

Robert Downey Jr. Hardass, Flake, Superstar— and an Iron Man, Too

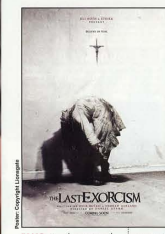


NATHAN BARR trained as a cellist, Barr entered film scoring in grand style, studying as an apprentice to heavyweight Hollywood composer (and former Beatles footman) Hans Zimmer. But it wasn't until he began his association with horror enthusiast Eli Roth, **FANGORIA:** Your collaboration with Eli Roth is shaping up to be one of the most enduring composer/director relationships in horror. How did you meet?

NATHAN BARR: Well, it's a fairly boring industry story, really. A producer I had worked with was set to produce this film from a new director nobody had heard of. That nobody was Eli and the film was *Cabin Fever*, a long story short, I met with Eli and he came to my studio, and as soon as he looked at my horror film collection, he knew it was the right fit. And then we started talking about *FANGORIA*, it was one of the genres that brought us together.

FANG: Speaking of great relationships, I always think of Ennio Morricone and Sergio Leone, and the fact that they would start thinking about the score at the script stage. Do you ever do that with Eli?

BARR: I love the stories I've heard about how Morricone would be on set with Leone and write music while they shot the films—it's so cool. Eli and I aren't there yet, but I always ground early, reading the script and preparing sounds. And Eli's always thinking about music while he's shooting scenes. When I consider these great relationships in cinema, for me, the biggest one is obvious, but it's obvious for a reason: Bernard Herrmann and Alfred Hitchcock. I just rewatched *The Birds* and *Vertigo* last week, and while *The Birds* doesn't really hold up, *Vertigo* is just amazing. Both Hitch and Herrmann were at the top of their games when they made that. It's a subtle film, really, and it's Herrmann's music that keeps us watching, emotionally engaged and informed.



FANG: I've always viewed *Vertigo* as one of cinema's first long-form music videos...
BARR: Yeah, exactly. Imagine how boring it would be without that incredible score.
FANG: Your studio setup is in your garage at home, right?
BARR: That's right.
FANG: You have this incredible collection of choice, and I imagine you as this sort of cinematic business Jones, traveling the planet collecting these bizarre musical instruments.

BARR: In a way, I guess I am, yeah. I was raised in Japan, and my parents had a large collection of instruments. My mom played the shakuhachi. So watching it is more exciting to me than finding some bizarre instrument, using it to create new sounds and working it into my music. Most composers make music sitting at the same keyboard day in and day out, no matter what the project and that gets stale. But I use all kinds of strange things, including kazoos, to get the results I want. I hope that because of this, I'm kind of getting a signature sound.

FANG: The music of *True Blood* is so mournful, eerily... it's a very haunting score.

BARR: It is, yes. I did Bill (Stephen Moyer), the lead vampire. He's over a century old, and because of that, he's had all this loss—that's lost love, lost family. These are universal themes, and I found myself drawing from my own life experience. That's the key to composing for horror, because no matter how monstrous the character is—in *True Blood* there are many horrible monsters, human and otherwise—you can see how your life may relate to it.

FANG: What's the greatest thing you learned from your mentor, Hans Zimmer?

BARR: Oh my God, I learned so much. I mean, when I first walked in his studio, I didn't even know what MIDI stood for [Musical Instrument Digital Interface]. Ultimately, I learned that I could do anything I wanted to do. Hans told me that he thought I could do this and make a living, which was incredibly inspiring for me, because I had doubts.

He gave me insight; at one point he said, "Are you sure you want a career that requires so much time alone?" I'm persnickety, but I accept that. He has a very particular process, and he took me a while to find my own.

FANG: The power of a great film score is if it can stand alone—if you can listen to it and it's evocative without the aid of the visual. Your work in the *Halloween* films is disturbing even without Roth's violent images. Is this something you think about when you work?

BARR: Absolutely. I always try to make it a listenable score that can survive on its own. In fact, I was in Spain recently at a music festival doing a live concert of *True Blood* music!

FANG: You're more prolific now than you've ever been. Do you still love your work?

BARR: I do, I really, really do. I still love these moments where I can't believe that this is actually my job. I get to make coffee and then I go to my garage and beat my piano up with a hammer. I'm very lucky.

—Chris Alexander

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