

Some interesting films on US television, December 11-17

By Marty Jonas (MJ) and David Walsh (DW)
11 December 1999

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

Return to Oz (1985)—Sequel to *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), but with none of the characters from that film other than Dorothy. Highly imaginative but very disturbing (the film opens with Dorothy being threatened with shock therapy), this is definitely not a film for very young, impressionable children. Dorothy is played by the remarkable child actress Fairuza Balk (who grew into a remarkable but underemployed adult actress), and Nicol Williamson is the charlatan who tries to "cure" her in his sanitarium. Characters include a talking duck, a flying couch, the Nome King, and Jack Pumpkinhead. Will Vinton supplied the excellent Claymation sequences. Directed by Walter Murch. (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 11

*5:00 a.m. (HBO)—*A Shock to the System* (1990)—A middle-aged advertising executive being kicked off the corporate ladder by younger men discovers how easy it is in our society to literally get away with murder. He then begins—with some glee—to dispose of those who stand in his way. This very dark comedy—reminiscent of Chaplin's classic *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947)—has a marvelously deadpan performance by Michael Caine as the murderous executive. With Elizabeth McGovern, Peter Riegert and Swoosie Kurtz. Directed by Jan Egleson. (MJ)

6:00 a.m. (Encore)—*Romeo and Juliet* (1968)—Franco Zeffirelli's lush version of the famous love tragedy. Overwrought and simplified, but entertaining. With 17-year-old Leonard Whiting and 15-year-old Olivia Hussey in the leading roles. (DW)

6:00 a.m. (Cinemax)—*One-Eyed Jacks* (1961)—Marlon Brando's only directing effort. He plays an outlaw seeking revenge on Karl Malden, a former friend, now a sadistic sheriff. (DW)

*9:30 a.m. (HBOS)—*Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976)—A young man (based on the director, Paul Mazursky) moves from Brooklyn to Greenwich village to pursue a career as an actor. He falls in with an assortment of colorful characters. This fond reminiscence of Greenwich Village in the 1950s is unfortunately marred by a stereotyped, overdone Jewish-mother performance by Shelley Winters. With Lenny Baker, Christopher Walken and Ellen Greene. Watch for a brief, performance by then-newcomer Jeff Goldblum, who steals the scene he's in. (MJ)

*10:00 a.m. (TCM)—*The Gunfighter* (1950)—A famous gunfighter tries to retire and find peace in his later years, but his reputation follows him like a curse. A young gunslinger, eager to make a name for himself, challenges the older man to a final shootout. One of the best Westerns, somber and tragic, with fine performances by Gregory Peck and Skip Homeier. Directed by Henry King. (MJ)

12:00 p.m. (HBOS)—*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)—Elia Kazan's

version of the Tennessee Williams drama about the strong and the weak in a New Orleans tenement. Marlon Brando, Vivien Leigh, Kim Hunter and Karl Malden. (DW)

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

*2:30 p.m. (Showtime)—*Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986)—The affairs and careers of neurotic, middle class New Yorkers. Barbara Hershey is excellent, as are Mia Farrow and Dianne Wiest. One of Woody Allen's serious efforts—how successful an effort, let the viewer decide. (DW)

*4:00 p.m. (FXM)—*The Gang's All Here* (1943)—Delightful Busby Berkeley film, with the usual lush and intricate musical sequences, but this time in rich Technicolor. Watch for the not-so-subliminal chorus line of bananas in Carmen Miranda's "The Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat" number. (MJ)

4:30 p.m. (AMC)—*The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951)—A visitor from another galaxy visits our planet to issue a stern warning. Robert Wise's film is a liberal plea for peace and understanding; as such, it defied the McCarthyite xenophobia and bellicosity dominating Hollywood at the time. It stands up surprising well almost 50 years later. Starring Patricia Neal and Michael Rennie. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)—*The Man Who Would Be King* (1975)—John Huston's adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's novel is a rousing, enjoyable adventure film—one of his best. Sean Connery and Michael Caine have great chemistry as the buddies who try to steal the riches of the kingdom of Kafiristan by pretending that one of them is a god. Christopher Plummer makes an appearance as Kipling. (MJ)

12:25 a.m. (HBOS)—*A Star Is Born* (1954)—Judy Garland is the star on the way up and James Mason the unfortunate drunk on the way down, in George Cukor's version of the tragic tale. A remake of the 1937 film made by William Wellman, with Fredric March and Janet Gaynor. (DW)

12:30 a.m. (TCM)—*Gunga Din* (1939)—If one sets aside the history and politics of this film, about the heroic British army fighting off the thuggee cult in nineteenth century India, "the most entertaining of the juvenile Kipling movies." Directed by George Stevens. (DW)

1:05 a.m. (TNT)—*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)

Sunday, December 12

*6:00 a.m. (FXM)—*The Gang's All Here* (1943)—See Saturday at 4:00 p.m.

*7:00 a.m. (HBOP)—*Last Action Hero* (1993)—Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle that proves to be a delight. A boy goes to a movie theater and meets his idol—an action hero—who steps out of the screen and takes him back in. A good action film that spoofs the genre and plays with the tension between movies and reality. It also includes hilarious sendups of Olivier's *Hamlet* and Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*.

Directed by John McTiernan. (MJ)

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

1:55 p.m. (TBS)— *Rio Lobo* (1970)—Howard Hawks' last film (he died in 1977), something of a disappointment. John Wayne is an ex-Union colonel who discovers a gold shipment and uncovers a traitor. Jennifer O'Neill was not up to the task in this film. (DW)

2:00 p.m. (Bravo)— *La Strada* (1954)—Federico Fellini directed this work about a brutal carnival strongman (Anthony Quinn), his long-suffering girlfriend (Giuletta Masina) and a kindhearted acrobat (Richard Basehart). (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Singin' in the Rain* (1952)—Is there anyone who hasn't seen this film by now? Anyway, it's a remarkable musical, with Gene Kelly, Debbie Reynolds, Donald O'Connor, about the days of silent film. Stanley Donen and Kelly directed. (DW)

8:00 p.m. (FXM)— *Compulsion* (1959)—Richard Brooks' fictionalized account of the Leopold-Loeb "thrill" killings of the 1920s. Best thing about the film is Orson Welles in Clarence Darrow role. (DW)

*10:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Show Boat* (1936)—Paul Robeson is unforgettable singing "Old Man River" in James Whale's version of the Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein II musical about riverboat entertainers. Helen Morgan is also memorable singing "Bill." With Irene Dunne, Allan Jones. (DW)

*12:00 a.m. (TCM)— *The End of St. Petersburg* (1927)—Soviet director Vsevolod Pudovkin's film about a peasant from the provinces swept by the great events of 1917. With Ivan Chuvetov, Vera Baranovskaya, A.P. Christiakov. (DW)

1:30 a.m. (TCM)— *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* (1954)—A lively musical directed by Stanley Donen. When Howard Keel decides to find a wife, his brothers follow suit. With Jane Powell, Russ Tamblyn, Virginia Gibson. A Johnny Mercer-Gene DePaul score and Michael Kidd's choreography. (DW)

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

3:30 a.m. (TCM)— *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945)—"Biography" of the great American composer George Gershwin, heavy on the schmaltz. Robert Alda plays Gershwin. Directed by Irving Rapper. (MJ)

Monday, December 13

*6:45 a.m. (Cinemax)— *I Confess* (1953)—Alfred Hitchcock's tale of a priest, played by Montgomery Clift, who hears a confession of a murder and later becomes accused of the crime. Filmed in Quebec. (DW)

2:00 p.m. (FXM)— *Heaven Can Wait* (1943)—Don Ameche stars as a dead man seeking entry to hell, who recounts in flash back what he thinks has been a life full of sin. With Gene Tierney and Charles Coburn. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. (DW)

4:00 p.m. (Showtime)— *Carousel* (1956)—Hollywood turned a great dark Broadway musical into a perky feel-good film. Most of the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs are intact, however. Starring Gordon MacRae and Shirley Jones. Directed by Henry King. (MJ)

*6:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Adam's Rib* (1949)—One of the stronger Spencer Tracy-Katharine Hepburn films, in which the two find themselves on opposing sides in the court case of a woman (the wonderful Judy Holliday) who has shot and wounded her philandering husband (Tom Ewell). Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin wrote the script; George Cukor directed. (DW)

7:25 p.m. (TMC)— *Modern Romance* (1981)—Occasionally amusing film, directed by and starring Albert Brooks as a neurotic film editor obsessed with Kathryn Harrold. (DW)

*8:00 p.m. (Cinemax)— *The Ice Storm* (1997)—Excellent film by Ang Lee of aimlessness and disillusionment in the 1970s. As the middle class disintegrates in suburbia, we see the disintegration of the White House

playing out in the background as the Watergate crisis runs its course. The fine cast includes Kevin Kline, Sigourney Weaver, Joan Allen, Jamey Sheridan and Christina Ricci. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (Encore)— *Deconstructing Harry* (1997)—Woody Allen's film is mean-spirited, misanthropic, bitter, cynical, crude and foul-mouthed, but it is deliberately provocative, often funny, and one of his best films of recent years. A writer (Allen) confronts the friends and family members that he has cruelly featured in his novels, as well as their fictional representations. Also, Allen and his character confront their horror at growing old. Compare this film with the one preceding it, the light-hearted romantic musical *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996), which it seems to rebut. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)— *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947)—Chaplin plays a Parisian Bluebeard who murders women for their money. His famous courtroom speech, in which he describes himself as a small fry among mass murderers, did not endear him with US authorities. With the unlikely Martha Raye. (DW)

*8:30 p.m. (AMC)— *Laura* (1944)—A murder mystery about a woman believed to be dead who suddenly makes an appearance. Otto Preminger directed an extraordinary cast, including Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, Vincent Price and Clifton Webb. (DW)

*10:15 p.m. (TCM)— *Limelight* (1952)—Chaplin is a washed-up music hall comic who saves Claire Bloom from suicide in this exquisitely painful look at the art of performance. Chaplin and Buster Keaton, two immortals, team up in one memorable scene. (DW)

2:00 a.m. (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) and the late great Madeline Kahn. (MJ)

(Note: To celebrate the 25th anniversary of *Young Frankenstein*, FXM is running this film, as well as specials about it, repeatedly until 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, 12/15.)

*2:45 a.m. (AMC)— *Laura* (1944)—See 8:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 14

5:00 a.m. (TMC)— *Modern Romance* (1981)—See Monday at 7:25 p.m.

6:00 a.m. (TCM)— *The Crowd Roars* (1932)—James Cagney is a race car driver in this early sound film, directed by Howard Hawks. With Joan Blondell and Ann Dvorak (who was to star in Hawks's immortal *Scarface* the same year). (DW)

6:15 a.m. (AMC)— *Seven Chances* (1925)—Buster Keaton has until seven o'clock that evening to find a bride if he wants to inherit a fortune. He ends up being pursued by thousands of women. Some famous sequences in this silent film, directed by Keaton. (DW)

6:30 a.m. (Cinemax)— *Silk Stockings* (1957)—A Soviet agent (Cyd Charisse) falls in love with an American film producer (Fred Astaire) in Paris. Fair adaptation of the minor Cole Porter Broadway musical, which was itself adapted from the 1939 film *Ninotchka* (starring Greta Garbo). Directed by Rouben Mamoulian. (MJ)

*8:00 a.m. (HBOS)— *Casablanca* (1942)—See Saturday at 2:15 p.m.

3:30 p.m. (HBOS)— *A Star Is Born* (1954)—See Saturday at 12:25 a.m.

3:45 p.m. (Showtime)— *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994)—Louis Malle directed this film, his last, about a group of actors rehearsing an adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Andre Gregory is the director; writer Wallace Shawn plays the lead character. (DW)

*6:00 p.m. (Showtime)— *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986)—See Saturday at 2:30 p.m.

*8:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950)—One of the best jewel heist films, and one of director John Huston's best. With Sterling Hayden and Louis Calhern (who has the best line: "Crime is nothing but a left-handed form of endeavor"). (MJ)

10:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Badlanders* (1958)—A minor, but well-made

Delmer Daves Western, with Alan Ladd and Ernest Borgnine planning a gold robbery in Arizona at the turn of the century. Each attempts to outsmart the other. With Katy Jurado and Claire Kelly. (DW)

11:30 p.m. (AMC)— *Battle Cry* (1955)—Raoul Walsh World War II melodrama, about the lives and loves of a group of Marines getting ready for battle, with Van Heflin, Aldo Ray, Tab Hunter and Dorothy Malone. (DW)

11:30 p.m. (TCM)— *The Lost Patrol* (1934)—An interesting John Ford film about a squad of British soldiers stranded at a desert outpost somewhere in the Mesopotamian desert during World War I, and picked off one by one. With Victor McLaglen, Boris Karloff, Wallace Ford, Reginald Denny, Alan Hale. (DW)

2:05 a.m. (HBO)— *American Gigolo* (1980)—Paul Schrader wrote and directed this flawed but fascinating study of an upscale male prostitute. Starring Richard Gere. (MJ)

Wednesday, December 15

6:30 a.m. (Cinemax)— *A Place in the Sun* (1951)—A George Stevens film based on Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. Not very faithful to the book, but valuable in its own right. Elizabeth Taylor is extraordinary as Montgomery Clift's dream girl. (DW)

6:45 a.m. (HBOS)— *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)—See Saturday at 12:00 p.m.

4:30 p.m. (AMC)— *Home of the Brave* (1949)—Mark Robson directed this well-meaning film about black GI suffering abuse from fellow US soldiers in the Pacific during World War II. One of the first to deal with racial discrimination. (DW)

9:00 p.m. (USA)— *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (1989)—Real-life siblings Jeff Bridges and Beau Bridges play musician brothers in this emotionally gripping story of sibling rivalry, With Michelle Pfeiffer. Directed by Steve Kloves. (MJ)

9:00 p.m. (HBOS)— *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)—See Saturday at 12:00 p.m.

*10:00 p.m. (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)

*11:45 p.m. (IFC)— *Heavenly Creatures* (1994)—Odd, compelling film, based on fact and set in 1950s New Zealand. Two inseparable teen-age girls kill the mother of one to prevent their being parted. Directed by Peter Jackson. With Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet. (MJ)

*4:00 a.m. (AMC)— *The Getaway* (1972)—See 10:00 p.m.

Thursday, December 16

9:00 a.m. (TCM)— *Cimarron* (1931)—Dated early sound Western epic; a version of Edna Ferber's account of an American family living on the frontier in Oklahoma 1890-1915. Wesley Ruggles directed; with Richard Dix hamming it up, and Irene Dunne. (DW)

12:00 p.m. (Encore)— *Romeo and Juliet* (1968)—See Saturday at 6:00 a.m.

12:30 p.m. (TNT)— *Tootsie* (1982)—See Saturday at 1:05 a.m.

1:15 p.m. (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)

5:35 p.m. (FXM)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—Burt Reynolds and Cybill Shepherd can neither sing nor dance—they are definitely not Astaire and Rogers. Still, it's fun to watch them mangle Cole Porter's beautiful music and lyrics. Peter Bogdanovich's glitzy, expensive film proves that a warm affection for 1930's film musicals is not enough. One of the great bombs. With Madeline Kahn (often funny, despite her material) and John Hillerman. (MJ)

*8:00 p.m. (AMC)— *How Green Was My Valley* (1941)—John Ford's

powerful film about Welsh coal miners. With Walter Pidgeon, Maureen O'Hara, Donald Crisp and Roddy McDowall. (MJ)

11:30 p.m. (TCM)— *Ben-Hur* (1959)—Turgid retelling of Lew Wallace's "epic." Charlton Heston stars as the Jew Ben-Hur and Stephen Boyd as Messala, who remains loyal to Rome. Famous for its chariot-race. Directed by William Wyler. (DW)

*2:00 a.m. (AMC)— *How Green Was My Valley* (1941)—See 8:00 p.m.

Friday, December 17

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

7:35 a.m. (FXM)— *At Long Last Love* (1975)—See Thursday at 5:35 p.m.

12:00 p.m. (TCM)— *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945)—Robert Young, as a disfigured man, and Dorothy McGuire, as an unattractive woman, who grow beautiful in an enchanted locale. Directed by John Cromwell (father of actor James). (DW)

*3:45 p.m. (HBOS)— *Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976)—See Saturday at 9:30 a.m.

4:00 p.m. (AMC)— *A Night to Remember* (1958)—Well-made film about the sinking of the Titanic, directed by Roy Ward Baker. With Kenneth More, David McCallum, Jill Dixon, Laurence Naismith. Novelist Eric Ambler wrote the script based on the book by Walter Lord. (DW)

5:30 p.m. (FXM)— *The Sun Also Rises* (1957)—Star-filled adaptation of the Hemingway novel. Glossy and inadequate. Directed by Henry King. (MJ)

10:00 p.m. (FXM)— *The Name of the Rose* (1986)—A murder mystery set in a medieval monastery (the MacGuffin is a lost book by Aristotle). Though lacking much of the rich detail of Umberto Eco's fine novel, the film stands well on its own. Sean Connery is perfect as the monk-detective, John of Baskerville. With Christian Slater, F. Murray Abraham and William Hickey. Directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud. (MJ)

10:35 p.m. (AMC)— *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971)—Vincent Price stars in this very strange, baroque horror film about a man who devises imaginative forms of revenge. Price's character has been injured in an accident, so he speaks but never moves his lips—an eerie touch. Directed by Robert Fuest. (MJ)

11:30 p.m. (TCM)— *The Locket* (1946)—A drama about a woman (Laraine Day) with psychological problems who ruins the men who fall for her. One of several "mood-drenched melodramas" directed by John Brahm. With Brian Aherne, Robert Mitchum, Gene Raymond. (DW)

2:00 a.m. (TCM)— *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955)—One of Ingmar Bergman's most delightful works, about a group of people on a weekend at a country estate, set in the late nineteenth century. With Ulla Jacobsson, Eva Dahlbeck, Harriet Andersson, Gunnar Bjornstrand. (DW)

4:35 a.m. (AMC)— *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* (1971)—See 10:35 p.m.

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