

Some interesting films on US television, October 23-29

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW)
23 October 1999

Video Pick of the Week - Find It in Your Video Store:

Horatio Hornblower (1999)—This series—based on the novels of C.S. Forester—first appeared on British TV and then on A&E on US cable TV. A set of four videotapes, it follows the career of young Horatio Hornblower from midshipman in the royal navy to commissioned lieutenant, in the context of the French Revolution and the subsequent war between France and England. The series is distinguished by superior acting (especially by Ioan Gruffudd as Hornblower and Robert Lindsay as Captain Pellew) and scrupulous attention to historical detail. It has some of the best battles at sea ever put on film. The episode "The Wrong War" is particularly good at showing the class issues at stake in the French Revolution. (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, October 23

6:00 am (TCM)—*Arsene Lupin* (1932)—Jack Conway directed this trifle about detectives and jewel thieves in Paris. The first film pairing of John and Lionel Barrymore; with Karen Morley. (DW)

*6:00 am (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)

7:45 am (Encore)—*American Graffiti* (1973)—A film that probably had a negative effect on the course of American film-making, this is director George Lucas' entertaining fantasy about teenage life in California in the 1950s. With Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard, Paul LeMat, Cindy Williams, Candy Clark. (DW)

*8:00 am (IFC)—*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)

9:15 am (HBOS)—*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)

*10:00 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)

10:30 am (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)

*12:30 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)

1:00 pm (Cinemax)—*Diner* (1982)—Barry Levinson wrote and directed this sympathetic account of a group of young men who hang out in a diner in 1950s Baltimore. With Steve Guttenberg, Daniel Stern, Mickey Rourke, Kevin Bacon, Timothy Daly, Ellen Barkin. (DW)

*2:30 pm (IFC)—*The Dead* (1987)—See 8:00 am.

6:00 pm (Encore)—*American Graffiti* (1973)—See 7:45 am.

6:05 pm (AMC)—*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)

*7:00 pm (HBOF)—*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)

9:00 pm (HBOP)—*John Grisham's the Rainmaker* (1997)—See 10:30 am.

11:00 PM (TCM)—*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)

12:00 am (AMC)—*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955)—See 6:05 pm.

*12:30 am (Showtime)—*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)

1:00 AM (TCM)—*Moby Dick* (1956)—John Huston's not entirely successful adaptation of Herman Melville's classic novel. Gregory Peck is an unexciting Captain Ahab; Richard Basehart is Ishmael. Huston and Ray Bradbury wrote the screenplay. (DW)

2:20 am (Encore)—*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)

Sunday, October 24

5:00 am (TCM)—*Louise Brooks: Looking for Lulu* (1998)—Aron profile "gash drama" with Kirk Douglas, Edward G. Robinson, Cyd Charisse, George Hamilton. (DW)

*12:00 pm (Bravo)—*A Passage to India* (1984)—See Sunday, at 9:00 pm.

6:00 am (AMC)—*The Long Voyage Home* (1940)—Sentimental, murky, but enormously moving account of sailors at sea, adapted by screenwriter Dudley Nichols from four short plays by Eugene O'Neill. John Ford was the director, Gregg Toland (who shot *Citizen Kane* the following year) the cinematographer. (DW)

7:15 am (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)

*11:30 am (TCM)—*Paths of Glory* (1957)—Stanley Kubrick's fine film about military insanity. In World War I, when a suicidal advance that he ordered has failed, a French officer selects three of his men to be tried and shot for cowardice. With Kirk Douglas, Ralph Meeker and Adolphe Menjou. (DW)

1:00 pm (TCM)—*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)

5:30 pm (Showtime)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See 7:15 am.

5:40 pm (TMC)—*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 pm (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)

8:00 pm (Encore)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See 7:15 am.

*9:00 pm (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 percent 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)

10:20 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)

*11:45 pm (HBOS)—*Taxi Driver* (1976)—Paul Schrader wrote and Martin Scorsese directed this bleak, obsessive classic that looks at the underside of New York City. Starring Robert De Niro, Jody Foster, and Harvey Keitel. Great score by Bernard Hermann. (MJ)

Monday, October 25

10:00 am (HBOP)—*The Great Gatsby* (1974)—A pallid, but occasionally interesting film, based on the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel about the "careless" rich and their gangster friend, on Long Island in the 1920s. Robert Redford is too placid as Jay Gatsby, Mia Farrow too jittery as Daisy Buchanan. (DW)

11:00 am (AMC)—*Little Fugitive* (1953)—Odd independent film, directed by Morris Engel, about a young boy who thinks he's killed his brother and gets lost in Coney Island. Interesting shots of 1950s New York City. (DW)

*12:00 pm (TCM)—*Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962)—Vincenzo Minnelli's adaptation of Irwin Shaw's novel about the making of a film in

12:30 pm (AMC)—*The Court Jester* (1956)—Classic Danny Kaye farce of confused identities in the Middle Ages. Lots of witty verbal humor. Directed by Melvin Frank and Norman Panama. (MJ)

*5:35 pm (TMC)—*Five Easy Pieces* (1970)—Early Jack Nicholson film that helped define his sardonic screen persona. He plays a concert pianist from a wealthy family who opts to work on an oil rig. Watch for the memorable scene in the diner between Nicholson's character and a waitress. Directed by the underappreciated Bob Rafelson. With Karen Black, Billy "Green" Bush, and Susan Anspach. (MJ)

8:00 pm (Bravo)—*House of Games* (1987)—Disappointing film about the world of con artists. David Mamet wrote and directed, and (as usual) his characters talk in a peculiar, stilted way. Much promise, but short on delivery. With Lindsay Crouse and Joe Mantegna. (MJ)

*8:30 pm (AMC)—*Laura* (1944)—A murder mystery about a woman believed to be dead who suddenly makes an appearance. Otto Preminger directed an extraordinary cast, including Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, Vincent Price and Clifton Webb. (DW)

11:00 pm (Bravo)—*House of Games* (1987)—See 8:00 pm.

11:00 pm (TCM)—*Mark of the Vampire* (1935)—One of Tod Browning's remarkable and obsessive horror films. A vampire terrorizes a small village. With Bela Lugosi, Lionel Barrymore and Lionel Atwill. (DW)

12:30 am (Showtime)—*Sirens* (1994)—Beautifully photographed, inscrutable tale of sexuality and mythology in a modern, sylvan setting. With Hugh Grant. (MJ)

*2:45 am (AMC)—*Laura* (1944)—See 8:30 pm.

1:30 am (Encore)—*All That Jazz* (1979)—Choreographer/director Bob Fosse's overwrought autobiographical film about his mental and physical crackup. Not strictly speaking a musical, but it is filled with musical numbers—including a bizarre one occurring during the main character's open-heart surgery. With Roy Scheider and Ben Vereen. (MJ)

4:30 am (Encore)—*At Long Last Love* (1975)—Burt Reynolds and Sybil 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)

Tuesday, October 26

7:30 am (AMC)—*Rain* (1932)—W. Somerset Maugham story about the South Sea island tramp (Joan Crawford) and the preacher (Walter Huston) who, at first, is determined to save her soul. This film has been made numerous times. Lewis Milestone directed this version. (DW)

7:55 am (TMC)—*Saturday Night Fever* (1977)—See Saturday, at 9:15 am.

11:00 am (Showtime)—*Detective Story* (1951)—William Wyler's somewhat dated film about the activities inside a New York City police station. Kirk Douglas is a bitter cop, Eleanor Parker his wife, William Bendix another detective. The good cast also includes Horace McMahon, Lee Grant and Joseph Wiseman. (DW)

11:30 am (HBO)—*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)

1:45 pm (TMC)—*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)

4:00 pm (Encore)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Monday, at 4:30 am.

4:00 pm (Bravo)— *House of Games* (1987)—See Monday, at 8:00 pm.

*4:00 pm (IFC)— *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972)—Described by one critic as famous Spanish director Luis Bunuel's "most completely achieved fusion of satire, comedy, fantasy and (controlled) emotion." (DW)

*8:00 pm (TCM)— *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)

*9:45 pm (IFC)— *Blue Collar* (1978)—Paul Schrader (screenwriter of *Taxi Driver*, among other films) wrote and directed this work about corruption in an auto union in Detroit. Richard Pryor and Harvey Keitel costarred. (DW)

10:15 pm (TCM)— *Cat People* (1942)—The first of the Val Lewton-produced horror films, directed with considerable elegance by Jacques Tourneur. Extraordinary moments of psychological terror. (DW)

11:30 pm (TCM)— *The Leopard Man* (1943)—Val Lewton-Jacques Tourneur thriller about a series of murders in a border town blamed on a leopard. (DW)

*2:45 am (IFC)— *Blue Collar* (1978)—See 9:45 pm.

3:15 am (TCM)— *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944)—Not a horror film at all, this is the story of a lonely girl who conjures up a vision of her father's mysterious first wife (Simone Simon from *Cat People*). Val Lewton produced, Robert Wise made his directorial debut. (DW)

Wednesday, October 27

*7:45 am (IFC)— *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972)—See Tuesday, at 4:00 pm.

11:00 am (HBOS)— *Saturday Night Fever* (1977)—See Saturday, at 9:15 am.

5:30 pm (AMC)— *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1957)—James Stewart, a little long in the tooth, plays Charles Lindbergh in this mediocre Billy Wilder film about the first trans-Atlantic flight in 1927. (DW)

8:00 pm (TCM)— *The Thing* (1951)—Remarkable, tense science fiction film about an Arctic outpost threatened by a creature that inadvertently gets thawed. Christian Nyby is the nominal director, but the Howard Hawks touch is unmistakable. With Kenneth Tobey, Dewey Martin and James Arness, as the creature. (DW)

9:00 pm (HBOS)— *Rosemary's Baby* (1968)—John Cassavetes is excellent as an 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)

*9:30 pm (HBOF)— *Last Action Hero* (1993)—See Saturday, at 7:00 pm.

*12:30 am (TCM)— *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 "pod people" who look like them but act mindlessly as members of a communal hive. With Kevin McCarthy and Dana Wynter. (MJ)

3:00 am (HBOS)— *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)

Thursday, October 28

*6:30 am (Cinemax)— *The Big Heat* (1953)—Fritz Lang film about a policeman (Glenn Ford) who sets out to break up a crime ring and pays a heavy price. Lee Marvin is chilling as a tough guy, Gloria Grahame is excellent as a mob girl who turns good. (DW)

*7:00 am (HBOS)— *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)

*9:45 am (HBOS)— *Miller's Crossing* (1990)—The Coen Brothers do their version of the *Red Harvest* (Dashiell Hammett) story: gangsters wage a civil war for control of a city. Overblown and self-conscious, but it holds one's attention. With Gabriel Byrne and Albert Finney. (DW)

1:45 pm (HBOP)— *John Grisham's the Rainmaker* (1997)—See Saturday, at 10:30 am.

*8:00 pm (TCM)— *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)—Robert Mitchum is a sinister religious fanatic in pursuit of a couple of children and the money their father stole, in the only film Charles Laughton ever directed. James Agee wrote the screenplay, from a novel by David Grubb. With Lillian Gish, Shelley Winters. (DW)

8:00 pm (Encore)— *American Graffiti* (1973)—See Saturday, at 7:45 am.

*10:00 pm (TCM)— *M* (1931)—Fritz Lang's gripping expressionist film about a German child murderer pursued not only by the police but by the underworld. With Peter Lorre. (MJ)

11:40 pm (Encore)— *Alien* (1979)—See Sunday, at 10:20 pm.

2:00 am (Bravo)— *Breaker Morant* (1979)—Australian film, directed by Bruce Beresford, about three soldiers in Boer War court-martialed for murdering prisoners. With Edward Woodward and Bryan Brown. (DW)

*3:00 am (HBOS)— *Taxi Driver* (1976)—See Sunday, at 11:45 pm.

Friday, October 29

6:00 am (TCM)— *Queen Christina* (1933)—Greta Garbo is memorable as the 17th century Swedish queen who gave up her throne for love. John Gilbert, one of her real-life amours, plays her aristocratic lover. Rouben Mamoulian directed. (DW)

6:45 am (Showtime)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Sunday, at 7:15 am.

8:00 am (TCM)— *The Merry Widow* (1934)—Ernst Lubitsch directed this version of the Franz Lehár operetta. Described by one critic as "the last musical of a certain spirit and style to be made on this planet." (DW)

10:00 am (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)

12:30 pm (Bravo)— *Breaker Morant* (1979)—See Thursday, at 2:00 am.

*1:00 pm (HBOP)— *Miller's Crossing* (1990)—See Thursday, at 9:45 am.

*1:45 pm (IFC)— *I Shot Jesse James* (1949)—Samuel Fuller's remarkable film—done mostly in close-ups—about the shooting of Jesse James by Robert Ford, "that dirty little coward." With Reed Hadley and John Ireland. (MJ)

*2:00 pm (FXM)— *All About Eve* (1950)—Joseph Mankiewicz wrote and directed this classic about backstabbing in the world of the theater. The dialogue is nonstop witty and incisive. Memorable performances by George Sanders and Bette Davis. (MJ)

3:00 pm (HBOP)— *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)

5:30 pm (Showtime)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Sunday, at 7:15 am.

11:00 pm (HBOP)— *Tin Men* (1987)—See 3:00 pm.

1:15 am (Showtime)— *Sirens* (1994)—See Monday, at 12:30 am.

1:30 am (Cinemax)— *Year of the Dragon* (1985)—Michael Cimino directed this violent, wildly uneven film about a New York cop, a Vietnam veteran, going up against the Chinese mafia. It contains both convincing and unconvincing elements. Mickey Rourke, John Lone, Ariane. Oliver Stone wrote the script. (DW)

*4:00 am (FXM)— *All About Eve* (1950)—See 2:00 pm.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact