

FILM SCORE BLOG [Blog # 20]
Thursday, March 17, 2005 at 8 am

Tuesday early evening, Susan & I went to Acapulco Restaurant to take advantage of their Happy Hour until 7 pm. I got her a rose-type wine while I treated myself to a strong glass of water (“on the rocks”)! However, I ordered a half-off cheese and chile quesadilla, while my wife helped herself to the spicy chicken, beans, potatoes, and vegetables available in the help-yourself buffet inside (we seated ourselves outside in the second-floor porch area overlooking the mall parking area). Cost: A reasonable \$6, and we gave the waitress a \$3 tip.

Then my wife went to a clothing department store in the mall while I walked to Tower Records. After all, it was Tuesday—the day new dvd’s and cd’s are released. Also I heard about the Naxos sale on their classical cd’s (normally \$7.99, now \$5.99), and I wanted to take advantage of that opportunity.

First I perused the dvd titles. The first one I bought on sale for \$9.99 was the “Fox Film Noir” series title LAURA. I read in a message board somewhere how this newly released dvd would have a commentary by the composer himself, David Raksin. He composed this scant commentary (like his scant music) just before his seque into the next level or state of existence after his heart failure in early August of last year. I was disappointed that he barely commented at all during the showing. Jeanine Basinger clearly dominated the screen or commentary-time in her separate track (it sounded as if it was a separate track). Basinger did commentaries on the dvd for GHOST & MRS. MUIR, THE PHILADELPHIA STORY, and others.

What I picked up on Raksin’s sparse comments was that he would more than once state, in effect (paraphrased from recent memory after hearing that commentary), “Oh, I chose not to score that scene” or “I could’ve put music there, but no way!” or “I didn’t interfere with the scene with music” or “Music could’ve been put there in that quiet scene, but that would’ve been corny.” I guess, inferred from these comments, that Raksin was the first film music minimalist! And I suppose he would consider Max Steiner as very “corny” indeed.

The Laura theme was indeed beautiful but it was probably a bit over-exposed in that short film, despite the different treatments (restaurant/bar ensemble, etc). I never was emotionally taken with Raksin’s style, just as I wasn’t too taken by Friedhofer’s music overall—although both are mighty fine composers and excellent artisans. Similarly I never cared for Adolph Deutsch’s music style, although I did indeed take advantage of the Naxos sale and purchased the Morgan-Stromberg edition of the Naxos *Film Music Classics* “The Maltese Falcon” (and other film scores by Adolph Deutsch). These selections include *George Washington Slept Here*, *The Mask of Dimitrios*, *High Sierra*, and *Northern Pursuit*. I’d be far more interested in, say, Kaun’s music. Too bad Deutsch’s music for RAMROD wasn’t included in that cd because I just recently saw his detailed sketches at Cal State Long Beach. I would’ve been very interested hearing it (since I never saw the movie, and it’s not available on dvd). Perhaps it’ll be on the Western Channel soon on STARZ.

I always will be appreciative of Raksin personally. Back in the early Eighties, I purchased the piano-score to Herrmann’s WUTHERING HEIGHTS at Acres of Books Bookstore in downtown Long Beach. The store had an excellent reputation for having a

fantastic collection of used books, some of them treasures. Ray Bradbury praised the store. Well, I found WUTHERING HEIGHTS there and noted that Herrmann signed a note to "David" on a title page. Hmmmm, I asked myself, who is David? I had a good hunch it was David Raksin, and so I looked up his name in the phone directory service, and spoke to him! Indeed, the copy of W.H. was his; stolen with a bunch of other books he had in boxes in his office (I believe at USC, where he was teaching). I wanted to go see him and return the book, and he agreed, but somehow it never worked out due to work schedule, and I was moving in with my girlfriend (now wife!). Anyway, it was Raksin then who clued (not cued) me in to the fact that the Herrmann scores were just now being made available at UC Santa Barbara. Thanks to his timely advice, I believe I was the first outside researcher to start working on the manuscripts in a consistent basis (hand-copying the materials). Marty Silver was the point man in the collection.

Raksin his highlighted in the Tony Thomas book, "Film Score: The Art & Craft of Movie Music. " I have the old First Printing—August 1991. I understand from the old Filmus-L archives, that he wrote an article titled, "ALL ABOUT LAURA: Composing Music for the Face in the Misty Light" in the book PERFORMING ARTS ANNUAL, 1989. I'd like to read that. Also in Filmus-L October 97, someone mentioned that David Raksin is pictured on the front page of the Calendar section of the previous Sunday's (10-20) L.A. Times. He was one of those interviewed in an article about the blacklisting of "communists" in Hollywood during the McCarthy Hearings. Raksin discusses his involvement in the 1947 HUAC hearings and he mentions his own membership in the communist party prior to the investigation, and he talks about how he was pressured under duress to give the HUAC the names of a dozen other "communists". He refers to this act as "a major sin...done under torture." Interesting, but a composer's politics, a composer's sexual practice, a composer's dietary habits (and so forth) do not interest me that much. I am far more interested in a film composer's actual written scores, and seeing what I can learn from them. But it can be helpful to know more about the man behind the composer, so to speak, in order to better understand character, and to see what factors may've influenced the music. Unfortunately I did not focus on Raksin's full scores except for brief snippets of a Columbia score or two that just happened to be in boxes of materials I was research (say, a Steiner score). In terms of priority, therefore, I would rather spend limited time on Steiner and Herrmann and Rozsa and Goldsmith than, say, Deutsch, Raksin, Fielding, Addison, and others. The former composers' styles appeal to me far more, temperamentally. I resonate to Herrmann, most especially, and then to Max Steiner, than Raksin's and Friedhofer's style. But I did indeed study Friedhofer's score to BODY & SOUL recently, as given in a past blog, held at Cal State Long Beach.

I just ordered yesterday from Screen Archives a copy of Steiner's FOUNTAINHEAD, so in all probability I will later this year research the written score at Warner Bros. Archives. I do not believe, however, that it is yet available on dvd. I typed it in just now on DVD Price Search on the web, and there were no matches.

At Tower Records on Tuesday I also purchased the three-cd set of "The Greatest Story Ever Told" (music by Alfred Newman) for the good price of \$19.99. I'm still in the process of listening to it. Also I purchased the Film Score Monthly release of the original tracks to THE EGYPTIAN. Somehow that one passed me by, and now I have

a copy in case I wish to do a cue rundown of the Herrmann part of the score (I don't have the Newman score).

Taking further advantage of the Naxos sale, I bought several classical cd's.

Paul Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler Symphony" (along with a few other pieces). Terry Teachout gives it a high rating, one of his selected "Masterpieces" of the Century. Well, I did not take to the music, personally. I won't be buying anymore Hindemith cd's!

Tchaikovsky: "The Snow Maiden," Op. 12 (complete incidental music). Very charming music. I like the Big T (Tchaikovsky, not Tiomkin!) a lot. If he were alive during the Golden Age of film music, he would've been a natural.

Tchaikovsky: Symphony #1, Hamlet Overture, and the cd of the Symphony # 4, and the Romeo & Juliet Fantasy Overture. Nice but not as evocative as his excellent Manfred Symphony.

Another dvd I purchased for \$9.99 was another "Fox Film Noir" item, CALL NORTHSIDE 777 (starring James Stewart). I purchased it because of the commentary by James Ursini & Alain Silver. I'm appreciating the film more, although I hardly noticed the music of Alfred Newman except for the brassy Main Title stating, "Listen! This is an important docu-story film!" You have that feeling with the person's hand (maybe it was Newman's!) stamping "Urgent" on the title page! There's no music in that scene in Chapter 4 past 6 minutes when Stewart walks down the corridor after speaking with the mother of convicted cop-killer Frank Wiecek (whom she believes was falsely framed) scrubbing the floors. Raksin probably would not have inserted music there as well, but I think Herrmann would! Certainly Steiner would've but Steiner was not working for Fox, and he would've been avoided for this type of realism movie. I think Friedhofer would've maybe inserted music there as well, but that's highly debatable. During that montage scene at the start of Chapter 7 (after Stewart's prison interview with Conte), definitely Steiner would've included interesting montage music. I personally would've liked it (especially by Steiner) in order to increase more interest in the static scene, make it more involving. I would've like a little quiet or neutral music in the start of Chapter 8 (after the interview with Conte's ex-wife) where we see McNeal (Stewart) typing away late at night, and then a little later when Stewart is in bed at home in disturbed sleep. I like the movie (thanks to Stewart) but it's definitely lacking something—such as more music. Herrmann would've been better for this movie than Newman. I understand Herrmann turned down LAURA. Too bad (but great for Raksin!).

On Tuesday I also purchased the newly released two-disc Special Collector's Edition of STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT for \$14.99. I was attracted to the special feature tribute to Jerry Goldsmith (who passed away last year as well). It was interesting seeing for the first time his son, Joel. I would've never guessed he was Jerry's offspring (being very hefty and bearded). The inference in the piece from at least one person interviewed is that Goldsmith could've been still alive if he had only taken better care of his health. I understand he was a strong drinker (and perhaps a smoker?). Of course he lived longer than Herrmann did. Herrmann looked like a physical wreck, like a real old man, and he was only 64/65 when he died. I do not know what Herrmann's dietary habits were, but I assume his astral/emotional turbulent lifestyle reactions had a tremendous impact on his physical well-being. Goldsmith didn't look too good on this dvd interview in the recording sessions for First Contact. I tell people that they really must take good

care of their health because by the time you reach your Fifties and certainly Sixties, you'll start to really feel the effects of your habits. The physical body cannot so easily adapt and heal as when you were young. I've seen this especially with smokers in my life as well as drinkers. It's a bit more subtle with those with poor dietary habits, unless they are heavy over-eaters since obesity has a detrimental effect on the organs in the body, contribute to sugar problems, cholesterol increase, etc.

Go to Chapter 19 at 2:03 of the *Call Northside 777* dvd. There the commentators briefly discuss sound and music in this picture during the scene when the hum of the picture-enlarging cylinder dominates the scene. One commentator says, "I love the use of sound, the hum—because the absence of music just creates more tension because you're used to hearing more music cues, at least in this period." The other commentator says, "True, it certainly works very well [in this instance]" and the other returns to ask, "Is there any music in this movie by Alfred Newman?" The other guy says, "The Main Titles, and the End Titles," and the other gives a soft laugh. So there you have it. I wish Newman offered it to Herrmann! I wondered if anyone interviewed Newman and asked him why he didn't write at least *one* cue between the Main and End titles! Wasted opportunity to enhance the film. Just because someone is an esteemed composer (such as Newman), it doesn't mean that what he chooses to do (or chooses *not* to do) is always correct and "right on" and appropriate and best for the film. Herrmann goofed by not writing a score for *THE BIRDS*. Steiner erred in over-scoring some films, especially earlier films. Some composers would say that Steiner erred by becoming too simplified in his latter career (not as elaborate with counter-melodies and so forth as in his earlier movies) but I prefer the leaner sounds.

Love Has Many Faces was a 1965 Columbia film (Production #8634) that Raksin scored. While studying another score by another composer, I noted Raksin's score and managed to xerox Raksin's sketch and the Full Score version of the "Billy" cue (Reel 1-A1). IT was an overlap from the Main Title. Raksin wrote on Pacific Music Paper 572 that had three sections (top, middle, bottom) of four staves each. This was his sketch sheet. The bar lines were already preset equally. On the top of the page he wrote "10 free variable clx starting at 18 _ to match (?) M.T." beneath that it states "mid 4' Diss from M.T." Underneath that was " :00 boys on rocky shore." Within the box of the top section, he wrote *Andantino* and quarter note = 18 _ fr. The cue starts in the 5/4 meter. The top staff line is "Voice" with Line 1 Eb dotted half note tied to half note and tied to half note next bar (followed by "out." Above the notes is "fade" with like a trill squiggly line throughout the length of the notes. Then he inserts "3 piccs" for that line. After a half and two quarters and an 8th rest, they play *mf* and *Accel Poco* Line 2 Eb-Line 3 C 16ths to (Bar 3) Db *rinforzando* quarter note to two Db tenuto quarter notes. Curiously he writes *8va* with an arrow pointing to the piccolos. That's odd since piccolos cannot go as high as it indicated. The full score shows the piccolos playing as written. Underneath the piccolo line is the "H" (harpsichord) playing a phrase. Staff line 2 was vacant in Bar 1, while staff line 3 is I,II, V (violins I-II and violas) while the bottom staff is C, B (celli and basses).

I believe I may've discussed this somewhat in a previous blog, but I thought I would reintroduce it since I am speaking of Raksin again. So, although one may not resonate with his musical style, one can still learn from him by the study of his works. The information can be helpful, and the information is assimilated into one's

subconscious for later use if ever necessary, especially if you are a composer and want to use a certain musical device. As I may've given in that other blog, curiously the voice line (indicated on Raksin's sketch) is nowhere to be seen (or scene?) in the full score version arranged by Van Cleave. That orchestrator used Pacific Music Papers 321 (33 staves). The instruments and bar lines were already pre-labeled, and Van Cleave made changes as necessary. The top two staff lines are preset as "Flutes" but he penciled in 1 Picc and 2 picc, and beneath that (in the oboe preset line) 3 Picc. There is also one oboe, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoon, 1 horn, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, Boo-Bams (Kraft), Bongoes (Smelek), Marimba (Richards), harpsichord, harp, I believe a guitar, 8 violins I, 6 violins II, 4 violas, 4 VC, 2 CB.

I have also a copy of the title page of the Conductor cue for the Main Title for this movie. Mack David was also credited along with the composer, Raksin. The "Orch." Was Sid Feller. Instrumentation: 1 horn, 3 Pos, 3 drums, piano, 14 violins, 4 viole, 4 celli, 1 bass, and 2 guitars. No mention was made of the voice except on the top staff line. It was set in Cut time in the key signature of 4 flats. I believe the person singing was someone named Nancy because in Bar 7 a note "Nancy out" was made above the top staff line (for the Voice).

In the background I am listening to the commentary of Jonathan Frakes on that FIRST CONTACT dvd. I'm enjoying it. He has a very light, humorous approach, and yet he gives informative insights. Just now watched Dorn's Schwarzeneggeresque line, "Assimilate this!" when he phaser-rifles the Deflector Dish. Frakes pays homage to Goldsmith right at the very start of the commentary.

May end this blog now so that I resume my new rundown on Rozsa's excellent film noir score for *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*. Besides, I won't have use of the computer at 6 pm when Susan arrives home to do more eBay work.

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