Hammer was the first film production company to exploit the ‘adults only’ X certificate for the purpose of horror entertainment. Not that everybody in late 1950s Britain saw the company’s innovative brand of Grand Guignol as entertainment. Detached eyeballs, severed limbs and splashes of Eastmancolor gore were eminently censorable, leaving some films so compromised that modern audiences struggle to see what all the fuss was about.

The film’s scores, however, usually escaped the attention of those who struggled to keep up with the pace of cultural change. Hammer’s production design was noted for its elegance, and the actors the company employed were commendably understated, but composers and conductors usually appreciated that there was little call for subtlety in Hammer’s underlying approach. The posters proclaimed that these films were designed to shock, and as soon as the house lights dimmed it was the job of the theme music to heighten that anticipation.

In the early years of Hammer horror the scores commissioned by John Hollingsworth and written by the prolific James Bernard were bombastic, doom-laden affairs, establishing Bernard’s trademark of echoing the syllables of the film’s title in the musical phrasing of the theme. The most famous example of this approach can be heard in the score for *Dracula* (1958), elements of which would be reprised numerous times up to and including *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (1974).

Bernard’s association with Hammer typecast him in the eyes of the snobbish film establishment, but under the baton of Hollingsworth’s successor, Philip Martell, he would prove his versatility with more lyrical themes for *She* (1965) and *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1970). *She*, in particular, suggested that there was room for some romance in Hammer’s now traditional formula of sex and death. Bernard enhanced his theme for *The Gorgon* (1964) with a Novachord and the siren-like vocals of Patricia Clark, while part of his tour de force theme from *The Kiss of the Vampire* (1964) would be performed within the film’s narrative. *The Devil Rides Out* (1968),
Hammer’s acclaimed adaptation of Dennis Wheatley’s black magic novel, featured one of Bernard’s most celebrated themes – a musical evocation of the encroaching threat posed by the story’s urbane Satanist. When Hammer’s long-running series of traditional Gothic horrors came to an end with Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell (1974), Bernard’s mournful score reflected the film’s fin-de-siècle atmosphere.

Bernard may have been Hollingsworth and Martell’s most reliable composer, but many others were invited to score the Hammer horrors. Some of them rejected the overbearing approach of most horror films, instead experimenting with styles more commonly associated with other genres. Harry Robinson made Twins of Evil (1971) sound like a spooky western and introduced a shimmering, ethereal tone to Countess Dracula (1971). Laurie Johnson’s galloping signature for Captain Kronos Vampire Hunter has all the immediacy of his TV themes, while Roy Phillips and his group The Peddlers imbued The Lost Continent (1968) with a swinging jazz beat.

Taking direct inspiration from the pictures on screen, Franz Reizenstein’s The Mummy (1959) resembles a sinister biblical epic, while musique concrète pioneer Tristram Cary expressed the apocalyptic tone of Quatermass and the Pit (1967).

Hammer’s output diversified in the early 1970s. The scores composed by Michael Vickers and John Cacavas for the company’s modern-day Dracula films were a suitably funky soundtrack to the bell-bottomed action, while Christopher Gunning’s haunting theme from Hands of the Ripper (1971) was a deceptively gentle introduction to one of the goriest Hammer films of its era. In the same year, the waltzing melody David Whitaker composed for Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde underlined the fact that this was a sophisticated and darkly humorous twist on a familiar tale.

This album gathers an evocative and diverse collection of themes that are just as memorable as the films they accompanied.

Marcus Hearn
A protégé of Benjamin Britten, James Bernard was the composer who did more than any other to define the sound of Hammer horror. Bernard wrote 25 scores for the company between 1955 and 1980, and was also an Oscar-winning screenwriter.

American composer John Cacavas was living in London when he was commissioned to score The Satanic Rites of Dracula. His theme for the film was designed, in part, to appease Hammer’s distributor Warner Bros, who had requested a rock music soundtrack.

One of the doyens of early electronic music, Tristram Cary combined traditional and experimental techniques in his score for Quatermass and the Pit. Alarmed by some of what he heard, Hammer’s musical supervisor Philip Martell discarded the more radical elements.

The success of Hands of the Ripper, one of the outstanding Hammer films of the 1970s, is due in no small part to the contribution of Christopher Gunning. The 26-year-old composer was underused by Philip Martell, but went on to a distinguished career.

Best known for television theme tunes such as The Avengers, This Is Your Life and Whicker’s World, Laurie Johnson maintained his longstanding partnership with producers Brian Clemens and Albert Fennell when they joined Hammer to make Captain Kronos Vampire Hunter.

Roy Phillips’ trio The Peddlers were the resident band at the Pickwick Club in London’s Great Newport Street when they were approached by Philip Martell, producer Michael Carreras and writer Jimmy Sangster to provide the theme for The Lost Continent.

Renowned composer and pianist Franz Reizenstein was born in Germany but emigrated to England before the war. The Mummy was a rare foray into film music – another was Circus of Horrors, one of the films that rivalled Hammer’s dominance of X-rated cinema in the early 1960s.

Harry Robinson had already worked for the Children’s Film Foundation and topped the Hit Parade (as ‘Lord Rockingham’s XI’) when he began composing for Hammer. His highly melodic scores accompanied some of the company’s most sexually explicit films in the early 1970s.

Dracula AD 1972 represented a radical update of Hammer’s traditional formula. Multi-instrumentalist Michael Vickers, a former member of beat group Manfred Mann, helped to ring the changes. Plans to also include Rod Stewart’s group, the Faces, never came to fruition.

Philip Martell hired David Whitaker on the strength of his score for Scream and Scream Again. Whitaker wrote the music for Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde and Vampire Circus before the ill-advised comedy That’s Your Funeral brought his brief association with Hammer to an end.
01. Captain Kronos Vampire Hunter (Laurie Johnson)
   Bucks Music Group

02. Twins of Evil (Harry Robinson)
   Universal/Dick James Music

03. The Kiss of the Vampire (James Bernard)
   BMG Rights Management UK

04. The Mummy (Franz Reizenstein)
   MCPS/PRS

05. Dracula (James Bernard)
   Universal/MCA Music

06. Quatermass and the Pit (Tristram Cary)
   MCPS/PRS

07. The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires (James Bernard)
   Universal/MCA Music

08. The Lost Continent (alternative main title) (Roy Phillips)
    Performed by The Peddlers
    BMG Rights Management UK (Primary Wave)

09. Dracula AD 1972 (Michael Vickers)
    BMG Rights Management UK

10. The Devil Rides Out (James Bernard)
    EMI United Partnership
11. **Countess Dracula** (Harry Robinson)  
Universal/Dick James Music

12. **The Gorgon** (James Bernard)  
BMG Rights Management UK (Primary Wave)

13. **Hands of the Ripper** (Christopher Gunning)  
Universal/Dick James Music

14. **Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde** (David Whitaker)  
EMI Film and Theatre Music

15. **She** (James Bernard)  
BMG Rights Management UK (Primary Wave)

16. **The Satanic Rites of Dracula** (John Cacavas)  
Universal/MCA Music

17. **Taste the Blood of Dracula** (James Bernard)  
Universal/MCA Music

18. **Frankenstein and the Monster From Hell**  
(finale and end credits) (James Bernard)  
Sony/ATV Harmony UK

Tracks 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 conducted by Philip Martell  
Tracks 3, 4, 5 conducted by John Hollingsworth  
Track 12 conducted by Marcus Dodds