

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN

EPIX dives deep into the legend of 'Billy the Kid'



Tom Blyth has the title role in "Billy the Kid," premiering Sunday on EPIX.

Stories of Billy the Kid are bountiful, but a new series is aiming to be the definitive one on screen.

The legendary outlaw born Henry McCarty – but also known by the pseudonym William H. Bonney – first ran into trouble as an orphaned teen, and he wouldn't live many years beyond that, killed at age 21 by lawman Pat Garrett while a fugitive charged with committing several killings in the Lincoln County War. The saga is recounted in the eight-episode EPIX series "Billy the Kid," premiering Sunday, April 24, and casting Tom Blyth of HBO's recent "The Gilded Age" in the title role. Daniel Webber also stars as Jesse Evans, whose lethal gang was enlisted to oppose Billy in that war, with Eileen O'Higgins as Billy's mother.

The drama's writer, Michael Hirst ("The Tudors," "Vikings"), says he's been "fascinated by Billy ever since I was a kid, actually. He's like a rock star of the West. I thought I knew things about him, but when I started doing the research, I realized that I knew very, very little indeed. I had cliched ideas about him that he was probably psychopathic, that he was a born killer, that he was a roughneck. What I didn't know about was his background, born of Irish immigrants ... very devoted to his Catholic mother, who taught him to

respect women, to read, and to empathize with the underdog.

"He had a beautiful singing voice," adds Hirst, also an executive producer of the series, as are Justin Falvey and Darryl Frank of Steven Spielberg's Amblin Television. "He played musical instruments. He was incredibly sensitive. As he said himself, he was more sinned-against than sinning. He's a wonderfully attractive character."

Blyth believes much of Billy the Kid's relatability lies in the outlaw's effort to make a life for himself, even a largely illegal one. "I think we've created such a brutally honest show," the actor reflects. "You can see the kind of blood, sweat, and tears and mud that went into creating a life here, all these different societies all trying to build their own life in this kind of messy landscape."

Still, Hirst keeps a spotlight on the lawlessness that marked Billy's iconic yet relatively brief existence.

"He was absolutely fearless," the writer-producer maintains. "He would work out ways of escaping, which is a great joy of writing about him because we put him in this situation where it seems totally unlikely that he can escape it, and he always finds a way to do it. It's part of his charisma. Pat Garrett even talks about that, with deep respect for the Billy it took him a long time to catch."

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