

Treasure Island

US : 1950 : dir. Byron Haskin : Disney / RKO : 96 min
 prod: Perce Pearce : scr: Lawrence Edward Watkin : dir.ph.: F. A. Young
[Bobby Driscoll](#).....
 Robert Newton; Basil Sydney; Walter Fitzgerald; Denis O'Dea; Ralph Truman; Finlay Currie;
 John Laurie; Geoffrey Wilkinson; Francis de Wolff; Geoffrey Keen; John Gregson

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	KBytes	Ω □ ♀ Z ♀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3469a	12½	12	26	10400	3 7 7 3 7	No	Pre 1990





Billy Bones, you old sea-dog! You been puttin' rouge on this here tavern lad again?

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996 review:

"Vivid Disney version of Robert Louis Stevenson's classic, filmed in England, with Driscoll a fine Jim Hawkins and Newton the definitive Long John Silver. Changes the novel's original ending, but who's quibbling? "Objectionable" violence was deleted from the 1975 home video version but restored in the 1992 tape/laser reissue. ***1/2"

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Cheerful Disney remake, poor on detail but transfixed by a swaggeringly overplayed and unforgettable leading performance. *"

"Serviceable rather than imaginative"
- Lindsay Anderson

"The result is an absolutely super party, but not "the world's greatest adventure story". Walt Disney may have, as the synopsis

suggests, "much in common with Stevenson". But not this; shiver my timbers, not "TREASURE ISLAND". - C.A. Lejeune

"The Long John Silver of Robert Newton.. is the finest I ever saw.. as succulent as peach-fed ham, as sweet as a spoonful of sugar held high over the porridge plate, as darkly oily as a car sump, as tricky as an ageing jockey."
- Paul Holt

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"It begins corkingly at the Admiral Benbow Inn: Bobby Driscoll is young Jim, Finlay Currie is Billy Bones, Walter Fitzgerald the squire, Denis O'Dea the doctor and Basil Sydney the captain. The crew includes Geoffrey Keen, Ralph Truman and John Gregson. Gloom sets in on the voyage, and is furthered by the treasure island, a matter of process shots, a tatty palm tree and some forested shore which may be Cornwall. As for Robert Newton's Long John Silver, it makes Beery's seem in comparison a shy violet. Orson Welles played the role in 1972, in a junky version made in Spain. *"

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

“Not a bull’s-eye, but generally on target, this is the Disney version of the R.L. Stevenson classic about a young boy’s encounters with some salty buccaneers sailing the Seven Seas for treasure. Newton (Long John Silver) was the only actor ever to give Charles Laughton a run for his money in the ham-acting sweepstakes. An action-filled delight. *** ”

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

“Newton is splendid as Long John Silver, and Driscoll is competent as Jim Hawkins in this Walt Disney version of the Robert Louis Stevenson tale about the discovery of a pirate map that leads to a search for buried treasure. A notable version because the film changes the ending of the original novel. In 1975 the film was re-released in an 87-minute version, with some objectionably violent scenes edited out. Basil Sydney, Denis O’Dea, Ralph Truman, Walter Fitzgerald, Finlay Currie, and Geoffrey Wilkinson appear in supporting roles. *** ”

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995
review:

“Full-blooded Disney version of the classic story, with the definitive portrait of Long John Silver from an eyeball-rolling Robert Newton and an appealing performance as Jim Hawkins from a rosy-cheeked Bobby Driscoll: you’ll be on the edges of your seats as he flees up the mast from kill-crazed Israel Hands. *** ”



Grog, me bucko, and look lively!

Source: A Pictorial History of the Talkies



Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

“ **"TREASURE ISLAND"**, Robert Louis Stevenson's classic, has been handsomely mounted by Walt Disney. The settings are sumptuous and a British cast headed by American moppet [*sic*] Bobby Driscoll faithfully recaptures the bloodthirsty 18th-century era when pirates vied for the supremacy of the seas. It was made in Britain with Disney and RKO frozen pounds.

The Stevenson yarn revolves around a squire and a doctor who fit out a ship to search for South Seas treasure on the strength of a chart obtained from a dying pirate. Robert Newton racks up a visual tour de force as Long John Silver. Likewise, Driscoll smashes across with a vital portrayal of Jim Hawkins, the saloonkeeper's son who falls heir to a map leading the way to pirate treasure¹. There's no dearth of action in the footage.”

¹ Bizarre rendition of the storyline - a "saloonkeeper's son" who "falls heir" to a map? A yarn that "revolves around a squire and a doctor"? Not when I read it, it didn't..

Video Movie Guide 1993 review:

“Disney remake of the Robert Louis Stevenson pirate adventure is powered by a memorable Robert Newton as Long John Silver. **** ”

The Virgin Film Guide review:

“This was Disney's first totally live-action movie, and it is, by far, the best film version of the familiar Stevenson story. Disney regular Bobby Driscoll takes on the coveted role of Jim Hawkins, and a number of reliable British actors round out the cast. This version has a marvellous full-bodied visual style that never appears to be studio-bound. When Disney wanted to re-release the film in the 1970s, the MPAA rating system had arrived, and because of some rather graphic violence, the movie was given the dreaded (by Disney) "PG" rating. The offending scenes had to be snipped to acquire the desired "G" rating, depriving audiences of some excitement, but this remains an extremely satisfying film. **** ”



[no listing in "The Critics' Film Guide", "50 Years of the Movies", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television" or "The Time Out Film Guide"]





Treasure Island



Collins Film Book for Young People –
(1949/50) - feature article:

NB: the stills montages that follow are all from the same source.

“The Admiral Benbow Inn, which stood on a desolate stretch of sea coast in the West of England, seemed a rather dull place to young Jim Hawkins (Bobby Driscoll), whose mother kept the inn, until the day when Captain Billy Bones (Finlay Currie) came to live there. For Billy, a fierce old man, was obviously not only an ex-pirate, but he kept a mysterious locked chest in his room, and seemed in terror of a one-legged seafaring man who might one day find him at the inn.

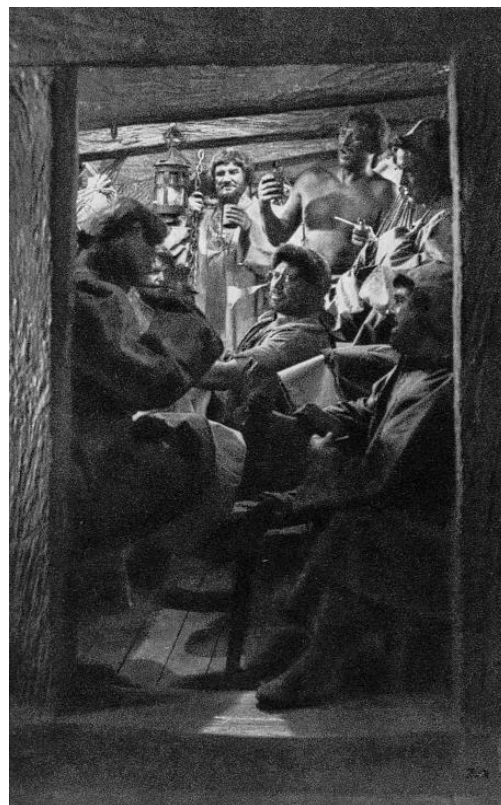
Old Billy's fears were realised when Black Dog (Francis de Wolff), one of his old pirate ship-mates, appeared at the inn and gave him the Black Spot, a sign of death from his old shipmates. Captain Bones was terrified and called Jim up to his bedroom. He said he had only a few hours to live, and that the pirates were after his mysterious chest, not for the golden pieces-of-eight in it, but for a precious map. He gave Jim the map and told him to hurry with it to Doctor Livesey (Denis O'Dea), the local magistrate, and try to bring help before it was too late.

Before Jim could get away from the inn, he was seized by a terrible old blind man called Pew (John Laurie) who forced him to take him to Billy Bones. Jim got away and found Doctor Livesey at the house of Squire Trelawney (Walter Fitzgerald). They raised help and rode back to the inn just as Blind Pew and the other pirates were running away from it. The rest of the pirates got away, but Pew was deserted by them, and ran under the horses' hooves and was killed. At the inn they found Captain Bones dead and the inn ransacked by the pirates.

The Doctor and the Squire realised that Jim's map was the key to a great treasure buried on an island in the West Indies by a famous pirate, Captain Flint. They went to Bristol, and Squire Trelawney outfitted a fine square-rigger, the Hispaniola, to sail for the secret island and find the treasure. Jim sailed with them as cabin boy.

In command was Captain Smollett (Basil Sydney) who was rather hot-tempered, but a fine seaman. The crew, who had been taken on by the rather over-trustful Squire, were a rough-looking lot, and dominating them was

the sea cook, a soft-spoken, one-legged man called Long John Silver (Robert Newton), whose perpetual companion was a parrot nicknamed "Captain Flint," which sat on his shoulder shouting out monotonously the same phrase : "Pieces of-eight! Pieces-of-eight!"



Long John Silver was such a good sailor and was so ingratiating to Jim, that Jim never suspected that this might be the same one-legged seafaring man of whom Captain Bones had been in such terror at the Admiral Benbow Inn, but one night he climbed into a nearly empty apple barrel and he overheard Long John plotting mutiny with the boatswain, Israel Hands (Geoffrey Keen). Nearly all the sailors were pirates who had sailed under the dead Captain Flint, and Long John planned to lead them in taking over command of the ship, getting possession of the map which Billy Bones had stolen from Captain Flint and sailing the Hispaniola to the island to find the treasure for themselves.

Jim hurried to the ship's cabin and told his news to Doctor Livesey and Squire Trelawney. Captain Smollett was there, and it was as well that he had taken a dislike to the crew that the Squire (urged by the smooth-spoken Long John Silver) had engaged. For he had taken the precaution of having all the firearms

aboard removed to his cabin. Faced with this, there was nothing the mutineers could do but wait till they had reached Treasure Island before coming out into the open.

Once the ship had anchored off the island, Long John wasted no time. He slipped off ashore with his men, and he took Jim with him as a hostage. Jim got away from them, but soon got lost in the jungle, and there he met an extraordinary man, dressed in skins and with a great beard and matted hair called Ben Gunn. It turned out that Ben Gunn (Geoffrey Wilkinson) had been another of Captain Flint's crew and that, years before, he had been left marooned on the island.

Meantime Captain Smollett, the Doctor and the Squire, along with a few faithful hands, had landed on the island and built themselves a stockade. Long John and the mutineers attacked the fort, and a terrific battle followed.

In the middle of it, Jim swam out to the *Hispaniola*, climbed aboard her, and cut her anchor so that she could drift out of the firing range of the mutineers. But Israel Hands had been left aboard to guard the ship. He flung a knife at Jim and pinned his arm to the mast. As he was creeping forward to grapple with him, Jim fired the pistol he had brought along to protect himself, and shot Hands dead.

Wounded, Jim managed to make his way ashore and, reach the fort. But a bitter disappointment awaited him there. His friends had been driven out, and it was in the hands of the mutineers. The mutineers wanted to kill Jim out of hand, but here he found an unexpected friend - Long John Silver himself. It seemed that Long John was really fond of Jim, and he announced his intention of taking the boy to Doctor Livesey to have his wound dressed. The other pirates protested that this was asking for trouble, but Long John soon



talked them down. He took Jim off and handed him over to the Doctor - but not before he had purloined the precious map from him!

With the help of the map, the pirates soon located the spot where the treasure had been hidden, but only to find nothing there - Ben Gunn had dug it up long ago and removed it to the cave in which he had been living. Ben Gunn, in fact, was the key to the whole situation. With his help, Captain Smollett and his men ambushed and killed the pirates, with

Picturegoer Film Annual 1949 appraisal of Driscoll:

“A relaxing of the official attitude to children in film studios - and that is liable to happen in the near future - would enable Britain to produce films with a strong child interest that would rival anything that Hollywood can present.

But, make no mistake, when Hollywood really tries, it can produce some of the finest child



the exception of Silver, whom they took prisoner.

But Jim could not forget that Long John had saved his life when the other pirates had wanted to kill him, and he felt he owed him a debt of honour. As the sea cook was being taken back aboard the Hispaniola - with the prospect of being hanged for piracy on arrival in England - Jim contrived to let him escape. And as the ship, laden with the treasure, turned her nose towards home, Silver was seen sailing alone to the west in one of the longboats.”



performers you could wish to see. Those who

saw "**THE WINDOW**", that brilliant little thriller which circulated unheralded, will agree to that because of the fine performance of young Bobby Driscoll. As a child who witnesses a murder and then can get no one to believe his story, this amazingly clever little boy gives a performance that for intensity, restraint and passionate sincerity has not been surpassed by any other child.

His reward for that fine piece of work has been the plum role of Jim Hawkins in Disney's version of "**TREASURE ISLAND**", a good deal of work upon which was due to be done in Britain in 1949. We are apt to criticise the lush performances of some Hollywood children - even to be a little nauseated by them. But when a child of the quality of Bobby Driscoll is handled as delicately and effectively as that youngster was in "**THE WINDOW**", we can only applaud and hope that less sensitive producers will learn a lesson from such a fine example."



Left: Driscoll turns on the charm for director Byron Haskin. Robert Newton and Film Illustrated's associate editor watch amused. Source: Film Illustrated 4/11

Excerpt from interview "Bobby Driscoll Says Farewell" in **Film Illustrated Monthly** - vol.4/11 (1949):

"It is no use denying it - at one stage I would rather have tried to interview Greta Garbo herself than Bobby Driscoll. You know what they say about those American child stars.

Now that I've spent the day with young Mr. Driscoll, however, I am just as emphatic that I would spend it with him any time compared with some of the ladies and gentlemen of the screen that I have met.

It was the day before Bobby and his parents left for home - and the day after they had been given a demonstration of our famous "letter of the law" in relentless operation - to the tune of

a hefty fine for the Driscolls and RKO for daring to use a juvenile in making Walt Disney's version of "**TREASURE ISLAND**" over here instead of in Hollywood.

In the circumstances, it would have been understandable if the Driscolls had been reasonably inclined to get the heck out of it, and hang the fans. But the Driscolls and R.K.O really put themselves out to make sure that FILM readers should get a genuine picture of Bobby, perhaps the most promising juvenile in Hollywood to-day.

Driving down with Phil Gersdorf (Disney's representative) to the "Bull" Hotel, Gerrard's Cross, where the Driscoll's were staying, I learned a few details of Disney's coming films... He was going to make another film in England next year, with Bobby Driscoll getting mixed up with Robin Hood, but that is now off - for obvious reasons.

At the "Bull" Hotel, a delightful old place dating from 'way back (Bobby knows the date), we found the Driscolls in their room, playing cards.

12-year old movie Veteran

Twelve-year old Bobby, of the brown hair, hazel eyes and smooth face, was wearing, despite the rain, blue jeans and a dazzling sliirt. "I wear these to school back home," he said casually. I pictured him attending an English school similarly dressed.

Bobby's parents take an obviously intense interest in everything he does, for, with sixteen pictures under his belt, he is now getting into the higher income brackets - but they remain very sensible about it.

Mr. Driscoll was a roofing contractor and Mrs. Driscoll a schoolteacher in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where Bobby was born in 1937. When Bobby was five, Mr. Driscoll, who was plagued with sinus trouble, took the family to Pasadena, California, seeking relief.

A barber there who cut Bobby's hair kept saying: "That kid ought to be in pictures. He's bright." Finally he got his son, who was a bit-player, to take Bobby along to a mass-interview at MGM, where they were looking for a little boy to play opposite Margaret O'Brien in **"LOST ANGEL"**.

Bobby beat his forty competitors into second place and his first film. The Driscolls decided to stay on in Pasadena for a bit...

Then he was spotted by Disney, who was looking for someone to play the lead in **"SONG OF THE SOUTH"**. Bobby did so well with his complex tests that Disney not only starred him but put him under contract - the first live player to win that honour with Disney.

Disney used Bobby in **"MELODY TIME"** and **"SO DEAR TO MY HEART"**, and lent him to RKO for that gripping job, **"THE WINDOW"** and **"IF YOU KNEW SUSIE"**.

Now, at twelve, Bobby plays Jim Hawkins in **"TREASURE ISLAND"** (the first all-live picture, incidentally, that Disney has ever made).

Long John Silver is played with suitable villainy by Robert Newton, and Disney has used a fine crowd of British character actors, including Basil Sydney, Walter Fitzgerald, Denis O'Dea, and Finlay Currie.

As it is in colour, full of action on sea and land (directed by Byron Haskin, who did the camera work on **"THE SEA WOLF"** and other pirate classics), I hardly think **"TREASURE ISLAND"** can go wrong.

But to Bobby it is just another job of work. "I'm going back home to school," he told me as we went down to lunch. "But I had to do my lessons here too, you know. They sent my books over from Los Angeles so I wouldn't get behind."

He told me - after ordering his own lunch - that he liked English films like **"THE THIRD MAN"**, but had "only listened to Dick Barton once."



Source: Radio Times

He had been working six days a week at Denham nearby (particularly when they were rushing to get his part shot before the appeal against his fine came up), but on Sundays he tore around the countryside on his bicycle ("Much better than the one I had stolen back home just before we came over - I'm taking it back"), or climbed the trees at the back of the hotel with the manager's boys.

During and after lunch Bobby talked quietly and intelligently on all sorts of subjects, so that by the end I was treating him the way he likes to be treated - as a grown-up. (When the waiter asked what "Master Bobby" would have, Bobby, not realising that in England this is no reflection on his age², but merely politeness, mischievously lapsed into baby-talk!)

In the afternoon Bobby showed me over the "Hispaniola," the model ship built on the set, and exchanged wisecracks with the unit technicians the way all the American stars do.

All the time he was giving me a picture of his life in America, the life - between films - of an ordinary boy of twelve going to school, playing baseball and football, camping and hiking with the scouts, cutting a rope bridge across a river as the scoutmaster was crossing, and similar endearing tricks that boys get up to all over the world.

Before we left, Bobby showed me his most precious possessions - a collection of old knives and daggers from many countries, presented to him by members of the cast of **"TREASURE ISLAND"**. Some of them are really beautiful pieces of antique workmanship in silver and steel, and I can imagine the scene there must have been when Bobby whipped

² Of course it is - he was quite right

them out to show the press upon his arrival in New York.

No hard feelings

I asked Mr. Driscoll how they felt about the prosecution, in view of the fact that the practice of using under-age children had been going on here for years without having the law against it invoked.

"Oh, we don't feel badly about it," he grinned. "The people we've met have been real nice about it. I guess the person who started the case must have been someone who thought that a British boy should have played the part."

Which I understand is the correct explanation, Can't you guess the consternation among the handlers of would-be British juvenile stars when they see the wonderful acting jobs turned in by foreign boys like Bobby Driscoll and Bobby Henrey?"

[see biographical file on Driscoll for the unedited article]

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

"Bobby Driscoll, finally one of the most tragic of screen children, seemed to have everything going for him. He was pleasant-looking, alert, plucky, intelligent, with a sense of humour and great acting talent. He had all the chances a kid actor could have wished, and took them beautifully. And his was a face the camera loved, alive with fleeting shadows and nuances.

His mother, born Isabella Kretz, was a school-teacher. His father, Cletus Driscoll, was a roofing contractor whose sinus trouble caused him to move from Iowa to California in search of warmth and sunshine. A friend in Pasadena, where they came to live in 1942, arranged for Bobby to attend a studio audition, and he was given a tiny part in "**LOST ANGEL**". Even this was enough for people to notice something fresh and special about him, and he was signed up by 20th-Century Fox.

His early films included "**IDENTITY UNKNOWN**", a title that was to prove ominous. He went on to win Critics' Awards for his performances in "**SONG OF THE SOUTH**" (a semi-animated Disney, based on the "Uncle Remus" stories), "**SO DEAR TO MY HEART**" (boy and black lamb) and "**THE WINDOW**" (cry-wolf tale of a child who witnesses a murder but is not believed) - all these made before he was twelve. He was equally endearing in grubby denims or in



By Thunder! The next one o' you lubbers as cries out "Who's a pretty boy then"...

velvet and lace.

Source: Film Illustrated Monthly

He went on to play Jim Hawkins to the legendary, eye-rolling Long John Silver of Robert Newton, though this was one of his less interesting efforts, perhaps cowed by the magnificent ham of his companion. And, at 15, he was the voice of Disney's "**PETER PAN**".

In his mid teens, Driscoll was still a handsome fellow, but the ground was crumbling under his feet. Suddenly Walt Disney had no further plans for him, nor did anyone else. For the next five years the only job he got was in a Colonial-period piece called "**THE SCARLET COAT**" (55). In 1956 he got married - and was arrested on a narcotics charge, which was to be the first of many. In 1958 came his last movie, a teenage gang melodrama called "**THE PARTY CRASHERS**". His lead in this mediocre affair wasn't among his happiest.

The year after, Bobby was jailed as a heroin addict. Then came a curious incident with a handgun, a robbery charge, and a six-month jail sentence for drugs and forgery. In his statement to the court he said he had been

experimenting with drugs since he was 17, and at the time had the money to pay for it. Now he was hooked and broke.

The last five years of Bobby Driscoll's life are a sad blur of addiction, mostly spent in hippie circles of New York's Lower East Side. His family and friends lost sight of him for ever. In March 1968 a young man's body was found by some children playing in an empty tenement. There was no identification, but there were needle marks and there were "certain sub-stances" in what was left of the bloodstream. The body went into a pauper's grave.

When, a year or so later, Bobby's mother renewed her appeals to the FBI to find her missing son, the unidentified man's fingerprints were among those compared with Bobby's. They were a perfect match, and so the mystery was solved - just after his father's death."

Archive review pending.

Some of Disney's early live action films - particularly the ones shot outside the US - were among the studio's best. One would be hard pressed to think of a recent production to rival the popularity of "**MARY POPPINS**", saccharine as it was, while Disney's "**THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER**" (62) is for my money the best (film) version to date. These productions were in the can before the corporation ethos took its toll and began churning out family fodder to a very undemanding template. Not all of their early classic treatments were an unmitigated delight - a stultifying "**KIDNAPPED**" in 1960, a wet "**SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON**" the same year, and a lifeless remake of the German children's classic "**EMIL AND THE DETECTIVES**" in 64 - but even these acquire a lustre of sorts when we see the *third* sequel to "**HONEY I SHRUNK THE KIDS**" creaking off the automated production line.

See also "**TREASURE ISLAND - GENERAL NOTE**" for details of the twenty-plus other adaptations, and subject index under **DISNEY**, **HISTORY**, **KIDS OUTWIT THE CROOKS**, **SEAFARING / PIRACY**, **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS** and **TREASURE HUNTS**.



Never come between a cabin boy and his apples

Source: The Moving Picture Boy