



You Must Remember This Presents... "The Old Man Is Still Alive"

Cheyenne Autumn

Cheyenne Autumn

Directed by: John Ford

©: Ford-Smith Productions

Production Company: Warner Bros.

Produced by: Bernard Smith

Associate Director: Ray Kellogg

Assistant Directors: Wingate Smith, Russ Saunders

Screenplay: James R. Webb

Suggested by 'Cheyenne Autumn' by: Mari Sandoz

Director of Photography: William Clothier

Editor: Otho Lovering

Art Director: Richard Day

Set Decorator: Darryl Silvera

Music Composed and Conducted by: Alex North

Sound by: Francis E. Stahl

Indian Technical Adviser: David H. Miller

Narrator: Spencer Tracy

Cast:

Richard Widmark (*Captain Thomas Archer*)

Carroll Baker (*Deborah Wright*)

Karl Malden (*Captain Wessels*)

Sal Mineo (*Red Shirt*)

Dolores Del Rio (*Spanish Woman*)

Ricardo Montalban (*Little Wolf*)

Gilbert Roland (*Dull Knife*)

Arthur Kennedy (*Doc Holliday*)

Patrick Wayne (*2nd Lieutenant Scott*)

Elizabeth Allen (*Guinevere Plantagenet*)

John Carradine (*Major Jeff Blair*)

Victor Jory (*Tall Tree*)

Mike Mazurki

(*Sr First Sergeant Stanislas Wichowsky*)

George O'Brien (*Major Braden*)

Sean McClory (*Dr O'Carberry*)

Judson Pratt (*Major 'Dog' Kelly*)

Carmen D'Antonio (*a Pawnee woman*)

Ken Curtis (*Joe*)

James Stewart (*Wyatt Earp*)

Edward G. Robinson

(*Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior*)

Walter Baldwin (*Jeremy Wright*) *

Nancy Hsueh (*Little Bird*) *

Shug Fisher (*Skinny, trail boss*) *

Chuck Roberson (*platoon sergeant*) *

Harry Carey Jr (*Trooper Smith*) *

Ben Johnson (*Trooper Plumtree*) *

Jim O'Hara, Chuck Hayward, Dan Borzage,

Dean Smith, David Humphreys Miller, Bing Russell

(*troopers*) *

Lee Bradley, Frank Bradley (*Cheyennes*) *

Walter Reed (*Lieutenant Peterson*) *

Willis Bouchey (*colonel*) *

Carleton Young (*aide to Carl Schurz*) *

Denver Pyle (*Senator Henry*) *

John Qualen (*Swenson*) *

Nanomba (*'Moonbeam' Morton (Running Deer)*) *

Charles Seel *

USA 1964©

147 mins

35mm

* Uncredited

35mm print courtesy of Lowell Peterson, ASC

The screening on Sat 19 Apr will be introduced by
season programmer Karina Longworth

The Iron Horse to *Cheyenne Autumn*... what a career it is! John Ford's world is a reincarnation of the pioneer spirit recollected and diffused by time and memory: the coming of the railroads, the insurge of prospectors and gunslingers, the Indian 'problem' to be tamed by the arts of war and peace as expediency demanded – these are themes he has returned to a dozen times and more. *Cheyenne Autumn* takes up the Cavalry versus Indians theme again (this time it is based on fact) and turns it into a plea for tolerance. The Cheyennes make a 1,500-mile trek to their old hunting grounds at Yellowstone, having tired of broken government promises of help and sustenance on the reservation.

One might have thought that the actual physical setting of bare plains, lonely outposts and towering mesas had been exhausted even by Ford; yet, for the first hour at least, he proves once again how richly he can renew himself. As the Indians sadly pack up camp, in a wonderfully shot sequence of scurrying figures picked out in a shimmer of dust, William Clothier's richly toned photography in 70mm Panavision and Technicolor and Ford's instantly recognisable set-ups create their own chain reactions. There is a bit of everything here – echoes of *Stagecoach*, *Drums Along the Mohawk*, *Wagon Master* – the main difference being that Ford now has a bigger canvas than ever before. Typically enough, he shoots in 70mm as if he had been doing it for years. A simple, almost obligatory composition of three Indian riders coming into the empty frame from below is placed exactly at the moment where it works best. His long shots – a man taking his horse to water, with a shimmering mountain as backdrop; a rider disappearing up a road into a hazy infinity – carry all the old poetic charge.

With so much to choose from, one just sits back and watches the images pile up. These early sequences have a beautifully controlled rhythm and flow, from the static shots of the Indians waiting under the scorching sun for the government commission which never comes, and the beginning of the trek, with its alternation of bare landscapes and more urgent tracking shots, to the two big action sequences of the first half. The battle in the echoing canyon is a cruel conflict between blazing cannon and panic-stricken riders. The Cavalry's equally fruitless attack through grass fired by the Indians begins with a cavalry charge of unsurpassed virtuosity and ends with a great shot of Widmark ordering back his troops, as men and horses fall and scatter in confusion, the supply wagons blaze away, and the screen becomes a smouldering inferno...

In this and other recent works, Ford seems to have developed an increasingly disenchanted attitude towards the myths he helped to create over 40 years. In *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, the hero achieves victory by proxy, as it were; and in the present film it is suggested that the Cheyennes' plight was brought about by a series of accidents and misguided decisions involving vested business interests and the demands of newspaper editors to boost circulation. Be that as it may, the Dodge City interlude which forms a kind of central panel wilfully turns the Wyatt Earp legend upside down by depicting him as a jaded, gangling clown, so preoccupied with his poker matches with Doc Holliday that he prefers to do his shooting sitting down. Still an unerring shot, of course, but a clown nevertheless. On a second viewing, this episode seems less out of place than before. The rumbustious business of caricatured

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The Tiger of Eschnapur Der Tiger von Eschnapur
Tue 1 Apr 20:45; Sat 12 Apr 12:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

A Hole in the Head

Wed 2 Apr 20:40; Sat 5 Apr 15:00

The Indian Tomb Das indische Grabmal

Sat 5 Apr 20:30; Sat 12 Apr 15:00 (+ pre-recorded
intro by season programmer Karina Longworth)

Cheyenne Autumn

Wed 9 Apr 20:10; Sat 19 Apr 14:20 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Sat 12 Apr 17:30; Fri 18 Apr 14:00 (+ intro by
season programmer Karina Longworth)

Red Line 7000 + intro

Mon 14 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 20:50

The Liberation of L.B. Jones

Tue 15 Apr 18:00 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 20 Apr 14:50

The Only Game in Town

Tue 15 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Fri 25 Apr 17:55

Frenzy

Wed 16 Apr 20:35 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sun 27 Apr 18:35

Such Good Friends

Thu 17 Apr 20:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Mon 21 Apr 13:45

True Grit

Fri 18 Apr 17:50 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Sat 26 Apr 17:35

Rich and Famous

Sat 19 Apr 17:45 (+ intro by season programmer
Karina Longworth); Wed 30 Apr 20:40

Avanti!

Sun 20 Apr 14:40; Wed 23 Apr 20:15

Movie Movie

Sun 20 Apr 18:30; Mon 28 Apr 20:50

Under the Volcano

Mon 21 Apr 18:35; Tue 29 Apr 20:50

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badmen, hoydenish ladies of the town (led by the spunky Elizabeth Allen) being upturned and de-skirted, and the helter-skelter retreat of the whole boozy menage from the sight of a lone Indian, is certainly very funny and more controlled than usual, with James Stewart and John Carradine in their best laconic form. Any final doubts about its rightness might have been dispelled if the last third of the film had either equalled the quality of the first or clarified Ford's own thoughts about his subject.

As long as he is in Dodge City, the mood is free and unbuttoned: this is Ford doing what comes naturally. Afterwards, instead of moving forward to its admittedly pre-ordained conclusion, the story meanders and confuses. Last-minute cutting seems to have left some inexplicable holes in the narrative. But this is not the real reason why, for me, this part of the film fails to live up to its splendid promises. Despite his connections with the more boisterous Hollywood Tories, Ford has often seemed to have a great big liberal heart beating gamely beneath that tough exterior. And, in his own way, I am sure he is being sincere about his Indians – the trouble is that the film never loses an opportunity to say so. This kind of gesturing towards significance means that Ford is dealing with symbols rather than those roistering, larger-than-life characters whose very expansiveness seems to bring out the essence of his personality (*Young Mr. Lincoln*, surely, belongs more to Ford than to history).

The script of *Cheyenne Autumn* does little to smooth over this division of feeling. Leading Indian roles are played by celebrated white actors, speaking the sort of dialogue usually reserved by Hollywood for picturesque Mexicans, and playing with a stiff-upper-lip conception of what constitutes national pride. Dolores del Rio, dewy-eyed amid close-ups of inscrutable Indian faces, becomes a sort of Madonna of the trails; and Carroll Baker's Quaker schoolmarm, spelling out words to her small charges at the most unlikely moments, also has to grapple with lines like 'what does it matter who fires the first shot.' The film, in fact, is at its least effective when stressing all these moral points, and at its worst when Karl Malden is introduced as a German fort commander who substitutes allegiance to the book of rules for human instinct. Some critics have seen an attempted parallel with Eichmann and his like here; whichever way you look at it, the performance is wretchedly over-stressed, with Malden spitting out his words as if they were evil-tasting sweets and making the big breakout scene appear unnecessarily 'plotted'.

Ford, of course, remains a law unto himself. It is probably a bit late in the day to start questioning his way of expressing himself (*The Sun Shines Bright* set the most bewildering conundrum in this respect); yet *Cheyenne Autumn* makes it difficult to dodge these issues. Equally, it would be ungrateful to complain too much – throughout the film, one is reminded how *good* Ford is when he has something he really responds to. 'Film is still basically a silent medium,' he said recently, and it is significant that most of the best things here are without dialogue. In his last few films, it is as if Ford has been looking back on his career and re-assessing what he has achieved. If *Cheyenne Autumn* can be considered a testament (as the French say), one can find in it the best of the past as well as signs of what has been lost since the great periods of the late 1930s and early '50s. In my case, I still relish the images in my mind's eye and tend to forget the sentiments. In the old days, it was a little easier to remember both.

John Gillett, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1964/65