

The first sentence in Samuel Fuller's Wikipedia entry reads thusly: "Samuel Michael Fuller (August 12, 1912 – October 30, 1997) was an American screenwriter, novelist, and film director known for low-budget, understated genre movies with controversial themes." One wonders if the author of that first sentence has actually seen a Samuel Fuller movie, because "understated" would be about the last word you'd ever use about a Fuller film. After all, according to Fuller, he didn't speak until he was almost five years old, and when he finally did speak the first word out of his mouth was "hammer." And if that doesn't perfectly encapsulate who Fuller was as a person, writer, and director, nothing does. "Hammer." Hardly an understated first word.

Fuller began his working life as a copyboy, then at seventeen worked as a crime reporter for the *New York Evening Graphic*. In his early twenties, he wrote his first three novels, all with classic Fuller titles: *Burn, Baby Burn, Test Tube Baby, and Make Up and Kiss*. His 1944 novel, *The Dark Page*, was turned into the 1952 film, *Scandal Sheet*. In 1936, Fuller wrote his first film, *Hats Off*. As he saw the films made from his scripts he was usually dissatisfied with the result. When offered a deal to write three films for producer Robert Lippert, Fuller agreed only if he would be allowed to also direct them – at no additional fee. That, of course, was happy news to low-budget producer Lippert and Fuller's directing career was launched with the film *I Shot Jesse James*. That was followed by *The Baron of Arizona*, starring Vincent Price, and then came *The Steel Helmet*, the first film about the Korean War that was actually shot during the Korean War. Filmed in ten days on a budget of \$105,000, the film was so successful that the major studios sat up and took a look at this young director. One of those who sat up was Daryl F. Zanuck at Twentieth Century Fox, who signed Fuller for a seven-picture deal.

Fuller's first film for Fox was *Fixed Bayonets!* (note the exclamation point – understated, isn't it), released in 1951. As Fuller noted in his memoir, *A Third Face: My Tale of Writing, Fighting and Filmmaking*: "Zanuck had always championed me. He didn't always agree with me but he'd tell me face-to-face, no matter. Once he'd Okayed a project, Zanuck was there for me, always fighting for my vision."

For this CD set of Fuller at Fox, we pick up with the next three films Fuller would make for Zanuck and Fox – *Pickup on South Street*, *Hell and High Water*, and *House of Bamboo*, three classic Fuller films that also happen to have

excellent music. In order of their appearance on these two CDs, they are:

## HELL AND HIGH WATER

When Zanuck proposed to Fuller that his next project after *Pickup on South Street* should be *Hell and High Water*, Fuller agreed, even though he wasn't crazy about the script. He did it as a favor to Zanuck, who'd defended Fuller when J. Edgar Hoover attacked both Fuller and Fox over *Pickup on South Street*, about which more later. Zanuck agreed to let Fuller do a complete rewrite of the script. Fox had, the year before, introduced Cinemascope to the world with *The Robe*, and *Hell and High Water* was to be in that glorious "You see it without glasses!" process. Fuller was wary, as were many filmmakers back then. Zanuck screened Jean Negulesco's film, *How to Marry a Millionaire* for him, and Fuller was impressed. As he would later write, "I realized that Negulesco made Cinemascope serve the story, and not the opposite."

Fuller fully embraced the new widescreen process and *Hell and High Water* became the poster child for Cinemascope and the movie Zanuck would show to nervous filmmakers because Fuller had found a way to keep Cinemascope fluid even in claustrophobic scenes in a submarine.

*Hell and High Water* begins with voice-over narration:

"In the summer of 1953, it was announced that an atomic bomb of foreign origin had been exploded somewhere outside of the United States. Shortly thereafter it was indicated that this atomic reaction, according to scientific reports, originated in a remote area in North Pacific waters, somewhere between the northern tip of the Japanese Islands and the Arctic Circle. This is the story of that explosion."

A group of scientists, businessmen, and statesmen believe that the Communist Chinese are building a secret atomic base on an island north of Japan. But they must have proof so they hire a submarine commander to get proof. The commander agrees (there is a lot of money in it for him) and he assembles his crew – also on board are a scientist, Professor Montel, and his comely assistant Denise Girard. What happens is by turns taut, romantic, dramatic, exciting, and with occasional moments of Fulleresque brevity.

Fuller assembled a first-rate cast, including Richard Widmark (with whom he'd just worked on *Pickup on South Street*), Victor Francen, Cameron Mitchell, David Wayne, Gene Evans, Richard Loo, and, as Denise Girard, newcomer Bella Darvi, who also just happened to be the mistress of Daryl F. Zanuck. The film's handsome photography was by Joseph MacDonald and the music was by Alfred Newman, the head of the Fox music department, who by the time of *Hell and High Water* had already won six Oscars.

Newman, of course, turned in an exemplary score, highlighting all the action, suspense, and romance in his usual brilliant way. His rousing march that occurs in the main title sequence was actually written almost a decade before for an hour-long documentary called *The Fighting Lady*. In addition to Newman's incredible scoring, the film also features one of Fuller's favorite tunes, the song "Mam'selle." Newman's interpolations of it are simply wonderful and give the Widmark and Darvi romance real warmth. The score is yet another Newman classic from an era in which he simply could do no wrong.

## PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET

The year prior to *Hell and High Water*, Fuller made a noir classic for Fox, *Pickup on South Street*. It's classic Fuller, with its anti-hero pickpocket Skip McCoy, police informant Moe, who informs on her friend Skip, who doesn't mind ("Moe's okay, she's gotta eat"), a fetching female named Candy, a Commie spy named Joey, tough cops, and various other noir types all lurking around the peculiarly Fuller landscape.

The story kicks off on a crowded subway train when Skip lifts the fetching female Candy's wallet. The wallet, however, contains microfilm that she was delivering for her ex-boyfriend, Joey, who's told her the microfilm contains stolen business secrets – alas, what it really contains is top government secrets because Joey is a nasty Communist spy. From there we are fully in Fullerland and the movie is by turns weird, wacky, extremely touching (especially in Moe's final scene), and filled with classic Fuller touches – in other words, a movie like no other.

The film is filled with great performances, especially from its stars, Richard Widmark as Skip, Jean Peters as Candy, Richard Kiley as Joey, and most especially the extraordinary Thelma Ritter as Moe, certainly one of her greatest

performances in a career filled with them – her heartbreaking turn as Moe earned her an Oscar nomination. The supporting cast is no less terrific and includes such stalwarts as Willis Bouchee, Murvyn Vye, Milburn Stone, and Parley Baer.

While the film received some middling reviews (now, of course, it's a masterpiece, but it was a masterpiece back in 1953, just not one critics were quite ready for), it was a big success for Fox and Fuller. But it raised the ire of none other than Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, so much so that Zanuck and Fuller were summoned to meet him at a Hollywood restaurant called Romanoff's. Hoover took exception to Widmark's character – when asked for his help in catching the Commie spy, the character replies, "Are you waving the flag at me?" And Hoover also took exception to the notion that the Feds would pay an informant, which Hoover assured the two men would not happen. And then he asked Fuller and Zanuck to either cut or reshoot those scenes. As Fuller later wrote, "Politely, Zanuck refused. 'Mr. Hoover, you don't know movies,' he said. He might as well have been telling the director to go fuck himself." No scenes were cut or reshot, but Zanuck did remove some references to the FBI in the film's advertising.

The score for *Pickup on South Street* was written by Leigh Harline. At that point, Harline had already won an Oscar for Best Song with "When You Wish Upon a Star," from Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* (lyrics by Ned Washington), and one for Best Original Musical Score for that film. He was with Disney for a decade before he left to write scores for other studios, for some terrific movies such as *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer*, *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, *They Live By Night*, *The Boy with the Green Hair*, and, for Fox, *Monkey Business* – after which he became a very busy Fox composer.

Fuller was determined to use the song "Mam'selle" for the scenes involving the character of Moe, so he went to Fox music head Alfred Newman asking if they could purchase the rights to the French song. According to Fuller, Newman burst out laughing, saying, "That song's not French! Edmund Goulding wrote it himself for *The Razor's Edge*. We already own it!"

As Newman would do a year later, Harline interpolated "Mam'selle" beautifully in his score, and also uses the song "Again", written by Lionel Newman and Dorcas Cochran (for the Fox film *Road House*). But Harline's original music is top-notch, starting with his propulsive main title music, which really sets the mood for

what's to come – jagged, bluesy, and jazzy. The film's music perfectly defines its characters, drama, and milieu. It's a great score for one of Fuller's finest films.

## HOUSE OF BAMBOO

From Julie Kirgo's wonderful notes for the Twilight Time release of *House of Bamboo*:

"In the fall of 1954, fresh from the back-to-back hits *Pickup on South Street* and *Hell and High Water*, writer-director Sam Fuller was in London, taking advantage of a clause in his contract with Twentieth Century Fox that allowed him six months off to work independently. What he had in mind was 'a yarn about a bank heist committed by some ex-GIs' – but no one was biting. With characteristically impeccable timing, Fox studio chief Daryl F. Zanuck picked just this moment to give Fuller a call, offering the tough little maverick a very alluring carrot, indeed. How, this shrewdest of all executives wondered, would Fuller like to shoot a picture in Japan, where no major Hollywood production had gone before? Fuller had a two-word answer: 'Let's go!'"

The script Zanuck gave to Fuller was by Harry Kleiner, one he'd written for the 1948 Fox film, *The Street of No Return*. Of course, Zanuck knew that Fuller would Fullerize it and so he did and the result was another unique Fuller classic. *House of Bamboo* features a stellar and solid cast, including Robert Ryan, Robert Stack, Shirley Yamaguchi, Cameron Mitchell, Brad Dexter, Sessue Hayakawa, DeForest Kelley, and Biff Elliot. The stunning Cinemascope and color photography is once again by Joseph MacDonald. Julie Kirgo sums up its story as "focusing on a tough Army cop (Robert Stack) posing, we swiftly learn, as Eddie, a coarse piece of American rough trade. Clumsy on purpose, Eddie crudely rousts the bosses of a couple of Tokyo pachinko parlors, offering 'protection'; this gets him noticed by the real bosses of the trade: a gang of 'stockade hounds' – dishonorably discharged American servicemen – headed by the disarmingly soft-spoken Sandy (Robert Ryan). Along the way, Eddie becomes romantically involved with Mariko (the lovely Shirley Yamaguchi), the fetching widow of a slain gang member; together – with some assistance from the Japanese police (headed by none other than Sessue Hayakawa) and the American MPs (amusingly led by Brad Dexter) – they determine to bring Sandy and his thugs down." Of course, Fuller imbues the story with his kinetic style, crackerjack dialogue, and like all his films, it's unique to him – a picture suffused with the characteristics of its iconoclastic director.

Once again, Fuller turned to Leigh Harline for the score and Harline turned in what was and is one of his best scores. It is lush with melody and orchestral color, and the Fox orchestra has rarely sounded more beautiful. As with all great main titles, we immediately enter the sound world of the film – the swirling strings and brass statements draw us in instantly. From there, Harline's score really does run the gamut, hitting every mood and story point with absolute and unerring precision. Harline remains one of the most under-appreciated of the Golden Age composers, but hopefully with each CD release, new fans will emerge and people will appreciate just how great he was.

All three scores have had previous releases. For this release, *Hell and High Water* has received a loving upgrade from Mike Matessino, and he has newly mastered the other two scores. We are thrilled to follow up our release of *Preminger at Fox* with this tribute to one of the most interesting and one-of-a-kind directors in all of cinema – *Fuller at Fox* – with the music of two wonderful composers who knew exactly what Samuel Fuller and his films were all about.

— Bruce Kimmel