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Weekly VARIETY • Johnny Guitar (SONG-COLOR)

Joan Crawford's marquee worth to bolster only fair piece of western entertainment. Prospects spotty.

Hollywood, May 4.

Republic release (no producer credit). Stars Joan Crawford; co-stars Sterling Hayden, Mercedes McCambridge, Scott Brady; features Ward Bond, Ben Cooper, Ernest Borgnine, John Carradine, Royal Dano, Frank Ferguson, Paul Fix, Rhys Williams, Ian MacDonald. Directed by Nicholas Ray. Screenplay, Philip Yordan; camera (Trucolor), Harry Stradling; ed-camera (Trucolor), Harry Stradling; editor, Richard L. Van Enger; music, Victor Young; song, Peggy Lee and Young; sung by Miss Lee. Previewed April 30, '54. Running time, 111 MINS.

Vienna	Joan Crawford
Johnny Guitar	Sterling Hayden
Emma Small	Mercedes McCambridge
Dancin' Kid	Scott Brady
John Melvers	Ward Bond
Turkey Ralston	Ben Cooper
Bart Lonergan	Ernest Borgnine
Old Tom	John Carradine
Corey	Royal Dano
Marshal Williams	Frank Ferguson
Eddie	Paul Fix
Mr. Andrews	Rhys Williams
Pete	Ian MacDonald

(Aspect ratio: 1.66-1)

Joan Crawford, whose last western was Metro's "Montana Moon" in 1930, has another try at the wide open spaces with "Johnny Guitar."

Like "Moon," it proves the actress should leave saddles and levis to someone else and stick to city lights for a background. "Guitar" is only a fair piece of entertainment, seemingly headed for spotty returns, even with exploitation.

The Roy Chanslor novel on which Philip Yordan based the screenplay provides this Republic release with a conventional oater basis. Had the makers played it straight it would have been much better entertainment for the masses. Instead, scripter Yordan and director Nicholas Ray become so involved with character nuances and neuroses, all wrapped up in dialog, that "Johnny Guitar" never has enough chance to rear up in the saddle and ride at an acceptable outdoor pace. It will be a major disappointment to loyal Crawford fans, even though they will give the picture some initial business.

Miss Crawford plays Vienna, strong-willed owner of a plush gambling saloon standing alone in the wilderness of Arizona. The solitude doesn't bother Vienna; she knows the railroad's coming through and she will build a whole new town and get rich. Opposing her is Mercedes McCambridge, bitter, frustrated leader of a nearby community, who has egged the ranchers and others into taking her side in the fight by using their fear of the settlers and fences that will come with the rails.

Love, hate and violence, with little sympathy for the characters, is stirred up during the overlong 111 minutes of film. Near the climax the picture takes on the appearance and rough action of a western, all of which would have been to more effective purpose had not it been so long in coming. The people in the story never achieve much depth, this character shallowness being at odds with the pretentious attempt at analysis to which the script and direction devotes so much time.

Republic's Trucolor process was used to dye the footage and under the camera-wielding of Harry Stradling the hues are an effective part of the film's sight values.

Brog.