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Jerry Goldsmith

Scoring the Fantastic

By
MARC
SHAPIRO

With an emphasis on humanity over hardware, the Oscar-winning composer is still making the genre his beat.

Jerry Goldsmith doesn't go out of his way to score science-fiction, fantasy and horror films. But producers and directors bent on effectively setting the tone for their otherworldly visions inevitably end up dialing G for Goldsmith.

"I don't seek these kinds of movies out," explains Goldsmith despite a background which includes *The Satan Bug*, *Planet of the Apes*, *The Illustrated Man*, *Capricorn One*, *The Other*, *Coma* and *Damnation Alley*. "For whatever reason, the people who make them seek me out."

Amid a clutter of electronic instruments, tape recorders and furniture in his backyard office/studio, Goldsmith, this day, is laying the creative groundwork for the futuristic alien/human cop thriller *Outer Heat*. Creeping up to the drawing board is an as-yet-untitled "Omen-like" supernatural feature and a musical backing for the underwater monster picture *Leviathan*. In a fantasy of a different kind, Goldsmith is struggling with the thematic structure of *Rambo III*.

"And what's funny is that I have a real hard time even watching most of these movies," he laughs. "Every time *The Omen* comes on, I close my eyes during the decapitation scene. I had a real hard time watching the hand being cut off when I was scoring *Psycho II*. I guess, I'm just squeamish about those things."

But Goldsmith's aversion to violence hasn't prevented him from digging deep to give the appropriate backbone to fantasy films.

"When I get a fantasy film job, the first thing I look for is the non-fantasy element to build the music upon," he reveals. "The human side of a film is what's important, not the hardware. My work on *Poltergeist* is a perfect example. Most people saw that film as a ghost story and a horror story. I saw it as a love story and wrote the music with that emotion in mind."

"There is no formula to finding what musically fits a science-fiction film. I just look for the emotion. When I don't find those, it makes things more difficult."

The composer recalls matters being just that difficult when he created the soundtrack for *ALIEN*. "None of the characters were very sympathetic and the only emotion to exploit musically was rampant fear."

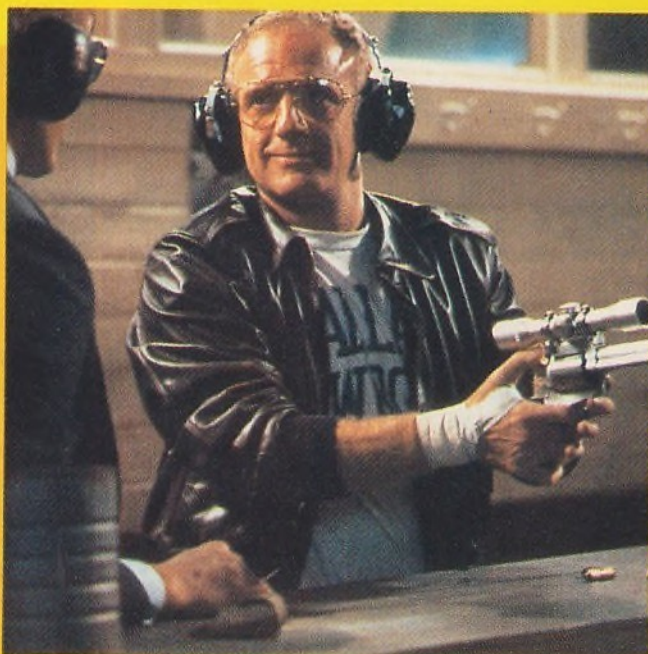
However, Goldsmith doesn't foresee any difficulties with *Outer Heat*. To date, he has seen only 45 minutes of the film, but it has been enough to give him a good vibration.

"What excited me about *Outer Heat* is the number of human emotions on display. There's a definite relationship between our two main characters and we will get some insight into racial tolerance. Sure, it's an action picture and a cop show, but what the music will point out is something very positive and uplifting rather than downbeat and gritty."

Amid the studio clutter, Jerry Goldsmith is a composer extraordinaire.



Goldsmith Photo: Courtesy Jerry Goldsmith



Outer Heat Photos: Jane O'Neal/Copyright 1988 20th Century Fox

Not downbeat and gritty, but "positive and uplifting"—that's Goldsmith's music for *Outer Heat* starring James Caan.

Uptempo & Downbeat

Goldsmith was given room to move in his previous genre workout, *Innerspace*. As with *Gremlins*, his earlier collaboration with director Joe Dante, Goldsmith ran a gauntlet of emotions that saw a major orchestra alternate with odd bits of piano and synthesizer on passages primarily dark but oddly quirky.

"Every picture you do with Dante is a challenge," says Goldsmith. "He's so off the wall and has such a strange sense of humor that you can't help but infuse that attitude in the music."

"The biggest challenge to scoring *Innerspace* was to keep the characters' size in perspective. I tended to restrict the score when we're focused on the man inside the body. The trick was to keep the melodramatic feel going while avoiding the temptation to go completely over the top. I went for a lighthearted dramatic style that seemed to capture what Joe wanted."

However, there was nothing lighthearted about Goldsmith's experience with Ridley Scott's *Legend*. Goldsmith recalls spending five months composing "a very lyrical fairy-tale, song-oriented" score that he rates as "one of the best soundtracks I've ever done." Unfortunately, he also remembers how his work, at least for the American release version, was scrapped in favor of Tangerine Dream's rock tracks.

"When a picture doesn't come out as well as people had expected," he observes, "those responsible begin grabbing at straws. Unfortunately, the last straw they grabbed at was my music. I wrote my music based on what I read in the script and the film ultimately came out with a much darker tone. My original score [which was heard on the European release] was uplifting and really sang. The problem was that it ran contrary to what the film turned out to be."

Despite the virtually stillborn nature of *Supergirl*, Goldsmith still has fond memories of the lush and basically romantic edge he gave to that film.

"I had *always* wanted to do one of those bigger-than-life fantasies, so I jumped at the chance. But not with my eyes closed. I knew there was only one musical direction to take with the film: big and broad. But even with those limitations, I found that I was able to do some interesting things."

"In the scene where Supergirl flies for the first time, I wrote a big expansive piece. It was really gorgeous. However, when the scene was cut in half, the piece lost some of its impact when I had to rework it to fit the edits," he winces.

Up until the motion picture *Runaway*, Goldsmith had been a traditionalist, preferring to work with an orchestra and string section. But he chose to change his tune with Michael Crichton's 1984 futuristic action film.

"*Runaway* was the first totally electronic score I did," offers Goldsmith. "Computer programs were not totally perfected at that time and so I basically had to learn the

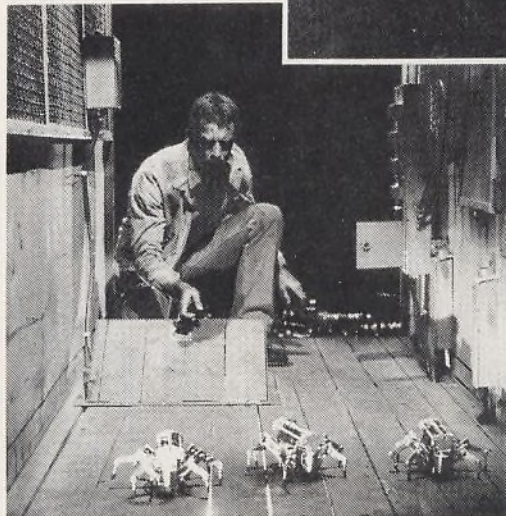


Legend Photo: Copyright 1986 Universal City Studios

When *Legend* reached America, Goldsmith's lyrical score was missing—trashing five months' work.



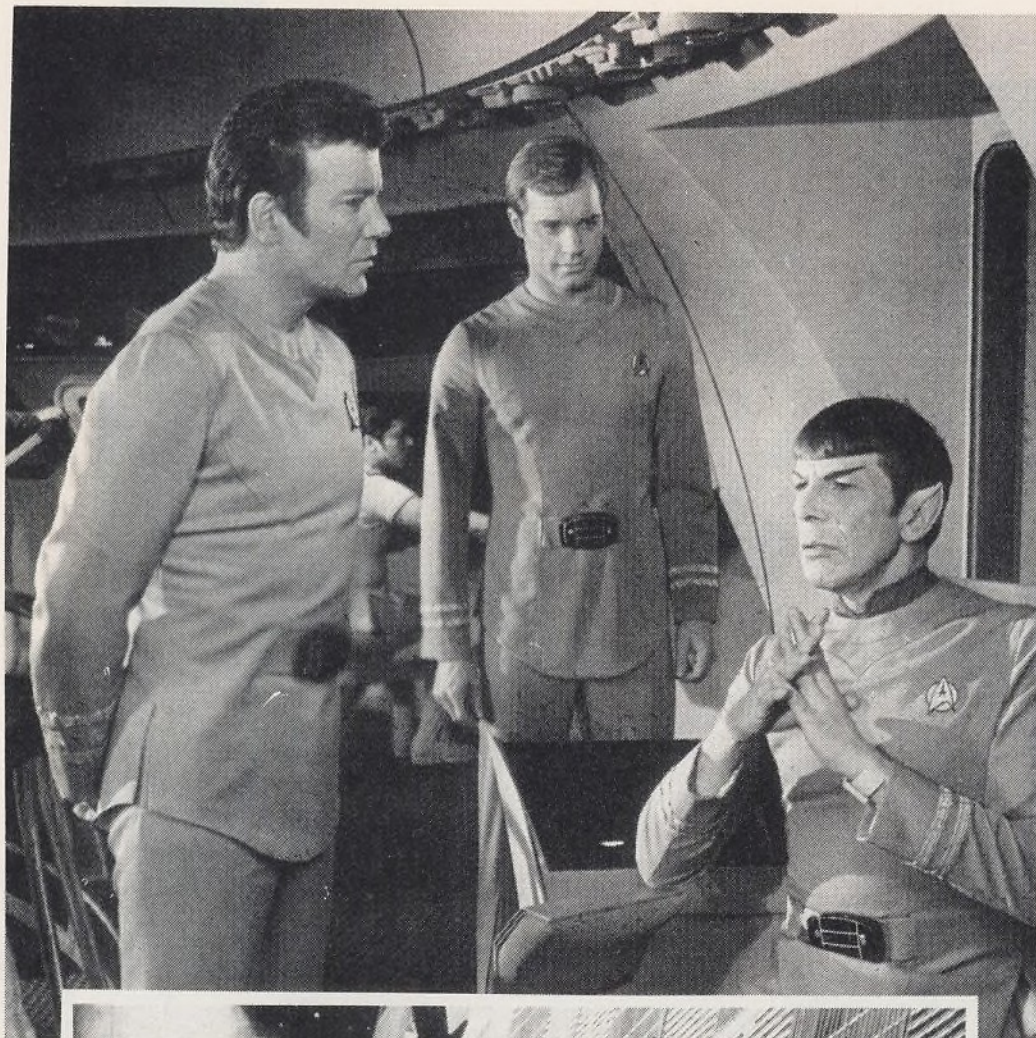
Innerspace Photo: Copyright 1987 Warner Bros.



Runaway Photo: Copyright 1984 Tri-Star Pictures

Goldsmith's tone for Dennis Quaid's *Innerspace* voyage was "lighthearted and melodramatic."

Tom Selleck battled *Runaway* robots with Goldsmith's first totally electronic score plugged in for background.



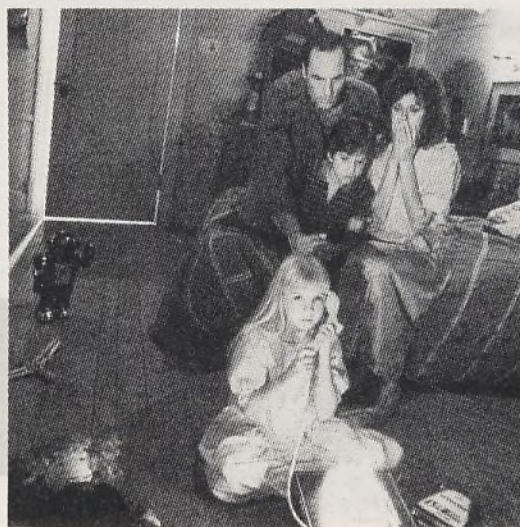
ST:TMP Photo: Copyright 1979 Paramount Pictures



Outland Photo: Copyright 1981 The Ladd Company

Outland "wasn't very enjoyable," Goldsmith notes. "It just didn't work out."

Poltergeist II was a struggle for Goldsmith, dogged by editing changes in the sequel.



Poltergeist II Photo: Copyright 1986 MGM/UA

technology and apply it to the music and come up with a movie soundtrack in five weeks. Parts of what I came up with are pretty stark, but I think there's some real movement to what I did."

But his success with *Runaway* didn't prompt him to enter the electronic age and stay there. The reason? A strong loyalty to flesh and blood musicians.

"A good string section and an orchestra are the first things I think of when I start a project," insists Goldsmith. "The strings are particularly important to me. With them, I can do *any* kind of picture. After the human voice, they are the most expressive instrument I know."

Goldsmith was certainly true to his word in 1982 when the time came to put music to *Poltergeist*. Entering the studio with an 80-piece orchestra, a 60-voice choir and no electronics to speak of, he created a monstrosity lavishly and progressively score, the impressionistic movements of which added supernatural tones to even a simple child's lullaby. Full-bodied arrangements and masterful use of the choir in a quasi-religious sense were two of the elements that helped Goldsmith capture an Oscar nomination for *Poltergeist*. (He won an Oscar for his *Omen* score in 1977).

Many of these same elements were present in the score for *Poltergeist II* but, as Goldsmith remembers, the thrill was gone.

"The music in *Poltergeist II* was good, but it was a struggle for me because the film's production was so frantic. Things were being constantly edited and changed and when most of the child-grandmother relationship was cut, so was much of the human element to build the music on."

Poltergeist II, however, wasn't Goldsmith's first rush job. His work on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, which also garnered an Oscar nomination, stands head and shoulders as the classic example of needing it yesterday.

Star Trek: The Motion Picture was plagued by a number of well-reported production delays that, in turn, kept Goldsmith from getting his hands on the film until dangerously close to its release date.

"They were bringing me the film for orchestrating in bits and pieces, a sequence or two at a time," he recalls. "It was a real close call. I called on Fred Steiner [a much credited TV composer who worked on the original *Star Trek*] for help and we ended up finishing the music three days before the film was scheduled to open in theaters."

Given its desperate nature, Goldsmith worked a major miracle on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Rather than produce a *Star Wars* carbon copy, he forged an original musical road that mixed and matched orchestration, percussion, electric guitar and the familiar Alexander Courage theme into a powerful but subtle blanket for the film.

"Working under that kind of deadline pressure was definitely a challenge," admits the composer. "I enjoyed using the different instruments and was happily surprised at the effects I was getting."

Goldsmith's *ST:TMP* music has resurfaced on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. "I have *not* seen the show, but I've heard that they did a very good job incorporating the music that I did on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and the music of Alexander Courage into the series."

Crescendo & Coda

In 1981, Goldsmith was asked to score a "High Noon in outer space"—*Outland*. The score, quiet and slow-moving a la his work in *ALIEN*, was every creative nightmare the composer had ever had come to screeching life.

"*Outland* was so totally a hardware picture that it was hard to exploit the human element. I had great difficulty with that picture because I couldn't get into the human side of any of the characters. On paper, everything was there for *Outland* to work for me. But when I saw the finished film, I just didn't *feel* it and so it wasn't very enjoyable."

What proved enjoyable and quite an education to the veteran composer was his work on Don Bluth's animated feature *The Secret of NIMH*. Goldsmith's job, though, was complicated by the fact that most of the animation was incomplete during his scoring sessions.

"There's also the problem of animated scene lengths being shorter than live action scenes," he elaborates on his *NIMH* chores. "Because scenes don't take as long to unfold, it was more difficult to get a flowing musical line."

Yet, Goldsmith managed a small opera that, within the context of the cartoon proceedings, invested the movie with liberal dollops of romantic, comedic and adventuresome music strains.

"I was able to be musically broader because the feature's concept played in such an abstract manner," Goldsmith notes.

Just as enjoyable was his time on *Psycho II*, a film that allowed Goldsmith to pay tribute to one of his heroes, Bernard Herrmann (who scored the original *Psycho*). It was also the first time since *Runaway* that Goldsmith felt ready to tackle a major electronic score. The result was something as creepy and unpredictable as the character of Norman Bates.

"I like to think I took a more lyrical approach than what Herrmann did in *Psycho*," explains Goldsmith. "At some points, I tried to surround Norman with music that was innocent and sympathetic. But as Norman's character continued to fluctuate and change, I made the music demented and schizoid to fit those changes."

Goldsmith, whose salad days included scoring *Thriller* and seven episodes of the original *Twilight Zone* series including the famous "The Invaders" episode, found he could go home again when he got the call to work on the four segments of *Twilight Zone: The Movie*.

"That movie took me back 25 years to
(continued on page 69)



Nimh Art: Copyright 1982 Mrs. Brisby/MGM/UA

The Secret of NIMH presented problems for the composer: animated scenes are shorter than live-action ones.

Goldsmith "made the music demented and schizoid" to reflect Norman Bates' changing character in *Psycho II*, a salute to his friend Bernard Herrmann.



Psycho II Photo: Copyright 1983 Universal City Studios

Goldsmith

(continued from page 21)

Photo: Viacom



Some 25 years ago, Goldsmith scored Agnes Moorehead's *Twilight Zone* visit from "The Invaders."

when I was scoring a show a week. The music was stylistically different for each segment. I used a great deal of strings, keyboard and percussion. And the end sequence, which included Marius Constant's famous *TZ* theme, was fun to do."

Goldsmith—who discussed his early career and other work in an interview in *STARLOG* #51—agrees with the notion that his veteran status in the film industry has made him a major influence on such SF-composing newcomers as James Horner.

● "I do seem to hear traces of myself on other people's scores," concedes Goldsmith. "I know I hear pieces of my *Planet of the Apes* score on other people's music more than I do mine. But hell! There's a lot of Igor Stravinsky and Bela Bartok in what I do."

And not everything the composer does meets with his satisfaction. He returns to the horrors of *Outland* as an example of something "that just didn't work out" and he points to his non-genre experience with *Extreme Prejudice* as "a film I attempted to soften and give some heart to but [director Walter Hill] kept taking it away from me."

Goldsmith claims that the occasional fumbles and musical miscalculations haven't made him bitter, or, more importantly, mercenary.

"I would have burned out a long time ago if I just took the job, the money and ran with it," says Jerry Goldsmith. "There's still a challenge for me in scoring films. I'm willing to tackle an interesting project, if it offers me a chance to do something I haven't done before. When I'm excited about something, the creativity just flows. I like a good creative fight. The soundtrack will always get done.

"But, I'm not happy until it gets done well."