

JANUARY 1995

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ROBBIE ROBERTSON

with

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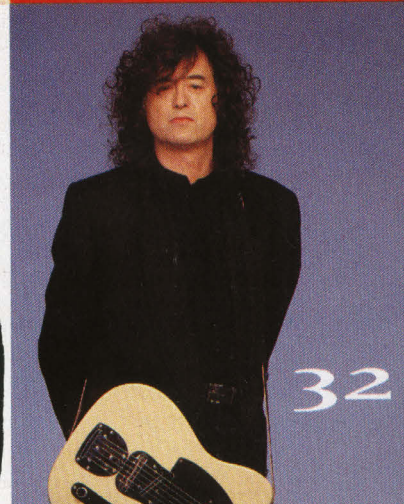
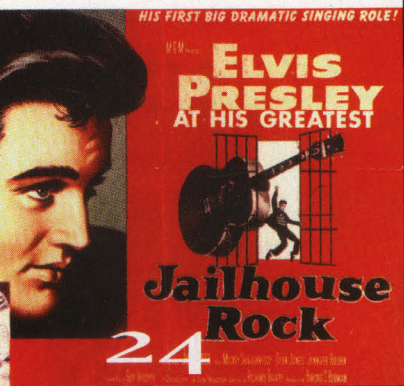
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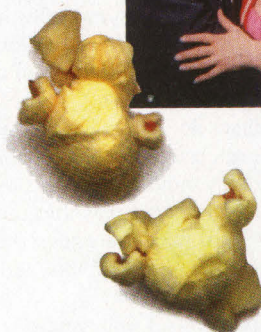
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Trent Reznor by Frank Forcino
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Scoring

Guitars in

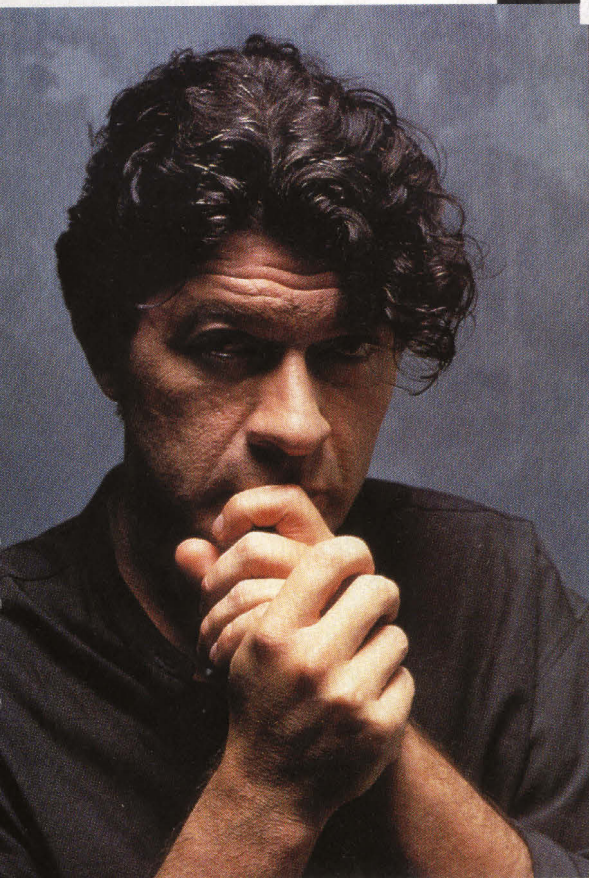
“Scoring” is the term used to describe the process of writing music to moving images.

Moving images can be many things: an abstract montage of shapes and patterns; animation; single, fixed-camera live action (such as a dancer performing a routine); or quick-cut edited action sequences. These images can exist in either a video or film format. In all cases, the requirements for the composer are the same: Capture the mood through music, and enhance the visual so that it becomes even more dramatic with music. You only have to imagine your most vivid movie moments *without* music to realize its power. Think of Superman’s flight over Metropolis without John Williams’ grand orchestrations, or Batman’s ride through the outskirts of Gotham City without Danny Elfman’s humorously sinister music, or even *Jaws*’ cruise for a human snack without (again) Williams’ terrifying two-note “shark theme.” Music can’t make a bad movie good, but it can make a good movie great. If you think you have the ability to enhance a movie or video’s mood through music—or the process fascinates you enough to try—we’ll show you what you need to have, both in hardware and brainware, to make it happen in the real world.



TWO TAKES

BY HP NEWQUIST



ON MAKING MUSIC FOR MOVING PICTURES

Guitarists get into film and TV scoring for a number of different reasons. Once they do make the leap from stage to screen, they go about the scoring process in their own idiomatic ways. Here, veteran movie scorer Robbie Robertson and TV-scoring newcomer John Christ of Danzig discuss their particular and personal approaches to putting music to moving pictures.

JOHN CHRIST

RECENT RELEASES: "For Christ's Sake" on *Guitar's Practicing Musicians Vol. III, Danzig 4*

RECENT SCORES: the TV promo spots for *McKenna*, *Passion for Justice*, ABC-TV's May '94 sweeps schedule

I had a friend who was the line producer for promotional spots at ABC. They were in a bind, for some reason, and didn't have any music for a TV movie they were doing with Sissy Spacek called *A Place for Annie*. So my friend called me up and asked if I could come up with 30 seconds of music for the promo, and I said okay. I was still working on *Danzig 4*, so I found myself going home from the studio at 1:00 in the morning to work on creating this music for a TV commercial.

I had no idea whatsoever as to how to go about it. The studio told me a little bit about what they wanted, then I watched the videotape about 10 or 15 times until a melody came into my head. Then I'd hum

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ROBBIE ROBERTSON

RECENT RELEASES: *Music for The Native Americans* (with The Red Road Ensemble), *Across The Great Divide*

RECENT SCORES: *The Native Americans*, *Jimmy Hollywood*

I never really liked the idea of doing music for film. I always thought, "Well, this is someone else's vision, and the scorer is really just an accompanist." And for me, when I wrote songs I always was trying to tell a story anyway, like putting a little film in the song.

When it came time to do the music for *Carny*, which I was producing [Robertson not only produced but starred in, co-wrote, and composed the source music for this 1979 film, which also stars Gary Busey and Jodie Foster—ed.], the director asked me what I thought the music should be, which was only natural I guess, since I'm a musician. I was quick to say that we should use Alex North, who was one of the great maestros of movie scoring. He did those big dramatic soundtracks:

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Marty Temme

TWO TAKES

JOHN CHRIST

Continued from page 39

along with it, and finally got to the point where I played the melody along with the video.

I was intimidated at first, since I'd heard about all these guys who had all these studios in their guest houses, and here we were trying to make do with basic stuff in an apartment—and trying not to piss off the neighbors by playing too loud! And for the

first promo, my partner [Noel Masson] and I were doing it all with just a regular VCR in the living room and the remote control; going back and forth, pausing, rewinding, trying to get our cues on time. After getting paid for that promo, we went out and bought a 3/4" Beta machine that we could sync up to our IBM PC and a Cubase sequencer. Every time we do a piece, we reinvest our money in better equipment, like getting a better sampler or another piece of gear. Right now we're trying to use more digital equipment because you have more flexibility than if you do it with analog. You can manipulate digital recordings after the fact; with analog you have to get everything right the first time through or you have to do it all over again.

The real challenge in scoring, especially for commercials, is the timing. You need to come up with something musical in a 20- or 30-second time frame, so you look to create pieces that are short and melodic, almost like going back to Music Composition 101; you have an A phrase, and then a B phrase, and you work from

there. Not only that, but you don't always get a lot of notice in advance from the studios. When we did the promos for *McKenna*, we finally got the okay from them at 8 o'clock the night before they needed it, which was 9 o'clock the next morning! Even then you still don't know if they'll like it or not, so it always feels good when they do accept it. And when you actually see it on TV—even though the music is usually compressed and way down deep behind the voices and the sound effects and you think

to yourself, "I wish they'd turn it up"—it's a charge.

You can make a lot of money if you do it on a consistent basis, because the networks pay well. And it's not a question of having a big studio or all kinds of contacts. I got into it through a friend, and I started out using only the bare essentials for equipment. Now I'm being approached to do other things, and although nothing's signed yet, my next scoring work might be for erotic movies. ☐



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