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Tangerine Dream Risky Business Soundtrack

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Introduction: The Synth-Driven Sound of a Generation

In the pantheon of 1980s cinema, few soundtracks are as instantly evocative as the electronic soundscape that underscores Paul Brickman's 1983 classic, *Risky Business*. While Joel Goodson's iconic slide across the living room floor in a pink Oxford shirt, a pair of Ray-Bans, and tube socks is seared into pop culture history, the sonic backdrop that fuels that scene—and the entire film—is the work of the legendary German electronic group, **Tangerine Dream**. The **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** is more than just background music; it is a character in itself, a pulsating, atmospheric journey that perfectly captures the film's blend of teenage anxiety, burgeoning ambition, and the cold, sleek aesthetic of Chicago's North Shore.

Understanding why this particular electronic score works so brilliantly requires a deep dive into the group's unique style, the film's thematic core, and how this collaboration created one of the most distinctive and influential film scores of the decade.

The Maestro of the Moog: Tangerine Dream's Distinctive Sound

Before examining the specifics of the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack**, it is essential to understand the artists behind the music. Formed in 1967 in West Berlin, Tangerine Dream—founded by Edgar Froese—pioneered the genre now known as electronic music. Their sound is characterized by long, evolving sequencer patterns, ethereal synthesizer pads, and melancholic, melodic phrases. By the early 1980s, the band, then consisting of Froese, Christopher Franke, and Johannes Schmoelling, had honed a style that was simultaneously cold and deeply emotional.

Their early work, like *Phaedra* and *Rubycon*, was dark, cosmic, and ambient. However, by the time *Risky Business* came around, they had proven their ability to create narrative-driven music with the scores for *Sorcerer* (1977) and *Thief* (1981). The **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** represents a perfect synthesis of their ambient roots and a new, more accessible thematic maturity.

The Core Elements of the Score

The music for *Risky Business* relies heavily on three core sonic elements:

- Layered Synthesizer Sequences: The signature "pulsing" sound that drives scenes of tension or transition. In the context of the Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack, this creates a sense of forward momentum, mirroring Joel's journey from a passive high school student to an active agent of his own destiny.
- Melancholic Lead Melodies: Tracks like "Love on a Real Train" are not just fast-paced synth beats. They feature a lonely, beautiful lead melody that suggests the emotional distance between characters and the emptiness lurking beneath the materialistic surface of their lives.

- Atmospheric Textures: The ambient "pad" sounds create a spatial quality. In Risky Business, this is used to emphasize the vast, empty spaces of the wealthy suburbs—the spotless living rooms, the empty streets at night, and the lakefront.

The Perfect Mismatch: Why It Worked

At first glance, a German electronic band known for cosmic space music might seem like an odd fit for a coming-of-age comedy about a suburban teenager starting a brothel in his parents' home. Yet, the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack**works perfectly because it treats the material with a seriousness that the character himself feels. To Joel Goodson, his decisions are not just teenage pranks; they are life-and-death struggles for his future. The sweeping, dramatic electronic score elevates his mundane anxieties to epic proportions.

Paul Brickman, the director, was a fan of using existing music to create ironic contrasts. He initially envisioned the entire film using only popular songs. However, he realized he needed a connective tissue—a musical narrative that could bridge the gap between scenes and sustain the film's unique tone. Tangerine Dream provided that connective tissue. Their music creates a constant state of ambivalence: it is exciting yet dangerous, beautiful yet isolating.

Key Tracks and Their Narrative Function

Let's break down the most significant contributions from the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** and how they function within the story.

This is arguably the most famous track from the score. It plays during the extended sequence on the elevated commuter train ("L" train) between Joel and Lana, played by Rebecca De Mornay. The track is hypnotic, driven by a relentless sequencer pulse and a simple, haunting melody. It is a brilliant piece of music scoring because it accomplishes several things simultaneously:

- Represents the Uncertainty of the Relationship: The repetitive nature of the music feels like the clattering of the train on the tracks, but also the looping thoughts in Joel's head. Is this real? Is it safe?
- Builds a Sensual Yet Tense Atmosphere: The music is romantic but also contains a hint of danger. It perfectly captures the mood of a teenager engaging in an adult, transactional relationship that is also intensely intimate.
- Marks a Turning Point: This is the scene where Joel fully commits to the "risky" path. The music underscores this irreversible transition.

This is the piece that opens the film, accompanying the famous slide scene and the opening credits. While we associate the slide with Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock and Roll," that song is a diegetic choice (played on the record player). The actual score piece that introduces the film's theme is "Dreaming." It sets the tone for the entire narrative: a dreamlike state where reality is slightly distorted. It is hopeful, gentle, and full of possibility, representing the "dream" of success that Joel pursues.

This darker, more aggressive piece emerges during the film's second half. As the stakes rise—the Porsche is stolen, the household is trashed, the Princeton interview is looming—the music becomes more percussive and frantic. This theme represents the consequence of the "risky" path. It is the sound of chaos closing in, a direct contrast to the open, airy soundscapes of the first act.

The Missing Songs: The Controversy of the Commercial Soundtrack

A major point of confusion for fans is the difference between the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack**(the film score) and the commercial soundtrack album released by Virgin Records. The commercial album was a hybrid. It contained the hit songs from the film—including Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock and Roll," Phil Collins' "In the Air Tonight," and Journey's "After the Fall"—alongside a severely truncated selection of

Tangerine Dream's score.

This led to a lasting frustration for soundtrack collectors. The beautiful, immersive score that plays so prominently in the film was not fully available on an official release for decades. Many of the best ambient sequences and connecting pieces were simply left off the commercial album. It was not until later remastered and expanded editions that fans got a more complete picture of the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** in its intended form.

Beat the Heat: The Iconic Scene

No discussion of the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** is complete without addressing the "Beat the Heat" sequence. When Joel's home is transformed into a party scene, the score recedes, and the jukebox takes over with "In the Air Tonight." However, the Tangerine Dream score provides the crucial transition into this sequence. The pulsing, anxious synthesizers build as Joel realizes the party is spiraling out of control, creating a tension that explodes into the cathartic release of the Phil Collins drum fill. The interplay between the score and the licensed songs is masterful, with the Tangerine Dream music providing the psychological depth that underpins the pop-song celebrations.

Influence and Legacy of the Soundtrack

The **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** cast a long shadow over the film scores of the late 1980s. It demonstrated that a purely electronic score could be commercially viable, emotionally rich, and narratively complex without a single orchestral instrument. It paved the way for other synth-heavy scores, such as Harold Faltermeyer's *Beverly Hills Cop* and Jan Hammer's *Miami Vice* work.

The "Cold Suburb" Aesthetic

The score is also a key component of the "Cold Suburb" aesthetic that defines the film. The music never gets too funky or too warm. It maintains a cerebral distance. This reflects the film's subtle critique of the American Dream. Joel's home is beautiful, but the music reminds us it is a cage. The **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** makes the suburbs feel mysterious and slightly threatening, a stark contrast to the sunny, simplistic portrayals often seen in 80s media.

A Template for Coming-of-Age Scores

Directors who followed Brickman learned from the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** that you could take a teenage story seriously. By applying a sophisticated, European electronic sound to an American teen story, the film gained a level of artistic credibility that helped define the "Golden Age" of teen cinema in the mid-80s. It told future filmmakers that the music doesn't have to sound like a teenager to be about a teenager.

Listening Today: The Enduring Freshness

One of the most remarkable aspects of the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** is that it has not aged poorly. While many of the pop songs from the film are time-stamped artifacts of the early 80s, Tangerine Dream's score sounds modern. This is because their music is based on texture and repetition, not on specific drum machines or synth presets that sound dated. The minimalist, hypnotic quality of "Love on a Real Train" could easily be mistaken for a track by a modern electronic act like Tycho or Boards of Canada.

Where to Find the Score

If you are looking to experience the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack** without the interjections of pop songs, you should seek out the expanded score releases. These are available on streaming platforms and as special edition CDs. Look for the releases by **Virgin Records** that specifically list the full score or bootleg-quality collections that have been officially remastered. The track "Guido The Killer Pimp" and "Lana" are

essential listening for any fan of electronic film music.

The Art of the Synth

In conclusion, the **Tangerine Dream Risky Business soundtrack**is a masterclass in the art of film scoring. It is a perfect example of how music can define a film's identity. It takes a simple story—a boy, a girl, a stolen Porsche, and a Princeton interview—and turns it into an epic, mythic journey of self-actualization. The pulsating sequences and melancholic harmonies of the band provided the perfect nervous system for the film, translating the internal turmoil of adolescence into audible soundwaves.

Whether you are rewatching the film to see Tom Cruise's breakout performance or just listening to the isolated score tracks, the music of Tangerine Dream remains the beating heart of *Risky Business*. It is a testament to the power of electronic music to convey the most human of emotions: fear, desire, hope, and the terrifying thrill of taking a risk.

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