



# Czeching out RAISE THE TITANIC

Commentary and photography by  
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**O**ver the last few years I have done a certain amount of research work for Silva Screen, mainly on liner notes for their John Barry and related albums. Very recently at the request of James Fitzpatrick I spent some time going through the first James Bond films, looking for any notable music cues which do not appear on the official albums. James' idea was to combine these cues with the best of the previously released material into mini-suites. Nic Raine would have the rather more exacting job of reconstructing the 'new' music and arranging it.

For some years now, Silva have recorded much of their catalogue in Prague, mainly due to the spiralling costs of London-based musicians and studios, but also because the standard of Czech musicianship over the past seven years has improved dramatically. To make the best use of the time and facilities over there, James always ensures there is a variety of music to be recorded - certainly enough to last for a few days. On this occasion, apart from the Bond album, he would also be recording a tribute album to Gordon McCrae and Howard Keel, using Welsh baritone Jason Howard with arrangements by Paul Bateman; a Barbra Streisand film music album (for another company) and, to my delight, Nic Raine's reconstruction of the entire score to *Raise The Titanic*.

Recording in Prague was set to begin on the 9<sup>th</sup> June, lasting until the 14<sup>th</sup>, and I was surprised and delighted to be asked along to the sessions. The journey from Bristol to Prague went very smoothly. By coincidence, a friend of mine was also going to spend some time in Prague, and, living only a few miles away, we were able to journey to Heathrow together.

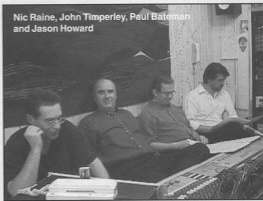
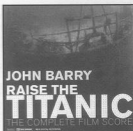
This was the first time I had flown anywhere from Heathrow, but I had precise directions from James as to where everything was. Most of the rest of the party had already flown out earlier in the day, either from Heathrow or Stanstead, but James told me to look out for Jason, who, due to a late change of plan, would be on my flight.

After an initial frustrating delay on the plane waiting for our 'slot', the flight went very smoothly and lasted only one hour twenty minutes. I had a rough description of Jason but failed to spot him either on the plane or at the airport, although there was one or two who looked as though they might be him. I later discovered he thought he had seen me but was put off because I appeared to be with someone rather than on my own as he had been told. For my part, I have to say James' description of Jason wasn't particularly accurate!

I'd heard one or two horror stories about Prague taxis, especially their prices, but I was able to share a mini-bus with my friend who had one booked and paid for as part of his package.

I knew recording was due to start at 5.00pm and as I didn't get booked into the hotel until about 7.15pm I decided it wasn't worth turning up for the last half-hour. Instead I met James in the lobby about an hour later. He quickly introduced me to Jason, who I was embarrassed to discover was one of the people I'd been staring at at Prague airport a little earlier! We were soon joined by the other members of the party, John Timperley (Chief Engineer) Nic Raine (arranger/conductor) and Paul Bateman (arranger/conductor).

James has spent so much time in Prague that he has a good knowledge of the restaurants, and, in fact



Nic Raine, John Timperley, Paul Bateman and Jason Howard

had already pre-booked all the evening meals! Two of the choices were in walking distance of our hotel and dinner followed a few minutes later at one of these. The food was excellent, though not always easy to digest due to much laughing as John Raine kept up a relentless succession of jokes, puns and banter - much of which was directed at Nic Timperley. Paul Bateman also had a few good stories (and the local accents go with them) and Jason proved as unlikely an opera star as is imaginable, with some truly awful limericks and the most disgusting jokes! Incidentally, he revealed he spent six years in the fire brigade before embarking on a professional career as a singer. He has a marvellous voice. Later on in the week I got to hear songs like 'Oklahoma', 'You'll Never Walk Alone' and 'If I Loved You' - wonderful and very moving.

Next morning we walked down the road to the nearby studio for the second session. Nic Raine was first on with *Raise the Titanic* and James arranged a chair for me in the studio so I could alternate between there and the control booth. Being there for this recording was a never to be forgotten occasion. I could hardly believe I was sitting just a yard or so behind the violins during the live recordings - and I managed not to cough!

Having seen the film on a number of occasions, and listened to a few 'clean' cues dubbed onto cassette, I considered myself something of an expert on the music. So I was keen to discover not only how it would sound, but also whether I would recognise all the cues. There was no problem on either score. Nic had clearly done an incredible job in reconstructing the score and The City Of Prague Philharmonic appeared entirely at home with it. Readers will by now have had the opportunity to judge for themselves, but suffice it to say I considered it was brilliantly played and sounded so authentic.

The string sound in Prague is remarkable, and the woodwind rather good, too, although the brass and especially rhythm section isn't always completely at home with 'Western-style' music. This later resulted in a few problems recording OHMSS in the Bond music sessions, which had been 'anticipated' as the synth and extra rhythm parts would be overdubbed in London.

During the afternoon, Nic finished off *Raise the Titanic* and made a start on the first Bond suite. The evening session was the first allocated to Paul Bateman and Jason Howard, and they got through a fair amount, despite the fact that Jason's voice was a bit 'gravelly', as he put it.

Friday was James Bond day. Having heard some of the 'previously unreleased' music via video so often recently, it was wonderful now hearing it played live in the studio. One has to remember that although nearly all this music is very familiar to most of us, as far as the Czech musicians are concerned, it is all still very new. In the circumstances, and with considerable assistance from Nic, they soon got into the swing of things. I am very new to orchestral rehearsals in the studio and was slightly taken aback by the tempo adopted by Nic Raine on occasions. For example, *From Russia with Love*, and was slightly taken aback by the opening, was taken at a gallop, so much so that the rhythm section was a good yard behind the strings! 'Surely they won't be able to get that right?' I thought. But this is just Nic's way of warning them up and making room for even more 'takes' per session (Nic's idea of a joke!), and after another couple of tries they were almost perfect. On occasions after an apparently successful take, I found myself wondering if they couldn't get a cue just a little more together, when as if by magic Nic said as such to the orchestra. I should point out that both Nic and Paul Bateman used an interpreter for nearly all their instructions to the orchestra. The interpreter, a violinist herself, was really good at her job and very little time was lost because of this. Occasionally Nic would ask for a retake but mostly the decision would be made by producer James (following the music bar by bar) or by engineer John Timperley, who might have heard a noise from the studio or be unhappy with the mixing of a particular instrument or section of the orchestra.

As I mentioned earlier, there were some problems with the rhythm section. The Prague studio isn't especially big, and although it easily coped with the 75 or so musicians, it isn't always possible to position the percussion and guitars to the best advantage. The cymbal player was moved upstage and backstage, the vibraphone player's mike was moved closer, the guitarist was completely re-sited - all until John was satisfied. On one occasion the decision was made to ask the electric guitar player to remain silent for the only four bars he had in that session, since he had brought the wrong guitar with him! When they played the 'spider' music from *Dr. No*, with its final crash, crash crash, the orchestra fell about laughing. Must remember to tell Monty Norman!

John Timperley is an amazing character. This is his fortieth year in the business and he is now an independent engineer. He started his career at Chappells in 1960 and was given his first opportunity by legendary Robert Farnon. He also recalls working with John Barry and Ron Grainer around that time, *King's Breakfast* was one of the latter's earliest short films. He spent nine years at Chappells during which time he worked with all the great artists, before moving to work in France for several years. I was surprised to learn that Norman Newell recorded several EMI acts at Chappells during the sixties. I had assumed everything was done at Abbey Road. One year in the late seventies, he spent one year recording rock groups - a year which nearly finished him off, he claims.

Back in the studio, it was strange to see the acoustic guitarist, Peter Binder, playing 'Gypsy Camp', the cue originally created by Vic Flick back in 1963. He managed pretty well even though he had to be asked to put on his headphones because his timing was slightly out. Incidentally, Peter is one of the few Czech musicians to have a smattering of English.

My few days in Prague were over all too quickly. A thoroughly enjoyable experience made all the more rewarding by the kindness and patience of my colleagues towards a 'new boy'. I particularly admired the way the two arrangers/conductors supported each other when off-duty themselves. I'm told that sessions in Prague don't always go quite as smoothly, but nonetheless I left there with a very favourable impression of the entire operation.

Special thanks to James Fitzpatrick.



James Fitzpatrick and Nic Raine

