

TKAM – Variety Original Review

Variety Movie Guide 2000

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TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

1962, 129 minutes, US b/w

Dir Robert Mulligan Prod Alan J. Pakula Scr Horton Foote

Ph Russell Harlan Ed Aaron Stell Mus Elmer Bernstein

Art Henry Bumstead

Act Gregory Peck, Mary Badham, Phillip Alford, John Megna, Robert Duvall, Brock Peters (Universal)

Harper Lee's highly regarded first novel has been artfully and delicately translated to the screen.

Horton Foote's trenchant screenplay, Robert Mulligan's sensitive and instinctively observant direction and a host of exceptional performances are all essential threads in the rich, provocative fabric.

As it unfolds on the screen, To Kill A Mockingbird bears with it, oddly enough, alternating overtones of Faulkner, Twain, Steinbeck, Hitchcock, and an Our Gang comedy. A telling indictment of racial prejudice in the Deep South, it is also a charming tale of the emergence of two youngsters from the realm of wild childhood fantasy to the horizon of maturity, responsibility, compassion and social insight.

It is the story of a wise, gentle, soft-spoken Alabama lawyer (Gregory Peck) entrusted with the formidable dual chore of defending a Negro falsely accused of rape while raising his own impressionable, imaginative, motherless, children in a hostile, terrifying

environment of bigotry and economic depression.

For Peck, it is an especially challenging role, requiring him to project through a veneer of civilized restraint and resigned, rational compromise the fires of social indignation and humanitarian concern that burn within the character. He not only succeeds, but makes it appear effortless, etching a portrayal of strength, dignity, intelligence. But by no means in this entirely, or even substantially Peck's film. Two youngsters just about steal it away, although the picture marks their screen bows. Both nine-year-old Mary Badham and 13-year-old Phillip Alford, each of whom hails from the South, make striking debuts as Peck's two impressible, mischievous, ubiquitous, irresistibly childish children.

There are some top-notch supporting performances. Especially sharp and effective are Frank Overton, Estelle Evans, James Anderson and Robert Duvall. Brock Peters has an outstanding scene as the innocent, ill-fated Negro on trial for his life.

1962: Best Actor (Gregory Peck), Adapted Screenplay, B & W Art Direction

Nominations: Best Picture, Director, Supp Actress (Mary Badham), B&W Cinematography, Original Music Score