# The Concert John Barry
**liner notes**

**"The experience of *The Concert* was conclusive: for the first time, I realized that my film-music could exist on its own, quite independently from pictures."**

**John Barry, 2010**

"Ever since I was a child I've considered poetry and music to be two twin sisters, completely inseparable. Over the years I've always tried to develop a poetic universe of my own, not only for filmmakers but, through their films, for audiences too. I work with very precise harmonic mechanisms to do this... and my melodies take shape according to what these mechanisms are. Sometimes the melodies weave together straight away; at times they have to be guided and adjusted. But, whatever happens, they always find a kind of foster parent with my harmonies. In my work, the horizontal comes from the vertical." British composer John Barry was referring to one of his singularities: his unconventional approach to harmony. This particularity of his immediately struck attentive listeners at the dawn of the Sixties, as soon as they discovered the music he'd written for his first films; a whole series of box-office successes quickly followed, films thanks to which he suddenly found himself thrust to the top as a composer for young moderns: *Born Free* and *The Knack*, a film that was a manifesto for Swinging London, the first James Bonds, and then the Bond anti-hero named Harry Palmer, who was played by Michael Caine. Millions of cinema-goers and music-lovers discovered the strange splendour of John Barry's compositions for the screen: harmonic traps; a highly personal sense of lyricism and melody which immediately hooked people's memories; a taste for characteristic, unusual timbres; a desire to create surprise with the orchestration... Barry walks a tightrope between the spectacular and the *cinema d'auteur*. He is a sophisticated composer whose most visible works, the most famous, do little to conceal a more secret vein that is more melancholy, a vein that leans towards introspection.

In 1972, John Barry was thirty-nine and had just written three works, each with a different aesthetic, that were destined to leave an indelible stamp on the collective memory: the historical production *Mary, Queen of Scots*, the James Bond film *Diamonds are Forever* and his theme-music for *The Persuaders*. And then Sydney Samuelson invited him to conduct the orchestra at the third *Filmharmonic* concert in London. Organized as an annual charity event, the *Filmharmonic* was to see a procession of guest-conductors take up the baton: such prestigious musicians as Henry Mancini, Elmer Bernstein, and soon Francis Lai. In accepting Samuelson's offer, Barry was well aware of what was at stake, if not the symbolic reach of such an offer: it would be his first symphonic concert, and the venue was to be the legendary Royal Albert Hall. Miklos Rozsa, the great "Wagnerian gypsy" in the old days of Hollywood, was to conduct the first part of the concert, with Barry replacing him after the intermission; it was a programme where Ben-Hur extended a hand to the spy known as 007. The division between the conductors' roles was crystal-clear: Barry represented the present, while Rozsa was the musical memory of films, its heritage. "I was very impressed and quite moved to find myself facing a legend like Rozsa," confesses John Barry today. "He was precise and very clear, both as a composer and as a conductor. He'd begun writing for the screen at the beginning of the talkies in the Thirties, while I was still a little boy. In my father's cinemas in Yorkshire, his scores for *The Thief of Bagdad* or *The Jungle Book* were things of my dreams. Rozsa belonged to the galaxy of composers who shaped my vocation. And then thirty years later, there we were, sharing the same stage and the same orchestra." Between the two halves of the concert, it wasn't merely one conductor handing over to the second: the baton was also clearly figurative, a transition between the old and new worlds.

In 1962, John Barry was still fronting his John Barry Seven, a group influenced by Bill Haley and Little Richard. Ten years later he was at The Royal Albert Hall in tails, conducting The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The concert was aired later on the BBC as a part of a special evening entitled *John Barry and His Music*. It was more than a concert; it was a

diploma that recognized his professional ascension, almost a coronation. The trumpeter who played with The John Barry Seven had become a young world-leader in film-music; more than that, he had breathed new life into it. "It's true," he says today. "That concert was a milestone in the evolution of my career in more than one respect. That being said, I wasn't very confident: I was going to conduct a symphony orchestra in front of an audience for the first time. I prefer to stay in the shadows, and the spotlight makes me feel uncomfortable. Sammy Davis Jr. often said to me: 'Performing in front of spectators is like being an addict: when I'm off the stage I have withdrawal symptoms!' It was the same with my friend Henry Mancini; he loved conducting his film-music at concerts. For me, on the other hand, it's hell... I don't like exposing myself in public. I take pleasure in isolation: I like the solitude, with just a sheet of blank music-paper in front of me; or else in the studios, where things I've imagined on paper come to life thanks to the musicians. There's a dimension that fascinates me in the process of creation, particularly composing and recording... a mysterious one that belongs to something intimate, private, inexplicable. It's a dimension that partly escapes the creator. For all those reasons, it took a violent effort for me to go onstage at The Royal Albert Hall. But it had its rewards: the audience was incredibly enthusiastic and receptive. Once the concert was over, I had a smile on my face again."

One has to give credit to the composer for submitting his scores to a vigorous overhaul, given the Royal Philharmonic's instrumental line-up. Barry had to rethink the orchestration of certain works due to the absence of a rhythm section, and also key instruments such as the Moog used in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, the cimbalom in *The Persuaders* or *The Adventurer*, or else the harmonica in *Midnight Cowboy*. "It would have been frustrating to ask Toots Thielemans to come in just for one piece," he concedes. "I had a full orchestra at my disposal, so it was up to me to adapt. At a pinch, you could say it was a game, a rather stimulating exercise. I managed to compensate for the absence of some of the soloists by making full use of the orchestra's resources. I had a trumpet play the main role in *Midnight Cowboy*, for example: it's still the same piece, but the change of instrument causes the music take on a different character." One of the high points in the concert was a shattering *James Bond Suite* that lasted seventeen minutes, a kind of musical compression of the first seven Bond films, from *Doctor No* to *Diamonds are Forever*, which had been released to cinemas the previous year. "I tried to preserve the best of the Bonds, and write a resume in a suite with a continuity that's fluid, logical and natural," explains John Barry. "With hindsight, you can see that this suite corresponds to the "classic" period in the series, a period which ends with *Diamonds*, the last film with Sean Connery. Obviously that period is my favourite, and its template still remains *Goldfinger*, the Bond film where, in terms of style, all the codes and references found their place: the gun barrel, the opening sequence, the animated titles sequence, Peter Hunt's editing... It was also the first Bond where I had sole responsibility for the music; so I was able to assert a compositional style inspired by what I learned from Bill Russo, Stan Kenton's arranger: a particular way of adapting the brass right across the register from the deepest bass to the highest treble, with sharp attacks and incisive punches. That's where you find the roots of the 'Bond sound'." It was something of a paradox that Barry created his *Bond Suite* just when he was about to move on from 007: during the Roger Moore era, Barry went back to the Bond films intermittently, bidding his final farewell to the series in 1987 with *The Living Daylights*. The first Timothy Dalton film was the last Barry. Years have passed, but the *James Bond Suite* has stood the test of time: even today, it invariably concludes the composer's concerts throughout Europe.

For the rest of his *Filmharmonic* concert, John Barry drew up a subtle balance, with doses of music from the emblematic soundtracks of the Sixties – *Midnight Cowboy* and the Oscar-winning *Born Free*, a grandiose evocation of nature and wide open spaces – and some recent works: the theme-tune for the *Adventurer* television series (more dramatic in its symphonic treatment), the main theme from *Mary, Queen of Scots* (where the grace of Erich Gruenberg's violin seems to make time stand still) and, above all, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a new adaptation of the Lewis Carroll classic. With the British release of Australian director William Sterling's film only two months away, Barry unveiled its three central themes – three ballads – as a seductive, seven-minute suite. Carroll's subject took Barry's imagination (and also that of lyricist Don Black) to a

much higher level: their readings of *Alice* translated not so much the picturesque in Carroll's universe, but rather its serious, psychoanalytical dimension. *The Me I Never Knew*, especially, carried the composer's art to its quintessence, with a sad lyricism and sinuous song-lines perverted by abrasive harmonies. Barry was never bettered in the search for a musical equivalent to the troubling tale written by Lewis Carroll and its profound themes: traversing the mirror, and the loss of innocence.

There were two consequences to the triumphant welcome reserved by *Filmharmonic 1972*: first, John Barry returned to the stage of The Royal Albert Hall for the event's subsequent edition a year later; and Barry also went to Abbey Road to record a large part of the concert for Polydor, the record-label with which he had just signed a contract as an artist. Released towards the end of 1972, *The Concert John Barry* became the first 33rpm LP produced under the new contract. It was never reissued in its entirety, curiously, because the master-tapes were reported missing. Providence, however, took a hand thirty-eight years later when the tapes were located among the archives of Universal Music in Japan. Today their discovery has resulted in this CD reissue of a historic album, and the music is enhanced by the addition of other John Barry classics from the Seventies: first there are the Polydor versions of *Walkabout* and the 1970 western *Monte Walsh*, and they are completed by *The Deep* (which, according to Barry, was "A terribly complicated film to set to music: most of the action took place underwater"), and *The Day Of The Locust* – a caustic pondering of the dark side of Hollywood – which also marked the second time the composer had worked with director John Schlesinger, five years after *Midnight Cowboy*. In many respects, *The Concert John Barry* came as a milestone-recording in the composer's career. For John Barry, it was an opportunity to take his film-music to the concert-stage, like Prokofiev adapting the suites from *Lieutenant Kijé* or *Alexander Nevsky*. It was also a means of giving the public a synthesis of his first ten years in films. Twenty years later, Barry would extend that approach when he conducted the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra again for two albums entitled *Moviola*. In the interval, his repertoire had grown to include such gems as *Somewhere In Time, Body Heat, Frances, Out of Africa, Cotton Club* and *Dances with Wolves*. But above all, Barry's writing had grown fuller and matured; an impression that was confirmed by his diptych *The Beyondness of Things/Eternal Echoes*, composed at the turn of the 21st century. The colours appear more autumnal, and his inspiration is more elegiac, more introspective, too. As if, in the man and the artist, the share of melancholy had definitively gained the upper hand. In the light of this evolution, revisiting *The Concert John Barry* takes on extraordinary interest: "I've rediscovered this album with emotion," concludes Barry with a smile. "It's a look in the rear-view mirror, a photograph of the way I was composing and conducting during that period. Curiously enough, I was the first to be surprised when I heard the sound of my music at a concert; it hadn't been written with that in mind. Conceived for pictures, it could exist perfectly well outside that context and lead its own life in total autonomy. I'd hoped that this would be so but, until then, I had no concrete evidence. That's the experience I gained from this adventure: to me, it's the major impression left by *The Concert*."

**Stéphane Lerouge**