

Some interesting films on US television, September 11-17

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW)
11 September 1999

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

Before Sunrise (1995)—A remarkable work. An American man and a French woman (Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy) meet on a train going through Germany, and she agrees to get out in Vienna to wait with him for his U.S. flight the next morning. The whole film is then filled with their conversation and eventual lovemaking (which is low-key and unsensational). Much of the talk is banal and young, but it centers on the universal subjects of birth, death, love and sex. The film creates its own special moment in Vienna; and when the couple first decide never to see each other again, but then resolve to meet at the same place next year, we are uncertain and know it could go either way. Like life, the film wanders in all directions and has no certain resolution. Directed by the talented Richard Linklater. (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, September 11

7:00 a.m. (A&E)—*The Spiral Staircase* (1946)—Taut thriller with Dorothy McGuire as a deaf-mute servant employed in a household in 1906 New England. Directed by Robert Siodmak. (DW)

8:30 a.m. (Sundance)—*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)

12:00 p.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)

*12:30 p.m. (TCM)—*The Great Dictator* (1940)—Chaplin plays the twin role of a Jewish barber and Adenoid Hynkel of Tomania, in this extraordinary attack, which also manages to be very funny, on Hitler and Nazism. Jack Oakie is Benzino Napaloni of Bacteria. (DW)

*1:00 p.m. (TNT)—*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)

*3:05 p.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)

8:15 p.m. (AMC)—*Land of the Pharaohs* (1955)—Howard Hawks's historical epic is full of the typical Hollywood hokum, but the scenes of the building of the pyramids are truly impressive. William Faulkner

helped write the screenplay. With Jack Hawkins and Joan Collins. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBOP)—*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)

*10:00 p.m. (Starz)—*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)

*10:30 p.m. (TCM)—*The Narrow Margin* (1952)—A policeman has to transport a gangster's widow to a trial to testify. They have to avoid various attempts to kill them. With Charles McGraw and Marie Windsor, both B-movie standouts. Directed by Richard Fleischer. (DW)

2:00 a.m. (TCM)—*Berlin Express* (1948)—Spy drama set in postwar Germany, as agents from a number of countries attempt to rescue politician kidnapped by Nazi underground. With Robert Ryan, Merle Oberon and Paul Lukas. Directed by Jacques Tourneur. (DW)

4:00 a.m. (A&E)—*The Spiral Staircase* (1946)—See 7:00 a.m.

4:05 a.m. (HBO)—*Tin Men* (1987)—Barry Levinson's comedy-drama about the aluminum-siding business, set in Baltimore in 1963, with Richard Dreyfuss and Danny DeVito. (DW)

Sunday, September 12

*5:10 a.m. (TMC)—*The Boys in Company C* (1978)—See Saturday at 3:05 p.m.

*7:45 a.m. (Starz)—*A Merry War* (1998)—An advertising man in 1930s London abruptly leaves his job to become "a poet and a free man." He works in a bookshop and lives in squalor, but vows never to give in to the world of money. Richard E. Grant plays the disagreeable Gordon Comstock, and Helena Bonham Carter his patient girlfriend. This witty film version of George Orwell's novel *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* punctures the pretensions of the British middle class. Directed by Robert Bierman. (MJ)

9:50 a.m. (Encore)—*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 a.m. (TCM)—*High Sierra* (1941)—Wonderful, hard-boiled Raoul Walsh film about an ex-convict (Humphrey Bogart) and the two women in his life, a lame girl, Joan Leslie, whose treatment he pays for, and the tough, no-nonsense Ida Lupino. Final chase sequence in the mountains captures something essential about America. Written by John Huston and W.R. Burnett. (DW)

10:15 a.m. (Showtime)—*Young Frankenstein* (1974)—One of Mel Brooks's funnier and more successful parodies, this time of the classic horror film by James Whale. Particularly effective because it uses many of

the original sets. With Peter Boyle (as the monster) and Gene Wilder (as Dr. Frankenstein). (MJ)

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

1:00 p.m. (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)

*3:45 p.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. (DW)

6:00 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)

*12:10 a.m. (HBOS)—*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)

12:30 a.m. (AMC)—*Battle Cry* (1955)—Raoul Walsh World War II melodrama, about the lives and loves of a group of Marines getting ready for battle, with Van Heflin, Aldo Ray, Tab Hunter and Dorothy Malone. (DW)

2:45 a.m. (HBOF)—*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)

Monday, September 13

6:00 a.m. (Cinemax)—*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)

9:30 a.m. (AMC)—*Deadline U.S.A.* (1952)—Humphrey Bogart as a crusading editor, trying to keep a big city newspaper alive. Ethel Barrymore plays the paper's owner. Directed by Richard Brooks. (DW)

10:00 a.m. (TCM)—*Words and Music* (1948)—Colorful, upbeat, less-than-true "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)

*12:30 p.m. (HBOS)—*Strangers on a Train* (1951)—Hitchcock classic, with Farley Granger as a callow tennis player and Robert Walker as a psychopath, based on the Patricia Highsmith novel, co-scripted by Raymond Chandler. (DW)

*12:30 p.m. (AMC)—*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)—Don Siegel's classic parable about conformity in 1950s America. After a meteor lands nearby, inhabitants of a small town are quietly replaced by Òpod peopleÓ who look like them but act mindlessly as members of a communal hive. With Kevin McCarthy and Dana Wynter. (MJ)

2:00 p.m. (HBO)—*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)

*4:30 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)

8:00 p.m. (Bravo)—*Sirens* (1994)—Beautifully photographed, inscrutable tale of sexuality and mythology in a modern, sylvan setting.

With Hugh Grant. (MJ)

8:00 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)

10:10 p.m. (Disney)—*Breaking Away* (1979)—Intelligent story of group of "townies" in Bloomington, Indiana, home of Indiana University. Directed by Peter Yates. (DW)

2:30 a.m. (Bravo)—*Sirens* (1994)—See 8:00 p.m.

9:00 p.m. (HBOS)—*The Devil's Advocate* (1997)—See Saturday at 9:00 p.m.

Tuesday, September 14

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)

*7:15 a.m. (Showtime)—*Reds* (1981)—See Monday at 4:30 p.m.

8:00 a.m. (HBO)—*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)

*8:00 a.m. (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)

*12:45 p.m. (Cinemax)—*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)

4:00 p.m. (Bravo)—*Sirens* (1994)—See Monday at 8:00 p.m.

4:15 p.m. (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)

*6:00 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)

12:05 a.m. (HBOF)—*Heaven Can Wait* (1978)—See Sunday at 2:45 a.m.

12:15 a.m. (TMC)—*American Gigolo* (1980)—Paul Schrader wrote and directed this flawed but fascinating study of an upscale male prostitute. Starring Richard Gere. (MJ)

Wednesday, September 15

6:30 a.m. (Cinemax)—*Play It Again, Sam* (1972)—Woody Allen's very funny homage to Bogart and *Casablanca*. Starring and written by Allen, but directed by Herbert Ross. With Diane Keaton. (MJ)

6:30 a.m. (Sundance)—*The Wanderers* (1979)—See Saturday at 8:30 a.m.

*8:00 a.m. (AMC)—*To Be or Not to Be* (1942)—Ernst Lubitsch's classic black comedy about an acting troupe in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Jack Benny is superb as the conceited ham who heads the troupe, and Carole Lombard is his faithless wife. Not to be missed. (MJ)

*11:05 a.m. (Starz)—*A Merry War* (1998)—See Sunday at 7:45 a.m.

1:00 p.m. (Sundance)—*Sliding Doors* (1998)—Charming, likable light comedy hinges on a gimmick that works well: the film shows the two

paths the main character's life could take depending on whether or not she misses her train. A vehicle for the talented Gwyneth Paltrow, performing with a flawless British accent. (MJ)

2:30 p.m. (HBO)— *Gattaca* (1997)—See Saturday at 12:00 p.m.

*4:00 p.m. (HBOP)— *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)

6:00 p.m. (Sundance)— *The Wanderers* (1979)—See Saturday at 8:30 a.m.

9:00 p.m. (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—See 1:00 p.m.

10:35 p.m. (TBS)— *High Plains Drifter* (1973)—Clint Eastwood directed (and stars in) this excellent spaghetti western tale of revenge, into which he poured everything he learned from his mentors Sergio Leone and Don Siegel. (MJ)

11:00 p.m. (Bravo)— *Z* (1969)—Fictionalized account of the assassination of Greek liberal politician Gregorios Lambrakis and the government cover-up. Director Costa-Gavras has made this into an ominous, sinister political thriller. With an all-star French and Greek cast headed by Yves Montand. (MJ)

2:45 a.m. (TNT)— *American Graffiti* (1973)—A film that probably had a negative effect on the course of American film-making, this is director George Lucas's entertaining fantasy about teenage life in California in the 1950s. With Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, Paul LeMat, Cindy Williams, Candy Clark. (DW)

Thursday, September 16

7:00 a.m. (HBOS)— *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)

10:00 a.m. (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)

10:30 a.m. (HBO)— *Heaven Can Wait* (1978)—See Sunday at 2:45 a.m.

*12:00 p.m. (FX)— *The Stepfather* (1987)—Gruesome slasher film that is actually a clever attack on the values of the Reagan era. A psychotic killer goes from city to city, marrying widows with children. When they fail to meet his high standards of a perfect family, he slays them all and moves on. A sleeper that shouldn't be missed. Starring Terry O'Quinn as the stepfather. Directed by Joseph Ruben. (MJ)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *Z* (1969)—See Wednesday at 11:00 p.m.

2:00 p.m. (TBS)— *High Plains Drifter* (1973)—See Wednesday at 10:35 p.m.

2:30 p.m. (Showtime)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—Burt Reynolds and Cybill Shepherd can neither sing nor dance—they are definitely not Astaire and Rogers. Still, it's fun to watch them mangle Cole Porter's beautiful music and lyrics. Peter Bogdanovich's glitzy, expensive film proves that a warm affection for 1930's film musicals is not enough. One of the great bombs. With Madeline Kahn (often funny, despite her material) and John Hillerman. (MJ)

5:45 p.m. (Showtime)— *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)—See Monday at 2:00 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Reckless* (1935)—Chorus girl (Jean Harlow) marries a drunk of a millionaire and finds herself in deep water. With William Powell and Franchot Tone. Directed by Victor Fleming. Remade as *Written on the Wind* in 1957. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (TNT)— *Carrie* (1976)—Director Brian De Palma can never entirely restrain himself, but this film is more interesting than most of his others. Sissy Spacek plays a high school misfit, equipped with telekinetic powers, who wreaks revenge on her tormentors. Piper Laurie, a fine actress, is memorable as her mother. (DW)

Living in 8:00Oblivion p. (1995)—Some (IFC)—

at the making of a (relatively) low-budget film, with Steve Buscemi as the harassed director. James Le Gros as a spoiled, self-important rising star (allegedly based on director Tom DiCillo's experiences with Brad Pitt) is the highlight of the film. (DW)

*10:00 p.m. (AMC)— *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)

11:30 p.m. (TCM)— *99 River Street* (1953)—The underrated Phil Karlson directed this crime drama. John Payne is a taxi driver who gets mixed up with jewel thieves and has to clear himself of a murder charge. With Evelyn Keyes, Frank Faylen. (DW)

1:05 a.m. (IFC)— *Living in Oblivion* (1995)—See 8:00 p.m.

2:00 a.m. (Comedy)— *High Anxiety* (1978)—See 10:00 a.m.

*2:15 a.m. (HBOS)— *Mean Streets* (1973)—See Sunday at 12:10 a.m.

Friday, September 17

6:00 a.m. (IFC)— *Living in Oblivion* (1995)—See Thursday at 8:00 p.m.

8:00 a.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)

10:00 a.m. (FXM)— *Carousel* (1956)—Hollywood turned a great dark Broadway musical into a perky feel-good film. Most of the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs are intact, however. Starring Gordon MacRae and Shirley Jones. Directed by Henry King. (MJ)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)— *Love and Anarchy* (1973)—One of Italian director Lina Wertmuller's first misguided efforts, with Giancarlo Giannini as a bumpkin who attempts to assassinate Mussolini. (DW)

*2:00 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. (Showtime)— *Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Sunday at 10:15 a.m.

8:00 p.m. (Encore)— *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)

8:05 p.m. (AMC)— *A Shot in the Dark* (1964)—Blake Edwards directed the second of the Inspector Clouseau films, starring the inimitable Peter Sellers. With Elke Sommer, George Sanders and Herbert Lom. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Seven Samurai* (1954)—Classic Kurosawa film about a village in medieval Japan that hires samurai warriors to defend them against bandits. (DW)

11:20 p.m. (TMC)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See 8:00 p.m.

12:00 a.m. (FXM)— *Carousel* (1956)—See 10:00 a.m.

2:20 a.m. (HBOS)— *The Devil's Advocate* (1997)—See Saturday at 9:00 p.m.

*3:30 a.m. (TCM)— *High and Low* (1962)—Kidnapers take a chauffeur's son, thinking he is the child of the chauffeur's rich employer. The industrialist (played by the great Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune) decides to pay the ransom, though the huge amount jeopardizes an important financial deal. This rarely seen film by Akira Kurosawa shows the great gulf between the classes in Yokohama as the police hunt down the kidnapers. Adapted from the crime novel *King's Ransom* by the American writer Ed McBain (Evan Hunter). Alternate title: *Heaven and Hell*. (MJ)

*4:00 a.m. (FXM)— *The Gang's All Here* (1943)—See 2:00 p.m.



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