

FRANCO NERO WAR DJANGO



FRANCO NERO IST

Keoma

Regie: ENZO G. CASTELLARI · Ein Film der URANUS-CINEMATOGRAFICA, ROMA
im ADRIA-FILMVERLEIH



CONTENTS

- 5 **Cast & Crew**
 - 7 **“He Can’t Die”: Keoma and the Widely Reported Demise of the Spaghetti Western (2019)**
by Simon Abrams
 - 19 **Shooting from the Hip: The Westerns of Franco Nero (2019)**
by Howard Hughes
 - 31 **Contemporary Reviews**
compiled by Roberto Curti and James Blackford
 - 34 **About the Restoration**
-



CAST

Franco Nero Keoma Shannon

Woody Strode George

William Berger William Shannon

Olga Karlatos Liza Farrow

Orso Maria Guerrini Butch Shannon

Gabriella Giacobbe The Witch

Antonio Marsina Lenny Shannon

Joshua Sinclair Sam Shannon (as **John Loffredo**)

Donald O'Brien Caldwell

Leonardo Scavino Doctor (as **Leon Lenoir**)

Wolfgang Soldati Confederate Soldier

Victoria Zinny Brothel Owner

Alfio Caltabiano Member of Caldwell's Gang

CREW

Directed by **Enzo G. Castellari**

Produced by **Manolo Bolognini**

Screenplay by **Mino Roli, Nico Ducci, Luigi Montefiori** and **Enzo G. Castellari**

Story by **Luigi Montefiori**

Director of Photography **Aiace Parolin**

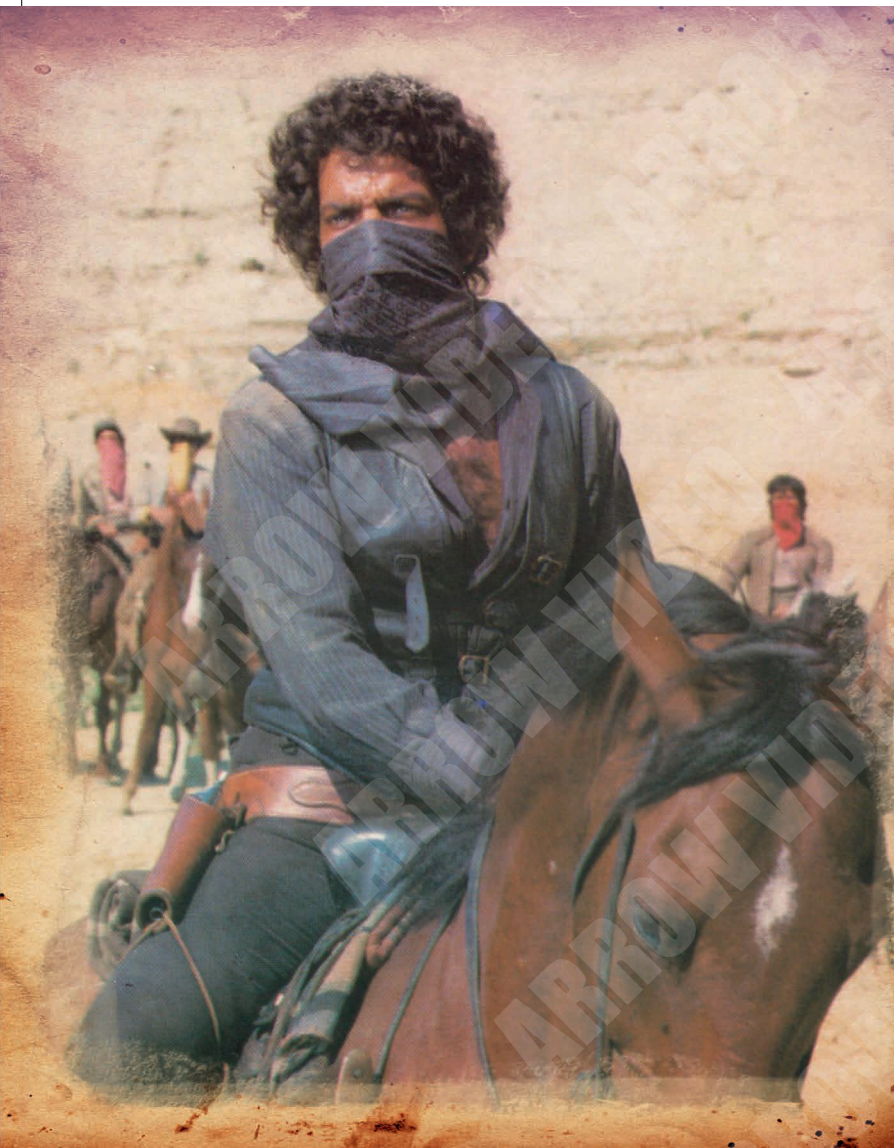
Music by **Guido** and **Maurizio De Angelis**

Production Manager **Stefano Pegoraro**

Art Director **Carlo Simi**

Film Editor **Gianfranco Amicucci**

Assistant Director and Stunt Co-ordinator **Rocco Lerro**



“HE CAN’T DIE”

KEOMA AND THE WIDELY REPORTED DEMISE OF THE SPAGHETTI WESTERN

by Simon Abrams

To a contemporary moviegoer, *Keoma* – a mystical revenge drama and Franco Nero vehicle set in a moribund mining town – must seem pretty strange. Filmed in 1976, *Keoma* follows Nero’s outlaw gunslinger as he helps to free quasi-romantic interest Liza (Olga Karlatos) and the other residents of a dying mining town from the corrupting influence of Caldwell (Donald O’Brien), a vicious wannabe real estate tycoon, and the racist Shannon brothers, led by Sam Shannon (Joshua Sinclair).

Keoma was not only one of the last financially successful spaghetti westerns, many diehard fans still consider *Keoma* to be the genre’s last great offering.¹ Case in point: in October 2018, *Il Tempo*’s Davide Di Santo introduced Italian readers to Italian filmmaker Enzo G. Castellari as the director of *Keoma*.² That’s particularly striking given that – as di Santo notes a few paragraphs into his article – Castellari also directed the 1978 *The Wild Bunch* riff *The Inglorious Bastards* (*Quel maledetto treno blindato*), a film that Quentin Tarantino famously re-imagined as *Inglorious Basterds* in 2009.

Still, *Keoma* was a modest financial hit when it was first theatrically released in Italy: it grossed approximately £1.57 billion, which at the time was equivalent to about \$182,000, and would now be worth somewhere between \$805,000 and \$828,000.³ Ironically, *Django* – the oft-imitated 1966 Franco Nero vehicle and western pastiche – only grossed £1.03 billion domestically. According to Italian filmmaker Sergio Martino – who directed *A Man Called Blade* (*Mannaja*, 1977), a halfway decent homage to not only *Django* but also *Keoma* – £1 billion was average for a spaghetti western during the genre’s heyday.⁴ But while *Django*’s box office may not seem impressive, bear in mind that was about \$642,796

1 - Various, ‘Keoma (Enzo G. Castellari, 1976)’ in *Spaghetti Western Database*. (Web. Jul 2006).

2 - *Ibid*.

3 - Figures accurate at time of writing. Via inflationtools.com and poundsterlinglive.com.

4 - Various, ‘A Man Called Sergio’ in *Mannaja: A Man Called Blade*. (DVD. Blue Underground: 27 Apr 2004).



in 1966 money, which is now worth anywhere around \$5 million. *Keoma* was therefore impressive at the time of its release since it debuted at the tail end of the spaghetti western cycle.

With all that said: *Keoma* inarguably lived in *Django's* shadow. Which is fitting, since Nero's long-haired, shirt-liberated, aphorism-spouting Keoma is his most iconic role after his character-defining performance as *Django's* tight-lipped title character. Nero was also the star of a handful of other Castellari films of varying quality, including the decent *Death Wish*-like 1974 *poliziotesschi* vigilante flick *Street Law (Il cittadino si ribella)* and *Cry, Onion! (Cippola Colt)*, an understandably lesser-known 1975 western-comedy.

Still, *Keoma* stands apart because it's not only a perfect example of *fin de siècle* decadence, but also a fantastic (and fantastically conflicted) meta-commentary on the then-moribund genre's final days, as Spaghetti Western Database writer Simon Gelten notes in his characteristically thoughtful *Keoma* write-up.⁵ Just look at *Keoma's* opening scene: the movie begins with a half-observed wide shot of a rider (Nero) on horseback. Keoma enters the film in a frame within the camera's frame: an open doorway, similar to the one that surrounds John Wayne's haunted anti-hero/tracker Ethan Edwards at the end of *The Searchers* (1956). That's especially noteworthy since Keoma is, like Wayne's character, a self-described "half-breed" who grew up to become a Civil War vet. But beyond that, Keoma is pointedly different than Edwards: while Keoma is an ex-Union soldier, Edwards is an ex-Confederate soldier. Also: Keoma was brought up by Caucasian rancher William Shannon (William Berger) – father of Sam and the two other Shannon boys – unlike Edwards, who is one-eighth Cherokee.

Still, attentive viewers will note that the doorway that frames and introduces us to Keoma is slightly askew: the door frame is, from our perspective, framed a little off-center and to the right. Here, Castellari's careful but playful framing perfectly exemplifies how he, as a gifted cinematic image-maker, regularly applied his art history degree.⁶ In a 2015 interview with USC's Jon Fauer, Castellari explicitly said that this training generally "helped me in discussions with [art directors] and [costumer designers] because I could draw sketches with a pencil. I could [also] explain shots by drawing them for [directors of photography]."⁷

But wait, there's more to Keoma's first scene: you can also hear the wind howling as the in-frame door repeatedly flaps open and closed. I don't think we're in Monument Valley any more, Toto. We are, however, in the same realm of post-modern John Ford homages that Sergio Leone introduced western fans to in genre-redefining pastiches like *A Fistful*

5 – Simon Gelten, 'Keoma Review' in *Spaghetti Western Database*. (Web. 27 Oct. 2017).

6 - Jon Fauer, 'Enzo Castellari at USC' in *Jon Fauer's Film and Digital Times*. (Web. 2 Feb. 2015).

7 - Op. cit. Gelten.

of Dollars (Per un pugno di dollari, 1964) and *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly (Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo, 1966)*. *Keoma* is, however, more like Leone's operatic 1968 epic *Once Upon a Time in the West (C'era una volta il West)*. Right down to Castellari's casting of character actor legend Woody Strode. Strode – playing Stony, one of three archetypal western figures – gets blown away by Charles Bronson and his muted harmonica early on in Leone's film. Strode also starred in Ford's golden age 1962 genre milestone *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, among other classic (and not-so-classic) westerns.

For *Keoma*, Castellari applied a number of influences – including *The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet, 1957)* and *Macbeth (1971)* – when he and actors Joshua Sinclair (AKA John Loffredo) and Nero actively rewrote the film's dialogue at the end of each shooting day.⁸ Still, *Liberty Valance* seems especially significant given how hard Nero's Keoma works to reconcile his nature as both a pseudo-mystical icon, with a mysterious one-liner for every occasion, and a human individual, with a past and the ability to empathize with other characters.

You can see Keoma's inner conflict play out when he first stumbles upon Strode's George, a now-drunk ex-slave who, back when Keoma was a young orphan, taught Nero's anti-hero how to hunt. In this table-setting encounter, Nero primarily speaks through body language. That's unusual given that, during the film's first twenty minutes, Keoma mostly communicates through confusing aphorisms.

Still, look at the way that Castellari frames Nero's face when Keoma stumbles upon George. Both actors are surrounded by negative space and selectively covered in dark shadows. Here, you can see why Castellari rewrote both Nero and Strode's parts with them in mind: he clearly loved filming them and wanted to (literally) put them in conversation with each other. Strode's connection to *Liberty Valance* also makes his inclusion in *Keoma's* cast pretty irresistible given that Ford's movie concludes with the now-immortal credo of: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." Keoma also frequently appears to struggle with the knowledge that he (and Nero, by extension) are now more legendary than human. That understanding predictably does not sit well with Nero's foil.

Keoma's inner conflict is most clearly articulated in the film's score, composed by biological brothers and regular Castellari collaborators Guido and Maurizio De Angelis. Castellari conceived of the score's Leonard-Cohen-meets-Bob-Dylan-style music as he edited *Keoma*, during which time he used a temporary soundtrack comprised of tracks from the scores of both *McCabe & Mrs. Miller (1971)* and *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (1973)*. The De Angelis brothers' score is sung by Susan Duncan Smith and Cesare De Natale, who

8 - Op. cit. Fauer.



simultaneously comment on the on-screen action and reveal the characters' inner motives. Both Smith and De Natale had also previously worked with the De Angelis brothers on the score for the Castellari-Nero collaboration *Street Law*. That film's prog rock-like soundtrack was fairly popular, especially its title theme 'Goodbye, Friend', which American moviegoers might recognize from the Tarantino-esque 2010 revenge drama and Dwayne Johnson vehicle *Faster*.

Keoma's score is, understandably, still very divisive among spaghetti western fans. The film's opening theme is performed by Smith, whose voice has a Maria Callas-like wobble every time she hits (and sometimes has to sustain) a high note. Smith's voice is sadly not as confident or as seductive as Callas, though I imagine that Castellari and his crew liked her voice's more jagged, atonal qualities. Smith is also unfortunately saddled with puzzling, run-on lyrics like "When there's no way to end, you must leave" and "Help, this time, if you don't want, I don't want, I don't want". Eventually, Smith is joined by De Natale, who has a weirdly springy baritone voice and a thick Europudding accent. The juxtaposition of Smith and De Natale's voices is unusual, but it is, at the very least, memorable given that the material they had was essentially Bertolt Brecht by way of Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell.

At the same time, Castellari and Nero speak most eloquently for the title character (and his concerns) in scenes where Keoma is directly juxtaposed with George. It's no coincidence that Keoma only starts to talk like a normal person when he meets George. In this scene, the past very literally humanizes Nero's character and reveals him to be more than just an icon. That trend continues when Keoma reunites with William Shannon, another blast from Keoma's past.

But Keoma and George's conversation is even more revealing. In a later scene, Nero's anti-hero unfairly corners Strode's drunk: "What's happened to you, George? I used to admire you so much. I've never forgotten the lessons you taught me. You were my idol: you, a black man, and me, half-Indian." There's more to Keoma's righteous, but self-serving rant, but it takes a while for him to admit that to himself. George is essentially the spark that Keoma uses to light a fire under his own ass.

Without George, Keoma would probably never understand his own motives. In a later scene, Liza effectively cuts Keoma off by asking: "Why are you helping us?" You can feel the weight on Nero's shoulders as his character pauses to think: "Myself, maybe." Here's a rare moment where Keoma speaks completely honestly, both verbally and physically. Finally: Keoma, the character, and Nero, the icon, are in sync.

You may have noticed that I keep emphasizing Keoma and George's platonic relationship at the risk of downplaying Keoma and Liza's romance. That's mostly because Castellari doesn't appear to be as interested in Keoma and Liza's bond, though he does clearly like to shoot Karlatos's face. Just look at the scene where Liza squares off with Sam. Sam hides his face behind a paisley bandanna, which allows Castellari to emphasize Sinclair's piercing stare and the beads of sweat on Sinclair's tan forehead. But Liza returns Sinclair's gaze with a hard look of her own; her emerald-green eyes could cut diamonds.

Also, Keoma and George's palpably tense relationship is basically the engine of Castellari's film. You can see that in the (again, literally) critical scene where Keoma unfairly lectures George for abandoning the mining town when his fellow townsfolk/moviegoers needed him most. You can also see it in George's inevitable death scene, one of the most indelible salutes to a western icon this side of the symbolic death of John Wayne's on-screen persona in *Liberty Valance*.

Strode – who had a rough time working with Ford on *Liberty Valance* – would ditch the western genre after *Keoma*, but also before the spaghetti western cycle effectively stopped in 1978 with *A Man Called Blade*. But Nero would return to the genre in the Castellari-helmed 1994 curio *Jonathan of the Bears* (*Jonathan degli orsi*). *Jonathan of the Bears* viewers might recognize Nero's look – scraggly beard, tattered clothes, and long flowing wig – from *Keoma*.

If nothing else, *Keoma* proves that the spaghetti western – in all of its idiosyncratic, self-referential glory – will never die. There are a number of superior examples of the genre, but very few of them conclude with such a wild and truthful self-defense: Nero's Keoma rides away from the smoking wreckage of the film's by-then thoroughly busted narrative. He declares that Liza's newborn son can "never die". "And you know why? Because he's free, and a free man can never die."

£ = Italian Lira

Simon Abrams is a New York-based author, movie critic, and film programmer. His first book is Guillermo del Toro's The Devil's Backbone, co-written with Matt Zoller Seitz.





SHOOTING FROM THE HIP THE WESTERNS OF FRANCO NERO

by Howard Hughes

Franco Nero has made over 200 films and TV productions, in every conceivable genre, from musicals such as *Camelot* (1967), to cult sci-fi *The Wild, Wild Planet* (*I criminali della galassia*, 1965) and everything in-between. Some of his diverse career highlights include an adaptation of DH Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy* (1970), an appearance in Luis Buñuel's *Tristana* (1970), the arthouse psychodrama *A Quiet Place in the Country* (*Un tranquillo posto di campagna*, 1968), a host of political and crime films (including *Day of the Owl* [*Il giorno della civetta*, 1968] and *Confessions of a Police Captain* [*Confessione di un commissario di polizia al procuratore della repubblica*, 1971]) and Hollywood blockbusters such as *The Bible: In the Beginning...* (1966), *Force 10 from Navarone* (1978) and *Die Hard 2* (1990). He has also starred in TV miniseries, such as *The Pirate* (1978) and *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1984). He's appeared in westerns of all kinds – as mercenaries, lawmen, drifters and avengers – as well as playing journalist John Reed in *Mexico in Flames* (*Krasnye kolokola, film pervyy - Meksika v ogne*, 1982) and having a cameo as a slave owner in Quentin Tarantino's 'spaghetti southern' homage *Django Unchained* (2013).

Nero is a prolific actor, but also an underrated one. An extraordinarily handsome young man, with blue eyes and a strong jawline, his real name was Francesco Clemente Giuseppe Sparanero, but he adopted the more accessible stage name Franco Nero. It was in spaghetti westerns that he initially made the greatest impact. A supporting role as unwelcome lothario Charley Garvey in Albert Band's *The Trampers* (*Gli uomini dal passo pesante*, 1965), billed as 'Frank Nero', was followed by his starring role for Sergio Corbucci in what remains his most famous role, the coffin-dragging avenger with a machine gun in *Django* (1966). The film, with its surreal mix of intense violence and implausibility, has become a major cult film and forever cemented Nero's reputation as a leading star of spaghetti westerns. He reprised the role in 1987 for *Django Strikes Again* (*Django 2 - Il grande ritorno*) – with the machine-gun, but without Corbucci.

When *Django* was a big success at the Italian box office (it remains Nero's most successful western in Italy), Nero starred in two westerns to capitalize on its success – Ferdinando



Baldi's *Texas Adios* (*Texas, addio*) and Lucio Fulci's *Massacre Time* (*Le colt cantarono la morte e fu... tempo di massacrè*). Both traded heavily on Nero's 'Django' persona and both were released in Italy in August 1966. In *Texas, Adios*, for the only time in his career, Nero played a sheriff, who rides south of the border to Mexico to settle a personal score. Baldi was a minor-league Corbucci, adept at lively action narratives, and this was reflected in the casting of stuntmen and acrobats such as Alberto Dell'Aqua, Lucio De Santis, Tomas Blanco and Remo De Angelis in prominent roles. Nero did many of his own stunts and fight scenes, dispensing with the need for a double, and was also an excellent horseman. *Massacre Time* sent Nero's avenger back to his hometown and the film is notable for its savage violence (particularly a lengthy bullwhipping torture carried out on Nero's character). Fulci's film has two different English language dubs (*Massacre Time* and *The Brute and the Beast*), neither of which employs Nero's own voice. A feature of Nero's early westerns was that he didn't dub himself in the English language version, nor in the Italian one. In *Django*, Nero was voiced in the English language version by Tony Russel and in the Italian by Nando Gazzolo (who also dubbed Nero in *Massacre Time*). In the Italian version of *Texas, Adios* Nero's voice is provided by Enrico Maria Salerno, while in English we hear Dan Sturkie.

Man, Pride and Vengeance (*L'uomo, l'orgoglio, la vendetta*, 1967) was the first western where Nero's own voice was heard in the English language dub (though he was still dubbed in the Italian version, this time by Giancarlo Maestri). Directed by Luigi Bazzoni, it was released in Italy in December 1967, after Nero's foray into Hollywood as Lancelot Du Lac in *Camelot*. Nero was reunited with Alberto Dell'Aqua for the film, which Nero counts as his favourite of all the films he has made – he gives a superb performance as Jose, a disgraced soldier who is seduced and humiliated by a bewitching brown-eyed gypsy. It's an adaptation of Prosper Mérimée's *Carmen* and though the film was set and filmed in Spain, it was sold as a western in many countries. In Germany it was a 'Django' film, *Mit Django kam der Tod* ('With Django Comes Death'), with Nero as Django and Tina Aumont's Carmen renamed Conchita. Nero's blue Spanish army uniform and kepi at the beginning of the film resembles an American Union blue uniform, while the latter part of the film in the desert, when Jose falls in with smugglers and robbers, closely resembles a spaghetti western. The excellent cinematography captured the scorching Andalusian vistas in all their glory. The director's brother Camillo Bazzoni was the cinematographer, with future Oscar-winner (and the Bazzonis' cousin) Vittorio Storaro as camera operator. Bazzoni, Nero and Storaro later worked together on the ultra-stylish giallo *The Fifth Cord* (*Giornata nera per l'ariete*, 1971).

Nero was back with Sergio Corbucci for *The Mercenary* AKA *A Professional Gun* (*Il mercenario*), which was released in Italy in December 1968. In the English dubbing, Nero's distinctive Italian-voice was passed off as Polish in his role as Captain Sergei Kowalski, a mercenary making money out of the Mexican Revolution. The big-budget production,

bankrolled by top Italian producer Alberto Grimaldi, was Corbucci's most polished western – with a black sense of humor present amid the serious violence. A semi-sequel, *Compañeros* (*Vamos a matar Compañeros*) came out in Italy in December 1970 and continued in the same vein, with Nero cast as a Swedish arms dealer, Yod Petersen. Both co-starred Jack Palance as Nero's rival and both were considerable successes, remaining among the most perennially popular offerings the genre has to offer. A falling out with Corbucci led to Nero making his next Mexican Revolution western, *Long Live... Your Death* (*Viva la muerte... tua!*, 1971), with director Duccio Tessari. This paired Nero with another disgruntled star, Eli Wallach, who had been promised the lead in Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dynamite* AKA *Duck, You Sucker* (*Giù la testa*, 1971), which had then been given to Rod Steiger. Nero's accent this time was supposedly Russian, as he played Prince Dimitri Vassilovich Orlowsky, while Wallach was Alfonso Lozoya, a lowly bandit who is mistaken for rebel hero El Salvador. Lynn Redgrave, the sister of Nero's long-term partner, co-star and later wife Vanessa, played feisty Irish journalist Mary O'Donnell. As it turned out, *Long Live... Your Death* – also released as *Don't Turn the Other Cheek* – was much better than Corbucci's own third instalment of his Mexican Revolution films, *What am I Doing in the Middle of a Revolution?* (*Che c'entriamo noi con la rivoluzione?*, 1972) and showcases Nero's best comedic performance in a spaghetti western. Nero followed it with another unusual western, Paolo Cavara's *Deaf Smith & Johnny Ears* (*Los amigos*, 1973), which teamed Anthony Quinn as Erastus Smith, a deaf-mute, and Nero as his exuberant sidekick Juanito 'Johnny Ears'. They're spies working undercover as insurrection boils in the Republic of Texas in 1836, in what is probably Nero's most underrated western, superbly photographed by Tonino Delli Colli.

Nero then scored two massive hits in Europe which were inspired by Jack London's Klondike adventures – Lucio Fulci's *White Fang* (*Zanna Bianca*, 1973) and *Challenge to White Fang* (*Il Ritorno di Zanna Bianca*, 1974), with canine heroics and sentimentality to the fore. These outdoor adventures set around Dawson City in Canada and Nome in Alaska are quite violent by today's standards, though they were aimed at a family audience and later played on afternoon TV. Nero played Jason Scott, an intrepid journalist in the first film, who has become a famous author of tales of adventure in the second film. Both these picturesque 'Northwesterns' highlight Nero's adaptability to role and material. Nero's western 'look' had changed by the early-1970s too. In his early westerns (*Django*; *Texas, Adios* and *Massacre Time*) his facial appearance, with stubby beard and moustache, seems inspired by Clint Eastwood. He appears both clean-shaven and bearded as Jose in *Man, Pride and Vengeance*, but by the early-1970s he sported a moustache that remains his most familiar look – the way he appeared in *Compañeros*, *Long Live Your Death*, the 'White Fang' films and countless other films.



Cry, Onion! (Cipolla Colt, 1975) is far and away Nero's most atypical western. It's the first of Nero's western collaborations with Enzo G. Castellari, a director with whom he had a fruitful creative partnership that equalled Nero's work with Corbucci. The pair's *The Marseilles Connection* AKA *High Crime* (*La polizia incrimina la legge assolve*, 1973) is the archetypal example of the violent crime films that became known as *poliziotteschi*. Composers Guido and Maurizio De Angelis were also part of the team, with their music an essential ingredient of the formula for success. *Cry, Onion!* is a surreal slapstick comedy, with Nero cast as an onion-eating drifter, which won't be enjoyed by fans who like Nero for his no-nonsense, violent western roles. Made with a big budget in Almeria and produced by Carlo Ponti, the film has Nero's hero helping two orphans defend their homestead against a land-grabbing oil baron. How on earth Castellari talked Sterling Hayden and Martin Balsam into appearing in the film, as a crusading journalist and the oil baron (who has a deadly golden mechanical hand) remains a mystery. Nero didn't use his own voice in the English language dub, but was saddled with an inappropriate voice that sounds like James Stewart. It's a daft film and the 1910 setting allows Castellari to feature such modern technology as motorbikes and automobiles, which were both regular presences in Nero's later westerns. It's also one of a series of 1970s Italian westerns, including *A Fistful of Dynamite*, *It Can Be Done Amigo* (*Si può fare... amico*, 1972) and *Bad Kids of the West* (*Kid il monello del west*, 1973), that feature children in prominent roles.

Nero and Castellari's next western assignment was much more satisfying and successful, even if it was as unusual as *Cry, Onion!* in its approach and depiction of classic western myths. *Keoma* (1976) was also released as *The Violent Breed*, *Django Rides Again* and *Django's Great Return* – more for Nero's involvement than any resemblance to Corbucci's film. Nero played Keoma, the mixed-race son of rancher William Shannon (William Berger). Following the American Civil War, Keoma returns to his hometown, Skidoo City, to find it plague-ridden and oppressed by Confederate renegades. Keoma also faces the hatred of his racist, bullying stepbrothers – Sam (Joshua Sinclair, as 'John Loffredo'), Butch (Orso Maria Guerrini) and Lenny (Antonio Marsina). The stunt work and action is energetically staged, with Peckinpah-style slow-motion and blood squibs utilised by the stunt team. Skidoo City could have appeared in *Django* (it's the same set at Elios Film, Rome) and Carlo Simi was again the film's art director. The street is dominated by a ramshackle mine's entrance façade which conceals the Elios set's church tower.

For this outing, Nero's hero sports a distinctively indigenous look unlike anything the actor had adopted before – a lion's mane of long hair, whiskers, a headband, buckskins, beads, a hairy chest, ammo bandoliers, open crown Stetson hat and a long leather range coat, and is armed with knives, a Colt .45 revolver, Winchester rifle and a sawn-off double-barrelled shotgun. Nero also dubbed his own voice in both the English and Italian language versions

of the film. Among a strong cast, Woody Strode gives one of his finest performances as Keoma's mentor, George, who has been driven to alcoholism. *Keoma* was a great success in Italy and remains one of the boldest westerns ever made – dark, grimy, almost medieval in its primal energy, with a very weird score by the De Angelis brothers. Nero and Castellari reunited years later for a partial remake of *Keoma*, though the title seems more inspired by *Dances with Wolves* (1990). An Italian-Russian co-production, *Jonathan of the Bears* (*Jonathan degli orsi*, 1994) saw Nero play Jonathan Kowalski, an orphan raised first by bears, then by Native Americans, who faces greedy oil baron Fred Goodwin (John Saxon). Originally titled *Navajo Jones*, it was marketed as *Keoma 2* in some media and was released on DVD in Germany as *Keoma 2 – Die Rache des weißen Indianers* ('The Revenge of the White Indian'). It was dedicated to western writer Clair Huffaker and director Sergio Corbucci.

Though the western fad had passed by the late-1970s, Nero's popularity was cemented with the arrival of home video. Nero's westerns were well served on VHS during the 1980s video boom. In the UK, *Django* and *Texas, Adios* were both released by Inter-Ocean Video, *Massacre Time* was released by Cinehollywood as *Colt Concert*, *Man, Pride and Vengeance* was issued by Videomedia, *A Professional Gun* by Market Video and *Deaf Smith & Johnny Ears* by MGM/UA Home Video. *Keoma* was released as *The Violent Breed* by Hokushin, while Iver Film Services released both *Compañeros* and *Long Live Your Death*. Only the 'White Fang' films, *The Trampers* and *Cry, Onion!* missed out. These VHS releases were in the so-called pre-cert era and remain highly collectible today, for their box artwork if not their picture quality. In the digital era, with the huge leaps forward in picture and sound restoration, Nero's films are still popular. He remains one of the top stars of Italian cult cinema and some of his westerns – *Django*, *A Professional Gun*, *Compañeros* and *Keoma* – are among the genre's most popular works.

Howard Hughes writes about film, history and music in print and online. He is the author of a range of film books including Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult and Once Upon a Time in the Italian West: The Filmgoers' Guide to Spaghetti Westerns.





CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

compiled by Roberto Curti and James Blackford

With *Keoma*, Franco Nero returns to the genre and type of character which first gave him notoriety with *Django*. Long beard and hair, frowning face and looking not very reassuring, he is a man who sinks his own bitterness in solitude. The year is 1865: the Civil War is over and the enigmatic individual named Keoma is on his way home. He finds his house destroyed, his village struck by pestilence and ravaged by a gang of outlaws who are aiming at isolating the place with the help of other adventurers. Keoma is the hero who attempts, first with mixed results and then successfully, to fight the violence and cruelty of the bandits and their acolytes.

[...] the film is enriched by even too many visual embellishments, such as the repeated use of slow-motion in the scenes of killings; the dead jump in the air and fall to the ground in a rarefied atmosphere, in which the [...] horror of the killings seemingly dissolves in the evanescent outlines of dreams. Then it all goes back to the usual brutal realism, which the spectators of these films seemingly prefer.

Aldo Viganò, 'Franco Nero vendicatore' in *La Stampa*, 28 November 1976

In the rest of the world, cinema is facing a crisis by attempting to renovate itself, but in Italy there are still those who fiddle with the by-now worn-out formulas of the "spaghetti-western". That's the case with Enzo G. Castellari, who, in *Keoma*, dusts off Sergio Leone's formal Byzantinisms and pushes Franco Nero to once again play the role of the enigmatic and solitary avenger, as was the case ten years ago with *Django*. The long-bearded, tattered Keoma is a half-breed, a veteran of the Civil War who finds his village overwhelmed by pestilence and devastated by a gang of outlaws which also include his three stepbrothers, driven by an insane hatred for their bastard relative since childhood.

To face injustice and violence, Keoma can count only on his elderly father and on a faithful Indian who uses the bow as a defense weapon. The conflict leads up to two epilogues, the first depicting the hero's decisive showdown against the head outlaw, and then against the three stepbrothers.

Set in a West which has been ridiculously recreated in the Abruzzi mountains, the story unrolls amid a heap of embroidery, such as the exasperated and sickening use of slow-motion in the violent scenes, a soundtrack almost constantly punctuated by the whistling of the wind, the self-satisfied pursuit for eccentric camera angles, and the presence of an old diviner of misfortunes – the latter hinting at references to Elizabethan tragedy on the part of the [film]makers. But these tricks are too explicit and heavy-handed to be somehow convincing.

Add to this the mannered and often very bad acting on the part of the cast supporting the keen Franco Nero. Wolfango Soldati (the renowned writer's son) makes his debut as one of the evil brothers: we can only wish him a more felicitous chance next time.

Leonardo Autera, 'Vendicatore solitario' in *Corriere della Sera*, 4 December 1976

This film by the director Enzo G. Castellari [...] is irredeemable, as baleful as [the initial] idea of recovering the "Italian western", crammed in some forgotten closet. In fact, the shabby accessories of that second-rate cinema, as well as the most phony and degenerate imitations of the glorious Fordian stereotypes, have spilled [onto] the film's [director] like an avalanche. Whenever Castellari attempts to innovate the matter by way of Bergman-like introspection, the catastrophe is truly Biblical, thanks also to Franco Nero's solemn and silly performance.

David Grieco, 'Keoma' in *L'Unità*, 4 December 1976

Buried under the beans, the jokes, and the fistfights of the Hill & Spencer flicks, the Italian western has resurfaced. Of course, all these years have not passed in vain. In America, for instance, there has been a certain Mr. Peckinpah, who renovated the genre. And so, the second coming of the western, Italian-style, turns out a big, stodgy hodgepodge. This Keoma, perhaps, is some kind of Jesus Christ Superstar of the prairies, who protects a pregnant Mary Magdalene and is truly indestructible. The setting is just after the Civil War. Keoma slaughters his adversaries (the violent scenes are shot in slow-motion, precisely as Peckinpah has taught us) and in the end he leaves like the lone riders of the West (the real ones) used to do. Franco Nero is the same as always, Olga Karlatos is beautiful.

Angelo Falvo, 'Sempre più Nero' in *Corriere d'Informazione*, 9 December 1976

A bizarre and somewhat Biblical Italian western, which has been too severely cut in this version to allow one to follow its plot easily let alone its multiple Freudian undercurrents. It also relies rather innocently on some staples of the genre (the taciturn protagonist) which have been too heavily parodied in the past for them to appear more than unintentionally humorous or nostalgic. But visually it has many impressive if conventional aspects: a long atmospheric pre-credits introduction, adventurously incorporated flashbacks, and some baroque Christian imagery. Franco Nero, as the obsessed half-breed, is outrageously enjoyable, suggestive of Charles Manson caught in a western time warp. Castellari's rather ordinary direction won't immediately resuscitate the genre (the production of Italian westerns these days – like the Hong Kong martial arts films – is eccentric and primarily restricted to the domestic market); but *Keoma* is an effective reminder that the Italian western was always formally more intriguing than its critics would have one believe.

Colin Pahlow, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 44, no. 526, November 1977

ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Keoma is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with Italian and English mono audio. The original 2-perf 35mm camera negative was scanned in 2K resolution at EuroLab. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, scratches, picture instability and other instances of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. The mono Italian and English language tracks were remastered from the optical sound negatives at Deluxe Media, Los Angeles. The audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the dialogue was recorded entirely in post-production, as per the production standards of the period.

All original materials used in this restoration were accessed from Surf Film.

Restoration supervised by **James White, Arrow Films**

R3Store Studios

Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Andrew O'Hagan, Rich Watson, Jenny Collins

Deluxe Media

Jordan Perry

EuroLab

Laura Indiveri

Surf Film

Stefania Carnevale



PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **James Blackford**

Associate Producer **James Flower**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**

Production Assistant **Nick Mastrini**

Blu-ray Authoring and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

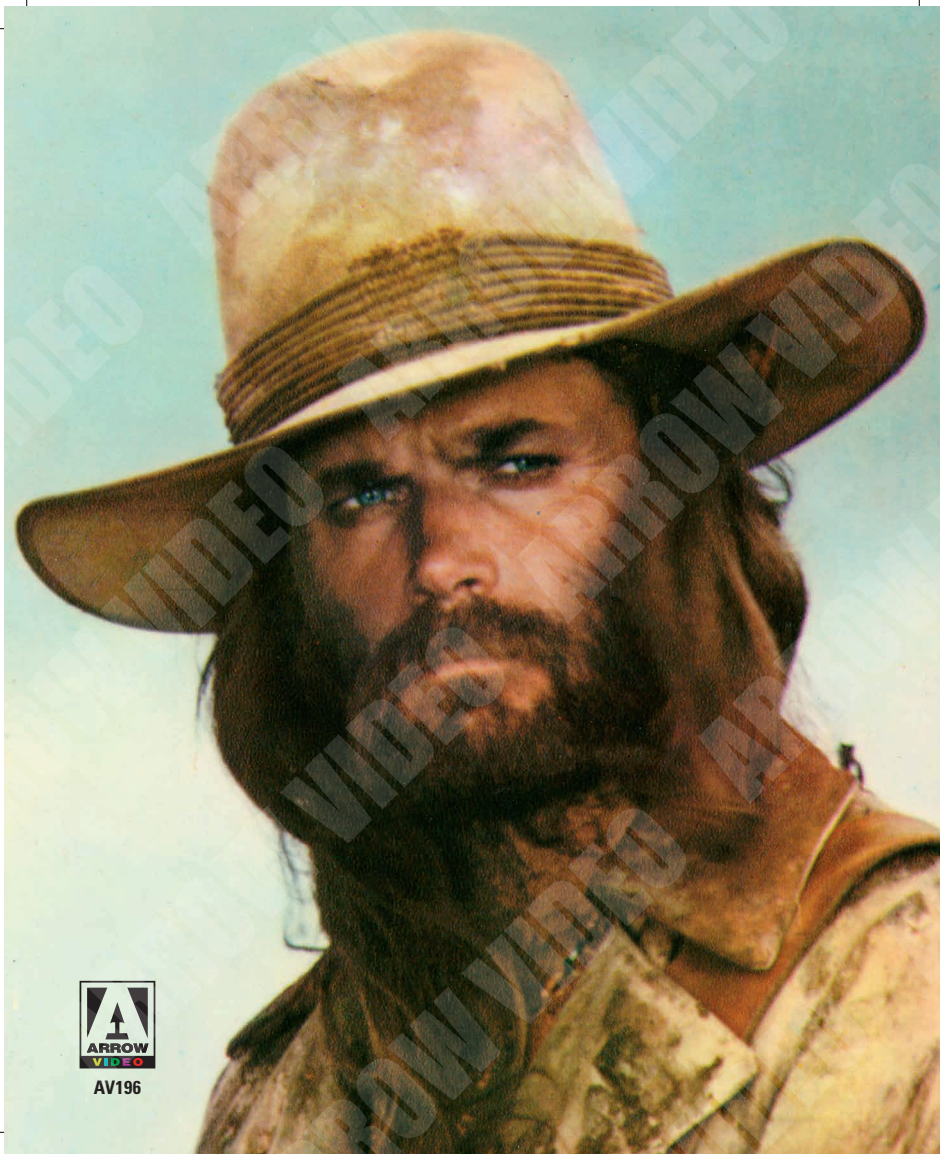
Artist **Sean Phillips**

Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Simon Abrams, Alex Agran, Gianfranco Amicucci, Enzo G. Castellari, Alex Cox, Roberto Curti, Roberto Dell'acqua, Austin Fisher, Manlio Gomasarica, Howard Hughes, Danilo Micheli, Luigi Montefiori, Franco Nero, Davide Pulici, Mike Siegel, Wolfgang Soldati, Massimo Vanni





AV196