Overdrive: L.A. Noir, 1940-1959
November 2—24, 2013
AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center

Noir, as a film genre, is a slippery construct inspiring debates over style, story, context and time frame. What is easier to agree upon is the important role played by Los Angeles in noir storytelling. Between 1940 and 1959, the burgeoning metropolis of L.A. pushed ahead of New York in the total number of films noir set within its city limits. During this era, the City of Angels provided filmmakers with a sun-splashed and architecturally unique landscape (especially the soon-to-be bulldozed Bunker Hill neighborhood) in which the LAPD, hard-boiled private eyes, countless femmes fatales—and a few hommes, too—could navigate an unsettled, and unsettlingly amoral, world.


- **Criss Cross** (Robert Siodmak, 1949, 88 min.)
- **Without Warning** (Arnold Laven, 1952, 75 min.)
- **Cry Danger** (Robert Parrish, 1951, 79 min.)
- **M** (Joseph Losey, 1951, 86 min.)
- **Crime Wave** (André De Toth, 1954, 73 min.)
- **Act of Violence** (Fred Zinnemann, 1948, 82 min.)
- **Double Indemnity** (Billy Wilder, 1944, 107 min.)
- **City of Fear** (Irving Lerner, 1959, 72 min.)
- **Kiss Me Deadly** (Robert Aldrich, 1955, 106 min.)

AFI Information
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AFI Member passes accepted at all screenings in the Overdrive series.

CRISS CROSS
Sat, Nov 2, 5:00*; Thu, Nov 5, 7:00; Thu, Nov 7, 5:15
*Introduction by Deborah Sorensen, Assistant Curator, National Building Museum, on Nov 2

“The savage drama of an amazing double double-cross!” This follow-up to the smash hit THE KILLERS reteams director Robert Siodmak with star Burt Lancaster, who one again finds himself on the short side of a deadly love triangle. Lancaster returns to his native Los Angeles and his old neighborhood haunts after a year of wandering and soon bumps into ex-wife Yvonne De Carlo, who seems interested in rekindling their relationship, though she has just married gangster Dan Duryea. Soon the hopelessly still-smitten Lancaster is drawn into Duryea’s criminal orbit, planning an armored car heist and scheming to run off with De Carlo, but completely unaware that the others may be looking to leave him holding the bag. Producer Mark Hellinger hoped the film “would do for Los Angeles what [his film] NAKED CITY had done for New York,” and German émigré Franz Planer lenses the film’s many L.A. locations with similarly clear-eyed precision; from Bunker Hill’s steep streets and worn mansions, to Union Station’s bustle and deco glamour. DIR Robert Siodmak; SCR Daniel Fuchs, from the novel by Don Tracy; PROD Michael Kraihe. US, 1949, b&w, 88 min. NOT RATED

WITHOUT WARNING!
Sun, Nov 3, 3:15*; Tue, Nov 5, 5:15; Wed, Nov 6, 5:15
*Introduction by Scott Kratz, Vice President for Education, National Building Museum, on Nov 3

Blonde-obsessed, baby-faced gardener Carl Martin (Adam Williams) kills a string of pick-ups with garden shears, triggering a police investigation that doggedly travels across the City of Angels. This documentary-style picture bristles with unexpected humor and unusual L.A. locations; from a daytime shoot-out on a four-level highway interchange (the first of its kind) to the killer’s unfinished shack in Chavez Ravine—where hundreds of homes were in the process of being cleared to make way for public housing that would never materialize, especially once Dodger Stadium moved in. With its playful script, inventive visuals and genuine moments of suspense, this is a streamlined B-movie that aspires to A-movie enjoyment—and largely succeeds. DIR Arnold Laven; SCR William Raynor; PROD Arthur Gardner, Jules V. Levy. US, 1952, b&w, 75 min. NOT RATED

Restored 35mm Print!

CRY DANGER
Sat, Nov 9, 1:15; Mon, Nov 11, 12:45; Thu, Nov 14, 7:15

Robert Parrish’s directorial debut, one of the wickedest, Wittiest revenge yarns of the original film noir era, was recently restored under the auspices of the Film Noir Foundation and the UCLA Film and Television Archive. Former song-and-dance man Dick Powell caps several years of success in the crime genre as savvy ex-con Rocky Mulloy, now working to clear his partner’s name. The film offers a uniquely L.A. noir landscape, where seedy hangouts and hilly streets sparkle with California sunshine, and low-rent trailer parks replace tenements. Costarring the ravishing Rhonda Fleming and the redoubtable Richar Erdman, one of the great wisecrackers of all time. (Note courtesy of Noir City.) DIR Robert Parrish; SCR William Bowers; PROD W. R. Frank, Sam Wiesenthal. US, 1951, b&w, 79 min, 35mm. NOT RATED

M
Sat, Nov 9, 3:00*; Wed, Nov 13, 7:15
*Introduction by Chrysanthe Brokas, Curator, National Building Museum, on Nov 9

“The first time a city exists on the screen.” —Pierre Rissient, film critic. Joseph Losey stylishly reinterprets Fritz Lang’s disturbing 1931 masterpiece about a child killer whose crimes forge an unlikely alliance between the underworld and police. Although Lang and von Harbou’s script remains largely untouched, the shadowy claustrophobia of the first film’s German city is replaced by the sun-bleached sidewalks, faded Victorian buildings (including the oft-filmed Bradbury) and underground garages of post-war Los Angeles—the final location being where the murderer (David Wayne) faces the blunt force of a vigilante mob. Ironically, members of the film’s left-leaning production team were themselves the target of anti-Communist protests, with the film picketed and even banned in many cities. Despite this backlash, critics admired the film’s “true-to-life locations which raise the overall impact of realism,” and called attention to “the unidentified but hugely effective backgrounds of Los Angeles.” DIR Joseph Losey; SCR Norman Reilly Raine, Leo Katcher, Waldo Salt; PROD Seymour Nebenzal. US, 1951, b&w, 88 min. 35mm. NOT RATED

All screenings at AFI Silver Theatre, 8633 Colesville Rd, Downtown Silver Spring
AFI.com/Silver
CRIME WAVE
Sun, Nov 10, 3:30*; Wed, Nov 13, 9:20
*Introduction by Scott Kratz, Vice President for Education, National Building Museum, on Nov 10

One of the best noir thrillers to come out of Hollywood in the 1950s stars Sterling Hayden as a righteously PO’d cop making life miserable for a small-time ex-con who wants to go straight but can’t shake his old gang. Director Andrè De Toth and cameraman Bert Glennon work black magic with a tiny budget and 14-day shooting schedule, capturing nocturnal Los Angeles in all its seedy allure, as well as the more mundane streets of suburban Glendale—where the gang’s heist plans go awry. De Toth’s decision to cast the “rumpled” Hayden over star Humphrey Bogart was a boon to the film’s talented ensemble and reinforces the film’s gritty realism. The colorful cast includes Gene Nelson, Phyllis Kirk, Ted de Corsia, Charles Bronson and Timothy Carey. (Note courtesy of Noir City.) DIR Andrè De Toth; SCR Crane Wilbur, adapted by Bernard Gordon and Richard Wormser from the story “Crime’s Mark” by John and Ward Hawkins; PROD Bryan Fox. US, 1954, b&w, 73 min. NOT RATED

ACT OF VIOLENCE
Sun, Nov 10, 5:10; Tue, Nov 12, 7:15

Respected family man and successful contractor Van Heflin is a World War II veteran lauded for his national service and for bringing much-needed housing to his community. When limping Robert Ryan arrives in Heflin’s sleepy burg, wild-eyed and determined to kill him, it becomes clear that there may be some dark secrets that Heflin would do anything—even kill—to keep in this complex psychological thriller. Ryan obsessively tracks Heflin from Big Bear Lake back to his suburban home and then deep into L.A.’s shabby Bunker Hill neighborhood, where Heflin struggles to hide in crowds that bring new dangers. The Glendale train station, of DOUBLE INDEMNITY fame, is the site of the pair’s final meeting and the film’s poetic finale. Mary Astor as a lady of the night and Janet Leigh as Heflin’s unsuspecting wife round out the superb cast. DIR Fred Zinnemann; SCR Robert L. Richards; PROD William H. Wright. US, 1948, b&w, 82 min, 35mm. NOT RATED

DOUBLE INDEMNITY
Fri, Nov 15, 3:00, 7:00; Sat, Nov 16, 7:00*; Tue, Nov 19, 8:45
*Introduction by Senior Curator G. Martin Moeller, National Building Museum, on Nov 16

Nominated for seven Oscars, including Best Picture, Director, Screenplay and Actress. This is film noir at its noir-est, as jaded insurance man Fred MacMurray and bored housewife Barbara Stanwyck team up to murder her husband and collect on the policy. They fool ace insurance inspector Edward G. Robinson, but getting away with murder turns out to be a full-time job. L.A.’s car-centric sprawl isolates the couple and provides cover for their scheming—from its empty streets and offices, to mundane markets, garages, and commuter train stations. The screenplay is by Billy Wilder and detective fiction maestro Raymond Chandler, adapting the novel of another hardboiled great, James M. Cain. DIR/SCR Billy Wilder; SCR Raymond Chandler, from the novel by James M. Cain; PROD Joseph Sistrom. US, 1944, b&w, 107 min, 35mm. NOT RATED

CITY OF FEAR
Fri, Nov 22, 5:30; Sun, Nov 24, 3:00

“He’s one man, holding the lives of 3 million people in his hands.” A late entry to the noir genre, Irving Lerner’s atomic age parable simmers with violence and jumps off the screen with a pounding, jazzy score by Jerry Goldsmith. Vince Edwards reteams with director Irving Lerner, playing convict Vince Ryker who escapes San Quentin with a canister he believes to hold heroin, but which actually contains Cobalt-60, a radioactive substance that could wipe out the map. Ryker ferries the ominous canister across town in his convertible, contaminating himself, his girl and countless others, while the authorities chew their nails and struggle to locate Ryker before the public catches on. Veteran cinematographer Lucien Ballard boosts the lean procedural plot with gleaming visuals, throwing location details into sharp relief as the increasingly scrambled and sweaty Ryker dissolves in the foreground. Twenty-five years later, Alex Cox unleashed a similarly radioactive sedan—and sociopath—on L.A.’s residents in REPO MAN. DIR Irving Lerner; SCR Robert Dillon, Steven Ritch; PROD Leon Choulock. US, 1959, b&w, 81 min, 35mm. NOT RATED

KISS ME DEADLY
Fri, Nov 22, 7:15; Sat, Nov 23, 5:30*
*Introduction by Deborah Sorenson, Assistant Curator, National Building Museum, on Nov 23

“Blood-Red Kisses, White-Hot Thrills!” Mickey Spillane’s tough-talking New York detective Mike Hammer gets a California makeover in this cult fave by proto-indie filmmaker Robert Aldrich, with gonzo script by A. I. Bezzerides. Atomic age fears find their foil in modern L.A.’s sprawling landscape of violence and corruption, in which Ralph Meeker’s Hammer sneers with sarcastic cool. Equal parts narcissist and sadist, Hammer lives in a swank bachelor pad, drives his corvette too fast and is drawn by ego and curiosity into a murder investigation—despite clear danger to all around him. Hammer’s search is inventively filmed by Ernest Laszlo across Los Angeles (filmed 75 percent on location), from Bunker Hill and Beverly Hills to the isolated Malibu beach house where the “great whatisit” finally goes critical. Excellent support is provided by “va-va-voom!” Juano Hernandez and femmes Cloris Leachman, Maxine Cooper, Gaby Rodgers and Marian Carr. DIR Robert Aldrich; SCR A. I. Bezzerides, from the novel by Mickey Spillane; PROD Robert Aldrich. US, 1955, b&w, 106 min, 35mm. NOT RATED