

Love is a Many-Splendored Thing / The Seven Year Itch

A MANY-SPLENDORED THING

The Orient was enormously fashionable in the mid-1950s - its allure irresistible to filmgoers and filmmakers alike. Also very much in the air at the time was a dreamy west/east romance; the promise of forbidden love. Stories and plays on the subject proliferated, and Fox, always slightly ahead of the curve, had anticipated the cultural shift and purchased the rights to a novel by Han Suyin (a pseudonym for Dr. Elisabeth Comber), which detailed an interracial love affair between a Eurasian doctor and a British journalist. Dr. Comber, herself Eurasian (half Flemish, half Chinese), was in actuality living in Hong Kong, working in a large hospital and trying to get over the death of her husband. Whilst there, she began an affair with an English correspondent. When her book was published it became a monster bestseller, prompting many film companies to court it. Titled *A Many-Splendored Thing*, it was ahead of its time, both with the illicit nature of the affair as well as the emotionally charged aspect of its Eurasian theme. To wit, the displacement of a person born to two cultures – not being sure which is the one to belong to – and not quite fitting in anywhere. Buddy Adler, the new head of production at Fox, hired John Patrick, who had won a Pulitzer Prize for adapting *The Teahouse of the August Moon* for Broadway, to work his magic again.

In casting the film, Adler lit on Jennifer Jones to play Han Suyin. The wife of David O. Selznick, Miss Jones had a reputation for fragility, but had a good working history with Fox. Indeed she had won an Oscar for the studio's *Song Of Bernadette* (1943) and was also very adept at playing slightly off-kilter highly-strung women. *Love Letters* (1945) and *Duel In The Sun* (1946) had brought her further nominations. To play opposite her, Fox sought the services of William Holden. According to the blurb at the time, Holden coveted the role of Mark Elliott, having read the book. Allegedly he cabled Para-mount, to whom he was under contract, imploring them to purchase the property on his behalf. Fox already had it thought, but were able to engage the star in a loan-out deal. The truth, however, was that Holden had little interest in the story but was keen on returning to Hong Kong, where he particularly enjoyed the ladies and the nightlife. Henry King was signed to direct and received Holden's approval. The star was at his apex in 1955, having won an Oscar the previous year for *Stalag 17*. His string of hits was impressive: *Sunset Boulevard*, *Executive Suite*, *Sabrina*, *The Country Girl* and *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* – all establishing the "Golden Boy" at the top of the heap.

Hong Kong wasn't the safest place on Earth in 1955, but everyone assembled there in February for the start of shooting. Mostly the location was Aberdeen Bay, a densely populated island.

Holden, an amiable drinker, was in his element, but Miss Jones had difficulties, and Holden wasn't affectionate. It was odd for him, because he had affairs with many of his leading ladies. Bob Thomas, Holden's biographer, wrote that "Miss Jones complained about her makeup, her costumes, the dialogue; and when Holden failed to sympathize, she complained about him." She prevailed upon David O. Selznick to intercede, who sent reams of memos to Fox. The strain between the film's leads actually works in its favor; the tension is palpable and it really conveys the anguish of Han Suyin's decision to have an open relationship with a married man. At one point, Holden declared a truce, and tried to warm the icy atmosphere. He presented her with a bouquet of white roses – which she promptly threw in his face. *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* wrapped in April 1955 after interiors were completed back at Fox's home base.

For the music, Alfred Newman, Fox's department head, decided to handle the chores himself. Sammy Fain and Paul Francis Webster were engaged to write the title theme, and Newman realized it could be woven into the film's sonic tapestry with ease. The song was pushed out to radio in advance of the movie to familiarize the audience, and Newman went to work. As film score enthusiasts know, Newman was one of the great interpreters of music. An exquisite composer in his own right, for movies such as *Wuthering Heights*, *How Green Was My Valley*, *Song Of Bernadette*, *Captain From Castile* and *The Robe*, he was also the arranging genius behind many musicals including *State Fair*, *There's No Business Like Show Business*, *Oklahoma!*, with *Carousel* and *The King and I* already in the pipeline.

When recording commenced in July 1955, Newman brought his customary perfection to bear on his beloved studio orchestra. The "Main Title" is a beautiful and stirring statement of Fain and Webster's composition. Accompanying aerial shots of Hong Kong, the music announces in no uncertain terms the bold romance to come. Newman's stunning variations on the Fain and Webster song, along with his own gorgeous secondary themes creates a unique atmosphere with a swirling tenderness that's almost indescribable. The music for *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing* aches and roils with love, loneliness, lost feelings, and confused hearts. The music is like a Chinese proverb: deep and unfathomable, shallow and transparent. It's like a river – constantly flowing, but ever changing. At the end, after Mark has died, Suyin returns to the high hill where their love blossomed. There, high on that windy hill, Newman's music crescendos and the Fain and Webster song takes center stage, while a chorus introduces the lyrics, ensuring there's not a dry eye in the house.

Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing had cost \$1.8 million to make, and returned \$4 million at the domestic box office. The reviews were positive and the film garnered several Academy Award nominations, including best picture (Adler), best actress (Jones), cinematography (Leon Shamroy), and art direction. It won Oscars for costume design and music – both the song by Fain and Webster, and the score by the incomparable Alfred Newman.

— Nick Redman

THE SEVEN YEAR ITCH

Just a few months previously, before audiences would swoon to *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*, Billy Wilder's film version of George Axelrod's hilarious play, *The Seven Year Itch*, had audiences rolling in the aisles. With original star Tom Ewell repeating his Broadway role and the incandescent and stunning Marilyn Monroe as "The Girl," *The Seven Year Itch* was a huge hit, due in part to the iconic image of Monroe standing on a subway grating with her dress (designed by Travilla) blowing up – it was not possible to escape that image that year, and it's been hard to escape it ever since. As the tagline to the poster read: It TICKLES and it TANTALIZES, and boy did it ever. Almost sixty years later, the film still tickles and tantalizes – Marilyn Monroe is so dazzling, the camera loves her so, and she is so charming and funny, that there is no way to not be captivated by her luminous presence, and Tom Ewell, shuffling around fantasizing all manner of scenarios with Miss Monroe, gives a brilliant comic performance. And equally as tantalizing is the score by Alfred Newman.

The score is monothematic, with many variations on the same theme – "The Girl Upstairs." It also has a classic Newman main title that gets things off to a rousing start, and, of course, Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto plays a co-starring role.

Love Is a Many Splendored Thing was released previously by Varese Sarabande and was a quick sellout. For this release, we've remastered it and moved two early source cues, one of which is by Leigh Harline, to after the film score proper, giving the actual early score cues a bit more prominence. *The Seven Year Itch* is making its world premiere on this CD. We've included the main title, and several variations on "The Girl Upstairs," which represents most of what was usable from the somewhat problematic original materials. The entire program is presented in that unparalleled Fox stereo sound.

— Bruce Kimmel