

RECENT RELEASE: CD You Might Have Missed

Black Sunday • LES BAXTER. Bay Cities CD (BCD 3034). 2 tracks - 59:33 • The long-awaited release of Les Baxter's music for *Black Sunday* (1960) and *Baron Blood* (1972) is cause for celebration. Mr. Baxter is well-known to genre followers for his always serviceable and occasionally uniquely orchestrated scores for many of the Roger Corman-Edgar Allan Poe films of the 1960s. He produced widely divergent works such as the bizarre and evocative score for *The Pit & the Pendulum* and the lushly romantic piano-laden waltzes which fill *Master of the World*. The liner notes for this release are by Tim Lucas, the informed creator of *Video Watchdog* magazine, who explains how in an effort to add some punch to *Black Sunday*, A.I.P. producers James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff replaced Roberto Nicolosi's original, poorly-recorded Italian-made score with Baxter's for U.S. distribution. Directed by horror maestro Mario Bava, the film is considered a seminal classic of the golden age of the Italian horror film—Baxter's work surely assisted in earning this place of honor. The first track, which runs over 30 minutes, is a continuous suite from the film. Although the sound quality is slightly muted, Bay Cities did a grand job in producing a consistently pleasing recording—Baxter's characteristic use of brass and timpani are in evidence as is an unexpected romantic turn for piano. This is followed by a second suite for a much later Bava film, *Baron Blood*. Once again, Baxter's work replaced an original score by Stelvio Cipriani deemed too bland for the ghastly proceedings. Here, the sound quality is excellent, and although given second billing, the score is superior to the previous suite. Baxter's use of brass, flute, piano and organ create a noteworthy souvenir of the equally strange film. The score's final phrases, depicting the horrific death of the Baron, are disturbingly touching. Last, but hardly least, are the priceless inclusion of reminiscences by the magnificently bewitching and legendary star of *Black Sunday*, Barbara Steele. Ms. Steele refers to the work of director Bava as "bold, baroque, and beautiful." Mr. Baxter's scores certainly compliment both these films admirably well. **4**

-Michael O. Yaccarino