

# Dear Brigitte | Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation

By 1965, the family comedy film was about to hit rough times because the world was changing and we were entering a more challenging time and the movies, of course, reflected that change. This was especially true of the quirky family comedy about quirky families doing quirky things. In the 1960s, James Stewart, then in his mid-fifties, made three such comedies at Twentieth Century-Fox – *Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation*, *Take Her, She's Mine*, and *Dear Brigitte*. All were directed by Henry Koster and all were likeable and amiable comedies that had warmth, quirkiness, and laughs, all that you really needed back then.

*Dear Brigitte*, which did not make much noise at the box-office, came at the end of the cycle. It's a delightful film and had it been released a few years earlier probably would have done much better. The screenplay was by Nunally Johnson and Hal Kanter, adapted from the novel, *Erasmus with Freckles* by John Haase. The supporting cast could not be more wonderful, with the lovely Glynis Johns, the young Billy Mumy, John Williams, Ed Wynn, cute couple Cindy Carol and Fabian, Jack Kruschen, Alice Pearce and Jessie White. Stewart plays a quirky professor who lives with his quirky family on a quirky Mississippi riverboat. He insists that his entire family play music, but that especially proves to be difficult for young Erasmus, who seems to have no talent for music and/or art. But it's soon discovered what his true talent is – he is a math genius. He also has a huge crush on actress Brigitte Bardot, and writes her long letters, which he sends off to France. Soon his math skills are being put to nefarious use by a couple of con men, under the guise of helping the arts. Shenani-gans ensue, Erasmus and dad get to go to France and meet the spectacularly beautiful Dear Brigitte, and Erasmus even gets kissed by Miss Bardot. Of course there is a happy ending. If the film had come out a few years later, they all would have probably gone to jail for larceny.

Beautifully shot in Cinemascope and color by Lucien Ballard, *Dear Brigitte* viewed today holds up extremely well. It has several laugh-out-loud moments, and the scenes with Bardot are as charming as charming gets. One wishes they still made this kind of film, but, alas, not in today's world of bigger, louder, faster, and more crass, with musical scores that just sit there not really doing what music for film is supposed to do. Thankfully, *Dear Brigitte* has a score that is as delightful as the movie it accompanies, aiding immeasurably in making the film so entertaining.

George Duning, born in 1908, was one of the greats. The fact that today he is most remembered for a couple of *Star Trek* scores from the original series is unfortunate. His first credited score was written in 1947 (*Johnny O'Clock*) and

from there he worked mostly at Columbia Studios, turning out wonderful scores for a diverse number of films, including *Salome, From Here to Eternity, Tight Spot, 5 Against the House, The Man From Laramie, Picnic* (perhaps his greatest achievement), *The Eddy Duchin Story, Full of Life, Nightfall, 3:10 to Yuma, Jeanne Eagles, Cowboy, Houseboat, Bell, Book, and Candle, Strangers When We Meet, The World of Suzie Wong, The Devil at 4 O'Clock*, and tons of others. He also was prolific in television starting in the mid-1960s, and provided great music for *The Big Valley, The Time Tunnel, Star Trek, Then Came Bronson, Mannix*, and *The Partridge Family*, to name but a few.

Duning's music was always tuneful, always served the films beautifully, and his comedy scores especially were models of what great comedy scores should be and *Dear Brigitte* is one of his most charming. Right from the main title, with xylophone and banjo leading the way to a classic Duning theme (a three-note motif – many composers like to do this – it's literally the syllables of the title set to music), you know you're in good hands. The score is fun, frothy, and classic Duning – just listen to the beautiful "B.B.'s Letter" or the magical "Erasmus Kissed" or the wonderfully scored "Villain Upjohn/End Title" – it's the kind of score that is woefully missed these days. Duning passed away in 2000.

Three years earlier, the Stewart family comedy was *Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation*, which also had a stellar cast, including beautiful Maureen O'Hara, John Saxon, John McGiver, Marie Wilson, Reginald Gardner, and Lauri Peters (fresh from Broadway's *The Sound of Music*), and Fabian, along with Michael Burns as Stewart's young son (and an uncredited appearance by someone named Herb Alpert, playing a trumpet player). It was Stewart's return to comedy, after *Anatomy of a Murder, The FBI Story, Two Rode Together*, and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Stewart was one of the great comic actors – everything he did was so natural and effortless, with no attempt to "be funny." The screenplay, as it would be for *Dear Brigitte*, was by Nunally Johnson (adapted from the novel by Edward Streeter), and Henry Koster was the director.

The film was a huge hit and is as delightful today as it was then. What starts out to be a romantic vacation for Roger Hobbs and his wife, turns into a huge family reunion at a beach house filled with cobwebs and barely-working plumbing that Stewart, as Hobbs, dubs "Dragonwyck." If you haven't seen it, do, because it's a total charmer and will remind you just how much fun it used to be going to the movies. Once again, it's a perfect match between film and composer, in this case, Henry Mancini. Mancini was riding high in 1962, thanks to the

success of his score for the classic TV detective show, *Peter Gunn* and its follow-up, *Mr. Lucky*, both for Blake Edwards – which were followed by two more great scores for Edwards, *High Time* and the classic *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Mancini had been all over the pop charts, especially with "Moon River," which was a gigantic hit for him. In 1962, Mancini would write four great scores in a row for four different studios – *Experiment in Terror, Hatari, Days of Wine and Roses*, and *Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation*. Each score is completely different and each brilliant in its own way. *Mr. Hobbs* is the lightest of them – a wonderful compendium of classic Mancini music, from the delightful main theme (in its many guises), to Mancini's usual great source music tracks, to his deft way with underscoring both comedy and scenes of emotion. As with most Mancini scores of this vintage, there is a surprising amount of dramatic scoring that works beautifully in the film. The masters of this kind of film were Mancini, Duning, Previn and a handful of others, and nobody did it better than Mancini.

*Dear Brigitte* is making its debut on this CD. The tapes were mostly in good shape, but a handful of tracks were beyond repair, so badly damaged that there was no way to include them. Thankfully, thematically all that material is covered in other tracks. We've done our best to minimize the wow and flutter present on a couple of tracks, but most of it sounds pretty great in stereo. *Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation* was previously released by Intrada – it sold out and hasn't been available for years now. The Intrada presentation put all the tracks in strict film order, but because there were quite a few source music tracks in a row, we felt that interrupted the actual score too much, so we've switched it up a bit and moved some of the source music cues to the bonus track section. If you'd like to program them back where they belong, it's easy – just put tracks 33 through 36 after track 24. It's a choice, but I find too much source music in a row wearying to the ear and disruptive to the listening experience of the actual score. Again, there is a bit of wow and flutter here and there, but we've remastered the sound, cleaned up some little sound problems from the previous release, and put a few of the really short tracks together, which, for us, makes for a more seamless listening experience. Any way you listen to it, *Dear Brigitte* and *Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation* are smilers – music that just makes you smile, that makes you happy – music that's filled with memorable melodies in a delightful variety of guises and settings, by two great film composers – Henry Mancini and George Duning.

— Bruce Kimmel