

Small Soldiers Recording Sessions:

Film music is a vital part of "The Motion Picture Experience". I believe that it may be the single most important emotional part of any movie. Here's a way I can prove it to you. Try this simple at home experiment.

If you don't own copies of the films "Jaws" and "Spellbound" obtain them from a local video store. Let's start with "Jaws". Fast forward to the scene where the shark first swims past the boat. Turn the sound down all the way. You'll see the three heroes moving rapidly about the deck. Shots of their feet sliding along the rails. And the shark swimming by. Not very exciting is it? Now try the same scene once again with John Williams' classic score. All of a sudden there's menace in the scene. And, fear. Lots and lots of fear. All created by the music.

Now, repeat the experiment with the scene from "Spellbound" where Gregory Peck is looking at himself in the mirror and wondering if he is a killer and about to do great harm to Ingrid Bergman whom he loves. Remember sound down. What we get is just a guy looking in a mirror. At best pondering a shave. Now try it again with the great Miklos Rozsa's spooky and haunting theme. Rozsa uses the Theremin to add eeriness and fear to the scene that just ain't there without it. Convinced?

As regular readers of the Weekly's Film Review know, I am a devoted film music fan. Have been since I was about 11 or 12 years old back in the late '50's. With a little bit of luck and a lot of perseverance, I was able to live out a lifelong dream and attend 2 days (June 5th and 6th) of the scoring sessions for Small Soldiers with music provided by my long time favorite composer Jerry Goldsmith. A scoring session is when the film composer, having already written the music to be used in a film, gets together with an orchestra and conducts the music in live session to fit a finished or almost finished film. Small Soldiers (released Friday, July 10th) was no where near done just 4 1/2 short weeks ago when these sessions occurred on Sound Stage 1 (AKA The Newman Scoring Stage) at 20th Century Fox in Hollywood. With a hundred musicians gathered, JG takes the podium, dons a headset and concentrates on the TV monitor where each scene will appear. The musicians having never before seen the music have practiced only once. The red lights indicate a session has begun and the entry doors lock out the outside world. The baton comes down and anywhere from 30 seconds to 6 minutes of music pour forth into

the waiting mics. As the cue is completed there is a dash by JG, Joe Dante (the films director) and Ken Hall (music editor) back to the control room where they watch a playback of the scene with music added for the first time. If they like it they move on. If they don't, it's back out for another take. This process ran for 5 days with 1 day scheduled for the following week for any changes to the film at the last minute.

Dividing time between the blue visitor's couch, about 15 feet behind the podium, and the control room, I saw quite a bit of the unfinished film, one scene at a time, in no particular order. This special effects wonder (provided by the venerable Stan Winston and the ever present Industrial Light and Magic) looks a little strange at a point just a few weeks from release. Many of the Small Soldiers don't even appear on screen as the computer generated images had not yet been added. Gray shadow areas move about amongst the real actors. In other scenes there are actually people visible moving the Small Soldiers. They will not make the final cut as the computer will wipe out all evidence that they were ever there. The voices are 3rd party for the SS's, if there at all. The dubbing sessions for the real voices were not scheduled until the following Tuesday, June 9th. Talk about pressure!

JG seems to be really enjoying himself. The sessions are going well and although he has no doubt seen this film over and over while preparing the score, he actually cries in the control room while watching the Spielberg like ending with his score adding punch and emotion absent from the prescore versions. JG now nearing 70 has scored over 175 films of every conceivable nature. His music is always original and fits like a hand in glove any film he has worked on. I've had prior opportunities to talk with JG and have asked him many questions about his years in Hollywood and the many projects he has worked on. Where this well of seemingly endless inspiration keeps coming from (he's doing 6 major films this year alone. Disney's "Mulan" was his last release) is anybody's guess. I told him I really admired his score for the film "Baby...Secret of the Lost Legend". Not the pig movie, but the one nobody remembers about the baby dinosaur. Apparently not real sure himself where the inspiration comes from he often replies as if talking about a third person. His comment about the score was that it was very sweet. It was like once the score was finished he looked at it as if someone else had done it.

The sessions on Saturday the 6th included a visit by a CNN news crew, there to film portions of the session and an interview with JG and the director. Near midday things start to get pretty loose. JG changes places with the First Violin, one of the Cellists

and the Harpist. They conduct and he makes an attempt to fill in as a musician. While they do pretty well, Jerry shows no aptitude at these instruments. The clowning around continues and a good time is had by all. The scoring sessions for the day still get done before 2:00PM and everybody goes home happy. Especially me.

"Small Soldiers" the film, is now at local theaters. Small Soldiers, the film score, is available at most CD stores. Small Soldiers the Burger King promos are available at Burger King. The endless books, toys and other Small Soldiers souvenirs await you at the mall. The cost to you for all these items probably won't be Small Change.

Other Joe Dante films you might enjoy, all on video, include "Gremlins" and "Gremlins II", "Explorers" and one of my favorites, "Inner Space" starring Martin Short.