

Advise and Consent

ADVISE AND CONSENT

Adapted from the 1959 novel by Allen Drury, Otto Preminger's 1962 film of *Advise and Consent* was a hard-hitting political drama with an all-star cast. Preminger, by this time, was expert at these kinds of films, but also one of the most eclectic of filmmakers, tackling whatever genre came his way and if that project had some controversy, Preminger embraced it rather vociferously. In those days, he was a groundbreaker – hiring Dalton Trumbo to write the screenplay for *Exodus*, and then fighting to have it be Trumbo's first credited screenplay after his long blacklisting period.

Advise and Consent followed his films of *Exodus*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Bonjour Tristesse*. He was critically acclaimed, critically lambasted, and had a reputation as a tough taskmaster or, in certain cases, a downright bully to his actors. From his first success with *Laura*, Preminger increasingly wanted to make films that dealt with subjects that not only would make excellent films but that would garner him publicity because of their subject matter – films like *The Moon Is Blue* (running afoul of the Production Code and the Catholic Legion of Decency – Preminger's battles with the Production Code was ultimately one of the things most responsible for sending the Code on its merry way), *The Man With the Golden Arm* (one of the first serious depictions of heroin addiction, which again ran afoul of the Production Code), and *Anatomy of a Murder*, which bandied about words like “rape” “intercourse” and “sperm” which put him again in hot water with the Code – but this time the MPAA Seal of Approval was given to the film and signaled the true beginning of the end for the Code. Preminger was one of the few directors of that time, along with John Ford, Alfred Hitchcock, and a few others, whose name as director was publicized as much as the stars of his films.

For *Advise and Consent*, the controversy was it being a mainstream film that featured as part of its story a character being blackmailed over a wartime homosexual affair – at the time, not many A pictures had shown a gay bar on screen. But Preminger loved pushing those envelopes and would continue to do so all throughout his career.

He assembled a starry cast: Henry Fonda, Charles Laughton (whose final film it was), Don Murray, Walter Pidgeon, Peter Lawford, Gene Tierney (who'd starred in Preminger's breakout film, *Laura*), Franchot Tone, Lew Ayres, Burgess Meredith, Paul Ford, George Grizzard, Inga Swenson, Edward Andrews, and in a small role, Betty White. The screenplay was by the wonderful writer Wendell Mayes (who'd done the screenplay for Preminger's *Anatomy of a Murder* and would subsequently write Preminger's film of *In Harm's Way*), and the cameraman was Sam Leavitt (who'd photographed Preminger's *Carmen Jones*, *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*, *The Man With the Golden Arm*, *Anatomy of a Murder*, and *Exodus*).

The film didn't get great reviews and it received not much attention come awards time, but then again, 1962 was one of the greatest years in movie history. But the film is wildly entertaining and you simply will never have a cast like that again.

Preminger had always been a director with a keen ear for music and keen eye for up-and-coming or underrated and underused composers. In fact, his musical taste in composers was astonishing, really. He completely understood music and its importance in the film, in the storytelling. Beginning with *Laura* and David Raksin (who scored several of Preminger's early films), he took chances on composers and it always paid off handsomely. For *The Man With the Golden Arm* it was the fast-rising Elmer Bernstein, who created a hugely popular score for the film. For *Saint Joan* it was the great composer Mischa Spoliansky, who turned out to be the perfect choice. For *Bonjour Tristesse* it was the French composer, Georges Auric. He took the bold step of hiring Duke Ellington to score *Anatomy of a Murder*. The underrated Ernest Gold scored *Exodus*, turning in a score that gave the world a chart-topping theme, a hit soundtrack album on RCA, and the icing on the cake, the Oscar for Best Score. And so it was for *Advise and Consent*, when Preminger had the good musical taste to hire Jerry Fielding (another victim of the blacklist) to write his first film score, thus beginning his long film scoring career that gave the world some incredible scores like *The Wild Bunch*, *Lawman*, *Straw Dogs*, *The Nightcomers*, *Chato's Land*, *Junior Bonner*, *The Mechanic*, *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*, *Johnny Got His Gun*, *The Out-*

law Josey Wales, *The Enforcer*, *Demon Seed*, and many others. His scores were brilliant, and he had a unique musical voice. He was a three-time Oscar nominee.

In *Advise and Consent*, Fielding's great sense of melody is apparent from the first notes of its main theme, a beautiful piece that never overplays its musical hand in the film – it's a gorgeous melody, so gorgeous in fact that a prominently credited Frank Sinatra sings the theme, which is playing on a jukebox in the infamous gay bar sequence. The song was entitled “Heart of Mine” and the lyric was by Ned Washington. But it's the dramatic scoring that's so wonderful, especially for a first-timer. Fielding really has a feel for this story and these characters, as well as a terrific sense of how to set-up a scene, whether with exciting music, melancholy music, tense music, dissonant music – his score is really a marvel.

As it had with *Bonjour Tristesse* and *Exodus*, RCA issued the soundtrack to the film, with the distinctive Saul Bass art adorning its cover. The album was, like all soundtracks of that era, fairly short at around thirty minutes. But it's a great thirty minutes. While one wishes that the additional ten or so minutes of score was available, no additional material could be found for this release. However, the album master on this title sounded absolutely fantastic. As was also occasionally the fashion then, the score as heard on the album is not in film sequence. But for those who might enjoy hearing it that way, here is how to program the CD: Washington Scene (Main Title), Dolly's Interlude, Nocturne, Politely Political, Young Illusion, Heartbreak, Invitation, Advise and Consent, Lonely Corridors, Premonition, Adjournment.

— Bruce Kimmel

JERRY FIELDING

“By the time I got home,” Jerry Fielding would remember bitterly, “I knew I wouldn't have a job.” These remarks pertained to the dark day toward the end of 1953 when Jerry would exercise his constitutional right to plead the 5th amendment at his hearing before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. When asked to name his friends and colleagues thought to be communists, he remained resolutely silent. At the time, he had been working as the musical director on Groucho Marx's TV

show, “You Bet Your Life,” but despite his close relationship with the comedian—a lengthy one, including the show’s transition from radio to television—such was the fear and finger-pointing in Hollywood that no one was safe. The accusations were particularly unjust in Fielding’s case; unlike several of his pals, he had never been a card-carrying member of the party. He had attended a few meetings of “Hollywood Progressives”—enough in that scarifying era to get him singled out and placed on the blacklist. In one of the dirtiest and most shameful periods of modern American politics, Fielding became another victim. It cost him years in terms of a lost career, and indeed he never got over it, bemoaning what had happened to him—unjustly, indeed—far into the future.

Unsure what to do next, he put together The Jerry Fielding Orchestra, and toured the country playing dance halls, weddings, high-school hops. He noted that 1953-54 represented the last days for that kind of playing; what had for years been a staple of American music was giving way to the latest “fad” of rock and roll. The audience had moved on and Jerry knew he had to, too. He found refuge in Las Vegas, Nevada, where all the hotels put on dazzling shows for weary gamblers. There, Jerry arranged and conducted for a parade of artists: Eddie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds, Abbott & Costello, Betty Hutton. He also recorded a number of albums under his own Jerry Fielding Orchestra brand, and as musical director for a range of vocalists.

In 1959, Betty Hutton, with whom Jerry had drawn close, was offered her own television variety show. She said she wouldn’t do it unless Jerry could be her MD. Although warned that he was blacklisted, she refused to budge. Her admirable pressure paid off; the network relented. Rescued from the wilderness, Jerry settled into his new job, but his personal dark cloud of animus would persist and inform his work for the rest of his life.

One of Jerry’s closest friends, the writer Dalton Trumbo (another famously blacklisted talent), was also close with maverick director Otto Preminger. Trumbo knew that Preminger, who otherwise enjoyed a fearsome reputation for cruelty toward those he worked with, believed in rehabilitating those poor souls whose lives had been damaged by the blacklist, and was always on the lookout for fresh talent to exploit. His upcoming feature film about the rancid underbelly of political life seemed a perfect fit

for Fielding, who was now desperate to prove himself as a composer for the first time, and to make up for all that had been stolen from him.

ADVISE AND CONSENT (1962), a star-studded affair, offered a lot of red meat for Fielding to attack, but the true surprise here and what helps to make his debut score so startling and memorable, is its surprising romanticism. Highlights include the gorgeous main title melody (also known as “Heart of Mine” and heard plaintively sung for a few moments by Frank Sinatra in the film’s notorious gay bar scene); “Dolly’s Interlude,” which offers a first glimpse of trademark Fielding scoring—gentle themes floating on a fragrant breeze with a bed of nettles just below to warn the listener not all is safe here; and “Invitation,” which introduces us to a favored Fielding gimmick, trumpets doubled and sped up to create an eerie ambience over a deep jazz groove. In fact, this album provides many precursors of the work to come, and its twilight-realmed beauty is evocative and strange. Although Jerry was almost 40 at the time he wrote and recorded ADVISE AND CONSENT, it seemed as if a fresh new voice had arrived. That voice had been hidden by circumstances beyond his control, but Jerry would hide no more. From now on he’d do every job that came his way; he had a lot of catching-up to do.

For the next 17 years, Fielding was responsible for a veritable torrent of music for films and television, as well as continuing as a recording artist in his own right. Academy Award nominations would accrue for THE WILD BUNCH (1969), STRAW DOGS (1971), and THE OUTLAW JOSEY WALES (1976); his work for directors Sam Peckinpah, Michael Winner, and Clint Eastwood is well documented and is his principal legacy. By rights there should have been more than 17 years, but by the age of 57, his overworked and weakened body gave up the ghost.

What if there had never been a blacklist? What else could Jerry Fielding have accomplished? We will never know, of course, but perhaps that doesn’t matter. As driven as Jerry was, we have the scores that he did write, and that we will keep on playing until the day comes when we can’t. Dig into ADVISE AND CONSENT right now; it will start you on a journey of listening thrills that should last you a lifetime.

— Nick Redman

ORIGINAL LP LINER NOTES

Otto Preminger’s faculty for choosing young, singularly talented composers to score his films has resulted in some outstanding motion picture soundtracks. Jerry Fielding, who wrote the music for *Advise and Consent*, is thirty-nine years old. Ernest Gold was thirty-seven when he won an Academy Award for *Exodus*. Elmer Bernstein was a mere stripling of thirty-one when he composed *The Man with the Golden Arm*. And, though Duke Ellington would be the first to admit he wasn’t exactly a boy scout when he did *Anatomy of a Murder*, it nevertheless was his first film score.

The music for *Advise and Consent* began to be written almost the moment cameras started to turn. It is Preminger’s policy to bring his composers on location, and Fielding spent many weeks in Washington “picking up the vibrations of the town” and writing on the spot.

The film – based on Allen Drury’s Pulitzer Prize best-seller with a screenplay by Wendell Mayes – deals with the personal conflicts of men in power. It tells of two lives destroyed by incidents which took place in the distant past. In it Fielding saw “counterpoints of character pulling in many directions.” The main theme? “Human beings’ basic conflicts with themselves.” What evolved is not mirrored scoring – i.e., duplicating screen action – but rather whole pieces of music which imply, underline, and counterpoint shifting currents of emotion. To reflect these shifts, the music is constructed in unsymmetrical phrases of three measures with new time signatures, in some cases, for each bar. There is only one principal theme – a hauntingly wistful soliloquy.

Jerry Fielding was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and started out to become a classical clarinetist. He soon switched to composing, arranging and conducting for some of radio’s and TV’s top shows. He formed his own orchestra in 1951, made many recordings, and at several different times in his young career hosted his own TV show. He has also written and arranged special material for leading nightclub and concert performers.