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JOHNNY GUITAR

(U.S.: 1954) 112 minutes color \$40.00

Directed by Nicholas Ray - Screenplay by Philip Yordan. Based on the Novel by Roy Chanslor - Cinematography by Harry Stradling - Edited by Richard L. Van Enger - Special Effects by Howard and Theodore Lydecker - Music by Victor Young (Words to closing song Composed and Sung by Peggy Lee) - Presented by Herbert J. Yates - Produced by Ray for Republic Pictures. Players: Joan Crawford, Sterling Hayden, Mercedes McCambridge, Scott Brady, Ward Bond, Ben Cooper, Ernest Borgnine, John Carradine, Royal Dano, Frank Ferguson, Paul Fix, Rhys Williams, Ian MacDonald, Will Wright, John Maxwell, Robert Osterloh, Frank Marlowe, Trevor Bardette, Sumner Williams, Sheb Wooley, Denver Pyle, Clem Harvey.

"I'm going to kill you!"

"I know . . . if I don't kill you first."

If you think these two lines were probably uttered by Sterling Hayden to Scott Brady (or vice versa), you've never seen this baroque, incredible western for which Nicholas Ray became so famous, and which he still remembers fondly. It is the *women* who are the strong characters in this psychologically frenzied film: the men function more or less as a Greek Chorus in the background to Mercedes McCambridge's all-stops-out portrayal of the sexually-frustrated-to-the-point-of-near-madness Emma Small and Joan Crawford's cool-as-ice-but-lethal enactment of Vienna. It is these two women who are swapping death threats in that dialogue, and they mean every blasted, searing word of it!

Crawford "comes on so strong" that one of the men who works for her (Frank Marlowe) remarks when she is out of ear-shot, "Never saw a woman who was more man! Acts like one, thinks like one, sometimes makes me feel I'm not one." She has the same effect on Ben Cooper as Turkey, a mad-eyed teenager who wants to stay at the saloon and protect Vienna (this scene is played very much like the scene between Katy Jurado and Lloyd Bridges in *High Noon*). Cooper attempts to show Vienna his prowess with a gun, but bungles it badly when Sterling Hayden grabs a gun and shoots the revolver out of Cooper's hand (thereby revealing himself as a former gunslinger, a fact that Hayden was attempting to hide behind such mild lines as, "When you boil it all down, what does a man *really* need? A smoke and a good cup of coffee!").

In between the main story lines are embroiled such theatrical touches as the dragging of bleeding bodies over

to ooze red on top of the green baize pool table and having Vienna make her first entrance in complete male drag, later posing her in red against a beige wall and still later in white lace against a red stone wall. Hayden makes his first entrance to the phallic symbolism of a dynamite blast the railroad advance crew have planted which tears the top off a nearby mountain. The Dancin' Kid makes his first entrance in one hell of a dust storm. John Carradine is used for humorous counterpoint between scene changes as Royal Dano, one of Brady's gang, who is ostensibly dying of consumption throughout the film, but keeps rousing himself to fight another battle. Crawford is directed to play more and more quietly as McCambridge gets louder and louder, so that the result is an incredible breadth of tension between the two that is always nearly to the breaking point. (The rivalry between the women in the film carried over to such an actual loathing on the set that Crawford tried



to leave the film twice, once after scattering McCambridge's clothes all over the highway.)

Ray has subtle things going on underneath the surface of the film, too. The posse, eager to lynch with no proof, was intended as a jibe at the McCarthy Committee (Ray says this symbolism was understood very well abroad when the film was exhibited, but apparently either missed here or the critics were afraid to mention it). When Hayden plays his guitar, mostly to prove to the Dancin' Kid that he *could* play the guitar, in visual reply to which the Kid proves to Hayden that he could dance, (no, they *don't* dance together, but they would have if Ray had thought of it), he first plays "Old Joe Clark," a reel. When McCambridge is discussed, he starts singing "Oh, my name is Emma Dunn, Emma Dunn . . ." to the tune of "My name it is Sam Hall, it is Sam Hall," and since the next line of *that* song goes: "And I *hate* you one and all - goddam your eyes," he has etched a vicious portrait of Emma without having to sing the next line.

Crawford is also given an anti-male chauvinist line to deliver, which she does with obvious relish: "A man can lie, cheat and kill, and as long as he hangs onto his pride, he's still a man: all a woman has to do is slip once and she's a tramp! It must be a great *comfort* to . . . be a *man!*" The way her lips curl on that last word would stop any *man* in his tracks, and it has that very effect. Romance is never heard of in the film, and lust is never quite consummated. There are always interruptions that keep all the men from reaching Crawford's sneering lips, if it isn't a windstorm, it's a posse; if it isn't a posse, it's another body hitting the pool table. This eventually builds up an emotional tension that is unsettling and difficult to describe.

As for Ernest Borgnine and his ridiculous hat (he is one of Brady's gang, too), he is so unfeeling and self-centered that when Brady says "You and Emma would make a good pair! You don't smoke, you don't drink, and you're mean to horses. Just what *do* you like?" Borgnine isn't nonplussed for an answer.

"Me! I like me! And I take good care of *me*."

Critics detected a repressed lesbian relationship between Crawford and McCambridge in the film, to which Ray recently responded that it never entered his mind at the time, "But that's fine! That's something you have to feel free enough to release." (Ray to Mike Goodwin in an interview in *Take One*) The entire picture, according to Ray, was a "go for broke ~~idea~~ It works! -GDIV
Note: Our prints have been processed in the original Trucolor by Consolidated and have some of the finest color of any films we offer: the sort of browns and greens and yellows that no other color process seemed able to reproduce as naturally.