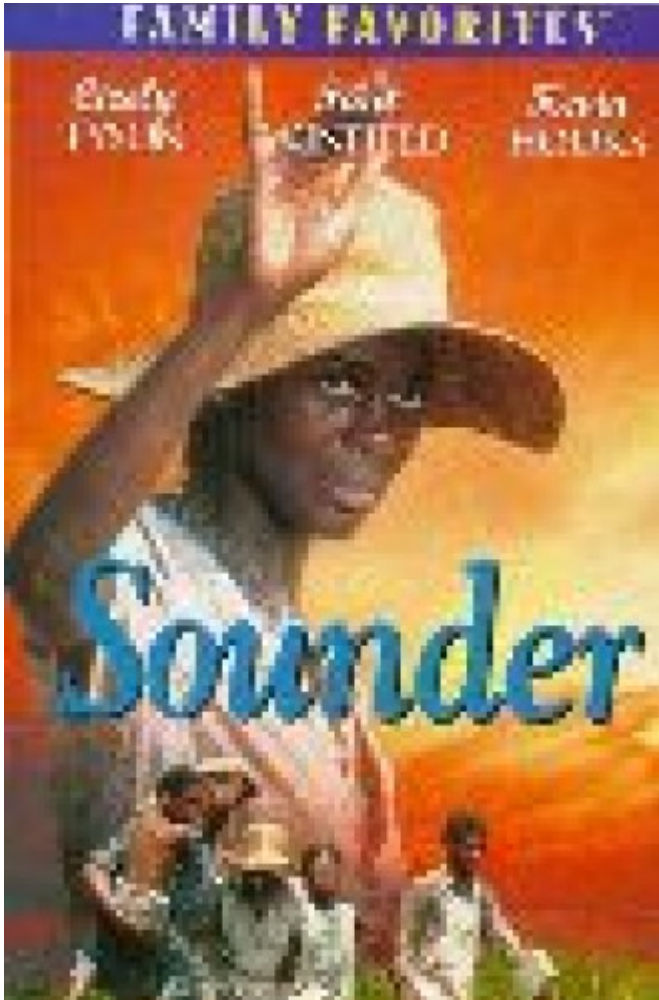


CC Recommends

selected by [John Petrakis](#) and [Steve A. Vineberg](#)

This review appears in the [December 16, 2008](#) issue.

In Review



Sounder

Martin Ritt
Paramount



Orchestra Wives

Archie Mayo
20th Century Fox



Green for Danger

Sidney Gilliat

Criterion



Bleak House

BBC Warner



Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan

Sergei Bodrov

New Line



Chungking Express

Wang Kar-Wai

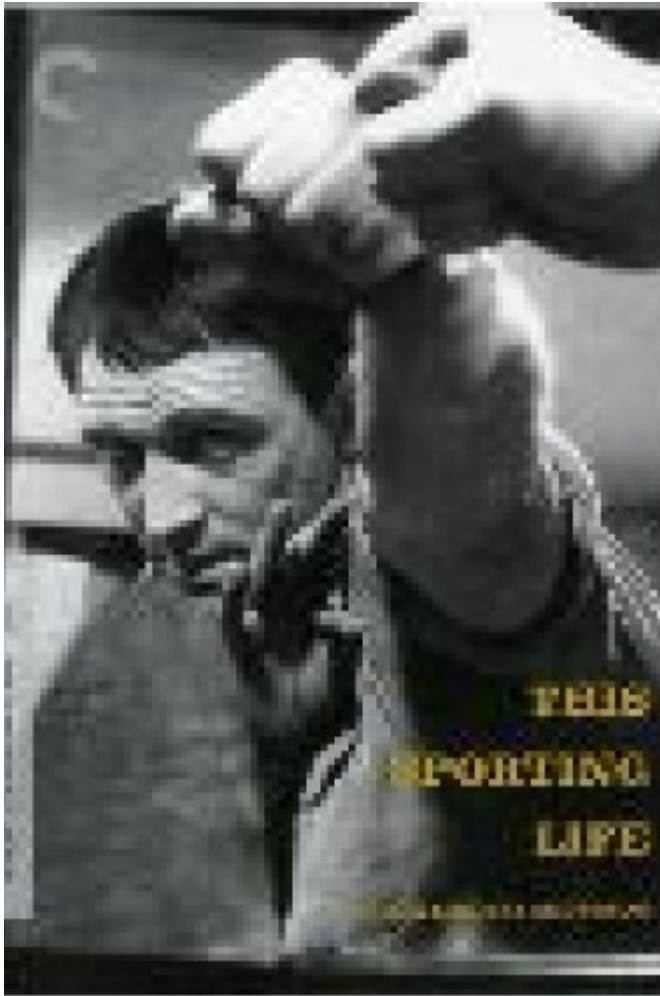
Criterion



The Match Factory Girl

Aki Kaurismäki

Criterion



This Sporting Life

Lindsay Anderson
Criterion

Martin Ritt's 1972 adaptation of the beloved children's novel by William H. Armstrong is one of the most powerful family films ever made. It is set in Depression-era Louisiana, where a proud father (Paul Winfield) poaches game to feed his wife (Cicely Tyson) and children and winds up on a chain gang. The core of the narrative is the journey his son (Kevin Hooks) takes to try to find him. The boy doesn't locate his dad, but he finds a mentor, a young black schoolteacher (Janet MacLachlan), who holds out the priceless gift of education. Everything about the film is memorable, from the dialogue to the cinematography to the folk-blues score by Taj Mahal (who has a small comic role) and Lightnin' Hopkins.

This evocative, vivid wartime big-band musical has mostly been forgotten. The plot involves a musician (George Montgomery) who ditches his singer girlfriend (Lynn Bari) to marry a “civilian”—a pretty hick (Ann Rutherford) who has to prove her mettle. The writing is strong, but it’s the dancing and the music—by Glenn Miller and his orchestra—that make the film.

Sidney Gilliat directed this 1946 tale of homicide in a provincial hospital; it’s a favorite among aficionados of English murder mysteries. There’s a nifty gimmick: the voice-over narrator tells us at the beginning that we’re about to witness two murders but doesn’t identify the killer or the victims. Trevor Howard plays one of the hospital’s physicians, but the star of the picture is the indispensable Alastair Sim, with his amused death’s-head face, as the Scotland Yard detective who solves the crimes.

If you missed it on television, you can now see the BBC adaptation of Charles Dickens’s great exploration of characters whose fortunes are stuck in a morass of litigation. There was a classic TV version in the mid-1980s; this one is almost as fine. Gillian Anderson gives an elegant, mournful performance as Lady Dedlock. The direction is occasionally overly stylized, but the cast does justice to the wonderful Dickens creations, and the suspense is compelling. You’ll be grateful you don’t have to wait a week for the next chapter.

This 2007 Russian epic, nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Film, chronicles the early years of the brave and seemingly invincible Mongol warrior Temudjin (Tadanobu Asano), later known as Genghis Khan. The sweep of the storytelling, combined with the breathtaking cinematography, might be expected. What is surprising is the way director Sergei Bodrov portrays subtleties in such a large and bloody endeavor. The performances of the actors playing Temudjin and the love of his life, Börte (Khulan Chuluun), are almost delicate, while the episodic approach that the film employs, complete with timely flashbacks, makes it less a tale of conquest than one of legend morphing into myth.

Film students the world over genuflect at the name of Chinese director Wong Kar-Wai. One of the reasons is this 1994 charmer that first gained him attention in the West. Though the plot itself is little more than a pair of love stories, both involving police officers and a fast-food stand called the Chungking Express, there is enough style and panache in the opening 15 minutes to keep you glued for hours. Of particular note are the saturated color transitions, the multiple voice-overs and the

creative use of extreme close-ups to beef up the suspense.

This 1990 stunner is part of a new release of three classics by the Finnish flimmaker Aki Kaurismäki. Packaged under the title “The Proletariat Trilogy” and including *Shadows in Paradise* (1986) and *Ariel* (1988), *The Match Factory Girl* stars Kati Outinen as Iris, a miserable young woman whose life is little more than work and abuse. But neo-realism turns to black comedy once Iris buys a red dress and decides to get mad and get even with those who would trifle with her feelings.

Younger audiences may identify the late Richard Harris only with his role as Dumbledore in the Harry Potter movies. This 1963 black-and-white film, made in the kitchen sink-style English realism of the time, reveals Harris at his most vital and complex. He plays Frank Machin, a Yorkshire coal miner turned rugby player whose attempts at self-awareness tend to go awry. Written by the playwright David Storey, this was the feature debut of director Lindsay Anderson, who went on to an illustrious career.

John Petrakis teaches screenwriting in Chicago. Steve Vineberg teaches at the College of the Holy Cross.

More recommendations:

[Theology and the Bible](#)

[Memoir, biography and spirituality](#)

[Current events](#)

[Fiction](#)

[Children's literature](#)

[Classical music](#)

[Pop Christmas music](#)