

Five Outstanding Westerns that You Should Literally Watch this Very Second (or ASAP)

Hollywood is full, FULL, of outstanding westerns from its beginning to current day. There are many that deserve all too well to be on any list of great western recommendations. This is a Five, so we wanted to highlight five of our personal favorites and a few that may not be so well known but totally should.

1. The Treasure of the Sierra Madre



My formal education did not include a ton of movies so it is amazing to me that both in Spanish Class in High School as well as History Class my first year at USC, my instructors showed my classes this film. A 1948 classic that has

transcended time, it more or less did for me with westerns what *Sergeant York* did for war movies. I'm not a sincere fan of either genre but I can't get enough of these movies.

Humphrey Bogart is magnificent and in this role as Dobbs earns the fame still associated his name 70 years later. Yet there is a plethora of other characters that make this movie so memorable, people most Americans have never heard of like Tim Holt, Walter Huston and Alfonso Bedoya has "Gold Hat". And speaking of him, I would feel amiss not to mention one of the most famous lines in the history of American cinema. A line that has been referenced literally dozens of times in TV, other movies, music and other media. But I cannot mention it without getting it right, because I sense like many other famous lines, it is misquoted. It's:

"Badges? We ain't got no badges. We don't need no badges. I don't have to show you any stinkin' badges!"

Note that the word "stinkin" isn't until the last line. But this movie is way more than a quote. It's a thrilling adventure of that teaches us a lot about injustice, greed and what it means to trust others when we're in desperate circumstances. It gets real at times. And it does not have a sentimental *Happy Madison* type ending. Yet the conclusion still leaves me very satisfied and wanting to watch the whole thing again. Isn't that the premiere mark of a great film? (Gowdy Cannon)

2. The Big Country



I am a huge fan of the western genre. I love films whether very old or brand new. There are many, many great ones that could be named. While I could list one that is a well known and justly deserved fan favorite, I will lend my praise to a relatively ignored classic: *The Big Country*. *The Big Country* is one of the most underappreciated movie treasures out there. The big names to match this Big County and big film include Gregory Peck, Charlton Heston, Burl Ives, and Jean Simmons. Most of the reviewers I have read seem to think it okay at best. While the musical score is almost universally applauded, the film is supposedly too long, too ambitious, is too pretentious, and contains way too much empty space.

Okay.

I honestly doubt that half the reviewers I read have watched it in its entirety. Many of them contain glaring plot errors in their descriptions. I imagine most of them just watched a few clips and wrote the rest of their reviews based on other reviewers who did the same thing. I will agree that the premise of *The Big Country* is not all that original. But unoriginality does not always make a bad film. Hollywood history is chock full of classic unoriginal films. Chock full. And *The Big Country* is part of that "chock." Filled to the brim with great music, filming, acting, and writing, it's an unrecognized western classic. (Ben Plunkett)

3. The Shakiest Gun In The West



Many grew up watching Don Knotts in *The Andy Griffith Show*. I grew up with *Threes Company* and watching him and Tim Conway over and over again in a 1980 movie called *The Private Eyes*. I watched it probably 50 times and for years could quote the whole thing, complete with character accents.

But eventually people started pushing me to broaden my Don Knotts horizons and I did, taking in *The Apple Dumpling Gang* (also with Conway) and a 1968 Comedy Western called *The Shakiest Gun In The West*.

And it was quite the addition to his filmography. It's classic Don Knotts as the bumbling, clueless, lovable almost hero and filled with memorable scenes and lines. My favorite is when Knotts' character Jesse Heyward is getting ready for a showdown with Arnold the Kid and after practicing five shots he wastes his final bullet putting his gun back in his holster. I can hear my brother Jeremy in my head saying, "Two at the can...two at the sign...one in the skillet...and one in the pants." We laughed about it dozens of times. I laugh right now just thinking about it.

The supporting cast is great, highlighted by Bad Penny and we even get a glimpse of Pat Morita in the only role I've seen him in that didn't feature the words "Karate Kid" or "Happy Days" in the title. The movie also has an unforgettable song that plays during the opening title sequence and sets the mood for the show you're about to experience.

So if you're looking for a western big on laughs and a lead character that bears no resemblance whatsoever to John Wayne or Clint Eastwood, this is a movie worth watching. (Gowdy Cannon)

4. True Grit



To my knowledge, there are only two film versions of *True Grit*: the 1969 and 2010 versions. While the 1969 version is not bad and is a pretty accurate retelling of the novel, the 2010 version is much, much better in just about every way. The only place where both match in greatness is with their Rooster Cogburn actors: John Wayne and Jeff Bridges. While they may be equal in this manner, Bridges wins out because he is surrounded by excellence in every single other aspect of his film. In my opinion, there is not one thing in the film that is shoddily done. The music, the acting, the film work, the

dialogue, the attention to detail, the thorough capturing of the novel's spirit. Everything. Matt Damon deserves a particularly loud bout of praise for his portrayal of the cocky but goodhearted Texas Ranger, Laboef. Bridges and Damon are accompanied by an amazing cast of characters, some of whom only appear onscreen for a handful of minutes. I'm not sure that I can overstate my love for this movie. I strongly believe that it would belong in a top ten list of the greatest westerns ever made. (Ben Plunkett)

5. Open Range



There is a lot to love about *Open Range*. First, Kevin Costner and Robert Duvall are a fantastic duo in the film. They have an easy chemistry and are given plenty of room to inhabit their roles. Second, the cinematography is open (no pun intended) and expansive; really giving the viewer an appreciation for the untamed and wild Montana landscape. While the film has plenty of other elements to celebrate, for *Open Range*, it all comes down to the climactic shoot-out. After a film that unhurriedly moves along, the final gun-fight is bold, shocking, and edge-of-your-seat filmmaking. Kevin Costner, pulling double duty as the director, expertly stages

the fight with plenty of moving pieces, a concise and understandable geography, and a fair share of “hero” moments for our main characters. It’s an intense sequence that allows this slow-burn of a film to end with a blaze of glory – classic Western motif and homage all in one. (Phill Lytle)