

How the quality of american comedy has deteriorated

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



By the mid 1950s, comedy virtually disappeared from the lists of top-ten moneymaking films. In 1959 it came back and has remained a steady part of America's film diet ever since. The genre returned with two hit films which typify the extremes in audience tastes: *The Shaggy Dog* and *Some Like It Hot*. Although now rarely revived and barely remembered, the Walt Disney Company's live-action comedies were among the biggest box-office hits up until the late '70s. Blending broad humor with fantasy and aiming at an audience of youngsters, the studio made stars of Fred MacMurray (*The Shaggy Dog*, 1959; *The Absent-Minded Professor*, 1961; *Son Of Flubber*, 1963), Tommy Kirk (*The Misadventures Of Merlin Jones*, 1964; *The Monkey's Uncle*, 1965), Dean Jones (*That Darn Cat*, 1965; *The Ugly Dachshund*, 1966; *The 1, 000, 000 Dollar Duck*, 1971), and a Volkswagen (*The Love Bug*, 1969; *Herbie Rides Again*, 1974; *Herbie Goes To Monte Carlo*, 1977). Other popular vanilla entertainment of the time included Doris Day's romantic comedies opposite Rock Hudson (*Pillow Talk*, 1959; *Lover Come Back*, 1962), Cary Grant (*That Touch Of Mink*, 1962), and James Garner (*The Thrill Of It All*, 1963; *Move Over Darling*, 1963). In the face of such blandness and unreality, the films of Billy Wilder seem all the more inspired. Writing with I. A. L.

Diamond heightened Wilder's genius for plot construction and verbal repartee and brought a new sharpness to the satire. Their second film was perhaps Wilder's funniest, the classic *Some Like It Hot* (1959), in which Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon hide from mobsters by disguising themselves as women. Lemmon then co-starred with Shirley MacLaine in *The Apartment* (1960), a powerful comedy/drama that looked at the loss of personal and professional ethics in corporate America. Wilder hilariously satirized

American/Soviet relations in *One, Two, Three* (1961) with James Cagney, and followed with *Irma La Douce* (1963), about a French prostitute and her inept pimp, which reteamed MacLaine and Lemmon for Wilder's biggest box-office hit. But the far superior *Kiss Me, Stupid* (1964), a savage farce of small-town adultery, was rejected by audiences and press alike as offensive, and the film hurt Wilder's career. He'd stretched the envelope until it ripped, and none of his later comedies restored his command of the box-office, despite his teamings of Lemmon with Walter Matthau in *The Fortune Cookie* (1966), *The Front Page* (1974), and *Buddy Buddy* (1981).

After helming the last Martin and Lewis film in 1956, Frank Tashlin wrote and directed two classic farces, *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956) and *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957), both starring sex-symbol Jayne Mansfield. He went on to direct Jerry Lewis' solo comedies, *Rock-A-Bye Baby* (1958), *The Geisha Boy* (1958), *Cinderfella* (1960), *It's Only Money* (1962), *Who's Minding The Store?* (1963), and *The Disorderly Orderly* (1964), and finished out the decade guiding Doris Day and Bob Hope through minor vehicles. Lewis however did his funniest work in the '60s, writing and directing a series of films which at first stuck to his formula of having Jerry bring slapstick chaos wherever he goes: *The Bellboy* (1960), with a wordless Jerry wreaking havoc at a hotel; *The Ladies' Man* (1961), set in a girls school, and *The Errand Boy* (1961), in a film studio. In *The Nutty Professor* (1963), arguably his classic, ultra-nerd Professor Julius Kelp may still blow up the laboratory, but he also transforms himself into an oily lothario called Buddy Love and gives Lewis a new persona to play. He also broadened and

redefined his character in *The Patsy* (1964), playing a nobody who's turned into a superstar by a team of handlers, and *The Family Jewels* (1965), which cast him in seven different roles.

But by the end of the decade Lewis found less success acting and directing with *The Big Mouth* (1967) and *Which Way To The Front?* (1970) and became more involved in performing on television. Lewis' later comedies, *Hardly Working* (1981) and *Smorgasbord* (1983, aka *Cracking Up*), although filled with funny sequences, failed to reinvigorate his filmmaking career. In the mid 1960s two classic comedies came from filmmakers ordinarily known for their seriousness. Producer/director Stanley Kramer gathered a stellar cast of film and television comics, including Sid Caesar, Milton Berle, Jonathan Winters, Buddy Hackett, Mickey Rooney, Phil Silvers, and Terry-Thomas, for his slapstick epic of greed well chastised, *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963), written by William and Tania Rose. Director Stanley Kubrick, writing with Terry Southern, turned Peter George's nuclear-war thriller *Red Alert* into the doomsday satire *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love The Bomb* (1964). Kubrick shrewdly cast British comic Peter Sellers as a stuffy English officer, the wimpy American President, and his ex-Nazi political advisor, and the actor's every reappearance heightened the nightmare atmosphere of this ultimate black comedy. Sellers also outdid himself that year in *The Pink Panther*, directed and co-scripted by Blake Edwards; as the klutzy French policeman Inspector Clouseau, he walked away with this farce of international jewel thieves, and Edwards immediately starred him as Clouseau in *A Shot In The Dark* (1964).

In *The Great Race* (1965), with Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon, and *The Party* (1968), also with Sellers, Edwards again combined slapstick with elaborate set pieces, but to less effect. Both men found their greatest success in the '70s by reviving Clouseau: *The Return Of The Pink Panther* (1975), *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (1976), and *Revenge Of The Pink Panther* (1978). After Sellers' death in 1980, Edwards attempted less successful reinventions of the character with *Trail Of The Pink Panther* (1982), *Curse Of The Pink Panther* (1983), and *Son Of The Pink Panther* (1993). More impressive were his comedies with his wife Julie Andrews: *10* (1979), a satire of marital infidelity, co-starring Dudley Moore; *S. O. B.* (1981) with William Holden and Robert Preston, a brutal send-up of Hollywood; and the gender-switch comedy *Victor/Victoria* (1982) with Preston and James Garner. Among Edwards' notable recent films are *Skin Deep* (1989), with John Ritter as a compulsive Casanova, and *Switch* (1991), with Ellen Barkin as a compulsive Casanova who's reincarnated as a woman. The biggest effect on American film comedy of the 1960s came from the collective fall-out of a classic '50s television series: NBC's live 90-minute comedy/variety program *Your Show Of Shows* (1950-54), which was built around the genius of comic Sid Caesar. Equally adept at character comedy, slapstick, and pantomime, Caesar could also mimic dialects and fake foreign languages; yet he and his regular co-star, comedienne Imogene Coca, acted infrequently in films.

Most of the important talent who worked with them, however, changed the face of comedy in the 1960s and '70s. Carl Reiner had clowned hilariously with Caesar and then lampooned him when he created the television sitcom

The Dick Van Dyke Show (1961-66). Reiner began writing for films with the satires *The Thrill Of It All* (1963) and *The Art Of Love* (1965), both starring James Garner and directed by Norman Jewison; he also starred in Jewison's hit farce of a Soviet submarine accidentally grounded off Massachusetts, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!* (1966), written by William Rose. Reiner then directed and co-scripted *Enter Laughing* (1967), his autobiographical comedy of a struggling young actor, and *The Comic* (1969), a neglected comedy/drama about a forgotten silent-film clown, with a great performance by Van Dyke. *Where's Poppa?* (1970), directed by Reiner and written by Robert Klane, starred George Segal as a lawyer plagued by his senile mother Ruth Gordon. This breakthrough black comedy about the horrors of urban (and family!) life used hitherto taboo language and situations to hilarious effect. Reiner's later work is most notable for his films with writer/comic Steve Martin: *The Jerk* (1979), *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* (1982), *The Man With Two Brains* (1983), and *All Of Me* (1984). Three of Caesar's writers also went on to become illustrious figures in American comedy: Neil Simon, Mel Brooks, and Woody Allen.

Simon had a smash with his Broadway comedy *Come Blow Your Horn*{~; the play's 1963 film adaptation was also a hit and led to successful films of his other comedies (usually adapted by Simon), including {#*Barefoot In The Park* (1967) with Jane Fonda and *The Odd Couple* (1968) with Lemmon and Matthau, both directed by Gene Saks, and *The Sunshine Boys* (1975) with Matthau and George Burns and *California Suite* (1978) with Fonda and Matthau, both directed by Herbert Ross. Simon wrote funny original

screenplays too, notably the romantic comedies *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972, directed by Elaine May) with Charles Grodin and *The Goodbye Girl* (1977, directed by Ross) with Richard Dreyfuss, and the satires *The Out-Of-Towners* (1970, directed by Arthur Hiller) with Lemmon and *Murder By Death* (1976, directed by Robert Moore) with Peter Sellers. In 1968 Mel Brooks wrote and directed the classic farce *The Producers*, which made a star of Gene Wilder as a meek accountant who helps showman Zero Mostel swindle his investors. Highlighted by its classic Nazi musical production number, *The Producers* wasn't afraid of bad taste, and after making the zany *The Twelve Chairs* (1970), Brooks reteamed with Wilder for his western send-up *Blazing Saddles* (1974), where his use of crude humor resulted in a box-office smash. Brooks made a career of lowbrow satires, starting with arguably his best film, the mad-scientist spoof *Young Frankenstein* (1974), again with Wilder, who also co-scripted with Brooks. With mixed results Brooks went on to parody Alfred Hitchcock (*High Anxiety*, 1977), science fiction (*Spaceballs*, 1987), swashbucklers (*Robin Hood: Men In Tights*, 1993), and horror (*Dracula: Dead And Loving It*, 1995).

Wilder wrote and directed his own vehicles in the mid '70s, but found less success with *The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother* (1975) and *The World's Greatest Lover* (1977). After writing for Caesar while still a teenager, Woody Allen found fame as a stand-up comedian, playing the quintessential neurotic Jewish New Yorker. He wrote his nebbish character into a supporting role in his first screenplay, the hit farce *What's New Pussycat?* (1965, directed by Clive Donner). After redubbing a Japanese spy

film into the hilarious *What's Up Tiger Lily?* (1966) and co-starring in the James Bond spoof *Casino Royale* (1967), Allen wrote, directed, and starred in the bank-robber comedy *Take The Money And Run* (1969). A series of intelligent and funny comedies followed, which took Woody through revolutionary Latin America in *Bananas* (1971), a potpourri of sexual sketches in *Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Sex But Were Afraid To Ask* (1972), futuristic America in *Sleeper* (1973), and 19th-century Russia in *Love And Death* (1975). Filled with sharp, surreal humor, both verbal and visual, the films were always humanized by Allen's struggle against a hostile world. He was at his peak adding elements of romantic drama with *Annie Hall* (1977), and afterwards began to make purely dramatic films as well. Audiences found less to laugh at in his later comedies *Manhattan* (1979), *Stardust Memories* (1980) and *Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982); more successful were *Zelig* (1983), in which Allen played a human chameleon, and *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), about a hack theatrical agent trying to hold his career together. He wrote himself out of the bittersweet *The Purple Rose Of Cairo* (1985) and the nostalgic *Radio Days* (1987) and played the comic relief to the drama in *Hannah And Her Sisters* (1986) and *Crimes And Misdemeanors* (1989). Allen re-emphasized comedy and starred in *Manhattan Murder Mystery* (1993) *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) and *Deconstructing Harry* (1997). By the late 1960s, the African-American stand-up comic Richard Pryor had found success in nightclubs and television and began acting in films.

After co-scripting Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*, and playing effective small roles in such comedies as *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974) and *Car Wash* (1976), Pryor struck box-office gold starring with Gene Wilder in *Silver Streak* (1976, directed by Arthur Hiller); equally potent was their reteaming in *Stir Crazy* (1980, directed by Sidney Poitier). Pryor went on to star in numerous films, including *Bustin' Loose* (1981), *Some Kind Of Hero* (1982), and *Jo Jo Dancer, Your Life Is Calling* (1986), which he also wrote and directed. His greatest film work, however, are his concert films, with his brilliant, adults-only commentaries on race, drugs, and sex: *Richard Pryor Live In Concert* (1979), *Richard Pryor Live On The Sunset Strip* (1982), *Richard Pryor Here And Now* (1983). Disabled by muscular sclerosis, Pryor has performed only rarely in the '90s. Barbra Streisand was a popular comedienne at the box-office in the '70s, with *The Owl And The Pussycat* (1971), *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), and *For Pete's Sake* (1974). More memorable were two blistering satires written by Paddy Chayefsky: *The Hospital* (1972), directed by Arthur Hiller, which looks at the collapse of American health care, and *Network* (1977), directed by Sidney Lumet, which takes apart the television industry. Other excellent '70s comedies were *Cold Turkey* (1971), director Norman Lear's spoof of a town that attempts to quit smoking; *A New Leaf* (1971), written and directed by Elaine May, who also starred as a classic dweeb who finds her true love in Walter Matthau, even though he wants to murder her; and director/star Burt Reynolds' black comedy of terminal illness, *The End* (1978), written by Jerry Belson. In 1975, NBC premiered another live 90-minute comedy/variety show, which altered film comedy as profoundly as *Your Show Of Shows* had. The sketch-comedy television series *Saturday*

Night Live introduced a cast of new young comics drawn from the Second City improvisational comedy group: Canadian Dan Aykroyd and Detroit-born Gilda Radner came from its Toronto branch; the Chicago base produced John Belushi and Bill Murray (who joined SNL in 1977); Chevy Chase was a comedy writer who'd been cast by producer Lorne Michaels.

The show was a big hit, and soon the SCTV series (1977-1984) was also on the air, combining Chicago's Harold Ramis and Joe Flaherty with Canada's John Candy, Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Andrea Martin, Dave Thomas, and Rick Moranis; Martin Short joined in 1982. They were all wonderful actors and talented writers, but the shorter-lived SCTV, not being live, offered greater subject matter and experimentation and satirized a range of storytelling styles. The SCTV players also worked concentratedly with each other, more like such television series as England's Monty Python's Flying Circus or Canada's The Kids In The Hall, than like Saturday Night Live and its huge staff of NBC writers. As a result, SCTV created genuinely funny characters, not just the catchphrases and posturing which dominated the ever-more repetitive SNL. The players from both shows have acted, written, and/or directed film comedy since the 1980s, but none of them have ever burned onscreen with the intensity or originality they showed on television. Movies were their talkies, slowing them down and coarsening their style, just as the silent clowns had gotten bogged down in sound features. At first the SNL alumni had a cluster of box-office successes. Writer Ramis and star Belushi had a mega-hit with the frat-house comedy National Lampoon's Animal House (1979), directed by John Landis.

Chevy Chase's mystery-comedy with Goldie Hawn, *Foul Play* (1978), directed by Colin Higgins, and Bill Murray's summer-camp spoof *Meatballs* (1979), directed by Ivan Reitman, had also been hits. Then Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi starred in two very expensive and unfunny flops: *1941* (1979), directed by Steven Spielberg, and *The Blues Brothers* (1980), directed by Landis. The debacle of *1941* wasn't their fault, but they brought no distinction to it; *The Blues Brothers* was co-scripted by Aykroyd and used their own SNL characters. After co-starring with Aykroyd in the feeble *Neighbors* (1981), Belushi died of a drug overdose in 1982 at age 33.

Radner, who had been showcased in *Gilda Live* (1980), Mike Nichols' film of her stage show, married actor/director Gene Wilder in 1984; but after co-starring in his *The Woman In Red* (1984) and *Haunted Honeymoon* (1986), she died of cancer in 1989 at age 42. Murray, Ramis, and Reitman found success in the early '80s: *Caddyshack* (1980) with Chase, *Stripes* (1981) with Candy, and the smash hit *Ghostbusters* (1984) with Aykroyd and Moranis. It was Abbott and Costello for the '80s — boot camp, haunted houses — but audiences loved these comedies, just as those of the '40s had loved theirs.

The SCTV stars never were able to reconvene effectively and made flop after flop: *Strange Brew* (1983), with Moranis and Thomas, who also co-scripted and co-directed, using their own SCTV characters; *Going Berserk* (1983) and *Speed Zone!* (1989) with Candy, Levy, and Flaherty; *Armed And Dangerous* (1986) with Candy and Levy, co-scripted by Ramis; *Club Paradise* (1986) with Moranis, Levy, and Martin, directed and co-scripted by Ramis. Just as mechanical and strained were the films of the SNL contingent: Aykroyd and Chase in *Spies Like Us* (1985, directed by Landis) and *Caddyshack II* (1988,

co-scripted by Ramis); Ghostbusters II (1989), which reteamed Reitman with Aykroyd, Murray, Ramis, and Moranis, but wasn't successful enough to keep the series going; Chase in his series launched by National Lampoon's Vacation (1983), which director Ramis co-scripted with John Hughes. Hughes then scored a huge hit writing the house-husband comedy Mr. Mom (1983) and became a director with two clever tales of teen angst, Sixteen Candles (1984) and The Breakfast Club (1985), both starring Anthony Michael Hall and Molly Ringwald. Perhaps noting how easily Candy stole the comedy/fantasy Splash (1984), Hughes gave him funny leads in Planes, Trains And Automobiles (1987) with Steve Martin and Uncle Buck (1989).

Ahead for Candy were the dismal Nothing But Trouble (1991) with Chase and writer/director Aykroyd, and Once Upon A Crime (1992), directed by Levy; in 1994, Candy died of a heart attack at age 43. Steve Martin, a successful comedy writer on television in the late 1960s, began performing stand-up in the '70s and became one of America's hottest young comics. After starring in and co-scripting a series of zany comedies with director Carl Reiner, Martin became noted as a romantic-comedy lead thanks to Roxanne (1987), an updating of Cyrano de Bergerac, which he also scripted. Martin's later hits include Parenthood (1989) and the remake Father Of The Bride (1991).

Television comic Billy Crystal also found a home playing comic leads in the '80s in both broad farces (Throw Momma From The Train, 1987; City Slickers, 1991) and romantic comedies (When Harry Met Sally..., 1989; Forget Paris, 1995). More successful was madcap television comedian Robin Williams, who began acting in films in the '80s. He was a hit in such comedy/dramas as

Good Morning, Vietnam (1987) and Dead Poets Society (1989), and a mega-hit in the purely comic vehicles Mrs. Doubtfire (1993), directed by Chris Columbus, and The Birdcage (1996), directed by Mike Nichols and written by Elaine May.

Writer/director Steve Gordon scored with his first film, Arthur (1981), a clever comedy of a wealthy alcoholic, starring Dudley Moore; sadly, Gordon died the following year. Other successful '80s comedies were the feminist-revenge satire 9 To 5 (1980), directed by Colin Higgins and starring Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin, and Dolly Parton; Tootsie (1982), directed by Sydney Pollack, with Dustin Hoffman impersonating a woman to win a role on a soap opera; and A Christmas Story (1983), Bob Clark's spoof of Yuletide nostalgia, adapted from writings by Jean Shepherd. Two comics who co-wrote their best features were poised for a success that eluded them in the '80s: veteran stand-up comedian Rodney Dangerfield, who was fun as the harried lead in Easy Money (1983) and Back To School (1986), and Paul Reubens, better known as television's childlike Pee-Wee Herman, in the surreal comedies Pee-Wee's Big Adventure (1985) and Big Top Pee-Wee (1988). As Saturday Night Live changed its cast over the years, most of its players returned to well-deserved obscurity. The 1980s alumnus who achieved the greatest success was African-American comic Eddie Murphy, who became one of the biggest box-office stars of the decade thanks to the action comedies 48 Hrs. (1982), Beverly Hills Cop (1984), and Beverly Hills Cop II (1987), as well as the more SNL-like Trading Places (1983) with Aykroyd and Coming To America (1988), both directed by Landis. His success opened doors for other

black comics to star in their own films, including writer/directors Robert Townsend (*Hollywood Shuffle*, 1987; *The Meteor Man*, 1993) and Keenen Ivory Wayans (*I'm Gonna Get You Sucka*, 1988; *A Low Down Dirty Shame*, 1994). But Murphy hurt his own career writing and directing *Harlem Nights* (1989), in which he generated little excitement co-starring with Richard Pryor. He followed with a series of flops, action (*Another 48 Hrs.*, 1990; *Beverly Hills Cop III*, 1994) and otherwise (*Boomerang*, 1992; *The Distinguished Gentleman*, 1992), but he managed to regain his popularity with the hit remake *The Nutty Professor* (1996), playing the sympathetic but grotesquely obese Professor Sherman Klump, who turns himself into Eddie Murphy. Several low-budget, critically-derided comedies spawned popular series in the 1980s. Cheech and Chong, a mid-'70s stand-up duo whose pot-smoking routines made them a hit with college crowds, had a box-office smash co-scripting and starring in *Up In Smoke* (1978); Chong directed most of their later films before they split in 1984.

Writer/director Bob Clark raised the ante of slob humor with his hit comedy of horny teenagers, *Porky's* (1981), and generated *Porky's II: The Next Day* (1983) and *Porky's Revenge* (1985). The zany cop spoof *Police Academy* (1984) discharged five follow-ups over the '80s. Jim Varney starred as brain-dead hick Ernest P. Worrell in the slapstick comedies *Ernest Goes To Camp* (1987), *Ernest Saves Christmas* (1988), *Ernest Goes To Jail* (1990), and *Ernest Scared Stupid* (1991). A lot more fun came from Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, and Jerry Zucker, who wrote and starred in the freewheeling satire *The Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977) and then began writing and directing as a

trio with the disaster-film send-up *Airplane!* (1980). Crammed with gags and clever in its genre twists, the film was a box-office smash and launched Leslie Nielsen on a career as a deadpan clown. The threesome followed with the hilarious spy satire *Top Secret!* (1984) and soon thereafter began working on different projects. Their solo work has been varied, but they've returned to their winning formula with Jim Abrahams directing and co-scripting *Hot Shots!* (1991) and *Hot Shots! Part Deux* (1993) and David Zucker directing Nielsen in the zany cop series they launched with *The Naked Gun: From The Files Of Police Squad!* (1988). In the late '80s, audiences' taste for Shaggy Dog-style fare was as keen as ever, and it was assuaged by the sugary farces *Three Men And A Baby* (1987) and *Three Men And A Little Lady* (1990), as well as by action superstar Arnold Schwarzenegger, who hit another vein of gold in comedy thanks to *Twins* (1988) with Danny DeVito and *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), both directed by Ivan Reitman. The mega-hits came from writer/producer John Hughes: *Home Alone* (1990) and *Home Alone 2: Lost In New York* (1992), both directed by Chris Columbus. To cataclysmic box-office effect, ten-year-old troublemaker Macaulay Culkin pounded the crap out of the bad guys, with a slapstick vigor that owed as much to cartoons as to live-action comedy. More recently, the seismic movements at the box-office have come from the flailing limbs and gross-out humor of Jim Carrey, whose rise to comedy stardom was launched in 1990 as the resident "white guy" on Keenan Ivory Wayans' Fox TV Network comedy weekly *In Living Color* — though he did appear in several films before then. His first feature film hit, *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1993), made over \$80 million; his next three comedies — *The Mask* (1994), *Ace*

Ventura: *When Nature Calls* (1995), and *Dumb & Dumber* (1995) — each brought in over \$100 million. Later additions to his repertoire include a more-serious role in the dark, mean-spirited *The Cable Guy* (1996), followed in 1997 with *Liar, Liar*, and, in 1998 he took on another dramatic role in the highly acclaimed *The Truman Show*, a comedy drama that comments on all-pervasive media manipulation. Among the '90s alumni of *Saturday Night Live*, Mike Myers and Dana Carvey had a hit bringing their SNL characters to the screen in *Wayne's World* (1992); but *Wayne's World 2* (1993) ended the series, and their subsequent solo work — *So I Married An Axe Murderer* (1993) with Myers, *Clean Slate* (1994) with Carvey — was unremarkable, though Myers went on to make the riotous spy spoof and box-office hit *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*. Julia Sweeney played her obscurely gendered Pat in *It's Pat* (1994), which was shelved, Al Franken flopped with *Stuart Saves His Family* (1995), and Dan Aykroyd had little more success reteaming with Jane Curtin to make *Coneheads* (1993).

Other SNL players who went on to feature films include David Spade and the late Chris Farley in *Black Sheep* (1994) and *Tommy Boy* (1995); Adam Sandler in *Billy Madison* (1995), *Happy Gilmore* (1996), and the two surprise hits of 1998 *The Wedding Singer* and *The Water Boy*. Sadly, overshadowing the success of SNL players were the tragic deaths in 1998 of two more of its talented alumni: Chris Farley (reportedly of a drug and alcohol overdose) and Phil Hartman (murdered by his own wife Brynn, who then took her own life). In the 1990s, another trend that emerged was the making of films from popular television sitcoms of the 1960s and '70s. Some lively work surfaced,

such as {#The Addams Family (1991) and Addams Family Values (1993), both directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, and The Brady Bunch Movie (1995) and A Very Brady Sequel (1996). Other efforts, however — The Flintstones (1994) with Rick Moranis and John Goodman, The Beverly Hillbillies (1995) with Jim Varney and Lily Tomlin, Sgt. Bilko (1995) with Steve Martin and Dan Aykroyd — have been tiresome, big-budget flops, attempting to exploit low-budget charm and wit. Nevertheless, creative film comedy continues to emerge, with such recent examples as the Kids In The Hall film Brain Candy (1995), and To Die For (1995) with Nicole Kidman, a dark satire of a lethal fame junkie, written by Buck Henry and directed by Gus Van Sant. As long as people are willing to pay to be made to laugh, there will be films attempting to meet the challenge. The comedy may be visual or verbal, subtle or slapstick, realistic or fantastic — but as long as it's funny, it will continue to work its magic.