



## Interview: Composer Alexandre Desplat

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One of the most versatile and distinguished composers working in film is Alexandre Desplat, who composed the evocative music for “The Queen,” the two Harry Potter “Deathly Hallows” films, “Twilight: New Moon,” “The King’s Speech,” this week’s release, “Carnage,” and three of this year’s biggest films, “The Ides of March,” “Extremely Long and Incredibly Close,” and “The Tree of Life.” He generously took time to answer my questions:

*Tom Hooper told me it was your idea to use the Beethoven for the climactic scene in “The King’s Speech.” Can you tell me what made that music right for that scene?*

It was my idea not to replace it! The editing was so perfectly shaped to the 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony and the dramaturgic build was so strong that I would never have improved it with my music. Always stay humble, especially in front of the Masters!

*What is the first thing you look for when you read through a script to help you formulate your ideas about the score?*

When I read a script, it is necessary that the story speaks to me on some level. If I feel this, then I know that it is a project that I am capable of writing for. But I am most inspired by the images, when the words come to life.

*You have worked on the biggest and most epic and special-effects-filled studio films and on smaller, more intimate, independent films. Beyond the budgetary issues, what are the other differences in the way you approach the scores?*

In fact, I approach them all in the same way. Granted, the music can be quite different, but my approach does not vary greatly between movies and I think there is continuity in my work. I take great pleasure in working on a variety of projects as it keeps me fresh. You will notice that I never write for the same type of film twice in a row.

*What is the best way to introduce the audience to the world of the movie with the music? Or what is a good example?*

I think a newcomer cannot go wrong by listening to the greats of the film music world – John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith, Nina Rota, Georges Delerue, Maurice Jarre and Bernard Hermann. But also any type of scores, not only symphonic: Miles Davis’s score to “Ascenseur pour l’échafaud”, Angelo Badalamenti’s Straight life...

*How do you make sure that the music enhances the story without distracting from it?*

There is a fine line in judging which emotional direction to go in and also how far to go. I rely on my instincts and search to add to the scene, rather than simply mimicking what is already there. I always seek for this mysterious “vibration” between the images and the music.

*What score from another composer do you wish you had written?*

Rota’s “Casanova,” Takemitsu’s “Ran,” John Williams’s “Incidental Tourist,” Herrmann’s “Taxi driver” ...the list is long!

*Which director taught you the most about how movies work?*

Oh, there are so many that I have learnt from! I always dreamed of working with the masters. Stephen Frears was one. To me it was incredible when he called me to work with him on “The Queen,” as it was with Ang Lee, Roman Polanski or Terrence Malik. They are incredibly talented artists and each pushes me in new directions. I have just finished working on Stephen Daldry’s “Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close” and Wes Anderson’s “Moonrise Kingdom.”

*What was the biggest challenge in working on “Extremely Loud?”*

The story is an emotional one – a young boy coping with the death of his father, which in itself is very challenging to express and reflect upon. Sorrow can be rather inspiring when writing music. The fact that this is based around the 9/11 attacks pushed everything up a level, so writing the score was a very intense process.

*What’s your next project?*

I’m currently working on a Florent Emilio Siri film called “Clo Clo” – a biopic about Claude Francois, the composer of the song “My Way”, brought to international fame by Sinatra. I would like to strike a balance between my American and European projects. I have written for a Spanish movie, I’ve never made German movies. I’d love to explore these tracks. I’d love to do Japanese movies, because I love Japanese cinema. I’m a very multicultural person and I’m excited just talking about it. I’m excited about making movies with foreign directors, could it be Greek or Italian. I would love that.