

All throughout the 1980s, the thriller genre kept threatening to make a huge comeback, and in September of 1987 with the release of *Fatal Attraction*, the thriller was back with a vengeance. Earlier that year, in February, MGM released a nifty, old-fashioned thriller called *Dead Of Winter*, directed by Arthur Penn (*Bonnie and Clyde*, *Mickey One*, *Night Moves*, *Little Big Man*), starring Mary Steen-burgen, Roddy McDowell, and Jan Rubes. The film was actually an unofficial remake of Joseph Lewis' 1945 film, *My Name Is Julia Ross*. Here, in homage, one of the characters is named Julie Rose, and another is called Joseph Lewis.

Penn had a good deal of fun with the thriller conventions, with Hitchcockian touches, a big, foreboding house, a severed finger, evil machinations under the guise of something innocent, blackmail, deceit, and an innocent heroine thrust into those evil doings. With atmospheric photography by Jan Weincke, you can practically feel the snow and cold, and the film builds up a nice head of creepy steam as it twists and turns to its conclusion – and that's all I'm saying. Steenburgen is ideal as the lady-in-distress (mainly – she plays another role at the beginning of the film, and a third one towards the end – and that's all I'm saying), and McDowell and Rubes are fun as – and that's all I'm saying. Go watch the movie if you want to know more – the less you know the more fun you'll have.

The reviews were mixed, but respectful – the New York Times' critic Janet Maslin wrote, "When a director approaches Gothic horror with this much enthusiasm, the results are bound to be as merry as they are frightening. So audiences for Arthur Penn's *Dead of Winter* are in for a hair-raising treat." And Roger Ebert wrote, "The movie itself is finally just an exercise in silliness – great effort

to little avail – but the actors have fun with it, the sets work and there are one or two mom-ents with perfect surprises."

For the film's score, Penn hired Richard Einhorn, a composer who straddled the worlds of classical and film music. Born in 1952, Einhorn studied with the wonderful American composer, Jack Beeson. His "opera with silent film," *Voices of Light*, was hailed as "a great masterpiece of contemporary music" and has had over 150 performances. Its CD (on Sony) was a *Billboard* classical best-seller. Prior to *Dead Of Winter*, he scored several films, including *Don't Go In The House*, *Eyes Of A Stranger*, and *The Prowler*, among others, and subsequent to *Dead Of Winter* he scored Bill Condon's cult film, *Sister, Sister*.

As it turned out, Einhorn was the ideal choice for Penn's film – the then-current vogue for thrillers, chillers, and horror back in the 1980s was an emphasis on synthesizers. Einhorn took the opposite approach, with wonderful, atmospheric scoring for a real orchestra consisting of piano, harp, reeds, strings, and percussion. His score is eerie, beautiful, suspenseful, and perfectly evokes the snowy New England setting.

Speaking about the score, Einhorn said, "It was fascinating to watch *Dead of Winter* change as Arthur Penn edited it, as it got better. From my standpoint, the project was interesting in two ways. First and foremost, Penn was one of the best directors I've worked with. He was amazing. I learned so much! He gave me virtually carte blanche to do what I wanted and used all the music exactly as intended (with one minor exception). I can't tell you how rarely that happens.

"The other thing about the score I remember were some nifty compositional techniques I tried out. I had been reading Erno Lendvai on Bartok. He's the fel-

low who claimed that Bartok used all sorts of mathematical ratios like the Golden Ratio (approximately 3:5) and the Fibonacci series in his music. Not only as large-form structure, but also to construct chords and progressions. I thought that was kind of neat, so I tried the same thing in my score to *Dead of Winter*. I got the film editor, Rick Shaine, to tell me the total length of the film and calculated the Golden Ratio. And so... Just before 3/5ths of the way through the film, I insisted we start a music cue. Up until then, all of the music was in G minor, and closely related keys. Then, exactly at the Golden Ratio, the music modulated very audibly to C# minor and stayed there until the final scene, when both the story and the music resolved. For the final shots, I wrote a shameless – but if I may so, rather elegant – progression reinterpreting the C# as the third of A, creating an easy V/V-V-i back to G minor and we hear Katie's theme, the innocent, simple piano melody. But even though it's the same music, it doesn't sound so innocent and wistful anymore: the horror of the C# music lingers in memory, and it now makes Katie's theme sound tragic and sad."

With *Dead Of Winter*, Richard Einhorn wrote one of the best thriller scores of the 1980s, and it's a pleasure to finally bring it to CD. And that's all I'm saying.

— Bruce Kimmel