CRAFTING THE SOUNDS OF SENTIMENT
Jen Anderson Interviewed about *The Sentimental Bloke* DVD score

Jeannette Delamoir & Karl Neuenfeldt

Abstract

Multi-instrumentalist and composer Jen Anderson used her musical, compositional and productions skills to create a folk-rock score for the 1918 silent film, *The Sentimental Bloke*. After 15 minutes of extra footage were discovered and restored to the film, she expanded and reworked the score. In collaboration with the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, Anderson recorded this revised score. In an extended interview, Anderson reflects upon the musical, logistical and technical challenges she encountered, and the aesthetic decisions she made in representing, via original music, an iconic Australian film. She also discusses performing live accompaniment, with two other musicians, for screenings of the film around the world. The process of recording the score allowed her to alter the instrumentation, adding extra session musicians to obtain a fuller sound. However, the trio who had performed on the film’s tours was able to maintain a ‘natural’ sound, similar to a live performance, in part through improvising while recording.

Keywords
improvisation, Australian silent films, Australian film composers, Jen Anderson, *The Sentimental Bloke*

Introduction

Jen Anderson (b. 1959) (Fig 1) is interviewed by Karl Neuenfeldt1 about the process of crafting a new musical score for the 1918 Australian silent film classic *The Sentimental Bloke* (Raymond Longford). Over several years, Anderson performed this score live with a small, acoustic ensemble for national and international film screenings and, following a new restoration of the film by the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), she re-worked and recorded the score for their 2009 DVD release.

Music researcher Karl Neuenfeldt has performed live music with silent films (Frank Hurley’s *Pearl of the South Seas* at the National Folk Festival in Canberra, 2009) and has also co-produced (with Nigel Pegrum) ARIA Award winning CDs (Seaman Dan’s 2005 *Perfect Pearl* and 2009 *Sailing Home*). From those musical and production perspectives he explores with Anderson the pre-production, production and post-production stages of the process of creating the score for *The Sentimental Bloke*.

---

1 Interview conducted and recorded by Neuenfeldt on 16 December 2008, in Melbourne. All quotes extracted from this interview.
**Bloke** DVD. They discuss the musical, logistical and technical challenges encountered, and the aesthetic decisions made in re-presenting, via original music, an iconic Australian film.

Anderson, trained classically on violin and piano, is a versatile musician who has toured with bands the Black Sorrows (1989-1993) and Weddings Parties Anything (1993-1998). Besides her score for **Pandora’s Box** (Georg Pabst, Germany, 1929), she has written scores for feature productions (**The Goddess of 1967** [Clara Law, 2000], **Hunt Angels** [Alec Morgan, 2006]), television series (including the ABC’s **Simone de Beauvoir’s Babies** [Kate Woods, 1997]), short films, animations, and documentaries. She also produces her own and others’ recordings, and has taught audio production at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. During the past four years, she has combined her love of music with her training in public health by running music workshops with Sudanese refugee women, a project that resulted in a CD recording of traditional Sudanese songs. In 2011 she is based in the Kimberley, in the remote Indigenous community of Turkey Creek, Western Australia, where she hopes to instigate public health programs with a strong musical focus.

Anderson’s involvement with **The Sentimental Bloke** began when Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) director Tait Brady invited her to compose and then perform the score. The NFSA had recently restored the film, and it was to open the 1995 Festival as a special tribute to the 100th anniversary of ‘the birth of cinema’: the Lumières’ first public screening of projected moving images in 1895. Anderson performed her newly written score at MIFF—and subsequently toured—with Michael Thomas and Mark Wallace, two fellow members of Weddings Parties Anything.

Then, in a chance discovery, 15 minutes of extra footage was found in the vaults of the George Eastman House Photography and Film Museum in Rochester, New York. “After the initial run with this film”, Anderson says, “the National Film and Sound Archive decided to pull the film from public viewing until it had been restored with this extra footage added. So there was a hiatus of about seven or eight years where no performance took place at all.”
After she reworked the score to fit the expanded film, Anderson found her original performing partners were no longer available to tour. She then formed the Larrikins with Dan Warner and Dave Evans. When the NFSA decided to release the film—along with Anderson’s score—on DVD, the three musicians went into the recording studio.

The Film and its Music

*The Sentimental Bloke*, shot mainly in Sydney, is a classic of Australian silent cinema. The film is based on a collection of popular humorous verse, *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915), written by CJ Dennis. The poems are written in the slang of inner city 'larrikins', or no-good gang members, and tell the story of one protagonist, Bill, his courtship of factory-worker Doreen, and the impact she has on his life, as he becomes a responsible, upwardly mobile husband and father.

![Image of The Sentimental Bloke](image)

*Figure 2: The Sentimental Bloke (Raymond Longford, 1918). Courtesy of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia.*

The first 50,000 copies of the poems sold out within nine months of publication (Chisholm, 1976: 42), and this immense popularity was certainly a factor in the film’s success on its 1919 release in Australia and Great Britain. Critics praised the director, as well as the actors: Arthur Tauchert as Bill, the 'Bloke'; Lottie Lyell, as his sweetheart Doreen; and the leering and spitting Gilbert Emery as Bill’s friend, Ginger Mick. However, the film’s attempted 1922 release in the United States failed, despite new inter-titles using American slang.

Anderson’s *The Sentimental Bloke* commission may have been partly prompted by an earlier widely acclaimed project in which she had composed and performed a string-quartet score for another—very different—silent film, *Pandora’s Box*. Starring
Louise Brooks and full of dark psychological shadows, this film inspired Anderson to draw on her years of classical music training.

The suggestion for a folk-rock approach to *The Sentimental Bloke* came from Tait Brady, who explained in a radio interview that: “What we were after was... something more in the spirit of the film... wonderfully kind of laid back and knockabout and certainly completely unpretentious” (n.d. [1995]). Undoubtedly, the use of a modern musical style inevitably raises questions about the music appropriate for silent films.² There is no evidence of a score written specifically for the initial release of *The Sentimental Bloke*.³ Newspaper review shows clearly that the musical experience surrounding the first screenings of the film—that is, accompaniment and a separate, additional musical entertainment—mixed ‘high’ aesthetics with ‘low’ comedy:

Incidental music was agreeably rendered by a competent theatre orchestra under Mr Robert Keers, and Miss Carrie Lancely appeared with her Melody Maids. This well-known soprano rendered various songs with vocal brilliancy and artistic refinement of style, and was admirably accompanied by Miss D Struble. The latter’s humorous imitation of a little girl screaming in a fit of passionate tears was clever, but a little too prolonged from the point of view both of her own health and that of the audience. ([*Sydney Morning Herald*], 1919: 4)

For many years, the NFSA lending collection included a version of Longford’s *The Sentimental Bloke* with a soundtrack performed by well-known Adelaide pianist Tom King, who claimed to have accompanied the film for its 1919 Adelaide premiere. The ABC recorded King in 1959 playing a re-creation of his accompaniment—a pastiche including popular songs of the day and, according to RW Freney, then South Australian Acting Manager of Australian Broadcasting Commission, “about seventy per cent... improvised” (1959: unpaginated correspondence), a level of improvisation which is, of course, difficult to achieve with an orchestra. This recording was laid onto a 16mm print of the film as a soundtrack.⁴

Given King’s connection with early exhibition of the film, this is the closest approximation to ‘authentic’ incidental music. A 1959 letter from HL White, Film Division librarian at the Commonwealth National Library (as the National Library of Australia was then known), indicates that some of the songs included in the accompaniment were ‘By the Light of the Silvery Moon’ (1909), ‘Let the Rest of the World Go by’ (1919), and ‘How You Gonna Keep 'Em down on the Farm’ (1918) (unpaginated correspondence).

---

² Regarding the appropriateness of using ‘modern instrumentation’, Delamoir (2009: 152) has observed that ‘... even if an authentic musical accompaniment could be achieved, today’s audiences, conditioned by a completely different musical culture, cannot hear it the same way as did past audiences. Notwithstanding such a caveat, arguably using instrumentation common in a film’s era, such as used by Anderson in her score, can lend at least a patina of historical ambience and emotional and sonic authenticity, even if this particular combination of instruments was not used for film accompaniment.

³ Historically, Whiteoak (2003) notes how using music for silent film accompaniment in the Australian context followed on from other earlier modes of projecting images with music, such as moving panoramas, the Edison Kinetophone and phantasmagoria (281). Lack (1997) notes that, certainly in the UK and US prior to the 1920s, composed scores were uncommon. Prestigious touring productions might have them but in smaller venues accompanists might draw on cue sheets or library music or improvise with light classics or popular tunes of the day. The Australian feature film, *The Picture Show Man* (John Power, 1977) represents the life of a touring cinema piano accompanist.

⁴ The version of *The Sentimental Bloke* with Tom King piano accompaniment is on the NFSA’s 1961 reconstruction (title number 550243).
In passing, it is interesting to note several genre-based scores for *The Sentimental Bloke*. The 2005 Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (TSO) annual report notes the 2004-5 recording of two scores commissioned by the TSO from prominent Australian classical composers, Graeme Koehne and Larry Sitsky, for the Longford film version. Sitsky combined classical composers such as Tchaikovsky, Gounod and Mendelssohn with Australian composers such as Frank Hutchens, Rex and Iris Cairos-Rego, and Louis Lavater, who were prominent at the time the film was made (Togher, 2002). The overall effect is rather stately, whereas—on the flimsy basis of a 10-minute test synchronisation of the Koehne score to the film—the latter composition seems to reflect more sympathetically the film’s humour and emotion.⁵

There are also other compositions inspired by CJ Dennis’s characters. For example, Horace Gleeson wrote a score for the 1932 synchronised sound version of *The Sentimental Bloke* (FW Thring). During the 1950s, John Tallis wrote music for a ballet clearly based on the 1918 film of *The Sentimental Bloke*. Albert Arlen, in 1961, used CJ Dennis’s verses as the starting point for a score for a much-loved musical. In 1988, Donald Hollier composed for string quintet, tinny piano and voice; and in 1985, George Dreyfus wrote ‘The Sentimental Bloke: A Play with Music’, for brass band.⁶ Anderson’s score has generated lively debate in part due to this extended cultural connection with Dennis’s work and the early film.

Preproduction

Karl Neuenfeldt (henceforth KN): From the point of view of the [Melbourne International Film Festival] organisers, what was your brief regarding the music?

Jen Anderson (henceforth JA): I don’t recall too much of a brief being given to me, to be honest. That might partly be because we’re talking thirteen years ago now. I do remember talking to Tait Brady about the fact that he really liked the idea of a folk-inspired type of score. Because I was playing with a folk-rock band at the time, and that was one of my big influences, I was very ready to accept that as an idea. In fact, I thought that the instrumentation that you often use in folk music was ideal for the era of this project.

I do recall now spending some time talking about the practicalities of putting on live performances with film. I had learnt a lot from my project with *Pandora’s Box*, but was well aware that it would be really good to write something where—if it became an on-going thing—a small number of musicians could perform it and it didn’t have to be played by a full orchestra. We would probably keep it a fairly small number of musicians for budgetary reasons, as well as practicality. And then they just pretty well let me go. It was wonderful.

I guess when I was offered the project I was very keen to look ahead and try and give it as long a life as possible—something that was going to be mutually advantageous for both myself and for the National Film and Sound Archive—try

---

⁵ The NFSA holds recordings of both scores: the Sitsky trial recording is title number 660071; the Koehne trial recording is title number 661872.

⁶ The NFSA holds most of these: FW Thring’s 1932 sound version of *The Sentimental Bloke* (title number 267); John Tallis’ ballet score is recorded in a 1963 ABC television documentary (title number 448756); Albert Arlen’s musical, in an undated sound recording (title number 417604); and George Dreyfus’ 1987 recording, *A Medley of Seven Songs* (title number 163075).
and give it the ability to be toured as far and wide as possible. And that meant really looking very hard at how many players would be involved in the performance.

One of the things I had found out with *Pandora’s Box* was that cinemas aren’t used to paying for any of these extra sorts of requirements that you have with live performance, such as PA systems and flights for musicians and accommodation and a wage. I found that these factors were really off-putting for a lot of cinema owners. So I wanted to try and make it as friendly and inviting as possible for them, but still create an interesting score.

I decided to choose musicians who could play a few different instruments so that, whilst only using three musicians, we could have different combinations of sound throughout the score to make it more interesting. So that dictated who I chose as musicians, of course. For the initial opening night at the Melbourne International Film Festival, both Michael Thomas and Mark Wallace [from Weddings Parties Anything] played with me. Michael played acoustic guitar and mandolin, and Mark played piano and piano accordion, and I played violin and mandolin and tin whistle. And we all sang a bit as well. So that was the basic format.

Then when the new version [of the film] was ready, Michael Thomas had moved on to other things and so had Mark Wallace. So I found some other performers in Dan Warner and Dave Evans, and we’ve been performing together as a trio over the past four or five years. They were the musicians that I used on the recordings for the DVD, but I also called in a few other musicians because I had that luxury of the multi-track recording. There was enough of a budget to do that, as well.

**KN:**

What do you find most satisfying and unsatisfying in the live situation?

**JA:**

The satisfaction of the live version is that you’ve got a live audience and I love winning them over. We’ve been really fortunate with this film, to play in a lot of different situations, from playing nationally around Australia—and that includes a lot of little, small country towns—to playing overseas in countries such as Japan.

[In] most of the overseas countries where English isn’t the main language, there were subtitles [with an appropriate translation of the original intertitles] but, in a couple of places, there weren’t. So it was a real challenge to see how an audience would take the film, whether they, in fact, would understand it without being able to read the [intertitles] that are in the film, and whether the music would actually help get the emotion of the film across on its own. You can always ‘feel’ an audience. It’s very interesting the way you can really ‘feel’ the vibe of an audience and whether they’re enjoying it or not. I’m pleased to say that, most of the time, audiences do really enjoy this film. We’ve played in Japan and Korea, with subtitles. But for such a different culture, you sort of think, “Wow, these people are just not going to understand the humour in this film at all.” Whilst you may not get as many laughs in Japan or Korea, you still can feel the audience warming to the film, which is just a wonderful feeling.

I think I can only remember one time where an audience didn’t enjoy it. That was in French-speaking Canada. There were no subtitles and I had a few comments after the film and I thought they were well justified. People couldn’t understand.
But for me, the beauty of live playing is feeling the audience start to relax and enjoy themselves and laugh. When they start laughing, it makes me feel really good.

KN:

How did you research the historical era of the film as well as its iconic status within Australian film history?

JA:

I read what I could find about Raymond Longford, the director. I was very interested in him. I was really interested in the way the film was put together. I've composed a fair bit of music for film and television now and, whilst I've been lucky enough to compose for two silent films, I'm certainly not an expert in silent film at all.

But having said that, I've always liked researching anything I'm working on, and I really enjoy finding out about people's lives who've been involved in the film. So it was interesting reading about Raymond Longford and Lottie Lyell in particular, and to find out what Australian film was doing at the time—all of that sort of thing, just to get an idea of background. And then I had a bit of a think about what sort of music was around at that time in Australia. That confirmed to me that, given the mood and feel of the film, it would be a good idea to use the sorts of instruments that you could sit around in your lounge room and play.

Production

KN:

In your roles as both producer and arranger, how did that pre-production research influence your in-studio production?

JA:

It probably only influenced me in an indirect way, in a subconscious way, because, really, I suppose I like to work this way. I like to do some research and then virtually just throw it all away and see what happens. And that's what I did.

The in-studio production, I guess it depends really whether you're talking about the initial writing of the whole thing or the actual in-studio production of the DVD, which took place twelve months ago. And the DVD recording really was very easy for me because myself and Dave and Dan had been performing the film live so many times that I knew what I wanted to keep out of that and what I might want to tweak and what I wanted to add. The initial in-studio production was just getting the whole score down to have—for my sake—an aural reference, and this occurred on the Tascam DA88 [digital recorder]. I suppose it was initiated mainly by guitar, by finding the structure of the score on the guitar and then adding melody lines and improvisations over the top of those chords.

KN:

I guess we should focus on the music that was recorded for the DVD. Was that fully scored?
JA: No, it’s not. Well, it’s not fully scored in the classical sense, in that every note was written out, by any means. It’s scored in the sense that there is a chart all the way through, a chord chart. And at different times, there are bits of melody that are scored out but, at other times, the chord chart’s just there and it’s just got some written notes saying who is going to improvise over those chords.

KN: So all the musicians are music notation readers in the DVD version?

JA: Dan Warner’s not a reader, so he was relying totally on chord charts and learning by heart any melodies that we wanted played exactly, which is how he’s always learnt music. Dave reads music [but] he doesn’t normally read in most of the work that he does. He’s mainly an improviser, but he did read some of the [score]. There were a few parts I wanted him to play exactly and he read them. I’m probably the one that’s most used to reading out of the three of us, because I was classically trained. But I think, really, by the time we got to recording that DVD, we all knew the score backwards. Nobody had to even look at the charts, even though it was nearly two hours long.

KN: So then how did you direct the musicians in the choice of, for example, instrument, if your basic chordal bed-track is a guitar? Do you think in terms of, “Well, we need certain frequencies here, so let’s put in the mandolin” or “We need a melody line, a melody instrument, so let’s put in the violin” etcetera? How do you direct that for the use of, first-off, instruments?

JA: The choice of instruments was largely dictated by the melodic themes. When I looked at the film and saw what’s happening on the screen, usually an idea for an instrument would come to me. But there were also practical considerations with the instruments. Because we were all playing different instruments at different times, there was a real underlying technical thing of needing to think about and allow time for people to put down or pick up a different instrument, and to every now and then have a break as well, so that you weren’t playing for two hours flat without a brief rest. One of the biggest considerations was switching between a piano accordion and a piano, particularly if it is a grand piano. It’s actually a physically cumbersome instrument, the accordion, and needs to be swung out of the way to get back onto the piano. You have to change microphones and things like that. That was one of the considerations. It was mainly chosen around what was happening on the screen, and which instrument that I thought would best suit the mood of what was going on, on the screen.
What about things such as tempo? The scenes where they’re playing the two-up gambling game\(^7\) and the cops [police] come—did you actually pick a tempo of 112 beats per minute just to have an idea to sync it?

JA:

This scene is, actually, totally—or nearly totally—performed at one tempo, at 112 beats per minute. With scenes like the two-up scene, I just gave it more momentum by putting a lot of fast tempo passages in it, a lot of semi-quaver driven passages. Well, actually, that particular scene is a good example [because] I’m playing a... sort of hoe-down or Irish type of fast fiddle—double-stopped fiddle line over a lot of that. And we’re improvising a lot in that, too, but we’re playing fast over a relatively slow tempo of 112 beats per minute. What does happen live is that, even though I don’t, the other two musicians play with a [metronomic] ‘click track’ in their ear to keep them basically in time with the film. Then we have visual markers with the film so that if a certain section of the score’s finished a little early, we [repeat] on a short chordal sequence. We sort of come up with these clever little tricks that keep the whole music going continuously until the next visual marker that we’ve decided on comes up, and then we move on to the next section of music.

KN:

What about linkages between individual instruments and emotions? That is, the ‘sentimental’ will be on the violin or the viola, ‘anger’ will appear on another instrument, and so on. Was that a conscious decision?

JA:

It is in a way, but I’m always trying not to make anything too clichéd. The violin obviously is a wonderful instrument to bring out emotion, but it’s important not to make the whole thing look too obvious. So, at different times, I would almost try and go the opposite way—perhaps try and use mandolin tremolo for building up moments rather than, say, using the bass notes of the piano for building up suspense. So there was, at times, a conscious sort of trying to move away from the clichéd instruments that you often think of to bring out emotions.

KN:

When you were in the studios, did you sync to the visuals or to time code? You mention you had a click track running.

JA:

Yes, we had time code going in the studio. The three of us—Dan and Dave and me—all sat down in separate rooms but with visual access to each other. We were acoustically isolated from each other, so that our microphones weren’t bleeding into each other, and we could do drop-ins, but we actually had visual contact with each other and we all could also see the screen, [on] our own monitors. That worked really well.

---

\(^7\) Two-up is a simple, illegal, but extremely popular gambling game in which bets are made on how two coins, tossed into the air, will land.
We basically put down the whole thing live and then did a few fix-ups. I had given the film to our engineer Craig Pilkington [at Audrey Studios in Melbourne] beforehand, and he made sure that it was all hooked up with time code and ready to go. He worked with Pro Tools software in the studio. I actually work on Logic but these days there’s not too much of a drama interfacing between the two programs. I actually had the whole thing on Logic here anyway, and I gave that all to him, so that we would have my old pre-production music as a sort of rough guide. But we really didn’t need that in the end because, as I say, we know the film so well now, and we know which visuals initiate which piece of music, so it was all relatively easy getting the live stuff down. Then we did a few fix-ups—you know, if anyone had made a serious mistake, or we weren’t happy with it as a playing group, we all did the fix-up.

Then we brought in a few other musicians. I particularly wanted to add acoustic bass throughout the DVD recording because, personally, I always missed having a bit more bottom end [frequency] in the score when we play it live. So we brought in a good bass player, Rosie Westbrook. She is a reader, but she played the whole thing through chordally. She’s also a great improviser. She took about twelve hours to do it, but we got bass down on just about every track.

What else did I add? I got Andy Reed to play on washboard, spoons and bodhran, Chris Altman played banjo and ukulele, and we added a few more vocals than we would probably use live. I used a bass mandolin, a mandola, for a couple of tracks, just to add a bit more variety where I would normally have played the mandolin. And that was it, really.

KN:

You mentioned that you gave the arrangement spaces for improvisation. So, in essence, what was improvised in the DVD recording could be quite different from what would appear live?

JA:

Yes, and even when we’d been playing live, all the challenge as a live performer, especially if you’re playing something often, is to keep it fresh. It’s very easy to fall into the same solo every night. I found this in my years of performing with bands. You find a good solo and you want to stick to it, because it sounds good and you know how to play it. But the challenge is to push yourself on and find an even more exciting solo, and risk making mistakes. That’s one of the things I love about improvising. That’s been the great thing about this score: there’s always been that chance to push yourself into trying to play something different. I guess if, on any particular night, if you’re not playing at your very best, you can always fall back to that solo that you know is going to work.

KN:

You mention that you had done some pre-production with getting the Pro Tools link-ups. What was the specific role, then, of your audio engineers? During the actual cutting process, did they have the role of a de facto or facto producer because you three are in the studio performing and recording live?

JA:
Yes, we were in there performing at first, but then afterwards, I had a very hands-on role as a producer or executive producer. One of the reasons I chose to work with Craig [Pilkington] and his studio is because I think that he's got a wonderful ear, and he is not only a great engineer. The main role for him was choosing the right microphones and setting us up in the right space and organising the [actual recording]. It wasn't incredibly technically difficult, but I always trust his choice of whether a ‘take’ [a single recorded version of a piece of music] is good enough or whether it should be done again. He's also incredibly quick with Pro Tools. He's very good at getting you to do two or three takes of a solo and then perhaps making one great take out of those three good takes, if, say, someone is struggling to get a good solo down. But he also knows when to let someone just play a good solo and keep it. Yeah, he’s a great producer, Craig, as well as a really good engineer. But he would always defer to me, as having the executive decision on whether something was worthy of keeping or a good idea. Having said that, I've worked very closely with the project for so long that it’s really great to have a fresh ear on it at the stage when we were recording.

KN:
There are some fretted instruments and some unfretted instruments. What about issues such as intonation or timbre?

JA:
Well, [intonation is] probably one of the main issues, particularly for me on the violin. I’m very fussy about intonation on violins. I trained classically but have lost a lot of my classical technique from years of improvising and doing things like sliding around in blues styles. So perhaps your ear becomes a bit more forgiving of not-completely-perfect tuning when you’ve been improvising in those styles for a long time. But I still really hate to hear things out of tune, and out of tune with each other. So that probably was one of the things that I really wanted to get right, but without overdoing it. We were still striving to keep as natural a feel as possible—or as live a feel as possible—with the DVD recording. So this is where I deferred to Craig at different times, if a note or a phrase was worrying me for pitch. He’d say, “Look, let it go, it’s fine.” Once I had let it go and come back and listened to that phrase a couple of days later, it did sound fine.

Post-production

KN:
What role, if any, did the musicians have in post-production?

JA:
The musicians, both Dave and Dan, dropped in when we were mixing, but none of the session musicians had any say at all in the post-production. I got Craig to give me rough mixes of everything and then we’d listen to it in sections, again, because I really trust his ear and his sensibility with this style of music. I would make comments if I thought something needed to be louder or softer or panned differently or whatever. Dan and Dave would add their comments, but they weren’t as intensively involved in the post-production as I was. As you can probably tell, I’m a little bit of a control freak and I guess I feel especially precious about this.
project because I've been involved for so long. It was really good for me to place my trust in Craig and let him do all the mixing, and I'd just make comments that I felt really strongly about.

KN:

How do you master then? Did you use an on-board or out-board mastering program on Pro Tools?

JA:

I actually wasn't there for the mastering, but I do know that he used a mixture of software and putting things through a valve [amp], external out-board gear. So I came in to have a final listen to the mastering but I wasn't there when he was actually doing it. There was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing going on as to whether we should present it as a 5.1 mix or just in stereo. I think in the end we sent it as both. I was fairly keen to leave it as a stereo mix because of the era that the film was about. [The final DVD version was presented in stereo.]

KN:

So then how did you sync to the visuals, or were you already synced to the visuals?

JA:

We were already synced to the visuals because we had played with the time code and the click track. Well, the time code was setting off the click track that we were playing to. We did have some interesting moments, I think because whenever we performed live, different [film] projectors do play at slightly different speeds. So we were always having to [adjust]; each night was a different night in that way. I hope I'm getting across the idea of having these sorts of sections throughout the whole score—probably 30 or 40 different pieces of music that are loosely linked together with simple chordal passages that you can extend or cut back as the need arises to make sure that you stay in sync with the next visual cue. When we came down to doing the actual recording, there were moments where, for instance, there might have been a half a bar too much or not enough, to go into the next visual sequence. At some moments like that, Craig actually did a little bit of time stretching or time compression, which you can do with Pro Tools, so that he could fit it exactly how I intended it to fit when I wrote it.

KN:

Did you use any sound enhancement in post-production, such as a bit of pitch correction or reverb or delays? What kind of sound were you aiming for with that?

JA:

Well, we wanted as natural a sound as possible, so we didn't use pitch correction because I've got such a personal bug about that—I like to get it right on the instrument. Reverb we did use, to quite an extent, because reverb—the many different types of reverb that you can use—really allow you to place an instrument spatially in a track. So using different reverbs on different instruments at the same time really does help give a sense of space, in a track, and can almost make the listener feel like they're there in the live environment. That really helps along with
the panning of instruments whether they be left, right or centre, to give the listener that feeling that they’re actually in a live room listening to people. I was pretty reluctant to add any sort of other fancy types of effects because of wanting to keep it as natural-sounding as possible.

KN:

So you didn’t do things like moving the solo to the stereo middle, and so on?

JA:

Oh, yes, there was different panning going on, but [it was] very subtle because we wanted it to sound like people playing live. If you were live, that would happen. You know, you’d be sitting in the one spot. But every now and again, when we went into a new piece of music, we might pan something slightly differently. But we didn’t want to, for instance, have the violin over on the right-hand side and then suddenly have it over on the left-hand side for the next piece of music. That would have been very disorienting for the listener.

KN:

What format did you deliver the studio recordings to the film people who were doing the final sync-up?

JA:

I’m guessing a bit here because I didn’t actually do the delivery, the engineer did. But I believe he delivered it on a DVD, on an actual disc [as .wav files, with the merging of music and visuals done in Canberra at the NFSA].

KN:

From your perspective as a composer, producer and performer, what was most satisfying about the project’s in-studio version?

JA:

For me, it was just fantastic to hear the whole score put down in a totally professional environment and with great musicians. And it was great to be able to add those few extra bits and pieces as I mentioned before, for instance being able to have the upright bass, on it, adding those extra things that I’ve found [to be lacking] in the live environment. Yeah, for me it feels like the project’s really been fulfilled after many, many years, by being able to have it recorded totally professionally to the visuals.

I love working in the studio. I find the whole thing just great. I think sometimes, with a project this big, you get a bit lost in it. It can be a bit bewildering. You have to focus really very strongly on it. I make a lot of written notes while I’m in the studio, to remind myself of things I want to get back to, or what needs to still happen. So you have to concentrate. I can only say that that’s satisfying as well. I didn’t have any unsatisfying moments with [The Sentimental Bloke]. I just totally enjoyed it.

KN:
One final question: what would you change—if anything—for future sound and film projects, aside from bigger budgets?

JA:

Bigger budgets. Look, I would like the opportunity to be able to write a score that was going to be performed live for a lot of instruments. I love orchestral sound. For me, it would be a huge challenge to write something for a full orchestra, but I guess that is very much budgetary-related.

What I’d really like to do is let go of the click track altogether. The first film, Pandora’s Box, I had the full shooting match there, of a computer [and a] click track [so I was locked into its metronomic tempos]. [It was a challenge because] I was trying to change the tempo as we went along with the film if need be—you know, if different projectors were playing at different speeds. With this project, I learnt to let that go. We found that way around, by either pedaling or jumping ahead, to make sure we were staying in sync with the vision. But with the next film, I think I would have the confidence and would like to just totally let go of the click track altogether and work in a much more free-form way.

Conclusion

The score for The Sentimental Bloke DVD—created, recorded and produced by Jen Anderson and her collaborators—is an instructive example of some of the challenges and opportunities encountered by contemporary Australian film composers and music producers.

One challenge for Anderson was to match the new music to the well-established—or at least iconical—ambience and in some sense also the ethos of a film that presents a world out of living memory for most Australians. As witnessed by the various genre-based versions of musical works inspired by the film (for example, brass band, symphonic, balletic), the film’s ambience and ethos certainly articulates an historical Australia of interest to contemporary audiences; it represents how we were, or at least how some of us were. Perhaps its trans-generational popularity arises from the way it encapsulates some the foundational values that still resonate socially, culturally and politically.

For Anderson, her wide-ranging experience both as a classically trained musician and a rock/folk music performer skilled in improvisation meant she already knew how to use music to meld genre-based sound and socio-cultural sentiment. Similarly, her experience as a producer meant she had the technical skills to facilitate the demanding process of linking sound and image so they are aesthetically inseparable for the viewers and listeners.

Another challenge for Anderson was to create a recorded score that was ‘fresh’, notwithstanding the many live performances that preceded the studio sessions. Whilst it was a decided advantage to know a film so intimately and understand its internal dynamic, Anderson notes a real challenge was not to perform the recorded music on ‘auto-pilot’. It still had to be a stimulating experience for the musicians and engineer because their energy and enthusiasm would eventually inform, albeit perhaps subliminally, new viewers’ experience of The Sentimental Bloke DVD.
One opportunity the score presented for Anderson was the chance to collaborate with a major cultural institution, the National Film and Sound Archive, to help reconnect originally silent films such as *The Sentimental Bloke* with new audiences, in part through the use of new musical scores. The fortuitous discovery of the ‘lost’ footage and the NFSA’s equally fortuitous institutional commitment to a new version combining updated sound and vision meant she had the stimulation of new visuals to write for, thus enlarging on the scope of the live score that had toured with the previous version.

Finally, another rewarding opportunity for Jen Anderson was the chance to work with a team of sympathetic musicians and a skilled audio engineer to craft a memorable score that is very much a team effort, one inspired by and overseen by her musicality, eclectic musical training and performance background, as well as her abiding love of melding sound and moving images with sentiment.

Acknowledgement - Thanks to Jen Anderson for her cooperation with the authors.

Bibliography


Freney, RW (1959) Acting Manager for South Australia, Australian Broadcasting Commission, letter to HL White, Librarian, Commonwealth National Library, Film Division, Canberra, 7 September 1959, correspondence in National Film and Sound Archive file ‘Historical Collection re: ‘The Sentimental Bloke and Other Films’ (file number F.D.9/1/5).


White, HL (1959) Librarian, Commonwealth National Library, Film Division, Canberra, letter to Tom King, 14 October 1959, in National Film and Sound Archive file ‘Historical Collection re: ‘The Sentimental Bloke and Other Films’ (file number F.D.9/1/5).

Filmography

*The Sentimental Bloke* (Raymond Longford, 1919), with Tom King 1961 piano accompaniment, 16mm, NFSA title number 550243.