

It is a great pleasure to collaborate with Cinematheque of Macedonia on this festival that celebrates the American western. These seven films capture an America that mostly never existed, of course, and yet they reflect so many of our dreams and fears.

Part of our American heritage is the romance of the west, nostalgia for an imagined time when the rules were simpler and coffee grittier, when a lone person could make his or her own destiny based on nothing but a tough, inevitably flawed character.

Almost every American child has spent time pretending to be a cowboy (or girl) or Indian. If the cowboys stood for honor and independence, the Indians were wise and wily, deliciously dangerous. My Macedonian friends tell me that many children here played cowboys and Indians, as well. There is something universal, then, in this play, in trying on these two different ways to be in the world.

I saw this American romance as a kind of faded mirage growing up in different parts of the United States and in Australia. My father's family is from Washington State, in the far Pacific Northwest, and I lived and studied in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona. In Arizona, people still wear cowboy hats. Many famous westerns were filmed at the "Old Tucson" movie set; Tombstone, the OK Corral, and the Boot Hill cemetery are real places. Two of the films in this series are set in Arizona, John Ford's ground-breaking *Stagecoach* and Fritz Lang's *Western Union*. Obviously the Arizona of today is very different from the West depicted in American Westerns, most of which are set in the

late 1800s, back when Arizona itself was still a territory—back before the United States was grown up. Today the "Grand Canyon State" is home to twenty-one federally recognized tribes, and reservations and tribal communities make up more than twenty-five percent of the state. If the Arizona of the Westerns was a troubling, rough-hewn place, the Arizona of today, while it still faces challenges, showcases diversity. Where else but in Arizona could I have Vietnamese *pho* for lunch served by recent immigrant waiters wearing Wrangler jeans and boots? It is worth remembering that Tempe, Arizona, home of Arizona State University (the largest university in the United States, with over 67,000 students – including my youngest brother) is a sister city with Skopje.

This festival would not have been possible without the talented staff at the Cinematheque of Macedonia, particularly Mimi Gorgoska-Ilievska, the Director, and Vladimir Angelov, Senior Filmologist. I would also like to thank Linda DeLiberio, Associate Director, Film and Media Studies program at Johns Hopkins University, for lending her expertise and creativity to this project. Finally, I would like to thank the students who have come to participate in the talks about Westerns and the viewers who have chosen to spend their evenings immersed in sagebrush and dust and horses. To quote John Wayne: "Tomorrow is the most important thing in life... It hopes we have learned something from yesterday."

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