

"HELLRAISER" & "HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II" (Soundtrack Review)

Written by Trevor Parker

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The year is 1987. Progressive horror author Clive Barker was nearing completion on his first feature as director, the cruel parable of cancerous, sado-masochistic love called HELLRAISER. Barker had enlisted underground Industrial duo Coil to provide a suitably sludgy and grinding musical accompaniment to his dark romance, but Coil soon called off their efforts over what was reportedly a mutual decision with Barker.

The story goes that producer Christopher Figg and Editor Tony Randel (who would go on to direct the sequel to HELLRAISER himself, re-hiring Young for scoring duties to boot) would urge Barker to consider rising composer Christopher Young (A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 2: FREDDY'S REVENGE) for the assignment. Young's resulting score is often described as a return to a 'traditional' style of horror music, and its lush textures and full-bodied orchestral sound are precisely what differentiate it and lift it to prominence when set amongst the vast majority of eighties' horror film music—take that to mean cheap, thin synth lines tooting and undulating away in the background of any number of budget-constricted fright flicks. With HELLRAISER, Young's bold and sumptuous themes brought aural scope and majesty back to scary little movies and managed to drape Barker's small, intimate film in velvet finery (Coil's abandoned music has since been released on disc as a curio, and turned out to be an interesting but simplistic effort that underscores the fact that Barker did indeed trade up by going with Young).

This month, Young's HELLRAISER and HELLBOUND: HELLRAISER II scores have been re-issued as a two-disc set from the Buysoundtrax.com label. All of the music that comprises this set has been released previously on other labels, although those discs have been out-of-print for ages and can be about as difficult to track down as a certain lacquered puzzle box. What this double album may lack in fresh, expanded or alternate cues, it makes up for in sheer dollar value as its price is that of a typical single score album. There is a lengthy new essay by writer Randall Larson included with the liner notes featuring a critical description of the two scores and their origins, as well as a few scattered interview snippets with Young.

Another benefit of employing orchestral over synth scores is that the former usually weathers age much better than the latter; such is most definitely the case when examining Young's

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HELLRAISER work twenty-five years later. The remaster is lovely and clear, and favorite passages sound fantastic, especially with what must be the series' most memorable cue—the evil, skewed waltz of 'Resurrection'. Other highlights have to be the dissonant, metallic gonging and tinkling chimes in "The Lament Configuration", and the chimes returning as a backwards-tape smear and leading into chugging percussion and brass (here veering awfully close to James Horner's score for ALIENS) during "Seduction and Pursuit". Also tasty is the despair and doom in "The Cenobites"; this sort of opaque, miserable atonality being Young's sonic representation of hell (and the music which he's most proud to have created, according to the liner notes).

Young's HELLBOUND comes with a wider sense of experimentation. Along with expected reprising and adjusting of themes from the first score, there are some truly freaky detours. Take the comically twisted carnival calliope and tuba in "Hall of Mirrors," or the brief spate of tribal rhythms and pulsing drum break in the cue "Looking Through a Woman." HELLBOUND's opening theme is grander but no improvement, as the addition of a soaring chorale and thundering tympani tipping things over the border and into the realm of Too Much. As a listening experience divorced from the films, the original's tighter focus and memorable melodies definitely beat HELLBOUND's weirder, more expansive digressions.

To fans who happen to own any of the older HELLRAISER albums, there honestly isn't much impetus to upgrade with the buysoundtrax set. For everyone else, this release is a bargain and a great excuse to finally own two classic and seriously influential scores on disc. One more thing: the set is limited to two thousand copies. If you miss out, please refrain from crying onto your keyboard—as a certain pin-adorned, paleface gentleman once opined, that's a waste of good suffering.

