

first feature film and Andre's first film score.

The Hosseins were two unique individuals who shared a love for each other but couldn't express it verbally. Although they didn't talk much, they completely understood one another. The end result of this director/composer relationship was always fresh and innovative. In 1959, the two Hosseins outdid themselves with *Toi, le Venin* (*Blonde in a White Car*). Musically it was quite successful—more so than the film itself. The up-tempo jazz numbers, with swinging horns and light vibraphones, fit well in the film and were markedly different from most of the noir and new wave soundtracks written at the time. Hossein's score traversed into the bars and dance halls of France, and people soon took notice.

Hossein's jazz style continued with *Le Vampire de Dusseldorf*, which is slower and a bit more shaded, with a more symphonic feeling. Vocalist Pia Columbo adds her beautiful voice to the song "La Belle de Nuit."

As a bonus, some of Hossein's writing for directors Greville, Gerard and Oury is included in this set. Outside of films, Andre Hossein composed concertos, symphonies and ballets. He had a well-rounded career in music, and his writing should please fans of Aaron Copland and Ennio Morricone. —Jason Verhagen

Yo-Yo Ma Plays Ennio Morricone

★★★★★

ENNIO MORRICONE

Sony Classical SK90453

8 tracks - 62:26

It seems like there's an Ennio Morricone tribute CD released every month, and of course, it's not totally unwarranted. Morricone is one of a few living film composers who lives up to the title of maestro. He has scored over 400 films, mostly with Italian directors, but with many American ones as well. He's been nominated for five Academy Awards (but, shamefully, has never won), and at 80

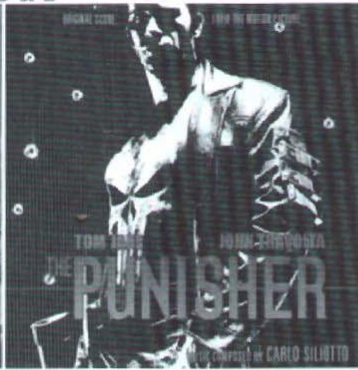


years old, he shows no signs of slowing down. Cellist Yo-Yo Ma came up with the idea for this CD a few years back when Morricone was nominated for an Oscar for *Malena* and Ma was on the show performing the nominated scores. And while a CD filled with cello-centric versions of popular Morricone film themes is certainly worthwhile, Ma and Morricone went the extra step.

This CD is being released with a DVD of short movies (directed by USC students) that used the new performances as inspiration. The movies themselves will have their premiere in Southern California on Nov. 5 in a live screening/concert with Yo-Yo Ma as soloist and Morricone's son Andrea conducting. The program will be repeated in Rome with Yo-Yo Ma on Nov. 16, with the maestro himself conducting.

The musical selections are mostly in the form of medleys corresponding to some of the major directors with whom Morricone has worked. There are suites for the films of Sergio Leone, Giuseppe Tornatore and Brian DePalma. Of the three suites, my favorite would have to be the old-fashioned romanticism of the Tornatore suite. Music that sounds remarkably like *Casualties of War*, however, seems to have found its way into the Leone suite. There's also music I was unfamiliar with: an elegant suite of music from two TV miniseries, *Marco Polo* and *Moses*. I was also glad to revisit the lush music from 1970's *The Lady Caliph*, two lovely cues from *The Mission* and a rendition of the underrated *The Legend of 1900*.

Ma, the crossover cello virtuoso, has never been a stranger to film



music or film composers. He's had a working relationship with John Williams and Tan Dun on film and non-film projects, and his stature in the classical world is unsurpassed in his appeal to staunch fans and crossover fans alike. Neither group will be disappointed. The arrangements are by Morricone himself, so they are not arbitrarily thrown together. The cello flows organically within all the selections. This CD is a testament to a true collaboration between two artists who respect each other.

—Cary Wong

The Punisher (2004) ★★★★★

CARLO SILIOTTO

La-La Land LLC 1020 • 30 tracks - 65:37

The most interesting thing about this score is that it doesn't contain any standard action music. Siliotto mentions in his liner notes how happy he was that writer/director Jonathan Hensleigh supplied him with great characters, and his music reflects just that—*character*. The first track's moody trumpet solo demonstrates that this music doesn't intend to go for the throat.

The sheer amount of thematic writing Siliotto packs into this score is an absolute joy; there are roughly five themes in total. One for Punishment, one for Remembering, and three slithering ideas for the villains. The Punishment theme gets the most treatments, opening the album with a rendition that makes it sound similar to Zimmer's trumpet work in *The Rock*. In other places it escapes this similarity; played quickly in staccato bursts, it sounds more like James Horner ("She Took the

Train/Punishment" for example). This theme stays melancholy the entire way through, only becoming vaguely heroic at the end ("The Skull"). The trumpet solo aims for the heart.

The Remembering theme gets the standard piano orchestration, but what distances it—as well as the rest of the score—from other similar ideas is Siliotto's approach. His background in foreign films is a godsend, because he doesn't approach this theme the way a typical American composer would. There is very little percussion, and the melody stays in your face the entire time. It doesn't interfere with the dialogue but plays alongside it, underscoring the emotions. It's prominently mixed in the film as well, unlike the murky string work or percussion samples that hide in the background in many similar films. Siliotto's music also carries a slight tinge of Spanish flavor that isn't apparent in the orchestration yet casually surfaces as the album progresses.

Siliotto's choice to include a saxophone in the score piqued my curiosity especially, because this instrument can signal the essence of cheesiness. Surprisingly, he manages to wrangle some evocative moments out of it, underscoring the evil Mrs. Sain, who's tied to the very instigation of the revenge against Castle. Thus she gets her own theme, which frequently plays against Howard Saint's menacing piano and string melody. Evil henchman Quentin Glass also gets his own idea—another slow, minor-key piece so subtle it isn't even immediately recognizable as an actual theme.

I never expected *The Punisher* to sound like this. I feared repetitive percussion, techno. I feared the new world (though some of Siliotto's string passages do sound like Don Davis' *Matrix* work!). Instead, I was treated to a rich, melodic score that harkens back to yesteryear and soars to the forefront of the mix. La-La Land's presentation also impresses, as it includes a whopping 60

minutes of score. Only one corny pop song finds its way onto the album, as does a selection from "Rigoletto," (used as underscore during a fight scene). Rarely does a score get treatment this good, and even more rarely does it actually deserve it. —**Luke Goljan**

Du Barry Was a Lady (1943) ★★

PORTER, EDENS, HARBURG

Rhino Handmade RHM2 7851

23 tracks - 78:27

Another sterling example of Hollywood's uncanny knack for getting it wrong, the 1943 film treatment of Cole Porter's 1939 stage smash *Du Barry Was a Lady* really lost something in the translation. For starters, belter extraordinaire Ethel Merman may have had the rafters ringing at the 46th Street Theatre on Broadway, but by the time cameras rolled, the Merm's powerhouse pipes were sacrificed in favor of Lucille Ball, a comedic genius but no great shakes in the high-notes department. Arthur Freed, M-G-M's legendary producer of topnotch musicals, seemed intent on molding Ball into Metro's answer to Betty Hutton, Paramount's raucous and bankable comedienne. For *Du Barry*, Ball was newly coiffed and her tresses tinted a striking henna hue that studio stylist Sydney Guilaroff christened "Tango Red." As a result, the future Mrs. Ricardo would never photograph more ravishingly than she did in the resplendent Technicolor process. Still, an elaborate musical seemed an odd choice for a performer far more comfortable with pratfalls than Porter tunes.

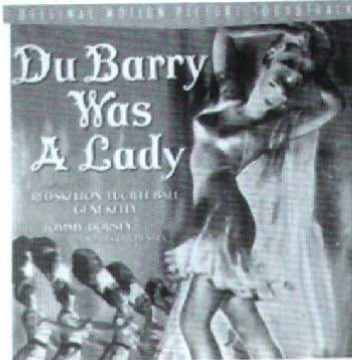
The incomparable Bert Lahr and Ronald Graham ("The Boys from Syracuse") were lauded for their performances during the triumphant theatrical run of *Du Barry*, but they were replaced on film by Red Skelton and Gene Kelly, respectively. Like Lucy, Skelton and Kelly were being groomed for superstardom by M-G-M, and the revue-like qualities of the project were deemed ideal for showcasing

their distinctive talents. With a youthful Zero Mostel, Virginia O'Brien, and Tommy Dorsey and His Orchestra stirred into the mix, *Du Barry* boasted the most eclectic movie cast ever assembled until *Myra Breckinridge* arrived nearly 30 years later (speaking of Mae West vehicles, scenarist Herbert Fields first offered *Du Barry* to the inimitable West as an original screenplay specially tailored to her lascivious persona, which the star promptly rejected as unsuitable).

Irving Brecher faced obstacles in adapting the frothy innocuousness of the book by Fields and B.G. DeSylva: A nightclub cloakroom attendant (Skelton) covets comely headliner May Daly (Ball), who only has eyes for a nimble chorus boy (Kelly). During a delirious episode, the attendant imagines himself as Louis XIV, wooing the scandalous coquette Madame Du Barry in overdressed 18th-century Versailles. Not exactly *Porgy and Bess*, but thanks to Porter's reputation and Merman's fiercely dedicated fan base, it racked up 408 performances on The Great White Way.

This limited-edition Turner Classic Movies Music/Rhino Handmade version of the *Du Barry* soundtrack offers knockout fidelity, but immaculate audio is beside the point when the material being presented is almost uniformly uninspired. This is one movie musical with a notable absence of vocals. Merman's spotlight numbers "When Love Beckoned," "Come On In" and "Oo-La-La" were either relegated to instrumentals or dropped entirely by the Freed Unit. Several other Porter compositions were tossed overboard and substituted with fresh concoctions by Burton Lane, Roger Edens and Ralph Freed. Considering the talent quotient involved, it's surprising that none of these newfangled arrangements amounted to anything memorable.

In fact, the *Du Barry* cinematic score achieves the sublime once as Kelly serenades Lucy with "Do I Love You?," one of Porter's most



tender and satisfying ballads. The only other keeper is Dorsey's "I'm Getting Sentimental Over You/We'll Get It" medley, which is presented in its entirety on this soundtrack release. Following *Du Barry* are five tracks from Metro's *Meet the People* (1944), which reunited Ball and O'Brien and added Lahr and Dick Powell to the marquee. The musical content is as unimpressive as the batch of *Du Barry* misfires, and these latter selections are also marred by an intrusive hiss and other auditory imperfections. Taken in tandem, this is a disappointing double feature for M-G-M musical aficionados. —**Mark Griffin**

The Thorn Birds (1983)

★★★★ ½

HENRY MANCINI

Varèse Sarabande 302 066 564 2

Disc One: 23 tracks - 56:56

Disc Two: 25 tracks - 60:25

This year marks the 10th anniversary of Henry Mancini's death, and yet this release is one of the precious few restored and remastered releases of one of his scores. That said, Robert Townson now presents us with nearly two hours of Mancini's fine work for this landmark miniseries.

Though often best remembered for his hip sound that defined a whole generation of movie music

with the jazz/rock elements of *The Pink Panther*, *Peter Gunn*, *A Shot in the Dark*, etc., Mancini's more straightforward orchestral writing is often sorely ignored. *The Thorn Birds* falls squarely in this latter field, containing some of the most heartfelt writing in the composer's canon. Mancini had a gift for melody, and the main theme kicks things off right away in "Main Title," simultaneously conjuring up nostalgia, romance and the Australian outback—without the use of a didgeridoo.

The main theme dominates the score, but Mancini provides a handful of other fully developed themes, at times even evoking his previous score for *The White Dawn*—and even hinting at his future score for *Lifeforce*. All the album highlights are too numerous to mention but include "Baby Hal Dies," "Beach Walk," "It's Shearing You're Hearing," and "Arrival at the Vatican." And it's not only a full, lush orchestral sound Mancini uses; there are several quieter reflective moments for solo flute or guitar with string backing. It's great to hear a composition written for television from the days before synthetic drones and looped electronic backbeats and shrinking music budgets took the art down a few notches. Furthermore, the music is allowed to develop; unlike today's television projects where most cues run less than a minute, there are several lengthy tracks here.

Much has been made on the internet message boards regarding the dulcimer missing from "Main Title." Having been an adolescent when *The Thorn Birds* first aired, I can't remember watching it, let alone what the music was like. It's unfortunate that it's missing, but my review is based on the material at hand. The dulcimer does show up on the album during "The Thorn Birds Theme" on the first disc, so it's not entirely absent. To pass over this album because of one cue would deprive yourself of two hours of some of Mancini's most heartfelt and beautiful writing. —**Darren MacDonald**