

Document Citation

Title	Chords and discords
Author(s)	Lyn Murray
Source	<i>American Film</i>
Date	1986 Jun
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	17-20
No. of Pages	4
Subjects	Murray, Lyn (1909-1989), London, Great Britain
Film Subjects	To catch a thief, Hitchcock, Alfred, 1955 Bells are ringing, Minnelli, Vincente, 1960

FLASHBACK

American Film

June 1986

pp. 17-20

Bells Are Ringing

Chords and Discords

A composer's notes on *To Catch a Thief* and *Bells Are Ringing*.

By LYN MURRAY

*Editor's Note: In 1947 Lyn Murray emigrated from New York to Hollywood because he wanted to write music for movies. In time he achieved this goal, scored some films, television series, plays, and specials. Now and then he was persuaded to revert to a first love: beating the notes into, and coaxing the sounds out of, large choral ensembles. From 1947 on, he entered details of his musical life, and four marriages, into a journal. The following excerpts from this work in progress, which is called *Musician: A Journal*, relate two professional experiences, one delightful, one not.*

TO CATCH A THIEF

Monday, August 16, 1954

I am at the studio [Paramount] redubbing *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*. Bill Perlberg, the producer, has promised to speak to Hitchcock about getting me *To Catch a Thief*. My contract here is up in five days.

Friday, August 20

Bill Perlberg has spoken to Hitchcock about me for *To Catch a Thief*. Fingers crossed.

Thursday, November 18

Had lunch with Hitchcock. I am going to do the picture. He is a very funny, bawdy man. His views on American women are similar to Jimmy Hilton's. (He says that American women look like they will and won't, while English women look like they won't and will.) [James Hilton, author of *Random Harvest*, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, and *Lost Horizon*.] Hitch says American women are teasers. Grace Kelly and Cary Grant are in the picture. Hitchcock said Grace Kelly has an affair with every leading man she works with, but blushes when you tell a dirty story. He said, "You can't say 'shit' around her."

Wednesday, November 24

Ran *To Catch a Thief* by myself and taped all the dialogue. It is a wonderful picture, one of



Cary Grant and Grace Kelly on the beach in *To Catch a Thief*. The secret of the suspense is in the music.

Hitchcock's best, and is full of marvelous chances for music. I am elated.

Friday, December 3

Ran *To Catch a Thief* with Hitchcock. In the big party scene near the end of the picture, Grace Kelly is wearing a gold lamé dress, very elegant. Hitchcock leaned over to me and whispered, "There's hills in them thar gold." Afterwards in his office, he gave me three pages of single-spaced notes about sound and music. He knows exactly what he wants each of these elements to accomplish. For example, in a scene on the beach at Cannes, with Grant, the wind is whipping the umbrellas and the canvas on the cabanas. He said there would be absolutely no sound in this scene—just music. The result is a heightening of the suspense.

January 1955

I am writing *To Catch a Thief*.

Hitchcock is shooting another picture, *The Trouble With Harry*. He tells me he doesn't have a composer set for it yet. I recommend Bernard Herrmann for it. Hitch does not know Herrmann. I introduce them. It is love

at first sight. (This was probably the biggest mistake of my life. Hitchcock had Herrmann do all of his pictures until he fell out of love with him on *Torn Curtain*. By that time, Hitchcock was enjoying a very lucrative arrangement with Lew Wasserman at MCA. It is said that Wasserman had suggested Hitchcock have a lighter, more pop-sounding score for *Torn Curtain* than Herrmann was capable of writing. Hitchcock is said to have transmitted this request to Herrmann, who brought in his usual marvelous-sounding eight-horn-blowing-their-brains-out score. After the recording of the main title, the musicians say Hitch came out and stopped the session and the rest of the score was not recorded. John Addison did another one.)

Wednesday, February 2

Recording *Catch*. In the main title, there is a section played by three pianos (with the orchestra) in which I used the Effenbach sisters and the studio pianist, Harry Sukman. It sounded puny and ineffectual to me. You just can't record a lot of things going on at once on the Paramount stage. Something to do with the acoustics, I guess.

Courtesy Lyn Murray

1-A1 CONDUCTOR 11511 (324)
YOU'LL LOVE FRANCE - SEC. 1
 (TO CATCH A THIEF)
 -REVISED-
 LYN MURRAY

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Reproduction of Lyn Murray's original score for *To Catch a Thief*, dated Feb. 7, 1955, above; Party girl; Grace's gold dress elicited a telling comment from her director in *To Catch a Thief*, right.



Monday, February 14

Georgie Auld, the tenor saxophonist, recorded some sequences with Jack Costanza, the virtuoso bongo player, today.

Thursday, March 10

We rescored a couple of scenes today. In the fireworks scene with Grant and Kelly, I had Auld playing the tune in a very sensuous manner. The front-office brass wanted the whole scene toned down, and Hitch thought if I rescored it in a more conventional way, like with strings, he might get to keep it.

Hitchcock amazes me. He has an innocuous scene where two French plainclothes policemen are staking out a villa hoping to catch the thief. It is a long shot and they are looking at what one imagines are dirty French postcards—a wry Hitchcock touch. Don Hartman, one of the studio brass, objected and Hitch took it out. I said, "Why would you take that out? It's charming." He said, "The picture doesn't stand or fall on one little shot. Besides, if I take that out, they won't complain so much about the fireworks scene."

Friday, March 11

Finished the dubbing today.

Herrmann recorded his score for *The Trouble With Harry* this week. Strings and woodwinds. I introduced him to the orchestra. He had a hassle immediately with Charlie Strickfaden, the first oboe. He is a saxophone dou-

ble and is not really the best first oboe in the world, but we all love him, he is such a nice man. But Herrmann is a martinet and Charlie did not please him. After the session, Steve Czillag, head of music cutting, said to me, "He may be your friend but he is a prick." Herrmann had always been very superior about our complaints concerning the acoustics of the stage at Paramount. He said, "You guys who can't conduct always blame it on the acoustics." Then he did this picture and they recorded it with a very close pickup. After the dubbing sessions he admitted he was physically ill.

Thursday, March 17

Previewed *Catch* in Pasadena. Smash.

BELLS ARE RINGING

September 1959

MGM is making *Bells Are Ringing* with Judy Holliday and Dean Martin. André Previn is the musical director; I am doing the vocals, mainly to go through a big musical with André. Vincente Minnelli is directing, Jule Styne, composer, and Betty Comden & Adolph Green, book and lyrics, are here to protect their interests. Arthur Freed is the producer.

Styne has the greatest ego I have ever encountered, with the exception of Johnny Green's. Russell Bennett did the orchestrations for the Broadway show. Styne ordered André not to change a note of those orchestra-



Dean Martin and Judy Holliday do it to (Lyn Murray's) music in *Bells Are Ringing*.

tions, because he personally had spent three hours on each arrangement with Russell; further, they had cost \$30,000; and last, any changes would "throw" Judy. I was most impressed with the way André handled Styne. One day André read through a number with the orchestra. Styne said, "I don't understand that trumpet figure." André said to the trumpets, "Take it out." At one point, he remarked to Styne that *Bells Are Ringing* seemed to have more tradition than the Salzburg Festival.

We spent seven days with Judy and Dean, four or five hours a day, recording eight songs each averaging a chorus and a half in length. Dean was a consummate professional. He came in knowing his songs and recorded them fast. No trouble. Judy was another story. She was living with Gerry Mulligan and he was around—helping. She was unable to record with the orchestra directly because of throat problems and panic. She recorded to earphones, and made numerous takes of each number, rejecting and rejecting until even Styne and Freed joined us in trying to tell her that what she had done was not only acceptable, but quite often marvelous. She is a great performer, but if perfectionism is a neurosis, then she has got as bad a case of it as I have.

Mulligan is articulate, intelligent, and quickly learned to express his opinions and exercise the rights conferred upon him as "friend to the star." The fact that her sore throat delayed the start of the picture two days at roughly a cost of \$50,000 a day didn't bother him, or her, or Julie Styne, or, apparently, Arthur Freed. When we finished this phase of the prerecording, the studio gave Judy a set of disks to take home and listen to. At MGM these are made at 80 RPM. Her machine revolved at 78.

She came in and announced that the tracks were no good and she wanted to do them all over. Freed put his foot down and Judy did not show up for the next day's shooting. Freed backed down and agreed to let her do some of them over, even though this meant shutting down the picture until they were done.

André told me an anecdote about a Freed picture, *Invitation to the Dance*, starring Gene Kelly. André had a disagreement with Kelly about a piece of scoring. Impasse. He went to Freed to explain his viewpoint. Freed said, "Excuse me a minute," and left the room. Fifteen minutes later, André went into the secretary's room and asked where Mr. Freed was. She said, "He's gone home."


Fred Clark is in the picture. One day he blew a few takes and Mulligan took him to one side and offered some suggestions on how to clear up the problem. Clark went to Minnelli and said, "This won't do. Call him off." Minnelli explained he couldn't do anything about Mulligan since he was so important to Judy and he didn't want to disturb anything.

I had a twenty-eight-voice group in the picture. We worked on the song "Drop That Name." When I had it ready, I called Minnelli to come and hear it. We sang it and I turned to Minnelli for comment. He bowed his head and said, "I couldn't understand a single word." He stayed with us for a day and a half getting it exactly the way he wanted it. We went over every word a thousand times in a hundred different ways. When we recorded it, Styne came onto the stage and said it was all wrong. So we went over it word by word for *him*, changing it to the way *he* wanted it. Minnelli didn't put up a fight for what *he* wanted. He just rolled his big doe eyes and pushed his

lips in and out. I asked Bill Ryan why everybody rolled over for Styne, and he said Freed wanted to buy *Gypsy*, and the way to buy *Gypsy* was to keep Styne happy. (Warners got *Gypsy*.)

After a hiatus, I went back to Metro to record "It's a Simple Little System," a wonderful funny song in which a character—played with a Hungarian accent by Eddie Foy—explains to a crowd of bookies a system for using the names of composers for race tracks: Beethoven is Belmont, Debussy is Delmar. The big joke comes at the end of the song when Foy says, "What is Handel?" and the chorus answers, "Hialeah! Hialeah!" à la the Hallelujah Chorus. I had forty voices (Halperin the budgeteer is still on the floor) and we rehearsed for a bit and got it down. Minnelli came in and heard it. Comment: "Isn't the last note of 'Hialeah' too short?" My answer: "No. It's the Hallelujah Chorus." Minnelli: "I know, but they didn't do the note that short in the show." He returned to his shooting and we continued preparing the number and then made it.

Arthur Freed came down and heard it. Freed is an elderly man whose hearing is probably on a par with Sam Goldwyn's, whose ears cut off at about six thousand cycles. When you play back for the producer, he sits in a chair about forty feet from three Voice of the Theatre speakers, and he hears the stereo track played loud enough to please even musicians. The clarity and the balances were superb. Freed: "I can't understand a single word." Previn was there. I said to him, "What can I do? It's perfect." André, cool as always, marvelous in these idiotic situations, said, "Let's sing the names of the tracks louder than the names of the composers." I went out onto the stage and we took it bar by bar and Mr. Freed okayed it bar by bar. Then we made it and Mr. Freed left—mad at me—and I left—mad at him.

The solution at Metro is simply not to become involved in what you are doing. Rehearse it poorly, play it for them, let them suggest how it can be improved, do it, gradually making it better, or at least different; if they want it upside down, do it upside down. I have come to the conclusion that those who can do this succeed at Metro. I have failed. When André conducts, the height of his beat is maybe a foot, the orchestra plays clean and meticulous, but no head of steam is generated, no one gets up a sweat. Cool. When I work in front of a group, I get into a lather. Discussions following a take are heated because I am flying. Opposite of cool. The hell with Metro. 

Musician will be published by Lyle Stuart in the spring of 1987. Lyn Murray recently wrote the score for a National Geographic film called Jerusalem: Within These Walls, broadcast on PBS. The music can be heard, faintly, under Christopher Plummer's narration.