



MORRICONE

Once upon a Time in the West

Reflecting Morricone's admiration for the Second Viennese School, this remains among his peak achievements. His score is tightly bound into the pitiless study of frontier greed and depravity concocted by Leone in conjunction with Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento.

Once again, it was written in advance and each of the principals has a theme that becomes interwoven into the mood music. The widowed Jill (Claudia Cardinale) is represented by a dulcimer, flute and the angelic voice of Edda Dell'Orso, while the debased soul of Frank the gunslinger (Henry Fonda) is suggested by Bruno Battisti D'Amario's razzing guitar. The guitar part no longer has the Hank Marvin twang of the Dollars triptych, as it duels chillingly during the McBain massacre with a wailing harmonica, which in turn denotes the hired gun (Charles Bronson) on Frank's tail. Morricone set out to 'wound the audience's ears like a blade' and he audaciously succeeds.

David Parkinson, bfi.org.uk

The Sound of Music

Morricone, John Cage and 'Once upon a Time in the West'

Christopher Frayling: *You were part of a seminar with John Cage, at Darmstadt in Germany in 1958, and subsequently in the 1960s you joined an improvisation group called Nuova Consonanza...*

Ennio Morricone: John Cage was a massive influence on many composers at that time – and I'm talking not just about avant-garde music but also music in general. For example, he gave importance to the *pauses* in music – the absence of sound – that's something that came from Cage. He also made the *isolated* sound very important... all this led to a correction and therefore Cage influenced all composers, traditional and avant garde.

Did these ideas have any influence on your western scores?

The music I composed for film, TV, radio and music hall is one story, and the music I composed as a composer is what I call 'absolute music', which is a different thing. That's what I studied for.

So you tend to associate your film work with 'applied music' – like the distinction between an art and a craft...

Yes, it's a different process. For instance, when I was writing symphonic music or chamber music, what I had to do was to wait for a few days after having composed film music because I had somehow to get rid of being conditioned to write film music in order to write absolute music.

I still think there's a connection between your avant-garde experiments and your film music. For example, some of the 'instruments' you use in your film music include sounds that are not normally associated with music.

There is some history to this. There was at that time a French school of musicians who used sounds from reality, like traffic sounds. What we did in

the group Nuova Consonanza was to make that kind of music into a different kind of music that was not reality any more. We understood that all kinds of sounds – the sounds of reality that we all know – if you take them out of the context in which they're originally created, they become something different. For example, the sound of a fly that flies close to a microphone surrounded by silence is not, when you think about it, actually a real sound. This use of sound actually enabled me to create the music I have created.

An extreme example of this happened during a concert in Florence at the Conservatory. Our group was due to play in the second half. In the first half, the concert was supposed to begin but didn't. People waited and there was no music.

There was a man who went on a ladder up to the balcony that surrounded the stage, high up. People hadn't even noticed him because they thought he worked there. It was 10.15pm and the concert still hadn't begun. He was trying to creak the ladder by moving it! People kept thinking: 'Well, the concert must be about to begin' – when all of a sudden the audience realised that the concert *had* in fact begun. They kept quiet and he kept creaking this ladder. Everyone was very upset, as you can imagine. It was a huge scandal! Even for me. But, on second thoughts, I realised that – as I was saying – any sound that is taken out of its real context actually acquires a totally different meaning.

I said this to Sergio Leone, and for [the opening of] *Once upon a Time in the West* there was that deep silence, then the creaking windmill, the telegraph, the water dropping on the hat and so on. He applied this principle. I had talked to Leone about this, and from that, it all started. It was true that in that case it *was* aided by the images!

Extract from an interview with Morricone by Christopher Frayling, reprinted in *Sight & Sound*, December 2020

It is tempting to see *Once upon a Time in the West* as the outcome of the meeting of Leone's cynicism and Bertolucci's Marxism. In its style and its ambitions it pushed the Italian Western as far as it could go. The full version is certainly one of the most remarkable films of its time – a materialist fairy tale which, where given the chance, struck a chord at the box-office. Leone's style, evolved in the earlier films, expanded its spare outlines to grandiose but appropriate proportions. The film becomes an epic without pretensions to historical precision (hence the title) but to being an emblematic tale, comparable with Italian political movies like *Quemada*, and also in a sense the ultimate Western.

Most major Western themes are there, but, through Leone's artificial, operatic style, the film becomes a view from Europe, based on American historical mythology but presenting it precisely as an alien mythology. The traditional function of the Western is undercut and its iconography used to say, in effect, that it does not wash any more: that life in the West, past and present, is nasty, brutish and short; 'heroes' and villains pursue money; and nobility comes only through preserving personal dignity, avenging evil, and turning one's back on the world created by corrupt and crazy moneymakers.

David Nicholls, *Sight & Sound*, Winter 1980-81

ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST (C'ERA UNA VOLTA IL WEST)

Director: Sergio Leone
Production Companies: Rafran Cinematografica, San Marco Cinematografica, Euro International Films, Paramount Pictures Corporation
Executive Producer: Bino Cicogna
Producer: Fulvio Morsella
Production Supervisor: Ugo Tucci
Production Manager: Claudio Mancini
1st Assistant Director: Giancarlo Santi
Screenplay: Sergio Donati, Sergio Leone
Dialogue: Mickey Knox
Story: Dario Argento, Bernardo Bertolucci, Sergio Leone
Director of Photography: Tonino Delli Colli
Special Effects: Baciucchi
Editor: Nino Baragli
Sets/Costumes: Carlo Simi
Make-up Supervisor: Alberto De Rossi
Make-up: Giannetto De Rossi
Hairdresser: Grazia De Rossi
Music Composed and Conducted by: Ennio Morricone
Sound Recording: Claudio Maielli, Elio Pacella, Fausto Ancillai
Sound Effects: Luciano Anzellotti, Italo Cameracanna, Roberto Arcangeli
Studio: Cinecittà

uncredited
Producer: Sergio Leone
Administrator: Raffaele Forti
Production Inspector: Camillo Teti
2nd Production Inspector: Manolo Amigo
Production Secretary: Glauco Teti
2nd Assistant Director: Salvatore Basile
Script Supervisor: Serena Canevari
Camera Operator: Franco Di Giacomo
Assistant Operator: Giuseppe Lanci
Key Grip: Franco Tocci
Gaffer: Alberto Ridolfi
Stills: Angelo Novi
Special Effects: Giovanni Corridori
Assistant Editors: Andreina Casini, Carlo Reali
Assistant Art Director: Enrico Simi
Set Decorators: Carlo Leva, Rafael Ferri
Assistant Set Decorator: Antonio Palombi
Costume Collaborator: Marilù Carteny
Wardrobe: Valeria Sponsali
Assistant Make-up: Feliziano Ciriaci
Assistant Hairdresser: Antonietta Caputo
Soprano Soloist: Edda Dell’Orso
Weapons Master: Benito Stefanelli

Cast

Claudia Cardinale (Jill McBain)
Henry Fonda (Frank)
Jason Robards (Cheyenne)
Charles Bronson (Harmonica)
Gabriele Ferzetti (Mr Morton)
Paolo Stoppa (Sam, Jill’s driver)
Woody Strode (Stony)
Jack Elam (Snakey)
Keenan Wynn (sheriff of the county)
Frank Wolff (Brett McBain)
Lionel Stander (tavern proprietor)

uncredited
Marco Zuanelli (Wobbles)
John Frederick (Frank gunman 2 sent to kill Jill)
Enzo Santaniello (Timmy McBain)
Dino Mele (Harmonica as a boy)
Al Mulock (Knuckles)
Benito Stefanelli (Frank’s lieutenant)
Aldo Sambrell (Cheyenne man wearing duster)
Aldo Berti (Frank gunman playing poker)
Bruno Corazzari (Cheyenne man 2)
Lorenzo Robledo (Cheyenne man 3)
Tullio Palmieri (Flagstone lumber salesman)
Simonetta Santaniello (Maureen McBain)
Fabio Testi, Antonio Molino Rojo (Frank gang members at auction)
Marilù Carteny (Maureen McBain)
Paolo Figlia (Frank man at auction)
Claudio Mancini (Harmonica’s elder brother)
Renato Pincirolì (first bidder at auction)
Luigi Ciavarro (deputy escorting Cheyenne to station)
Conrado San Martín (town official at Brett McBain’s funeral)
Spartaco Conversi (Frank gang member shot through foot)
Francisco Braña (pipe-smoking Frank gang member)
Luana Strode (Indian woman at station)
Giuseppe Anatrelli (Frank gunman 4)
Robert Spafford (construction yard owner)
Joyce Gordon (voice of Jill McBain, English version)
Luigi Magnani, Sandra Salvatori, Dino Zamboni, Livio Andronico, Stefano Imparato, Umberto Morsella, Claudio Scarchilli, Salvo Basile, Frank Leslie, Enrico Morsella, Ivan Scratuglia

Italy/USA 1968©
167 mins

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