

"I'm also just a girl standing in front of a boy asking him to love her," Anna Scott, portrayed by Julia Roberts, said to William Thacker, played by Hugh Grant, 23 years ago. At that moment, *Notting Hill* made any less-romantic relationship seem like it was not worth being in. And for many people, it's that ridiculous portrayal of love that makes romantic comedies oh-so-polarizing.

For a while, the genre saw a huge decline. Rom-com stars had moved on during the '10s, whether directly like Grant, who said he's too old for the genre, or indirectly like Roberts and Jennifer Lopez, who opted for more dramatic turns. Even the mastermind Nancy Myers, who's behind 2003's *Something Gotta Give* and 2006's *The Holiday*, publicly voiced that she struggled to get financing for new movies.

The box office market share of romantic comedies went from 11.39% in 1999 to 6% in 2011 to never passing 2.6% since.

In 2023, rom-com is back — it's the kick A-list actors are on right now. With only 11 films released in theaters last year, the genre grossed over \$100 million at the box office.

The revival is wonderfully weird, because rom-coms have always been divisive between genders. Many men may secretly enjoy it, but the genre is regarded as "chick flicks" for a reason. In 2022, the same year that some said rom-coms were "dead" and "dormant," theater audiences saw Roberts and George Clooney reunited in a rom-com that grossed \$172 million worldwide as a divorced couple who couldn't stand each other but had to work together to stop their daughter from getting married too quickly.

In the same year, the genre brought us Jenny Slate and Charlie Day charmingly falling for each other after helping one another return to their exes; Channing Tatum, as a book cover model, hilariously pursuing Sandra Bullock, a grumpy middle-aged novelist; or Billy Eichner and Luke Macfarlane trying to be together despite having commitment issues.

"People love the idea that people will fall in love with the right people, and in the end of any romantic comedy, when you see them finally get together, we all feel really good, right?" Bart Weiss, cinematic arts associate professor, said. "Like, how can you not feel good at the end when these people that have struggled and you know they loved each other, but they couldn't get it together, and then they finally do, it's something that makes us feel good."

Streaming services are jumping into the rom-com trend for Valentine's Day, too. Reese Witherspoon, who started as a rom-com actress but has since won almost all prestigious acting awards for her drama turns and producing work, joined forces with Ashton Kutcher for Netflix' *Your Place or Mine*, which premiered Feb. 10 on the streaming platform.

"I didn't stop on purpose. I don't think I'll ever

stop making romantic comedies," Witherspoon told *Vanity Fair* at the *Your Place or Mine* premiere in Los Angeles. "They are very important to me. It's my favorite genre because it makes people feel good."

The same day on Amazon Prime, Alison Brie

adaptation of *Red, White & Royal Blue*, a hate-at-first-sight story between the son of the U.S. president and the prince of the United Kingdom.

"I think people just want an outlet to forget and enjoy and look at pretty people going through re-

ies-of-the-week at NBC." The secret to a good rom-com comes from a good script and a solid cast, she said.

For a genre with a reputation for bad quality, few people know that the history of rom-com dates all the way back to the early 20th

anything special that makes a good rom-com, as a "good script is good script," Weiss said. It comes down to good timing, good structure, good characters and character development. Since the plot can be predictable, the scriptwriter has to figure out a way

elements — lovable leads, meet cute, a troublesome situation that jeopardizes the relationship — with showbiz melodrama.

Weiss said any film genre is cyclical, so there will always be another cycle of rom-coms that will come back. When a genre has been there for a while, people will move on to a different one until someone reinvents it with new energy like *La La Land*.

There's always a large potential audience for the genre, Newton said, because most people have either been in love or want to be so. "I think people just want an outlet to forget and enjoy and look at pretty people going through relatable situations," she said.

The argument about rom-coms being relatable or unrealistic will always remain. On some level, it's comical to think that a genre meant to be harmless would spark such divisive opinions. But does it matter much, if many rom-coms are still coming this year and the genre is making bank at the box office? After all, Scott was just a girl, standing in front of a boy, asking Thacker to love her.

I think we all have done that, or wish we had, or would root for a person if they dared to do so.

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Celebrate February with an A-Z list of rom-coms:

- A: *Annie Hall*
Available on Prime Video for rent at \$3.99
- B: *Bridget Jones's Diary*
Available on Prime Video for rent at \$3.99
- C: *Crazy Stupid Love*
Available on HBO Max
- D: *Definitely, Maybe*
Available on Prime Video
- E: *Easy A*
Available on Peacock
- F: *Fire Island*
Available on Hulu
- G: *Grease*
Available on Netflix
- H: *The Holiday*
Available on Showtime
- I: *It Happened One Night*
Available on Tubi
- J: *Jerry Maguire*
Available on Netflix
- K: *The Kissing Booth*
Available on Netflix
- L: *Love & Basketball*
Available on HBO Max
- M: *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*
Available on HBO Max
- N: *Notting Hill*
Available on Netflix
- O: *Obvious Child*
Available on HBO Max
- P: *The Princess Bride*
Available on Disney+
- Q: *The Quiet Man*
Available on Prime Video
- R: *Roman Holiday*
Available on Paramount+
- S: *Sleepless in Seattle*
Available on Prime Video for rent at \$3.99
- T: *10 Things I Hate About You*
Available on Disney+
- U: *Under the Tuscan Sun*
Available on Prime Video for rent at \$3.99
- V: *Valentine's Day*
Available on HBO Max
- W: *When Harry Met Sally...*
Available on HBO Max
- X: *Xanadu*
Available on Prime Video for rent at \$3.99
- Y: *You've Got Mail*
Available on HBO Max
- Z: *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*
Available on Hulu



MOVIES AND TV

The revival of romantic comedies is here

The oh-so-divisive genre is making a comeback, as A-list stars are jumping on projects and audience is reacting to it through positive box office numbers

STORY BY DANG LE
The Shorthorn editor-in-chief

ILLUSTRATION BY CLAUDIA HUMPHREY

starred in *Somebody I Used to Know*, which follows a workaholic TV producer running to the comfort of her hometown and spending an evening with her first love, only to realize that he is getting married. Such a classic plot (1997's *My Best Friends' Weddings*, anyone?) and so rom-com.

Films already confirmed for this year include Wes Anderson's *Asteroid City*, which features Tom Hanks, Tilda Swinton, Adrien Brody, Margot Robbie, Steve Carell and Scarlett Johansson and an

latable situations. Globally, there's a lot of unease due to conflict everywhere, socially, politically, environmentally and we're just coming off a pandemic," said Patty Newton, cinematic arts assistant professor of practice, in an email. "The world is complicated. 24-hour news cycles fuel this unease. People need escape."

As a writer, producer and director, Newton said she directed a short LGBTQ+ rom-com in 2012 and worked on the Danielle Steel franchise of "20 mov-

ies-of-the-week at NBC." The secret to a good rom-com comes from a good script and a solid cast, she said. For a genre with a reputation for bad quality, few people know that the history of rom-com dates all the way back to the early 20th

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He doesn't think there's

to give the main characters the problem that keeps them from coming together in a comedic yet believable way.

In 2016, Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone teamed up in *La La Land*, which tells the story of a struggling jazz pianist and an aspiring actress meeting and falling in love while pursuing their dreams in Los Angeles. Receiving a record-tying 14 nominations and six wins at the Oscars, the movie presents a newer way of combining rom-com