

# Jules Verne's Rocket to the Moon

## The 1960s

brought us a whole slew of period comedy adventure films like *The Great Race*, *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines*, and *Those Daring Young Men in Their Jaunty Jalopies* – movies with all-star casts, lots of slapstick comedy, and filled with all manner of heroes, villains, and eccentric characters. Two years after *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* had its successful run, *Jules Verne's Rocket to the Moon* hit movie screens in the UK. This time the all-star cast included Burl Ives, Terry-Thomas, Dennis Price, Troy Donahue, Gert Frobe, Hermione Gingold, and Lionel Jeffries. Interestingly, Terry-Thomas and Gert Frobe had also appeared in *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* and *Those Daring Young Men in Their Jauntily Jalopies*.

For a film called *Jules Verne's Rocket to the Moon* it's interesting to note that it's actually not based on any Jules Verne story, but "inspired" by his writings. Nor does the titular rocket actually go anywhere near the titular moon. The story takes place in Victorian England and involves a bunch of wacky people trying to build a rocket to the moon, each for his own purpose. The cast has a lot of fun playing these madcap characters, and one can never get enough Terry-Thomas or Hermione Gingold. The film is handsomely photographed in scope and color by Reginald H. Wyer, and has a lot of top-notch production value. And it's graced with a truly wonderful and tuneful score by John Scott (billed as Patrick John Scott).

Prior to film scoring, John Scott was a highly sought after musician, playing with various-sized bands all throughout the 1950s, usually billed as Johnny Scott. He likes to say he was the eighth member of The John Barry Seven. Barry had a popular radio show called *Drumbeat* and John played on that show regularly. And when Barry began his film-scoring career, he made sure John was on those dates. He played on *Dr. No*, *From Russia with Love*, and most memorably on *Goldfinger* (on which his sax solos were and are spectacular). He also played with the Julian Bream Consort, John Dankworth, Cleo Laine, Yehudi Menuhin, Nelson Riddle and Ravi Shankar, as well as arranged for The Hollies, Shirley Bassey, and Matt Monro. He also played principal sax for Henry Mancini on *Charade*, *The Pink Panther*, and *Arabesque*. In addition to that, George Martin called him to play flute on the classic

Beatles song, "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away." For that job, he worked two hours and made about six pounds for his trouble. Flash forward to a couple of years ago, and John had a friend who was playing with Paul McCartney. The friend told him about John and how much he'd made on that session. According to John, McCartney pulled out a ten-dollar bill and signed it, "To John – this is your second payment." John has it framed in his house now.

John began his film scoring career with industrial films, one of which, *Shellarama*, played ahead of the Cinerama film, *How the West Was Won* in the UK. Producer Herman Cohen happened to see it, was very taken with John's music, and contacted him about doing the score to *A Study in Terror*. And with that terrific score, John was on his way. He quickly established himself as a composer who could deliver one wonderful score after another, whether for low-budget genre films like *Berserk* and *Trog*, or higher toned fare such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, *England Made Me*, *Billy Two Hats*, a whole series of Jacques Cousteau specials, *North Dallas Forty*, *The Final Countdown*, *Where Eagles Fly*, *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Harem*, *The Shooting Party*, *King Kong Lives*, *Man on Fire*, *Black Rainbow*, *Shoot to Kill*, *Becoming Collette*, *The Whistle Blower*, and many, many others.

No matter what the genre, his scores are filled with wonderful themes, running the gamut from drama to comedy to romance, to adventure, thrills, and suspense, or whatever else the films might have called for.

By the time of *Rocket to the Moon*, the word-of-mouth on John was spreading, and director Don Sharp hired him to do the score – that began a fruitful director/composer relationship that continued for several years. For *Rocket to the Moon*, he came up with a tuneful, eclectic, and wonderful score – the main theme is so infectiously melodic that it's hard to get it out of your head once you've heard it. When everyone saw the film put together with his score they were all very happy with the film, thinking it filled with wonderful performances and big laughs. Hopes were high for a big hit, but, as John said, "On a cold morning in London, in a freezing theater in Leicester Square, the film was shown to a shivering audience of distributors with not one laugh." In a panic, the film was recut and finally came out to middling box-office and middling critical reception, with

*The Times* saying, "Inspired by Jules Verne', the credits for this film rather cryptically announce. One can't argue with the credits, of course; but a more instantly recognizable inspiration is that brand of screen comedy that assumes that a large gathering of well-known names plus some vintage piece of machinery (a car for preference, but a plane or rocket will do) adds up to irresistible mirth. But, as this film takes nearly two hours to demonstrate, it's no use cramming the cast with comedy actors if you're not going to give them anything very funny to do."

For it's U.S. release, the film was retitled *Those Fantastic Flying Fools* to make it sound more like the other films of its ilk, but it didn't help and once again the film flopped at the box-office. In one last-ditch effort, it was retitled yet again as *Blast Off*, shorn of twenty minutes, and, of course, it flopped again. Seeing it now, however, it's a pretty amiable bit of fluff with some very amusing moments, and it does have that top-notch score, as you'll hear on this CD. And John continued his association with Jules Verne with his score to the 1977 Hallmark adaptation of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, his epic symphonic work, *Odyssey of the Belem* (aka *Jules Verne Adventure*, and his "Concert for Adventures" pieces for the Jules Verne Society.

*Rocket to the Moon* was released on LP in the UK – this is its CD debut. So, while there may not be any Jules Verne or the moon, the film does have a sparkling John Scott score filled with his singular melodic gifts. On a personal note, I met John in the late 1980s and have enjoyed his friendship and company ever since. He's one of the nicest people on the planet. When he composed a wonderful chamber piece called "An Inhabitant of Carcosa," he asked me to be its narrator, which I happily was. His music has delighted and touched me (and audiences all over the world), and it's enlivened and enhanced a whole slew of movies.

— Bruce Kimmel