

Some interesting films on US television, May 8-14

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

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

Impromptu (1991)--A group of Parisian bohemians spend a weekend at the country estate of a bourgeoisie dilettante, in an ebullient film resembling Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night* and Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*. The movie is a delightful portrait of the overheated lives of artists, writers and composers in the mid-nineteenth century--Frederick Chopin, Eugene Delacroix, Alfred de Musset, Franz Liszt and George Sand (played by the remarkable Judy Davis, coming on like a force of nature). Starring Hugh Grant, Mandy Patinkin, Bernadette Peters, Emma Thompson and Julian Sands. Directed by James Lapine (a frequent stage collaborator of Sondheim's).

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 8

10:00 a.m. (IFC)-- *Repulsion* (1965)--Catherine Deneuve starred as a sexually repressed girl who goes homicidal when her sister leaves her on her own in an apartment for a few days. Startling at the time, it seems dated today. Directed by Roman Polanski. (DW)

*11:15 a.m. (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)

*12:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *Call Northside 777* (1948)--A solid, matter-of-fact drama about a reporter (James Stewart) righting a wrong: proving that a convicted killer is innocent. With Richard Conte and Lee J. Cobb. (DW)

1:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *The Miracle Worker* (1962)--Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft co-starred in this version of William Gibson's play about the early life of Helen Keller. Arthur Penn directed with his normal sensitivity to acting performances. (DW)

*1:15 p.m. (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)

1:30 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Charlie Bubbles* (1968)--British actor Albert Finney's directing debut, about a married and unhappy writer who begins an affair with Liza Minnelli, as his secretary. It has moving moments. (DW)

2:00 p.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)

3:30 p.m. (HBOS)-- *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)

Repulsion (1965)--See 10:00 a.m. (IFC)--

8:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Dark Victory* (1939)--Bette Davis is a socialite who learns she has a terminal illness. George Brent is her brain surgeon husband. Directed by Edmund Goulding. (DW)

*9:00 p.m. (HBOS)-- *Barbarians at the Gate* (1993)--See 11:15 a.m.

10:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Of Human Bondage* (1934)--Bette Davis stars as the waitress with whom doctor Leslie Howard becomes "inexplicably" enamored. An interesting film, directed by John Cromwell, but W. Somerset Maugham's story is pretty stupid and insensitive. (DW)

*10:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Charley Varrick* (1973)--A modest, intelligent Don Siegel action picture, superior to most films of the 1970s. Varrick is a smalltime crook who robs money from the Mob by accident. With Joe Don Baker, as a menacing hit man, Sheree North and John Vernon. (DW)

12:00 a.m. (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)

2:30 a.m. (TCM)-- *Kid Galahad* (1937)--Classic hard-boiled, no-nonsense Warner Bros. film of the 1930s. Edward G. Robinson is the boxing promoter, Wayne Morris is the fighter on the rise, Bette Davis is the girl who comes between them. Michael Curtiz directed with his customary efficiency and flair. (DW)

*2:30 a.m. (Bravo)-- *Charley Varrick* (1973)--See 10:00 p.m.

2:30 a.m. (Sci-Fi)-- *The Andromeda Strain* (1971)--One of the first techno-thrillers, by veteran director Robert Wise, about a terrestrial virus that could wipe out humankind. (MJ)

4:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *The Big Trail* (1930)--See 2:00 p.m.

Sunday, May 9

6:00 a.m. (IFC)-- *Repulsion* (1965)--See Saturday at 10:00 a.m.

8:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *Alfie* (1966)--Somewhat unpleasant film about cockney playboy, played memorably by Michael Caine, from the play by Bill Naughton. With Shelley Winters, Jane Asher and Eleanor Bron, among others. Directed by Lewis Gilbert. (DW)

9:30 a.m. (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)

*10:00 a.m. (Cinemax)-- *Zardoz* (1973)--Odd saga spanning thousands of years in the future, with Sean Connery and Charlotte Rampling. A good-bad film bursting with half-baked ideas and marvelous images. Directed by John Boorman, an exceptional director who takes chances. (MJ)

10:30 a.m. (AMC)-- *Imitation of Life* (1959)--Douglas Sirk directed this work, "A big, crazy film about life and death. And a film about America." Lana Turner is a career-driven actress; Juanita Moore is her black maid. Moore has a daughter (Susan Kohner) who wants to pass for white. The characters' thoughts, wishes and dreams "grow directly out of their social reality or are manipulated by it" (R.W. Fassbinder). (DW)

11:00 a.m. (History)-- *Merrill's Marauders* (1962)--It's how much this has to do with real history, but engrossing war film directed by Samuel Fuller; Jeff Chandler as commander of US soldiers fighting Japanese in Burmese jungle. (DW)

12:45 p.m. (AMC)-- *Gypsy* (1962)--Unfortunate film adaptation of the great Jule Styne-Stephen Sondheim-Arthur Laurents musical. Rosalind Russell does not have the necessary fire in her belly for the role of Mama Rose. Worth seeing for the music, but look for the recent, far better, made-for-TV version with Bette Midler. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. Also starring Natalie Wood and Karl Malden. (MJ)

*2:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Charley Varrick* (1973)--See Saturday at 10:00 p.m.

*3:00 p.m. (Showtime)-- *Reds* (1981)--Warren Beatty's account of the life and times of John Reed, American socialist and author of *Ten Days that Shook the World*, the authoritative chronicle of the October Revolution of 1917. With Diane Keaton and others. (DW)

5:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *The Ruling Class* (1972)--In a career of over-the-top roles, this is Peter O'Toole at his most unrestrained. It includes bizarre musical numbers and long stretches where the character believes he is Jesus Christ. Not for everyone. Directed by Peter Medak. (MJ)

5:30 p.m. (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)

6:00 p.m. (IFC)-- *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)--The tall tales of the German baron are retold by Terry Gilliam in his typical brilliant but sprawling style. With John Neville and too much Robin Williams. (MJ)

6:00 p.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)

6:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *Bachelor Mother* (1939)--Ginger Rogers plays a sales clerk who discovers an abandoned baby and is assumed to be its mother. David Niven plays the store-owner's son in this fairly sharp-eyed work, directed by Garson Kanin. (DW)

*11:45 p.m. (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)

1:00 a.m. (VH1)-- *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)

Monday, May 10

6:00 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)

7:00 a.m. (Cinemax)-- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)--Elia Kazan's version of the Tennessee Williams drama about the strong and the weak in a New Orleans tenement. Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden. (DW)

*9:25 a.m. (TMC)-- *Notorious* (1946)--One of Alfred Hitchcock's best. American counterespionage agents convince the patriotic daughter of a convicted Nazi spy to marry a Nazi agent in South America. Very suspenseful (especially the sequence with the dwindling champagne bottles) and with complex characterizations. Wonderful chemistry between Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman and an oddly sympathetic performance by Claude Rains as the Nazi agent. (MJ)

*9:30 a.m. (HBOS)-- *Barbarians at the Gate* (1993)--See Saturday at 11:15 a.m.

questionable *The Adventures of a Baron Munchausen* (1989) Sunday at 6:00 p.m.

12:30 p.m. (AMC)-- *Bachelor Mother* (1939)--See Sunday at 6:00 p.m.

*12:45 a.m. (HBOS)-- *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)

4:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *The Big Picture* (1988)--A recently graduated film student tries to succeed in Hollywood. Many hilarious moments. Starring Kevin Bacon, Martin Short and J.T. Walsh. Directed by Christopher Guest. (MJ)

6:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Yolanda and the Thief* (1945)--Fred Astaire is a conman in this Vincente Minnelli musical, trying to convince Lucille Bremer, a Latin American heiress, that he is her guardian angel. With Frank Morgan. (DW)

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

*8:00 p.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)

*8:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *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% 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)

*11:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *A Passage to India* (1984)--see 8:00 p.m.

*2:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Band Wagon* (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 and Jack Buchanan (particularly good). (MJ)

*4:00 a.m. (A&E)-- *Mean Streets* (1973)--Excellent, highly influential film by Martin Scorsese about growing up in New York's Little Italy. With Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel, both very young. (MJ)

Tuesday, May 11

*6:10 a.m. (TMC)-- *The Boys in Company C* (1978)--One of the better realistic films about the Vietnam War. Avoids the cliches of most other war films. With James Whitmore, Jr. and Stan Shaw. Directed by Sidney J. Furie. (MJ)

*6:30 a.m. (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)

6:45 a.m. (HBOS)-- *The Sun Also Rises* (1957)--Star-filled adaptation of the Hemingway novel. Glossy and inadequate. Directed by Henry King. (MJ)

9:30 a.m. (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)

*11:00 a.m. (AMC)-- *Phantom Lady* (1944)--Unsettling film noir, perhaps emblematic of the genre, about a man convicted of a murder and

the search for an elusive witness. With Franchot Tone, directed by Robert Siodmak. (DW)

12:00 p.m. (FX)-- *Wall Street* (1987)--see Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

3:15 p.m. (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)

6:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1966)--Richard Lester directed this film version of the Broadway musical comedy (with a score by Stephen Sondheim) about ancient Rome. The wonderful Zero Mostel plays a slave in a jam. Frenzied and trying too hard. (DW)

6:15 p.m. (AMC)-- *The Naked Jungle* (1954)--Above-average jungle adventure directed by Byron Haskin, with Charlton Heston and Eleanor Parker. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (Showtime)-- *The Godfather, Part II* (1974)--A rarity--a sequel 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)

9:00 p.m. (HBOS)-- *The Sun Also Rises* (1957)--See 6:45 a.m.

2:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *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)

*4:00 a.m. (TCM)-- *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983)--Love story set against the background of the military bloodbath against the Communist Party in Indonesia in 1966. The political scenes are very powerful. Linda Hunt is marvelous as the diminutive photographer Billy Kwan, for which she deservedly won an Academy Award. Starring Mel Gibson and Sigourney Weaver. Directed by Peter Weir. (MJ)

Wednesday, May 12

5:35 a.m. (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 inspired mugging. Also with Emma Thompson. Directed by Mel Smith. (MJ)

6:00 a.m. (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)

7:00 a.m. (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 a.m. (TCM)-- *Stage Door* (1937)--Amusing, lively comedy-drama set in a theatrical boarding-house. Extraordinary cast includes Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Lucille Ball, Eve Arden, Franklin Pangborn and Jack Carson. Directed by Gregory La Cava. (DW)

*10:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *The Culpepper Cattle Company* (1972)--An unjustly forgotten film about a naive young man joining up with a cattle drive. Grittily realistic depictions of the daily working life of cowboys--the kind of detail rarely shown in Westerns. A gem. With Gary Grimes, Billy "Green" Bush and Geoffrey Lewis. Directed by Dick Richards. (MJ)

12:00 p.m. (FXM)-- *Hombre* (1967)--See 7:00 a.m.

2:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *Undercurrent* (1946)--In the *Gaslight* genre: a woman (Katharine Hepburn) discovers her husband is evil and conniving. Robert Mitchum is her ultimate savior. Directed by Vincente Minnelli. (DW)

5:00 p.m. (HBOP)-- *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)

5:45 p.m. (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 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)

10:00 p.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)

2:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *Hombre* (1967)--See 7:00 a.m.

3:20 a.m. (HBOS)-- *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)

*4:00 a.m. (A&E)-- *Beat the Devil* (1954)--Humphrey Bogart, Robert Morley and Peter Lorre team up in this cynical John Huston film about a group of lowlifes planning to acquire land rich in uranium deposits. (DW)

Thursday, May 13

10:30 a.m. (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)

*12:00 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)

12:30 p.m. (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)

4:00 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Charlie Bubbles* (1968)--See Saturday at 1:30 p.m.

4:00 p.m. (TCM)-- *The Lusty Men* (1952)--A film about rodeo cowboys, with Robert Mitchum as the ex-champion who becomes a mentor to newcomer Arthur Kennedy. Mitchum then falls for Kennedy's wife, Susan Hayward. Full of moral ambiguities, directed by Nicholas Ray. (DW)

5:45 p.m. (AMC)-- *The Molly Maguires* (1970)--Sean Connery and Richard Harris co-starred in this well-meaning film about the secret organization of Irish-born miners in Pennsylvania in the 1870s. Directed by Martin Ritt. (DW)

6:30 p.m. (IFC)-- *Gray's Anatomy* (1996)--See 12:30 p.m.

8:00 p.m. (Comedy)-- *National Lampoon's Vacation* (1983)--See Saturday at 12:00 a.m.

9:30 p.m. (TCM)-- *Stage Door* (1937)--See Wednesday at 8:00 a.m.

*10:00 p.m. (FXM)-- *Blood and Wine* (1996)--Jack Nicholson plays a bankrupt wine merchant pulling off a jewel heist with an over-the-hill, nerved-up safecracker (Michael Caine, in an unusual role as a murderous heavy). With Judy Davis and Stephen Dorff. Another neglected film by underrated director Bob Rafelson. (MJ)

*1:10 a.m. (HBOS)-- *Barbarians at the Gate* (1993)--See Saturday at

11:15 a.m.

*4:00 a.m. (A&E)-- *The Stranger* (1946)--Orson Welles' thriller in which the director plays a Nazi war criminal living in a sedate Connecticut town. With Edward G. Robinson. (DW)

4:00 a.m. (FXM)-- *The Razor's Edge* (1946)--An overlong film, with some embarrassingly silly moments, but also some extraordinarily believable ones. With Tyrone Power, looking for the meaning of life, Gene Tierney, Anne Baxter. Directed by Edmund Goulding, from the novel by Somerset Maugham. (DW)

Friday, May 14

10:30 a.m. (IFC)-- *Gray's Anatomy* (1996)--See Thursday at 12:30 p.m.

12:00 p.m. (AMC)-- *The Molly Maguires* (1970)--See Thursday at 5:45 p.m.

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)-- *Charlie Bubbles* (1968)--See Saturday at 1:30 p.m.

*1:05 p.m. (TMC)-- *Notorious* (1946)--See Monday at 9:25 a.m.

*4:00 p.m. (FXM)-- *The Gang's All Here* (1943)--Delightful Busby Berkeley film, with the usual lush and intricate musical sequences, but this time in rich Technicolor. Watch for the not-so-subliminal chorus line of bananas in Carmen Miranda's "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat" number. (MJ)

4:00 p.m. (Comedy)-- *National Lampoon's Vacation* (1983)--See Saturday at 12:00 a.m.

5:45 p.m. (HBOS)-- *The Sun Also Rises* (1957)--See Tuesday at 6:45 a.m.

*6:30 p.m. (HBO)-- *Rosemary's Baby* (1968)--See Monday at 12:45 a.m.



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