

# Taps | The Only Game in Town

From the time Maurice Jarre began scoring films in 1952, but especially from 1959 onwards, it was very apparent that a completely unique voice in film scoring had arrived. Back then, no film music sounded like Jarre's, and even today those early scores sound fresh and adventurous and like no other composers of that or any other era.

For many Americans, the first exposure to Jarre may have been either Georges Franju's masterpiece, *Eyes Without a Face* (released in the United States as *The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus*), a stunningly original and terrific score, or the huge international hit, *Sundays and Cybele* in 1962. But that same year, it was another film that would put Jarre on the map and catapult him onto the A-list of film composers – *Lawrence of Arabia*. For David Lean to take that kind of a chance on a relatively unknown, speaks to Lean's brilliance, and the end result was not only a brilliant score but Jarre's first Academy Award. He'd go on to score all of Lean's subsequent films, including *Doctor Zhivago*, *Ryan's Daughter* and *A Passage to India*.

But the 1960s were an especially fertile period for Jarre, and he continued to write strikingly original music for such disparate films as Franju's *Judex*, William Wyler's *The Collector*, John Frankenheimer's *The Train* and *Grand Prix*, Fred Zinneman's *Behold a Pale Horse*, *Is Paris Burning?*, Richard Brooks's *The Professionals*, *Gambit*, *The Night of the Generals*, *The Damned* and Hitchcock's *Topaz*, to name a few – it was an astonishing decade for the composer. Continuing into the 1970s, Jarre turned out many memorable scores for every type of movie – westerns (*El Condor*, *Red Sun*, *Posse*, *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*), comedy (*Plaza Suite*), drama (*Pope Joan*, *The Tin Drum*, *Winter Kills*), adventure (*The Man Who Would Be King*, *Crossed Swords*, *Shout at the Devil*) and on and on. But that was only the tip of the iceberg, and the 1980s were equally filled with classic Jarre scores, including *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *Witness*, *Enemy Mine*, *Tai-Pan*, *The Bride*, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, *Fatal Attraction*, *Dead Poet's Society* and more. And while his 90s output slowed down, it still included his hugely

popular score to the hugely popular *Ghost*. It is a breathtaking body of work, and Jarre was rewarded with nine Oscar nominations. Aside from taking the prize for *Lawrence of Arabia*, he also won for *Doctor Zhivago*, and *A Passage to India*, a David Lean triple play.

In 1981, Jarre was hired to score *Taps*, a Twentieth Century-Fox film, directed by Harold Becker, starring George C. Scott and an pretty incredible array of up and coming young talent, including Timothy Hutton, Sean Penn and Tom Cruise. *Taps* was a hit with both critics and audiences – a taut and tense story of a group of cadets who take over their military academy instead of allowing it to be closed. The acting from everyone was superb, and Becker's direction of the screenplay by Robert Mark Kamen, James Lineberger and Daryl Ponsican (from the novel *Father Sky* by Devery Freeman) is simple and assured. Tying it all together is Jarre's wonderful score. Many cues are sparsely scored for trumpet, piano and percussion to excellent effect, and the other cues are used carefully throughout the film and help give the film its tension, emotion and texture. Given the film's success and the high caliber of its acting, directing, writing, music and production, it's rather surprising that it was not nominated for a single Academy Award.

While other films from that year are barely talked about today, *Taps* continues to have a big following on home video and has held up amazingly well over the years.

A decade earlier, Jarre was hired to compose the score for what would be director George Stevens's final film – the 1970 romantic comedy/drama *The Only Game in Town*. *The Only Game in Town* began as a three-character play by Frank Gilroy, which opened on Broadway at the Broadhurst Theater on May 20, 1968, starring Tammy Grimes, Barry Nelson, and Leo Genn. The play was not a success, running only sixteen performances. Twentieth Century-Fox had actually purchased the screen rights prior to the play opening. Set to star in the film version were Elizabeth Taylor (reunited with Stevens, with whom she'd worked to great success in *A Place in the Sun* and *Giant*), and Frank Sinatra. But when the film was postponed, Sinatra

had to bow out and was replaced by Warren Beatty. Despite the story being set in Las Vegas, Taylor insisted the film be shot in Paris, so she could be with her husband, Richard Burton, who was there shooting a film.

The resulting film was, like the play, not successful with either critics or audiences. It opened, had a brief run, and disappeared. It simply was not the right time for a dialogue-heavy, old-fashioned, three-character film. It was the time of counterculture and *Easy Rider* and a whole new generation of filmmakers and no one wanted to see a film about the uneasy relationship between a lounge piano player and compulsive gambler and a Vegas chorus girl. But all these years later, thanks to the recent Twilight Time Blu-ray release, we get to finally reassess the film, which, as it turns out, is pretty entertaining – not perfect by any means, but with some wonderful dialogue, star-power performances from Taylor and Beatty, and George Stevens usual elegant direction. There's something very dreamlike and surreal about the film, thanks to the gorgeous photography of the brilliant French cameraman Henri Decae and just the natural oddness of shooting a film set in Vegas in France.

For the film, Maurice Jarre came up with a truly great score. Beginning with a lonely trumpet leading directly into an exciting and jazzy "Vegas" feel, leading back to a melancholy duet for sax and trumpet (the film is all about loneliness, connections missed or made, and has a pervasive feeling of melancholy), Jarre's score compliments the movie perfectly.

*Taps* was previously released on CD on Varese Sarabande as a limited edition that sold out quickly. This is the premiere release for *The Only Game in Town* – we present all the cues that were usable, but, thankfully, it's most of the score and is fully representative of the cues Jarre wrote.

— Bruce Kimmel