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## INTERVIEWS

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### Well Stated!

Composer Alex Heffes discusses the music from *STATE OF PLAY*



**SN:** I felt that your music for *State of Play* was quite effective and helped guide the story forward in great fashion. Given that it was a very tightly edited film, was it at all challenging in determining the spots that required score material?

**AH:** In a really good picture like *STATE OF PLAY*, good performances, direction and editing mean the film already plays very well without music. This is a luxury for a composer because you can actually spot the music where the film will benefit from scoring rather than where it may need 'propping up' because of weaknesses in those areas. The scoring process can hopefully amplify and bring out all the strengths that are already there in the picture.

**SN:** Can you share some of the ideas that you and the film's director might have discussed in mapping out the strategy for this soundtrack?

**AH:** I was asked to write some music to the script before shooting which is quite unusual. I had brought on board the fantastic British rock producer Flood early on in the process and he recorded all these early jam sessions. We brought in a whole variety of interesting instruments and people in order to create a 'palette' that would have a particular flavour. This included the wonderful Crystal Bacht which Thomas Bloch brought in from Paris, some unique sound sculptures and percussion made by Steve Hubback and the human beatboxer Shomo. These sessions were a lot of fun and provided much of the rhythmic ideas that came later in the score.

**SN:** There is a subtle touch of dramatic influences in the music. How important was it to instill an undercurrent of emotion within the score?

**AH:** You need to engage with your characters to lift your film above just being a plot led narrative. Russell Crowe is fantastic at being able to convey what his character feels with the minimal of expression. He says it all with a look often. The emotional part of the score comes towards the end where things start to get messy. The relationship between Cal and Steven is what we focused on. In order to do this I wrote a short theme or motif which comes back in various guises. You hear it on a piano earlier on in the film. Towards the end of the film it comes back on a 'broken' sounding

piano - to try and mirror the split in their relationship. When we were recording in the studio I just happened to open up the Bechstein piano they had there which hadn't been tuned that day. As it happened it was well in tune except for a couple of notes which has a rather interesting off-key sound. So I wrote the main theme of the film there and then around the notes that were 'broken' on the piano. Flood has the great idea of recording the theme at half speed an octave lower onto 2 inch tape. When it's played back at the correct speed it has a slightly fuzzy sound which is what you are hearing towards the end of the film to evoke the emotional breakdown of the characters.

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**SN:** In the battle of online vs. print media, do you think the newspapers will ultimately lose this fight for readership? Or, as suggested in the movie, do you feel there will always be a demand for established newspaper reporting?

**AH:** I think the jury is still out on this one. I guess you'll probably get different answers if you were to ask this question to a child of the internet generation and someone who was brought up with newsprint on their hands.

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**SN:** Getting back to your score, are there any plans for a soundtrack release of your material?

**AH:** The score is planned to be released online by Universal soon.

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**SN:** In looking ahead to the rest of this year, do you have any ongoing or future projects that you would like to share with us?

**AH:** I'm currently scoring '**Shanghai**' directed by Mikael Häfström and starring John Cusack, Gong Li and Yun-Fat Chow. I'm also working on an album project which has been going for some time. It's an exciting collaboration project with a series of different artists in different locations. More about that shortly!

**[AlexHeffes.com](http://AlexHeffes.com)**

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