
FIFTIES (1951-1960) S-T
All reviews by Michael J. Weldon

SHADOW ON THE WINDOW (Fang, 57) D William Asher, S Leo Townsend, David P. Harmon, P Jonie Taps

Little Petey (Jerry "The Beaver" Mathers) is taken to a hospital in shock after seeing three young robbers kill a man then tie up his mom Linda (Betty Garrett) in a house. Violent, hot headed Jess (Barrymore), the leader Gil (Corey Allen) and the strong, simple minded Joey (Gerald Sarracini) argue and fight and eventually obtain guns. Linda tries to psych them out and escape. Meanwhile the father (Phil Carey) stays very cool as he and the cops try to figure out where his (estranged) wife is and doctors try to get Petey to talk. Asher later created BEWITCHED and made the BEACH PARTY movies. Garrett was Laverne's mom on LAVERNE AND SHIRLEY. The print of this rare Columbia feature jumps.

SING BOY SING (Fang, 58) P/D Henry Ephrom, S Claude Binyon

In 57, Tommy Sands starred in a TV drama called THE SINGING IDOL and had his only top ten hit ("Teenage Crush" on Capitol). 20th Century then had him recreate the role of Virgil Walker from Louisiana. He's like Elvis mixed with Marjoe and this Cinemascope feature is an early look at how a Southern singer can lose it under pressure to make money for others. His devious shark like manager (Edmond O'Brien) tries to erase the influence of his tent preacher grandfather (John McIntire). In the big city (New York) lonely Virgil hires a friendly Oakie (Nick Adams) as his road companion and later beats up a papparazzi. With Jerry Paris as the record PR man, Josephine Hutchinson as his aunt, Lili Gentile as the girlfriend who he leaves behind, Regis Toomey as a reverend, Diane Jergens, and Cleveland's Bill Randle and other real disc jockeys. Sands sings a half dozen orchestrated pop and gospel songs (the title song went to #24). I wish I liked the music more. O'Brien had also been in THE GIRL CAN'T HELP IT (56).

SIX BRIDGES TO CROSS (54) D Joseph Pevney, S Sidney Boehm, P Aaron Rosenberg

In 1933 Boston (which has six bridges) Jerry Florea (Sal Mineo in his film debut) takes the rap for a statutory rape and goes to a reformatory. Released at 21 (and now played by star Tony Curtis) he plans a horse race scam, is arrested several more times and works as an informant. As Pearl Harbor is bombed he's labeled a "public enemy." He eventually goes straight and marries, but dies tragically. All the while Gallagher (George Nader), a cop, changes from an enemy to an ally as he moves up the ranks. The cast of Universal contract players including Julie Adams as Mrs. Gallagher, were joined by Jay C. Flippen and Jan Merlin. Sammy Davis Jr. sings the theme song. It was partially filmed in Boston and was based on a novel which was based on the 1950 Brinks robbery. Curtis was in three movies directed by Pevney.

THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO (Englewood, 52) D Henry King, S Casey Robinson, P Darryl F. Zanuck

In Africa, famous novelist Harry (Gregory Peck) lies dying, vultures circle, and his wealthy wife (Susan Hayward) just leaves him there to go hunting. The delirious man remembers his past. The rest of the 117 min. semi-autobiographical Hemingway adaptation features multiple narration and flashbacks inside of flashbacks. He goes to Paris in the 20s, falls for a life model (Ava Gardner) and writes The Lost Generation. They go to Africa and watch bullfights in Spain but after he leaves her, she dies working for the Red Cross on the front lines of The Spanish Civil War. Also with Hildegard Knief as a Countess, Leo G. Carroll as his uncle, Torin Thatcher as the "great white hunter," Paul Thompson as the witch doctor, and a laughing hyena. The wildlife footage is excellent, but the actors were all filmed on sets. The score is by Bernard Herrmann. Hayward soon returned in

the “dark continent” movies WHITE WITCH DOCTOR (53) and UNTAMED (55). It's odd to see this Fox Technicolor hit released by a video company known for low budget titles. They added the trailer and some lobby cards but the end credits are missing.

THE STORY OF MANKIND (57) P/D/S Irwin Allen, S Charles Bennett
 An H bomb explosion opens this colorful, half assed 100 min. Warners adaptation of Hendrik Willem van Loon's 1921 book. It's been on local TV stations (cut). The Spirit Of Man (Ronald Colman in his last role) and Mr. Scratch (Vincent Price) debate whether mankind deserves to survive in a high court. It's worth it just to hear Price, perfect as the Devil, ridicule all humanity and condemn the Colonists for “stealing the land from the Indians” and being guilty of “the foul smelling crime of slavery.” Serious thoughtful parts are undermined by having a leering Groucho Marx swindle Manhattan from an idiot Indian (Abraham Sofaer), then taking his sexy daughter, and Harpo as Sir Isaac Newton. The book was updated by adding Pearl Harbor and Hitler (Bobs Watson), but doesn't even mention Communism. The many impressive epic scenes are from previous features (LAND OF THE PHAROAHS, HELEN OF TROY...) and the new dialog scenes feature “name” stars. John Carradine, as a Pharaoh, is the first witness and Lorre is the laughing “rapist pervert, arsonist” Nero. Others are Francis X. Bushman (Moses), a young Dennis Hopper! (Napoleon), Edward Everett Horton (Sir Walter Raleigh), Hedy Lamarr (Joan Of Arc), Virginia Mayo (Cleopatra), Agnes Moorehead (Queen Elizabeth), Marie Wilson (Marie Antoinette), and Marie Windsor (Josephine). Also with Sir Cedric Hardwicke as the judge, Charles Coburn, Nick Cravat, Henry Daniell, Helmut Dantine, Anthony Dexter, Reginald Gardiner, Marvin Miller, Chico Marx, Franklin Pangborn (in his last role), Ziva Rodann, Cesar Romero, Angelo Rossitto, William Schallert, and George E. Stone. Bennett had written Hitchcock movies and NIGHT OF THE DEMON (56). He went on to write four more scripts for Irwin Allen.

A STRANGE ADVENTURE (Fang, 56) D William Witney, S Houston Branch
 After doublecrosses and murder, gangsters from Omaha and some hostages all end up holed up in a snowed in cabin. Hero Ben Cooper falls for Joan Evans but the real star is Marla English (THE SHE CREATURE) as a nightclub singer who flirts with, teases and uses the gangsters. The gangster (who has a cold) is played by Nick Adams, wearing a white tie and suspenders with a black shirt. Also with Jan Merlin (later in THE TWILIGHT PEOPLE). English looks great in a bathing suit. From Republic.

STRANGERS IN THE CITY (Charter, 60) P/D/S/cine Rick Carrier
 Felipe (Robert Gentile) lives in a rat infested 108th St. tenement apartment with his family, newly arrived from Puerto Rico. He's attacked by a small gang while delivering groceries and criticized by his no good father. He fights, then befriends the gang leader (who dresses in a suit with a cane) in time for a pot smoking, bongo rock dance party. His sister Elena (long haired beauty Creta Margos) is raped at her machine shop job, then is conned by the slick, cultured Mr. Lou into becoming a high class hooker. With a flashback and death by electrocution. This low budget local movie is impressive (despite some mic shadows) and is depressingly believable until maybe, the suitably downbeat but over the top ending. It was filmed on location in Harlem, at Coney Island and in Rockefeller Center before Christmas. Mr. Lou is played by Kenny Delmar (the voice of Senator Claghorn on the Fred Allen Show). Embassy picked this up for release in 62. Carrier later worked for Barry Mahon on THE BEAST THAT KILLED WOMEN (editing) and other nudie movies (photography).

STRIPORAMA (SW, 52) D Jerald Intrator, S Allan Bodian, P Martin Lewis
 After a look at Times Square, newspaper headlines announce “Council Nixes Burlesque in Time Capsule!” Jack Diamond and his two comic friends force

council members (at gunpoint) to watch the rest of this nostalgic color "boilesque" movie. Georgia Sothern and Rosita Royce (she uses trained doves) do their acts, a man throws a woman around in an athletic "Apache" dance number, the comedians do routines and "Mr. America" plays harmonica while dancing with a woman on his shoulders (!). An American sailor howls and barks like a dog in a harem, then a smiling, winking Betty Page takes a bubble bath. Page, the main attraction, also appears in a comedy skit, after a man dreams about her picture. She also talks ("Touch me, caress me.") for the only time on film. It all ends with Lilli St. Cyr in the short CINDERELLA'S LOVE LESSON (with separate credits). The many females (including Jeanne Carmen) are sexy but the emphasis is on tease (this could get a PG rating). The opening segments include the most obvious boom microphone shadows I've ever seen but the bright color is a plus. Page went on to the similar features TEASERAMA, VARIETEASE and STRIPPERS PARADISE. Intrator later made movies like SATAN IN HIGH HEELS.

TALES OF TOMORROW Vol. 1 (Eng, 51/2) D Don Medford, Leonard Valenta, P Mort Abrahams

This serious live (51-3) sci fi show was on ABC TV (and briefly on radio). The excellent opening credit sequence is followed by set bound dramas. VERDICT FROM SPACE, written by Theodore Sturgeon and directed by Valenta, was the series premiere and is the most complex. Flashbacks during a murder trial reveal that an alien transmitter has been recording the development of the A bomb. "Thousands of space ships" arrive (off camera) at the end. ICE FROM SPACE is a bit like THE THING, as a glowing block of ice is found at a secret government post. With Paul Newman as a gum chewing sergeant, Edmon Ryan, and Raymond "Mr. Drysdale" Bailey as an angry Congressman. The more memorable BITTER STORM is one of those Cold War dramas that seems more like Sunday school than sci-fi. An angry bitter scientist (Arnold Moss, also in THE 27th DAY) on an island finds faith after witnessing human sacrifice and can hear the actual sounds of Christ's crucifixion (!) through his invention. With Phillip Pine and Joanne Woodward (Newman's future wife). Other episodes were released by Nostalgia Merchant. These have new title credits.

TALES OF TOMORROW Vol. 2 (Englewood, 52/3) D Don Medford, P Mort Abrahams

FRANKENSTEIN, written by Henry Meyers, features Lon Chaney Jr. as the monster. His mutant make up is like Christopher Lee's some years later. He terrifies servants, picks up furniture, rages, cries and throws a kid around. He also looks at the camera (supposedly Chaney thought it was a rehearsal). John Newland is the doctor and Mary Alice Moore is Elizabeth. This semi-famous episode is better than I expected. READ TO ME HERR DOCTOR, written by Alvin Sapinsley, is about a very crude robot created by an old professor (Everett Sloan) to read to him. The mechanical man rebels and takes over the house. Mercedes McCambridge is the daughter. In THE MIRACULOUS SERUM, written by Theodore Sturgeon, a hospital doctor (Richard Derr) transplants a pineal gland into a poor dying patient (Lola Albright). She recovers, but with no morals and wanting political power. The logical solution is a lobotomy. These have new title credits.

TALES OF TOMORROW VOL. 3 (Englewood, 52/3) D Don Medford, P Mort Abrahams

In THE EVIL WITHIN (written by Manya Starr), the neglected wife (Margaret Phillips) of a workaholic scientist (Rod Steiger) is accidentally dosed with his mind altering drug. She becomes a raging vengeful hellcat. The assistant (struggling actor James Dean) stays in the lab. THE WINDOW (written by Frank DeFelitta) was pretty experimental for early 50s TV. A televised sci fi TALES... show is interrupted (Please Stand By!) by a mysterious live broadcast from a bare (HONEYMOONERS look) apartment. The actual producer, director and others (as

themselves) in the ABC studio are horrified when they realize they're broadcasting a murder. Steiger is the killer of his lover's drunk husband (Frank Maxwell). In YOUTH ON TAP (written by Lona Kenney and Mann Rubin), a man (Harry Townes) pays money to others for their blood in order to stay eternally young. A truck driver (Robert Alda) who wants to marry a waitress (Alice Moore) is the latest victim. These have new title credits. For more on this live ABC (51-3) sci fi show see PV # 31 + 32. This is the best volume so far.

TALES OF TOMORROW Vol. 4 (Englewood) D Don Medford, P Mort Abrahams
 Each tale in this volume (the best so far) of the cool early TV show features time travel. In Past Tense (53), scientist Harry Marco (Boris Karloff) uses his time machine (a chair surrounded by coils) to go back to 1910 and offers penicillin at a hospital. His wife (Katherine Meskill) and the main doctor think he's crazy. With footage of Pearl Harbor and the Hiroshima bomb. Has anybody out there seen Karloff's movies from the same year: MONSTER OF THE ISLAND (filmed in Italy) and THE HINDU (filmed in India)!? In Another Chance (53), a paranoid loser thief (Leslie Nielsen) is sent back in time by a con man (Robert Middleton) with a "forgetfulness machine" (a chair) and ends up murdering his wife (Virginia Vincent). All The Time In The World (52), the best story here, was written by Arthur C. Clarke. A woman from the future (silent movie beauty Esther Ralston) offers a lot of cash and a bracelet device that speeds up time for the wearer to a crook (Don Hammer, a very likable character actor I never heard of). He finds a friend (Jack Warden) at a bar (where "Wheel Of Fortune" is heard on the jukebox) to help him steal great works of art from museums. The plot includes an H bomb test, the end of the world, and the fact that queer means counterfeit money. Note: America had in fact just conducted its first H bomb test. It was named Mike. Crude ABC slide commercials are for PAUL WHITEMAN'S TEEN CLUB, HOLLYWOOD SCREEN TEST and others.

TARZAN AND THE TRAPPERS (Sinister, 58) D H. Bruce Humberstone, Charles F. Hass, Sandy Howard, S William E. Snyder, Alan Stensvold, P Sol Lesser
 Three episodes of an unsold (b/w) TV series, using the sets, director and stars from TARZAN'S FIGHT FOR LIFE (58) were edited together. The result premiered on NBC. 6'3" Gordon Scott (Werschkul) stars with lots of stock footage. Cheeta gets more screen time than Jane (Eve Brent) and Tartu/Boy (Rickie Sorenson). Tarzan makes two African natives dance, knocks the heads of natives together (twice), fights off a whole tribe by himself and strangles a black guard. Tarzan also rides a giraffe and Cheeta burps. Tarzan defeats evil trapper Schroder (Leslie Bradley), then is marked for death by the man's brother Sikes (Saul Gorss) and a Frenchman (Maurice Marsac) searching for a lost city. Scatman Crothers is a faithful native in a loin cloth who get tied up and slapped in the face before being rescued by Tarzan. He tells the tribal witch (Mme. Sul-Te-Wan from BIRTH OF A NATION): "Quiet foolish woman, Tarzan stronger than LIFE!" Other tribesman (including Naaman Brown, Paul Thompson, and Don Blackman) carry spears while saying their nonsense lines. NBC succeeded with a TARZAN series (featuring Woody Strode) in '66, a major year of racial unrest and riots. Humberstone had directed KING OF THE JUNGLE (33) for Lesser who became the official Tarzan series producer in '43.

TEASERAMA (SW, 55) P/D Irving Klaw
 This one is much more interesting than VARIETEASE (even though it was shot on the same minimal set), shows more skin, and has more Bettie Page. She smiles while holding the intro signs, has two solo sequences and plays maid to star attraction Tempest Storm. Page's dance moves are some of the oddest you'll see. Storm is also featured in two solo segments. The main comics are the Shemp look Dave Starr and Joe E. Ross (later famous for the CAR 54 series). The sexiest strippers here (in my opinion) are redheads Chris La Chris and Cherri Knight (who strips on a couch) and the platinum blonde Trudy Wayne. Also with acrobatic platinum blonde Twinnie Wallen and the pretty convincing drag star

Vicki Lynn. The "new edition" tape (from '93) includes the trailer and unfortunately, a huge Something Weird logo on top of Bettie.

TEENAGE REBEL (Fang, 56) D Edmund Goulding, P/S Charles Brackett, S Walter Reisch

Despite the title, this 20'th Century Fox Cinemascope production is an adult appeal soap opera, based on a play. The very proper, angry and stuck up 15 year old Dodie (Betty Lou Keim) is sent to stay with her estranged mother (Ginger Rogers) in San Francisco. She resents her mom, now married to an architect (Michael Rennie with little to do) and with a little boy, but eventually things work out. Dodie also learns to have a good time thanks to a neighbor boy (Warren Berlinger) and his mother (Mildred Natwick) and sister (Diane Jergens). There's dancing at a soda shop and at a party and a drag race. Louise (BEULAH) Beavers as a comic relief mammy type and the black porters make it resemble a 40's movie. Hard to believe that Brackett had backed some of Billy Wilder's classics.

TEENAGERS BATTLE THE THING (Monument, 58) D/S Don Fields

The very serious Prof. Bill Wyman (!) takes 6 nice, well behaved students (2 are female) on a field trip and they discover what he claims is an ancient mummy. The man in a motley suit creature takes off, kills a baby-sitter, is lured back with meat scraps and set on fire. The end. In 72, this obscure b/w feature was recycled as THE CURSE OF BIGFOOT with new framing scenes and used to put late night local TV viewers to sleep. The sheriff says "Of all the weird things I've heard, this is the strangest." My favorite line is when one teen says "I sure could go for a bottle of pop" and another explains that he'll need 10¢ plus a 3¢ deposit. The print is excellent. Supervising producer Hugh Thomas had also been a producer of PLAN NINE FROM OUTER SPACE.

TREAD SOFTLY STRANGER (Sinister, 58) D Gordon Parry, P/S Denis O'Dell, S George Minter

No good Johnny (George Baker) flees creditors in London and returns to his hometown of Rawborough. He latches on to Calico (Diana Dors), a tough, weary club girl. She convinces his accountant brother to embezzle money and murder results. With Terence Morgan and the familiar faces of Patrick Allen and Andrew Keir. Many scenes take place on an apartment rooftop (an interesting set) where platinum blonde Dors exercises. Baker was born in Bulgaria.

THE THIEF (Englewood, 52) D/S Russell Rouse, P/S Clarence Greene

This experimental b/w no dialog drama is so good at conveying alienation and paranoia that parts reminded me of ERASERHEAD. It has a full score and sound effects but not a word of dialog. U.S. government scientist Dr. Fields (Ray Milland) is forced by an enemy agent (Martin Gabel) to microfilm nuclear secrets which are then passed from one courier to another. The scientist sits dreading the loud ringing of his (tapped) phone and has to travel from D.C. to NYC. He's eventually moved to a flop house where a sexy neighbor (Rita Gam) tries to entice him, he has a nightmare and sits and sobs. The lone action sequence takes place inside the top of the Empire State Building. I enjoyed the location work at Grand Central and the Lincoln Tunnel (looking pretty much like they do now), the Times Square subway station and 42nd St (note the Flea Circus) which are unrecognizable and other famous spots. The U. A. release would make a good Milland scary NYC double bill with LOST WEEKEND.

THE 27TH DAY (Unearthly, 56) DWilliam Asher, S John Mantley, PHelen Ainsworth

An alien (Arnold Moss) who plans to take over Earth for his own race, abducts five people. On his flying saucer he gives each one a (Neutron bomb like) set of capsules that will stay active for 27 days, then returns them. He then appears on

worldwide TV and gives their names. Chinese Buddhist Su Tan (Marie Tsien) immediately stabs herself. The British Eve Wingate (Valerie French), who had been abducted while in her swim suit, throws her weapon into the ocean then flies to join L.A. reporter Jonathan Clark (star Gene Barry). He goes incognito (by shaving his mustache) and mentions that the rock and roll on a transistor radio is "almost music." They hide out in a cabin and later fall in love and join Euro Prof. Bechnar (George Voskovec) at top level Pentagon meetings. Meanwhile Iron Curtain guard Ivan (Azenat Janti) is tortured by order of a Soviet General (Stefan Schnabel). Soon headlines announce - World Control Claimed By Iron Curtain! All American troops are withdrawn under threat of nuclear war and The Soviets are set to easily take over the world. German scientist Dr. Neuhaus (Federic Ledebur, star of THE MAN WHO TURNED TO STONE) simply vanishes from a raft while sacrificing himself testing an alien bomb in the ocean. Everyone on the nearby Navy ship is served by a black servant. Bechnar finally figures out how the free world can win. A TV announcer (Paul Frees) then explains that "every person throughout the world known to have been an enemy of human freedom" has been killed." In other words every Commie on Earth has evaporated!?! Everybody is happy and Bechnar gives a U.N. speech inviting the aliens to come live on Earth! The saucer footage is from the same year's EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS, also from Columbia. With Paul Birch (American admiral), Mel Welles (Soviet marshal), and Three Stooges regulars Emil Sitka and Emil Van Zandt. Mantley, who wrote the brilliant crazed script based on his novel, later produced THE WILD WILD WEST show. Asher later directed BEWITCHED. The tape includes 10 good trailers.

THE TWONKY (Fang, 53) P/D/S Arch Oboler

Oboler, whose greatest fame (Lights Out) was on the radio, had good reason to hate TV and had the foresight to distrust its effects. I wish this odd comedy (from U.A.) was better but it does show that TV can kill. Professor Kerry (Hans Conried) is left home alone with a new TV set, a gift from his wife (Janet Warren). The (robot like) set uses rays to do helpful things (it lights his cigarettes, shaves him, creates money...), but it also walks around awkwardly, uses the phone and makes unwanted value judgements (like breaking his classical records). Characters that resist are reformed or punished. It zaps the clothes off Kerry's sister in law (Gloria Blondell), hypnotises some students (they walk out like zombies repeating "No complaints") and even causes a car crash. With Billy Lynn as the coach, L.A. dj Al Jarvis as the mailman and (I think) a young Henry Gibson. The music is light and whimsical. Oboler's previous feature BWANA DEVIL was recently remade (as GHOST AND THE DARKNESS). Somebody should remake THE TWONKY.