Selected Filmography
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For decades, motion pictures have greatly underscored the Brooklyn Bridge’s image as the definitive symbol of New York City by utilizing the venerable span as the ultimate signature of the Big Apple. Scores of films—from super epics to B movies—have focused in on the Bridge for opening shots, thus immediately establishing location of the film and, perhaps, the very mood of the work itself. Sometimes, the Bridge has been part of a brilliant tableau of the city, as in West Side Story. At other times, it has served as another sort of symbol, as in Saturday Night Fever, where an automobile ride across the Bridge indicates John Travolta’s growth from “small town hero” to “big city hopeful.” The Bridge has turned up in such varied works as Cover Girl, King Kong, No Way to Treat a Lady, The Detective, The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, The Kid from Brooklyn, The Sentinel, Sweet November, Youngblood Hawk, Loving, A Fine Madness, Superman, Escape from New York, Park Row, City Across the River, and so on ad infinitum. The following is a representative sampling of films that have used the setting of the Bridge for narrative and other cinematic purposes.

The Bowery 1931. Director: Raoul Walsh
Wallace Beery, George Raft, Jackie Cooper, and Fay Wray. The fast-moving story of Steve Brodie (played by Raft), who, New York mythology insists, jumped from the Brooklyn Bridge on a bet.

Every Day’s a Holiday 1938. Director: A. Edward Sutherland
Classic comedy starring Mae West, Edmund Lowe, Charles Butterworth, Louis Armstrong, and Lloyd Nolan. The unsinkable Ms. West is told to leave New York after she is involved in a continuing “scam” to sell the Brooklyn Bridge to unsuspecting men. One scene on the Bridge (Hollywood variety) shows the ploys with which the Brooklyn-born Mae accomplishes her “sale.”

Force of Evil 1948. Director: Abraham Polonsky
John Garfield, Beatrice Pearson, Marie Windsor, and Thomas Gomez. A true “cult” film—generally considered to be one of the best of the forties films that tried to analyze crime and the syndicate. The climax takes place in the shadow of the Bridge at the site of the current Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park.
Godspell 1973. Director: David Greene

The classy film version of the Broadway/off-Broadway stage hit with theater star Victor Garber (Little Me, Sweeney Todd) in the pivotal role. The film opens with Garber singing his way across the Bridge in a beautiful on-location scene.

Guilty Bystander 1950. Director: Joseph Lerner

Zachary Scott, Faye Emerson, and Mary Boland. A neglected film. An intense drama about a kidnapping. This dark, brooding work utilizes a finale that takes place on and around the area that now sports the River Café, Ferrybank Restaurant, and Musicbarge. Comedienne Boland here performs a malevolent role with brilliance.

It Happened in Brooklyn 1947. Director: Richard Whorf

An enjoyable, though smaller-scale MGM musical of the forties, starring such MGM regulars as Frank Sinatra, Kathryn Grayson, Peter Lawford, Jimmy Durante, and Gloria Grahame. Sinatra sings the song “Brooklyn Bridge” in this story involving Brooklynites trying to “make it” in show biz. The song is performed on the Bridge itself.

Marathon Man 1976. Director: John Schlesinger

One of the most exciting spy-chase thrillers of the seventies, starring Dustin Hoffman, Sir Laurence Olivier, and Roy Scheider. In one of the nail-biting sequences, Hoffman, on foot, tries to elude a group of neo-Nazis who are chasing him across the Bridge.

‘Neath Brooklyn Bridge 1942. Director: Wallace Fox

Vintage Grade-B film featuring the group that made up, at various times, the Bowery Boys, the Dead End Kids, and the East Side Kids—Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall, Bobby Jordan, and Gabriel Dell. By the time this Monogram film was made, the Dead End Kids had mellowed; the once-vicious juvenile delinquents of the original “Dead End” had become comic, “Brooklynese-talking,” street-wise do-gooders.

On the Town 1949. Directors: Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly

One of MGM’s groundbreaking musicals, starring Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, Vera-Ellen, Betty Garrett, Ann Miller, Jules Munshin, and Alice Pearce. This classic version of the Leonard Bernstein-Betty Comden-Adolph Green musical has early scenes of sailors leaving the Navy Yard to cross the Bridge and spend shore leaves in Manhattan (they wind up in a Hollywood-studio Coney Island).

Saboteur 1942. Director: Alfred Hitchcock
Robert Cummings, Priscilla Lane, and Otto Kruger. One of Hitchcock’s thrilling spy-chase adventures in which hero Cummings (mistakenly thought to be a murderous arsonist) tracks down the true culprits by following the Nazi agents across the entire country. In one chilling scene, the villains sink a ship in New York harbor. Characters see the ship (actually the Normandie) overturned below them as they drive across the Brooklyn Bridge.

**Sophie’s Choice** 1982. **Director: Alan J. Pakula**

Critically acclaimed version of the William Styron novel. Meryl Streep stars in one of the most lauded performances of the decade. Kevin Kline and Peter MacNicol play the two men in Sophie’s powerful story. Scenes shot in Flatbush, Prospect Park, and on the Bridge.

**Tarzan’s New York Adventure** 1942. **Director: Richard Thorpe**

Johnny Weissmuller, Maureen O'Sullivan, Johnny Sheffield, Charles Bickford, and Paul Kelly. A strong entry in the early MGM Tarzan series. Tarzan—manipulated by the plot to visit New York—takes a dive off the Bridge.

**A View from the Bridge** 1962. **Director: Sidney Lumet**

Raf Vallone, Carol Lawrence, Jean Sorel, Maureen Stapleton, and Raymond Pellegrin. Powerful version of the Arthur Miller play. One of many films that Lumet has set in New York City (often with the assistance of the Brooklyn Bridge).

**Winterset** 1936. **Director: Alfred Santell**

The highly praised film version of the Maxwell Anderson prize-winning play. A poignant melodrama that takes place in the shadow of the Bridge, although this stage-bound version was filmed entirely in a movie studio. The cast includes Burgess Meredith, Margo, John Carradine, and Edward Ellis.

**The Wiz** 1978. **Director: Sidney Lumet**

Diana Ross (as modern-day Dorothy), Michael Jackson, and Lena Horne. Splashy version of the Broadway super hit, with scenes all over New York City, including most notably the Bridge, all gussied up for the occasion. Another one of Lumet’s New York-based films.

**Wolfen** 1980. **Director: Michael Wadleigh**

Albert Finney in a spine-chilling yarn about werewolf-like beasts on the loose in New York City. Spectacular special effects are employed as the “beast” makes its way across the Brooklyn Bridge at night.
Two independently made non-commercial films not to be overlooked are the 1921 avant-garde classic **Mannahatta** (produced, directed, and filmed by Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler) and the delightful 1981 documentary **Brooklyn Bridge** (produced and directed by Ken Burns). The Burns film garnered an Academy award nomination in the documentary category.

One major Broadway play has utilized part of the Brooklyn Bridge saga for its plot. A musical called **Kelly**, it was a one-performance flop of 1965. Lavishly produced by a powerhouse group composed of David Susskind and Daniel Melnick in association with Joseph E. Levine, it was based on the story of Steve Brodie (see film **The Bowery**), who purportedly leaped from the Bridge in order to win a bet. Although it was a smash hit on the road, it failed to attain any acceptance in New York.