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film

What's the name and where do they come from?

Sam Peckinpah. He was born in 1925 in Fresno, California.

And how would one pronounce that, then?

Peck-in-pah. Though he'd just as soon punch your lights out as tell you, if his reputation is to be believed. His first masterpiece was 'Ride the High Country' and he went on to do just that, revitalising the Western genre. A hard drinking, hard living maverick who used to go out on drinking binges with his stars so often that he would sometimes only get two hours filming in per day, Peckinpah pioneered the use of "balletic" violence in his films to emphasise its importance to the plot.

What key films of theirs can I casually drop into conversation?

The 'Wild Bunch'... Not really a light afternoon's family viewing, but certainly, with 'Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid', one of the best and most beautifully shot Westerns of all time. The Wild Bunch contains the famous line "If they move, kill 'em", and clearly inspired Quentin Tarantino in his use of bloodletting and violence as part of the film, not just on the periphery. He went on to make 'Straw Dogs', in which Dustin Hoffman plays a mild mannered professor driven to violent revenge after he and his wife are hounded by locals in a quiet English hamlet.

He completed the trilogy with 'Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid', a slow-moving journey across the west, following a friendship through trials and tribulations, the major one being that the old cronies are now sworn enemies. The haunting soundtrack revolves around Bob Dylan's 'Knocking on Heaven's Door', written especially for the film.

Any awards or other notable information?

Although 'The Wild Bunch' was nominated for the Best Original Screenplay Oscar, Peckinpah managed to avoid awards through a skillful campaign of a violent attitude, drug and alcohol abuse and generally not being the kind of person the industry likes to hold up to the world... Still managed to bring about Bob Dylan's feature film debut (as the mysterious Alias in 'Pat Garrett') and provoke Charlton Heston into saying he was "the only person I've ever physically threatened on a set".

And are they still alive?

Nope. Died in 1984, of heart failure, while being lined up to direct a Stephen King flick. He descended into obscurity in his final years; among his last works such lead balloons as 'Convoy' and 'Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia', as well as two Julian Lennon music videos.

Where can I find out more?

- The films of Sam Peckinpah
- The Passion of Sam Peckinpah
- Dueling with Sam Peckinpah



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