

independent-minded directors to exert an unprecedented amount of influence on the creative process, including the type of musicians they wanted to work with. "With the breakup of the studio system, you no longer had bosses at the studio level saying, 'You can't hire this guy. He has no experience in film. He can't write orchestral music,'" explains film and television music historian Jon Burlingame. "Now you have directors calling the shots and saying, 'That's the sound I'm looking for to underscore this picture.'"

When assembling *The Graduate* in 1967, director Mike Nichols insisted that the songs of folk-rock duo Simon & Garfunkel should dominate the film's soundtrack rather than a traditional score. (Pianist Dave Grusin contributed additional music.) Two years later, actor and director Dennis Hopper would pack the soundtrack to the seminal counterculture film *Easy Rider* with music from artists such as Jimi Hendrix and Steppenwolf. Soon, the essential sounds for a film's soundtrack were as likely to come from the director's record collection as from the pen and staff paper of a studio composer. While big, brassy orchestral scores would still remain popular among filmmakers—especially for spectacle films like *Star Wars* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—the use of nontraditional scores from diverse artists was gaining a greater foothold in the industry. In 1981, Greek composer and former pop performer Vangelis won the Academy Award for Best Original Score for his groundbreaking synthesized music from *Chariots of Fire*. Two of today's most well-known film composers, Grammy winners Hans Zimmer (*Inception*, *Sherlock Holmes*) and James Newton Howard (*Salt*, *Duplicity*), got their starts in pop music—as sidemen to Elton John and the Buggles, respectively.

CHANGING SCENES

The attraction between Hollywood and rock musicians is mutual. The notion of applying your musical skills to a film or TV show that might be seen by millions of people is an appealing one for musicians who made their bones on the rock 'n' roll stage—not to mention the fact that the lifestyle is a welcome reprieve from the rigors of touring. "Getting in the van doesn't quite have the attraction



Brian Tyler



Wayne Kramer



Mark Mothersbaugh

at 62 as it did at 18," Wayne Kramer says with a laugh. Then there's the sheer diversity of Hollywood films and television, offering the opportunity to broaden one's musical palette and explore new sounds and instruments. "If I stayed in rock music, I'd be limited to a style and have to stick with it," says Paul Haslinger. "In film music, by definition, you get to go around the world a little bit."

Modern film composition practically demands a chameleon-like ability to effortlessly shift between musical genres, says composer Brian Tyler, who trained as a classical musician and composer but also worked as a rock session drummer and guitarist. He recently scored director Sylvester Stallone's *The Expendables* and is now working on the TV reboot of *Hawaii Five-O*. "Twenty years ago, you'd be fine with just a classical music background, but now you have to be versed in a variety of styles when something comes your way," Tyler says. "I often dwell in the world of bringing two forms of music together, whether that's classical, world music, rock music or hip-hop—even in the same movie."

Perhaps the strongest asset many rock-musicians-turned-film-composers bring to the filmmaking process is a background in collaboration. With film firmly established as a director's medium, composers are often asked to sublimate their creative impulses to create background art that first and foremost must benefit the story being told on screen. "You're being paid to create and play what's in someone else's brain. You learn as a sideman to become a musical psychologist, and that skill is an important one as a composer," says former Oingo Boingo keyboardist Richard Gibbs. He, like bandmate Danny Elfman, has forged a second career making music for movies like *Doctor Dolittle* and TV shows like *Battlestar Galactica*.

THE PRICE OF ADMISSION

Still, nontraditional composers have often struggled to prove their worth to moviemakers. Even today, many rock and pop artists, some with multiple film and television credits to their name, encounter resistance from cautious producers or studio executives when they try to work on projects that seem out of their

perceived comfort zones. "They want to listen to your résumé and say, 'I don't hear exactly what we're looking for with this movie on your résumé,'" Mothersbaugh says. When the cartoon TV series *Rugrats* made the leap to the silver screen in 1998, the show's producers turned to Mothersbaugh—who previously composed for the show—to write both songs and score. The film involved writing for a 100-plus-piece orchestra, a task he had not yet attempted in his career. Despite having scored dozens of films and TV shows, Mothersbaugh says studio executives were hesitant to hand him the reins until the *Rugrats* producers successfully went to bat for him. The film eventually grossed more than \$100 million domestically at the box office, and the soundtrack spent 26 weeks on the Billboard album chart. For his part, Mothersbaugh doesn't blame studio executives for their reluctance to take a chance on composers looking to branch out. "They have job security to worry about, so I understand why they are so lily-livered and yellow-bellied," he says.

For every rock performer who navigates the transition to big-time Hollywood composer successfully, there are countless others who can't manage the leap. Recently, a hectic touring schedule kept Muse frontman Matt Bellamy from making a planned contribution to the score of this year's *Clash of the Titans*; the film's primary composer, Ramin Djawadi (*Iron Man*), turned instead to Neil Davidge of trip-hop group Massive Attack.

Scoring movies can be a tough, thankless vocation. Music you wrote can be jettisoned at the last minute and you can be replaced with another composer. You're often asked to write themes virtually identical to your previous works because the filmmakers used something of yours as a temporary soundtrack in the editing room. And if you do get to make your musical contribution to the world of film, you'd better be quick about it. Fast turnarounds are par for the course even if a film's production was relatively trouble-free. Composers are among the last craftsmen brought onto a project, and the nitty-gritty composition work can't begin in earnest until the film's editing is complete—which occasionally happens less than a month before

5 TOTALLY ROCKING FILM SCORES



SHAFT

Isaac Hayes won an Oscar for his iconic theme song, and his soul- and funk-filled instrumental score to the 1971 Blaxploitation epic proved a perfect counterpart to director Gordon Parks' gritty visuals. Three years later Hayes would go on to score *Truck Turner*, in which he also starred.

BEETLEJUICE

Danny Elfman had already scored hit films like *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, but it was the demented funhouse-like themes in this 1988 comedy-horror classic that announced him as a composer with a unique and playful sensibility.

RAIN MAN

Onetime pop keyboardist Hans Zimmer would later be recognized for his pulse-pounding scores to *Crimson Tide* and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies, but his synth-heavy score for this 1988 Barry Levinson drama shows off an almost delicate, world music-infused sensibility.

FIGHT CLUB

From the film's tense opening moments to its mind-bending climax, the Dust Brothers' rocking electronica score to David Fincher's controversial 1999 commentary on masculinity and consumerism feels dark, urgent and devilishly ironic all at the same time.

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

At certain points, Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood's strings for this 2007 score sound eerily like a swarm of bees plotting their attack. Greenwood's brash, original music was controversially denied an Oscar nomination because the score also included pre-existing themes by other composers.

