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### Original Citation

Haworth, Catherine (2008) John Barry and the James Bond sound. Programme note for 'James Bond: Shaken, not stirred' concert, Leeds Town Hall International Concert Season.

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**Catherine Haworth**

**Programme note for 'James Bond: Shaken, not Stirred' concert, Leeds Town Hall International Concert Season, 30 November 2008.**

### **John Barry and the James Bond sound**

The James Bond films rely heavily on music to provide both continuity and innovation: John Barry's early Bond scores set a template for subsequent films with their combination of repeated musical elements that remain consistent across the series, and original material written specifically to reflect the narrative of each film. Barry's involvement in the James Bond series began with the first film in the series, *Dr No*, where he was engaged to orchestrate and record Monty Norman's 'James Bond Theme'. Barry was subsequently hired to write the score a further eleven Bond films, making him by far the most influential composer behind the distinctive Bond 'sound'.

Barry's original recording of the 'James Bond Theme' features saxophones, brass, solo guitar and an extended rhythm section. The similarity of this combination to traditional big band orchestration is no coincidence, and stems from Barry's earlier career as a trumpeter, first in the army and later in several jazz orchestras and his own successful pop group, the "John Barry Seven". The Theme is tightly constructed, consisting of short and instantly recognisable 'hooks': the semitonal bassline pattern that opens the Theme, followed by the distinctively 'twangy' guitar melody, and a contrasting swing section played by the brass. As well as fitting together seamlessly, all these elements are distinctive enough to work by themselves, meaning they can easily be referenced in short, snappy film cues as well as extended sections of scoring.

Several of Barry's scores also include a secondary theme for Bond: the track '007', which first appears in *From Russia With Love*. This theme, with its heavy brass melody and high pitched woodwind interjections is often used in large-scale fight sequences; the militaristic style is complimented by its ability to cut through the noise of gunfire and explosions on the soundtrack with relative ease.

In addition to these two familiar pieces, Barry's Bond films also feature new material written specifically around the storyline of each film. Much of this music is often introduced in the film's title sequence, and Barry's cues develop this material to

identify various characters, to signify tension and romance, and to mark the locations of various scenes (for example the repeated use of fourths to 'Orientalise' the score for *You Only Live Twice*, or the Motown-ish sound of much of *Diamonds are Forever*).

Bond title songs and their accompanying visuals are an important and influential aspect of the series. These often tongue-in-cheek and innuendo-strewn sequences provide a spectacular way to showcase Barry's classic song writing skills. The tradition of using currently popular performers (such as Shirley Bassey, Duran Duran and a-ha) to record the tracks also helps ensure that this aspect of a Bond film is never far from the public eye (or the pop charts). Barry's distinctive instrumentation is a key element in these songs, which combine brass and percussion with high string lines that float above the rest of the texture. Elements of the 'James Bond Theme' frequently find their way into the theme songs, either in their orchestration and overall styling or in the form of musical phrases that quote the Theme.

Only two of Barry's Bond scores feature purely instrumental tracks as part of the credits sequence: *From Russia With Love*, which features Matt Munro's recording of the title song elsewhere in the film, and *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, a title that no-one could manage to incorporate into a suitable lyric! Instead, Barry composed a fast-paced instrumental track which makes heavy use of sixties synthesiser sounds and is re-used as part of the film's score to help inject energy into some of its long ski sequences. *OHMSS* also features Louis Armstrong's rendition of 'We Have All the Time in the World' as a love theme for Bond and Tracy.

*Thunderball* provides a good example of Barry's ability to combine familiar and original musical elements as part of his James Bond 'formula'. Many of the film's incidental cues make use of the melody from its original title song, 'Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang'. This track oozes a laid back charm and sophistication which makes it an ideal accompaniment to Bond's romantic encounters with both Domino and Fiona, and Barry also transforms it into a dance with 'Caribbean' influenced orchestration for use in the film's carnival scenes.

Tom Jones' impassioned rendition of 'Thunderball' (he reportedly fainted after hitting the final note at the recording session), came about after Barry received a last-minute request from the producers for a new song. It contrasts heavily with 'Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang', and instead has more in common with the 'James Bond Theme' itself.

'Thunderball's' lyrics are somewhat ambiguous and can refer to both Largo, the film's villain, and some of the more unappealing aspects of Bond's character. These features serve to make the track both a memorable pop song and a suitable musical accompaniment to the various battles between Bond and Largo.

*Thunderball* also showcases another of Barry's techniques: the use of repeated musical patterns to create tension. Many of the nerve-wracking underwater scenes in the film are accompanied by cues featuring strings, harp, vibraphone and alto flute to create a resonant and haunting sound. The flutes cycle a relentless chromatic figure which loops continuously, providing an aural illustration of the sustained tension which Bond (and the viewer) are experiencing. Barry takes a similar approach to scoring tension elsewhere in the series: perhaps the most famous example is the 'Laser Beam' cue from *Goldfinger*, where Bond's visible panic at his predicament is accompanied by a cue nearly three minutes long, but with absolutely no harmonic movement at all. Instead, Barry gradually increases the volume and texture of the opening sonority, refusing to resolve or remove its insistent presence until Goldfinger finally shuts off his threatening machine.

Barry himself has described his Bond scores as 'Mickey Mouse Wagner', often taking a self-deprecating view of some of their more exaggerated elements. However, his scores are extremely successful in matching the typical Bond film's tongue-in-cheek humour and cinematic showmanship. His music utilises these characteristics and makes a virtue out of their self-conscious and enjoyable excess. This is reflected in the artistic and financial success of the films and their soundtracks, and the huge influence Barry's work has had both on other Bond composers and contemporary film scoring.