

Guinness Choice

Bringing Up Baby



POISON IVY KATHARINE HEPBURN DROPPED HER COOL DEMEANOUR TO PLAY IT FOR LAUGHS IN *BRINGING UP BABY*, HELPING TO OFFSET HER 'BOX-OFFICE POISON' REPUTATION

102 mins, USA, b/w

Dir Howard Hawks

Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn,
Charlie Ruggles, May Robson



Howard Hawks's classic screwball comedy flopped at the box office when released, but set the pace for many films that followed. Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn are the perfect comedy couple, each playing against type. Grant is a stuffy palaeontologist whose dinosaur bone is stolen by scatty socialite Hepburn's pet dog (played by Asta from the *Thin Man* films). Grant is desperate to retrieve the bone in order to complete a

reconstruction. He is also trying to secure the funding for his museum from a wealthy sponsor, and is due to wed his disapproving and bossy assistant. Hepburn, deciding that she likes Grant, tries to stop him achieving all three.

The plot is nonsensical, with Grant somehow bamboozled into looking after Hepburn's pet leopard, Baby, serenading the creature with impromptu renderings of 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love', forced to dress in a frilly negligée ('I just went gay all of a sudden!') and to spend an afternoon digging up the back garden of Hepburn's country home before ending up in jail along with the rest of the cast. Hepburn

relishes her role as the scheming rich girl looking for ways to keep Grant to herself, from stealing his ball during a golf match to posing as a gangster's moll when the pair are arrested. Her performance went some way towards rehabilitating her career in Hollywood after she was labelled 'box-office poison' a couple of years earlier. Hawks keeps the pace fast and furious throughout, and the cast's timing is spot-on. Despite the constant pratfalls demanded by his goofball role, Grant still manages to exude his usual charm. His mounting frustration is almost tangible, and the scene in which he inadvertently tears Hepburn's dress off in a

restaurant must surely go down as one of the funniest moments in cinematic history.

The supporting cast is excellent, notably May Robson as Hepburn's aunt and Grant's potential sponsor, and Charlie Ruggles as her big-game-hunter companion, who is thrilled at the opportunity to go leopard hunting until he meets one in the flesh. Hawks enjoys poking fun at various institutions, including psychiatry, the upper classes and the police. He and Grant went on to hone the art of fast-paced comedy still further with *His Girl Friday* (1940), but for many this example of their work remains the best of its kind.