LaSalle Bank Cinema lbc

PRESENTS

mustache Cinema

AND THE FILMS OF RITA HAYWORTH

CLASSIC FILM SERIES

{ JULY - DECEMBER 2006 }

FROM THE BOOTH

Ever lose sleep wondering how Jimmy Stewart or Humphrey Bogart would look in a mustache? How about Katharine Hepburn? Well, you can finally quit tossing and turning, because these elusive visions and more will be yours to behold in the next six months at the LaSalle Bank Cinema. That's right, folks, we dug through the archives to bring you six months of the finest in facial hair, spotting mustaches on everyone from Marlon Brando to Dracula. Dick Powell celebrates them in song in *Flirtation Walk,* and even Gloria Swanson gets in on the act in *Sunset Blvd*. As a respite from all that manly manliness, we also bring you seven films starring the beautiful Rita Hayworth, who, as far as we could determine, never wore a mustache. Ladies and gentlemen, hide your razors.

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

July 1

THE GUNFIGHTER (1950)

Henry King
20th Century Fox/85 min.
35mm
Cartoon: "Daffy Doodles" (1946), Robert McKimson

In his third western, Gregory Peck stars as Jimmy Ringo, an outlaw who appears to have survived at least a dozen. But even the bad guys have midlife crises: on the run from his latest showdown, Ringo holes up in his hometown saloon and conducts a long-range stake-out on his estranged family, extending secondhand olive branches to his ex-wife (Helen Westcott) via some sympathetic locals (Millard Mitchell, Jean Parker). As Ringo defensively laments his careers as a quick draw (he's so fast it happens offscreen) and deadbeat dad, his celebrity status attracts a restless audience of young hotshots, old-timers with scores to settle, and "more people wondering when I'm gonna get killed than any other man in the country." Contemporary viewers might peg this as *A History of Violence* collapsed into a single day, though here it gets tied up with an altogether different, albeit similarly disturbing, finale (and Maria Bello's character is about a thousand times more interesting than Westcott's). William Bowers and Andre de Toth nabbed an Oscar nomination for writing, but *The Gunfighter* tanked at the box office, which Fox bigwig Spyros Skouras blamed squarely on Gregory Peck's enormous (read: awesome) mustache. (MK)

July 8

THE TALK OF THE TOWN (1942)

George Stevens
Columbia/118 min.
35mm
Cartoon: "Hollywood Steps Out" (1941), Leon Schlesinger

A daffy schoolteacher (Jean Arthur), a radical convicted arsonist (Cary Grant), and a stodgy Supreme Court nominee (Ronald Colman) shack up in this screwball love triangle. Arthur and Grant conspire to thaw the icy Colman's severe personality and conservative stance on the law, while Colman and Grant bond over their arguments. This makes for an odd love triangle: more sparks fly between Grant and Colman than between Arthur and either man, so the studio shot two different endings because it wasn't obvious who she should end up with (a viewer poll decided who gets the girl). During a very meaningful scene, Arthur accuses Colman of hiding behind his professorial beard, so he shaves it off, leaving his signature mustache. Director George Stevens tempers the comedy with the same seriousness that he'd later bring to another genre film, 1953's *Shane*; the impassioned arguments about social justice make the stakes higher than in most comedies. The film netted seven Oscar nominations including Best Picture and Stevens's first Best Director nomination, but went home empty-handed. This was Colman's first film at Columbia since 1937's *Lost Horizon*, and director Stevens's second film at the studio under a contract that stipulated that he wouldn't have to talk to studio head Harry Cohn. (MP)

July 15

YOU'LL NEVER GET RICH (1941)

Sidney Lanfield
Columbia/88 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #1: Night of Terror" (1938, Columbia), James W. Horne & Ray Taylor

Early in this, the first screen pairing of Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth, a chorus girl tells Sheila (Hayworth) "Honey, don't kid yourself. He doesn't notice you. To a hungry man a lamb chop is a tasty dish, but to the butcher it's just another hunk of meat." It's obvious that she hasn't seen enough musical comedies. Astaire plays a choreographer with his eye on Hayworth, but she's in love with someone else (John Hubbard). It's clear they were meant for each other, but first they have to be kept apart by plot contrivances. He gets drafted, punches her boyfriend (who happens to be an officer), spends enough time in the pokey to rattle off a few numbers with the resident jazz band, and celebrates his release by putting on a big show—a typical week in the life of a soldier. Robert Benchley fills the role that usually went to Edward Everett Horton, and Guinn "Big Boy" Williams and Cliff Nazarro step in for Eric Blore and Erik Rhodes. This film landed Hayworth on the cover of Time, and generally made her the biggest star around. She counted this and her next with Astaire, *You Were Never Lovelier*, as her two best movies. (MP)

July 22

VALDEZ IS COMING (1971)

Edwin Sherwin
United Artists/90 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #2: Death Below"

Ahh, westerns: the last refuge of aging heartthrobs. In other words: mustache paradise. Westerns from the 1970s? You can barely see their mouths move. Burt Lancaster made quite a few interesting choices late in his career, and this Elmore Leonard adaptation was no exception. After getting mixed up in the murder of an innocent black man, constable Bob Valdez's (yes, Lancaster as a Mexican) initial offer of financial redemption balloons into a self-appointed one-man crusade for justice. First order of business: kidnapping the mistress (Susan Clark) of his racist nemesis (Jon Cypher's big-screen debut). At least he picked a good hostage: she's in no rush to get home, packing a plot-twisting secret and seeming like a good candidate for Stockholm syndrome. The metaphors, if mixed, aren't exactly buried: Valdez gets tied to a cross, left for dead, and returns all within the first half hour or so, already uttering his titular slogan. Even if its revisionism borders on the anachronistic, Broadway director Edwin Sherin's first film is admirably rough around the edges, undercutting the Sergio Leone-esque premise with a stark realism. It's PG-13, so leave the kids at home (they probably wouldn't like it anyways). (MK)

July 29

LOVE CRAZY (1941)

Jack Conway
MGM/99 min.
16mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #3: High Voltage"

"There's nothing wrong with anyone's life that a good marriage can't cure," observes Steve Ireland (William Powell) on his way home to celebrate his fourth wedding anniversary with his wife Susan (Myrna Loy). By the end of the night, she's ready to file for divorce—it's a long story, but it involves a sort-of date with his old flame (Gail Patrick) and a conversation overheard by his meddling mother-in-law (Florence Bates). Now Steve's desperate to get her back, and he's willing to do anything to do it, including pretending to be crazy. This backfires when she has him committed to a mental hospital. America's favorite onscreen couple took a break from the *Thin Man* series to appear in this, their tenth of fourteen films together. Instead of the sophisticated wit audiences expected, this is flat-out slapstick comedy: highlights include Steve's battle with an elevator and his attempts to escape from the nuthouse. And then there's the situation that leads Powell to shave off his mustache for the first time in his screen career… but I wouldn't dream of spoiling the surprise. Director Jack Conway, not exactly known as a director of comedy, keeps things moving at breakneck pace until the surprisingly modern ending. (MP)

August 5

COVER GIRL (1944)

Charles Vidor
Columbia/107 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #4: Surrender or Die"

After hoofin' it twice with Fred Astaire, Rita Hayworth took a spin with his heir apparent in this wartime smash. Columbia pulled out all the stops in giving Gene Kelly (on loan from MGM) the perfect starmaking vehicle: Technicolor, the studio's biggest star for his dance partner, songs by Jerome Kern and Ira Gershwin, and even choreography by a young up-and-comer named Stanley Donen. Hayworth plays Rusty Parker, a dancer at Danny McGuire's (Kelly) nightclub who lands on the cover of a glossy fashion rag thanks to its publisher's (Otto Kruger) immortal crush on her grandmother (Hayworth in flashbacks). Soon enough, a Broadway hotshot (Lee Bowman) swoops in with fancy contracts and marriage proposals, and poor, stubborn Danny's stuck dancing with himself (albeit in an extraordinary alter-ego sequence). Perennial comic reliefers Eve Arden and Phil Silvers are Stonewall and Genuis, on hand whenever the headliners stop singing (or lip-syncing) songs like "The Show Must Go On" and the Oscar-nominated "Long Ago and Far Away." Who could ask for anything more? Director Charles Vidor, for one. He further cemented Hayworth's legend by casting her as Rusty Parker's flipside in their next film together, *Gilda*. (MK)

August 12

MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY (1935)

Frank Lloyd
MGM/132 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #5: Shoot to Kill"

"People are fascinated by cruelty, and that's why *Mutiny* will have appeal," said boy wonder Irving Thalberg, and boy was he right. It helped that MGM's peerless seagoing adventure featured this cast: king of the world Clark Gable (in his last film sans mustache) as Fletcher Christian; Franchot Tone (the future Mr. Joan Crawford) as Byam; and the larger-than-life Charles Laughton somehow appearing larger-than-Laughton as the sadistic Captain Bligh. Gable and Tone lead the titular mutiny in response to Laughton's evildoing, setting their captain adrift on the high seas and returning to their Tahitian paradise; but like a bad penny, Bligh turns up again and spoils the merry mutineers' party. It's based on Nordhoff and Hall's *Bounty* trilogy, which was based on a 1787 mutiny. The film won Best Picture, and all three leads were up for Best Actor, virtually assuring that none of them won. Although they tried, not even Marlon Brando (in 1962) or Mel Gibson (in 1984) could top Gable's Christian, and poor Trevor Howard and Anthony Hopkins are fluffy stuffed animals compared to Laughton's Bligh, who came in at #19 on the American Film Institute's top 50 villains list. (MP)

August 19

VIRGINIA CITY (1940)

Michael Curtiz
Warner Bros./121 min.
16mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #6: Sealed Lips"

After professional mustacher Errol Flynn's successful reinvention as a western star in 1939's *Dodge City*, he and director Michael Curtiz made good on that film's sequel-baiting ending with this quick genre followup. Frank McHugh, Alan Hale, and Guinn "Big Boy" Williams were all retained, though Miriam Hopkins stepped in for Olivia de Havilland. Because "wars are won with gold nowadays, not with men," the Civil War-set story concerns a last-ditch gold-grubbing effort by a confederate captain (Randolph Scott) and his former prisoner charged with stopping him (Flynn). Humphrey Bogart plays a deadly bandit but looks more like a cat burglar trying to pull off that Flynn-style mustache (especially standing right next to the man himself), and Hopkins is a showgirl torn between the South and Flynn—not such a tough choice, really. It all goes down in the eponymous "richest, roughest town on the face of the earth" (even the establishing shot looks like a riot). Despite offscreen feuding, Curtiz and Flynn did a dozen pictures together, including two others released 1940: *The Sea Hawk* and *Santa Fe Trail*. Meanwhile, Bogart got a shave and a bigger part in the next of his seven films with the director: *Casablanca*. (MK)

August 26

MONKEY BUSINESS (1931)

Norman Z. MacLeod
Paramount/77 min.
16mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #7: Shadows in the Night"

No self-respecting mustache series would be complete without an entry from the most famous in the biz—even if it is only painted on. The first Marx Brothers film written especially for the screen paradoxically features one of their flimsiest scenarios, depriving their characters of petty contrivances like backstories and, um, names. Good riddance: the brothers are always at their best when taking a simple setup (like, say, stowaways run amok on a Transatlantic ocean liner) and running with it. When they're not busy dodging the ship's crew (Tom Kennedy) or terrorizing every girl on board, Groucho, Chico, and Harpo manage to get mixed up with rival gangsters (Harry Woods, Rockliffe Fellowes, and Thelma Todd)—there's also some business with Ruth Hall to keep Zeppo occupied. It all conveniently winds up at a swank party, ripe for mayhem: not only is it the perfect spot for some last-minute piano and harp numbers, but it's overflowing with Margaret Dumont substitutes. As if that weren't enough, there's even a theme-appropriate quip: when told someone "goes around with a black mustache," Groucho retorts "So do I. If I had my choice, I'd go around with a little blonde." (MK)

September 2

THE BITTER TEA OF GENERAL YEN (1933)

Frank Capra
Columbia/88 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #8: While the City Sleeps"

Frank Capra called this, his forgotten masterpiece, "Art with a capital A," and it was chosen to open Radio City Music Hall in 1933, but it seemed doomed to failure: it featured an interracial love story, even if the Chinese man was played by a Swede in yellowface, and it tossed in an unflattering portrait of Christian missionaries. It flopped. It's a timeless love story about a missionary (Barbara Stanwyck) who ends up in the care (well, captivity) of the charming yet sadistic General Yen (former matinee idol Nils Asther). Yen courts her and she resists—at first. She gets tangled up in court politics and attempts to convert him as he's attempting to win her heart. Walter Connelly appears as Yen's cheerfully amoral banker. Capra's longtime cinematographer Joseph Walker gives it a lush, decadent, Sternbergy feel. Sometimes it's hard to separate the film's racism from that of the characters, but it does make baby steps toward addressing the stereotypes it also helped perpetuate: in a dream sequence, Yen appears both as a hideous Fu Manchu caricature and as a romantic savior, the opposite poles of Western ideas about Chinese men crashing head-on into each other. (MP)

September 9

THE LADY FROM SHANGHAI (1947)

Orson Welles
Columbia/87 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #9: Doomed!"

"Some people can smell danger…not me." Kamikaze auteur Orson Welles and estranged wife Rita Hayworth (Blonde! Scandal!) teamed up for the first and last time on this career-suicide-mission noir. Word is Welles's original cut ran 155 minutes before Columbia head Harry Cohn apparently ran it through a blender and emerged with this half-length hallucination. "If the lab had scratched initials and phone numbers all over the negative, I couldn't be unhappier about the results" quoth the director, cueing the historians to wring their hands over another Welles masterpiece sabotaged and ignore the one Cohn left us with: a whirlwind nightmare with a rhythm all its own, streamlined in delivery and overstuffed everywhere else. What's left of the plot follows the interpersonal "tarrrrget practice" taken by the members of a love triangle timebomb (Welles, Hayworth, & Everett Sloane) in their three-legged-race to self destruction. The hall-of-mirrors shootout finale dives even deeper into the nonsensical abyss, as Welles dares any junior Marlowes in the audience to try to follow Hayworth's here's-how-it-all-happened speech by plopping it smack dab into the most visually arresting sequence of his career (no small feat). To float a minority opinion: maybe a little studio interference isn't always such a bad thing. To float another, with more conviction: this is the best film of the 1940s. (MK)

September 16

THE RETURN OF FRANK JAMES (1940)

Fritz Lang
20th Century Fox/92 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #10: Flaming Danger"

After his brother Jesse's murder by the coward Robert Ford (John Carradine) in 1939's *Jesse James*, Frank James (Henry Fonda, reprising his role and his mustache from the earlier film) just wants to be left alone on his farm. He changes his name and tries to be a civilian, but when he gets word that the Ford brothers have received a reward for Jesse's murder, his outlaw side wins out and he goes a-gunnin' for revenge, an awkwardly teenaged Jackie Cooper and an enthusiastic Gene Tierney, in her first screen role, in tow. Helmer Fritz Lang tackled both the Western genre and color film for the first time, managing both with his usual aplomb. Screenwriter Sam Hellman, who paid scant attention to historical facts in his screenplay, had to do some thematic juggling in his efforts to show Frank as both a bad guy and a hero. Fonda is a tad hard to accept as a desperate killer, and thus the sensitive side of Frank's character is emphasized, likely pleasing the Hays Office to no end. However, 28 years later he'd balance the scales as the heartless murderer Frank in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. (MP)

September 23

LITTLE WOMEN (1933)

George Cukor
RKO/117 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #11: The Road of Peril"

"It was strong, *strong*, full of human virtues, love of family and everything else, which can be magical or dumb if it's sentimentalized." So said director George Cukor about Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, even though he later admitted that he didn't actually read it before filming (and Katharine Hepburn, who stars as Jo, accused him of never finishing it). Whatever the case may be, he produced the best of multiple versions of this story of a New England family during the Civil War. Playing Hepburn's sisters are Joan Bennett, Jean Parker, and Frances Dee; Spring Byington (whom Cukor didn't like) appears as their doting mother. The episodic nature of the book is reproduced here, but as the film progresses the sense of an ensemble cast at work recedes, and it becomes all about Hepburn, who, in Cukor's words, "cast something over the film: a sort of innocence and strength that was quite remarkable and very touching." Cukor did such a good job that when the first director of the 1949 remake was fired, MGM asked Cukor to take over, but he wisely refused. The film was up for Best Picture, Cukor netted his first Oscar nomination, and the screenplay won Best Writing–Adaptation. (MP)

September 30

SUNSET BLVD. (1950)

Billy Wilder
Paramount/110 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #12: The Spider Falls"

Ready for your close-up? Sure, we've all seen it a million times, but once more couldn't hurt—and good luck finding something more compulsively re-watchable. Indisputably the greatest of all the movie movies, at once a heartfelt elegy for the silent-era "waxworks" (Buster Keaton, Anna Q. Nilsson, and H.B. Warner, not to mention Gloria Swanson, Erich von Stroheim, and Cecil B. DeMille, casting coups all) and a cynical indictment of industry amnesia (remember, "it's the pictures that got small"). Wilder semiregular William Holden gets to recite the dialogue of his career as the down-on-his-luck screenwriter commissioned to write a comeback screenplay for a downer-on-her-luck actress. Swanson had appeared in exactly one film since the Production Code set in (*Father Takes a Wife* in 1941), and only ended up as Norma Desmond after Greta Garbo, Mae West, Mary Pickford, and Pola Negri turned down the part; miffed Desmond-style that Paramount had the gall to ask for a screen test, Swanson considered turning Wilder down until George Cukor twisted her arm, warning "if they ask you to do ten screen tests, do ten screen tests, or I will personally shoot you." A triumph of every facet of film production, *Sunset Blvd.* ended up being Wilder's last collaboration with longtime cowriter/producer Charles Brackett, and was deservedly nominated for just about every Oscar, but won only three: art direction, score, and writing. (MK)

October 7

THE PIRATE (1948)

Vincente Minnelli
MGM/102 min.
16mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #13: The Man Hunt"

Judy Garland's fourth and last film with then-husband Vincente Minnelli is one of the most exuberant musicals of the 1940s. With shades of the director's 1945 *Yolanda and the Thief*, Gene Kelly stars as an actor who puts his chops to the test by taking on the guise of his crush's crush, a "ruthless, magnificent, and romantic" pirate ("fake Barrymore and fake Fairbanks," Kelly called it). Garland's the girl, doomed to marry some rich oldster (who's not just *any* rich oldster) and spend the rest of her life suppressing elaborate dance-crazed fantasies about womanizing swashbucklers—unless somebody can snap her out of it. Longtime Minnelli producer Arthur Freed ended up with something of a fiasco on his hands: thanks in large part to Garland's "illness," *The Pirate*'s budget ballooned to nearly four million dollars and became Garland's first film at MGM to lose money. But between Jack Martin Smith's dazzling art direction and the Technicolorful sets by Edwin B. Willis, *The Pirate* is brimming with pure cinematic energy; add Kelly performing acrobatics to tunes by Cole Porter and try remembering that this was based on a non-musical Broadway play that starred Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. (MK)

October 14

BUFFALO BILL (1944)

William A. Wellman
20th Century Fox/90 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #14: The Double-Cross"

Colonel William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody was a grand storyteller who would never let the truth get in the way of a good yarn, so he probably would have been happy with William A. Wellman's film version of his life story. Legend has it that Wellman agreed to direct this so Fox would let him have the previous year's *The Ox-Bow Incident*. The film follows Cody from his time as an Army scout to his career as the quintessential showman and proprietor of the Wild West Show. Cody, played here by a mustachioed Joel McCrea, emerges as a friend to Native Americans and a conservationist (although he got his name from his skill at killing buffalo). The exuberant, old-fashioned western of the first half—complete with expertly staged battle scenes—gives way to a somber second half in which Bill finds himself publicly scorned back east before hitting on the idea of going into show business. Maureen O'Hara, with her fiery red hair courtesy of the film's Technicolor, costars as a senator's daughter that Cody rescues and marries; and Anthony Quinn and Linda Darnell appear, in order of decreasing probability, as the Cheyenne chief Yellow Hand and a Native American schoolteacher in love with Bill. (MP)

October 21

GILDA (1946)

Charles Vidor
Columbia/110 min.
35mm
Serial: "The Spider's Web #15: The Octopus Unmasked!"

Glenn Ford got a big postwar break opposite Rita Hayworth in this blockbuster melodrama. Ford and Hayworth play an estranged couple reunited in Buenos Aires when she marries his casino-owner boss (George Macready). They've got nothing in common beyond mutual contempt and a defensive penchant for answering nasty questions with even nastier ones, but that doesn't stop the unlikely trio from torturing each other with jealousy until one of them just *has* to fake their own death. Joseph Calleia and Steven Geray are in there too, more or less as consciences to the love/hate triangle. The iconic highlight comes when Hayworth lip-syncs Anita Ellis for a legendarily racy run-through of "Put the Blame on Mame"—her guitar-syncing could still use some work, though. There's also some mysterious murmuring about a tungsten monopoly and ruling the world (yes, ruling the world) that amounts to a plot non sequitur, but the biggest head-scratcher is how Gilda wound up having to choose between these two bozos in the first place—especially when it looks like the most chemistry is between her male leads. A note on Jean Louis's costume design physics: when asked what held up her dress in this film, Hayworth replied "two things." (MK)

Halloween Horror Show

(with 10 minute intermission)

October 28

MARK OF THE VAMPIRE (1935)

Tod Browning
MGM/60 min.
16mm
Cartoon: "Skeleton Frolics" (1937), Ub Iwerks

"Fancy that, vampires in the twentieth century...they'll never believe that at the club." Refreshingly lean on foreboding legends (besides, *Dracula* is all the exposition you really need), Tod Browning and Bela Lugosi's second go-round is a decidedly livelier affair than their ubiquitous classic, as much *Scooby-Doo* as Bram Stoker. Despite the stage-whispered warnings of the locals, tourist bodies pile up quick in the shadow of a big spooky castle, thanks to some incredibly prolific vampires. As the skeptical police inspector, Lionel Atwill grills some handy character actors (Jean Hersholt, Donald Meek, Ivan Simpson) until the requisite Van Helsing-style know-it-all (Lionel Barrymore) shows up and sets everyone straight. Lugosi's the nosferatu, natch, and he handpicked *Countess Dracula* scribe Carroll Borland to play his undead live-in girlfriend. *Mark of the Vampire* is a remake of Browning's own legendary *London after Midnight*, which featured the great Lon Chaney under pounds of ghoulish prosthesis, and has since become one of the holy grails of lost films, survived only by stills. However, this remake might not be the greatest indication of what we missed, as MGM hacked off about a third of its running time. On the other hand, for once you can't blame the lame twist ending on studio interference: Browning used it in both versions. (MK)

HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN (1944)

Erle C. Kenton
Universal/71 min.
16mm

It's too bad that budget cuts excised the Mummy from this film's original script—he would have completed the all-star Universal monster mash. Boris Karloff stars as a mad doctor imprisoned for trying to put a human brain in a dog's body—but why would he want to do that? Oh, right, he's mad. He and his hunchback assistant (J. Carroll Naish) release Dracula (John Carradine, the second mustachioed Dracula after Lon Chaney Jr. in *Son of Dracula*) from the afterlife and set him to work murdering Karloff's enemies. The merry band ends up at the Frankenstein castle just in time to release the Wolf Man (Lon Chaney Jr.) and Frankenstein's monster (Glenn Strange, the fourth actor to play the monster) from their icy prison. Karloff sets to work giving one or both new brains, or perhaps trading brains, or—well, like I said, he's mad. Cue the angry mob of villagers. By this point, the Universal franchises were pretty campy—all that was left was for Abbott and Costello to show up, which they did two movies later. Oddly enough, this was the first film in the Frankenstein series to lack a member of that famous family. (MP)

November 4

THE BRASHER DOUBLOON (1947)

John Brahm
20th Century Fox/72 min.
35mm
Short: "A Versatile Villain" (1915),
Frank Griffith (Charley Chase)

"I got into this thing on account of a pretty face," says Philip Marlowe (George Montgomery). "The ancient Trojans were sucked into a ten-year war for the same reason, but they didn't regret it any more than I did." This 1947 film, based on Raymond Chandler's novella *The High Window*, is structured around a romance that didn't exist in the book, but who cares? We're here because director John Brahm (seen here recently with *The Lodger* and *The Undying Monster*) throws all of his visual tricks at the screen: sinister shot setups, oddly placed shadows, scary-looking neon signs… it's like Marlowe wandered into a horror film. (Also, it's the only time the character wore a mustache.) Marlowe's brought in by a millionaire widow (Florence Bates) to recover a stolen gold coin, but he's quickly in over his head with murder, blackmail, and his employer's unstable but sexy secretary (Nancy Guild). Fritz Koerner appears as the bad guy modeled on director Brahm. *Films in Review* called it "the least violent, moodiest, and perhaps finest, U.S. private-eye film." The story, which was reworked five years earlier as *Time to Kill*, a Michael Shayne mystery, was inspired by the real Brasher Doubloon, the most valuable US-minted coin in existence. (MP)

November 11

FLIRTATION WALK (1934)

Frank Borzage
First National Pictures/97 min.
16mm
Cartoon: "Koko's Cartoon Factory" (1925),
Max Fleischer (Koko the Clown)

In one of seven films together (and the second of 1934, after *Dames*), Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell "pursue their amorous and social difficulties with the shy and wholesome demeanor which has made their names a symbol for good, clean, romantic fun on the screen," in the words of New York *Times* critic Andre Sennwald in his 1934 review. Powell is a brash young private who falls for a general's daughter (Keeler) and nearly gets court-martialed. On the advice of his sergeant (Pat O'Brien), he decides to go to West Point to forget her. It suddenly turns into a backstage musical (the duo were old hands at this by now) when Keeler's father is transferred to West Point and she gets the lead in a show Powell's putting on. Songwriters Allie Wrubel and Mort Dixon stocked it with memorable songs, including the reason we're showing it, "No Horse, No Wife, No Mustache," but the high point of the film is definitely Powell's hazing. It's dedicated to West Point, where it was filmed, and writers Delmer Daves and Lou Edelman whip up a patriotic fervor that makes it perfect for Veterans Day. The film got a surprise Oscar nomination for Best Picture. (MP)

November 18

THE STRAWBERRY BLONDE (1941)

Raoul Walsh
Warner Bros./97 min.
35mm
Short: "The Dentist" (1932),
Leslie Pearce (W.C. Fields)

James Cagney and Olivia de Havilland played against type as a chump and funny, respectively, while Rita Hayworth established hers in this charming comedy. Cagney is Biff Grimes, a hot-tempered dentist who gets the redemptive chance of a lifetime when his best friend/worst enemy Hugo (Jack Carson) strolls in for a checkup. Flashbacking, Biff stews over the years he spent in jail after playing the fall guy to Hugo, who further upped the friends-like-these ante by stealing Biff's titular dream girl (Rita Hayworth). Then again, Biff's got a good opposites-attract thing going with the strawberry blonde's best friend (de Havilland), so what's he complaining about? This was the second and best of three stabs at James Hagan's play *One Sunday Afternoon* in a 15 year time span: Gary Cooper, Frances Fuller, and Fay Wray played the Cagney/de Havilland/Hayworth parts in 1933, and director Raoul Walsh was back for a musical version in 1948 featuring Dennis Morgan, Dorothy Malone, and Janis Paige. A master of marrying quality with quantity, the ever-prolific Walsh directed three other films released in 1941: *High Sierra*, *Manpower*, and *They Died with Their Boots On*, also with de Havilland. Meanwhile, Cagney and Carson were at it again that same year, fighting over Bette Davis in *The Bride Came C.O.D.* (MK)

November 25

DESERT FURY (1947)

Lewis Allen
Paramount/96 min.
16mm
Cartoon: "Flebus" (1957), Ernest Pintoff

The fictional town of Chuckawalla, Nevada turns upside down when reckless bombshell Paula Haller (Lizabeth Scott) comes home, landing squarely in her mother Fritzie's (Mary Astor) casino. She quickly finds the perfect match for infuriating her mother in shady Eddie Bendix (John Hodiak), who was not only run out of town right around the time his wife mysteriously died, but seems to have something of a past with Fritzie. Bent on curtailing her daughter's rebellious nature (though she's not exactly the best role model herself), Fritzie tries to break up the relationship with the two-pronged assistance of local lawman/Paula's ex Tom Hanson (Burt Lancaster). Meanwhile, Eddie's partner (Wendell Corey in his film debut) chips in for reasons of his own…actually, the plot is kind of hard to follow, but rest assured that you'll get your fill of double-crossings, spiteful glares, and face-slappings. For a noir-tinged melodrama set in the boonies, producer Hal B. Wallis went all out: between the Technicolor, costumes by Edith Head, and Miklos Rozsa's score, this is downright iconoclastic in its sumptuousness. (MK)

December 2

THE LAST GANGSTER (1937)

Edward Ludwig
MGM/81 min.
16mm
Short: "45 Minutes from Hollywood" (1926), Fred Guiol (Glen Tryon)

Edward G. Robinson signed a new contract at Warner Bros. in 1937 that guaranteed two specific things: he wouldn't have to play any more gangsters if he didn't want to, and he wouldn't have to carry any films by himself. He turned down a truckload of Warner scripts, and then went to MGM to make… a gangster movie, one where he was the only star. Appearing in the film with him was a rising young actor named James Stewart, who proved beyond a doubt that some men just shouldn't wear facial hair. Robinson plays a mob boss sent to prison for tax evasion, leaving his pregnant wife Talya (Rose Stradner) behind. Stewart plays a reporter who falls for Talya and marries her after she divorces Robinson; the two move away and raise the kid (Douglas Scott) together. When Robinson gets out of the hoosegow ten years later, he wants a part in his son's life. So, it turns out, do his old gangster cronies. This film, based on a rare story by William A. Wellman, was the second ever filmed at Alcatraz; the first, *Alcatraz Island*, beat it by a month. (MP)

December 9

VIVA ZAPATA! (1952)

Elia Kazan
20th Century Fox/113 min.
35mm
Cartoon: "Caballero Droopy" (1952), Dick Lundy (Droopy)

Marlon Brando earned his second of four consecutive Oscar nominations and Anthony Quinn won his first in this epic biopic of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. Brando's the titular leader, Quinn's his brother, and the future Mrs. Howard Hughes Jean Peters pops up as, well, the girl. Name-namer Elia Kazan helmed this while in the throes of his infamous HUAC controversy, which may account for the quavering treatment of Zapata's politics; Kazan hedges his bets with a general disgust for power and corruption. The director worked closely with author John Steinbeck on the Oscar-nominated script (he filmed Steinbeck's *East of Eden* three years later), and the film remained close to his heart: "of all the films that I have made, it is certainly one of those that are most dear to me." Beyond the stellar cast, producer Darryl Zanuck assembled Kazan's most accomplished crew to date: also Oscar-nominated were Alex North's score and Joe MacDonald's cinematography, which took inspiration from the famed Casasola photographs documenting the Mexican Revolution. Listen up for the future voice of Fred Flinstone as Pancho Villa (Alan Reed), Zapata's revolutionary counterpart whom Hollywood had previously memorialized with his own *Viva* film in 1934, starring Wallace Beery. (MK)

December 16

YOU CAN'T CHEAT AN HONEST MAN (1939)

George Marshall
Universal/76 min.
16mm
Cartoon: "The Man on the Flying Trapeze" (1934), Dave Fleischer (Popeye)

Given the success of the radio "feud" between W.C. Fields and Edgar Bergen's wooden dummy Charlie McCarthy on the Chase and Sanborn Show, it was inevitable that they'd end up sparring on the big screen. Fields turned down the role of the Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz* to sign a contract at Universal that gave him creative control, and this partial remake of his silent film *Two Flaming Youths* was the first film he chose to make (writing under the name "Charles Bogle"). He plays Larson E. Whipsnade, who runs a seedy and debt-ridden circus while his children attend an expensive college and his daughter (Constance Moore) gets involved in one of those romantic subplots that pop up in comedies like this. But you came for W.C. Fields, who surprised contemporary critics with how unlikable his new persona was: "Whipsnade is not the Fields we have known. We want no part of him," whined Frank Nugent in the New York *Times*. Of course, this is the same hilarious Fields that we got in the classics *The Bank Dick* and *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*, his next two films under his Universal contract. (MP)

December 23

BLOOD AND SAND (1941)

Rouben Mamoulian
20th Century Fox/125 min.
35mm
Cartoon: "Ferdinand the Bull" (1938), Dick Rickard

When Fox brought Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's classic bullfighting novel to the screen for the second time, they had some big shoes to fill. Replacing Rudolph Valentino, and not really up to the task, was heartthrob Tyrone Power (who wasn't allowed to do his own bullfighting), but once Rita Hayworth saunters onscreen—a saunter choreographed by Hermes Pan—all eyes are on her. Director Rouben Mamoulian said "You couldn't play Dona Sol, you had to be it," and finally, after testing over thirty actresses, he saw "it" in Hayworth, who saved the makeup crew the trouble of having to dye her hair red—and this was the first time audiences could luxuriate in that famous hair, since this was her first Technicolor film. Linda Darnell plays Power's wife, who doesn't have a chance once the sultry Hayworth sets her eyes on the young bullfighter, and Anthony Quinn plays the inevitable younger man. Mamoulian was hired because he directed the first three-strip Technicolor film, 1935's *Becky Sharp*, and he added set decoration to his résumé when he spray-painted parts of the sets to more resemble the paintings of El Greco. The gorgeous cinematography by Ray Rennahan and Ernest Palmer won an Oscar. (MP)

December 30

ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS (1939)

Howard Hawks
Columbia/121 min.
35mm
Newsreel: "Movietone News" (1937)

Jean Arthur arrives in a South American port town, and the men are literally killing themselves for a date with her: just wait until Rita Hayworth shows up. Cary Grant headlines as a tough-as-nails airmail pilot with an axe to grind against the ladies, and Arthur's the self-stranded showgirl he grinds it against. Things get complicated when a hotshot flyboy (Richard Barthelmess) joins their ranks with Grant's ex (Hayworth in her A-list coming-out party) on his arm. Drawing on his WWI flying experience, director Howard Hawks "knew every character personally that was in that picture," and used business-as-usual realism to draw out the tension in some especially harrowing scenes. In characteristic man's-man mode, Hawks excused the pilots' cavalier attitude toward their high turnover: "If they went into mourning for everybody who died in the squadron, they'd spend all their time mourning and it wouldn't be good for flying." Bookended by the comedies *Bringing Up Baby* and *His Girl Friday*, this was the second of the director's three consecutive classics starring Grant. And no, you're not having deja-vu, Hawks and screenwriter Jules Furthman reused that "all you have to do is ask me" line in *To Have and Have Not*. Nominated for the first-ever Best Special Effects Oscar. (MK)

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