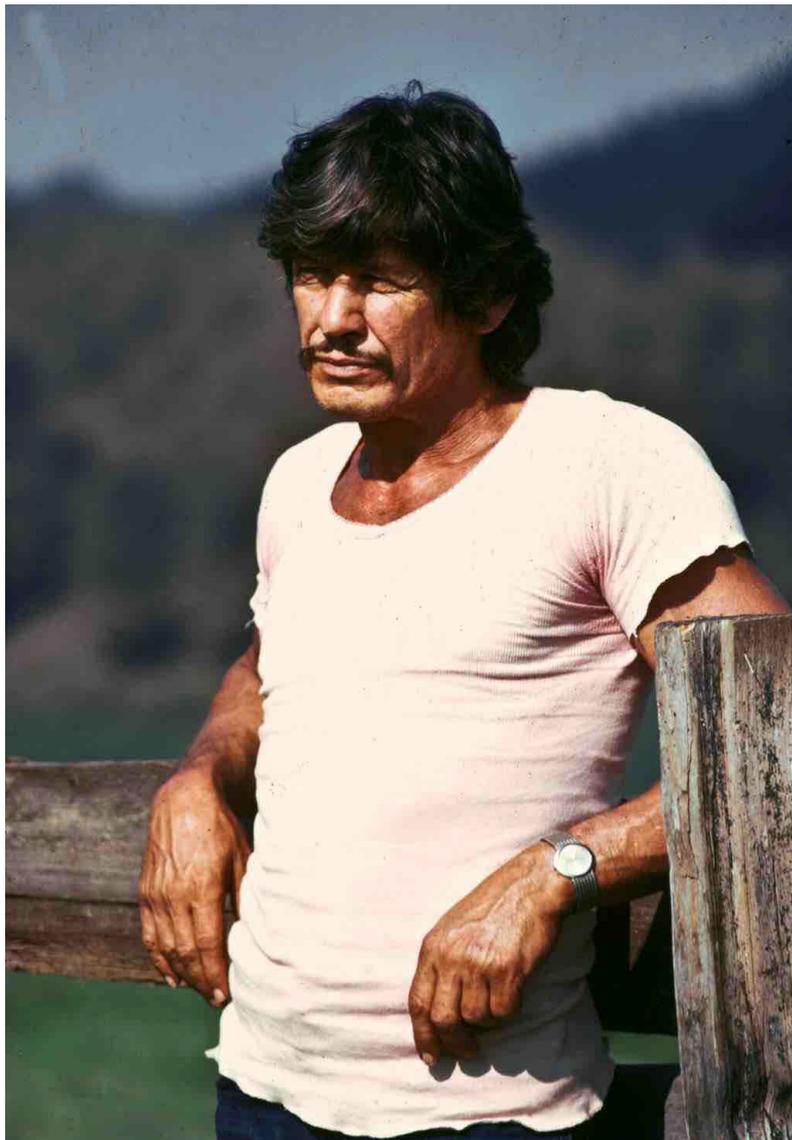


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Presents

CHARLES BRONSON
The Spirit of Masculinity



A 52' written and directed by Jean LAURITANO

Produced by Slow Production

DELIVERY: MARCH 2020

SUMMARY

His gray mustache and his chiseled face have become iconic. Charles Bronson is the symbol of a somewhat archaic, taciturn and vaguely reactionary virility. He is the symbol of a whole sub-genre of action cinema – the *vigilante movie* (an urban thriller telling the story of a character's revenge) – with a more than dubious ideology.

And yet on closer inspection, the reality is much more nuanced.

He used to be cast in roles of characters living on the fringe of society (Native Americans, Mexicans) before getting trapped in his image of a lone killer. He was a great figure of mainstream cinema in the 60s and 70s. His raw physicality and acting skills as well as his career path deserve to be re-evaluated.

For Charles Bronson is **a man of paradoxes**.

A former miner of Lithuanian origin, Charles Bronson developed an inferiority complex that was strengthened by his speech difficulties. This feeling of rejection has continually plagued him, for the rest of his life.

His acting could not be further from the Actor's Studio's techniques based on introspection – embodied at the time by Marlon Brando or Montgomery Clift. On the contrary, he brazenly refused all lyricism, all hidden sensibility. He is a pure block of presence. He imposes the Bronson formula: a gaze, a magnetic presence and little to no discussion.

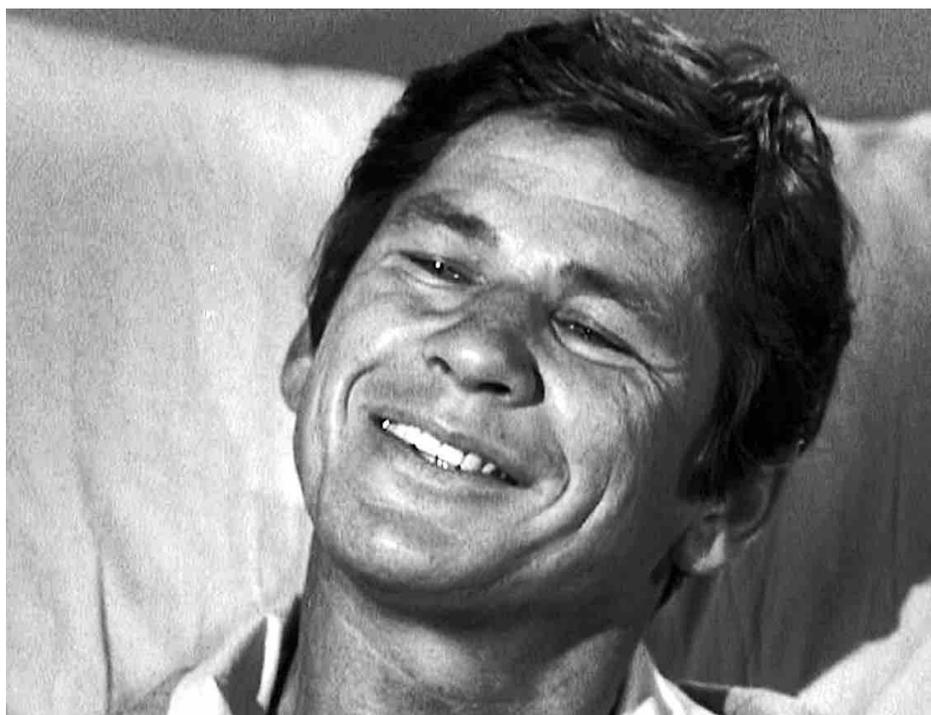
While he was a **huge star in Europe**, he was ignored for a very long time in the United States. There, he suffered many failures and did not become reach stardom until his fifties.

When he finally did reach this status, becoming the highest paid actor in the world, then he could have played whoever he wanted. And yet he found himself locked in one role: that of the manly, heavily armed, mustachioed vigilante.

A man who dreamed of being a painter and often played **anti-heroes** and outcasts on the silver screen then became **a symbol for the paranoid and reactionary** fringes of America in the Nixon and Reagan years. His rise to glory came at a steep price.

Ironically, Charles Bronson's story is one of revenge: the story of a slow, to a crawl, rise to fame that forged him a shell that few have managed to crack. A month after his death, Quentin Tarantino dedicated him – as well as other figures of popular cinema that he cherished (including Sergio Leone and Sergio Corbucci) – the ultimate revenge film: *Kill Bill*.

Through Bronson's career – one that spans more than four decades – **a history of popular cinema** is finally being told: from the classic Hollywood age, with its Westerns and B-series where Bronson made his mark; to the European co-productions of the 1960s (Spaghetti Western and others) that saw his rise to international stardom; to the Cannon exploitation cinema, of which he became one of the leading figures in the 1980s.



NOTE OF INTENT

Like Chanel, Bronson has a revenge to take. And like her, he is determined to achieve it, by hook or by crook, even if it means taking some liberties with morality. Bronson is also a controversial icon and a fascinating character to follow: his complexity demands that he be defended, but not excused.

The title is a little offbeat: “Charles Bronson, A Leading Male” pokes fun at the irony of his thwarted destiny; he who was supposed to be a self-confident macho, convinced that he was right against all odds.

To tell Charles Bronson is to tell the story of a man whose career and life have fused to weave a complex but inseparable tapestry. It is difficult to separate the actor from his roles, as they seem to share a single burning desire: revenge. Charles Bronson's revenge on Hollywood, on America, is one he spent his entire life playing out in his films. All while dressed as a Native American, a cop, or an urban vigilante.

It is a social revenge: that of a miner's son who became a second-rate actor to then finally rise, in his fifties, as the best paid star in the world.

Bronson's rise can be linked to the rise of a new generation of actors who marked Hollywood in the 50s and 60s: actors with a striking and memorable face, such as Ernest Borgnine, Jack Palance, James Coburn, Steve McQueen, or Clint Eastwood.

With them, Charles Bronson breathed new life into American cinema. More raw, less glamorous than the previous generations (Clark Gable, Cary Grant or Gary Cooper), less cerebral than the next (Warren Beatty, Robert Redford), he embodied a more rugged type of masculinity.

But very quickly, Bronson's rise was thwarted. First by his physique, “too odd” for the job; then by a deep inferiority complex, which festered and made him feel rejected. When his time to shine finally came, he harbored sharp resentment towards his peers and a certain form of paranoia.

The story of Charles Bronson is the story of an actor who was not good enough for Hollywood. A man who believed in the American dream and thought he had found a way to escape his childhood’s misery. But being too atypical and unfamiliar with the codes of the Hollywood caste, he found himself stuck in supporting roles, leaving him with the impression that he was not being given a chance.

He brooded over his revenge while following through the motions for guys Hollywood does not want: TV series, then Europe where he easily got roles in international co-productions.

And it was in Europe that the impossible happened. The eternal secondary role became a world star, which enabled him to return to his home country and achieve what he was dreaming of.

With “Death Wish”, in just one film, he hit pay dirt and became the most popular actor in the world. The highest paid too. And he decided that was enough for him.

He made a conscious decision not to build on that success and go on to the next level. He was not going to break his image to win an Oscar, either.

It is not that he was not good enough for Hollywood.
Hollywood just was not good enough for him.

Refusing to play in Hollywood's worldly games, Bronson treated with contempt an industry that had rejected him for so long. He thus chose to focus on his family over a career that he quickly abandoned, letting himself be locked into a stereotype.

Instead of ambitious projects, he preferred the laughter of his children, walks in the woods and the happiness of his wife, to whom he could not refuse anything.

Talking about Charles Bronson's life also allows us to witness the personal evolution of a man of his time, a macho man who gradually mellowed. Very early on, he married a young woman whom he held in his thrall and made a housewife out of her while she was planning a career as an actress. He was cheating on her during the shootings; he was forced to divorce her when she caught him in the act.

He remarried a free, independent woman who was much younger than him and who transformed him, making him an exemplary husband and father.

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