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film
society

the
notes

july
2018

coming up
@ kings lynn

- **FESTIVAL FILM** Tuesday Jul 17th
2.30pm **WIND RIVER**
 - **FESTIVAL FILM** Friday Jul 20th
2.30pm **THE DEATH OF STALIN**
 - **FESTIVAL FILM** Saturday Jul 21st
11am **THE RED TURTLE**
 - **FESTIVAL FILM** Wednesday Jul 25th
12.30pm **LOVING VINCENT**
 - **FILM** Thursday Aug 9th 7.30pm
**FILM STARS DON'T DIE
IN LIVERPOOL** + pre-film meal
- further details* klcc.uk

The Last Picture Show

Peter Bogdanovich, US 1971

Screenplay by Larry McMurtry and Peter Bogdanovich from the novel by Larry McMurtry

Timothy Bottoms Sonny Crawford
 Jeff Bridges Duane Jackson
 Cybill Shepherd Jacy Farrow
 Ben Johnson Sam the Lion
 Cloris Leachman Ruth Popper
 Ellen Burstyn Lois Farrow
 Eileen Brennan Genevieve
 Clu Gulager Abilene
 Sam Bottoms Billy
 Sharon Ullrick Charlene Duggs
 Randy Quaid Lester Marlow
 Joe Heathcock the Sheriff
 Bill Thurman Coach Popper
 Barc Doyle Joe Bob Blanton
 Jessie Lee Fulton Miss Mosey
 Gary Brockette Bobby Sheen
 Helena Humann Jimmie Sue
 Loyd Catlett Leroy
 Robert Glenn Gene Farrow
 John Hillerman Teacher
 Janice E. O'Malley Mrs. Clarg
 Floyd Mahaney
 ... Oklahoma Patrolman

Cinematography Robert Surtees
 Music by Bob Wills and His Texas
 Playboys, Phil Harris, Johnny
 Standley, Hank Thompson.



Peter Bogdanovich's masterpiece from 1971, co-written with the original novel's author Larry McMurtry, is set in a small, dusty, windblown town in Texas at the time of the Korean war, with shades of John Updike's *Tarbox* and *Peyton Place*. (The last picture in question, which is to say the final feature to be shown in the town's dying movie theatre, is Howard Hawks's *Red River*.) Timothy Bottoms and a heartbreakingly young-looking Jeff Bridges play Sonny and Duane,

two boys destined to fall out over their interest in the stunningly beautiful, exquisitely manipulative Jacy, played by Cybill Shepherd. This movie is baked hard in the high summer heat of eroticism and sexual tension. Sonny's affair with a melancholy older woman Ruth (Cloris Leachman) is compelling. It begins with the awkward teen agreeing to drive her to the clinic for an illness that is never specified and appears later to vanish, perhaps cured by this glorious adventure. The nude

swimming-party scene is inspired: shy Jacy strips off on the diving board, stumbles in, and smilingly shows to a handsome naked boy that the watch her boyfriend has given her has stopped. Bogdanovich deserves a special laurel for that quietly superb sequence. The cast, including Ellen Burstyn, Eileen Brennan and Ben Johnson, take their leave in quaint "curtain-call" style final credits.

When *The Last Picture Show* opened in 1971, it created a sensation. Audiences crowded in with the eagerness reserved, these days, for teenage action pictures. It felt new and old at the same time. Bogdanovich, a film critic and acolyte of Welles, shot in black and white, which gave the film a timelessness, then and now. He used a soundtrack entirely made up of pop songs, which was something new (Scorsese had tried it with his first film, in 1967). It was mostly Hank Williams who provided the soundtrack for these lives, and Bogdanovich used real sources in the scenes for the music -- radios, jukeboxes -- where "Cold, Cold Heart" and "Why Don't You Love Me (Like You Used to Do)" commented directly on the action.

We had not seen these faces before, except for Ben Johnson and a few other supporting players. Like *Citizen Kane* by his hero, Bogdanovich made a film introducing future stars. Cybill Shepherd was in her first film. Tim Bottoms was in his second but spent his first, *Johnny Got His Gun*, as a soldier who could not see, hear or speak. Jeff Bridges had done nothing memorable, and Cloris Leachman and Ellen Burstyn caught fire with their roles here.

The film is above all an evocation of mood. It is about a town with no reason to exist, and people with no reason to live there. The only hope is in transgression, as Ruth knows when she seduces Sonny, the boy half her age. And then he, too, falls briefly under the spell of Jacy, leading to the powerful scene where he returns to Ruth and she hurls the coffeepot against the wall and spills out her soul. (Leachman did that scene in one take, first time, no rehearsal.)



Peter Bogdanovich recognizes that, no matter what else he does in life, the first paragraph of his obituary likely will mention the movie he made in 1971, *The Last Picture Show*.

*[...] He was 31 when he made *The Last Picture Show*, an actor and film journalist who had a couple of low-budget films under his belt (most famously, the 1968 thriller *Targets*, with Boris Karloff). The movie put him in the list of "New Hollywood" directors of the 1970s, alongside Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Brian De Palma and George Lucas.*

The movie, adapted from Larry McMurtry's novel, captures a year in a north Texas town, from the end of 1951 through most of 1952. It focuses on high-school friends Sonny Crawford (Timothy Bottoms) and Duane Jackson (Jeff Bridges) and their romantic and sexual experiences. A rundown movie theater serves as a symbol of the dying town's fortunes and the boys' coming of age.



"I got the impression that it spoke to a lot of people," Bogdanovich said. "People have told me that it reminds them of their hometown, so I think it has a certain universality to it. Young love, and sex and all that, is pretty universal."

The cast included Cybill Shepherd (in her first movie), Eileen Brennan, Ellen Burstyn and Randy Quaid. The movie's two older stars, Ben Johnson and Cloris Leachman, won Oscars for their supporting roles. The movie received six more nominations: Best Picture, director for Bogdanovich,

adapted screenplay (for McMurtry and Bogdanovich), cinematography, and supporting nods for Bridges and Burstyn.

"Roger Ebert said it was the best movie of 1951," Bogdanovich said. "But you couldn't make a movie like that in 1951, with the candid conversations about sex. I think it's the tension between the subject matter and the classic American storytelling technique that makes the picture work."

Part of that technique was filming in black and white. "Orson Welles says every performance looks better in black and white," Bogdanovich said. "It's the fact that you don't see blue eyes and blond hair. You focus on the performance, not the look of the people. And it enables you to capture the period better."

*Bogdanovich has tried his hand at many genres: screwball comedy (*What's Up, Doc* in 1972), period dramas (*Daisy Miller*, 1974), musicals (*At Long Last Love* in 1975), family drama (*Mask* in 1985), a country-music romance (*The Thing Called Love* in 1993), a Hollywood mystery (*The Cat's Meow* in 2001) and modern romance (*She's Funny That Way* in 2015).*

*He's also kept his hand in as a film historian (notably in his 1997 book *Who the Devil Made It: Conversations with Legendary Film Directors*) and as an actor, most famously on *The Sopranos*, playing the psychiatrist of Tony Soprano's shrink, Jennifer Melfi (Lorraine Bracco).*

[...] Through his career, he said, it's been difficult to separate his films from the memories of working on them. "That's why I never see my pictures alone," he said.

"I always make sure I see it with an audience."



Sean P. Means
Salt Lake Tribune

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OF HORSES AND MEN**

(Benedikt Erlingsson,
Iceland 2013)

Monday 21 August

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