

# COMEDY FILMS

• **Comedy Films** are "make 'em laugh" films designed to elicit laughter from the audience. Comedies are light-hearted dramas, crafted to amuse, entertain, and provoke enjoyment. The comedy genre humorously exaggerates the situation, the language, action, and characters. Comedies observe the deficiencies, foibles, and frustrations of life, providing merriment and a momentary escape from day-to-day life. They usually have happy endings, although the humor may have a serious or pessimistic side.

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## Types of Comedies:

Comedies usually come in two general formats: comedian-led (with well-timed gags, jokes, or sketches) and situation-comedies that are told within a narrative. Both comedy elements may appear together and/or overlap. Comedy hybrids commonly exist with other major genres, such as musical-comedy, horror-comedy, and comedy-thriller. Comedies have also been classified in various *subgenres*, such as romantic comedy, crime/caper comedy, sports comedy, teen or coming-of-age comedy, social-class comedy, military comedy, fish-out-of-water comedy, and gross-out comedy. There are also many different kinds, types, or forms of comedy, including:

### (1) Slapstick

Slapstick was predominant in the earliest silent films, since they didn't need sound to be effective, and they were popular with non-English speaking audiences in metropolitan areas. The term *slapstick* was taken from the wooden sticks that clowns slapped together to promote audience applause.

This is primitive and universal comedy with broad, aggressive, physical, and *visual* action, including harmless or painless cruelty and violence, horseplay, and often vulgar sight gags (e.g., a custard pie in the face, collapsing houses, a fall in the ocean, a loss of trousers or skirts, runaway crashing cars, people chases, etc). Slapstick often required exquisite timing and well-honed performance skills. It



was typical of the films of Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, W. C. Fields, The Three Stooges, the stunts of Harold Lloyd in [Safety Last \(1923\)](#), and Mack Sennett's silent era shorts (for example, the Keystone Kops). Slapstick evolved and was reborn in the screwball comedies of the 1930s and 1940s (see further below).

More recent feature film examples include the comedic mad chase for treasure film by many top comedy stars in Stanley Kramer's **It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963)**, French actor/director Jacques Tati's mostly dialogue-free **Mr. Hulot's Holiday (1953, Fr.)**, the Blake Edwards series of *Pink Panther* films with Peter Sellers as bumbling Inspector Clouseau (especially in the second film of the series, **A Shot in the Dark (1964)** with Herbert Lom as Clouseau's slow-burning boss and Burt Kwouk as his valet and martial arts judo-specialist), and Jim Carrey in **Ace Ventura, Pet Detective (1993)** and **The Mask**



(1994). Cartoons are the quintessential form of slapstick, i.e., the Roadrunner and Wile E. Coyote, and others.

## (2) Deadpan

This form of comedy was best exemplified by the expression-less face of stoic comic hero Buster Keaton.

## (3) Verbal comedy

This was classically typified by the cruel verbal wit of W. C. Fields, the sexual innuendo of Mae West, or the verbal absurdity of dialogues in the Marx Brothers films, or later by the self-effacing, thoughtful humor of Woody Allen's literate comedies.

## (4) Screwball

Screwball comedies, a sub-genre of romantic comedy films, was predominant from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s. The word 'screwball' denotes lunacy, craziness, eccentricity, ridiculousness, and erratic behavior.

These films combine farce, slapstick, and the witty dialogue of more sophisticated films. In general, they are light-hearted, frothy, often sophisticated, romantic stories, commonly focusing on a battle of the sexes in which both co-protagonists try to outwit or outmaneuver each other. They usually include visual gags (with some slapstick), wacky characters, identity reversals (or cross-dressing), a fast-paced improbable plot, and rapid-fire, wise-cracking dialogue and one-liners reflecting sexual tensions and conflicts in the blossoming of a relationship (or the patching up of a marriage) for an attractive couple with on-going, antagonistic differences (such as in [The Awful Truth \(1937\)](#)). Some of the stars often present in screwball comedies included Katharine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, Claudette Colbert, Jean Arthur, Irene Dunne, Myrna Loy, Ginger Rogers, Cary Grant, William Powell, and Carole Lombard.



The couple is often a fairly eccentric, but well-to-do female interested in romance and a generally passive, emasculated, or weak male who resists romance, such as in [★Bringing Up Baby \(1938\)](#), or a sexually-frustrated, humiliated male who is thwarted in romance, as in Howard Hawks' farce **I Was a Male War Bride (1949)**. The zany but glamorous characters often have contradictory desires for individual identity *and* for union in a romance under the most unorthodox, insane or implausible circumstances (such as in Preston Sturges' classic screwball comedy and battle of the sexes [★The Lady Eve \(1941\)](#)). However, after a twisting and turning plot, romantic love usually triumphs in the end. (See more discussion later in this section.)

## (5) Black or Dark Comedy

These are dark, sarcastic, humorous, or sardonic stories that help us examine otherwise ignored darker serious, pessimistic subjects such as war, death, or illness. Two of the greatest black comedies ever made include the following: Stanley Kubrick's Cold War classic satire from a script by co-writer Terry Southern, [★Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb \(1964\)](#) that spoofed the insanity of political and



military institutions with Peter Sellers in a triple role (as a Nazi scientist, a British major, and the US President), and Robert Altman's **M\*A\*S\*H (1970)**, an irreverent, anti-war black comedy set during the Korean War. Another more recent classic black comedy was the Coen Brothers' violent and quirky story [Fargo \(1996\)](#) about a pregnant Midwestern police chief (Oscar-winning Frances McDormand) who solves a 'perfect crime' that went seriously wrong.

Hal Ashby's eccentric cult film **Harold and Maude (1972)** was an oddball love story and dark comedy about a suicidal 19 year-old (Bud Cort) and a quirky, widowed octogenarian (Ruth Gordon), with a great soundtrack score populated with songs by Cat Stevens. (See examples of other feature films below for more.) John Huston's satirical black comedy **Prizzi's Honor (1985)** starred Jack Nicholson as dimwitted Mafia hit man Charley Partanna for the East Coast Prizzi family, who fell in love with West Coaster Irene Walker (Kathleen Turner) - another mob's hitwoman. The film included an Oscar-winning performance from Anjelica Huston as the vengeful granddaughter of Nicholson's Don. Tim Burton's dark and imaginative haunted house comedy **Beetlejuice (1988)** featured Michael Keaton as the title character in a dream house occupied by newlywed spirits Geena Davis and Alec Baldwin. The shocking but watchable first film of Peter Berg, **Very Bad Things (1998)** told the dark and humorous story of a 'bachelor' weekend in Las Vegas gone bad for five guys when their hired stripper/prostitute was accidentally killed.

#### (6) **Parody or Spoof** - also **Satire, Lampoon** and **Farce**

These specific types of comedy (also called put-ons, send-ups, charades, lampoons, take-offs, jests, mockumentaries, etc.) are usually a humorous or anarchic take-off that ridicules, impersonates, punctures, scoffs at, and/or imitates (mimics) the style, conventions, formulas, characters (by caricature), or motifs of a serious work, film, performer, or genre, including:

- the Marx Brothers' satiric anti-war masterpiece ★ [Duck Soup \(1933\)](#) with anarchic humor
- the western spoof **Cat Ballou (1965)**
- Woody Allen's Japanese monster film parody **What's Up, Tiger Lily? (1966)**
- the 'genre' films of Mel Brooks (the quasi-western [Blazing Saddles \(1974\)](#), the quasi-horror film [Young Frankenstein \(1974\)](#), the inventive Hitchcock spoof/rip-off **High Anxiety (1977)**, the [Star Wars \(1977\)](#) spoof **Spaceballs (1987)**, and his swashbuckler send-up **Robin Hood: Men in Tights (1993)**)
- Herbert Ross' [Play It Again, Sam \(1972\)](#) poked fun at Woody Allen as an insecure nebbish-hero who worshipped an imaginary, trench-coated, archetypal tough-guy detective (a la Humphrey Bogart)
- **Silver Streak (1976)** - a comic thriller parody of Alfred Hitchcock's 'train' pictures, with Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor (their best film together) onboard the *Silver Streak* from LA to Chicago
- Neil Simon's scripts for **The Cheap Detective (1978)** and **Murder By Death (1978)** spoofed Agatha Christie detective films
- Jim Abrahams' and the Zuckers' revolutionary comedy **Airplane! (1980)** - a sophomoric parody of the earlier disaster series of



**Airport (1970)** films and the original **Zero Hour (1957)**; their **The Naked Gun (1988)** series parodied TV cop shows, and **Top Secret! (1984)** ridiculed Cold War agents and espionage spy films (and Elvis Presley films); Abrahams' military comedy **Hot Shots! (1991)** was a genre parody/spoof of **Top Gun (1986)**, while **Hot Shots! Part Deux (1993)** parodied **Rambo: First Blood Part II (1985)**

- in **The Freshman (1990)**, Marlon Brando (as Carmine Sabatini) poked fun - with brilliant parody - at his own characterization of Don Corleone in ★[The Godfather \(1972\)](#)
- Carl Reiner's **Fatal Instinct (1993)** spoofed suspense thrillers and murder mysteries such as [Basic Instinct \(1992\)](#)
- Gene Quintano's **Loaded Weapon I (1993)** made fun of **Lethal Weapon (1987)** as well as [The Silence of the Lambs \(1991\)](#), [Basic Instinct \(1992\)](#), and **Wayne's World (1992)**
- the **Austin Powers** films (**1997, 1999, 2002**) - parodies of the James Bond 007 films
- the **Scream** films (**1996, 1997, 2000**) - spoofs of slasher horror films
- Barry Sonnenfeld's **Men in Black (1997)** - a sci-fi comedy farce based on a comic book series that poked fun at alien invasion films, with Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith as government agents (with camaraderie similar to Mel Gibson and Danny Glover in the **Lethal Weapon** series) battling about 1500 Earth-dwelling, other-worldly extra-terrestrials in the New York area; a sequel appeared in 2002
- **Galaxy Quest (1999)**, about the cast (including Tim Allen, Alan Rickman, and Sigourney Weaver) of a 70s sci-fi TV series in reruns, this was a parody of sci-fi TV, **Star Trek** itself, and cultish "Trekkie" activities
- director Nora Ephron's romantic comedy **You've Got Mail (1998)** updated and paid homage to Ernst Lubitsch's classic **The Shop Around the Corner (1940)**, with leads Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan in their third teaming (after their previous hit with Ephron - **Sleepless in Seattle (1993)**), replacing James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan as feuding-by-email Manhattan bookstore owners
- **Last Action Hero (1993)** - a spoof of action films

This category may also include these widely diverse forms of *satire* - usually displayed as political or social commentary, for example:

- Billy Wilder's sex farce [The Seven Year Itch \(1955\)](#) - a parody of a conventional Hollywood romance
- Terry Gilliam's tasteless but hilarious **Monty Python's The Meaning of Life (1983)** and **The Life of Brian (1979)** - an irreverent parody of religious films
- the witty Monty Pythonesque **A Fish Called Wanda (1988)**, co-scripted by veteran John Cleese (with the character name of Archie Leach - named after Cary Grant's real name) and directed by veteran Charles Crichton (whose film career was responsible for such classics as **The Lavender Hill Mob (1951)**); it was both an acclaimed black comedy and caper farce about a search for a stolen cache of diamonds; the title referred to both a fish and the name of Jamie Lee Curtis' character
- writer/director Albert Brooks' satirical **Real Life (1979)** - a pseudo-documentary on 'real' small-town suburban family life
- Woody Allen's pseudo-documentary **Zelig (1983)** with its use of vintage historical clips to portray a human cipher or chameleon in various time periods

- Rob Reiner's largely-improvised show-biz mockumentary **This is Spinal Tap (1984)** about a non-existent British heavy metal rock band on tour of third-rate venues
- the serious-comedic political satire of Tim Robbins' pseudo-documentary (or fictional mockumentary) **Bob Roberts (1992)** about running for Senatorial office; **Tanner '88 (1988)** was a similar made-for-TV mini-series about a fictional Presidential candidate (Michael Murphy)
- Steven Soderbergh's **Schizopolis (1996)** - an irreverent, bizarre, and absurdist media satire
- Christopher Guest's **Waiting for Guffman (1996)** - an intelligent satirical parody (and mockumentary) about small-town 'drama queen' hopefuls

### Earliest Comedy:

Cinematic comedy can be considered the oldest film genre (and one of the most prolific and popular). Comedy was ideal for the early silent films, as it was dependent on visual action and physical humor rather than sound. *Slapstick*, one of the earliest forms of comedy, poked fun at farcical situations of physical mishap and indignity, usually in pratfalls, practical jokes, accidents, acrobatic death-defying stunts, water soakings, or wild chase scenes with trains and cars. [*Burlesque* is another form of early comedy, characterized by unrefined and broad humor, designed to produce ridicule.] Pioneers in the early days of silent cinema and film-making, the Lumiere Brothers, included a short comedy film in their very first public screening in 1895 titled *Watering the Gardener* or "The Sprinkler Sprinkled" (*L'Arroseur Arrose*). Its predictable subject matter included a man with a garden watering hose who is tricked into being soaked by a prankster child.

### Keystone Studios:

It took until 1912 for American comedy to emerge. The first comics were trained by performing in the circus, in burlesque, vaudeville (music halls), or pantomime. Film entrepreneur Mack Sennett, soon nicknamed "The King of Comedy" and "The Master of Slapstick Comedy," formed the Keystone Company (and Studios) in 1912 - it soon was the leading producer of slapstick and comic characters.

The major hallmark of Sennett's career work was inventive, visual, improvised comedy displayed in short silent films that moved frantically. His early short comedies featured wild slapstick chase finales, visual gags and stunts, and speedy, zany action. The action appeared all the more frantic and frenzied by his use of a filming technique whereby he shot the pictures at a slow camera speed, and then accelerated the frames in the projector during playback. He often cast vaudevillian, burlesque, and circus performers in his films. Those with exaggerated or grotesque looks (obese, cross-eyed, lanky, leering, pop-eyed, etc.) were chosen to add to the unreality of the situations. His most popular pictures involved his bumbling comedy policemen, the Keystone Cops. There would be flying pies, bricks, careening vehicles with people hanging off, crashes, and other dangerous-looking stunts.



Eccentric comic artists (and character actors) such as Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, Edgar Kennedy, Mabel Normand, zany and cross-eyed Ben Turpin, Mack Swain, Billy Bevan, Charley Chase and Chester Conklin. [Even Carole Lombard began her career at Keystone.] Charlie Chaplin got his start at Keystone (his first film was the short **Making a Living (1914)**) and made numerous short films from 1914-1919 (for Keystone, Essanay, Mutual, and First National), until his first full-length feature that he directed, wrote, and acted in, **The Kid (1921)** - see below.

### The Silent Era Clowns

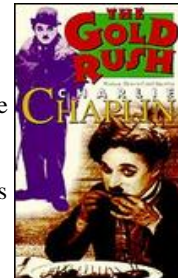
#### Charlie Chaplin:



Charlie Chaplin, a silent actor and pantomimist, was recruited to Keystone from an English variety act, and became Sennett's most important discovery. Chaplin made 35 short Keystone films for Mack Sennett in 1914. In Chaplin's second picture, the 11-minute **Kid Auto Races in Venice (1914)**, he invented his immortal, trademark Little Tramp character as he attends a 'baby-cart' race in Venice, California. His first masterpiece, **The Tramp (1915)**, produced by the Essanay Company in Chicago, showed the early development of the character, known for his baggy pants, bowler hat, walking cane, funny stride, and oversized shoes. Chaplin then appeared in Sennett's feature-length **Tillie's Punctured Romance (1915)** and produced two dozen two-reelers for Mutual, including such classics as **The Rink (1916)**, **The Floorwalker (1916)**, **The Pawnshop (1916)**, **The Cure (1917)**, **The Immigrant (1917)** and **Easy Street (1917)**.



Chaplin made two masterpieces in the 1920s: his first full-length starring feature that he directed was **The Kid (1921)** pairing him with young Jackie Coogan. It was followed by another full-length comedy titled **★The Gold Rush (1925)**, Chaplin's best silent film with segments of poetic miming and classic slapstick. Even though the silent era was ending and the sound era had arrived, Chaplin turned out more "silent" features: the exquisite **★City Lights (1931)**, and his satire on the machine-age, **★Modern Times (1936)**. Chaplin resisted the coming of the talkies until his first talking picture **The Great Dictator (1940)** and other talkies including **Limelight (1952)** - a film with silent comedian Buster Keaton as co-star.



### Buster Keaton:



One of the great silent clowns of the early comedic period was Buster Keaton, known for acrobatic visual gags, physical action, and for his deadpan, unsmiling, expression-less "stoneface." (His first name was a nickname given to him by Harry Houdini after he fell down some steps.) Keaton was first a vaudeville performer, performing and partnering quite often with former Keystone star and mentor Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. He entered the profession of film-making in 1917 at the age of twenty-one as a supporting player, in his film debut **The Butcher Boy (1917)**. Then, he started his own production company and became an actor in his own production unit in many excellent short films (usually two-reelers) from 1920-1923, including **One Week (1920)**, **Neighbors (1920)**, **The High Sign (1921)**, **The Boat (1921)**, **The Haunted House (1921)**, **The Playhouse (1921)**, **The Paleface (1921)**, **Hard Luck (1921)**, and **The Frozen North (1922)**, but none as a repeating character.

A few years later, he also starred in a number of feature-length silents, his first being **The Three Ages (1923)**. Among his best features were **Our Hospitality (1923)**, **The Navigator (1924)**, **Sherlock, Jr. (1924)**, **Go West (1925)**, **Seven Chances (1925)**, and **Battling Butler (1926)**. His most-acclaimed feature-length production was the fast-paced Civil War adventure tale of a railroad engine called **★The General (1927)**, which he soon followed with **College (1927)** and **Steamboat Bill, Jr. (1928)**. The latter film is known for one of the most suicidal stunts ever filmed - a falling wall with only a top-floor open window to save him from being flattened. [One of his last film appearances was as one of the 'waxworks' friends who plays bridge with silent film star Gloria Swanson in **★Sunset Boulevard (1950)**.]

### Harold Lloyd:

Harold Lloyd, a popular silent clown, has been dubbed the 'third' genius or master of silent comedy - after Chaplin and Keaton. [An actor/producer, he actually outgrossed his better-known counterparts, by retaining ownership of his films and their profits.] Like them, Lloyd also spent some time in the early years with Mack Sennett, became known for realistic, daredevil stunts, and for his bespectacled, neat, innocent, noble-hearted, 'average Joe' characters. From 1915-1921, he produced a number of short films for Keystone and for major comedy producer Hal Roach, playing the character of Willie Work (debuting in his first starring film **Just Nuts (1915)** as a Chaplin-like character) and Lonesome Luke (first appearing in **Lonesome Luke, Social Gangster (1915)**).



Lloyd graduated to full-length features playing the part of a normal Everyman (or "Glasses Character") or "Boy" - which debuted in the short **Look Out Below (1919)**. His last short was **Never Weaken (1921)**. He became most identified with this 'boy'-next-door character (normally named Harold) with his most famous trademark - horn-rimmed glasses. His most-remembered film, the feature-length

[Safety Last \(1923\)](#), featured his perilous, memorable climb up a tall skyscraper's face that climaxed with his hanging off a giant clock. Lloyd's career lasted 34 years with over 200 comedies (mostly short subject featurettes, but including 11 silent features and 7 sound features). One of Lloyd's other greatest films was also his most successful, **The Freshman (1925)**, in which he portrayed a college underclassman (Harold 'Speedy' Lamb) determined to redeem himself - on the football field. Other well-known films included **Grandma's Boy (1922)**, **Why Worry? (1923)**, **Girl Shy (1924)**, **The Kid Brother (1927)**, **Speedy (1928)** (his final silent film) and **Movie Crazy (1932)**. His last film was released in 1947 - director Preston Sturges' **The Sin of Harold Diddlebock (1947)**, retitled **Mad Wednesday** by co-producer Howard Hughes, re-edited and released by RKO in 1950.

### Harry Langdon:

Another early comic performer was baby-faced, innocent, timid Harry Langdon, who also worked at Keystone. He experienced only a brief period of fame during the end of the silent era, with comedies including director Frank Capra's **Long Pants (1927)**, in which Langdon played his typical simple-minded, man/child role.

### Larry Semon:

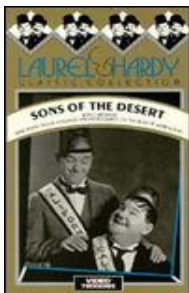
Another popular, second-level slapstick comedian in the silent era who made hundreds of two-reel shorts from 1916-1924 for Vitagraph and for the B-picture company, the Chadwick Pictures Corporation, was the charming, white-faced, smiling, and clownish Larry Semon. He began film work at Vitagraph in 1915 as comedy short gag writer and then as director in 1916. His first feature-length film was also his best known and most influential work - a remake and adaptation of Baum's **The Wizard of Oz (1925)**, with Semon serving as both director and star - as the Scarecrow opposite Oliver Hardy (of the comic team) who played the Tin Woodsman. The film's release was highly publicized, but the public didn't like it - and it was essentially a failed effort. Afterwards, he took a supporting role in Josef Von Sternberg's classic film **Underworld (1927)**, and his last film, after filing for bankruptcy, was **A Simple Sap (1928)**, released posthumously after his prematurely-short life.

### The 30s Clowns

With the coming of sound, slapstick went into a bit of a decline and the flexible freedom of the earliest comedians was curtailed. Comedy was transformed, however, and began to be refined as an art form, with new themes, elements, and written characterizations, and comedic humor was now being derived from clever dialogue. Visual comedy remained strong throughout the 1930s, but now witty dialogue and verbal comedy were added. Some of the great comedians or teams, including Laurel and Hardy, the Three Stooges, the Marx Brothers, and Abbott and Costello, or individuals such as radio star Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor, Joe E. Brown, W. C. Fields, and Mae West emerged. Hal Roach's company was responsible for other ground-breaking comedy shorts during the 1930s, including the popular "Our Gang" series that lasted until 1944.

### Laurel and Hardy:

One of the greatest and most-beloved of the comedy teams was the one of British-born Stan Laurel and the fat-faced Oliver Hardy, first purposely teamed together toward the close of the silent era by producer Hal Roach in the slapstick film **Slipping Wives (1926)**. They had first met, by accident, during the filming of **Lucky Dog** in 1917. Director Leo McCarey at Hal Roach Studios recognized their potential as a team and capitalized on their contrasting, disparate physical differences (Stan: the "thin" man and Oliver: the "fat" one - each with derby hats) and classic gestures (bewildered head-scratching, tie-twiddling, eye-blinking and baby-like weeping).



Although Laurel and Hardy worked together as a successful comedy team for 20 years (and were precursors of the 50s team Abbott and Costello), they were not equal partners - Stan considered himself the creative force and "brains" of the team. Their dozens of short films and twenty-seven feature-length films were produced over three decades (the 20s to the 40s), including such film classics as [Sons of the Desert \(1933\)](#) - arguably their best film, [Way Out West \(1937\)](#), [The Flying Deuces \(1939\)](#), and [A Chump At Oxford \(1940\)](#). One of their funniest bits involved getting a piano up a set of stairs in [The Music Box \(1932\)](#). Laurel and Hardy's last Hollywood film was [The Bullfighters \(1945\)](#), capping a teamed career of

almost twenty years. They were among the few actors who successfully made the transition from silents to talkies.

Plots of their hilarious films used situational mishaps or incidents to trigger chaos and personal jeopardy, usually with the dignified, superior-acting, pompous Ollie trying to succeed and boast, only to be frustrated, exasperated and sabotaged by the simple-mindedness, childishness and brainlessness of Stan. Audiences were amused by their endearing qualities of naivete, clumsiness, innocence, and stupidity as they sunk deeper and deeper into trouble, chaos, and self-destruction.

### The Marx Brothers:

Once talkies emerged, the most famous and popular comedy team was the zany foursome of the Marx Brothers. They were the only real-life sibling comedy group in Hollywood history:



- the witty, wise-cracking, ad-libbing, absurdly-punning, caustic, fast-talking Groucho (famous for his crouched walk, mustache, cigar, round glasses and leering eyes)
- piano-playing, broken Italian-accented Chico, famous for distorted logic
- the mischievous mute-pantomimist/harpist Harpo (with an old taxi horn and numerous harp solos), known for chasing girls
- the straight-man Zeppo (who left the other brothers in 1933 after his performance in ★[Duck Soup \(1933\)](#), his fifth film)

Their comedy was a mixture of slapstick, sophisticated verbal comedy (often absurd and risqué), zany anarchistic disrespect for the establishment, nonsensical action, and inspired buffoonery.



After almost two decades in vaudeville together, the brothers finally received widespread attention in their screen debut, **The Cocoanuts (1929)**, filmed at Paramount's East Coast studios. Next were major box-office and critical successes - the film version of their Broadway play, [Animal Crackers \(1930\)](#), [Horse Feathers \(1932\)](#) and their last film for Paramount - the political, anti-war satire/spoof ★[Duck Soup \(1933\)](#).

The Marx Brothers further developed their unique brand of absurdist, hilarious, slapstick comedy with a change to MGM Studios in the mid-30s. MGM's productions of ★[A Night at the Opera \(1935\)](#) with its memorable scenes of the stateroom and a legal contract, and [A Day at the Races \(1937\)](#) were made at the height of their popularity. A frequent romantic foil for

Groucho who appeared in a number of their films was Margaret Dumont, a memorable character actress. The film career of the Marx Brothers extended from 1929 to 1946. Later on, Groucho became a star as an early TV game-show host.

### W. C. Fields:



W. C. Fields is known for his recognizable raspy voice, pool cue, oversized bulbous nose and nasal drawl, stove-pipe hat, flask of 100-proof whiskey and love of drink, caustic verbal wit and wisecracks, and irritable disdain for small children, animals, upper-class snobs and bullying wives. He was an inspired comedian, a master of visual gags, double-takes, casual asides and pantomime. Fields usually wrote his own scripts and produced such classics for Paramount as [It's a Gift \(1934\)](#) and possibly his best film, [The Bank Dick \(1940\)](#), in which he credited himself as screenwriter Mahatma Kane Jeeves. Another wacky contribution was [Never Give a Sucker an Even Break \(1941\)](#) (written with the pseudonym of Otis Cribblecoblis) - his last starring role in a feature-length film. Fields was a natural while portraying a hen-pecked husband, a phony, an eccentric, a windbag, a non-conformist schemer, or a pompous charlatan.



### Mae West:

Another contemporary, wise-cracking, drawling performer was the bold, blowsy and flirtatious Mae West who enjoyed titillating and shocking audiences with *double entendre* dialogue, sexual





innuendo and a desire for sex, especially before the advent of the Hays Production Code. [One of her typical lines was: "Listen, when women go wrong, men go right after them."] Mae West starred in her own films, notably as a buxom burlesque queen and singer in an 1890s saloon in [She Done Him Wrong \(1933\)](#), and as a circus floozy in [I'm No Angel \(1933\)](#). She also appeared with Fields in their only film together: [My Little Chickadee \(1940\)](#).

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### Screwball Comedy:

Screwball comedies were launched in the mid-1930s, and established their place after the advent of film sound and the social disturbances of the Depression. This form of comedy provided by a new generation of writers and directors offered escapist entertainment for Depression-era audiences through much of the 30s and into the 40s - especially after the strict enforcement of the Hays Code took effect. Screwball comedies were characterized by social satire, comedic relief through zany, fast-paced and unusual events, sight gags, sarcasm, screwy plot twists or identity reversals, and precisely-timed, fast-paced verbal dueling and witty sarcastic dialogue - blending the wacky with the sophisticated.

Screwball comedies often took an anarchic tone or irreverent view of domestic or romantic conflicts ('battles of the sexes'), and usually aimed their barbs at the leisure-upper class. The main feature of a screwball comedy was the total disruption of a hero's ordered, unhassled life by a heroine. [Screwball comedies often presented actresses with their most complex and challenging roles.] The hero and heroine, both antic characters united by romance, were usually of different social, sexual, and economic stratas, and thrown together in ridiculous, improbable, unlikely situations and comic misadventures. Ultimately, their antagonistic conflicts and class differences were happily resolved when they fell in love, were reconciled together, or married.



The earliest screwball comedy was Lewis Milestone's [The Front Page \(1931\)](#) (remade in 1940 by director Howard Hawks as [★His Girl Friday \(1940\)](#)), although some consider Hawks' raucous [Twentieth Century \(1934\)](#) (with Lionel Barrymore and Carole Lombard) the most definitive screwball comedy. Frank Capra, the star director of Columbia Pictures, directed the successful [★It Happened One Night \(1934\)](#) earlier in the same year, featuring the sparring of Clark Gable as a cynical, hard-times reporter and Claudette Colbert as a pampered, runaway heiress. Even though Howard Hawks had three classic screwball comedies, Capra's 1934 film is the seminal example of this sub-genre, and the highly popular film was the *first* to win the top four Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, and Best Actress.

A third film in the same year, a screwball comedy-mystery [The Thin Man \(1934\)](#), was a comedic adaptation from a Dashiell Hammett novel, about a wise-cracking, sleuthing, party-going couple (William Powell and Myrna Loy with tremendous screen chemistry in their first film of the six-part series) with their dog Asta. Fourthly, the musical screwball comedy [The Gay Divorcee \(1934\)](#) was the first film to co-star dancing partners Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

The formula for screwball films inspired many more excellent examples of the sub-genre in future years, such as:

- Gregory La Cava's [My Man Godfrey \(1936\)](#) with a unusual scavenger hunt that turns up a "forgotten man" bum (William Powell) who teaches a family and its spoiled heiress-daughter (Carole Lombard) about life
- the superb [The Awful Truth \(1937\)](#) from Leo McCarey (Best Director of 1937) with Cary Grant and Irene Dunne as a squabbling



- about-to-divorce couple who sabotage each other's efforts at new relationships
- **Nothing Sacred (1937)** with Carole Lombard and Fredric March
- Howard Hawks' quintessential screwball comedy ★**Bringing Up Baby (1938)** with Cary Grant as a straight paleontologist and Katharine Hepburn as a free-spirited heiress, both in conflict with each other while caring for a pet leopard named Baby and searching for a dinosaur bone hidden by her dog
- Cukor's **Holiday (1938)** with Hepburn and Grant again and a witty Philip Barry script
- the superior re-rendering of *The Front Page* in the newspaper office comedy and the fast-paced war-between-the-sexes film, ★**His Girl Friday (1940)**, starring Rosalind Russell as a reporter and Grant as her ex-husband and editor
- George Stevens' screwball comedy set during World War II in Washington DC, **The More the Merrier (1943)**, that found Joel McCrea and Jean Arthur cramped together during a housing shortage

### Preston Sturges' Comedies:



Writer/director Preston Sturges, one of the greatest comic geniuses, was known for his many social satires in the 1940s, poking fun at sex/love, politics, war and the military, and death. He made eight screwball comedies in five years for Paramount: **The Great McGinty (1940)**; **Christmas in July (1940)**; his third inspired feature **Sullivan's Travels (1941)**, about a comedy director who quits Hollywood to be a hobo - a satire on Hollywood's socially-responsible films during the Depression Era; ★**The Lady Eve (1941)** with Barbara Stanwyck in an exceptional role as sexy con artist Jean Harrington/Lady Eve Sidwich and Henry Fonda as a hapless victim; **The Palm Beach Story (1942)** with Claudette Colbert and Joel McCrea playing the archetypal couple; **The Miracle of Morgan's Creek (1944)** with Betty Hutton as a wide-eyed, pregnant party-goer unable to identify the father; the political satire **Hail the Conquering Hero (1944)**; and **The Great Moment (1944)**.

### The 'Road' Pictures with Hope, Crosby and Lamour:

Beloved entertainers Bob Hope and Bing Crosby partnered together as a wise-cracking, ad-libbing duo and teamed up with actress Dorothy Lamour in a series of seven 'Road pictures' for Paramount (beginning in the 1940s):

- **The Road to Singapore (1940)**
- **The Road to Zanzibar (1941)**
- **The Road to Morocco (1942)** - their best
- **The Road to Utopia (1945)**
- **The Road to Rio (1947)**
- **The Road to Bali (1952)** - the only one in color
- **The Road to Hong Kong (1962)**



Vaudeville star Bob Hope also starred in a number of other comedy films in the late 30s and 40s, including **My Favorite Blonde (1942)** with a trained penguin and co-star Madeleine Carroll as a British spy, and a spoof of the Old West titled **The Paleface (1948)** with co-star Jane Russell as Calamity Jane. Danny Kaye and Red Skelton were also popular comedians in the 1940s. Kaye first gained attention when he appeared with Gertrude Lawrence on the Broadway stage in Moss Hart's *Lady in the Dark*. Afterwards, when under contract to Samuel Goldwyn, he starred in many musical comedies, often opposite Virginia Mayo. The 31 year-old's first feature film was **Up in Arms (1944)** starring vivacious Dinah Shore (and Virginia Mayo as a chorus girl).

### Various Forms of Comedy:

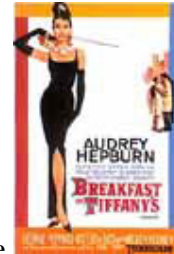


Comedies have been created in many varieties and forms including, for example, the family comedies, typified by the Hardy Family series with Mickey Rooney as young Andy Hardy. Gregory La Cava's realistic, sassy/bitchy-woman 30s comedy about the Broadway theatre titled [Stage Door \(1937\)](#) starred Katharine Hepburn as an aspiring, patrician actress opposite her room-mate - a plebian, wise-cracking Ginger Rogers. Hepburn also recreated the role of a spoiled and snobby socialite she had originated on Broadway in MGM's classic, straight romantic comedy ★[The Philadelphia Story \(1940\)](#) opposite ex-husband Cary Grant and lovestruck marriage reporter James Stewart.

Excellent examples of supernatural romantic comedies are **Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941)**, **Heaven Can Wait (1943)**, **Blithe Spirit (1945, UK)** and **The Ghost and Mrs. Muir (1947)**. The versatile MGM superstar and comic buffoon Danny Kaye played identical twins with strikingly-different personalities: a timid bespectacled librarian and a nightclub emcee (who becomes a ghostly spirit and then enters his brother's body) in the Technicolor, Goldwyn-produced **Wonder Man (1945)**. The singing, dancing, and joking Kaye also starred in other films with multiple personalities, including: **The Kid From Brooklyn (1946)** - a remake of Harold Lloyd's **The Milky Way (1936)**, the Technicolor musical comedy **The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (1947)** adapted from James Thurber's short story, and **The Inspector General (1949)**.

#### Sophisticated Comedy:

Depression-Era social comedies and satires have been categorized as sophisticated comedies. This sub-form of the comedy genre generally finds humor in the lives and activities of the rich and urbane, and are marked by witty and sophisticated dialogue, centering on marital and romantic relationships. A classic example is George Cukor's sparkling [Dinner At Eight \(1933\)](#) about a Manhattan dinner party attended by an array of high-society guests (millionaires and financial predators, washed-up and aging actors, a sexy hatcheck girl - and more), an adaptation of a Broadway hit by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber. Cukor also directed the all-female **The Women (1939)**, an entertaining but stinging look at the state of matrimony. Fred Astaire and Jane Powell starred as a brother/sister dance act (threatened by burgeoning romances) in MGM's Alan Jay Lerner musical **Royal Wedding (1951)**, a film famous for Astaire's dancing on the ceiling. A more recent example of sophisticated comedy is the off-beat, wistful love story of Manhattan party girl Holly Golightly (Audrey Hepburn) in **Breakfast at Tiffany's (1961)**.



#### Ernst Lubitsch:



German director Ernst Lubitsch, one of the earliest masters of sound comedy, was also known for having a sophisticated comedy style called "The Lubitsch Touch." His comedies poked fun at the idle rich in a comedy of manners. He brought his special blend of romance, comedy, and music to the screen with **The Love Parade (1929)**, and then with his early 30s erotic comedy ★[Trouble in Paradise \(1932\)](#). Later screen classics include his joyous comedy ★[Ninotchka \(1939\)](#) in which the cold-hearted Russian agent (played by Greta Garbo) fell in love and turned light-hearted - it was advertised as 'Garbo Laughs'. Finally, Lubitsch directed the romantic classic **The Shop Around the Corner (1940)** with James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan as feuding, lonely-hearts co-workers and pen pals, and the sophisticated anti-Nazi comedy **To Be or Not To Be (1942)** with Jack Benny and Carole Lombard (her final screen appearance before a fatal plane crash) as husband/wife members of an acting troupe in Nazi-occupied, wartime Poland.

#### Frank Capra:

Heartwarming, idealistic "Capra-corn" tales of decent American little-man heroes who exemplified hard work, common sense, and virtue were best expressed in director Frank Capra's semi-comedic films: **Lady for a Day (1933)**, **Mr. Deeds Goes to Town (1936)**, the zany Best Picture winner **You Can't Take it With You (1938)**, ★**Mr. Smith Goes to Washington (1939)**, **Meet John Doe (1941)**, and the nostalgic, Christmas-time classic ★**It's a Wonderful Life (1946)**. He was also responsible for the romantic fantasy film **Lost Horizon (1937)**, and for brilliantly adapting the black screwball comedy and Broadway stage production (by Joseph Kesselring) of **Arsenic and Old Lace (1944)** with Cary Grant - shot in 1941 but released three years later.

### The Teaming of Tracy-Hepburn:

The 1940s also brought together Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn for the first time in **Woman of the Year (1942)** with Tracy as a brash sports reporter and Hepburn as a political columnist for a New York newspaper. They starred in a total of nine films together over a twenty-five year period. Through the years, there were many great Hepburn and Tracy comedies with a "battle of sexes" theme, including **State of the Union (1948)**, **Adam's Rib (1949)** with the duo as married lawyers on opposite sides in a divorce case, and **Pat and Mike (1952)**.



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### Abbott and Costello:



Another popular comedy film team of the 40s to the early/mid 50s, Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, were a variation on the Laurel and Hardy team. Tall, slim, fast-talking, self-important con man Bud Abbott played the straight man to the short, stubby, cowardly, stupid and childish Lou Costello. They made a number of witty, humorous pictures - their first, successful feature film was set in an Army base, **Buck Privates (1941)**. Other earlier films were **Hold That Ghost (1941)** and **In Society (1944)**.

Their most well-remembered comedy sketch is entitled "**Who's On First?**" - a scene originally from their radio act that was reprised in their film, **The Naughty Nineties (1945)**. The silly locales of their situation-style, formulaic comedies were reflected in some of their film titles: Universal's **Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein (1948)** - they appeared as baggage clerks delivering packages to a haunted house, with Bela Lugosi's Dracula, Lon Chaney Jr.'s Wolfman, the Frankenstein monster, and other ghouls, **Africa Screams (1949)**, **Abbott and Costello Go to Mars (1953)**, and **Abbott and Costello Meet the Mummy (1955)**. They also had their own TV show titled *The Abbott and Costello Show* (1952-53).

### The Comic Duo - Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin:

Abbott and Costello were succeeded by wacky, childlike comic Jerry Lewis with his crooning, handsome, straight-man partner Dean Martin. While they had both failed as single performers, they were much more successful as a team. They were first paired in 1946, and then made seventeen movies together between 1949 and 1956. Their films included **Sailor Beware (1951)** and **Scared Stiff (1953)** - one of their better films was **Artists and Models (1955)** with Martin as a comic book cartoon artist and Lewis as his idiotic room-mate with imaginative dreams. In the early 1960s after the partners had split, Lewis' unique brand of humor was exhibited in his directorial debut film titled **The Bellboy (1960)** about a bellboy at Miami's Fountainbleau Hotel.



Although often detested for his over-the-top style of comedy, Lewis' best film was **The Nutty Professor (1963)** with Lewis as a chemistry professor named Julius Ferris Kelp whose



Jekyll/Hyde potion converts him into swinging extrovert Buddy Love (resembling Rat Packers Frank Sinatra and/or Dean Martin) - loveably irresistible to Stella Stevens. Lewis also starred in the 'fractured fairy tale' **Cinderfella (1960)** as a male 'Cinderella.' In the slapstick-ish **The Disorderly Orderly (1964)**, the zany comic starred as a hospital orderly employed in a nursing home. And in **The Family Jewels (1965)**, he portrayed seven characters (mostly named Peyton). [Lewis actually played a straight man business rival to newspaper correspondent Tony Curtis in **Boeing Boeing (1965)**. In another rare serious role, Lewis starred as late-night show host Jerry Langford opposite Robert DeNiro as an obsessive, aspiring comedian in Martin Scorsese's satirical black comedy **The King of Comedy (1983)**.]

### British, Italian and French Comedy: European Entries

Some of the most celebrated, intelligent comedies from Britain after World War II were produced by Michael Balcon's anti-authoritarian Ealing Studios - termed "Ealing comedies." They included the following four films that starred Alec Guinness:

1. the black-hearted comedy about inheritance, **Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949)** featured the versatile Guinness (in his third film) playing the parts of all eight D'Ascoyne family victims (including Lady Agatha!)
2. **The Lavender Hill Mob (1951)** again starred Alec Guinness as an unsuspecting bank clerk who masterminded a scheme to melt down gold bank bars into miniature Eiffel Towers
3. **The Man in the White Suit (1952)**, about an idealistic, humble inventor named Sidney Stratton (Guinness) who quickly develops enemies after discovering a new fiber that cannot wear out or get dirty
4. the droll and farcical comedy **The Ladykillers (1955)**, with Guinness as bumbling criminal mastermind Professor Marcus in the midst of a planned train robbery

Similar to *The Ladykillers*, Italian writer/director Mario Monicelli's fast-paced caper spoof **Big Deal on Madonna Street (1958)** starred Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni and a young Claudia Cardinale, with its story of misfit criminals orchestrating a jewelry heist of a pawn shop on Madonna Street. Italian director Vittorio De Sica's **Marriage, Italian Style (1964)** (an imitation of Pietro Germi's black comedy, **Divorce--Italian Style (1962)**) was a farcical and sexy romantic comedy about modern marriage featuring womanizer Marcello Mastroianni and his busty, statuesque mistress/wife Sophia Loren (her fourth film with De Sica).

British comedies usually combined deft wordplay, sophisticated wit, character impersonations, and high-low brow contributions to the genre. Cartoonist Ronald Searle's work inspired director Frank Launder's rollicking British comedy **The Belles of St. Trinian's (1954)** - a slapstick story about devilish students with get-rich-quick schemes at a British all-girl's school, and Alastair Sim (in a dual role as the school's headmistress and as her twin brother bookie Clarence). Peter Sellers impersonated three different individuals (one of his trademarks) - a prime minister, a grand duchess, and a military officer of the small European Duchy of Grand Fenwick in **The Mouse That Roared (1959)**. And **The League of Gentlemen (1959)** was another classic British caper film with Jack Hawkins as the disgruntled leader of a group of disgraced ex-soldiers plotting a complex raid on a bank.



The Best Picture winner from director Tony Richardson, **Tom Jones (1963)** was a bawdy comedy and rambunctious adaptation of Henry Fielding's novel about an 18th century womanizing playboy (Albert Finney) and his ribald adventures. **Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)** skewered the medieval King Arthur legends with graphic violence and quirky, manic comedy. **Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979)** irreverently attacked all forms of religious hypocrisy and zealotry. The high-grossing British, adult romantic comedy **Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)** featured Hugh Grant as an uncommitted, confirmed bachelor at the weddings of his single friends. The



widely-popular British comedy **The Full Monty (1996)** exhibited the strip-tease talents of a group of unemployed, middle-aged and overweight Yorkshire mill workers.

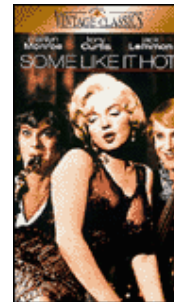
Zany comedies also emerged from France, especially the works of comic actor/director Jacques Tati, such as **Jour de Fete (1949)** - his debut film about a bicycle postman named Francois, and his Monsieur Hulot films including the virtually-silent cinematic gem **Mr. Hulot's Holiday (1953)**, about the tall Frenchman on a seaside resort holiday in Brittany, and the comedy satire **Mon Oncle (1958)** with numerous sight gags - the recipient of the Best Foreign-Language Film Academy Award.

### **The Series of Carry On Films:**

A highly successful, saucy and interminable series of almost 30 British comedy films were popular over a period of 20 years, from 1958-1978, from **Carry On Sergeant (1958)** to **Carry On Emmanuelle (1978)**. They were mostly crude slapstick farces composed of double entendres and larger-than-life characters that became increasingly sexier as time progressed. The naughty films full of sexual innuendo were set in various locales to target various institutions - the Army, a hospital, a British school, a police station, an employment agency, and more. Since there wasn't one major star, the performers were more like a repertory group of actors, and included names such as Kenneth Williams, Sid James and Charles Hawtrey. In the early 90s, there was a disastrous attempt to revive the series with **Carry On Columbus (1992)**.

### **50s Comedy:**

There were 50s comedies as well - usually squeaky-clean, formulaic, courtship romantic comedies exemplified by the Rock Hudson/Doris Day films. Their best classic, witty and light-hearted 50's sex comedy was **Pillow Talk (1959)**. Other memorable romantic comedies of the 1950s include George Cukor's **Born Yesterday (1950)** about the tutoring of a racketeer's uneducated girlfriend (Judy Holliday), and director Vincente Minnelli's family wedding comedy **Father of the Bride (1950)** starring Spencer Tracy as the "father of bride" Elizabeth Taylor. And a tipling James Stewart was the only one able to see an invisible six-foot rabbit in **Harvey (1950)**. Stanley Donen's classic comedy/musical **Singin' in the Rain (1952)** told about the end of the silent film era, with Gene Kelly and squeaky-voiced Jean Hagen as film stars, Debbie Reynolds as an ingenue, and spotlighted by Donald O'Connor's incredible "Make 'Em Laugh" number.



Sexual comedies were successively enhanced by the appearance of Marilyn Monroe at her prime in **The Seven Year Itch (1955)** as a Manhattan apartment dweller, and as the lead singer in an all-girls band in director/co-writer Billy Wilder's hilarious and subversive adult comedy **Some Like It Hot (1959)** - a ribald spoof of gangster films.

### **The Pink Panther Films Franchise (1964--):**

The series of *Pink Panther* films, mostly from writer/director Blake Edwards, featured Peter Sellers as archetypal Inspector Jacques Clouseau, animated credit sequences, and Henry Mancini's recognizable score. [The Pink Panther refers to a rare diamond.] The screwball comedy films in the series were well-known for their slapstick physical comedy, with Sellers (with a strange French accent) experiencing numerous pratfalls, clumsiness (or klutziness), and some brilliant crime-solving nonetheless. The earliest *Panther* films (in the 60s) were the best, before Sellers just became an outright buffoon. Eventually, there were nine sequels to the first film and a popular TV cartoon. Not all of the films had the name "Pink Panther" in the title:



- **The Pink Panther (1964)** - the first in the series, with Clouseau in only a supporting role
- **A Shot in the Dark (1964)** with Herbert Lom as Clouseau's slow-burning, twitching boss Dreyfus, and Burt Kwouk as his valet and martial arts judo-specialist Kato
- **Inspector Clouseau (1968)** - directed by Bud Yorkin, and with Alan Arkin in the Clouseau role
- **The Return of the Pink Panther (1975)** - marked by Sellers' return to the role, after an 11-year disappearance
- **The Pink Panther Strikes Again (1976)** - with Sellers' former boss as an insane criminal
- **The Revenge of the Pink Panther (1978)** - the last film with Peter Sellers before his death
- **The Trail of the Pink Panther (1982)** - released two years after Sellers' death, with a compilation of 'greatest' excerpts and unused footage and outtakes
- **The Curse of the Pink Panther (1983)** - a bland attempt to keep the series going; with Roger Moore as Jacques Clouseau; this was David Niven's last film
- **Son of the Pink Panther (1993)** - mostly recycled skits, featuring Roberto Benigni as Inspector Clouseau's equally-bumbling son Jacques
- **The Birth of the Pink Panther (2005)** - the 10th film in the series, directed by Shawn Levy, starring Steve Martin (as Clouseau), Beyonce Knowles, Kevin Kline and Jean Reno; a prequel to the original Peter Sellers film in 1964

#### Other Comedies in the Late 50s and 60s:

The rise of television and its increasing popularity had a damaging effect on film comedy. Screen comedies declined in number and quality in the 1950s, contributing to the rise of TV situation comedies ('sitcoms') and variety shows, and stand-up comedy routines/sketches. There have been only a few comedy films since the 1950s with the innovative vigor and creativity of the classic era of film comedy.

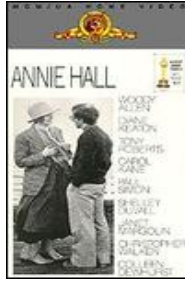
As a result of Best Director-winning Mike Nichols' 60s classic ★[The Graduate \(1967\)](#) with a Simon and Garfunkel soundtrack, young Dustin Hoffman defined a generation and its alienation and non-conformity by his inter-generational romance with Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft) and with her daughter (Katharine Ross). He also became a leading star and established a new kind of romantic lead in a film comedy. His disgust with materialistic society was embodied in one word: "Plastics." The original parody version of **Bedazzled (1967, 2000)** from director Stanley Donen updated the Faustian tale in sacrilegious, witty fashion with co-writer Peter Cooke as the British Lucifer/George Spiggott, Dudley Moore as the tempted short-order cook, and Raquel Welch as one of the Seven Deadly Sins (Lillian Lust).



Robert Altman's **M\*A\*S\*H (1970)** was an irreverent, anti-war black comedy set during the Korean War (although the film was a caustic criticism of the Vietnam War) about the stressed lives of surgeons and nurses (Donald Sutherland, Elliott Gould, Sally Kellerman, etc.) at the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. It spawned a long-running TV series of the same name with Alan Alda, Loretta Swit, Harry Morgan, Jamie Farr, and Gary Burghoff, among others. The comic mismatched pairing of Walter Matthau (as slob Oscar Madison) and Jack Lemmon (as neat Felix Ungar), their second film together following Billy Wilder's **The Fortune Cookie (1966)** was skillfully demonstrated in Neil Simon's adaptation of his Broadway play - director Gene Saks' buddy comedy **The Odd Couple (1968)**. As with **M\*A\*S\*H**, the storyline was adapted into a popular early-70s TV sitcom of the same name starring Tony Randall and Jack Klugman.

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#### Woody Allen, Mel Brooks, and Others in the 70s:



In the 1970s and 80s, self-effacing, satirical humor, usually in a New York upper middle-class setting, was showcased in the films and acting of stand-up comic turned director Woody Allen, including his early film [Play It Again, Sam \(1972\)](#) and then in two of his most influential films: his classic, semi-autobiographical, bittersweet romantic comedy and Best Picture winner ★ [Annie Hall \(1977\)](#) with Allen as a Jewish stand-up comedian and Oscar-winning Diane Keaton as his WASP girlfriend, and the black and white success of his ode to his hometown, [Manhattan \(1979\)](#).

The comic madness of Mel Brooks' films was evident in the cult farce classic [The Producers \(1968\)](#) with Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder as show producers and would-be con artists deliberately attempting to produce a bomb - *Springtime for Hitler*. It was Brooks' directorial debut film and one of his best, and the basis for one of Broadway's biggest hits. Later, he spoofed different types of genres in parodies: westerns in the anarchic [Blazing Saddles \(1974\)](#), horror films in [Young Frankenstein \(1974\)](#), and Hitchcock in [High Anxiety \(1977\)](#).

Art Carney from *The Honeymooners* won a Best Actor Oscar for his role as a cross-country traveling retired teacher with his beloved cat Tonto in Paul Mazursky's [Harry and Tonto \(1974\)](#). 29 year old Richard Dreyfuss won a Best Actor Oscar as a struggling actor sharing a Manhattan apartment with divorced single mom Marsha Mason and her precocious daughter in Herbert Ross' bittersweet romantic comedy [The Goodbye Girl \(1977\)](#), adapted from a Neil Simon script.

Burt Reynolds and Kris Kristofferson played the role of professional football players who both loved the same woman (Jill Clayburgh), the rich daughter of the team's owner, in Michael Ritchie's sports comedy [Semi-Tough \(1977\)](#). The film also featured Bert Convy as a EST, Werner Erhard look-alike self-improvement guru. Competitive bicycling was part of the storyline in Peter Yates' charming coming-of-age sports drama/comedy [Breaking Away \(1979\)](#) about four local teens (Dennis Christopher, Dennis Quaid, Daniel Stern, and Jackie Earle Haley) from blue-collar families, derogatorily nicknamed Cutters, who grew up in a college town in mid-western Indiana (Bloomington, the location of Indiana U).

**The National Lampoon Films:**

In 1978, the popular humor magazine *National Lampoon* (founded in 1969 - a spinoff of the college magazine *Harvard Lampoon* and a competitor to *Mad Magazine*) released their first film, [National Lampoon's Animal House \(1978\)](#), a wildly-successful film about an anarchic party-animal frat house (Delta House) at fictitious Faber College, that was co-scripted by *National Lampoon* founder and humorist Douglas Kenney (who appeared in the film as the nerdy frat brother Stork). The gross-out comedy with unrefined humor was the first \$100 million hit comedy. The series would continue with uneven results over many years, often with comedian Chevy Chase in the lead role as dumb-witted Clark Griswold for four *Vacation* films:

Film Title (Year)	Director	Major Star(s)
<a href="#">National Lampoon's Animal House (1978)</a>	John Landis with co-screenwriters John Hughes and Harold Ramis	John Belushi
<a href="#">National Lampoon Goes to the Movies (1981) (aka National Lampoon's Movie Madness)</a>	Bob Giraldi, Henry Jaglom	Diane Lane, Candy Clark
<a href="#">National Lampoon's Class Reunion (1982)</a>	Michael Miller with John Hughes as producer/screenwriter	

<b>National Lampoon's Vacation (1983)</b>	Harold Ramis with John Hughes as producer/screenwriter	Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo, Randy Quaid; followed with three Chevy Chase sequels
<b>National Lampoon's The Joy of Sex (1984)</b>	Martha Coolidge	
<b>National Lampoon's European Vacation (1985)</b>	Amy Heckerling	Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo
<b>National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation (1989)</b>	Jeremiah S. Chechik with John Hughes as producer/screenwriter	Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo, Randy Quaid
<b>National Lampoon's Loaded Weapon 1 (1993)</b>	Gene Quintano	Emilio Estevez, Samuel L. Jackson
<b>National Lampoon's Last Resort (1994) (aka National Lampoon's Scuba School)</b>	Rafal Zielinski	Corey Haim, Corey Feldman
<b>National Lampoon's Senior Trip (1995)</b>	Kelly Makin	
<b>Vegas Vacation (1997)</b>	Stephen Kessler	Chevy Chase, Beverly D'Angelo, Randy Quaid
<b>National Lampoon's Van Wilder (2002)</b>	Walter Becker	Tara Reid
<b>National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation 2: Cousin Eddie's Island Adventure (2003)</b> (direct to video/TV release)	Nick Marck	Randy Quaid

### **The Monty Python Films:**

*Monty Python's Flying Circus*, the famed British comedy troupe (composed of Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin), a group similar to the Marx Brothers, starred in a series of BBC-TV comedy shows from 1969-1974 that pushed the comedy envelope. From there, they went on to star in four big-screen films beginning in the early 70s:

- **And Now For Something Completely Different (1971)**
- **Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)**
- **Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979)**
- **Monty Python's The Meaning of Life (1983)**

Each member of the group would go on to star in his own film and television projects after the breakup of the group. They would often appear in films together as well, such as in **Time Bandits (1981)**, **Yellowbeard (1983)**, **A Fish Called Wanda (1988)**, and **Fierce Creatures (1997)**.

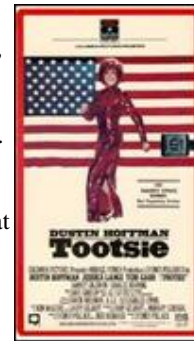
### **The 80s and 90s: Widely Divergent Comedies**

The writer/director team of David and Jerry Zucker and Jim Abrahams (known as ZAZ), first gaining notoriety with **The Kentucky Fried Movie (1977)**, created **Airplane! (1980)** - a fast-paced lampooning of all the *Airport*-like disaster films of the 70s, with non-stop visual gags, pratfalls and parodies of common film cliches. Members of the same team that created *Airplane!* went on to make **Top Secret! (1984)**, **The Naked Gun (1988)** films, spoofs of

*Police Squad*-type TV cop shows, **Ruthless People (1986)** - starring Bette Midler and Danny DeVito, **Hot Shots! (1991)** (a spoof of **Top Gun (1986)**) and the sequel **Hot Shots! Part Deux (1993)** - a parody of Stallone's *Rambo* films.

In Walter Hill's **48 Hours (1982)** (aka **48 Hrs.**) (better than the sequel eight years later in 1990), Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy (21 years old and in his feature film screen debut while still a cast member in *Saturday Night Live*) were paired as bickering, 'odd-couple' buddy-cops: temperamental detective Jack Cates and smooth-talking Reggie Hammond who disliked each other immensely ("We ain't partners, we ain't brothers, and we ain't friends"). The title referred to the amount of time that Reggie had been released from prison in Jack's custody to track down a cop killer. Another long-running series of films started with Disney's adventure/fantasy comedy **Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989)** with Rick Moranis as an experimental shrinking machine inventor whose kids unwittingly turned a ray-gun upon themselves. And the mid-life crisis of three urban dwellers (Billy Crystal, Bruno Kirby, and Daniel Stern) was resolved by sturdy cowpoke Curly (Jack Palance) during a 'vacation' cattle drive in the western comedy spoof **City Slickers (1991)**. In the 'fish-out-of-water' comedy of manners **My Cousin Vinny (1992)**, scene-stealing, Oscar-winning Marisa Tomei played the role of whiny, leather-clad, brassy girlfriend Mona Lisa Vito to inexperienced, loud-mouthed Brooklynite defense lawyer Joe Pesci in the deep South of Alabama.

**Private Benjamin (1980)** found Goldie Hawn as a whining, spoiled, and pouty US Army enlistee, experiencing a rude training regimen from tough, butch drill sergeant Eileen Brennan. Director Colin Higgins' **Nine to Five (1980)** brought together Lily Tomlin, Dolly Parton, and Jane Fonda as sexually-harassed secretaries by chauvinistic office boss Dabney Coleman. In former actor/director Richard Benjamin's **My Favorite Year (1982)**, Peter O'Toole starred as a hard-drinking, badly-behaved, legendary but burned-out swashbuckler movie star (based upon Errol Flynn) in a film that also paid tribute to Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*.



Actor/director Sydney Pollack's **Tootsie (1982)** was in the tradition of Billy Wilder's classic gender-makeover comedy [Some Like It Hot \(1959\)](#). It starred Dustin Hoffman as an unemployed actor named Michael Dorsey who resorted to cross-dressing to become dowdy Dorothy Michaels - a soap opera star for the show *Southwest General*. The film was an effective satire on gender roles and learning how the 'other half' lived. Another gender-bending, sexual confusion, and cross-dressing film, Blake Edwards' **Victor/Victoria (1982)**, was set in 1930s Paris with Julie Andrews in a dual role as Victor and Victoria - as a woman impersonating a man posing as a woman.

Director Ron Howard's romantic comedy fantasy **Splash (1984)** featured Daryl Hannah as a mermaid rescued by successful workaholic Tom Hanks (an unknown TV actor at the time) in a fairy tale brought to life. Hanks also starred in director Penny Marshall's **Big (1988)** as a 12 year old boy in the body of an adult, with additional insightful commentary on friendships, business, sex, and growing up.

### Romantic Comedies in the 80s and Early 90s:

The romantic comedy was making a strong comeback in the late 80s and early 90s, with films like the following:

- director Donald Pietrie's **Mystic Pizza (1988)** featured three teenaged girls who came of age while working in a seaport pizza parlor (with the slogan "A Slice of Heaven") in Mystic, Connecticut - all three stars (Annabeth Gish as Kat, Julia Roberts as Daisy, and Lili Taylor as JoJo) had star-making roles in the film
- director Rob Reiner's [When Harry Met Sally... \(1989\)](#) was about a long-term platonic friendship and relationship threatened by sex





- Peter Weir's **Green Card (1990)**, told about French composer and petty thief Georges' (Gérard Depardieu in his American film debut) convenience marriage to an American woman named Bronte (Andie MacDowell) to escape from Paris and remain in America, and to help her rent a Manhattan apartment
- Garry Marshall's opposites-attract *Cinderella* story - the blockbuster **Pretty Woman (1990)**, was about a prostitute named Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) 'dating' a corporate businessman named Edward Lewis (Richard Gere) for a week in Beverly Hills
- the existential comedy-fantasy **Groundhog Day (1993)** starred Bill Murray as a time-trapped local TV weatherman stuck in Punxsutawney Pennsylvania with his producer/love interest Rita (Andie MacDowell)
- writer/director Nora Ephron's **Sleepless in Seattle (1993)** - a charming film with romantic match-making via radio between Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, reprised by **You've Got Mail (1998)**, an updated remake of Ernst Lubitsch's classic **The Shop Around the Corner (1940)** - with the couple communicating by e-mail (with monikers NY152 and Shopgirl)

Writer Cameron Crowe made his directorial debut with the successful teen romance **Say Anything... (1989)** about two mis-matched lovers. The gifted and original Coen Brothers' **Raising Arizona (1987)** was a dark farce about the kidnapping of a baby by an infertile couple (Nicolas Cage and Holly Hunter) . James L. Brooks' romantic comedy **As Good As It Gets (1997)**, about a crusty romance novelist (Jack Nicholson) and single mother/waitress (Helen Hunt) in Manhattan, won Oscars for its two main leads. **Runaway Bride (1999)**, **Notting Hill (1999)**, and **What Women Want (2000)** were the most popular and successful romantic comedies to close out the decade.

Mike Newell's British comedy above love and weddings, **Four Weddings and a Funeral (1993)** starred Hugh Grant as a young, uncommitted bachelor, a "serial monogamist" who falls in love with Carrie (Andie MacDowell), an unattainable, attractive American woman. Another fabulously successful and witty film by director Peter Cattaneo, **The Full Monty (1997)**, illustrated how underclass British steelworkers could find lucrative work - as male strippers. The Australian family comedy **Babe (1995)** cleverly portrayed an orphaned talking piglet with the skills of a sheepdog.

Director John Madden's US/UK production of the Best Picture-winning dramatic comedy **Shakespeare in Love (1998)** speculated on the love life of England's famous bard with Viola (Gwyneth Paltrow) - a prototype for a character in *Romeo and Juliet*. One of the most successful independent films of all times was the warmhearted marital comedy **My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002)**, about the culture clash resulting from the engagement of a thirtyish single Greek-American woman (Nia Vardalos) to a non-Greek school teacher.

#### TV to Film Cross-Over Stars:

The counter-cultural, shocking-for-its-time TV show *Saturday Night* (introduced as "Live from New York, it's Saturday Night") first appeared in the mid-70s and featured some of the best, up-and-coming comics (Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi, Bill Murray, Gilda Radner, Eddie Murphy and more) known as the Not Ready for PrimeTime Players, and hip guest hosts. [George Carlin was the *first* guest host of *Saturday Night* and the *first* musical guest was Janis Ian.] From television shows such as *SNL*, a new breed of talented comedians, all cross-over stars, emerged in the 80s and 90s. For example, Barry Levinson directed **Good Morning, Vietnam (1987)** with stand-up comedian Robin Williams as Adrian Cronauer, the manic, anti-authoritarian DJ voice of Armed Forces Radio in Vietnam.

The most popular *Saturday Night Live* film was the wildly popular **Wayne's World (1992)** with Mike Myers and Dana Carvey in spin-offs from their *Saturday Night Live* sketches as self-mocking Wayne and Garth, two stoned, high-school public access cable-TV show hosts. The sequel that was poorly received was **Wayne's World 2 (1993)**. Myers also starred in a series of James Bond spy-spoof films: **Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery (1997)**, **Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me (1999)**, and **Austin Powers in Goldmember (2002)**.

After many years in two TV sitcoms in the 80s and 90s, *It Takes Two* and *Mad About You*, Helen Hunt was able to cross-over into a variety of screen roles, such as **Twister (1996)** and **As Good As It Gets (1997)** - with an Oscar-winning performance.

### Dan Aykroyd

*Saturday Night Live*'s Dan Aykroyd starred in some of the best comedies ever made: his road film **The Blues Brothers (1980)** was filled with guest-starring appearances and cameos (Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Cab Calloway, Ray Charles, John Lee Hooker) - and featured a spin-off of characters portrayed by Aykroyd and Belushi on *SNL*. The duo portrayed black-suited rock/blues singers/brothers Jake and Elwood Blues who were on a "mission from God." He also played a prominent role in **Trading Places (1983)** with Eddie Murphy. Director Ivan Reitman's blockbuster fantasy comedy **Ghostbusters (1984)** featured additional *SNL* stars in a tale about paranormal exterminators in NYC. Lesser Aykroyd hits included John Landis' **Spies Like Us (1985)** (with Chevy Chase), **Dragnet (1987)** with Aykroyd as detective Jack Webb, Aykroyd's sole Oscar-nominated supporting role in **Driving Miss Daisy (1989)**, and the belabored flop **Coneheads (1993)** about alien coneheads Beldar (Aykroyd) and Prymatt (Jane Curtin) - by then, his career had begun to falter.

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### John Belushi



Another member of NBC's *SNL* cast (originally a member of the *Second City* comedy troupe in Chicago) was John Belushi. Often considered the most famous and popular of the group, he was best noted for two films both directed by John Landis: **National Lampoon's Animal House (1978)**, a classic college frat-based comedy of 'misfit slob vs. elite snobs'; and **The Blues Brothers (1980)** in which he acted as vocalist Jake Blues opposite Dan Aykroyd as harpist Elwood Blues (characters derived from skits and appearances on *SNL*). In between those films, he also starred in Steven Spielberg's strange action comedy **1941 (1979)**, a satirical disaster film that bombed. On March 5, 1982, Belushi died in Hollywood of an accidental drug overdose, ironically repeated in 1997 by Chris Farley, another overweight *SNL* cast member who idolized Belushi. [Farley also went on to films from *SNL*, and starred with fellow former cast member David Spade in slapstick low-brow comedies such as **Tommy Boy (1995)** and **Black Sheep (1996)**.]

In the early 80s, John's younger brother Jim built a comedic career of his own by appearing in bit and supporting roles in various films and on *SNL*. By the mid-to-late 80s, Jim had established himself in comedies, serious dramatic roles (e.g., **Salvador (1986)** and **Red Heat (1988)**), and comedic dramas (e.g., **About Last Night... (1986)**). Later, he would appear in the comedic ABC-TV family sitcom, *According to Jim*.

### Steve Martin

Steve Martin (from *The Smothers Brothers* variety show, and from *Saturday Night Live* as a guest host and one of the 'Wild and Crazy Guys') often collaborated with director Carl Reiner (from 1979-1984), and appeared in other varied films including:

- director Carl Reiner's farcical **The Jerk (1979)** - Martin's debut film
- **Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (1982)** about a detective facing suspicious characters-stars from old film noir clips
- **The Man With Two Brains (1983)**, a mad scientist spoof
- **All of Me (1984)**, about a lawyer with two genders battling each other



- **Little Shop of Horrors (1986)**, with Martin as leather-jacketed, Elvis-like sadistic dentist Orin Scrivello DDS
- John Landis' **Three Amigos! (1986)**, with the threesome of Martin, Martin Short and Chevy Chase as silent film movie-star cowboys
- **Roxanne (1987)**, an updating of Edmond Rostand's play about large-nosed suitor Cyrano de Bergerac, played by Martin as C.D. Bates, smitten by Roxanne (Daryl Hannah)
- John Hughes' **Planes, Trains and Automobiles (1987)** including Martin's hilarious, disastrous cross-country trip as a tired businessman trying to get home accompanied by boorish companion John Candy
- Frank Oz' **Dirty Rotten Scoundrels (1988)**, a remake of **Bedtime Story (1964)** starring David Niven and Marlon Brando, co-starred Michael Caine and Martin as international con artists on the Riviera
- director Ron Howard's drama/comedy about **Parenthood (1989)**
- **My Blue Heaven (1990)** (with a script by Nora Ephron), with Martin as an Italian mobster in a witness protection program, living in a small town in California
- **Father of the Bride (1991)**, a remake of the Spencer Tracy/Elizabeth Taylor classic by director Vincente Minnelli - [Father of the Bride \(1950\)](#); a sequel followed in 1995
- **L. A. Story (1991)**, an insightful tale of life in La-La Land
- **Bowfinger (1999)**, with screenwriter Martin as the title character, a wanna-be film director, and Eddie Murphy as his action star
- **Bringing Down the House (2003)**, a farce about a newly-divorced attorney and single father who helped escaped convict Charlene (Queen Latifah)

### Chevy Chase

Chevy Chase, another slapstick performer on *SNL* in the mid-70s noted for his numerous pratfalls (and he pioneered the "*Weekend Update*" segment), starred in many of the National Lampoon *Vacation* films (see above) as bumbling Clark Griswold, as well as in the comedy classics: **Caddyshack (1980)**, and as the arrogant title character Irwin M. Fletcher - an undercover newspaper reporter in **Fletch (1985)** (sequel as **Fletch Lives (1989)**). One of his earliest films was the offensive, anti-establishment sketch comedy film **The Groove Tube (1972)** composed of a series of satirical skits. He also co-starred with other funnymen Steve Martin and Martin Short in John Landis' comedy farce **Three Amigos (1986)**.

### Bill Murray



Both a writer and dry-witted cast member on *SNL* in the mid-70s, Bill Murray further established himself with numerous TV and film appearances afterwards in both slapstick comedies and serious adult dramas, including: **Meatballs (1979)** as head camp counselor Tripper, **Caddyshack (1980)** as lunatic golf course gardener Carl Spackler, **Stripes (1981)** as reluctant Army trainee John Winger, **Tootsie (1982)** in an unbilled role as Dustin Hoffman's partner Jeff, [Ghostbusters \(1984\)](#) as parapsychologist Dr. Peter Venkman, **Little Shop of Horrors (1986)** in a cameo appearance as masochistic patient Arthur Denton, **Scrooged (1988)** as a cold-hearted Scrooge-like television executive Frank Cross, **What About Bob? (1991)** as neurotic psychiatric patient Bob Wiley, the comedic and existentialist **Groundhog Day (1993)** as Phil Connors - an obnoxious and bored TV weatherman destined to torturously repeat his life daily in a time loop, **Ed Wood (1994)** as the title character's trans-sexual cohort Bunny Breckinridge, **Rushmore (1996)** as eccentric rich industrialist Herman Blume, **Wild Things (1998)** as sleazy lawyer Ken Bowden, and in the Farrelly Brothers' gross-out live-action and animated comedy **Osmosis Jones (2001)** as zookeeper Frank. He received critical acclaim for his serious, Oscar-nominated role as lonely and bored American actor Bob Harris in director Sophia Coppola's **Lost in Translation (2003)**.

## Gilda Radner

Another of the original *SNL* cast members, comic genius Gilda Radner (who married actor Gene Wilder in 1984) brought a madcap, zany persona to characters on the show such as loud-mouthed Roseanne Roseanna-danna ("Just goes to show ya — it's always somethin'! If it's not one thing, it's something else!"), nerdy Lisa Lupner ("That was so funny I almost forgot to Laff!"), talk-show host Baba WaWa, and Emily Litella ("Never mind"). She and Wilder starred in **Hanky Panky (1982)** and the Wilder-directed sex comedy **The Woman in Red (1984)** and **Haunted Honeymoon (1986)**, before her career was cut short by ovarian cancer and death in 1989.

## Lily Tomlin

The offbeat comedienne first gained popularity as a regular on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* in the early 70s, and was best known for her indelible collection of wacky characters, including:

- obnoxious, goofy telephone operator Ernestine ("One ringy-dingy. Two ringy-dingys." and "Go look it up yourself, I've got better things to do!")
- 5-year old rambling, precocious, and philosophizing toddler Edith Ann, in a huge rocking chair
- the shopping bag lady Trudy ("Goin' crazy was the best thing ever happened to me. I don't say it's for everybody; some people couldn't cope.")
- school-spirited, virginal college student Suzie Sorority
- average middle-class housewife and consumer advisor Mrs. Beasley
- Crystal, the hang-gliding quadriplegic
- Agnes Angst, a fifteen-year-old punk performance artist
- evangelist Sister Boogie Woman
- lounge lizard Tommy Velour



She also appeared in a number of dramatic films, including Altman's **Nashville (1975)** as troubled gospel singer Linnea Reese (a Best Supporting Actress nominated role) who was womanized by Keith Carradine, and **The Late Show (1977)**, as well as comedies, including **9 to 5 (1980)** alongside Dolly Parton and Jane Fonda, **The Incredible Shrinking Woman (1981)**, **All of Me (1984)** with co-star Steve Martin, and opposite Bette Midler in **Big Business (1988)**. On the Broadway stage, she also had two successful one-person shows: **Appearing Nitely (1976)** and the Tony-winning **The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe (1986, 1991-film)**.

## Albert Brooks



Albert Brooks, a regular on *The Dean Martin Show* in the early 70s and a bit actor in many films (such as ★ **Taxi Driver (1976)**, **Private Benjamin (1980)** and **Unfaithfully Yours (1984)**), made his feature film debut as writer, director, and star in the satirical mockumentary **Real Life (1979)**. He followed up with the romantic comedy **Modern Romance (1981)** with Kathryn Harrold, and the road comedy **Lost in America (1985)** about a yuppie and his wife (Julie Hagerty) who forsake their materialistic possessions and jobs and drive cross-country in a Winnebago (a modern-day take-off of *Easy Rider*) to Las Vegas. [Paul Mazursky's R-rated **Down and Out in Beverly Hills (1986)** similarly examined the lives of a nouveau riche BH couple (Richard Dreyfuss and Bette Midler) after taking in a homeless tramp (Nick Nolte).] Albert Brooks also appeared as a reporter (providing his *sole* Oscar nomination) in James Brooks' expose of TV journalism, **Broadcast News (1987)**, with William Hurt as a shallow but good-looking anchorman and Holly Hunter as the network news producer. Brooks also wrote, directed, and co-starred with Meryl Streep in **Defending Your Life (1991)** about the afterlife, and in **Mother (1996)** featuring Debbie Reynolds. He

provided the voice of Nemo's Clown Fish father in the popular animated adventure comedy **Finding Nemo (2003)**.

### **Eddie Murphy**

John Landis directed *SNL*'s Eddie Murphy as a con-artist hustler reversing roles and exchanging jobs with a wealthy Wall Street stockbroker (*SNL*'s Dan Aykroyd) in the test of Social Darwinism in **Trading Places (1983)**, with Jamie Lee Curtis in a memorable and sexy role as a prostitute. John Landis' hit **Coming to America (1988)** was an enormous success for both director and actor Murphy (and co-star Arsenio Hall), who portrayed a pampered African prince who journeyed to America to find a new bride.

### **Billy Crystal**

Versatile stand-up performer and comedic actor began his career as gay character Jodie Dallas (the first openly gay character in TV history) on the TV drama *Soap*, and soon after starred in his debut film - Joan Rivers' directed film **Rabbit Test (1978)** as the world's first pregnant man. He made several TV movies and had a number of guest appearances, and soon became a regular on *SNL* by the mid 80s, with a few signature characters: Buddy Young, Jr., Sammy Davis, Jr., Willie the Masochist ("I hate it when that happens"), and the suave Fernando Lamas (with his catchphrase "You look maaaahvelous"). His next starring roles were in Rob Reiner's rock-group mockumentary **This Is Spinal Tap (1984)** and in the romantic fantasy adventure **The Princess Bride (1987)** as a wizened dwarf reanimator named Miracle Max, in addition to appearances in the cop buddy film **Running Scared (1986)** with Gregory Hines, and in Danny DeVito's dark Hitchcock spoof **Throw Momma From the Train (1987)**.



His first major role was in the modern-day romantic comedy **When Harry Met Sally...(1989)** opposite Meg Ryan as a clever but uncommitted guy, followed by the dude ranch comedy **City Slickers (1991)** with Best Supporting Actor Oscar-winner Jack Palance as hard-bitten cattle-drive master Curly (with its sequel **City Slickers II: The Legend of Curly's Gold (1994)**). His first-directed film was **Mr. Saturday Night (1992)** - a fictional biography of his own self-destructive Buddy Young, Jr. character. Further films included the romantic comedy (and box-office flop) **Forget Paris (1995)**, Woody Allen's dark comedy **Deconstructing Harry (1997)**, the buddy comedy **My Giant (1998)**, director Harold Ramis' popular comedy **Analyze This (1999)** (and its sequel **Analyze That (2002)**) with Crystal as the therapist of mobster Robert De Niro, and then he served as the voice for one-eyed round-shaped Mike Wazowski in Pixar's animated comedy **Monsters, Inc. (2001)**.

### **Jim Carrey**

TV's manic, hyper-nutty and energetic, rubbery *In Living Color* star Jim Carrey appeared in three back-to-back hits to jump-start his emergence as a comedy star:

- **Ace Ventura: Pet Detective (1993)**, his first hit as a silly, hammy pet gumshoe
- the comic-book, supernatural action film **The Mask (1994)** with great special effects
- the gross-out **Dumb and Dumber (1994)**

Then he appeared as a compulsive lawyer-liar compelled to tell the truth in **Liar Liar (1996)**. He also portrayed the Riddler in **Batman Forever (1995)**, and a malevolent repairman in director Ben Stiller's dark and negatively-received **The Cable Guy (1996)** (he became the *first* actor to be paid \$20 million to star in this film!) He won back-to-back Golden Globe awards for Best Actor in a Drama and Comedy/Musical for Peter Weir's **The Truman Show (1998)**, and for Milos Forman's **Man on the Moon (1999)** - in the role of uniquely complex comedian Andy Kaufman. [Oscar nominations for both roles were denied to Carrey.] Carrey also



portrayed the mean and green lead character in director Ron Howard's **Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas (2000)**, the top-grossing film of its year.

### John Hughes - Teen Film Director of "Coming of Age" Films:

There were also a number of comedic, "teen"-oriented *coming-of-age* or 'rites of passage' films directed toward a youth audience, frequently emphasizing the tensions of the adolescent and post-adolescent years, the problems of growing up, the high school years, aspects of peer pressure, teen parties, money, rebellion, friendship, romantic relationships among teens, and family strains. Rock 'n roll musical scores accompany many of them. **Sixteen Candles (1984)** told the tale of a sixteen year old girl suffering romantic *angst*. Teenpix film director/writer John Hughes' **The Breakfast Club (1985)** was about a group of high school students during a weekend detention. Hughes scripted **Pretty in Pink (1986)** - a comedy/drama involving the angst romance of a poor, outcast girl falling for an elitist rich boy. In the following year, Hughes directed a reversed-role 'sequel' titled **Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)**. One of Hughes' best teenage comedy films was **Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)**, the story of a malingering high school student taking another day off for misadventures in Chicago.



### Other "Coming of Age" Films and Teen Comedies:



George Lucas' much-loved and imitated, light-hearted 'coming of age' film, **American Graffiti (1973)**, was about a group of N. California high school graduates. It brought new, previously-taboo topics to the screen, helped create the TV series *Happy Days* and launched the careers of Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, Cindy Williams, Harrison Ford, and other future stars. Another was the 'sleeper hit' **Breaking Away (1979)** - the story of four Indiana youths, one a passionate bicycle racer, who were trying to decide what to do with their lives. On the other hand, **Risky Business (1983)** was about an ordinarily well-behaved high school boy (Tom Cruise) whose first sexual experience transformed his life and profitably mixed sex and capitalism - while his parents were away for a trip.

**National Lampoon's Animal House (1978)**, **Porky's (1981)** and **Police Academy (1984)** set the tone for teen gross-out comedies of the late 1970s and 1980s. Female director Amy Heckerling's **Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)** provided a view of life in a Southern California high school (composed of many teenage future stars including Nicolas Cage, Eric Stoltz, and Forest Whitaker). Writer/director Barry Levinson's bittersweet autobiographical **Diner (1982)**, his debut film (with screen debuts for Paul Reiser and Ellen Barkin), followed a group of twenty-something guys (including a breakthrough role for Kevin Bacon) who met regularly in an all-night Baltimore diner in the late 50s for talk about women and life. (With the addition of **Tin Men (1987)** and **Avalon (1990)**, Levinson created a so-called trilogy of films.)



The startling dark comedy **Heathers (1989)** tackled such controversial issues as teenage cliques and teen suicide. The seriously dramatic **Dead Poets Society (1989)** with comedian Robin Williams portrayed an unorthodox but inspiring English/poetry teacher at a New England prep school known for teaching his students to "Seize the Day" (Carpe Diem) and rip out the introduction to their poetry textbooks. The witty, funny **Clueless (1995)** (again directed by Amy Heckerling) starred Alicia Silverstone as Cher - a spoiled, rich, shallow but beautiful student in a W. Beverly Hills high school who helps a fellow student get into the 'in' crowd.

**Dazed and Confused (1993)** was set on the last academic day (and night) of a Texas high school in the Bicentennial year of 1976 as seen through the eyes of graduating seniors and a new crop of entering freshmen students, while **Grosse Pointe Blank (1997)** (with John Cusack as a professional hitman attending a reunion dance in his Michigan hometown) and **Romy & Michele's High School Reunion (1997)** (with Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow as dim-witted but scheming reunion-goers) both retroactively looked back to the 1980s as seen during a 10th HS reunion.

#### **Raunchy, Gross-Out Comedies at the Turn of the Century and into the 21st Century:**

Teen comedies - designed for both teens and adults - took a turn towards humiliation, bodily functions, and toilet humor with the sophomoric **There's Something About Mary (1998)**, starring Cameron Diaz, Matt Dillon, and Ben Stiller. Likewise, the gross, disgusting teenflick farce **American Pie (1999)** poked fun at the rite of passage of losing one's virginity. Other films notable as gross-out comedies included the films of Adam Sandler (i.e., **Billy Madison (1995)**, **The Waterboy (1998)** and **Big Daddy (1999)**) and the *Austin Powers* films with Mike Myers (i.e., **Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me (1999)** and **Austin Powers in Goldmember (2002)**). Chris Kattan and Will Ferrel starred as two obnoxious lounge lizard brothers in **A Night at the Roxbury (1998)**.

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## **Selection of Greatest Comedy Films:**

\* (Films designated by the [American Film Institute](#) as *America's [100 Funniest Movies](#)*).

#### **Greatest Charles Chaplin Comedies (Feature Films):**

The Kid (1921)  
★[The Gold Rush \(1925\)](#) \*  
★[City Lights \(1931\)](#) \*  
★[Modern Times \(1936\)](#) \*  
The Great Dictator (1940) \*  
Limelight (1952)

#### **Greatest Buster Keaton Comedies (Feature Films):**

Our Hospitality (1923)  
The Navigator (1924) \*  
Sherlock, Jr. (1924) \*  
★[The General \(1927\)](#) \*  
[Steamboat Bill, Jr. \(1928\)](#)

#### **Greatest Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle and Mabel Normand Films:**

Mabel, Fatty, and the Law (1915)  
Fatty and Mabel Adrift (1916)

#### **Greatest Laurel and Hardy Comedies (Feature Films):**

[Sons of the Desert \(1933\)](#) \*  
Our Relations (1936)  
[Way Out West \(1937\)](#)  
The Flying Deuces (1939)  
A Chump At Oxford (1940)

#### **Greatest Harold Lloyd Comedies:**

Grandma's Boy (1922)  
[Safety Last \(1923\)](#)  
Why Worry? (1923)  
Girl Shy (1924)  
The Freshman (1925) \*

#### **Greatest Harry Langdon Comedies:**

The Strong Man (1926)  
Long Pants (1927)

**Greatest Marx Brothers Comedies:**

The Cocoanuts (1929)  
[Animal Crackers \(1930\)](#)  
Monkey Business (1931) \*  
[Horse Feathers \(1932\)](#) \*  
★[Duck Soup \(1933\)](#) \*  
★[A Night at the Opera \(1935\)](#) \*  
[A Day at the Races \(1937\)](#) \*

**Greatest W. C. Fields Comedies:**

[It's A Gift \(1934\)](#) \*  
You Can't Cheat an Honest Man (1939)  
[The Bank Dick \(1940\)](#)  
[Never Give a Sucker an Even Break \(1941\)](#)

**Greatest Mae West Comedies:**

[Night After Night \(1932\)](#)  
[She Done Him Wrong \(1933\)](#) \*  
[I'm No Angel \(1933\)](#)  
Belle of the Nineties (1934)  
Klondike Annie (1936)

**Greatest Screwball Comedies:**

The Front Page (1931)  
★[It Happened One Night \(1934\)](#) \*  
Twentieth Century (1934)  
Libeled Lady (1936)  
[Mr. Deeds Goes to Town \(1936\)](#) \*  
[My Man Godfrey \(1936\)](#) \*  
[The Awful Truth \(1937\)](#) \*  
Nothing Sacred (1937)  
★[Bringing Up Baby \(1938\)](#) \*  
You Can't Take It With You (1938)  
★[His Girl Friday \(1940\)](#) \*  
My Favorite Wife (1940)  
Ball of Fire (1941) \*  
The Man Who Came to Dinner (1941)  
[The Talk of the Town \(1942\)](#)

**Preston Sturges Screwball Comedies and Satires:**

The Great McGinty (1940)  
★[The Lady Eve \(1941\)](#) \*  
[Sullivan's Travels \(1941\)](#) \*  
[The Palm Beach Story \(1942\)](#) \*  
Hail the Conquering Hero (1944)  
The Miracle of Morgan's Creek (1944) \*  
[Unfaithfully Yours \(1948\)](#)

**Greatest Frank Capra Comedies:**

Lady for a Day (1933)  
★[It Happened One Night \(1934\)](#) \*  
[Mr. Deeds Goes to Town \(1936\)](#) \*  
You Can't Take it With You (1938)  
★[Mr. Smith Goes to Washington \(1939\)](#)  
[Meet John Doe \(1941\)](#)  
[Arsenic and Old Lace \(1944\)](#) \*  
★[It's a Wonderful Life \(1946\)](#)  
State of the Union (1948)

**Greatest Mel Brooks Comedies:**

The Producers (1968) \*  
[Blazing Saddles \(1974\)](#) \*  
[Young Frankenstein \(1974\)](#) \*  
Silent Movie (1976)  
High Anxiety (1978)  
Space Balls (1987)

**Greatest Woody Allen Comedies:**

[Take the Money and Run \(1969\)](#) \*

[Bananas \(1971\)](#) \*

[Play It Again, Sam \(1972\)](#)

[Sleeper \(1973\)](#) \*

Love and Death (1975)

★[Annie Hall \(1977\)](#) \*

Manhattan (1979) \*

Zelig (1983)

Broadway Danny Rose (1984)

The Purple Rose of Cairo (1984)

Hannah and Her Sisters (1986)

Crimes and Misdemeanors (1989)

Husbands and Wives (1992)

Manhattan Murder Mystery (1993)

Bullets Over Broadway (1994)

**Greatest Black Comedies, Anti-War Comedies, Spoof Comedies:**

★[Duck Soup \(1933\)](#) \*

The Great Dictator (1940) \*

Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949)

★[Sunset Boulevard \(1950\)](#)

[Lolita \(1962\)](#)

★[Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb \(1964\)](#) \*

The Russians Are Coming! The Russians are Coming! (1966)

M\*A\*S\*H (1970) \*

Harold and Maude (1972) \*

Eating Raoul (1982)

Heathers (1989)

The Player (1992)

True Romance (1993)

**Other Greatest Comedies:**

Tillie's Punctured Romance (1914)

Exit Smiling (1926)

Million Dollar Legs (1932)

★[Trouble in Paradise \(1932\)](#)

[Dinner at Eight \(1933\)](#) \*

[The Thin Man \(1934\)](#) \*

Ruggles of Red Gap (1935)

[Stage Door \(1937\)](#)

Topper (1937) \*

Holiday (1938)

[Pygmalion \(1938\)](#)

The Cat and the Canary (1939)

[Destry Rides Again \(1939\)](#)

★[Ninotchka \(1939\)](#) \*

The Women (1939)

My Favorite Wife (1940)

★[The Philadelphia Story \(1940\)](#) \*

The Shop Around the Corner (1940)

Ball of Fire (1941) \*

Here Comes Mr. Jordan (1941)

Road to Morocco (1942) \*

To Be or Not To Be (1942) \*

Woman of the Year (1942) \*

Heaven Can Wait (1943)

[The More the Merrier \(1943\)](#)

Blithe Spirit (1945, UK)

Wonder Man (1945)

The Kid From Brooklyn (1946)

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (1947)

Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein (1948) \*  
Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House (1948) \*  
The Paleface (1948)  
[Adam's Rib \(1949\)](#) \*  
Everybody Does It (1949)  
Born Yesterday (1950) \*  
[Father of the Bride \(1950\)](#) \*  
Harvey (1950) \*  
The Lavender Hill Mob (1951, UK)  
The Man in the White Suit (1951, UK)  
Pat and Mike (1952)  
★[Singin' in the Rain \(1952\)](#) \*  
Genevieve (1953, UK)  
Mr. Hulot's Holiday (1953, Fr)  
The Belles of St. Trinian's (1954, UK)  
[The Seven Year Itch \(1955\)](#) \*  
[The Court Jester \(1956\)](#) \*  
Auntie Mame (1958) \*  
Big Deal on Madonna Street (1958, It.)  
Mon Oncle (1958, Fr.)  
The League of Gentlemen (1959, UK)  
Pillow Talk (1959)  
★[Some Like It Hot \(1959\)](#) \*  
The Mouse That Roared (1959, UK)  
[The Apartment \(1960\)](#) \*  
It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World (1963) \*  
The Nutty Professor (1963) \*  
Tom Jones (1963)  
The Pink Panther (1964)  
A Shot in the Dark (1964) \*  
Marriage, Italian Style (1964, It.)  
Cat Ballou (1965) \*  
The Great Race (1965)  
Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines... (1965)  
The Fortune Cookie (1966)  
Barefoot in the Park (1967)  
Bedazzled (1967)  
★[The Graduate \(1967\)](#) \*  
A Guide for the Married Man (1967)  
Playtime (1967, Fr)  
The Odd Couple (1968) \*  
[Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid \(1969\)](#)  
The Heartbreak Kid (1972) \*  
What's Up, Doc? (1972) \*  
[American Graffiti \(1973\)](#) \*  
Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)  
The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975)  
Shampoo (1975) \*  
The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings (1976)  
Car Wash (1976)  
Silver Streak (1976) \*  
The Goodbye Girl (1977)  
Kentucky Fried Movie (1977)  
Semi-Tough (1977)  
National Lampoon's Animal House (1978) \*  
[Being There \(1979\)](#) \*  
Breaking Away (1979)  
The Jerk (1979) \*  
Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979)  
[10 \(1979\)](#)



Airplane! (1980) \*  
Caddyshack (1980) \*  
9 to 5 (1980) \*  
Private Benjamin (1980) \*  
Stir Crazy (1980)  
Arthur (1981) \*  
Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid (1982)  
Diner (1982) \*  
Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982) \*  
48 Hours (1982)  
My Favorite Year (1982)  
Tootsie (1982) \*  
Victor/Victoria (1982) \*  
Risky Business (1983)  
Trading Places (1983)  
Beverly Hills Cop (1984) \*  
[Ghostbusters \(1984\)](#) \*  
Splash (1984)  
This is Spinal Tap (1984) \*  
Top Secret! (1984)  
Back to the Future (1985)  
The Breakfast Club (1985)  
Lost in America (1985) \*  
Prizzi's Honor (1985)  
Down and Out in Beverly Hills (1986)  
Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)  
Broadcast News (1987) \*  
Good Morning, Vietnam (1987) \*  
Moonstruck (1987) \*  
Planes, Trains, and Automobiles (1987)  
The Princess Bride (1987)  
Raising Arizona (1987) \*  
Roxanne (1987)  
Three Men and a Baby (1987)  
Beetlejuice (1988) \*  
Big (1988) \*  
Bull Durham (1988) \*  
A Fish Called Wanda (1988) \*  
Married to the Mob (1988)  
Midnight Run (1988)  
The Naked Gun (1988)  
Working Girl (1988)  
Honey, I Shrunk the Kids (1989)  
Look Who's Talking (1989)  
Parenthood (1989)  
Say Anything (1989)  
[When Harry Met Sally... \(1989\)](#) \*  
Home Alone (1990)  
Pretty Woman (1990)  
City Slickers (1991) \*  
Hot Shots! (1991)  
Soap Dish (1991)  
A League of Their Own (1992)  
My Cousin Vinny (1992)  
Wayne's World (1992)  
Dazed and Confused (1993)  
Groundhog Day (1993) \*  
Mrs. Doubtfire (1993) \*  
Sleepless in Seattle (1993)  
Ace Ventura, Pet Detective (1994)

Bullets Over Broadway (1994)  
Clerks (1994)  
Ed Wood (1994)  
Forrest Gump (1994)  
Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994)  
Babe (1995)  
Clueless (1995)  
Dumb and Dumber (1995)  
Get Shorty (1995)  
Mighty Aphrodite (1995)  
[Fargo \(1996\)](#) \*  
The Nutty Professor (1996)  
Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery (1997)  
The Full Monty (1997, UK)  
Grosse Pointe Blank (1997)  
Men in Black (1997)  
My Best Friend's Wedding (1997)  
Romy and Michele's High School Reunion (1997)  
Wag the Dog (1997)  
Babe: Pig in the City (1998)  
Life is Beautiful (1998, It)  
Pleasantville (1998)  
Rushmore (1998)  
There's Something About Mary (1998) \*  
The Truman Show (1998)  
You've Got Mail (1998)  
American Pie (1999)  
Analyze This (1999)  
Galaxy Quest (1999)  
Topsy-Turvy (1999)  
Meet the Parents (2000)  
Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)  
My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002)