

# The Strange Love of Martha Ivers

It was 1946 and film noir was everywhere, from low budget quickies to major studio releases. Of course, the studios didn't realize they were making films noir, since that term had just been coined in 1946 by French film critic, Nino Frank. The noirs of 1946 included: *The Killers*, *The Blue Dahlia*, *The Big Sleep*, *Gilda*, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, *The Stranger*, *The Dark Mirror*, *The Black Angel*, and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*.

*The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* was an "A" picture from Paramount, produced by Hal B. Wallis. It featured a terrific cast, including Barbara Stanwyck (who'd been in the classic noir, *Double Indemnity* two years prior), Van Heflin, smoky-voiced Elizabeth Scott, Judith Anderson, and, in his film debut, a young actor named Kirk Douglas. Also featured in a bit part was the director-to-be, Blake Edwards. The film was based on a short story called *Love Lies Bleeding* by playwright John Patrick (*The Hasty Heart*, *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, and the screenplays for *Three Coins in the Fountain*, *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*, *Some Came Running*), with a screenplay by Robert Rossen (*The Roaring Twenties*, *Body and Soul*, *All the King's Men*, *The Hustler*) and Robert Riskin (*It Happened One Night*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Lost Horizon*) (Riskin received no credit on the film). The director was the great Lewis Milestone (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Front Page*, *Rain*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Red Pony*, *Ocean's 11*, and the remake of *Mutiny on the Bounty*). The moody black-and-white photography was by Victor Milner (*Design for Living*, *Union Pacific*, *Reap the Wild Wind*, *The Furies*, *Dark City*).

As you might imagine from such a stellar cast and creative team, *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* is a terrific picture with wonderful dialogue, elegant direction, and great performances. But 1946 was an incredibly strong year for movies, with such smash hits as *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Yearling*, *Henry V*, *The Razor's Edge*, *Duel in the Sun*, *Brief En-*

*counter*, *The Jolson Story*, *Notorious*, *The Spiral Stair-case*, *Anna and the King of Siam*, and more, so it's no wonder that *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* got lost in the shuffle. It did manage to sneak in one Academy Award nomination for John Patrick (Best Writing, Original Story), but he lost to Clemence Dane for *Vacation from Marriage* (anyone heard of that one since?).

When Martha Ivers, young, orphaned heiress to a steel mill, is caught running away with her friend, she's returned home to her aunt, whom she hates. It's a fateful night that ends in murder. And in classic noir style, that one reckless moment infects everyone's lives. Threats of exposure, unhappy marriage, a domineering woman and the return of her childhood friend after eighteen years – it's noir, it's melodrama, and the whole film crackles with electricity. And perfectly capturing every mood, every character and every situation is the classic score by Miklós Rózsa.

Rózsa, born in 1907, had begun scoring films in 1937 with *Knight Without Armor*. By the time of *Martha Ivers* in 1946 he was a major film composer who'd already had nine Oscar nominations and one win (for Alfred Hitchcock's *Spell-bound*), which was pretty amazing for someone who'd been scoring films for less than a decade. His scores up to *Martha Ivers* ran the gamut through fantasy, spectacle, historical, romance, mystery, intrigue, and noir, and included such classics as *The Thief of Bagdad*, *The Jungle Book*, *Lydia*, *That Hamilton Woman*, *Five Graves to Cairo*, *Double Indemnity*, *The Lost Weekend* (the latter three for Billy Wilder), *Spellbound* and, the same year as *Martha Ivers*, *The Killers* (Oscar nomination once again). He would go on to score some of the greatest and most beloved films ever made, including *A Double Life*, *Brute Force*, *The Naked City*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, *Quo Vadis*, *Young Bess*, *Julius Caesar*, *Knights of the Round Table*, *Lust for Life* – to name only a handful. Then in 1959 he created his magnum opus, *Ben-Hur*, which was followed by an amazing array of scores throughout the 1960s

and into the 70s and 80s, including *King of Kings*, *El Cid*, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, *The V.I.P.s*, *The Power*, *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (for Wilder again), *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*, *Providence*, *Fedora* (Wilder again), *Last Embrace*, *Time after Time*, *Eye of the Needle*, *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid* and more. It's one of the most impressive filmographies of any film composer in history, and along the way he garnered an additional six Oscar nominations and another two wins.

The music for *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* is almost a second cousin to *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*, filled with the incredible Rózsa sound of that era. No one did this kind of thing better than Rózsa – he seemed to have a real affinity for these darker tales. The main title is everything a classic main title should be: It draws you in right from those great Rózsa-esque opening chords, introduces its beautiful main theme and then segues directly into the first cue for the young runaways. From there, Rózsa's music weaves its magic, perfectly capturing the film's moods, situations and characters as they travel their dark roads.

The surviving music from *Martha Ivers* was taken from a set of incredible-sounding acetates preserved in the Paramount vaults. It's almost fifty minutes of prime Rózsa and it's actually most of the score. Only two tracks had material that was beyond repair – one of those tracks was only twenty-four seconds long and the material contained therein was well represented elsewhere. For the other track, through careful editing, we were able to save ninety percent of it and again, the material that wasn't salvageable was represented elsewhere in the other cues.

Miklós Rózsa is in the pantheon of greats, and it's really gratifying to bring one of his classic noir scores to CD.

— Bruce Kimmel