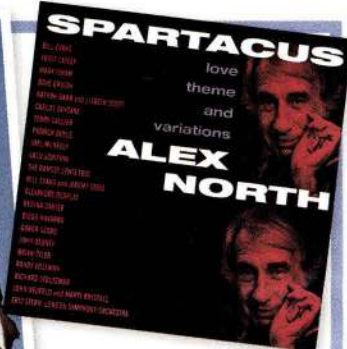


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Kirk Douglas, left, starred in 1960 epic "Spartacus," which was scored by Alex North.

## 'Spartacus' scores royal treatment

By JON BURLINGAME

This year marks the centenary of Alex North, the composer of "A Streetcar Named Desire," "Cleopatra" and nearly 60 other scores, and the first composer ever to be awarded an honorary Oscar for his body of work.

"Spartacus," the 1960 score for the Kirk Douglas classic that is widely perceived to be North's finest, is about to be issued in a deluxe package that also happens to be the 1,000th album of film music produced by Robert Townson of soundtrack label Varese Sarabande.

Townson, who has been producing soundtracks since 1986 and been with Varese since 1989, called "Spartacus" "the masterpiece of Alex's career and his life. It has a range of expression, a level of writing, that is simply not matched in other epics. There is an enormity and an intimacy to 'Spartacus' that is unique."



To celebrate the North centennial, Varese Sarabande is releasing a package that includes six CDs, a DVD and a 168-page book all dealing with the music of "Spartacus." According to Townson, one disc will contain all surviving 70 minutes of stereo music; two more will feature the entire two-hour, 20-minute score in mono; and a fourth contains early, unused and alternate versions of cues from the score.

Two more discs feature 22 different versions of the "Spartacus" love theme, which pianist Bill Evans turned into a jazz standard in 1963.

That recording, plus some by Yusef Lateef, Carlos Santana and others are interspersed with newly recorded versions including by Lalo Schifrin, Mark Isham and Dave Grusin.

The DVD includes interviews with film composers — such as John Williams, David Newman and Alexandre Desplat — talking about North, the "Spartacus" score and his impact on film music. Townson himself wrote the book, discussing the score and the career of North, who died in 1991.

"Spartacus" was originally issued as a 42-minute LP in 1960, and reissued on CD in 1991. But the fact that the film is owned by Universal and the LP/CD by Universal Music Group, two different companies, made the undertaking "far and away the most complicated thing I have ever done," said Townson. It took four years to make the deals, locate all the music (some of which came from the North estate), record the new material and write the book.

"I've never done anything that I'm prouder of," Townson said, "and I can't imagine topping it."

The 5,000-copy limited edition will be released Aug. 2.