

Romantic comedy film

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

(Redirected from [Romantic comedy](#))

Romantic comedy films are a sub-genre of [comedy films](#) as well as of [romance films](#).

The basic plot of a romantic [comedy](#) is that two people meet, banter with each other, but despite an attraction obvious to the audience do not become romantically involved because of some internal factor (on the surface, they do not like each other) or an external barrier (one is romantically involved with another person, for instance). At some point, after various comic scenes, they are parted for some reason. One partner or the other then realizes that they are perfect for each other, and (often after some spectacular effort, sometimes termed the *Grand Gesture*, and/or incredible coincidence) they meet again, they declare undying love for each other, and disappear off into the sunset together.

COMEDY FILMS

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).

Created in 1996-2005 © by Tim Dirks. All rights reserved.

The birth of the [screwball](#) comedy can be attributed to many factors. America was dealing with the devastating effects of [The Great Depression](#), and Americans were in no mood for any additional [depression](#) that might come with a particularly sad film. Although there are films that could be argued to be screwball comedies that [date](#) back before 1934, that specific year can be called the year of the true "birth" of the [genre](#). In 1934, three of the most important and defining screwball comedies were released; [It Happened One Night](#), [Twentieth Century](#), and [The Gay Divorcee](#). Each of the films was [unique](#), but all of the films had some common [themes](#) and conventions, which the screwball genre would eventually be based on. Screwball comedies were notorious for the [juxtaposition](#) of [sexes](#) and [classes](#), fast, smart and witty [dialogue](#), and being cast with [famous](#) and talented stars.

From the 30s to the 50s, censorship was abundant in the film industry. The [Hays Code](#), required [screenwriters](#) and [filmmakers](#) to adhere to certain rules when making a movie, or pay the consequences. What came from these boundaries were creative ways of breaking the rules, highly suggestive dialogue, actions, and [mise en scène](#).

The screwball comedy [genre](#) did not last an exceptionally long time, as when [World War II](#) started up, comedy films were made much less frequently, the nation's tastes switching to more [patriotic war films](#), and other forms of drama.

The genre did leave its marks on film comedy in [general](#), though, and although very few good screwball comedies were made after the early 40s, you can certainly see the influences it had in today's [romantic comedy](#) genre. The director [Preston Sturges](#) made many wonderful screwball comedies, but his [style](#) tends towards a romantic comedy that is more modern. Sturges was the man responsible for bridging the screwball comedy film with the more modern romantic comedy film.

Actors and especially actresses were [typecast](#) into these screwball roles, and unfortunately, some of them weren't able to escape the typecasts once the genre died out. Notable screwball actors:

- [William Powell](#)
- [Cary Grant](#)
- [Melvyn Douglas](#)

Notable screwball actresses:

- [Carole Lombard](#)
- [Claudette Colbert](#)
- [Katharine Hepburn](#)
- [Jean Arthur](#)
- [Irene Dunne](#)
- [Myrna Loy](#)
- [Ginger Rogers](#)

Notable screwball directors:

- [Frank Capra](#)
- [Billy Wilder](#)
- [Charles Brackett](#)
- [Howard Hawks](#)
- [Preston Sturges](#)
- [Ernst Lubitsch](#)

(Note that most of these directors are not purely screwball, and moved on to [other](#) things)

Notable screwball films:

- [Twentieth Century](#) (1934)
- [The Gay Divorcee](#) (1934)
- [Mr Deeds Goes To Town](#) (1936)
- [Bringing Up Baby](#) (1938)
- [You Can't Take It With You](#) (1938)
- [It's a Wonderful World](#) (1939)
- [His Girl Friday](#) (1940)
- [The Philadelphia Story](#) (1940)
- [Arsenic and Old Lace](#) (1941)
- [The Lady Eve](#) (1941)
- [Sullivan's Travels](#) (1942)
- [The Palm Beach Story](#) (1942)
 - [The Miracle of Morgan's Creek](#) (1944)