

# Grant's screwball comedies play up slapstick

**Gray Faces**  
by  
**Michael Stock**

Do NOT — I repeat — DO NOT leave your house on Wednesday! Turner Network Television — Lincoln's channel 31 — is offering two masterpieces within hours.

TNT will air "His Girl Friday," at 9 a.m. and "The Awful Truth" at 1 p.m.

Both films are in the hilarious vein of the screwball comedy, which became famous in the '30s for its clever use of slapstick, wordplay and social bites.

The screwball comedies featured wacky families, scatterbrained heroines — usually featuring Claudette Colbert, Carole Lombard, Jean Arthur, Katharine Hepburn and Irene Dunne — and playboys, including Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, William Powell, and Cary Grant.

"The Awful Truth," a 1937 film, featured the perfectly matched Dunne and Grant as Lucy and Jerry Warriner.

After a bout with marital misunderstandings and mistaken identities, the Warriners decide to divorce — getting into a custody battle over their pet terrier, Mr. Smith. The dog-actor is perhaps better known as Asta, Nick and Nora Charles' dog in "The Thin Man" series.

The film takes its form following Daniel Leeson (Ralph Bellamy) in his quest to marry Lucy (Dunne), and Jerry's (Grant) engagement to Barbara Vance (Esther Dale).

Some of the finest scenes in the film are found in the condescending pleasure that Grant derives from making Bellamy's native Oklahoman character look like an idiot and from Grant's jealous suspicions concerning his wife (Dunne).

"How can I believe you? The car broke down? People stopped believing that before cars started breaking down!" Grant exclaims.

"Well, the car was very old," Dunne offers.



Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Cary Grant and Irene Dunne star in "The Awful Truth." The movie will be shown on TNT, Lincoln's channel 31, next week.

"Yeah? Well, so is his story," Grant retorts.

"The Awful Truth" derives its story from a 1922 play by Arthur Richman. It was remade as a 1925 silent film with Agnes Ayers and Warner Baxter and as a 1929 "talkie" starring Ina Claire and Henry Daniell.

Much of the success of the film is owed to the improvisational style of producer/director Leo McCarey, who won Best Director Oscar for the film.

Improvisational is perhaps an understatement. When shooting began, none of the cast even had a script to work from!

"We shot that in less than six weeks without a script. Leo knew all the time what he was going to do, but he was the only one who did," Bellamy

recalled of the film.

The film collected nominations for Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress for Dunne, Best Supporting Actor for Bellamy, and ironically, for Vina Delmar's "screenplay," which never really existed.

"His Girl Friday" likewise starred Grant, only this time with Rosalind Russell.

This 1941 film was directed by Howard Hawks who had worked in the screwball vein with Grant before in the 1938 "Bringing Up Baby," starring Grant and Hepburn.

"His Girl Friday," like "The Awful Truth," features Grant's problems surrounding his wife's demands for a divorce. Again, Grant's wife finds

herself being romanticized by a Bellamy character, Bruce Baldwin.

Set in the office of The Morning Post, Russell's characterization of Hildy Johnson is reminiscent of Myrna Loy's outspoken, sparkling character in "Manhattan Melodrama" (1934) and in "The Thin Man" series.

Grant is incredible — with the film hanging on his every word. Every line is extremely quick and succinct — in typical Grant fashion.

"I suppose I proposed to you," Russell offers.

"Well, you practically did — making goo-goo eyes at me for two years until I broke down. And I still claim I was tight (drunk) the night I

proposed to you! If you'd have been a gentleman, you'd have forgotten all about it. But not you!" Grant exclaims.

"His Girl Friday" is a much more socially conscious film than "The Awful Truth," calling the attention of the media to the problem of political corruption and graft.

Much of the film's plot centers on Earl Williams, a man sentenced to death for his accidental shooting of a black police officer. Walter Burns' (Grant) paper is championing Williams, claiming that the governor will not grant him a reprieve in an effort to secure the black vote.

Like "The Awful Truth," much of "His Girl Friday" gains its energy through the improvised lines and actions of Russell and Grant, allowing Grant to even say his real name.

"Listen — the last man who said that to me was Archie Leach — just before he got his throat cut!" Grant said.

Carole Lombard was the first choice for the role of Hildy, but studio head Cohn couldn't meet her loan-out price. However, Grant didn't seem to mind, becoming lifetime friends with Russell. Both called the film one of their favorites.

"His Girl Friday" was the second of four films adapted from the play "The Front Page" by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. The first version was made in 1931 and starred Adolphe Menjou, Pat O'Brien and Mary Brian.

"Friday" was the only version to portray one of the reporters as a woman — through the wonderful insight of Howard Hawks — making this version the most successful and the definitive version.

Considering the fact that the two movies would cost almost \$100 to buy, and that no rental places in town carry the film — coupled with the fact that both films are wonderful classics . . .

Well? What better reason do you need to skip class?

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## Awards

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against some formidable competition — Meryl Streep, Kathy Bates, Anjelica Huston, Joanne Woodward.

But Roberts is a talented actress who can more than hold her own in this company. And don't overlook the fact that she was nominated for Best Supporting Actress for her work in "Steel Magnolias" last year.

As well, the Academy has developed a pattern over the past few years of awarding Best Actress honors to the more unlikely choices. Examples of this include Cher for "Moonstruck" and Jodie Foster for "The Accused." Roberts could very well follow in the "she was good but I didn't think she'd win" mold and walk away with Best Actress honors for "Pretty Woman."

Other Oscar surprises included

Richard Harris' Best Actor nomination for his work in the Irish film "The Field" and Diane Ladd's nomination for Best Supporting Actress in "Wild at Heart."

In no real surprise to anyone, "Dances With Wolves" swept the nominations with 12. The three-hour epic, about an Army man and a group of Sioux Indians, was nominated for Best Picture, making it the first western in 22 years to receive a nomination for Best Picture. The film's director and star, Kevin Costner, was nominated for both Best Director and Best Actor honors. Mary McDonnell, Costner's love interest in the film, earned a nomination as Best Supporting Actress, while Graham Greene, as the film's Native American patriarch Kicking Bird, was nominated for Best Supporting Actor.

The film was also nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Cine-

matography, Best Film Editing, Best Original Score and Best Sound.

Two films, touted before their releases as sure Oscar bets, were largely ignored by the Academy. "The Bonfire of the Vanities," a miscast, botched attempt of a film from Tom Wolfe's insightful book, failed to get any nominations; "Havana," the Robert Redford-Lena Olin bomb, got one nomination for Best Original Score. Mel Gibson's Hamlet was ignored, as was Penny Marshall for her directing work in "Awakenings."

Below, a few guesses for the winners. The awards will be held on March 25 at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. Billy Crystal will host.

**BEST PICTURE:** "Dances With Wolves," in a landslide.

**BEST ACTOR:** Kevin Costner for "Dances With Wolves." That's it. No

one else should possibly win this.

**BEST ACTRESS:** I admit it. I sincerely doubted that she would be nominated. But I'll go out on a shaky limb and say Julia Roberts will get the nod for "Pretty Woman."

**BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR:** Bruce Davison for "Longtime Companion," in a dead heat with Joe Pesci, for "GoodFellas."

**BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS:** Whoopi Goldberg, for her role as an offbeat psychic in "Ghost," will just edge out the talented Mary McDonnell, "Dances With Wolves."

**BEST DIRECTOR:** Kevin Costner, "Dances With Wolves." And as good as Costner was — and as much as he deserves to win — Penny Marshall should at least have been nominated

in this category.

**ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY:** Definitely Whit Stillman's "Metropolitan," a charming tale about NYC debutantes and their life struggles. Stillman's captivating story brings to mind a young Woody Allen or a sweeter J.D. Salinger.

**ADAPTED SCREENPLAY:** Michael Blake, "Dances With Wolves."

**BEST SONG:** The Academy really should avoid awarding the prize this year, as most — if not all — of the choices are putrid excuses for songs. Not only that, it's scary to think that Jon Bon Jovi is nominated for an Academy Award. "I'm Checkin' Out," from "Postcards from the Edge," is the least distasteful of the choices. It should win.

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## Kronos

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Harrington said.

This problem with classifying Kronos into one musical genre gives the band much of its allure.

Often the band spices up its show with lights, mechanical gears and complex stage designs. The group's "post-modern" image offers audiences more than just sound.

"When people come to a Kronos concert, they know they will hear something that requires a reaction,

even if they don't like what they are hearing. You can't just sit back and relax," Jeanrenaud said.

Kronos argues that playing the classics is a waste of creativity — with all of the new music that is available.

"There's a place in American music

that exists, somewhere between blues and rock 'n' roll — a place where there's an incredible amount of intensity and energy. I'd like to bring that into our music. Some of Hendrix is like that, Bo Diddley. There's a quality of sexual, rebellious-type energy that I really like — a kind of stance I

appreciate," Harrington said.

Tickets for Kronos are \$20 and \$16; tickets for UNL students and youth 18 and under are half-price. They are available at the Lied Box Office on 12th and R, 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. weekdays.

## Sale

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is still out on what kind of an impact the recession could have in the long run."

One of the more effective marketing strategies used by Twisters to help keep sales steady "is to stick with low-ball prices on new releases," McCallum said. "The other thing we do that I think can really encourage buyers is that we guarantee everything on sale as a buy it, try it deal with absolutely no risk," McCallum said.

Current music sales are outstripping last year's sales at this time, according to Denys Shafer, assistant manager of Music Avenue in Gateway Shopping Center.

"Sales are generally lower after Christmas and after everyone's returned to school," Shafer said, "but we're beating last year's figures."

Though some economists attribute the gulf war as a cause of the domestic recession, Shafer says so far the war has had a positive effect on music sales.

"War promotes a lot of emotions," Shafer said. "People buy things that remind them of the experience. If they're for it, they're buying patriotic music, and if they're anti-war, they're buying John Lennon and peace music."

If the war continues, however, Shafer said sales could decline.

"After a while, I'd assume it could affect us, and things may slow down. But definitely not currently."

Pete Hjermstad, merchandise

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**Sales are generally lower after Christmas.**

Shafer  
assistant manager of Music  
Award

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manager at Target, 333 N. 48th St., said that "for the month, sales have not been better or worse one way or the other than in comparison to last year."

Music is definitely susceptible to recession, Hjermstad said. He said he thought movie sales had a better chance of succeeding in an economic slowdown than sales of cassettes and CDs.

"People see a gain out of purchasing a movie for the family rather than taking the whole gang out to a theater, but the same just doesn't hold true for music," Hjermstad said. "You can see it on TV with videos or just listen to it on the radio, so it just doesn't have the same applicability as a movie in this situation."

The marketing strategy Target currently is using is the same one used last year at this time, to "latch onto the Grammy nominees and take advantage of it," Hjermstad said.

As far as the Persian Gulf war inspiring music sales, Hjermstad said, "I haven't seen anything like that. I think that's a little far-fetched."

"Overall, there's nothing showing me that anything's different," Hjermstad said. "There's certainly been no major increase, but there hasn't been

a decline in music sales, either."

If the war is short, Hjermstad said he thought consumer buying confidence would increase and "we could have a positive impact through sales," instead of a decline in music sales.

According to Jeff Randall of Project Import Records, 122 N. 14th St., the recession already has had an adverse effect on music sales.

"Definitely, business has been real slow," Randall said. "The recession has put a dent in us."

The theory that the music industry is somewhat recession-proof, Randall said, is simply false. "That idea hasn't helped our cash register too much," Randall said.

Project Import relies on college students for most of its business, and generally sells a variety of independent label releases.