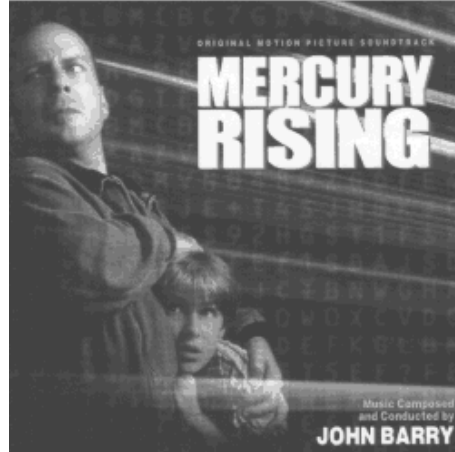


“MERCURY RISING” – Film Score

John Barry

Varèse Sarabande VSD 5925

Review by Stephen Woolston (first published in Soundtrack)



As much as I love John Barry’s lush romantic style it is pleasing to see him breaking type by tackling something different. A low brow Bruce Willis actioner might not bode well (nor does Varèse’s indifferent packaging), but pre-release hopes were raised by the adage of **Raise The Titanic**, which proves a bad film doesn’t insist on a bad score.

Where **The Specialist** focussed on jazzy noir with perhaps overly symphonic action episodes, **Mercury Rising** opts for the lighter touch. This score is typified by lilting piano-flute doubles against subtle shifts and driving percussion. The idea appeals. One might imagine an interesting action score evoking a mix of **The Living Daylights** with **Jagged Edge**. Alas, **Mercury Rising** isn’t quite that good.

This score evokes those minor B-scores that Barry scored in the late eighties, like **My Sister’s Keeper**, about which I have mixed feelings. On the one hand I admire their non-pretentious, non-languid thrust; their simple and effective deployment of key Barry scoring techniques. On the other hand I fault their lack of stirring, memorable music.

Mercury Rising sounds like the minor half of a larger score, like the extra cues that might be left off one of Barry’s better scores. **The Specialist** had a highly memorable theme in “*Did You Call Me?*”. **Mercury Rising** has a sweet and delicate theme (“*Simon’s Theme*”) but it does not impress itself upon the score as a whole.

It is to Barry’s remarkable credit that his scores are never without merit. In this case the merit is this sweet theme and some interesting, if not stellar, suspense cues. But without more major themes, or more memorable motifs in the suspense music, **Mercury Rising** is a lesser entry on Barry’s CV. He sets out with an interesting style here, which I’d like to see developed, but for now everyone should save their spending money for **The Beyondness of Things** and the upcoming release of Rykodisc’s expanded **The Living Daylights**.