



SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 95=

Once upon a Time in the West

It may not be the definitive western, but it might just be the most western: part parody, part eulogy, part apotheosis, *Once upon a Time in the West* is every narrative and formal cliché, every grandiose gesture, every ambiguous, every subversive, every troubling commentary on American history that its parent genre deals in condensed into a sumptuously operatic melodrama that stands tall as one of the most purely cinematic spectacles ever put to film.

Alan Mattli, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23

Sergio Leone's operatic, elegiac 1968 Western *Once Upon a Time in the West* regularly sits at the top of many people's favourite films of all-time list, and with good reason: think of Ennio Morricone's unforgettable score, or the dialogue-free opening sequence that lingers on three hitmen as they wait for Charles Bronson's 'Harmonica' to arrive in town by train – a masterpiece of slow-building tension. Then there's the endlessly quotable dialogue ('People scare better when they're dying') and the pitch-perfect performances, with Henry Fonda playing against type as the evil Frank, Jason Robards as Cheyenne, and a never-more beautiful Claudia Cardinale as the dignified widow Jill McBain. Leone called his film 'a ballet of the dead', and it both celebrated and changed forever the classic Western film.

***Sight and Sound*, July 2009**

Reviewing the newly released uncut version of the film

One is grateful that the vandalism wreaked on this masterpiece has been belatedly repaired. However, it is noticeable that the film's almost totally hostile critical reception on its initial release focused on complaints about its length and pace.

In reply, one might offer the following remarks from Christopher Frayling's book [*Spaghetti Westerns*, 1981]: 'to divorce Leone's "formalism", his "rhetoric", completely from the content of his films is radically to misinterpret what he is trying to achieve... Leone's flamboyant display of the "codes" of the Western shows how well he had digested the implications of the early writings of semiologists on *Mythologies* – and it is this display which has been treated by many critics as an (empty) exercise in "formalism", an over-indulgent use of the medium... But, to my mind, it is precisely the unrestrained quality of Leone's display in *Once Upon a Time* which sets the film apart as the finest synthesis of his attempts to transcribe the Hollywood Western.

'*Once Upon a Time* is concerned as much with the fictional stereotypes as with the history of the West-specifically, the divorce between "myth" and socioeconomic context, a cinematic study of fictions as distinct from, and finally destroyed by, history... The visual correlatives of the basic themes, the interplay between music and image, the construction of 'set-pieces' – all seem to achieve a "control" which leaves most American directors of Westerns (even the formalist ones) standing-albeit with a very different intention, which could only be realised from outside the Hollywood system...

In his [Leone’s] terms, the melodramatic gestures or poses (visual and verbal, in a word rhetorical) are inseparable from the relationships (mythical and historical) he wishes to explore. Leone’s treatment of these relationships is intended both to help elucidate the meaning of the West, and to reappraise its trace-the Hollywood Western, a global text’. Hopefully, the reappearance of the missing footage will at least lend support to this verdict.

Monthly Film Bulletin, August 1983

It is tempting to see *Once upon a Time in the West* as the outcome of the meeting of Leone’s cynicism and Bertolucci’s Marxism. In its style and its ambitions it pushed the Italian Western as far as it could go. The full version is certainly one of the most remarkable films of its time – a materialist fairy tale which, where given the chance, struck a chord at the box-office. Leone’s style, evolved in the earlier films, expanded its spare outlines to grandiose but appropriate proportions. The film becomes an epic without pretensions to historical precision (hence the title) but to being an emblematic tale, comparable with Italian political movies like *Quemada*, and also in a sense the ultimate Western.

Most major Western themes are there, but, through Leone’s artificial, operatic style, the film becomes a view from Europe, based on American historical mythology but presenting it precisely as an alien mythology. The traditional function of the Western is undercut and its iconography used to say, in effect, that it does not wash any more: that life in the West, past and present, is nasty, brutish and short; ‘heroes’ and villains pursue money; and nobility comes only through preserving personal dignity, avenging evil, and turning one’s back on the world created by corrupt and crazy moneymakers.

David Nicholls, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1980-81

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST
(C'ERA UNA VOLTA IL WEST)
Director: Sergio Leone
Production Companies: Rafran Cinematografica, San Marco Cinematografica, Euro International Films, Paramount Pictures Corporation
Executive Producer: Bino Cicogna
Producer: Fulvio Morsella
Production Supervisor: Ugo Tucci
Production Manager: Claudio Mancini
1st Assistant Director: Giancarlo Santi
Screenplay: Sergio Donati, Sergio Leone
Dialogue: Mickey Knox
Story: Dario Argento, Bernardo Bertolucci, Sergio Leone
Director of Photography: Tonino Delli Colli
Special Effects: Baciucchi
Editor: Nino Baragli
Sets/Costumes: Carlo Simi
Make-up Supervisor: Alberto De Rossi
Make-up: Giannetto De Rossi
Hairdresser: Grazia De Rossi
Music Composed and Conducted by: Ennio Morricone
Sound Recording: Claudio Maielli, Elio Pacella, Fausto Ancillai
Sound Effects: Luciano Anzellotti, Italo Cameracanna, Roberto Arcangeli
Studio: Cinecittà

uncredited
Producer: Sergio Leone
Administrator: Raffaele Forti
Production Inspector: Camillo Teti
2nd Production Inspector: Manolo Amigo
Production Secretary: Glauco Teti
2nd Assistant Director: Salvatore Basile
Script Supervisor: Serena Canevari

Camera Operator: Franco Di Giacomo
Assistant Operator: Giuseppe Lanci
Key Grip: Franco Tocci
Gaffer: Alberto Ridolfi
Stills: Angelo Novi
Special Effects: Giovanni Corridori
Assistant Editors: Andreina Casini, Carlo Reali
Assistant Art Director: Enrico Simi
Set Decorators: Carlo Leva, Rafael Ferri
Assistant Set Decorator: Antonio Palombi
Costume Collaborator: Marilù Carteny
Wardrobe: Valeria Sponsali
Assistant Make-up: Feliziano Ciriaci
Assistant Hairdresser: Antonietta Caputo
Soprano Soloist: Edda Dell'Orso
Weapons Master: Benito Stefanelli

Cast
Claudia Cardinale (*Jill McBain*)
Henry Fonda (*Frank*)
Jason Robards (*Cheyenne*)
Charles Bronson (*Harmonica*)
Gabriele Ferzetti (*Mr Morton*)
Paolo Stoppa (*Sam, Jill's driver*)
Woody Strode (*Stony*)
Jack Elam (*Snakey*)
Keenan Wynn (*sheriff of the county*)
Frank Wolff (*Brett McBain*)
Lionel Stander (*tavern proprietor*)

uncredited
Marco Zuanelli (*Wobbles*)
John Frederick (*Frank gunman 2 sent to kill Jill*)
Enzo Santaniello (*Timmy McBain*)
Dino Mele (*Harmonica as a boy*)
Al Mulock (*Knuckles*)

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|---|--|
| Benito Stefanelli (<i>Frank’s lieutenant</i>) Aldo Sambrell (<i>Cheyenne man wearing duster</i>) Aldo Berti (<i>Frank gunman playing poker</i>) Bruno Corazzari (<i>Cheyenne man 2</i>) Lorenzo Robledo (<i>Cheyenne man 3</i>) Tullio Palmieri (<i>Flagstone lumber salesman</i>) Simonetta Santaniello (<i>Maureen McBain</i>) Fabio Testi, Antonio Molino Rojo (<i>Frank gang members at auction</i>) Marilyn Carteny (<i>Maureen McBain</i>) Paolo Figlia (<i>Frank man at auction</i>) Claudio Mancini (<i>Harmonica’s elder brother</i>) Renato Pinciroli (<i>first bidder at auction</i>) Luigi Ciavarro (<i>deputy escorting Cheyenne to station</i>) | Conrado San Martín (<i>town official at Brett McBain’s funeral</i>) Spartaco Conversi (<i>Frank gang member shot through foot</i>) Francisco Braña (<i>pipe-smoking Frank gang member</i>) Luana Strode (<i>Indian woman at station</i>) Giuseppe Anatrelli (<i>Frank gunman 4</i>) Robert Spafford (<i>construction yard owner</i>) Joyce Gordon (<i>voice of Jill McBain, English version</i>) Luigi Magnani, Sandra Salvatori, Dino Zamboni, Livio Andronico, Stefano Imparato, Umberto Morsella, Claudio Scarchilli, Salvo Basile, Frank Leslie, Enrico Morsella, Ivan Scratuglia |
| | Italy/USA 1968© 165 mins |

SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

The General
Sun 1 Jan 12:10; Sun 29 Jan 15:10
The Leopard (Il gattopardo)
Sun 1 Jan 14:10; Thu 5 Jan 18:40; Fri 20 Jan 14:00
Sunset Boulevard
Sun 1 Jan 15:50; Fri 27 Jan 14:30; Mon 30 Jan 17:50
Metropolis
Sun 1 Jan 17:55 (+ intro by Bryony Dixon, BFI Curator); Sun 15 Jan 14:40; Mon 30 Jan 16:30 BFI IMAX
L’avventura (The Adventure)
Sun 1 Jan 18:05; Sun 22 Jan 15:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:15
Touki-Bouki
Mon 2 Jan 13:40; Tue 31 Jan 17:40
The Red Shoes
Mon 2 Jan 13:50; Tue 24 Jan 18:05
Once Upon a Time in the West (C’era una volta il West)
Mon 2 Jan 15:20; Sat 7 Jan 17:15; Sun 15 Jan 16:15 BFI IMAX
Get Out
Mon 2 Jan 18:40; Fri 6 Jan 17:50
Pierrot le Fou
Tue 3 Jan 18:10; Wed 4 Jan 20:30; Thu 19 Jan 20:30
My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)
Tue 3 Jan 18:20; Sun 22 Jan 10:00 BFI IMAX; Sat 28 Jan 13:40
A Man Escaped (Un Condamné à mort s’est échappé)
Tue 3 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 20:30
Black Girl (La Noire de...)
Tue 3 Jan 20:30; Thu 12 Jan 18:15 (+ intro)
Ugetsu Monogatari
Tue 3 Jan 20:50; Tue 17 Jan 20:30
Madame de...
Wed 4 Jan 14:30; Fri 20 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, Cultural Programme Manager)
Yi Yi (A One and a Two...)
Wed 4 Jan 18:40; Sun 22 Jan 14:00 (+ intro by Hyun Jin Cho, Film Programmer, BFI Festivals)

The Shining
Fri 6 Jan 20:10; Tue 10 Jan 20:10; Sat 21 Jan 20:30 BFI IMAX
Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi)
Sat 7 Jan 12:10; Sun 22 Jan 12:30 BFI IMAX
Tropical Malady (Sud pralad)
Sat 7 Jan 13:50; Mon 9 Jan 20:40
Histoire(s) du cinema
Sat 7 Jan 16:30
Blue Velvet
Sat 7 Jan 20:30; Fri 20 Jan 20:35; Tue 24 Jan 21:00 BFI IMAX
Sátántangó
Sun 8 Jan 11:15; Sat 21 Jan 13:30
Celine and Julie Go Boating (Céline et Julie vont en bateau)
Sun 8 Jan 14:45; Sat 21 Jan 17:00
Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)
Sun 8 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 14:30; Fri 27 Jan 20:50
Parasite (Gisaengchung)
Mon 9 Jan 17:50; Wed 18 Jan 17:30 BFI IMAX
The Gleaners and I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse) + La Jetée
Wed 11 Jan 20:30; Mon 23 Jan 18:10
A Matter of Life and Death
Thu 12 Jan 20:40; Sun 22 Jan 11:30
Chungking Express (Chung Him sam lam)
Thu 12 Jan 20:45; Tue 17 Jan 20:50; Sat 21 Jan 14:15
Modern Times
Fri 13 Jan 17:45; Sun 22 Jan 13:10
A Brighter Summer Day (Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian)
Mon 16 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:00
Imitation of Life
Wed 18 Jan 20:30; Wed 25 Jan 14:30; Sun 29 Jan 12:30
The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)
Thu 19 Jan 18:00; Sat 28 Jan 13:50
Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho Dayu)
Fri 20 Jan 17:45; Thu 26 Jan 17:50
Andrei Rublev
Thu 26 Jan 18:40; Sun 29 Jan 17:20

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