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# Marathon Man

Supplemental Liner Notes

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## Marathon Man

The death of book editor Hiram Haydn in 1973 proved to be a turning point for screenwriter and novelist William Goldman. Goldman had worked with Haydn for 15 years, beginning with his third novel, *Solider in the Rain*, and he “worshipped” Haydn, seeing him as a father figure and later writing that he would have stayed with the editor “forever.” At the time, Goldman’s screenwriting career focused largely on highly commercial genre projects, most notably his Oscar-winning screenplay for 1969’s smash hit *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. But his novels tended toward the realm of serious fiction—so much so that when he wrote his first thriller, *No Way to Treat a Lady*, Haydn told him, “I have no idea how to edit this. Why don’t you take it somewhere else and do it under a pseudonym?” Goldman took his advice, first publishing the novel under the pseudonym “Harry Longbaugh” (the given name of the Sundance Kid).

*The Princess Bride*, Goldman’s favorite of his own novels, was the final project Haydn edited for Goldman. When his editor passed on, the author was “shocked and saddened, didn’t know quite what I wanted to write, but I did know there was a world of material that I was fascinated with that I was never allowed to try when he was mentoring me.” Goldman was a fan of spy thrillers, especially the works of Eric Ambler and Graham Greene: “Of course you know you can’t reach that level, but hope is a thing with feathers and away you go.” Although he had at that point adapted his novel *The Thing of It Is* as an unproduced screenplay, overall he kept his movie and novel writing separate, including his planned spy thriller. “I had no intention or notion when I was writing that book that it was ever going to be a movie. Never ever.”

Goldman felt that a thriller must begin with its villain, so he conceived of a Nazi war criminal inspired by the real-life Dr. Josef Mengele, nicknamed “The Angel of Death,” who had conducted ghastly medical experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz-Birkenau during World War II. Goldman saw Mengele as “the most intellectually startling of the Nazis,” who was still alive in the 1970s, hiding in Paraguay. Goldman named his villain Christian Szell, after the Hungarian conductor George Szell (“Szell. . . just saying it made me feel sadistic”). It should be noted that George Szell was, as *Time* wrote in 1944, “a Jewish refugee from Nazi Europe and a fervent Hitler-hater” (although in the next sentence, the article did go on to say that “his outward manner suggests the average American idea of the typical Nazi”).

Goldman needed a logical and dramatic reason to

bring his Nazi villain to 1970s New York. (“If I were English, he would have come to London, but I live in New York so here came Szell.”) Having read an article on a revolutionary heart operation performed by a doctor in Cleveland, he decided that Szell would come to America for lifesaving surgery, until he asked himself, “What kind of a thriller do you have if the villain is already dying?” Abandoning the surgery idea, Goldman then read an article on Nazis who got rich stealing gold from the teeth of prisoners. Inspired by the memory of a hated dentist from his childhood—who would pin the young Goldman down in the dental chair with his knee while working without anesthetic—the author made Szell a dentist who comes to the U.S. to retrieve a fortune in diamonds.

Goldman felt his hero needed to be “a total innocent,” and was particularly intrigued by the question, “What if someone close to you was something totally different from what you thought?” He made his protagonist a brilliant graduate student in history at Columbia University: Thomas Babington “Babe” Levy, a compulsive marathon trainer still haunted by the suicide of his blacklisted father. Babe is unaware that “Doc,” his beloved older brother, is actually an American spy with the code name “Scylla.” With a Nazi dentist as his villain, Goldman planned to feature a scene in which Babe undergoes dental torture at Szell’s hands and decided to give Babe a toothache early in the story to make the torture even more agonizing. Goldman asked his periodontist, “a genuinely kind and decent human being,” for advice, and the doctor suggested instead that Szell drill into a healthy tooth, describing with disturbing relish how “the level of agony would be unsurpassable. Death would be preferable. The memory of being destroyed in the chair would never leave you.” Goldman spent the summer of 1973 writing his novel, which he titled *Marathon Man*, in an Upper East Side office that his friend, director George Roy Hill, described as “scrofulous.” Unaware that he tended to read his scenes aloud as he wrote, the author alarmed a neighbor who heard Goldman loudly enacting the torture scene.

The novel arrived in bookstores at the beginning of 1974 and became a bestseller in hardback. The film rights sold to Paramount Pictures and producers Robert Evans and Sidney Beckerman for \$500,000, with Goldman also signed to write the screenplay. Evans’s first choice to direct the film was John Schlesinger, who had specialized in small-scale character studies like *Darling*, *Sunday*, *Bloody Sunday* and his Oscar-winning *Midnight Cowboy*, but who relished the chance to work in a new genre: “I simply adore thrillers. I love the

complexities of this story and the task of creating the element of fantasy a thriller should have. That's the fun part." Schlesinger had also directed a segment of the Olympics documentary *Visions of Eight* titled "The Longest," about marathon runners, and saw *Marathon Man* as a story about "pain, and the endurance of pain."

Schlesinger worked closely with Goldman on the screenplay, particularly concerned with adding "texture" to the scenes, such as a recurring idea of "cities in crisis"—garbage strikes, luggage strikes, public demonstrations. Schlesinger incorporated inspirations from his location scouting trips; while walking through Manhattan with Goldman on Yom Kippur, he decided to set an opening car-crash sequence on the Jewish holiday—"the image of Jews rushing out, having a break from the shul, and rushing toward these burning vehicles. It had a sort of pertinence"—particularly since Schlesinger saw the film as a "Jewish thriller." After witnessing Parisians observing a street demonstration from their balconies, he incorporated this element into a scene in which Doc is attacked in his Paris hotel room. Goldman simplified the parts of the novel that took place in Europe, condensing it to a Parisian section "which is not, believe me, a Shakespearean episode," and added a murder at the opera: "Basically John's an opera nut and he always wanted to shoot the Paris opera."

Goldman may not have originally conceived *Marathon Man* as a movie, but the final script stayed largely faithful to his novel. The film, like the book, begins with the death of Szell's brother in a fiery Manhattan car crash. This accident brings together the lives of three people: Babe, who is about to begin a romance with the beautiful Swiss student Elsa; the spy Doc, who discovers that the couriers for Szell's diamonds are being killed off and that he may be next; and Szell himself, who travels incognito from Uruguay to New York to retrieve his gems. When Doc learns that Babe and Elsa have been mugged in Central Park by Szell's goons, he travels to New York and tries to convince Babe that Elsa is not who she claims to be. Doc confronts Szell, who fatally stabs him, but the spy survives long enough to die in Babe's arms. Peter Janeway, Doc's colleague and (implied) lover, questions Babe, warning him that Szell's men may come after him. Indeed, Szell's goons abduct Babe and the Nazi doctor tortures him with dental tools, seeking the answer to a mysterious question: "Is it safe?" (for Szell to retrieve his jewels from the bank). Babe escapes and travels with Elsa (secretly one of Szell's couriers) to the countryside, where a shootout with Janeway (who has been working with Szell) and Szell's henchmen leaves everyone except Babe dead. Szell manages to get his di-

amonds safely from the bank, but a gun-toting Babe confronts him, now telling him "It isn't safe"—their final confrontation leaves Szell dead and his diamonds scattered in the Central Park Reservoir.

Goldman's published screenplay features a framing device flashing forward to Babe being interrogated by the police after Doc's murder, but the finished film drops this gimmick. The novel and screenplay also alert readers early on that Elsa is league with the villains, but the film only reveals this when Babe learns the truth. The screenplay's ending underwent many revisions: Goldman preferred to have Babe kill Szell, although one of his drafts ended with Babe tearing up Szell's passport and the Nazi committing suicide rather than letting the authorities arrest him. The filmmakers brought in Robert Towne (an Oscar-winner for *Chinatown*) to write a new version of the final scene, with Babe forcing Szell to eat his diamonds. Schlesinger was pleased with the new ending, which he saw as "Jacobean," though Goldman felt it weakened Szell as a villain to have him perish by falling on his own knife.

Robert Evans's top choice to play Babe was Dustin Hoffman. Schlesinger resisted the casting at first—he had hoped to cast an unknown, and the 38-year-old Hoffman was arguably too old to play a graduate student—but the star was eager to work with his *Midnight Cowboy* director again and Schlesinger relented. *Women's Wear Daily* announced that Tony Curtis was set to play Doc, but the role went instead to Roy Scheider, fresh off the blockbuster success of *Jaws*.

Actor Michael York recommended Marthe Keller for the role of Elsa after seeing her on the Paris stage in *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*. The filmmakers flew to France to meet her, but according to Keller, "Nobody introduced themselves, so I didn't know which one was John Schlesinger. So I lit up a cigarette and said, 'I loved *Midnight Cowboy*,' knowing the one who said 'thank you' would be John." Evans flew Keller out to Los Angeles to test with Hoffman; the producer had no doubts about her acting, but wanted to make sure of the chemistry between his stars: "The worst thing you can do is to sign someone and discover the vibes between the players aren't good."

The role of Szell caused the most problems, although Evans knew whom he wanted from the start: Laurence Olivier. Illness had plagued Olivier during the mid-1970s, limiting the great actor to small roles, such as Professor Moriarty in *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*. Olivier was willing to play Szell, but his ailing health made it uncertain whether the studio could insure him for the film. Knowing that the filmmakers wanted Olivier, Richard Widmark visited Schlesinger and Goldman at Schlesinger's London home to read for the role. Goldman later described Widmark's au-

dition as “frightening” and “sensational,” but Evans was later able to convince Lloyds of London to insure Olivier for six weeks—and only six weeks—of filming.

The cast began two weeks of rehearsals with Schlesinger and Goldman on September 15, 1975, in Manhattan’s Huntington Hartford Theater. Goldman reported that no one was eager to ask Olivier about shaving his head, as the role required, but at the first rehearsal Olivier himself asked, “Would it be possible for me to be shaved bald now? I think it might be best to get it done.” Schlesinger suggested that Szell should have a moustache, but Olivier instead thought the director “should use to the maximum my mean little mouth.” Olivier was inspired in his portrayal by watching the gardener at Robert Evans’s home: “The care he took pruning each branch. The delicacy of his touch. That is how I shall torture Dustin.”

Schlesinger emphasized during rehearsals that the cast would need to make their performances believable to counteract the larger-than-life nature of the story, to “play it as if it’s Chekhov: so seriously, so truthfully, so realistically.” William Devane, cast as Janeway, explained to Goldman his views on rehearsing with Olivier. “This is rehearsal. It’s nothing. When the camera starts to roll, he’ll give me a little of this, he’ll give me a little of that, and you’ll never know I’m in the movie. No one’s going to be watching me—that’s Olivier, man.” Goldman felt the “most memorable incident of my movie career” came when Olivier, “the actor of the century,” called him “Bill” and asked his permission to make a slight change in a line of dialogue. For Goldman, that was “high cotton.” The low point for Goldman came after an otherwise successful first reading of the script, when the man hired as the film’s dentistry adviser remarked, “I don’t know about the rest of you, but frankly I have a lot of problems with the screenplay.” Goldman screamed at him, “You’re here for teeth. Leave the goddam script alone,” and later wrote, “If I’d had a gun and thought I could get away with it, the guy was dead.”

Filming began in Paris on October 3, 1975, on a \$6.5 million budget. The production moved to New York City for five weeks of filming beginning on October 17, including such locations as Central Park and Columbia University. Schlesinger discovered that while Hoffman liked to improvise to discover new approaches to a scene, Olivier preferred to memorize the script as written and remain faithful to it. For scenes in which Hoffman needed to be sweaty or exhausted, he would find a place near the set to run laps—and in locations that rendered this impractical, he had a personal sauna on hand. Hoffman’s need to be genuinely exhausted for a scene inspired the most famous quote that emerged from the production of *Marathon Man*, at-

tributed to Olivier and repeated by many of the film’s participants, with the older actor asking, “Why doesn’t he just try acting?” Hoffman confirms that Olivier said it, but insisted that it was merely a joke between the two stars, admitting that some of his exhaustion actually came from ’70s-style partying. Makeup effects artist Dick Smith, who had worked with Hoffman on several films, including *Midnight Cowboy* and *Little Big Man*, designed a dental appliance for Hoffman that made him appear younger and kept his teeth looking consistent before and after the torture scene. Smith also created memorable gore effects, such as a garrote wound on Scheider’s hand during the hotel fight and the throat cutting of a diamond merchant.

Schlesinger and his crew filmed a memorable sequence in which Szell finds himself stalked by Auschwitz survivors in the actual Manhattan diamond district, but had to reschedule the filming to a Saturday, when shops were closed, because the real jewelers tended to walk into the frame and look at the camera. For the opening car-crash sequence, the effects crew did a test explosion on City Island in Long Island Sound, with three fire chiefs and two bomb squad members on hand. The actual sequence was staged two days later, on Halloween afternoon, on East 91st Street in Manhattan, but as *New York* magazine reported, the on-camera explosion was a disappointment—“instead of shooting to the sky, the flames burn gently, politely, limply”—so Schlesinger asked editor Jim Clark to carefully structure the scene to make the blast look more impressive. Another minor mishap occurred when filming a scene in which Janeway chases Babe over a pile of dirt in lower Manhattan. Reaching for Hoffman, Devane accidentally got too close and pulled down Hoffman’s pajama bottoms, exposing his bare backside to the onlookers.

Schlesinger’s strongest memory of making the film was of working with Olivier, “this great stage and screen actor, who’d been very sick for quite a long time, getting better with every day he worked. The relish he had for the role and for working was quite moving.” Schlesinger discovered the star’s self-deprecating side, as when the director tried to tone down Olivier’s acting by asking him to make the scene more “intimate,” with Olivier replying, “You mean cut off the ham fat, dear boy?”

Filming concluded in the Los Angeles area during January 1976, with the Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden in Arcadia doubling for Uruguay and the fatal argument between Doc and Szell unfolding at the Arco Plaza in downtown L.A. in front of Herbert Bayer’s distinctive 1973 sculpture “Double Ascension.” The interior of a pump station at the Central Park Reservoir—the site of Babe and

Szell's final confrontation—was actually a \$135,000 set designed by Richard MacDonald, built in Stage 15 on the Paramount Pictures lot.

Schlesinger described the six months he spent editing the film with Jim Clark as “the most fascinating period I’ve ever spent in film. We really had a wonderful time trying things. A few inches can make a difference as to whether a scene works or doesn’t in this kind of film. You can manipulate it so.” He was particularly impressed with producer Robert Evans’s attention to detail during the process. “On a piece of dub he might say, ‘Don’t have the breathing there because it’ll be more frightening if you just have the door creaks,’ or, ‘You might want more door creaks earlier.’”

The film had its first, successful sneak preview in what the filmmakers described as “Clint Eastwood country,” but a second preview, held in San Francisco, proved much more problematic. According to Clark, “I guess it was the politics of the people of San Francisco coupled with the fact that the air conditioning had broken down. It was hot as hell in there and whenever there was violence on the screen people were shouting ‘Fascist rubbish!’ and things like that.”

Schlesinger felt that “instead of turning on to the emotions, audiences were turning off to the effects of the violence.” He decided to make significant cuts in the more violent scenes, removing the gory shots of Szell’s fountainside disemboweling of Doc and significantly trimming the dental torture of Babe, losing graphic inserts filmed by Clark. Most significantly, Schlesinger eliminated Scheider’s original introduction, a scene retained from the novel in which Doc loses control and kills two assassins after they murder another veteran agent. For Goldman, this was a “grievous” cut, as the original scene established Doc’s vulnerability, showing him as “a guy who’s dead but won’t lie down” and giving Doc’s scenes with Babe a stronger emotional subtext. “Without that eight-and-a-half-minute scene, you see a superstud.”

*Marathon Man* premiered in U.S. theaters in October 1976, ultimately grossing \$21 million and earning generally strong reviews. Jay Cocks in *Time* called it “the year’s most cunning entertainment,” and Judith Crist in *Saturday Review* went even further, describing it as “a film of such rich texture and density, so fascinatingly complex in its unfolding, so engrossing in its personalities, and so powerful in its performance and pace that the seduction of the senses has physical force... a potential neo-classic of the thriller genre.”

Goldman’s screenplay and Schlesinger’s direction earned suitable praise, but the stars received the majority of the raves for the film. Cocks felt that Hoffman gave one of his best performances, and John Simon in *New York* regarded his performance in the torture

scene as “the perfect blend of agony and comic absurdity that characterizes nightmares.” Richard Corliss in *New Times* especially appreciated his work in the kidnapping scene, the way “the naked Hoffman makes the difficulty he has trying to put on his pajama bottoms into a tense, hilarious ballet of klutzy hysteria.”

Roy Scheider also garnered strong reviews, with Gordon Gow in *Films & Filming* praising his “quiet, shrewd, enlivening, enthralling performance... which... comes very close, in minimal time, to stealing the show,” and John Simon felt he played the role “with extraordinary authenticity,” and was an actor who “unerringly hits the true note of humanity even among hoked-up circumstances.” But it should come as no surprise that Laurence Olivier received the most attention from the critics. Reviewers such as Ray Loynd in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* (“Olivier makes a two-beat horror role resonant with his art”) and A.D. Murphy in *Variety* (“Olivier gives an A-budget version of what George Zucco did in hundreds of formula programmers”) noted how the star transcended the pulpy nature of his role, while John Simon went into great detail, praising the actor’s “combination of petty shrewdness, stolidity, and querulous self-pity... refreshingly different from the usual arrogant demon; welcome, too, are the less-Prussian-than-usual accent and the wonderfully realized walk in which military bearing has begun to crumble into shards of senile stiffness.” Olivier earned the film’s only Oscar nomination, for Supporting Actor (the film was also short-listed for Conrad Hall’s cinematography), and the film marked a resurgence in both his health and career—two years later he earned a Best Actor nomination for another international thriller, *The Boys from Brazil*, this time portraying a Jewish hero while Gregory Peck played a Nazi antagonist, none other than Josef Mengele (Goldman’s model for Szell).

Goldman envisioned his story as a spy thriller, but three decades later the film version of *Marathon Man* plays more like a horror film, and an exceptionally effective one. The political elements of the story—Nazi war crimes, McCarthyism—may have less contemporary relevance than they did in the mid-’70s, but the nightmarish elements of the story remain as powerful as ever. The film feels surprisingly contemporary, from the road-rage incident that begins the story (long before the term “road rage” even existed) to the desaturated color in the flashbacks of Babe’s childhood. The dental torture sequence was the film’s most notorious element at the time of its release—so much so that Goldman says he witnessed audience members leave in droves for the lobby in order to miss it—but Olivier’s repeated question “Is it safe?” may be even better remembered today, arguably one of the most

quoted lines of '70s cinema. Babe's late-night abduction is even more chilling than the torture scene, and the moment when Janeway brings Babe back to his captors after his "rescue" is a brilliant (and oft-imitated) twist. Schlesinger does a masterful job in directing the suspense and action scenes—particularly impressive for someone who had never worked in the genre before—and his determination that the actors should play their roles "truthfully" and "realistically" pays off beautifully, as Hoffman's utter conviction plays perfectly against Olivier's understated menace.

Goldman brought Babe Levy back one more time for a sequel novel, *Brothers*, published in 1987. Surprisingly, Goldman also brought back Doc—not dead, as *Marathon Man* would have had us believe, but kept alive by sci-fi means—but the book, Goldman's final novel to date, proved to be a disappointment and has gone unfiled.

John Schlesinger saw *Marathon Man* as a story about "pain, and the endurance of pain," and conveyed this impression to composer Michael Small. Over his three decades of scoring for film and television, Small (who died in 2003) worked in nearly every genre, including comedy, romance, western, science fiction and documentary, but it is his scores for the paranoid thrillers of the 1970s and '80s for which he is best remembered. His elegantly sinister music provides the perfect accompaniment for an era during which many Americans felt as much fear of their government as they did about ordinary criminals.

Small's career as a musical stylist for free-floating paranoia began with his score for the Oscar-winning *Klute*, and continued with his work on such thrillers as *The Stepford Wives*, *Rollover* and *The Star Chamber*. His music for Alan J. Pakula's 1974 assassination conspiracy thriller *The Parallax View* remains one of his most acclaimed works, and Schlesinger used cues from its score in his temp track for *Marathon Man*, admitting that he asked Small to "really rip himself off."

The theme Small introduces in the main title sequence for Babe obsessively running laps around the Central Park Reservoir—intercut with shots of Szell's brother at a bank—dominates the score. According to Small, "I needed to find a motif that would go with these shots in a very rhythmic way. I felt that the score needed music that had the pulse of a man running. In fact the sound effect of his feet is the 'rhythm track.'" In the opening titles, Small also introduces a musical effect created by his keyboardist, Ian Underwood, which Small described as "a kind of a scream which went not only with terror and torture but also with the limits pushed by being a marathon runner."

Small was particularly happy with the "skewered anthem" he wrote for a scene in which Szell arrives in

New York, and one of the most striking elements in his score is the use of a 12-tone row—"the first and last time I have gone this route." He felt that the use of the row gave "a felt unity (because the notes are the same) between the heavy running sequences and the sparkly sounds when Hoffman throws the diamonds down the drain at the end." Small creates striking variations of his row, especially the nightmarish rendition when Babe discovers that the seemingly helpful Janeway has actually delivered him back to his torturer.

Mainstream film critics remarked upon the score favorably, especially Arthur Knight, who reviewed the film for both *Westways* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. In the latter publication, he went into particular detail about the music, opining: "No less helpful is Michael Small's score, with its ominous chords when we see Olivier, its romantic piano theme when Hoffman is seen with Keller." Schlesinger himself felt that the score "worked so beautifully," and Small admitted that the success of the film and its music kept him working steadily in Hollywood for another decade.

—Scott Bettencourt

**1. Main Title 1M1RY** The film opens with archival footage of marathon champion Abebe Bikila from the 1964 Olympics. Small provides an air of tension with pitch-bending strings, bell tree and "screaming" electronics for the subsequent main title sequence, which unfolds as graduate student Thomas Babington "Babe" Levy (Dustin Hoffman) jogs around the Central Park Reservoir. The composer then introduces three of the score's key ideas in quick succession: a grave pulse for strings and harp, a chromatic figure for strings and woodwinds, and Babe's bleak melody, sounding first on electric piano before the orchestration broadens. The material creates intrigue as the film cuts back and forth between Levy's training and a sinister, elderly German man (Ben Dova) retrieving a case from a safe-deposit box. The cue fades after the German slips the case to a passerby outside the bank.

**2. Tragedy at the Truck 1M3** The German's car stalls in the middle of the street, leading to an argument with an irritated Jewish driver, Rosenbaum (Lou Gilbert), stuck behind him. Their bigoted altercation escalates into a darkly humorous chase through Manhattan; the score signals impending doom with a low-register grunting figure as they unwittingly bear down on a fuel truck that backs into the street in front of them. The material climaxes as both cars crash into the truck, causing an explosion.

As a crowd forms around the flaming vehicles, the German convulses and drops his key to the safe-deposit box before dying. Small underlines the severi-

ty of the crash and the significance of the German's passing by introducing two more recurring ideas: an airy "death" sustain for pitch-bending strings, joined by vibraphone and electronics, and a leaping figure on piano that suggests forthcoming material for the film's chief villain. Babe's theme anticipates a cut back to Central Park, where he continues to jog.

**3. In Hot Pursuit/Out of the Race 1M4/1M5** As Babe attempts to catch up to an antagonistic jogger, Small captures his frustration with a harsh soundscape of electronics, harp, piano and percussion. Babe eventually gives up the chase and leans against a chain-link fence, the film cutting back to footage of Bikila.

**4. Bellman and Pram 2M1/2M2** At a hotel in France, Babe's older brother, "Doc" (Roy Scheider), an American secret agent, flirts with his colleague Janeway (William Devane) over the phone. Strings linger with suspicion after a bellman enters the room attempting to hang a suit that does not belong to Doc in the closet. When the film cuts to Doc arriving via cab at a flea market, the score continues to offer quiet menace with variations on both the taunting figure from the "Main Title" and Babe's theme. A creepy 15-note piano motive—almost but not strictly serial—wanders as someone pushing a baby carriage and another mysterious figure, Chen (James Wing Woo), spy on Doc before the agent steps into a shop to deliver diamonds to a courier, LeClerc (Jacques Marin).

**5. The Doll's Demise 2M3** Small reprises his suspenseful material from "Bellman and Pram" as Doc returns to his cab. His unseen pursuer has positioned the baby carriage—which contains a "sleeping" doll—behind the vehicle. The cue concludes when the doll's eyes open, triggering an explosion that leaves Doc startled but unharmed.

**6. Biesenthal Flashback 3M1** At Columbia University, Babe discusses the topic of his doctoral thesis, "The Use of Tyranny in American Political Life," with Professor Biesenthal (Fritz Weaver), who needles him about including the McCarthy hearings in his writing. A cold 12-note (but not 12-tone) motive sounds on harp and synthesizer over an unnerving sustain as Levy flashes back to his childhood and relives his discovery of his historian father's suicide due to being blacklisted as a Communist.

**7. Soccer Ball 3M3** After Doc discovers LeClerc's throat-slashed corpse at an opera house, he waits at night in a deserted courtyard to rendezvous with fellow agent Nicole (Nicole Deslauriers). When she arrives, he orders her to keep walking: "It's not safe." Once she proceeds past him and disappears through a gate, Doc hears a thud; he calls her name, but she fails to answer. Instead, a lone soccer ball comes bouncing towards him out of the darkness. The taunting figure

and the creepy piano motive create a shroud of terror before Doc flees the scene.

**8. Elsa's Intrigue 4M1** While researching at a library, Babe meets a Swiss beauty named Elsa (Marthe Keller). After she leaves, he chases after her to return a book she left behind. Small intended this unused, flowing rendition of Babe's theme for electric piano, harp and strings to sound as he catches up with her near her apartment building and convinces her to see him again.

**9. Szell Arrives 4M3** After an unscored scene introducing Nazi dentist Christian Szell (Laurence Olivier), during which he cuts off his hair, the creepy piano motive underscores "Der Weisse Engel" (The White Angel) departing his Uruguayan hideout via speedboat.

**10. Love Scene 5M1** A setting of Babe's theme for romantic piano and lush strings plays through a montage of him falling in love with Elsa; after she times him while he jogs around the reservoir, the film transitions to the couple making love, with the cue acting as phonograph source music. The piece wanders into rhapsodic, dissonant territory for a segue to the couple in Central Park, where they are mugged by Szell's henchmen, Karl (Richard Bright) and Erhard (Marc Lawrence). A tortured, climactic reading of Babe's theme (2:15–2:28) was cut from the mugging, causing the cue to end prematurely in the film.

**11. The Letter 5M2** Babe's theme returns on electric piano as he writes a letter to Doc, telling him about the mugging and that he feels angry enough to kill the men responsible. His narration of the letter continues through flashback footage of him cleaning Elsa's wounds and returning home after the attack; outside his apartment, some local hooligans torment him.

**12. Airport 5M3** For Szell's arrival at Kennedy airport, the grave pulse from the "Main Title" joins with the leaping figure from "Tragedy at the Truck" and Small's introduction of the Nazi's "skewered anthem" on horns once he meets up with Karl and Erhard.

**13. Resemble Diamonds 6M1** Doc joins his brother and Elsa for lunch at an upscale New York restaurant; Babe is unaware that Doc is a spy and believes him to be a successful businessman. Suspicious of Elsa, Doc subtly harasses her, going so far as to mention diamonds. Small intended this cue featuring the creepy piano motive amid bell tree flourishes—evoking "sparkly" diamonds—for Elsa reacting to Doc's comment, but the finished film instead tracks in the 12-note motive from "Biesenthal Flashback."

**Fountain Appointment 6M2** When Doc exposes Elsa as a liar, she becomes indignant and runs from the table with Babe chasing after her. A grave pedal enters for Doc left alone at the table, before the film



cuts to a deserted fountain at night, where Small develops Szell's anthem, expanding it with a corrupted, more chromatic B section as the Nazi and his henchman Erhard await "Scylla" (Doc's code name); the cue dissipates with low-end grunting as Doc arrives and confronts Szell.

**14. Scylla Stabbed 6M3** Szell questions whether it is safe for him to retrieve his diamonds from the bank (the elderly German from the beginning of the film was Szell's brother). Doc refuses him a direct answer and in the midst of their heated exchange, Doc's facial expression suddenly changes to one of wide-eyed shock: The "death" sustain sounds before it is revealed that Szell has thrust a retractable blade into the agent's belly. Squealing electronics, piano and bass flutes add disturbing color as Szell leaves Doc for dead. The finished film dials out the cue's final 0:55 of textural dread after a transition to Babe at his apartment apologizing for Doc's behavior to Elsa over the phone. He screams when his mortally wounded brother arrives and collapses in his arms.

**15. Doc Dies 6M4** Small intended this (unused) bittersweet solo piano reading of Babe's theme to play for him cradling Doc in his arms before the agent dies.

**16. Nightmare of the Past 7M1** After the police interrogate Babe, Janeway informs him that Doc was actually a spy for a government agency, "The Division." He asks Levy to act as bait to draw out Doc's killers, believing they will come looking for him to find out if Doc told him anything before he died.

The film transitions to Babe taking a bath. As he covers his face with a washcloth, childhood flashbacks show him with his brother and their disgraced father (along with a disturbing shot of adult Doc clutching his bleeding stomach). Small scores the montage with a reprise of the 12-note motive, mixed with a statement of Babe's theme.

**17. Bathroom Terror 7M2** Babe locks himself in his bathroom when he detects intruders in his apartment. In this unused cue, the creepy piano motive repeats over ominous pedal point for the intruders attempting to break through the bathroom door while Babe screams for help. He eventually panics and runs out the bathroom door, with the material accelerating as Szell's henchmen apprehend him and dunk him in the bathtub.

**18. False Rescue 8M1** At Szell's warehouse hideout, the Nazi tortures Babe with dental instruments, digging into one of his cavities and repeatedly asking the infamous question, "Is it safe?" Afterward, Karl brings the student to a bed and provides him with a topical anesthetic for his teeth. Small indented a light, suspenseful passage that references the taunting figure to sound as Babe spots Janeway entering the

warehouse and sneaking up behind Karl; the finished film replaces this material with music from a forthcoming cue, "The Recognition." "False Rescue" is dialed back into the film with frantic electronic readings of the creepy motive joined by alarm-like string clusters and snare drum punctuation as Janeway knifes Karl in the back. The material continues as the agent ushers Babe from the warehouse, shooting Erhard along the way. The cue ends with a fateful reading of Babe's theme that plays against the creepy motive as Janeway loads Babe into his car and speeds off into the night.

**19. Betrayal 8M2** While Babe cowers in the back seat, the agent speeds around town, explaining Szell's Nazi history and his plan to retrieve the diamonds from the bank. When Janeway asks Babe to come clean and reveal what Doc told him, the student insists: "Nothing!" This prompts the frustrated agent to pull back up to the warehouse, with the creepy motive crying out over whining clusters and *col legno* effects as Karl and Erhard emerge from a door, alive and well! The traitorous Janeway watches the henchmen carry a screaming Babe back inside, to a fleeting statement of Babe's theme.

**Drilling Horror 9M1** During a second torture session, Szell drills into one of Babe's healthy teeth. In the film, Szell's drill and Babe's agonized screaming nearly drown out a percussive pulse and a searing swell of electronics.

**20. Escape 9M2** After Szell deems Babe useless, Karl and Erhard prepare to load him into their car in the alley outside the warehouse. Agitated strings and percussion accents sound as Babe seizes an opportunity to escape, slamming Erhard with the car door and dashing barefoot down the alley. Sporadic stings for percussion and synthesizer follow for Babe unsuccessfully trying to flag down an ambulance. The final two stings do not appear in the finished film.

**21. Chase Pt. I 9M3** As Janeway chases Babe through a deserted neighborhood, sporadic percussion and electronics join with fitful atonal writing that incorporates the taunting figure and frantic readings of the creepy motive. Harsh strings, screaming synthesizer and a suffering trumpet solo signal Babe remembering Bikila once again, with the film cutting to archival footage of the marathon champion. The fitful chase material returns as Babe climbs over a heap of rubble, losing Janeway in the process.

**22. Chase Pt. II 9M4** After Szell's henchmen pick up Janeway in their car, pummeling percussion and whining strings mark a cut to Babe running on a highway onramp. As the villains' car bears down on Babe, the score spirals out of control with furious, unstable developments of the creepy motive, climaxing as Babe escapes his pursuers by leaping off a railing and onto

an adjacent highway.

**23. Urgent Phone Call 9M5** Janeway and Karl scan the roadway for Babe but he has vanished. Eerie strings and harp mix with cautious developments of Babe's theme for a transition to him arriving via cab at a payphone down the street from his apartment and trades his brother's Rolex to the cabbie for a dime. Small intended an unused passage (1:10–1:40) of dry string sustains and percussive grunting to underscore Levy calling Elsa for help.

**24. Calculated Risk 9M6** The composer reprises thematic material from "Bellman and Pram" as Levy sneaks down the street and sees Szell's henchmen parked in front of his apartment. He makes his way into a building across the street and uses the intercom to summon Melendez (Tito Goya), the leader of the neighborhood hooligans who routinely taunt him.

**Gang Moves In 10M2** Melendez and his friends agree to "rob" Babe's apartment and bring him his gun and clothes. The grunting figure from "Tragedy at the Truck" sounds as they make their way across the street into Babe's building with Szell's henchmen watching from their car. The suspenseful material continues as the gang sneaks upstairs and begins to pick the lock on Babe's door. Janeway, staked out in the stairwell, confronts them with his pistol but the punks reveal weapons of their own. Outmatched, the agent relents.

**25. House on the Hill 10M3** Babe meets up with Elsa and she drives him out of town. A cold, flowing rendition of Babe's theme underscores their arrival at Elsa's country house, where Babe forces her to confess that she works for Szell and holds her hostage.

**Approaching Showdown 10M4** As they await the villains' arrival, Elsa clarifies that she is only a courier for Szell; a delicate piano statement of Babe's theme plays over a troubled string sustain when he answers her confession with, "God, you're pretty." The grunting figure alternates with stark percussion as the villains' car approaches, with pungent readings of the creepy motive sounding as Levy holds Elsa at gunpoint near the front door and applies anesthetic to his teeth. The cue dissipates as Janeway and Szell's henchmen step out of the car and confront Babe.

After admitting them to the house, Babe goes on to kill Karl and Erhard in self-defense; caught off guard, Janeway identifies the bank from which Szell will retrieve his diamonds. Once Babe flees the premises, Janeway grabs his gun, prompting Elsa to scream out and warn Babe. Just as the agent kills her, Babe reappears in the window and guns him down in return.

**26. Jewelry Market Pt. I 11M1** Szell's anthem builds tension as the Nazi walks through the 47th Street diamond district, observing countless Jews along the way. The cue continues with the anthem's B section

as Szell uncomfortably steps into a jewelry store in an attempt to determine the value of his diamonds.

**27. Market Continuation 11M2** The anthem's accompanimental material returns after Szell barks at an unhelpful clerk and leaves the shop. As he crosses the street to visit another store, an elderly Jewish woman (Lotte Palfi Andor) seems to recognize him.

**28. The Recognition 11M3** In the second store, Szell learns the value of the diamonds but is also recognized by one of the salesmen, a Holocaust survivor. Dissonant string sustains and a grunting percussive figure follow the Nazi back outside, where the elderly Jewish woman across the street—another survivor—begins to call out Szell's name in disbelief. In one of the film's most famous sequences, she chases after Der Weisse Engel with her hysterics attracting a crowd of bystanders as the Nazi continues down the street, attempting to maintain his composure. Deliberate, horrified statements of the creepy motive sound as the woman follows him, with the material turning chaotic as she runs into the street and a taxi nearly runs her down.

**29. Szell Escapes 11M4** As the crowd tends to the elderly woman, the jewelry salesman catches up with Szell and confronts him on the street (the finished film tracks the concluding section of "Szell Escapes" over this footage). Gruesome readings of the creepy motive sound when Der Weisse Engel slashes the man's throat with his retractable blade; Szell calls out for help before hopping into a cab. Another crowd forms around Szell's victim as the taxi drives off, a pathos-ridden development of Szell's anthem mixing with the creepy motive for the Nazi re-holstering his blade and taking his brother's key from his briefcase. The film transitions to the bank, where piano statements of the creepy motive sound over low-register grunting as a guard retrieves the safe-deposit box for Szell.

**30. All That Glitters Pt. I 11M5** In a private room inside the vault, Szell retrieves a can from the box and pours a mound of diamonds onto the desk before him. A shimmering setting of the creepy motive sounds on upper-register piano, surrounded by bell tree flourishes as the Nazi caresses the jewels and laughs, unable to contain his excitement.

**All That Glitters Pt. II 11M6/12M1** A bank guard checks on Szell after his excited outburst. After the Nazi dismisses him, the shimmering piano and bell tree return as he pours out more diamonds.

**31. Too Close 12M3** Szell leaves the bank with his briefcase full of diamonds, but Babe confronts him almost immediately, escorting the Nazi him to Central Park at gunpoint. They enter a Reservoir pump room, where Szell opens his briefcase and presents Babe with the diamonds.

Small intended this unused, tension-filled setting of the creepy motive's first six notes to sound as Szell approaches Babe on a pump room catwalk. Babe levels his gun on Der Weisse Engel and forces him to stop before he can get close enough to knife him.

**Essen 12M4** The composer intended this second unused setting of the creepy motive's opening pitches to play as Babe tells Szell that he can keep as many diamonds as he can swallow.

**32. Diamonds of Death 12M5** Szell swallows one diamond but refuses to eat more, instead spitting in Babe's face. When younger man smacks the Nazi in return—dropping his gun in the process—the score erupts with agitated strings and percussion. Szell lunges for the student with his blade and Babe snatches up the open case of diamonds, with the creepy motive unfolding deliberately through a standoff until Babe tosses the case down some stairs; the cue responds with queasy sustains and percussive accents as Szell panics and goes tumbling after his precious diamonds. At

the bottom of the stairs, the “death” sustain wafts with irony as Szell, having impaled himself, slowly pulls his blade from his own stomach and collapses dead into the water.

**33. Babe Tosses Gun 12M6/12M7** Szell's B material sounds on bass flutes, trumpet and strings for Babe watching Der Weisse Engel's corpse float in the water below, alongside the diamonds. Babe's attention drifts to his gun resting on the walkway before him; he retrieves the weapon and tosses it into the reservoir outside, the cue reaching a harsh climax just before the gun hits the water. Although the nightmare has ended, Babe's theme haunts him on solo trumpet as he walks off lost in thought.

**34. End Credits 12M8** As Babe disappears into the distance, a typically plaintive setting of his melody plays through the end credits over a shot of New York's skyline.

—Alexander Kaplan

## The Parallax View

A climate of general paranoia and distrust of the government pervaded the 1970s, reinforced by such traumatic events as: the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X; the investigation into the Watergate break-in; and the controversy over the war in Vietnam. The decade saw an increase in popularity for the conspiracy thriller genre, with such films as *The Conversation*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *All the President's Men* and *The China Syndrome* offering a fascinating time capsule of the attitudes and fears of the era. One of the most memorable films of the genre was director Alan J. Pakula's 1974 thriller *The Parallax View*.

The project began with the book of the same name, the first published novel by Loren Singer, who had served with the O.S.S. during World War II. In the years after the JFK assassination, a rumor spread that a statistically improbable number of witnesses had since died, helping to popularize the already prevalent idea that the murder was not the work of lone gunman Lee Harvey Oswald but rather part of a wide-ranging plot. Singer's novel told the story of journalist Malcolm Graham, a witness to a Kennedy-like assassination who discovers that a shadowy governmental organization called the Bureau of Social Structure is murdering his fellow witnesses. Ultimately, the Bureau pits Graham against his friend Tucker, the only other surviving witness, and after Tucker kills the woman with whom Graham has fallen in love (the widow of a Bureau employee in whose murder Graham participated), Graham kills Tucker. Resigned to his fate, Graham himself

then dies at the hands of a Bureau agent.

Doubleday published the novel in June 1970 and the following summer announced plans to develop it as a motion picture: although the company had produced and distributed educational films, this would be their first attempt at a feature. Michael Ritchie, fresh off his big-screen directorial debut on the skiing drama *Downhill Racer*, was pegged to produce and direct, and Lorenzo Semple Jr. was hired to adapt Singer's novel. Semple may have been best known for his work on the campy '60s TV version of *Batman*, but he was also a respected screenwriter who had won the New York Film Critics Circle award for the cult classic thriller *Pretty Poison*. Semple gave his finished script, which changed the protagonist from a journalist to a policeman, to Gabriel Katzka, who signed on to produce the film for Paramount Pictures. After Ritchie decided not to direct the film after all, Katzka gave the screenplay to Warren Beatty and producer-director Alan J. Pakula for consideration.

Beatty had taken a temporary absence from filmmaking to concentrate on politics, working on George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign, and had not made a film since Richard Brooks's 1971 caper film *\$*. Pakula admired the “bold sketches and almost impressionistic quality” of Semple's screenplay. In June 1972, Pakula and Beatty announced that they would begin production on the film at the end of that year. The filmmakers brought a new writer on board to execute Pakula's ideas for the script: David Giler, a veteran of episodic television who had co-written the con-

roversial film adaptation of Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckendridge*. The *Parallax View* screenplay, ultimately credited to both Giler and Semple, diverged greatly from Singer's novel, with the script's policeman protagonist, Joe Frady, a surviving witness to a political assassination, going undercover to infiltrate the Parallax Corporation, a mysterious organization that recruits assassins from among society's loners and misfits. Although the script featured elements and a few character names from the book, as well as a similarly fatalistic and downbeat ending, the only sequence that remained largely intact from novel to script to finished film was the hero's investigation into the drowning death of a witness during a fishing trip to a small town.

The project encountered a major obstacle when the Writers Guild of America went on strike on March 6, 1973. The strike, which lasted through June 24 of that year, meant that Giler would not be able to make the changes Pakula wanted in the script, while the studio insisted that production begin as planned in April to make use of Beatty's availability. The situation forced Pakula to write the new scenes himself during production—and even during the casting process he made major changes in his vision of the film. Pakula originally saw Lee Carter, the journalist whose mysterious death inspires Frady to begin his investigation, as “a tough kind of older woman, older than Warren, wisecracking, witty, sardonic, a lady like Lauren Bacall,” but when 35-year-old Paula Prentiss auditioned, “looking wide-eyed and vulnerable,” he cast her as Lee and changed the character to “a girl who's crashed once too often, who was in a constant panic. It made her death more moving.”

The filmmakers first conceived Jack Younger, the Parallax operative who recruits Frady to the organization, as “six foot two, easy with a gun in his jacket holster, that classic kind of man,” but Pakula had been impressed by the performance of Walter McGinn in Jason Miller's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *That Championship Season*, and decided to reconfigure the role for McGinn. “You expect, when Parallax comes, to get some kind of Superman figure, and what you get is this little church mouse man with some kind of strange emotional need to pull these people out. And I changed the whole part for Walter, a little... man with great eyes.” McGinn made his film debut in *Parallax*, his subtle, insinuating performance proving to be one of the picture's greatest assets. Sadly, after only a few more features—including roles in *Farewell, My Lovely* and *Three Days of the Condor*—a 1977 car accident would cut McGinn's career short by claiming the actor's life at the age of 43.

One of the most important alterations came when Pakula, after encouragement from Beatty and Giler, decided to change the protagonist from a policeman—

as he was in the Semple and Giler drafts—back to a journalist, as Loren Singer originally conceived him. Shortly before filming began, Hume Cronyn, who had been cast as Frady's boss, called Pakula, confused about his role in the film: “In the script I read, I play a police chief, and you told me a couple of weeks ago when I checked in on the phone that I was going to be a newspaper editor, and I just wanted to know if you'd settled on which of them I'm going to be. I'm shooting on Monday.” Pakula confirmed that Cronyn's character, Bill Rintels, was now an editor, and he invited the actor to his home that Sunday. The pair worked with Beatty and the script supervisor to plan the scenes involving Frady and Rintels, with Cronyn asking Pakula's wife for scissors and tape so he could paste the new pages together. Pakula saw Frady as “the totally rootless modern man,” and removed a scene from the script that was set in the editor's home, so that the Rintels scenes take place in the newspaper office, which he saw as representing “much more simple American values, almost 19th century values. It represented a family, a man who was rooted, a whole American tradition that was dying, an anachronism.”

Filming took place from April to July 1973, on locations in California and Washington. The Gorge Dam on Washington's Skagit River provided the setting for Frady's fatal confrontation with the duplicitous sheriff, and Seattle's Space Needle featured in the opening assassination scene (Semple's screenplay began with a Kennedy-esque killing involving a motorcade, but Pakula found the idea of referencing JFK's murder so explicitly “distasteful”). Pakula's opening shot features a pan from an Indian totem pole to the Space Needle looming behind it: he felt the use of the Seattle landmark “made the whole beginning work for me,” with the shot jumping “hundreds of years into today, and there's... the Space Needle, which was like an American totem to me.” The prologue also features a Fourth of July parade, which Pakula saw as a key image for the story. “I wanted to start with Americana. And I want to start with sunlit Americana, the America we've lost.” He continued this emphasis on American iconography throughout the film. “That's the old Hitchcock thing. If you're doing a picture about Switzerland, use cuckoo clocks and chocolates. In America I used golf carts and kids making faces out of cards and the Space Needle.”

Pakula and Beatty collaborated closely throughout the production. According to cinematographer Gordon Willis, they had “in-depth discussions about everything.” Pakula told his star, “If the picture works, the audience will trust the person sitting next to them a little less at the end of the film.” Pakula would write scenes in the morning to film in the afternoon, and

made the film under what he termed “hair-raising conditions,” reconceiving major elements of the film during production, such as adding a tense sequence on a passenger jet.

Willis had provided the moody yet naturalistic widescreen cinematography for Pakula’s hit thriller *Klute*, and he proved to be an equally integral collaborator on *The Parallax View*, laboring to make sure that the film’s images reinforced Pakula’s overall idea “to do *Parallax* in a kind of poster style, like a series of poster images... It was American baroque.” According to Pakula, Willis “never forgot that. Sometimes, right in the middle of a scene, he would say that what I wanted him to do was a violation of what I wanted the style of the film to be. Gordon always operates within a conception of the film.” Pakula wanted “a certain surrealism” for the film, in which he intended to portray America “as it is seen through a distorting glass which may point out more intensely certain realities.”

As originally written, the finale features an assassination during a crowded political rally, but according to Pakula, when he, Willis and production designer George Jenkins visited the location, “it was empty, and they were putting up all these tables, these dining room tables, which looked totally ludicrous for a banquet, an absurd place to be eating. And there was nobody in it except for these lonely waiters setting up these tables. It was terrific with nobody in it. There was something dreamlike about those tables. And [the waiters] were using their little golf carts... to go from table to table with their dishes and knives and forks.” Pakula decided to change the crowded rally to a rehearsal in a near-empty auditorium, instructing Jenkins to procure red, white and blue tablecloths so that the assassinated politician “gets caught in the middle of a flag.”

Pakula spent an unusually long time on post-production, working particularly closely with editor John W. Wheeler. One of their most challenging tasks was the creation of the “Parallax test” for a sequence in which Frady visits the Parallax Corporation’s “Division of Human Engineering” as part of his interview process. The equivalent scene in Singer’s novel featured Graham looking at a series of words through a specially constructed eyepiece as sensors monitored his reactions. The scene in the Giler draft was similar, but Pakula entirely reconceived it during post-production. The new version shows Beatty only briefly before switching to Frady’s point of view for the remainder of the sequence, in which he views a series of still images interspersed with words like “Love,” “Mother” and “Me.” Pakula’s assistant Jon Boorstin (who would go on to write Pakula’s 1986 thriller *Dream Lover*) collected photographs for consideration; Pakula and Wheeler spent four months assembling and edit-

ing the montage, resulting in the film’s most famous sequence. Incorporating everything from historical paintings to movie stills to documentary photographs of Depression-era America, Pakula designed it “to rip you into a kind of frenzy of rage if you are one of the people who have been left out of society and to see if you are one of the ones who have been unwanted, one of the tragic people who are the unknowns of society, people society doesn’t care about.”

*The Parallax View* received mostly excellent reviews upon its release in June 1974. Judith Crist in *New York* proclaimed it Pakula’s “best film to date... a tidy, taut, and stylish thriller that functions as political chiller as well,” while the critic from *Cosmopolitan* found it “exciting, wonderfully directed by Alan J. Pakula, and so real you can taste the metal of fear in your mouth.” *New Times*’ Frank Rich praised Beatty’s return to the screen, writing that the star “showers the screen with a magnetic vitality that cannot be matched by any other American movie actor.” But Paula Prentiss in her brief but pivotal role as the doomed Lee received the best notices, with Gordon Gow in *Films & Filming* calling her “excellent” and Cynthia Kirk in *The Hollywood Reporter* citing her performance as “extremely effective.” Gordon Willis’s cinematography received much-deserved praise as “beautiful” (*Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*) and “dazzling... almost a show in itself” (*Playboy*), and although Oscar voters ignored the film, the Giler-Semple screenplay earned nominations from the Writers Guild of America and the Mystery Writers of America. Warren Beatty, who was notoriously choosy about his projects, described it as “an important subject and a film I respect.”

Pakula’s film may be very much a product of its time, but it holds up remarkably well when viewed more than three decades later, both as a stylistic tour de force and as pure entertainment. One of the most striking elements of the film is its mixture of the realistic and fantastic. The plot is often outlandish, but Pakula maintains an aura of naturalism through the marvelously subtle performances he obtained from his cast, an ability he exploited to even greater effect on his next film, *All the President’s Men*. Beatty brought his relaxed, low-key charm to his leading role, making his character’s fate even more shocking, while the supporting cast provided a bevy of memorable performances, including Paula Prentiss’s heartbreakingly terrified reporter, Walter McGinn’s unnervingly friendly Parallax operative, and Bill McKinney (who had recently played an especially chilling villain, the hillbilly rapist in *Deliverance*) as the silent assassin. Pakula chose to keep the characters and their relationships understated and implied, rather than overexplaining them. “One of the problems in that film that inter-

ested me was sketching in characters that I had no time to explore, sketching them in one scene, and giving a sense of relationships underneath that you never explore but are there." The past affair between Frady and Lee is only referenced in passing, while there are subtle hints about the relationship between the doomed political aide played by William Daniels and his body-guard (both the Singer novel and the Giler draft made Daniels's character explicitly gay).

Similarly, Gordon Willis' superb cinematography balances low-key, realistic lighting with striking widescreen compositions; his asymmetrical images showing Beatty dwarfed by modern architecture give the visuals something of a science-fiction quality, reflecting Pakula's desire "to deal with a bigger canvas, man in his relationship to society." Pakula saw *Parallax* as "a whole other kind of filmmaking for me. In many ways it's the most visually stylized film of anything I've ever done," depicting an America "that has become Kafka-like, in which you never meet the bad guys." Many film critics would compare *Parallax* to John Frankenheimer's 1962 classic *The Manchurian Candidate*, but Pakula saw an important difference between the two thrillers. "In 1962, films still had to show audiences that the bad guys were North Koreans. Now, with reality sounding more bizarre daily, it was possible for me to show an American audience that the sickness and perversion of assassination comes from within the fabric of our own society."

Pakula also viewed *Parallax* as a means to invert the traditions of Hollywood drama. "In America, most films are about good and evil. But the difference—in the American myth as compared to the European myth—is that in America, the evil is always known. For example, in the Western... evil is the guy at the other end of the street with the gun during the shootout." But in *Parallax*, we never see the main villains, never learn their ultimate motive, and the hero's attempt to uncover them only leads to his being murdered and framed as a traitor, perhaps as dark an ending as you will find in a Hollywood film. Pakula felt that his film "takes a lot of those American myths, all the most 'movie' versions of the indestructible hero figure, carried almost to the point of kitsch, and says 'this is what has happened to them.' The American hero character who can do anything, who can survive anything and expose the truth in the end, has been destroyed. We can't believe in him anymore." Pakula observed that Frady "imagines the most bizarre kind of plots, (but) is destroyed by a truth worse than anything he could have imagined."

The lighthearted tone of the early scenes in the small town of Salmon Tail, with a barroom brawl and car chase (accompanied by rollicking music), leads

the audience to expect a more mainstream Hollywood thriller with a happy ending. Pakula regularly subverts our expectations of Frady as a traditional movie hero: one of the director's many inspired changes was to keep Frady out of the actual assassination scene in the film's opening. Lee refuses to bring him up to the Space Needle as her guest (Pakula makes it unclear whether she refuses to do so out of spite due to a shared history, or because she genuinely does not know him) and his not being an actual witness makes it much more plausible that he could infiltrate Parallax, since he would not be on their hit list (both the Singer novel and the Giler draft had him actually witness the killing). The film's ending, however, suggests that Parallax may have been onto Frady the whole time, another subversion of his heroic status.

Even the hero's name is unheroic, "Joe Frady" suggesting a mocking mixture of *Dragnet's* Joe Friday and the schoolyard taunt "'fraidy cat." Rather than giving Beatty a typical movie star entrance, Pakula and Willis introduce Frady as little more than an extra in the opening scene of Lee interviewing the soon-to-be-assassinated politician in front of the Space Needle. It is difficult to believe that until shortly before filming commenced, the film's protagonist was planned as a policeman instead of a journalist. The film's sense of expanding paranoia would never have worked nearly so well with a cop hero backed up by the police department, and Frady's isolated nature is one of the film's most evocative elements—the Giler script gave him a longer scene with a girl briefly glimpsed in his motel room when Lee visits, as well as a love scene with a woman who helps him escape from Salmon Tail after the car chase, but Pakula wisely excised both scenes.

Pakula chose a deliberately elliptical style of storytelling for *The Parallax View*, leaving narrative gaps and allowing the audience to fill them in, much in the same way a conspiracy theorist has to connect the dots between facts: apart from the two assassinations that bracket the story, the main deaths (a framed busboy, Lee, the sheriff, Tucker, Frady) occur off camera. For Pakula, the film "depended on a certain kind of hypnosis to work. And if you stop and explain it to such an extent that you break the hypnotic rhythm of the film, you make it more believable on an intellectual level, (but) the thing that may pull that audience emotionally can fall apart."

*The Parallax View* was only the fourth film directed by Pakula (following over a decade as a producer for director Robert Mulligan, their projects together including *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Inside Daisy Clover*), but as he had done with his two previous films, *Klute* and the seldom-seen romantic tragicomedy *Love and Pain and the Whole Damn Thing*, Pakula hired Michael

Small to compose the score.

Small felt that he had immersed himself too deeply in the dark world of *Klute* while scoring that film, and resolved not to make that mistake again. “I have since learned to be very careful, to keep a distance, to portray but not get overly involved. I always give the audience an ‘out,’ an elegant escape route. That is where artistry should enter into it. After all, fear of what is going to happen next is what it appears to be at all. Perhaps it is really dealing with the unknown, an archetypal human impulse that involves awe and wonder as well. That is why I like films that are suggestive, not specifically horrible or repulsive. To me ‘noir’ style always has mystery and distance. There is the space provided for an experience that can be quite subtle.” Small did, however, feel while working on it that the project had unusual relevance to its era. “I remember when I was scoring it, Patty Hearst was being held hostage and they were broadcasting her statements every day. It was a time where there was a lot of paranoia and speculation about the Kennedy assassination. It was still a very alive feeling in the mid-seventies.”

Small decided to compose an anthem as his main theme, finding anthems “both terrifying and very attractive. I’ve always been attracted by patriotic anthems—and scared by them. You not only have *The Star-Spangled Banner*, but you have *Deutschland über alles*. The skewed patriotic anthem worked not only as underscore, but became signature for the overall point of view of the story.”

Small’s score is relatively brief, and he left the opening assassination unscored, his music beginning with an announcement from an investigative panel leading into the opening credits. “The opening of the film was constructed with this very long dolly shot of appeal judges who look so august and solemn in the act of pompously dismissing a case in a way in which the audience senses may be a total whitewash and fraud. Although you might expect to hear ‘official’ sounding music in this type of scene, here there is a strange and ominous tone to it. But then there is a paradox. The music opens up on a certain chord, you’re taken in, swept along, and even moved by it. Something irresistible is pulling at you. Anthems have a mysterious power to move you, almost in spite of yourself. Therefore, in a certain way, the film is exploring conspiracy as skewered, inverted loyalty.”

Pakula was particularly impressed by the way Small’s music helped to characterize the film’s villains. “We never discuss who they are, but they hide behind the patriotic music that whips people up and makes it seem like they’re all American and patriotic. It has a kind of John Philip Sousa march feeling about it, but he also did a trumpet thing with it and it was almost

like playing taps for an America that was. It worked on so many levels and it was really what characterized the heavies.”

Small had to compose and record the source cue for the Parallax test scene on a tight deadline—“I don’t think Alan even heard it. It was just one of those magical events”—but the director was pleased with the result. “He started out with that wonderfully simple little folk melody, and then it’s all very simple Americana and terribly innocent. And then it just builds into this kind of acid-rock hysteria.” Cynthia Kirk in *The Hollywood Reporter* singled out this sequence for praise in her review, particularly its “steely, piercing musical score by Michael Small.” Small even incorporates a motive from the test cue into the scene that follows, in which Frady tails the silent assassin from the Parallax offices.

For the film’s end credits, Small converted his dark anthem into a patriotic march. The director explained that they “dubbed it so it didn’t sound to you like it was marching across the screen. And you hear cheering sounds along with this cheerful music. But you know it’s the sound of evil. It’s being used to make you think they are patriotic.”

The critical acclaim for the film and its score caused Small to be typecast as a composer for conspiracy thrillers—ultimately, it is the genre with which he remains most associated even today—and he followed *Parallax View* with such other similarly themed projects as *Marathon Man*, *The China Syndrome* (for which his score ultimately went unused), *Rollover* (another Pakula film) and *The Star Chamber*. But Small did not resent being pigeonholed, admitting, “I find the ‘conspiracy’ genre one of my favorites. The intrigue of it, the topicality of the political dimension can be so intense and involving, it really lends itself to music so well.” Pakula remarked that “we’ve shared our paranoia together,” and ultimately felt that Small’s *Parallax*, along with *Klute*, was “one of the best scores I’ve ever had,” and that they “were two of the most important scores in films of mine in terms of the part they played in telling the story.”

Pakula worked with many of the top composers in Hollywood during his nearly three decades of directing features, including Marvin Hamlisch, James Horner and John Williams, and the director felt among the things these musicians had in common with Small was that “they all worked conceptually. I only work with people I feel can work that way. The score can say things that nothing else can say. It can in some ways make you feel inside a character. That’s my favorite use of it. There’s something when the music plays back in your mind, it should bring up some subtext of that film for you. On an emotional level you understand the film better because of the music. Not just feel it more, but

you understand it more.”

Small would ultimately score nine of Pakula’s 16 features (Pakula died in 1998, and Small in 2003), the director appreciating his “almost child-like joy in composing and in working on the film.” Pakula openly acknowledged the special nature of their collaboration: “It’s wonderful because you have a shorthand. The other thing I love about working with Michael is that every film is different, which is what I try to do myself. He doesn’t try to go back to old scores for old solutions. He has the same excitement about starting over each time. The best film composers are wonderful dramatists, as much as a screenwriter is. They understand dramaturgy and they contribute to it. Michael really understands that, he really has a great sense of storytelling.” Interviewed in the mid-1990s, Pakula was as impressed with Small’s work on *Parallax* as ever. “When seeing *The Parallax View* recently I was again struck by what an extraordinary accomplishment that score was and what it did for that film.”

—Scott Bettencourt

*The author wishes to acknowledge two invaluable research sources for this article: Jared Brown’s book Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life, from which many of the Pakula quotes about the making of The Parallax View were drawn; and Rudy Koppl’s profile of Michael Small in the Autumn 1998 issue of Music from the Movies, whose interviews with Small and Pakula featured many of the quotes regarding the Parallax score included in this essay.*

**38. Main Title** During the film’s unscored opening sequence, Senator Charles Carroll (William Joyce) is assassinated—supposedly by a lone gunman acting as a waiter—at Seattle’s Space Needle. Small’s score enters after the suspected killer falls to his death: a mid-register pulse, militaristic snare and a wide-leaping paranoia motive mark a shot of the dead politician before the film cuts to an exterior of the Space Needle. Back at ground level, another suspicious waiter (Bill McKinney) flees the scene.

The pulse continues through a transition to an announcement issued several months later by a seven-man panel investigating the assassination. The camera slowly pushes in on the committee as its chairman dismisses the notion of a second assassin. Composer Small casts doubt over his speech with the score’s main theme, a pseudo-patriotic anthem that struggles to maintain purity amid the dread-ridden pulse and the paranoia motive. At the conclusion of the chairman’s statement, the opening credits unfold over a freeze-frame on the panel; Small transfers the melody to trumpet, the piece building in intensity through the brief credit sequence.

**39. The Morgue** Three years after the assassination, television reporter Lee Carter (Paula Prentiss)—a witness to the senator’s murder—visits with investigative journalist Joseph Frady (Warren Beatty). She informs him that six witnesses to the assassination have mysteriously died and she fears that she will be next; despite her tearful pleas for help, he remains unconvinced. Small’s music reenters on a quick cut to Lee’s body lying on an examination table in a morgue, the ominous pulse joined by the paranoia motive and the main theme. Frady remains silent throughout a medical examiner’s explanation of how Lee died from a drug overdose, the music reinforcing the reporter’s suspicion that she was murdered.

**40. Sheriff’s House** Frady follows up one of Carter’s leads by visiting the small town of Salmon Tail, Washington, where he investigates the “accidental” death of another witness to the assassination. After surviving an ambush by the local sheriff, L.D. Wicker (Kelly Thordsen), Frady visits the lawman’s home to snoop for clues. Unnerving flute varies the paranoia motive over a pedal point as Frady discovers a briefcase full of literature about the Parallax Corporation. The cue dissipates after Deputy Red (Earl Hindman) arrives at Wicker’s house; when the phone rings, Red answers, inadvertently alerting Frady to his presence.

**41. Car Chase** Frady escapes from the house with the Parallax briefcase but Red spots him speeding off in the sheriff’s car. The score erupts into a propulsive chase cue comprised of taunting country fiddle, biting winds (offering accelerated bits of the main theme) and pop rhythm section. Frady manages to lose a pursuing Red before the cue climaxes when he crashes into a grocery store.

**42. Testing Center** Frady visits a psychologist, Prof. Schwartzkopf (Anthony Zerbe), who determines that a personality test found in the briefcase is designed to identify homicidal characteristics. A questioning figure for flute and bass clarinet alternates with a breathy bass flute and harp pulse and electronics as Schwartzkopf resolves to have one of his murderous patients take the test for Frady.

**43. Out to Sea** Austin Tucker (William Daniels)—a former aide to Senator Carroll and another witness to his murder—finally agrees to meet with Frady. A bleak variation on the main theme plays as Frady joins Tucker and his assistant (William Jordan) on a yacht, the material unfolding as the sailboat heads out to sea. The cue dissipates when Austin begins to show Frady slide photographs taken at the Space Needle the day of the assassination.

**44. Slide Art and Austin Sleeps** Frady studies the slides but is unable to identify the mysterious waiter who fled the scene of the murder. A nagging, repeated-



note figure for brass and electronics mixes with the paranoia motive, representing the unidentified assassin. After Tucker loses interest in the reporter and rests on a couch in the ship's cabin, swelling textures mark a passage in time as the yacht continues its journey. The music reinforces an unspoken tension for Frady standing at the boat's stern while Tucker and his assistant talk in secret by the bow. Small reprises the main theme's variation from "Out to Sea" before the boat suddenly explodes—Tucker and his assistant die instantly, while Frady escapes into the ocean.

**45. Parallax Test** Using a fake identity, Frady is accepted for training at the Parallax Corporation by company representative Jack Younger (Walter McGinn). At Parallax headquarters, Frady undergoes a visual response test: a five-minute slide show of keywords ("Mother," "Father," "Me," "Home," "Country," "God" and "Enemy") and warm, patriotic images set to music. Small's disturbing source piece for the test balances benign country-pop and male humming with rich Americana brass, blaring organ and driving, militaristic percussion. The music maintains its steady, insincere optimism (with only an occasional lapse into subtle discord) even as the montage begins to accelerate at a disturbing rate and casually mixes images of death and carnage in among the more nostalgic photos.

**46. Art in Cafeteria and Suitcase Bomb** A dread-ridden cue combines several of Small's motives as Frady tails the mysterious waiter from the Space Needle photos. Nervous bassoon readings of the main theme's opening figure sound when the reporter first spots him in the lobby of the Parallax headquarters; the villain's nagging motive from "Slide Art" marks a freeze-frame of his face that clearly identifies him. A warped suggestion of the country music from "Parallax Test" plays as the assassin exits the building, before an intermittent pulse alternates with the paranoia motive for Frady following him to his car. The film segues to the Parallax operative arriving at a parking lot and retrieving a suitcase from another car, the main theme playing cautiously as Frady spies on him from afar. As the man arrives at an airport and checks his suitcase as luggage—for a flight that carries a senator—anguished developments of the main theme for piercing, upper-register strings play against a harp ostinato based on

the tune's opening pitches. The score continues to build tension with this material through shots of the suitcase being loaded onto the plane, before agitated string readings of the paranoia motive cry out over the pulse as Frady arrives on the tarmac and boards the aircraft. A final reading of the waiter's motive rings out, giving way to a threatening sustain of tremolo strings for a shot of the Parallax operative watching from atop an airport parking garage as the plane begins to take off. (In a subsequent unscored sequence, Frady alerts the flight crew to the presence of the bomb; the plane turns around in mid-flight and is evacuated before the bomb detonates.)

**47. Gunmen Search** Frady's investigation leads him to a rehearsal for a political rally at a large indoor arena. In the rafters above the banquet hall, the reporter spies on Parallax men while political candidate George Hammond (Jim Davis) assists with a sound check and a marching band rehearses several upbeat tunes. Pandemonium ensues when shots ring out and Hammond collapses, with one spectator spotting Frady on the catwalk. An unnerving bed of *sul ponticello* string effects, bass flute trills and murky winds sounds as the Parallax men make their discreet escape from the rafters after planting a rifle on the catwalk near Frady, who continues to hide.

**48. Joe's Final Run** After police arrive at the stadium, a tentative reading of the main theme joins the paranoia motive as Frady—set up as a patsy—creeps along the catwalk. When a band member calls out "I see him!" the main theme escalates on brass amid piercing tremolo strings for Frady making a mad dash toward an exit door. The cue climaxes just before he is shot by a silhouetted gunman standing in the doorway. (The finished film omits a mournful trumpet solo intended for a lingering shot of the vast banquet hall.)

**49. End Title** The camera slowly pulls back from another investigative panel as its spokesman pins Hammond's murder on Frady. When the chairman (Ford Rainey) finishes his statement, the committee members abruptly disappear, leaving the end titles to unfold over their empty chairs, while Small presents the "Out to Sea" variation of the main theme as a distant, triumphantly perverse march that plays to the sounds of a cheering crowd.

—Alexander Kaplan