



THE SOCIETY
OF COMPOSERS
& LYRICISTS

THE SCORE

SAE 2022

SPECIAL
AWARDS
EDITION

THE SCL AWARD
NOMINATIONS



CARTER BURWELL

Mines Thriller Genre

**BILLIE EILISH
AND FINNEAS**

No Time to Die

NICHOLAS BRITELL

Don't Look Up

“THIS YEAR’S MOST THRILLING—
AND HUMAN—DOCUMENTARY”

Esquire

3 **WINNER**
CRITICS CHOICE DOCUMENTARY AWARDS
INCLUDING
BEST SCORE

5 **CINEMA EYE HONORS NOMINATIONS**
INCLUDING
OUTSTANDING NONFICTION FEATURE

PRODUCERS GUILD OF AMERICA
NOMINEE
BEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

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AND THRILLING TO WATCH.”

 *RogerEbert.com*

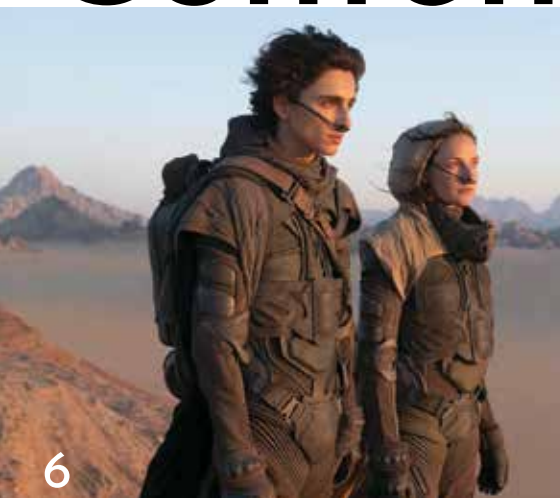
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This Special Awards Edition of *The Score* contains media coverage of SCL Award nominees.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A RETURN TO 'NORMAL'

BY ASHLEY IRWIN

The nominees for our 3rd Annual SCL Awards have been announced and what a stellar group they make. A collection of seasoned stalwarts mixed with some fresh faces will ensure a very exciting night this year. After the pandemic forced us to reinvent our 2021 ceremony in the virtual space, we are very much looking forward to returning to an in-person event where we can celebrate our peers in a communal atmosphere, with all the energy and enthusiasm we experienced in our inaugural year. As music creators, we simply don't get out to see each other as often as we'd like, and the dearth of live events over the past two years has only exacerbated the situation. Who isn't sick of the never-ending parade of Zoom conferences to which we've unfortunately become so accustomed?

I'm particularly excited this year by the addition of two new awards—well, actually one completely new category, and the bifurcation of another existing one. It became apparent that lumping all the songs into one big melting pot was doing our songwriter members a disservice. We needed a better way to acknowledge their stylistic achievements

demanded by such a wide variety of genres. So it was decided to split the 'Outstanding Song for a Visual Production' award into two distinct categories—one representing songs written for drama or documentary programs, and the other for comedies or musicals. This has allowed for a more complete and diverse representation of our songwriter members' work, and as I mentioned earlier, has pitted relative newcomers against established icons.

Our other new award, the David Raksin Award for Emerging Talent, should hold a place in the hearts of all who knew David. His influence on film music, on young composers, and on the SCL itself, cannot be understated. While the celebration of those working at the highest level by their peers is of paramount importance, the need to provide opportunity to not only the next generation, but to those whose work may have missed some accolades through under-exposure, led us to the decision to define 'emerging talent' in the broadest of terms, agnostic to age. It was also important to engage our Associate members in the competition by



"The David Raksin Award for Emerging Talent should hold a place in the hearts of all who knew David. His influence on film music, on young composers, and on the SCL itself, cannot be understated."

providing an arena in which they could cast a vote.

So I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible when we gather for our gala event. It promises to be a fun night, full of great entertainment, heartfelt speeches, and above all, a sense of much-needed camaraderie. See you then.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley".

F O R Y O U R C O N S I D E R A T I O N

FOUR GOOD DAYS



THE SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS
& LYRICISTS AWARDS
NOMINEE
OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SONG
FOR A DRAMATIC OR DOCUMENTARY
VISUAL MEDIA PRODUCTION
"SOMEHOW YOU DO"

BEST ORIGINAL SONG
"SOMEHOW YOU DO"

Music and Lyrics by **DIANE WARREN** • Performed by **REBA McENTIRE**

THE SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS & LYRICISTS AWARDS NOMINEE
OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE FOR A STUDIO FILM JONNY GREENWOOD

10 CRITICS CHOICE AWARD NOMINATIONS
INCLUDING
BEST PICTURE | **BEST SCORE**
JONNY GREENWOOD

CHICAGO FILM CRITICS ASSOCIATION
7 WINNER
INCLUDING
BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
JONNY GREENWOOD

INDIANA FILM JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION
WINNER
BEST MUSICAL SCORE
JONNY GREENWOOD

PHILADELPHIA FILM CRITICS CIRCLE
6 WINNER
INCLUDING
BEST SOUNDTRACK/SCORE
JONNY GREENWOOD

PHOENIX CRITICS CIRCLE
5 WINNER
INCLUDING
BEST SCORE
JONNY GREENWOOD

UTAH FILM CRITICS ASSOCIATION
4 WINNER
INCLUDING
BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
JONNY GREENWOOD

“THE BEST PICTURE
OF THE YEAR.

JONNY GREENWOOD'S
SCORE STANDS AS
THE YEAR'S INDISPUTABLE
SOUNDTRACK PINNACLE.”

PETER TRAVERS, ABC NEWS

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THE POWER OF THE DOG



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THE SCORE

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THE SCORE
Editor RAJASRI MALLIKARJUNA

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EDITOR'S DESK

CELEBRATING A WEALTH OF TALENT

BY RAJASRI MALLIKARJUNA



To kick off a new year of *The Score* and the entertainment industry's awards season, this Special Awards Edition (SAE) features media coverage of several nominees in the various categories of our 3rd Annual SCL Awards. We've reprinted insightful interviews and articles about these composers and songwriters, along with their process and experience while working on the projects for which they've been nominated. From celebrated songwriters like Diane Warren, Finneas O'Connell, and Billie Eilish, to venerated composers like Alexandre Desplat and Hans Zimmer and industry newcomers like Joy Ngiew, we can see that the approach to scoring or songwriting always exemplifies the artists' unique talents while the results inevitably display a shared desire for great artistry. For example, the interview with Carter Burwell—who, along with filmmakers Joel and Ethan Coen, are the recipient of this year's Spirit of Collaboration Award—covers his soundscape, his musical ideas, and the conceptual approach that he and director Joel Coen took for *The Tragedy of Macbeth*.

Though we didn't have space to include articles about every SCL Award nominee, our last issue, the Fall 2021 issue of *The Score*, also contains interviews with some of our other outstanding nominees: Jonny Greenwood (page 62), Jennifer Hudson and Carole King (page 40), and Lin-Manuel Miranda (page 72). Access these articles, along with the rest of the issue, by logging into the SCL website (thescl.com) and choosing "The Score Magazine" from the Resources tab at the top of your web browser.

As we see 2022 unfold in both its challenges and joyful surprises, let's celebrate the amazing work that our community has created in the last year by diving into our SCL nominees' projects; we can listen to their soundtracks, watch their films and TV shows, play their video games, and read about their experiences. The Special Awards Edition aims to help you dig into their art, as well as learn from it—so please enjoy this unique issue!

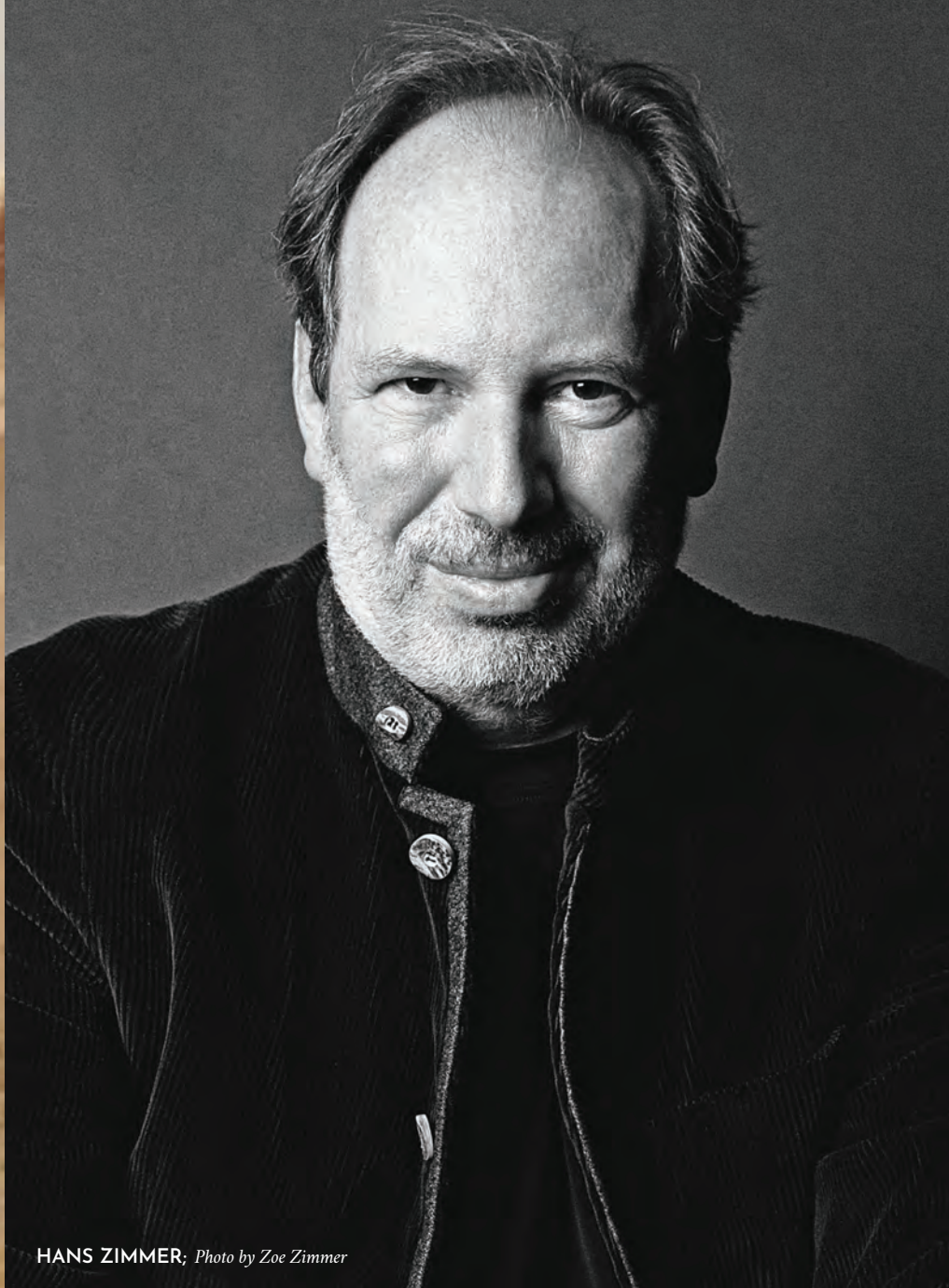
HANS ZIMMER

In the moment in *Dune* when Paul Atreides sticks his hand in a box and feels a surge of enormous, unrelenting pain, Hans Zimmer wanted singer Loire Cotler, who he describes as a sweet and gentle person, to “unleash that inner female strength” for what would become a primal wail in his “Gom Jabbar” theme. “She sang just one note, and it tore the enamel off my teeth and ripped my eyeballs out,” Zimmer said. “She’s like, ‘Something like that?’ Yep! Something like that!”





DUNE Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures



HANS ZIMMER, Photo by Zoe Zimmer

BY BRIAN WELK **The score’s voices, which were provided by four women Zimmer handpicked not just for their singing but for what he said was their courage, were necessary to lend Denis Villeneuve’s film the otherworldly, spiritual quality that is so driven by its women. “You can hear that commitment in their voices. You don’t understand the words, but you know there’s a master storyteller at work,” he explained of the vocalists he chose. “For me, it was incredibly important that the movie was carried by the strength of the female voices and that there was a sense of spirituality that went all the way through the score.”**

“He cuts in a very musical way, just as Denis shoots in a very musical way, and I can’t explain to you what that means other than I’m very influenced by his color palette.”

—Hans Zimmer

Zimmer, an Oscar winner for *The Lion King* (1994) and an 11-time nominee, said that he went to work “building a sonic world” within the film just as Villeneuve built the visual world. And though no one asked him, he wound up recording multiple albums’ worth of material beyond what’s been released on the original soundtrack. The German composer, who is a natural when it comes to manipulating sounds with electronics, could have his way inventing and contorting sounds to create something truly otherworldly—even if that quest for alien sounds sometimes circled back to familiar instruments and forced him to, for example, figure out

where the heck he could find a bagpipe player during the pandemic.

His *Dune* score features a cello that he twisted to make it sound like a Tibetan long horn, as well as sounds fashioned inside a friend’s resonating chamber full of bizarre metals. And while his colleagues spent time in the desert recording sounds you can’t believe come from Earth, he spent time sitting at his synthesizer trying to “make things up.” “If you set something in the future, you wanted that ‘foreign-ness,’” Zimmer said. “Why would you have a bunch of strings? Why would you rely on the Western vocabulary?”

He even created drums that were “completely fake” and wholly electronically generated. The goal was to have rhythms that were unplayable by human beings, though Zimmer is certain that it won’t be long before some drummer on YouTube figures out how to play it anyway.

But Zimmer also worked closely with the other departments on the film. He collaborated with the sound team to meld the heartbeat rhythm of the thumper used to lure desert sandworms into the score itself and bonded with film editor Joe Walker over music. (Walker went to music school; Zimmer did not.) “He cuts in a very musical way, just as Denis shoots in a very musical way, and I can’t explain to you what that means other than I’m very influenced by his color palette,” he said. “I know when what I’m doing sounds wrong against his colors.”

Zimmer’s partnership with Villeneuve began auspiciously with 2017’s *Blade Runner 2049*. “He showed me *Blade Runner*, he got to the end of it and I didn’t know what to say,” Zimmer said. “So I just started to play, and what I played moved him and became the beginning of the score. Sometimes the best conversation you can have with a director is not to use words.”

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CRITICS CHOICE AWARDS NOMINATIONS

INCLUDING

11 BEST PICTURE

Verse 1



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION IN ALL CATEGORIES INCLUDING

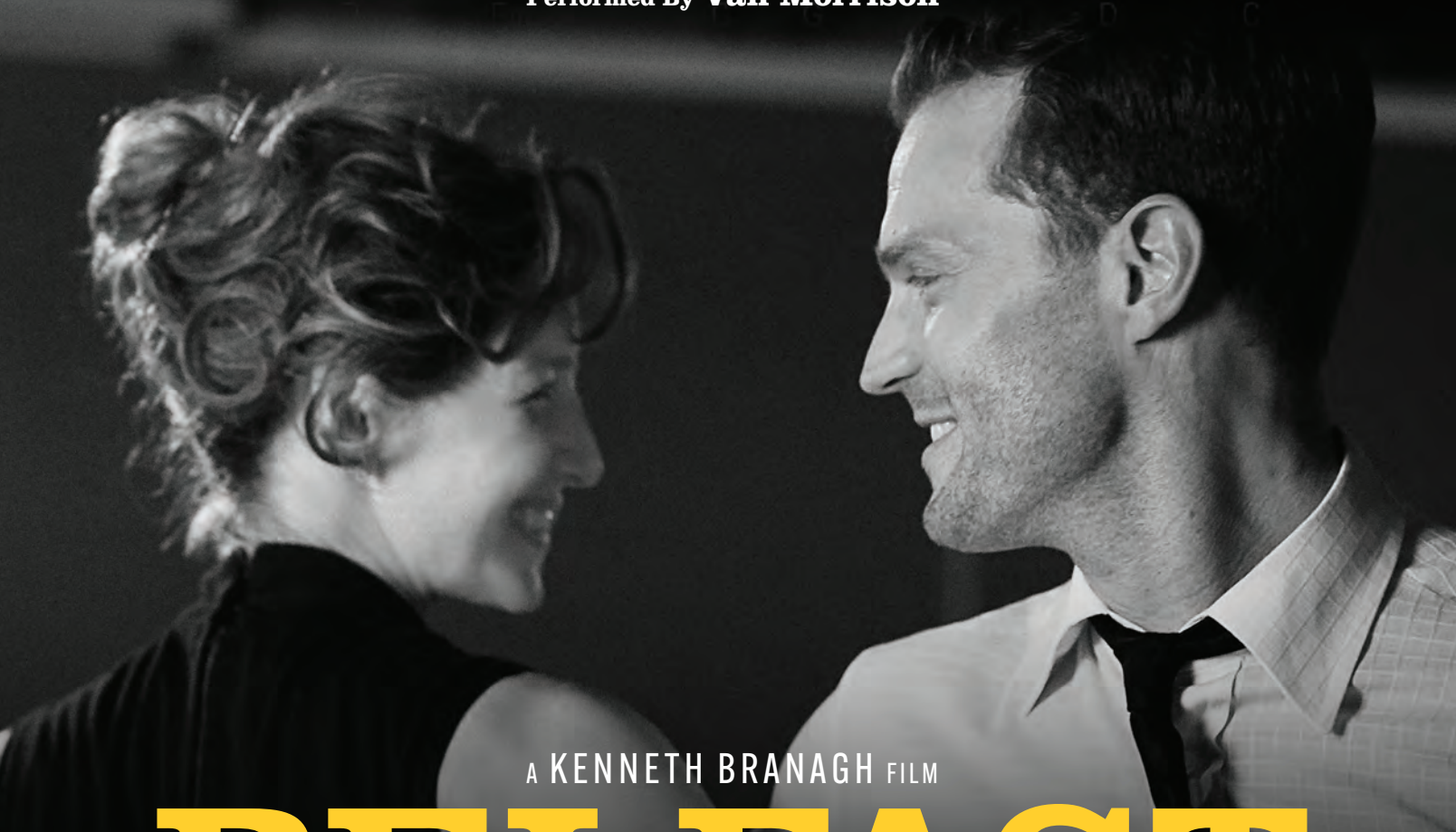
BEST PICTURE OF THE YEAR

BEST ORIGINAL SONG

"Down to Joy"

Music and Lyrics By **Van Morrison**

Performed By **Van Morrison**



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DON'T LOOK UP COMPOSER NICHOLAS BRITELL ON CREATING A BIG BAND "HIGH ANXIETY" SOUND IN ADAM MCKAY'S SATIRE

BY ANTHONY D'ALESSANDRO

In the wake of creating a fierce, hypnotic classical sound for the media dynasty politics of HBO's *Succession*, which won him a Primetime Emmy, Nicholas Britell turns the volume up to an 11 with big band jazzy score for Adam McKay's new Netflix satire feature, *Don't Look Up*.

As the composer explains here, he started at a place of "logic and knowledge" with a strings and celesta tone that had stellar qualities with dark understones.

But then the high anxiety took over, meaning the hysterical chaos that Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence's astronomers encounter in trying to convince a stubborn world that a comet is heading right for there, meaning the end of the world as we know. Sound familiar? Like trying to convince those in red states that the COVID vaccine is good for them, or else.



NICHOLAS BRITELL
Photo by Emma McIntyre

That's when Britell settled on a World War II big band sound "when the world at that time was in an existential civilizational—the stakes were there for good vs. evil, to the greatest extent we had had up to that point."

McKay and Netflix loved the theme, the latter asking for more of it throughout the film. Britell recorded the theme remotely with a big band set of musicians at AR Studios in London, including blaring trumpet and big saxophone.

"You don't get the sound, until you work the sound," says Britell about his process in the above Netflix playlist

video, "we really wanted this to be a comedic explosion that also deals with the craziness of our times."

Britell expounds on how he used flutes, choirs, and more in striking balance between the zany, and the sheer awe and intelligence of what's out there (meaning space and society).

McKay was emphasizing "the anxiety of the movie" so much that Britell says, "I finally screamed into a microphone, and recorded my voice and put it through this weird effect, pitched it and did all these things to do it," to achieve a truly unique vibe.

Adds the composer, "That's actually the frequency this movie is vibrating at: High anxiety meets comedy meets what is going to happen to the world, that is that emotional cue."

Britell also wrote and produced two songs for the film: "Just Look Up," performed by Ariana Grande and Kid Cudi which the composer co-penned with Grande, Scott Mescudi, and Taura Stinson; and "Second Nature" which he co-wrote with Justin Vernon, sung by Bon Iver.

Reprinted courtesy of Deadline

DANIEL HART

MEDIEVAL 'WEIRDNESS' IN THE SCORE TAPS INTO THE OTHERWORLDLY FEEL OF *GREEN KNIGHT*



BY TIM GREIVING

The one note David Lowery kept giving his composer, Daniel Hart, was: “Be weirder.”

Lowery’s film was already as weird as its source, the 14th century poem “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.” Starring Dev Patel as the laddish Gawain, *The Green Knight* is an art-house take on a medieval epic, a psychological character study where bawdy humor and sensuality and horror commingle, and where magical creatures and wizardry are conjured by both old-school trickery and modern CGI.



DEV PATEL is Gawain
Photo by Eric Zachanowich/A24



DANIEL HART Photo by Emily Ulmer

It's a twisted meditation on fate and death from the same director who put Casey Affleck under a bedsheet to wander for eternity in *A Ghost Story*.

Hart, who provided the haunting adagios for that 2017 film and has been working with Lowery since 2005, was born to tackle the enchanted world of Sir Gawain. His parents are both musicians in the Episcopalian church, and he grew up surrounded by music with roots in medieval England, so this score is "a real representation of a huge chunk of my relationship to music as a child," Hart said.

"*Ghost Story* felt very personal to me, but this one probably even a bit more than that."

Gawain is first introduced waking up on Christmas, hungover in a brothel, uttering one of the most risqué deliveries of the phrase "Christ is born, indeed."

"I thought my parents would really enjoy that," said Hart. "They said when they were in grad school for church music, they heard the dirtiest jokes they've ever heard in their lives."

Hart introduces a jagged, mischievous theme for the movie's title character in

that scene which, performed on childlike recorders, captures his immaturity. The score often comments on Gawain from an authorial perspective, rather than emanating from within him. When he encounters a bevy of female giants, for instance, the music acknowledges their awesome beauty instead of Gawain's terror.

"The score is appreciating what's on screen in a way that Gawain is not," said Lowery, "and it is understanding what is happening, and reflecting what is happening, in a way that Gawain is too shortsighted to see."

THE SOCIETY OF COMPOSERS & LYRICISTS AWARD NOMINATIONS
OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE FOR A STUDIO FILM NICHOLAS BRITELL
OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SONG FOR A COMEDY OR MUSICAL VISUAL MEDIA PRODUCTION
"JUST LOOK UP" - NICHOLAS BRITELL, ARIANA GRANDE, SCOTT MESCUDI AND TAURA STINSON

6 CRITICS CHOICE AWARD NOMINATIONS
INCLUDING
BEST PICTURE | **BEST SCORE** | **BEST SONG**
NICHOLAS BRITELL | "JUST LOOK UP"

**"A GORGEOUSLY CHURNING SCORE
BY NICHOLAS BRITELL."**

JUSTIN CHANG, *Los Angeles Times*

**"NICHOLAS BRITELL DELIVERS
ONE OF THE BEST SCORES OF THE YEAR."**

VARIETY

HOLLYWOOD MUSIC IN MEDIA AWARDS
WINNER
BEST SCORE (FEATURE FILM)
NICHOLAS BRITELL



Don't Look UP

FROM ACADEMY AWARD® WINNER ADAM MCKAY


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The theme for Gawain and Essel (Alicia Vikander) reflects the fact that, at least in the film’s climactic montage, their love isn’t enough for the boy who would be king.

“There’s definitely an inherent sadness in their love, and I think unconsciously so in their theme,” said Hart. “Optimistic melancholy is my default, so it’s not a stretch for me to write a sad love song. But it’s definitely the crux of what their relationship is up to that point in the film.”

In the long, nearly wordless montage, Hart’s score blossoms from a lonely fiddle tune into a rampant, rapidly growing forest of chorus and orchestra as Gawain’s bleak projection of what lies ahead if he chooses the path of a coward unfolds.

Stylistically, the music feels of the time and the soil that the story grows from. “It has an earthiness to it that sounds like wood and metal and stone all just being scraped against each other”—which was something that took trial and error to discover, Lowery said.

“One of the very early pieces Daniel tried had a much more electronic feel,” the director added. “It was beautiful, and at one point I almost revisited it. But it was too electronic. And that degree of anachronism just ran afoul of the film.”

As usual on Lowery’s films, Hart began working at the script stage, in the summer of 2018. What was highly unusual, of course, was the pandemic that delayed the film’s release by a full year, during which Lowery significantly recut the film.

Hart ended up re-scoring it multiple times. Whole scenes were dropped or re-edited as montages, necessitating new music. There were sequences Hart had scored with an orchestra that Lowery, in lockdown, decided would be better served by songs. So Hart wrote—and sang—original songs, including a Christmas carol and a lonely folk ballad that plays over a pivotal scene where Gawain rides home from his quest.

The composer’s journey was therefore, aptly, very weird. But that suited the music Hart was composing for a quartet of recorders, nyckelharpa—a medieval



Swedish instrument—and a female choir singing alternately in Latin or made-up words. He recorded the choir, recorders and a cello ensemble in London last January.

The dominant sound on *The Green Knight* score, though, is Hart himself. A professional violinist, singer and general tinkerer, Hart typically layers his own personal style of playing into a full string ensemble. He also performed the contrabass recorder and the Paetzold, a blocky wooden recorder, as well as synthesizers and a custom-made hybrid wooden instrument—the Apprehension

Engine—originally designed by a Canadian luthier for the film *The Witch*.

“It’s really part of my giving of myself to these scores, to this music,” said Hart. “I have things that I want to say as a composer, but I also have things that I want to say as a musician. And, you know, I could hire a string section to do it, and I could ask them to play like they’re whispering. But it means something more to me when I do it myself.”

Reprinted courtesy of L.A. Times

ENCANTO ENLISTS COMPOSER GERMAINE FRANCO FOR AUTHENTIC COLOMBIAN MUSIC SCORE

BY JON BURLINGAME



One expects a Disney animated film to have great music. But when the setting is outside the United States, it's especially crucial that the musical backdrop be true to the locale. Composer Germaine Franco does just that for *Encanto*.

Franco, who co-wrote most of the songs and orchestrated the score for Disney's *Coco*, set in Mexico, has become Hollywood's go-to composer for authentic Latin flavors. She was co-composer on *Dora and the Lost City of Gold*, set in Peru; wrote additional music for the Dia de los Muertos musical *The Book of Life*; and scored the Starz series *Vida*, about Mexican-American sisters living in East L.A.

Originally from El Paso, her Mexican-American heritage and vast experience as a

percussionist in Latin bands has served her well. She was the first Latina to be invited to join the Motion Picture Academy and the first to win an Annie for her work on *Coco*.

Encanto is set in Colombia, and although the songs are by Lin-Manuel Miranda, the score needed to "weave in and out of the songs, and tell the story of Mirabel [the central character] and her emotions," she says, evoking a sense of "magical realism."

It all began with the cumbia, Colombia's

national dance, which became a key element of the score. And while Franco could not visit the country because of the pandemic, she worked with Colombian musicians in L.A. and did extensive research into the colors of the region.

Traditional folk instruments played a big part in the score, Franco notes—not just accordion, the backbone of Colombian folk music, but also the tiple, a three-stringed guitar; the tambora bass drum; the gaita, a cactus-made flute; the arpa llerna, a harp; and the marimba de chonta, a percussion instrument specific to the region.

“Specific rhythms are applied to different characters,” Franco says, noting that the little boy Antonio is accompanied by Afro-Colombian rhythms.

Franco was inspired by a Hollywood Bowl performance by Carlos Vives, who performs Miranda’s “Colombia, Mi Encanto” in *Encanto*. The unique sound of Vives’ singers encouraged Franco to ask for a choral recording session...but not in L.A.

“The women of Colombia are also musicians and singers,” she explains. “They’re called cantadoras and they have this tradition, especially in the Afro-Colombian areas, where the women play percussion, chant, and sing. I wanted that sound. So we did a session remotely in Colombia and they are singing [on the score].”

Miranda praises Franco’s work: “It was really important to me that we have a Latino music team for this movie. Our first meeting went really well and she just spoke so powerfully about the themes and instrumentation she wanted to use. The theme she found was so incredible. Particularly in the finale, there’s give and take between where my song ends and her score begins.”

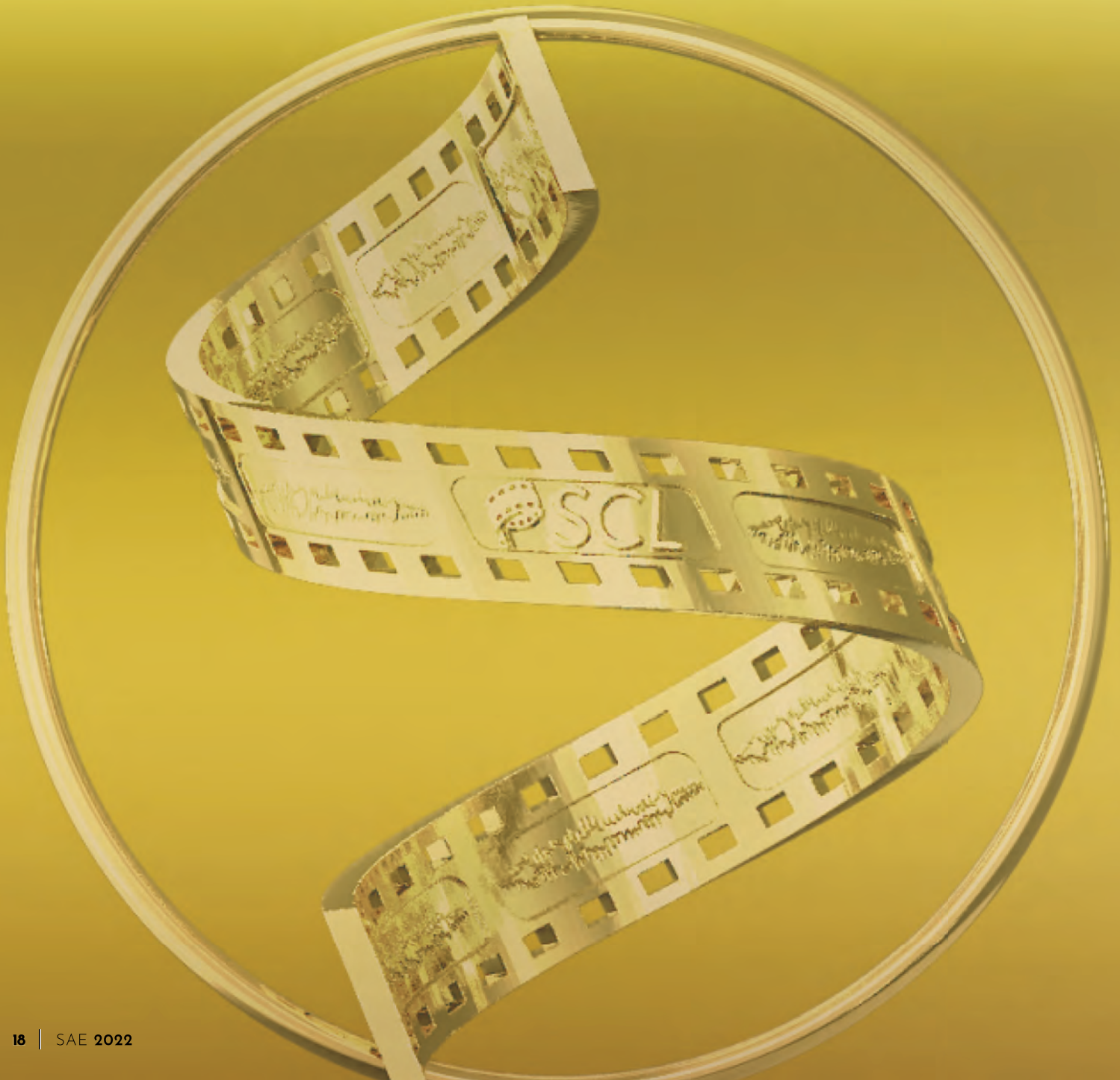
Adds Franco: “The music and the storytelling are a huge fabric that works together. It’s such a joy because you get to be who you are. I spent a year on this score. I stopped all other projects, because I felt I needed to really focus and spend all my time on this.”

Reprinted courtesy of Variety



GERMAINE FRANCO Photo by Robert Zuckerman

THE 3RD SCL AWARD NOMINATIONS



The Society of Composers & Lyricists announces the nominations for our 3rd Annual SCL Awards.

We are excited for everyone that entered, but also the vast number of you who reviewed the entries and cast your votes. Thanks for the support. The awards ceremony will be an in-person live event held at the Skirball Cultural Center Los Angeles.

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE FOR A STUDIO FILM



Don't Look Up

NICHOLAS BRITELL
Netflix



The French Dispatch

ALEXANDRE DESPLAT
Searchlight Pictures



Encanto

GERMAINE FRANCO
Walt Disney Pictures



The Power of the Dog

JONNY GREENWOOD
Netflix



Dune

HANS ZIMMER
Warner Bros. Pictures

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE FOR AN INDEPENDENT FILM



Spencer

JONNY GREENWOOD
Neon



The Green Knight

DANIEL HART
A24



Parallel Mothers

ALBERTO IGLESIAS
Sony Pictures Classics



Julia

RACHEL PORTMAN
Sony Pictures Classics



**American Traitor:
The Trail of Axis Sally**

KUBILAY UNER
Vertical Entertainment

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE FOR A TELEVISION PRODUCTION

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SONG FOR A COMEDY OR MUSICAL VISUAL MEDIA PRODUCTION



WandaVision
CHRISTOPHE BECK
Disney+



Dear White People
"Together All the Way"
KRIS BOWERS, SIEDAH GARRETT
Netflix



Succession
NICHOLAS BRITELL
HBO



Don't Look Up
"Just Look Up"
NICHOLAS BRITELL, TAURA STINSON (W/ARIANA GRANDE* & SCOTT MESCUDI*)
Netflix



Loki
NATALIE HOLT
Disney+



Spirit Untamed
"Fearless"
AMIE DOHERTY
DreamWorks Animation



Squid Game
JUNG JAE-IL
Netflix



Respect
"Here I Am (Singing My Way Home)"
JAMIE HARTMAN, JENNIFER HUDSON, & CAROLE KING
MGM/United Artists



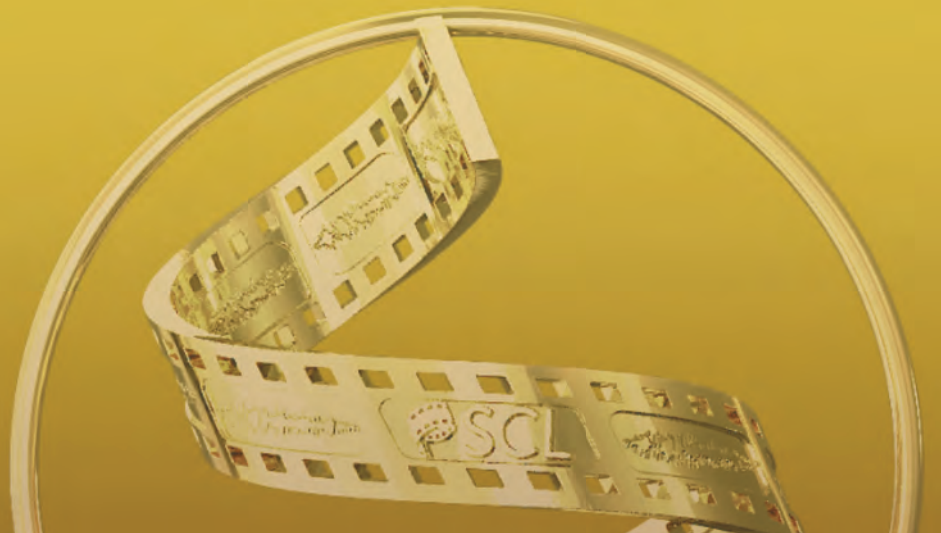
The White Lotus
CRISTOBAL TAPIA DE VEER
HBO



In the Heights
"Home All Summer"
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OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SONG FOR A DRAMATIC OR DOCUMENTARY VISUAL MEDIA PRODUCTION "GUNS GO BANG"

MUSIC BY JEYMES SAMUEL LYRICS BY JEYMES SAMUEL, SCOTT "KID CUDI" MESCUDI, SHAWN "JAY-Z" CARTER

2 CRITICS CHOICE AWARD NOMINATIONS

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BEST SONG "GUNS GO BANG"



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THE HARDER THEY FALL

★★★★

The score, by **Jeymes Samuel** and the film's co-producer **Jay-Z**, grounds its hip-hop, reggae and Afrobeat mix in nods to the master of spaghetti Western noise, Ennio Morricone."

San Francisco Chronicle



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"AN ARTISTICALLY IMPRESSIVE MOVIE WITH A **HEART-TUGGING SCORE** BY KRIS BOWERS"

SCOTT FEINBERG, *Hollywood Reporter*

"A **PULSING ANTHEM** FOR THE BLACK PRIDE AND PERSEVERANCE EMBODIED IN WILLIAMS' STORY."

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BEST PICTURE

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

KRIS BOWERS

BEST ORIGINAL SONG

"BE ALIVE"

WRITTEN BY

**DIXSON and
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VISUAL MEDIA PRODUCTION



The Harder They Fall
"Guns Go Bang"
JEYMES SAMUEL
(W/**SHAWN CARTER*** &
SCOTT MESCUDI*)
Netflix



No Time to Die
"No Time to Die"
BILLIE EILISH &
FINNEAS O'CONNELL
MGM/United Artists



Rebel Hearts
"Secret Sister"
RUFUS WAINWRIGHT
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Four Good Days
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Carter Burwell
Joel Coen & Ethan Coen

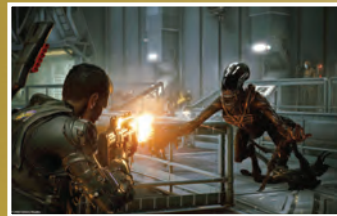
OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE FOR
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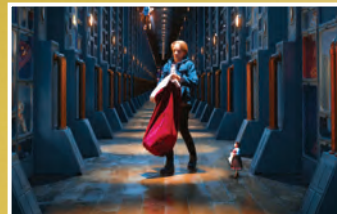


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HILDUR GUÐNADÓTTIR,
SAM SLATER
Digital Illusions CE
Electronic Arts



Alien Fireteam Elite
AUSTIN WINTORY
Cold Iron

DAVID RAKSIN AWARD
FOR EMERGING TALENT



The Claus Family
ANNE-KATHRIN DERN
Netflix



Jupiter's Legacy
STEPHANIE ECONOMOU
Netflix

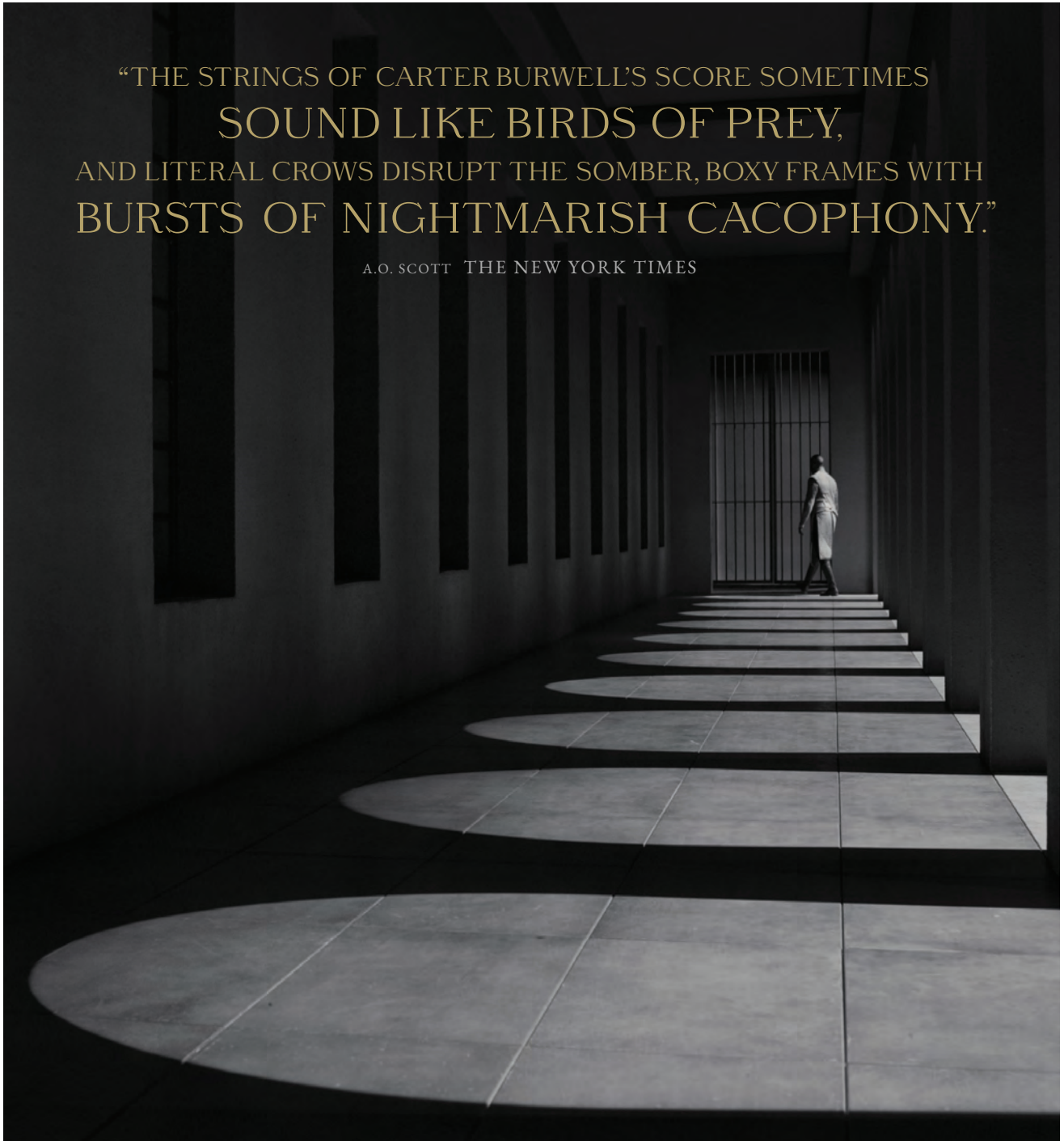


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CARTER BURWELL

“THE STRINGS OF CARTER BURWELL’S SCORE SOMETIMES
SOUND LIKE BIRDS OF PREY,
AND LITERAL CROWS DISRUPT THE SOMBER, BOXY FRAMES WITH
BURSTS OF NIGHTMARISH CACOPHONY.”

A.O. SCOTT THE NEW YORK TIMES



DENZEL
WASHINGTON

FRANCES
McDORMAND

THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH

WRITTEN FOR THE SCREEN AND DIRECTED BY JOEL COEN



A24

BILLIE EILISH AND FINNEAS ON NO TIME TO DIE, A BOND THEME THAT REALLY MIGHT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE

BY CHRIS WILLMAN

The sibling collaborators received Variety's Film Song of the Year Award

Probably never before in history did as much time transpire between the release of a film's theme song and the actual release of the movie as in the case of *No Time to Die*. Billie Eilish's title song, written with her producer and brother, Finneas, came out 20 months before the James Bond film it was written for, due to a series of pandemic-related delays that kept pushing back the movie. Since it was written so specifically to echo thematic and narrative elements of the film that were being kept under wraps, that meant 20 months of Eilish and Finneas talking about the tune but not being at liberty to talk freely about the actual meaning and intent of the lyrics.

Now that the film has been widely seen, they're unleashed, at last, to discuss every aspect of what went into their song. The sibling collaborators are being honored at this weekend's *Variety* Hitmakers event for having the Film Song of the Year, and they spoke with us in advance of being honored about some of the subtleties that went into their composition, which we recently named as one of the 10 best Bond songs of all time.

Q: *What's it been like for you to have people sort of marinating in your theme for 20 months while they waited for the film? Fortunately, since it turned out that people did like the song, that gave them time to bask in its mood and sort of further imagine what the film might be like, during all that time. So how did it feel to finally have it come out?*

EILISH: Exciting. I mean, we all feel it's been a very loooong year and a half, or two years. [The film was originally supposed to come out in fall 2019, before it had its first, pre-pandemic bump.] And I was nervous because I was like: Are people going to be tired of me by the time this movie is out? And who knows if that might even be the case, but I don't feel that it is. It was really cool, because it made it so much more impactful even when it came out than it was before, just because it was this insane anticipation that had all of our skin...what's the word? Not crawling, but the opposite—like, excited and on the edge of our seats. And it's funny, because it was so long ago that I was 17 recording it, and I'm about to turn 20, and that's such a large difference in your life and who you are and the things around you.

Q: *In a conversation we had about the song about a year ago, you said it was written very specifically to dovetail with the plot of the film, but that you couldn't really discuss exactly how it was supposed to fit in. ["There's definitely a lot in the song that will make more sense when you do see the movie," Eilish said then, and Finneas added: "If we spoil anything, each of us have a red dot from a scope outside of the window that'll stick a hypodermic needle in our necks."] Now that everyone's seen it: What kind of instruction were you given about writing the song, as far as coming out of that 25-minute pre-credit sequence, but also, perhaps, "The ending of this movie is kind of somber, so we don't want too excitable of a song?"*

FINNEAS: You want me to take this, Bill?... We were given the opening; up until where the song comes in in the movie, we were given that much of the script. We read that and we knew the title of the film, obviously, and that was really it, in terms of writing it. All of the other parameters of writing the song were things that Billie and I felt passionate about. We definitely thought the name of the movie should be the hook of the song. It definitely had to have that signature 007 feel, musically and melodically. Billie and I often write lyrics and melody at the same time; sometimes we write lyrics before we write melody. But in this song's case, we wrote all of the melody before we wrote the lyrics, just because I had this feeling that the lyrics could be perfect, but if the melody isn't also perfect, then it's not going to land.

Once we had written the song, we were invited to London by Hans (Zimmer, the score composer) and Barbara (Broccoli, the producer) to see the movie before we orchestrated the song. So that was when we learned how the film ended. But otherwise we were kept totally in the dark—which was really cool. I think it's such a cool way to write that song, to be given only the piece of the movie that has preceded it. I just loved that. I feel like I wouldn't have wanted to know every in and out of the movie.



FINNEAS and **BILLIE EILISH** next to James Bond's Aston Martin car at the World Premiere of **NO TIME TO DIE** at the Royal Albert Hall on September 28, 2021 in London, England. Photo by Ian Gavan/Getty Images

Oh, you know what? The only thing Barbara said that wasn't in the script? She said, "He ends up having been wrong." That was the thing that she told us: Bond thinks that he's been betrayed, and he hasn't. So that was really important for us to know, too.

Q: *That's interesting, because it is a song about feeling betrayed, and then you find out he wasn't. And so when you come back with a reprise at the very end of the final credits, you're just humming it, because the words might not be appropriate anymore at that point.*

FINNEAS: Well, it's funny that you say that. Because we knew that he had thought he was wrong, but I wanted to make the words have enough of a double meaning that they would still be relevant. So all that stuff—"I had fallen for a lie"...He's been lied to, and he thinks the lie was (from) his love interest. But the lie was, in fact, Blofeld. So I thought like if we could land that, it would also add a good layer to it.

EILISH: It had like a double meaning: "fallen for a lie" as in what he thinks is the lie, but then he believes his own lie. It's like he fell for his own not-trusting-people lie.

Q: *The melody is very clear and emphatic—so much so that Hans keeps repeating it instrumentally throughout his score—but*

your reading of it is subtle, as Bond themes go. Although it includes some big moments, it's hard to think of another Bond theme that takes that big of a chance on being hushed for a lot of the song. Did you think of it as taking a chance, in that way?

EILISH: You know, we kind of just let it flow how it flowed. Mainly the things we were focused on were having a very strong melody and incorporating what we knew of the movie and the plot and the title, and having it feel very Bond-y. We weren't too focused on "What are the dynamics going to be?" But then it just needed a moment at the end to have a big belt. And at the time, I had never done anything like that. So for me, it was really out of my comfort zone, and I was nervous and very excited to try new things. But I was very, very worried that I wouldn't be able to do it, or that I wasn't good enough or people wouldn't like it. But I feel like we got it to such a place of having it feel very soft and just melancholy, and then also very strong and harsh, almost—and then powerful. didn't force it to be anything. It just became what it is.

Q: *Almost kind of contradictorily, the song feels like it was very individual to you guys, but at the same time, it felt like part of like a John Barry-like musical tradition. You could almost think of it either way. So how much did you think about that tradition?*

FINNEAS: Oh, I think it was omnipresent on our minds—I think especially punctuated by the fact that, you've got to remember, we were really auditioning for this. They didn't come to us and say, "The job is yours. Now go write a song." They said to us, "We'd love to hear what you come up with." And so we knew that they were inviting us into their world.

You know, to me, the agony of our song being out for 18 months before the film was that it really isn't supposed to live on its own that way. It's a little bit like if a film score came out 18 months before the movie. If you love the movie and then you want to put the song on that was in the movie, then great. I love that. But THIS song only exists because of the film *No Time to Die*. So I was so anxious for the film to come out, because I felt that it really was a marriage of music and film. To me it was always this feeling of, we really want to add our names to the ledger, and be respectful—and still be true to ourselves as artists. I didn't want to make a song that didn't feel like a Billie Eilish song with Billie. But it's a "Bond song."

Q: *You've talked about how Hans and some others worked on the orchestration independently for a while, and had come up with these really big arrangements for your song, and you wanted to strip a lot of that back, but you were nervous about letting them know that you'd taken out some of what*

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they did with it. How did you arrive at that comfort level of: This is going to have some real orchestral flourishes, but that's really not going to be what the song is about in the end?

EILISH: I was nervous because I've always loved orchestration, but I had never really dipped my foot in the pool of it. And I didn't know how it would go. I wasn't used to it at all, and I didn't really know what to expect. I was worried that it would take over what the song felt like, and be too much over my voice. Because my voice is really small, and especially at the time, I didn't have a very powerful voice when I

was a teenager—which was when I made all my music, except for the recent stuff. My voice was very soft and small and not very loud, and I didn't know how it would work together.

And it was just so great to have Hans be the way he is, because he's so easy to work with, and so collaborative, and really agrees with what you feel. He doesn't ever give me the feeling that he thinks he knows best and "oh, you're (new to this)" or whatever. He was also so self-deprecating in a very endearing way, which I always love in a person, especially somebody like him, who is unbelievably and incredibly accomplished and could literally be the most self-centered

person on earth. He's really not. He is open to ideas and open to changing things and having them not be the norm. And that was really, really helpful, especially for people like me and Finneas, who hadn't really been in this world of orchestration or having our music be part of it. And it was a really good process.

Q: Speaking to how the recording incorporates the original Monty Norman theme: I think you refer to it four times in the song, subtly or blatantly. You don't want to make the song campy or diminish the emotion in any way, but at the same time, Bond fans really appreciate having the "spy chord" at the end. Was that a tough choice to make in any way?

FINNEAS: No, it wasn't a tough choice. And especially once Johnny Marr was involved, obviously that amazing (final chord)—I think it's a minor nine, or whatever that chord is at the very end of the song that Johnny plays on that kind of tremolo guitar—it's just the coolest. And it's like, if you have Johnny Marr at your disposal, let Johnny Marr do his thing. So that was our philosophy with that. The same with Hans: we have Hans Zimmer, let's let Hans Zimmer do his thing.

Q: Was there anything about "No Time to Die" that you can pinpoint as having influenced the *Happier Than Ever* album you recorded subsequently?

EILISH: I can't say specifically that from the song "No Time to Die," there was an exact inspiration for *Happier Than Ever*. But I do think that everything we do creatively and musically inspires everything else we do, good and bad, and especially the good things. I feel like this taught us so much about character writing. That for sure inspired a ton of my brain, and all of the music that we made after. I mean, it's the butterfly effect—you think about what the hell would the album sound like if we never made "No Time to Die." It would probably be super different. But I think everything is inspiring, in every aspect, weirdly.

FINNEAS: I think *No Time to Die* absolutely gave us confidence to go vocally in a place that we hadn't yet.

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CARTER BURWELL

MINES THRILLER GENRE FOR *TRAGEDY OF MACBETH* SCORE

BY JON BURLINGAME

Carter Burwell has scored 19 of the movies of Joel and Ethan Coen, including such classics as *Fargo*, *The Big Lebowski*, and *No Country for Old Men*, yet he's never been nominated for a major industry award for any of that music. That could change this year with his dark and disturbing sounds for Joel Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, starring Denzel Washington and Frances McDormand.





CARTER BURWELL *Photo courtesy of Apple*

KATHRYN HUNTER, *writer/director* JOEL COEN,
and cinematographer BRUNO DELBONNEL
behind the scenes of *THE TRAGEDY OF MACBETH*.



Q: *What did Joel say he was looking for in the music?*

CARTER: One thing he knew he didn't want: He didn't want it to be Scottish. It's all shot on sound stages, and fairly surreal ones, and that's the way I took it—not as a physical reality but as a psychological reality. He was interested in the way the play suggests certain genres of film: thriller, horror, psychological drama. He wanted the music to serve the function that music does in those genres, making you uncomfortable, driving the story forward, getting you ready for a big denouement.

Q: *How would you describe your soundscape?*

CARTER: We were recording during the pandemic, and that did help push me toward the string orchestra. The silky, gray-black tones always evoke *Psycho*, one of my favorite film scores. The string sound for me fits that type of film: a

“We came to the concept that the dialogue itself is like a melody, and the score would be the accompaniment to it.”

—Carter Burwell

black-and-white horror film. I tried to look for novel textures: the basses are doing biting attacks, some of the cellos are doing bouncy vibratos.

Q: *Being Shakespeare, there's a lot of dialogue. How did you decide where to add music and where to remain silent?*

CARTER: We came to the concept that the dialogue itself is like a melody, and the score would be the accompaniment to it. That led me to think about having the music in the lower two octaves of the

orchestra, mostly cellos and basses, where it wouldn't interfere with the dialogue. And there's a solo fiddle that goes off pitch a lot; it's disturbing and a little witchy.

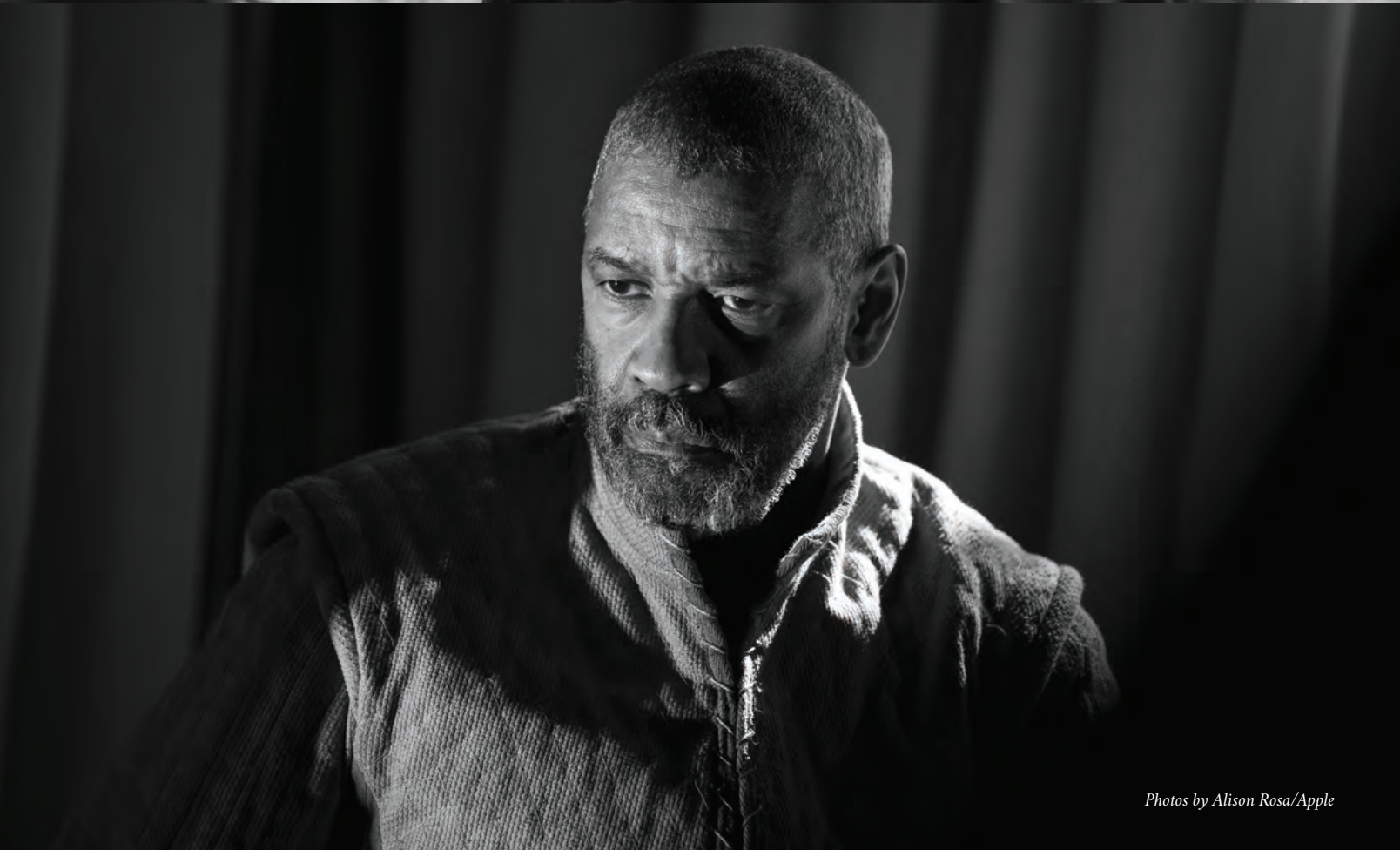
The big monologues mostly don't have music under them because these actors are such magnificent solo instruments. For Fran's "out, damned spot" speech, you could have had music under it, but her performance of that monologue goes from pianissimo to fortissimo.

Q: *Were there any musical ideas that didn't make it into the final score?*

CARTER: I wanted there to be a love theme for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Maybe more than any other version of this play, those two actors do convey that. They're a team, there is a tenderness between them. I did want to play that, and I did have a theme for it. But in the end, Joel found it just too distracting. The film and the music have to stay in a disturbing tone.

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From top: FRANCES MCDORMAND
and DENZEL WASHINGTON



Photos by Alison Rosa/Apple

JAY-Z EXPLAINS

HOW HIS SONG 'GUNS GO BANG' ALMOST DIDN'T MAKE IT INTO *THE HARDER THEY FALL*

BY JAZZ TANGCAY

It's a big deal when multi-hyphenate Shawn Carter—better known as Jay-Z—makes an appearance pretty much anywhere—and his presence at a Q&A at Hollywood's Neuehouse on Tuesday night, moderated by *Variety's* Jazz Tangcay, was a *really* big deal.

Carter, who served as a producer on Netflix's *The Harder They Fall*, was at the event to talk about his collaboration with friend and director/composer Jeymes Samuel.



A fully-vaxxed and tested crowd of AMPAS voters and members of the music branch packed into the screening room as Carter explained how first-time director Samuel—who also goes by The Bullitts—spent over a decade going through different iterations of the film, which stars Regina King, Jonathan Majors, LaKeith Stanfield, and Idris Elba.

Jay-Z—who had specifically asked to be called by his real name during the event, although Tangcay slipped and called him Jay at one

point; he laughed and said it was OK—spoke about the importance of the film's all-Black cast.

"The fact that we could tell stories of people that really existed and bring their story to life," he said. "It's not a documentary—it's a fantasy, but the names of people existed, and that cherry on top for us is super prideful."

Woven into the film is an original score by Samuel and original song "Guns Go Bang,"

performed by Kid Cudi and Jay-Z and written by the three of them. With the song tipped by many pundits to crack the final five nominees in the Oscars' Best Original Song category, the pair talked about crafting the song which plays over the film's opening title sequence. "We call that our 'verbal kit' moment, when it stares you right in your face," Jay said, noting that the film was already in the editing process when Samuel called him.

"We were making sure that the story we were



Producer/songwriter SHAWN "JAY-Z" CARTER and director, writer, producer, songwriter, composer JEYMES SAMUEL. Photo by Kit Karzen



THE HARDER THEY FALL; Photos courtesy of Netflix

“When you’re listening to it for the first time, you’re not looking for clues. It’s when you hear it back and you’re like, ‘Oh wow, you just told me the whole plot of the movie.’”

–Jay-Z

me every day: “It’s a lot of real estate to wait two and a half minutes,” Samuel said.

And so “Guns Go Bang,” came along. “There was no way that couldn’t be at the beginning,” Samuel said. And the title sequence is an homage to *The Sting*, with Nagenda getting his way in the end.

The team used the soundtrack to help bring a new take on the Western genre, including artists such as Barrington Levy, Koffee, CeeLo Green, and Lauryn Hill into the mix.

“We were pushing it,” Jay said. “The way the music plays here. At first glance, if someone told you it was going to be reggae against a cowboy film, they’ll be like, ‘Nah, that don’t go.’ But as you see, it’s seamless because the music that plays in Westerns is not Western music. There’s an Italian guitar and we’ve come to accept this is what that is.”

Samuel added, “I’ve always believed that composers should work hand in hand with not only the directors but the writers. If the director has a strong vision of where he’s going, he should be collaborating with the composer because the score could help dictate where you put the camera, and how you shoot.”

He added Jay’s contributions to the film went far beyond the music, noting his suggestions to the film’s ending (SPOILER ALERT). Speaking of the two characters in the film’s end, he said, “Jay was like, ‘Rufus has his back to him, his guns are down and he’s nursing a drink. Nat Love can never shoot a man in the back. Pick up the guns and turn him around’—and that’s why he’s Jay-Z.”

Reprinted courtesy of Variety

discussing and telling in our heads manifested itself on a screen,” Jay said. “I had the song, and Jaymes put strings on it. I was like, ‘I got it, and just told this whole story of the film in 12 bars.’”

He continued referring to the first verse which he sings and reveals the plot of the film. “When you’re listening to it for the first time, you’re not looking for clues. It’s when you hear it back and you’re like, ‘Oh wow, you just told me the whole plot of the movie.’”

However, the song’s last-minute addition to

the film almost didn’t happen. Both revealed that originally an unnamed Elvis Presley song was set to play over a different opening sequence. Samuel says, “It was a real homage to the Old West with Nat Love riding through the desert.”

It was Netflix’s executive vice president of production, Tendo Nagenda (who was in the audience Tuesday), who suggested there was a chance to do “something dope there,” Samuel said. “We did a reggae remix of the Elvis track, and it shows how closely related the two genres are.” But then came Tendo moaning at

**“JENNIFER HUDSON, CAROLE KING, AND
JAMIE HARTMAN CRAFT A GOSPEL-INSPIRED
ORIGINAL SONG **WORTHY OF THE QUEEN
OF SOUL** WITH ‘HERE I AM (SINGING MY WAY HOME)’”**

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“HERE I AM (SINGING MY WAY HOME)”

RESPECT



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TWO-TIME OSCAR WINNER **ALEXANDRE DESPLAT** REUNITES WITH WES ANDERSON FOR *THE FRENCH DISPATCH*

BY EDWARD DOUGLAS

After receiving seven Oscar nominations, composer Alexandre Desplat finally won an Oscar for Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* in 2015. That was followed a few years later with another Oscar for scoring Guillermo del Toro's Oscar-winning *The Shape of Water*. In fact, Desplat has been nominated for 11 Oscars in total, including three for work he's done with Anderson.

Anderson's *The French Dispatch* is an odd anthology of stories centered around a fictional American magazine based in the French town of Ennui-sur-Blasé, the film telling four particular stories from the last issue after the death of the magazine's editor, Arthur Howitzer, Jr. (Bill Murray). The writers of those stories include Owen Wilson's Herbsaint Sazerac (Owen Wilson), the "Cycling Reporter"; Tilda Swinton's critic J.K.L. Berensen; essayist Lucinda Kremetz, as played by Frances McDormand; as well as Jeffrey Wright's Roebuck Wright. Those four are just the tip of the iceberg for Anderson's amazing ensemble that also includes Benicio del Toro, Timothée Chalamet, Elisabeth Moss, Jason Schwartzman, Liev Shreiber, Christoph Waltz, Edward Norton, Willem Dafoe, and many more.

More importantly, it reteams Desplat and Anderson for another terrific collaboration of quirky musical ideas to match Anderson's distinctive cinematic storytelling. It's such a fantastic and original score that it should get Desplat back into the Oscar race, and actually, Desplat's score just received a Golden Globe nomination earlier this week.

Below the Line got on Zoom with Monsieur

Desplat, literally the day after he returned to California after almost two years abroad, because the borders had been closed due to COVID.

Q: *I'm not sure if the last time we spoke whether I asked you how you got started in film composing. Did you go to school for composing and that led you to scoring films?*

ALEXANDRE DESPLAT: I was a flautist. I started music when I was 5, but when I started going to the movies, when I was in my teenage years, I realized how music was important in these films. I started to become passionate about music and collecting theme scores, American theme scores, European theme scores, and I just dreamt of becoming a composer for the cinema. I never dreamt of being a composer for a concert, but cinema was my passion. I started with a short movie and another short and another project, and then a feature and then slowly but surely, I became a film composer.

Q: *Did you have a favorite film composer whose work you admired in particular?*

DESPLAT: We had a great French School of Film Music—Antoine Duhamel, Maurice Jarre, Georges Delerue—but I also loved the Italians, Nino Rota, but all the Americans. Of course, there's the classic history of [Max] Steiner, [Franz] Waxman, and [Erich] Korngold, and Newman. I think I learned almost chronologically, and then again, Jerry Goldsmith, Bernstein, of course, and they became my idols. I was raised by parents who had lived in America and studied in America and got married in America. So my childhood was really charged with this passion of California. I think subconsciously, there was something pulling me toward California and American culture, as simple as that.

Q: *You've worked with Wes on five or six films so far, so I assume when he does a movie called *The French Dispatch*, it's not even a question that you'll do the music on that one.*

DESPLAT: I must say that through the years, there's no question I'm not doing a film by Wes, because I know that the world that he's going to offer to me will be different from the previous one, and it would be a new adventure and a new challenge. We're good friends, and there's no reason for me to even read the script.

Q: *But I assume you still do read it, so at what point does he actually give you the script and you start thinking about themes and stuff like that? Is it fairly early on?*

DESPLAT: Yes, very early on before shooting, and for the next film we're going to do together, that is just finished and is in editing now. Wes said that I would write music before, so I wrote some ideas before that they used on set, I think.

Q: *How do you start to write and come up with ideas? Do you generally sit down at the piano?*



ALEXANDRE DESPLAT

Photo by Brigitte Lacombe

DESPLAT: I'm not a pianist. Of course, I play piano, but I wouldn't play in a concert or to perform, but I use the piano to play a melody and themes, something not too "pianistic." Otherwise, I work on the computer with very precise orchestrated demos that I play to the director.

Q: Branching off my previous question, are you actually writing a lot of stuff while he's shooting or before he's shooting?

DESPLAT: No, [the new movie is] an exception. I usually wait for the [film to be edited]. Even the director that you know, that you've worked with before, people who have been very loyal to me, and I've been loyal to them through the years. I still prefer watching the film, because you never know...the script is just paper and ink, and it's not enough in the end to see the light, the actors, hear their voices, the pace of the film, the pace of the acting. I want to be an actor in a film.

Q: I'm sure one of these days Wes will find a role for you in one of his films.

DESPLAT: I meant it metaphorically. I want

to compose as if I was on the set with the actors, that's what I meant.

Q: I spoke with Randall Poster recently, and it seemed like *Life Aquatic* was a bit of a turning point, since that was the last song-based soundtrack Wes did, and then you joined him for *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. He told me that when it comes to scoring, it's mainly you and Wes in a studio together. Is Wes coming to you with ideas for instruments or things like that? What's your first conversation with Wes about the music on one of his films?

DESPLAT: He never plays music for me, and there's no temp track. It's always about the fantasy that he has. Let's take *Grand Budapest*. [He'll be like] "Oh, how about we don't use an orchestra, but we try and put together instruments that are new to Europa," and then I suggest ideas, sounds. I do demos, I play themes, and it becomes the score, and then together, in my studio, we decide where and how. Then, he takes my demos and goes back to the editing room, and puts everything together as a Swiss clock, and the music really becomes part of the editing of the pace of the film. When

we did *Mr. Fox*, I suggested that we use only small instruments because it was these little puppets. I didn't want a big score. I think that's how we started, actually, playing with the instrumentation, with weird, strange instrumentation combinations of sounds. In *Mr. Fox*, I didn't want to use full orchestra, so I used little instruments, baby instruments. It creates a very charming, gentle sound, not bombastic, because the movie didn't need to be bombastic in terms of score.

Q: The French Dispatch has some really interesting instruments as well. I think I heard tuba, banjo, harpsichord...

DESPLAT: Bassoons...

Q: I'm always trying to figure out if there are live musicians or just really good samples, but I assume you always record everything live?

DESPLAT: There's no samples, everything's live. It's very important for Wes that everything's live, because he likes to experiment in the studio, "How about we try this or that?" No, my demos are



[samples], but they become much better, because it's real instruments, always.

Q: *So would he say something like, "Let's try a tuba," and then you have to find a tuba player?*

DESPLAT: It could be that. In the studio, he could say, "Oh, how about we play the piccolo by the tuba?" "Okay, let's bring the tuba in." Yeah, we could do that kind of thing. He has this strategy.

Q: *How have things changed for you with COVID? I've spoken to composers who have worked with live orchestras in Vienna using all these crazy apps to sync up between countries. Have you been doing that, too, or just working there in France?*

DESPLAT: Yeah, I did that with George Clooney for *The Midnight Sky*. We recorded a lot over the DSL from Paris with a great sound connection from Abbey Road, so -everything was smooth and easy. Netflix made it very, very, very comfortable for us to work, but it was very painful for me and frustrating, because I like to be conducting. I like to be near the musicians, near the orchestra, and share that moment with them when I hear music for the first time. It was not fun. It

was efficient and great, but not as I wish it to be. Many other scores I recorded in Paris. Luckily enough, I could finally go to England a few weeks ago and recorded a new score for Stephen Frears, but my everyday life was the same. I was locked in the studio all day, writing music, but the fun of taking a train or a plane to go record in the bigger studio with musicians, unfortunately, that was not possible. That was sad.

Q: *Does it feel like things have gotten better in the last year and a little closer to going back to normal?*

DESPLAT: No, it's very new. I mean, I was under to go to Greenland three weeks ago, and America, for the first time I could come yesterday, I arrived yesterday, because it was the first time the borders were open to me. I've been very much away because of COVID. I couldn't be here and work with directors here.

Q: *I always get a kick out of the names of cues on soundtracks, and the ones on French Dispatch are quite witty. Is that you coming up with names for the different pieces?*

DESPLAT: No, that's Wes. That's all Wes. Because it's the name of the characters or the situations and the scenes, so it's mostly from

Wes' world.

Q: *You work with a lot of other directors and filmmakers as well, a lot of people multiple times as you mentioned. Do any of the other directors you work with use temp music, either your own or someone else's that they cut to, or do you generally get a dry edit with no music?*

DESPLAT: Well, directors like Wes Anderson, like Roman Polanski, they don't use temp. They never use temp, they don't need it because they have their own idea of what the music should be, and what the editing should be without using temp. Some others, they mix existing scores of mine or other composers. It's a bit of a battle each time for the director to forget this temp that is heard again and again and again and again and again and again. And again. And again. It's always difficult to convince him that you can look for another sound, another pace, that the bass is not right, or the sound is not right, or the placement is not right, which is another story all along. I have to deal with it, and I try to convince the director that my choice is best. Sometimes I win, sometimes I lose.

Q: *I've spoken to quite a few composers about hearing your own past music over new images, and the composers I've spoken to*

know right away that it's not the right music for those images. I'm not sure if that's just a natural knack one has as a composer or the instinct of not wanting to lose scoring work to his or her past self. How do you feel about temp music even if it's your own?

DESPLAT: There's this famous scene between Brian de Palma and Bernard Hermann coming to a screening where he used his previous cues, previous music from Hitchcock, and Bernard Hermann just stormed out, saying it was impossible to use that music in this film because it was wrong. And I understand. When you see a film, and you hear the music that you've written for something else, it's disconnected. It's just not right. You know that there's something else that can be cooked by the chef.

Q: I know you're working on a few different things, including Stephen Frears' next movie, which I'm excited for, since it's been the longest time since a movie from him. Do you generally focus on scoring one movie at a time?

DESPLAT: Always. It's too difficult. I'm just by myself in my studio, and I couldn't do two movies at a time. I don't want to hire somebody to write in the room beside my room, that's not what I want to do. I write every single note of my scores, that's what I love, that's why I chose that job, because I'm passionate about writing music and orchestrating.

Q: Can you write something, then work on something else and then do recording or post later, or is it usually one project, beginning to end?

DESPLAT: Beginning to end, usually.

Q: It's great talking to you. The French Dispatch is another one of your great works, and I do have to say that I have listened to the score more than I've seen the movie.

DESPLAT: That's what I try to do. Some movies are harder to be able to score and write music that can hold, because it's too much action or maybe you're not inspired by a scene at that time, but it's always what you dream of as a composer, to be able to write music for a film that would still be able to be listened to by listeners out of the theater.

Q: You said that you never want to compose music for a live orchestra to play a concert, but a lot of composers have gone out with an orchestra to perform their music from films, so have you thought about that?

DESPLAT: Of course, that was when I was 15, but I've started to write a concept now. I wrote some pieces for flute and orchestra and I wrote an opera. I've started doing something else in between.

Q: But even just performing some of your film scores...

DESPLAT: Yes, yes, I've done that. Of course, with the COVID, that was basically shut down, but I've done many concerts around the world. But there are some concerts coming in Vienna, in Moscow, in Hong Kong, many places...And maybe one day in America.

Q: That would be nice.

DESPLAT: I agree.

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"ONE OF THE BEST PICTURES OF THE YEAR"
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Richard Brody, THE NEW YORKER
Ann Hornaday, THE WASHINGTON POST
Owen Gleiberman, VARIETY
David Rooney, THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER
Stephanie Zacharek, TIME

"A HITCHCOCKIAN SCORE BY REGULAR COLLABORATOR ALBERTO IGLESIAS THAT'S LUSH AND ENVELOPING EVEN BY THE COMPOSER'S DISTINGUISHED STANDARDS."
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YOU CAN TELL IT'S OSCAR SEASON BECAUSE **DIANE WARREN** HAS A NEW SONG IN THE RACE

"I wanted to write a song about hope," 12-time nominee says of "Somehow You Do" from *Four Good Days*.



BY STEVE POND

You can think of it as an Oscar-season version of *Groundhog Day*. At some point in the fall, Diane Warren pops her head out of the cave—sorry, the office—where she goes to write songs, bearing a new tune from a new movie. And when she does, it doesn't matter whether she sees her shadow or not, because a new Diane Warren movie song means that awards season has begun.

It's been like that for much of the last three decades. Warren had a remarkable streak beginning in 1996 in which she was nominated for five songwriting Oscars in six years. But she's been in an even more impressive streak since 2014, with six nominations in seven years, including the last four years in a row.

And naturally she's back in the race this year, aiming for her 13th nomination and her so-far elusive first win. She's got more than one song in the mix, but her best bet is "Somehow You Do," an ode to resilience that's sung by Reba McEntire in the Rodrigo Garcia drama *Four Good Days*.

The film is about a mother and daughter, played by Glenn Close and Mila Kunis, who are fighting the daughter's crippling drug addiction. "I watched it right at the beginning of the pandemic shutdown and thought it was a powerful movie with great performances," Warren said.

"So I came into work, and nobody was in my office—which I have to say, I didn't mind. That was the silver lining of COVID, that I had no one to bug the s— out of me except myself. So I sat at my keyboards that morning and started writing "Somehow You Do." I literally just wrote that whole chorus right away, and I had tears in my eyes as I was writing it."

That chorus, she said, was a key to what she wanted to say with the song: "When you think it's the end of the road/It's just 'cause you don't know where the road's leading to/When you think the mountain's too high and the ocean's too wide and you'll never get through/Some way, somehow you do."

"I wanted to write a song about hope, you know?" she said. "We were going through the pandemic, so here I was writing this song for this movie, but I'm going, 'God, this feels like outside of the movie—this is what we're all living at the moment, where we're all feeling like life's punched a hole in our soul and that we're not going to get through.'"

In that way, she added, it tied into other recent songs of hers, including "Til It Happens to You" from *The Hunting Ground*, "Stand Up for Something" from *Marshall* and "I'll Fight" from *RBG*. "First and foremost, a song has to be right for the movie," she said. "I thought the song was really right for the movie, but then it felt bigger than that as well."

The choice of Reba McEntire to perform the song in *Four Good Days*, she added, came from her usual process. "When I'm casting an artist for a song in a movie, it is like a character in the



DIANE WARREN Photo by Mekael Dawson

movie,” she said. “That casting is really important. And when I was watching the movie, I was thinking, ‘What would Glenn Close listen to?’ I could see her character listening to Reba McEntire. I felt like she could almost be like another invisible character in the movie.

“And now, if you look at the comments on the Reba video on YouTube, there’s a bunch of them about addiction, but also about depression, and comments saying, ‘Hearing this song made me feel like I can get through this.’ As a songwriter, the idea that a little song you wrote in your room might give somebody strength and hope, there’s nothing better than that.”

As she said this, Warren was Zooming from her Hollywood office—where, of course, she was writing songs. “I don’t need an assignment, I just write songs I want to write,” she said. “I haven’t written my best songs yet. I finished a great one yesterday, and I was working on one this morning. I’m always writing something.”

She shrugged. “I think I’d maybe go crazy if I wasn’t writing. Not that I’m not crazy anyway, but I think I’d be *more* crazy.”

Reprinted courtesy of Variety



GLENN CLOSE and MILA KUNIS

FIDDLES, THEREMINS AND REMOTE ORCHESTRAS: **NATALIE HOLT ON HER SCORE** FOR MARVEL'S *LOKI*

BY CLOVIS MCEVOY

The UK-based composer and violinist discusses the weird and wonderful sounds of *Loki*, her career composing for the screen, and the perils of managing an orchestra over Zoom.



“I enjoyed the feeling of not having to be a slave to what Marvel had done before,” says Natalie Holt. The UK-based composer is telling us how she had to chart a new course for *Loki*, away from the Wagnerian pomp and full orchestras that have defined the sound of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) over dozens of films and TV shows. “We wanted to really push it and do things that were unexpected.”

Loki, the latest MCU spin-off that landed on TV screens last month, follows the titular antihero as he skips across timelines, leaving chaos in his wake. Not your average superhero-saves-the-universe tale. And to match that, Holt had to venture into new sonic territory, where warbling theremins, thick synth textures, Scandinavian folk instruments and the ghostly Ondes Martenot play recurring characters.



LOKI Photo courtesy of Disney+

The left-field soundtrack has now earned plaudits from fans and critics—with one reviewer even calling it among the “best things about the show.” So how did Holt manage to convince a cinematic behemoth like Disney that a primitive Soviet electronic instrument would be right for the job?

Rewind a decade or so, and the prospect of working with Disney would have seemed as fantastical to Holt as one of *Loki*'s time-twisting plotlines. As a young composer, she initially struggled to break into the highly competitive world of screen composing after completing her master's degree at London's National Film and Television School in 2007.

“I left and was earning peanuts for many years,” she remembers. “Playing the violin to make a living because I just could not get a gig. It's so frustrating to be in your 20s and know that you have it in you, but you've got no way to actually get to the work.”

A breakthrough eventually came co-writing the music for the 2011 BBC adaptation of *Great Expectations* with fellow composer Martin Phipps. It earned the pair a nomination for Best

Score at the BAFTAs and was the start of a successful creative partnership. They would go on to earn several more nominations and awards, including the Ivor Novello Award for Best Television Soundtrack for 2014 spy drama *The Honourable Woman*, and a nomination at the Primetime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Music Composition in a Series for 2016 drama, *Victoria*.

By the time Holt produced her emotionally raw and heartfelt score for the 2017 BBC drama, *Three Girls*, which won her a Royal Television Society Award for Best Original Music, she was firmly on the path that would lead her to pitch her musical ideas for *Loki* to series director Kate Herron.

“I'd read the script and had a pitch meeting with Kate,” says Holt. “A lot of the things I responded to—and the influences I had when I read the script—connected up with Kate's vision, which was really lucky.”

Holt was officially brought on board as the series' composer, becoming the second woman to helm the musical soundtrack for an MCU title after Pinar Toprak, who scored *Captain Marvel* in 2019.

Holt's first task after joining the production was scoring a suite of themes to be sent off for review and approval by, among others, MCU mastermind Kevin Feige. She explains, “The way Marvel handles their process means that they're all on board with the style and the sound before you dig in to scoring scenes or start working through an episode.”

Of all the musical motifs that the character of *Loki* has accrued through a decade of appearing in the MCU, it's Holt's theme that truly captures the playful extravagance and deep theatricality of the supervillain.

“It's got the drama and the low-end,” says Holt. “Then it has those cheeky string rips over the top. It felt like it had to have lots of layers in it and be really over-the-top.”

Loki takes place in a retro-futuristic world, paradoxically filled with time-travelling plot points, action-adventure fantasy, and office cubicle bureaucracy. It's a setting that perfectly suited the “over-the-top” aesthetic Holt had in mind and offered the composer a wealth of different influences to draw upon.

“I adore all the *Doctor Who* soundtracks

and all that early electronic music. I'm a big fan and so I was really happy to be able to explore those influences and pair them with classic, powerful, Wagneresque themes."

While Holt's score certainly honours the orchestral stylings which have become synonymous with the MCU, it also takes risks and notably branches out—menacing drones, twisting melody lines, and synthesised percussion take centre stage, with strings and brass largely playing a supporting role.

Of course, as Holt will readily point out, that creative freedom needed to be balanced against the larger goals of the production and vision of its director.

"You can't impose your score on the film—it's got to be serving the picture. You've got to be collaborative and write something that fits," says Holt. "[Herron] had a really strong sense of where scenes were leading, overall story arcs, what was driving each scene and how characters were feeling, which all might be more complex than what you're seeing on the surface."

That detailed direction, combined with a visual aesthetic that blends brutalist architecture, retro-futuristic technology, and *Brazil*-style authoritarian workplace posters, demanded a delicate touch from the composer—something that was helped along by a close working relationship between Holt and Herron.

"The director-composer relationship is so important, and I really hit it off with Kate," Holt says. "It's amazing to feel like someone is leading you forward and supporting you. It's the best relationship you can have with a director."

Befitting a visually rich tale that spans multiple timelines and realities, Holt's score brings together a pleasingly eclectic selection of instruments and performers.

Weighty string sections and grand orchestral textures, provided by the Budapest Film Orchestra, dovetail with classic synth tones produced on a Roland Juno-60 and Moog Mother-32. At the same time, *Loki*'s mythical,

Nordic-inspired origins manifest through Scandinavian folk instruments such as the *nyckelharpa* and Hardanger fiddle, expertly performed by the Lodestar Trio, a group that Holt had wanted to work with for years.

"Kate really loved the theremin," recalls Holt. "I'd worked with [Draper] on a different project during lockdown, [and] every track that he played on, he was so amazing, so enthusiastic."

The soundtrack features an original 1929 RCA Theremin (one of only 140 surviving instruments from the original production run of 500) and the newer Big Briar 91A designed by Bob Moog. Holt and Draper also used the haunting tones of the rare Ondomo, a portable version of the historic Ondes Martenot, one of the world's earliest electronic instruments. Rather than using them purely in their traditional role as soprano instruments, Holt's soundtrack often pairs them with software synths like Zebra2 to create deep, rich swells, and basslines. It's a combination that perfectly evokes the blend of vintage and futurism we see on screen.

"I'd send [Draper] a digital synth and he'd go over the bassline on a low theremin—the low sound is just awesome," Holt explains. "Then we might run that through an analogue tape machine, a Revox G36, to make it even more dirty."

However, despite the liberal use of rare electronic instruments, sequencers, and tape machines during the production of *Loki*'s soundtrack, Holt says it was essential to keep the technology from getting in the way of her writing.

"I feel like the best point when using technology is when you're not thinking about it," she says. "When you can just use it as a tool to get what's in your head into the world and onto the picture. I'm always trying to keep my process quite simple and straightforward. A lot of my writing is done on the piano, sketching things out on manuscript paper, and then taking things into a sequencer afterwards."

As with many recent film and TV projects, the production of *Loki* had to contend with the ongoing pandemic. Holt didn't

even meet any of the Marvel team nor the Budapest Film Orchestra in person—everything was done remotely.

"All the recordings were done remotely in Budapest, which was challenging," says Holt. "I'd spend about two days per episode just sat on Zoom with an orchestra or choir or brass section, and if your audio stops working in the middle of a cue or you couldn't get the picture to work..."

Despite the special hell of trying to manage a recording session from a thousand miles away from the Hungarian capital, the pandemic slowed down the production schedule and gifted the composer that most precious commodity: time.

"TV schedules generally demand a quicker turnaround than films," says Holt. "Because of COVID, we had loads of time to work on *Loki* and it didn't feel rushed. I gave *Loki* the attention that you usually expect to give to a film."

With approximately 40 minutes of detailed music scored for each 50-minute episode, that extra breathing room was a blessing. "I felt like it was hard to hold it all in my head because there was just a lot of music," she laughs. "Making sure I'd sent the right parts off to the right people, getting it back, putting it in the session and going, 'Oh shit, I forgot to record the theremin!'"

So what's next on the horizon for the composer? Holt isn't at liberty to say, but judging by the success of *Loki*, coupled with an already confirmed second season, we may soon get to hear more of the composer's vision for the MCU's favourite anti-hero.

There's certainly no shortage of musical ideas for the character. As she puts it: "*Loki* is so grand, it's on an epic scale—gods and time—these huge themes. It feels like a big space to be able to write in."

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9 ANNIE AWARD
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BEST ANIMATED FEATURE
BEST SONG "DOS ORUGUITAS"

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—NOMINATION—
BEST SCORE
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Disney
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THE NEW YORK TIMES

“A triumph in every category: art, songs and heart.”
AP

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gorgeous and hugely impactful.”
THE PLAYLIST



FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE • BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
BEST ORIGINAL SONG "DOS ORUGUITAS"

CHAOS AND CLIMATE:

**HILDUR
GUÐNADÓTTIR**

AND

SAM SLATER

ON SCORING THE
NEAR-FUTURE WORLD
OF *BATTLEFIELD 2042*

BY CLOVIS MCEVOY

The award-winning team sat down to talk about their disruptive new score, hybrid instruments, and bringing a punk attitude to screen composing.

SAM SLATER AND HILDUR GUÐNADÓTTIR; Photo by Camille Blake





“If you want to go as far outside the box as you can possibly go, it kind of makes a lot of sense to hire someone that has no idea what the box is to begin with.” So says Hildur Guðnadóttir, the Academy Award-winning composer and cellist, about her recent work on the highly anticipated *Battlefield 2042*.

The game is set to totally reimagine the music landscape which has traditionally accompanied the beloved *Battlefield* franchise. Working alongside her co-composer and partner, Sam Slater, the two Berlin-based musos were given one primary directive from publisher DICE: to create music that is completely disruptive.

The result? A *Battlefield* title that dispenses with heroic trumpet melodies and lush string sections, and instead drops players into a world filled with grit and distortion, with screeching timbres and guttural sirens.

The future is here, and its soundtrack takes no prisoners.

A BACKGROUND IN EXPERIMENTATION

Both Guðnadóttir and Slater have a background in experimental music and have built a reputation for intensive onsite recording, capturing sounds in decommissioned nuclear power plants and submarines and transforming them into musical textures.

That exploratory approach can be traced back to Guðnadóttir’s childhood, growing up in Iceland—a place so small that only one airline flew in and out of the country and the composer could count the number of amplifiers and gear that she had access to.

Classically trained as a cellist, she quickly began playing with boundary pushing bands like Pan Sonic, Throbbing Gristle,

Múm, and Stórsveit Nix Noltes. She recalls the music scene in Iceland wasn’t exactly lucrative at that time. “Sigur Rós, Björk, this whole scene of people, none of us ever thought that we would ever make a living with this stuff!” Guðnadóttir recalls with a laugh.

Nevertheless, the composer describes it as a “communal, fun and friendly and explorative situation, and that energy is by its nature very creative”. Coming from a similar background playing in bands, Sam went on to study experimental composition at Leeds University before his professional career led him to Berlin, Germany. It was there he got his start working as the principal musical sound designer and creative engineer for the late, great Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson.

When discussing their appreciation for experimental music, Sam says “When we get together, we are always really excited by the idea that you can make sounds do things” adding that, “why would you look to the familiar places when you can look for unfamiliar places?”

Both Guðnadóttir and Slater swept to global prominence in 2019 with their work on the psychological thriller *Joker*, and the acclaimed historical miniseries *Chernobyl*.

In both cases Slater took up the role of score producer, while Guðnadóttir held the reins as composer. It was a creative partnership that bore significant fruit—*Joker* went on to win the Academy, BAFTA, and a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score, making Guðnadóttir the first solo female composer to win all three, and *Chernobyl* was awarded a Primetime Emmy, a BAFTA, and a Grammy.

So, with a breakout year under their belts, the duo decided to mix things up and co-compose for the first time on *Battlefield 2042*—and, despite having never scored for games before, the pair took to the project with experimental zeal.

BUILDING A NEW SOUND WORLD

Battlefield 2042 takes place in a near-future world wracked by climate change, scarcity of resources, and political turmoil. Though conflict and warfare are bread and butter to the *Battlefield* series, what really captured the attention of the two composers was the equally destructive power of the weather systems which cause havoc throughout the game levels, turning the environment itself into an enemy.

For Guðnadóttir and Slater, it was the “dialogue between humans and nature” that provided the impetus for their recording approach. Eschewing sample libraries, the duo instead opted to build an entirely new sound world from the ground up. As Guðnadóttir puts it, “All the sounds are created by us from scratch, none of the recordings existed before we started working on this.”

Instead, the sounds of *Battlefield 2042* are derived from the physical materials found in the game’s levels: earth, metal, glass, and sand, are warped, stretched, and transported into the musical realm.

Often this was achieved through surprisingly analog means. Describing one of his favourite percussion sounds, Slater talks of building a custom instrument made up of four trays, each

filled with materials from the game levels, and placed above massive bass drivers. “Each one was tuned to pick up a specific kind of frequency or resonance coming out of various instruments,” he says. This innovative approach allowed the duo to ‘play’ the physical materials of the levels and capture the sound of the substances vibrating to the tune of Guðnadóttir’s cello or Slater’s rhythms.

Meeting weekly with the audio team, Slater found his job to be very closely aligned with the game’s sound designers who were tasked with bringing the world to life. “The visual departments are dealing with the eyes,” says the composer. “You’re simply dealing with the ears, with the intention of creating a cohesive experience of these frankly colossal and very exciting worlds.”

The soundtrack was written during 2020 which imposed some additional creative restrictions. At one point they had the opportunity to travel to France and spend some time recording ship engines, but eventually travel restrictions meant they had to reimagine how to access the sounds they were looking for. At times, this meant searching for sounds within the confines of their postcode—a 5-km radius.

“Some of the creative decisions we’ve made have been directly expanded or contracted based on how far outside of the city we were allowed to go”, says Slater.

In the lineage of the *Battlefield* franchise, the music has always had traditional orchestral scoring, later incorporating the use of electronic production techniques.

Breaking into a whole new musical territory was a bold move for such an established franchise, and Guðnadóttir and Slater say they were certainly aware that not everyone would like the new soundtrack. Nonetheless, they, and the development team behind *Battlefield 2042*, were committed to creating something daring.

“It’s messy, it’s chaotic, it’s falling apart.” Says Guðnadóttir, when asked to describe the game’s world. “You can’t really have something that’s clean and pristine, the music has to live in the same world as the game. So, it needed to be ugly, messy, and

really tangible.”

The tactile nature of the sound recordings comes through sharply, having an otherworldly quality without the use of synthesizers, which would probably be the first port-of-call for other composers. When asked if convolution synthesis was used on a particular track, Slater replies with a chuckle, “we’re a bit more punk than that.” Instead, most of the technical end involves what the composer describes as the “abuse of compressors” more than anything else.

“Actually, Hildur often says to me,” grins Slater, “if you ever turn around and say ‘I’ve found the plugin that will solve this problem,’ then you’ve run out of ideas.”

While Slater and Guðnadóttir have an undeniably DIY aesthetic, and a clear love for sounds that originate in the real world, they certainly don’t shun technology either.

While working on the track, “The Observation of Beautiful Forms,” they opted to enlist a coder to build a machine learning algorithm which could create ‘sound profiles’ of different physical materials. And while at one point they recall the algorithm spitting out 24,000 useless files, eventually they were able to train the algorithm to create profiles of ringing glass and other sounds. The final step was to input the sound of Guðnadóttir’s voice, allowing them to appropriate the timbral essence of the glass with all the nuance, expression, and musicality of the human voice.

“There’s lots of really strange and beautiful things,” says Slater about the sounds they achieved throughout the creative process. “When we listen to the score, they often make us smile.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

Though neither composer would call themselves gamers, they both offer an unequivocal ‘Yes!’ when asked if they’re planning to play *Battlefield 2042* upon its release.



“I might be ‘dating’ myself a little bit,” says Slater. “But whatever the 2021 equivalent of a LAN party is, we’re going to be doing it.”

So, after conquering the worlds of film, TV, and now game, the pair show no signs of slowing down. Asked what they plan to work on next, Slater pauses before replying with a drawn out “muusic.”

Guðnadóttir makes clear those future plans will include two different scoring projects, a record, and likely some live performances. So, what gives them the energy and inspiration to keep pushing their artform into new and exciting directions?

“Exploration gives you that feedback loop of discovering things every single day,” says Slater. “Which makes it very easy to turn up in the morning.”

Reprinted courtesy of Music Tech

EMERGING TALENT NOMINEE JOY NGIAW SWEEP AWAY BY THE GRAVITY OF BLUSH



JOY NGIAW Photo by Joanne Leung

“She was the air I breathed.” Emmy Award-winning animator Joe Mateo takes that heartfelt concept and in *Blush*, his directorial debut, delivers what must rate as one of the most personal yet still resonant films at this year’s Anecy Animation Festival.

The inaugural short from Apple Original Films and David Ellison’s Skydance Animation, bowing a multi-year partnership between the studios, *Blush* world premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival on June 13 as part of its showcase of Animated Shorts Curated by Whoopi G. It begins with a fresh-faced astronaut whose spaceship is knocked off course by an asteroid. It crash-lands on a benighted dwarf planet, made of lonely hard grey rock. A horticulturist, the hapless astronaut hopes to create just a weany bit of oxygen with a plant he has. It withers.

Blush will be released on Apple TV Plus. Composer Joy Ngiaw writes about the scoring process:

“When I first saw the storyboards of *Blush* I was completely swept away by the immense meaning and gravity behind the film. The film evoked a wide range of emotions—from falling in love, the joy of building a family, the loss and grief when you lose someone, to having hope as life goes on. It was important that the music theme established was not only memorable,

but also able to translate all aspects of those emotions.

“During our collaborative process, one of the themes that Joe and I kept coming back to was how Mary Ann was just like oxygen to

him. The importance of oxygen signifies the importance of family and love. This inspired me to have breath-like elements to incorporate into the score—recording sound effects like breaths, whispers, and vocal elements. Something subtle and not in the foreground, yet we can feel the presence of it—it just exists, just like breathing.

“For instrumentation and sound palette—I kept it in the orchestra with sprinkles of hybrid elements. I featured instruments such as piano when we first hear our theme (common instruments in most households so it will remind us of home and family), and strings which provide a lot of heart. Since this film has no dialogue, I featured solo woodwind instruments as the characters’ voices (flute being mom’s voice, clarinet being dad’s, and oboes for the two daughters). Wind instruments also capture our theme of breathing and oxygen. By using orchestra and organic instruments that sound familiar to the audience, it provides a feeling of grounding, wholesome, warm, feeling rooted. I also recorded instruments such as wind chimes to again tie in our theme of air, and to signify a distant memory feeling. The hybrid elements were electronic pads to establish the environment of space. We intentionally didn’t have any score in the beginning of the film, to reflect the characters’ isolation. And when we first hear the music, is when we first see mom bringing life to the trees.

“Sharing a connection and getting to know another human being is the most meaningful part of my job. Having conversations with Joe about him and his wife’s love story—how they first met and how her blush completely swept him away, how her laughter was larger than life— and just hearing him gush about his wife—I wanted all that to reflect in the music, and the score to truly honor and represent her spirit, how she was so full of life and joy, living life to the fullest. We wanted to make sure we can establish a memorable theme that brings the audience on this journey.”

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A still from *BLUSH*; Courtesy of Apple

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FOR AN INDEPENDENT FILM

BLIZZARD OF SOULS

Lolita Ritmanis

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE
FOR INTERACTIVE MEDIA

METAMORPHOSIS

Garry Schyman, Mikolai Stroinski

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE
FOR A TELEVISION OR STREAMING
PRODUCTION

THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT

Carlos Rafael Rivera

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SONG
FOR VISUAL MEDIA

**EUROVISION SONG CONTEST: THE
STORY OF FIRE SAGA**

Savan Kotecha, Fat Max Gsus, Richard
Goransson
"Husavik"

OUTSTANDING ORIGINAL SCORE
FOR A STUDIO FILM

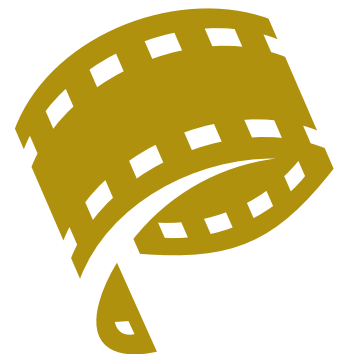
SOUL

Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross, Jon Batiste

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Terence Blanchard, Spike Lee



“Loki’ is beautifully scored by British composer Natalie Holt, who delivers a mostly suspenseful and mysterious vibe while providing Marvel’s horned menace with a theme song that might just be the MCU’s best.”

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FOR A TELEVISION PRODUCTION
NATALIE HOLT



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