

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Redford and Me

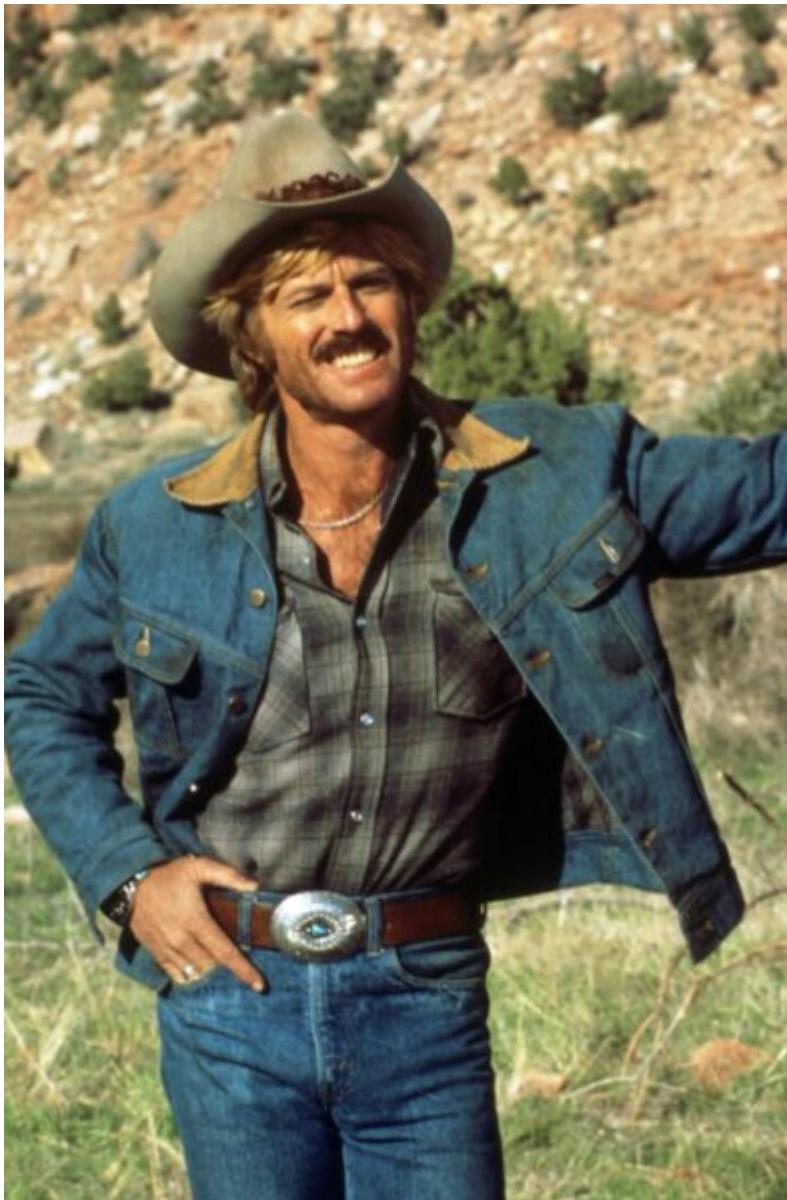
Elisa Leonelli · Sunday, August 18th, 2024

I have been watching Robert Redford on the big screen ever since I was a teenager living in Italy. I liked him in *Barefoot in the Park* (1967) with Jane Fonda, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) with Paul Newman. I enjoyed his performances even more after I moved to the United States in 1972 and I was able to hear his voice speaking English and not dubbed in Italian.



Elisa Leonelli, Robert Redford 1998

I appreciated his work as an actor in *The Sting* (1973), *The Way We Were* (1973) with Barbra Streisand, *The Great Gatsby* (1974), *All the President's Men* (1976) with Dustin Hoffman, *The Electric Horseman* (1979) with Jane Fonda, *The Natural* (1984) with Glenn Close, *Out of Africa* (1985) with Meryl Streep, and many other movies. But I did not swoon over Redford's golden boy image like many women of my generation did.



Electric Horseman © Columbia

It was not until I first met “Bob” in person in 1992, while doing interviews for *A River Runs Through It* in Toronto, that I realized how good he was as a film director. He had won an Academy Award for his directorial debut *Ordinary People* (1980), and done an excellent job on *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988), but it was this movie that really impressed me. I wrote an article for Venice, Los Angeles Arts and Entertainment magazine, where I served as Film Editor for ten years.

In December of that same year, I decided to apply for a Master Degree in Critical Studies at USC School of Cinematic Arts, after getting advice from Marsha Kinder, and started attending classes in January 1993.



Elisa Leonelli, Robert Redford 2000

In the Fall of 1993, when I was tasked with writing a book proposal for a class on Bibliography of Cinema taught by Steven Hanson, I chose Robert Redford. In Fall of 1994, while taking a Multimedia class with Charles Tashiro, I used Hypercard, Adobe Photoshop and Premiere on a Macintosh Pro computer to create a video/photo/text presentation of *A River Runs Through it*. In Spring of 1995, for a class on Television Criticism by Jon Wagner, I made an oral presentation about *Quiz Show* (1994) directed by Redford.



Robert Redford (c) HFPA 1994

When I asked Rick Jewell's approval to write my master thesis on Robert Redford, he agreed, but told me it could not be a generic examination of his work as a director, it needed a specific point of view. So I decided to travel to Sundance in June 1994 and attend the Filmmakers Lab. That is where a light bulb went on in my head and I discovered what I wanted to demonstrate with my thesis. When I saw the Indian totem pole in the middle of the resort, the decor of the hotel rooms, the restaurant and the gift shop, I witnessed Redford's appreciation for Native American culture.



Jeremiah Johnson © WB

As an actor in *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (1968) written and directed by Abraham Polonsky, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) by George Roy Hill, *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972) by Sydney Pollack, *The Electric Horseman* (1979) by Pollack, Redford played different kinds of Western heroes, in movies he directed, *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1986), *A River Runs Through It* (1992), *The Horse Whisperer* (1998) where he also played the lead, Redford expressed his views on a way to survive in the West in harmony with nature.



Sundance Kid © Fox

Additionally Redford wrote the text for a picture book, *The Outlaw Trail* (1978), founded the Sundance Institute (1980), produced the documentary *Incident at Oglala* (1992) about Leonard Peltier, the movie *The Dark Wind* (1991) from the novel by Tony Hillerman.



Horse Whisperer © Disney

I presented my thesis in 1997, when *The Horse Whisperer* had not been filmed yet, so when I reworked my text into a book published in 2007, also titled *Robert Redford and the American West*, I added chapters about this movie, and about *An Unfinished Life* (2005) directed by Lasse Hallström.



Elisa Leonelli, Robert Redford 2004

As a journalist, I interviewed Redford many more times, for *Sneakers* and *Indecent Proposal* (1992), *Quiz Show* (1994), *The Horse Whisperer* (1998), *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), *Spy Game* and *The Last Castle* (2001), *The Clearing* (2004), *Lions for Lambs* (2007), *All Is Lost* (2013), *The Old Man & the Gun* (2018).



Robert Redford (c) Yoram Kahana 2004

I wrote articles for the Italian magazines Marie Claire, Gioia, Donna Moderna, the Spanish Cinemanía, and in 2015 for this publication about *A Walk in the Woods*. I mentioned *Butch Cassidy* (1969) in my article about the Pesaro Film Festival where it was shown in 2019 on its 50th anniversary. Last month I wrote about Sydney Pollack's views on directing Redford.



Robert Redford © Yoram Kahana 2000

Please click an underlined words for additional information.

Happy Birthday, Robert Redford!

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