

John Barry

The legendary composer continues to score films while taking new cues from literature and theater.

John Barry, England's most celebrated movie composer, has a date with the queen of England.

On Oct. 14, he will go to Buckingham Palace to receive an Order of the British Empire which was awarded during the queen's birthday honors in July.

It will go nicely with the five Oscars he has for "Dances With Wolves," "Out of Africa," "The Lion in Winter" and "Born Free" (score and song).

Still, despite his three-dozen movie scores, many will always think of Barry as the man who put the music to 007. He has scored 13 of the 17 James Bond movies.

He will also be honored by the Oxford Union on Oct. 18, and is this year's honoree at the annual British Music Industry Trusts' dinner in London on Oct. 22.

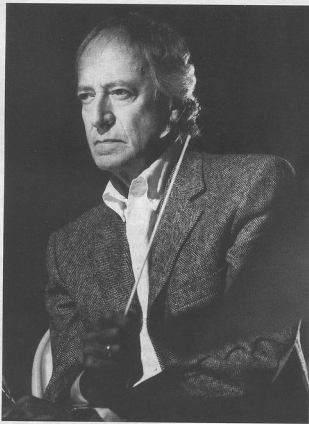
His most recent movies were "Mercury Rising" and "Playing by Heart," and aside from two movie-score collections titled "Moviola," he has produced an album of autobiographical music called "The Beyondness of Things."

With two movies slotted for next year, Barry is currently working on an album of songs and music inspired by John O'Donahue's best-seller about the Celtic religion, "Anam Cara." And he's writing the music for a stage version of the Graham Greene novel, "Brighton Rock."

From his summer home in Long Island, Barry spoke to **The Hollywood Reporter's Ray Bennett** about good directors, bad movie music and his affection for Graham Greene.

The Hollywood Reporter: You are, presumably, a Graham Greene fan?

John Barry: Oh, a huge Greene fan. I did actually attempt to do "Brighton Rock" over 30 years ago. I met with Greene and spent quite a lot of time with him. But there's a time



for everything and it seemed that wasn't its time. The reaction this time out has been most positive from all areas. I'm looking forward to finally doing it. Bill Kenwright will produce it and Don Black will write the lyrics. We have no time frame, but it definitely will happen.

THR: Did Greene talk about his taste in music?

Barry: He had a mad desire to write lyrics himself. This was one of those awkward moments. I had some ideas at a very early stage for three songs, which I told him about. He thought they were very good, and said, "Let me take a shot." I couldn't say no, obviously. So he went off and took his shot and, um, they were pages of words. I had the unfortunate job of telling him that this wasn't lyric writing. This was rhymed prose. He said, "Yes, I know, I know. I don't think I can do it." He'd always fancied doing it, but the way

he wrote was the exact opposite of lyric writing. Brevity was not what he was into. He was very sweet about it and said, "OK, let me just forget about writing the lyrics." But we ran into all kinds of other problems. I seemed to be the only one who was madly enthusiastic about it back then.

THR: Your most recent movie was the jazz score for "Playing by Heart," which strikes me as a labor of love.

Barry: Well, it started that way. I really don't want to go into what happened. It didn't wind up the way it should have as far as I was concerned. It didn't wind up the script that I read and fell in love with. I think the less said about it, the better. There is a soundtrack album out, which is all songs except for two tracks that I did, that unfortunately didn't do anything. But then Chris Roberts, who's in charge of A&R for me at Decca Records, heard the whole score. I used Chris Botti on trumpet and we had some Chet Baker tracks. That was terrific. That was the score as it was originally intended to be. It was very nice of Chris to say, "Look, I love this music. We think the music stands up on its own, so let's put it out as a jazz album." And so we released it in Britain, presented more as a jazz album than a soundtrack album. It's being released in the States toward the end of the year.

THR: Have you run into directors who have fallen in love with temp scores?

Barry: Yeah, that's what you have to sort out with the director. If I go into a movie for the first time and the director says he's put a temp track in, I say, "Is this a specific temp track? Is it a carefully chosen track that you feel akin to, or is it just filling in?" I think that's the first question you ask. For the most part, they'll say it's just filler. There are, unfortunately, a lot of people who do temp tracks, and I don't think

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Q & A

JOHN BARRY

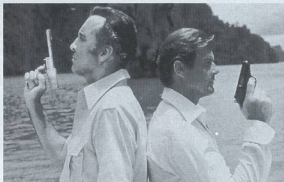
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they fall in love with it. I think it's more a question that they get used to it. Then it's very difficult to punch holes in it and put another piece of music there that is actually 10 times better in terms of the scene itself and the whole story — the progress of how it takes place in the whole structure of the score. But they lose sight of that. That's why you get a lot of scores that

are so bitty today. I love a score that sound like it all came out of the same hole. I love the unity of a score so that when you hear just a couple of cues, you say, "That's the score for so-and-so." It should have a distinctive voice. The script, hopefully, is distinctive, and the music should carry that forward and shouldn't be bitty. I find a lot of movies today lack that cohesion, musically. It's a lot to do with this temp track thing; people buy into it.

THR: What have been among the most satisfying collaborations for you with directors?

Barry: In the early days in London, I did about seven movies with Bryan Forbes, and that was a terrific time. He loved music. He understood it, and he listened to what I had to say, always. Movies like "King Rat," "Séance on a Wet Afternoon," "The Whisperers," "The Wrong Box" and "Deadfall." They were all interesting and different. Some of them were very



IRON JOHN: (clockwise from top) "Midnight Cowboy"; "The Man With the Golden Gun"; "Chaplin," an Oscar nominee for Best Original Score in 1993; and "Out of Africa" which won the award in 1986.

successful. Things like "The Whisperers" and "Séance" were beautiful. They were small black-and-white movies that were made in England in that period at the end of the '50s and in the early '60s. But they were beautifully made movies, with extraordinary performances. You still look at them and say, "My God, was this well made!" I loved working with John Schlesinger on "Midnight Cowboy" and "Day of the Locust." Sidney Pollack on "Out of Africa" was terrific. Who else? There are a lot of very good moviemakers that I've had the pleasure of working with. Francis Ford Coppola ... I did "Cotton Club," "Hammett" and "Peggy Sue Got Married."

THR: Were there film composers who influenced you?

Barry: Yeah. I love all the Korngold stuff that he did in the '30s. "Robin Hood," and all those. Wonderful, larger-than-life scores and they still hold up. I love Nino Rota; all the stuff he did for Fellini was so original, so fresh. Fellini really understood how to use music in a movie, probably more than any other director of his generation did. Of the American composers, I'd say Alex North. Still one of my favorite scores is "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" — an incredible and very self-conscious fusion of jazz and classics. Often when people try to fuse jazz and classics, it becomes very self-conscious. I think that's what happened on that movie. It was so self-conscious that it just came out the way it came out. It was magnificent and had a wonderful life of its own. You still listen to that score today and it doesn't sound dated. It stands up now beautifully.

THR: Do any of the younger composers today impress you?

Barry: Today? No. This song thing has really gotten out of hand. I think the use of song in movies is terrific. I'm still very proud of the way we integrated "Everybody's Talking" into "Midnight Cowboy." They still

show that at UCLA as an example of the integration of popular music into a serious movie, but used really intelligently. I see movies today and all of a sudden a song will come in and it's like the record companies just feed into this folder. There are albums out with 10 songs and they're laid in willy-nilly. There's not the care taken as there was in the early days. You have the affiliation of the record company with the movie company, and I know they're selling a lot of albums, but I think the craft of movie composing is suffering miserably because of that. I saw something — I won't say what it was — a big movie that came out a few weeks ago — and the use of the music was nothing short of diabolical; insensitive to the scenes. I ran the thing again and turned down the songs, and the movie was a pretty good movie. But the use of music was as if some record guy was plugging his records. It was like you were listening to a DJ who had scored the movie. I hate that. It's awful. I love film too much to say, "Oh, yes, this is hip, this is bright, this is a new wave." This is not a new wave. A new abuse is what it is. If it's done well, I'm all for it. All the Bond films had great successes with songs, but they were all very specifically written as the main titles, and then the themes were used dramatically throughout the scores. It wasn't just a song stuck on the front. The music for "Goldfinger," which had been introduced in the song, was the nucleus of the rest of the score. I love that kind of integration. But then you get a song at the beginning and the score is not related to the rest of the movie. There are all kinds of songs that are just songs and they don't really possess a mood that's right for the scene. Often, they're inoffensive and it's OK, but at other times they really cut across it. That's when I go crazy. And they'll have songs that are not even in the movie but are "inspired by" the movie, yet the

song was written 20 years ago. I don't know how you work that. They've got some kind of time machine going, these guys.

THR: Getting back to the younger generation, I believe you have some admiration for David Arnold, who's scoring his second Bond film now.

Barry: I think Dave's great. He retained the essence of the Bond music, the way of writing for Bond, but he gave it a contemporary switch mainly in terms of the rhythm sounds. I think that's what he's doing. He's retaining the original mood and the harmonic feel of what was established, then adding more contemporary rhythm sounds.

THR: He's a huge fan of yours, as you know.

Barry: Yes, he's a sweet guy — and I'm not saying that because he's a fan of mine, but I think he's doing the right thing by the music.

THR: If they asked you, would you score another Bond?

Barry: No, no. When you look at "Goldfinger" and "Thunderball" and "You Only Live Twice" against what's coming across now, the design of the movies has really changed radically. They used to have terrific stories because they were all based on the original writer, who knew what he was doing. And now they're free to do like a franchise, and with all due respect to the writers, they don't have the talent of Ian Fleming as a storyteller and so they become a lot less than they were. I know they're still hugely successful and I think all the people are doing great jobs; I think Pierce [Brosnan] is terrific. But if I was presented with one today: Where do you start? It's a wham-bang-thank-you-ma'am action movie now. Before, it was always the plot, the villain, it had great action sequences, and they were great because they were spasmodic. It wasn't all "go"; they didn't try to drive the movie all the time. There were all kinds of other kinds of scenes that were interesting. □