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Film
Series

january-
june
2006



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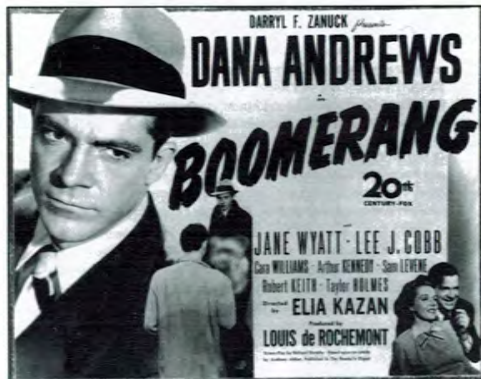
Well here we are, and once again, there's no theme for these films. Scandal! Outrage! But before you charge the projection booth, check out some highlights: We've got three films by everyone's (or at least our) favorite highfalutin misfit, Josef von Sternberg, and they're all sans-Dietrich. Watch Fay Wray, Marian Marsh, and Sylvia

Sidney squirm as his starlet placeholders! In January, we're screening back-to-back noirs featuring everyone's (or at least our) favorite femme fatale, the post-*Double Indemnity* Barbara Stanwyck. Plus, we've pulled two rare gems apiece by Otto Preminger and Don Siegel out of the vaults. And hang tight themists, because the great unifier for the second half of 2006 is already in place, and trust us, it's beyond your wildest dreams. No hints.

Features Program by Michael King

Shorts Program by Michael W. Phillips, Jr.

Text by Michael King (MK) and Michael W. Phillips, Jr. (MP)



January 7



THUNDERBOLT (1929)

Josef von Sternberg

Paramount/85 min.

16mm

Short: "Spills & Chills" (1949), Walton C. Ament

Returning to the seedy turf that made *Underworld* such a huge success, Josef von Sternberg regular George Bancroft stars as gangster Thunderbolt, a death row inmate looking to commit one last murder before his number's up. Fortunately for him, the intended victim

(Richard Arlen), his girlfriend's lover, lands in the opposite cell. Viewed in retrospect, it isn't difficult to see Fay Wray as von Sternberg's unwitting Marlene Dietrich prototype: from her casual dismissal of male authority to her preoccupation with her manicure, all the essential ingredients are there. This is one of the first true sound films in a landscape of talkies; von Sternberg dove into the era with more imagination and resourcefulness than any of his Hollywood contemporaries. Instead of functioning as a slave to realism and dialogue, the film's soundtrack complements its breathtaking visuals independently; the celebrated nightclub scene showcases the boldest experiments with asynchronicity the nascent sound film had to offer in 1929. As you might expect from von Sternberg, the usual gangster contrivances go out the window along with any other sense of rationality, in favor of the intense fetishization of death and furs—as Andrew Sarris put it, "*Thunderbolt* is less a gangster film than a gangster fantasy." (MK)

January 14

THE BIG KNIFE (1955)

Robert Aldrich

The Associates & Aldrich Company/111 min.

35mm

Cartoon: "The Big Swim" (1926),

Charles R. Bowers (Mutt & Jeff)



"Ideals, nowadays? A lost crusade." Jack Palance stretches as movie star Charlie Castle, a shining example of that "20th century phenomenon," the sellout. But like any sellout, he longs for a return to serious work, delivering righteous "I can change" sermons to everyone except the one person that matters, studio mogul Stanley Hoff (Rod Steiger in a scathing composite of several Hollywood bigwigs), who holds both Charlie's contract and the keys to his skeleton-filled closet. Tangled in his own web of empty promises, Charlie runs short on options, and, well, it's called *The Big Knife* for a reason. Or is it? With the first two scenes running twenty minutes apiece, there's no mistaking the dialogue's origins on the stage; fortunately, the talented cast dives in with abandon. This was the first project for director Robert Aldrich's budding Associates production company: art director William Glasgow and editor Michael Luciano were on hand, and Frank De Vol contributed the series of abrupt musical cues that passes for a score. With Ida Lupino, Wendell Corey, Jean Hagen, Shelley Winters, Everett Sloane, and Nick Dennis (the "va-va-voom!" guy from Aldrich's other 1955 classic, *Kiss Me Deadly*). (MK)

January 21

A SLIGHT CASE OF MURDER

(1938)

Lloyd Bacon

Warner Bros./85 min.

16mm

Short: "Pardon My Terror" (1946), Edward Bernds

(Schilling & Lane)



Remy Marco (Edward G. Robinson) is a former bootlegger looking to go straight after the end of Prohibition, but he has problems: his beer is undrinkable, his daughter (Jane Bryan) wants to marry a cop, bankers are eager to foreclose on him, and all Marco wants to do is go on vacation at his rented estate—where he discovers the bodies of four rival gangsters and a pile of stolen money. This surprisingly dark farce keeps the grim humor coming double time, as Marco attempts to stay solvent and out of prison. In the midst of robbery and murder, what's most important to these ex-thugs is politeness: some of the most subtle laughs come when Marco's wife Nora (Ruth Donnelly) slips between affected upper-crust politesse and underworld slang, and the bookies who owned the stolen money are more upset about the breach of etiquette than about the theft itself. But the main attraction is Robinson, who shows impeccable comic timing in yet another spoof of his gangster image (we showed 1933's *Little Giant* here a couple of years ago)—he even refers to himself in the third person. The film, based on a play by Damon Runyon and Howard Lindsay, was remade in 1952 as *Stop, You're Killing Me* with Broderick Crawford in the lead role. (MP)



NO MAN OF HER OWN (1950)

Mitchell Leisen
Paramount/98 min.
16mm

Cartoon: "A Hatful of Dreams" (1944),
George Pal

Barbara Stanwyck stars as Helen Ferguson, domestic abuse victim turned femme fatale in director Mitchell Leisen's melodrama-cum-film noir. Playing along with an extremely farfetched

case of mistaken identity in the aftermath of a tragic train crash, Helen undergoes an overnight transformation from pregnant and alone to wealthy and paranoid—and that's just the setup for the kind of lurid outlandishness that can only be found in something with a title like *I Married a Dead Man* and written by Cornell Woolrich (whose resume also includes the source material for *Rear Window*, *Phantom Lady*, and *The Leopard Man*). Things only get darker when Helen receives blackmail threats from her ex (Lyle Bettger), but don't worry, the production code won't allow the plot to follow the novel too closely (though somehow they did let Helen off the hook for being pregnant out of wedlock). John Lund, Jane Cowl, and Henry O'Neill appear as the victims of Helen's reluctant con job. Hollywood took another, even weirder stab at Woolrich's story in 1996, somehow reconfiguring it as *Mrs. Winterbourne*, a romantic comedy that replaced Barbara Stanwyck with (I can't believe I'm typing this) Ricki Lake. (MK)



THE FILE ON THELMA JORDON (1950)

Robert Siodmak
Paramount/100 min.
35mm

Short: "Office Blues" (1930), Mort
Blumenstock (Ginger Rogers)

Barbara Stanwyck drops in on an Assistant D.A. in the middle of the night spilling an elaborate story about robberies threatening her benefactor—you'd have to be the dupe in the story (Wendell Corey) not to guess where

this is going. Soon enough, they've forgotten all about their significant others (Joan Tetzel and Richard Rober) and are knee deep in the genre-requisite love affair—but at least this time the pair's conscience begins nagging before everyone is already dead. By this point in her career, Barbara Stanwyck had established herself as the go-to wrong woman for film noir: the photograph that outs her character as a femme fatale could easily pass for a publicity still from *Double Indemnity*. Meanwhile, director Robert Siodmak's tenure in Hollywood was winding down, and *The File on Thelma Jordan* was the last of his string of canonical postwar thrillers, which included *The Killers* and *Criss Cross*. Siodmak returned to Europe in the early 1950s and began directing films in West Germany, but perhaps due to the relative lack of studio-bred talent he had harnessed so expertly in Hollywood, this last act of his career is sadly one of unfulfilled promise. (MK)





THE 13TH LETTER (1951)

Otto Preminger

20th Century Fox/85 min.

35mm

Cartoon: "Little Cheeser" (1936), Rudolph Ising

In this remake of Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1943 film *Le Corbeau*, Michael Rennie plays Dr. Pearson, who comes to a rural Quebec village for some peace and quiet after his unfaithful wife's suicide. Too bad someone in town starts circulating poison pen letters, signed "The Raven," accusing him of having an affair with Cora (Constance Smith), the beautiful young wife of Dr. Laurent (Charles Boyer). It

doesn't stop there: other letters show up accusing him of misdiagnosing patients, leading to tragedy when a paranoid war hero comes to believe that he's dying. Along for the ride is Linda Darnell as a club-footed temptress. In Otto Preminger's capable hands, and with longtime collaborator Joseph LaSelle behind the camera, the picturesque little village soon appears as seedy and degenerate as any noir city. According to Preminger, the film, shot in Quebec, was the first Hollywood film shot entirely on location, but his memory wasn't exactly reliable. Life imitates art: during filming, Michael Rennie dated a young model named Mary Gardner, but, in Preminger's words, "gradually her attention switched from him to me," and she became Mrs. Preminger in 1951. In 1958, he filed for divorce, citing infidelity. The co-respondent? Michael Rennie. (MP)



MONKEY BUSINESS (1952)

Howard Hawks

20th Century Fox/97 min.

35mm

Short: "Chimp the Fireman" (1940), Castle Films

In his fourth and final film with director Howard Hawks, Cary Grant plays Barnaby Fulton, a chemist attempting to cram the fountain of youth into a drinkable elixir. The monkey-concocted (don't ask) wonder drug he winds up with has the bizarre effect of turning Barnaby and wife Edwina (Ginger Rogers) into exactly the kind of spastic brats who today get diagnosed with a dozen disorders and pumped full of ADD medicine. Then again, these days pharmaceutical magnate Oliver Oxley (Charles Coburn) would surely recognize such an obvious indefinite closed-circle

prescription dependency opportunity. Although this is one of the rare Hollywood romantic comedies featuring over-the-hill stars playing an adult couple, it's hardly a buttoned-down affair. Quite the opposite: Rogers and Grant run around like chickens with their heads cut off for half the film. During his first escapade as a self-made guinea pig, Barnaby cavorts wildly on an innuendo-packed date with Oxley's secretary (Marilyn Monroe), but the biggest laughs occur later when Edwina falsely assumes that her husband's regression has been carried to a literal extreme both absurd and logically inevitable. A warning for interspecies buddy picture aficionados: for a film called *Monkey Business*, there is surprisingly little primate hijinks—but that's still more than you got with the Marx Brothers. (MK)

MAKE WAY FOR TOMORROW (1937)

Leo McCarey

Paramount/91 min.

16mm

Short: "Be Your Age" (1926), Leo McCarey (Charley Chase)



To celebrate Oscar weekend, we give you a film that should have won, at least according to its director. Leo McCarey won the 1937 Best Director Oscar for *The Awful Truth*, but during his acceptance speech, he said, "Thanks, but you gave it to me for the wrong picture." This film, based on a novel by advice columnist Josephine Lawrence, is about an elderly couple of 50 years (played by Victor Moore and Beulah Bondi) who are forced to separate when the bank forecloses on their house and none of their five children (including Fay Bainter, Thomas Mitchell, and Barbara Read) is willing or able to take in both parents. The makeup department had to work overtime: the 46-year-old Bondi wasn't much older than the actors playing her children. This was a labor of love for McCarey, who worked at a reduced rate and insisted that no big-name stars be attached. Later in life, he was still telling anyone who would listen that this was his masterpiece: "If I really have talent, this is where it appears." Although McCarey admirably balances comedy and pathos, make sure to bring extra tissues: even the great cynic Orson Welles said that "it could make a stone cry." (MP)

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (1935)

Josef von Sternberg

Columbia/88 min.

16mm

Short: "Another Wild Idea" (1934), Charley Chase



"The truth remains that there is no prison as steel-bound as a man's conscience," says Inspector Porfiry (Edward Arnold), something that Raskolnikov (Peter Lorre) has ample time to contemplate in Josef von Sternberg's adaptation of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's 1866 novel. Lorre, in his Hollywood debut, is stunning as the scholar-turned-murderer Raskolnikov (although von Sternberg deemed him "unsuitable for the part"), alternately cowering in fear and strutting around like Napoleon as he slowly cracks under the pressure of Porfiry's aggravatingly bemused "investigation" and his own conscience. His slow collapse is witnessed by the pious streetwalker Sonya (Marian Marsh), who falls in love with him. Von Sternberg was contractually obligated to make this film, which he thought was "no more related to the true text of the novel than the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower is related to the Russian environment," but, as usual, he's too hard on himself. Lucien Ballard's stark cinematography and the spare, almost minimalist, set design provide a moody backdrop to Lorre's breakdown. Stage diva Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who gave von Sternberg headaches on the set in her final screen role, is memorable as the murdered pawnbroker. (MP)



BOOMERANG! (1947)

Elia Kazan

20th Century Fox/88 min.

35mm

Short: "Disorder in the Court" (1936),
Jack White (Three Stooges)

After a beloved priest is murdered by an unknown assailant, the heat is on the police and mayor's office to apprehend the murderer. They seize on a likely suspect and force a confession from him, then turn him over to State's Attorney

Henry Harvey (Dana Andrews) for the trial. The local political machine dangles the governor's office as a prize if Harvey can do one thing: try and convict a man he thinks is innocent. Lee J. Cobb and Karl Malden are superb as the chief of police and an investigating officer, and Sam Levene plays a crusading reporter. Director Elia Kazan went for an almost documentary feel: the film was shot in many of the actual locations where the real murder took place, and some townspeople had minor roles. Andrews's character is based on Homer Cummings, who never achieved that governor's mansion—he ended up as Attorney General under FDR instead. Although this film is an incisive look at the politics of corruption, years afterward, Kazan said, "Actually, civic corruption is much more widespread. It is much more complex, and I know that now." Watch for playwright Arthur Miller in a cameo as one of the murder suspects. (MP)



FOURTEEN HOURS (1951)

Henry Hathaway

20th Century Fox/92 min.

16mm

Cartoon: "Liberty" (1929), Leo McCarey
(Laurel & Hardy)

Richard Basehart stars as Robert Cosick, a man driven to the edge by the twin forces of Agnes Moorhead (as his mother) and Barbara Bel Geddes (as his wife) in this downtown nail-biter. He spends the titular duration perched atop a skyscraper, contemplating ending it all while beat cop/impromptu life-coach Charlie Dunnigan (Paul Douglas) gets struck trying to convince him it can't be all that bad. Robert's self-inventory proves contagious: a 22-year old Grace Kelly (in her film debut) turns up in one of several

rubbernecker detours, reconsidering her divorce as she stays tuned to Robert's plight from an office across the street. Meanwhile, a cynical media circus assembles below, positioning *Fourteen Hours* as an altitudinal inversion of Billy Wilder's *The Big Carnival*, released just three months later (and screened here last year). Howard Da Silva, Jeffrey Hunter, Robert Keith, and Debra Paget round out the cast, and look for Ossie Davis (after all, it shouldn't be hard to spot him) in a small role as a cab driver. Director Henry Hathaway shot two separate endings for this film—you can probably guess the main difference. Which one will we be showing? I'm not telling. (MK)

THE LINEUP (1958)

Don Siegel

Columbia/86 min.

16mm

Cartoon: "Under the Counter Spy" (1954),
Don Patterson (Woody Woodpecker)



Eli Wallach and Robert Keith star as Dancer and Julian, killers for hire charged by wheelchair-bound heavy The Man (Vaughn Taylor) to recover stolen heroin shipments. Real sticklers for language—they muse over subjunctives and record their victims' last words for kicks ("Why be greedy?" being an especially harrowing entry)—

the pair relish in verbally torturing their victims with the most nihilistic barbs writer Stirling Silliphant could dream up. Director Don Siegel established his mastery of the marathon chase scene ten years earlier with *The Big Steal* (screened here last April), but he outdoes himself in the finale. Witness the unsung (or at least undersung) invention of modern car chases in a whirlwind sequence still fervently pillaged today, right down to the now-ubiquitous climax on a still-under-construction freeway (The Embarcadero) dead ending into thin air. All that driving makes for a nice little tour of 1950s San Francisco with cinematographer Hal Mohr (was Siegel already scouting for *Dirty Harry*?). *The Lineup* was halfheartedly spun off from the police procedural TV show of the same name, so there's Warner Anderson as Lt. Ben Guthrie, although Tom Tully is inexplicably missing in action. (MK)

WILD BOYS OF THE ROAD (1933)

William Wellman

First National Pictures/68 min.

35mm

Short: "Fast and Furious" (1924), Norman Taurog
(Lige Conley)



William A. Wellman's second harsh Depression survey of 1933 (the first was *Heroes for Sale*) focuses on two young delinquents (Frankie Darro and Edwin Phillips) who face a serious reality check when their parents are laid off. The boys drop their Dennis the Menace-style shenanigans in a hurry and plunge headlong into their idea of adulthood, embarking on a cross-country train hopping odyssey. It isn't long before things get surprisingly grisly (or "real," I guess) and soon Eddie (Darro) is facing off against the cops as de facto leader of a gang of displaced misfit squatters. For such pointed subject matter, Wellman keeps his politics admirably heartfelt and street-level, all consciously out of step with what was happening across the lot; as an ironic counterpoint to the film's socially responsible subject matter, escapist refrains culled from Warner's contemporary Busby Berkeley extravaganzas pepper the soundtrack (*Footlight Parade* itself shows up in a movie theater). It's characteristic of Wellman's respect for the kids that this irony isn't lost on Eddie, who whistles "We're in the Money" like he's in on the joke. But don't think Wellman couldn't enjoy a little song and dance every now and then: actress Dorothy Coonan was one of Berkeley's chorus girls when Wellman handpicked her for her first (and only) credited screen role as Sally in this film—they married later that year. (MK)

April 8



THE GANG'S ALL HERE (1943)

Busby Berkeley

20th Century Fox/103 min.

35mm

Short: "Pot Luck" (1937), Robert Hall

Undulating neon hula-hoops, disembodied heads floating around on giant polka dots, Carmen Miranda balancing a supermarket on her head—this could only have sprung from the dance-addled mind of Busby Berkeley at

his most out-to-lunch. After wasting away at MGM helming Judy Garland pictures, Berkeley poured all the surreal verve he had been suppressing since his glory days at Warner into this Fox production, his first in three-strip Technicolor. Even with Alice Faye's polka-dot freak-out and the Benny Goodman Orchestra as contenders, there's no contest for best number—Carmen Miranda's joyously incomprehensible "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat" is truly one for the ages. Once you've seen dozens of chorus girls with giant bananas as dance partners, you'll never look at produce the same way again. But nothing in Berkeley's grocery list of citrus hallucinations can top the single most confounding aspect of *The Gang's All Here*—somehow, it required the services of four (4) credited screenwriters to cook up the paper-thin plot propping up this extravaganza. That stuff that happens between the big dance numbers features only-in-wartime leading man James Ellison, along with Edward Everett Horton and Eugene Palette as the comic relief. (MK)

April 15



DAISY KENYON (1947)

Otto Preminger

20th Century Fox/99 min.

35mm

Cartoon: "The Perils of Pearl Pureheart" (1949), Eddie Donnelly (Mighty Mouse)

In this melodrama based on writer (and later feminist critic) Elizabeth Janeway's 1945 novel, Joan Crawford plays the title role, a commercial artist torn between two loves. One is Dan O'Mara

(Preminger favorite Dana Andrews), a manipulative and married lawyer; the other is Peter Lapham (Henry Fonda), a veteran who wants to settle down. When Dan's wife (Ruth Warrick) divorces him, he tries to break up Daisy and Peter's happy home. Although it's a love triangle of sorts, everyone is essentially alone—Andrews is a failure, Fonda is a pseudo-existentialist, and Crawford is at a loss about what choice is the correct one—and Preminger and cinematographer Leon Shamroy make masterful use of deep-focus photography to emphasize their isolation. Crawford agreed to do the film only if Fonda and Andrews were her costars; when they complained about how cold she insisted the set be kept, she bought them long underwear. Crawford later said that "If Otto Preminger hadn't directed it, the picture would have been a mess." Preminger didn't agree or disagree: in the 1970s, he told an interviewer that he had no memory of making the film. Watch for columnist Walter Winchell, who saved Preminger's *Laura* from a terrible ending, in a cameo alongside fellow writer Damon Runyon. (MP)

April 22

THE FASTEST GUN ALIVE (1956)

Russell Rouse

MGM/89 min.

16mm

Cartoon: "Beep, Beep" (1952), Chuck Jones (Road Runner)



Although a blind man prophetically tells quick-drawing bad guy Broderick Crawford "No matter how fast you are, there's always someone faster," he can't imagine that such a person could exist, and he can't stand the idea. Meanwhile, mild-mannered storekeeper Glenn Ford is trying to forget that he's the titular fastest gun alive, and he just wants to be a good husband to his pregnant wife Dora (Jeanne Crain). Could it be that a showdown in a dusty, deserted street is imminent? I'm not telling. Because this is a 1950s psychological western, we get backstory on each man: Crawford wants to prove his manliness because his wife left him for another; and Ford is haunted by his failure to avenge his father's murder. The film is populated by a beggar's banquet of grizzled supporting players, including Noah Beery, Rhys Williams, Leif Erickson, and J.M. Kerrigan. And then there's Russ Tamblyn's dance scene... The film is based on Frank Gilroy's story "The Last Notch." Although cowriter/director Russell Rouse specialized in rough-and-tumble genres like the western and film noir (he wrote 1950's *D.O.A.*), he won an Oscar in 1959 for writing the decidedly un-rough-and-tumble *Pillow Talk*. (MP)

April 29

HERE COMES THE NAVY (1934)

Lloyd Bacon

Warner Bros./87 min.

16mm

Short: "His Wooden Wedding" (1925), Leo McCarey (Charley Chase)



James Cagney and Edmund O'Brien teamed up for the first of eight films together in this fast-talking comedy. Cagney plays Chesty O'Connor, a construction worker with a prominent chip on his shoulder. When naval officer Biff Martin (O'Brien) steals his girl and beats him up at a dance, Cagney decides to join the Navy just to get back at him, and he quickly decides that wooing O'Brien's sister Dot (Gloria Stuart) is a good place to start. He soon learns that his civilian bad attitude doesn't belong in the armed forces: he finds himself court-martialed and, much worse, branded a "wrong guy" by his fellow sailors. Throughout the film, O'Brien and Cagney trade a torrent of insults, most of them consisting of aspersions at the other's manhood. Frank McHugh, in one of twelve films he did with Cagney, provides comic relief as Cagney's friend Droopy. This film received a surprise nomination as Best Picture (along with eleven other films that year, the most nominees in the category's history). The film was shot with the full cooperation of the Navy, which provided the Naval Training Station in San Diego, the dirigible *U.S.S. Macon*, and the ill-fated *U.S.S. Arizona* as locations. (MP)



AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY (1931)

Josef von Sternberg

Paramount/96 min.

16mm

Cartoon: "Time for Love" (1935),
Dave Fleischer

This big-screen adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's novel was originally slated to be Sergei Eisenstein's Hollywood debut until

Paramount rejected his treatment, instead handing the task over to Eisenstein's cinematic polar opposite, Josef von Sternberg. Without his trusty muse around to fuss over, the reliably irascible director attempted to smuggle his usual preoccupations into the project by way of "eliminating the sociological elements, which, in my opinion, were far from being responsible for the dramatic accident with which Dreiser had concerned himself." Said accident concerns abortion, drowning, and courtroom histrionics, carried out by Phillips Holmes, Sylvia Sidney, Frances Dee, and Irving Pichel, all photographed by the master Lee Garmes. The lost prospect of Eisenstein cooking up a big Hollywood spectacle is undeniably intriguing—it certainly captured Dreiser's imagination. Apparently a big fan of Eisenstein's, Dreiser was so displeased with von Sternberg's handling of his story that he unsuccessfully sued Paramount to block distribution. There's no telling what he would have made of Montgomery Clift and Elizabeth Taylor trudging through *A Place in the Sun* 20 years later; George Stevens made his Oscar-mongering adaptation of Dreiser's tome free from interference, as the author died six years earlier. (MK)



BLOOD MONEY (1933)

Rowland Brown

20th Century Pictures/65 min.

35mm

Short: "Crook's Tour" (1933),
Robert F. McGowan

"As long as you have cities, you're bound to have vice in them. And you can't control human nature." So says Bill Bailey (George Bancroft), who should know: he's a shady bail bondsman with lots of friends in the

underworld. Some of those friends decide it's time for Bailey to check out, so they invite him to a game of pool that should be familiar to fans of Buster Keaton. In the middle of all this, poor Bailey gets tangled up with Elaine Talbert (Frances Dee) and her bank-robber boyfriend. Bailey encounters a risqué assortment of characters that would vanish from the screen once Will Hays started cracking down on screen sexuality the following year: Elaine isn't interested in Bailey because she prefers rough guys she can "follow around like a dog on a leash," and Bailey and his only real friend Ruby (Judith Anderson) spend an awful lot of time in bars where the women dress like men. Writer-director Rowland Brown directed only four movies because he had a penchant for punching producers. However, he did make it as a short-story writer, penning the tales that became such films as *Angels with Dirty Faces* and *Kansas City Confidential*. (MP)

THE HEIRESS (1949)

William Wyler

Paramount/115 min.

16mm

Short: "An Arcadian Maid" (1910),
D.W. Griffith (Mary Pickford)



If you can imagine the beautiful Olivia de Havilland as a mousy girl with no social skills, you're halfway to appreciating this film, which is based on a play that was based on Henry James's *Washington Square*. De Havilland brought the play to producer/director William Wyler's attention. She wanted to play Catherine, the titular heiress, who hopes to marry against the wishes of her overprotective and wealthy father; the father suspects that the young man is a fortune-hunter. Wyler convinced a young Montgomery Clift to play the suitor, against Clift's reservations about acting in a period film, and rounded out the cast with the newly-knighted Sir Ralph Richardson to play the father. The clash of acting styles—Richardson's classical training, de Havilland's old-school Hollywood, and Clift's slouchy proto-Method—leads to a few odd moments, but the real problems were offscreen, where Wyler practically tore his hair out getting the three to work together. Miriam Hopkins, described by some as the best actress in classic Hollywood, plays de Havilland's close friend who encourages her to disobey her father. The film was nominated for eight Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Director, and won four, including de Havilland's second Best Actress award. (MP)

DECISION BEFORE DAWN (1951)

Anatole Litvak

20th Century Fox/119 min.

35mm

Cartoon: "Fifth Column Mouse" (1943),
Friz Freleng



It's near the end of World War 2, the Third Reich is falling apart, and German soldiers are defecting to the Americans and offering to spy on their countrymen. This film follows one of them, "Happy" Maurer (Oskar Werner in his first English-language film), who says that he's doing it to save Germany from further destruction. He's accompanied behind his new enemies' lines by Lt. Rennick (Richard Baseheart), who doesn't quite believe that the turncoats are sincere. This is one of the first American films to turn a sympathetic eye toward Germans, viewing the German people as victims of the Nazi regime. Director Anatole Litvak shot the film on location in the bombed-out ruins of Germany; many of the extras were former German soldiers, and there was plenty of original WW2 equipment around to use as props. The film is based on George Howe's novel *Call It Treason*, which was based on a true story. Watch for a young Klaus Kinski in his English-language debut as an overzealous defector. Backed by studio head Darryl Zanuck, this film received nominations for Best Picture and Best Editing. (MP)

June 3



MURDER, HE SAYS (1945)

George Marshall
Paramount/91 min.

16mm

Cartoon: "Farm of Tomorrow" (1954),
Tex Avery

Somewhere in the middle of this truly bizarre film, the bullwhip-bearing matriarch Ma Fleagle (Ma Kettle herself, Marjorie Main) shouts "There's some kind of fiddle-faddle goin' on around here!" You said it, Ma. Fred

MacMurray, fresh off *Double Indemnity*, plays an unfortunate pollster who disregards the townsfolk's warning "They don't cotton to strangers up at the Fleagles." That's an understatement: the Fleagles, a cross between the Beverly Hillbillies and *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, are looking for some bank loot hidden on the Fleagle estate (which looks like it was designed by Rube Goldberg by way of M.C. Escher), and the only clue is a nonsense rhyme. MacMurray has to avoid being poisoned, shot, bullwhipped, or bludgeoned by the overeager family (which includes Jean Heather as a space case, Porter Hall as the prescriber of glow-in-the-dark poison, and Peter Whitney as a pair of murderous twins). Caught up in everything is Claire (Helen Walker), who's also looking for the dough. This film has all the inspired lunacy of a Friz Freleng Warner Bros. cartoon (an encounter with a Lazy Susan dinner table is especially hilarious), and it also features some pretty stunning visual effects as Peter Whitney interacts with himself as the twins. (MP)

June 10



BROKEN ARROW (1950)

Delmer Daves
20th Century Fox/93 min.

35mm

Short: "Notch Number One" (1924),
Ben Wilson

Along with Anthony Mann's concurrent *Devil's Doorway*, this was the first and glossiest of the revisionist westerns that appeared in the 1950s addressing the inherent racism of the cowboys-and-Indians mentality that had previously pervaded the genre. This ideal is present right from the opening narration, in which star Jimmy Stewart apologetically excuses the film's indulgence in the genre shorthand of having the Apache characters speak broken English (cited as "our language"). Stewart plays Tom Jeffords, the self-appointed American ambassador to the Apaches (after

learning the language in the span of an edit) who works to quell the incessant combat between the two parties, and maybe hook up with a young Apache woman (Debra Paget) along the way. Jeff Chandler earned an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of Apache leader Cochise, one of the first Native American characters to be given a fair shake in American cinema. A valuable contribution to the genre, *Broken Arrow's* honorable intentions now seem a bit simplistic and self-congratulatory; a few years later, Samuel Fuller added to the pile of westerns weighing in on the same themes with his more complex dissection of elastic patriotism and general stubbornness, *Run of the Arrow*. (MK)

June 17

CRIME IN THE STREETS (1956)

Don Siegel
Allied Artists/91 min.

16mm

Short: "The House I Live In" (1945), Mervyn LeRoy
(Frank Sinatra)



Fifteen years before *Dirty Harry*, director Don Siegel helmed another film with a decidedly milder solution to crime. *Crime in the Streets* features a young John Cassavetes (although not that young—he was 27, playing a teenager) as Frankie Dane, the alienated leader of a street gang who decides to murder a neighbor who rats him out to the police. He manages to convince two gang members—the timid Baby (Sal Mineo) and the lunatic Lou (Mark Rydell)—to help him carry out his plan, while social worker James Whitmore tries to keep them from going through with it. Virginia Gregg appears as Frankie's harried single mom. Reginald Rose based his screenplay on the script he wrote for a 1955 episode of the TV series "The Elgin Hour," starring Cassavetes and Rydell and directed by Sidney Lumet (who directed Rose's screenplay for *12 Angry Men* the following year). Siegel must have taught his young charges a thing or two about directing: two of them went on to become Oscar-nominated directors, Cassavetes for *A Woman under the Influence* in 1974 and Rydell for *On Golden Pond* in 1981. (MP)

June 24

NIGHTMARE ALLEY (1947)

Edmund Goulding
20th Century Fox/110 min.

35mm

Short: "Night 'n Gales" (1937),
Gordon Douglas (Little Rascals)



Following his comeback performance in *The Razor's Edge*, Tyrone Power continued his postwar bid for credibility with this bizzaro tale of backstabbing carnies. Smooth-talking his way to the top of the bottom, Stanton Carlisle (Power) morphs from cheap sideshow to faux prophet and back again, stealing liberally from every misfit he encounters along the way (Joan Blondell, Coleen Gray, and Helen Walker among them). Before long, Stan's done so much double-crossing that the only sucker left to screw over is himself. Pulling an about face from his *Grand Hotel* days at MGM, director Edmund Goulding concocts a strange lost breed of mystical noir: psychics, religion, tarot cards, showbiz, and that special brand of psychological mumbo-jumbo that could only exist in 1940s vintage Hollywood are all treated with interchangeable (ir)reverence. With so many characters dipping in and out of foreboding trances, it's a wonder *Nightmare Alley* never plunges full-on into pinwheel lap dissolves and Theremin drones. Save for a few stray aural flashbacks, the audience remains firmly outside of the headgames, which is probably for the best: at least it's a safe enough distance to admire the black-on-black palette of master cinematographer Lee Garmes. (MK)



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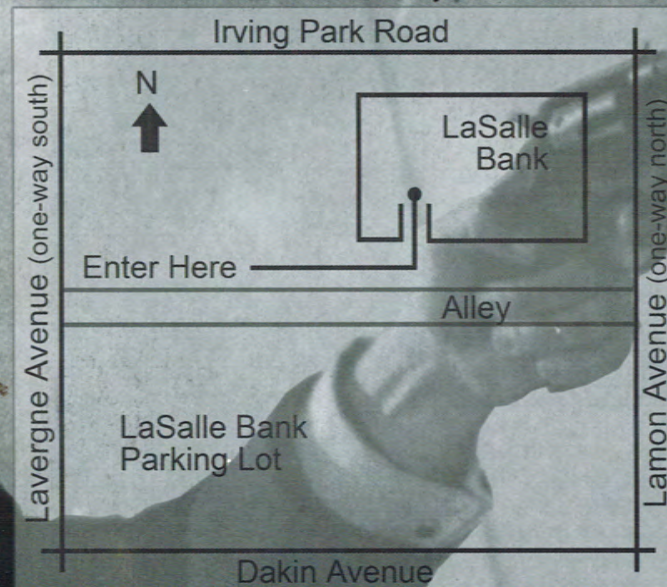
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