

2021 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE



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CHARLES STARRETT

By O.J. Sikes

Between 1935 and 1952, near the end of the B western film era, Charles Starrett made 115 western movies. Over 100 of them featured western music. Starrett was always among the Top 10 cowboy movie stars, and holds the record for the longest career in Westerns with one movie studio, Columbia. When Roy Rogers was still Len Slye and a member of the Sons of the Pioneers, Starrett gave the Sons of the Pioneers a prominent role in his first western movie, *Gallant Defender* (1935).

The Sons soon became featured regulars in Starrett westerns at Columbia and remained as very popular performers in those films until 1941, making the group a prominent feature in B-Western films from the mid-30s into the 1940s. Starrett made sure that their music was featured, not just used as background music with lots of dialog spoken over it. Complete songs were used whenever possible, songs composed by Nolan & Spencer that were being introduced to the public through Starrett's movies.

Starrett made his first *Durango Kid* film in 1940, and the Sons of the Pioneers played a major role in it. The film was significant because most youngsters born in the 1940s grew to know Starrett mainly for his role as “The Durango Kid.”

In 1941, The Sons of the Pioneers moved to Republic Studios where they were reunited with their old pard, Roy Rogers. Smiley Burnette, a great musician and western composer in his own right (and member of the Hall of Fame), became Starrett's co-star. Smiley brought his own music to the Starrett films, as well as facilitating the appearance of numerous musical performers in those films over the years. But it was mainly Starrett's support for the Sons of the Pioneers that gave the Pioneers (and Western music) the national exposure that was needed to ensure viability and continuity long beyond the B-Western movie era.