

MAKING THE SCENE

In Gary Marmorstein's extended liner notes (which we couldn't squeeze into the CD package), read how Al Newman & Co. tackled How to Marry a Millionaire.

Alfred Newman's "Street Scene"—composed for Samuel Goldwyn's 1931 film version of Elmer Rice's play of the same name, and the music that provides the prelude to *How to Marry a Millionaire*—occupies an exalted position in the symphony-of-the-city pantheon. High up in the penthouse of our collective musical memory, it's flanked by Louis Alter's "Manhattan Serenade," Richard Rodgers' "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue," the main theme of Harold Arlen's Blues Opera, more popularly known as "I Had Myself a True Love," and, of course, an entire subway line of Gershwin themes.

In his USC doctoral dissertation, composer Fred Steiner pointed out a strong resemblance between "Street Scene" and the principal motive of Gershwin's first piano prelude, a bustling, trafficky theme familiar to most Gershwin lovers. Of course it's possible that Newman, then a Manhattan resident, attended the December 1926 recital at the Hotel Roosevelt where Gershwin premiered three preludes. Whatever its inspiration, New Yorkers heard in "Street Scene" the pulse of their city, its grit as well as its shimmering beauty. Fred Steiner wrote, "This well-known melody prominently features the flatted seventh degree characteristic of blues and the popular jazz of its time. It so readily evokes a vision of life in the big city that, to this day, playing only the first few bars in a TV show, or whatever, is enough to establish a setting among the skyscrapers or in a tenement."

Whether or not there was some kind of licensing agreement between Sam Goldwyn and Joe Schenck, who would become head of 20th Century-Fox in 1935, Al Newman was able to reuse the "Street Scene" theme throughout his 20-year career at that studio. The theme's subsequent ubiquity has often rendered its true source perplexing even to musicians. Several years ago I attended my brother's wedding in Cincinnati. After the band had run through its Jewish wedding repertoire—"Havah Nagilah!" to ersatz klezmer to "Sunrise, Sunset"—and only a few of us remained in the banquet hall, the

slightly juiced band members loosened their ties and the trumpeter-leader came to the edge of the stage, planted his feet wide and, aiming his horn northeast toward New York City, blew the eerily familiar opening notes of Newman's theme. Most of us suddenly stopped whatever we were doing to listen. For three minutes we were transported to a mythic "mean quarter of New York" (in Elmer Rice's stage description for the play *Street Scene*), where even poverty can be romantic. "What's the name of that?" someone shouted. The leader said, "It's from a Lucille Ball film, *The Dark Corner*." Well, yes and no; *The Dark Corner* (1946) was just one of many Fox pictures that exploited it. "Street Scene," like the city it evoked, was everybody's girl, and nobody's.

Among other Fox productions that used the theme were *I Wake Up Screaming* (1941), *Do You Love Me?* (1946), *Cry of the City* (1948), and *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1950). The theme's employment in the 1946 *Kiss of Death* was typical: pursuing David Buttolph's dark-alley main title music, Newman's "Street Scene" is suddenly dropped into a penumbral shot of the Manhattan skyline, fades out when the cam-

era moves into an office building to pick up Victor Mature and his band of thieves, and doesn't re-emerge until the movie's final seconds, when Mature lies on the sidewalk critically wounded, and the skyline shot returns with the theme attached. The principal theme's opening bar is as instantly evocative of the naked city as Brahms' *Lullaby* is of a baby's cradle: three notes and you get the picture. The theme got such a workout in the studio's pictures, no matter who the composer of record was, that Newman began to feel a little self-conscious. But his boss, Darryl F. Zanuck, never one to reject a cheap device if it proved effective, reassured him. "Dear Al," Zanuck wrote to Newman in a memo dated September 17, 1948: "Do nothing but continue to use 'Street Scene' wherever it fits." Zanuck permitted Paramount to use the theme for the first Dean Martin-Jerry Lewis picture, *My Friend Irma* (1949), where the first few notes would have made the Manhattan setting clear to a blind man. In the 1940s and '50s, coinciding with Al Newman's two decades as music chief, 20th Century-Fox (i.e., Zanuck) favored Gotham-based film stories. "Street Scene," which, according to Fred Steiner, was republished in 1942 as "Sentimental Rhapsody" after Harold Adamson added lyrics, became the musical hallmark of those stories.

STREET SMART: Maestro Alfred Newman doing what he loved best.



Infectious Enthusiasm

When Al Newman, dressed in tails and waving his baton, conducts "Street Scene" in the Cinemascope prelude to *How to Marry a Millionaire*, you can see his delight as well as hear it. Other studios posted men as music directors who were either musically bombastic (Herbert Stothart at MGM), steeped in the 19th-century romantics, or were solid administrators (Joe Gershenson at Universal, Leo Forbstein at Warner Bros.) rather than working composers. Newman happened to be a serious composer, a fearsome department head, and a demanding conductor all at once. Blessed with a terrifically sophisticated ear and skin toughened for negotiation, Newman put together a studio orchestra



ON THE TOWN: Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, screenwriter Nunnally Johnson and Marilyn Monroe at the *MILLIONAIRE* premiere.

that was without peer in Hollywood. In his memoir *No Minor Chords*, Andre Previn wrote, "Every studio had its own contract orchestra of approximately 75 players. These were musicians whose provenance included the world's great symphony orchestras and America's best dance bands." By common consent, the 20th Century-Fox Orchestra under Newman's baton became a world-class orchestra. Felix Slatkin, patriarch of one of the nation's most prominent musical families, was concertmaster; Paul Shure was the long-time assistant concertmaster. (Both men were regular members of the Hollywood String Quartet, arguably the best in the land.) In turn they attracted other expert musicians, particularly the string players who created the expressive, versatile sound of what came to be called the "Newman Strings." A perfectionist, Newman drove his orchestra through exhausting nocturnal recording sessions. He was not shy about making his displeasure known, occasionally even dismissing a chronically errant musician; but at the end of a successful session, usually well past midnight, he would reward his musicians with catered food (Chasen's) and drink (J&B Scotch, hauled in by the case). Despite the grueling hours, there were few complaints.

For the more solitary drudgery of writing, Newman had an instinct for which musicians could adapt to the weirdly collaborative, step-by-step process of composing for film. Originally hired as an orchestrator, David Buttolph had preceded Newman's tenure at Fox; after Newman arrived, he turned Buttolph into a composer. By 1948 Buttolph had moved over the Hollywood Hills to Warner Bros., so Newman leaned more heavily on Cyril (Cy) Mockridge, an Englishman who had made piano arrangements for Rodgers & Hart before being hired at Fox in 1932 as a studio pianist. At Fox, Mockridge was soon assigned to provide underscoring—the intermittent, often unnoticeable music that is supposed to dramatically thread each scene—notably on Shirley Temple pictures. Mockridge would become, after Newman, the

studio's go-to guy, the composer who could get the job done and on time. Newman and Mockridge went so far back together that, in a 1976 interview with Fred Steiner, Mockridge recalled sitting with Newman at "21" in New York, in 1930 or so, while Newman was grappling with "Street Scene." The two men enjoyed a musical symbiosis, with Mockridge blending his own style into his boss'. (One example: you can hear Mockridge's Delius-inspired cues rippling through Newman's score for *How Green Was My Valley*.) The young David Raksin, who scored Fox's *Laura* in 1944, decamped to RKO in 1947, but Franz Waxman, already considered a towering film composer, often came onto the lot as a freelancer. The irascible Bernard Herrmann, also a freelancer, practically lived at the studio whenever he was in Los Angeles. Hugo Friedhofer, who had been on staff at Fox with the coming of sound, then at Warner Bros. tirelessly orchestrating the music of Max Steiner and Erich Korngold, returned to the studio in 1950. Like the progressive maverick Alex North, Friedhofer composed relatively complex, modern-sounding film scores (e.g., *Broken Arrow*) that only the open-minded Newman, among studio music directors, would encourage. Sol Kaplan (father of the fine director Jonathan Kaplan) was around until April 1953, when the studio, panicked about his left-wing sympathies and with HUAC breathing down its throat, fired him. After bouncing among several studios through the '40s, Daniele Amfitheatrof settled at Fox to handle the "B" unit's scores. Ken Darby came over from RKO in 1950 to serve as vocal arranger; beginning with *David and Bathsheba* (1951), Darby served as choral director on most Newman-scored pictures and also became Newman's right hand at the studio. And of course Newman's brothers Emil and Lionel joined him as key members of the department—Emil primarily as composer-conductor, Lionel as composer-arranger. Each in his way idolized Alfred, the eldest of 10 children.

A Team Effort

Newman could also boast of having the best orchestrators on his staff. By the late '40s he had lost the invaluable services of Arthur Morton, who had made the fatal mistake of asking for a raise, then gone to Columbia and worked steadily (in latter years primarily for Jerry Goldsmith) until his recent death. But Newman had had Edward Powell by his side since the Broadway days, through the Goldwyn pictures and then at Fox. Powell was known as "The Great Engineer" for the way he built a piece of music and set it in motion. Herbert Spencer kept a piano in his office that his colleagues referred to as "the woodwind piano" because its idiosyncratic sound suggested flutes. Spencer's frequent composing

partner Earle Hagen, writer of another symphony-of-the-city standard, "Harlem Nocturne," orchestrated much of the "B" product. Maurice DePackh, pronounced a genius by no less a discriminating musician than David Raksin, was known as an orchestrator who could sniff out the appropriate instrument: he'd listen to a piano line, point his nose and say, "That should be an English horn!" Newman, chronically overworked at the podium and at his piano at home, depended on these men to create orchestral color and texture from the Fox scorers' compositions—in other words, to bring the music to life.

For *How to Marry a Millionaire*, in addition to the studio's ever-reliable Powell and vocal arranger Darby, the services of four non-staff orchestrators were employed. Léo Arnaud had been a workhorse for MGM's Freed Unit since its inception. Much later Alexander (Sandy) Courage joined MGM where his orchestrating was considered first-rate—a long apprenticeship to becoming one of television's top composers. Bernard Mayers would work as chief orchestrator, with the help of Courage and several others, on Jerome Moross' classic western score for *The Big Country* a few years after *Millionaire*. And Nelson Riddle, who had been a star pupil of the important film composer-teacher Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco a decade before he became the pin on Frank Sinatra's lapel, rounded out the orchestrating team. Newman and Mockridge, credited composers of the music herein, needed these men the way the body needs blood.

Alfred Newman's composition of the archetypal New York melody, some 70 years ago, turned out to be only the prelude to a long Hollywood career of ineffable musical achievement, as well as to the 1953 soundtrack before your ears. As the elegant William Powell might have put it in *How to Marry a Millionaire*, the pleasure is ours. **FSM**

A BATCH OF BACHELORETTES: Monroe, Bacall and Betty Grable as they appear in *MILLIONAIRE*.

