



SCARECROW

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FIVE NORTHWESTERNS

compiled by Mark Steiner

With Kelly Reichardt's latest period drama set in the Pacific Northwest (*FIRST COW*) opening to universal acclaim, we thought it'd be fun to look back on a few other frontier-era films that use the lush, bountiful landscapes of the area we like to call home.

BEND OF THE RIVER (1952, dir. Anthony Mann)

Adapted from Walla Walla author and historian Bill Gulick's novel, and filmed on the Sandy & Columbia Rivers as well as Mount Hood, this tale of a hardened cowboy who helps a wagon train of settlers was the second in the cycle of 5 Westerns that director Anthony Mann and Jimmy Stewart made together in the fifties. In each of them, Stewart adopts a cynical, dark persona, a sharp contrast to the heroic everyman he played in romantic comedies or the films of Frank Capra. He still plays the hero in these, but Mann's stories of an unforgiving new Western frontier showed a darker side to the genre, in which the hero's shadowy past sometimes came in handy when dealing with the challenges of greed, lawlessness, and nature.

MCCABE AND MRS. MILLER (1971, dir. Robert Altman)

Filmed in West Vancouver (back before it had houses), Robert Altman's beautiful, dreamy, hushed masterpiece (with a gorgeous acoustic score by Leonard Cohen) weaves together a tale of the birth of a frontier town with an odd love story between a dreamer/gambler/businessman (Warren Beatty) and a practical, Cockney madam (Julie Christie.) Altman's mastery of tone and mood was never better, and cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond's tableaux of the rainy forests and late, Western sunsets created some defining images of the Pacific Northwest.

THE GREY FOX (1982, dir. Phillip Borsos)

Unavailable for years on anything but a cropped VHS release, Kino Lorber has restored Philip Borsos' amazing story of a stagecoach robber who is released from prison after 31 years, only to see and be inspired by one of the first pieces of cinema, *THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY*. Based on a true story and filmed largely in British Columbia and Bellingham, *The Grey Fox* gave actor Richard Farnsworth a breakthrough performance at age 62 as the aging outlaw.

THE HANGING TREE (1959, dir. Delmer Daves, Karl Malden)

Passions run high during a Montana gold rush in this interesting late-Fifties Western/melodrama hybrid from Delmer Daves and Gary Cooper (the first for Cooper's new production company,) which was filmed in the mountains east of Yakima. Coop's the stranger with a mysterious past, Karl Malden's a lusty, greedy townie, Maria Schell is the sole survivor of a nasty stagecoach robbery, and (in his film debut) George C. Scott is already in full George C. Scott mode as a psychotic faith healer eager to put the titular tree into service.

THE BALLAD OF LITTLE JO (1993, dir. Maggie Greenwald Mansfield)

Suzy Amis had one of her best roles as the title character in Maggie Greenwald's loose retelling of the life of "Little Joe" Monahan, who was born as a female in Buffalo in 1850 but lived most of his adult life as a man in Silver City, Idaho. Filmed in south-central Montana with a great cast that includes Ian McKellen, Bo Hopkins, Heather Graham, and Rene Auberjonois, *The Ballad Of Little Jo* is a beautiful Western that uses the beauty of the locations to make a small but important story feel like an epic.