

Some interesting films on US television, September 25-October 1

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

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

The Bicycle Thief (1948)—Vittorio de Sica's great film helped usher in the period of neo-realism in Italy. A poster hanger's bicycle—essential to his livelihood—is stolen, and he and his son search the streets of Rome for the thief. It is all set against the background of widespread postwar unemployment. A beautiful and moving film. With Lianella Carell, Lamberto Maggiorani, and Enzo Staiola. (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 25

*5:45 am (TMC)—*The Big Lebowski* (1998)—A lovable, sprawling mess of a film by the Coen brothers about mistaken identity and bowling. Generally hilarious. With Jeff Bridges, John Goodman, and Steve Buscemi. (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)

*11:30 am (Cinemax)—*A Shock to the System* (1990)—A middle-aged advertising executive being kicked off the corporate ladder by younger men discovers how easy it is in our society to literally get away with murder. He then begins—with some glee—to dispose of those who stand in his way. This very dark comedy—reminiscent of Chaplin's classic *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947)—has a marvelously deadpan performance by Michael Caine as the murderous executive. With Elizabeth McGovern, Peter Riegert, and Swoosie Kurtz. Directed by Jan Egleson. (MJ)

1:00 pm (TCM)—*Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938)—Michael Curtiz directed this story of gangsters and slum kids. James Cagney is the gangster who pretends to be a coward on his way to the electric chair to scuttle his reputation with the kids. (DW)

1:00 pm (Bravo)—*Fahrenheit 451* (1966)—François Truffaut's adaptation of the Ray Bradbury dystopian science fiction story about a world in which firemen are sent around to set fire to books, which are banned items. Oskar Werner plays a fireman who rebels; with Julie Christie. (DW)

1:30 pm (HBOS)—*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965)—Cold War melodrama of double- and triple-agents, based on the John Le Carré novel, with Richard Burton as the embittered British agent and Oskar Werner. Directed by Martin Ritt. (DW)

*3:35 pm (Encore)—*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)

*5:00 pm (TCM)—*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)—Nicholas Ray's socially conscious portrait of disaffected youth, with James Dean, Natalie Wood, Sal Mineo. Memorable scene in a planetarium. (DW)

5:30 pm (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)

6:40 pm (TMC)—*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)

8:00 pm (IFC)—*Living in Oblivion* (1995)—Sometimes amusing look 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)

*8:30 pm (TCM)—*Casablanca* (1942)—The Michael Curtiz classic about life and love in wartime Morocco, with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. (DW)

10:00 pm (FXM)—*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)

1:15 am (IFC)—*Living in Oblivion* (1995)—See 8:00 pm.

Sunday, September 26

6:00 am (IFC)—*Living in Oblivion* (1995)—See Saturday, at 8:00 pm.

*10:00 am (TCM)—*White Heat* (1949)—Not-to-be-missed crime drama about criminal with a serious mother complex. James Cagney is unforgettable in Raoul Walsh's film. (DW)

2:05 pm (Showtime)—*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)

3:00 pm (AMC)—*Mississippi Masala* (1992)—Mira Nair's story of cross-cultural romance between Denzel Washington and Indian-born Sarita Choudhury, set in Greenwood, Mississippi. (DW)

*4:00 pm (A&E)—*Excalibur* (1981)—John Boorman directed this lush adaptation of the King Arthur legend at fever pitch. As with all of Boorman's work, it is carefully made and embodies his unique, fantastic vision. Starring Helen Mirren, Nigel Terry, and Nicol Williamson (outstanding as a sardonic, antic Merlin). (MJ)

5:30 pm (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)

6:00 pm (TCM)— *They Were Expendable* (1945)—An extremely well-done film: the story of an American PT boat squadron, directed by John Ford. John Wayne and Robert Montgomery are the squadron's officers, but equally memorable is Donna Reed, as a nurse in love with Wayne's character. (DW)

8:00 pm (Showtime)— *Sirens* (1994)—Beautifully photographed, inscrutable tale of sexuality and mythology in a modern, sylvan setting. With Hugh Grant. (MJ)

9:30 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)

9:45 pm (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)

2:05 am (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)

Monday, September 27

6:00 am (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)

6:00 am (TCM)— *Lady in the Lake* (1946)—Robert Montgomery directed himself as Raymond Chandler's private detective Philip Marlowe. The camera, as a novelty, takes the first-person (Montgomery's) point of view. (DW)

7:45 am (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 am (TCM)— *Tension* (1949)—A gem of a film noir, directed by John Berry, soon to be blacklisted. Pharmacist Richard Basehart plots to kill his wife's lover, only to discover someone has beaten him to it. With Audrey Trotter and Barry Sullivan. (DW)

9:15 am (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)

*10:15 am (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)

11:00 am (Cinemax)— *American Gigolo* (1980)—Paul Schrader wrote and directed this flawed but fascinating study of an upscale male prostitute. Starring Richard Gere. (MJ)

12:30 pm (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—See 6:00 am.

1:30 pm (TCM)— *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941)—Hollywood's version of the George Custer story. Surprisingly sympathetic to the Indians, in fact. Custer is made out to be an opponent of the campaign that led to his death. The last of the Errol Flynn-Olivia de Havilland cycle of films; directed vividly by Raoul Walsh, with a score by Max Steiner. (DW)

Gray's Anatomy (1996)—See 7:45 am. (IFC)—

6:00 pm (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)

6:15 pm (HBO)— *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)

7:00 pm (Sundance)— *Sliding Doors* (1998)—See 6:00 am.

9:30 pm (FXM)— *The Name of the Rose* (1986)—A murder mystery set in a medieval monastery (the MacGuffin 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)

10:15 pm (Encore)— *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997)—Mike Myers plays a double role in this consistently amusing sendup of James Bond movies and the manners and styles of the 1970s. (MJ)

2:00 am (TCM)— *Private Lives* (1931)—Sidney Franklin directed this version of Noel Coward's play, with Norma Shearer and Robert Montgomery. Hollywood's attempt at Anglicized gentility. (DW)

2:00 am (Bravo)— *A Face in the Crowd* (1957)—Andy Griffith, in his film debut, as country boy made into a huge television star. With Lee Remick, also in her debut. Directed by Elia Kazan, script by Budd Schulberg (same team as *On the Waterfront*). (DW)

Tuesday, September 28

*6:00 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)

7:15 am (Sundance)— *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994)—Louis Malle directed this film, his last, about a group of actors rehearsing an adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Andre Gregory is the director; writer Wallace Shawn plays the lead character. (DW)

8:00 am (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 Havilland and George Brent. (DW)

*9:45 am (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 am.) (DW)

10:35 am (Encore)— *The Hustler* (1961)—See Sunday, at 9:30 pm.

*11:30 am (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)

*12:00 pm (TCM)— *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950)—One of the best jewel heist films, and one of director John Huston's best. With Sterling Hayden and Louis Calhern (who has the best line: "Crime is nothing but a left-handed form of endeavor"). (MJ)

12:30 pm (Bravo)— *A Face in the Crowd* (1957)—See Monday, at 2:00 am.

2:30 pm (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)

4:00 pm (TCM)—*High Society* (1956)—Glossy musical version of *The Philadelphia Story* has music and lyrics by the great Cole Porter. Starring Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Grace Kelly, and Louis Armstrong. Directed by Charles Walters. (MJ)

5:30 pm (Sundance)—*Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994)—See 7:15 am.

6:00 pm (FXM)—*Heaven Can Wait* (1943)—Don Ameche stars as a dead man seeking entry to hell, who recounts in flashback what he thinks has been a life full of sin. With Gene Tierney and Charles Coburn. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. (DW)

6:00 pm (HBOP)—*Ulee's Gold* (1997)—Peter Fonda gives a strong, sensitive performance as a Florida beekeeper who struggles to keep his troubled family from spinning apart. The film is weakened by a neat, uplifting ending. Directed by Victor Nunez. (MJ)

7:00 pm (HBO)—*Gattaca* (1997)—See Sunday, at 5:30 pm.

8:00 pm (TMC)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday, at 6:40 pm.

8:00 pm (FXM)—*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)

*9:00 pm (TMC)—*The Big Lebowski* (1998)—See Saturday, at 5:45 am.

*9:00 pm (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)

10:00 pm (Bravo)—*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)

10:30 pm (TNT)—*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)

12:35 am (TNT)—*The French Connection* (1971)—Gene Hackman is fine as a New York City policeman chasing drug traffickers. William Friedkin directed the proceedings at a breakneck pace. His subsequent work shows that this film was overrated at the time. With Roy Scheider, Tony LoBianco. (DW)

2:30 am (Bravo)—*The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)—See 10:00 pm.

4:00 am (AMC)—*Captain Horatio Hornblower* (1951)—Raoul Walsh directed this sea epic set in the Napoleonic wars, based on the C.S. Forester novels, in his vivid, muscular style. Some remarkable sequences. The normally dull Gregory Peck is well-cast as Hornblower. (DW)

Wednesday, September 29

6:00 am (AMC)—*America, America* (1963)—Elia Kazan's account of the immigrant experience, based on his uncle's emigration in the late 19th century. (DW)

*7:00 am (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)

8:00 am (FXM)—*Heaven Can Wait* (1943)—See Tuesday, at 6:00 pm.

11:00 am (TNT)—*High Plains Drifter* (1973)—See Tuesday, at 10:30 pm.

12:30 pm (Bravo)—*The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* (1989)—See Tuesday, at 10:00 pm.

2:00 pm (FXM)—*At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Monday, at 9:15 am.

6:00 pm (HBO)—*Saturday Night Fever* (1977)—See Sunday, at 2:05 pm.

6:00 am (FXM)—*At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Monday, at 9:15 am.

1:45 am (TCM)—*Humoresque* (1946)—A remarkable performance by John Garfield, as a classical violinist from the slums, who falls for a wealthy society lady. With Joan Crawford, Oscar Levant. Directed by Jean Negulesco. (DW)

4:00 am (FXM)—*At Long Last Love* (1975)—See 2:00 pm.

*4:00 am (TCM)—*The Big Sleep* (1945)—Howard Hawks' 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)

Thursday, September 30

*6:00 am (HBOS)—*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)

*6:15 am (AMC)—*Pete Kelly's Blues* (1955)—Underrated film about a jazz band in the 1920s and its fight against being taken over by the mob, as told by the trumpet player (Jack Webb, who also directed). Excellent jazz score. Director Webb made good use of the wide screen, so the film is best seen in letterbox format. With Peggy Lee (who won an Academy Award). (MJ)

*7:30 am (HBOS)—*North by Northwest* (1959)—See Monday, at 10:15 am.

*8:00 am (Cinemax)—*A Shock to the System* (1990)—See Saturday, at 11:30 am.

4:00 pm (FXM)—*Unfaithfully Yours* (1948)—Not Preston Sturges at his best, but still amusing. Rex Harrison is a symphony conductor convinced of his wife's (Linda Darnell's) infidelity. (DW)

4:30 pm (HBOS)—*Ulee's Gold* (1997)—See Tuesday, at 6:00 pm.

*6:30 pm (HBOS)—*The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985)—See 6:00 am.

8:00 pm (Showtime)—*Sirens* (1994)—See Sunday, at 8:00 pm.

8:00 pm (AMC)—*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 pm (HBOS)—*North by Northwest* (1959)—See Monday, at 10:15 am.

2:00 am (TCM)—*Glory Alley* (1952)—Fine character actor Ralph Meeker is a boxer who quits just prior to the big fight. Flashbacks explain his story. Directed by Hollywood veteran Raoul Walsh, with Leslie Caron, Gilbert Roland and an appearance by Louis Armstrong. (DW)

2:00 am (AMC)—*How Green Was My Valley* (1941)—See 8:00 pm.

Friday, October 1

6:00 am (FXM)—*Unfaithfully Yours* (1948)—See Thursday, at 4:00 pm.

6:30 am (Showtime)—*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)

*11:30 am (Cinemax)—*The Inner Circle* (1991)—A meek movie projectionist (Tom Hulce) finds himself suddenly a favorite of Stalin's. A harrowing picture of life during the purges. With Lolita Davidovich and Bob Hoskins. Directed by Andrei Konchalovsky. (MJ)

4:00 pm (HBOS)—*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)

4:00 pm (Bravo)—*Things Change* (1988)—A poor Italian-American

shoemaker willingly takes the rap for a mobster. David Mamet wrote and directed this disappointing, poorly resolved film that is distinguished by a remarkable performance by the elderly Don Ameche. With Joe Mantegna. (MJ)

6:00 pm (Showtime)— *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979)—See 6:30 am.

10:10 pm (Encore)— *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)

10:30 pm (HBOS)— *John Grisham's the Rainmaker* (1997)—See Saturday, at 5:30 pm.

12:00 am (TCM)— *Nothing Sacred* (1937)—Fredric March is a cynical reporter who sets out to make headlines with the story of a Vermont girl (Carole Lombard) supposedly dying from radium poisoning. Ben Hecht wrote the script and William Wellman directed. (DW)



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