

= Americana ( film ) =

Americana is a 1983 American drama film starring , produced , edited and directed by David Carradine . The screenplay and story , written by Richard Carr , was based on a portion of the 1947 novel , The Perfect Round , by Henry Morton Robinson . The novel 's setting was originally post @-@ World War II , but the screenplay involved the post @-@ war experiences of a Vietnam War veteran , obsessed with restoring an abandoned carousel .

In 1981 , the film , won The People 's Choice Award at the Director 's Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival . Financing the movie himself , Carradine shot most of the footage for the film , which was co @-@ produced by Skip Sherwood , in 1973 with a band of 26 people , mostly his family and friends , over the course of 18 days . Problems with financing and distribution kept the film from being released until 1983 . The film was well received by audiences , but met with primarily negative criticism .

= = Plot = =

A down on his luck , former Green Beret captain ( Carradine ) , freshly discharged from the Vietnam War , drifts into Drury , Kansas . There he finds a derelict merry @-@ go @-@ round that he decides to restore . " The symbolism of a man wanting to build something joyful after being part of the carnage and destruction of war , " surmised film critic , Charles Champlin . The people of the town have mixed reactions : some support his efforts while others hinder them . Among his supporters are two local business men : a hardware store owner , played by Barbara Hershey 's father , Arnold Herzstein , and Mike , a gas station proprietor played by Michael Greene , who had guest @-@ starred on two episodes of Carradine 's television series , Kung Fu . Both men supply employment to the veteran as well as parts and tools for his endeavour .

Another helpful character is a young local girl , who watches the reconstruction efforts from afar , and scampers off when she is seen . The girl , played by Carradine 's real life domestic partner , Barbara Hershey , provides a tool box and some food . Detractors of the veteran 's efforts include a band of local teenagers , one of whom is played by John Blyth Barrymore , a personal friend of Carradine 's and a frequent guest star on Kung Fu . The protagonist is also harassed by the town 's sheriff , played by Carradine 's brother , Bruce .

When the town 's ruffians vandalize the half @-@ restored carousel , the captain redoubles his efforts . By this time he has found , to his displeasure , that Mike 's favorite pastime is to officiate the weekly cock fights , and the two have a falling out . Mike refuses to make good on a promise of a much needed part for the carousel , unless the soldier agrees to fight a dog . The veteran reluctantly agrees to the fight during which he kills the dog . After installing the last piece that completes the carousel 's restoration , he lays the dog 's body inside it , starts it up and walks away , while the townspeople look on .

= = Cast and crew = =

In addition to those previously mentioned , the film also featured Dan Haggerty , who starred in the television series , The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams . He provided the fighting dog , played the role of the dog 's trainer and worked on the set design and the actual restoration of the carousel .

Robert Carradine , David Carradine 's younger half @-@ brother , assisted with the camera work . Greg Walker , former Kung Fu stunt coordinator , served as stunt coordinator and played one of the town 's ruffians . Fran Ryan , whom Carradine met while they both worked on The Long Riders ( 1980 ) , played a colonel in a scene that was shot several years after the main body of footage . Claire Townsend , a United Artists ( UA ) executive who had helped finance the film , played a lieutenant . Rick Van Ness , who had scouted the location , had a role as a Grateful Dead fan who gives the hero a ride . He also served as production manager .

Calista Carradine , David 's daughter , sang the theme song , " Around " , during the opening credits . The haunting tune , which was written by David Carradine , was reprised at the end of the

movie , with Carradine himself singing . Several members of the Drury , Kansas community appear in the film as themselves . Carradine 's own dog , Buffalo , is credited in the film playing a stray dog .

= = Inspiration and production = =

In 1969 , David Carradine and Barbara Hershey met , and began a romantic relationship , on the set of *Heaven with a Gun* ( 1969 ) . The movie 's writer , Richard Carr , had occasion to tell the couple what he referred to as a " bedtime story " . Carradine remembered it as " the merry @-@ go @-@ round " story . A few years later , after Carradine had experienced financial success with *Kung Fu* , he decided he wanted to make the story into a movie . He contacted Carr , who secured the rights to the Henry Morton Robinson novel , and began writing the screenplay . He told Carradine that the book contained a much more complicated story than the one he had told him . Carradine responded , " I want to make the bedtime story . "

Carradine formed an acting company that he called " ' Kansas Flyer ' , a metaphor for a check that bounces . " He acquired a broken @-@ down carousel in a junk yard in Los Angeles , and some broken horses in Kansas City . He and his entourage then headed for Drury , Kansas . The original working title of the film was *Around* . While exploring film title designs for the picture , Carradine came across a style called *Americana* . " I was trying to figure out what it would look like if it said *Around* . Suddenly , I said to myself , ' Why am I doing this , anyway ? It 's right here in front of me . ' I called up the title designer and told him I was changing the title to *Americana* . "

Carradine provided most of the financing for the project , which cost under 1 million dollars . He stated that the purpose of his other acting jobs was to pay for his independent projects , over which he would have artistic control . Carradine said he even sold his *Kung Fu* residuals to raise money for his own projects , and consequently gone into debt . He also sought advice from directors he had worked with , including Martin Scorsese and Ingmar Bergman . " ' The wonderful thing about working with good directors , ' Carradine admitted , ' is it gives me the opportunity to pick their brains for my own films . ' " Using his spare time to edit the film , in 1981 , Carradine finally had a finished project to take to film festivals .

There were setbacks with distribution , however . United Artists , which had ownership of the movie , changed hands and the new owners had no interest in the movie . Carradine bought the movie back from U.A. , and set out to find a distributor . The picture was picked up by Crown International , which specialized in teen exploitation films . Just two weeks before the opening was scheduled , Carradine was still shooting some additional scenes .

Another problem arose when a representative from the Motion Picture Association of America set the pictures rating at " R " ( restricted ) , explaining that the sound of the fighting dog 's spine being broken was too loud . Carradine said that he would change it . A few weeks later he submitted it again and received the " PG " ( parental guidance suggested ) rating he wanted , without having changed a thing .

= = Reception and release = =

The Los Angeles Times film critic , Charles Champlin , explained that the Director 's Fortnight at the Cannes Film Festival " came into being as one of the consequences of the political turmoil that aborted the festival in 1968 . It is designed to make the festival a less than totally establishment affair and it offers Third World , independent and frequently angry films on social themes . " He further explained that Carradine 's *Americana* was " an ideal selection for the fortnight . " In fact , the film won the People 's Choice Award there in 1981 . Film columnist Christopher Hicks stated that *Americana* was also warmly received at the 1981 United States Film and Video Festival in Park City , Utah . This was the third of such events which would later become known as the Sundance Film Festival . Carradine said of the audience 's reaction to the film , " Well , they laughed in all the right places , and they applauded at the end , so I guess it went alright . " He also said , " *Americana* swept the festival and I came very close to making a distribution deal with Warner Brothers . "

However , the Associated Press described Americana 's reception in Utah as " quiet " .

The moment of truth for the film came when it opened in New York City on October 21 , 1983 . Carradine had discussed Americana with film critic Kirk Honeycutt . Upon hearing of Carradine 's death in 2009 , Honeycutt recalled the discussion , remembering that he was " most impressed . " He explained , " I got an assignment from The New York Times to do a profile on Carradine the filmmaker " . Honeycutt 's profile was planned to coincide with the film 's opening at the Embassy 72d Street theater and the East Side Cinema , in New York City . Carradine commented that when he arrived at the premiere to promote the film , he noticed that the poster and advertisement that he had made for the occasion had been replaced with " inferior ones " . He also said that the film received standing ovations at both venues .

However , negative reviews , like the one from New York Times film critic , Janet Maslin , killed the publication of Honeycutt 's piece . Maslin said of the final scene of the movie , " Anything this moment reveals about Vietnam and about America , not to mention about dogs and merry @-@ go @-@ rounds , has been said better elsewhere . " Critic Richard Freeman found Barbara Hershey 's character " moronic " , and referred to the film as " twaddle . " Freeman said it was " fraught with symbolism . Or maybe it is just fraught " . He further said of the film , " Actually , it 's about David Carradine , of whom the less said the better " . The Kokomo Tribune called the story " pointless " . When Carradine read the reviews , he went back to the hotel bathroom and threw up . " ' It wasn 't just that the critics didn 't like the picture ; they were angry at me for making it , ' Carradine said . ' I 'll never figure that out . ' "