

MUSIC FOR *THE SILENT ONE*: An Interview with Composer Jenny McLeod

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Abstract

The Silent One is a significant film in the context of New Zealand (NZ) cinema for several reasons. It was the first New Zealand drama feature film directed by a woman and the first using a Dolby stereo soundtrack. Its incorporation of underwater film sequences played a vital part in portraying the world of the film's central character, Jonasi, a deaf-mute. Jonasi's vocal inability allows for other sound elements to play an important role in the narrative and emotional content. One such element is the music score provided by Jenny McLeod who discusses her work on the film in the following interview.

Keywords

The Silent One, Jenny McLeod, film score, New Zealand film

Introduction: New Zealand Cinema Context

A baby boy in a small canoe washes up on the shore of a beautiful Pacific Island. What will the local tribe make of him? (Promotional tagline, *The Silent One*, 1984)

The Silent One was produced and released at a transitional moment for New Zealand cinema. As Roger Horrocks argues, around 1984 there were “profound changes... in government, in popular culture and the arts” (1999: 130) that were tied into debates about New Zealand cinematic ‘identity’. Roger Donaldson’s highly acclaimed *Sleeping Dogs* (1977) is generally regarded as the start of contemporary cinema in New Zealand. The success of this film, and initiatives of Donaldson and his contemporaries, led to the establishment of the New Zealand Film Commission in 1978 by an Act of Parliament that aimed “to encourage and also participate and assist in the making, promoting, distribution, and exhibition of films” (Dennis and Bieringa, 1996: 214). It also showed the government’s support for and confidence in the film industry which continues to the present day.

The 1980s brought further advances for the film industry. In 1981 the New Zealand Film Archive was founded as an independent Charitable Trust and the National Film Theatre in London presented a season entitled ‘New Zealand – Emergence of a New Cinema’. An amendment to the tax laws in 1982 permitted write-offs of production expenses for projects that were classified as ‘New Zealand film’ by the Film Commission. The New Zealand blockbuster, *Goodbye Pork Pie* (Geoff Murphy,

1981) was the first film to recover its costs on the home front alone and to be screened in the market section at Cannes and it played a significant part in integrating local cinema into 'Kiwi' culture. The score was written by New Zealand composer John Charles who now resides in Sydney, Australia. Other award-winning films of 1984 that shared the spotlight with *The Silent One* were *Came a Hot Friday* (Ian Mune, music by Stephen McCurdy), *Death Warmed Up* (David Blyth, music by Mark Nicholas), *Vigil* (Vincent Ward, music by Jack Body), *Constance* (Bruce Morrison, music by John Charles and Dave Gibson). The New Zealand/United Kingdom/Japan co-production *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* (Nagisa Ôshima) was filmed in the previous year with music by Ryuichi Sakamoto, whose work influenced Jenny McLeod's music for *The Silent One*.

New Zealand film composers working in the 1980s did not have the benefit of formal training (and techniques for composing screen scores are still not taught in any formal setting in New Zealand). Victoria Kelly, composer of film scores such as *The Ugly* (Scott Reynolds, 1997), *Toy Love* (Harry Sinclair, 2002), *Out of the Blue* (Robert Sarkies, 2006) and *Under the Mountain* (Jonathan King, 2009), is possibly the only New Zealand composer who has a post-graduate qualification in film scoring, which she obtained at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Whereas institutions such as Victoria University in Wellington and the University of Auckland today offer courses where music in films is studied, in the 1980s no such courses were on offer. Like McLeod, composers for film scores learned by doing, drawing on their experience in concert or popular music and working under great pressure.

Jenny McLeod (born 1941 in Wellington) obtained a BMus (Hons) in 1964, having studied with Frederick Page, David Farquhar and Douglas Lilburn. She also spent two years in Europe, first under the mentorship of Olivier Messiaen, and later with Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio and Pierre Boulez. After returning to NZ, she became a lecturer at Victoria University in 1967, and later a professor at the age of twenty-nine. In the late 1980s she translated Dutch composer Peter Schat's (1984) book on 'tone clock' theory into English, and illustrated its application in her *Tone Clock Pieces* for piano (1988-89). McLeod had previous experience in composing incidental music for theatrical works, but none for film composing. The score for *The Silent One* uses a variety of tone colours and an amalgam of classical, popular and traditional styles. Instrumental combinations include xylophone and bassoon to accompany Jonasi's dream scene and the turtle is characterised by a clarinet motif.¹ The scene of a shark attack on one of the villagers is set to dramatic orchestral music. Rhythmic Cook Island drumming is often used as diegetic music. McLeod structures the score in a formal manner with the main title theme functioning as an overture, comprising motifs and rhythms that feature later in the film. Effective, although not over-abundant, synchronised music illustrates some scenes; for example, ascending passages accompany Jonasi struggling to the surface in deep water, and conclude with a brass fanfare.

The Silent One Film Overview

Directed by Yvonne Mackay, *The Silent One* was filmed in 1983 on Aitutaki in the Cook Islands and produced by Gibson Films. Based on the eponymous children's book by Joy Cowley (1981), the screenplay was written by actor and film director,

¹ Instrumentation uses 3 flutes, 2 oboes, 3 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 trumpets, 3 French horns, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, 3 timpani, marimba, celesta, synthesizer, harp, piano, bass guitar, drums, choir, strings.

Ian Mune. *The Silent One* won six international awards in the ‘children’s films’ and ‘cinematography’ categories of international film festivals as well as, and relevant to this article, the ‘Best Film Soundtrack’ award at the NZ Music Awards in 1984. The Centre for New Zealand Music (SOUNZ) describes the soundtrack as “a landmark in the country’s musical heritage with an exciting blend of Polynesian, classical and popular music styles”.² Despite these accolades, the score was not released at the time although, in recognition of the soundtrack value, a CD was produced by Jayrem Records in 2009.³

The Silent One deals with the problem of being different in a superstitious society and finding comfort in a mystical world. It tells the story of Jonasi, a deaf-mute baby boy who is washed up on a beautiful Pacific island. Due to religious prejudice, he is ostracised by both adults and children in his adopted tribe and he seeks solace in friendship with a rare white turtle. Jonasi and the turtle are regarded as evil spirits by the tribe and he must go to some lengths to protect his friend, especially when a damaging storm breaks out, for which the pair are blamed. The magic realist conclusion suggests Jonasi’s metamorphosis into a turtle and generically situates the film as fantasy.⁴

Although the film uses several professional actors, it also draws upon the indigenous Rarotongan community of Aitutaki, including musicians. The film’s mise-en-scène conveys a sense of everyday life of the islanders. The film sequences by Australian underwater photography specialists Ron and Valerie Taylor⁵ is instrumental in conveying the movements and silent communication between Jonasi and the turtle. In terms of cinematography, Jonasi’s deafness is illustrated using techniques such as suddenly cutting to point-of-view (POV) shots combined with near-silences in the middle of festivities and noisy crowds. In a *NZ Listener* interview with Douglas Jenkin in 1988, director Mackay observed that, apart from the cinematography, the score of *The Silent One* was the most important element in the film. Due to the lead character’s inability to speak, Telo Malese’s acting performance had to compensate for his lack of speech and the film score became the vehicle for his emotions.⁶

Although the setting in the South Pacific is not specified, local Cook Island musicians and traditional drumming form part of the soundtrack. McLeod incorporated folk melodies from the area into the score, and the traditional spiritual chant in the opening sequence suggests the mystical elements that evolve into magical events. She added further variety to the score by using orchestral as well as electronic music, the latter underscoring the underwater scenes where Jonasi’s special bond with the white turtle develops and suggests his being at peace in the quiet beneath the surface of the ocean. The following (edited) interview investigates Jenny McLeod’s experience of successfully scoring the music for *The Silent One*. While she has continued to write music for television and documentaries, McLeod has not scored another feature film and the interview informs the documentation of a specific moment in New Zealand cinema history.

² See listing and further links at: <http://sounz.org.nz/manifestations/show/10007> - accessed November 2009.

³ Jayrem Records is a specialist CD and DVD publisher operating since 1977. See further details in Appendix.

⁴ *The Silent One* has been reviewed on ‘Moria, the Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy Film Review’ website, http://www.moria.co.nz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3351Itemid=1 - accessed November 2009.

⁵ Ron and Valerie Taylor were scuba divers and fisherfolk who took up underwater photography and have become specialist filmmakers. Their first film project was released in 1962 and they have continued to pursue this work into the new millennium. See <http://www.ronvaltaylor.com/> - accessed November 2009.

⁶ See <http://www.nzvideos.org/silentCD.html> - accessed November 2009.

Approaching the task

Riette Ferreira (henceforth RF): Do you find writing for film easy in terms of finding ideas?

Jenny McLeod (henceforth JMCL): No, sometimes things come very easily and when it is film, things always have a deadline, and the film composer is the last in the production process. The studio will have already been booked to put the whole thing together. So you haven't got time to dwell on things, whether this is the right note or not, you've got to work fast. That is how it was with *The Silent One*; I just went through it like a bomb.

RF: How long did you work on that film?

JMCL: I think I had about six weeks. I didn't have time to write the score out. The whole thing was done in pencil.

RF: What inspired you in this film?

JMCL: It has a mythical quality. The story itself has a universal resonance. I like that it is legendary. It is partly realistic, but there is symbolism in it, that the turtle stands for wisdom... To me the meaning is that the victim of persecution is lifted out into something transcendental. I think the music is 'over the top' in a fairytale way. It is big and colourful and to me those are all qualities of a symbolic story, something that is not quite realistic.

RF: You must have been very proud of working on the first New Zealand feature film with a Dolby stereo soundtrack.

JMCL: Oh, yes, that arrived kind of late. I only found out about the problems with Dolby stereo sound after I had written the music. I added synthesizer parts afterwards because in Dolby stereo you can't have the same thing coming out on both sides. They cancel each other out and you lose it. Maybe they have solved the problem now but it cropped up in that particular score. I had to think what I could have coming out one side that wouldn't be cancelled out by the other side. Where the tone colours were doubled up, I had to use the synthesizer to get rid of that, or put some percussion over there or something. I like the sound of synthesizer mixed in with orchestra. It freshens it up a bit.

RF: Howard Shore once said he doesn't think that a real orchestra will ever become obsolete in film music.

JMCL: The orchestra is brilliant! In *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001) they bring in those amorphous effects from the Polish school – they're in the background of *For Seven* [McLeod's ensemble for seven instruments written in 1966] too. But the film people got onto it. They hadn't at the time of *Silent One*, but now they have. If you get good speakers and hear those film soundtracks with their special sound effects through them, you will be amazed at what is going on. It's very good for a composer to hear. I think a lot of classical people don't know the difference between good and bad popular style, semi-classical or film music. They live in a more ethereal world; they haven't had the experience to know. But if you ask me, it is like the reasons why some Mozart is better than other Mozart. It is the same in pop music. With some of my composer friends it is useless to talk about good or bad soundtracks because our tastes are

completely different. A lot of my serious friends couldn't handle Howard Shore's soundtrack for *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of The Ring* (Peter Jackson, 2001), but I think certain parts are very, very good. It is about understanding the function of music in film.

Setting the Score

JMcL: I think I overdid the music in *The Silent One*.

RF: Do you mean there is too much music?

JMcL: No, not too much. I listen to it now and think today I would do something much more restrained. There wouldn't be so many overt gestures in it now, because the score doesn't need a big, colourful soundtrack. There is about forty minutes of music [in the 95 minute film], but some of it was recorded in the Cook Islands, which became incorporated into what I did. I didn't add anything to the Cook Island drumming; those were just tracks on their own. There were one or two cues where I became a bit more contrived and I wasn't happy with them either. The hunting scene was one example. I played it through to David [producer David Gibson] and he didn't like it – and I knew he was right not to. I needed to do it again and the second version came very easily and was much better. But what comes easily in music is not always the best, in fact today, what comes easily I tend to mistrust. I find that I have to change often, or I have to develop. Nowadays you replay things using software and you can test the weaknesses of your ideas, because you keep playing things back. I trust my own responses and when I get sick of it, I will try and change it. Things can come fast, but I don't necessarily trust them.

RF: Did you use a lot of the Cook Island traditional music?

JMcL: The Gibsons got the right to record and use recordings of some Cook Island songs. There is one at the banquet. I turned it into little xylophone tunes as well. There's a bit of traditional singing when there's a kind of family reunion moment. There's a very slow electronic and string build-up on one chord, and then there's a song after the climax. At the very start, I was imagining the listeners coming into the theatre and they see the start of the film and they don't know what kind of a film it is going to be. I got the idea from a sound engineer who, when he started up his metronome click-dial to set the tempo, swept through the dial from the one end to the other and back again to get it in tune, and then he would set it. So I thought of the sweep right through and I would start (with the high shot of the sea) and the tune from the Cook Islands (that I had made into the background of the main theme). I put it in there on its own – so at first the audience are not sure whether it is going to be an ethnic, arty film, or not. The electronics come in gradually and then suddenly the full orchestra comes in with this grand gesture, and then they think oh, this could be a big Hollywood glossy! And then after that, it sweeps back to a kind of middle mainstream area where the score mostly stays. That was fun.

RF: The score starts from where the orchestra comes in. Marimba and xylophone come in with that theme.

JMcL: The Cook Island song is in the voices, this is a countermelody that goes with it. When you listen to the soundtrack, they vocalise on "yay", there are no words. The song is a background to the main tune which is in the marimba and xylophones.

RF: It seems that there are variations of the motif. The interval of a third pops up everywhere. Did you consciously use this interval and does it have a symbolic meaning?

JMcL: No, in this kind of film music I certainly wasn't thinking along those lines. There is that little pattern, the Jonasi pattern, which to me signifies Jonasi. But here I was just trying to write a nice, memorable tune... It took a while to get that tune right, but not all that long. And the harmony rotates. I love the way it just gets ready to start again and is kind of poised for a second. I haven't discovered another way, other than harmony, to achieve that kind of poise. The harmonic movement that brings you to a point that says yes, we can start again. It is a bit like in Indian music when you get to the beat before the start of the next cycle.

RF: Are there a lot of similarities between the traditional musical elements of the Cook Islanders and the Maori?

JMcL: Well, no. Cook Islanders have wood drums and slit drums. In the old days the Maoris had the big signal drum, but their drumming had disappeared. Cook Islanders speak an older version of Maori and the Maori call them their "older brother". They can more or less understand each other. Cook Islanders don't have the slow waiata; the old classical Maori songs appear almost unmeasured. It is a 'take-your-time' kind of thing. Cook Island music is metrically more complex.

RF: Because of the drumming?

JMcL: Maybe, but the drumming and the songs don't necessarily go together. The drumming tends to be on its own. I have noticed the little song that comes in the banquet, the feast, had mixtures of twos and threes. You find those sorts of things in some chants that Maori do. They may miss half a beat and then they will be off again. But I don't find the two styles all that similar. The Gibsons gave me the Cook Island music because they had the rights to use it. They recorded it themselves while they were there, so it was sung by the actual people in the film. I used what I really liked if I could find a place to fit it in.

RF: Do you have any favourite keys?

JMcL: I wouldn't say they're favourite keys; in fact they can become quite the opposite, because of the general range of the human voice. D Major very often ends up being a comfortable key. It depends on the range of the music, whether it is dominant to dominant or tonic to tonic.

RF: Some composers think of keys as colours.

JMcL: No, I don't think I do. I certainly don't do it consciously, but my teacher, Messiaen, saw colours in all sorts of things. He believed everybody did. I'd say D, A, E, and G Major would be bright.

RF: What about timbres and instrument combinations?

JMcL: The Polynesian background was nice. I love wooden sounds: marimbas, xylophones, thumb piano, although I didn't use a thumb piano. With the recordings of Cook Island music I used some wood drums and xylophones.

RF: And then the orchestral sounds as well.

JMcL: Yes, and some electronic sounds.

RF: When the white turtle appears for the first time, there was a clarinet tune. I thought that must be a leitmotif for the turtle.

JMcL: Actually, I lifted it from Chopin, one of the Preludes, with the tune in the left hand. It doesn't sound like Chopin at all and nobody has ever noticed it. It has the horns on top of it.

RF: Does your score usually develop dramatically with characters and events, like the same tune morphing through different styles?

JMcL: It probably does, but most of it wouldn't be that conscious. Like those things that symbolically stand for Jonasi, or the turtle, or the main theme. But the main thing was that they were ideas, not music. To write with the video, you have to try it out and see if it works. I was always just using my instincts.

RF: Have you got any techniques you use to bring out geographical location?

JMcL: Choice of tone colour, like using marimbas. There are no marimbas in the Cook Islands, but there is a kind of generalising these days and film composers use it all the time. There is a problem with that, because connotations are so strong you can't use those colours for anything else. Tone colours can suggest things you do not want.

RF: The subliminal effect on audiences interests me, such as what instruments and styles to choose.

JMcL: And tempi are very important too. All those things wear out as time goes by, because they become increasingly stereotyped and stereotypes tend to wear out. It is a big subject.

Inspiration and Collaboration

RF: [In an interview with David Jenkins you mentioned Ryuichi Sakamoto, saying that the music is sometimes like Sakamoto and sometimes like "pop-Rachmaninoff" (1988: 36). Did Sakamoto influence you?

JMcL: You will recognise the resemblance with *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence* [Nagisa Ôshima, 1983]. The Gibsons liked it (I'd never seen it) and they came along with a recording of that and drew my attention to it. I loved it, it was great! They were giving me a ballpark area in which they thought music could be written that would suit *The Silent One* and I entirely agreed with them. *Merry Christmas* has a xylophone theme too. It's not the same theme and the harmonies are completely different and it doesn't have any Cook Island tune running through the back of it either, which kind of distinguishes it. Yes, I wrote something of the same genre. I'd like to think mine is better than his, because it has the Cook Island music as well!

RF: Let's talk about your relationship with the director and producer. Did you work well with them?

JMcL: Yes, I liked them. I liked that they always did what they said they were going to do. I could trust them. I don't think it can work if you don't have that. And in terms of how they responded to the music I proposed, there were only a couple of occasions where Dave said 'no' and I agreed with him.

RF: How did you communicate with them?

JMcL: Just by demos, tapes or I played passages for them.

RF: Were they exact about where they wanted music?

JMcL: We talked it through first; they asked me where music would fit in too. Dave couldn't sing in tune, but he had good musical instincts. On occasions when he didn't like the music he didn't always know why, but I knew - because it was too contrived, it didn't sound natural.

RF: Were you involved in the editing at all?

JMcL: They supposedly gave me the finished version and you write your bits to fit that version and suddenly they changed it. I had written a whole sequence for the shark attack. There had to be a lot of synchronising and then they went and changed the length. I was there for the final mix, yes.

RF: Any input in the Cook Island drumming? They recorded it there.

JMcL: We put it down an octave, for the witchdoctor.

RF: Did they ever ask your advice on any other aspect of sound design?

JMcL: Yes, the turtle call. I had worked with Tim Jordan, the sound editor, on the Sun Festival in Oriental Bay. We worked out some electronic passages together. I called him in, because I figured we would need a turtle call that was done electronically.

RF: It wasn't a whale call as was suggested in some reviews?

JMcL: No, it was a layered sound that he created.

RF: Were you involved in the filming process?

JMcL: No, I never went there. It was all done by the time they asked me to write the music.

RF: Would you have liked to be part of the process, to get a feel for it?

JMcL: I don't know what I could have done or if it would have helped. When we did *Cuckooland* [Yvonne Mackay, 1986 television series] on the other hand, they came to me first. It was after *The Silent One*, so we had a very good relationship. I wrote all the songs and recorded them before they even started shooting. So they took their cue for the whole episode from the songs, which was good. And I did a few things they could use in between. That was later and it was pretty simple, on a synthesizer. But if you do it with an orchestra, you have to plan ahead and book sessions and make sure they are all there. With *Silent One* we got to the end of the booked session and it was about midnight and we still had about three quarters of an hour to finish the recording and the players were magnificent. They all agreed to stay, because they liked the music. It was brilliant.

RF: What would be the biggest hurdle or frustration in the production process?

JMcL: The time was not so much frustration; you just had to get on with it. The least enjoyable aspect about writing anything to commission is 'will I be able to do it?'

RF: What was the most rewarding?

JMcL: It was a challenge and it worked out well.

RF: Did you receive any feedback from audience members?

JMcL: Yes, people liked the music and there was a bunch of my composer friends from the 'serious world' who really loved it. There were also people like Ken Young and Barry Johnstone from the NZSO [New Zealand Symphony Orchestra] who thought it was great. I knew it was good music. It was one of those pieces that I can look back on and say, "That's good, it's got the qualities."

The Language of Film Music

RF: You said that you were trying to appeal to a wider audience as well as a local one and that you used a variety of modes, but you feel it all hangs together. What did you mean by that?

JMcL: Modes as in styles, or modes of expression. Not musical modes, I didn't mean that. I didn't consciously use any new scales. Sometimes I used modes of expression more to create dramatic effect and the music is not tuneful at all, it is just creating an effect.

RF: And is it largely about the emotion?

JMcL: It depends on the film. I think music for film can do a lot more than it has done... in terms of the range and people being very sensitive to very small sounds.

RF: And with the good systems we have in theatres nowadays?

JMcL: Yes. I really enjoy listening to the soundtracks, mainly films I watch on television now. Hearing what they're doing and how things are changing and watching the techniques of films and the way things get telescoped. Things you once had to put in you no longer do, because people know, it's understood. I think that kind of thing really applies to the language of music as well and the language of film music. It is a little bit along the lines of what I said about restraint. I mean, if Wagner were alive today, he would probably get through one of his operas in half an hour, because it wouldn't need all the bits in between! So I think the history of our experience of expression affects how we experience it now and it changes the modes of expression filmmakers and composers use. It applies to some concert music too. I think there will be ongoing change and it will be very interesting.

RF: Do you think a film composer needs special training?

JMcL: The whole technique of writing film music has changed now with computers. There are a lot of things you would need to know. I think hands-on is the best way of learning anything.

RF: And that's how you did it?

JMcL: There was nowhere to go and no time, I had to make up my mind. I don't know why they left it so late; it was very daring of them. Just looking at films and listening and seeing what other film composers do.

RF: Do you have a favourite film composer?

JMcL: I love Ennio Morricone. He chooses such odd combinations of instruments and the choice of the actual timbre can be crucial in film music - like the sound of a mouth organ, how evocative that is of a certain kind of film even. He is particularly good.

RF: You don't particularly use his techniques?

JMcL: I got used to listening to him. After I did *The Silent One* I started listening to soundtracks. Before that, the soundtrack could be subliminal; I didn't really notice or pay much attention to it. But after that and ever since, I've been listening. After you've done it yourself you have some appreciation of the craft, you realise it's not an easy job. For instance, [New Zealand composer] David Farquhar said to me he could never get the music to be the right length.

RF: That is very important.

JMcL: Yes, you had to record at the right metronome markings.

RF: And the images were already edited.

JMcL: Yes, the challenge was to make it sound like music and fit the action, because there are these key moments in the action where there has to be synchronisation. And I didn't know about that then, I have learned since how the old composers have done it, by watching. I just did it by metronome markings, working out to the beat. Sometimes you have got to be right on, other places it can be a little out. The music for a shot doesn't always begin at the beginning of a shot.

RF: Do you find writing for film a challenge, or rather restrictive?

JMcL: If you find it restrictive, then you're not a film composer. It has to be a challenge, otherwise you won't enjoy it and if you don't enjoy it, you're not going to write anything anyone else is going to enjoy.

RF: Richard Rodney Bennett [Ford, 2001: 207] said that writing film music couldn't possibly use all your musical ability. Do you agree?

JMcL: Never say never! He had a lot of experience, also in concert music. He said something else that made me wonder a bit too, and that is that it's okay to do both, but you should never mix film music and concert music up. That, to me, indicates a kind of split in his mind - that they are two different worlds. But there are more serious kinds of film music, art films.

RF: Do you think a film composer needs specific skills?

JMcL: Probably, I think we would agree that not everybody is a natural film composer.

RF: Things like working under stress?

JMcL: Oh, yes, and working with other people and having to rewrite music.

RF: Do you have other compositions that can be arranged as film music?

JMcL: Yes, more in the sort of light pop-classical pieces. There was some interplay; I was taking some bits out of *Cuckooland*, jazzy, bluesy, passages that I thought I could turn into a sonata movement. So I got double mileage out of the same material. Somebody rang up and asked if I would be interested in doing the music

for a series on migration of Maori to New Zealand. I immediately had title music for it, but they never did it and I changed it a bit and eventually used it for another film score, a documentary with a lot of sea in it: *Beyond the Roaring 40s* [Conon Fraser, 1986].

RF: That's about the Antarctic islands.

JMcL: That's right, there was this big sea theme in there and then the metre changed and other things happened to it and it was also the first movement for the *Three Celebrations for Orchestra* (1987). I don't know if I would do it anymore. I don't think so, but at that stage my semi-classical music still had a lot of pop streams coming into it.

RF: Are there any film scores that stand out for you?

JMcL: John Williams does things like the saloon sequence in *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), the strange sort of mocking music; I think he does that really well. I like Jerry Goldsmith's music. Jerry Fielding wrote some really good film music too. The New Zealand composer, Graeme Revell, who lives in Hollywood, does interesting scores. He did *Dead Calm* (Phillip Noyce, 1989). He's done about eighty films. He had no training or experience. In a radio interview Graeme talked about Penderecki and how he ended up writing and recording Penderecki-style effects for big orchestra and used it in every film.

RF: Would you agree that film music could be a vehicle for avant-garde music and, even subliminally, expose an audience to that kind of sound?

JMcL: It is done, but I don't know if it is a good thing, because in film music the kind of staged avant-garde sounds you hear are where they try to freak the audience out. Film composers are such magpies; they'll pick up any style that can help them create an effect for something. That's what works as the stereotype with a mass audience.

RF: Do you think New Zealand film music can be distinguished from other countries?

JMcL: Can New Zealand as a country be distinguished from other countries? There are qualities of New Zealanders that can be mirrored in their music. I think it is a kind of dryness. Whether there are special qualities depends on the consciousness of the composer. There is a down-to-earth-ness. I never think about this. I say, if it was written by a New Zealander, it is New Zealand music!

Conclusion

Jenny McLeod is admired by her peers and is one of New Zealand's most accessible and well-liked composers.⁷ The rest of her oeuvre includes large-scale works *Earth and Sky* (1969), *Under the Sun* (1971) and *He Iwi Kotahi Tatou* (1991) for combinations of Maori and Pakeha adult and children's massed choirs, orchestras and rock groups. Other examples of her work are *For Seven* (performed by the

⁷ A more detailed biography and list of McLeod's compositions can be found on the SOUNZ website: <http://sounz.org.nz/contributor/composer/1071> – accessed November 2009.

Stockhausen Ensemble), 17 *Tone Clock Pieces* for piano, many songs and hymns, and recently *The Poet* for chamber choir and string quartet on a cycle of 11 poems by Janet Frame (2008). She aims to communicate effectively with the audience but, at the same time, portray a sophistication that reflects her intellectual outlook on life. She has had diverse musical experiences throughout her career and her music for *The Silent One* demonstrates this. Her score for this film also influenced later works, for example, melodic and rhythmic motives appear in *Jazz Themes* (1987) and *Three Celebrations for Orchestra* (1987). McLeod's screen music and compositional practice – for *The Silent One* and subsequently for television series and documentaries – offers a useful body of work for Australasian screen sound studies.

Bibliography

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Appendix

The Silent One: Awards

- 1984 - New Zealand Music Awards: Best Film Soundtrack: Jenny McLeod.
 1984 - Frankfurt Film Festival for Youth: Best Children's Film
 1984 - Silver Gryphon - Giffoni Film Festival for Children, Italy
 1985 - Moscow Film Festival: Silver Medal: Children's Section, Russia
 1985 - Figuera de Foz Festival, Portugal: Best Children's Film
 1986 - Chicago Children's Film Festival: Best Cinematography
 1986 - Paris Film Festival for Children and Young People: Best Actor: Telo Malase (Jonasi) and Special Jury Prize for Best Film.

The Silent One: Film Credits

Director: Yvonne Mackay
 Production co: Gibson Films
 Producer: Dave Gibson
 Executive producer: David Compton
 Screenplay: Ian Mune
 Based on the novel by Joy Cowley
 Director of photography: Ian Paul
 Designer: Tony Rabbit
 Film editor: Jamie Selkirk
 Underwater photography: Ron & Valerie Taylor
 Music composed by Jenny McLeod
 Cast: Telo Malese (Jonasi), George Henare (Pau Te Po), Pat Evison (Luisa), Anzac Wallace (Tasiri), Rongo Tupatea Kahu (Taruga), Jo Pahu (Etika), Reg Ruka (Bulai), Anthony Gilbert (Aesake), Bernard Kearns (Redbeard), Prince Tui Teka (Postmaster)
 35mm, 95 minutes

The Silent One: Soundtrack Information

Jayrem Records Ltd - CDJAY321 - 42 min. UPC #9421002391681

Performed by the Wellington Regional Orchestra, conducted by William Southgate.

Leader: May Hannan; Piano: Kevin Wooding; Bass: Barry Johnstone; Drums: Bud Jones.

The Bach Choir conducted by Roy Tankersley with Kathy Blennerhassett, soloist.

Electronic engineer and Turtle calls by Tim Jordan.

Drum tracks on location in Aitutaki, Cook Islands, by "The Aitutaki Diggers".

Arranged by Craig Utting.

Recorded and mixed at The Studio Centre, Wellington, by Garry Clark.

Tracklisting for *The Silent One: Original Soundtracks* CD: *Ancient Voices; Main Title Theme; The Meeting; Ka ta te Puaka; Night To Day; Underwater Ballet; Homecoming; The Call; Pai; Te Kaikai; Discovery; Rude Awakening; The Cry; Trouble; Peril, The Turtle Hunt; Shark; Jonasi Weeps; Confrontation; The Return and Jonasi's Theme.*

Jenny McLeod's Screen Music

The Gift (John King, 1987, documentary)

Cuckooland (Yvonne Mackay, 1986, television series)

Beyond the Roaring Forties (Conon Fraser, 1986, NZFU, documentary)

The Haunting of Barney Palmer (Yvonne Mackay, 1985, electronic music for television film)

The Neglected Miracle (Barry Barclay, 1985, documentary)

Plants (Barry Barclay, 1985, promotional video)

The Silent One (Yvonne Mackay, 1983, feature film)

Equation (John O'Shea, 1973, industrial film).