

## **One Two Three (1961) Billy Wilder**

P Michell, 2014

### **Creative Talent:**

James Cagney, Horst Buchholz, Pamela Tiffin, Arlene Francis, Howard St. John,

Hanns Lothar, Lilo Pulver

Cinematography Daniel L. Fapp

Production Designers Robert Stratil, Heinrich Weidemann

Art Direction Alexander Trauner

Film Editor Daniel Mandell

Original Music André Previn

Written by Billy Wilder, I.A.L. Diamond from the play by Ferenc Molnar

Produced and Directed by Billy Wilder

Cagney's swansong to his acting career and the final of our three part homage. Two other people apart from him are crucial to this film – **Billy Wilder and I A L Diamond**.

“... Wilder & I A L Diamond's script, inspired by a one act Molnar play, sprays satirical machine-gun bursts in all directions, lambasting communists and capitalists alike.”

Note – Hubert von Meyernick as gloriously named Count von Schattenberg – a toilet attendant.

### **Summary:**

by Glenn Erickson

**One, Two, Three** is Billy Wilder's Hellzapoppin' ode to Cold War politics, the classy comedy with the machine-gun pacing. He brings on the jokes, gags, puns and political jabs so quickly even his perfect cast of fast-talking farceurs has a hard time keeping up with him. To paraphrase a third act one-liner, the theme is that everything is 'hopeless, but not serious' - few of the jokes have real bite, and they're at the expense of pompous Commies and Capitalists alike. The film is so funny, its appeal wasn't even compromised when the Brandenburg gate closed right in the middle of production, marking the beginning of the Berlin Wall. Wilder was forced to build a stand-in Gate set on a sound stage.

In his last main-career film, James Cagney is an electric dynamo of pushy, motor-mouthed aggressiveness, whether playing tricks on the East Germans or warming his way into his sexy secretary's *glockenspiel*. **One, Two, Three** gives Jimmy the Gent a thorough workout; its complicated shenanigans build to verbal and action climaxes that put other anything-goes comedies to shame. Oh yes, it's really funny,

too.

### **Synopsis:**

Nervy, bossy Berlin Coca-Cola exec C.R. MacNamara (James Cagney) is stymied by his Atlanta supervisor Hazeltine (Howard St. John), who won't let him sell The Pause that Refreshes behind the Iron Curtain, and expects him to take in his daughter Scarlett Hazeltine (Pamela Tiffin) on short notice. MacNamara's vacation is ruined, putting him in hot water with his wife Phyllis (Arlene Francis), who already knows her husband is getting schnitzel on the side with his oversexed assistant, Ingeborg (Lilo Pulver). But nothing can compare with the catastrophe that ensues when Scarlett announces she's pregnant - by an East German beatnik named Otto Ludwig Piff! (Horst Buchholz)

A twisted, wild takeoff on the basic idea of **Ninotchka, One, Two, Three** is Billy Wilder and I.A.L Diamond running in top form after their home run with the sentimental ([The Apartment](#)) of the previous year. There's probably no direct connection, but during a Soviet visit a Russian reporter praised Wilder's criticism of the American system, where a worker has to use sex and his apartment to get ahead. Wilder retorted that **The Apartment** could never happen in Russia - because there's no such thing as an available apartment!

Wilder normally didn't come out with opinions on politics. He'd participated in the de-Nazification of Germany for the Army, and made a good comedy called **A Foreign Affair** out of the situation, but he mostly stayed away from topical themes, especially after the backlash of his rather subversive film noir **Ace in the Hole**.

But in **One, Two, Three** he comes out swinging at every pitch available. It's everything American versus everything Eastern-bloc: baseball, soft drinks, Huntley & Brinkley, **Gone With the Wind** and the Pledge of Allegiance - versus Commisars, party dues, propaganda, missiles, caviar, trains that don't run on time and pitiless interrogators using *The Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini* as a torture device. Americans are arrogant, pushy, boorish, ignorant, sex-obsessed and success-driven, while the East Germans and Russians are sneaky, arrogant, paranoid Marx-spouters who hate *The Wall Street Journal* and want Yankee to Go Home. In between, Wilder gets in a few merciless jabs at the efficient West Germans - every West Berliner seems to have a guilty secret in their closet. A reporter is revealed to be ex-S.S. officer. MacNamara's own assistant clicks his heels at every command and lets slip that he used to be a pastry cook in the S.S., "A very bad pastry cook." MacNamara: "Schlemmer! You're back in the S.S. again! Smaller Salary!"

Cagney is nothing less than marvelous, changing comedic gears at the drop of a cuckoo clock and keeping us breathless with his limitless energy. Wilder pulls in references so fast our radar picks up on only the top 20%: grapefruits in the kisser (**Public Enemy**), a bowler and an umbrella stored away for a big promotion (**Mister**

**Roberts**). Red Buttons contributes some of his most worthy screen time doing a great Cagney imitation. Cagney's still so spry on his feet, once or twice we almost think he's about to break out in a dance. Cagney made a lot of great pictures during his Warners' heyday, but few demonstrated his comedy talent to the degree seen here.

The much-maligned Horst Buchholz is intense & frenzied as the commie punk who doesn't wear underwear, spits in disapproval of Coca-Cola diplomacy, and wears a wedding ring that was "Forged from the steel of the guns of Stalingrad!" Pamela Tiffin has her best role as the air-brained jet-setting Southern belle likely to fall in the sack with every Otto or Pierre available. She's ready to be an impoverished Communist bride, but only if she has the proper tableware like back home in Atlanta.

Arlene Francis also shines with perfect delivery as MacNamara's patient but wisecracking wife, trying to find out what 'Schwanger' means and mimicking Scarlett's hysterical laugh. Lilo Pulver (Liselotte, previously seen in Sirk's **A Time to Love and a Time to Die**) is the tall, stacked sexpot secretary who gives Wilder a chance to lampoon lust, German-style. She's a borderline nympho who laughs like a stevedore and snaps out some of Wilder's earliest raunchy humor:

MacNamara, staring at Ingeborg's chest: "Don't look now, but your goose pimples are showing." Ingeborg: "That's nothing, you should see my sister!"

Angular Hanns Lothar plays Schlemmer, MacNamara's heel-clicking functionary, who'd probably jump out of a window if ordered. Completely corruptible Commisars Leon Askin, Ralf Wolter and Peter Capell provide the crass example MacNamara uses to eventually convert Otto Piffel to Freedom-loving Western ways ... after a short detour into aristocratic decadence, via an arranged adoption by the monocle-snapping Count von Droste Schattenburg. In short, Communist ideology proves too inflexible for warm-blooded humans, and MacNamara wins his case.

The set piece of the film is an eight-minute stretch where MacNamara does a high-toned makeover on the beatnik Piffel, bringing in a parade of tailors, barbers, haberdashers, etc., and rattling off pages of exacting dialogue with perfect articulation and precision - precisely as Wilder wrote it (it reportedly took many takes and some strained tempers). This dovetails into a mad car chase to the airport and a sharp finish. Audiences laugh - and then quiet themselves to not miss out on the *next* joke - Wilder's pace leaves little room for reaction time, just a raised eyebrow or a quick breath.

The amped-up pacing works because it's not forced on the material - the agitated Germans are inspired to lunatic levels of efficiency by MacNamara's demands, unlike the Italians of [Avanti!](#) who are always trying to slow things down. 43 years later, with its topical subject matter now considered ancient history, **One, Two, Three** still keeps audiences breathless and laughing.

--- 000 ---

3 October 1961 – MPAA has lifted bans on ‘perversions’ such as lesbianism, homosexuality – discrete treatment allowed.

--- 000 ---

### **Jimmy Cagney:**

Biography here:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Cagney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Cagney)

The wonders of Youtube !!!!

Intimate Interview with Dorothy West – 1931:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3CKPkj4HNE>

Parkinson interview with Pat O’Brien & Cagney in the 1970s. Cagney doesn’t say much – but when he does - still got it!

Part 1:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_x1Pu6dq8s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_x1Pu6dq8s)

Part 2:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcOEU-S9xsk>

NY Times Obituary:

<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0717.html>

--- 000 ---

Screenplay by Wilder & I A Diamond – A formidable pair making some early great movies. Wilder was almost always director / writer with Diamond.

**Billy Wilder** – Writer (78 films) & Director (26 films)

Significant other films as director – Lost Weekend (1945), Sunset Boulevard (1950), Ace in the Hole (1951), Stalag 17 (1953), Seven Year Itch (1959), Witness for the Prosecution (1957), Some Like it Hot (1959), The Apartment (1960),

Wilder's first significant success was *Ninotchka* in 1939, a collaboration with fellow German immigrant [Ernst Lubitsch](#). This [screwball comedy](#) starred [Greta Garbo](#)

(generally known as a [tragic](#) heroine in film [melodramas](#)), and was popularly and critically acclaimed. With the byline, "Garbo Laughs!", it also took Garbo's career in a new direction. The film also marked Wilder's first [Academy Award](#) nomination. For twelve years Wilder co-wrote many of his films with Charles Brackett, from 1938 through 1950. He followed *Ninotchka* with a series of box office hits.

His third film as director, *Double Indemnity* (1944) was a major hit. A *film noir*, nominated for Best Director and Screenplay, it was co-written with mystery novelist [Raymond Chandler](#), although the two men did not get along. *Double Indemnity* not only set conventions for the *noir* genre (such as "venetian blind" lighting and voice-over narration), but was also a landmark in the battle against Hollywood censorship. The original [James M. Cain](#) novel *Double Indemnity* featured two love triangles and a murder plotted for insurance money. While the book was highly popular with the reading public, it had been considered unfilmable under the [Hays Code](#), because adultery was central to its plot. *Double Indemnity* is credited by some as the first true film noir, combining the stylistic elements of *Citizen Kane* with the narrative elements of *The Maltese Falcon* (1941).

Spanish filmmaker [Fernando Trueba](#) said in his acceptance speech for the 1993 Best Non-English Speaking Film [Oscar](#): "I would like to believe in God in order to thank him. But I just believe in Billy Wilder... so, thank you Mr. Wilder." According to Trueba, Wilder called him the day after and told him: "Fernando, it's God." French filmmaker [Michel Hazanavicius](#) also thanked Billy Wilder in the 2012 Best Picture [Oscar](#) acceptance speech for *The Artist* by saying "I would like to thank the following three people, I would like to thank Billy Wilder, I would like to thank Billy Wilder, and I would like to thank Billy Wilder." Wilder's 12 [Academy Award](#) nominations for screenwriting were a record until 1997 when [Woody Allen](#) received a 13th nomination for *Deconstructing Harry*.

### **Billy Wilder Quotes:**

Making movies is little like walking into a dark room. Some people stumble across furniture, others break their legs but ... some of us see better in the dark than others. The ultimate trick is to convince, persuade.

Trust your own instinct. Your mistakes might as well be your own, instead of someone else's.

The best director is the one you don't see.

[asked if it was important for a director to know how to write] No, but it helps if he knows how to read.

I was not a guy writing deep-dish revelations. If people see a picture of mine and then sit down and talk about it for 15 minutes, that is a very fine reward, I think.

My English is a mixture between Arnold Schwarzenegger and Archbishop Tutu.

[upon seeing Sigmund Freud's therapy couch] It was a very tiny little thing. All his theories were based on the analysis of very short people!

A bad play folds and is forgotten, but in pictures we don't bury our dead. When you think it's out of your system, your daughter sees it on television and says, "My father is an idiot."

The Wilder message is don't bore - don't bore people.

I just made pictures I would've liked to see.

Famous line ... 'He has Van Gogh's ear for music.'

"A director must be a policeman, a midwife, a psychoanalyst, a sycophant and a bastard."

#### Interview Links:

Review of Volker Schlöndorff's documentary Billy Wilder Speaks (2006) –  
<http://aurorasginjoint.com/2012/06/21/billy-wilder-speaks/>

Interview with Wilder about screenwriting experiences in Paris Review – 1996  
<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1432/the-art-of-screenwriting-no-1-billy-wilder>

#### **I A L Diamond** – Co-Writer:

Diamond was born **Ițec (Itzek) Domnici** in **Ungheni, Iași County, Bessarabia, Romania**, present day **Moldova**, was referred to as "Iz" in Hollywood, and was known to quip that his initials stood for "Interscholastic Algebra League".

Diamond emigrated with his family to the Crown Heights area of Brooklyn in the United States at the age of 9. There he studied at the Boy's High School, showing ability in mathematics, competing in the state Mathematics Olympiads in 1936–37, winning several gold medals.

In 1957 Diamond began a collaborative relationship with **Billy Wilder** on the movie *Love in the Afternoon*. From there, the pair had a string of hits with *Some Like It Hot*; *The Apartment* (which won an **Academy Award** for Best Screenplay); *One, Two, Three*; *Irma la Douce*; the Oscar-nominated *The Fortune Cookie*; the sex comedy *Kiss Me, Stupid*; and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. Diamond also had a hit with his 1969 solo adaptation of the play *Cactus Flower* into **the movie of the same name**.

In total, Diamond and Wilder wrote twelve movies together over 25 years. Some of these films feature characters engaged in never-ending but friendly squabbling, such as Joe and Jerry in *Some Like it Hot* and Holmes and Watson in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. Diamond's widow claims that these characters were based on her husband's relationship with Wilder.

## **Fun Trivia:**

The instruction at the front of [Billy Wilder](#) and [I.A.L. Diamond](#)'s screenplay reads: "This piece must be played *molto furioso*". Suggested speed: 110 miles an hour - on the curves - 140 miles an hour in the straightways. "

When asked in 1974 why he made a film about Coca Cola, [Billy Wilder](#) responded, "I just think Coca-Cola to be funny. And when I drink it, it seems even funnier to me."

In an early scene, MacNamara begins negotiating with the three Russians, who offer him a Cuban cigar. The Russians tell MacNamara that they have a trade agreement: "We send them rockets, they send us cigars." What was written as a joke later turned out to be the truth - within one year (October 1962), Russian missiles were discovered in Cuba.

At one point MacNamara, played by [James Cagney](#), threatens Otto with half a grapefruit so that the scene resembles the famous one in [The Public Enemy](#) (1931), Cagney pushed into [Mae Clarke](#)'s face.

After he learns Scarlett is pregnant, [James Cagney](#) moans, "Mother of mercy, is this the end of Rico?" This was [Edward G. Robinson](#)'s famous line from [Little Caesar](#) (1931).

While watching "the blonde lady" dance at The Hotel Potemkin", one of the Russians takes off his shoe and bangs on the table with it. The banging eventually causes the photograph of Nikita Khrushchev the fall out of its frame to reveal the picture of Josef Stalin, his predecessor, behind it. Khrushchev, who is mentioned several times in the movie, is supposed to have taken his shoe off and banged on the table with it at the United Nations.

When trying to return to West Berlin the car Cagney is in is being chased by another car. Cagney asks his driver what kind of car it is. The driver tells him it's a 1937 Nash. The 1937 Nash was the car of choice in late 30s and early 40s gangster films.

When Cagney tells Otto he must give the couple a wedding present Scarlett claims that Otto's friends did not give them any gifts but instead sent the money to unemployed cotton pickers of Mississippi. Cagney was accused of being a communist sympathizer for sending money to striking cotton workers in the 1930's.



## Reviews:

### **One of The Ten Best Comedy Films Ever Made**

[Bill Baldwin, Jr.](#) (Los Angeles)

If you're planning on screening "One, Two, Three" for the first time and you weren't alive in 1961, take a moment to acquaint yourself with the political climate of the time....then get ready to laugh A LOT ! I was 17 when "One, Two, Three" came out and all these years later I am still amazed at the majesty of this film. As most of you know, this was to be James Cagney's last picture, and it took a lot of convincing by Billy Wilder to get him to do it. Cagney did come back one more time for "Ragtime", but that doesn't lessen the greatness of this, his final starring role. I saw a comment posted about the film having the perfect cast and I agree, but it's not surprising when you consider this: name me a Billy Wilder film that didn't have the perfect cast ! William Holden and Gloria Swanson in "Sunset Blvd", Jack Lemmon and Shirley MacLaine in "The Apartment", Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis and Marilyn Monroe in "Some Like It Hot", Jack Lemmon and..well, you get the picture: Billy Wilder knew precisely who he wanted for every part and usually got them, and if he had to go with choice # 2, then choice # 2 was one lucky actor. And each supporting role, no matter how small, got the same Wilder treatment. I know because my dad was the TV Movie Host in "The Apartment".

Actors knew that being in a Billy Wilder film meant the script would be first rate and the director would get a first rate performance out of them, even if it took all night. Pamela Tiffin was just terrific in this film, but sadly she never got another role worthy of her ability. The same goes for Horst Buchholz, "The Magnificent Seven" notwithstanding. At least they got to do "One, Two, Three" and that might have just been enough. Right up there in the same league with "The Philadelphia Story", "Annie Hall" and the original version of "To Be Or Not To Be" starring Jack Benny and Carole Lombard, Billy Wilder's "One, Two, Three" is a forever film classic for all the reasons I and others have mentioned, and for one more which it shares with every great film: "One, Two, Three" assumes you have a brain and treats you accordingly ... " SCHLEMMER !!!!!"

### **Outstanding Comedy**

[Robert J. Maxwell \(rmax304823@yahoo.com\)](#) from Deming, New Mexico, USA

5 December 2003

Howard Hawks usually gets the palm for the fastest dialogue in comedies but Wilder probably ties him here. This must be one of the funniest comedies to come out of Hollywood, at least during the sound era. The gags come fast -- and thick. If one



doesn't work you don't have time to be disappointed because the next one is already underway.

It's one of those movies in which the gags would be spoiled if they were described to a person who hadn't yet seen the film. For the most part they are tied closely to the plot and often build on one another. But I'm compelled to give one example. Cagney is an executive in Berlin and his first-hand man is Schlemmer. Schlemmer has a habit of clicking his heels before and after addressing Cagney. At one point Cagney chews him out and asks him, "just between us," what Schlemmer did in the war. "I was in the underground," says Schlemmer. "Oh, the resistance?" "No, the underground. The subway. I was a conductor." Cagney says suspiciously, "And I suppose you never were a supporter of Adolf." Schlemmer: "Adolf who? You see, I was always in the underground. They never told us anything down there."

The dialogue is shouted rather than spoken. Heels are clicked, people leap to attention, fingers are snapped, orders are flung about. The only person who doesn't run around frantically is Lilo Pulver who does not have to run to attract anyone's attention. She can simply stand still and get the job done. She's Cagney's secretary and tells him she's thinking of getting a job elsewhere as a translator. "Don't forget I am bilingual." "Don't I know it," Cagney mutters ruefully.

### **Billy Wilder Gets Hot Over the Cold War**

**Author:** [bkoganbing](#) from Buffalo, New York

21 September 2005

One, Two, Three is from the fertile mind of Billy Wilder where Cold War politics gets reduced to the absurd. This film is so fast and so funny it's only a few steps from Monty Python. For what was and what should have remained his swan song to the world of film James Cagney heads the cast in this. He's the man in charge of Coca-Cola's operations in Germany which is headquartered in West Berlin and he's had a lovely little present dumped in his lap.

The daughter of the CEO of Coca-Cola is in Europe and now she's in Germany and he's expected to watch out for her. The daughter is played by Pamela Tiffin and she is one of the biggest airheads ever portrayed on the screen. She's fallen big time for a German kid played by Horst Bucholtz. They've gotten married. Bucholtz is a kid who's real good at spouting all kinds of left wing slogans without delving to deeply into their meanings. He's a Communist and that drives Cagney nuts and if it drives Cagney nuts, Tiffin's father is sure to go over the top. Cagney takes it upon himself to get Bucholtz arrested on the East Berlin side as an American spy. Of course a small memento of their married life has developed inside Tiffin so now Cagney has a real problem. He's got to get Bucholtz back and turn him into a money grubbing capitalist in his image. The frantic pace at which this is attempted, racing against the clock when Tiffin's father played by Howard St. John arrives in Berlin is what the rest of the film is about.

Wilder has a ball reducing the Cold War to its basic absurdities. The USA is symbolized by James Cagney who thinks the whole world will become America if only enough Coca-Cola is peddled. Cagney comes real close to proving it so. The Communists come out far worse. Karl Marx's world always looked nice on paper, but always has had a real problem being converted into a functioning state. The Russians are also good at spouting the party line, but in *One, Two, Three*, Wilder shows how very easily they can be influenced by some of life's most elemental things and I don't mean Coca-Cola. Cagney did not always get along with Wilder, but both men were professional enough to bury certain creative differences. Cagney was kind and patient with Tiffin who was getting her first real break in film. However he grew to positively loath Horst Bucholtz. In his memoirs which came out in the 1970s, Bucholtz was the only colleague who Cagney had anything really critical to say about.

During the middle of the film being shot, the Russians stopped the flow of traffic from West and East Berlin. Some shots had to be redone around the Brandenburg Gate, a whole set had to be constructed. I suppose a well trained cinema professional could spot the shots where the real and the fake Brandenburg were used. I sure can't. The following year, the Berlin Wall was built, so Wilder got his film done just in time. Arlene Francis plays Cagney's exasperated wife and she of *What's My Line* does just fine. Cagney made an appearance on that show just before shooting started and gave the picture a big old plug. The laughs come pretty fast and furious as James Cagney struggles mightily to prevent the arrival of "another bouncing, baby, Bolshevik."