

A Brief History of Spaghetti Westerns

By Jason Gallant

Most recently I have become obsessed with a new genre of film, or rather an old genre. The Spaghetti Western as it became known almost single-handedly because of the success of Italian filmmaker Sergio Leone (*Fistful Of Dollars*, *For A Few Dollars More*, *The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly*). In 1963 while searching for a new script to produce, Leone happened to catch a showing of Akiraw Kurowsawa's film "Yojimbo". Yojimbo was the story of a rogue samurai who pits two opposing factions against each other then sits back to watch the ensuing carnage. This idea became a turning point in Leone's career and the story of Yojimbo was transformed into the story of a man with no name played by a young Clint Eastwood. This was to be known as "A Fistful Of Dollars", the first in Leone's trilogy.

In 1964, like many other famous Europeans, Leone had a love for American cinema because of its close relationship with its fans. It seemed Hollywood had the ability to touch millions as it had touched him, giving him a great bit of influence on his work.

"A Fistful Of Dollars", with its young star instantly spurred hundreds of imitations within the same year, few as effective or as original as Leone's. Following "Fistful" came two more classic westerns, "For A Few Dollars More" and "The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly". While the "Good, The Bad, And The Ugly" may be considered the greatest western of all time by some, it is arguably not much greater than the previous two.

What is most interesting



about these films is their obvious difference from their American counterparts produced in the fifties. There was no attempt at realism or of replicating of the west. Leone opted for a more comic book style, with over the top acting, scenes, and little dialogue. Dialogue was one of the worst things to have happened to the western genre according to Leone. In his spaghetti westerns Leone takes American culture, the western, and turns it on its head. He is considered by many film experts to be the first post modern film director. An Italian

who made stories about the United States starring German actors (Klaus Kinski), Shot in European towns, based on Japanese films which were in turn based on American novels. Leone was bringing the western back to the U.S.

On top of the mix of a wide range of world influences, the technical ability of the filmmakers shines through. Leone loves the camera pan and rarely have close-up facial expressions been used so often with some much effect. It is these close-ups that Leone to get

rid of most of the dialogue. Enzo Barboni's lighting and camera make these films feel more western than the west if this is possible. Interesting enough is that while "Fistful" is shot in both day in night, most of "For a Few" takes place at night while "The Good" takes place nearly entirely during the day. Are Barboni and Leone trying to say something about the character of "The Man with no name"?

The final aspect of these films which make them almost irresistible is Ennio Morricone's score. Incredibly enough, Morricone was second choice for composer of the films. Upon first meeting Morricone, Leone admitted he did not care for his music. He informed Morricone that his score for "Duello El Texas" was a watered down version of composer Dimitri Tiomkin. Morricone laughed and Leone was shocked when he replied that he agreed. Morricone then informed Leone that for "Duello" he had been hired to compose a watered down version of Dimitri Tiokin. Through this relationship we have seen the creation of probably the most widely known piece of music from any film. This, of course, is the score for "The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly".

These films became deserved instant classics for all the reasons mentioned and too many more to share here. I highly recommend anyone interested in film history explore these and anyone else who loves a great movie to take a look as well. If you are sceptical at least watch "A Fistful Of Dollars". Leone's magic will do its work and I am sure you will be back for more.