

FILM SCORE BLOGS [Blog # 16]
Tuesday, January 25, 2005 at 8:48 pm]

I will start this blog tonight and continue tomorrow after work since I am starting rather late. Just got home with the wife. We ate at the Panda Express. I had a two-item plate with fresh vegetables (especially broccoli) and the tofu/eggplant dish. Curiously, my dentist was also there eating, and observing me eating! He said hello, and I asked him if he had an extra toothbrush handy.

Incidentally, as a response to the end of Blog 14, we did indeed see THE AVIATOR after all. It's a long movie, quite entertaining, and well directed by Scorsese. This may be his year for the Oscars (he already won the Golden Globe and Producers' awards). However, while I liked the movie overall, it lacks the simplicity and emotional substance that Clint Eastwood's MILLION DOLLAR BABY offered. AVIATOR did not have a very likeable character as the lead, while MILLION DOLLAR BABY had three very appealing characters (Swank, Eastwood, Freeman). It deserves the big Oscars—at least the Best Picture award. Swank should get the Best Actress, and the movie Best Picture—but Aviator can get the Best Director, etc. Eastwood probably won't get Best Actor. Of course it lacked a good score. I of course preferred the orchestral sound to AVIATOR, although I did not think Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D minor needed to be borrowed as the driving emotional emphasis behind the character. John Barry would've been a good choice for the scoring assignment. So, once again, while AVIATOR is a good movie (it entertained me except for the draggy last half hour or so), it is not a *great* movie (rather superficial in nature), and I think MILLION DOLLAR BABY deserves the Oscars for its non-glitzy primal substance and enduring human values portrayed. It is rather downbeat towards the end especially (in a somewhat manipulative plot device) but I feel it deserves Best Picture in comparison to THE AVIATOR. I have yet to see the other three *contenders*, so to speak. I have very little desire to see *Ray* and *Finding Neverland*, but I would like eventually to see *Sideways*.

I just earlier was on the Internet and reserved a National Car Rental vehicle on the weekend rate. I am going to finish my research on Max Steiner's *Helen of Troy*. My two previous research days on it were insufficient. The score is rather mammoth (33 folders of materials). The glorious dvd is now available, and I plan eventually to do a "rundown" of the score (but first I *may* do his *The Caine Mutiny*). Nothing in film music these days compare in caliber to the likes of someone as dear Max. Imagine if he was around to score the recent *Troy* adaptation! He had a certain "over-the-top" characteristic to most of his music (but not as much as Tiomkin!) that infused a rich Late Romantic vitality or extra-dimensional vibrancy to the scenes. His music can be described as rather energizing for the most part.

Tiomkin I like too, but not as much as Steiner. Tiomkin I describe as the musical Leo, the Leonine film music composer type, where he wanted his music to shine and be bigger and larger than life, and have people notice it! More and bigger is better! He tended to go overboard a lot in his approach of unrestraint. The music tended to be center

stage in the limelight. He would “dress up” his music; make it look flashier with dramatic flourishes. Just look at the full scores with the huge 44-stave pages, and you’ll see this substantiated. And then later on he might have to cut some of it away in the recording sessions. He tended to be spontaneously notey or “too busy” many times with his music. It is as if he “picked up” musical ideas all at once—various channels of inspiration pouring in all at once, simultaneously, and he struggled to try to incorporate all of them at once! Steiner employed the “Hollywood style” as well, but his music appeals to me more. I miss his ability to create melodies (generally absent these days!), although one must remember that a melody tends to bring attention to itself in a scene, so that was a major component of the old Hollywood/Romantic style—and, in a sense, Steiner was a Leonine composer as well. His music is certainly far more colorful and energetic than, say, Friedhofer’s music, and Raksin’s music, both of which (especially Friedhofer, most likely) tended to create music to capture the overall mood of the scene. Herrmann, on the other hand, overall eschewed the so-called Hollywood style, being more (then, in comparison) the so-called “modernist” in leaning, far more “atmospheric” in approach. He may have described himself as a Romantic, but certainly not in the same Late Romantic style employed by Steiner and Korngold who tended to “mickey-mouse” the scenes with music and synchronize their music to the action on the screen. And Herrmann certainly did not practice (except in rare occasions) the “melody method” of writing music (as Steiner and Korngold did). Melody was perhaps the major component of the so-called Late Romantic style. Therefore, under the circumstances, let’s call Herrmann, say, a romantic modernist!

Probably B. Kaun is half like Herrmann in that musical sensibility. I worked on his *Black Legion* last fall at USC/Warner Bros. Archives, and it’s excellent. However, Kaun employed the Hollywood Style techniques as well, so I think it was a question of his adapting to the predominant needs of the times and the scoring assignments he had (what was probably “expected” of him). I would rather liken him to being, in a sense, a music production man or commercial composer, an excellent craftsman technically who churned out scores, but did not dedicate himself as a “true artist” type with a specific vision that he wanted to be true to. He simply did a job that was required of him, and did it superlatively well, like a Virgo composer. He would’ve been perfect churning out all the Universal B-movies in the Fifties. Whereas Herrmann overall, and more fully (especially after the mid-Forties), pretty much committed himself to the non-Hollywood approach to scoring movies. His was not the lush Steiner/Korngold approach, to be sure!

Now: I have to say, however, that there’s a cue in *Helen of Troy* that starts off sounding a lot like Tiomkin! This cue is located on the dvd in Chapter 13 starting at 3:56. Scene: Paris is in the beach house and says, “And for the Queen, tell her she’ll walk in all my dreams.” He then proceeds out stealthily in his escape attempt. The first several bars appear to be rather Tiomkinesque. Very nice music. The *sords* (muted) violins [usually Steiner does not mute his strings—unlike Herrmann!] plays in $\frac{9}{8}$ time Line 1 E up to A to G 8th notes (crossbeam connected) back down to E dotted quarter note tied to quarter note to D 8th down to (Bar 2) small octave B up to Line 1 D to C 8th notes back to B dotted quarter note tied to quarter note, and then down to A 8th up to (Bar 3) F up to B to A 8th notes down to G dotted quarter note tied to quarter note, and then F 8th tied to 8th note in Bar 4 with a leap upwards to Line 2 F-E 8ths to Eb-D-Db 8ths figure to C-B-A#

8ths all played in legato descent. After an quarter and two 8th rests in Bar 1, clarinet I plays *solo* small octave G-A 8ths (crossbeam connected) to B-G-A 8ths up to (Bar 2) G dotted quarter note tied to 8th note up to B-A 8ths to G-E-C 8ths down to (Bar 3) small octave A dotted quarter note (etc). Anyway, it's lovely music. I noticed a continuity error in this scene later on. Paris was wearing this silly merchant hat as part of a disguise when he was at the fisherman's hut. He was still wearing it as he was climbing the small cliff at the end of Chapter 13. This seques into the start of Chapter 14 (nice music again by Max at this section) where now Paris is no longer sporting that un-princely hat!

Another error (this time a dialogue error) I noticed in the movie is located after the cestus fight between Paris and Ajax in Chapter 11. Go to :51. Helen tells her husband, the King of Sparta, "You expressed a wish yesterday to present your guest to me," to which the king, Menelaus [played by Niall MacGinnis, a man with a distinctive voice, and who also later played Zeus in *Jason & the Argonauts*, by the way], replies, "A proud wish." *Yesterday??* The king and the rest of the Spartans in that room only met Paris about five or ten minutes ago (except, of course, for Helen).

Anyway, I really need to return to Warner Bros. Archives to finish my research. I did not go thru the trouble of obtaining permission from Warner Bros. to have desired pages of the score xeroxed, so I needed to exclusively hand copy. That's all right because it's a great way to learn, and the details are permeating right thru to the subconscious.

As early as the third cue (Reel 1/pt 3), there is music written that was unused. Several pages of this 18-page cue were not used. In the next cue (R1/4-2/1), Bars 106-110, and Bars 117-131 (end) were not used.

I've tried searching thru Google to determine the identity of the Brit who dubbed the voice of Jacques (Jack) Sernas who plays Paris. A vague reference to perhaps Geoffrey Toome is indicated in only one source. I heard that Rossana Podesta's voice (she's Helen, of course) was also dubbed, but then other sources indicated it wasn't—that she learned the lines by rote and later mixed in. Perhaps when I'm there again at W/B Archives, I'll have all the legal documents pulled and see if I can find the name(s), and the true facts. A good site:

<http://home.flash.net/~torchie/jsernas/helenoftroy.htm>

OK. Let's return to that essay by Herrmann written for Modern Music, Vol 22, May-June 1945 titled "Four Symphonies by Charles Ives." I discussed it very briefly at Talking Herrmann. He opens the paper with the line, "The strange neglect of Charles Ives at this time can be ascribed only to our musical apathy." He soon discusses the First Symphony (1897-98) and how it embraced the European models, especially Tchaikovsky, and praised Ives' "brilliant orchestration, clear architecture and pleasing melodies..." Unfortunately I do not have a cd of the First Symphony, but I *do* have the Naxos cd "American Classics" of Charles Ives Symphony No. 2 that Herrmann then discusses and provides two-stave examples. Herrmann writes, "In this symphony he repudiates the European models. Unconventionally, a slow prelude, somber and introspective in mood, forms the first movement. An organ-like melody [Herrmann gives a six-bar excerpt] is followed immediately by a theme whose startling harmonies suggest

Prokofiev [Herrmann gives a two-bar example]. It is at the end of this movement that Ives makes his first symphonic use of American music” [a quotation from *O Columbia The Gem of the Ocean*]. Then Herrmann gives an example of the opening six bars of “the gay and rollicking *Allegro*, whose simple tunes and galloping rhythms recall the village band.” It heard it several times now, and it is a nice tune. The first movement (*Andante moderato*) does not appeal to me as much.

Herrmann starts page 218 by discussing in only one paragraph the third movement, ending with, “To close this restful piece, of such deep feeling, the flute plays a quotation from *America the Beautiful*.” I am listening to it now (III *Andagio cantabile*). Fine work, but not my cup of tea. Herrmann does not discuss the fourth movement (*Lento maestoso*) that lasts only a very short 2:23! . He sequesters from the third movement one-paragraph commentary to the fifth (and final) movement (*Allegro molto vivace*). Skipping slightly, he writes: “Ives calls the second subject, a variant of *Old Black Joe*, a ‘kind of reflection of Stephen Foster and the old barn-dance fiddling over it.’” You first hear this on the cd played by the high strings at track # 6 starting at 1:33. It’s very appealing and very noticeable. Herrmann provides an example of the passage (seven bars) from a slightly later point in the movement (heard starting at 1:47 thru 2:08). It is not Herrmannesque, but it certainly sounds like something that Jerome Moross was influenced by! I mean, I could see this music used in a segment of *The Big Country*.

So I find this six movement as the best part of the Second Symphony, quite distinctive and something you want to hear over again. Then Herrmann writes in a new paragraph, “The first theme returns to overwhelm everything. Then the whole pattern is repeated with subtle variations in color and harmony. Now it is decorated by fragmentary quotations from folk and patriotic themes. Some are not easy to identify, since only a few notes of the original melody are preserved, and they are quickly caught up in the rushing speed of the dance...” Curiously, Herrmann then states that “this movement might be called a musical Currier and Ives.”

Soon Herrmann discusses the Third Symphony. He states that Gustav Mahler was so impressed with it that he took it back to Austria with him to be performed but, as was Ives’s fate, Mahler died before that happened! I’ll need to buy that cd as well soon—although I am far more interested in the First Symphony with the Tchaikovskian influence!

Finally Herrmann discusses Ives’ Fourth Symphony, “the most elaborate and ambitious of Ives’ works.” Herrmann continues, “It is scored for an immense orchestra, large percussion section and chorus. And it contains the simplest music and the most complex ever written.” I liked his discussion of the Scherzo. Here he writes, “After the opening bars, which recall the Prelude, it uses no themes, quotations or motives, no harmonic or rhythmic patterns. Each instrument pursues its own path in ever-changing rhythms, breaking into its own themes. The chorus sings a wordless vocalization. The effect is of a great *sound*, a tutti which swells and recedes. An Oriental would describe such music as the “pure state” which exists in space, chaotic, all-embracing.”

The feeling I get from this is that Herrmann was influenced very much by the overall *sound* of the music, as he put it. Usually the Herrmann technique involved combinations and changes of timbre textures. Patterns would repeat but the textures changed to make it continually interesting to hear, a sort of variation or development in those terms.

Maybe in the next blog, I will excerpt Copland's entertaining paper in Modern Music titled "Second Thoughts On Hollywood."
[Wednesday, January 26 at 10:14 pm]

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