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AFTER  
DARK

A FORTY GUNS'  
SALUTE TO  
THE WESTERN

Manly, yet sensitive: John Wayne in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*.

ONCE THE most popular genre in the history of cinema, the Western is currently suffering a low point in popularity. The public is just plain burned-out on the overused stories of gunfighters, settlers and frontier romances. But like any genre, some films are Hollywood filler/star vehicles, quickly forgotten, and others are "classics" that give a thrill even decades later.

If any director deserves the title of "classic," it's master craftsman John Ford, who gained his stature by taking his stories outdoors (to Monument Valley), and made a star out of John Wayne in the process. In *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, Wayne plays a retiring cavalry captain who, at the last minute, can't help but go on just one more "Indian pacification" campaign. Wayne's character is the type of military commander who's tough on his men, but only because he loves them dearly (the scene where his men present him with an engraved watch would make Ronald Reagan cry). The Indians are, of course, "primitive," and, less here than in earlier works, bordering on the "savage." Despite this inherent racism, Ford's heroes are deeply in touch with the land, and the stories are majestic slices of our book-learned history.

Where Ford is the acme of the "classic" Western, the genre is not without its quirks. One of these is Sam Fuller's *Forty Guns*, argued by critics (including Godard) to be this powerful "B" director's best film. One listen to the title song, "The Woman with the Whip," sung by a group of dirty cowboys in an outdoor bathhouse, is enough to convince you that this is no ordinary yarn. The plot involves three lawmen who roll into town and are immediately in conflict with Barbara Stanwyck, the "woman with the whip" who runs the town, and her "40 guns" who ride behind her.

*She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* plays Wed/25 at 7 pm, and *Forty Guns* follows at 9:10 pm, kicking off a three-month overview of Western films at the Pacific Film Archive, 2625 Durant, Berk. 642-1412.

— Kurt Wolff