

DVD Review: Criterion Takes Look at ‘The Fugitive Kind’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 10, 2010 - 1:53pm

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CHICAGO – One of the most recent inductees into the most esteemed collection in the history of DVD is one of the most star-powered dramas of the '60s with four Oscar-winning actors in Maureen Stapleton, Anna Magnani, Joanne Woodward, and Marlon Brando, working in collaboration with a script co-written by Tennessee Williams and directed by Sidney Lumet. That “The Fugitive Kind” doesn’t quite live up to that incredible pedigree shouldn’t be too surprising, but it’s still a good addition for classic film collectors.



Wannabe film historians who have understandably become enraptured with the best of Sidney Lumet (“12 Angry Men,” “Dog Day Afternoon,” “The Verdict,” many more) and theatre-driven film buffs who know masterpieces like “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” and “A Streetcar Named Desire” by heart should be warned that expectations for “The Fugitive Kind” must be tempered. I went in to the film expecting to find a lost classic, a work that had been somehow dismissed on its initial release and unjustly forgotten. “The Fugitive Kind” was forgotten for good reason.



The Fugitive Kind was released on DVD on April 27th, 2010.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

It’s not a horrible film and someone who loves classic cinema as much as I do should see it just for the historical record and the talent involved, but “The Fugitive Kind,” based on the play “Orpheus Descending,” falls into so many of the cliches and traps of Williams’ work that it nearly plays like a parody of the famous playwrights milieu. Once again, there’s a brooding outsider, this time with the spectacular name of Val Xavier (Brando). Val is introduced in front of a judge and promising to go straight. Naturally, the film that follows is going to test that promise.



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Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

Once again, there's a sexually frustrated older woman (Magnani) and a free-spirited young one (Woodward). Anyone who's studied even a little bit of Williams' work and saw five minutes of "The Fugitive Kind" would know that this was one of Tennessee's works for the big screen. And Lumet seems like the wrong fit for the playwright. He's such a master of emotionally-timed precision - the bottled emotions of the characters of "Dog Day Afternoon" or "12 Angry Men" boiling over by the final act - where Williams' characters wear their emotions on their overheated sleeves from the minute we're introduced them. There also seems an odd disconnect between such an urban-NYC director and a story of the south.

Having said that, "The Fugitive Kind" is historically interesting more for the actors on display. Just watching Brando and Woodward share scenes in their physical (and arguably acting) primes is culturally interesting for their fans or fans of classic cinema in general. And, of course, you can't ask for a better studio than Criterion.

For "The Fugitive Kind" they present the film in a gorgeous, restored high-definition digital transfer that was approved by Lumet. The package also includes a number of new supplemental material: a new video interview with Lumet, a new video program discussing the playwright's work in Hollywood and "The Fugitive Kind," and a booklet featuring an essay by film critic David Thomson. The coolest extra is an hour-long television presentation of one-act plays with Ben Gazzarra and Lee Grant from 1958 called "Three Plays by Tennessee Williams".

'The Fugitive Kind' is released by The Criterion Collection and stars Marlon Brando, Anna Magnani, Joanne Woodward, Maureen Stapleton, and Victor Jury. It was written by Tennessee Williams and Meade Roberts and directed by Sidney Lumet. The DVD was released on April 27th, 2010. It is not rated.



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