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# COWBOYS & INDIANS



## Billy Zane Talks 'Hannah's Law'

**The actor plays a corrupt cattleman who faces off with a justice-bent bounty hunter, but the strong-willed young lady refuses to get out of dodge.**

BY JOE LEYDON

In the world according to *Hannah's Law*, the straight-shooting western set to premiere June 9 on the Hallmark Movie Channel, Dodge City, Kansas, is more or less the personal fiefdom of Lockwood, a smooth-talking, dapper-dressed autocrat who rules the community with a whim of iron. From his vantage point atop the town's most elegant hotel, he keeps a watchful eye on the comings and goings of passing strangers and longtime residents, always on the lookout for anyone who might disturb the peace — or, worse, disrupt his businesses.

When he sees that bounty hunter Hannah Beaumont (Sara Canning) may attract a gang of gunslingers to Dodge City, he encourages the feisty young woman to get out of town. She refuses; he fumes. And even after she neutralizes the threat — with a little help from good friends Wyatt Earp (Greyston Holt), Doc Holliday (Ryan Kennedy), and former bounty hunter Isom Dart (Danny Glover) — Lockwood remains unhappy about her insolence. So he opts to express his displeasure in a nonverbal fashion.

You can add Lockwood to the ever-expanding rogues' gallery of supporting characters memorably essayed by Billy Zane, the 46-year-old Chicago-born actor who's played everything from a masked comic strip hero famed for derring-do throughout the world (*The Phantom*) to a gun-wielding hothead who'll let nothing, not even the intrusion of an iceberg, distract him from pursuing a romantic rival (*Titanic*).

Zane earned his spurs as a murderously corrupt cavalry officer in *Posse* and as a Shakespearean actor on a Wild West tour in *Tombstone*. *Hannah's Law*

marks his first appearance in a western since the 2008 indie drama *The Man Who Came Back*. But if Zane has

his way, you won't have to wait long before you see him back in the saddle again.

**Cowboys & Indians:** As the rich and powerful Lockwood, you're master of all you survey in *Hannah's Law*. So you're the bad guy, right?

**Billy Zane:** Yes, they sure love to throw those bones to me. But, really, it's a pleasure. Those characters are always fun. The interesting challenge always is to mine a little bit of understanding from the audience. To bring a little bit of dimension to the characters who are usually written with broad strokes, and find the nuances that make them a little more accessible. You always try to bring a little humor in there, too. And some humanity. And in this case ... well, this guy's got a good wardrobe, I can tell you that.

**C&I:** You and Sara Canning, the Canadian actress who plays bounty hunter Hannah Beaumont and who readers might know from *The Vampire Diaries* and *Black Field*, develop a nicely edgy give-and-take in your few scenes together. Is it hard to prepare to play like that when you're working on a tight shooting schedule?

**Zane:** Well, time is of the essence on any picture that you're shooting. You're always chasing daylight. This one didn't seem any more hurried than any other production, in terms of the natural course of trying to find a connection with another actor and pick a certain rhythm. And fortunately, with Sara, it was immediate. She's a very fine actress, a very talented lady.

**C&I:** Would you agree that every actor wants to make at least one western?

**Zane:** I'd say more than one. I consider the genre sort of like haiku; the best westerns of John Ford are like poems to me. I could rewatch *My Darling Clementine* and *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers* over and over and over again. Westerns can have a lot of appeal even for a fellow who grew up in the city, as I was raised. In fact, I've found that westerns have influenced a lot of my career aspirations. I've developed a western, actually, called *Son of a Gun*. It's an original story of mine. I plan to direct and star in it, playing a former gunfighter who's searching for redemption. And I'm trying to convince my producers to shoot it in black-and-white. We'll see what traction that gets.

**C&I:** Which filmmakers do you think you'll look to for inspiration when you direct your own western?

**Zane:** John Ford and Howard Hawks [*Red River*, *Rio Bravo*], of course. But there's also a lot to be said for [*Giant* director] George Stevens' work; if we do wind up going the Technicolor route, I'm sure I'll borrow from the Shane playbook, in a widescreen format. But right now, I'm looking at shooting it in the more classic square format, in black-and-white — you know, the old-fashioned way, using studio lighting. Using techniques and controlled environments that make your leading ladies look so darn classy and beautiful.

**C&I:** Many contemporary actors are hard-pressed to look convincing in westerns, primarily because they've never had much experience riding horses ...

**Zane:** That's true. I was quite fortunate to have been raised riding since I was quite young. So I've always had what they call a good seat. In fact, I was sort of underwhelmed by the stunt double who was supposed to do the trick riding for me in a movie once. He was flapping his elbows; his shoulders were up high. He just did not look good in the saddle. I'm sure he was very skilled at doing a lot of the trick work. But aesthetically speaking, he didn't add a lot to the performance. [Laughs.] And I found myself thinking, C'mon, man. I thought you were supposed to make me look better!



**C&I:** You made quite an impression playing the flamboyant Shakespearean actor Mr. Fabian in *Tombstone*, a western many fans consider a classic. What's your favorite memory of working on that film?

**Zane:** The scene in which I gave the St. Crispin's Day speech was pretty dynamic. I think that was my first day on the set. So we had a kind of baptism by fire with that. [Laughs.] It was funny doing a western with all those guys while wearing a codpiece. That's not what you'd expect. Like, "Hey, wait a minute! I'm in tights here! How did this happen?" But it was a wonderful movie anyway.

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