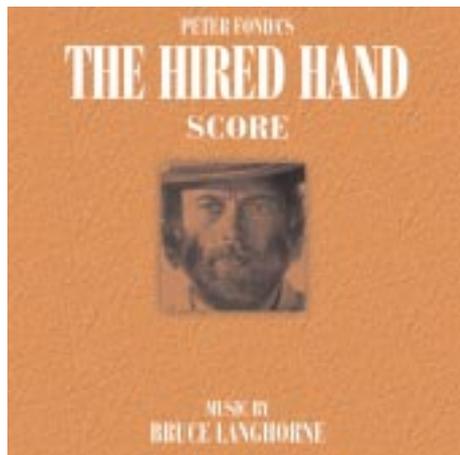


Bruce Langhorne

Soundtrack to The Hired Hand (Dir Peter Fonda) 1971

Blast First [petite] (catalogue number PTYT 02)



BRUCE LANGHORNE was one of the most significant session guitarists to emerge in the early years of folk rock at the start of the sixties. He is best known for playing on some of Bob Dylan's most ground breaking records, notably 1965's Bringing It All Back Home, Dylan's transitional excursion from folk into folk rock. Langhorne did, however, play with countless other musicians during the sixties, including Richie Havens, Gordon Lightfoot, on Richard and Mimi Fariña's two Vanguard Ips, Eric Anderson, Buffy Sainte-Marie, on Joan Baez's Farewell Angelina and, most memorably in conveying Langhorne's own exquisite style, on Tom Rush's The Circle Game.

He produced fellow traveller Ramblin' Jack Elliot's Young Brigham in 1968 and has since done considerable soundtrack work. In all that time, Langhorne had never released an lp under his own name but, finally, his mesmerizing score for Peter Fonda's revisionist Western and directorial debut The Hired Hand is to be released in late October on Blast First [petite].

Langhorne's distinctive style evolved through his use of an acoustic guitar with a pick up, fed through a Fender Twin Reverb amp that he originally borrowed from another renowned guitarist, Sandy Bull. Langhorne's sound is a blend of the acoustic and electric, using a tremolo effect in time with the song, a technique influenced by Roebuck Staples of The Staple Singers.

His unique minimalist picking style is also shaped by him having a foreshortened finger on one hand (strangely a theme that is obliquely echoed in the script of The Hired Hand).

A regular in the burgeoning Greenwich Village scene of the early sixties, Langhorne worked first as an accompanist in clubs like Gerdes and The Bitter End and, subsequently, in the studio,

including the same sessions for Carolyn Hester's first Columbia lp in 1961 where a young, then-unsigned Bob Dylan played harmonica. This contact with Dylan led him to play on the sessions, albeit mostly for Dylan's 1963 career-breaking lp, The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, which marked Dylan's first attempts at mixing folk and rock. Langhorne also played on the hastily withdrawn non-lp rock single, Mixed Up Confusion, a less successful experiment for Dylan with the Sun Records sound.

Langhorne's finest hour with Dylan is throughout the Bringing It All Back Home lp, and most tellingly on She Belongs To Me and Love Minus Zero/No Limit. The other defining track is Mr Tambourine Man, which Dylan notes in the booklet to the Biograph Box Set: "Mr Tambourine Man, I think, was inspired by Bruce Langhorne. Bruce was playing guitar with me on a bunch of the early records. And he had this gigantic tambourine. It was like, really big. It was as big as a wagon wheel. He was playing, and this vision of him playing this tambourine just stuck in my mind. He was one of those characters..."

He worked with Dylan again for the soundtrack to Pat Garret & Billy The Kid. Bruce Langhorne's session work was overtaken by regular work on soundtracks by the early seventies and with co-running an L.A. recording studio. The score to The Hired Hand was his first soundtrack commission (previously, he had written music to accompany adverts), a full score with all the music composed AND performed by Langhorne. His mood music beautifully enhances a film that is by turn trippy, surreal, downbeat and sad, the images underpinned by Langhorne's melancholy score using guitars, tonal effects, fiddle, banjo and sitar.

His score predates by nearly 30 years the work of David "Papa M" Pajo and Will "Bonnie Prince Billy" Oldham and even manages to match Ry Cooder's sublime Paris, Texas score for its winsome evocation of high plains drifting, lonesome cowpoke, soul music. Indeed Pajo, on seeing the film recently, has become an enthusiastic fan of Langhorne's work.

The Hired Hand soundtrack was recorded on only two tracks, with Langhorne "bouncing down" the overdubs and therefore mixing as he went along, a method that allows for no mistakes. It's all the more impressive in that it utilises 40 different instruments to orchestrate this virtuoso tumbleweed symphony, each instrument carrying its own character and subtlety, evoking the "real west" of the late 1800s.

Langhorne has gone on to work on various soundtracks, most notably with Jonathan Demme on several occasions, and his music is to be found on the soundtracks for Melvin And Howard, Stay Hungry and Outlaw Blues.

These days, Bruce Langhorne lives in Venice California where he also makes a fine hot sauce to his own recipe ("Brother Bru Bru"), which is distributed throughout America by the appropriately named "Cosmic Chile" company. Now in his sixties, Langhorne is still involved with music, spending much of time teaching in drum circle workshops around the USA.

This album will be his first "solo" release.

The Hired Hand, featuring Peter Fonda, Warren Oates and Verna Bloom, was Fonda's directorial debut and was made directly after he had shot to fame in Easy Rider. The film was not well received, having been marketed as an action movie. Fonda comments: "Those marketing guys just didn't want to see me on a horse, moving slow!" The studio buried it after a week or so.

The maverick UK-based film distributor Hamish McAlpine of Tartan Films had always been a fan of the film and, along with Martin Scorsese (who utilised his own film foundation), The Hired Hand finally was restored for theatrical release to Fonda's original cut and was released this year on DVD by Sundance Film (in the USA) and Tartan Films.

Martin Scorsese says of the film: "...it is an Anti-Western, a reinvention...an extraordinarily delicate and beautiful picture".

Empire, Uncut and Hotdog, popular film magazines, each gave the re-released movie four stars.

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