

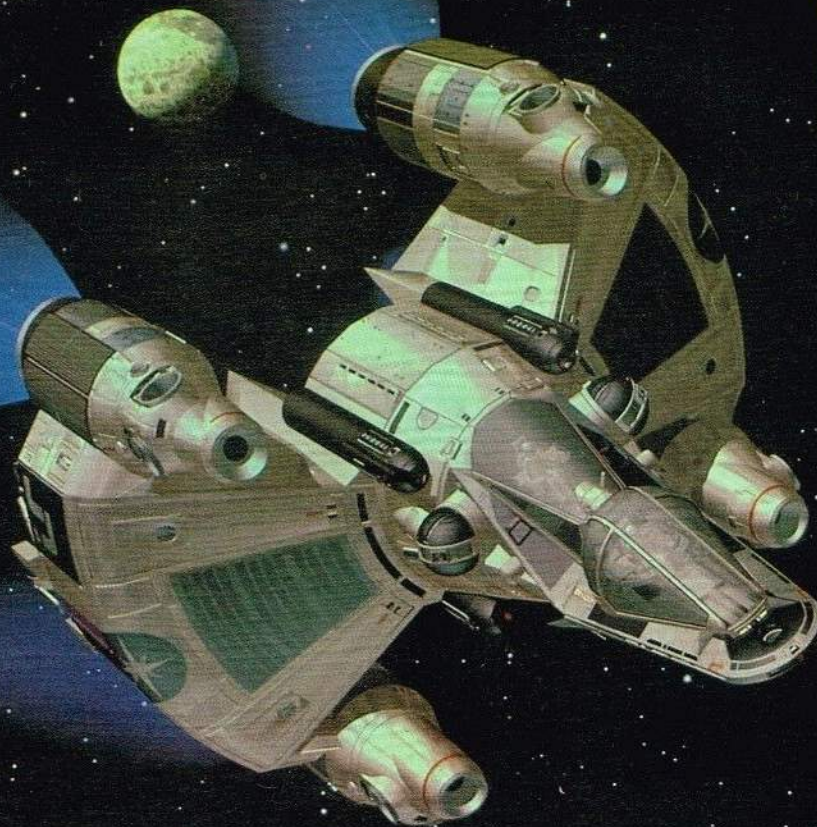
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Is it a bird? Is it a plane?
No, it's a Thanksgiving Turkey

THE SCORE / *Bernstein Busts Ghosts, Knocks Rock*

By Randall D. Larson

The images are equally comical: a towering, plodding incarnation of cosmic evil emerges from Manhattan's shadowed skyscrapers, a childish grin on its puffy, marshmallow face, and a tilted sailor's cap on its domed head. A hairy alien waddles from the darkness of a Bronson Canyon cave to eradicate Earth's final residents, intoning dismal threats from within the deep-sea diving helmet worn over its gorilla body.

The films are thirty years apart, vastly different in scope, style and technology, but they are both brimming with hilarity and riotous fun. One intentionally so, its earlier relative was instead the comical result of mindless, low-budget filmmaking. It may seem slightly strained to compare *GHOSTBUSTERS* with 1953's *ROBOT MONSTER*, but there is an important connection. Both films were scored by Elmer Bernstein, one of the film industry's ablest creators of movie music.

Bernstein had come to Hollywood in 1950 from New York, where he had pursued a career as a concert pianist. After gaining several low-budget films under his baton, Bernstein achieved prominence in 1955 when he composed the expansive music for DeMille's lavish *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*. Bernstein went on to further acclaim with his innovative use of modern jazz in Otto Preminger's *THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM*, and in the 60's became popular as a composer for Westerns after the success of *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN*.

Bernstein is also one of the most articulate of composers on the subject of film music. In addition to a presidency of The Screen Composers Guild in the 70's, Bernstein founded the (now defunct) Film-music Collection in 1974, respected for its scholarly film music journal and the first-time recording of many sought-after film scores.

Bernstein composed relatively few science fiction films until the 80's, when in rapid succession he provided notable symphonic music for *SATURN 3*, *HEAVY METAL*, *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON*, *SPACEHUNTER*, and the orchestral score for Michael Jackson's *THRILLER* video.

Besides *ROBOT MONSTER*, Bernstein also scored *CAT WOMEN OF THE MOON* in 1953; both these films are considered to be among the worst ever made. Bernstein's music managed to shine through their squeaky, papier mache props and ludicrous non-acting.



Film composer Elmer Bernstein

"Those were very important pictures for me," Bernstein recalled. "That was a difficult time. I had started out well in the business when I first came here, and I just fell on lean times. I was doing those films because they were the only kinds of films I could do!"

Rather than moping over the quality of the assignment, Bernstein found in these films the opportunity to try new approaches. "I was disappointed that this was the best kind of film I could get, but they were important experiments for me. I was fooling around with electronics a long time then, using the Hammond organ and the Novachord." For *ROBOT MONSTER* Bernstein mixed innovative electronics with a jangly, avant-garde piano, brass and percussion score.

GHOSTBUSTERS marks Bernstein's sixth collaboration with producer/director Ivan Reitman. The two met while Bernstein was composing for John Landis's *ANIMAL HOUSE*, for which Reitman was an associate producer. Two years later, Reitman was putting together a comedy film called *MEATBALLS*, and had Bernstein compose the score. "It was a little film and I took a chance on it," Bernstein said. "Reitman didn't have the money to pay me but I had great faith in his ability and his talent, and I loved the film." Their subsequent association resulted in a number of effective scores, including the militaristic *STRIPES*, the sweeping and lyrical orchestral moments of *HEAVY METAL*, the brassy and Williams-like *SPACEHUNTER*, and now *GHOSTBUSTERS*.

Reitman, who was a music major in college (he also scored David Cronenberg's *THEY CAME FROM WITHIN*, and *RABID*, which he produced), worked closely with Bernstein in establishing the placement and atmosphere

of his music for these films. "Ivan is a very talented man when it comes to the application of music in dramatic situations," Bernstein said. In an era where most composers are handed a film at the end of post-production and told "I need the score in two weeks!", Bernstein is brought into Reitman's productions early on, in order to establish the musical design from the very start. In the case of *GHOSTBUSTERS*, Bernstein became involved before the actors were even signed.

The music for *GHOSTBUSTERS* is particularly notable in that Bernstein plays it straight, avoiding mickey-mouse or cartoon music. "In the last seven years I've suddenly become the king of comedy," Bernstein remarked. "I've had, in succession, *ANIMAL HOUSE*, *MEATBALLS*, *STRIPES*, *AIRPLANE!*, and now this film. I think one of the reasons that the scores I've written for them work is that I do not denigrate the film. I don't try to do anything hokey or make the music funny. My theory is that if the comedy is working in the film, let the film do the comedy, and let the music get behind the emotion or action, so as to add another element."

The bulk of Bernstein's score climactic scenes in which the ghostbusters wage war on the reawakened cosmic ghost, Gozer, on the roof of a Manhattan skyscraper. Bernstein treated this music in an awesome and mystical way, with majestic crescendos and brooding, suspenseful chords, dominated by strings, brass, and supplemented by three Yamaha DX-7 synthesizers. Bernstein also used a rare French instrument called the Ondes Martenot, which creates eerie sound oscillations similar to that of the theremin which was popularized in the 40's and 50's.

Oddly enough, Bernstein found the most difficult part of the composition to be creating a theme for the central characters—Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, and Harold Ramis, the Ghostbusters. "You have to believe, along with these guys, that the ghosts really do exist. The score had to walk a very fine line. What I did was to create a kind of an 'antic' theme for them—it's kind of cute, without being really way out. The last part of the film, with the possession and the climax on top of the building, that was much easier to do, conceptually."

GHOSTBUSTERS is also graced with one of Bernstein's nicest love themes, a sweeping lyric for strings and woodwind, often backed by the Ondes Martenot, which underlies the relationship between Bill Murray and Sigourney Weaver. "I'm

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THE SCORE

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very fond of that theme," Bernstein said. "Unfortunately, because of the way the picture goes there was relatively little I could do with it."

Bernstein's only real dismay over the score is that his music, as was the case previously in *ANIMAL HOUSE*, *MEATBALLS*, and *HEAVY METAL*, is overshadowed by the prevalent use of rock-and-roll songs during many scenes, a predicament Bernstein is begrudgingly learning to live with.

"I'm really not happy with it," he said. "John Landis and Ivan Reitman are both extremely gifted and they really have a sense for the market. I think using the rock-and-roll songs is part of their awareness of this market. Quite honestly, they do it because they think it's going to help sell their picture. Obviously, as a composer, I don't much care for it. I'd rather handle the whole thing myself and, ultimately, I don't think it's as good for a film as having a completely composed score. But it's very hard to argue with something like the Ray Parker, Jr. song from *GHOSTBUSTERS*, when it is in the top ten."

The conflict between rock songs and orchestral scoring has plagued film composers for years. Even now in this post-*STAR WARS* era where the symphonic score has regained its respectability, Bernstein and other composers are still confronted by producers or studios who demand theme songs or rock scores to boost the marketability and promotion of their movies. To Bernstein and many others, a foot-tapping rhythm will never equal the dramatic atmosphere that an orchestral score can provide.

While Bernstein did like the Ray Parker Jr. title song, (which, incidentally, is a musical clone of Huey Lewis and the News's 1983 hit, "I Want A New Drug"), there were other places—such as the scene in which the ghosts are released from the Busters' headquarters and wisp their way back to Sigourney Weaver's apartment building—in which the rock music provided little atmosphere or dramatic support to the visual, only a distracting rhythm and beat. This isn't what makes good movie music, according to Bernstein.

"I have nothing against rock-and-roll, per se," Bernstein said. "I think if it's appropriate, then fine. What bothers me, is that it's a shame that in a film like *GHOSTBUSTERS* one feels compelled to put in a rock-and-roll tune for public acceptance. There isn't any real reason why *GHOSTBUSTERS* had to have rock-and-roll music—after all, it's not *FOOT-LOOSE*!"

When allowed its own space, though, Bernstein's music breathes with its own seething life—capturing the windy spirit of *Gozer*, the seductiveness of *Zuul*, the roarings of *Terror Dogs*. In *GHOSTBUSTERS*, Bernstein continues to find in science fiction films, welcomed opportunities for musical inventiveness, as he did thirty years ago in *ROBOT MONSTER*.

"Science fiction is a composer's holiday," he said. "It gives you such a wide range of things you can do and experiment with." □

Director Ivan Reitman—"he ain't afraid of no ghosts"

GHOSTBUSTERS

A Columbia Pictures release. 6/1984, 107 mins. Produced and directed by Ivan Reitman. Written by Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis. Music by Elmer Bernstein. Production designer, John De Cuir. Director of photography, Laszlo Kovacs, A.S.C. Visual Effects by Richard Edlund, A.S.C. Executive producer, Bernie Brillstein. Film edited by Sheldon Kahn and David Blewitt, A.C.E. "Ghostbusters" written and performed by Ray Parker, Jr. Associate producers Joe Medjuck and Michael C. Gross.

Dr. Peter Venkman Bill Murray
Dr. Raymond Stantz Dan Aykroyd
Dana Barrett Sigourney Weaver
Dr. Egon Spengler Harold Ramis
Louis Tully Rick Moranis
Janine Melnitz Annie Potts
Walter Peck William Atherton
Winston Zeddemore Ernie Hudson
Mayor David Margulies
Male Student Steven Tash
Female Student Jennifer Runyon
Goez Slavitza Jovan

by David J. Hogan

Early in *GHOSTBUSTERS*, college parapsychologist Dr. Peter Venkman (Bill Murray) warns an interloper, "Back off, man. I'm a scientist." Ah, but not merely a bland, real-world scientist, but a *movie* scientist, spiritual kin to Baron Frankenstein and the guy who owned Donovan's brain. Venkman is a scientist with a special flair—that's why he squanders foundation money on pointless ESP research, torments a male test volunteer with electrical shocks, and flirts with a lovely female subject.

Of course, movie scientists are usually misunderstood, so it's no surprise when Venkman, Stantz (Dan Aykroyd), and Spengler (Harold Ramis) are stripped of their grant and thrown off campus into what Stantz bleakly refers to as "the private sector." But this isn't just America—it's *movie* America, so what *else* would three parapsychologists do but go into business as "professional paranormal investigators and eliminators?"

In a wacky New York City that is



Ghostbusters Bill Murray (left) and Dan Aykroyd make a house call at a posh New York hotel. Inset: One of the hotel ghosts, the blobby green weenie-eater, one of the few optical effects in the film played strictly for laughs. Makeup artist Steve Johnson sculpted the prototypes of the cable-activated suits worn by Mark Wilson, with his legs draped in black.

hilariously delineated by scripters Aykroyd and Ramis, and director Ivan Reitman, ghosts are a given. Spooks and the gooey ectoplasm they leave behind are facts of life, like cockroaches and athlete's foot. Look: they're real, okay? New York *needs* the Ghostbusters.

With their para-military coveralls, high-tech spook sniffers, and ray-spitting "unlicensed nuclear accelerators" strapped to their backs, the Ghostbusters are to stealth what The Three Stooges are to etiquette. "I think we'd better split up," Spengler suggests as the trio creeps through a haunted hotel. "Yeah," nods Venkman, "we can do more damage that way."

After dispatching an amusing assortment of unruly spirits (everyone's favorite will be the blobby green weenie-eater), the Ghostbusters investigate Dana Barrett's refrigerator, the apparent home of a pair of *very* nasty demons named Zuul and Gozer. Dana (Sigourney Weaver) is a symphony musician who wants the smitten Venkman out of her face

nearly as much as she wants the ghosts out of her refrigerator. The showdown between our heroes and the demons is protracted, frantic, noisy, and as deftly funny as anything that has been on screen for several years. *GHOSTBUSTERS* glories in the kind of expensive, big-scale mayhem that pictures like *THE GREAT RACE* and *1941* only aspire to.

Producer/director Ivan Reitman may be the surprise story of the season. He emerges as a confident, sure-footed director: his style is big and brassy, stuffed with closeups and vulgar charm. The absurd is cleverly balanced with the horrible. One scene, for instance, Dana Barrett's unexpected ride in her living room chair, is as slick and enervating as anything that has been done by Steven Spielberg.

The film doesn't just move, but *leaps* from here to there in single bounds, progressing briskly until the elements of the climax begin to fall into place. Then, oddly, Reitman slows things down. Some ruthless

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A live-action *terror-dog* bounds into Sigourney Weaver's apartment (left). Animator Randy Cook is shown (right) sculpting the stop-motion *terror dogs* that were used for sequences requiring broader, more realistic movement than the stage-bound dogs.



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BACK ISSUES

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GHOSTBUSTERS

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editing would have helped. But this is a relatively minor cavil, as are complaints about some of Richard Edlund's incredibly ambitious special effects. Edlund and his crew sweated under a tight deadline, and the pressure is apparent in a couple of matte paintings that do not cut in well, and in some sloppy optical compositing that compromises the fine stop-motion animation by Randy Cook. Generally speaking, though, Edlund and his Boss Film Company have delivered. The deliciously absurd Mr. Stay-Puft, alone, is worth the price of admission.

John DeCuir's production design is lush and appropriately stylized. Dana Barrett's penthouse apartment—so deco it's decadent—is a special treat. Laszlo Kovacs' cinematography glitters. Sigourney Weaver seems quite at home in such surroundings. The epitome of class and delectability, Weaver smolders across the screen in her *best role since ALIEN*. SCTV alumnus Rick Moranis does a hilarious turn as Dana's *geeky neighbor, who is* Annie Potts, Ernie Hudson, and William Atherton are effective in smaller roles. Actress Slavitza Jovan is especially memorable as the sexy, ember-eyed incarnation of the demon Gozer.

Aykroyd and Ramis are fine—Aykroyd with his resolute walk and blank confusion (he reminds me of *The Stooges'* Larry Fine); Ramis with his tinny voice and faintly pompous manner. Both actors underplay, in *obvious* deference to Bill Murray. Watching Murray effortlessly dominate *GHOSTBUSTERS* is like listening to Victor Borge have fun with a piano concerto, or observing a great boxer toy with a flatfooted opponent. There is nothing arrogant about Murray's performance, so we can't say that he rises above his (very funny) material; he seems rather to move beyond it, to some point in another dimension that *allows him to* approach his lines and his character at oblique, delightfully eccentric angles. He understands what's expected of him, and delivers, but with a wryness and sense of ironic detachment that is *pure joy*. I wonder if anybody was surprised when they saw the dailies and realized that—*bam!—no contest, Murray owned the movie.*

Murray's Dr. Venkman not only gives *GHOSTBUSTERS* its special cheek and irreverence, but brings a *dimension* of subtle social satire. Venkman has *no illusions* about himself or his comrades—he knows that ghostbusting is a pretty silly way to make a living. When the trio become media darlings and make the covers of *Time*, *USA Today*, and *The Atlantic*, Venkman revels in the attention, greeting his fans and working the adoring crowds with all the slick shamelessness of Pia Zadora. Venkman hasn't been fooled by the American cult of celebrity. He—and the movie—throw our gullibility right back at us. We don't mind, though, because *GHOSTBUSTERS* lets us know that sass is healthy, and that good deeds, good friends, and belly laughs are all that really matter. □

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