

**The Comedy Films of
Judy Holliday**

A paper by Marc Peurye

The Comedy Films of Judy Holliday (Women's Humor in Film)

GREENWICH VILLAGE (1944)
SOMETHING FOR THE BOYS (1944)
ADAM'S RIB (1949)
BORN YESTERDAY (1950)
THE MARRYING KIND (1952)
IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU (1954)
PHFFFT! (1954)
THE SOLID GOLD CADILLAC (1956)
FULL OF LIFE (1956)
BELLS ARE RINGING (1960)

THE COMEDY FILMS OF JUDY HOLLIDAY

Shelley Winters once said, “If she had lived Judy Holliday would have been a national treasure, a superstar on the level of Streisand. She had a sweetness together with a super intellect and cunning that allowed her to survive in one of the most difficult eras of the entertainment industry. (She was) one of our greatest American clowns and tragediennes.”¹ “Mary Steenburgen (who won an Oscar for her performance in “Melvin and Howard” (claimed) to have studied all of Holliday’s performances before taking on her first screen role. Nancy Allen told a TV talk-show audience that she used Holliday as a model for the character she played in “Blow-Out”).”²

What makes her films so unique? She had an I.Q. of 172, but the New York Times described her as creating “a new kind of beautiful-but-dumb blonde.”³

Judy Holliday’s film career lasted only 16 years. Among the twelve motion pictures she did the majority were comedies and these, like Miss Steenburgen, we will take a good look at.

“Greenwich Village” was her first movie, but she didn’t agree to do it right away. She turned Fox down when they offered her it. She was extremely loyal to her small group known as “the Revuers.” Fox made a counteroffer. They were about to go into production on a musical entitled “Greenwich Village.” If Judy would sign the standard long-term contract, the studio would take the others on short-term contracts with an option for extension. Judy gave them the seven years they wanted, starting at \$400 a week. The others were given a six-week guarantee, also at \$400 a week each.”⁴

The Revuers were added to bring a note of much-needed authenticity to the film’s background. Under the supervision of a second-unit director, they shot two of their

nightclub sketches—one was their spoof of Shubert operettas—and also appeared on the periphery of several other scenes.”⁵ “They worked on “Greenwich Village” for eight weeks, then crossed their fingers and waited to hear from the studio.”⁶ “But in the release print of the film, both numbers had been cut and the Revuers had vanished except for a brief scene with Betty Comden⁷, as a hatcheck girl, handing Don Ameche his fedora. Judy was genuinely distraught. Ultimately, Judy was persuaded that she was legally obligated to Fox and that any defection might lead to a court battle, which she was in no position to afford.”⁸ The Revuers were broken up. Betty Comden and fellow Revuer and her husband, Adolph Green went back to New York.

Judy was swiftly swept into her next motion picture, “Something for the Boys,” a war musical about a poor southern belle who turns her plantation into a residence for soldier’s wives.”⁹ “Judy came in and had a look at the script. They showed her her part, and seconds later she looked up in disbelief. ‘It’s two lines.’ ‘But it’s Technicolor,’ they reassured. How many girls get the chance to be seen in full color? Think how beautiful you’ll look.’ Judy was susceptible to flattery. At least, she’d be able to show off her trim figure and tan.”¹⁰ Judy played a welder in a defense plant. “That hope lasted until she reported wardrobe and came out wearing overalls, a bandanna covered her hair, and a pair of goggles that made her look like an insect. With an outfit like that they could have saved the trouble and used a bit actor in drag. The producers explained that the movie was intended as a morale-builder for servicemen. By that they meant shapely women were supposed to cram every spare inch of film. Judy thought they were trying to build something more than morale. After limited negotiations, Judy won a small concession and would be permitted to lift her goggles before reciting her lines. She came to the set a

few days later wearing her Rosie the Riveter uniform.”¹¹ “The director told Holliday: ‘Look, we don’t want to waste much time on this. Say it fast.’”¹² She said “her first uncut lines for film posterity: ‘I knew a girl once had carborundum in her teeth, and she turned into a radio receiver.’”¹³ “On the first take, Holliday spat out the line so rapidly that she sounded like Danny Kaye performing one of his patter songs. The director glared at her. ‘Now, ah—what’s your name?—Judy—yes, well, Judy, you’ve got the idea: fast, but intelligible, please!’”¹⁴ The line was important to plot development. Carmen Miranda played the radio set Judy was talking about.

Pauline Kael said about her next film “Adam’s Rib” that it “just seemed the right size” for her and that “intermittently, Holliday lifts the picture to a higher, free-style wit.”¹⁵

“One night, as the Kanins¹⁶ and (Spencer) Tracy and (Katharine) Hepburn were discussing possible casting for the supporting roles, someone suggested Holliday as Doris Attinger. No, Kanin said, it’s too small a part. Small, but colorful, Hepburn argued, and it could be built up. “Yes,” Kanin answered with mounting excitement as he began to see the possibilities of Hepburn’s suggestion. He dearly loved Holliday, and here was a chance to allow Cohn¹⁷ to see what Judy could do on screen. If she came across in ‘Adam’s Rib’, Cohn might give her a second look for ‘Born Yesterday.’ It was a crazy idea, but when dealing with Cohn, a touch of craziness could be an advantage.

Although Holliday had informally agreed to appear in ‘Adam’s Rib,’ a legal obstacle had to be overcome before she was free to join Kanin and company: Contractually, she was committed to ‘Born Yesterday’ for another three months. Since she stayed with the show for so long, however, Max Gordon was willing to release her on

two weeks' notice. In gratitude, Judy extended him a favor: As 'Adam's Rib' was to be shot partly in New York, she promised to play Billie Dawn on stage each night while shooting the film by day, she was determined to stay with the plan until it was time for her to leave for the Coast."¹⁸

"Judy's opening scene, filmed at a New York City police precinct in Greenwich Village, was an account of Doris Attinger's first interview with her attorney, Amanda Bonner (Hepburn). It was a lengthy, crucially important dialogue (in terms of plot and characterization), with the brunt of the conversation carried by Holliday—the Hepburn character acting mainly as a "feed." Cukor decided to shoot the scene in one continuous take, the camera placed behind Hepburn's shoulder and looking steadily at Holliday. By doing this—and it was a relatively unorthodox method of filming at the time—Cukor was allowing Holliday to 'flow' with the role, to sustain and build up a character as she might on stage.

Nonetheless, when Judy sat down opposite Hepburn for the first take, she was almost frozen with fear and nervousness."¹⁹ Fortunately, the near-immobility that often goes hand in hand with a state of severe tension was not inappropriate to what Doris would have been feeling, and so what Holliday was suffering personally became a telling piece of screen impersonation. After the first take, Cukor said he was more than satisfied with the results, but that it would be necessary to shoot again, this time from another angle, favoring Hepburn. 'Forget it, George,' Hepburn interrupted, 'the scene is fine and it should belong to Judy, anyway.' A few reaction close-ups of Hepburn were shot for editing purposes; otherwise, the sequence appears in the film pretty much as it was originally photographed."²⁰

“The New York exteriors were shot at Lexington Avenue and Fifty Second Street. Doris Attinger was shadowing her wayward husband and nervously munching on candy bars. It was the kind of pantomime at which Judy was most expert, but the first day before the camera was rough. Judy apologized to Cukor and the crew for her initial ineptitude, shook off her nervousness, and the next day, performed the sequence flawlessly.

Judy registered brilliantly as Doris Attinger. She timed the Kanins’ shorthand dialogue to the last ellipsis. Kate (Hepburn) was determined that audiences get a good look at Judy. In their two major scenes together Kate saw that the angles favored Judy and at one point played with her back selflessly to the camera.”²¹

“Because of a rather overly fanciful plot twist, Judy, Tom Ewell (playing Doris’s unfaithful husband), and Jean Hagen (Mr. Attinger’s ‘friend’) were required to appear in drag for one scene. Hair slicked back with Vaseline, sporting a matchstick mustache, and wearing a double-breasted pinstripe suit, Judy started to stroll the labyrinthine streets of M-G-M during a lunch break. Turning a corner, she nearly collided with Greer Garson, the Queen Mother of the Metro lot, who yelped in horror at the androgynous stranger who accosted her from nowhere. Judy was enormously amused by Garson’s reaction; she was never to dwell on anecdotes from her past, but this was one story she did enjoy telling to her friends in later years.

Everyone concerned with ‘Adam’s Rib’ was excited by Judy’s work, including Judy. Bolstered by the unflagging support of Cukor and Hepburn, Holliday began to recognize her abilities as a screen actress. As shooting progressed, the gossip columns in the Hollywood trade papers started carrying ‘inside’ reports about how Judy was stealing

the picture from Hepburn and Cukor. Though Judy realized that this was part of the Kanin-Hepburn-Cukor conspiracy against Cohn, and also valuable publicity for the picture, she knew that such principled and exacting professionals would never have stooped to such a ruse unless they genuinely believed in her talent.”²²

Her next film was “Born Yesterday,” a script Harry Cohn had originally purchased for Rita Hayworth. “Several weeks before ‘Adam’s Rib’ opened to glowing reviews in New York during December 1949, Holliday had been promised the screen role of Billie Dawn. “Born Yesterday” started in production in the spring of 1950. “Garson Kanin had worked for Harry Cohn, which was something like mortal combat. Cohn enjoyed a good fight, and Gar gave it to him, though both men were often the worse for the effort. A few years earlier they’d had a falling-out over a script Cohn commissioned from the Kanins and then rejected, and which was later sold to Universal as “A Double Life,” where it eventually became an Oscar-Winning vehicle for Ronald Colman. When Gar put “Born Yesterday” on the block for Hollywood, he gave strict instructions to his agent that it was for sale to anybody but Cohn. His agent, Abe Lastfogel, asked if he was open to negotiation, and Gar answered no, ‘Not for a million buck.’ Two months later Cohn purchased the film rights for a record one million dollars. Cohn was thoroughly tantalized by the character Harry Brock. It would be some time before Gar confessed that Harry Cohn had in fact been the rough model for Brock.

Meanwhile the writer and the mogul were back to their old tricks. They agreed that George Cukor should direct, and that was the last thing they agreed on. Gar wanted Paul Douglas to repeat his role, but Cohn wanted Broderick Crawford, whom he had under contract and who had just received an Academy Award for “All the Kings Men.”

Cohn pointed out that the stage role had been offered in first place to Crawford. Gar gave in on that and went to bat for Judy as Billie Dawn. Cohn's gruff reply was, 'That fat Jewish broad?' He was not about to gamble a million dollars on an unknown, even if she was the backbone of the Broadway production. Cohn mentioned several contract players—Rita Hayworth, Lucille Ball, Alice Faye, Barbara Stanwyck. Gar just shook his head.

Judy did not know the particulars of the negotiations, but she did know virtually every actress in the business was being mentioned and she hadn't even been offered a screen test. To make matters worse, she had spied Rita Hayworth in the audience one night taking notes. Little over a year earlier, Hal Wallis had pleaded Judy to star in "My Friend Irma." Judy refused and asked, 'What about Marie Wilson? She created it on radio.' Wallis took the advice and cast the original. Marie Wilson then turned around and launched a minor publicity campaign in an attempt to win Billie Dawn, not for Judy, but for herself. The list of possible Billies ballooned—Gloria Grahame, Barbara Hale, Evelyn Keyes, Jan Sterling. A movie would be the perfect end to Judy's long association with the role."²³

Judy then made 'Adam's Rib.' Cohn was impressed. Cohn thrived on conflict, and when none was to be found, he instigated it. When Cohn attempted to sign her to a standard seven-year contract, she refused. Judy held out for one picture a year for seven years and a free hand to work in theatre, radio, and television. Although Cohn was loath to admit it, he admired those few who stood up to him. Even more he admired Judy's talent, the quality of her mind, and her integrity. She was not a shallow glamour girl who relied on good looks and handy editing."²⁴

“(Broderick) Crawford wasn’t thrilled about the role (Brock); like Holden, he felt the men in the film were overpowered by Billie, particularly since Billie was to be played by Holliday. Judy became aware of the problem, and confronted Crawford and Holden about it. ‘It’s a wonderful script,’ she said, ‘and there are lots of opportunities for everyone.’”²⁵ “The moment she put on the costumes, she became Billie Dawn. With her newly lightened hair and a loose-hipped walk she’s picked up from the rumba line at the Copacabana, she was the classis chippie made good.”²⁶ “To convince them, she suggested they rehearse the play with Cukor and stage an abbreviated performance for the Columbia employees. This was done, with Cohn’s reluctant approval, and the result was as Judy had planned: an enormous success for everyone involved.

During the shooting of ‘Born Yesterday,’ Judy’s professional love affair with George Cukor intensified. His idiosyncrasies appealed to her. One of the best things about George, Holliday once said, was his roundabout way of calling for a retake. ‘Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!’ he’d cry, clapping his hands with enthusiasm. ‘Now let’s try it again!’ She delighted in arriving at a piece of business or a line reading that would leave his speechless, gasping for the appropriate superlative, which, when found, would always be repeated three times.”²⁷

“In mid-June the production shifted to Washington, D.C., for location work. Judy was afraid of flying, so while the rest of the cast came by air, she took to the rails. Cohn did not want his leading lady to travel alone, and he ordered Broderick Crawford to join her. The last thing Crawford wanted was to squander four days in a cramped train, but Cohn was adamant. It was a relatively minor chapter in what had become the longest and loudest running verbal brawl on the lot. Judy and Crawford passed the long hours talking

and playing gin rummy for money. Crawford arrived in Washington immeasurably fonder of his leading lady and six hundred dollars poorer.

Cukor shot exteriors all over town. The itinerary read like a high-school field trip: Superior Court, Washington Monument, National Archives, Treasury Department, National Gallery, Library of Congress, Jefferson Memorial. It took two weeks to get what he wanted, and then they all returned to Los Angeles to finish up the interiors.”²⁸

Cukor kept telling her Cohn wasn’t the bastard he seemed, but Judy’s impression of him as a ‘thoroughbred son of a bitch’ was supported by Broderick Crawford, who reported for work one morning screaming for blood. The day before, he had gone to Cohn’s office and asked for twenty-four hours’ leave since his son, who had just undergone surgery to correct a hearing impairment, was returning from the hospital the following afternoon. Cohn said, no—work was work. Crawford rose in fury and threatened to go AWOL. ‘Walk off that set,’ Cohn screamed, ‘and you’re fired!’

On hearing his story, Holliday, Holden, and Cukor urged Crawford to return home. He thanked them, but said since he was there, he might as well stay put. Shooting went along halfheartedly until noon, when suddenly the motorized door at the rear of the soundstage opened and an ambulance drove onto the set. With perfect timing, Cohn appeared out of nowhere. ‘There’s your son,’ he told Crawford. ‘Take him home. But don’t you ever again threaten to walk off one of my pictures!’ As time went on, she found herself beginning to like Cohn—he had been more than decent to her since their initial set-to and even that incident she could now view good-naturedly.”

“Born Yesterday” concluded principal photography on August 12. “In December 1950, the film version of ‘Born Yesterday’ opened in New York to sensational reviews.

There was some quibbling about ‘canned theatre,’ but the faults of the film were dismissed as the critics raved on and on for paragraphs about Holliday’s Billie Dawn. The triumph was virtually complete—even the cautious had to agree with Life that, at the very least, Holliday had given ‘the top comedy performance of the year.’

Three months later, Judy received an Academy Award nomination. That citation had been anticipated by Cohn and the studio, but no one really expected her to walk off with the award—least of all Judy. This was the year of ‘All About Eve’ and ‘Sunset Boulevard,’ and the odds favored Bette Davis (‘Eve’) or Gloria Swanson (‘Boulevard’) as best actresses. Both of them had given powerful performances, and both had strong sentiment going for them.

On the night of the awards ceremony, March 21, 1951, several of the more prominent nominees were in Manhattan. Jose’ Ferrer (nominated for ‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ and a shoo-in for best actor) was appearing on Broadway with Miss Swanson in a stage revival of ‘Twentieth Century.’ Judy was also in town, as were several other candidates—among them, Sam Jaffe (best supporting actor, ‘Asphalt Jungle’), Celeste Holm and Thelma Ritter (both nominated for best supporting actresses for ‘All About Eve’)—and Ferrer decided to host his own celebration at a West Side Spanish Cabaret, La Zambra. Arrangements had been made for a coast-to-coast radio hookup (this was four years before the Academy Awards ceremony was televised) so that if one of the New Yorkers won the award, he or she would then be able to accept it verbally, if not in person.

The first real excitement at La Zambra occurred when Jose’ Ferrer won the Oscar as best actor. He went up to an improvised platform and gave a short speech that was

broadcast to the West Coast and simultaneously sent out over the national airwaves. The next award was for best actress. By this time, odds were high in favor of Davis; ‘All About Eve’ was on a winning streak, far outdistancing ‘Sunset Boulevard.’ But that could also work in Swanson’s favor: She could take the best-actress award as compensation for all the minor awards her picture had lost during the evening. The atmosphere at La Zambra was taut while Olivia de Havilland, on the stage of the Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles, read off the list of nominees. After a dramatic pause, she unsealed the envelope, gasped, and then clearly enunciated, ‘JUDY HOLLIDAY.’”

Bedlam at La Zambra. Judy bolted out of her chair, hid her face in her hands, laughing and crying simultaneously. She had been prepared for defeat, but not for the emotions of victory. While Ferrer and Swanson cooed and hovered in the background, David (her husband at time, David Oppenheim) was whooping with joy and George Cukor nearly strangled Judy with a bear hug. Meanwhile, in Hollywood, Ethel Barrymore (one of Cukor’s dearest friends, who had agreed to accept the award in Holliday’s stead) was approaching the Pantages podium. At the same time the crowd in New York was pushing Judy toward the microphone at La Zambra. But before she got there, Miss Barrymore had finished a brief and gracious speech in her behalf, and the network had unplugged its connection with the East Coast.

‘Another case of Revuers’ Luck,’ she told a friend the next day. After the ceremony, Cukor—always the director—suggested they clear out of La Zambra and move on to a place that served decent food. Everyone was high on wine and exhilaration. It was also a night that marked a turning point in Judy’s life. When she woke the next morning, she would be a national celebrity, but the complications, professional and

private, that would grow out of this elevated status were nothing Judy thought about on this evening. This was a time for only celebration.²⁹

Her next film was called “A Name For Herself.” It was later renamed “It Should Happen To You.” Leonard Maltin describes it as a “raucous comedy about a publicity seeking actress (Holliday) who has her name plastered on billboards in N.Y.C. with deft results.”³⁰

For her next vehicle, Cohn and his Columbia assistants wanted a story that would present Judy in a more entertaining, enhancing way. Still, they had no idea where they would find the right kind of picture until Garson Kanin came along with another script. It had started out as a vehicle for Danny Kaye, but, on reading an outline, Ruth Gordon said, “Sounds like a Holliday property to me.’ Kanin ignored the comment, but after plotting out of a few scenes, he, too, realized that his central character should be female and that the script was ideal for Holliday.

Cohn was also pleased with the script—as was George Cukor, who agreed to direct what was to be his fifth and final Holliday film. Shooting for ‘It Should Happen To You’ was scheduled to begin in May 1953.”³¹

“The wardrobe test was not going well. Columbia had found a new leading man who had worked extensively in television and appeared in a recent Broadway revival of ‘Room Service.’ His name was Jack Lemmon and he had all the makings of a fine comic actor. The studio had carefully screened him over a period of months but inadvertently overlooked one thing—his size. Jack was trimly built, maybe five-feet-ten in height. Judy, even in her slender condition, was broadly built and in heels also stood about five – ten. This violated the Hollywood rule by which a leading man appear larger than his

leading lady. Judy thought it was foolish, but she had long since learned to expect such foolishness in the movies.

Jack was handed a pair of lifts, which left the matter of bulk. He was then given a special sports coat with shoulders that were padded and built out with all the subtlety of a football uniform. Jack told Judy he felt like an asshole. She made pleasant conversation to put him at ease. Toward the end of the afternoon Jack was thinking of a way to express his gratitude to Judy and in a moment of forced nonchalance he ventured, ‘What are you doing for dinner tonight?’ He couldn’t believe he had asked. Why would this star want anything to do with an upstart from television?

Judy casually took the cue. ‘So where we going?’

Jack couldn’t believe his luck. ‘I don’t know. You tell me.’

Judy lowered her voice conspiratorially. ‘There’s this wonderful little Italian place that I shouldn’t go to but I love. I’ll pick you up. Where are you staying?’

‘I’m staying at the Hollywood Roosevelt, but I’ll pick you up.’

Jack took down her address and set a time. He went out and rented a car and promptly got lost. He arrived at Judy’s place twenty minutes late and she proceeded to navigate him to the restaurant, a clear case of the blind leading the blind. They were on a dark winding road in the Hollywood Hills when the car blew a tire. Jack instructed Judy to roll up the windows and lock the doors and he took off in the direction of some distant lights hoping to find a gas station. He had run perhaps two miles and the lights seemed no nearer. He started to worry about Judy and ran back to the car, afraid that she had been hurt or abducted. He returned sweaty and breathless to find her sitting calmly in the front

seat. ‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry,’ he apologized? ‘We’ll have to drive down, I’ll probably ruin the wheel.’

‘Do you have a handkerchief?’ she asked.

He handed her one. ‘What happened?’

‘I changed your tire.’

Jack had come west reluctantly, expecting to find an absurd ‘star’ system full of phony hauteur and overblown egos. He looked admiringly at Judy, chuckled, started the car, and thought to himself: She isn’t a star—she changed the fucking tire!

They were friends from that moment on, and it was only part of the rare family feeling that soon surrounded the production.”³²

“One of the reasons Judy was so generous toward Lemmon was that she immediately spotted his talent and was eager to encourage him. She had an eye for up-and-coming beginners and was extraordinarily supportive, urging them to nurture their gift and work arduously to perfect it. Also, she genuinely liked Lemmon—he was in fact one of the few of her Hollywood leading men who she did respect. One of her frequent beefs was that Cohn kept dropping the dregs of the lot into her pictures, making her work twice as hard to make comic points. But she couldn’t complain about Lemmon—he always met her more than halfway.”³³

“The warmth extended to the cast’s other leading man, Peter Lawford. Peter knew Betty and Adolph from their work together a few years before on the film ‘Good News.’ He had never met Judy and was the least bit wary, half-afraid she might look down her nose at movie people. Before shooting they bumped into each other on the set and

without the least hesitation or awkwardness Judy offered her hand and introduced herself. They chatted and clicked right away.”³⁴

“‘A Name for Herself’ was released in late January of 1954 as ‘It Should Happen To You’ and it was a commercial success. Not only did it introduce Jack Lemmon to the movie going public, but it also provided Judy with an invaluable comeback vehicle and officially ended her blacklist exile.”³⁵

“Her next picture was one that most everyone would like to forget, but unfortunately it sticks in the mind, if only because of its title: ‘Phffft!’—possibly the worst-named picture in American film history.^{35A} ‘Don’t say it! See it!’ a Columbia publicity campaign urged viewers. But how many people want to see a picture with a name they can’t pronounce and don’t understand?

It was stodgily staged by Mark Robson, a Hollywood veteran with a few first-class credits behind him, but never a director noted for his light touch.

George Cukor wasn’t free to direct, as he was then in the midst of nursing Judy Garland through ‘A Star is Born.’ But this disappointment was offset by Judy’s pleasure in working again with Jack Lemmon, who had scored a big hit in ‘It Should Happen To You.’ About the picture’s second leading lady, Kim Novak, she had no particular feelings. They were not to meet until the first week of shooting.

By then, Judy had learned that Harry Cohn referred to Novak as ‘that fucking Polack broad.’ Showering them with foul epithets was his way of grooming them for the rigors of stardom. There could be no doubt about it—Novak was being prepped for the big time.

Judy swiftly realized that no matter what the screen credits or press releases said, ‘Phffft!’ wasn’t intended as a Holliday picture. Everything was being arranged for Novak to steal ‘Phffft!’ from its two stars.

The reviews for ‘Phffft!’ (which opened in December 1954) weren’t measurably better, and on every newsstand there were cover pictures of Kim Novak showing lots of décolletage and a sensuous mouth that suggested an appetite for something less flattering than pasta.”³⁶

“As the weeks passed and the ideal stage script continued to elude her, Holliday decided it would be foolish to postpone her return to Hollywood. Much to her surprise—maybe the studio hadn’t written her off, she thought, Columbia had purchased for her the hit Broadway comedy ‘The Solid Gold Cadillac,’ written by George S. Kaufman in collaboration with her old and dear friend Howard Teichmann. Judy had seen the play shortly after its opening and loved it, though she never imagined it as a vehicle for herself. The play centered on Laura Partridge, a little old lady who, with ten shares of stock in a huge, General Motors-esque corporation, succeeds in wresting control from a selfish and underhanded board of director.

This was a property about which Judy felt truly enthusiastic. It was a lighthearted portrait of the American underdog, which struck a deep chord in Judy. Many of her great roles ran among similar lines: She was nearly always the representative and/or champion of the little folk of America, a girl who thwarted big business and came down solidly on the side of ‘the happy peasant,’ as in ‘Born Yesterday.’

Abe Burrows was hired to fashion the screenplay for ‘Cadillac.’ Like Holliday, he had been a victim of the congressional witch-hunts; and perhaps because of this

experience, he played safe and watered down the already adulterated satire of the playscript. Laura comes off funnier—many of Burrow’s gags are not only cleverer than the ones they replace—but also kookier.”³⁷

Judy started work on “Cadillac” in the fall of 1955.

“The picture suffered from the casting of Paul Douglas as the automobile executive who falls in love with Laura. Always a heavyweight as a leading man, Douglas had grown stouter since ‘Born Yesterday,’ and his comedy timing was almost as broad as his figure. Judy felt no greater affection for him than she had during the stage run of ‘Born Yesterday,’ and on screen they make a singularly unattractive couple—perhaps the least exciting pair of movie lovers since Beulah Bondi and Victor Moore in ‘Make Way for Tomorrow’ or Burl Ives and Sophia Loren in ‘Desire Under the Elms.’ When they gaze at each other, they seem to be envisioning a golden retirement in Saint Petersburg, not an explosive sexual congress.

‘The Solid Gold Cadillac’ was to be another personal triumph for Holliday, and the film as a whole was generally well received by both the critics and the public: It was to be one of the top-grossing films of all the time in England.

‘Wouldn’t you like to do a dramatic film or play?’ a reporter asked Holliday at about the time of ‘Cadillac.’ Well, yes, she replied, ‘but I don’t think the public would accept me. As soon as they see me, they start to laugh. They see me as a clown. I doubt they could accept me in a serious role.’

Her sixth film for Columbia, ‘Full of Life,’ made directly after ‘Cadillac,’ is the most inconsequential of all her films and the most negligible of her screen performances.

All during shooting, Judy was terribly upset about ‘Full of Life,’ which she recognized was nothing more than an extended TV situation comedy.”³⁸

“Judy finished ‘Full of Life’ in late June and cheered herself with the observation that she was only one film short of completing her contract with Columbia.

His passing (Harry Cohn) accentuated Judy’s belief that she and Columbia had grown out their need for one another. The studio incentive to give her fresh viable material and she lacked the ego to endure another ‘Full of Life’ just to be back in pictures. Neither party seemed interested in pursuing the unfulfilled seventh picture in her contract, and so Judy was looking forward to more artistic freedom than she had known in really a decade. All she had to do was get past the filming of ‘Bells.’”³⁹

“Holliday returned to Los Angeles for preproduction meeting on ‘Bells’ in mid-August—actual shooting wasn’t scheduled to begin until October. Most of her preliminary duties revolved around costume fittings and conferences with Vincent Minnelli and producer Arthur Freed, the masterminds behind many of the great M-G-M musicals of the Forties and Fifties. Judy told Freed she thought the script for the film was pedestrian, and though he didn’t say so, Freed tended to agree. Judy also told Comden and Green what she thought, and they definitely did not agree. The three friends had been on the outs and this argument was to put another dent in their relationship. But Judy didn’t care: She knew she was right about the script—it was seriously flawed.

Vincent Minnelli was surprised to find he couldn’t gain Holliday’s confidence. He had been one of her fans since the Revuers days, and had expected no difficulties in working with her.”⁴⁰

“(But) the strain between Judy and Minnelli grew to the point that he automatically rejected her suggestions. There was none of the diplomatic give-and-take of a Cukor set. Minnelli viewed Judy as a threat to his authority and responded with more authority.

Given what he saw as a troublesome star and a leading man whose consciousness was somewhere in the ozone, Minnelli worked around his principals. Judy thought she was being under rehearsed for key scenes while the extras, bit players, and even the sets were getting all the attention. When an actress is unsure of her material and director, the one thing she needs most is reassurance. But Alfred Freed was somewhat alienated, and Judy’s pleas for support from Betty and Adolph went unheeded—they sided with Minnelli.”⁴¹

“After the first week of shooting, she became so distraught that she begged to be released from the picture: She would even contribute her entire salary if they would only start all over again with another actress—maybe Shirley MacLaine. The offer was politely refused. Judy resigned herself to finishing the film, but her anxiety broke out in a new form: Suddenly she was afflicted with a scourge of diseases. Her bursitis returned; then she came down with laryngitis; then a bladder ailment; finally a kidney infection. Later there was to be a series of freak accidents. First a heavy suitcase fell on her foot, causing her to limp for a few days; then, in a scene requiring her to walk across a room with the back of her dress on fire, the igniting apparatus became overheated and she was badly burned.

At the time, most of Judy’s ailments were generally considered to be psychosomatic in origin; but in light of what was to happen a year later, this seems a false

assumption. Holliday was truly ill, otherwise she would never have acted as she did; she had never been difficult or temperamental in the past. The cast and crew were extremely considerate, almost compassionate in their deference toward her. Minnelli did his best to reassure her, but he failed to win Judy's confidence simply because she was convinced that the entire concept of the film was hopelessly, irredeemably wrong. The production was a nightmare from start to finish. Judy had frequent crying jags, and when she wasn't in front of the camera, she was sequestered in her dressing room with Mulligan, rarely speaking to anyone else, not even her costar, Dean Martin, who remained good-natured though he let it be known that he thought the role of Jeff Moss was a waste of time and talent.

Judy's only other trusted companion on the set was Ralph Roberts, who was cast in a small role in the picture. Known as 'Big Ralph,' this muscular actor with a soft southern drawl had for years been moonlighting as a masseur, and much to his consternation, his therapeutic fingers were in greater demand than his acting activities. Marilyn Monroe was his most fervent fan—she was always calling for him at ungodly hours.

Following the wrap-up of the film in December 1959 (one day before Christmas), Judy rushed back to New York, angry at nearly everyone, convinced that the picture wasn't worth the celluloid it was printed on. And, as it turned out, she wasn't entirely wrong. Her performance is amazingly good, but the script is even weaker than the original, and the production is lethargic and synthetic, a mediocre example of canned theatre.

The picture opened six months later to favorable, if less than enthusiastic, reviews, and the public reaction ranged from good to tepid. It was Judy's first out-and-out box office bomb. It was also to be her last picture."⁴²

In 1958, 'Life' Magazine ran a picture spread of top actresses in the roles they would most like to play. In the photo session at the Dakota, Judy posed as Amanda in 'The Glass Menagerie.' It was a rather solemn occasion for her, spoiled by the commotion over Marilyn Monroe, who was also being photographed at Judy's apartment. They had met a few years before, not long after Judy had done a Monroe imitation as part of a television special. Marilyn bumped into her in the street and said, 'I hear you did a pretty good imitation of me.' Judy said it really wasn't much and invited her over for tea. They spent a pleasant afternoon together, but it was an ironic study in contrasts. Both women had come to the public's attention for playing what were essentially, for want of a better term, dumb blondes. Judy's characters were more undereducated diamonds in the rough, whereas Marilyn's were overheated baby dolls.

Judy had her agents scouting new properties for her. She was rather annoyed at the sudden spate of Doris Day films. Judy respected her as a singer, but said that as a comic actress she left a lot to be desired. These films were precisely the sort of romantic comedies that had been Judy's specialty, and it distressed her that none of the offers were coming her way. Still, she figured it was only a matter of time before she was back on screen, and then she would be flooded with scripts again."⁴³

"On Friday, June 4, Arnold Krakower, her lawyer, spent an hour with Judy in the early evening. She was still fully conscious, but unable to speak. He told her that there had been a couple of new TV offers. Judy reaches out and squeezed his hand.

Sometime later that night, Holliday lost consciousness. Krakower was the last of her friends ever to communicate with her. Two days later, at 5:00 A.M., Monday, June 7, Judy Holliday died peacefully in her sleep. Precisely two weeks later, she would have celebrated her forty-fourth birthday.”⁴⁴

“Judy’s death received front-page coverage from most of the leading newspapers, including ‘The New York Times.’

In 1956, only two of her films, ‘Born Yesterday’ and ‘Adam’s Rib,’ had achieved even semi-classic standing. Worst of all, a whole new generation of moviegoers had come of age since her final screen appearance, and for them she was an unknown quantity. At the time of her death, ‘Newsweek’ referred to her as ‘the nearly forgotten Judy Holliday.’ The description raised storms of protest along Shubert Alley, but ‘Newsweek’ was reflecting the viewpoint of a wider audience.

As it turned out, her mother, Helen, needn’t have worried about Judy’s continuing fame—everything has worked out nearly as well as she would have wanted. Perhaps her daughter hasn’t as yet been entered into the first rank of screen greats, but rarely a year passes without another up-and-coming actress being likened to Holliday, and that in itself is some guarantee of immortality. The list extends from Barbara Harris through Golden Hawn and Lilly Tomlin to Gilda Radner. And actors and acting teachers still speak of Holliday’s comic technique with a note of awe that reverberates throughout their commentary.”⁴⁵

ENDNOTES

1. Holtzmann, Will. Judy Holliday. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, © 1982, p. outside back cover.
2. Carey, Gary. Judy Holliday—An Intimate Life Story. New York: Seaview Books, © 1982, p. 260.
3. “Judy Holliday, 42, Is Dead of Cancer.” New York Times June 8, 1965, p.1.
4. Holtzmann, pp. 86-87.
5. Carey, pp. 56-57.
6. Holtzmann, p. 87.
7. One of the Revuers.
8. Carey, pp. 56-57.
9. Ibid., p. 59.
10. Holtzmann, p. 95.
11. Ibid.
12. Carey, p. 60.
13. Holtzmann, p. 95.
14. Carey, p. 60.
15. Kael, Pauline. 5001 Night At The Movies. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, © 1985, p. 4.
16. Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon.
17. Harry Cohn, head of Columbia Pictures.
18. Carey, pp. 97-98.
19. Ibid., p. 99.

20. Ibid., pp. 99-100.
21. Holtzmann, pp. 134-135.
22. Carey, pp. 101-102.
23. Holtzmann, pp. 132-133.
24. Carey, pp. 137-138.
25. Ibid., p. 110.
26. Holtzmann, p. 138.
27. Carey, pp. 110-111.
28. Holtzmann, pp. 112-113.
29. Carey, pp. 116-119.
30. Maltin, Leonard. TV Movies and Video Guide—1987 Edition. New York: New American Library © 1987, p. 439.
31. Carey, pp. 154-156.
32. Holtzmann, pp. 184-185.
33. Carey, pp. 159-160.
34. Holtzmann, p. 186.
35. Carey, p. 194.
- 35A. That is with the exceptions of “I Dismember Mama,” “I Spit On Your Grave,” “The Incredible Strange Monsters Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies,” “Jesse James Meets Frankenstein’s Daughter,” “Matango, the Fungus of Terror,” “Rat Fink a Boo Boo,”

“Ssssss,” “Wine, Women, and Horses.” Incidentally none of these pictures starred Judy Holliday, Jack Lemmon, or anyone I think she would be likely to know.

36. Carey, p. 174.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-179.
39. Holtzmann, pp. 207, 237-238.
40. Carey, pp. 206-207.
41. Holtzmann, pp. 241-242.
42. Carey, pp. 207-209.
43. Holtzmann, pp. 245-246, 289.
44. Carey, p. 255.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 258-260.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carey, Gary. Judy Holliday—An Intimate Life Story. New York: Seaview Books,

© 1982.

Holtzman, Will. Judy Holliday. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, © 1982.

Kael, Pauline. 5001 Night at the Movies. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and

Winston, © 1985.

Maltin, Leonard. TV Movies and Video Guide, 1987 Edition New York:

New American Library, © 1987.

“Judy Holliday, 42, Is Dead of Cancer.” New York Times. June 8, 1965:I: p.1.