

The Journal

Composer tells an audience how a soundtrack is made



Staff photo by Connor Cummiskey Visiting composer Peter Michael von der Nahmer told a crowd in the Public Library on Wednesday details of how a movie soundtrack is made.

NEW ULM — Visiting composer Peter Michael von der Nahmer told a crowd in the Public Library on Wednesday details of how a movie soundtrack is made.

Nahmer's lecture *"How Soundtracks are Made and Why they Affect Us:*

an Introduction to Music for Films” discussed styles and functions of soundtracks and the process of how they are made.

“Just the change of music has an immensely important impact on how you experience movies, and this is why film scoring is such a fascinating field to work in. The music can have such an impact on what you are doing,” von der Nahmer said.

Soundtracks in movies serve two fundamental functions. They function as a form of expression and they provide dramatic structure.

As an expressive function, soundtracks help strengthen a perception, increase understanding and intensify emotions, von der Nahmer said.

One of the major dramatic functions of a soundtrack is the leitmotif, a series of notes that underscore, or play along with, actions by a specific character, von der Nahmer said.

Leitmotifs can represent characters and influence audiences as well as connect a character to the action when they are not present.

There are three basic types of underscoring: paraphrasing, polarizing and counterpointing, von der Nahmer said. Paraphrasing is when music is rehashing what is on screen, like a series of increasingly high notes when a character runs up stairs.

“The music is putting an emphasis on what you see in the images,” von der Nahmer said.

Paraphrasing also works to set the perspective of the movie. A music-box ballerina coming to life and being harassed by a sentient jack in the box was a prescient example.

“The fascinating thing that I see all of the time, again and again, is that you have the same images and you put different kinds of music on it and your brain shifts characters,” von der Nahmer said.

Polarizing adds information to the images that would otherwise be unknown. An example is a scary movie playing creepy music so the audience knows something is sneaking up on the protagonist.

Counterpointing is when the music is saying something different than the images. As an example, von der Nahmer used the idea of a rock-and-roll artist only being shown on screen with violins underscoring.

“Many times what is going to happen when the music shifts this way, counterpointing the image that you see, you want to know more about the people in the picture,” von der Nahmer said.

After covering some basics, von der Nahmer outlined the production process for movie music. The first thing that happens after getting the job is a spotting session.

The composer, director and others get together, usually after having watched through the film a couple of times, and look for where music is needed, von der Nahmer said.

The director will sometimes use temporary tracks to indicate what kind of music they want in which scene, von der Nahmer said.

Then the composer has to settle on an overall theme and stick to it unless the movie demands something else.

From there, von der Nahmer’s process was to start with a few notes and play with them up and down octaves, in different patterns and speeds until they developed into something workable.

Due to a movie’s time-sensitive nature, it is common to have an assistant composer put together some pieces.

There is also a massive team to play the music, make sure it is in tune and instruments work, plus much more.

To record it, the composer directs a band while also listening to a clicker

track. The clicker track is like a metronome set to the movie, so the soundtrack is timed correctly.

After that, it is only a few minor adjustments to having the final music underscoring a film.

Connor Cummiskey can be emailed at ccummiskey@nujournal.com.

COMMENTS

The Journal



NEWS

Local News
Communities
Monday
Business
Obituaries

SPORTS

Local Sports
MN State
Sports
National
Sports

OPINION

Columns
Editorials
Letters

LIFE

Lifestyle
Columns
Lifestyle
Feature
Engagements

CONTACT

Submit News
Subscribe
Advertise
Contact Us

Copyright © The Journal | <http://www.nujournal.com> | 303 N. Minnesota St., New Ulm, MN 56073 | 507-359-2911 | Ogden Newspapers | The Nutting Company