



SCORING EVIL

the Henry Mancini TOUCH

Brian Light

It was a rainy Saturday morning I remember. Welles swept into Joe's [Gershenson] office in a cape and a dark hat and with a big cigar, one of those Monte Cristo giants. It seemed as if doom, the wrath of hell, was invading the music department. ... Joe introduced me to Welles. Al Zugsmith (producer) was sitting on the couch. Welles started to cruise the room saying, "Here we'll do this and here we'll do that." Then Zugsmith made some point that wasn't exactly to Welles' liking. I can't remember what it was, but I certainly remember Welles' reaction to it. He let it go for a couple of minutes. But he walked a little faster as he talked, obviously getting his offensive up. He continued walking

faster and faster, getting angrier and angrier, and directing his stream of fury at Zugsmith. I was sitting there taking it all in. By now I was used to movie people, but this, after all, was Orson Welles, and I was working on his picture. At the height of his rage—he had just met me a half hour ago—he snapped around, looked at me, pointed a long finger at me, and said from a great height, "Who's he?" That was my only encounter, and my only conversation, if you want to call it that, with Orson Welles. After that meeting I never saw him again.

—Henry Mancini,
Did They Mention the Music?

W

hen Orson Welles agreed to direct the screen version of Whit Masterson's novel *Badge of Evil*, his one caveat was that he be allowed to rewrite the entire script. In doing so he made a crucial change: he moved the setting from San Diego to the fictional Mexican-American border town of Los Robles, which is defined by its opposing sides. This enabled him to explore (and obscure) not only the central theme of police corruption—but literal boundaries of place, sex, race, and social class.

Just as the movie's characters jump back and forth across the border throughout the film, the film's music also crosses and blurs cultural and geographical boundaries. As author Jill Leeper illustrates in *Crossing Musical Borders: The Soundtrack for Touch of Evil*: "...the soundtrack is as much a musical hybrid as the fictional setting of Los Robles is a culturally fractured town of wasps, Russians, and Germans, in brown face, playing Mexicans. ...[It] is a thematic analogue of border crossings that structures the score in a direct relationship to the film's narrative organization."

Welles expressed his concept for the film's music in a three-page letter to Joe Gershenson, the head of Universal's music department, who served as the connecting link to Henry Mancini. As Mancini explains: "Welles' description of the music as he wanted it was exactly what I was already planning to do. He wanted no scoring as such—that is to say, underscore...all the music had to be what we call source cues."

In addition to the now widely circulated 58-page memo Welles fired off after viewing the edited version of the film, he also wrote a nine-page memo titled "Sound Notes" where he broke down his soundtrack concept in greater detail. Excerpts from this unpublished memo were reproduced in *Sounds of Evil*, an article by Tim Tully about the 1998 restoration of the film. Welles made an important distinction between "underscoring" and "source" music, also known as diegetic music, which is music the actors can hear emanating from a source within a scene. There are two types of diegetic music/sound: the first type occurs when the source can be seen by the viewer (i.e. a radio, juke box, bandstand, etc). This is "visualized" music/sound, a term coined by French critic and composer Michel Chion (*Audio Vision, Sound on Screen*), a pioneer in the study of sound in film. The second type is where the source is off screen, unseen by the viewer: a phonograph or television playing in another room, or music spilling into the street from a nightclub. This type of diegetic music/sound is



Henry Mancini, 34, had very few solo credits on his résumé when he "collaborated" with Welles on the complex soundtrack for *Touch of Evil*

THE EVIL PLAYERS



Red Norvo



Dave Pell



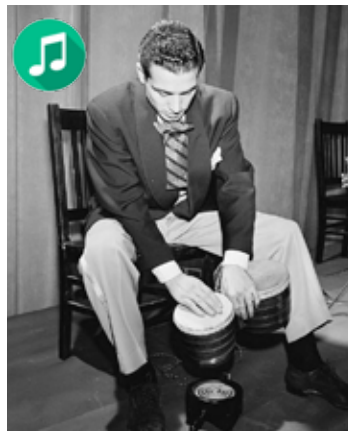
Plas Johnson



Shelly Manne



Barney Kessel



Jack Costanzo



Conrad Gozzo



Henry Mancini

“acousmatic,” a term conceptualized in the 1960s by French novelist and poet Jérôme Peignot. Acousmatic music is used extensively in *Touch of Evil*. Welles puts a finer point on it:

The streets of a border town are always noisy with the blare of various loudspeakers, broadcasting from the entrance of nightclubs...bars and cantinas....What we want is musical color rather than movement; sustained washes of sound rather than...melodramatic or operatic scoring.

It’s worth noting that Welles essentially banned the music most commonly associated with Mexico. Instead, he proposed substituting music with a different cultural and geographic origin: “It is very important that the usual rancheros and mariachi numbers should be avoided and the emphasis should go on Afro-Cuban rhythm numbers. ...This rock and roll comes from radio loudspeakers, juke boxes and in particular, the radio in the motel.”

Welles not only had a specific style of music in mind, he had precise ideas of how the music should be recorded, and re-recorded:

It is very important to note that in the recording of all these numbers—which are supposed to be heard through street loudspeakers—that the effect should be just exactly as bad as that. The music itself should be skillfully played, but it will not be enough in doing the final sound mixing to run this track through an echo chamber with a certain amount of filter. To get the effect we’re looking for, it is absolutely vital that this music be played through a cheap horn in the alley outside the sound building. After this is recorded, it can be then loused up even further by the basic process of re-recording with a tinny exterior horn.

... And since it does not represent very much in the way of money, I feel justified in insisting upon this, as the result will really be worth it.

Academy Award-winning sound designer Walter Murch, who worked on the 1998 reconstruction of *Touch of Evil* with producer Rick Schmidlin, said in his interview with Tully, “My god! I’ve never seen a director understand music that well.” Murch realized that the technique of “lousing up” the music, something he thought he’d invented in the late sixties and perfected in movies like *American Graffiti* (1973), had in fact already been achieved by Welles years earlier.

At Universal, Mancini was the go-to guy for source music: “I would do an arrangement on something that was in the Universal library, or I would write a new piece for a jazz band or a Latin band or whatever... for really low-budget pictures...an even less creative way of scoring had been developed, a ruthlessly ingenious system of cribbing the music of earlier Universal pictures. ... If Universal owned it, we could steal it. I used a lot of music from Miklos Rozsa’s *The Killers*. ... Rosza had no say in this. The studios, not the composers, owned the music.”

The major distinction in this case is that none of the source music used in *Touch of Evil* was lifted from old Universal scores—with the exception of a few brief snippets of conventionally sourced music, it’s entirely composed by Mancini. Unlike, for example, David Raksin’s iconic film score for *Laura*, which uses both diegetic and non-diegetic music cues, but all variations on the same melody. Mancini studied the script and watched the rushes, and had already begun thinking along the same lines Welles had outlined. “Orson Welles had a perception of everything in the film, including the music. He knew. He truly understood film scoring. And since he was making a grimly realistic film, I think he reasoned that even the music had to



Welles resisted Mancini's bravura "Main Theme" because he felt it clashed with his dazzling three-minute opening shot. Zugsmith went further, superimposing titles

be rooted in reality. And that meant it all had to come from the story itself; it would have to be source cues."

Mancini knew he could not accomplish this with the staff musicians at Universal. So with Gershenson's blessing he assembled a lineup of stellar jazz musicians with impressive pedigrees: legendary vibraphonist Red Norvo; West Coast sax heavyweights Dave Pell and Plas Johnson; three-time *Downbeat* jazz poll winners Shelly Manne and Barney Kessel (drums and guitar); Jack "Mr. Bongo" Costanzo; and Conrad Gozzo (Mancini's old roommate from the Tex Beneke days) on trumpet, among others. The result was an impressively eclectic array of musical numbers. This was in no way a jazz composer displaying a *faux* attempt at "rocking out."

Mancini clearly understood the diverse musical styles, as did the musicians, who all shine—particularly the soloists. Johnson and Pell provide some inspired honking and wailing on the raucous rock and blues numbers, but the sharpest relief is provided by Barney Kessel who steps out of his swing-to-bop mode, painting the walls with rollicking grindhouse riffs and gut-bucket blues licks. No less impressive are the Afro-Cuban jazz tunes fronted by a high-caliber brass section, and anchored by the triple threat of bongos, conga, and drum kit on percussion. In composing the Afro-Cuban jazz numbers, Mancini was heavily influenced by the Stan Kenton orchestra. As David Butler notes in *Jazz Noir: Listening to Music from Phantom Lady to The Last Seduction*: "Just prior to *Touch of Evil*, Kenton had returned

to a focus on Cuban percussion with his *Cuban Fire* album, and Mancini is almost certain to have been aware of this recording."

The power of Mancini's compositions is in that they register so well within a given scene, regardless of the duration of the piece. In fact, six of the 20 pieces Mancini composed for the film were only a minute and a half or less, and many of the longer pieces were only sampled from the full-length version. It may be a snippet squeaking out of a motel's wall speaker or snatches resonating from a restaurant or cantina. In addition to composing, Mancini was also instrumental in choosing where each musical number was placed in the film. This was called "spotting" the picture. Mancini worked side by side with Gershenson during this process.

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Mancini's "Main Title" theme is a masterful mood-setting piece, but Welles objected to it because he didn't want underscoring to interfere with his bravura three-minute opening shot. Hindsight shows Welles may have been wrong-headed on this score. The reconstructed version removes Mancini's main title music—and the viewer is left feeling that an essential element is missing from the film.

The mournful pianola tune "Tana's Theme," which trickles out of the cathouse is also Quinlan's (Welles) theme because it represents a past forever lost to him, and as Tana (Marlene Dietrich) says, "you haven't got any [future], it's all used up." Though the movie is essentially about a moral struggle between Vargas (Charlton Heston) and Quinlan—good and evil, virtue and corruption—Suzy (Janet Leigh) is the unsuspecting pawn being manipulated in



The plight of Suzy Vargas inspired some of Mancini's strongest compositions

Quinlan's depraved chess game. She is the lamb-to-slaughter, subjected to violations of a kind that knows no boundaries. Consequently Mancini's most diverse and colorful compositions revolve around Suzy and her descent into the Mexican maelstrom. When she first meets Pancho (Valentin de Vargas), "Borderline Montuna" can be heard in the background, which leaks into "Strollin' Blues" when she's introduced to Uncle Joe Grandi (Akim Tamiroff.) The music then bleeds into the whimsically titled "Orson Around," the volume level of which is carefully modulated as she exits Grandi's storefront office. "Flashing Nuisance" is heard when she's harassed by the flashlight in the hotel and it returns a few scenes later when she's handed the photo of her and Pancho. "Susan"—a dreamlike tune—plays on the radio when Suzy is driven, first by Vargas and then by Menzies (Joe Calleia), to the fateful motel.

At this point in the film the music takes on a more "active" role. As Phyllis Goldfarb, an early proponent of music/sound appraisal in film, noted in her essay "Orson Welles' Use of Sound" (*Focus on Orson Welles*): "In *Evil* our awareness of music is so intense that it takes on an ideational quality. We respond to it directly, rather than to a mood it creates. The volume and persistence of the irritating music in the motel scenes invade our consciousness much as it does Suzy's. It is a pervasive force in her presence...but it belongs by association to the teenage hoodlums."

That scene is noteworthy not only for its creative use of the "loused up" music emanating from the wall speaker, but also for the sudden, unexpected absence of

music. When first she meets the night man (Dennis Weaver) we hear country & western music—one of the few source cues Mancini did not write—then in a subsequent scene it's the tranquil "Rock Me to Sleep" as Suzy settles in for a much-needed nap. This piece provides counterpoint to the music that accompanies the scenes leading up to the gang rape. As hot-rods pull up outside the motel "The Big Drag" is grinding away in the motel room. Suzy continues to be sonically harassed by the pulsing beat of "Ku Ku", while gang members scheme to make their move. As they creep into her room, the raucous, aptly titled "Lease Breaker" pounds away. With his background in radio, Welles not only understood music, but he also understood how effectively silence can be used. There's a cut to the night man in the manager's office looking at the wall speaker in disgust, before angrily switching off the radio—and in Suzy's room the abrupt silence suddenly heightens the tension. We see a distorted, wide-angle close up of Pancho as he whispers, "Hold her legs." By literally pulling the plug on the music, Welles makes this line far more sinister and salacious than if it had been accompanied by blaring music.

A perfect synthesis of music and action occurs with the murder of Uncle Joe Grandi, elaborately staged to frame Suzy. This extended musical piece—the longest in the film, "Background to Murder"—becomes a virtual accessory to the crime, aided and abetted by Welles' kinetic editing, and rendered by the hand-held camera of an uncredited Philip Lathrop (Russell Metty's camera operator) shooting with a 35 mm Éclair Cameflex. As John Caps (*Henry Mancini... Reinventing Film Music*) astutely observes:

Neon lights and wild dance music blast in through the windows from the street below. Slowly the music is being turned up on the soundtrack and grows in violence as though becoming involved in the killing to come. Two blaring opposing solo trumpets over a persistent honking sax are the elements of the dramatic score that appear to be up here with us at the scene of the crime, and then gradually the wild horns of the street music add in through the windows and blend ecstatically with the functional scoring until the soundtrack is all one cauldron



Nightclubs are a constant source of the film's many diegetic music cues

