

Soundtrack Superstar

He's scored blockbusters like *Dinosaur*, *The Fugitive*, *The Sixth Sense* and *Pretty Woman*, as well as intimate critical favorites such as *Mumford*, *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Five Corners*. But regardless of the film's scale, a James Newton Howard soundtrack always boasts an unerring dramatic sense, explosive energy and a hip blend of classic soundtrack devices and modern innovations. Howard spoke with us between meetings for his next project, the action thriller *The Vertical Limit*.

You're known for mixing synthesizers and orchestral instruments.

Synths are almost always part of my palette. I got noticed a lot for that on *The Fugitive*, which I don't happen to think is my best score, though some people do. I got stuck in that sound for a while on films like *Outbreak* and *Waterworld*, and by the time I did *A Perfect Murder*, I was a little bored with that particular blend. Now I'm tending

to combine the synths with the orchestra so that they're not so obviously distinguishable from the orchestral sounds. *Dinosaur*, which is the biggest movie I've ever done, actually has relatively few synths, though there are a lot of sampled wind, voice and percussion sounds.

Do you tend to use samples as stand-ins for real instruments, or as sounds in their own right?

Probably more the former. I'm basically an orchestral guy, after all. But there are exceptions. For example, I used lots of ethnic percussion samples for *Snow Falling on Cedars*. I find that if you're not careful, a score made up largely of samples can sound one-dimensional in the theater. That's why I tend to double samples with real instruments. But I'm not putting down sampling—I'm a huge fan of it. I just got a new Yamaha A5000 sampler, which sounds wonderful. It has tremendous clarity and impact, which are very important to me in film work.

How much of the score do you specify before it gets passed on to an orchestrator?

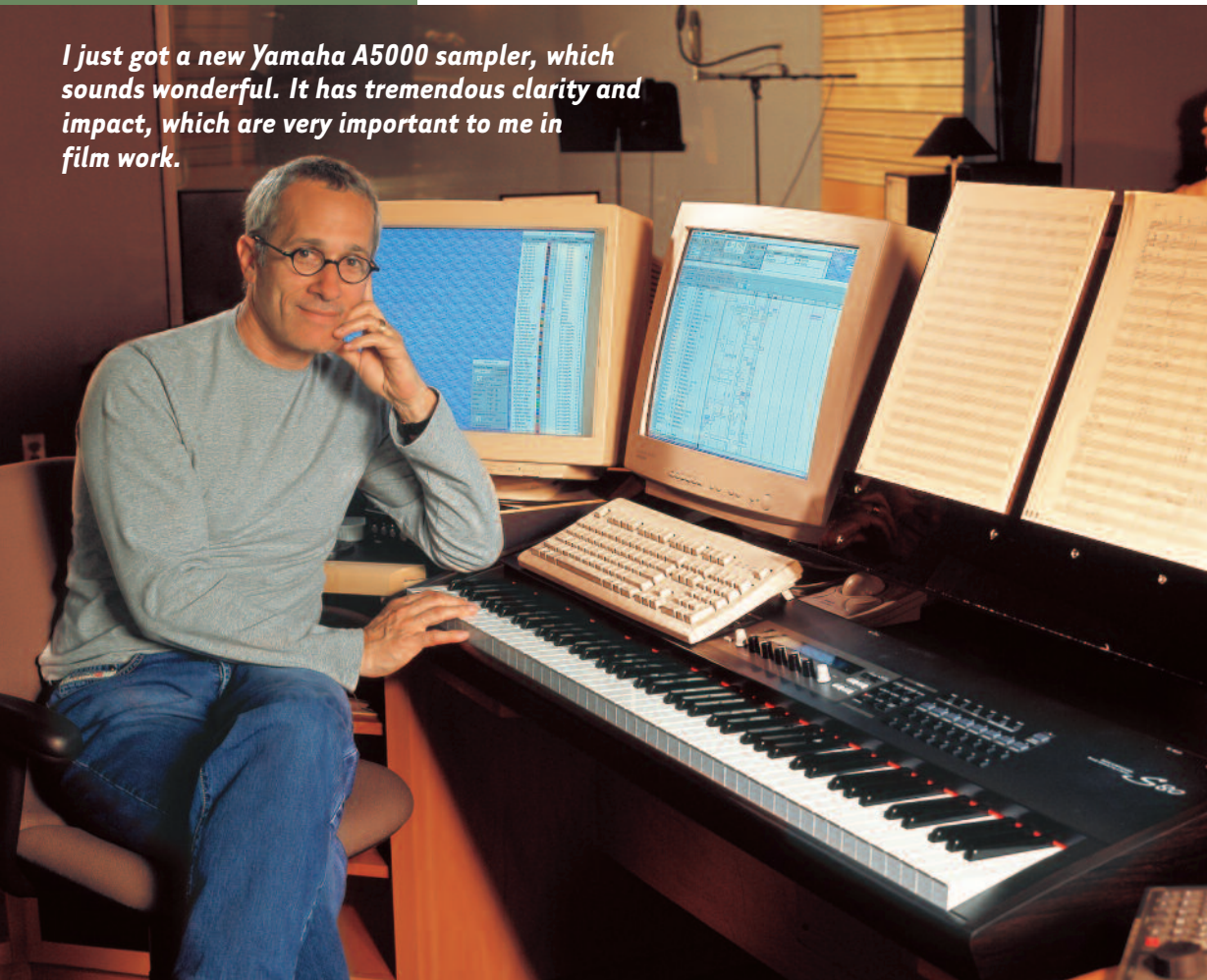
I write every note in my control room, working from a Yamaha keyboard controller. For a long time I used a KX88 because I loved the feel so much, but now I'm using an S80, and I love it. The piano and electric piano sounds are just fantastic, and the other sounds I've heard are wonderful too. But since I'm a pianist, the main deal for me is the feel.

So how have your methods changed since your first score 15 years ago?

I've gotten more efficient and the technology has gotten better, so I get more done in less time. My sense of what will work has improved. My melodic sense is better. I know when I'm pursuing a good idea and I don't overwrite as much. Plus, I've become friends with most of my directors, so that makes my work a lot more pleasant.

James Newton Howard

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Patrick Leonard's DIGITAL DESK SET



Patrick Leonard's resume fills page after page. In small print! Small print that includes names like Madonna, Elton John, Jewel, Enrique Iglesias, Bryan Adams, Jody Watley, the Black Crowes, k.d. lang and . . . well, we'd better stop there, or we'll fill this page simply reprinting the list. The scary part is, the resume is divided into two sections: artists Leonard has produced and those he's written songs for. Both sections are equally impressive.

These days, Leonard's dual talents are united by one piece of gear: the Yamaha O2R Digital Recording Console. "I use O2Rs in my MIDI/digital audio rig, where I do my writing and sequencing," he says. "Later I transfer everything through the O2Rs to what-

ever format we're using for the project. Tracks usually travel back and forth a lot throughout the process. Any and all records I've made in the last three years have come through my two O2Rs, including Madonna's *Ray of Light*, Jewel's *Spirit*, and Elton John's *Road to El Dorado*."

Leonard is so enamored of the consoles' on-board EQ, dynamic processing, and effects that he generally turns to outboard gear only for "really over-the-top" effects. "I like the O2R EQ a lot," he says. "It's good and severe. The compression is also as severe as I'd ever want. It's great on the effects and I always have it on the two-mix."

There are several items on Leonard's O2R wish list: He says he'd prefer if the motorized

faders were a touch quieter in automation mode and he wouldn't mind if certain effects parameters ran a bit deeper. But he's enthusiastic enough that he plans to incorporate a third O2R into his system. "It's great the way you can hook them together," he adds.

"Because the O2Rs are my main consoles in the initial stage of a project," says Leonard, "the conveniences they offer make my work more seamless overall. I like how the O2Rs give me the ability to monitor my Pro Tools system along with my MIDI gear. I like how they let me save presets with effects included. I like how they give me 48 tracks per board. In fact, everything I do, they make easier."

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