

The Original Bombshell: A Tribute to Jane Russell

By Katie Sirles

SPECIAL FOR FILMS FOR TWO®

My Path and My Detours

Jane Russell with a copy of her memoir (1995)
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Jane Russell began making waves in the film industry the moment she entered it. She signed a seven-year contract with Howard Hughes who immediately wanted to show off his newest gem. He did so in a way that would go down in cinematic history. By showcasing the buxom figure of this 5-foot 7-inch woman, he lit a fire under Hollywood censorship. His first film starring Jane Russell, *The Outlaw*, was completed in 1941 but did not show to the public until 1943. Howard Hughes had Jane in revealing outfits throughout the film and the Hollywood censors would only okay a limited release in 1943. The film finally had a general release in 1946. Between making *The Outlaw* and its general release, Russell made a name for herself in Hollywood.

Born Ernestine Jane Geraldine Russell in Bemidji, Minnesota, Russell died in Santa Maria, California due to respiratory failure. Russell married three times. Her first husband was Bob Waterfield. The two adopted three children together, but divorced in 1968. Her second husband was Roger Barrett. They met in Chicago, Illinois when they worked together in a stage show called *Here Today*. They married shortly after meeting in 1968. Barrett died of a heart attack later that year. Russell was quoted as saying "Everybody tells me to 'stay busy.' He was only 47 and strong as an ox. He used to carry me across the stage and I'm a big girl. That was in Chicago where we met last summer. The play was *Here Today*. And to think we used to laugh at that title." The third and final marriage was with John Calvin Peoples. The two married from 1974 until 1999. She is survived by her daughter and her two sons.

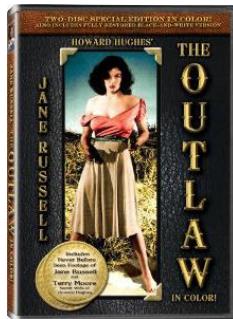
Jane's presence in Hollywood changed the way women would be seen in film. She was smart with a sharp wit and wouldn't take any guff from anyone. She held her own on screen alongside Marilyn Monroe who had a very strong presence of her own. Russell was beautiful, talented, and had a voice like silk.

To write this tribute, I watched the following eight films:

- ▲ *The Outlaw*
- ▲ *Double Dynamite*
- ▲ *His Kind of Woman*
- ▲ *Macao*
- ▲ *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

- ▲ *The Tall Men*
- ▲ *Johnny Reno*
- ▲ *Waco*

**Based on my sample,
I recommend you watch
these four Russell films →**



1.) Double Dynamite (1951): This was my favorite of all of the Russell films that I watched. It was not only a further introduction to the work of Jane Russell, but also the first movie I'd ever watched with Groucho Marx. The team of Groucho Marx, Jane Russell, and Frank Sinatra is a winning one.

Sinatra plays "Johnny Dalton". He is a bank teller and tends to stay out of the way of trouble. Lady-love, "Mibs" (Russell) wants the finer things in life and to be married to Johnny. Johnny wants to make more money so he can give Mibs the life that she wants. By way of fate, Johnny finds himself in a bit of a fix after betting on some races. With his new wealth, Johnny finally has the means to shower Mibs with gifts. This would be wonderful if the bank that he worked for didn't come up short in the exact amount of his winnings.

When he is accused of embezzlement he looks to his good friend "Emile" (Marx) for help. Mibs begins to question where all of the money is coming from as well and Johnny has to find a way to prove himself innocent and make sure no one else gets hurt in the process. This is a fun movie and hilarious to boot!

2.) The Tall Men (1955): In this Western, we have Clark Gable and Jane Russell. What a pair! The Tall Men follows the story of "Ben" (Gable) and his brother "Clint" (Cameron Mitchell) as they attempt to drive a bunch of cattle from Texas to Montana. Along the way they meet "Nella" (Russell) and wind up rescuing her. This is a girl who doesn't need rescuing, but every good Western needs a damsel in distress.

Nella and Ben hit it off right away. They have a spark that ignites a flame but fizzles out too

quickly. One of my favorite quotes from this film occurs when Ben is eating some rabbit that Nella has cooked. He says "You sure give a honey and molasses flavor to this rabbit." to which she coyly replies "That's not honey and molasses. That's just girl."

Russell has a way about her that comes across no matter what role she's playing. Whether she is vulnerable and looking out for a man or strong and looking out only for herself. When Ben starts to reveal his plans for the future, Nella quickly realizes that those plans are not the ones she has for herself. She winds up with another man who fits her needs more appropriately. Thankfully, she makes the right decision in the end.

3.) Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1953): I used this movie as an introductory point to the work of Jane Russell. I had never seen any of her films before this one and it was just about what I expected it to be. Musical numbers, wacky comedy, and two gorgeous gals in the middle of it all! The movie stars Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell as "Lorelei" and "Dorothy".

Lorelei is in love with diamonds and the men who can provide them. Dorothy is in love with love. She is looking for something more enduring than square-cut or pear-shaped lust. Russell is charming with her biting wit and gorgeous figure. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* plays on the idea that blondes have more fun. The young Lorelei falls for anyone with the right equipment including a married man on board the cruise ship that the girls are taking to Paris. Dorothy manages to find the only man on board who isn't talking about his money every chance he gets. Everything - as is usually the case in movies - is not as it seems.

Hilarity ensues as the plots tangles and twists until a fantastic ending with Dorothy doing her best Lorelei impression. I've gotta hand it to her, she does a diamond - no pun intended - Lorelei impression.

4.) The Outlaw (1943): *The Outlaw* is the first movie of Russell's that I watched where I was able to see a softer, more vulnerable side of her. It also may have been my least favorite. It starts out strong, but loses steam along the way. However, it is her first film, and earns a recommendation from me just for that fact. This is the film that caused a delayed general release due to Jane's bosom-bearing scenes.

The Outlaw stars Walter Huston as "Doc Holliday" and Jack Beutel as "Billy the Kid". The ongoing feud between the two is not over the scandalous "Rio" (Russell), but over a horse. Holliday says it's his horse and that Billy the Kid rode off with her while he wasn't looking. The horse isn't the only girl in the movie that Billy the Kid will steal from Holliday. After a showdown with the law, "Pat Garrett" (Thomas Mitchell), Billy is seriously injured. Holliday - who has feelings that run hot and cold for Billy - takes him home to let him rest and get well.

After a prior meeting in the form of a literal roll in the hay, Billy meets Rio again when he awakens after nearly slipping away only to find that she's Holliday's wife. Little does he know, much to the chagrin of the Hollywood censors, a scantily clad - for that time - took drastic measures to warm up the shivering and unconscious Billy (if you catch my meaning). For me, the movie goes on a bit longer than it needs to, but is entertaining nonetheless.

There are few actresses in Hollywood who don't catch a bad role or give a lackluster performance here and there. Jane Russell was no exception.

His Kind of Woman (1951): Robert Mitchum and Jane Russell star in *His Kind of Woman*.

Russell often appeared on boats, in other countries, or in Westerns. In *His Kind of Woman*,



Russell plays "Lenore", a singer pretending to be someone else. Mitchum plays "Dan". He's a man with a plan and purpose in Mexico but falls for the siren call of Lenore. Raymond Burr plays a gambler named "Nick Ferrero" who has been deported for the United States and needs to get back in. He intends to step on anyone's toes to get there, including and especially Dan's.

I always love when Jane sings in her films. She had such an elegant voice. She had a strong on screen presence as well. At a resort in Mexico,

Mitchum plays a gambler who is down on his luck. He makes a deal with a mobster who needs a different identity. The plot line of this one is lacking, but this film was one that showcased Russell's voice which almost made it worthwhile.

Macao (1952): *Macao* takes us back to the ship and on our way to another exotic location. On a

boat from Hong Kong to Macao are "Julie Benson" (Jane Russell), "Nick Cochran" (Robert Mitchum), and "Lawrence C. Trumble" (William Bendix). Julie is a mysterious woman who may or may not be trustworthy. We can't quite figure her out.



Nick is the man who finds himself both following her and falling for her. This movie is another one containing twists and turns and being a bit hard to follow. Jane croons for us and works her magic with her undeniable charm. She is smart and savvy and wears a heavy suit of armor as Julie, but really all she wants is to find a man who she can trust and love to care for her.

She finds a job in Macao as a singer. Her boss who runs a casino - the most happening casino in all of Macao - has some shady business to deal with. He is looking for someone and thinks he has it all figured out, but really, he's all wrong. The film ends rather abruptly after tying up all of the loose ends.

MY BOTTOM LINE:

Jane Russell was a siren of the silver screen. She was beautiful, talented, and caught the attention of Hollywood very quickly. Though her later films were not quite as exciting as the films she made early in her career, Jane had an impressive life in pictures. She left an impression and showed that blondes – in fact – don't always have more fun.

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Cinephile, blogger, aspiring writer, and chocolate enthusiast, Katie Sirles moved to Chicago two years ago. Katie's love of movies and writing came together when her blog www.MsSilverScreen.com was born. She attends Harold Washington College in the Chicago Loop, and you are sure to see her biking from her home in Printer's Row to the AMC River East to catch a film at her favorite theater once a week.