

The Missouri Breaks

Well, it seemed like a good idea: Pair two superstars coming off hugely successful films – Marlon Brando, whose last two films had been *The Godfather* and *Last Tango in Paris*, and Jack Nicholson, coming off *Chinatown* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* – add in screenwriter Thomas McGuane, a well-respected novelist turned screenwriter, with *Rancho Deluxe* and *92 in the Shade* (based on his novel) to his credit, and top it off with the great director Arthur Penn, who'd made the brilliant *The Miracle Worker*, *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Little Big Man*. Then hire some of the best character actors working then – Harry Dean Stanton, John McLiam, Randy Quaid, Frederic Forrest, and a fetching, strong-minded leading lady, Kathleen Lloyd and how could it fail?

But fail it did, with both critics and audiences. Perhaps the expectation of acting fireworks between the two screen giants was too high. Perhaps the story of down-on-their-luck-but-well-meaning rustlers, an imperious rancher who hangs rustlers just as soon as look at them, and a regulator hired by the rancher to take care of the rustlers and one in particular, just didn't appeal to audiences in 1976. Perhaps critics and audiences just weren't prepared for Brando's outrageous, outlandish and out-sized performance, surely one of the oddest in movie history. Or perhaps the timing was just off for an iconoclastic western with no real heroes and not much plot.

But thanks to TV and home video, films like *The Missouri Breaks* just refuse to go away. People who missed it at the time of release were obviously intrigued by the cast and writer and director – so, the film was discovered and people began to reassess it, and somehow over the years it has become a cult favorite. People have come to embrace the pleasures of the film and appreciate Nicholson's wonderfully subtle performance, and yes, even appreciate Brando's colorful, unpredictable, and completely wacky approach to regulator Robert E. Lee Clayton.

Brando is, of course, the stuff of legend. The scuttlebutt at the time of filming was that director Penn just gave up and let Brando do whatever he wanted, because there was no controlling him. He improvised a good deal of his role, came up with its oddities, which included an accent that kept changing in every scene, from Irish to American to British, and even appearing in a granny dress for no discernable reason. But all these years later, the whole film just

seems to work and is quirky in the best way. There are no back stories, no Screenwriting 101 plot contrivances – scenes just unfold, characters breathe and live, romance blossoms in very unexpected ways, and it's just a whole lot of fun to watch because it's never predictable. It looks great, thanks to the beautiful photography of Michael Butler, but even more importantly it has a musical score that just brings the whole thing alive, thanks to the great John Williams.

Williams had started out as a studio musician in Hollywood in the 1950s, where he was known as Johnny Williams. He graduated to composing and began working steadily in television on such shows as *M Squad*, *Bachelor Father*, *Checkmate* and others, then in film with such low-budget programmers as *Daddy-O*, *Because They're Young*, and *I Passed for White*. He graduated to his first bigger budget film, *Bachelor Flat*, which was directed by Frank Tashlin and which starred Terry-Thomas, Tuesday Weld, and Richard Beymer. After that, he continued in TV with *Wagon Train*, *Alcoa Premiere*, *Lost in Space* and even *Gilligan's Island*, as well as films like *Gidget Goes to Rome*, *Diamond Head*, *The Killers*, *None But the Brave*, *John Goldfarb, Please Come Home*, *The Rare Breed*, *How to Steal a Million*, *The Reivers*, and many others. He was working constantly, had already been nominated for Oscars (for *Valley of the Dolls*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, *The Reivers*, *Images*, *The Poseidon Adventure* – very few years went by without his name appearing in the nomination list), and in 1972 he won his first Oscar for his work on the film version of *Fiddler on the Roof*.

His cache continued to grow – he began what would be the greatest composer / director relationship in the history of film when he scored *The Sugarland Express* for Steven Spielberg. His three blockbuster hits, *The Poseidon Adventure*, *Earthquake* and *The Towering Inferno* made him even better known. And then came *Jaws*. And suddenly John Williams was at the top of everyone's list. He won the Oscar for that score, which was iconic the instant it was heard by audiences. It was his first Academy Award for original score. His first post-win score was for Alfred Hitchcock's final film, *Family Plot*. And then came *The Missouri Breaks*.

Williams had already done big, brash, outdoorsy Americana before with *The Reivers* and *The Cowboys*. But *The Missouri Breaks* wasn't big and brash, and so re-

quired a different kind of score – smaller in scale, but one that would capture the characters and the drama as well as the period and the feel of the film. And, of course, Williams delivered a perfect score (albeit atypical for him during this period), mostly composed for guitars, harmonica, percussion, and a handful of other instruments. Williams never wants for coming up with instantly memorable and beautiful themes and *The Missouri Breaks* has a beauty in its love theme – never overused, always right. His main title music sets the mood with tense bass notes, and off-kilter harmonica and guitar – it's wonderfully evocative and haunting. There are up-tempo, infectious cues, and cues for Brando that are really off-kilter. Even though the long cue, "Clayton at the Wake," was unused in the finished film, one can only imagine that it made the already crazy Brando performance seem even crazier. It's Williams doing what he did (and still does) better than anyone, and it's a score that's completely unique to him.

There was an LP release at the time of the film – that was a re-recording, and Williams, as he did frequently, arranged the music differently than the film, to work as a cohesive thirty-six minute album. That LP release was issued on CD, first by Ryko, who added three bonus tracks from the original film cues – the first time those had been heard outside the film (although, interestingly, those three cues contained no music that wasn't in the re-recording) – and then by Varese Sarabande.

For this CD release, we are really pleased to present all of the original film cues for the very first time – their world premiere release – from the original session masters. It's leaner and meaner than the re-recording, and a completely different listening experience. A handful of the cues went unused but we've included everything for this release. And obviously as happens in almost every film, some of the cues were shortened or moved around in the film itself. We also are including the original LP presentation but we've gone back to the original album masters so we could be at the original source for the best possible sound.

So, here, at long last, are the original film cues for *The Missouri Breaks*. They've been a long time coming, but we hope you'll find they've been worth the wait.

— Bruce Kimmel