

Hangover Square | 5 Fingers

Sometimes a movie comes along in which all the elements align perfectly – cast, writer, director, photography, art direction, costumes, and music – and the result is often a unique film that works on every level, and the 1945 film *Hangover Square* is a perfect example. Adapted from the novel by Patrick Hamilton, Barré Lyndon's screenplay made many changes from the novel, most importantly turning its central character into a classical pianist and composer and setting the film early in the 20th century. There could not have been a better choice of director than John Brahm, who fled Germany after the rise of Hitler and settled in Hollywood several years later, beginning a long career in film and television. While Brahm never really attained "A" list status, he was a superb visual stylist with an incredible sense of atmosphere and pacing. The cinematographer was Joseph LaShelle, one of Fox's best cameramen, who, over the years, photographed such classics as *Laura*, *Fallen Angel*, *Captain from Castile*, *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, *River of No Return*, *No Down Payment* and many, many others.

The cast was equally perfect, beginning with Laird Cregar as composer/pianist George Henry Bone. Cregar was a completely unique actor – there was no one like him before and there really hasn't been anyone like him since. He had a very short film career, which began in 1940 but sadly ended when he had a heart attack two months before the release of *Hangover Square* – he was thirty-one years old. Cregar is brilliant in the film and it's impossible to think of any actor who would have brought what he did to the role. The other members of the cast included beautiful and talented Linda Darnell and the always-wonderful George Sanders.

Filming was turbulent, with Brahm and Cregar frequently clashing (they'd worked together in *The Lodger*) – part of that was due to Cregar's erratic behavior due to taking amphetamines to lose 100 pounds for the film (that rapid weight loss resulted in the symptoms that caused his eventual heart attack). But, as usually happens, the backstage drama didn't hinder the film – it was a big success, despite its extremely short running time of 77-minutes.

Of course, in a film in which a musical composition also plays a leading role, the choice of composer is key to the film's

success. In this case, the match was sublime – Bernard Herrmann. By 1945, Herrmann had already composed two masterpieces of film music right out of the gate, both for Orson Welles – *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*. In the former, Herrmann had to come up with an operatic aria. For *Hangover Square*, the task was to compose George Henry Bone's piano concerto. The resulting "Concerto Macabre" is a tour de force and the final ten minutes of the film is a visual and aural feast, where image and music combine to create Bone's complete descent into the depths of his madness and hell. Herrmann's "Concerto Macabre" had to accomplish many things, including beginning and ending with just piano (you'll know why when you see the film's finale), but it also had to portray the mind of its on-screen composer. But the concerto is but one piece of Herrmann's musical tapestry in *Hangover Square*, and the rest of the score is as evocative and brilliant as the concerto.

Stephen Sondheim has said that Herrmann's score for *Hangover Square* was his musical inspiration for *Sweeney Todd*. He'd seen the film as a teen and the music had such an effect on him that years later he said of still being able to play the concerto's opening eight bars, "They were glimpsed briefly on Laird Cregar's piano during the course of the film, and I dutifully memorized them by sitting through the picture twice."

Variety's review of the film said, "Production is Grade A, and so is the direction by John Brahm, with particular bows to the music score by Bernard Herrmann." Surprisingly (or not), the film received not one Academy Award nomination.

5 Fingers was a 1952 spy picture directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz and written by Michael Wilson (based on the book *Operation Cicero* by L.C. Moyzisch). The film and book was based on the true story of Elyesa Bazna, a spy during World War II. In the film, James Mason plays the character based on Bazna, Ulysses Dello (code name Cicero). The movie is suspenseful throughout, with wonderful dialogue and performances – in addition to Mason, the film also features Danielle Darrieux, Michael Rennie, John Wengraf, and Herbert Berghof. Mankiewicz's direction keeps the tension high and the storytelling clear, and it's beautifully photographed by Norbert Brodine (*Topper*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The House on 92nd*

Street, *13 Rue Madeline*, *Kiss of Death*).

5 Fingers was a critical and box-office success and received a love-letter review from Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times*, who began it with, "Those who may fear that the old days of silken spy films are as dead as the gone days of diamond tiaras and princely diplomacy can now settle back in the comfort and the tingling satisfaction to be had from Twentieth Century Fox *Five Fingers*." He continued his rave with, "... is as dandy an espionage thriller as ever went through the polished hands of a Graham Greene or an Alfred Hitchcock." *5 Fingers* received two Academy Award nominations – one for Mankiewicz for Best Director and one for Wilson for Best Screenplay.

Bernard Herrmann was once again the perfect choice for the film. His score conveys every bit of suspense and emotion, from the dramatic main title, to the jittery music for "Cicero," to the brief-but-beautiful cue "Romance," to the exciting music for "Escape." Much of the score almost seems like a preview of what Herrmann would go on to compose for his legendary series of films with director Alfred Hitchcock. It's a world-class score by a world-class composer.

Both *5 Fingers* and *Hangover Square* were released in the Bernard Herrmann at Fox box set on Varese Sarabande. For that release, *Hangover Square* was a much-truncated presentation. But thanks to advances in technology and a couple of new sources we present it here with over sixteen additional minutes of music, and what music it is. While the source material for *5 Fingers* was in excellent condition, the sources used for *Hangover Square* were not in as prime condition. Everything possible has been done to clean them up, but the music is so important we wanted to include every note we could. For this CD, Mike Matessino has gone back to the *5 Fingers* elements and done a fresh new transfer and the entire CD is newly mastered.

— Bruce Kimmel