

British Film Magazine

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## LEONARD-MORGAN/MAKING MUSIC

**Most films benefit from a little musical help. But how does anyone decide where the notes should go? If you are unsure, here are a few clues from a man who knows.**

Paul Leonard-Morgan is a producer, arranger, writer and pianist who has benefited from working on a number of projects with Craig Armstrong (composer for *Moulin Rouge*, *Love Actually*, *Ray*) and has recently scored the new feature film *Love Me Still*.

Leonard-Morgan says: "It's one weird job being a soundtrack composer. If you can call it 'a job'.

Not only do you have to be able to understand what two different people – the director and the producer – want, translating their thoughts into a musical score, but you also need to be original and stick to what you believe.

The process starts with the spotting session. Meeting the director, talking about musical styles. Where the music comes in and out. He – they – might say: "I need you to help the tension here. I need you to bring out the romance there."

I get the gist. Then go away and watch the film. Over and over again, till I know it inside out. And I know exactly what's going on in each and every frame.

I remember there was one film I was working on when my assistant came into the studio one morning and asked me to make sure that the next soundtrack I did was for a film that was a bit more cheery. She was getting depressed coming into the studio each morning, knowing that she would be hearing a scene about yet another murder going on in the movie.

And then the fun begins. Trying out different themes to the picture. I'm definitely not one of those people that goes for walks trying to come up with ideas. I just try stuff from the start.

Bizarre dark stuff in slightly twisted themes. Strangely quirky stuff in happy scenes. You soon get to know what works and what doesn't. So I do a rough score all the way through and then play it to the director. And that's the scary stage, but ultimately the part that gives me the biggest buzz. The playthrough.

Watching a film with a director is like torture. Sometimes they won't say anything until they've sat through the whole 90 minutes with you and then say "wow"!

Other times, they stop at the end of every cue, giving you their detailed thoughts. But at the end of that first viewing, when you see them really getting into a scene because of your music, that's the biggest adrenalin buzz that I can get.

Similarly if there are cues that they want changes to, it's important to remember that it's not because your music isn't any good – it's because it doesn't necessarily fit their picture. It took me a long time to learn that one.

Have self-belief, without being arrogant. If you've been approached to write a score, it's because you're good and people like what you do – it's your job to then try and make that fit people's pictures and their vision.

So then you go away and make those changes and send them back for final approval. Remember, don't be precious. It's teamwork. Just because the director wants a music cue to be more subtle, don't take personal offence at it. It's a combination of the pictures, sound and dialogue that make a film complete. It's not about creating a personal pop video to showcase your music!

And then, if you're lucky and the budget permits, you get to record the musicians. From a string quartet to a full orchestra, this is the piece de la resistance.

Some composers like to sit in the control room while other people take charge of the session. For me, I like to stand and conduct the orchestra as the thrill it gives me is totally indescribable.

To get a whole bunch of professionals to play your music, under the guise of a job, is truly awesome.

When that first downward motion of your arms go and they play those first notes, it's then that you realize that it's the best gig in the world.

I remember when I had my first 80-piece orchestra playing my soundtrack to a BBC programme called Galapagos. It was the first score I had ever done for solo orchestra and it hit me about 10 minutes before the session started. This wasn't a case of helping out a studio-based score by adding a few musicians and tweaking it in my studio afterwards. There was nothing else to add to this orchestra – if it didn't sound good then, it would never sound any good!

Standing in Angel studios with all those players before me, there's a lot of responsibility as well as adrenalin!

And finally, maybe 6 months down the line, you get to hear your work married up to picture.

Many of the audience will focus on the acting. Others notice the special effects. Hopefully at least a few will notice the music.

But whatever everyone else is enjoying, for a composer there's nothing to beat sitting in a cinema with your soundtrack blasting out of the surround sound system, knowing you've helped to create that director's dream."

Paul's first solo album "Filmtales" is released on the 22nd October and offers a genre-defying collection of vocals and instrumentals, where lush string arrangements meet lazy beats and whispered vocals, including collaborations with Steve Mason (Beta Band), Isobel Campbell, Richard Colburn (Belle & Sebastian), Jenna (Un-cut, Shapeshifters) and Esther Duffin. Tracks have been used for ITV's 2006 Winter Drama Promo and regularly appeared on sports programmes including the BBC World Cup Final, ITV Boxing and on the BBC Golf Open coverage.

*For further information please go to [www.filmtales.com](http://www.filmtales.com) or to [www.paulleonardmorgan.com](http://www.paulleonardmorgan.com)*