

Charade (1963) Donen

P Michell, 2021

Romance and suspense ensue in Pairs as a woman is pursued by several men who want \$250,000 from her dead husband. Whom can she trust?

This film is one of the rare movies that becomes a whole different story on subsequent viewings, once the plot twist is revealed at the first viewing.

Alfred Hitchcock was a master of the comedy-thriller and said: “*For me, suspense doesn't have any value if it's not balanced by humour.*” Charade is a great example of this.

Noted musical director Stanley Donen (“On the Town (1949) / Singin’ in the Rain (1952) / It’s Always Fair Weather (1955) / The Pajama Game (1957) this time helms a smart Hitchcockian thriller based on the brilliant screenplay by Peter Stone; Mr. Stone also co-authored the short story with Marc Behm. The film hums along in a breezy entertaining way with plenty of charm and a great repartee from the sharp effortless performances by the stars—the always elegant 32-year-old Audrey Hepburn and the always charismatic 60-year-old Cary Grant.

Director: Stanley Donen; screenwriter: story by Peter Stone & Marc Behm/Peter Stone; cinematographer: Charles Lang Jr.; editor: James Clark; music: Henry Mancini; cast: Cary Grant (Peter Joshua/Alexander Dyle/Adam Canfield/Brian Cruikshank), Audrey Hepburn (Regina ‘Reggie’ Lampert), Walter Matthau (Hamilton Bartholemew), James Coburn (Tex Panthollow), George Kennedy (Herman Scobie), Dominique Minot (Sylvie Gaudel), Ned Glass (Leopold W. Gideon), Thomas Chelimsky (Jean-Louis Gaudel), Paul Bonifas (Mr. Felix, stamp dealer), Jacques Marin (Insp. Edouard Grandpierre); Runtime: 113; MPAA Rating: NR; producer: Stanley Donen; Universal Pictures; 1963)

Selective Creative Personnel

Stanley Donen - Producer/ Director (32 credits)

Wanted to be a tap dancer. Worked with Gene Kelly at Arthur Freed’s musical unit at MGM for 10 years. Famous films (apart elsewhere listed) inc Seven Brides for Seven Brothers (1954). Known as the ‘King of Hollywood Musicals.’

For me directing is like having sex: when it's good, it's very good; but when it's bad, it's still good.

If we remade [Singin' in the Rain](#) (1952) today, when [Gene Kelly](#) sings in the rain, I think he'd be looking around to make sure he wasn't going to get mugged.

Peter Stone - screenplay / author (33 credits)

Mostly TV work. Charade easily the best work. Mirage (1965) is a weak homage to Hitchcock’s Spellbound (also with Gregory Peck), Arabesque (1966) weak sequel to Charade.

Charles Lang - Cinematographer (152 credits)

One of the famed Hollywood cinematographers. Paramount from 1929-1952. Famous for The Big Heat (1953), Some Like it Hot (1959), the Magnificent Seven (1960), How the West Was Won (1962).

Henry Mancini – prolific composer / conductor for TV and movies (364 credits!)
Started doing arrangements for Benny Goodman Orchestra. Known films include – Breakfast at Tiffanys (1961), Glenn Miller Story (1954), Tarantula (1955) [one of the best scary Sci-Fi monster films], Hatari (1962).

When asked "What's your favorite piece of all of them you've written?", Mancini said, " I'd have to say my favorite out of all the pieces of music I've ever written is "The Pink Panther". When asked why, Mancini replied, "Because I own half of it!".

Maurice Binder - Titles (84 credits)

With Saul Bass made titles a mini-movie. Became famous for his James Bond titles. Because Binder delivered the title sequences for the Bond series at the very last minute, the censors would often deem them too racy because of all the naked women in them, even though audiences never saw anything to cause upset. The fact that the premieres were a charity event helped him to get around that.

Walter Matthau – Bartholomew (106 credits)

Predating the Odd Couple (1968) with Jack Lemmon, who he'd often partner with. His role in this film suits him well. A gamble claimed to have lost US\$5 million in his life. Famous roles – Mr Roberts (with Lemmon) (1955), The Fortune Cookie (1966), Taking of Pelham One Two Three (1974). Hopscotch (1980) showed his comedic talents to great effect without Lemmon.

People were never sure if he was joking or saying things seriously, either on-screen or off-screen.

He hated to be identified as a comedic actor.

Dan Castellaneta has said that his original voice for Homer Simpson was simply an impression of Matthau.

Trivia

It was agreed Cary Grant would keep all of his clothes on when he took a shower, as he was nearly sixty and slightly overweight. However, they then decided the scene was funnier that way.

According to Audrey Hepburn, the scene where Regina spilled ice cream on Alex's suit was based on a real-life accident where Hepburn spilled red wine on Cary Grant's suit at a dinner party.

Seven studios rejected the original screenplay. Screenwriter Peter Stone turned it into a novel which was serialized in Redbook, which in turn sparked interest from all seven studios.

Audrey Hepburn was several years older than actresses who had already played Cary Grant's love interest back in the 1950s, such as Sophia Loren and Jayne Mansfield, which makes the fact that this movie often gets cited as an example of age gap relationships all the more peculiar. Hepburn was already in her mid-30s here, and "only" 25 years younger than Grant.

This film is in the public domain, due to the failure to put the then-required copyright notice in the released print. The attempt at a copyright notice in the film failed to include the text

"Copyright", "Copr.", or "©", as was needed by pre-1989 U.S. law; only the year and supposed copyright holder were listed.

The character of Peter Joshua was named after director [Stanley Donen](#)'s two sons, Peter and Joshua.

Peter Joshua ([Cary Grant](#)) quotes a line from [My Fair Lady](#) (1964) ("On the street where you live"). The film version starred [Audrey Hepburn](#) the following year, and Grant was offered male lead.

On the Tonight Show, George Kennedy revealed that Cary Grant had pulled a prank on him when making the film. During the scene where Kennedy's character is discovered submerged in a bathtub, Kennedy had to hold his breath. As soon as the crew was done filming the scene, Grant had everyone leave Kennedy, still holding his breath, in the bathtub.

Reviews

[ex IMDB Top review]

"If you don't stop following me, I'm going to call the po-LEECE!"

Charade seems to exist in a parallel universe, where it is not only humanly possible for a man to be as dapper, sexy and urbane as Cary Grant, and a woman to be as chic, adorable and beautiful as Audrey Hepburn, but for them to be a romantic couple, to boot (the mind reels at what the children would look and sound like). Long underrated and underappreciated (and only available in horrible-looking, grainy video prints), this fabulously entertaining comedy-thriller is the cinematic equivalent of a champagne cocktail. Often compared (perhaps unfavourably) to Hitchcock's films of the period, "Charade" contains little of the heavy psychological tension that marked Hitch's work. Instead, the film concentrates on witty banter, Audrey's wardrobe and a clever script--and we're the richer for it. Audrey is a sudden widow who is terrifyingly thrust into a web of deceit; her late husband, it seems, was being hunted by three ex-war buddies with whom he stole \$250,000. Audrey, they think, has the money--and if she doesn't come up with it quickly, she'll be joining him.

Cary Grant is the handsome, mysterious stranger who may be friend or foe. It had been done before, and it's been done since, but never with such panache. Henry Mancini's stylish score adds immeasurably to both the fun and the tension; and the ever-nimble Stanley Donen directs the suspense scenes just as deftly as the comic ones. My favourites: Audrey trailing Cary dressed "inconspicuously" in a white Givenchy trench coat and huge movie star sunglasses, while giving a poor German tourist the fits; Audrey finally cornering Cary in her hotel room and lightly kissing her way down his face--today's filmmakers might take a page from her book: this scene is intensely romantic without ever seeing a bit of exposed flesh or duelling tongues; and of course, the fabulous opening scene (I won't give away the surprise)--with Audrey wearing one of my favourite Movie Star get ups of all time: a hooded mink poncho over a catsuit. This is entertainment with a capital "E", made all the more enjoyable because it never panders to the lowest common denominator, never dips into "camp," and never breaks a sweat. Today's films continue to mine the same territory, and the results are ceaselessly boring, tawdry or both. You can FEEL the strain of the writers

and actors as they attempt the kind of slick interplay that came naturally to those involved in "Charade."

Charade: The last sparkle of Hollywood

Michael Newton, The Guardian, 2013.

Celebrating 50th anniversary of the movie.

In the wake of the Kennedy assassination Hollywood suffered a crisis of identity. But, as the stars retired and television boomed, Stanley Donen's *Charade* provided one last gleam of a golden age

In early December 1963, only a couple of weeks after the Kennedy assassination, Stanley Donen's *Charade* opened at Radio City, Manhattan. According to [Tom Wolfe](#), at 6am on a freezing December morning the crowds were already lining up down 50th Street and 6th Avenue to make sure they secured a seat. During "the dark days" after JFK's death, *Charade* offered [Cary Grant](#) and [Audrey Hepburn](#) (the two most attractive people ever to appear on screen?) a Henry Mancini score, Givenchy dresses, suspense, glamour and Paris. In the midst of the dislocation and strangeness produced by JFK's assassination, it must have seemed one of the few signs that life was proceeding as normal; the world may have become strange, but Hollywood's illusions were intact. Yet some months later, Pauline Kael, the best of all American film reviewers, was writing: "I couldn't persuade friends to go to see *Charade*, which although no more than a charming confectionery trifle was, I think, probably the best American film of last year." For Kael, the film's invisibility was a sign of the times, a refusal of all that was vibrant and vulgar and wonderfully frivolous in American movies.

Somewhere around 1963, just as sexual intercourse began, the classic Hollywood movie was dying. It was a death from a thousand cuts, brought on by the triumph of television, by a self-doubt that preferred the longueurs and disruptions of *Last Year at Marienbad* to the sheen of a movie like *Charade*, and by the death or retirement of the classic stars (Humphrey Bogart and Clark Gable, Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe). The best directors were turning valedictory; there's a touch of autumn in John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962); even when they soldiered on into the swinging world, as Billy Wilder did or Howard Hawks, some saving vitality had departed. In such transitional films as Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) or Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) a dark candour and a fractured storytelling displaced the old consensus of self-censorship and narrative cohesion. I am not suggesting that at this point the world started going to the dogs; Hollywood continued to make excellent films for another 40 years or so. But things were different. In the transition from *The Searchers* to *The Wild Bunch*, from *The Apartment* to *M*A*S*H*, a charm, an inconsequential grace, an unreality vanished.

Right before Hepburn made *Charade*, she filmed *Paris When It Sizzles* with William Holden, a movie that lays bare something of Hollywood's identity crisis. It's a smart, sophisticated film that parodies the script-writing business and in the process dismantles Hepburn's screen persona of the impressionable ingénue. Hepburn looks like she's enjoying the demolition, and there's a kind of fun about the screen parodies, the self-reflexive exposure of the clichés of movie romance. And yet there's something a little desperate about it too, a post-mortem feel provoked by the dismal spectacle of Hepburn's love-interest (and real-life former lover) William Holden all boozed-up and bleary. It's Hollywood responding to the European New

Wave and admitting that the game is up. The film guesses that the audience has seen through the movie business, and aims to get there before us in our projected boredom about the conventions – the meet-cutes, the expected unexpected plot twists and the inevitable closing kiss. It tells us that the whole Hollywood shtick is hokum, but then sells it to us anyway. Only Holden's self-loathing feels authentic; it's the film's stab at joyfulness that seems unreal. A pre-emptive weariness awaits us in the pastiche; the tongue has hollowed out the cheek.

Kennedy's murder signalled a crisis in American life; for some, nothing thereafter made much sense. And in the late 1950s there had already been talk of the perils of conformity, of a national failure of spontaneity, of women incarcerated behind their picket fences, of the death of the individual at the hands of the organisation man. Yet in this dark American moment, this apparently moribund culture produced films such as *Rio Bravo*, *Gigi*, *Some Like It Hot* and *North By Northwest*, works of a wit, a freshness and an inner joy unrivalled by any other nation on earth. And there, in the moment of classic Hollywood's departure, just as the gilt of the golden age fades, stands *Charade*.

A limited but defensible definition of film might be that it exists to present and preserve Grant and Hepburn. (As well as Monroe and Gary Cooper and Carole Lombard and James Stewart, and a few dozen others.) These are actors who were merely interesting on stage, or even out of place there; yet on screen they were astonishing.

It is sad that Hepburn and Grant took so long to make a film together, and that they never made another. They would have made a good pairing for a remake of Hitchcock's *Notorious*, with Grant rumoured to have spied for the British in Hollywood, and with Hepburn genuinely having a father with fascist (indeed Nazi) connections. Yet at least we have *Charade*, a movie that unifies two highly compatible acting styles. On the one hand there is Grant's ironic presence, performing himself and somehow standing aloof from that performance. Then there is Hepburn's heartfelt earnestness combined with her genius as a comedian, present in her ability to transform in an instant seriousness into silliness. Donen's film manifests the same doubleness – it's a screwball suspense movie, a comedy laced with violence, channelling the droll anxieties of Hitchcock at his lightest. In its plots and counterplots, its version of an endlessly various Grant (his identity changes four times), Donen taps into the latent fear in Grant's urbane demeanour – the potential killer of Hitchcock's *Suspicion* lurks behind his persona's unruffled calm. As such, *Charade* plays on the spy film's interest in the notion of trust as the basis of love – in a world of espionage, of deceptions and dishonour among thieves. With two actors whose whole image was nourished by the contrivance of an artful naturalness, the film wants to ask: how can we tell when someone is lying to us? How do we know who is merely an actor?

As *Paris When It Sizzles* explicitly informs us, Hepburn's persona was often that of Frankenstein's creature, an artless, blank, dreamy Undine of a girl turned into something extraordinary by an older man. One of the premises of her films, amazingly enough, was that Hepburn was a plain Jane, a kid with a funny face, waiting for the moment when the camera (controlled, of course, by a man) would reveal her womanly beauty. So it is with Eliza Doolittle, with Sabrina, with Jo Stockton in *Funny Face*. Elsewhere she was sometimes accorded the right to remake herself: a virginal music-student inventing a counter-life as a philandering femme fatale in Billy Wilder's *Love in the Afternoon* (1957); barefoot waif Lula-Mae Barnes metamorphosing into a metropolitan Huckleberry-sophisticate in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961); or collaborating on the script of her creation in *Paris When It Sizzles*. *Charade* was significant in allowing Hepburn to side-step such processes, while

keeping her in the genre of romantic comedy where she was always at her best. She is grown-up here in ways not often allowed her in a comedy – cut loose for once from an on-screen father, independent, mature, in possession of herself. Embarrassed by the 25-year age difference between him and his co-star, Grant persuaded scriptwriter Peter Stone to have Hepburn make all the romantic running. The result is a new sense of agency in her, and, for once, the absence of worry over the uncomfortable discrepancy between elfin Hepburn and her variously superannuated lovers (like Bogart, Gary Cooper or Fred Astaire).

After *Charade*, Grant had only two more films in him; he retired in 1966. Hepburn played on through the 60s, and the films she went on to make – *How to Steal a Million* (1966), *Two for the Road*, for instance, and *Wait Until Dark* (both 1967) – are good; yet undoubtedly some glory has departed. No one ever wanted to live inside the downbeat "realism" of *Two for the Road*. Yet perhaps the world is better off without the sugared artifice of classic Hollywood? More than with any other actors, when watching Grant's and Hepburn's movies it proves hard to escape the ache of film – that nostalgic longing that invites us to live in that celluloid world, while knowing we cannot. Yet for all of its 113 minutes, *Charade* presents us with a temporary entry into that brighter place, into the possibility of adventure, the vicarious possession of beauty. Acted by two Europeans in a mythic, dangerous, beguiling Paris, it remains a quintessential Hollywood film: so soon after the half-centenary of Oswald's fatal gunshots, its anniversary serves to remind us of the brief, lost wonder of a specifically American beauty.

YouTube

Preferred version:

Includes titles and clear image ... though has ads. Other versions either poor quality, missing titles, etc.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uc86VH8hdA>