



FESTIVAL DE CANNES

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[Musical Interview with Alexandre Desplat](#)



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The French film composer, Alexandre Desplat, is a member of the feature film Jury for the 63rd Festival de Cannes. Today he accords us a ‘musical’ interview.

You’ve been to the festival several times, what sticks in your memory?

The strange thing is that sometimes going up the steps can be very different. Sometimes it’s a complete joy, sometimes it’s happy but tense, and sometimes dark... That’s maybe the most interesting thing. Obviously it depends on the film you’re presenting. For example, yesterday, with Tamara Drewe, there was a sense of fun and shared desire which I think was really visible. On other films, you feel really tightly bonded as a crew, if I think of *Quand j’étais Chanteur*, we were all very happy to be there, but it was a lot more restrained. For *A Prophet*, it was different again, because the film had a very dark side to it. Even if everyone was very happy to be there, there was a sort of concentration and solemnity.

This year, you’re a member of the feature film Jury, what did you feel when you got the offer?

I was very happy, very honoured and surprised! I was in the process of doing something else, and I had planned other events for that time, but I didn’t think too long about it before saying yes! I saw who was in the Jury and didn’t hesitate for a second. And I was so happy that a composer had the chance to be a member of the Jury. It doesn’t happen often.

If the Festival de Cannes were a piece of music, what would it be?

Rossini, *The Thieving Magpie*.

What piece of music do your co-members of the Jury make you think of?

The Aquarium by Saint Saens. The Carnival of the Animals.

Was there a piece of film music which made you want to become a composer for the cinema?

Certainly one of the oldest pieces of music I remember is the love theme from *Spartacus*, by Kubrick, which almost coexists on the screen with Jean Simmons. As soon as she appears, this theme appears, and when she exits, the music remains, as if her perfume was still lingering, even though she’s no longer there. It’s quite moving.

The music was by Alex North, who also composed the music for The Misfits.

If you had to express your current feelings with a piece of music what would it be?

For me, the absolute reference in music is Mozart, because his music is never happy or sad, but evokes both emotions. We enjoy a sort of festive carnival here, when you walk back from the Palais at two in the morning, the circus has shut the tent until tomorrow, and there's both a sweetness in the air, and a density of emotions which soothes you and enfolds you. So, for me, it might be a Mozart quartet, which calls upon all these emotions which are both complex and complementary.

In 2006, you came to give a music lesson at Cannes with Jacques Audiard. You collaborated with him on all his films. What's the relationship between the composer and the director like?

The history of cinema and film music has created some mythical partnerships - Rota/Fellini, Rota/Visconti, Morricone /Pasolini, Dany Elfman/ Tim Burton, Bernard Herrmann with Hitchcock, David Lean with Maurice Jarre, Duhamel with Truffaut, Delerue with Truffaut, both with Godard – where the composer, starting from the aesthetic sense of another artist, manages to construct his own identity and to maintain it from film to film. It's this which is quite mysterious and magical and that any film composer tends to experience. I've had it with Jacques Audiard, Marion Vernoux, Xavier Giannoli, Florent Siri, Stephen Frears... I've been lucky enough to have had very loyal directors. It's luck because you establish trust in a line of conduct which can also deepen. With Frears, you can never take it for granted, you always have to be asking yourself questions, same for Jacques. So you feel the trust, but at the same time there's an element of danger, so you don't fall off the wrong side of the cliff.

Can the music be like a character in a film?

Absolutely. In Ghost Writer, by Polanski, the music has a crucial role. It's a strength for directors who like music in the cinema. Polanski is an example. He's a music lover, and he also likes his music to mislead, to boost the energy in a scene, to create an invisible world and make it visible.

I always wanted to write for cinema and never for anything else. My reward is to be doing what I always dreamed of doing. I always wanted to compose for films, and never for concerts or operas. I'm where I wanted to be with the same passion for both cinema and music. Cinema fascinates me. I've always found emotion in it, sometimes overwhelming emotion. It's a real passion.

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