

# ELEPHANT WALK • BOTANY BAY • STALAG 17

## FRANZ WAXMAN AT PARAMOUNT

**Franz Waxman at Paramount.** One great composer, one great studio, and an astonishing batch of scores. If Waxman had written only *Sunset Blvd.* and *A Place in the Sun* for Paramount he would have been assured his place in the pantheon of great film composers. But he wrote many other fantastic scores for the studio as well, including *Sorry, Wrong Number*, *Alias Nick Beal*, *Rope of Sand*, *The Furies*, *Dark City*, *Come Back, Little Sheba*, *Rear Window*, *Career*, and the three scores we're offering on this world premiere CD release: *Elephant Walk*, *Botany Bay*, and *Stalag 17*. The films are as different as can be, but Franz Waxman brings his musical genius to each. For all three scores we present all of the surviving musical cues.

### ONE MAN CLAIMED THE LAND.

### TWO MEN CLAIMED THE WOMAN WHO LIVED THERE.

We begin our triple bill with *Elephant Walk*, a Paramount picture from 1954, which starred Elizabeth Taylor, Peter Finch and Dana Andrews. Adapted by John Lee Mahin from the novel by Robert Standish (a pseudonym for English novelist Digby George Gerahty), and directed by William Dieterle, *Elephant Walk* is the story of a wealthy colonial tea planter named John Wiley (Peter Finch), who, when visiting England, woos and weds a beautiful English woman named Rose (Elizabeth Taylor, looking as lovely as she ever did). He takes her home to his plantation in Ceylon, but melodrama is just around the corner. Problems include Ruth feeling isolated as the only white woman in the area, and her growing attraction to plantation manager Dick Carver (Dana Andrews) – not to mention those pesky titular elephants who do not like the plantation because it blocks their migrating path.

The film was beautifully put together, with gorgeous photography by Loyal Griggs (*Shane*, *White Christmas*, *The Ten Commandments*), the usual great costumes of Edith Head, and editing by George Tomasini, who, that same year, began a long and fruitful collaboration with Alfred Hitchcock. *Elephant Walk* received mixed reviews, but everyone agreed about the beautiful Griggs photography and the outstanding score by Franz Waxman.

Right from the first chords of the "Prelude," its lush theme transporting us immediately into the world of the film, we know we are in the safe and brilliant hands of a composer at the top of his game. What follows demonstrates Waxman's usual adeptness at capturing mood, incident and characters,

including his splendid dramatic action cue for the film's climactic "Elephant Stampede." While it's a shame that the entire score hasn't survived, the cues presented here – in beautiful-sounding stereo – are an excellent representation of Waxman's contribution to the film.

### SAVAGE AS THE GREAT CONTINENT THEY INVADED!

Next up is the 1953 Paramount film *Botany Bay*, starring Alan Ladd, James Mason, Patricia Medina, Cedric Hardwicke, and Murray Matheson. The screenplay was by Jonathan Latimer (*The Glass Key*, *The Big Clock*, *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*) from the novel by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall, who, of course, had written the hugely successful *Mutiny on the Bounty*. In the director's chair was the great John Farrow (father of Mia), who'd already made such terrific films as *The Big Clock*, *Blaze of Noon*, *Alias Nick Beal*, *Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, *His Kind of Woman* and, the same year as *Botany Bay*, *Hondo*.

The plot is classic Nordhoff and Hall material: in 1787 a group of prisoners from Newgate jail are shipped to Botany Bay, New South Wales, to found a new penal colony. We learn that one of the prisoners, Hugh Tallant (Alan Ladd), an American medical student, was wrongly imprisoned. Along the way, Tallant clashes with the ship's nasty and sadistic captain (James Mason) and begins to plot a full-scale mutiny.

Once again, Waxman's "Prelude and Foreword" sets the tone of the film and its tale. From there Waxman provides a textbook on film scoring, with adventure and drama on the high seas, with heroes and villains, with drama and suspense – all with the classic Waxman sound. Happily, the majority of the score cues have survived for *Botany Bay* – close to forty minutes of music, all in crisp, clear mono sound.

### "THERE ARE TWO PEOPLE IN THIS BARRACKS WHO KNOW I DIDN'T DO IT. ME AND THE GUY THAT DID DO IT!"

*Stalag 17*, the last of our Waxman triple bill, began life as a stage play written by Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski. It opened on May 8, 1951, at the 48th Street Theater, directed by Jose Ferrer, and featured among its large cast John Ericson, Harvey Lembeck and Robert Strauss. It had a very healthy run

of 472 performances. In 1953, it was brought to the screen by Paramount Pictures and director Billy Wilder. Wilder also wrote the screenplay (with Edwin Blum) and altered certain aspects of the play significantly. The film starred William Holden, who won an Oscar for his performance. Lembeck and Strauss repeated their roles from the stage version (Strauss received a supporting actor nomination). Also appearing were Richard Erdman, Don Taylor, Peter Graves, Sig Ruman and Gil Stratton. But the most audacious casting in the film is Wilder's stroke of genius: film director Otto Preminger as the German prison camp's commandant. For Preminger, Wilder wrote some of his most classic lines ("All right, gentlemen, we are all friends again. And with Christmas coming on I have a special treat for you. I'll have you all deloused for the holidays." "Nobody has ever escaped from Stalag 17. Not alive, anyway." "Curtains would do wonders for this barracks. You will not get them.").

*Stalag 17* is one of the great prisoner-of-war films, right up there with *The Great Escape* and *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, both of which came later. There are a great many laugh-out-loud Wilderesque moments in the film, as well as a good deal of suspense. The main plot point is as simple as can be: There is a Nazi spy in Barracks Four and no one knows who it is, although everyone suspects it is the cynical Sefton (William Holden). It's a brilliantly written and directed film (Wilder received an Oscar nomination for direction), with beautiful black-and-white photography by Ernest Laszlo (*D.O.A.*, *Apache*, *Vera Cruz*, *Kiss Me, Deadly*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, *Star!*, *Airport*), and taut editing, once again by George Tomasini. The film was a huge hit with both audiences and critics and became an instant classic.

For the film, Franz Waxman came up with a brief but perfect score, utilizing "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" as its basis. Otherwise, it's percussion and brief bits of scoring that work wonderfully well in the film. Again, Waxman's innate approach to material and his knowing when music is necessary and when it isn't is what made him one of the greatest film composers in the history of movies. The main title, with its propulsive drums and treatment of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," is the perfect start to the film. We present the surviving tracks in mono, as they were recorded.

— Bruce Kimmel