

NOIR THROUGH THE DECADES: TEN FILM RECOMMENDATIONS

BY DIRECTOR DARKO TRESNAK

One of the things that I love the most about my profession is that research never ends. Every worthwhile production that comes along takes me back to the library, the bookstore, the museum, or - in this instance - the silver screen.

The silver lining of the past two years, when so many theatre projects had to be postponed, was that I had plenty of time to revisit my favorite noir films and to watch many more for the very first time.

I started out with the genre-defining classics by Billy Wilder, Nicholas Ray, and Fritz Lang. Then I watched several dazzling movies by Ida Lupino, the only woman director in old Hollywood who had the opportunity to leave her mark on the noir genre. I revisited more recent neo-noir masterpieces by Lawrence Kasdan and Stephen Frears. And then I sailed overseas with the genre, and discovered: the French masterpieces of the 1950s, directed by Louis Malle and Jules Dassin; the Japanese jewels of the 1960s, directed by Akira Kurosawa and Masahiro Shinida; and the grimy but powerful British contributions of the 1980s, directed by John Mackenzie and Neil Jordan. Thanks to the Criterion Channel and Amazon Prime, I think I ended-up watching several hundred noir and neo-noir movies. Silver lining, indeed!

Here, in chronological order, are the posters for ten great movies, the ones that proved to be most helpful - to me and to our creative team - in bringing *Noir*, the musical, to life on stage.



DOUBLE INDEMNITY

Directed by Bill Wilder, 1946

The gold standard of the genre. Phyllis Dietrichson, portrayed by the fearless and versatile Barbara Stanwyck, is my all-time favorite film character.



THEY LIVE BY NIGHT

Directed by Nicholas Ray, 1948

An impoverished young couple. In trouble. On the run. While Kyle Jarrow's plot for *Noir* is completely original, it pays homage to noir tropes, like this one. The Wife and the Husband in our production face similar problems to the ones hounding the young couple in *They Live by Night*.



THE BIG HEAT

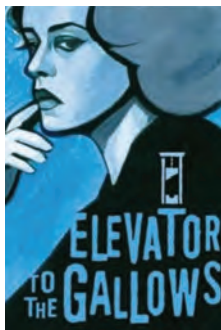
Directed by Fritz Lang, 1953

There is an infamous, still startling, moment in the movie that we quote (and subvert) in our production. You will have to watch the movie to find out more.



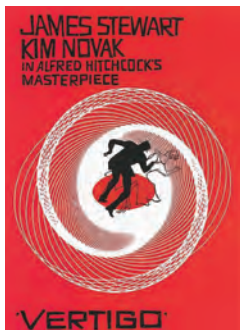
THE HITCH-HIKER

Directed by Ida Lupino, 1953
Ida Lupino. A great actress. And even greater director. In *The Hitch-Hiker*, she directs an all-male cast in a lean and mean masterpiece.



ELEVATOR TO THE GALLOWS

Directed by Louis Malle, 1958
The movie that made Jeanne Moreau a star. It features an innovative and influential soundtrack composed by Miles Davis.



VERTIGO

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, 1958
The haunting "green light" sequence (you can look it up on YouTube) informed Alexander Dodge's set design and Ben Stanton's lighting in our production.



PALE FLOWER

Directed by Masahiro Shinida, 1964
Haunting. Impeccably composed. A movie that unfolds like a kinesthetic woodblock print.



BODY HEAT

Directed by Lawrence Kasdan, 1981
From Lana Turner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* to Kathleen Turner in *Body Heat*, the more conniving the femme fatale, the more likely that she will be dressed in white.



MONA LISA

Directed by Neil Jordan, 1986
I love this gritty thriller, featuring Bob Hoskins and Cathy Tyson, even more than Jordan's acclaimed and very popular *The Crying Game*, from 1992.



THE GRIFTERS

Directed by Stephen Frears, 1990
I think that few film actresses get the opportunity to go to the scary places that Anjelica Huston braves in *The Grifters*. The Los Angeles setting - the nefarious doings set in seedy motels - influenced the set design and even some of the fight choreography in *Noir*.