

Rob Freese's  
BEST OF THE  
SPAGHETTI WEST

ARROW VIDEO

(\$29.98 2-disc Blu-ray) 4/17

DJANGO PREPARE A COFFIN (1968)

♫♫♫1/2

D: Ferdinando Baldi. Terence Hill, Horst Frank, George Eastman, Jose Torres, Pinuccio Ardia, Guido Lollobrigida. 92 mins.

After Django (Hill) is set up by crooked politician David Barry (Frank), he is left for dead and his wife is killed by Barry's henchman Lucas (Eastman). Years later, Django, assumed deceased since there is a grave marker in the cemetery bearing his name, is covertly working as a hangman, going from town to town to execute men wrongfully accused by Barry so he can steal their land. Django does not actually kill the men; he provides harnesses to make it look like they're hanged, then drags off the "dead" body for burial. In exchange for saving their lives, Django enlists the men to form a phantom posse of vigilantes to ride against Barry and raise hell with those who wrongfully accused them. A wagon full of bank funds complicates matters as the vigilantes stray from their mission, obstructing Django's efforts to avenge his wife's murder. This is one of the best of the many, many "Sons of Django" films that galloped across the screen after the success of Sergio Corbucci's original *Django* in 1966. Part of this is due to the fact that *Django Prepare a Coffin* was conceived as an actual sequel to the Corbucci film, with original star Franco Nero planning to return to portray the gunslinger he made famous. When Hollywood called, Nero took the first plane to the States and the very capable Hill stepped in to perform Django duties. He's a great match for Nero and gives the character his own touches without veering too far from the original. There are a number of exciting surprises along the way, including an insane fire gag that will make your skin crawl. Extras include liner notes, trailer, and *Django Explained*, a short history of Django on film from spaghetti western expert Kevin Grant. This is an explosive great time that delivers the six-shooter goods.

WILD EAST PRODUCTIONS

(\$19.98 DVD) 4/17

RAMON THE MEXICAN (1966) ♫♫

D: Maurizio Pradeaux. Robert Hundar (Claudio Undari), Vilma Lindamar, Jean Louis, Joes Torres, Luciano Rossi, Giovanna Lenzi. 92 mins.

The action starts when Esmeralda (Lindamar) is attacked at a river by scummy

Juan Morales. Slim Baxter (Louis) ends the assault by filling Juan's belly with lead. Ramon Morales (Undari/Hundar) vows to avenge his brother's death and starts by bullying the sheriff into letting him handle it his own way, then gunning down Slim's father in cold blood. When Slim approaches Ramon, he is shot and left for dead. Esmeralda swears to become Ramon's wife after she nurses Slim back to health, hoping that will cease the killing. Once Slim begins feeling fidgety, he blows away some of Ramon's men and tells a survivor to let Ramon know he's coming for him. Ramon retaliates by killing more of Slim's family. Slim hangs out with a rough crowd and learns to be quicker on the draw, thanks to a nut with an axe. He finally heads into town for his final confrontation with Ramon. Unfortunately, this early spaghetti western suffers from having a hero and a villain that are so unappealing it's hard for the viewer to care about either one of them. The lily-livered sheriff is no help either. In fact, there's really no one worth rooting for except for a funny old man who seems to play both sides of the fence, which makes him not very appealing either. There is one silly but fun scene with a wagon and a keg of gunpowder straight out of a Bugs Bunny cartoon that generates a real laugh. I'm sure it has its fans, but I found Ramon lacking in genuine sagebrush thrills.

CALIFORNIA (1977) ♫♫♫

D: Michele Lupo. Giuliano Gemma, William Berger, Miquel Bose, Chris Avram, Paolo Dominguin, Robert Hundar (Claudio Undari), Raimund Harmstorf. 100 mins.

After the Civil War, Confederate soldiers are set free to return home and resume their lives. Michael "California" Random (Gemma) heads back to Missouri, but young Willy Preston (Bose) tries to talk the older soldier into accompanying him to his home in Georgia. Michael reluctantly travels with Willy but is always looking for an opportunity to dump his motor-mouthed companion. Meanwhile, bounty hunter Rope Whitaker (Harmstorf) leads his men in rounding up Confederate criminals for the Union in the most brutal fashion. When Willy is murdered by a grief-stricken Northern father who lost his son, Michael feels it's his responsibility to travel to Willy's parents' homestead and deliver the news. When he arrives, he is coerced into staying a while by Willy's attractive sister Helen (Dominguin, Bose's real sister). The Prestons take a liking to Michael and he becomes comfortable in his new surroundings. But when Helen is abducted by Rope, Michael goes into full-blown vengeance mode. Arriving toward the end of the spaghetti western cycle, *California* is a fantastic action flick that is amusing in parts (such as when men jump wildly in a swamp trying to collect a bullfrog dinner) and straight-up brutal in others. Multiple bullet wounds (courtesy of old-school squibs) will grab your attention and



Gianni Ferri's synthesizer-driven score lends the film a modern edge. Gemma (also known as Montgomery Wood) plays it straight, without his customary goofy farm-boy charm, but is still as likable as ever. Instead, Bose takes over in the goofy farm-boy department and is delightful. Dominquin is fetching and plays her role well, becoming a shattered version of her former self after her abduction. Regular viewers of Spaghetti Cinema will no doubt recognize Romano Puppo as one of Rope's henchmen; he played in other classic Italian flicks like *After the Fall of New York*, *Escape from the Bronx* and *The Great Alligator*, among many others. It wasn't enough to breathe new life into the then-tired genre, but this is a solid, satisfying entry and fans would do well to scope it out. Both films are excellently remastered and presented in widescreen. Extras include a trailer for *California*, picture galleries and a Robert Hundar trailer gallery. ♫

REST OF THE WEST

Elsewhere on the western front, Kino Lorber unleashes a gala double-disc edition of Walter Hill's classic account of the James Gang's exploits, *The Long Riders* (1980), cast with four famous brother acts (the Carradines, the Keaches, the Guests, and the Quaid) and packed with bonus material galore, from commentaries to interviews to featurettes and more. The same label issues Sergio Corbucci's excellent *The Mercenary*, with Franco Nero and Tony Musante, along with George Peppard in *Cannon for Cordoba*, both set in early 20th century Mexico, and Giulio Petroni's Lee Van Cleef showcase *Death Rides a Horse* (\$29.95 each Blu-ray). Warner Archive goes the Blu-ray route with the solid 1958 sagebrush adventure *The Law and Jake Wade* (\$21.95), starring Richard Widmark and Robert Taylor as sworn antagonists.