Byington star in this classic fairy tale about two children who search for the bluebird of happiness, only to find true happiness at home. The film is based on Maurice Maeterlinck’s fantasy, but the plot seems similar to **“THE WIZARD OF OZ”**. The production is impressive, but it pales in contrast

to the popular **OZ** film, which was released about the same time. Johnny Russell, Nigel Bruce, Gale Sondergaard and Eddie Collins also star. ** ”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

“This much-neglected fantasy was Shirley Temple’s present from 20th Century Fox for their not allowing her to do **“THE WIZARD OF OZ”**. Like Judy Garland in that film, Shirley also sets out on an incredible journey – to find the bluebird of happiness, searching for it in the past, the future and the Land of Luxury. The photography and art direction perfectly capture the sometimes quite creepy mood of Maeterlinck’s original fairy-tale play, and the sole sadness is that the only existing versions of this film now run 20 minutes shorter than the original. Gale Sondergaard as a cat and Eddie Collins as a dog offer first-class, if faintly sinister, supporting contributions. Bits, though, are just too twee. ** ”

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Following on the success of **“THE WIZARD OF OZ”**, this extravagant fantasy features Shirley Temple as a spoiled brat who seeks true happiness by leaving her loving parents’ home. She meets some remarkable characters before realising that there’s no place like home. The film is remarkable for the star’s characterisation of a spiteful little crab, which contrasts markedly with her usual sunny roles. **1/2 ”

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "Variety Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. It’s unclear whether this was already in pre-production when MGM approached Fox for the loan of Shirley Temple to star as Dorothy in their own musical whimsey, but Fox had no intention of assisting the rival studio, even though nobody expected **“THE WIZARD OF OZ”** to be such a runaway hit. Whoever started shooting first, the rivalry between the two productions was unambiguous by the time of release. Both films had a black and white prologue, exploding into Technicolor when the fantasy begins. Both films had a threadbare “East, West, Home is Best” punchline, and both starred girls strictly too old for the roles they were playing. It’s interesting to speculate how their respective careers would have panned out if Garland had starred in this, and Temple in **“WIZARD”**. It’s certain that this was the start of the slippery slope for Shirley.

See also **“BADKONAK-E SEFID”** and **“BASHU”** - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.