REVIEWS

Christian DesJardins. *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*

Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 2003. [xxv, 358 p. ISBN: 1879505886. \$ 20.95 (trade paper)] Index.

TONY FONSECA

In an interview with *MusicWeb International*, first time author Christian DesJardins calls *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak* a labor of love, which is an appropriate description of his reasons for writing the book. Like many of the composers he interviews, DesJardins began as somewhat of an outsider to film music. As a youth he studied music theory, practiced music as a member of both choir and band, and wrote compositions on piano. He describes his introduction to film music as follows: He had gone to see Barbra Streisand's *The Prince of Tides* (1991), which was scored by James Newton Howard, and was flabbergasted: "Once you see this heartfelt film and hear the incredibly beautiful and emotional score, you might see why I am now a devoted film music listener."¹ In some respects the emotive quality of film music implicitly argues that the best requirement for an interviewer in the field is rapport (based on interest level, a sense of camaraderie, and an intuitive connection with composers), rather than pedigree or scholarly standing. Christopher Young hints at this in his foreword to DesJardins' text, wherein Young lists as the goals of the publication as both giving readers an appreciation of and love for film music, and giving would-be composers helpful hints based on others' personal experiences. In essence, a review of *Inside Film Music* is as much a test of DesJardins' authorial privilege as it is a critical analysis of the final product. The book fares well on both counts.

The book is not nonchalant homage to either the field or its practitioners. DesJardins spent considerable time gathering and transcribing the thirty interviews, three years in fact. Since the book includes not only composers, but also a select number of orchestrators

and directors, it comes across as nothing less than a monumental undertaking. Reviewers uniformly praise what is arguably its greatest strength—the interviews themselves, particularly for their mass appeal. An unnamed reviewer for *PR Newswire* underscores this, writing that "the dialogues speak clearly and intelligently to musicians and non-musicians alike."² This is important because of the multidisciplinary nature of film music studies, a field where researchers and scholars often come from disciplines other than music. This is not to say that the text is without its flaws. Perhaps its major weakness is DesJardins' choice of subjects, something that most critics have noted. Reviewer Sam Thielman, for example, calls selection of composers the book's "one baffling flaw."³ He questions the noticeable absence of mainstays John Williams, Thomas Newman, Hans Zimmer, and Ennio Morricone. Likewise, Mark Koldys, in *American Record Guide*, points out that DesJardins did not talk to what he calls the most interesting composers.⁴ DesJardins answers these critics by explaining that his intention was to find composers from various backgrounds, who had representative experiences when both breaking into and ultimately making a living film scoring. He adds that "it becomes dangerous territory" when an interviewer attempts to include every popular composer, as someone will ultimately be left out. "To make a long story short," DesJardins notes, "I feel this book gives the reader a diverse appreciation of scoring for motion pictures or television."⁵

Despite the implications of this criticism, DesJardins included composers who are neither no-names nor has-beens. In fact, he interviews Best Score Academy Award winners John Barry, Jan

1 Ian Lace, "Interview with Christian DesJardins," *MusicWeb International*, 7 April 2007, http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2007/Apr07/Interview_DesJardins.htm (accessed 19 February 2008).

2 Anon., "Three Dozen Premier Film Composers from Hollywood's Elite Candidly Speak Their Minds in *Inside Film Music*," *PR Newswire*, 14 March 2007, through <http://proquest.umi.com> (accessed 19 February 2008).

3 Sam Thielman, "Review of *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*," *Back Stage East* 48, no. 35 (August 30, 2007): 10.

4 Mark Koldys, "Review of *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*," *American Record Guide* 71, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 248.

5 Lace, "Interview with Christian DesJardins," *MusicWeb International*.

Kaczmarek, Rachel Portman, Stephen Warbeck, and Gabriel Yared, as well as nominees Bruce Broughton, John Debney, Philip Glass, Mark Isham, Don Davis, David Raksin, Mark Shaiman, and Alan Silvestri. Before the interviews begin, Ryan Shore discusses in his introduction the basics of film music—its *raison d'être*, its stages of composition, its effectiveness, and its terminology. Shore sets the stage by answering the most basic question in the field: Why is there a need for film music? His response allows readers to take an interesting trek back to the era of silent films, when organists worked from large books of pre-composed themes (photoplay music) or played themes from memory. He points out that the music not only covered the noise of the projector, but it also supported the emotion of a scene. Shore also details the process of writing a film score, from the meeting between the composer and director, to decisions on style and placement of music, to discussions about audience demographics. He chronicles the composer's creation of a mock up, a series of main themes, and finally a score, with emphasis on the use of temp tracks. Other fundamentals discussed by Shore include how a composer is chosen and contracted, when instrumentation enters the picture, what others such as orchestrators and music editors do in the process, and how a mix is created and used. Finally, Shore remarks candidly about issues such as unionization and ownership rights.

In his presentation of composer interviews, DesJardins chooses the same format as the previous Silman-James publication of composer interviews, Michael Schelle's *The Score: Interviews with Film Composers* (1999), a text to which *Inside Film Music* compares favorably in every aspect other than interview depth. Like Schelle, DesJardins uses strict alphabetical order, beginning with Klaus Badelt. The Badelt interview exemplifies both DesJardins' interview process and his entry presentation. The entry begins with a brief biographical note that lists the major works of the composer. DesJardins typically begins each interview with questions pertaining to the composer's first break in the movie business. In Badelt's case, his answer leads to a story about working with Hans Zimmer (at Media Ventures), as well as Ralf Zang. The John Barry interview follows the same basic pattern, only with stories of learning piano in childhood and eventually working on Bond films. Like many of the interviews, Barry's ultimately leads to questions about the creative process, to which he responds that he always imagines a story first, and sets it to music, or finds the music of a character—that he cannot simply “write music.”

As the interviews continue, readers get a sense of DesJardins' abilities as an interviewer to ask the right question, allow for open-ended answers, and ask follow-up questions when appropriate. This technique leads to many fascinating asides in some interviews: Marco Beltrami tells his story of going from Yale School of Music to the program in film scoring at the University of Southern California (USC), to basically intern and work as a gopher until he got his first short film score on a film by Sony, and eventually landed *Scream* (1996). Bruce Broughton gives good insight on the differences between working as a music composer in television (*Hawaii Five-O*, *Quincy*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Wild Wild West*) and working on movies (the remake of *Miracle on 34th Street*, which was released in 1994; *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey* and *Homeward Bound II: Lost in San Francisco*, which were released in 1993 and 1996, respectively). Teddy Castellucci talks of finding the perfect rapport with a specific actor (Adam Sandler) and in a wonderful interview talks genuinely about the politics of working with directors, battling with the preliminary score ideas set into directors' minds, and being pigeonholed (a problem which Don Davis also discusses in his interview). He also elaborates on the writing process. In essence, composers are encouraged to be themselves, and since no two composers have the same experiences, DesJardins does not get caught up in asking stock questions. Rather, he tailors each line of questioning to what best puts each composer at ease. This process seems to work for most composers, with the exceptions of Glass and Raksin.

As DesJardins mentions in his *Musicweb International* interview with Ian Lace, *Inside Film Music* offers a good look at the variety of experiences that lead one to being a career film composer. Some of the better discussions include John Debney's account of working with Mel Gibson for *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), a stint which led to Debney's learning and using Sanskrit, and instruments that were contemporary with the time of the historical Jesus, as well as to Gibson's singing and chanting on the sound track. In other interviews, John Ottman, who both directs and composes, pays homage to and credits Danny Elfman as the trailblazer who helped open up film composing for musicians who were not trained musically (the same position in which Ottman found himself), and Rachel Portman discusses honestly the plight of women in both film and classical music, with emphasis on how so few make it in either field. Portman also offers an excellent account of the relationship between a composer and an orchestrator (in her case, Jeff Atmajian). The interview with

David Raksin chronicles his working with Charlie Chaplin on the music for *Modern Times* (1936). Here, readers find out that Chaplin himself composed the melodic ideas, but could not notate them. And for those future composers who are considering breaking into the business by ghost writing or becoming part of a film music crew, Jeff Rona discusses doing a lot of uncredited composing during the early part of his career. Truly, this book does offer a little something for everyone interested in film music.

Despite the few errors that Koldys notes in *American Record Guide*, DesJardins' text is well worth owning.⁶ What sets it apart from the book by Schelle or David Morgan's superbly organized *Knowing the Score* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000) is DesJardins' decision to include a handful of interviews with orchestrators and directors (and one music contractor). To answer those reviewers who commented that they would have liked to have seen some big names among the directors (DesJardins interviews John Amiel, Atom Egoyan, and Norman Jewison), DesJardins explains this limitation was a result of the practical decisions he was forced to make during the research and writing phases of the book. He mentions that he intends to remedy this in a follow-up publication that will look more in-depth at the composer-director relationship.⁷ What also makes *Inside Film Music* a worthwhile purchase for film music aficionados, would-be composers, scholars of film music, and academic librarians supporting music programs, is the fact that, as Sam Thielman observes, "it is a study not merely of film music but of film itself, involving a larger discussion of how music makes movies work."⁸ Sadly, potential sales of the book may be determined more by the lack of what Thielman calls "names who might sell the book" than by any real weaknesses.

Tony Fonseca is an Assistant Professor/Serials Librarian at Ellender Memorial Library, Nicholls State University. He earned his PhD in English literature from Southwestern Louisiana, now the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. His areas of specialization include occult and horror fiction and film, research strategies, and faculty development/accreditation scholarship. Recently, he gave a presentation on the film music in *The Toolbox Murders* (1978), *Candyman* (1992), and *Hannibal* (2001) at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Chapter of the American Musicological Society at Florida State University and on remaking academic libraries as cultural spaces at the Louisiana Library Association Conference in Shreveport.

⁶ Koldys, "Review of *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*," 248.

⁷ Lace, "Interview with Christian DesJardins." *MusicWeb International*.

⁸ Thielman, "Review of *Inside Film Music: Composers Speak*," 10.