

# DOWN WITH LOVE

Directed by Peyton Reed  
Produced by Bruce Cohen and Dan Jinks  
Distributed by Twentieth Century-Fox  
Released in 2003

Patently derivative, but somehow managing the occasional burst of wacky inventiveness, *Down With Love* is a loopy mess. A twisted pastiche of *Pillow Talk* and other 'innocent' Doris Day sex comedies, we're granted many well-constructed, well-delivered jokes. But a movie that would have proved a legendary exclamation point if released in 1967 is but a question mark in 2003. If the pertinent cultural and entertainment tropes have long been abandoned, what is there to skewer? Isn't this like kicking a man when he's down? More practically, the extreme innuendo that punctuates the narrative every ten minutes takes us out of the story, which, apparently, is supposed to resemble a romantic comedy of role reversals that underscores the importance of marriage, even as both antagonists in this battle of the sexes refuse to acknowledge their deepest desires. But it all comes to naught. Since everything in *Down With Love* is a joke, the ending is hollowed out, and we're left wondering if a happy marriage is just another phony Hollywood construct.

As far as the cast is concerned, David Hyde Pierce and Sarah Paulson navigate the very difficult material more successfully than leads Zelwegger and McGregor. Tony Randall lends his seal of approval to this ungainly, self-immolating, too-cute-by-half genre roast. But his character—disloyal, lying, cruel—contrasts sharply with Pierce's Peter MacManus (the type of character Randall used to play). Marc Shaiman's deliberately anachronistic score is wall-to-wall zaniness. And the production design of Andrew Laws is kitsch of the highest order. We really do have the sense of being dropped into an idealized 1962, a charming, safe-and-dorky world of Ed Sullivan and Judy Garland, loaded sidebars and record changers, hipsters and stewardesses, baseball and Broadway; the United States is charging headlong into the New Frontier, high on JFK and NASA, with New York City—awash in cash and divertissements, all glitter and neon and limitless opportunities—a safe little bubble in the center of everything.

From a box-office perspective, this is a daring film. But it's also wimpy, flaccid, and ludicrously extenuated. Its unique brand of oil-and-water insouciance and cynical deconstructionism is best suited for 20-year-old film students.