



**Cinéformation**

Screen • Experience • Collaborate

## Music for Film

**Thurs 24 April 2008**

**Watershed Media Centre, Bristol**

### Event outline:

#### **Networking and drinks (7pm – 7:45pm):**

MAFTV composition students showcasing their film/music clips, with discussion  
Demonstration of Digital Performer (MIDI and audio sequencer)

#### **Break (15 mins)**

#### **The psychology of sound (8pm – 9:30pm):**

Introduction and background to film music composition  
The uses of music for film  
Why have music in film?  
Story structure and music  
The mechanics of film scoring

### Guest Speakers:

**University of Bristol MAFTV composers:** Michael Ferguson, Blair Mowat, TyLean Paisley-Hixson, Jane Qu Yi, Aaron Whitfield, Chris Willis, Alex Wise

**Martin Kiszko** has over 200 soundtrack and concert credits as well as eight albums released with Europe's finest orchestras. Amongst his award winning scores are the BBC'S 'REALMS OF THE RUSSIAN BEAR', 'WILDLIFE ON ONE' and the soundtrack for the short film 'DREAMWORKS' commissioned by the BBC Natural History Unit and Steven Spielberg.

Martin's recent achievements include: the score for the major new movie THE KILLING OF JOHN LENNON; the world premiere of his new cantata for Soloist, Orchestra, Choir and Film 'A RADIUS OF CURVES'; Music Consultant credit on Aardman Animation's 'WALLACE AND GROMIT – CURSE OF THE WERERABBIT' computer game and winning the **2004** British Academy of Composers and Songwriters **Composer of the Year Award (Education and Community Category)** for his work INUA which uses the ultrasonic device 'Soundbeam'. He is currently composing a multi-media work for Soundbeam, dancer and electric violin – VI-SPY – world premiered at Bristol's Colston Hall in May.



**Jean Hasse** composes for films, videos, concerts and special events and teaches composition at the University of Bristol. She is a pianist, music publisher and copyist and did the score preparation work for The Killing of John Lennon film.

Her first silent film score was a chamber orchestra accompaniment to F.W. Murnau's 1926 film, Faust (106 min), premiered in Bristol and London, October 2007. Other recent commissions include Scisational - titles/end credit music to eight films (Univ of Bristol), and new scores to silent films: Mabel's Dramatic Career (1913) - live piano accompaniment for Birds Eye View Festival, BFI Southbank London, and Ghosts Before Breakfast (1927) - for the ensemble Counterpoise (sax, tpt, vln, piano), touring the UK from 25 April (Nottingham) and playing at St George's Bristol, 25 November.

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**Jonathan Scott** is Manager of the Composition and Recording Studios in the Department of Music at the University of Bristol. He teaches studio techniques and handles the IT facilities in the department. He also plays percussion, drums and guitar. Jonathan recorded, mixed and mastered the music cues for The Killing of John Lennon.

## **Martin Kiszko on.....**

### **The major and minor adventures of composers in La-La land.**

#### **FLEDGLING TO FLIGHT**

My childhood memories of music are of winding up old 78rpm vinyls on a gramophone with a huge horn. At age four I scratched the vinyls so regularly it must have been my first accidental attempt at DJing a turntable. Then, spurred on by a very musical father and a passionate primary music teacher, I was encouraged at age ten to learn music theory, clarinet, piano, and tenor saxophone at the City of Leeds College of Music. The tenor sax, as I remember, was a tiny bit taller than me. Saturdays were a joy – going into town to buy the latest EP release, delving into scores at the music library and then returning home to play make believe to the accompaniment of all those early 'Music for Pleasure' discs such as 'Great Western Themes', or Ron Goodwin's wonderful score for '633 Squadron.' At around the age of 13 or 14 I embarked on my first orchestral scores – just for fun – I had no idea what they sounded like – I simply liked the aesthetic of all those notes on the manuscript – and still do!

And so, after a secondary education with extra curricula music as a side dish, I embarked on a music and fine art degree. This venture into a bilingual world – one of image and one of sound music was – unbeknown to me at the time – prepared me for a grounding in understanding and developing the relationships between music and film.

#### **FROM SHORTS TO LONG TROUSERS**

Even at the rookie stage of trying out my first compositions which combined music and drama or music and film, I wasn't aware of the learning curve required to fully understand the reading of the grammar of filmmaking and how the craft of music should be applied to picture. I developed these skills by taking a Post Graduate course in Film and Television at the University of Bristol where I directed film and composed my own soundtracks. There were also opportunities to score other students' films so I guess that was one safe learning environment to test the waters. I worked on everything from animations to medical documentaries. Of particular interest was the scale of soundtracks and the economy of orchestration. One of my first score was for bowed cymbal; another for clarinet and tape delay. Both were a real test of how to make a

little - along with the most important ingredient, one's imagination – go a long, long way.

## THE BREAK

The break into the business of composing for film doesn't have to be big, it just has to happen and be consistent – preferably as long as a lifelong career. I was immensely lucky to start work as an assistant – an apprentice to veteran film composer Edward Williams who had been extremely successful in composing both orchestral and electronic scores for both film and television. My first jobs for him were menial: transferring tapes, setting and lining up electronic instruments and endless cabling of equipment. What was invaluable was learning how to run a studio, how to deal with producers and directors and most importantly in the orchestral realm – how to prepare and set up sessions and bring in an orchestral score on budget. It was this 'nuts and bolts' experience which brought in one of my first major orchestral scores – for Total Oil – a score about the erection of an oil rig. I guessed if I could make that subject musically interesting enough to enhance the film and impress the director, I could impress anyone with anything. That score was the passport to into the TV industry - the perfect environment for young composers to experience the challenges of transmission deadlines and the demands of an eclectic range of directors. In television one is expected to flex and stretch one's compositional skills to meet all genres of programming. Hopefully, it is also a place to nurture a few character traits that won't go amiss in a professional career: the ability to be personable, professional, accommodating, work all hours and be resilient in the face of many rejections.



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## MOVIE MADNESS

....it's a disease which is rife. There are very few young film composers who don't have the urge to immerse themselves into the turbulent but tantalising world of feature film. As well as seeing your front credit projected tall and wide, there's also a notion that the words 'feature film' open the door to an Aladdin's cave. It's true that some composers can command good budgets from well financed films, though most composers – especially in the UK's microscopically tiny movie industry - will still be burning the midnight oil on low budget films. Some will even be working for free. But whether working for pounds or pennies, the pleasure of the feature film lies in working with a substantial and often sophisticated narrative. It is in the feature film where the composer must demonstrate a full grasp of scene, sequence and screenplay structure as well as character arcs and the nuances of storytelling. It is here where the composer's applied art must fully complement the arc of the narrative. Film conductor Muir Matheson put it like this: 'Music must be accepted not as a decoration or filler of gaps in the plaster, but as part of the architecture.' The feature film is also a place where the young composer can consolidate years of electronic or orchestral skills honed in television, corporates or commercials. But like many good stories, he or she who enters the cave must beware.....the industry's appetite is huge. Personal time, social life or anything else that might interfere with getting the movie score completed must take second place. Movie scores are nowadays often written in burst of concentrated time requiring both mental and physical stamina from the composer and any assistants. *The Killing of John Lennon*, for example, was realised in 24 consecutive 18 hour days.

## RELAX ....AND COMPOSE YOURSELF!

Easier said than done. The composer is often brought in at the very last moment of the filmmaking process. The heat is on...the budget is...probably low...and the mind is buzzing: 'Can I afford one or two trombones, or will I have to use electronic samples.' 'Can I write the score in a week and get it performed by a symphony orchestra in Europe by the weekend?' 'Will the director like the three minutes of music I have had to compose and orchestrate today?' 'Have I correctly interpreted the director's brief?' 'How can I make my score successfully replace the film's temp track, but still keep a similar feel of what the director wants?'

And remember...once composed...there are likely to be many changes:



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changes in timings, scene durations, shot durations, melodic and harmonic adjustments. Directors and producers and even teams of executives will implement changes that the film composer will have to musically accommodate at a moment's notice and within an incredibly punishing schedule. It's the perfect scenario for the practice of patience and the capacity to discover your personal limits for capping your lid on pent up frustration. Even when you've done all that...the director expects your score to be the best s/he's heard, enhance the movie and will sell soundtracks. No pressure then. But remember, if you end up scoring what is at the outset a bad film - then you may - as composer Adolph Deutsch put it - end up like a 'mortician who can't bring the body back to life but is expected to make it look better.'

## NEVER BELIEVE ANYTHING ON THE WRAPPER

Now remember. Don't believe you are composing the score to a TV programme or feature film until you are sitting in your front room telly goggling it or you're stuffing popcorn as you front row it at the Odeon Leicester Square. Before you are confident that you can put pen to paper, there are minefields to cross to ensure you can confidently say you are the composer that will be commissioned. To name a few: the creative and budgetary agendas of directors or companies; their contractual politics; the circumnavigation of the best friends of the producer's cat who says that Joey Buick who wrote the hit score for blockbuster *My Cat is an Alien Lovechild* will do it over a weekend for a £100 000; the belief that you are of course the only composer in which the director is interested; the consideration of whether you really are a commercially exploitable product for the production?' Landing the commission will require a tough skin combined with a water off a duck's back approach and an ability to make compromises where expedient. Decisions on commissions these days are perhaps seldom made only on talent. Then again...as happens in Hollywood and beyond...even the best composers write scores that are then removed and rewritten by others. Hold your cool in the midst of disappointment!

## BEST BITS - LISTEN TO THIS MUM

Composer Laurence Rosenthal said that 'the recording stage is the composer's golden moment; after that everything is downhill.' It is indeed the composer's greatest moment. Only at the recording session will the composer hear everything as s/he intended it in their mind's ear - in all its glory. Perhaps there are other moments too that are satisfying for the composer - the ability to musically give an audience an insight into the psychological make up of a character or the ability to underscore in such a way that dialogue, sound design and score work in tandem to heighten the emotional or dramatic impact of a sequence.

## THE FILM COMPOSER'S FOUNTAIN OF WISDOM

If there was one, we would all be freely drinking from it. But a few words and phrases that might describe what attributes might be required to build your own composer:

Sheer talent, an original voice, the ability to compose across genres, a bilingual knowledge of the languages of film and music, resilience, stamina, patience, preparation, accommodation, collaboration, a sense of business, be personable, acquire the ability to live frugally early on in your career, give attention to detail, keep your ears open to everything.....'When I don't like a piece of music, I make a point of listening to it more closely.' Florent Schmitt (French Composer. 1870-1958).

And then, if it's in your blood and pulsating through your veins and nothing will stop it...do it! Otherwise...well I wouldn't know would I? I've never done anything else except compose for film.



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## Resources

### Suggested Reading:

- Adorno, T & Eisler, H, *Composing for Films* (repr. Athlone Press, 1994)  
Amyes, T, *The Technique of Audio Post Production in Video and Film* (Focal Press)  
Bazelon, I, *Knowing the Score – Notes on Film Music* (van Nostrand Reinhold Co, 1990)  
Brown, R,W, *Undertones and Overtones, Reading Film Music* (University of California Press, 1994)  
Burt, G, *The Art of Film Music* (Boston, 1994)  
Cook, N, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford, 1998)  
Donnelly, K, (ed), *Film Music – Critical Approaches* (Edinburgh University Press, 2002)  
Flinn, C, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia & Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton University Press, 1992)  
Gorbman, C, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London, 1987)  
Karlín, F & Wright, R, *On the Track – A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring* (Schirmer, NY, 1990)  
Manvell, R & Huntley, J, *The Technique of Film Music* (Focal Press, 1975)  
Pellegrino, R, *The Electronic Arts of Sound and Light* (Van Nostrand Reinhold Co, 1983)  
Prendergast, R, *A Neglected Art – A Critical Study of Music in Films* (New York, 1977)  
Skinner, F, *Underscore* (Criterion Music Corp. NY, 1963 )  
Thomas, T, (ed. A. S Barnes), *Film Score: The View from the Podium* ( New York, 1973, 1979)  
Thomas, T, *Music for the Movies* (Los Angeles, 1997)

[www.bristolmedia.co.uk](http://www.bristolmedia.co.uk)

<http://www.bristolmusicfoundation.com/>

[www.swscreen.co.uk](http://www.swscreen.co.uk)

<http://www.mfiles.co.uk/film-music.htm>

[www.southwestsound.org.uk](http://www.southwestsound.org.uk)

### **NEXT EVENT:**

#### **Cineformation: Locations**

**7pm Thursday 29 May 2008, Watershed, Bristol, BS1 5TX**

Looking to somewhere to shoot your next masterpiece?

Look no further than the South West. With *Hot Fuzz*, *The Duchess* and *Skins* being filmed right under our noses, at this month's Cineformation, Filming and Locations Co-ordinator Fiona Francombe and other guest speakers will be guiding us through the process of finding and shooting the perfect location.

So, if you're looking for somewhere to shoot your film, or you fancy trying your hand at a bit of location scouting, join us as we uncover some of the well-known and hidden gems in Bristol & beyond.

*This event is free, please collect a ticket from the Box Office on the night.*