

Butch and Sundance: The Early Days

What do you do when you have a smash hit film that becomes an instant classic, that breaks box-office records, and that audiences flock to see? Easy – you do a sequel, of course. However, doing a sequel becomes a little problematic if your two leading characters are dead at the end of the film. That was the problem faced by Twentieth Century-Fox in 1969 with their monster hit, *Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid*, written by William Goldman, directed by George Roy Hill, and starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford in what some would say were the most iconic roles of their long and illustrious careers. So, nothing happened because what could happen? But a decade later, in 1979 someone finally came up with a way to bring back Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid – not in a sequel, put a prequel. Back in 1979 prequels were a rarity – in fact, some folks say that *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days* was the first film to actually use the term prequel. Whether that's true or legend, there certainly weren't many true prequels prior to it.

While the screenplay was by Allan Burns, original screenwriter, William Goldman, was on hand as the executive producer of the film, and he contributed certain elements to the script. Allan Burns had had a big career in television, starting with the *Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*. He co-created *The Munsters*, and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and that show's spin-offs, *Rhoda* and *Lou Grant*. But it wasn't until 1979 that he made his big-screen debut as a screenwriter, with the huge hit film *A Little Romance* and then *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days*.

Richard Lester was hired to direct. Lester had already helmed such classics as *A Hard Day's Night*, *Help!*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Petulia*, *The Three Musketeers* and *The Four Musketeers*, the hugely underrated *Juggernaut* and *Robin and Marian*, and many others. His quirky style ended up being perfect

for Burns's quirky script for *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days*.

The casting of the film proved inspired. For Butch it was the young actor, Tom Berenger, who'd just gotten a lot of attention for *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. While he wasn't an exact dead ringer for Paul Newman, there was definitely an uncanny resemblance. For The Sundance Kid it was another young up-and-comer, William Katt, who'd had a big success in the Brian de Palma blockbuster, *Carrie*, followed by an excellent performance in the John Milius film, *Big Wednesday*. Katt's resemblance to Robert Redford was even more uncanny, and he and Berenger had terrific chemistry. Rounding out the cast were such terrific supporting players as Michael C. Gwynne, John Shuck, Christopher Lloyd, Peter Weller, and Brian Dennehy.

The resulting film wasn't a hit. Many critics felt the film was simply unnecessary, while begrudgingly admitting that they were entertained by it. If one reads the reviews of the film from 1979, it's almost like the reviewers were unwilling to cut the film some slack and review it on its own merits. Audiences stayed away and the film disappeared, although, interestingly, it actually received one Academy Award nomination, for Best Costume Design. But, over the years, thanks to home video and cable, the film has developed a real cult following and deservedly so. Because watching it today, without all the baggage it had back in 1979, it's a wildly entertaining film with a wonderful screenplay and great direction, along with colorful performances. The dialogue sparkles and there are hints of running gags that had already appeared in *Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid*. It has a real charm about it and those who've found it over the years can look past the obvious: No, it's not *Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid* – it is its own film, with its own style, and, for those who haven't seen it, one worth catching up with.

One of the things that makes the film

work so well is the great score by Patrick Williams, one of two happy collaborations with Richard Lester, both from 1979, the other being his wonderful score to Lester's *Cuba*. Patrick Williams, born in 1939, began scoring films in 1968 with *How Sweet It Is*. Over the years he's written some truly superb scores, such as *The One and Only*, *Casey's Shadow*, *The Cheap Detective*, *Hero at Large*, *Used Cars*, *Breaking Away* (Oscar nomination), *Some Kind of Hero*, *The Toy*, *The Buddy System*, and many, many others, along with scores for such television classics as *The Streets of San Francisco*, *The Magician*, *Cannon*, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, *Lou Grant*, and on and on. For his television work he has been awarded four Emmys and been nominated a whopping twenty-three times. He has also arranged and conducted for any number of great singers, including the two Frank Sinatra duets albums.

For *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days*, Williams wrote an eclectic score – playful, beautiful, filled with adventure and bravado, tenderness, and gorgeous melodic themes. It works perfectly in the film, complementing the visuals, the comedy, and the drama, a real old-fashioned honest-to-goodness film score.

Almost the entire score for *Butch and Sundance: The Early Days* was recorded twice. Some cues remained exactly the same in both orchestration and writing, while other cues had slight differences in orchestration and timing, while other cues had quite a bit of different material. We present the entire score as used in the film (along with an unused cue), and then, as a bonus we present the original versions of cues where they differed from the rerecorded cues.

— Bruce Kimmel