



# From Tangerine Dream to the Big Screen

By Mr. Bonzai

Paul Haslinger scores big in the world of movie music.

Austrian-born Paul Haslinger has built a reputation for composing film scores that incorporate robust classical elements and compelling electronica. Formally trained in his hometown of Linz, Haslinger ventured to Vienna after high school, where he continued his classical studies while exploring the new domain of electronic music. Auditions for the band Tangerine Dream led to a five-year collaboration, four albums, and a number of film soundtracks, including *Miracle Mile* (Columbia Pictures, 1988), *Near Dark* (Anchor Bay, 1987), and *Canyon Dreams* (Simitar, 1989).

After leaving Tangerine Dream in late 1990, Haslinger released three solo albums and scored two landmark animated science-fiction films, *Planetary Traveler* (Winsor, 1997) and *Infinity's Child* (Winsor, 1999). He continued perfecting his film-music skills as the programmer for Graeme Revell, supplying memorable textures and atmospheric style to films such as *Blow* (New Line Cinema, 2001), *The Negotiator* (New Regency, 1998), *The Siege* (Fox, 1998), *Pitch Black* (Interscope, 2000), and *Tomb Raider* (Paramount, 2001).

Haslinger earned his first solo credit as a film composer for the 2000 movie *Cheaters*, directed by John Stockwell. Since then, he has worked on Stockwell's *Crazy/Beautiful*, *Blue Crush*, and *Into the Blue*. He also composed and produced musical segments for Steven Spielberg's thriller *Minority Report* (20th Century Fox, 2002). In 2003, Haslinger scored Len Wiseman's

*Underworld*, his first film to open as No. 1 in the United States (see the sidebar “Paul Haslinger Soundtracks”).

He recently completed work on *Far Cry: Instincts*, a new Microsoft Xbox game from Canadian developer Ubisoft. Haslinger’s immense vision embraces film, games, albums, and live performance in a modern musical world without boundaries.

#### What is the first music you remember?

I don’t specifically recall, but I’m sure it was the usual assortment of “music for children” that parents all over the world use to expose their offspring early on to really bad musical structure. The first time I actually paid attention was when I was six years old, and my sisters—eight and ten years older—took me to a band rehearsal. I remember being nearly deaf for several days from the noise. I decided right there and then that that was what I wanted to do when I grew up (I’m still waiting for that to happen!).

#### Who were your musical heroes early on?

Whatever my older sisters exposed me to—unknown Austrian bands, Ike and Tina Turner, the Who, Hendrix.

#### Who do you respect and admire today?

DJ Krush, UNKLE (James Lavelle), Jon Brion, Arvo Pärt, Funkstoerung, TerraNova, Kruder and Dorfmeister, Jon Hassell, David Sylvian, Timbaland, Sigur Ros.

#### Talk about your early musical education.

I started piano lessons at age six but didn’t take music seriously until I was a teenager, when I thought about a career in music. I studied classical music, and my instruments were guitar and piano. I played keyboards in bands, and after high school I went to Vienna to study



FIG. 1: Haslinger recently scored *Far Cry: Instincts*, an Xbox game by Ubisoft.



FIG. 2: Haslinger extols the virtues of Stylus RMX by Spectrasonics, citing the “unprecedented” control it gives him.

at the Academy of Music. I also became a session player, which culminated in my work with Tangerine Dream.

#### How did you get into electronic music?

I always had a fascination with electronic instruments. Part of the mystique was that nobody could afford them when I was growing up. But by the early ’80s, one thing I could afford was an Atari 1040 ST, one of the first PCs to make music applications available to musicians. I guess I was in the first group of kids to take advantage of that. It was a little like learning a new language early in life. By 1985, when I met Tangerine Dream, I was the “computer kid” who could easily work with sequencers and synthesizers. I auditioned for their U.K. tour, and afterwards was asked to join the band.

#### Who was in the group at that time?

Traditionally, it is a three-piece ensemble. I joined Edgar Froese, the original founder, and Christopher Franke, and stayed with them for five years. I worked with them at their studios in Germany and Austria, and we also toured a lot during that period. Two U.S. tours and two European tours—it was a great way to get my feet wet, and to be exposed to the international music business.

A good portion of my work with Tangerine Dream at the time involved film music, and I remember approaching it as any 23-year-old would—without much fear or respect. Also, Tangerine Dream was typically asked to deliver a monochromatic kind of score, the electronic-analog trademark sound that TD had become famous for following landmark films such as *Sorcerer* [Universal, 1977], *Thief* [MGM, 1981], and *Risky Business* [Warner Brothers, 1983].

After moving to Los Angeles in the early ’90s, I started looking into “music for picture” more seriously and in broader scope. My collaboration as a programmer and arranger with Graeme Revell exposed me for the first time to the full spectrum of film music, including the hectic demands of orchestral scoring and the power politics surrounding the finalization of any score for a major motion picture in Hollywood.

Music is typically the last chance for directors and studios alike to change the feel of the movie. They typically get nervous, and the composer has to fulfill last-minute requests and make sure the musical integrity of the score stays intact.

### Do you have a philosophy of scoring?

Watching a movie should be an experience. The music's most important role is to enhance, and in some cases even establish, that experience. To do that, a composer needs to understand the history and craft of storytelling and its application in film. And in this day and age you must be aware and have an understanding of psychological effect.

Other than that, it always helps to simply write a good piece of music. Keeping an open mind is equally important, because there are many ways to score a picture effectively. I always try not to make my position a singular one.

### It's very emotional, isn't it?

Emotion has a lot to do with it. In Bach's time there was a theory of how music affects emotional states. It's interesting, because Bach is not thought of as being very melodic. He didn't use a lot of recognizable themes—there was something else that pushed the emotions. His music is more subtle and, for me, more effective. I feel that I am working in a long tradition of using music to change emotions.

It's important to note, though, that it's not good if you notice a film's music. If you don't notice it and the effect is created, that's what we are striving for. It involves understanding the psychology of storytelling and having skill with music to do it well. I love the fact that in film you are part of a bigger entity and that you are not out in front.

### How do you prepare for your scoring work?

That is my favorite part of the job. I love to dive into projects, to research and explore the possibilities. I typically spend weeks establishing a sound and a musical vibe for a project—building project-specific sound libraries, experimenting with musical ideas—throwing paint against the canvas and seeing what sticks in context.

### Do the rules of film scoring apply in scoring for video games?

There are many parallels, and the starting points are similar. At the core of both, there is storytelling. With video games, the difference is that you are working with nonlinear techniques and tools—working with loops, samples, with fragments, and multitracking.

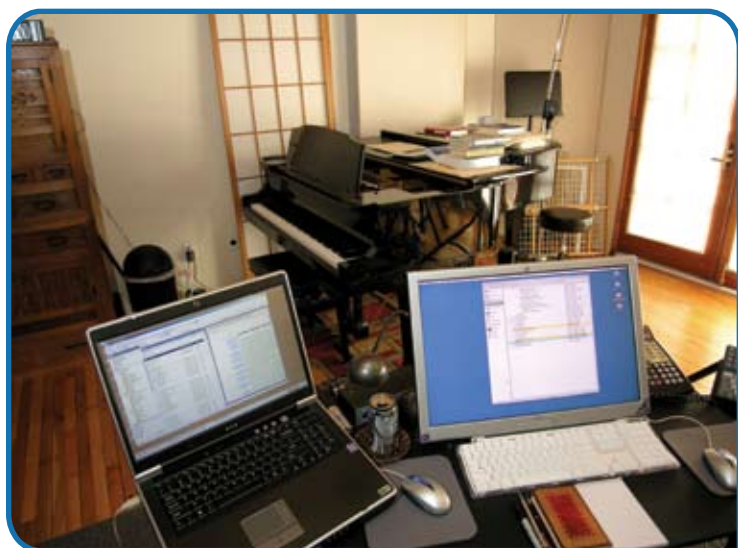
In Vienna, when I was studying classical music, I would do little demonstrations of studio technology at the Academy. People were blown away because I could mix eight tracks in different ways and create completely different pieces of music. In scoring video games, I take musical fragments and combine them in different ways and create different effects. For me, that is the way I write, anyway. I love to experiment with modules, and recombine them to take on new appearances and forms. My way of working is paying off with games, and I am having a lot of fun.

### Do you find game scoring as satisfying as film scoring?

Yes, but it depends on what you are working with. Just as there are boring films, there are boring games. I am working with Ubisoft now on a game called *Far Cry: Instincts* [see Fig. 1], which is an ideal situation. They give me the framework of the game and how the music will be applied, and lots of freedom with it. With film, you are working with a picture, but with games, there is only an assignment—a minute of action music, a minute of music leading up to the action. With film, you are a slave to the picture and the timecode. With games, it is more like animation, where the visuals may be created alongside the music.

Because there is a higher fragmentation of musical elements and, as you say, more “modularity” in games, what does that mean for the production process? It just puts higher demands on production organization, or *production architecture*. The number of software platforms, intermediate and final recordings, samples used, and so on, produces a data accumulation that can quickly turn into chaos. Add to that tight schedules and delivery demands.

With my crew, we typically run everything through a central database that can be accessed through a server or the Web pretty much from anywhere on the planet. That way we can all share and update data from various locations, and it gives everybody a clue



MR. BONZAI

In Haslinger's studio, this juxtaposition of laptops and an acoustic piano is emblematic of the mixture of electronic and classical influences in his music.

as to where we stand in overall production development. The key here is not only to have network and broadband communication access, but also to know how to use it most effectively for the purpose of the project at hand.

### Do you notice aesthetic differences between Japanese games and those designed in the West?

There is a culture of animation in Japan that is unlike anywhere else in the world. Manga and anime have a lasting influence on everything else. There is even an art theory called Superflat. If the Western approach to art is vertical, the Japanese approach is more lateral; it goes toward a spherical feeling more than a pinpoint feeling.

I've always felt very inspired by and fascinated with Japanese art. It places an importance on emptiness and empty sound that I don't find anywhere else. More importantly, it uses that absence of sound just as effectively as sound itself and, in doing so, is closer to my own understanding of art as "choice of balance" rather than "genius of creation."

### What did you learn from Tangerine Dream?

It's difficult to point out any one thing, since that was such an important engagement and time for me. But probably it was the "photographic" principle applied to music, which I first started to comprehend when working with them. Until then, I was under the impression that "creation" of music is all there is. After working with TD, I began to see "selection" as the other complementary principle to coming up with something, and one that is becoming even more important, as we are flooded with options afforded to us by advances in technology. You often have a lot of musical options, and there is a skill in selecting that one moment that is actually worth something.

We spent a lot of the time in the studio together, and because it involved producing, I was exposed for the first time to a world beyond being a session player. I began to understand the selection process involved in creating music, and over the years it has become more of an issue for me. How do you select the data and manage it?

## DIGITAL DREAM STUDIO

Haslinger's studio (see Fig. A) contains nine networked computers. Of those, seven are PCs, the flagship of which is an AMD Dual Opteron 2.0 GHz. He also has a Mac G4 and a Mac G5. The various audio interfaces for all his computers are patched through his Yamaha DM2000 digital mixer and centrally clocked with an Apogee Big Ben master clock.

His primary sequencing software is Steinberg Nuendo 3.1, which he runs on the AMD CPU. "I ran Nuendo on a [Mac] G5 before, and I ran them parallel for a while," says Haslinger. "My impression was that I got more bang for the buck on the PC. So at some time I just switched over to PC."

His other six PCs are used for Tascam GigaStudio. He uses his G5 for running Mac-specific music software (such as Audio Ease Altiverb 5), and his G4 for his Digidesign Pro Tools|HD system (he's currently running v. 6.7). Although it might seem redundant to be running both Pro Tools and Nuendo, Haslinger has a definite division of labor between his two main DAW systems.

"The musical playground is Nuendo," he says. "It's all self-contained, and I have my own stock of files in there. The exchange platform to the outside world, more or less, is Pro Tools, simply for the fact that every music editor in town, every post-production [facility], everybody is on Pro Tools."

Haslinger typically slaves the Pro Tools system to the Nuendo system using MIDI Time Code. He loads the picture into Pro Tools and does his composing and arranging in Nuendo.



**FIG. A:** There is no shortage of computers in Haslinger's studio. The audio from nine of them is routed and mixed through a Yamaha DM2000 console (far right).

He runs his Nuendo system at 44.1 kHz, because that's what his 2-terabyte collection of samples is saved at. He runs the Pro Tools system at whatever sampling rate the project dictates. He's able to easily move files back and forth between the two systems, thanks to a real-time sampling-rate conversion card installed in his DM2000.

"When I record audio and am working on a cue or working on a song and I want to record a stereo mix of it, I usually record it into both Nuendo and Pro Tools," he explains. "I record it into Pro Tools because there I have it in the project-specific sampling rate—mostly 48 kHz or something. I record it into Nuendo because there I've had it at 44.1 kHz, and can use it in the continuation of the project."

—Mike Levine

**Describe your studio setup.**

My studio is basically one big computer network. I record and play certain instruments directly into the computer right here—guitars, bass, and so on—but I also love going to traditional recording studios and working in the vibe of that studio for a particular recording session. And L.A. is full of great studios! [For more on Haslinger's gear, see the sidebar "Digital Dream Studio."]

**What is the primary software you use when you are scoring?**

Steinberg Nuendo 3 with HALion 2 is my main writing and production environment. I apply most effects and mix treatments directly within Nuendo; I prefer the sound of Nuendo's audio engine over comparable sequencing products out there—it helps that it was written with surround sound in mind. I utilize HALion 2 as a quick-shot sample-management tool that allows me to pitch and adapt audio in real time.

**What other music software do you use?**

Steinberg Wavelab 5. The UAD-1 Ultra Pak from Universal Audio, the Max Bundle from Elemental Audio, and plug-ins from CamelAudio. All the virtual instruments from Spectrasonics, Applied Acoustics, and Native Instruments.

**What's your favorite virtual instrument?**

I have to single out Stylus RMX [see Fig. 2]; it is the most powerful and most versatile instrument I have in my arsenal. It offers an unprecedented amount of control and creative options for rhythm arrangements, and it allows import of REX files, which means it can be customized to even play tonal loops with all the sound control of its main engine. Amazing and very inspiring to work with.

Steinberg was bought by Yamaha, so Steinberg software and Yamaha hardware work nicely together. There is a software extension in Nuendo that allows direct control of the console. The mixer itself allows me to run a lot

of live signal coming from samplers (outboard modules that I am still using) into a digital matrix where all signals can be routed according to project needs.

**Do you have to replace tools every year?**

Not as much anymore. Most of the changes happen in software these days. Think of it as a network, and you are changing parts off the network quite regularly. We are so dependent on orchestral emulation, which in programming terms is dependent on having a lot of colors available to us in real time. That means you need stacks of PCs running GigaStudio with all the stuff online and ready to go. I don't want to be loading up a sound when I have an idea—I want it ready to go. Being able to operate in real time is a major factor in catching the moment.

**Any new stuff that helps you with your work?**

There are no big surprises, but good-sounding technology and good-sounding software is finally here. My current new favorites: Stylus RMX, Nuendo 3, Eqium, Wavelab 5, Absynth 3, Tassman 4.

**What is wrong with the music industry?**

It's only partially the fault of the big bad corporations. The main problem is one of evaluation and judgments about music, which are going through a change. The music industry and the audiences haven't fully acknowledged that yet.

On top of that, there is an ideological disconnect because music doesn't quite "mean" as much anymore. Life is more experience based now, which is why live concerts are thriving. Hopefully, music can and will find new grounds and new environments, like the next generation of games, in which it can flourish and develop again past the narrow confines of the pop song. There is nothing wrong with pop songs—they just become overbearing as a format at times.

I think we are in a period of shifting paradigms of taste and judgment. In the past, we had critics and A&R people who would attempt to pinpoint what is good and what is bad. Today, I see this in flux. The PC laptop revolution has allowed many people to make their own records, whether they're good or not. I do think there is a lot of good music being made today, but it may be overshadowed by the huge amount of mediocre music. Where are the magazines, and where are the radio shows you can go to and find worthwhile work?

**Who is your best musical friend?**

Brian Williams, also known as Lustmord. He was a member of SPK, as was Graeme Revell. I met him in L.A. during the early '90s. We collaborate quite a bit, and we hang out and talk about music, film, and games. He has introduced me to a lot of music I wasn't aware of over the years, such as the Mo' Wax label out of the U.K., founded by James Lavelle. This led me to DJ Krush, one of the most influential artists in recent years.

**PAUL HASLINGER SOUNDTRACKS****TV show**

*Sleeper Cell* (Showtime, 2005)

**Video game**

*Far Cry: Instincts* (Ubisoft, 2005)

**Films**

*The Girl Next Door* (New Regency/Fox 2000, 2004)

*Underworld* (Screen Gems, 2003)

*Blue Crush* (Imagine Entertainment, 2002)

*Into the Blue* (Sony Pictures, 2002)

*Crazy/Beautiful* (Disney, 2001)

*Picture Claire* (Alliance Atlantis, 2001)

*Cheaters* (HBO, 2000)

**Is there any filmmaker that you would like to work with?**

Hideo Nakata, who made *The Ring* [Dreamworks, 2002] and is now working on a film version of one of my favorite books, called *Out*, by Natsuo Kirino. I also admire Akira Yamaoka, sound designer and producer of *Silent Hill*, and would love to collaborate with him in some fashion. Some of my other favorite filmmakers include Danny Boyle [*28 Days Later* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2002), *Trainspotting* (Miramax, 1996)], Jonathan Glazer [*Sexy Beast* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2001), *Birth* (Fine Line Features, 2004)], David Fincher [*Seven* (New Line Cinema, 1995), *Fight Club* (Regency Enterprises/Fox 2000, 1999)], and Gaspar Noe [*Irreversible* (Lions Gate Films, 2002)].

**If you could go back in time before recording, what would you like to hear?**

Different tunings. I'd love to hear J. S. Bach conduct his choir in Leipzig at Sunday Mass. Singers tune naturally toward each other, and it would be amazing to hear how Bach shaped that choir to tune and sound at that time.

**Which film scores do you consider important steps in your development as a composer for film?**

I feel *Miracle Mile* was the best of my scores with TD. It is also one of the most used temp tracks. Another one was *Cheaters*, the first film under my own name. At that time, I had spent ten years living in Hollywood, honing my skills in film writing and establishing a new vocabulary for my music. *Cheaters* was the first real sign that all that hard work was starting to pay off, and it was the start of a beautiful creative working relationship with director John Stockwell, who I've worked with ever since.

**Any advice for getting a good start in the music-scoring business?**

Try to start out working on the front lines, but in a noncombative position—that is, work with a composer as a programmer, a copyist, and so on. My work

with Graeme Revell proved invaluable helpful, not just in working with orchestras and tight schedules, but more importantly because it allowed me to observe and learn how politics play out on high-profile projects. No school can prepare you for that.

**What's coming up for you?**

Freedom of Noise, a project about the connection between experience and memory. Over the years I've spent time in many cities, and one of my favorite things to do is go for long drives at night, somewhere between midnight and 6 a.m. I always find a certain tranquillity, a weightlessness, on these drives, and I can recall the experience, the vibe of these moments, very clearly, because they have attached themselves to my core memory. And there is a music that goes with that atmosphere—a music that is between worlds, between time, between circumstances. In happy isolation.

My plan is to release this as a collection of material. Initially, it will be a regular album release (CD and download), but I plan to expand its release cycle with image and text elements, and audio complements. Think of an updated version of the old radio-play format, popularized by such creators as Orson Welles. The cities I've chosen to select memories from for this particular film are Tokyo, Paris, and Los Angeles. Their common denominator is the vast differences of landscapes within these cities, the worlds within worlds, the ethnic multiplicity, and their sense of tranquil despair, which is so fitting for the times.

**What music would you like played at your funeral?**

Bach: BWV 82, *Ich hab' genug*; Debussy: *Claire de Lune*; Bobby McFerrin: "Don't Worry, Be Happy." EM

*Mr. Bonzai is an award-winning photographer and writer. His new book, Faces of Music: 25 Years of Lunching with Legends (Thomson CoursePTR/ArtistPro, 2005), includes over 400 photographs and 160 interviews. Visit [www.mrbonzai.com](http://www.mrbonzai.com) to learn more.*



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