

Film Scoring

COMPOSING A WAY TO KEEP SCORE IN HOLLYWOOD

Even if a UC program had plainly promised to prepare one for "megastardom," Randy Edelman never would have enrolled. In the end, that's what he achieved as a CCM graduate, yet that's not why he traveled to Cincinnati from his home outside New York City.

The prominent singer, songwriter, arranger and film scorer came to UC with no definite aspirations and certainly no musical dreams, even though he had been playing piano by ear for many years. Pre-med was in the back of his mind, with a little time to toss around a football on the weekends. So, he enrolled in the McMicken College of Arts and Sciences.

During his second year, however, he transferred to CCM, thanks to faculty encouragement after he began private piano lessons. By graduation in '69, he was already orchestrating songs for the "Godfather of Soul," James Brown, and writing scores for local theaters.

Within a year and a half, he was the opening act for the Carpenters, performing and singing original works

in front of thousands of people a night. By the end of the decade, he had toured with Frank Zappa; conducted for Dionne Warwick and Jackie DeShannon, whom he married; wrote songs for the Fifth Dimension, Blood Sweat and Tears, and Barry Manilow, whose recording of Randy's "Weekend in New England" hit the top 10; recorded a dozen solo albums internationally; and literally reached "cult" status as a star in England, where he did a solo show at the London Palladium.

Today, he is famous in another field, as one of Hollywood's most versatile and sought-after film scorers. He has more than 50 credits for everything from comedies to dramas with large-scale symphonic scores, including "The Last of the Mohicans," "Gettysburg," "Anaconda," "While You Were Sleeping," "Dragonheart" and this summer's film version of "Leave It To Beaver." Moreover, his music is frequently used as background for television productions, such as the opening and closing ceremonies at the

'96 Olympics, occasions in which millions of viewers get goose bumps without even realizing the music helped trigger those emotions.

Creating "moods" and "feelings" is his goal. He talks of making music that is "magical." "I put my complete heart and soul into every one of these scores," he says, "regardless what style the film is — old-fashioned, animated, a comedy or some little intimate thing."

Achieving those heartfelt results, ironically, requires a highly "mathematical process." In Randy's private studio, situated behind a lush, 1920s home in Beverly Hills, he works at a grand piano surrounded by sophisticated computers, synthesizers and video screens, calculating timings and sequences before the first note is ever written. Then he writes, orchestrates and plays every individual part, making sure each note is locked into a time code with the video screen.

His methods have come a long way since the days in which he used to score the TV show "MacGyver," by working from a music editor's



photo courtesy of Universal Pictures

DRAGONHEART

time notes. The thought of scoring a complete movie like that makes him shake his head in disbelief.

Of course, there are aspects of the good-old days he would love to regain, such as the way composers would disappear for three months with the final film to write the score. These days, composers generally have four weeks, he says, and the film could be changed at any time.

And therein lies the danger of the computer: Film editors can now edit movies up until the very end . . . and editing changes the score.

That is what happened with "Leave It To Beaver" in the spring. He had just spent five long days writing six and a half minutes of music for the opening. The night before this "Horizons" interview, the studio executives called to say they didn't like the opening scene and were changing it. Randy was going to have to toss the work out and start again.

To further complicate the situation, Randy has set up his studio so that the director can come over and hear the music played with film footage while work is in progress. "If the emotion, the pacing, the rhythm of the music is wrong, the director isn't going to like it," he says. "And if he doesn't like it right here, he's not going to like it any better with a 100-piece orchestra." Consequently, he is able to fix problems early on; however, it is also easy for a director to breathe down his neck and request changes frivolously.

Ultimately, the arrangement is still better than having a completed score rejected. "They throw out film scores, big ones, every day," he says. "They spend a million dollars, then say, 'We don't like it.' I haven't had it happen yet, but it will. Everybody does it."

Once he finishes a score, he turns it over to people who cover up the music with dialogue and sound effects, delete some of the music altogether, move pieces around and "do anything they want." Furthermore, the viewer is oblivious to the score at times because the screen action overpowers it. He rarely sees the finished film, but knows what the reality will be. "Anaconda" opened the weekend before this interview, and he surmised, "Can you imagine being able

Leave It To Beaver

to hear my score when the snake is biting someone's head off?"

His ultimate gratification is the fact that every movie now has its score released as a CD. "And it's stocked by the television networks," he says with a gleam in his eye. "When you turn on the Olympics, it's Randy Edelman's music that opens it. When Elvis Stojko won the gold medal in the Olympics, it was to my music from 'Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story.' It doesn't matter who saw the movie; my music was out there in front of a zillion people all over the world. The score from a movie has a complete life of its own, and it's a big, big thing."

Even in the best of circumstances, Randy keeps to a tight schedule while scoring, beginning shortly after rising at 6 a.m. and working steadily into

the night. Taking time to meet a writer, he warned "Horizons," would be impossible if he were in the middle of scoring. As it turns out, he was, yet was still gracious enough to let this writer barge in on him at 8:30 a.m., with the promise to retreat by 9:30.

Despite the tight schedule, Randy fits an incredible amount of information into one hour, partially due to the way he talks — a mile a minute and rarely finishing a sentence before moving onto another topic. As the interview began to sneak past the 9:30 witching hour, he reacted in mock horror, but concluded by sincerely admitting that his years at UC were good. "At UC, I got to do things that never would have happened anywhere else. It worked out well."



photos Universal Pictures



PROFILE

RANDY EDELMAN

Partial credits: "The Last of the Mohicans," "Gettysburg," "Anaconda," "While You Were Sleeping," "Dragonheart," "Leave It To Beaver."

Most recent work: Harrison Ford's "6 Days/7 Nights," as well as the theme for the next winter Olympics.

Memorable quotes: "You need a personality that can somehow stay up all night, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and write the score 12 different ways."

"I would go to England and have a completely different life — interviewing all day, kissing babies, appearing with David Frost to comment on politics when Reagan was elected president. Every cabdriver, every grandmother, every little kid walking down the street knew my face."



photo Deborah Rieselmann