PICTURING SOUND
An Interview with Screen Composer Graeme Perkins

Henry Johnson

Abstract

Graeme Perkins is an eclectic musician. Based for much of his career in Dunedin in the south of the South Island of New Zealand, and working as a freelance performer, arranger, composer and director, Perkins spent several decades composing documentary film music amongst other television and film music work. This interview article highlights his compositional activities through his own voice in order to reveal information about his background in music, his introduction to working with film music, compositional techniques and style, equipment and musical identity. Each of these themes is explored as a way of providing information about Perkins’ creative processes when producing sound for screen, and to reveal some of the musical and social dynamics that are a part of the collaborative process of producing screen sound more broadly.

Keywords

Documentary film, film music, Graeme Perkins, New Zealand, Dunedin sound

Introduction

This is the third of several interview articles on Dunedin-based documentary film composers. From the 1980s to the 2000s, three particularly influential and prolific screen composers were employed by Natural History New Zealand (NHNZ) to work on documentary films, which were often produced for major international broadcasters, including Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, National Geographic Channel and NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation). Formerly called the Natural History Unit of Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and established in 1977, between 1997 and 2012 it was a subsidiary of Fox International Channels. NHNZ is currently owned by David Haslingden, a former Fox executive.

The purpose of this article is to further celebrate the compositional activities of Dunedin-based documentary film composers and to highlight through

46 The research process for this article was undertaken with the approval of the University of Otago Ethics Committee. The interview with the composer took place in December 2012 and has been edited by the author and checked for style and accuracy by the interviewee.
their own voices some of the creative and social processes that are a feature of working in film music in New Zealand, especially in the south of the South Island. Building on my previous two interview articles with Trevor Colman and Neville Copland (Johnson 2010; 2012), this particular article includes a major interview with screen composer Graeme Perkins. My aim in undertaking the interview was to allow the composer to talk about his background in music, his introduction to working with film music, compositional techniques and style, equipment and musical identity. Each of these themes was explored as a way of providing information about Perkins’ creative activities with film music, and reveal his processes for working with film creatively through screen sound and in terms of the social dynamics that are a part of the collaborative process of making a film more broadly.

Graeme Perkins has had an eclectic career in music. Following undergraduate study at the University of Otago in New Zealand, he undertook studies in composition, arranging and film scoring at the Dick Grove School of Music in Los Angeles [run by Dick Grove, (1927-1998)], and at Berklee College of Music in Boston in the US. In New Zealand he has worked as musical librarian for the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, and as programme producer for National Radio, both positions being based in Wellington. As a professional keyboardist, Perkins has been a private piano teacher and performed in Copyright, Cripple, Shaman, Smalltalk, In Time, and The Swing of Things. He has been pianist for the Dunedin City Jazz Orchestra, which has made tours of California and Europe. Other creative outputs in music have included arranging for the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra pops concert, and musical director/arranger (and often keyboardist) for an array of productions in and around Dunedin, which was his home for many years, at the Fortune Theatre (including Angry Housewives, Personals, Shakers, Always...Patsy Cline, Making it Big, and Love Off the Shelf), in various Dunedin Operatic musicals, and for children’s TV (including Play School, You And Me, and Tiki-Tiki Forest Gang). Similar work has also included being keyboardist for the Southern Jazz Ensemble and other artists for ‘Jazz Tonight’ recordings for Radio New Zealand. More recently he has worked in a number of shows and bands, including Swing of Things, the Motown Show, Oxo Cubans, Little Winter Cabaret, the Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, and Stars in Your Eyes.

![Figure 1: Graeme Perkins in Central Otago, New Zealand (Image courtesy of the composer).](image-url)
Of particular interest to this article is Perkins’ work in TV and film. He has composed music for numerous commercials and jingles for TV and radio, including National Business Review, New Zealand Lotteries Board, Hollands Honey, Dairy Fresh, and Arthur Barnett. Most significant of his work in film has been as soundtrack composer for Natural History New Zealand (NHNZ) between 1989 and 2009, when he produced over 200 music soundtracks, among them Masters of Inner Space, Emperors of Antarctica, Animal Cannibals, Chile: Land of Extremes, The Lost Whales, A Wild Moose Chase, Twisted Tales, Tibet: Wheel of Life, Winds of Change, Deep Blue, The Devil's Playground, Ice Worlds, Ghosts of Gondwana, Aleutians: Cradle of the Storms, The Most Extreme, Curse of the Elephant Man, The Jonathon Lemalu Story (for TVNZ), New Zealand Movie Paradise, The Great Wall of China, Deer Wars (for TVNZ), and Expedition Antarctica (see further IMDb 2014; NHNZ 2014; The Film Archive 2014). His creative work in this field resulted in Best Original Music (Television) in 1997 for Dragons of Komodo. He applies his experience of composing for film with annual music workshops for Science Communication film students in a course “The Language of Music” at the University of Otago.

Background

Henry Johnson (henceforth HJ): How did you get into music?

Graeme Perkins (henceforth GP): Well I got sent to piano lessons first up when we lived in Invercargill [South Island, New Zealand] and I didn’t get very far with those. I got to about grade four, and when I was fifteen pulled out. But the interesting thing is the minute I pulled out of formal lessons I started playing by ear. I started using the piano as my relaxer, and as a teenager got into playing in bands down there at a very young age, probably about thirteen, fourteen, or even before. Our dads used to drive us to the first gigs we got out in the country.

HJ: What type of bands were they?

GP: Pop bands. This would have been in the late ’60s. When I was at Highschool. We played for weddings; just your normal gigs. Dance music, doing covers. I went to Southland Boys’ High School. We practised hymns and we listened to classical records, and there was zero else because it was a very traditional boys school. So I sort of had no encouragement there apart from playing in our bands on the side, and then went to varsity and thought there was nothing offering in music so I just took history. I took one unit of music along the way and ended up with a Post-Grad in History.

HJ: This would be in the early ’70s by now?

GP: Yeah, we’re in the early ’70s and there was still nothing going. There was no contemporary music course at all, and the straight music offering at varsity was very conservative and didn’t suit me at all really. So anyway, I graduated out of that and then immediately thought I still love music. I thought what can you do with history, just teach or whatever. I knew I didn’t want to, so I just climbed straight back into bands and started playing

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47 On Natural History New Zealand, see their website at www.nhnz.tv
around Dunedin. I started teaching piano and guitar at the same time. I felt as though I was good enough to turn around and start teaching, even though I didn’t have any letters or anything. Back at high school I played guitar, but I’d come on to keys. I bought a Fender Rhodes piano and a Fender Twin Reverb [amplifier] to match and off we went with that.

I played in quite a few bands during the last year of varsity and the next two years. I was very interested in jazz and arranging in particular. I knew that I didn’t know enough and didn’t know quite where I could get that knowledge. I remember going up and seeing Calder Prescott [Dunedin-based jazz musician] and was fascinated by what he could do and what he knew, but I still wasn’t quite sure that I wanted to be doing that so I thought, okay, I’ll take myself overseas. So I went to the States and by this time we’re in 1976 and I just sort of went over there. I didn’t even know where I was going and I went to Los Angeles first and I found a fantastic course, The Dick Grove School of Music in Los Angeles and it was run in Studio City [neighborhood] just over the hill from Hollywood. It was like a night school and a weekend school, but the whole thing was run by people who worked in Hollywood. It was amazing and I just thought, oh my god this is good you know. So I’d saved as much as I could beforehand ‘cause I didn’t have a scholarship or anything and I took every course I could possibly get at that place. I was just going nights through the week and weekends and I took things like film scoring, arranging and jazz improv and everything, choral arranging, lyric writing, and then we had masterclasses in arranging where absolute big wheels would come in and talk to us. I lasted there for about half the year before the money ran out.

HJ: What are your musical influences?

GP: I never quite saw myself into one bag. Not really classical; I didn’t listen to classical much. I didn’t like it that much, but oddly enough what I was to do in the soundtrack world ended up being in the classical bag you would say.

HJ: What was your first step into film music?

GP: Prior to going to the States I didn’t really have any desire to step into film. I was more interested in playing and being in bands, and I was very interested in arranging, the whole concept of writing at that stage. Just the monkish art of writing orchestrations for musicians and handing it to them and then wait for the incredible surprise of what you’re about to hear, whether you got it right or not. I was much more into that than film scoring at that stage I guess. It sounded interesting, but it was sort of a little to the side. I had no great sort of desire at that stage.

Over the years looking back, I think a lot of the reasons I had a lot of work was because I could turn my hand to different styles, different genres. I never really felt I was an absolute master of any of them. I was masterful at turning to different situations and demands, and particularly in the soundtrack writing because what we ended up doing at NHNZ were a lot of different styles. I think the reason I ended up getting an awful lot of work was I could do an ethnic style if they wanted, or I could do an historic sort of sounding piece, or I could give you a feel from the ’50s, or I could do a jazz piece.
Then I had enough money to throw myself into the Summer School at Berklee College of Music in Boston. So I went across there and threw myself in there to studies as well. It was good in that they had the facilities, but it wasn’t so good in that you weren’t taught by people who were working in the field during the day. You were being taught by teachers and for me just coming straight from the Dick Grove School of Music in Hollywood, that was quite a difference. But they had great facilities and practise rooms and huge libraries. Then I came back [to New Zealand] after that.

HJ: And then set up in Dunedin?

GP: Well just trying to break in somewhere and find a job as such that was more in music than I’d experienced before. I ended up getting a job with the NZSO [New Zealand Symphony Orchestra] as a Music Librarian in Wellington [North Island]. We were in the Library on the Terrace [street], but the great thing was the NZSO practised in the room next door. It was like a big recording studio in the old building on the Terrace. There were three of us in the Music Library and we compiled music not just for the NZSO, but for regional orchestras too. We were sort of like the Library of classical music.

HJ: There’s a certain irony in that, isn’t there?

GP: I know there is, yeah. Here in the area I don’t have much interest in, but at least it was a nine-to-five, you know.

And then I moved from there. A job came up. It sort of grew to be a bit boring. Another job came up in National Radio. It was just along the road and so I moved along there and became a programme producer at National Radio, but that only lasted about six months. It was great job again, but it was really just assembling programmes for airing on National Radio and back then in what was about, what are we now, ’77 or ’78, National Radio was very conservative. You’d be playing the Percy Faith Orchestra or [laughs], you know what I mean?

At that point, I was married to Yvonne and we decided to just come back to Dunedin and come full circle. We had our first little boy born and we wanted to be back with friends and people so we came back. First of all I came back and it was just the same old place and I went labouring on a building site and then I went truck driving. But then I very quickly got back into bands. Started playing in bands and started getting involved in shows, writing arrangements, which I really enjoyed, and I got quite a bit of work in the Fortune Theatre so we did those music shows. And just eked along like that for a few years into the ’80s, so just sort of always thinking gee it could be better. That’s pretty much what I was doing, playing. We were doing a lot of playing then and working in bands. There was work six nights a week. It was amazing back then, the bands. Just pub work and stuff like that, and pop bands and playing private dos. There was a huge amount and you could live off it easily.

The other thing that was going on then was New Zealand’s National Radio programme and it recorded a lot of jazz music in what is now the University [of Otago] music studio. I did a lot, directed and arranged for a lot of programmes, which went to the show Jazz Tonight, where jazz bands all around the country were recorded and put on this show and there was a
good income out of that as well so I did over a dozen of those half-hour shows. I formed a couple of big bands as well and even though I was an absolute novice at writing jazz for big bands I seemed to pull it off and I used that opportunity to write my own music for those big bands.

Screen Composition

HJ: When did you first experience writing for film?

GP: That was, we’re up to about the mid ’80s. In 1986 I got a call from TV because I was doing music direction at the Fortune [Theatre, in Dunedin]. Would I come in and direct a series of shows to be called Let’s Sing Out, which was like a semi-religious series to feature local singers and to be televised? I thought yeah that sounds great so I did that. So that was my first look into television. It was arranging for the backings for the bands for a start. And there was a core of about eight singers so I’d arrange all the vocals for those and so I arranged all of the music although they were all covers in this case. I wrote the theme and we went in and did that show. Shortly after that an ad came in the paper. They wanted Music Directors for Play School, a children’s programme based on the original UK version.

HJ: You did a lot on that didn’t you?

GP: I did. I wasn’t at all interested and friends and family pushed me. They said go on give it a go. At least find out about it, and so I applied for it and asked what the conditions were and everything and they sent out how much you’d be paid and it was like mega bucks compared to what I had been earning. And you only worked half the week for it you know. Yeah, you could do what you liked for the rest of the time, which I did. So I went for it like a rat down a hole because the money was so darn good. Not that I had any burning desire to do children’s music and as it turned out I got it and Neville [Copland] and I got the jobs as Music Directors because there were two teams working and we did that for two years and as it turned out I thoroughly enjoyed it.

In ‘89, the very early stages of NHNZ were being formed. I think it was still under the umbrella of TVNZ. They had a very small staff then and that one was called What Next and that was my very first soundtrack and I hustled round and bought and begged and borrowed gear and set it up in my room. I had not very much in the way of recording gear so in the late ’80s there was an absolute explosion of me trying to accumulate recording gear.

Compositional techniques and style

HJ: Tell me about the process of writing music for What’s Next?

GP: My memory is pretty blurry about the first little bit. I remember I did it, but the actual to-and-fros I can’t remember. I think I went out and bought myself a Fostex desk and a matching eight-track machine. Whether I did that just on the spot or whether I had just set it up prior because I knew this was opening up, I’m not sure. I can’t remember the details. When they had some
roughts put together on film you would sit down and view it and just decide. They would still be editing, of course, but down to a certain reasonable length you would sit down and they would have a very clear idea of where they would like music go in it. They would say, well I would like some music here. It was usually at the front and then maybe there’s a bit of a dramatic scene coming here so I’d like some here. The whole way through I would madly take notes as they talked about it and I got pretty good at asking the questions I needed to know. I’m speaking generally now because this is the general process of it. You would have a session together where they would show you their film, usually still too long, and you would talk through and as I gained more experience and became more on the scene they would say what do you think. Do you think we should have music here and it was more a two way thing. I would madly take notes and time codes off the thing and we’d get through and they would go away and I would come up with some demos I would use. I would say well why don’t I do a demo of maybe the opening and maybe this sequence here and maybe this one here because this one’s a bit different, and come up with demos and invite them back and say okay here’s what I’ve come up with and run the music against the film and see what they thought. It would be usual for them to tip it a certain way, you know, I really like that but I’m not so keen on that, or hey this is making me feel worried rather than tense. You’d get into very subtle emotions, which is interesting in itself because you can play one piece of music to someone and they will feel melancholic. The other person will just feel slightly blue.

HJ: Did the directors ever say we don’t want this, we want something else.

GP: Oh yes, sometimes they say no, or often it would be me. I’d got the wrong end, not often, but sometimes I would get the wrong end of the stick. I would have picked them up wrong. As the years rolled through and I did many hundreds of hours of soundtracks, you got real good at asking the right questions at those director meetings. Each director is totally different. Some directors are self declared musical morons where they are relying on you heavily and so they want you to provide; they want help. They need help but I just don’t let that go because they still will react to what you have written so it’s still a process of trying to know what they want to feel. So regardless, they might say to me look you’re the muso, you know. You’re the one, you know better than me. No, that’s scary territory because I’ve had that happen and then they come back and they go, oh no, because they do have more to say. They’ve been in the field with this damn film, up to their ears in some swamp filming natural history, and this is precious to them. Musicians come along at the eleventh hour and can make or break it literally by what you do with it and so it’s very important to get in their head. Some of the best experiences I had were with the guy Rod Morris [director and producer]. He would tell you himself he has very little musical knowledge or understanding, but he would bring you into the process way early. Like he would ring me up and say look I’m doing this film. I haven’t actually started it yet, he would say, and it would be on Tasmanian devils or Komodo dragons or something like that. He would have the type of music sussed, he would be so prepared about the angle that he wanted to take with that doco that he would know the music, and he said, I’ve got this CD and I’m going to give it to you. It will be way early, before it had even started and he said I want it, there’s this particular track on it, I just love it and I’m going to shoot this thing with this in mind. So that was fantastic because you were very early on. So you want it to be reflective or try and capture the same mood of that piece yet not
plagiarise the composer at all. I have very good experiences with that and there’re other directors who you get great results in the end with too who are very musical and they’re able to say, look I want some French horns in here and I want this. Very specific, you know.

HJ: Would there be any type of director that you’d prefer to work with?

GP: Well I ended up working, forming good relationships with several of the directors and they would keep coming back to me. We did many films together. There were maybe four or five of them at NHNZ who would just keep coming back to me each time because you had a good rapport with them and they grew to trust that you would bring something to their film. You know, that balance of bringing something yourself to the film yet sort of staying within their big picture for it.

HJ: Would any directors say here’s my film, I’ve got no idea what music I want to go in it or where it should go?

GP: Yeah, that’s one extreme and I know that’s happened to me. I can’t think specifically, but I know that’s happened to me and I don’t like it because you don’t know you’re often wasting your time on a demo.

I do a workshop for budding young directors and so I style it on trying to give them a language of music. If and when they come to being able to hire a composer they have language and the whole workshop is styled on being authoritative about music, and we practise in those workshops just the use of musical language, and I’m not talking about crotchets and minims and stuff like that, but more talking about getting used to describing emotions with music and they practise ordering up music.

HJ: What do you mean by that?

GP: By ordering up what music they want for their film or for segments of their film. They practise the language, they practise how to talk to a composer so that composers gets a good idea of what they want, so as not to waste time and energy. Yeah, come up with a vocab as near as they can to ask them for what they want and the way I do it. They have to suss out a piece of music that might well be used as a soundtrack. They’ve got to find this piece of music. They’ve got to bring it along to the workshop so they get this assignment well ahead and they have to bring it along, but they have to prepare some writing for me so that in the workshop they can say to me, now Mr Composer, I would like you to write me a piece of music and what follows is a description of that piece of music. So then I and everyone else in the group tries to get a picture of what this is that they’re talking about and when everybody’s satisfied, and they can use whatever words they want, and we’ve practised them in the workshop prior to that, to try and describe this piece of music as if they’re asking me to write that piece of music and then we stick it on and we listen to it and everyone goes, oh that’s pretty good, or jeez I wasn’t expecting that, and that gives them a sense of what it’s like for me. I have always seen or have come to see as the essence of that relationship between the composer of film music and the director because that’s the core of a good working relationship.
HJ: When you then work with the director or the producer you’re hoping that that director will have this language.

GP: I am.

HJ: What type of things would you be asking?

GP: I would say, well what do you reckon? It seems to me like this would be nice with an orchestral sound track. What do you think? They might say, that sounds pretty good, I was thinking of that, and you find they actually were. Or you might say, or we could either go the orchestral way with this, or we could go a very sparse way and we could just use lots of sound washes, soundscapes. What do we want here? Do we want to be drawn into it? Do we want to be slapped around the face by it? Do we want it just to sit nicely in the background? I usually ask them to put a scratch narration on so that I can hear where it is and how much it’s talking and all of that.

We did films in Indonesia and I would find myself going into the library and trying to get good samples and soak up how the gamelan music is made. The directors would never want it to be purely ethnic because the audience for most of these films was in the West. So they would often want just moments of pure ethnic composition and structure, but it had to fit the broader style that would be accessible to viewers in the States and Europe.

Equipment

HJ: Can we now turn to technology? Can you give me a bit of the background on the equipment you’ve used over the years and how you use it?

GP: For me, technology was an absolute struggle. I’ve never been hugely technically minded. I leaned heavily on Neville [Copland] as he was very good, younger than me. And I’d always pick his brains, and he was always very helpful, but I started off with a little eight-track Fostex desk and an eight-track quarter-inch reel-to-reel. So I was doing all the early recordings onto that and I would bring home a seven-inch Studer [reel-to-reel]. I would hire it from NHNZ, and I would master onto that. So it was all very tapey.

HJ: How did you get everything lined up? What would you be watching the film on?

GP: I never got it synced up. It was terrible. But I did it because we didn’t sort of have sync. I’d have the time code on. I’d bring home a VHS [video tape]. It would have time code burned in visually. I just got used to lining up some sort of pre-roll. It was real rough. They’d come out home to see the demos and then when everything was ticked off I’d just master onto the Studer.

HJ: So you played the VHS, press play and then press play on your reel to reel.

GP: Yeah, it was that rough. We’re talking about 1989.

HJ: What was the last film you made for NHNZ?
GP: *Expedition Antarctica* for Max Quinn. I was on the Q-base audio on the computer and used QuickTime for film. When we went from VHS to DVD I went onto very early sequences.

HJ: On line?

GP: Oh no, not on line. Oh, totally synced up.

HJ: So how did they give you the movie?

GP: Well, when I did the last one, which was about two or three years ago, it was QuickTime. They just give you QuickTime or you just pulled it off the halfway site. The very last soundtrack I did was a short film for a guy in Wanaka, and yeah, I just downloaded the film. I never even met the guy, I still haven’t to this day. I just found that really strange, yeah. But just fed it back to him.

HJ: Did he have any questions or comments?

GP: No, he just logged it straight off. Towards the last few years at NHNZ it was just becoming a sausage factory really.

HJ: So do they have any full-time composers now?

GP: I don’t believe they do. Neville and I started about the same time in the late ’80s and we both worked right through the ’90s. And then Trevor [Coleman] came back from overseas in the 2000s. He started doing a bit and there were all three of us through the 2000s. Neville and I sort of fell away three years ago, and Trevor did a couple more. It’s really thinned out and the last few experiences weren’t like the good old days. For the bulk of it I would get a set time to compose and turn it around. You’ve got to rush through it and drip feed it into the sound suite and the composing time literally vanished towards the end. Pleasure gone, yeah. When I left one of their big series has been done by Plan 9 [Wellington-based composers]. For the bulk of it Neville and I, and then Trevor at the end.

HJ: How would you describe your compositional process? Do you work at the keyboard.

GP: Yeah, pretty much. Right at the beginning of the process I would try to get some themes or motifs going that would serve the whole film and a real feel. A melody or a theme or something; I’d sit at the piano and just really work it out. And then come back to the synth and start pulling in sounds that I might use. Just getting your palette of sounds. I just like the acoustic of the piano. It sort of surrounds you, doesn’t it, and you can immerse yourself in the sound. It’s much more immersive to play the piano than at the synth, which is just really coming out of that speaker.

HJ: If you’re working at the piano and you’ve got the sounds you want, do you then go to the synth?

GP: Yeah.
HJ: What kind of software do you use?

GP: For the bulk of what I did back then I used a lot of modules. Then in later years there were a lot of software sounds as well. I get the themes going then I create a sort of orchestral sound with a leaning towards French horns and woodwinds or something. Then I'd start shopping around in the banks of sounds to see what worked. It would also depend on things like the speed of music or the frequency of it because you can never replace the real players. So you might want violas that attack, a bit of staccato at one stage, and then you might want to be smooth for another, so you might have to choose more than one sound.

HJ: So there's a lot of classical music coming out in your film scores?

GP: Yeah. I know it's odd because I've really immersed myself in it. I prefer to do big sweeping classical themes.

HJ: This is all working for NHNZ?

GP: I always contracted to them. I always freelanced. One contract after another. You would sign a contract for each film.

Identity

HJ: Do you think any New Zealand influence has come out in your music?

GP: Not necessarily. I don't think so. That would be up to others to decide really, but I don't tend to pull on anything like that I don't think. Quite eclectic and that's just what the job required really.

HJ: What next from here Graeme?

GP: I'm not sure. It might be the end of my recording for film. It might not be. It doesn't feel like it is, but I'm enjoying not doing it at the moment and I'm enjoying playing. I've stopped sound tracking now for two and a half years and I really have enjoyed the break from it because I did so much for the decades before. I often say that if the phone rang and it was one of those directors that did those wonderful old blue chippers saying look I've just scored a real nice film on the Andes, or some adventure at the South Pole or something, saying I'd like you to write the music, I think that would be great, but times have changed you know. The very last series that I did for Animal Planet was the most extreme, which I thoroughly enjoyed. We did one series of thirteen one-hour films, then they ordered up a second, then they ordered up a third, then they ordered up a fourth, then they ordered up a fifth. We ended up doing seventy-seven one hour programmes of the most extreme. Just me. So I've pumped out a lot of music you see, which I thoroughly enjoy, but now I feel like I need to rest from it.
Conclusion

This interview has revealed much about the process of composing for documentary film through the voice of Graeme Perkins. As with Trevor Coleman and Neville Copland, Perkins has had an eclectic musical upbringing in the South Island of New Zealand. He pulled out of formal piano lessons as a teenager, yet only to start to play the instrument again by ear. Playing in pop bands was a large component of his teenage life, and such eclecticism in musical tastes has allowed him to pursue a career in music where he has made a living by undertaking a range of jobs.

His visit to the US in 1976 changed the course of his musical career. In the US he took further training in music, especially in composition and film scoring. After his return to New Zealand, it was not long before Perkins had entered the field of screen composing, and, mixed with his other music activities, was working as a professional musician.

In the interview, Perkins has offered insight into his creative compositional processes in writing for film, especially his use of classical sounding music. In the early years, his use of technology was minimal, and his reflection of his younger days of working in this field shows how music was given to film with very limited technological resources. He has also shown some of the social dynamics involved in finding the right music for screen, and especially the collaboration with the director/producer, who may have much influence on the choice of a particular musical style, or in contrast none whatsoever.

After many years of working in documentary film music, Perkins is now moving in a new direction in his long career in music. In the field of film music, the composer has produced an array of works that have contributed to New Zealand documentary film more broadly, and in particular the identity of Dunedin as a hub for such activity over the past three decades.

References