



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Rio Bravo

### Rio Bravo

*Directed by:* Howard Hawks  
*©:* Armada Productions, Inc.  
*Production Company:* Armada  
*Presented by:* Warner Bros.  
*Produced by:* Howard Hawks  
*Assistant Director:* Paul Helmick  
*Screenplay by:* Jules Furthman, Leigh Brackett  
*From a short story by:* B.H. McCampbell  
*Director of Photography:* Russell Harlan  
*Film Editor:* Folmar Blangsted  
*Sound System:* RCA Sound System  
*Art Director:* Leo K. Kuter  
*Set Decorator:* Ralph S. Hurst  
*Costumes Designed by:* Marjorie Best  
*Make-up Supervisor:* Gordon Bau  
*Original Songs Music by:* Dimitri Tiomkin  
*Original Songs Lyrics by:* Paul Francis Webster  
*Music Composed and Conducted by:* Dimitri Tiomkin  
*Sound by:* Robert B. Lee  
*Sound System:* RCA Sound System

#### uncredited

*Sound Editors:* Wally Haynes, Seth Larsen,  
Billy Mauch  
*Studio:* Old Tucson Studios (Arizona)

#### Cast:

John Wayne (*Sheriff John T. Chance*)  
Dean Martin (*Dude*)  
Ricky Nelson (*'Colorado' Ryan*)  
Angie Dickinson (*'Feathers'*)  
Walter Brennan (*'Stumpy'*)  
Ward Bond (*Pat Wheeler*)  
John Russell (*Nathan Burdette*)  
Pedro Gonzalez-Gonzalez (*Carlos Remonte*)  
Estelita Rodriguez (*Consuela*)  
Claude Akins (*Joe Burdette*)  
Malcolm Atterbury (*Jake*)  
Harry Carey Jr (*Harold [role deleted]*)

#### uncredited

Bob Steele (*Matt Harris*)  
Bob Terhune (*Charlie the bartender*)  
Ted White (*Bart*)  
Nesdon Booth (*Clark*)  
George Bruggeman (*Clem*)  
José Cuchillo (*Pedro*)  
Eugene Iglesias (*card player*)  
Joseph Shimada (*undertaker*)  
Myron Healey (*barfly*)  
Fred Graham (*gunman*)  
Riley Hill (*messenger*)  
Tom Monroe (*henchman*)  
James B. Leong (*Burt, Chinese townsman*)  
Arthur Kendall

USA 1958©  
141 mins  
Digital 4K

## SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](http://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)

**SIGHT  
AND  
SOUND**

Hawks' acclaimed chamber western is at once defiantly idiosyncratic (complete with wordless prologue and musical interlude), leisurely in pace, and engrossing throughout, peppered with suspenseful set-pieces and an exhilarating finale. The story – about a sheriff helped by a motley band of misfits in defending his jail from a murderous gang – is less important than the generous characterisation and meticulous balancing of drama and comedy.

[bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)

### Howard Hawks on 'Rio Bravo'

*Could you explain how Rio Bravo was made as a reaction against High Noon?*

I saw *High Noon* at about the same time I saw another Western picture, and we were talking about Western pictures and they asked me if I liked it and I said, 'Not particularly.' I didn't think a good sheriff was going to go running around town like a chicken with his head off asking for help. I said that a good sheriff would turn around and say, 'How good are you? Are you good enough to take the best man they've got?' And the fellow would probably say 'No' and he'd say, 'Well, then I'd just have to take care of you.' And that scene was in *Rio Bravo*. Then I saw another picture where the sheriff caught a prisoner and the prisoner taunted him and made him perspire and worry and everything by saying, 'Wait till my friends catch up with you.' And I said, 'That's a lot of nonsense, the sheriff would say, 'You better hope your friends don't catch up with you, 'cause you'll be the first man to die.' While we were doing all this, they said, 'Why don't you make a picture the other way?' And I said 'O.K.', and we made *Rio Bravo* the exact opposite from *High Noon* and this other picture – I think it was called *3:10 to Yuma*.

Interview by Joseph McBride and Michael Wilmington, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1971

'I don't think I've ever seen you like this before,' says Ward Bond's not-long-for-this-earth Pat Wheeler, early in Howard Hawks' 1959 masterpiece, *Rio Bravo*. He's talking to Dude, the one they call 'Borachón' ('It means drunk'), the same deputy sheriff we've just seen beaten and humiliated in the film's opening scene. We've not seen the actor playing Dude like this before either. The Dean Martin that sidles into that wordless opening with a thirst and a sweat on, his skin scorched by the Texas sun, is a world away from 'the coolest man who ever walked the earth,' as more than one YouTube hagiography of Martin would have it.

The erstwhile crooner's cinematic career was a curious one. Some 16 films as straight-man to Jerry Lewis's manic whirlwind preceded the Rat Pack's tabloid highs, before a descent towards the Bond-lamooning lows of the Matt Helm spy series. Yet three films in the late 1950s suggested a different story. If *The Young Lions* (1958) and *Some Came Running* (1958) proved the adaptability of Dino's movie star charisma, it was *Rio Bravo* that gave him the against-type role of his career.

If saying that *Rio Bravo* is ultimately Dude's story ignores the importance of the film's group dynamic, it's safe to say that his arc provides its central theme (one central to the whole Hawksian mode): that acceptance in said group is dependent on one's ability to perform the tasks at hand – on being 'good enough'. Dude may be the character most obviously singled-out as in need of salvation, but his battle remains explicitly his own – 'Sorry don't get it done, Dude.'

## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

### The Draughtsman's Contract

Sun 1 Sep 18:40; Tue 10 Sep 20:30

### The Piano

Mon 2 Sep 18:10; Wed 4 Sep 18:00 + intro by Rosie Taylor, Curator, BFI National Archive; Sat 5 Oct 15:45

### Les Demoiselles de Rochefort

The Young Ladies of Rochefort

Tue 3 Sep 20:30; Sun 15 Sep 12:10; Wed 25 Sep 18:05

### Rear Window

Wed 4 Sep 20:45; Sat 7 Sep 12:20; Mon 16 Sep 14:30; Thu 19 Sep 20:45; Wed 2 Oct 18:00 + intro by film and talks programmer & writer Nadia M. Oliva

### Do the Right Thing

Thu 5 Sep 18:00; Fri 20 Sep 20:40

### 12 Angry Men

Fri 6 Sep 20:45; Sat 21 Sep 12:30; Sun 29 Sep 12:30

### Le Trou

The Hole

Sat 7 Sep 15:15; Mon 9 Sep 18:00; Sat 5 Oct 20:30

### Rio Bravo

Sun 8 Sep 17:45; Sat 28 Sep 14:50

### UK Premiere of restoration: The Exterminating

### Angel

El angel exterminador

Tue 10 Sep 18:20; Wed 25 Sep 18:10 + intro; Tue 8 Oct 20:50

### The Miracle Worker

Wed 11 Sep 18:10 + intro by Clare Baines, BFI Inclusion Partner and Founder, Crip Club; Mon 23 Sep 14:30; Fri 27 Sep 18:15; Tue 1 Oct 20:50

### Hunger

Thu 12 Sep 20:30; Thu 26 Sep 20:40

### Black Narcissus

Fri 13 Sep 14:30; Sun 22 Sep 11:45

### Barton Fink

Sat 14 Sep 20:45; Thu 3 Oct 20:45

### King of the Hill

Tue 17 Sep 20:45; Fri 4 Oct 18:10

### The Servant

Wed 18 Sep 18:15 + intro by Ruby McGuigan, BFI Programme and Acquisitions; Wed 25 Sep 20:45; Sun 6 Oct 12:30

### The Incredible Shrinking Man

Tue 24 Sep 20:40; Mon 7 Oct 18:40

## BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

## BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](http://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)

For a film that runs almost two and a half hours, there's remarkably little by way of plot. Yet the mastery of late-period Hawks – of which *Rio Bravo* marks the beginning – lies in the filmmaker's ability to hone narrative, action and theme organically out of character. The laconic approach to plot matters little when it's such a pleasure simply keeping company with the gang. Casting proved key, but Hawks understood the importance of gesture in building relationships between characters, and so much of the film's magic stems from moments of understated nuance, the grace notes of interpersonal business.

The dynamic between sheriff John Wayne and Martin is economically established up top, as Duke's entrance – towering over a cowed and humiliated Dude – sets up the power balance between the pair. We see the former-crack-shot deputy before we learn the reason for his slide into disgrace (a woman, natch), feel his wounded pride as he slugs his boss, before he later saves his bacon by making an outnumbered move on the villain. If the rules of archetype with which Hawks toys suggest Dude is set up as the tragic figure, it's the humour and pathos brought by Martin, the resignation and then defiance at his allotted role that allows Dude to transcend a familiar fate.

That the pair became fast friends off screen pays dividends in their on-screen chemistry, with Martin's deference to Wayne bringing out a paternalistic softening in Duke (he even calls him Papa at one point). It was Wayne's suggestion that he roll cigarettes for the DT-addled Dude, and while the dialogue that sees the deputy aspire to 'goodness' for his sheriff came courtesy of screenwriters Jules Furthman and Leigh Brackett, the adoring eyes were all Dino's.

The protection of the jail ultimately takes a back seat to Dude's readiness for the job, the film's emotional climax being Martin's triumphantly steady hand as the band strikes up 'The Alamo' again, pouring his whisky back into the bottle ('I didn't spill a drop') moments after having handed in his resignation.

The climactic dynamite-tossing serves up some gang's-all-here larks, a stage set for Dude to play his part. But really, it's as superfluous an excuse for on-the-job camaraderie as an earlier sequence that's quintessentially Hawks. The jailroom singalong may have been conceived along commercial lines to make use of Dino and Ricky Nelson's pipes, but it's a poignant moment for Dude and the rest of the ragtag crew – as much a close-knit reminder of what's worth fighting for as an expression of pure joy.

Matthew Thrift, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk), 7 June 2017

## A contemporary review

Although this long, conventionally outlined Western restricts its action within the confines of a small Texas bordertown, it gives an impression of breadth and canvas and something very like depth. The characterisation has freshness and contrast – Stumpy's toothless age and Colorado's baby-faced, deadshot youth; Dude's weakness and Chance's domination: it is set in its environment and developed well beyond the cursory monolith-and-baggage format of most 'horse opera.' Similarly the episodic script, alternating a taut and explosive violence with romantic and comic asides, is effortlessly integrated by Howard Hawks with a kind of deliberate informality which is most notably successful in such cliché-traps as a singing sequence. An instrumental melody played by a band of Mexican saloon musicians broods sadly and ominously over much of the action; and almost one's only disappointment rests with the spurious quality of the studio-ish night photography.

*Monthly Film Bulletin*, May 1959