

# The World of Suzie Wong

*The World of Suzie Wong* began life as a novel by British author Richard Mason. The book, published first in England and then in the United States, proved very popular. It led to a stage adaptation by Paul Osborn, which opened on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theater on October 14, 1958, and ran for over a year. The play, produced by David Merrick and directed by Joshua Logan, starred France Nuyen as Suzie and, opposite her, an up-and-coming young actor named William Shatner. Because of the success of both novel and play, Paramount brought *The World of Suzie Wong* to the screen in 1960, starring William Holden and Nancy Kwan.

The road to the screen started out a little rocky: France Nuyen was signed to recreate her Broadway role, and the director was Jean Negulesco. However, Nuyen fell ill during production and the producers decided to replace her rather than delay the film. The producers also replaced the director, hiring Richard Quine to reshoot everything that had been shot up to then. Quine had begun as an actor, but quickly graduated to the director chair in 1951 with the film musical *The Sunny Side of the Street*. He directed a terrific noir called *Pushover*, the film musical *My Sister Eileen*, *Full of Life*, *Operation Mad Ball*, *Bell, Book and Candle*, *It Happened to Jane* and, the same year as *The World of Suzie Wong*, *Strangers When We Meet*. The screenplay was by John Patrick, who certainly knew his way around Asian themes, having written the stage adaptation of *Teahouse of the August Moon* (for which he'd won a Pulitzer Prize for drama).

Nancy Kwan had read for the title role in the film, and when she was tapped to replace France Nuyen she was, in fact, touring the United States in the

road company of the play, understudying the title role. And so, filming began all over again. From then on, everything went smoothly and the resulting film was a complete delight.

The plot revolves around an American artist named Robert Lomax (William Holden), who puts his nine-to-five job on hold and moves to Hong Kong, giving himself a year to see if he has what it takes to actually make a living as an artist. On the ferry, he meets a beautiful young woman named Mei Ling (Nancy Kwan) – a “meet cute” if ever there was one. She tells him she is a very proper young lady of high social status. Later, he checks into the Namkok Hotel and there he catches sight of Mei Ling, dressed in a slinky outfit and in the company of a sailor. She's now calling herself Suzie Wong and she unashamedly admits to Lomax that she's a prostitute. From there it's the usual mix of comedy and drama, filled with arguing, falling in love, arguing, more falling in love, painting, more arguing, and finally more falling in love, with lovely performances from Holden and newcomer Kwan, all set against stunningly photographed locations (Geoffrey Unsworth was the cameraman) and played out against the gorgeous musical score of George Duning.

Duning and Quine had already worked together several times – beginning with Quine's first film, *The Sunny Side of the Street*, and continuing with *My Sister Eileen*, *Full of Life*, *Operation Mad Ball*, *Bell, Book and Candle*, *It Happened to Jane* and *Strangers When We Meet*. Duning had an innate musical sense of what made Quine's films tick, and their collaboration together produced some unique and wonderful film scores, of which *Suzie Wong* is a classic example. It is filled with Duning's incredible

gift for melody, starting with his stunning main theme using a device he and other film composers love – using the syllables of the title to create their melody. In this case the syllables of “Suzie Wong” create a delicious three-note motif that occurs throughout the main theme and the score. James Van Heusen and Sammy Cahn also wrote a song for the film called “Suzie Wong (The Cloud Song),” and Duning uses that as a secondary theme throughout the score. There is some source music, mostly heard coming from the bar in the Namkok Hotel – a lot of those cues are Duning originals, but he sprinkles in some classic standards, too. The score has a lot of variety and perfectly blends the picturesque visuals with the human drama, capturing every emotion and every scene perfectly. In a career filled with classic scores, *Suzie Wong* is one of Duning's finest achievements.

*The World of Suzie Wong* had a soundtrack release on RCA Records back in 1960. Side A of the album basically had the main title and then a lot of the Duning source music, while Side B had some of the score cues – the album ran around thirty-five minutes, which was a pretty standard running time for LPs back then. For this release, we have Duning's entire score, which we've put in film order because it plays so beautifully that way. We've kept all the Duning source music cues in the film sequence because they're really part of the fabric of his score. In the bonus section, we've put the source music cues that aren't by Duning, along with the LP version of the main title and a few other odds and ends.

— Bruce Kimmel