

“It’s a Wonderful Life”

Christmas came early to our house this year: not in the shape of that awful Father Christmas outside the Bridge Hotel who counts down the days to Christmas just as you are returning from your summer holiday! Rather instead, by way of another screening of my favourite Christmas movie: “It’s a Wonderful Life” this time in August!



In case there happens still to be some unsuspecting person on the planet who has not seen this movie, I should mention that the film stars James Stewart in the central role of George Bailey; a man who forsakes his own ambitions to go to university and then travel the world, in order to safeguard the family “Building & Loan” business, following the untimely death of his father. George is aware that unless he steps into his father’s shoes, the business will fall into the hands of the greedy and ‘Scrooge’ like villain – Mr. Potter (played

superbly by Lionel Barrymore); to the detriment of the ordinary working people of ‘Bedford Falls.’ The film follows the life of George, recalling incidents from his childhood days; his marriage to Mary (played sensitively by Hedda Hopper) and their eventual family; through events such as the “the Great Crash” of 1929; the Second World War; and finally on to the dramatic climax of the film as George faces bankruptcy and prison when the firm’s takings are mislaid by one of it’s employees. It is at this point in the film that George’s attempt at suicide is foiled by an elderly angel with the name of Clarence (played by Henry Travers), being sent down to earth in order to show George that he has not been a failure and that his “wonderful life” has done so much good and touched the lives of so many others.

Although nominated for two Academy Awards, and regarded by Capra as his “greatest film”, the film was not financially successful and ended up \$500,000 in the red! A lot of the critics dismissed the film as being ‘sentimental’ and failed to appreciate that the reason it is so moving is that it “ventures into the heart of darkness and despair” (Christopher Tookey). James Stewart, who regarded it as his favourite film, gives a performance of outstanding range and emotional conviction. Ironically, it has been television, and in particular the BBC (who seem to schedule it every year at Christmas time), that has brought the film to the attention of a wider audience and even succeeded in returning the film to the cinema network in 1997; more than 50 years after its first release!

The idea hit upon by Clarence, of showing the central character just what life would have been like for his friends and loved ones, and indeed most of the townsfolk of Bedford Falls, had he never existed, is for me the most heart-warming and thought provoking part of the film. Without giving away the ending it is also the part of the film that never fails to bring a tear to my eye. The film is a great reminder of how all our deeds and words can affect the lives of others and is something I have thought about recently following the death of our dear friend David ‘Dave’ Loosley. Holy Cross audiences may best remember Dave as the man who sang ‘All I want is a Proper Cup of Coffee’ and who along with his musical colleagues, Pat and Pauline, took part in numerous fund-raising concerts held at the church; including the very first ‘Crisis’ concert.

Dave, was a loving husband and father, who was also blessed with creative skills in the form of his music and in later years his ability to paint wonderful pictures. This brought great enjoyment and pleasure to many people; but perhaps Dave's greatest gifts were his ability to be a friend to so many



people in the community and be always there to help them. The phrase "Dave will fix it" was almost synonymous with the man himself. It was thus not surprising that at both his funeral and his recent tribute concert, that so many people whose lives had been enriched by knowing Dave, were in attendance. Dave was not a believer in any religious faith, but I always regarded him as being the most Christian atheist I have ever known!

Jacky and Dave

As Christmas approaches, perhaps we should all think about the way we conduct our own lives, and how much "comfort and joy" we bring to others. On Christmas Day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, it would be appropriate to contemplate how different the world would be today, if He had not come amongst us. Now there's food for thought! Have a "Wonderful Life" and Christmas too.

Alan Kingshott

SERIOUS CHRISTMAS CAROL

Jesus's birthday, celebrate with glee,
Jesus and Mary and Joseph and me.
Glory to God and the Angels too!
I welcome him here on Earth – wouldn't you?

Jesus's birthday brings grace to mankind.
A miracle - creator incarnate we find.
A magician who magicked himself we all saw.
Growing and grinning down there in the straw.

Jesus's birthday is a sacred mystery.
A single event now part of history.
May greetings redouble from near and from far,
As we kneel by the crib and sing Hallelujah!

Richard Jameson

