



A Matter of Life and Death



Notes

Vital Statistics

Director Michael Powell born Kent 1905
& Emeric Pressburger born 1902 Hungary
Released March 1947, Eagle Lion (UK)
Running Time 104 mins
Genre - Drama/Fantasy

Synopsis

Returning to England from a bombing run in May 1945, pilot Peter Carter's plane is damaged and his parachute ripped to shreds. After ensuring that his crew has bailed out safely, he's resigned to the fact that he will go down with his plane. He gets on the radio, and talks to June, a young American woman working for the US Army Air Force and feels a connection with her. He then jumps from the plane and wakes up in the surf. He believes it was his time to die, but there was a mix-up in heaven. By the time his Conductor catches up with him 20 hours later, Peter and June have met and fallen in love. This changes everything, and since it happened through no fault of his own, Peter argues that heaven owes him a second chance. Heaven agrees to a trial to decide his fate.

Notes

Did you know?

- The film was originally released in the US under the title 'Stairway to Heaven'.
- For the trial and other scenes set in the other world, over 5,000 extras were used, including real R.A.F. crews, Red Cross nurses and members of the Women's Army Auxilary Corps.
- Although there was extensive pre-production, the movie actually completed filming in three months. Twenty nine sets were used and it cost an estimated £320,000.
- The first scene shot was David Niven washing up on the beach. Originally planned to fade in from black, Michael Powell decided on the spot that he didn't want to use this effect. Instead, the Cinematographer, Jack Cardiff, deliberately breathed right onto the lens, which fogged the glass for a few seconds until it evaporated. The Director loved the idea and used it for the shot.

Notes

Tasks

- This film includes an amazing prop - the huge escalator. How do you think the set builders and director worked together to make this look realistic?
- What about the sound in the film - can you identify any dialogue scenes where you think that sound recordings would have been difficult?

Notes