

Why aren't more movies made in Arizona?

Kaely Monahan

[00:00:29] **KM** The Old West, cowboys, saloons, cactus, and yodeling. For decades, the Western movie genre held sway over the box office in Arizona, featured prominently in many of them, from John Wayne to Henry Fonda, Clint Eastwood to Kurt Russell. Hollywood's golden actors flocked to our state to shoot movies.

[00:00:55] **Roy Rogers clip** There is a view. I'd like for you to see. Or if you prefer, your family or. There's a girl I know in Phoenix who will suit you to sing a song.

[00:01:11] **KM** But Arizona's film history goes beyond the Wild West stereotypes. Welcome to Valley 101 The Arizona Republic and AZCentral's podcast that explores stories from Arizona's biggest city to the state's borders. I'm Kaely Monahan. You're producer for today. We're dusting off the rails and shining a light on the many, many movies made in Phenix and Arizona at large. Aside from Westerns, you might think of this film.

[00:01:56] **Raising Arizona clip** All right you, hay seeds! It's a stick up. Everybody freeze! Everybody down on the ground!

[00:02:02] **Raising Arizona clip** Well, which is it, young fella? You want? I should freeze or get down on the ground?

[00:02:07] **KM** Or maybe this one.

[00:02:09] **Revenge of the Nerds clip** What are you looking at, nerd? Huh? I but I was looking at my mother's old douche bag, but that's in Ohio.

[00:02:18] **KM** If you're a film nerd, you might even think of this one.

[00:02:22] **Psycho** It's not as if she were a maniac for raving things. She just goes a little mad sometimes. We all go a little mad sometimes. Haven't you?

[00:02:51] **KM** Arizona used to be beloved by Hollywood.

[00:02:54] **Chris LaMont** You can go back, actually, to legendary Oscar winning director John Ford. He loved coming to Arizona. You shot a lot of movies, especially up in Monument Valley.

[00:03:08] **KM** This is Chris LaMont, professor at Arizona State University's Sidney Poitier New American Film School.

[00:03:16] **Chris LaMont** One of the big movies he did here was called Stagecoach, which was actually John Wayne's first major movie. And that was in 1939.

[00:03:25] **Stagecoach clip** You're the notorious Ringo kid. My friends just call me Ringo. Nickname I had as a kid. My name's Henry.

[00:03:35] **Chris LaMont** And he's done a number of films here in Arizona, "My Darling Clementine" with Henry Ford. "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" and considered one of the best Westerns of all time is "The Searchers," starring John Wayne as well.

[00:03:46] **KM** In addition to teaching film, Chris is an independent filmmaker himself, as well as a writer, director and producer. When I asked him What are some of the notable films shot in Arizona, he opened up like a flashflood in Phenix.

[00:04:01] **Chris LaMont** "National Lampoon's Vacation."

[00:04:03] **National Lampoon's Vacation** Okay, let's go. Come on. Don't you want to look at the Grand Canyon?

[00:04:12] **Chris LaMont** 1984. "Revenge of the Nerds."

[00:04:15] **Revenge of the Nerds clip** Clap your hands, everybody. And everybody clap your hands. We Lambda, Lambda, Lambda.

[00:04:20] **Chris LaMont** "Raising Arizona."

[00:04:23] **Raising Arizona clip** My lord, he's cute. He's a little outlaw. You can see that, aye? Now, listen, you folks can't stay here!

[00:04:29] **Chris LaMont** "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure" as well.

[00:04:31] **Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure** Oh, excuse me. When did the Mongols rule China? I don't know. I just work here.

[00:04:38] **Chris LaMont** "Tombstone," shot in 1993. Kurt Russell, Val Kilmer. Iconic.

[00:04:43] **Tombstone clip** Your friends might get me in a rush, but not before I make your head into a canoe, you understand me? He's bluffing with rush 'im. No, he ain't bluffin. You're not as stupid as you look.

[00:04:55] **Tombstone clip** Of course, everyone remembers Jerry Maguire, right? Shot in Phenix.

[00:04:59] **Jerry Mcguire clip** I am a role model, Jerry. I have a family to support, hear me? I want to stay in Arizona. I want my new contract. But I like you. Yes, I like you, Jerry.

[00:05:11] **Chris LaMont** There's also "Three Kings" with George Clooney, directed by David Russell. There was "Waiting to Exhale," starring Angela Bassett. Whitney Houston, directed by Forest Whitaker.

[00:05:21] **Waiting to Exhale clip.** Yeah, I was your white woman for 11 years! Couldn't started that damn company without me. Hell I worked my a-- off.

[00:05:27] **Waiting to Exhale clip.** The 80s, 90s, I mean, those are some pretty good times.

[00:05:31] **KM** You might think Arizona's golden age of moviemaking was during the Western era. But Chris disagrees.

[00:05:39] **Chris LaMont** I'm going to say that the real golden age is not so far away, when Arizona was a huge filmmaking mecca, it was actually the 1980s.

[00:05:48] **KM** That's when you get "National Lampoon's Vacation," "Revenge of the Nerds," and "Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure."

[00:05:55] **Chris LaMont** I'm going to add the 90s to that kind of golden age because there were some pretty amazing movies.

[00:05:59] **KM** Those included movies like "Jerry Maguire" and "Tombstone." But after cowboys and before "Show me the money!" There was an infamous shot of downtown Phoenix's skyline in late 1959, early 1960. This, of course, is Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece, "Psycho."

[00:06:29] **Chris LaMont** He's got never came to Phoenix to shoot that. He had sent a second camera crew, but they actually took pictures, I think, of Van Buren, and like, Central Avenue, and they actually recreated that on the backlot at Universal Studios.

[00:06:46] **Phil Bradstock** A gentleman came out here a decade ago, actually.

[00:06:49] **KM** This is Phil Bradstock. He heads the Phoenixville office.

[00:06:53] **Phil Bradstock** He figured out the exact location of the camera, which is on top of the Orpheum Lofts in the pan. And it's really interesting. It's kind of a then and now type looking. Looking I find most interesting is, first of all, it shows that it's the barrister building that it goes into. There's been a lot of debate between that building in the Heard building downtown, but it really clarifies it. But what's really fun, is if you look in the background at South Mountain, there's just only a few antennas. And now when you look, there's just tons of antennas.

[00:07:35] **KM** Let's take a brief intermission.

[00:08:01] **Amanda Luberto** Hello. Producer Amanda Liberto here. We're just taking a short break to let you know about our free mobile app, whether it's stories like this one, politics or breaking news. Keep up to date with the A-Z Central App available in the App Store and Google Play.

[00:08:35] **KM** Here's a bit of movie trivia for you. Marilyn Monroe shot one of her first big films, "Bus Stop" in Phoenix. The film also stars Don Murray in Arthur O'Connell as cowboys. They attend a rodeo in Phoenix, and that's where they meet the alluring cafe singer Cherie, a.k.a. Marilyn. Don Murray's character falls in love with Cherie and wants to take her back home to Montana and marry her. But Cherie dreams of going to Hollywood and becoming a star.

[00:09:08] **Bus Stop clip** Cherie, what's the matter with you? Are you sick or something?

[00:09:11] **Bus Stop clip** No, I ain't sick. No I....I just can't lie to you. And I can't marry you. And I ain't going to Montana with you. And goodbye forever!

[00:09:25] **Bus Stop clip** Cherie wait a second!

[00:09:41] **KM** Many of the locations from this movie have long since been demolished. But there is a scene with a parade that goes right in front of the iconic Westward Ho. And

even though it isn't 16 Stories in the Sky, another famous movie location is also still around. This one from "Raising Arizona."

[00:10:00] **Bus Stop clip** The fun part is at the Camelback Inn. If you go to the Camelback Inn and you drive in right up front, there's kind of this house that's their kind of adobe looking house. That actually was the exterior location for the Nathan Arizona's house where the baby was actually kidnaped from. And so you get to actually go and it's right there every time you drive into the Camelback Inn.

[00:10:23] **KM** In the 1977 Clint Eastwood film, "The Gauntlet," downtown Phoenix saw some spectacular action scenes.

[00:10:31] **The Gauntlet clip.** What's wrong with you man? This is a bus!

[00:10:32] **The Gauntlet clip.** I don't give a damn. So the Queen Elizabeth, get your hand away from that lever.

[00:10:37] **The Gauntlet clip.** He's gotten this far. How many units have you deployed? I suggest we let Shockley drive right into the city. Now we have his route. We clear the streets along his route, deploy our men, and create an impassable barrier. A gauntlet, if you will. He won't have a chance.

[00:10:58] **Chris LaMont** What was great about that movie is that he was a I think he was in the FBI and he was transporting a witness to witness protection from Las Vegas to Phoenix. And he's driving a bus and he crashes the bus through downtown Phoenix. And the bus eventually ends at what was the courthouse, which was actually at the time the Civic Center parking lot.

[00:11:17] **KM** Unsurprisingly, many movies shot in Arizona make use of our picturesque scenery. The Old Tucson studios were a go to location to shoot many of the Westerns.

[00:11:29] **Chris LaMont** They did "The Outlaw Josey Wales" with Clint Eastwood recently, "The Quick and the Dead," with Leonardo DiCaprio and Russell Crowe, even older films like "Rio Bravo" with John Wayne as well. But it's amazing all the Westerns that have filmed in the past, "How the West Was Won," I mean, even "Three Amigos," Steve Martin and Chevy Chase, we shot here in Arizona.

[00:11:49] **Three Amigos clip** I just like to say, on behalf of the three amigos, we're very, very sorry. We'd like to go home now.

[00:11:58] **KM** Obviously, Monument Valley and the Grand Canyon are also popular locations, but even lesser known spots such as court site make for stunning backdrops like in the Oscar winning "Nomadland." So why aren't more movies made in Arizona now? What happens all the interest in filming in our state? In a word, incentives.

[00:12:33] **Chris LaMont** The genesis of the film incentives that were created by individual states actually has to do with Vancouver. Vancouver became the first place of what they call runaway productions, where productions are leaving Los Angeles and going elsewhere. And because of that, the difference between the dollar with the currency is there is a currency difference. They can spend a lot less money up in Vancouver than they could in Los Angeles.

[00:12:59] **KM** Arizona used to have a tax incentive, but it had a limited life. To learn more about this, I turn to Phil Bradstock of the Phoenix Film Office. Phil knows film. Not only is he a movie buff, but he also has studio experience. And he saw how these film incentives changed the industry.

[00:13:19] **Phil Bradstock** When I was at Warner Brothers Television, I started there in early 2000 and left, right in the beginning, 2006. But during that time in the nineties, Canada started incentivizing the film industry. And so my producer told me this I'm going to take him, but he knows exactly what he's talking about. But I do trust him. He said that for every dollar that a studio spent in Canada, they got back \$0.60 on the dollar. So that was a combination of the valuation of the Canadian dollar versus the U.S. dollar and also the incentive. So that's why TV shows like "X-Files," a lot of them went up into Vancouver and into Canada to make their productions into film, and then some of them came back. But in the early 2000, if you walked around a lot of the stage, a lot of studios in Hollywood, you'd have a lot of empty stages.

[00:14:09] **KM** In fact, there was a lot of anti-Canadian sentiment at the time.

[00:14:13] **Phil Bradstock** There's a lot of Canadian maple leaves with a line through it, the bumper sticker that said "Got Work?" And it was for all the unions because everything was happening in Canada.

[00:14:21] **KM** In the early 2000s. States across the U.S. started creating their own film incentive programs to lure Hollywood producers. After all, big budget films bring lots of people who spend lots of money locally. And they will also hire locals to. But making movies is expensive, no matter if it's a summer blockbuster or an independent psychological thriller. States who could kick some money back to the filmmakers were and still are enticing, and those with better incentives usually went out. This is why you'll often see New Mexico posing as Arizona. But back to our own incentive program.

[00:15:21] **Phil Bradstock** So the tax incentive was called the MOPIC program, and it offered basically up to about a 30% transferable tax credit. And it went into effect on January 1st, 2006, and it expired on December 30th of 2010. So it was a solid five year run. It was about a little over \$110 million spent within the state of Arizona. And I would say probably around close to 70% of that was spent here in the greater Phoenix area, but applied in over 50 productions in here. And so that's where we get "The Kingdom," "Take Me Home Tonight," "Everything Must Go," which was a Will Ferrell movie that shot in the Arcadia residential neighborhood. Up in Lake Havasu, they had "Piranha 3D." The film is a result of the incentive out here, but for better or worse, it always had a sunset date when it was originally passed.

[00:16:02] **KM** Now there are movies being made in Arizona. Many are small, independent films that don't require permits or even notifying the film office.

[00:16:12] **Phil Bradstock** You know, Phoenix is the fifth largest city in America, and we know that there's productions going on all the time. I'm a one person office. There's no film police out there. So we do know that there's a lot of work going on. They don't always necessarily want to contact the film office because sometimes they don't want government to be a part of it. But also at the same time, they're also using locations that are friends and family that don't involve city property. So really, my office oversees our parks streets right away. So when you get in a residential neighborhood, you have more than 10 vehicles, you're filming after hours. That's where I get involved. But usually these smaller

productions will have maybe around 10 vehicles and they'll be shooting for a couple of hours inside of the house, and that's usually kind of the extent of it. So they tend to fly under the radar a little bit or go to places that really don't need the involvement of my office, which is totally fine with me.

[00:16:59] **KM** Since the state film incentive entered, proponents of the tax incentive have tried and failed to bring another one back. But Phil says there's hope.

[00:17:11] **Phil Bradstock** This year, it looks like there's a little bit better chance of that happening. Senate Bill 1708 is working its way through the legislature, and we'll see how that all turns out.

[00:17:26] **KM** State Senator David Gowan is the lead sponsor on the bill, but it's also supported by other notable politicians, such as State Senate President Karen Fann and Vince Leech, the Senate President Pro Tempore and House Representative Mark Finchem and House Majority Leader Ben Toma.

[00:17:50] **Amanda Luberto** It would be a boon for Arizona to have a tax incentive again for moviemakers and not only for bringing in the projects, but also keeping homegrown talent in state. Here's ASU use Chris LaMont again.

[00:18:03] **Phil Bradstock** We had 125 film students graduating every semester and they have to go to Los Angeles or they have to go to New Mexico or New York or Georgia or Florida to get jobs. They can't stay here in Arizona because nobody is coming here. I mean, there's production, of course. There's commercials, marketing, education, business videos, that kind of thing. But nothing self-sustaining. No TV, no films. So the students, you know, we have to tell them you have to leave. Hopefully that incentive is put into place and that's not going to be an issue anymore because we've got students who would love to stay in Arizona and follow their passion and they just don't have an opportunity to do that right now.

[00:19:15] **KM** Well, it's time to pull the curtain on this episode. If you have questions about Phoenix or Arizona's movie history or just curious about our city, send us your questions. You can either send us a voice message to podcasts@azcentral.com or write to us at Valley10@azcentral.com. And if you like to this episode, consider sharing it with a friend also and follow our show.

[00:19:50] **KM** You can support all of our podcasts by subscribing to azcentral.com. I'm producer Kaely Monahan, riding into the sunset. We'll catch you next week.