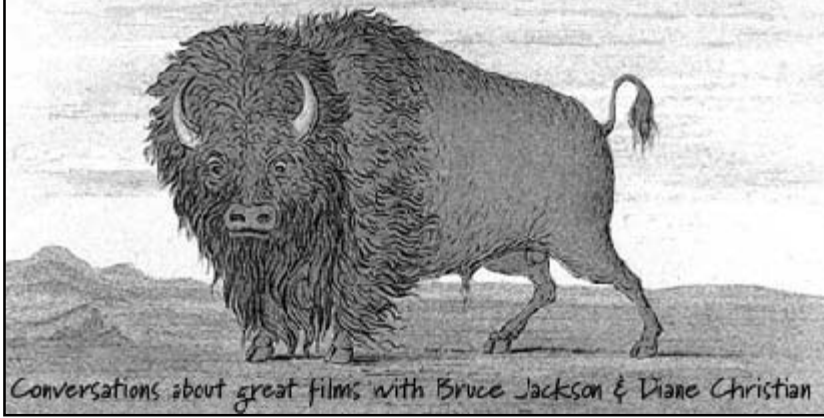


The Buffalo Film Seminars



JOHN FORD (Sean Aloysius O'Fearná, 1 February 1894, Cape Elizabeth, Maine – 31 August 1973, Palm Desert, California, cancer) directed 146 films, 54 of them westerns. He won four Academy Awards for Best Director (*), two more for best documentary (#), five New York Film Critics Best Director awards (+), the Directors' Guild of America Life Achievement Award (1954), and the first American Film Institute Life Achievement Award (1973). Some of his films are: *The Informer**+ 1935, *The Prisoner of Shark Island* 1936, *Stagecoach* 1939+, *Drums Along the Mohawk* 1939, *The Long Voyage Home* +1940, *The Grapes of Wrath** + 1940, *Tobacco Road* 1941, *How Green Was My Valley*+ 1941,* *The Battle of Midway* # 1942 (which he also photographed and edited), *December 7th* # 1943, *They Were Expendable* 1945, *My Darling Clementine* 1946, *Fort Apache* 1948, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* 1949, *Rio Grande* 1950, *What Price Glory?* 1952, *The Quiet Man** 1952, *Mogambo* 1953, *Mister Roberts* 1955, *The Searchers* 1956, *The Rising of the Moon* 1957, *The Last Hurrah* 1958, *Sergeant Rutledge* 1960, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* 1962, *Donovan's Reef* 1963, and *Cheyenne Autumn* 1964. His older brother Francis started in movies in 1907 and changed his name to Ford. Jack joined him in Hollywood in 1914, acted in a dozen serials and features, and began directing in 1917. He did three films in 1939, all of them classics: *Drums Along the Mohawk* (starring Henry Fonda and Claudette Colbert), *Young Mr. Lincoln* (starring Fonda), and *Stagecoach* (which made a star of John Wayne). He's known (and has famously identified himself as a maker of westerns, but he's done a large number of non-western classics as well, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *How Green Was My Valley*, and the wartime documentaries. But the westerns dominate: *My Darling Clementine*, his so-called "Cavalry Trilogy" (*Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, and *Rio Grande*), all of them starring Wayne, and *The Searchers*, also starring Wayne. He had what amounted to a stock company of leading actors (John Wayne, Harry Carey, John Carradine, Henry Fonda) and supporting actors (Ward Bond, Ken Curtis, Jane Darwell, Francis Ford, Ben Johnson, Victor McLaglen, Mae Marsh, Mildred Natwick, John Qualen, Woody Strode, Tom Tyler, and Patrick Wayne). His westerns had various settings, but he shot most of them in Monument Valley, Arizona, because he liked the look of the place. Whenever there was a funeral in one of his films, the mourners usually sang "Shall We Gather at the River." When C.B. DeMille and other Hollywood McCarthyites got in the witchhunting bandwagon, it was Ford who most publicly and famously stood up to them.



JOHN WAYNE (Marion Robert Morrison [his parents later changed it to Marion Michael when they named their second son Robert], 26 May 1907, Winterset, Iowa – 11 June 1979, Los Angeles, California, lung & stomach cancer) performed in nearly 200 movies, starting with *Brown of Harvard* 1926 (an uncredited role as a Yale football player) and ending with *The Shootist* 1976. He seems to hold the record for the most leading parts: 142 of them. Marlene Dietrich, upon seeing John Wayne for the first time, is supposed to have said, "Oh, daddy, buy me that." Wayne, writes Leonard Maltin, "has come to represent the archetypal American of our country's formative period: honest, direct, decisive, solitary, and reverent; one whose faith in his own ability enables him to take action when it's needed, and whose belief in justice spurs him to right wrongs when they're discovered. John Wayne, nicknamed 'Duke,' played that character-or variations on it-in almost every movie he made, and it became so much a part of him that most people couldn't separate the real Wayne from his screen persona." He worked in low-budget westerns until his role in Ford's *Stagecoach* made him a star. He did his best work playing a character like himself, or what he thought himself to be; when he ranged afield (*The Green Berets* 1968, Ghengis Kahn in *The Conqueror* 1956, *McQ* 1974) the pictures were usually awful. Some of his other films are: *The Cowboys* (1972), *True Grit* (1969), *Donovan's Reef* (1963), *The Longest Day* (1962), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) *The Alamo* (1960), *Rio Bravo* (1959), *Rio Grande* (1950), *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), *Wake of the Red Witch* (1948), *Fort Apache* (1948), *They Were*

Expendable (1945), *Back to Bataan* (1945), and *The Fighting Seabees* (1944). He won a Best Actor Academy Award for *True Grit* and had a nomination for *Sands of Iwo Jima*.

WARD BOND (9 April 1903, Brinkleman, Nebraska—5 November 1960, Dallas, heart attack). **Biography from Leonard Maltin's**

Movie Encyclopedia: “It was oddly ironic that when he was cast in his last feature, *Rio Bravo* (1959), Bond was better known as a TV star-for his longrunning hit series “Wagon Train”-than for the countless films in which he'd appeared over the preceding three decades. Even more amazingly, the star of that film-John Wayne-had appeared alongside him in his first, 1929's *Salute* when both were still playing on the USC football team and were hired as extras by director John Ford. It was the start of an extraordinary director/actor relationship that lasted almost the length of Bond's life. A tall, sturdy actor with a gruff voice and no-nonsense manner, he could play pretty much anything-and did. He seems to have been in half the movies made in the 1930s, appearing in small roles in, among many others, *The Big Trail* (1930), *Wild Boys of the Road* (in a chilling bit as a rapist), *Heroes for Sale* (both 1933), *It Happened One Night*, *Broadway Bill* in a small part he later repeated for director Frank Capra in his 1950 remake *Riding High* (both 1934), *Black Fury*, *She Gets Her Man* (both 1935), *Conflict*, *The Leathernecks Have Landed* (both 1936), *Dead End*, *Night Key*, *You Only Live Once* (all 1937), *Bringing Up Baby*, *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*, *The Law West of Tombstone*, *Professor Beware* (all 1938), and a blizzard of 1939 classics:*Gone With the Wind*, *Dodge City*, *The Oklahoma Kid*, *They Made Me a Criminal*, *Made for Each Other*, *Frontier Marshal* including two by Ford: *Young Mr. Lincoln* and *Drums Along the Mohawk* The next year saw a similarly nonstop pace, with two more Fords-*The Long Voyage Home* and *The Grapes of Wrath*-as well as *Buck Benny Rides Again*, *The Mortal Storm* and *Santa Fe Trail*. Though the size of Bond's roles increased, his pace didn't slow down, and he kept busy thereafter in *The Maltese Falcon* (as one of the cops), *Manpower*, *Swamp Water*, *Sergeant York*, *Tobacco Road* (all 1941), *Gentleman Jim* (1942), *The Falcon Takes Over* (a 1942 B film adapted from Raymond Chandler's “Farewell, My Lovely,” with Bond as the murderous Moose Malloy, one of his best characterizations), *A Guy Named Joe*, *Hello Frisco, Hello* (1943), *The Sullivans*, *Tall in the Saddle* (both 1944), *They Were Expendable* (1945), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946, as Bert the cop), *My Darling Clementine* (1946), *The Fugitive*, *Unconquered* (both 1947), *Fort Apache*, *Tap Roots*, *Joan of Arc*, *3 Godfathers* (all 1948), *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye*, *Wagon Master* (both 1950), *The Great Missouri Raid*, *On Dangerous Ground* (both 1951), *The Quiet Man* (1952, as the priest/narrator), *Hondo* (1953), *Gypsy Colt*, *Johnny Guitar* (both 1954), *The Long Gray Line*, *Mister Roberts* (both 1955), *The Searchers* (1956), *The Wings of Eagles* (1957, as movie director “John Dodge,” parodying Ford), and a gag cameo in *Alias Jesse James* (1959) as Major Seth Adams, his “Wagon Train” character. By the way, although the series was based on *Wagon Master* in that Ford feature had played a religious fanatic, not the lead. He died at the height of the show's-and his-popularity, leaving behind generations of fans to whom he was like a favorite uncle. However, in sharp contrast to his latter-day screen image, Bond made many enemies during the 1950s, as a rabid anticommunist in Hollywood.”

Robert Warshow “Movie Chronicle: The Westerner”

The two most successful creations of American movies are the gangster and the Westerner: men with guns. Guns as physical objects, and the postures associated with their use, form the visual and emotional center of both types of films.

The gangster is lonely and melancholy, and can give the impression of a profound worldly wisdom. He appeals most to adolescents with their impatience and their feeling of being outsiders, but more generally he appeals to that side of all of us which refuses to believe in the “normal” possibilities of happiness and achievement; the gangster is the “no” to that great American “yes” which is stamped so big over our official culture and yet has so little to do with the way we really feel about our lives. But the gangster's loneliness and melancholy are not “authentic”; like everything else that belongs to him, they are not honestly come by: he is lonely

THE SEARCHERS, 1989, 120 min

1989 entered into the National Film Registry

John WayneEthan Edwards
Jeffrey HunterMartin Pawley
Vera MilesLaurie Jorgensen
Ward BondRev. Capt. Samuel Johnston Clayton
Natalie WoodDebbie Edwards
John QualenLars Jorgensen
Olive CareyMrs. Jorgensen
Henry BrandonChief Cicatrice Ken Curtis (I)Charlie McCorry
Harry Carey Jr.Brad Jorgensen
Antonio Moreno....Emilio Figueroa
Hank WordenMose Harper
Beulah ArchuletaWild Goose
Flying in the Night Sky (Look)
Walter CoyAaron Edwards
Dorothy JordanMartha Edwards
Pippa ScottLucy Edwards
Patrick WayneLt. Greenhill
Lana WoodDebbie Edwards

Directed by John Ford
Writing credits Alan Le May (novel),
Frank S. Nugent (screenplay)
Produced by C.V. Whitney
Cinematography by Winton C. Hoch
C.V. Whitney Pictures and Warner Bros.

and melancholy not because life ultimately demands such feelings but because he has put himself in a position where everybody wants to kill him and eventually somebody will. . .

The Western hero, by contrast, is a figure of repose. He resembles the gangster in being lonely and to some degree melancholy. But his melancholy comes from the “simple” recognition that life is unavoidably serious, not from the disproportions of his own temperament. And his loneliness is organic, not imposed on him by his situation but belonging to him intimately and testifying to his completeness. The gangster must reject others violently or draw them violently to him. The Westerner is not thus compelled to seek love; he is prepared to accept it, perhaps, but he never asks of it more than it can give, and we see him in situations where love is at best an irrelevance.

In the American mind, refinement, virtue, civilization, Christianity itself, are seen as feminine, and therefore women are often portrayed as possessing some kind of deeper wisdom, while the men, for all their apparent self-assurance, are fundamentally childish. But the West, lacking the graces of civilization, is the place “where men are men”; in Western movies, men have the deeper wisdom, and women are children. Those women in the Western movies who share the hero’s understanding of life are prostitutes (or, as they are usually presented, barroom entertainers)—women, that is, who have come to understand in the most practical way how love can be an irrelevance, and therefore “fallen” women.

The Westerner is the last gentleman, and the movies which over and over again tell his story are probably the last art form in which the concept of honor retains its strength.

Andrew Tudor, JOHN FORD entry in *World Film Directors V I*, ed. John Wakeman, The H.W. Wilson Co, NY 1987.

He found a variety of employment in the booming industry, including stunt work and doubling for his brother, assistant cameraman and riding with the Ku Klux Klan in *Birth of a Nation*. He became proficient as a cameraman and editor, and often functioned as such throughout his career. Although accounts disagree, he had definitely graduated to assistant directing by 1916.

[Ford visited Germany during the shooting of *Four Sons* (1928) and met Murnau and other German filmmakers.] It is tempting to see their influence in his emerging visual style, doubly so in that he acknowledged no mentors other than his brother, Harry Carey, and D.W. Griffith. It is a difficult judgment to make. The clearest stylistic feature of Ford’s early cinema is its inclination to pictorialism, to studied effects of composition and lighting, a tendency as much apparent before *Four Sons* as after it. Anderson argues that “at times in *Four Sons* the influence is strong, with movements that recall German camera handling and lighting effects that verge on the expressionistic.” With so many films “lost,” however, it is all but impossible to make the appropriate before-and-after comparisons, especially in a period when German influence on American cinema was widespread.

In many ways *Stagecoach* is the foundation stone of the modern Western, for, just as it was the occasion for Ford to find a mature outlook upon the landscape and characters of his early cinema, it also heralded a new seriousness and legitimacy for the Western genre. The French critic and theorist André Bazin saw it as the consummate classical Western, “the ideal balance between social myth, historical reconstruction, psychological truth, and the traditional theme of Western *mise-en-scène*.” With its stagecoach laden with characters who were, or who were to become, archetypes of the Western genre, it now looks far more clichéd than would have been the case in 1939.

It also brought John Wayne to stardom. A descendant of the Harry Carey figure in the early Ford Westerns, Wayne’s Ringo Kid is in genesis the honest man of few words and profound actions who stands at the heart of Ford’s vision. In genesis only, however, for *Stagecoach* viewed in the context of Ford’s subsequent work seems a somewhat contrived sketch for what was to follow, not a fully realized

The Western hero is necessarily an archaic figure; we do not really believe in him and would not have him step out of his rigidly conventionalized background. But his archaism does not take away from his power; on the contrary, it adds to it by keeping him just a little beyond the reach both of common sense and of absolutized emotion, the two usual impulses of our art. And he has, after all, his own kind of relevance. He is there to remind us of the possibility of style in an age which has put on itself the burden of pretending that style has no meaning, and, in the midst of our anxieties over the problem of violence to suggest that even in killing and being killed we are not freed from the necessities of establishing successful modes of behavior.

achievement. It is a story very well told, and our pleasure in its magnificent Monument Valley settings, its compelling narrative, and its visual elegance, should not disguise the economy and skill with which its characters are presented to us and developed. In the end, though, it lacks the elegiac spirit of *My Darling Clementine* (1946), the irony of *The Searchers* (1956), and the richness of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962).

Grapes of Wrath –the novel’s humanity without its disturbing edge. Ford’s film is a powerful experience, but apolitical and individualistic in its affirmation of human fortitude in the face of desperate adversity.

The Searchers is more than simply a touching story. In its treatment of its central character it gives us *the* Western hero trapped forever in a world of his making, but a world to which he can no longer belong. It is this sustained reflection upon the major themes of the genre that finally raises *The Searchers* beyond Ford’s other work, giving it the status of tragedy. When Ethan turns away at the end it is a profoundly moving moment. McBride and Wilmington, who believe this to be Ford’s indubitable masterpiece, put it this way in their monograph on Ford: “[Ethan] . . . steps aside to let the young couple pass him by and turns away to ‘wander forever between the winds’ like his Indian nemesis. Scar and Ethan, blood-brothers in their commitment to primitive justice, have sacrificed themselves to make civilisation possible. This is the meaning of the door opening and closing on the wilderness. It is the story of America.”

It was only with *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962) that Ford successfully returned to the ethically complex world of *The Searchers*.

That said, it must also be conceded that in some respects *Liberty Valance* is far from typical Ford. There are no grand landscapes (indeed, there are precious few exteriors) and the film’s visual style makes it almost claustrophobic. It is frequently observed that Ford was ill at the time of shooting *Liberty Valance* and thus unable to work on location. While there is no doubt that he was ill, it is difficult to see how this particular story could have benefitted from location work; as a narrative it is necessarily set in the town of Shinbone, and its thematic concerns are eminently suited to the “closed in” world suggested by Ford’s careful framing

and camerawork. Although lacking the tragic scale of *The Searchers*, it is a deeply sad movie, and there are critics who believe *Liberty Valance* to be at least the equal of Ford's finest.

As with *The Searchers*, the basis for this evaluation is to be found in Ford's apparently changing vision. *Liberty Valance* stands as his final word on the recurrent tensions between wilderness and civilization, individual and community. Not for the first time in Ford, but for the first time with such absolute consistency and clarity, these oppositions are captured in the casting of the movie's central characters. Doniphon (John Wayne) and Stoddard (James Stewart) embody both the virtues and failings of, respectively, the individualist at home in the wilderness and the bringer of "civilized" legal order to the community. The fundamental narrative device has Stoddard, who is opposed to the rule of law by violence, forced into a situation in which he must face the notorious gunman Liberty Valance. He is victorious, and his success brings him fame and power as "the man who shot Liberty Valance." The truth, however, is otherwise. Doniphon, knowing Stoddard has no chance and impelled by his own standards of integrity, shoots Valance from the shadows, leaving Stoddard to take the credit and the girl whom Doniphon loves. Once more the traditional Man of the West has been sacrificed in the cause of civilization.

The story, already laden with saddening echoes of previous Westerns, is made all but unbearably poignant by its framing a final revelation by the aging Senator Stoddard on the occasion of Doniphon's death. He tells the story to the editor of the Shinbone *Star* in explanation of his arrival at the funeral of an unknown pauper, fully recognizing the political price he might have to pay. But in one of the most famous lines in a Ford movie, the editor (Edmond O'Brien) declines to print: "This is the West, sir. When the legend conflicts with the facts, print the legend." The matter is not left there, however, which would have taken us no further than, say, the end of *Fort Apache*. Instead, in an exquisitely shot scene, we are returned to Doniphon's coffin where Hallie (one of Ford's stronger female characters, played by Vera Miles) is waiting, and, only as Stoddard turns for a last look, do we see that she

John Baxter in *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Ed. Andrew Sarris. Visible Ink NY 1998.

John Ford has no peers in the annals of cinema. This is not to place him above criticism, merely above comparison. His faults were unique, as was his art, which he pursued with a single-minded and single-hearted stubbornness for sixty years and 112 films. Ford grew up with the American cinema. That he should have begun his career as an extra in the Ku Klux Klan sequences of *The Birth of a Nation* and ended it supervising the documentary *Vietnam! Vietnam!* conveys the remarkable breadth of his contribution to film, and the narrowness of its concerns.

Mythologizing the armed services and the church as paradigms of structural integrity, Ford adapts their rules to his private world. All may speak in Ford's films, but when divine order is invoked, the faithful fall silent, to fight and die as decreed by a general, a president, or some other God-anointed elite.

In Ford's hierarchy, Native and African Americans share the lowest rung, women the next. Businessmen, uniformly corrupt in his world, hover below the honest and

has planted a cactus rose on the otherwise bare box. Both flower of the Garden and enduring survivor of the Wilderness, the cactus rose (which we have earlier seen as a gift from Doniphon to Hallie) becomes the perfect symbol for the film.

The train takes them away from Shinbone through lushly fruitful country. "Aren't you proud?" Hallie asks. "Once it was a desert and now it's a garden." Stoddard talks of retirement until, on the arrival of the train's conductor to attend his famous passenger, he reverts to the politician's front that has served him so well. The conductor's response to his thanks is sudden and sobering: "Don't you worry about that, Senator. Nothing's too good for the man who shot Liberty Valance." With that ironic line, and our final shot of Stoddard and Hallie lost in their regrets, we reach the last stop in Ford's journey through the West. The captivating optimism of *Drums Along the Mohawk* and *My Darling Clementine* has been replaced by the irony and sadness of *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Yet all is not regret, and Ford has showed us the benefits of civilization as well as its price. He was never a filmmaker given to simple didacticism, and both these great achievements of his last years have a density of reference and a control of style that makes them for many his richest reflections upon and within the Western genre.

Though he lived for a decade after *Liberty Valance*, illness effectively ended Ford's career in 1966.

Orson Welles, asked which American directors he most admired, replied "the old masters...By which I mean John Ford, John Ford, and John Ford."

"As a kid," he told Peter Bogdanovich, "I thought I was going to be a great artist; I used to sketch and paint a great deal and I think, for a kid, I did pretty good work – at least I received a lot of compliments about it. But I have never thought about what I was doing in terms of art, or 'this is great,' or 'world-shaking' or anything like that. To me, it was always a job of work – which I enjoyed immensely – and that's it."

imaginative citizenry of the United States. Above them are Ford's elite, within which members of the armed forces occupy a privileged position. In authority over them is an officer class of career military men and priests, culminating in a few near-saintly figures of which Abraham Lincoln is the most notable, while over all rules a retributory, partial, and jealous God.

Belligerent, grandiose, deceitful, and arrogant in real life, Ford seldom let those traits spill over into his films. They express at their best a guarded serenity, a skeptical satisfaction in the beauty of the American landscape, muted always by an understanding of the dangers implicit in the land, and a sense of the responsibility of all men to protect the common heritage. In every Ford film there is a gun behind the door, a conviction behind the joke, a challenge in every toast. Ford belongs in the tradition of American narrative art where telling a story and drawing a moral are twin aspects of public utterance. He saw that we live in history, and that history embodies lessons we must earn. When Fordian man speaks, the audience is meant to listen—and listen all the harder for the restraint and circumspection

of the man who speaks. One hears the authentic Fordian voice nowhere more powerfully than in Ward Bond's preamble to the celebrating enlisted men in *They Were*

Satvajit Ray, "A Tribute to John Ford," *Our Films Their Films*. Satvajit Ray. Hyperion NY 1994

The nearest description of Ford's [hallmark] would be a combination of strength and simplicity. The nearest equivalent I can think of is musical: middle-period Beethoven.

Like Picasso's obsession with the bull, Cézanne's with the apple, Bach's with the fugue, and the Hindu miniaturists' with the theme of Krishna, John Ford had a lifelong affair with the Western. 'When in doubt, make a Western,' is reported to have been his maxim. One only wishes he had been in doubt oftener.

For those who look for 'commitment' in the cinema in the new fashionable sense of the term, the work of Ford—as well as most of the great American directors prior to the 1960s—will have nothing to offer. But for those who look for art, for poetry, for a clean, healthy, robust attitude to life and human relationships, John Ford is among the most rewarding of directors. He was also unique in having won unreserved admiration from eminent film makers from all parts of the world—from Eisenstein in Soviet Russia, Kurosawa in Japan, Bergman in Sweden, and Orson Welles in the USA.

There is little doubt that this admiration was based primarily on the genre that Ford perfected. Along with slapstick comedy, the Western is the least literary of film

Expendable as they toast the retirement of a comrade. "I'm not going to make a speech," he states. "I've just got something to say."

genres. No wonder Ford's genius for pure cinema shone most luminously in it.

The distinction consists, as in all great film makers, in the manner of telling the stories; in how Ford uses his tools, how he stages his actions and photographs them, where he places his camera, how the shots and scenes follow one another, how the pace and the pulse of the film derive from the cutting. Among other things, Ford was a master of the static shot, of the 'telling' composition. There is rarely any movement of the camera within a shot unless it happens to be part of a larger action. This is a method which lies at the other extreme from, say, Orson Welles. One can say that in a Ford film the camera is a sensitive observer, always sure of the best viewpoint, while in Welles it is a dextrous participant, exploring all manner of viewpoints.

Much of the best things in a Ford film has the mysterious, indefinable quality of poetry. Because some of them seem casual—even accidental—it is difficult to realise how much experience and mastery lie behind them.

[he describes a moment from *Fort Apache*] What it does is to invest a casual moment with poetic significance. Those who look for 'meaning' here, whether symbolic or literary, and are disappointed not to find it, are obviously unaware of what makes for poetry in the cinema. All the best Ford films are full of such poetic details, which, taken in conjunction with the sweep and vigour of the action sequences, give the films their satisfying richness.

Join us next week, Tuesday October 21 for Jimmy Stewart and Kim Novak in

~~Alfred Hitchcock's best film: *Vertigo*.~~

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