



# Some Like It Hot

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

‘Sensationally funny, one of the best scripts ever, Marilyn Monroe at the peak of her incandescence, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon beyond brilliant in drag and some great songs. How can anyone not love this?’ – Alan Jones

‘I was about to write about the richly coded and deceptively generous queerness of Billy Wilder’s immortal cross-dressing comedy, but I also shouldn’t overcomplicate things: it’s here because it has always made me laugh like nothing else, and still does.’ – Guy Lodge

‘Nobody’s perfect. Nobody but Billy Wilder.’ – Fabio Troncarelli

‘Comedies are always underrated in this poll. This is a masterpiece of its genre, one of the funniest films ever made. Wonderful actors, wonderful tempo, wonderful dialogue.’ – Barbara Schweizerhof

*Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

## A contemporary review

Billy Wilder’s *Some Like It Hot* will not appeal to those who find female impersonation unamusing in any circumstances; and certainly, since it also contains two painfully accurate re-creations of gangland slaughter, its opportunities for offence are considerable. In fact the gangster sequences are the least successful part of the film. There is too much random detail and intramural humour (a marmoreal George Raft is confronted with a coin-flipping gunman played by Edward G. Robinson, Jr.) and the whole could be cut by at least one bloodbath. The horrifying Al Capone reunion dinner, for instance, is effectively staged and chillingly well-acted by Nehemiah Persoff, but it is an unrelated tour de force; its sole purpose, to conclude the ‘drag’ act necessitated in the first place by an involuntary witnessing of the St. Valentine’s Day massacre, could have been more simply served.

Although the comedy never quite shakes off this basic confusion in styles, it comes to life from the start. A suddenly speeding hearse sets the pace, a leaking coffin of whisky the pre-credits setting – Chicago in the freewheeling 1920s – and a funeral parlour front to a speakeasy the comedy’s predominant note of incongruity and masquerade. Soon, painted and padded and tilting at a perilous angle, two jazz musicians on the run join an all-girl train call for Florida.

Extravagance takes over on arrival, when Jack Lemmon’s husky squeaks and girlish dormitory confidences give way to frolicking chaperonage and beach games. Courted by a dotty, much-married millionaire (Joe E. Brown), the duenna mellows into a teasing siren, tangoing through the night with a rose gripped wistfully between her teeth. This is a brilliantly worked-out performance. If Tony Curtis’s cooing Josephine is by contrast a shade too real for comfort, the actor’s heavier style of burlesque is better suited to a secondary impersonation, in yachting cap and blazer, of a pseudo-Cary Grant petroleum tycoon. Marilyn Monroe is charmingly herself, if a little wan, but her role of innocent at large is too peripheral to strike a useful balance with the film’s blacker and more clinical humours.

Almost every character has a touch of consulting room fantasy. (Like *Love in the Afternoon*, the Wilder & A. L. Diamond script is distantly adapted from an old German film.) Apart from female impersonation, Tony Curtis takes a foam bath fully dressed and seduces a solicitous Marilyn by feigning doubts about his potency; Marilyn herself has a weakness for men in glasses – large pebble ones at that; George Raft makes a fetish of his immaculate spats; Joe E. Brown, having unerringly picked out the most heavily muscled girl in sight, is not in the least surprised to learn that he has eloped with a man. ‘After all,’ he says, ‘nobody’s perfect.’

Obviously the day is that much nearer when Billy Wilder must film Hirschfeld’s *Anomalies and Perversions* as a musical. So long as it casts Jack Lemmon as an Oedipus complex, there should be no grounds for complaint.

**Peter John Dyer, *Sight and Sound*, July 1959**

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#### **SOME LIKE IT HOT**

*Directed by:* Billy Wilder  
*©/Presented by:* Ashton Productions  
*Production Company:* Mirisch Company  
*Produced by:* Billy Wilder  
*Associate Producers:* Doane Harrison, I.A.L. Diamond  
*Production Manager:* Allen K. Wood  
*Assistant Director:* Sam Nelson  
*Script Continuity:* John Franco  
*Screenplay by:* Billy Wilder, I.A.L. Diamond  
*Suggested by a story by:* R. Thoren, M. Logan  
*Director of Photography:* Charles Lang Jr  
*Special Effects:* Milt Rice  
*Editor:* Arthur P. Schmidt  
*Art Director:* Ted Haworth  
*Set Decorator:* Edward G. Boyle  
*Property:* Tom Plews  
*Miss Monroe’s Gowns:* Orry-Kelly  
*Wardrobe:* Bert Henrikson  
*Make-up Artist:* Emile LaVigne  
*Hairstyles:* Alice Monte, Agnes Flanagan  
*Background Score:* Adolph Deutsch  
*Songs Supervised by:* Matty Malneck  
*Music Editor:* Eve Newman  
*Sound:* Fred Lau  
*Stunt Double:* Polly Burson \*  
*Studio:* Samuel Goldwyn Studios

#### **Cast**

Marilyn Monroe (*Sugar Kane*)  
Tony Curtis (*Joe, ‘Josephine’*)  
Jack Lemmon (*Jerry, ‘Daphne’*)  
George Raft (*Spats Colombo*)  
Pat O’Brien (*Mulligan*)  
Joe E. Brown (*Osgood Fielding III*)  
Nehemiah Persoff (*Little Bonaparte*)  
Joan Shawlee (*Sweet Sue*)  
Billy Gray (*Sig Poliakoff*)  
George E. Stone (*Toothpick Charlie*)  
Dave Barry (*Beinstock*)  
Mike Mazurki, Harry Wilson (*Spats’ henchmen*)  
Beverly Wills (*Dolores*)  
Barbara Drew (*Nellie*)  
Edward G. Robinson Jr (*Johnny Paradise*)  
Tom Kennedy (*bouncer*)\*  
John Indrisano (*waiter*)\*  
Laurie Mitchell (*trumpet player*)\*

USA 1959©  
121 mins

\* Uncredited

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