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## The Explosive Power of Love, Sex and Fireworks

The writer never understood the appeal of pyrotechnics until he saw Katharine Hepburn kick off a shoe and light up the night

posted by John Stark, July 3, 2012 [More by this author](#)



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For much of my life, I could take or leave fireworks.

But that was before I rented the 1955 movie, *Summertime*, directed by David Lean. In it, Katharine Hepburn plays a spinster school teacher who takes a vacation in Venice and winds up having an affair with the suave owner of an antique store, played by Rossano Brazzi. Upon seeing a phallic-shaped, red wine goblet in his shop window, she decides she has to have it. Romance ensues.

The consummation of their affair happens to be the sexiest love scene I've ever seen in a movie, and yet not one article of clothing gets shed — well, one of Hepburn's evening shoes.

Throughout the film, the sexual tension builds and builds — especially after Hepburn discovers that Brazzi is married and has a family. One night, upon visiting his apartment, she gives in to her repressed desires. As they're kissing (that's when her shoe comes off) the camera pans upward to reveal a dazzling fireworks display over the city. No skin, no sheets. Director Lean ends the scene on that image.

*Whew*. Pass the defibrillator! That's even sexier than when train-mates Barbara Stanwyck and Henry Fonda get it on in *The Lady Eve* — and the camera cuts to the speeding locomotive entering a tunnel.

It was only after I saw *Summertime* some 20 years ago that I could finally appreciate fireworks for what they truly are. Along with "Bolero" and "The 1812 Overture," they're the hottest thing going.

Think about it: Fireworks set off the same kind of feel-good chemicals in our brains that sex does. No matter how many times we experience fireworks, we still *ooh* and *ahh* at every dopamine-producing burst. During the climatic, grand finale, we get chills as a full arsenal of chemical explosives is unleashed. And when it's all over, and the sky is silent, we're silent too, reeling from the glowing experience.

If only we could still smoke cigarettes.

Not long after seeing *Summertime*, I just happened to find myself in Venice for the first time. It was New Year's Eve, and I was alone, though you're never really alone in Italy. The Piazza San Marco was filled with young lovers who had come to ring in the New Year by watching the annual fireworks display. They brought baskets of food and bottles of red wine. Some were huddled together under blankets. At the stroke of midnight the sky lit up and the air was suddenly filled with the sounds of explosives, champagne bottles being uncorked, and exuberant whoops and screams. As the smoke mixed with fog, a group of Italian sailors began joyfully kissing everyone in sight, including me.

I know that fireworks symbolize the battles our forefathers fought to win our nation's independence: the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air — I get it. But they also represent another kind of union, one David Lean chose to film — or not to film, at least literally. He let the sparks from a kiss ignite the sky, and our imaginations.