



## JOHN BARRY: SOUNDTRACKING BOND AND BEYOND

# Boom

### Boom

*Directed by:* Joseph Losey  
*©:* Universal Pictures Limited  
*Production Companies:* World Film Services Ltd., Moonlake Productions, Universal Pictures Limited  
*Presented by:* Universal  
*Produced by:* John Heyman, Norman Priggen  
*Associate Producer:* Lester Persky  
*Production Supervisor:* Ottavio Oppo  
*Unit Manager:* Valerio de Paolis  
*Assistant Director:* Carlo Lastricati  
*Continuity:* Helen Whitson  
*Screenplay by:* Tennessee Williams  
*From the play* *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* *by:* Tennessee Williams  
*Lighting Cameraman:* Douglas Scombe  
*Camera Operator:* Chic Waterson  
*Editor:* Reginald Beck  
*Production Designed by:* Richard MacDonald  
*Miss Taylor's Clothes:* Tiziani of Rome  
*Wardrobe Supervisor:* Annalisa Nasalli Rocco  
*Jewellery:* Bulgari (Rome)  
*Noël Coward's Suit:* Douglas Hayward  
*Elizabeth Taylor's Make-up:* Frank La Rue  
*Richard Burton's Make-up:* Ron Berkeley  
*Miss Taylor's Hairstyles Designed/Created by:* Alexandre de Paris  
*Miss Taylor's Hairstyles Executed by:* Claudie Etori  
*Filmed in:* Panavision  
*Processed by:* Humphries Film Laboratories  
*Music Composed and Conducted by:* John Barry  
*Indian Sitar Music by:* Nazirali Jairazbnoy, Viram Jasani  
*Sound Recordists:* Leslie Hammond, Gerry Humphreys  
*Sound System:* RCA  
*Dubbing Editor:* Alan Bell  
*Play Produced on the Broadway Stage by:* Roger L. Stevens  
*Made at:* De Laurentiis Studios (Rome)  
*uncredited*  
*1st Assistant Editor:* Roger Wilson  
*2nd Assistant Editor:* David Hitchcock  
*Art Director:* John Clark  
*Assistant to the Production Designer:* Jorie Pepper  
*Set Dresser:* Jill Oxley  
*Construction Manager:* Ron Grundy  
*Make-up:* George Claff  
*Hair:* Bill Griffiths  
*Boom Operator:* Fred Tomlin  
*Cast:*  
Elizabeth Taylor (*Flora 'Sissy' Goforth*)  
Richard Burton (*Christopher 'Chris' Flanders*)  
Noël Coward (*Bill Ridgeway, The Witch of Capri*)  
Joanna Shimkus (*Miss Black, 'Blackie', Goforth's secretary*)  
Michael Dunn (*Rudi, Goforth's watchman*)  
Romolo Valli (*Doctor Lullo, Goforth's doctor*)  
Howard Taylor (*journalist*)  
Fernando Piazza (*Etti, Goforth's butler*)  
Veronica Wells (*Simonetta, Goforth's maid*)  
*uncredited*  
Gens Bloch (*photographer on boat*)  
Franco Pesce (*villager*)  
Claudie Etori (*manicurist*)  
Nazirali Jairazbnoy, Viram Jasani (*sitar players*)  
Sergio Carozzi  
Giovanni Paganelli  
UK/USA 1968©  
112 mins  
35mm

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

Set on a secluded island, *Boom* introduced a new, minimal 'music box' sound that Barry frequently used in the years immediately before his move to the US. The powerhouse combination of Burton and Taylor at their most florid propels Joseph Losey's adaptation of Tennessee Williams' *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore*. Wonderfully camp, it bombed in 1968. But time has been kind to it. And Noël Coward has a star turn as Bill Ridgeway, 'the witch of Capri'.

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### A contemporary review

Sooner or later in one's life someone knocks the ramparts down. Vulnerability, or the fear of it, are the conditions of mind that follow. Rebuild the defences, and they may never fall again. Leave them down, and the comfortable precincts of self-lie open to erosion. This dilemma seems to crystallise in each of Losey's film: cry for help (like the wife in *The Prowler*) and find betrayal, or preserve a growling independence (like the heroine of *Eve*) and settle for a fatal loneliness. If a balance exists between the two, Losey's characters rarely discover it. Rather, they seesaw wildly from one extreme to the other – the arrogant master changes places with the contemptuous servant, the rational scholar becomes a would-be rapist, the curt army officer turns ardent pacifist. The transitions, of course, do represent a kind of progress from fantasy to actuality, but the pendulum then swings further still and a new fantasy takes over. Whether it is an improvement or not Losey doesn't bother to mention; maintaining an utter detachment, he is content to observe and to leave the deductions to his audience.

In a sense, Losey places himself actually with his audience. An intense curiosity is prominent in his films, as though he too were seeing the characters and their settings for the first time and felt slightly in awe of them. In *Boom* the slow, contemplative tracking shots take us through richly furnished rooms with an awareness of textures, of mellow lights and shadows, and above all of an atmosphere of expectancy. In the Goforth villa, a servant, a bodyguard or a secretary could be just behind the next pilaster. *Boom* is constructed around the theme of intrusion, on the narrative level that of unwanted (but clearly vital) arrival on the island of independence, and on the cinematic level that of an inquisitive audience on a series of tableaux which, like rocks, mosaics and furniture, have a centuries-old story to tell whether anyone listens or not. In their construction, *Accident*, *Boom*, and *Secret Ceremony*, an immaculate trilogy of introspection, resist almost tangibly the invasion of the critic, interpreter or commentator, turning him away with a reflective, flawless surface – the archetypal Losey mirror.

The trespasser in *Boom*, like the girl in *Accident* who preceded him, is a more complex individual than appearances at first suggest. Discounting, as one must, that he is portrayed by Richard Burton in a mood of cheerful hairiness that Tatsuya Nakadai would put to shame with one elegant eyebrow, his determined scrutiny of the dying days of Mrs Goforth has a cannibalistic hunger about it which rightly goes far beyond what is hinted by the shots that introduce him (from a giant close-up of her jewelled hand to his figure tramping along the road). As he scales her mountain, his shouts echoing into her dictated memoirs, the regal disdain with which she chooses to ignore him has its own echoes of immortal omnipotence. If she is dying (and for all the

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### Boom

Sat 24 Feb 15:10; Wed 28 Feb 18:00

### Midnight Cowboy

Sat 24 Feb 17:50; Wed 28 Feb 20:45

### The Whisperers

Sat 24 Feb 20:40

### Deadfall

Sun 25 Feb 18:15

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injections and transfusions Elizabeth Taylor makes this rather too difficult to believe), she needs neither help nor sympathy in the process. But the visitor seems undeterred by her refusal to feed him or by the samurai robe she selects for him to wear, or by the way she describes the death of the original Goforth over a loudspeaker system in the middle of the night, or delves into his luggage at gunpoint. Her armour, encompassing a small tribe of recalcitrant courtiers, is only proof against him for as long as she wears it; when she voluntarily weakens enough to invite him into her bedroom she finds, to her hazy surprise, that her guest has his own brand of integrity.

The splendid consistency of Mrs Goforth is that as she dies she is still giving orders, and is still convinced, despite some early shudders at the Angel of Death label carried by her new parasite, that even if he doesn't want her, he certainly wants her wealth. This pragmatic paranoia has, of course, always been demonstrated by Tennessee Williams' heroines, tragically unable to comprehend how their menfolk could have more perverse obsessions than woman-hunting; like Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Mrs Goforth revels in the philosophical turn of phrase ('My next chapter,' she announces sweepingly, 'is on the Meaning of Life') and in nostalgic memories of former loves. She denies strenuously that she is ill, despite the blood on her handkerchief, and composes herself for death on her Borghese bed as if for a brief doze. Whereupon the gleeful houseguest pitches her jewels into the sea. Boom – 'the shock of each moment of being alive,' he comments, with slightly jaded lyricism, as the waves pound their rhythm below.

It's the miscasting that throws *Boom* somewhat out of gear, coupled perhaps with the startling transposition from Williams' country to a Sardinian island. Given a magnificent location and the smooth lines of Richard MacDonald's white architecture, however, Losey has created a fable that transcends its players just as kabuki (the analogous references in the film need be strained no further) relies only on the most formal movements and expressions to convey its meanings. The timeless landscapes and luminous beauty of the interiors (the shot of Mrs Goforth at last ordering dinner by the fireside would have been worthy of Dreyer if he had ever ventured into colour) convey far more powerfully than the brittle conversations on the terrace the extent to which the Goforth domain is peopled with living dead.

A flurry of wind breathes the impotent autobiography into chaos, the sunlight is too fierce or vanishes altogether (at one point, by an uncharacteristic lapse in continuity, reappearing firmly after the script has written it out), while the sea, in which the Angel of Death occasionally takes a dip, waits patiently to reclaim the lives that belong to it. Encompassed by such forces, the small span of Mrs Goforth's intellect and influence is made pathetically clear ('I have lots of art treasures in my bedroom – myself included'), and her tyrannical charade rightly seems based on blindness. Her guest gives her a number of shocks by attempting to drag her off into the wilderness, but these serve only to accelerate her decline. Like the aristocrat in *The Servant*, she can be thrown out of her depth rather too easily, whereas her elusive companion seems to be familiar with all the currents, human or elemental. And he has the necessary merit of a sense of humour, obscured as it sometimes is by a ponderous dose of pontification. 'You're not so tough that some day you're not going to need something that will mean God to you,' he snarls, incorrectly as it turns out. But Elizabeth Taylor stands in the folds of a huge golden-headed sculpture, and as usual Losey's imagery speaks volumes more than his script.

Philip Strick, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1969