

Elia Cmiral: An Overlooked Score and a Forgotten Treasure by Michael Mays

Battlefield Earth ****

ELIA CMIRAL

Varese Sarabande 302 066 144

28 tracks - 48:54

Released: 5/2/2000

When I first started reading the pre-release buzz surrounding this score, describing it as one that "looked to *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner* and *Alien*" (or whichever films they were) for inspiration, I thought to myself, "Oh...great...another score with an obvious heavy temp-track influence and too many references/rip-offs to sci-fi scores past." Well, when I saw the film opening weekend (yes, I'm one of the ones who paid to see it), I was simply blown away by the music. It was the complete, total opposite of what I had expected. With the exception of a brief bit that was similar to *Waterworld* early on, I didn't hear one piece of music that reminded me of another score.

Written in just six weeks, Elia Cmiral's score for *Battlefield Earth* is a change-of-pace from the scores we usually find accompanying big science-fiction/action movies, similar to how his *Ronin* was very different from the typical action/thriller scores. Utilizing both orchestra and synths, he creates a superb score. Regardless of what you think of the film (and I'm sure we all know what everyone thinks of it), you have to admit that Cmiral's score is interesting for a sci-fi film.

The album opens with the "Battlefield Earth Theme," a too-short heroic fanfare for three trumpets in unison, with crushing percussion provided by huge Japanese Taiko war drums, accompanied by a rising chorus. "The Dome" perfectly captures the massive size of the Psychlo's enormous enclosed home base (even though it's not technically a dome in the film, but what the heck?) There's also a female vocal that first appears in "Johnnie Leaves," though what she's saying (if anything at all) I'm not sure.

Our first tastes of action comes in "The Plan/Fort Hood" and "Man Animal Revolt." There's also the very strange "Psychlo's Top 40," the source music heard during visits to the Psychlo bar, with what I believe are vocals provided by star/co-producer John Travolta. (I heard a rumor that Travolta himself had a hand in composing this specific

track.) But the action returns in the very next track, "Commence Revolt," which builds up to a hard-charging piece as the rebellion finally gets underway. Following a brief break with "Do You Want Lunch?" and "Options For Renewal," all-out action explodes for the remainder of the score.

Other standout action tracks include "Air Battle," the short-but-exhilarating "Trench Attack," "Dome Explodes" and "Web Cracking Stops." There's also a nice, quiet statement of the theme in "Mickey the Hero," and everything culminates in the triumphant "We've Won." And as with the finale of *Ronin*, Cmiral nicely wraps the score up with the exciting (though short) "End Titles."

The score has a bigger (for lack of a better word) feel to it than *Ronin*, and the way Cmiral makes limited use of strings and utilizes drum kits for most of the percussion is admirable. As with *Ronin*, *Battlefield Earth* shows that this relatively new composer has his own distinct sound, one that makes his music stand apart from the rest of the pack. Hopefully, the gigantic negative impact toward the movie itself will not translate to Elia or his score, and filmmakers will continue to see him for what he is: an extremely talented composer.

Six-Pack *****

ELIA CMIRAL

Label: La Bande Son LBS A00002-2

18 tracks - 45:35

I don't usually buy scores without hearing them...or at least seeing the movie first. I like to hear as much of the music as possible, even if it's layered over with dialogue and sound effects. But at least I have an idea of what the music's like, so I can then make up my mind whether or not it's a score I want to own. But I hit a snag when it came to *Six-Pack*. I was impressed with *Ronin* and *Battlefield Earth*, but had not (and could not) see this film, as it's currently available only in Europe. I was reluctant to buy it without knowing anything about the music, but, in the end, I gave in and ordered it, based solely on two things: 1) Cmiral's name, and 2) the strength of the two aforementioned scores. And now that I've heard *Six-Pack*, I can say that I am not disappointed.

The album starts off with "Intro," which I assume is the movie's main title or opening scene. From the start, the tone of the score is set as moody/action-suspense music for piano, strings, brass and synths. The first track features a stomping-like sound that later returns at the climax. The first action track on the album, "The Fifth Victim," is a driving strings piece that would sound right at home in a Hitchcock movie, with synths scurrying underneath. "Marine's Montage" starts off with a strings-and-piano mix that sounds as if something bad is about to happen, but they grow in volume and become more pleasant, with a violin later adding a sad quality. Without having seen the film, it sounds like this track underscores a traveling scene of sorts.

"Emergency Exit" is mostly a percussive track, reminiscent of *Ronin's* "Gunfight At The Amphitheater," with accompanying strings, brass and synth rhythms. "Unspoken Love" is a love theme that is used from time to time, here given a full treatment by piano and strings. It's a beautiful theme that adds a nice contrast to the action and suspense.

"Apartment Attack" is action-packed, with brass and percussion starting the suspense before breaking into a section of driving strings, brass and percussion, culminating in an action piece that is used frequently throughout the score. "Nathan's Theme," a delicate cue for piano and strings, is similar in texture to the "Unspoken Love" theme.

"Marine's Demise" starts off with a great low-key drum beat as the strings build, giving away to a brief moment of silence before the drums come back. The strings return, building in intensity before finally breaking into a fast piece with strange synth sounds to convey the terror of the scene. "The Tunnel & Lament" opens much like "Emergency Exit," with a rhythmic drum beat that eventually lets up, allowing the brass and mild percussion to take over before the track closes with quiet strings. "Nightmare" is another drum-heavy track, with synths, prominent brass and rising strings. The piano and the brass underline the suspense, which begins to build as the strings slowly return to add to the tension, with the music taking a short pause before breaking into a pursuit cue, the brass loud, the strings driving and the percussion pounding. The action comes to an end, allowing the strings to play on suspense for a good length before the track closes out with a final mild percussion beat.

"Kill the Killer" features a brief return performance of the stomping from "Intro," along with a moment of music that sounds right out of a carnival. (In the background of the CD cover is a carnival, so this must somehow figure into the climax of the film). "Unspoken Love (Piano)" is a beautiful rendition on the love theme. "Aftermath" starts off quietly, feeling uneasy, while at the same time conveying the sense that the terror is over. But the love theme rises up and plays loud before coming to a smashing halt as the tribal-like percussion rhythm returns to underscore (what I assume are) the closing credits, with rising and falling strings and underlining brass. This is followed by another statement of the action cue. Then the action quiets down to let the love theme play one last time...the track ends on a quiet note.

Six-Pack is by far my favorite Elia Cmiral score, taking the crown from *Ronin* -- a feat I never thought possible. It's an extremely satisfying listening experience, an excellent blend of action, suspense and terror, with a touch of romance thrown in for good measure. Some would be quick to write this off as a *Ronin* rehash, and though certain tracks share minor similarities with that masterpiece, *Six-Pack* is a standout piece of work that should be experienced by any serious fan of action/thriller scores.

http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/articles/2001/21_Feb---Lost_Issue_Cmiral_Six_Pack.asp