

The vision of movie sound

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From Screen to Score to explore emotional linkage of the senses



Ellen Denny stars as Marie Rogerfield in the film *Top of the World*, which is being shown at the From Screen to Score event at CBC-TV's Halifax studio tonight as part of the Atlantic Film Festival.

Movies are manipulative.

Every time you sit in a darkened room under the beam of a projector, put a disc in the DVD player or fire up YouTube, you're part of an ongoing psychological experiment where every cut between camera angles, line of dialogue and facial expression is designed to elicit an emotional response.

What we hear can be as important as what we see on the screen, from sweeping romantic melodies to sharp and scary piano stings. The process of how music is shaped to fit the moving image will be demystified at From Screen to Score, a special Atlantic Film Festival presentation taking place tonight at CBC-TV's Bell Road studio.

The event came into being through discussions among film fest executive director Wayne Carter, program director Jason Beaudry and musicians/film scorers/brothers Asif and Shehab Illyas, whose work has graced several East Coast productions in recent years.

"They loved the idea, and they're pioneering enough to want to do something like this, because it's pretty unorthodox," says Asif Illyas, who also runs The Shire recording studio and scored AFF 2013 entries like the documentaries *Buying Sex* and *Zoo Revolution*.

For From Screen to Score, the Illyas brothers have put together an ensemble that includes singer Meaghan Smith, fellow film composer Chris Pauley, bassist Ron Hynes, keyboardist Kim Dunn and drummer Kris MacFarland.

Together they'll accompany Pardis Parker's silent comedy *The Dance*, scenes from Jason Buxton's *Blackbird*, scored by Illyas, and Michael Ray Fox's *Roaming*, which features music composed by Pauley.

Inspired by the expressive physicality of Looney Tunes cartoons and Rowan Atkinson's Mr. Bean character, comic actor and filmmaker Parker resolved to tell a sweet story in *The Dance* without the aid of dialogue. Music would be key in getting the message across, and he turned to Asif and Shehab Illyas to help tell the tale of a shy office worker trying to get up the courage to ask out a fellow employee.

Parker edited his film to a temp track, using a previously released piece of music, but gave Asif and Shehab a rough cut and a general idea of what he wanted to get across, and in turn got a heart-warming jangly pop tune to match *The Dance*'s upbeat mood.

"For them to have the talent and the skill to be able to evoke that same emotion and transport people to that same place with a completely original song—

something no one has any previous attachment to—is incredible," says Parker. "It's a real testament to their abilities as musicians."

This evening also marks the premiere of Shehab's "motion picture music album" *Top of the World*, a moody detective story filmed around Halifax over two weeks last November.

The film follows his videos for Ria Mae and Alan Doyle as well as the Illyas' trio MIR, which earned an ECMA nomination for a clip shot for \$800 in a school gym with a few lights and a wheelchair used for a dolly.

"Working with Shehab on *Top of the World*, the songs are really great, but seeing them intrinsically tied to a film is something else, because it's not just a series of music videos," says Asif. "There's a plot, and it's a really neat twisted story."

While MIR has been on an extended hiatus, Asif Illyas also released his solo album *Synesthesia*, but the bulk of his time lately has been spent putting music to other people's images, including the intro spots for Empire Theatres that announce the feature presentation and implore us to turn off cell phones and refrain from personal grooming.

"Composing for the screen is really rewarding, in that you'll get these requests, like 'This scene needs help.' Or 'We wanted to get this emotion, but it just wasn't happening,'" he explains. "And then you have to decide if you want to be overtly dramatic, or try something subtler."

"Sometimes silence is better. One of the neat things about *Blackbird* is the lack of score; we had as many discussions, or more than on a normally scored film, about when not to use music."

"When you watch the film, it's very psychological, very much inside that kid's head, because (actor Connor Jessup) is so good at projecting that. If it was a different actor, director or script, we probably couldn't get away with such a sparse score."

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