

## Small-screen signposts

**More streaming and dreaming with CN&R film critic**

**I**t almost goes without saying that moviegoing in this highly fraught year continues to be mostly a matter of “streaming in place.” Be that

as it may, perhaps a little more could be said, and maybe should be said, about some of the rewards and benefits, large and small, emerging from the altered circumstances of contemporary film experience.

by  
**Juan-Carlos Selznick**

I miss watching movies on a big screen in a theater with an audience as much as anybody, but I’ve also been enjoying the increased access to cinematic benefits provided by video for many years now. Those benefits have been both expanded and magnified in this year of lockdowns and confinements. For me that has meant, among other things, more freedom and variety in the viewing choices I make, as well as the increased urgency and heightened sensitivity in the actual viewing.

One way of showing what I mean might take the form of a side-

ways top “10” list—not as a list of recommendations but rather as a set of signposts along the improvised pathways of my own viewing in 2020:

**Cat Videos:** I’ve been hooked on ‘em for a long time, but I only see the ones that my sister in Seattle sends me. There’s so much comic inventiveness in so much of what she sends me that I’ve begun to think of the videos as tiny film comedies, a thriving movie genre in its own right.

**Ready for some football, Mr. DeMille?** I watch a lot of NFL games, especially the 49ers and other West Coast teams. I especially enjoy the rich visual spectacle of games played on turf in autumn sunshine, and more often than not I put the nattering of broadcasters on mute. And in recent times, the multifaceted camerawork and on-the-fly editing often give the live broadcast a near-cinematic dimension.

**Perry Mason, re-imagined?** HBO’s prequel/revisionist tale of the early career of fictional legend (played here by Matthew



Rhys) makes almost no real sense as a character study, but as a somewhat gruesome tabloid-style period piece (Los Angeles between the first and second World Wars), it’s often fascinating. Mason’s loyal secretary Della Street (Juliet Rylance) is here a feminist/crimefighter; investigator Paul Drake (Chris Chalk) turns up as a black cop who’s too honest for the era’s LAPD; gusts of corrupt atmosphere blow in from *Chinatown* and other classic hits; a lurid version of the real-life, glamorous evangelist

Aimee Semple McPherson (Sister Alice McKeegan, played by Tatiana Maslany) steals the picture from Mason. Absurd, but also very hard to resist.

**We just jammin’ here!** There’s an 11-minute YouTube segment from the film of a 1984 George Thorogood concert in New Jersey. It has Thorogood doing his signature cover of John Lee Hooker’s paired talkin’ blues, with “House Rent Blues” sliding into “One Bourbon, One Scotch, One Beer.” The opening lyric, “I’m gonna tell you a story,” is directly addressed

Tatiana Maslany as Sister Alice McKeegan, nearly in HBO’s *Perry Mason*.

to the front rows of the audience, and what follows is not only the story the songs tell, but also the story of the band’s performance (including a guest cameo from Elvin Bishop) complete with running commentary from Thorogood and explicit nods to the musical history that walks alongside this blues genre. It’s a straight-up music video, but filmed and edited with such intelligence and wit that it also comes to life as a festive short story in movie form. □

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