

FILMS ON FREE TO VIEW TV WEEK COMMENCING 19 APRIL 2021

Clint Eastwood

It's extraordinary to think that Clint Eastwood will be 91 next month. He has been acting in films and TV for 65 years and is still active as actor and director. His latest film, *Cry Macho*, will be released later this year.

Given the number of films he has directed or appeared in, he's hard to avoid in any TV week but this week we have a chance to map almost his whole career.

- *Gran Torino* (2008) Monday 9.00pm ITV4
- *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (1966) Monday 9.00pm Paramount
- *In The Line Of Fire* (1993) Tuesday 9.00pm Sony
- *A Fistful Of Dollars* (1964) Weds 9.00pm Paramount
- *Two Mules For Sister Sara* (1970) Saturday 6.40pm Paramount

Eastwood wasn't the first choice for *The Man With No Name*: Leone had wanted Henry Fonda to play against type (a wish that came true in *Once Upon A Time In The West*). It was only when he saw a particular episode of *Rawhide*, the long-running TV series in which Eastwood appeared, that he changed his mind. Later, Leone said: 'His laziness is what came over so clearly...he was like a snake, forever taking a nap 500 feet away, wrapped in his coils...Then he'd open his coils out, unfold and stretch...' Although he was keen to break out from TV, Eastwood was no pushover on set and clearly made a significant contribution to the script and the look of the film, which Leone had modelled on Akira Kurosawa's Japanese samurai film, *Yojimbo*.

By the time of *The Good...* the professional relationship between Leone and Eastwood was tense. Leone was jealous of Eastwood's fame resulting from what he considered 'his' films and Eastwood, already keen to direct, was equally frustrated. It was their last collaboration and ended with a serious rift.

Back in Hollywood, Eastwood was now a hot property, building his screen persona; a tough, principled loner standing out against the crowd. Still, he wasn't beyond poking a little fun; in *Two Mules For Sister Sara* he's a mercenary taken in by a nun who turns out not to be quite what she seems. Perhaps not one of his best efforts but it's directed by Don Siegel, a Hollywood veteran with whom Eastwood struck up a continuing working relationship and who was responsible for shaping Eastwood's approach to directing: strong, no frills, narrative story-telling with a minimum of artifice.

By the time of *In The Line Of Fire*, Eastwood was at the top of the tree, both as director and actor. He plays a guilt-racked Secret Service agent on the trail of a would-be presidential assassin. Wolfgang Petersen directs a fine action thriller and Eastwood has worthy opposition in John Malkovich. Like each of the previous three films on show this week, it also has a score by Ennio Morricone, a nod to those spaghetti western days.

Gran Torino sees Eastwood in late career, a retired and reclusive Detroit Ford worker, recently widowed, who is drawn, reluctantly, into the lives of the Korean family who have recently moved next door. This is classic Eastwood territory and while some have criticised its rather simplistic message and white saviourism, it's a fine example of both his acting and directing skills. This time some of the music is provided by his son Kyle.

Around the world...

- Happy as Lazzaro (2018) Tuesday 00.55am Film 4
- Ema (2019) Saturday 1.35am Channel 4

Happy as Lazzaro is hard to define: part parable, part social realism in the traditional Italian mode. Lazzaro, a benign and trusting young man is the link, via a mysterious event, between two stories, one of privilege and one of urban poverty. It's a strange but satisfying film. Ema is a rather fiercer piece from Chilean director Pablo Larrain. Ema is a dancer, desperate to find the child she and her husband adopted and then returned to the orphanage. Larrain is known for his films about the continuing personal damage and societal dislocation resulting from the Pinochet regime.

Elsewhere...

- Shampoo (1975) Monday 11.40pm Sony
- House of Bamboo (1955) Tuesday 3.55pm Talking Pictures
- Snowpiercer (2013) Weds 11.50pm Film 4
- Young and Innocent (1937) Friday 1.20pm Talking Pictures
- Philomena (2013) Friday 11.35pm BBC1
- Julia (1977) Saturday 6.50pm Talking Pictures
- Dangerous Liaisons (1988) Sunday 10.00pm BBC2

Shampoo, set on the day of Nixon's election as president in 1968, actually says more about contemporary Hollywood. It was the third film in a row for which Robert Towne was nominated for a screenplay Oscar (this time jointly with star and producer, Warren Beatty). Towne was a famously destructive force, at this time addicted to cocaine, and it's unclear how much of his scripts ever reached the screen and how much support he got from his friends Warren Beatty and, on Chinatown, Jack Nicholson.

I have a soft spot for Samuel Fuller, at best a B movie director but also a great iconoclast whose films look like tabloid newspapers: lurid stories and banner headlines, but sharp and often startling to look at. On one level a standard thriller, House of Bamboo is enlivened by its great widescreen colour photography and its Japanese location.

International co-productions often turn out to be multi-national turkeys but Snowpiercer, US/Korean financed, made in Prague, based on a French graphic novel series and with an international cast, turned out rather well. It's a post-apocalyptic thriller, as the remnants of the human race embark on a trans-globe train

ride after an attempt to reverse global warming has gone wrong. It sounds a bit like the East Midlands Trains journey between Lincoln and Spalding.

This week's Hitchcock is an early, less well-known one: *Young and Innocent* has a sassy young heroine trying to prove the innocence of a man on the run. It's good fun and has a famous crane shot which reveals the identity of the real killer. If you missed Hitchcock's rather more substantial *Notorious* last week, it follows on after *Young and Innocent* today.

Steve Coogan and Judi Dench sound an unlikely pairing but in *Philomena* it works a treat. It's based on the true story of Philomena Lee, an Irish woman who spent 50 years trying to trace the child taken from her by the Catholic church and given up for adoption. Coogan plays real-life journalist Martin Sixsmith, who is drawn into helping her search. Stephen Frears directs with his usual compassion and the film was nominated for four Oscars.

Talking of Oscars, *Julia* was the big film of 1978, nominated for a total of 10, though winning only three. It was based on a story by American writer Lillian Hellman about her friendship with Julia, a Jewish woman working against the Nazis in pre-war Europe. Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave play the leads. Despite its success the film was mired in accusations that Hellman had either made up or greatly exaggerated her own role. In the end, the film looks as though it's much more about Hellman than the heroic Julia.

More Oscars (three from seven nominations) and more Stephen Frears and John Malkovich in *Dangerous Liaisons*, Christopher Hampton's adaptation of his own play based on the 18th century French novel. Strangely, two hundred years after it was written, the novel spawned two film adaptations simultaneously, the other being *Valmont*, directed by Milos Forman. This one is witty, sumptuous and beautifully made.

And finally...

*After just over a year, this will be my last weekly round-up of films on free to view TV. It's been great fun but I think it's time now for all of us to begin to prise ourselves out of those armchairs and get out a bit more. I've taken in a lot of films in the course of the year and I hope you have enjoyed at least some of them. I hope too, that you have forgiven my excessive devotion to Hitchcock and Michael Powell and the occasional duff suggestion. I've seen some unexpected gems and some real oddities in the last year but please don't hold *Fire Maidens of Outer Space* against me.*

Bye!