

Some screen-time notes from another very interesting month of streaming in place:

At first, I was kinda miffed that the Oscarizers ignored *First Cow*. But, after throwing a fistful of popcorn at our flatscreen, it dawned on me that part of the true beauty of Kelly Reichardt's beguilingly distinctive movie is that it is simultaneously a great film and categorically unworthy of Oscar-begging attention!

First time through with the Oscar-nominated *Mank* (Netflix), I took a film-buff kind of pleasure in the onscreen results of David Fincher's labor of love, the baroque onscreen realization of his late father's screen-play about the writer Herman Mankiewicz and

by
**Juan-Carlos
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the making of *Citizen Kane*. The second time through, the pleasures ran much deeper, and for me, the Finchers'

long-awaited project began to take on an aesthetic life of its own.

In between the two viewings of *Mank*, I chanced to see *Curtiz* (Netflix), a haunting 2018 film from Hungary (in English) that mirrors *Mank* in a number of interesting ways. It, too, is filmed in sumptuously moody black-and-white, and it deals with the making of *Casablanca*, with central focus on Hungarian-born director Michael Curtiz and his struggles with writers, studio bosses, fellow emigres, wartime censors, and family. I look forward to a second viewing.

As always—but maybe even moreso amid the convulsions of contemporary existence—*Murder and the Movies*, the latest book by critic/historian David Thomson, is must reading, especially for anyone thinking seriously about the movies and cultural history. The book continues and deepens his incisive reflections on the history of movies, the history of violence in motion pictures, the culture of violence in modern history and the implications for movie viewers as well as moviemakers. Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese and Fincher are among the auteurs getting multifaceted attention in the book's discussions.

"Harry Langdon's First Talkie" (on



CN&R film critic's spring streaming includes biographical dramas of cinema's golden age



YouTube) is a little masterpiece from 1929 that was never shown in theaters. It's a seven-minute promo reel meant to announce a series of short Langdon comedies from Hal Roach studios. Langdon, one of the big names in silent film comedy, performs a short, semi-surreal dialogue scene with the

Mank

remarkable Thelma Todd. Langdon's characteristic persona—the simpering baby-faced manchild—is fully present as are the sidelong moments of burlesque hall rowdiness. All seven of the Roach/Langdon shorts, and the promo reel as well, can be found on a DVD



Silent film and "talkie" star Harry Langdon.

entitled *Harry Langdon: At Hal Roach – The Talkies 1929-1930*.

Bertrand Tavernier, the great French filmmaker, critic, historian and archivist, passed away on March 25. For memorial viewing, I'd recommend one (or better yet all) of the following: *Coup de Torchon* (aka *Clean Slate*, 1981), *A Sunday in the Country* (1984), *Round Midnight* (1986), *Laissez-passer* (aka *Safe Conduct*, 2002) and *My Journey Through French Cinema* (2016). □

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