

# The Ghastly Love of Johnny X

I've spent the latter part of ten years working on some aspect of the *The Ghastly Love of Johnny X*, and I can tell you that the script underwent numerous revisions throughout production. The story was initially imagined as having at least two major musical moments, but I promise you that the movie was never conceived as being an actual musical. The musical number set at the diner ("The Rumble") was going to be the big set piece for the whole picture—the only one other than a necessary concert scene planned for much later. That's why we put everything into that particular song, which is really several different songs delivered by most of the cast in a wide variety of styles. Composer Scott Martin did a marvelous job seamlessly threading together such diverse elements as the modern rock opera, the old fashioned Broadway musical and 1960s era pop to come up with an entertaining explosion of sound early in the movie. It was lengthy by design, since "The Rumble" was going to be the one shot at incorporating character driven song, and we wanted everyone's voice to be represented. Then we decided there were a couple other spots in the script that cried out for musical moments of their own. But the movie was still not being re-imagined as a typical musical. Even after all was said and done, and we realized there were now six different songs incorporated into the finished product, I firmly argued against *Johnny X* being referred to or marketed as a musical. Six songs is not all that many, compared to how many you'd find in a typical musical, which might easily have six songs in the opening act alone! *Johnny X* is a loving tribute to the science fiction & juvenile delinquent dramas of a bygone era, with touches of comedy and a few sprinklings of horror here and there. It also happens to have several clever, and if I may say so myself, extremely catchy songs in it from time to time. Okay, a lot of people who've seen the movie do refer to it as a musical, so maybe I should just stop fighting the tide on this one. But it definitely isn't a textbook musical, you'll have to admit that. Besides the toe-tapping songs provided by Martin, the movie benefits enormously from the score itself, composed and orchestrated by Ego Plum (who also arranged Martin's songs). I made it clear from the get go that there would be room for only one ego on *Johnny X*—and it was Mr. Ego Plum! His score never intrudes on the action, but always perfectly accents the visuals, from the spaghetti-western feel of "To Earth" to the haunting percussion and strings of "The Resurrection of Mickey O'Flynn". Sometimes the soundtrack is thrilling and bombastic, other times subdued and introspective, but always absolutely correct.

I'm thrilled to be asked to provide these notes as we prepare to issue this soundtrack on CD. Everywhere we've screened *Johnny X* so far, different audiences

respond in different ways. Some 'get' the intention, loving the quirkiness of the film and the fact that it is not a cheap parody, but a respectful nod to the past in more ways than one. Others enjoy the witty dialogue, and many are blown away by the gorgeous black and white cinematography. But audiences everywhere have been unanimous in praise for the songs and the score, something that seems to take everyone by surprise. Not bad for a movie that isn't a musical!

— Paul Bunnell  
September 2012

It is my pleasure to provide a little insight into the music which contributes so much to the movie. One of the joys of original soundtracks, of course, is getting to hear everything without dialogue and sound effects, plus little bits here and there which were deleted for various reasons. That will definitely be the case here, as you'll see from the following notes. Now, grab an ice cold drink and some popcorn, slip on the headset, and get ready to experience the aural joys of *The Ghastly Love of Johnny X!*

## TRACK 1 SENTENCED (PROLOGUE):

The opening scene introduces Johnny Xavier, played by Will Keenan, on trial before The Grand Inquisitor, portrayed by Kevin McCarthy (in his final filmed performance). Johnny is a hoodlum from another planet whose low crimes get him and his pals exiled to Earth, but he doesn't seem to be overly upset at the prospect. The underscore here includes a bass line that will be repeated throughout whenever Johnny or his alien origin is spotlighted. This piece also features vocals by Lena Marie, who effortlessly hits high notes with precision and beauty. She will be featured in several other tracks, as we felt her particular style was ideal for the ethereal, other-worldly feel we were going for. We sparingly utilize a bit of electronica in observance of the outer space element. The first appearance of the Resurrection Suit in action is supplemented with a few brash, somewhat comedic riffs in the music, otherwise the mood is suspenseful and serious.

## 2 TRACK 2 TO EARTH (MAIN TITLE):

The first track leads straight into this one without a break. The main title logo appears in red and yellow (the only use of color in the movie) with the rising sun. I wanted the mood to be somber, with a little foreboding and a touch of Ennio Morricone. The result is this excellent piece, a musical ode to a sci-fi/spaghetti western! The arid, desolate feel of the desert is conveyed by the electric guitar here, and the main melody is once again augmented by the soaring vocals of Lena Marie. The melodica (an instrument which is played by blowing air through a mouthpiece that fits into a hole in the side of the instrument) is used to great effect to provide a mournful sound reminiscent of a harmonica, and the melody

is further supplemented by a little more electronica and some unique, unsettling percussion. The weird, wavering sci-fi sound is accomplished here and elsewhere in the score through use of the Ondes Martenot, which sounds a lot like a theremin, and is ideal for stories about juvenile delinquents from beyond the stars. Note: Perhaps one of the most enigmatic musical instruments of all time, the Ondes Martenot was invented by Maurice Martenot in 1928. It has been used in many film scores first dating from 1931; *Odn*a by Shostakovich, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Ghostbusters* (1984), *A Passage to India* (1984), through to present day movies such as *Amélie* (2001) and recently *There Will Be Blood* (2007).

## TRACK 3 THE RUMBLE:

There was initially no real musical aspect to this movie, other than a couple of proposed concert numbers for Mickey O'Flynn later in the story. Then I decided to stage one really big set piece at the diner, something that would come out of left field to be a complete surprise to the audience. Scott Martin whipped up a pretty unique musical sequence, encompassing a wide range of song styles and genres. As this was intended to be the only character driven song in the whole movie, it wound up being rather long, and we reluctantly had to cut some of the music cues that preceded the fantasy diner portion of the song. Those excised cues have been re-instated for the first time in this soundtrack, sung by Johnny, Chip (Les Williams), King Clayton (Reggie Bannister) and Lily Raquel (Heather Provost). "The Rumble" is mostly inspired by the classic musical, *West Side Story*, right down to the finger snapping attitudes of Johnny's gang, and their need to express themselves in dance. I refer to this as the "Fantasy Diner" sequence. Johnny gets two separate solo moments, the first as he sings about the missing Mickey O'Flynn. The percussion then takes on a military feel, which is interesting, since Johnny is depicted as a non-conformist in the extreme. Broadway musical aficionados often chuckle at the exchange between Bliss (De Anna Joy Brooks) and Johnny, with its unobtrusive nod to *Porgy and Bess*. When Chip interrupts, the style jolts briefly into Rock-Opera territory, then Johnny takes center stage again with a Rockabilly tune in which he echoes the likes of Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis. This bit includes a couple of lines delivered by Bruce Kimmel, a TV news anchorman who manages to comment on the scene via the TV set in the diner. The number culminates in a wild mash-up, revisiting all the songs with overlapping melodies and a big, frantic finish. Lengthiness aside, I felt the number worked so well, and helped to give the movie such a unique personality, that I eventually requested another song, then another, and the rest is history! An interesting aside: Vocals for "The Rumble" (and "These Lips That Never Lie") were recorded at South-West Studios in Sierra Madre, California. This turned

out to be right down the street from the town square that was the main set piece for *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, the 1956 sci-fi classic that just happened to star our own Kevin McCarthy!

#### TRACK 4 JOHNNY VS. BLISS:

After the wild and wacky Rumble musical sequence, I asked for something much more serious to underscore the battle of wills between Johnny and Bliss. I was looking for more of a John Williams feel as Johnny demonstrates the power of the Resurrection Suit, and the mood here is definitely darker and more dramatic. It also includes something of a heroic motif for Chip, who impulsively comes to the rescue. Occasionally incorporating a sound reminiscent of *Star Wars* or even Danny Elfman's *Batman*, this track is about as close to a superhero theme in the movie as we get.

#### TRACK 5 THESE LIPS THAT NEVER LIE:

I wanted the vamp song to end all vamp songs, something classic along the lines of "Whatever Lola Wants" (from *Damn Yankees*), and indeed this turned out to be my personal favorite of the six songs. For me, it is the simplicity of the song and its exquisite delivery by De Anna Joy Brooks that sets it apart from the rest. Bliss is at her seductive best as she attempts to persuade Chip to join her cause with this stirring, sizzling performance. It's really the polar opposite of "The Rumble", which involved a dozen actors and was played big on a stylized set. This is intimate, focusing on just two people at a genuine drive-in theatre. In the movie, there is a break before the final repeat of the chorus, but for the CD we are presenting it seamlessly as a single track. By the way, you may pick up the haunting sound of a female vocalist in the background here—it may interest you to know that this particular vocal was actually provided by composer Ego Plum, but let's keep that our little secret.

#### TRACK 6 THE GHASTLY LOVE OF JOHNNY X:

Here I wanted a score that would accent the scene and cover a number of dramatic needs, as Bliss finally reveals to Chip where Johnny and his gang are from, and why they are after her. Portions of this melody will be repeated in connection to pivotal scenes with Johnny, and the main instrument used to convey the craziness of the situation is once again our handy dandy Ondes Martenot. We avoided anything overly goofy here, opting for a sound that was big and mysterious, while still somewhat magical and definitely sci-fi. We feel a dreamy quirkiness as Bliss takes Chip into her confidence, but there is still a basic uncertainty as well. Is she being completely on the level, or is she holding something back? The music really helps sell this moment to the audience, while keeping them guessing at the same time. Incidentally, this section in the film is followed by the reprise of "These Lips That Never Lie", which is why that song's introductory percussion is present in the final bars of this track.

#### TRACK 7 THAT'S FOR ME (45rpm version):

Now this is a really interesting track. First of all, it introduces Creed Bratton as Mickey O'Flynn to the audience. However, in the film, his character is not

actually singing, we just hear a reel-to-reel tape recording while someone operates a not-at-all-convincing dummy on stage, and the number is never actually played through to the end. This is a special treat, as you not only get to hear Creed performing the song from start to finish, but we've even gussied it up with a 45rpm vinyl sound, complete with genuine nicks and pops that were commonplace in the analog era. Considering Creed's actual real life participation as one of the founding members of The Grass Roots, this comes off as a fairly authentic love/pop song of the 1960s. An interesting aside: Early on, I myself provided vocals for some of the demos of our songs, including this one. When I played it for Creed, he said it was very sweet, and compared my rendition to Paul Anka, but advised me that he wouldn't be able to do it in quite the same way.

#### TRACK 8 FLASHBACK MACABRE:

We did something a little different here, putting clock sound effects into the score. For example, the sound of a grandfather clock winding at the beginning of the piece is used to suggest winding back to a flashback onscreen—an audio transition rather than a more typical visual cue, such as a dissolve. The ticking of a clock during the scene represents Mickey's heartbeat. Time is running out for him. Cuckoo clocks start rushing as the track nears the end, indicating Mickey's nearly out of time, culminating in the final death toll of a bell, which ends the track. Many of these effects are somewhat subtle and may be difficult to make out while viewing the movie, but they are crisp and clear on this recording. This track is heavily influenced by Franz Waxman's score for *The Bride of Frankenstein*, which is certainly one of my Top Ten favorite movies of all time. In particular, our use of a simple 3-note motif and a pervading bass line is a nod to Waxman's "Dance Macabre" from that movie. This is one of my favorite musical pieces of the instrumental score and my personal favorite scene in the movie, for the simplicity of two people having a serious conversation with a lot at stake for the players. There are some truly great moments here, from Mickey's stubbornness and cynicism to the real sense of quiet desperation you get from Reggie Bannister's King Clayton and his struggles to get Mickey to commit to the concert.

#### TRACK 9 MICKEY O'FLYNN IS DEAD:

This is a really great piece. It conveys sadness, opening with a few notes suggesting *TAPS*, and is beautiful and melodic, while remaining essentially very dark. This particular track shows how the whole score could have gone either way—light & comic or dark & serious, and I think we made the right choice going serious overall. That's because *Johnny X* is not a parody, it is an out of this world adventure with some comic moments, but essentially played straight. This is my second favorite scene in the movie.

#### TRACK 10 BOBBI SOCKS!:

This is a percussion heavy track, and I tried to come up with every acoustic instrument possible to add to the mix. It starts off with a classic cat fight in King's

office, then moves to the parking lot, where Johnny threatens to destroy Bliss' mean machine if she doesn't produce the Resurrection Suit. The action is accented by the sound of wild horns and xylophones. I performed the bongo fills and directed the recording session. Ego could see me but not the monitor, so I had to conduct while he played percussion so he would know when to make the music louder or quieter. Just another fun day at the office.

#### TRACK 11 IMPORTANT BUSINESS:

Following the fight between Bobbi Socks (Katherine Giamonte) and Bliss, plus the near-fight between Chip and Johnny, King steps in to try and keep the peace. Of course, he has his own agenda, but this track represents King's sensibilities as he convinces Chip and Johnny to reach an uneasy truce. This piece features a repeat of the bass line and main theme that represents Johnny, who gets what he wants (the Resurrection Suit), but doesn't seem to be especially happy about it for some reason.

#### TRACK 12 LULLABY FOR A GHASTLY ONE:

Here is a track that is effectively both beautiful and sad. The first portion represents Bobbi Socks' confusion as Johnny asks to be left alone, and her yearning for someone that it seems she is in danger of losing. Similarly, the second portion represents Johnny's own frustration and sorrow, as well as his need for something that has been taken away by fate, as we discover that the late Mickey O'Flynn was his father. Lena Marie provides vocals, and the tick-tock clock motif appears again when the scene shifts to Johnny's lament to Mickey. The *Johnny X* theme is also subtly worked into the lullaby, but this time very sweet, like a child's music box; he is, after all, at this point feeling a lot like a lost child. The music in this section perfectly complements Johnny's soliloquy, helping shade the moment without distracting from Will Keenan's fine performance in what is definitely the most serious moment of the movie.

#### TRACK 13 WHAT'S UP WITH JOHNNY?:

This is a fun little number that showcases the talented cast, as The Ghastly Ones try to figure out what Johnny's next move is going to be, interspersed with scenes showing Bliss and Chip, King and Lily, and Johnny with his deceased father. Scott Martin provided some clever lyrics, and everyone gets their moment in the spotlight. Bliss now appears more playful and coy than her previously steamy incarnation at the drive-in, and Chip comes across as utterly sweet and trusting—his earnestness in this scene always gets a laugh. The personalities of the gang (Giamonte, plus Rebecca Burchett, Morris Everett III, Sara Grigsby and David Slaughter) also get to shine through. Johnny even gets a *Rebel Without A Cause* moment at one point! This is as good a place as any to note that everyone in the movie did their own singing and dancing. As originally scripted, "What's Up With Johnny?" began with a brief prologue with Johnny's gang impatiently drumming their fingers and tapping their feet on the backs of theatre chairs. The scene was never filmed, but the audio was recorded and we've included it here just for fun.

#### TRACK 14

#### THE RESURRECTION OF MICKEY O'FLYNN:

The mournful sound of a kettle drum keeps a steady beat throughout this piece, representing the heart beat of a man who is no longer living. His body is propped up center stage while Johnny prepares to enable the corpse to perform one last concert for an unknowing audience. Sweeping strings and other instruments gradually get added to the mix, skillfully building suspense up to the moment the concert begins. Additional percussion here provides a military feel at times, just as it did during Johnny's first solo in "The Rumble". King Clayton, the wannabe impresario extraordinaire is represented with a carnivalesque sound, while the Ondes Martenot resurfaces to essay Bliss and her otherworldly worldliness. We keep music playing throughout, never changing tempo regardless of what may be happening on-screen, and peaking with the start of the next track.

#### TRACK 15 BIG GREEN BUG-EYED MONSTER:

Well, here is pretty much the only true rock-and-roll song in the entire movie. After the slow, steady, suspenseful build-up of the previous track, the opening drum beat of this song is a terrific payoff and a sudden change stylistically. The concert scene was filmed with multiple cameras shown in split-screen as a tribute to one of my all-time favorite movies, *Phantom of the Paradise*, where a rock star gets killed on stage. In *Johnny X*, a rock star comes back to life on stage.

#### TRACK 16 THE MONSTER SPEAKS:

Here I wanted monster music. After all, Mickey, whether or not he realizes it, is very much like the Frankenstein monster jolted back to life, unnaturally. This track is very much influenced by Bernard Herrmann, scary and full of darkness, but with a little bit of humor as well. Sort of similar to his terrific score for *Jason and the Argonauts* in some places. My one requirement here was the use of an anvil. This, plus cowbells and other percussive instruments, help to represent the idea of Mickey's rattling bones.

#### TRACK 17 DAMNATION'S HOLE:

This track sets up the movie's climactic showdown, as Sluggo, played by Jed Rowen, shows his true colors, literally throwing Dandi Conners (Kate Maberly) to the curb as he reveals his master plan. The track is named for the enormous, stylized set where everything comes together, and we felt an ethereal sound was needed again. Beyond that, there are several nuances difficult to make out during the movie, but once again easier to appreciate on this CD. My favorite moments include a swelling chorus of rising ghostly voices at about the three minute mark, or the frantic, plucking strings at 4:18, which contribute a slightly off center, crazy feel to the proceedings. Much of this piece is influenced by James Horner's score for *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, which makes marvelous use of vocal arrangements and sweeping strings. I have to say that this is my very favorite track of the entire score. It incorporates many different elements and sounds to achieve the right effect. Also, certain established musical themes, such as "Mickey O'Flynn Is Dead", are interwoven, culminating in a splendid musical composition that

underscores the overall mood brilliantly. It sets the scene so well that I had Ego Plum create a one minute loop of this track to play before the movie at theatrical roadshow presentations—an overture of sorts.

#### TRACK 18 THE OLD CHERRY SMASH:

Lots of dramatic melodies here, as the fight scene ensues. There's plenty of percussion on hand for the action cues, as Sluggo first battles both Bliss and Bobbi Socks before facing off against Johnny. Interestingly, Johnny, for all his swagger, doesn't actually lay a finger on Sluggo. By this point, the audience realizes that Johnny is not all that bad a boy, and though he threatens to get violent often enough, he actually doesn't want to hurt anybody. Lena Marie once again provides just the right vocals to accentuate the scene. I should mention that, not only did she instantly connect with what we were going for upon getting the music, but also she recorded all of her pieces in a single session.

#### TRACK 19 REQUIEM FOR A SODA JERK:

The previous track flows seamlessly into this one, a genuinely touching little piece that plays while Johnny sincerely (if melodramatically) eulogizes poor, fallen Chip. More marvelous and haunting music, re-visiting the much earlier composition written for track 2 ("To Earth"), but arranged differently. This is a great example of walking a fine line, since, subtle though it is, it still plays as somewhat over the top without ever veering into outright comedy, which would ruin the story. Of course, things aren't always as they seem, and it turns out Chip isn't dead after all. This scene is an homage to Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book*, which was one of the very first movies I ever saw in a theatre as a brand new film.

#### TRACK 20 THE UNSELFISH ACT:

So Johnny has tried to do the right thing, but will he and The Ghastly Ones be pardoned and allowed to return home, or are they stuck on Earth forever? With the appearance of a spaceship from Johnny's home planet, this piece harkens back to track 1 ("Sentenced"), and is classic sci-fi through and through. Here we once again used a little bit of electronica to represent the sci-fi elements and super-advanced technology depicted in the scene (the flying saucer and the holographic projection of Queen Betty, played by Christine Romeo). This piece has a real *The Day The Earth Stood Still* feel, although the scene itself is also partially inspired by *Pinocchio* and his meeting with the Blue Fairy—again, another fond tip of the hat to a Walt Disney classic.

#### TRACK 21 HERE WE GO!:

I wanted to make a fun picture that entertained and kept things basically light, so The Ghastly Ones get to go home after all, while Johnny and Bliss get to remain, by choice, on Earth. Therefore I wanted one last number to end the picture (the concert sequence was the last time anyone broke into song) and my only requirement this time around was that it be something "happily ever after" and upbeat. Since it was going to be fairly brief, composer Scott Martin chose to reprise the "Let 'Em Go" portion of "The Rumble", adding new lyrics to show everyone going

their separate ways. This ended up being a wise move, as re-visiting that particular toe-tapping song turned out to be a crowd pleaser. It is also more or less an ensemble piece, even with the action split off three ways. Johnny and Bliss are off and running in one car, King, Lily and Chip, going a different direction, are joined by Dandi Conners, and the remaining Ghastly Ones are briefly seen through the spaceship's portals, dancing and providing the be-bop background. Sluggo, naturally, is nowhere to be seen, but the actor who plays him, Jed Rowen, plays slide guitar throughout the number. The middle section at the key change (right after the first verse) is dialogue free, and the groovy swing/jazz organ played in this section represents the free-spirited sweet nature of Dandi, discovered at that point at the side of the road. (So Chip gets to rescue a damsel in distress after all!) The specific sound I wanted here to end the track is that of playing cards flipping through the spokes of a bicycle wheel, but played backwards. I just thought it was a unique way to augment the final notes of the song.

#### TRACK 22

##### GHASTLY LOVE THEME (END TITLES):

And now the credits! Except for a couple of producer notes, plus the title itself, we didn't put any credits at the beginning of the movie, choosing instead to save them for the end. I think it was a good move, since at this point the audience feels like they know the characters, and it's always fun to see a quick montage of favorite clips when all is said and done. I was familiar with The Moon-Rays and contacted them about doing a theme song for *Johnny X*. Scott Mensching and Andy Blanco came up with this cool, rockin' number, which was recorded in their home state of Illinois. The "Oh Johnny" vocals are stylishly performed by Joelle Charbonneau. A terrific capper to a great musical score!

— Paul Bunnell  
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