



RESTORED

Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid

Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid

Directed by: Sam Peckinpah

©: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc.

Presented by: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Produced by: Gordon Carroll

Unit Production Manager: Jim Henderling

Mexican Production Manager:

Alfonso Sánchez Tello

2nd Unit Director: Gordon Dawson

Assistant Director: Newton Arnold

2nd Assistant Director: Lawrence J. Powell

Mexican Assistant Director: Jesús Marín Bello

Casting by: Patricia Mock

Screenplay: Rudy Wurlitzer

Director of Photography: John Coquillon

2nd Unit Director of Photography: Gabriel Torres G.

Camera Operator: Herbert Smith

Special Visual Effects: A.J. Lohman

Editors: Roger Spottiswoode, Garth Craven,

Robert L. Wolfe, Richard Halsey, David Berlatsky,

Tony De Zarraga

Art Director: Ted Haworth

Set Decoration: Ray Moyer

Property Master: Robert John Visciglia

Wardrobe: Michael Butler

Make-up by: Jack P. Wilson

Colour by: Metrocolor

Filmed in: Panavision

Music by: Bob Dylan

Music Editor: Dan Carlin

Sound: Charles M. Wilborn, Harry W. Tetric

Supervising Sound Editor: Bill Wistrom *

Studio: Estudios Churubusco *

Cast:

James Coburn (*Pat Garrett*)

Kris Kristofferson (*William 'Billy the Kid' Bonney*)

Richard Jaeckel (*Sheriff Kip McKinney*)

Katy Jurado (*Mrs Baker*)

Chill Wills (*Lemuel*)

Barry Sullivan (*John Simpson Chisum*)

Jason Robards (*Governor Lew Wallace*)

Bob Dylan (*Alias*)

R.G. Armstrong (*Deputy Ollinger*)

Luke Askew (*Eno*)

John Beck (*John W. Poe*)

Richard Bright (*Holly*)

Matt Clark (*Deputy J.W. Bell*)

Rita Coolidge (*Maria*)

Jack Dodson (*Howland*)

Jack Elam (*Alamosa Bill*)

Emilio Fernández (*Paco*)

Paul Fix (*Pete Maxwell*)

L.Q. Jones (*Black Harris*)

Slim Pickens (*Sheriff Baker*)

Jorge Russek (*Silva*)

Charlie Martin Smith (*Bowdre*)

Harry Dean Stanton (*Luke*)

Claudia Bryar (*Mrs Horrell*)

John Chandler (*Norris*)

Mike Mikler (*Denver*)

Aurora Clavell (*Mrs Ida Garrett*)

Rutanya Alda (*Ruthie Lee*)

Walter Kelley (*Rupert*)

Rudy Wurlitzer (*Tom O'Folliard*)

Elisha Cook Jr (*Cody*)

Gene Evans (*Mr Horrell*)

Donnie Fritts (*Beaver*)

Dub Taylor (*Josh*)

Don Levy (*Sackett*)

Sam Peckinpah (*Will, the undertaker*) *

USA 1973©, 122 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

* Uncredited

+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences

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

A contemporary review

The story of Billy the Kid has been told often enough for its basic outline to require only the lightest of sketches, while Peckinpah's own nostalgia for obsolescent gunmen has become as much of a trademark as Ford's skylines. The outlaw turned sheriff, the obsessive pursuit from one decrepit town to the next, the two friends who must shoot it out to the death – the territory has been so well explored that few members of Peckinpah's audience will be entirely without map references.

Myths don't require surprises; instead they demand ritual, a formal pattern that can be repeated to infinity, and grandeur. And they need (as Fritz Lang pointed out in *Le Mépris*) the vitality of perpetual reinterpretation. The less that is explained in *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, the more that is explicable – not only in terms of plot but also in terms of metaphor. Fernandez may have been a member of the Kid's gang in the past, or no more than a passing shepherd with a daughter susceptible to rape; what matters here is his presence, the sense of other times and other places, the glimpse of another life going on in another direction. The enigma of his relationship with Billy is balanced, as it turns out, by Billy's series of fights with Chisholm, whose nature can be deduced from Garrett's contemptuous meeting with his would-be hirers (he informs them tersely where they can stuff their money), lurks in the wings like a spider, occasionally casting a barbed-wire thread across the screen. He is progress, fate, and the future; he means the ruthless destruction of the values that Garrett and the Kid once knew; he is the capitalist, the money-spreader, and the law. He is even, you might say, the Hollywood producer. Without him, the myth could not exist.

It's tempting to see in Rudolph Wurlitzer, who wrote *Two-Lane Blacktop*, a link between Peckinpah and the Monte Hellman Westerns where the fascination lies in the rumours, the unseen events, the indefinite motivations. Certainly it is consistent with the Wurlitzer-Hellman film that *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* is a patchwork of incidents and uncertainties, an aimless ramble from one contest to the next, a man's world in which pride, loyalty and affection are monosyllabic. Yet it was the same for *Junior Bonner* or *The Wild Bunch*; Peckinpah's characters come to his films complete with memories, and their present behaviour is the only guide we are allowed to their past – other than what we care to create for ourselves.

So the scene that now begins the Garrett/Kid story could hardly be better: Billy's old friend Pat, father figure, mentor, partner, turns up just when times are so boring that the gang can find nothing better to do than shoot the heads off chickens, and he offers the go-for-broke challenge that they both need and they both cherish. Leave the territory (forget the glory, betray the self) or face the gallows. Or, of course, fight. Billy is delighted to see no choice among the alternatives. 'It feels like times have changed,' says Garrett, meaning that he doesn't feel like changing with them. Another suicide mission, like the charge among the French lancers in *Major Dundee*, or the last act of the *Wild Bunch*, has begun.

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What follows is a series of sacrifices. Trapped in a hut by Garrett's ambush, Billy's two companions allow themselves to be shot apart in cheerful, matter-of-fact mood ('Time to take a walk? Hell, Yes!'), and Billy stands with arms wide as if to embrace his captor. Escaping from jail, as Garrett has clearly meant that he should, Billy kills his two guards with smiling unconcern, and they accept their deaths in horrified resignation ('He's killed me too,' says the second, waiting for Billy to shoot). Garrett's enlisted deputies, grizzled copies of himself except that they are closer to stagnation, are then given remarkable death scenes of their own. Slim Pickens, dragged into an insignificant gunfight, afterwards clasps his wounds in the sunset, placidly dying beside a river. And Jack Elam, unexpectedly encountering Billy at a trading post, tries hopelessly to cheat in their duel only to find, without surprise, that Billy cheated at the first step. The scene is completely ritualistic, performed before a row of silent children and their mother, its incongruity as disturbing as a scene from Pinter. An audience attends each sacrifice at the Garrett/Kid altar, immobile and inactive witness to the creation of the myth, a classical Chorus participating only so far as to provide a horse or a blanket, or to hurl a final clod of earth at Garrett's departing back to remind us that history will favour Billy, not him.

The missing scene of Garrett's death is embodied in that clod of earth, but what would have made it even more superfluous is the way Peckinpah films the killing of Billy, when Garrett's second shot hits his own mirror image. With the death of the Kid, Garrett himself is dead; he has destroyed what he used to be and at the same time he has destroyed his reason for living. His vigil over the body restages the death of Pickens beside the river, a slow ebb of life and purpose. Earlier, beside the same river, Garrett has watched a cumbersome boat go by, its owner shooting at bottles for evidently much needed target practice; Garrett's attempt to join the contest earns him only a shotgun blast past his ear, and boatman and sheriff confront each other warily until the current takes the floating family out of range. The scene could be cut so easily that one wonders how it survived. Could someone have noticed that with its extraordinary layers of mood and meaning it is very nearly the heart of the film?

Changes of direction may have been indicated by the subjects of Peckinpah's last four films, but with *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* he demonstrates reassuringly that his first love hasn't lost its potency. Beautifully shot by John Coquillon, the film certainly makes better watching than *Straw Dogs* or *The Getaway* (the scene of Billy playing cards with one jailer and riling the other, while kids play on the gallows outside, is a superbly composed example), and the various towns in which it's set look so authentic as to have survived intact, by some miracle, the lesser myths that have passed through them since 1881.

The only major eccentricity (Peckinpah's West is a catalogue of eccentrics) which is on the edge of not working is the figure of Bob Dylan, his motivations and behaviour more peculiar than obscure, his own Dylan myth and brittle self-possession a slightly uneasy anachronism beside the comfortable performances of James Coburn (Garrett) and Kris Kristofferson. (William Bonney was never as robust as this, but Kristofferson is otherwise the ideal Peckinpah hero.) And as the ultimate seal of approval, the director himself pops into the film to urge Garrett to complete the ritual by killing the Kid, as if Peckinpah feared that the legends might change and die without him to guide their perpetuation. Where *Wild Bunch* used brute force, *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid* favours elegy; the effect is less shattering, but the tone of savoured melancholy is just as haunting.

Philip Strick, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1973