

BLESS HIM!  
DAMN HIM!

In March of 1927, Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer Gantry* hit bookstores everywhere. Its story of a womanizing con man and a female evangelist selling religion to small-town America created a furor, with the book being banned in Boston and other cities and denounced from pulpits all over America. The evangelist Billy Sunday called Lewis "Satan's cohort." But no matter, the book was hugely popular and was, in fact, the number one best-selling fiction book of 1927.

The first try at adapting the book for another medium happened in 1928, when a stage version by Patrick Kearney opened at the Playhouse Theater on Broadway. It was not a success, only running 48 performances. It would take another thirty-two years for it to finally reach the screen, courtesy of writer/director Richard Brooks.

Brooks had already made several notable films, such as *The Blackboard Jungle*, *The Catered Affair*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*. His screenplay was only moderately faithful to the book, but he certainly captured its tone and color. He cast the film with astonishing perfection. As Gantry, there was no more perfect actor to portray the colorful and bombastic huckster than Burt Lancaster – it was a sublime melding of actor and role and Lancaster gave one of his all-time great performances. For Sister Sharon Falconer, Brooks cast Jean Sim-

mons, an actress of great depth and beauty, and as Gantry's former girlfriend and now prostitute, Brooks surprised everyone by casting the sweet-faced Shirley Jones, who was known for her ingénue roles in two successful film musicals, *Oklahoma* and *Carousel*. The supporting cast was filled with great character actors like Arthur Kennedy, Dean Jagger, Edward Andrews, John McIntire, Hugh Marlowe, and even included singer Patti Page.

The film was an instant critical and audience success. Everything about it was first-class, and when Oscar time rolled around, despite stiff competition, the film was nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Screenplay (based on material from another medium), and Best Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture. Lancaster won, as did Shirley Jones, and Brooks took home the statue for his screenplay.

Andre Previn's score was especially deserving of its Oscar nomination (Ernest Gold's *Exodus* was the winner that year). His score is almost a character in the film. It's a surprisingly short score, but it informs the film every time it's used. The "Main Title" is one of the most propulsive scene-setters in the history of film scoring, an astonishing virtuosic showpiece that sets the stage perfectly. While there are some standard religious songs sprinkled throughout the film, Previn never resorts to quoting from them in his actual score cues. In a career filled with brilliant scores (in-

cluding *Bad Day At Black Rock*, *Two For The Seesaw*, *Inside Daisy Clover*, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, and his four for Billy Wilder, *One, Two, Three*, *Irma La Douce*, *Kiss Me, Stupid*, and *The Fortune Cookie*) *Elmer Gantry* remains a highlight of his distinguished career.

*Elmer Gantry* was originally issued on a United Artists LP, and then on CD by Ryko. For this release, we've used the original three-track album takes. Ryko discovered some outtakes, which they put into a bonus suite, but we found one outtake cue that they inadvertently left off. We've put the entire score in film order, including the outtakes. We've also included the original album presentation, as well. Also included on the Ryko were a few other bonus tracks of the religious music – but they were included as acapella vocals. The original LP presentation included the instrumental tracks for *Shall We Gather At The River* and *Stand Up For Jesus*. For the first time we've combined the vocals and instrumental tracks and present them as they were used in the film.

— Bruce Kimmel