



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Killers

The Killers

Directed by: Robert Siodmak

©: Universal Pictures Company

Presented by: Mark Hellinger Productions

Produced by: Mark Hellinger

Assistant to the Producer: Jules Buck

Assistant Director: Melville Shyer

Screenplay by: Anthony Veiller

Screenplay: John Huston, Richard Brooks *

From the story by: Ernest Hemingway

Director of Photography: Woody Bredell

Special Photography Effects by: D.S. Horsley

Editor: Arthur Hilton

Art Direction: Jack Otterson, Martin Obzina

Set Decorations: Russell A. Gausman,

E.R. Robinson

Gown Supervision: Vera West

Director of Make-up: Jack P. Pierce

Hairstylist: Carmen Dirigo

Music: Miklós Rózsa

Music, 'The More I Know of Love': Miklós Rózsa

Lyrics, 'The More I Know of Love': Jack Brooks

Director of Sound: Bernard B. Brown

[Sound] Technician: William Hedgcock

Cast:

Burt Lancaster

(*Ole 'The Swede' Anderson, aka Pete Lund*)

Ava Gardner (*Kitty Collins*)

Edmond O'Brien (*James Riordan*)

Albert Dekker (*'Big Jim' Colfax*)

Sam Levene (*Lieutenant Sam Lubinsky*)

Vince Barnett (*Charleston*)

Virginia Christine (*Lilly Harmon Lubinsky*)

Jack Lambert (*Dum Dum Clarke*)

Charles D. Brown (*Packy Robinson*)

Donald MacBride (*R.S. Kenyon*)

Charles McGraw (*Al, the killer*)

William Conrad (*Max, the killer*)

Harry Hayden (*George, counterman*) *

Bill Walker (*Sam, cook*) *

Phil Brown (*Nick Adams*) *

Howard Freeman (*Brentwood police chief*) *

John Berkes (*Plunther, the coroner*) *

Queenie Smith (*Mary Ellen Doherty, 'Queenie'*) *

Ann Staunton (*Stella, Reardon's secretary*) *

Gary Owen (*Joe Smalley*) *

Mike Donovan (*timekeeper*) *

John Sheehan (*doctor*) *

John Miljan (*Jake the Rake*) *

Jeff Corey (*Blinky Franklin*) *

Noel Cravat (*Lou Tingle*) *

Wally Scott (*Charlie*) *

Gabrielle Windsor (*Ginny Bryson*) *

Milton Wallace (*waiter*) *

Reverend Neal Dodd (*minister*) *

Harry Brown (*paymaster*) *

Audley Anderson (*assistant paymaster*) *

George Anderson (*doctor*) *

Charles B. Middleton (*Farmer Brown*) *

Vera Lewis (*Mrs Hirsch, landlady*) *

Ethan Laidlaw (*conductor*) *

Ernie Adams (*limping man following Kitty*) *

Jack Cheatham (*police driver*) *

Howard Negley, Perc Launders,

Geoffrey Ingham (*policemen*) *

Rex Dale (*man*) *

Al Hill (*customer*) *

Nolan Leary, John Trebach (*waiters*) *

William Ruhl (*motorman*) *

Beatrice Roberts (*nurse*) *

Michael Hale (*Pete*) *

USA 1946©, 105 mins

* Uncredited

Burt Lancaster and Ava Gardner star in Robert Siodmak's gritty and muscular film noir. Told entirely in flashback, a life insurance investigator pieces together the tragic story of 'the Swede' (Burt Lancaster), a boxer drawn into a dangerous world of crime by his feelings for a fickle mobster's moll (Ava Gardner). The influential opening scene, in which two hit-men track down their prey in a sleepy small town, sets the bleak but seductive tone of noir fatalism to memorably brilliant effect. Ernest Hemingway's short story has also been filmed by Andrei Tarkovsky and Don Siegel, but Robert Siodmak's version remains the definitive adaptation.

bfi.org.uk

Robert Siodmak was a man of contradictions. Some were of his own devising, others were thrust upon him. They start at birth, with some sources claiming his birthplace as Memphis, Tennessee, while others give Leipzig or Dresden. Critic Andrew Sarris reckoned that his American films were more Germanic than his German ones, while others feud over whether he was an *auteur* who helped define film noir or a studio hack whose work was decidedly mediocre when not abetted by quality craftsmen. Moreover, while Siodmak was feted in some quarters as the new Fritz Lang or Alfred Hitchcock, he was appreciated in others as a master of kitsch.

So, how do you start to fathom such a self-effacing enigma? Some of the answers lie in an eventful life history that saw his Jewish banking family endure the hardships of the Depression before Siodmak left Berlin for Paris and then France for the United States, as the Nazis rolled across Europe. There are also clues in the films he made before he reached Hollywood, as the optimistic naturalism of *People on Sunday* (1929) – which he produced with his writer brother Curt, roommate Billy Wilder and friends Fred Zinnemann, Edgar G. Ulmer and Eugen Schüfftan – was first replaced by the claustrophobic expressionism that characterised UFA pictures like the Emeric Pressburger-scripted *Abschied* (1930) and the 1933 adultery saga, *The Burning Secret* (which led to Joseph Goebbels branding Siodmak 'a corrupter of the German family') and then by the nascent noir morbidity that pervaded Gallic outings like *Mollenard* (1937) and *Pièges* (1939). But the true Siodmak style only started to emerge in Hollywood towards the end of the Second World War.

Siodmak didn't patent the noir formula, but he showed how to blend German expressionism and French existentialism with American angst and, in the process, he directed more canonical landmarks than anyone else in the new genre's heyday. Dismayed by the world around him, Siodmak examined societal injustice, domestic turmoil, gender conflict, sexual repression, psychological trauma and the rise of the career criminal. Preferring to shoot on controllable studio sets rather than on location, he used deep-focus photography, precise camera moves, meticulously designed *mises-en-scène* and sculpted lighting effects to create milieux beset by paranoia, greed, lust, obsession and violence. Multiple flashbacks, rapid cuts, mirrored images and unsettling scores reinforced the sense of urban alienation, moral decay and nightmarish paranoia.

These formal and thematic concerns dominate the loose crime trilogy that Siodmak produced in the immediate postwar period. Adapted uncredited by

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Out of Sight

Fri 1 Sep 20:30; Thu 7 Sep 20:35; Fri 22 Sep 17:55

Girlhood (Bande des filles)

Sat 2 Sep 16:00; Sun 17 Sep 18:30;

Mon 2 Oct 18:10

Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45;

Sat 30 Sep 15:40

Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40;

Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,

Programmer-at-Large)

Notorious

Tue 5 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 11:45;

Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

The Wind Will Carry Us

(Bad mara khahad bourd)

Wed 6 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Shohini Chaudhuri,

Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex);

Fri 15 Sep 20:40

Ace in the Hole (aka The Big Carnival)

Fri 8 Sep 14:40; Mon 11 Sep 20:45;

Fri 29 Sep 18:00

The Killers

Sat 9 Sep 18:20; Tue 12 Sep 14:30;

Mon 18 Sep 20:50

The Maltese Falcon

Sun 10 Sep 11:50; Mon 25 Sep 14:40;

Tue 26 Sep 20:55

F for Fake

Wed 13 Sep 18:20 (+ intro by Jason Wood,

BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes &

Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

Barry Lyndon

Sat 16 Sep 19:30; Sun 24 Sep 14:30

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Tue 19 Sep 20:45; Tue 26 Sep 18:05

Au revoir les enfants

Wed 20 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic and lecturer

Dr Julia Wagner); Thu 28 Sep 20:45

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John Huston from an Ernest Hemingway story, *The Killers* (1946) became known as the 'Citizen Kane of noir' on account of the intricate network of flashbacks that allow insurance investigator Edmond O'Brien to discover the role that Ava Gardner played in the duping of both mobster Albert Dekker and ex-boxer Burt Lancaster. Elwood Bredell's cinematography is grimly atmospheric, with the heist sequence filmed in a single take from a swooping crane being justly celebrated. But, while the performances are exceptional, it's the baroque bleakness of Siodmak's Oscar-nominated direction that ensures this reeks of abject pessimism and hard-boiled doom.

Although the visuals are less stylised, there is still plenty of pitiless villainy in *Cry of the City* (1948), which follows cop Victor Mature's bid to prevent childhood pal Richard Conte from leading his kid brother into a life of crime. Making evocative use of locations in New York's Little Italy, Siodmak creates realist poetry from the rain-soaked tarmac and uses his formulaic story to expose the squalor, corruption and treachery of the mean streets. Franz Planer's views of the Bunker Hill area of Los Angeles are equally atmospheric in *Criss Cross* (1948), which sees femme fatale Yvonne De Carlo lure ex-husband Burt Lancaster into robbing his armoured car with her new gangster beau, Dan Duryea. Establishing the template for the heist caper, this has been described as Siodmak's most American film and its twisting fatalism captures the mood of a nation ill-at-ease with itself.

David Parkinson, bfi.org.uk

A contemporary review

An impressive film elaborated from the Hemingway short story of the same name. It opens with the murder of Swede Lunn, small-town garage hand, by a couple of professional killers, who make no attempt to hide the fact that they are working for someone else. Reardon, an insurance company investigator, takes up the case and embarks upon a succession of clue-giving events beginning with an interview with a maid in a hotel in Atlantic City, beneficiary of a small life insurance policy left by Swede, and ending with the moment at which the broken-down boxer decides to give in to his pursuers.

Gradually, in a series of flashbacks, the twisted, complicated story is unfolded: Swede's infatuation for a decoy girl, his double-crossing of the gang who he thinks have double-crossed him, the burglary, escape with loot, prison sentence and final round-up.

Peopled with a sinister collection of characters and set against a background in which crime and violence are the keynote, the film is permeated by a feeling of intensity apparent in the memorable opening sequence, and which is rarely absent despite the entanglements of the plot. A stimulating if harrowing film, brilliantly directed and photographed, and acted with distinction by a newcomer, Burt Lancaster, as Swede, Edmond O'Brien as the insurance agent, Ava Gardner as the girl and Albert Dekker as the gang leader directly responsible for the major crime.

Monthly Film Bulletin, December 1946