



RIO BRAVO (RIO GRANDE) is a Fourth Quarter 2018 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Here's Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

12 of a possible 20 points

***** of a possible *******

**United States Technicolor 142 minutes live action feature western dramedy
An Armada Production / Warner Brothers Pictures Producer: Howard Hawks**

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement

Points:

- 1 Direction: Howard Hawks**
- 1 Editing: Folmer Blangsted**
- 1 Cinematography: Russell Harlan**
- 1 Lighting**
- 1 Screenplay: Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett from a story by
B.H. McCampbell**
- 2 Music: Dimitri Tiomkin Lyrics: Paul Francis Webster
Orchestrations: Sidney Cutner, Maurice De Packh, Manuel Emanuel,
Michael Heindorf, Gus Levene, George Parrish,
Leonid Raab, Herbert Taylor
Songs: 1. "Rio Bravo," 2. "My Rifle, My Pony and Me," and
3. "I Wish I Had An Apple" ("Get Along Home, Cindy, Cindy")
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- 1 Art Direction: Leo Kuter**

Set Decoration: Ralph Hurst
Costume Design: Marjorie Best
Makeup: Gordon Bau

2 Sound: Robert B. Lee

1 Acting

1 Creativity

12 total points

Cast: John Wayne (John T. Chance), Dean Martin* (“Dude”), Ricky Nelson (“Colorado” Ryan), Angie Dickinson* (“Feathers”), Walter Brennan (“Stumpy”), Ward Bond (Pat Wheeler), John Russell (Nathan Burdette), Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzalez (Carlos), Claude Akins (Joe Burdette), Malcolm Atterbury (Jake), Harry Carey, Jr. (Harold), Bob Steele (Matt Harris), Riley Hill (Messenger), Estelita Rodriguez (Consuela), Walter Barnes (Charlie the Bartender), Nesdon Booth (Clark), George Bruggeman (Clem), Jose Cuchillo (Pedro), Jack Young (Gunman Shot by Dude in Saloon), others

RIO BRAVO is probably the most amiable of film westerns. Intended by director Howard Hawks as rebuttal to HIGH NOON’s craven townsfolk and loner lawman, it centers on a hodgepodge of colorful eccentrics working together, more or less, to insure a prisoner is properly safeguarded until a United States Marshal arrives to convey him to trial for murder. Heading the cast is John Wayne’s Sheriff John T. Chance, supposedly a highly efficient law enforcer.

Hawks shoots himself in the foot, though, in this regard. Most of the brightest ideas about keeping their captive alive and behind bars come from others. The only sign of anything resembling prudence from Chance is drawing of a drape before conversing about assistance from a sympathetic trail boss. Both Dean Martin’s recovering alcoholic Dude and youthful gunslinger Colorado Ryan, played by Ricky Nelson, are superior shots and more ingenious strategists. It’s crotchety office caretaker Stumpy who comes up with a cunning notion of using dynamite to flush out the Burdette gang’s hired gunmen from warehouse coverts. Hotel owner Carlos supplies extra ammunition for a critical showdown, something essential neglected by Chance, who frequently lives up to his name by relying on serendipities. Even Feathers, traveling card shark and occasional bar girl, has more sense than John T. She cleverly suggests he spend a watchful

night in her hotel room rather than his usual alternate lodging there. Nathan Burdette's assorted professional lowlifes wouldn't expect to find him in a lady's private chamber. Or would they?

As for plot, action gets underway in a six-minute wordless sequence. Heartbroken, thirsty deputy Dude is taunted by saloon regular Joe Burdette, who tosses a coin into a cuspidor. Burdette hopes the addicted toper will debase himself by ferreting it out. Results of this gambit are rather unexpected: a sheriff rendered unconscious when hit from behind by groggy underling, stomach punches administered Dude by Joe while the lawman is restrained from behind by a Nathan Burdette hireling, and the shooting of an unarmed anonymous intercessor who makes the fatal decision to interfere. Joe's response to his meddling is to pull out a gun and eliminate the peacemaker.

A hard-drinking womanizer strutting about town in an offensively arrogant manner, the younger Burdette sibling has no redeeming virtues. Killing a weaponless man in a bar brawl with plenty of witnesses is a foolish first step to the gallows for him. Chance is quite accommodating, especially after getting clubbed and rendered unconscious while trying to extricate Dude from his shameful predicament. Following the unrepentant murderer to another watering hole, he attempts to arrest him there, but finds himself temporarily outgunned. Only opportune arrival of Dude, seeking atonement for prior folly, saves him from a second shaming. Thanks to the timely reinforcement, Chance can finally apprehend a smirking lawbreaker and take him to temporary residence in the hoosegow.

Joe expects to be sprung from jail by his brother's henchmen. That's not an unreasonable assumption. Nathan has made a career of buying what he wants. He sees no reason to forego his customary approach in the current situation. If Chance and his deputies get in the way that will be just too bad for them.

When an offer of help is forthcoming from Ward Bond's Pat Wheeler, whose wagon of explosives is detained at the edge of town, it's rejected as too likely to end in loss of numerous defender lives. Chance isn't interested in recruiting amateurs.

Wheeler is twenty minutes later shot in the back by a sneak who hustles off to Charlie's saloon afterwards, pursued by an observant and very sober Dude. Fated to frequent drinking establishments in the line of duty, the deputy is distracted by offer of a welcome whiskey. Approaching temptation, he detects

dripping blood falling onto the bar from a suspected killer lurking in shadows upstairs. Without waiting for benefit of judge or jury, he takes rapid remedial action.

Chance sees nothing wrong in warrantless homicide, since the victim was likely drawing a bead on Dude at the time of his unexpected demise. Revenge of a friend's death is sweet, even when accomplished by someone else.

With Wheeler and his terminator both bound for Boot Hill, the first of two jokers comes into play. Colorado Ryan no longer has an employer, becoming a sort of New World ronin. He pockets his pay, but can't bring himself to leave town until further discourse with John T., who in his opinion ought to handle disbursement of money owed Ryan's colleagues.

True enough, the other agrees. However, nobody draws a salary until it's approved by the United States Marshal and a seconding magistrate.

That leaves Colorado penniless and unemployed. Still, he's disinclined to enter the lists against Burdette's lawless enforcers, preferring to sit on the sidelines and watch developments.

Meanwhile, grizzled erstwhile rancher Stumpy sits guard on a hostile bone of contention eager to vacate the premises. He lost property to Nathan Burdette at some previous juncture in a manner left unexplained. So the old man has a grudge against Joe's brother and delighted to taunt the junior Burdette as partial payback.

Nathan's initial reaction to news of fraternal duress is to close off all roadways leading to town. A similar scheme is executed by the guardians of justice within it, who seal off their territory from the inside. Every visitor to this menaced border community must leave weapons at the town's outer boundary, with Dude enforcing that policy at one location and Chance presumably doing the same elsewhere.

A standoff ensues, with threats veiled and direct traded between John and Nathan when the latter pays a courtesy call on wayward kinsman. Nothing serious occurs in its immediate aftermath, contending parties settling into preferred positions and trying to assess potential outcomes of any provocative action.

After nightfall makes surveillance of incoming riders prohibitive, the sheriff begins a tour of inspection down Main Street. He eventually enters the Alamo Hotel, where a pair of strangers appear to be fleecing two local players in a

rigged poker game. Chance blusteringly accuses lone female Feathers of cheating. This she coolly denies, countering with a less-than-credible tale of woe concerning a deceased spouse who had gradually resorted to supplementing hands with hidden extras before coming to a premature sudden death when his chicanery became publicized. Before long these two debaters are powerfully attracted to each other and allied in hostility to everyone on the Burdette payroll.

Their friendship is expedited by Colorado's interruption, breaking news of trickery at the gaming table downstairs. It seems the other wayfarer is the real cheat, withholding three critical cards from the deck. Since he isn't a Burdette employee, Chance refrains from gunplay, urging instead repayment of fraudulent winnings and quick removal from town on the next stage.

Mr. Competence then has to apologize for incorrect appraisal of the talkative lady gambler, proof his expertise certainly isn't in social judgment. She's smitten by Cupid and willingly accepts what passes for manly contrition from someone unused to admissions of error. Thus becoming another member of a most unusual coalition.

Still unwilling to commit himself to backing obviously besieged custodians of law and order, Colorado finally joins the fray when slow-thinking rifleman John T. is duped into solo confrontation with three crack shooters, one dressed to look like Dude.

For Dude the duped has managed to get himself ambushed while suffering from the shakes. He's no longer free to take an active part on the security force's varsity team. His replacements are lovelorn widow Feathers and a Johnny Ringo fast draw. Those two combine talents at vase toss, rifle relay, and pistol shooting to distract the trio temporarily holding Chance hostage. Tables are turned in a flash, villains left peremptorily dead or put to flight.

John T. decides to wait within makeshift fortress for a United States Marshal to arrive. He doubts outlaws will attempt storming it. That would merely end with a corpse in place of truculent Joe. Stumpy's lame leg won't keep his trigger finger from sending a confined culprit to early arrival in the afterlife should Chance command him to open fire. Which he surely would in the event of massed assault.

This being no revisionist oater, the dramedy's conclusion is quite predictable, viewer entertainment deriving chiefly from frequent self-parodying clichéd

dialogue, two interjected ballads courtesy of singers Dean Martin and Ricky Nelson, and ultimate face-off between warehouse and barn, forces of good operating from symbolic manger against agents of evil pinned to a storehouse of worldly goods probably owned by affluent Nathan Burdette himself.

What makes this film special is not its leisurely pace, though itself quite rare in a western. Nor its climactic fireworks. Most of the cast is adequate, if uninspired. Claude Akins makes a suitably crude ogler and bully. He's by no means the definitive western antagonist. Likewise, John Russell's Nathan Burdette is an acceptable mix of snaky charm and unprincipled threat. Incessant mutterer and cantankerous senior officer Stumpy, portrayed by Walter Brennan, spouts tangy cornball repartee in scene after scene, as so instructed by Hawks according to an audio commentator.

No, the chief assets of this film lie elsewhere, in seductively measured phrasing of Angie Dickinson's flirtatiously amoral Feathers and the agonizing wretchedness of Dean Martin's whiskey-bound Dude, trying to battle demons both external and within simultaneously.

Ricky Nelson is agreeably relaxed, though fairly monochrome in personality. If his speech resembles that of a crooner more closely than anything remotely frontier-like, he compensates with accomplished lyricism.

Dmitri Tiomkin's music score, melodically rich and rhythmically hammering, nonetheless suffers from bouts of forgetting its prime purposes of generating atmosphere and subtly underlining emotions. Instead it charges into trailblazing outbursts of martial violence quite gratingly.

Shot partly in Old Tucson, Arizona, and partly on studio soundstages, RIO BRAVO combines wonderfully impressive sound effects recording and indifferently mixed dialogue. Hawks' penchant for utilizing overlapping conversations is better left to operas.

Technicolor lighting has the underwhelming defects of 1950s Hollywood: insufficiently lit interiors contrast with far more luminous outdoor settings.

A screenplay by the talented duo of Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett does what it can with overfamiliar characterizations and stereotyped verbal duels probably traceable to the original story source. These drawbacks are partially plastered over by irony of line delivery, pregnant pauses after phrases that could have masked secondary meanings, and pileups of bromides that become absurd in cumulative proliferation.

No perceptive psychological insights or philosophical pearls are discoverable.

What is present? An immensely satisfying dramedy of engaging characters allowed plenty of time to gradually unfold personality traits and a sharp rein on graphic depiction of bloodshed, motivations and transformations of character being of far greater impact and interest.

RIO BRAVO is suitable viewing for teens and adults. Younger fans will fail to detect subtleties of behavior and dialogue that form essential spicing.

There are two special features accompanying this release: an informative dual audio commentary by director John Carpenter and film critic Richard Schickel and five trailers for John Wayne westerns. The latter set includes one for RIO BRAVO. All five cumulatively have a runtime of approximately ten minutes.

Special note: Though the disk carries on its surface an indication of being one of a multiple set of dvds, it actually contains all material specified on the case cover. There is no second disk.