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At the Back of the North Wind

Jared DePasquale brings George MacDonald's fantasy to life with a richly conveyed and substantial symphonic radio score.

By Randall D. Larson May 20, 2004

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DEPASQUALE'S NORTH WIND

Info:

Composer Jared DePasquale, known here for his effective low-budget horror scores to **THE FRIGHTENING, ANCIENT EVIL: SCREAM OF THE MUMMY**, and **THE DEAD HATE THE LIVING**, recently entertained a somewhat more benevolent form of fantasy, providing a lovely orchestral score for a Focus on the Family Radio Theatre dramatization of George MacDonald's fantasy story, **AT THE BACK OF THE NORTH WIND**. The composer's vivid melodies and orchestral atmospheres provide a smooth, richly textured symphonic sensibility, beautifully capturing and conveying the personification of the North Wind with continually aerial, flowing, and soaring music (his cue, "Into the Storm," is just wondrously captivating in this regard DePasquale told me this cue was the most satisfying one to write). The small orchestra (the score was recorded in Nashville with The Wormwood Orchestra), overdubbed in places by sampled chorus, does a great job and sounds larger than it really is. A limited, privately produced CD of the score may be had from the composer contact depasquale@mindspring.com and see DePasquale's web site at www.mindspring.com/~depasquale/jared/jhome.html

I spoke to Jared recently about his experiences scoring this show, and the intricacies of scoring for radio versus film and television.

"When a composer scores a radio drama, the project becomes more music dependent," [IMG3R]DePasquale said. "The drama is wall-to-wall dialogue with maybe three-five second breaks between scenes, so the challenge over the years has been to really pay attention to what the characters are saying and play off it. These kind of productions stretch you because you pay more attention to tempos (quick *ritards* and *accelerandos*) as well as orchestrations (specific instruments for characters or scenes/ranges and thickness of the music for a cue based on the dialogue). Another challenge is to make things sound and feel musical when you have to add a bar or drop a beat and have an odd meter. In some styles of film scoring, a composer can play 4/4 through a scene and just paint in what I call "broad strokes". It works great and is something I do too, but in radio, I can't do that as much so I'm constantly adjusting tempos, adding and dropping beats to make thing fit, but it is never at the expense of losing musicality."

To prepare for **AT THE BACK OF THE NORTH WIND**, DePasquale read the novel about two months before starting on the project, and then made some musical choices right away based on his gut reaction to the book. "The main character is the North Wind who is personified as a mysterious woman who blows tragedy into people's lives, but in the end tragedy can be used for good," said DePasquale. "I started to study Ravel and Debussy because I wanted there to be an overall Romantic period feel to the music. Ravel is a master of color, and I really wanted the woodwinds to be flowing like water (or the wind!). I wrote a fast moving flute line, and then wrote moving lines for the clarinet and bassoon. I always wanted there to be at least three independent lines going, so it would feel like the wind was flowing on many levels. Even the way the music looks on paper looks like the wind. So much opposite motion in the lines created the look of a storm on paper."

To capture the "fantasy" aspect of the program, DePasquale started studying harmonic movement in minor thirds "something Stravinsky popularized with the octatonic scale and movement in major thirds (what the whole scale is based from). These kind of moving progressions create a real sense fantasy."

The project was one of DePasquale's biggest challenges, far more so than scoring music for rampaging zombies and reawakened mummies. The gentle fantasy of **AT THE BACK OF THE NORTH WIND** required one of his most complex musical approached. "First of all, I never have written so many notes!" he said. "I would have a few days where I would only write and orchestrate a minute and half, so it was hard not to get a little stressed because the orchestra date was looming closer and closer. I also have never written anything that dense before. I would write a section and know that I still needed to fill it out with more color. Since I'm a perfectionist, I have a hard time settling for something when I know there is more in me. But as anyone who has worked in our industry knows, you have to let it go because there is so much more to write."

The effort paid off with a first rate composition, splendidly performed and a beautifully sensitive work. DePasquale has scored a number of radio dramas for Focus on the Family and continues to find the association stimulating. "The most rewarding thing about working with Focus Radio Theatre is that they pick out classic novels with such rich characters and meaningful stories," DePasquale said. "That was a big problem that I had with horror films - you just didn't care about the people. There was no substance. I scored **LITTLE WOMEN** for Focus last year, and that is a story with some of the most memorable women on paper. It was a joy to write for characters you love."