

Film Music and the Film Composer

SECTION ONE Film Music

People, from the perspective of filmmaking, a film, especially an *intelligent* film, is an exquisitely balanced composite of technology, creativity, and passion. What does one mean by an intelligent film? It's one that would not fall under such adjectives as asinine, banal, soporific, degenerate, mediocre, idiotic, decadent, and so on. That is, in general terms, intelligent films are those that are, at once, immensely entertaining, and yet powerfully thought provoking, emotionally challenging and intellectually enriching. Most importantly, they fulfill the mandate of true art: via the medium of the aesthetic experience to comment upon and/or question the status quo--at whatever level it may be (global, regional, national, local, etc.) and from whatever perspective (the family, society, polity, economy, the environment, etc., etc.)--in the service of a better world.



Michael Danna



To put the matter in another way: the difference between an intelligent film and non-intelligent film, at the simplest level, is that the intelligent film makes demands on the intelligence of the viewer. This difference emerges most clearly when one makes the distinction between art and entertainment. (See the definition of [Art](#) in the [Course](#)

[Glossary](#)--PART B of Online Course Materials.) Intelligent films, then, are also works of art.

Now, A widely underappreciated creative element of films among the unwashed (meaning the masses) is the *sound track*--to be understood here to refer to the musical portion of the film audio and which, when it is an original composition, is also referred to as the *film score*. Since this course features a number of films and film-clips as a pedagogical device for exploring course-

relevant subject-matter it is important that you learn to see films with a more attentive/critical eye than you are ordinarily used to. The irony is that in the arsenal of the filmmaker the film score is just as important (if not more so) as the other elements of the film in capturing/manipulating the emotions of the audience—which, of course, is one of the central tasks of all films. (Note: the term “filmmaker” should be understood as a composite and not a unitary entity and reflects my obsession with debunking the theory of the *auteur*—which posits that a film is the work of just one person, the director.)

The significance of the film score in filmmaking is indicated by a number of functions; such as these:

- (a) establishing the mood of the film;
- (b) situating the story in a given geographic locale;
- (c) situating the story in a given time period;
- (d) suggesting the passage of time;
- (e) accentuating specific action(s) taking place on the screen;
- (f) serving simply as a filler for missing dialogue (like program music in television or in documentaries);
- (g) negatively accentuating other sounds critically important to a scene by *withdrawing* the film music from that scene; and
- (h) serve as a thematic thread, in place of dialogue and/or subtitles, that binds the scenes in a film into a thematically coherent whole.

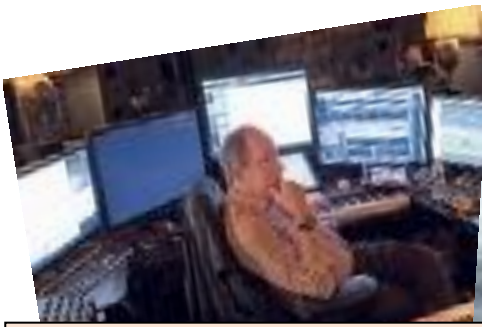
Clearly, then, the take-away here is that the power of a film score in cinema is such that it can break or make a film. Therefore, at the top of the list of the people who make cinema possible also includes the film composer. However, it is also important for you to know that composing for a film is no cakewalk—in the world of music in general the challenges that a film composer faces are daunting, to put it mildly. Every film composer faces at least three main musical challenges:

- (a) how to enhance the emotional impact of the film on the audience;
- (b) how to bring additional emotional insight to the film not captured by the script, the cinematography, the acting, etc.; and



(c) how to compose a score that can stand on its own—as a piece of music in its own right—which

even those who may not have seen the film that it was originally intended for, would still appreciate and enjoy.



Hans Zimmer

A good score should have a point of view all of its own. It should transcend all that has gone before, stand on its own two feet and still serve the movie. A great soundtrack is all about communicating with the audience, but we all try to bring something extra to the movie that is not entirely evident on screen.

So, People, the film score or soundtrack is really important. Consequently, you have been (or will be) introduced to the

work of one or more of these film composers (who in a number of cases also perform their own music outside of films—e.g. A. R. Rahman and Tangerine Dream): *Quincy Jones*, *A. R. Rahman*, *John Barry*, *Mark Isham*, *Tangerine Dream*, and *Vangelis*. We may also touch upon the work of *James Horner*, *Mychael Danna*, *Dead Can Dance*, *John Williams* and *Hans Zimmer*.

SECTION ONE SOURCE: Instructor's Notes

SECTION TWO

Biographies

John Barry: A Composer of Scores as Famous as the Films

By Robert Dax

John Barry was the composer whose scores were as famous as the films for which he wrote them.

As the long-standing Bond soundtrack guru, he oversaw the stunning musical settings for films such as *Goldfinger*, *From Russia With Love* and *You Only Live Twice*.

Alongside his 11 007 soundtracks, Barry was also behind TV themes, sweeping compositions to films such as *Born Free*, *Dances With Wolves* and *Out Of Africa* and a short run of early 60s' guitar hits.

But it is his lengthy association with James Bond which will overshadow all else - his scores effortlessly switching from breathless chase scenes to the intimacy of a tryst as the secret agent indulges in yet another seduction.

Barry was brought up in York [England], where he attended a Catholic convent school and was encouraged with his musical gifts by the organist of the city's Minster.

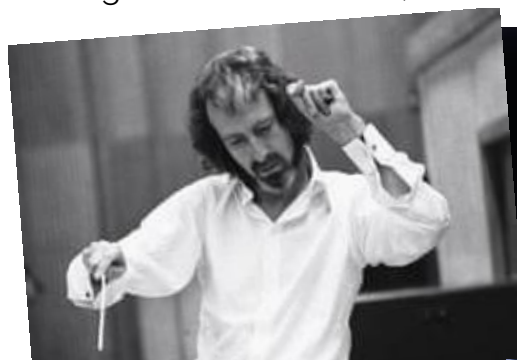
His movie career perfectly channeled his family's interests - his father was a cinema owner and his mother a classical pianist.

Barry himself learned the piano as a child and was also a capable trumpeter. During his National Service he furthered his musical knowledge by taking a correspondence course in composition.

After leaving the army he formed a rock and roll band The John Barry Seven, notching up hits with *Hit and Miss*, later the theme to TV's *Juke Box Jury*, *Beat For Beatniks* and a cover of the twangy guitar track *Walk Don't Run*.

His work on TV series *Drumbeat* - for which the group had backed chart star Adam Faith - led to Barry being enlisted for the singer's first movie role, *Beat Girl*.

Producers of the first Bond film *Dr No* took him on to spruce up the James Bond Theme which had been written by Monty Norman. His skilful work on the tune, with its tricky jump of time signatures, led to him being taken on to handle the whole score for subsequent film adaptations of the Ian Fleming novels, beginning with *From Russia With Love*. [...]



Barry was married four times - his second wife was the actress Jane Birkin, a marriage which lasted three years. He had been married to his current wife Laurie since 1978.

He relocated from the UK in the mid-1970s, setting up home in the United States with a long-established home on Long Island, New York, although he kept a London base for many years.

In 1999 he was honoured with an OBE and was awarded a Bafta Fellowship in 2005.

[John Barry died in New York on January 30, 2011]

This is a shortened version of material sourced here:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/john-barry-oscar-winning-bond-composer-dies-2199287.html>

John Barry Was Every Bit as Vital as a Star Director

By Geoffrey Macnab

Soundtrack composers take great pleasure in startling their audiences by working against the grain. They'll choose unusual instruments and turn genre conventions on their head. John Barry – one of the greatest movie composers – did this regularly. It's a measure of his genius that the effect was never jarring and that his scores defined the movies every bit as much as the direction or performances.

Take *The Ipcress File* (1965), in which Michael Caine played the crumpled spy Harry Palmer. For this score, Barry opted to use a cimbalon. The effect was every bit as mesmerising as the Anton Karas zither on the Harry Lime theme in *The Third Man*.

The *Ipcress File* score, with its echoing brass, was lilting but deceptive. There was a hint of mystery and menace about it. The setting may have been Sixties London but that wasn't where the music seemed to come from. Barry may have played rock'n'roll and his band might have backed Adam Faith but that didn't lead him to make glib swinging Sixties references.

For another thriller, *The Quiller Memorandum*, he chose a barrel organ. He was a pioneer of the Moog synthesizer too, using it both on *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* and for his score for TV's *The Persuaders*.

His lovely harmonica theme for *Midnight Cowboy* added pathos and a sense of yearning to a film set in a very sleazy and downbeat milieu. At the same time, he was capable of writing martial scores, full of pomp and ceremony, as he did for *Zulu*, or rousing arrangements, reminiscent of the old Hollywood scores he so admired (for example, for *Born Free* or *Out Of Africa*.)

Without John Barry, would the *James Bond* series ever have become the worldwide phenomenon that it did? Barry's music played as important a part in defining the Bond brand as the gadgets or stunts. It was also a point of continuity. Whatever digressions the series made, whatever its occasional false steps, the Barry music gave the Bond films both dynamism and gravitas.

Barry arranged, conducted and performed as well as composed. He was hugely admired by his peers, young and old. The five *Oscars* he won and the multiple other awards showed the esteem in which he was held.

Last year, when he won *World Soundtrack Lifetime Achievement Award* at the Ghent Festival in Flanders, he was too ill to attend. A concert was held in his honor. The program, which included excerpts of his music for everything from *Goldfinger* to *Dances With Wolves*, from *Body Heat* to *The Lion In Winter*, underlined just how rich his legacy is.

SOURCE: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/geoffrey-macnab-john-barry-was-every-bit-as-vital-as-a-star-director-2200164.html>

Quincy Jones

by Mark Deming

In a career spanning over seven decades, [Quincy Jones](#) has earned his reputation as a renaissance man of American music. Since entering the industry as an arranger in the early 1950s, he has distinguished himself as a bandleader, solo artist, sideman, songwriter, producer, film composer, and record label executive. A quick look at a few of the artists he's worked with -- [Miles Davis](#), [Frank Sinatra](#), [Count Basie](#), [Lesley Gore](#), [Michael Jackson](#), [Peggy Lee](#), [Ray Charles](#), [Paul Simon](#), and [Aretha Franklin](#) -- reveals the remarkable diversity of his career. He has been nominated for a record 80 Grammy awards, and has won 27 in categories including Best Instrumental Jazz Performance for "Walking in Space" (1969), Producer of the Year (1981), and Album of the Year for [Jackson's Thriller](#) (1983) and his own [Back on the Block](#) (1990). [...]

Quincy Delight Jones, Jr. was born in Chicago, Illinois on March 14, 1933. While still a youngster, his family moved to Seattle, Washington and he soon developed an interest in music. In his early teens, [Jones](#) began learning the trumpet and started singing with a local gospel group. By the time he graduated from high school in 1950, [Jones](#) had displayed enough promise to win a scholarship to Boston-based music school Schillinger House (which later became known as the Berklee School of Music [today called [Berklee College of Music](#)]). After a year at Schillinger, [Jones](#) relocated to New York City, where he found work as an arranger, writing charts for [Count Basie](#), [Cannonball Adderley](#), [Tommy Dorsey](#), and [Dinah Washington](#), among others. [...]



In 1957, [Jones](#) moved to Paris in order to study with [Nadia Boulanger](#), an expatriate American composer with a stellar track record in educating composers and bandleaders. During his sojourn in France, [Jones](#) took a job with the French record label Barclay, where he produced and arranged sessions for [Jacques Brel](#) and [Charles Aznavour](#), and traveling American artists like [Billy Eckstine](#) and [Sarah Vaughan](#). [Jones](#)' work for Barclay impressed the management at Mercury Records, an American label affiliated with the French imprint, and in 1961 he was named a vice-president of Mercury, the first time an African-American had been hired as an upper-level executive by a major U.S. recording company. [...]

In 1963, [Jones](#) began exploring what would become a fruitful medium when he composed his first film score for Sidney Lumet's controversial

drama *The Pawnbroker*; he would go on to write music for 33 feature films. [...]

Having risen to the heights of the recording industry, [Jones](#) moved from scoring films to producing them in 1985. His first screen project was the screen adaptation of [Alice Walker](#)'s novel *The Color Purple*, directed by [Steven Spielberg](#). In 1991 he moved into television production with the situation comedy *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, which gave [Will Smith](#) his first starring role. [...]

[Jones](#) spent the rest of the '90s and first decade of the new century concentrating on his music publishing business, completing *Q: The Autobiography of Quincy Jones*, and being an "unofficial" cultural ambassador for the United States. In 2004 he helped to launch the *We Are the Future* (WAF) project, benefiting children in conflict-inhibited situations all over the globe. In 2010, [Jones](#) released [Q: Soul Bossa Nostra](#), his first album in 15 years. As with many of his previous solo albums, the set featured appearances by popular vocalists like [Amy Winehouse](#) and [Usher](#). Three years later, he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as a recipient of the Ahmet Ertegun Award. He continued working with artists including [Emily Bear](#), [Nikki Yanofsky](#), and [Terrace Martin](#), and released the [Chaka Khan](#) collaboration "Keep Reachin'," recorded for [Quincy: A Life Beyond Measure](#), a 2018 documentary about his illustrious career.

This is a shortened version of material sourced here:

<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/quincy-jones-mn0000378624/biography>

A. R. Rahman

By Nathan Bush

Since *Roja* hit movie screens in South India in 1992, [A.R. Rahman](#) has redefined the country's widely popular film music. Generally regarded as the finest Indian film composer of his time (and certainly the most commercially successful), [Rahman](#) produced music for dozens of widescreen releases just during his first five years in the industry. [...]

Born [A.S. Dileep Kumar](#) on October 10th, 1966, in Madras, India, [Allah Rakha Rahman](#) was exposed to music from the time he was a child, entered in classical piano studies by his parents at the age of four. At 16, he quit school (after the death of his father, R. K. Shekar) and was following in his father's footsteps ([R.K. Shekhar](#) was a successful film musician, arranger, and conductor himself), working full-time as a session musician on soundtracks under the popular South Indian composer [Ilaiyaraaja](#). The monotony soon grew tiring however, and at the suggestion of a colleague, [Rahman](#) tried his hand at television commercials, eventually composing over 300 jingles in just five years.

It wasn't until 1989 that [Rahman](#) planted the first seeds of his film career. That year, he began acquiring the equipment and organizing the sound library for his Panchathan Record Inn. When Sharada Trilok's ad for Leo Coffee (for which [Rahman](#) penned the music) won her an award, she introduced the young composer to her cousin, Mani Ratnam. Impressed with his work, the director signed [Rahman](#) to compose the music for K. Balachander's 1992 film *Roja*. [Rahman](#)'s score, a colorful, uncluttered combination of pop, rock, reggae, and his country's traditional music, re-shaped the genre, winning him three awards for Best Music Director. *Roja* became the equivalent of an Indian crossover success. Originally filmed in South Indian Tamil, it was re-dubbed (and its soundtrack re-recorded) in Hindi, the language of North India's famous Bollywood film center. [...]

[Rahman](#) finally seemed poised on the brink of the international success he desired. Performances were booked in Europe, Canada, and the United States during the final years of the century and a session was arranged with singer [David Byrne](#) (owner of the Luaka Bop label and a [Rahman](#) fan). [Andrew Lloyd Webber](#) chose [Rahman](#) to compose the music for his [Bombay Dreams](#), a musical based on the Bollywood film industry. The pair began work on the project during the second half of 2000, and the musical opened in London during 2002. [Bombay Dreams](#)

also ran for 284 regular performances at the Broadway Theatre in New York from April 2004 to January 2005.



After the turn of the millennium, [Rahman](#) only saw his global recognition and acclaim grow, as he rose to the upper echelon of film composers worldwide. In 2005 he opened AM Studios -- regarded as one of the foremost recording facilities in Asia -- as an adjunct to Panchathan Record Inn, and the following year the composer established his own record label, KM Music. [...]

He scored the 2003 Chinese (Mandarin-language) film [Warriors of Heaven and Earth](#) directed by He Ping and co-composed (with [Craig Armstrong](#)) the score to the 2007 English-language film [Elizabeth: The Golden Age](#), directed by [Shekhar Kapur](#) and starring Cate Blanchett. [...]

However, [Rahman](#)'s widest recognition to that point -- at least with Western audiences -- came with British director [Danny Boyle](#)'s 2008 hit film [Slumdog Millionaire](#). It won eight Academy Awards in the United States, including Best Picture and Best Director as well as two for [Rahman](#): Best Original Score and Best Song. Two [Rahman](#) songs from the film had been nominated for Oscars, "O... Saya" and "Jai Ho," the latter of which won the statuette for [Rahman](#) and for lyricist [Gulzar](#). In 2010, he was awarded the Padma Bhushan, India's third highest civilian award. The following year, he was nominated for two more Oscars, this time for best song and score for 2010's [127 Hours](#), also directed by [Boyle](#).

As he continued to write music for Indian cinema at a prolific rate, subsequent work in Hollywood included the 2014 [Disney](#) co-production [Million Dollar Arm](#) and 2016's [Pelé: Birth of a Legend](#). A year later, his music could be heard in the U.K.-India co-production [Viceroy's House](#), directed by [Gurinder Chadha](#).

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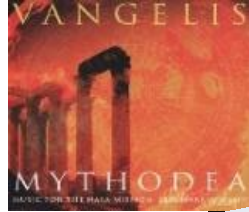
<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/ar-rahman-mn0000577701/biography>

Vangelis

By Sonya Shelton

Born Evangelos Odyssey Papathanassiou on March 29, 1943 in Greece.

Known around the world for his award-winning soundtrack to the film *Chariots of Fire*, Vangelis has been classified under a variety of genres, including New Age. He's composed a lifetime of music for ballet and film, as well as released a number of international solo records. Born and raised in Greece, Vangelis has also lived in Paris and London, where he has his own studio called Nemo Studios, near London's Marble Arch.



Vangelis was born Evangelos Odyssey Papathanassiou in Greece in 1943. Although he began playing piano at four years old, he has never been able to read or write music on paper. When he was six, his parents enrolled him in an Athens music school. Soon, he performed his first concert of his own compositions.

Despite his love for music, Vangelis despised being schooled in the art. "When the teachers asked me to play something, I would pretend that I was reading it and play from memory," Vangelis told Joe Klien in *Life*. "I didn't fool them, but I didn't care." The young boy knew his teachers could help him become a musician, but they could not teach him how to be creative. [...]

In 1967, Vangelis left Formynx and Greece after a right-wing military coup occurred in his homeland. He moved to Paris, where he formed the band *Aphrodite's Child*, with Demis Roussos and Loukas Sideras. The group released the album *Rain and Tears* and the double-album *666* in France, before they broke up in 1970. Instead of moving onto another band, Vangelis began scoring music for French television documentaries. He also composed the soundtrack for the French film *L'Apocalypse des Animaux* for director Frederic Rossif.

Vangelis released his first solo album *Dragon* in 1971 on Phillips Records. In 1974, he moved to London, England, to work with the rock band Yes. [...]

In 1981, Vangelis made his mark in the world of music with the soundtrack for a film about the 1924 Olympics, called *Chariots of Fire*. It became the fastest-selling LP and single in the United States at the time, and quickly topped the Billboard charts. Irv Cohn wrote in *Stereo Review*, "The

music is very much Vangelis' style, yet it is perfectly suited to the action and atmosphere of the film, with gorgeous pastoral melodies that capture the feel of England between the wars." [...]

His success with *Chariots of Fire* stimulated many other movie soundtracks over the years, including *Missing*, *Blade Runner*, *The Bounty* and *1492: The Conquest of Paradise*. Almost any reference made to Vangelis after 1981 mentioned *Chariots of Fire* and often compared it to his later works. In 1982, he released a compilation of his previous work on *The Unknown Man*, released on RCA. He also continued to produce his own solo albums, as well as working with other artists. [...]

Vangelis spent most of the 1990s experimenting in his studio and traveling around the world, although he rarely performed in concert or granted interviews. He continued to release his solo work, such as 1995's *Voices* and *Oceanic* in 1997. He also played a special performance for the Opening Ceremonies at the Sixth IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Athens, Greece, in 1997.

From the time he was a child, Vangelis showed less signs of concern for his popularity or success as an artist than his dedication to his own creative expression. "All I try to do is let people know what I think through my music," Vangelis stated in the liner notes of his 1981 *Greatest Hits*. "I just bring the music to you, and it's up to you to do what you want with it."

This is a shortened version of material sourced here:

<https://www.musicanguide.com/biographies/1608001753/Vangelis.html>