



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Last Picture Show

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Released in 1971 amidst the dope-fuelled rush of the New Hollywood, Peter Bogdanovich's second feature *The Last Picture Show* was in many ways an out-of-time anomaly. With its black-and-white photography, gentle pace, period setting and formal classicism, it was closer to the work of critic and film historian Bogdanovich's mentors John Ford and Howard Hawks than it was to that of his New Wave-inspired peers at the BBS production company. But it was immediately embraced as a modern classic – *Newsweek* wrote that it was 'the most important work by a young American director since *Citizen Kane*' – propelling Bogdanovich at a stroke into the front rank of US filmmakers.

Adapted from a novel by Larry McMurtry, the film takes place in a small Texas town over the course of a year (from October 1951 to October 1952), following the relationships and entanglements of its inhabitants, both school kids on the cusp of graduation – played by then newcomers Jeff Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, Randy Quaid and Timothy Bottoms – and their elders, played by Ellen Burstyn, Ben Johnson and Eileen Brennan.

The film is an elegy at once for a period in history, for a time in one's life, for small-town America – and for the kind of studio-produced cinema that Bogdanovich loved, but that was ironically being supplanted by the energies of his peers.

The Last Picture Show was made for Bob Rafelson and Bert Schneider's legendary BBS, who were the vanguard of the New Hollywood at the start of the 1970s. Did you feel part of that movement?

You're never fully aware you're part of something when you're in the middle of it, but I did dimly recognise that we were moving into a new era. What happened was that Henry Jaglom was friendly with Bert Schneider and Bob Rafelson, because he'd helped them edit *Easy Rider*. Henry saw [Bogdanovich's 1967 debut] *Targets*, and brought it to the attention of Bert and Bob. They liked it very much, and said to me that if there was anything I wanted to make, I should bring it to them.

Later on I was told that Bob and Bert had a bit of a disagreement about doing the picture with me after they had dinner with me and my wife at the time, Polly Platt, because we were not into grass or cocaine or anything. Bert said to Bob, 'They're so square. Are you sure we should do the picture?' Bob said, 'Look, we've got enough crazies around. We should do it.' They encouraged me to add bad language and all of that, and I somewhat reluctantly embraced that – if I was going to do this story about teenage lust and love, we'd better tell it honestly. Most of the sex in the picture is really funny rather than erotic – as teenage love often is.

In other respects the film is very classical, looking back to an older American style of filmmaking – in contrast to other BBS films, which borrowed from the European New Wave.

I grew up with the classic American cinema. I didn't like all that jiggling camera, jump cuts, zoom lenses – I felt it took the audience out of the picture. But it wasn't a crusade of any kind. One of the things that makes *Picture Show* intriguing is the tension between the material and the execution. The material is very frank and candid, unlike the classic American cinema, which was more oblique. Certainly the [Production] Code would have prevented the kind of stuff we were doing.

For all its 1950s setting, much of the film plays like a western. Did that arise naturally because you were a fan of westerns yourself?

I guess it must have had some western reverberations with me, but I wasn't thinking of it that way. I did think of it in the sense of what the West had become, and what had gone – so at the end I used the clip from *Red River*, where there's adventure, a frontier to be broken. All that was over and passed, and they're living in this end-of-nowhere place.

*Other cinephile directors – Scorsese, for instance – very openly borrow particular shots from their influences. Is this something you did on *The Last Picture Show*?*

Not really. But I learned the technique and craft of making movies from watching classic American cinema. Hitchcock once said to me: 'Never use an establishing shot to establish. Why? Because it has no dramatic meaning. Only use it when it has dramatic meaning in the story.'

I took that advice on *Picture Show* – for example in Sam's funeral scene. It's all played in very close shots – until the last shot, when Ellen Burstyn's character walks away, and we drop back and show what would normally be an establishing shot, with the great open sky above them. It has much more power at that point because you're invested emotionally.

Apparently Bert Schneider was alarmed when he saw you hadn't shot establishing shots, and were cutting 'in camera'?

Well, from watching the masters [at work], I saw that they only shot what they needed – they didn't shoot additional scenes and coverage and so on. I once watched Ford put his hand over the lens and say, 'That's enough of that.'

You discovered Cybill Shepherd after seeing her photo on the cover of a magazine. What convinced you she would work on screen?

It was a look on her face. She was wearing this shirt which had little 'I love you's' written all over it, but the look on the face belied the sentiment on the shirt – it was more 'Well, maybe I'd love you.'

Then when I met her, I remember a gesture she did. We were in a hotel room and she was sitting on the floor, and there was a breakfast tray on the coffee table next to where she was sitting. There was a little vase with a single rose in it, and as we were talking she started flicking the rose around with her finger, very casually. I thought: 'That's the way she treats guys.' That gesture, small as it was, convinced me that she had this kind of offhand delivery that would work with the picture.

*Do you think *The Last Picture Show* has had a lasting influence?*

I don't know. I saw Jeff Bridges recently and we talked about *Picture Show*, and Jeff said, 'It's funny, it sort of stands by itself. There's not a picture like it.'

The actors, of course, all became well known. I remember seeing Emir Kusturica's *Do You Remember Dolly Bell?* at the Venice Film Festival in 1981, when I was on the jury. I thought it looked familiar to me, and I then found out that he'd been very influenced by *Picture Show*. We gave him an award!

Has it ever felt like a millstone?

No, I'm very proud of it. It's the film of mine that people return to. Orson Welles and I were talking about Greta Garbo one time, and he was raving about her transcendent quality, and me being pedantic said, 'Yes, but isn't it too bad that there are only two great films?' – thinking of *Ninotchka* and *Camille*. He looked at me for a minute and said, 'Peter, you only need one.' I have my one.

Peter Bogdanovich interviewed by James Bell, *Sight & Sound*, May 2011

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW (DIRECTOR'S CUT)

Directed by: Peter Bogdanovich
©: Last Picture Show Productions
Production Company: B.B.S. Productions
Executive Producer: Bert Schneider
Produced by: Stephen J. Friedman
Associate Producer: Harold Schneider
Unit Production Manager: Don Guest
Production Co-ordinator: Marilyn Lasalandra
Location Manager: Frank Marshall
Production Assistant: Mae Woods
Production Secretary: Elly Mitchell
Assistant Director: Robert Rubin
2nd Assistant Director: William Morrison
Assistant to the Director: Gary Chason
Script Supervisor: Marshall Schlom
Casting: Ross Brown
Screenplay by: Larry McMurtry, Peter Bogdanovich
Based on the novel by: Larry McMurtry
Director of Photography: Robert Surtees
Camera Operator: Terry Meade
Gaffer: Alan Goldenhar
Key Grip: Carl Manoogian
Dolly Grip: Leonard Lookabaugh
Editor: Donn Cambern
Design: Polly Platt
Design Assistant: Vincent Cresciman
Art Director: Walter Scott Herndon
Props: Walter Starkey, Louis Donelan
Construction Supervisor: Ed Shanley
Construction Co-ordinator: Al Litteken
Painter: George Lillie
Wardrobe: Mickey Sherrard, Nancy Mcardle
For their music we thank: Hank Williams, Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, Eddy Arnold, Eddie Fisher, Phil Harris, Pee Wee King, Hank Snow, Tony Bennett, Lefty Frizzell, Frankie Laine, Johnnie Ray, Johnny Standley, Kay Starr, Hank Thompson, Webb Pierce, Jo Stafford
[Sound] Mixer: Tom Overton
Boom Marr: Dean Salmon
Re-recording: Producers Sound Service
Sound Effects: Inc Edit-Rite

USA 1971
126 mins

Cast

Timothy Bottoms (*Sonny Crawford*)
Jeff Bridges (*Duane Jackson*)
Cybill Shepherd (*Jacy Farrow*)
Ben Johnson (*Sam the Lion*)
Cloris Leachman (*Ruth Popper*)
Ellen Burstyn (*Lois Farrow*)
Eileen Brennan (*Genevieve*)
Clu Gulager (*Abilene*)
Sam Bottoms (*Billy*)
Sharon Taggart (*Charlene Duggs*)
Randy Quaid (*Lester Marlow*)
Joe Heathcock (*the sheriff*)
Bill Thurman (*Coach Popper*)
Barc Doyle (*Joe Bob Blanton*)
Jessie Lee Fulton (*Miss Mosey*)
Gary Brouette (*Bobby Sheen*)
Helena Humann (*Jimmie Sue*)
Lloyd Catlett (*Leroy*)
Robert Glenn (*Gene Farrow*)
John Hillerman (*teacher*)
Janice O'Malley (*Mrs Clarg*)
Floyd Mahaney (*Oklahoma patrolman*)
Kimberly Hyde (*Annie Annie Martin*)
Noble Willingham (*Chester*)
Marjorie Jay (*Winnie Snips*)
Joye Hash (*Mrs Jackson*)
Pamela Keller (*Jackie Lee French*)
Gordon Hurst (*Monroe*)
Mike Hosford (*Johnny*)
Faye Jordan (*nurse*)
Charles Seybert (*Andy Fanner*)
Grover Lewis (*Mr Crawford*)
Rebecca Ulrick (*Marlene*)
Merrill Shepherd (*Agnes*)
Buddy Wood (*Bud*)
Kenny Wood (*Ken*)
Leon Brown (*cowboy in café*)
Bobby McGriff (*truck driver*)
Jack Mueller (*oil pumper*)
Robert Arnold (*Brother Blanton*)
Frank Marshall (*Tommy Logan*)
Tom Martin (*Larry*)
Otis Elmore (*first mechanic*)
Charles Salmon (*roughneck driver*)
George Gauden (*cowboy*)
Will Morris Hannis (*gas station man*)
The Leon Miller Band (*musicians*)

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Persona Mon 17 May 14:30; Fri 28 May 21:00; Wed 2 Jun 18:10
(+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)
Mon 28 Jun 21:00
Touch of Evil Tue 18 May 14:30; Mon 31 May 12:45; Sat 5 Jun 17:50;
Sun 20 Jun 18:15
The Tango Lesson Tue 18 May 20:45; Wed 9 Jun 17:50 (+ pre-recorded
intro by So Mayer, author of 'The Cinema of Sally Potter')
Citizen Kane Wed 19 May 18:00; Sun 30 May 12:40; Mon 21 Jun 20:45
L'eclisse (The Eclipse) Thu 20 May 14:15; Sat 5 Jun 12:10;
Tue 15 Jun 17:50
La Haine Thu 20 May 17:50; Sat 29 May 21:00; Wed 16 Jun 21:00;
Fri 18 Jun 20:40
The Last Picture Show (Director's Cut) Fri 21 May 20:30;
Mon 31 May 12:50; Mon 7 Jun 17:45
Steamboat Bill, Jr. Sat 22 May 12:00; Thu 3 Jun 14:30;
Tue 22 Jun 18:30
Raging Bull Sat 22 May 14:40; Sun 30 May 15:30; Tue 1 Jun 17:30
Cleo from 5 to 7 (Cléo de 5 à 7) Sat 22 May 21:00; Thu 10 Jun 21:00;
Mon 21 Jun 14:30
The Big City (Mahanagar) Sun 23 May 12:10; Wed 23 Jun 17:40
The Gospel According to Matthew (Il vangelo secondo Matteo)
Sun 23 May 15:20; Thu 24 Jun 17:40

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The Night of the Hunter Mon 24 May 14:30; Tue 8 Jun 20:50; Wed 16
Jun 18:15 (+ pre-recorded intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)
The Killers + pre-recorded intro by Imogen Sara Smith,
author of 'In Lonely Places: Film Noir beyond the City'
Tue 25 May 20:30; Tue 8 Jun 14:30; Wed 23 Jun 17:50
Alice in the Cities (Alice in den Städten) Wed 26 May 17:50;
Tue 1 Jun 14:30; Fri 25 Jun 20:45
Eraserhead Thu 27 May 18:20; Mon 14 Jun 21:00; Thu 24 Jun 21:10
Man Hunt Fri 28 May 18:10; Sat 12 Jun 16:00; Tue 29 Jun 14:15
Sweet Smell of Success Fri 4 Jun 15:00; Sun 13 Jun 15:45;
Sat 26 Jun 11:40
The Man Who Wasn't There Fri 4 Jun 17:50; Sun 27 Jun 18:20
The White Ribbon (Das weisse Band) Sun 6 Jun 18:10;
Sat 26 Jun 16:30
Le Doulos + pre-recorded intro by Professor Ginette Vincendeau,
King's College London
Mon 7 Jun 14:15; Thu 17 Jun 20:45; Wed 30 Jun 17:45
Bitter Victory Sun 20 Jun 13:00; Mon 28 Jun 17:55

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