

Some interesting films on US television, December 19-25

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW)
19 December 1998

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

Saturday, December 19

8:00 a.m. (HBO)-- *Gattaca* (1997)--In this future capitalist society, your place in the productive process is determined by your genetic makeup--which is mapped at birth and stays with you as your main ID for life. One man rebels against the system. Andrew Niccol wrote and directed this intelligent film, highly derivative of the fiction of Philip K. Dick. (MJ)

10:15 a.m. (AMC)-- *The World in His Arms* (1952)--Gregory Peck is an American ship's captain wooing an aristocratic Russian woman (Ann Blyth) in San Francisco in the 1850s. Raoul Walsh directed with his customary vigor. (DW)

11:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *Two Rode Together* (1961)--James Stewart and Richard Widmark are an army officer and a marshal negotiating with Comanches about the return of some prisoners. John Ford directed. (DW)

11:15 a.m. (HBO Plus)-- *The Fifth Element* (1997)--Vacuous, silly science fiction film 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)

11:35 a.m. (Cinemax)-- *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)--A hardware store salesman in Brooklyn becomes a champion disco dancer at night. This is the film that launched John Travolta's film career, and he is a marvel as a dancer. Music by the Bee Gees. Directed by John Badham. (MJ)

*12:00 p.m. (FXM)-- *Lifeboat* (1944)--Alfred Hitchcock's tale of shipwreck survivors during World War II. With Tallulah Bankhead, William Bendix and Walter Slezak as a Nazi taken aboard. (DW)

12:15 p.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Kansas City* (1996)--Uneven period piece by Robert Altman. Worth seeing for the fine jazz music throughout, and for the excellent performances by Miranda Richardson and Harry Belafonte (as a mellow but bitter black mobster who utters trenchant comments about racism in America). But the plot is ridiculous, and Jennifer Jason Leigh provides the annoying grimaces and mannerisms we have come to expect from her. (MJ)

*3:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Show Boat* (1936)--Paul Robeson is unforgettable singing 'Old Man River' in James Whale's version of the Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein II musical about riverboat entertainers. Helen Morgan is also memorable singing 'Bill.' With Irene Dunne, Allan Jones. (DW)

3:30 p.m. (HBO)-- *Gattaca* (1997)--See 8:00 a.m.

5:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *Against All Odds* (1984)--Decent remake of the 1947 film noir *Out of the Past*. Good performances by Jeff Bridges, Rachel Ward and James Woods. Directed by Taylor Hackford. (MJ)

5:25 p.m. (TMC)-- *Blazing Saddles* (1974)--Mel Brooks Western parody, with Cleavon Little, Gene Wilder and Madeline Kahn. (DW)

7:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *Night Falls on Manhattan* (1997)--Another of Sidney Lumet's tales of police corruption. They are usually incisive, with a good feel for urban realities, but this one, with Andy Garcia as a cop

turned crusading DA, is a bit paint-by-numbers. (MJ)

8:00 p.m. (Cinemax)-- *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)

9:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Julia* (1977)--Vanessa Redgrave won an Oscar for her performance as the anti-fascist Julia based on Lillian Hellman's autobiographical work, *Pentimento*. With Jane Fonda, Jason Robards; directed by Fred Zinnemann. (DW)

12:00 a.m. (Comedy)-- *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984)--Rob Reiner directed this mock documentary about a fading rock band on its final tour. He also appears as filmmaker Marty DiBergi, with Harry Shearer, Christopher Guest and Tony Hendra playing members of the band, in this hilarious parody of all the solemn, pretentious films about rock groups. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *The Fifth Element* (1997)--See 11:15 a.m.

10:15 p.m. (TCM)-- *Meet John Doe* (1941)--Gary Cooper as John Doe, the barefoot Everyman, suspicious of ideas and doctrines, in Frank Capra's populist fable. (DW)

12:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *Little Women* (1949)--Mervyn LeRoy directed this, the second version of Louisa May Alcott's novel about a quartet of sisters growing up in New England during the Civil War. This version is inferior to George Cukor's 1933 film. June Allyson, Margaret O'Brien, Elizabeth Taylor and Janet Leigh co-star. (DW)

1:25 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *The Firm* (1993)--Another film that takes a shot at the legal profession. In this paranoid potboiler, a young, ambitious lawyer finds out that his high-toned firm is totally owned by organized crime. An unremarkable film is saved by a remarkable performance by Gene Hackman (always dependable) playing a cynical partner. From the bestseller by John Grisham.

1:30 a.m. (Bravo)-- *Julia* (1977)--See 9:00 p.m.

*2:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *Lifeboat* (1944)--See 12:00 p.m.

4:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *Three Godfathers* (1948)--John Ford's version of the story of the Three Magi, with three lowlives coming upon and taking care of an infant whose mother dies in the desert. John Wayne, Pedro Armendariz and Harry Carey Jr. (DW)

4:35 a.m. (Cinemax)-- *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)

Sunday, December 20

6:00 a.m. (AMC)-- *I Remember Mama* (1948)--George Stevens, in his first film after returning from war, directed this saga of Scandinavian immigrants in San Francisco. With Irene Dunne, Barbara Bel Geddes and Oskar Homolka, among others. (DW)

8:30 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988)--The pioneer automaker (played by Jeff Bridges) and his company

are destroyed by the giants of the auto industry. Director Francis Coppola obviously meant this as a parable about the independent artist versus the film industry, with Tucker standing in for Coppola. The whole thing seems oversimplified. Good performance by Martin Landau. (MJ)

*10:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Big Sleep* (1945)--Howard Hawks's version of Raymond Chandler novel, with a script again by Faulkner. Detective Philip Marlowe (Bogart) becomes involved with wealthy girl (Bacall) and her spoiled, irresponsible sister. Don't bother to figure out who did the murders, the director reportedly wasn't certain. (DW)

10:30 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Against All Odds* (1984)--See Saturday, at 5:00 p.m.

*11:55 a.m. (Encore)-- *Sorcerer* (1977)--Three trucks driven by desperate men run all kinds of hazards to bring volatile shipments of explosives to an oilfield fire in Latin America. William Friedkin directed this underrated, highly suspenseful remake of the French classic *The Wages of Fear*. Starring Roy Scheider. (MJ)

*12:00 p.m. (Cinemax)-- *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)

2:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Julia* (1977)--See Saturday, at 9:00 p.m.

3:00 p.m. (TNT)-- *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980)--Sissy Spacek, who did her own singing, is excellent in this slightly sanitized biography of country singer Loretta Lynn, born in poverty in Kentucky. Tommy Lee Jones as her husband, Beverly D'Angelo as Patsy Cline, and Levon Helm as her coal miner father also stand out. Directed by Michael Apted. (DW)

5:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Under the Volcano* (1984)--John Huston's adaptation of Malcolm Lowry's novel: the last few days in the life of an alcoholic British diplomat in Mexico in late 1930s, with Albert Finney. (DW)

*6:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)--Vincente Minnelli's sentimental, but very evocative musical about turn-of-the-century family life in St. Louis, set during the World's Fair of 1903. Judy Garland is memorable; she sings 'Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas' and 'The Trolley Song,' among others. Margaret O'Brien is her younger sister. With Leon Ames and Mary Astor. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (Cinemax)-- *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)

8:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *Band of Angels* (1957)--A remarkably complex look at black and white relations in Civil War America. Clark Gable plays a Southern gentleman with a past as a slave trader, Yvonne DeCarlo is a Southern belle who discovers she has black ancestors and Sidney Poitier is an educated slave. Directed by Raoul Walsh, from the novel by Robert Penn Warren. (DW)

*9:45 p.m. (Encore)-- *Sorcerer* (1977)--See 11:55 a.m.

1:25 a.m. (TMC)-- *Kansas City* (1996)--See Saturday at 12:15 p.m.

1:30 a.m. (TNT)-- *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980)--See 3:00 p.m.

2:30 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Against All Odds* (1984)--See Saturday at 5:00 p.m.

Monday, December 21

9:00 a.m. (AMC)-- *Make Way for Tomorrow* (1937)--A remarkable portrait of an aging couple (Victor Moore and Beulah Bondi) in the Depression years, shunted aside by their ambitious children. Directed by Leo McCarey. (DW)

10:30 a.m. (AMC)-- *Alice Adams* (1935)--Katharine Hepburn as social-climbing girl in George Cukor's filming of Booth Tarkington's novel.

Memorable dinner table scene, as Hepburn embarrassingly tries to impress wealthy Fred MacMurray. (DW)

11:30 a.m. (HBO Plus)-- *William Shakespeare's 'Romeo + Juliet'* (1996)--Inventive and exciting modern-dress version of the play. Starring Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio. (MJ)

1:30 p.m. (TCM)-- *Words and Music* (1948)--Colorful, upbeat, less-than-truth 'biography' of the great Broadway musical team of Richard Rodgers (Tom Drake) and Lorenz Hart (Mickey Rooney). From the Golden Age of the MGM Musical. Helped by exuberant acting by Drake and Rooney, and by great musical performances by Gene Kelly, Judy Garland and Lena Horne. Directed by Norman Taurog. (MJ)

4:30 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *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, towards the end the film becomes mushy-minded and tries to make its peace with religion. (MJ)

8:00 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)

9:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *Kansas City* (1996)--See Saturday at 12:15 p.m.

10:30 p.m. (TCM)-- *Jezebel* (1938)--Bette Davis again, as an antebellum Southern belle causing trouble with her willful behavior. Also with Henry Fonda. Directed by William Wyler. (DW)

11:00 (AMC)-- *The Naked Jungle* (1954)--Above-average jungle adventure directed by Byron Haskin, with Charlton Heston and Eleanor Parker. (DW)

3:00 a.m. (AMC)-- *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945)--Extraordinary melodrama by John Stahl, about a woman (Gene Tierney) consumed by jealousy and possessiveness, to the point of madness and murder. With Cornel Wilde and Vincent Price. (DW)

3:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *Marie Antoinette* (1938)--Lavish MGM spectacle about the life of the doomed queen of France. Criticized in its time, it stands up to a certain extent. Robert Morley is memorable as Louis XVI; Norma Shearer is Marie. Directed by W.S. Van Dyke. (DW)

Tuesday, December 22

8:30 a.m. (AMC)-- *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939)--John Ford's account of Abraham Lincoln's early years as a frontier lawyer, starring Henry Fonda. (DW)

10:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *Executive Suite* (1954)--A power struggle erupts after the death of a major executive. Interesting to compare the corporate culture of the 1950s (and Hollywood myths about them) with today's. With William Holden, Barbara Stanwyck, June Allyson, Fredric March, Walter Pidgeon. Robert Wise directed. (DW)

11:00 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *The Firm* (1993)--See Saturday at 1:25 a.m.

11:45 a.m. (HBO Plus)-- *The Name of the Rose* (1986)--A murder mystery set in a medieval monastery (the McGuffin is a lost book by Aristotle). Though lacking much of the rich detail of Umberto Eco's fine novel, the film stands well on its own. Sean Connery is perfect as the monk-detective, John of Baskerville. With Christian Slater, F. Murray Abraham and William Hickey. Directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud. (MJ)

12:00 p.m. (Comedy)-- *History of the World--Part I* (1981)--An example of Mel Brooks's scattershot humor. Many jokes are forced and lame, and most routines just limp along, but the Spanish Inquisition sequence, staged as a Busby Berkeley water ballet, is hilarious and worth staying for. (MJ)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)-- *The Pawnbroker* (1965)--Sidney Lumet's strained tale of pawnbroker (Rod Steiger) with memories of concentration camps. (DW)

2:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *Monkey Business* (1952)--Cary Grant and Ginger

Rogers in a Howard Hawks comedy about a chemistry professor who comes up with youth serum. Marilyn Monroe and Charles Coburn costar. (DW)

*2:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Madame Bovary* (1949)--Vincente Minnelli's film version of the Gustave Flaubert novel about a bored provincial wife who thinks she has found true love. Jennifer Jones is Emma Bovary, with Van Heflin, James Mason. (DW)

4:00 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)

4:15 p.m. (HBO)-- *Gattaca* (1997)--See Saturday, at 8:00 a.m.

6:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Bringing Up Baby* (1938)--Classic screwball comedy, with Katharine Hepburn as bedazzling, eccentric heiress and Cary Grant as the sedate zoologist whose life she turns upside down. Howard Hawks directed this comedy of sex and morals. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (Comedy)-- *History of the World--Part I* (1981)--See 12:00 p.m.

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Casablanca* (1942)--The Michael Curtiz classic about life and love in wartime Morocco, with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (FXM)-- *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)--A visitor from another galaxy visits our planet to issue a stern warning. Robert Wise's film is a liberal plea for peace and understanding; as such, it defied the McCarthyite xenophobia and bellicosity dominating Hollywood at the time. It stands up surprising well almost 50 years later. Starring Patricia Neal and Michael Rennie. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Julia* (1977)--See Saturday, at 9:00 p.m.

*10:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)--Is there anyone who hasn't seen this film by now? Anyway, it's a remarkable musical, with Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds, Donald O'Connor, about the days of silent film. Stanley Donen and Kelly directed. (DW)

*11:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)--John Ford's version of the John Steinbeck classic novel, about the Joad family, driven from their home in the 1930s 'Dust Bowl.' Henry Fonda plays Tom Joad. With Jane Darwell, John Carradine. (DW)

11:30 p.m. (HBO)-- *Gattaca* (1997)--See Saturday at 8:00 a.m.

12:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *High Noon* (1952)--Gary Cooper stars in this Fred Zinnemann-directed Western about a sheriff who, on his wedding and retirement day, has to confront a gunman seeking revenge. With Grace Kelly, Thomas Mitchell, Lloyd Bridges, Katy Jurado, et al. (DW)

12:15 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Night Falls on Manhattan* (1997)--See Saturday at 7:00 p.m.

1:00 a.m. (Bravo)-- *Julia* (1977)--See Saturday at 9:00 p.m.

*1:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *Citizen Kane* (1941)--Orson Welles's classic work, the tragic story of a newspaper tycoon with delusions of grandeur. Based loosely on the life of millionaire William Randolph Hearst, the film was essentially suppressed when it came out. (DW)

*2:10 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *The Ice Storm* (1997)--Excellent film by Ang Lee of aimlessness and disillusionment in the 1970s. As the middle class disintegrates in suburbia, we see the disintegration of the White House playing out in the background as the Watergate crisis runs its course. The fine cast includes Kevin Kline, Sigourney Weaver, Joan Allen, Jamey Sheridan and Christina Ricci. (MJ)

3:05 a.m. (TMC)-- *Rebecca* (1940)--Alfred Hitchcock's first US-made film, with Joan Fontaine as the second wife of nobleman Laurence Olivier. The first wife's presence hovers over the place. Judith Anderson is memorable as the sinister housekeeper, loyal to the first wife. (DW)

*3:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948)--John Huston directed this bitter version of the B. Traven story about three prospectors searching for gold in Mexico. Humphrey Bogart, Tim Holt

and Huston's father, Walter, make up the trio. (Also Wednesday at 2:30 a.m.) (DW)

Wednesday, December 23

6:45 a.m. (Cinemax)-- *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge* (1990)--James Ivory directed this touching film that follows a reserved Kansas City couple through several decades, revealing much of what really goes on under the surface of their long, seemingly placid relationship. Starring real-life husband and wife Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward in quiet, sensitive performances. Adapted--with inevitable changes and abridgements--from the brilliant but unfilmable pair of novels by Evan S. Connell, Jr. (MJ)

*7:30 a.m. (AMC)-- *Force of Evil* (1948)--The principal film effort of director Abraham Polonsky, soon to be blacklisted. A parable about American capitalism. John Garfield plays the lead, a crooked lawyer from the wrong side of the tracks, who faces a moral crisis over a Fourth of July holiday. With Thomas Gomez and Beatrice Pearson. (DW)

9:00 a.m. (Cinemax)-- *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965)--Cold War melodrama of double- and triple-agents, based on the John Le Carre novel, with Richard Burton as the embittered British agent and Oskar Werner. Directed by Martin Ritt. (DW)

9:00 a.m. (AMC)-- *Canyon Passage* (1946)--Stylish Jacques Tourneur directed this Western set in Oregon about settlers facing Indian attacks and the consequences of white man's greed. With Brian Donlevy, Susan Hayward and Dana Andrews. (DW)

*11:15 a.m. (Encore)-- *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)

12:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Pride and Prejudice* (1940)--Hollywood's version of the Jane Austen classic about five sisters in early nineteenth century England. Laurence Olivier is the standout as the proud Darcy; Greer Garson plays the 'prejudiced' Elizabeth Bennett. Robert Z. Leonard directed; Aldous Huxley helped write the screenplay. (DW)

12:30 p.m. (AMC)-- *Springfield Rifle* (1952)--Andre de Toth's film about a Union officer (Gary Cooper) who goes undercover to expose a Confederate horse stealing ring. Dark and spare, with an exemplary performance by Paul Kelly as the chief villain. (DW)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Julia* (1977)--See Saturday at 9:00 p.m.

*2:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *The Beggar's Opera* (1953)--Laurence Olivier in something of an oddity, John Gay's eighteenth century work, brought to the screen by famed theater director Peter Brook (*Marat/Sade*, et al). Play that inspired Brecht/Weill's *Threepenny Opera*. (DW)

4:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *Artists and Models* (1955)--An extravagant Frank Tashlin cartoon, with Jerry Lewis, Dean Martin, Dorothy Malone and Shirley MacLaine. (DW)

4:45 p.m. (HBO Signature)-- *The Name of the Rose* (1986)--See Wednesday at 11:45 a.m.

5:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *John Grisham's the Rainmaker* (1997)--Francis Coppola took a John Grisham potboiler and made it into an engrossing but pedestrian film. Nonetheless, it is rich in characters, with particularly good work by Danny DeVito and Mickey Rourke (in a surprising stand-out performance as an ultra-sleazy lawyer) Also starring Matt Damon, John Voight and Claire Danes. (MJ)

*6:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Ride the High Country* (1962)--Sam Peckinpah directed this anti-Western, with Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea, as two aging gunfighters guarding a gold shipment shipped from a remote mining town. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *A New Leaf* (1971)--Elaine May's first directing effort in which she also costarred as a clumsy, introverted heiress wooed by Walter Matthau, a playboy who has run through his fortune. The final cut was taken out of May's hands and she disclaimed it. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Dinner at Eight* (1933)--A collection of individuals from various social classes, all facing a crisis, prepare to dine at eight.

George Cukor directed this MGM version of the George Kaufman-Edna Ferber play, with Jean Harlow, Marie Dressler, Wallace Beery and John Barrymore. (DW)

*9:35 p.m. (Encore)-- *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985)--See 11:15 a.m.
10:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Gaslight* (1944)--Charles Boyer tries to drive Ingrid Bergman mad in George Cukor's period thriller. (DW)

12:00 a.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. (DW)

12:05 a.m. (TBS)-- *The Horse Soldiers* (1959)--Another classic John Ford Western, with John Wayne as a cavalry officer leading Union troops into Confederate territory during the Civil War. (DW)

1:05 a.m. (TMC)-- *Spellbound* (1945)--Psychiatrist Ingrid Bergman attempts to unravel patient Gregory Peck's dilemmas. Has he committed a murder? Alfred Hitchcock directed. (DW)

2:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Actress* (1953)--The film is based on the experiences of Ruth Gordon struggling to be a stage performer in the early part of the century in Massachusetts. With Jean Simmons, Spencer Tracy and a youthful Anthony Perkins. George Cukor directed. (DW)

2:30 a.m. (USA)-- *Heaven Can Wait* (1978)--Warren Beatty stars as a football player who dies before his time and returns to earth in another body, that of a millionaire businessman. Julie Christie is a social activist who awakens his conscience. With Jack Warden. Directed by Beatty and Buck Henry. Good-natured, but not extraordinarily insightful. (DW)

*2:40 a.m. (TBS)-- *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949)--The second part of John Ford's cavalry trilogy, with John Wayne as an officer about to retire, drawn into campaign against a group of Indians. With Joanne Dru, Ben Johnson, Victor McLaglen. (DW)

4:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Philadelphia Story* (1940)--George Cukor directed this film adaptation of Philip Barry's stage play about a spoiled mainline socialite yearning for--well, what exactly? One critic calls it 'simply the breaking, reining, and saddling of an unruly thoroughbred,' i.e., Katharine Hepburn. (DW)

4:25 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988)--See Sunday at 8:30 a.m.

Thursday, December 24

*6:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Thin Man* (1934)--The first of the films featuring husband and wife detective team of Nick and Nora Charles, with more than a touch of madcap comedy. With William Powell and Myrna Loy as the duo. Directed by W.S. Van Dyke. (MJ)

6:00 a.m. (Sundance)-- *Arizona Dream* (1993)--Yugoslav director Emir Kusturica (*Underground*) directed this self-consciously offbeat film about a drifter (Johnny Depp), his car salesman uncle (Jerry Lewis), and an oddball mother and daughter (Faye Dunaway and Lili Taylor). (DW)

11:00 a.m. (HBO Plus)-- *Night Falls on Manhattan* (1997)--See Saturday at 7:00 p.m.

4:00 p.m. (Sundance)-- *Arizona Dream* (1993)--See 6:00 a.m.

8:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)--See Saturday at 6:00 p.m.

*8:00 p.m. (FXM)-- *How Green Was My Valley* (1941)--John Ford's powerful film about Welsh coal miners. With Walter Pidgeon, Maureen O'Hara, Donald Crisp and Roddy McDowall. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *Gattaca* (1997)--See Saturday at 8:00 a.m.

11:30 p.m. (HBO Signature)-- *The Firm* (1993)--See Saturday, at 1:25 a.m.

2:30 a.m. (Sundance)-- *Arizona Dream* (1993)--See 6:00 a.m.

3:55 a.m. (HBO Signature)-- *Kansas City* (1996)--See Saturday, at 12:15 p.m.

Friday, December 25

6:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *Flying Down to Rio* (1934)--Early Fred Astaire-

Ginger Rogers film with wonderful dance sequences. The one with the chorus girls dancing on the wings of flying planes is amazing. Directed by Thomas Freeland. (MJ)

7:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Gay Divorcee* (1934)--One of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals. Not famous for its plot, but for its musical numbers, including 'Continental' and Cole Porter's 'Night and Day.' Directed by journeyman Mark Sandrich. (DW)

9:00 a.m. (Comedy)-- *Heaven Help Us* (1985)--On-the-mark depiction of life in a Catholic high school in 1960s Brooklyn. With Donald Sutherland, Andrew McCarthy, and Wallace Shawn. Directed by Michael Dinner. (MJ)

10:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *The Big Trail* (1930)--An early sound picture with John Wayne, in his first starring role, shepherding a flock of pioneers westward. Somewhat stiff and awkward, but with very nice touches. Directed with his customary vigor by Raoul Walsh. (DW)

*11:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *Top Hat* (1935)--One of the finest of the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals, directed by Mark Sandrich. The plot, for those who care, involves mistaken identity. It is the songs by Irving Berlin and the dance numbers that count here, including 'Cheek to Cheek,' 'Isn't This a Lovely Day to Be Caught in the Rain,' and 'Top Hat, White Tie and Tails.' (DW)

*12:30 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Foreign Correspondent* (1940)--Joel McCrea is the correspondent caught up in a spy intrigue in Alfred Hitchcock's film, with George Sanders, Robert Benchley, Herbert Marshall, Laraine Day. (DW)

*1:30 p.m. (TCM)-- *Follow the Fleet* (1936)--One of the more mediocre Rogers-Astaire films, with a plot involving a double romance (Randolph Scott and Harriet Hilliard [Nelson] form the other pair). The film's highlight is Irving Berlin's 'Let's Face the Music and Dance.' Directed by Mark Sandrich. (DW)

3:00 p.m. (HBO Plus)-- *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988)--See Sunday at 8:30 a.m.

3:30 p.m. (TCM)-- *Swing Time* (1936)--Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in top form, but at a time when their popularity had begun to decline. Immortal songs by Jerome Kern include 'The Way You Look Tonight,' 'A Fine Romance,' and 'Never Gonna Dance.' George Stevens directed. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Ben-Hur* (1959)--Turgid retelling of Lew Wallace's 'epic.' Charlton Heston stars as the Jew Ben-Hur and Stephen Boyd as Messala, who remains loyal to Rome. Famous for its chariot race. Directed by William Wyler. (DW)

11:15 p.m. (TMC)-- *The Cotton Club* (1984)--Richard Gere stars in Francis Coppola's sometimes successful attempt to capture the music and gangster violence of Harlem in the 1930s. The production was riddled with problems and the often rewritten screenplay is by novelists William Kennedy and Mario Puzo. (MJ)

12:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *The Big Trail* (1930)--See 10:00 a.m.

*1:00 a.m. (Bravo)-- *The Dead* (1987)--John Huston's deeply felt adaptation of James Joyce's short story, one of the best in the English language. This was Huston's last film; it ended his great career on a high note. With Anjelica Huston and Donal McCann. (MJ)

1:30 a.m. (USA)-- *Canadian Bacon* (1995)--To divert attention from domestic problems the US president (Alan Alda) and his advisers cook up a scheme to launch a war against a most unlikely enemy, Canada. John Candy has several marvelous moments as a red-blooded American patriot, but, all in all, Michael Moore's script and direction are too buffoonish. (DW)

3:00 a.m. (TMC)-- *Blazing Saddles* (1974)--See Saturday at 5:25 p.m.

4:30 a.m. (AMC)-- *My Favorite Wife* (1940)--Amusing film, directed by Garson Kanin, with Irene Dunne, thought dead, returning to find husband Cary Grant married to another woman (Gail Patrick). Produced and cowritten by Leo McCarey. (DW)

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