

# How Green Was My Valley

In the spring of 1942, *How Green Was My Valley* had the misfortune to beat *Citizen Kane* for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science's 1941 Best Picture award. Initial triumph turned, in the fullness of time, into liability as generations of cineastes arrived to point to *How Green* as the "conventional," "sentimental," "Hollywood" choice: a sadly typical Academy snub of the daring, ground-breaking Kane.

As a long-time participant in this argument—and one who has, moreover, switched sides—it's hard for this writer to refrain from getting personal. But truly, there's no need: if ever there were an apples-and-oranges comparison, it is the one between *Citizen Kane* and *How Green Was My Valley*. Kane is an impudent original, *How Green* the full flowering of a tradition. The genuinely remarkable thing is that both were produced under the studio system in the same miraculous year, 1941, along with the likes of *High Sierra*, *The Lady Eve*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *Suspicion*, and *Dumbo*. All this, and more, with the world at war—it's enough to make a movie-lover weep.

But the charges that *How Green Was My Valley* is somehow a standard-issue ear of Hollywood corn require some addressing. Based on Richard Llewellyn's beloved 1939 novel, the film—directed by the one, the only John Ford from a screenplay by that pro's pro, Philip Dunne—is certainly emotional, focusing as it does on the hard-scrabble life of a large, loving turn-of-the-20th-century family exposed to change and loss in a Welsh coal-mining village. Darryl F. Zanuck, the head of Twentieth Century Fox—who claimed the producing credit, as he did here, only on those pictures he considered top of the line—perfectly summed-up *How Green* as "a great, human, warm story about real living people."

It was Zanuck who suggested that the story be told from the point of view of Huw, the youngest Morgan child, poignantly played by Roddy McDowall. Through Huw's innocent eyes, we see the shadows creeping over his traditional community: the pain inflicted by industrialization, over-zealous religiosity, and oligarchical exploitation of the workers. At times, the shadow is literal, as when we see the rolling contours of the village despoiled by the mine's ever-growing slag heaps; here, in particular, the genius of the studio system comes into play, giving us a Welsh mining hamlet constructed on the Fox Ranch in the hills of Malibu (remnants of which can be seen today in Malibu Creek State Park) that is a marvel, first, of beauty, and then a chilling monument to loveliness defiled.

Add to all this a fervent defense of unionization—without which the older Morgan sons are heartbreakingly forced to emigrate to America, breaking up the family forever—and it becomes clear that *How Green Was My Valley* is far from conventional. If that weren't enough, there is the film's love story, a tale of frustration, denial, longing, and regret, interwoven with a passionate condemnation of religious fanaticism. Angharad Morgan (the sublimely ardent Maureen O'Hara) adores the ascetic yet attractive village pastor, Mr. Gruffydd (the austere Walter Pidgeon); he returns her feelings in his careful way, but feels he can't submit her to the arduousness of a minister's life. She marries the wealthy, horrid son of the mine owner, jumping up in class, but can't forget her first love; although they are innocent in deed, both Angharad and Gruffydd are condemned by local church wardens, led by the vicious Mr. Parry (Arthur Shields). The pull between the two doomed lovers is hardly sentimental: it is, rather, a wrenching agony.

What we have in *How Green Was My Valley* is, in fact, the opposite of sentimental or conventional. It offers, instead,

real, hard, genuine anguish that is, often, tormentingly beautiful. Director Ford, with his sterling cinematographer Arthur C. Miller, gave us the basics, but for ultimate support, studio chief Zanuck turned to the *ne plus ultra* head of the Fox music department, Alfred Newman. In 1941, Newman had been at Fox for just a year (poached by Zanuck from Sam Goldwyn in 1940); he would continue at the studio for another two decades, demonstrating his incomparable gifts as a composer, a conductor, an administrator, and a mentor for new talent (including the likes of Hugo Friedhofer—one of the orchestrators for *How Green Was My Valley*—Bernard Herrmann, David Raksin, Alex North, Jerry Goldsmith, and John Williams).

Habitually—with his biggest fan, Zanuck, urging him on—Newman would serve as composer or musical director on Fox's most prestigious films (in 1941, he worked in one or the other capacity on no less than 16 movies). His friend, colleague, and protégé, David Raksin, noted that composing was in some sense anathema to the gregarious Newman; he described it as "sitting in a room, wearing out pencils." Although a sublime composer—as his nine Oscar wins and astonishing 45 nominations will attest—he preferred conducting, at which he excelled to a degree unequalled by any other Hollywood musician. As Raksin put it, there was in Newman's "conducting style a mixture of sentiment and romantic turbulence, of precision and passionate intensity that is next to impossible to duplicate." This *rubato* style is in full evidence here, in Newman's score for *How Green Was My Valley*.

This is a score based on a number of traditional melodies, many of them Welsh—appropriately so, given that one of the film's plot points revolves around the village's choir performing for Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. The picture opens, in fact, with the Tudor Williams Choir's ren-

dition of “Men of Harlech” (“Main Title”), a military tune traditionally said to describe events during the seven-year siege of the Welsh Harlech Castle between 1461 and 1468, the longest-known siege in the history of the British Isles. The song was also featured, famously, in *Zulu* (1964).

Here, too, throughout the score, is the sturdy Welsh hymn, “Cwm Rhondda,” (“The Strike,” “Dad and Huw”) written by John Hughes (1873-1932), and a popular religious tune in both Welsh and English (where it is commonly known as “Guide Me, O Thou Great Redeemer”). If you are an Anglican, a Methodist, or an enthusiast of church music, you have no doubt heard this song. Notably, the composer, Hughes, worked in his youth in a colliery—a coal mine.

But perhaps the most significant traditional tune utilized by Newman in his magnificent score is “The Sixpence,” generally agreed to be not a Welsh, but an Irish folk song. As the great musicologist Tony Thomas has said, “the melody is so effective, so touching, and so suitable that it is almost ungrateful to criticize.” Conductor John Mauceri (who has led some stunning versions of *How Green’s* score in concert) makes special mention of the tune’s “‘blue note’, the flatted seventh.” And Glynne Jones, Chorus Master of the Pendyrus Male Choir, adds that “Of course this note, like the minor mode in Wales, pulls at the heartstrings. The flatted seventh: we have a special word for it in Wales—*hiraeth*—and *hiraeth* means ‘longing.’ It’s a longing where sentiment and feeling pulls and pulls. And you get it, of course, in all these lovely love songs where you talk about unrequited love.” This air, heard throughout the score (perhaps most poignantly in “Love Denied”), may be the most wrenching depiction of romance unfulfilled, of love lost, in Hollywood musical history. Listen to those *rubato* strings—and try not to cry.

Beyond the traditional—but within the

tradition—the score for *How Green Was My Valley* is a thing of marvels. “Huw’s Theme”—another oft-heard gem in this score—is a mélange of emotional strings and choir that represents the springing youth and optimism of the film’s innocent protagonist. But here, too, are the powerful narrative support of “The Strike,” “Mother and Huw in Broken Ice,” “The Mine Tragedy,” and “Morgan Is Discharged.” Newman doesn’t look away from the tragic, but gives us a potent sense of the darkness that gradually envelops the film’s beloved Welsh valley.

Curiously, although Newman was one of the ten Academy Award nominees for *How Green Was My Valley*, he didn’t win for Best Score. That honor went to Bernard Herrmann—but not, more curiously still, for his score for *Citizen Kane*. Herrmann was singled out for his score for *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (*All That Money Can Buy*)—this idiosyncratic composer’s one and only Oscar win. Herrmann’s career would go on to flourish at Fox, largely thanks to the support of Alfred Newman.

Newman would, of course, flourish, too—on his very own hook. In the words of film music restoration specialist and producer *extraordinaire* Nick Redman, “The legacy of Alfred Newman and his influence on the language of music for the cinema is practically unmatched by anyone in Hollywood history. As an executive, he was hard but fair. As a mentor to his staff he was revered. The orchestras under his baton delighted in his abilities as a conductor. The music he himself composed, often under extreme emotional duress, is among the most gorgeous ever written...Not big in physical stature, he was a giant in character, a titan of the world he loved and dominated. He was a true musical force, and one that cannot in any sense be replaced.”

—Julie Kirgo

## About This Release

The previous Arista CD release of *How Green Was My Valley*, which has been out-of-print for many, many years, was almost but not quite complete. The previous release was taken from a premixed and assembled 1/4” element that had been retained by Len Engel. This new Kritzerland edition comes from Fox’s archival 1/4” rolls made in the 1980s off the first generation optical film, and was newly restored, mixed, and assembled, allowing for the opening up of many of the cues that had previously been combined together. Most of the cues were recorded with separate close-up and long shot perspectives, allowing for the creation of a stereo presence. Other cues were recorded with monaural sound only. The score is presented chronologically, with mono and stereo material indexed separately. The sound is much improved save for only two cues, the main and end title, which were available to us only in the condition they were in. Happily, the main title is very short and is completely vocal with no orchestra – once that’s done we settle in to the beautiful, lush, rich sound that was a Fox and Alfred Newman trademark. As a bonus we present the end title in stereo without the vocal.

— Bruce Kimmel