



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Mildred Pierce

Mildred Pierce

Directed by: Michael Curtiz

©/Presented by: Warner Bros.

Production Company: First National

Executive Producer: Jack L. Warner

Produced by: Jerry Wald

Screen Play by: Ranald MacDougall

Based on the novel by: James M. Cain

Director of Photography: Ernest Haller

Special Effects by: Willard Van Enger

Film Editor: David Weisbart

Montages by: James Leicester

Art Director: Anton Grot

Set Decorations by: George James Hopkins

Wardrobe by: Milo Anderson

Makeup Artist: Perc Westmore

Music by: Max Steiner

Musical Director: Leo F. Forbstein

Orchestral Arrangements: Hugo Friedhofer

Sound by: Oliver S. Garretson

Sound System: RCA

Dialogue Director: Herschel Daugherty

uncredited

Unit Manager: Lou Baum

Assistant Director: Frank Heath

Assistant Director (2nd): Dick Moder

Contributing Writers: Catherine Turney,

Albert Maltz, Margaret Gruen,

Margaret Buell Wilder, Thames Williamson,

William Faulkner, Louise Randall Pierson

2nd Camera: William Schurr

Camera Operator: Frank Evans

Assistant Camera Operator: Frank Burkett

Gaffer: James Goldenhour

Best Boy: Rene Steffen

Grip: S.E. Young

Stills: Milton Gold

Matte Paintings: Paul Detlefsen, Mario Larrinaga

Special Effects: Harry Bamdollar

Supervising Art Director: Bertram Tuttle

Props: Limey Plews

Wardrobe: Clayton Brackett, Jeanette Storck

Make-up: Bill Cooley, Eddie Allen

Hairstylist: Geraldine Cole

Special Optical Effects: Russell Collings

Music Mixer: David Forrest

Re-recording/Effects Mixers: Gerald W. Alexander,

Robert G. Wayne

Publicity: John Mitchell

Cast:

Joan Crawford (*Mildred Pierce*)

Jack Carson (*Wally Fay*)

Zachary Scott (*Monte Beragon*)

Eve Arden (*Ida Korvin*)

Ann Blyth (*Veda Pierce*)

Bruce Bennett (*Bert Pierce*)

Lee Patrick (*Maggie Binderhof*)

Moroni Olsen (*Inspector Peterson*)

Veda Ann Borg (*Miriam Ellis*)

Jo Ann Marlowe (*Kay Pierce*)

uncredited

Garry Owen (*policeman on pier*)

Tom Dillon, Clancy Cooper (*policemen*)

James Flavin (*Joe, detective*)

John O'Connor (*detective*)

Charles Jordan (*policeman*)

Larry Rio (*reporter*)

George Meader (*Jack, the mailman*)

Johnny Walsh (*delivery man*)

Joyce Compton, Lynne Baggett, Marion Lessing,

Doria Caron, Marjorie 'Babe' Kane, Elyse Brown

(*waitresses*)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

'She was thirty-seven years old, fat, and getting a little shapeless. She had lost everything she had worked for, over long and weary years. The one living thing she had loved had turned on her repeatedly, with tooth and fang, and now had left her without so much as a kiss or a pleasant goodbye. Her only crime, if she had committed one, was that she had loved this girl too well.'

James M. Cain, *Mildred Pierce*, 1941

Director Michael Curtiz was confident in many genres, and 1945's *Mildred Pierce* combines at least two of them. The melodramatic narrative of an ambitious housewife's rise and fall, demonstrating Curtiz's enduring preference for 'homey pictures', is cloaked in elements of classic film *noir*, which makes for an especially cold-hearted weepie.

Joan Crawford stars as Mildred, a suburban woman striving to give her daughters the opportunities she never had by transforming from a stay-at-home mother, 'born in a kitchen', to a divorced businesswoman running a string of restaurants. Tragically, Mildred's sacrifices are made in support of a child whose monstrous appetites and self-interest offer a cruel exaggeration of her own humbler desires. Young Veda Pierce (Ann Blyth, who beat Shirley Temple to the role) remains one of cinema's most memorable villains, and the electric mother-daughter confrontations are deeply unsettling. The structure of the film is neatly symmetrical, and on repeat viewing the parallels between Veda's rise and Mildred's descent move into crisp focus, their mother-daughter story punctuated by two sharp slaps to the face and the gunshots that ring out at each end of the film.

It was a happier story of reinvention for Crawford, as Mildred was her first substantial role for Warner Bros after MGM had quietly terminated her contract, and she won an Oscar for her performance, which bristles authentically with resentment and determination. The film, its cinematography and screenplay as well as Blyth and Eve Arden's supporting performances were all also worthily nominated but failed to win. It's tempting to compare Mildred's metamorphosis not just to Crawford's late-career revival, but to her earlier transformation from Lucille LeSueur the chorus girl to the 1930s film star with a crisp new name.

Veda is at her most vicious when she drags up her mother's past: 'You think just because you made a little money you can get a new hairdo and some expensive clothes and turn yourself into a lady. But you can't, because you'll never be anything other than a common frump whose father lived over a grocery store and whose mother took in washing.' Veda's own pretensions are just as transparent, though, from her clatter of French phrases to her sleazy blackmail plot and her clumsy flirtation with her stepfather. And just like her mother, Veda realises that paid work, however much she despises it, is the only route to the life of luxury she craves. Her gig as a nightclub singer in a

Butterfly McQueen (*Lottie*)
 Jimmy Lono (*houseboy*)
 Manart Kippen (*Dr Gale*)
 Mary Servoss (*nurse*)
 George Anderson (*Peterson's assistant*)
 John Compton (*Ted Forrester*)
 Don Grant (*bartender*)
 Chester Clute (*Mr Jones*)
 Barbara Brown (*Mrs Forrester*)
 Charles Trowbridge (*Mr Williams*)
 Paul Panzer (*waiter*)
 Bob Evans (*sailor*)
 Wallis Clark (*Wally's lawyer*)
 David Cota (*Pancho*)
 George Tobias (*Mr Chris*)
 Robert Arthur (*high school boy*)
 Ramsay Ames (*party guest*)
 Leah Baird (*police matron*)
 John Christian (*singing teacher*)
 Joan Winfield (*piano teacher*)
 Park Lazelle (*attorney's clerk*)
 William Alcorn (*soldier*)
 John Sheridan (*clerk*)
 Angela Greene, Betty Alexander, Helen Pender
 (*party guests*)
 Richard Kipling, Wheaton Chambers, William Ruhl
 (*personnel men*)
 Jeanne Wardley (*wife*)
 Harold Miller
 Mary Ellen Meyran
 Jean Lorraine
 Bob Locke Lorraine
 USA 1945
 111 mins

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glittery two-piece carries less dignity than Mildred's waitressing shifts wearing plimsolls and a striped uniform, though it's doubtful she understands that.

The framing story revolves around a murder, which opens the film by wrongfooting the audience. We are misled both about the culprit and the genre of the film that is to follow, as Mildred recounts her story in the police station. Curtiz keeps both genres in play throughout the film, finding ingenious ways to insert deep black shadows into homes and restaurants flooded with California sunshine.

Crawford's years at MGM had schooled her well in the art of emoting in women's pictures, but here her inner grit suits the crime-film aesthetic too. Mildred's first appearance, striding down a neon-lit pier wearing a cantilevered fur coat, folds both styles into each other: as she arrives she is tearfully contemplating a watery suicide; when she leaves she is planning to cover up a felony. The murder was an addition to James M. Cain's Depression-era source novel. In 1940s Hollywood, criminals needed to suffer the consequences of their actions – though you may wonder whether Mildred really deserves everything she gets. The final shots of the film seem to equate her return to her former life to a term of servitude, and domestic incarceration.

The 4K restoration does justice to this astonishing film, especially Ernest Haller's sumptuous cinematography – there are almost as many bold crane shots as biting lines of dialogue to cherish here. In support of Crawford and Blyth, Arden is superb as Mildred's colleague Ida, rendered bitter, unmarried and yet disarmingly witty after years of working for a living in the restaurant trade. Similarly, the performance by comic star Jack Carson, as seedy huckster Wally Fay, is far more memorable, and entertaining, than Mildred's two adulterous husbands.

Pamela Hutchinson, *Sight and Sound*, April 2017

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Miller's Crossing

Tue 1 Aug 20:40; Sat 12 Aug 15:20; Mon 14 Aug 18:10

Sawdust and Tinsel (Gycklanas afton)

Wed 2 Aug 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large); Tue 22 Aug 20:45

The Night of the Hunter

Thu 3 Aug 20:50; Sat 26 Aug 18:10; Tue 29 Aug 20:50

The Bigamist

Fri 4 Aug 20:45; Wed 9 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Aga Baranowska, Events Programmer)

3 Women

Sat 5 Aug 20:30; Sun 20 Aug 18:25

La Peau douce (Silken Skin)

Sun 6 Aug 18:30; Thu 24 Aug 20:45

In the Mood for Love (Huayang Nianhua)

Mon 7 Aug 18:10; Fri 18 Aug 20:45; Fri 25 Aug 18:20

Charulata (The Lonely Wife)

Tue 8 Aug 20:35; Wed 16 Aug 18:00 (+ intro by Professor Chandak Sengoopta, Birkbeck College, University of London)

Brief Encounter

Thu 10 Aug 18:30; Sun 20 Aug 13:20

Merrily We Go to Hell

Fri 11 Aug 18:20; Wed 23 Aug 18:15 (+ intro by author and film journalist Helen O'Hara)

Love Is the Devil: Study for a Portrait of Francis Bacon

Sat 12 Aug 20:40; Wed 30 Aug 18:10 (+ intro)

Mildred Pierce

Sun 13 Aug 15:40; Mon 21 Aug 20:45; Mon 28 Aug 15:10

Beau travail

Tue 15 Aug 20:45; Mon 28 Aug 18:30

Red River

Thu 17 Aug 20:20; Sun 27 Aug 15:20

Blue Velvet

Sat 19 Aug 17:45; Thu 24 Aug 18:10; Thu 31 Aug 20:35