

# Drango

*Drango*, *Django*, *Durango* – even though they’re all different and were made in different decades it’s hard to keep them all straight, but *Drango*, a low-budget film from 1957 was the first of them. The film starred Jeff Chandler (and was produced by his company Earlmart), a very underrated actor, and had a terrific supporting cast, including Julie London, Donald Crisp, Ronald Howard, Joanne Dru, John Lupton, Milburn Stone, Parley Baer, and Morris Ankrum. The film takes place in the months following the Civil War. A union officer, Major Drango (Chandler) arrives in a small Georgia town called Kinnesaw, determined to help rebuild it. The townspeople don’t want any of it – they are, of course, angry because they are still feeling broken and bruised from the effects of Sherman’s March. We come to find out that Major Drango was part of the horror (even if by order) and this is his attempt to try to deal with his guilt and heal the damage that he himself was a part of. Chandler’s anguish is palpable throughout the film, and the script presents the story honestly and simply and without any attempts to sugar coat anything from anyone’s point of view.

*Drango* was directed by Hall Bartlett, an interesting filmmaker who never really had a breakaway hit – he tended to do serious, sobering films with strong social themes – not unlike the more successful Stanley Kramer films. While his films were decidedly programmers, he made sev-

eral worth seeing and several that have become historic for various reasons – *Unchained* (the story of Elroy “Crazylegs” Hirsch – and which gave the world “Unchained Melody”), *Zero Hour* (which was the inspiration and basis for the classic film comedy *Airplane*), and *The Caretakers* (which features one of the great Elmer Bernstein scores), and the film of the best-selling book, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

One thing Bartlett had as a director was extremely good taste in the composers he chose for his projects – Alex North for *Unchained*, George Dunning for *All The Young Men*, Neil Diamond and Lee Holdridge for *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, and, of course, the great Elmer Bernstein for *The Caretakers* and *Drango*.

Elmer Bernstein had begun scoring films in 1951, and by the time of 1957’s *Drango* had already written two masterpieces of film scoring – *The Man With The Golden Arm* and *The Ten Commandments*. 1957 was a busy and incredible year for Bernstein – in addition to *Drango*, he also scored *Men In War*, *Fear Strikes Out*, *Sweet Smell Of Success*, and *The Tin Star*. *Drango* is a very strong Bernstein score – somber, melancholy, exciting, and, as always, filled with wonderful and unique Bernstein themes. Elmer Bernstein was one of the giants and he would go on to write film scores for another forty-five years before his death in 2004. He would be nominated for fourteen

Academy Awards, winning only once, for *Thoroughly Modern Millie*. Considering his other nominations were for such films as *The Man With The Golden Arm*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Summer and Smoke*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Hawaii*, *True Grit*, *The Age Of Innocence*, and *Far From Heaven*, it was a shame he never won for any of his superb dramatic film scores.

*Drango* was issued on a Liberty Records LP. This is its first official CD release. There was a specious overseas limited edition release thanks to the European fifty year copyright law, but that CD was mastered from a not very pristine copy of the LP, with ticks and pops and, for some reason, much of the sound coming mostly from the left speaker (how this can happen with a mono LP is anyone’s guess). This CD was mastered from the original first generation album master housed in the Capitol vaults. The difference in sound is, of course, major, and it is a thrill to hear this prime Elmer Bernstein score in gorgeous and full-bodied mono sound.

Elmer Bernstein was a legend and there was no one like him – then or now. He could do anything – whatever genre was thrown at him – he not only adapted to the genre, he delivered something unique and fresh and perfect every time.

— Bruce Kimmel