

# Midnight

1939 | US | 94 min.

## Credits

<b>Director</b>	Mitchell Leisen
<b>Screenplay</b>	Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder
<b>Photography</b>	Charles Lang
<b>Music</b>	Friedrich Hollaender
<b>Cast</b>	
<b>Eve Peabody</b>	Claudette Colbert
<b>Tibor Czerny</b>	Don Ameche
<b>Georges Flammarion</b>	John Barrymore
<b>Helene Flammarion</b>	Mary Astor

## In Brief

Midnight begins during a midnight rainstorm as Eve Peabody, an American ex-showgirl arrives penniless at Paris' Gare de L'Est, owning only the gold lame gown on her back. She attracts the attention of Hungarian cab driver, Tibor Czerny, but walks out on their budding romance; Eve will no longer make the mistake of dating for love rather than money. Instead, she finds shelter from the downpour by crashing a socialite's late-night soiree using a pawnticket and a pseudonym - Baroness Czerny. There, Eve meets aristocrat Georges Flammarion, who entices her with a place in society if she agrees to remain disguised as the Baroness and seduce his wife's playboy lover. Meanwhile, Tibor Czerny has not given up his search for Eve. When he locates her whereabouts and discovers the fact that she is using his name, Tibor also travels to the Flammarion estate -- to win back Eve, and to pose as her husband, the Baron. What ensues is quintessential screwball comedy, full of deception, love, quadruple entendre, and outright farce.

~ Aubry Anne D'Arminio, Rovi

In the screenplay of this breezy, charming romantic comedy, one must look very deep to find the trademark Billy Wilder cynicism and ultimately realize that the final product definitely comes up short in this respect. The lack of knee-slapping pessimism does not, however, detract from how enjoyable the picture is. Wilder's screenplay, co-written with partner Charles Brackett is such a perfectly formed bauble of fairy-tale romance with healthy dollops of sexual frankness (which, frankly is a more-than-equal Wilder trait to that of cynicism) that it can steadfastly maintain a place amongst other terrific examples of its type.

Finally, what makes this urban, continental variation on the Cinderella tale soar is the exquisite visual panache of the great (and truly underrated) director Mitchell Leisen. His touch, though light as a feather, earns its heft (so to speak) thanks mainly to his fine eye for composition, his razor-sharp sense of pace and his deft ability to handle the proceedings with an elegance befitting its deliriously romantic setting of 1930s Gay Par-ee. In Leisen's hands La Ville-lumiere bubbles and sparkles with such frothy sophistication that one is reminded of just how awe-inspiring Paris is, but more importantly, how the essence of one's memories of Paris itself can, in some ways, actually benefit from the eye of the motion picture lens, and, more to the point, the perspective of a director as stylish as Leisen.

And there's nothing more stylish than Paris in the rain – precisely the setting our heroine, Eve Peabody (Claudette Colbert) finds herself in at the beginning of “Midnight” as she stumbles off the train in full evening attire with neither an umbrella nor a penny to her name. Luckily, she catches the eye of dashing Hungarian émigré cab driver Tibor Czerny (Don Ameche) who agrees to chauffeur her about the city as she searches for a singing job, but more importantly, for an opportunity to land her a rich husband.

Even though she and Tibor are clearly a match made in Heaven (something both the audience and the characters are equally and plainly aware of), Eve is tired of poverty, and rather than prolong the inevitable, she sneaks away from the man who would shower her with the riches of love (but not much else) and sneaks her way into a private party and classical music recital. It is here where she meets the irascible Georges Flammarion (John Barrymore) who sees in Eve the kind of spunk and good heart that attracted him to his own wife Helene (Mary Astor). Alas, Helene is dabbling in a rather open affair with the dashing Marcel Renaud (Rex O'Malley) and a heartbroken Georges sees an opportunity to win his beloved wife back with the assistance of Helene.

In the meantime, the love-struck Tibor, aided by the watchful eyes of every cab driver in Paris searches under every rock for Eve. This, of course, becomes increasingly difficult since the radiant gold digging chorus girl has appropriated his surname and is now firmly ensconced in high society with the rather noble moniker of Baroness Czerny.

The action eventually leads to a Grand Ball where all the players cavort in a manner only befitting one of the finest romantic screen comedies that borrows generously from one of the great fairy tales of all time. Needless to say, it can hardly be called a “spoiler” to suggest that Cinderella results in a happy ending and that the same can be said for “Midnight” which hurtles like a runaway train through a multitude of breakneck twists, turns, dips and ascensions until its inevitably delirious conclusion.

With movies like “Midnight”, it's the ride that truly counts. And what a ride! One never feels like the final destination has come unearned.

It almost goes without saying that the cast is utter perfection. Colbert proves, yet again, why she was one of those most beloved stars – not only of her generation, but also of all time. The camera not only loves her to death, but she embodies all that is WOMAN! She is graceful, sexy, bubbly and sharp as a tack. Most importantly, she makes us laugh and is not afraid to have us laugh both with her and



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at her.

Don Ameche is not only charming as the Hungarian cab driver, but he too is blessed with such a truly buoyant sense of humour that it's no wonder his career lasted well into old age. Contemporary audiences will, no doubt, remember his finely wrought performances in "Trading Places", "Cocoon" and, most notably, David Mamet's "Things Change".

Mary Astor and Rex O'Malley make a perfect illicit couple and deliver highly nuanced performances which respectively blend haughtiness and warmth, and smarminess and charm. Astor is especially surprising. She often strikes me as humourless, but not only does she display considerable lightness, but she's also really sexy.

The genuine treat in "Midnight" is, predictably enough, the genius that is John Barrymore who alternates between all-knowing reprobate and a love-obsessed fool. His lines readings and comportment are nothing less than perfection itself – all the more amazing since he was, no doubt, completely and utterly plastered for much of the film's production.

"Midnight" is a class act all the way. It's also more fuel to the fire that is: "They don't make 'em they way they used to."

Now isn't THAT the truth?

- Greg Klymkiw ([www.dailyfilmdose.com](http://www.dailyfilmdose.com))

## Claudette Colbert

One of the brightest film stars to grace the screen was born Emilie Claudette Chauchoin on September 13, 1903, in Saint-Mandé, France. Her banker father moved the family to the United States when she was three. As Claudette grew up, she wanted nothing more than to play to Broadway audiences (in those days, any actress or actor worth their salt went for Broadway, not Hollywood). After her formal education ended, she enrolled in the Art Students League, where she paid for her dramatic training by working in a dress shop. She made her Broadway debut in 1923 in the stage production of "The Wild Wescotts". It was during this event that she adopted the name Claudette Colbert.

When the Great Depression shut down most of the theaters, Claudette decided to make a go of it in films. Her first film was called For the Love of Mike (1927). Unfortunately, it was a box-office disaster. She wasn't keen on the film industry, but with an extreme scarcity in theatrical roles, she had no choice but to remain. In 1929 she starred as Joyce Roamer in The Lady Lies (1929). The film was a success and later that year she had another hit entitled The Hole in the Wall (1929). In 1930 she starred opposite Fredric March in Manslaughter (1930), which was a remake of the silent version of eight years earlier. A year after that Claudette was again paired in a film with March, Honor Among Lovers (1931). It fared well at the box-office, probably only because it was the kind of film that catered to women who enjoyed magazine fiction romantic stories. In 1932 Claudette played the evil Poppeia in Cecil B. DeMille's last great work, The Sign of the Cross (1932), and once again was cast with March. Later the same year she was paired with Jimmy Durante in The Phantom President (1932). By now Claudette's name symbolized good movies and she, along with March, pulled crowds into the theaters with the acclaimed Tonight Is Ours (1933).

The next year started a little on the slow side with the release of Four Frightened People (1934), where Claudette and her co-stars were at odds with the dreaded bubonic plague onboard a ship. However, the next two films were real gems for this young actress. First up, Claudette was charming and radiant in Cecil B. DeMille's spectacular Cleopatra (1934). It wasn't one of DeMille's finest by any means, but it was a financial success and showcased Claudette as never before. However, it was as Ellie Andrews, in the now famous It Happened One Night (1934), that ensured she would be forever immortalized. Paired with Clark Gable, the madcap comedy was a mega-hit all across the country. It also resulted in Claudette being nominated for and winning the Oscar that year for Best Actress. IN 1935 she was nominated again for Private Worlds (1935), where she played Dr. Jane Everest, on the staff at a mental institution. The performance was exquisite. Films such as The Gilded Lily (1935), Drums Along the Mohawk (1939) and No Time for Love (1943) kept fans coming to the theaters and the movie moguls happy. Claudette was a sure drawing card for virtually any film she was in. In 1944 she starred as Anne Hilton in Since You Went Away (1944). Claudette picked up her third nomination for Best Actress.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s she was not only seen on the screen but the infant medium of television, where she appeared in a number of programs. However, her drawing power was fading somewhat as new stars replaced the older ones. In 1955 she filmed the western Texas Lady (1955) and wasn't seen on the screen again until Parrish (1961). It was her final silver screen performance. Her final appearance before the cameras was in a TV movie, The Two Mrs. Grenvilles (1987) (TV). She did, however, remain on the stage where she had returned in 1956, her first love. After a series of strokes, Claudette divided her time between New York and Barbados. On July 30, 1996, Claudette died in Speightstown, Barbados. She was 92.

- Denny Jackson (IMDB)

