

# THE SOUND TRACK

In a film so typical of elements that its production company claims are needed to "add something permanent to the cultural treasure-house of civilisation", it is not surprising that the music tracks for *Quo Vadis* abound in heavenly choirs, mushy orchestrations and shattering trumpets. It is not generally known that the whole of the music for this film was recorded at Elstree Studios, with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the B.B.C. Choir. Miklos Rozsa, the composer, worked here for many years and wrote the music for such films as *South Riding*, *The Divorce of Lady X* and *The Four Feathers*; he came to this country again to record his latest score, and his assistant was Marcus Dods, now chorus master at Sadlers Wells theatre. J. B. Smith and Ted Drake were responsible for the balance and recording, under the supervision of A. W. Watkins.

Seven scenes are represented on two records (M.G.M. 460-61), taken direct from the sound track. The *Prelude* starts with a furious brass fanfare, and is followed almost at once by the choir singing "Quo Vadis, Domine?" which, conveniently, is translated and serves as a kind of English-Latin counterpoint. After some development, the orchestra takes up a few bars of a heavy rhythmic accompaniment, leading into the first scenes of Roman soldiers on the march. *Syrian Dance* begins with a wistful melody on *cor anglais*, then taken up by the flute with an intriguing percussion accompaniment. It has some interesting examples of pseudo-period atmosphere in the resultant orchestration and, like other sections of the film, cannot resist a crescendo finale. *Siciliana Antique* is perhaps the most interesting item, dominated by drum rhythms, sudden cymbal crashes and an ingenious use of bagpipes which are employed to create an impression of martial music of the Roman era. *Hymn of the Vestal Virgins* is a screaming, over-played piece of bombastic nonsense.

The scene of *Petronius' Meditation and Death* gives us Rozsa in melodic mood, as distinct from the Romanesque of the other extracts. An Elgar-ish dignity is suggested by the opening string theme, but over-orchestration soon destroys the mood. *Miracle* and *Finale* are a matter of reducing the volume and standing well back: the heavenly choir to end (one hopes) all heavenly choirs. The beginning is a pleasant melody for strings and wordless voices, interspersed with woodwind and brass phrases. An attractive *cor anglais* setting picks up the theme, and the choir enters, chanting and singing the original "Quo Vadis, Domine?" phrase of the *Prelude*. Suddenly the jubilant voices are hushed as they recite "I am the Way, the Truth and the Light . . ." whereupon the full force of over 200 voices, full orchestra, peals of bells, chants of "Hallelujah!" and *double forte* brass fanfares is unleashed to bring the recording to an overwhelming conclusion.

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