

# Some interesting films on US television, December 18-24

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

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

*Underworld U.S.A.* (1961)—A petty thief (Cliff Robertson), obsessed with getting revenge on the mobsters who murdered his father, collaborates with a D.A.'s investigating committee. Director Samuel Fuller makes stunning use of close-ups and expressionist cinematography. Robert Emhardt (usually in a bathrobe by the swimming pool like a Roman emperor) is particularly effective as the syndicate head. (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 18

6:30 a.m. (AMC)—*The Thief of Bagdad* (1940)—Thoroughly enchanting version of the tale of magic and heroism based on *The Arabian Nights*. Dazzling Technicolor, superb Miklos Rosza score. With Sabu, Conrad Veidt and Rex Ingram (as the genie). Directed by Ludwig Berger, Tim Whelan and Michael Powell. One of the fine films produced by Alexander Korda. (MJ)

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

9:00 a.m. (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)

\*10:00 a.m. (TBS)—*Coogan's Bluff* (1968)—A good action film, directed by veteran Don Siegel, concerning an Arizona lawman (Clint Eastwood) who comes to New York City to pick up a prisoner (Don Stroud); complications ensue. (DW)

3:00 p.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)

5:45 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)

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)

8:05 p.m. (TBS)—*Lone Star* (1996)—John Sayles wrote and directed this well-done, politically astute film about the ethnic divisions in Texas. Unfortunately, it suffers from a contrived, hard-to-believe ending. With Chris Cooper and Elizabeth Pena. (MJ)

*Crumb* (1999)—Remarkable portrait of cartoonist Robert Crumb. His two dysfunctional brothers prove to be considerably more interesting than he. Directed by Terry Zwigoff. (DW)

10:30 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)

1:15 a.m. (TBS)—*Lone Star* (1996)—See 8:05 p.m.

1:20 a.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)

3:15 a.m. (TCM)—*Jezebel* (1938)—Bette Davis again, as an antebellum Southern belle causing trouble with her willful behavior. Also Henry Fonda. Directed by William Wyler. (DW)

3:15 a.m. (IFC)—*Crumb* (1994)—See 9:45 p.m.

4:20 a.m. (TBS)—*The Dirty Dozen* (1967)—Twelve convicts, serving life sentences, are recruited for a suicidal commando raid in Robert Aldrich's film. (DW)

## Sunday, December 19

6:45 a.m. (HBOS)—*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)

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

8:45 a.m. (Encore)—*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)

\*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)

5:00 p.m. (Bravo)—*Ishtar* (1987)—See Saturday at 10:30 p.m.

6:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Mildred Pierce* (1945)—Powerful melodrama, directed by Michael Curtiz, about a woman (Joan Crawford) who goes from rags to riches and her ungrateful daughter. Based on the novel by James M. Cain. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (Encore)—*American Graffiti* (1973)—See 8:45 a.m.

11:45 p.m. (Encore)—*The Warriors* (1979)—Walter Hill's bizarre and exciting retelling of Xenophon's ancient Greek classic *The March Up-Country*. Set in nighttime New York City, the film shows members of a

juvenile gang fighting their way back to the Bronx. (MJ)

3:50 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)

4:00 a.m. (Bravo)— *Black Orpheus* (1958)—Much was made of this French-Brazilian film at the time, a version of the Orpheus-Euridice story, set in Rio during carnival. Romance between a street-car conductor and a country girl. Directed by Marcel Camus. (DW)

#### **Monday, December 20**

5:25 a.m. (Encore)— *Mickey One* (1965)—Arthur Penn's interesting film about a nightclub comic (Warren Beatty) in trouble with the mob. An American attempt at a French New Wave film. (DW)

\*6:00 a.m. (HBOS)— *Casablanca* (1942)—The Michael Curtiz classic about life and love in wartime Morocco, with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. (DW)

\*6:00 a.m. (IFC)— *Indochine* (1992)—See Sunday at 3:15 p.m.

\*6:30 a.m. (AMC)— *Sherlock Jr.* (1924)—A work of genius, made by Buster Keaton. A projectionist walks into a movie screen and becomes part of the action. Not to be missed. (DW)

10:00 a.m. (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)

\*11:15 a.m. (Showtime)— *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986)—The affairs and careers of neurotic, middle class New Yorkers. Barbara Hershey is excellent, as are Mia Farrow and Dianne Wiest. One of Woody Allen's serious efforts—how successful an effort, let the viewer decide. (DW)

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

1:05 p.m. (Showtime)— *Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Saturday at 6:00 p.m.

\*3:00 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)

4:00 a.m. (Bravo)— *Black Orpheus* (1958)—See Monday at 4:00 a.m.

\*5:45 p.m. (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)

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

\*10:30 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)

1:50 a.m. (TMC)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 5:45 p.m.

2:00 a.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)

#### **Tuesday, December 21**

\*5:00 a.m. (AMC)— *Seven Chances* (1925)—Buster Keaton has until

seven o'clock that evening to find a bride if he wants to inherit a fortune. He ends up being pursued by thousands of women. Some famous sequences in this silent film, directed by Keaton. (DW)

6:00 a.m. (Cinemax)— *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (1941)—Amusing tale of a boxer (Robert Montgomery) called to heaven too soon, who has to return to earth in another body. With Evelyn Keyes, Claude Rains, Edward Everett Horton. Confusingly, Warren Beatty and Buck Henry's 1978 *Heaven Can Wait* is a remake of this film and not Ernst Lubitsch's 1943 *Heaven Can Wait*. (DW)

8:30 a.m. (TCM)— *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935)—Charles Laughton is memorable as the abominable Captain Bligh on board a British ship bound for the South Seas. Clark Gable is Fletcher Christian. Directed by Frank Lloyd. (DW)

11:00 a.m. (Showtime)— *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)—See Monday at 2:00 a.m.

2:00 p.m. (FXM)— *Carousel* (1956)—See 11:00 a.m.

8:00 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)

\*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)

10:00 p.m. (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)

\*11:00 p.m. (AMC)— *Stagecoach* (1939)—Famed western, directed by John Ford, about a group of disparate passengers thrown together on the same eventful journey. Starring John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Thomas Mitchell, John Carradine. Dudley Nichols wrote the script. (DW)

12:00 a.m. (TCM)— *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940)—James Stewart and Margaret Sullavan are co-workers who, unbeknownst to themselves, have entered into a romance through letters. Marvelous Ernst Lubitsch film, occasionally precious, but deeply felt. (DW)

12:15 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)

\*12:45 a.m. (IFC)— *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)—See 8:00 p.m.

2:00 a.m. (TCM)— *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949)—This musical remake of *The Shop Around the Corner* is one of the fine films from MGM's Golden Age. With Judy Garland and Van Johnson. Directed by Robert Z. Leonard. (MJ)

4:00 a.m. (FXM)— *Carousel* (1956)—See 11:00 a.m.

\*4:00 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. (AMC)— *Stagecoach* (1939)—See 11:00 p.m.

#### **Wednesday, December 22**

\*6:00 a.m. (IFC)— *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)—See Tuesday at 8:00 p.m.

7:25 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)

12:30 p.m. (AMC)—*The Naked City* (1948)—A "neo-realist" treatment of a murder case, filmed self-consciously on the streets of New York. Barry Fitzgerald and Howard Duff play leading roles. The film provided the basis for the subsequent television series. Directed by Jules Dassin and co-scripted by Albert Maltz, both soon to be blacklisted. (DW)

1:30 p.m. (HBOS)—*The Last Hurrah* (1958)—See Sunday at 3:50 a.m.

3:00 a.m. (TMC)—*Modern Romance* (1981)—Occasionally amusing film, directed by and starring Albert Brooks as a neurotic film editor obsessed with Kathryn Harrold. (DW)

#### **Thursday, December 23**

\*1:00 p.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)

\*2:00 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)

2:00 p.m. (FXM)—*The Sun Also Rises* (1957)—See Saturday at 8:00 a.m.

4:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Little Women* (1949)—Mervyn LeRoy directed this, the second version of Louisa May Alcott's novel about a quarter of sisters growing up in New England during the Civil War. This version is inferior to George Cukor's 1933 film. June Allyson, Margaret O'Brien, Elizabeth Taylor and Janet Leigh co-star. (DW)

\*5:35 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)

6:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Little Women* (1933)—George Cukor's film version of the Louisa May Alcott classic, perhaps the best of the lot. Four sisters growing up in Civil War America, with Katharine Hepburn and Joan Bennett. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (TCM)—*West Side Story* (1961)—Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins co-directed this screen version of the remarkable Leonard Bernstein-Stephen Sondheim musical. Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer are dull, Rita Moreno, Russ Tamblyn and George Chakiris are memorable. *Romeo and Juliet* set in New York City of the 1950s. (DW)

\*10:00 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)

10:35 p.m. (TNT)—*Super Mario Brothers* (1993)—Underrated, highly imaginative film version of the popular video game, to which it bears only a slight resemblance. The two plumber brothers (Bob Hoskins and John Leguizamo) visit an alternate universe in which evolution took a different course, leaving dinosaurs as the dominant species. Dennis Hopper overacts wonderfully as the dinosaur dictator of that world. (MJ)

\*11:00 p.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)

11:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Romeo and Juliet* (1936)—Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard were a good deal too old for their starring roles, but they perform admirably, in George Cukor's version of the tragedy. (DW)

11:30 p.m. (IFC)—*Crumb* (1994)—See Saturday at 9:45 p.m.

\*1:00 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)

2:00 a.m. (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)

3:30 a.m. (TCM)—*The Champ* (1931)—Wallace Beery is an over-the-hill boxer and Jackie Cooper his adoring son in this sentimental, but very moving work, directed by King Vidor. (DW)

4:00 a.m. (FXM)—*The Sun Also Rises* (1957)—See Saturday at 8:00 a.m.

4:00 a.m. (A&E)—*Giant* (1956)—George Stevens directed this work, described by many as "epic," about two generations of a Texas family. With Rock Hudson, Elizabeth Taylor and James Dean in his last role. (DW)

#### **Friday, December 24**

\*9:00 a.m. (TCM)—*Meet John Doe* (1941)—Gary Cooper as John Doe, the barefoot Everyman, suspicious of ideas and doctrines, in Frank Capra's populist fable. (DW)

9:25 a.m. (Encore)—*Carousel* (1956)—See Tuesday at 11:00 a.m.

9:25 a.m. (TMC)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 5:45 p.m.

10:00 a.m. (Comedy)—*Heaven Help Us* (1985)—See Thursday at 2:00 a.m.

10:15 a.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 made by William Wellman, with Fredric March and Janet Gaynor. (DW)

11:15 a.m. (TCM)—*The Bells of St. Mary's* (1945)—If you can bear the sentimentality of this Leo McCarey film about the doings of priests and nuns, it has its pleasures. With Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman. The sequel to *Going My Way*. (DW)

11:40 a.m. (Encore)—*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 5:45 p.m.

12:35 p.m. (TNT)—*Super Mario Brothers* (1993)—See Thursday at 10:35 a.m.

\*2:35 p.m. (Showtime)—*The Conversation* (1974)—See Monday at 3:00 p.m.

\*4:00 p.m. (TCM)—*Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)—Vincente Minnelli's sentimental, but very evocative musical about turn-of-the-century family life in St. Louis, set during the World's Fair of 1903. Judy Garland is memorable; she sings "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" and "The Trolley Song," among others. Margaret O'Brien is her younger sister. With Leon Ames and Mary Astor. (DW)

4:00 p.m. (FXM)—*Heaven Can Wait* (1943)—Don Ameche stars as a dead man seeking entry to hell, who recounts in flash back what he thinks has been a life full of sin. With Gene Tierney and Charles Coburn. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. (DW)

4:15 p.m. (Encore)— *American Graffiti* (1973)—See Sunday at 8:45 a.m.  
6:00 p.m. (FXM)— *Young Frankenstein* (1974)—See Saturday at 6:00 p.m.  
8:00 p.m. (TCM)— *In the Good Old Summertime* (1949)—See Tuesday at 2:00 a.m.  
9:00 p.m. (HBOS)— *A Star Is Born* (1954)—See 10:15 a.m.  
9:30 p.m. (Encore)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 5:45 p.m.  
11:50 p.m. (Encore)— *American Graffiti* (1973)—See Sunday at 8:45 a.m.  
12:10 a.m. (TMC)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Saturday at 5:45 p.m.  
4:00 a.m. (TCM)— *Three Godfathers* (1948)—John Ford's version of the story of the Three Magi, with three lowlifes coming upon and taking care of an infant whose mother dies in the desert. John Wayne, Pedro Armendariz and Harry Carey Jr. (DW)  
4:00 a.m. (A&E)— *Giant* (1956)—See Thursday at 4:00 a.m.



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