



You Must Remember This Presents... "The Old Man Is Still Alive"

Avanti!

Avanti!

Directed by: Billy Wilder
©/Production Companies: Phalanx Productions, Jalem Productions, Mirisch Company
Produced by: Billy Wilder
Production Manager: Alessandro Von Normann
Unit Managers: Ennio Onorati, Peter Shepherd
Assistant Director: Rinaldo Ricci
Script Supervisor: Yvonne Axworthy
Casting: Isa Bartalini
Screenplay by: Billy Wilder, I.A.L. Diamond
Based on the play by: Samuel Taylor
[Play] Produced on the New York stage by: Morris Jacobs, Jerome Whyte
[Play Produced] In association with: Richard Rodgers
Photographed by: Luigi Kuveiller
Aerial Photographer: Mario Damicelli
Editor: Ralph E. Winters
Assistant Editors: Claudio Cutry, Bobbie Shapiro
Art Director: Ferdinando Scarfiotti
Assistant Art Director: Osvaldo Desideri
Conductor: Gianfranco Plenizio
Music Arranged by: Carlo Rustichelli
Music Editor: George Brand
Sound Recordist: Basil Fenton-Smith
Re-recordist: William Varney
Sound Editor: Frank Warner
Dialogue Coach: Rae Mottola
Cast:
Jack Lemmon (*Wendell Armbruster III*)
Juliet Mills (*Pamela Piggott*)
Clive Revill (*Carlo Carlucci*)
Edward Andrews (*J. J. Blodgett*)
Gianfranco Barra (*Bruno*)
Franco Angrisano (*Arnold Trotta*)
Pippo Franco (*Mattarazzo*)
Franco Acampora (*Armando Trotta*)
Giselda Castrini (*Anna, maid*)
Raffaele Mottola (*passport officer*)
Lino Coletta (*Cipriani*)
Harry Ray (*Dr Fleischmann*)
Guidarino Guidi (*maitre d'*)
Giacomo Rizzo (*barman*)
Antonino Faà Di Bruno (*concierge*)
Yanti Sommer, Janet Ågren (*nurses*)
Maria Rosa Sciauzero, Melù Valente (*hostesses*)
Aldo Rendine (*Rossi*)
USA-Italy 1972©
144 mins
35mm

Jack Lemmon plays a Nixonian corporate stiff who travels to an Italian island to retrieve the body of his recently deceased father, only to fall for the daughter of the woman his dad was having an affair with. With beautiful location cinematography and a bittersweet tone, *Avanti!* pays tribute to Billy Wilder's mentor, Ernst Lubitsch, updating his travelogue romances for a more sexually permissive era.

A contemporary review

Given the jungle law of the film industry, and the depressingly limited options open to the professional filmmaker, Billy Wilder, like Hitchcock, has doggedly refused to come to terms with contemporary issues and demands (social or filmic) and instead recalcitrantly returned to his own sources. *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* and *Topaz* were both, for their makers, experimental in form and theme; each film gave its director unprecedented formal problems; and both were commercial flops. *Avanti!* and *Frenzy* are reversions to long trusted formulae, with the director in each case engaging himself in reworking by improving his earlier themes and style. Both films aim at consolidation rather than gain.

Wilder has taken his title and the basic situation from an unsuccessful Broadway play by Samuel Taylor. He spent two years on his script, working with three other writers before resuming his usual partnership with I. A. L. Diamond. Wendell Armbruster Jr. (Jack Lemmon) flies to Italy to supervise the shipment of his father's coffin back to America, Armbruster Sr. having been killed in a motor accident while taking his annual vacation in Ischia. Wendell repeatedly stumbles across Pamela Piggott (Juliet Mills) and then discovers to his horror that his father had been enjoying a longstanding affair with her mother, and that the couple had died in the crash together. Pamela's ingenuousness whittles away Wendell's reserve and whiz-kid efficiency, and they gradually recreate their parents' affair. The plot serves as a pure yet attenuated vehicle for Wilder to inventory his effects, and indulge his growing penchant for pushing crazy comedy into lyrical romanticism. The film is a steady crescendo of emotion, not only with the younger couple inheriting the aura left by their parents, but also with Armbruster re-evaluating his father and then (as a classic Wilder hero) himself, rejecting his inherited role. The limpid mood is the one aspect carried over from *Sherlock Holmes*; it shares little with, say, *The Apartment* (where Jack Lemmon undergoes an exactly similar process) but owes a lot to Genevieve Page's romantically signalling parasol.

If the core of *Avanti!* is a familiar Wilder statement of a role played to the point where it becomes untenable, then the decorations and counterpointing are equally characteristic. The film bristles with national stereotypes, American, British and Italian, each fleshed out with succulent political and social gags. In a context safely insulated from the realities of American business society, Wilder offers his most dismissive analysis of the American psyche: Armbruster the industrialist cocooned in right-wing prejudice, with a statutory wife given to making ill-timed long-distance telephone calls and an unthinking acceptance of the implications of being head of Armbruster Industries. ("Work at every Armbruster plant in the country will stop so that 216,000 employees can watch the funeral on closed-circuit TV, in colour. Except for Puerto Rico, who get it in

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SIGHT AND SOUND

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The Tiger of Eschnapur Der Tiger von Eschnapur
Tue 1 Apr 20:45; Sat 12 Apr 12:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

A Hole in the Head

Wed 2 Apr 20:40; Sat 5 Apr 15:00

The Indian Tomb Das indische Grabmal

Sat 5 Apr 20:30; Sat 12 Apr 15:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

Cheyenne Autumn

Wed 9 Apr 20:10; Sat 19 Apr 14:20 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Sat 12 Apr 17:30; Fri 18 Apr 14:00 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Red Line 7000 + intro

Mon 14 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 20:50

The Liberation of L.B. Jones

Tue 15 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 20 Apr 14:50

The Only Game in Town

Tue 15 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Fri 25 Apr 17:55

Frenzy

Wed 16 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 27 Apr 18:35

Such Good Friends

Thu 17 Apr 20:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Mon 21 Apr 13:45

True Grit

Fri 18 Apr 17:50 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 17:35

Rich and Famous

Sat 19 Apr 17:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Wed 30 Apr 20:40

Avanti!

Sun 20 Apr 14:40; Wed 23 Apr 20:15

Movie Movie

Sun 20 Apr 18:30; Mon 28 Apr 20:50

Under the Volcano

Mon 21 Apr 18:35; Tue 29 Apr 20:50

black and white.') The coffin that is eventually flown back to accommodate the plan actually contains Bruno, a hotel valet who fell victim to a *crime passionel*, posthumously fulfilling his ambition to emigrate. The Italian contingent also includes Carlucci the hotel manager (Clive Revill, as Italian here as he was Russian in *Sherlock Holmes*) with relatives in all the right places, the Neapolitan Trotta family, who hold the corpses to ransom with Pasolinian cunning, a robotic coroner and a cab driver cherishing his own memories of beloved Benito. The role-playing of the principals is told, again as usual in Wilder, in terms of their dress: Wendell switching from his leisure self to his business self by exchanging clothes with a fellow air traveller, the lovers-to-be wearing their parents' wardrobe, Pamela impersonating a manicurist in Wendell's room and compromised because she's wearing his pyjama top. Movingly, the moment of personality breakthrough comes with Wendell and Pamela in the nude, having swum out to a rock to sunbathe, discussing their unsatisfactory home lives with a new frankness and self-awareness.

Despite the profusion of incident, the film is predominantly languorous in pace and tone. Wilder films an astonishingly high proportion of it in long shot, the images offhandedly composed and yet crowded with detail. He uses camera movement with a restraint that makes a simple tracking shot (Pamela's entry into Wendell's room when she learns that her baggage has been moved there) extraordinarily intense. The method seems to represent a shift in Wilder's attitude to his material (though it isn't rigorous enough to avoid a brief lapse into Negulesco travelogue during Pamela's promenade), as if he were tackling his favoured themes with a greater self-consciousness. The audience is literally distanced from the action while at the same time encouraged to identify with it, which gives the whole exposition an almost diagrammatic quality. Perhaps this is the inevitable corollary of making a film with *Avanti!*'s relative facility of plot, after the more decadent and dangerous territory of *Sherlock Holmes*, where love was glimpsed, savoured, and then sublimated in morphine.

Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1973

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