

9th Year for SoCal Fest

NOIR CITY BACK IN HOLLYWOOD

By Chris D
Special to the Sentinel

What is it about the dark worldview, especially as personified in the classic 1940 – 1960 period of film noir, that holds many of us so fascinated? The spectacle of lost souls trying to navigate the downward spirals in their personal or professional lives, the plight of an Everyman (or woman) as they are sucked into a whirlpool of dismal circumstance beyond their control—these scenarios enrapture us and hold us spellbound.

Are we watching as voyeurs, simply glad to see someone else with worse luck than our own? Or are we perhaps hoping to find a key how to deal with our own existential plights, turmoil that may not be as violent or as dramatic but nevertheless just as traumatizing, at least to us?

All one has to do is listen to the news to see very plainly that, hey, it's a noir world, baby! Today, with unparalleled global access through the internet, we witness it, all pervasive, on a worldwide scale. Here, to help you with a road map to vicariously chart your path through a perilously dark universe, the American Cinematheque and the Film Noir Foundation have assembled another grand gathering of noir gems.

A few of these classics are encore presentations, but the majority are masterpieces we've never shown before. We'll also be screening such ultra-rare titles as the Dick Powell double shot of *Cornered* and *To the Ends of the Earth*, the James Mason bill of Carol Reed's *The Man Between* and *One Way Street*, plus *Hell's Five Hours*, *Cry of the Hunted*, *Lure of the Swamp*, *The Red House*, Richard Fleischer's *The Clay Pigeon* and Don Siegel's *Count the Hours*.

There'll be brand new 35mm prints, as well, of such rarities as *Night Has 1000 Eyes*, *The Night Holds Terror*, *Face Behind the Mask*, *The Story of Molly X* and *Woman In Hiding*, many of these brought to the screen through the untiring efforts of The Film Noir Foundation. And the vast majority? Yes, still not on DVD!

Last but not least, Noir City bon-vivant and co-programmer Eddie Muller will be presenting the LA Premiere of his directorial debut, a stunning, suspenseful short film *The Grand Inquisitor*, with 90 year old star Marsha Hunt (*Raw Deal*) in attendance! Don't (Cont'd on p. 10)

Emigres in Noir

BILLY WILDER

By Marc Svetov
Special to the Sentinel

During an interview thirty years after he made *Double Indemnity*, Billy Wilder claimed that the pessimism in film noir was not due to the European or Jewish backgrounds of many of those involved in making the films. Rather, it was America itself. From the perspective of our day, it is not easy to interpret what he meant. Film noir emerged as a burgeoning style with World War II, slipping into full gear when the war's accumulating pressures demanded a new, synthesized sense of realism in film.

There was a sea change happening in the United States in the early 1940s, gathering momentum from the prior decade of deep Depression-related woes and hard times. By late 1942 and on into 1944, the year of *Double Indemnity*'s release, Americans in their local movie theaters were viewing wartime documentaries that depicted graphic violence, mayhem, prisoners of war, a mounting death count—real-life narratives with sons, fathers, and uncles

as the protagonists.

This, it has been claimed, undermined official Hays Office censorship of film violence. After all, with Americans dying overseas, and the government itself approving the display of war and releasing such images, it seemed absurd to be squeamish.

Regardless of who it was—GIs or private eyes, saboteurs or working women—a new sense of realism took hold. People seemed to want real people and real things on-screen. And from this a new, dressed-up version of crime emerged: films about normal people who got into trouble, whose fateful decisions and desperate ploys to escape the consequences might have been yours, if you had turned down the wrong street.

Unquestionably, Wilder's own experience greatly encouraged his own pessimism. He lived in Europe during its darkest moments: the horror and depravity of Nazism, and the resultant

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Ella Raines

HEROINES IN NOIR

Beyond the Femme Fatale

by Don Malcolm
Sentinel Managing Editor

As noir continues to rise in prominence some sixty years after its heyday, a greater understanding of its range is evolving. We are at last getting beyond a core set of defining stereotypes (private eyes, femme fatales) as more of the noir canon becomes accessible.

Two of the San Francisco NOIR CITY festivals (in 2004 and again in 2008) shone a deliberate light on the

many noirs that feature women as protagonists. It turns out that heroines in noir are much more than an exception to the rule. Some play roles much like that of a private investigator (though none of them wear trench coats). Others are akin to the "woman in distress" that was prominent first in Victorian melodrama, a genre that as it evolved into the 1940s showed strong affinities with noir. Others are unique unto themselves.

Here we examine eleven noir heroines who reveal the nuances in gender roles and relationships that flow seamlessly into the dark side of the screen.

FEMALE REDEEMERS

Carol "Kansas" Richman (*Phantom Lady*)

Kathleen (*The Dark Corner*)
Lucia Harper (*The Reckless Moment*)

These women protect and defend loved ones, even when the odds are stacked against them.

Carol "Kansas" Richman (Ella Raines) turns female sleuth in order to find a missing woman who is the only person capable of clearing her boss (Alan Curtis) from false murder charges.

Kathleen (Lucille Ball) is a feisty secretary in love with her woozy, wavering, private-eye boss (Mark Stevens) who intercedes to keep him from being framed in a nasty case involving a deadly art dealer, his unfaithful young

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