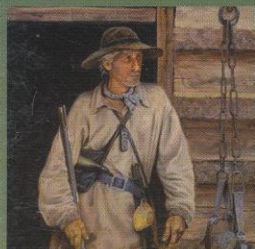


April 2010

Volume XVII, Number 4



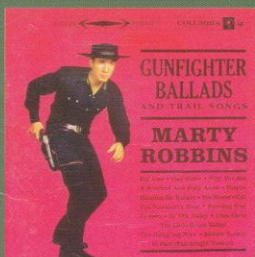
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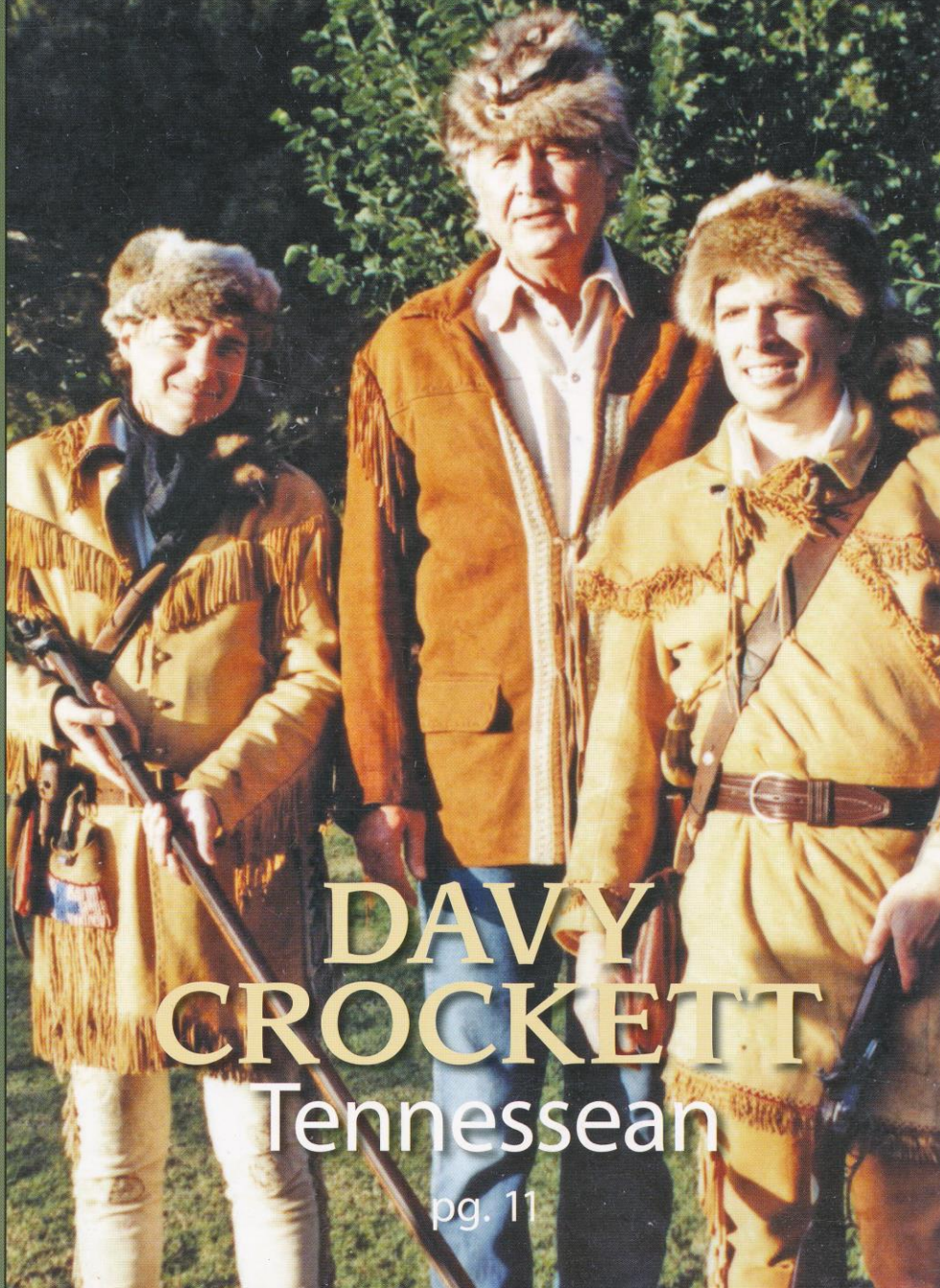


WWA to Select 100 Greatest Western Songs of All-Time
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Western Writers of America ROUNDUP

M A G A Z I N E



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Lust for the Trail Dust— *Cravings for Western Movies* **By Vicky J. Rose**

The true Western fan harbors a sneaking suspicion that after dying and going to heaven, it won't be James or John one sees sitting at Jesus' right hand, but Gene or Roy. This same fan occasionally commits blasphemy by secretly cursing John Wayne for wasting his time making *The Barbarian and the Geisha* when he could have been doing another John Ford film.

The desire for new Western films can be worse than any monkey on the back of an addict, and the dole Hollywood hands out seems pitifully small.

Three Hollywood filmmakers have their own opinions as to why more Western movies are not being made. Kirk Ellis, a slender man with round eyes behind rimless glasses, can give the impression of being just another yuppie, until he puts his hands on his hips John Wayne style while staring intently, just like the Duke, and that yuppie notion flies out the window. "Every actor I've ever worked with wants to do a Western," Ellis said. "I think actors love the genre."

Courtney Joyner's impish sense of humor sometimes camouflages the keen intelligence behind his kind eyes, but not for long, and he agrees with Ellis. "I've never ever run across an actor or director who didn't get excited about the prospect of doing a Western. There is absolutely no resistance from talent to get involved in Westerns."

Andrew J. Fenady doesn't disagree; he only bemoans that the young actors of today all look alike. Fenady, slim with steel-gray hair, has all the feistiness and energy of a wiry Jack Russell Terrier. "You don't have the leading man; in those days, you had the Errol Flynn and the John Waynes and the

Spencer Tracys, the Clark Gables, and by God, when one of them walked into the room, you knew he was a movie star. These [actors today], they all look like fugitives from a homeless station."

So if actors, even the ones who look like fugitives, directors and producers are eager to do Westerns, what's stopping them? For varying reasons, Fenady, Ellis and Joyner all agree on the source—top executives who control the money.

"Despite the recent success of films like *3:10 to Yuma* and *Appaloosa*, there is still a hesitation on the part of executives in charge of green lighting projects, that this is a genre with limited appeal, when in fact, it is a genre of universal appeal, not only within the United States, but also internationally," Ellis said. "There is still that resistance that it is a 'horse opera' or an 'oater' as *Variety* often refers to Westerns."

Fenady concurs, but with even stronger feelings. "The difficulty is that there is an elitist bias against Westerns. They have become elitists. They are not all that interested in the people that they fly over when they go from New York to Los Angeles and back. You go in and talk about a Western; they don't even want to pay any attention

to you, unless you come in with Clint Eastwood."

Joyner follows the money trail. "Financial returns on DVDs of Western titles are always very, very solid. The ratings on television...for Westerns are always excellent," Joyner said, but they are not in the mega-buck range. "The problem with big theatrical Westerns is that one has not done well in quite some time. And I mean really well. *3:10 to Yuma* did great, but again, it is not the mega-blockbuster money. That mega-blockbuster money is the only thing that gets them."

It's a sad truth that according to *Quigley's 2008 International Motion Picture Almanac*, of the top fifty highest grossing movies, only two have been Westerns. Western movies are akin to the American middleclass. They go forth and make money in a solid, dependable, but not spectacular way. Nevertheless, the Western saved the financial hide of many a studio in the early days of motion pictures.

"That was the staple; that was the commodity of all the studios, the big studios and the little studios," Fenady said.

Perhaps this familiarity bred contempt, kind of like what a sullen teenage boy feels for his old man. "They tend to regard the success of *Into the West* and *3:10 to Yuma* as anomalies," Ellis said. "Sort of the exception that proves the rule that Westerns don't work. It is that kind of backward thinking that has plagued Hollywood for decades."

Fenady also sees political correctness as factor. "Everybody is afraid to say something because somebody is going to call them either a bigot or a racist, or a moron, or some other name that they'll dig up. I think it has impinged

upon the creative community.” Instead of generating strong characters that might offend one half of one percent of the population, actors are covered in dirt in the hopes of making them appear “gritty.”

Joyner views the hesitation of studio executives to back Westerns as a lemmings’ effect. “It is a floodgate mentality. No one wants to be first, no one wants to do anything until somebody else does it, and then when that person does it and is successful, then everybody follows suit—which is why there is the reluctance at the studio level to move ahead on things.”

This reluctance has paradoxical outcomes. After the cancellation of *Rawhide*, Clint Eastwood had to go to Italy to make the Westerns he wanted to do because studio executives weren’t interested. His spaghetti Westerns achieved success, and now executives call him “Mr. Eastwood.” However, few people have Eastwood’s courage and drive and as Joyner points out, “Clint Eastwood is now almost eighty. Ed Harris got *Appaloosa* made himself, but look at his age.” Swimming against the current takes incredible strength and fortitude.

“A good Western is simply a good story that happens to be set in a Western milieu,” Ellis said. However, he’s almost sure that when someone went in to pitch *3:10 to Yuma* to studio executives, he or she had to say, “Look, it’s an action film set in the West.”

There are other factors working against Westerns as well. After the closing of the range and during the Depression, out of work cowboys drifted to Hollywood and formed a tightly knit group of stuntmen and wranglers. “Westerns were easy to make initially because animals were plentiful; the people to ride them were plentiful; it was something you did outdoors,” Joyner said. Nowadays, locations are harder to find, and instead of cowboys, colleges churn out technological geniuses by the thousands who flock to Hollywood, trained to use computer effects for action instead

of living creatures that have to be fed every day.

“It is a combination of all those things,” Fenady said. “First of all, they don’t want to make them; second of all, they don’t know how to make them.”

Despite these drawbacks—lack of executive support, difficulties in locations and props, unknowledgeable manpower—the future looks bright for Western movies. Actors, directors, producers, are all willing and eager to do Westerns. Studio executives with hidebound prejudices will eventually be replaced with men and women who wish to explore the possibilities of a genre their industry was practically founded upon. As far as technology versus living creatures go, it was once predicted that polyester would eliminate cotton, but it hasn’t happened yet.

“They’ll make Westerns,” Fenady said. “They’ll always come in because somebody who’s got some coins, some purchase, wants to make one. But it will never be the way that it was, but then nothing ever is.”

Ellis, along with Fenady and Joyner, believes the Western to be an authentic

American genre. “We are now getting to a phase where things aren’t really romanticized, or overly revisionist, but becoming more accurate and more reflective of the times films are set. I don’t think we have in any way exhausted its potential.”

“It is not a dead genre,” Joyner adds. “And it is not a genre that people have no interest in, because it just keeps coming back and coming back, sometimes in a small way, sometimes in a big way, but it is there, and it is alive.”

And that gives every Western movie fan something to look forward to.

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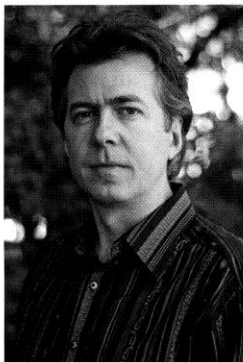
Vicky J. Rose, author of numerous articles, has had the pleasure of interviewing a wide range of fascinating people—former Disney star and business magnate Fess Parker; screenwriter and producer Frank Q. Dobbs; rodeo legend Sonny Sikes, and author and expert horse trainer, Charles H. Ham, among others. Her novel Testimony, a romantic thriller set in the modern-day West, will be published as an e-book by Whiskey Creek Press in March, 2010.

What You Can Do To Generate More Western Movies

“GO TO THE MOVIES,” Courtney Joyner said. It is as simple as that. Quit complaining, get off your duff and see what’s out there.

TALK IT UP—create a ripple effect by discussing Western television programs and films.

SEE FOR YOURSELF—don’t pay attention to reviews. “I think reviews are a complete waste of time, television reviews especially,” Kirk Ellis said. “I rarely read reviews before I see a film, but I often read them afterward. I’m often struck by the fact that the critic seems to have screened a completely different film than I just saw.”



Kirk Ellis won two 2008 Emmy awards, one for producing and the other for writing in a miniseries that garnered twenty-three nominations, *John Adams*. He was nominated in 2006 for producing *Into the West*, another outstanding miniseries that received sixteen nominations. *Into the West* was also nominated for a PGA Award, won a Bronze Wrangler from the Western Heritage Awards and a Spur Award for Best Drama Script from the Western Writers of America. He recently adapted Hampton Sides Spur Award-winning book, *Blood and Thunder*, for an upcoming film about Kit Carson. He's currently embarking on a project about the explorations of Lewis and Clark being produced by Mimi Gitlin,

Ridley Scott's former partner, and producer of such movies as *Thelma and Louise* and *Gladiator*. Born in Texas, Ellis received a degree in cinema from the University of Southern California and now resides with his wife, Sheila, in Santa Fe.

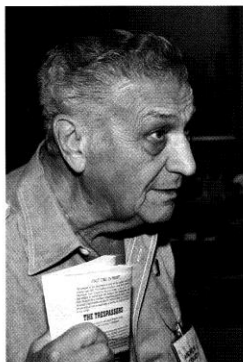
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Courtney Joyner is a director and highly prolific screenwriter with over twenty produced movies to his credit, working with such stars as Vincent Price, Helen Hunt, and Viggo Mortensen. Author of numerous magazine articles, Joyner recently conducted a series of interviews with movie legends including **Glenn Ford**, **Harry Carey Jr.**, **Andrew McLaglen**, and that perennial favorite with the big smile and crooked teeth, Warren Oates. Look for these personal dialogues in his new book, *The Westerners*, published by McFarland. You can

also see Joyner as on-camera film commentator for the new 20th Century Fox DVD release of Raoul Walsh's *The Big Trail*. Born in Pennsylvania, the son of a prominent physician, Joyner made his way to California, attended the University of Southern California and honed his writing skills while boozing it up with Sam Peckinpah. Just once, but once was enough to inspire Joyner to keep on writing.

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Andrew J. Fenady can be called a true Renaissance man in the entertainment field. He wrote and produced the John Wayne movie *Chisum*, along with writing, producing and/or creating over twenty-five projects for film productions, the stage and television, nine of them Westerns, including *Branded*, *The Rebel*, and *Hondo*. He penned Johnny Cash's smash hit *Johnny Yuma*. In recent years, he's turned to writing novels. *The Man With Bogart's Face* was made into an Edgar award winning movie. He is also a recipient of the Owen Wister Award given by the Western Writers of America for a lifetime contribution to Western literature. In 1995, he was honored with a Golden Boot Award for his outstanding contribution

to the Western genre in films and television. Fenady lives with his beautiful wife, Mary Frances, in Los Angeles, where several of their six children have followed him into the motion picture industry.

Homestead Student Fellowships Available

Homestead Fellowships are available for attendance at the WWA Convention in Knoxville by students. One fellowship will be given to a college student and one will be given to a high school student.

Nominations for the fellowships are due by May 15. They should include a letter from the student on why he/she wants to attend the convention, and include a letter from a sponsor, which in the case of high school students can be a teacher or parent, and in the case of college students should be a faculty member. Members of WWA also may submit letters as the sponsor of a student at either the college or high school level.

Applications should include the applicant's name, full address and contact information as well as the appropriate letters and be sent to the WWA office:

Paul Hutton, Executive Director
WWA
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