

By Daniel Schweiger



*"First the Violins,
then the Handkerchiefs"*

COMPOSER JOHN BARRY

is **SWEPT FROM THE SEA**, and back in his romantic element

There's a common fact known among soundtrack fans, and it's that women dig John Barry.

I can't pretend to guess the unknown reason that mostly puts soundtrack collecting into the boy's clubs of baseball cards, comic books and video games. Yet it seems that women who would never dream of buying a movie score usually have John Barry's soundtracks to **OUT OF AFRICA** and **SOMEWHERE IN TIME** stacked amidst their **Sinead O'Connor** and **Fleetwood Mac** cds.

Perhaps it's the fact that film scores are essentially "program" music, their rhythms designed to jump along with specific physical actions. The movie music that captures the general public has more in common with song structure than anything resembling film music. A theme is played with a lush orchestral backing, its melodic "hook" delicately repeated without doing anything too obtrusive.

John Barry is the master of this type of style. Whether it's his scores for **MIDNIGHT COWBOY**, **CHAPLIN**, **BORN FREE**, **THE LION IN WINTER** or **THE SPECIALIST**, Barry's distinctive string sound repeats the melody over and over, his themes washing over the listener like a soothing breeze, until the effect is almost hypnotic. This isn't to say that John Barry composes beautiful music, or isn't capable of writing "to picture." The growling electronics of **THE JAGGED EDGE**, **KING RAT**'s mournful strings, and **WALKABOUT**'s ghostly chorus more than attest to his versatility. Yet there's something infinitely listenable

about his work, a rich, melodically repetitive sound that plays across more than 100 soundtracks. It encompasses the sensual film noir of **BODY HEAT** and the sweeping period adventure of **THE LAST VALLEY** and **HIGH ROAD TO CHINA**, not to mention the jazzy action of his classic James Bond scores to **GOLDFINGER** and **FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE** - themes that also play a large part in David Arnold's latest 007 score to **TOMORROW NEVER DIES**.

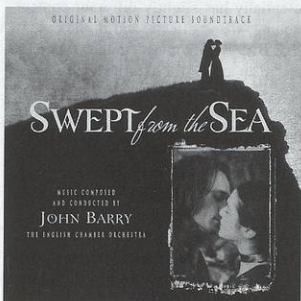
John Barry's scores are more memorable for their themes than the music that's playing for Sean Connery drinking a martini or Kevin Costner riding amidst the buffalo. Indeed, they aren't so much film soundtracks as they are tone poems. It's this quality that romanticists the world over find so enchanting.

Barry truly shines with the public when he ventures into the realm of historical romance, films about "simpler" times where the imagery and emotions match the richness of his music. Think African savannas, Victorian hotels, doomed lovers embracing against the sunset, and you'll get the idea. Some people like to call them "Chick flicks," but there's a sentimental beauty about stuff like **SOMEWHERE IN TIME**, **OUT OF AFRICA** and **DANCES WITH WOLVES**. They're scores that really let loose with the orchestral music's ability to dig into our emotions, and make us reach for the handkerchiefs.

John Barry's latest score is no exception, and in many respects, among his most affecting. Based on a novella by Joseph Conrad, **SWEPT FROM**

THE SEA is a tragic and beautiful romance between two outcasts - one literally thrown from a boat, and the other cast off by village simpletons. Yanko (Vincent Perez) is the sole survivor of a disaster at sea, a Russian immigrant who's bound for America, but lands on the rocky shores of Cornwall. Not understanding a word of English, Yanko is treated as a madman by the villagers. Even when he picks up a smattering of the language, Yanko is still treated to harsh prejudice. However, he finds a kindred sole in Amy Foster (Rachel Weisz), a farmgirl whose silence hides a deep well of intelligence and emotion.

SWEPT FROM THE SEA is the kind of romance where tortured souls exchange heartfelt and furtive touches. It's not that Yanko and Amy can't find the words; it's that they can barely speak at all. **SWEPT FROM THE SEA** offers its composer the chance to express their emotion in melodic form, and John Barry has run with the opportunity to do the talking. As Yanko and Amy struggle against prejudice and their language barrier, **SWEPT FROM THE SEA** draws the lovers together with rousing orchestrations, ethnic dances, a haunting chorus and a gorgeous theme that plays itself with infinite variety. If the fine performances and Beeban Kidron's direction weren't enough, John Barry's lush romanticism does the four-handkerchief trick. When **SWEPT FROM THE SEA** is over, you walk out with that theme playing over and over in your head, a musical aphrodisiac if there ever was one.



Soundtrack!: I imagine you were always the studio's first choice to score **SWEPT FROM THE SEA**. Yet Beeban Kidron has always used Rachel Portman to do the music for her films. What was it like for you as the "new" composer?

John Barry: Mike Medavoy, who runs

Phoenix Pictures, was the head of Orion when I did **DANCES WITH WOLVES**. He's always been a big fan of mine, and wanted me to score the film from the beginning. I'd never met Beeban before **SWEPT FROM THE SEA**. As a composer, one of my main functions is to try and figure out how much the director knows about music. A lot of them will come at you, think that they know everything. But when you start to work with them, you realize that they don't know too much. It was totally the opposite with Beeban. She didn't pretend that she knew anything. But the more I got to work with her, I realized that she knew a hell of a lot. I had the least complicated time with her than I've ever had with a filmmaker. Our collaboration was clean and direct, which is not usually the case. Beeban's an extraordinarily talented director, and it was a joy to work with her.

How did you and Beeban decide on a musical approach?

The script was sent to me by slow camel, and I got rather impatient. So I went to a local bookshop in Oyster Bay, (New York) and got Conrad's short story. I ended up reading "Amy Foster" before I ever saw the script. Usually, you'll wait until you see the picture before you compose any music. But Conrad's characters are so well-defined that you can do that. I've always been a big admirer of his, and the essence of what Conrad writes is spectacular. Even though I knew some things were going to get lost in the translation to film, I knew two things wouldn't. One was the character of Yanko, and the love story between him and Amy. So I sat down and wrote Yanko's theme, as well as the love theme. He can't speak the English language, and Amy is very slow at communicating. These are two people

who have total silence between them at first. Their only connection comes from looking at each other. So the romantic theme was hesitant, unlike the kind of positive, "in your face" love theme that **OUT OF AFRICA** had.

There's almost a question mark after each musical phrase in **SWEPT FROM THE SEA**. The music says "What is this? Who are we? We don't know each other." After writing the themes for Yanko and the love story, I went to George Martin's studio in London and recorded them with a piano and synthesizer. I played them to Beeban, and she loved them. She hadn't filmed the scene in the barn where Amy washes Yanko's wounds, and ended up playing that music while she was directing the scene. The whole visual rhythm of it was shot to themes I'd written on the piano. It's the first time something has happened on that level for me, and it can only happen when you're working with material like Joseph Conrad's.

Is there a certain melodic approach that you take for a film that's based on classic literature?

There's a clarity to the classic writers, which is why we label them as such. They got there through their brilliance and clarity of thought. There's no confusion. So as a composer, their ideas are relatively easy things to embrace. It also comes down to the integrity, dignity and poetry of the adapted screenplay. The very word "classic" embraces all of that.

How did Yanko's Russian background fit into the score?

Yanko is from Western Russia, and his folk theme is first heard when he does a little dance. It's a Jewish derivation of a Russian cha-cha. Beeban needed the dance as an original piece of source

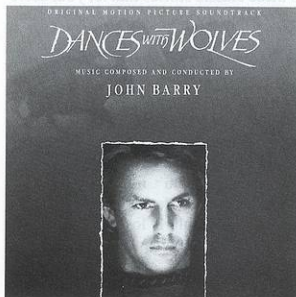
music that could be used as playback on the set. But I knew it was going to become a big theme with Yanko's journey. So I wrote the broad melody first, and then "crunched" it down into a dance tune. I recorded that for playback with a cymbalom, a bass, an accordion and a drum. Then that theme grows with Yanko's train trip to Hamburg.

The sea is like a third partner in the love affair between Amy and Yanko. How did the film's setting affect your score?

I've always tried to live by water. In London, I lived on the river. In Spain, I overlooked a bay. There's something about water that is very comforting to me. I come from a long line of seafarers. My mother's father was a sea captain, and my great-grandfather died at sea at the Bay of Biscay. So there were sea captains on her side, as far back as I could remember.

Most of your scores are usually based on one or two themes, which keep repeating themselves. In that sense, do you think you're a minimalist composer?

I hate movies where every piece of music is different. I call it "cucy" writing. It's like "We have this scene, let's do that. We have another scene, let's do that!" I love it when the score is like an opera, where the whole thing is pulled together with thematic material. The great operas work because they have terrific themes. They cross-fertilize the emotions, and give the whole piece strength. It's a Wagnerian thing, and a good melody is the key to capturing the essence of the characters and their relationships. I love getting a thematic idea that I can bend in different ways. In **OUT OF AFRICA**, there are two themes that wrap Meryl Streep and Robert Redford together. While other things happen in the score,



"Recently a television interviewer wanted to know what music the Pope listened to. It turned out to be DANCES WITH WOLVES!"

those two themes are the predominant elements of the music. They act as the score's uniting force. You can also use a theme in four or five different ways, all of which connect emotionally for the audience. I don't think they pick up on that as they're watching the movie, but there's a subconscious, emotionally binding force that carries through on all these different levels. I think that's very important when you're scoring a movie like **SWEPT FROM THE SEA**.

There are composers who work in different genres, but always have a unified "sound". How would you describe yours?

Even though I'm a movie composer, I don't do everything "to picture." All of the films that have been successful for me are films like **OUT OF AFRICA** and **DANCES WITH WOLVES**, where I can find an emotional light that's above and beyond where the script and acting are. Because I try to get beyond the celluloid and enlighten the audience, I relate to my scores on a very personal level. The man is the music, and I can't separate myself from it.

MIDNIGHT COWBOY is the story of a fucked-up dreamer, and the music captures that. This guy from Texas is walking around New York to Harry Nilsson's wonderful song "Everybody's Talking." It captures the whole gusto of this kid who's going to kill the city. And then when things turn around, there's a harmonica theme that tells us that his plans aren't going to work. **THE LION IN WINTER** was about the English royal families, who had the Church of Rome dominating their decisions. The music carries that weight. So it's lovely to get a story that has a "beyondness" in terms of where the music can go, a place that's more spiritual and uplifting—rather than doing something that's scene-by-scene. The Bond movies are like that. They're million-dollar Mickey Mouse films where you go with the action.

*Are romantic films like **SWEPT FROM THE SEA** the kind of movies that you enjoy doing the most?*

Absolutely. The opportunity to define romance in a movie is what I gravitate to. The dramatic thrust, and the accuracy of your dramatic sensibilities are the most important considerations when you're writing. But once you've dealt with them, you've got to figure out how to rise above what's on the screen and give the film

another spiritual dimension. I'll say, "Oh my God, there's an extraordinary thought here that I can really use."

*Your scores for **OUT OF AFRICA** and **SOMEWHERE IN TIME** have transcended the arena of film scoring. They seem to have touched everyone's romantic consciousness.*

I've had more letters from **SOMEWHERE IN TIME** than any other movie I've scored. I've got letters that

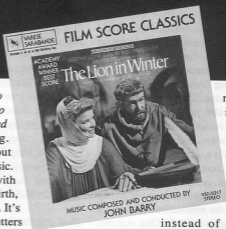
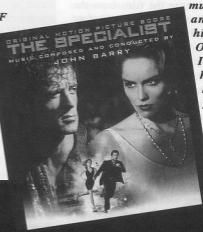


say "I was married to this," "I gave birth to this" and "My father died to this." It's amazing. People don't write about how they liked the music. It's usually connected with a marriage, a death, a birth, a loss or a sense of gain. It's amazing that all these letters culminate on that level.

Recently, I saw an ABC television program about the Pope. An interviewer wanted to know what music he listened to. So I'm thinking that the answer's going to be Beethoven's *Ninth*. But it turned out to be **DANCES WITH WOLVES**! Well, being of Irish-Catholic descent, that totally creased me. I couldn't believe what I'd just heard. It was a thrill for me, because the whole score was about the soul of John Dunbar. He's a guy who's fascinated with the west. Even with everything that's out there to threaten him, Dunbar still gets on a horse, and takes that voyage. I asked what that must have been like for him, and it was the equivalent of landing on the moon. While the script and acting tell us that to a certain degree, it's the score that tells the audience what's happening on a spiritual level. Music is the only

element of moviemaking that can do that.

*In **SWEPT FROM THE SEA**, your music plays at an unusually high volume. On the whole, I'd say you have better luck in the final mix than most composers. I always take great*



notice of sound effects. I'm lucky that **SWEPT FROM THE SEA** has a horse and carriage instead of a motorcar. You're in Cornwall instead of the city, so the film isn't loaded with sound effects that can screw up your score. It's the same thing with **OUT OF AFRICA** and **DANCES WITH WOLVES**. Those movies have nothing in terms of sound effects to get in your way. There's a purity to these classic stories that let your score really sing.

Before you composed for films, you were a popular jazz player in England. How difficult was it for you to make the transition to orchestral scoring?

My musical interests didn't start with jazz. I was a classical music snob until I was fifteen. I didn't like anything else. My older brother Patrick was a total jazz freak. He particularly loved the big bands like Duke Ellington and Harry James.

Where do you think composers like

Mark Isham and Mike Figgis have taken jazz scoring?

I love all of the west coast jazz from the 50's and 60's. When I want to listen to jazz, I put on people like the Stan Kenton Band, the Gerry Mulligan Quartet, Chico Hamilton and Miles Davis. Wynton Marsalis is also a fantastic musician. But in terms of contemporary jazz, nobody gets me like those guys. I don't think it's a question of age, because no one kills me today like these bands do. When I listen to Chet Baker and Bob Brookmeyer, I say "Oh my God, did they know how to do it!" I think there was a compositional value in the way these people played that's missing today.

What instruments do you play?

Nothing terribly well. I started off on the piano and trumpet, then went into the military when I was 19. You were drafted for two years, which meant they could put you anywhere. But if you signed on for another year, you could choose your profession. So I signed up for the extra time, which let me join a military band. This was the end of the British Empire, and the experience was quite amazing. I felt like I was on the set of Gunga Din when I was in Egypt for a year. Then I was positioned in Cyprus for eighteen months. I had nothing to do but learn, and wrote some music for the band. Even though I never learned to play the clarinet, I learned the fingering techniques for it. Being in a band wasn't something I loved, but when I look back on it, I'm damn glad I did it.

What had the greatest impact on you as a film composer?

I originally wanted to be a concert pianist, until I realized that I had no memory and I still don't! There are some musicians who can't wait to blow in front of a live audience. They're real hams. I

remember talking to Sammy Davis Jr., who said he couldn't wait to get on the stage. I told him that I couldn't stand going in front of an audience. Yet composing for some people is agony. They don't want to look at a blank page on a piano. But I love being alone, or working in a studio where you can get your music right with an orchestra. There's something about the science of writing and recording music that fascinates me. It's very private and very personal.

But you're one of the few composers who's actually appeared as "himself" in a film. DEADFALL in your case.

That was an easy thing to do. I'm talking about going in front of the Royal Albert Hall and The Hollywood Bowl. You've got limited rehearsal time, and you're out there with an orchestra and an audience. That's not what I was built for. Some people like Henry Mancini love to get up there. But it kills me. Kills me! I can't stand it.

Even though you didn't write the music for TOMORROW NEVER DIES, David Arnold's score certainly pays homage to you with its use of the 007 theme and FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE. What do you think of that?

I think David Arnold's terrific. I was out doing demos for SWEPT FROM THE SEA when George Martin came in and told me that David wanted to meet me. He was in the next studio, doing a compilation of my Bond themes. Dave and I went out for lunch, and we've been close friends ever since. He told me that his father took him to a screening of YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE when he was 11 years old. And after that, Dave decided that he wanted to be a movie composer. I phoned Barbara Broccoli and told her that this

was the guy to do the next Bond movie. I'm flattered by the way that he's retained my themes. David's smart enough to know what works, and is generous enough to use my music. I think he's the heir apparent.

What is it like for you to deal with studio politics, especially producers and directors who think they know more about music than you do?

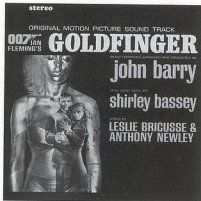
I wish the studios knew as much as they think they do. There's an old saying in Yorkshire, which is "You don't buy a dog, then bark yourself." You shouldn't hire a composer who's done over 100 movies and has five Academy Awards, then tell him what to do. I'll say "Don't hire me for Christ's sake! I'd love to bring something to this movie, which I think I really can do. But if you're going to step on my feet, then goodbye! Please, let's not get involved together on this thing. It's not worth it for you, because you've got other ideas. You go off and get someone who's going to kiss you but deliver what you want. Don't ask me to get involved in this unless you respect me enough to think that I can make a true contribution to this movie."

Do you think the collaboration has to end at a certain point so you can go into the studio and actually write the score?

If you have a good collaboration, then there's no "cut off" point. I like to work at my home in Oyster Bay, but if I have any doubts on a scene, then I'll contact the director. A good collaboration is when you have a constant rapport on every cue, and I had a great time working with Kevin Costner on DANCES WITH WOLVES and Sydney Pollack on OUT OF AFRICA. It's only annoying when you get certain people who say "This is what I'm hearing, and I want to tell you how to score my movie." Then I'll just



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"Harry Saltzman hated GOLDFINGER. He yelled, 'That fucking song!' "

say "If I know the way you want to go, I can do that." Or I'll say "I'm sorry, but I'm not a lackey here. We obviously shouldn't be in the same room together, because we're not doing the same movie."

How do you think temp tracks have affected your work, especially after you left THE HORSE WHISPERER before you even started writing the score?

There's a whole other story about **THE HORSE WHISPERER** that hasn't been written yet, so I don't want to comment on it. It will be interesting to see how the film turns out. There have been other stories like that, especially when I was briefly on **THE PRINCE OF TIDES** with Barbara Streisand.

In a way, do you think an experience like THE PRINCE OF TIDES is humorous in an ironic way for you, whereas it might be crushing for a less accomplished composer to leave a project?

A young composer today can become suicidal when he's trying to deal with studio politics. I went through those states in my early career. James Hill, God rest his soul, hated the score for **BORN FREE**. He said "This is the worst music I've ever heard, I didn't want you as the composer, blah, blah, blah..." That was the most unhappy movie I've ever worked on in my life, and it wound up winning two Academy Awards! I remember getting a call from Michael Crawford, who was doing a play in New York. He woke me up to say "John, you've won! I'm watching the Oscars on tv, and you've won the best song! Wait a minute... you've also won for Best Score!" So here I am, lying on a bed in London, having just found out that I've won two Academy Awards for a movie that I couldn't wait to get off. I thought

"What the hell kind of business am I in? This is crazy!" So when you've been through those changes and switches, your whole attitude is really tempered by that. Harry Saltzman hated **GOLDFINGER**. He yelled "That fuckin' song!" And then it topped the Beatles' White Album, which was number one in America. So who are you going to listen to? You just have to go through that kind of stuff with a smile on your face.

You almost perished from an unusual esophagus accident a while back. Do you think that near-death experience changed your career?

That was ten years ago this March, and it was probably one of the most extraordinarily awful things that could happen to someone. But at the same time, it made me re-assess my whole life. I had four operations over fourteen months. Not one of them took less than thirteen hours, and some of them were as long as sixteen hours. I wasn't supposed to have lived through them. But I did, which was quite a nice thing to happen. It perks you up at the end of the day when you can say "Hey! I'm still here!" I love reading, so I thought I'd at least be able to get through a lot of books while I was lying there. But the strange thing is that you can't. I'd pick up a book and read half a chapter, but my concentration wasn't there. What you really have to do is concentrate on getting yourself well-your whole body, soul and mind. It's like going into some unbelievable period of darkness, and then coming out of it after fourteen months with all of this magnificent help. The science of modern medicine is quite extraordinary. But you have to have the spirit to go along with it. Dr. Slanet, Dr. Skinner and Dr. Cooper were the most extraordinary physicians, and I'm friends with all of them now. They helped me to pull through, but I also

had to give back to them. Talk about collaboration! That's the real collaboration in life, that doctor-patient collaboration. You trust them with your life. They say "I'm going to do this to you. You're not going to like it, and you're going to go through hell for the next week." And you say "If that's what I've got to do, then I'm going to do it." And you do it. I came out the other side as an entirely different person, and the first movie I scored after my recovery was **DANCES WITH WOLVES**.

Would you eventually like all of your scores to be released?

There are some things that I wish wouldn't turn up. I don't want a re-issue of **HOWARD THE DUCK!** For the most part, I'm very happy with 75% of the stuff I've done, and extremely happy with 25% of it. Then there's that "middle area".

What would you say to the people who want HOWARD THE DUCK out?

Well, I'm not going to run and buy it.

Do you have any concluding thoughts on SWEPT FROM THE SEA?

I think it's a wonderful movie. I was so happy to have a great story, director and performances. They gave me a lot of room to move into unfamiliar grounds. The film was a terrific experience for me, and it shows on the screen.

When you see this kind of tragic romance, do you find yourself reaching for the Kleenex?

The emotions get a little deeper than Kleenex. It's a thing in your heart and soul. There are certain scores that you turn over, and say "God, I nailed that. That's pretty powerful stuff, and I like it." That's a more forceful emotion than tears.