



COMEDY · ROMANCE · CRIME

Some Like It Hot

1959 · Directed by Billy Wilder

Comedy

Classical Hollywood

Gangster Film

Chicago, 1929. Two broke jazz musicians witness something they should not have and run for the only job that will hide them: a touring all-girl band bound for Florida. A farce built on disguise, desire and a very fast tempo.

DIRECTOR Billy Wilder

YEAR 1959

RUNTIME 2h 03m (123 min)

COUNTRY USA

GENRES Comedy, Romance, Crime

CAST Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon, Marilyn Monroe, George Raft, Pat O'Brien

MUSIC Adolph Deutsch

IMDB 8.2 / 10 (304,528 votes)

ROTTEN
TOMATOES 95% (critics)

METACRITIC 98 / 100

TMDB SCORE 8.1 / 10 (4,009 votes)

WHERE TO
WATCH

Stream (US): fuboTV, MGM+ Amazon Channel, Philo, MGM Plus Roku Premium Channel, YouTube TV, MGM Plus

Rent: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home, Spectrum On Demand

Buy: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home

Before watching

Spoiler-free

WHY WATCH THIS?

1 Billy Wilder's most celebrated comedy

Wilder and co-writer I.A.L. Diamond turned a thin farce premise into one of the most tightly built screenplays in Hollywood comedy, with Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe at full strength.

2 A landmark of the late classical studio comedy

It fuses screwball tempo, gangster parody and gender-bending farce, and it was released without the Production Code seal, a sign that the old censorship system was losing its grip.

3 Marilyn Monroe at her most deft

Monroe plays Sugar with comic timing and real vulnerability, and the film is the clearest showcase of how her screen persona could carry both a gag and a heartbreak.

WHY IT MATTERS IN CINEMA HISTORY

A late peak of classical Hollywood farce that also tested the limits of the Production Code, it shows an old studio genre becoming franker, faster and more self-aware as the 1960s approached.

WATCH WITH INTENTION

YOUR LENS

Watch it as a machine: every gag, prop and line of dialogue is planted early to pay off later.

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE

- How the first ten minutes switch from gangster picture to musical backstage comedy without losing speed, using music and cuts as punctuation.
- How Curtis and Lemmon play their disguises differently: one keeps a performer's calculation, the other lets the new identity take over.
- How Monroe's entrance is staged through movement and sound, and how the film uses her song numbers for character as well as spectacle.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

When a film is built on lies, whose deception do we end up rooting for, and why?

CINEMA AT THE TIME

- **Censorship:** The Production Code still governed Hollywood in 1959, discouraging sexual innuendo and anything suggesting sexual ambiguity. By this point its authority was eroding, and the film reached cinemas without a Code seal.
- **Industry:** Television was drawing audiences away, and studios answered with colour, widescreen and spectacle. Black-and-white comedy was now a deliberate choice rather than a default.
- **Genre inheritance:** The film draws on the 1930s screwball comedy and on early gangster pictures, whose clichés and stars were familiar enough to be parodied. Prohibition-era Chicago was already a screen mythology.
- **Director's moment:** Wilder had moved from the bitter noirs *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard* to comedy and courtroom drama, and was now a major name with the clout to push a risky premise.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

FILM

Fanfare d'amour (1935)

The French comedy about two musicians who pose as women to join an all-female orchestra supplied the basic premise Wilder and Diamond reworked.



MOVEMENT

Screwball comedy

Its fast talk, farcical misunderstandings and romance under pressure are inherited from 1930s comedies such as *It Happened One Night*.



TRADITION

1930s gangster films

Prohibition-era mobsters, speakeasies and star persona such as George Raft's are the source of both the film's menace and its parody.



THIS FILM

Some Like It Hot (1959)

NEW AT THE TIME *A mainstream studio comedy that built its whole engine on cross-dressing and open sexual innuendo, at a time when the Code was meant to forbid exactly that.*

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Made in late-1950s America, when the Production Code was losing its grip and Cold War conformity was starting to loosen, but a 1920s Prohibition setting still felt safely distant.

- **Country and moment:** Postwar American prosperity and suburban conformity shaped 1959, with rigid expectations of masculinity and femininity. The film looks back at 1929 Chicago, the Prohibition era of speakeasies and organised crime, as a comic, nostalgic setting.

- **Politics and censorship:** The Hays Production Code still formally governed Hollywood, banning open treatment of sexual themes and cross-dressing innuendo. Wilder released the film without Code approval, and its commercial success helped weaken the Code's authority.
- **Society and audience:** Audiences were growing more relaxed about sexual humour, as the postwar years and the rise of television pushed Hollywood toward more adult material. Marilyn Monroe was by then one of the biggest stars in the world, and her image was central to the film's appeal.
- **The filmmaker's situation:** Wilder was a Jewish emigre from Austria-Hungary who had fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and built a Hollywood career as a writer-director. By 1959 he was an established, powerful figure who could take risks. Monroe's lateness and difficulties on set made the shoot famously tense.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Pace:** Fast and dialogue-driven, with set-pieces timed like musical numbers. The long runtime rarely feels slack.
- **Style:** Classical studio farce with period gangster parody. Jokes are verbal, visual and structural, and many depend on knowing earlier setups.
- **Colour / ratio:** Black and white, standard 1.85:1 widescreen framing.
- **Performance:** Broad comic acting held in check by real emotional stakes. Monroe, Lemmon and Curtis each play different registers.
- **Sound:** Jazz-age songs and period dance music, with Monroe singing on screen. Dialogue is quick and full of innuendo.
- **Tone:** Warm and cynical in turns. Some violence appears early, but the film is chiefly comic.

WATCH WITH KIDS?

12+ SUGGESTED AGE

Ratings range from PG (GB) to 12/16 (DE) and TP/12 (FR); 12 suits the gangster violence, innuendo and length, though mature 10-year-olds could cope with you there.

Official ratings: UK PG · Germany 12/16 · France TP/12

- **Good for:** Fast, brilliant farce with famously funny performances, snappy dialogue, jazz-age music and costumes. Older children and teens who enjoy slapstick and mistaken-identity comedy can see why it is a classic.
- **May unsettle, gangster violence:** Shootings are implied or briefly shown in black and white, with a tense chase atmosphere. It is mostly stylised rather than graphic.
- **May unsettle, sexual innuendo:** Frequent suggestive jokes, flirtation and revealing costumes. Much of it is double entendre that younger children will not follow.
- **May unsettle, dated attitudes:** Period views on gender, women and marriage, plus jokes about drinking and Prohibition, reflect 1959 and 1929 sensibilities.

- **May unsettle, pace:** Black-and-white and over two hours long, with period dialogue delivered quickly. Younger children may lose focus.
- **Explain first:** It is set in 1929 during Prohibition, when alcohol was illegal and gangsters ran secret bars called speakeasies.
- **Explain first:** The film is in black and white, which was a deliberate choice for the comedy.
- **Explain first:** Much of the humour comes from men dressing as women, which was daring in 1959 and is played as farce.

Talk about it after: *Which jokes still work today, and which ones feel dated? What do you think made audiences laugh in 1959?*

Cinespective's own guidance, a draft. Check it against the official ratings and your own judgement.

After watching

CONTAINS SPOILERS

THE FILM, UNPACKED

CENTRAL IDEA

The film can be read as a comedy about performance: identity is something put on with a wig, an accent or a bank account, and desire keeps exposing what people are actually like underneath.

THEMES

- **Disguise and identity:** Both leads discover that pretending to be someone else reveals who they are. Daphne's enjoyment of the disguise is as telling as Joe's discomfort with it.
- **Gender and desire:** The farce plays with how men see women when they are forced to live as them, and it treats attraction as less fixed than the period officially allowed.
- **Money and class:** The characters are broke, and their schemes are driven by rent, gigs and the fantasy of a rich husband. Sugar's romantic fantasies are as financial as emotional.
- **Violence beneath the laughs:** The gangster plot is never played as pure comedy. It keeps the stakes of the farce real and gives the disguises urgency.
- **Acceptance:** The ending turns on a refusal to judge. It reads as a joke, but also as a surprisingly generous view of other people.

Key scenes

The garage massacre

It places real violence at the start and sets the stakes. The shift from period gangster pastiche to the heroes' panic establishes a tone that lets the later farce feel urgent.

The train and sleeping-car party

It establishes the band, the disguises and Sugar in one confined space. The comedy of concealment and the film's first musical-comic crescendo come from the same set-up.

Marilyn's yacht seduction

Joe's Cary Grant impersonation makes the disguise-within-a-disguise comic, and the scene turns a seduction into a performance study in which both parties are acting.

The final motorboat

It resolves the plot by exposing the film's central joke. The last exchange sums up its attitude toward identity, and shows why the film is more than a gag machine.

Filmmaking

- **Screenplay structure:** Wilder and Diamond plant details early, such as props, names and habits, and pay them off later. The script runs on escalating misunderstandings and tight scene-to-scene logic.
- **Black-and-white photography:** Charles Lang's cinematography gives the film a 1920s feel and a crisp comic look. The black and white also hid the makeup problems that colour tests had shown.
- **Performance:** Lemmon plays Daphne's happy absorption in the role, Curtis separates two voices and a manner of walking, and Monroe's apparent naivety is a carefully handled comic instrument.
- **Music and period design:** Adolph Deutsch's jazz scoring and the period songs set the era, while Orry-Kelly's costumes helped the disguise work. The costume design won the film's only Oscar.
- **Direction:** Wilder keeps shots simple and lets timing carry the jokes. He cuts and stages for clarity and rhythm rather than showy camera work.

THE FULL STORY

The full plot, including the ending.

Chicago, 1929, during Prohibition. Joe, a saxophonist, and Jerry, a bass player, are out of money and out of luck. After a speakeasy raid, they accidentally witness the St. Valentine's Day-style massacre carried out by gangster Spats Colombo and his men, and they escape with the mob hunting them.

Desperate for work out of town, they disguise themselves as women, Josephine and Daphne, and join Sweet Sue's all-female band on a train to Florida. There they befriend the ukulele player and singer Sugar Kane, who dreams of marrying a rich man. Joe, bewitched, invents a second disguise as a shy millionaire and begins to court her, while Jerry, as Daphne, is wooed by the real millionaire Osgood Fielding III.

The mob arrives at the same hotel for a gangsters' convention. Spats recognises the pair and the two are forced to flee again, but not before they witness another killing and the gang is dealt with.

Joe, no longer able to lie to Sugar, drops his disguise during a performance, and she runs to him. They escape in Osgood's motorboat, with Jerry still in drag. When Jerry finally reveals that he is a man, Osgood shrugs it off with the film's famous last line: nobody's perfect.

BEHIND THE FILM

- **Why black and white:** Wilder insisted on black and white because colour tests made the leads' drag makeup look greenish. The choice also helped give the film a period feel, and it was a deliberate break from the 1950s colour trend.
- **Borrowed premise:** The story is loosely based on the 1935 French film *Fanfare d'amour*, about two musicians who pose as women to join an all-female orchestra. Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond rebuilt it with a gangster plot and new characters.
- **Cary Grant voice:** Tony Curtis based Joe's millionaire voice on an impression of Cary Grant. Curtis later said that Grant, on hearing it, told him he did not talk like that, which became part of the film's own legend.

- **A difficult shoot:** Production was slow and tense, in large part because of Monroe's lateness and difficulty with lines, which required many retakes. The finished performance nevertheless shows no trace of the strain.
- **Spoofing George Raft:** Casting George Raft as a mob boss was a knowing joke. Raft had made his name in 1930s gangster films, and the coin-flipping gag nods directly to his role in Scarface.
- **Myth:** Wilder shot in black and white to evoke the 1920s setting. **Reality:** The period feel was a bonus. The main reason was practical: colour tests showed that Curtis and Lemmon's makeup looked green on colour film.

LEGACY AND CONNECTIONS

Its place in the lineage before → after

FILM

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MOVEMENT

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TRADITION

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THIS FILM

Some Like It Hot (1959)



FILM

Tootsie (1982)

A comedy of a man living as a woman that uses the disguise to explore how men treat women, building on Wilder's template.



FILM

Mrs. Doubtfire (1993)

Another mainstream comedy in which a man lives in female disguise, with the farce resting on the same mix of deception and affection.



TRADITION

The post-Code Hollywood comedy

By opening commercially without a Code seal, it helped show that the system had lost its power and encouraged franker sexual comedy.

Reception and reputation

The film was a major commercial success in 1959 and was widely praised for its pace, script and performances, with Lemmon and Monroe especially admired. Some moral groups and censors objected to its sexual innuendo and cross-dressing, and it opened without the Production Code seal, but the objections did little to hurt its audience.

Its reputation has only grown. It is now routinely named among the greatest film comedies, and its screenplay is studied as a model of construction. Its treatment of gender, once a risk, is now seen as unusually relaxed, while Monroe's performance is valued more highly than in her lifetime.

Awards Oscars and Cannes

Academy Awards: 6 nominations, 1 win (Best Costume Design, Black-and-White, Orry-Kelly).

Nominated for Director, Actor (Jack Lemmon), Adapted Screenplay, Cinematography (Black-and-White) and Art Direction (Black-and-White).

Cultural impact beyond cinema

- **Nobody's perfect:** The closing line, "Well, nobody's perfect," spoken by Joe E. Brown's Osgood, is among the most quoted endings in cinema. It is widely used as a punchline for shrugging off a shocking revelation or an unlikely situation.
- **Marilyn Monroe's persona:** Sugar Kane, with her ukulele, her breathy "I Wanna Be Loved by You" and her clinging gowns, is one of the images most tied to Monroe's stardom. It is often cited alongside her white-dress subway-grate image as shorthand for her screen persona.
- **Queer readings:** Its gender play and Osgood's unfazed acceptance of Jerry as Daphne have led many viewers to read it as an early, affectionate, if coded, comedy of gender fluidity. It is often screened and discussed in LGBTQ+ film programmes and in writing on gender performance in Hollywood.
- **Parody and stage afterlife:** The film's title and its two musicians in drag recur in comedy sketches and pop-culture references. It was adapted as the Broadway musical *Sugar* (1972) and later as the stage musical *Some Like It Hot* (2022), which reworked its story with contemporary views of gender and race.

Its lasting influence

It became the template for the cross-dressing comedy, from *Tootsie* to *Mrs. Doubtfire*, and its commercial success helped weaken the Production Code, opening the way for franker mainstream comedies in the 1960s.

WHAT NEXT?

CONTINUE THE DIRECTOR

Sunset Boulevard (1950)

Wilder's darker side. The same sharp dialogue and cynicism about show business appear in a noir story with Hollywood as its subject.

FOLLOW THE IDEA

It Happened One Night (1934)

The screwball romance that set the template for fast talk, mismatched leads and a relationship tested by travel.

CONTINUE THE DIRECTOR

The Apartment (1960) COMING SOON

Wilder and Diamond reunite with Jack Lemmon for a comedy-drama that is more bittersweet, and that also won Best Picture.

EXPLORE THE ERA OR MOVEMENT

Dr. Strangelove (1964)

A different kind of comedy, in which satire replaces farce and the nuclear age becomes the target. It shows how the form darkened in the 1960s.

SEE WHAT INFLUENCED IT

Scarface (1932) COMING SOON

The gangster picture whose coin-flipping George Raft the film spoofs, and a good way to see what the parody is parodying.

FULL CAST AND CREW



Billy Wilder
DIRECTOR



Tony Curtis
ACTOR
as Joe (Josephine)



Jack Lemmon
ACTOR
as Jerry (Daphne)



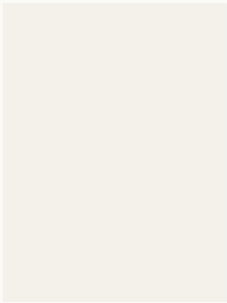
Marilyn Monroe
ACTOR
as Sugar Kane
Kowalczyk



George Raft
ACTOR
as Spats Colombo



Pat O'Brien
ACTOR
as Detective Mulligan



Adolph Deutsch
COMPOSER