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Cover image: Still from Diffuse live performance event held at Southern Cross University, Lismore, 2010, from personal collection and courtesy of Grayson Cooke.
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EDITORIAL
Soundtrack Co/Improvisation

Rebecca Coyle

Abstract

Screen Sound number 2, 2011, brings together contributors dealing with sound in live performance, feature films (contemporary and ‘silent’ films) and television. Six articles relate to the theme of this issue—Co/Improvisation, or the fluid interface between composition and improvisations—and another four articles offer additional studies relating to songs and performed music in films, and the business of screen composition and synchronisation. This substantial issue demonstrates the broad range and scope of Australasian research projects relevant to screen sound that are currently underway.

Keywords

Improvisation, film composition, comprovisation, live performance, ‘silent’ cinema

Interpreting Co/Improvisation

This Screen Sound 2011 issue features a collection of articles that address the theme of improvisation in screen media sound. There are various terms used to suggest such practices and articles offer a lexicon indicating specific interpretations as well as ethnographic and textual studies of improvisation practices. Ultimately, improvisation operates as musical communication in the moment. Pianist and live computer performer, Sarah Nicolls, argues:

To improvise means at one level to follow one’s instinctive urges, the internal reactions and responses that could be referred to as pre-analysis in the performer’s own cognitive process. (2010: 48)

From one perspective, music and sound cultures have always incorporated improvisation but the most engaging (and perhaps challenging) aspect of defining or identifying the improvised element of a sound work is the point at which it coalesces with composition. Indeed, defining improvisation may require the articulation of composition, which suggests formally notated or recorded structured musical performance. Notated scores may be required so that musicians can perform the musical work as written. However, even the most tightly composed work will be open to interpretations by performers (and conductors). The introduction of new computer software has to some extent reduced the need to notate composition in manuscript form. Ironically, this may create problems for musicologists and other researchers who wish to analyse compositional practice by
studying scores in archives.\textsuperscript{1} More frequently today, composers have no scores to be scrutinized and only produce notations of parts that require performance by session musicians or orchestral ensembles. A trained musician/performer may ‘improvise’ around a series of chords that are part of their musical experience, so that, while the performance may be spontaneous, the chord changes (and even additional embellishments) follow accepted Western musical practices. Improvisation may also involve other performers so that artists emotionally and spontaneously respond to each other. Furthermore, musical instruments may be set up to ‘perform’ in ways that are more or less predictable, and this may include the ‘prepared piano’ mentioned in Michael Hannan’s article, or software and computerised interactions such as those outlined by Grayson Cooke.

It seems, then, that improvisation and composition operate along a continuum (or, according to Stephen Nachmanovitch, at a “fluid interface”, 2009: online) rather than as binary opposites. Indeed, new music composer/improviser Richard Barrett suggests that they operate side-by-side:

\begin{quote}
\textit{... I prefer to think of “composition” as defining the act of bringing music into being, and “improvisation” as one element among various means by which that might be brought about. Thus, it isn’t really a matter of bringing “improvisation” and “composition” together, which at first I thought it was: it is more a question of realizing that they aren’t really two different things. (quoted in Nicolls, 2010: 50)}
\end{quote}

When specifically applied in the screen sound context, improvisation attracts additional questions and debates. Improvisation can be used in the context of tightly composed scoring and/or as a compositional device in response to narrative or image track. Where the image track is fixed by the director/producer (and editor), the approach to improvisation will be notably different to the kind of live performance event discussed in the article by Grayson Cooke. In the latter context, the collaboration occurs between sound and image artists, and very much ‘in the moment’, as distinct from most film and television productions, in which the music (and sound) are largely determined by the image-centred directors/producers. Improvisation may be employed by the composer to search for a musical idea, and it may be part of the performance during recording. However, once recorded and finally edited (the post-production step that enables more or less input from composers and musicians), the film music track is generally fixed.

In contrast to Cooke’s live performance approach, both Michael Hannan and Matthew Hill present models for how improvisation more or less plays a role in the composition of film scores. In one approach, improvisation is triggered by the brief provided by the director and by the rough cut edit of the film, while, in another approach, music cues in a composed film score allow for elements of improvised recordings (and suggest a form of what Hannan identifies as ‘comprovisation’). Hill’s focus on film music composed by jazz artists raises the question as to whether jazz musicians are more accustomed to improvisation in performance, and to what extent this might be reflected in film scores by jazz-experienced composers. Hill’s description of these processes is somewhat different to the method employed by Michael Hannan working under the instruction of concert composer Peter Sculthorpe on a made-for-television drama, \textit{Essington} (Julian Pringle, 1974), designed for the launch of colour TV in 1970s Australia. The type and capacity for improvisation, then, appears to relate to the requirements of the image track, the

\footnote{An issue, amongst others, explored in Whiteoak’s 1999 study of improvisatory practices in Australia.}
audiovisual ‘director’, the composer and compositional process, and the collaborative possibilities and expectations in the creation of the work.

Studies of ‘silent’ film archives and exhibition provide excellent vehicles for investigating the relationship of improvisation and composition, given the sources used for musical performance, each of which would have been unique to the specific screening. Two articles that discuss musical performance in relation to pre-synchronised sound (or ‘silent’) films show how composed elements can work with improvised segments, with variable weighting given to each component. The attitude to the music demonstrates different levels of recognition of historical screening contexts. Jan Thorp and Eleanor McPhee discuss the silent film screenings with live music for the Sydney-based company, The Moving Pictures Show. In contrast to their events based on research into original 1920s presentations, experimental musician Mike Cooper discusses (in an interview with Philip Hayward) his improvisations and sound performances accompanying well-known silent films. Both articles address the adaptation of musical accompaniment for contemporary audiences and this is also raised in an interview with Australian musician and composer Jen Andersen. In the interview-based article by Jeannette Delamoir and Karl Neuenfeldt, Andersen talks about her solutions to problems in creating a music track for a digitally restored version of the Australian cinema classic, *The Sentimental Bloke* (Raymond Longford, 1918).

Different approaches to improvisation and composition may be determined by the performance experience, training and backgrounds of the musicians. While some musicians may not be so attuned to pre-planning and notating music (and sound) but prefer to play by ear or in response to other musicians, highly trained composers may conceive of music tracks that are tightly timed to the required music cues and also require performances by contracted session musicians or ensembles. The differences in views between composers working in various styles sometimes present as debates about the legitimacy of training programs for composers. This was just one issue that arose at a ‘Screen Music Futures’ event co-hosted by the Australian Guild of Screen Composers and an Australian Research Council-supported research team from Southern Cross University, and held at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in September 2010, an extract of the event transcription of which is presented as one of the articles here.

Non-Theme *Screen Sound* Number Two Articles

Screen composers in the contemporary era are frequently required to compose around songs and other musics, and all of the other (non-theme) articles address these components in different ways. Anthony Linden Jones investigates Australian Aboriginal musician Archie Roach’s songs and their narrative operation in the form of a ‘Greek Chorus’ for Rolf De Heer’s *The Tracker* (2002). Adolfo Cruzado’s interview with the Australian documentary director Curtis Levy covers music as a storytelling device in two films dealing with music topics including concert pianist Hephzibah Menuhin, and the Australian Senate candidate standing on the platform promoting the folksong ‘Waltzing Matilda’ as the national anthem. Two other articles address the business side of composing for screen products: Guy Morrow uncovers the role of synchronisation agents who, like song publishers, work to maximize revenue from songs but, most relevantly, via synchronisation with visual imagery. Linked to this, the transcript extract of the Screen Music Futures event in Sydney, refers to the potential for income generation for composers in the current
and future Australian screen industry. Several of the issues identified in these articles may form the basis of larger studies in the future.

Screen Sound Update

Our 2012 issue of Screen Sound will focus on the theme of songs in screen sound. We welcome ideas and abstracts relevant to this theme, as well as other research projects on Australasian screen sound studies. Future theme issues planned for the journal include the sound of games and gaming (with relevance to Australasia) for the 2013 issue.

The Editorial Board has an additional member and we welcome James Wierzbicki, originally from the USA and now based at Sydney University, who brings expertise in classical music critical writing and film music research, with many publications including his Film Music: A History (2009).

Screen Sound is pleased to receive comments on its articles, direction and scope from researchers in diverse fields relevant to Australasian screen sound.

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Bibliography

LIVENESS AND THE MACHINE
Improvisation in Live Audio-Visual Performance

Grayson Cooke

Abstract

Live audio-visual performance is an emerging area of new media arts practice that crosses between, and draws upon, multiple artistic traditions and trajectories. Under a range of nomenclatures – VJing, Live Cinema, Live Media, Expanded Cinema – artists work solo and collaboratively with sounds and images, and significantly, they do this in a performance context. Liveness, then, with its associated notions of improvisation, spontaneity, singularity and ‘the event,’ plays a key role in how live audio-visual performance is understood, valued and marketed. Liveness is a selling point, a mark of difference that separates live performance from the recorded or ‘mediated’, such as music albums, films, television. But how live is live? And, to what degree is the live premised on what is programmed, prepared for, pre-arranged or composed? What assumptions are buried in the celebration of the live, the moment, the real-time? In this paper, with reference to my own practice as a collaborating performer in live audio-visual contexts, I shall discuss the relations between liveness and preparedness in live audio-visual performance.

Keywords
liveness, live cinema, audio-visual, performance, improvisation, VJ

Introduction

Live audio-visual performance – the concurrent production, projection and amplification of moving images and sound by one or more performers – is an emerging area of arts practice that dovetails together a diverse range of historical and artistic trajectories. Moving images and sounds have been produced live and in tandem and, in some intended relation for a long time now, in contexts as diverse as the 18th century magic lantern shows and phantasmagoria, Javanese wayang (shadow puppets), silent film with musical accompaniment, Japanese benshi performances, Scriabin’s synaesthetic symphonies, the psychedelic ‘liquid light’ shows and Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable in the 1960s, and the experiments of Woody and Steina Vasulka with real-time video and performance in the 1970s. However, the recent explosion of portable digital and online technologies has prompted live audio-visual performance to become a widespread and identifiable phenomenon. Under a range of nomenclatures—Live Cinema, Live Media, Live A/V, VJing, Expanded Cinema, Projector Performance, Visual Music—that each signify subtle variances in context and intent, artists work with sound, music, and with combinations of abstract and representational imagery. Most importantly, they do this live; in galleries, theatres, clubs, at festivals, indoors and out, projected on screens, domes, balloons and buildings. Ultimately, live audio-
visual performance (live a/v) is something that happens in ‘real-time,’ on the fly, in the moment. Live a/v is not about replicating some studio recording, film or music video (Auslander, 2008: 34), nor is it about producing a performance for recording and later distribution (Halter, 2008: 151); it is about performance and ephemerality, about the construction and experience of an apparently singular ‘event.’

As such, live a/v is founded on narratives borrowed from a number of other traditions. Most significantly, live a/v takes the idea of ‘liveness’ from all other performance contexts, as an activity that happens only when performers and audience are gathered in some context, joined in some spatio-temporal or tele-communicational coincidence. Liveness is a quality of the live, and as such is difficult to pin down and define, as mythical and fleeting as it is clear and evident, both a banal trope of the global real-time televisual/internet apparatus and 24-hour news cycle, and a cornerstone of performance theory. In a broad sense, liveness is a contract between performers and audiences, an agreement to treat this moment, and the events that constitute these moments, as self-evidently and empirically ‘special’ by virtue of their occurrence within a shared context and spatio-temporal relation. As Philip Auslander notes, however, the terms of this contract are frequently obfuscated by reference to “clichés and mystifications like ‘the magic of live theatre,’ the ‘energy’ that supposedly exists between performers and spectators in a live event, and the ‘community’ that live performance is often said to create among performers and spectators” (Auslander, 2008: 2). In reference to live electronic/classical music, John Croft, in ‘Theses on Liveness’, provides more nuance to the term when he distinguishes between procedural liveness, defined as “the material fact that live sound is being transformed in real time”, and aesthetic liveness, “a situation in which... aesthetically meaningful differences in the input sound are mapped to aesthetically meaningful differences in the output sound” (Croft, 2007: 61). While Croft’s discussion is in the main limited to the context of the performance of classical and electro-acoustic composed works (improvisation plays little role in his discussion or definition of liveness), and is primarily concerned with signal processing, we can see how procedural liveness would be identified with a kind of technical liveness, where computers perform pre-defined tasks on behalf of a performer, while aesthetic liveness would imply an artistic performance which incorporates technical liveness and further relies on a performer making aesthetic decisions on the basis of what is happening in the moment.

Accordingly, live a/v draws upon notions of spontaneity and creativity in the moment, and thus explicitly draws on the idea of improvisation as it is understood in musical contexts, especially jazz, but also in something like DJing. While improvisation is a broad notion – generally celebrated as an artistic practice but also somewhat derided as a social practice (‘making it up as you go along’) – within musical contexts it is used to refer to “the simultaneous conception and performance of a work” (Smith and Dean, 1997: 3). While many performance forms are premised on the expression and representation of a script, score or choreography, and thus limit decisions to questions of interpretation, improvisation is understood to involve a much higher degree of aesthetic decision-making, and these decisions are made while the performance occurs. Live a/v, in eschewing the pre-recorded broadcast or screening, relies on the possibility of structuring a

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1 It is notable that DJs usually mix the performative with the practice of playing entire pre-recorded musical tracks, so their performances tend to have less ‘granularity’ than those of VJs and live a/v artists, hence DJing will not be discussed here except inasmuch as the VJ/DJ combo is a widely experienced live a/v performance.
performance around decisions made in the moment. It is dependent on the creative capacities of the performers and their willingness to take the risk that they have sufficient command of their artistic ‘tools,’ and the possibilities these tools represent, to structure a satisfying experience for an audience without exhaustive forethought.

Within live a/v, there is a correlative emphasis on the ‘handmade’ also, a sense of something produced purposively and with intention, designed for localised and personalised experience rather than mass consumption. One of live a/v’s drawcards, then, is that it is a singular, ephemeral event, destined and designed to disappear, designed also to stand out from the morass of pre-produced, demgraphised, manufactured and replicated commodities both in terms of entertainment artefacts but also, more broadly, in terms of the rise of mass produced and globally distributed goods that we witness as a function of global capital. It is ironic, however, that built-in obsolescence and the upgrade cycle of contemporary technologies represents an increased ephemerality in the very consumer culture live a/v stands against!). You have to ‘be there’ to experience it, and it is this singularity, this disappearance, as Matthew Reason argues, that is often understood to give live performance its “authenticity” (Reason, 2006: 24-5) or, in Walter Benjamin’s terminology, its “aura” (1936).

Given live a/v’s reliance on notions of liveness, spontaneity, improvisation, immediacy, authenticity and singularity inherited from a number of traditions, then, it is worth asking whether the critiques of these notions undertaken in relation to other traditions, and especially in relation to improvisation in music, hold also when discussing live a/v. In his Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture (2008), Philip Auslander undertakes a thoroughgoing critique of the valuation of the ‘live’ over what he calls the ‘mediatized,’ arguing that the notion of the live only comes into being after, and is entirely reliant on, the possibilities provided by representation and recording on various media. Of course, as I have described it, live audio-visual performance is always-already entirely mediatized, as it is premised on the use of a range of apparatuses for producing audio and visual media. There is no non-mediatized live a/v performance; the elements of a live a/v performance will always pass through some media substrate, even if that substrate is simply a hard drive or the graphics card of a computer, and will always rely on the screen/projector dyad of the cinematic apparatus, and will thus always connote traditional pre-recorded media in some fashion. Likewise, many writers on improvisation testify to the problematic of distinguishing between spontaneous creation and pre-existing structure or motif; the term ‘comprovisation’ has arisen as a way of recognising the intricate interweaving of the com-posed with the improvised. Again, live a/v is premised on the pre-existence of structural arrangements or media samples, and so again will trouble assumptions of a ‘pure’ spontaneity in improvisation.

In this paper I explore some of these issues of liveness and mediatization, of spontaneity and preparation, with reference to my own practice as a live audio-visual performer using digital media tools. In particular I will refer to a recent collaboration I have undertaken, the ‘Diffuse’ event, a one-off, collaborative performance between myself, visualist Jaymis Loveday, and electronic musicians Lawrence English and Rafael Anton Irisarri, held at Southern Cross University in

2 Footage from Diffuse can be viewed here (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xo53k4pyY) and here (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAzcEj0PT_o&feature=related).
August 2010. I discuss this event and these artists because this event was conceived from the beginning as an improvisation and ‘live’ event, a coming-together of like-minded artists who were all experienced both as live performers and as improvisers with digital tools, but who, nevertheless, had never collaborated previously. As such, the Diffuse event serves as a highly appropriate lens through which to approach questions of improvisation and preparation, across media and modes and using digital tools. The next section established this framework by analyzing liveness in relation to definitions of improvisation.

Improvisation and Liveness

Discussions of both improvisation and live performance frequently highlight a series of binary oppositions underpinning how these practices are understood. Analyses of improvisation question the relation between the apparent spontaneity, unexpectedness and singularity of the improvisation, and the degrees of composedness or preparedness that may underpin an improviser’s performance. Likewise, critical writings on live performance have focused on the relation between assumptions of liveness and practices or processes of ‘mediatization’, where the immediacy, ephemerality and temporal fleetingness of live performance is contrasted with the durational and representational capacity of various media – audio/visual/digital. A related binarism—which opens up the scope of this discussion to considerations of the archive and so perhaps takes us beyond the performative moment as such, but which is pertinent nevertheless—is that between disappearance and documentation, that is, the simultaneous celebration of live performance as a form designed and destined to disappear, and the existential bemoaning of this very disappearance and subsequent scramble to document, preserve and archive (see Reason, 2006). In what follows I wish to explore these oppositions and their necessary deconstruction, after which I will relate them to the contexts, practices and technologies of live audio-visual performance.

Improvisation is a complex notion, its myriad complexities and iterations stemming from, as indicated, the temporal confluence of conception-and-performance/generation of an artwork. It is this temporal confluence, also, which constitutes the ‘real-time’ aspect of improvisation, where real-time occurs “when the interval between the triggering of an event and its processing/reception falls beneath the threshold of sensible perception” (Mackenzie, 2002: 168). Of course, this temporal confluence between conceiving of something and doing it is precisely what runs the risk of a kind of absolute banalisation of the notion of improvisation. Aren’t we all improvising all of the time? As Fred Frith notes in an interview about teaching improvisation, “in the end, improvising is what we all do. It’s how we get through life, even within the rigid structures where we may have to work... I like to keep the focus on improvisation as the act of making stuff up” (quoted in Chan, 2008: 2). While such a broad view of improvisation may be strategically useful in Frith’s pedagogical context, where it can serve as a salutary reminder to improvisation students that they are already improvisers of a sort, it also runs the risk of dissipating the significance of improvisation as a creative practice. If everything is improvisation then nothing is improvisation, and the potential for a language to discuss the intricacies of live performance is likewise dissipated. What is important to remember, then, is that improvisation is not merely ‘making stuff up’ but that it is doing it in a certain context, where the improviser’s behaviour is both reactive and purposive. As Alfonso Montuori notes, improvisatory activity requires focus and discipline, it is not the stuff of the everyday but rather a special
way of being and acting in the moment, a kind of creative attention/inattention to the present:

*To improvise means to draw on all our knowledge and personal experience, and focus it on the very moment we are living in, in that very context. It requires a different discipline, a different way of organising our thoughts and actions. It requires, and at its best elicits, a social virtuosity which reflects our state of mind, our perception of who and where we are, and a willingness to take risks, to let go of the safety of the ready-made, the already written, and to think, create, and “write” on the spot. (Montuori, 2003: 244)*

As part of artistic forms and practices, then, improvisation can be found in multiple art-forms, in jazz, in the traditional musics of many nations and ethnicities, such as the Indian raga, but also in the visual and performing arts. In *Improvisation, Hypermedia and the Arts since 1945*, Hazel Smith and Roger Dean note improvisation’s importance in the work of abstract expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock, who developed techniques of dribbling and splashing paint that relied on a kind of painterly ‘performance’ and real-time exploration of the exigencies and possibilities of the technique (Smith and Dean, 1997: 110). They argue that such approaches in ‘action painting’ are improvisatory in that they “start off with no preconceived notion of what the painting is going to be like”, so the work is conceived as it is produced (109). Like live performance, this is painting as duration rather than the development of a finished object. Also improvisatory, according to Smith and Dean, are the practices of environmental artists such as British artist Andy Goldsworthy or Australian artist Sieglinde Karl, who improvise with the natural materials they find in a specific environment, and the environment processes that subsequently affect constructed material objects. These artists also operate on a refusal of preconception: Karl says her process when working in a particular landscape has “no preconceived idea—the forms emerge through play, observation and contemplation”, while Goldsworthy likewise emphasises the emergence of processes and materials through approaching what is immediately at hand: “I take the opportunities each day offers; if it is snowing, I work with snow, at leaf-fall it will be leaves; a blown-over tree becomes the source of twigs and branches” (quoted in Smith and Dean, 1997: 116).

The use of what is ‘at hand’ here constitutes an improvisatory creativity, coupling the mundane sense of improvisation as ‘making do’ or makeshift extemporising (Montuori, 2003: 245) with a more intuitive and ingenious sense of improvisation as a kind of multi-sensory and conceptual ‘listening in’ to an environment. This environmental listening is directly comparable to the kinds of listening advocated in musical improvisations, especially in collaborations. Cornelius Cardew calls this ‘awakeness’ or ‘preparedness’, an awareness of the necessity to act on the basis of some as yet unforeseen event or stimuli (Cardew, 1971).³ Japanese audio-visual improviser Keiko Uenishi sees her work always within a context, as a response not only to her fellow improvisers but to the space she finds herself in, as environmental listening:

*I am performing not to make a statement but I’m improvising with the environment in which I am placed. I am not only playing to myself or fellow musicians but also play to the space and the environmental and surrounding sound, and how the echoing is going. (Masaoka, 2006: 6)*

³ Although, ironically, Cardew uses the term preparedness to refer to being prepared for what is unforeseen.
These notions of improvisation as duration not object, of a refusal of preconception, of working with what comes to hand, are inflected with other associations, often to do with the unexpected and unforeseen and, therefore, with risk. Indeed, it is frequently noted that the Latin root of improvisation is the term improvisus, which means that which is not foreseen (see Montuori, 2003: 240; Ramshaw, 2006: 11, n.19). Again discussing improvisation as it relates to the complexity of life in general, Montuori highlights how life “requires of us the ability to react appropriately to unforeseen events, and actually generate those events—to act creatively and innovatively” (Montuori, 2003: 241). He defines creative improvisation in jazz as “the generation of the unpredictable, the unusual, the unforeseen, within the pre-existing structures of the song form” (239). Similarly, Sara Ramshaw quotes saxophonist Steve Lacy, who argues that improvisation sits “on the edge—in between the known and the unknown and you have to keep pushing it towards the unknown otherwise it and you die” (Lacy in Ramshaw, 2006: 3). This embracing of the unknown and unforeseen involves a certain degree of risk, and this highlights another key aspect of how improvisation is understood, with Scott Thompson arguing that improvisation has “an immanent risk of musical failure” (Thompson, 2008: 1). Montuori likewise argues that improvisation “involves a constant dialogic between order and disorder, tradition and innovation, security and risk” (Montuori, 2003: 246). Improvisers are encouraged to ‘let go’, to destabilise existing patterns of thought and action and explore new expressive territory: “At the very heart of the creative process, is this ability to shatter the rule of law and regularity in the mind” (Barron, in Montuori, 2003: 242).

Of course, what needs to be kept in mind in these celebrations of the spontaneity, the unforeseeability, and the risk of the improvised performance, is that in each case each term is either tempered by its opposite, necessarily juxtaposed against that which is foreseen or foreseeable, or is conceptually incoherent anyway; is there any such thing as the categorically ‘unforeseen’? Would or could we recognise it if we saw it? The truly unexpected, the truly unforeseen, could surely not be recognised as such, and so is strictly speaking impossible, or (im)possible as Derrida might say; desirable in its very impossibility, necessary as a yardstick but equally spectral, an instance of ‘original repetition’ or ‘iterability’ where it is both recognisable and unrecognised (Ramshaw, 2006: 8). It is for these reasons that most commentators on improvisation temper claims to spontaneity, originality and unforeseeability with the recognition that there must remain, at the core of improvisation, something that is known and knowable, something that is preconceived, some base structure to either build on or attack, and, moreover, that this is a necessary part of the dialectic that makes improvisation what it is.

As indicated above, Montuori notes that improvisers draw on “knowledge and personal experience” (2003: 244) and innovate always on the basis of some prior tradition; hence improvisation is not, strictly speaking, invention, it is innovation. In this sense, Montuori questions the linguistic and conceptual formulation of ‘invention’ in relation to l’aveni - the ‘to come’ (ibid). Steve Lacy’s comment about the unknown, above, recognises also the necessity of the known, as the unknown can only be conceived of in terms of what is known. Likewise, we could question the apparent lack of pre-conception in the work of the environmental artists mentioned above, when even being in some landscape, putting oneself in a certain place in order to respond to it, must involve some degree of expectation or recognition of that space in order that it be artistically useful, not to mention the artists’ pre-existing skill, discipline and capacity to respond to what is at hand. As Smith and Dean note,
...all improvisations have in common the fact that they are a particular type of procedure which requires skill and practice. This is often obscured in discussions which suggest that improvisation is an unprepared sequence of events which are entirely spontaneous. (Smith and Dean, 1997: 26)

Just as the figures of author and artist as inspired creative geniuses have been thoroughly problematised in structuralist and post-structuralist thought over the past 40 years, so too has improvisation as spontaneous creative activity been critiqued, both as an ahistorical fantasy that denies the importance of tradition, and—in relation particularly to the role of African-Americans in the development of jazz in the mid-20th century—as a racist construction of the ‘primitive’, ‘instinctive’ and ‘unconscious’ jazz musician (Ramshaw, 2006: 2). Some kind of composition, some degree of pre-conception will always haunt improvisation, even in its most experimental or exploratory moments, just as composition will always involve some opening up to the unfamiliar, and it is on this basis that Scott Thompson claims that “there is no justifiable difference, in theory, between composition and improvisation” (Thompson, 2008: 1) and Viyay Iyer claims that “the binary between composition and improvisation is false” (Miller and Iyer, 2009: 8). Sara Ramshaw, in ‘Deconstructing Jazz Improvisation: Derrida and the Law of the Singular Event’, undertakes a lengthy Derridean analysis of the relation of jazz to law, arguing that there can be no improvisation in jazz without some basis in the determinacy of law, just as the regularity and order of law and the juridical decision can only be upheld by the capacity of law to open up to “what is beyond”, to respond to the Other of law (Ramshaw, 2006: 7). Her deconstruction of the binarism of improvisation and law, however, is designed not to render the distinction meaningless or redundant, but rather to uphold its necessity despite it all; that is, she argues that it is the very impossibility of improvisation as purely singular which gives it cogency and value, which gives it a horizon, “for if improvisation were truly possible, in the sense of being wholly improvised or original, there would be no call for spontaneous invention or, by analogy, for jazz” (ibid: 8).

To extend Ramshaw’s use of Derridean terminology into a terrain that resonates with our discussion of performance and digital media tools, we could further understand improvisation as the possibility of joining ‘the event’ with ‘the machine.’ In ‘Typewriter Ribbon: Limited Ink (2)’, Derrida discusses Rousseau’s Conessions and Paul de Man’s commentary on this text, but he does so under two figures that populate both texts; the event (“what is happening”) and the machine (“the calculable programming of an automatic repetition”) (Derrida, 2002: 72). Derrida notes that we would think these concepts to be antinomic because “what happens ought to keep, so we think, some nonprogrammable and therefore incalculable singularity”, yet he also asks, characteristically, whether it is possible to think these things together: “Will we one day be able, and in a single gesture, to join the thinking of the event to the thinking of the machine?” (ibid). While the ensuing discussion is concerned with the use Rousseau makes of the literary excuse, the simultaneous performativity (in Austin’s sense of an utterance which performs an act in merely being spoken—see Austin, 1962) and automaticity of excuses, Derrida frames the event and the machine in terms that recall the performance situation. He notes that the event is linked to intentionality and affect, to organicity, to its capacity to produce an aesthetic affect in someone, while the machine is comparably anaesthetic, unintentional and inorganic, without affect in its automaticity. These two poles, the event and the machine, reflect the poles of the argument regarding improvisation: the singular, unforeseen, improvisatory event
and the machine of pre-conception, programmability and the law. The impossibility of the purely unforeseen event, and its necessary reliance on the machine which makes possible any recognition of the event as event, recalls Ramshaw’s juxtaposition of improvisation and the law. What emerges is the necessity of thinking together the event and the machine, singularity and repetition, and to identify the aesthetic and affective charge of the point where event and machine might meet: “To think both the machine and the performative event together remains a monstrosity to come, an impossible event. And therefore the only possible event” (Derrida, 2002: 74).

The same deconstructive approach can be applied to the question of liveness—a question that is asked in terms of all ‘live’ performance, but which is particularly relevant in terms of live performances that are improvised, that have no determinative script from which they operate, and thus have no ‘original’ form of which they are a ‘representation’. Liveness is generally understood to consist of a number of factors, many of which are coterminous with elements of improvisation. Live events are understood to ‘happen’ at the same time as they are perceived, they happen ‘in the moment’ and, when improvised (that is, conceived while they are performed), they happen in ‘real-time’. Moreover, they only happen when they happen; they are transient, ephemeral, they disappear, and no document of ‘what happened’ can ever be a direct reflection of this happening in the fullness of its context. Numerous writers on both improvisation and live performance attest to this logic: Cornelius Cardew argues that

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\text{[i]mprovisation is in the present, its effect may live on in the souls of the participants, both active and passive (i.e. audience), but in its concrete form it is gone forever from the moment that it occurs, nor did it have any previous existence before the moment that it occurred, so neither is there any historical reference available. Documents such as tape recordings of improvisation are essentially empty, as they preserve chiefly the form that something took and give at best an indistinct hint as to the feeling and cannot convey any sense of time and place. (Cardew, 1971: online)}
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Echoing Cardew some 20 years later, Peggy Phelan’s oft-quoted statement about the ontology of performance is similarly declarative about the presentness and ephemerality of performance:

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\text{Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance. (Phelan, 2001: 147)}
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Liveness, then, is binarily related both to the past, what is or isn’t preconceived, and to the future, what can or cannot be recorded, documented and archived. Liveness is hemmed in in the present, corralled and defined by the temporalities it is apparently not. The live, improvised event is that unheralded occurrence that refuses the mediation – on ontological grounds, according to Phelan – which would render it indebted to past or future, and instead, remains staunchly a thing that disappears as it occurs.
But is this really the case? In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Philip Auslander asks whether the celebration of the 'live' in live performance is not a kind of blindness to the degrees of mediatization operating always in the background of what is considered live. He notes that the notion of the live only comes into being with the introduction of recording technologies. “Prior to the advent of those technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as ‘live’ performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility” (Auslander, 2008: 56). Liveness requires mediatization (the event requires the machine), it is not ontologically prior to mediatization but rather conceptually reliant on it. In his analysis of Phelan’s argument about performance refusing the economy of reproduction (which in itself is problematic given the likelihood that any given performance will function as either or both a cultural or economic commodity and must perforce operate within a general system of reproducibility, exchange and equivalence), he notes that performances of whatever sort – theatrical, poetic, musical, dance – will always rely on some means of expression that is sense-able and therefore reproducible, and therefore always-already reproduced (ibid: 45).

Again, following Auslander’s deconstructive logic, this is the ‘différance’ of liveness, its iterability, its population by and indebtedness to the traces of mediation and reproduction. It is not, then, that live performance can convey no justifiable frisson of excitement or uniqueness for an audience and cannot convey a sense of liveness, a sense of presentness, of ephemerality and singularity, but rather, simply, that the ontological liveness of the live is a fiction, the projection of a desire that cannot (and, indeed, must not) be fulfilled. Thus Matthew Reason, in *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, discusses the ‘promise’ of the present in live performance, arguing that while the general repeatability of performances testifies to the impossibility of an absolutely new ‘now,’ what liveness provides is a promise of the now that is tantamount to a kind of contract or suspension of disbelief:

> Performance promises to be the present, promises to be unrepeateable presentation. This is what performance promises even when it is recognised that it will not be fulfilled literally.... In a willing contract between the audience and the performance this promise of presence is not a delusion, but instead an event that creates faith; it is a promise that also carries with it its own reward. (Reason, 2006: 19)

**Live A/V Performance**

Live audio-visual performance is generally figured using many of the terms and concepts discussed above, emphasising improvisation, uniqueness, unpredictability, singularity, ephemerality and contextual responsiveness. For example, discussing club-based VJ performance, Daniela Tordino argues that “the improvisation and unpredictability of sounds and images, combined with the audience and the space itself, turns the moment of performance in to a unique event, impossible to be relived in all its depth” (Tordino, 2007: online). Likewise, in interviews, VJs and live a/v artists testify to these same assumptions. VJ duo Zelabo state that, “although the pre-production work is tremendous, the work is really accomplished when it is played live. All our media are pieces of a narration we improvise live, depending on the music. Consequently, every performance is different” (quoted in Faulkner, 2006: 116), and French collective Pixopath reiterate
this logic: “Our performances are improvisation: nevertheless, we follow the beat, and react to the gimmicks, the verses, the refrains and the breaks. We don’t use software to synchronize pictures to the beat. Our mixes are handmade” (ibid: 119).

What emerges, however, both in thinking through the live a/v situation and in reading such accounts, is the clear and unproblematic relation between improvisation and pre-conception or preproduction, and thus also between liveness and mediatization. Live a/v is self-evidently mediatized in its very conception, premised on technologies of reproduction, recording and representation, and as such, has from the beginning gone beyond the binarism of live versus mediatized identified by Auslander. Live a/v artists work with a range of pre-existing materials, from video and audio samples that are looped, mixed, processed and filtered in real-time, to ‘patches’ in visual-programming environments such as Max/MSP-Jitter, Processing, VVVV and Isadora, that represent pre-given sets of possibilities for the manipulation of live a/v data streams. Live sampling of audio or visual material represents a kind of recursive mediatization and comprovisation, where what is produced live is mediatized within the performance and becomes raw material for further live manipulation. Aesthetic decisions are made on the fly, but these decisions may just as likely be made within the framework of a pre-given structure as devised as part of the momentary ‘flow’ of a performance. Members of the audio-visual improvisation collective The Lucid Dream Ensemble, from North-Western University in Illinois, attest to this happy marriage of pre-conception and improvisation, specifically using the term ‘comprovisation’ to signal their working method. Members Virgil Moorefield and Jeffrey Weeter observe:

The person generating the visuals, like other members of the group, had a set of moves which he deployed as he saw fit, according to a general plan devised by the ensemble. This is comprovisation: a plan is made for the general shape of the performance, but tightly composed sections alternate with improvisational segments which are planned out in a general way, while allowing considerable freedom of movement in the local context. (Moorefield and Weeter, 2004: 276)

As such, we can understand live a/v as a concrete instantiation of what Bolter and Grusin refer to as ‘remediation,’ where a desire for ‘immediacy’ and transparency of experience is coupled with and frequently achieved through the ‘hypermediacy’ of the juxtaposition of multiple media forms and technologies (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 5). The Lucid Dream Ensemble even conceive of their work in these terms, noting that their desire to provide “an immersive experience of such compelling clarity that [their] audience finds itself in a new, unmediated world” can only be realised through a plethora of technologies where the performers are “seen staring at computer screens, surrounded by controllers, sensors and plugs, reminding [their] audience of the medium with every twist of a knob” (Moorefield and Weeter, 2004: 274)

Diffuse: An Improvising Collaboration

I turn now to the ways in which my own practice as a collaborative audio-visual performer bears out many of these observations, and how improvised live a/v performance may differ from more traditional musical improvisation. I am interested in how audio and visual artists improvise separately and together, in the
different kinds of contextual 'listening' required by working in each mode, and also in how digital media technologies structure and influence this process.

'Diffuse' was a performance and seminar I organised at Southern Cross University in Lismore in August 2010, for which I invited ambient electronic musicians Lawrence English and Rafael Anton Irisarri to collaborate with two live visualists, myself and Jaymis Loveday. SCU has a performance space with a huge white infinity wall around two sides, and my intention was to use surround sound and multiple projections on the infinity wall to create an immersive audio-visual environment for the audience (see Figure 1). As with the Lucid Dream Ensemble, my desire was precisely to marry a multi-sensory immersion, an immediacy, a filling of the audio and visual field with a kind of technological spectacle, a hypermediacy, a performance that was clearly a function of digital media tools. Lawrence and Rafael each performed a solo set accompanied by the two visualists, followed by a collaborative set with all four of us. We also gave a seminar on live audio-visual performance, which has been transcribed, and I have conducted follow-up email interviews with the other performers as well.

While clearly premised on media technologies of recording and representation, the performance was conceived of as an improvisation on a number of levels. Only English and Loveday had ever played together, so none of us had deep familiarity with the others on any concrete level, other than a general sense of what the other performers' styles or aesthetics were. Moreover, none of us discussed the planned performances with each other beforehand, beyond a general indication of how long each set would go for and the general sense that we were to create an ambient, immersive experience for the audience. This was one level of risk or chance

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*Figure 1: Diffuse event multi-screen set-up*

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4 Not limited to a small screen, but useable to screen images in unframed format from floor to ceiling.
operating in the performance; at the very base level was an assumption that we could work together, that we were each experienced enough as performers, and familiar enough with our tools, to be able to collaborate and ‘listen’ to each other while still structuring a dramatically coherent experience for the audience. What emerged from the seminar and follow-up interviews I conducted, was that each performer sees this as a primary task in improvised performance; the necessity of thinking about the experience as a whole for the audience, and structuring the performance appropriately with reference to the dynamics of rising and falling tension. Irisarri observes, “To me, a live performance should be an immersive, unique experience for the audience. Furthermore, it should be given the same care and attention as if it was going to be documented.... I try to build an experience that goes from micro to macro and vice versa. One that develops slowly, builds into a climax and ends.” Noting the relation between collaborators, English responds, “Once the concert setting is in place and there are people present with a reasonable expectation of hearing something compelling, I feel strongly that there should be some glue (no matter how small) uniting the piece.” Likewise, as a visualist, Jaymis notes that the performance,

should be a balance between everyone. It’s part of being dexterous, and being physically skilled in the actions of live visuals. If a musician suddenly drops something out of the mix, or suddenly adds something to the mix, you should always have something ready so that you can work with them, have something to bring in that will heighten, and keep it at the same level as what they’re doing.

For my own part, my visual set was shaped by my sense of the overall aesthetic and emotional ‘arc’ of the performance as a whole; this is a kind of non-narrative and cross-modal audio-visual storytelling where, rather than a dramatic arc, what the performance aims for is a kind of affective arc. The “immanent risk of musical (and visual) failure” identified by Thompson (2008: 1) is still present, and functions as a key aspect of liveness for both audience and performers alike because it provides a necessary degree of challenge to rise to, a certain danger and sense of possibility. Yet it is a calculated risk providing all performers share a common sense of their orientation and responsibility towards each other and the audience.

This risk is also mitigated by the relation between preparedness and improvisation. While all the performers conceived what they intended to do as an improvisation—and given we hadn’t played together before nor planned the performances in any way, there was no choice but for this collaboration to be improvisatory—all performers in ‘Diffuse,’ including myself, came to the performance with a different set of pre-conceived or pre-arranged materials, and therefore a different set of intentions regarding how they would be used live. I put together two ‘patches’ in visual programming environment VVVV, plus a set of video clips for live looping and processing in VJ software Modul8. The VVVV patches both produced abstract ‘colour music’ imagery generatively, one using audio-reaction where the amplitude of the music triggers visual transformations, and the other using a series of low-frequency-oscillators to generate geometrical patterns. Both patches could run ‘on automatic’ if need be (providing there was sound to drive the audio-reactive patch), so constituted a high degree of mediatization or “machinalité” (Derrida, 2002: 74).

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5 Irisarri, R A (2010) Email interview with author, 2 December. All subsequent quotations from this source.
6 English, L (2010) Email interview with author, 14 November. All subsequent quotations from this source.
7 Quoted in Diffuse: a seminar on live audio-visual performance with Lawrence English, Rafael Anton Irisarri and Jaymis Loveday, Southern Cross University, Lismore, August 2010.
Both patches, though, as well as the loops in Modul8, could be manipulated live using keyboard commands and MIDI devices, so they were essentially ‘visual instruments’ where I had defined the parameters with which I could improvise. Moreover, using something like audio-reaction introduces a very concrete level of chance or aleatoric production into the performance, because when visuals are produced as a function of sound that is produced live, then there is no possibility of strict pre-conception. Another way of phrasing this would be to say that I built a machine for generating events.

The other performers work the same way, utilising the capacities of digital media for both the playback and live processing, mixing and layering of pre-arranged material, and for the processing and looping of live streams of audio and video. In place of, or in addition to, the kinds of musical knowledges and disciplines of chordal structures and progressions that often underpin musical improvisations, the work of digital media improvisers is underpinned by the preparation of existing media and knowledge of how to mix, process, filter and effect the media. Lawrence prepares for a performance by “work[ing] on pieces ahead of time – several conjoined layers that can be brought into and out of relief with each other. I rarely rehearse, though I do spend a lot of time editing and preparing material for live events” (English, 2010). Rafael works with pre-recorded samples and live guitar, often played with a bow. Composition and improvisation work hand in hand: “My live performance consists of improvisation, so I do a lot of prep work – patches, soundbanks etc, – so I have a wide palette…. At the same time, I’m running live signals from my guitar and sampling/looping my own playing, so it’s a combination of both, improvising and composition” (Irisarri, 2010). Jaymis does the same thing with visuals, as he uses an array of surveillance cameras on the performers, bringing multiple live video feeds together with pre-edited clips, and processing both together:

When I’m improvising with visuals I’ll draw on combinations of layering, blending and routing which I’ve found through prior practice or performance... ‘Editing live’ is probably the closest mechanical description of what I’m doing on stage. I’m taking pre-produced and live materials and putting them together in an artistic way. ‘Editing’ isn’t a very sexy term though, so I can live with ‘composing live’.8

Of course, as much as preparedness and pre-conception mitigate a real-time risk on one level, they introduce an aesthetic risk on another, and an element of the unexpected or unforeseen, because if all members of an ensemble bring along different materials, and are each unaware of what the other will bring to the mix, there is no knowing what the result will be. At the seminar before the performance, Lawrence announced that he would be working with a set of his audio samples of wind from Patagonia (which sounds very exotic, though I was left wondering whether Patagonian wind sounds any different to Australian wind…). In contrast, alongside my colour music VVVV patches, I had decided to work with animations produced from a set of photos taken at Hong Kong airport in 1998, highly clinical photos of vast empty airport spaces, banks of payphones, rows of escalators under cold fluorescent light (see Figure 2). These are decidedly different ‘samples,’ and so bringing them together in a live juxtaposition or audio-visual montage would necessarily involve an element of risk. And yet they actually share comparable aesthetic qualities in a cross-modal and affective space, both connoting a ‘coldness’

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8 Loveday, J (2010) Email interview with author, 25 November. All subsequent quotations from this source.
and ‘emptiness’ that can be felt regardless of which mode – audio or visual – they are perceived in.

Another assumption and aspect of the risk involved, then, was the assumption that we shared or could generate a shared aesthetic language and, also, that this aesthetic language could operate across visual and audio media; that is, that there is such a thing as a cross-media aesthetic, that images and sounds can ‘talk’ to each other on the same ‘frequency’. Obviously this happens all the time, but it begs the question of the relation between improvising with sound, improvising with image, and improvising between image and sound. In a collaboration like ‘Diffuse’, where does the improvisation ‘take place’? In asking each performer how they ‘reacted’ to the other media form, quite different responses emerged, which highlights the distribution of the senses and attention in live a/v. Both musicians noted that they concentrated very much on their own sound, and had less attention for the visuals.

*When I do that style of performance (all improvisation), I’m so focused into what I’m doing and concentrating so hard, that I literally zone out and everything else in the room becomes a blur. Goes into the background so to speak – otherwise I become too self-conscious with what I’m doing and then my performance starts to feel too contrived and unnatural in a way.* (Irisarri, 2010)

Lawrence took the same approach in his solo set although, in the group session, perhaps because he was no longer solo and so had more ‘space’ to look around in, he “was very aware of the visuals and looked for linkages” (English, 2010). As a visualist, however, Jaymi sees his role as very much about ‘listening’ and responding appropriately to the music in terms of aesthetic elements such as tone and contrast: “I think that the visuals follow the music, so I generally try to create something which matches the tone of the sound very closely. There are occasions
where I’ll ‘pull focus’ and create a contrast, but I generally try to produce a seamless work” (Loveday, 2010). Jaymis also used a live feed from my own visuals as an additional input: “I was able to use his feed as a base at various times during Lawrence and Rafael’s sets. I wasn’t so much ‘reacting’ to the visuals, they were used as the seed which triggered my layer and feedback chains” (Loveday, 2010: see Figure 3). Likewise, my own visual mix was very much aimed as a visual analogue to the sound, picking up on and responding to aesthetic elements like timbre, tone, density, complexity, tempo, and dynamics.

On the concrete level of attention capacity, then, it is worth noting that there are differences in how different sense stimuli are received, and the kinds of attention each sense requires and leaves free. In working with digital tools, sound artists need to pay attention both aurally to the sound they are producing, and visually to the interfaces through which their sound is channeled. Furthermore, because screened visuals are precisely located in space, sound artists must split their visual attention between the interface and the screen if they are to pay attention to what the visualists are doing. Because sound is essentially non-directional or immersive, however, visualists are better able to listen and respond to the sound while still paying full attention to their software/hardware setup and visual output. What this suggests is that, in a collaborative audio-visual improvisation, there are most likely numerous improvisations happening simultaneously; there is improvisation by each artist within their own medium, and there is a cross-media or cross-modal improvisation where it is primarily the visualists who are able to respond to what the sound artists are doing, and so produce images that bear some direct aesthetic relation to the sound. As with Jaymis’s observation that ‘tone’ can translate from sound to visuals, we can see how ‘density’ of sound can be easily translated into ‘density’ of image, just as aural ‘timbre’ can translate into visual ‘texture’. It is a quality specific to live a/v improvisation that these potential relations between media and modes, these juxtapositions and translations of aesthetics, are constantly tested out, iterated and expanded upon.
This cross-modal improvisation and translation of aesthetics is also facilitated by the way digital media technologies ‘level’ differences by turning all media into data. Digital tools in audio and visual media work in common with layers, loops, processes and filters—or, in the case of visual-programming ‘patching’ environments, with generators and processors, with nodes, parameters and properties. “Once one understands Logic, for example, it’s not so hard to get a grip on Final Cut Pro; each program is aware of both sound and video, while stressing opposite sides of the equation” (Moorefield and Weeter, 2004: 278). More than that, though, digital tools reduce that very opposition, treating sound and video as made of the same stuff. What this means is that there is a deeper level of preparedness and improvisation operating here; conditioning whatever visual and sound artists do live in terms of working with pre-existing materials and their spontaneous manipulation is the actual construction of their ‘instrument.’ Rafael recounts an early impetus to start working with the possibilities of marrying analogue instruments with digital technologies:

I remember when I first heard this record by My Bloody Valentine, a friend played it for me, and it had this elephant-like sound, and I had no idea what was doing this elephant-like noise, but I wanted to play whatever that was! Then I learnt it was done with a guitar and a sampler, and that was how I got interested in these things. (in Diffuse seminar, 2010)

We need to understand this guitar-sampler machine as an innovation on a traditional instrument and a structural opening up to possibility. Every traditional instrument has a large range of possible uses and methods, and one of the elements of musical improvisation has always been to experiment with the capacities of the instrument; once it is merged with digital technologies, however, these methods become essentially infinite and take on qualitatively new potentialities, crossing media and modes. Coupled with live camera feeds, sampling and looping technologies and audio-reactive visual patches, a saxophone can quickly become a saxo-piano-video-phone that can be further manipulated live to change its composition once again. In contrast to Richard Dudas, who sees digital instrument design as a form of composition (Dudas, 2010: 30), I would argue that this is improvisation with the very instrumentality of the instrument, the exploration and creation of new affordances within a collaborative milieu. And again, while the instrument’s component parts will be pre-determined to some degree by the elements that are brought together and the capacities of the hardware and software underpinning it, this composedness will be matched by the performer’s improvisation both on or with the instrument, and in the instrument’s ongoing de- and re-construction within the performance. To recall Croft’s earlier distinction between procedural and aesthetic liveness, such improvisation with the instrumentality of the instrument in the midst of performance clearly places live a/v in the latter camp, where technical possibilities are explored and employed creatively in the presence of an audience.

Conclusion

Live a/v is a notably concrete meeting of and ‘thinking together’ the event and the machine, in the Derridean terminology introduced earlier, and it is the multitude of ways in which the event and the machine meet that represent live a/v’s ongoing
promise and necessity, its urgency and excitement as an emerging arts and performance practice. Premised on the broad availability and accessibility of digital technologies, live a/v is in part a function of the machine, the programmed and programmable, the preconceived and pre-given. And yet it is out of the machine that the event will spring, because the sudden juxtaposition of pre-conceived materials will perforce introduce something new and unexpected into the performance. Furthermore, with the use of random or generative algorithms, the machine can be used to generate events that must also be incorporated into the performance and reacted to aesthetically by the performer, meaning there is a constant feedback between event and machine. As the Diffuse event exemplifies, live a/v in no way shies away from mediatization and pre-recorded media, which traditionally may have been thought to reduce the liveness or degrees of improvisation of the performance; rather, it produces liveness through mediatization, recursively enlivening the mediatized, ‘eventalizing’ the machine. Further, live a/v embraces the inherent risk of improvisatory contexts, building chance and the accident into a malleable digital instrumentality, as the Diffuse event demonstrated for the collaborating artists.

The ongoing debate amongst performance and improvisation theorists regarding the liveness/mediatised relation is essentially rendered moot in the live a/v scenario, where media technologies and preparation of materials are defining factors. Live a/v’s value lies precisely in the degree to which it references and draws upon pre-recorded, pre-edited traditional media, and uses the language and display mechanisms of these forms. Yet live a/v performance also refuses to participate in that economy by ensuring each instantiation is different and that digital tools are used by performers not to reduce contingency but to always open up to possibility.

Bibliography


BENEATH CLOUDS AND THE BOYS
Jazz Artists Making Film Music

Matthew Hill

Abstract

This article examines the compositional processes of established Australian jazz artists writing for film. Two specific case studies are discussed: the Necks’s score for the film The Boys (Rowan Woods, 1998) and Alistair Spence’s score for Beneath Clouds (Ivan Sen, 2002). Specific music cues from the films are analysed in relation to artists’ observations recorded in interviews. The artists featured in this research have well-established careers as improvising musicians and the application of their music making knowledge to the film scoring process is germane to the final film score. Key questions relevant to the film music concern the extent to which improvisation played a part in the scoring process, the application of improvisatory musical experience to the audiovisual domain, and the nature of the collaboration with the director.

Keywords

Alister Spence, The Necks, Australian film, composition, jazz film music

Introduction

Musicians with established careers as performing and recording jazz artists have been contracted to provide original music for film in numerous instances. Miles Davis’s music for the film Ascenseur pour L’Echafaud (Louis Malle, 1958 – French release) or Herbie Hancock’s music for Blow Up (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966 – USA release) are two prominent international examples. More recently, established Australian jazz artists including The Necks (Chris Abrahams, Lloyd Swanton and Tony Buck) have produced original music for the film The Boys (Rowan Woods, 1998) and pianist and composer Alister Spence has collaborated with Ivan Sen to produce the music for Beneath Clouds (Ivan Sen, 2002).

This article seeks to address a number of broad questions surrounding the processes utilised by jazz musicians in devising music for film. These questions include: how do experienced improvisers go about making music for film? To what extent do the improvising practices of jazz musicians, in purely musical domains, translate into making music for film? and What is the nature of the collaboration between the director/producer/sound editor and the improvising musician? It is not the intention of this paper to answer these questions definitively, instead the research presented here offers insights in relation to these questions from two specific case studies: The Necks music for The Boys and Spence’s music for Beneath Clouds. These examples highlight two contrasting music making processes
for film: one where the composer is working directly with images (*Beneath Clouds*), and the other where music was made without reference to specific images, instead working within a broader stylistic brief (*The Boys*). These two methods are common to film and have been discussed recently by New Zealand screen composer and improviser Trevor Coleman (Johnson, 2010: 66-77).

The analytical method employed examines contextual and textual features of the music and the processes by which it was produced. The author conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with Alister Spence and two members of The Necks, Chris Abrahams and Lloyd Swanton. Such approaches are well established, for example in the work of Tagg and Clarida (2003) (on music affect) and Berliner (1994) and Monson (1996) (in jazz research). Specific sections of music have been transcribed and pertinent musical features are described in relation to the image and narrative content. In this regard I have found the analytical and theoretical approaches used by Chion (1994, 2009) to be particularly relevant and make use of his terms where appropriate.

**The Films**

*The Boys* is Australian director Rowan Woods’ first feature film and is an adaptation of a play by Gordon Graham. The film tracks the events that occur over one day following Brett Sprague’s (David Wenham) release from prison and his return to the family home where his girlfriend, mother, step-father, two brothers and their girlfriends await. The day is marked by various conflicts and arguments as Brett struggles with these relationships, and he eventually forms an alliance with his two brothers. The film ends with the three brothers about to commit the crime (rape and murder) that has been alluded to throughout the film via a series of flash-forwards. The film received local critical acclaim, winning four Australian Film Institute awards for direction, adapted screenplay and supporting actor/actress awards (John Polson and Toni Collette) in 1998, the year of its release.

*Beneath Clouds* is the first feature film made by Australian director Ivan Sen. The two main protagonists are Lena (Dannielle Hall) and Vaughan (Damian Pitt) who meet up at a western New South Wales (NSW) roadhouse and hitch-hike together to Sydney. Lena is a young woman reacting against her part-Aboriginal heritage on a quest to find her absent Irish father. Vaughan, a young Aboriginal man, has just escaped from a low-security prison in order to visit his dying mother. The film follows their journey, much of the time spent on foot, as they negotiate their pasts and get to know one another. The film won Australian Film Institute Awards for best direction and best cinematography in 2002.

**The Necks - Background**

The Necks are an improvising instrumental trio featuring Chris Abrahams (piano, organ, synthesiser, samples), Lloyd Swanton (bass) and Tony Buck (drums). They formed in Sydney in 1986 and have since recorded fifteen albums (five released prior to *The Boys*) and performed live at major venues in Australia and internationally. In both live and recorded settings The Necks often perform single continuous tracks of about one hour in length, in an approach that avoids traditional jazz trio elements such as rehearsed themes and individual solos and instead focuses on a gradual unfolding of minimal harmonic and rhythmic
elements within a collective improvisation context. Whilst live performances by the Necks feature the acoustic instrumentation of drums, double bass and piano, some of their studio albums have explored the use of other instruments and sampled sounds. Buck suggests that in some senses there are two bands, that is, one for live settings and the other for the studio: “In the latter we don’t feel a need to eschew any approach or instrument: electric, digital or acoustic” (Shand, 2009: 112). They have received widespread critical acclaim for their work including being tagged by the New York Times (USA) as “one of the greatest bands in the world”. Their music has been described by the Guardian (UK) as “entirely new and entirely now... they produce a post-jazz, post-rock, post-everything sonic experience that has few parallels or rivals” (ibid).

Prior to recording the music for The Boys, the three members of The Necks had well-established careers as musicians working on a number of different projects ranging from conventional jazz groups to rock and avant-garde ensembles. Between 1982 and 1985 Abrahams and Swanton released three albums with the hard-bop influenced jazz group The Benders. During the 1980s and 1990s Abrahams recorded two solo piano albums (Piano, 1984 and Walk, 1986), was a member of the indie rock band The Sparklers and worked extensively with the singer/songwriter Melanie Oxley to produce four albums. Swanton has performed as the bassist with major Australian and international jazz artists such as Bernie McGann, Vince Jones, Dewey Redman, Nat Adderley, Clifford Jordan and Barney Kessel, and has worked with pop/rock artists such as Tim Finn, Steven Cummings, Wendy Matthews and Sting. He leads another successful long running Australian group, The Catholics, with whom he has recorded seven albums. Tony Buck has worked with a string of major jazz artists such as Mark Simmonds, Paul Grabowsky, Sandy Evans, Dale Barlow, Clifford Jordan and Branford Marsalis. In the 1990s Buck formed the hardcore improvisation band Peril In Japan that featured a dense use of drum-triggered samples alongside bass and guitars. Relocating to Europe in the mid 1990s, Buck has continued to work with an array of experimental improvising artists such as Jon Rose, John Zorn, Nicholas Collins and Tom Cora. In relation to screen sound, the soundtrack for The Boys remains The Necks only music produced for film, although individual members have composed soundtracks including Swanton’s music for the short film The Beat Manifesto (Daniel Nettheim, 1994), and Abraham’s more recent music for the feature film The Tender Hook (2008, Jonathon Ogilvie).

From this brief biographical account, it is clear that members of The Necks draw on an extensive range of experiences that inform both their musical processes and aesthetic tendencies. In terms of formal music education, all three members studied jazz at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in the early 1980s, however their subsequent performing and recording experiences reinforce Berliner’s notion of the “jazz community as an educational system” (Berliner, 1994: 36). In his detailed account of the processes of American improvising musicians, Berliner stresses the importance of informal study, jam sessions and apprenticeships with more renowned artists for the cultivation of emerging artists. Furthermore, in establishing a career, the emerging artist needs to develop a strong sense of self-reliance and personal responsibility for artistic development.

*Emerging improvisers, in coming to terms with jazz’s varied conventions, do not simply absorb them. Rather, they interpret and*

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2 See also references to collaborations with Mike Cooper, discussed elsewhere in this Screen Sound issue.
select them according to personal abilities and values, formative musical experience and training, and dynamic interaction with other artists. (Berliner, 1994: 59)

The formation of The Necks in many ways aligns with Berliner’s model and represents a ‘coming to terms’ with the various conventions the three emerging improvisers had encountered. In reflecting on how their experiences, both in terms of formal music education and experiences in purely musical settings, translate to working in film in a more general sense, Abrahams feels that, regardless of the level of improvisation involved in the process, the composer should arrive at the same point. On a more pragmatic level, Abrahams observed that:

being quite a good improviser means you can make a lot of product quite quickly. That’s something that can be very handy, particularly in TV, where the turnaround is very quick and you’ve got to work quite quickly.³

The Necks – Music Making Processes

The Necks established their *modus operandi* in their early rehearsals where, according to Swanton, they were seeking to “find a music where we were totally in the moment” (quoted in Williams, 2010). To that end they initially rehearsed as a “private experiment” (ibid) without the intention of performing but, as Abrahams recounts:

When we started rehearsing, we began to make a sound that made us think, ‘Let’s develop this.’ I don’t think we ever really verbalised it. Intuitive is the best word. Before that, I’d operated on the concept of developing what you did to a level of competence and then presenting it to an audience. But for me, the Necks brought an understanding that things can find a way of becoming other things while you’re performing. That was such a big breakthrough for me that once I’d crossed the line, I had a whole different way of playing. (ibid)

In performance, The Necks begin with silence for up to a minute or more until one of the three members begins and the other two gradually join in. The individual parts are often a spacious ostinato (a repetitive sequence of notes) that is gradually transformed as the piece develops. As Shand describes it:

the playing is free, in the sense that there are no defined parameters in advance of the rendering, but there is usually a tonal centre and, until recently, usually a groove. (2009: 95-6)

Rather than making instant and frequently shifting responses to each other’s playing, Buck suggests that the more gradual transformations produce music that is:

constantly shifting through different meanings and contexts. The centre of gravity is changing and the meaning of what you’re doing changes with it. (in Williams, 2010: online)

³ Chris Abrahams interview with author, 6 December 2010, by telephone. All quotes, unless otherwise cited, are from this source.
Buck acknowledges that The Necks’ sound has evolved as they incorporate their various other musical experiences:

Although the sort of things we do have broadened a lot, I don’t think we’ve ever diluted the basic concept. But we play different music outside the group, and we bring in elements of those approaches, fitting it into this context, this way of working. (ibid)

One such element, which Buck proposed as an idea for the track ‘Black’ on The Necks album Silent Night (1995), was the incorporation of various sound effects within the track. The samples used on ‘Black’ included sounds of footsteps, laughter, screams, conversations, cars, church bells, phones and sirens and were all recorded by Abrahams from films screened on SBS television (Mitchell, 2005). This recording became the point of connection between The Necks and the director (Rowan Woods) and producer (Robert Connolly) of The Boys. According to Abrahams, Connolly played the album to Woods:

Rowan found the aesthetic we got on the record, which in terms of a broad brush stroke is quite dark, particularly the first side “Black”, you can’t get much darker I guess, and they thought that the sound of what we were doing was very much in keeping with the mood of the film ... basically we understood the brief being like ‘can you make music like what’s on Silent Night, but can you make a whole lot more of it. (Interview, 2010)

As Mitchell suggests “the film noir-like properties of Black were especially appropriate to the disturbing psychological drama of masculine violence that is developed in The Boys” (2005: online).

The Necks and The Boys

Much of the film was shot in a house rented specifically for the purpose in Maroubra in Sydney’s east. The Necks’ music from the Silent Night album was played in the background in rehearsals as “general mood setting” (Abrahams interview, 2010). The Necks visited the house during the early rehearsal stage and “spent a lot of time absorbing the atmosphere of the film” (Mitchell, 2005). Abrahams has compared the use of the rented house to the location used for In Cold Blood (Richard Brooks, 1967), the recreation of a non-fiction USA-based crime novel by Truman Capote, where filming was undertaken in the actual house the murder was committed (Mitchell, 2005). Mitchell has discussed how this and other factors, including that it was the first feature film for many in the film crew, emphasised process over finished product, an approach that mirrors The Necks’ own music making procedures.

The emphasis on mood and ‘vibe’ as opposed to detailed and specific underscoring suited The Necks’ working methods. As Abrahams notes, “the project, for me, seemed to be largely concerned with the juxtaposition of Necks’ music with the film, rather than us writing music to the film”. To this end The Necks recorded large amounts of material in the studio to give to the sound editor, Nick Myers. As Swanton elaborates:
We knew they didn’t need one hour long pieces but we also knew that the way we work it takes a while to get a piece up and rolling and establishing a direction so we gave them quite a lot of trio textures I guess you’d say, usually running to 15-20 minutes at least and when they found a use for those we’d go back and tighten it up a bit in terms of the duration in some cases, maybe add some things that they might have wanted, then basically giving it to them in an unmixed form. But then I think they found that that was too much to work with, like they didn’t really want to be our audio mixers as well, so we gave them some versions that were roughly mixed with instruments sort of grouped where they should sound in the sonic spectrum and everything and they were still free to do what they wanted beyond that.4

There were also logistical considerations for The Necks that precluded a close collaboration with the filmmakers throughout the placement of sound and editing processes, given that drummer Tony Buck was at the time residing in Berlin and only available for a short time for Sydney recordings. However, whilst Swanton acknowledges he stayed on in a ‘consultative role’, he was not overly concerned about handing over the control of placement and editing.

Some people are horrified to think musicians would surrender that much control but all three of us always felt that the dramatic chord when the door opens is a little bit too didactic anyway. We tend to think in much more general terms, alluding to various ambiguities in our music and hopefully doing the same in the film.

It is clear from this discussion that the editor (Nick Myers) was crucial in the construction of the final “audiovisual scene” to use Chion’s (1994:66) term. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the editor and director’s processes, the following analysis of specific cues makes reference to the whole “audio–logo–visual” text (Chion, 2009:468).

The Boys Opening Credits Cue

The most prominent Necks’ music utilised in the film comprises three cues totaling about seven minutes that are variations on a repeating four bar pattern (the ‘theme’ as discussed by Abrahams below). The process employed in the creation of these cues was, according to Abrahams, a little more contrived than for a regular Necks piece:

I don’t think the process was like ‘let’s play a Necks piece’ and if you guys can remember anything at the end that was in that piece we’ll try that. I think we actually sat down and said we have to work out a theme here and kind of nutted it out… we knew it was a theme while we were working on it but nonetheless it came about through an improvised process, knowing that the end result would be a three minute piece of music. That’s what we sat down and tried to work on in a kind of Necks’ way.

4 Lloyd Swanton interview with author, 26 November 2010, by telephone. All quotes, unless otherwise cited, are from this source.
The structure of the film involves a non-linear time line where events prior to and post the central crime are presented. The switch between the two is signaled with both visual and audio elements and is set up in the opening credits sequence. Prior to hearing the first cue, there is about one and a half minutes of low pitched textural drone elements (with Bflat and G pitches prominent) interspersed with somewhat ghostly human vocal sounds including a baby crying and train station announcements (possibly slowed down) and the squeal of car tyres. Visually, this sequence features somewhat blurred images of the slowed down night-time view from a car (Fig 1). After these dark textural sounds, the opening music cue begins with a piano figure that is synchronised with the first of a sequence of shots of mundane household fittings and furnishings (Fig 2). Throughout the film the pre-crime shots feature very little non-diegetic sound, with the exception of the two Necks’s cues. The post-crime shots feature textural elements similar to those used in the opening one and a half minutes.

![Figure 1: The Boys sequence featuring blurry images from a car](image1)

![Figure 2: The Boys: household fittings in opening credit sequence](image2)

The first cue (approximately two and a half minutes in length) is heard in the opening credits, the second (approximately one and a half minutes) about midway through the film and the final cue (approximately fifty seconds) just before the end. The first version of the theme contains the densest texture with the piano, bass and drums augmented by organ and distorted bass guitar (see the author transcription in Fig 3).
Whilst the key signature of the transcription suggests G minor, it is not until the second cue when the bass plays the Bflat, that the key is apparent. However, as noted above, the drone elements prior to the Necks’s cue include prominent G and Bflat pitches that help to establish a sense of tonality for the listener. In the opening credits the bass is restricted to the root and fifth while the four note piano motif outlines the semitone movement from the 5 and b6 of the scale followed by a repetition of the b6 and then a repetition of a dyad, the 2 and 5, in a higher octave. The absence of the b3 makes the key ambiguous, as does the repetitive striking of ‘the lowest key on the piano’, the 5, in the third and fourth bars of the cycle. An obvious parallel to the use of the minor second interval as a theme is John Williams’s *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975). Yet Swanton does not consider the interval itself to be inherently menacing but rather the relationship between the scale tones is more important.

In a minor key the b6 has a particular sound and it’s a semitone above the fifth, which is very consonant and very comfortable. So maybe there is a tension and release thing there, where if you are constantly going up from the fifth to the b6th that will create an undulating effect.

However Abrahams was also attracted to the effect of the beating decay of the piano sound when two notes a semitone apart are sounded with the sustain pedal down. Thus the use of the melodic minor second can be theorised in isolation as well as in relation to a particular tonic, and both readings present a sense of unease for the listener.

Rhythmically, the different instruments repeat their own part within a four bar cycle with the opening piano motif on beat four being answered by the toms on beat two of the next bar. The repetition of the tom figure, initially every two bars (as shown in Fig 3), and then in every bar, has a march-like quality although this is disrupted by the piano rhythm. The piano repeats a dotted quaver rhythm that, with the very sensitive performance of the dynamics indicated, creates the...
impression of the use of a delay effect. Abrahams has indicated his interest, particularly at the time of making the music for The Boys, in the timbral effect heard when rapidly striking a single note on the piano:

I hit the same string quite hard with the sustain pedal down and you get this kind of acoustic distortion on the note and a lot of the bottom end disappears when you hit a string that has just been hit before. You get a kind of cimbalom, like a hammered dulcimer kind of effect where the rounded piano sound changes into a very metallic sound with a lot of upper mid frequencies.

For Abrahams, another important timbral element in the opening cue is the intermittent sounds from the DX7 synthesiser:

I love the DX7 synthesiser, and I felt that electronic, very harsh, spiky sort of sound would further orchestrate the foreboding nastiness that the theme was striving for. The way the opening credits turned out, I think the DX7 turns into a bit of a star. That real electronic, surveillance, nasty kind of quality that the keyboard has... it's quite subliminal actually. It provides these spikes, where the main thing is the band, the trio sound, and then there are these very unpleasant insect intrusions.

The most prominent shifts in timbre occur in the organ and distorted bass guitar sound, with the organ sound shifting sharply from a contour containing many of the higher partials to one containing mainly the fundamental at the change of pitch in the third bar of the cycle. Walser (1993) has discussed the relationship between heavy metal music and construction of gender, in particular the use of distorted power chord as a musical articulation of power. The use of distortion in the theme music can thus be considered a form of culturally-informed musical coding.

There are many points of synchronisation between the music and the images. The tempo of the cue is twice spelt out in the opening sequence with a rhythmic “pivot dimension” (Chion, 2009: 483) between diegetic and non-diegetic sound, first by the low pitched thudding sounds (at 1:08–1:34, possibly a windscreen wiper sound slowed down, or car tyres on raised road markings) (Fig 4) which almost act as a count in for the band, and second by the tap dripping (at 2:30–2:45) (Fig 5) which marks out the upbeats for a short time (coinciding somewhat aptly with the credit for sound designer, Sam Petty) before drifting out of time. Cuts from image to image often align with a particular part of the repeating musical cycle, although notably avoid shifting on the start of the cycle (as transcribed in Fig 3) and often lag by a beat (for example the cut from knives to light switch at 3:04) (Fig 6). The shifting timbre of the distorted bass guitar is synchronised with the blurring of various images (such as the light shade at 3:14) (Fig 7).
Figure 4: The Boys: blurred images synchronised with thudding sounds

Figure 5: Tap dripping synchronised to sound designer credit

Figure 6: Images not synchronised to musical beat
The use of music in opening titles to convey the mood of the film is an established cinematic code and the various musical features identified here work in conjunction with the images and other sounds to convey meaning. Director Woods has suggested that the opening sequence “evokes an atmosphere of dread and could possibly represent the empty house while the murder is being committed” (quoted in Mitchell, 2005: 8). Editor Myers sees a parallel between the music and the central theme of the film. “The Necks’ music is based on repeating patterns, quite appropriate for a film about men perpetrating violence against women” (Johnson and Poole, 2005: 114). The above analysis illustrates how rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, timbral and textural elements contribute to qualities such as menace, violence, unease and foreboding. The realisation of the audio-visual relationship was a product of the editor and director’s work utilising theme music arrived at via improvisation and refinement by The Necks working within set parameters.

The process detailed above can be contrasted with the one undertaken by Alister Spence and Ivan Sen in scoring the music for Beneath Clouds. Spence and Sen developed the music working directly with rushes and thus, unlike The Necks, Spence had direct input into the construction of specific cues and the placement of sounds in relation to image and narrative content. Before discussing the details of this process I will provide some background on Spence.

Alister Spence - Background

Alister Spence is a pianist and composer who has worked extensively in Australia, Europe and Asia with his own trio and with groups such as Clarion Fracture Zone (as co-leader), Wanderlust and the Australian Art Orchestra. Clarion Fracture Zone formed in 1988 and has received much critical acclaim for their live performances and recordings, including a five star review from Downbeat Magazine in 1995 for the album Zones on Parade. They have been described in The Guardian (UK) as “a truly contemporary band sensitively mixing acoustic playing and electronic sampling to produce a confection of influences that sound as if they were meant to
belong together rather than just thrown in a blender and spun" (Fordham 1994).\(^5\) Spence's own trio, featuring the bassist Lloyd Swanton and drummer Toby Hall from Clarion Fracture Zone, have been described by *Sydney Morning Herald* jazz critic John Clare in glowing terms: “Beautiful. Spence’s piano vocabulary is very distinctive, his playing very fine, with rhythmic excitement and melodic beauty entwined”\(^6\).

Spence has performed and/or recorded with numerous notable Australian jazz musicians such as Bernie McGann, Sandy Evans, Don Burrows, Dale Barlow, Tony Buck and Phil Slater and international jazz musicians including Mark Helias, Andy Sheppard and Phillip Johnston. Whilst his background is mostly in jazz and improvised forms, Spence has written music for a number of short films and documentaries. His interest in working with moving images has led Spence to work most recently with film artist Louise Curham, an experimental creator of visuals using ‘obsolete’ film media like Super 8. The Alister Spence Trio has produced four albums, the most recent, *Fit* (2009), features a DVD with visuals by Curham, with whom the trio has performed numerous live concerts. The Australian Art Orchestra recently performed Spence’s composition ‘Soak’ that also featured visuals by Curham at the 2010 Melbourne International Arts Festival.

In terms of formal music education, Spence had a classical upbringing (theory and performance) before, like the members of The Necks, studying jazz at the Sydney Conservatorium. He has undertaken an arranging course in the USA and studied with American pianists Andy LaVerne, Cedar Walton, Mulgrew Miller and Benny Green. As for The Necks, this brief biographical account is provided in order to highlight Spence’s experience and education in improvised musical forms that align with Berliner’s aforementioned notion of the ‘jazz community as an educational system’ (1994). Comparing his experience in purely musical settings to working in film, Spence suggests that, although an improviser’s sensitivities are transferable between the different domains, he sees a critical difference in terms of orientation.

> Everything translates. If I’m playing something for myself I’m playing self expression, I’m playing to express what’s on the inside of me and to get that out. But if I’m playing for film I’m serving the film, I’m playing for it, I’m supporting that mood. I think all the same sensitivities have to be there, you have to have your antennae out about what you’re doing and why you’re doing it... it’s a very good way to learn to economise your ideas.\(^7\)

Collaboration with Ivan Sven

Prior to making *Beneath Clouds*, Spence had worked on a number of documentaries and short films with director and musician Ivan Sen beginning with the documentary *Journey* [Ivan Sen, 1997], commissioned by the ABC Indigenous unit. Completing these projects with Sen facilitated an effective collaborative experience for *Beneath Clouds* by enabling Spence to consider that he had:

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\(^7\) Alister Spence interview with author, 29 November 2010, by telephone. All quotes, unless otherwise cited, are from this source.
a clear understanding about [Sen’s] mind and the way he thought about things and what things were important to him in terms of life in general as well as in the film.

Whilst Spence was the sole composer in these initial collaborations, Sen’s interests in music led to their sharing of the composition role for Beneath Clouds. As Spence elaborates:

We definitely had things which were our strengths but as it went on, because Ivan is a guitar player and very interested in music and plays quite a bit for himself, and we share some musical tastes in common, it began to be a better thing to try and work on things together.

Improvisation was a major part of the process which Spence and Sen employed for writing the music for the film. Using Sen’s home studio, they tried out ideas prior to filming and then when rushes were being done, as Spence recounts:

We would get together and watch sequences of the film and more or less jam along to that to see what came out of that that might be useful... [Improvisation] had a very big part to play. We were pretty much just trying things out against the film so making up harmonic progressions and bits of melodies on the spot and recording ourselves doing them. So a lot of, for instance, what ended up being the string parts, was me playing on a string sound on a keyboard, just getting a feeling for what worked and what progressions worked and what sort of potential counter lines could work in amongst the parts and so on.

In conversations about the music for the film, Spence recalls little discussion using particular music-theoretical terms. Instead, the conversations were

definitely more about the mood... we didn’t really talk about musical things at all like chord structures and so on, we probably don’t share that language. He’s learnt music a different way so it’s just better to talk about the mood and that’s more helpful for me because it gave me a good insight into what I was trying to provide for him musically.

Beneath Clouds Music

The score for Beneath Clouds features a range of instrumentation including a string section, uilleann pipes, solo cello, piano, guitar, drum loops and “whatever was on offer in the sampling/synth side of the world”. The choice of instruments was carefully considered and ‘played with’ early on in the process with budget a factor:

We had a larger than usual budget and we wanted to put a largish string section in so that was always part of the equation... To tag the various storylines we had a uilleann pipes, to reflect the Irish background of one of the characters [Lena], and a solo improvising cello, which we’d used before on ‘Journey’... Cello had always been a sound that Ivan was very fond of... a little bit of piano and Ivan’s trademark guitar... We were going for sounds which had some sort of emotional weight - of course then we had to be careful it wasn’t
overdone – (sounds) that could carry some importance without having to do very much.

Spence relates that the piano was chosen, in general, for two reasons: first “because I play it”, and second because

it seems to be one of those sounds that can be quite universal and transparent in film, it does seem to be able to carry or support things without getting in the road too much. It does seem to be able to sit in film quite easily, and I guess that’s just because of the amount of time it’s been used, people are familiar with it.

The string section is utilised throughout the film, first appearing in the opening credits and then underscoring many scenes in the film. There are two main tonal centres for the string parts that align with the two main characters, Lena and Vaughn, in a leitmotif fashion. The opening credits and the first two string cues establish the tonal centre of F minor for Lena in the opening ten minutes of the film. These cues feature a repeating four-chord progression, i – VII – VI – VII, in the key of F minor with a movement from iv – v as a police car takes her step-brother from home (Fig 8). The F minor tonality is also used to underscore key narrative events for Lena such as when she is sick at the roadhouse (a low pitched F minor drone); when two men try to pull her into their car (F minor drone), when Vaughn hands back her photo album (a reprise of the opening cue), and when Lena talks to Shaun in the pub just prior to Vaughn almost breaking into a car (a version of the opening chord progression and then a low pitched F drone) (Fig 9).

Figure 8: Beneath Clouds: Lena’s stepbrother is taken away

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Transcribed at A=434 Hertz - the actual soundtrack is slightly flat in relation to concert pitch of A=440Hz.
The tonal centre used for cues for Vaughn is B-flat minor and is established with the more tonally ambiguous chord progression, iv – III – i – VII, when Vaughn’s sister visits him at the prison gates and then as he goes to sleep on the night of his escape. This progression is also used at a particularly poignant moment in the film when Lena looks at the cliff after Vaughn has explained its significance in relation to a massacre of his people (Fig 10). The B-flat minor tonality is reinforced later when his escape from prison is underscored with a B-flat minor drone; when the first police car stops the car Vaughn is travelling in (B-flat minor drone); and the use of a VI – VII – i progression when Vaughn tells Lena that his mum is dying, a progression that is also used at the climax of the film when Vaughn has been home and runs back to meet Lena at the train station (Fig 11). A variation on this progression, i – VI – VII, is used as a transition into another particularly poignant moment in the film when Vaughn and Lena enter an abandoned church and Vaughn lights a fire using pages from a bible (Fig 12). The connection between tonality and character can also be extended to other cues, such as the A-flat pedal note when the older lady in the car identifies Lena’s aboriginality, something Vaughn seems to have missed. This part of the story presents a moment of great insight for both Vaughan and Lena and is reinforced tonally by the sounding of B-flat (for Vaughan) and F notes (for Lena) immediately after the A-flat (possibly for the older woman herself). The relationship between Lena and Vaughn can also be examined in terms of the strong relationship in tonal music between F and B-flat, either as I – IV or I – V depending on which note is considered the tonic.
Figure 10: Beneath Clouds: landscape of grief

Figure 11: Vaughn runs to meet Lena

Figure 12: Vaughn uses pages from a bible to light the fire
Whilst Spence’s musical background draws heavily on jazz, the harmonic choices for the film were informed primarily by “the language (of) the classical, rock and folk/pop music area” (Interview 2010). Spence considers this a result of Sen’s own aesthetic:

> [in film] you are always working on the director’s terms. So in this case with Ivan it’s based on the music that he likes to listen to and the sorts of sounds that he wants to hear, so I’m trying to provide those as well and create some interest in that for myself.

The relatively simple harmonies were a conscious choice as Spence sought to:

> create a sense of movement in the harmony so that it sounded like it was going somewhere slightly interesting, and not just sticking to the primary chords.

The overarching structural organisation of harmonic elements as described above present perhaps one means by which Spence sought to create further interest.

**Improvisation in the Church Scene**

A detailed analysis of the church scene exemplifies both the harmonic underpinnings as they relate to the above discussion, and particularly the improvisatory nature of the piano part. This scene occurs about fifty minutes into the film where Lena and Vaughn seek shelter inside a disused church and Vaughn lights a fire using the pages from a bible (Fig 13). The subsequent fireplace dialogue revolves around both characters’ parents and their sense of belonging. The piano punctuates the dialogue between Lena and Vaughn in a form of “scansion”, where the piano interjections aid the viewer in comprehending the scene. (Chion, 2009: 489) The piano parts resulted from Spence improvising to the scene:

> We had demoed this up before we got to the final... Just by trying out ideas we found a phrasing or the right amount of space between the piano events so it could interact effectively with the dialogue and still give a sense of space. Later on we had to re-record that with proper piano in a good studio and try to emulate the timing as best as possible, although of course those things could be moved in editing if necessary.
The transcription (Fig 14) shows how the piano and dialogue interact in a call and response manner, one of the five prominent types of interaction Rinzler (1988) identifies as important for analysis of jazz performances. Whilst the transcription gives an approximate tempo and time signature, the actual timing of this cue is very free, unlike call and response in a jazz setting. This led to a somewhat challenging process when the strings had to be scored and conducted. As Spence recounts:

**At the outset there was no time signature for all of that chordal movement, it just had to be devised so that it could occur in time and be conducted... So there was a kind of a reverse process from the improvisation into the written world to recreate that improvisational feel... So even if there was an underlying pulse, that pulse wouldn’t be discernable by the audience.**
The music and diegetic sound in the scene provide a thoroughly “empathetic effect” (Chion, 2009: 477). The lack of pulse in the music reinforces the floating feel of the scene, a feel that is also established by other ambient stylistic elements in the music such as the static harmony, gentle timbres and minimal pitch materials. These elements are augmented by the sounds of the fire burning, not a threatening fire but the soothing sound of a campfire. The campfire is a strong cultural code in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian cultures denoting a sense of belonging and connection to land as well as offering a contemplative setting. However this particular campfire was lit by tearing up pages of the bible, as Tsiolkas suggests after “the trashing of European religion that mirrors the desecration Europeans have wrought on Aboriginal culture, as well as a defiant opposition to Christianity’s role in tearing apart Aboriginal families and communities” (Tsiolkas, 2002: 4). Tsiolkas is critical of many aspects of the film and he considers scenes such as the church scene do not effectively articulate (in both the sense of the minimal dialogue and the underlying political reading) the violence of Australia’s past. In other words, as a “coming of age story” (Collins and Davis, 2004: 154), the rendering of the themes of disconnectedness and shame in the film are somewhat cursory. However, I suggest that the elements I describe here work together in an empathetic manner to enhance an understated exploration of issues of identity and injustice.

The minimal harmonic elements used in the scene are consistent with the harmonic palette used throughout the film (discussed above). The piano is restricted for most of the cue to three pitches - B flat, F, and A flat – again perhaps making a programmatic association with Lena (B flat), Vaughn (F) and the A flat possibly representing a mother/parent figure (foreshadowing the A flat pedal used when the older woman in the car recognises Lena’s Aboriginal heritage, as mentioned above). These pitches are played either as dyads or arpeggiated in the mid register of the piano and it is only at the point in the dialogue where Vaughn asks Lena somewhat rhetorically, “You’re not from there are you?” that the piano plays a higher pitched F and also adds a C for the first time in the scene. This jump in register acts to shift the mood of the scene from a settled state (where both Lena and Vaughn are presenting their particular frame of mind in relation to their upbringing) and presents a moment of insight and clarity, where Lena and Vaughn make a deeper connection with each other. Throughout the scene the strings play sustained notes that shift subtly around a B flat tonal centre with B flat (root) and F (5th) notes the most prominent, and C (2nd), E flat (4th) and A flat (b7th) notes contributing a suspended, unresolved tonal atmosphere to the music. The strings play in the low to mid range with the higher register utilised at the end of the scene in the same manner as the piano.

The degree to which the music for the church scene was revised from initial improvisations, or, in Spence’s words, the process of “trying out ideas” (Spence, interview 2010), is unclear. As in The Necks example, the role of the director, editor and/or sound editor is critical in terms of the creation of the completed audiovisual scene. However, in the case of Beneath Clouds, the improvising musicians (Spence and Sen) played a far more active role in this regard.

Conclusion

The analysis of cues and production processes discussed suggest two distinct approaches to improvisation elements in Australian film scoring: first, The Necks
produced a large stock of music that was then edited to the image, and second, Alister Spence devised specific music cues for edited film sequences. Whilst these two methods are not specific to improvisers, in both examples presented here, improvisation played a major role in the development of the music. In both films, improvised performances were refined, edited and re-recorded where necessary and, in the case of the string parts in *Beneath Clouds*, realised via a ‘reverse process’ where improvised draft recordings were then scored and recorded.

The idiosyncratic style of The Necks and the desire of the director to recreate the feel of earlier Necks’s music (from *Silent Night*) led to a fairly direct translation of the improvising practices of The Necks from the solely musical to the film music domain. Although the intention was to make music for the film, the band process and subsequent sonic outcomes are in many ways akin to previous Necks’ recordings. In contrast, the music for *Beneath Clouds* is markedly different from Alister Spence’s own improvised work. Spence suggests that his purely musical experiences translate inasmuch as he is using the same sensitivities developed throughout his musical career. His collaborative process has been affected by his compositional approach with director, Ivan Sen, and the overarching needs of the image track. Similarities in music education and jazz improvisation suggest that, at least in these two exemplars, such a background offers useful training for film composers. This is not to argue that such improvisatory practices are unique to jazz musicians (especially given the contested definition of ‘jazz’ today – see Chan, 2008) but rather that improvisation is a well-accepted component of jazz performance and this suggests it also has a place in jazz-inflected film composition.9

The analysis of the main theme from *The Boys* suggests that The Necks created a sense of unease, foreboding, violence and menace with a range of musical elements. These include rhythmic (repetitive elements and march-like qualities providing a sense of relentlessness), harmonic and melodic (use of a minor key, emphasis on tension and release with the movement between the flattened 6th and 5th scale degrees), timbral qualities (use of industrial sounding DX7 synthesiser sounds and the acoustic distortion of the piano) and textural elements (the combination of sound design and musical elements). The analysis of *Beneath Clouds* suggests that larger scale structural considerations were an important part of the music creation process. A sense of unity was created by the choice of instruments and use of particular tonalities for the two main characters. Uilleann pipes were used to signify the Irish background of Lena and cello and piano were used to convey emotional weight. F, B-flat and Ab key centres were ascribed to the main characters and these notes provided the foundation for piano improvisations in the particularly poignant church scene.

Regarding the nature of the collaboration between the director/producer/sound editor and the improvising musician, the two films present some distinct differences. In *The Boys*, existing band material (from The Necks’s *Silent Night* album) formed a pseudo temp track that informed both the composers’ and director’s subsequent endeavours, whereas Spence and director Sen collaborated as co-composers to developing the music score for *Beneath Clouds*. The Necks took a far less active role in the placement of their music in the film, instead assigning control of this to the sound editor and director. The working relationship between Spence and Sen had developed over the course of numerous short films, whereas The Necks were brought in by *The Boys*’s filmmakers in order to create music

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9 See Michael Hannan’s discussion of comprovisation elsewhere in this *Screen Sound* issue.
within familiar stylistic and generic parameters. The comments from the interviews suggest a relatively deep understanding between the musicians and the directors of overall aesthetic goals, and highlight collaborative endeavours at the level of music composition and construction of the audiovisual text. This analysis of two feature film scores by contemporary jazz artists contribute to an understanding of film music practices in an Australian screen industry context.

Bibliography

SCORING ESSINGTON
Composition, Comprovisation, Collaboration

Michael Hannan

Abstract
New music technologies have increasingly enabled elements of improvised score to be incorporated into screen music tracks, even where a score is devised for performance by orchestral ensembles. This article focuses on the music construction for a film produced for (colour) television in the first decade of the Australian cinema revival period. In 1974 the author collaborated with composers Peter Sculthorpe and David Matthews on the production of the music score for the Australian feature-length drama, Essington (Julian Pringle, 1974). This reflective practice article outlines the creative ideas behind the composition of the Essington score and focuses on comprovisation (composition involving improvisation) as distinct from then-common practice in film scoring of fully notating the underscore. In scoring Essington’s music, comprovised cues, produced mostly using unconventional piano ‘interior’ sounds (where the sounds are produced by direct contact with the strings rather than using the keyboard), were used to sonically contrast with fully notated cues written in a conventional way for the piano. This study analyses a collaborative approach that offers a useful model for contemporary (Australian) film composition practices.

Keywords
Australian film music, Peter Sculthorpe, improvisation, comprovisation, piano interior

Introduction
Essington, a television feature film made by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) for the introduction of colour television¹, is an historical drama written by well-established historical novelist Thomas Keneally, directed by Julian Pringle and produced by Brian Burke. Essington’s storyline centres on the difficulties faced by British colonial settlers in coping with the harshness and strangeness of the Australian continent in the 1840s. It was one of the first Australian films to tackle the negative impact of European colonialism on the indigenous population. Keneally’s screenplay dealt critically with issues affecting indigenous peoples such as: the introduction of diseases like influenza, dysentery, and sexually transmitted diseases; the imposition of Western cultural practices such as religion and law; and, generally, the display of culturally insensitive behaviour by the settlers. First broadcast on ABC TV on March 6, 1974, Essington gained industry recognition in the 1976 Logie Awards: Keneally won Best Script and Chris Haywood won Best

¹ Colour television was officially launched in Australia on March 1, 1975, although several test transmissions and productions were available through 1974.
Individual Performance by an Actor (for the part of Squires). Significant musical resources were directed to this film that was designed to highlight a new era of TV transmissions in Australia.

Peter Sculthorpe, then a highly-regarded Australian chamber, orchestral and music theatre composer, was invited to score *Essington*. The producer was expecting an orchestral score and had organised the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (at the time managed by the ABC) to record it. Sculthorpe, however, was not interested in writing for orchestra and negotiated with the ABC to be able to compose piano keyboard music combined with layered piano interior (or ‘extended techniques’) textures in the recording studio using multi-track technology. Sculthorpe felt there was not enough time allowed to compose a fully orchestrated score (Skinner, 2007: 634) and that, “Television doesn’t necessarily require large musical forces” (Sculthorpe, 1999: 207). Even for feature films for theatrical release he had previously written scores for small instrumental combinations: for the children’s drama *They Found a Cave* (Andrew Steane, 1962) he used a light jazz ensemble featuring American virtuoso harmonica soloist Larry Adler, and for the romantic comedy, *Age of Consent* (Michael Powell, 1969), he employed an ensemble of wind quintet, harp, vibraphone, cello and double bass, ideal for his gamelan-influenced musical style in this period.

The decision to incorporate extended piano techniques into the *Essington* score coalesced with techniques and textures that had featured in some of Sculthorpe’s concert music in the early 1970s, for example, he had written *Landscape* for amplified piano and tape delay (1971) and *Koto Music* for amplified piano and tape loop (1973) for the Australian concert pianist Roger Woodward. Both these works incorporated piano interior textures such as plucking and stroking the strings, as well as improvised elements. In addition Sculthorpe had written for piano interior as part of the orchestra for his theatre work, *Rites of Passage* (1972-73), which premiered in September 1974. The idea of working with piano interior techniques in a multi-track recording environment for *Essington* presented the opportunity to create unique textural sonorities using an experimental approach rather than producing an entirely notated score for conventional instruments.

Sculthorpe’s decision to invite David Matthews and I to collaborate with him on the *Essington* score was driven by his need to share the workload for completing the score in a short time. 1974 was an extremely busy year for Sculthorpe. Matthews had been sent to Australia by Sculthorpe’s UK publisher, Faber Music Limited, to assist Sculthorpe with preparing the score and parts of *Rites of Passage*, and he also copied the score of *The Song of Tailitnama*, the first performance of which was filmed in May 1974 (Skinner, 2007: 636) as part of a documentary *Sun Music for Film* (Stafford Garner, 1974). Apart from doing editorial work for publishers and composers, Matthews already had a strong profile as a professional concert composer in 1974, and is now a major figure in British and European contexts.

For my part, I had worked as Sculthorpe’s composition assistant at the time of his writing *Landscape*, and had previously developed a piano interior performance and improvisation practice based largely on my electro-acoustic music studio experiments as a University of Sydney music student from 1968. I had recorded piano interior improvisations onto tape and made tape collages using standard *musique concrète* techniques such as tape splicing, tape looping, tape-speed manipulation as well as layering using multi-track tape recorders.

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As a composer/academic I have employed practice-based methodology, a research approach that has recently garnered recognition for artist researchers for whom the primary research outcome—the production of new knowledge—is the creative work itself (see Knowles and Cole, 2008). I have applied this methodology using retrospective analysis of a collaborative creative project in which I engaged early in my career as a composer/researcher. In addition, research for this article focuses on analysis of texts, including the film itself, and documents relating to the scoring of the music that are held in the manuscript collection of the National Library of Australia (NLA), in the Papers of Peter Sculthorpe (MS 9676). In this collection, the folder relating to the Essington film project includes the original manuscripts of the scores of piano cues written by Matthews and Sculthorpe, a few manuscripts of composition sketches, the music spotting notes, tracking notes that detail the multi-track layering of the compromised cues, and notes on the recording sessions at the Recording Hall of the Sydney Opera House. This article discusses the diegetic music cues, including the use of an Aboriginal song, and underscore, as well as the incorporation of improvisatory techniques.

Musical Approach to Essington

Essington is a fictionalised account of a British attempt in 1838 to establish a military and trading settlement at Port Essington on the Coburg Peninsula in what is now the Northern Territory. The story’s characters are the military personnel and their families, a gang of convicts engaged as labourers, a shipwrecked priest, and an Aboriginal tribe. One of the military objectives of the settlement, which took the form of an unrealistic border protection policy, was to prevent the French from establishing naval bases in the north of the continent. The settlement lasted only eleven years because of its failure to deal with the isolation and harsh conditions, for which the Europeans were inadequately equipped.

The film narrative commences at a point where the colonists are building their fifth government house from stone after the first four buildings had been destroyed by termites. The commandant, Captain Macarthur, is portrayed as becoming increasingly mentally deranged by his failure to cope with the expectations of his assignment to maintain the operational standards of the Royal Marines. He is also an insomniac, and makes nightly visits to the local Aboriginal camp, because the only way he can fall asleep is by listening to their songs that appear to have a hypnotic effect on him. He has formed a bond with the Aboriginal elder, Namankati. The other main character is Squires, a convict who, unlike his fellow inhabitants in then-Victoria (better known as Port Essington), demonstrates awareness of cultural and locational sensitivity, and is portrayed as being resourceful, talented and intelligent. Squires has learned to speak the local indigenous language, has superior understandings of aboriginal culture, and is not afraid to criticise his fellow convicts, the officers, the soldiers and the priest, if they do, or intend to do, something culturally inappropriate. Such cultural issues form a common thread in the film narrative.

Although the drama is a hard-hitting critique of British colonial attitudes and behaviour, Keneally’s script posed a problem for the scoring team when we first viewed the film in the company of the director and producer. At this point the film had dialogue and most of the sound effects, but no underscored music or even a ‘temp track’ (a temporary selection of recorded music commonly dubbed onto an early edit or rough cut of the film to assist the edit and give the composer an idea of
the required musical style). After a half-hour of viewing, it became evident that, while the subject matter was serious, the underlying treatment was often humorous in its emphasis on the ludicrous efforts of the military to maintain the cultural ‘standards’ of the British Empire in a tropical location.

While engaged in the viewing session we (the scoring team) were all (independently) afraid to laugh in case we offended the filmmakers. The incident highlighted the importance of music to remind the viewer how they should be interpreting the mood of the visual and spoken narrative. As Kathryn Kalinak puts it:

*Music’s dual function as both articulator of screen expression and initiator of spectator response binds the spectator to the screen by resonating affect between them.* (1992: 87)

The idea of using quaint nineteenth century piano styles (described below) came from this identification of the humorous elements of the screenplay.

**Diegetic music cues**

*Essington* uses two different sources of diegetic music: Anglo/Celtic folk music and traditional Aboriginal music. These two musics are respectively emblematic of the two cultures: the new settlers and the Aboriginal people. One of the soldiers, Sgt. Masland, plays the harmonica in a number of scenes and the harmonica itself is central to the plot. The Aboriginal elder, Namankati, believes the harmonica has magical powers. Early in the story he is seen dancing enthusiastically to a folk tune, much to the amusement of Masland and some other soldiers; and later Namankati steals the harmonica, believing that if he plays it, it can cure the influenza that has fatally afflicted his tribe. He is subsequently arrested and shot dead by Masland as he tries to escape.

Recordings of four traditional Aboriginal songs are used for the three Aboriginal night-time camp scenes and a day-time mourning-for-the-dead scene. One of the tracks chosen by Sculthorpe was a song titled ‘The whistling duck, *djilili*, swimming in the billabong’, sourced from an LP of field recordings made by anthropologist, Professor AP Elkin (Arnhem Land Volume 3) (Sculthorpe and Hughes, 1998). This song was used diegetically for the first of the Aboriginal camp scenes. Sculthorpe decided to use the melody of this song as a central theme for the underscore of the film. The practice of using a diegetic music cue in a film as the basis for non-diegetic underscore ideas is not uncommon as a screen composition strategy. For example Lindley Evans’s underscore in the early Australian film *Tall Timbers* (Ken G. Hall, 1937) extensively uses the tune of the song ‘Trees’ (1914 poem by Joyce Kilmer; 1922 music by Oscar Rasbach) that is sung diegetically by the lead male character in one of the early scenes. More recently in various scenes of *Australia* (Baz Luhrmann, 2008), the song ‘[Somewhere] Over the Rainbow’ (lyrics by EY Harburg; music by Harold Arlen, 1939) is performed diegetically and melodic elements of it also understatedly permeate David Hirschfelder’s underscore.

For *Essington*, the melody of ‘The whistling duck, *djilili*, swimming in the billabong’ was transcribed by me. I used this version of the tune in six of the twenty-three cues that I recorded. I use the word ‘recorded’ because, unlike the piano keyboard music written by David Matthews and Peter Sculthorpe, only two of the cues that I created
were ‘scored’ (in the sense of being notated on manuscript paper). These two cues were named ‘Null & Void I’ and ‘Null & Void II’.

Sculthorpe has used my arrangement of the transcribed melody of “The whistling duck, djilili, swimming in the billabong” (as found in my “Null & Void” cues) in a number of his subsequent works, including Port Essington for string trio and string orchestra (1977), Djilili for piano (1986) and Kakadu for orchestra (1988). In an interview, Sculthorpe stated that:

I love the melody so much that I used it exactly, note for note, as it is, in a number of works since that time. (Sculthorpe and Hughes, 1998: unpaginated)

However, a transcription and analysis of the recording of “The whistling duck, djilili, swimming in the billabong” made by ethnomusicologist Steven Knopoff, reveals that my transcription is only vaguely approximate in pitch and rhythmic detail when compared to the melody in the Aboriginal recording. In versioning it into something workable in a Western compositional context, the rhythmic subtleties and elaborate vocal filigree of the source song have been ironed out. Knopoff’s 2006 transcription and analysis focused on the ethics of appropriating Aboriginal musical materials into Western musical compositions. Within this framework I believe that the melody, as I transcribed, transformed (and then arranged) it, is an original construction. Indeed, it may be difficult for any viewer/listener of Essington to make a conscious connection between the Aboriginal recording of ‘The whistling duck, djilili, swimming in the billabong’ (as heard in the first night-time camp scene) and my transcription of the melody as represented, for example in the ‘Null and Void’ cues.

Two Charles Chauvel films, Uncivilised (1936) and Jedda (1955) use traditional Aboriginal music recordings diegetically but, unlike Essington, the scores have non-diegetic orchestral instrumental textures added to the diegetic Aboriginal recordings as a way of building dramatic tension. Interestingly, in Jedda, the Aboriginal recordings used are credited to ‘Professor Elkin’, the same anthropologist whose field recordings are used in Essington (without credit). The didjeridu, as a non-diegetic musical signifier of Aboriginality, was used in Walkabout (Nicolas Roeg, 1971) and later films such as The Last Wave (Peter Weir, 1977), Burke and Wills (Graeme Clifford, 1986) and Young Einstein (Yahoo Serious, 1988). Curiously these four films are set in locations where the didjeridu is not traditionally part of the indigenous music. Clearly the power of the didjeridu sound to evoke Aboriginal culture prevailed in the filmmaking process over any concerns for musical authenticity. The adaptation of a theme derived from an Aboriginal song as the basis for an underscore (as deployed in Essington) has not been a practice common in Australian film scoring. The only other example is found in Manganninnie (John Honey, 1980), which was scored by Peter Sculthorpe (with contributions by David Matthews and Ian Fredericks). Although this is a film about the Tasmanian Aboriginal people, Sculthorpe used a traditional song known by the lead actress, Mawuyul Yanthalawuy, who is from Elcho Island (near the coast of Arnhem Land). The song is performed by the character Manganinnie as part of the diegesis, and then developed into a theme for the underscore. The focus of this article is on the particular creative practice of comprovisation in the scoring of the feature film Essington but the material presented also contributes to the literature of music scoring in films dealing with Australian Aboriginal culture.
The *Essington* Underscore

As stated, the underscoring of *Essington* comprised two contrasting approaches. The first used piano music written in a nineteenth century European idiom to accompany those sections of the film which reference the British colonial mindset; and the second used textures constructed by layering mostly improvised piano interior sounds, that is, sounds made by direct contact with the strings and frame of the piano, rather than playing on the keyboard. This latter approach was used for underscoring the dramatic themes of sex, death and violence and is also connected with Macarthur’s obsession with the Aboriginal singing, as well as Squires’s oneness with the environment.

Generally the pieces written for piano in nineteenth century European musical styles accompany scenes that characterise the European-ness of the officers and their families in Port *Essington*, as outlined in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cues</th>
<th>Scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Essington</em> theme</td>
<td>the main titles, accompanying a fire in the commandant’s office caused by Sgt. Wright in his attempt to kill a spider with a spirit lamp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lullaby</td>
<td>a sick baby asleep in a British-style cot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mac. 1</td>
<td>Captain Macarthur lying in bed, unable to sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leichhardt March I</td>
<td>the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt’s party arriving on foot at Port <em>Essington</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leichhardt March II</td>
<td>Leichhardt’s departure by ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Cole’s Academy</td>
<td>Mrs Macarthur reminiscing about her geometry studies at her Chelmsford school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea Party</td>
<td>Captain Macarthur telling a colonial anecdote at a tea party held outdoors in the torrid tropical heat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arietta</td>
<td>Macarthur and his second-in-command, Captain Lambrick, talking nostalgically about their time in Port <em>Essington</em> just as they are about to abandon it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the music handwriting of the piano keyboard scores held in the National Library of Australia, it appears that Sculthorpe wrote the ‘Lullaby’, ‘Mac. 1’ and ‘Miss Cole’s Academy’ cues and that Matthews wrote the remainder of the piano keyboard cues. There is, however, a sketch in Sculthorpe’s handwriting of the short cadenza of the ‘*Essington* theme’, suggesting that he drafted that part of this cue. The piano keyboard music for *Essington* was recorded by session pianist Joyce Hutchinson (uncredited). A military snare drum part was also improvised over the piano tracks of ‘Leichhardt March I’, and ‘Leichhardt March II’ by session drummer Neil Boland (also uncredited).

Extending my approximate transcription of the melody of ‘The whistling duck, *djilili*, swimming in the billabong’, the melody of this song was radically transformed in the piano keyboard cues that Matthews and Sculthorpe scored. In their cues, the theme and its series of variations are intentionally made simple and banal to function in stark contrast with the subtle rhythmic and melodic inflections of the original Aboriginal melody, as a way of asserting that the European claims of cultural superiority in this colonial context are illfounded. However the basic melodic shapes of the piano keyboard cues are inventively arranged in a variety of nineteenth
In one sense improvisation is anathema to film scoring. In the spotting of the music to be used in a synchronised sound era film there is always a starting and an end point for each music cue. There may also be requirements for the synchronisation of the music precisely with certain hit points of the action within a music cue. Considering this standard approach, the idea of an improvised score is problematic and thus not often employed in synch-sound era filmmaking, particularly when large ensembles of musicians are employed to perform the score. The early history of film reveals, however, that live improvised musical accompaniment was common in the presentation of pre-synchronised sound ('silent') films (Whiteoak, 1999: 64-66). In silent film exhibition it was also common to use existing repertoire from hire libraries (including large ensemble works). Another practice was the use by pianists and organists of stock cue books, such as those by Beynon (1921) and Rapee (1925), providing different moods and types of action. Here the performer was free to choose from hundreds of short pieces, which could be adapted (eg lengthened or abbreviated) for different films and screenings. Although the music was fully notated the selection of individual items and their sequencing was improvised.

In the modern era, a certain amount of improvisation occurs in the creative practices of screen composers and their improvising collaborators. In response to the question ‘Do you mostly work from improvisation or preconceived musical images?’, Magee (1996) found that all ten Australian feature film composers she interviewed used some improvisation in their approach, particularly in devising initial musical ideas to work with particular images. Some composers also identified electronic musical production as lending itself to improvisation, since working in real-time with the musical materials in a multi-track recording environment allows for a much more exploratory approach than scoring directly onto manuscript paper.

Bruno Nettl notes that:

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\text{Improvisation and composition are frequently regarded as separate processes, but they also may be viewed as two forms of the same kind of thing.} \quad (1983: 28)
\]
and that “the extreme forms of both appear at opposite ends of a continuum” (29). In 2006, I first employed the term ‘comprovisation’ to take account of composition that has strong improvisational elements (Hannan, 2006). One comprovisation strategy is to work from a skeletal score and add the compositional details through improvising. Another is to cut up recordings of improvised materials and re-assemble them into new compositions. In all forms of composition and improvisation, a musical vocabulary is established by the practitioner and used as the basis for assembling compositions or improvised performances. The comprovised piano interior cues of Essington involve a vocabulary of unusual sounds and sound patterns made from special features of the instrument. Some techniques are derived from existing works that used extended piano techniques and others are derived from personal experimentation. For example some comprovised cues involve arrangements of the melody that I transcribed from the Aboriginal song ‘The whistling duck, djililii, swimming in the billabong’. In these the melody is presented using two types of sounds: plucked strings, a technique that was pioneered by American ‘naïf’ composer Henry Cowell in works such as *Aeolian Harp* for string piano (1923) and *The Banshee* for string piano (1925) (Mellers, 1964: 149-150); and prepared piano, a technique developed by John Cage where objects such as pieces of “wood, glass, rubber and metal” are inserted in the piano strings to create a variety of timbres (ibid: 178). To prepare the piano, I inserted metal screws between the strings of each note at roughly the same distance along the strings. This preserved the pitch relationship between the five tones of the melody (G, A, B, C, D) and produced a buzzy, gong-like timbre.

The melody in these two forms (plucked strings and prepared piano) is the only specifically pitched element in the piano interior cues (apart from accompanying plucked patterns in the scored cues titled ‘Null and Void I’ and ‘Null and Void II’, the second of which is used for the end titles). The other items of musical vocabulary included pitched elements, although they were not adopted for specific pitches but rather improvised randomly to achieve particular textural effects. Nine specific elements are: low- to mid-range clusters made by hitting groups of strings with a metal bar; low booming clusters made by hitting the palm of the hand on a group of low strings; a rapidly repeated tone made by bouncing a wooden pestle on a high string; string glissandi up and down created by moving a finger across a succession of strings while simultaneously depressing different clusters of keys; harmonic glissandi made by scraping a plastic plectrum firmly and rapidly along one or more of the low wound strings; harmonic glissando clusters made by scraping a metal object [in this case a scalpel handle] along a group of low wound strings; high randomly plucked notes; rolls on the lowest strings using timpani sticks; and gong-like low individual tones played with a timpani stick. In addition Aboriginal clap sticks were used in a few of the melody-based cues and a harmonica drone was used in one cue.

These sounds were allocated to the various cues and improvised in layers using multi-track tape recording technology. I use the word ‘improvised’ here because these sounds were performed using free improvisation techniques. The pitches and rhythmic organisation of the clusters, glissandi and rolls, for example, were not predetermined. However they were also far from arbitrary in the sense that free improvisation techniques were used to create a predictable textural result within the context of cues that were scored in detail.

To explain how the comprovised cues of Essington were planned and created, I analyse a cue with reference to documents held in the Essington folder in the NLA,
which includes recording tracking notes (in Sculthorpe’s handwriting) for each of the compromised cues. For the cue ‘Mac. II’, the tracking notes are as follows:

- **Track I Piano**
- **Track II PP at 16**
- **Track II Gliss at 32 (end of Track I)**
- **Track IV Roll at 24**
- **Track V Bass notes from End Track I**
- **Track VI Plectrum on strings, c.10” from end.**

This refers to one of the music cues early in the film. In the scene Macarthur is in his office. We hear the opening *Essington* keyboard piano theme as he sits down at his desk, shuffles some documents, and then begins to daydream. After 16 seconds, superimposed on the keyboard piano music we hear the prepared piano (PP) version of the theme fading in with an accompanying regular beat of clap sticks (as if imitating the traditional combination of Aboriginal singing voice and clap sticks). The piano keyboard music ends as variable ‘dream-like’ piano string glissandi is added to the prepared piano and clap sticks texture, and the music becomes increasingly more intense, with multiple textural layers of bass string rolls, bass notes and harmonic glissandi (‘plectrum on strings’) being progressively added. On a close-up of Macarthur’s face, the piano interior texture builds dynamically as he goes deeper into a trance. The music cue ends on an abrupt cut as Macarthur snaps out of his trance.

Although tracks III to VI of this cue are un-notated and improvised, the tracking notes of this cue (and also of the other piano interior compromised cues for *Essington*) represent a skeletal form of music scoring. The tracking notes identify the elements of each track of the layered texture. They also indicate the timings of the beginnings (and the ending in the case of the keyboard piano on Track I) of each element. In performing these multi-track passes, I was assisted by Sculthorpe who was with me on the studio floor and used a stopwatch to cue me for the entry of each new music track in the overdubbing process.

**Comprovised Cues Using the Aboriginal Melody Transcription**

The ‘Mac. II’ cue described above was one of five cues that reference Macarthur’s insomnia problem, his reliance on the Aboriginal music to sleep, and his deteriorating mental state. The first (‘Mac. I’) uses a piano keyboard variation of the theme to accompany a shot of Macarthur lying in bed, unable to sleep and then rising to dress with the intention of visiting the Aboriginal camp. Piano interior glissando is added to the piano keyboard recording and the cue ends with heavy tape echo applied to the final chord of the variation. For the third cue (‘Mac. III’) when Macarthur is given a sedative by the settlement surgeon (Figure 1) and he is drifting into sleep (Figure 2), we hear the prepared piano version of the theme with music sticks and sharp harmonic glissandi on the wound strings. This then accompanies Macarthur’s nightmare in which an Aboriginal group at the campfire is beckoning him to come to them (Figure 3) and Namankati is coming towards him with a knife (Figure 4). The music intensifies with the addition of bass notes, the plectrum scraped on strings, the timpani roll on low strings and the scalpel handle striking the strings. The cue ends when Macarthur is stabbed and awakes screaming (Figure 5). The cue titled ‘Mac. IV’ is almost identical to ‘Mac. III’ but with the addition of several tracks of a drone played on harmonica. As with ‘Mac. II’ it accompanies Macarthur getting out of bed to go to the camp. This time, however, he is not welcome there.
because he is blamed for the death of Namankati following the stolen harmonica incident.
Figure 3: Macarthur’s nightmare: Aborigines beckon to him.

Figure 4: Namankati stabs Macarthur.
As with the piano keyboard music cues discussed above, this set of comprovised cues is based on the theme and variations of it, thus creating links between the narrative content of the scenes where the cues are used and contributing to structural unity, an association articulated by Gorbman (1987: 91).

Three other cues use the transcription of the song ‘The whistling duck, djilili, swimming in the billabong’ in its slow and gentle plucked-string form. One of these (titled ‘Cannon Music’) is also related to Macarthur’s sleeping problem. When the Port Essington settlement is abandoned and the ship taking the settlers home is bombarding the buildings with cannon fire, the sound effects of the cannon fire are underscored with a comprovised combination of ‘mysterious’-sounding piano string glissandi and low bass tones. The gentle version of the Aboriginal song melody floats in on top of this to accompany a shot of Macarthur sleeping peacefully in a ship’s bunk, oblivious to the deafening cannon fire. The same slower and gentler version of the melody is used for two closely related cues titled ‘Null & Void I’ and ‘Null & Void II’. Unlike the other piano interior cues, I scored these entirely for plucked strings. The gentle version of the Aboriginal melody is accompanied by an ostinato bass-line and other repetitive overdubbed embellishments based entirely in Aeolian mode. Although framing modal music in this manner is a European musical construct, this arrangement of the melody seems more in keeping with the modal qualities of Aboriginal melody than with the harmonic convention of nineteenth century music as represented by the piano keyboard music. As such, it functions as a kind of blending or musical reconciliation between the two musical traditions.

The ‘Null & Void’ cues are associated with Squires. Earlier in the film when the explorer Leichhardt is talking to Squires, he ties a bandanna around Squires’ head and pronounces him “the king of null and void” (representing Leichhardt’s perception of the emptiness of the Australian continent and recognition of Squires’s ease with this environment). The first version of the cue with just the melody and ostinato bass-line accompanies Squires sitting in the commandant’s veranda chair just after the settlement has been abandoned. A more elaborately arranged version is used for the end titles that follow the scene with Squires in the Port Essington town square.
looking and speaking directly into the camera with the punchline “I always told those bastards this was my place”.

Comprovised Cues for Death, Sex and Violence

Several themes in the narrative are reinforced by music cues that are entirely comprovised from the piano interior vocabulary listed above. The simple sound of a pestle bouncing on a high string is used for a series of cues associated with death. We first hear it when Captain Lambrick is trying to persuade his wife to take their sick child back to England because half the children in the settlement had died in the previous wet season. It is used again when Squires tries to persuade Mrs Lambrick that she should take her husband’s advice (it is clear he has strong feelings for her). The sound recurs as Squires is summoned by Mrs Lambrick after her child dies (at this point her husband is in denial about the child’s death and refuses to be anywhere near her). Squires is under the misapprehension that Mrs Lambrick desires him but she only wishes to ask him to deliver a message to her husband. After giving the message to Squires, she shoots herself and her blood splatters over him. The bouncing pestle sound linking all these scenes is part of the violent musical texture accompanying her suicide.

Conclusions

Essington highlights the differences between the European and indigenous cultures, a theme also tackled in Jedda and Walkabout (Nicolas Roeg, 1971). In Essington, Squires and Macarthur are depicted as sympathetic to the Aboriginal people, suggesting the potential for harmonious co-existence. In framing the music for Essington these cultural contrasts were mirrored first in the diegetic music (Anglo-Celtic folk music and traditional Aboriginal songs) and then in the non-diegetic underscore (piano keyboard music composed in a nineteenth century style and atmospheric piano interior music, some of which adopts the melodic and rhythmic textures of indigenous musical styles). Much of the underscore is composed or comprovised as a set of variations on a melody derived from an Aboriginal song, ‘The whistling duck, djilili, swimming in the billabong’, that features in a diegetic music cue.

The creation of the score was collaborative in two different modes. In the notated mode, David Matthews and Peter Sculthorpe shared the composition of the piano keyboard music cues and I composed the plucked multi-tracked score for the ‘Null & Void’ cues. In the comprovised mode, all three of us planned the tracking and timings of the cues and I improvised the different layers on multi-track tape using a vocabulary of piano interior sounds that I had previously developed as an experimental composer and performer. In addition, in the mixing process, effects such as tape echo and reverb were added to some of these multi-track comprovised cues and the two cues that involve both piano keyboard and piano interior (‘Mac. I’ and ‘Mac. II’).

Although the comprovised cues involve improvised elements, these are principally related to the non-specificity of the notes being played. In other respects, they are like cues that are composed, that is, the length of the cue is set, as are the internal cue points for the entries of the various predetermined sounds on each of the layers of the multi-track tape.
In planning the *Essington* score, various structural threads were determined to create what Gorbman calls the principle of unity:

*Via repetition and variation of musical material and instrumentation, music aids in the construction of formal and narrative unity.* (1987: 73)

In *Essington* different sets of variations track the various narrative themes. The piano keyboard cues are emblematic of out-of-place European cultural practices; the improvised cues involving the prepared piano melody accompany the commandant’s insomnia and progressive derangement. There are also sets of similarly textured improvised cues that link scenes with related content, that is, themes of death, sex and violence. Through this elaborate web of musical connections we aimed to strengthen and enhance the narrative structure of the film.

The score of *Essington* can be regarded as innovative for several reasons. It used a combination of traditional piano keyboard music with modernist extended techniques for piano, a combination that was rare—if not unique—in the history of feature film synch-sound scoring. Jerry Goldsmith’s score for *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) involved some notable extended piano techniques and Goldsmith had previously incorporated some prepared piano techniques into the score of *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968). However extended piano techniques had never before dominated a feature film score in the way they did in *Essington*. Even the idea of using solo piano played in a traditional way for multiple cues was not common in sound film underscoring. One example of this practice devised contemporaneously with *Essington* is David Shire’s score for *The Conversation* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) that uses only piano music for its non-diegetic cues. There is an interesting connection here with *Essington* since the piano music cues of *The Conversation* are progressively subjected to tape echo manipulation as a device to represent the growing instability of the central protagonist.

Comprovisation as a scoring strategy had rarely—if ever—occurred in Australian sound film before *Essington*, even though improvisation is a technique that many film composers acknowledge as a part of their processes for developing scoring ideas. For *Essington* this process of creating music cues was enabled by newly developed multi-track recording technologies, which allowed for the creation of complex musical textures by overdubbing many layers of different kinds of sounds played by a single performer. This practice was in marked contrast to the usual Hollywood method of recordings scores without the benefit of overdubbing. For example, Goldsmith’s score for *Chinatown* was written for the extremely unusual combination of string orchestra, solo trumpet, four harps and four pianos so that the multi-part textures for harp and piano could be recorded on the sound stage without any overdubbing.

The concert composer in the modernist and post-modernist music era is generally focused on innovative compositional strategies as a way of forging a career through developing a distinctive style or sound in his or her music. Thus it could be argued that composers from a concert or experimental music background who are contracted as screen composers are more likely to try to break with the norms of screen scoring than career screen composers. A notable example is the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu who was prolific in both concert and screen music and employed the modernism and experimentalism of his unique concert music practice (including the blending of Western classical and traditional Japanese instrumentation) in his film scores, to great critical acclaim (Koizumi, 2009). This
This page offers an alternative to the notion of the dedicated screen composer who employs multiple styles or genres to fulfill the screen music brief.

Having secured the contract for the *Essington* score on the basis of his acknowledged body of concert music, Peter Sculthorpe gained acceptance for a very different kind of score than originally expected. Rather than an orchestral score, he opted for the innovative combination of piano keyboard composition and piano interior comprovisation. By opting for a three-way composition collaboration with other concert composers (David Matthews and myself), opportunities for various scoring approaches were enhanced.

*Essington* remains a significant yet largely overlooked film from the first decade of Australia’s film revival period. While a feature film, *Essington* was devised for the launch of Australian colour television transmissions. This production and exhibition context inevitably enabled a different approach to the creative ideas informing the work. The film’s music is notable as representative of an innovative approach to music track construction for Australian screen production.

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ALTERNATE SOUNDTRACKS
Silent Film Music for Contemporary Audiences

Jan Thorp and Eleanor McPhee

Abstract

The Moving Pictures Show is a contemporary Australian ‘silent’ film company that screens films produced in the period from 1912 to 1929, with a 9-piece orchestral accompaniment. This article explores the ways in which music is chosen for the show both to heighten the audience’s aesthetic experience of the film and to abide by historical practice. It also describes the ways in which improvisation can be accommodated within these boundaries. The Moving Pictures Show uses recognisable music from the non-synchronised sound (or ‘silent’ film) era, including ‘classical’ music that is well known to audiences through previous association with the animations of Disney, Warner Bros and Hanna-Barbera studios; mood music that was purpose-composed for the films of the silent era by composers such as John Stepan Zamecnik; and leitmotifs to alert the audience to repeating themes in the narrative. Around these music components, improvisation provides a degree of flexibility of tempo necessary to fit the music with the film and allows the performers the freedom to musically respond to the onscreen action in a spontaneous manner.

Keywords
Film music, silent film, improvisation, John Stepan Zamecnik, The Moving Pictures Show

Background

*Change the score on the soundtrack, and the image track can be transformed.* (Gorbman, 1987: 30).

Since the 1980s there has been increased interest in the non-synchronised sound ('silent') film era as a subject for performance based research. Festivals such as the Pordenone Silent Film Festival and the Avignon/New York Film Festival, featuring the screenings of silent films accompanied by orchestras, have become annual events. The Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) film department has collected and commissioned scores to be performed as accompaniments to the films in the MOMA collection. The National Library of Australia houses the State Theatre collection of scores and parts for cinema use and has almost fourteen thousand charts. Modern production houses have revived films of the silent era to make them accessible to contemporary audiences by creating historical reproductions of original films and the music that accompanied them, for example *Napoleon* (Abel Gance, 1927 – French release) has undergone a number of reconstructions, most recently in 2000 by film historian Kevin Brownlow, with music scored by Carl Davis. Other composers have attempted to bring films from the 1920s and 30s in
line with modern tastes by marrying them with contemporary style scores, notable examples being Philip Glass's score for Dracula (Tod Browning, 1931 – US release) and Giorgio Moroder's soundtrack for Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1928). When not paired with historical or contemporary scores, film screenings have been accompanied by an improvised performance using the musician's direct response to the action on screen.\(^1\)

The Moving Pictures Show is a contemporary Australian silent film presentation company that screens films produced from 1912 to the end of the silent era in 1929, with accompaniment performance by a nine-piece chamber orchestra. The Moving Pictures Show came into being five years ago when its creator, (co-author) Jan Thorp, discovered the sheet music collection of the Theatre Royal in Bradford, Yorkshire in northern England. She was intrigued by the fact that much of this collection was dance styles such as the foxtrot and the cha cha so she bought the collection, started researching its origins and discovered that the Theatre Royal was built in 1864 and showed silent films with orchestra accompaniment for the whole thirty years of the silent era. On the strength of her work with the Bradford collection, Thorp was given access to the Sydney State Theatre silent film music library.

The State Theatre collection consists of published orchestrations, band arrangements and instrumental music, most of it composed or arranged to accompany silent movies produced in Australia, the UK and the USA. The music was from the State Theatre’s lending collection and was used by the theatre, and by other film distribution companies throughout Australia, from 1900 to 1930. The music in this collection often carries the name-stamps of these companies and this charts the evolution of these music collections within Australia. Some of the scores and parts include performance annotations and historical information. It was originally a library collected for use by Sydney theatres that needed access to music to accompany the films they screened. At the end of the silent era it was stored at the State Theatre and, when the venue came to be restored in the 1980s, this whole collection was donated to the National Library who then collated and preserved it.

Studying these collections raised many interesting questions: was there a full orchestra or just a small ensemble? Did it perform each film in popular, ‘classical’ or a mixture of both styles? Did it play continuously throughout the film? How did it handle repeats? Did it finish all numbers? How closely was the music synchronised with the rhythmic movement of the film? Was every show accompanied? What was the quality of the performances? It is impossible to answer all of these questions with certainty, however, in exploring these issues, The Moving Pictures Show began.

The shows started experimentally as screenings at a local club and originally comprised a feature film screening accompanied by an orchestra using music devised from both the Bradford theatre and the State Theatre collections. The historical context is provided as information from several sources: the available research (much of it from the USA) about screening conditions; the music of the State Theatre Collection itself, as the markings on the music provide much information as to its use in Sydney; and, in addition, recollections from family

\(^1\) See articles elsewhere in this issue featuring interviews with Jen Andersen about her score for the Australian digitally restored The Sentimental Bloke DVD, and Mike Cooper on his contemporary live musical performances incorporating improvisation for silent films including Tabu and Venus of the South Seas.
members of musicians who played for theatres in the silent era in Sydney have been informative. For example, when we first screened *The Kid Stakes* (Tal Ordell, 1927), we had family members of the pioneering Australian cinematographer Arthur Higgins in the audience and the Higgins family has been very generous with their records to aid our research. In addition, we recently acquired a collection of glass slides from a local theatre that have been a rich source of information, as they advertise movies shown in NSW in the 1920s as well as provide information on advertising and songs used during film screenings.

Through this research, the shows have evolved into a programmed event commencing with a rendition of ‘God Save the King’, followed by a newsreel from the era accompanied by a march, then a short US film comedy, followed by a feature film screening. Music is performed to accompany the newsreels and shorts although, due to their duration, this consists of one dance number expanded to fit the length of the short through the use of extra improvised sections in the choruses.

We have shown Australian features, such as *On Our Selection* (Raymond Longford, 1920) and *The Kid Stakes*, but most of the feature films are US productions. This reflects the way in which US productions dominated in the 1920s. Between 1911 and 1913 feature films were being produced in Australia at the rate of one a fortnight (Reade, 1970: 6) but this situation changed markedly until, by 1923, 94% of films screened in Australia were US productions (Moran and Vieth, 2005: 10). The Moving Pictures Show stages events at various venues, most recently at the Chauvel Theatre in Paddington, Sydney and a special screening for the New South Wales Model T Ford Association, which was presented at a drive-in theatre in Windsor, New South Wales.3 Most of our events are one-off presentations although in 2011 the Sydney Fringe Festival has commissioned a short run of three presentation/performances at the Newtown Theatre in September.4 The films screened are either owned by The Moving Pictures Show or hired through the National Film and Sound Archive, depending on whether the film in question is out of copyright.

The creators of the show are the authors, Jan Thorp and Eleanor McPhee, along with Ian McPhee. Jan Thorp holds a Master of Music (Honours) from the University of Western Sydney and is a music education specialist who located and identified the Bradford collection as an interesting project for senior students and teachers.5 Ian McPhee holds a Bachelor of Arts (performance) degree from the University of Western Sydney, is the Drama master at a private Sydney school and an award-winning filmmaker, and creates the live sound effects and MCs for the show (Fig 1). Eleanor McPhee is currently completing her PhD in music at the University of Western Sydney and provides the research material for the show. She is also a music teacher and performer who plays flute, sax and clarinet in the show’s orchestra.

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2 The reasons for this change are not directly relevant to this article, but relate to several factors including production versus import costs, resources required for the World War One war effort, and exhibition deals between cinemas and film distributors.


5 The Moving Pictures Show holds special events for school students.
In this article we describe how The Moving Pictures Show approaches the difficulties of devising a musical accompaniment that both appeals to contemporary audiences while addressing historically accurate recreation. This article considers specific aspects of these larger issues, namely, a contemporary audience's experience of the silent film diegesis, and the role of improvisation in directing the audience's narrative engagement.

Historical Context

From the earliest days of film, music played a part in its presentation. Originally introduced to mask the noise of the projector and audience, the usefulness of music as a vehicle to illustrate and explain the action became apparent (Palmer, 1980: 549), resulting in the growth of a silent film music industry. This industry resulted in an increased demand for pianists in the many thousands of small movie theatres that sprang up. Anthologies of music were published to cover emotional contexts and provide cue sheets, and indexes helped in the compilation of music to fit each film (Marks, 1997: 10). As films increased in length and complexity, the music fulfilled further functions; it bridged reel changes and provided cohesion to the succession of scenes appearing on screen (Boller, 1992) and, more interestingly, it helped to create a mood that served the needs of the narrative. Irving Thalberg, the production head of Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, went so far as to say:

*There never was a silent film. We'd finish a picture, show it in one of our projection rooms, and come out shattered. It would be awful. Then we'd show it in a theatre, with a girl pounding away at a piano, and there would be all the difference in the world.* (Thalberg, cited in Viera, 2010: 90).

Early twentieth century American film music began as a relatively open and improvisational response to the onscreen narrative, often by a single pianist. In time this approach shifted towards nationally distributed scores as the film
industry became more concerned with film music’s social and affective influence and musicians vanished from the theatres completely with the onset of synchronised sound in film. Movie theatres were no longer places of live musical performance.

The first movie to be projected onto a theatre screen in Australia was at the Melbourne Opera House on 17th August 1896 and this began a practice of screening short films as an item in vaudeville productions (Long and Whiteoak, 2003: 281). The popularity of this screening heralded the arrival of an entertainment medium particularly suited to Australia as a conqueror of isolation as ‘traveling picture show men’ took films to the outback. Live accompaniment to silent films was accomplished in the style suggested in the music hall and instruction books such as Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures (Lang and West, 1920) that indicated the techniques and themes of cinema keyboardists of the era. Journals such as Sydney’s Photo-play and the Australian Kinematograph Journal in Melbourne illustrate the pervasive influence of American film culture from before World War One and US cue sheets, orchestrations and collections of ‘mood’ music all influenced the types of music heard in Australian cinemas (Long and Whiteoak, 2003: 282).

Claudia Gorbman notes that the music that accompanied silent films was pivotal to the performance because

> it had semiotic functions in the narrative and it provided a rhythmic “beat” to complement, or impel, the rhythms of editing and movement on the screen. As sound in the auditorium, its spatial dimension compensated for the flatness of the screen, and, like magic, it was an antidote for the technologically derived “ghostliness” of the images. Finally it bonded the spectators together. (1987: 53)

In light of Gorbman’s arguments, it seems a strange oversight that music of the silent era has been investigated by relatively few scholars when one considers the considerable amounts of research that explores motion pictures of the synchronised sound eras. In relation to silent film music, researchers have examined the use of music (Altman, 1996; Boller, 1992; Gorbman, 1987; King, 1984; Marks, 1997), the role of the audience (Altman, 2004; Gunning, 1995; Hansen, 1991) and silent film as it relates to American society and culture (PM Cohen, 2001; Everson, 1998; Ross, 1999). However the music as it responds to the narrative and the role of music in the Australian performance context are under-investigated lines of enquiry.

The Moving Pictures Show – Choosing the Music

Effective musical accompaniment can provide an emotional bridge into an historical film genre that may otherwise prove to be inaccessible to present day audiences. In this way, the music can act, as Annabel Cohen (2001) suggests, as a pre-attentive step to lead the audience into the film’s diegesis. Gorbman regards this function as a form of mediation

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6 See fictional representation of this in the Australian feature film The Picture Show Man (John Power, 1977).
between film and older dramatic traditions, between spectator and circumstances of projection, between spectator as living being and the cinema as ‘ghostly’. (1980: 186)

Music for The Moving Pictures Show is chosen with ‘music as mediator’ always in mind and consequently we choose music that is 1) recognisable for an audience; 2) is closely aligned to the mood and emotional content of a scene; and 3) is thematically associated with characters or places. Within these requirements we create space for our musicians to improvise to allow the music to closely respond to onscreen movement.

Recognisable Music

In choosing music for the shows that we produce, we are particularly aware of the historical context of the films’ production and narrative setting, and the fact we are using music that was actually played as an accompaniment to the films shown in Sydney theatres during the silent era. If they were devised as strictly musically accurate, the shows would risk offering little emotional engagement for a modern audience. We therefore made several choices. One was to use music that a modern audience recognises as belonging to the era of the film. Thus in Harold Lloyd comedies of the 1910s and 1920s we use music such as ‘What’ll I Do’ by Irving Berlin that was used in The Great Gatsby (Jack Clayton, 1974 – US release) and is recognisable as belonging to the 1920s. For earlier comedies we use rags such as ‘Twelfth Street Rag’ by Euday Bowman, composed in 1914. This was one of the best selling rags of the World War One era and the style and, to a large extent, the tune is familiar to contemporary audiences.

Popular music of the period does not fit as well with the silent dramas but the available collections offer many classical pieces, often in a severely edited form. Several well-known themes from these pieces, such as the gallop from Franz von Suppé’s Light Cavalry Overture, have been ringed in red, or have several arrows drawn on the original music in the library collection. From this, we surmised that these were the only parts of these long pieces that the silent movie orchestras played and now these are the parts that are well known today. Carl Stalling (1891-1972) and Scott Bradley (1891-1977) are composers whose work is recognizable to contemporary audiences from the context of Disney, Warner Bros and Hanna-Barbera animation productions. By these films and television series, audiences recognized that, when they hear Rossini’s William Tell Overture, the heroine is about to be rescued, or that Lange’s ‘Flower Song’ suggests sadness. This is a cliché but humorous method of showing the on-screen emotional content but, thanks to early American animation and well-used musical themes, audiences are cued to laugh at the overblown acting paired with this music with its cartoon associations.

Annabel Cohen notes that “logically music should detract from, rather than add to, the sense of reality in a film” (2001: 253) and filmmakers are adept at mobilising this paradox for comic effect by using music to cause the diegetic and non-diegetic realities to collide. This was evidenced in the silent era by the music compilers’ love of puns. Music was sometimes inappropriately chosen for the sake of the joke (Altman, 2004; Marks, 1997) but it was a practice that continued long past the silent era, as discussed in the screen composition analysis of Carl Stalling’s and Scott Bradley’s work (Goldmark, 2005, 2007; Goldmark and Taylor, 2002). With that in mind, we often try to find a musical item whose lyrics or title directly
narrate the onscreen action. Thus for *Big Business* (Horne and McCarey, 1929 – US release) starring Laurel and Hardy, when the actors appear together onscreen, we included ‘Side by Side’ as one of the accompanying songs, and in *The Blacksmith* (Keaton & St Clair, 1922 – US release) starring Buster Keaton we opened with ‘The Anvil Chorus’ from *Il Trovatore* by Verdi.

**Mood Music and Zamecnik**

Much of the music used in our performances is taken from the vast selection of ‘mood music’ kept in the State Theatre collection. One of the main composers of theme music of the era was John Stepan Zamecnik (1872-1953) and because of recent research interest in his work (Altman, 2004; Hubbert, 2005; Marks, 1997), his music has been more carefully edited to modern expectations compared with many other composers of the era. Zamecnik was a major composer of ‘photoplay’ music (the genre of music used by silent film theatre orchestras). He composed in many genres including songs, dances, salon music, and mood music, that is, items to be used in compiled silent film scores. In 1907 Zamecnik was appointed musical director of the newly constructed Hippodrome Theatre in Cleveland, Ohio, and he began composing for film at this time. His compositions were published by Samuel Fox whose company was the first to publish original film scores in the USA. Zamecnik was one of the few film music composers who continued to work through the entire period spanning vaudeville through silent film to the coming of synchronised cinema sound.

The National Library in Canberra, Australia, has a major collection, numbering 524 Zamecnik scores. As a comparison, the Balaban and Katz Theatre Orchestra Collection of Chicago, which has been described as “extraordinary” Altman (2004: 354), has 141 separate scores by Zamecnik. He composes in a style that is understandable to modern audiences but also very useable, for example, incorporating a system of repeats so the orchestra can devise a perpetual loop of music that continued until the narrative of the film indicates a musical change. The orchestra then plays to the next ‘perfect’ cadence (dominant chord to tonic chord ending) and segue to the next musical item. Zamecnik’s music was titled to describe the intended mood, for example ‘A stealthy escape’ or ‘The Tempest’, and these titles create a guide to their application.

**The Use of Leitmotifs**

Music can become integrated with the film and assist the representation of past and future events within the narrative through the use of leitmotif (AJ Cohen, 2001: 258). Throughout the late 1910s and 1920s, cue sheet compilers were seeking new methods of establishing musical continuity and, influenced by the expressive qualities of Wagner’s use of thematic material, recommended that musical leitmotifs or themes be assigned to the major characters (Altman, 2004). For The Moving Pictures Show presentations, this is a device that we use to alert the audience to repeating themes in the narrative. In *The Black Pirate* (Albert Parker, 1926 – US release) we chose two musical themes to represent the pirates, namely, *The Corsairs* by Hugo Riesenfeld arranged by Zamecnik and ‘Ballet Barbarian’ by Zamecnik. Other narrative themes in that film were: the desert island for which we used *Algerian Scene* by Albert W Ketélbey; Douglas Fairbanks as a pirate was represented by part of *Danse Bacchanale* by Camille Saint-Saëns; and love scenes were portrayed using Ständchen (serenade) by Franz Schubert. This
love theme was first played by a solo piano, the next time by piano and muted trumpet and the last time—for the finale—by the full ensemble.

These changes in orchestration, increasing in complexity, were intended to illustrate the developing emotional attachment between the lovers, and this is a device that Deutsch (2007: 9) recommends to allow film composers to illustrate place and mood. Varied uses of leitmotif fulfill important functions because they allow particular musical themes to be continuously paired with a character or event so that the theme itself conjures up the concept of the character or event in the absence of other audiovisual narrative clues (Palmer, 1980: 550). This is particularly important in silent films because leitmotifs allow the audience to follow the narrative and emotional content of the film when there is no dialogue or intertitle slides. Although cue sheet compilers devised leitmotifs to represent different characters, we have found the cue sheets themselves to be almost impossible to employ effectively. They changed music so often that it left little flexibility for working with an ensemble and many of the music choices seemed to be inappropriate for the film for which they are intended. This is a conclusion also made by Altman (2004) who regarded the cue sheets as little more than revenue raisers for the publishing company that produced them.

Figure 2: Performance for The Sun Down Limited (Robert F McGowan, 1924) screening at St George Masonic Club, Sydney, June 2011, as the feature in the Chasing Choo Chaos program staged by The Moving Pictures Show.

The Role of Improvisation

In The Moving Pictures Show presentations the role of improvisation is twofold. First, it allows some flexibility to adjust the pace of the music to fit the film in a seamless manner. Second, it allows the music to respond more closely to the onscreen action, thereby providing the audience with the aural information to generate the emotional content they need to make a coherent story from the diegesis (AJ Cohen, 2001: 254).
Although our music has been chosen very carefully to fit the films, within much of this music there is space for improvisation. We use improvisation to allow flexibility within our chosen scores and help create a relatively seamless musical accompaniment to the film. As we do not use a click track, our choice of tempi can vary slightly from one performance to the next so we need to create a means by which our music can be adapted on a moment-by-moment basis. This is done in part by marking a series of musical elements that can be frequently repeated when the piece is played. In feature films, where more classical pieces are performed, the pianist, Glenn Amer, is usually required to improvise at the end of each section, often up to an inter-title where the music will change. He will then start the new piece and the rest of the orchestra will join in after the first phrase. At various times through the film the pianist improvises alone. This follows the usual practice of the era (Altman, 2004) and gives the other musicians a chance to rest. It also allows more flexibility where there are quick changes of mood, as the pianist is able to improvise within the set music and can play tiny segments from various pieces in response to the action on the screen. When the orchestra is performing the passages that allow improvisation it must play bigger segments of music, and the pencil markings on the State Theatre collection indicate that this was also a usual practice in the silent era.

The comedy films allow us greater scope for improvisation because we use the dance numbers of the era rather than classical or mood music as was the usual practice with this genre (Altman, 2004: 260) and many of our performers are specialist jazz musicians. We sit the orchestra at 90 degrees to the screen so they can see the film and be seen by the audience. The orchestra members are given the music and lead sheets for each item, plus the approximate times that we need each piece to last for. This has required us to create modern lead sheets from the original scores, as the contemporary jazz musicians are unable to improvise upon the music in its originally notated form because no chords were provided. The players watch each segment of film and work out an appropriate order for improvisational solos according to what is seen on screen. The orchestra improvises in the styles of the 1920s and the musicians are careful to ensure that they do not revert to the more familiar swing of the 1930s and later. This has allowed us to perform each piece in larger segments and yet still create musical variety because each performer responds to the film in a unique way. The music is chosen to follow a structure built around the narrative of the film. This means there is an agreed ‘shape’ that would be lost with totally improvised accompaniments to films. Deutsch (2007: 10) notes that musical acceleration can provide trajectory and increase tension and the comedies of the 1920s used this strategy to poke fun at farcical situations of physical mishap and indignity with a pace that moved more and more frantically toward the finale. With this in mind, we usually use Zamecnik mood music such as ‘Hurry Music’ as these pieces are structured around short segments and offer easy alternatives for repetition and continuation while gradually speeding up the tempo. This builds tension as the aim is to aurally indicate the mayhem at the end of the film. We have found that our audiences enjoy this form of accompaniment as they are aware of the virtuosity of the musicians and treat it as a varied audiovisual entertainment comprising music and film.

An example of how this system of improvisation works in The Moving Pictures Show can be illustrated through a recent production of Hot Water (Harold Lloyd, 1924 – US release). We chose a series of popular pieces that gradually increased in speed and energy to illustrate mounting tension in the film scene. Each section of each piece was timed and then the performers sat and watched the film. With
reference to the onscreen action, they decided the order in which they were going to improvise and the broad structure of the improvisations. Some choices were closely dictated by the film action, for example in a scene where an elevator causes a car to be lifted up, they used a trombone soloist because of his ability to glissandi. Each soloist incrementally increased the tempo and the performers chose to end with a trumpet solo as this instrumentation choice allowed greater volume to assist the accelerated pace of the scene.

Conclusions

The Moving Pictures Show aims to be as historically accurate as possible, while offering an entertaining presentation. To this end the music has been selected from the State Theatre collection with additional input from the Bradford collection. As there is a substantial overlap of music between the two collections, the styles match relatively seamlessly. In the context of historical performance practice and in relation to these two music collections, The Moving Pictures Show aims to engage contemporary audiences with the diegetic world of the silent film by: choosing music that is recognizable to audiences as being from the era of the film; using ‘classical’ music that is well known to audiences through previous association with the animations of Disney, Warner Bros and Hanna-Barbera; incorporating mood music that was purpose-composed for the films of the silent era by composers such as Zamecnik; and mobilising leitmotifs to alert the audience to repeating themes in the narrative.

In addition to these music choices, The Moving Pictures Show uses improvisation to allow a degree of flexibility when adjusting the tempo of the music to fit the pace of the film. The use of improvisation also allows our performers the freedom to directly respond musically in a spontaneous and unique manner to the onscreen action. This is of particular importance in the slapstick comedies of the 1920s in which music that very closely follows the physical movements of the actors lends itself to the frenetic pace and farcical situations of the narrative.

As there is little available research on the ways in which silent film orchestras performed in Australia, much of our information has been acquired from primary sources: the families of filmmakers and musicians from the era and the markings on the music of the State Theatre collection. While these provide rich sources of information regarding the performance practice of silent film in Sydney, they also suggest avenues for further research. If film music, as Annabel Cohen suggests, acts as a pre-attentive step to lead the audience into the film’s diegesis, the goal of The Moving Pictures Show’s musical choices must be to contribute to the emotional expression and experience of the film by providing continuity, directing the audiences’ attention, creating mood, cueing inter-textual associations and communicating meanings. The resultant musical performance expresses emotion that supports the film’s diegesis and heightens the audience’s aesthetic experience of the film presentation.

Bibliography

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 production 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 Neuenfeldt 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*. 

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1 Interview conducted and recorded by Neuenfeldt on 16 December 2008, in Melbourne. All quotes extracted from this interview.
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 Lumière’s 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.

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).

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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.

KN:
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 reverbs 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 reverbs—the many different types of reverbs 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.

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Filmography

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

SWITCHING TRACKS
Improvising Music for the Screen - A Discussion
with Mike Cooper

Philip Hayward

Abstract
The following text is an edited version of a discussion with British musician and
composer Mike Cooper that took place in October 2010 prior to his performance of
an improvised score for the 1924 film Venus of the South Seas (James R. Sullivan,
starring Annette Kellerman) at Griffith University’s Queensland Conservatorium of
Music in Brisbane. Cooper is a colourful, iconoclastic performer and composer
whose career began in the late 1960s. After establishing a profile as a folk/blues
and, later, Hawaiian-styled guitarist, he transitioned into more esoteric areas of
sound composition, collaboration and improvisation. He has performed with other
notable experimentalists such as Mike Gibbs, David Toop, Lol Coxhill and Mike
Abrahams, and released a series of recordings on independent labels and as on-
demand, self-released CDs. From his home base in Rome, Cooper is now involved
in recordings, performances, tours and writing around music and sound. Part 1 of
this article comprises a discussion with the author on aspects of performing live
accompaniments to screen media and Part 2 includes questions from other
soundtrack researchers, composers and musicians present at the Conservatorium
event, together with responses from Cooper.

Keywords
Mike Cooper, improvisation, silent film score, Tabu, Venus of the South Seas

Introduction
Mike Cooper came to musical prominence in the 1960s performing with British
rhythm and blues bands, and singing folk and country blues as a solo artist in
local folk clubs. In the 1970s, through recording four solo albums with producer
Peter Eden for Pye/Dawn records, his songwriting shifted into blues and free jazz,
and he commenced musical collaborations in free-improvisation and avant-garde
contexts, for example, with members of the London Musicians Collective. In the
1980s, Cooper developed an interest in Hawaiian, musical exotica and lap steel
guitar musics, and in the 1990s he commenced annual tours of various locations
in the Pacific, Australia and New Zealand. These tours resulted in artistic
collaborations with musicians, filmmakers and visual artists, including Richard
Nunn (improvisations on Maori instruments), Chris Abrahams (from The Necks)
and Louise Curham (New Zealand film-maker now based in Sydney), and have also
led to a series of CD releases.¹ Cooper's musical work now includes ambient field

¹ The first of these released on his Hipshot Records label (self-distributed by mail order via
recordings and his performances are influenced by the observations by ethnomusicologist Steven Feld of the richly multi-layered soundscapes in Papua New Guinea and his work with the Kaluli people (see Feld, 1982). Such extra-musical elements are also incorporated into his musical accompaniments for ‘silent’ (non-synchronised) films. In 1995, John McAuslan, director of the Brunswick Music Festival in Melbourne commissioned a live performance of music for FW Murnau’s Tabu (1931) and Cooper was able to draw on his Pacific recordings and appropriate guitar styles for this score. Cooper has developed a repertoire of music for several silent films, as well as more contemporary productions such as Onibaba (dir: Kanebo Shindô, 1964) and has created his own scratch videos and Super 8 films. Recently, Cooper has extended his screen score productions into collaborations with other audiovisual producers and performers, while maintaining other musical projects. He argues that performing music for film screenings offers “another way of presenting music to people… it’s actually a good way to get people to listen to music that they might not listen to in other contexts.”

In October 2010, a team of Australian film music researchers approached Cooper to prepare a score for the James Sullivan’s 1924 New Zealand silent film Venus of the South Seas, starring internationally famous Australian swimmer/actress Annette Kellerman. The live performance event for the 43-minute film was hosted by Griffith University’s Queensland Conservatorium of Music in Brisbane. Several sound artists, musicians and screen sound researchers who attended contributed to the pre-screening presentation, and the following is an edited transcription of the interview and discussion, chaired by Southern Cross University researcher Professor Philip Hayward.

I: Interview – Performing Live Accompaniments to Screen

Philip Hayward [henceforth PH]:

How did you begin work in soundtrack improvisation?

Mike Cooper [henceforth MC]:

I saw Friedrich Murnau’s film Tabu (1931) on the television in Italy one afternoon in the early 1990s. I was already playing Hawaiian slide and slack-key guitar music and I had an interest in Pacific culture and that general area, and I just suddenly thought, it’d be really great to play music to this film. It was made without a synchronised soundtrack but it now has this orchestral score on it (by Hugo Resenfeld) that does make some kind of vague reference to Polynesian music but in a very Germanic way. I thought that I could remove the soundtrack (ie just switch it off) and use some of my knowledge of Hawaiian guitar and ‘play across’ this movie, which I did. I performed it once in Italy then I was booked to play at the

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2 See, for instance, his work with Grayson Cooke.
3 Information about Mike Cooper’s various projects and recordings is available at: www.myspace.com/cooparia
4 See YouTube clip ‘Mike Cooper TABU Maria’s Blues’ available at http://tendaysontheisland.org/_webapp_727982/Live_Music_for_Silent_Films
5 The event was part of outcomes of Australia Research Council Discovery Project Grant DP 0770026 ‘Music production and technology in Australian Film: enabling Australian film to embrace innovation’, led by Rebecca Coyle, Michael Hannan and Philip Hayward.
6 The film was provided by the National Film and Sound Archive, Australia.
7 Thanks to Melissa Carey for transcribing the event recording.
Brunswick Music Festival in Melbourne (which I had played at before as a solo singer/guitarist). The festival director, John McAuslan, asked me if there was anything else that I could contribute to that festival and I said I’d really like to accompany a silent movie with live music. John agreed and asked me to return the next year (1995) with a film and I took Tabu - and I’ve been back there fifteen years running, doing a different film every year. So it’s thanks to John McAuslan that I actually got involved in improvisation to the screen as a continuing activity.

PH:

So, the first time you began working with Tabu you basically improvised a musical score for the film based on the stylistic work you’d already done in that idiom.

MC:

Yes, I had this kind of ‘bag-of-licks’, as you say, these Hawaiian guitar stylings. Hawaiian music’s kind of like blues – songs are kind of interchangeable, even though they’re all different, if you get my meaning; you know, they all sound the same but they don’t and there are these kind of musical loops that go round in Hawaiian music, and in blues, and you fit them all together. So, if you take three Hawaiian songs, take bits out of all three and join them altogether you have another song, and another tune. So this is basically what I did with Tabu. I should also say that was the beginning of my use of pre-recorded parts because when I looked at that film, and thought about it, I realised that, in its time, it was an extremely avant-garde film. First of all, it was actually made at the time when synch-sound had come in but Murnau decided that he wanted to make a silent film that didn’t require any inter-titles. Tabu is one of those silent films that, afterwards, you don’t realise you’ve sat through without actually reading anything on screen apart from two entries in a journal, which are part of the action that goes along (you see this white colonial guy writing in his journal, and that’s the only thing you read through the whole film). So the whole film’s motivated by the acting and visuals and, in my case, by putting this other bit of music to it. I wanted to make a score which made reference to Polynesian culture but at the same time was very modern, so I used some electronic pieces in it as well – I made some loops up and things and I had them on mini-disc, which I used to play across the top of.

PH:

So, in terms of what you were doing, you weren’t so much re-scoring it as creating an improvised soundtrack for visual/narrative sequences that had a thematic link to the musical style.

MC:

Absolutely, I mean I was re-scoring it in a way, because I turned the existing soundtrack off.

PH:

But the traditional approach to writing a score would be to write cues of fixed durations on film cut points and narrative accents. Your work doesn’t do that.

MC:
Well I did do that to an extent in *Tabu*. There are a couple of themes that run through *Tabu* that I would use, and I use them in probably what you would call a traditional manner, in that I've changed the key of them, or slowed them down, or sped them up. They come in two or three places all through the film. More recently I have just totally improvised *Tabu*. After a while I got bored with the way I was doing it and I actually improvised it all the way through and those themes sometimes disappeared completely or, came back in a totally open procedure.

PH:

So, there's a classic film such as *Tabu*, screened as a 'fixed text' with a specially-composed score that's meant to have an organic interrelation with the film, then Mike Cooper comes along, strips away the sound artifice and puts something else in. What do you regard yourself as doing? Making a radical re-interpretation? An intervention into a classic work? Do you see *Tabu* as open for a whole number of audio-musical readings as a 'heritage' object? What's your approach to the authorship issues involved?

MC:

Those issues have always been interesting points of discussion. People have said to me, why do you do that? There are several reasons why I do it. One is for my own pure pleasure and secondly, I think it's a way of presenting cinema history in a modern context, especially with the music. You can get a lot of people who'll watch these movies because they've come to see your music. They wouldn't go and see that movie otherwise. I'm re-contextualising the film completely, absolutely.

PH:

So, would you like to have the film available on DVD with a Mike Cooper score? Or is it something that's about the live moment, the improvised elements of it, so that you don't want to release it in that way?

MC:

About three years ago I actually made a CD of the *Tabu* soundtrack, and I've done that to two or three of the other films I do, but they're only kind of demos, in a way. They're never the fixed end product that you'll hear when I screen the film and perform.

PH:

So, having done *Tabu*, and presumably seeing it as a successful project, what guided your selection of the next films you did? What were you looking for? Were you looking for thematics you could identify with, narrative visual aesthetic things etc? What attracts you to a film?

MC:

I have two or three reasons for choosing a film and it was great that I had this open-ended invitation to Brunswick to do a film every year because I really had to go and find a film for each event. Obviously, the Polynesian thing attracts me, so I looked for films about Polynesia – but these are very difficult thing to find. The second thing was that I was very interested in Russian cinema as well, Eisenstein,
Dziga Vertov and those people, and I was also very interested in politics and films. And so politics is one of the factors that I look for in a film. Then I decided I can take this approach with a more modern film, and I tried that recently as well, so then I had to go and find modern films that were made in the manner of a silent film. Modern contemporary cinema is completely different to films from the 1920s and 1930s. They're edited totally differently, they're narrative-montage driven. Eisenstein pioneered montage, but I don't think he envisaged what it would end up as it is today. Contemporary cinema is just edited so fast that I personally find it very difficult to think of doing a live score on my own to a contemporary film.

Having said that, I rediscovered *Onibaba*, a Japanese film by Kaneto Shindo, a few years ago. I recall watching it when it first came out in 1964 and I realised about five years ago that it was actually made like a silent film and I could turn the soundtrack off - and thanks to the technology of DVD you can activate the subtitles, so you still had the story underneath - and I could play across the top of that. And I actually do *Onibaba*. I have also had some disasters, I must admit. I tried to improvise to a surf film called *Big Wednesday* (1978), directed by John Milius, but that is edited very fast. I did come up with a score for it, but I was never really happy with it. It was too fast, and unrelated, too jumpy (and I dumped it).

PH:

In your approach to film did you consciously refer to, or build on, previous approaches to producing music for film? In the ‘silent’ era pianists would often have books of motifs, some of which they knew, some of which they could flick through, and then they’d work around those, improvising to the screen. Did you see yourself as working out of that tradition? Or were you bringing your more free music improvisation skills from the free music tradition into the cinema?

MC:

Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) is the first film that I did that I improvised completely live and I did that because when I watch that movie, I see it as like a piece of music, or as a piece of improvised music that had been (shall we say) ‘recorded’, had been captured in images. And so I felt it was kind open to total free improvisation I and found that I could bring in a lot of language that I had gathered from free improvising. It was very interesting for me that after a number of years with that movie I discovered that Vertov in fact wrote somewhere that he had wanted to be a musician, he wanted to compose and he wanted to make music that was as contemporary as the films that he made but the technology didn’t exist for him to do that. They didn’t have recording studios that could do that at that time. His film *Enthusiasm* (1930) actually has a soundtrack that he assembled made from location recorded sound. He was eventually able to put his own sound composition to a film, and *Enthusiasm* is the film, and so I should say something: there are some films that I would never mess with and *Enthusiasm* is one of them. And I would never mess with a film that Toru Takamitsu wrote the score to either because I just think that’s too much.

PH:

One of the ways that composers who work in the commercial industry know that their score has been successful is that the production company accepts it and, at the end of the production process and negotiations they have a fixed score. Future successes could be the recognition of the score through a CD release or by film
awards. So they have those paths. When you do a score for a film, the sense of success must be in your perceptions of how it went, and some degree of audience feedback, but what kind of loop do you have to ensure that your work is succeeding in various contexts?

MC:
I don’t have any at all, other than those you’ve just mentioned. I was talking about this to my friend (media artist and academic) Grayson Cooke earlier on today, and I said, in fifteen years of doing these films in Australia, no-one’s ever written a review of what I do. So, I don’t know, maybe that’s the height of success, when no one writes a review about you. That’s a kind of Zen thing, isn’t it?!

PH:
I guess the fact that you keep being asked back and keep selling out venues is a statement of success?

MC:
Yes and I get audience feedback afterwards, people come up and say, ‘I hated that’, or they walk out halfway through, or, people come up and say, ‘that was great, I really enjoyed that’. That’s ok. That’s good enough and I get asked back each year to Brunswick.

PH:
In terms of other approaches to film music you mentioned Toru Takamitsu, who is a very accomplished Japanese composer who has worked in a number of popular film genres. Who are the other composers that you find interesting, and how do you contrast their approaches to the kind of industrially formulaic Hollywood scoring approaches?

MC: I think probably my favourite film composer is John Zorn, for several reasons, one being that John will score a film for anybody as long as he gets to keep the tape afterwards... And I like the way he approaches scoring a film. He'll go into the studio and get the guys to play live over some small motifs and ideas that he's written, all of which can disappear during the recording session if the other guys get better ideas. And I think he's probably my favourite film scorer at the moment.

PH: You use electronics as part of the performances, even though the focal instrument there is the guitar. In terms of electronic music composition, is there anything in there you think that has worked well either in the history of cinema or in the current approaches?

MC: I don’t really listen to electronic music but, to answer that, I think Blade Runner (1982 – directed by Ridley Scott and scored by Vangelis) is probably the most interesting film score in that it was all electronic, even though it sounds like something else. All the sounds – all the ambient sounds and everything in that film, are all ‘fake’, they’re all electronic. So maybe that’s my favourite electronic film score.

PH:
Increasingly screen soundtrack composition is something taught in institutions such as conservatoria and other places. Your approach to making music for films is very much based around your career and your sense of a kind of organic relation to music making, where you don’t see yourself or your practices as pigeonholed, which is great for Mike Cooper. In terms of teaching, how would you think of going about teaching aspiring people to do that? I mean, what principles might you have and what approaches?

MC:

That’s really difficult for me to answer being as I was never taught anything that I do, so I don’t know. I think maybe perhaps I would try and teach people how to improvise (which is a kind of contradiction in itself). I think that’s a really important element in what I do – I improvise. This evening you have put me in the position where I’ve got to actually come up with the goods because I offered you the film I am touring Australia with, Que Viva México (1932) by Eisenstein, and you sent me an email asking me to do Venus Of The South Seas instead. I’d only ever seen this film once before, when I did it in New Zealand last year, and before I did it they sent me a DVD of the film, but it only had about 15 minutes of the film on. Something happened to the DVD, so that I actually didn’t see the whole film until it was screened. And I’d completely forgotten the film until you mentioned it again. So, I’m going to have to improvise it again tonight.

PH:

I asked you to perform a score for Venus tonight on account of its slow pace, its Pacific exoticist elements and its stylish and inventive underwater ballet sequences. I felt that it would offer another engagement with a dialogue we began ten years back. I wasn’t aware that you had performed to it before. On that, how many of the approaches of your original music to Venus are you going to try to recoup from your memory tonight? Or are you going to start from scratch?

MC:

I can’t remember anything I did last time. I barely remember the film, actually. I remember it’s got this woman, swimming in a tank and mermaids...

PH:

So meticulous research isn’t really necessary for an improvised score?!

MC:

Meticulous research is not my forte...

II. Audience Discussion – Improvisation in Screen Scores

Tungi Beyer:

I think that improvising with film is a fantastic thing to do, I have had some experience in that area with a 1920s’ film as well. The film that I worked on was an old film called Shiraz (1929, directed by Franz Osten), which was an Indian and British co-production, relating a sort of tragic love story that led to the building of
the Taj Mahal. The live score was commissioned by the Sydney Film Festival. During the festival, audiences vote on the films they attend and the film was rated up in the top five. Do you have ratings from film festivals?

MC:

No, I don’t. I’ve never done film festivals. I’ve never been so lucky. But I have worked with filmmakers in Sydney, doing a similar thing to their short films. Maybe I should talk a bit more about improvising to the movies. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t improvise every movie that I do live the first time. I did that with Man With A Movie Camera but with most of the other films that I do, I work out what I’m going to do before I do it and I also have a lot of pre-recorded pieces that I use. Having said that, if I do the film enough, I can actually change it all. When I become familiar with the movie, and familiar with the music that I’ve chosen to do in that film, I can change it around quite a lot. And that’s something I really enjoy doing, it’s like, how can I do this different tonight? I only realised I could do that when something went wrong with the gear I had, and it went completely out of sync, and I had to suddenly do something, otherwise it was just going to stop. And so, I discovered, then, at that point you don’t need to panic about this; when it goes wrong, you do something else. As long as you’ve got something else that you can come up with and do, and you can grab something quickly out of your musical brain/‘book’/baggage and put it in there you’re ok. And no one knows you’ve made a mistake, of course, unless they’ve seen you do it before but then, when they’ve seen you do it before, it’s probably different anyway, and so they never know when you’ve made a mistake.

TB:

Shiraz was a pretty long film, two and a half hours long, so there’s so much film that you often think ‘how am I going to get through this film?’ I performed it in a duo with a wind instrument player and there was so much to do. What we ended up doing was to categorise it in scenes to start off with and then we selected moods and instruments for each scene, and that’s all we fixed in advance. I was going to play a particular instrument, or, to a particular background loop, and improvise over the top of that. So every time we did it, it was fairly different.

MC:

I use a lot of looping nowadays, practically in all my music, and the beauty of using looping is that you can put this thing on and sit back and think for a little bit. So if you ever want to have a pause, you just put a loop on and no one notices if you’re rolling a cigarette or something under the table! I don’t use gaps very often. Sometimes the whole lot stops, and there’s a gap, but that isn’t intentional, it just happens sometimes.

TB:

I think one can overdo it with film, I think that because I think as a player, as a musician, one forgets that there’s already so much going on, there’s already so much that the brain’s taking in visually, and it’s easy to overplay.

Joff Bush:
Do you consider story structures and how you approach the film from a real macro-perspective? How much is that part of your work?

MC:

It depends on the film. Again with Eisenstein’s film about Mexico that I’ve just done, there are some parts in that, for instance, where there’s this huge dancing scene going on, and I could have ‘gone against the grain’ and not played some dance music in that but it was just more fun when you watched it to hear dance music. You get the movie going and you get into that part of it. So from that point of view, I sometimes go with it, and sometimes I just go contra, go against what’s going on on-screen, and leave it to the visual thing to get it going.

Rebecca Coyle:

When you started doing work with screen music, as distinct to music in other contexts, did that enable and/or enthuse you to take on instruments or new textures and timbres that you hadn’t explored previously?

MC:

Yes, initially I started to use small keyboards and some homemade string instruments as well. I’ve used those in a few films but it’s not something that I use live very often to do movies with. I sometimes do some of the pre-recorded parts, if I’m using pre-recorded pieces with small keyboard or some homemade instruments, things like that.

RC:

So those would be the composed elements, would they be fairly extensive? What kind of duration are we talking about?

MC:

No, nothing lasts that long in my film scores. It tends to move on, you know, depending on what’s going on on-screen and if I use it to fill a certain section. There’s a part in Tabu, for instance, where this guy swims out to a boat in the night. He’s trying to escape from this island, and he swims out to a boat, and I’d use a kind of electronic bird sound piece that I made and it just lasts the length of the scene.

RC:

You mentioned before that you’ve worked with some young filmmakers, is that a collaborative arrangement where the image is informed by the film music? I’m just wondering to what extent you have intervened in the image track in any of your projects so far?

MC:

I should mention one filmmaker in particular, Louise Curham, who I found through a piece in RealTime magazine. I read a review of something she did and I thought that what she was doing sounded really great. She was working with Super 8 film and during a live screening she would often degrade these films, and so the
whole thing would fall apart, and it would end up as a different film from what she had originally intended. I wrote to her and said, I’d really like to work with you if an opportunity arises, and she lived in Sydney at the time and so the next time I went to Sydney we did a live concert together. So, basically, what she was doing was improvising with her own material, as a screening, and I was able to improvise the music to her improvised film. I really enjoyed working with Louise.

I’ve done something similar with another filmmaker, an English guy called Greg Pope, who lives in Norway (and we are doing something in Manchester when I get back). Greg performs what he calls ‘expanded cinema’, a term that I believe has a history of its own. What Greg does is that he has three 16mm projectors and he runs blank (ie unexposed) film through these projectors, and as they loop from one to the other he basically attacks the film with electric drills and various implements that will scrape off the emulsion. So when they go through the projector, the screen starts off completely black, and over a period of time, of course, where he’s attacking it, these specks of light start to appear. And the whole idea is that he eventually fills the whole screen with just white light, pure light, and I do music to that. Most of the time the music is supposed to be the sound from the projectors. He has three contact microphones on his projectors, and he puts it through my equipment there, and I digitally process the sound of those projectors.

We did the Rotterdam Film Festival in September and when we did a sound check everything was fine but when we came to do the live performance, we cranked the projectors up, and the sound was going away there but I suddenly realised that none of the sound from the projectors was coming into my equipment. And I pulled out one of the jack plugs on the projectors that was going into my little mixer there, and there was a huge spark. This thing’s live! There was electricity coming somehow through this thing! And there were three of them. I pulled out all three of them and the same thing happened. There was electricity going into my stuff. I actually could have died at any moment, I realised, and I had no sound coming from him at all. The sound guy was sat right by the side of me and I tapped him on the shoulder and showed him what was happening and he went, ‘I have no idea’. I said, ‘what are we going to do’? And he said that we’d have to stop. And I said, we’re not going to stop. If we stop, Greg’ll have a heart attack, because he hasn’t realised yet that it’s not happening. We’re not going to stop, so, I’ll just pull the whole lot out, and improvise – make something up. Of course after about five minutes Greg realised that what he was getting sound-wise had nothing to do with him, and he’s just looking at me, and I’m going like, ‘don’t worry about it, just keep going’. So we do the gig, and we finish it and there’s huge applause, and they loved the whole thing. If something goes wrong just do something, basically, that’s what it comes down to in the end.

PH:

Following on from Rebecca’s question, you also were telling me earlier that you’ve been working on the visual text yourself, for example with regards to Frank Hurley’s _Pearl of The South Seas_ (1927) in which you’ve taken some of the original footage of the 1920s’ silent film about the Torres Strait and you’ve inserted contemporary elements. Can you tell us a bit about that process?

MC:

Helen Miller, who was at Central Queensland University, Rockhampton, at the time, I think, gave me a copy _Pearl Of The South Seas_, the film that Hurley made in
the Torres Strait. It’s kind of really bad B-movie that he made when he thought that he was going to be a feature film director. I watched the film and I thought, this is a really bad film, and then it occurred to me that I could chop it up, and make something else out of it (retrieve it from the ‘garbage bin’, so to speak). So I cut it up, and I inserted pieces of contemporary film into the action. For instance, when this couple row out to this sunken boat, climb on to it and open a doorway they step through into the video for Tom Waits’s ‘In The Neighbourhood’ (1982) and there’s this whole thing going on. And then the next scene they come out of the door. The Tom Waits’s clip finishes and they just stand and look at each other, with this completely perplexed look, as if they really had gone in and watched that film, and out with, ‘what was that’? And I did that to the whole thing, and inserted material from Peter Greenaway, Derek Jarman and other filmmakers that I like. It livened the whole thing up and made it more watchable although I don’t know whether Frank Hurley would have liked it or not though!

Andrew Hall:

I have a friend who is a member of an online avant-garde cinema discussion board and a young student had posted that he wished to create a soundtrack to a well-known silent film by Stan Brakhage, who was an early avant-gardist direct contact screen printmaker. He was hoping to make the soundtrack, and Tony Conrad, who was also a member of the discussion board, ripped into this person quite severely. Conrad argued that to create a soundtrack to this film forty years later, and a digital synthesised soundtrack at that, would be so aesthetically wrong it would debase the film every time it was shown with this soundtrack. A very interesting point was raised after that by someone whose name I've forgotten - they said that there’s already inherent music every time you watch this film, because when you watch the 16mm print there’s the sound of the projector in that room, and it’s this Cagean kind of listening that opens up. So I was wondering, in all your considerations that you go through when formulating a work, or formulating ideas for improvisation, does that kind of Cagean listening, or effect come into play? What kind of role would that have with you, as an improviser, or comproviser?

MC:

I guess if you were listening – if you were watching that film as it ran through on film, and not on DVD, then you’d get the sound of the projector. But if you don’t have the film on film, you’re not going to get that Cagean effect. And if I could make a comment about doing music to Stan Brakhage, I think Stan Brakhage made it quite clear in his writings that he didn’t want people to do music to his films. An ensemble named Text of Light (after Brakhage’s eponymous 1974 film), featuring Lee Ranaldo from Sonic Youth, has performed since 2001, improvising scores to classic US avant garde films from the 1950s-1960s. They had lengthy discussions with Stan’s wife about doing this to his films. She actually objected but eventually they worked out some deal. I would think twice about doing music to Stan Brakhage’s films though because, you know, I think his films are music... how Cagean is that?

AH:

Do you think that aesthetic is only key to certain directors or film artists, or do you think that there is this wider kind of listening that occurs every time a screen work is presented?
Stan Brakhage is a good example. When you watch Stan Brakhage's films you get some music going on in your head. I have never really understood why there's that soundtrack on Murnau's *Tabu*. You know, he wanted some music going on, otherwise he wouldn't have had that score written in the first place. So in terms of it being a silent film, his idea of a silent film is, I guess, one in which there's no dialogue, not one in which there's no music. I don't know how many people made silent films that were meant to be totally silent. Maybe there were some, I just don't know them. Maybe they were into Cage before us.

PH:

I think there's one problem, and I'm speaking as an academic rather than a musician here; I am always very wary when we say certain filmmakers' stuff shouldn't be done and certain ones can be interpreted. Surely there's a general principle. If we accept we have some kind of cultural creative rights to put other sounds with audiovisual texts, this applies to everything. Whether the individual chooses to work on a particular film is where that comes in but I don't think you could say there's any absolute moral sense in that you can't do Brakhage but you could do, for instance, Michael Snow.

MC:

No, it's just a personal thing. It's like I said, I wouldn't mess around with a film that Takamitsu had done the score to because I think he made perfect scores for those films. That's only a personal thing. A lot of people might hate Takamitsu.

PH:

It's interesting in copyright terms. There's nothing to stop you doing any musical score to anything you want. The issue comes when you try and release - or otherwise exploit - that as a product. If you were to put out an established film with a new score on DVD, then it's obviously an issue. It's interesting because there's nothing firmly in place to stop live substitutions (and you could also play over the top of the score that's on there as well). I guess it would make an interesting test case if any copyright holder wanted to pursue it.

Kim Cunio:

Mike, one of the things I really like about your approach in this whole 'movement', if you could call it that, is that it sidesteps what happens to musicians in the screen process, which is often that we get – or we feel that we get - treated badly; that is, that we become functionaries who have to sort of 'join the dots' and do someone else's bidding, and we have to become very unattached to our themes and our ideas. I am interested in what happens when the so-called professional screen soundtrack writer who's trained in the leitmotifs and cues and the stingers and all of that, what happens when they own up to the fact that there's almost as much improvisation in their stuff? I think it's dressed up as something else, quite often, because so often the writing process occurs on an instrument in real time. And then it's just a matter of what happens after. It might be different for you because it's a performance, as opposed to a reconstruction of that idea. Anything to add on that?
MC:

I think probably Ry Cooder does that. He did that with his work with Wim Wenders, but they don't work together anymore. I think perhaps in the end Wim Wenders didn't like improvisers actually, which is why Ry Cooder doesn't work with him anymore.

RC:

I wonder whether it's about the lack of constant synchronisation, so that you get the same soundtrack every time that movie is played, whereas, as you've pointed out, in some of your performances, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, sometimes the equipment fails you in some way. So it's going to be different every time. It's very much 'of the moment', even though you have some composed elements that you bring in.

MC:

Absolutely, my ultimate way of working would be that I don't even see the movie beforehand and I go in and do it. I could do that, I guess – depending on what the movie was.

RC:

Which returns you to the so-called 'silent era' because even with films that had scores, they weren't necessarily synchronised the same in every cinema, or at every performance, because there would have been different performers and different performance conditions every time it was shown on a different screen, in a different town.

MC:

Different musicians, films broken down, films different each time probably as well. I am aware that they had books of music available for the pianist to flick through and choose from. Apparently there were records as well, that they sent round with some films, and you'd put the record on and watch the movie. I've no idea what was on those records, and I've never ever seen one, but I've read that the film arrived with a box of 78s and someone put the record on as the film went on.

PH:

I think one of the important points you hit on there is the synchronisation aspect, because if any of you have worked for film, you'll know that you write something that’s, say, one minute forty-three seconds long, and it works perfectly and then the editor comes back and says, no it's got to be one minute thirty-seven now, and it has to be precisely synched so just chop a bit out. And the composer says, no, you can't just chop a bit out...

MC:

Yes, that’s it, synching to scenes is only one way of working. I spent two or three weeks working on Que Viva México and I used this old wind-up stopwatch and when I'd finished everything and thought I had it timed perfectly, I sat there fiddling around with the stopwatch, just clicking and thinking probably, in front of
the computer, and I suddenly noticed when I did five minutes on the stopwatch it wasn’t five minutes on the computer. And I went, ‘Oh my God!’ it’s an old Russian stopwatch, and it’s totally wrong, and I’ve been using this thing for the last fifteen years. I had no idea. Perhaps when I started it was ok... but it’s gone completely now, and it’s like, five minutes in its ‘real time’ is about seven minutes now in reality. So that was fun!

PH:

I remember seeing one of your film performances. You were working on an interesting bottleneck guitar motif that you obviously liked because the scene changed but the motif lingered on. And it was actually quite liberating because it wasn’t the kind of metronomic ‘chop’ approach on an image cut. It supported the notion that the film soundtrack doesn’t have to be precisely synched, it can ‘sway’ either side of the hard visual edits. You were liberating the score from the tyranny of the real time of the film’s edit sequences and allowing it a less restricted ‘reel time’ and space. And that’s probably a good note to end on.

Conclusion

Mike Cooper’s approach to musical improvisation for screen media is one that draws heavily on his prior experience in European ‘Free Music’ improvisation and his collaborations with sound and performance artists. His musical improvisations rely less on careful synchronisation of motifs and sequences to on-screen action and more on creating musical themes and textures that weave in and out of the screen narrative (and its diegetic ‘logic’), creating a parallel sonic text with points of overlap and divergence. This serves to undermine the primacy of the visual-narrative text in the performance (and the subservience of music to the pre-existent themes and moods of the former). Cooper’s approach, instead, offers a performance space and context where a (silent or silenced) audio-visual text is treated as the pre-[text for a distinct type of audio-visual event where strategic intent and performer sensibility combine with circumstance and accident to create an unpredictable musical improvisation to image.

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Bibliography

SYNC AGENTS AND ARTIST MANAGERS
A Scarcity of Attention and an Abundance of Onscreen Distribution

Guy Morrow

Abstract
This article explores the role of synchronisation agents, and the current music business environment in Australasia more generally, in order to examine the various methods for music and image synchronisation and the extent to which the process of synchronisation can assist artist managers in building and maximizing their clients’ musical careers. ‘Sync agents’ are similar to song publishers. However, while song publishers work to maximise revenue from the exploitation of the performance and mechanical copyright of songs and having the songs in their catalogue synchronised with visual imagery, sync(hronisation) agents just work with the latter. Chris Anderson’s ‘Long Tail’ theory (2006) provides the model for arguing that the exchange value of musical copyrights has decentralised and therefore, as aggregators, sync agents are in the best position to generate revenue from synchronising more songs with a lot more images. This contrasts with artists or artist managers who are poorly positioned to generate revenue via this means. The article reports on a research project involving the International Music Managers Forum that seeks to create new standards in relation to artist management practices in the contemporary dispersed media context.

Keywords
Screen songs, synchronisation, artist manager, sync agent, ‘long tail’ theory

Introduction
In the Australasian popular music industry, the online environment is leading to more pressure being placed on artists and managers, rather than record labels, due to the fragmentation of the media landscape and the downsizing of recording labels. Artist managers helping clients to build and maximise their careers must hit many more media targets in the fragmented media context to deliver the same number of impressions than previously generated in the more centralised media landscape. This increased workload is exacerbated by the fact that record companies have dramatically reduced their staffing levels due to reduced profitability. Artist managers now operate across a wider media field while receiving less assistance from record labels.

This article employs Watson’s (2002) model for characterising the unique relationship between artist and manager as the nucleus around which a successful musical career revolves. Watson mobilises a bicycle wheel analogy to describe the structure that evolves due to the fact that (if successful) eventually the manager
and the artist will assemble a network of other relationships to further the artist’s career. Watson claims that the artist and manager might build a team that includes record company staff, booking agents, live crew, publicists, accountants, music publishers, record producers, merchandisers and many other specialists. His model depicts the unique combination of the artist and manager constituting the hub in the middle of a wheel. The artist and manager together work out where they want to go and how they want to get there. They then start assembling the additional members of the team around the hub like the spokes of a wheel.

While the individual spokes are important in their own right, the artist/manager hub remains pivotal in every situation. The spoke of the wheel that is the record label is carrying less weight and this is putting more pressure on the artist and manager hub. Furthermore, the online environment is leading to the creation of new and additional spokes. This article will therefore explore the role of sync agents and the current music business environment more generally, in order to examine the various methods for music and image synchronisation and the extent to which the process of synchronisation can assist artist managers in building and maximising their clients’ musical careers.

Research Method

It is important to note the manner by which this article approaches the issue of artist management (and artist managers’ relationships to sync agents). This article is not a neutral, disengaged reflection; the investigation analyses the subject in order to illuminate cultural practice and inform both internal and external theorisation of the cultural space in which artist management occurs. In other words, it is important to note at the outset that the author is an artist manager.

This article therefore reports on a participant-observer method of research, an approach that is well established in qualitative research practices (Punch, 2005) and the auto-ethnography is employed in conjunction with ethnographic research interviews that were conducted by the author (drawing on the approach used by Greene and Porcello, 2005). In assuming a participant “non autonomous” (Titon, 1997: 99) role in the processes of artist management, this article relies on an interaction model (Shelemay, 1997: 197) in which the researcher’s own immersion in the project casts a ‘shadow’ on the results (Macionis and Plummer, 2005; Rice, 1997). To this end, the article includes elements of a case study of the Australian indie folk band Boy & Bear that the author has been co-managing with Rowan Brand since 2008.

In both its local and international forms, music industry success (measured in terms of profitability) is dependent on successful access to and exploitation of markets of sufficient scale to generate the income necessary to cover production costs.
and various artist development and facilitation costs. So few artists and managers achieve viable long-term careers that it is often said of the music industry that ‘failure is the norm’. Given that is the case in mainstream western markets (such as the United Kingdom and United States), with their massive markets, concentrated populations and economies of scale, the issues facing performers from smaller, geographically isolated contexts such as Australia are considerable. If an artist manager and artist operate in Australia alone, they will only be able to access 1.8% of the global market for popular music. This article therefore concerns research into the UK and US markets from the perspective of an Australian artist manager who is trying to build the career of an Australian band in these larger markets, as well as in Australasia.

From this perspective, and counter to the common rhetoric which states that the music business is in decline, this article will examine the proposition that the exchange value of songs/musical copyrights is increasing as music comes to be associated with media products that were once only visual images. Such media products include print media advertising, interactive slide-shows, car software, digital cameras and advertising in newspapers. The audiovisual use of music is increasing and therefore music/image synchronisation licensing revenues will expand. Such a situation demands more fiscal responsibility on behalf of artist managers, song publishers and sync agents.

This proposition raises complex questions concerning the industrial organisation of the music and film/media industries, particularly in relation to the ownership and control of musical copyrights. Chris Anderson’s (2006) ‘Long Tail’ theory is relevant to explore the scarcity of mass media outlets for popular music and film, and the abundance of audience attention that accompanied this scarcity, leading to the exchange value of a hit song. Hit songs could be synchronised with a hit movie and thereby increase the exchange value of both forms. However, digital technologies such as the internet have reversed the way in which the media and entertainment industries operate and provided an abundance of distribution and, as a result, a scarcity of audience attention (Fig 1). This offers an opportunity for input by synchronisation agents.

![The New Marketplace](http://www.longtail.com/the_long_tail/about.html)
Sync Agents

Synchronisation (sync) agents are similar to song publishers but, while song publishers work to maximise revenue from the exploitation of the performance and mechanical copyright of songs and having the songs in their catalogue synchronised with visual imagery, sync agents just work with the latter. The long tail theory argues that the exchange value of musical copyrights has decentralised and therefore, as aggregators, sync agents are in the best position to generate revenue from synchronising more songs with many more images. Any one artist or artist manager is not as well positioned to exploit songs in the same way. Danny Goldberg, a senior US artist manager, observed the different amounts of time that artist managers and the sync agents invest:

*To me the biggest problem is not a conflict of interest; the biggest problem is a lack of effort. People take on too many artists and can’t do a good job for everyone, and the old cliché is to throw things against a wall and see what sticks. And if you’re one of the artists that didn’t stick to the wall you feel ‘gee they said that they loved me, and now I never hear from them’, you know, ‘if I’d known they weren’t going to work hard I would’ve found somebody different to represent me’. That’s the kind of thing that doesn’t lend itself to legal remedy; it’s just a function of judgement and reputation.*

While Rowan Brand and I have addressed this issue with regard to the management of Boy & Bear through co-managing them exclusively, sync agents often work on a non-exclusive basis with musical copyrights that are ‘pre-cleared’, meaning that the owner of the copyrights in both the song and the recording have consented in advance to making them available for placement in film, television and online, and this makes the process of synchronisation easier for the buyer. Rather than having to negotiate with both the owner of the copyright in the master recording and the song publisher (or the song writer directly if they do not have a song publishing agreement), sync agents are the one point of contact for advertising agencies, film producers, television producers, digital marketers and online magazines. Sync agents usually license the copyrights rather than have them assigned.

Rather than owning the copyrights in an attempt to build an asset base, sync agents only generate a fee for themselves if the copyrights are synchronised with images, as this is when the licence agreement that they already have in place is triggered. The business structure that sync agents use is in line with Anderson’s hypothesis; that there will be no more mass media hits but rather a lot more niche media hits and therefore the exchange value lies in the aggregate. Goldberg notes that this is occurring in a context in which the value of music licences can be protected more easily than the exchange value of recorded music can be:

*Licensing for major media can be protected. The law can be enforced when it comes to licensing songs for use in feature films, television shows and advertising. You can’t practically sue millions of individuals who may or may not be illegally copying your music but you can sue a movie studio if they use your song without permission. Therefore they know this and therefore you can negotiate appropriate fees. So the licensing part of the business looks to me like that is going to endure, it’s an enforceable thing. And that is particularly valuable for people*
who write their own material, because the song writing is typically 50% of rights.

Artists and Artist Managers

The exchange value of the intellectual property (IP) in songs is increasing and, as music comes to be associated with media products that used to be images only, questions concerning the ownership and control of this IP arise from the artist and artist managers’ perspectives. As there is no longer a scarcity of distribution outlets for popular music, musicians (arguably) no longer have to assign their copyrights to companies that control the mass media outlets for popular music and other media to exploit this potential means of income generation.

The abundance of distribution outlets is leading authors such as Kusek and Leonhard (2005) to argue that a new ‘middle class’ of artist is arising as niche marketing replaces mass-marketing in the digital age. While this is accompanied by an increased scarcity of audience attention, this middle class of artist has more of a chance of accessing an audience than they did through relying on the mass media ‘lottery’. As aggregators such as sync agents potentially assume a position of dominance in the industry, musicians themselves, and therefore also their managers, will control more of their copyrights. Concerning this issue of either licensing (and therefore having more control over) copyrights or assigning copyright, Goldberg notes that:

*It depends how much you need money up front. If you don’t need cash up front obviously it is better to own things 100% and therefore do licensing deals. If you need cash so that you can pay your rent, or pay for school for your kids, or to not have to sell your house, then you give something up in return for that cash. Obviously it’s better to own something 100% than to just own half of it or three quarters of it or lose some control over the administration of it, but sometimes it’s in your interest to give that up if you need the money.*

Related to this, ‘collapsed copyright’ challenges definitions of copyright, asserting that these no longer make sense when music is consumed online. This is because when a song is streamed online or is downloaded, a copy of the song is generated and the performance copyright in the song and the mechanical copyright are one and the same. Such online use also involves the copyright in the actual recording as well. Collapsed copyright therefore includes the performance copyright, the mechanical copyright and the copyright in the actual recording merging into the one ‘creator right’. This centralisation of copyrights (if it is realised) has important ramifications for the structure of the music industry. It would involve the royalty collecting societies, song publishing companies and record companies merging into one. However a major issue arising from this concerns the increased workload that surrounds the ‘creator right’ if all functions of the aforementioned entities were rolled into one.

Regulating the Hub

The notion of the different forms of copyright being conflated into the one ‘creator right’ has ramifications for the relative power of artists and therefore their managers. While the artist manager’s role is increasingly central, their attempts to
work globally are hampered by a lack of consistency in relation to best practice and conduct across different territories. In addition to information gathered via the aforementioned participant-observer method, this article draws on research input by the International Music Managers’ Forum (IMMF), which is a voluntary body seeking to create new standards in relation to artist management practices and to the enforcement of international copyright law. The forum’s aim is constrained by lack of empirical research and the author is involved in a long-term project that is attempting to alleviate this through a comparative study of regulation (self-regulation and/or governmental) and best practices in the UK, Canada, Australia and the US. The study targeted members of the IMMF and involved 18 participants, of whom two are represented via extracts of interview transcripts quoted here.\(^3\)

The research project identifies issues that are arising as the power balance in the music business shifts towards artists (and therefore their managers) due to the fact that they can control more of their copyrights through using the services of sync agents, rather than assigning their copyrights to the companies that control the mass distribution outlets. For this reason, it is a problem that there is no code of conduct that regulates artist management practices in the music business. There are two movements that are currently attempting to address this issue. First, the aforementioned research is being conducted into the establishment of a code of conduct for artist managers in the international music industry, and second, an organisation entitled the Featured Artistes’ Coalition (FAC) has formed in the UK. As has been discussed, the international recording industry has decentralised and this has shifted more commercial control from monopoly companies to smaller artist-manager teams.

In order to ensure that the Code of Conduct provides adequate and appropriate protection for artists, and so that it provides a set of guides for personal behaviours and values that assist an artist-manager team to establish a positive working environment, stakeholder input is being sought regarding two questions: first, the nature and extent of the ‘problem’, that is, what are the main risks for artists in their commercial relationship with managers in the current phase of decentralization? The second issue is the appropriate level, type and targeting of self-regulation to address these problems without imposing red tape.

The Featured Artistes’ Coalition’s manifesto for ‘fair play’ in the digital age states that all music artists “should control their destiny because ultimately it is their art and endeavours that create the pleasure and emotion enjoyed by so many”.\(^4\) They believe that: artists should always retain ultimate ownership of their music; all agreements should be conducted in a fair and transparent manner; and rights-holders should have a fiduciary duty of care to the originator of those rights and should consult and accurately report to creators on all agreements that affect how their work is exploited. The FAC is attempting to achieve this by changing artists’ approaches to agreements, the music and technology companies’ treatment of artists, and the law and its administration. In its campaign for laws, regulations, business practices and policies that protect artists’ rights, the FAC argues that: “Together, we will stand up for all artistes by engaging with government, music and technology companies, and collection societies, arguing for fair play and, where necessary, exposing unfair practices.” (ibid)

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\(^3\) This research was conducted with the support of a Macquarie University (Sydney, Australia) research development grant (for new staff) that was awarded to the author as Chief Investigator.

Keith Harris, reflecting the views of a number of British artist managers, noted that a set of guidelines produced by the IMMF for artist managers could be linked to the FAC:

> It’s basically a good idea, to actually have an artist’s voice, but there was always a problem with the IMMF, and I speak as a former chairman here, insomuch as 90% of the time, artists’ rights and managers’ rights co-align, but then there is 10% of the time when they don’t. And it’s that 10% that does need to be addressed and the Featured Artistes’ Coalition can kind of address that.

Harris goes on to argue that, while a solution would be for the IMMF or another similar body to put guidelines as to what the agreements mean up on a website, it actually might be more appropriate for the FAC to be interpreting what these guidelines mean to the artist:

> It is incumbent on the artists to go to the FAC to get the artists’ point of view, and the managers to go to the IMMF to get the managers’ viewpoint and then their independent advisors can actually negotiate and pick a suitable model. It’s got an important role to play. And the good thing about the FAC is that it encourages artists to feel that they need to know, in the new environment, exactly what the business side means. There is no longer that attitude of ‘OK, I’ll leave that to my manager’.

In such a scenario, in addition to becoming a quasi-regulatory body, the IMMF could work with the FAC to fulfil an educational role. Artists and artist managers specifically need to be educated concerning song publishing agreements and agreements that are formed with sync agents because this is an increasingly significant area of the business and one that is set to become an even more important engine for career growth. It is notable in the current media context that this sector is a business-to-business one, rather than involving a business-to-consumer transaction.

The B2B Context

The growing significance of B2B (business-to-business) revenue in the music industry is the result of end users’ ability to obtain free digital music and have concert ticket prices subsidised by sponsors. In their 2006 report on the international record business, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) added a “trade revenues” category alongside “retail revenues” in its country-by-country summaries, demonstrating trends in the B2B sector. Opportunities abound for revenue generation from music copyrights, but many no longer involve a retail (B2C - business-to-consumer) sale or transaction with an individual consumer. Licensing revenue, for example, is all B2B.

Song publishing income therefore is set to be an even more crucial income stream in the newly emerging version of the business. Kusek and Leonhard (2005) argue that, traditionally speaking, due to the complexity of a record deal and the usually lopsided terms contained therein, publishing income tends to be a more valuable and reliable revenue stream than recording income—provided that the recording artist is also the songwriter. They note that,
It just takes longer to build a good catalogue of songs, and to get those songs into the right channels so that they are being used. Indeed, when the valuation was set for the recent acquisition of Warner Music Group, the publishing company was valued at $2 billion, compared with the $1.5 billion given for the recorded music operation. (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005: 25)

In terms of the future of the music business, the internet can be seen as essentially a giant publishing apparatus: “everything is about disseminating data (also known as ‘information’ or ‘content’), getting heard or being viewed by people, and reaching out to others” (ibid). Therefore sync agents, publishers and songwriters stand to benefit as technological advances enable data/songs to be disseminated as widely as possible. Kusek and Leonhard contend,

> **Once we can broaden our views on how the remuneration will be derived and start to embrace new models, the resulting revenues will be larger than ever before. One can see traces of this when looking at the flourishing ring-tone business, music for video games, and synchronisation income that stems from digital media products. (ibid)**

Music is set to become even more ubiquitous. Leonhard (2008) notes that a wide range of music will become part of everything that used to be ‘images only’, including print media advertising. He notes that the audiovisual use of music will increase, and the licensing revenues will expand along with it (Leonhard 2008: 15).

In order to realise the potential of song publishing in a digital environment, Kusek and Leonhard (2005) note that copyright laws need to be amended to do what they were originally supposed to do, that is “protect authorship for a limited period of time so that an invention or work could be released to the public for the benefit of all” (25). They believe that the importance of mechanical reproduction licenses will decrease in favour of ‘access licenses’ that allow the public to freely use any song under a new blanket-licence arrangement (Kusek and Leonhard, 2005: 26). Song publishing is an important aspect of the music business because once the mechanisms of performance royalty collection are adapted to address the new modes of song usage (such as music ‘renting’), performance royalty collection and publishing will take the lead as the primary source of compensation for composers and performing artists. New technologies have a major role to play in this, according to these analysts:

> **Technologies such as the ones pioneered by Mediaguide, YesNetworks, and Yacast already allow us to monitor actual performance on broadcast networks with 99-percent accuracy, rather than relying on the sample-based accounting that has been commonplace until now. (ibid)**

Under the existing performance royalty collection procedure, only those who can afford it are able to individually audit performance logs, thus giving them a better chance of collecting royalties, with implications that the rich artists get richer and the smaller acts sometimes miss out. In the new paradigm that is emerging, publishing is set to become inseparable from distribution and therefore the tasks that record companies used to perform will arguably be morphed into the publishing business or into ‘next generation’ music businesses.
The Future of Music/Image Synchronisation

There are several ramifications for the synchronisation of popular music with imagery in the situation in which performance royalty collection and publishing take the lead as the primary sources of compensation for composers and performing artists. The synchronisation of hit songs works because these copyrights trigger a shared familiarity with a particular popular song. The fragmentation of the media landscape may diminish this familiarity and thus dilute the resonance of hit songs in synchronised form. Most of the top fifty best-selling albums were recorded in the 1970s and 80s (for example, the Eagles and Michael Jackson) and none of them were recorded in the early millennial period (Anderson, 2006: 2). Yet consumers now have unlimited and unfiltered access to culture and content of all sorts, rather than just Michael Jackson and the Eagles and other such financially successful musicians. While canonical popular songs such as Michael Jackson’s ‘Beat It’ and ‘Billy Jean’ (both 1983) will remain familiar to millions of people, a familiarity that will be heightened by the practice of synchronising them in films, it will become difficult for any more recent popular music to become as canonical.

This will impact on a significant way in which the economic value of musical copyrights is generated: namely, synchronisation. More songs will be synchronised with more images and this will increase the value of music copyrights on aggregate, but diminish the value of any single popular song such as ‘Beat It’. This is because albums by the Eagles and Michael Jackson were more popular in the Seventies and Eighties than equivalent albums are now, not because they were better, but because consumers had fewer alternatives to compete for their attention. According to Anderson,

*What we thought was the rising tide of common culture actually turned out to be less about the triumph of Hollywood talent and more to do with the shepherding effect of broadcast distribution... The great thing about broadcast is that it can bring one show to millions of people with unmatched efficiency. But it can’t do the opposite—bring a million shows to one person each.* (2006: 5)

The economics of the broadband era are reversed because the internet is a distribution network that is optimised for point-to-point communications. The mass market is turning into a mass of niches. Although musical copyrights that are synchronised in films do not have to be hits, the confusing mosaic of a million mini-markets and micro-stars will change the way songs that are synchronised with imagery generate a shared sense of familiarity.

Long Tail Critics

The shattering of the mainstream, on which the practice of synchronising hit songs is dependent, into many different cultural shards is something that upsets traditional media and entertainment companies and practitioners. This is in part why there is a debate surrounding the long tail theory as many established players latch on to a growing body of scholarly work that uses statistical data to reject it. Elberse (2008) argues that Anderson’s proposition that consumers will migrate away from homogenised hits through now being able to find and afford products that are more closely tailored to their individual tastes is flawed. Rather than moving away from a reliance on blockbusters towards niche offerings, she argues
that companies should instead increase the number of blockbuster strategies they pursue.

While this is to an extent missing a certain nuance within Anderson’s argument, namely that a combination of hit and niche content is needed so that the shared sense of familiarity surrounding hit songs will lead consumers into the ‘tail’, the statistical data she presents suggests that the practice of synchronising hit songs will remain unchanged. This is greeted as pleasing news by established song publishers who control catalogues of hit song copyrights that benefit from the cultural practice of synchronising music with imagery. One of the charts Elberse presents depicts the aggregate selections of more than 60,000 Rhapsody subscribers who had more than 1 million tracks to choose from and yet:

In the three-month period of 2006 portrayed here, those customers engaged in more than 32 million transactions, or “plays”. And what do we see? Clearly, a high level of concentration. The data underlying the graph reveal that the top 10% of titles accounted for 78% of all plays, and the top 1% of titles for 32% of all plays. (Elberse, 2008: 3)

She argues that the amount of music consumed was equal to the entire music inventory of a typical Wal-Mart store. Although the data presented is from 2006, it does undermine the argument being presented here: that the application of the long tail theory will affect the practice of synchronisation.

An underlying assumption in Elberse’s article is that ‘obscure’ material is so because it is of lesser quality ‘naturally’, rather than its marginal status being the result of the bottleneck in, and thus the scarcity of, distribution. In contrast, Anderson argues that, while much of the material in the long tail is of lesser quality, some of the less homogenised material in the long tail is likely to resonate more with specific consumers and that we just need effective filters to find the gems. Elberse cites McPhee’s (1963) study positing that light users of a product category are a relatively large proportion of those customers interested in the popular products. McPhee noted that hit products monopolise light consumers and thus the phenomenon was labeled a ‘natural monopoly’ in his study. Hit songs synchronised with film imagery reflect this natural monopoly. Elberse distinguishes light users from heavy users who are more likely to venture into the long tail, but they choose a mix of hit and obscure products.

Elberse’s argument hinges on the, albeit substantiated, belief that light consumers concentrate largely on the hit products. However, the very definition of ‘hit’ products is changing because of the abundance of material that is now available and because of the fragmentation of the media landscape. According to Elberse, a balanced picture emerges of the impact of online channels on market demand,

Hit products remain dominant, even among consumers who venture deep into the tail. Hit products are also liked better than obscure products. It is a myth that obscure books, films, and songs are treasured. What consumers buy in internet channels is much the same as what they have always bought. (2008: 7)

However the emerging culture of participation changes this. Consumers also cherish what they make themselves, they cherish their own creativity. Elberse is assuming that culture will primarily remain a monologue rather than becoming more of a dialogue. Whether the long tail theory is realised or not has important
ramifications for the work of both artist managers and sync agents. Artist managers are limited in terms of the number of clients for whom they can provide their service and therefore they benefit from a culture that is dominated by hit products (provided that they manage the artists who are producing the hits and have good relationships with the companies that control the mass distribution outlets). In contrast, sync agents are set to benefit greatly if the long tail theory is realised because the revenue they generate is derived from the aggregate of a many different ‘niche hits’.

Music like Water

Kusek and Leonhard (2005) and Leonhard (2008) believe that the record and song publishing industries overall need to embrace a model that will enable music to be accessible like tap water. This ‘music like water’ analogy draws on the notion that there will be a paradigm shift from treating recorded music like a product (that is, like expensive bottled water) to enabling music to function like a service or ‘utility’—like water from a tap. This means that recorded music will seem like it is free but actually will not be and therefore the music content owners could compete with the large volume of piracy that online file-sharing has enabled. Leonhard notes that this will lead to much-needed price flexibility:

*Today’s music pricing schemes will be completely eroded by digital music services (legal and, mostly, otherwise) and by stiff competition from other entertainment products. A “liquid” pricing system will emerge, involving subscriptions, bundles of various content types, multi-channel/multi-access charges, and countless added-value services. CD prices will end up at around €5–7 per unit. But most important, the overall music consumption and use will steadily increase, and – if the industry can manage the transition to a service-based model – can eventually bring in €50–90 per person per year, with 75% of the population in the leading markets as active consumers – the pie will be three times as large. (Leonhard, 2008:15)*

He therefore envisages that access to music will replace ownership, that consumers will have access to ‘their’ music anytime, anywhere, and the physical possession of it will become more of a disadvantage. Music will also be bundled with various other content types that are visual and therefore the synchronisation royalty stream will be reconceptualised. Music will feel (and act) like tap water.

The underlying assumption inherent in the ‘music like water’ model is that users will pay a low flat fee to an entity such as an ISP or digital music retailer in order to access a large pool of music. These flat fees will amount to more money than the record industry has ever generated. Software can be used (featuring watermarking and fingerprinting) that enables the content owners to be paid on a usage basis rather than per copy. This is also because it is increasingly difficult to distinguish what constitutes a ‘copy’ anyway. This flat fee-based system can precisely track what music is actually used and can distribute exact royalties accordingly, and this would enable online bloggers and others to use music like radio stations use music. That is, all that would be required is a collective voluntary blanket licence.

Boy & Bear
As a participant-observer in the industry managing Australian band Boy & Bear it is difficult to apply such a model, regardless of how attractive it may appear. One reason for this is that being responsible for a band’s career means that, while artist managers consult artists on the decisions that they make, ultimately the decisions rest with the artists. When it is their career on the line, artists will often look for the safe bet, the established company and the tried and true method. In the contemporary period, the industry is in such a state of flux that both sides of a debate can resonate with an artist manager and their client (or, often times, just with the artist manager) and therefore the decision making process is particularly challenging. In the case of Boy & Bear, we procured a licence agreement with Universal Music Australia for Australia and New Zealand only because we believed that the best position for the client was to be signed directly to a record label in a larger territory. With regard to the clients’ song publishing, we have not engaged sync agents. This is because, to realise our goal of signing them directly to a record label in a territory that is larger than Australasia, we needed funding and song publishers are effectively venture capitalists who advance song writers their future earnings from the exploitation of their musical works in order to justify administering and participating in this revenue. While the territory for the first record label deal was limited to Australia and New Zealand, the agreement with the song publisher, Sony ATV, is for the world. The rationale behind this decision was that the client needed a significant amount of money to tour the UK and the publisher would only advance this amount in exchange for having the world as the territory. Sync agents typically do not advance money in this way. Furthermore, it meant that we then had access to the Sony ATV offices in Los Angeles and London and the staff there could help us to procure a direct signing with a record label in either the US or UK. It also increased the likelihood that the band would receive lucrative offers for the synchronisation of their music with imagery in films, in television episodes and in advertisements.

A specific anecdote that is useful for elaborating on the main themes and debates in this article concerned a meeting that the author attended with an HBO music supervisor in Los Angeles in February 2010. The music supervisor was interested in licensing one of Boy & Bear’s recordings/songs for a very popular television show and offered approximately USD$3000 for the licence. However, once he found out that the band’s song publishing was with Sony ATV the deal did not proceed because he knew that Sony ATV would negotiate for an approximate fee of USD$8000. If we were using a sync agent for this particular client then the deal may have gone ahead and, while the sync agent would have undercut the song publisher, thereby decreasing the value of the licence, the client would have received a massive amount of exposure all around the world due to the popularity of the television show.

While Boy & Bear were in a position whereby a major international song publishing company was interested in their work, many bands are not in this position and therefore working with sync agents is often their only method for obtaining synchronisation licences. It is positive that artists nowadays have multiple options in this regard though it is negative that the increasing number of sync agents is increasing the competition for synchronisation licenses and this has the potential to lead to a decrease in the exchange value of any individual musical copyright. This could affect individual artists negatively, and also artist managers because of the limited number of clients for whom they can provide their service. However, the decrease in the exchange value of any one individual copyright is less significant for sync agents because of the long tail theory and the notion that the value for
them lies in the aggregate of the many different copyrights that they make available to TV, film and advertisement producers.

Conclusion

The music business is rapidly changing in line with a radically different contemporary media context. The relative centralisation of industrial roles with the artist manager in the digital music business environment accompanies the decentralisation that has occurred in the recorded music business. This article has used a participant-observer perspective to explore the ramifications of this centralisation/decentralisation. One ramification of these changes is that the exchange value of songs/musical copyrights is increasing relative to the decrease in the value of the recorded music sales and as music comes to be associated with media products that used to be images only. The audiovisual use of music will increase because of this, and therefore music/image synchronisation licensing revenues will expand and this will lead to an increase in fiscal responsibility on behalf of the artist manager.

This proposition challenges the industrial organisation of the music and film/media industries, particularly in relation to the ownership and control of musical copyrights. It is clear that there has been a shift from a scarcity of distribution outlets for recorded music to an abundance of them, and therefore from an abundance of audience attention for recorded music to a scarcity of it (or, at least, dispersed niche audiences for a multitude of musical works). The application of Anderson’s (2006) ‘Long Tail’ theory means that live performance has become the most reliable source of income for artists because there is still a scarcity of distribution outlets for it, and, in addition, performance royalty collection and publishing is increasingly a primary source of compensation for composers and performing artists. However, while the number of screens upon which music can be synchronised with imagery is increasing and this has the potential to lead to an increase in revenue overall, the work of sync agents will potentially decrease the income that any individual artist will receive.

Nevertheless the practice of music and visual image synchronisation is arguably the second most reliable sector for the financial survival of musical artists and the business entities associated with them. This is because litigation is an option for the owners of musical copyrights if film studios, TV production companies and advertising agencies do not adhere to copyright law and because the internet has led to more opportunities for music and visual image synchronisation. Sync agents benefit from this and from any application of the long tail. However, if more sync agents start to operate in the music business because of this, the competition between them and song publishers may lead to undercutting each other by ‘low balling’ licence deals. This form of music licensing in the long term may end up sitting alongside recorded music in the ‘free’ category. Artists will still be involved in the practice of music and visual image synchronisation because many are intrinsically motivated to make art. How this can be leveraged into sustainable business practices is the issue for the current transitional period and for the future. Meanwhile, the relationship between artists, managers and sync agents will continue to evolve in the next decade or two, offering further opportunities for analysis of the business of screen sound transactions.
Bibliography

ANCIENT ARCHETYPES
The ‘Greek Chorus’ in The Tracker’s Songs

Anthony Linden Jones

Abstract

Rolf de Heer’s film The Tracker (2002) is a fictional representation of period, location, characters and events but has strong echoes of historical documentation. It is, essentially, a morality play, much akin to Aesop’s fables. By not revealing character names in the film, de Heer renders the players as ancient archetypes, like the anthropomorphic animals of Aesop. The film is confronting and thought-provoking yet a number of key elements serve to disrupt a realist reading of the film: most particularly, the use of a series of songs that function like the Chorus of ancient Greek drama to compensate for the inability of the characters to interrelate on any kind of emotional level. Performed by Australian Aboriginal singer Archie Roach, the songs were written by (non-indigenous) Rolf de Heer and composer Graham Tardif. Do the songs serve as a bridge between cultures, or as a potential site for antagonism? How does the ‘Greek Chorus’ dramatic device function in the context of a contemporary Australian feature film? In attending to these questions, this paper outlines the history of the use of the device of the ‘Greek Chorus’ in cinema and investigates its application in this film.

Keywords
The Tracker, Rolf de Heer, indigenous Australian, Greek Chorus, film songs, Archie Roach

Introduction

The lineage of the ‘Greek Chorus’ in dramatic productions can be traced from ancient Greek theatre through to the contemporary use of leitmotifs in opera and film music. The particular application of the ‘Greek Chorus’ in the music of Rolf de Heer’s 2002 film The Tracker is different from common practice in contemporary Australian cinema. Rendered as a series of songs performed by renowned singer Archie Roach, the ‘Greek Chorus’ in this manifestation has an overt narrative function passing commentary on the action without intruding upon it, unlike the role of songs in a musical film. Modern drama feature films commonly employ musical underscore to convey emotions or unspoken information in an effective yet subtle way (Gorbman, 1987) and as a conduit to identification with the narrative (Kassabian, 2001). This article explores the use of the Greek Chorus as a narrative device, tracing its lineage, and comparing its implementation in this film to that of the use of leitmotif in other film scores to convey complex unspoken concepts: the sub-narrative. The Tracker uses a number of overtly contrived narrative devices, including the use of Greek Chorus in the musical score. The article illustrates how
this device has the potential to heighten our emotional engagement with a fictional narrative.

Establishing the Music for *The Tracker*

Rolf de Heer first conceived the story for *The Tracker* in 1992, ten years prior to its final release:

> An idea for [the] film formed in my head, an angry film, a story of three white men and a black tracker in the middle of nowhere, hunting down a fugitive. The film would be a philosophical discourse between the white men, as they argued the black and white ethics of the time while tracking deeper and deeper into hostile territory, committing the sorts of acts I'd read about. (De Heer, 2007: 5)

In 1992, researching the history of interactions between the Indigenous population and the colonisers as background for another film, De Heer was alarmed at what he found:

> I did learn that the history of white colonisation of Australia was a much more troubled one than the history I'd learnt at school. The violence inflicted upon the Indigenous population was at times extreme, and certainly widespread. It was a deeply shocking contradiction to the comic book version taught in schools in the early sixties. (ibid)

De Heer proceeded to craft a story, set in early twentieth century Australian outback, of three white men and an Aboriginal tracker (played by acclaimed indigenous actor, David Gulpilil) attempting to locate an Aboriginal man who has been accused of murdering a white woman. The central white characters, led by a racist colonial policeman, engage in some horrific acts of violence. All characters are identified only by archetypal names in the closing credits: The Fugitive (Noel Wilton), The Tracker (Gulpilil), The Fanatic (Gary Sweet), The Follower (Damon Gameau) and The Veteran (Grant Page). Thus, as external observers, we are kept at a distance from the characters. While basing the narrative on character archetypes, De Heer allows space for their development through the narrative and especially in response to the violent acts they engage in.

The setting for *The Tracker* is indeterminate. The clothing of the characters and the music score for the film are inconsistent with the year 1922, the given time of the events, and we are not told the exact place where the story occurs. Although the events of the film are fictional and the presented characters archetypal, De Heer intimated in conversation that the character of The Fanatic was modeled on that of Constable William Willshire, active in the Northern Territory in the 1890s, who dealt out large measures of self-determined justice to local Aboriginal people, conducting many atrocities similar to events depicted in *The Tracker* (Perkins and Nowra, 2008).

In order to lessen the negative impact of the violence that he envisaged in the story, De Heer considered counterpointing the harder edges of the film with the use of “jaunty Country ‘n’ Western songs” (De Heer, 2007: 7). Reaching a dead-end in the

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1 For more analysis of the film, see several critical and scholarly articles, including Probyn (2005), Sharp (2003) and Smaill (2002).
progression of the script, De Heer left it to work on other projects. The idea was revived as a proposal to feature in the Adelaide Festival of Arts of 2002 but De Heer was required to position the film as a piece of cinema in the context of a performing arts festival:

How do you play a piece of cinema and give it relevance within an Arts Festival context... where you have all this theatre and live performance stuff?... And so, I talked to them about doing a live performance of it, which then became a contractual necessity... Because there was this agreement to have a band and songs, we developed it until it did work.2

To suit the (perceived) needs of the Adelaide Festival of Arts, De Heer set a primary condition that the music involve live performance for the film’s premiere in the Festival. During the production process, the composer Graham Tardif and De Heer together explored a number of alternative approaches to scoring. A solution had still not been found by the time shooting was completed. The original conception, the ‘jaunty Country ‘n’ Western songs’, was found to be anempathetic to the mood of the film. As an experiment, De Heer tried sections of the CD Buried Country, the soundtrack of a documentary produced by Andy Nehl in 2000 detailing the history of Aboriginal popular music, with a particular focus on the genre of ‘Country’.

The first time we put something up and realised it was going to work was when we had a clear Indigenous voice— and then it attached itself immediately to the character of the Tracker. That’s when we realised that we had to have an Indigenous singer.

In a ‘Q & A’ session with the director at a screening of the film in January 2011, De Heer described the use of a ‘gravely campfire voice’ from Buried Country. Unsuccessful attempts were made to match the (unidentified) singer to the film: while he had an appropriate vocal quality, the singer was unable to match his performance to the practical necessity of a click-track. It was then that an approach was made to Archie Roach, a singer/songwriter with an intensely soulful, rich voice appropriate for carrying the emotion of the film and with many years recording experience.3

The music for the film developed as ten songs with a number of linking instrumental cues, mostly derived from the songs, used to link scenes and transport the spectator through several montage sequences. Tardif composed the music threaded through the film, while the song lyrics were written by De Heer. Tardif had collaborated on several of De Heer’s previous films. To aid him in the writing of the lyrics for The Tracker, Tardif supplied De Heer with a recording of the computer-sequenced music with the vocal line played by a keyboard instrument. De Heer then wrote the lyrics to suit.

Archie Roach played a crucial role in transforming the lyrics to the highly emotive performances heard in the film sound track. De Heer describes the recording process:

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2 All quotes from Rolf de Heer, unless otherwise cited, are extracted from an interview with De Heer conducted by the author, 20th August 2009, by Skype.
The great Aboriginal singer Archie Roach was asked to sing them, and seeing the film (without the words to the songs, which had not yet been written), he readily agreed. Some months later we spent a week recording Archie and the musicians, and during a break in the recording (a very emotional time for Archie), he and I were sitting outside having a quiet cigarette. He looked at me several times, then asked a question...“Did you write those words?”. I said that I had indeed written the words to the songs. A piercing stare from Archie...“All of them?”. I nodded. He shook his head in some sort of disbelief, then said, “You and I have traveled very different roads, but we’ve arrived at the same place”. (De Heer, 2007: 7)

There can be little doubt that Archie’s own life experiences as a member of the ‘stolen generation’ who was raised in orphanages and foster homes, and survived periods of alcoholism and living as an itinerate musician, inform his performances in the songs of the film. His voice, featuring heavy tremolo and bass resonances like anguished sobs, seems to tell the story of his own struggles, and his personal engagement with the content of the lyrics is evident in the performances.

To allow live performance with the film, Tardif assembled a modest ensemble of four instrumentalists to accompany Archie Roach, with musicians on slide dobro guitar/electric guitar, rhythm guitars, organ/synthesizer, electric bass, and drums. While the musical score was performed live for the opening night of the Adelaide Festival of Arts on 2nd March, 2002, the cost of staging such performances—plus the complications of synchronising performance to a complicated variable click track—precluded the possibility of a large number of performed screenings. To date, the film has had only one other live performance: on 23rd July 2002 at the opening night of the Melbourne International Film Festival. De Heer had planned a third performance that was to be in the USA, but it became logistically impractical and the idea was abandoned.

The music accompanying the version of the film screened in cinemas, international film festivals and released on DVD closely resembles these live performances (with some additional multi-tracking and mixing). The sparse instrumentation used is typical of Tardif’s scores for De Heer’s films. Of the ten feature films that Tardif has scored for De Heer (out of twelve De Heer films to date), only one—The Old Man Who Read Love Stories (2001), a relatively generously-funded international co-production—has used a large instrumental ensemble.

While the music of The Tracker cannot be tied easily to any particular time period, both the mood and the instrumentation are decidedly not of the specified year of the story, 1922. For the most part, the music is simple, pensive and mellow with the primary function of transporting the lyrics, without subsuming them.

There are long periods in the film without dialogue, both as a result of the characters’ inability to interact in other than superficial ways, and because the characters move through wild country under the constant fear of attack from ‘those

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4 A term used to describe indigenous children (mostly mixed race) who, in the period from 1870s to 1970s, were forcibly removed by Australian federal and state government agencies from their families to be raised by church missions, orphanages or foster families in a policy aimed at diluting the indigenous cultural influence. Alec Morgan’s 1983 documentary Lousy Little Sixpence, and Philip Noyce’s feature film Rabbit-Proof Fence are just two screen representations of ‘stolen generation’ stories.

5 The musicians credited in the DVD release of the film are Martin Boyd (keyboard), Julian Barnett (guitars), Andy Salvanos (bass) and Craig Lauritsen (drums).
damned bush blacks’. This allows the songs to tell aspects of the story that the characters are incapable of articulating without intruding into the temporal flow of the narrative, while the instrumental music serves to aid the flow of montage sequences that indicate the passing of time or distance. Like the ‘Greek Chorus’, each song is inserted into the narrative either as a commentary on the action we see, or as reflection of underlying feelings. They function non-diegetically, in that the characters do not hear or respond to the voice and the songs operate for our benefit, as spectators of the tableau vivant.

Although limited to a small ensemble, the music adopts several emotional moods and is able to express viewpoints through variation of style and instrumentation. Sustained low chords with or without voice are used to evoke solemnity, fearfulness or sacredness. Slide dobro guitar recalls Ry Cooder’s work in Paris, Texas (dir: Wim Wenders, 1984). However, whereas Cooder’s use of the instrument paints a sonic image of an empty sprawling landscape, the landscapes here are packed full of detail. Filmed in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia, the locations range from rugged spectacular ridge tops to steep-walled gullies—there are no wide empty plains here as we are used to seeing in Australian ‘quest’ (or ‘road’) movies. Unaccompanied dobro guitar is used at various times to give an acoustic highlight to ‘reveals’, where the camera zooms in to an object usually visible only to The Tracker. Slightly distorted organ with bass, electric guitar and drums played in slow triple time common in some styles of gospel music is used to represent oppression. Strong driving snare drum rhythms are used to express anger. Some songs reoccur with different lyrics and there is increasing use of an Aboriginal language to express anguish through the progression of the narrative.

Early in the film, The Tracker sees smoke rising from behind a distant ridge and announces “Plenty big trouble coming!” Slow organ in a gospel-like feel begins, and the song that follows indicates to the spectator that the trouble will in fact come from within the party:

Bad times ahead, trouble coming
What am I doing here? Waiting.
Have to face up to them, someone like me
Who must carry the burden alone.
What am I doing here? Waiting to strike.
Waiting only until the right time
Bad times ahead.

The music sounds solemn, even devotional. This is the first indication that The Tracker is the character who is really controlling the destiny of the party.

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6 De Heer chose not to open The Tracker with a conventional title sequence, instead presenting a landscape painting, frozen in time, which slowly transforms into the filmed landscape alive with shimmering heat. This is the first of a series of paintings used at points of transition, often occasioned by moments of extreme violence in the story. Filmed images are replaced by paintings in a simple, naive style by South Australian artist Peter Coad, who traveled with the company creating his images on set to ensure that the view and the light was the same as for the camera. De Heer took this radical approach not out of a desire for novelty but to subvert the increasingly graphic nature of violence he saw in contemporary film. To feature such graphic images he felt would only serve to lessen the impact of the film, and adversely limit the potential audience.

7 Lyrics reprinted with permission by Rolf De Heer for Vertigo Productions. All subsequent lyrics also covered by this permission.
The party storms a group of Aboriginal people, one wearing a trooper’s uniform, and as the two white policeman chain and humiliate the group, The Tracker stands aside and we hear a short verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{In this land long ago, we lived our own way} \\
\text{Ninyamoni yanguenei} \\
\text{Now we’re no longer free, we are disposessed} \\
\text{Nangale withakenye} \\
\text{Nangangalele, people of mine}\end{align*}
\]

The music starts in the same devotional tone as before, but as the actions of the policeman become more and more degrading, the feel of the music changes, gathering rhythmic momentum, and an increasing amount of Aboriginal language is heard in the lyrics. As firearms are brought into play, we hear a strong snare rhythm and rock-type organ riff. The song is dramatically cut-off by the sound of gunshots, as the policemen massacre the group. Thus the music anticipates the growing anguish felt by either the group or The Tracker and the abrupt music cut suggests that even The Tracker did not expect the severity of the massacre that ensued. This heightens the shock of the action for the spectator. We are spared the sight of the implied graphic violence by the use of paintings ‘interpreting’ the violence.

As the sun rises to reveal the hanging body of the leader of the party (The Fanatic), executed by The Tracker for his crimes against innocent people, we hear the bittersweet triumph of a slow shuffle beat in a verse-chorus song configuration. This neatly encapsulates the demands for a Government apology to the Indigenous people of Australia that were heard in the Australian community at the time of the film’s production. The song also touches on the then-Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard’s, preoccupation with the teaching of colonial history:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{You have taken my country,} \\
\text{Fought me, killed me, exterminated by your hand.} \\
\text{I have lost all my being,} \\
\text{Empty, derided, forsaken in what was my land} \\
\text{And I can never return until there’s contrition} \\
\text{And we can all read my history.} \\
\text{I still long for my country,} \\
\text{I still remember the spirit that lives in my land.} \\
\text{But I can only forgive when there is contrition,} \\
\text{And we at last face my history.} \\
\text{And so I will only forgive when there is contrition,} \\
\text{And I can face proud my history.}
\end{align*}
\]

The songs throughout generally give us a sense that The Tracker considers he is taking on responsibility for righting wrongs on behalf of ‘my people’, and this is

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\[8\] All examples of Aboriginal language given in the paper are phonetic representations of Archie Roach’s performance.
established from very early in the film, before we have seen much evidence of the depths to which the leader of the party can sink.

Reviewing the soundtrack CD in the online magazine *Urban Cinefile*, Brad Green observed:

> Movingly elegiac, there is not nearly so much ire here as lament. These are beautiful sounds that echo ugly truths. Roach’s greatest achievement is to emote with the stately solemnity of a man standing on a cliff top, surveying a landscape that hardly changes, while all the while bearing witness to tumultuous vicissitudes of human history. It is an earthy, poignant experience for the listener, and as cathartic and poignant as the American blues. (Green, 2002: online)

The reference to American blues is certainly warranted. Like that style, the songs of *The Tracker* place powerful lyrics with emotional delivery over slow, mellow musical feels. However, none of the songs use standard blues structures. De Heer has stated that the songs were intended to serve primarily as cinematic underscore, and indeed the songs are moulded to shape around the narrative of the film rather than conforming to standard song structures. As a consequence, although the soundtrack CD lists ten vocal songs, a couple of the songs are segmented into distinct sections.

The song with the strongest leanings to a standard structure is ‘All Men Choose the Path They Walk’, which uses a common ballad harmonic/melodic structure A A B A of sixteen bars duration, with the final A section carrying the title as a ‘refrain’. However, there is no consistent rhyming pattern and no repeated lines within each verse, a common feature in the blues. The songs in the film therefore might be intended to hint at blues styles without direct use of their most obvious structures. Although the use of dobro and organ particularly reference popular music styles of southern USA, Archie Roach’s voice is recognisably Australian Aboriginal in pronunciation and phrasing.

Voicing the Narrative

Central to our perception of sound is the human voice, both in life and in the acousmatic dimension of film. Michel Chion articulates the ‘vococentrism’ of our reception of film sound thus:

> In actual movies, for real spectators, there are not all the sounds including the human voice. There are voices, and then everything else. In other words, in every audio mix, the presence of a human voice instantly sets up a hierarchy of perception... the presence of a human voice structures the sonic space that contains it. (Chion, 1999: 5)

The voice therefore occupies a primary focus in the narrative of a film. Chion defines the ‘acousmêtre’ of a film—an unseen character whose voice implies their immanence, or unseen presence, within the mise en scène (Chion, 1994: 129). The presence of a disembodied voice makes us consider its source. Is this voice the internal dialogue of an onscreen character, or a separate individual? Is the voice speaking/singing within or external to the temporal flow of the narrative? For the

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9 This was used as a tagline in marketing materials for promotion of the film.
voice as the disembodied internal dialogue of one of the on-screen characters, Chion defines the term “I-voice” (Chion, 1999: 49).

In this film, we perceive by inference an attachment of the voice of the narrator/singer to the character of The Tracker through references in the song lyrics to ‘my people’ accompanying images of Aboriginal people. Of course, the voice is that of Archie Roach, and not that of David Gulpilil, the actor playing the character. For most spectators, the songs assume the role of reflective narrator most likely in the first-person voice of the Tracker. However, this “I-voice” interpretation is disrupted by the seemingly external observation of the Tracker’s character in “All Men Choose the Path They Walk”. For this song, the camera holds our gaze on each character for an entire verse as they travel—the external observer of the ‘Greek Chorus’ providing a ‘score sheet’ comparing the natures of each character:

(The Fugitive)
Some men are prone to misadventure, questions of guilt aren’t always clear
Some men run from a fate they can’t avoid, all men choose the path they walk

(The Veteran)
Some can’t be faulted for their reason, failing to justly intervene
Some men hide from the memories that haunt, all men choose the path they walk

(The Follower)
Some men see everything through duty, cast off responsibility
Some regret that their courage sometimes fails, all men choose the path they walk

(The Fanatic)
Some men have attitude that’s righteous, care not about the consequence
Some men fight with the violence inside, all men choose the path they walk

(The Tracker)
Some men have reached their destination, finding their own serenity
Some men lead others till they recognise, that all men choose the path they walk.

We cannot be sure if the narrator’s voice (sung) is located in the temporal flow of the narrative (as if the Tracker were singing to himself), or part of a retelling of the story. A retelling narrative film would usually be framed by seeing the storyteller at the beginning and end of the film, such as De Heer used in an earlier film Epsilon (1997), or indeed is commonly used in many children’s stories. However, if the film were to clearly identify the sung narration with the character of The Tracker, it might become clear to the audience too early in the film that in fact he will be one of the surviving characters by virtue of the retrospective reflection that the songs might imply, thus deflating the primary focus of uncertainty in the narrative. One of the primary generators of tension that De Heer uses in the narrative is the uncertainty about which character(s) will survive the ordeal.

While The Tracker is not the first film to use songs to serve the function of a ‘Greek Chorus’ within a film, it is an uncommon narrative technique in the context of contemporary Australian feature film, and especially those telling Indigenous stories. Non-Australian examples include Cat Ballou (Elliot Silverstein, 1965) with
Nat ‘King’ Cole and Stubby Kaye as on-screen minstrels, and Woody Allen’s *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) in which a Greek Chorus is a literal and constant interpreter of events both in spoken declamation and in song (and, finally, in dance as well!). Yet the device remains a rarity, and is a diegetic construct necessary in this film to compensate for the lack of ability of the characters to effectively emote.

Another setting of songs in a film might draw the label ‘musical’ or ‘screen opera’. Two such examples, both by the director Rachel Perkins, are *One Night the Moon* (2001) and the screen version of the Jimmy Chi stage musical *Bran Nue Dae* (2009). *One Night the Moon*, based around a series of songs and musical pieces written by singers Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody and composer Mairead Hannan, features Paul Kelly, his (then) wife and daughter as principal actors, and presents as an extended ‘music video’ (see Winchester, 2005). The pacing of the drama and editing of the film is structured around the songs. Dialogue is minimal with the narrative driven primarily by the songs sung by the principal actors accompanied by instruments that we, for the most part, do not see. The film’s ability to emotionally engage the audience is limited by the awareness of the artificial miming of the songs onscreen by the actors, the stylized and slow-paced acting, and the structural restrictions placed on the narrative flow by the use of standard song-forms. The more recent example, *Bran Nue Dae*, is widely marketed as a comedy musical. There is some music played within the mise en scène but the majority of singing and dancing in the film is performed without the accompaniment of visible instruments. How do we perceive the artificial attachment of the voice to the character in a movie? Chion comments:

> ... why should we care at all about jerry-rigging, nailing-down, dubbing, synch sound, playback or ventriloquism? Well sometimes it matters and sometimes not. In the burlesque strain of film comedy... nothing ontological is at stake. These films often play on the very situation of the human being as a dislocated body, a puppet, a burlesque assemblage of body and voice. If we stop believing for a moment in the unity of the body with the voice, it is “serious” dramatic movies whose effect is more readily threatened. (Chion, 1999: 131-2).

*Bran Nue Dae* accommodates the artificial process of miming of the songs because of different expectations for the audience in the comedy musical genre, emphasised in this case by highly exaggerated characterisations and farcical situations.

For both of these movies, and for the genre of the musical in general, the songs are the starting point in the narrative from which all other aspects of the film derive. The songs in *The Tracker* serve a quite different function.

The ‘Greek Chorus’ in Opera and Film Music

There is some disagreement on the exact function of the Chorus in ancient Greek theatre. In writing for the stage, each poet/dramatist would use the Chorus in different ways. However, for the purposes of this discussion it is reasonable to generalise on our contemporary perception of the Chorus as a group of singers/dancers functioning as one of the characters, commenting on the drama and interacting to some extent with the other players (Weiner, 1980: 205). The opening of Woody Allen’s *Mighty Aphrodite* is a pseudo-authentic historical presentation of the Greek Chorus in its historical and dramatic context.
The musical genre of opera, invented by the ‘Camerata de’ Bardi’ of late 16th century Florence, was predicated on the belief that the ancient Greek dramas had been sung throughout. In realising a musical drama, recitativo (for which the singer adopts common speech rhythms) was invented as a means to accommodate narrative flow, otherwise encumbered by being forced to conform to existing quadratic musical structures such as dance forms, thus creating a dichotomy between the rhythmically free recitativo and the other more rigid forms. The modern musical, either for stage or screen, is derived from this early opera, with recitative more or less in evidence between songs and dances in regular structures.

In Wagnerian opera, the function of the Greek Chorus was absorbed into the musical structure of the drama through the use of leitmotifs. The libretto of the opera (often employing poetic linguistic devices) served to tell the outward aspects of the story, whereas the use of musical leitmotifs allowed for an external observer or the inner voice of the characters to ‘comment’ on events and convey unspoken meaning in a form of sub-narrative. Thus, text and music were free to adopt complementary roles in the narrative process.

This development in opera, using the interplay of themes for the conveyance of a sub-narrative, occurred almost coincidentally with the development of moving pictures, toward the end of the nineteenth century. Soon after the broad introduction of synchronised cinema sound technology in the late 1920s, film music composers turned to nineteenth century opera as a desirable model for the application of music in film allowing for emotional or hidden information to be conveyed economically and with subtlety. From the early 1930s and particularly evident in the scores of Hollywood studio film composers such as Max Steiner, the use of leitmotifs was adopted as an effective technique for creating a musical setting for film, using musical themes to represent characters, objects, places or emotions and thereby allowing the music to assist narrative unity (Gorbman, 1987: 90). Other techniques have since been employed in the creation of a music score for a film (Prendergast, 1992: 231) including the use of songs, however the use of leitmotifs and thematic variation have continued as commonly employed compositional techniques. The use of instrumental leitmotifs presumes the ability for music to represent extra-musical factors: people, objects, places, emotions and situations (as well as change over time) outside of the boundaries of the music itself. For music to effectively signify non-musical elements in a drama requires the establishment of a system of reference.

In composing for opera or for film, the composer can utilise both extant musical cultural signifiers, from within or without a culture, or newly composed themes created to function within the enclosed world of the opera or film. The establishment of a system of reference for newly composed themes is achieved by association and repetition. With sufficient repetition of a musical theme within an enclosed self-referential system, the ‘hidden’ meaning can be conveyed at a subconscious level. Wagner’s large-scale operas achieved this to some extent through their extended duration and, in the case of the tetralogy commonly referred to as *The Ring*, through a consistency of use across operas. Within the scope of a dramatic film, there is both less time available to establish this self-contained system of signifiers, and less conscious attention paid to their reception because of the subordination of sound to image in the conscious perception of a film.

A film composer rarely has the opportunity to make the narrative of the film conform to quadratic musical structures or consistent time intervals, such as is
heard in early opera. Music in a film is most usually rendered as short gestures to avoid overwhelming or ‘constructing’ the narrative (Brown, 1994: 154). Longer musical structures in a score are still usually reserved for extended sequences without dialogue, such as in montage, scene transitions, and the opening and closing credits of a film.

We have seen how the music for opera or for film can comprise newly composed themes or extant cultural materials, real or contrived. The effectiveness of engagement of the audience with these resources will depend upon the extent to which association of the signifier to the signified has been established through repetition. Extant cultural materials may offer an intertextual association but, where the signification process is dependent on cultural experience of the individual spectator, can suffer from cultural ambiguities. Much less ambiguous, but still far from perfect, is spoken or sung text, with meaning imbued in the performance, the music and the text itself. Intended meanings can be strongly conveyed via songs specifically composed for a screenplay, as is the case with The Tracker. Nevertheless, issues of authorship require consideration.

Text as a Site of Conflict

The fact that the song lyrics for The Tracker were written by (Dutch-Australian) De Heer has been a site of conflict for some commentators, who have questioned the propriety of having such emotional words sung by an Aboriginal person (De Heer, 2007: 7). But De Heer explains how the song texts were integral to his screenplay:

... in the writing of the words, I had to do it because the words were going to affect how one reads the film—I couldn’t begin to think of letting somebody else write them because they had such an intimate relationship with the storytelling of the film.

In fact, when asked in a radio interview how he felt singing songs written by a ‘whitfella’, Archie Roach defended the process, stating firmly “They’re MY words, those words belong to MY people!” (De Heer, 2007: 8). It is clear that Roach felt very strongly that the words and the music were appropriate to the story. This of itself is not a defence of De Heer’s presumptive actions, and, as far back as 1993, Marcia Langton warned against considering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as speaking with one voice, and against making:

... the assumption of the undifferentiated ‘Other’. More specifically, the assumption... that all Aborigines are alike and equally understand each other, without regard to cultural variation, history, gender, sexual preference, and so on. (Langton, 1993: 27)

However, up to 2002 when The Tracker was produced, no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person had had the opportunity to relate the early colonial experience from an indigenous perspective in a feature-length film. De Heer’s film reveals a part of Australia’s indigenous and settler mutual history, expressed as a uniquely powerful narrative that at the time was little acknowledged by the wider community. This film has carried the message to substantial audiences mainly within Australia. More recently, Rachel Perkins and SBS produced the First

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10 The film grossed almost AUD$800k by March 2003 but also was recognized through several Australian and international film awards, including a Screen Music Award to Tardif and De Heer for the song Far Away Home.
After

Australians
documentary series (2008) giving an eye-opening account of the first two hundred years of European and Indigenous interaction in Australia. These films and others like them have an important role to play in changing perceptions, and music and songs can assist in such a project.

Language in The Tracker Narrative

Although Aboriginal language is used at points throughout The Tracker, Gulpilil’s character makes it clear quite early in the film that there is no universal Aboriginal language, that the people of one area cannot necessarily understand the speech of those from another area. When Aboriginal language is used, at no point are we given the support of translated subtitles although meaning is discernable via the film context.

For non-speakers of an Aboriginal language, there is no conflict implicit in the use of language, per se. However, speakers of Aboriginal languages might have cause to wonder who is represented by the use of language in the dialogue and in the songs. Is it The Tracker, The Fugitive, the various groups of ‘bush blacks’ that we see, or the voice of the ‘Chorus’, Archie Roach? As the location of the action in the film is indeterminate, perhaps we do not need to know. De Heer notes the language used in the songs is Bundjalung, a language from the far northeast corner of New South Wales, the language of Archie’s father. The words were written by De Heer and translated into Bundjalung by Archie Roach, Michael Walker and Michelle Torrens.

Language is used as a statement of power within the narrative. When The Tracker pretends not to understand an instruction from the leader of the tracking party, The Fanatic grabs the youngest of the tracking party and declares, “This man, for a white man, displays a particularly low level of intelligence, yet he understands what I say BECAUSE he is a white man.” The Fanatic also attempts to assert his

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11 Special Broadcasting Service, the multi-lingual television (and radio) service for multicultural Australia.
12 Personal communication with director, 13th September 2009.
authority over The Tracker through (limited) use of Aboriginal words. Later, it is revealed that, not only does The Tracker speak English and at least two different Aboriginal languages, he speaks Latin as well! Language holds an elevated status of importance within the narrative, and thus consideration of the actual languages used in both dialogue and songs is not particularly significant. Indeed, The Tracker’s role in the narrative as both a servant of the whitefellas ostensibly assisting in the search for The Fugitive but sympathetic to the Indigenous peoples makes him an archetypal ‘everyman’, and this is conveyed with the mixture of languages in song and dialogue.

The voice of Archie Roach is recognisable, particularly for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander audiences, and even though he is never seen on screen, his singing style is easily identifiable. Many Aboriginal people are aware of Roach’s own history as one of the ‘stolen generation’ (Roach, undated). Additionally, David Gulpilil’s upbringing as a traditional Yolŋu man from East Arnhem Land is well known to many Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Gulpilil, undated). Rather than this knowledge compromising the ‘suspension of disbelief’ required for engagement with the narrative, it offers an additional level of meaning to the film.

Conclusions

The use of a sung narration in a film score can be seen to derive from the Chorus, as seen in ancient Greek theatre. A comparative history reveals the more common technique of the instrumental leitmotif to derive from the same source. The inclusion of songs in The Tracker as a principle vehicle of unspoken communication is an unusual narrative technique, particularly in the context of contemporary Australian cinema. However, it is but one of several innovations that De Heer has employed in this film to create a work of fiction with a powerful, lasting emotive effect. Brad Green’s review highlights how the choice of the particular voice of Archie Roach positions the songs from the viewpoint of an external observer, standing at a distance from the story. Positioned in this way, the songs, functioning as a ‘Greek Chorus’ or hidden narrator, are able to guide the viewer through the film by observing and interpreting events from an Aboriginal perspective, that of The Tracker himself.

The Tracker uses several techniques—landscape paintings, archetypal characters, the lack of a specific time and place for the action—to reinforce that the film does not present a true story. The use of a sung narration is another, powerful technique to reinforce this fictional construct. Yet while De Heer’s innovative elements would appear to work against a reading of this film as a retelling of historical fact, this does not appear to affect the emotive power that the film commands. Much of this emotive power results from its soundtrack: Archie Roach’s rich and expressive voice, Graham Tardif’s aptly chosen sparse instrumentation and musical arrangements, and Rolf De Heer’s effective lyrics. The message is not subtle, as the subject matter demands. The use of sung narration leaves little room for misinterpretation of the underlying message.

As the final credits roll, De Heer issues a call for the audience to engage in the process of reconciliation with the indigenous people of Australia, through the lyrics of the final song:

*Hope’s all we have, until we find a way,*

*For all around to respect what we say.*
Blood and land, it’s not our shame,
Chain our hands, take our lands,
We stay.

That’s where our future goes, searching for those
Who will carry the burden with us.
Always, we hope.

By engaging the emotions of the audience, De Heer attempts to engage them more actively in the process of reconciliation for past wrongs in Australian post-colonial society. In that regard, the use of the ‘Greek Chorus’ narrative device in The Tracker music has addressed the overarching aims of the director, mobilising a philosophical discourse on race relations and performing this function in an effective (and affective) way. The music in this film raises potential issues of authorship and appropriation, and has been a site of conflict. In The Tracker the primary use of songs to serve as a ‘Greek Chorus’ has proven to be an effective tool for emotional engagement. De Heer has eschewed any attempt to objectively portray a true story; rather, The Tracker employs music interwoven in the narrative to not only entertain, but also to inform and, ultimately perhaps, to change opinions.

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SCREEN MUSIC FUTURES
Deriving Income from Screen Composition - An Australian Industry Symposium
Rebecca Coyle and Natalie Lewandowski

Abstract
A public symposium co-hosted by the Australian Guild of Screen Composers and a Southern Cross University research team was held at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, Sydney, in September 2010. The event was coordinated by Jo Smith, Executive Manager of the AGSC, with session host Rebecca Coyle, and the speakers were composers Guy Gross, Christopher Gordon and Amanda Brown; composer/AFTRS educator Martin Armiger; composer and President of the AGSC, Clive Harrison; and Michelle O’Donnell from the Australasian Performing Rights Association. The article comprises an edited extract of the symposium transcription that focuses on the business aspects of screen music production, and how composers can generate income from their work in the future.

Keywords
Australian screen music, Australian Guild of Screen Composers, screen music industry, Australasian Performing Rights Association

Introduction
A research project titled ‘Music production and technology in Australian Film: enabling Australian film to embrace innovation’ has been running from 2007 to 2010 (funded by Australia Research Council Discovery Project Grant DP 0770026). One of the project’s culminating events was an industry symposium co-hosted by the Australian Guild of Screen Composers (AGSC) and the research team, held at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), Sydney, on 22 September 2010. The Australian film music research project had looked at many elements of feature film music produced in Australia from the Revival period (late-1960s) to the present, but the symposium was designed to extend debate into some of the most urgent issues facing screen composers in the future. In addressing this brief, the major themes that arose included: the impact of new software and technologies on work practices of composers; innovative practices for the future and the role of the internet; industrial issues including rates of pay and collaborative approaches; and training and education. The following is an edited extract of the symposium transcription (by Natalie Lewandowski) specifically focusing on the business aspects of screen music production, and how composers can derive income from their work.
Brief profiles for the speakers at the Screen Music Futures symposium, in order of presentation, are:

Jo Smith - Executive Director of the Australian Guild of Screen Composers, has worked as a Policy Advisor for the Screen Producers Association of Australia (SPAA), and consultant to the Australian Directors Guild and the Australian Writers’ Guild.

Clive Harrison (President, Australian Guild of Screen Composers and composer (http://www.clivemusic.com.au/);)

Michelle O'Donnell - Manager, Film & TV Writers, Australasian Performing Rights Association (http://www.apra-amcos.com.au/)


Amanda Brown – popular music performer and composer for Look Both Ways; Son of a Lion; recipient of the 2009 APRA-AGSC Screen Music Award for Best Documentary (http://www.myspace.com/amandagabriellebrown);

Martin Armiger – composer for film and television, songwriter; Head of Screen Composition, AFTRS; and Board Member of Screen Rights (http://www.martinarmiger.com/)

Christopher Gordon – composer for Mao’s Last Dancer, winner of the 2009 AFI Award for Best Music; co-composer for Master & Commander: The Far Side of the World (http://www.christophergordon.net/index.htm);

Additional questions and observations are provided by members of the audience, which included AGSC members, AFTRS and other tertiary students, academics and other researchers, and interested members of the public. The transcription extract commences with Jo Smith’s welcome.

Jo Smith (JS):

It's not often that you actually get industry and academia coming together and the film industry is usually pretty isolated. The aim tonight is to look at various questions which we need to look at as a [screen music] industry; issues that are to be considered include – Innovation, What is the future of screen music in Australia, technology, industrial issues, it’s always been a question of whether or not composers should be industrializing, rates of pay, the impact of whether we can continue to have an industry based on what people are earning, training and education, also another central question to this industry is; whether or not there actually is a screen music industry in Australia – is there an actual industry or is it just people working on their own in their own little studios that just happen to come together because of their work on films.

Clive Harrison (CH):
Some of the issues that are top of mind for me and for many composers who contact the guild [AGSC] are the nature of the contracts that they are being asked to sign when they are doing television or film work. Payment per episode fees, publishing, who gets the publishing – do they retain 100%? The relationship of co-production partners, for instance if they have partners in France, England, the USA etc.

I have noticed that people here are far more qualified than me to talk about the film and motion picture end of town – I have not done that – I have just done the television end of town. For example, a typical mid-range TV cartoon series produced in Australia, the composer may get AUD$3000 or $4000 an episode, per episode, for 22 minutes, of which 15 to 18 minutes would be highly synchronised, so there is a lot of time spent synchronising. You’re not writing two minute cues which are washing underneath the dialogue, you are writing music that is hitting stuff—every five to ten seconds you’re hitting something. It is quite labour intensive, I would quite commonly spend 80 to 100 hours for the first episode and by the time I get to episode 20 or 26 I might still be doing 30 hours per episode. So there are a lot of hours going into it, as well as providing all the recording equipment, doing everything basically. So using that as a starting place, the 3 or 4 grand an episode, I can say that there are some Australian composers that are getting a lot more than that and there are certainly composers who are getting less than that. I know composers that are getting double that in Australia, but there are not many.

I was interested to find that, in Canada, animation composers were getting similar rates of pay, factoring in the exchange rate and so forth – they were getting similar money for their budget. The same sort of story in the UK, slightly higher rates of pay, but it is hard to say. You can’t ring up every animation composer in England and ask, ‘What are you charging?’

I found it interesting when I spoke to a number of animation composers in Los Angeles and New York that some of them were getting USD$10-12,000 an episode. Which would seem to be a fairly standard rate in the top end of the spectrum, not the high top end, but they were doing okay. This brings me just to inform you about the publishing issue. Before 2000 I used to retain all of my publishing and after 2000 things started to happen where I was starting to notice that production houses were starting to sniff around and ask for half of the publisher’s share, meaning 25% of my share of publishing. So negotiations started to take place. More recently, however, at first I started hearing anecdotal evidence that production houses were asking for 50% of the publishing, which horrified me. Then I got asked for 50% of my publishing on a recent show. So it is clear that, in the animation world, production houses are saying “There’s an income stream that has been going to composers all this time” – a royalty stream, “we want a piece of it”. They don’t take into consideration in that regard, that pay rates for composers have gone down dramatically since the 1980s and there has been a movement by some composers in Los Angeles to join up with the [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters union so they have some negotiating clout to stop the downward trend on pay rates and conditions.

Generally speaking, from what I can glean from talking to composers and the president of the guild in LA – yes the model in the USA is definitely that
the composer hands over 50% of their publishing, i.e. 100% of the publisher’s share and keeps 50% for himself. However the pie is bigger and they’re getting bigger upfront fees from what I can gather. I am happy to hear other people have different experiences of this. So what we have is a situation where Australian companies are looking to their US counterparts and thinking “that is what we should be doing—taking 50% of the publishing”—however, they’re not paying the same per episode rate as the companies in the USA are paying. The pie that you are tapping into as a composer in Australia is substantially less than the equivalent show in the USA.

The upshot of the whole story is that now there is pressure on improving the composer rates and conditions, but they are always negotiable. Your negotiating will depend on your experience, how desperate you are for the work and your relationship with the producer and director.

We need to know what the values of those things are, i.e. the publishing rights and copyright. At the moment the AGSC’s procedure is to advise composers as best we can, not what rates they should be charging, but what they should protect, or try and protect, and what they should value. I personally treat my royalties like my super, and the production fee that I get per episode is my salary. My intellectual property, my copyrighted musical works are my legacy for my children. So that when I give away my publishing, I am giving away my children’s legacy—it is a very personal thing for me. It is not always the same for everyone else.

Michelle O’Donnell (MO):

What Clive said, a lot of it is very true. I would hazard to say that $4000 per episode is very high. If you moved outside the animation world, into the soap operas and the day-to-day TV drama, you’re doing very well to get $4000 for a half hour episode, it is obviously a lot worse. Particularly for the reality TV shows you’ll get a lot less.

The general consensus I get from the screen composers I talk to is that it’s tough out there, budgets are shrinking and it’s very hard. Another problem for film and television composers is the rise and rise of production music. I know we have had some discussions with the AGSC about this and are trying to come to terms with what we can do. What we have noticed in this distribution is that now a lot of television shows are using free or almost free production music. From our [APRA] point of view, every time someone uses production music, one of our composers loses a job. The other thing with a lot of production music in Australia is that it is foreign, so the backend royalties will not end up in Australia. I think Les Gock was interesting in his suggestion at the last AGSC meeting, coming up with “if you can’t beat them, join them”. I think composers need to think outside the box in terms of finding a way around that, or at least finding some extra work. There’s more and more people changing from being pop composers to being film and television composers, and there are not that many projects. In the last 12 months there has been a huge downturn in the spend on film music budgets, we’re hoping that it is just the global financial crisis. We’ve just done the judging for the Screen Awards and there has been a very big decrease in the number of film projects and that is across the board. In
documentary, short film (which I was surprised, a lot of it is self-funded) and
the big one is jingles and advertisements, there are half as many jingles and
ad campaigns last year as there was the previous year, so that’s got to be
50% less work. Having spoken to composers, this is true. A lot of
[advertisers] just re-hashed old campaigns, a lot of them didn’t have the
money to start something else. So it’s another area where the film and
television composers would go if there were not any work in film and
television [but] in this instance it’s not actually there to provide a backstop
for them that it used to.

Guy Gross (GG):

I am being controversial on purpose, but part of me, certainly not all of me,
seems to think that quality is important, and I’m happy for you to attack me
on that because another part of me thinks that it isn’t. Certainly some of
what I create in my studio everyday is far from quality, it is functional
music, and it serves a purpose and keeps my clients happy—if they want
salt and fat, then that is what I give them, salt and fat. I am a functional
composer, I occasionally get to make filet mignon, it just doesn’t happen very
often. From a point of view of a composer who is seeking to create quality
music, there is a dilemma here, which is very difficult to reconcile. Are we
composers that are professionally trained and want to create high art music;
or are we functional composers that simply do what we are asked to do,
simply add the salt, fat and sugar to effectively sell that hamburger. I think
that is why composers find themselves in that dilemma, and that dilemma
extends into how professionally we take ourselves.

It’s no surprise that lawyers are so highly paid; their actual job is to
negotiate like dogs, they’ve done that to themselves. Composers, we’re soft—
that’s not what we’re trained to do—no one has trained us to negotiate hard,
someone maybe trained us to play guitar, hopefully more than three chords.
It is the nature of musicians, we are not those hard-nosed negotiators.

Amanda Brown (AB):

I feel very much like the small-time composer up here tonight. I have only
been composing for film for ten years. I am largely an individual, I work from
a home studio. My home studio is in a tiny sunroom off the bedroom, I feel
incredibly unprofessional at times when I have directors and editors and
producers come around to my house for a music feedback session on works-
in-progress. They literally have to squeeze into a room that holds no more
than 3 people and walk through the bedroom on the way.

I guess I have been lucky. I have had a good run of interesting jobs, I am
represented by a composer’s agent: his name is Norman Parkhill and he
works mainly in feature films and television as a music supervisor. He has
been my agent for probably 6 or 7 years now. Like me, he also came from
the popular music world. He represents a small stable of around 10-12
composers, quite a diverse bunch of composers. I would say that on the
whole he generates about 50% of my work and I generate the rest myself—
just from relationships that I have built up with filmmakers who come back
for repeat jobs or people who have coincidentally read about me from
someone or somewhere. He takes a 15% commission and 10% even if I generate the work. But the benefits of that are that he will negotiate contracts and budgets.

I do concur with people, even in my relatively small career span—budgets do seem to be getting smaller, year by year. The very first feature film that I did, I think the budget was AUD$40,000, which seemed like a huge amount of money to me at the time. It was such a problematic job, because it was my first job I was trying to do such a great job and I had all these grand ideas and I wanted to write a Magnolia style score—with songs written specifically for the film, collaborating with another songwriter. I think I only composed 18–20 cues of music and in the final film they ended up using 3.

The feature film I worked on this year Wog Boy II: The Kings of Mykonos, for which I had a co-composer, Nick West, I think that the fee for that film was $30,000 and we split it 3 ways. So it ended up being $10,000 each, and it was a lot more work. $10,000 for each composer and then a $10,000 budget for studio, mixing, musicians. I think it’s good to talk figures so people know what the reality is. Yes, it’s pretty appalling—that wasn’t including the music synch budget, I don’t know what that was actually. We did do a number of re-records of songs, so they just paid the publishing licence and not for the sound recording.

With this film, The Kings of Mykonos, we found out that we had the job about a month before the film was locked off. We had about 2 months to work on the project—which I think is pretty good. I like having that time before lock-off personally. I was engaged on the film primarily because they needed a lot of Greek music. Not knowing much about Greek music and being hired to write that, I had to do a lot of research and find some Greek musicians as well—which was enjoyable. But just getting back to the miniscule sounding budget, at the time, I tried to rationalize it. I knew it was not going to be like an incredibly artistic piece of auteur filmmaking—having seen bits of the first Wog Boy. I took the punt that the back-end royalties on a popular and commercially successful film would compensate for the small fee. I haven’t got the APRA on that yet, so I cannot tell you definitively, but maybe other people here can? With commercially successful films it can be a way to make some money. This was my first commercial film, the other ones I had worked on were very much art-house type feature films.

Just commenting on our industry at-large, I would say that it is very small. It is largely government subsidized, which is very different to the two big industries of Hollywood and Bollywood. Hence our pool of productions is really small—that’s kind of the opposite of where I came from which was the world of pop music. Pop music is a really capitalist private-enterprise, sink-or-swim kind of system.

To finish off on working as a composer and on a composing industry in general, I guess that probably Michelle would know better than I do that the majority of screen composers are like me: freelance individuals working in their own studios. There are some collectives, like Song Zu and Nylon, which are collections of half a dozen composers pooling their resources. Having the finances to be able to employ someone who can chase work for them but—in their cases—the money that keeps them afloat comes from advertising. As an individual I have quite deliberately chosen not to go down that road. Not
just idealistically because I am ideologically opposed to advertising but it’s just something that I have never really been interested in. I have to say I am not completely driven by ‘the money’ in chasing work. Hence, I have worked in a number of different jobs and I continue to supplement my film composing gigs with other gigs like being a session musician for other people, a bit of teaching, working as an engineer for community groups in the Bondi Pavilion. Also, for the last 20 years I have worked part-time as a library assistant, which I’ve actually consciously chosen to do—I have found that the world of music and screen composing is pretty male-dominated and the world of library work is pretty female-dominated—so I find it a good counterbalance in my working life.

There was a survey done by the Australia Council recently about artists and their incomes.¹ The majority of artists have other jobs. I call them McJobs, because I am generation X and obviously the library is my McJob – but I find that McJobs also give you a certain amount of time away from sitting in the studio and constantly having to come up with the ‘creative goods’. Your brain can be free to imagine, research, be inspired by something outside the studio. Even though I am just down to one day a week at the library now—which shows that for me personally things are looking up—I still value that day.

Martin Armiger (MA):

First of all, money – for as long as I have been involved it’s been a sort of zero gross sum adventure, really. [With film composition] I started with nothing and ended with nothing and it seems as though nothing has changed. What we do is, we do something that we love doing and, as a result, we don’t have the money to put down on a house when we’re in our 20s, or we don’t have that thing that gets you organized so you can relax later on. Most of us don’t, I mean I have had friends in this who have made money early. But the money doesn’t ever seem to make sense. Except if you just keep on doing it eventually you get a bit back.

With all of the budgets, the producer never ever really says “how much do you want?” I say, “How much have you got?” Whether it is 30 grand or 100 grand, whatever it is and then I talk to Danielle [Weissner: assistant, co-worker] and she says I am crazy, “you can’t do this, get more money”. It never makes sense, I am really bad with money.

A lot of what we talk about is money and our working conditions and you’ve got a kind of academic thing and what you’re interested in is music in a theoretical way. What I’m trying to say is that the film and television industries are two very conservation institutions in a way. When you talk about the future of music and the future of film music you have this strange disjunction. This is partly because there is this need to keep the client happy, and the clients are trying to keep the network happy and the network is trying to keep the punters happy. So you don’t get this most exciting music coming into film, because you put it in and someone will go “what is that?!”. This splintering of music into niches, for instance I love that Japanese feedback music – I could listen to that all night – but if you put

¹ Throsby and Hollister (2010).
that into a film, people will say, “what is that?!” There’s very few filmmakers who can listen to music that is weird and out there and stick it into the film. There are not many directors and producers who listen like that and are prepared to take a risk. Most of the time you’re being asked to “do something like..., be like this”, write the score like the temp tracks that they have been using. Do something that someone else has done 10 minutes ago and it’s not really exciting as music. I can remember a little while ago, someone telling me that their favourite music is film music, and I thought “really?” I mean at a dinner party it won’t get in the way, it’ll sit underneath the dialogue!

Jim Manzie (JM) (Audience member):

I have been pretty much involved in the factory system that is Hollywood, when you’re churning it out and you have to churn it out by 9:30am on Thursday otherwise you’re fired, that absolutely is the case in the system that I was working in. Although, I have to say throughout all that, there has to be a kernel of yourself, your self-belief and passion—things that inspired you about music to begin with.

You really do have an enormous responsibility to bring a lot of emotion to the film. A lot of the directors are looking for some guidance and some extra power for what they have worked on. I found it always to be a huge responsibility to be writing something which supports somebody else’s vision.

On the larger side of what you’re talking about with the business, I would say that things have been getting slower and consistently harder. The advent of midi after analogue made us learn new skills, we’ve had to continually re-adjust and learn new skills. Of course the producers have seen that there are tremendous opportunities for driving the race to the bottom in our industry. But what can you do? You just need to maintain that personal belief and love of your work. As Martin said, you get your first guitar and that’s what first gets you into it and, after 20 years of doing it over there, that’s what has kept me in it—just those little flashes of satisfaction and the understanding that what you’re doing is helping somebody else’s vision or helping the public really enjoy a piece of artistic cooperation.

Audience member - question:

Just in general, is there a big effect on composers with the use of popular songs in movies? I know that has been around for ages, but does it affect anything?

GG:

Some movies more than others.

MO:

They suck up your budget.
GG:

If you're lucky it's quarantined away from your production budget, if you're unlucky it is included within it and there's a whole big fee, "oh by the way there's a Rolling Stones track that we're going to use so we're going to need 50 grand out of your budget".

MA:

I think that the skill of writing a song is something that is invaluable if you're going to do films. Songs are a great form, and to encapsulate something in a few minutes - a hook or drive or contour that will express that emotion in a concentrated form - it's a great skill, gift and talent. We all write songs, sometimes we only write songs because the movie calls for one, but writing songs is a part of what we do. If we write a song it is a great advantage. I sometimes think we should spend more time on songs in our course here, because so many directors want them and so many producers want them and therefore if you can do it you're in a better position.

AB:

Can I just say that I have written several songs for films, particularly for the films which have been collaborations with the director, often with the script. There has been collaboration on the lyrics, often they'll provide the lyric and I will write the music. I find that very rewarding and a great way to work. Of course that song is going to be much more suitable for the film because it has been tailored for that purpose.

Danielle Weissner (DW) – Audience member:

Over the last ten years I have been working in music post and as a music production manager, taking care of some of the things involved in the business side of music for a composer, or assisting them with that at any rate.

It is apparent in this symposium, that the business end of this guild is not particularly being looked after and I think education is a key in how we present our budgets of what is required to compose music for films and how to make budgets work. Budgets are a key idea. If you want to have a future as a music composer, you must attend the business side. So not only do we need music supervisors, but we need music production managers and we need music editors. I think that should be looked at to innovate and move forward.

JS:

Just following up from that: is there resistance from composers to that because they see it as coming from their budget but not from the production budget?

DW:

When I am doing a budget, I actually factor myself in and above the budget, so the issue is to make the budgets a reality. Several times I have worked on
budgets before where producers do not pick up the phone anymore and say “what is your rate?”, they don’t ask facilities what their rate is. All I’m saying is pick up the phone. How much is a musician worth for a call, for a session, pick up the phone and ask the musician. Is it $250 an hour, $400 an hour—how much is it going to cost me to get my piano tuned?—don’t say, well it’s not in my music budget so I don’t have to do it, still factor it in if it needs to get paid for. When the film is being budgeted, 3 years before you’re ever going to come onto the film, producers need to be educated in actual fact.

Christopher Gordon (CG):

Can I just pick up on something there, I tend to do it all myself. I compose from the spreadsheet, almost literally—I watch the film, I break it down, I get an idea of how much music there is, what size orchestras we’ll need and that sort of thing. As a rule of thumb, we’ll probably get about 12 minutes of music recorded in one session, so then I know how many sessions I need to have. Not all of it is going to be big, some of it may be quite small, maybe just four players for one session and so on. I will work all of that out before I compose a single note. I then compose from it. When I am doing the stuff that is going to be big, I work on it until I have filled out that column then I move onto the next part. Gradually all the columns seem to fill out. I always do a spreadsheet. Generally I budget $275 per musician as an average, which includes a contractor’s fee, which is for an orchestra. Then there are extra little bits and things that you throw in. The point is though, that I do a spreadsheet and invariably I will come in, with budgets of around $50,000, [or] about $1000 under or over.

DW:

How much of a contingency do you include in your budget for the lock-off that never locks off?

CG:

That isn’t a part of my music budget, that is more to do with editing. So if they want to go on for ten years making changes, it’s not going to affect me. It’s in a different budget. That’s a standard American thing, the music editor is not a part of the music budget. [This is in my contract.]

The way that my jobs are, they pretty much always involve working with the orchestra. So you don’t re-cut that, you don’t re-do the orchestra – most changes I deal with are before that, generally on manuscript or before on your demonstrations that you have done on synthesizers. So [last minute edits impacting the score] don’t particularly affect my budgeting.

DW:

I think it’s really important, contracts, to define the terms under which everybody is able to work. Because what happens is you’ve got the squeeze to get it done at the end, and they’re still cutting the film, but you have to get it finished, even when there is no more money. Well, I’m sorry, but no more money, how does one eat?
GG:

There is a need for discussion of that holistic underpinning of composers and their conditions, their labour law – there needs to be a point where the composer says “no that’s not an acceptable fee, either find some more fees or I’m doing the score on the harmonica.”

DW:

But are you not looking for innovations or ways to bring the community together to make your conditions better? I’m just saying that this is just one thing you can all do to make it better.

Audience member:

Is it not a problem with the scarcity of work in Australia that there is always someone who is willing to do it for less than you are? Someone else who wants that experience. I know that, in advertising, people used to get paid to do demos, but people started saying well, we want that job so we’ll do that demo for free. So that used to be something that was paid but it is not anymore, it sort of seems like, unless everybody has the same controls for what they will and won’t do for that amount of money—which is what we were talking about how people won’t release the information on their rates—but unless everybody does that, then it does turn into a situation where people will do it for nothing to get experience. Then this brings the standard down, as there is no money to do it properly.

MO:

But that is consistent across the whole music industry.

GG:

So people need to consistently say no, and then call their friends and say, “if Joe Blogs calls you, say no”—it’s illegal but you should do it.

Audience member:

I live with a sound location recordist and a film production assistant who does a lot of running and various miscellaneous things during production. I have found that there is a tremendous disparity between their expectations and what producers know they have to pay them to get them out of bed, compared with post-production. I wonder if this is because there is somehow this rigid set of expectations. Maybe it is because line producers exist and they make sure that, if you’re a location sound recordist and you’re working on a feature, you must get paid this amount of money. Even my flatmate who is just out of uni will not negotiate because if they can’t afford her, then the next company will and there’s an understanding that you won’t get a good person unless you pay this much. There’s no undercutting.

GG:

The problem is, in music there are far too many variables. What’s the experience of the composer? What style of score is it? Do we retain the
publishing rights? Are they licensing just for Australia? There are all these variables, which means that 50 grand can buy you a score of varying size and quality depending on the film variables. Producers don't understand what their money is buying them, as composers we are a bit to blame for that. If we can try and quantify what a composer should get, for instance, is it a day rate that we're expecting? Most composers don't work as though it is a day rate, a lot of them don't like to think that they work at a day rate. Are you paid per bar, is it the duration of the music? It is just terrifying how many variables go into a score and then calculating how much it is worth.

JS:

Just to add to this topic, I worked on a shoot last year where the sound recordist and cameraperson were working and they are paid a day rate. In theory they are supposed to work an eight-hour day, but they were working 15-hour days, so they were actually getting paid half of what they should have been. So, while on paper it looks great for those people, I think that the reality is very very different.

GG:

So the producers will say, hire Joe because he works double the time but we can still pay him the same. You still have the same problem.

AB:

I don't know, but historically, location sound recordists and other sound people have had some sort of union background that have ensured those hourly rates. Musicians and composers, we don't have that and because we've all agreed that we're largely working as individuals, clearly we do need some kind of organized collectivism to mobilise and get in now before things get worse.

JS:

[I'd like to introduce] Lynn Gailey who used to work for the media, entertainment and arts alliance. She was also head of film development at the Australian Film Commission, so Lynn actually knows about the union area. Do you have any comments that you would like to make?

Lynn Gailey (LG) – Audience member:

I think that the most important thing is, it goes back to education. I remember in the 1980s and production managing feature films and I would get the budget and it would say “Art Department: Sets – allow 25,000, Props – allow 25,000, Locations – allow 25,000, Music – allow 50,000” and you would think, okay that’s a fat lot of help to no one, because what sort of items are they wanting? Do they want it shot on a specific location? So you're starting from a budget that is nonsense. There was a very big push in the 1980s to stop budgets being acceptable where they said things like “allow” – you would ask for a further breakdown, where is your sets, wardrobe make-up etc.?
GG:

But frankly, what producer knows the scope of the score before they get into it?

LG:

But what they should be doing is factoring it in, but they don’t, so they’re making ‘educated’ guesstimates—I mean it’s not rocket science to work out how much it is going to be per session with an orchestra, what size orchestra are you allowing for? These discussions need to be had with the director. A vision needs to be budgeted from the beginning. Music is in worse shape than most other sectors on a production, it is at the very end, the film might start with a 10% contingency, but you can bet your bottom dollar that, by and large, it is all gone on the last day of principal photography. Any money that can then be stolen gets stolen in editing and, by the time you’re heading towards music, there is nothing left, so I think that goes back to education. There needs to be a dialogue with the Screen Producers Association [of Australia: SPAA] to get some genuine rigour back into the way productions are budgeted.

CH:

[Comparing work opportunities in Australia to those in US or Europe] I don’t know if anyone has done any research in terms of numerical data. Guy raised an interesting point a year or so ago when we were wrestling with this whole rates card idea, he said “if we added up the total amount of every production in Australia we would come up with some finite figure and we could calculate from that finite figure the amount that is allocated to the music budget. Then if we use that figure, we could then take that total amount spend on music in Australia and compare that to the number of people that are putting their hands up and saying ‘I’m a screen composer’—we might find that there is not enough work to keep half of those people gainfully employed.”

My experience, from the people I know here, is that nearly all of those who work in the screen composition world have to augment their income somehow. Playing live gigs, playing on an album, teaching, working in a library, whatever. Whether we are worse off than the composers in LA would be very hard to find, because I am sure that every restaurant you went into you would find a film composer amongst the waiters.

I was thinking before this session started, I would like to ask of the people in this room, who could say that they make more than the basic wage from writing screen music? That’s about $30,000 a year. As the president of the AGSC, I would love for most of my members to make as much as my plumber. There are few and far between that do, I am one of the lucky ones, but it terrifies me that so many people, far more talented than I, don’t have any work.

From talking to the composers that I met with in Canada, France, London, they were all complaining of a lack of work and it is a battle for all of them, whether it is worse there, I don’t know. I know that there is far more work in Hollywood than there is here, but there are also far more composers. There’s
the possibility of being a bigger fish in a smaller ocean here, so perhaps it is easier to get noticed here. So there might not be thousands of people competing for the work, there may just be hundreds or twenties or tens. I don’t know if there has been any quantitative survey. The general feeling that I got from my trip is that it is tough. The interesting thing is when the lyricists union started talking about joining up with the teachers union in LA, people like Alf Clausen (the guy who wrote background music for The Simpsons) submitted an article to the guild of screen composers over there to the effect that the money that is being tossed around now, amortised for the cost of living, is 18% of what it was in the 1980s. The way he based that was on the fact that back then he was being paid a composer’s fee and all the orchestra, copying, studio hire, was all being paid by the production house. His fee was quarantined. So if he took that figure that he was getting paid as a composer and did the CPI for 30 years, the rate that he would get now would be 6 times what it was. But now he is being asked to do everything within that budget, delivering a finished product to the production house.

The 18% was just his example, but when I read that, I thought about how I was doing a lot of advertising music in the 1970s and 80s as a session musician. I know some of the figures that the composers were getting for the big ads back then and I know people now are not getting that kind of money. I can give you an example, I played bass for a TV commercial which was 60 seconds to the book, and I know that the budget for the 60 second TV commercial was AUD$30,000 for the music, which was in 1979/80 or thereabouts. I don’t do commercials these days, but I do know that, if there are any people that do commercials here, they would jump at the chance of doing a job like that.

CG:

Now they want to give you $30,000 for the score on a feature film.

Conclusion

While the Screen Music Futures symposium covered additional topics to the above transcription extracts, this article has focused on the discussions and debates about income-generation for screen music composers in the future. Various problems and issues were raised related to the current state of the industry and generated subsequent discussions in other forums. Although no fixed solutions were offered, each speaker offered their own perspective on deriving income from screen composing. The training of composers to work within budgets and to deal with financial aspects of contracts is a priority for the future, and additional research and debate may yield further strategies for deriving realistic income from screen composition.

2 Amanda Brown proposed the following additional strategies in a subsequent AGSC discussion: 1) Attract additional payments for digital content delivery by various means. This requires assisting APRA to lobby government to impose a levy on computer hardware and MP3 players to compensate copyright owners for illegal downloads; 2) Strengthen the AGSC by aligning more closely with other professional associations and achieving quality status for members as a way of improving rates of pay; 3) Market post-production in Australia to attract and retain on-shore services; and 4) Investigate superannuation and health benefits indexed to income for composers.
The full transcription of this event may be requested through the Australian Guild of Screen Composers.

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Bibliography

DIRECTING MUSIC-BASED DOCUMENTARIES
Curtis Levy on *The Matilda Candidate* and *Hephzibah*

Adolfo Cruzado

Abstract

This article features an interview with director Curtis Levy who discusses the creative process in his music-based documentaries and the storytelling challenges inherent in musical characters and music subjects. Levy’s documentary film, *The Matilda Candidate* (2010), follows the comedic journey taken by the filmmaker as he stands for election to the Australian Senate on the platform that the popular folk song, ‘Waltzing Matilda’, should become the national anthem. *The Matilda Candidate* is a ‘hybrid’ style documentary incorporating interviews, archival footage, essay reflections, comedy and observational techniques to tell its story. In the second part of this article, Curtis comments on another music-based documentary, his multi-award winning *Hephzibah* (1998) that investigates the life of the American-Australian concert pianist and human rights activist, Hephzibah Menuhin (1920-1981). Levy indicates how he uses music to enhance the viewer's response and other layers and forms of storytelling to engage TV audiences.

Keywords
Curtis Levy, *The Matilda Candidate*, *Hephzibah*, music-based documentaries, Australian documentary film

Introduction to Curtis Levy

Curtis Levy (born 1942 in Melbourne) is an Australian independent film producer/director who has made several films for television and cinema release. He studied Arts and History at Monash University, majoring in Asian and Indonesian studies and was the editor for the student newspaper, *CHAOS*. Before graduating he commenced employment as an assistant producer at Channel 0, a commercial TV station in Melbourne owned by Reg Ansett (that later became ATV-10 under control of Rupert Murdoch). His interest in film developed during his travels in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, where he worked as a unit manager on a drama series and as an assistant director on a number of documentaries. On his return to Australia he joined the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) where he made several radio documentaries. After transferring to ABC Television as a researcher, Levy progressed to directing documentaries for the ABC and Film Australia. In the mid 1970s Curtis made films for the Australian Institute of
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AITSIS) in Canberra, where he directed four documentaries, including *Sons Of Namatjira* (1976) about a group of Aboriginal artists living in a camp outside Alice Springs.

Curtis’s interest in stories from Asia has led him to make five major films in Indonesia, including *Invitation To A Wedding* (1995), about Islamic dissidents in Indonesia and *Riding The Tiger* (1992), a three-part series examining the origin of authoritarian rule in Indonesia and nominated for the Australian Film Institute (AFI) Award for Best Documentary and Winner of the Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) Award for Best Television Series. In 2001 he completed *High Noon In Jakarta*, living for four months in the Freedom Palace in Jakarta to make an intimate portrayal of the President of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, and the film was selected as a finalist at the Hollywood and Banff Film Festivals and the ATOM Film Awards. Other films Curtis Levy has made in Asia include: *The White Monkey* (1987), a film about an Australian priest charged with multiple murders and imprisoned in the Philippines by the Marcos regime; and *Breakout* (1984), about the mass breakout by Japanese prisoners-of-war from their prison camp in Cowra, which won the Award for Best Television Documentary at the Chicago International Film Festival. In 2004 Curtis co-directed (with Bentley Dean) *The President Versus David Hicks*, a film about the Australian Taliban fighter incarcerated in Guantánamo Bay detention camp. The film won the AFI award for best documentary and an Australian television-industry Logie award, and was screened at the Hot Docs International Film Festival in Canada and Full Frame Film Festival in the United States of America.¹

The following article features a Curtis Levy interview² discussing two documentaries in which music is featured in contrasting ways, commencing with a recent film, *The Matilda Candidate* (2010), followed by an earlier biographical work, *Hephzibah* (1998).

Part I: *The Matilda Candidate* – Film Overview

‘Waltzing Matilda’ is Australia’s most widely known bush ballad, or rural folk song, and is widely perceived as the unofficial national anthem of Australia. The title is Australian slang for travelling by foot with one’s goods in a ‘matilda’ (bag) slung over one’s back. The song narrates the story of an itinerant worker, or swagman, making a drink of tea at a bush camp and capturing a sheep to eat. When the sheep’s owner arrives with three police officers to arrest the worker for the theft (a crime punishable by hanging), the worker commits suicide by drowning himself in the nearby ‘billabong’ (watering hole), and then returns to haunt the site. The original lyrics were written by poet and nationalist, ‘Banjo’ Paterson, in 1895, and the music by Christine McPherson during a meeting at Dagworth Homestead estate near Winton, Queensland. It was first published as sheet music in 1903. Extensive folklore surrounds the popular song and the process of its creation, to the extent that the song has its own museum, the Waltzing Matilda Centre in Winton, Queensland.³

² The interview took place at Levy’s home in Balmain, Sydney, January 21, 2010.
The Matilda Candidate, directed by Levy, was produced by Helen Pankhurst and Christine Olsen with Levy, and funded by ABC TV. The film was screened during the Documentary Fortnight at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, following its premiere at the 2010 Melbourne Film Festival, as well as on the ABC for a special Australia Day broadcast. The documentary features the filmmaker himself, along with his campaign manager, Jo Smith. The story follows Levy’s attempt to run as a candidate for the 2009 Australian Senate elections on the platform that the ‘Waltzing Matilda’ song should be the national anthem and—more broadly—that Australia should become a republic. Levy uses the campaign as a narrative vehicle to explore aspects of national identity and, specifically, Australians’ support for becoming a republic. He looks at the historical parallels between the period in which ‘Waltzing Matilda’ was first written and Australia in the first decade of the millennium. In the 1890s, leaders of the six British colonies occupying the Australian continent started to promote Australian federation. ‘Waltzing Matilda’ was circulating at a time of various federalist activities and referendums, leading to the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act that came into effect on the 1st January 1901. The Matilda Candidate explores Australia’s changing relationship with Great Britain, which is a recurring theme in the nation’s post-colonial history.

Curtis Levy Interview - Origins and Intention of The Matilda Candidate

Adolfo Cruzado (henceforth AC):

What prompted you to use the song, ‘Waltzing Matilda’ as the starting point and central motif for the documentary?
Curtis Levy (henceforth CL):

My research was not initially about the actual song, ‘Waltzing Matilda’. I originally wanted to make a film about why Australians were so scared about wanting to be a republic. I read an article about the song written by the historian, Inga Clendinnen⁴, and she looked at some of the historical background of the song and I realised there was a burgeoning republic movement back at the time when the song was originally written, and we had a dilemma between being Australian or British, and there was a resentment of British control. So, the song lent itself to a broader, more universal story, and we wanted to use that as a microcosm of a bigger picture.

AC:

How do you explore this dilemma in the nation’s character in the documentary?

CL:

The film looks at some of the reasons why we stuck with the British throughout over two hundred years, and that we continue to feel insecure and have a fear of outsiders; in particular back then it was the Asians, the Chinese in particular, and now it’s the Islamic people coming to Australia. Today, a lot of people are afraid, so we have the Australian Navy fighting off refugees and putting them on offshore islands. So, we’ve always had this fear of outsiders. In the film, the actual campaign for the Senate part was humorous, if not comical, but we then go off to some more serious tangents throughout the film, looking at Australian history and its character.

Working with the Music Composers

AC:

How did you work with the music composer to enhance the story in the documentary?

CL:

In The Matilda Candidate, we had Caitlyn Yeo as our composer. The complexity of the various elements in the film presented some challenge for the music and Caitlyn did a fantastic job. We showed Caitlyn the film while it was very rough, so she got an idea about where we were heading, and so she could think about it before we got to the fine cut. It happens with a lot of films that they call the composer in at the last minute and the composer doesn’t have enough time to come up with an original work, or to develop ideas that are in tune with the images or the mood of the film. The Matilda Candidate is quite difficult for a composer because it was running a fine line between humour and serious content. There were times when we wanted the audience not to be sure whether we were being serious or when it was being a ‘send up’, being satirical. We wanted the audience to maintain a belief in

⁴ Clendinnen (2006).
the subject, but we also wanted the music to give pointers to the undercurrent of humour running throughout the film.

AC:

Filmmakers often have difficulty talking about music, having to use different descriptions, a different language to convey ideas about music. As a director and producer, how do you overcome this challenge?

CL:

Yes, the language (of music) is very difficult. For example, in the first draft of the music that Caitlyn delivered, I guess there was a slight misunderstanding about what was intended in some scenes. The first time she looked at the film, we gave her the chance to respond to what was appropriate, then we realised that it was better to steer more towards a certain direction so that we could get the subtleties in the changes of moods, the balance between the more humorous and serious sequences. The opening sequences we worked on quite a lot. [Fig 1] It was the scene where I am walking down the street with Jo Smith, my campaign manager, and putting up posters. One of the posters falls down, and the camera focuses on the poster falling down after we walk off. The original version of the music was a bit too serious, and the audience would think, ‘how sad that the poster fell down’; but in the final version of the film, the music picks up on the humour, not high slapstick, but giving an indication that this film is not going to be entirely worthy and serious.5

AC:

Apart from the original score by Caitlyn Yeo, there’s also quite a variety of other music in the film...

CL:

The original composition scored had to blend occasionally with some live performances we created especially for the film, of women playing ‘Waltzing Matilda’. For example, there’s the blues version written by Abbey May, a wonderful singer from Western Australia; and Holly Throsby also came up with a version, which she played in our re-enactment. Holly was playing the role of Christine McPherson, the woman who created the original music for ‘Waltzing Matilda’, and we see her with a harp, which she had to play on camera, and she had to learn to play the auto harp for the role. These performances were blended with recorded versions from the archives, such as Eric Bogle’s version of the song and a very funny version of Barry Humphries’s Dame Edna Everage, singing and dancing to ‘Waltzing Matilda’.

Music and Story

AC:

How did you integrate the original story of the song, about the itinerant worker who jumps into the watering hole, with other interpretations of the song’s story?

CL:

In *The Matilda Candidate*, a lot of the story was worked out before we started. The song is so iconic, probably the most iconic Australian song, so it is imbued with all kinds of meaning before, without me having to interpret it at all. It meant certain things to certain people. What I did as a director, was bring a lot of different meanings and uses of the song into the one film, and blended in those uses to the themes I was trying to elaborate. For instance, ‘Waltzing Matilda’ has a very patriotic use; it is used a lot in wars by Australian soldiers, old diggers, and so I wanted to combine the telling of that story by an old digger with my message, a political message that we are always following other people to war, into stupid useless situations. Earlier on in the film, this digger is talking about how he used to sing ‘Waltzing Matilda’ when he was charging Japanese soldiers with bayonets. By singing the song, that gave the soldiers courage. Well this example, this interpretation, has the opposite meaning to when the song was written. The original version of ‘Waltzing Matilda’, written by Christine McPherson and ‘Banjo’ Patterson, it’s said to have been written as a love song.

AC:

And there’s also a political ghost story?

CL:

When ‘Banjo’ Patterson arrived at the sheep station where he met Christine McPherson, only three months before, there was a shearers’ strike. Historically, around the same time there was also the story of the suicide of the swaggie shearer called Samuel Hofmeister, a German shearer. His nickname was ‘Frenchie’.

6 There is a strong theory that ‘Frenchie’ is the ghost in story of the song ‘Waltzing Matilda’. So we built on that theory in the documentary. We use the music rising over the mist of the billabong, where the actual swaggie was supposed to have committed suicide [Fig 2]. In the film, the voice of the ghost comes over the mist, in German, talking about what it meant for him, and that he doesn't mind having an anthem written about him because as a German, well, the British royal family was originally German, and nobody seems to mind the fact that we have an anthem about them! So there’s also the possibility of political intrigue, but done in a light-hearted, satirical way.

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6 It is not unusual for Australian nicknames to be ironic or contradictory.
Levy’s *The Matilda Candidate* preceded other documentaries, one of which features music built into the narrative. However, the approach to music is somewhat different due to the documentary style and its sources, as Levy explains.

**Part II: Hephzibah – Film Overview**

In 1998, Levy made *Hephzibah* about the internationally-acclaimed concert pianist and human rights activist, Hephzibah Menuhin. A child prodigy, like her violinist brother, Yehudi Menuhin, she toured the world giving piano concerts from an early age. When Hephzibah was just 17, she and her brother married an Australian brother and sister, Lindsay and Nola Nicholas, heirs to the Nicholas fortune accrued to the family as manufacturers of Aspro medical products. Hephzibah left her cosmopolitan life in California to move to an Australian sheep farm. For a time she managed to commute between the farm and her concert commitments in Europe but a post-war visit to a Nazi concentration camp radicalised her. Hephzibah’s newfound political views alienated her conservative farmer husband. Hephzibah had an affair with a Viennese sociologist, Richard Hauser, and after a traumatic divorce she left her husband and two sons on the farm and moved to Sydney. Hephzibah and Richard later made their home in London where they established a Centre for Human Rights and campaigned for world peace.

Curtis Levy's mother, Joan, was a close friend of Hephzibah and the filmmaker gained access to valuable archival material, including home movies from Hephzibah’s early married life and her letters. Hephzibah is
reflective and articulate in the letters, extracts of which are read aloud in the film, by the actress Kerry Armstrong. Several interviews are featured, notably those with Yehudi and Yalta Menuhin, her talented siblings, and they discuss their sister with clearly heartfelt emotion. The film also includes interviews with Eva Cox, Richard Hauser’s daughter, and Clara, Hephzibah’s daughter, who speak with commendable frankness about their memories of her (see King, 2010).

The documentary feature premiered at the 1998 Sydney Film Festival and had long-running cinema releases in Sydney and Melbourne. Its first television broadcast was on November 8, 1998, on SBS in the Masterpiece series. The film has been screened at numerous international film festivals and sold to several countries (Fig 3). Hephzibah won the AFI Award for Best Documentary Film, the Silver Wolf Award for Best Video Documentary at the International Documentary Festival in Amsterdam, and the Australian Film Critics Circle Award for Best Documentary Film.

Curtis Levy Interview – On Hephzibah

AC:

Let’s talk about your other docos where music played a major element in the story.

CL:

Hephzibah (1998) and The President versus David Hicks (2004) both used music very strongly to build up the emotional involvement of the audience with the subject. Hephzibah was a natural one for music because she was a musician, a celebrated concert pianist, as well as a human rights activist... Hephzibah leaving her family—especially her kids—behind was, at the time, considered very daring, so it was an emotional story. She was like a

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8 SBS is the Special Broadcasting Service, Australia’s multi-lingual television station.
character from a Henry James novel. Many people have been emotionally affected by the story of Hephzibah’s attempt to make the world a better place, in her role as a human rights activist and as a concert musician. It made many people realise what one person can achieve, given the right kind of commitment.⁹

Use of Music and Editing

AC:

The film made use of a rich variety of classical music, both within the story of Hephzibah as a musician and as an underscore to the documentary.

CL:

There were quite a few changes in mood throughout the film, and we had a big array of Hephzibah’s music performances to choose from, playing music from famous composers like Brahms, Schubert and Beethoven. We were able to adapt her music to the scenes, to heighten the mood. Often we didn’t have a lot of footage to work with because she is dead, so we just had images of locations, plus the archival home movies and photographs, and interviews with her relatives about her life. The music strongly enhanced all those scenes. We also had an actress, Kerry Armstrong, reading Hephzibah’s letters, and she had a very emotional voice, a very empathetic voice.

AC:

Can we talk about the role of the film editor in constructing story and how they use music?

CL:

_Hephzibah_ was a film where everything was set up, like a jigsaw puzzle. It was a matter of working out the use of archival material, photographs and letters, everything coming together. I had a wonderful editor, Veronika Jenet, who did _The Piano_ (1993) feature film with Jane Campion and other films. Veronika is very sensitive about music, going through the music, helping us decide what music to use where, she was fantastic. It’s always a surprise when you see the image with music, how it can be transformed, one way or the other. I’m always amazed at how what you might think of as a prosaic sequence can become magic. People were very moved by Hephzibah’s story, and the music would have been a large part of what gave it that emotional response.

On Documentary Form and Styles

AC:

You’ve worked on many different forms of documentaries. Describe how you built the _Hephzibah_ story from various found elements?

⁹ Levy expands on audience engagement in his 2002 chapter.
CL:

Most of the films I’ve directed have been observational, yet *Hephzibah* is one of the best films I’ve made, if not the best. It is a more structured, more set-up film, where almost every shot we were able to mould and design. We built everything from found elements rather than following an ongoing story happening in front of the camera. That’s something I wouldn’t want to do too often because it’s a risky business, just relying on found elements. It is much easier to make a film where everything is happening in front of the camera, like the more observational types of film. In most observational films I’ve worked on, I’ve had to rely a lot on the cameraperson, being at the mercy of their skills; whereas, in a structured film, it’s all up to the director really. Some of the best observational films, the director is the camera, like the Maysles brothers, one of whom was camera, the other sound.  

AC:

Let’s talk about the importance of storytelling in docos. Why do you think stories have an impact on an audience?

CL:

A story has to provide the kind of foundations for people’s interests, like in plays or books, and it’s the way you tell that story that’s the most important. This is the same in documentaries. Some observational ‘reality’ TV, or observational films—not that the two terms are interchangeable—can be quite boring if the filmmaker hasn’t juxtaposed ideas, or told a story. I like films with unusual juxtapositions, where you have sudden changes in moods. I don’t like seamless films usually. I quite like to jar the audience occasionally. Some editors have been brought up in a school of seamless editing, and not a kind of self-conscious changes of moods and ideas. I try to work against that school of editing.

AC:

Can you expand on the unique challenges for doco makers trying to tell stories from actual events?

CL:

I think too many documentary filmmakers don’t realise they need to do a lot more work on the story. This is as important as the amount of work put into the way they are filming the subject. For me there’s not a lot of difference between stories for a doco and a feature film, the need for strong stories. It’s not enough just to observe someone’s life, the way they are living it—that is, unless they have an extraordinary life. Usually the pace of real life is very slow, often mundane. So a lot of construction has to go with the representation of someone’s life and you have to think out various ways to create emotionally engaging stories. I’m not saying you need the three act arc that feature films have, but we need to be conscious of how we can

10 US-based Albert and David Maysles produced cinéma vérité styled documentaries as a team in the 1960s to 80s, with Albert on camera and David on sound.
change the moods, to use certain parts of someone’s life to build up strong emotions towards some kind of climax.

AC:

The arguments about aesthetics, about how the documentary director interprets the raw material are always interesting.

CL:

Documentaries are not as easy as feature films where you can write out beforehand what you need. In documentaries we have to work with the material in front of us. This doesn’t mean that we can’t manipulate a lot of things to create deliberate moods out of what we are seeing or capturing, with the use of music, sound, voiceover, etc; music being the prime tool to change the emotional response. Some filmmakers don’t think out the development of the story. They think it’s good enough to follow an action of the subject, pick up what you can and put it together without going with an individual’s interpretation, from the director. I’m not a purist at all and believe the director can play around with the material, to use elements to heighten the audience response.

AC:

Documentaries are a unique form of storytelling because of the perceived relationship to ‘truth’ or actuality.

CL:

These days, the forms of docs and narrative features are closer together. A lot of feature filmmakers are shooting in doco style, trying to create a documentary effect. And some documentary makers are far more intervening in the way they tell their stories. Going back to the 1960s with the Maysles and Pennebaker, who are still working, their technique was more purist than the filmmakers of today. But even in the film Salesman [Albert and David Maysles with Charlotte Zwerin, 1968], which is my favourite documentary, it has a strong sense of drama, a strong sense of pathos. In the way it was edited, they were working with a strong undercurrent throughout the film. The Salesman story was about these middle-aged men trying to sell bibles door to door. It was a fabulous film, so I don’t want to run down those classics, but today we are more free-wheeling, using the many resources available. Digital video editing has allowed us to do things that people would never have thought of doing with film editing. Filmmakers play a lot more easily, and there’s a greater tolerance amongst audiences of suddenly seeing images that had nothing to do with the image before, throwing images into a sequence that may seem alien to the story. People are ready to be disrupted, disorientated. And it doesn’t disturb people as much as probably it did twenty or thirty years ago.

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11 Donn Alan Pennebaker (Penny) is widely considered to be one of the US pioneers of cinéma verité documentary filmmaking, whose films (since the 1950s) often dealt with popular music.
12 David Maysles died in 1987 but Albert continues to produce film work.
Conclusion

The Matilda Candidate and Hephzibah garnered audience interest both locally via SBS and ABC TV, as well as critical appreciation at international film festivals. There is a growing trend in documentary towards ‘hybrid’ forms, with popular films by Michael Moore, Nick Broomfield and Louis Theroux adopting a style where the documentary-filmmaker is the active central subject within the film storytelling. The use of comedy and satire for the purpose of entertainment in these documentaries (sometimes called ‘mock docs’) has also attracted debate regarding the potential conflict with documentary’s notions of truth and objectivity (Ronson, 2006: 403). Levy’s central role in The Matilda Candidate can be seen as part of this trend. This film is notable in his filmography because of Levy’s personal and political interest in the subject of Australia’s foreign policy and relationship to Asia. In addition, relevant to this article, the use of music in the structuring of the story is a crucial element in the impact of the documentaries discussed above. These examples suggest that producers and directors of music-based documentaries can succeed critically, with audiences and the market, if they are attentive to the storytelling challenges inherent in music and music subjects.

Bibliography


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