

## THE BELLS AND THE BANJOS

We all have scores that, for whatever reasons, just get to us, just reach into our hearts and get lodged there forever. For me, when I first saw *Love With The Proper Stranger* back in 1963 on opening day, I not only fell in love with the film, I fell head over heels in love with the music by Elmer Bernstein. By that time, Bernstein was already one of my favorite composers, maybe my favorite – *To Kill A Mockingbird* cemented that. But I'd also loved his scores for *Some Came Running* and *The Rat Race* and *Fear Strikes Out* and *The Tin Star* and *The Magnificent Seven* and *The Ten Commandments* and *Man With The Golden Arm* and *Sweet Smell Of Success* and, and, and – in fact, there wasn't a Bernstein score I'd heard that I didn't love. But *Love With The Proper Stranger* got to me and wouldn't let go. I immediately went to buy the soundtrack album only there was no soundtrack album to buy. I bought the 45 of the title song (with a lyric by the great Johnny Mercer) sung by Jack Jones and just put it on my RCA 45rpm record player and had it repeat over and over and over again. I must have seen the film another seven times during that original engagement, just to hear that glorious Bernstein score again and again.

For its time, *Love With The Proper Stranger* was a very adult film in its treatment of subject matter that really hadn't been dealt with all that much on the screen, and, if it had been dealt with it had been dealt with coyly. There was nothing coy about Arnold Schulman's great script – in what is almost the first line of dialogue in the film, Natalie Wood as Angie Rossini, approaches Steve McQueen as Rocky Papasano in the musician's union meeting hall and informs him she's going to have a baby. He can barely remember who she is. It comes to light that they've had a quick one-night stand. What follows is a romantic drama and sometimes comedy that pulls no punches. The scene when Wood and McQueen go to a back-alley doctor is, even today, harrowing, and Wood is so brilliant in that scene that it's no wonder she was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress. McQueen never really gets his due as an actor, because he's just so natural and real it looks like it's not even acting. But he was one of the best screen actors of his or any generation – there is so much going on in his facial reactions and his eyes, and he didn't need yards of dialogue to tell you how or what he was feeling – he did it with a look or a glance or an intake of breath. The two of them together are magic. They simply light up the screen and both have never looked better than in this film. The supporting cast is equally good, filled with wonderful character performances from Herschel Bernardi, Harvey Lembeck, Edie Adams, and Tom Bosley, whose film debut this was.

Of course, *Love With The Proper Stranger* had the perfect director, Robert Mulligan, who'd recently given the world the gift of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Mulligan knew how to get great performances and how to handle sensitive subjects sensitively but powerfully and his work in this film is absolute perfection. Mind you, there are no show-off camera moves, nothing to call your attention to the fact that a DIRECTOR is at work doing BRILLIANT things to dazzle you – no, Mulligan just tells his story and tells it in such a way that it's funny, touching, and beautiful. And that brings us to the touching and beautiful score of Elmer Bernstein.

Right from the opening cue, the Main Title, you know you're in the hands of a master composer who understands exactly the film he is scoring. His main theme is gorgeous and filled with longing and passion and heart. There are many variations on the theme throughout the score and each and every one of them is more beautiful than the last. It's the kind of achingly romantic music you wish you could have underscore your real life romances. The approach to scoring the film, whether Mulligan's or Bernstein's, is very interesting: the only time dramatic scoring is used is for scenes in which Wood and McQueen appear on screen together. There can be other characters in the scene with the two of them, but if, for example, it's a scene with Angie and her family or Angie and her brother, there is no score. If it's a scene with Rocky and his gal-pal Barbie there is only source music coming out of the radio. It's an approach that really works and focuses the movie on Angie and Rocky's relationship and draws you into them and makes you root for them to stop arguing and just fall in love which, of course, in the film's wonderful finale, they finally do.

For one important scene in the film, just prior to the visit to the back-alley doctor, Angie and Rocky hear a love song on the radio – it's the vocal version of "Love With The Proper Stranger" (sung in the film by Jack Jones), and that's where Angie hears the phrase "if I heard the bells and the banjos ring" – in the film's finale, Rocky finally stops being hard-headed and is waiting outside Macy's (where Angie works) with a sign that says "Better wed than dead" playing a banjo and bells. They kiss (the scene was filmed with hidden cameras and it's really fun to watch real people reacting to them kissing), and presumably and hopefully live happily ever after, all accompanied by Bernstein's great final cue. That sort of coming together of image and music is what the movies are all about.

In addition to Wood's Academy Award nomination for Best Actress, the film also received nominations for Best Writing, Story, and Screenplay – Written Directly For The Screen (Arnold Schulman), and also nominations for Best Art Direction-Set Decoration, Black and

White (Hal Pereira, Roland Anderson, Sam Comer, Grace Gregory), Best Cinematography, Black and White (Milton Krasner), and Best Costume Design, Black and White (Edith Head).

## A GIRL NAMED TAMIKO

One year prior to *Love With The Proper Stranger*, Elmer Bernstein scored the John Sturges film, *A Girl Named Tamiko*. Sturges and Bernstein had already done one classic film together, *The Magnificent Seven* and the same year as *Proper Stranger*, would do a second classic, *The Great Escape*. 1962 was, for me, the greatest year in film history, and it is rather astonishing to think that in that year alone Elmer Bernstein scored the following films: *Walk On The Wild Side*, *Birdman Of Alcatraz*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and *A Girl Named Tamiko* – a rather impressive list.

*A Girl Named Tamiko* was another film with subject matter that was quite adult for its day. It was based on a novel by Ronald Kirkbride, with a screenplay by Edward Anhalt, and starred Laurence Harvey as a disillusioned and bitter half Chinese / half Russian photographer living in Japan and doing everything he can to get a visa to live in the United States. To that end he begins a relationship with a woman he feels can help him achieve his goal (played intensely by Martha Hyer in a terrific performance), but becomes involved with a young highborn Japanese woman named Tamiko (played by France Nuyen) and much drama ensues. The Japanese scenery is gorgeously photographed and the supporting players are top notch and include Miyoshi Umeki, Gary Merrill, and Michael Wilding.

For this film, Bernstein created one of his most memorable themes, lush and beautiful, and the rest of the score, tinged with an Oriental flavor, is just fantastic. The Main Title starts with a grand flourish and then introduces the "Tamiko" theme that will be heard throughout the score. But it's a richly varied score and even though the film may not be remembered today, the score remains a highlight in the Bernstein canon.

Both of these scores are part of the legacy of Paramount's then music director William R. Stinson, who was a keen supporter of Bernstein's work in film.

It is particularly gratifying when one gets to do a Holy Grail release, and I offer my profound and heartfelt thanks to everyone at Paramount for making it happen.

— Bruce Kimmel