
I have been tracing *Film Score Guides* since the series’ early beginnings in 2004. It has been almost fifteen years from the time when the first volume of these *film music* study handbooks appeared, and now the time has come to review the last contribution to this major undertaking. Mariana Whitmer’s *Elmer Bernstein’s The Magnificent Seven: A Film Score Guide* is the nineteenth book of the series and marks the completion of these all-inclusive analyses that contributed to a great extent in the expansion of the academic field of film musicology, i.e., the interdisciplinary study of music in cinema. As a Lecturer in the School of Music at the West Virginia University and an executive director for the Society for American Music who has also authored other texts focusing on the film scoring practices of the American western, Whitmer is an ideal author for this latest addition to the series.

John Sturges’ *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) is an old-style western, a remake of Akira Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai* (1954), featuring Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson, and Eli Wallach, and Bernstein’s score for the movie is considered one of the most emblematic soundtracks ever written for a classic American western film. The book begins with Whitmer’s notes on Bernstein’s inspired expression as an embodiment of his “authentic Americana” music style and a symbol of the synthesis between symphonic, modern, and folk music elements—extending, to a certain degree, the tradition of Aaron Copland’s idioms. It continues with an examination of previous Bernstein scores for other westerns, i.e., for the films *Battles of Chief Pontiac* (Felix E. Feist, 1952), *Drango* (Hall Bartlett and Jules Bricken, 1957), *The Tin Star* (Anthony Mann, 1957), and *Saddle the Wind* (Robert
Parrish, 1958), as well as for thirty-one episodes of the TV series Riverboat (1959-1960). By highlighting this succession of Bernstein's preliminary screen music, Whitmer provides a systematical framework for understanding both The Magnificent Seven's soundtrack but also the distinctive compositional qualities that would dominate the following films typical of the western genre.

Chapter 3 critically formulates the film's historical (cultural and political) context based on its production, post-production, and reception, while Chapter 4 prolongs the relevant discussion on how "the film's narrative validated the sense of American exceptionalism advocated in the face of advancing Communism" (55). In addition, the author highlights the debate of the use of The Magnificent Seven's main music theme in the advertising campaign concept of "Marlboro Country." The main part of the book features the scene-by-scene analysis of the soundtrack, in which Whitmer applies a semiotic-musicological approach to Bernstein's score by exploring all music and visual cues. This is the longest chapter of the volume but also the most demanding, as it contains more complex musicological terms, specifically perceptions and notation examples that could be quite difficult for an average, non-specialized reader to follow.

Whitmer ends up with an epilogue on the legacy of the unforgettable background music of the film that has been designated as one of the most distinguished film scores of all time by the American Film Institute. She also mentions the soundtrack of the renewed adaptation of The Magnificent Seven (Antoine Fuqua, 2017), which—although different from the earlier version's sound—still pays tribute to Bernstein's composition. In sum, Whitmer's book pursues the standard structure of other Film Score Guides and serves as a first-rate work of reference for Bernstein's legendary cinematic music, making it an appropriate end to this fascinating series.

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