



## FILM NOIR SEASON

Eden Court Cinema  
Sept 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 at  
8:15pm

# The Killers (1946)

1946, USA, B&W, Film Noir, Running time: 103 mins.

Rating: PG

Cast: Burt Lancaster, Ava Gardner, Edmund O'Brien

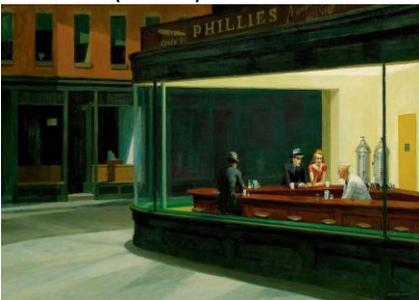
The second in the InFifa showing of 'film noir' classics; our example tonight would seem to fulfil the definitive requirements of the genre, featuring as it does brooding characters, corruption, treachery, detectives, criminals aplenty, is set in the seedy side of 'big city' life, was shot in black and white, with an evidently American milieu and a gorgeous 'femme fatale', played by Ava Gardener no less.

Its origins began with a short story of the same name, penned by Ernest Hemingway. An apparently true account is that Hemingway, offered a private screening before its being released on the big screen, Hemingway always a prodigious

drinker and apparently prepared for disappointment (he famously had never cared for the previous film adaptations of his writing) by dint of placing a pint of gin in one pocket, and a pint of gin in the other. ‘Didn’t need them!’ he remarked at the film’s conclusion.



The film has also been listed as ‘A Man Alone’. The initial 20 minutes are a faithful adaptation of the Hemingway story, but thereafter it takes off in directions beyond its original starting point. In the 3,000 words of the story by Hemingway we never know the what or why ‘The Swede’ (Lancaster’s character) seemingly has to die, or indeed why he accepts his fate without demur. The film provides a rationale for both. One of its advocates was Edward Hopper who said that it provided the inspiration for one of his most iconic paintings, ‘Nighthawks at the Diner’ (below).



The film features Burt Lancaster in his first starring role, although he was not the director’s first choice; indeed several others were chosen initially but they were not available. William Conrad, the portly killer, again featured for the first time in a film. He went on, as older viewers will attest, to T.V. fame as ‘Cannon’ the ever expanding detective.

Ava Gardner had appeared in a series of minor roles, but this film launched her career as a star.

An unaccredited John Huston co-wrote the screenplay with Richard Brooks, which was officially credited to Anthony Veiller.

The film is cited as a prime example of ‘film noir’ photography in the award-winning documentary ‘Visions of Light’ (1992) and has been included as of 2008 for preservation in the American National Film Registry. It has achieved a 100% positive ‘Rotten Tomatoes’ rating based on critics reviews over time. In 2018 it was selected for the Venice Classics section at the 75th Venice International Film Festival. Indeed the film was very successful on its release, with picture houses offering consecutive showings over a period of several 24 hour days to meet demand.

It employs the use of flash-back to tell its tale, (which thereafter became something of a trope for film noir) using Riordan (Edmund



O'Brien, above) as a life insurance investigator to provide a quintessential exploration of a man so worn down and disenchanted with life that he finally gives it up.

Howard Hughes in his lengthy isolated final years apparently watched this film obsessively several times a day.

The music and songs were composed Miklos Rozsa, The opening chords may seem familiar to older viewers, used as they were for the T.V. series 'Dragnet'.

Film buffs may be surprised to know that whilst a film student in the USSR Andrei Tarkovsky (Solaris, etc.) created a 19 minute short based on Hemingway's original story.

Andrew Walker, screen writer of the thriller 'Seven', along with many other films, has created a new screen-play, but as yet it hasn't been filmed.

Lancaster trained for 2 months with several real boxers until he was knocked out twice, when apparently discretion became the better part of valour. As many will already know Lancaster was already in his 30's, formerly an acrobat, an unusual calling card in Hollywood. His success reportedly led to the director asking to find yet more acrobats as potential stars!

Look out for Virginia Christina who appears as Lancaster's girl-friend here, when she appears as a blind secretary in the later version of 'The Killers' to be shown here in a few weeks.

The plot, as with 'Double Indemnity' shown previously, is set in motion by a Life Insurance investigator, played by Edmund O'Brien, who is assigned to find the beneficiaries of Lancaster's death. Look out for the central robbery of 'The Prentiss Hat Company' which was filmed with just the one camera, and with no cuts. Lastly for younger viewers, the L.A. band 'The Killers' apparently named themselves after this, a favourite movie of theirs.



A question to ask of yourselves is whether this deserves to be cited as one of the movies to see before you die (it is one of a 1,000 chosen by a collection of film enthusiasts). Is it a matter of style over content, or does the story have something to say about the 'human condition'?

**Notes compiled by Dominic Thierry (InFifa)**

Our next screening.....**Criss, Cross**

Eden Court Cinema..... **30th Oct 2019 at 8.15pm**

The next film in our.....**Film Noir Season**



The seedier side of 1940'S Los Angeles makes a fitting noir background for this brilliant, classic film noir starring Burt Lancaster as the lovelorn hero, Steve, foolish enough to go back to his ex-wife Anna (an excellent Yvonne de Carlo) who has since taken up with a bunch of hoodlums headed by the sinister Dan Duryea. Steve commits himself to a dangerous course of action that quickly takes everyone somewhere unintended...



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*Inverness Film Fans (InFiFa) meet fortnightly at Eden Court Cinema for screenings and post-film discussions.*

*For more information and to join us, free, go to:*

[www.invernessfilmfans.org](http://www.invernessfilmfans.org)