

The Blue Bird

US / U.S.S.R. : 1976 : dir. George Cukor : 20th Century Fox / Lenfilm : 99 min
prod: Paul Maslansky & Edward Lewis : scr: Hugh Whitemore & Alfred Hayes
: dir.ph.: Freddie Young & Ionas Gritzus

Todd Lookinland; Patsy Kensit
Elizabeth Taylor; Jane Fonda; Ava Gardner; Cicely Tyson; George Cole; Will Geer;
Robert Morley; Harry Andrews; Mona Washbourne; Richard Pearson

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	€	M	⊗	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
5904	3.5	9	1	1,023	3	-	-	-	-	No	unseen



Détente made flesh – Todd Lookinland rides the whole unwieldy mess without turning a hair
Source: The Moving Picture Boy

Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Posh, star-studded but heavy-handed fantasy based on Maeterlinck's play about children seeking the bluebird of happiness. The first co-production between the US and Russia is unbelievably draggy. ** "

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review - identical to above

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"Abortive remake... widely touted as the first Russian-American co-production, but sabotaged by a flabby script, unsuitable casting and unresolved production problems. (Elizabeth Taylor plays Mother, Maternal Love, Light and the Witch.) "

"It works so hard at making history that it forgets to make sense."

- David Sterritt, **Christian Science Monitor**

"If you have any naughty children you want to punish, take them to "THE BLUE BIRD" and make them sit all the way through it."

- William Wolf, **CUE**

"It turns a work for adults that children can enjoy into a charade for children that must sicken adults." - John Simon, **New Yorker**

"Senile and interminable"

- Stephen Farber, **New West**

"Lavishly done; limited box office" - **Variety**

The Critics' Film Guide review:

"Woodcutter's children (Todd Lookinland, Patsy Kensit) seek the blue bird of happiness. Remake of the 1939 Shirley Temple film, and a massive flop. Less a blue bird than a red-faced turkey. 1/10 "

"The film gives evidence of being heavily edited, probably in a Cuisinart... Elizabeth Taylor, Ava Gardner and Jane Fonda camp it up like movie queens on an overseas press junket."

- Jay Cocks, **Time**

"A mixture of Soviet ineptitude and the American belief that the grotesque expenditure of dollars can set anything a-right."

- **Daily Express**

"Patsy Kensit is a cute Mytyl, but not much of an actress... and further cursed with reminding one of Goldie Hawn. Let us pray that she outgrows it." - John Simon

The Films of 20th Century Fox review:

"A reworking of Maeterlinck's fantasy, filmed as a Shirley Temple feature in 1940 without great success and done here as an American-Russian production with even less success. Taylor appears in two roles, principally as the mother of the children looking for the bluebird of happiness. On their trip the children visit the worlds of the Dead, the Night, the Forest, Luxury and the Future. The visuals are impressive, but the telling is muddled and heavy-handed, rather than the light fantastic the story needs."

Excerpt from **The Good Film and Video Guide** review of the 1940 version:

"...The Cukor version, made amidst much publicity as a co-production with the USSR, is poorly conceived and has some dreadful performances, including that of Elizabeth Taylor in a triple role...."

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"A disappointing remake of the Shirley Temple fantasy. * "

Rating the Movies (1990) review:

"Détente comes to the movies, but the result is a disappointment. The first major Soviet-American co-production, filmed in Leningrad, is the classic fable about two children who search for the bluebird of happiness; the audience will find the pigeon of boredom. Taylor, Fonda, Gardner and Cicely Tyson appear briefly in cameo roles. The film is plagued with technical problems, dull dialogue and lacklustre sets. Directed by George Cukor, who should have known better. *1/2 "

The Time Out Film Guide review:

"Forget the alluring cast (incorporating some Russian dancers for the ballet sequences), this is a desperately pedestrian, hideously glitzy version of Maeterlinck's delicate fantasy about two kids and their quest for the blue bird of happiness. You'd never believe in a month of Sundays that Cukor directed it."

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

"Third film of the Maurice Maeterlinck novel (after 1918 and 1939)¹ takes spoiled peasant children Todd Lookinland (excellent, by the way) and Patsy Kensit on a dream trip from their humble abode through a fantasy world in search of the bluebird of happiness. Elizabeth Taylor's four roles include the dominant (and dazzling) one as (a) Light; as mother (b) she's uncomfortable; as witch (c) she's fun to guess at; as maternal love (d) she's elegantly simple and believable. Jane Fonda does Night, the princess of darkness, with a flair, while Ava Gardner is extremely effective as Luxury. Nobody's going to laugh in ridicule at any of it (it's that good), but nobody's going to be strongly moved (it's that bad)."

Nambla Bulletin vol.7/5 – June 1986 – media note:

"...The Nov/Dec 1979 "Boys in the Performing Arts" was the last issue. Cover boy Todd Lookinland, who had debuted on "The Brady Bunch" (he was Mike's brother), made "THE BLUE BIRD" in Russia. Blue-grey eyes..."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Todd Lookinland:

"Todd, younger brother of tough Mike Lookinland (of "The Brady Bunch" and "THE TOWERING INFERNO"), had made many TV appearances, for instance in the "Petroceili" series, before being cast as Tyltyl in the ill-fated remake of Maeterlick's "BLUE BIRD", which was filmed in the Soviet Union with Elizabeth Taylor doubling (rather well) as Mother and Witch. Most of the other players betray an

embarrassing lack of conviction, and the magnificently expressive faces of Todd (and of Patsy Kensit as his kid sister Mityl) are wasted on this charmless magic. In his later teens Todd appeared in "**BEULAH LAND**" (80), "**EVERY STRAY DOG AND KID**" (81), and "**THE KARATE KID**" (84), as well as the TV serial "**The New Land**".

[no listing in "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

¹ Fourth – the first version was made in Britain, 1910

No further information currently available.

See also "**BADKONAK-E SEFID**" and "**BASHU**" - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.