

Some interesting films on US television, December 25-31

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

Note: this will be the final such weekly listing. In future the hundreds of capsule film reviews that have appeared over the past year and a half will be posted as a permanent resource on the web site.

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

Macbeth (1948)—Orson Welles shot this low-budget version of Shakespeare's play in 23 days for Republic Pictures, which usually made cheapie Westerns. The lack of money and the unadorned sets reduced the film to basics—dark, primitive, brutal, in a unidentified barbaric era. Welles (who plays Macbeth) called it a "charcoal sketch" of the play. Undoubtedly influenced by the just-concluded World War II, it shows a shadow-filled world in which murderers rule. With Jeanette Nolan, Dan O'Herlihy, and Roddy McDowall. (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 25

6:00 am (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)

*1:15 pm (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 sendups of Olivier's *Hamlet* and Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*. Directed by John McTiernan. (MJ)

*2:30 pm (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)

*3:30 pm (A&E)—*The Searchers* (1956)—John Ford classic. John Wayne and Jeffrey Hunter search for Wayne's niece, taken by Indians. Natalie Wood plays the girl. An essential American film. (DW)

8:00 pm (TCM)—*Dial M for Murder* (1954)—A lesser film by Alfred Hitchcock, with Ray Milland as a husband who plots his wife's death. Grace Kelly is the wife who, when the plot fails, falls under suspicion of murder. With Bob Cummings. (DW)

10:00 pm (FXM)—*The Razor's Edge* (1946)—An overlong film, with some embarrassingly silly moments, but also some extraordinarily believable ones. With Tyrone Power, looking for the meaning of life, Gene Tierney, Anne Baxter. Directed by Edmund Goulding, from the novel by Somerset Maugham. (DW)

*10:00 pm (TCM)—*Suspicion* (1941)—Joan Fontaine is a new bride

who believes her husband, Cary Grant, is trying to kill her. According to the book, he was, but Hollywood's production code forbid it. With Nigel Bruce; directed by Alfred Hitchcock. (DW)

*12:00 am (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)

2:15 am (TCM)—*Marnie* (1964)—Tippi Hedren is a woman who can't stop stealing and Sean Connery is her employer, and admirer, who is trying to figure out why. The story traces her problem to psychological trauma. Alfred Hitchcock directed. (DW)

Sunday, December 26

7:00 am (A&E)—*Of Human Bondage* (1934)—Bette Davis stars as the waitress with whom doctor Leslie Howard becomes "inexplicably" enamored. An interesting film, directed by John Cromwell, but W. Somerset Maugham's story is pretty stupid and insensitive. (DW)

*10:00 am (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)

*11:15 am (TCM)—*The Red Badge of Courage* (1951)—John Huston's intelligent adaptation of Stephen Crane's Civil War novel, about a young soldier in the Union army who runs from his first encounter with the enemy, but comes to terms with his fear. (DW)

*12:30 pm (TCM)—*A Night at the Opera* (1935)—Along with *Duck Soup*, one of the Marx Brothers' best efforts. Unfortunately, a silly, uninteresting love story occasionally gets in the way. Directed by Sam Wood; with the inimitable Margaret Dumont, also Kitty Carlisle and Alan Jones. (DW)

*1:15 pm (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)

*1:45 pm (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)

2:10 pm (TMC)—*Modern Romance* (1981)—Occasionally amusing film, directed by and starring Albert Brooks as a neurotic film editor obsessed with Kathryn Harrold. (DW)

*2:15 pm (TCM)—*A Day at the Races* (1937)—Marx Brothers' foolishness. Set in a sanatorium where rich and hypochondriacal Margaret Dumont is the most prominent patient. Directed by Sam Wood. (DW)

*3:45 pm (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 pm (TCM)— *Pat and Mike* (1952)—Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy play a leading female athlete and her manager, respectively, in this lightweight piece. Directed by George Cukor. (DW)

*8:00 pm (AMC)— *The Getaway* (1972)—Steve McQueen as a convict who gets out of jail and immediately takes part in a bank robbery. With Ali McGraw. Directed by Sam Peckinpah, from the novel by Jim Thompson. (DW)

*8:00 pm (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 pm (TCM)— *On the Town* (1949)—Memorable MGM musical about three sailors with 24 hours' leave in New York City. Based on the show by Betty Comden-Adolph Green-Leonard Bernstein, with Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, Vera-Ellen and Betty Garrett. Directed by Stanley Donen and Kelly. (DW)

*11:30 pm (IFC)— *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)—See 8:00 pm.

*1:30 am (TCM)— *Louise Brooks: Looking for Lulu* (1998)—A profile of the silent screen actress Louise Brooks, one of the most extraordinary figures of the 1920s, the devastating star of *Pandora's Box* (1928). (DW)

1:55 am (TBS)— *This Boy's Life* (1993)—Based on the novel by Tobias Wolff, about a young boy, his mother and his volatile stepfather, set in remote Washington state in the 1950s. With Robert DeNiro, Leonardo DiCaprio and Ellen Barkin. (DW)

*2:30 am (AMC)— *The Getaway* (1972)—See 8:00 pm.

2:30 am (TCM)— *Tootsie* (1982)—Dustin Hoffman is amusing as an actor who can't find work as a man, but finds great success as the female star of a television soap opera. Sidney Pollack directed; with Jessica Lange, Teri Garr, Dabney Coleman. (DW)

*4:45 am (TCM)— *The Big Lebowski* (1998)—See 3:45 pm.

Monday, December 27

8:00 am (TCM)— *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1944)—Not as good as the wonderful political drama/suspense novel by Eric Ambler, about inter-war intrigue in the Balkans (eerily echoed in today's headlines), but a solid film in its own right. With Zachary Scott, Peter Lorre and Sydney Greenstreet; directed by Jean Negulesco. (DW)

8:25 am (TMC)— *The Naked Jungle* (1954)—Above-average jungle adventure directed by Byron Haskin, with Charlton Heston and Eleanor Parker. (DW)

*9:15 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)

12:30 pm (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)

*2:00 pm (TCM)— *An American in Paris* (1951)—Classic MGM musical directed by Vincente Minnelli and built around its Gershwin score; Alan Jay Lerner wrote the screenplay. Gene Kelly is an artist torn between gamine Leslie Caron and wealthy Nina Foch. With the irrepressible Oscar Levant. (DW)

3:00 pm (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)

*3:30 pm (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)

*4:00 pm (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)

5:00 pm (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)

*8:00 pm (TCM)— *City Lights* (1931)—Chaplin's tramp in love with a blind flower girl. Sentimental, but unforgettable. (DW)

8:00 pm (Bravo)— *A Midnight Clear* (1992)—Strong anti-war film about a squad of US soldiers in France near the end of World War II. Ethan Hawke, Peter Berg, Kevin Dillon, Gary Sinise starred. Directed by Keith Gordon, from William Wharton's novel. (DW)

10:00 pm (FXM)— *Blood and Wine* (1996)—Jack Nicholson plays a bankrupt wine merchant pulling off a jewel heist with an over-the-hill, nerved-up safecracker (Michael Caine, in an unusual role as a murderous heavy). With Judy Davis and Stephen Dorff. Another neglected film by underrated director Bob Rafelson. (MJ)

11:00 pm (Bravo)— *A Midnight Clear* (1992)—See 8:00 pm.

Tuesday, December 28

7:20 am (Cinemax)— *Merrill's Marauders* (1962)—It's questionable how much this has to do with real history, but engrossing war film directed by Samuel Fuller; Jeff Chandler as commander of US soldiers fighting Japanese in Burmese jungle. (DW)

9:00 am (TCM)— *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1933)—Michael Curtiz' prison drama, with Spencer Tracy as a hardened criminal and Bette Davis as his girl-friend. (DW)

12:00 pm (AMC)— *You Can't Take It With You* (1938)—Frank Capra's version of the George S. Kaufman-Moss Hart comedy about the antics of an eccentric during the Depression. Starring James Stewart and Jean Arthur. (DW)

2:15 pm (HBOS)— *Casablanca* (1942)—The Michael Curtiz classic about life and love in wartime Morocco, with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. (DW)

2:45 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)

4:00 pm (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)

8:00 pm (TCM)— *Anna Karenina* (1935)—A superficial and turgid version of the Tolstoy novel. But anything with Greta Garbo is of interest. Clarence Brown, for some reason Garbo's favorite, directed the film. (DW)

*4:00 am (A&E)— *Notorious* (1946)—One of Alfred Hitchcock's best. American counterespionage agents convince the patriotic daughter of a convicted Nazi spy to marry a Nazi agent in South America. Very suspenseful (especially the sequence with the dwindling champagne bottles), and with complex characterizations. Wonderful chemistry between Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman, and an oddly sympathetic performance by Claude Rains as the Nazi agent. (MJ)

Wednesday, December 29

*9:30 am (HBOS)— *Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976)—See Sunday, at 1:45 pm.

1:00 pm (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)

4:00 pm (Encore)— *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977)—See Tuesday, at 2:45 pm.

8:00 pm (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)

10:00 pm (FXM)— *Young Frankenstein* (1974)—One of Mel Brooks' 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)

10:15 pm (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)

2:15 am (TCM)— *Apache* (1954)—Pro-Indian film about an Apache (Burt Lancaster) who wages a one-man war against the US government and military for his tribe's rights. With Jean Peters and John McIntire. (DW)

2:15 am (IFC)— *Crumb* (1994)—See 10:15 pm.

Thursday, December 30

6:50 am (Cinemax)— *Ninotchka* (1939)—Greta Garbo is an unlikely Soviet official in Paris, who gets seduced by Melvyn Douglas and the pleasures of capitalism, in Ernst Lubitsch's comedy. (DW)

11:30 am (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)

12:00 pm (TCM)— *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* (1949)—The last film made by famed musical extravaganza director Busby Berkeley. A relatively restrained work about a baseball team, with Frank Sinatra and Gene Kelly as its stars, taken over by Esther Williams. (DW)

*8:00 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)

8:00 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)

8:00 pm (TCM)— *Lady for a Day* (1933)—Frank Capra directed this story about an apple vendor transformed into a society lady by a kindhearted hoodlum. With May Robson and Warren Williams. (DW)

*12:15 am (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)

*2:30 am (AMC)— *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962)—See 8:00 am.

Friday, December 31

8:00 am (TCM)— *The Tender Trap* (1955)—Likable film, real 1950s fare, about a "swinging" bachelor (Frank Sinatra) and a determined young woman (Debbie Reynolds) out to ensnare him. Charles Walters directed; memorable Cahn-Van Heusen title song. (DW)

*12:00 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)

The Birds (1963)—See Thursday, at 12:15 am (TNT)—

12:55 pm (TMC)— *Modern Romance* (1981)—See Sunday, at 2:10 pm.

4:00 pm (HBOS)— *The Last Hurrah* (1958)—John Ford adapted this film about U.S. 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)

*6:00 pm (AMC)— *Bringing Up Baby* (1938)—Classic screwball comedy, with Katharine Hepburn as bedazzling, eccentric heiress and Cary Grant as the sedate zoologist whose life she turns upside down. Howard Hawks directed this comedy of sex and morals. (DW)

9:45 pm (HBOS)— *Casablanca* (1942)—See Tuesday, at 2:15 pm.

10:05 pm (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)

11:30 pm (HBOS)— *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)—See Monday, at 3:00 pm.

4:00 am (AMC)— *His Girl Friday* (1940)—Marvelous film version of Ben Hecht-Charles MacArthur's *The Front Page*, co-scripted by Hecht, with Cary Grant as scheming editor and Rosalind Russell as his star reporter trying to get married to Ralph Bellamy. Directed by Howard Hawks. (DW)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact