



## BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

### **GUN CRAZY (12A)**

Director: Joseph H. Lewis

Starring: John Dall, Peggy Cummins, Barry Kroeger

US, 1950, 1 hour 27 minutes, English

"*Gun Crazy* is one of the greatest of all film noir, fast paced, visually inventive and featuring a couple of fated lovers as doomed as any in the genre. John Dall, fresh from Hitchcock's *Rope* plays Bart, just out of reform school after his teenage gun obsession gets him in trouble. At a travelling fair he meets Laurie, a circus sharpshooter, and falls in love. As he says later, 'We go together, like guns and ammunition.' Playing Laurie is Welsh-born actress Peggy Cummins, whose Hollywood career had misfired, and *Gun Crazy* was her parting shot before she returned home. The film was scripted by the blacklisted Dalton Trumbo writing under a false name who would only get an on-screen credit a decade later when he wrote Kubrick's *Spartacus*. Director Joseph H. Lewis pulls these ingredients together with elan. Watch out for the bank robbery scene filmed in a three and half minute single shot with the camera set up in the back of a stretch Cadillac. The single shot 'oner' is currently very much in vogue, from *Adolescence* to Seth Rogan's *The Studio*, *Gun Crazy* used it more than 75 years ago.

"Joseph H Lewis's 1949 noir classic *Gun Crazy* turns pulp into pure gold. This is a small but perfectly formed black-and-white masterpiece of flash and trash, unwholesome obsession and criminal daring. The masters of the nouvelle vague adored it, not least for the bold and brilliant camerawork: there's a tremendous continuous take of a bank job, filmed from one camera position in the back seat of the getaway car. Present and future cinephiles may be tempted to compare it to coups from *Touch of Evil* and *I Am Cuba*.

"Guns are the most unexamined part of cinema's idiom. They are a casually accepted part of on-screen life: Godard famously said that a girl and a gun are all you need. Here is a rare film that turns the spotlight on guns themselves - and also girls and guns. The result is worryingly addictive". Peter Bradshaw, **The Guardian**

"Though underappreciated in his time, Lewis would become a major inspiration for the directors of the French New Wave, in part because working in the low-budget sector allowed him the freedom to experiment and defy Production Code censors (at the price of resources and big-name studio glory). Famously, François Truffaut arranged a screening of *Gun Crazy* in 1964 for eventual *Bonnie and Clyde* writers Robert Benton and David Newman, who were unaware that the kinetic style they wanted their own outlaw story to imitate did not originate in France, but Hollywood's B-movie backlots." Beatrice Loayza, **Sight and Sound**

Notes compiled by Steve Freer (Borderlines Chair)

If you like **Gun Crazy**, you may enjoy:

**RIFI** Fresh out of prison, senior gangster Tony le Stéphanois agrees to carry out a daring jewellery heist in the centre of Paris with three associates.

**BREATHLESS** Watch Jean-Luc Godard's ground-breaking first feature alongside Richard Linklater's playful making-of tribute, *Nouvelle Vague*.