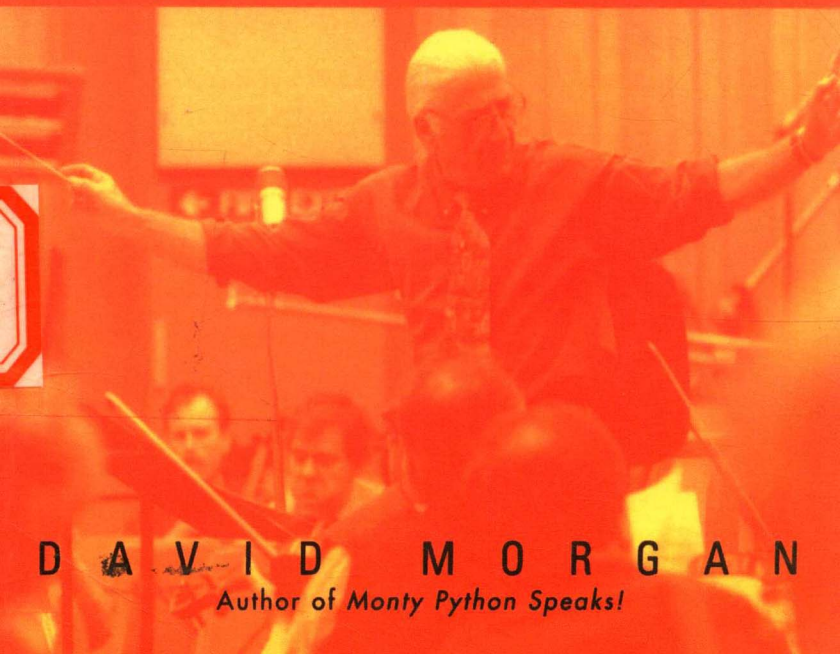


KNOWING THE SCORE

**Film Composers Talk About the Art, Craft,
Blood, Sweat, and Tears of Writing for Cinema**



D A V I D M O R G A N

Author of Monty Python Speaks!

KNOWING THE SCORE

FILM COMPOSERS TALK ABOUT
THE ART, CRAFT, BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS
OF WRITING FOR CINEMA

DAVID MORGAN

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INTRODUCTION

As a youngster, one of my proudest record purchases was of the soundtrack for the animated film *Yellow Submarine*, whose grooves I proceeded to wear down apace. What was unusual, perhaps, was that the tracks on side B (which featured the orchestral background score to the film composed by George Martin, a sprightly pastiche of classical, pop, and humorous vignettes) got as much play—if not more—than the Beatles songs on side A. Such was the attraction of music that captured and evoked the film's visual extravagance, and an early lesson in the power of music to tell a story or a joke.

Like the medium for which it is created, film music is a relatively young art form, although its ancestors—opera, theater music, and, later, radio—have helped set the conventions by which most film music functions: support the atmosphere and drama of a picture without jarring the listener with the seeming incongruity of an unseen orchestra accompanying two lovers or a car chase.

While most cinema is literal—what we see is usually what we get—film music by its very nature allows a filmmaker to expand

the scope of a film by introducing nonliteral elements: emotions not evident on the faces of actors, memories of events long gone and undramatized, or contradictory commentary on the actions of characters. When an audience sees an adorable, innocent little boy but hears a hellish, swirling mass chanting praise to Satan, they understand that they are not to believe what they see. Conversely, if we watch a boxer being pummeled and losing a prizefight, but the soundtrack blares a triumphant horn passage, we are being reminded that "victory" and "loss" are not so easily defined. Audiences can be challenged to rethink what they experience, and thus film music can make a film deeper and more resonant than it might otherwise be.

Cinema has offered some of the most vibrant and sophisticated music available to mass audiences, yet film music remains an underappreciated art form. It is easy to denigrate a score for a crass, commercial Hollywood time-waster as having no more merit than the film it inhabits, but it is not unusual for a grade-B picture to sport a classy or inventive piece of music from one of the most talented composers working today. Good film music can rise above its material and even live on outside of the film, long after the drama for which it was written has been forgotten. And it is a testament to the composers featured in this book that Hollywood has given them opportunities to write their music and have it performed in a wide variety of styles and genres that would be almost impossible to match on stage or in the concert hall.

Knowing the Score is a collection of interviews with some of cinema's leading composers, working in both the Hollywood studio system and the independent film community. The interviews have been edited together to form a "symposium," in which their shared or disparate ideas and experiences about working in the film medium are brought together to give readers a rounded and in-depth glimpse into the filmmaking process.

This book is not strictly for the musician, a technical guide to

Introduction

composition or theory; nor is it a primer on synchronizing music to film running at twenty-four frames per second, or on which software programs are best for mixing MIDI recordings with sound effects. Rather, *Knowing the Score* is an appreciation of and inquisitive exploration into the art and craft of film music for film buffs and music fans, as told in the words of some of the form's leading practitioners. They will explore such topics as how film composers decide upon a musical style for a given film, how they collaborate with a director, how they make the choices on what function music should serve in the film, how editing changes in a film can affect their music, and how the process of writing film music changes according to the logistics of the project or the temperaments of their collaborators.

In addition, these composers will examine in depth certain noteworthy scores that helped break new ground or stretched the craft in new directions.

Readers will hopefully come away with a new (or renewed) appreciation of the special talents required to make a film score memorable, even timeless, and perhaps to listen even more carefully the next time the credits roll and the music announces a new adventure, a new world.



PANEL

The following were interviewed for this “symposium”:

ELMER BERNSTEIN

With a movie career spanning fifty years, Bernstein has written for such diverse films as *The Ten Commandments*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Ghostbusters*, *Heavy Metal*, and *The Age of Innocence*. He won an Academy Award for the musical *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

CARTER BURWELL

Beginning his film composition career with Joel and Ethan Coen's *Blood Simple* (and continuing on all their subsequent films), Burwell has fashioned an eclectic roster of scores, including *Rob Roy*, *Gods and Monsters*, and *Being John Malkovich*.

ELIA CMIRAL

Cmiral began his music career in Europe before coming to the United States in the mid-1990s. After gaining several indepen-

dent film and TV credits, he was offered the chance to score a high-profile Hollywood studio picture, the John Frankenheimer thriller *Ronin*.

JOHN CORIGLIANO

An acclaimed concert hall composer of concertos and chamber works, Corigliano composed the groundbreaking scores to *Altered States*, *Revolution*, and *The Red Violin*, for which he won the Academy Award. He is perhaps best known for his 1991 opera *The Ghosts of Versailles* and for his Symphony No. 1, also referred to as the "AIDS Symphony," as it was written to the memory of deceased friends.

MYCHAEL DANNA

A Toronto-based composer and musician, Danna has collaborated extensively with director Atom Egoyan (*The Sweet Hereafter*, *Felicia's Journey*), and has recently worked with such Hollywood filmmakers as Joel Schumacher (*8mm*) and Ang Lee (*The Ice Storm*, *Ride with the Devil*).

PATRICK DOYLE

An actor and musical director with Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company, Doyle wrote his first film score for Branagh's *Henry V* and has worked on many of the director's subsequent films. In addition to his Shakespearean scores, Doyle has written lyrical period and contemporary pieces for *Sense and Sensibility*, *A Little Princess*, *Carlito's Way*, and *Great Expectations*.

PHILIP GLASS

One of the most influential of late-twentieth-century composers of concert works, opera, and music-theater productions, Glass has contributed highly iconoclastic music to some iconoclastic films, from Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi* and *Powaqqatsi* to

Paul Schrader's *Mishima* and Martin Scorsese's *Kundun*. He recently composed a new score for the 1931 Tod Browning version of *Dracula*.

ELLIOT GOLDENTHAL

A student of John Corigliano and Aaron Copland, with extensive theater and concert hall credits, Goldenthal has created strikingly original scores using a *mélange* of styles (orchestral, pop, electronic) for such films as *Drugstore Cowboy*, *Alien³*, and *The Butcher Boy*. He received Academy Award nominations for *Interview with the Vampire* and *Michael Collins* and recently scored *Titus*, a film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* directed by his wife, Julie Taymor.

JERRY GOLDSMITH

Recognized as a leader among Hollywood veterans, a composer of more than 250 film and TV scores, Goldsmith's prolific output is matched only by his own virtuosity in finding unique musical voices for each of his subjects, such as the surreal percussion of *Planet of the Apes*, the echoing trumpets of *Patton*, and the unearthly electronics of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Recipient of eighteen Oscar nominations, he won the Academy Award for his chilling satanic chorales for *The Omen*.

MARK ISHAM

A classically trained performer with a solid jazz streak, Isham was part of such noted San Francisco Bay Area bands as Group 87 and Sons of Champlin before striking out solo, producing several electronic and jazz recordings. Isham has had a similarly varied film résumé, employing electronics, jazz, and orchestral writing, and earning an Oscar nomination for his Celtic-inspired melodies in *A River Runs Through It*.

MICHAEL KAMEN

Kamen graduated from the Juilliard School, and from the New York Rock and Roll Ensemble, into a career writing for the movies. Among his most notable scores are *Die Hard*, *Brazil*, *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, *Don Juan DeMarco*, and *Mr. Holland's Opus*.

ALAN MENKEN

His success with the Off-Broadway musical hit *Little Shop of Horrors* (co-written with Howard Ashman) helped steer Menken to the big screen, where he has become the preeminent composer of musicals, helping to revive two film genres (animation and musical comedy) with *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*. They and their successors, including *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, have earned Menken eight Academy Awards.

BASIL POLEDOURIS

As a film student at USC's School of Cinema in the sixties, Poledouris had the distinction of being the first to direct a script by John Milius (who would later author or co-author *Apocalypse Now* and *The Wind and the Lion*). Poledouris eventually returned to music studies—he had taken piano since he was seven—scoring television and feature films such as *Lonesome Dove*, *Robocop*, *The Hunt for Red October*, *Les Misérables*, and *For Love of the Game*.

JOCELYN POOK

Pook is a violinist/violist who has divided her career between performing and composition. She played on the soundtracks of a few Derek Jarman films (and even appeared on-screen in *Edward II*), and wrote music for dance companies, theater groups, recordings, and several British TV films and documentaries before scoring Stanley Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*.

DAVID RAKSIN


Beginning as an arranger for Charlie Chaplin on *Modern Times*, Raksin is one of the most respected of composers from Hollywood's Golden Age. Celebrated for his rich, sometimes dark scores to such classics as *Laura*, *Forever Amber*, and *The Bad and the Beautiful*, Raksin has also taught a generation or two of film music students, promoting the validity of film music as an intrinsically artful musical form.

DAVID SHIRE

Noted for his works both for the stage (*Closer Than Ever*, *Baby*, *Big*) and for screens big and small (*The Conversation*, *All the President's Men*, *The Hindenburg*, *Last Stand at Saber River*), Shire's chameleonic musical abilities also won him an Oscar for his song from *Norma Rae*, "It Goes Like It Goes."

ROBERT TOWNSON

A record producer who formed the Masters Film Music series of soundtrack recordings, Townson took over Varèse Sarabande, a predominantly classical label, in 1989 and helped turn it into one of the leading producers of original soundtracks and film music recordings, releasing newly recorded classic works by such composers as Bernard Herrmann, Alex North, John Barry, and John Williams.



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THE ART OF FILM MUSIC

How would you describe the best or most satisfying use of music in a film?

DAVID SHIRE (*All the President's Men*, *The Conversation*): Film music is so often an art of juxtaposition. When the music is more about subtext—adding an element that isn't on the screen—that's the most satisfying. The most simple-minded scoring is what you get in most B-movies and bad television, where they want happy scenes made as happy as possible, love scenes made as loving as possible, and action scenes made as fast and furious as possible. It's not as creative, and it doesn't leave much room for your imagination, except to try to find some *new* way to write the same old music for the three-hundredth time. And usually they just want the same old music anyway, a generic, same old score that isn't going to tax anybody. I've had scores thrown out because I did a subtext score and they wanted something vanilla, right down the mainstream. You struggle and struggle, and they throw things away, and then I'd hear the