

...and may all your Christmases be white!



Michael Curtiz's *White Christmas* (1954) is a perennial holiday favorite. That it treads the familiar ground of two friends making sojourn to a quaint New England inn (a plot device already explored to more enduring and poignant effect in Paramount's own *Holiday Inn* a decade earlier) is a moot point. Aware of the success of both the song and the previous film the studio and Irving Berlin sought to rekindle as much of the stardust and magic of the previous effort as possible. Reportedly Berlin nervously paced back and forth during the recording session of his beloved holiday classic until Crosby approached the composer between takes to

assure him that there was 'nothing' that could possibly hurt either the song or the film from continuing on as a celebrated bit of Americana.

Originally Fred Astaire was supposed to reunite with Crosby. But his self imposed retirement precluded his involvement in the film. The studio next approached veteran dancer Donald O'Connor, who also turned the project down. Ultimately tour de force comedian Danny Kaye got the part and made the most of his hamming in several deliciously camp sequences. Only two songs from *Holiday Inn* survive in this loosely based remake, the title song and 'Abraham' originally sung in black face but re-orchestrated as a jazzy pas deux between lanky Vera Ellen and rehearsal instructor (Les Clark) for this film.



All of Ellen's costumes had to be designed with a high collar to conceal her neck which had aged severely due to the actress' chronic battle with anorexia. If the inn in *White Christmas* looks oddly familiar – it is. Portions of the set belong to the same scenery used in *Holiday Inn*. Paramount was gambling quite a bit on the film. It was their first venture into widescreen with their patented VistaVision process and a big budget musical besides. The resulting film was a colossal success – easily becoming Paramount's biggest and brightest money maker of the year.





PLOT: While stationed in Europe during the WWII Bob Wallace (Crosby) meets Phil Davis (Kaye), a private desperate to break into show business. When Davis accidentally saves Wallace's life, Wallace decides to give Davis his big break once the war is over. The break snowballs into a highly successful partnership – one that transforms Bob into a workaholic that Phil eventually grows tired of. He tells Bob, “I want you to get married. I want you to have nine children. And if you only spent five minutes with them every day I'd at least have time to go out and get a massage or something!”



Although prospects for settling down seem rare in the theatre, things begin to look up when Bob and Phil meet Judy (Vera Ellen) and Betty Haynes (Rosemary Clooney); a sister act performing at Novellos. After some cajoling Bob relents to Phil's request at joining the girls on their trip to Vermont where they are scheduled to perform at a rustic lodge. However, upon arriving to 'New England's winter playground' the troupe discover that no snow has fallen – placing the tourist trade and Betty and Judy's jobs in jeopardy.



The inn in question is presided over by Bob and Phil's retired commander, Gen. Waverly (Dean Jagger). The housekeeper, Emma (Mary Wickes) confides in the group that the general is going broke fast. Bob and Phil decide to import their entire Broadway smash to the inn – a move that seems to have everyone buzzing until Betty misinterprets the move as a shameless 'plug' in free advertising for the show. Disheartened at the prospect that Bob is only helping the general for the money, Betty departs for New York. However, her faith is reaffirmed when she learns that no such deal has been brokered. Betty returns on Christmas Eve. The troupe surprises the general with a gala of all his old army buddies, it begins to snow and, voila – it's a 'white Christmas' after all.



Paramount's DVD transfer of White Christmas is not entirely what one would expect of a film so deservingly ingrained in our collective cultural consciousness. Though the anamorphic widescreen image exhibits relatively bright colors, the image in totem appears to be softly focused. Colors are often slightly pasty looking. Age related artifacts are present throughout.

The audio has been remixed to stereo, but has a hollow tinny characteristic – particularly in dialogue – that is unnatural sounding. The mono mix is also included. Extras include an all too brief reminiscence with the late Rosemary Clooney. Clooney also provides a running commentary throughout the film. The theatrical trailer is included as well.