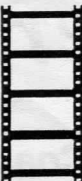


Collecting Soundtracks

by Bob Bryden



COLLECTING SOUNDTRACKS: THE COMPOSERS - PART TWO

MIKLOS ROZSA:

Hardly a day goes by when I don't recall or hum a bar from what is considered by many to be the greatest film score ever written, 'BEN HUR' (1959). Once source told me that the composer, Hungarian-born Miklos Rozsa, has earned 10 million dollars in royalties from this one score alone. Whatever the figure, no one disputes the impact and the quality of this colossal accomplishment! Nearly 2 ½ hours of symphonic music!

I can remember the box set from 'BEN HUR' being in nearly every living room when I was a kid. The record was one of the biggest soundtrack hits (and, ironically, was not a REAL soundtrack at all—the music was re-recorded for record release and, incredibly enough, the original music tracks were lost by MGM).

"I decided one day that I enjoyed eating.."

Rozsa had several phases in the film industry, developed great flare in certain milieus and, like Herrmann and others, worked with some directors, producers and film companies more than once. Rozsa enjoyed some success in the concert hall before succumbing to the celluloid bud, but as he is oft quoted as saying 'I decided one day that I enjoyed eating' - he realized how difficult it would be to live well on that circuit. An artistic refugee from Europe, Rozsa had seen Hitler's writing on the wall well in advance and moved to London, England in

1935 where he eventually enjoyed a bustling, successful musical-marriage with 'London Films' (Alexander Korda's firm.) During this tenure he wrote the music for these and many other films: 'Knight Without Armour', 'The Four Feathers', 'The Thief of Baghdad' and 1942's 'Jungle Book' (which was, by most reports, the first film to have a complete soundtrack recording released. Not even 'Gone With The Wind' had a full recording released till much later.)

Hollywood Years

Having tackled these colourful historical and fantasy films, Rozsa moved to Hollywood and for most of the 40's he lent his talents to a mixed-host of films, most with decidedly off-beat, psychological and/or gangland 'film noir' themes: 'Double Indemnity', 'The Lost Weekend' (both for Billy Wilder), 'Spellbound' (for Hitchcock), 'The Killers', 'The Naked City' and 'Asphalt Jungle', etc. One of his 'crime' themes was later adapted and became the famous 'Dragnet' motif: da-da-da-da. It was, however, the 1950's which brought Rozsa fully into the limelight via his handling of the big budget Bibleicals, biographies and historical/adventures produced for the most part by MGM: 'Quo Vadis', 'Ivanhoe', 'Plymouth Adventure', 'Lust For Life' and of course, 'Ben-Hur'. As you can readily see, Rozsa literally wrote the Hollywood book on musical approaches to these kinds of subjects. This foray continued well into the 60's when Dr. Rozsa continued to produce some remarkable scores for similar films: 'King of Kings', 'El Cid' and 'Sodom and Gomorrah'. Each one of these scores is distinguished by a profusion of strong - unique melodies, (Rozsa was rarely stingy with his tunes) and a robustness in the writing and performance (he usually conducted

his own work) which makes the scores incredibly vital to this day. (The MGM symphony was a tremendous orchestra).

The Later Years..

Miklos Rozsa continued to work right on through the 70's and into the early 80's, albeit more sporadically. In 1977, I had the great privilege of meeting this musical hero when he came to Toronto to host a three night retrospective of his films at the Ontario Science Centre. I was there all three nights and took full advantage of this 'chit-chat' sessions afterwards! He graciously autographed every Rozsa soundtrack lp I owned!!! (About 25, I think). Miklos Rozsa, as of this writing, is still with us and is retired, living in California.

SOME OTHER SCORES WRITTEN:

'Madame Bovary', 'Adam's Rib', 'Something Of Value', 'The VIPs', 'The Green Berets', 'The Golden Voyage of Sinbad', 'Providence', 'Time After Time' and 'Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid' (this last one a hilarious send-up of the very films Rozsa helped to create in the 40's).



DIMITRI TIOMKIN

Russian-born maestro Tiomkin is my favourite film composer! Certainly many will scoff - because he was undoubtedly the master of musical 'bombast' (many of his scores are punctuated by the most obnoxious brass snarls and tumultuous melodic 'heaps') - but in his boundless enthusiasm and panache - Tiomkin displayed a heroic musical audacity unrivalled in Hollywood annals!

Accomplishments

Just look at the films he's done: 'The see 'SOUNDTRACKS', page 6