

The Emerging Film Composer

Richard Bellis \$24.95

Reviewed by John Guth

Being a composer, and an avid student of film scoring, I have read many of the books available today which discuss the art and craft of writing music to picture. Though outstanding in many respects, I have found that one thing most of these books lack is an essential look at the intangible elements that comprise the day-to-day life of a working composer. Particularly, for the novice, it is imperative to find a guide for the journey into the murky waters where creativity and business collide, often in spectacular fashion.

I can think of no one better qualified for this task than Past SCL President Richard Bellis. He is an accomplished, award-winning composer, arranger and musician, as well as a highly venerated and gifted educator. Having taught at USC for 14 years in the Scoring for Motion Pictures & Television Program, he is currently teaching in the UCLA Extension Program in Film Scoring, in addition to the annual ASCAP Television & Film Scoring Workshop with Richard Bellis. With this pedigree, he is well-suited to provide a unique look at the inescapable caveats that accompany any neophyte composer from school to the scoring stage.

In *The Emerging Film Composer*, he has done just that.

Many working professionals in our industry agree: James Newton Howard, Bruce Broughton, Alf Clausen, the endorsements alone merit this book some serious consideration. One of many sparkling comments states: "Richard Bellis has produced the 'missing link' for film composers."

That may well be the case. Without condescension or conciliation, this book takes a close, hard look at how the "people, problems & psychology" influence the creative process, and outlines the path we must take to reach the prize.

One of the critical points discussed is that no matter how well-crafted your music is, if you don't know the score, you can't do the job. In this industry, the score goes well beyond the notes: it is the budget, the deadlines, and the backroom politics of filmmaking.

Last summer, chapter two of *The Emerging Film Composer* was published in *The Score*. This is a perfect example of the kind of reality check this book provides. Moving through enlightened discussions on getting work and spotting, he then focuses on the writing process.

Here he covers everything from courting the muse to laying out specific timeframes for accomplishing what appears to be an insurmountable volume of work. He quantifies those project parameters that can become horribly disfigured in a smoky haze of subjectivity, writers block, and anxiety attacks.

His expertise continues to reveal itself in a chapter devoted to podium procedure, and another focusing specifically on delivery and the dub.

Throughout the book, his intimate knowledge of the subject matter and easy conversational style make this a very straightforward read, and an invaluable primer for those segueing from the heady, ethereal confines of academia into the chaotic world of the film business.

Much of what is encountered on the path to the real world of scoring for film and television is touched upon in this book, and Bellis has done an outstanding job of bringing to light those things that any emerging composer must know before setting foot on that path.

The Emerging Film Composer is available as of March 1st. More information and purchasing info can be found at www.richardbellis.com.