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NEWS [November 1982]

Honors:

Illness (a circulatory problem) prevented Dr. Rózsa from attending the French and British events described in PMS 36, and since he was not able to stop in England it was impossible for him to autograph the British copies of *A Double Life* as planned. The American copies should be ready by early December, and we hope they can be autographed by then. The special offer announced in PMS 36 remains valid.

Thomas Murray reports on the 1981 "Artistry in Cinema" awards banquet, a movie-oriented affair that Dr. Rózsa significantly neglected to mention to us. John Williams presented Rózsa with the Max Steiner Memorial award, and Rózsa in turn praised him for restoring serious music to the screen. But the music for the evening was provided by members of the Lawrence Welk band, and the two composers were last seen exiting after what Mr. Murray thinks was their attempt at *SPELLBOUND*. Murray was also present for the Santa Fe Film Festival in April, during which there was a premiere screening of *DEAD MEN DON'T WEAR PLAID* (instead of *THE RED HOUSE*) and a chamber concert (instead of an orchestral one). Virgil Thomson was also honored. A film music discussion took place in the Palace of the Governors, the oldest government building in the U.S. (1610-1612) and the site where Governor Lew Wallace (1878-1881) completed his novel Ben-Hur.

Performances:

Dr. Rózsa's composition this summer was a short work for organ and brass to open the 1984 convention of the American Guild of Organists in San Francisco.

Bernard Herrmann's opera, *Wuthering Heights*, finally had its world premiere in Portland, Oregon, on November 6, 10, and 13, in a somewhat shortened form that Herrmann had refused to authorize during his lifetime. Librettist Lucille Fletcher, once married to Herrmann, was scheduled to be present for the premiere. Another of her works, the short opera that Jerome Moross derived from *Sorry, Wrong Number*, was premiered in New York in June.

Recordings:

In addition to *LAST EMBRACE*, Varese-Sarabande will release a *THIEF OF BAGDAD/JUNGLE BOOK* coupling, without narration, and (in some form) additional *KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE* material.

*DRAGONSLAYER*, and also *CHEYENNE AUTUMN*, may yet appear on disc in premium-priced Japanese pressings if Southern Cross Record Distributors and "Label X" (successors to Entr'acte) succeed in their plan. Address: 1200 Newell Hill, Suite 302, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. *DEAD MEN DON'T WEAR PLAID* is another possibility for this series. And Tony Thomas's Medallion label is planning to follow its choral Rózsa album with a new recording of the Piano Sonata, plus some old sound track material from *THE STRANGE LOVE OF MARTHA IVERS*.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

This is our smallest issue since PMS 5 filled a mere six pages back in 1973. While in itself no cause for rejoicing, this temporary belt-tightening does at least give us a chance to celebrate our readers. "Letters" has been a section too often neglected in PMS, sometimes for merely technical reasons: articles tend to be of a fixed length, and there is always a certain amount of news that must be included in an issue. Letters, by contrast, are flexible; they can always be trimmed to size, and we can include as many or as few as will fit. As a result, they tend to gravitate to the back of the issue, where they can get lost when space and time run tight. This time we won't let that happen. Of course we receive many more letters than we can print here. All are appreciated. We try to answer, sooner or later, those letters which pose specific questions. If you wish a prompt answer, a self-addressed stamped envelope vastly improves your likelihood of getting one.

Our recent dues increases, coupled with slowly increasing membership rolls, have gradually improved the MRS financial situation, and we expect to have a full-sized issue next time. In the next year we look forward to Alan Hamer on a Rózsa talk in London, Mary Peatman on KING OF KINGS, and Frank DeWald on THE PRIVATE FILES OF J. EDGAR HOOVER.

PANTHEON FSM 53901: A NONREVIEW  
by John Fitzpatrick

PMS has always striven, with mixed success, to present objective critical reviews of Rózsa works. In time I hope that some qualified critic will do as much for this splendid new release of the Piano Concerto and Cello Concerto. It will be especially interesting to compare the virtues and flaws of these performances with those of the various broadcast tapes. But right now, such objectivity is quite beyond me. Folks, get out there and buy this record! Buy several. Give copies to friends, to libraries, to pianists and cellists. This is a time for the "fan club" side of the Society to come to the fore. This is a time to support a worthy project and a risky financial venture.

Why the fuss? Because this is the most important Rózsa album in a quarter-century. Not since Heifetz recorded the Violin Concerto in 1956 have we had such a significant release. And as that album was only half-Rózsa, one may well argue that the Pantheon is even more significant.

Some members, of course, prefer Rózsa's film music to his concert works. It is a matter of taste. But there can be no denying that Miklós Rózsa himself values these personal, free-standing works more than a shelf full of soundtracks and Polydor anthologies, glorious though some of the latter may be. Anyone who doubts this simply does not understand the man. Not everyone need share in the composer's own evaluation, but there is a time to try and appreciate it. That time is now.

Records like this one are not common for a simple reason: the market for serious contemporary music is very small. A soundtrack album is to some extent presold on the strength of its title. Anthologies appeal to nostalgia buffs. But most of that audience does not buy classical music. Even with such distinguished soloists as Starker and Pennario, there would have been little chance of any company offering to fund such a substantial

symphonic recording. (The chamber works released in the 1970s are another matter entirely.) That we have this record at all is a minor miracle owing to the special release of broadcast material by the Bavarian Radio, something that only came about after several years of complex negotiations. Whether we shall have more such records--the Sinfonia Concertante, the Tripartita, the Viola Concerto--depends on the support we accord this one. We all love the music. Now let's prove it.

As we go to press, the record is not yet in stores. The special bargain announced by Pantheon in PMS 36 (p. 15) remains in effect.

#### CINEMASCORE

by A. C. Robbins

Film music clubs and "fanzines" have proliferated in recent years, but with all due respect to the many enthusiasts involved, I would have to say that since the demise of Elmer Bernstein's *Film Music Notebook* only the Belgian *Soundtrack!* (formerly SCN) has thus far achieved a consistently high intellectual standard. However, it appears that Randall Larson's *CinemaScore*, which has been around since 1977, may be about to offer a serious challenge. Its current issue (no. 11) offers much valuable content in its 36 illustrated, large-format pages.

The material of the most unimpeachable value is the series of interviews--a lengthy one with Ernest Gold, plus more fragmentary conversations with Basil Poledouris and James Horner in the course of commentaries on CONAN THE BARBARIAN and STAR TREK II. Williams, Goldsmith, and other composers are also quoted in spots, apparently at second hand but still valuably as these comments have not been widely published elsewhere. Interviews with everyone from Wendy Carlos to Albert Glasser are promised for the future.

Reviews are also extensive, and *CinemaScore* makes a more serious effort at covering true "filmmusic" (to borrow Frank DeWald's term) than the many competitors who settle for merely talking about record albums. The quality of criticism is naturally uneven, and too many reviews are written by the energetic Mr. Larson himself, who is prone to such puzzling statements as, "PROM NIGHT, at least on disc, isn't valuable movie music." (See Frank DeWald on this common confusion elsewhere in the present PMS.) Nevertheless, I find all these reviews valuable. Ever since the advent of Morricone (and most especially in the present era of schlock horror by the bucketful) we have been deluged by new composers of claimed merit--Horner, Donaggio, May, Carpenter, Poledouris, et al. *CinemaScore* in effect provides an annotated scorecard to keep these players straight, and I for one find the service valuable (and much beyond the powers of PMS).

It is worth noting in passing that Mr. Larson also publishes a whole series of "fanzines" relating to "the fantastic cinema." He thus exemplifies a marked current trend toward coincidence of interest in film music and film fantasy (cf. Steve Vertlieb's music column in *Cinemacabre*). Someone really ought to investigate this neglected subject in depth. The connection is understandable in a way. As Miklós Rózsa is fond of pointing out, music excels at supplying the "irrational" element that is needed in films of this sort. Naturally music is prominent in such films, as it is in historical pictures. Nevertheless, confluence of interest among film music buffs and sci-fi "fandom" is extraordinary in degree and extent. Why?

Unfortunately (a minor criticism) one effect of this confluence in the present *CinemaScore* is a heavy emphasis in the art program on the less appetizing clichés of the genre—pictures of salivating ghouls and underclad Amazons in suggestive poses. Music is capable of ideal beauty as well as horrific irrationality, and one hopes that a magazine so professionally produced will find more appealing subject matter for its many illustrations.

*CinemaScore* may be ordered (at \$8 for four issues) from Fandom Unlimited Enterprises, P.O. Box 70868, Sunnyvale, CA 94086.

LETTERS:

I congratulate the Society and most especially Mr. John Caps on the publication of his article on film music criticism in PMS 34. Such articles are a testament to the reputation and integrity of *Pro Musica Sana*. Mr. Caps's comments on and analysis of Mr. Page Cook are both timely and unfortunately all too accurate.

Mark Stanberry, Champaign, Illinois

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John Caps's article should be read by everyone who writes about film-scores. His "three sins of criticism"—careless inexperience, haste which leads to misrepresentation, unfeeling opinionizing—are committed, alas, all too often. They are certainly flaws to watch out for in what we write and what we read. Mr. Caps deserves our thanks for reminding us of them.

However, despite his frequent admonition to be "careful," Mr. Caps allows himself the self-contradiction implied in these two statements from his article:

It is not wrong that the music written to accompany movies is extracted and studied out of its original contexts for its own merits, (p. 9)

and

But when such a writer [i.e., a record reviewer] carelessly ignores the film contexts for which the music was written, then he is doing wrong, (p. 10)

In my view, failing to come to grips with this confusion between music considered as a self-contained entity and music considered as part of a greater musical-dramatic whole is the basic flaw--the Original Sin, if you will--underlying most filmscore criticism, after which come Mr. Caps's three more specific sins. Although the problem is not unique to filmscores (consider opera and ballet), filmscore reviewers seem to have the most trouble with it.

It may be there is no solution to the problem, since a filmscore will always have a double life, existing both as filmusic and film music. Kudos to the critic who listens to soundtracks both ways and keeps the two approaches separate in his or her thinking and writing.

Thank you, Mr. Caps, for reminding us (however inadvertently) that we must continue to sensitize ourselves to this distinction and be wise enough to understand

the unique nature of this music about which we care so very much!

Frank DeWald, Haslett, Michigan

Ed.: Longtime readers will remember the useful distinction made by Frank DeWald in PMS 3 between "filmusic," the simultaneous admixture of sight and sound, and "film music," or music divorced from its original medium.

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PMS 34 was a pretty fine issue, except that judging from John Corigliano's haste to debunk Benny Herrmann as "old fashioned," I daresay he will prove a "one-shot" film composer. Certainly he is not going to live up to the expectations of more traditional film music admirers if they are expecting him to become another Herrmann or Rózsa. Otherwise I should not think he would be that presumptuous after having done only one major film score. It is easy to forget that a surrealistic fantasy like ALTERED STATES is itself a kind of one-shot instance. This kind of film allows just about any halfway-trained composer to do something very noticeable and flamboyant; but that does not necessarily mean the composer possesses the precise kind of subtlety and talent required for a MADAME BOVARY or DEATH OF A SALESMAN or LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA or PATCH OR BLUE or even ON GOLDEN POND. I am not saying that Corigliano is a bad composer, simply that any number of predecessors had to work much harder and longer to get the recognition which Corigliano obtained instantly from a particularly offbeat film.

Mike Snell, New York City

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I am afraid this letter is going to be quite different from my usually enthusiastic ones of past years. PMS 34 is unquestionably the most depressing issue I have ever seen. It indicates a complete reversal of principle. No longer is artistry or creativity or imagination your basis of musical criticism; now it seems to be, "Is it fashionable?" or "Is it now?" Never mind that the past twenty years has not produced a single score even remotely close to the brilliance and quality of a VERTIGO, BEN-HUR, SEVENTH VOYAGE OF SINBAD, DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, or a GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD. If you expect PMS to once again attain a level of quality in reviewing you are going to have to go back to firmer ground. What is a great achievement one year is a great achievement in twenty years; if it was superb once it must, by all logic, be superb always. If you wish to accurately measure quality in film scoring you must have a yardstick by which to measure it. You cannot let whim or fancy dictate opinion. No one has a "right" to their opinion; rather, one has the obligation to see that his opinion is the right one.

I see no reason to express anything other than embarrassment by the announcement that Miklós Rózsa will waste his time with something called DEAD MEN DON'T WEAR PLAID. If we love and respect Dr. Rózsa for the great artist that he is, why should we be happy that he does such drivel as PRIVATE FILES OF J. EDGAR HOOVER, LAST EMBRACE, EYE OF THE NEEDLE, or FEDORA? Are we to rejoice that Bernard Herrmann spent the last precious years of his creative

life on SISTERS, TAXI DRIVER, IT'S ALIVE and OBSESSION? To be sure, Hollywood isn't producing any DOUBLE INDEMNITYS or PSYCHOS any more, but that is no reason for a great artist to lower himself. To me one of the most heart-breaking sights of all time is the spectacle of such dignified film artists as Herrmann, Rózsa, Harryhausen, Bernstein, James Cagney and Hitchcock, to name only a few, wasting their God-given talents on pornographic rubbish.

Considering his comments on Herrmann, I assume you printed the John Corigliano interview as a sort of grotesque comic piece. The interview underscores my apprehensions about the current state of moviemaking and film composing. The only thing that needs to be said is that Mr. Corigliano and Mr. Russell deserve each other.

John Caps is one of those arrogant know-nothings who does not belong in a publication such as yours. He epitomizes that current thinking which ignores the achievements of the past while mindlessly genuflecting over the "new." He has no convictions. He can in the same breath praise the work of a Hugo Friedhofer and treat rock "music" as if it were actually a serious creative effort. How on earth can anyone take such a person seriously? Instead of criticizing Elmer Bernstein for wasting his time on things like MEATBALLS, HEAVY METAL, et al., he leaps to defend a defenseless position. Are we to be accused of hating Bernstein when we lament his association with the degrading? Does Mr. Caps seriously put ANIMAL HOUSE on the same level as THE BUCCANEER?

Significantly, Mr. Caps fairly despises Page Cook. He despises him not for his somewhat earthy style but for his consistency of opinion. Whatever you may think about Page Cook you must admit he is consistent in his demand for quality in music. Cook does a greater service to film music by pointing out what is bad instead of merely playing the part of a shill. No true artist resents this type of criticism. If Caps doesn't have the guts to call Herrmann's TAXI DRIVER a bunch of junk, then he has no right to call Herrmann's GHOST AND MRS. MUIR a great work of art. He prefers the role of shill or, as he so amusingly puts it, "careful and caring."

I apologize if I have been carried away in spots and have not acted with the charity I suggest in others. But you simply must take a stand sometime for good film music.

Dan Guenzel, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Ed.: Whew! This seems like a good time to remind readers that opinions expressed in PMS are not necessarily those of the Miklós Rózsa Society or of the editors. Nor is it our place to endorse or rebut individual reader comments. Nevertheless, a few merely rhetorical questions and observations may be of use in the continuing discussion.

1. Isn't one composer's opinion of another a matter of legitimate critical interest? Stravinsky resented Wagner; Britten hated Brahms; Rózsa dislikes Schönberg. No one is thereby obligated to agree with these opinions, but aren't we better apprised about Stravinsky's and Britten's and Rózsa's aesthetic goals for having heard them?

2. Are we free to assume that a composer shares in our negative evaluation of any given film? Certainly there are intelligent, honorable viewers who hold very different opinions of, say, FEDORA and LAST EMBRACE. And even granting this assumption, ought we ask

musicians to fall silent because they are not presented with masterpieces? The scripts of THE RED HOUSE, QUO VADIS, and DIANE were not exactly monuments of good taste either. For that matter, neither was Schikaneder's Masonic singspiel. But Mozart turned it into *The Magic Flute*.

Regarding Ken Sutak's query in his DRAGONSLAYER article (PMS 36): Christopher Page did the "period" music for this film. Richard Rudolph and Michael Boddicken composed the "Leisure Club" music for OUTLAND. It was performed by "Ganymede."

Ronald Bohn, Los Angeles, California

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Preston Jones's piece on the DEAD MEN scoring sessions (PMS 35) was not only one of the most informative and illuminating articles on the scoring process that I've ever come across, it was also one of the most enjoyable. Jones's matter-of-fact restraint . . . nearly had the punch of one of those just-tell-it-like-it-happened portraits that Lillian Ross did so well for *The New Yorker* in the early fifties. . . . By the way, there's another place where performances of Rózsa works are being given, at least this year. Have you been to the circus lately? Well, I have, and much to my surprise I encountered no less than four Rózsa film pieces among the band repertoire of the current Ringling Bros & Barnum and Bailey show. In addition to two of the Roman marches from BEN-HUR the band served up the prelude from IVANHOE (during one of the acts, the "wheel of death" routine) plus the EL CID march, the Intermezzo version with opening fanfare, for the tiger-taming sequence. The latter opens the second half of the circus. Newman gets a couple of big nods there, also. The majestic HOW THE WEST WAS WON theme forms the centerpiece of the extended Wild West Show sequence, complete with lyrics. And one of the other acts is underscored with Caligula's March from THE ROBE! Somebody with that circus band really has taste.

Ken Sutak, Brooklyn, New York

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