

to the LAND of THIEVES and PHANTOMS 6:54

...SUCH BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS 2:56

the STRANGLER 5:13

of CAVES, TOMBS, and COFFINS 4:54

- DYLAN JACK QUARTET -

JERRY SABATINI - TRUMPET, CORNET, and EUPHONIUM

ERIC HOFBAUER - GUITAR and ELECTRONICS

TONY LEVA - BASS

DYLAN JACK - DRUMS and PERCUSSION

RECORDED at the ROTARY RECORDS

in WEST SPRINGFIELD, MA on NOVEMBER 5, 2022

ENGINEERED, MIXED, and MASTERED by WARREN AMERMAN

PRODUCED by WARREN AMERMAN and DYLAN JACK

DESIGN by BENJAMIN SHAYKIN

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EINE QUARTETT DES GRAUENS

DYLAN JACK QUARTET

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LIVE MUSIC ACCOMPANIMENT FOR SILENT FILMS

was born out of necessity over 100 years ago, but today it's a choice, a creative modality of its own. For Boston-based drummer Dylan Jack, this lost art seemed a potential way to reach new audiences and depart from musical routine. "I've always been inspired by the Art Ensemble of Chicago and their performances involving intermedia," Jack says. "I think that combining art forms like they did is the future of creative and improvised music."

To that end, Jack decided to go for the jugular: a spontaneously composed soundtrack to F.W. Murnau's 1922 film *Nosferatu*. In terms of a narrative arc with built-in tension, *Nosferatu* is pretty ideal, and Jack had been considering it for some time. Enticing the members of the Dylan Jack Quartet — guitarist Eric Hofbauer, trumpeter Jerry Sabatini, bassist Anthony Leva — was simple (no biting required), and after a couple of public performances in different theaters, the group entered the studio to capture what they'd done.

A prime example of German Expressionism, *Nosferatu* stands as perhaps the most influential horror film of all time. The gangly semi-human figure of Count Orlok, based of course on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, is something you don't soon forget. (Despite the name change, Murnau got sued by the Stoker estate and lost.)

The long-fingered silhouette climbing the stairs, hovering over a sleeper's bed, laying in a coffin with fangs exposed — these images are as iconic as it gets.

Jack's quartet captures the dark foreboding and lost innocence of it all, with subtle harmonic implications, stark instrumental timbres, extended techniques and modest use of effects. And although the band followed a basic game plan — incorporating Jack's precomposed themes to depict Orlok, the cooing lovers Hutter and Ellen, and the sinister real estate agent Knock (Hutter's boss) — all else was improvised, with no second takes.

In rehearsals, Jack recalls, the four organized themselves in a semicircle. "We all faced a big screen television and went for it." The performances were the same but with a bigger screen and more space to spread out. The recording, however, was different: iso booths for guitar and drums, semi-isolation for bass, Sabatini on trumpet "right in the open," Jack says. "We set ourselves up so we could see the television in the studio. Then we played through the first two acts and stopped to listen and watch. We finished the final three acts after lunch. The rehearsals and performances made it so much easier. It really helped that this group has worked together for so many years."

Bouncing off one another and the film as it unrolls, the players achieve a remarkable synthesis: Leva with fat and woody frequencies, Hofbauer with crisp close-miked archtop guitar and subtly deployed reverb and chorus, Sabatini with open and muted timbres and gothic-sounding tones at the bottom of the trumpet range: all of it aptly conjures "the call of the deathbird," to use a phrase from the film's parchment-style intertitles.

Note the entrance of what I'll call doom-trumpet when we first meet Knock, and how Leva responds with a deep implied groove while Hofbauer introduces metallic and subtly processed sounds. Sabatini's growls and smears turn to grotesque, ashen-faced horror when Hutter reaches "the land of phantoms," Orlok's domain. There's also the use of silence or near-silence, like the record-scratch moment when Hutter foolishly boasts to tavern guests that he's en route to visit Orlok. Cue the doom-trumpet, which persists as the scene changes to a "werewolf" (hyena? wild dog?) on the prowl. Leva's hovering whale-like arco bass is key at such junctures as well.

Trumpet turns from doom to daylight as Hutter awakes to continue his journey, but the horn sounds its very darkest, practically like a tuba through ocean-like reverb, when Hutter and Orlok finally meet at the end of Act I, and when Orlok looms about subsequently (there are five acts in all).

"I play more of a supporter's role in the film," Jack says of his drumming. "I felt my job was to build in certain parts when I felt things need to go elsewhere." The snare crescendo roll with brushes on the line "your wife has a lovely neck" is a notable example. But Jack's signal contribution is perhaps in terms of tempo: the initial drum beat on the opening frames, or the way the tambourine kicks in when locomotion is involved — often via horse-drawn carriage, but also when wild horses are herded across a field, or when Hutter paces about while he packs his bags or washes up and gets dressed, or when Knock (by now an escaped inmate) is chased through town and fields in a climactic Act V scene.

The brief moments without any figures onscreen — human, animal or vampiric — are some of the most compelling. The looming Carpathian Mountains of Central Europe have a menace all their own, though if you shot those landscapes now with 12-megapixel wide-color capture, they'd look another way. F.W. Murnau, using the available tech, didn't have to do much to make them demonic. Imagine his reaction upon hearing the Dylan Jack Quartet, marshalling their resources to make this early 20th-century artifact brand new again. — David R. Adler

To view the film with the full improvised score, visit dylanjackmusic.com/nosferatu