

# BELOW THE LINE

PRACTITIONERS + PRODUCTS + PERFECTION



George Burt has said, "Music has the power to open the frame of reference to a story and to reveal its inner life in a way that could not have been as fully articulated in any other way."

In my early days as an intern on *The Simpsons*, Alf Clausen and his scoring team entertained the thought of how many emotions could possibly be achieved in the least number of seconds. Although just for fun, he made the key point that a customized score, one that takes every nuance on the screen into account, can react to, magnify and transform a moment in infinite ways.

## THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Where do you begin? Do you include music at all? In 1960, Hollywood film composer Bernard Herrmann commenced scoring Hitchcock's new film, *Psycho*. The dynamic of this composer-director partnership helped create one of the most famous and quoted moments of cinema: the shower scene. Hitchcock's original instructions were to leave the shower scene free of music. Thankfully, a headstrong Herrmann persisted, and screeched his way onto all our screens.

In certain instances, though, the absence of music can be incredibly powerful; and certainly, when everything is being said by the other elements of the film, the presence of music may only crowd and distort the message.

## PERFECTION — SCORING POSSIBILITIES

As John Corigliano prepared the score for *The Red Violin*, intensive collaboration with acclaimed violinist Joshua Bell aided in the development of a masterful score with incredible depth in theme and structure. The score reaped the rewards of this collaboration between composer and studio musician.

Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* drew on masses of existing works to cut and splice together music in a way that really saw the director undertake a musical leadership role, with unusually intensive requirements on the music editing team.

## SETTLING THE SCORE:

LEAH CURTIS LISTENS TO THE KEY CREATIVES OF COMPOSITION

By Leah Curtis

THE SILVER SCREEN FLICKERS WITH ITS OPENING IMAGES AND THE FIRST NOTE STRIKES. THE PICTURE IS ONE WITH THE SOUND. IT IS AS IF THEY ARE INVISIBLY ATTACHED, AND AS IF THE MUSIC MAKES A DIRECT CONNECTION FROM THE SCREEN TO EACH MEMBER OF THE AUDIENCE. THE FILM COMPOSER IS THE MUSICAL DRAMATIST. OUR RESPONSIBILITY IS TO MAKE SURE THAT THIS IS THE RIGHT NOTE FOR THE MOMENT, EXECUTED WITH THE PERFECT COMBINATION OF SOUNDS WITH MOVING PICTURE.

In the late 1920s, when sound became a part of cinema, the tradition of the recorded original motion picture score was born, and so were the endless musical choices for the soundtrack.

Morricone's *The Mission* took us to lush melodic heights, John Williams shot us deep into the adventures of space with *Star Wars*, and David Raksin's masterful and meandering theme from *Laura* captured what it was to yearn.

## POWER & POSSIBILITIES

Film music is powerful. It can immerse you in any time or place and speak the psychological subtext of the moment. It can effectively manipulate your emotional responses to a scene with the possibility that you may not even be conscious of its very existence.

When music is considered from the concept stage of a film, as it was with these, the possibilities that can be achieved through the score suddenly multiply. Some of these include using music from the composer on-set between takes, incorporating music in cast rehearsals, developing a brief with the composer as a response to the script, and editing a scene to music that was written before the cutting process.

## THE INTERPRETERS

A successful original score for most major motion pictures requires a large contingent of music specialists. Each brings the mastery of their craft and experience, and needs to buy into the vision of the filmmaker and composer to fully harness their energies.

Music exists in many tangible and nontangible forms throughout this process. It is expressed in musical, visual, physical (the conductor), emotional and technical languages, and accepts input from masters of each of these disciplines and crafts. It is a complex and inspiring journey, and one that requires master interpreters along the way.

**THE DIRECTOR** must share his or her global vision for the film with the composer. The director defines the role of the music and expresses the emotional subtext of any one moment of the story through images, words, conversation and any references pertinent to the intended message. The director needs to nurture his or her vision of the film in the composer.

**THE COMPOSER** is ultimately responsible for all of the elements of the original musical score. The composer writes the music, taking it from the very first concept through the final stage of production.

**THE ORCHESTRATOR** is equipped with intimate knowledge of the capabilities and nuances of every instrument, and is responsible for delivering the written full score that is to reflect the complete vision of the composer. Many composers view the latter as inseparable from their role, and do both.

**THE CONDUCTOR** translates the written score into a physical representation, leading the studio musicians in the recording session. Often the composer also fulfills this role.

**THE MUSIC COPYIST** creates the individual parts for each studio musician.

+ The Scoring Mixer, The Studio Musician and the Music Editor. **-MPM**

# THE INTERPRETERS

THREE OF THE MANY HANDS TROUGH WHICH THE NOTE PROGRESSES AND IS TRANSFORMED FROM THOUGHT TO SCREEN.



**JOHN RODD:** SCORING MIXER

(*Ultraviolet*; *The Madagascar Penguins in a Christmas Caper*; *SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs*)

**ROLE:** responsible for recording and mixing the underscore for a film

I capture the music as a photographer captures an image: It is alchemy of the creative and the technical. Just as photographers make choices in terms of lens and film, composition and printing, I make choices in terms of microphone selection and placement, music processing and mixing. However, my considerations go far beyond personal aesthetics, as I must "serve the film." My mixes should help convey the intentions of the composer but not conflict with the dialogue. And just as underscore can articulate narrative that the dialogue does not, my recordings and mixes must help create the right mood and tell the story of the film.



**ALAN STEINBERGER:** STUDIO MUSICIAN - PIANIST

(*March of the Penguins*; *Mrs. Harris*; *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*)

**ROLE:** responsible for performing the score

What can I bring to a score? I bring tools, colors and experience honed from decades of being a concert and recording pianist. I deliver in every style, every shade of tone, the sharpest attack, the softest touch. I'm the upgrade from silver to platinum, from dial-up to broadband, from 8 crayons to 64.

I breathe life into the composer's synth mockup. If there's a tweak needed, I adjust my performance instantly. I want the music to be so organic, so *right* for the scene, that the audience could never imagine the film any other way.



**SIMON LEADLEY:** MUSIC EDITOR

(*Moulin Rouge*; *Hearts in Atlantis*; *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*; *Aquamarine*)

**ROLE:** responsible for temp music, cutting source music and prepping for scoring sessions, and looking after the music in the final dub

In most film projects I work on, I serve three masters: the director, the composer and the film. Often I feel like a go-between, where I am interpreting the director's vision and passing on information to the composer while still trying to give them the space they need to create the score. I try to facilitate all the processes that go into making a modern score, both technical and psychological, so that we have everything prepared with no surprises for the scoring sessions.

During the final mix, I am the composer's representative on the dub stage, so that any changes that are made to the music – due to re-cuts, for instance – are handled with sensitivity to the original intention of the score. And there are many other little tasks that go into making my job one of the most satisfying that I can imagine.