

Audrey Rose

THERE IS NO END

The problem was *The Exorcist*. In trying to sell the 1977 film *Audrey Rose*, the posters for the film made it look like it was going to be yet another ripoff of William Friedkin's shocking and terrifying 1973 film. But the fact is, *Audrey Rose* has nothing whatsoever to do with *The Exorcist*. It is, in fact, about as far removed from that kind of visceral terror as you can get. Based on the 1975 novel by Frank De Felitta (who also wrote the screenplay), *Audrey Rose* is not about possession by a demon of any sort – it is about reincarnation. A man's wife and daughter die in a horrible car crash, with the daughter trapped inside the burning car and unable to get out. Years later, the man comes to believe that his child, Audrey Rose, has been reincarnated as a young girl named Ivy, the child of an upwardly mobile young couple, who was born two minutes after the car crash. Therein lies the tale, as the husband doesn't believe such balderdash but the wife comes to believe – how else to explain Ivy's trances and her screams of pain and how she responds to the name Audrey Rose when Audrey's father speaks it? There are, of course, frightening things in the film, but they're not in your face – and there are some very moving things, as well.

Director Robert Wise was certainly no stranger to making atmospheric films of this nature, starting at the beginning of his career when he worked with the master of understated terror, Val Lewton, directing *The Curse of the Cat People* and *The Body Snatcher*. Years later, he would direct the brilliant horror film *The Haunting*, which was very much in the Lewton style. Wise could seemingly do anything – from two of the screen's greatest musicals (*West Side Story* and *The Sound of Music*), to gritty noirs, to wonderful dramas like *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, *Executive Suite*, *I Want*

To Live, Odds Against Tomorrow, to a sci-fi classic, *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, and even a spectacle like *Helen of Troy*.

In the magazine, *Filmmakers Newsletter*, Wise stated his case: "I don't think we're going to prove reincarnation in this picture, but I'm very open to the whole possibility of the supernatural, the para-normal, the possibility of dimensions out there." To *Audrey Rose* he brought his usual impeccable visual style and his usual restraint. But audiences of the day, especially after *The Exorcist*, didn't want restraint – they wanted full out horror, they wanted sensory overload, the more shocking, the better. And so *Audrey Rose* was, sadly, not a success at the box-office or with critics. The *New York Times* jumped right on the comparison train, totally misunderstanding the film – "The soul of the movie is that of '*The Exorcist*' instantly recycled."

Watching the film all these years later, without the baggage of *The Exorcist*, one finds an extremely affecting little chiller. Part of that is due to the cast – Anthony Hopkins, Marsha Mason, and the young Susan Swift, from whom Wise gets a terrific performance. And a major part of the film's atmosphere is its musical score by the gifted Michael Small.

Born in 1939, Small began scoring films in the late 1960s, but it was his masterful score to the 1971 Alan Pakula film *Klute* that announced him as a unique voice in film scoring. From that point on, he was a familiar name, providing some of the best scores for some of the best films of the 1970s, including *The Parallax View*, *The Stepford Wives*, *Night Moves*, *The Drowning Pool*, *Marathon Man*, *The Driver*, *Comes A Horseman*, *The China Syndrome* – there was no mistaking a Michael Small score, you knew it was his instantly, the minute the music began playing. He went on to

score many other films, such as *Going In Style*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *Rollover*, *The Star Chamber*, *Target*, *Dream Lover*, *Jaws: The Revenge*, as well as working in television. Sadly, Michael Small passed away in 2003 at 64 years of age.

Small's score for *Audrey Rose* is one of his best. It is filled with his unique music, emphasizing character and drama and never playing for cheap effects. It is at times haunting, at times lyrical, at times downright creepy and scary, but always in service of the story and the characters. Right from the get-go, with his engaging and beautiful main title, right through to the film's somewhat downbeat ending, Small's music is simply and unerringly right.

The source material for *Audrey Rose* consisted of only two reels of tape in the MGM vaults. These mono tapes, made from the music stem (which means the volume shifts up and down repeatedly, as it does in the film), were in good shape for what they were. While it is not always easy to master from an up and down source, our mastering engineer, James Nelson, working his usual magic, got it to sound as good as it probably can. The result is that we finally have one of Michael Small's best scores on CD.

It is always an honor to do a score that you love by a composer that you love and doing *Audrey Rose* was a true labor of love for everyone concerned.

— Bruce Kimmel