

The Phantom's
**BEST
OF THE
WEST**

ARROW ACADEMY
(\$39.95 Blu-ray) 9/18

THE HIRED HAND: SPECIAL EDITION
(1971) ♂♂1/2

D: Peter Fonda. Peter Fonda, Warren Oates, Verna Bloom, Robert Pratt, Severn Darden, Ted Markland. 93 mins.

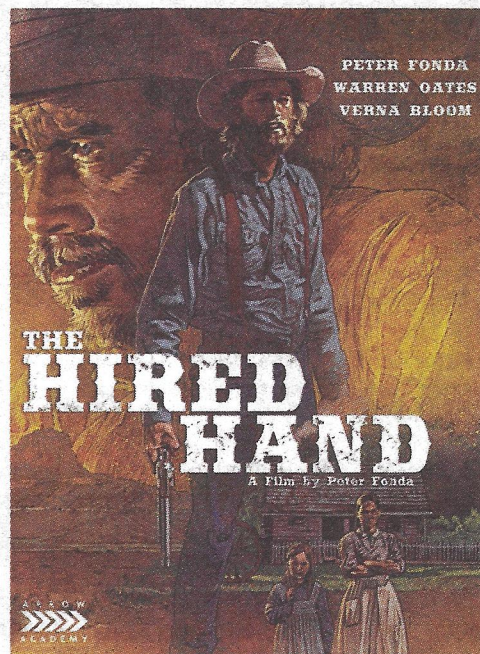
Though largely ignored during its original theatrical release, Fonda's low-key 1971 sagebrush fable has rightly gained in respect over the years. In addition to directing, Fonda assumes the lead role of Harry Collings, a lean, laconic cowpoke who, after seven years on the trail, seeks to resume a relationship with long-abandoned wife Hannah (Bloom). After a burst of sudden violence claims the life of a young saddlemate (Pratt), Harry's shaken prairie partner Arch (Oates, excellent as ever here) decides to accompany his pal on his domestic quest. Much of the subsequent action focuses on Harry's attempts to reclaim Hannah's affection, working at first in the titular position before graduating to active husband duties. The leisurely paced film unfolds like a live-action painting in progress, thanks to celebrated cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond's lush palettes and poetic dissolves, while Bruce Langhorne's lyrical, laid-back guitar score provides ideal aural support. Considerable credit likewise goes to scripter Alan Sharp, whose impressive western resume also includes Robert Aldrich's brilliant 1973 *Ulzana's Raid* and Ted Kotcheff's 1974 *Billy Two Hats* (VS #79). Arrow Academy's Special Edition blu-ray, meantime, arrives with a plethora of extras, including Fonda's audio commentary, the 2003 documentary *Return of the Hired Hand*, deleted scenes, *The Odd Man*, a 1978 documentary about Scottish screenwriters, including Alan Sharp, Fonda and Warren Oates at the National Film Theatre, theatrical trailers, TV and radio ads and an interview with filmmaker/fan Martin Scorsese.

WARNER ARCHIVE
(\$21.99 Blu-ray) 7/18

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JUDGE ROY BEAN (1972) ♂♂1/2

D: John Huston. Paul Newman, Jacqueline Bisset, Tab Hunter, John Huston, Stacy Keach, Roddy McDowall, Anthony Perkins, Victoria Principal. 123 mins.

Acting great Newman frequently wandered the Wild West, usually with positive results. His range experience included an early stint as a Method Billy the Kid in Arthur Penn's postmodern *The Left Handed Gun* (1958); an Oscar-winning turn as the eponymous amoral rancher in Martin Ritt's moody character study *Hud* (1963); an overly hyper Mexican bandito in Ritt's 1964 semi-misfire *The Outrage*, a frontier twist on Kurosawa's *Rashomon*; a complex, code-bound loner in Ritt's edgy *Hombre* (1967); a jaunty incarnation of a real-life outlaw in George Roy Hill's mega-hit *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969); the titular self-made myth in Robert Altman's incisive *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* (VS #94); and, here, in John Huston's decidedly mixed affair, *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*. As scripted by John (The Wind and the Lion) Milius, *Bean* kicks off to a memorable start: Our parched antihero saunters into an isolated prairie bar/brothel seeking refuge from a possible pursuing posse after pulling a bank heist. The local lowlifes respond to Roy's outreach by robbing him, applying a severe beating, and tying him by the neck to his runaway horse, presumably to be dragged to his death. But the resilient Roy somehow survives the ordeal and immediately returns to administer harsh lethal justice to a dozen or so of his recent tormentors. Roy then claims the abandoned building as his own and turns it into a combo casino, cathouse and courtroom where he alone, armed with revolvers and a thick Texas law book, stands as the self-proclaimed Law West of the Pecos. The very loosely fact-based film continues in an entertaining tall tale vein, hosting cameos by the likes of Perkins as an itinerant preacher and his former off-screen partner Hunter as captured killer Sam Dodd, rounded up by Roy's own rough-hewn police force, until gradually falling prey to the cinematic self-indulgence that struck down many promising pics of the period. Suddenly, the tone shifts from revisionist irony to broad comedy as Roy adopts a beer-guzzling circus bear abandoned by medicine show huckster Huston as his best friend, orders his marshals to marry local whores, encounters cartoon villain Bad Bob (Keach), and engages in an epic struggle with would-be town developer Frank Gass (McDowall) that ultimately leads to a gratuitous *Wild Bunch*-style bloodbath. Apparently, writer Milius and director Huston were often at odds, with Milius crediting the experience as the stimulus to become a director with creative control; as it stands, the dual visions frequently collide with unsightly results. Worse, the pic features a cringe-worthy interruptive tune, "Marmalade, Molasses and Honey," extending a trend begun by *Butch Cassidy's* annoying ditty "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head" and continuing with *The Ballad of Cable Hogue's* "Butterfly Mornin's," nearly as irritating as the incessant MTV music video inserts that burdened many an '80s flick. Still, the *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* offers enough early-reel rewards to merit a viewing. ♂



BEST OF THE SPAGHETTI WEST

WILD EAST PRODUCTIONS
(\$19.95 DVD)

DAYS OF VENGEANCE (1967) ♂♂1/2

D: Florestano Vancini. Giuliano Gemma, Francisco Rabal, Gabriella Giorgelli, Conrado San Martin, Nieves Navarro. 123 mins.

Ted Barnett (Gemma) is doing hard time in a labor camp for a crime he did not commit. After working on a rather elaborate plan, he escapes and quickly puts some distance between himself and the camp. With the help of a grumpy old medicine man and his granddaughter Dulcy (Giorgelli), Ted gets back to Kartown and sets to righting the wrongs perpetrated against him. He learns that his gal Dolly (Navarro) left him to hook up with Cobb (San Martin), the local crook, and Cobb has the sheriff (Rabal) on his payroll. Ted learns of an arms deal with some Mexicans and does what he can to gum up the works. There's a big shootout, but Ted ends up with his neck in a noose anyway. Who or what will save him? It occurred to me while I was watching this that about 50 percent of all the Spaghetti westerns ever made are about an innocent man trying to clear his name and get revenge on whoever set him up. Of those films, Giuliano Gemma seems to play the luckless gunslinger in 50 percent of them. Which is to say that a feeling of "been here, seen it" settled in way before the closing moments. This is still a fun flick, and Gemma shines in a couple of scenes, particularly when he is dealing with the Mexican bandits, but he did this film better a couple of other times. Still, this is a worthy find, the first time the full English version has been released in the U.S., so *Days of Vengeance* reps a major release for Gemma fans. Extras include the original English titles and an interview with Nieves Navarro. The second film on this Gemma double feature is a departure, a Vikings vs. Indians tale starring Gemma and Gordon Mitchell, *Erik the Viking* (1965). ♂