



Marilyn Monroe: Self-Made Star

Some Like It Hot

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 Poliakov*)
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
Digital 4K / 35mm (Fri 5 Jun only)

* Uncredited

The screening on Fri 5 Jun will include an extended intro by season curator Kimberley Sheehan

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The year 1959 was a good one for motion pictures in the United States. *Rio Bravo*, *Imitation of Life*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Horse Soldiers*, *The Nun's Story*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *North by Northwest*, *Odds against Tomorrow*, *Pillow Talk*, *A Summer Place*, *On the Beach*, *Ben-Hur* and *Suddenly*, *Last Summer* were all released during that calendar year. Standing at the head of the pack was Billy Wilder's rapid-fire comedy, *Some Like It Hot*, the one film from 1959 that most people remember today, if not for its witty dialogue, drag humour and carefully structured comic narrative, then for the luminous performance of its iconic female star, Marilyn Monroe. As Wilder recalled, '*Some Like It Hot* will be a picture of mine people will see for as long as prints last, not because of me, but because of Miss Monroe.'

To be sure, 1959 also saw art-house releases in the US of films from other countries aimed at more discerning audiences, such as *Room at the Top* from Britain, *The 400 Blows* from France and *Wild Strawberries* (1957) from Sweden. But another interesting aspect of American cinema in 1959, as Ed Sikov has noted, is that 'for the first and only time in the decade, the four most commercially successful films of the year were comedies': *Auntie Mame* (1958), *The Shaggy Dog*, *Some Like It Hot* and *Pillow Talk*.

Of the four comedies, *Some Like It Hot*, with its frenetic plot about two musicians who, after witnessing the St Valentine's Day massacre, escape the gangsters by passing as women to join an all-female band, was the most daring. Compare it with *The Shaggy Dog*, which opened nationally at the same time. This film set the template for successive family comedies from Walt Disney starring Fred MacMurray (and MacMurray's befuddled 'dad' persona would be severely undercut by Billy Wilder the following year with *The Apartment*). The other two comedies pushed the needle much further, although not as far as Wilder's did. *Auntie Mame* challenged the Eisenhower era's conformity with Rosalind Russell's madcap eponymous character and is now considered a camp classic. *Pillow Talk* cunningly toyed with what had become the archetypal swinging bachelor figure (played by Rock Hudson) from *Playboy* magazine, just as it peeled back the outwardly cold façade of the single career woman (played by Doris Day) to reveal her comparable heat. It does not take away from the considerable fun and wit of those two comedies to appreciate the greater seriousness of the generic and gender playfulness of *Some Like It Hot*. This tantalising oxymoron – can a film at the same time be serious and playful? – is at the heart of Billy Wilder's genius as a writer and director, and the basis of *Some Like It Hot*'s enduring appeal, the legend of Miss Monroe notwithstanding.

Yet despite its wildly popular reception and Academy Award recognition with half a dozen nominations, including ones for director Wilder and star Jack Lemmon, *Some Like It Hot* was not without a fair amount of notoriety at the time of its release. Wilder was able to avoid interference from the Production Code Administration (PCA) but shortly before its opening the Catholic Legion of Decency almost condemned *Some Like It Hot*, according to correspondence in the PCA file. Ultimately rating it as 'morally objectionable', the Legion complained about the cross-dressing, smutty dialogue and offensive costumes. United Artists (UA), which released the film for the Mirisch Company, had some difficulty with local censorship boards, too. The board in the state of Kansas wanted to cut the yacht scene in which Tony Curtis seduces Monroe but UA refused, although viewers in Kansas City, Kansas, could drive across

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Monkey Business

Mon 1 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by BFI Programme and Research Coordinator Giulia Saccogna);
Sat 13 Jun 17:45

The Misfits

From Fri 5 Jun

Some Like It Hot

Fri 5 Jun 18:00 (+ extended intro by Kimberley Sheehan); Sun 14 Jun 18:15; Fri 19 Jun 14:30

Niagara

Sat 6 Jun 12:10 (+ *The Marilyn Monroe Century* book talk); Wed 17 Jun 20:40 (+ intro)

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

Mon 8 Jun 18:10 (+ intro by BFI Film Programmer Rógan Graham); Sat 20 Jun 12:00;
Thu 25 Jun 14:30

River of No Return

Fri 12 Jun 20:50; Mon 22 Jun 18:15 (+ intro)

There's No Business Like Showbusiness

Sun 14 Jun 15:10; Fri 26 Jun 18:00 (+ intro)

25 and Under:

An Introduction to Marilyn Monroe

Wed 17 Jun 19:15 Blue Room

The Prince and the Showgirl

Fri 19 Jun 18:05 (+ intro); Thu 25 Jun 20:40

How to Marry a Millionaire

Fri 19 Jun 20:45; Thu 25 Jun 18:15 (+ intro by Lucy Bolton, Queen Mary University of London)

Philosophical Screens:

How to Marry a Millionaire

Thu 25 Jun 20:15 Blue Room

Let's Make Love

Sat 27 Jun 20:30; Tue 30 Jun 18:15 (+ intro)

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the state line to see the uncut film in the larger sister city in Missouri. Ultimately, UA permitted 105 feet to be removed from the scene and the film got to play in the state of Kansas after all. In Memphis, Tennessee, to give another example, the film was restricted to adults.

Trouble was already on the horizon even before the film opened as an Easter attraction in the spring of 1959. The first sneak preview at a neighbourhood theatre in Los Angeles was a disaster; everyone was silent, presumably, it was thought, because the regular feature showing that evening did not adequately prepare the audience to watch a boisterous comedy. Studio execs wanted Wilder to recut the film but he only removed a snippet, a short scene that anticlimactically concluded the train sequence. A second preview was arranged at the Village Theatre in Westwood, close to the UCLA campus, and this time, to prepare audiences for what was to come, instead of following the custom of proclaiming a major studio preview, the sign as the screening began read: 'THE MANAGEMENT IS PROUD TO PRESENT A MINOR FEATURE PREVIEW.' The audience at this preview howled from start to finish.

Decades later, accounts in some books and articles have perpetuated confusion about the film's immediate box-office success, its critical reception and even its premiere date. Two people directly involved in the production, I. A. L. Diamond and Tony Curtis, and two of Wilder's biographers, Charlotte Chandler and Gene Phillips, claim that the film opened to great reviews and muted business at first, but the opposite was the case. While the Hollywood trades and some weekly magazines raved about the comedy, many major newspaper reviews were mixed. In the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Mae Tinee complained about its crude humour; in the *New York Times*, A. H. Weiler griped that its two-hour running time was too long for a comedy; and in the *Los Angeles Times*, Philip Scheuer was irritated by almost everything, from the generic blending to Monroe's zoffig figure to Curtis's Cary Grant accent. In the *Washington Post*, Richard Coe, on the other hand, raved about the film, calling it a 'rollicking blockbuster'. He advised his readers that they would want to see it more than once.

While its notoriety as well as its popularity persists, having risen to mythic proportions in Monroe's case, the secure position of *Some Like It Hot* in the canon of great American cinema is by now unquestioned. In 1989, it was among the first group of films selected for the National Film Registry by the Library of Congress. It placed fourteenth on the American Film Institute's list of '100 Years ... 100 Movies' in 1998 and first on its list of '100 Years ... 100 Laughs' in 2000. In a 2017 poll by the BBC, *Some Like It Hot* was voted the best comedy of all time. In 2022, it ranked 38th in *Sight and Sound's* critics' poll of the greatest films of all time.

Such high esteem is well deserved. *Some Like It Hot* was Wilder's second collaboration with I. A. L. ('Izzy') Diamond, who would serve as his writing partner and associate producer for his subsequent movies. When writing the film in 1958 with Diamond, Wilder recalled, 'We were pretty sure it would be a good comedy. What we did not know was that it would be a great comedy.' Yet once it was released, they must have sensed that they had made something great. As Diamond's wife Barbara recalled, '*Some Like It Hot* is the one picture that both of them said they wouldn't change a line if they had to do it over. And this was from men who second-guessed themselves for years after a picture of theirs was out of their hands.'

Extracted from *Some Like It Hot* by Steven Cohan (BFI Film Classics, 2025).

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