

The Party (1968) Edwards (& Sellers)

P Michell, 2019

Synopsis

A clerical mistake results in a bumbling Indian film star being invited to an exclusive Hollywood party instead of being fired. Then is the loner at the party.

1968 - A memorable year. Height of Vietnam War:

Prague Spring, My Lai Massacre, Columbia Uni Protests in NY, Hair opens on Broadway, Paris Student Riots in May, Intel company is founded, Yale Uni admits women, Khmer Rouge founded, computer mouse debut, first inter-racial kiss on TV (USA), 747 plane introduced. Two Apollo missions, Polanski marries Sharon Tate, Langlois reinstated at Cinematheque in Paris.

Movies: 2001: A Space Odyssey, Zefereili's Romeo and Juliet, Odd Couple, Rosmary's Baby, Bride Wore Black, Warhol's Flesh, Bullitt, Night of the Living Dead, Barbarella, Bergman's The Shame, Thomas Crwon Affair, Coogan's Bluff.

The Party is a showcase for Seller's comedic talent. Note the use of timing and visual humour. Moves mostly effortlessly from one sight gag to another, not unlike the Marx Bros films from some 30 years before.

'Birdy-Num-Num' has entered the lexicon.

Film likely morphed from an idea between Edwards and Sellers. Exploring how far it would go.

Blake Edwards – Director, Writer, Producer

Prolific film maker – 76 writing credits inc much TV work from the 1950s inc Peter Gunn.

Pink Panther films, Breakfast at Tiffanys (1961), 10 (1979)

Family connections to film making. Married to Julie Andrews.

Quote - *Peter Sellers became a monster. He just got bored with the part [Inspector Clouseau] and became angry, sullen and unprofessional. He wouldn't show up for work and he began looking for anyone and everyone to blame, never for a moment stopping to see whether or not he should blame himself for his own madness, his own craziness.*

Peter Sellers (1925-80) Famed British Comedian.

If you've not heard of him, where have you been hiding?

Tortured genius? Made some really great films and many more poor ones.

Mother was Jewish. Due to his unique voice mimic ability, did many uncredited voice overs for films and TV.

Famous for being part of the Goon Show (1951-60) and he many zany voices including Bluebottle, Henry Crun, Hercules Grytype-Thynne & Major Dennis Bloodnock.

Significant films inc: Ladykillers (1955), I'm Alright Jack (1959), Kubrik's Lolita (1962) & Dr Strangelove (1964) (famous for playing three roles!). Pink Panther (1963). The PP films made him quite wealthy. Starred in the unusual and succesful Being There (1979). Not well known is his musical ability - was a great ukele player, as well as percussion, and features on Steeleye Span's 'New York Girls' track which includes various voices.

Mel Brooks considered him for - and he expressed interest in - the role of "Leo Bloom" in *The Producers* (1967), but nothing ever came of it, and the role eventually went to Gene Wilder. **However, Sellers was instrumental in the success of the film.** After its release, he happened, almost by accident, to see a private screening of it and was so impressed that the next day he took out two full-page newspaper ads at his own expense proclaiming that it was one of the greatest comedies he had ever seen. This exposure helped promote the film at a critical time when it appeared that it was destined to sink without a trace.

Made very funny records inc 'Best of Peter Sellers' which includes the justly famous 'A Visit to Balham'.

Became friends with the [The Beatles](#), and visited them at Abbey Road Studios. Was given a tape of rough mixes from the "White Album", which was auctioned (and bootlegged) after his death.

[Shirley MacLaine](#) said of him, *"Past lives leaking through and confusing him in this life."* Possibly related to this Sellers' quote: *"If you ask me to play myself, I will not know what to do. I do not know who or what I am. There used to be a me, but I had it surgically removed."*

Sellers was widely considered by industry professionals (particularly [Blake Edwards](#)) to be mentally ill with no real personality of his own. He habitually assumed the personalities of the characters he portrayed, morphing into another one in a following role. People that knew him intermittently over years were baffled by his transformations. As an actor, Sellers could be brilliant with a strong script, but he often accepted sub-par projects and inferior roles which would wreak havoc in his personal life.

Fun stuff - One afternoon the doorbell rang in Sellers' London flat. As he was busy in his study, his wife Anne went to the door, where she was handed a telegram. The message: "Bring me a cup of coffee. Peter".

Sellers was the first male to appear on the cover of *Playboy Magazine*, in April 1964.

Sadly ... Trail of Pink Panther (1982) consisted of out-takes from earlier films!

Steve Franken – The Waiter, Levinson.

Prolific actor (178 credits). *Westworld* (1973). Mostly TV. A small part that your will remember.

Fay McKenzie – Alice Clutterbuck (mother of daughter) (58 credits)

Long lived actress who began in silent films. Wife of Tom Waldman, one of the writers. Wikipedia claims that she spent over a hundred years in film! First uncredited film in 1918, aged 10 weeks as Gloria Swansons' baby in Station Content. Her last film was Kill a Better Mousetrap filmed in 2018. She died before its release at 101. Son Tom Waldman, Jr is a writer and actor.

The Elephant !

Trivia:

This film was improvised from a 56-page outline. Each scene was shot in sequence, and built upon the previous scene. To aid in this experiment, the film's producers had a video-camera tube attached to the Panavision camera and connected to an Ampex studio videotape machine, allowing the actors and crew to review what they had just filmed.

The interior of the mansion was a massive indoor set built at "The Lot" Studio, in Hollywood.

Look for Pink Panther reference. Only film that Edwards and Sellers made together which was not a PP film.

The sequence in which Peter Sellers' character is repeatedly shot but continues playing his bugle call to rouse his troops is a merciless satire of Rudyard Kipling's "Gunga Din", which had been filmed in 1939 (Gunga Din (1939)).

The scene where Hrundi involuntarily blows up the bridge was possibly inspired by a similar real-life occurrence which happened a couple of years before, while shooting a now iconic scene of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966). Due to a misunderstanding, a huge bridge was blown up while the cameras were not filming, enraging director Sergio Leone, and had to be rebuilt.

Released on the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated.

Significance to U3A re Inheritance issues:

Make a Will of what you wish for your estate. When Peter Sellers died he was in process of writing his wife out of his will. (They fought a lot.) Never amended and thus Lynne Frederick inherited all of £4.5 million. His children got a paltry £800 each. On Lynne's death her daughter then got the full amount. Lynne successfully sued the next Pink Panther film (post Sellers' death and received another million. Now Cassie Cecilia Unger is the sole recipient. Nothing more went to any of the Sellers' side of the family.

Reviews

Hilarious! One of Peter Sellers' best films!

[zetes](#) 28 January 2002

The Party begins with a kind of lame parody of Gunga Din's final scene (I guess you might consider it a SPOILER to Gunga Din, so consider that before you check this one out). Hrundi Bakshi (Sellers) is playing the main character of the new film production Son of Gunga Din, but he's little more than a series of accidents waiting to happen. He ends up ruining a set piece, which gets him fired. The producer of that film tells a studio exec to blacklist him. That exec accidentally adds Hrundi's name to the bottom of a party list. He goes, and, as you might expect, ends up destroying everything around him like a small tornado. Most of the film takes place at this party (and the film only really gets funny when Hrundi gets to the party), where we meet various Hollywood phonies and stars who are full of themselves, as well as a few innocent newcomers being beckoned to the infamous casting couch. All these people react in different ways to Hrundi, but most like him and see him as a nice guy who probably doesn't belong there anyway. He becomes enraptured by a young French newcomer named Michelle (Claudine Longet).

Peter Sellers made a lot of films, and I have to admit that I haven't seen many. What I particularly like about The Party is the character of Hrundi and Sellers' performance. Sellers' films are usually very funny, but the characters are often just caricatures. I really like Hrundi. He could have easily been a gross stereotype. Sellers wears dark makeup to appear Indian, and he speaks in an accent. But Hrundi is not just a stereotype. He is a genuinely lovable person. He does some stupid things, but he always means well. I actually think the character would have been worth sequels.

I am sure that Sellers and Blake Edwards were studying the French comedic filmmaker Jacques Tati when they were making this film. There are several scenes very, very reminiscent of M. Hulot's Holiday, Mon Oncle, and Playtime. Hrundi seems to be clearly based on M. Hulot. Of course, I am not accusing The Party of stealing or anything. I'm just happy that someone in Hollywood was a fan of Tati's films, and felt that his formulae would work in an American film. I wonder how well this film did financially. It's not well known at all today.

One more note: my Lord, Claudine Longet may be the single cutest girl I've ever seen! I don't know if I've seen her elsewhere. I can see why she didn't become a huge star. She's not imposing like others. Nor, truth be told, is she a great actress. But wowza! I think my heart just stopped!

The Party (1968) – Film Reel Reviews

A great comedy that I haven't seen since I was a kid. Peter Sellers is an amazing comedian. – Will

Directed by – Blake Edwards

Written by – Blake Edwards, Tom Waldman, Frank Waldman

Starring – Peter Sellers, Claudine Longet, Natalia Borisova, Jean Carson, Marge Champion, Al Checco, Corinne Cole, Dick Crockett, Frances Davis, Danielle De Metz, Herbert Ellis, Paul Ferrara, Steve Franken, Allen Jung, Sharron Kimberly, Kathe Green, James Lanphier, Buddy Lester, Stephen Liss, Gavin MacLeod, Jerry Martin, Fay McKenzie, J. Edward McKinley, Denny Miller, Elianne Nadeau, Tom Quine, Timothy Scott, Ken Wales, Carol Wayne, Donald R. Frost, Helen Kleebe, Linda Gaye Scott

I watched this movie when I was just a little kid. I'm sure I was in grade 5 or 6 the first time I saw it and while my idea of humour may have changed, this film still holds up as one of the great comedies that I've watched. It helps that Peter Sellers can make me laugh just by a small facial gesture or even his posture. It's mostly visual comedy in this one with some of the most humorous moments happening in the background of a scene. There isn't usually a punch line to deliver the laughs and they typically come naturally from a series of accidents. Sellers as the bumbling extra Hrundi V. Bakshi is the one who is at the center of those accidents and while he may be trouble for anyone involved, he's also very lovable and sweet in his naivety.

The movie can be a little slow to start and the really good laughs don't start to kick in until Bakshi has arrived for the party. At first he's the reason behind all the problems for the party guests. He loses his shoe in a little waterfall in the house, plays havoc with a switches that control everything from a loudspeaker to the moving bar and tries to be friends with a bird by feeding him his birdie num nums (my personal favorite joke from the film). You can't help but feel bad for Bakshi as he seems to annoy the other guests and can't seem to find anyone that will even speak to him. As the party wears on and the alcohol is flowing freely, it's the other guests that start to become annoying and causing even more problems than Bakshi ever could have.

Eventually Bakshi finds a friend at the party. Michele Monet (a gorgeous Claudine Longet) is an aspiring actress who shows up with the same director whose film Bakshi had destroyed earlier. Both Monet and Bakshi seem to be out of their element and form a friendship as the only two people at the party who don't seem to be insane in some way. By the end of the film it's Bakshi who is in the middle of all the trouble instead of being the one who caused it all. Along the way it's a hilarious journey of slapstick comedy and subtle jokes.

The film plays out almost like a silent movie since most of the gags are all visual. Dialogue is limited at some points and it really allows the physical aspect of the comedy to play out perfectly. One moment that shows just how well done the comedy is happens when Bakshi is in the bathroom and reaches for a piece of toilet paper. As he pulls a few

sheets off to dry his hands we watch the roll just keep going and going until it's empty. Sellers just stands still and watches it, just like we are, and it manages to slowly build a laugh as it just keeps unrolling and unrolling while Bakshi doesn't even try to stop it.

There's way too many gags to even try to mention. What starts as a very respectable Hollywood party winds up with a house filled with bubbles, numerous guests in the pool and a painted elephant running around the house. If that's not enough to entice you to watch then I don't know what would. Sellers plays the comedy role perfectly and his chemistry with Claudine Longet seems very natural. It's really Sellers as Hrundi that carries the film. No matter how much trouble he causes you can tell that he's just trying to be the best person he can and when he finally finds someone who will listen to him at the party, we start to realize just how great a person he really is. This is a great comedy that I just don't hear enough about anymore. I suggest getting some birdie num nums and sitting down to watch it!

Under the marquee – Will