



MORRICONE

A Fistful of Dollars

In Britain, Morricone is best known for his work with Sergio Leone. As Bernard Herrmann is to Alfred Hitchcock, Nino Rota to Federico Fellini, John Barry to James Bond and John Williams to Steven Spielberg, Morricone is – for many – to Leone. It is well-nigh impossible to recall Leone's films in the mind's eye or ear – from *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) via *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) to the very different *Once upon a Time in the West* (1968) and *Once upon a Time in America* (1983) – without Morricone's music. So close was the creative partnership between composer and director that Leone once described it as 'a marriage like Catholics used to be married before the divorce laws were reformed.' Morricone returned the compliment by saying: 'Leone wanted more from music than other directors – he always gave it more space, more room to breathe.'

The resulting films were mythical melodramas, with Morricone supplying the melo. From the early whipcracks, bells, whistles, anvils, Italian folk instruments, incomprehensible lyrics and Fender Stratocaster riffs – which may well have been distant spin-offs from Morricone's researches into John Cage and the idea that all sounds belong to the realm of music – to the melancholy, yearning score for *Once upon a Time in America*, with its wistful use of pan-pipes and dense orchestral textures, the work of these two artists ran on parallel lines. The opening bars of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, with their 'Ay-ee-ay-ee-ay' coyote howl are among the most instantly recognisable in the history of the movies.

And yet Morricone was always hyper-sensitive about his association with 'spaghetti westerns'. Whenever I interviewed him, he would make clear from the outset that if I so much as mentioned the phrase 'spaghetti westerns', he would walk out. 'I don't compose things that we eat.' When Quentin Tarantino sent him the script of *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), he told me, the tense opening sequence included the stage direction 'This is a real spaghetti western moment': he closed the script there and then and sent it back. And he was at pains to point out that even during his most prolific period in the 1960s and 1970s – when as Bernardo Bertolucci once joked 'you barely saw a major Italian movie without music by Ennio' – he only scored 35 westerns, or less than ten per cent of his oeuvre. Only 35! That's almost as many as Elmer Bernstein (*The Magnificent Seven*, 1960; *True Grit*, 1969, et al), Dimitri Tiomkin (*Red River*, 1947; *High Noon*, 1952, et al) and Jerome Moross (*The Big Country*, 1958) combined...

Morricone always emphasised the distinction between '*musica assoluta*' (absolute music, the concert work) and '*musica applicata*' (the film and television work); and within those categories, between his more serious film work and rotgut 'spaghetti westerns' (a phrase he did not apply to Leone's films). This sensitivity had something to do with a certain unease about his reputation among members of the elite musical establishment in Italy and especially Rome: this meant a lot to him, and he felt it was something he hadn't quite achieved. Close association with 'spaghetti westerns', for him, lowered the tone.

Morricone started to experiment with writing music for Italian films in the late 1950s, with his first credit in 1961 (Luciano Salce's *Il federale*). When Leone

was seeking someone to write the new-style music for his first western, he discovered he had been at primary school with Morricone in the mid-1930s, and the two men were meeting again for the first time in 28 years. They hit it off immediately and Morricone was hired to compose the music for *A Fistful of Dollars*.

What was your working relationship with Sergio Leone?

I have to say it was entirely loving and supportive. Every once in a while, it's true, he would get angry for a minute or I would, then his wife Carla would come over and say, 'Shut up, you two, stop it.' There was total trust between us, and that's what you need to work well together.

You created a distinctively Italian sound for the 'western all'Italiana' – the maranzano, the arghilophone, these are Italian folk instruments, aren't they, which had never been used in that context before – and it's a whole world away from Aaron Copland and his students Elmer Bernstein and Jerome Moross and all those big symphonic scores for American westerns based on American folk tunes...

You can find the arghilophone in Korea and Germany as well as Italy. No, if Leone's Italian westerns had been set in China I would have written the same music. I wasn't influenced by the place and therefore neither by American or Italian folklore, so I just put in the tones, the sounds that felt right.

What about the whistling, which you were to use in 30 of your scores?

I can't remember how that happened. I just came up with the idea and Sergio liked it and decided to use it in the first film, and then he wanted it in the second one as well and by the third I had to say, 'That's enough now, no more whistling, we've used it too much' – and so we used the coyote howl instead in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. In the concert version, though, I didn't have the voice or the arghilophone, so I simply gave the part to the clarinet.

And there was the use of the human voice as a musical instrument – with the soprano Edda Dell'Orso taking the female vocal line, from For a Few Dollars More onwards: this, too, was to prove very influential on soundtracks such as Gladiator [2000].

...because the human voice is the most amazing instrument that exists! We don't need an instrument; we are the instrument – it's us, our body. The voice can do anything and that's why I love it as the principal instrument. We're used to beautiful, sweet voices, but then there are terrible voices as well – subhuman, dramatic, the voices of evil people, terrible people. In the tone of voice you can represent either...

Article and interview extract by Christopher Frayling, *Sight & Sound*, December 2020

A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS (PER UN PUGNO DI DOLLARI)

Director: Bob Robertson [Sergio Leone]
Production Companies: Jolly Film (Rome), Constantin Film, Ocean Films, Madrid
Produced by: Harry Colombo [Arrigo Colombo], George Papi [Giorgio Papi]
Production Managers: Frank Palance [Franco Palaggi], Günter Raguse
Unit Manager: Fred Ross [Fernando Rossi]
Assistant Producer: Peter Saint [Pietro Santini]
Assistant Director: Frank Prestland [Franco Giraldi]
Script Girl: Tilde Watson
Photographed by: Jack Dalmas [Massimo Dallamano]
Cameraman: Steve Rock [Stelvio Massi]
Special Effects: John Speed [Giovanni Corridori]
Editor: Bob Quintle [Roberto Cinquini]
Art Director: Charles Simons [Carlo Simi]
Set Decorator: Charles Simons [Carlo Simi]
Costumes: Charles Simons [Carlo Simi]
Make-up: Sam Watkins
Music by: Dan Savio [Ennio Morricone]
Sound: Edy Simson
Sound System: Western Electric
Technical Adviser: W.R. Thompkins
Music Edition [Publishers]: R.C.A.
Studio: Elios Film (Rome)

uncredited

Screenplay: Sergio Leone, Duccio Tessari
Dialogue [English Version]: Mark Lowell
Titles: Lardani
English Lyrics: Robert Mellin
Trumpet: Michele Lacerenza
Whistling: Alessandro Alessandroni
Guitar: Bruno Battisti D'Amario
Sound: Elio Pacella

Cast

Clint Eastwood (*The Stranger*)
Marianne Koch (*Marisol, Ramón's woman*)
Johnny Wels [Gian Maria Volonté] (*Ramón Rojo*)
W. [Wolfgang] Lukschy (*Sheriff John Baxter*)
S. [Sieghardt] Rupp (*Estebán Rojo*)
Joe Edger (*Piripero, coffin maker*)
Antonio Prieto (*Don Miguel Rojo*)
José Calvo (*Silvanito, bar owner*)
Margherita Lozano (*Consuelo Baxter, John's wife*)
Daniel Martin (*Julio, Marisol's husband*)
Benny Reeves [Benito Stefanelli] (*Rubio, Ramón's right-hand man*)
Richard Stuyvesant [Mario Brega] (*Chico, Rojo's trusted aide*)
Carol Brown [Bruno Carotenuto] (*Antonio Baxter*)
Aldo Sambrelli (*Ramón gunman with scar*)

uncredited

Freddy Arco (*Jesús, Marisol's son*)
Luis Barboo (*Baxter man sitting on gate*)
Raffaele Baldassarre (*man descending saloon stairs*)
Edmondo Tieghi (*man watching Joe's beating*)
José Orjas
Umberto Spadaro (*Miguel, Rojo gunman*)
Antonio Vico (*Baxter gang member*)

Italy/German Federal Republic/Spain 1964©
100 mins

MORRICONE

The Battle of Algiers (La battaglia di Algeri)

Sun 1 Aug 15:10; Wed 25 Aug 14:30

The Sounds of Ennio Morricone

Mon 2 Aug 18:10

A Fistful of Dollars (Per un pugno di dollari)

Mon 2 Aug 20:45; Sat 7 Aug 11:30; Tue 10 Aug 20:50; Mon 30 12:20

Two Mules for Sister Sara

Wed 4 Aug 18:00; Sat 21 Aug 20:30

Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom (Salò o Le 120 giornate di Sodoma)

Thu 5 Aug 20:45; Tue 10 Aug 17:45; Wed 25 Aug 17:50

The Untouchables

Fri 6 Aug 17:45; Tue 24 Aug 14:30

The Thing

Fri 6 Aug 20:50; Tue 24 Aug 20:50

For a Few Dollars More (Per qualche dollaro in più)

Sat 7 Aug 14:00; Sun 22 Aug 12:10; Mon 30 Aug 15:00

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo)

Sat 7 Aug 17:10; Sun 29 Aug 18:20; Mon 30 Aug 18:15

White Dog

Sat 7 Aug 20:50; Fri 20 Aug 18:10; Fri 27 Aug 20:45

Once upon a Time in the West (C'era una volta il west)

Sun 8 Aug 12:00; Fri 27 Aug 14:00; Tue 31 Aug 14:00

The Mission

Sun 8 Aug 15:10; Thu 12 Aug 20:30; Thu 26 Aug 18:00

Days of Heaven

Mon 9 Aug 21:00; Tue 31 Aug 17:50

Tie Me Up, Tie Me Down (Atame!)

Wed 11 Aug 20:50; Thu 19 Aug 14:15; Mon 23 Aug 21:00; Tue 31 Aug 20:45

The Hateful Eight

Sun 15 Aug 15:00; Sun 22 Aug 18:00

Once upon a Time in America

Tue 17 Aug 17:40; Sat 28 Aug 11:20

The Legend of 1900 (La leggenda del pianista sull'oceano)

Sat 21 Aug 11:50; Sun 29 Aug 15:10

Cinema Paradiso (Nuovo Cinema Paradiso)

Sat 21 Aug 14:30; Thu 26 Aug 14:30

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