

# **furey** **knows the score**

by lois siegel

Collaborating with Gilles Carle enabled singer/composer Lewis Furey to adapt his unique musical style to film. It has paid off in film credits, awards, and plenty of personal satisfaction. Lois Siegel interviews the man behind the music.

When it comes to film music, Lewis Furey doesn't fool around. The list of films he has scored is growing almost as fast as he can write. **Fantastica** was his most recent credit. Others include **Agency**, **Jacob Two Two**, **The Rubber Gun**, **La Tête de Normande St-Onge** and **L'Ange et la femme**. A Quebecois artist presently living in Paris, Lewis returns to Montreal whenever there's another film which requires good composition.

He first became involved in scoring music for films with Gilles Carle and **La Tête de Normande St-Onge**, in 1975. Actress Carole Laure brought Carle to The Nelson Hotel where Lewis was performing. Carle returned to the show several times and finally approached Lewis to do the music for his film.

"It was a very good experience," Lewis explains. "I developed a way of working with Carle's help. He taught me not to do illustration music for films: not to have music which just describes what is happening on the screen, but to have something which works on another level. For example, if two characters are talking and are angry at each other, not to have tension music which merely describes the anger, but to create something which brings the viewer into another world —something like the way Nino Rota worked with the Fellini movies. Not just to have a cymbal crash when someone walks into the room and slams the door or to preview what's going to happen.

"Luckily, my first experience was with a director who wanted to do research and who wasn't just interested in having emotional hooks for his movie. For me music plays an editorial role in a film. You're making a comment on what's happening. If you have a sad piece of music, a conversation, something about a relationship becomes very sad. And even if the characters are talking in the same tone of voice, if the music is punchy, dramatic, tension-building music, it could mean that one of us is going to jump up and strangle the other."

**The Rubber Gun** was being made at this time, an underground film with no money, being shot by Lewis' friends, Allan Moyle and Stephen Lack. They had been working on the movie for two years. "A lot of the songs on my first album had grown out of the same scene as their movie," Lewis says. "And they thought that those songs would be terrific music for their movie. Finally, we got A & M Records' permission in Los Angeles to use the tracks from the album. I went to the president himself. Since **The Rubber Gun** had no money, there was no bargaining to be done. We either got permission or we didn't. The president was a nice guy. We talked about it and decided that the movie could only help sell the record. Stephen Lack had some relationship with the company because he had been doing the cover designs for my albums, "The Humors of Lewis Furey" and "Lewis Furey". (A new album has recently appeared: "The Sky is Falling", produced by RCA Europe.)

"We got the O.K. and did a little bit of re-recording in N.Y., pulling out thematic material from the songs, leaving out the voice, using just the clarinets, trombones and violin

overdubs. It was a very inexpensive way of doing a very rich score. The situation was special. I don't think you can usually get a good score by pulling songs from record albums, but their film was semi-documentary and it worked —in the same way as in **The Harder They Come**. I can think of two other occasions when this method worked well —in one Robert Altman film with Leonard Cohen's songs, and then in **Harold and Maud** with Cat Stevens' songs."

Lewis learned the film business quickly. When he started composing, he considered the budget of the movie he was asked to score. "If a film costs \$300,000 you don't ask for the same amount as you would for a film that costs \$8 million." With this background he would set his price and get what he asked for.

Later, he met other composing veterans like John Barry, and learned what kind of deals Barry made with Dino DeLaurentiis for **King Kong**. "Which obviously wasn't the same deal I was making with Cinépix for scoring," Lewis admits.

He is always careful to retain some rights to his music. "I believe that if you write something, at least some of the copyright belongs to you. It's very complex, the royalties systems for movies. In different countries you're paid in different ways. In America, for instance, every time a movie plays in a theatre you are not paid again. In France, when a movie plays in a theatre, the composer has a percentage of every ticket that is bought. There are lawyers who can help you negotiate the fine points of contracts."

Learning to score for film, Lewis explains, "There's a mathematics which is very easy to learn. The film runs at 24 frames per second, and by multiplying and dividing, you can find out how many bars of music there are to a given number of seconds."

For **Normande St-Onge** Lewis composed the music to a rough cut. Carle was willing to do a little more cutting with the music, so they spent three weeks, ten hours a day, working with the picture and music, trying out a lot of

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Lois Siegel has just completed principal photography on **A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chocolate Cake** — a 'no-budget' feature film



Carole Laure and Lewis Furey teamed up with a cabaret-like show which wowed Paris last year, and took first prize this year in Quebec at the 1979 Gala de l'industrie du disque et du spectacle (photo: Lois Siegel)

different things. "That was excellent —working with people who are willing to spend that time— it's a tremendous luxury. Carle's film *L'Ange et la femme* was done the same way.

"**Jacob Two Two** was not. It's a picture that was very precise. There's a bit two minutes and 32 seconds long, and the music had to be scored exactly that way. Also, because film is big business, deadlines are mandatory. A company is opened for a short period of time and the production has to be ready for a certain day. **Agency** didn't have an exact day for which they needed the music because the film was pre-sold in almost every territory. They didn't need it for Cannes, so they were fairly loose. They knew I couldn't work in April because I had a series of shows in Paris, so I did a bit of composing before April and did most of the scoring in May. I have always been hired before the first day of shooting on any particular film. Therefore, I have had a long time to consider the project. I usually see rushes, or rough cuts, and even go on the set occasionally, so the ideas and themes are running through

my head for months before it comes time to do the actual scoring. Usually there are three weeks of recording: I don't mean ten hours a day — maybe a day of three hours, a day off, a day of eight hours, three days off."

But how does a director approach a composer like Lewis Furey? "If you're interested, they send you the script. You meet with the producers and the directors, and you talk about what they have in mind. And you see if it corresponds at all with what you feel capable of doing. If they came to me and said 'we want this to sound like Henri Mancini, but we can't get Mancini, do you think you can do it?' I would be very loath to do it, because I don't think I effectively sound like Mancini, and the effort to do it wouldn't be worth it to me. I don't want to do films for people who want a score that sounds like something that has been done before. Also, now, as I do more scores, I'm more particular about whom I work for. I like to do scores that are going in the same direction as what I'm into."

Lewis concludes, convincingly, "It fascinates me to do music for films." □

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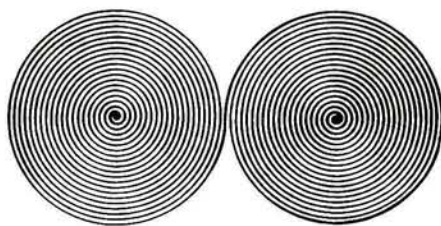


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