

Lone Pine Film Festival Friends Taylor, McCrea Co-star in Canyon Trail

By Dorothy Kosich

Actor/artist [Buck Taylor](#) of [Gunsmoke](#) TV fame and actor/producer Wyatt McCrea, both long-time friends of the Lone Pine Film Festival and the Museum of Western Film History, are featured in the new western DVD, [Canyon Trail](#), scheduled to premier tonight in Enid, Oklahoma, home of Skeleton Creek Productions.



Co-founded by brothers and self-trained filmmakers Larry and Rick Simpson, [Skeleton Creek Productions](#) is a successful small business which has been making family-friendly westerns since 1996 at a profit. [Canyon Trail](#), their sixth western in a series featuring ranch hands Stormy Lake, Texas Clapsaddle and Cimarron Simons, has attracted a crew from California, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, who serve as actors, handle livestock and build sets.

The straight-to-dvd production was filmed on the plains of Kansas and Oklahoma and in the mountains of Colorado and New Mexico. Headlining the 140-actor cast are Buck Taylor, Rick Simpson, Bryanna Holt (actress daughter of the late western actor [Tim Holt](#)), Larry W. Simpson, Tom Ward, Wyatt McCrea (grandson of the late western actor [Joel McCrea](#)), and cowboy singer [R.W. Hampton](#).

In a recent interview with this writer, McCrea (Deputy Walt Tyler) said he appreciated the chance to work in [Canyon Trail](#), especially since it was a family-friendly western with no cursing and “nothing overtly sexual.”

Rick Simpson told this writer he grew up on the Skeleton Creek Ranch. The brothers turned the old family western wear store, founded by their father K.P. Simpson, into a western museum in downtown Enid. In his spare time, K.P. Simpson would write scripts that eventually became episodes of the former NBC show, [Unsolved Mysteries](#). Two of his scripts were made into full-length films, CBS’s [Staircase](#) and [the Young Guns](#).

Both Simpson facilities now house a total of nine western movie sets.

To save costs, the production company keeps “stunts to a minimum,” Rick Simpson noted, adding he and his brother are also very familiar with good filming locations in Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Rick writes and directs the westerns, which Larry Simpson produces. In an interview published by [Cowboys & Indians](#) in July, Rick Simpson observed, “Today there are no heroes for kids to look up to who won’t let them down—men who never swear, who always protect the kids and womenfolk, who drink sarsaparilla. I think our movies have been very successful so far because people want to go back to that—right versus wrong. There’s so much gray anymore that it’s hard for people to tell right from wrong.”

The Stormy Lane Fan Club boasts 3,800 members in 45 states. The series is so popular that actor Buck Taylor has appeared in two of the episodes.

Lone Pine Museum of Western Film History Director Robert Sigman calls Taylor, “a very good friend” of both the Lone Pine Film Festival and the museum. Taylor exhibited his paintings at the Lone Pine Film Festival in October 2011, as well as donating artwork for the program cover, poster and t-shirt for the festival.

However, Taylor could not be reached for comment about the Canyon Trail DVD or the Museum of Western Film History in time for publication of this story.

Preserving Western Heritage in Era of Shrinking Corporate Funding

Taylor’s Canyon Trail co-star [Wyatt McCrea](#) is a long-time advocate of preserving our western heritage, particularly in family-friendly films and museums. The oldest grandchild of the later actors Joel McCrea and his wife, Frances Dee, the executive producer/actor/rancher is the co-owner of [Third Point Productions](#), producing television content, commercials and music videos.

McCrea has served on the board of directors of the [National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum](#), and as chairman of the museum’s Western Heritage Awards. He also serves on the board of the Will Rogers Ranch Foundation and the [Will Rogers Memorial Commission](#).

Jennifer Rogers Etcheverry, Will Rogers’ great-granddaughter, has a photo in her office of Joel and Wyatt McCrea. “These men are a great example of real cowboys and true gentlemen. That is what Wyatt McCrea brings aboard [to the Will Rogers Memorial Commission],” she recently told the State of Oklahoma’s Will Rogers Memorial Museums. “He instills the moral and values that are becoming lost in today’s world; the tipping of his gat to ladies, strong handshakes and his word is as good as gold.”

Etcheverry noted that Wyatt McCrea turned his [grandparents’ ranch](#) in Moorpark, California, “into a living memorial where people from all over can visit and enjoy.”

In an interview with this writer during the Lone Pine Film Festival last month, McCrea said he has spent the last 12 years attending the Lone Pine and [Western Legends Roundup](#) film festivals in California and Kanab, Utah, because he believes these events perpetuate a “uniquely American” heritage. This year the popular festival favorite is also attending [The Memphis Film Festival](#) in Tunica, Mississippi.

McCrea admitted he worries because the western genre as a whole “is kind of shrinking.” It is now tougher for non-profit organizations to get funding for western heritage events and “adjustments are having to be made,” he noted.

McCrea is also concerned about the future of the [National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum](#) in Oklahoma City, which is working to become more attractive to a younger audience.

The National Cowboy Museum has “huge collections downstairs” which should be viewed by more people nationally in order to develop the larger audience that convinces corporate donors to “be more apt to give money,” he suggested. The static displays typically found in museums now need video interactions to compete and “it takes dollars to do it.”

While corporations still donate to western heritage museums, McCrea said those facilities must now demonstrate that their attendance goes well beyond their actual buildings, including an online presence that attracts hits to their websites.

For example, the Glendale, California-based [The Autry Museum of the American West](#) is diversifying beyond its traditional western heritage exhibits, he noted.

Another example cited by McCrea is the [Cleveland Museum of Art's Gallery One](#) interactive gallery, which features the largest multi-touch screen in the United States, displaying images of over 3,500 objects from the museum's collection. The blend of art, technology and interpretation is aimed at enhancing and customizing the museum experience.

Visitors are allowed to dock an iPad at the collection wall and save their favorites to their iPad, which helps guide the visitors through a customized tour of the facility.

McCrea also favors technical advances, such as a future featuring livestream broadcasts from western heritage museums into schools.

Meanwhile, McCrea continues to convince other film and television professionals not solely employed in western filmmaking to make the three-hour drive from the Los Angeles area and participate in the annual Lone Pine Film Festival. He credits Lone Pine's proximity to Hollywood as a key component of attracting top talent to the film festival.

To purchase a copy of the Canyon Trail Dvd, go to <http://www.skeletoncreekproductions.com/p-movies.html>

Lone Pine Film Festival contributing writer Dorothy Kosich is a longtime international online and print journalist, who resides in the "real" cowboy country of Nevada. dorothykosich@sbcglobal.net

