

LESLIE BRICUSSE ON JOHN BARRY

Any attempt to categorise the multi-faceted career of Leslie Bricusse would prove difficult. Best known as a supreme lyricist who has collaborated with some of film music's finest composers, it should also be remembered that during the Sixties he penned the music and lyrics for three major musical films - DOCTOR DOLITTLE (for which he also wrote the screenplay), GOODBYE MR CHIPS and SCROOGE. (A projected musical filming of SHERLOCK HOLMES, to have starred Rex Harrison, was not mounted following disappointing public response to the grossly underrated GOODBYE MR CHIPS). As a curtain-raiser to our extensive coverage of Leslie Bricusse's career to be featured next year, I asked him about his collaboration with John Barry.

JW: When did you first meet John?

LB: There's a whole gang of us who were friends in England, right back to the beginnings of the 1960's. So John I knew kind of personally before I knew him professionally. The days of The John Barry Seven, do you remember them?

JW: Oh yes, very much so.

LB: O.K. so we go back to that period and then he started doing the Bond films. We were good mates and I owned a restaurant in London called "The Pickwick Club". We all used to have lunch there every Friday. John, Tony Newley, Terry Stamp and a fellow that lived in Terry's spare room, an unknown actor called Michael Caine - and myself. Lionel Bart had done the first Bond film to have a song in it, the second film - FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE. Then came GOLDFINGER. Tony and I had just written "Stop The World I Want To Get Off" at that time, and we were writing our second show. I guess it was '63 we wrote it, the film came out in '64 - and it was very strange because we went over to America having no idea of its success. We'd been in Italy - Tony, Joan Collins, they were then married, and Evie and myself. We got to New York and United Artists called us to ask if we could pop over to see them as they had Gold Records waiting for us!

Tony was in America, so then John and I wrote the next one, "Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang" which was what the producers wanted to call the song from THUNDERBALL. Bond was a big success in Japan, and that's what they called him over there - Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, so that was why they wanted a song with that title. I don't know if you've heard the big double CD that they've just brought out, but it's very interesting some of the things that are on there.

There's Newley's demo for "Goldfinger" and then there's Shirley Bassey's version of "Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, which didn't sound quite right - something to do with the vowel sounds, I think, in the song. I remember hearing it all those years ago and I heard it again just a couple of days ago. So what they did right the way through the Bond films, as you will realise, is they took the current pop star who had the biggest hit at the moment to sing the Bond song. Dionne Warwick, who had just started her association with Burt Bacharach and Hal David, had a big hit with "Anyone Who Had A Heart" and things like that at the time, so John went to her and she recorded it. Then I went to America to do a film and at the last minute they decided to go for a song called "Thunderball", after all, to do for the title. I didn't do that because I was in America, so Don Black did Thunderball with John.

Then I did YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE with John, and the first version of that is that strange song which is also on the Bond double CD. That was the first draft song which we didn't like, the melody didn't feel as good as the others we had done, but I put a lyric on it anyway and some lady did that demo. Then we wrote the version that Nancy Sinatra did. Now what's interesting about that is that John had found another black singer that he wanted to do that one, but Cubby Broccoli and Harry Saltzman said, no, the biggest hit at the moment is Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made For Walkin'", so we go for Nancy. The young black singer we didn't get was Aretha Franklin who had her first song later that year. Of course it was number one and so was everything else for a long time after that. We wondered what would have happened but I think she would have made a pretty good record.

Then what happened after that was that Sean left the film and they had that strange episode with George Lazenby. I don't think anybody wanted to write a song called ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE. I actually did have a rather clever idea and I think it would have worked out. After that, when Sean came back it was DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER which was John and Don Black again, and then when Roger Moore started they went for Paul McCartney and LIVE AND LET DIE and so on, with pop singers whoever was the top singer of the moment - right through the seventies. That's my James Bond story.

JW: Did you write a song for THE IPCRESS FILE?

LB: Yes, there is a song - though we didn't use it in the film. There were two or three things done around that time, but that's really the time we did these things. You know, John did a lot of Bond songs. He's one of those few composers in the film world that can write a song as opposed to writing beautiful themes and it's a pity he hasn't done more musicals things outside the film scores.

JW: Have you ever talked about writing something together for the stage?

LB: Not really, no. By that time I had started working with other people in America. John lived in Spain at the time, he had built this monster house - a story in itself - and divided his time between here and there. So our paths sort of drifted though we do bump into one another from time to time.