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## News and Happenings

October 1998

### Recordings

Telarc will soon record two of the major concertos. Lynn Harrell will perform the Cello Concerto, Op. 32, with Yoel Levi and the Atlanta Symphony. The companion work will be the Violin Concerto, Op. 24, played by Robert McDuffie. Mr. McDuffie will also perform the work in February 1999 with the Long Beach (California) Symphony under JoAnn Falletta. This will be the third recording of the VC and the fourth of the CC. The recording will also feature the *Tema con variazioni*, which combines the two soloists in the middle movement of the Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 29.

Sara Davis Buechner's recording of the piano works is now expected in the spring of 1999. See this issue's feature on the New York recording sessions.

The Finnish label Ondine will feature a new recording (the fifth!) of the Concerto for String Orchestra, Op. 17, together with Bartók's Divertimento for Strings. Peter Csaba will lead the Virtuosi de Kuhmo. We are always amazed at how one of the most astringent and uncompromising of MR's works has been most frequently recorded of them all.

Citadel has reissued THE PRIVATE FILES OF J EDGAR HOOVER soundtrack (STC 77118) in an expanded 42-minute version. Albert Dominguez's piano suite from LYDIA and Darryl Denning's guitar solos from CRISIS fill out the album (STZ 77118). Unfortunately the disappearance of the Bay Cities version leaves the catalog with no version of MR's final work, the Introduction and Allegro for Viola, Op. 44, in print. The piece deserves a better performance than Maria Newman's solo on that album. Where will it come from?

*Film Score Monthly* reports that the Rózsa Polydor trilogy of the 1970s will finally appear

on two CDs, possibly on Phillips. A good reason to avoid the bootleg version that has been seen recently.

Silva Screen has a two-disc collection called *Warriors of the Silver Screen* (SSD 1081). It includes two tracks from EL CID (Overture and Love Theme), three from BEN-HUR (Prelude, Love Theme, and Parade of the Charioteers), and a short (12-minute) version of the THIEF OF BAGDAD Suite. Kenneth Alwyn and Nic Raine conduct the City of Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. (Some of this material derives from previous Silva collections.) This is a rich anthology, with long suites from Waxman's PRINCE VALIANT and TARAS BULBA and much interesting music by North, Goldsmith, Doyle, Scott, Barry, Nascimbene, and others. Silva's *Cinema Choral Classics* contains music from KING OF KINGS. A forthcoming Silva collection is *Cinema Café*, focusing on European scores and including music from PROVIDENCE, among many other films.

Marco Polo's film music series, which has embraced Korngold, Herrmann, Waxman, Steiner and Newman, may move on to Rózsa in the future. Conductor Bill Stromberg and arranger John Morgan have expressed interest in the noir scores of the forties, particularly DESERT FURY (which also happens to be a favorite of Nick Rozsa's).

Pianist Earl Wild's new album (Ivory 70801) includes a yet another variant of the *Spellbound Concerto* in a performance that won Mark Koldys's approval in the *American Record Guide*.

Prometheus (the Belgian label associated with *Soundtrack!* magazine, will issue a CD of THE GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD.

*(continued on page 17)*

# Carrying on with the Concertos

Frank K. DeWald

**J**ust prior to leaving Koch International Classics for a new position at Deutsche Grammophon, producer Michael Fine completed work on the fifth volume in Koch's "complete orchestral music" series (Koch 3-7402-2H1). Comprising the second commercial recording of the 1967 Piano Concerto and the third of the 1968 Cello Concerto (soon to be joined by a fourth!), the disc brings these major works to the public in performances that are, if not revelatory, assuredly musical and competently professional. The composer's son attended the sessions in New Zealand, giving the release the added imprimatur of family involvement.

Evelyn Chen's performance of the Piano Concerto is a fine one indeed. Comparisons with Leonard Pennario's recording (Pantheon D07124) may be unfair, and possibly even moot (the recording was never widely available and is currently out of print), but they are certainly instructive. If Chen falls just short of creating the edge-of-your-seat frenetic energy that Pennario brings to the work (particularly as captured in some live performances preserved by the Society), she nonetheless combines sufficient muscular power and poetic feeling to bring the work to life. The first movement gets off to an unimpressive start due to shallow-sounding timpani; we hear too much of the timbre of the mallets striking the surface of the instruments rather than the deep resonance of the drums themselves. But the necessary rhythmic drive is there, and for the most part the orchestral contribution is superb. Every once in a while tiny details disappoint, such as the failure to bring out the second violin counterpoint at measure 56 (2:01) or the lack of impact in the timpani entrance at measure 97 (4:06). Fortunately, conductor Sedares has restored three small cuts made in the Pennario recording: measures 262–266 (9:22–9:33), measures 272–283 (9:39–9:57), and measures 303–314 (10:26–10:48).

The second movement is one of Rózsa's most haunting nocturnes. It is beautifully realized here, in a series where slow movements have been especially successful. The sense of questioning mystery is established at the start (but where is the sound of the celeste, which so clearly registers on Pennario's recording?) and is maintained evocatively throughout. Again, we are treated to some portions of the score that were cut on the previous disc: measures 31–36 (2:40–3:03) and measures 92–99 (6:35–6:55). The former passage is especially lovely, although the beautiful English horn melody is somewhat lost in this over-reverberant recording. Overall, this is exquisite music making, with boldly shaped climaxes set off by poignantly measured moments of repose. Only in such subtle details as the poor balance between piano and oboe (the latter too loud) in the final moments is it apparent that these musicians have yet to really live with this music and fully plumb its depths.

The third movement is a rhythmic tour-de-force for both composer and performers. The asymmetrical  $3/4 + 5/8$  meter of the principal theme keeps everyone on their toes and propels the music forward with inevitable force. To the listener, it's as though the music keeps jumping ahead with every other measure (it being "shortened" by one eighth note). Chen and Sedares keep things moving with admirable precision, never letting the energy flag. Again, we can be grateful for the restoration of two cuts: measures 161–176 (2:54–3:27) and measures 282–322 (5:31–6:14). The latter passage includes a delightful fugato that recalls some of Rózsa's earlier works. I have one reservation concerning a tempo adjustment at measure 490 (9:35). The score is marked "Vivo," but Sedares seems a little conservative here; perhaps, however, he is holding back slightly to make the final push to the end that much more exciting. Again in this concluding movement there are details of Rózsa's sparkling orchestration that are buried, either for lack of direction from the podium or (as I rather

suspect) from too much resonance in the recording venue. Two examples are the xylophone at measure 85 (1:20) and the *col legno* affects (caused by hitting the string with the back of the bow) at measure 215 (4:25). This is admittedly nit picking and shouldn't spoil anyone's enjoyment of this splendid performance. The performers have restored all the cuts that Rózsa made in this work. I suspect that he made them only to fit the piece onto a single LP side.

With the Cello Concerto, matters of recording resonance take on added import. The work is one of the most linear and contrapuntal by this very linear and contrapuntal composer, and if the melodic lines are obfuscated by sonic fog the piece cannot have its full impact. It is already one of the composer's "toughest" listens, with much dissonance (far more than in the film music, for certain) and an uncompromising harmonic idiom. To me it seems the Rózsa work which most closely resembles Bartók, but that's an avenue of thought for another issue! The over-resonant sound is apparent right from the beginning, where the solo cello, supported only by a timpani roll, resounds in an almost bigger-than-life way. At least when we hit the main *Allegro non troppo* (0:29) the theme has a nice thrust and much forward momentum that almost never lets down. But the bassoon counterpoint at measure 17 (0:44) is the first of many such lines to be lost in the haze; yes, it's there all right, but we are not likely to notice it without a score. I think the composer wanted us to know it was there just by hearing it. The same could be said of the string counterpoint at measure 144 (5:46). The appearance of the second theme at measure 50 (1:55) is sensitively played and for a moment at least the sound is appropriately atmospheric. There is a slight but definitely noticeable (unmarked) tempo change at the trumpet solo at measure 93 (4:11); could this have been patched in from a different take? It does temporarily derail the movement's momentum. A good measure of the soloist's credentials is the long and demanding cadenza of this first movement (the longest in any Rózsa concerto?). Brinton Smith here maintains the tension throughout yet captures the variety of moods with seemingly effortless ease. Things are just right at the return of the second theme immediately afterward (9:28); again the sound is suitably resonant yet the separate lines for oboe and clarinet are clear and well balanced.

The second movement of the Cello Concerto is perhaps the finest thing on this new disc. Sedares and Smith are fully attuned to the movement's impassioned lyricism. There are numerous moments of near breathtaking beauty, such as the distant muted trumpet at measure 50 (3:52) and the spectral timbre of celeste and cello harmonics at measure 73 (5:08). Occasionally the counterpoint could be brought more to the foreground (such as the viola cross-rhythm at measure 56 (3:59), but within the overall framework of his syrupy acoustic Sedares balances his forces with remarkable acuity and success.

The fast-moving and complex counterpoint of the last movement is not always so well served by the sound. At measure 63 (1:00) it is difficult to hear the precise notes (or even rhythms) that make up the accompaniment, and at measure 182 (3:05) the background is undefined; the undulating 6/8 lullaby is not clear. Comparison at these points (and many others) with the recent Silva disc (SILKD6011) reveals what a drier acoustic can add to our appreciation of the music. Yet even given its sonic liabilities, this New Zealand production had much to offer us, such as the marvelous, Bartókian sonorities at measure 225 (4:44).

Taken as a whole, this Cello Concerto performance has brought me a little closer to a work which I always considered a bit unfriendly, putting a softer edge on some of its Transylvanian gloom and revealing a warmth I had not previously noticed in the piece.

In summary, both these performances, more compromised than aided by their over-resonant acoustic, are exciting, professional and fleetingly profound. There is no doubt in my mind that, given more time to get to know the scores, Sedares, his soloists, and his orchestra would fine-tune their interpretations and increase many-fold the number of insights and subtleties that inform their already excellent performances. It is unfortunate that these sessions were not preceded by concert per-

formances (which might have served to distill their essence even more. And even that could not approach the wisdom that a lifetime of living with these scores might bring. Let us hope that more and more performers and conductors take up these concerti and apply their experience to the genius of Rózsa.

As for the Koch series, will the departure of Michael Fine mean the end? We know that Koch has ready for imminent release a recording of the solo piano works, but we know nothing of plans for future orchestral recordings. Mr. Fine, on the other hand, has pledged to continue his personal commitment to Rózsa at his new label. DG has already announced plans to record the Violin Concerto with Gil Shaham, one of their “superstar” soloists. Although Rózsa’s music never exactly suffered neglect by record companies during the composer’s lifetime, this recent activity is most encouraging and promises great rewards for Rózsaphiles everywhere.

MR

## **A Passion for This Music:**

### **David Buechner Records the Piano Scores**

**John Fitzpatrick**

**P**ast issues have reported on a number of Rózsa recording sessions. Alan Hamer witnessed the BEN-HUR and QUO VADIS albums being recorded (PMS 18 and 21, respectively) and also the scoring sessions for THE PRIVATE FILES OF J. EDGAR HOOVER and PROVIDENCE (both in PMS 19) and EYE OF THE NEEDLE (PMS 33). All of the preceding were recorded in London. Preston Jones wrote extensively about the Hollywood sessions for DEAD MEN DON’T WEAR PLAID in PMS 35.

New York is less of a studio center than those cities, though Patrick Doyle (CARLITO’S WAY) and Elmer Bernstein (TWILIGHT) have recorded here in recent years. The latter sessions were the subject of a prominent *New York Times* feature on the veteran composer. In any case, this New York native has never had the pleasure of attending one of those events.

My chance came in March, thanks to the pianist David Buechner, who was recording the complete works for solo piano in Koch’s ongoing Rózsa series. The venue was not Manhattan’s West Side, where the recent movie sessions have been taking place, but the Master Sound Studios, which are part of the Kaufman Astoria complex in Queens. These are the venerable sound stages where Paramount had a major operation back in the twenties and thirties, and where activity has greatly revived in recent years thanks to such local filmmakers as Sidney Lumet and Paul Newman. It was here, too, that the LOST WEEKEND “theremin” (actually a keyboard substitute) had been dubbed in for the recent New Zealand recording.

The new Koch recording involves some sixty minutes of music: the Variations (Op. 9), the Bagatelles (Op. 12), *Kaleidoscope* (Op. 19), *The Vintner’s Daughter* (Op. 23), and the great 1948 Sonata (Op. 20). Buechner also planned to include the haunting *Valse Crépusculaire* from *Providence* (1977). Recording all this music would call for three days of work, with the entire third day blocked for the

challenging Sonata. I visited on the second afternoon, devoted to *The Vintner's Daughter*. Or so the schedule said. When I arrived, the shoeless pianist was doing riffs on *Mannix* and *Perry Mason*. It was lunchtime, and everybody needed a break from the intense morning spent on the 1932 Variations. This, you may recall, was the piece Rózsa composed especially for his joint concert with Arthur Honegger, on which occasion it was premiered by Clara Haskil. That fact seemed to impress Buechner's young assistant, a piano student herself. Buechner teaches at the Manhattan School of Music and at New York University, where he gave a sensational 1996 recital traversing most of these same piano pieces.

Over lunch, David spoke of the French influence on Rózsa's piano music, notable in both the Variations (which were composed in Paris) and *The Vintner's Daughter* (which is based on a French poem). Buechner advanced the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů as an interesting parallel. Martinů was another Central European whose life's journey took him to Paris and the United States. I thought Rózsa's music (at least the Sonata) to be more muscular and dramatic than Martinů's graceful, fluid scores, but Buechner held out for the comparison.

Back to work. Buechner fortified himself with sandwiches, coffee, and a large supply of sesame noodles. Even though he has played all this music in recital, he made no secret of its difficulty. Recording is hard work. The sessions had started late owing to the tardy delivery of the Yamaha instrument. The clock was ticking, and there was no turning back. Besides, "Susan yells at me" was the pianist's plaint. The "yeller" was actually the soft-spoken Susan Napodano Del Giorno, who has taken over from Michael Fine as producer of the Koch Rózsa series. I joined her in the control room, where she sat at the huge console, hunched over the score while facing the large window that overlooked the square performing area. There Buechner addressed the enormous Yamaha with only two microphones draped above its opened lid. The engineer explained that despite the studio's multitrack capabilities, they would be using only two channels that day. And the actual recording was made on a stacked pair of Sony DAT machines looking not all that different from the familiar home models.

Would Buechner begin with a master take of the entire work? No, "too exhausting," he said. His method was to play the first two variations, repeat them once or twice as necessary, and then move on to the next segment. To facilitate better matchups in editing, he stopped not at the end of a variation but rather a few bars into the succeeding segment. The idea is to make consistent transitions easier to achieve in the editing room.

Buechner kidded that Del Giorno was going to want him to make the opening sound more like a French horn. After all, she had been involved with the editing of James Sedares's orchestral version; indeed, that was the only acquaintance she had with this music. None of the principals was familiar with the Erich Kloss recording with the Frankenland State Symphony on an extremely rare early sixties MGM LP. That Nuremberg orchestra, still decimated by the war, sounded truly awful, and so Sedares's version is one instance where that conductor decisively surpasses all the competition. Tony Thomas's Citadel release of *The Vintner's Daughter* was actually a marginally legal issue of the Frankenland recording, camouflaged by the presence of spoken narration. Thomas himself read the Juste Olivier text. Big mistake! Thomas's mellow voice is utterly out of synch with the humorous text, and the interruptions destroy the musical flow. That recording, sans narration, is now on DRG CDSBK 13101.

Though new to the music, Del Giorno proved a helpful critic: "Just a little more accent on the dotted quarter notes." In variation 4, "too much left hand there." "Just a couple of little notes that didn't speak." "The end of no. 6 was really gorgeous that time." Buechner was sometimes skeptical: "the theme is in the left hand," he said. But a quick check of the playback convinced him of the validity of this criticism, which he remedied in the next take.

"Can you imagine this played by a piccolo?" said Del Giorno at no. 6 (*vivo e scherzando*). A

clarinetist herself, the producer couldn't help but be intrigued by the differences between the two versions. Rózsa is a really fine orchestrator, everybody agreed. The score seemed less obviously "pianistic" than Rózsa's other works for that instrument, and we wondered whether the composer had the orchestral version in mind when he wrote the original. In fact, *Double Life* says not: "A friend had sent me a little volume of French folk songs and one of these, "The Vintner's Daughter," I had arranged as a set of variations for piano. Eugene Ormandy liked the piece and asked me to orchestrate it for the Philadelphia Orchestra. I was glad to do so, and managed to get two weeks off from the studio for the purpose. After the first rehearsal, Ormandy said he would prefer a loud and brilliant ending to the quiet and reflective coda I had written. Well, I tried my best, but apparently when he played other versions with the orchestra nobody liked the loud ending and he had to give in and go back to the quiet one, which is the way it is published and recorded."

Only rarely did the pianist pause for an obvious mistake: "Gee, that's so f\_\_\_ hard. You can never relax." Del Giorno agreed: "It's thinking man's music." Of Buechner's concentration she said, "he really does have a passion for this music."

The biggest challenge was the very end, which he tried again and again for a true pianissimo—never easy to achieve from on a striking percussive instrument. His fingers hovered over the keys for long, breathless moments as if trying to tame the faintest remaining vibrations. In the end, he never was fully satisfied: "You'll have to take it way down in the editing."

The forty-third and final take of the afternoon would be the master. Buechner, now aided by the page-turner he had not required for the short takes, summoned up his reserves of strength and concentration and essayed the fifteen minutes and twenty seconds straight through. Once more the quiet bass chords faded away into sheer silence. There were no criticisms. "We have time to do it again," said the producer. But there was no need. Rest was in order for the next day's challenge: the Sonata and a possible remake of the troubling "Zingara" movement in the *Kaleidoscope*.

Returning to Manhattan, Buechner's Rózsaophile enthusiasms showed no sign of waning. He had ideas for promoting and continuing the Koch series, tales of recording in New Zealand with Sedares and Michael Fine. He had not yet heard the Concerto, recorded in New Zealand by the young prize-winning Evelyn Chen, but he expected her to do a good job. It was the orchestra that would be challenged, he predicted. The piece demands an ensemble that capable of subtleties of dynamic shading. He urged the Concerto on his assistant and spoke of wanting to perform it himself one day. In such moments is a musical tradition handed down. It will be hard not to look forward to David Buechner's Piano Sonata in the not too distant future and perhaps even a go at the big Concerto later on.

*For more about Buechner see an exceptionally interesting profile in the New York Times Magazine for 13 September.*

MR

# Classical Radio Conference

Frank J. Oteri

**A** highlight of the 1998 Conference of the American Music Personnel in Public Radio (AMPPR), held at Los Angeles's historic Regal Biltmore Hotel, was a luncheon honoring Miklós Rózsa on February 7th. You might consider my opinion biased: I have been intimately involved with Rózsa's music both as a journalist and as the resident self-proclaimed "Music Propagandist" and Director of Radio Promotions for Jay K. Hoffman and Associates, a New York-based public relations firm devoted to widening the audience for classical music that happens to work with the Rózsa Trust. However, everyone who reads *Pro Musica Sana* has a pro-Rózsa bias, and with good cause. Miklós Rózsa's work is some of the most deeply moving and well-crafted music created in this century!

The AMPPR conference is the largest gathering devoted to classical music broadcasting in the United States and is attended by over 150 program directors and radio hosts from across the country as well as representatives from the major record companies, music publishers and other organizations interested in the future of classical music on radio.

It seemed particularly fitting that Rózsa was honored at the Biltmore, which was the original location for the Academy Awards ceremonies. In fact, the Radio Conference Tribute almost seemed like a fourth Oscar. After three days of discussing the relevance of classical music on radio, the need to play more contemporary music on classical radio, and the appropriateness of broadcasting film music on classical radio, Rózsa's music drowned out all the dissent.

The celebration began at noon with a brief recital by Evelyn Chen and Brinton Averill Smith, soloists in Koch International Classics' new recording of the Piano and Cello Concertos with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. While the New Zealanders were not able to fly over to Los Angeles, and the acoustics of the room would probably not do justice to a full orchestra at any rate, Chen and Smith held their own in some riveting selections from Rózsa's too-little-known chamber music.

Chen immediately captured the attention of the 150-plus participants with an extremely powerful reading of the last movement of the 1948 Piano Sonata (Op. 20), a work which is crying out to be standard repertoire. One prominent radio host exclaimed, "Finally some music at this conference!" Brinton Smith then took the stage to play the 1977 *Toccata Capricciosa* (Op. 36), a rousing solo that should be in the repertoire of every cello recitalist. To bring the concert segment to a close, Chen and Smith joined forces for the first movement of the 1931 Duo for Cello and Piano (Op. 8), composed six years before Rózsa's music ever accompanied the silver screen.

The Conference attendees then preceded to the Heinsbergen Room to hear a series of moving testimonials from Rózsa's friends and family as well as movers and shakers in the music industry who continue to carry the torch for Rózsa's music. Rózsa's colleague David Raksin started the ball rolling with a series of delightful reminiscences about conversations with Rózsa.

Michael Fine, Vice President of Artists and Repertoire for Deutsche Grammophon, then discussed his long-term commitment to the music of Miklós Rózsa, the legacy of which has been Koch International Classics ongoing landmark series of the complete orchestral music. This historic series was launched while Fine was A&R Director at Koch. Now that Fine is at D.G., one can only hope to see some new Rózsa recordings on that Mercedes Benz of classical record labels!

Conductor James Sedares, speaking for himself as well as the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, recognized the importance of the Koch series and promised an ongoing commitment to Rózsa's music both in the recording studio and the concert hall. Sedares's promise was followed by a passionate call to arms from Jay K. Hoffman, president of Jay K. Hoffman and Associates who also happens to be my boss. Jay explained how Rózsa's music is exactly what classical radio needs. It is music which is at once contemporary and exciting, as well as immediately gratifying to listeners.

Finally, we heard from Juliet Rozsa, daughter of the composer, whose heartwarming anecdotes about her father moved everyone in the room. The classical radio programmers were particularly touched when Juliet recounted her father turning the radio dial to a classical station whenever he discovered his children were listening to something else.

I was honored to serve as the master of ceremonies for this event, which I hope will result in more frequent broadcasts of Rózsa's music all across America. AMPPR's Rózsa Tribute was an extremely rewarding experience for me and, I believe, for everyone in attendance. In addition to Juliet and Nick Rozsa, the guests included Miklós Rózsa's sister, Edith Jankay, along with Rózsa's three granddaughters (via Juliet). All were visibly moved.

**MOMENTS WE REMEMBER:** No. 6

Mike Reamy

**JULIUS CAESAR (1953):** This is perhaps a strange choice because, while the music is certainly Rózsa, its placement might or might not have been his doing. At the conclusion of Antony's speech, as the mob begins rioting and he walks away, there are a few chords that express to perfection what he has just accomplished. Indeed, every time I experience this moment, I feel driven to rise up in mutiny myself. It is only with the prospect of the remainder of the film to view that I am able to calm myself down. The Intrada recording has made it clear where these chords originated. They are from the Overture (approximately 2:43–3:07). Douglass Fake notes in the accompanying brochure that the fragment "was tracked in the film." By whom? If by Rózsa, the music and its placement are a stroke of pure genius. If by someone else, the music and its placement remain a stroke of pure genius. I find this possibility intriguing because fans of film music so often complain about the distortions to a score made by those other than the composer. Here for me is a rare example of an anonymous filmmaker significantly enhancing a scene's impact.

## **Rózsa in China: Rediscovering *The Seventh Sin***

**John Fitzpatrick**

I've been listening to *THE SEVENTH SIN* lately. That's pretty odd, when you think about it. Here's a picture I haven't seen in thirty years. My only viewing was back around 1968. If you could call it a viewing. For you must understand that this was an afternoon showing on New York's WABC-TV. Half of the CinemaScope frame would have been missing. And even though the picture is only 94 minutes long, they probably shaved off a few bits to fit their late afternoon time slot. Oh, yes, this would have been in black-and-white. It was under just such circumstances that I first experienced

GREEN FIRE, VALLEY OF THE KINGS, and even the sublime DIANE. It's amazing that these castoff flicks made any impression at all. Of course I was making audiotapes of the scored sequences in those days. Over the years, I've replayed them often to jog my memory. Those were the days!

If I had been ten years older I might have seen THE SEVENTH SIN in a theater—as, I suppose, no one will ever see it again. It was a 1957 release, really just a programmer designed to fill out a double feature in the waning days of the studio system. The picture must not have started out that way. Eleanor Parker was a genuine star, and the film boasted some scenic Hong Kong backgrounds to help fill the giant screen. It had started out with a major director, Vincente Minnelli, but he fell ill and was replaced by the pedestrian Ronald Neame. Things must have gone awry, for the finished film seems a halfhearted effort.

THE SEVENTH SIN is a remake of a 1934 Greta Garbo picture called THE PAINTED VEIL, based on Somerset Maugham's novel of that title. In the remake Eleanor Parker, unhappily married to an aloof physician, has just been caught in the midst of an affair. Deeply wounded, the husband withdraws even further into himself and volunteers for a Chinese cholera relief mission with an almost masochistic zeal. Bill Travers makes no apparent attempt to breathe life into this hopeless prig. The wife offers to come along. She hopes for redemption; he is looking for punishment. So off goes the unhappy couple to a series of utterly unmemorable Metrocolored adventures until the doctor finally expires and sends a deathbed benediction to the long-suffering Parker. It's a pretty unpleasant affair, excruciating when it isn't simply inert. George Sanders turns up in China with a mute and compliant Chinese wife whose serene docility is supposed to teach Parker some lessons about marriage. (Another reason the film won't be revived any time soon!) Oh, yes, to help Sanders (of all people!) expound on the Wisdom of the East, there is an elderly nun played by Françoise Rosay, the veteran French actress who, as the wife of Jacques Feyder, was present at Miklós Rózsa's famous encounter with Marlene Dietrich.

Ah, yes, Miklós Rózsa. He cannot have found much inspiration in this priggish potboiler. I never heard him mention the film. For that matter, I don't think I've heard *anybody* talk about it. Even the Chinese locations don't seem to have elicited much interest from Rózsa. His orientalisms consist largely of garden-variety pentatonic runs on the xylophone and similar conventional gestures. (Rather in the manner of BLOOD ON THE SUN.) Altogether a minor effort from the curious valley that lies between the solitary peak of LUST FOR LIFE (1956) and the awesome massif of 1959–1961. Compared with its contemporaries, THE SEVENTH SIN lacks the inventiveness of the intense SOMETHING OF VALUE and the passion of the wartime romance A TIME TO LOVE AND A TIME TO DIE. Yes, it's a better score than TIP ON A DEAD JOCKEY. But overall, the picture seems an accurate reflection of Rózsa's impression of MGM of that era: “[There was] a smell of disease and decay and disintegration.... Pictures lost all semblance of quality” (*Double Life*). Nobody is likely to place this score among Rózsa's top ten—or even his top forty.

Still, no mature Rózsa score is without interest. I'm not going to nominate this one for the pantheon, and I wouldn't push for a full recording. It's a fairly repetitive score, with only two themes bearing most of the weight for some forty-five minutes of music. But ten or fifteen minutes would be really welcome. Here let me celebrate just two cues.

The first is the prelude. No surprise here. Like many Hollywood composers, Rózsa knew how to seize the moment. This main title lasts only a minute and a half and is largely based on a single theme. But the melody is a fine one, and Rózsa develops it with considerable imagination and feeling. Forget about the clanging “Chinese” staccato of the introductory chords. Their purpose is to fight with MGM's leonine emblem while doing a bit of locale setting. The real theme, starting eight seconds in, is “ordinary” only for Rózsa: strong, full of sharp and unexpected accents, dark, and suggestive of passion. With a relentless counterphrase in the horns, the underlying 4/4 suggests a harshly freighted procession. Here is a musical precursor to some of the darker Roman marches

and even to “The Procession to Calvary.” What amazes me here is how little repetition you hear in the prelude. The first statement is conventional enough. Then, at thirty seconds the theme starts to blossom out, to *develop*. This is what real composition is all about. This is what so many of today’s accomplished scoring craftsmen just don’t know how to do. By 0:50 we have a climax, and by 1:00 Rózsa is using the horns contrapuntally to generate real musical drama. The form, as in MADAME BOVARY, is a simple *ABA*, where the *B* section is really an expressive outgrowth of the main theme. This is real musical evolution. Make no mistake about this simple prelude. It is beyond the ability of 90 percent of Hollywood musicians—then or now. When the original *A* motive returns, there is a real sense of struggle. In a minute and a half Rózsa has created more genuine drama than the picture will achieve in its entire length.

There follows another fifty seconds of music: a repeat of the oriental figures (now on the xylophone and presumably accompanying some establishing location shots) and then a gentler theme for the Eleanor Parker character, which builds up to generate some tension of its own before suddenly exiting as a pathetic little violin solo. (How many times have we heard MR use that device!)

MADAME BOVARY is exactly the right comparison—another tale of seething, domestic passion and frustration. Although THE SEVENTH SIN does not equal the former score’s explosive intensity—BOVARY may be the most exciting of all Rózsa’s main titles—it is nonetheless a worthy addition to the canon.

Two other scenes deserve comment. The oriental chords, slowed down to an impressive heavy tramp, help to express the grimness of the trek into disease-ridden China. But my favorite bit is the accompaniment to Françoise Rosay’s long speech in praise of the compliant wife. The introductory scoring here is ravishing: divided violins with pizzicati against high-pitched glissandi. Then the music settles into a more conventional sound that somehow bathes the scene in an ineffable sweetness. It is a blessed contrast to the other characters’ incessant moping. Serenity is not a common mood in Rózsa. But THE SEVENTH SIN gave him one of his infrequent chances to express a very special kind of mood. For this I remain grateful after more than forty years.

There is but a single recording of THE SEVENTH SIN: Daniel Robbins’s little suite of the three main themes on Intrada MAF 7064D. I think this five and a half-minute suite is the highlight of Robbins’s uneven piano cycle. (Uneven because so much of the many of the selections chosen by producer Tony Thomas are uncharacteristic and minor Rózsa.) Robbins’s playing is slower than the film tempo, but he has a nice way of bringing out the inner conflicts, though perhaps the Chinese wife’s theme cannot quite achieve its air of serenity on the piano. For that we await a new orchestral version.

## **Bradford on *Ben-Hur* A Correspondence**

**B***ecause the Rhino BEN-HUR is arguably the most important soundtrack release ever, we expect to continue discussing it for a good long time. Producer Marilee Bradford was kind enough to reply to Paul Packer’s “A Bit of Friendly Nit-Picking” in PMS 55. Her comments and the Editor’s are excerpted from a correspondence we had earlier in 1998.*

BRADFORD: I want to thank you for giving BEN-HUR some mention in print. Unfortunately, the album was not sent out for critical review at the time of its release, so any attention it receives is ap-

preciated. As producer of the album, I naturally have a few comments about Mr. Packer's article. On the issue of the missing fanfare: all of the BEN-HUR fanfares were recorded in Rome and stored with sound effects elements rather than with music elements. None of these cues were given identifying numbers or names when the Rome elements were transferred from six-track to three-track (nor were they later identified on the music editing logs, daily music reports, or prerecord logs). The three-track elements were subsequently shipped to America, and the six-track elements were destroyed. Searching for these unidentified fanfares through hours of sound effects tapes was a difficult procedure, particularly in light of the very limited time and budget allotted to a project that received little or no company support. Messala's five-second fanfare was the only piece that could not be located despite diligent efforts, though I was very fortunate in finding all but this one cue. Unlike the shofar call, which was located in the sfx materials after a "mere" diligent search, it would have taken many, *many* hours (translating into many, many dollars) to locate this fanfare—that is, if it still existed at all. And from all indications, it did not exist, since it was truly recorded for sfx (unlike the marches, which were recorded in a music studio but stored as sfx) So I made a difficult decision to just "let it go." I realized then that I would receive inquiries about it. And so here we are! My choices at that time were to either transfer the missing cue from a bootleg (which I felt was unethical), to transfer it from the original fine-grain print master (which would have included sound effects and therefore diminished the "music only" archival character of the project), or to forgo its use completely. I opted for the third choice. Due to space limitations in the producer's notes, this explanation was unfortunately purged from the booklet—my biggest regret, as I've since had to offer it many times over.

I'm confused at Mr. Packer's reference to the "original Entr'acte." I can only assume that he's referring to the piece specifically recorded in Rome [actually Nuremberg—*Ed.*] for the 1960 album, which should not be considered the original but rather a re-recording. (Further, I am very familiar with Rózsa's various "takes" of the Entr'acte, and can verify that the one on the album is indeed the one used in the picture.) Mr. Packer's reference to the debate between original film tracks and album reworkings is legitimate—a popular subject among film music lovers who enjoy comparing various interpretations of film scores. It was with full intention that I produced the new BEN-HUR solely from the original film music elements with no consideration to interpolating tracks from the re-recorded album. As you know, this BEN-HUR is the premiere release of the original score, and there would have been no purpose served in tainting the project with previously released material not recorded specifically for the film. In creating an extended archival work such as BEN-HUR, there will always be an issue as to whether or not such a work is pleasurable for repeated home listening. Addressing Mr. Packer's complaints about the number of tracks and his comment "I take it that track titles and divisions are based on the conductor's score, but what does the conductor's score have to do with home listening?" I will say only that my purposes in creating the album were to restore the deteriorating film music masters, to preserve the recordings for future use and enjoyment, and to present the material and written information with historical accuracy. As a producer, I rely on my best judgments with some measure of objectivity, all the while knowing that the resulting experience will be purely subjective for the listeners.

Many thanks again for your attention to BEN-HUR. You can imagine that this project is very dear to my heart.

*FITZPATRICK: I commented about the "limited resources." This spectacular album, with its 50-page color booklet, is one of the most lavish productions in soundtrack history. Ms. Bradford assured me that getting resources at Rhino wasn't easy. A tale for another day. I wondered why Bradford had not simply interpolated the fanfare from the mixed track or the bootleg: "Is it really unethical to appropriate from a bootleg a segment to which your company has every legitimate right? And to which the bootleggers have no right? You do no harm to MGM, to the composer, or (as far as*

*I can see) anybody else. Why the scruples? As for possible contamination with sound effects, are there really any significant noises during that fanfare? Well, folks may disagree with you on this particular call. But consider what you have gained: the tiny missing piece will be an eternal trivia question. Like the undetected flaw in the postage stamp, it will make for a true collector's prize."*

BRADFORD: Looking back (as I am loath to do), I might have used the bootlegged fanfare despite my personal ethics, however subjective, (1) if the recording had sounded up to par, (2) if I hadn't been pushed into an unconscionable production schedule in which there was no time for second-guessing and no time for pause to regain access to the bootleg (which was in my possession for only one day during development stages of the project—there's a whole scenario here with hunting down and identifying cues that I won't get into), and (3) if I had had more support from the sponsors. The whole project was a complete panic—I'm still surprised that it came out as well as it did.

FITZPATRICK: *Regarding "the original Entr'acte," I believe Paul Packer referred not to the 1960 re-recording but rather to an alternate version that exists on the old tapes. This piece does not exactly match either the film or the "Kloss" recording. It begins and ends, like the Kloss, with festive fanfares and the "racing" allegro section. But the midsection of the studio track features a bright, impassioned version of the love theme that is quite different from the somber treatment of two Hebrew themes in the Kloss. Although it was not used in the film, this version certainly qualifies as an outtake of sufficient interest to commit to disc. The interest of the Entr'acte is partly dramatic. It strikes me that the music of the alternate version was meant to prepare us for the race. It tells us that the gears are about to change. We have been immersed in darkness and suffering for the past half-hour. Now for something entirely different. This music is the closest MR came to scoring the actual chariot race—surely a point of great interest. I wonder who decided against using it. I posed that and similar questions to MR on many occasions, with little success. He simply refused to commit most of his everyday soundstage experiences to memory—except for a choice few tales which he retold and embellished over the years with all the craft of the master raconteur that he was.*

BRADFORD: I sincerely don't recall all of my impressions while listening through the recorded music for the film. There were alternate takes of several pieces, so I assume the entr'acte could be among them. Regarding alternate takes in general, I felt that this album was a long, intense "listen" as it was, particularly with all of the outtakes and extended cues, so my choice was to forgo squeezing some alternate recordings onto the end, save the one vocal (which I felt was a wonderfully soothing piece by which to reflect on all the music preceding).

FITZPATRICK: *Thanks again to Paul Packer for taking the time to address these important issues and also to Mike Quigley for quoting another Bradford reply (incorporated above) and to Jim Doherty for clarifying the nature of the alternate Entr'acte. (Jim simply referred me to an old MRS tape that I had completely forgotten!) As for the bootleg, I have heard only bits of a dub and I would urge readers to avoid the thing. (Paul Packer disagrees.) On one point, however, I imagine everybody must agree: Marilee Bradford has put us all in her debt for producing the BEN-HUR that we have awaited for nearly forty years. The Rhino is an album for the ages. As its initial release has not sold very well, any collector in his right mind ought to stockpile multiple copies of this first edition.*

MR

## Simmons on Rózsa

*Editor's Note:* I have always admired the record reviews of Walter Simmons. He has been a leading exponent of the American symphonic tradition in *Fanfare* for as long as I can remember. A firm believer that the possibilities of tonality have not been exhausted, he has advocated his views in sympathetic reviews of such composers as Samuel Barber, David Diamond, Paul Creston, Ernest Bloch, Nicholas Flagello, Arnold Rosner, and Alan Hovhannes, among many others.

Simmons is neither Rózsaophile nor Rózsaophobe. Perhaps that is remarkable statement regarding a composer whose highly charged music tends to arouse strong feelings. Simmons obviously knows and respects Rózsa's music and is occasionally capable of noting a potential Rózsa influence, as for example of QUO VADIS (the quieter statements of the "Quo Vadis, Domine?") on Samuel Barber's great *Prayers of Kirkegaard*. He has commented respectfully on recordings of the *Tripartita* and the First String Quartet. In fact, he actually ventured to "rank" the musical value of the six quartets on the Vox "Old World Composers the New World" album," and I recall that he placed the Rózsa work second—following the Bloch but preceding the quartets by Stravinsky, Tcherepnin, Korngold, and others.

I always look up expectantly when I spot a Simmons review. His coolly descriptive objectivity and willingness to go against the received wisdom make his writing instantly recognizable. So I was excited to find Simmons reviewing Koch's recent *Noir* album in *Fanfare*.

Well, this particular review contains some very sharp barbs. Sharp enough that we would not have published them here during the composer's lifetime. (For all his desire that we publish views both "pro and contra." MR did have a natural sensitivity to criticism.) Nevertheless, I continue to find Simmons's ideas stimulating. For that reason, I reproduce his review here with some suggestive annotations of my own. I hope that some writers will take time to show how and why they disagree.

*Walter Simmons's review of Koch International 3-7375-2-H1 is reprinted from Fanfare 20:5 (May/June 1997), by permission of the author and the publisher.*

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**R**oyal Brown is reviewing this new release from the perspective of a film music connoisseur in his "Film Musings" column.<sup>1</sup> I, on the other hand, approach this disc not as a film music buff, but as an *aficionado* of the musical syntax shared both by some film-music composers (Miklós Rózsa and Bernard Herrmann especially) and by many symphonic composers of the twentieth century as well. My fondness for this idiom extends to an interest in film music for its relationship to the autonomous works by the same composers, as well as to the broader musical context from which this syntax grew. This may seem "academic," or perhaps idiosyncratic and somewhat defensive, because on the one hand, I object to the use of terms like "movie music" or "Hollywood" as cheap critical epithets with which to disparage serious concert music that partakes of this idiom. Without addressing the aesthetic issues involved, some critics seem content to sneer at film music as the product of mercenary pseudo-composers who recycle schlock melodramatic clichés in order to manipulate the emotions of a gullible lowbrow audience.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, I almost invariably find listening to film

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<sup>1</sup> RSB's notice is an almost unqualified rave. Despite his filmic concerns, Brown clearly admires this music *as music*.

<sup>2</sup> That sort of criticism is less common than it used to be. Younger readers would be amazed how universal such views seemed to be in the 1960s. Our Society was founded partly to combat them.

music as a pure musical experience to be frustrating and disappointing—but for reasons of form, not of taste or morality: the structure of film music is subordinated to the primary medium—the film—and is not designed to provide an autonomous listening experience. Heard by itself, it usually does nothing and goes nowhere, from a musical standpoint. This is by no means an irrelevant academic matter: it is fundamental and seriously limits the depth and magnitude of the listening experience.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to view the composers of film music—especially the masters of the genre, most of whom also produced their own bodies of abstract concert music—with the same respect and attempted objectivity that one grants to those who have concentrated on other musical genres.

Miklós Rózsa, who died two years ago at the age of eighty-eight, is generally regarded as one of film music's greats, with more than a hundred scores to his credit, which coexist alongside approximately forty abstract works.<sup>4</sup> Born in Budapest and trained in Leipzig, he underwent the same sort of rigorous apprenticeship that prepared most of his contemporaries; indeed, he is arguably one of the most prominent Central European composers of his generation.<sup>5</sup>

Rózsa divided his output of film scores into a number of different phases. But the majority of listeners probably associated him most closely with lavish epics set in ancient Rome and similar settings—scores from the 1950s and early 60s like *BEN-HUR*, *JULIUS CAESAR*, *KING OF KINGS*, *SODOM AND GOMORRAH*, and *QUO VADIS?* Not quite as well known are his scores for those films from the 1940s generally grouped under the term *film noir*, which include the scores featured on this disc.

One of the most fascinating observations that arises from a consideration of Rózsa's film music is that as appropriately as his scores suit their cinematic contexts, which include a variety of subject matters, geographical settings, and chronological periods, when heard *outside* their cinematic contexts, virtually *all* the music sounds unmistakably Hungarian. This amusing realization illustrates quite clearly the chameleonlike ability of music to appear to reflect and mirror visual and dramatic stimuli presented within the same context—a phenomenon explained by the principles of *Gestalt* psychology. This is not to suggest that *any* music will fit *any* cinematic situation, but that human perception actively seeks to create meaningful wholes of disparate elements.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I happen to agree with Mr. Simmons here. Even the very best film music on discs can sometimes frustrate my efforts at serious attentive listening. (We are not talking about background music here.) However, it is obvious that many listeners differ. As evidenced by, say, the pages of *Film Score Monthly*, the “soundtrack” community shows a widespread preference for original tracks over concert suites and for authentic arrangements over those which seek to shape film scores into more coherent form. Although some soundtrack fans are uneducated and care little for musical form—that is certainly not true of all. It would be interesting to hear Mr. Simmons's views on this phenomenon.

<sup>4</sup> Actually the *Double Life* canon is 94 scores; if you subtract *TIME OUT OF MIND* (an adaptation of Rózsa) and then add the uncredited bits during the Korda and Paramount years, 100 isn't too far off the mark. There are 45 autonomous works with opus numbers; *Hungaria* and the unpublished pieces would bring the number to around 50.

<sup>5</sup> Again, note the fair recognition here. The typical anti-Rózsa review of an earlier generation took the tone of “Who is this guy, anyway?” I actually recall a newsmagazine's comment on the Heifetz-Piatigorsky *Tema con Variazioni*. It said that Rózsa had emerged from “the swimming pool set.”

<sup>6</sup> I'd love to see this point developed. So often, we praise a composer for capturing exactly the “right” mood for a scene. In fact, the composer is helping to *create* the scene, and a variety of different approaches are always possible. It's just that we only get to hear the final choice. Gestaltists investigate how the human mind helps to complete the image. (You know, does the silhouette represent a white goblet or two black profiles?) Just as the composer, after the fact, helps to create the film's meaning, so we, the audience, help to create some of film music's meanings.

In addition to the pervasive Hungarian accent, Rózsa's scores integrate a rich amalgam of stylistic elements, including the sweep and grandeur of Mahler, the feverish intoxication of Scriabin, the mysterious exoticism of the early Bloch, the throbbing richness of Hanson, the brilliant coloration of Respighi, and the sweet sentimentality of Rachmaninov—to name a few associations that come to mind.<sup>7</sup> The scores—especially those created for these *film noir* classics—are so suggestive of primal passions and seething emotions, so redolent of dark and disturbing moods, that the films themselves often fail to match the power and intensity suggested by the opening credit music (usually the most satisfying statement found in the score, because it is the one moment in which the music is dominant, defining the tone of the entire experience to follow). Listen to the opening of the suite from *THE LOST WEEKEND* (for me, the high point of the disc): it is difficult to believe that this overwhelmingly powerful statement of ominous gloom and dark foreboding is introducing a film about a drunken binge.<sup>8</sup> And so, disappointed by unfulfilled expectations and realizing that this music is only a backdrop for something else, one turns eagerly to Rózsa's abstract works for that missing sense of communication. But what one discovers—forgive me, Rózsa fans—is that the concert music is altogether different: lukewarm, impersonal, emotionally undercharacterized Hungarian busywork—like afterthoughts on Bartók's *Dance Suite* and *Divertimento* for Strings. It is as if Rózsa could give expression to his deeper emotional life only through the anonymity of a film score, but became paralyzed by a sort of compositional stagefright when standing alone.<sup>9</sup>

These three scores were composed during the years 1944–46, and are fine examples of Rózsa's *film noir* period. As stated above, *THE LOST WEEKEND* appeals to me most, and is notable for its use of the theremin, the early electronic instrument that Rózsa had also featured in his Academy Award-winning score for *SPELLBOUND*, composed earlier but released later. *THE KILLERS* is the film that introduced the four-note motif that soon became almost as famous as the four-note motif from Beethoven's Fifth when it was adapted for the *Dragnet* TV show. *DOUBLE INDEMNITY* is a great score for a great movie. The performances here are fine, although the sound quality suffers

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<sup>7</sup> Sit tight, folks. Simmons is not saying that MR is a derivative composer. He is locating Rózsa in a musical spectrum. Comparison is one of the best forms of nontechnical musical description. It can be fun and it has the additional virtue of widening our horizons. If you like Rózsa, you ought to be interested in other composers who share some of his characteristics. Simmons here provides a nice jumping-off point. For myself, I love Mahler (as MR did not), but I don't quite get the comparison. Rózsa was rarely so expansive as the Austrian composer. Bloch and Respighi are good likenings. Get to know their music if you don't already. Respighi should not be cited only for the "brilliant coloration." Works like the *Ancient Airs and Dances* reveal the Italian composer as a man so deeply in sympathy with the traditions of the past that he could make them part of his own musical fabric. That characteristic is fundamental to Rózsa. I would also mention Tchaikovsky and Puccini for their straightforward, unashamed, and highly dramatic romanticism. And Vaughan Williams for the incorporation of folk material into a modern idiom. But Scriabin? I don't know his music very well, but I will certainly investigate it now. Thanks to Mr. Simmons for the musical tip.

<sup>8</sup> There is an important point here. The film didn't have to be scored in Rózsa's tragic mode. In fact, the temp track used a number of "drunk" musical clichés—to disastrous effect at a preview. (Today we'd probably be stuck with the temp track in the finished film!) Rózsa's feeling for the drama is part of what makes the film succeed.

<sup>9</sup> Wow! All of us will write pages to refute this one. And yet... Isn't there some validity to the notion of "compositional stagefright"? Ever since Wagner and Schoenberg, composers have feared that the tradition was exhausted, there is nowhere left to turn. I am sure that Rózsa was not exempt from this fear. He was a slow composer who often tore up what he wrote for the concert hall. There are some long gaps between his 45 numbered works—periods when he wrote nothing for orchestra. But in Hollywood there was no time for such self-criticism. No time for paralysis. And there is no denying that the movies did liberate a side of MR's creativity, as of John Williams's, that never emerged in either man's concert music. The matter deserves serious discussion.

from the opacity I have noticed on other recordings of the New Zealand Symphony. The program notes contain some interesting information, but suffer from insufficient editing and proofreading. The disc is dedicated to the memory of Christopher Palmer, one of the most original musicological minds of our time, and a great advocate of Rózsa's work.

**MOMENTS WE REMEMBER:** No. 7

Jeffrey Dane

“The single best performance I’ve seen in *any* movie” is how filmologist Don Miller described Frank Faylen's minor but memorable portrayal of the sadistic nurse in *THE LOST WEEKEND*. One can comfortably and suitably clothe his remark in musical garb: *BEN-HUR*'s “Magi” sequence is graced with what's arguably the most touchingly moving such music heard in *any* film. Since our reactions are by nature personal we can speak only for ourselves, not for others, but that music gives new significance to the concept of inspiring and affectingly beautiful music: impossible to define, difficult to explain, hopeless to imitate, but very easy to recognize. Rózsa felt Bach would approve, and it seems he pulled out all the stops for this music. Rózsa had the *chutzpah*, the slang Yiddish word for audacity: he also pulled the wool over the studio's eyes, thereby discrediting his “superiors” by implication, when he suggested composing music of his own, rather than complying with the idiotic request to use the anachronistic *Adeste Fideles*. That Rózsa's music *postdates* it seemed to escape everyone's attention.

Christ's birth was an event which in retrospect was, in a word, *unique* in the world's history. The historical consequences of what happened then are now a matter of record. No-one like the rabbi from Nazareth had ever lived before—and music accompanying a cinematic depiction of that happening should be unique as well, in keeping with the singularity—and ultimate magnitude—of the circumstances. Rózsa had the right idea, it would appear.

## News (continued from p. 2)

### Performances

A June 1998 festival at the University of California, Santa Barbara, was entitled “Film Composers: The Whole Picture.” It consisted of film screenings by day and live performances of concert music in the evenings. The first night opened with the Last Chance Quartet playing MR's Second String Quartet, Op. 38, of 1981 together with quartets by Corigliano (1995) and Korngold (1920).

Music from classic Rózsa scores was heard in concert at Grant Park (Chicago) and the Hollywood Bowl under John Mauceri. Also in Rochester with Peter Bay.

*THE LOST WEEKEND* was heard April at the Atlanta Symphony.

June saw Charles Floyd's Boston Pops program feature a suite from *BEN-HUR*. Floyd, who is best known as Natalie Cole's arranger and con-

ductor, told the audience he has been working with the Rózsa estate trying to reconstruct the score for *King of Kings*, which was thrown out in a studio cleanup. The music from *BEN-HUR* was described in the *Boston Globe* as “colorful and exciting, the might of Rome caught in music of sophisticatedly barbarian splendor.”

### Publications

Mike Quigley has a Web site currently featuring his report on the Rózsa concert and interviews in Hamilton, Ontario (1977):  
<http://www.mjq.net/rozsa/index.html>

Dorothy Lamb Crawford's book, *Evenings on and off the Roof: Pioneering Concerts in Los Angeles, 1939–1971* (1995) is an account of the new music scene in L.A. during the middle years of the twentieth century. There are several references to MR. Most notably, a letter from Robert Craft describes a 1950s concert that introduced some of Webern's

music to the West Coast. MR is described as ostentatiously storming out of the hall in disgust and slamming the door behind him.

Mark Koldys has an 18-page overview of recorded film music in the March/April issue of the *American Record Guide*. Filmmaker Jim Pavelek's interview with MR is in the current *Soundtrack!*

The next PMS will appear promptly. Honest! The big feature on LUST FOR LIFE is already in type. Don't delay your responses to the member poll in the present issue. We hope to present preliminary findings in PMS 57 in the spring.

## Letters

Legally my membership begins now; but mentally and emotionally it begins that long since forgotten day in 1940 or '41 when the first bars of JUNGLE BOOK riveted me to my seat. Ever since, I have maintained that the score for this film is not only one of the best Dr. Rózsa ever made, but one of the five best movie scores ever made in the history of movie making. My initial impression has not changed a bit in all this time.

Thank you for the issues of PMS. Even though I made a mental gumbo out of all the Mixolydian, Phrygian, and Aeolian modes, all fully prepared and packaged for your readers' convenience with tuttis without fruttis, pedals, triads, lowered sevenths, asymmetrical phrase lengths, praises to Allah and other technical or tactical niceties and mysteries, I could still find some little (very little) satisfaction reading the article on EL CID's scoring.

I could give EL CID another try in the tape player, but by the time I read a technical term, go to a suitable dictionary, open it, search for the term and read the explanation, the corresponding sound would be way back in the play sequence. With a composer as prolifically beautiful as Dr. Rózsa was, I find it extremely difficult to decide for myself what represents his artistic pinnacle. Perhaps if I were limited to let us say, the last ten scores he made, the selection would only be a little less difficult to make; but not at all when I consider his earlier, 1940s, works. No way for me!

It saddened me to see that in the recent surveys you mention not a single vote was given to THE FOUR FEATHERS, FIVE GRAVES TO CAIRO, or SAHARA. They are works as great if not greater than BEN-HUR or EL CID, which seem to have gathered most of the votes. Reading all the hoopla in PMS about B-H and EC made me wonder

whether we, the present generation of admirers of this composer, are not really Johnnie-come-latelys to his production.

I cannot say a word about MR's creations as concert music. I have never been at a concert where one was played. We do have a symphony orchestra, but it plays, as the Spanish saying goes, "from Christmas to St. John's Day." Here we're are lucky when we get Floyd Cramer on the stage; even at that it is difficult to fill our Civic Center beyond the fifty percent capacity. I know a lady who equates the musical *Okelahoma!* with opera. MR's music would sound as strange to our rank-and-file Bible Belt Jesus-whining crusader as Les Baxter's old album *Music out of the Moon*.

I leave for the end my comment on that eminent piece of work called DOUBLE INDEMNITY. As happens with so many other movie works by this composer, the score transcends tremendously in its emotiveness, drama, and even tragedy the very limited personal and social environment where the plot takes place, As I hear it—and the same happens with Variation 7 from *Theme, Variations, and Finale*—I get the feeling of a much greater scope, going beyond the ordinary tale of an infamous woman and her insurance agent lover planing and executing the death of her husband to collect on his life insurance. It is the same situation Walt Disney faced in 1939 when planing the use of Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* in his movie FANTASIA. The composer had built his ballet as a series of tribal dances from "pagan" Russia. Yet the studio animators saw something much greater in it: the evolution of life on earth. In the same vein, Dr. Rózsa's music suggests a dramatic scope of saga proportions, many times

## The MRS Poll

Let's find out what MR's admirers really think. Here's a chance to compare your own tastes with those of the whole community of Rózsaphiles. Just send us your comments on a separate sheet. PMS 57 will tabulate your responses and offer a generous sampling of personal views. Where a multiple selection is requested, please list up to five titles or names. You need not repeat the questions. Just remember to number your answers.

### ***These questions apply only to Miklós Rózsa's film music:***

1. What are your top five scores?
2. What is your favorite "soundtrack" recording (i.e., a disc devoted to an individual score)?
3. What is your favorite anthology?
4. What are the unrecorded scores most in need of a recording?
5. Do you enjoy the film scores more in their dramatic context or as a listening experience on CDs?
6. Which of MR's film scoring "periods" most appeals to you: Korda/Oriental fantasy? Crime/noir? /Historical romance? Post-1961?
7. Which is your favorite score of each decade: '30s? '40s? '50s? '60's? '70s?
8. What are your favorite scenes in Rózsa-scored films?

### ***These questions apply only to the concert music of MR.***

9. What are your favorite Rózsa concert works?
10. What is your favorite recording of a concert work?
11. Which concert work is most in need of a new (or first) recording?
12. How many live performances of Rózsa concert works have you attended?

### ***These questions apply to the film music and the concert music.***

13. Do you prefer the film music or the concert music?
14. Which do you think will survive for posterity?
15. What was the first Rózsa work you discovered?
16. What are the best articles you have read in *Pro Musica Sana*?
17. How old were you when you first discovered MR?

### ***These questions apply to composers other than MR.***

18. Who are your favorite composers of music for films?
19. What are your favorite film scores by other composers?
20. Who are your favorite composers overall?
21. What are your favorite concert works or operas?

The final question calls for a thoughtful response: How has MR influenced your life? Has his music inspired your beliefs, your profession, your education?

**MADAME BOVARY** (1949): Of this score's many memorable themes and moments, the one that has always meant the most to me is "The Letter." This cue depicts the immediate aftermath of Emma's disastrous attempt to flee from Charles and her debts. The letter in question is to be read after she is gone. But Charles gently reassures Emma that he has not read the letter or taken its implications to heart. Emma's hysterical frenzy is aptly caught in the music as she gradually calms down and Charles burns the letter. The music is nerve-rackingly scored—as much so as for any of the violent *films noirs* of a few years earlier. I understand that Elmer Bernstein recorded the sequence for his **BOVARY** album, but omitted it from the finished production because the RPO had failed to thoroughly master the challenging piece. This music deserves a modern recording for us all to savour.

## Letters (Continued from p. 18)

bigger than the one that sets the story. It gives the impression of great, strong, unstoppable masses in movement, as if describing a big war action. It would perfectly fit a top-ranking war movie with all the grand heroics we are used to and more.

*Joseph Velo*, Marshall, Tex.

*THIEF and JUNGLE BOOK have always had their partisans. And Royal Brown has made no secret of his championship of DOUBLE INDEMNITY. But you are right that we have neglected the earlier scores. J. J. Wayne is preparing an article on SONG OF SCHEHERAZADE for a future issue. We certainly welcome any similar efforts. I note that Nick Rozsa once said that DESERT FURY was a particular favorite of his . . . —Ed.*

Having known and worked with Miklós Rózsa, I take a back seat to no man where my admiration for his music is concerned.

However, Paul Packer's "A Bit of Friendly Nit-Picking" needs to be taken with a ton or two of salt. While enthusiasm for Rózsa's music is perfectly understandable in a periodical published by a society devoted to that composer and his works, to refer to the Rhino/Turner **BEN-HUR** as "the greatest event in the history of records, the greatest thing since the invention of the CD itself" is to render ourselves absurd.

Get serious. The greatest event in the history of records—and probably the history of everything else—was the birth of Mozart. Or Beethoven. Take your pick. Certainly that would have been Mikki's view. Get the idea?

*Nicholas Meyer*, Pacific Palisades, Calif.

*MR once offered a "desert island discography" on a BBC radio program. It included Bach, Britten, and Beethoven (the Ninth Symphony) but nothing by Mozart. —Ed.*

MR's teachers are an important subject, at least to Rózsaophiles. Still, I wonder if we're fully appreciating what we're getting on CD these days. So little was said about the recent **IVANHOE**. And could not so much more have been said about **JULIUS CAESAR**, **EL CID**, and, yes, **BEN-HUR**? True, Rózsa's teachers are important, but are they as important to the bulk of the Society's membership right here and now as the above CDs? I can't help but recall when any one of these recordings would have been greeted with hosannas and the closest examination, as was **KING OF KINGS** a few years back. (Remember the special newsheet—PMS 50a—announcing its release?) As you've already acknowledged, we're getting blasé.

We're in the middle of a re-release of **BEN-HUR** here in Sydney in a brand new 70mm print. Best print of the film I've seen, in fact, with such deep, rich colour and contrast I'm wondering why it hasn't ever looked this good before. Great sound too. If you get a re-release in the States, don't miss it.

For me *The Vintner's Daughter* [on the recent Koch recording] was the biggest surprise. Variation 4 reminds me strongly of one of Jerome Moross's ballet scores. Odd, that, since one wouldn't normally confuse the two. I think of all the early Rózsa I've heard, this piece most strong-

ly indicates a possible other direction Rózsa could have gone in, a path not taken. I'm still exploring it.

I've found the *Concerto for String Orchestra* and *Andante for Strings* somewhat problematical. They echo the film noir scores of the forties and make an interesting companion piece to the recent DOUBLE INDEMNITY disc. Yet on direct comparison, I much prefer the latter. This of course raises that ugly head of which is best—film Rózsa or classical Rózsa. Personally I'd rate classical Rózsa on a par with Kodály, which is high enough, but I'd rate film Rózsa with nobody at all. Or to quote Franz Waxman in 1960, "Rózsa's the best film composer anyway." It seems to me that those who only respond to Rózsa's film music have come in for some unfair criticism in PMS, the suggestion being that they need accompanying images to appreciate music. I don't see this at all. Rózsa was first and foremost a superb dramatist. To quote a recent liner note, he had an unerring dramatic sense. He was born for film music, and in no other genre does his music shine so lustrously. Indeed, he seems himself to have needed the aid of images. I can't escape the feeling that in his best scores the music just seems to flow effortlessly, the ideas almost running into each other, whereas his classical efforts seem far less thematically prolific; there seems much more of a struggle for ideas. Yes, I know: film music is about themes, classical music about construction and logic—the architecture of the piece. Well, forgive me if I forgo the architecture and just delight in the music.

Not that one should compare different mediums. I mean, where in the Symphony or Violin Concerto does one find naval battles, Roman marches, or bacchanalian dances? Two different things, equally valid. But I still believe Rózsa's greatest contribution, the true essence of his genius, will turn out to be his film scores.

**Paul Packer**, Gorokan, N.S.W., Australia

*I'm sorry if we've seemed to harp on the subject of concert vs. film music. The values of both are certainly open to debate, as you can see from the Walter Simmons piece elsewhere in this issue. We do sometimes "push" the concert music—because it is less familiar and because it was MR's own first love. But I respect any informed opinion on the matter, and I have to admit that my own preferences are curiously divided in a manner not easy to reconcile. The one thing I really deplore is failing to even try the concert music.*

*People who hold back out of fear or caution are doing a disservice to themselves as well as to MR.*

*On the subject of the architecture "versus" the music, I'm not sure that a real opposition should be created here. In the greatest works, the architecture is the music. —Ed.*

My wife and I wish to express our deepest empathy with your remarks on behalf of "the people out there in the dark" (PMS 53). I believe in speaking on behalf of many of us you really expressed our feelings of devotion and admiration for the man and his music at the memorial service for Dr. Rózsa. The story of David was especially touching. As a lad of fourteen, I discovered THE THIEF OF BAGHDAD and tried to play "Eternal Love" on my old metal clarinet. (At least I enjoyed it!) I was hooked on MR. All I had to see was "Music by Miklós Rózsa" in a main title and I knew that even if the movie dragged or was too introspective for an early teenager, MR would carry the action. Much later, in films such as LAST EMBRACE, TIME AFTER TIME, and EYE OF THE NEEDLE, this still held fast. MR had "the Power." His legacy of recorded music may comfort us, but he is missed.

**Harold and Marianne Sacks**, Norristown, Penn.

Thanks for your tribute to MR. Dearly love his music—therefore I loved him too. The man is the music, and that applies to the great classical composers. Benny Herrmann appeared a son of a bitch, but listen to THE GHOST AND MRS. MUIR or his opera and you know the real man inside. Even Wagner ...

It took me months to come to grips with Rózsa's death. Sad sense of loss and finality. There is no one left to touch me the way MR did. Goldsmith and Williams are often fine in their scores, but they are so far under Rózsa, Herrmann, Korngold. Thank God for recordings. Thank you or continuing with the MRS. Right now I just feel sad the man is not there behind the words. But the music will always be there. Reactions often follow a composer's death: increased fame or obscurity result. Your work with the Society, this loose fellowship, is necessary to help offset the pressures of history which swallow up everyone eventually. Thank you again.

**Allan Young**, Southampton, Penn.

I think that Paul Packer misses what seems to me the point of the Rhino/Turner BEN-HUR album,

which is to create as *complete a presentation of the score as possible*.

“Complete,” however, is not synonymous with “best.”

You, I, and everybody else will each have his own ideas as to what constitutes best. For example, I prefer the “Fertility Dance” music in its longer re-recorded version of the Kloss album to the original version on the new Rhino. But someone else equally enthused with and knowledgeable about the score may prefer the Rhino track. Now we have both.

Fortunately, because God in his wisdom created tape recorders, CD recorders, DAT recorders, and editing equipment, anyone who’s interested and has access to the necessary equipment (which, I think describes most of us) will be able to create his or her own best presentation according to preference by editing into a whole chosen tracks from all of the albums.

When I do get around to create my own personal “best” BEN-HUR—the willingness to invest the time is another necessary element—I will have

available for the first time since the picture’s release such treasures as the complete sea battle music, many extended versions of cues that were cut for the picture but are now heard for the first time as they were originally composed, the marvelous music heard right before the intermission, and a glorious “Miracle and Finale” that surpasses anything we’ve heard on previous recordings.

So, to everyone who loves the music from BEN-HUR as much as I do but agrees that the “perfect” album is not synonymous with the Rhino recording, get out all your albums, your tape recorders, your scissors, your splicing tape, and get to work and stop complaining.

*Leslie T. Zador*, Los Angeles, Calif.

*Readers may wish to explore the music of Eugene Zador (1894–1977), Rózsa’s longtime orchestrator and colleague. Newly available on Cambria CD-1100 are his short 1939 opera Christopher Columbus and Studies for Orchestra—Ed.*

## Editor’s Notebook

IT’S BEEN a year since PMS 55, but you won’t have to wait so long for PMS 57. The issue will focus on LUST FOR LIFE, and the lead essay is already in type. Speaking of the last issue, I must apologize to readers for the unusual number of typos. Be assured that it was our distraction with type formats and not Paul Packer’s ignorance that turned Sydney into Sidney and, alarmingly, Judah into “Ben-Hur’s girlfriend.” Gene Kohlenberg has helped us with formatting this time, and I think that future issues will move faster as a result. Now if we can only get an MRS Web site up and running . . .

JERRY GOLDSMITH gave a concert of his own music at Carnegie Hall this month. The audience was young and enthusiastic. The composer really seemed to care about these young people. His “aw, shucks” informality could be corny, but you sensed that he was having a good time and wanted the young folks to do the same. By the end of the afternoon they were shouting out requests (“Hey, Jerry”) from their seats. Underneath the fun was a serious point that Miklós Rózsa often used to make. The symphonic film score is likely to be many people’s first exposure to orchestral music. It is the composer’s duty to make sure the experience is worthwhile.

And the music? A fairly lightweight miscellany of short suites and “themes.” A couple of medleys were particularly problematic. It may be possible to modulate from THE SAND PEBBLES to THE WIND AND THE LION by way of BASIC INSTINCT, but it isn’t necessarily good idea. However, three movements from PLANET OF THE APES worked far better in concert than I would ever have imagined. Brilliantly effective on screen, this music has always struck me as hopeless on records. But in concert the music came alive. By careful selection and introduction, Goldsmith made it work. Next time, let’s hope for more substantial selections like this one.

**Sinfonia Concertante** (1966): The opening. How many concertos begin with a scraping of snare drums? And a slap of the tambourine and a single blast from the piccolo? The effect is not entirely pleasant. Rather as if somebody were tearing paper or raking chalk across a blackboard. We are immediately put on notice that tension and anxiety will be to the fore in this long-awaited work. Then, as the violins take up a nervous ostinato, and the cello enters with an angular theme, we enter a more familiar world.

I have a special reason for remembering this introduction. With several friends I first learned the music from a privately pressed LP of the world premiere that MR had sent to Page Cook. Unfortunately, the outer edge of the disc had been chipped in transit and rendered unplayable. Not until somebody captured a broadcast years later did we learn how the Double Concerto was really supposed to begin!

**R**ECENTLY I've been rediscovering the pleasures of "TV taping." Younger readers may find this hard to imagine, but in the days before videotape, your only chance to catch an old movie was at a revival house or else in a very occasional telecast. And if a movie was shown once, you never knew if it would appear again. So anybody who wanted to enjoy or study film music in its natural habitat had to hook up to the tube and make an audio tape. This process was never entirely satisfactory. If you recorded the entire movie, you were stuck with a lot of dead space without music or even dialogue. Trying to keep your finger on the pause button meant that you couldn't enjoy the picture. And you were always missing the start of cues. (The best composers can bring the music in *very* unobtrusively.) An alternative strategy was to record the entire soundtrack and then edit on another machine. But that was a time-consuming process and degraded the sound by one generation.

One way or another I did acquire hundreds of hours of TV audio. And I think I learned more about film music from this medium than any other. Even today, I have only seen a picture like *DIANE* five or six times. But I have heard the soundtrack more than a hundred times. There is no better way to appreciate the composer's dramatic art. Yes, the new CD releases are wonderful, but they present the music out of context. The films themselves, or most of them, are scarcely worth multiple viewings. But the music, with its artful pauses, its ebb and flow, its give and take with the dialogue—that is something you can't really appreciate any other way.

I recently picked up a new Sony MiniDisc recorder. It's an exciting new medium, far superior to the conventional cassette, that makes dubbing and editing easier than ever. (It's more like a computer diskette than anything else—you can add, delete, and resequence without recourse to a second deck.) For my first experiment I tried a dubdown from a rented video of Franz Waxman's *THE STORY OF RUTH* (1960), a score I had been meaning to revisit for some time.

Well, the picture mostly deserves its oblivion. The biblical tale gets an appropriately modest retelling, and the embellished "backstory" of Ruth's childhood in Moab, her training as a priestess of Chemosh, and her tragic love with the Hebrew Mahlon are nicely and plausibly detailed in Norman Corwin's script. But the plot adds needless contrivances once the heroine comes to Bethlehem. Elana Eden is lovely but wooden in the title role. The professionals in the cast aren't a whole lot better. In fact, *everything* is wooden in Henry Koster's sorry staging. Has any director been responsible for more flatfooted action scenes?

But Waxman's score holds up. It's refreshingly small-scaled and full of lovely solos for cello, various flutes, and other instruments. And the music, with extensive use of the ram's horn, really

sounds Jewish—more so than any other biblical film. I don't know if Waxman was exploring his own roots or responding to the symphonic Hebraism of Ernest Bloch or whether he simply sought the right idiom from this timeless story of conversion and tolerance. In any case, he succeeded brilliantly. The score takes some getting used to. Leitmotifs aren't obvious. The sound can be quite brazenly barbaric for the rites of the Moabite god Chemosh. Waxman doesn't round off scenes with the theatricality of Rózsa. In this score he paints tone pictures— exquisite ones— that provide a greater sense of exotic antiquity than anything we see on screen.

And there lies my point. RUTH failed to impress me on first viewing many years ago, despite the advocacy of Page Cook, who urged the score on me with his typical passion. The whole cinematic experience was unsatisfactory and turgid. And while the two recent disc versions on Varèse and Capriccio are both worth a listen, neither really captures the essence of the score. And yet on the soundtrack there is magic. The cool flutes that adorn the garden love scenes in Moab create far more mood than the modest nighttime set. The hoarsely brazen music for the quarries and the rites of Chemosh may not be rounded off into finished episodes, but it speaks volumes about the alien religious practice of the time.

While the film is running, you tend to notice its inadequacies—the wooden performances, the chintzy sets. When you hear the music alone, you miss some of the meaning and purpose and structure. But on a soundtrack tape, this film plays to its strengths. It has often been said that Hollywood cinema was insufficiently visual, especially when CinemaScope shallowed the focus and hobbled the imagination of so many directors. But movies that lack visual magic can still possess audible merit. Despite his good looks, Tom Tryon was a wooden actor on screen. (Realizing his limits, he retired to write novels like *The Other* and *Fedora*.) His voice is more expressive than his face, however. Or so it seems when you concentrate on a soundtrack enhanced by Franz Waxman. The listening experience is full of such epiphanies. I'm glad the MiniDisc has led me back to one of the truest forms of movie listening, and I look forward to more such encounters as I use MDs to archive and preserve some of the moldering treasures that still lie of the hundred reels of movie audio that I recorded in the not entirely benighted days before the VCR. I won't need to see THE STORY OF RUTH again for a good long time. But already I have been returning to its memorable musical score. There are a lot of other movies of which the same thing could be said.

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