

# The Raven & An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe

## QUOTH THE RAVEN: NEVERMORE

By the time of 1963's *The Raven*, Roger Corman had already given the world such heady weird and wacky low-budget films as *It Conquered The World*, *Not Of This Earth*, *Attack Of The Crab Monsters*, *The Wasp Woman*, *A Bucket Of Blood*, and his classic shot-in-two-days *The Little Shop of Horrors*. In 1960, Corman made *House of Usher*, the first of his inspired-by Edgar Allan Poe films, and it was an exploitation sensation, playing to packed houses and packed cars at drive-ins. Knowing a good thing when he saw it, he followed with more inspired-by Poe films, including *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Premature Burial*, *Tales Of Terror*, *The Raven*, *The Haunted Palace*, *The Masque of the Red Death*, and *The Tomb of Ligeia*. These were all stylish horror films, but only one of them was an out-and-out comedy and that was *The Raven*.

With a screenplay by Richard Matheson (he wrote many of the Corman/Poe pictures, in addition to his classic novels *The Shrinking Man* and *I Am Legend*, both of which became films, the latter several times over, and then *Bid Time Return* and *What Dreams May Come*), and delectable performances by the likes of Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, and Boris Karloff (along with a young Jack Nicholson and a fetching Hazel Court), audiences expecting a horror film instead got a horror comedy, with an emphasis on the latter. It didn't matter that the emphasis was on the latter, because audiences still flocked to see it.

Beautifully shot in scope and color by Floyd Crosby, *The Raven* is a tale of three sorcerers – wizards and purveyors of magic – Price, Lorre, and Karloff. At the beginning of the film, Dr. Bedlo (Lorre) has been turned into the title character – a raven, transformed into such by Dr. Scarabus (Karloff), during what Bedlo describes as an unfair fight. He visits the home of Dr. Erasmus Craven, who is still grieving over the loss

of his dear wife Lenore. With the help of a magic potion, Craven restores Bedlo to his old self. From then, it's just a hop, skip, and a jump until they go visit Scarabus, accompanied by Bedlo's son (Nicholson) and Craven's daughter (Olive Sturgess). We get a wild carriage ride through the forest, Scarabus' foreboding castle, and the news that the lamented Lenore is, in fact, alive and well and living with Dr. Scarabus. The film ends with a very funny duel to the death magic act between the two sorcerers – Scarabus and Craven – as they try to outdo each other with single, double, and triple whammys. While all that is happening, poor Dr. Bedlo is once again turned into a raven. Craven prevails at the end of the duel of magic, and though Scarabus survives, he no longer can perform his bag of tricks. At the end, Bedlo implores Dr. Craven to restore him, but instead Craven simply says, "Quoth the raven – nevermore."

Adding to the fun of *The Raven* is the delightful score of Les Baxter, who did several of the Corman/Poe films. Baxter uses electronics as well as conventional orchestra, and the result is a really fun and interesting score that just propels the film along its merry way. His eerie electronica for the opening narration of the Poe poem is really effective, and his music for the battle of the sorcerers is classic Baxter, as his exhilarating music for the wild ride to Scarabus' castle.

For this release, the first ever for this music, only one tape could be found, the second of two reels. However, it was a full reel and contained music from not only the second part of the film but several cues from the first part. Taking our cue from the popularity of the La La Land release of Baxter's score from *X: The Man With The X-Ray Eyes*, which was the same situation – one tape, partial score – we decided that some *Raven* was better than no *Raven*, especially as we actually had a lot of music from the film and unlike the score to *X*, none of it was source music. So, with close to twenty-five minutes of original score, it's

actually a pretty good sampling of the film's music. We also include several of electronica cues as a bonus, bringing the total minutes closer to twenty-nine. The mono tape was in excellent shape.

## AN EVENING OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

In 1970, AIP produced a low-budget hour-long TV show called *An Evening Of Edgar Allan Poe*, starring Vincent Price doing solo recitations of four Poe stories: "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Sphinx," "The Cask Of Amontillado," and "The Pit and the Pendulum." For Price, the show was a tour-de-force and he gave a terrific performance in each of the stories – done very theatrically on sets. The show was shot on videotape and is thankfully available on DVD as the second half of a double bill (with *Tomb of Ligeia*). No one did this sort of thing better than Price and while the film itself isn't much to look at, Price most certainly is. The show was directed by Kenneth Johnson, whose second directorial assignment it was. After that, Johnson went on to a prolific career directing and producing television, and worked on such shows as *Adam 12*, *The Bionic Woman*, *The Incredible Hulk, V: The Original Miniseries*, *Alien Nation* (the latter four shows he also created), *JAG*, and many others, as well as the film *Short Circuit 2*.

Naturally, AIP turned to their favorite composer, Les Baxter, and he provided his usual excellent work and some of his most adventurous scoring – a little more atonal than he usually did, but some seriously great music. The show has a brief main and end title theme, and then four complete scores. This music was released on CD by Citadel, but we present it in better sound and in proper order, and include for the first time the main and end title, taken from the DVD release.

— Bruce Kimmel