

Isn't it funny that one of the greatest of all American Western film composers was born, raised, and studied music in Russia? But Dimitri Tiomkin was, for many years, the go-to guy for Western scores. His scores for various classic westerns had a true Americana sound to them – *Duel In The Sun*, *Red River*, *High Noon*, *Gunfight At The O.K. Corral*, *Rio Bravo*, *The Alamo* and many others. Tiomkin had an incredible gift for creating memorable main themes and was a pioneer in the main title as song with *High Noon* (“Do Not Forsake Me, O My Darlin’”), for which Tiomkin not only won the Oscar for Best Score, but for Best Song (over the years he was nominated for an astonishing 17 Academy Awards).

*The Unforgiven* was a film plagued by problems. Adapted from the novel by Alan Le May (*The Searchers*), the original director, Delbert Mann, was replaced by John Huston, who constantly fought with star Burt Lancaster and his production company, Hecht-Hill-Lancaster (he wanted to make a serious-minded film and Lancaster and the production company wanted a hit), the film's female star, Audrey Hepburn broke her back during filming when she fell from her horse, co-star Audie Murphy almost drowned while duck hunting, and director Huston's mind seemed to be on other things instead of the actual film he was directing.

But years later, looking at the film now, it's a handsome film (shot by the great Franz Planer), well directed, with wonderful performances by Lancaster, Hepburn, Murphy, Lillian Gish, Charles Bickford, John Saxon, Albert Salmi, and Joseph Wiseman. Like Le May's *The Searchers*, *The Unforgiven* has racism as its theme and certainly was, for its time, a very adult western. The film's reviews were mostly positive, and it is only in the intervening years that the public consensus on the film became wildly divergent, with some professing it to be the worst film Huston ever did (Huston thought so, too, apparently), and a film that doesn't work at all, to those who admire the film's direction, acting, and story, and who find the film a splendid western.

Tiomkin's score also divides people, and

even divided the critics back in the day. For the score's fans, it is, of course, classic Tiomkin, with a wonderful, memorable main theme (this time not done as a song, although it later did have lyrics added by Ned Washington), a theme that is haunting and perfect for the film. The rest of the score is filled with the unique Tiomkin sound – crashing brass, xylophones run amok, beautiful strings, and stirring action music – there's no way not to know it's a Tiomkin score from first note to last. The score was recorded in Rome with the Santa Cecilia Symphony Orchestra of Rome, with Tiomkin conducting. I've heard tell that some people think the recording is not good, but I disagree – the recording is fine, it just had what was then the standard large reverb applied to it. Nothing to be done about that, and it's no different than most scores released on LP back then. But even with the large reverb, the recording has more clarity than most that have that kind of reverb. No, it's not a Hollywood film studio recording, but it does not deserve the bad rap it gets in certain quarters.

*The Unforgiven* was originally released on a United Artists LP, and then as part of a Film Score Monthly Western CD box set. We've done some work on the sound, and are really happy to make it available again, as the box set sold out quickly and many people missed out on getting it.

We're also happy to couple it with another fine western score, *The Way West*, written by Polish-born composer Bronislau Kaper. Kaper didn't do that many westerns, but the ones he did do were really interesting and he was a master craftsman, who, like Tiomkin, had an incredible gift for memorable melodies, as you can hear in his wonderful scores for *Invitation*, *Lili*, *Auntie Mame*, the 1962 *Mutiny On The Bounty*, among many others.

*The Way West*, based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by A. B. Guthrie, was a Western more in the grand tradition; a big, sprawling epic produced by Harold Hecht, with a screenplay by Ben Maddow (who'd also written the script for *The Unforgiven*) and Mitch Lindemann. The film is colorful, fun, and compelling, as it follows a wagon train of settlers from Missouri as they make

their way to Oregon, and, thanks to cameraman William H. Clothier, it is absolutely stunning to look at. Andrew McLaglen was a fine director and he gets terrific performances from his large cast, including Kirk Douglas, Robert Mitchum, Richard Widmark, Lola Albright, Sally Field (in her film debut), Stubby Kaye, and two stalwart western character actors, Jack Elam and Harry Carey, Jr.

Kaper's score has its own Americana sound and is a total delight. It begins with some narration from the film, which segues into a song (with lyrics by Mack David) sung by The Serendipity Singers. Then the score proper begins, and it is filled with rousing action music, playful music, and stunningly beautiful music, all in Kaper's distinctive style and all of which captures the film's myriad moods and scenes perfectly.

The score was originally issued as an LP on United Artists, and then on CD by Intrada – that limited edition release sold out instantly, and so it's nice to be able to make it available to those who missed out, those who didn't even get a chance to find out about it, and fans of great western scores. Both scores have been remastered for this release.

A note on the spelling of Bronislau, just because it's interesting: Kaper was born Bronislav, but it was apparently misread during his immigration years as Bronislau, and it is the latter spelling that pretty much stuck to his Hollywood credits, even though on certain albums and films (and at ASCAP) he's credited with the original spelling, i.e. *The Way West*.

By the end of the 1960s, Tiomkin and Kaper's careers were all but over, and film music was all the poorer for it. They were two masters, and their legacy of movie music continues to be discovered and loved by each new generation – and that's a good thing.

— Bruce Kimmel