

OLLI@Berkeley Fall 2024

Comedy! Crime! Chaos! The Cinema of the Coen Brothers

Holding the likely distinction of Hollywood's most iconoclastic producer/writer/director duos of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Coen Brothers are truly a "cine" *qua non* for film lovers of all stripes. For nearly four decades, their films have embraced, subverted and lampooned classical genres, from Westerns, B-movies, musicals - even horror flicks – sometimes all folded into the batter of one single film. Known for their inimitable scriptwriting talents and the creation of characters who have slipped so seamlessly into the fabric of American popular culture it's as if they've always been there (e.g. Jeff Bridges as The Dude, Frances McDormand as Marge Gunderson), the Coens have built an irresistibly imaginative empire of images and sounds well worthy of exploration or revisitation, for those already in the know. This course will feature four films from the oeuvre of Joel and Ethan Coen, emphasizing the 'caper comedy'.

Dates/Times: THURSDAYS 1PM-3PM October 17, 24, 31 and November 7, 2024

Location: Lafayette Library and Learning Center, 3491 Mount Diablo Blvd, Lafayette, CA

Instructor:

Karen Davis is Senior Film Programmer Emerita and Program Consultant for the Mill Valley Film Festival and Professor Emerita at California State University at Monterey Bay. She has also taught courses in world cinema at Vassar College, St. Mary's College of California and University of California at Santa Cruz.

Films to be discussed include:

1 THE HUDSUCKER PROXY (1994) 111min. Available: Amazon, AppleTV, Google Play, Kanopy, more

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/OK1SFY1BIXZL8OUZLIHG93AJDG/ref=atv_dl_rdr?tag=justus1ktp-20
https://play.google.com/store/movies/details/The_Hudsucker_Proxy?gl=US&hl=en&id=wD6j5CeJEO8&pli=1

The Coens' fifth feature is a brilliant homage to classic screwball comedy, following the meteoric rise of Norville Barnes (Tim Robbins) from the mailroom to the boardroom of New York's Hudsucker Industries. Scheming to tank the company and buy up controlling interest on the cheap, nefarious executive Sidney J. Mussburger (Paul Newman) installs Norville as Hudsucker's new president. But to the board's surprise, Norville's seemingly idiotic design for a circular plaything ("You know, for kids!") turns out to be a runaway success. Fast-paced and loaded with references to classic cinema, THE HUDSUCKER PROXY finds the Coen Brothers at their funniest and most technically accomplished. -Description courtesy of the Philadelphia Film Society

2 FARGO (1996) 98min. Available: Amazon, AppleTV, Google Play, more

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/0072J8GIKLDMPJZMEO3G67U3UO/ref=atv_dl_rdr?tag=justus1ktp-20
https://play.google.com/store/movies/details/Fargo_1996?gl=US&hl=en&id=fr2Q2PbiWe4.P

Leave it to the wildly inventive Coen brothers to concoct a fiendishly clever kidnap caper that's simultaneously a comedy of errors, a Midwestern satire, a taut suspense thriller and a violent tale of criminal misfortune. It all begins when a hapless car salesman (played to perfection by William H. Macy) ineptly orchestrates the kidnapping of his own wife. When the plan goes horribly awry in the hands of two bumbling bad guys (Steve Buscemi and Peter Stormare), the pregnant sheriff of Brainerd, Minnesota (Frances McDormand in an Oscar-winning role) is suddenly faced with a case of multiple murders. At times shocking and hilarious, Fargo is utterly unique and distinctly American, bearing the unmistakable stamp of its inspired creators. – Description courtesy of 'All Tomorrow's Parties'

3 THE BIG LEBOWSKI (1998) 117min. Available: Netflix, Amazon, AppleTV, Google Play, more

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/0SXHE537B482UIW1I8WISN3Y2O/ref=atv_dl_rdr?tag=justus1ktp-20
https://play.google.com/store/movies/details/The_Big_Lebowski?gl=US&hl=en&id=KgKhPObZeaw

A hilariously quirky comedy-thriller about bowling, avant-garde art, nihilistic Austrians, and a guy named "The Dude". Jeff (The Dude) Lebowski doesn't want any drama in his life... heck, he can't even be bothered with a job. But, in a case of mistaken identity, a couple of thugs break into his place and steal his rug (you gotta understand, that rug really tied the room together). Now, The Dude must embark on a quest with his friends to make things right and get that rug back! Starring Jeff Bridges, Julianne Moore, John Goodman, John Turturro, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Steve Buscemi, The Big Lebowski has become a cultural phenomenon of epic proportions. Abide! – Description courtesy of the Reilly Arts Center

(cont'd)

(cont'd)

4 HAIL, CAESAR! (2016) 106min. **Available: Amazon, AppleTV, Google Play, more**

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/OMNKEGY8ETTAP5B2A6BYJ2DPL2/ref=atv_dl_rdr?tag=justus1ktp-20

https://play.google.com/store/movies/details/Hail_Caesar?gl=US&hl=en&id=uDE9_mU08Hc

A rollicking ensemble comedy set in the dying years of the studio system, Hail, Caesar! follows Capitol Studios production head and all-around troubleshooter Eddie Mannix (Josh Brolin) as he scrambles to keep the studio's films on schedule, its stars out of the tabloids, and tries to figure out who kidnapped star Baird Whitlock (George Clooney) from the set of the eponymous film within a film. Brimming with plum character parts for a cavalcade of A-listers, including a tap-dancing Channing Tatum and Ralph Fiennes channeling Lubitsch, Hail, Caesar! is a gaspingly hilarious send-up that targets the messianic doctrines of Christianity, communism and, of course, cinema. – *Description courtesy of Metrograph.com*