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MULTIMEDIA REVIEW

Seconds. John Frankenheimer, director. Criterion Collection CC2294BD, 2013, DVD.
Jerry Goldsmith, *I.Q./Seconds*. La-La Land Records LLLCD 1109, 2009, CD.

In 1967, Jerry Goldsmith remarked that "The whole style of film-making has changed," and that for scoring a picture, "the idea is not to bombard the audiences and beat them down with sound, not to fill the screen with as much music as there is picture. Composers have learned to save it for the right moments and make them count."[1] Coming the year after the release of *Seconds*, his second collaboration with director John Frankenheimer, these words sum up much of Goldsmith's work in the 1960s.

For the epic war film *The Sand Pebbles* (dir. Robert Wise, 1966), Goldsmith wrote just over an hour of music for a film lasting over three. And for Frankenheimer's *Seconds*, a film lasting 107 minutes, Goldsmith scored less than twenty-five minutes of music. Thus, when Goldsmith's music is used in film, it is always to great effect. This is what makes his score for *Seconds* remarkable and positions it with his other landmark scores of the 1960s, including *Freud* (dir. John Huston, 1962), *The Blue Max* (dir. John Guillermin, 1966), and *Planet of the Apes* (dir. Franklin Schaffner, 1968). Unlike in his scores for *Freud* and *Planets*, Goldsmith did not employ serialist techniques in *Seconds*, but the music is no less evocative. Here, Goldsmith swings between gothic horror and soft longing, matching the emotions of the lead character who faces a life of suburban banality before undergoing a Frankenstein-like rebirth (complete with a new identity) only to find that nothing has truly changed within him.

For his score, Goldsmith relies mostly on a string orchestra supplemented with harp, piano, and pipe organ. The organ is featured mostly in the first half of the film, prior to the protagonist's transformation from Arthur Hamilton (John Randolph) to Tony Wilson (Rock Hudson). The organ builds the sense of gothic horror as Hamilton is faced with troubling phone calls, clandestine meetings, and being led through a literal slaughterhouse before arriving at the metaphorical one where his pudgy, middle-aged body is cut and molded by surgeons into Wilson's Adonis-like physique.[2]

When the film shifts to Wilson's new life in sunny Malibu, Goldsmith's score becomes more introverted, contemplative, and pared down to simple piano and harp lines sweetened by strings. He has problems adjusting to his new reality and is even lonelier than before his transformation. These feelings eventually prove to be his undoing, as he returns to the house of horrors that birthed him only to be

[1] Charles Champlin, "Sound and Fury over Film Music," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 March 1967, repr. in *The Routledge Film Music Sourcebook*, ed. James Wierzbicki, Nathan Platte, and Colin Roust (New York: Routledge, 2012), 190.

[2] The film was released at a time when plastic surgery was first becoming prominent in American culture.

led kicking and screaming to the operating theatre where he is killed and his body cut again, this time to be turned into a stand-in corpse for another client seeking a second chance at life. This final scene is silent except for Wilson's screams of terror, and is made all the more chilling because of Goldsmith and Frankenheimer's decision to play it without music.[3]

Indeed, John Frankenheimer's film is filled with talented collaborators, none more so than cinematographer James Wong Howe, who was nominated for an Academy Award for this film. Howe's off-kilter camera shots, lighting designs, and innovative use of harness cameras and handheld photography convey the paranoid, horrifying, lonely feelings of John/Tony in striking fashion, making Goldsmith's job that much easier. In that same 1967 interview, Goldsmith is also quoted as saying, "People always say music used to be used as a cosmetic to cover the bad spots in a picture. But I'll tell you this: there has never been a bad picture saved by a good score, although lots of bad scores have been saved by good pictures. Hollywood will never learn that but it keeps trying."[4]

Luckily, both picture and score are of high quality here, though *Seconds* was not always held in high regard. In the numerous supplements on the disc and Frankenheimer's own commentary for the film (recorded for the laserdisc release in 1997), there is much discussion of the picture's commercial and largely critical failure upon release in 1966, and the film's later transformation into a cult classic. These supplements include a conversation with actor Alec Baldwin about the film (Baldwin worked with Frankenheimer on his last project, *Path to War*, in 2002); another interview with actress Salome Jens (who played Hudson's love interest, Nora) and Frankenheimer's wife Evans (who played the daughter of Arthur Hamilton in a scene cut from the film); and an audio essay on the film by Murray Pomerance and R. Barton Palmer, authors of *A Little Solitaire: John Frankenheimer and American Film*.

All of these interviews are excellent and add much context to the film, as is usual with Criterion Collection releases. Criterion also unearthed a 1971 interview with John Frankenheimer and a 1965 news program about the film shooting on location in Scarsdale, New York. In all the features, however, the only mention of Goldsmith is when the director notes that he had worked with the composer extensively during their time at CBS in the 1950s on programs like *Playhouse 90* and *Climax!*.

Goldsmith's music was never released commercially in the '60s because of its brevity (it would barely take up one side of a standard LP). It was not until the boutique film music label La-La Land Records issued a combined CD release with Goldsmith's score for the 1994 romantic comedy film *I.Q.* (dir. Fred Schepisi) that it became available to the public. It is an odd pairing to say the least, as the two scores could not be more different. They do provide for a nice contrast, however, highlighting how Jerry Goldsmith's musical style has changed throughout his long career. Always a chameleon, he was a master of adapting his style to suit genre,

[3] Similarly, the final scene of *Apes* was also played without music, and even eschews end-credit music. Goldsmith and Schaffner decided to have the sound of crashing waves as its only accompaniment.

[4] Champlin, "Sound and Fury," 190.

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setting, and director, a fact demonstrated by the La-La Land release, which also features extensive liner notes for both scores by Jeff Bond.

Seconds is a film that demonstrates much of what was at play in 1960s American cinema: the paranoia of a country living in the specter of war, civil unrest, assassinations, and a counter culture pointing to the emptiness of suburban lives. In Hollywood, the collapse of the studio system in the 1950s had ushered in an era of independent productions, more freedom for directors, and new styles in film music compositions. Although not as well known as Frankenheimer's earlier *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), or Goldsmith's serial score for *Planet of the Apes*, *Seconds* is a film that should reside alongside both in a film music course. *Seconds* can provide a satisfying alternative for a professor looking for an unconventional yet highly complex film to show in class. Its status as a cult classic, a position achieved seemingly overnight according to Frankenheimer's commentary, is well deserved. It is a stark, chilling, horrific view of what might happen if we ever did have that "second" chance at life, all set to the strains of a classic 1960s Jerry Goldsmith score.

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