



US : 1973 : dir. Don Taylor : Readers Digest / United Artists : 104 min
prod: Arthur P. Jacobs : scr: Robert B. & Richard M. Sherman : dir.ph.: Frank Stanley
Johnnie Whitaker; Jeff East; Jodie Foster
Celeste Holm; Warren Oates; Henry Jones; Dub Taylor; Lucille Benson; Kanu Hank,
Noah Keen; Richard Eastham; Sandy Kenyon; Joshua Hill Lewis; Susan Joyce; Steve Hogg

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	≠	Z	⊗	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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Source: indeterminate website

Leonard Maltin’s Movie and Video Guide
1996 review:

“Well-crafted musical remake of **"TOM SAWYER"**, the boy wonder of Hannibal, Missouri, and his friends Huckleberry Finn and Becky Thatcher. Songs by Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman. Shot in Panavision. *** ”

Speelfilm Encyclopedie rendition of the above:

“A well-directed new version of **"TOM SAWYER"**, wonderchild from the little American town of Hannibal with his friends Huckleberry Finn and Becky Thatcher. A musical with charm. *** ”

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

“Reverential, rather tediously over-produced version for family audiences of the seventies, with brief songs and real Mississippi locations. Musical direction by John Williams. Academy Award nominations: Richard and Robert Sherman; John Williams. There had been a version with Jackie Coogan in 1930. Selznick's **"THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER"** followed in 1937. In 1939 Billy Cook was **"TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE"**, with Donald O'Connor as Huckleberry Finn.”

Film Review 1974-75 review:

“A most engaging screen adaptation as a musical of Mark Twain's famous story about a boy and his friends living along the Mississippi; pleasing melodies, lovely backgrounds, delightful performances by Celeste Holm, Warren Oates and Jeff East, and a wholly winning one by the tow-headed Johnny Whitaker as Tom. Release date August 12. Cert. U”

“The spectacular Mississippi countryside, lovingly photographed in all its rich colours, was the background for UA's engaging adaptation of Mark Twain's classic story of boyhood, in which Johnny Whitaker gave a very winning performance in the title-role. With him [*in the still above*] watching the riverboat make its call at the local "landing", Mark's great pal Huckleberry Finn – played by Jeff East.”

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89 review:

“Strictly for the kids, the adults will be annoyed by this scrubbed-clean musical version of the Mark Twain classic. Shot entirely on location in Mississippi (a plus), the film contains most of the familiar incidents, from the fence whitewashing to the scary chase through the caves. ** ”

A Pictorial History of the Talkies incidental note on 1973:

“...Last year's brilliant **"CABARET"** heralded the production of more musicals, among them **"JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR"**, the fey **"GODSPELL"**, the twee **"LOST**

HORIZON", the blowsy **"TOM SAWYER"**, and Stanley Donen's sad return to the genre, **"THE LITTLE PRINCE"**...”

The Time Out Film Guide review:

“A "Readers Digest" production, with songs by the Sherman brothers of Disney fame, and surprisingly enjoyable. Highly professional old-style movie-making which has the wit to ditch its set-piece white-picket-fenced Southern town, its inhabitants, and even Tom himself, to fill the screen with dazzling helicopter shots of the Mississippi River (complete with Howard Keel style ballads) whenever it can. Of course there are the statutory moments of schmaltz, the indian bogeyman, and a marked absence of blacks (in a Southern town?). Nice, if over-detailed, performance from Warren Oates as Muff Potter.”

The United Artists Story review:

“Songwriting brothers Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman provided the forgettable music and lyrics, and the innocuous screenplay for **"TOM SAWYER"**, a musical version of the Mark Twain classic for the kiddie market. Although prettily shot on location in Missouri by director Don Taylor, the Arthur P Jacobs production was not a patch on the earlier film adaptations of 1930 or 1938 starring Jackie Coogan and Tommy Kelly respectively. Johnny Whitaker, Jeff East and Jodie Foster were over-cute as Tom, Huckleberry Finn and Becky Thatcher. Adult contributions came from Celeste Holm (Aunt Polly), Warren Oates (Muff Potter), Kanu Hank, Lucille Benson, Henry Jones, Noah Keen and Dub Taylor.”

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

“The strikingly handsome \$2.5 million production, directed with discreet and appealing folksiness by Don Taylor, boasts an excellent cast, including Johnny Whitaker as Sawyer and Celeste Holm just sensational as Aunt Polly. Robert B and Richard M Sherman's script, music and lyrics maintain an all-age interest. Jeff East is most effective as Huck Finn, making of that character an intriguing and contrasting personality. Jodie Foster is great as Becky Thatcher.

Holm returns to the screen in personal triumph. Few actresses project so well warmth-with-backbone, and a ladylike gentility not immune to kicking up the heels occasionally. Also superbly cast is Warren Oates as Muff Potter, the likeable boozy philosopher. Oates and Holm keep the film together for older audiences."

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

"This musical version of Mark Twain's classic has a few contrived moments here and there, but it is, on the whole, enjoyable. *** "

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Whitaker:

"... He was signed up by the Disney studio, with whom he made the majority of his films, for the cinema or for TV. This was his cosy, kid-next-door side, which reached its apotheosis in the musical "TOM SAWYER of 1973... "

[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies of the Seventies", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

TV Quick note:

"Jodie Foster crops up in this musical version of the much-filmed Mark Twain story."

Daily Mirror review:

"Ponderous musical version of Mark Twain's Mississippi childhood classic starring Jeff East, Johnnie Whitaker, Jodie Foster and Warren Oates."

Source unknown:

"Mark Twain's boyhood adventures."

Comment from "**Child Loving**" by James R Kincaid:

"...The "Buster Brown" bottom, reproduced over and over, [*became*] featured in an astonishing number of movies... Films made by guardians of the cultural centre are especially likely to wind toward the rear. Both Walt Disney, who had a positive mania for bottoms, and *The Readers Digest* manage consistently to get clothes off and cameras positioned for back-end shots... In *The Readers Digest's* right-wing version of "**TOM SAWYER**" (1973), the reward we get for watching the moronic Nixonite inversion of Twain is a shot of Tom and Huck swimming, both actors arching their backs in turn so that their naked posteriors, emerging from the waves, can be fondled by the camera ..."

Reader's Digest 26-page souvenir brochure
synopsis & production notes:

As I understand it, United Artists had their fingers burned at the box office with this lavish attempt to repeat the colossal success of the UK's "**OLIVER!**" four years before. The fact that not one of the tunes escaped off the screen into public memory is never a good indicator for a film musical, almost all of which originated as successful stage productions. This one, written straight for the screen, neglected to test the water first. And I'm not altogether convinced a lot of costly helicopter shots of the Mississippi at the expense of the central characters is the great idea the Time Out critic made it. "Tom Sawyer", for my money, is the better story than "Huckleberry Finn", but cinema and television have seen far more adaptations of the latter, no doubt because adult roles are more prominent in the second story. Mark Twain preferred "The Prince and the Pauper" to both, interestingly enough.

Jeff East, 16, continued his role the following year in a musical version of "**HUCKLEBERRY FINN**", which sank like a stone, and deservedly so. In 1978 he played Clark Kent as a boy (though clearly too old to do so) in "**SUPERMAN**". Button-nosed Johnny Whitaker, 14, had played with Jodie Foster the year before in Disney's ho-hum runaway melodrama "**NAPOLEON AND SAMANTHA**", and aside from small parts in a handful of features, and a larger one in Spielberg's early TV movie "**SOMETHING EVIL**" ('71), he had a regular character in the sitcom "A Family Affair" (1966-71). Although he later studied directing at the Brigham Young University (he's a Mormon, which only goes to show the candy-box-pretty Osmonds were not representative) a burgeoning film career was not to be for him. No such worries for veteran Foster, however, here 11. "Controversial" roles in films like "**BUGSY MALONE**", "**TAXI DRIVER**", "**THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LIVES DOWN THE LANE**" and "**CARNY**" only paved the way to her becoming one of the most accomplished and talented adult actresses in the US today. I wonder if Whitaker is rueful.

See subject index under **BOY MEETS GIRL, CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, EYEWITNESSES TO MURDER, KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS, MUSICALS, ORPHANS / ADOPTION, RUNAWAYS / STOWAWAYS, RASCALS & SCALAWAGS, SCHOOL, MARK TWAIN and WESTERNS.**