DARK KNIGHT REVIEW

Noir City Sentinel

NO STOCKS NO SPORTS ALL NOIR

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VOL. 3 NO. 4 CCCC**** A PUBLICATION OF THE FILM NOIR FOUNDATION MONTHLY 2 CENTS JULY/AUG 2008

START MAKING YOUR PLANS!

DATES SET FOR NOIR CITY 7

Fave Frisco Fest Back At Castro Palace Jan. 23

SAN FRANCISCO — The 7th annual edition of Noir City: The San Francisco Film Noir Festival will take place January 23 through February 1, 2009, at the majestic Castro Theater in San Francisco, hosted by the Film Noir Foundation.

Sentinel subscribers are getting a sneak peek at the poster (right) before it's posted on the Noir City website. Prominently featured is the new Ms. Noir City, Alycia Tumlin, selected as this year's festival femme fatale from more than 70 contenders.

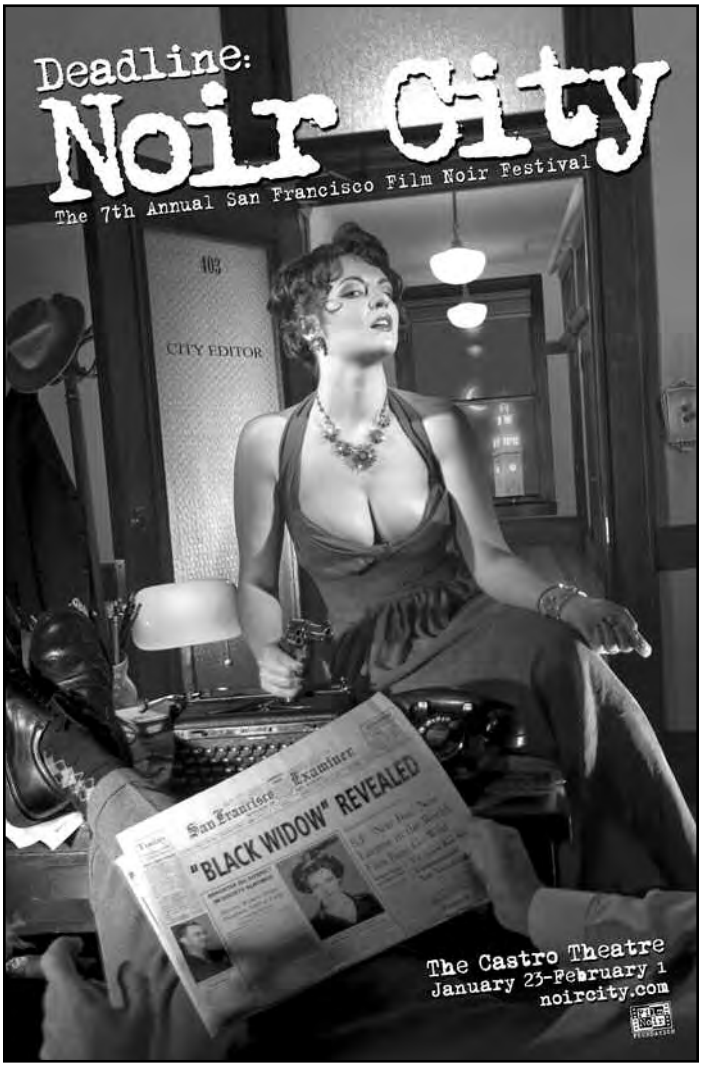
As savvy viewers might already have guessed, the theme of Noir City 7 is the newspaper racket, and programmer and host Eddie Muller discloses that "most of the films have a media theme: publishing, newspapers, radio, that sort of thing."

The full schedule of films will be released in the next issue of the *Sentinel*, and will be posted on the FNF and Noir City websites in October.

"We're still trying to lock down a few really rare items," said Muller, "but we're pretty well set. It's an eclectic line-up."

This year's poster is once again the work of the FNF's graphics designer Bill Selby and photographer David Allen, working from a concept supplied by Muller. San Francisco's Mechanic's Institute Library was enlisted to portray the 1940s-era newspaper office.

"There's a storyline within the poster," Muller noted. "And Alycia is eager to enact it. She's a very enthusiastic Ms. Noir City, which makes me a little nervous."



UNIVERSAL FIRE NOT AS DIRE AS FIRST FEARED

Studio Working 24/7 to Replace Damaged Films

A SENTINEL STAFF REPORT

UNIVERSAL CITY, CA — "Casualties" from the June 1 fire at Universal Studios—which burned part of the studio's main film vault—are not as extensive as initially feared.

Yes, numerous prints were lost, of contemporary and vintage titles. But sources within the company, who supply the Noir City festival and other festivals and repertory cinemas around the world, indicate that a quickly paid insurance settlement has allowed the company to work virtually round-the-clock striking new prints of all the films that were either lost or damaged.

Since studios make it a policy to never store circulating prints and original elements together (a hedge against incidents exactly like this), the materials needed to strike new prints were not affected.

Universal's plan is to start by replacing films that had screenings already scheduled, so those bookings can be met. Eventually, all the "lost" films will be resurrected in new prints.

Especially heartening is that none of the Universal-International titles scheduled for the next Noir City festival were affected. One print of the five U-I selected for screening in San Francisco was damaged, but a new print will be struck in time, Universal sources confirmed.

FILM NOIR: NO LAUGHING MATTER?

An Opinion-Editorial
BY ERIC BEETNER
Special to the *Sentinel*

Anyone who has attended a screening of a classic film noir with a modern audience has experienced it. The proceedings onscreen are anything but light and yet a line of dialogue or burst of action elicits chuckles, if not outright peals of laughter. At a recent screening of *Night Editor* (1946) at the annual Palm Springs Film Noir Festival, you would have thought the Marx Brothers had wandered on-screen to judge by the knee-slapping audience reaction.

What is this phenomenon? Why are contemporary audiences compelled to laugh at films from a different era? Or, more pointedly—are they laughing *at* the films or *with* them?

What get the biggest laughs invariably are the juiciest slices of hard-boiled dialogue. Sterling Hayden can scarcely get a word out without being chuckled at for his rat-a-tat-tat delivery and flat, tough-guy speech pattern. In *The Killing* (1956) he dresses down Marie Windsor with "You've got a great big dollar sign there where most women have a heart," and it's hard not to get a kick out of it—but is it worthy of guffaws? Outrageous bon mots and double entendres are part of why we love noir, but at their core these films are hard-boiled crime dramas. Too often, modern moviegoers act as if they're watching a slapstick comedy.

There are a variety of opinions as to what sparks the laughter. American Cinematheque programmer Chris D. (who coordinates the NOIR CITY festival in Los Angeles) believes

(continued on pg. 7, col. 1)

Illustration by Steve Ditko

THIS DIRTY TOWN

By J.J. Humsecker Jr.

Let's all follow the bouncing ball of the "new" *Bad Lieutenant*: First came word that **Werner Herzog** was remaking **Abel Ferrara**'s 1992 bile-noir with **Nicholas Cage** standing in (full frontal?) for Harvey Kietel. Herzog is shooting in New Orleans, figuring the post-Katrina environment will add heft to the proceedings. Ferrara said to French reporters: "I wish these people die in hell. I hope they're all in the same streetcar and it blows up." Nothing like esprit de corps.

Now Herzog declares that the film is not a remake, but the first of a possible series of noir-style films about a corrupt cop: *Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call: New Orleans*. Herzog also bemoans the inevitable confusion that will dog his project. Werner, here's an (albeit far-fetched) suggestion: *New Title*. A funny interview with Herzog about the whole mess can be found at Defamer.com.

•

Another reported project we're wondering about is *Black Wings Has My Angel,* an adaptation of **Elliott Chaze**'s 1953 novel that was announced last spring as the initial producing effort of actor **Elijah Wood**, in conjunction with Indalo Prod-uctions. We heard from writer **Barry Gifford** that he'd completed a screenplay in collaboration with director **Christopher Peditto**, but no further word has come on casting. It'd be nice to see this done right: Chaze's book is one of the great unheralded works of noir fiction; in fact, Gifford was set to reprint the book back in the 1980s as part of his venerable Black Lizard paperback series, but rights issues delayed things past the point when Black Lizard was sold to Vintage / Random House. Thankfully a new (albeit sloppy and typo-ridden) edition of the book is available from www.blackmask.com, since original copies of the Gold Medal paperback are now priced in the $400–$600 range.

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It seems that every three or four years another fitting tribute gets paid to American original **Arthur Fellig** (aka Weegee, 1899–1968). The *New York Times*'s June 20 Art and Design section ran a wonderful feature on the man who coined the term "the naked city" and whose legendary real-life crime photography was a major influence on noir artists of all media. I recall enjoying—but not enough—**Howard Franklin**'s 1992 film *The Public Eye*, which was clearly inspired by Fellig (played by **Joe Pesci**). Weegee still deserves better. Noir fans can see him in Robert Wise's *The Set-Up* (1949) making a cameo as the ring timekeeper.

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Los Angeles residents might want to take their film noir badges to the city of Sierra Madre to check out *Earth and Sky*, an intriguing new play billed by its author, **Douglas Post**, as "a romantic film noir thriller."

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Just how deeply is noir permeating the Southern California arts community? Well, dancer-choreographer **Meg Wolfe**'s latest work, *Eleven Missing Days*, features herself and four "movement collaborators" using film noir as a "starting point to explore doomed love, the femme fatale, disappearance, and the creative process." Be warned: The *San Diego Union Tribune* refers to Wolfe as a "postmodernist jokester with a sly sense of humor."

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Due in theaters this November is *Dark Streets*, a musical noir set in 1930s New Orleans with a plot about big-business corruption that sounds straight out of the Enron debacle, if the Enron debacle had featured singing and dancing (which might have helped). The film, directed by **Rachel Samuels** and written by first-timer **Wallace King** (from **Glenn Stewart**'s stage musical), has gotten mixed reviews on the festival circuit, mostly of the typical "looks great, plays flat" variety. We reserve judgment . . .

•

But no judgment reserved on *The Dead Girl*, one of the great overlooked films of 2006, finally available on DVD. Writer-director **Karen Moncrief** crafts a superb screenplay about the lives of various people entwined with a murdered girl, and her sensitive direction elicits great performances from a cast that includes **Toni Collette**, **Marcia Gay Harden**, and **Mary Beth Hurt**. Highly recommended.

•

An interesting article in the *Hindustan Times* shows that the travails of preserving films are a global issue. What particularly pops out from this thoughtful piece is a reference to an apparently missing 1959 Indian film, *The Black Cat*, described as "a film noir with **Balraj Sahni** as a Bogart-style, cigarette-puffing detective." Hmmm, that has to be found immediately. Any info out there?

•

If you're a brave and hardy soul who can stomach the arch proselytizing of academics, you may find something of value in the following: **Charles Bogle** offers a politically charged review of the Warner Bros. Film Noir Collection Vol. 4 at the World Socialist Web Site, and it's pretty much what you'd expect.

If you crave balance in these things, check out the book *Arts of Darkness: American Noir and the Quest for Redemption* by Baylor University professor of ethics and culture and National Review film critic **Thomas Hibbs**, in which he attempts to redefine the essential tenets of noir to rescue it from its (already somewhat specious) roots in Marxism and nihilism and make it safe for theocratic neoconservative believers.

Love to hear readers' reactions, since I'll be skipping both—I need to concentrate on alphabetizing my spice rack.

QUERIES & SUBMISSIONS

If you wish to submit an idea or a finished article, please email Managing Editor Donald Malcolm at:

dmalcolmjr@yahoo.com

Finished articles, no longer than 750 words, are subject to editing for space and content. Press releases will be edited to conform to style guidelines. The *Sentinel* does not pay for articles; all content is contributed. We claim no rights on material contributed for publication or posting.

Mr. Modern Noir

The Martial Art Of David Mamet

TAKING HIS CUE from classic sports noirs such as *Body and Soul* (1947) and *Night and the City* (1950), David Mamet fashions a hard-hitting macho meditation on honor and betrayal with his latest film, *Redbelt*. Instead of boxing or wrestling, the central physical source of conflict here is jujitsu, but the underlying theme of personal ethics versus organized corruption is no less resonant.

Directing his own script, Mamet delivers his trademark quick-jab dialogue within a bob-and-weave storyline that is less convoluted—and less compelling—than previous walks on the dark side such as *House of Games* (1987) and *Things Change* (1988), but he manages to keep the audience fully engaged until the final bell.

The main protagonist, jujitsu instructor Mike Terry, is portrayed with carefully controlled passion by Chiwetel Ejiofor (*Talk to Me* [2007], *American Gangster* [2007]). Noir is more of an internal journey than an external excursion, and Ejiofor's sad eyes empathetically reflect the conspiratorial circumstances engulfing him. Also in the cast is comedian Tim Allen, who at first seems cast against type when introduced during a barroom brawl, but when it's revealed he is playing a narcissistic movie star, his presence makes sense. He inhabits Mamet's hard-boiled cutthroat world with impressive ease. I was rather relieved when Joe Mantegna showed up, since he (like William H. Macy) is to Mamet what Walter Matthau was to Neil Simon—a natural mouthpiece for a mannered but unique linguistic rhythm, which not all actors can master so effortlessly. Mamet-speak is as distinctive as Runyonese.

Emily Mortimer and Chiwetel Ejiofor in David Mamet's "fight noir," *Redbelt*.

The pivotal role of a cop who is also Mike's prize martial-arts student, unwittingly caught up in the random whirlwind of unfortunate "coincidences," is played by a little-known actor with the lounge-lizard moniker of Max Martini, who reveals an inner vulnerability that nicely complements his stock tough-guy persona. In the lower-profile female roles, Emily Mortimer ably plays a lawyer who is the initial catalyst for the proceedings, and Alice Braga is stern and sexy as Mike's long-suffering but somehow suspicious wife.

Redbelt ends with a TKO despite its somewhat ridiculous (but crowd-pleasing) forays into martial-arts mayhem, particularly during the feverish but fully satisfying finale. A few of the plot points seem slightly forced too, especially a stunning suicide midway through the twisting tale, but this is still *The Karate Kid* for grown-ups, and viewed as such, it's a winner.

—Will Viharo

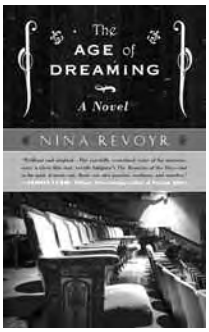
Ed: Mr. Modern Noir also weighs in on *The Dark Knight*, page 8.

New and Used BOOKS

NOVEL APPROACH TO SILENT-ERA "NOIR"

The Age of Dreaming by Nina Revoyr
Akashic Press, $15.95, 327 pages

This wonderful novel will appeal to readers who appreciate the noir ethos, but even more to aficionados of vintage Hollywood, in particular the early days of silent cinema. The author fancifully entwines the life story of Japanese film star Sessue Hayakawa with the sensational, still-unsolved murder of 1920s film director William Desmond Taylor, creating a narrative that hums with the excitement of Hollywood's pioneer era.



Revoyr sets her main story in 1964, depicting it as the pivotal moment when the Dream Factory's old guard surrendered its bright torch to the "new Hollywood." An ambitious young cineaste, Nick Bellinger, discovers the elderly, reserved Jun Nakayama—a major Hollywood star of the silent era—living in total obscurity.

To Nakayama's amazement, the young man has written a screenplay featuring a role perfect for the reclusive actor. Bellinger's persistence opens Nakayama's personal Pandora's Box, forcing him to revisit, both in memory and in person, many of the colleagues with whom he forged a cinematic legacy that has been sadly forgotten. In true noir fashion, a dreadful secret lies buried at the core of all their lives.

Included in the backstory is a gallery of intriguing characters such as Ashley Bennett Tyler, Nora Minton Niles, and Elizabeth Banks—composites of real-life figures William Desmond Taylor, Mary Miles Minter, and Mabel Normand. Revoyr renders these characters with élan, but she wisely prunes the complexity of the actual Desmond murder case down to manageable size, using it as a plot device that keeps the story moving while she deftly explores the manners and mores of a culture that would so avidly embrace the Other—making a major star of a dashing and darkly dangerous Japanese actor only to abruptly turn him into a pariah, forced to choose between demeaning character roles and utter obscurity.

Revoyr is a supple and well-focused writer, able to convey complexities of human thought and behavior in concise, evocative prose. She provides a thoroughly convincing journey through the Hollywood of several

(continued on pg. 3, col. 4)

Noir City Sentinel

Published once a month by the Film Noir Foundation, One Sunset Drive, Kensington, CA
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NAZIS & COMMIES IN NOIR

TAKING THE LOW ROAD OF CARICATURE AND OMISSION

By Marc Svetov
Special to the Sentinel

First, two questions: What did film noir show of Nazism and Communism? And what did Nazism and Communism stand for in these films?

The paucity of both ideas and ideology is immediately apparent. Most of these movies portray a ring of conspirators spying for either Germany or the Soviet Union. That is the case with *Ministry of Fear* (1944), *Pickup on South Street* (1953), *Notorious* (1946), and *The House on 92nd Street* (1945). But these spies in action act no different than mobsters or common criminals. And presenting Nazism and Communism without their underlying philosophies is like portraying the Ku Klux Klan—see *Storm Warning* (1951)—without the racism.

The virulent, fervid *Woman on Pier 13* (1949, a/k/a *I Married a Communist*) deals with Communism at home and gives a hint as to why the movement could be attractive as a *Weltanschauung*, especially to idealistic young people longing for a more righteous society. It was especially seductive to those born on the wrong side of the tracks—like Frank Johnson (Robert Ryan), for example, who is now living under the name of Brad Collins, having been a radical and staunch Party member in the 1930s.

Collins has changed sides. We see how he was unable to find a job in Depression America, became angry at social and economic conditions, and found a home in the Party. But soon it becomes clear to him that striving for justice is only its cynical pretense. Thomas Gomez plays Vanning, Party boss in San Francisco, who runs his empire the way any gangster would and is after increased power on the docks. Unable to dominate the unions by sheer numbers, the Communists resort to illegitimate means to bend union politics their way. Their ruthless tactics are always at the expense of the union and the workers.

William Talman plays a cold-blooded Party henchman and Paul E. Burns a Stalinist-style bureaucratic murderer and gofer. Under Vanning's leadership, union negotiations are subverted and people suspected of betraying the Party are simply eliminated. The Party brainwashes young, impressionable workers with lofty rhetoric and blackmails former members to coerce subversive action that will consolidate their power. At the film's conclusion, Ryan kills Vanning with a grappling hook, showing that it is the working man who will take care of the Commies.

Samuel Fuller's *Pickup on South Street* tells us little about Communists other than that they are a bunch of mobsters who, when crossed, do just what gangsters do. It is unclear what motivates them. But the complexity of lead character Skip McCoy (Richard Widmark) sustains our interest. An FBI agent tries to appeal to Skip's patriotism: "If you refuse to cooperate, you'll be as guilty as the traitors who gave Stalin the A-bomb." McCoy: "Are you waving the flag at me?" FBI agent: "Do you know what treason is?" McCoy: "Who cares?"

Skip turns patriotic only after Candy (Jean Peters) is beaten to a pulp by the Communist agent Joey (Richard Kiley) and police informant Moe (Thelma Ritter) is murdered when she refuses to divulge Skip's whereabouts.

Gordon Douglas's *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951), starring Frank Lovejoy, is a heavy-handed propaganda film, demonstrating how a noir visual style could be tailored to such a purpose. The story covers familiar territory—a band of criminals and gangsters—but they are more political than Communists in other films. The Party leaders are so incredibly cynical about racism, union members, and anti-Semitism that it's hard to see how they ever attracted followers. This is probably the point. Every time one sees the uncomfortably wooden "average guy" Frank Lovejoy, thoughts stray unwillingly to Richard Nixon (right down to the disturbingly similar hairline).

Not even a whiff of anticapitalist justification survives in *Shack Out on 101* (1955), a low-rent production that is almost Surrealist in execution, featuring the world's most unlikely Communist agent: Lee Marvin as "Slob."

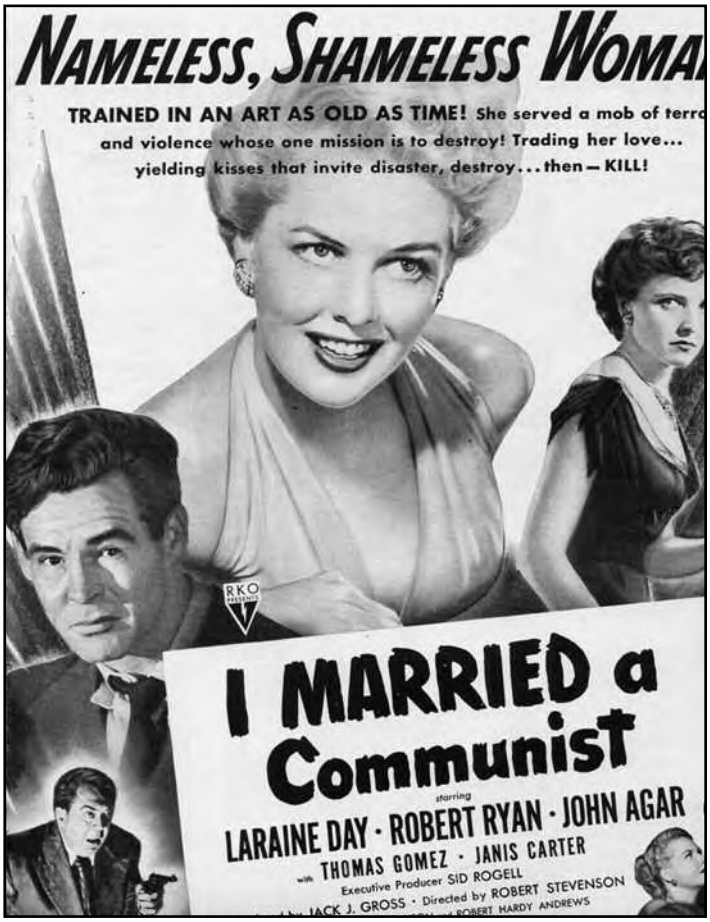
There is a vast difference between dealing with Nazis as war opponents and portraying Nazism as an ideology. Unlike Communism, with its claim of struggling for social justice, Nazism is ideologically unredeemable.

In *Witness to Murder* (1954), Nazism plays a caricatured role. Slayer Albert Richter (George Sanders) justifies his deeds via the ideology of the master race and a bowdlerized Nietzscheanism. These ideas play a pivotal role in the plot. They have since been regurgitated ad nauseam in crime stories and films—the lone murderer feeling superior to the anthill below. Here, though, Sanders is a Nazi acting alone, without politically motivated cronies.

We get a hint of Nazi psychology when Carl Esmond, playing Willi Hilfe in Fritz Lang's *Ministry of Fear*, states that he would not mind killing his own sister, to whom he is quite close, if it will benefit the "cause." Later, of course, he actually attempts it. With Nazis, family relationships simply don't count.

In other spy-ring films, Nazis are portrayed as particularly capable of cannibalistic ruthlessness, thinking nothing of disposing of their own people. Claude Rains in *Notorious*—with its characteristic Hitchcockian MacGuffin of uranium ore hidden in wine bottles—is more fearful of his Nazi coconspirators than he is of the Americans.

Loretta Young and Orson Welles in the often-underrated *The Stranger*.



The Stranger (1946) is by far the best film of this type, dealing with Nazism in a more fully dimensional way. Vital elements of its plot touch on genocide, escaped mass murderers, war-crime trials, and anti-Semitism. It is a true film noir with its expressionist lighting and camerawork by Russell Metty. And since it is directed by Orson Welles, with his characteristic preference for baroque imagery, the visuals are tightly linked to the film's thematic elements.

Welles plays escaped Nazi mastermind Franz Kindler. He is hiding under an alias: Charles Rankin, an American professor in a small college town in New England. (It is not explained how Kindler has managed to lose his German accent!) We get several harrowing glimpses of Nazism's aberrant psychology as Rankin displays an alarming degree of coldness—for instance when he disciplines the family dog "for its own good," eventually killing it.

Then there is his double-edged dinner-table talk. He seems to be making accusatory remarks about the Germans, while in reality he is praising them. He justifies German arrogance by claiming the German feels superior to "inferior people, inferior nations." There's also his matter-of-fact repudiation of the idea that Germans might long for social justice a la Karl Marx: "But Marx wasn't a German. Marx was a Jew."

This anti-Semitic remark gives him away to Mr. Wilson (Edward G. Robinson), an investigator for the Allied War Crimes office who has tracked Kindler/Rankin down. As for Germany itself, he coldly suggests something akin to a final solution. In his mind there is no choice but "annihilation, to the last babe in arms," which, of course, is alarmingly similar to what the Germans actually tried to do.

Wilson informs the audience that Kindler was no small fish, but on a par with Joseph Goebbels and Heinrich Himmler. When he is finally captured, Kindler dissembles, as many high-ranking Nazis did: "It's not true, the things they say I did. It was all their idea. I followed orders." Wilson counters with: "You gave the orders." Here we have accurate representations of actual Nazi psychology and behavior. Welles even makes use of 1945 documentary material from the Ohrdruf-Buchenwald concentration camp, in which the United States army shows the press what they discovered when they liberated the camp.

This is a singular event in Hollywood filmmaking, which was quickly overtaken by anti-Communist propaganda. Once the Cold War became the dominant American ideology, Hollywood audiences would not be shown anything like this again. It would be nearly two decades before a sober, documentary approach emerged with Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961).

DREAMING *(continued from pg. 2)*

different eras, and an equally convincing trip through the brainscape of Jun Nakayama. Especially rewarding is Revoyr's decision to have the resolution of the mystery plot not the raison d'être of the narrative, but rather just a setup for the novel's unexpected and genuinely moving conclusion.

Revoyr, daughter of a Japanese mother and a Polish American father, is also the author of *Southland*, a terrific Los Angeles noir novel also published by Akashic. She has clearly established herself as one of Southern California's most prominent new voices. *The Age of Dreaming* is a deep, graceful, beautiful book—a gift to readers and movie lovers alike.

—Eddie Muller

SIX ACTORS IN SEARCH OF TRANSCENDENCE

CASTING AGAINST TYPE

By Don Malcolm
Sentinel Editor In Chief

WHILE FILM NOIR HAS MANY RECURRING MOTIFS, familiar situations, and a marked tendency toward a finite set of character types, it still retains the capacity to surprise us with its range of expression. These six performers found ways to escape—and in some cases transcend—typecasting via a film noir role.

Dan Duryea, ***Black Angel*** **(1946)**

Those Duryea fan clubs that sprang up in response to the sneering sadism he exhibited in films such as *The Woman in the Window* (1944) and *Scarlet Street* (1945) may have been disappointed in his turn as Marty Blair. But noir aficionados know better. *Black Angel* gave Duryea room to expand his already well-established persona and make it work in a more encompassing (if not exactly more realistic) setting. Blair is a quintessential noir hero, haunted by the bad end to his marriage to a hard-core femme fatale (Constance Dowling) and forced to relive it in a way that proves . . . well, fatal.

Blair's got talent—lots of it—but he's always putting his faith in (and giving his heart to) the wrong person. It's no wonder he winds up having a love affair with the bottle. Duryea captures the character's anguish and yearning in a way that transcends the murky machinations of the plot (the movie is based on a Cornell Woolrich novel, after all).

Universal's efforts to broaden Duryea's appeal weren't successful, despite the quality of his performance in *Black Angel.* He remained a reliably enjoyable villain. It would be another decade before a role with similar breadth came his way: the conflicted criminal mastermind Nat Harbin in *The Burglar* (1957).

Tyrone Power, ***Nightmare Alley*** **(1947)**

Looking for gravitas in a world that seemed determined not to give it to him, Tyrone Power came back from his service in World War II looking for darker roles. He got a small taste of it in Fox's adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge* (1946), but it wasn't enough. Power lobbied with everything he had to play antihero Stanton Carlisle in *Nightmare Alley*; he was willing to throw his career to the wind in order to portray, as he put it, "someone with a total character arc."

Some may think that the film version of William Lindsay Gresham's sinister carny-pulp novel had far too much glossy grandiosity, but the strategy played into Power's hands. He gives us marvelous glimpses of how Carlisle dupes himself even as he makes his ascent to stardom. We always know that no matter how high

Carlisle might climb, there is something dark waiting for him where he least expects it: his double-crossing partner, Lilith.

Power had to fight to deglamorize the character, especially in the harrowing scenes where Carlisle hits bottom. He delivers that "total character arc"—something he was never allowed to do again in any of his subsequent roles.

Peggy Dow, ***Woman in Hiding*** **(1950)**

Let's face it: Unlike "Ava Gardner" or "Gloria Grahame," the name "Peggy Dow" is not going to catapult its owner into the upper reaches of screen vixenhood.

Not that Peggy (born Margaret Varnadow) didn't have sufficient physical charms. Her radiant beauty is dazzling on-screen. In her brief Hollywood career, just as the noir cycle was in its most tumultuous phase (1949–51), she became a minor icon of purity and wholesomeness. Against all odds, the "understanding beautiful woman" (as exemplified by her role in the highly lauded tearjerker *Bright Victory* [1951]) was not a contradiction in terms.

Woman in Hiding is sort of a tossed-salad noir with all the obligatory ingredients: flashback, nasty psychopath, woman in peril, lunkhead would-be savior, hushed voiceover. Ida Lupino, Howard Duff, and Stephen McNally are all solid in what are by now too-familiar characters and performances. But not Peggy Dow. She plays a dolled-up other woman with venom in her voice and a side-long glance that promises a lot more than a man might be willing to bargain for. Even her name—Patricia Monahan—sounds like what she looks like.

In her lamentably brief time on-screen in *Woman in Hiding,* Dow makes it clear that she has what it takes to go from radiant beauty to blowtorch babe. She takes the film into a very different and dangerous place, and we can only wonder where she might have taken her career had she not found Mr. Right and walked away from Hollywood at the age of 23.

David Wayne, ***M*** **(1951)**

Absolutely nothing in David Wayne's career could prepare us for his work in reprising Peter Lorre's renowned performance in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). A veteran of Broadway comedies, musicals, and light dramas, Wayne made his on-screen breakthrough as a wacky composer smitten by Katharine Hepburn in *Adam's Rib* (1949). But, as a college student, he'd been transfixed by Lorre's performance in the original film; when he heard that Joseph Losey was remaking it, he sought out the soon-to-be-blacklisted director and, after considerable discussion, landed the role.

Wayne is beyond extraordinary as the pitiable child molester who wants to be stopped but can't stop himself, becoming the object of a hysterical manhunt. *M*'s final scene might be the most foully feverish in all of noir, when an angry crowd in a basement garage veers perilously close to becoming a combination kangaroo court / lynch mob.

Losey later recalled the power of Wayne's performance in that final scene: "That was a triumph of acting because the camera is absolutely static, and he is absolutely static in it. And when David Wayne finished his speech, the whole cast—the extras, and the crew—applauded him. It's the only time on any stage that I've seen that happen."

Steve Cochran, ***Tomorrow Is Another Day*** **(1951)**

No one ever questioned Steve Cochran's proficiency at playing hunky, hair-trigger thugs one wrong glance away from mayhem and murder, as demonstrated by his performances in the gangster-noir hybrids *White Heat* (1949), *The Damned Don't Cry* (1950), and *Highway 301* (1950). But a tempestuous off-screen lifestyle, coupled with a cluster of tough-guy roles early in his career, made it difficult for Cochran to achieve serious recognition as an actor.

That's what makes *Tomorrow Is Another Day* so surprising. As the film opens, he's in jail (actually, something new for him, since in his films he usually didn't survive long enough to wind up in jail). The warden, a kindly old buzzard, tells him to sit down. He hesitates, and for a moment you think: OK, here we go, blood will flow.

But he sits down, and you know that you're in for a completely uncharacteristic Cochran performance. His character was jailed at the age of 13 for murder, and now, 18 years later, he's got to adjust to the real world. He manages to tap into something

childlike in the character as he wobbles his way into a relationship with dime-a-dance girl Ruth Roman. He's remarkably restrained, touching in his boyish ingenuousness, with barely a trace of the patented Cochran strut. He wouldn't manage it again until 1957, working with Michelangelo Antonioni in Italy on *Il Grido*.

June Allyson, ***The Shrike*** **(1955)**

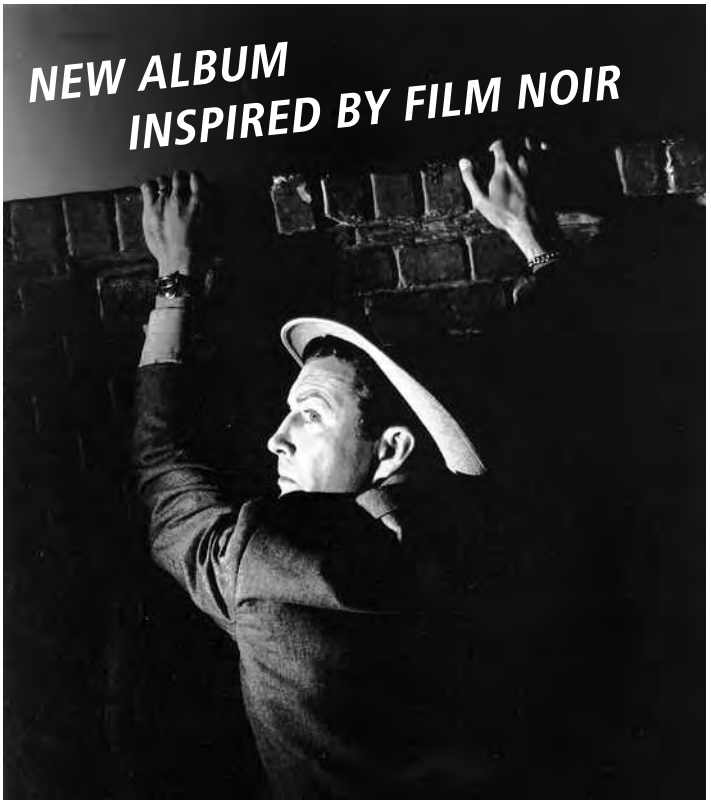
Perhaps noir's most unlikely (and most unpopular at the time) "cast against type" transformation was June Allyson's portrayal of Ann Downs in the eerie psychological noir *The Shrike*. The original 1952 Broadway production of Joseph Kramm's play netted acting and directing Tonys for José Ferrer, who played a husband driven to attempted suicide by his wintry wife. Virtually the entire cast was reassembled in mid-1954 to make the film, with one key change: Allyson replaced Judith Evelyn (best known for her performance as Miss Lonelyhearts in *Rear Window* [1954]) in the "title" role.

It was an astonishing stretch for an

actress who had been a girl-next-door type during her days as MGM's reigning ingenue, and who'd already made the transition to "perfect wife" in a series of early 1950s films, including several with Jimmy Stewart. But Allyson knew that the screenplay of *The Shrike* had been augmented by Hollywood's foremost female script doctor, Ketti Frings. With the addition of several key flashbacks, the role of Ann Downs had been greatly expanded in scope and complexity.

And Allyson is harrowingly perfect, playing a different type of femme fatale: the superficially supportive but actually smothering wife, whose revenge when her desperate husband seeks solace with another woman is to lock him away in a mental hospital. "A small, innocent-looking bird that impales its victim on a cluster of thorns"—Allyson even modulates her voice into a husky, birdlike coo as she pushes Ferrer to the breaking point.

Audiences and critics at the time could not accept her in such a role; today, however, we can appreciate both her achievement and her desire to expand her craft. It's a performance worth seeking out. But brace yourself!



Jazz Pianist Vuckovich Finds Truth, Beauty in the Darkness

By Arthur Tashiro
Special to the *Sentinel*

High Wall, MGM's 1947 film noir about a World War II veteran falsely accused of murder, features a beautiful theme by Bronislau Kaper. Acclaimed jazz pianist Larry Vuckovich believes it should be a jazz standard, like Kaper's "Green Dolphin Street." That's why he made it the title track to his new CD, *High Wall: Real Life Film Noir*.

This isn't the first time Vuckovich has distilled new music from old. For years he's played versions of Alfred Newman's "Street Scene," which is ubiquitous in 20th Century–Fox film noirs. He even put together a version of the noir-head "national anthem" for *Sentinel* editor Don Malcolm's recent birthday party. Larry explained it quickly to the band—"It's 'Black Coffee,'" he told the bass player—and group played on and around the melody for six or seven minutes.

In the bar of the Benbow Inn, an old movie-star haunt near Garberville, California, I spoke with Vuckovich about his new CD, his love of noir, and his amazing life story.

Not surprisingly, since it was the title of his last album, what came up first was "Street Scene." He's carried that tune around with him for years. He remembers it from San Francisco in 1950s, when his family arrived from Yugoslavia and he fell in love with movies.

Larry Vuckovich: March 1, 1951, was the date we arrived. The first house we lived in was at 18th and Taraval, and the Parkside Theater was at 19th and Taraval. I'd go to the movies two or three times a week, whenever the program changed.

Art Tashiro: Were those the first American movies you saw?

LV: No, I saw some in Yugoslavia. I remember *The Great Dictator* [1940]. There's that scene where Jack Oakie as Mussolini meets Chaplin and each one tries to raise his chair above the other—politicians! Some funny stuff, man. And they showed movies on the boat coming over, but no noirs, just happy American movies like *Tea for Two* [1950].

AT: You told me you saw *Kiss of Death* [1947] back then. Was that the first time you heard "Street Scene"?

LV: When I heard that music and on the screen was that city with the tall buildings—it was such a feeling of the loneliness of someone in the city. And the story was powerful too—Victor Mature, that soulful guy, in an awful situation where he had no choice.

AT: It made a big impression.

LV: I bought a 45 of "Sentimental Rhapsody" with Alfred Newman. That's what it's called on the record. The first thing I bought when I came here was a 45 RCA Victrola. Do you remember those? I bought a lot of 45s, and I would go to sleep with that machine next to my bed. That was a great feeling.

AT: What makes a good movie theme?

LV: I'd say ones that grab you right away with a feeling of something soulful and hip musically. *On Dangerous Ground* [1952], when you hear the first notes—I think it starts with a trumpet. And the music in *Crime Wave* [1954] is good.

AT: Are you listening for a jazz influence?

LV: I would say anything where the music is right. For example, in *Torch Song* [1953] I remember a scene where Joan Crawford sings "Tenderly." The pianist on the soundtrack [Walter Gross] knows where everything goes, the harmonies and so forth, so he just keeps alternating some beautiful chords.

Larry likes all types of film scores, just as he sees the good in all sorts of movies. He fondly remembers the trumpet solo that Pete Candoli dubbed for Tony Curtis in *Kings Go Forth* (1958), and Kaye Lorraine singing from the heart for Gloria Grahame in *A Woman's Secret* (1949).

We try to think of a noir with lifelike jazz musicians, but we can only remember ones like *D.O.A.* (1950), where African American jazz players are portrayed as popeyed, leering stereotypes. Even so, Vuckovich says he's glad that filmmakers were hearing, and incorporating, the jazz sound.

LV: That scene in *The Asphalt Jungle* [1950] where Sam Jaffe watches the girl dance—the music on the jukebox is very close to bebop. A composer who knew the value of the current music would work it in when he could.

Some background: Larry grew up in Kotor, Montenegro, first under the German occupation and then under the Tito dictator-

(continued on pg. 6, col. 1)

Just How Dumb Can a Femme Fatale Be?

We Count the Ways with the Hick Vixen of *Count the Hours*

By Don Malcolm
Sentinel Editor in Chief

FEMMES FATALES are supposed to be cunning, right? If they're not outright psychotic (Ann Savage in *Detour* [1945]) or ruled by the zeal of suppressed incest (Gene Tierney in *Leave Her to Heaven* [1945]) or driven to orgasm by the aroma of buckshot (Peggy Cummins in *Gun Crazy* [1950]), then they're ruthless schemers, both smarter and deadlier than the male.

So would it be fair to say that a "dumb femme fatale" is a contradiction in terms? All fatal ladies, at least in the classic noir era, wind up dead through some twist of fate or bad luck; occasionally they slip up, but this really shows that they are only human. No, a "dumb vixen" would seem to be either an oxymoron or a fatal femme who just happened to be a deaf-mute.

But to every rule there is an exception. And an extremely curvy one, in this case.

Lurking deep down in the nether regions of the noir canon, in a film called *Count the Hours* (1953), there is Gracie Sager. Gracie (Adele Mara) is what the many explicit-sex websites of our meta-jaded age identify as a "bangin' chick." There is literally no angle at which Gracie does not induce weakness in the knees of men. Yes, she moves just like a jungle cat.

But she is, in all truth, as dumb as a rock. Lawyer Doug Madison (Macdonald Carey) is desperate to save his client from a bum murder rap. He knows that Max Verne (played with backwoods brio by the great and grotesque Jack Elam) is the real culprit. He's grim-faced and at his wit's end when he runs up against Gracie, but within less than a minute he's got a twinkle in his eye.

And it's not because she's the cornpone reincarnation of Gloria Grahame. It's because she's got no idea of how to use what she's got to get a lot more. Madison is hardly a Romeo: He's been thrown over by his girlfriend for being too dedicated to a hopeless case. But after just a few exchanges, he knows he's got more gray matter in his little toenail than Gracie has in her entire, tightly toned body.

Actually, poor Macdonald Carey is hard pressed not to break character, thanks to the hilariously broad portrayal of Dixie-fried dumbness that Adele Mara serves up. He's as amused as we are—maybe even more so. You can tell he's thinking exactly what we're thinking: How can a girl who looks like this *be shacked up with Jack freakin' Elam*??

It's a question that would make anyone's mind go soft. But Carey keeps from giggling, and takes Gracie for a ride. And, in return, she sells out poor Jack for a new dress.

VUCKOVICH *(cont'd from pg. 5)*

ship. Serbians in Yugoslavia stood with the Mihailovic resistance against both Nazis and the Tito faction. His childhood had, he remarks, "a pretty intense atmosphere."

He was studying classical piano at a school that also required the students to learn Gypsy and Balkan folk songs. American big bands were on Armed Forces Radio and later, when the Communists took the family radio away, there were politically acceptable American musicals. Music students discussed for days Woody Herman and the close-harmony singing in *Wintertime* (1943).

Tito's forces took not only the radio, but eventually the Vuckovich home—putting the family piano in the town hall, where Larry still used it for practice. And they tried to execute his father. "I used to go visit him in jail," he recalls. "That's a strange feeling for a kid, to be in that kind of place. Talking to your father through bars." Despite the testimony of some well-coached accusers, Milutin Vuckovich was spared. Too many people came forward to speak on his behalf.

LV: *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* [1950]. My father liked that one, first of all because he liked James Cagney, but also he really liked that scene where Cagney outsmarted the corrupt cops by tape-recording them.

AT: You said you remember *Kansas City Confidential* [1952].

LV: Some powerful stuff, man. *Boomerang!* [1947], that's another one. It was pretty impressive how they did the research.

AT: And *High Wall.*

LV: "The high wall" is the big lie that's fabricated to slander others, the excuse for attacking them. That movie is about a man trying to break through the wall.

AT: Yet that theme music is so lovely.

LV: That's film noir. It's reality—people of all kinds, the selfish and deceptive ones and the ones with soul who keep their integrity. Someday we'll see a movie about today and that will be a *real* film noir.

Vuckovich expresses that sentiment at every gig he plays. He does it, he says,

because he remembers a lot of big lies directed at his people. Even in his adopted home, the authorities choose the enemies they need to further their aims. Serbs were labeled the monsters of Yugoslavia, and there were excuses for Muslim terrorists killing civilians there; after 9/11, Muslims became the new species of not-quite-human menace.

But for Larry Vuckovich, film noir fan, our bitter little world always contains stories of individual decency. During the war, for example, someone remembered that Milutin Vuckovich spoke English and sent a stranger—a downed American airman—to his house. Larry's family hid the man in their attic for weeks while German soldiers bivouacked on the ground floor. Tito partisans were killing Germans in Serbian territory to provoke reprisals against the communities there, but Vuckovich vividly remembers a German soldier named Joseph Schultz who put down his rifle and chose to die with the hostages he'd been ordered to shoot.

This is what Vuckovich sees in a film like *High Wall,* as well as in real life: beautiful themes within tales of treachery.

"The movies and jazz are where the truth is in America," Vuckovich declares. "Not the politics and the moneymaking and the rest of it."

Music samples from *High Wall: Real Life Film Noir* are available at www.larryvuckovich.com.

Palm Springs Noir Fest Posts Biggest Year Yet

"The Darkness Continues" as Tribute to Late Fest Founder Arthur Lyons

PALM SPRINGS, CA — The eighth annual Palm Springs Film Noir Festival, which took place May 29–June 1, broke all previous attendance records. The desert fest, renowned for its one-two punch of obscure film noirs and notable movie-star guests, wasn't the same without its founder and usual host, Arthur Lyons. But this year's festivities would have done Lyons proud. Producer Barbara Lyons evolved her late husband's festival tagline "It's all in the story" into "The darkness continues . . ." as a tribute to the author and noir impresario.

"We are going to keep this festival going for years to come," said Barbara. "Arthur wouldn't want people moping around and turning this into a funeral dirge. He would want all of his friends and film noir buffs to do what they've always done: Have a ball!"

Beginning with the sold-out opening-night screening of *The Killers* (1964), featuring an onstage interview with star Angie Dickinson, the noir-hungry audience did exactly that. All of the screenings were well attended—and not just the films with guests, although the guest roster was impressive indeed: Jayne Meadows (*Lady in the Lake,* 1947), Carol Lynley (*Bunny Lake Is Missing,* 1965), Margia Dean (*Treasure of Monte Cristo,* 1949), Karen Sharpe Kramer (*Man in the Vault,* 1956), and Billy Gray (*Talk About a Stranger,* 1952).

Smooth as Silk (1946), a virtually unknown Universal Pictures B noir, was the hands-down sleeper of the festival according to host and codirector Alan K. Rode. "It was really intriguing; sort of a noir mystery folded into an *All About Eve* motif," he exclaimed. "It was Arthur Lyons's last paleontological discovery."

The Film Noir Foundation was well represented by the estimable Foster Hirsch, who shared the presentation and interview duties with Rode and MSNBC movie critic and Sunset Gun blogger Kim Morgan.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Film Noir and Neo-Noir On Screen and DVD

By Anne Hockens
Sentinel News and Events Editor

THE PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE in Berkeley, California, will screen the film series *Streets of No Return: The Dark Cinema of David Goodis* August 1–23. These screenplays written by, or adapted from stories by, David Goodis range from classic Hollywood film noirs to French New Wave landmarks. Goodis wrote extensively for a variety of pulp magazines during the 1930s and 1940s. The serialization of his novel *Dark Passage* in the *Saturday Evening Post* led to the hit Warner Bros. film starring Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart. Unfortunately, Goodis's alcoholism prevented him from parlaying this coup into further success. He died in 1967.

Visit www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/film-series for times and more information.

Friday, August 1
Dark Passage (1947) / **The Unfaithful** (1947)
Introduced by Barry Gifford. With the help of Lauren Bacall, Humphrey Bogart escapes from prison and gets plastic surgery in this San Francisco film noir. / Ann Sheridan is a wartime adulteress who pays the price when the troops come home.

Saturday, August 2, and Tuesday, August 5
Shoot the Piano Player (1960)
Introduced by Mike White. A brand-new print of Francois Truffaut's frolicsome yet faithful genre pastiche, starring a hangdog Charles Aznavour.

Thursday, August 7
Nightfall (1957) / **The Burglar** (1957)
Introduced by Eddie Muller. Jacques Tourneur's noir unravels fall-guy Aldo Ray's paranoid past, with stunning outdoor cinematography by Burnett Guffey. / A miasma of incestuous, pulpy desire hangs over thief Dan Duryea and his sister Jayne Mansfield.

Sunday, August 10
Descent into Hell (1986)
A boozehound author and his chilly wife go to the tropics to revive their marriage, but Haiti becomes a stand-in for hell.

Thursday, August 14
The Burglars (1971)
Starring Jean-Paul Belmondo, this French retooling of *The Burglar* shifts the action to Greece, with a now-famous car chase as the centerpiece of the high-speed caper.

Thursday, August 21
The Professional Man x Two (1989, 1995)
Nicholas Kazan in person. Kazan and Steven Soderbergh directed two totally different TV takes on the same Goodis story.

Thursday, August 21
And Hope to Die (1972)
Jean-Louis Trintignant and Robert Ryan in René Clément's study of pent-up rivalries in a claustrophobic gangland hideout.

Saturday, August 23
Moon in the Gutter (1983)
Introduced by Elliot Lavine. Jean-Jacques Beineix evokes Goodis's murky and haunted world with sinister artifice. Starring Gérard Depardieu and Nastassja Kinski.

IN OTHER FILM NEWS

In July and August, the **Museum of Modern Art** in New York celebrates jazz composed specifically for the cinema in its film series *Jazz Score.* Screenings include episodes of the television noirs *Peter Gunn* (1959) and *Staccato* (1959) as well as several theatrical film noirs and neo-noirs. For complete details on screenings and related exhibitions visit www.moma.org.

The **Los Angeles County Museum of Art's** August screenings include *The Pushover* (1954) and *Drive a Crooked Road* (1954). See www.lacma.org for more info.

On the art-house front, two films with noir connections are in general release this summer in Landmark Theatres. The indie neo-noir ***Quid Pro Quo*** (2008) revolves around a femme fatale and her erotic attraction to paralysis. In ***My Winnipeg*** (2007), legendary femme fatale Ann Savage (the vicious Vera in *Detour* [1945]) plays "Mother" in Guy Maddin's "docu-fantasia" that explores his hometown of Winnipeg, Canada. See www.landmarktheatres.com for show times in your area.

UPCOMING ON DVD

New Line Home Entertainment will release a DVD director's cut of Alex Proyas's stunning, futuristic film noir ***Dark City*** (1998) on July 29. The film stars Rufus Sewell as an amnesiac who wakes up next to a brutally murdered prostitute. He investigates with the help of his estranged wife (Jennifer Connelly) and a homicide detective (William Hurt) and uncovers a vast conspiracy. The DVD will include three commentaries, a making-of documentary, an introduction by the director, and more.

Huge news for film noir and James Ellroy fans! On September 23 Warner Home Video will release both a digitally remastered DVD two-disc special edition and a single-disc Blu-ray high-def version of Curtis Hanson's ***L.A. Confidential*** (1997), starring Kevin Spacey, Russell Crowe, Guy Pearce, and Kim Basinger. This exceptional neo-noir won two Oscars and was nominated for another five, and it is certainly deserving of this sort of star treatment.

LAUGHTER *(cont'd from pg. 1)*

that while fans of all classic film genres will laugh at older movies, "There's a frankness you sometimes find in noir that you would not find in other films from the period. Sometimes it is the decidedly different standards of civility and propriety from that era, and the very dated ideas about women and government" that draw the laughs.

Film Noir Foundation board member Alan Rode, author of *Charles McGraw: Biography of a Film Noir Tough Guy,* reminds us that "Laughter does not automatically default to disrespect. These are movies to be enjoyed, for God's sake. They're not Greek statues." He adds, however, that "derisive, hyenalike laughter that is mocking in tone and annoying in consistency has no place in any movie theater."

He also points out that it's nearly impossible not to laugh at the outrageousness of something like McGraw in *Armored Car Robbery* (1950) when, after his partner is killed, he struggles to find words of comfort for the dead cop's widow, only to come up with "Tough break, Marsha." It's a surefire laugh line for today's audiences, but probably not one the screenwriters planned as comic relief.

Even among the most hard-core noir fanatics opinions differ on the laughing matter. Film Noir Foundation founder and author Eddie Muller states, "The laughter used to bother me, but it doesn't anymore. I appreciate the sound of people having a good time at the movies. It means they'll come back for more. And that the idea of going to a theater to see an old film, on the big screen, isn't dead yet or strictly the purview of cineastes. To me, laughing at a film isn't the same as somebody going to a museum and yelling 'What a piece of s—!' to people looking at the art."

Foster Hirsch, a film studies professor and author of the books *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* and *Detours and Lost Highways: A Map of Neo-Noir,* says that laughter at the wrong moment usually makes him "furious." He concedes, however, that laughter "need not be belittling" and that "sometimes it can imply a certain engagement and enjoyment" of a film.

Unfortunately, incessant laughter could mean that for many viewers film noir has devolved into camp. Sci-fi and ham-handed antidrug films of the 1950s have already descended there, but noir still garners respect as serious cinema. It doesn't feature actors in shoddy monster suits leaping out at screaming teenagers. Noir was never meant to be escapist fare, especially after it took its post–World War II turn toward realism and moral ambiguity. Believe it or not, critics and audiences of that era felt the dialogue in crime dramas was very realistic—that by embracing the parlance of the pool hall and the flophouse, it turned a trench-coated cold shoulder on the musical-comedy worldview.

The trouble is that mid-20th century realism no longer has much relevance. Few members of a modern audience are likely, or able, to put themselves in the mindset of the period in which such a film was originally made and realize that now-laughable situations were then deadly serious. These are, after all, films about murder, corruption, and the souring of American ideals.

"Today's public feels they must be above all that. It's part of the cynicism the public puts on to say, 'I know better than that.'"
—Marsha Hunt

Where laughter is typically the most cringe-inducing is when the films are screened with the surviving actors, actresses, writers, and directors in attendance. It seems cruel that they should have to endure an audience's ironic laughter. Foster Hirsch has seen this happen many times, and he says he is always "embarrassed for the audience and the celebrity." Veteran actress Marsha Hunt (*Raw Deal* [1948], *Kid Glove Killer* [1942]) attributes the laughter to the cynicism of contemporary society. "Today's public feels they must be above all that. It's part of the cynicism the public puts on to say, 'I know better than that.'"

Jean Gillie and Sheldon Leonard in *Decoy*: some viewers find the film a gem of noir nihilism while others find its overcooked hard-boiled attitude hysterically funny.

Audiences back in the day were more reverent, she notes, but not church-mouse silent by any means. According to Hunt, reactions included "applause, gasps, laughter, all of the above"—but at the appropriate moments. She does admit, however, that even during the making of the films, especially those she calls "six-day wonders" (aka B movies), actors were well aware that they were reeling off lines with a panache far beyond everyday conversation. "*Raw Deal* was pretty ripe, I thought, even as we were shooting it."

Coleen Gray (*Kiss of Death* [1947], *Kansas City Confidential* [1952]) puts no stock in an audience's reaction. The only time she can remember being laughed at was during a preview screening of the 1957 western *Copper Sky*: "I was so mortified I tied a scarf around my head and ran out the back of the theater." For a while she stopped attending her own films. While Hunt maintains that she is "not insulted" by laughter at present-day screenings, Gray is less ambivalent. As to whether she thinks the cacklers are laughing *at* or *with* the films, she says, "I think they are absolutely laughing at them," and that those who do so at inappropriate moments "should be spanked." But, thankfully for her fellow filmgoers, Gray hasn't had much experience with laughter at her films. "No one laughs at *Kiss of Death*." The same is true of *Nightmare Alley* (1947)—but do only such A films deserve our respect? Why not their lower-budgeted cousins?

As archeological entities such as the Film Noir Foundation dig deeper to unearth obscure films, will the end result be more laughter? A movie like the recently resurrected *Decoy* (1946) almost dares you to take it seriously. And anyone who has seen the films of Hugo Haas knows what incredible, and unintentional, comedies he made. Foster Hirsch goes so far as to say, "Sometimes a little laughter is appropriate because the movies aren't that good."

It's true more often than not: The lower the budget, the louder the laughs. But some undisputed classics draw big chortles, too. Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck's famous tête-à-tête about the "speed limits in this town" wasn't written (by Billy Wilder and Raymond Chandler) for big laughs—it was intended as a sex-laced showdown that danced around the production codes of the time. Loaded? Absolutely. Funny? Not really. Great dialogue, even when it's over-the-top sexual innuendo, draws you deeper into the film. But the moment the yahoo sitting behind you overreacts with gales of laughter, the spell breaks, even the spell cast by a film as great as *Double Indemnity* (1944).

In attempting to rescue noir from the clutches of camp, do we risk stifling our enjoyment of it? I think not. True, laughter is probably the purest human expression of enjoyment, and isn't that why we go to the movies in the first place? And, granted, opportunities to see classic cinema—in a cinema—are so rare today that any type of audience is better than no audience at all. But the beauty of old movies is that they transport us to a different place and time, if only for 90 minutes or so, and for some of us, noir does this better than any other genre. To fully enjoy that different place and time, and to be respectful to the rest of the audience, modern moviegoers need to make concessions; we need to withhold our tittering judgments of outdated gender roles and gutter poetry. Any film historian will tell you that film noir is where American movies first turned cynical—it was still too early for the filmmakers to be winking at the audience and hoping for laughs. Bleakness and tragedy are the hallmarks of noir, and they are certainly no laughing matter.

It's probably impossible to reason with the casual noir fan who revels more in camp than craft. But before noir ends up on the joke pile of cinema like *Plan 9 from Outer Space* we should take a little time to consider the world in which these films were made. The artful shadows of John Alton, the taut direction of Anthony Mann, the nuanced acting of Glenn Ford or Dana Andrews—these are nothing to chuckle about. Times were different then, and they sure don't make 'em like they used to. We should be celebrating that, not mocking it.

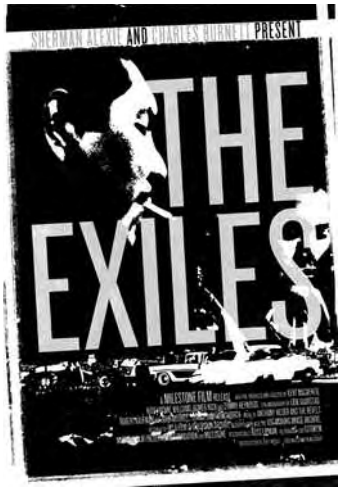
In the end the laughter will probably win out, though, which has led many lovers of the genre, such as Eddie Muller, to adopt a diplomatic, almost philosophical, attitude. "I love the fact that these films elicit not only laughter—be it genuine or specious—but real gasps and enthusiastic applause," he says. "Accept one reaction, accept them all. People have visceral responses when they watch a movie in a public venue. And I dread the day we can't experience that anymore."

Return of "The Exiles"

Lost Bunker Hill Docu-Noir Gets Theatrical Release

The Exiles (1961), Kent MacKenzie's astonishing blend of neorealist documentary and sociologically tinged film noir, has been rescued from oblivion thanks to Milestone Films. It will soon enjoy a limited nationwide theatrical release and will come out on DVD in December. This is the second film featured in Thom Andersen's 2003 video essay *Los Angeles Plays Itself* that has been restored and rereleased by the New York–based company. (The first, Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* [1977], appeared to great acclaim in 2007.)

The Exiles is set in the dying neighborhood of Bunker Hill, an iconic noir location. It chronicles a day in the lives of young Native Americans who have moved away from their reservation and are experiencing total dislocation as they struggle to adjust to the meanness of urban life. MacKenzie was fascinated by Bunker Hill. One of his short films, made prior to *The Exiles,* is also set there and will be one of the extras in the DVD release.



MacKenzie's use of lighting, with its clear homage to noir, reveals a singular talent. Often compared with John Cassavetes's early films, *The Exiles* is both more poetic and more true to life. One film critic observed: "In 72 minutes, MacKenzie altered how I perceive night."

FNF's monthly news updates will feature screening information as it becomes available. See www.exilesfilm.com for up-to-the-minute screening information. Don't miss this one in the theater! *—Don Malcolm*

WHY SO SERIOUS?

EPIC "BAT-NOIR" IS NO JOKE

By Will "the Thrill" Viharo

"Superman is how America sees itself, and Batman is how the rest of the world sees America."

—Michael Caine

Let's not mince words: Its comic-book origins notwithstanding, *The Dark Knight* is a masterpiece of crime cinema. Several set pieces boast a cool, pulsating intensity and vivid immediacy a la Michael Mann (especially the opening bank robbery sequence), while the fluid camerawork and staccato editing are reminiscent of Scorsese. The grotesque pop art grandeur of Tim Burton and bright, surreal, over-the-top landscape of Joel Schumacher aren't even referenced. Ultimately, director Christopher Nolan has a signature style all his own, established in smaller but equally dark and intricate films such as *Memento* (2000) and *Following* (1998).

This stunning sequel stands alone by delivering on all the promises made by Nolan's premiere Bat-flick, 2005's revisionist *Batman Begins*, which rebooted the franchise much like *Casino Royale* rejuvenated the stale 007 series. Nolan's interpretation of Batman's universe (he cowrote the screenplay with his brother Jonathan) is more akin to the gritty, graphic crime dramas of Dennis O'Neil and Neal Adams in the DC comics of the '70s than the more stylized, punk-dystopian work of Frank Miller in the '80s, and that realism works to its favor, without diluting the escapist fantasy of the source material. This is Batman for grown-ups—very cynical ones, at that.

As much as I love the campy *Batman* TV series of the 60s, this is about as far West of Adam as you can get, and still call it "Batman." But like that classic TV show, it's a perfectly realized product of its era: a very specific (if diametrically opposed) conceptualization of a uniquely American but universally beloved mythology that has deep roots in the same tainted soil that yielded film noir.

It's all here: split personalities, societal decay, the corruption of the ruling class, the destruction of the idealist, the seduction and slaughter of the innocent, and the inescapable conflict between traumas of the past, struggles of the present, and aspirations for the future. And yes, there are grown men playing with toys, blowing stuff up, and running around in costumes and garish makeup. It's still an exemplary exponent of modern noir.

The fact that this familiar story, featuring icons of our pop culture, is told from a foreign perspective (Nolan and much of the cast are British, Christian Bale was raised in Wales, and Heath Ledger is Australian) gives it an unusual ring of authenticity and clarity of subtext, just like it took the French to discover Hollywood had "accidentally" created the self-effacing and self-revealing subgenre of film noir. The phenomenon of this movie goes beyond its record-breaking box office success. Its influence will be felt for a long time, in ways we can't really predict. All academic mumbo jumbo aside, it's a kickass piece of entertainment.

The fantastic score (by Hans Zimmer and James Newton Howard) has a driving urgency, combining a bombastic yet chilling sense of dangerous dread with a brooding melancholia, much like Bernard Hermann achieved with his Hitchcock pieces. Bale as Bruce Wayne/Batman once again makes this larger than life (but empathetically human) character credible, from the inside out, skillfully swerving between his dual identities with graceful conviction. Bale is also adept at conveying Nolan's point that Batman's self-financed war on crime is a personal vendetta, an unending campaign of vengeance seemingly justified by the murder of his parents, with dubious side effects.

Michael Caine as Alfred and Morgan Freeman as Lucius Fox again have Batman's back, adding much appreciated maturity to the material, and well-grounded sanity to the spectacular excess. Gary Oldman is quietly intense as (newly appointed) Commissioner Gordon. The Scarecrow (Cillian Murphy), underused in the first film, makes a brief cameo here as well, but as we all know, this installment belongs to that death-dealing doppelganger, the Joker.

The sadness I felt watching the late Ledger perform his already legendary, anarchistic version of the Joker abetted the ambience of hopelessness and impending doom that pervades every frame of this film. Ledger's untimely demise also imbues the Joker with a pathos this gleefully amoral character may not actually deserve. This Joker is much more in the tradition of noir psycho-killers like Richard Widmark's Tommy Udo and James Cagney's Arthur Cody Jarrett than Jack Nicholson's broader and dare I say more conventional take on the character in the 1989 film. But in the end, this is a singular acting achievement with no obvious precedent.

Dispensing with the traditional comic-book explanations, the murky and ever-morphing mystery of this Joker's origins and motivations only add to his unpredictable and unsettling madness. As long as people like him exist, you can never totally relax in this world—and people like him will *always* exist, despite all desperate countermeasures.

The Dark Knight will also go down as the culture's most ironically popular Post-9/11 allegory. The Joker is obviously a renegade terrorist rather than a simple crazy crook, because he operates totally outside the realm of mainstream Reason. As much as his rants of antisocial rhetoric freak us out, they also make sense in the scheme of things, at least from his twisted but compelling point of view. Unlike Muslim fundamentalists, or for that matter trigger-happy Christians, he has no religion to support his violence—only a nihilistic philosophy that justifies his sick need to blow shit up for the hell of it.

Ledger's Joker will no doubt enflame existing feelings of alienation and angst amongst the multitudes of audience members who feel powerless to change anything, even if it's just for the sake of challenging the status quo. Ledger's casting as the Joker, and his unexpected death, are a cultural confluence that comes perhaps once in a generation. It's one for the zeitgeist. As the Joker himself would say: You can't plan these things, they just *happen.*

Ledger's performance was lauded even before the film was released to massive acclaim. It's gratifying to have these lofty expectations met, but it's no big surprise, especially given his previous transformation into the star-crossed gay cowboy of *Brokeback Mountain*. The revelation for me was Aaron Eckhart as crusading DA Harvey Dent. His gradual then sudden conversion into the disfigured "villain" Two-Face is both credible and carefully calculated. Unlike other comic-book movies that shoehorn an assortment of villains into the plot solely to sell toys and fast food tie-ins, the inclusion of Two-Face into the operatic proceedings is integral to the overall theme of Chaos vs. Control, his raison d'etre meshing perfectly with the Joker's own twisted pseudo-ideology. Eckhart is upstaged by Ledger through no fault of his own—his performance is equal to the part as conceived (and,

unlike Tommy Lee Jones's regrettably cartoonish portrayal of Two-Face in *Batman Forever*, quite faithful to Bob Kane's creation). The central story of Harvey-Dent / Two-Face is likewise noir to the bone, with echoes of other compromised champions of the law like Glenn Ford in *The Big Heat* (1953) and Orson Welles in *Touch of Evil* (1958). As literal as Two-Face's moral choices are—decided by chance, the flip of an ironically scarred coin—the symbolism and metaphorical power of this imagery are just as memorable and impressive as the more flamboyant antics of the Joker and athletic heroics of the Batman. "You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain" is the key quote from this film, and it doesn't only apply to Harvey.

"Good" and "bad" are indeed flip sides of the same coin. While this isn't a new concept, the exploration and presentation of this age-old notion is so dynamic it almost seems fresh—and particularly resonant in today's

Christian Bale and Heath Ledger as the Batman and the Joker: a dynamic—and scary—duo.

increasingly antagonistic, splintered world, with all points of view vying for attention, validation, and dominance. Batman likes to believe his better nature dictates his decisions, separating and elevating himself above the element he's attempting to eradicate, but he questions the sincerity of his crusade, and the validity of its outcome. At one point he engages in a clear case of Bush-era surveillance, sacrificing personal rights for the sake of his self-righteous agenda. Redemption, as such, is achieved only via self-sacrifice, and though the motivations for it may be pure, the results are ambiguous at best.

The finale suggests while humanity is basically resilient, i.e "good," it will be continually challenged by contrary forces, which we deem to be "evil," both internal and external, and the ultimate victory will go to whichever can go the distance. Like the Joker says to Batman, "we're destined to do this forever." (Although the finality of Ledger's premature death in "real life" is a noirish asterisk in itself.)

After the dust has settled, the disturbing dénouement is pure and simple textbook noir. I won't give it away, of course, though by now chances are you've seen the film several times. Suffice to say, *The Dark Knight* lives up to its ominous title, and then some. This is film noir for the masses, and the fact that its uncompromisingly bleak vision is wrapped in a summertime action blockbuster, like a deceptively packaged booby trap, is a subversive sucker punch of which the Joker himself would be proud.

REMEMBRANCE

JOSEPH PEVNEY

Last Man Standing

(1911–2008)

By Alan K. Rode
Sentinel Senior Editor

When Joseph Pevney died on May 18 at 96 years of age, it rang the curtain down on a life well lived. His distinguished career spanned three-quarters of the last century. Pevney's screen acting credits were pure noir, and his directorial résumé included such gems as *Shakedown* (1950), *Undercover Girl* (1950), *Six Bridges to Cross* (1955), and *The Midnight Story* (1957).

I first got acquainted with Pevney last year when I interviewed him by phone for my book on Charles McGraw. I was rewarded with vivid recollections dating back to 1937 when the two young actors appeared in a play together—"Charlie got into a fistfight with another actor in the company and got his clock cleaned . . ."—to tales about the challenges of directing the rough-hewn tough guy in a couple of Universal features in the 1950s.

"I have very little memory left, let's face it," said Pevney, when we met again at his Palm Desert home the following year.

I took his disclaimer with a grain of salt. Sure enough, when I brought up his screen debut in *Nocturne* (1946) and showed him a still of himself playing the piano alongside George Raft, he grinned and remembered: "Raft was a nice guy, a very nice guy. He couldn't act, though, and he knew it. He hated to memorize dialogue, so he actually gave up lines to me and others in the cast. He would tell the director, 'Have Joe say this instead.'"

After starting out in 1924 as a vaudeville boy soprano in his native New York, Pevney went on to Broadway to act in *Home of the Brave, Battle Hymn, The World We Make,* and *Native Son*. He disliked the vaudeville circuit but loved working onstage. He remembered the lean days that nearly made him quit the production of *Native Son,* despite having Orson Welles as the director. "After the first or second rehearsal, I walked out. Orson grabbed me in the hallway and said, 'Where are you going?' I told him, 'I can't live on this $40 a week that you pay your actors, I'm sorry.' Welles asked, 'How much do you want?' I told him that I was going to need $100 a week. So I ended up getting $100 a week. I played Canada Lee's trainer, I had a bandage on my head, it was a good show."

During his stage period, Pevney began a fruitful working relationship with John Garfield that culminated in 1947 with *Body and Soul.* His recollections of the film, in which he played John Garfield's sidekick, Shorty Polaski, included one of the classic laments of the film actor: "I had a really a good sequence in *Body and Soul,* a long speech, that got cut out of the picture."

Pevney appreciated Garfield's talent but wasn't in awe of his mental prowess. "He wasn't that intelligent, you know. He wanted to boast about how important he had become and wanted me to appreciate his development as a person, a human being. He had just married, and he invited me to dinner at his new apartment. He was trying to impress me. I tried to act impressed."

Pevney couldn't recall a lot of details about his truncated screen-acting career, probably because he logged too many decades working (and thinking) as a director. His acting credits are confined entirely to noir: *Nocturne* (1946), *Body and Soul* (1947), *The Street with No Name* (1948), *Thieves' Highway* (1949, featuring a compelling sequence where Pevney zips his jacket while standing before a burning truck containing the actor Millard Mitchell), *Outside the Wall* (1950), and a cameo appearance in *Shakedown* (1950).

Shakedown was also his directorial debut. "The opening sequence had Howard Duff running down a long sloping street. We shot it and I said, 'I'm not crazy about that. Can we do it once more?' And [the assistant] Joe Kenney took me aside and said, 'You don't need to do that. Just cut in anytime you want.' And I thought, 'My God, I am directing *motion pictures*! You can cut and cut and cut!' I learned my principal lesson as a director from that very first moment."

Matters became stickier when he met Brian Donlevy, Duff's costar in the picture. "He was terribly short. He wore lifts in his shoes. Rock Hudson was the nightclub doorman, and he was six foot four, and Donlevy was about five foot two! It was a horrible situation. I had to show Rock how to open the door and how to stand so the height disparity wasn't so obvious. Donlevy was a good actor, very professional, but you wouldn't believe how short he was."

Pevney had been warned about another of the film's actors, the infamous Hollywood bad boy Lawrence Tierney—but had no problems with him. "Tierney was very moody and the things they said about him were probably true. I didn't know. I didn't care. As far as I was concerned, he was a likeable guy. He didn't have that many lines, but he was fine in the picture, easy to work with."

Shakedown launched Pevney into a position as a contract director at Universal International for the next eight years until the studio, bought out by Music Corporation of America (MCA), terminated most of the contracts it had with long-term talent. Pevney was one of the last of the studio-system directors. He directed 25 features for Universal in all different genres and worked with nearly every major star in Hollywood. The high point of his career came in 1957, when he had three pictures in theaters simultaneously: *Man of a Thousand Faces,* a tremendously popular biopic starring James Cagney as Lon Chaney; *Tammy and the Bachelor,* a lighthearted comedy with Debbie Reynolds; and *The Midnight Story,* a crime-noir filmed on location in San Francisco with Tony Curtis and Gilbert Roland.

Reminiscing about his Universal years, he extolled the virtues of his stars, including Joan Crawford ("I loved her; she was the consummate professional.") and Jeff Chandler ("Sweet, simple, wonderful, no problems. We did eight pictures together. I enjoyed him as an actor and close friend."). He particularly remembered Charles Laughton from *The Strange Door* (1951). Laughton took overacting to unparalleled heights and Pevney let him run wild.

"At that time, Charles Laughton was preparing a four-person routine (*Don Juan in Hell*) that he was going to take on the road. So he only wanted to have fun with our picture, and did he ever! Universal thought they

(continued next page)

Pevney had one of his biggest roles in RKO's *Nocturne* (1946) in which he costarred with (left to right) Virginia Huston, Lynn Bari, and George Raft.

OBITUARY

EVELYN KEYES

Evelyn Keyes, 91, one of the most radiant if underrated actresses of Hollywood's Golden Era, passed away July 4, in Montecito, California. She lived the last few years in an exclusive assisted living facility, coping with Alzheimer's disease, and, more recently, uterine cancer. The latter was listed as the official cause of death.

Keyes is best remembered for her role as "SueEllen," Scarlett O'Hara's younger sister in the 1939 classic *Gone with the Wind*. She spent all of the 1940s under contract at Columbia Pictures, where she displayed natural charm and abundant talent in both comedies and dramas, starring in such films as *Here Comes Mr. Jordan*, *A Thousand and One Nights*, *The Jolson Story*, *The Mating of Millie*, and *Mrs. Mike*, all hits for the studio. Some of her best performances were in film noir: *Face Behind the Mask*, *Ladies in Retirement*, *Johnny O'Clock*, *The Killer That Stalked New York*, *99 River Street*, and her own favorite among her films, *The Prowler*.

During her heyday in the 1940s and 1950s, Keyes was as renowned for her personal life as for her movie roles. Her husbands included directors Charles Vidor and John Huston, and famed bandleader Artie Shaw. She also considered producer Michael Todd a "husband," although the marriage was never official. Her numerous love affairs were recounted, quite candidly, in her two bestselling autobiographies: *Scarlett O'Hara's Younger Sister* and *I'll Think About That Tomorrow*. She also has to her credit the critically acclaimed novel *I Am a Billboard*.

Keyes abandoned Hollywood in the mid-1950s to live in Spain with Shaw, a union that lasted 11 years, a record of longevity for both of the much-married spouses. In the early 1970's, after splitting from Shaw (they were never officially divorced), Keyes resurrected her show business career with a long-running touring show of *No, No Nanette*. She also became a featured columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, penning remembrances under the banner "Keyes to the City."

Author Eddie Muller, who profiled Keyes in his book *Dark City Dames: The Wicked Women of Film Noir*, recalled her as "One of the smartest and most brutally honest people I have ever known. Her BS detector was finely tuned and went off with great regularity."

He added that "She could have had a much more accomplished career—if she was only less interested in living such a rich, exciting life."

PEVNEY *(from previous page)*

were making a horror movie. Not Laughton. For him it was camp! He also insisted on doing his own stunt work at the end where he dies in the moat with the waterwheel. He got right in the water and loved it. Laughton just loved being a ham actor."

Although Pevney enjoyed directing features, working for a major studio was not without its frustrations. "They would answer my request to cast Jeff Chandler with Tony Curtis in *Six Bridges to Cross* [1955] or with Rock Hudson in *Twilight for the Gods* [1958] with a great big WHY? 'We can get two pictures out of them—one from Tony and one from Jeff—you don't need to put them together.' I told the studio, 'But if you put two of the studio's biggest stars together you'll make twice as much money!' They would never believe me and never go along with me."

Pevney began directing television in 1959 as the studio system was falling apart and discovered that he was temperamentally well suited to the small screen's tight schedules. He helmed more than 150 TV episodes before retiring in 1985; his résumé is a veritable history of the medium's first quarter-century.

He recalled the early episodes of *Mission Impossible* with Steven Hill: "Talk about mission impossible! Steven Hill was an observant Jew and had to quit at 5 p.m. on Friday and I had to finish the show!" There were also 11 episodes of *The Munsters*: "Fred Gwynne had good makeup and heels to build him up to seven feet. He was as gay as a $3 bill, but who cared! He had a ball doing that show."

Pevney did a lot of shows for producer Jack Webb, including 11 episodes of *Adam-12* and seven of *Emergency!* "Webb was a horror! He had a rule that a director couldn't direct one of his shows and something else simultaneously. I did, and never directed any more of his shows. There was something very strange about him."

In a career that spanned 35 years, Pevney directed 31 feature films and hundreds of hours of episodic television.

Pevney's work in the original *Star Trek* series between 1967 and 1969 remains his principal legacy. He directed a total of 14 episodes, many of which are now revered for their originality and humor.

"I had a great cast. I really liked Leonard Nimoy. I wasn't crazy about William Shatner. I was the one who found Walter Koenig, who played Chekov. The kid had a terrible Russian accent, but he was a hit; audiences loved him. The shows I liked most were the ones that [writer] Gene Roddenberry said were too funny, like 'The Trouble with Tribbles.' I told him that in the future, people will still behave normally and be funny. I loved 'The Trouble with Tribbles.' It was my favorite."