

The Trial

“IT'S BEEN SAID THAT THE LOGIC OF THIS STORY IS THE LOGIC OF A DREAM... A NIGHTMARE.”

“Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning.”

Thus begins Franz Kafka's novel, *The Trial*, originally published in 1925. In 1962, Orson Welles brought *The Trial* to the screen in what he himself called “the best film I ever made.” Whether one agrees with that assessment or not, *The Trial* is Welles at his Wellesiest, with brilliant imagery and atmosphere so thick you can cut it with a knife. Filmed in gorgeous black-and-white by Edmond Richard (he'd also do Welles' *Chimes At Midnight*), featuring a screenplay by Welles, and incredible performances by Anthony Perkins as the persecuted Joseph K., Romy Schneider, Welles, Jeanne Moreau, Akim Tamiroff, and Elsa Martinelli, *The Trial* truly captures the Kafka spirit while also being uniquely Wellesian.

The film begins with Welles narrating over shots of a pin screen. It's a classic Welles opening that sets the tone for the film completely:

“Before the law, there stands a guard. A man comes from the country, begging admittance to the law. But the guard cannot admit him. Can he hope to enter at a later time? ‘That is possible,’ says the guard. The man tries to peer through the entrance. He had been taught that the law should be accessible to every man. ‘Do not attempt to enter without my permission,’ says the guard. ‘I am very powerful. Yet I am the least of all the guards. From hall to hall, door after door, each guard is more powerful than the last.’ By the guard's permission, the man sits down by the side of the door, and there he waits. For years, he waits. Everything he has he gives away in the hope of bribing the guard, who never fails to say to him ‘I take what you give me only so that you will not feel that you have left something undone.’ Keeping his watch during the long years, the man has learned to know even the fleas on the guard's fur collar, and growing child-ish in old age, he begs the fleas to persuade the guard to change his mind and allow him to enter. His sight has dimmed, but in the darkness he perceives a radiance

streaming immortally from the door of the law. And now, before he dies, all he's experienced condenses into one question, a question he's never asked. He beckons to the guard. Says the guard, ‘You are insatiable! What is it now?’ Says the man, ‘Every man strives to attain the law. How is it then that in all these years, no one else has ever come here, seeking admittance?’ His hearing has failed, so the guard yells into his ear. ‘No one else but you could ever have obtained admittance. No one else could enter this door. This door was intended only for you. And now, I am going to close it.’ This tale is told during the story called *The Trial*. It's been said that the logic of this story is the logic of a dream... a nightmare.”

We then go to the cramped, claustrophobic room of Joseph K., who is awakened by the police and told he must stand trial, although he is not told what he is being accused of. What follows is indeed a nightmare of paranoia and persecution, along with unexpected moments of Wellesian humor. It is an astonishing film, where every component comes together to create a world that is bleak, desolate, and ultimately futile.

DISCOVERING THE TRIAL

I first discovered Welles' *The Trial* at a sneak preview in Los Angeles. It previewed at a local art house movie theater and I was completely mesmerized by it – in fact, I had never seen a film like it before, but then again, I was only fourteen at the time. Everything about it was slightly off-kilter and weird and when the film opened a few weeks later I was back again, and returned several more times over its two week run. Mind you, at fourteen I'd never heard of *Citizen Kane*, and had yet to discover the wonders of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *The Lady From Shanghai*, *Touch Of Evil*, or any of Welles' other films. So, *The Trial* was my introduction to Welles, and though I've since seen and loved most of his films, for me *The Trial* will always remain my favorite and a film that I never tire of watching. I don't know why such a film would even appeal to a fourteen-year-old, but it did and it haunted me through the years, until I finally purchased a 16mm print in the 1970s.

One of the elements that contributes heavily to the atmosphere and feeling of the film is the score by Jean Ledrut, using both orig-

inal music and adaptations of Tomaso Albinoni's stunning and iconic “Adagio in G minor.” Ledrut only scored a handful of films, including Abel Gance's 1960 film *The Battle of Austerlitz*. It is that film that gave Ledrut his only real bout of celebrity, when he sued writer/producer Joe Meek, claiming that his hit song “Telstar” was plagiarized from Ledrut's “Le Marche d'Austerlitz” from the Gance film. That suit tied up Meek's royalties for years, until, in fact, three weeks after Meek's death, when Meek finally prevailed as he'd not been aware of *The Battle Of Austerlitz* because the film hadn't been released in the UK until 1965.

Ledrut's score relies heavily on variations of the Albinoni “Adagio,” as well as some wonderfully atmospheric original cues. There are several jazz-flavored pieces, as well (played by the great jazz pianist and composer Martial Solal, he of *Breathless* fame), and it all works splendidly, especially as a listening experience.

I was very obsessed with this music when I saw the film. We had a French bookstore near where I lived and they carried lots of French EPs, including soundtracks, and one day I was thrilled to find the EP of *The Trial*. Prior to that, I'd bought a recording of the Albinoni “Adagio” but it wasn't as good as the one in the film so that's the one I really wanted. That EP gave me much pleasure over the years, but I was sorry that there wasn't a full LP done. Only there was. In the mid-1970s, a friend finally scored one in a European soundtrack auction and surprised me with it on a birthday. I couldn't believe it, after all those years, I finally had forty minutes of *The Trial*.

It's been a long journey, but here, finally, on CD for the first time, is *The Trial*. It is mastered from a quarter-inch tape source and the sound was excellent.

— Bruce Kimmel