

MOVIE REVIEW-Western Month

‘Big Jake’ is a movie about family

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Classic westerns don't carry as much weight nowadays as they once did.

Being born in the 90s, I didn't grow up with the likes of John Wayne or the young Clint Eastwood.

Henry Ford and James Cooper would be others, as well, who were part of that American western cinema scene which at one point epitomized American cinema to its core.

Instead, Tom Crews, Steve Carrel or Jim Carey were actors I was more accustomed to seeing on the big screen. And they weren't playing the lead in a gunslingin' cowboy story in the wild west, but rather, working in an office in a room or portraying a goofy animal detective.

They're great actors, don't get me wrong, and I love their movies, but as I grow older, checking out movies from the past has been more common for me.

For this week's movie review, I went back to check out "Big Jake."

The film came out in 1971 and starred the iconic John Wayne.

This was the first film I've watched with John Wayne and I enjoyed his quick wit and collected coolness the most.

Wayne's character, Jacob McCandles, seems to be something of legend.

When the film starts, he saves a man from being hung, and the ones about to hang the man attempt to get smart with McCandles.

But when they find out who they're dealing with, they comically apologize. They mis-

takenly thought Big Jake was dead.

The plot of the film plays true to classic western form.

The McCandles family is very well off, and when a notorious group of roughnecked outlaws raid the family ranch, they kidnap McCandle's grandson.

Further, the kidnapers request \$1 million of the family to get their grandson back, and Big Jake's former wife Martha — played by Maureen O'hara — is the one who accepts the ransom note.

She then rounds up a group of men to get her grandson back, and despite her personal feelings, calls in the only man she knows is right for the job: Big Jake McCandles.

Included in the group of men are two of Big Jake's sons.

The younger of the two seems to be a little bit of an airhead, but excited to get to know his father. The older of the two holds hard feelings towards his "daddy."

As I mentioned before, westerns were never movies I grew up watching. But the ones I have seen never included cars or motorcycles — usually just horses and buggies.

The start of "Big

Jake" gives context to the time period. It explains the industrial revolution taking place out east, but adds the fact the west is still, in fact, wild.

With that being said, one of my favorite parts of the film is when the group of men rounded up are devising how to go about the task at hand, and decide to take vehicles.

Big Jake is stubborn when it comes to this decision, and sides with his horse, donkey and man's best friend; his dog.

Big Jake is seen riding through the river, as they head out, with the group riding past him just above on a bridge.

Later in the film, Big Jake's decision to stick with what he knows best, proves right.

At another point in the film, McCandles is seen commenting on his older son's pistol. He basically tells him to stop playing with a fancy new pistol and to use a gun a real man would use.

Both instances further illustrated what type of man Big Jake is, and why only John Wayne (the man himself) is the one to play him. He's old school. It also suggests doing things the old way, and not getting ahead of oneself, may work out for the best.

John Wayne is synonymous with the American western, much like Eastwood,



IMAGE COURTESY OF IMDB

and without him this movie would be nothing.

Besides Wayne's acting, others in the film made me cringe sometimes with how bad they played their roles.

There was another exception, however, and that was Richard Boone. His role as the villain John Fain stood out, particularly in the las scene when he sits over the box of "money" dur an exchange with McCandles.

I was able to accept the rest of the bad acting, however, because I was able to enjoy everything a classic western is.

The movie is dramatic, funny at times and centers on family, most importantly.

Two of Wayne's actual sons (Patrick and Ethan) play sons of Big Jake in the movie.

While Big Jake was estranged to his family, the quest to get his grandson little Jake helped rekindle the lost relationship.

It's a movie about the ideal American hero out west, but it is a movie about reconnecting with family and what family means, first and foremost.

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