



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

When Harry Met Sally...

When Harry Met Sally...

Director: Rob Reiner

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Castle Rock Entertainment in association with
Nelson Entertainment present
a Columbia Pictures release

Producers: Rob Reiner, Andrew Scheinman

Co-producers: Jeffrey Stott, Steve Nicolaides

Associate Producer: Nora Ephron

Unit Manager: Mark A. Baker

Production Manager: Steve Nicolaides

Production Co-ordinators: Linda Allan, Jane Raab,
Meng Hwei-Chu

Location Managers: Donna Bloom, Don Garrison

1st Assistant Director: Aaron Barsky

2nd Assistant Director: Michael Waxman

Script Supervisor: Kerry Lyn McKissick

Castling: Jane Jenkins, Janet Hirshenson

Castling Associates: Michael Hirshenson,
Robin Allan

Written by: Nora Ephron

Director of Photography: Barry Sonnenfeld

Camera Operator: M. Todd Henry

Assistant Camera: Angelo Di Giacomo,
Brian Armstrong, Christopher Duskin,
Thomas Miligan

Video: Video Image, Greg McMurry

Editor: Robert Leighton

Production Designer: Jane Musky

Art Department Co-ordinator: Harold Thrasher

Set Decorators: George R. Nelson,
Sabrina Wright-Basile

Scenic Artist: Billy Puzo

Property Masters: David L. Glazer, Dick Tice

Costume Designer: Gloria Gresham

Costume Supervisor: Jennifer L. Parsons

Make-up (Meg Ryan): Stephen Abrams,
Joseph A. Campayno

Make-up (Billy Crystal): Ken Chase,
Peter Montagna

Hairstyling: Barbara Lorenz, William A. Farley

Titles/Opticals: Pacific Title

Special Music Performances/Arrangements:
Harry Connick Jr

Orchestrations: Marc Shaiman, Tom Sharp

Music Supervisor: Scott Stambler

Sound Mixer: Robert Eber

Re-recording Mixers: Terry Porter, Mel Metcalfe,
David J. Hudson

Supervising Sound Editors: Charles L. Campbell,
Louis L. Edemann

Cast:

Billy Crystal (*Harry Burns*)

Meg Ryan (*Sally Albright*)

Carrie Fisher (*Marie*)

Bruno Kirby (*Jess*)

Steven Ford (*Joe*)

Lisa Jane Persky (*Alice*)

Michelle Nicastro (*Amanda Rees*)

Gretchen F. Palmer (*stewardess*)

Robert Alan Beuth (*man on aisle*)

David Burdick (*9 year-old boy*)

Joe Viviani (*Judge*)

Harley Kozak (*Helen Hillson*)

Joseph Hunt (*waiter at wedding*)

Kevin Rooney (*Ira Stone*)

Franc Luz (*Julian*)

Tracy Reiner (*Emily*)

Kyle T. Heffner (*Gary*)

Kimberley Lamarque (*waitress*)

Stacey Katzin (*hostess*)

Estelle Reiner (*older woman customer*)

John Arceri (*Christmas tree salesman*)

When Harry Met Sally... is so much more than a faked orgasm and a punchline. Not only does it offer many more pleasures than these, admittedly fine comic moments, it also stands as a pivotal film that helped reinvigorate the romantic comedy genre. Paradoxically, the film is well loved but also misunderstood and underappreciated: viewers know it is good, funny and poignant, but perhaps do not fully realise how important and influential it is. But *When Harry Met Sally...* is worthy of a place in a romcom pantheon with other films that introduced or perfected a whole new subgenre, like *It Happened One Night* (1934) with the screwball, *Pillow Talk* (1959) with the battle-of-the-sexes comedy and *Annie Hall* (1977) with the radical romcom; *When Harry Met Sally...* is similarly transformative.

It needs to be appreciated as a pivotal film in two ways: for stimulating a revival of the romantic comedy after the genre had idled for over a decade, and for reinvigorating the products of that genre in ways that changed what romcom meant and could do.

It was released in a decade in which the romcom was extremely under-represented at the box office. In looking at the increased number of romantic comedies that began to appear after *When Harry Met Sally...* I am not arguing that these later films were made expressly because of its success, but rather that its popularity indicated audience hunger for such films, and that other directors then began to tap into this with more confidence. Indeed, year on year across the succeeding decade the romcom came back into its own, increasing from 1990's two romcom hits to five in 1993, eight in 1995, ten in 1997 and so on to a high of 13 in 1999. *When Harry Met Sally...* had indicated that the romcom could be big business again and, while hardly any of the films that followed could match its combination of traditional conventions and innovative elements, many obviously tried to emulate its success by borrowing directly from it.

Close analysis reveals the film to be carefully and cleverly organised. Along with Nora Ephron's witty script, adroit direction from Rob Reiner, and performances from principals Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan that are both comic and touching, the film's structure plays a significant part in its appeal: while it seems to chart in a loose, organic way the haphazard development of the protagonists' relationship, it takes place within a rigorous framework, enabling a subtle deployment of echoes and parallels across the narrative.

It may seem strange that a film as popular as *When Harry Met Sally...* now it needs to be dissected to reveal what it does so audaciously and brilliantly, but in order to understand it for the trailblazer it was, I think analysis is necessary.

First, it introduced its central couple and then dropped them for five years – and then did it again. When other romcoms make narrative fodder out of the events of *One Fine Day* (1996) or one night (*Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*, 2008), one of the Reiner-Ephron film's most audacious moves is to stretch its story out over 12 years. Richard Linklater might perhaps be seen as responding to this in allowing a real-time gap of nine years to elapse between filming *Before Sunrise* (1995), its original companion piece, *Before Sunset* (2004) and its most recent return, *Before Midnight* (2013).

Peter Day (*joke teller at wedding*)
Kuno Sponholz, Connie Sawyer,
Charles Dugan, Katherine Squire, Al Christy,
Frances Chaney, Bernie Hern, Rose Wright,
Aldo Rossi, Dona Hardy, Peter Pan, Jane Chung
(*documentary couples*)
USA 1989©
95 mins
Digital

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Little Women

Sun 1 Dec 18:10; Mon 16 Dec 14:30; Fri 20 Dec 17:50

My Night with Maud

Ma nuit chez Maud
Mon 2 Dec 18:10; Thu 5 Dec 12:20; Tue 17 Dec 20:30

Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence

Tue 3 Dec 20:35; Sat 21 Dec 14:50

When Harry Met Sally

Wed 4 Dec 18:10 + intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions; Fri 20 Dec 20:50; Sun 22 Dec 12:15

Torch Song Trilogy

Fri 6 Dec 18:05; Fri 13 Dec 20:30

Female Trouble

Fri 6 Dec 20:50; Wed 18 Dec 20:50; Sun 29 Dec 18:30

Fanny and Alexander

Fanny och Alexander
Sat 7 Dec 19:30; Sun 29 Dec 14:15

The City of Lost Children

La Cité des enfants perdus
Sun 8 Dec 15:15; Fri 27 Dec 20:45

Tangerine

Mon 9 Dec 20:45; Sat 21 Dec 20:45

Monty Python's Life of Brian

Wed 11 Dec 18:10 + intro by Justin Johnson, BFI Lead Programmer, Thu 19 Dec 12:30; Sun 22 Dec 18:30

Carol

Thu 12 Dec 12:20; Sat 21 Dec 20:40; Mon 30 Dec 17:50

Eyes Wide Shut

Sat 14 Dec 20:00; Wed 18 Dec 17:40; Sat 28 Dec 17:00

Goodfellas

Sun 15 Dec 17:50; Mon 23 Dec 20:10; Sat 28 Dec 20:15

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Second, then, *When Harry Met Sally...* gave realism back to the genre, which is one reason it is so well loved. The protagonists do not meet cute, fall in love at first sight, know instantly they have met The One and then spend forever loving that person. Like people in real life, they get it wrong, get hurt, get older, get closer, get it wrong again, then finally learn how and when to make amends, and get married. This is a much more credible timeline, which lets us relate to the protagonists and their narrative. And then when they do get together, there is no dramatic *deus ex machina*, no great reversal of fortune, no car crash or coma, to make them realise, just their separation and then a growing realisation of what they mean to each other. The evident regret that bedevils Harry towards the finale is very realistic, even if he remains largely in denial of it.

Third, the film is beautifully structured, but so lightly that it is perfectly possible just to enjoy the parallels, echoes and returns without closer analysis. And this leads to fourth, which is the movie's enjoyably complex editing and sound mixes, and its recourse to a range of filmic techniques, such as split-screen, voiceover and montage, which both enrich the film itself and gesture in affectionate tribute to some of the great romantic comedies of the past.

Fifth, *When Harry Met Sally...* is funny, with not only a great written script but inspired improvisation from a quartet and more of actors who give excellent performances. And again, leading on from this, is sixth: its heroine. This is a film in which the heroine is not a cipher, not a fantasy of a woman (unlike *Working Girl's* sexy Cinderella who has 'a head for business and a bod for sin') but a character as well rounded as the man she spars with and learns to love. As much popular culture debate about Bechdel Tests and Manic Pixie Dream Girls has shown lately, the concept of the fully rounded female lead character is sadly all too uncommon now.

Seventh and finally, the film has been influential, not only in establishing that the romcom could be profitable at the box office, but that the genre, although one of the very oldest in cinema, could continue to evolve and renew itself.

Extract from *When Harry Met Sally...* by Tamar Jeffers McDonald (BFI Film Classics; BFI/Palgrave, 2015) Reproduced by kind permission of Bloomsbury Publishing. ©Tamar Jeffers McDonald

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