

Noir's Not-So-Nice Guys

## NEVILLE BRAND

By Eric Beetner  
Special to the Sentinel

Neville Brand came out of WWII as a highly decorated hero, and with the money he had saved from his G.I. bill he took acting classes with Stella Adler. Working in several films for the Army Signal Corps, Brand had become comfortable in front of the camera. In no time at all, Hollywood beckoned.

When your film debut has you brutalizing an already-dying Edmond O'Brien in *D.O.A.* (1950), your career in noir is off to a wonderful start. As Chester, the wild-eyed muscle behind the outfit that has poisoned O'Brien, Brand's character is summed up by his boss, Majak (Luther Adler): "He's an unfortunate boy. He's psychopathic. He's unhappy unless he gives pain."



Brand braces O'Brien in *D.O.A.*

Thus are instant legends born.

Neville Brand had a way of acting with his hair. His thick black locks would start out neatly groomed in a wave, but as soon as the fists started flying, out it would flail, wildly flopping to the rhythm of the fistcuffs. It played every which way as he obsessively socked O'Brien in the gut; then, in *Where The Sidewalk Ends* (1950), the hair once again comes undone during his workover of Dana Andrews in the heat and humidity of a Turkish bath.

His off-screen life edged into notoriety via occasional sparring aided by a few belts of liquor, often with drinking buddy Lee Marvin. Still, the reviews were great, and there was hope for something more.

Ultimately, though, his "lived-in mug" would relegate him to being one of the gang behind the big guy, all variations of Chester: *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950), where he works under James Cagney; *The Mob* (1951), as the muscle for Broderick Crawford; a hit man hired by Ed Begley Sr. in *The Turning Point* (1952). It looked as if he might never get away from playing a "tough guy with a hair-trigger temper."

He lamented his fate to the *L.A. Daily*

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Universal buys Chandler novels for Brit Star

## CLIVE OWEN BRINGS MARLOWE BACK TO MOVIE SCREENS

It's been nearly thirty years since Philip Marlowe has been a movie headliner (Robert Mitchum's valiant but slightly tired rendition of Chandler's knight-errant in a disappointing remake of *The Big Sleep*.)

But all that is about to change, thanks to British actor Clive Owen, Universal Pictures and Strike Entertainment.

Strike made a deal with Phil Clymer at U.K.-based Chorion to obtain rights to the entire Chandler mystery series. Marc Abraham and Eric Newman will produce the film for Strike, with Owen acting as executive producer. The project is still in a nascent stage, with "compatible" writers and filmmakers being courted—and word is that they haven't decided which novel to adapt first.

But Owen's enthusiasm for Chandler and his performance in *Sin City* sparked the executives' imaginations, so things are looking a lot darker for fans of Chandler and noir. And yes, that's a good thing.

—Don Malcolm

The plan is to keep the spirit of the Chandler books, and (best of all) keep the mysteries set in 1940s Los Angeles, with Marlowe remaining in character as a hard-drinking, wisecracking gumshoe.

Owen is exactly the right age (42), and, for our money at least, possesses both the looks and acting chops to pull off a satisfying portrayal of noir's most potent icon. Once thought to have the inside track in the running to be the next James Bond, Owen might just be a better fit with Marlowe.

If we had a vote, we'd love to see a remake of *The Lady In The Lake*, with Naomi Watts as Adrienne Fromsett, Charlize Theron as Mildred Haviland, and (in the role he was born to play) Michael Madsen as Lt. DeGarmo. Without the first-person camera gimmick that bogged down the first version, you've got a first-rate nail-biter, with some of Chandler's kinkiest plot twists.



The face of the new Philip Marlowe.

## NOIR CITY 5: NIGHT BY NIGHT

By Haggai Elitzur  
Special to the Sentinel

For those of you unable to attend San Francisco's annual love fest to noir, here is a night-by-night recap of Noir City 5:

### Friday, January 26

Opening Night was a gala tribute to Marsha Hunt, a double bill showcasing Anthony Mann's classic *Raw Deal*. The audience was enthralled by the hard-edged script, rough violence, and John Alton's dream-like visuals. *Kid Glove Killer*, costarring Ms. Hunt and Van Heflin, charmed with appealing chemistry between the two leads and some running gags that pay off nicely in a satisfying ending. The lively, still lovely Ms. Hunt was the evening's special guest, interviewed onstage by "Czar of Noir" Eddie Muller. She shared filmmaking memories, talked at length about her experiences with the Blacklist, and discussed her long-term activism on behalf of the United Nations.

### Saturday, January 27

Night #2 feted late screenwriter William Bowers, justly prized for his wisecracking dialogue. *Cry Danger* showcased Bowers at his best, with non-stop badinage brilliantly delivered by Dick Powell and the evening's guest star, Richard Erdman. Onstage, Erdman was sharp and funny, recounting half-century-old incidents in impressive detail. A lovely, unscripted reunion between Erdman and Bowers' son Tony occurred onstage, adding more fascinating memories for the audience to absorb.

Next up was *Abandoned*, with Bowers as uncredited "script doctor." Eddie's intro included an anecdote from the director, Joseph Newman, who claimed the script was junk until Bowers worked on it: "Everything in it that's good was from him." The audience enjoyed this briskly paced "baby racket noir" with its witty banter, some surprisingly intense violence, and a gripping finale. One of the most memorable lines of the

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Emigrés and the Film Noir: Part Two

## EXPRESSIONISM AND THE DISPOSSESSED

By Marc Svetov  
Special to the Sentinel

"The analogy to the films of the postwar period is obvious: it was their expressionistic nature which impelled many a German director of photography to breed shadows as rampant as weeds and associate ethereal phantoms with strangely lit arabesques or faces. These efforts were designed to bathe all scenery in an unearthly illumination marking it as scenery of the soul."

—Siegfried Kracauer,  
From *Caligari to Hitler*



The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari

For its most significant visual and thematic elements, film noir reaches back to Weimar Germany and the silent and early sound cinema produced from 1919 until 1933. These films had been a fertile breeding ground for what came twenty years later in Hollywood; titles as wide ranging as *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919), *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1921/22), *Destiny* (1921), *The Student of Prague* (both versions, 1913 and 1926), *Nosferatu* (1921/22), *The Golem* (1920), onward to *Warning Shadows* (1923), *Metropolis* (1925-27) as well as *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933)

and the great forerunner of it all: *M* (1931), by director Fritz Lang, were representative of this German cinematic tradition.

Thematically, Expressionist films during that epoch reached back to German romanticism but that is another subject in itself. Emphasis was placed on psychology—threatened individuals, urban settings, dreams gone wrong, the inexorable nature of fate, the dissolution of the self. The pathology of existence, of the Krafft-Ebbing and

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**Brand** (cont'd from pg. 1)

News: "I thought acting would take me away from guns. So now I'm always cast as a soldier or a killer and I've never played a scene with an actress. What do you have to do to kiss a girl in a movie?" Perhaps it didn't help that even the studios that employed him weren't exactly doing wonders for his public image. A Warner Brothers press release once stated that Brand had "a face that would put a rutted detour to shame."

Now one of Hollywood's go-to bruisers, Brand's next outing in crimeland teamed him with arguably the finest assemblage of tough guys in screen history. In *Kansas City Confidential* (1952), Brand joins a young but still menacing Lee Van Cleef and Jack Elam—one of few actors whose mug could make Brand's features seem less-than-harsh. When these three get together on screen, it's definitely the Mount Rushmore of thuggishness. Brand's hair once again becomes fabulously unkempt as he and Van Cleef dish out a beating to John Payne while wearing suits and ties in the heat of Borados, Mexico.

Just as his chance to play a lead role materialized with 1954's *Riot in Cell Block II*, two drunk driving accidents chilled the buzz from a riveting performance. As close as he got to kissing, however, was an attempted rape of Inger Stevens in 1957's *Cry Terror*. His drinking nearly got the best of him but Brand took control of his life and found success on TV as Al Capone in *The Untouchables* (1959-63).

He was finally allowed to show his tender side inside prison walls as a sympathetic guard to Burt Lancaster's *Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962), which brought Brand his first and only Oscar nomination.

In 1966, Brand wrote an assessment of the "tough guy" that is dead-on: "Guys like me will be around this town a lot longer than the pretty boys because we are...special models, unique and one of a kind. Nobody forgets our faces once they've had a good look at them. We may produce more nightmares than pleasant dreams, but we aren't forgotten."

Not forgotten, but increasingly neglected, Brand would find only sporadic work in film and TV from the 70s on. Emphysema eventually got the better of him, and he died in 1992. But even now, Brand's odd combination of sadism and sensitivity is testament to a talent that still leaps out at you with disheveled energy, like his wildly flailing hair.



Brand gets the drop on Broderick Crawford in *The Mob*.

**EMIGRES** (cont'd from pg. 1)

Freud variety, was amply illustrated in Expressionism. Stories with a fear-laden atmosphere were symptomatic of the period, epitomizing an inchoate, threatening fatality. In this angst and anxiety was a premonition of doom, which Kracauer traced so well, culminating in the rise of Hitler—which eventually pushed the film exiles out of Europe, finally, fleeing to America.

One says "Expressionist," because there was enough in common among these German films to unite them under one rubric; but other labels occurred, like the New Sobriety (late 'twenties); there is ample evidence, too, that the lighting technique actually stemmed from Max Reinhardt's experiments in German theater preceding World War I.

Chiaroscuro, deep dark-light contrasts; incessant use of spotlights—for instance, lighting from the ground up, emphasizing reliefs and contours, warping and transforming the forms of objects into a throng of bewildering streaks and shapes, or by their placement off to one side, at a slant, in order to inundate surfaces with an illumination that creates shifting and competing shades of light and dark; shadows and silhouettes; use of the subjective camera; extreme close-ups—all these stemmed from the repertoire of German Expressionist cinema, and only from there.

Concentration on mood and environment; motifs like staircases, glistening windows, mirrors, all manner of shimmering glass surfaces; electric signs, streetlights, gloomy corners, automobile headlights, a few isolated lighted windowpanes on a lonely street where menacing dark mysterious houses line the way in the early morning hours, as light reflects off wet sidewalks, and Destiny is calling; these were all part and parcel of the standard imagery of German film. As the emigre film critic/historian Lotte Eisner put it, "German film-makers, haunted by the desire to break beyond the shallow dimensions of their art and of human existence through the manipulation of shadows, did succeed in infusing life into surfaces."

Anyway, there is no question that German and Central European émigrés carried this cultural baggage when they arrived in America—we might say, without extra charge at Customs. In establishing the film noir style, said to have begun about 1940, the influence of these exiles was immense, especially during the war period and initial years



German émigré Curtis Bernhardt displayed an Expressionist style in *The High Wall*, the 1947 thriller starring Robert Taylor and Audrey Totter.

following the end of the conflict. What they brought to Hollywood—German film traditions and techniques for *mise en scene* (which means a totality of atmosphere), for lighting, for camerawork and for scenery—was what cemented Hollywood's new visual style for American crime stories.

Albeit there had been visual forerunners in the early Universal horror films, thematic predecessors in the '30s gangster films as well and a similar use of visual and thematic elements reflected in many of the films produced contemporaneously by Val Lewton, there was nothing to compare with the new film noirs except the German precedent. These Expressionist elements provided a dreamlike half-life to the films, moving them beyond any gangster or horror films from, say, the '30s; the émigrés in turn found themselves and their experience capable of being expressed in many ways through the American hardboiled crime story, which portrayed the dark side of the American dream of success and happiness.

All this was different from the Depression era—what was found in these new films, with their flawed heroes and heroines, plots portraying a relentless fate bearing down upon them, appears to be a massive disillusionment. And in the exploitation of the new American hardboiled crime narratives, we saw the nation's psychic underbelly shamelessly exposed to light (or dark)—how it was done was the key—in a trance-like, oneiric manner.

Émigré directors utilized those visual techniques to convey the film characters'

interior world. They were dark, obsessive, shadowy, fatalistic movies—and their narratives were awash with a pervasive pessimism. In many ways, this was reflected in the wrenching, hopeless political situations in which the exiles had often found themselves—they and millions more.

Pathological behavior is another key thematic link between Expressionism and noir. A few examples: violence as a direct cause of sexual excitement in the female protagonist played by Janis Carter in *Night Editor* (1946) and Peggy Cummins in *Gun Crazy* (1950); perversion of feelings along with an intimation of evil in the soul in the portrayal of Phyllis Dietrichson by Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* (1944); the mother fixation of James Cagney in *White Heat* (1949); father fixation in *Angel Face* (1952) with Jean Simmons; the deranged young man holding hostages in *Dial 1119* (1950). This trend has continued into neo-noir, where the use of color has taken us away from shadows and toward a bright, cartoon-like palette of gratuitous violence.

Could film noir have evolved as it did without the exiles? Is it imaginable without directors Preminger, Wilder, Siodmak, Lang and their seminal work in 1944-45—without *Laura*, *Double Indemnity*, *Christmas Holiday*, *Fallen Angel*, *The Woman in the Window*, *Scarlet Street*, *Phantom Lady*? The exile contribution was so important that of the 300 films most often mentioned as belonging to the central canon, 75 were directed by émigrés.

**OBITUARIES**

Alfred Isaac "Buzz" Bezerides, a novelist turned Hollywood screenwriter best known for the post-World War II film noir classics like *Kiss Me Deadly*, *On Dangerous Ground* and *Thieves' Highway*, died Jan. 1 at the Motion Picture & Television Hospital in Woodland Hills after a brief illness. He was 98 years old.

Bezerides was working for the L.A. Department of Water and Power when his 1938 novel "Long Haul" was turned into *They Drive by Night*, a 1940 melodrama with George Raft and Humphrey Bogart as trucker brothers hauling California produce.

After Warner Bros. paid him \$2,000 for the rights to his novel and put him under contract as a \$300-a-week screenwriter, Bezerides discovered that a script based on his book already had been written.

"I had no idea whether it was guilt or conscience, or greed to swindle more stories out of me, for peanuts, that motivated Warner Bros. to offer me a seven-year contract, with

options to be exercised every six months," Bezerides wrote in the afterword to the 1997 University of California Press republication of his 1949 novel "Thieves' Market."

Bezerides' first film credit was *Juke Girl*, a 1942 story of migrant farmworkers starring Ann Sheridan and Ronald Reagan.

After leaving Warners, Bezerides, wrote or co-wrote films such as *Beneath the 12-Mile Reef*, *Desert Fury*, *Sirocco* and *Track of the Cat*.

He got into television in the 1950s, writing for such series as *Bonanza*, *Rawhide*, *77 Sunset Strip*, and *The Virginian*. He created *The Big Valley* specifically for its star, Barbara Stanwyck.

A longtime resident of Woodland Hills, Bezerides was married to film and television writer Silvia Richards until her death in 1999.

In addition to his daughter Zoe, he is survived by another son, a daughter, a granddaughter and four great-grandchildren.