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6 QUESTIONS

with ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL
by ANN DONAHUE

"Public Enemies" has cops, robbers, Johnny Depp and Christian Bale—what more could you want out of a summer movie? How about a score that craftily enhances the central tension of the film, as Depp's John Dillinger takes on the banks with a gun and a grin during the Great Depression? The film, which opened July 1 and has so far earned \$43.6 million, according to Box Office Mojo, marks the second time composer Elliot Goldenthal teamed with director Michael Mann; the pair also worked together on the iconic score to the 1995 film "Heat." The "Public Enemies" soundtrack, a combination of Goldenthal's score and songs from the movie—like Diana Krall's take on "Bye Bye Blackbird"—was released June 30 on Decca and has sold 5,000 copies to date, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

1 You did an intense score with Michael Mann for the film "Heat"—how did you change it up this time, for "Public Enemies"?

The thing with Michael is that he has a very broad appreciation and a real connection with music. He's not afraid to approach various dramatic problems with off-center solutions. And this is the same way I work. When we're on the same wavelength, it's a very successful collaboration. He doesn't solve cinematic problems with the usual big movie approach. It's sometimes with unusual solo instruments or unusual orchestral combinations.

2 What are some examples from the "Public Enemies" score where these things came together?

There is a collision between a symphony orchestra and American rural, homespun instruments—not unlike the collision in the drama of the work between the Dust Bowl of the late '20s/early '30s and the shiny new city of Chicago. There's was a reed instrument from Armenia, a duduk, that has a very mournful, very personal sound. It sounds like a saxophone, but it isn't a saxophone. It sounds like

a voice within a voice. And also in the instrumentation, I stuck to more than the usual amount of low brass. Everything has this gravitas to it to reflect on an inner snarling that Dillinger has.

3 Before you embark on a project like this, do you do any research about the era?

I do, but once I get started it all goes out the window because you're reacting to what's on the screen—the actor's work, the editor's work, the director's input. So many things can trigger off a musical response.

4 Is there a particular scene that you found inspiring to mold the visual with the music?

One is near the end of the movie where Dillinger gets killed—hope it's not a surprise to anyone—when he is attending a movie and he walks out afterward and he's eventually killed. Also the scene where he is traveling—he's arrested and he's in an airplane getting transferred from one prison to the other. He's more than the person that walked on the airplane. He arrived and now he's a star. I tried to feed off the energy, and the audience that surrounded his arrival and also

Johnny Depp's acting—his self-realization that he's the last of the Robin Hoods.

5 How long did it take you from when you saw the first early cut of the film to the point where you were happy with the score?

Well, you're never happy. Every script, every score, every piece of work that I do—it's always a case of abandonment.

6 What are you working on now?

A project with Julie Taymor [the two previously collaborated on "Frida," which won Goldenthal an Academy Award for best score] and a promising writer called William Shakespeare. It's a movie of "The Tempest," starring Helen Mirren. Especially with Shakespeare, you have to dance between the raindrops of his language, because that's music in itself.

