

GAILY, GAILY

THE NIGHT THEY RAIDED MINSKY'S

“In 1925,
there was this real
religious girl”

The end of the 1960s brought a lot of changes in the movie business. Even before the release of *Easy Rider* in 1969, styles were changing, audiences were changing, young people wanted films that spoke to them and old-fashioned films were, well, old-fashioned. So, it's interesting that Norman Jewison, who'd come off an amazing string of hits, all modern-day and topical, including *The Cincinnati Kid*, *The Russians Are Coming*, *The Russians Are Coming*, *In The Heat Of The Night*, and *The Thomas Crown Affair*, would then choose to make *Gaily, Gaily*, a nostalgic story set in 1910 Chicago, which recounts the fictional coming-of-age memoirs of writer Ben Hecht, as he takes his first steps toward being a journalist and author. The story of this innocent, who is robbed upon arriving in Chicago, and who ends up living in a house of ill repute and having all sorts of adventures, well, it didn't exactly speak to the young audiences of the time. And yet, a year later, young director William Friedkin made his second film, *The Night They Raided Minsky's*, a film that, while entertaining, also didn't really speak to young audiences of the time, and yet that film did achieve success and fared well with critics, which is more than you can say for *Gaily, Gaily*, which didn't do well at the box-office or with critics. Which proves, as William Goldman says, no one knows anything.

Gaily, Gaily certainly had the makings of a hit – a terrific cast including young Beau Bridges, Brian Keith, Hume Cronyn, Melina Mercouri, and a very young Margot Kidder, along with a large cast of wonderful character actors. The whole look and sound of the film were wonderful – in fact, the film garnered three Academy Award nominations: Best Art Direction, Best Costumes, and Best Sound. But in the end, the film felt very episodic, frenetic, and, yes, old-fashioned. But with actors such as these, much of it still managed to be entertaining.

The one area where it succeeded perfectly was in its score by Henry Mancini. By this time, Mancini was already a legend. After toiling in the music department at Universal (the highlight of his tenure there would be Orson Welles' *Touch Of Evil*), he hit it big, first with his TV score to *Peter Gunn* – which not only provided that Blake Edwards series with its signature sound, but which also produced a best-selling album on RCA – and then in a series of films for which he provided amazing scores, one right after another – *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, *Charade*, *Hatari*, *The Pink Panther*, *Days Of Wine and Roses*, and many others. Many of those films also produced best-selling albums. Mancini not only knew how to score a film perfectly, but he was one of the great melodists and each of his scores was jam-packed with one memorable tune after another. His songs from films received many Academy Award nominations, and he won back-to-back statuettes for “Moon River” and “Days Of Wine And Roses.”

Mancini's score for *Gaily, Gaily* is short but perfect. As was his wont, the soundtrack album was, in fact, a rerecording – it featured all the themes from the film, but not the actual score tracks from the film. The main theme, “Tomorrow Is My Friend” (with lyrics by Marilyn and Alan Bergman) is one of his most sublime and haunting melodies, and Jimmie Rodgers' performance of it in both film and on the album is wonderful. The other themes are pure Mancini and a great deal of fun. As a wonderful bonus, the album gave us Melina Mercouri's recitation of “Christmas Eve On Skid Row” with Mancini's underscore.

The Night They Raided Minsky's was a troubled film. Bert Lahr, one of its key players, died before shooting was finished. The first cut was, by all accounts, dreadful – according to the film's editor, Ralph Rosenblum, David Picker, head of United Artists, having seen the first cut, said, “In all my years in film, this is the worst first cut I've ever seen.” It was left to editor Rosenblum, to try to save it. His “save” was detailed in his fine book *When The Shooting Stops... The Cutting Begins*. Friedkin wasn't around for any of the post-production, having moved on to his next film. The original idea from producer Norman Lear was that he wanted this old-fashioned musical – about an innocent Amish girl who comes to New York in 1925, gets involved with a burlesque troupe at Minsky's Burlesque, and ends up inadvertently inventing the striptease – to have a New Look. Just what that meant or what the New Look was supposed to be, nobody quite knew.

So, Rosenblum began refashioning the film, using a clever device of stock footage that would lead into the production footage, rearranging and restructuring scenes, and spending a year doing so – the result was stylish and visually interesting and it transformed the film from disaster into a hit.

The score for *Minsky's* was written by Charles Strouse, who'd already written several Broadway shows, as well as the score for the film *Bonnie and Clyde*. The lyrics were by Lee Adams, with whom Strouse had written the Broadway shows *Bye Bye Birdie*, *All-American*, *Golden Boy*, *It's A Bird, It's A Plane*, *It's Superman* and others. He and Adams provided some clever and catchy songs, and Strouse's other themes for the film are clever and catchy, too. Plus, we get vocals by the likes of Rudy Vallee, Dexter Maitland, Lillian Heyman, and the film's stars, Jason Robards and Norman Wisdom.

The LP presentation of *Gaily, Gaily* was assembled by Mancini with his customary good taste, and since the album presentation in no way resembles the music as heard in the film, we left it as he assembled it. The album masters were in excellent condition. The LP of *Minsky's* was never a great-sounding album, and it, for me, was oddly put together, opening with a LeRoy Holmes-produced version of the main theme rather than opening as the film did, with the “Overture and Introduction.” In fact, the two LeRoy Holmes' arranged and conducted tracks are not in the film at all. I took the liberty of moving a few tracks around and making the CD more like the film because I felt it better represented the score. Our mastering engineer, James Nelson, has done all he can to make it sound as good as possible given the quality of the original masters.

Having worked briefly with Henry Mancini (and what a wonderful man he was) when we issued *The Molly Maguires* on CD (on the Bay Cities label), and having worked with Charles Strouse and recorded quite a few of his songs over the years, I couldn't be more pleased than to offer these two scores on one CD. Mr. Mancini, meet Mr. Strouse – Mr. Strouse, meet Mr. Mancini – and thanks for the melodies.

— Bruce Kimmel