

RECOVERED TREASURES: GREAT FILMS FROM WORLD ARCHIVES

January 15–February 20, 2011

THE BIG COMBO

Friday, January 21, 7:00 p.m. (Moving Image Theater)

Saturday, January 22, 3:00 p.m. (Celeste and Armand Bartos Screening Room)

**Restored 35mm print from UCLA Film & TV Archive,
made possible with funding provided by the Film Foundation**

1955, 89 mins. Released by Allied Artists.

Directed by Joseph Lewis. Produced by Sidney Harmon. Written by Philip Yordan. Photographed by John Alton. Music by David Raksin. Production design by Rudi Feld. Edited by Robert Eisen.

Principal cast: Cornel Wilde (as Leonard Diamond), Richard Conte (Mrs. Brown), Brian Donlevy (McClure), Jean Wallace (Susan Lowell), Robert Middleton (Peterson), Lee Van Cleef (Fante).

Note by Carl Macek, from *The Encyclopedic History of Film Noir*, The Overlook Press, Woodstock, New York, 1979:

There is a sense of fatalism and perverse sexuality found in *The Big Combo* that exists in few noir films. The relationship between Susan Lowell and Mr. Brown is a blending of fatalistic deference combined with a feeling of raw sexual abandon. Brown adores Susan's body. In one scene, he brings her to the height of sexual excitement by worshipping her with lewd compliments and lavishing her entire body with kiss after kiss. Despite her sense of guilt, Susan resigns herself to this situation because of her own sexual dependence on Brown. Her eventual attempt at suicide and apparent rebirth at Diamond's insistence suggests no more than a weak effort to alter her amoral lifestyle. Beyond this obvious sexual exploitation, *The Big Combo* is filled with

violence of a brutal and erotic nature. The homosexuality of Mingo and Fante is smothered in an atmosphere of murder and sadistic torture, as they refine the conventions of violence into a sexual ritual. Joseph H. Lewis's direction strongly points to a crude sexual bias throughout the film. Even Diamond appears to be sexually frustrated and compensating for impotence. Much as in the same way as Lewis's classic *Gun Crazy*, there is an affinity between sex and violence, and the exploitation of futility presents an ambience strangely reminiscent of an earlier period of noir films, such as *Scarlet Street* and *Woman in the Window*. These attitudes combine with John Alton's photography to create a wholly defined film noir, as the striking contrasts between the black and white photography and Lewis's sexual overtones isolate *The Big Combo*'s characters in a dark, insular universe of unspoken repression and graphic violence.

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