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Under The Same Moon - Silence Is The Key

By Rudy Koppl

When you talk with Patricia Rigger, the reality of filmmaking is an eye opening event. Though she has only made a few short films over the years, the director, writer, producer is extremely passionate about her work and the music that surrounds it. She's a new director from a younger generation who has entered the mainstream with



Under the Same Moon. Patricia wrote, produced, and directed **La Milpa** (2002) and **Family Portrait** (2004), two short films; she has worked on a few films with younger brother Jorge, and produced numerous projects over the years, but it's directing features that will be her lifelong love. Thrilled by the thought of her new career she explained how it all happened, "I got into films by chance; I was writing articles for a newspaper about unknown interesting characters from the city. A producer came to my hometown Guadalajara to create a documentary television series. She read my articles, called me up, and invited me to be a screenwriter. This producer happened to be Bertha Navarro who produced **Pan's Labyrinth** and most of Guillermo del Toro's films, we did many documentaries together. That's how I came into the business around 1994. I moved to Mexico City and became a producer and worked for the Mexican Film Institute. This is where I learned a lot, but I was very unhappy, unsatisfied, I really didn't want to produce and thought I'd be a screenwriter. I quit this job and went back to school in New York at Columbia University, I received my Masters Degree and I felt like I'd find myself as a writer there.

Time was passing and I really needed to know if I was going to be a screenwriter. During my very first directing class when I did the very first exercise I knew that I had found what I had been looking for all of my life, which was directing. I haven't done anything else ever since. Of course I've been producing and writing my own films, but I'm mainly a director."

On Thursday April 17th, two weeks after I talked with Carlo, I reached Patricia to discuss her views on film music, Carlo's score to her new picture, and how film music enters into her process when directing. She was at home in Los Angeles taking care of her newborn daughter. "I had a baby girl a few months ago, Francesca. I remember when I went to the doctor and he told me I was pregnant, I was working with Carlo and he knew, I came back and he knew. Nobody else in my entire crew, people that I worked with very closely ever realized, but Carlo knew because he's Italian, he's aware of the human condition," remembers Rigger. Her philosophy of filmmaking and using music with film is fascinating; it's almost as if Patricia allows her creation to breathe and then by adding music her film takes on new insight, it reaches a completely different level making the message complete. Definitely, the key to Patricia's film is silence, it's essential for the editing, making the music, and the clarity of the film. The message is the medium, but you don't hear a thing as the creative elements fall into place, it's almost like rocking a baby to sleep silently in your arms.

As a director, what do you want the music to do for your film?

Music is one of things I love the most in films. It's the one thing that I remember most after watching a film. If I see a movie once I can hear the music afterwards and know exactly which film it is. The music that's made depends on the film you're making; each film calls for a different thing and has its own individual feeling. The music identifies characters and emotions, it can advance the story, but sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes silence is more compelling than music, so it's not specific. Some filmmakers in Hollywood use a ton of music; they are always using music to make up for the lack of emotions in the storytelling. The idea is to find a specific place for the music in the story. The way I use music is not only to accompany the scenes, it has a very specific place in my narrative. I also use songs as part of the themes. Some scenes are even created with songs in my work. I adore music and love to bring both song and score into my film. It's a combination because each story or film calls for a different thing. It could call for minimalist music that's not dominant, but plays a role in the background, so it can require anything, even scoring for the main character in the scene. The music is the part of the movie that really carries the emotion. That's what I love in films, I love to be

excited, laugh, to be moved, it's an emotional journey, but at the same time it's very important to achieve a balance and not go overboard. If you use too much music then it takes away from the film. You have to give and take, contain, and let it slowly work its way into the film. Music like everything else in filmmaking is at the service of the story, like photography, acting, sound design, or production design. Everything is at the service of the story!

Do you remember the first scores you loved?

You can start with the music from Cinderella, I remember those first Walt Disney movies (laughter). Then it all continued with Ennio Morricone who's so memorable, it's so emotional, I became familiar with all of his work and it's beautiful. Then of course all those adventure movies directed by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, they were all amazing adventure scores. Also Nina Rota's scores are excellent.

In the filmmaking process, when do you start thinking about the music?

In many instances, even when I'm writing, I can feel some of the music in the scenes. I don't mean hear the music because I'm not a composer, but I can sense what kind of music the scene calls for, needs, or has. I do it from the writing sometimes for some scenes, then of course when we are editing the film and later on again. I see my scenes, I imagine them even before I write them and many times they have music. This is when I'm considering a moment, for me it's very clear, it comes with everything. It comes with the performances; it comes with the music, whether it's light or dark I can see the rhythm of the editing in the scene, many things. You can hear it if it's very loud rock or just a soft piano in the background. So with many of the scenes you know what kind of music you are listening to at the beginning of the process. Not the complete film, but for some things, yes!

Is it necessary to temp your picture to understand the musical potential in it?

The temp is important for some things, I'm not crazy about the temp, but it is necessary for some things to be put together and to be able to particularly show the movie to other people. I personally don't like editing with music. I always take off the music because it's very tricky. You edit music into the film and you feel that the scene works, but for me the scene always has to work in silence. I always take out the temp before I lock picture when I'm editing. Once I know that it's ready without any music then I can put in the temp. I think it's very tempting and it's very tricky to have music with the film because music can make scenes work, but the scenes have to work in silence, that way, when you add the music then the film takes on a new layer, it's beautiful, but it's not supplying rhythm that the scene should have on its own without any music. That way you can create really tight editing.

What are some of the scenes in Under the Same Moon where the music came to you?

First of all, the scenes that already have songs in them. For example, when I had the idea of a duel in the kitchen through a song, I thought, 'No they're working in the kitchen listening to the radio, a song starts, and they are going to fight with a song,' it's the duel between the kid and the guy. I knew I wanted a song that would underscore the fighting, a song that they could reply to each other. So bringing in a song here works with the film. When it comes to the score, when I shot the end I had some music in my head. I heard some music played by an accordion and imagined how the scene plays, how I would cut from him to her, from him to her, and then to black. I shot it adding music in my head. It's another instance of having music that's not in the writing, but in the shooting. When I'm shooting I am constructing the scene, how it's going to cut together in the editing room. When I'm shooting I know how I'm putting the bits and pieces of the scenes or takes together, so I'm editing it in my mind and for some of those scenes I put music on top of them in my head.

How did you discover Carlo's music?

I was introduced to him by executive producer Ram Bergman, who also worked with Carlo on Nomad. I was in a very difficult situation because I had an extremely tight deadline. I needed to finish the movie in time for the Sundance film festival and it was late. I knew I needed a very experienced composer, someone who could really deliver strong, good music in no time, somebody that I could trust because I was running out of time. I had been working with another composer, but he wasn't delivering the music. There was a lot of time lost during the process because of technology. Precious time was lost, months later I hadn't heard anything so I said, 'This is not going to happen!' As a director I needed to hear the music to make corrections, so I had to bring in a strong and experienced composer immediately. The amazing thing about Carlo is that he works with a pencil and a piano; he doesn't need anything, so he purely works with the music.

Did hearing Carlo play the music for you on the piano give you the insight, the emotion, to know if his music would work in your film?

The moment that I came to his apartment to meet him he already had written the Main Theme. We hadn't even met and Carlo was already working, he had seen the film, and was already working with the Main Theme. That was amazing. When I heard it on piano it gave me a little insight. One of two themes he played for me, I felt it right there, I knew that this is it; this is what I'm looking for. His music had emotion; it was complex enough to get a good idea of what it would sound like with an orchestra. It had the right emotion I was looking for in my movie. My

film is sweet, it's positive, it has a good spirit, and I felt that in the music besides the maturity of the composer. Carlo understood the structure of the movie; he was constructing his score as I constructed my movie. He understood structure and was ready to build the music so it could develop emotionally. By the end of the film it was important that we remembered the music, had a sense of it, we could enjoy and feel it. Carlo locked himself away for ten days and then came out with everything, the entire score was written with his pencil, piano, and a laptop sitting on top of his piano with a DVD in it. That was just amazing!

How did you explain to Carlo what you wanted musically?

We spotted the complete film and discussed the moments. I would explain what I was looking for, what each theme should really be about because sometimes it's not completely clear just by watching the film. It could be a fight, but maybe it's about love? I need to tell the composer what the scene is really about. Sometimes the dialog and other things can tell you one thing, but sometimes the music helps to really convey the inside of the characters and what the filmmaker is really trying to say. Carlo saw the film with no music at all, only silence, so he could imagine every piece of music he'd write for it. This is great, more and more we are listening to movies that all sound the same. It's because people are using the same scores to temp their films with. The composer comes in, listens to the temp, and can be influenced by that instead of having a pure plate. Carlo imagined the music from nothing and was completely inspired by the film. When we were spotting the movie there was this scene that we had applied action music to, it's when the migra comes in to take all the immigrants that are working in a tomato field away. I told Carlo about the pain, being persecuted because you are trying to work, that's it, it's clean, it very painful. These people are honest workers and they are persecuted like criminals just for doing that. Carlo said that this scene didn't call for any action music, but music should painfully underscore this part. It should musically define the pain that these people are going through, so the music for that scene changed a lot. It became very heartfelt, sad music.

What other parts in the film did Carlo's music and your images work together in perfect harmony?

Everywhere because Carlo found a different approach to my scenes in giving up another point of view, it wasn't clear in the images and the music helped this become more substantial. Carlo is the real thing, you can even tell it through his hand gestures, and he understood the film so clearly. He constructed the scenes, but took us through this journey. It's the same thing with my vision; the music takes us through this journey to the end for a wonderfully emotional moment. He gave me this gift in the middle of

the movie when the mother appears in the bed, when the boy imagines his mother, that piece of score is constructed as a lullaby and was absolutely perfect. It's like the mother comes for the boy and is talking him to sleep, comforting him, calming him down. This was an excellent choice by Carlo, it's a perfect part which we never talked about, and he just got it.



What was your greatest challenge musically when making Under the Same Moon?

What was amazing was that Carlo really pulled it off, it was very difficult to approve everything quickly, and that is very painful as a filmmaker. I had just a few hours to make minor corrections. Basically I heard the entire score and I had to decide where to delete certain cues, where we'd needed something else, so Carlo would bring it in. We are going to take this new piece, reapply it to certain moments, and that was it! That was all the time I had, so I had to really choose what was more important. Thank God Carlo was strong as a composer, so he brought me this really great score otherwise I would have been dead. This was one of the most painful moments I've ever had in my life as a filmmaker. Just to know you only have a few hours, I have to choose the most important things, I can't dwell on anything else, and I can't rework or ask for anything more, it's really hard to do. It's like Sophie's Choice, I failed, and you have to choose. I chose to do this correction on the last part of the score for the end scene in that cue because it's the end, I had to disseminate and it's really tough, but thank God the score was very strong. You can actually hear the story telling through his music, Carlo was amazing!

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