



Flight of the Doves

UK / US : 1971 : dir. Ralph Nelson : Columbia / Rainbow : 105 min
 prod: Ralph Nelson : scr: Frank Gabrielson & Ralph Nelson : dir.ph.: Harry Waxman
Helen Raye [d]; *Jack Wild*
 Ron Moody; Dorothy McGuire; Dana; Stanley Holloway; William Rushton

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	≠	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Leonard Maltin's TV Movies and Video Guide review:

"Calculated cuteness mars tale of two Liverpool children who flee to Ireland to visit their grandmother; the good cast isn't seen to best advantage. ** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Two children run away from their bullying stepfather to join their Irish grandmother, but are chased by a wicked uncle who knows they are heirs to a fortune. Pantomimish whimsy which works in fits and starts, but has little real humour or charm."

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Ralph Nelson's film version of Walter Macken's story, **"FLIGHT OF THE DOVES"**, is a heartwarming, often funny, often suspenseful story of two runaway children, fleeing from a cruel stepfather (British) to their grandmother (Irish) who lives "somewhere in Ireland". The screenplay takes some liberties in casting. Dorothy McGuire is a delight as a bright-eyed, most articulate grandmother, standing up to authority, both Irish and British, on behalf of the young runaways, but is much too young-looking to make anyone believe that she could have a grandson as large as Jack Wild.

It allows Ron Moody to dominate the film from his first appearance. With almost as many character changes as Alec Guinness in **"KIND HEARTS AND CORONETS"**, Moody is so good at his disguises that the audience starts imagining that each new character who appears might be the irresponsible Moody. Ostensibly the villain, he's so captivating that no-one really believes that he won't survive - even after seeing him plunged into a wild Irish sea. As the uncle of Wild and Helen Raye, he's described as the eventual heir to money left by the children's grandfather should they die before he does."

[no listing in "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "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", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review::

"Director Ralph Nelson followed the success of the controversial **"SOLDIER BLUE"** with this charming piece of Irish whimsy, which charts the trials and tribulations of a pair of Liverpudlian children. *** "

"Adventure starring Ron Moody and Jack Wild. A boy and his little sister run away but are chased for their fortune by an uncle. *** "

“Children’s drama. ** ”

TV Times note:

“Drama. Two young children flee their cruel stepfather to live with their granny in Ireland.
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Anyone hoping for a felicitous reteaming of the Ron Moody/Jack Wild double act from “**OLIVER!**” will be woefully disabused. A couple of days ago I reviewed “**MAME**” (1974) here and believed that was the worst film I’d seen in six months. This is even worse, a grotesquely amateurish effort, badly played by the entire cast. Those who bemoan the demise of the British film industry in the mid Seventies should be compelled to watch reeking works like this to understand why it became defunct. We were simply turning out too many dire films.

Their mother dead, Finn and Derval Dove (13 and 7 respectively) are two Liverpool Irish kids – despite Jack Wild’s cockney accent being thick enough to cut with a knife – who live in abject misery with a bullying English stepdad, Tobias Cromwell (William Rushton). Finally enough is enough, and they take off to go and live with their maternal grandmother somewhere in county Galway. Unbeknowns to Cromwell a sizeable inheritance has been left to the waifs which on the event of their demise will pass to their uncle, third-rate touring actor John Cyril “Hawk” Dove, whom the children only know by a tattoo on his wrist.

With no money, no map, and no very clear idea of their grandmother’s address, the kids hop a boat to Eire without difficulty. Meanwhile Hawk Dove (Ron Moody), disguised as a solicitor, has apprised Cromwell of the legacy, and both are hotfoot in pursuit. But this is ten minutes into the story. Before the opening titles, we have a “heartwarming” scene between brother and sister, when Finn (Jack Wild, 19 no less) brings Derval (Helen Raye) a model he’s made at school of their grandmother’s farm, from a picture postcard she once sent them. The dialogue between the kids is unimaginably stilted, and delivered by Wild exactly as though reading from a book in front of a school class. Derval coos appreciatively over the toy, and then a large boot descends and crushes it. Stepfather has arrived home, and demands that she throw this rubbish in the fire. “I keep a clean house” declares the ogre. Rarely has a bad film telegraphed the audience its own inadequacies even before the title music has started.

So now we’re in Ireland, and just when we’re thinking it couldn’t possibly get any worse, the story stops dead in its tracks for a St Patrick’s Day musical parade number in Dublin, and that too is staggering in its awfulness – “You Don’t Have To Be Irish To Be Irish”.

The film’s mid-section is a long series of chases as the Irish Garda start a nationwide manhunt for the missing children, chivvied along by an English detective (also Ron Moody in disguise). Finn and Fergal weave and dodge, steal a loaf here, “borrow” a policeman’s bike there. They spend a night in a cemetery and hitch a ride in the back of a moonshine wagon (driven by Ron Moody). They join an “enchanted” tinkers’ camp (cue another limp song) and, with Finn now dressed as a girl and Derval as a boy, are aided further on their way by a friendly English lady fashion photographer (Moody again). She/he manoeuvres them onto a cliff-top to take their picture, and is about to push them into the sea when his tattoo betrays him, and he topples over the edge instead.

Presently they arrive by accident at grandma’s sweetly rustic Irish cottage, but at once the garda arrive to ship the runaways back to England with their legal guardian, who carries the hated name of Cromwell. Grandma, aided by scythe-wielding neighbours, fends off the police, and a local magistrate arrives to adjudicate on the matter

Needless to say, Moody pops up again in the final reel. And needless to say, all turns out in fairy-tale fashion to the joy of the poor motherless lambs. It's such a contrived bit of whimsy-wamsy from start to finish, furnishing Ron Moody with a chance to emulate Peter Sellers in a clutch of cameo roles, but even with that modest ambition it manages to ring a false note at every turn. Moody in his various disguises is not as entertaining as Sellers, Jack Wild at 19 is pushing his luck trying to pass as 13, and the musical interludes are excruciating. A Hansel and Gretel tale requires charm to work its spell on an audience, and it requires a sense of real danger, even for an audience of small children. This film has a dearth of both qualities, and the very best to be said of it is that it offers a tourist glimpse of Dublin in the early 70s, although its portrait of Ireland verges on mere caricature. ***Abysmal.***

Despite the American producers, a preponderantly English cast and story qualify it as home-grown product. Columbia were obviously keen to re-team Wild and Moody before the Artful Dodger grew altogether too old for this kind of nonsense. Jack Wild had recently been seen on American TV in the series "**H.R.Pufnstuf**". After this he turned in yet more whimsy in the shape of "**THE PIED PIPER**" (with Donovan in the lead) as a lame lad of Hamelin (the only one the Piper doesn't net), before finally landing a more serious dramatic role in "**THE FOURTEEN**". There was talk of him starting up a production company with friend Mark Lester, but nothing came of that. Thankfully, one might add.

See subject index under **EPIC JOURNEYS, GRANDPARENTS, GYPSIES / TINKERS, HEIRS / HEIRESSSES / INHERITANCES, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS, STEPMOTHERS / STEPFATHERS** and **WOMEN AS BOYS / BOYS AS GIRLS**.