

**SCREEN ARCHIVES ENTERTAINMENT  
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February 23, 1993

Steve Leggett  
National Film Preservation Board  
Library of Congress  
M/B/RS Division, LM-338  
Washington, DC 20540

Subject: American Film Music Preservation

Dear Mr. Leggett,

I would like to appeal for your help with our preservation efforts to save important, but neglected and an often maligned creative element of American film production: The musical score.

Screen Archives Entertainment is a small but, very enthusiastic group of film music recording collectors. We enjoy watching films, particularly paying close attention to that last creative process - the musical "gift wrap". Film scores were necessary to heighten the scenes message, to give a generally "cold" one dimensional medium a warm human creative element: music. In most cases, the truly well-crafted film score helps to give the visual scene its true meaning and helps overcome shortcomings. This music has been frequently composed and played by many of the world's most distinguished musicians.

For years, we had heard stories of original audio, composers' hand-written manuscripts and other related music materials being discarded by studios - sometimes to make room for other needs, a new parking lot. A priceless American heritage (and the studios' legacy) was being burnt, sent to landfills or dumped at sea. During the "MGM Holocaust," four decades of brilliant musical history were incredibly destroyed.

MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING  
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It's incomprehensible that the great original recordings of Judy Garland, Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire are lost. The songs, dances, ballets and the wealth of original music written especially for dramatic and comedy films by world class composers, are forever lost. Master recordings of one of America's greatest film scores BEN-HUR by Miklos Rozsa, containing several hours of some of the most inspired and brilliantly performed 20th Century music has been destroyed. Only the 40-minute commercial rerecorded "soundtrack" exists, but is no where close to the brilliance of the original screen version.

The Hollywood musicians union would not allow commercial recordings to be conducted by Dr. Rozsa - maybe his name wasn't American enough. The studio then had the commercial recording conducted in Europe (by someone else).

Generally it was the practice of studios when a commercial "soundtrack" recording was to be released that the musicians would have to be paid a second time. Thus, the music was frequently rearranged for smaller orchestral forces, creating "diluted" arrangements for popular consumption.

Films in the 30's produced some remarkable music. The general public and critics did recognize that some very good and intelligent new music was being composed and wanted them on discs, but because of WWII and the unavailability of vinyl, film music became an early sacrifice. Despite the exodus of great European artists to America, very little of their work was made available because the studios' attitude was since the music had no commercial value, why keep it?

Of course, we are tragically aware of the great loss in older films and the fragile condition of recent films. Major public and private institutions and influential individuals are trying to save what's left of our film history. But time is taking its toll.

Some audio and paper materials are being collected from composers (or their estates), producers, music editors, choral directors, small commercial stock music businesses, as well as vigilant private collectors (like Screen Archives). Unfortunately, most repositories have no idea as to proper methods of audio preservation. No nationwide standards have been adopted. Most institutions are too financially "strapped" to allocate proper

funds. Collected valuable and irreplaceable materials are locked away only to deteriorate further.

Screen Archives projects are designed to make recordings an example of what could be done to preserve original audio recordings. We document with written text, original art and photographs, the film, composer and music for the interested laymen and the scholar. The most important value is access for the general public.

Scores we have privately recorded were obtained from the composers (or their estates). It is a miracle that they even had copies of *any* original audio recordings since the most powerful studios owned the music. We tried to work with a major studio, who was genuinely interested in our proposal, but would not proceed until the powerful musicians' union was reckoned with, who insisted on full payment at the current union rate, despite the fact the music had been recorded years earlier, had very minimal commercial value and the sound quality was not to current standards.

A general studio rule is that the artist is merely an employee, with little or nothing to say about his work after the composing and recording process. Recordings from mixed-down multi-track tapes (monophonic and stereophonic) that ended up in composers' hands are now the only known copies in existence. One prestigious recording of musical Americana, New York theater composer Jerome Moross' complete score from William Wyler's 1958 massive western, *THE BIG COUNTRY*, is one example of such a preservation.

Screen Archives was approached by Moross' estate because of earlier preservation efforts involving the music scores of important, but lesser known composers. No other classical or popular recording label was interested, despite it was good music and could have wide popular appeal. (Ironically, Moross had been sent a set of three monophonic reel-to-reel tapes of the complete musical tracks and a horrible commercial lp was released through a "faked" stereo process.)

Fortunately, the Moross copy included many music tracks that were not used in the final film. These tapes were stored at New York's Columbia University (in the composer's archives) and

his estate released them to us to determine their condition. We then began an immediate duplication process since the magnetic tapes were 30 years old and were rapidly deteriorating.

The tapes were flown to Hollywood for digital transfer and editing. The magnetic tapes were so old that they were deteriorating before our eyes as the transfer began. Each pass of a cue required the tape machine "heads" to be cleaned of metal oxide. Music had to be carefully recorded on the first pass, since there could be no going back. The tape would often break. It was a long first day.

After we finished the compact disc, we then produced a 68-page booklet. The three and a half year process was paid for out of our own pockets, but the music of this important composer was saved for future generations.

It is obvious (from our first-hand experience) that time is running out. This is an appeal to larger institutions, especially the Library of Congress. Please help preserve these important original American works. Please help preserve their related papers and photographs. Please help create, and make available, a national repository of films, and their own very special, but separate companion - film scores. Please help solve issues of public access to printed and recorded materials for study and enjoyment. Finally, we need your help to make film scores a part of this country's creative art that will be studied and remembered. We must preserve the imaginative efforts of these very special composers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Spaulding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Craig Spaulding