



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 54=

The Apartment

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Billy Wilder and IAL Diamond's sharp, cynical script concerns an insurance clerk (Jack Lemmon) who, bent on promotion, lends his apartment to his philandering superiors, only to find that the elevator girl he's fallen for (Shirley MacLaine) is being courted by his boss. If the behaviour on view is murky, the leads' performances vibrate with a tender humanity, ensuring that the film is both funny and poignant.

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The Apartment may be set during the Christmas holidays but, despite its sophistication and peerless wit, it offers little in the way of festive cheer. This is a romantic comedy macerated in moral corruption and director Billy Wilder's trademark cynicism. Inspired by the British weepie *Brief Encounter* (1945), but transferred to mid-century Manhattan, *The Apartment* is as much about loneliness and self-loathing as it is about love. And yet, the joy of its airtight script by Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond, its bittersweet score by Adolph Deutsch, and Joseph LaSelle's gleaming monochrome widescreen cinematography make it a film to savour – not to mention the famous forced-perspective sets by Alexandre Trauner, which transform an office block into an anonymous dystopia.

Jack Lemmon plays the hapless C.C. Baxter, a desk jockey at a New York insurance firm who is so much of a loser at love that instead of enjoying flirtations of his own he lends his flat to his sleazy colleagues for their adulterous trysts. Shirley MacLaine plays Fran, the unattainable object of his affection, a charming lift operator whose heart is broken by one of those duplicitous office creeps: a callous boss played by Fred MacMurray, returning to the insurance business after his previous turn for Wilder in *Double Indemnity* (1944). Lemmon and MacLaine make an adorable couple, two lost souls in the mean streets, but sharing an ambiguous attraction right up until the film's famous last line.

Pamela Hutchinson, *Sight & Sound*, February 2018

Mark Cousins on *The Apartment's* ending

The end of a movie is like the end of a party, like a comedown. I don't want it to happen, but how could I resist the invitation to write about the ending of Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960)? Twenty years ago I named my production company, Shut Up and Deal, after its last line. It's the film I've watched most in my life. I wrote the introduction to the screenplay when it was published by Faber & Faber. When you've loved something for a long time – let's say your whole adult life – you can either see deep into its core, or you're blinded by its beauty, and by your own history with it. My own sense of love, of Manhattan and of cinema is so entwined with *The Apartment* that I can't see it from any distance. But I'll have a go.

The story, of course, is about two people who work together in a New York skyscraper. She operates the elevators. He rides them every day to his number-crunching salaryman job. It's like a vertical car pool. The final shot of the film lasts about 90 seconds. It's New Year's Eve. He's packing up to leave his apartment; she's just been disappointed by the realisation that her older

boss, whom she thought she was in love with, is Eisenhower America in a nutshell. She arrives at the first man's apartment. A lot happens in those 90 seconds. He tells her that he loves her, that he absolutely adores her (note to readers – when you tell someone you love them, add that phrase). And, as if she hasn't heard him, or has and knew that it was coming and so isn't surprised, or because her being in this apartment on this night with this man and in this dress is just so perfect that she's incapable of shock – she doesn't react to his expression of love, one of the great expressions of love in cinema. Instead, she says, 'Shut up and deal.'

To the outside world they are two losers, Fran Kubelik and C.C. Baxter, Shirley MacLaine and Jack Lemmon. He lets out his apartment to his male colleagues so that they can shag their girlfriends. They live in a world of people who take and people who 'get took'. Sex is commodity in this midtown, mid-century Manhattan. People are cynical or self-exploit. If these 90 seconds were, say, a poem rather than the end of a narrative film, we might be able to isolate, and see more clearly, some things about the scene in their own right: Lemmon's almost non-sexual anxiety. The fact that Fran is both witty and traumatised by all the crap men she's known. The apartment itself – a big, drab knocking-shop and refuge which contains hints of modernism, such as the Picasso poster on its walls. The music – *fin de siècle* and Viennese-y – gestures to the Mitteleuropean world that Wilder knew well. The clothes: she slips off her coat and we see a cocktail dress. And her 'shut up and deal' – a deferral, a choice of play and innocence over sex.

The camera moves in to a two-shot at the end of the 90 seconds, but if it had pulled out and craned through the window into the world, what would it have discovered? White flight from New York. The Port Authority proposing the construction of the World Trade Center. The end of Beaux-Arts New York and its replacement by Mies van der Rohe's International Style. The consequences of the world and ideas of Mr Sheldrake, the boss Fran loved. A world before Stonewall. Further afield, JFK was getting elected, the Pill was approved in the US, Africa was decolonising, and the Jet Age was beginning.

That'll be Fran and C.C.'s world if they live together and love together. They won't be hippies. They won't go to Woodstock. They're not trendy. They're hurt, beautiful and feel dirtied by the world in which they work. Half a century later, in their eighties, would they vote for Donald Trump? Possibly.

Mark Cousins, *Sight and Sound*, January 2018

THE APARTMENT

Directed by: Billy Wilder
©/Production Company: Mirisch Company
Produced by: Billy Wilder
Associate Producers: I.A.L. Diamond, Doane Harrison
Production Manager: Allen K. Wood
Assistant Director: Hal Polaire
Script Continuity: May Wale
Written by: Billy Wilder, I.A.L. Diamond
Director of Photography: Joseph LaShelle
Special Effects: Milt Rice
Editor: Daniel Mandell
Art Director: Alexander Trauner
Set Decorator: Edward G. Boyle
Property: Tom Plews
Make-up: Harry Ray
Music by: Adolph Deutsch
Music Editor: Sid Sidney
Sound: Fred Lau
Sound Effects Editor: Del Harris

uncredited

Wardrobe: Forrest T. Butler

Hairstylist: Alice Monte

Cast

Jack Lemmon (*C.C. 'Bud' Baxter*)
Shirley MacLaine (*Fran Kubelik*)
Fred MacMurray (*Jeff D. Sheldrake*)
Ray Walston (*Joe Dobisch*)
Jack Kruschen (*Dr Dreyfuss*)
David Lewis (*Al Kirkeby*)
Hope Holiday (*Margie MacDougall*)
Joan Shawlee (*Sylvia*)
Naomi Stevens (*Mrs Dreyfuss*)
Johnny Seven (*Karl Matuschka*)
Joyce Jameson (*blonde*)
Willard Waterman (*Vanderhof*)
David White (*Eichelberger*)
Edie Adams (*Miss Olsen*)
uncredited
Frances Weintraub Lax (*Mrs Lieberman*)
Benny Burt (*bartender*)
Hal Smith (*Santa Claus*)
Dorothy Abbott (*office worker*)

USA 1960©

125 mins

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

Breathless (À bout de souffle)

Wed 1 Feb 14:30; Tue 14 Feb 20:50; Fri 24 Feb 18:20

Le Mépris (Contempt) Wed 1 Feb 18:10; Fri 17 Feb 20:50

Daughters of the Dust Wed 1 Feb 18:15; Thu 16 Feb 20:30

Sans Soleil Wed 1 Feb 20:40; Fri 17 Feb 18:00

M (Mörder unter uns)

Thu 2 Feb 14:30; Thu 16 Feb 20:40; Wed 22 Feb 18:00

Moonlight Thu 2 Feb 20:45; Tue 14 Feb 20:30

Blade Runner: The Final Cut

Fri 3 Feb 20:40; Sun 5 Feb 20:40; Sat 18 Feb 18:10

Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potemkin)

Sat 4 Feb 12:40; Sat 18 Feb 18:30

La dolce vita Sat 4 Feb 14:15; Sat 25 Feb 19:30

Sherlock Jr. Sat 4 Feb 17:20; Sat 11 Feb 11:45

City Lights Sat 4 Feb 17:20; Sat 11 Feb 11:45

Goodfellas Sat 4 Feb 20:10; Wed 15 Feb 20:10

North by Northwest Sat 4 Feb 20:20; Thu 9 Feb 18:00

L'Atalante Sun 5 Feb 12:15; Tue 14 Feb 18:30; Wed 22 Feb 14:30

Rear Window Sun 5 Feb 12:20; Fri 24 Feb 20:45

Stalker Sun 5 Feb 17:40; Tue 7 Feb 20:10; Sun 26 Feb 14:00

Casablanca Mon 6 Feb 20:30; Sun 12 Feb 13:20

Psycho Mon 6 Feb 20:45; Mon 20 Feb 14:30; Thu 23 Feb 20:40

8 1/2 (Otto e mezzo)

Tue 7 Feb 18:00; Tue 21 Feb 14:30; Sun 26 Feb 12:50

The Battle of Algiers (La battaglia di Algeri)

Tue 7 Feb 18:10; Sat 25 Feb 11:50

News from Home Tue 7 Feb 20:45; Fri 17 Feb 18:20 (+ intro)

Rashomon (Rashômon) Tue 7 Feb 21:00; Thu 23 Feb 18:20

The Piano Wed 8 Feb 20:35; Tue 21 Feb 17:50

Wanda Thu 9 Feb 20:30 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Sat 18 Feb 18:20

Fear Eats the Soul (Angst essen Seele auf)

Thu 9 Feb 20:55; Mon 27 Feb 18:00

Ordet (The Word) Fri 10 Feb 18:15; Sat 25 Feb 14:30

The 400 Blows (Les Quatre cents coups)

Fri 10 Feb 20:50; Sun 19 Feb 18:40

Bicycle Thieves (Ladri di biciclette)

Sat 11 Feb 11:50; Mon 20 Feb 20:55; Thu 23 Feb 14:30

Barry Lyndon Sat 11 Feb 19:20; Sat 25 Feb 15:30

Some Like It Hot Sun 12 Feb 13:30; Tue 14 Feb 18:10

The Third Man Sun 12 Feb 18:30; Tue 21 Feb 20:40

Killer of Sheep Sun 12 Feb 18:40 (+intro); Sat 18 Feb 20:40

Mirror (Zerkalo) Mon 13 Feb 20:50; Tue 28 Feb 20:50

Pather Panchali Sat 18 Feb 20:30; Tue 21 Feb 20:35; Sun 26 Feb 15:45

The Apartment Wed 22 Feb 20:35; Sun 26 Feb 12:40

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