

## HOME THEATER

# Surf's up! Catch a cinematic wave



## 'Gidget' (1959)

Sandra Dee stars as Francie, a gangly only child who is “pushing 17.” Francie’s older, boy-crazy girlfriends decide their young charge had better snag a boyfriend this summer, or she won’t be able to face her classmates in September.

Alas, Francie is not ready to chase boys. And for all their suggestive sashaying in the sand, her friends fail to draw the eyes of the surf-obsessed boys at the beach.

When Francie starts floundering while swimming in the ocean, she is rescued by local surfing legend Moondoggie (James Darren), who whisks her back to the shore on his board. Well, that does it: Francie has caught the surfing bug. Her persistence in mastering the sport makes her the celebrated mascot of the beach ... with a new nickname.

There were earlier beach-movie harbingers, but the genre coalesced with the cute, if sometimes corny, “Gidget.”



## 'Where the Boys Are' (1960)

For spring break, four college girls hop in a convertible and leave their snowy Northern university behind. Merritt (Dolores Hart) is an astute student who locked horns with an elderly professor (Amy Douglass) over the topic of sex, resulting in probation. Melanie (Yvette Mimieux) is a striking blonde who hopes to snag an Ivy League boy. Tuggle (Paula Prentiss) is a tall quipster looking for a fella who won't be intimidated by her height. Angie (Connie Francis, working her Jersey accent in her film debut) is the captain of the girls' hockey team who must work a bit harder to attract male attention. For its time, Henry Levin's film is surprisingly frank, albeit with generous use of clever code. Hilarious are Chill Wills as Fort Lauderdale's police chief; Barbara Nichols as (what else?) a brassy showgirl; and Frank Gorshin as a jazz-obsessed bassist.



## 'Beach Party' (1963)

Oddly, the first pairing of Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello in the seven- or eight-film series (it's complicated) didn't *star* Avalon and Funicello. Top billed were relative old-timers Bob Cummings and Dorothy Malone. (Yeah, it's as if the kiddies needed chaperones.) Cummings plays an anthropologist with a long, professorial beard who is studying the mating habits of modern teens. Malone plays his long-suffering assistant whose attractiveness is lost on her boss. When Cummings shaves off his face fur and takes a particular interest in Funicello — purely for scientific reasons, of course — Avalon gets jealous. And if you don't know where this is going, you've failed Romcoms 101. William Asher's “Beach Party” introduces series regulars Jody McCrea as dimwitted surfer Deadhead and Harvey Lembeck as blustery biker Eric Von Zipper.



## 'Beach Blanket Bingo' (1965)

In the fifth “Beach Party” movie, the gang adds sky-diving to its list of thrill-seeking activities. It all starts when pop star Sugar Kane (Linda Evans) sky-dives into the ocean — though really, the jump was done by a pro (Deborah Walley) *disguised* as Sugar. A slippery publicist (Paul Lynde) makes sure columnist Earl Wilson (playing himself) covers Sugar's every move. Beach bum Bonehead (Jody McCrea) falls in love with a mermaid (Marta Kristen, Judy in “Lost in Space”). Screen comedian Buster Keaton, wearing the trademark “pork pie” hat from his silent-movie days, is improbably teamed with onetime Las Vegas dancer Bobbie Shaw, who shimmies in a fur-trimmed two-piece. Somehow, they click onscreen. Don Rickles plays Big Drop, proprietor of the sky-diving operation. Rickles even does some apparently unscripted “insult comedy” standup.



## 'Beach Ball' (1965)

An obnoxious surfer-musician (Edd Byrnes, still wearing his “77 Sunset Strip” pompadour) is the leader of the Wiggles, a singing group made up of college dropouts. Just prior to an audition for a music festival, a loan agent threatens to repossess the Wiggles' instruments. In order to scam a loan from a credit union run by a group of brainy college girls, Brynes poses as a student. When the deception is uncovered, the vengeance-bent girls hit the beach in bathing suits to spy on Byrnes and his partners-in-crime. The Wiggles get to play the festival after all — in drag.

Lennie Weinrib's “Beach Ball” is a transparent imitation of the Avalon-Funicello movies. The film itself is not so hot, but the musical talent sure is. Frankie and Annette *never* got to bop to the Supremes, the Four Seasons, the Righteous Brothers, the Hondells and the Nashville Teens.



## 'It's a Bikini World' (1967)

Cool, confident Mike (Tommy Kirk) can have any girl on the beach ... *except*, that is, aloof newcomer Delilah (Deborah Walley). So naturally, he makes it his mission to woo her. Donning thick-rimmed spectacles and a bow-tie, Mike poses as his own nerdy brother, “Herbert.” When a skateboarding competition comes to town, Herbert teaches the sport to Delilah, who then challenges Mike to a race. Stephanie Rothman's film — which she co-wrote with producer Charles S. Schwartz — is a low-budget affair, but Kirk and Walley are adorable together. Bobby Pickett, singer of “Monster Mash,” made his film debut as Woody, Mike's goofy wingman. Musicians performing include the Animals (doing “We Gotta Get Out of This Place”), the Castaways (doing “Liar, Liar”), the Toys and the Gentrys.

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