

# JOHN BARRY'S

## TELEVISION SCORES: AN OVERVIEW

by JON BURLINGAME

For John Barry, the 1970s were a period of transition, from the excitement of the 1960s (the early Bond films, three Oscars, status as one of the world's most sought-after film composers) to the sedate 1980s (the era of *BODY HEAT* and *OUT OF AFRICA*) which produced the contemporary Barry sound that we now recognise from *DANCES WITH WOLVES* and *CHAPLIN*.

It was also a period during which he worked with some regularity in American television. This was partly due to professional relationships he had formed with people in films, and partly because of his location. Barry moved to America in late 1975. "I went to Los Angeles to do *ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN* for ABC," he later recalled, "and while I was there, Dino De Laurentiis offered me *KING KONG*. Then I was offered *THE DEEP*, so I stayed." He remained in L.A. for five years, moving in 1980 to New York (where he still makes his home).

Barry's well-known TV themes came even before the movies for television, while he was still living in England. *THE PERSUADERS!* (1971), composed for the Tony Curtis-Roger Moore adventure series, cracked the charts in Britain (ranking as high as no. 13 in early 1972) and received some airplay in the U.S. (although it never became a hit here, primarily because ABC had no faith in the series and relegated it to a little-seen Saturday-night timeslot). Written for keyboards (notably electric harpsichord), mandolin, synthesiser and rhythm section, it was far and away the single most stylish piece of music composed for television that season.

Barry's theme for the Gene Barry series *THE ADVENTURER* (1972) was far superior to the show itself (a cheaply made half-hour for what was then known as "prime-time access," the early evening hours, in the states). Both *THE ADVENTURER* and his musical signature for the suspense anthology *ORSON WELLES' GREAT MYSTERIES* (1973) featured mandolin and synthesiser: the upbeat *ADVENTURER* had a rhythm-section backing, *GREAT MYSTERIES* a more seductive string section.

It was in 1973 that Barry composed his first score for a made-for-television movie. The Claire Bloom version of Ibsen's *A DOLL'S HOUSE*, aired on TV in Great Britain (but given a theatrical release in the U.S.), features an almost childlike theme, perhaps mirroring Nora's view of life (and one that will change before the end of the film). The film's sparse score also includes a tarantella version of the theme, played for a dancing Nora by a string quartet at a holiday party.

Far more noticed, however, was Barry's music for *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*, later the same year. The unique end-title credit explains it: "original music composed and played by John Barry." Whether due to budgetary constraints or simply the dramatic conception of the composer, the entire score consists of solo piano, performed by the composer. *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* score is brilliant in its honesty and simplicity; the theme is a fragile, beautiful evocation of Laura's collection of glass miniatures, a reflection of her own sensitive soul. Many of the short cues, including the main and end titles, are like Laura's fate in the Tennessee Williams play - unresolved.

Barry later recalled that his scoring of Katharine Hepburn's TV-movies - three in all, beginning with *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* - was at the insistence of the actress. "I met Kate on *LION IN WINTER*," he said, "when they were shooting in Ireland, and we just became kind of nice friends. When I won the Academy Award for *LION IN WINTER* - she sang a little part of a carol [written for the film] - she sent me a telegram in London [since] I didn't go out to the ceremonies. [saying] 'Congratulations - you won because I sang for you!' Tony Harvey, who directed *LION IN WINTER*, did *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*. The first thing she did after that was *LOVE AMONG THE RUINS* with George Cukor in London, and she said, 'George, why don't you get ahold of John.' And then Cukor did *THE CORN IS GREEN* while I was living in Los Angeles. So that was the connection. She has visited here [at his home], and she called me when I was ill in New York hospital. She's a wonderful person, very kind."

*LOVE AMONG THE RUINS* (1975) was one of the highlights of the 1974-5 season. This one and only teaming of Hepburn and Sir Laurence Olivier was a delightful romantic comedy about an ageing actress and the barrister she hires to defend her in a slander suit (who also happens to be her long-ago, forgotten lover). It won five Emmys, including awards for the stars, director Cukor and writer James Costigan. The *Los Angeles Times* singled out for praise "John Barry's nostalgic score" - quaint, enchanting and, like the film, ultimately quite touching, with a harpsichord the perfect instrument to carry the melody.

The main theme was composed before shooting began, for Olivier actually sings the Don Black lyrics to Hepburn during a dinner scene ("Thee is love / thee is wine / but more, much more / thee is sun when the days are cold ..."). Happily recorded, with an almost identical orchestra, *LOVE AMONG THE RUINS* became a highlight on Barry's theme-compilation album "Play It Again."

Barry's first score after moving to Los Angeles, *ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN* (1976), may well be his finest for a made-for-television film. His uncanny knack for choosing high-profile, prestige projects remained intact in this instance, for this four-hour adaptation of Joseph P. Lash's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of the Roosevelts would up winning 10 Emmys, including Outstanding Dramatic Special. Jane Alexander and Edward Herrman played the title roles in this dramatization of their lives before Roosevelt became president.

The ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN theme (voiced by solo horn and strings, harpsichord and flute) possesses a dignity and strength - touched ever so slightly with a hint of sadness - that is absolutely right, and remains among the most memorable television music of the decade. That Barry's score was overlooked in the Emmy competition was a major surprise. (Even the winner, a Jerry Goldsmith score, was for a now-forgotten tearjerker.)

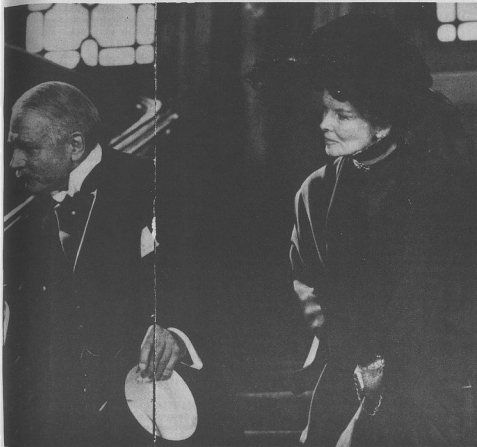
The entire creative team reassembled for the three-hour sequel, ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN: THE WHITE HOUSE YEARS (1977). Barry reprised his original theme, albeit in a gentler arrangement. This time, he was at least nominated for the Emmy (although he lost to Leonard Rosenman's score for SYBIL). That the theme has never been properly recorded is one of the few disappointments of Barry's recording career: "The White House Years" on the B side of THE DEEP single is marred by a wildly inappropriate disco beat; the only other version was recorded for just saxophone and piano. Veteran film-music chronicler Tony Thomas characterizes Barry's theme as "simple yet wistful ... essentially American in character and yet one that has universal regret for the past as it fades into memory. It is a prime example of the eloquence of music when written as an extra dimension to visual experience."

Barry filled the time between KING KONG and THE DEEP with TV-movie assignments, making 1977 his most prolific year ever. In addition to ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN: THE WHITE HOUSE YEARS, his television scores included THE WAR BETWEEN THE TATES; YOUNG JOE, THE FORGOTTEN KENNEDY; and THE GATHERING.

TATES came to Barry because it was for David Susskind's Talent Associates, which produced the ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN films; this Emmy-nominated adaptation of the Alison Lurie best-seller starred Elizabeth Ashley and Richard Crenna as a couple in the throes of divorce. Barry's melancholy music, largely for strings and piano, mirrors the film's uncompromising content. YOUNG JOE was another downbeat assignment, about the eldest Kennedy son (played by Peter Strauss, then very hot coming off RICH MAN, POOR MAN) who was killed in World War II; Barry varies the main theme to encompass the young man's love for a British girl and, in a martial version, Joe's doomsday assignment.

THE GATHERING, for ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN producer Harry Sherman, was another award-winner: The Emmy for Outstanding Drama Special for 1977-8 went to this moving story about a crusty businessman who, having learned that he has only a few weeks left to live, goes home to make peace with his divided family at Christmas. Edward Asner and Maureen Stapleton headed the all-star cast. Barry's chamber-sized score relies principally on harpsichord, flute and viola.

Barry returned to the medium in 1979 with a charming score for Katharine Hepburn's THE CORN IS GREEN, a remake of the Emyln Williams plays about a spinster schoolteacher-in-turn-of-the-century Wales.



ABOVE: Laurence Olivier and Katherine Hepburn in LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Or so we thought. While recovering from major surgery for a ruptured esophagus, Barry was summoned back from TV retirement to compose the music for the widely ballyhooed daily news magazine USA TODAY: THE TELEVISION SHOW (1988). One of the country's most widely read newspapers, USA Today boasted lively graphics, so the producers of the TV version called in movie-graphics whiz Richard Greenberg. Greenberg's previous collaboration with Barry on INSIDE MOVES (1980) led him to recommend the composer. Barry composed a series of variations on a three-note, descending melody - a fanfare that suggested a musical "USA" - for this short-lived experiment in early-evening informational programming.

Once again the composer turned primarily to strings, flute and harpsichord to accompany director George Cukor's final collaboration with his favourite actress (who won an Emmy for her performance). For the lady-trucker story WILLA (1979) - which reunited him with Deborah Raffin, the lead actress on his THE DOVE - Barry dipped into the country field, writing a song for vocalist Merle Haggard, with whom he would later collaborate on THE LEGEND OF THE LONE RANGER.

After his move to New York, only an old friend could lure Barry back to television. That was Anthony Harvey, who agreed to direct his former LION IN WINTER star Peter O'Toole, and the then up-and-coming actress Jodie Foster, in a new version of SVENGALI (1983) for CBS.

SVENGALI was unlike Barry's previous collaborations with Harvey (DUTCHMAN, THE LION IN WINTER, THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS, THE GLASS MENAGERIE) in that music was an integral part of the film's fabric from the very beginning. Barry and his frequent collaborator Don Black composed several songs in advance of shooting the story of an aspiring pop singer (Foster) and her controlling mentor (O'Toole).

Their work made SVENGALI one of the richest scores of the 1982-3 season. The problem was that both O'Toole and Foster have, at best, limited talent as singers; Barry later said that, while he and producer Phil Ramone approached several labels about releasing a single, no one expressed interest and the songs essentially died with the movie. Most prominent were "One Dream At A Time," which became the film's love theme, and "Getting Some Feeling Back In My Heart," the title tune for the singer's chart-topping album in the film.

Barry, by now having suffered through the era of STARCRASH and GAME OF DEATH, was back in peak form. The music was first-rate; the performances, and CBS's failure to acknowledge its possibilities, killed it. Discarded with a minimum of fanfare in a Tuesday-night timeslot, SVENGALI came and went virtually unnoticed. And that was the end of John Barry in television.

Along the way, there have also been several commercials, notably a two-minute spot for Eastern Airlines' "Second Summer" campaign (1967) that won him a Clio (the advertising world's version of the Oscar); a very classy, BODY HEAT-style score for a Lincoln Town Car commercial (1982); and a recent Kodak ad that echoes the Americana sound of DANCES WITH WOLVES.

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#### About the author.

Jon Burlingame is a nationally syndicated American television critic who has frequently written about film and TV music for such magazines as Premiere and Emmy. He is currently at work on a book about the history of American TV scoring.