



The Waying of the West

ONCE the West was young. Tall, leathery men leaped into their saddles, grim-jawed and steely-eyed, in hot pursuit of deep-dyed villains and abstract, often adolescent ideals of honor and justice. It was an admirable formula when the movies were growing up, before either film audiences or film-makers had become very sophisticated. For that matter, the formula still seems to work for television, with its hour-long wagon trains and thirty minute shoot-outs. The large screen, however, has not only grown wider, but longer in the tooth. Its audiences are big boys now; they have learned that good guys sometimes finish last, and have grown notably less eager to pin medals on the man with the fastest gun. As for our Western heroes, while still grim of jaw, they have become decidedly slack of jowl. They still walk tall, but they now move a bit stiffly in the joints. Fortunately, the deeds of derring-do that are beyond them physically are no longer demanded by today's audiences. The Westerns have mellowed gracefully, along with their stars.

Archetype of the new Western hero is the craggy-faced, laconic John Wayne, a veteran who carries almost forty years of film experience upon his broad shoulders. That this experience has served him well is evidenced by two large-scale Westerns in which he is currently being starred, *El Dorado* and *The War Wagon*. In both he poses his massive frame in doorways to emphasize his height, walks away from the camera with a cool, loose-limbed grace peculiarly his own, and speaks his lines so slowly and flatly as to suggest worlds of reined-in passion and strength.

In *El Dorado*, which teams Wayne with sleepy-eyed Robert Mitchum, he is on the side of law and order, helping a drunken sheriff (Mitchum) to protect a rancher's water rights from the machinations of an unscrupulous cattle baron. Wherever he rides in Leigh Brackett's singularly loose-jointed script, he is greeted with enthusiasm and respect—even by the baron and his gunmen.

But the curious aspect of *El Dorado* is the underplaying of the action. There are some wild brawls between the two stars, but mostly in fun. There are no hot pursuits, and even in the inevitable barroom brawl, Wayne waits patiently before mixing in. Instead of action, the film proffers a rather pleasing, rough-and-ready kind of humor—a man-to-man joshing that goes on between virtually all the members of the cast. It makes for

a less exciting kind of Western than those hard-riding, hard-shooting thrillers of the past, but one perhaps more suited to a time when blacks and whites have disappeared in favor of Technicolored shadings.

The War Wagon, on the other hand, is a bit more like old times, with action all the way. But even here there is a difference. Bruce Cabot is as unmitigated a villain as ever railroaded an innocent man to jail in order to steal a goldmine, but he is a *smiling* villain, a friendly rattlesnake. Indeed, the real villain of the piece is the menacing "war wagon" of the title, an early version of the armored car, complete with revolving turret and Gatling gun. To capture it, and his gold, Wayne enlists the aid of Kirk Douglas and a whole tribe of Indians. Their intricate plans to outmaneuver the "war wagon" are the substance of Clair Huffaker's suspenseful script; and director Burt Kennedy has built on this to create a picture that moves tautly and constantly. Neither Wayne nor Douglas is quite as springy as he used to be, but they still make it clear that the old West, the West of those early Westerns, was a lively place to be.

HOLLIS ALPERT's recent article on the value of film festivals ["How Useful Are Film Festivals?" *SR*, July 8] receives a solid confirmation in several current releases that, without question, would never be here had they not first been discovered along the festival route. The sad fact is that not all movies are "commercial"—which means merely that not all pictures have a built-in guarantee that they will return millions of dollars to their distributors. But there are some films of quality that, despite this lack of guarantee, can certainly interest and delight great quantities of people—enough, at least, that the distributors can be assured of some small measure of profit on their investments. Two such pictures are Satyajit Ray's *The Big City* and the Yugoslavian *Three*, directed by Aleksandar Petrovic. Both received their American premieres thanks to the New York Film Festival, and the chances that either would have been imported had they not had the kind of pretesting that a festival offers are slim indeed.

In *The Big City*, Ray abandons his infatuation with India's recent past to speak, with his own special insights into the hearts of his people, of the growing urbanization of India, and the emergence of the Indian woman. The film moves swiftly and poignantly as it

exposes the tensions created when a wife can outearn her husband in a society traditionally oriented the other way. *The Big City* well deserves to stand as the present-day addendum to Ray's memorable *Apu* trilogy.

Three is even more remarkable since it represents the emergence of the Yugoslav cinema on an artistic level, rather than as merely the supplier of large-scale armies for low-budgeted spectacles. Poetically and movingly, Petrovic has recreated three episodes from World War II, each revealing a different aspect of man in his relation to death. Only superficially is *Three* a war film; it moves on a level of humanity that transcends both time and place. Both pictures amply warrant the patronage of audiences that proclaim they want "better films."

New York has recently tested this audience in a novel way. For two weeks, under the auspices of Lincoln Center, the Museum of Modern Art played host to a twelve-film festival of the new Czechoslovakian cinema. Virtually every program was a sell-out (and all the films will be repeated in the Museum's regular daily screenings). What is more important, the series demonstrated to timorous distributors that an audience for such pictures (at \$2 a ticket) does exist. Just as Satyajit Ray was "discovered" at Venice and Petrovic at Karlovy Vary, the Czech cinema was "discovered," for this country at least, at the New York Film Festival, where the warmth of *The Shop on Main Street* and the wry humanism of *Loves of a Blonde* dispelled for all time the notion that films from an Iron Curtain country are of necessity party-line preachments.

The dozen films (plus shorts) on the Museum's programs eloquently strengthened this impression. Inevitably, not all of them were great; but for such a program, it is the variety as well as the quality that is important. Vera Chytilova's *Daisies*, for example, is a notably fresh but also self-indulgent attempt to satirize the attitudes of the "mod" generation—a highly original supplement, if you like, to what Antonioni presented so well in *Blow-Up*. *When the Cat Comes* and *Lady of the Trolley Tracks* are musicals that manage to be light-hearted and serious-minded at the same time. *Diamonds of the Night*—and, in fact, most of the films presented—proffered a reality filtered through the highly personal viewpoint and estheticism of each film's director. It makes for a refreshing and original kind of cinema, and one can only hope that the success of the Museum's endeavor will inspire similar institutions across the country (and perhaps theaters as well) to make these films available in their own communities. The world is too small for us to pass up this opportunity to become acquainted with our neighbors.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



Uncolloquial Colloquium

MONTREAL.

THIS YEAR Canada is celebrating the centennial of its confederation with ambitious and well-organized programs in every city and town of its vast geographical expanse. While Expo 67 has attracted the most attention, other projects of deeper value to the Canadian people are quietly operating.

There is, for instance, the Planned Youth Travel program, in which children, with financial assistance from the Canadian Centennial Commission, visit with families in other provinces. There is the Centennial Train, and the Centennial Caravan which uses both rail and motor to bring an exciting awareness of Canadian history to the Canadian people. And in mid-June the Canadian Theatre Centre attempted an international exchange of ideas on the design of the theaters, with experts from forty countries attending.

Colloquium 67, as the seven-day meeting was called, began by discussing "Why Theater?" British playwright Arnold Wesker explained the background of public indifference to art, which makes the task of theatrical creation difficult. He said, "The politician, having regard only for the manufacturer in our society and caring only for that degree of education that will produce a laboring class fit for those manufacturers, has consistently made a mess of the job. And for this reason people have not had the opportunity to consider that a preoccupation with anything but the running of a country can be important. Hence, an indifference to art. There is no energy left." He also urged that theater enthusiasts avoid the trap of justifying theater on the grounds that it will be needed to fill a predicted increase of leisure time. For him theater must stand or fall on the degree of real concern we feel for it.

Wesker's countryman, Kenneth Tynan, currently literary advisor to the National Theatre, stated his personal view that the theater should stop evangelizing itself as a widely popular mass medium and withdraw to prepared positions to concentrate on the limited number of areas where it functions best. He felt that the areas of politics, sex, and religion could be dealt with best in the theater. And he added, "Let us agree that theater is a minority art, not easy to appreciate, but, for the once-hooked, a lifetime addiction. Let it be exclusive in everything but price."

Other divergent opinions followed as the symposium moved on to a considera-

tion of what kinds of theater buildings would be called for in the years ahead. Canadian director John Hirsch argued that present audiences are too bourgeois and too old, and stated a preference for a theater which makes a variety of physical arrangements between actor and audience easily achievable, provided that each also insures the basic necessities of good visual and oral communication between performer and spectator.

Irish-born scene designer Sean Kenny asserted that the traditional theater is dead, and that the modern designer should not be a paper-hanger, but should be given a space envelope the totality of which could be redesigned for each play. American designer Jo Mielziner argued that such an all-purpose theater is unfeasible and voiced his preference for having a number of separate theaters, each ideal for a primary function, rather than one rearrangeable space which would require a prohibitive expenditure of time and money in order to work well in all its various rearrangements.

Poland's young director Jerry Grotowski, who has experimented with rearranging audience-actor relationships within a simple room, cautioned that

the unlimited liberty of the "free space theater" was dangerous and suggestive of a lack of discipline. Director Michael Langham, who is moving from Stratford, Ontario, to La Jolla, California, revealed some of the unique features of his new playhouse, which will have two connected thrust stages and will make possible the quick appearance and exit of actors. He added, "In our society today, where so much is mechanized, where we're perpetually being dazzled by brilliant technological achievements or by the quick hypocritical footwork of politics and big business, is it not essential for those of us who wish to live fully and vulnerably outside the rat race to have a refuge in which we can, in company with those who feel the same, recapture contact with those basic human values that are so easily lost sight of today because of the intensity of distraction?"

Mr. Langham spoke prophetically, for the colloquium proceeded to examine theater technology, and, although much information was exchanged, it soon became clear that there is a strong danger of the theater artist's becoming inundated with technical considerations. Thus the final days of the meeting turned chaotic. Nevertheless, our ideas about the theater of the future had been stimulated and challenged, and we had been made aware of Canada's interest in attuning itself to an advanced kind of theater that will suit the needs of this rapidly growing 100-year-young country.

—HENRY HEWES.



"Goodnight, Bogey, goodnight, Beatles, goodnight, Monkees."