

Visit to a Small Planet/The Delicate Delinquent

It's hard to imagine just how popular Martin and Lewis were. Their personal appearances drew huge sold-out crowds, they were a smash on radio, and they were one of Paramount's premiere attractions – major box-office gold, with lines around the block for each new picture. Audiences screamed with laughter at Jerry Lewis's antics; Dean Martin was, perhaps, the greatest comic straight man in history, and his crooning had ladies in the audience swooning. But it all ended in 1956 with the pair's final film for Paramount, *Hollywood or Bust*.

After the split, Martin recorded hit albums for Capitol Records and branched out into dramatic acting for a variety of different studios. Lewis, on the other hand, stayed at Paramount and began making solo pictures. Within a short time, he became Paramount's biggest star, working with producer Hal B. Wallis on his first few solo efforts. But Lewis was chomping at the bit to be on his own, and in 1959 he achieved just that when Paramount signed Jerry Lewis Productions to a multi-picture deal that would result in fourteen films. Lewis's final film with producer Wallis was *Visit to a Small Planet*, released in 1960.

Visit to a Small Planet began life as a television play by Gore Vidal. It aired on May 8, 1955, on the *Goodyear Television Playhouse*. It starred Cyril Ritchard, Edward Andrews, Theodore Bikel, Alan Reed and Dick York, and was directed by Jack Smight. Vidal adapted it for the Broadway stage, where it opened on February 7, 1957, at the Booth Theater, once again starring Cyril Ritchard as alien visitor Kreton. This time, Ritchard was also in the director's chair. The play was a hit, and Paramount bought the rights, turning it into a vehicle that was specifically tailored to Lewis and jettisoning a good deal of the Vidal play in the process.

Norman Taurog, who, in 1931 – at the age of thirty-two – had won his first Oscar (for directing *Skippy*), helmed the film. Over the years he directed such pictures as *Boys Town*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Broadway Melody of 1940*, *Girl Crazy*, and many others, including six films with Martin and Lewis (*Jumping Jacks*, *The Stooge*, *The Caddy*, *Living it Up*, *You're Never Too Young*, and *Pardners*). Taurog also directed eight Elvis Presley movies. Appearing alongside Lewis was a terrific supporting cast, including Fred Clark, John Williams, Joan Blackman, Gale Gordon and Earl Holliman.

Visit to a Small Planet opened in February 1960 and was another hit for Lewis. And he got to do what he liked best – physical comedy mixed with small doses of pathos. Lewis is pure Jerry as Kreton, the alien, who, against the wishes of his teacher, loves to visit that “odious little plan-

etoid” Earth because he's fascinated by human beings. His teacher finally allows him an extended visit with the proviso that he not get involved in the humans' lives. Of course, he immediately gets involved in everyone's lives. It's a fast-paced, fun film that hasn't been seen much since its original release, other than the odd television broadcast and a VHS release in the early days of home video.

Aiding Lewis immeasurably in his hijinks is the delightful score by Leigh Harline. Harline began in films scoring Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies* and other Disney cartoons, then won an Oscar for scoring and Best Song for *Pinocchio*. He also wrote songs (with Frank Churchill) for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In 1941, Harline left Disney and began scoring movies for other studios, writing terrific scores for such films as *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer*, *The Boy With the Green Hair*, *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, *They Live by Night*, *His Kind of Woman*, *Monkey Business*. At Fox, he wrote great scores for all kinds of films, including *Pickup on South Street*, *Vicki*, *Broken Lance*, *Black Widow*, *House of Bamboo*, *The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing*, *Good Morning, Miss Dove*, *The Bottom of the Bottle*, *23 Paces to Baker Street*, *The Wayward Bus*, *The Enemy Below*, and many, many others.

Harline's score for *Visit to a Small Planet* is a treasure, beginning with a melodic seven-note main theme that is impossible to get out of one's head once it's been heard. Harline makes liberal use of the Theremin and keeps the comedy in the film plowing forward with his clever and infectious musical hijinks. There are a few nice source music cues, too, and the whole thing adds up to an entertaining and buoyant score.

The Delicate Delinquent was originally meant to be the Martin and Lewis follow-up to *Hollywood or Bust*, but when the partnership went bust the film was quickly retooled as a solo vehicle for Lewis, with the Martin role going to actor Darren McGavin. Shot during September and October of 1956, the film came out in the summer of 1957 and was a huge hit. Lewis plays Sidney L. Pythias, a janitor who is mistaken for a juvenile delinquent gang member. Policeman Mike Damon (McGavin) believes he can help Sidney reform, just as a policeman had once helped *him* reform. Many shenanigans ensue for Damon and Pythias, but in the end all turns out well, with Pythias attaining his dream of becoming a policeman. The film also starred Martha Hyer, Horace McMahon, and, in an early appearance, actor/comedian Frank Gorshin; it was written and directed by Don McGuire. McGuire had begun as an actor, then turned to writing. He worked on two Martin and Lewis pictures as a writer – *Three-Ring Circus*

and *Artists and Models*. The scoring assignment fell to someone relatively new to film composition, a young wunderkind named Buddy Bregman.

Bregman, born in 1930, hit the big time in his mid-20s when he became the A&R man at newly formed Verve Records. While there, he orchestrated, arranged and conducted two classic albums with Ella Fitzgerald: *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook* and *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Rodgers and Hart Songbook* – the beginnings of her extraordinary *Songbook* series. Bregman also did a great Bing Crosby album called *Bing Sings Whilst Bregman Swings*. He did the arrangements and orchestrations for the television musical *Ruggles of Red Gap*, with music by his uncle, the great Jule Styne. With Nelson Riddle, Bregman orchestrated the film version of *The Pajama Game*. He wrote his first film score in 1955, the low-budget western *Five Guns West*. He wrote two other scores to low-budget films before getting the plum assignment of Jerry Lewis's first solo film.

Bregman's score for *The Delicate Delinquent* is an undiscovered gem. It's surprising that it did not lead to other major film scoring assignments – he did a few other low-budget films and then turned to producing, writing and directing in the 1960s, creating specials for such people as Judy Garland, Shirley Bassey, Mel Tormé, Nancy Wilson, Ethel Merman, Bing Crosby and others, as well as working on several TV series as producer and director. Bregman's themes are tuneful and his scoring expert. The score starts out with a bang with the exciting main title – all bongos and drums and percussion until the dynamic orchestra enters with its propulsive rhythms and its jazzy pyrotechnics. There follows a lovely, bluesy theme for saxophone and orchestra and that's followed by the main theme, a truly beautiful melody that will appear throughout the score, along with more of the big-band, jazzier stuff. Bregman never plays up the comedy – it's a straightforward score and it's one of the reasons the film holds up well today.

This is the world premiere release of both scores, taken from tapes housed in the Paramount vaults. Jerry Lewis has a great ear and love for music, and the music from his films has always been a huge part of their success, whether by Bregman or Harline or Walter Scharf. These two scores in particular are very different from each other, but each is perfect for the film it's underscoring, and both are delightful to listen to on their own.

—Bruce Kimmel