



MORRICONE

The Mission

Having crafted what many consider his masterpiece, Morricone was rightly dismayed by the fact that Herbie Hancock received the Oscar for best original score for essentially arranging the work of others for Bertrand Tavernier's jazz drama, *Round Midnight*.

There are numerous highlights in the score for Roland Joffé's Palme d'Or winner, including the interpolated sacred music of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, but 3 pieces stand out. Used early in contrasting contexts, the 'Iguazu Falls Theme' conveys both the scale of the task facing Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) in seeking to convert and protect a 1740s Amazonian tribe, and the scope of the Jesuit's faith. Driven by drums, the 'Guarani Theme' throbs with life in celebrating the culture that the Iberian slavers wish to crush and its combination with the exquisite melody of 'Gabriel's Oboe' in 'On Earth as It Is in Heaven' reveals Morricone's genius in finding an acoustic metaphor for the merger of two worlds.

David Parkinson, bfi.org.uk

The sense of the '*mistica musicale antica*' which so fascinated Ennio Morricone became a powerful element in one of his most celebrated scores of the 1980s, for Roland Joffé's *The Mission* (1986) – a film the composer has always said he feels particularly attached to. The resulting score should have won an Academy Award, especially since *Round Midnight*, the winner that year, featured jazz music that was not written specially for the film.

Ennio Morricone: *The Mission* is a film in which I certainly recognise myself technically and spiritually. It was set in the 1750s, a period, in Europe, of important developments for instrumental music. The oboe's theme is actually conditioned by the language and culture of the Jesuits at that time, but also by the fact that Jeremy Irons couldn't really play the oboe – to start with, he just moved his fingers at random! That was the first element.

The second element I took into account was 'Palestrinian polyphony'. Because before the Council of Trent [in the mid-16th century] and the Counter-Reformation, people used to casually combine sacred texts with profane melodies, and sacred melodies with profane text. The Council of Trent tried to bring some coherence to this... and the finest exponent of the polyphonic treatment of sacred texts at that time was Palestrina, who was a very important interpreter of these rules in Italy. Where the folk music in the film was concerned – the third element – I was creating an illusion because I had none of the indigenous musicians or instruments. I wasn't even familiar with the music of the Indios – so I had to invent something that I felt was right, that I felt could have been. These were the three main elements. I do not love to compose music that is conditioned by history – I prefer to be free – but I had to take all these things into account.

Extract from an interview with Morricone by Christopher Frayling, reprinted in *Sight & Sound*, December 2020

A contemporary review

It is an old, old story, but Roland Joffé and screenwriter Robert Bolt make a brave new assault on it and for the most part honourably succeed. The true events occur in the Spanish and Portuguese possessions in South America in the middle of the 18th century. Jesuit missions threaten by their economic as

much as spiritual success to undermine the authority not only of the colonial empires, but equally of the central Roman Church. More particularly, they look like souring the delicately queasy relationship between Church and States, in which the former turns a blind eye, in return for nominal allegiance, to the sinful depredations of the latter, not least their slave trading. A papal nuncio, Altamirano, is dispatched to adjudicate between the antagonists: the colonial powers who want to see the missions closed, and the Jesuits. Carefully weighing the shorter glories of the missions against the longer glories of the Holy Roman Church and Empire, the nuncio finds, regretfully, for the European powers. The Indians cannot believe that God has changed his mind. They decide to fight for what they have made into a brave new world, and some if not all of the priests join in the doomed enterprise.

One who joins is Mendoza, a former slave trader himself, rescued from sin and converted by Father Gabriel, who himself will not fight. Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons are the centre of the character battle. But first the violent Mendoza expiates his lifetime's misdeeds in a penance to the mission on the high plateau. He drags the burden of his sins, literally, in a net behind him, a great ball of armour and weapons, the tokens of his former life, upstream, through jungle, across mountain and, agonisingly, up the vertical face of a cataract. It is the most spectacular of many dazzling sequences. It is crowned by the moment when the distraught and exhausted penitent hauls his burden to the feet of the Indians who were once his victims and sees them absolve him by cutting not his throat as they first threaten, but the rope that binds him to the net, sending his torture crashing hundreds of feet to the river below.

At these moments, and there are several of them, Joffé is well in command of this emotional commitments. It has to be said of course that he has the world's most powerful screen actor lending a hand. De Niro is simply a lap ahead; but then, part of the good director's armoury is persuading the best people to work for him. Money alone won't do it, and Joffé rightly enjoys his confidence. But perhaps the best performance, since it is the most difficult, is Ray McAnally's. Altamirano is a subtle prelate, and McAnally does the complicated thing superbly: convey honest doubt, decent confusion, ultimate compromise, tragic self-awareness. He's an attractive figure who makes the wrong decision. We never question that his doubt was honest, nor that the outcome was deeply suspect. There is evidence possibly that the structure, in which his report to the Pope forms the narrative envelope, incorporating flashbacks, was arrived at rather late in the proceedings. It's a small sense of awkwardness and complexity that occasionally conflicts with the clear directness of the tone, but it is not damaging. At least it enables McAnally to address us with all the ironic texture of the most advanced intelligence on display – and to confront us, the audience, with a final bold post-credits accusatory glare.

But why go back to the middle of the 18th century for a moral history lesson? Joffé and Bolt (and David Puttnam and Fernando Ghia) have clearly felt the pressing lessons. Fortunately, Joffé has learned a light touch here in the analogy department. Only the piercing honesty of our world-class cinematographer Chris Menges occasionally burns an image right through its housing and lands it with a jolt on our doorstep; a heap of naked wet babies stacked in the mud awaiting the blade; the bemused flight of the poor, the innocent, the betrayed down the centuries.

Gavin Millar, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1986

THE MISSION

Director: Roland Joffé
Production Companies: Kingsmere Properties, Goldcrest Films, Enigma Productions
Producers: Fernando Ghia, David Puttnam
Associate Producer: Iain Smith
Production Supervisor: Barrie Melrose
Production Co-ordinator: Judi Bunn
Production Accountants: Brian Harris, John Sargent
Location Unit Managers: Philip Kohler, David Nichols, Pamela Wells
1st Assistant Directors: Bill Westley, Gerry Toomey
Continuity: Pat Rambaut
Casting: Juliet Taylor, Susie Figgis
Screenplay from his own story: Robert Bolt
Director of Photography: Chris Menges
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Robin Vidgeon
Camera Operator: Mike Roberts
Focus Puller: Jeremy Gee
Clapper Loaders: Tom McDougal, Tom Taylor
Camera Grips: Tony Cridlin, Bill Geddes, Fred Harris
Special Effects Supervisor: Peter Hutchinson
Editor: Jim Clark
1st Assistant Editor: Bryan Oates
Production Designer: Stuart Craig
Supervising Art Director: Norman Dorme
Art Directors: George Richardson, John King
Property Master: Terry Wells
Construction Manager: Jack Carter
Costume Designer: Enrico Sabbatini
Wardrobe Masters: Giovanni Viti, Thomas Casterline
Wardrobe Mistresses: Anna Orazi, Uliva Pizetti
Makeup Supervisor: Tommie Manderson
Make-up Artists: Kenneth Lintott, Sallie Evans, Madelene Gaffney
Chief Hairdresser: Paula Gillespie
Wig Maker: Charlotte Bakker
Titles/Graphics: Richard Morrison
Music/Music Conductor/Orchestration: Ennio Morricone
Music Performed by: The London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Voices, Barnet Schools Choir, Incantation
Music Recording: Dick Lewzey

Sound Mixers: Clive Winter, Hernando Tejada
Boom Operator: Allan Brereton
Sound Maintenance: Trevor Rutherford
Dubbing Mixers: Bill Rowe, Ray Merrin
Sound Editors: Chris Ackland, Ian Fuller
Dialogue Editor: Martin Evans
Stunt Co-ordinator: Vic Armstrong
Supervising Rock Climber: Joe Brown
Indian Acting Coach: Peter Wallace
Armourer: Carl Schmidt, Simon Atherton

Cast

Robert De Niro (Captain Rodrigo Mendoza)
Jeremy Irons (Father Gabriel)
Ray McAnally (Cardinal Altamirano)
Aidan Quinn (Felipe)
Cherie Lunghi (Carlotta)
Ronald Pickup (Hontar)
Chuck Low (Don Cabeza)
Liam Neeson (Fielding)
Bercelio Moya (Indian boy)
Sigifredo Ismare (witch doctor)
Asunción Ontiveros (Indian chief)
Alejandrino Moya (chief's lieutenant)
Daniel Berrigan (Sebastian)
Rolf Gray (young Jesuit)
Álvaro Guerrero (Jesuit)
Tony Lawn (Father Provincial)
Joe Daly (nobleman)
Carlos Duplat (Portuguese commander)
Rafael Camerano (Spanish commander)
Monirak Sisowath (Ibaye)
Silvestre Chiripua (Indian)
Luis Carlos Gonzalez (boy singer)
Maria Teresa Ripoll (Carlotta's maid)

UK/France 1986
125 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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