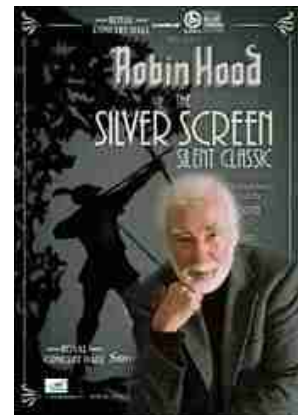


## Robin Hood: The Silent Treatment

By John Scott

Whether it be a Mozart symphony or a Strauss tone poem, music has always conjured up pictures in my mind; as a child I was terrified by the music of Sibelius, now I wonder why. Music for film is essentially different to music composed for the concert hall. There is less freedom in film music; the story dictates the role that music must play in order to induce the audience to react to a situation which fails to convey the dramatic essence. If one sees a person walking down the street, the music signals that he is happy, or in love, or sick with worry, it tells the audience that all is well, or that things are anything but normal.



I was fortunate to have played in symphony orchestras as well as jazz orchestras, to have worked with folk singers and to have arranged and directed music for pop artists. This has provided me with a large spectrum of musical experience to draw from. It's funny to think that I am in fact, an accidental composer. My early career was that of an instrumentalist, but this was brought to an end when I underwent dental surgery.

A film composer's job commences after the film has been shot and edited; at this point, the director and composer discuss thematic and dramatic requirements. There are no two films with the same musical requirements, the genre certainly tells the composer a lot; one would not be writing romantic music for a horror film, but that is only the start. Sometimes the composer might create themes for different characters, which is what I did in the case of *Robin Hood*.

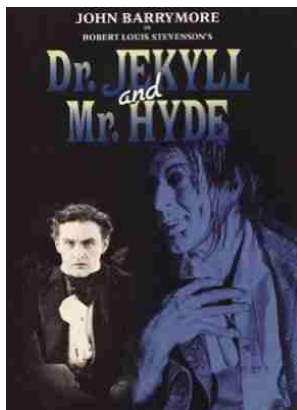
The main themes contained in the score are: (1) The Crusaders Theme, a theme of adventure and heroism which relates to King Richard. (2) Maid Marion's Theme, the romantic element expressing her longing for the man who has captured her heart. (3) Prince John's Theme conveying the suffering and brutal torture inflicted on the people during King Richard's absence. (4) Robin Hood's Theme, a swashbuckling theme full of humour, daring and adventure.

This theme only truly emerges in the second half of the film when the Earl of Huntingdon assumes the full character of Robin Hood.

The most important difference in composing for film is that the music has to be synchronized. A film editor accurately measures every millimeter of the areas where music is required and provides the composer with a timing sheet detailing every important point, for instance: change of scene, timing description of all action, and points where dialogue commences and ends. This insures that trumpets will not be blaring out during an intimate whisper, ‘I love you’, but they will blare out when the rejected lover throws himself off a high cliff to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below at precisely 2 minutes 49.5 seconds. At 2 minutes 53 seconds, the film cuts back to her crying to herself, “What have I done?”—a solo violin lets out a plaintive melody. The trumpets, trombones and timpani interrupt the anguished violin when she thrusts a carving knife into her stomach (2 minutes, 59 seconds). But the violin gains dominance as her spirit leaves the bleeding corpse, and soars skywards to join her true love (3 minutes 5.5 seconds) in the pastures of heaven where he patiently awaits her arrival, knowing that she will soon be with him to dwell happily for ever and ever in the hereafter.

I engaged a music editor to provide me with all the timings for *Robin Hood*. Generally, there are 50-60 music cues in today’s feature films; they can have a duration anywhere from 20 seconds, to 6 minutes. 6 minutes would be considered a long music cue. In *Robin Hood*, there are only two music cues, one for part 1 and one for part 2. Both cues are over an hour in length.

The process of composition commenced with a search for the main themes. It is my practice to compose many themes and finally be happy with something which may end up being the main theme. The same goes for the other themes. As the music in *Robin Hood* is continuous without breaks, I was obliged to work with a continuous time code which was manufactured by the music editor and allowed me to hold my music perfectly in synchronization with the film. In performance, it will be necessary to be guided completely by that time code. Within the film, I have built in areas where I can gain or lose time in order to stay in synch. This process does not give a conductor the freedom he or she would like, to communicate visually with members of the orchestra. The eyes cannot and must not stray from the time code which is relayed to the various members of the orchestra through the hands of the conductor.



*Robin Hood* is my second score composed for a silent film; the first was *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the 1920 silent classic featuring John Barrymore. I had always been intrigued by Stevenson’s story, but was disappointed when I came to a view a video copy. Somehow, I was not drawn into the film. Later, I looked at it again without the accompanying music, and was immediately engaged. This set me thinking

that the film could benefit greatly from a music score which would heighten the drama and emotion of the story. The next thing I knew was that I was composing music for this silent film. What I did not realize was that composing for a silent film is nothing like composing for a film with dialogue and sound effects. Music is not continuous in a sound film, it gives way to dialogue, it hides behind sound effects, it is planned to strategically support the film. Now I discovered that music has to be continuous in a silent film, there are no sound effects, and if the music stops, there is immediately a dead hole.

Composing music for *Jekyll and Hyde* took me all of seven months continuous hard work. The film was 80 minutes in length and the music score was continuous. The average length of a modern film is 100 minutes out of which there might be 50 minutes of music. The film and the score were performed in Los Angeles with the Hollywood Symphony Orchestra. It was a wonderful night and it drove home another point to me. We had presented a symphony concert. The audience, made up of many people who never attend symphony concerts had been introduced to symphonic music and enjoyed it.

Towards the end of last year Paul Talkington, with whom I have enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship, asked if I would be interested in composing a new symphonic score for the *Robin Hood* classic starring Douglas Fairbanks Senior. I knew it to be a highly regarded film; in fact, it was the most costly film ever to have been made at the time, which was 1922. I told Paul that I had already composed music for one silent film and could not face the ordeal of working on such a lengthy and complicated silent epic.

Paul came back two months later and told me that he had got the city of Nottingham interested and there was a good chance that the Nottingham Philharmonic Orchestra would be willing to perform the score. It started to sound like an offer I could not refuse, I mean, composing music for Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham, and then the added bonus of performing it in Nottingham, even better, performing it at the Royal Concert Hall. I agreed and prepared to put myself through purgatory. I have composed some lengthy chamber music, a couple of symphonies, an opera, some epic film scores, but nothing as long as this score!