

Get the Wunderkind

A homage to the jazz musician, pianist and composer Roy Budd

by Stephan Eicke

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Roy Budd is a composer of film music whose work should be seen as a whole to evaluate it fully. An examination of individual scores – *Get Carter*, *Soldier Blue* or *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* – might put some critics off with their simplicity. By taking all his works into consideration, however, you cannot fail to be astonished at the versatility of the British musician and learn to appreciate him. Heavily influenced by Oscar Peterson, Roy Budd was a thoroughbred jazz musician, a composer, arranger and self-taught conductor. He was forever seeking new challenges and reinvented himself in the last years of his life. After 21 years, his widow Sylvia Budd has now independently released his last score for the silent film *The Phantom of the Opera* on DVD and CD. This offers a welcome opportunity to introduce this exceptional musician in CinemaMusica.

A child prodigy – at what price?

Child prodigies may well be exceptional children, but this does not necessarily mean they have it any easier in life than others. If you look at the careers of famous children with an artistic gift, the opposite appears to be the case. Yet the life of a child prodigy is not necessarily destined to follow the same drastic path as Mozart, who was literally forced into an early (mass) grave by his composing. Nor does it have to be as tragic as the fate of Erich Wolfgang Korngold. He suffered terribly from the disdain of critics who were instrumental in ensuring practically no one took an interest in his old-fashioned music; it remained forgotten until

long after his death. Nino Rota was another precocious musician who was later to make a name for himself in the world of film music. Although he was already writing demanding compositions before other children had learnt to read and write, he was hopelessly challenged, absentminded, and incapable of coping on his own in everyday life. Roy Budd was also celebrated all over the world at an early age, initially for his brilliant piano playing and later for his classic compositions. Yet he too had to pay a price. Bullied by fellow pupils, deceived for many years by his manager, in the last phase of his life he turned away in disgust from show business in order to fulfil his own desires and dreams. His untimely death at the age of 46 meant, however, that he was unable to realise all of them.

The charismatic musician was an all round talent who for a long time remained unrecognised as such. He learnt to play the piano as a three-year old without ever having had lessons. The five-year old pianist was described by the legendary Winifred Atwell as a genius. At fifteen he toured internationally as a jazz musician although he had never studied jazz. At 22 he scored his first film music, orchestrated and conducted himself, and just one year later wrote **Get Carter**, one of those distinctive and instantly recognisable melodies whose coolness has made it an iconic film tune. Roy Budd's music has such a classic quality that it has inspired many artists to make remixes. The original compositions, with their mixture of elegant bar room jazz and catchy funk, were so ahead of their time it feels like they were only written five years ago; they have lost none of their freshness and transparency. One reason for this may be the deep, lifelong interest Budd took in all genres of the musical competition, interpreting them and anticipating and accelerating their development in his own works. It may also lie in the elegant minimalism of his compositions, nowadays more in demand musically than before. Roy Budd's music is something special. It has unmistakable stylistic features and trademarks, is always smooth, masterful and atmospheric; it is instantly memorable without descending into easy listening. It is his brilliant feeling for rhythm which not only distinguishes his compositions, but also elevated him as a child from the mass of young pianists, as the Afro-American pianist Winifred Atwell remarked when she heard the five-year old Roy playing the piano: "I've

never seen anything like it. His sense of rhythm is superb. There's a real genius here all right!"

The genius was born in Mitcham, South London in 1947. He grew up in Croydon, an important industrial suburb of London, with his parents – his father was a grocer – and his brother Peter C. Budd, who was seven years older and later emigrated to the USA as a guitarist. Young Roy taught himself by copying the jazz he heard on the radio on the piano. Despite never having lessons, he was able as a three-year old to perform complete pieces. "I have no idea of how the music comes. When I hear a tune, I just sit down at the piano and the music flows from my fingers," the ten-year old prodigy said when attempting to explain his talent. His parents were soon encouraging him to perform in public, and he made his debut as a pianist at the famous London Coliseum in 1953. A year later, aged 7, his diary was as full as any CEO; he quite often performed several times a day within Greater London. Instead of playing out with friends, the schoolboy would spend every weekend sitting at the piano in matinees or charity events. Young Roy had no leisure time. The child lived the life of a sought-after musician. But performing in psychiatric institutions, where the patients gathered around the guest pianist, proved to be most unsuitable for a child growing up. Memories of these appearances plagued Budd for the rest of his life. One of the few hobbies he allowed himself was his interest in classic horror films of the 1930s. He adored them so much that he stole out of the house once when he was 11 to buy a precious edition of the magazine 'Famous Monsters of Filmland' he had been eagerly pursuing.

Roy Budd's many public appearances left a mark on the young lad. He was envied and bullied by his fellow pupils and as a result of these distressing experiences developed an extremely sensitive personality. He was never able to refuse an invitation to perform at a charity concert and towards the end of his life he also founded the ADA, an organisation to help drug addicts. As well as appearing in public as a pianist, Roy Budd began entering, from the age of 11, any number of competitions – with great success, both in the classical repertoire and jazz. Indeed, his piano playing in the Young Talents and BBC Contest went down so well that he was awarded the prize for best pianist five times in succession between the ages of 10-15. Yet the young Roy was not always on top of

things, as he recalled years later: “When I was twelve I was asked to perform at the London Palladium – this was in front of Royalty. I was so nervous; I went on stage and was just in awe of the watching people. I actually did perform but I finished playing about a minute before the orchestra had. I stood up, bowed quickly and I think I ran off stage. It was like playing the minute waltz in 48 seconds!”

First success in the record market

As being a schoolboy proved to be a distraction from Roy Budd’s chosen profession as a jazz pianist rather than something he pursued with great interest, he left when he was 16 to play in London clubs with his own quartet, made up of musicians who were all at least ten years older than him. With a bassist, drummer and guitarist he performed for six months in Blackheath and a year in Bermondsey before the musicians went their separate ways. At this early stage Budd decided to engage an agent. He befriended Douglas Stanley, who soon became a father figure to him and protected the young musician from shady deals and dubious job offers. Shortly after splitting from his quartet Budd came across Chris Karan and Pete Morgan who were playing in Dudley Moore’s trio. He quickly became friends with the group’s founder. This friendship with the actor and musician Moore, with whom he often played music in his free time at home, and also his collaboration with the drummer Karan and bassist Morgan, lasted till the end of his life. Certainly his career would have taken a different path without the two jazz musicians; it was Karan and Morgan who gave Budd’s compositions their catchy sound. The trio, which carried on performing for over 40 years, welded together by reciprocal respect and close friendship, can be heard in film music and on many discs. The three musicians appeared in clubs, hotels and even in army camps five days a week. At the same time Budd became resident pianist at the Bull’s Head in Barnes, often accompanied by Pete Morgan on bass. The busy pianist soon caught the attention of the composer Jack Fishman who provided a contact to the British record label Pye Records; it brought out his first single ***Birth of the Budd***, his own composition, in 1965. Budd was already well acquainted with the music scene in which he was moving: “To be pigeon-holed as a jazz musician is professional suicide. It’s very difficult to find jobs purely as a jazz musician. I just like good music, for example I like a lot of stuff by

the Beatles (...), whereas the normal jazz fan wouldn't go anywhere near that kind of music. (...) It all depends on how long I'm playing and the show I'm appearing in. If I'm a guest on a programme like the Val Doonican Show, I'll play something I think the audience will like – perhaps an old standard or something from a successful musical. There's no point in playing pieces they've never heard; on the other hand, you don't have to make compromises.”

Fascinated by Latin American music, Budd went on a jazz tour through South America in 1966 and got to know the legendary singer, guitarist, composer and pianist Antonio Carlos Jobim. A meeting in Rio de Janeiro developed into deep friendship with the shy Brazilian artist. Until the end of his life Budd met up with Jobim practically every year to play music together. Budd's manager Douglas Stanley arranged for the Roy Budd trio to appear at the 'Sunday Night at the London Palladium' on the return of the pianist to London; this was to be the definitive breakthrough for the three musicians. Tony Hatch, at that time producer of the popular singer Petula Clark, was so taken by the jazz musicians' playing that he offered them a fixed contract on his Pye Records label which went on to issue the first album with Budd, Karan and Morgan. *Pick Yourself Up!* was the first record Budd made for Pye Records, but it would not be his last – the pianist worked on 12 further albums for the label, and recorded film music, jazz and easy listening for the company. At that time Dave Holland took over from Pete Morgan on bass for the trio. It says something about the qualities of each musician that Holland left the group shortly after. Miles Davis had heard the three musicians during a performance and tempted Holland to the USA where he began a successful career as an influential bassist in the local jazz scene. One can only guess at the status Budd would enjoy today in jazz had he not turned to composing film music in the early 1970s. His compositions for Pye Records show his enormous versatility: bossa nova (***Budd'n Bossa***) stands next to a homage to Budd's idol Oscar Peterson (***Lead On***), reinterpretations of classical works like Gabriel Fauré's *Pavanne* (***Lead On***) and new versions of famous pop songs (***The Sound Of Music***) to which Budd only agreed if he could make an album of his choice. This album was to become ***Live at Newport***; Budd performed it with Holland and Karan at Bettws Social Club in South Wales in front of 700 spectators. Budd had achieved one of his aims, formulated at that

time, namely to become a successful pianist. He was about to embark on his other aim shortly after: to make his mark as a film composer.

The beginning of a promising film music career

Towards the end of the 1960s Roy Budd's manager and close confidant Douglas Stanley decided to emigrate to Australia. His decision proved fatal for his client, for Budd not only lost a father figure he could trust but also a reliable agent whose successor had yet to be found. The replacement who took over Budd's business affairs turned out to be a disastrous mistake and was the reason the disillusioned composer withdrew from the film business in the 1980s. In contrast to his predecessor Douglas Stanley, his new manager mercilessly exploited Budd's inexperience in legal matters and got him to sign contracts which guaranteed him 75% of the musician's earnings. The film music writer earned only a small fraction of what was actually due to him. Roy Budd's good nature had led him into a trap from which he was only able to free himself by separating from his manager in the early 1980s.

When they started working together Budd was not yet known as a film composer. In 1970, at the age of 23, he scored **Soldier Blue** as his first piece of film music and thereby completed an assignment he could only obtain in a roundabout way and by risking a trick or two. Budd recalled later in an interview his efforts to get the job of composer for the brutal war film with Candice Bergen: "It was a very controversial film. For the most part it was shot in Mexico by Ralph Nelson, and the end of the film where American soldiers massacred all the Indians became a political event – it was just after the My Lai and Pinkville massacre in Vietnam (1969). Because of the controversy Nelson had to finish the film in England, and through a friend I heard that he was looking for a British composer. (...) Anyway I went to see the director; I must admit I was nervous. I took along a tape of some of my music. I played it on piano and recorded it but what I did not tell the director was that some of the music was not mine. I had actually pinched it from the likes of Jerry Goldsmith, Jerry Fielding, John Barry, Dimitri Tiomkin, Max Steiner, in fact just about everyone; the tape sounded like Great Movie Music Volume 1, 2 and 3 (*laughs*). Of course I did not include the main themes or anything that might be recognised, just tracks from soundtracks I had listened to on record and then performed myself on the piano for the

tape. I told the director that all the music he was hearing was mine and he was very impressed – well he would have been. Just think, if he had turned me down, he would have been turning down half of the film composers in the world. The rest is history – I got the job.” The youth of the composer was not all positive; Budd had to fight to be recognised. When the film makers and chosen VIPs, among them the actor and presenter Bob Hope, were waiting to view the film for the first time, Budd joined them in the auditorium only to see his fellow spectators become increasingly agitated as time went by. After three quarters of an hour, the 23-year old composer asked his neighbour Hope why the film hadn't yet started. We're waiting for the composer, came the answer – the young man sitting in the audience had not been recognised. At least Budd was able to win Bob Hope over as a fan with his first film music; in the following decades he asked the pianist to play at charity events he had organised.

Despite the fact he was at the top of his game as a musician, the composing of music for the western was an intimidating experience. Budd had never put symphonic compositions on to paper – never mind orchestrate or conduct. “My main problem was I didn't know what I was doing. I bought a copy of ‘Henry Mancini's Book of Sounds and Scores’ and learnt from it how to write film music. One day I rang Tony Hatch, the record producer, to ask him how to write the clef for the viola – he didn't know either! I'd won many European jazz competitions but I knew nothing about orchestration. Standing up in front of lots of people and waving your arms about is quite different from getting up and playing *On Green Dolphin Street*.” Despite his inexperience Roy Budd orchestrated his film music completely on his own. His modus operandi consisted in walking through London for weeks on end to structure his music in his head until he had worked it all out. Only then did he sit down at his desk to commit the music to paper in a marathon of writing often lasting 17 hours a day. He never used his piano when composing – something which may seem unusual for a pianist. If you look at his scores, you will only rarely find corrections. Instead, the script is clear and so careful it could be printed. He never allowed himself improvisations; his polished compositions had been too strictly conceived.

Soldier Blue, the film about the Sand Creek massacre of the Indians in the United States by the cavalry of the northern states in 1864, proved to be such a powerful and promiscuous work that the musicians who recorded Budd's score were repelled by it and had to be cajoled by the composer. Although he had nothing to do with the film's content, he apologised for it even before the music was recorded. Anyone wishing to listen to Roy Budd's first film music today has to watch the film itself. The soundtrack released first on vinyl and subsequently on recordings on CD are revised versions Budd was pressured into making. The record label was hoping for larger sales from an easy listening version rather than from the symphonic film music which has still not been issued, though it exists in Budd's estate. Despite the aversion felt towards the film, **Soldier Blue** turned out to be a complete success for the composer. It did not take long before film makers, and not just British directors, were desperate to get hold of the young musician. Roy Budd's next project, the western **Catlow**, brought him into contact with the producer Euan Lloyd, with whom he began to collaborate extensively on several projects. Lloyd became aware of Budd through the actor Sam Wannamaker who had told the director about his memorable experience of seeing **Soldier Blue** at the cinema and the strong impression the music had made on him. After Euan Lloyd watched the film, based on this recommendation, he engaged Roy Budd to compose the music for his new film. Budd had arrived in the film world.

At the zenith of his career

In the same year, 1970, Budd scored probably his most famous film music, which today still enjoys cult status: **Get Carter**, a raw gangster film about the racketeer Jack Carter, played by Michael Caine, who wants to avenge the death of his brother and in doing so leaves a trail of blood in his wake. The film by Mike Hodges (**Flash Gordon**) is based on the thriller **Jack Returns Home** by Ted Lewis and was written, filmed and completed in less than a year on a low budget. Influential as the terse thriller may be (Hollywood decided on a remake with Sylvester Stallone in 2000), it is in fact influenced by the Nouvelle Vague, in particular by the legendary thriller **Le Samourai** by Jean-Pierre Melville. **Get Carter** shares with it a psychopathic, taciturn antihero and a minimalist score. Both **Le Samourai** and **Get Carter** have less than half

an hour's music – in the case of the latter, it is not even a quarter of an hour once the diegetic parts, i.e. the source music, are removed. Nonetheless, Roy Budd was to become famous through these fifteen minutes. With a music budget of just £450, the composer and his three musicians recorded four instruments: Budd himself on piano and harpsichord, Chris Karan on percussion and Jeff Clyne on bass. The catchy **Get Carter** theme was created by this ensemble. With its minimalism it is more a motif than a theme, but represented exactly what the film required. For the director Mike Hodges it was the first time he had collaborated with a composer, “with a composer who was only 22 years old and yet much more experienced than I was. The film's producer Michael Klinger recommended him to me. Although I had often heard Roy play piano, I had never considered him as a composer for a film. When he played me the **Get Carter** theme for the first time, he didn't seem to realise that he had written the most beautiful and simplest theme – precisely what I needed for my film.” The restrained music was recorded at the Olympic Studios in Barnes, in southwest London. The singers John Turnbull and Mickey Gallagher from the band Arc joined the trio; their publishers had put them in touch with the soundtrack producer of **Get Carter** to record some of the source songs in the film written by Roy Budd and Jack Fishman. John Turnbull had happy memories of the recording: “Working together on this soundtrack was something completely new for us because we were pop musicians, whereas Roy Budd, Chris Karan and Jeff Clyne were jazz musicians of repute. They could play everything, and **Get Carter** has everything: pop, jazz, there's even psychedelia in the music. That partly explains what makes this soundtrack so special – that and the fact that it was recorded on such a low budget. (...) The film was projected onto an enormous screen so that, although you were sitting in the control room, you could see the film and at the same time watch Roy Budd and his musicians record the main theme in the studio. (...) It was great to watch them in action. At first I wondered how it would all fit together. It was very unusual: tablas and a jazz piano, and then this memorable theme – it's really thrilling, a really great piece of music.”

Naturally Roy Budd's move to film did not mean he gave up working as a jazz pianist. The opposite was the case. In the 1970s in particular he made many albums which offered a change from the film business. In

1970 he made two albums, **Watch What Happens** and **The Happening** for the Marble Arch label, which released the music as **John Brown Junior's Go-Go Music**. The decision not to appear under his own name but to use the pseudonym John Brown Junior, here playing contemporary funk on a new electric organ, was not Budd's but that of his manager who was responsible for these unusual records in Budd's discography. In the meantime demand for his film music was increasing. In 1972 Budd wrote the music for the thriller **Something to Hide** with Peter Finch (**Network**), a close friend of the composer's. He wrote the six-minute *Concerto for Harry*, a smooth romantic piece for the orchestra with a complex piano part of which Budd was particularly proud, for Finch, though it is scarcely heard in the film. In the same year Budd wrote the music for the action thriller **Fear is the Key** based on a novel by Alistair MacLean about a man who pretends to be a gangster in order to kill the shadowy figure behind the death of his family. This film has a special place in the composer's filmography as it is the one for which Budd wrote one of his most elaborate scores for a ten-minute chase sequence. The pulsating piece, listed on the album as *The Car Chase*, shows off Budd's talents as a composer better than any other. With his regular team (Chris Karan on percussion and Jeff Clyne on bass), a fifty-piece orchestra and the legendary saxophonists Ronnie Scott, Tubby Hayes and Kenny Ball, Budd delivers a musical tour de force which hardly gives the spectator time to breathe in ten minutes, yet continues to develop consistently its fast-paced material. "It was one of Roy's first scores recorded in the CTS Studios and not only did it use a big orchestra but had a large, raucous jazz section with the crème de la crème of the British jazz scene. Although he was only 25, he had already gained enough experience in orchestral composition to be able to carry out the assignment. I think Roy had been waiting all his life to write music for such an action scene, so it's no wonder that he was able to serve up such a richly varied meal. He recorded the piece in two sections. The first section lasts seven minutes and was recorded in two takes. It's what you could describe in music as a riff and is the orchestral equivalent to Led Zeppelin meets **Shaft**. When the piece was completed, the musicians – and this happened on several occasions in his career – broke into spontaneous applause both for the playing of their fellow musicians and the composer," is how soundtrack producer

Paul Fishman describes the recording of this sophisticated music. It was also Fishman who decided to issue the music on the album with the sound of cars racing in the background – something for which the record label received strong criticism from reviewers and fans. The fact that this complex piece of music was recorded in only two takes is even more astonishing since the music in this particular sequence had to be cued to the picture to the second.

Pigeon-holed

In the same year Budd married the Italian singer Caterina Valente with whom he had a son, Alexander, in 1974 – at a time when the composer was busier than almost ever before. In 1974 he wrote the music for Don Siegel's British film **The Black Windmill** which meant a reunion with Michael Caine. Caine here plays an agent whose son has been kidnapped and who sets out to track down the kidnappers on his own. For Budd it was one more in an ever growing list of thrillers he had written for. Despite the risk of being pigeon-holed, the British musician enjoyed collaborating with the legendary American director: "I was happy to be able to work with him. Unfortunately I worked on the one Siegel film which flopped. He had just made **Dirty Harry** and **Charley Varrick**, two great works. I think **The Black Windmill** flopped because it is neither a love story nor a thriller. It's a mixture of both, and I think Siegel wanted to make something different. It was a difficult for me as composer. When I look back now, it's a better film if you ignore the fact it was made by Don Siegel, because it isn't a thriller in the way most of his other films are."

One year later came another film about kidnappers: **Paper Tiger** with David Niven and Toshiro Mifune, who became a close friend of Roy Budd's. Until the end of his life he regularly had long telephone calls with the help of an interpreter so that they could catch up. Budd referred to **Paper Tiger** as his favourite film score, and the producer Euan Lloyd also speaks highly of Budd's work: "**Paper Tiger** was a movie that called for a very different approach and to be honest I was a little worried about giving the assignment to Roy, but it did not take Roy long to convince me that he should work on the picture; he could be very persuasive at times. He told me that he thought that he would be able to do something special on the movie; it had a very emotional storyline and it was this

aspect of the story that Roy focused on. I wanted a similar type of score to that, say, Steiner had written for one of those Bette Davis melodramas. I asked Roy to concentrate on the emotive ingredients of the movie rather than the action sequences. He did this superbly, he gave me exactly what I wanted, and he lifted what was a relatively inexpensive movie into a minor classic. A big symphonic title treatment on a theme to be used frequently throughout the film, played by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (*with which Budd had already recorded **Soldier Blue**, ed*) under Roy's baton; this is still my favourite Roy Budd score. When David Niven is humbled by a ten-year old Japanese boy, Roy's surging strings made audiences reach for their handkerchiefs. Steiner would have loved it!"

Someone else who also appreciated the music was the famous lyricist Sammy Cahn, responsible for many of Frank Sinatra's songs. When he was visiting London and heard the main theme from **Paper Tiger**, he was so touched that he asked Euan Lloyd if he could write lyrics for the piece. When he heard the second theme from the film (*Who knows the answers?*) he also felt he had to write the lyrics. The famous (at least at that time) groups The Ray Conniff Singers and The Mike Sammes Singers took a prominent place on the album cover for reasons of their popularity, even though the latter did not sing in the film. Although the song was not used, Budd decided to record it for the album. Anyone wanting to hear extracts from **Paper Tiger** does not need to buy the CD recording by Cinephile but can listen to the album of Budd's music for **Tomorrow Never Comes**, since the label made a mistake by adding four pieces from **Paper Tiger** (*Kidnapped, Under Suspicion, Out of Control, and Escape*) to the music from **Tomorrow Never Comes**. If you select *M5, M22, M26* and *M27*, you will hear the four listed titles from the film with David Niven and not the score to the 1978 film.

The next project Budd embarked on with the producer Euan Lloyd was again an action film, though the composer was eager to write music for a love film. Though **The Wild Geese**, a war film with Roger Moore, Richard Harris and Hardy Krüger, was not what he really wanted to do, the film nevertheless inspired him to write one of his most versatile compositions, a mixture of funk, symphonic, military, jazz and Borodin's String Quartet No.2. Lloyd's ambition was not without challenges for the

composer since the producer was expecting nothing less than a score of the calibre of **The Magnificent Seven** or **The Wild Bunch**, played by a full symphony orchestra, to achieve music appropriate to the international cast. The flowing overture with its tongue-in-cheek military march does indeed smack of Elmer Bernstein's music for **The Great Escape**, but overall it achieves more variety through the different elements. The fusion of symphonic music, jazz and funk works exceptionally well; even the use of Borodin's concert music was carefully conceived and interwoven, as Euan Lloyd remembers: "We gave Roy the black-and-white reels of the film and he turned his bedroom into his studio. With the help of an old Movieola he synchronised his composition with the pictures. My only contribution to the music was to insist that Richard Harris' character hears Borodin every time he sees his son. Roy planned that very precisely and used it most effectively as a fragment in one of the last scenes in the film when Harris' character is killed by Richard Burton. It was breathtaking!"

Between film assignments Roy Budd continued touring internationally. He played in concerts with Shelley Manne and Woody Allen and even met his great idol, the pianist Oscar Peterson, whom he had worshipped ever since he was a small child and often described as a major influence on his own playing. In a 45-minute NBC television broadcast, the two artists played a concert as a duet; it was a dream come true for Roy. Towards the end of the 1970s, Roy Budd became more selective about film assignments though he was not always astute in the choices he made, as he later admitted when speaking about **Mama Dracula**, a film he scored in 1980: "One movie I was not that keen on was **Mama Dracula**. The film was a little weak to be honest but I still gave it my best shot." In fact the first years of the 1980s signalled the gradual end of Budd's career in film. In 1980 he wrote an orchestral score for the French animation film **The Missing Link** in just six days, after a previous composer's work had been rejected. Budd called it a 'hair-raising affair' when he recalled it at the beginning of the 1990s.

Taking time out

His separation from his manager in 1980 represented a radical watershed in his life. After years of exploitation and deception, Budd, disillusioned and disappointed by his manager's breaches of trust, fired

his partner. The musician could no longer tolerate a situation where it was abundantly evident that most of the money he was earning for his television film work ended up in his manager's pocket. Distressed by the lack of loyalty he had experienced in the music business, Budd began a new period in his life which also followed his separation from his first wife in 1979. In 1980 he married the French journalist Sylvia Noel and lived with her in Paris, Los Angeles and London until 1986, when he settled with her in London. After 1980 Roy Budd took time out, turned down film assignments and resolved never to play the piano again. Instead, he wanted to enjoy life for the first time by doing all those things his many obligations meant he had never had time for in his childhood, youth and as an adult. His second wife Sylvia made it her task to expose him to culture and to fill the large gaps in his knowledge with frequent visits to museums and the cinema. There they saw **Ladri di biciclette** by Vittorio de Sica and **Minnie and Moskowitz** by John Cassavetes, two films which meant a lot to the couple. For the first time in his life Roy Budd had time – he was living. This radical change went as far as deciding to sell his piano, inconceivable for a pianist and inconceivable for anyone who had seen Budd in 1983 – shortly after he had taken time off from playing – in a performance hosted by Bob Hope at Grosvenor House with Chris Karan and Pete Morgan. The brilliant pianist sat at the piano grinning mischievously like a small child, becoming more involved in the music, playing faster and faster and – cheered on by an audience carried away by his breakneck tempo – bringing the jazz piece to a thunderous conclusion.

He never entrusted his affairs to a manager again but took charge of them himself. As was later to emerge, this brought him to the verge of financial ruin. But before this happened, he was able to enjoy a carefree new life in Paris. He loved living for the day and spending a lot of time with his new wife. She was amazed that her husband had worked on almost 50 films but knew practically nothing about film history or literature. In his late 30s he was now making up for the lack of exposure to culture he had had as a child. A turning point came through a meeting with a friend, the former rugby player Jean-Pierre Rives who had ended his career to become a sculptor. Budd had not played the piano for over three years when the two met for dinner in a restaurant in St. Germain. Rives presented a sculpture of Don Quixote as a gift to his friend.

Deeply moved, Budd asked the former rugby player what he could give him in return. That evening Roy Budd serenaded his friend on the restaurant piano. It had been three years since he had sat at a piano “and it was as if he had never stopped playing,” his wife recalls. On that evening Budd took up music again.

In 1988 he decided to found the ADA, an organisation for the rehabilitation of drug addicts. The catalyst for this was three families in Los Angeles he knew well who had faced this problem. To help them – one of the families in question had four children, three of whom were drug addicts – Roy Budd planned to organise concerts with music stars to raise money. It was an idea the sensitive artist was unable to realise before his death. Apart from ADA, Budd developed many plans for projects which concerned him in the last years of his life. After several years of time out, it seemed he had a real thirst for new musical challenges which, after all the assignments he had worked on, he could carry out himself. The last years of his life constituted the most fruitful period from his viewpoint and one in which the jazz pianist reinvented himself.

Projects close to his heart

He invested money earned from assignments into projects close to his heart. One of these was almost to ruin him. As a long time film music fan, Budd realised his dream of releasing a collection of film music in the mid-1980s at a time when the market was not yet saturated by such products. Roy Budd and his wife Sylvia invested \$300,000, every cent they had, in recordings he wanted issued under the title ***The Final Frontier***. For this double LP Budd recorded, with the famous London Symphony Orchestra, extracts from **The Mark of Zorro**, **The Final Conflict**, **Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom**, and **Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger** as suites, without having previously obtained a contract with a record company. In his search for a suitable label, the composer hit on the American company CBS which was responsible for publications by the Reader’s Digest division. Budd saw this as the right partner to market his collection as a niche release. After separating from his manager he had refused to engage a replacement; this was to prove to be his undoing, for CBS exploited his ignorance in legal matters to offer a general contract which was disadvantageous to Budd. Although

Budd's recordings were released, it was not by Reader's Digest but by Hermes which issued two CDs entitled **Fantasy Movie Themes** and **Space Movie Themes** in 1986 without the permission of the conductor and arranger. Budd made not a single cent from the releases. In despair he returned to New York to negotiate with CBS; they hardly took him seriously in this David and Goliath struggle. The company had over 60 lawyers at their disposal who were able to get a positive result for CBS. Shattered by the experience Roy Budd flew back home – the collection he was so proud of sold at a loss without him making any money. On the **Space Movie Themes** CD there is a piece for choir and orchestra which Budd had written, arranged, conducted and produced as *Planet of Dreams* in 1984. It was dedicated to the physicist Stephen Hawking – Budd had been a fan of his for many years – and is a piece which gives a foretaste of Budd's last project, **The Phantom of the Opera**. It seems incredible that it was written by the same man responsible for **Get Carter** or **Fear is the Key**, so sensitively orchestrated is the Romanticism of the symphonic music with its memorable melody.

A further project the enthusiastic composer, gradually developing from a jazz musician and film music writer into a serious classical composer and conductor, intended to embark on in the late 1980s also came to nought. Engaged in 1988 to write a symphony on the occasion of the bicentenary of the French Revolution, the project never saw the light of day as its organiser Edgar Faure suddenly died. Only the overture was completed and subsequently recorded with the Luxembourg Symphony Orchestra as the *Tricolore Overture*. His friendship with the German film and theatre director Götz Friedrich, who Budd met for the first time in 1985, gave the composer a further opportunity to test new frontiers. In 1990 he was commissioned to write an opera.

Budd was inspired by Jean Racine's play **Britannicus**, first performed in 1669, which tells the story of the eponymous hero, the son of the Roman emperor Claudius. His accession to the throne is prevented by Nero and his mother Agrippina and he is violently separated from his bride Junia. It was an intimidating task for Budd. The pianist, conductor, arranger and composer, lacking any formal instruction in any of these disciplines, had never before undertaken a project of this magnitude. At a very early stage the enthusiastic composer decided on the cast – Nero was to be

played by René Kollo, Britannicus by Peter Hofmann. The dynamic composer also resolved to turn his opera into a film. Even before a date had been set for the premiere, Budd looked into the expected costs and visited film sets all over the world which might be suitable for portraying ancient Rome. However, **Britannicus** was never completed. A date for the premiere was never set. Budd began composing at the beginning of 1993, after he had completed another project which was to become his opus magnum...

The Phantom of the Opera

At the end of the 1980s Sylvia Budd and her husband went to the cinema to watch Abel Gance's **Napoléon**, a four-hour long silent movie which made such an impression on the British composer and led to him wanting to score new music for the epic film. After making some investigations, however, he learnt that Carl Davis had already been engaged to write a new score. Although he was deeply disappointed, Budd did not give up his ambition to write music for a silent film. In 1991 he heard that a private collector wanted to sell a 35mm copy of a film which had always fascinated him: **The Phantom of the Opera** (1925) with Lon Chaney and based on the novel by Gaston Leroux. Ironically it was this same phantom that was displayed on the cover of the film magazine which Roy had bought without his parents' knowledge when he was 11.

From this moment on he had only one goal in mind: to get hold of the copy of the film so that he could devote himself entirely to the composition of new music. "I made a phone call and the 35mm copy was mine. Not even the British Film Institute had a 35 mm copy!" Budd recalled in the last interview he gave before his death. The film was in almost perfect condition; it needed just some minor adjustments to give a better picture quality and had to be slowed to 22 shots per second so that the 78 minute long film became a work of 83 minutes. In all, the project cost Budd a million dollars which he paid for out of his own pocket – for the composer this was one of the many challenges he had to face: "It was a difficult film I was writing the music for. In the middle Gounod's **Faust** music appears, and I had to write around it. There is a ballet scene and the opera singer sings in French. I got hold of the 400 page score and it took me a week to find the passage she sings in this

scene. (...) The film had been shot at different speeds, in particular the final hunting scene where different cameras had been used, all cranked by hand at different speeds. One scene was slowed down until the people in it were running at a reasonable pace, and in the next scene they are hardly moving. It's impossible to write music which fits, and there's no simple way of slowing down these scenes." Roy Budd completed his complex orchestral score in the first half of 1993 and recorded it with the RTL Symphony Orchestra in Luxembourg in the same year.

The Phantom of the Opera is Roy Budd's masterpiece, a brilliantly orchestrated, thematically rich score in the late Romantic style with which the composer reinvented himself. The main theme, first introduced by an organ, perfectly mirrors the morbid Romanticism of the story, the phantom's obsession with the opera singer Carlotta who is trying to escape the clutches of the disfigured musician. The theme for the relationship between these two people, moving through all the music, is simultaneously inscrutable and beautiful, fragile and taut, like a variation on Wagner's **Tristan und Isolde**, a piece which had already been the inspiration to Bernard Herrmann for his music for **Vertigo**, accentuating a similarly dangerous relationship. It is fascinating to hear how Budd brings together in this composition everything he had learnt throughout his musical career to reveal a mature master at the height of his powers. His music not only stands on its own as a listening experience, but is also imbued with a unique sense of the relationship between sound and vision. The way in which Budd, for instance, merges his own score with apparent source music, reveals the clever concept that lies at the basis of his composition. Budd's sinister organ music is cued with the finger movements of the phantom who, seated at his home organ expresses his feelings for Carlotta before ceding to passionate orchestral music and, on the reappearance of the organ music, merging with the film's main theme, played on the organ.

The Phantom of the Opera was Budd's most important project; performances of it had already been planned on its completion. On 21 September 1993, the composition was to be premiered in a live screening of the film with the Young Musicians Orchestra at the Barbican in London, under the composer's baton. Budd waived his fee –

he organised the performance in aid of UNICEF for the financial relief of the Bosnians following the civil war. In April 1994 the Phantom was planned for the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, organised by Budd's friend Götz Friedrich, in May at the Paris Opera, prior to further charity concerts in the USA, Moscow, Rome and Beijing. Budd was already contemplating two further silent film projects before completing the score to **Phantom**: Fritz Lang's two-part **Nibelungen** film and Dreyer's **The Passion of Joan of Arc**. Budd had seen the first of these in Paris in 1983, but the desire to write music for it (Gottfried Huppertz' score had gone missing) took root only years later. Götz Friedrich supported the artist by introducing him to the Ministry of Culture and the Senate in Berlin. Disappointment followed, however, in 1993 when Budd heard that Huppertz' original music had been discovered – a new composition was thus rendered superfluous.

Despite this, Budd was full of enthusiasm, busy in a way he had not been for ages, and full of ideas and vigour when on 7 August 1993 he suffered a brain haemorrhage at home in London. He was only 46 years old. The man who had gone through as many periods as Picasso in his life and had shown such versatility in every new epoch in his professional career died within 15 minutes. In those 15 minutes his wife Sylvia promised to take care of his estate. She tried to save the premiere at the Barbican, due to take place in a matter of weeks, by asking Budd's friend and fellow artist Dudley Moore if he could conduct the premiere: "Roy always wanted to conduct his own music. After Roy died, Dudley was one of the first to ring me. I asked if he could help me save the premiere and keep our promise to UNICEF. Dudley said he would only be too happy, but would need a year to study the music as it was so complex. Ron Goodwin, a wonderful man and great conductor, then tried to save the premiere. We often spoke on the phone about it, and this performance was very important to me as a tribute to Roy, but in the end the premiere had to be cancelled. The Barbican still insisted on being paid in full, although the orchestra didn't, and I am very grateful to all the musicians for that," Sylvia Budd recounts in explaining the precarious situation after the death of her husband. A new composition by Carl Davis, commissioned later because no one was aware of Roy Budd's work, contributed to Budd's score being forgotten over a period of time.

It was only in 2014, many years later, that the film composer's music was issued on both CD and DVD – released by Sylvia Budd as a memorial to her husband. She paid for the project out of her own modest means after the EMI record label, with which she had had discussions years before, said it was not interested in the project. With this CD and DVD it now not only became possible to discover this great film music, but also to get to know a new facet of Roy Budd's creative work which, along with the projects of his later years, freed him from categorisation as a jazz musician writing for thrillers and action films. Sylvia Budd administers her husband's estate and preserves all his scores and master tapes. No score has been lost. Roy Budd, who played during his life at countless charity events, carried one last act of goodness after his death: the donation of his organs saved the lives of two seriously ill patients.

My special thanks go to Sylvia Budd, without whom this portrait would not have been possible.

Sources:

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- (3) Roy Budd: A Talented and Likeable Man, "Soundtrack Magazine Vol.3/No.11, 1984"
- (4) A Work in Progress, www.dougpayne.com
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- (6) Exclusive recent interview with Mike Hodges by Sylvia Budd, "The Phantom of the Opera DVD", Mishka Productions 2014
- (7) Fear is the Key, Booklet-Text by Geoff Leonard, Paul Fishman and Jonathan Benton Hughes, Castle Music 1999.
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The Phantom of the Opera

Music: Roy Budd

USA 1925/Music 05.05.2014

Mishka Productions

[59:23/11 Tracks]

The Phantom of the Opera, a symphonic tour de force, a kind of 'Alpine Symphony' in film music as far as the grandiose sweep of the work is concerned, is truly a remarkable swan song allowed to only few film composers. Roy Budd, who would not be put in the front row of the British film music elite (Addison, Barry, Bennett, Scott, Walton) died at the young age of 46 in 1993. **The Phantom of the Opera** was his last work, a new score for the silent film classic of 1925. With exceptional orchestral refinement and a sublimely gentle British restraint, as though it were a piece by Vaughan-Williams, Budd breathes life into the film with a flowing stream of dark Romanic, at times sumptuously lyrical melodies. Again and again you hear a chromatically descending 3 note motif, not dissimilar to Max Steiner's **King Kong**, and a certain minimalist frolicking on the organ is reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann. Budd, jazz musician and musical autodidact, has succeeded with this music in creating a remarkable orchestral work which is also convincing as an hour-long listening experience per se.

Matthias Büdinger

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Convincing musical tour de force; a fitting conclusion to a remarkable career in film music.

