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1950s

Films are bigger, more epic and getting wider releases. Movies heavily featuring teens and young people are gaining audiences and by the end of the decade the Hays Code, a moral guideline all major motion pictures had to adhere to, would begin to lose its grip, giving way to edgier storylines that are more reflective of real life.

"Anatomy of a Murder" (1959) — Another courtroom film very ahead of its time, this drama stars James Stewart as a semi-retired lawyer who takes on a murder case. He defends an Army lieutenant who murdered a man his wife had accused of rape. It has been ranked among some of the best courtroom dramas of all time. Rent it from Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"Giant" (1956) — A cinematically beautiful and sweeping epic journey of an oil family in Texas, their patriarch, played by Rock Hudson, and their upstart neighbor, played by James Dean. The film follows these two men and their changing fortunes and familial relationships over the course of decades. Rent it from Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"Lust for Life" (1956) — The late, great Kirk Douglas takes on Dutch master painter Vincent Van Gogh in a masterful showcase of his acting prowess. The film follows Van Gogh through all his failures, setbacks and his struggles with his mental illness. With a little support from fellow painter Paul Gauguin, in an Oscar-winning performance from Anthony Quinn, and from his brother Theo, van Gogh gets through as best he can. Rent it from Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"Rear Window" (1954) — When your main character is limited to one location, it creates some interesting choices for a director. Alfred Hitchcock, of course, has no problem with these situations, so Jeff, a temporarily wheelchair bound photographer (James Stewart), takes on being a nosy neighbor, watching the lives of the people who live across him in a small bohemian courtyard apartment complex. Everything is pretty banal, people having parties, cleaning, going on dates and what not, until he realizes a neighbor has murdered his wife. The Master of Suspense gets your heart racing as Jeff tries to convince the rest of the world that what he saw happen is indeed the truth. Rent it from Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"Some Like It Hot" (1959) — Directed by Billy Wilder, the film stars Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon as two musicians on the run from the mob who decide to dress as women and join an all-female band to hide out. They meet the bombshell singer/ukulele player Sugar Kane played by Marilyn Monroe. Stream it on Hulu, TCM Watch, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"Sunset Boulevard" (1950) — Gloria Swanson



Peter Sellers stars in a scene from 'Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.'

plays an aging silent film star who decides to make a grand comeback, refusing to let her star die out. She hires a screenwriter, played by William Holden, to create her newest project. Though he believes he can use her to his advantage, he realizes he's wrong — which leads to disastrous consequences. It's one of those films that everyone tells you is great and when you do finally watch it, you realize why. Top-notch acting oozes out of every frame with brilliantly directed sequences from Billy Wilder. Stream it on Crackle, Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

1960s

The decade that said goodbye to black and white, the Hays Code and the studio system. The 1960s saw great changes in films with more European influence, creative freedom and the birth of an entirely new Hollywood.

"Breakfast at Tiffany's" (1961) — Based on the Truman Capote novel of New York party girl Holly Golightly and her friendship and eventual romance with young writer, Paul. Holly, played by Audrey Hepburn, is a tragic character who lies her way through life, getting caught up in the fantasy of it all. But bit by bit, Paul, also acting the fake, peels back the layers, and they both uncover their authenticity. Though the film contains one of the worst racial offenses in history from Mickey Rooney, it's easy to fast forward through. Stream it on Starz, Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes and Vudu.

"Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb" (1964) —

In 1964, the world was terrified of nuclear weapons being pointed from Russia and the U.S., so what better time than to explore that anxiety in a black satire from Stanley Kubrick? It stars Peter Sellers in three distinctly different characters along with George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden, Slim Pickens and a young James Earl Jones. Stream it on Crackle, Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"Lawrence of Arabia" (1962) — This is long, clocking in at nearly four hours, and much

of that is spent in sprawling and beautiful, but silent, shots of desert. Be aware that this movie contains many characters in brownface.

The entire film is basically a masterclass of acting and cinematography. Rent it on Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.

"The Producers" (1967) — Another dark comedy coming from the '60s, this one is a bit more lighthearted than "Dr. Strangelove." This is Mel Brooks' directorial and film writing debut (he wrote for Sid Caesar throughout the 1950s) and what a debut it was. A failed Broadway producer (Zero Mostel) ropes in a nebbish accountant, played by Gene Wilder in his second film and first starring role, to put on a flop and in the process make more money off it. Well, that's the scheme at least. They choose a script written by a former Nazi about the kinder side of his Fuhrer, hire a flamboyantly awful director to helm it and cast an inept hippie to star. What could go wrong? There's the beauty of this sharp comedy. Rent it on Amazon Prime, YouTube, Google Play, iTunes or Vudu.



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