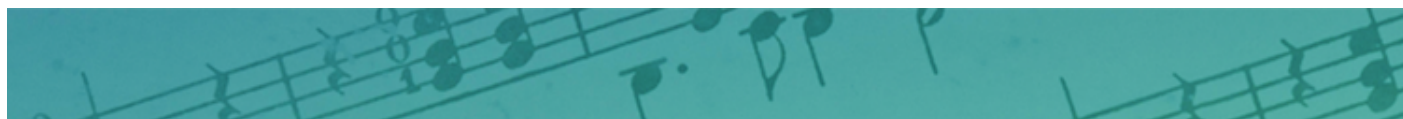


DRUNK MONKEYS | LITERATURE + FILM (/)

September 9, 2019

FILM / ONCE UPON A TIME IN FILM SCORING / TOP GUN / SEAN WOODARD

Film (/2017-posts/category/Film)



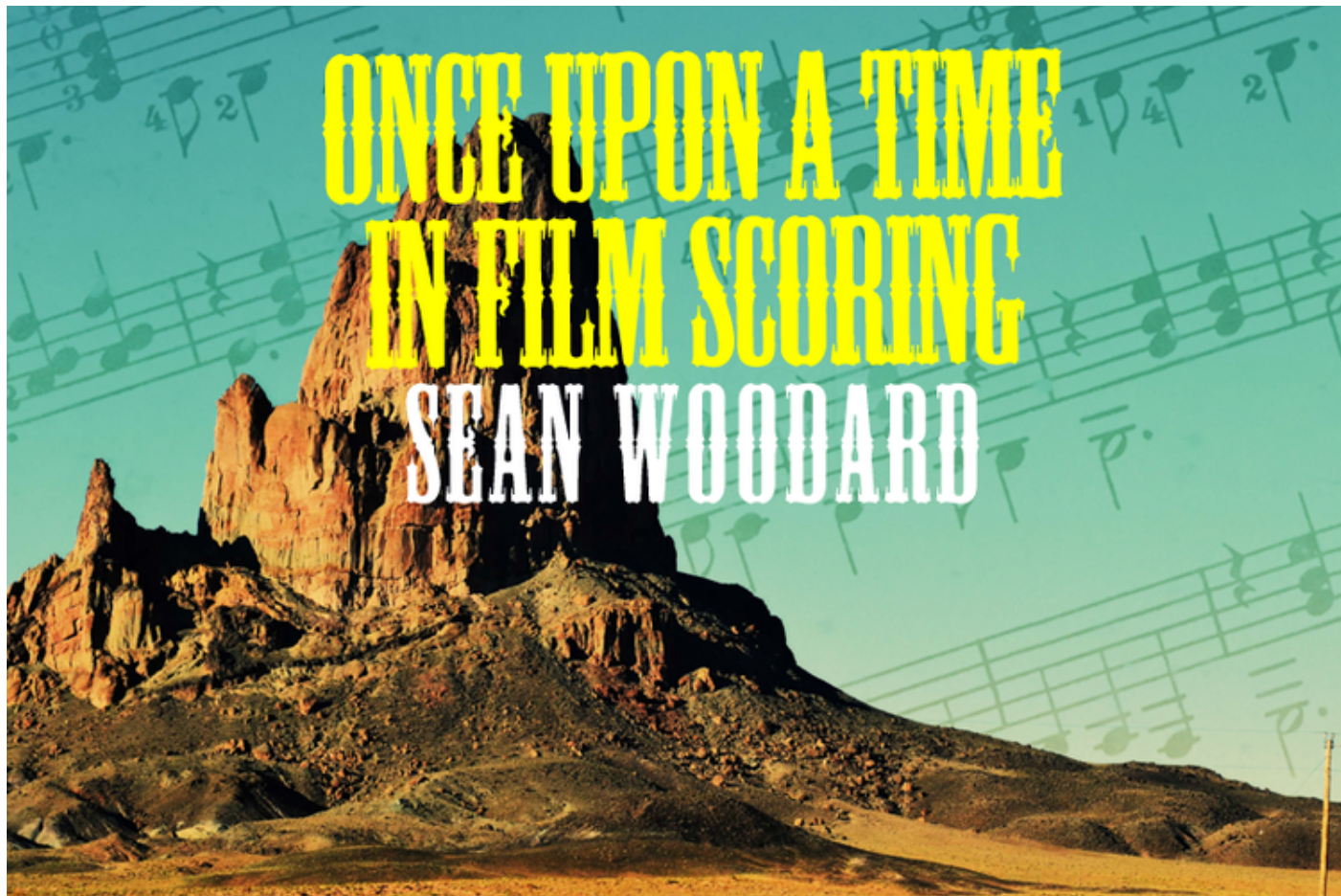


Image © Nathan Alan Schwartz

Top Gun (1986)

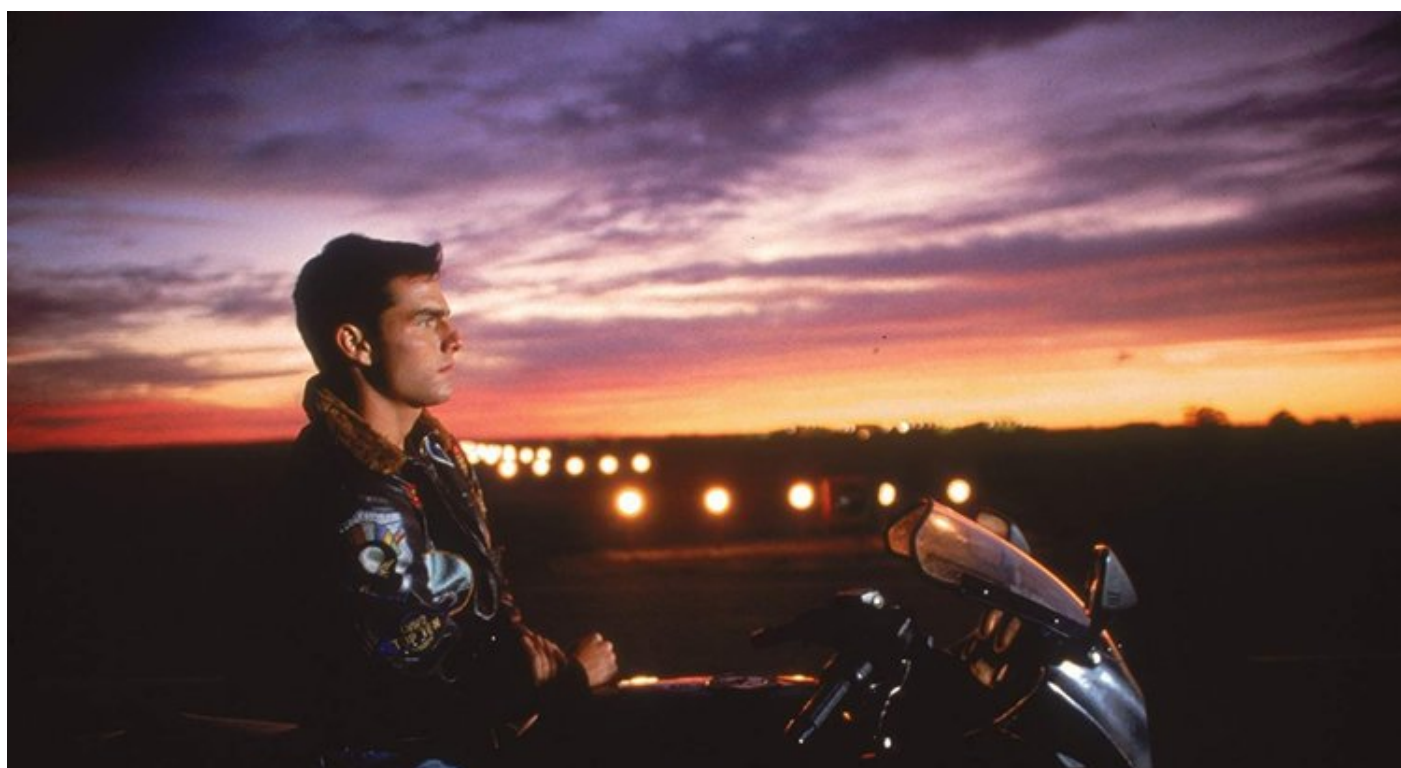




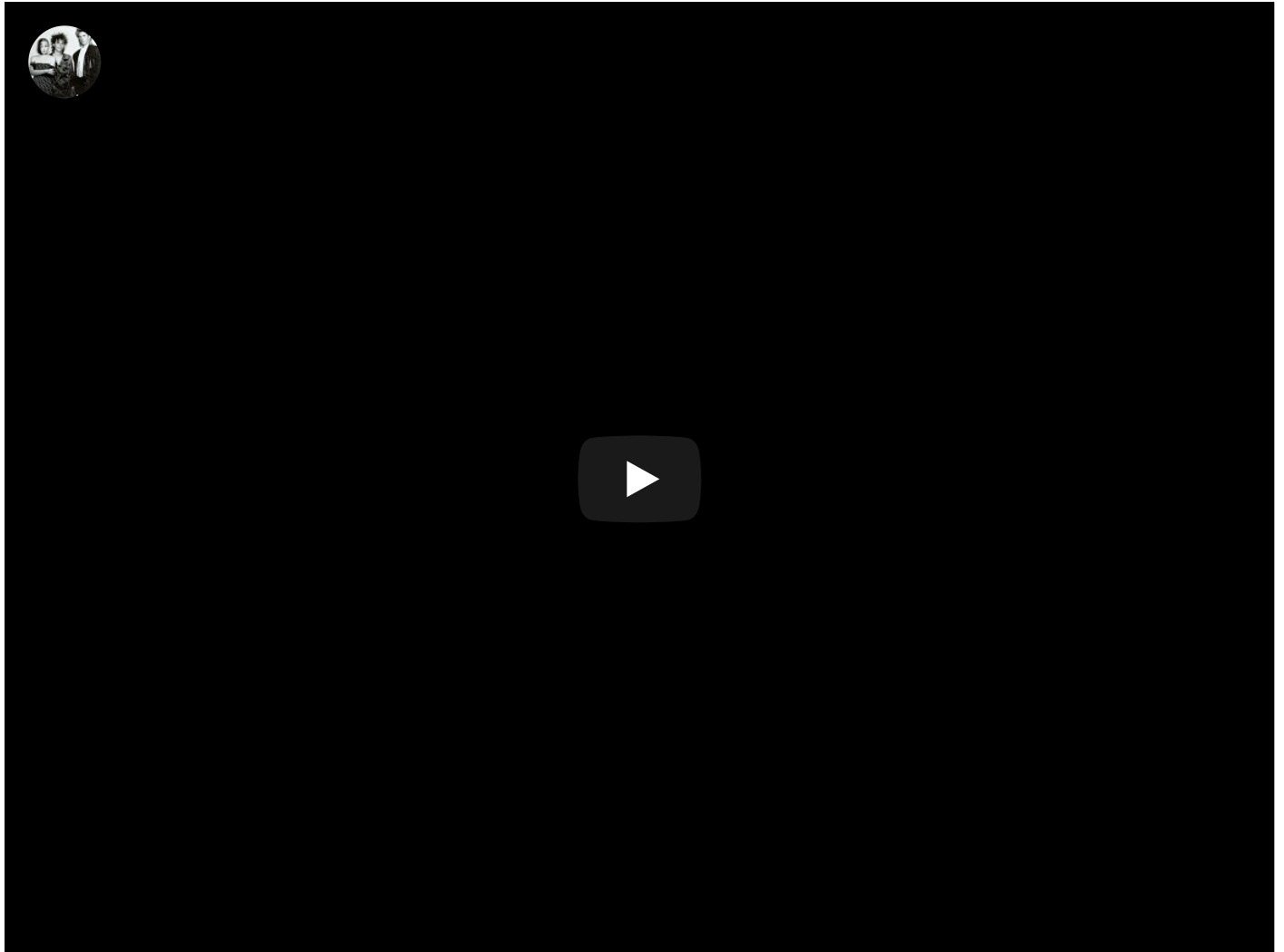
Image © Paramount Pictures

A few months ago I was sitting at home, burnt out on the couch. I decided to kill time and relax by watching a movie. But it had to be something that had to be fun and didn't require much thinking. I scanned through my Blu-Ray collection and my eyes landed on *Top Gun*. I figured, why not?

I was probably around ten years old when I first saw the film. I liked the songs "Danger Zone" and "I'm Alright" by Kenny Loggins and asked my dad if I could watch both *Top Gun* and *Caddyshack*. Those were terrible choices at the time. I was too young. I remember a family friend saying I shouldn't have seen *Top Gun* because of the sex scene between Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis to Berlin's "Take My Breath Away."



Seeing it recently was like seeing it again for the first time. And, while I admit it wasn't anything special, I can see how it was one of the most successful releases in the 1980s. Immensely quotable and entertaining, the film also boasted one of the best-selling movie soundtracks of all time. Not only did Harold Faltermeyer and Steven Stevens's "Top Gun Anthem" win the 1987 Grammy Award for Best Pop Instrumental Performance and Berlin's "Take My Breath Away" (Giorgio Moroder and Tom Whitlock) the Grammy for Best Original Song — Motion Picture, but the soundtrack went on to become certified multi-Platinum.



Perhaps the glue that tied it all together was Giorgio Moroder, whose brilliant songwriting and collaboration with top musical artists was the key to the soundtrack's success. For example, Bryan Adams was originally supposed to sing "Danger Zone," co-written by Moroder and Tom Whitlock, but can you imagine anyone else but Kenny Loggins singing the hard-rocking tune over the roar of jets taking off from an aircraft carrier?

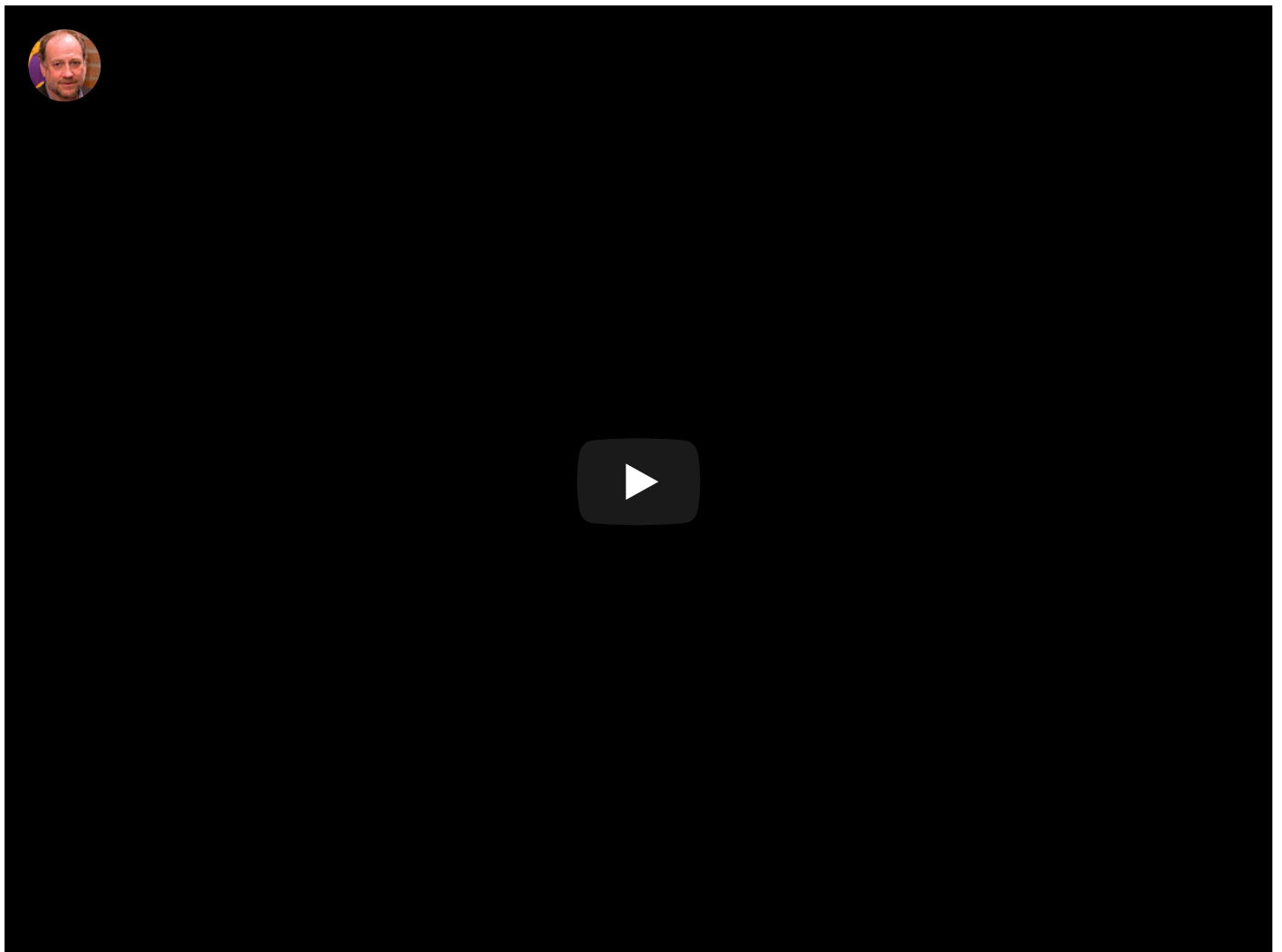
Moroder has also stated that “Take My Breath Away” is the hit record of which he is most proud. The track, with lead vocals by Terri Nunn of the group Berlin, was an astronomical success. After hearing a demo of the song, prior to Berlin’s involvement in the song’s recording, allegedly inspired director Tony Scott and producers Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson to increase the romantic chemistry between Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis in the film, ultimately resulting in them shooting a love scene between their characters.

If anything, the film and its soundtrack projects a male machismo attitude—from the hammy, yet endearing, breakout karaoke of The Righteous Brothers’s “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling” as Maverick tries to pick up Charlie in a bar at the beginning of the film to the inclusion of Kenny Loggins’s “Playing with the Boys” during an extended beach volleyball scene between the shirtless and tanned naval aviators. Add in the guitar- and synth-driven “Top Gun Anthem” and “Danger Zone,” along with songs by Cheap Trick and other notable ‘80s artists, and you complete this picture of cocky, young flyboys with a white male exceptionalism complex while basking in their brotherly bond.

However, the film saves itself at points with its likable characters and its well-placed pathos—particularly the scene where Goose dies. It never fails to make my eyes water. Harold Faltermeyer’s “Memories” underscores the scene with strings, synths, and a mournful acoustic guitar that elicits such a strong tug on the heartstrings as Maverick faces the reality that his best friend is gone forever. It makes the previous scenes that humanized Goose, including when he plays “Great Balls of Fire” on the piano with his son in his lap, more memorable.



The soundtrack has been released several times, including a Special Expanded Edition in the 1999 and a Deluxe Edition for the film's 20th anniversary. I remember playing my mom's 1999 CD and being perplexed why Otis Redding's "(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay" was a bonus track since I couldn't recall hearing it in the film. My most recently viewing confirmed it plays over a radio in a scene between Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis. From my understanding, the additional bonus tracks on the 2006 Deluxe Edition don't even relate to film at all. While the original 10-track version is perhaps the best of the three releases, I appreciate the Special Expanded Edition's inclusion of Flatermeyer's "Memories" and the original versions of "Great Balls of Fire" and "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling."



Top Gun remains a fun movie to watch. But its soundtrack solidifies the film as the iconic 1980s gem it is to this day. So switch on your television, crank the volume and “feel the need . . . the need for speed!”



***Sean Woodard** is a graduate of Point Loma Nazarene University and Chapman University. Focusing on a wide variety of interests, Sean's fiction, film criticism, and other writings have been featured in NonBinary Review, Los Angeles Review of Books, Cultured Vultures, The Cost of Paper, and Los Angeles Magazine, among other publications. He serves as the Film Editor for Drunk Monkeys and as a co-producer of the faith-based Ordinary Grace (<http://ordinarygrace.org/>) podcast. A native of Visalia, CA, he now resides in Orange County.*

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