

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

By JULIA CROWE

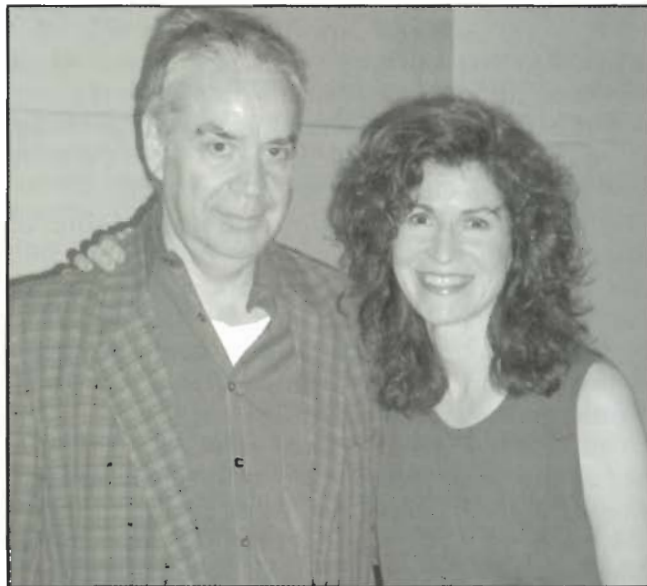
CLASSICAL nylon string guitar, vintage steel string, electric guitar and dobro all comprise the main musical voices featured in Howard Shore's original film score for the Scorsese film 'The Departed', which was recorded this past summer in New York by Sharon Isbin, rock guitarist G.E. Smith (formerly of The Saturday Night Live band), downtown guitarist Marc Ribot (whose playing can also be heard in the Johnny Cash biopic, 'Walk the Line') and guitarist Larry Saltzman, (who has toured with Paul Simon and recorded with David Johansen.)

'The Departed', which was released in theatres in October 2006, is Scorsese's remake of the acclaimed 2002 Hong Kong thriller, 'Infernal Affairs' and stars Leonardo DiCaprio, Jack Nicholson, Mark Wahlberg, Martin Sheen, Alec Baldwin and Matt Damon. The film's story is set in South Boston and focuses on a police department's attempt to fight organised crime by placing an informant within a gang run by one of their more elusive and ruthless Irish mafia chieftains, who has cleverly planted his own mole within the police force.

This particular score happens to be Howard Shore's fifth time working with director Martin Scorsese, following their previous collaboration on the films 'After Hours', 'The Aviator', 'Gangs of New York', and the documentary, 'Made in Milan'. Shore, who has scored over one hundred films in his career with a number of directors including Jonathan Demme, Tim Burton, David Cronenberg, Sidney Lumet and Chris Columbus, earned his first Oscar Award for Best Score in 2002 and a Grammy for his work on Peter Jackson's 'Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring' in addition to another Grammy for his score of 'Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers'. Shore subsequently won two Oscars, two Golden Globes and his third and fourth Grammys for Best Film Score for 'Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King' and Best Song for *Into the West*. His recordings for the 'Lord of the Rings' Trilogy have sold over six million copies to date.

Shore's soundtrack for 'The Departed' creates a subtly effective underscore, expertly woven with tracks handpicked by Scorsese, including Roger Water's *Comfortably Numb*, performed by Van Morrison; two tracks by The Rolling Stones (including Scorsese's third use to date of *Gimme Shelter* in one of his films) and well-known songs by Patsy Cline, the Allman Brothers, the Dropkick Murphys, Badfinger, The Beach Boys, LaVern Baker, The Human Beinz and Roy Buchanan.

In looking closely at the titles chosen for Shore's original soundtrack, he appears to have broken down the music according to character, theme



Howard Shore with Sharon Isbin.

and particular locations which have resonance within the story. Interestingly, the nylon string guitar appears often on tracks named for the characters and places which reflect their aspirations and better natures while the electric and steel string guitar and dobro parts revel in the grittier and more plangent moments.

Shore says, 'I chose four of New York's most acclaimed guitarists to capture the sound and rhythm of the film's narrative. These guitarists each brought their own unique musical personality to the composition. Sharon Isbin is a renowned classical guitarist and she had just the right feeling for *Billy's Theme*. I also featured her in some of the quieter parts of the film. Larry Saltzman and G.E. Smith played electric and acoustic guitars and performed some of the tango pieces together. G.E. Smith used a 1915 Gibson guitar on quite a few scenes. He had brought in a lot of old instruments and experimented with many vintage guitars. Marc Ribot played dobro on *The Departed Tango*, pitted against Larry's guitar.

'The use of the tango was an idea of Marty's. He wanted to express the game that is being played by the characters, the duplicitous dance. He called it *The Dance of Death*. Marty is a real historian so whenever you are working with him you have to start by doing a lot of research. We looked at films that feature solo instruments such as 'Murder by Contract' and 'Zorba the Greek'.

'Marty, Thelma and I would spot and discuss the film over many months and with multiple screenings to feel the rhythms and the pace of the story. I would work very closely with Thelma, Marty's wonderful editor, shaping and developing each piece to work precisely with the film edits. It was a real collaborative effort; we would

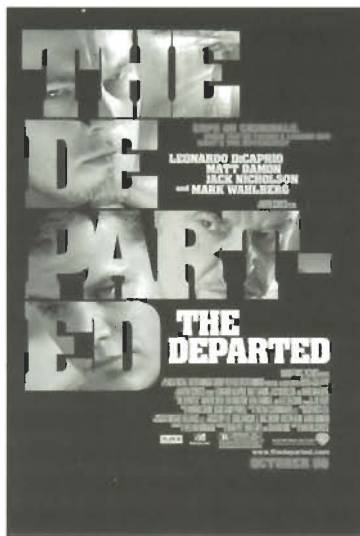
continuously shape the film edits and the compositions to work together in the best way.'

For Isbin, meeting film composer Howard Shore and the opportunity to work with him was unexpected. 'I'd always wanted to meet Howard. He'd taught film composition at the Aspen Music Festival for several summers but our schedules there never overlapped.' Shore, who was obviously aware of Ms. Isbin's playing, requested that she perform at an event in New York in December 2005 where he was to be honoured by the New York chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. At the award ceremony, Sharon performed *Into the West*, originally sung by Annie Lennox in the film. At this point, Shore asked Isbin to participate in recording several tracks for the soundtrack of Martin Scorsese's *The Departed*.

Isbin plays a total of five tracks on the CD. She recorded the 7-minute long work *Billy's Theme* for solo guitar accompanied by orchestra in July at the Right Track studio in New York City, the same venue where she had recorded her concerto album with the New York Philharmonic. She recorded the other tracks at Shore's studio in upstate New York at the end of August. The orchestra included top session players in the city from both the New York Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, comprising a 50-piece group. Isbin played in an iso-booth from which she could see the orchestra and conductor Howard Shore and hear them through earphones. *Billy's Theme* can be heard in the film during the scene when Leonardo DiCaprio's character Billy has a terse and frank conversation with his psychologist about his department-mandated therapy sessions. The tracks *Beacon Hill*, *Madolyn*, and *Boston Common*, are arranged as multiple guitar parts, which Isbin performs in duos, trios and quartets with herself. In *Last Rites*, Isbin is joined by guitarist G.E. Smith.

'The end result of the CD is a great mixture of nylon, acoustic and steel string,' Isbin says. 'My first recording of crossover music was with Larry Coryell and Laurindo Almeida back in the 80s - an album called "3 Guitars 3". This album, now out of print, includes the slow *Adagio* movement from Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* scored for three guitars with an extended bossa nova improvisation at the end.' Isbin describes 'The Departed' film soundtrack as 'ethereal, evocative, haunting, sensuous and beautiful.'

'When you see the film - it has been brilliantly done. I was amazed to feel haunted by the characters for weeks afterward. Not only are they very believable as human beings but Jack Nicholson, Matt Damon, Leonardo DiCaprio, Martin Sheen, Alec Baldwin and Mark Wahlberg



give *tour-de-force* performances. When the two factions discover they've been infiltrated and struggle to determine the identity of the spies - it is a brilliant idea to use the tango as a musical theme, interlocking opposing forces.'

Two music CDs have been released in conjunction with the film. The first, issued by Warner Bros., is the song compilation featuring many of the pop tunes used within the movie along with a final track featuring Howard Shore's *Beacon Hill* performed by Isbin. Another CD released this past December on the New Line label features Shore's entire original

score which he had composed for the film. This CD includes all of Isbin's tracks along with those performed by guitarists G.E. Smith, Marc Ribot, and Larry Saltzman. 'As a number of the parts were already in the can, Larry was the only guitarist with whom I actually worked in the studio,' Isbin says. 'He was wonderful and a great colleague. I had about two weeks advance notice before the orchestral recording and a few days to learn the other works.' Isbin was unable to attend the New York film premiere, however. 'I was in Mexico on tour, performing recitals for a festival in Chihuahua and Juarez.'

During the ten months it took Howard Shore to put the entire film score together, he divulges, 'The only improvisation is in *The Departed Tango*, a duel between the soloists with Marc Ribot playing the dobro and Larry Saltzman on acoustic steelstrings. The score is notated and very carefully designed around the soloists. Each of the guitarists provided the compositions with a unique instrumental translation that certainly affected the richness of the final score.'

'The Departed', whose opening box office returns have made it Scorsese's most successful film to date, received six Golden Globe nominations in December 2006, including 'Best Picture' and 'Best Director' (awards were announced January 15, 2007), and the film will undoubtedly be an Oscar contender at the Academy Awards in February 2007. Scorsese revealed at the RomeFilmFest that this will be his last big budget picture for some time as he turns toward working on smaller film projects, his next being an adaptation of the 1966 Shusaku Endo novel 'Silence' set in 16th Century Japan. Howard Shore is currently writing an opera based on David Cronenberg's film 'The Fly', to be directed by Cronenberg and staged for the 2007-2008 season of the Los Angeles Opera. And in March 2007, Ms. Isbin will be performing for the Allegro Guitar Society in both Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas and Los Vegas after performing as a soloist with the Williamsport Symphony in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.