

Some interesting films on US television, December 4-10

Marty Jonas (MJ), David Walsh (DW)
4 December 1999

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

Lady with a Dog (1959)—Josif Heifits's film about the joy and bleakness of an adulterous affair is a model of adaptation. Taken from Anton Chekhov's great short story, and photographed beautifully in black-and-white, it translates perfectly the style, settings, and mood of the original. Like the short story, the film is a marvel of succinctness. (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, December 4

8:00 a.m. (HBOS)—*The Last Hurrah* (1958)—John Ford adapted this film about US big-city machine politics from the novel by Edwin O'Connor, which was based on the career of Boston's rogue mayor, James Curley. The great Spencer Tracy is perfect in the lead role, as Mayor Frank Skeffington. (MJ)

11:00 a.m. (TCM)—*3:10 to Yuma* (1957)—A modest, yet suspenseful western with Glenn Ford as an outlaw and Van Heflin as the farmer, in need of money, who agrees to watch him until the train arrives. Directed by Delmer Daves. (DW)

12:00 p.m. (FX)—*The Fly* (1986)—David Cronenberg's film about a scientist (Jeff Goldblum) who experiments on himself and evolves into a human fly. Cronenberg apparently saw his character's condition as a metaphor for AIDS. Geena Davis is the woman who stands by him. As usual, Cronenberg gets caught up in the machinery of his conceits and loses track of his theme. (DW)

12:30 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)

1:30 p.m. (HBOS)—*A Star Is Born* (1954)—Judy Garland is the star on the way up and James Mason the unfortunate drunk on the way down, in George Cukor's version of the tragic tale. A remake of the 1937 film by William Wellman, with Fredric March and Janet Gaynor. (DW)

1:40 p.m. (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)

3:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Brigadoon* (1954)—Vincente Minnelli's rendition of the Lerner and Loewe musical about two hikers (Gene Kelly and Van Johnson) in Scotland who happen upon a village that comes to life every 300 years. Colorful and charming, but suffers badly from being shot on an obvious Hollywood soundstage. Also starring Cyd Charisse. (MJ)

4:00 p.m. (TMC)—*Modern Romance* (1981)—Occasionally amusing film, directed by and starring Albert Brooks as a neurotic film editor obsessed with Kathryn Harrold. (DW)

8:30 p.m. (TCM)—*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)

*12:40 a.m. (Encore)—*Deconstructing Harry* (1997)—Woody Allen's film is mean-spirited, misanthropic, bitter, cynical, crude and foul-mouthed, but it is deliberately provocative, often funny, and one of his best films of recent years. A writer (Allen) confronts the friends and family members that he has cruelly featured in his novels, as well as their fictional representations. Also, Allen and his character confront their horror at growing old. Compare this film with the one preceding it, the light-hearted romantic musical *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996), which this film seems to rebut. (MJ)

3:00 a.m. (Sci-Fi)—*The Andromeda Strain* (1971)—One of the first techno-thrillers, by veteran director Robert Wise, about an extraterrestrial virus that could wipe out humankind. (MJ)

Sunday, December 5

6:00 a.m. (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)

2:00 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. (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)

6:00 p.m. (FXM)—*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)

*6:00 p.m. (Showtime)—*The Conversation* (1974)—A security specialist involved in bugging and other surveillance begins to have qualms about his profession. Francis Copolla's detailed, disturbing look at the milieu and practices of the security business is one of his best films. Starring Gene Hackman and the late John Cazale. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (AMC)—*Rio Bravo* (1959)—Classic Howard Hawks western, with John Wayne as a sheriff, Angie Dickinson as a dance-hall girl, Dean Martin as a drunk and singer Ricky Nelson joining forces to thwart a jail-break and other crimes. Much first-rate dialogue by Leigh Brackett and Jules Furthman. (DW)

9:00 p.m. (Bravo)—*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)

2:00 a.m. (TNT)—*Oliver!* (1968)—Excellent, spirited film version of the

musical based on Dickens's *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)

2:00 a.m. (Bravo)—*Love and Anarchy* (1973)—See 2:00 p.m.

*2:30 a.m. (AMC)—*Rio Bravo* (1959)—See 8:00 p.m.

Monday, December 6

*6:00 a.m. (AMC)—*Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928)—One of Buster Keaton's later silent films, not directed by him (Charles F. Riesner). Buster must prove his toughness to his father, a steamboat captain. Anything with Keaton is essential viewing. (DW)

7:30 a.m. (TCM)—*Journey into Fear* (1942)—A traveling engineer unwittingly 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)

8:00 a.m. (FXM)—*Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Sunday at 6:00 p.m.

10:15 a.m. (Encore)—*Written on the Wind* (1956)—One of Douglas Sirk's extraordinary films about 1950s America and its discontents. Robert Stack is a drunken heir to an oil fortune, Dorothy Malone his restless sister. They destroy themselves and others without ever understanding why. Not to be missed. (DW)

10:30 a.m. (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)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)—*La Strada* (1954)—Federico Fellini directed this work about a brutal carnival strongman (Anthony Quinn), his long-suffering girlfriend (Giulettta Masina) and a kindhearted acrobat (Richard Basehart). (DW)

2:05 p.m. (Encore)—*Romeo and Juliet* (1968)—Franco Zeffirelli's lush version of the famous love tragedy. Overwrought and simplified, but entertaining. With 17-year-old Leonard Whiting and 15-year-old Olivia Hussey in the leading roles. (DW)

4:00 p.m. (Bravo)—*Ishtar* (1987)—See Sunday at 9:00 p.m.

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Modern Times* (1936)—Chaplin on the machine age. Consistently funny and perceptive, with Paulette Goddard. Chaplin's last silent film. (DW)

*8:00 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)

*8:30 p.m. (AMC)—*Sunset Boulevard* (1950)—Billy Wilder's classic about illusions hanging on, and the old Hollywood versus the new. A once-glamorous star of the silent screen living in a gothic Hollywood mansion takes a younger, cynical screenwriter as a lover. One of the great films. With Gloria Swanson, William Holden, Eric von Stroheim and Buster Keaton. (MJ)

*9:30 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)

2:00 a.m. (Bravo)—*La Strada* (1954)—See 12:30 p.m.

*3:30 a.m. (AMC)—*Sunset Boulevard* (1950)—See 8:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 7

6:40 a.m. (HBOS)—*The Last Hurrah* (1958)—See Saturday at 8:00 a.m.

9:00 a.m. (TCM)—*Tarzan, the Ape Man* (1932)—The original Tarzan, with Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan (Mia Farrow's mother).

Directed by 'One-take' W. S. Van Dyke. (DW)

*10:00 a.m. (HBOP)—*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 send-ups of Olivier's *Hamlet* and Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. Directed by John McTiernan. (MJ)

11:00 a.m. (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)

11:40 a.m. (Encore)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 1:40 p.m.

12:00 p.m. (FX)—*Dead Ringers* (1988)—David Cronenberg's remarkable film about twin gynecologists, played by Jeremy Irons, and their descent into madness. With Genevieve Bujold as an actress who comes between them. (DW)

3:45 p.m. (AMC)—*Brute Force* (1947)—Jules Dassin's prison drama with Burt Lancaster, Charles Bickford, Yvonne DeCarlo and Hume Cronyn as brutal prison official. Scripted by Richard Brooks. (DW)

*4:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Show Boat* (1936)—Paul Robeson is unforgettable singing "Old Man River" in James Whale's version of the Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein II musical about riverboat entertainers. Helen Morgan is also memorable singing "Bill." With Irene Dunne, Allan Jones. (DW)

9:45 p.m. (Encore)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 1:40 p.m.

10:00 p.m. (FXM)—*Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Sunday at 6:00 p.m.

10:45 p.m. (IFC)—*Crumb* (1994)—Remarkable portrait of family of cartoonist Robert Crumb. His two dysfunctional brothers prove to be considerably more interesting than he. Directed by Terry Zwigoff. (DW)

11:00 p.m. (TNT)—*The Dirty Dozen* (1967)—Twelve convicts, serving life sentences, are recruited for a suicidal commando raid in Robert Aldrich's film. (DW)

2:30 a.m. (USA)—*Starman* (1984)—Basically the same story as Spielberg's *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982)—an alien creature tries to return to his home in another galaxy—but far superior to that children's film. Jeff Bridges, in another fine performance, plays the alien, who takes on the appearance of a woman's dead husband. During a long trip by car to find his spaceship, she (Karen Allen) falls in love with him. Sensitive and moving, this is probably John Carpenter's best film, many notches above his usual pulp output. (MJ)

4:00 a.m. (IFC)—*Crumb* (1994)—See 10:45 p.m.

Wednesday, December 8

9:15 a.m. (HBOS)—*A Star Is Born* (1954)—See Saturday at 1:30 p.m.

*10:45 a.m. (TCM)—*Detour* (1945)—Edgar G. Ulmer, German expatriate and legendary denizen of Hollywood's Poverty Row, directed this remarkable low-budget work. Tom Neal is a drifter who becomes tragically involved with Ann Savage—and Fate—while hitch-hiking from one coast to the other. Not to be missed. (DW)

*11:45 a.m. (HBOS)—*Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976)—A young man (based on the director, Paul Mazursky) moves from Brooklyn to Greenwich village to pursue a career as an actor. He falls in with an assortment of colorful characters. This fond reminiscence of Greenwich Village in the 1950s is unfortunately marred by a stereotyped, overdone Jewish-mother performance by Shelley Winters. With Lenny Baker, Christopher Walken and Ellen Greene. Watch for a brief, performance by then-newcomer Jeff Goldblum, who steals the scene he's in. (MJ)

*12:25 p.m. (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)

*1:30 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)

2:00 p.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)

*3:15 p.m. (AMC)—*Flying Down to Rio* (1934)—Early Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers film with wonderful dance sequences. The one with the chorus girls dancing on the wings of flying planes is amazing. Directed by Thomas Freeland. (MJ)

5:30 p.m. (HBOS)—*A Star Is Born* (1954)—See Saturday at 1:30 p.m.

*9:00 p.m. (HBOS)—*Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976)—See 11:45 a.m.

9:45 p.m. (TCM)—*From Here to Eternity* (1953)—Fred Zinnemann directed this generally overrated work, based on the James Jones novel, about life on an army post in Hawaii on the eve of Pearl Harbor. With Burt Lancaster, Montgomery Clift, Deborah Kerr, Donna Reed, Frank Sinatra. (DW)

*2:30 a.m. (TNT)—*The Birds* (1963)—See 12:25 p.m.

4:00 a.m. (FXM)—*Carousel* (1956)—see 2:00 p.m.

Thursday, December 9

11:00 a.m. (Showtime)—*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)

2:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Kid Galahad* (1937)—Classic hard-boiled, non-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)

*3:15 p.m. (IFC)—*Indochine* (1992)—A fine film that sets its overwrought love story in the context of the developing revolution in Indochina. It spans the period from the birth of the Indochinese Communist Party to the defeat of the brutal French colonialists and the division of Vietnam at the 1954 Geneva Conference. Catherine Deneuve gives a remarkable performance as the owner of a rubber plantation. With Vincent Perez. Directed by Regis Wargnier. (MJ)

4:30 p.m. (Showtime)—*Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Sunday at 6:00 p.m.

*10:00 p.m. (AMC)—*The Big Carnival* (1951)—Billy Wilder's highly bitter film about a down-on-his-luck reporter who exploits a man trapped in a deep cave for the sake of a big story. Fifty years later, with the media even more ravenous and cynical, the film is still timely. Kirk Douglas is outstanding in the kind of snarling role he perfected. With Jan Sterling. Also known as *Ace in the Hole*. (MJ)

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)

*10:30 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)

12:05 a.m. (Starz)—*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)

Friday, December 10

*7:45 a.m. (IFC)—*Indochine* (1992)—See Thursday at 3:15 p.m.

11:45 a.m. (AMC)—*I Walked with a Zombie* (1943)—One of the Val Lewton-Jacques Tourneur collaborations, a stylish horror film about a

nurse who turns to voodoo to cure a patient. Francis Dee and Tom Conway co-starred. (DW)

12:30 p.m. (Bravo)—*Love and Anarchy* (1973)—See Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

*1:00 p.m. (IFC)—*Indochine* (1992)—See Thursday at 3:15 p.m.

*6:30 p.m. (HBOP)—*Last Action Hero* (1993)—See Tuesday at 10:00 a.m.

*7:00 p.m. (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 p.m. (IFC)—*Heavenly Creatures* (1994)—Odd, compelling film, based on fact and set in 1950s New Zealand. Two inseparable teen-age girls kill the mother of one to prevent their being parted. Directed by Peter Jackson. With Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Badlands* (1973)—Terrence Malick's strangely idyllic recounting of a killing spree in the 1950s Midwest. Martin Sheen plays the main character, based on killer Charles Starkweather, and Sissy Spacek plays his teenaged girlfriend, who narrates the film with naive, romantic passages from her diary. Beautifully photographed. (MJ)

8:00 p.m. (FXM)—*The Sun Also Rises* (1957)—Star-filled adaptation of the Hemingway novel. Glossy and inadequate. Directed by Henry King. (MJ)

11:30 p.m. (IFC)—*Blue Velvet* (1986)—This is the quirky film that launched director David Lynch's career. It was then a short jump to his influential, idiosyncratic TV series “Twin Peaks.” And then he flickered out like a shooting star. With Dennis Hopper. (MJ)

11:30 p.m. (TCM)—*In Cold Blood* (1967)—Good adaptation by Richard Brooks of Truman Capote's “non-fiction novel” about two men (Robert Blake and Scott Wilson) who kill an entire family in the course of a burglary. Filmed in stark black-and-white documentary style on location in Kansas. (MJ)

*1:30 a.m. (IFC)—*Heavenly Creatures* (1994)—See 8:00 p.m.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact