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A PISTOL FOR RINGO

Una pistola per Ringo
1965

CAST

Giuliano Gemma (as **Montgomery Wood**) Ringo 'Angel Face'
Lorella De Luca (as **Hally Hammond**) Ruby Clyde
Fernando Sancho Sancho
Nieves Navarro Dolores
Antonio Casas Major Clyde
José Manuel Martín Pedro
Manuel Muñiz (as **Pajarito**) Tim
Juan Casalilla (as **Juan Casalilla**) Mr. Jenkinson
Pablito Alonso Chico
Nazzareno Zamperla Main Sancho henchman
Francisco Sanz (as **Paco Sanz**) The Colonel
José Halufi Member of Sancho's gang
Francisco Martínez Celeiro (as **George Martin**) Ben, the sheriff

CREW

Written and Directed by **Duccio Tessari**
Produced by **Luciano Ercoli**, **Alberto Pugliese**
Production Manager **Antonio Negri**
Assistant Director **May Velasco**
Director of Photography **Francisco Marín**
Camera Operator **José Climent**
Edited by **Licia Quaglia**
Music by **Ennio Morricone**
Conducted by **Bruno Nicolai**
The Song "Angel Face" is Sung by **Maurizio Graf**
Sound Technician **Alberto Bartolomei**
Set Design and Costumes **Carlo Gentili**
Art Director **Juan Alberto Soler** (as **Juan Alberto**)
Special Effects **Antonio Molina**
Make-up Artist **Franco Di Girolamo**

THE RETURN OF RINGO

Il ritorno di Ringo
1965

CAST

Giuliano Gemma (as **Montgomery Wood**) Capt. Montgomery Brown / Ringo 'Angel Face'
Fernando Sancho Esteban Fuentes
Lorella De Luca (as **Hally Hammond**) Helen Brown / Hally Fitzgerald Brown
Nieves Navarro Rosita
Antonio Casas Sheriff Carson
Manuel Muñiz (as **Pajarito**) Myosotis / Morning Glory
Mónica Sugranes Elizabeth Brown
Victor Bayo Jeremiah Pitt
Tunet Vila Mimbreno, the Apache medicine man
Juan Torres Bartender
José Halufi Gravedigger
Francisco Martínez Celeiro (as **George Martin**) Don Francisco 'Paco' Fuentes

CREW

Directed by **Duccio Tessari**
Written by **Duccio Tessari**, **Fernando Di Leo**
Produced by **Luciano Ercoli**, **Alberto Pugliese**
Production Manager **Antonio Negri**
Supervising Producer **Luis Marín**
Assistant Director **May Velasco**, **Fernando Di Leo**
Director of Photography **Francisco Marín**
Camera Operator **Sergio D'Offizi**
Edited by **Licia Quaglia**
Art Director **Juan Alberto Soler** (as **Juan Alberto**)
Make-up Artist **Franco Di Girolamo**
Costumes **Rafael Borqué**
Special Effects **Antonio Molina**
Master of Arms **Rinaldo Zamperla**
Hair Stylist **Hipólita López**
Wardrobe Mistress **Marina Rodríguez**
Sound Technician **Alberto Bartolomei**
Music by **Ennio Morricone**
Conducted by **Bruno Nicolai** (uncredited)
The Song "Il ritorno di Ringo" is Sung by **Maurizio Graf**



DUEL ROLES: THE RINGO STARS

By Howard Hughes

Duccio Tessari's two Ringo films, *A Pistol for Ringo* and *The Return of Ringo*, are not only connected by the title character's name. They were made by the same film crews, using the same western set called Esplugas City, near Barcelona. The films also feature scores composed by Ennio Morricone and title songs performed by Maurizio Graf, and the same actors appeared in both films, playing different roles in each scenario.

GIULIANO GEMMA

Playing Ringo on screen in *A Pistol for Ringo* (*Una pistola per Ringo*, 1965) and *The Return of Ringo* (*Il ritorno di Ringo*, 1965) turned Giuliano Gemma into one of Italy's biggest stars overnight. Even though he appeared under the pseudonym 'Montgomery Wood', word soon got around. He'd previously appeared in sword and sandal epics, including the lead in Duccio Tessari's *Sons of Thunder* aka *My Son, the Hero* (*Arrivano i titani*, 1962), but westerns arrived in the nick of time for the young Roman. The two Ringos are different characters, linked only by their name. In the first film, Ringo is a mercenary gunslinger, seemingly on the fringes of law and order, who agrees to help the sheriff solve a hostage situation, for a percentage of the bank's stolen money. The cleverly-constructed plot has Ringo infiltrate the ranch and side with the bandits, while actually freeing the captives. His charming 'Angel Face' Ringo persona became the one he'd most revisit over his series of 17 westerns that ran into the mid-1980s. The Ringo of *The Return of Ringo* was a much darker character, a fearful man up against the odds in a town ruled by Mexican bandits. He is trying to save his wife Hally and daughter Elisabeth from being held hostage in their own house this time, adding more depth to the western drama. Gemma's westerns with Giorgio Ferroni (*One Silver Dollar* [*Un dollaro bucato*, 1965], *Fort Yuma Gold* [*Per pochi dollari ancora*, 1966] and *Wanted* [1967]) and Michele Lupo (*Arizona Colt* aka *The Man from Nowhere* [1966]) capitalised on the Ringo films. Gemma's later role in the political western *The Price of Power* (*Il prezzo del potere*, 1969), a thinly-veiled allegory of the assassination and aftermath of the murder of John F Kennedy, is one of his most rewarding films. His most popular western was *Day of Anger* aka *Gunlaw* (*I giorni dell'ira*, 1967), where he was teamed with another hugely popular spaghetti western star in Lee Van Cleef. Gemma also worked with Duccio Tessari on other projects, including *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang* (*Bacia e spara*, 1966) which reunited the Ringo films cast in a zany, globetrotting James Bond spoof.

LORELLA DE LUCA

Working with her husband Duccio Tessari on the two Ringo films enshrined Florentine actress Lorella De Luca's name in spaghetti western history. She's rather delicate in the western environment, fragile and beautiful against the harsh, windblown, desert landscape, but holds her own in both films – physically and emotionally. In the first she played Miss Ruby, the sheriff's fiancée who is one of the hostages held by bandit Sancho at her father's ranch. As an easterner from Boston, Ruby is contrasted with bandita Dolores, who is her cultural opposite. In *The Return of Ringo*, De Luca played Ringo's wife – the equivalent of Penelope in Tessari's reworking of Homer's *The Odyssey* in a western setting. The film's finale, as she arrives in mourning attire for her unwanted wedding to the Mexican bandit Paco Fuentes, in a church aisle lined with coffins, is one of the great moments in spaghetti westerns. She was billed as 'Hally Hammond' in the credits for both films and played a character called Hally in the second movie. She also appeared in one of her husband's most atypical films, the charming musical fantasy *For Love... for Magic (Per amore... per magia...*, 1967), a *musicarello* starring singers Mina and Gianni Morandi (as Aladdin) and actors Rossano Brazzi, Sandra Milo, Daniele Vargas and Rosemary Dexter (as Princess Esmeralda). De Luca can also be spotted in Tessari's giallo *The Bloodstained Butterfly (Una farfalla con le ali insanguinate*, 1971) and the crime thriller *Three Tough Guys (Uomini duri*, 1974). Their little daughter Federica can be seen in *The Bloodstained Butterfly* too.

FERNANDO SANCHO

Born in Zaragoza, Aragon, Sancho went on to become one of the prolific spaghetti western actors and his presence always enlivened even the weakest effort. His role as bandit Sancho in *A Pistol for Ringo* was career-defining, but he'd already established himself in such Spanish-shot westerns as *The Seven from Texas (Antes llega la muerte*, 1964) and *Minnesota Clay* (1964). He was overshadowed in *The Return of Ringo* by his villainous brother, played by George Martin, but it was Sancho who made a career out of playing all types of Mexicans over the following decade in a total of 53 westerns – more than any other actor. He'd made 20 westerns by 1966! The best of the bunch included *Seven Guns for the MacGregors (7 pistole per i MacGregor*, 1966), *Django Shoots First (Django spara per primo*, 1966), *Hate for Hate (Odio per odio*, 1967), *If You Meet Sartana... Pray for Your Death (Se incontri Sartana prega per la tua morte*, 1968) and *Requiem for a Gringo (Réquiem para el gringo*, 1968), but he was a regular in Catalan westerns made at Balcazar Studios in Barcelona, and was one of its biggest assets, especially in its early days. Sancho's bandit/warlord often resembled a demented pirate king, complete with throne. In some films he adopted an eyepatch or even a peg-leg, making him even more piratical. Outside banditry, he played Mexican captain Segura in *The Big Gundown (La resa dei conti*, 1966), a corrupt official who's in the pockets of rich taxpayers and landowners. Westerns were Sancho's thing, despite his occasional attempts to escape them – he was particularly memorable

as the mayor up against the Knights Templar in *Return of the Evil Dead (El ataque de los muertos sin ojos*, 1973). He was much underrated as an actor, equally adept at conveying comedy, drama or sadism. One of his best roles was as roguish bandit Reyes in *The Boldest Job in the West aka Nevada (El más fabuloso golpe del Far-West*, 1972), where he is inadvertently hailed as a hero by the townsfolk for returning their stolen cash – his bemused expression, held in freeze-frame at 'The End', is priceless.

GEORGE MARTIN

Barcelona-born George Martin (real name Francisco Martínez Celeiro) became a big star of Catalan cinema. He appeared in several early Spanish-shot westerns, including *Two Gunmen (I due violenti*, 1964), *Fury of the Apaches (La furia degli Apache*, 1964), *Tomb of the Pistolero (La tumba del pistolero*, 1964) and *Joe Dexter (Oeste Nevada Joe*, 1965), but his roles in the Ringo films raised his profile immeasurably. He played Ben, the square-jawed sheriff of Quemado, in *A Pistol for Ringo*, a man of incorruptible principles and considerable toughness – Martin had been a stuntman and like Gemma required no double for the riding, action and fight scenes. Martin's performance as Paco Fuentes in *The Return of Ringo* is a masterclass in quiet menace: watch as he gently prompts reluctant Hally to say "I do" at their wedding ceremony, with the threatening "Dearest, Elisabeth is waiting for you". Martin was the hero of *Thompson 1880* (1966), *Clint the Stranger (Clint el solitario*, 1967), *Sartana Does Not Forgive (Sartana non perdona*, 1968), and *Watch Out Gringo... Sabata Will Return (Judás... ¡toma tus monedas!*, 1972) among others, and was also capable of villainy, particularly as outlaw Gus Kennebeck in *A Taste of Killing (Per il gusto di uccidere*, 1966). Martin teamed with Klaus Kinski in the *Clint the Stranger* sequel *The Return of Clint the Stranger (El retorno de Clint el solitario*, 1972), also called *There's a Noose Waiting for You... Trinity*. Martin's western *Let's Go Kill Sartana (Vamos a matar Sartana*, 1971) is a lost film these days, despite it being directed by Martin and co-starring Gordon Mitchell. Martin also appeared in the Three Supermen series of films, including the western spoof *Three Supermen of the West (...e così divennero i 3 supermen del West*, 1973), which has to be seen to be believed, as the three red-suited, caped heroes (Martin, Sal Borgese and Frank Braña) are transported by time machine from modern-day Rome to the old west. His best-known work outside westerns was the strange horror outing *Diabolical Shudder (Escalofrío diabólico*, 1972), which he also directed and co-wrote.



ANTONIO CASAS

Spanish actor Antonio Casas was a former footballer (he played for Atletico Madrid) who rose to prominence in a plethora of Spanish-shot westerns, including *Ride and Kill (Cavalca e uccidi)*, (1964), *Minnesota Clay* and as outlaw Pecos, who is sprung from Border City jail at the beginning of the US-Spanish MGM western *Son of a Gunfighter (El hijo del pistolero)*, (1965). He played refined aristocrat Major Clyde in *A Pistol for Ringo*, and was equally convincing as drunken Mimbres sheriff, Carson, in *The Return of Ringo*. His method of drawing a whiskey glass to his lips, despite his tremor, by using his neck scarf as a primitive pulley, is as moving as it is ingenious. Casas appeared in several of the top spaghetti westerns. He's Stevens, the farmer menaced by Lee Van Cleef's hired killer at the beginning of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo)*, (1966) and is almost unrecognisable behind a flowing saintly beard as gunslinger-turned-monk Brother Smith & Wesson, in *The Big Gundown*. Among his other western roles, he was the outlaw leader at the haven for badmen at Puerto Del Fuego in *Face to Face (Faccia a faccia)*, (1967) and played the father of Giuliano Gemma's character, who is murdered by outlaws working with corrupt politicians at the beginning of *The Price of Power*.

NIEVES NAVARRO

Andalusian actress Nieves Navarro, a former model, made her film debut in a *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) parody called *Toto of Arabia (Totò d'Arabia)*, (1965), made at Balcazar Studios, Barcelona, before she appeared in both the Ringo films. In *A Pistol for Ringo* she played bandit leader Sancho's girl, Dolores, who during the course of the siege falls for aristocrat Major Clyde. Her arrival at the Christmas Eve feast, descending the stairs on the Major's arm wearing a beautiful dress, echoes a scene in *My Fair Lady* (1964) and marks Dolores' transformation from bandit to lady. Her performance as Tarot-reading fortune-teller Rosita in *The Return of Ringo* is one of the most sensual and seductive by an actress in the spaghetti western genre. It signalled the way her career would later develop, as Navarro adopted the pseudonym 'Susan Scott' in the 1970s for a series of erotic and giallo movies. Tessari's two westerns were produced by Luciano Ercoli and Alberto Pugliese and Navarro later married Ercoli in 1972. Ercoli directed Navarro/Scott in three memorable gialli: *Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion (Le foto proibite di una signora per bene)*, (1970), *Death Walks on High Heels (La morte cammina con i tacchi alti)*, (1971) and *Death Walks at Midnight (La morte accarezza a mezzanotte)*, (1972). She also played murder victim Nina in Ercoli's crime drama *The Magnificent Daredevil (Troppo rischio per un uomo solo)*, (1973), which cast Giuliano Gemma as Formula One racing driver Rudi Patti, who becomes embroiled in the search for Nina's missing suitcase containing a heroin shipment. Navarro also appeared in exploitation and erotica, including *Emanuelle and the Last Cannibals (Emanuelle e gli ultimi cannibali)*, (1977) and *Emanuelle and Lolita (Emanuelle e Lolita)*, (1978), and was well cast as the sadistic widow lording it over her ranch hands in the spaghetti western *The Big Gundown*.

MANUEL MUÑIZ

An unusual-looking character actor, Manuel Muñiz acted in westerns under the name Pajarito, which translates from Spanish as 'Little Bird' or 'Birdie'. In *A Pistol for Ringo* he played talkative Quemado deputy Tim, who resembles many a western sidekick from Hollywood westerns. However, his role as eccentric florist Morning Glory in *The Return of Ringo* is far from a western stereotype. With his greenhouse of gadgets and cheerful demeanour, he's one of the most atypical characters to appear in the genre. In the English language version, the character is named Morning Glory after a species of trailing vine, but the Italian version names him Myosotis, the genus of the flower Forget-Me-Not – perhaps a clever reference by Tessari to Ringo returning incognito to a town that has forgotten him. Pajarito went on to appear in many more westerns, particularly at Balcazar Studios, including *Dynamite Jim (Dinamita Jim)*, (1966), *The Law of Violence (La legge della violenza)*, (1969) and *Now They Call Him Sacramento (Hijos de pobres, pero deshonestos padres... Le llamaban Calamidad)*, (1972), often as a drunk bar patron, undertaker or local eccentric. In *The Long Days of Vengeance (I lunghi giorni della vendetta)*, (1967), which was subtitled *Faccia D'Angelo (Angel Face)* and co-starred Giuliano Gemma and Nieves Navarro, Pajarito played a travelling dentist called Doctor Pajarito, who shelters Gemma's hero Ted Barnett.

JUAN TORRES

A regular bit-part actor in Balcazar Studios productions, Juan Torres was also the studio's administrator. Along with regulars such as head of production Valentin Sallent, production designer Juan Alberto Solar, wardrobe mistress Marina Rodriguez and carpenter Antonio Liza, Torres was involved in the day-to-day running of the studio under Alfonso Balcazar (Alfonso himself can be seen in the circus audience during a mindreading parrot act in Tessari's *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*). Torres also acted in small roles in many westerns filmed there. For Tessari, he played bank teller Henry in *A Pistol for Ringo* and the Mimbres saloon barman in *The Return of Ringo*. These were typical of Torres' type of role. He can be spotted in *Five Thousand Dollars on One Ace (Los pistoleros de Arizona)*, (1965), *The Texican* (1966), *Gentlemen Killer (Gentleman Jo... uccidi)*, (1967), *They Believed He Was No Saint (La caza del oro)*, (1972) and *None of the Three Were Called Trinity (Ninguno de los tres se llamaba Trinidad)*, (1973), among many others. One of his most prominent roles, in terms of screen time and dialogue, was as nervous watch salesman Jeremy Foster, a hostage at a relay station, in Juan Bosch's tense *Stagecoach of the Condemned (La diligencia de los condenados)*, (1970). He played barman Blinky in *Now They Call Him Sacramento* – the last of the westerns shot at the Esplugas City set – and also appeared in many other Spanish genre films, in fleeting, blink-and-you'll-miss-him appearances.

DUCCIO TESSARI

One of the founding fathers of spaghetti westerns, Tessari worked (uncredited) with his friend Sergio Leone on the screenplay for *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, 1964). Unlike Leone, whose films have a unique, easily-definable style, Tessari tackled many genres and varying subject matter and his style is more difficult to classify. He was a remarkably eclectic director, unafraid to try his hand at the unexpected, from horror films to musicals. His brace of Ringo westerns were among the most successful of the initial wave of westerns in Italy and helped to popularise the genre. As well as directing and co-writing the films, what's less known is that he also appeared in them as an actor. In *A Pistol for Ringo* he played Felipe, the nervous, chatty bandit who has his hand bashed by Ringo with a goblet and eventually goes stir-crazy during the siege. In *The Return of Ringo* Tessari has less screen time, but is more flamboyant, as a musical member of the Fuentes gang with a distinctive golden earring. He first appears in the Mimbres saloon, playing the guitar and singing, when Ringo enters the bar and encounters inhospitable Esteban Fuentes. Later he dances a high-kicking flamenco with Rosita at Villa Brown. Having played peekaboo with Fernando Sancho in the final shootout at the villa, Tessari's character is accidentally shot by his own comrades in mistake for Ringo. Tessari was known to wear a flower in his buttonhole when he directed and this is a key feature of the Fuentes brothers costuming in *Return*. Tessari also cameoed in his other films and can be spotted as Scott, a secret service agent, in *Kiss Kiss, Bang Bang*, as a key witness in *The Bloodstained Butterfly*, as aeronautical engineer De Santis amid the aerial acrobatics of *Winged Devils* (*Forza 'G'*, 1971) and look out for him being thrown onto a pool table by Fred Williamson in *Three Tough Guys*.

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Howard Hughes is the author of *Cinema Italiano: The Complete Guide from Classics to Cult*, *Once Upon a Time in the Italian West* and *The Kamera Guide to Spaghetti Westerns*.







SHOWDOWNS ON MAIN STREET: THE ESPLUGAS CITY STORY

By Howard Hughes

In the 1960s and '70s, Spanish westerns had two geographic centres of excellence – the Marchant family westerns were made near Madrid and on location in Andalusia, and the Balcázar family westerns, made in Barcelona and Catalonia. Balcázar Studios was home to Balcázar Producciones Cinematográficas, a production house started by Enrique Balcázar and his five sons, who created many westerns between 1964 and 1972. It often appeared in credits as P. C. Balcázar and had its own western street called Esplugas City constructed on site at Esplugues De Llobregat near Barcelona, a set which appears in all its western productions. For exterior desert scenes, Catalan westerns featured location footage filmed in Catalonia and Aragon, two Spanish regions that border France. Westerns made in this area were called 'bufifarra westerns', named after a variety of Catalan sausage, and are sometimes referred to as 'chorizo westerns' too, in the way culinary terms are often attached to global westerns. Popular desert, sierra and riverside locations in Aragon were in the area south of Fraga, within the province of Huesca. The topography includes distinctive ziggurat-shaped hills, mesas, cliffs and sweeping plains. Memorable locations are the panoramic Barraco De Valles, the plains at Candasnos and Seros, the Rio Cinca and the nearby ruined church of Ermita De Santa Maria De Chalamera at Alcolea De Cinca. Ranch sets were constructed at Castelldefels, Candasnos and Sabadell, and the rural village of Cardiel also appeared. Thanks to these locations, Balcázar Studios' westerns have a distinctive rustic look that sets them apart from other Spanish westerns. These Catalan westerns thrived on classic western themes, but explored them in interesting, innovative ways, often with the accent on familial feuds and revenge, amid romance and savage violence. Their leading stars included Giuliano Gemma, Francisco Martínez Celeiro (as 'George Martin'), Robert Woods, Nieves Navarro, Fernando Sancho and Luis Davila, while a lengthy roster of supporting players included Juan Torres, Pajarito, Cesar Ojinaga, Fernando Rubio, Miguel De La Riva (as 'Mike Rivers'), Paco Sanz, Antonio Molino Rojo, Luis Induni, Frank Braña and the great villain Gaspar 'Indio' Gonzales.

ESPLUGAS CITY: Mk I

Even before *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*) was a huge success in Continental Europe, a western set was built in September 1964 at Esplugues De Llobregat. This classic western-style street, designed by Juan Alberto Soler, was based on Twentieth Century-Fox's western street used in such films as *Forty Guns* (1957) and *Warlock* (1959). Some of the sets were false fronts, while others contained interior sets, such as the sheriff's office and the saloon. The saloon frontage is easily spottable, due to the distinctive fan design at the top of the veranda's supporting pillars. In later westerns it often had a sign advertising 'Golden Girls' over the swinging doors. In 1965 a Mexican village was added to the set, in 1966 a US cavalry fort and in 1967 the street was moved and remodelled to accommodate a major road development passing through the site. The Mk I set appeared in Duccio Tessari's Ringo films and several other westerns, while Mk II can be seen in *Sartana Does Not Forgive* (*Sartana non perdona*, 1968), *The Law of Violence* (*La legge della violenza*, 1969) and many latter-day Catalan westerns. The street set was spectacularly destroyed onscreen with dynamite and fire at the end of *Now They Call Him Sacramento* (*Hijos de pobres, pero deshonestos padres... Le llamaban Calamidad*, 1972), as part of the film's plot, when the set was ordered to be closed down by the government, who thought it gave the area a bad image.

The first western shot at Balcazar Studios was *Five Thousand Dollars on One Ace* (1965) a Spanish-Italian-West German co-production. It's original Spanish release title was *Los pistoleros de Arizona*. The film was shot in 48 days: 18 on studio interiors and exteriors, the remainder on location. American import Robert Woods starred as Jeff Clayton, a gambler who wins \$5,000 and a ranch in a card game, but has the money stolen from him when he helps Carrancho, a bandit. Untrustworthy rascal Carrancho is played with gusto by Fernando Sancho and was the blueprint for many Sancho portrayals over the next decade. At the ranch, which is co-owned by brother and sister David and Helen Greenwood, Clayton comes up against a land grabbing lawyer and his whip-wielding henchman, Jimmy Nero, who frame David for murder and robbery. A fast-moving, action-packed western, it pitted blond German villains – notably Helmut Schmidt as Jimmy Nero and Richard Häussler as sneaky lawyer Dundee – against Woods' hero. The newly-built saloon at Esplugas City had a high-sided mansard roof, with small dormers which were removed for later films. Location scenes were filmed in Aragon at the ranch set (high above a plain at Candanos in Huesca), at another ranch set at Fraga and the Rio Cinca. Producer Alfonso Balcazar turned director for this project, which was American Woods' debut in the European west. *Five Thousand Dollars on One Ace* was a great success on its initial release in Europe in December 1964 and was one of the most successful of the first wave of European westerns, as *A Fistful of Dollars* began to break box office records in Italy in the autumn and winter of 1964.

Released in October 1965, *Sunscorched* aka *Jessy Does Not Forgive...He Kills!* (*Tierra de fuego*) was one of several Spanish-West German westerns shot in Catalonia. The arrival of four outlaws in Fraserville causes tension and as their violence and intimidation escalates, the town's sheriff Jessy Kinley (Mark Stevens) can't act against them, as he was once a member of their gang and doesn't want his secret revealed. This is brutal stuff for 1965. When a local priest is beaten up and his son killed, Jessy must confront his former comrades. Marianne Koch (from *A Fistful of Dollars*) is stable girl Anna Lisa, who is strangled by outlaw Twitch, while Mario Adorf (from the West German/Yugoslav western *Winnetou the Warrior* [1963]) is chief bandit Abel Dragoner. Fraserville is the Esplugas City western set, with desert scenes in Fraga, Huesca.

Another Balcazar western, *Oklahoma John* aka *Ranch of the Ruthless* (1965) was much more traditional fare in the Hollywood mould. Sheriff Dan Cross (Rick Horn) arrives in the town of Red River, New Mexico, and quickly makes himself enemies. Georgiana White's father was killed during a stage hold-up and the crime has never been solved. Cross has to figure out why everyone is so interested in White's land and eventually discovers there's an oil field there. Cross takes on the might of wealthy rancher Rod Edwards (Jose Calvo) and his bullying hired gun Hondo, as played by Karl-Otto Alberty, who is best remembered as the Tiger tank commander in war movie *Kelly's Heroes* (1969) – that face makes him perfect as a western heavy.

GUNNING FOR RINGO

By far the most influential and successful of the first wave of Catalan westerns, Duccio Tessari's *A Pistol for Ringo* (*Una pistola per Ringo*) was released in Italy in May 1965 and in Spain in December that year. Italian Giuliano Gemma – billed under the American-sounding pseudonym 'Montgomery Wood' – headlined as charming, daring, deadly gunfighter Ringo, who is hired by the city of Quemado, New Mexico, to free hostages being held at a ranch by Mexican bandito Sancho and his gang of bank robbers, who have cleaned out Quemado's safe. Quemado is the Esplugas City set, but most of the action takes place in Almeria, Andalusia, at the finca (country house) at El Romeral, near San Jose, as Major Clyde's ranch. The story is set in the days leading up to Christmas and *Pistol's* mixture of comedy, romance, violence, tragedy and action was a sure-fire hit. It doesn't slavishly copy Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns and the plot always surprises, even down to its wistful ending. Ennio Morricone's classic score includes the title song 'Angel Face' sung by Maurizio Graf. Following the success of Gemma's Ringo character, the first of a flood of Ringo movies was Alberto De Martino's *\$100,000 for Ringo* (*100.000 dollari per Ringo*), released in November 1965. American actor Richard Harrison starred as Lee Barton who is mistaken for Ward Cluster, whose wife has been murdered by landgrabber and gun trafficker Tom Cherry

(Gerard Tichy). Barton, with help from bounty hunter Chuck (Fernando Sancho cast against type), defeats the villains who are trying to start an Indian war with the Apache. The catchy song 'Ringo Came to Fight', which accompanies the hero's arrival in Rainbow Valley, was sung by Bobby Solo, while Bruno Nicolai wrote the score. It was a massive success on its initial release in Italy. Of the 10 most popular films in Italy in 1965, six were westerns – *For a Few Dollars More* (*Per qualche dollaro in più*), four starring Giuliano Gemma and this one.

The official Ringo team returned with the aptly-titled *The Return of Ringo* (*Il ritorno di Ringo*) at the end of 1965, which heralded the return of Ringo to his home town – and also Gemma to the popular role. Not originally conceived as a Ringo film, this became an in-name-only sequel, which was Tessari's take on Homer's *The Odyssey*. Union captain Montgomery Brown (known locally as Ringo – a sign that the project wasn't originally to feature the character) returns to Mimbres in New Mexico, following the American Civil War, where Mexican bandits led by the Fuentes brothers, Paco and Esteban (George Martin and Fernando Sancho) have taken power. This is perhaps the best use of Esplugas City, as the windblown settlement of Mimbres, a place where the locals live in fear of their Mexican oppressors. The story unfolds, with references from Greek mythology to classics westerns such as *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and *Rio Bravo* (1959). Loretta De Luca played Ringo's wife Hally, the equivalent of Penelope in Homer's tale. Tessari's most assured western is more pessimistic and darker than *Pistol* and climaxes with Paco and Hally's wedding ceremony, which is interrupted before the blessing by Ringo's return, as he dramatically appears in the church doorway, in the eye of a dust storm. It was the third most successful film of the year in Italy, after *For a Few Dollars More* and *A Pistol for Ringo*.

Many Ringo films rode in the wake of these opening films. Ringo films from the official Balcazar Studios stable include *Five Dollars for Ringo* (*Cinco pistolas de Texas*, 1966) starring 'Anthony P. Taber'/Julio Perez Tabernero and *Who Killed Johnny Ringo* (*Wer kennt Johnny R.?*, 1966) starring Lex Barker, Joachim Fuchsberger, Marianne Koch and Ralf Wolter. Sergio Corbucci's *Johnny Oro* (1966) was retitled *Ringo and His Golden Pistol* for international release by MGM, while films of Italian origin included *Ringo's Big Night* (*La grande notte di Ringo*, 1966), *3 Bullets for Ringo* (*3 colpi di Winchester per Ringo*, 1966), *Ringo the Mark of Revenge* (*Ringo, il volto della vendetta*, 1966), *Ringo the Lone Rider* (1968) and spoofs such as *Two Sons of Ringo* (*I due figli di Ringo*, 1966), *Ringo and Gringo Against Everyone* (*Ringo e Gringo contro tutti*, 1966) and *Two Ringos from Texas* (*Due rringos nel Texas*, 1967). The mere mention of the name Ringo guaranteed at least a second glance from audiences eager to see more westerns featuring the character, though most owed little to Tessari's films.

THE STAMPEDE BEGINS

Balcazar Studios became very successful enterprise indeed, with the cameras rolling day and night at Esplugas City. When Hollywood western star Audie Murphy travelled to Barcelona to make a western for the Balcazars in 1965, the resulting film *The Texican* (1966) was released in Italy as *Ringo il Texano*. With Giuliano Gemma's Ringo films, this is probably the most widely seen of the Balcazar Studios westerns. In fact, it was a US-Spanish co-production between MCR Productions, Hollywood and Balcazar Productions, Barcelona. Murphy's nemesis was played by another ex-pat, guest star Broderick Crawford, who played murderous Luke Starr. Jess Carlin (Murphy), an ex-lawman hiding out in Mexico, returns to Texas to avenge the death of his brother Roy, the editor of the *Rimrock Clarion News*. Jess arrives in Rimrock (Balcazar Studios' Esplugas City set), to face the culprit, grouchy town tyrant Starr, who didn't like Roy's adverse publicity, as he land-grabs all he can on the Cherokee Strip.

The second of Robert Woods' Barcelona-shot butifarra westerns, *Man from Canyon City* (*¡¡Viva Carrancho!!*, 1965) sees Fernando Sancho reprise his popular Carrancho character from *Five Thousand Dollars on One Ace*. Prisoners Carrancho and Ryan (Luis Davila) escape through the desert, across the Rio Grande and into Mexico. At Canyon City they work for silver mine owner Morton (Woods, this time a villain) – Ryan as a gunhand, Carrancho as a chef. But when they witness Morton's appalling treatment of his Mexican workforce, Carrancho becomes El General Carrancho to mobilise the peasants in revolt. Renato Baldini, as mine foreman Greaves, suffers one of the great spaghetti western deaths, when he is blown apart by the stick of dynamite he's holding. Canyon City is the Esplugas City western set and a Mexican village set was constructed there too for this film. Wood's third Balcazar picture, *4 Dollars of Revenge* (*Cuatro dólares de venganza*, 1966), owes much to Tessari's second Ringo film, but it's one of few spaghetti westerns to end with a swashbuckling swordfight rather than a shootout.

The West German-Spanish western *A Place Called Glory* (*Die Hölle von Manitoba*, 1965) pitted the 'Winnetou' film series stars Lex Barker and Pierre Brice against each other in a gunfight staged in the boomtown of Glory City, as part of its annual Founder's Day celebrations. Brice plays a Frenchman from New Orleans, to explain his accent. Glory City was the Esplugas City western set. Other Balcazar Studios westerns of this hectic period include *Doc*, *Hands of Steel* aka *The Man with the Golden Pistol* (*L'uomo dalla pistola d'oro*, 1965) and Anthony Steffen's revenge western *Why Go on Killing?* (*¿Por qué seguir matando?*, 1966), which are defined by their powerful drama and visceral violence, to lighter outings such as *Dynamite Jim* (*Dinamita Jim*, 1966) and *Seven Guns for Timothy* (*7 magnífice pistole*, 1966). The latter was a *Magnificent Seven* spoof starring Errol Flynn's



son, Sean. Probably the most atypical of the Balcazar-produced westerns was Tinto Brass's *Yankee* (1966). Bursting with imagination, it's a bold comic-book western from a director who remains best known for his big-budget erotic movies. Gringo gunman Yankee (Philippe Leroy) rides into the territory of feared warlord Grande Concho (Adolfo Celi) and joins his gang, claiming to know the location of a cache of gold. But he's actually aiming to cash in on the rewards on the wanted gang. Brass makes good use of the barren Aragon landscape. Grande Concho's hideout was the church Le Ermita De Santa Maria De Chalamera, while town scenes were filmed at Esplugas City.

A couple of the Balcazar westerns, *Seven Pistols for a Gringo* (*Rio maldito*, 1966) and *Clint the Stranger* (*Clint el solitario*, 1967), used timberland, river and mountain locations in the Aiguestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park in the Catalan Pyrenees. The western town set at Esplugas City was still used for the town scenes, though *Seven Pistols for a Gringo* also used Ignacio F Iquino's modest western set known as IFI España at Castelldefels. Iquino has often been described as the Spanish Roger Corman and made a series of Catalan westerns of his own with his production company IFISA (the films begin with a distinctive IFISA logo). Iquino's westerns included *Joe Dexter* aka *Guns of Nevada* (*Oeste Nevada Joe*, 1965), *Five Dollars for Ringo*, *One Dollar of Fire* (*Un dólar de fuego*, 1966) and *Seven Pistols for a Gringo* (1966).

ESPLUGAS CITY: Mk II

With the relocation of the Esplugas City set, the second phase of Catalan westerns failed to match the quality of the first phase heyday of 1964-66, resulting in the street becoming more of a rented-out set than a studio facility. Films shot on the set included *The Long Days of Vengeance* (*I lunghi giorni della vendetta*, 1967), *Hate for Hate* (*Odio per odio*, 1967), *Professionals for a Massacre* (*Professionisti per un massacre*, 1967), *Saguaro* aka *I'll Die for Vengeance* (*Sapevano solo uccidere*, 1968) and *Twice a Judas* (*Due volte Giuda*, 1969). The studio continued to attract Hollywood actors to work at Balcazar. Jack Elam and Gilbert Rowland appeared opposite George Martin in *Sartana Does Not Forgive* aka *Sonora*. Martin starred as the black-coated avenger Sartana (Uriah in the original Spanish version), who is on the trail of outlaw Slim Kovacs (Elam), who raped and murdered his wife at the Los Alamos ranch. The film is essentially *For a Few Dollars More*, Balcazar Studios-style, with Roland as ambiguous gunman Kitchner. Most of the film takes place on the Esplugas City set, when Kovacs and his gang take over a town and this is one of the most Catalan of westerns – it's 100% butifarra.

Peter Lee Lawrence and Anthony Steffen were two spaghetti stars who continued making westerns into the early 1970s. Lawrence made *God in Heaven... Arizona on Earth* (*Una*

bala marcada, 1972) at Esplugas City, and *Dallas* (*Il mio nome è Scopone e faccio sempre cappotto*, 1972) teamed Steffen and Sancho in a nitro-glycerine-laced tale of factions warring over an emerald mine. One of the best of the latter-day Esplugas City-shot westerns, *They Believed He Was No Saint* (*La caza del oro*, 1972) was directed by Catalan filmmaker Juan Bosch, who wrote and directed several butifarra westerns, often billed as 'John Wood'. *They Believed He Was No Saint* was a partial remake of *Run, Man, Run* (*Corri uomo corri*, 1968), with Trash Benson (Steffen) and a bunch of vultures (including 'Indio' Gonzales as a mean hombre called Preacher) in pursuit of a saintly gold statue. The finale, as the four baddies try to make off across the desert with the statue, only for Trash to waylay them disguised as a Mexican sheep herder, is well staged. The film was partly shot at Cardiel, in Huesca, as the village of San Fermin, which is terrorised by Fernando Sancho's bandido Rojas.

A Spanish-Italian-French co-production, *The Boldest Job in the West* aka *Nevada* (*El más fabuloso golpe del Far-West*, 1972) offered Sancho a plumb role as bandit Reyes, who is part of a seven-strong gang who clean out the Sun Valley bank by tunnelling under the street. Muddy Sun Valley (a place that looks like it gets very little sun) was played by Esplugas City and the straightforward action and excellent cast make this a memorable outing. *The Return of Clint the Stranger* (*El retorno de Clint el solitario*, 1972) was a belated sequel to *Clint the Stranger*, with George Martin reprising his role. Again, patterned on *Shane* (1953), the plot added Klaus Kinski as bounty hunter Scott. For international release Clint became Trinity in the retitled *There's a Moose Waiting for You... Trinity*.

Other Mk II Esplugas City-shot westerns include *The Law of Violence*, an under-financed effort that features three low-budget filmmaking staples – a jet plane vapour trail in the sky, modern power cable pylons and an onscreen bug traversing the camera lens. *Twenty Paces to Death* aka *Saranda* (*Veinte pasos para la muerte*, 1970) starred Dean Reed as mixed-race Mestizo, in a post-Civil War tale of transgressional love and revenge. In *The Federal Man* (*Una cuerda al amanecer*, 1972), Steven Tedd's federal agent hero resembles Elvis (he appears to be wearing Yul Brynner's fringed black outfit from *Adiós, Sabata* [1970]), as he tracks down landgrabbers. Fernando Sancho appeared as gold prospector Sebastian, who strikes it lucky. Sancho belatedly reprised his Carrancho role from earlier Balcazar westerns in *Watch Out Gringo*, *Sabata Will Return* (*Judas... ¡toma tus monedas!* 1972), which pitted him against Rayo (George Martin), Texas (Vittorio Rielmy) and outlaw Luke Morton (Daniel Martin) in a treasure hunt for stolen gold: it's essentially *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* with two 'bads'. Sancho teamed up with Richard Harrison in *Stagecoach of the Condemned* (*La diligencia de los condenados*, 1970), which was for the most part a tense hostage situation western, and also in *Dig Your Grave Friend... Sabata's Coming* aka *I'll Forgive You Before I Kill You* (*Abre tu fosa amigo... llega Sabata*, 1971), which was an entertaining

manhunt western filmed on picturesque Catalan locations. Robert Woods starred in *Four Candles for Garringo* aka *My Colt, Not Yours* (*Un colt por cuatro cirios*, 1971), which was a pale shadow of his early Balcazar outings, and Craig Hill played bounty hunter Jeff Sullivan in the excellently-titled *And Crows Will Dig Your Grave* (*Los buitres cavarán tu fosa*, 1971).

THE FINAL CURTAIN

Industrious crows weren't the only ones digging themselves a hole in the early 1970s. As the decade wore on, the popularity of westerns made in Europe began to wane, mainly due to oversaturation of the market. The genre moved towards comedy as a way of sustaining production facilities, following the phenomenal success of *They Call Me Trinity* (*Lo chiamavano Trinità...*, 1970) and *Trinity Is Still My Name* (*Continuavano a chiamarlo Trinità*, 1971), which allowed Esplugas City to continue to be used as a standing set to its bitter end. Would-be comedies such as *My Gun... My Horse... Your Widow* (*Tu fosa será la exacta... amigo*, 1972), had their moments, if not of comedy then certainly of surprise. There were two 'Fat Brothers of Trinity' movies, which is probably two too many. They starred the hulking comedy trio of Cris Huerta, Ricardo Palacios and Tito Garcia as the Wesley brothers in *Fabulous Trinity* (*Los fabulosos de Trinidad*, 1972) and its laughter-free sequel *None of the Three Were Called Trinity* (*Ninguno de los tres se llamaba Trinidad*, 1973). Huerta also appeared in the self-explanatory *Karate, Fists and Beans* (*La ley del karate en el Oeste*, 1973).

Released in December 1972, the last film to be made at Esplugas City was *Now They Call Him Sacramento*, directed by studio supremo Alfonso Balcazar. It was a copycat comedy of fistfights and gluttony, with Michael Forest as Sacramento (a moseying, milk-drinking Terence Hill clone) and Fernando Bilbao as his sidekick, Big Jim (a bearded Bud Spencer type). The pair steal a train shipment of money and are joined in their adventures by Big Jim's father Tequila (played with enthusiasm by Luigi Bonos). During the course of the film, the set's buildings are dynamited, until it's nothing but a burning ruin. The first to go is the saloon set, obliterated spectacularly with dynamite. During the final confrontation between the heroes and the villains (including Antonio Molino Rojo and Indio Gonzales) the sets are blown apart, in some of the most pyrotechnic explosions ever to grace spaghetti westerns. The huge fire and the vivid destruction were filmed with three cameras, as the set's swansong is captured forever on film. Almost 60 westerns were shot at Esplugas City in its eight-year lifetime and it played an important role in both Spanish cinema history and the wider story of westerns in Europe.

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Thanks for further research to: Carlo Gaberscek, Kevin Wilkinson, Phil Hardcastle, Andy Hanratty and Tom Betts.







THE MYTH AND THE AUTHORS: FROM HOMER TO KUROSAWA AN INTERVIEW WITH DUCCIO TESSARI

This interview originally appeared in the book *Once Upon a Time the Italian Western* by Lorenzo De Luca (Roma, Istituto Bibliografica Napoleone s.r.l., 1987). Newly translated by Gloria Anania.

In the '60s the American western was in crisis, even if did not lack remarkable movies. Was this a sign of the end? That the public was tired of the myth of the 'perfect' hero?

I'd say yes! The typical 'perfect' hero comes from a kind of wholesome protestant culture, they are heroes through and through, with no ambiguity. Our heroes, however, are somewhat defeated, with nuance and complexity. America initially was a country where people used to live in heterogeneous groups (English, Spanish, French, German, Irish). To defend themselves from the adversity of the new lands and from the Natives, these groups amalgamated, they melted together. So was born the image of the heroic, invincible and upright American. In the '60s, however, there was a downturn these types of characters, but this crisis does not exist anymore – think *Rambo* (1985) or *Pale Rider* (1985). From the violent, like Corbucci; to the easy-going, like mine; to the most serious and clever characters of Leone, our westerns were full of fear, with a shoot-you-in-the-back approach and with what you could call anti-heroes.

The success of the Italian western caused controversy: people accused us of appropriating part of a cinematic culture that is not ours. Leone says that the western, as a myth, belongs to all of us. Do you agree? What was the basis of your westerns?

Sergio [Corbucci] was right when he said it was not strange that Italians made westerns. In previous years, Hollywood came to us to make movies about ancient Rome (*Ben Hur* [1959], *Quo Vadis* [1953]). For us, the western was a childhood dream. Each director of my generation would make amateur productions while schooling themselves in filmmaking, and they were all westerns. As I said earlier, the American people were a heterogeneous

group of races, so the genre is hardly exclusive. So, when we were finally able to realise these amazing dreams from our youth, it was a unique occasion.

As with the American tradition, our western also has its 'good' and 'bad' characters. But it is a distinction of convenience, as the Spaghetti protagonist was neither honest or without disgrace. When revisiting the classic hero, is its 'vulgarization' an intellectual endeavour, or was it spontaneous after years of the pure, 100% hero?

I do not believe it was an exact intention, I am saying this because I remember the screenplay I did with Sergio Leone for *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, 1964) and the one I did myself for *A Pistol for Ringo*. We must not forget that our culture's roots are European and not American; we do not see things in black and white as they do, or 'good' and 'bad'. Even a 'good' character has his past misdeeds, and even a 'bad' character loves his children. I would say instead that to de-mystify is a natural Italian characteristic, not only in westerns. I cannot speak of intention - for us this was only natural storytelling.

With Italian westerns came a new way of creating music for movies. Why the prominence of the soundtrack?

One reason for this is the quality of the music! I mean, composers like Morricone, Ortolani and Trovajoli took and repurposed classic themes in a new way. But in our western, and this is the key difference, the noise, the punching, the gunshots were exaggerated, they were never realistic. So, in the mixing room, to avoid part of music being overshadowed with other noises, we tended to raise the volume.

Hollywood did not immediately approve of our version of the myth of the West. Was this due only to shock, caused by seeing a genre where they always had supremacy being taken away from them?

After initial distrust, the spaghetti western exploded even on their market, but this happened after a while. After the success that our movies had everywhere, they had no choice but to go along with it. My movies performed well, the same for Leone and Corbucci. The Americans distributed our films and they were successful with the public.

What are the differences between the movies of Ford, Hawks, Davis and the movies of Leone, Tessari, Castellari?

The difference is fundamental. They play at home, they have got the right tools and faces for everything, from the protagonist to the extras. The Indians are real Indians; the Mexicans,

real Mexicans; the cowboys are real. We were forced to make everything up. A constant for our westerns are Mexican bandits. Why is this? Because we were filming in Spain, where the geography was similar to Mexico and some southern Spanish villages were very similar to Mexican villages. Only two or three of the protagonists in our films were American. We were forced to improvise, to make up everything. The Americans instead had all they need. That, in my opinion, is the strong difference between the Fordian westerns and ours.

Among the Hollywood classics, which one influenced you most?

I believe that you are influenced by someone even when you do not realise. We are never original: we are not original when we talk, when you make a joke, when you are making fun, when you write. For people who read, for a man of culture, or for someone who has any kind of critical sense, it is difficult to not be influenced, because we retain a large number of things in our memoirs. When you absorb a lot of cinema, it is difficult to remember what it is yours and what it is not. As a director, my greatest loves were the films of John Ford, Hawks, Hathaway, but I do not believe that they influenced me in how to direct. Or maybe I just did not realise. Two directors with whom I am really bound are De Sica and Visconti.

The stereotype of the American westerns were the Indians. Why is this element is totally absent in the Italian westerns?

For the simple reason that we did not have any original footage of them. A tall blonde guy, a good stuntman, a typical American, I can manage to find. A good flamenco dancer similar to a Mexican I can manage to find. But Indians, I can find one at the most. We didn't have the right faces. In fact, the rare times where the directors inserted real Indians in their stories, the result was really authentic.

With the '70s came the decline of the genre. Instead arrived successful movies with violent themes, like the crime and action movies of Clint Eastwood, or Kung Fu from Hong Kong. Was it the end of a genre that had been over-exploited, or was the public just thirsty for blood?

No, it was the sunset on an over-exploited genre. The public was tired: but I also believe that the end of the genre was caused also by Enzo (Barboni). With parody there is always the original product where it found inspiration (think about the countless parodies of Franchi and Ingrassia) and it is a genre that has always existed, because it takes ideas from the classics. But once people are no longer making parodies of specific movies, but instead an entire genre, we arrive at the point where there is nothing else to say. Enzo's two Trinity



movies were successful with the public (the second one was the highest grossing movie of the Italian cinema history at that point) but they were totally unrealistic. The films from the '70s were the last breaths of a dying prehistoric animal.

The love stories of the American westerns were replaced by the ferocity and irony of the Spaghetti. Were the gunfighters solitary, cruel and misogynist?

Cruel – not really. Solitary – sure. Misogynist – probably yes! We need to keep in mind that even in the American movies, the woman figure is always collateral. In the action cinema, the creators are always male: the writers, the directors, the producers always prefer telling stories of a male protagonist, just because it is a field that is more familiar to them. The biggest female writers rarely write action scripts, not because they are unimaginative, but because it is not requested of them. So, with the action movie, the male writer prefers to stick with something that he knows well instead of challenging himself with something that he does not know.

A *Fistful of Dollars* took inspiration from the epic Kurosawa movie *Yojimbo* (1961). *The Return of Ringo* takes influence from the Homer's poem of *The Return of Ulysses*. Why this continuous osmosis of foreign stories? Could you define Homer the "Great Western Writer", as Sergio Leone says?

To be honest, I do not believe that Sergio ever read Homer: the funny joke was mine and he just took it! Anyway, the meaning of all this stealing (like Spielberg says, today we steal everything, the important is to steal well) is that we do not create anymore. If someone goes and has a proper look, any big successful movie has some big classic tale behind it. So, Leone's movies, the Ringos, and the ones that followed, had some extrapolation from the classics. But not because of poor imagination: it is only because someone thought, "But the others did it very well, and they are much better than me, so why do I need to waste my time if I am not as good as them?"

Let's talk about your productions: with which movie did you become successful? How many movies have you made as a director and how many as a screenwriter? How did you start?

As a director, at twenty-five years old! As a screenwriter around in my forties. I directed a few documentaries and started as a director's assistant, writing the scripts at the same time. I made my directorial debut in 1961 with *My Son, the Hero (Arrivano i titani)*, starring a young Giuliano Gemma as the protagonist, which enjoyed a good reaction. Proper success arrived some years later with *A Pistol for Ringo*.

How was the Ringo figure born and why was he so different from the glacial and moody character of Eastwood, even if it was the same period of Leone's 'Man with No Name'?

Mainly it is as a tribute to John Ford (Ringo was Wayne's name in *Stagecoach* [1939]) I proposed Ringo's name also for Leone's Westerns, but they did not like it, so I took it back and I used it sometime after in my own movie. But I am Ringo... to demystify, to face up to things always with a degree of irony, this is my style. So, Ringo as a character, it came to me pretty easily.

Which out of your first two movies received the most harsh criticism and which the most favourable?

I had different negative reactions, but not for the two Ringo movies. And maybe there is a specific reason: the Italian critic comes from a pressing experience, for attacking *A Fistful of Dollars*, which then went on to be successful. So, they decided to not take the risk. In both Italy and abroad the two Ringo films had excellent reception and resonance.

Only one year separates *A Pistol for Ringo* from *The Return of Ringo* but even if the name and the protagonist are identical, the character and the meaning of the two stories are totally different. Why?

Because I do not like to repeat myself when I have done something already. The production wanted Ringo's name because of the first film's success, the title seems a continuation of the first one: but then I thought about Homer's *The Return of Ulysses*, and it became a different movie from the first, even technically: long lenses, frequent close-ups etc. I got bored repeating myself and I try to change whenever I can.

Which one of your westerns took more at the box office? Which one got the best review? And which one was the least successful?

The most successful was *A Pistol for Ringo*. The best reviews were for the second Ringo and the least successful probably was *Long Live Your Death (Viva la muerte tua, 1971)* with Eli Wallach and Franco Nero.

Do you think that irony was important for the Italian western?

In some ways, yes! But also, no! Some of Leone's movies and Corbucci's (who is one of the funniest people I know) are extremely serious and dark. Generally, I would say that irony never pays, because the public is not serious but is more 'steady'. So, having a laugh sometimes disturbed them. Irony is a sign of intelligence and it is more difficult to make someone laugh than cry. In *Silverado* (1985), which I saw in Venice, there are lots of occasions for having a laugh: the movie has been done really well, but is also really funny. And of course, in America it had less success compared to Clint Eastwood's *Pale Rider*; apparently Americans dislike laughing during westerns.

Which western would you preserve from the western history?

Ford's *Stagecoach*, De Mille's *How the West was Won* (1962), Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946), Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country* (1962), Hawks's *Red River* (1948) and, as a representative of our western golden era, *For a Few Dollars More*.

Would it be possible to make an Italian western nowadays in a similar way to how they were made twenty years ago?

No, you cannot come back! You can just create; substitute a horse with a car, a Colt with a Magnum. All of this with fun and irony. I believe that we can tell a good western story with a beloved character from the public. For example, I would like to direct a movie like this: four characters, from different nations, start a trip in the far West with each of their traditions and a personal story. During the trip each of them starts to think about what it means living in a community, depending on each other; understanding what it means to be human, throughout the western experience. The key, with big stories and characters, of course, you can do the western again!

At the beginning of the '70s, the New Hollywood trend of 'revisionist westerns' had lots of success; movies like *Little, Big Man* (1970) and *Soldier Blue* (1970) were very popular, but they also destroyed lots of classic myths. Do you think that also this type of movie decreed the end of the genre?

More than a demolition of the classic myth, in my opinion, it was a reconstruction of the Indian myth. And everywhere in the world it happens like this when you are looking for the historical facts. Thank God, at some point the Americans wanted to say the truth about what happened, so everything collapsed. But wait a minute: they can collapse but just to a point. Because as you can see today, movies like *Rambo* had huge success all around the world.

My friends saw Stallone's movie in America and told me it had been made perfectly. So, the first 15 minutes are boring, and you say to yourself, "What am I watching?" but soon you can see yourself become part of the movie and cheer when Rambo kills 300 Vietnamese. Then you come out from the cinema and think to yourself "Am I stupid?" So, America can destroy the myth but then it needs to be rebuilt, maybe to destroy it again. Anyway, they need to do it, no one else.

What do you think about the current American directors?

Too much wasted money. Nowadays they think about special effects more than the story. Spielberg is a good example: when he did not have much of a budget he made genius movies such as *Duel* (1971). Afterwards, with the super high-budget movies, you can certainly see the negative effect that it had, even if they were interesting films. Too much money numbs intelligence and creativity. Today they spend 20,40,50 million dollars on a movie! Roger Moore told me that the scene before *A View to Kill's* (1985) credits alone, cost around \$4 million. With the same money, people like us can make two movies. If the budget of *Tex and the Lord of the Deep* (*Tex e il signore degli abissi*, 1985), my last movie, was compared with Spielberg's *The Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), it would pay maybe for the actor's drinks.

In your opinion, are *Silverado*, *Tex and the Lord of the Deep* and *Pale Rider* a specific return to the western or is it just a momentary phenomenon?

Just a momentary phenomenon! As a great phenomenon, the western is over: there will never be 20-40 movies per year. But good movies might come back, and some of them could be within a western setting.

ABOUT THE RESTORATIONS

A Pistol for Ringo and *The Return of Ringo* have been exclusively restored in 2K resolution for this release by Arrow Films and are presented in their original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with mono 1.0 sound.

All restoration work on these new restorations was carried out at L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna. The original 35mm 2-perf Techniscope camera negatives were scanned in 2K resolution on a pin-registered Arriscan with a wetgate and graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master.

Thousands of instances of dirt, debris and light scratches were removed through a combination of digital restoration tools. Overall image stability and instances of density fluctuation were also improved.

The film's original Italian and English mono soundtracks were transferred from the original 35mm optical sound negatives using the Sondor OMA/E with COSP XI2K technology to minimise optical noise and produce the best quality results possible. The audio synch will appear slightly loose against the picture, due to the fact that the soundtracks were recorded entirely in post-production.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

Restoration Services L'Immagine Ritrovata, Bologna

Original film and audio elements and reference materials were made available by Intramovies. An additional theatrical print of *A Pistol for Ringo* was made available by the Cineteca di Milano.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by James Blackford
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering David Mackenzie
Artist Gilles Vranckx
Design Obviously Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Gloria Anania, Simone Arminio, Gilles Barberis, Valeria Bigongiali, Paola Corvino, Chris Edwards, Michael Hochhaus, Howard Hughes, C. Courtney Joyner, Paola Mantovani, Manuela Mazzone, Julia Mettenleiter, Alessia Navantieri, Anthony Nield, Charlotte Oddo, Caterina Palpacelli, Henry C. Parke, Davide Pozzi, Tony Rayns, Jon Robertson, Mike Siegel, Elena Tammaccaro



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