

**AGES WITH THE PARODY MASTER:
THE LIFE AND FILMS OF MEL BROOKS**



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Introduction: Mel Brooks became the grand master of movie parody through his life and works on TV and film.

I. Mel's Life

A. Life as a child

1. Born on June 28, 1926 in Brooklyn, NY.
2. Family was Russian Jewish.

B. Life in the Military

1. Served as a combat engineer in the U.S. Army.
2. Took part in the deactivation of land mines after the Battle of the Bulge.

II. Work in Television

A. "Your Show of Shows"

1. Brooks worked as a writer along with such greats as Neil Simon, Woody Allen, and Carl Reiner.
2. Brooks won a Writing Emmy for "The Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner, Howard Morris Special."

B. "2000 Year Old Man"

1. Routine done in the 1960's with Brooks and Carl Reiner.
2. Graduated into a hit record and numerous TV appearances.
3. Brooks received three Grammys for the 2000 Year Old Man role.
4. Record now on compact disc sold through rhino.com

C. "Get Smart"

1. Teamed up with Buck Henry to develop the sitcom.
2. Satirical spy sitcom starring Don Adams.
3. Ran from 1965-1970 on NBC and CBS.
4. Background on the show.

III. Work in Movies

A. Directing

1. First major film made in 1968 was “The Producers.”
 - a. Starred Gene Wilder and Zero Mostel.
 - b. Low budget film
 - c. Satire of Broadway Theater musical.
 - d. Now, at time of writing, in a major production starring Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane.

2. “The Twelve Chairs”
 - a. Movie based on story written by two Soviet Journalists: Ilya Ilf and Yevgenni Petrov, in the 1920's.
 - b. Movie set in Russia in 1927.
 - c. Plot: When he learns that his dying mother-in-law sewed a fortune of family jewels into one of twelve dining room chairs, he sets off across Russia to find it with an opportunist, a priest and his former servant all in equal pursuit.

3. “Blazing Saddles”
 - a. Brooks convinced Warner Brothers to finance an uproariously tasteless comedy about a black western sheriff.
 - b. “Saddles” was directed, co-written and co-starring Brooks.
 - c. One of the biggest moneymakers of 1974.
 - d. Found two co-stars to use later in his films: Madeline Kahn and Harvey Korman.
 - e. Nominated for a Best Music Score Academy Award.
 - f. Background on movie with information from “Back in the Saddle.”

4. “Young Frankenstein”
 - a. Premiered in 1974.

- b. Spoof of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.
 - c. Plot: The main character, young brain surgeon Dr. Frederick Frankenstein returns to Transylvania when he inherits his grandfather Victor's castle. His fiancée Elizabeth returns with him. In the castle and town, he finds a hunchbacked, bug-eyed Igor, a pretty assistant from the village named Inga, and the old housekeeper Frau Bleucher. He repeats his grandfather Victor's famous experiments when he finds a book/diary and recreates the Monster.
 - d. The "castle" of Dr. Frankenstein was the actual set from the original movie.
 - e. Music in "Young Frankenstein" is the same as the original movie.
5. "Silent Movie"
- a. Premiered in 1976.
 - b. Brooks co-wrote, directed, and starred in "Movie," but many people which could have been funny if Brooks weren't the star of the movie.
 - c. Tons of Cameos in the film.
 - 1). Paul Newman
 - 2). Burt Reynolds
 - 3). James Caan
 - 4). Liza Minnelli
 - d. Cameos paid \$138 a day for not knowing any lines.
 - e. Plot: "Silent Movie" is an affectionate, hilarious tribute to Hollywood's Silent Era in this classic parody of the movie business. Attempting to save his studio from the conglomerate "Engulf and Devour," a has-been movie director casts some of the hottest movie stars in town in one huge blockbuster film.
 - f. All the actors in the movie spoof themselves.
 - g. There's not a word spoken in this movie.
 - h. One brilliant, unexpected moment from the world-famous mime, Marcel Marceau.

6. "High Anxiety"
 - a. Premiered in 1977.
 - b. Plot: At the Psychoneurotic Institute for the Very, VERY Nervous, strange events are happening. The new administrator, Dr. Richard Thorndyke is framed for murder and must face his own high anxiety. He must also face the numerous Hitchcock references which are prevalent in the movie.
 - c. Tribute to Hitchcock- references to: Spellbound (1945), Vertigo (1958), Psycho (1960), The Birds (1963), North by Northwest (1959), Suspicion (1941), The 9 Steps (1935).
 - d. Ray Berwick, the same man who trained thousands of birds for Alfred Hitchcock's classic movie "The Birds," one of the actual pictures Brooks is spoofing, also trained the 200 pigeons who pursue and attack Mel in "High Anxiety."
 - e. The bird droppings in the film were actually mayonnaise and chopped spinach.
 - f. Mel Brooks was sent a "good luck" bottle of champagne from Hitchcock during production.

7. "History of the World: Part One"
 - a. Premiered in 1981.
 - b. Good cast, notable moments but audiences were growing weary of Brooks' recycled gags and repetitious style.
 - c. Plot: Mel Brooks and the gang travel through the annals of human civilization, to yield a new interpretation of much-remembered events. His delirious romp features everything from a wild send-up of "2001: A Space Odyssey" to the real stories behind the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, and the Spanish Inquisition, a splashy song-and-dance number with monks and swimming nuns.
 - d. Most of the stars in "History of the World: Part One" are alumni from Brooks earlier films.

8. "Spaceballs"

- a. Premiered in 1987.
- b. Actors in this film were well known stars of TV and film, which was unheard of in Brooks films.
- c. A parody of the Sci-Fi genre, and specifically of "Star Wars." Princess Vespa, from the planet Druidia, is kidnapped by the evil Spaceballs on her wedding day. As ransom, the Spaceballs ask the king of Druidia for all the air of Druidia. Planet Spaceball had an air pollution problem. The King recruits the services of a space rogue, Lone Starr, and sidekick Barf, to save the Princess. With appearances by Pizza the Hutt, Yogurt, a female android and the Dinks, this movie does fine justice to science fiction.
- d. Some interesting facts about this movie.
 - 1). President Skroobs' name is an anagram of Mel Brooks', the man who plays him.
 - 2). One of the ships parked at the diner is the Millennium Falcon from Star Wars.
 - 3). Spoofs: The Wizard of Oz (1939), One Froggy Evening (1955), Star Trek (1966), 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), Planet of the Apes (1968), Star Wars (1977), Alien (1979), Max Headroom (1987).

9. "Life Stinks"

- a. Premiered in 1991.
- b. Movie disappointed audiences.
- c. Critics speculated that Brooks had lost the magic he showed in his early blockbusters, but Brooks continued to produce fine films.
- d. Plot: Mel Brooks stars as Goddard Bolt, a multi-millionaire land developer who succumbs to a dare- to live one month as a homeless man on the streets. Bolt starts out as a greedy, needy man with a cold heart, and grows to something a little nicer, and a little more crazy. His month on the streets is a mix of hellish experiences- poverty, love, mental hospitals and the even more senile business world.

- e. Majorie Baumgarten quote.
- f. Roger Ebert's quote.

10. "Robin Hood: Men In Tights"

- a. Premiered in 1993.
- b. Parodied the world of Sherwood Forest, which poked fun at "Robin Hood: Prince of Theves" which was made in 1991.
- c. Brooks directed, co-wrote, produced and acted in this film as well, but only had a minor acting role.
- d. Plot: Robin Hood and his band of very merry men add a humorous angle to the story of robbing from the rich to give to the poor; the film spoofs Robin Hood movies in general, and Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves in specific. Just returned from the Crusades Robin find that his castle has been wheeled away, and all that remains is his blind servant Blinkin who holds a key to an unknown, but worthwhile prize. Robin unites a band of rapping, burlesque dancing peasants for his Merry Men, and along with the assistance of hilarious Rabbi Tuckman and others, he sets about to combat evil, save the countryside, get the woman and find the prize.
- e. Interesting facts about this movie
 - 1). The hangman in this film is played by Robert Ridgely, who played the hangman in "Blazing Saddles".
 - 2). The title song "Men in Tights" is the same song as the "Jews in Space" song from the end trailer of "History of The World, Part I", but with slightly different lyrics.
 - 3). The line "It's good to be the king" at the wedding, is a reference to Brooks' French king in "History of The World, Part I."
 - 4). The camera crashing the window when Marion sings in the bathroom, is similar to the window-crashing camera in "High Anxiety."
 - 5). There is a quick shot of the prince's guards coming out of a hallway. The camera angle and marching drums are almost exactly like the opening credits of the TV series "Hogan's Heroes."

- 6). Scenes in trailers, but not in the film:
 - a). Robin shoots an arrow that flies around tree, brakes, swerves, and eventually completely misses target on a tree, splitting the tree in half.
 - b). There is a rumor that the idea for this film came when a studio executive turned to his son and jokingly demanded "Give me an idea for a sure-fire hit, or else!" The boy replied "That's easy. Do a parody of Robin Hood."
 - 7). References to: Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves, The Godfather, The Freshman, Blazing Saddles, White Men Can't Jump, History of the World: Part I, JFK, and Malcolm X.
11. "Dracula: Dead and Loving It"
- a. Premiered in 1995.
 - b. Parodied "Bram Stoker's Dracula."
 - c. Included famous actors, and a few stars known to Brooks' films.
 - d. Plot: Dracula: Dead and Loving It parodies the score of Dracula movies over the years. With a reputation as a bumbling detective in the Naked Gun series, Leslie Nielsen plays the perfect vampire. In search of new blood, he arrives in London with his sidekick Renfield, and introduces England to his Transylvanian mix of comedic sensuality, hellish appetite and Brooks shtick.
 - e. Interesting facts about the film.
 - 1). Brooks called this movie a companion film to his 1974 hit "Young Frankenstein."
 - 2). For the scene in which Steven Weber sticks a stake into Lucy's heart, Mel Brooks did not tell him that he would be bathed in 200 gallons of blood. This allowed Steven's reaction to appear natural.
 - 3). Spoofs: Dracula (1931/I), Horror of Dracula (1958), Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht (1979), History of the World: Part I (1981), and Bram Stoker's Dracula (1992).

B. Acting

1. Most of the movies that Mel Brooks directed he also acted in.
 - a. List of Brooks' films and what role he played in.
 - b. Some of the roles that he played in were major which weren't very popular among most of the audiences.
2. Chart showing movie roles in his movies.
3. Besides his movies, Mel Brooks made numerous appearances in other movies.
 - a. Voice of a Baby boy in Nursery - Free to Be... You & Me (1974)
 - b. Professor Max Krassman - The Muppet Movie (1979)
 - c. Voice of Mr. Toilet Man - Look Who's Talking Too (1990)
 - d. The Silence of the Hams (1994) (USA)
 - e. Mr. Welling - The Little Rascals (1994)
 - f. Small part in The Prince of Egypt (1998)
4. Mel also made guest appearances on many television shows.
 - a. Uncle Phil - Mad About You.
 - 1). Won an Emmy for Best Guest Actor in a Comedy Series.
 - b. Himself - The Simpsons
 - c. Voice of Tom - Frasier
 - d. Bernard Schlanger - The Tracey Ullman Show
 - e. Himself - I Am Your Child

Conclusion: Mel Brooks created numerous wonderful movies though out his career. His work on TV made his transition into film easy to come into. His films were nominated for lots of awards. After his time in film, audiences loved him though his return to television on numerous shows and to actually win an award.

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"Humor is just another defense against the universe."

– Mel Brooks from www.tmbhs.com

Hopefully by the time you finish this paper, and had a nice ham sandwich, you will understand why Mel Brooks' films are funny. Parody has gone way back to the beginning of the earliest films, but Mel's films, with sexual and sometimes racist jokes funny acts made him into a master of the parody genre. Mel Brooks became the grand master of movie parody through his life and works on TV and film.

Mel Brooks was born Melvin Kaminsky into a Russian Jewish family on June 28, 1926, in Brooklyn, New York. Brooks commented about his birth: "I knew I was funny right from the beginning. People would come over to my crib, stare down at me and break into hilarious laughter. I knew I HAD it." Brooks overcame a childhood of abuse from his peers by taking on the comically aggressive job of "toomler" in various Catskills resorts. For very little money but a great deal of personal satisfaction Brooks kept the resort clientele happy by performing quickie monologues and routines, pretending to insult both the help and the customers, and when all else failed, jumping fully clothed into the swimming pool. Growing up in Brooklyn, he spent most of his time at the local movie cinema watching the movies of great silent stars like: Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, who he idolized and later paid tribute to in his classic "Silent Movie".

During Mel's time in the United States Army, he became a combat engineer where he took part in the deactivation of land mines after the Battle of the Bulge. After

the battle the Germans broadcasted propaganda to the American Troops through loudspeakers. Mel was known for his hilarious imitation of Al Jolson doing "Toot Toot Tootsie" and the shows he often arranged for his fellow servicemen. When the war was over he became a stand-up-comedian in "Borscht Belt" – a string of Catskill resorts and changed his name to avoid confusion with Max Kaminsky, who was a famous composer. His first acting role was in Red Bank, New Jersey, starring in Clifford Odets' drama "Golden Boy."

After years of his stand-up comedy, he signed up with Sid Caesar to write for "Your Show of Shows." He wrote with writers like Neil Simon, Woody Allen, and Carl Reiner. Brooks won a writing Emmy for "The Sid Caesar, Imogene Coca, Carl Reiner, Howard Morris Special." Mel said this gave him the best education he could ask for, even though him and Caesar were reported to have gotten into fistfights over a joke. After his time with "Your Show of Shows" in the mid-fifties, Mel went to produce three plays though out the rest of the fifties and sixties, "New Faces of 1952" (1952), *Shinbone Alley* (1957), and *All-American* (1962). (The Mel Brooks Humor Site)

In the 1960's, Mel teamed up with Carl Reiner to create the "2000 Year Old Man." Carl Reiner played as the interviewer, while Mel Brooks played as the 2000-year-old man. The routines graduated into a hit record and numerous TV appearances. Brooks received three Grammys for the role as the "2000 Year Old Man," which also earned him a reputation as one of the most spontaneously funny comedians around. The record is now on compact discs and sold through Rhino.com.

Brooks then teamed up with Buck Henry (of *The Graduate*, *Catch 22*, and *Saturday Night Live* fame) to create a parody of spy television. Critics have called *Get*

Smart undoubtedly become one of the finest parody/satires of all times. The main character of *Get Smart* is Maxwell Smart, or Agent 86. The show was given an “OK” by ABC, but after finding the first script “not funny” by ABC, the show was taken to NBC. NBC only wanted Don Adams (of “Inspector Gadget” fame) in the title role. The show is set in Washington D.C. and features Agent 86, The Chief, and Agent 99. Agent 99 is Smart’s partner and later his wife. There are two sides on the show CONTROL (not an acronym) or the good guys, and KAOS (once again, not an acronym) or the bad guys. In this show, anything can be a phone, tape recorder, camera, or even a weapon. (Watch your pen there! It might go off!) The show was painted in the broadest of strokes and played every moment for its own delightful reality. FOX tried to bring the series back with Agent 86 as the Chief and Agent 99 as a Congresswoman. Obviously the series failed (Guess you can say “Missed it by that much!”) and *Get Smart* went into the TV Vault only to be brought back by networks like Nick-At-Nite or TV Land. (TV Land)

When Mel moved into the film department of entertainment, he added several trademarks that would let the audience know that this movie was 100% Mel Brooks.

These trademarks are:

- Frequently casts himself, Gene Wilder, Harvey Korman, Rudy De Luca, and Madeline Kahn.
- Almost always uses music by John Morris II.
- Frequently uses the line: “We have much to do and less time to do it in.”
- His films usually contain many Jewish references and jokes.
- Always features one scene in his movies in which the main character is explaining a plan to another, and the latter character repeats everything the

former says, including something outrageous. After realizing this, the latter exclaims “what?”

- The main bad guy in his films is usually someone wearing a moustache or a beard.
- Always features one scene in his movies in which the main character is seated and staring blankly, wondering what went wrong, while friends console him.
- The lead character in his films is always a male.
- Known for parodying several films. (no kidding!)
- Constantly makes fun of Nazis.
- His films often contain references to the film’s sequel, which never come to pass. Good examples of this are History of the World Part I, Spaceballs, and Robin Hood: Men in Tights.
- Is known for including in his movies a “walk the way” gag; one character says “Walk this way!” (as in Follow me!), and another character(s) copies the way he/she is walking. Examples include History of the World Part I, Young Frankenstein, and Robin Hood: Men in Tights.
- Frequently has a bust of his head on the poster of video/DVD cover of his movies.
- All of his movies feature a wacky song-and-dance number. (Internet Movie Database)

This would be the move that would make him famous to the world. His first film, “The Producers,” starred Gene Wilder and Zero Mostel. The movie was a low

budget film, based on satire of Broadway musicals. The Cliff Notes version of “The Producers”: down-on-his-luck theatrical producer Max Bialistok teams up with accountant Leo Bloom to create the perfect Broadway scam, and earn both of them a lot of money. By producing a sure-fire musical flop - "Springtime for Hitler," and by taking in more money than is needed, the two plan to abscond with the money of their investors. Indeed they **almost** succeed- the play is entirely offensive, the lead actor is a joke and the show's writer is a crazed zealous German. Of course events do not turn out exactly as planned. (The Mel Brooks Humor Site) There are some simple little tidbits in the movie, like:

- Mel Brooks' voice was dubbed in for a singer in "Springtime for Hitler."
- The Producers was Brooks' favorite movie. In addition, the musical number for "Springtime for Hitler" was Brooks' "all time favorite funniest movie scene."
- The original title of the movie was “Springtime for Hitler”, but was considered too offensive. However when it was released internationally, the film was called by its original title. (The Mel Brooks Humor Site)

Now at the time of the writing of this paper, “The Producers” is a major hit on the Broadway scene starring Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane. In a way it is ironic, the movie parodied the Broadway Musical, but now it is a Broadway Musical.

Brooks’ next movie was “The Twelve Chairs.” The movie was based on a story written by two Soviet Journalists: Ilya Ilf and Yevgenni Petrov, in the 1920’s. The movie was set in Russia in 1927, where a treasure hunt poking fun at Communist life is the theme of this wild comedic adventure. On her deathbed an aristocrat confesses to her

son-in-law (a former nobleman) and the village priest that she has hidden her jewels in one of twelve chairs. In a race to outwit one another they travel across Russia, revealing the outrageous tenacity of the son-in-law and the greed of the priest. With the assistance of the former nobleman's former servant, a dashing Russian and others, the characters tell a story that mixes absurdity with humorous satire. "The Twelve Chairs" was filmed in Yugoslavia.

The first two films, "The Producers" and "The Twelve Chairs" was not the movie that made Mel Brooks what he is today. His third and most famous film, "Blazing Saddles," started his climb to success. Mel had convinced Warner Brothers to finance an uproariously tasteless comedy about a black western sheriff. "Blazing Saddles" was one of Mel's biggest moneymakers in 1974, while his second was "Young Frankenstein." It was nominated for a Best Music Score Academy Award, and found two co-stars to use later in his movies: Madeline Kahn and Harvey Korman. A town in which everyone is named Johnson stands in the way of the railroad. A shrewd politician, realizing the value of the land once the railroad is built, decides to purchase it for himself. But as he says, all that stands in his way is the townspeople's legal ownership. So to encourage them to leave he conspires to make the town unlivable- by sending his wild gang through the town to roughen things up. When this doesn't work he appoints the perfect sheriff to get the people riled up- the first Black sheriff in the west. The optimistic but slightly naive sheriff, his outlaw sidekick and a town full of stubborn, racist people decide to fight the combined forces of the railroad, a dimwitted politician, a sultry European dancer and a hired dumb brute. (The Mel Brooks Humor Site) "Blazing Saddles broke ground, as well as wind," said Brooks in "Back in the Saddle." "Back in the Saddle" was an added

background of the film that interviewed the actors of the movie. Andrew Bergman wrote the script, originally titled "Black Bart," to set 1874 in 1974. We notice 1974 in the 1874 setting with the Gucci bags and the hip look on "Bart," and in the fight scene where the camera leaves "Rock Ridge" and heads inside another filming in Warner Brothers studio. The "genre in genre" scene is classic in Mel Brooks films, more specifically the parodied genre in the Musical genre. In the original script, James Earl Jones was picked to play the sheriff, but as soon as Mel Brooks was given the script it was no go for Jones. Richard Pryor was also picked to play the sheriff, but Mel Brooks decided to have him as a writer. Richard did most of the writing for the character "Mongo," and Mongo's line "Mongo only pawn in game of life." "Blazing Saddles was a pretty dumb movie on the basis of people and life," said Mel Brooks in "Back in the Saddle." The movie shows everyone being slammed with absurdly on prejudices. Mel also added "the engine that drove Blazing Saddles was hatred of the black." Even Burton Gilliam ("Lyle") explained that he had trouble saying the word "nigger" to anyone because of the harshness of the word. The story behind Harvey Korman's character (Hedley LaMarr) was controversial because Heddy LaMarr sued Mel Brooks over the character. Mel paid her off so nothing major would come out of it. An inside joke was placed in the movie about the case. "What are you talking about, this is 1874, you'll be able to sue her!" The most famous scene in the movie is the Campfire scene. Mel explains in "Back in the Saddle" that since cowboys usually eat lots and lots of beans and drinks lots of black coffee, that eventually they will pass gas. So with that in mind, the "farting" scene was added in with noises. Unfortunately, when sent to TV, the sounds were replaced with horse noises.

Some other interesting facts about "Blazing Saddles:"

- The "stinkin' badges" line is from "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" (1948).
- In the shot where the showbill for "Lili von Schtupp, The Teutonic Titwillow" appears, the tune played on the honky-tonk piano in the background is "Springtime for Hitler" from The Producers, also directed by Brooks.
- When the town gathers to welcome Sheriff Bart, Howard Johnson's speech- "As honorary chairman of the welcoming committee, I would like to extend a LAUREL AND HEARTY handshake to our new sheriff" is in reference to the two-man comedy act Laurel and Hardy, who were active during the 1920's to the 40's.
- Director Mel Brooks plays a character called "Le Petomane", which was the stage name of a popular French performer (Joseph Pujol) from the beginning of the 20th century. His specialty was telling stories punctuated with flatulence.
- The name of Madeline Kahn's character is Lili Von Schtup. "Schtup" is Yiddish slang for "has sex with".
- The TV release has several extra scenes that weren't in the theatrical release:
 - When Sheriff Bart is trying to capture Mongo, after he delivers the "CandyGram for Mongo," it then shows a "draw on the dummy sheriff" game that fires a cannon at Mongo.

- A scene where Bart convinces Mongo to go diving down a well for Spanish Doubloons and Bart stops pumping air to the diving suit because it's time for his lunch break.
- Governor Le Petomaine arrives in the fake Rock Ridge a few moments before the final showdown, in a stagecoach with a flashing red light on the back, makes a joke about losing the "blue collar vote" and does a skit in the town where he impersonates Harpo Marx.
- When the dynamite fails to explode, Lily Von Schtuup says with some German rambling that it didn't work. When nobody knows what she said the guy that speaks frontier gibberish tries to translate. Those around him hit him with their hats.

Brooks' next moneymaker came after "Blazing Saddles." "Young Frankenstein," a parody of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, premiered in 1974. The plot behind the movie shows us the main character, young brain surgeon Dr. Frederick Frankenstein who returns to Transylvania when he inherits his grandfather Victor's castle. His fiancée Elizabeth returns with him. In the castle and town, he finds a hunchbacked, bug-eyed Igor, a pretty assistant from the village named Inga, and the old housekeeper Frau Bleucher. He repeats his grandfather Victor's famous experiments when he finds a book/diary and recreates the Monster. The hilarity continues when an abnormal brain is used as the Monster's brain. Some interesting things about this movie:

- The "castle" of Dr. Frankenstein was the actual set from the original movie. Also the lab equipment used was the same as in the old "Frankenstein" movie

- The music in “Young Frankenstein” is the same as the original movie.
- Bluecher means glue in German. Since glue is made from horses, horses are heard each time the name of Frau Bluecher is said.
- Cameo (Mel Brooks): the sound of the off-screen cat screaming when hit by a dart.

His next movie, “Silent Movie,” paid tribute to film actors of the past like Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin. The film premiered in 1976, and many people thought that it would be funnier if Brooks was not the main character. There were many cameos in the film including Paul Newman, Burt Reynolds, James Caan, and Liza Minnelli. These cameos were paid \$138 a day for basically not saying a word. All of the actors in the movie basically spoof themselves. There is not a word spoken in the movie, except for one line spoken, ironically by famous mime Marcel Marceau. The plot of “Silent Movie” is where a has-been movie director casts some of the hottest movie stars in town for one huge blockbuster film. He does this to save his studio from the conglomerate “Engulf and Devour.” Some interesting facts about this movie:

- In the scene in which Sid Caesar roars like the MGM lion, the inscription above his head reads "Ars Est Pecunia." This is in place of "Ars Gratia Artis" the way it does on the MGM logo. In English, the MGM logo reads "Art for Art's Sake," while the Mel Brooks Latin means "Art is Money."
- The movie was shot at the University of California, Irvine, California. (The Mel Brooks Humor Site)

In 1977, Mel premiered "High Anxiety," a major spoof of most of Alfred Hitchcock's movies. The movie made major references to "Spellbound," "Vertigo," "Psycho," "The Birds," "North by Northwest," "Suspicion," and "The Nine Steps." The gates to the Psychoneurotic Institute read "KEEP IN." The Plot: At the Psychoneurotic Institute for the Very, VERY Nervous, strange events happened. The new administrator, Dr. Richard Thorndyke realizes his predecessor died under suspicious circumstances. When events take a murderous turn, he is accused of the crime and left with a full-blown case of High Anxiety. He must also face the numerous Hitchcock references, which are prevalent in the movie. The movie was so popular that Mel Brooks was sent a "good luck" bottle of champagne from Hitchcock during production. Ray Berwick, the same man who trained thousands of birds for Alfred Hitchcock's classic movie "The Birds," one of the actual pictures Brooks spoofing, also trained the 200 pigeons who pursue and attack Mel in "High Anxiety." The bird droppings in the movie were actually mayonnaise and chopped spinach.

His next movie "History of the World: Part One," made everyone think that history class could be fun! "History of the World," which premiered in 1981, had good casting, notable moments but audiences were growing weary of Brooks' recycled gags and repetitious style. Most of the stars in the movie are alumni of Brooks' films. Richard Pryor was originally cast in the part eventually taken by Gregory Hines. Just before filming was to begin, Pryor had his now famous drug-related accident, catching fire and getting severely burnt. The film is divided into five sequences that play like blue-toned Eddie Cantor vaudeville sketches -- "The Dawn of Man," "The Stone Age," "The Spanish Inquisition," "The Bible," and "The Future." Also included is a Brooksonian depiction of

The Last Supper and a long-winded sequence about the French Revolution. The plot behind this movie is that the gang travels through the annals of human civilization, to yield a new interpretation of much-remembered events. His delirious romp features everything from a wild send-up of "2001: A Space Odyssey" to the real stories behind the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, and the Spanish Inquisition, a splashy song-and-dance number with monks and swimming nuns.

Another famous Brooks film, very popular in the 1980's is "Spaceballs." It premiered in 1987, which is why the actors in this film were well known stars of TV and film, which was unheard of in Brooks films. "Spaceballs" is a parody of the Sci-Fi genre, and specifically of "Star Wars." Princess Vespa, from the planet Druidia, is kidnapped by the evil Spaceballs on her wedding day. As ransom, the Spaceballs ask the king of Druidia for all the air of Druidia. Planet Spaceball had an air pollution problem. The King of Druidia recruits the services of a space rogue, Lone Starr, and sidekick Barf, to save the Princess. With appearances by Pizza the Hutt, yogurt, Dot Matrix (a female android) and the Dinks, this movie does fine justice to science fiction. Some interesting facts about this movie are President Skroobs' name is an anagram of Mel Brooks', the man who plays him. One of the ships parked at the diner is the Millennium Falcon from Star Wars. This movie spoofs "The Wizard of Oz," "One Froggy Evening," "Star Trek," "2001: A Space Odyssey," "Planet of the Apes," "Star Wars," "Alien," and "Max Headroom."

After the success of Spaceballs, Brooks wrote, directed, produced, and starred in "Life Stinks." "Life Stinks" premiered in 1991, and the movie actually disappointed audiences. Critics speculated that Brooks had lost the magic that he showed in his early

blockbusters, but Brooks continued to produce fine films. That speculation seems very odd to me, seeing how part of his “magic” was in the production. Marjorie Baumgarten of the *Austin Chronicle* compared “Life Stinks” to the movie “Network.”

“Like Network, Brooks' desperate rant will do about as much for the homeless situation as Peter Finch's “mad as hell” business did for quality television. The problem with ‘Life Stinks’ is that it's got its heart in the right place but not a whole lot else. The places where the movie shines are in its straightforward comedy bits, especially the physical humor. The movie has its moments but it plays like a ball of confusion. Life Stinks seems to be Brooks' bid to be taken seriously and leave the fart jokes behind. And something about that stinks.” (Baumgarten)

Give credit where credit is due, though, there is a story line! According to Roger Ebert, the story line is simple:

“[Mel] Brooks plays the rich man himself. His name is Goddard Bolt, and he intends to buy a large, wretchedly poor area of Los Angeles, tear it down, and start over – at immense profit to himself. His archenemy in business is a predatory capitalist named Vance Crasswell (played by Jeffrey Tambor with oily superiority). They get in a bidding and bluffing war, and it finally all comes down to a bet: The Brooks character bets he can live for 30 days, by his wits, as a homeless bum - without ever stepping foot outside the area.” (Ebert)

There are a few parts missing to Ebert's quote, which these parts came from Mel Brooks' Humor Site.

“Bolt starts out as a greedy, needy man with a cold heart, and grows to something a little nicer, and a little crazier. His month on the streets is a mix of hellish experiences: poverty, love, mental hospitals and the even more senile business world.” (The Mel Brooks Humor Site)

Mel then tried again with “Robin Hood: Men In Tights.” The movie premiered in 1993. It parodied the world of Sherwood Forest, which poked fun at “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves” which was made in 1991. This time Mel directed, co-wrote, produced and acted in this film but only had a minor role. The storyline tells us Robin Hood and his band of very merry men add a humorous angle to the story of robbing from the rich to give to the poor; the film spoofs Robin Hood movies in general. Just returned from the Crusades, Robin finds that his castle has been wheeled away, and all that remains is his blind servant Blinkin who holds a key to an unknown, but worthwhile prize. Robin unites a band of rapping, burlesque dancing peasants for his Merry Men, and along with the assistance of hilarious Rabbi Tuckman and others, he sets about to combat evil, save the countryside, get the woman and find the prize. Some extra tidbits about this movie:

- Robert Ridgely, who played the hangman in “Blazing Saddles”, plays the hangman in this film.
- The theme song “Men in Tights” is the same song as the “Jews in Space” song from the end trailer of “History of the World: Part One”, but with slightly different lyrics.

- The line “It’s good to be the king” at the wedding, is a reference to Brooks’ French king in “History of The World: Part One”
- The camera crashing the window when Marion sings in the bathroom is similar to the window-crashing camera in “High Anxiety.”
- There is a quick shot of the prince’s guards coming out of a hallway. The camera angle and marching drums are almost exactly like the opening credits of the TV series “Hogan’s Heroes.”
- Scene in trailers, but not in the film: Robin shoots an arrow that flies around a tree, brakes, swerves, and eventually completely misses target on a tree, splitting the tree in half.
- There is a rumor that the idea for this film came when a studio executive turned to his son and jokingly demanded, “Give me an idea for a sure-fire hit, or else!” The boy replied, “That’s easy. Do a parody of Robin Hood.”
- References to “Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves,” “The Godfather,” “The Freshman,” “Blazing Saddles,” “White Man Can’t Jump,” “History of the World: Part One,” “JFK,” and “Malcolm X.”

Mel’s last film, “Dracula: Dead and Loving It,” premiered in 1995. Leslie Nielsen (of “Police Squad” and “The Naked Gun” series fame) played as Dracula. The movie parodied “Bram Stoker’s Dracula,” and included famous actors, and a few stars known to Brooks’ films. The storyline of this movie tells us that “Dracula: Dead and Loving It” parodies the score of Dracula movies over the years. With a reputation as a

bumbling detective in the Naked Gun series, Leslie Nielsen plays the perfect vampire. In search of new blood, he arrives in London with his sidekick Renfield, and introduces England to his Transylvanian mix of comedic sensuality, hellish appetite and Brooks shtick. Brooks called this movie a companion film to his 1974 hit “Young Frankenstein.” Some other interesting facts about “Dracula: Dead and Loving It:”

- For the scene in which Steven Weber sticks a stake into Lucy’s heart, Mel Brooks did not tell him that he would be bathed in 200 gallons of blood. This allowed Steven’s reaction to appear natural.
- “Dracula: Dead and Loving It” spoofs “Dracula,” “Horror of Dracula,” “Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht,” “History of the World: Part One,” and “Bram Stoker’s Dracula.”

The interesting part of Mel Brooks’ films, is that he acted in most of his films. Some of the roles he played in were major parts, which the audience did not like. Here is a listing of all the roles that Brooks played in his movies:

Movie	Role(s)
"The Producers"	(voice) "Springtime for Hitler"
"The Twelve Chairs"	Tikon
"Blazing Saddles"	Governor William J. Le Petomane, Indian Chief, Cycle Hood
"Young Frankenstein"	(voice) Werewolf/Cat Hit by Dart
"Silent Movie"	Mel Funn
"High Anxiety"	Dr. Richard H. 'Harpo' Thorndyke/Assassin Double
"History of The World: Part One"	Moses/Comicus/Torquemada/Jacques/Louis XVI
"To Be Or Not To Be"	Frederick Bronski
"Spaceballs"	President Skroob/Yogurt
"Life Stinks"	Goddard Bolt
"Robin Hood: Men In Tights"	Rabbi Tuckman
"Dracula: Dead and Loving It"	Dr. Abraham Van Helsing

Besides his movies, Mel Brooks made numerous appearances in other movies. He was the voice of a baby boy in "Free to Be... You & Me." Mel played as Professor Max Krassman in "The Muppet Movie," Voice of Mr. Toilet Man in "Look Who's Talking Too," and Mr. Welling in "The Little Rascals." He had small roles in "Silence of the Hams" and "The Prince of Egypt." Lately, he has been making guest appearances on television shows like "Mad About You," where he played Uncle Phil. That character helped Mel win three Emmys for a guest appearance on any television show. He also was a guest on "The Simpsons" as himself, the voice of Tom on "Frasier," Benard Schlanger on "The Tracey Ullman Show," and himself in "I am Your Child."

In conclusion, (and boy how long have I have wanted to write those words!) Mel Brooks created numerous wonderful movies though out his career. His work on TV made his transition into film easy to come into. His films were nominated for lots of awards. After his time in film, audiences loved him so much that it brought him back to television on numerous television shows and to win three Emmys and Golden Globes. With a carreer like that, how can you explain it? Well Mel put it simply this way, "I believe you are either blessed with humor, or it escapes you. I don't think you can ever really acquire the gift of creating comedy unless you have been born with it." (The Mel Brooks Humor Site)

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Awards Won by Mel Brooks

(Information provided by the Internet Movie Database)

<u>Academy Awards, USA</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1975	WON	OSCAR	Best Music, Song for: Blazing Saddles (1974) Nomination shared with: John Morris (II) (music) - For the song "Blazing Saddles"
1975	WON	OSCAR	Best Writing, Screenplay Adapted From Other Material for: Young Frankenstein (1974) Nomination shared with: Gene Wilder
1975	WON	OSCAR	Best Writing, Story and Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen for: Producers, The (1968)

<u>Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1976	WON	GOLDEN SCROLL	Best Director for: Young Frankenstein (1974)

<u>American Comedy Awards, USA</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
2000	WON	American Comedy Award	Funniest Male Guest Appearance in a TV Series for: "Mad About You" (1992)
1997	WON	American Comedy Award	Funniest Male Guest Appearance in a TV Series for: "Mad About You" (1992)
1987	WON	Lifetime Achieveme nt Award in Comedy	

<u>British Academy Awards</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1975	Nominated	BAFTA Film Award	Best Screenplay for: Blazing Saddles (1974) Nomination shared with: Norman Steinberg Andrew Bergman Richard Pryor Alan Uger

<u>Emmy Awards</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1999	WON	Emmy	Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series for: "Mad About You" (1992) for playing "Uncle Phil Buchman". for episode "Uncle Phil Goes Back To High School".
1998	WON	Emmy	Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series for: "Mad About You" (1992) for playing "Uncle Phil". for episode "Uncle Phil And The Coupons"
1997	WON	Emmy	Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series for: "Mad About You" (1992) For playing "Uncle Phil." For episode "The Penis."
1956	Nominated	Emmy	Best Comedy Writing for: "Caesar's Hour" (1954) Nomination shared with: Mel Tolkin Selma Diamond Larry Gelbart Sheldon Keller

<u>Golden Globes, USA</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1978	Nominated	Golden Globe	Best Motion Picture Actor - Musical/Comedy For: "High Anxiety" (1977)
1977	Nominated	Golden Globe	Best Motion Picture Actor - Musical/Comedy For: "Silent Movie" (1976)
1969	Nominated	Golden Emmy	Best Screenplay For: The Producers (1968)

<u>Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1976	WON	Nebula Award	Best Dramatic Writing for: Young Frankenstein (1974) Award shared with: Gene Wilder

<u>Writer's Guild of America, USA</u>			
Year	Result	Award	Category/Recipient
1977	Nominated	WGA Screen Award	Best Comedy Written Directly for the Screen for: Silent Movie (1976) Nomination shared with: Ron Clark (III) Rudy De Luca Barry Levinson
1975	WON	WGA Screen Award	Best Comedy Written Directly for the Screen for: Blazing Saddles (1974) Award shared with: Norman Steinberg Andrew Bergman Richard Pryor Alan Uger
1975	Nominated	WGA Screen Award	Best Comedy Adapted from Another Medium for: Young Frankenstein (1974) Nomination shared with: Gene Wilder
1971	Nominated	WGA Screen Award	Best Comedy Adapted from Another Medium for: Twelve Chairs, The (1970/I)
1969	WON	WGA Screen Award	Best Written American Original Screenplay for: Producers, The (1968)
1969	Nominated	WGA Screen Award	Best Written American Comedy for: Producers, The (1968)