

The Cisco Kid in “The Gay Amigo”

What a fascinating and colorful history the character of The Cisco Kid has. The character was introduced by author O. Henry in 1907 in the short story “The Caballero’s Way,” which was published in a collection called *Hearts of the West*. It also appeared in the July 1907 issue of *Everybody’s Magazine*. And interestingly the Kid was not a heroic figure in that original story, but a cruel outlaw. That all changed when the movies came a calling. The first film was made in 1914, an adaptation of “The Caballero’s Way.” The first sound Cisco Kid film was *In Old Arizona*, starring Warner Baxter – Baxter won the second Best Actor Oscar for his performance. That film was directed by Irving Cummings and Raoul Walsh and was the first talkie to be filmed outdoors. Warner Baxter would play the role in several more films in the early 1930s. In 1939, he returned to the role for one film, *The Return of The Cisco Kid* – in that film he had a sidekick named Lopez, played by Cesar Romero. The next year, Romero took over the role of the Kid for six films.

In 1945 came another series of three films, this time from programmer studio Monogram. The first in that series was *The Cisco Kid Returns*. This time the film starred the man who would forever be identified with the role, Duncan Renaldo. And in this series of films the Kid had a new sidekick, Pancho, played by Martin Garralaga. Then yet another series of films were made, six in all, and all made in one year – those all starred Gilbert Roland as the Kid. Then Renaldo returned to the role in 1948 with *The Valiant Hombre* – this time Pancho was played by Leo Carillo. Renaldo and Carillo would do five films and then they both starred in what would be the most popular iteration of them all – the classic TV series filmed by ZIV starting in 1950. The show was hugely popular, running six years and 156 episodes. It also has the distinction of being the first TV series to be shot in color, not that it was aired that way back then. There is no kid who grew up watching the show who didn’t say the series’ classic tag line, “Oh, Cisco” “Oh, Pancho.”

There was also a popular radio show from

1942 to 1945 that starred Jackson Beck, and that was followed by another radio version, this one starring Jack Mather and Harry Lang – that version aired three times a week and ran for nine years and more than 600 episodes. There was also a popular comic book series from Dell Comics that had 41 issues.

Back in 1945, for the first series of films with Duncan Renaldo, *The Cisco Kid* got a new musical voice – composer Albert Glasser, who’d been scoring low-budget programmers since 1941. Another composer took over for the Gilbert Roland films, but Glasser was back when Renaldo and Leo Carillo did their five films – it was Glasser’s music that would become identified with The Cisco Kid and of course he went on to score all the episodes of the TV shows. His main theme was iconic and instantly identifiable, and his music for the films and TV show was exciting, melodic, and classic Glasser, especially in the blaring chase scenes.

We had a tape that came from Mr. Glasser that was in decent enough sound (some of his tapes were better than others), but it contained absolutely no real information. This tape and others from its era were from acetates. When we began working on this project, we all assumed this tape contained cues from the TV series, but while Glasser did recycle quite a bit of music from the film series into the TV series, after a lot of research we realized that what we in fact had was the almost-complete score to the 1949 film, *The Gay Amigo*, which was the second of the final five films prior to the TV show. There were slates, of course, but for this release we gave the tracks some titles, just for fun. The masterful Chris Malone labored over the sound for a long time and the result is pretty great. To fill out the CD, we include suites from the TV series, *Big Town*, as well as short suites from the films *The Buckskin Lady* and *Top of the World*.

Albert Glasser was a character. His scores are so him, and they’re so much fun to listen to and we’ve done quite a few of them on Kritzerland. He wrote an unpublished autobiography, which I have and which is so colorful and funny and so

him. His niece, Janet, is a friend of mine and she has great stories of Uncle Al. And any composer who scored *The Cisco Kid* and many of the classic Bert I. Gordon films is okay by me.

So, what a treat to finally get one of these great Glasser *Cisco Kid* scores out into the world. I began watching the show when I was four and never missed an episode. My brother and I would wake up in the morning, look at each other, and say, “Oh, Cisco,” “Oh, Pancho.” I also listened to the final years of the radio version, too. I simply couldn’t get enough of The Cisco Kid. Hearing that rousing main theme, also used on the TV show, is like coming back to a great friend.

Bruce Kimmel