

THE ODD COUPLE

Directed by Gene Saks
Produced by Howard W. Koch
Distributed by Paramount Pictures
Released in 1968

Bringing a stage play to the big screen can prove formidable. The script is there, practically done—good dialogue works anywhere. But few movies take place in one location. Anchoring a story to a single set would work fine, except that by its limitations the audience would be pulled out of the narrative, wondering what is bothering them. On the other hand, rewriting scenes conceived for one location and transferring them to another can also prove distracting. To work as a movie, a play must be reconstituted. It's not a question of middle ground, but of taking the *story* and making it into a movie; for *The Odd Couple* they took a play and made it into a movie. The results are mixed. We get some tacked-on scenes, like the search for Felix in the squad car and Felix's round of shopping at the local supermarket. In both sequences nothing happens. Another scene, where Oscar's attentive viewing of a Mets game is interrupted by a telephone call from Felix, also doesn't work. By troubling Oscar with pointless questions about dinner, Felix distracts his friend from the game. Oscar misses a triple play and is reproved by his sportswriter colleague. It shows how Felix can be annoying and has a real hang-up about traditionally feminine occupations. However, all Oscar has to do is turn to face the diamond while he's on the phone. Instead he looks away, to no end. To show that Felix is wearing on Oscar, a different setup should have been thought out.

Still, the movie works because of the performances of Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. For good reason they paired up in almost a dozen films; they have chemistry and pizzazz that give each joke just a little more pull. The other standout is Neil Hefti's score. Consisting of only seven cues, there isn't much material to consider, but his theme proved ideal and was adopted for the 1970s television show. It's whimsical, with an off-kilter instrumentation consistent with the comic tension between the stars.

The Odd Couple is very funny. Nothing is taken seriously, including divorce, which is introduced merely as the basis for some G-rated dark humor, particularly during the Pigeon sisters double date in which Felix is trying to extricate himself from an awkward tête-à-tête with two English girls characterized by a penchant for ribaldry. But each is more vapid than vixen, resulting in the looniest scene in the film. A first time viewing can result in some surprising abdominal pain.