

Tunes from the Wild West, *The Magnificent Seven* at the Granada

By Robert F. Adams, Special to CASA

A KNOCKOUT EVENING FOR FILM FANS

of an earlier generation of westerns, The Elmer Bernstein Memorial Film Series, Celebrating Distinguished Film Music, screened the 1960s swaggering western epic, *The Magnificent Seven*, at the Granada Theatre on March 30th. The concluding event for this season's film music-focused series featured curator and Oscar Award winning songwriter/composer and occasional actor Paul Williams who moderated onstage and insightfully engaged the noted composer Bruce Broughton with discussions of the influence of Elmer Bernstein's score for *Seven*.

Released at the outset of the 1960s, the Bernstein score for *The Magnificent Seven*

jumped off the screen. Both guests, Williams and Broughton, recognized that the symphonic background music was one of the first movie scores that cast a powerful spell both within the Hollywood picture-making industry as well as being embraced by the nation's public at the time. Broughton drew attention to the influence that this particular score had, especially in western films that followed, including his own memorable and Oscar-nominated score for Laurence Kasdan's *Silverado*.



The screening of *The Magnificent Seven*, which was broadcast on the Granada's state-of-the-art rear projection system, displayed unmatched locations, shot in Durango, Cuernavaca,

and Tepoztlán, Mexico by Director John Sturges. The film also featured towering performances from an ensemble cast including Yul Brynner - at the height of his powers - portraying the stoic leader of the posse of outcasts and drifters. The film also served as a breakout vehicle for future superstar Steve McQueen as Vin, and offered a spellbinding performance from Eli Wallach as the bandit-villain, Calvera. The



film's underlying story was based on the superb 1954 Japan-based historical epic from Akira Kurosawa, *The Seven Samurai*.

Comprising a main anthem, or leitmotif, the score represented a western journey of hope and resilience, echoing the energetic efforts of the heroic posse of gunfighters/saviors, with melodic leitmotif passages and tempos that, according to special guest Broughton, helped to energize the pace of the film. Within the suspenseful dramatic phrases, Elmer Bernstein thoughtfully referenced Bartok's second movement of the *Concerto for Orchestra*.

The moving score for *Seven* was recognized by the America Film Institute as the eighth

greatest American film score in a poll unveiled in 2005, the year after Bernstein's passing in 2004.

This delightful Elmer Bernstein Memorial Film Series series was sponsored by Montecito

Bank and Trust, and the screening was sponsored by Sarah and Roger Chrisman, among others. The discussions with special guests and the full-stage screening of this studio-produced western was a rare opportunity to revisit and rediscover the interwoven music, and pay tribute to the important role that composers play in how



we experience films of this scope and style.

For info on the current season at the Granada Theatre and upcoming film series programs, visit: granadasb.com or call 899-2222.

1. KRISTI NEWTON, PAUL WILLIAMS, EVE BERNSTEIN, BRUCE BROUGHTON, and ROGER CHRISMAN
2. DOUG NORBERG, LAURA DRAMMER, MARK TRABUCCO, SARAH SCHLINGER CHRISMAN, and NANCY NORBERG
3. MEG BURNHAM and EVE BERNSTEIN

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