

The Red Shoes — Music from the Golden Age of British Cinema

All during the 1940s and 1950s, American cinema was producing some of the best music ever written for films – composers like Max Steiner, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Alfred Newman, Miklos Rozsa, Bernard Herrmann, Dimitri Tiomkin, Hugo Friedhofer, David Raksin, and many others, delivering one great score after another. Sometimes it's hard to remember that there was also an extraordinary number of equally brilliant scores being written by equally brilliant composers like Ralph Vaughan Williams, William Walton, Arnold Bax, Arthur Bliss, William Alwyn, Benjamin Frankel, Brian Easdale, Allan Gray, John Addison, Richard Addinsell, and many others, delivering one great score after another. And it is those films we salute with this two-CD collection of some of the best and magical music from the Golden Age of British Cinema.

CD 1

We begin with one of the all-time classics, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's 1948 film, *The Red Shoes*. The film was a huge international hit with both critics and audiences – it just seemed to capture everyone's fancy. Here in the United States it ran in one theater for 110 weeks during its initial release, and then it was acquired by Universal for distribution and became one of the highest-grossing British films of all time. It was up for several Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Film Editing, and won for Best Art Direction (Hein Heckroth and Arthur Lawson), and Brian Easdale won for Best Original Score. The film has inspired many directors (most famously, Martin Scorsese), and the film continues to captivate audiences. Brian Easdale's score is one for the ages – a masterpiece, not only in the dramatic underscoring but the "Red Shoes Ballet" itself.

Two years earlier, Powell and Pressburger made the classic *A Matter of Life and Death*, starring David Niven, Deborah Kerr, and Roger Livesy. It was another gorgeously photographed film (photography by Jack Cardiff), with scenes taking place in heaven in monochrome and scenes on Earth in Technicolor. For its U.S. release, the film was retitled *Stairway to Heaven*. As with all Powell and Pressburger films music plays a hugely important role, just as if it were another character in the movie. In this case, that music is by Allan Gray, who'd previously scored *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, *A Canterbury Tale*, and *I Know Where I'm Going* for Powell and Pressburger. His score is delightful and touching.

One of the great British directors, Carol Reed,

made a terrific film from Wolf Mankowitz's short novel *A Kid for Two Farthings*, which starred, Celia Johnson, Diana Dors and David Kossoff. The movie is an absolute treasure and sadly kind of forgotten today and is rarely mentioned in lists of Reed's great films. It should be. Critics were cool to it but audiences liked it and it was the ninth highest grossing film in Britain in 1955. The score was by Benjamin Frankel and the main theme is ear candy of the highest order.

In 1945, Noel Coward's witty and clever play *Blithe Spirit* was turned into a witty and clever film by director David Lean. Coward himself wrote the screenplay, and you couldn't ask for a merrier troupe of players than Rex Harrison, Kay Humphries, Constance Cummings, and the irrepressible Margaret Rutherford as Madame Arcati. Photographed in Technicolor by future director Ronald Neame, *Blithe Spirit* won an Oscar for its special effects by Tom Howard. The score by the great British composer Richard Addinsell was as light and frothy as the Coward dialogue, as you'll hear in the "Prelude and Waltz."

Carol Reed's 1953 film, *The Man Between*, featured his *Odd Man Out* star James Mason, Claire Bloom, and Hildegard Knef. Like *A Kid for Two Farthings*, it's another Reed film that's not as well remembered as it should be. The film, like Reed's *The Third Man*, is dripping with atmosphere courtesy of Desmond Dickinson's crisp black-and-white photography, and adding to the dripping atmosphere is the score by composer John Addison, who was in the early days of his film scoring career that would span many decades (this was his fifth film score).

David Lean's film of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* followed up his earlier Dickens film, *Great Expectations*. There was some controversy over what some considered the anti-Semitic make-up of Alec Guinness's Fagin, and the film was shorn of about seven minutes for its U.S. release, most of those minutes profile shots involving Guinness's fake nose. Aside from Guinness, the film featured Robert Newton, Kay Walsh, John Howard Davies, and a very young Anthony Newley as the Artful Dodger. The score was by the renowned British classical composer Arnold Bax. While Bax did write music for two short films, *Oliver Twist* was his only feature film score, which, considering his music for the film is a shame because he had such a great knack for capturing story and character.

We close out CD 1 with another score by a classical composer, Arthur Bliss. The 1936

film *Things to Come*, with a screenplay by none other than H.G. Wells (from his 1933 novel, *The Shape of Things to Come*), was a look at what Wells thought our future might hold in store, said future covering the time period from 1940 to 2036. Interestingly, Wells was only off by sixteen months in predicting what would become World War II. The director was William Cameron Menzies, who, besides being a director, was a notable production designer (a term he invented) who designed any number of classic films. The stars were Raymond Massey, Ralph Richardson, Cedric Hardwicke, and Ann Todd. This was Bliss's first film score and what a score it is, filled from start to finish with incredible music. The music has been recorded many times, not only by Bliss himself, but many other well-known conductors, including Bernard Herrmann. The performance of the seven pieces included here was conducted by Bliss in 1935.

CD 2

To open the second disc we have David Lean's 1949 film *The Passionate Friends*, from the 1913 novel by H.G. Wells. Despite a starry cast including Ann Todd (the first of three Lean films did with Todd, who he married), Trevor Howard, and Claude Rains, the film is not well known today, which is a shame because any Lean film is worth seeing and this one is no exception. For this film, composer Richard Addinsell wrote one of his most beautiful scores, and has one of his most beautiful themes.

The 1948 espionage drama *Sleeping Car to Trieste* was a remake of a 1932 espionage drama called *Rome Express*. Directed by John Paddy Carstairs, it starred Jean Kent and Albert Lieven. It wasn't that popular in the UK but was in New York, where it had a successful run. Composer Benjamin Frankel began writing for films in 1935, and scored quite a few great movies – his final two scores were *Night of the Iguana* and *Battle of the Bulge*. His music for *Sleeping Car to Trieste* captures perfectly the sometimes tense and dastardly doings on the train.

Benjamin Frankel also did the score for the 1950 thriller *So Long at the Fair* (from the novel by Anthony Thorne), directed by Terence Fisher and starring Jean Simmons and Dirk Bogarde. The oft-imitated plot was a grabber and the film was a hit with critics and audiences alike. The selection included here is one of Frankel's best, "Carriage and Pair", a lovely tune that captures the time and setting of the story, and one which became a very popular piece of light music performed many times in

concerts all over the world. In addition to his film scores, Frankel was also a prolific composer of serious music with eight symphonies to his credit.

Wanted for Murder, an entertaining 1946 British crime film, had a screenplay co-written by the great Emeric Pressburger, and starred Eric Portman, Dulcie Gray, Roland Culver, and Stanley Holloway. The excellent score was provided by Mischa Spoliansky, who'd been scoring British films since 1935. His other memorable film scores include *Sanders of the River*, *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Saint Joan*, and *The Battle of the Villa Fiorita*.

Director David Lean's 1952 film *The Sound Barrier* was a fictional drama about the attempts to break the sound barrier. Starring Lean's then wife Ann Todd, Ralph Richardson, Nigel Patrick, and Denholm Elliott, the screenplay was by the superb writer, Terence Rattigan. The *New York Times* Bosley Crowther raved, "this picture, which was directed and produced in England by David Lean from an uncommonly literate and sensitive script by Terence Rattigan, is a wonderfully beautiful and thrilling comprehension of the power of jet airplanes and of the minds and emotions of the people who are involved with these miraculous machines." This film was the first of three films that composer Malcolm Arnold would do for Lean – the other two being *Hobson's Choice* and the Lean classic, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. Arnold's score is fantastic and instantly recognizable as Arnold – he had a melodic style all his own. The screenplay was nominated for an Oscar, and the film won an Oscar for Best Sound Recording. And yet the film, like *The Passionate Friends*, remains one of Lean's least known movies.

The 1941 film *49th Parallel* was an early collaboration between Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. The British Ministry of Information had approached Powell about making what was essentially a propaganda film. Instead, Powell decided to make a film to help sway opinion in the at the time neutral United States. Starring Leslie Howard, Laurence Olivier, Raymond Massey, Anton Walbrook, and Eric Portman, and shot by Freddie Young, Powell and Pressburger delivered a crackerjack film that was a huge hit in the UK. Columbia picked it up for distribution in the United States, retitling the film, *The Invaders* and cutting nineteen minutes from its running time. American critics really took to the film, with the *New York Times* saying, "an absorbing and exciting film" and *Variety* waxing enthusiastic, "This is an important and effective film." The score was by the brilliant and beloved composer Ralph Vaughan

Williams, his first feature film score. He was, at the time, certainly the most well known British composer and it was a real coup to get him as composer. And for a neophyte film composer, he took to the medium beautifully and composed a great score filled with classic Vaughan Williams themes.

The First of the Few was a 1942 film directed by its star, Leslie Howard. The story of R.J. Mitchell, the designer of the Supermarine Spitfire fighter plane, the movie was a hit in Britain and played in America under the title of *Spitfire*. Once again, a classical composer was enlisted for the movie's score, this time William Walton. Walton had been writing for the cinema since 1935 and already had seven film scores to his credit by the time of *The First of the Few*. *The First of the Few* is Walton at his considerable best – he made a concert piece from his score that became very popular – "Spitfire Prelude and Fugue."

Henry V, the first of Laurence Olivier's Shakespeare film adaptations was an unlikely worldwide smash hit. Released in 1944 and gorgeously shot in Technicolor by Jack Hildyard and Robert Krasker, the movie was intended as a morale booster for British troops fighting World War II. Critic and author James Agee called it "one of the cinema's great works of art" and the film surprisingly received four Oscar nominations, including Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Score, and Best Art Direction for a color picture. While it didn't win those awards, Olivier received an honorary Oscar for "his outstanding achievement as actor, producer and director in bringing *Henry V* to the screen. The score was by William Walton, who would go on to write brilliant scores to Olivier's other two Shakespeare adaptations, *Hamlet* and *Richard III*. *Henry V* is one of Walton's crowning achievements, a score filled with such color and drama and beauty that it literally takes one's breath away. The short piece "Touch her soft lips and part" is simply one of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written.

The Glass Mountain, a 1949 romantic drama starring Michael Denison, Dulcie Gray, and Valentina Cortese, was a success when it came out, but disappeared soon after and is pretty much unknown today. It was and is most notable for its main theme and score by Nino Rota. Rota began writing film scores in earnest in 1942 and already had twenty-six films to his credit by the time of *The Glass Mountain*. His output for 1949 alone was six films. His theme for the film, "The Legend of The Glass Mountain" had some popularity and even though this was three years before he'd start his legendary collaboration with Fellini, the music is pure Rota from its first note to its last.

The Loves of Joanna Godden was a 1947 historical drama from Ealing Studios, based on the novel by Sheila Kaye-Smith (once considered to be one of Britain's most popular novelists). It starred Googie Withers and Jean Kent, and was directed by Charles Frend, with beautiful location photography by Douglas Slocombe. The picture wasn't much of a success, but it does contain a great score by Ralph Vaughan Williams, filled with lovely melodies and dramatic scoring and used sparingly throughout the film.

We close out CD 2 with another Vaughan Williams score, a masterpiece of film music – the 1948 film *Scott of the Antarctic*, a bio-pic about Robert Falcoln Scott and his attempt to be the first person to reach the South Pole. Starring as Scott was the wonderful actor John Mills (the screenplay was co-written with his wife, Mary Hayley Bell). Filmed in beautiful Technicolor by Jack Cardiff, Geoffrey Unsworth, and Osmond Borradaile, it was an impressive production that garnered excellent reviews – it was the third most popular picture in Britain that year. But it's the score by Vaughan Williams that has endured. The music was so powerful, so dramatic and unique that Vaughan Williams eventually used the score as the basis for his seventh symphony, *Sinfonia Antarctica*, one of his most popular works.

These wonderful tracks were mostly recorded contemporaneously to the releases of the films, appearing on 78s and being fairly faithful to the way the music was presented in the films. There have been releases containing these tracks before – some sounded decent, some sounded horrible, some sounded processed to death. They weren't always taken from the same exact sources, and that goes for this new compilation of these classic tracks. Our amazing audio restoration expert, Chris Malone, has labored mightily to optimize each track, and they are definitely much improved from past releases, sometimes dramatically so. And this music is so important in terms of its history that all that hard work was well worth it.

— Bruce Kimmel