

1999 F.M.S. CAREER
ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
LAURENCE ROSENTHAL
MAKES AN OVERVIEW ON
HIS LONG MUSIC LIFE

BY FREDERIC GIMELLO-MESPLOMB AND DOMINIC VAN DER ZYPEN

TRANSCRIPTION: ELISABETH HANAUER, DOMINIC VAN DER ZYPEN , F. GIMELLO-MESPLOMB

PREPARATION: ANGEL ORTEGA, CLAUDE BOURHIS

OAKLAND (USA), 1999, JULY, 20TH



-Why did you choice to live in the Bay Area and not in Hollywood?

Because I hate Hollywood ! [laughs]. I met my wife here and her family lived here. I prefer this country. It is quiet. Others personalities lives and works here, as Francis Ford Coppola or George Lucas. Skywalker Studios are not very far. It is better for me.

-What is your musical background?

I studied piano with my mother when I was 3, and all my childhood. When I was 17, I went to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester (New York) where I studied piano and composition during four years. After that, I went to Paris, to study with Nadia Boulanger for two years. I met once Copland in Paris where he has been student. He came to visit Nadia Boulanger and I played him some of my music for him, but it was not especially for his taste. Soon after, I came back to doing the military service. It was during the Korean War. I was assigned to the Documentary Film Unit, to compose original music for these films. During this time, the US Air Force Symphony Orchestra (100 players) was for me the best of all the conservatories. After four years, when I came out of the military service, I went for New York and began composing for the theatre, television, and films...

-The military service seems to have been an important stage for you....

Yes, it was a great experience. I had the chance to learn what was the film music and I trained myself about synchronization, about click-tracks and nobody else. The US Air Force was a very valuable experience. I already have a very sizeable library of music I had compose and recorded, of course.

-And in the continuation...

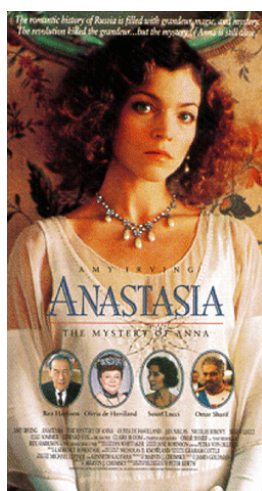
When I came out to New York, I had only one real good friend. This friend was Leonard Bernstein. I had known him at the college years before. He heard some of my film music and concert music and he liked very much.

-It seems he premiered yours compositions...

In fact, he premiered one only of my compositions, *Ode*, a student piece. This music was based on a famous poem by the 16th century English poet Henry

King, a poem called *Execree*. An execree is like a funeral song, a sort of funeral ode. I love this poem, and I decided to name again this piece with the same title. But Bernstein did not like it. He said: “*Nobody one know what it means!*” He decided to crate this piece in New York with the original title, *Ode*.

-In which way did your studies in Salzburg influence your approach of the 12-tone music?



[silence] I do not believe in 12-tone music. But, it is, of course, my personal view. It was an important phenomenon in 20th century music, but there is something essentially artificial in 12-tone music. Tonality, as we understood it for centuries, is based on laws, natural laws of sounds and physics. Whereas, the 12-tone system is a man-made manipulation of these tones, even when it was used by such enormously gifted and genius composers as Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg or Webern. But to me, the most moving and beautiful parts, especially of Schoenberg and Berg, are not purely 12-tone parts. So, when I was in Salzburg, I was more influenced by Mozart than by Schoenberg ! [laughs]

-However, atonality seems to be an important element in your film compositions, especially during the seventies (*Clash of the Titans: Medusa*) and in your TV works too (*Blackout: The Phone Voice* and the *Prologue, Anastasia: The Bridge*)...

Yes, all of those employed some atonal elements. It is true. Sometimes, I think especially in dramatic situations, like in film scores, I think it is enormously effective. It is wonderful. In films, I use atonality to expressing dark things, feelings of disorientation, certain kinds of inner states, of fear or anxiety. In *Blackout* (Douglas Hickox, TV, 1985) music was principally to express fear. It was a film of terror. *Medusa*, in *Clash of the Titans* (Desmond Davis, 1981), same case. In *Anastasia*, the music tries to evoke the feeling of Alban Berg music. Music tries to evoke also the deep alienation and disorder reflected musically in the often poignant Viennese atonality of the period, and mirroring in a way the bleak and unsettled condition of post-World War I Germany. But, I would not say I have never written 12-tone piece. In certain passages, occasionally, I used it, in dramatic situations. Sometimes, certain forms of atonality, I do find attractive. But I am certainly a tonal composer. I believe in tonality. It is very popular to say today that tonality is “out”, it’s “used out”. I do not believe that truth.



-In dark passages, maybe...

In the Peter Brook film *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), I used pure atonal music during one sequence: a man is being led to a certain distant. He is volunteer to go for a certain monastery in central Asia. The location of the monastery was secret and he must not know where it was. A hood is putted over his head, and he is leading on a horse in complete blackness. This moment is completely atonal.

-Does the Hollywood film system still accept this kind of research?

For certain kinds of film, yes, absolutely. People like Jerry Goldsmith use this kinds of techniques very much, and others composers as well. But if you were going to write a very romantic film, it could be very unlikely to use it ! [laughs] You could, of course, in very special conditions. But, you can not generalize. Each moment in each film has to be judged by its own needs in film music.

-Leonard Rosenman...

He has written a lot. But, that is closer to his own personal idiom. You see, he is not totally an atonal composer, but he was much more connected with the avant-garde during the 40's and 50's, than I was. He was sort of a different school, I was more from the Boulanger school, which was more a neoclassic in its orientation. For the anecdote, I feel Leonard is a very gifted composer because our names are so similar and sometimes have been confused, especially when he wrote *A man called Horse*, and I wrote *Return of a man called Horse*. Leonard Rosenman is really today one of the last finest composer in Hollywood. He was never given his really proper recognition. I really feel that he is a wonderful composer!

-Your first two films were directed by R. John Hugh (YELLOW NECK and NAKED IN THE SUN) in 1955 and 1957. Was this a simple coincidence or a real beginning of a collaboration?

John Hugh was a friend of a number of the officers who were in my film unit in the Air Force. When they left the air force they all went down to Florida and formed a film company. Because I had worked with them, they asked me to score these two films, my first commercial films. And I was just barely getting started. The first film I did



in Hollywood was not until 1960, which was *A Raisin in the Sun*.

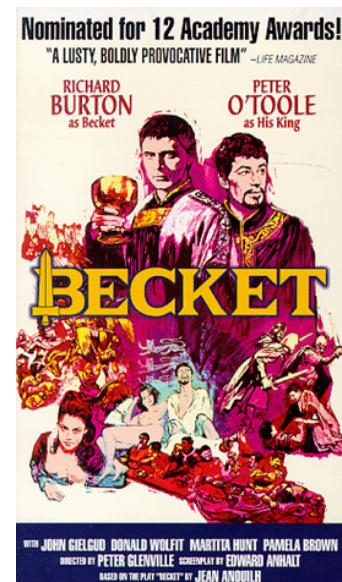
-Could you tell us about your collaboration with Peter Glenville on *Becket* (1964), *The Comedians* (1967) and *Hotel Paradiso* (1966)? Why did this English director stop his career so early after his latest film *The Comedians*?



I met Peter Glenville not in films but for a stage production of a play based on the famous Kurosawa film *Rashomon* (1950). Peter Glenville directed the stage version. I told them that I was an expert in Japanese music! In fact, they heard about me and they believed I soon became not an expert but I soon became quite knowledgeable about it... Peter and I got along very well we understood each other immediately. It was a very unusual and interesting score. Still one of the most interesting scores I ever done, very exotic, with a lot of percussion and Japanese instruments. Later, he was going to do a production of Jean Anouilh's play *Becket* on Broadway with Laurence Olivier and Anthony Quinn. And he asked me to do incidental music for this play which was a big success. Shortly thereafter he was going to make a film version of the play in London. He invited me to come and to compose the music. So, I took some of the elements from the theatre score but expanded them enormously to make this film.

After that I continued to work a lot with Peter Glenville. We did an other film, *Hotel Paradiso*, with Alec Guinness and Gina Lollobrigida and *Dylan*, a Broadway stage production based on the poet Dylan Thomas's life, with Alec Guinness again. Then we did a film in France which was shot actually in West Africa, called *The Comedians*, with Richard Burton, Elisabeth Taylor and Peter Ustinov. We worked again on the stage in Broadway on a project called *Patriot*, a very interesting play and a brilliant production by John Osborne, starring Maximilian Shell. Glenville loved the theatre. He is the kind of director I love work with. Because whenever I spoke with him, I good ask him what should the music achieve the film. And he would never tell me what I should do. He always told me what he wanted the music to accomplish. How I did it was my job.

For some reasons, Glenville was, I feel, unfairly by the critics. He went out to Mexico. I lost contacts with him. I think he was rather discouraged, disillusioned because he was so badly critiqued by the critics. Perhaps he understood it was too hard to continue? He didn't give money, and so, he just decided to retire. I

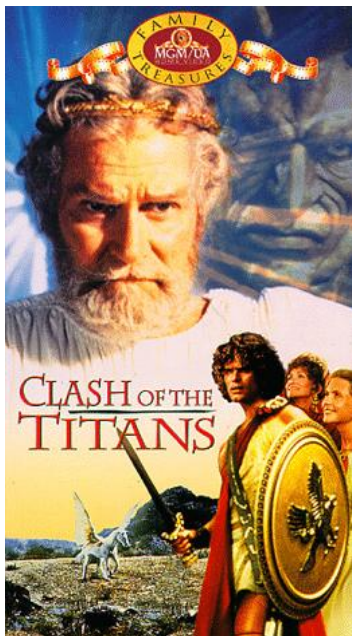
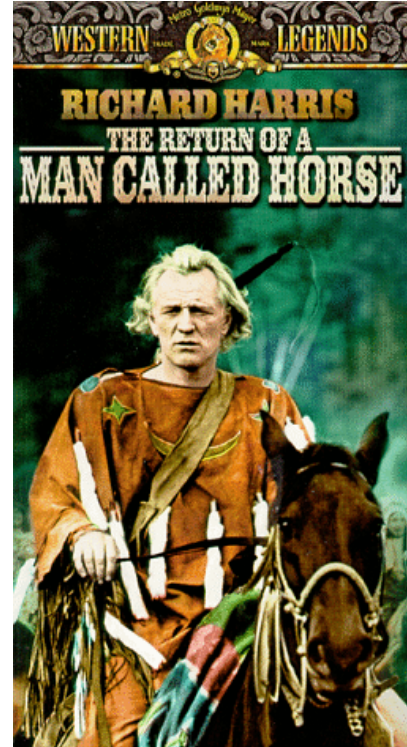


really had a wonderful relationship with him. He was a marvelous director and a brilliant and honest man, very cultured. He was too honest for this job.

-How did you do in *THE RETURN OF A MAN CALLED HORSE* (Irvin Kershner, 1975), to include elements from 19th century Lakota Indian dances within a classical symphonic orchestra?

The sound of the Indian voices and percussion was blended in the symphony orchestra. It was very hard because I wanted the sound was not imposed but rather created together with the orchestra. I moved the symphonic music around the Indians sounds, using all the combinations.

-In this film, the ostinatos and the rhythmic percussion of *The Son Dance* seems to have inspired a few years later Arthur Morton and Jerry Goldsmith on the cue *Decompression* of the film *Leviathan* (George P. Cosmatos, 1989). What do you think about the little interactions between (or perhaps the tributes too...) film music composers in Hollywood?

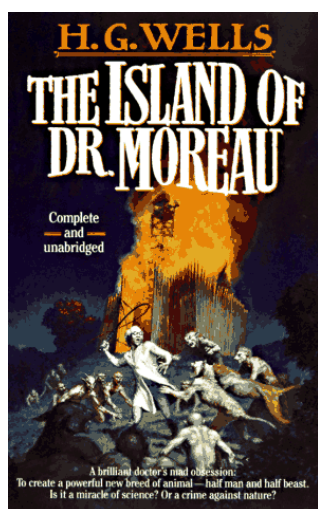


I have never seen that film. But it is not a problem for me. If I well remember, Arthur Morton worked on the orchestrations of *Return of a Man called Horse*, but most of the of the orchestrations for the film was done by Herbert Spencer (1905-1992). Interactions? Perhaps, but It is hard to say. We all breathe the same air. The music is in this air and we all heard it. Did Mozart steal from Haydn, did Beethoven take from Mozart? We really cannot say that. Sometimes, when you hear a very specific personal mannerism of one composer, something that he does his way and when you hear it copied, I mean for example: it is very easy to hear how composers would copy from Stravinsky. Because he has a very personal way, certain musical devices and techniques are so much his own, that they would not occur to anyone else. But on the other hand, there are some similar techniques used by Bartok. And when Bartok does it, it does not sound like Stravinsky at all. In other cases, you fell that they

are borrowing. And I confess, that I have heard of a number of composers of Hollywood who have been, shall we say, "fortunately influenced" by me ! [laughs]

At least I can recognize some things that I know are my own fingerprints and I hear them elsewhere. What they say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

-You once said, "Almost every composer has his moment of more or less high inspiration, and also moments when he simply relies on his craft to do a decent, professional piece of work." You are compelled to score a movie, but don't you feel sometimes that you don't have any inspiration at all, even if you are supposed to?



If I feel that the film does not speak to me at all, I have nothing to say in relation to this film. Because I don't like the film, because I find it offensive, because it is an idiom, which is not my world, then I would never accept to do it. So, any film that I accept to do would have to be a film, not everyone is going to be especially a great masterpiece, but a decent film and you do the best you can. When I see an absolutely great scene, I feel compelled somehow that I must give my best to match the quality of the scene. But when it is a scene which has not particular quality or not particular interest, but it needs music, it is very difficult to wake up the enthusiasm for that. And there is not a composer anywhere who has not had moments like that. That includes Bach and Beethoven who wrote sometimes purely from their technique and not from real

inspiration. They wrote so much great music that one doesn't look at these moments. All great composers have moments when they are more or less writing from what they know how to do but not writing from the heat of inspiration.

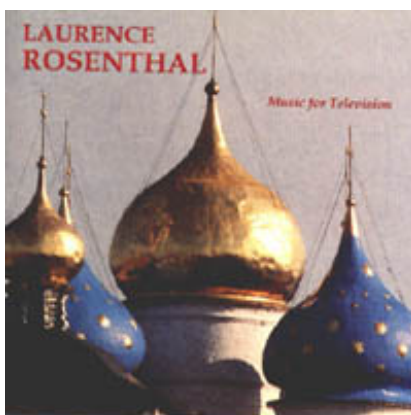
-Your filmography includes a lot of remakes: *ANASTASIA* (TV remake of the 1956 Anatole Litvak feature), *THE POWER AND THE GLORY* (remake of a William K. Howard/Preston Sturges film), *ROOSTER COGBURN* (remake of *TRUE GRIT*, original 1969 music by Elmer Bernstein), or *LOGAN'S RUN* (remake TV of a Michael Anderson feature, music by Jerry Goldsmith)... How do you work in these cases? Can you really forget the previous scores?

I hardly new the Jerry's score to *Logan's Run*, a very good score by a wonderful composer. But, in the cases you give me as examples, I never sort *True Grit*, I never sort *A man Called Horse* and the Leonard Rosenman film score, I heard it afterworld, and it is completely different from my score. Generally speaking, I would try not to listen, I really do not want to be influenced by what someone else done. *Anastasia*, the TV remake of the famous film with Ingrid Bergman was so different in its approach that I tried to writing in a completely different way. I have just scored an other remake by Daniel Petrie, *Inherit the wind* (1999), and I never seen the original.

-Jerry Goldsmith and Alexander Courage talk often with a certain nostalgia about the "Old good years". It seems that today in the Hollywood music community, there is a real family between David Raksin (87), Arthur Morton (91), Elmer Bernstein (77), Alexander Courage (80), Leonard Rosenman (75), Jerry Goldsmith (70) and yourself (72)?



I studied in the same school with Alexander Courage, at Rochester. He orchestrated for me a lot of scores, including *Island of Dr Moreau*. Arthur Morton was my first orchestrator in Hollywood, on the Daniel Petrie's film *Raisin in the Sun*. Jerry Goldsmith is an old friend. Leonard Rosenman is an other very good friend and Herbert Spencer was my favorite. You have to include also John Williams in this group... It is quite true, there was a kind of "quality". All the people you mentioned studied classical music. They are a real musical "background" and they need no synthesizers or computers to compose. That did not exist. Look at the musical sketches of John or Jerry or mine, before to being given to the orchestrator: it's all there! Everything the entire score is already there in a compressed form! Courage, Morton or Spencer were all brilliant orchestrators. They could help very often by making wonderful suggestions. We were speaking as equals each others, as professional musicians and very often, in the modern age, it is not this case. I mean they are still good composers, but it was a small community in the old days, we all knew each other really quite well, there was a kind of intimacy and a worth, and even a affection between all these people.



-In the late 80's and the recent 90's, you composed a lot of scores based on historic arguments, especially for the Marvin J. Chomsky films *Anastasia*, *Catherine the Great*, *Peter the Great*, *The Strauss Dynasty* and for other projects such as *Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*. These films have been awarded for their music, based in a great part on source music. Your colleague Leonard Rosenman was in the same case when him received two Academy Awards for Best Adaptation Score for *Bound for Glory* (1976) and *Barry Lyndon* (1975) when

his excellent scores for *The Cobweb* (1955), *Battle for the Planet of the*

***Apes* (1973), *A Man Called Horse* (1970) or *Lord of the Rings* (1978) were more complex, more personals, but also less accessible for the audience and perhaps the Academy, too. Isn't it finally frustrating to write complete and complex score and to be only awarded for functional compositions?**



Anastasia, *Catherine the Great*, *Peter the Great*, *The Strauss Dynasty* were films based on historic arguments. The Strauss dynasty was a film about the Strauss family: obviously, when you do a film like that, most all the music is by Strauss ! But *Anastasia*, *Catherine the Great*, *Peter the Great* and *Young Indiana Jones* were not composed on source music. I composed almost all original music, except for occasional cues, for the scenes in the churches. We need use authentic music of the Russian Orthodox Church. But I think it is quite true. Leonard Rosenman wrote such interesting, adhering, inventive scores, for *The Cobweb* or *Lord of the Rings*. Much of his music is very "avant-garde", and naturally, members of the Academy are not interested in that kind of music. But, you have

to understand one thing everyone knows about the Oscars of Best Score. When one film has a hag success, a film like *Titanic*, a film like *The English Patient*, a film like, *Shakespeare in love*, it swipes everything, and everyone who is connected with the film, including the composer. So, in those cases, there are very often perfectly acceptable scores, but certainly not great pieces of music. It sweeps into success by the power of the film itself because, in the Oscars, everybody the entire Academy votes in all categories. So, if I am a member of the Academy, I have to vote for best sound engineering even if it is not my specialty, or for best costumes design. So, very often, the winning picture brings the score with it. Whereas, for the Emmys, it is different because the voting system is different. For the Emmys, everybody is there to nominate, but a panel of experts in that field chooses the actual winner. It is the best way to be judged by yours pairs.

- September 1999 will mark an important stage in your career. On the 16th, you will be the guest speaker of the respected, annual American Society of Music Arrangers and Composers luncheon. The 18th, following Toru Takemitsu, Jerry Goldsmith and Ennio Morricone among others, you will receive the prestigious annual Career Achievement Award presented by the Film Music Society. What do you think about this late testimony of gratitude expressed by the Hollywood music community?

Late? Well... Inevitably, it must be late. Because if you are being given on a world for your old career, you can be given when you are 23 years old, or even 33...So, I am deeply flatted and horned by this award. I worked lately in the field, I have done not nearly as many films, as many of my colleagues. John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, or James Horner too, who is quotably a young man, all have

done many more film than I have. The only thing I can say about films I have done, is that many of them, quite few films does have still remembered, and are still watched and admired, even do, whereas many films, most films hat can made are very quickly forgotten. There are, you see, the one sound, that's it. A film like *The Miracle Worker* or a film like *Becket* became classics. So, I feel very grateful to have been involved to the fact in those films. I am very pleased by the Film Music Society Award.

-Could you tell me more about your interest in G.I. Gurdijeff, one of this century's most profound and influential spiritual teachers?

-Well, if somebody one of century's most profound and influential spiritual teachers, why would you be so surprising to be interested in what he has to teach? I mean, I first heard about him when I was a very young man, and I always been interested in teaching, in New York and also in France. In fact when the famous English director Peter Brook decided to make the film *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), which is a film based on Gurdijeff's old biographical book, he asked me to composed the music, and finally, what is probably not generally known, is that the great spiritual teacher Gurdijeff was actually also a composer. An he written a great pieces of music in collaboration with the Russian composer Hartman, and this music is now published and recorded. I participated with two other pianists, in a CD of Gurdijeff's compositions.

LAURENCE ROSENTHAL was born in Detroit, Michigan. He studied composition under Howard Hanson and Bernard Rogers at the Eastman School of Music and continued his training for two years in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. He also studied conducting at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. During the Korean War, he was assigned to the U.S. Air Force Documentary Film Squadron, where he composed music for many historical and informational films.

Following his tour of duty, he began composing for the Broadway theater. His scores include incidental music for *Rashomon*, *Becket*, and *A Patriot For Me*, ballet music for musical comedies, including *The Music Man*, and a musical of his own, *Sherry!*, based on *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. During this period, he also created a ballet with Agnes de Mille for American Ballet Theater, and his symphonic compositions were premiered by Leonard Bernstein with the New York Philharmonic and others.

At the same time he began composing for motion pictures in New York, the West Coast, and Europe. His original score for the film version of *Becket* and his adaptation of *Man of La Mancha* were both nominated for Academy Awards. Among other films he has scored are *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Miracle Worker*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, *Hotel Paradiso*, *The Comedians*, *The Return of a*

Man Called Horse, Rooster Cogburn, The Island of Dr. Moreau, Meteor, Brass Target, Who'll Stop the Rain?, Clash of the Titans, Easy Money, Heart Like a Wheel, and Peter Brook's Meetings with Remarkable Men.

He has also composed extensively for television and has been awarded the Emmy six times. The first was for the NBC documentary, *Michelangelo: The Last Giant*. Later he won Emmys in three successive years, 1986, '87, and '88, for the miniseries *Peter the Great, Anastasia, and The Bourne Identity*. Among his other miniseries are *Mussolini: The Untold Story, George Washington, Evergreen, and Strauss Dynasty*, a 12-hour drama about the celebrated Viennese family of waltz composers. He has also composed many television title themes, including *Fantasy Island*.

More recently, he has contributed numerous scores for George Lucas's *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*. Two of the episodes, *Ireland 1916* and *The Hollywood Follies*, won him his fifth and sixth Emmys in 1994 and '95. He has just completed in 1999 the music the TV remake of the 1960 film *Inherit the Wind* (directed by Daniel Petrie, with George C. Scott).