

The Sailor Who Fell from Grace With the Sea

Yukio Mishima's novel, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace With the Sea*, was published in 1963 and translated into English in 1965. A decade later, screenwriter Lewis John Carlino (*Seconds*, *The Brotherhood*, *The Mechanic*, among others) adapted the novel for the screen and also made his directing debut. Moving the setting to Dartmouth, Devon, Carlino got the wonderful cameraman Douglas Slocombe to photograph, and cast Sarah Miles and Kris Kristofferson in the leads.

Miles, plays Anne, a lonely widow with a 13 year-old son. The son is part of a group of boys led by Chief, a cruel Nietzschean youngster who has no moral compass and thinks he is superior to everyone. When a sailor (Kristofferson) begins a relationship with Anne, the son goes through a slew of emotions – attraction, jealousy, betrayal – and it all leads to a powerful and disturbing conclusion.

Miles and Kristofferson are excellent, and newcomer Jonathan Kahn turns in a terrific

performance. Reviews weren't too kind to the film in general, but most found things to praise. *The New York Times'* Richard Eder said about the photography and the film's setting, "With the inspired work of his director of photography, Douglas Slocombe, the transposition is an atmospheric triumph. The sweet but somber English coast, its lowering skies and transforming bursts of sunshine, the clean presence of the sea, the white seaside house where the widowed mother lives and into which the sailor comes—all these develop a powerful emotional background for their relationship."

Adding immeasurably to the atmosphere is the film's musical score by Johnny Mandel (here billed as John). Mandel began scoring films in 1958 with Robert Wise's *I Want to Live*. In the 1960s he wrote some amazing scores, including *The Americanization of Emily*, *The Sandpiper* (Mandel won his only Oscar for *The Sandpiper's* song, "The Shadow of Your Smile"), *Harper*, *Point Blank*, *Pretty Poison*, and then in 1970 he wrote his iconic theme

for the film *MASH*. Other great scores include *Agatha*, *Freaky Friday*, *Deathtrap*, and *The Verdict*.

Mandel's score for *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace With the Sea* is dripping with atmosphere, and his setting of Kristofferson's tune "Sea Dream" is stunningly beautiful. From the simple opening cues, to the lush cues underscoring the romantic scenes, Mandel conveys all the moods of the characters and the story perfectly. It's a short score, but it does exactly what it needs to do in the time it needs to do it.

Mandel was and is a world-class arranger and orchestrator, working with such legends as Tony Bennett, Quincy Jones, and Natalie Cole. His music has been interpreted by many great jazz musicians and several Mandel-penned movie themes became well-known songs – "Emily," "The Shadow of Your Smile," "A Time for Love" (Oscar-nominated), and "Close Enough for Love."

— Bruce Kimmel