

FEAR STRIKES OUT THE TIN STAR

1957 was an incredible year for Elmer Bernstein, a year in which he composed five major scores – *Drango*, *Men in War*, the classic *Sweet Smell of Success*, and the two scores contained on this CD – *Fear Strikes Out* and *The Tin Star*, both done for Paramount Pictures.

Fear Strikes Out was the true story of baseball's Jim Piersall (based on his autobiography, *Fear Strikes Out: The Jim Piersall Story*), who suffered from and overcame a complete nervous breakdown caused by the extreme and relentless pressure his never-satisfied father put on him to be the best of the best – from the time he was a young boy right up through his entering the major leagues. Beautifully directed by Robert Mulligan (his first film), with brilliant performances by Anthony Perkins as Piersall and Karl Malden as his father, the film is devastating, powerfully emotional, compassionate, and very moving. Perkins would, of course, go on to play the definitive disturbed person in *Psycho*, and Mulligan would go on to make a whole slew of great movies, including *The Rat Race*, *The Great Imposter*, *Love With The Proper Stranger*, *Up The Down Staircase*, *Summer of '42*, and, of course, his masterpiece, *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

The choice of Elmer Bernstein to score the film was serendipitous – Bernstein's and Mulligan's artistic temperaments were perfectly in synch and Bernstein would go on to score many films for him, including *The Rat Race*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Love With The Proper Stranger*, and *Bloodbrothers*. Bernstein's score for *Fear Strikes Out* really captures the film's myriad moods – from the elation of Piersall's baseball triumphs, to the dark road leading to his mental breakdown on the baseball field (an incred-

ible scene), to his rehabilitation, and, as always with Bernstein, he really understands how to make music coalesce with images and illuminate character and story – his music is timeless, perfect, and, all these decades later, still incredibly fresh.

The Tin Star was in a different world altogether – a western, also starring Anthony Perkins, this time alongside the great Henry Fonda. The director was Anthony Mann, who'd already made a string of classic westerns, including *Winchester 73*, *The Naked Spur*, *Bend of the River*, *The Man From Laramie* (all starring James Stewart), among others. The film is a character-driven drama about a former sheriff-now-bounty hunter named Morgan Hickman (Fonda) – when the sheriff of a town is killed, the green, inexperienced Perkins is appointed as a temporary replacement, a job he would like to make permanent. He asks Hickman to teach him the ropes. In so doing, Hickman is reminded why he once wore the tin star and in the process rediscovers the person he was. It's a fairly adult western, with its powerful portrayal of greed, racism, hate, violence, stupidity, and also human dignity. It's a wonderful film, produced for Paramount by Perlberg / Seaton, with a terrific script by Dudley Nichols, the great screenwriter of *Stagecoach*, *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, *The Bells of St. Mary's*, *The Big Sky*, *Prince Valiant*, and many others – the screenplay was nominated for an Academy Award. And one must also make mention of the beautiful black-and-white VistaVision photography of Loyal Griggs. And, of course, a world-class score by Elmer Bernstein.

Mann and Bernstein had worked together once before, on Mann's war film, *Men In War*, for

which Bernstein turned out a great score. Bernstein had done only one western prior to *The Tin Star* (*Drango*), but he would soon go on to become one of the most beloved composers of westerns in film history, with his classic scores for *The Magnificent Seven*, *The Comancheros*, *The Hallelujah Trail*, *The Sons of Katie Elder*, *The Scalphunters*, *True Grit*, *Big Jake*, *The Shootist*, and others. His "sound" is instantly recognizable, even in this early stage of his Western game. The score has all the things one has come to expect from a Bernstein western score – colorful Americana, great themes, all perfectly matched to the film.

Elmer Bernstein was one of a generation of composers who really understood the art of film scoring, and who took that art to new, unexpected, and brilliant heights. His body of work is breathtaking, unique, and eclectic – from the grandeur of *The Ten Commandments*, to the jazzy *The Man With The Golden Arm*, to the sensitive and lyrical *To Kill A Mockingbird* to the exciting *The Great Escape* to the big-as-all-outdoors *The Magnificent Seven*, to his late-in-life masterpieces *The Grifters* and *Far From Heaven*. His love of film music can be heard in every note of every score he wrote – there is a passion and intelligence that is unlike any other composer – he was as good as it gets.

— Bruce Kimmel