

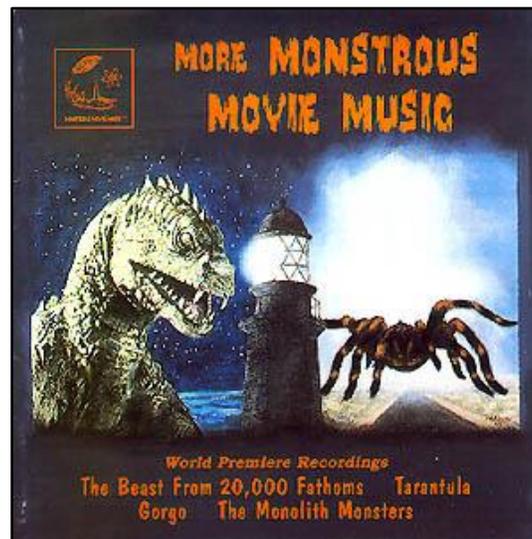


DIVE 12 – SEA NOMINEES FOR BEST (MY FAVORITE) SCORE

THE BEST (MY FAVORITE) UNDERWATER FILM SCORES

Let's now turn our attention to identifying the best (at least this writer's favorite) score in each of the ten sea genre categories—and the best (or my favorite) score overall. Let's start by identifying this writer's favorite score in each of the ten Sea Genres.

SEA MONSTERS – The original soundtrack CD (Sony) for **Godzilla** did not include the underwater theme titled “Godzilla Versus the Submarine” which cue does appear on the La-La Land CD. However, leaving out a key underwater score cue was not a mistake by the folks at [Monstrous Movie Music](#) when they re-recorded the scores for **The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms** (David Buttolph), **It Came from Beneath the Sea** (Mischa Bakaleinikoff), and **Gorgo** (Angelo Francesco Lavagnino). Each recording includes one or more cues for each film's underwater scenes. Of these three scores, my favorite in the **Sea Monsters** genre is Buttolph's score for **The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms**, with “Diving Bell” as the standout cue.



The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (David Buttolph)

SEA MUTANTS – In the **Sea Mutants** genre, a film's human protagonists confront a variety of “feature creatures” varying in their natural evolution or man-made devolution toward something not quite fish and/or not quite human, encompassing everything from mermaids (1984's **Splash** and 2001's **She Creature**), “mermachos” (the Mariner in 1995's **Waterworld**), and extraterrestrials (1985's **Cocoon** and 1995's **Ocean Girl**) to the more fish-like than human-like “creatures” in 1954's **Creature from the Black Lagoon** (and its sequels) or the aquatic humanoid in 2017's **The Shape of Water**. But which **Sea Mutant** film has the best score?

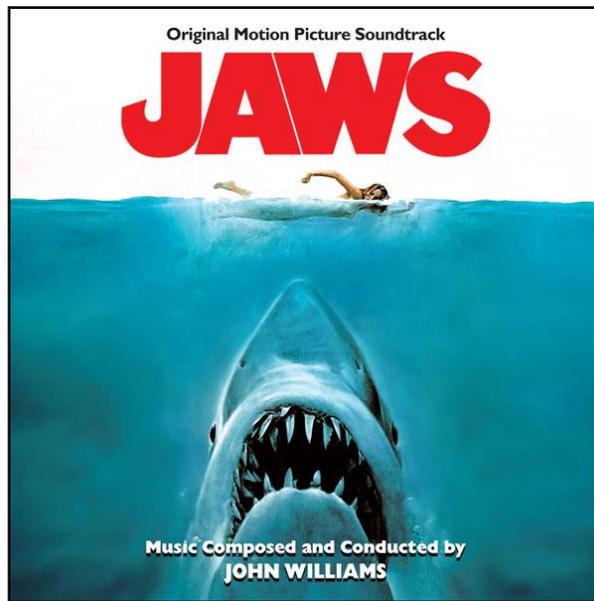
Reviewing the candidates, some of the standouts would have to include Luciano Michelini's "Descent to Atlantis" cue from **Screams (L'Isola degli uomini pesce)**, Lee Holdridge's "Love Came to Me" theme featured in several cues from **Splash**, the Gary McDonald and Laurie Stone "new age" score for **Ocean Girl**, and David Hirschfelder's atmospheric and haunting score that accompanies the mermaid in **She Creature**. For this genre, however, I have to split my first place vote for the film with the best **Sea Mutants** score between, drum roll please:

- Herman Stein's scoring for **Creature from the Black Lagoon** (notably for Stein's ascending, three-note, shouting brass motif for the Gill-Man (**BAH-BAH-BAHHH!**) and the beautiful melodies and atmospheric cues" (contributed by several composers) for the scenes where the film's protagonists, Kay and the Creature, are swimming underwater; and
- Alexandre Desplat's beautifully flowing and melodic score for **The Shape of Water** (2017).



Creature from the Black Lagoon (Herman Stein) & The Shape of Water (Alexandre Desplat)

SEA BATTLES – Our exhaustive (bet you couldn't hold your breath) review of scores in the **Sea Battles** genre covered some 24 films awash with always-hungry denizens of the deep. While Philip Sainton's score for **Moby Dick** (1956) was an early standout in this genre, no score has had more of an impact on the scoring of subsequent films in this genre, had more written about it, and had a more (easily) memorable leitmotif theme ("Da dum") for its protagonist (the shark) than John Williams' score for **Jaws** (1975). While other scores have their moments of brilliance, including Dimitri Tiomkin's score for **The Old Man and the Sea** (1958) and Ennio Morricone's score for **Orca** (1977), only a few of these scores were genuinely original, while many post-**Jaws** score were poor copy cats of Williams' innovative score for **Jaws**. Thus, my vote for the best **Sea Battles** score of those reviewed goes to **Jaws**, a score based on the most terrifying two-note sequence ("da-dum") ever strung together for a film.



Jaws (John Williams)

SEA BUDDIES – Identifying the best film score in this genre comes down to picking one’s personal favorite within each **Sea Buddy** sub-genre, and then an overall favorite, as follows:

- **Whales:** With nine nominees in this category – **Namu, The Killer Whale; A Whale for the Killing; Whale Music; Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home; When the Whales Came; Free Willy; Free Willy 2: The Adventure Home; Free While 3: The Rescue;** and **Whale Rider**, this writer’s favorite score was provided by Lisa Gerrard for **Whale Rider**.
- **Dolphins:** With six nominees in this category – **The Day of the Dolphin; Where the River Runs Black; Flipper; Palla di Neve; Zeus and Roxanne;** and **Dolphins**, my personal favorite score in this group was composed by Georges Delerue for **The Day of the Dolphin**.
- **Loch Ness Monsters:** Of the three nominees in this category – **Magic in the Water; Loch Ness;** and **The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep**, this writer’s favorite score is Trevor Jones’ touching score for **Loch Ness**.
- **Seals:** With only two contending nominees in this category – **The Golden Seal** and **Andre**, The magical score for **The Golden Seal** by John Barry and Dana Kaproff is this writer’s favorite over Bruce Rowland’s upbeat score for **Andre**.
- **Shark: Ti-Koyo E Il Suo Pescecane** – Though this category has only one nominee, Francesco de Masi’s score for **Ti-Koyo E Il Suo Pescecane**, it is hard to pick this score among the top five favorites as so much of the score is based on the melody that an earlier composer penned for the popular song “My Happiness,” leaving de Masi’s score for **Ti-Koyo** as an honorable mention.
- **Fish: Finding Nemo** – This category’s only nominee, **Finding Nemo**, was blessed with a rich score provided by Thomas Newman.

All things considered here is this writer's countdown to the best score in the **Sea Buddies** genre:

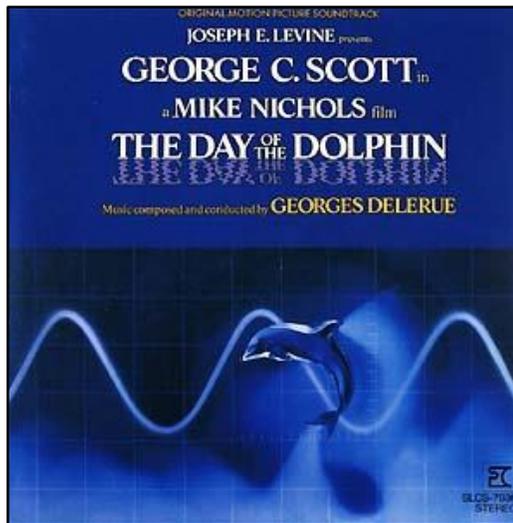
5th - John Barry and Dana Kaproff: **The Golden Seal**

4th – Thomas Newman's **Finding Nemo**

3rd – Lisa Gerrard's **Whale Rider**

2nd – Trevor Jones' **Loch Ness**

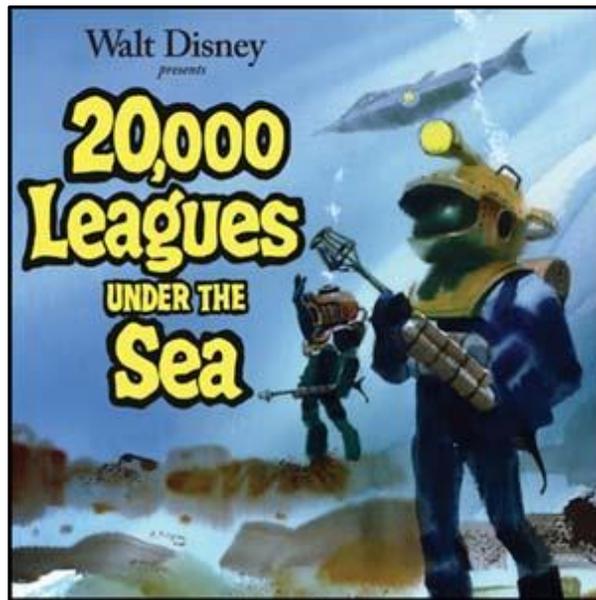
1st – George Delerue's **The Day of the Dolphin**



The Day of the Dolphin (Georges Delerue)

SEA SUBS (FANTASY SUBS) – Surfacing which is the best (to this writer's tastes) score in the **Fantasy Subs** sub-genre is not that difficult a task, when one eliminates films in which the film's submarine protagonist is given little time on screen (or underwater!) and/or limited scoring accompaniment – e.g., **Atlantis: The Lost Continent** (Russell Garcia) or **Ventimili Leghe Sotti I Mare** (Ennio Morricone), the latter actually being a radio drama. While interesting scores in their own right, the plots for the two mini-sub films – **Fantastic Voyage** (Leonard Rosenman) and **InnerSpace** (Jerry Goldsmith) – are somewhat at a disadvantage in that the actual environment being scored is within the human body (“in the bloodstream”) rather than underwater. Perhaps because this writer has not seen three of the Japanese films (**Mighty Jack**, **Latitude Zero**, and **Super Atragon**) their scores are less appreciated than the scores for more familiar films such as **Around the World Under the Sea** (Harry Sukman) and **Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea** (Paul Sawtell and Bert Shefter). Of course, the latter's title theme became forever etched in one's mind by the film's repackaging into a multi-year run as a popular television show, a feat not equaled either in the show's second season by the title theme that Jerry Goldsmith composed for “Jonah and the Whale” or some thirty years later by John Debney's rousing title theme for **SeaQuest DSV** and **SeaQuest 2032**.

Further, the adage “often imitated, never duplicated” never pings (rings) more true when one compares the scores that composers provided for multiple versions of **20,000 Leagues under the Sea**. Of the nearly half dozen scores reviewed here for various film versions of this Jules Verne classic, several offer exceptionally interesting cues, such as Bernard Herrmann’s innovative score for **Mysterious Island**, Angela Morley’s waltz-like title theme for **Captain Nemo and the Underwater City**, John Scott’s mystery-toned score for **20,000 Leagues under the Sea**, and Paul Smith’s score for the original (1954) version of **20,000 Leagues under the Sea**, which score was finally issued on CD by Intrada. Of these the score surfacing above the waves as my personal favorite (if not the best) was that provided by Paul Smith for 1954’s **20,000 Leagues under the Sea**.



20,000 Leagues under the Sea (Paul Smith)

SEA SUBS (WAR SUBS) – In picking the best score in the **War Subs** sub-genre, one certainly would not want to provoke an international incident. But, having not yet seen this category’s three most recent films [2004’s Russian film **72 Meters** (Ennio Morricone) and two Japanese films – 2005’s **Lorelei: The Witch of the Pacific Ocean** (Naoki Sato) and 2006’s **Deguchi No Nai Umi (Sea Without Exit)** (Minori Kabasawa)], this writer will leave it to the reader to judge whether the score for any of those three films is better than the one that will be crowned below as best in this genre. While each of this genre’s three oldest films – 1943’s **Destination Tokyo** (Franz Waxman and William Lava - uncredited), 1954’s **Hell and High Water** (Alfred Newman), and 1957’s **The Enemy Below** (Leigh Harline) – has a serviceable score, none rises to the level of being a personal favorite, plus Newman’s score reportedly incorporate themes he earlier composed for other films and, to boot, the film’s score relies heavily on the popular French song “Mam’selle.” While also having serviceable scores, I have not found the scores for 1968’s **Submarine X-1** (Ron Goodwin) or 1987’s **U Boats: The Wolfpack** (Christopher Young) all that memorable.

Continuing with this process of elimination, if I had to pick a favorite WWII-themed score, though not the best overall **War Subs** score, it could be Klaus Doldinger's score for **Das Boot** (1981), Richard Marvin's score for **U-571** (2000), or Graeme Revell's score for **Below** (2002). Of these three, my preference is Doldinger's score for **Das Boot**. The **War Subs** sub-genre also includes films set during the "cold war" – notably, the 1959 and 1999 versions of **On the Beach** scored by Ernest Gold and Christopher Gordon, respectively. Unfortunately, as noted in our earlier discussion of these scores, these films did not provide scores rich with either submarine- or underwater-themed cues. Three more recent films also set in the "cold war" period have, by comparison, extensive scoring for their narratives' submarine- and/or underwater-themed scenes: 1990's **The Hunt for Red October** (Basil Poledouris), 1995's **Crimson Tide** (Hans Zimmer), and 2002's **K-19: The Widowmaker** (Klaus Badelt). Yet none of these would be my #1 pick for best **War Sub** score.

By this process of elimination, we are left with only two films ping-ponging for the best score of the films in the **War Subs** genre: 1981's WWII thriller **Das Boot** (Klaus Doldinger) and 1968's "cold war" thriller **Ice Station Zebra** (Michel Legrand). While Doldinger provides a melodic and driving main theme to propel the film's submarine protagonist into battle, Legrand's score for **Ice Station Zebra**, as described by Jeff Bond, is "majestic"—"especially with the four-note theme for the Tigerfish." While this writer, as noted above, liked Doldinger's score for **Das Boot**, my vote for best score in the **War Subs** genre goes to Michel Legrand's score of **Ice Station Zebra**.

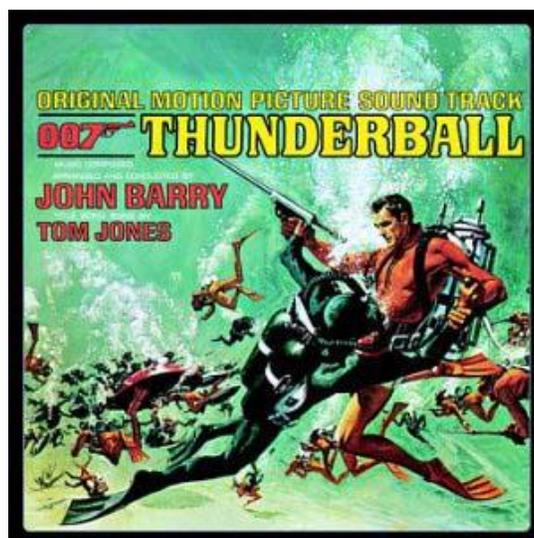


Ice Station Zebra (Michel Legrand)

SEA SPIES – This genre sports only a few contenders for best underwater score, so picking the best is really not a big challenge. The score, reportedly composed by David Rose, for the late 1950s’ **Sea Hunt** television series can be heard almost daily on one or another cable channel or at various internet sites (e.g., YouTube.com). Unfortunately, while a couple of cover versions of the series’ main title are available on LP and CD, the show’s original score, much of which accompanied each episode’s extensive underwater scenes, has yet to be commercially released, so don’t hold your breath! While a much more recent contender might be **Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Cradle of Life** (Alan Silvestri), the film had only one major scene filmed underwater with accompanying score, which generally also was the case for the otherwise excellent score that Michael J. Lewis composed for 1980’s **Fflok**.

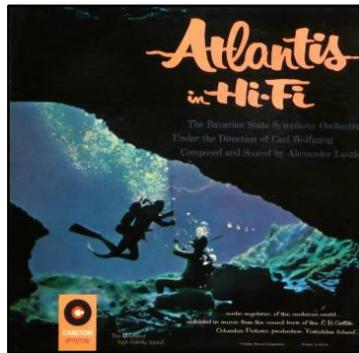
With the above contenders eliminated from the running, the list of candidates for best score in the **Sea Spies** genre boils down to which of six James Bond films, focusing on the score components for these films’ underwater scenes, has the best overall score. Five James Bond films – notably, 1981’s **For Your Eyes Only** (Bill Conti), 1985’s **A View to a Kill** (John Barry), 1989’s **Licence to Kill** (Michael Kamen), 1997’s **Tomorrow Never Dies** (David Arnold), and 1999’s **The World Is Not Enough** (David Arnold) – contain only a short score-accompanied underwater scene. Further, with the exception or two where a film had a memorable title tune (e.g., Sheena Easton singing “For Your Eyes Only”), this writer has never found the scores for these five James Bond films all that memorable.

While significant portions of 1977’s **The Spy Who Loved Me** (Marvin Hamlisch) and 1983’s **Never Say Never Again** (Michel Legrand) take place underwater, these films’ scores arguably suffer from their composers providing scores with disco or jazz flourishes that didn’t add much and/or now seem dated. With this process of deduction, our list of suspects for best overall score for the **Sea Spies** genre boils down to John Barry’s score for 1965’s **Thunderball**.

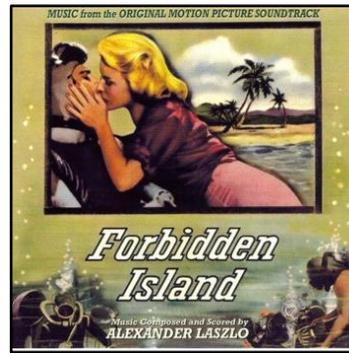


Thunderball (John Barry)

SEA TREASURES – This genre offers no shortage of great scores from those that are less well known compared with those that are almost a household name. The scores for several of this genre’s more recent films, if measured by the originality of their content from melodic to mysterious, just don’t quite seem to compare with the high bar set in the 1950s by golden-age film composers such as Max Steiner (**Mara Maru**), Bernard Herrmann (**Beneath the 12-Mile Reef**), and Alexander Laszlo (**Forbidden Island**).



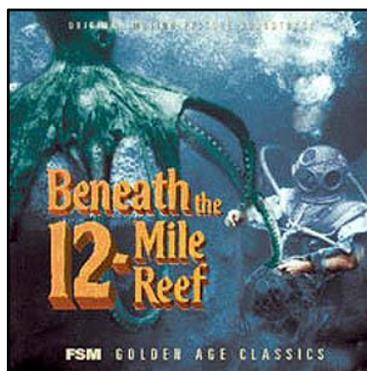
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Yet, as we move into the 1970s, well into the era of the silver-age film composers, only one composer clearly rises above all others when it comes to scoring an underwater film in the **Sea Treasures** genre—the one and only John Barry (**The Deep** and **Raise the Titanic**). Similarly, moving into the 1980s, **The Big Blue** offered a unique opportunity to hear two completely different scores for the same film, one by Eric Serra and the other by Bill Conti, with the melodic score of the later (Conti) resonating much more warmly to this writer’s ears than the “new age” score of the former (Serra).

Overall, it is hard to pick a clear winner but, with writer’s prerogative, I would opt for Bernard Herrmann’s innovative score for 1953’s **Beneath the 12-Mile Reef**, with John Barry’s melodic and mysterious score for 1977’s **The Deep** a not too distant second. Further, a special “Miss Siren” co-award is given in the **Sea Treasures** category for a tie between Christy’s hip 1960s vocal of “Deep Down” from Ennio Morricone’s score for **Danger: Diabolik** and Donna Summer’s sultry 1970’s disco delivery of “Down, Deep Inside” from John Barry’s **The Deep**.

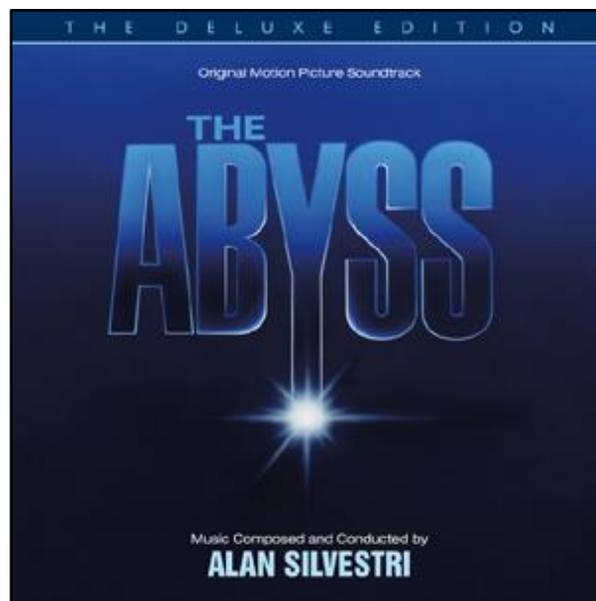


Beneath the 12-Mile Reef (Bernard Herrmann)

SEA ESCAPES – Now, let’s hope the air in our scuba tank holds out long enough to pick the best score in the **Sea Escapes** genre. We can narrow down the field a bit by eliminating Stelvio Cipriani’s scores for 1978’s **Bermude: La Fossa Maledetta**; while interesting, this is a film I’ve not yet seen. Also not yet seen by this writer is the 2005’s **Umizaru Evolution**. Next, we pull from the running two films having scores not yet commercially released: 1952’s **The Underwater City** (Ronald Stein) and 1981’s **Goliath Awaits** (George Duning). Finally, we’ll scrub three films where the plot takes place more on (than under) the ocean: 1998’s **Deep Rising** (Jerry Goldsmith), 1997’s **Titanic** (James Horner), and 1999’s **Deep Blue Sea** (Trevor Rabin). For a similar reason, we can scratch 2005’s **The Cave** (Johnny Klimek and Reinhold Heil)—which is more about being trapped in a cave than being trapped underwater.

The competition heats up with our next three Poseidon-themed films about passengers on an ocean liner trying to escape from a ship that has sunk below the ocean’s waves: 1972’s **The Poseidon Adventure** (John Williams), 1979’s **Beyond the Poseidon Adventure** (Jerry Fielding), and 2006’s **Poseidon** (Klaus Badelt). While Badelt provides a majestic title theme for the “Poseidon” at the outset of the most recent of these three films, the nod for best of these three scores goes to John Williams’ score for **The Poseidon Adventure** – but not for the best overall score in the **Sea Escapes** genre.

That honor goes to one of the following four scores, three released in 1989—**Leviathan** (Jerry Goldsmith), **The Abyss** (Alan Silvestri), and **DeepStar Six** (Harry Manfredini)—and 1998’s **Sphere** (Elliot Goldenthal). Of these, the latter is my least favorite, leaving three finalists: Jerry Goldsmith’s score for **Leviathan** (which I’d put in 3rd place); Harry Manfredini’s score for **DeepStar Six** (coming in 2nd), and topping the list as the best score in the **Sea Escapes** genre: Alan Silvestri’s **The Abyss**.



The Abyss (Alan Silvestri)

SEA DOCS – Our dives into the **Sea Doc** genre brought to the surface many potential candidates for best underwater-themed score in this genre. Picking the best score or at least my favorite of these scores is at worst a highly subjective task, especially if one has not seen the film or TV documentary for which a score has been composed, plus the **SEA DOCS** chapter provided little to no detailed score analysis for most of the films, mostly because relatively few score analysts have published written analyses of these scores. However, based on listening to sample tracks from the scores to many of these films, I nominate below a best score in each of the five **REEF** categories while also providing a ranking of the top five scores from #5 to #1.

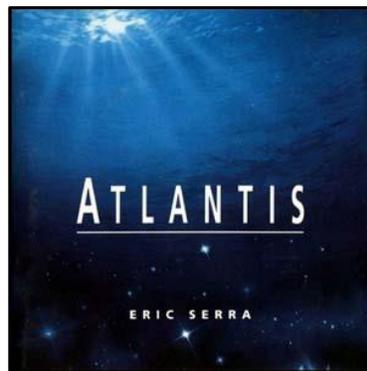
#5 - **CONSTEAN REEF** – **Park Oceanique** – “Dominion of the Whale” (John Scott)

#4 - **TV REEF** – **The Blue Planet** (George Fenton)

#3 – **ITALIAN REEF** – **Men of the Sea** (Daniele Patucchi)

#2 - **IMAX REEF** – **Island of the Sharks** (Alan Williams)

#1 - **FEATURE REEF** – **Atlantis** (Eric Serra)



Atlantis (Eric Serra)

THE TOP TEN UNDERWATER FILM SCORES

Summarizing the prior section’s best/favorite score in each of the ten **SEA GENRES**, this writer identified the following ten scores as his favorites:

SEA MONSTERS: **The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms** (David Buttolph)

SEA MUTANTS: **Creature from the Black Lagoon** (Stein) & **The Shape of Water** (Desplat)

SEA BATTLES: **Jaws** (John Williams)

SEA BUDDIES: **The Day of the Dolphin** (Georges Delerue)

SEA SUBS (FANTASY SUBS): **20,000 Leagues under the Sea** (Paul Smith)

SEA SUBS (WAR SUBS): **Ice Station Zebra** (Michel Legrand)

SEA SPIES: Thunderball (John Barry)

SEA TREASURES: Beneath the 12-Mile Reef (Bernard Herrmann)

SEA ESCAPES: The Abyss (Alan Silvestri)

SEA DOCS: Atlantis (Eric Serra)

This “Top 10” list of best or favorite Sea Genre scores represents a great variety of scores composed over the past 50+ years for films having an underwater plot motif – eleven different films, eleven different scores, eleven different composers.

Here now is this writer’s highly subjective ranking of the “Top Ten” from least to most favorite of scores for films having an underwater-related plot:

#10 - **SEA DOCS:** Atlantis (Eric Serra)

#9 - **SEA MONSTERS:** The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (David Buttolph)

#8 - **SEA SUBS (WAR SUBS):** Ice Station Zebra (Michel Legrand)

#7 - **SEA ESCAPES:** The Abyss (Alan Silvestri)

#6 - **SEA SPIES:** Thunderball (John Barry)

#5 - **SEA BUDDIES:** The Day of the Dolphin (Georges Delerue)

#4 - **SEA BATTLES:** Jaws (John Williams)

#3 - **FANTASY SUBS:** 20,000 Leagues under the Sea (Paul Smith)

#2 - **SEA MUTANTS:** Creature from the Black Lagoon (Stein) over The Shape of Water (Desplat)

#1 - **SEA TREASURES:** Beneath the 12-Mile Reef (Bernard Herrmann)

But this is only my listing of Top 10 favorite or best scores for films having an underwater-related plot. Surely, the reader on viewing these films and listening to their scores (as part of the film or separately on LP or CD) might come up with an entirely different listing of his or her Top 10 favorites.

Accordingly, grab your SCUBA gear (make sure the tank is filled with oxygen), don your goggles and flippers, and take the plunge (i.e., go on a viewing/listening binge) into The Soundtrack Zone to experience and do your own evaluation of the **SOUNDS OF UNDERWATER SCORING**.

[Click here to access the Table of Contents page where you can click on the link to the – OTHER SEA GENRE FILMS – chapter.](#)

DIVING DEEP, DEEP DOWN: SCORING THE FATHOMS OF THE SOUNDTRACK ZONE

by Kerry J. Byrnes

