

FILMS ON FREE TO VIEW TV WEEK COMMENCING 9 JANUARY 2021

Due to scheduling changes at Lincoln City Radio I will, temporarily, be doing my film round-up on Saturday mornings, so this week's summary overlaps a little with last week's and goes up to next Saturday.

So, before I get on to next week's films, here's a recap of those that I mentioned last time that you can still catch:

- Black Narcissus: Saturday 1.15pm BBC2
- Contraband: Saturday 2.25pm Talking Pictures
- Reds: Saturday 9pm Talking Pictures
- Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy: Saturday 9.30pm BBC2

Graham Greene and Fritz Lang

- The Big Heat (1953) Sunday 11.25pm Sony
- This Gun For Hire (1942) Wednesday 11.25am Sony
- Ministry of Fear (1944) Friday 1.15pm Film 4

Famously, Graham Greene divided his prodigious output into the literary novels and 'the entertainments', though both shared his guilt-riddled world view. Greene was shrewd enough early on to know that he could write in a genre style that would make his work easy and attractive to film. He was, after all, a film critic as well. This week we have two adaptations of his early espionage novels, A Gun For Sale and Ministry of Fear. The former is transferred from Europe to San Francisco but the latter retains its wartime London setting, albeit a Hollywood version. In both films, Greene's protagonists are men on the run, lugging around their guilty pasts. This Gun For Hire has Alan Ladd in his first starring role, shocking in his quiet violence, while in Ministry of Fear Ray Milland is the man who stumbles into a Nazi plot, although the script omits entirely a crucial element of the book; his murder of his ailing wife. Both are cracking thrillers but Ministry of Fear has the advantage of being directed by Fritz Lang, great German director of paranoid classics Metropolis and M, who fled to Europe and then the US to escape Nazism. Lang's world view was understandably bleak and not dissimilar to that of Greene. His films consistently feature individuals who find themselves in nightmarish situations which require them to stand up against the forces of oppression, all suffused by his strikingly expressionist visuals. By 1953, Lang was an established Hollywood director but his more recent films had been relatively less interesting. The Big Heat returned him once more to his favourite themes, though in this case it is organised crime that provides the sinister and vicious malignant force that destroys the happiness of its central character, a police officer. Its violence still retains the power to shock.

Other great heat movies?

- In The Heat Of The Night (1967) Sunday 9pm Sony
- Towering Inferno (1974) Sunday 3.30pm ITV4

Now we're cooking... redneck cop Rod Steiger clashes with cool city colleague Sidney Poitier as they try to solve a murder in Mississippi in Norman Jewison's now rather dated race issues thriller and a huge, disposable cast mostly plummets to its death while architect and fire chief argue and then collaborate in Towering Inferno. It may have gained some poignancy in the light of subsequent real tragedies. Finally, to cool off take a look at one of the short, historic public information films from the 1950s on Talking Pictures; The Benefits of Having a Fridge (Saturday 16th, 6am)

And if you're still in the mood for paranoia...

- Psycho (1960) Saturday 9pm Sony
- Assignment Paris (1952) Tuesday 6am Sony Action

Avoid all imitations (including the bizarre, virtual shot by shot remake by Gus Van Sant from 1988): this is the daddy of them all. Hitchcock was warned against doing it, after his string of glossy, highly-successful thrillers in the 1950s, but he was determined to try something that was different in every respect. The authorship of the infamous shower scene remains controversial: Saul Bass was brought in to storyboard the complex sequences of shots that make up the scene but it seems clear that the directorial control and the actual shooting of the scene was entirely Hitchcock's work. Assignment Paris is less exalted by far, a cold war thriller set in Hungary, with Dana Andrews as a reporter framed for espionage.

On a lighter note...

- It Should Happen To You! (1954) Tuesday 6am Sony
- The Importance of Being Earnest (1952) 12.05pm Talking Pictures

Judy Holliday was at the peak of her career when she starred in It Should Happen To You!, a witty satire scripted by Garson Kanin and directed by George Cukor. Holliday bravely resisted naming names to the HUAC anti-communist hearings but died of cancer at only 44. The second film here needs no introduction. This is a pretty straight transcription to the screen with a starry cast and Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell, forever associated with the one line.

Elsewhere...

- Dead Man's Shoes (2004) Saturday 11.05pm Film 4
- The Big Short (2015) Saturday 11.30pm BBC2
- Pili (2017) Wednesday 2.20am Film 4
- Mrs Brown (1997) Wednesday 9pm BBC4

- Gladiator (2000) Wednesday 10pm Channel 5
- Blade Runner 2049 (2017) Friday 9pm Sony

Shane Meadows is one of the best of British film-makers, usually working on very small budgets with a repertory company of actors on subjects and in locations that illustrate the struggles of poverty and abuse of one kind or another: a harder-edged, more nihilistic social realism than that of Ken Loach. *Dead Man's Shoes* has its flaws and isn't an easy watch but it's worth the effort. *The Big Short* is the story of how hedge fund managers made a killing out of the collapse of the sub-prime US mortgage market. Adam McKay's treatment is neatly informative and very funny in parts. It's the ultimate take on capitalism eating itself, the final irony being that the film was a big commercial hit. *Pili* was one of the best films I saw last year, a lightly dramatized story of how a young HIV-positive Tanzanian woman tries to achieve financial security for herself and her child. There's a remarkable performance by Bello Rashid as Pili. *Mrs Brown* is back to solid British historical drama with Judi Dench and Billy Connolly as the unlikely pair of Queen Victoria and John Brown, her Scottish man for all purposes (well, maybe not all purposes, but there was talk, hence the title). Not to be confused (ever) with *Mrs Brown's Boys D'Movie*. *Gladiator* took the top Oscars and made a mint and it remains a truly spectacular piece of work by Ridley Scott, not least coaxing such performances out of all concerned, including Oliver Reed. Scott's reputation also rides on *Blade Runner*, the visually impressive but narratively confusing sci-fi film noir based on a Philip K Dick novel. A sequel had been long-planned but in the end Scott decided not to direct and the gig went to Denis Villeneuve. Never one to do things subtly, Villeneuve managed to achieve equally stunning visuals but a long (260 minutes) and confusing film that seemed a bit flabby. But don't take my word for it: take a look yourself.

Oddity of the week

- *Fear and Desire* (1953) Saturday (16th) 02.25am Talking Pictures

Stanley Kubrick's first feature, made on a shoestring, is an anti-war film about a small group of soldiers stranded behind enemy lines in an unnamed conflict. To be honest, it's hard to see a genius at work here and Kubrick himself tried to destroy all copies. Still, it does contain themes that he returned to throughout his career and his collaboration with writer Howard Sackler and actor Frank Silvera gave rise to Kubrick's next film, *Killer's Kiss*, that kick-started his career.