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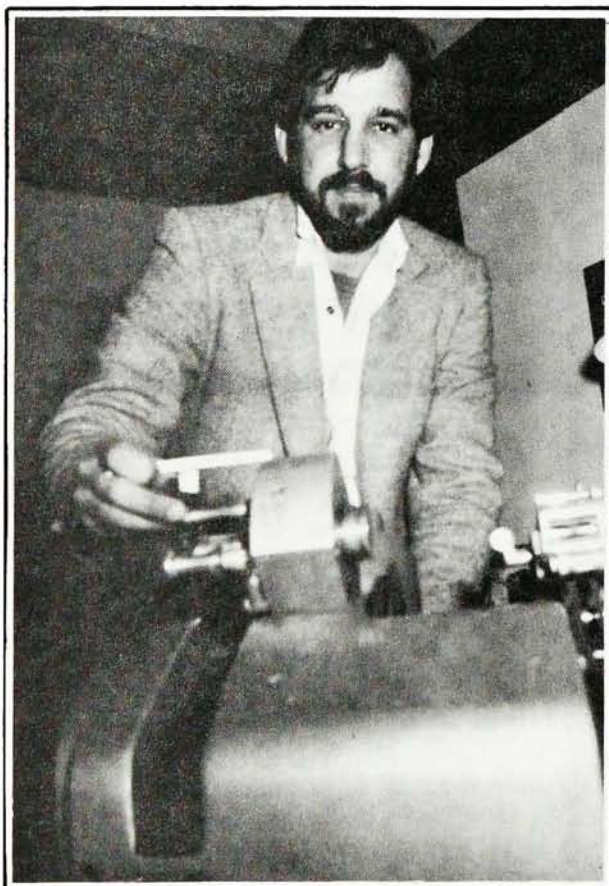
# **zaza and zittler**

# **different schools**

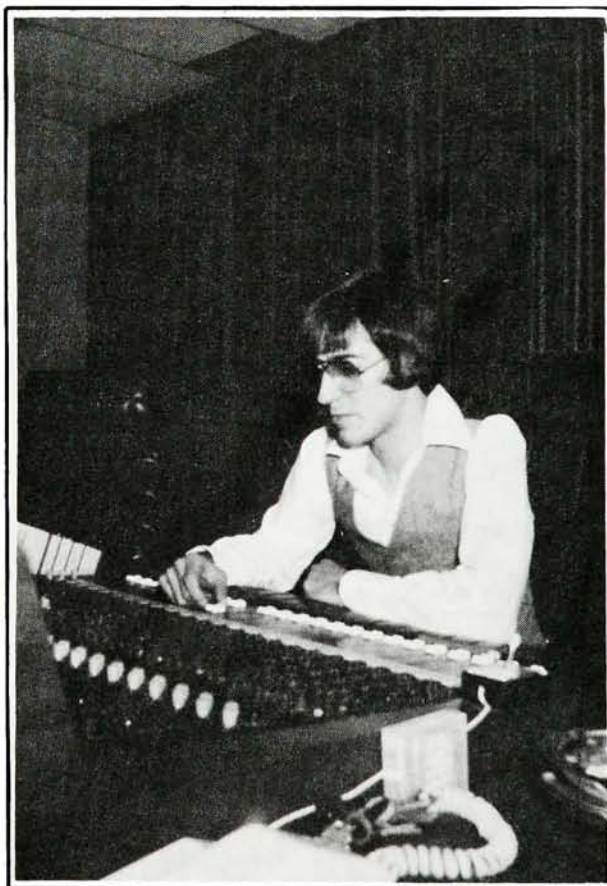
# **together**

by paul costabile

Combining musical talents has proven a worthwhile venture for composers Paul Zaza and Carl Zittler. In writing the score for the suspense thriller *Murder By Decree* they discovered that two heads were better than one. Now, they are tête-à-tête on *Prom Night*.



Composer Carl Zittler, who, with Paul Zaza composed the music for *Murder By Decree* (photo: Paul Costabile)



Composer Paul Zaza playing with sound on his console (photo: Paul Costabile)

Editing music for film isn't like performing, or writing for the concert hall or stage. It's an unrecognized aspect of movies that consist of long hours in editing rooms, like the one in the Pathé studios in downtown Toronto, where Carl Zitrter is busily working as the music editor for **Mary and Joseph**, Eric Till's upcoming Christmas film. It's the skilful manipulation of recording techniques and sophisticated equipment, like the control board in Paul Zaza's unpretentious but well-equipped studio on Scarlett Road in the city's west end. Film music is the complex creation of a final entity that often only touches the audience at a subconscious level, yet it is a vital part of the film. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Bob Clark's highly successful **Murder by Decree**, the product of a rather unique collaboration between two composers who, though from differing backgrounds and education, "went to different schools together," as Carl Zitrter puts it.

Zitrter came to films through theatre in his native Miami. "Whenever there were band contests, soloists needing piano accompaniment at school, or the theatre needing music for their shows, I was there. When I went to the University of Miami, I got more involved in theatre, and became musical director for productions like **The Three-penny Opera**, Brendan Behan's plays, Broadway stuff they'd bring in. I'd be the rehearsal pianist, and half the time I'd be the pit conductor as well. At that time, I became fascinated with how one could affect a dramatic scene with music." With this perception, so central to the film composer's art, Carl broke into pictures with his university friend Bob Clark, in a low budget horror item called **Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things**. It was the beginning of a working relationship that still continues.

Paul Zaza, on the other hand, seemed destined for a career in music almost from birth. His father, Jack Zaza, is a long-established and incredibly versatile musician, for nearly thirty years a respected figure in the studio. Paul's introduction to music was, in his words, "absorbed through osmosis. As a four-year-old kid, hearing him practicing in the other room, practicing all the time on so many instruments, I naturally absorbed it, because I was around it." By the time he was thirteen he was a full-fledged professional, with his own growing skill on several instruments. His practical experience was supplemented with a solid grounding in theory and composition under Samuel Dolin at the Royal Conservatory of Music. Sustaining an interest in recording techniques since high school, Zaza opened his own production facility in 1972.

"I sort of fell into films," he elaborates. "No one taught me how to write scores; I learned by reading books like the Earl Hagen book on scoring for films, and other books that I've acquired, like Henry Mancini's. Mostly it was working here in the studio, with people like Ricky Hyslop, John Mills-Cockell, Eric Robertson, Lucio Agostini... people whose films I played on. And the late Morris Surdin, who was, by my standards, one of the most brilliant film

composers around. Morris taught me a lot without knowing it. I just watched him, kept my eyes and ears open and just absorbed it."

The first film for which he wrote the score was called **You'll Never Miss It**, which, he points out, was true to its name. "It was horrible, a real B movie. I think the whole budget was \$3,000, everything. I made a lot of mistakes, and I sure learned in a hurry! It was a good picture to learn on, because it didn't matter, there was no pressure. Thank God for it though, because if it hadn't been for that I'd never have known what to do when I got to **Murder by Decree**."

A chance meeting at a New Year's Eve party with singer Jim Claverhill led to Paul's first really major assignment, the Bob Iveson/Les Rose/Richard Gabourie production **Three Card Monte**. Claverhill, who had a small part in the movie, had written the songs, and Zaza provided the backgrounds.

Meanwhile, Carl Zitrter and Bob Clark had established themselves in Canada, where they made the seldom seen **The Night Walk** (also known as **Dead of Night** and **Deathdream**, regarded by critic Robin Wood as one of the better, early 70's horror films), and **Black Christmas**, which gave them some visibility in the marketplace. **Murder by Decree** was, however, something of a change of pace for them. A striking period piece which brought together Sherlock Holmes and Jack The Ripper, it was

## 1979

ANATOMY OF A SEDUCTION (CBS)

KLONDIKE FEVER

TUKIKI (CBC)

THIS IS MY ISLAND (CBC)

AN AMERICAN CHRISTMAS CAROL (ABC)

IMAGES OF IRELAND

MUSIC BY

*Hagood Hardy*

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*Paul Costabile is a Toronto librarian who went to high school with Paul Zaza. He is a collector of soundtracks and other movie memorabilia, and writes the In Release column for **CineMag**.*

more suspense than horror, with a strong political-romantic tone.

When Paul Zaza joined the project, he and Zittler concocted an experiment in sound, which, though not generally recognized, was one of the keys to the achievement of the film's atmosphere of fear and conspiracy.

Carl Zittler explains how the style of music used in **Murder by Decree** was influenced by the style of the prophetic, American composer Charles Ives. "Ives conceived of music as basic sound, building emotional sound upon emotional sound, a sort of layering effect. He created sound pictures at first glance, without seeming to pay too much regard to the accepted rules of music. But it might be more accurate to say that it was a great skilful bending, and imaginative use of the so-called accepted, Western rules of music and harmony. This type of musical approach seems to me to be particularly applicable to film. You might be scoring a particular scene, but because it's a piece of drama, there are other things going on at the same time. The mixture of the sound with the action is what makes for the drama."

As applied in this picture, the music's sense of dislocation was used to insinuate the Ripper's madness, and the conspiracy he represented: to make him always impending. "It created a sense that you never knew exactly where or when he was going to strike."

Zaza elaborates on how his collaboration with Zittler worked. "I wrote the music, all of it. Carl took the music, and did some very beautiful, very creative things with it. We talked about this a lot in a little house in Dorking, England. We'd decided to do it in layers, sort of multilayered pyramids. It was my music, but it was also Carl manipulating it, elongating it, squashing it sonically... He'd speed it up, slow it down, adding echo, adding echo to echo. It was all that permutating, I think, that made it work."

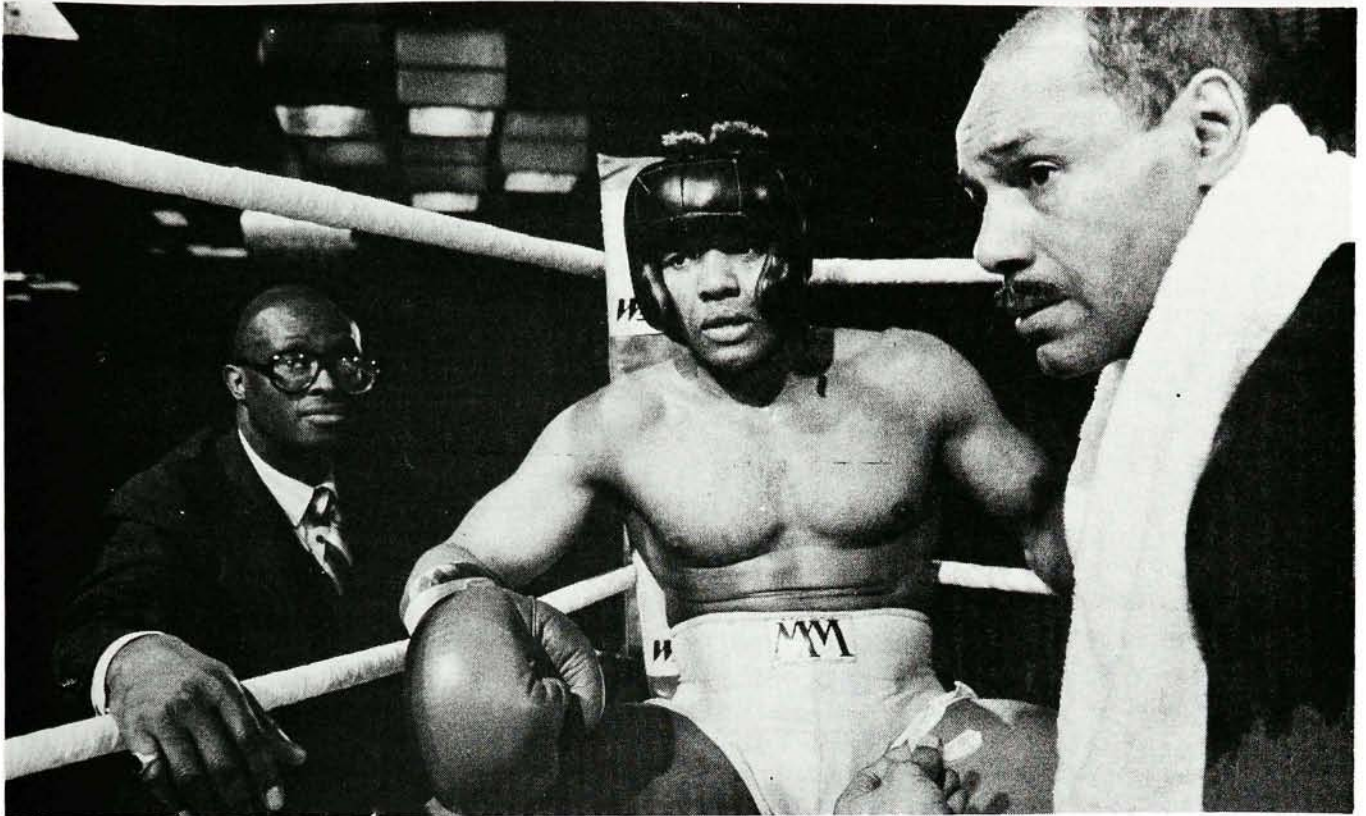
"We had decided that the way we were going to do this picture was so off the wall and so revolutionary that we daren't tell anybody, or they'd get nervous. What we did was, we wrote the music before we saw the movie!" (i.e. They didn't see it in continuity.)

"Now, this was a period movie, very orchestral, and some scenes would've been very difficult to fit the music to — like those of Jack The Ripper, running and stabbing. It was very dangerous. Bob Clark knew what was going on, he was worried about it, and he expressed a great interest in what Carl and I were doing. But he went along with it. He hadn't worked with me before, but he trusted Carl."

"I couldn't have done it without Zittler," Paul confesses. "Because he has such musical taste, such a musical flair for cutting. Anyone else would've made it painfully obvious that the music was scissored." His admiration for Carl Zittler is fully reciprocated. "Working with Paul is extremely



A little gentle persuasion? Prostitute Catherine Kessler accosts a reluctant James Mason (Dr. Watson, I presume?) on the trail of Jack The Ripper in **Murder By Decree**



While working on his own, Paul Zaza scored a punch for **Title Shot**

(photo: Ron Watts Photography)

refreshing. I find that he puts all of his energies, and all of his considerable talent into the music. The result is that, in terms of production quality and all round value, both musically and economically, we got far more from Paul than I had been able to get in Los Angeles."

Both composers have been fortunate, not only in their respect for each other, but in their relationships with producers and directors, such as between Zittler and Clark, and Zaza and the team of Rose, Iveson and Gabourie — for whom he recently wrote the **Title Shot** score. (Paul also had a cameo appearance in the film, a rare event for a film composer.) In remarks on the Regenthall team, which could also apply to Clark, Zaza says, "They're the nicest guys, the most knowledgeable I've ever met. They just make it easy, because there isn't a lot of Hollywood b.s., which I hate." These comments, echoed by Zittler, indicate the high standards of professionalism that they expect from their colleagues on the films they undertake.

According to Zaza and Zittler, the future for Canadian composers in Canadian films looks bright. Zaza, who has a branch of his company in Los Angeles, feels that "the people here are as good as the people there." Zittler, who has also worked there, agrees. "Not only can we compete with Hollywood, but we are competing with Hollywood and doing it most successfully. Our technical standards are as good, and sometimes better. If you take the best, musically, of each country, you'll find they're competitive."

With composers like these in the business here, it's easy to see why. □

## FILMOGRAPHY

(Features completed and/or released)

### Paul Zaza

- You'll Never Miss It** (1976, Randall Torno)
- Three Card Monte** (1977, Les Rose)
- One Night Stand** (1978, Allan King) with Carole Pope and others (uncredited)
- Murder by Decree** (1978, Bob Clark)
- Title Shot** (1979, Les Rose)
- Summer's Children** (1979, Julius Kohanyi) with Chris Stone and others (uncredited)
- Stone Cold Dead** (1979, George Mendeluk)

### Carl Zittler

- Children Shouldn't Play With Dead Things** (1972, Bob Clark)
- The Night Walk** (aka. *Dead of Night*, *Deathdream*) (1973, Bob Clark)
- Deranged** (1974, Jeff Gillen, Alan Ormsby)
- My Pleasure is My Business** (1975, Albert Waxman)
- Black Christmas** (1975, Bob Clark)
- Breaking Point** (1976, Bob Clark) music editor
- Murder By Decree** (1978, Bob Clark)
- Mary and Joseph** (1979, Eric Till) music editor