# Some interesting films on US television, May 1-7

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW) 1 May 1999

#### Video pick of the week--find it in your video store

Tales of Hoffman (1951)--One of the best film adaptations of an opera, directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. It is a lush production, photographed in brilliant color, with first-rate performances by Moira Shearer, Robert Rounesville, Leonid Massine, and Robert Helpmann. The Jacques Offenbach opera was adapted from the fantastic stories of German writer E.T.A. Hoffman. The Powell-Pressburger team ("The Archers") made this film shortly after their more famous *The Red Shoes*, starring some of the same performers. (MJ)

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

A&E= Arts & Entertainment, AMC = American Movie Classics, FXM = Fox Movie Channel, HBOF = HBO Family, HBOP = HBO Plus, HBOS = HBO Signature, IFC = Independent Film Channel, TCM = Turner Classic Movies, TMC = The Movie Channel, TNT = Turner Network Television

#### Saturday, May 1

7:30 am (Cinemax)-- *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)

\*8:00 am (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)

8:00 am (HBOS)-- *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)

8:30 am (TCM)-- Gentleman Jim (1942)--Errol Flynn makes a dashing Jim Corbett, early boxing champion, in this biography directed by Raoul Walsh. Ward Bond plays John L. Sullivan with panache. Scripted by Vincent Lawrence and Horace McCoy (author of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, among other hard-boiled works). (DW)

\*10:30 am (AMC)-- *The Glass Key* (1942)--Stuart Heisler directed this version of the Dashiell Hammett novel about a hard-nosed operator (Alan Ladd) who tries to defend his boss (Brian Donlevy), a wardheeler, against murder charges. Veronica Lake is the object of Ladd's affections. (DW)

\*12:00 pm (AMC)-- The Manchurian Candidate (1962)--A Korean War hero (Laurence Harvey) returns to the US, brainwashed by his Chinese captors and programmed to kill a presidential candidate. Ostensibly a cold war conspiracy thriller, this film turns around and becomes an intense satirical attack on right-wing politics. Angela Lansbury gives a superb performance as the war hero's villainous mom, as does James Gregory, playing a politician based on Senator Joe McCarthy. The baroque direction is by John Frankenheimer, from the novel by Richard Condon.

With Frank Sinatra and Janet Leigh. (MJ)

2:00 pm (Comedy)-- *National Lampoon's Vacation* (1983)--Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo star in this often hilarious low comedy about a quintessentially middle-class family's cross-country trip to the Wally Land theme park. The sequences with Imogene Coca are especially funny. Directed by Harold Ramis. (MJ)

\*4:00 pm (AMC)-- *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)--Don Ameche stars as a dead man seeking entry to hell, who recounts in flash back what he thinks has been a life full of sin. With Gene Tierney and Charles Coburn. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. (DW)

4:00 pm (USA)-- Cape Fear (1991)--Martin Scorsese directed this ambitious, but overblown and generally unsuccessful remake of the 1962 J. Lee Thompson-Robert Mitchum-Gregory Peck film. This time Nick Nolte is a lawyer whose family is stalked by a vicious ex-convict (Robert De Niro). Jessica Lange is Nolte's wife, Juliette Lewis his daughter. (DW)

\*4:00 pm (HBOS)-- *North by Northwest* (1959)--One of Alfred Hitchcock's wondrous late 1950s color pieces, with Cary Grant as an ad executive turned into a wanted and hunted man. (DW)

\*5:45 pm (Starz)-- Last Action Hero (1993)--Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle that proves to be a delight. A boy goes to a movie theater and meets his idol--an action hero--who steps out of the screen and takes him back in. A good action film that spoofs the genre and plays with the tension between movies and reality. It also includes hilarious sendups of Olivier's Hamlet and Bergman's The Seventh Seal. Directed by John McTiernan. (MJ)

\*8:00 pm (Bravo)-- A Passage to India (1984)--A decent approximation of the great E.M. Forster novel about British colonialialism 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% 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)

8:00 pm (FXM)-- *The Hustler* (1961)--Basically a boxing film, but set among serious pool sharks. Robert Rossen's movie is beautifully shot and capably acted, but the dialogue is full of stagey, pseudo-profound, high-proletarian language. With Paul Newman, Piper Laurie, George C. Scott, and Jackie Gleason. (MJ)

10:00 pm (TCM)-- *The Valley of Decision* (1945)--Tay Garnett directed this interesting film about romance and labor strife. Greer Garson is a maid who becomes involved with Gregory Peck; his family owned a mine in which her father and brother were killed. Laid in Pittsburgh in 1870. (DW)

\*1:00 am (Comedy)-- Heaven Help Us (1985)--See 8:00 am.

\*1:30 am (Bravo)-- A Passage to India (1984)--See 8:00 pm.

## Sunday, May 2

6:40 am (HBOP)-- *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)

\*10:00 am (TCM)-- *Dark Passage* (1947)--Bizarre film, with Bogart as an escaped convict who undergoes plastic surgery and then tries to uncover a murderer. Directed by Delmer Daves. (DW)

\*10:00 am (HBOP)-- Rosemary's Baby (1968)--John Cassavetes is excellent as ambitious actor who involves himself in diabolical activities to advance his career. Mia Farrow is his unsuspecting wife. Roman Polanski wrote the screenplay, based on the Ira Levin potboiler, and directed. (DW)

10:05 am (TBS)-- Rain Man (1988)--Barry Levinson's anti-Reaganite work, with Dustin Hoffman as an autistic man and Tom Cruise, a 1980s Babbitt, as his yuppie hustler brother. (DW)

\*12:00 pm (TCM)-- Oliver! (1968)--Excellent, spirited film version of the musical based on Dickens' Oliver Twist. There is no pulling back on the harshness of life in Victorian England. Outstanding costumes, sets, and choreography. With Oliver Reed, Ron Moody, and Mark Lester. Directed by Carol Reed. (MJ)

\*1:00 pm (TNT)-- *The Birds* (1963)--Alfred Hitchcock's terrifying drama about swarms of birds attacking humans in a small northern California town. With Rod Taylor, Tippi Hedren and Jessica Tandy. (DW)

1:00 pm (HBOS)-- *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* (1988)--The pioneer auto-maker (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)

\*1:45 pm (Starz)-- Last Action Hero (1993)--See Saturday, at 5:45 pm.

2:00 pm (Comedy)-- *Married to the Mob* (1988)--Michelle Pfeiffer is the widow of a Mafia hitman, trying to change her life. Dean Stockwell is the crime boss who lusts for her. With Matthew Modine. A semi-amusing, semi-conformist film, directed by Jonathan Demme. (DW)

\*4:30 pm (Bravo)-- A Passage to India (1984)--See Saturday, at 8:00 pm.

\*6:00 pm (TCM)-- The Shop Around the Corner (1940)--James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan are co-workers who, unbeknownst to themselves, have entered into a romance through letters. Marvelous Ernst Lubitsch film, occasionally precious, but deeply felt. (DW)

7:30 pm (FX)-- Wall Street (1987)--Oliver Stone directed this film about Wall Street sharks and their comeuppance with his usual subtlety and restraint. With Charlie Sheen, Martin Sheen and Michael Douglas. (DW)

8:00 pm (Cinemax)-- *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. (MJ)

8:00 pm (Comedy)-- Married to the Mob (1988)--See 2:00 pm.

\*8:00 pm (TCM)-- A Midsummer Night's Dream (1935)--Famed German theater director Max Reinhardt oversaw this oddity, with James Cagney as Bottom and Mickey Rooney as Puck in Shakespeare's magical play. (DW)

9:00 pm (HBOP)-- Gattaca (1997)--See 6:40 am.

10:45 pm (HBOS)-- Tucker: The Man and His Dream (1988)--See 1:00

4:00 am (TCM)-- Sylvia Scarlett (1935)--Disconcerting, interesting film about a father (Edmund Gwenn) and daughter (Katharine Hepburn), who take to the road with a touring show, which later includes Cary Grant. Hepburn disguises herself as a boy, which turns all sorts of social and sexual relationships upside down. George Cukor directed. (DW)

### Monday, May 3

6:00 am (Showtime)-- *Hombre* (1967)--Martin Ritt directed, from an Elmore Leonard story, this film about Indian-raised Paul Newman trying to survive in Arizona in the 1880s. With Diane Cilento, Fredric March, Richard Boone. (DW)

\*8:00 am (Cinemax)-- *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)

10:00 am (History)-- *Men in War* (1957)--The seriously underrated Anthony Mann directed this film about the Korean War. With a cast of stalwart character actors, including Robert Ryan, Aldo Ray and Vic Morrow (father of Jennifer Jason Leigh). (DW)

\*10:00 am (TCM)-- *The Maltese Falcon* (1941)--John Huston classic, based on the Dashiell Hammett novel, with Humphrey Bogart as private detective Sam Spade. Sydney Greenstreet, Mary Astor and Peter Lorre brilliantly co-star. (DW)

10:00 am (AMC)-- *Dallas* (1950)--A story set in post-Civil War Dallas, with Gary Cooper seeking revenge on those who wronged him. Ruth Roman and Steve Cochran co-star. Directed by Stuart Heisler. (DW)

\*12:00 pm (TCM)-- Across the Pacific (1942)--World War II spy and action drama, with Humphrey Bogart as an army officer cashiered so that he can make contact with pro-Japanese forces. John Huston directed. (DW)

1:30 pm (HBOP)-- 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)

\*2:00 pm (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)

\*2:00 pm (HBOS)-- Chinatown (1974)--The best example of modern film noir. A convoluted tale of incest, corruption, and the fight over access to southern California water. Jack Nicholson plays the private detective. With Faye Dunaway, John Huston. Directed by Roman Polanski. (MJ)

3:00 pm (History)-- Men in War (1957)--See 10:00 am.

\*6:45 pm (TMC)-- Last Action Hero (1993)--See Saturday, at 5:45 pm.

\*8:00 pm (HBO)-- *Alien* (1979)--A bloodthirsty alien creature pursues the crew members of a merchant space vessel. Beautifully done, one of the most frightening films ever made. Sigourney Weaver plays Ripley, one of the first smart and clever heroines in modern film. With Yaphet Kotto, Tom Skerritt, Ian Holm, and John Hurt. (MJ)

\*10:45 pm (Encore)-- *The Wanderers* (1979)--Philip Kaufman's film is an excellent adaptation of Richard Price's fine novel about youth gangs in the Bronx in 1963. With Ken Wahl. (MJ)

\*10:45 pm (HBOS)-- Chinatown (1974)--See 2:00 pm.

1:15 am (TCM)--20,000 Years in Sing Sing (1933)--Michael Curtiz' prison drama, with Spencer Tracy as a hardened criminal and Bette Davis as his girl-friend. (DW)

2:00 am (Comedy)-- *High Anxiety* (1978)--Uneven, to say the least, Mel Brooks comedy, but with rewards for the patient. Brooks is the new chief of a sanitarium, in this homage to and spoof of Hitchcock. With Madeline Kahn, Cloris Leachman and Harvey Korman. (DW)

# Tuesday, May 4

5:35 am (Showtime)-- *The Tall Guy* (1989)--Moderately funny film about an American actor (Jeff Goldblum) trying to make it in British theater. Highlights are the daffy musical version of *The Elephant Man* and Rowan Atkinson's insired mugging. Also with Emma Thompson. Directed by Mel Smith. (MJ)

8:00 am (HBOP)-- John Grisham's the Rainmaker (1997)--See

\*9:15 am (Showtime)-- The Shootist (1976)--John Wayne plays a gunfighter dying of cancer who returns to his home town for a last bit of peace. James Stewart is the doctor. This excellent, moving film was Wayne's last. Directed by Don Siegel. (MJ)

12:00 pm (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)

1:00 pm (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)

\*2:00 pm (TCM)-- The Trial (1962)--Orson Welles's delirious, over-thetop version of the Franz Kafka novel, much of it shot in an abandoned railroad station. Hard to take at times, but its Expressionist paranoia and terror are fascinating. (DW)

3:30 pm (AMC)-- The Buccaneer (1938)--Cecil B. DeMille presided over this film about Jean LaFitte, the pirate who aided the American side in the War of 1812. With Fredric March, Franciska Gaal, Margot Grahame and Akim Tamiroff. (DW)

4:00 pm (Comedy)-- History of the World--Part I (1981)--An example of Mel Brooks' 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)

6:00 pm (TCM)-- In This Our Life (1942)--John Huston's second effort at directing. Bette Davis steals her sister's husband and eventually ruins her own life. Based on the novel by Ellen Glasgow. With Olivia de Haviland and George Brent. (DW)

8:00 pm (Comedy)-- National Lampoon's Vacation (1983)--See Saturday, at 2:00 pm.

8:00 pm (Encore)-- 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)

11:35 pm (Encore)-- Hombre (1967)--See Monday, at 6:00 pm.

12:45 am (HBOS)-- Against All Odds (1984)--See Monday, at 1:30 pm. 2:30 am (USA)-- Canadian Bacon (1995)--See 1:00 pm.

2:50 am (HBOS)-- Barbarians at the Gate (1993)--James Garner is outstanding in this saga of the 1980s, about the corporate piracy that led to the takeover of RJR Nabisco. Larry Gelbart wrote the witty screenplay for the made-for-cable film. (MJ)

\*4:40 am (HBOP)-- Rosemary's Baby (1968)--See Sunday, at 10:00 am.

## Wednesday, May 5

9:30 am (HBOS)-- Tucker: The Man and His Dream (1988)--See Sunday, at 1:00 pm.

11:00 am (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)

4:00 pm (Comedy)-- National Lampoon's Vacation (1983)--See Saturday, at 2:00 pm.

8:00 pm (IFC)-- Gray's Anatomy (1996)--One of actor Spalding Gray's filmed monologues. This time he describes his efforts to find alternative treatments for an eye ailment. Directed by Steven Soderbergh. (DW)

8:00 pm (AMC)-- Seven Sinners (1940)--Lively film, with Marlene Dietrich and John Wayne, about the US sailors somewhere in the tropics. Dietrich is definitely one of the sinners. With an excellent supporting cast, including Broderick Crawford, Mischa Auer, Billy Gilbert. (DW)

1:00 am (IFC)-- Gray's Anatomy (1996)--See 8:00 pm.

Sunday, at 1:00 pm.

2:30 am (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)

\*3:40 am (Encore)-- Wag the Dog (1997)--A US president hires a PR team to distract attention from a sex scandal by fabricating a war with Albania. Barry Levinson's film has bite, and the screenplay by David Mamet is sinister and funny. Great ensemble acting by Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Denis Leary, and Anne Heche. (MJ)

#### Thursday, May 6

6:30 am (Showtime)-- One-Eyed Jacks (1961)--Marlon Brando's only directing effort. He plays an outlaw seeking revenge on Karl Malden, a former friend, now a sadistic sheriff. (DW)

\*9:00 am (TCM)-- The Magnificent Ambersons (1942)--Considered by some to be Orson Welles's finest work. The film, based on a Booth Tarkinson novel, examines the impact of social and economic change on a small town family. Joseph Cotten, Ray Collins, Agnes Moorehead are brilliant. The film was taken out of Welles's hands and an ending added.

\*11:15 am (HBOS)-- Chinatown (1974)--See Monday, at 2:00 pm.

\*11:30 am (AMC)-- Touch of Evil (1958)--One of Orson Welles's greatest films. He plays a corrupt police chief in a border town who plants evidence to convict the "guilty"--in this instance a hapless young Mexican. A tale of moral, physical, and political corruption that is rich in every way. With Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh, Joseph Calleia, and Akim Tamiroff, and uncredited cameos by Joseph Cotten, Marlene Dietrich, and Mercedes McCambridge. (MJ)

\*12:00 pm (TCM)-- Journey into Fear (1942)--A traveling engineer unwittinly becomes involved in international intrigue. From the novel by Eric Ambler. Credited to Norman Foster, but generally considered to be directed by Orson Welles (who also plays a Turkish general under much makeup). Very good, but not one of Welles's best. With Joseph Cotten and Dolores del Rio. (MJ)

1:30 pm (HBOS)-- Against All Odds (1984)--See Monday, at 1:30 pm.

1:45 pm (IFC)-- *Gray's Anatomy* (1996)--See Wednesday, at 8:00 pm.

3:30 pm (HBOS)-- The Sun Also Rises (1957)--Star-filled adaptation of the Hemingway novel. Glossy and inadequate. Directed by Henry King.

5:45 pm (HBOS)-- John Grisham's the Rainmaker (1997)--See Saturday, at 8:00 am.

6:00 pm (AMC)-- Love Letters (1945)--Joseph Cotten plays a soldier writing letters to his friend's fiancee, Jennifer Jones. Later he cures her amnesia. Directed by William Dieterle. Ayn Rand wrote the script! (DW)

8:00 pm (Cinemax)-- 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)

8:00 pm (AMC)-- Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing (1955)--Melodrama set in Hong Kong during the Korean War, with Jennifer Jones as a Eurasian doctor who falls for William Holden. Directed by Henry King. (DW)

\*10:00 pm (TNT)-- Escape from Alcatraz (1979)--Clint Eastwood plays a convict determined to break out of Alcatraz, the supposedly inescapable prison. Based on a true story, the film methodically follows Eastwood's efforts. Directed by Don Siegel. (DW)

12:30 am (TNT)-- The Great Escape (1963)--Steve McQueen and James Garner stand out in this World War II prisoner-of-war escape film. Routine in many ways, directed by John Sturges. (DW)

\*1:00 am (Sci-Fi)-- Dead Again (1991)--Visually exciting film (with

debts to Hitchcock and Welles) set in Los Angeles is a murder mystery in which reincarnation is the key. Kenneth Branagh directed and plays two roles, as does Emma Thompson. (MJ)

\*1:10 am (Starz)-- Fearless (1993)--Jeff Bridges experiences the eerie effects of having survived a jetliner crash. Stunning performance by Rosie Perez. Directed by Peter Weir. (MJ)

9:10 am (Encore)-- Love with the Proper Stranger (1963)--Natalie Wood is pregnant and Steve McQueen is her musician boy-friend in this occasionally affecting film shot on location in New York's Greenwich Village. Directed by Robert Mulligan. (DW)

# Friday, May 7

6:30 am (HBOP)-- 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)

12:35 pm (AMC)-- Love Letters (1945)--See Thursday, at 6:00 pm.

1:00 pm (Cinemax)-- Contact (1997)--See Saturday, at 7:30 am.

5:10 pm (Cinemax)-- The Firm (1993)--See Sunday, at 8:00 pm.

8:00 pm (TCM)-- *Jezebel* (1938)--Bette Davis again, as an antebellum Southern belle causing trouble with her willful behavior. Also Henry Fonda. Directed by William Wyler. (DW)

10:00 pm (TCM)-- *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939)--Stylishly done version of romance between Queen of England (Bette Davis) and Earl of Essex (Errol Flynn). Directed by Michael Curtiz, from play by Maxwell Anderson. (DW)

10:30 pm (AMC)-- A Night to Remember (1958)--Well-made film about the sinking of the Titanic, directed by Roy Ward Baker. With Kenneth More, David McCallum, Jill Dixon, Laurence Naismith. Novelist Eric Ambler wrote the script based on the book by Walter Lord. (DW)

\*1:00 am (HBOS)-- Alien (1979)--See Monday, at 8:00 pm.



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