

movie review

BY JAY BOBBIN

# Dean Martin is Matt Helm, or vice versa, in 'The Silencers'

At the peak of the spy-movie craze, there was James Bond, of course ... but there was also Matt Helm. Novelist Donald Hamilton's rugged secret-agent character gave Columbia Pictures what would become a four-film franchise, but Helm's image underwent quite a transformation in the hands of Dean Martin, who reshaped it (with the help of directors and screenwriters, of course) to fit his famously casual persona. The first picture in the series – 1966's "The Silencers" – leads off a Turner Classic Movies birthday tribute to Martin on Monday, June 7. Helm's professional cover is that of a professional photographer, and he just happens to have a specially rigged camera that fires knives for his work in espionage. Ostensibly retired from sleuthing, he's drawn back into active duty by the agency ICE. A villain (Victor Buono, whose consumption of cans of a diet supplement in the opening sequence sets the movie's tone) is bent on using a missile potentially to spark a nuclear war, and Helm is deemed to be the man to stop him.

If that seems like standard-issue spy stuff, the difference is Martin, whose breezy style lightens the proceedings considerably without making them totally comical. It's hard to say that any real suspense is generated here, but the star performs what action he's called upon to do quite ably, whether getting tough with a possible enemy agent (Stella Stevens) or handling weapons in the inevitable climactic shootout.

There's little question that certain elements of "The Silencers" belong to their original times – the name of Helm's alluring assistant, Lovey Kravezit (played by Beverly Adams) isn't likely to please come viewers now – but that somewhat dated feel, which was meant to be oh-so-hip 55 years ago (extending to Martin also singing on the soundtrack), offers its own sort of entertainment value today. That also goes for the special effects, decidedly low-rent when put up against modern standards.

The Helm movies got progressively weaker with "Murderers' Row," "The Ambushers" and "The Wrecking Crew" ... so as TCM evidently knows, if you're going to see one of the pictures, "The Silencers" is the one. It also benefits from having such performing stalwarts as Arthur O'Connell, Robert Webber, James Gregory (who would reprise the part of Helm's boss in later movies), Roger C. Carmel and MGM-musical veteran Cyd Charisse, who basically is on hand for a couple of dance-performance sequences.

Even with all of them also on hand, "The Silencers" principally is Dean Martin's show, making it a fitting choice to start his birthday the TCM way.



Dean Martin and Stella Stevens in "The Silencers"

## WORD SEARCH

Solution on page 18

In the grid below, twenty answers can be found that fit the category for today. Circle each answer that you find and list it in the space provided at the right of the grid. Answers can be found in all directions—forward, backward, horizontally, vertically and diagonally. An example is given to get you started. Can you find the twenty answers in today's puzzle?

### Today's Category: Oceans, Seas, Lakes & Rivers

M I C H I G A N O R U H  
 D S D E R C C I T L A B  
 F Y U G G E G G J D C H  
 G E G P I G B H R G V J  
 C L H R E H S I D H O O  
 I L E S R R A C T I N C  
 T O B L H T I V H T A A  
 N W U B I X D O A B I S  
 A D N C N N F R R L D P  
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