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THE NAKED SPUR

One fine name in films who's been especially obscure, at least among the people I talk to, is Anthony Mann. My personal discovery of him came during a six-month period when I tuned in every Western on television (which makes for a digression on the Cal Worthington commercials as what's *really* left of the Western genre, but that's another story). Anyway, almost every time that a Western grabbed me in its first few frames, with a visual sweep and rhythm that gave not only the landscape, but how it felt to stand in the landscape at that time . . . and this complemented by acting that was detailed and realistic, with almost no recourse to posing (very rare in a Western, or any "genre" sort of film) . . . and intelligently, sparsely written scripts . . . every time those qualities were in evidence together from the first few minutes, it turned out to be another Anthony Mann film I'd never heard of — *Winchester '73*, *The Tall Target*, *Bend of the River*, *The Naked Spur*, *The Far Country*, *The Tin Star*, *Man of the West* — most of them with James Stewart doing his finest work. *The Naked Spur* is Stewart, Janet Leigh and Robert Ryan in 1953. The Stewart of Mann's films is not trying to be pleasant — he's hard-bitten and, in fact, sometimes just plain mean — qualities enhanced, but not tempered, by the generosity and justness of the character.

He is, in fact, very close to Wyatt Earp as he's portrayed in contemporary journals and accounts, closer than in any movie actually about Earp. Which is to say that while Ford, Hawks, Peckinpah and Leone created great Western myths, Anthony Mann worked closer to the bone, closer to what there is to see in the Old West's journals and photographs. From this, he got in his work a feel of the psychology of that time, the way it felt to be of that mind, that I find in no one else. And Mann did this without ever drawing attention to what he was doing, giving as much tension, drama, laughter and gunplay — Western genre fun — as you could want. (MV)

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