

“He Strikes Like Thun-n-n-nder-r-r-BALL-L-L-L-L-L!”

The Place of the James Bond Theme Song

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Existing almost completely outside the narrative of the two dozen James Bond movies, the theme song played over the opening credits has served as one of the movies’ major promotional tools. In a world before Don LaFontaine-narrated trailers that took up half an hour of a theatrical program, national movie ads piled onto television networks’ “must-see-TV” Thursday nights, and a plague of magazines, cable channels and web sites devoted to covering movies before their release; the song from a Bond movie “of the same name” on heavy radio rotation was an avenue to free publicity. When these songs were effective, they conveyed something of the mood of the movies, or offered a tantalizing glimpse of Bond, his villain of the day, or the dystopian world in which Bond operates. During the greatest popularity of the Roger Moore movies, the theme songs became more about Bond’s sexual prowess. The later themes, though no longer as popular on American radio, continue to illuminate Bond’s world, and have remained one of the many repeated memes of the movies.

Movies and Music History

Given the apparently easy synergy that has existed between feature films and soundtrack albums during the Vinyl and CD eras, it can be hard to understand that it took so long to happen. An ad hoc arrangement between record companies and movie studios can be found even before the advent of talkies: pop chart maven Joel Whitburn documented the brief popularity of “Poor Pauline” by Arthur Fields (1915), a recording of the accompaniment composed for the 1914 serial *The Perils of Pauline*. (Whitburn, 1986: 155).

The silent romance *Ramona* (1928) had a title instrumental written by Mabel Wayne; to which L. Wolfe Gilbert added lyrics for its star, Dolores del Río, to sing during promotional appearances. However, the popular vocal recording at the time was by pioneering crooner Gene Austin. (Whitburn, 1986: 39)

With the advent of talking pictures, the major studios invested in music publishing companies, as most of the revenue in the music business was from sheet music sales and performance royalties. Warner Brothers had a stake in Brunswick Records, which released songs performed in Al Jolson's early talkies. But mostly, record companies were the “software” division of phonograph manufactures like Brunswick, Edison, Victor, Decca and later, RCA; just as NBC was a “content provider” for General Electric radios.

During the Depression, the record industry seemed unable to compete with free radio music, and nearly died off completely. Warner Brothers sold Brunswick to budget label American Record Corporation in 1931. ARC bought the bankrupt Columbia Records in 1934 — pressing plant, catalog and all — for \$70,500 (Gelatt, 1977: 268). Columbia, an original investor in the CBS radio network, was bought back by CBS in 1938. The label became affiliated with Columbia Pictures when both were brought under Sony's ownership by 1989.

The Hollywood studios' investment in music publishing gave them access to songs and songwriters for musicals and background scores. The studios' shorts department also had access to or were contractually obligated to use songs from the music division, thus the best-remembered tunes from the 1930's are those that were heard in cartoons — or “murdered” by Spike Jones.

Investing in record companies was not an obvious move for the studios, partly because the recording media were incompatible. Movie music was recorded to optical film, creating

separate tracks that could be edited together and synchronized to the picture. Phonograph records had to be recorded complete in a single take onto a wax matrix. Creating records from soundtracks involved copying and re-copying studio playback discs to edit them to a manageable length, resulting in poor sound. Far easier for Bing or Frankie to re-do 2-1/2 minute versions of their popular movie songs at the recording studio. Or for the movie studios to offer the songs to the record labels in hope that their own stars would record them.

The first successful release of a motion picture's original soundtrack on record was in January, 1938. Victor released "Songs from Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*," an album of three 78s with songs and dialogue transcribed straight to disc (Osborne, 2006). Through the 1940's Disney would be the only studio to release songs from the original soundtracks of its features and shorts.

One barometer of the use of theme songs as a promotional tool was the Academy Award for Best Original Song. The first drama with a nominated (and winning) song was the Alan Ladd vehicle *Captain Carey, U.S.A.* (1950), in which Nat "King" Cole introduced his rendition of "Mona Lisa."

The Television Invasion

The same year that he hit with "Mona Lisa," Cole also had a popular record in "Orange Colored Sky," which co-writer Milton DeLugg had often played as bandleader for NBC's first late-night program, *Broadway Open House*. Whitburn and others have cited this as the first song to be popularized through exposure on television (1986: 88). While TV provided plenty of exposure for their musical performers; the movie studios saw free TV as its adversary. Contrarian Walt Disney offered ABC an anthology show, *Disneyland*, in 1954, in return for an investment in his planned amusement park. Warner Brothers followed in 1955 with *Warner*

Brothers Presents, an anthology dramatizing their older movies. Warners found more success with Westerns like *Cheyenne* and *Maverick* (co-starring Roger Moore), and detective series like *77 Sunset Strip* and *Hawaiian Eye*, which included catchy theme songs. Henry Mancini incorporated more jazz into his themes for the Blake Edwards series *Peter Gunn* and *Mr. Lucky*, each spawning two best-selling albums; “The Music of *Peter Gunn*” winning the first Grammy Award for Best Album in 1959.

The introduction of high-fidelity and stereo microgroove 33-1/3 LPs and 45s meant more durable, better sounding records could be made cheaply, and rock’n’roll contributed to a boom in record sales that finally made the industry profitable. The adoption of magnetic audio tape and multi-track recording by both movie and record companies made it easier to produce music for either medium. MGM had started its own record label to sell soundtracks in 1946, and went into pop music in the 1950s. ABC-Paramount Records was formed in 1955 during the American Broadcasting Company’s merger with United Paramount Theatres. Warner Brothers went into the record business in 1958 after seeing its matinee star, Tab Hunter, get more publicity for his records on Dot (Edwards, 2004). United Artists Records started in the same year.

The 45 rpm single and the long-playing LP were then meant for very different audiences. The more portable 45 was favored by youngsters and was the *de facto* medium for single-song-based popular music. LPs were more likely to be available in stereo, and as such were favored by grown-ups who wanted to demonstrate their expensive hi-fi setups. The market for LPs was dominated by well-known acts: comedians with frequent TV exposure, the above-mentioned TV tie-ins, and long-form movie soundtracks, especially those performed by large studio orchestras as a modern type of classical music. A perusal of Whitburn’s *Top Pop Albums* charts compilation (1996) suggests that before the Bond era — outside of Elvis Presley’s movies —

High Society and *Picnic* (both 1956) were the only Top 10 soundtrack albums to also yield Top 10 singles. John Barry's James Bond soundtracks were the first popular combinations of a mostly orchestral soundtrack with a hit pop vocal song.

John Barry

Barry's varied background suited him ideally to bridge movie soundtracks and pop songs. While in the postwar British military, he had learned music arrangement in a regimental band, and maintained a correspondence with Stan Kenton's arranger Bill Russo (Rubin, 2002: 28). Upon his discharge in 1955, Barry prepared for a career as a jazz bandleader. When American rock'n'roll invaded England in the following years, and many established musicians hoped the fad would just go away, Barry incorporated rock and blues into his jazz repertoire. The John Barry Seven, started with some army buddies, was the first popular band in England to use an electric bass guitar. Barry scored the early British rock film "Beat Girl" (1960), and managed English rock star Adam Faith. Andy White, one of the combo's drummers, became more famous for replacing Ringo Starr on the Beatles' first single, "Love Me Do" (1962).

When Barry was contacted about working on *Dr. No*, his band was riding a hit cover of the Ventures' instrumental "Walk Don't Run." The influence of American surf guitar can be easily heard on this and many Barry records.

The authorship of the iconic James Bond theme has been a point of contention and litigation. It is generally established that Monty Norman wrote the original riff, the "Dum Di Di Dum Dum:"

...based on the song "Good Sign Bad Sign" sung by Indian characters in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, a musical he composed based on a novel by V.S. Naipaul set in the Indian community in Trinidad (Rubin, 2002: 75).

Norman provided the original score for *Dr. No*, but it's Barry's arrangement that's heard in the first part of the credits sequence. The original opening features the Saltzman & Broccoli "travelling dots" accompanied by electronic tones that suggest the influence of Joe Meek instead of Stan Kenton. But following the gun-barrel shot, the audience gets the full, jazzy arrangement of the now-familiar theme. Norman's "Dum Di Di Dum Dum" had been transposed from a "Colonel Bogey" style march to reverb-drenched surf guitar, (Cork, 2007: 270) backed by an orchestral chord progression in a threatening minor key, befitting the tense situations any espionage thriller wants to convey. The Bond theme itself was not long enough to fill out the credits sequence. It was followed by a calypso instrumental, then ended with a vocal variation on "Three Blind Mice" (titled "Kingston Calypso" on the soundtrack), played as the colored silhouettes of the three blind killers that start the movie walk across the screen.

Dr. No did decent box office business in the United States, then it and *From Russia with Love* gained a wide re-release in 1965 following the success of *Goldfinger*. As the Bond series' orchestra-and-electric-guitar theme proved the template for all espionage movies and TV shows to follow, including *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and spoofs like *Get Smart*. The British ITV series *Danger Man*, starring Patrick McGoohan, was retitled *Secret Agent* for American broadcast and fitted with a hit theme sung by Johnny Rivers. The theme from McGoohan's next series, *The Prisoner*, had a guitar part by Vic Flick of the John Barry Seven, who'd also played the guitar on the original "James Bond" theme.

Since it was *Goldfinger* and its theme song that truly set the Bond formula in place, it seems proper to begin parsing the themes represented here first.

Ballads of the Bad Men: Bond Villain songs

Goldfinger

Thunderball

The Man with the Golden Gun

Considering how well the song “Goldfinger” still evokes the dangerous nature of the title villain, it should have come out weeks before the film’s debut, making any radio or jukebox spin a free plug for the movie. But it was and still is standard practice for the movie and its soundtrack to be released as close together as possible. The soundtrack album debuted on the Billboard charts the week ending December 12, 1964, with the movie opening Christmas Day. *Octopussy* director John Glen mentioned, in the commentary track of the 2007 DVD, that this was because the soundtrack or the opening credits sequence were often last to be completed, sometimes as late as the premiere day (Glen). *Goldfinger*’s breakout success cemented many of its presentation and story elements for every Bond film for a generation. For the opening credits, these included, as often as possible, the song being written and arranged so that the movie’s title was sung at the same time it appeared on the screen.

The song “Goldfinger” was a paean to the movie’s villain instead of its hero. This in itself was not new in popular music. The dominance of Westerns on television and movies in the 1950s and early 60s led more than a few country artists to dabble in “gunfighter ballads,” especially Marty Robbins. His #1 album “Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs” (1959) offered hits like “El Paso” and “Big Iron,” and a ballad about “Billy the Kid.” Gene Pitney’s “(The Man Who Shot) Liberty Valance” became a hit in 1962 despite not making the film’s soundtrack. The traditional outlaws would get another turn in 1968, with British singer Georgie Fame’s hit “The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde,” written after the movie’s release.

All of these musical villains, though, got their comeuppance in the last verse of those songs. *Goldfinger*'s director Guy Hamilton had a different bad man in mind when he discussed the film's score with John Barry. On the commentary track to the *Goldfinger* DVD, Hamilton said:

"I'd gotten a recording of 'Mack the Knife,' that seemed to me dirty and gritty; and it was sort of 'Goldfinger'-ish. And he (John Barry) came up to my apartment and I played this for him. And I think it cued him in with Tony Newly and 'Goldfinger' in effect as a bit 'Mack the Knife.' *It* was the concept. They picked Shirley Bassey, who I think couldn't have done a better job." (Hamilton, *Goldfinger*: 1999)

Anthony Newly and Leslie Bricusse supplied the lyrics to Barry's score. The song was Bassey's first American hit, following a few years touring American clubs and singing at John F. Kennedy's Presidential inauguration. The combination of vocals and big band scoring delineated Auric Goldfinger as a many of seemingly attractive vices:

Such a cold finger
Beckons you to enter his web of sin,
But don't go in!

Golden words he will pour in your ear.
But his lies can't disguise what you fear.
For a golden girl knows when he's kissed her,
It's the kiss of death ...

From Mister Goldfinger.

Pretty girl, beware of his heart of gold:

This heart is cold (Barry, Bricusse, *et al.*, 1964)

The song offered little hint that Goldfinger would pay for any of actions. Meanwhile, Macheath, the “Mack the Knife” from Brecht & Weill’s “The Threepenny Opera,” murders, rapes and robs throughout the 1954 Broadway production translated by Marc Blitzstein. His cheery murder ballad was recorded by many artists at the time, including a 1956 version by Louis Armstrong and the most popular 1959 version by Bobby Darin. Unconstrained by the requirements of the Hayes Office, Macheath is saved from hanging at the last second by the deliberate *deus ex machina* of a pardon and a title from the Queen.

“Goldfinger” remains the definitive musical signature for the James Bond films, after the “James Bond theme,” and thus the most parodied. “Monty Python’s Life of Brian” (1979) had an animated opening theme written by Michael Palin. The demo was sung by then 16-year-old Sonia Jones, whose Bassey impersonation was so spot on they used her for the finished song. “The Simpsons” episode “You Only Move Twice” (1996) saw Homer’s accept a new job with boss Hank Scorpio (Albert Brooks), who turns out to be a Bond-type Evil Overlord. The episode ends a song by scriptwriter Ken Keeler warning:

He’ll welcome you into his lair,

Like the nobleman welcomes his guest.

With free dental care and a stock plan that helps you invest!

But beware of his generous pensions,

Plus three weeks paid vacation each year. (Anderson, 1996)

Although “Goldfinger” inspired a succession of brassy ballads as Bond theme songs, only one other used the film’s villain as its subject. “The Man with the Golden Gun” (1974) had a theme by Lulu that worked as well as any trailer in establishing the film’s premise:

He has a powerful weapon
He charges a million a shot,
An assassin that’s second to none,
The man with the golden gun. (Barry and Black, 1974)

The arrangement of the song seemed to be an attempt to meld the big band style of the first films with the rock’n’roll themes from the previous “Live and Let Die.” But the attempt to inject some “Goldfinger” style eroticism falls flat as Lulu belts out, “Love is required whenever he’s hired, / It comes just before the kill.” During the song’s slower bridge, she recites:

His eye may be on you or me.
Who will he bang?
We shall see.

It didn’t help that *TMwtGG* was considered one of the weaker entries in the Bond series, despite its title villain being played by Christopher Lee. When the next Bond movie, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, appeared three years later, it would be helped along by a more 1970’s style romantic tune.

“Thunderball” is counted in this category only because its lyrics and tenor were intended to closely match “Goldfinger.” Following that movie’s runaway success, John Barry went with Tom Jones, another big-voiced English singer. With lyricist Don Black, he crafted what sounded like another tantalizing peek at the next Bond villain. Only when one watched the movie would

they find that “Thunderball” was the code name for the MI6/NATO operation to retrieve atomic warheads stolen by SPECTRE agent Emilio Largo. Instead, the lyrical description:

Any woman he wants, he’ll get.

He will break any heart without regret.

His days of asking are all gone.

His fight goes on and on and on.

But he thinks that the fight is worth it all.

So he strikes like Thunderball. (Barry and Black, 1965)

Would be aptly applied to Bond himself.

Romantic Interludes

From Russia with Love

The Look of Love

We Have All the Time in the World

These songs are united by theme as well as by circumstance, in that none of the vocal versions were heard on their films’ opening credits. They instead occurred as mood setters while the films’ plots unfolded. They could also be considered songs from some of the “minor” Bond films: *From Russia with Love* because it was made before *Goldfinger*, and thus had fewer of the familiar Bond conventions in place, “The Look of Love” being from the non-canonical *Casino Royale* (1967), and “We Have All the Time in the World” from the only George Lazenby vehicle, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* (1969). These songs were not used in the opening credits, but occurred at parts of their films where romance is being pursued more than seduction in the line of duty.

The song “From Russia with Love” is heard first in the movie playing through a radio in the background of one scene. It finally assumes its place in the soundtrack at the last scene on a gondola in Venice. Bond is snuggling with his new conquest, Soviet SMERSH clerk Tatiana Romanova (Daniela Bianchi). Enjoying the canals of Venice while the Matt Monro ballad plays, Bond takes back the wedding ring Romanova wore as part of their cover, explaining that “All government property has to be accounted for,” but adding that they wouldn’t always be working on company time. The romantic, but nondescript lyrics of the song (“My running around is through / I fly to you, from Russia with love”) are undercut by Romanova apparently enjoying the idea that she’ll only have the weekend with Bond.

“The Look of Love” would have been a welcome addition to any of the EON Bond films, and is probably the sexiest song from the pens of Burt Bacharach and Hal David. As such, it is somewhat out of context with the scene it’s heard in, where Vesper Lynd (Ursula Andress) is using her wiles to convince baccarat master Evelyn Tremble (Peter Sellers) to impersonate Bond in a game against SMERSH agent LeChiffre.

As the first EON Bond with a new lead, *On Her Majesty’s Secret Service* had attempted to break from some of the conventions of the Connery films. Ditching a song for the opening credits was more of a practical consideration, as John Barry thought, and director Peter Hunt agreed, that he couldn’t come up with a song with that title that didn’t sound like a Gilbert & Sullivan piece. (Barry, 2000). Barry came up with a melancholy but romantic tune, with lyrics by Hal David, which was heard during the montage in which Bond chastely courts Teresa “Tracy” di Vincenzo (Diana Rigg).

Barry said he had considered the tragic end of Bond and Tracy’s relationship when choosing Louis Armstrong to sing “We Have all the Time in the World.” Armstrong, he said,

was a performer deep into his autumn years, who could put feeling and irony into the lyrics. This would be Armstrong last recording before his death in 1971. The song sold few copies at the time of its release, but did see some action at the time of Armstrong's death. Then Guinness used it, and a 1993 cover by My Bloody Valentine, in two beer commercials. With this new exposure, Armstrong's original reached #4 on the UK charts in 1994 (Polyhex.com), and it was listed in a 2005 poll as the third most popular "first dance" song at wedding dances in England (BBC).

Dreams and Escapism

You Only Live Twice

Moonraker

In trying to group the Bond themes into simple categories, these turned out to be the odd ones out. They could easily be placed among the sexual ballads of the late 1970's, nor nihilistic songs that followed. If anything can be found to unite these songs, it might be that they each touch on themes of dreaming.

It's possible the style of song chosen for "You Only Live Twice" (1967) was influenced on some level by the success of "The Look of Love," from the Bond spoof released only two months before *You Only Live Twice*. Rather than another Shirley Bassey type room-filler, we got the same large orchestration backing a softer ballad.

The title has been given several meanings in Bond-lore. In the Fleming novel, it was a haiku attempted by Bond for his friend Tiger Tanaka:

You only live twice.

Once when you are born.

And once when you look death in the face. (Fleming, 1964: 109)

In the movie, it comes into play when Bond indeed looks death in the face, in his first encounter with Ernst Blofeld:

Blofeld: They told me you were assassinated in Hong Kong.

Bond: This is my second life.

Blofeld: You only live twice, Mr. Bond.

The song declares:

You only live twice,

Or so it seems.

One life for yourself,

And one for your dreams.

You drift through the years

And life seems tame,

Till one dream appears,

And love is its name. (Barry and Bricuse, 1967)

“Moonraker” (1979) offers a similar theme of love found in dreams:

Where are you? Why do you hide?

Where is that moonlight trail that leads to your side?

Just like the Moonraker goes in search of his dream of gold,

I search for love, for someone to have and hold.

I’ve seen your smile in a thousand dreams,

Felt your touch and it always seems

You love me,

You love me. (Barry and David, 1979)

Both songs share similarly lush, sensuous orchestration, and dreamy vocal performances. If they have any relation to the Bond movies, perhaps it could be as unintended meta-textual commentaries on the dreamlike quality of movies themselves. You could still have seen *You Only Live Twice* in a downtown movie palace whose decor lifted the moviegoer out of the everyday world. Even Bond had entered the dream of a different life: targeted by SPECTRE, he'd been declared dead and began to live as a Japanese man married to a pearl diver. One may have been able to see *Moonraker* only in a cinder-block three-plex, but at least the ultimate escapism of Bond in space could be experienced, ending with Bond joining the "Zero G Club."

Coincidentally, for both movies, Saltzman and Broccoli apparently worked hardest to get their acquaintance Frank Sinatra to sing the theme songs. Nancy had just come off her first hit, "There Boots Are Made for Walking," when her father recommended her. That same year, Nancy returned the favor by singing a theme song for Frank's detective movie *Tony Rome*.

Love and Sex, the Bond Way

Nobody Does It Better (The Spy Who Loved Me)

For Your Eyes Only

All-Time High (Octopussy)

Never Say Never Again

From 1977 to 1983, both the Bond movies and theme songs reached a new peak of popularity. The success of *Star Wars* (1977) created the "summer blockbuster" season, which boosted business for *The Spy Who Loved Me* when it was released a few months later. The Bond movies delved deeper into science fiction, and had popular villains like "Jaws" return for a

further go at 007. Carly Simon's theme song proved maybe more successful than "Live and Let Die," just a few years ago, and set up a cycle of FM-friendly chanteuses singing more descriptively of Bond's love-making prowess. While the Bond movies had previously often ended with 007 and his latest Bond Girl enjoying some conjugation, this movie's closing scene has Roger Moore caught in flagrante by MI6's video surveillance, with Moore quipping to Q, "Keeping the British end up, sir."

"Nobody Does It Better" offers a firsthand account of a night spent with Bond, with little ambiguity as to what "it" is: "Nobody does it half as good as you / Baby. you're the best" (Hamlich and Sager, 1977). Although considering that the movie's plot involved a female Soviet agent sent to seduce and kill Bond, the song could also be considered as sung from Bond's point of view. Carly Simon's vocal stylings compared well to the Shirley Bassey standard, and reestablished the commercial viability of the Bond theme: after Paul McCartney's single "Live and Let Die" had scored in the Top 10 in both America and Britain, neither the album nor Lulu's single for *The Man with the Golden Gun* even charted. "The Spy Who Loved Me" equaled "Live and Let Die's" #2 position on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, and like the McCartney tune, was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song.

As a romantic song by a female balladeer, "Moonraker" would have fit right in this chronology after "The Spy Who Loved Me," but it better complements the dreamlike fugue of "You Only Live Twice."

The playful seduction of the Bond love themes tamed down after 1977. Sheena Easton's rendition of "For Your Eyes Only" (1981) included slightly cooler entendres:

For your eyes only, only for you.

You see what no-one else can see, and now I'm breaking free.

For your eyes only, only for you.

The passions that collide in me, the wild abandoned side of me. (Leeson and Conti, 1981)

Rita Coolidge's cool, measured delivery on the *Octopussy* theme, "All-Time High" carried only a hint of suggestiveness in its opening line: "All I wanted was a sweet distraction for an hour or two. / Had no intention to do the things we've done." (Barry and Rice, 1983)

Octopussy's credit sequence had one of the few cases in which the action in the sequence matched a lyric in the theme song, with one of its nude females in the arms of a male figure in a tuxedo, possibly skating together, to the line: "But then we're two of a kind, we move as one."

The second non-EON Bond movie, *Never Say Never Again*, and its theme, are a bit harder to analyze, as the "official" Bond fan sites seem to be obliged to ignore it. But the theme sung by Lani Hall can be easily seen as the end of the romantic song cycle. While the song's opening verse seems well matched to the "official" movies before it:

You walk in a room,

A woman can feel the heat.

One look is a guarantee

Nights could be long and sweet. (Bergman, 1983)

But the song plays over opening credits that advance the movie's action, with a visibly older Sean Connery laboriously climbing the walls of one of the movie villains' fortified

compounds. His infiltration continues through the rest of the theme song, with its chorus of “Never Say Never Again,” intimating the end of a romantic affair.

Lani Hall’s recording this song closed a cycle of sorts: When “The Look of Love” was nominated for a Best Original Song Oscar, it was performed on the 1968 Oscar telecast by Sergio Mendes and Brazil ‘66, one of the main acts on Herb Alpert’s A&M label. The response to the performance led to Mendes recording and releasing a samba-fied cover version, which charted even higher than Dusty Springfield’s original. Hall was Mendes’ featured vocalist, but did not do lead vocals on that song. Fifteen years later, she got to sing this unofficial Bond theme, from a soundtrack album produced by Mendes and Alpert, who had married Hall in 1974.

Death and Cynicism

Diamonds are Forever

Live and Let Die

A View to a Kill

The Living Daylights

License to Kill

Tomorrow Never Dies

The World is Not Enough

Die Another Day

You Know My Name (Casino Royale)

Another Way to Die (Quantum of Solace)

James Bond’s life is hardly all dollies and martinis. In each movie, agent 007 is shot or targeted, attacked by foes, betrayed by allies, and forced to instantly judge whether to exercise his license to kill. All in order to protect a “free world” that sometimes seems no better than the

forces it's fighting. While the character of Bond might remain unflappable and strongly assured of his purpose, the songs used to promote his movies took a darker, more cynical turn starting in the 1980s. How could they not, when so many of the movie titles included the words "Die" or "Kill?"

Most of these songs were written by the artists performing them rather than the traditional pop tunesmiths who knew better how to set toes tapping. These younger songwriters had known of the Bond films nearly all their lives, most of them went through a long "question authority" phase that informed their songwriting, especially those like Bono or Chris Cornell who were products of the punk or grunge movements.

The themes of betrayal and death show up as early as "Goldfinger" which warns wayward girls about Goldfinger's "kiss of death." Auric Goldfinger proved a prototype for many of the villains in the 80s and 90s Bond movies: the ruthless businessman with the means to throw the world into chaos by his control of, or to gain control of, a single vital commodity. Bond and MI6 in *Diamonds are Forever* worked from the assumption that someone was attempting to stockpile diamonds and later flood the markets with them, but it turned out that Blofeld using them in a space-based laser for global extortion. Shirley Bassey's reading of the theme song, however, cuts to the practicality of diamonds:

They are all I need to please me,

They can stimulate and tease me,

They won't leave in the night,

I've no fear that they might desert me. (Barry and Black, 1971)

The attitude and lyrics match very well with “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend,” from the 1949 musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, adapted from the Anita Loos novel, made famous on Broadway by Carol Channing and the 1953 movie by Marilyn Monroe:

He’s your guy

When stocks are high,

But beware when they start to descend.

It’s then that those louses

Go back to their spouses.

Diamonds are a girl’s best friend. (Styne, 1949)

“Diamonds are Forever’s” singer devalued all human relationships, trusting only in financial security rather than to risk betrayal and desertion.

I don’t need love,

For what good will love do me?

Diamonds never lie to me,

For when love’s gone,

They’ll luster on.

In the next film theme, the element of death is applied to Bond for the first time. The first Roger Moore movie had John Barry temporarily bowing out of scoring duties and recommending George Martin. Bond folklore has it that Harry Saltzman listened to Martin’s demo of the theme song, with Paul McCartney singing a scratch vocal: “But,” Harry asked, “who could we get to sing the finished song?” (Hamilton, *Live and Let Die*: 1999) This question was not asked out of ignorance of The CUTE BEATLE in the room with Saltzman and Martin, but

because *Live and Let Die* was to place Bond in the milieu of the then-popular blaxploitation films, with locations in Harlem and New Orleans, and with his first African-American Bond girl. Thus Saltzman might have expected a theme in the vein of “Shaft” or “Superfly.”

With only a few lines total, McCartney’s lyrics set up the darker world the new Bond would inhabit:

When you were young, and your heart was an open book,

You used to say “Live and Let Live.”

But if this ever changing world in which we live in

Makes you give in and cry,

Say “Live and Let Die”

What does it matter to ya?

When you got a job to do,

You gotta do it well.

You gotta give the other fellow hell. (McCartney, 1973)

The song may have lacked the funky grooves Saltzman wanted, except for Linda McCartney’s reggae bridge, but it has proven very durable, staying in McCartney’s concert set list ever since, and getting a harder-rocking cover version by Guns N’ Roses in 1991.

“The Man with the Golden Gun” could also be fit into this category, though the theme’s focus prefers the bad guy. The critical and commercial disappointment of *The Man with the Golden Gun* led to a three year gap before the next film, during which Saltzman sold out his share in EON, leaving Broccoli to re-think the franchise for the new summer blockbuster market:

more spectacle, more girls, and romantic ballads as theme songs. The rock theme would not return until 1985.

Duran Duran brought stadium rock back to the theme songs for “A View to a Kill.” Lyrically, the song lacked the danger and betrayal of others in this genre, opting for juxtaposition between death and sex:

The choice for you is the view to a kill.

Between the shades, assassination standing still.

The first crystal tears

Fall as snowflakes on your body,

First time in years,

To drench your skin with lover’s rosy stain.

A chance to find a phoenix for the flame,

A chance to die, but can we

Dance into the fire,

That fatal kiss is all we need. (Barry and LeBon, 1985)

The words and arrangement fit with Duran Duran’s hit-making formula of the time, and became the only Bond theme to hit #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart. The song also got a push when Duran Duran performed it for the Philadelphia show of the Live Aid concerts on July 13, 1985. Their performance drew the kind of mild controversy that just sells more records, when Pat Boone complained, “I heard Duran Duran talking about dancing into the fire and songs that were obviously hymns to the devil and satanic things, while you’re talking about feeding the hungry. I find a real inconsistency there.” (*Pittsburgh Press*, 1985) (*Weekly World News*, 1985)

Timothy Dalton's Bond debut in *The Living Daylights* (1987) offered a song by Norwegian synth-pop group *a-ha*. The lyrics remain somewhat obscure, in the style of similar bands, mainly repeated the idea that "The living's in the way we die." This would be John Barry's last Bond project, except for receiving a composer credit when his horn line from "Goldfinger" was re-used in "License to Kill."

Gladys Knight's turn in "License to Kill" (1989) returned briefly to the ballad form, using the point of view of a jealous lover:

Got a license to kill

And you know I'm going straight for your heart.

Got a license to kill

Anyone who tries to tear us apart. (Walden, Cohen, *et. al.*, 1989)

"GoldenEye" (1995) ended a six-year gap due to the television rights to the Bond movies being challenged in court, causing Timothy Dalton to bow out of the series. When Tina Turner was announced as performer for the song, Bono and The Edge of U2 offered to write it for her. The song's lush string background highlighted lyrics about a woman who appeared to be stalking Bond:

See reflections on the water,

More than darkness in the depths,

See him surface in every shadow,

On the wind I feel his breath,

GoldenEye, I've found his weakness,

GoldenEye, he'll do what I please,

GoldenEye, a time for sweetness,

But a bitter kiss will bring him to his knees (Bono and The Edge, 1995)

While "Tomorrow Never Dies" (1997) brought Sheryl Crow with another ballad, but with a stronger link between sex and death:

Darling I'm killed

I'm in a puddle on the floor

Waiting for you to return

Oh what a thrill

Fascinations galore

How you tease, how you leave me to burn

It's so deadly my dear

The power of having you near (Crow and Froom, 1997)

This song again reveals Crow's penchant for "borrowing" riffs from older pop/rock tunes: Crow's lead guitar lifts the organ line from the Animals' "House of the Rising Sun," while the chorus slips into the triplets most associated with the theme to *Perry Mason*.

Veteran Bond lyricist Don Black teamed with the series' new music director, David Arnold for "The World is Not Enough" (1999). The song laid down yet another low-key, threatening yet sensuous groove behind Garbage's singer, Shirley Manson:

People like us

Know how to survive

There's no point in living

If you can't feel alive

We know when to kiss

And we know when to kill

If we can't have it all

Then nobody will

The World is Not Enough

But it is such a perfect place to start my love

And if you're strong enough,

Together we can take the world apart my love (Arnold and Black, 1999)

Madonna went in the opposite direction by abusing the Auto-Tune for a discordant techno theme in "Die Another Day." The song may have seemed difficult to parse, but its play over the opening credits showing Bond being tortured in North Korea worked out, suggesting some of the methods for resisting "enhanced interrogation:"

I'm gonna wake up, yes and no

I'm gonna kiss some part of

I'm gonna keep this secret

I'm gonna close my body now (Ahmadzaï and Madonna, 2002)

The “reboot” of the Bond franchise with *Casino Royale* (2006) has so far offered a more self-reflexive type of title song. Chris Cornell and Jack Black each deconstructed much of the Bond mythos to comment more directly on the nature of Bond’s universe. The first line of the theme, “You Know My Name,” is “If you take a life do you know what you’ll give?” It seemed to directly comment on the previous scene in which Bond shoots MI6’s Prague station chief for selling secrets: for just one frame, but clearly placed deliberately, we see a framed photograph on the victim’s desk of his wife and family. Cornell, lead vocalist for the grunge band Soundgarden, easily captured the confusion and doubt this “rebooted” Bond faced as a newly-minted “Double-O” agent.

I’ve seen angels fall from blinding heights

But you yourself are nothing so divine

Just next in line

Arm yourself because no-one else here will save you

The odds will betray you

And I will replace you

You can’t deny the prize it may never fulfill you

It longs to kill you

Are you willing to die? (Arnold and Cornell, 2006)

The line “And I will replace you” seems like a meta-textual acknowledgment of Daniel Craig’s status as the sixth official James Bond. Considering how Timothy Dalton was used as a seat warmer until Pierce Brosnan became available, then Brosnan was dropped for the *Casino Royale* reboot, this line seems more like a warning note from the studio if the movie’s box-office

fails. Cornell's song was left off the soundtrack CD at his request: he said he worked on the song while recording his album "Carry On" (2007), and preferred to see it issued there. (MI6.co.uk: 2010)

Jack White, front man for the White Stripes and several side projects, titled the *Quantum of Solace* theme song "Another Way to Die," keeping the theme of mortality running through the latest list of Bond titles. White's duet with Alicia Keys starts with another reference to the transitory nature of a contract to play James Bond: "Another ringer with the slick trigger finger for Her Majesty."

The chorus is more of a pastiche of almost-clichés of spy films, sung in somewhat hop-hop fashion, followed by further apparent musings on death:

A door left open

A woman walking by

A drop in the water

A look in the eye

A phone on the table

A man on your side

Someone that you think that you can trust is just

Another way to die

Another tricky little gun giving solace to the one that will never see the sunshine

Another inch of your life sacrificed for your brother in the nick of time

Another dirty money, heaven sent honey turning on a dime (White, 2008)

Even more so than Cornell, White brought back some sorely missed rock guitar to the Bond movie song. “Another Way to Die” was released in limited edition CD and 7” vinyl singles, and may be the last Bond single released in a physical format. It reached #81 on *Billboard’s* Hot 100, but got to #42 on their “Hot Digital Songs” chart. Like any major commercial single today, it was also released to iTunes, as a ringtone, and even as a download track for the *Guitar Hero World Tour* video game.

The subjects of death, betrayal and sex in the later Bond themes have actually been present in popular music from the beginning. Early blues and country (“old-timey”) music reflected the often short, troubled lives of their audience, and often their performers, of which Robert Johnson is a prime example. The biggest selling non-holiday song of the pre-rock era was “The Prisoner’s Song” (1925) by Vernon Dalhart. Dalhart was an operatic tenor who turned to hillbilly music and also recorded tragic songs like “The Wreck of the Old 97,” “In the Baggage Coach Ahead,” “The Letter Edged in Black,” and “The Death of Floyd Collins.” Tragic folk and blues songs that are still known today include “Frankie and Johnny,” “Stack O’Lee” (renamed “Stagger Lee” in the 1959 Lloyd Price single), and the 18th Century song “The Unfortunate Rake,” which evolved into both “St. James Infirmary Blues” and “Streets of Laredo.” The Bond movies came out during a cycle of popularity for “teenage tragedy” songs, running from “Teen Angel” (Mark Dinning, 1959) and “Tell Laura I Love Her” (Ray Peterson, 1960) through “Leader of the Pack” (Shangri-Las, 1964) and beyond. Even Pat Boone was in on the trend with “Moody River” (1961). The first of these dark themes, “Live and Let Die,” was used instead of Saltzman’s preference for a more “Superfly” type of song, and the trend became more pronounced in the rise of gangster rap as a popular music genre.

The James Bond series showed Hollywood, and Pinewood, how a theme song and soundtrack could be vital in promoting a movie. In the 1960's, it would be unheard of for a trailer to promote a movie that wasn't due out for another year. Instead, studios often put together promotional short subject films tracking the filming of their movies, to fill a theatrical program that still included documentaries and cartoon shorts. Some of these shorts can be found on the Bond DVD releases, such as a *Goldfinger* short showing Harold Sakata's screen test for Oddjob, and Sean Connery rehearsing his roll in the hay with Honor Blackman; and a collection of takes for the skiing stunts in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. But if a theme song became popular, not only was each spin be a free ad, but it meant more albums on display in department store music sections, right in front of people likely to go to the movies that weekend. While other movie dramas after *Goldfinger* were able to produce hit singles, most were for romantic interludes or scene setters: "Everybody's Talkin' " at the start of *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), or Butch, Sundance and Etta fooling around on a bike to *Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head*. Very few remain indelibly tied to describing the dangers that await the protagonist.

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