

The Next Voice You Hear

US : 1950 : dir. William Wellman : M-G-M : 83 min
 prod: Dore Schary : scr: Charles Schnee : dir.ph.: William Mellor
[Gary Gray](#)
 James Whitmore; Nancy Davis (Reagan); Lillian Bronson; Jeff Corey; Tom d'Andrea;
 Art Smith

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω □ ♀ Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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The morning ritual of dad getting cranky with the starter motor is emblematic of mankind taking His Wondrous Gifts too much for granted. Joe Smith – American must mend his ways!
 Source: indeterminate webiste

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"The voice of God is heard on the radio and has a profound impact on Anytown, USA. Ambitious if not terribly successful message film produced by Dore Schary. **½"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"God speaks to mankind on the radio, and the life of Joe Smith – American is changed. Sappy parable, the archetypal instance of Schary's reign of do-goodery at M-G-M. (He wrote a book about it – "Case History of a Movie".) The idea is handled with deadly reverence, and falls quite flat, while the depiction of the inhabitants of American suburbia is depressing. Scr: Charles Schnee. *"

"The sins of the American working man are singularly uninteresting and their obliteration seem scarcely to require the very voice of God."
– **Henry Hart**

The M-G-M Story review:

"Schery's yen for movies with a message reached the ultimate with **"THE NEXT VOICE YOU HEAR"**. Its message was delivered by the voice of God when James Whitmore, Nancy Davis and Gary Gray switched on their radio. That the ludicrous was avoided and an impressive sincerity achieved proved the skill of director William Wellman, writer Charles Schnee, the cast (including Lillian Bronson, Art Smith, Tom d'Andrea Jeff Corey) and producer Schary himself."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Over-sentimentalised, but nevertheless engrossing drama about a group of people who hear the voice of God on the radio and the effect it has on their lives. ***"

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Man's-man director William Wellman was an odd choice to direct this preachy tract – typical of Dore Schary's well-meaning but ponderous message pictures of the Fifties – in which the voice of God speaks to mankind via a radio broadcast. The solid performances by James Whitmore and Jeff Corey lend the film what strength it has. **½"

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "A Pictorial History of the Talkies", "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" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times review:

"This oddity, produced by M-G-M's studio head Dore Schary himself, concerns the effects on an allegorical US town when no less than

the voice of God is heard over the radio. It's a fascinating idea, but action director William A Wellman handles it like a tub of molasses. Interesting today to watch Nancy Reagan, then Davis, in among all those liberals. ***"

"A parable for the 1950s, with the voice of God suddenly pronouncing from the radio in a small American town. It is dated and has little but curiosity value to recommend it today, such as the starring role of Nancy Davis, later Mrs Reagan. *"

"Drama starring James Whitmore, Nancy Davis. The contented life of Joe and Mary Smith is shaken when they hear what seems to be the voice of God coming from their radio. ***"

What's On TV review:

"The future Mrs Reagan, Nancy Davis, says yes to a radio broadcast by God. Supposedly a film with a message, it's both daft and dull. *"

"Drama. A couple's life is changed forever when they hear God speaking to them on the radio."

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Gary Gray:

"Anagrammatic Gary Gray's father, a businessman, let him do a little acting as a tot. He got picked as an extra for a Joan Crawford weepie, but everyone liked him so much he was given a few lines. He hardly stopped working in movies for the next dozen years, besides playing in several "little theater" stage productions. Gary was fair and blue-eyed, with an earnest, doggy expression. (In his early teens he frequently co-starred with dogs – Pal,

Shep, Lassie, etc – when not playing a junior member of Raymond Walburn's family in the **HENRY** and **FATHER** comedies. But he managed to avoid most of the **RUSTY** series.) Though occasionally stropky and mischievous, as in **"RACHEL AND THE STRANGER"**, he was almost invariably the Good Guy – brave, honest and loyal to the end..."

I take a different view. Seen not as a po-faced "message movie" but an extended edition of something like "**The Twilight Zone**" or "**The Outer Limits**", it is actually an intriguing little idea, from a time when the radio held sway over the population with the same immutable power television does today. Very wisely, the voice itself is never actually heard, but its words reported back between the characters. The film opens and closes with biblical quotations adorning cloudscares, and by the end inevitably succumbs to a bad attack of piety, but at least for the first half of the picture it might as well be a radio broadcast from Mars which is arousing the interest and consternation, principally of "Joe Smith, American" (that's how he's billed on the titles) and his family, mysteriously pregnant Nancy Davis (nine months gone and slim as ever) and dutiful son Gary Gray. The family is portrayed very much as a threesome, not a couple, hence the film's inclusion here. Young Joey is strangely disconcerted by the messages which begin to emanate from the radio at a fixed time every evening for a week, but his chief anxiety seems to centre around beatific Mom, since he overheard that second-child deliveries can be particularly hazardous to the mother. He has a secret friendship with his dad's curmudgeonly employer at an aircraft factory, and when dad rolls home one night paralytic drunk, Joey runs off in shame to the old man's house. The drinking binge is dad's tempting by Satan, you see, when he runs into a licentious globe-trotting friend in a bar, who tries to seduce him away from the drudgery of married life.

The mysterious daily announcements, at first taken for an elaborate Orson Welles style practical joke, become rapidly the focus of everyone's conversation as we learn they are being heard simultaneously in different languages all around the world – a French pilot and American co-pilot hear the broadcast midflight on the same radio, and each in their own tongue. The voice is miffed with mankind for neglecting the wonders of creation, and muses whether an Old Testament style proof of identity is really called for. The broadcast is followed by a severe sudden thunderstorm, and much wailing and gnashing of teeth in the Smith household. On the seventh day, all sceptics silenced, god keeps mum, having done wonders for church attendance. The future First Lady picks this precise moment to go into labour, and the film closes as she's wheeled out of the delivery room smiling seraphically, for all the world as though she's been delivered of the new messiah (a daughter, but how else?). Perhaps it was this experience that set her on her Christian fundamentalist crusade to bring "The Moral Dimension" back to American political life? In some respects the film's ending is echoed by the conclusion of "**2010**", with humanity receiving a reminder from its landlord to mend its naughty ways, or the ending of "**THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**", which featured the unrelated Billy Gray, and saw Earth given a severe ticking off by a patient galactic policeman.

Mundane the film certainly is, but it's intended as a comforting snapshot of small town fifties America, families grouped about their radio, nothing seriously amiss in the world, the rock-solid godfearing instincts of the nation requiring only the gentlest of admonitions from the Almighty. It's no more phoney a snapshot of the period than all those "swinging sixties" films of a decade later, and certainly no more phoney than today's all-encompassing soap operas.

Gary was 14, having notched up over 50 films as a boy, among them "**A WOMAN'S FACE**" (41), "**THE GREAT LOVER**" (47), "**GUN SMUGGLERS**" (48) "**RACHEL AND THE STRANGER**" (48) and "**THE PAINTED HILLS**" (51). A robust, cheerful blond, he seemed better suited to outdoors roles than domestic soap operas, but he could convey distress and grief well enough when called upon. Director Wellman's opus also included "**WILD BOYS OF THE ROAD**" (33), "**THE HAPPY YEARS**" (50) and "**GOOD-BYE, MY LADY**" (56), all of which featured boys prominently.

See subject index under **DIRECTORS, RELIGION** and **RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS**.