

Blu-Ray Review: 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' Exudes Ageless Radiance

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on September 30, 2011 - 7:18am

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CHICAGO – With her gamine physique and ageless radiance, it's easy to see why many cinephiles regard Audrey Hepburn as the greatest of all screen beauties. Yet it isn't merely her unconventional appearance that continues to keep moviegoers mesmerized. It's her utter lack of vanity and unmistakable sweetness that ground her in an earthy reality unoccupied by fellow icons like Monroe.

Her persona is so inherently engaging that it can even turn a gold-digging kleptomaniac like Holly Golightly into an irresistible heroine that has stood the test of time. Though fans of Truman Capote's edgier and more nuanced novella have rightfully criticized the film for softening its source material, Blake Edwards's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" works entirely on its own terms as classy entertainment, albeit with one major exception.



Blu-Ray Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Golightly is a Manhattan socialite with mob ties and a penchant for endless witty chatter. She works as a paid escort to save money for her brother (currently in the military), as well as keep her spectacular wardrobe fashionably up to date. When the new neighbor at her apartment, Paul (George Peppard), stops in for an impromptu visit, Golightly blissfully shares her life philosophies and insecurities with the complete stranger. It's difficult for the would-be couple to generate chemistry, partly because Hepburn has the majority of the dialogue, and partly because Peppard often resembles a blank slate (his delivery of the line, "I love you," is particularly unconvincing). Yet that hardly matters whenever Hepburn is front and center, strutting about in Edith Head and Hubert de Givenchy's infamous costumes and delivering George Axelrod's marvelous dialogue.



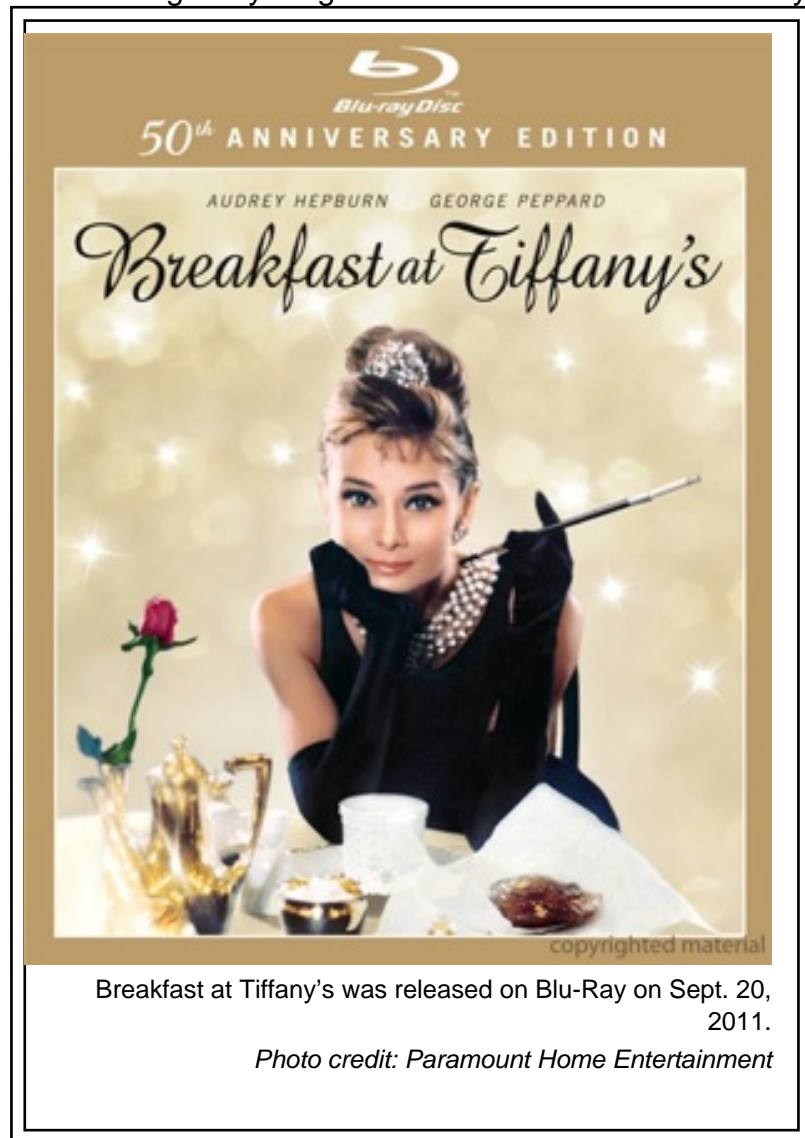
Audrey Hepburn stars in Blake Edwards's 1961 classic Breakfast at Tiffany's.

Photo credit: Paramount Home Entertainment

Though Capote's provocative tale was uneasily contorted by the filmmakers into lighthearted escapism, Henry Mancini's exquisite score plays a crucial role in adding an overarching tone of wistfulness to each scene. As a woman running from her past (with hubby Buddy Ebsen—who wouldn't?) and resisting her future identity (as Paul's wife), Hepburn allows rich nuances of repressed emotion to glimmer through her seemingly frivolous demeanor. Her lifestyle is ultimately portrayed as a soul-killing compulsion, and yet the film's most memorable scenes center on Golightly's various indulgences. Who can forget the brilliantly staged party set in a cramped apartment where catastrophe is narrowly avoided by the single tip of a glass? Or the oddly romantic set piece (hilariously scored by Mancini) where the couple robs a convenience store before falling into each other's arms?

For Hepburn fans, this pristine 50th anniversary Blu-Ray edition is sure to be a mandatory purchase. The picture is sharper and the colors are more vibrant than ever, allowing Hepburn's grace and impeccable style to shine like never before. It's her go-for-broke performance, combined with Mancini's "Moon River" refrain, that makes the melodramatic ending such a timeless tearjerker. Seeing the film again makes one even more appreciative of the splendid ensemble, particularly Patricia Neal as Paul's "decorator" nicknamed "2E," and Martin Balsam, who delivers a rapid-fire monologue that must be seen to be believed.

The film's one major misstep has gotten far more press in the last few years than it did in the past, and it's about time. Though Edwards routinely injected broad comedic sketches into his pictures, his caricatures were not often racially charged. In his woefully overlooked 1968 farce, "The Party," Peter Sellers played a clumsy yet well-meaning Indian gentleman without resorting to easy stereotypes, while Edwards depicted the racism amongst a group of decadent showbiz types. Perhaps Edwards had already learned from his galvanizing error is casting Mickey Rooney as Golightly's raving Asian landlord, complete with grotesque false teeth. His scenes are every bit as appalling as a blackface routine, and weirdly foreshadowed the inexplicable subplot in "Thoroughly Modern Millie," where an aging actress poses as an Asian landlord while selling her young female tenants into white slavery.



"Breakfast at Tiffany's" is presented in luminous 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio), and includes an array of featurettes recycled from past DVD releases (three of which are presented in HD). Producer Richard Shepherd starts off his audio commentary track by saying obvious things like, "Hepburn is the star," but eventually rattles off some diverting trivia, such as the fact that Neal was once married to Roald Dahl. He also mentions how the studio nearly sabotaged the entire project by suggesting to cut "Moon River" and fearing that audiences wouldn't accept Hepburn in the role of a call girl (though Capote told "Playboy" that he envisioned the character as more of an American geisha). In an all-too-brief making-of featurette, Hepburn's partner Robert Wolders argues that the studio should've allowed Hepburn to play the role as Capote had written it, rather than sanitize her character into a mere escort.

Casting director Marvin Paige and choreographer Miriam Nelson join various extras to reminisce about the production of the infamous party sequence, and the various bits of business that Edwards dreamed up on the spot. Various members of Henry Mancini's family reflect on the brilliant composer's thirty-plus year collaboration with Edwards in an extended interview, while style experts dissect the various infamous outfits worn by Hepburn throughout her career, the bulk of which were designed by Givenchy. There's also a Paramount studio tour and a brief history of Tiffany's, accompanied by a heartfelt preface Hepburn wrote for the company's book commemorating its 150th anniversary.

Both Edwards and Shepherd adamantly voice their deep regret of casting Mickey Rooney as a Japanese character, and the studio goes a step further by including an excellent 18-minute featurette about the depiction of Asians in American film. Members of the Media Action Network for Asian Americans discuss how the Rooney character was a direct reflection of various post-WWII Asian caricatures designed to portray all Asians as grotesque foreigners. The journey from Ming the Merciless in "Flash Gordon" to Hikaru Sulu in "Star Trek" has been one of great progress, and it's encouraging to see Paramount use this opportunity to educate its viewers about the film's traces of racism rather than ignore the yellow-faced elephant in the room.

'Breakfast at Tiffany's' is released by Paramount Home Entertainment and stars Audrey Hepburn, George Peppard, Patricia Neal, Buddy Ebsen, Martin Balsam and Mickey Rooney. It was written by George Axelrod and directed by Blake Edwards. It was released on Sept. 20, 2011. It is not rated.



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