

Some interesting films on US television, October 24-30

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW)
24 October 1998

Asterisk indicates a film of exceptional interest. All times are EDT.

Saturday, October 24

5:15 am (Encore)--THE GREAT GATSBY (1974)--A pallid, but occasionally interesting film, based on the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel. Robert Redford is too placid as Jay Gatsby, Mia Farrow too jittery as Daisy Buchanan. (DW)

*9:35 a.m. (TMC)--THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO (1985)--Woody Allen combines Keaton's SHERLOCK JR. and Fellini's THE WHITE SHEIK to come up with a satisfying tale about a drab housewife (Mia Farrow) romanced by a character (Jeff Daniels) who literally steps out of the movie screen. (MJ)

9:45 a.m. (HBO Plus)--BREAKDOWN (1997)--Suspenseful thriller in which the wife of a meek computer programmer (played by Kurt Russell) disappears during a cross-country trip. One of the last performances by the late, great character actor J.T. Walsh. (MJ)

10:00 a.m. (HBO Signature)--NETWORK (1976)--Heavyhanded satire on the TV industry. News anchorman (Peter Finch) has a psychotic episode on a national broadcast; his formless rage is taken up by the general populace. He is then regarded as a prophet. Sidney Lumet directed the Academy Award-winning script by Paddy Chayefsky. Starring Peter Finch as the mad newsman. (MJ)

11:40 a.m. (Cinemax)--ISHTAR (1987)--One of the most famous failures in recent Hollywood history, Elaine May directed this \$40 million picture, which stars Warren Beatty and Dustin Hoffman. Interesting as an historical curiosity. (DW)

12:00 p.m. (TBS)--THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY (1966)--A Serge Leone Western, the third in a trilogy, with Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Eli Wallach. Three outlaws look for Confederate treasure, during the Civil War. (DW)

12:20 p.m. (Encore)--THE GREAT GATSBY (1974)--See 5:15 a.m.

2:40 p.m. (Starz)--AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY (1997)--Mike Myers plays a double role in this consistently amusing send-up of James Bond movies and the manners and styles of the 1970s. (MJ)

*4:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--FEARLESS (1993)--Jeff Bridges experiences the eerie effects of having survived a jetliner crash. Stunning performance by Rosie Perez. Directed by Peter Weir. (MJ)

5:30 p.m. (USA)--WORKING GIRL (1988)--Mike Nichols's relatively superficial look at a working class girl (Melanie Griffith) from Staten Island who aspires to yuppiedom. Harrison Ford is the object of her affections, Sigourney Weaver her boss. (DW)

5:50 p.m. (Encore)--TOPAZ (1969)--A lesser Hitchcock film involving US intelligence, French intelligence, Cuba, and the Soviet Union--muddled but still worth watching. It contains an unfortunate cartoonish sequence of Fidel Castro's stay at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem right after the revolution; he and his followers are presented as crude, ignorant buffoons. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)--BREAKDOWN (1997)--See 9:45 a.m.

10:30 p.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--Interesting but disappointing film written and directed by Paul Schrader about faith healing in the South. With Christopher Walken and Bridget Fonda. (MJ)

11:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--NETWORK (1976)--See 10:00 a.m.

11:55 a.m. (HBO Family)--CONTACT (1997)--An intelligent, refreshingly non-xenophobic film on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. Jodie Foster plays the single-minded astrophysicist in this adaptation from the novel by the late Carl Sagan. Unfortunately, toward the end the film becomes mushy-minded and tries to make its peace with religion. (MJ)

12:30 a.m. (TCM)--CRY TERROR! (1958)--Andrew L. Stone and his helpful wife-editor made this little suspense drama about psychopath Rod Steiger who kidnaps and bombs to blackmail an airline. With James Mason, Inger Stevens, Angie Dickinson and Neville Brand. (DW)

2:30 a.m. (TCM)--CONFESSIONS OF A NAZI SPY (1939)--One of Hollywood's first anti-Nazi films. Edward G. Robinson is a government agent investigating spy ring in the US. Paul Lukas is a pro-Nazi German-American. With George Sanders and Francis Lederer, directed by Anatole Litvak. (DW)

3:10 a.m. (HBO)--FRANTIC (1988)--Roman Polanski's failed attempt to make a Hitchcock-type suspense film. With Harrison Ford. (MJ)

Sunday, October 25

6:00 a.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.

8:30 a.m. (TCM)--THE STAR (1952)--Stuart Heisler directed this film about a movie star whose career is a thing of the past, with Bette Davis, Sterling Hayden and a young Natalie Wood. (DW)

*12:00 p.m. (Cinemax)--ADAM'S RIB (1949)--One of the stronger Spencer Tracy-Katharine Hepburn films, in which the two find themselves on opposing sides in the court case of a woman (the wonderful Judy Holliday) who has shot and wounded her philandering husband (Tom Ewell). Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin wrote the script; George Cukor directed. (DW)

12:30 p.m. (TCM)--LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON (1957)--Billy Wilder directed this film about the affair between a young Parisian woman (Audrey Hepburn) and a middle-aged American businessman (Gary Cooper). Maurice Chevalier is her father, a private detective. This was Wilder's first film cowritten with I.A.L. Diamond. (DW)

2:30 p.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.

*2:30 p.m. (TMC)--THE GODFATHER (1972)--Francis Coppola's classic film about the Mafia as a form of capitalist endeavor. With Marlon Brando, Al Pacino, James Caan and Robert Duvall. (MJ)

3:00 p.m. (TCM)--THE NUN'S STORY (1959)--Audrey Hepburn is a nun undergoing a crisis in Fred Zinnemann's stolid film. She serves in the Belgian Congo and later leaves the convent. (DW)

*5:30 p.m. (TMC)--THE GODFATHER, PART II (1974)--One of the few sequels that measures up to its predecessor. The origins of the enterprising, murderous Corleone family. With Robert De Niro, Marlon Brando, Al Pacino and Diane Keaton. Directed by Francis Coppola. (MJ)

*6:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW (1997)--In Copenhagen, a half-Inuit scientist (Julia Ormond) investigates the suspicious death from falling of a young Inuit boy. A quiet, brooding film with beautiful photography of Denmark and Greenland is marred by a conventional melodramatic ending with a conventional corporate villain (overplayed by Richard Harris with evil white hair). Also starring Gabriel Byrne. (MJ)

*6:00 p.m. (TCM)--KEY LARGO (1948)--A brutal gangster (Edward G. Robinson) holds a group of people hostage in a hotel during a hurricane. Humphrey Bogart is a returning veteran. Based on Maxwell Anderson's play, script by John Huston (who directed) and Richard Brooks. With Claire Trevor. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)--THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME (1939)--Not a great, but a remarkable, sensual and disturbing film. Charles Laughton is Victor Hugo's Quasimodo, the deformed bell-ringer. Maureen O'Hara is unforgettable, in her US film debut, as Esmerelda. (DW)

*1:00 a.m. (TCM)--FREAKS (1932)--Tod Browning's astonishing film, really a revenge drama, about a traveling sideshow and its performers. Once described as the most compassionate film ever made. With Olga Baclanova and Wallace Ford. (DW)

2:30 a.m. (TCM)--A WOMAN'S FACE (1941)--Joan Crawford is a vengeful woman, whose face has been disfigured. Not a consistently good film, but it has some moments. With the wonderful Conrad Veidt. George Cukor directed. (DW)

Monday, October 26

*10:30 a.m. (HBO Signature)--THE PRODUCERS (1968)--Mel Brooks wrote and directed his funniest film, about two producers whose plan--to mount a deliberately awful Broadway musical that will flop and thereby bring them a tax bonanza--backfires. Starring Gene Wilder and the great, rarely seen (because of blacklisting) Zero Mostel. (MJ)

11:30 a.m. (HBO)--THE FIFTH ELEMENT (1997)--Vacuous, silly film about the future in which the future of the universe hinges on a Brooklyn cabdriver (played in proletarian style by Bruce Willis) finding something called 'the fifth element.' Worth seeing only for its imaginative settings and special effects. Typical scenery-chewing villainy by Gary Oldman. Directed by Luc Besson. (MJ)

12:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--LOST IN AMERICA (1985)--Yuppies, played by Albert Brooks (who also directed) and Julie Hagerty, give up their good corporate jobs to tour the country in an RV, with disastrous (and funny) results. (MJ)

4:00 p.m. (TCM)--HIS KIND OF WOMAN (1951)--A lively tale, as Robert Mitchum heads off to Mexico for a routine pay-off and finds out a gangster boss (Raymond Burr) has plans to kill him and take his identity. Jane Russell is in top form and Vincent Price is amusing as a ham actor. Directed by John Farrow. (DW)

*4:30 p.m. (HBO)--SUPER MARIO BROTHERS (1993)--Underrated, highly imaginative film version of the popular video game, to which it bears only a slight resemblance. The two plumber brothers (Bob Hoskins and John Leguizamo) visit an alternate universe in which evolution took a different course, leaving dinosaurs as the dominant species. Dennis Hopper overacts wonderfully as the dinosaur dictator of this world. (MJ)

*7:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--THE GRADUATE (1967)--Important coming-of-age film about a young man (Dustin Hoffman, in his first big role) deciding whether to throw in his lot with the adult world. Should he cast off his rebelliousness and join the prospering middle class of the late sixties--i.e., go into 'plastics'? Anne Bancroft is the memorable middle-aged seductress (and mother of his fiancée) Mrs. Robinson. Excellent music by Simon and Garfunkel. Directed by Mike Nichols. (MJ)

8:00 p.m. (HBO)--THE FIFTH ELEMENT (1997)--See 11:30 a.m.

8:00 a.m. (Encore)--A PASSAGE TO INDIA (1984)--A decent approximation of the great E.M. Forster novel about British colonialism in India--its effects on both the oppressed Indians and the clueless British

settlers. A hapless Indian is put on trial for the rape of a British woman. The power of the novel, however, is 90 percent in its language and rhythms, and no film could be expected to capture that. Directed by David Lean. Starring Judy Davis, Victor Banerjee, Peggy Ashcroft and the irrepressible Alec Guinness. (MJ)

*3:30 a.m. (TMC)--BOUND (1996)--A fine first film by brothers Andy and Larry Wachowski. Cinematically, it's a bit of a show-off, but it all works, re-mining familiar film noir elements. A mob money-launderer's mistress and her ex-con lesbian lover conspire to run off with the mobster's loot. Played broadly, and often with humor, by Jennifer Tilly, Gina Gershon and Joe Pantoliano. (MJ)

4:40 a.m. (HBO Plus)--BREAKDOWN (1997)--See Saturday, at 9:45 a.m.

Tuesday, October 27

6:30 a.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.

*7:30 a.m. (HBO Family)--SUPER MARIO BROTHERS (1993)--See Monday, at 4:30 p.m.

10:00 a.m. (HBO Plus)--GALLIPOLI (1981)--Peter Weir's antiwar film about Australian soldiers caught in a major battle of World War I. With a young Mel Gibson. (MJ)

*10:30 a.m. (Showtime)--SUNSET BOULEVARD (1950)--Billy Wilder's classic about illusions hanging on, and the old Hollywood versus the new. A once-glamorous star of the silent screen living in a gothic Hollywood mansion takes a younger, cynical screenwriter as a lover. One of the great films. With Gloria Swanson, William Holden, Eric von Stroheim, and Buster Keaton. (MJ)

12:00 p.m. (TCM)--MILDRED PIERCE (1945)--Powerful melodrama, directed by Michael Curtiz, about a woman (Joan Crawford) who goes from rags to riches and her ungrateful daughter. Based on the James M. Cain novel. (DW)

*1:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--FEARLESS (1993)--See Saturday, at 4:00 p.m.

5:30 p.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (TCM)--THE BARRETTS OF WIMPOLE STREET (1934)--Sidney Franklin directed this stolid and tasteful MGM production, the story of the romance between poets Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett in Victorian England. With Norma Shearer, Fredric March, and Charles Laughton. (DW)

*7:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)--SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW (1997)--See Sunday, at 6:00 p.m.

*7:00 p.m. (HBO Family)--SUPER MARIO BROTHERS (1993)--See Monday, at 4:30 p.m.

*7:35 p.m. (TMC)--THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO (1985)--See Saturday, at 9:35 a.m.

*9:00 p.m. (TMC)--THE SHINING (1980)--Stanley Kubrick departed from Stephen King's best-selling thriller and came up with a film totally his own about slow madness in a snowbound hotel in the Rockies and the violent dissolution of a family. With Jack Nicholson, Shelley Duvall and Scatman Crothers. (MJ)

9:30 p.m. (Encore)--THE GREAT GATSBY (1974)--See Saturday, at 5:15 a.m.

*11:55 p.m. (HBO Family)--WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S 'ROMEO + JULIET' (1996)--Inventive and exciting modern-dress version of the play. Starring Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio. (MJ)

*11:30 p.m. (TCM)--THE KILLING (1956)--An early effort by Stanley Kubrick, about an elaborate racetrack heist. With Sterling Hayden, Marie Windsor and Elisha Cook. (DW)

12:00 a.m. (HBO)--FACE/OFF (1997)--Hong Kong action director John Woo lets out all the stops in this exciting, humorous, and (of course) preposterous film about a government agent (John Travolta) and his terrorist nemesis (Nicolas Cage) exchanging faces. (MJ)

*4:25 a.m. (HBO Signature)--FIVE EASY PIECES (1970)--Early Jack

Nicholson film that helped define his sardonic screen persona. He plays a concert pianist from a wealthy family who opts to work on an oil rig. Watch for the memorable scene in the diner between Nicholson's character and a waitress. Directed by the underappreciated Bob Rafelson. With Karen Black, Billy 'Green' Bush and Susan Anspach. (MJ)

*4:50 a.m. (TMC)--THE PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO (1985)--See Saturday, at 9:35 a.m.

Wednesday, October 28

*9:15 a.m. (HBO Plus)--THE GRADUATE (1967)--See Monday, at 7:00 p.m.

9:30 a.m. (TCM)--FLYING DOWN TO RIO (1934)--Early Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers film with wonderful dance sequences. The sequence with the chorus girls dancing on the wings of high-flying planes is amazing. Directed by Thomas Freeland. (MJ)

*1:45 p.m. (HBO)--WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S 'ROMEO + JULIET' (1996)--See Tuesday, at 11:55 p.m.

3:00 p.m. (Sundance)--THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD (1995)--Bizarre crime thriller about horrific revenge exacted by mob boss (played with extreme creepiness by Christopher Walken in a motorized wheelchair) upon local hoods. With Andy Garcia and Steve Buscemi. Directed by Gary Fleder. (MJ)

4:00 p.m. (TCM)--MR. AND MRS. SMITH (1941)--Alfred Hitchcock's somewhat misguided effort at screwball comedy. Robert Montgomery and Carole Lombard discover their marriage is invalid; mayhem ensues. At least one marvelous scene in a restaurant, in which Montgomery, attempting to impress Lombard, from whom he is now estranged, pretends to speak into the ear of a woman seated next to him. (DW)

6:30 p.m. (Starz)--AUSTIN POWERS: INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY (1997)--See Saturday, at 2:40 p.m.

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)--THE BANDWAGON (1953)--Superior Fred Astaire vehicle about a film star trying to make a comeback on Broadway. This is the film that featured the song 'That's Entertainment!' Some sharp satire on Broadway pretensions of the time. Directed by Vincente Minnelli. With Cyd Charisse, Oscar Levant and Jack Buchanan (who is particularly good). (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBO Family)--CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (1977)--Steven Spielberg's special-effects-filled take on UFO sighting as a religious experience. Starring Richard Dreyfuss. (MJ)

10:00 p.m. (TCM)--SILK STOCKINGS (1957)--A Soviet agent (Cyd Charisse) falls in love with an American film producer (Fred Astaire) in Paris. Fair adaptation of the minor Cole Porter Broadway musical, which was itself adapted from the 1939 Greta Garbo film NINOTCHKA. Directed by Rouben Mamoulian. (MJ)

11:00 p.m. (Sundance)--THINGS TO DO IN DENVER WHEN YOU'RE DEAD (1995)--See 3:00 p.m.

2:00 a.m. (TCM)--TILL THE CLOUDS ROLL BY (1946)--A highly embellished biography of composer Jerome Kern (played by Robert Walker). Rich with musical numbers, well performed by MGM stars such as Judy Garland, Lena Horne, and Frank Sinatra. The shortened version of 'Show Boat' is especially good, far better than the full-length version made by MGM several years later. Directed by Richard Whorf. (MJ)

Thursday, October 29

6:45 a.m. (Cinemax)--THE CRIMSON PIRATE (1952)--A swashbuckling adventure, with Burt Lancaster at his most athletic. The German émigré Robert Siodmak directed. (DW)

10:30 a.m. (HBO Signature)--LOST IN AMERICA (1985)--See Monday, at 12:00 p.m.

*12:30 p.m. (Showtime)--HAMLET (1996)--Kenneth Branagh starred in and directed this long, unabridged film of Shakespeare's play. It is exciting and lucid, and it dispenses with the oedipal nonsense of other recent versions. Branagh is strong in the part, and Derek Jacobi is the definitive Claudius. Also starring Julie Christie and Kate Winslet. (MJ)

*12:45 p.m. (HBO Family)--SUPER MARIO BROTHERS (1993)--See Monday, at 4:30 p.m.

2:00 p.m. (TCM)--THE DAWN PATROL (1938)--Remake of Howard Hawks's 1930 film about World War I flyers. Officer Basil Rathbone is forced by circumstances to send up novices Errol Flynn and David Niven. Edmund Goulding directed. (DW)

4:00 p.m. (TCM)--CAMILLE (1937)--Perhaps Greta Garbo's finest film. She plays Dumas's tragic courtesan, forced to give up her love, a young man from a good family, for the sake of his family's honor. Robert Taylor and Lionel Barrymore are adequate, but Henry Daniell enlivens the proceedings as the villain. Directed by George Cukor.

4:30 p.m. (HBO)--CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (1977)--see Wednesday, at 9:00 p.m.

4:45 p.m. (HBO Signature)--GALLIPOLI (1981)--See Tuesday, at 10:00 a.m.

*6:45 p.m. (HBO Signature)--THE ELEPHANT MAN (1980)--David Lynch's moving film about society's cruelty toward John Merrick, the grossly deformed 'elephant man,' set in the context of the brutality of the Industrial Revolution in London at the turn of the century. John Hurt plays Merrick. With Anthony Hopkins, Anne Bancroft and John Gielgud. (MJ)

8:00 p.m. (TCM)--GUNGA DIN (1939)--If one sets aside the history and politics of this film, about the heroic British army fighting off thuggee cult in nineteenth century India, 'the most entertaining of the juvenile Kipling movies.' (DW)

8:30 p.m. (HBO)--FACE/OFF (1997)--See Tuesday, at 12:00 a.m.

9:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)--THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATE (1997)--Satan (portrayed in an over-the-top performance by Al Pacino) runs a white-shoe law firm in New York City. Keanu Reeves, as an ambitious young lawyer, makes a Faustian bargain and suffers for it. A very funny horror film that trades on the public's distrust of the legal profession. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBO Family)--CONTACT (1997)--See Saturday, at 11:55 a.m.

12:30 a.m. (TCM)--THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE (1936)--Historically distorted, but surprisingly moving account of British soldiers in colonial India and Crimean War. With Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland, directed by Michael Curtiz. (DW)

2:30 a.m. (TCM)--NOW, VOYAGER (1942)--A well-done melodrama with a remarkable cast. Bette Davis is an isolated, neurotic woman helped by psychiatrist Claude Rains, and falling in love with Paul Henreid. Directed by Irving Rapper. (DW)

*3:55 a.m. (HBO Signature)--THE ELEPHANT MAN (1980)--See 6:45 p.m.

Friday, October 30

6:00 a.m. (TCM)--SANTA FE TRAIL (1940)--A very peculiar film. Hollywood's marketing strategy, at this time, included adapting itself to pro-Southern sensibilities. Purportedly a film about the pursuit of John Brown after the Harper's Ferry raid. Errol Flynn plays Jeb Stuart and Ronald Reagan is George Custer, West Point classmates and rivals for the affection of Olivia de Havilland. Raymond Massey plays a maniacal, but finally sympathetic, Brown. Michael Curtiz presided over the goings-on. (DW)

*6:00 a.m. (HBO Signature)--THE GRADUATE (1967)--See Monday, at 7:00 p.m.

*6:30 a.m. (Cinemax)--Woman of the Year (1942)--Katharine Hepburn as a globe-trotting political commentator and Spencer Tracy as a sports reporter, in their first film together. Entertaining film, directed by George Stevens, marred by a conformist ending. (DW)

*8:00 a.m. (HBO Signature)--SUNSET BOULEVARD (1950)--See Tuesday, at 10:30 a.m.

10:00 a.m. (HBO Signature)--SMILLA'S SENSE OF SNOW (1997)--See Sunday, at 6:00 p.m.

12:00 p.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.

2:00 p.m. (HBO Signature)--NETWORK (1976)--See Saturday, at 10:00 a.m.

4:00 p.m. (TCM)--NOW, VOYAGER (1942)--See Thursday, at 2:30 a.m.

7:00 p.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.

*7:30 p.m. (HBO Signature)--THE PRODUCERS (1968)--see Monday, at 10:30 a.m.

*9:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)--FEARLESS (1993)--See Saturday, at 4:00 p.m.

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*12:20 a.m. (TMC)--BOUND (1996)--See Monday, at 3:30 a.m.

12:40 a.m. (HBO Family)--THE FIFTH ELEMENT (1997)--See Monday, at 11:30 a.m.

4:00 a.m. (A&E)--CARNIVAL OF SOULS (1962)--Effective very low-budget horror film shot with an unknown cast at a deserted amusement park in Lawrence, Kansas. Directed by Herk Harvey. (MJ)

5:00 a.m. (Sundance)--TOUCH (1987)--See Saturday, at 10:30 p.m.



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