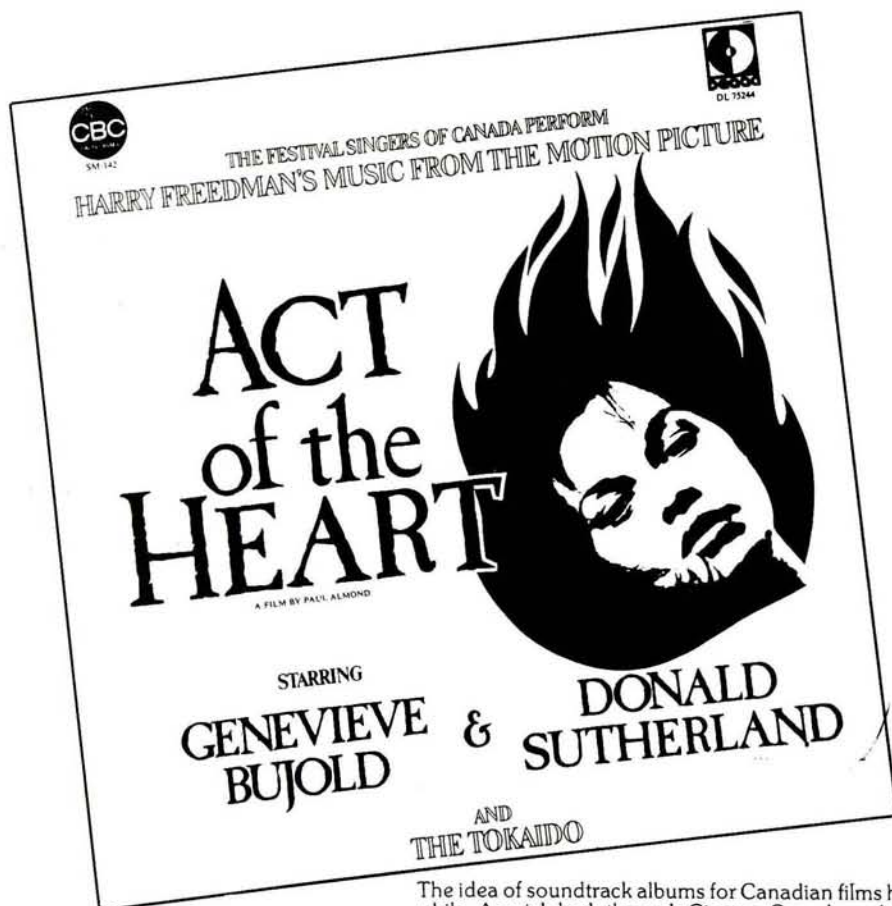


it's mainly because of the music

by bob hahn

Think of *Saturday Night Fever* —and you'll appreciate the potential of a movie soundtrack. The Canadian film industry may be booming but, as Bob Hahn explains, it has yet to exploit that lucrative resource, film music.



The idea of soundtrack albums for Canadian films has been around for a while. A quick look through Cinema Canada archives revealed albums for *Act of the Heart*, *IXE-13*, *The Rubber Gun* and *Le Martien de Noël*...

Film music, its ownership, and the aggressive promotion of soundtrack copyrights has been all but neglected by film producers in Canada. The free publicity garnered for a picture as a result of the broadcast exposure of songs, or excerpts from a film score, is impossible to measure; especially when one looks at No. One hit records such as "Nobody Does It Better" by Carly Simon from **The Spy Who Loved Me**, or the two hits by Barry Manilow from **Foul Play**. Art Garfunkel's "Bright Eyes" from **Waterhip Down** was a No. One record on the U.K. record charts for six weeks this past summer. Last year's Academy Award soundtrack from **Midnight Express** included a segment called "Chase" which was on the Disco and Top Ten record charts for months. The list goes on and on.

The traditional orchestrated score was not made obsolete with the advent of the 'Title Theme/Hit Song' approach — it still works too well for many types of pictures. However, the base for motion picture scores is broadening with the growing realization of how the music and film industries complement each other.

Little wonder then that astute U.S. film producers saw the value of copyright ownership early and moved into music publishing and the record business. Successful film copyrights became a tremendous source of added revenue for their owners. Two very recent examples are **Grease** and **Saturday Night Fever**, where soundtrack album sales and other copyright earnings grossed more than the pictures themselves.

If you were the owner of the copyright in such songs as "Lara's Theme" from **Doctor Zhivago**, or "Laura," "Third Man Theme," "High Noon," "Everybody's Talkin' At Me" from **Midnight Cowboy**, "Mrs. Robinson" from **The Graduate**, or the film output of Henry Mancini, Burt Bacharach, Quincy Jones and John Barry (James Bond series), you'd probably own one of the most lucrative publishing catalogues in the world.

If, as a film producer, you are involved in foreign co-production or, if your picture is slated for release outside of North America, and if you own the copyright to the film score, theatrical earnings on the soundtrack film score accrue to the copyright owner, based on a percentage of box office sales. Further copyright earnings accrue, worldwide, when records are either sold or performed. 'Cover' records by other artists of songs from a film score are another source of revenue. There are over 280 'cover' records on the theme from **Love Story**.

A film is not just the screenplay and box office stars, it's a whole series of moods and emotions to which people respond. It is a finely-tuned balance of sight and sound. Music is an important part of this balance and a composer can make a more meaningful and more valuable contribution to any picture if his creative input is considered early.

In Canada, invariably, the picture is shot and then the decision is made with respect to music. At that stage, a number of problems confront the composer. He has to

work with both time and budget constraints. These pressures are responsible for many music soundtracks which could have been better. Good composition requires the time to create and record.

Bob Hahn Productions has produced music for over 1,500 radio and television commercials in both English and French, as well as industrial shows, documentaries and television themes.

"Mainly Because Of The Meat" was a campaign to 'wear well': it ran for almost eight years on radio and TV in both languages and the copy theme is still being used.

Other campaigns were created to be treated in many different ways, i.e. "du Maurier," where 39 separate sessions were recorded. Each campaign needed a different creative approach.

The requirements are creativity, discipline, communication. In a television commercial, it all has to be said in 58 seconds and it is not uncommon to have to catch as many as 15 or 16 specific cues in that time. Very seldom (unless it is animated) does a musical segment in a motion picture require catching more than four or five cues. Composers with a background in commercials have little difficulty adapting their craft to feature films. The mathematics of 24 frames per second, metronome timings and click tracks are common to both feature films and television commercials.

In the advertising medium, composers have acquired the necessary discipline to conform to the objectives of the campaign. They become part of a team all striving for the



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Bob Hahn has been in the music business in Canada since he was a child performer. He operates a music production house, servicing advertisers and their agencies, and owns and manages two record labels and a group of music publishing companies. He is a composer, song-writer, orchestrator and businessman.

same results. The same requirements should apply to feature films. If there was more communication, earlier, the composer could undoubtedly use his expertise more creatively.

One last point in relating the advertising business and the film business. There are many advertising campaigns running in Canada where the budget for the production of music exceeds the music budgets for many multimillion dollar films.

There are very few pictures being produced in Canada which can't have a commercially exploitable soundtrack. This can only be achieved however, if the composer is consulted early in the planning. Most screenplays have a wealth of material where the story line can be transferred into lyrics and set to music. Even when the song is not part of the screen play or heard as part of the picture content, in many instances it can be used over opening or closing credits. This adds another dimension to the soundtrack value and provides the producer with the vehicle for free broadcast exposure.

Canada has the expertise to make this all come about but until film people realize the importance of music both in terms of dollars earned and free promotion, music will continue to be only a necessary evil in the film budget.

In reviewing a number of prospectuses for Canadian films, there is one with a budget slightly under \$3 million. A mere \$35,000 has been set aside for music. The prospectus goes on to promise the investors added revenue from the sale of a soundtrack album. Unless the intent is to use a string quartet, this is doubtful as there are step-up fees to all talent for this added usage. The starting point for a well-produced contemporary album today is somewhere in the order of \$50,000, including both the creation and the production of the music and these costs can easily go to a quarter of a million dollars. To budget approximately one percent for music in a picture is unrealistic.

To maximize the value of music in Canadian film scores, both esthetically and commercially, the following problems must be solved and when they are, the entire film industry, including the composers (and more importantly, the investors) will benefit.

- Communication must be improved between the people who make pictures and the people who make music.
- A more realistic dollar figure must be allotted for music when film budgets are being assembled and this budget must be adhered to when unforeseen production problems lead to cut-backs.

- The Canadian film industry must look to proper musical copyright promotion as another source of income. This would undoubtedly be looked on with favour by Revenue Canada, the Secretary of State and the CFDC, as it will mean the greater portion of all copyright earnings will flow back to Canada.

- Competent people must administer this function — people who know this business. A good film music publishing company is more than a repository for a film score. The copyrights must be aggressively exposed and promoted to other potential recording sources.

- Worldwide record distribution networks exist to release, promote and market film soundtrack albums. The experience gained through our own record company, Rising Records Limited, has shown how crucial it is to be able to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the many types of distribution agreements available.

- In negotiations with international film distributors which have an affiliated record company or a publishing arm, the Canadian film producer should consider alternate choices and not necessarily limit himself to their related companies. The different territories where a picture is scheduled for release will determine the strengths and weaknesses of the avenues open for consideration.

- The time factor between film release and record release is critical. In marketing a soundtrack album, the needs of the record market and those of the film are quite different. With the right expertise and sufficient communication, the soundtrack can effectively serve two purposes.

The film business in Canada is a burgeoning industry. Tax laws have created a healthy climate for investors. Our film product is being given a chance in world markets. We are developing expertise in the many allied crafts. A truly wonderful opportunity exists for continued development. The value of good and marketable soundtrack albums must not be underestimated. It is another weapon when negotiating for distribution. In a high risk business, it is important that all exploitable elements be looked at and music is certainly one of these elements.

Music is one of the six points required for feature film certification. Despite this, the issue should be, how to turn, what has historically been an expenditure in a film budget, into an added source of revenue. Pre-planning, communication, adequate film music budgets, all require attention. The Canadian film industry is getting what it has been paying for and to date, Canadian film music hasn't earned its keep. □

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