



Maigret And the St. Fiacre Case (1959), Kino Classics, 2017, 106 mins, \$23.95 • French superstar Jean Gabin takes a wonderful turn in this second adaptation of Georges Simenon's mystery series. Gabin's Inspector Jules Maigret seeks comforts: food, warm fires to stand by, a pint of ale, puffs off his pipe. He's quiet, soft-spoken, observant and yet, passionate. This case is personal. Maigret returns to his countryside hometown to investigate a foreboding letter received by an elderly countess, a woman the young Maigret had a crush on when he was twelve. When she dies, in a church sanctuary of a heart attack, he suspects foul play. Director Jean Delannoy often films Maigret with outdoor tracking shots, capturing his literal and figurative commitment to pursuing the case and uncovering the crime. The finale, involving all the suspects gathered in the dining room of the countess's chateau, is explosive.

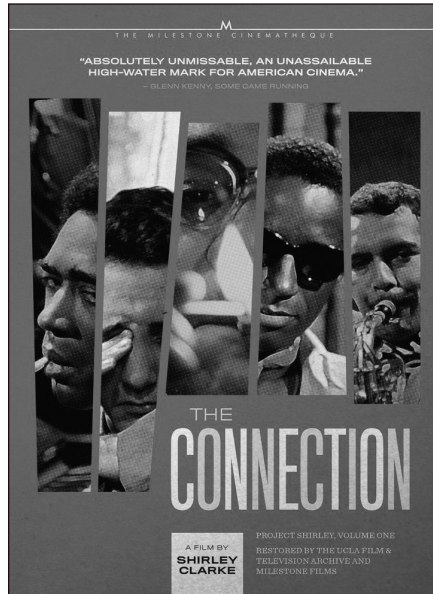
The Fortune Cookie (1965), Twilight Time, 2017, 126 mins, \$29.95 • A TV cameraman (Harry Hinkle) feigns a back injury to collect on an insurance scam. Jack Lemmon is the nebbish, a decent guy caught up in the scheming designs of his amoral brother-in-law, Whiplash Willie (Walther Matthau). The ambulance-chasing lawyer is played with sarcastic aplomb, as Matthau draws out many of his utterances with a sing-songy obnoxiousness that shows, hey, it's his world, he's driving the main melody. Hinkle agrees to participate, because it appears by doing so he'll win back his ex-wife, but when he sees the adverse effects his play-acting has on the football player (Ron Rich as Luther "Boom Boom" Jackson) who "injured" him, Hinkle has second thoughts. Matthau and Lemmon are wonderfully counterpointed in this hard-boiled Billy Wilder film and what emerges out of the entanglements of their innocence and fraudulence is a sentimental (and I mean that in a good way) final set piece that rivals Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca*.

Not as a Stranger (1955), Kino Lorber, 2018, 135 mins, \$29.95 • Director Stan-

Crosscuts

BRIEF DVD REVIEWS

GRANT TRACEY



ley Kramer delivers a hard-hitting tale of dedication and unrequited love. Lucas Marsh (Robert Mitchum), an arrogant, driven medical student, will do anything to become a doctor, including marrying a woman [Kristina Hedvigson (Olivia de Havilland)] he likes but doesn't love to acquire her financial backing. After setting up practice in a small town, Lucas eventually comes to grips with his own imperfections. Olivia de Havilland, partially reprising her role from another film about unequal distributions of love, *The Heiress* (1949), represents the film's moral center: she's gentle, kind, and loves Lucas deeply. When Kristina can't tell Lucas that she's pregnant, we feel her hurt, identify with her, and wonder if Lucas will ever come to really appreciate and love her. Sadsy. Grab the Kleenex. Compelling.

The Connection (1961), Milestone, 2015, 110 mins, \$39.95 • Shirley Clarke's avant-garde film blurs the boundaries between fiction and cinéma-vérité documentaries. Set in a grungy NYC apartment, a jazz quartet, junkies, and

various hangers-on await the arrival of their connection, Cowboy, and a fix of heroin. At times, they talk directly to the camera, pulling us into their existences. Added to the ensemble is Jim Dunn (William Redfield), a documentary filmmaker who exploits the group for his own artistic ends, even agreeing to pay for their fixes so that he can keep rolling film. He barks out, "be natural, be natural," but he attempts to guide their conversations, creating an overdetermined narrative that he envisions. Knowing nothing about junkie life, he's eventually lured into his own fiction, taking his first hit of H to experience the experience. The result: he loses focus, his cinéma-vérité lens no longer zeroing in on the lives of the people in the room, but on a rolling Hula-Hoop, a cracked window, a bug climbing the wall. Clarke's film is actually based on an off-Broadway play, written by Jack Gelber, complete with the original run's ensemble, including OBIE winner Warren Finnerty, who is fantastic as Leach (dig the name, cats, and its symbolic ramifications: he lives off the misery of others, getting free fixes for offering them a place to get theirs). Finnerty is crude, narcissistic, but also capable of profound moments of existential insight. Hard-bop cool oozes out of every frame of this film. A real curio.

Opera (1987), Scorpion, 2018, 107 mins, \$15.39 • Confession: I don't dig horror films, but I love visual style, so cats like Dario Argento grab me with their audacity. Argento's edits are action-to-action, and his gaillo has constant movement: fast-flowing tracking shots, jerky hand-held sequences, and swooping subjective point-of-views from, yes, ravens. The colors pop off the screen. The plot: a young opera singer Betty (Christian Marscillach) takes over the part of Lady M in Verdi's *Macbeth* and suddenly some crazed fan is killing off her friends, forcing her to watch, needles gating her eyes open, so she can't even blink. Is a recurring childhood nightmare really a repressed, memory flashback, holding the key to solving the brutal murders? Full-throttle thriller from the maestro, dripping with psychological nuances. □