

True Grit

By Tom Sims, Executive Director, Cape May Film Society

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I've never been a John Wayne fan... Did I lose any readers with that opener? Sorry but I always feel like he's playing... well... John Wayne. So when I heard a "reimagining" of True Grit was coming out, I wasn't all that interested. The 1969 film won John Wayne an Oscar. But when I heard the remake was from the Coen Brothers, I was mildly interested. Having seen the film now four times (yes, all in the theater paying full price), you could say I'm somewhat of a groupie.

The first thing you notice about the film is its amazing attention to detail. Some will criticize the film for its language—not that there was any cursing (there was none) but that the phrasing was awkward and sometimes difficult to follow. But you won't hear my say that. Remember, I'm a groupie. To me, the film's use of language was as important as its choice in props used to give us a sense of the past.

True Grit tells the story of a 14 year old girl Mattie, played masterfully by Hailee Steinfeld, hires a drunken, run down US Marshall (Oscar-worthy performance by Jeff Bridges) to bring in her father's killer (played by Josh Brolin). The two get some unwanted help from a Texas Ranger (Matt Damon) to track down the killer, who is running with outlaw Lucky Ned Pepper (played by Barry Pepper).

This film was marked by gold standard acting performances by the entire cast. And the Coen Brothers have once again proven that their style of filmmaking and storytelling is among the best in Hollywood. Just out of curiosity, I did rent the 1969 original and was impressed by how much of the original was mimicked in the remake—but with more than 40 years between them it's difficult to compare the two side-by-side. In the original, Glen Campbell played the Texas Ranger and a very young Robert Duvall as Ned Pepper.

So do I recommend the remake of True Grit? Well you might be okay with just one screening.

Quick Review of Somewhere

This "relationship" film is the latest offering from Sofia Coppola (daughter of the great director Francis Ford Coppola). This film may have been better titled Nowhere—because that seems to be where Coppola is taking us throughout. The fact is there are great moments of acting genius from the leads, Stephen Dorf and Ella Fanning—especially from the young sister of Dakota, but that only makes you that much more ticked off that these talents were squandered on a plot an storyline that could have developed much better.

For a free voucher to the 2011 Cape May Film Festival, email the answer to this question to capemayfilm@hotmail.com: For what other film did John Wayne win an Oscar?