

“MY NAME IS JUGGERNAUT”

And with that line, so begins one of the great unsung films of the 1970s, Richard Lester's 1974 film, *Juggernaut*. Lester was, by that time, known for his two wonderful Beatles' films, *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, the film version of the Broadway show *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, as well as *The Knack*, *The Bed Sitting Room*, and *How I Won the War*, all of which were suffused with Lester's visual style and humor. He'd also made the drama, *Petulia*, which was a whole different kind of film for Lester, and just prior to *Juggernaut*, he'd made a boisterous and wonderful film of *The Three Musketeers*. But nothing Lester had done could have prepared audiences for the tension-filled, excruciating suspense of *Juggernaut*. While it's sometimes spoken of as a disaster film, it's not really in the Irwin Allen mold at all. The set-up comes quickly – a man identifying himself only as “Juggernaut” calls the owner of a shipping line and says there are seven barrels of amatol (explosives) on board the luxury-liner *Brittanic*. They are set to explode by dawn of the next day. Any attempt to defuse them will cause them to detonate. If a ransom of 500,000 pounds is paid, *Juggernaut* will then send instructions on how to defuse the bombs. *Juggernaut* then gives a little demonstration by triggering a few small explosions. All this happens during the film's terrific opening sequence.

As it is the policy of the British government to not negotiate with terrorists, a bomb expert, Anthony Fallon (played by Richard Harris, in one of his best performances) is called in. He brings his right-hand man (played by David Hemmings) and his team. From there on out it's a game of edge-of-your-seat cat and mouse scenes between Harris and company and *Juggernaut*. Yes, there's still Lester's occasional quirky humor,

but mostly this is played completely straight, with even Lester's visual style completely in service of the material. Unfortunately, the film didn't do that well at the box-office, although it did receive many excellent reviews. But in the intervening years, the film has achieved cult, if not classic, status – some films are just a victim of timing or public taste or whatever – but ultimately if they're great, as this film is, they find their audience. Everything about the film works well, especially its cast – Harris and Hemmings are superb, Omar Sharif, Shirley Knight, Ian Holm, Lester regular Roy Kinnear, a young Anthony Hopkins, and especially Freddie Jones, are equally great.

Lester actually took over the direction of the film after both Bryan Forbes and Don Medford left during pre-production. He and writer Alan Pater rewrote the original Richard Alan Simmons script. Simmons was not happy with the new script and used the name Richard DeKoker on the film, and Pater was credited with additional dialogue.

WE'VE GOT A BOMB ON OUR HANDS

Ironically, “We've got a bomb on our hands” was the ad line used five years earlier for Lester's film version of John Antrobus and Spike Milligan's post-apocalyptic comedy, *The Bed Sitting Room*. Lester brought his unique comic visual style to this very weird comedy, which features an amazing cast (listed in the credits not alphabetically, but by height) – Ralph Richardson, Michael Hordern, Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Marty Feldman, Mona Washbourne, Roy Kinnear, Arthur Lowe, and fellow *Goon Show* members, Spike Milligan and Harry Secombe. There's not much plot – Lord Fortnum thinks he's mutating into a *Bed Sitting Room* (and he eventually does), a girl is seventeen months pregnant, the girl's mother finds a paper that says she's been dead for several years and then ultimately the mother becomes a chest of drawers, and on and on. It's all very surreal, very funny, and beautifully photographed by David Watkin.

The scores for both films were written by Lester's frequent musical collaborator, Ken Thorne. Thorne's score for *Juggernaut* is very brief but very effective – it is filled with tension, has some great action scoring when the bomb squad is parachuting aboard the *Brittanic*, and his music heightens every scene in which it's used. There's also a very pretty theme to accompany scenes with Shirley Knight and Omar Sharif, but mostly his music plays the same cat and mouse game that the characters play.

Thorne's score for *The Bed Sitting Room* is the polar opposite of *Juggernaut* – whimsical, jaunty, rueful, and filled with one great melody after another. Thorne was really adept at writing comedy scores, in a way that few composers are. And he especially had an affinity for complimenting Lester's visuals.

The source material for both scores came from Mr. Thorne's personal tapes. For *Juggernaut*, those tapes had the entire brief score, save for one cue, the end titles. We were able to take most of that from the DVD (there is a tiny bit of sound effects – ocean noise – for the first few seconds). *The Bed Sitting Room* is quite a long score, but Mr. Thorne only had highlights from it on a reel, and we've included everything he had, as no tapes from either film were in the MGM vault.

So, two completely different films with two completely different scores by one completely great composer – Ken Thorne.

— Bruce Kimmel