

GUNS! GOLD! BLOOD! BRAVERY! MUSTACHES!

majestic iceberg. A thousand films yield a LOT of fucking soundtracks, nearly all of them imbued with a uniquely Italian sense of operatic, cinematic, overstated grandiosity. Lone whistles sail over whips, bells, thunderous kettle drums, slashing violins, twangy surf guitars, and rooty-toot-tooting trumpets, yielding a sound as big as the untouched Western landscape. It's a sound as authoritatively violent as if God had wrenched the Grand Tetons from their roots and hurled them crashing into the Grand Canyon.

And despite its orchestral trappings, it's a sound more macho than any big-dick hip-hop or steroidal metal. It conjures the smell of leather, gunpowder, ball sweat, and Tabasco. It induces mental images of a savage, stark, vicious, unrelenting world, a world free of justice and deodorant. My heartbeat starts a-gallopin' when I hear it, and I want to grow a mustache, dress from head to toe in black, grab a gun, mount a horse, and start subjugating people. I want this music to be my life's soundtrack, but alas, my life is not nearly this exciting.

Although these soundtracks were composed by scores of men with olive-oily surnames, one short man stands tall above all others: Ennio Morricone, who can't even speak English, much less ride a

horse into the Arizona sunset. Considered by many to be the most gifted film composer of all time, Morricone received a lifetime-achievement Oscar last year. The beady-eyed genius delivered his acceptance speech in Italian while Clint Eastwood stood by his side, doing a lousy translation job.

That was an essential moment. The reason we need creative people is because they construct *fake* worlds that are better than the real world could possibly ever be. Through the Spaghetti Westerns, Italians of the 1960s infused the American West of the 1800s with more drama than Americans EVER gave it—definitely in the movies and probably in real life.

Even though I'm a non-Italian American, I somehow feel empowered. I wish the Italians HAD conquered the West, and at least the pizza would be better out there.

The West has been tamed, and there's no place left to run, much less gallop. What used to be a lonely frontier is now the most overcrowded part of the country. Yet one

only needs to put on the headphones and dive into that music, and the West is once again as wide-open as outer space.

I AM NOT A FAN OF WESTERN MOVIES.

I can't even think of anything good to say about the West Coast. Yet lately

I've become enamored of the so-called "Spaghetti Westerns"—a genre so named not because it features extended scenes of cowboys eating spaghetti, nor because spaghetti is intimately woven into the plotlines, but because these oft-maligned films were predominantly financed by Italian companies, even though many were filmed in a region of Spain that resembles the American West and afforded a large pool of Spanish peasants willing to pretend they were Mexican peasants.

Emerging with a feral belch in the early 1960s and petering out by the mid-70s, an estimated thousand or so Spaghetti Westerns were made, spewing a nihilistic torrent one could never get away with in Hollywood. The most famous and archetypal of the bunch are Sergio Leone's "Man With No Name" trilogy starring Clint Eastwood: *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For A Few Dollars More*, and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. These films were reputedly dark,

amoral, and inexplicably angry, showcasing what filmmaker Alex Cox called "a harsh desert world where human life is mercilessly exposed and violence erupts without warning." I say "reputedly" because as of this writing, I've never seen a Spaghetti Western. And I'm not sure I want to, because I can't imagine the actual movies being better than the soundtracks.

Everyone alive who isn't a complete, flat-out dillhole and jerkwad has heard the ghostly whistling title track to *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*, yet that is but the tip of a

iFUCKING MACHO!

THE TIMELESSLY BURLY MOOD MUSIC OF SPAGHETTI WESTERNS

