CHAPTER 1

Introduction: "Call Me Blake."

Today, Blake Edwards at best is primarily known to the public for ten films he directed at three points in his career beginning with *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *The Days of Wine and Roses* in the early 1960s; followed by five mid-1960s to mid-1970s Pink Panther films; and culminating with *"10," S.O.B.*, and *Victor/Victoria* between 1979 and 1982. But this is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Edwards is rightly often considered the most important filmmaker of his generation. Yet even this overlooks the importance of his successful work in radio, television, and theater. It also excludes his extensive work in addition to directing as a writer, producer, and actor as well as his work as a studio artist. In this book we expand and refocus our understanding of this ceaselessly creative multimedia, multi-hyphenate artist, including major screenplays of films that were unproduced, a stage play script that has also not yet been produced, and a survey of his public one-man shows and retrospectives of his work as a studio artist featuring paintings and sculpture.

Although it is not widely known, Blake Edwards began his postwar filmmaking career in 1948 with a B Western, *Panhandle*, which he cowrote and coproduced and in which he acted. He followed that with another B Western,

Blake Edwards: Film Director as Multitalented Auteur, First Edition.
William Luhr and Peter Lehman.

which he once again cowrote and coproduced. These were very low-budget films for minor studios, Monogram and Allied Artists. Edwards did not rise to sustained public prominence as a film director until over a decade later, as mentioned above, when he made *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), and *The Pink Panther* (1963), all of which were released by prestigious, high-visibility studios (Paramount, Warner Brothers, and United Artists respectively). Yet, between 1948 and the early 1960s, Blake Edwards burst upon the scene as a writer-producer-director-actor in radio, television, and film. He was everywhere doing virtually everything.

We will tell that story in Chapter 2, but we begin here for several reasons. We want to briefly situate Edwards within the historical context of profound changes within the film and television industries between 1948, when he began his career, and 1993, when he directed his last theatrical film; we want to survey the current state of scholarship on Edwards; and we want to outline our goals for this book, where we will minimize repetition from our earlier two books and the work of others since then.

Blake Edwards grew up in Hollywood and often referred to himself as a third-generation filmmaker since his step-grandfather, J. Gordon Edwards, was a silent film director most known for his popular films with Theda Bara. His stepfather, Jack McEdward, was an assistant director as well as a theater director. Distinguished film historian Kevin Brownlow told us a remarkable anecdote about this aspect of Edwards's family history during a Pordenone Silent Film Festival. Film archivists and historians had long presumed that all of J. Gordon Edwards's Theda Bara films had been destroyed in a fire. Tragically none had survived even in any international film archives. Remarkably, Brownlow was involved in the discovery and restoration of one of the lost films. Knowing of Edwards's pride in his family's place in film history, Brownlow invited Blake Edwards and Julie Andrews to a private screening. Edwards had never seen one of his step-grandfather's films, and he was deeply appreciative of the screening Brownlow had set up. Brownlow also sent us documents about that private screening. Clearly, the history of film, including the silent era, meant a great deal to Blake Edwards and became a significant influence on him as a filmmaker.

Although Edwards is nearly always thought of as a comedy filmmaker, we will focus attention on the many serious films he made, many of which are forgotten, overlooked, or marginalized. Careful analysis of these films foregrounds the complex and creative way he approached genre conventions in all his films, sometimes mixing genres, sometimes interrogating them, sometimes overwhelming convention with invention, and sometimes satirizing them. We will draw upon decades of research, including visiting the sets of four of his films and two of his plays, watching him work and talking

with and interviewing him and many of his creative and business collaborators. We have also conducted formal interviews with dozens of actors, editors, set designers, producers and publicists, and so on.

Blake Edwards has been recognized as an auteur since the 1960s, a status that was highlighted in 1968 with the publication of Andrew Sarris's groundbreaking book, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*. Sarris had placed Edwards in the category "The Far Side of Paradise," meaning directors immediately below the giants in the Pantheon, even though much of Edwards's best work would come in the following decades.[1] That recognition began in France when Jean-Luc Godard praised *Mister Cory* (1957) as a serious artistic accomplishment in *Cahiers du Cinéma*.[2] Sarris perceptively summarized aspects of Edwards's worldview and film style. It was important at the time to make the case for directors as serious artists who could develop their unique visions within the Hollywood studio system, despite its emphasis on box office, stars, and genre entertainment. It was not uncommon in academia at that time for many to consider such directors as Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini as serious artists in contrast to the presumed mere Hollywood entertainers with their eye on the box office.

It is within this context that we published two books on Edwards's films: the first, simply titled *Blake Edwards* (1982), and the second, *Returning to the Scene: Blake Edwards, Volume 2* (1989).[3] In those volumes, we tried to expand Edwards's auteur standing in two ways. We based our readings of his films on detailed close formal analyses which stressed how such aspects of film style as composition, editing, screen space, and visual motifs all shape and form the story they tell. Secondly, we helped introduce and apply important work in contemporary film theory such as feminist and psychoanalytic theory to expand upon previous auteur criticism of Edwards's films.

Since the publication of our first two books on Edwards, another major critical study has appeared in 2009: Sam Wasson's excellent *A Splurch in the Kisser: The Movies of Blake Edwards*. He chronologically analyzes the films Edwards has directed. As the title suggests, he emphasizes how Edwards used visual style to build such central features of the films as gag structures. This strategy foregrounds how Edwards worked creatively as a filmmaker, minimizing abstract discussions of character, theme, plot, and worldview which could just as well be summarizing novels instead of films. Rather than attempt to footnote every possible reference to his book, we will simply acknowledge its general importance to our work. We published our second book on Edwards on January 1, 1989, and Wasson's book came 20 years later, and the year before Edwards died. As such Wasson covers all the late-period films released after we finished writing our second book in 1989. At this

point in time, we recommend that readers seeking an introduction to the films of Blake Edwards begin with *A Splurch in the Kisser*. If some of our points seem similar at times, it does not mean there is a direct influence. We have been working on this book for several decades, and much of our research and the directions of our argument took place prior to reading Wasson's book. For example, we have analyzed Edwards's gag structure in relation to what Edwards called "topping the topper topper," a style he credited to Leo McCarey and his work with Laurel and Hardy. There are connections between "topping the topper topper" and the "splurch." Another shared assumption with Wasson relates to genre: As we reviewed Edwards's entire career for this book, we were struck by the fact that all of his genre films, radio shows, and television series were unusual departures from the genre norms of the time, so much so that many of them could more accurately be described as genre mixes. Wasson, although focused on the films Edwards directed, makes the same point. Wasson generously credits us with influencing him, and we want to credit him with influencing us. It is due to Wasson's work that we decided we did not need to focus in detail on all the films that Edwards had made since our previous work, nor did we need to update our previous analyses. That has had a profound impact on the structure of this book, freeing us up to focus on different things.

In addition to Wasson's book, we are indebted to Richard Brody's brief, but profound, reevaluation of Edwards's career in his article "What to Stream: Blake Edwards's Masterwork Documentary of His Wife, Julie Andrews" in *The New Yorker Magazine*, March 26, 2020.[4] We were not even aware of the 1972 documentary *Julie* prior to reading this article, and now we have an entire chapter on it in this book. But Brody goes on to reassess Edwards's entire career, granting that "Edwards (who died in 2010) was a comedic genius, the most skilled and inspired director of physical comedy working in Hollywood in his time," but then, noting his dissatisfaction with various scenes within those films, he claims, "Yet Edwards has also made some of the best movies of modern times, including 'Experiment in Terror,' 'Days of Wine and Roses,' 'Wild Rovers,' and even 'Sunset,' which has been much, and wrongly, maligned, including by Edwards himself." The argument about these dramas, or "serious" films as they are, regrettably, often labeled since comedies can be just as serious as dramas, along with the documentary *Julie*, inspired us to devote an entire section of this book to chapter-length analyses of each of the nine non-comic films, including the four Brody singles out. We held these four films in very high regard long before reading Brody's article, and we had written about three of them, but his spirit of reevaluating the Edwards oeuvre in this fashion inspired us to be the first book to focus an entire section on

Edwards's non-comic films, which we will call "dramas" for short. Those are the *only* films directed by Edwards that we analyze in such a manner, devoting an entire chapter to each film. Our goal is not just to help change the limited notion of Blake Edwards as "a comic director" but to further explore the relationship between his comedies and these dramas. We were surprised by some of the discoveries we made.

In this book we emphasize three different areas of Edwards's work: In Chapter 2 we will look at his immensely productive early period in which he burst upon the scene in radio (*Richard Diamond, Private Detective*), television (*Peter Gunn*), and film (*Operation Petticoat*), to hint at what lies beneath the tip of the iceberg. We were fortunate to interview some key figures from that period, including writer-director Richard Quine; composer Henry Mancini; choreographer Miriam Nelson; actor Craig Stevens; and writer-producer-director Owen Crump, since Edwards worked in so many different capacities, beginning primarily as a writer for radio and cowriting a series of screenplays with Richard Quine. He moved up to directing when Quine moved from B films to A films and from Columbia to Universal. Edwards worked extensively with two major figures in this early period: Dick Powell in radio and television, and Richard Quine in film. Interestingly, Edwards only ever mentioned Powell to interviewers including us within one specific context – his abrupt transition from singing and dancing in musicals to being a tough *Film Noir* detective in *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). Yet Powell was also a model of a multimedia, multi-hyphenate creator working as an actor and producer in radio, television, and film and may have influenced Edwards to develop his career in that direction. And although both Powell and Quine worked repeatedly with Edwards when they were established figures and he was an up and coming figure, he never called either of them a mentor. Throughout most of his career, he saved that praise for Leo McCarey with whom he never worked but whom he knew well and with whom he had many discussions about filmmaking. McCarey was yet another writer-director-producer. Yet once again, Edwards repeats the same point every time: McCarey's style of developing visual gags in such a manner that, just when the spectator laughs and thinks it is over (the topper), he extends it in a new direction for another laugh (topping the topper) and the spectator laughs again at what they think is the surprising end to the gag only to have it extended yet again (topping the topper topper). And he always recounted the same example from a McCarey film. Not surprisingly, Edwards called this "topping the topper topper" and it would be the central model for much of the comedy which made him famous and won him critical acclaim. Powell, Quine, and McCarey, three writer-producer-directors, seem to be the most

prominent formative figures in Edwards's early work. By the end of his career, however, as Sam Wasson reminds us, during a distinguished awards ceremony which we attended with Billy Wilder present, Edwards said, "Whether you know it or not, Billy, you have always been my mentor."[5]

As we situate Edwards historically as a writer-producer-director, it is important to remember that a long tradition of such hyphenates existed in Hollywood and that several of them also worked in various media and theatrical forms. This began during the silent era before the elaborate compartmentalization of later times emerged. A look at Charles Chaplin's credits in most of his films gives an indication of this. Chaplin was often the director, producer, star, writer, and at times composed the music and did the choreography. Our argument for the importance of Edwards as a multi-hyphenate, multimedia creator was not that he was an original (far from it) but, rather, that he became the most prominent such creator at a crucial moment in film history defining the post–World War II years up to the contemporary convergence of the entertainment and technology industries when such multi-hyphenate, multimedia creators became a new norm within a totally reorganized entertainment industry. Thus, he not only pointed to the past, but he also became an extraordinary link to the future. During his career both the nature of the film industry and the studio system, and their relationship with television, changed dramatically.

Under the Hollywood studio system when Edwards began, studios had actors and directors under contract and Edwards's relationship with Columbia Pictures' founder and president, Harry Cohn, as well as with director Richard Quine and star Frankie Laine was in that sense typical. Quine had a multipicture deal with Columbia to direct a series of films starring Mickey Rooney, and then the popular singer Frankie Laine. These were B films, meaning they had a smaller budget, shorter running times, and were intended as the second half of double features. In addition to their A features, studios such as Columbia frequently also produced such B features. When Quine was elevated to the status of directing larger-budget A features with established film stars, Edwards was assigned to direct the two films in the contracted Frankie Laine series. Edwards's start at Columbia thus epitomized many aspects of the studio system.

Edwards told us an anecdote about working with Cohn at Columbia. While he and Quine were in production on a film, Cohn called them into his office and complained about the film, saying it needed a scene with a moving speech. When Quine asked if he wanted something like Hamlet's soliloquy, Cohn replied, "No, something like 'To be or not to be'." Edwards lost it and doubled over with laughter. Cohn asked Quine, "What's the

matter with your boy?" Edwards replied, "To be or not to be *is* Hamlet's soliloquy." Cohn then said, "You're fired." The studio heads had such power under that system.

When Edwards went to Universal to direct Tony Curtis in the first film that he had written by himself and, outside of the Frankie Laine B series, he was able to do so because of another feature of the studio system: studios often loaned a star or director to another studio. They loaned Richard Quine to Universal in 1954, where he directed Tony Curtis in *So This Is Paris*, a musical. Edwards was no longer under contract to Columbia, and undoubtedly it was Quine's presence at Universal along with his having directed Tony Curtis that paved the way for Edwards's first drama, *Mister Cory* (1957), which also starred Curtis. When Edwards returned to Columbia Pictures in 1962 to direct *Experiment in Terror*, the poster boldly announced, "Columbia Pictures Presents a Blake Edwards Production." His status within the industry had clearly changed. He was no longer a B director or under contract to direct films with stars that were assigned to him.

Edwards had two major transitionary periods in his career. With *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), *Experiment in Terror* (1962), and *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), he transitioned from his early period into his middle period beginning with *The Pink Panther* in 1963. It was only after *The Pink Panther* and the box-office success of the five-film series he did with Peter Sellers playing Inspector Clouseau from 1963 to 1978, as well as the many other comedies he made during that time, that he became known as a comic director. In 1962, he was poised as a talented filmmaker in many genres and the diversity of these three transitionary films illustrates this: romantic comedy, a *Film Noir*–type crime procedural, and a grim social problem drama about alcoholism. Furthermore, two top stars, Audrey Hepburn and Jack Lemmon, had each chosen Edwards to direct their films; he did not originate the projects. Nor did he write the screenplays in any of the three transitional films; it seemed that he wanted to prove that he could tackle any genre and work with top actors. It is then ironic that he became known as a "physical comedy" director from the very beginning of his middle period when, at the last minute, he cast Peter Sellers in a production which he initiated and for which he cowrote the screenplay. Right after proving he could do anything, he zeroed in on slapstick comedy, a form that had languished and which enjoyed little or no critical prestige. This set the stage for the manner in which his non-comic and dramatic films were largely overlooked and underrated. It is startling how quickly the man who directed *Experiment in Terror* and *Days of Wine and Roses*, two black-and-white, serious dramas, would be forgotten in the wave of widescreen color slapstick comedies which

quickly followed: *The Pink Panther* (1963), *A Shot in the Dark* (1964), *The Great Race* (1965), *What Did You Do in the War, Daddy?* (1966), *The Party* (1968), and *Darling Lili* (1970). And his prominence in such genres as tough guy private eyes in radio and television did not stick to him, not even when, as in 1969, he made *Gunn*, a feature film adaptation of his late 1950s television hit, *Peter Gunn*.

Edwards's second transitionary period from his middle period into his late period was again formed by three films: *"10"* (1979), *S.O.B* (1981), and *Victor/Victoria* (1982). With these films Edwards transitioned from making films with elaborate sexual subtexts, including all five of the Pink Panther films which were widely viewed as just family films. Indeed, leading up to *"10,"* Edwards had made three Pink Panther films in a row. *"10"* is a sexually explicit comedy about a man with a midlife crisis; *S.O.B.* is a sexually explicit comedy about a film producer who transforms a G-rated family picture into an adult film with nudity; and *Victor/Victoria* is a comedy about a woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman. Following the transitionary films, many of Edwards's late-period films would be sex comedies: *The Man Who Loved Women* (1983); *Micki & Maude* (1984); *That's Life!* (1986); *Blind Date* (1987); *Skin Deep* (1989); and *Switch* (1991), nearly all of which deal with men having midlife crises (*Blind Date* is the exception).

Edwards had another type of transition during this middle period that was related to the end of the old studio system and the production and distribution systems in the new Hollywood. Edwards's trials and tribulations dealing with the collapse of the old studio system and the rise of the new Hollywood conglomerates coincided very closely with his middle period. Edwards, however, felt alienated from the new Hollywood and the conglomerate model. He had bad experiences at Paramount, which had become a Gulf and Western Company headed by Robert Evans, and with James Aubrey at MGM. The manner in which the new breed of CEOs interfered with production and postproduction frequently led to clashes. Edwards told us that at least the old Hollywood moguls knew and cared about movies, whereas the new ones cared only about business. He described the situation as follows: He said he would never presume to tell Gulf and Western where to drill for oil and that they in turn should not tell him how to make movies. He compared the way the new moguls reedited finished films to taking a chair with four legs and cutting one of the legs off. Edwards's clashes with the new conglomerates began after Gulf and Western acquired Paramount Pictures in 1966, and he made *Darling Lili*, which was released in 1970. Paramount insisted on changes in the script, making it a more traditional musical which would capitalize on Julie Andrews's image. The only songs Edwards

originally wanted in the film were ones performed by Lili Smith played by Julie Andrews. In other words, the songs were all about performance within the film's narrative context. In most musicals the characters break into song while interacting with one another. Edwards compromised to make the film but was unhappy with it. In 1992, however, he was honored at the Cannes Film Festival with the Legion of Honor, and his restored director's cut received its premiere screening. Whereas most directors add scenes to their new versions of their films, Edwards did the opposite, cutting about 30 minutes, including a musical number of children singing in the countryside. Edwards told us that he could not restore the film to his original vision since scenes he wanted had never been shot. This version, however, approximated his vision for the film and is now available on DVD.

Investor Kirk Kerkorian, with holdings in an airline and Las Vegas casinos, bought a controlling interest in MGM in 1969 and appointed James Aubrey as president and CEO. *The Hollywood Reporter* called Kerkorian "the most hated man in Hollywood," claiming, "In 1969, the MGM owner needed someone to run his company. He found James T. Aubrey, a former CBS executive who was widely known as the Smiling Cobra. He knew nothing about film, having spent much of his career in television, most notably at CBS."[6] Edwards's account of his experience with Aubrey when he made *Wild Rovers* at MGM definitely fits the description. Edwards's cut told the story within a complex plot structure including sophisticated shifts in time and use of voice-over narration. Aubrey drastically recut it by shortening the film by 30 minutes, making it a straightforward narrative with entire scenes and characters missing. Luckily, once again many years later, a director's cut appeared on DVD, and this time, the missing footage was restored.

Edwards was devastated by the experience and wanted his next film to be an adaptation of a Kingsley Amis novel, *The Green Man*, but Aubrey wanted Edwards to direct another MGM property, *The Carey Treatment*. Edwards agreed to do so only if Aubrey would commit to letting Edwards make *The Green Man* next. Once again everything went wrong and, due to studio interference, Edwards quit immediately after the completion of principal photography and sued unsuccessfully to have his name removed from the film. In despair, he decided to leave Hollywood and go to England, where Julie Andrews had a television and film deal with Sir Lew Grade's ITC. This led to the other transition in his creative career, which was short-lived but important. He made an extremely interesting documentary, *Julie* (1972), about his life with Julie Andrews while she was preparing for a television special, and a feature film, *The Tamarind Seed* (1974), a serious international spy drama starring Omar Sharif and Julie Andrews. That film

is about such complex life transitions with a Russian spy defecting from Russia to England and eventually Canada. But the next project, *The Return of the Pink Panther* (1975), marked the return of his collaboration with Peter Sellers. The film was a big success and led to Edwards's successful return to Hollywood, where he quickly followed with *The Pink Panther Strikes Again* (1976) and *Revenge of the Pink Panther* (1978). These successes were then followed by the transition to his late period with *"10," S.O.B.*, *and Victor/Victoria*, discussed above. When Edwards returned he managed to fit in with the new Hollywood.

All of Edwards's Pink Panther films with Sellers as Clouseau as well as the later ones with Ted Wass and Roberto Benigni in a similar role were made with United Artists, but this gives a false sense of continuity. Much like Columbia, MGM, and Paramount, United Artists underwent major changes over the years, including in 1967, when TransAmerica purchased the company, and then in 1981, when MGM purchased it from TransAmerica. In short, the United Artists that Edwards worked with in 1963 and 1964 was not the same company to which he returned in the mid-to-late 1970s. And when he returned for the remaining films in the series in 1982 and 1983 and for the last time in 1993, it was once again part of a different conglomerate. Of special interest in this UA history is the fact that, after TransAmerica took over, several leading executives left and formed a new company, Orion Films. Edwards had been so pleased working with them that he made *"10,"* his first non–Pink Panther film after returning from England, with Orion and he had a wonderful experience, including good box office and good reviews. He made his next film, *S.O.B.*, with Lorimar. Ironically, given all these changes in the new Hollywood, Paramount acquired the distribution rights to Lorimar films after Edwards made it. So, *S.O.B.*, which included a vicious satire of a studio head, David Blackman, based on Robert Evans and played by Robert Vaughan, was released by Paramount while Evans was the CEO! But this caused no problems since Paramount only had distribution rights and no cuts were made.

Between 1983 and 1988 Edwards made six films for Columbia: *The Man Who Loved Women* (1983), *Micki & Maude* (1984), *A Fine Mess* (1986), *That's Life!* (1986), *Blind Date* (1987), and *Sunset* (1988). Once again, the studio was far different from that where he made *Experiment in Terror* in 1962. In fact, it was a prime example of what happened in the wake of the demise of the old studio system. The Coca-Cola Company purchased Columbia Pictures in 1982 and was a founding partner in starting a new studio, Tri-Star (for which Edwards made *Blind Date* and *Sunset*), forming yet another conglomerate, Columbia Pictures Entertainment, in 1987. Richard Gallop, who had a

background in financial law, joined Columbia as a senior vice-president and general counsel in 1981 and led the team negotiating the merger with Coca-Cola. He then became the president and CFO of Columbia Pictures from 1983 to 1986.

Gallop came to Tucson, Arizona, in 1984 for a test audience screening of Blake Edwards's *Micki & Maude*. While in Tucson he gave a guest lecture at the University of Arizona film program. Gallop took an interest in us and our first book on Edwards, assisting our research and talking with us about working with Blake. Although Gallop told us that Edwards called him regularly from the set of his current film as he had the night before to talk about ordinary production concerns and they had a follow-up call scheduled, they did not have an antagonistic or difficult relationship. Edwards had a good experience with Columbia and, later, Tri-Star. Edwards told us that he used to think of his battles with Hollywood as sitting by a river waiting for the bodies of his enemy to come floating by until he realized that there were such people downstream waiting for his body to come floating past. Edwards had developed the reputation of being an extremely difficult director for studios to work with after his high-visibility battles and even lawsuits with Evans and Aubrey, but, after returning to Hollywood in 1976, Edwards had no such further battles.

A problem, for example, arose with *A Fine Mess*, which was originally titled *The Music Box*. Edwards planned the film as a remake of a Laurel and Hardy short, *The Music Box*. The central scene showed Laurel and Hardy moving a grand piano up a steep flight of stairs, only to discover that they had the wrong address. After viewing the footage, the studio asked Edwards to cut his version of that scene from his film, which he did, retitling it after the duo's iconic phrase where Hardy repeatedly berates Laurel by declaring he has gotten them into "a fine mess." But Edwards did not harbor anger toward studio executives, telling us that he was struggling with serious depression and chronic fatigue syndrome when he made the film. He would even tell us later that he had no memory of even making *A Fine Mess* and Henry Mancini told us, "That one got away from us" (more on that below).

Edwards followed that bad experience by making the low-budget, non-union independent film, *That's Life!*, which Columbia acquired for distribution. Although the film ultimately failed at the box office, the studio was so enthusiastic about the film, which got the highest scores from preview audiences that they had ever seen, they decided to change the planned slow rollout in major cities to a big national opening. Despite the failure, producer Tony Adams told us that neither he nor Blake held bad feelings, adding that the more experience he (Tony) had, the more he concluded that he never knew

how any film would do before opening. *Skin Deep* (1989) and *Switch* (1991) were Edwards's last two sex comedies; the former was released by Twentieth Century Fox where he had made *High Time* in 1960, and the latter by Warner Brothers, where he had made *Days of Wine and Roses*. Blake Edwards's production Company, BECO, was involved in both and, once again, there were no bitter battles with the studios.

This brief account of Edwards's changing relationships with studios and of the changes within the studio system is central to understanding his career trajectory. He was a writer-director at heart seeking maximum control from the very beginning of his career, and he had the usual tensions with the studios at times, but he had no reputation as a difficult director until the 1970s. All of that changed dramatically with three films in a row with widely publicized bitter battles: *Darling Lili*, *Wild Rovers*, and *The Carey Treatment*. Paramount accused Edwards of going well over budget with *Darling Lili*, a film that failed badly at the box office. Edwards felt that that experience unjustly gave him the bad reputation that he carried for many years. The following battles with MGM over cuts in *Wild Rovers* and production interference during *The Carey Treatment* threatened to end his career in Hollywood but, after his brief period in England, he returned to Hollywood and worked for two decades that were free of such extreme turbulence. His late-period films had modest budgets, and he completed them without delays and without going over budget. He had successfully transitioned from the old to the new Hollywood.

In order to fully understand Edwards's career achievements, we also need to briefly look at the television industry during this time period. Edwards was an important figure in television in the late 1950s, achieving his greatest success with *Peter Gunn* (1958–1961), a half-hour black-and-white private eye series. At that time television was seen as a starting point for those with ambitions to become film directors. The same was true for actors. Successful film directors seldom moved to television, and movie stars seldom acted on television. Most of the exceptions were actors and directors whose careers had peaked and who could no longer find work in film. There was at this time a strict hierarchy between film and television with film at the top. As always, there were a few exceptions such as *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955–1962).

Once again, Edwards's career does not conform to the norm. After working as an actor in mostly small roles from 1942, he began his behind-the-camera work in film as a writer-producer of two B Westerns, *Stampede* and *Panhandle*, in 1948–1949. In 1949 he created and wrote most of the episodes for *Richard Diamond, Private Detective*. By 1952 he was already writing screenplays with director Richard Quine: *Sound Off* and *Rainbow Round My*

Shoulder. Edwards would write four more screenplays with Quine between 1952 and 1954. During those years he also wrote nine episodes for *Four Star Playhouse* on television and created *The Mickey Rooney Show* for television with Quine. He directed five of the nine episodes on *Four Star Playhouse*, and, in 1954, he also wrote and directed an unsold television pilot: *Mickey Spillane's "Mike Hammer!"*. In the following year, 1955, Edwards began his career as a film director. And these are just the highlights from those years! Edwards launched his career simultaneously in radio, television, and film as a writer, producer, and director. In other words, he began as a multimedia, multi-hyphenate figure, and he would continue as one to the end of his life.

By the time he created and produced as well as wrote and directed a number of episodes of *Peter Gunn*, Edwards had directed six feature films. He had also written the screenplay for the highly successful Quine film, *Operation Mad Ball*. In a sense, he was going from film to television rather than television to film. And he would continue that complex interrelationship: in 1967, six years after the end of the television series, he adapted it for the feature film *Gunn*. In 1989 he attempted to reboot the series with a pilot made-for-TV movie, *Peter Gunn*. He also expanded his television work as a director by collaborating with Julie Andrews, beginning with his made-for-television documentary *Julie* (1972) and several Julie Andrews television specials – *Julie and Dick at Covent Garden* (1974) and *Julie: My Favorite Things* (1975) – and he directed all seven episodes of the series *Julie* (1992), which he did not write or produce. He also cowrote the screenplay for *The Ferret*, a made-for-TV movie (1984), and wrote and directed a made-for-TV movie pilot, *Justin Case* (1988), which aired as an episode of *The Magical World of Disney*. The pilot starred George Carlin but was not picked up as a series. Edwards was at work on yet another reboot of the Peter Gunn television series at the time of his death.

From these film and television industry perspectives, Blake Edwards may well be the most important and influential film director of his generation, essentially starting in the old studio system and successfully transitioning into the new Hollywood era of conglomerates, combined with a television career beginning in the heyday of the 30-minute TV shows made for small screen low-definition analogue TV and ending in 1992, exactly when the convergence of the film and technology industries would totally redefine both film and television and the interrelationship between them. Edwards began his behind-the-camera career full force in 1948 and directed his last TV series in 1992 and his last film in 1993.

The early 1990s were precisely when new digital technology along with the premium cable companies such as HBO began to transform television,

followed by new streaming companies such as Amazon (2005) and Netflix (2007). Initially they streamed older film and television shows and then expanded to create new shows and movies. Digital technology quickly changed television and home movies, first by replacing low-definition VHS tapes with high-definition DVDs, which also letterboxed movies in their correct aspect ratio and added sound, including 5.1 Dolby Surround Sound. Old analogue televisions were quickly replaced with digital large TV screens with stereo sound and then with even larger flat-screen TVs. Soon, the concept of "home theaters" with large screens and complete surround sound speakers became a new norm. And similar changes were taking place in filmmaking, most importantly beginning with replacing shooting on 35 mm film with digital film cameras and projecting digital video rather than 35 mm in movie theaters. The old distinctions between film and television began to disappear, affecting not just production, distribution, and exhibition but also creativity. Suddenly, film directors creating and executive producing television shows became a new norm, and made-for-TV movies produced by such companies as Amazon and Netflix acquired new levels of prestige and recognition. Similarly, actors in their prime went back and forth between television series and theatrical filmmaking.

Blake Edwards became the last major director to come out of the old Hollywood studio system and to work extensively in television throughout his career. As such he is an important link between the old Hollywood multi-hyphenate multimedia film directors and the next generation of new Hollywood film multi-hyphenates such as J. J. Abrams. And there is one more important distinction to note. Beginning in the late 1960s, critics and scholars began to refer to a new Hollywood Golden Era. Most of the prominent new filmmakers were either young counterculture figures such as Bob Rafelson and Dennis Hopper or, like Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Martin Scorsese, they were film school graduates from such prestigious universities as UCLA, USC, and NYU. The film curriculum also included film history, theory, and criticism. Blake Edwards, on the other hand, didn't even go to college, let alone film school. He began to go to community college but that was interrupted by his joining the Coast Guard. He had no formal film training, and this may account for how he was overlooked for so long in American academic film scholarship. He was unfortunately perceived as being part of the old Hollywood entertainment film genre establishment at a time when new, rebellious younger filmmakers were being lionized for redefining that entertainment tradition. But now, decades later, Blake Edwards's films appear to stand out over many lesser films that were overrated at the time. He did not easily fit in anywhere. His career is riddled with paradox. To

many he appears to be mainstream Hollywood or even Mr. Julie Andrews, as Radley Metzger once called him, but to others, he appears to be a highly innovative, sometimes even experimental, filmmaker.

We also want to add a word of caution about approaching both the issues of multimedia and the issues of multi-hyphenate creativity. The two are inextricably bound together. Edwards was frequently asked whether he preferred writing, directing, or producing. He wisely once answered that his answers were different at different times. A key point for us is that all these functions are entirely different in each medium: In radio for example, writing was primary, and directors were of minor importance, whereas in film, directing was of primary importance and writing was preliminary to actually creating the film which told the story visually. One area in which Edwards's career trajectory conformed to the norm was that, after becoming a film director, his primary role in television was as a creator-producer, not as a writer or director, although he did both from time to time. Significantly, he wrote and directed the pilot episode of *Peter Gunn*, which establishes the premise, the characters, and the visual style for the series. In conformity with television norms, the opening credits boldly declare, "Created and Produced by Blake Edwards." The closing credits then identify who wrote and who directed each episode, which are a variety of different writers and directors, but the writers did not direct the episodes they wrote and the directors did not write the episodes they directed. Only Blake Edwards at times fulfilled both the writer-director roles.

As a producer Edwards had total control of the production, enabling Henry Mancini for example to have an unprecedented role. Mancini told us that, in addition to creating the opening credit theme music, which in accordance with standard practice was used for each episode, he was able to compose new music to fit each episode on a weekly basis, which was not standard practice. Edwards guaranteed that Mancini would have the final cut ready by a certain day of the week, enabling Mancini to create the score in time for broadcast. The norm at the time was "canned music" put over the scenes. Edwards even went to bat for Mancini to retain the rights to his music to receive royalties from records and concerts. Edwards controlled all the major creative decisions. When he wanted to expand the series from 30 minutes to a full hour and to go from black and white to color and the studio refused, Edwards simply cancelled the series, even though it was a top-rated show at the time.

We use this as a simple example of the need to always understand writing, directing, and producing in careful relationship to radio, television, or film at the time. In feature filmmaking, for example, as was a norm

at the time, Edwards always talked of the importance of screenplays in creating a story worth telling to begin the process of filmmaking. But, as his career trajectory shows, this was not a view of writing as the "primary" thing, however much he enjoyed it; if it were, why would he also nearly always direct the films based on his own scripts? And his style of film directing was notoriously tied to carefully working out the action, camera positions, and compositions on the set each day. He knew that films were *made*, not *written*. And he even made several highly improvised films with short screenplays that mostly established the premise and the characters. For all practical purposes, the story was not written at all. And, having been influenced by his love of silent film, he frequently had major scenes without the primacy of dialogue and at times even without any dialogue in his films, and, being influenced by radio, he frequently gave primary importance to diegetic sounds.

Edwards was a profoundly complex creative man and generalizations about his love of writing, producing, or directing offer no insight into how he worked creatively. He quite rightly said different things to different people on different days. When speaking to the Writer's Guild, he spoke about the primacy of the screenplay, but that does not mean he always identified primarily as a writer. On the other hand, when we asked him whether he most enjoyed working in radio, television, or film, he answered radio, with a profound insight as to why. As a writer he loved how the story was told almost entirely through the spoken word and the listeners had to use their imaginations to fill in what the characters and their interactions looked like. In other words, he understood the primacy of the written-spoken word in *radio* and that appealed to his love of language and the imagination. His films, as we will see, would also frequently revel in both of those, including Clouseau's never-ending mangling of the English language and word pronunciation and scenes of his characters arguing over language and even asking one another to define exactly what a word they are using means. Since Edwards was successful in radio, television, and film, it is not surprising that he would have such a media-specific understanding of our question and offer insight with his profound answer.

We have designed this book to emphasize aspects of Edwards's work which have received little or no attention. Despite his extraordinary burst of creativity simultaneously as a writer, producer, director, and even actor inventively working in many different genres in radio, television, and film from 1948 to 1962, traditional auteur critics and scholars have always made the case for serious artistic achievement as being solely the province of film directors. In the case of Blake Edwards that means little more than

occasionally acknowledging some of his radio and television work such as *Peter Gunn* and *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* or acknowledging that he wrote screenplays for films he did not direct that included such gems as *Operation Mad Ball*. The main assumptions are that these are early works of a struggling media artist on his way to becoming a film director and that his importance lies there.

We will challenge that in Chapter 2 on Edwards's early period. Given the startling number of movies he wrote, or directed or acted in, and the number of television and radio shows he created and produced and sometimes directed and wrote for, totaling hundreds of episodes, this is a preliminary, and not a definitive, study of that period, and more scholarship on the early period is needed. We take his work in radio and television seriously and pose a number of questions. First and foremost, we hope to discover how Edwards creates as a multi-hyphenate, multimedia artist. Our goal is not to make a case for an identifiable worldview with recognizable themes, plots, and characters. That was done decades ago. We want to explore how Edwards worked creatively as a multi-hyphenate multimedia artist wearing his various hats as he engages quite different media.

For example, one of Edwards's great strengths as a filmmaker is his use of highly structured screen space and its relationship to off-screen space. How, if at all, does that relate to his work in radio, a form of media entirely reliant on sound? Does Edwards hear soundscapes in relationship to the space where the action is centered and surrounding spaces from which other sounds emanate? The *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* episode "Satire of Radio Detectives" (1949) is based upon an irate neighbor in Diamond's apartment building who pounds on the wall to get Diamond to stop singing. We hear his pounding from the sound perspective in Diamond's apartment, and we also hear the singing from the perspective of the irate neighbor. How, for example, does the manner in which sound effects accompany radio dialogue relate to Edwards's use of film sound? We consider a sequence with dialogue which is structured around the sights and sounds of running water in *The Party* below.

How does his interest in film screen space apply to analogue, low-definition television screen space at the time that people watched TV with the light on in distractive environments as opposed to high-definition films projected on large screens in the dark? Does Edwards's lifelong love of silent film relate to sound film, radio, and television? Logic would seem to dictate that nothing could be further from silent film than radio, but such is not the case with Blake Edwards. We will see, for example, in the next chapter that a sequence of four successive episodes of Season One of *Peter Gunn* literally

have short silent films for their pre-credit sequences, using editing to empathize that we do not hear a spoken word. Similarly, in *The Party* Edwards has two silent films in the middle of his sound film. But radio explains much about Edwards's use of silent films. The term "silent film" has always been something of a misnomer since nearly all films of the silent era included musical accompaniment. Film scholars have replaced the term "silent film" with "early cinema." Interestingly, another common term for sound film at the time it arrived was "talkies." What Edwards does in his inclusion of silent film in some of his work is to think of sound film as talkies and he eliminates the talking. But, as in radio, he foregrounds sounds emanating from the diegetic space. For example, *The Party* includes two seemingly silent film sequences. The first is a dinner scene in which we hear the constant din of conversation without hearing the words or following anything that anyone says. And that conversational din is augmented by off-screen sound such as a crash coming from the kitchen after a waiter enters with a full tray of dirty dishes. The second silent film sequence involves a character singing a song, but the action builds in relationship to the main character, who desperately has to urinate while the sound of running water coming from multiple sources builds on the soundtrack – a water fountain with a nude male urinating, water coming from a toilet being flushed and then overflowing, and culminating with the main character trapped on the lawn when the sprinkler system turns on. All of this without a spoken word. Similarly, in the four pre-credit episodes of *Peter Gunn* discussed above, although we never hear a word, we hear all kinds of sounds from cars to guns.

Another important question about how working in radio and television might have affected his filmmaking comes from the fact that his most important work in both came in the form of episodic series storytelling within a 30-minute format, which, minus commercials and station breaks, was about 27 minutes. Even *Panhandle*, the first film he wrote, produced, and acted in, was 85 minutes long. By contrast his last Western, *Wild Rovers*, was released in a studio cut of 106 minutes but was later restored to 136 minutes in a director's cut. But in addition to the experience of telling a story in a 30-minute format, Edwards learned how to tell stories in a series format, with familiar characters and settings. How did this affect his film work? Edwards was the first Hollywood "A" film director of his generation to begin making feature film series starting in 1963 with his Pink Panther-Inspector Clouseau films, a series which would end with eight films thirty years later in 1993! The other major film series of that time were the James Bond films, which had many directors, and Sergio Leone's *Man with No Name* Western

series starring Clint Eastwood. But Leone was working in Italy in the "Spaghetti Western" genre, which was perceived in the United States as a foreign B film.

Edwards also continued his *Peter Gunn* television series in films, first with his feature-length theatrical film *Gunn* (1967), and then with a made-for-TV movie *Peter Gunn* (1988), which was also a pilot for a proposed new television series. And he was working on a new Peter Gunn television series reboot late in his career. As we shall see in the final chapter, he had also completed two screenplays of a potential *"10"* series to include *10 (Again)* and *10½*. So even when working in film, he was thinking of various forms of series, sequels, and reboots. And he also adapted several of his films as plays, a form of remaking them in yet another art form.

Nearly all of Edwards's films belong to the category of Hollywood "entertainment" genres: Westerns, detective films, comedies, and musicals – but the way he creatively approaches those genres undermines their unity and definition. The mixing of various genres, the jarring disruptions of genre tones, and the satirizing of genre elements are present from the very beginning of his career in radio, television, and film. Richard Diamond, for example, may appear to be just another tough-guy noir-type private eye, but of course those private eyes were not known for their singing. But nearly every episode of *Richard Diamond, Private Detective* includes his singing to his girlfriend, and, as the title of the episode "Satire of Radio Detectives" indicates, Edwards would even foreground satiric comedy in that episode.

In Chapter 2, we will survey Edwards's early work in radio, television, and film as a writer, producer, director, and actor. We follow that not with the predictable survey of the middle period with the well-known comedies but, rather, with focused attention to his non-comic, "serious," dramatic films from his early, middle, and late periods. We do that not to denigrate his accomplishments as a director of comedies, which we think rank him not only as the foremost director of comedies in his generation, but also as one of the foremost in film history. Like Edwards, we think comedy is just as serious as drama, but we also think that Richard Brody is right that Edwards also made some of the best films of modern times that were not comedies, and we hope that focusing on these will bring renewed attention to his achievements in other genres. Although Brody acknowledges that Edwards was "a comedic genius, the most skilled and inspired director of physical comedy working in Hollywood in his time," with the use of the word "also" he categorizes those films as separate from what he calls the "best movies of our time." But he is right in bringing attention to the fact that the recognition

of the comedies has, with the exception of *Days of Wine and Roses*, all but obliterated awareness of the many other films in Edwards's career. In Chapters 3–11, we will carefully analyze those other films (*Mister Cory*, *Experiment in Terror*, *Days of Wine and Roses*, *Gunn*, *Wild Rovers*, *The Carey Treatment*, *Julie*, *The Tamarind Seed*, and *Sunset*, respectively), focusing on how Edwards worked creatively in those genres and exploring how these disparate works relate to one another.

In Chapter 12, we will survey his theater work, *Victor/Victoria: The Musical* and *Big Rosemary* (an adaptation of the second film he wrote and directed); his studio art exhibitions; and his finished screenplays for films which he wrote by himself but which he did not live to make: *10 (Again)*, *10½*, *It Never Rains*, and *Alter Ego* as well as theater plays which he also wrote that are unproduced at this time: *The Pink Panther Musical*, *A Shot in the Dark*, and *Scapegoat*. He remained active until the end of his life, and his interest in series, sequels, reboots, and theater adaptations of his own films was prominent. The chapter will also survey two tributes to Edwards which we can report upon since we were directly involved: the prestigious Preston Sturges Lifetime Achievement Award in Hollywood and the honorary PhD awarded to him by Arizona State University, Tempe.

We conclude this chapter with an account of our experiences on visiting Edwards's sets to watch him work since, in our previous books, we did not use those research visits to his sets nor the many conversations with him and formal interviews and casual conversations with many of the actors and creative collaborators as well as the business people in his office and production company. We will try to give a sense of how he worked as a director and what it was like to have ongoing interviews and conversations with him about his film and creative work. We first interviewed Edwards in his suite at the Sherry Netherland Hotel in Manhattan in 1979. He was in New York to testify in a trial against a company using the Pink Panther in an unauthorized television commercial.

We were dressed in suits and ties, to which we will return later. While we were sitting in the lobby waiting to begin the interview, we saw Dudley Moore walk by, who at the time we did not know was staying in the same hotel. Edwards greeted us at the door to his suite. He had no staff or assistant with him during the interview. He was gracious and forthright in answering our questions. He was interested in what we had to say, and he was never defensive. Nor did he adopt a false persona to hide behind. Sometimes he would comment upon an insight we had. When we observed that the physical gags in the Pink Panther films shifted away from Clouseau and onto other characters such as Cato as the series developed, he said that that

was a smart observation. He said that Peter Sellers was increasingly unable to do the slapstick gags due to his deteriorating physical condition and that he had to totally restructure them on the set. That was the only off-the-record comment he ever made to us, asking that we not use that part of the interview while Peter Sellers was alive. When at the end of the interview we asked him whether he was aware of how much of the humor in the Pink Panther films was about Clouseau not living up to the cultural norms of masculinity, he remarked, "increasingly so," and said we'd be interested in his next film, *"10,"* and in *Victor/Victoria*, the plot of which he then described to us. His comment about being increasingly aware of the masculinity issues in the Pink Panther films is profoundly revealing about Blake's introspective, creative mindset. He acknowledged that he did not have total awareness of and insight into every aspect of his creative work, and that of course explains his respect for the interview process. He enjoyed hearing the questions, and he did not think he had the answers to them all and certainly not the only answers. But his comment also reveals how he grew as an artist, moving from his middle period to his late period through introspective reevaluation. He always simply tried his best to answer our questions, and this would continue throughout our long-term relationship with him. With a minor exception about his play *Big Rosemary*, which we discuss in Chapter 12, he never asked us to not say something, nor did he ever criticize anything we had published. He set a tone of implicit mutual respect for one another and what we each did. He respected our critical distance from him.

When we arrived for the first day of our visit to the set of *A Fine Mess*, a slapstick comedy starring Ted Danson and Howie Mandel, we were dressed in ties and jackets. Katie Morgan, a production assistant, told us everyone thought we were "suits" working for the studio. We quickly learned that Edwards's sets were informal. We stayed near the rear of the set watching everything from a distance. We did not approach Blake. The next day we passed him as we were going to lunch, and he stopped to say hi and ask us how we were. When we exchanged greetings, he told us in detail about his struggle with chronic fatigue syndrome and depression, which had developed since our 1979 interview with him. He was very candid and told us of his Clouseau-like comic failed attempt to commit suicide with everything going wrong, but the grim underlying message about his health was clear; it was no laughing matter.

We were quickly welcomed and integrated with the crew and actors. On the Dinkie's set, he motioned for us to join him and listen in on the conversation he was having with Harry Stradling, Jr., director of photography, and Tony

FIGURE 1.1 *A Fine Mess*, © 1986 Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc.

Adams, producer. Dinkie’s was a hamburger drive-in restaurant with servers roller-skating to the cars laden with trays of food they were delivering or clearing away (Figure 1.1). He had started working on the set early in the day, and it was our introduction to the manner in which he carefully worked out his camera placements, movements, and compositions on the set. They were not scripted in advance, and, with the exception of *The Great Race*, he never used story boards. He spent most of the day in quiet, solitary contemplation of the complex moving parts of the scene, determining how to shoot it. For long periods of time he spoke to no one. On a few occasions, Tony Adams approached him for a word and quickly left. It was our introduction to a key aspect of his working style. We asked him when he worked out the camera placement and movements, and he said he began as he was driving to the set every day. For him the creative act of filmmaking included a great deal of improvisation, not just with the actors but also with cinematography and a vision of the editing. We would see this on every visit to every set. What stuck out to us was how much of that time was spent in solitary contemplation as his director of photography and actors all stood waiting. When he knew what he wanted, he spoke with the director of photography and the actors.

This working style caused Ted Danson to approach us at one point and say that Edwards had given him no feedback and that he was so quiet and spent so much time watching and contemplating that Danson was insecure about what Edwards thought of his performance. He asked if we knew, but Blake had not said a word to us either about the actors’ performances. His working style often had a brooding, enigmatic quality. When, later in the shoot, we told Danson that Edwards had mentioned that his performance was fine, he exhaled dramatically and said, “Whew, what a relief!”

The Dinkie's scene also included a choreographer and, for the entire day, we heard Fats Domino singing "I'm Going to be a Wheel Someday" as the skating choreography was being rehearsed. We were surprised when the completed film had a different song on the soundtrack.

Another aspect of Blake's working style included having family and close associates on the set for key scenes. Blake's elderly parents, Julie Andrews, and Milton Wexler, his therapist, who sat next to Blake, were all seated together when they shot the Dinkie's scene in the evening. And Blake pointed out to us that Richard Quine was standing at the rear edge of the set, which enabled us to meet him, have an informal conversation about his work with Blake, and schedule a follow-up formal interview.

After a productive week watching Edwards work and meeting and talking with many of the cast and crew, we approached him to say goodbye after the completion of work on Friday afternoon. As always, we called him "Mr. Edwards," to which he responded, "After that interview and a week of this, it's still Mr. Edwards? Call me Blake." And he warmly extended an open invitation to visit any of his future sets.

A Fine Mess received poor reviews and was a box-office failure. Jonathan Baumbach's video review of it in *The New York Times*, however, strikes us as insightful not only about that film, but also about much of Edwards's work in general:

> Blake Edwards's farces, often deplored on first appearance, have a way of becoming classics a few years later. "A Fine Mess," which was mildly abhorred in its recent brief theatrical release, gets better on re-seeing. The film's nonstop silliness – there are three chase sequences in the first 10 minutes – is wonderfully choreographed. The jokes may be old, but they are reconceived with considerable energy and wit... The plot has something to do with a doped race horse that wins two races on the same day on different courses. I counted 23 laughs, when I was able to stop laughing long enough to count.[7]

Although even Edwards dismissed it due to his health issues, which seemed to us to be minimal while watching him work, much of the film is hilarious. It belongs to a subgroup of his comedies including *Blind Date* in which the plot simply sets a number of things in motion. Character development is minimal since the films are structured around their gags as we see the characters dash around in a crazy world. And Baumbach is correct that with the passage of time Edwards's farces frequently gain a good and sometimes even cult status reputation.

In 1988, we visited the set of *Sunset*, a film to which we devote an entire chapter. We interviewed Bruce Willis in his trailer during a break in the

shooting schedule, and several aspects of the interview were of great interest to us. His first film with Edwards had been *Blind Date*, which was also directed by Edwards. Willis was thrilled to be working with Edwards because he admired him and wanted to learn about filmmaking from him. He mentioned *The Great Race* as having had a big impact upon him, which, as we discuss in the final chapter, was the same film J. J. Abrams mentioned as critical to his love of learning about films. Such unexpected connections between figures as diverse as Willis and Abrams are revealing. Every generation of Edwards's admirers identifies a different film as crucial in the impact it had upon them. For us it was *The Pink Panther* and *A Shot in the Dark*.

Once again, our visit coincided with another major location shoot, this one set in a train station where Tom Mix (Bruce Willis) goes to greet Wyatt Earp (James Garner) upon his arrival in Hollywood (see Figure 11.5 in Chapter 11). Edwards enjoyed a cordial working relationship with both Garner, with whom he had worked on *Victor/Victoria*, and Willis, with whom he had worked on *Blind Date*. Between shots the three of them sat around engaged in casual conversation. Edwards had a closeness with them which we did not see with Danson and Mandel in *A Fine Mess*. The next day Edwards invited us to watch the dailies with him and Julie Andrews. It was fascinating to see the filmed version immediately after having been on location witnessing the scene being shot. We had watched them shoot a close-up of Earp's boots as he steps off the train, and that shot even in the dailies already had a strong impact within the context of long shots (Figure 1.2). We also had a charming casual conversation with James Garner on the set between takes. He had nothing but praise for working with Edwards. Despite

FIGURE 1.2 *Sunset*, © 1988 Tri-Star Pictures.

Edwards's industry reputation as being a difficult director, we have been struck by how often the stars in his films love working with him and often return to star again in another.

Our next visit was to the set of *Switch* (1991), a gender comedy starring Ellen Barkin and Jimmy Smits. The premise of the film in which Steve Brooks (Perry King), a womanizer, is killed by avenging women only to come back to life as Amanda Brooks (Ellen Barkin), a man in a woman's body, clearly recalls *Victor/Victoria* in which Julie Andrews played Victoria, a female performer who pretended to be a man pretending to be a woman. For much of the film, Andrews dressed and behaved as a man. But whereas Andrews played all three parts herself in a demanding role portraying a woman who then transforms herself into a man who as a performer then pretends to reveal himself onstage as a man masquerading as a woman, *Switch* simply replaces Perry, the male character, with Barkin, the version of the male character trapped within a woman's body. Thus, two actors play different incarnations of the same character.

The tone on the set was closer than that on *A Fine Mess*. During days when she was filming, Barkin used to regularly sit directly next to Edwards between takes and they enjoyed talking together. We never, for example, saw either Danson or Mandel sitting next to Edwards and chatting with him. And his mood throughout our visit was upbeat without him speaking about bouts of depression or chronic fatigue syndrome. There were three highlights for us on this visit. We did an extensive interview with Jimmy Smits, who told us that Edwards was the first director to cast him in a role that had nothing to do with his being Hispanic. This was profoundly important to him. He felt freed of the burden of his character always representing a fixed racial ethnic background. He was entirely right of course, and it conflicts with any simple characterization of Edwards as racist given his use of Mickey Rooney as an offensive, stereotypical Asian male in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which we discuss later. This is a reverse form of color-blind casting. There is absolutely nothing in the film, not one moment, that suggests that Smits's character, Walter Stone, is Hispanic, nor is there a moment that invokes Hispanic stereotypes.[8] Like many younger actors who worked with Edwards, Smits was also thrilled to be working with a great master of physical comedy. He even told us to be sure not to miss a major barroom brawl the next day which would involve elaborate choreography, with Edwards using four cameras covering the action from every part of the room. Although he was not a character in that scene, Smits eagerly looked forward to joining us as observers of how Edwards staged and shot such sequences.

Smits was right and watching the rehearsals and filming of that scene was another highlight of our visit to the set of that film. The scene was in some ways parallel to the Dinkie's scene in *A Fine Mess* where suddenly everything in the film is set into extreme motion. In the next chapter we will explore how Edwards's use of extreme violence in his *Peter Gunn* television series was structurally similar to his use of slapstick in his comedies and dance numbers in his musicals. But the barroom brawl in *Switch* involved another highlight for us. Edwards surprised us by telling us to report to the costuming department since he wanted us to be extras at the bar in the first part of the scene preceding the outbreak of the fight. Off we went to the costume department where we were fitted as he wanted us to appear. The costume people knew what he wanted but we didn't, nor did it matter. Nor did he give us any direction on what to do or how to behave as two guys having a drink when action began between the main characters. So, we had fun reacting as we wished. But instead of getting an Academy Award for best supporting actors, we ended up on the cutting room floor. Edwards cut that part of the action from the film.

Sunset was the next set we visited but, since we devote an entire chapter to that film, we will end this section about our film set visits with an account of Edwards's last film, *Son of the Pink Panther* (1993). The film was shot at the Pinewood Studios outside London, and there were many highpoints for us, including interviews with Julie Andrews, Roberto Benigni, Graham Stark, Burt Kwouk, Herbert Lom, and Jennifer Edwards, as well as lunch with Blake and Jennifer at the Pinewood Studios private restaurant. Blake's mood was generally upbeat. After learning that Peter was a cigar aficionado, he invited us into his trailer to offer us Cuban cigars, and he invited us to listen in on a conversation planning the title credit sequence. He was, however, in a dark mood on one of the days, which foreshadowed what we would often see in our Minneapolis visit to *Victor/Victoria: The Musical*, his next project.

Roberto Benigni told us, "It was important to not imitate and not do Peter Sellers again." He was particularly enthusiastic about this role because he wanted to learn as much as possible about comedy from watching Edwards work. When we asked Graham Stark how the set of *Son of the Pink Panther* compared to that on the earlier films in the series, he said, "Actually, very good. It's funny, this picture revived a lot. I don't know why but I have a theory on this and I think it's a lot to do with Roberto. Now Roberto, whom I'd never met before, but funnily enough, I'm a great admirer of because I've seen him before and I thought he was amazing." Herbert Lom, on the other hand, was distressed by how distant Edwards was interacting with the cast in comparison to the earlier films where Blake socialized with the actors on the set. Oddly, Benigni told us that he had virtually no interaction with Edwards before or even during the production and that he valued that distance.

Burt Kwouk, who plays Cato in the series, offered an insightful analysis of his character: "I've been asked, 'Well, how do you feel about playing a stereotype?' And I say, 'What, you mean Cato's a stereotype? Well, do you know what the word stereotype means?' It means an exact copy. Now, who the hell behaves like Cato anywhere in the world? So, what is he a stereotype of? You tell me. I can't think of anything like it." Jennifer Edwards gave us insight into her being cast against type in *Sunset*:

> I think for *Sunset* he [Blake] knew that I wanted that kind of a challenge because I'd been talking about for quite a while that it's very difficult for me to be recognized by casting people or directors as playing a villainous sort of role. I mean, I was constantly hearing from people, you know, that if I wanted to go up for a bad-girl role, "Oh no, no. She's too lithe. She's too vulnerable. She's too willowy. She's too..." It made me so angry because the frustrating thing is when you're dealing with real life murderers or bad girls there's no stereotype. They all look differently and they are who they are.

Julie Andrews gave us great insight into how Blake works creatively. For example, she described the extraordinarily complex long take at the beginning of *Darling Lili* which she called

> The best exercise to date that I've ever had in filmmaking ... I had to hit marks and lip-sync perfectly. The camera had to move and dance with me and pull focus perfectly and men had to pull cables out of the way. We shot it originally in Ireland in the theater and it didn't work. And Blake said, "I want to go back to the United States and shoot it on a soundstage so I can control it"... It took a whole day. I don't know how many takes we did. Oh God, six or seven. But that's after monstrous rehearsals and making sure everything was alright.

Chapter 2 lays the groundwork for understanding how Edwards achieved this creative level in his career.

NOTES

1. Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968* (New York: Dutton, 1968).
2. *Godard on Godard*, translated and edited by Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1972), p. 147.

3. Peter Lehman and William Luhr, *Blake Edwards* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981) and William Luhr and Peter Lehman, *Returning to the Scene: Blake Edwards, Volume 2* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989).
4. Richard Brody, "What to Stream: Blake Edwards's Masterwork Documentary of His Wife, Julie Andrews," *The New Yorker Magazine*, March 26, 2020 (newyorker.com).
5. Sam Wasson, *A Splurch in the Kisser: The Movies of Blake Edwards* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), p. 308.
6. Stephen Galloway, "When Kirk Kerkorian Hired the Most Hated Man in Hollywood," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 16, 2015 (hollywoodreporter.com).
7. Jonathan Baumbach, Video Review of *A Fine Mess*, *The New York Times*, May 17, 1987, Section 2, p. 30 (nytimes.com).
8. Edwards was also criticized for casting Mickey Rooney as Yunioshi, a Japanese photographer in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and Peter Sellers as Hrundi V. Bakshi, an Indian actor in *The Party*, but that criticism misses some essential aspects of the latter film. Although Bakshi, unlike Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, is a sympathetic figure of identification throughout the film and "gets the girl" at the end, that does not address the casting issue since, from that perspective, an Indian actor could portray the character in the same way. The manner in which Edwards works creatively gets at the deep, underlying issue. *The Party* was conceived as an experimental film using improvisational silent filmmaking styles and techniques; it had no traditional screenplay. To work in that manner Edwards had to work with an actor with whom he had a close working relationship including a history of improvising complexly structured and timed slapstick comedy. Furthermore, the whole idea for the film had been developed with Sellers in mind since he had a strong interest in technology and gadgets which form the basis of the entire structure of the comedy, from retracting floors to high-tech sound amplification systems. The main set in the film is a mansion which disguises a slapstick nightmare in the making. Edwards could not have made that film with a talented Indian actor with whom he had never worked. Certain styles of filmmaking hinge on a close connection between an actor and a director. It is not just a Blake Edwards film, it is a Peter Sellers film too and is now frequently listed as one of the best comedies ever made. Some of course may still argue that it is racist and should not have been made.