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Drums Along the Mohawk – BFI 51st London Film Festival

Henry Fonda stars in John Ford's first colour feature film

Ford's first colour feature and one of his most beautiful films, this epic Western, set in the American colonial period on the eve of the War of Independence, has begged for a full restoration, now splendidly accomplished by the Academy Film Archive in Los Angeles in collaboration with Twentieth Century Fox.

A characteristic Ford hymn to the pioneer spirit, the film is a sweeping account of the challenges and hardships - hostile Indians and the perfidious English among them - facing a young couple (Claudette Colbert and Henry Fonda) trying to set up home in a frontier farming community. Or, as executive producer Darryl F Zanuck put it more simply, "a show" about "a pioneer boy who took a city girl to the Mohawk Valley to live."

Memorable sequences include Fonda's early-morning race for help, outrunning two Indians - more thrilling and more spectacular than Rod Steiger's similar trial of stamina in Sam Fuller's later film *Run of the Arrow*. To be cherished also is Edna May Oliver's Oscar-nominated supporting role as a no-truck-with-the-natives matriarch. But it's a film to be seen, above all else, for cinematographer Bert Glennon's beautiful images.

Clyde Jeavons

Directed by:

John Ford

Written by:

Lamar Trotti, Sonia Levien

Cast:

Claudette Colbert, Henry Fonda, Edna May Oliver

Country:

USA

Year:

1939

Running time:

103 mins