

The Miracle Worker

William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker*, based on Helen Keller's autobiography, *The Story of My Life* began its journey in 1957 as a *Playhouse 90* live broadcast. The broadcast starred Teresa Wright as Helen's teacher, Annie Sullivan, and Patty McCormick as Helen, and was directed by Arthur Penn. Two years later, Gibson adapted his teleplay for the stage and *The Miracle Worker*, again directed by Arthur Penn, opened on Broadway at the Playhouse Theater on October 19, 1959. It was an unqualified smash, running 719 performances. The play version starred Anne Bancroft as Annie Sullivan and Patty Duke as Helen Keller, along with Torin Thatcher as Captain Keller, Patricia Neal as Kate Keller, and in support, James Congdon, Michael Constantine and Beah Richards. The play did well at the Tony Awards, winning for Best Play (over Lorraine Hansbury's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Gore Vidal's *The Best Man*, Paddy Chayefsky's *The Tenth Man* and Lillian Hellman's *Toys in the Attic*), Best Actress (Anne Bancroft), Best Direction, and Best Stage Technician. Surprisingly and somewhat shockingly, Patty Duke wasn't even nominated – she did, however, win a Theatre World award. Anne Bancroft was replaced during the long run by Suzanne Pleshette, but Patty Duke stayed for the entire run.

In 1962, *The Miracle Worker* came to the screen, once again adapted by William Gibson, directed by Arthur Penn and with Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke recreating their stage roles. Also in the cast were Victor Jory, Inga Swenson, Andrew Prine and Beah Richards. The film was a hit with critics and the praise was loud and long for Bancroft and Duke. Interestingly, the studio didn't really want either actress – according to legend, the studio would have provided a bigger budget for the film if Elizabeth Taylor played Annie Sullivan. And Duke, at fifteen, was considered too old to play Helen. Thank heaven Penn held firm about the cast, but because he did, the budget of the film was only around \$500,000.

1962 was certainly one of the greatest years in the history of cinema, with an amazing number of films that would go on to become movie classics. And *The Miracle Worker* is high on that list. It is a brilliantly directed film, with two of the greatest female performances ever captured on film. The Academy Awards thought so, too, rewarding Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke with Oscars for Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress (at the time, Duke was the youngest actress to ever win the award). Penn and Gibson were also nominated (but didn't take home the prize), as was Ruth Morley for

her costumes (she didn't win either). Not nominated at all was the film's composer, Laurence Rosenthal. One can't really argue with the five choices that were made for best original score that year – they included Maurice Jarre's *Lawrence of Arabia* (the winner), Bronislau Kaper's *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Franz Waxman's *Taras Bulba*, Jerry Goldsmith's *Freud*, and Elmer Bernstein's *To Kill a Mockingbird* – great scores all. But they should have created a sixth slot for Rosenthal, because his music for *The Miracle Worker* is a true masterpiece of film scoring.

Laurence Rosenthal was born November 24, 1926 and began scoring films in 1955 with a low budget (really low budget) programmer called *Yellowneck*. But he found steadier work on Broadway, writing incidental music for plays (*A Clearing in the Woods*, *Rashomon*, *Becket*), and doing dance arrangements for such Broadway musicals as *The Music Man*, *Goldilocks*, *Take Me Along*, and *Donnybrook!* But soon Hollywood came calling again, and in 1961 Rosenthal wrote a great score for the film version of *A Raisin in the Sun*. That was followed by his two brilliant scores for 1962 films: *The Miracle Worker* and *Requiem for a Heavyweight*. After that, he began a prolific film career, scoring such movies as *Becket*, *Hotel Paradiso*, and *The Comedians*, then moved into television where he was also very prolific, scoring any number of TV movies, episodic and mini-series, while still doing features. During the 60s he also found time to write a Broadway musical called *Sherry!*, the musical version of Kaufman and Hart's *The Man Who Came to Dinner*.

Rosenthal's score for *The Miracle Worker* is, to put it plainly, a miracle. His grasp of what makes *The Miracle Worker* tick and his ability to capture that in musical terms is uncanny. Beginning with the haunting main title as we meet Helen Keller and enter her dark world, and continuing through a series of cues that capture every nuance of character and drama – never overstating, always illuminating, and ultimately as moving a score as has ever been written. There are no words that can capture what Rosenthal achieves in the film's penultimate cue, "The Miracle/ The Keys," other than to say it is one of the greatest fusions of image and music and emotion ever created. It is the key reason that sequence is one of the most emotional ever put on film – there is never a dry eye as the music swells and Annie Sullivan shouts, "She knows, she knows." It is, and forgive the hyperbole, one of the greatest moments in all of film.

The Miracle Worker has been released twice before on CD – once on a composer promo and once by Intrada. The latter edition sold out very quickly. It's always a tough call when doing a rerelease of a limited edition title, but in the case of *The Miracle Worker* there was no question – the music deserves to be heard by the widest audience possible and because of its quick sellout it never really had a chance beyond the film music collector market. For this release, we have done what we hope are some improvements to the sound. The previous releases both had kind of a reverby faux stereo spread that wasn't part of the original session sound - we've gone back to the basics as there was nice room ambience in the original recordings and the score takes on a more immediate sound without the extra reverb. On the previous releases there was a tape crimp problem in the opening notes of the main title – we've happily fixed that, and we've fixed a few other dropouts and other anomalies. Also, we include two bonus tracks that were not on either CD. Unfortunately, the sound is not optimal but we felt that the music is so good in those two cues (one of which, as you'll hear, was obviously rescored for the film as it differs from the originally recorded cue) that we hope you'll forgive the not-so-hot sound just to hear more of this incredible score.

The Miracle Worker has had a strong life after the film version. It's been filmed for TV twice now – first in 1979 with Patty Duke playing Annie Sullivan and Melissa Gilbert as Helen, and then by the Disney Channel in 2000, with Alison Elliot as Annie and Hallie Kate Eisenberg as Helen. There was a 1984 made for TV sequel called *Helen Keller: The Miracle Continues*, which starred Blythe Danner as Annie and Mare Winningham as Helen. And in 2010 there was a Broadway revival starring Alison Pill as Annie and Abigail Breslin as Helen. In 1982, playwright William Gibson wrote his own sequel called *Monday After the Miracle*, which was directed by Arthur Penn and starred Jane Alexander as Annie and Karen Allen as Helen. It opened on Broadway at the Eugene O'Neill Theater and closed after only four performances. It was turned into a TV movie in 1998, which starred Roma Downey as Annie and Moira Kelly as Helen.

But it's the 1962 film version that is indelibly etched into memory – those performances, that direction, and that amazing score by the amazing Laurence Rosenthal.

— Bruce Kimmel