

Joan of Arc has served as inspiration to many filmmakers and actresses over the years – from Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (starring Falconetti), to *Joan of Arc* (starring Ingrid Bergman), to Luc Besson's *The Messenger* (starring Milla Jovovich), with many stops in between, the story of the girl who heard voices has been told in many different ways. Each approach – in style, storytelling and performance – was completely different.

Otto Preminger's 1957 film of George Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan* is probably his most maligned film (even more so than *Skidoo*) – the critical reaction was downbeat and downright nasty, and the film was a huge box-office disaster. Part of the reason for this is because he chose to go with a very young and completely unknown actress as Joan – the beautiful seventeen-year-old Jean Seberg. For critics and audiences she was not up to the demands of the role, especially in the company of such superb players as Richard Widmark, John Gielgud, Richard Todd, Kenneth Haigh, Harry Andrews, and Anton Walbrook. The film came and went quickly, and, over the years, has either been completely forgotten or counted as one of the director's lesser films by all but a handful of people. The director himself said he realized that his film was a failure. Jean Seberg said, "I have two memories of *Saint Joan*. The first was being burned at the stake in the picture. The second was being burned at the stake by the critics. The latter hurt more. I was scared like a rabbit and it showed on the screen. It was not a good experience at all. I started where most actresses end up." When she spoke of being burned at the stake in the film, she was speaking literally – due to an accident on the set, she really was engulfed by flames and burned on her hand and stomach, although they were not serious burns.

But time is the great leveler and occasionally time is kind to certain films. Watching *Saint Joan* today, away from all the hullabaloo and critical brickbats, one finds a compelling film (with a screenplay by Graham Greene), beautifully acted and with, surprise of surprises, an incandescent performance by Jean Seberg. In fact, for my money, Jean Seberg's Joan is the screen's finest, and yes I know the Falconetti devotees will want to burn me at the stake for

saying so. With Seberg there is an innocence, a purity, a simplicity, an honesty, and a glow, and even her occasional awkwardness is, for me, totally believable for the character.

The film, like the play, is dialogue-driven. Preminger's style is one of long takes and staged scenes, but that style works perfectly for the film. The black-and-white photography never tries to be arty or to show off (the great Georges Perinal was the cameraman) – everything is in service of the dialogue and the story, and thanks to the cast of players that story is told wonderfully. The film has a small but devoted following, and it seems to grow with each passing year. Its original poster design by the brilliant Saul Bass remains an all-time classic image. Bass worked with Preminger often and created the title and logo designs for a dozen or so Preminger films.

Otto Preminger had an extraordinary instinct for choosing the perfect composer for each of his films, and for taking chances on people who were either just beginning or who were not all that well known. Right from the start, Preminger's instinct proved brilliant, with David Raksin's incredible score to *Laura*. Raksin would also score Preminger's *Forever Amber*, *Daisy Kenyon*, and *Whirlpool*. But it was as an independent filmmaker where Preminger's genius for choosing composers really shone through – Elmer Bernstein's legendary and groundbreaking score for *The Man With the Golden Arm*, George Auric's haunting and lovely score for *Bonjour Tristesse*, Duke Ellington's *Anatomy of a Murder*, Ernest Gold's Oscar-winning score for *Exodus*, Jerry Fielding's first film score, *Advise and Consent*, Jerome Moross' *The Cardinal*, Jerry Goldsmith for *In Harm's Way*, Paul Glass' memorable *Bunny Lake is Missing*, Hugo Montenegro's *Hurry, Sundown*, and even Harry Nilsson's funky and fun score for *Skidoo* – Preminger's knack for the right music paid off time and again.

For *Saint Joan*, Preminger hired Mischa Spoliansky, not exactly a film composer whose name was known to the public, even though he'd provided great scores for numerous films by then. Spoliansky was born in 1898 in Bialystock, which was then part of Russia. He was a child prodigy who made his first public appearance at the age of ten. He was a very successful cabaret

composer in Weimar Germany, after which he fled to England during Hitler's rise to power. In England he began his career as a film composer, and soon he was writing the scores for many high-profile films like *The Private Life of Don Juan*, *Sanders of the River* (starring Paul Robeson, and for which Spoliansky composed several songs), *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Wanted for Murder*, *The Happiest Days of Our Lives*, and many others. He wrote a song for Marlene Dietrich for Alfred Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* (he'd worked with Dietrich in Germany – she was performing in one of his works when she was discovered by Josef von Sternberg for *The Blue Angel*). His last film score was to *Hitler: The Last Ten Days*, starring Alec Guinness, written in 1973. Spoliansky passed away in 1985.

How Preminger knew of him or understood that Spoliansky was the perfect composer for his film is anyone's guess, but perfect he was. His main theme is astonishingly beautiful and evocative, and his dramatic scoring accompanies Preminger's stately visuals masterfully. His "Toccatina" for organ is a wonderful piece, as is the "Dream Minuet." But every cue in the film helps underscore the characters' many and varied emotions. It's too bad he didn't write more scores for mainstream films in the 1950s and 1960s because he was a wonderful melodist with a keen dramatic sense of what film music can and should accomplish.

For this first ever CD release, we used the original album masters housed in the Capitol/EMI vaults. The score was recorded and released in mono. For an LP presentation back then, it was quite long – over 38 minutes, and the album contained all of Spoliansky's score. On the LP, cues were combined, and rather artfully so, so we've left our CD in the exact album configuration.

"O God that made this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

With the release of this CD, certainly we're ready to receive the wonderful Spoliansky score to *Saint Joan*.

— Bruce Kimmel