

How does it feel to square off against the dirty rascal who killed John Wayne? Ask Oklahoma actor Brock Harris, who gets a chance to do just that in "Last Shoot Out," a Western film scheduled for Friday, Dec. 3 release via select theaters, Apple TV and movie rental forums. A character played by Bruce Dern shot and killed Wayne's character in the 1972 film "The Cowboys." Fans of the Duke don't like it when he kicks the bucket. Maybe that's why he died so rarely in his films. Anyhow, Dern is back on bad guy turf in "Last Shoot Out" and ultimately he crosses paths with the hero of the film, who just so happens to be a raised-in-Stillwater actor (Harris). Here's the foundation of the story: Dern is the daddy of a not-so-nice brood. Jocelyn (Skylar Witte) recently married into the family and overhears a chat that causes her to flee. Billy (Harris) prevents the family from intercepting the runaway bride. He becomes her protector. People in the black hat family are used to getting everything they want, no matter who gets hurt. They're hell-bent on retrieving the girl and, as you can glean from the movie title, that will lead to bullets flying. Harris, asked what appealed to him about the film, said he has a passion for Westerns. He likes stories that have a core value and it's all about a man sticking to his code. He thought it would be fun to do a traditional Western. "I love horses," he said. "The cast was great. The director is awesome. So it was a no-brainer for me." Harris, an Eskimo Joe's drink cup within his reach, took part in a recent Zoom interview prior to the film's release. The conversation veered to favorite Western movies from the past and Harris called "The Cowboys" a classic. "I have to mention that because, when I got this role, working with Bruce Dern was one of the highlights," he said, adding that he loves Westerns from the 1970s. "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" is a great one. "Once Upon A Time in the West." All the Spaghetti Westerns. Harris volunteered a

“Last Shoot Out” story about Dern. There’s a scene late in the film where Dern’s character is suffering from an injury. Lying on the ground on the set, Dern, 85, began groaning. Harris said the director asked Dern if he was OK. Responded Dern: “I’m getting into it.” “He was still just as committed to his acting and just as into it even though this is probably a fairly small film for him,” Harris said. “You could tell that he was a real craftsman. Like, it didn’t matter what size movie set he was on. This was a fully committed performance and it was cool to see his level of investment in this part.” Harris paid wrestling dues and choir dues on his way to a collision course with Dern. Born in San Antonio, Harris was a child when his family moved to Stillwater, where his father was a college professor. He wrestled, which is very much a Stillwater thing, but got bitten by the movie/performance bug (he was attracted by the adventure of it all) and left town at age 17, prior to his senior year at Stillwater High School. If you grow up in middle America, maybe there isn’t a clear path to being on movie screens? Harris, in response, expressed appreciation for his time in the Stillwater Boys Choir. “It was led by this guy named Dr. Robert Ward and it was just particularly nice singing training,” Harris said. “He did a really good job with the kids. He was the kind of guy that came in and shook everyone’s hand and made sure everyone knew how to shake a man’s hand and look them in the eye. We learned how to tie our ties and wear our little tuxes and stuff.” Harris said that was a big point of entry for him into the world of art. “Stillwater luckily has the university to give some cultural element to what would otherwise be more of an agriculture town,” he said. “And so I had just enough access point to get the experience” and it was changing a lot as I was growing up. They got a performing arts center in

the high school just as I entered. There was a lot going on there, but I did get really lucky having parents who loved that kind of thing.

My grandparents and my family always took us to plays in Tulsa and Oklahoma City and eventually in New York as we got older and always watched a lot of movies. So the access point wasn't exactly there and I had a lot of lucky things happen. Among breaks was getting spotted at a summer camp and being "drafted" to a performing arts school (Idyllwild Arts Academy) in California, where Harris trained in musical theater. "Before that happened, I had no idea that you could study acting in school," he said. "I had no idea that there were opportunities for that." Harris then trekked to the opposite coast to continue career prep at The Hartt School, a performing arts conservatory, in Connecticut. In years since, he has amassed a long list of TV and film credits as an actor, producer, writer and director. He resides in Austin now (he's become sort of a Southwestern filmmaker) but was in Tulsa for Thanksgiving because he has family here. He said his company, Wild Game Productions, operates out of Oklahoma and is shooting all its films in Oklahoma, Texas and Wyoming right now. He just directed a Western film ("Wild Game") scheduled for Dec. 17 release. Tulsa's Tim Blake Nelson recently starred in a new Western, "Old Henry." "Maybe Westerns are making a comeback? Like we were talking about earlier, (Westerns encompass) the spirit of what the American culture used to really represent and I think that there's a real hunger for that" that resilient, self-reliant type mentality," Harris said. "I think people want to romanticize the west and, as you know growing up here, Oklahoma was once a wild west place. It's a big part of our heritage. I think that there are a lot of people who forget that is sort of the American story." Continuing, Harris said international films have kind of taken the limelight, but, yes, he thinks the Western genre is on the comeback trail. "I have seen a lot of things springing

up lately," he said. "The 'Bone Tomahawk' movie was really good that came out a few years ago. A lot of them are genre-bending, you know? They might be a modern Western or have some other kind of element to it. But I think it definitely will make a comeback. It's one of those things where I think that, when the culture gets askew, it's a grounding place that everyone can go back to and remember, oh yeah, we went on covered wagons across this land and we had to provide and grow our food and we had to deal with outlaws when there was no police force to take care of that. So it's an interesting thing. I have distributors tell me that Westerns under-perform sometimes internationally and I've had other people looking directly for Westerns because they know it's a niche thing that people want right now. So it's interesting, you know? I do think it will come back and I think it'll have a little trend."

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