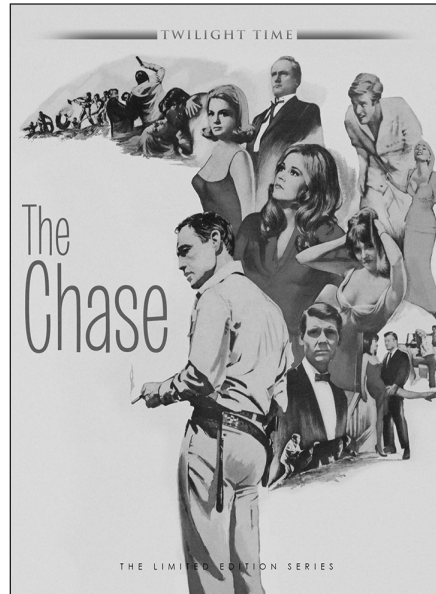


The Chase (1966), Twilight Time, 2016, 134 mins, \$29.95 • A small, corrupt, racist Texas town, an honest liberal-minded sheriff, an escaped convict returning home, and a host of spoiled rich folks living lives of sexual angst and infidelities sets the backdrop for Arthur Penn's flashy soap opera of love and loss. Some of the acting might be over the top, but this is a film about manners gone wrong, and the excess works within the story's context. Marlon Brando is marvelous as Sheriff Calder. He has his hands full trying to find Bubber (Robert Redford) before a vigilante posse does. Brando exudes a slouchy swagger, confidence, and earnestness. He may be a reluctant hero, but he does his best to maintain his own professional code and personal dignity. Best bit: Brando rubbing a pipe along the edges of his nose, oiling it up before lighting it. Quirky, original, so Brando. The film has the vibe of a muted western, and in the end Calder, like John Wayne's Ringo Kid in *Stagecoach*, abandons civilization for the wilderness. Visually dazzling.

Phoenix (2014), Criterion, 2016, 98 mins, \$19.95 • To label this film evocative is to undersell it. Nina Hoss, in a rich, multileveled performance, plays a Holocaust survivor (Nelly Lenz) who has radical facial reconstruction. Rather than exile herself from postwar Germany she decides to stay on and find her husband Johnny. He doesn't recognize her. Painfully made to feel invisible, Nelly needs his love to feel whole. In an ironic twist Nelly (who Johnny still doesn't know is she) commits to a scam he invents, passing herself off as his "wife" so that he can acquire a share of her inheritance. Bizarre. Christian Petzold's film reinvigorates the Orpheus/Euridyce myth. Unlike Orpheus, Johnny needs to look back, see her for who she is. But like much of Germany after WWII he's so in denial that he can't own up to his own betrayals or what the German people did to the Jews. Like Orpheus, Nelly needs to quit looking back, to find her identity not through her husband, but in her own terms, her own journey. Petzold's final image, lyrical and haunting, is shot in



rack focus. Nelly in her red dress blurs into a swirling variation on Phoenix rising.

Something Wild (1961), Criterion, 2017, 113 mins, \$29.95 • "I like the way you look here," Mike (Ralph Meeker) says to Mary Ann (Carroll Baker) midway through Jack Garfein's indie masterpiece. Mike feels a connection to her, they are subterranean people, and he won't let her leave, imprisoning her in his claustrophobic apartment. Strange, troubling. Garfein's film is full of such surprises, horror and beauty, the mystery of choices. Carroll Baker, as a rape victim, gives an incredible performance, intuitively bending her body to her character's emotional existence. Prior to the rape, she glides, skips, walks with brisk, strong strides. Following her trauma, she moves with a halting pace, shoulders hunched. With no support system for what she's experienced, Mary Ann wears a mask, repressing her trauma, constantly bathing, wandering through much of the film like a silent film star. Eventually she contemplates suicide. Mike rescues her, and then takes her to his apartment for

Crosscuts

BRIEF DVD REVIEWS

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rest and food. Their first night together, a drunk, nearly somnambulant Mike makes an aggressive pass, and she kicks out an eye! And this is the man she'll eventually marry, sensing his love, kindness, devotion. Stockholm syndrome or a genuine, shared connection? Such labels are too limiting. Garfein, himself a trauma victim (when he was liberated from Belsen the fourteen-year-old weighed a scant forty-eight pounds) identifies with Mary Ann, her struggle to understand her past and climb out of her subterranean existence into the lived present. Sensitive, gritty, and all Method.

Black Girl (1966), Criterion, 2017, 59 mins, \$29.95 • This groundbreaking debut by African director Ousmane Sembène was inspired by the reported suicide of a young Senegalese woman found in the bathtub of a white Parisian family. The newspaper account, written from a colonial perspective, never ventured inside her experiences. By contrast, Sembène grants Diouana (M'Bissine Thérèse Diop in a sensitive, dignified performance) agency and subjectivity. Sembène inverts the "invisible man" paradigm, giving his protagonist a name, while her colonial oppressors remain nameless. Moreover, his soundtrack employs authentic African music, including a rush of agitated rhythms at the end, pushing the colonial "Monsieur" out of Dakar. Sembène also invests in African mythology, ancestral masks, and champions Diouana reclaiming hers, her Africanness, her deities. Diouana travels to France under the mistaken impression that she'll take care of children and see the city. Instead, "Madame" yells at her constantly, converting Diouana into a domestic slave. Throughout the film Diouana's voiceover places us in her consciousness, and when not directly revealing her dissatisfaction, Sembène's scenework suggests a host of indignities: Diouana forced to eat in a separate room; and at one dinner party she must accept an abrupt kiss from a dinner guest: "I've never kissed a Negress before." A powerful cautionary tale of African migration. □