

Reviews / Articles

"The connection between music and movies is crucial. But I never realized how crucial until I heard Tom Nazziola's thrilling score for *The Golem*. Paul Wegener's 1920 German silent film classic is a source of the Frankenstein legend. It tells how the chief rabbi of Prague created a huge, hulking creature out of clay to protect the ghetto from anti-Semitic attacks. Now Nazziola's enveloping music draws on Jewish musical influences (oh those Middle Eastern drums!) to blow the dust off of film scholarship to make the film live and breathe for a new generation. I sat spellbound watching Nazziola conduct the musicians of his BQE project in a live performance of score and film. And I later listened to the score on its own, its power even deeper and more resonant. Nazziola is doing astonishing compositional work with silent films, from the drama of *The Golem* to the comedies of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. His talent is rare. His contribution indispensable." - **Peter Travers, Rolling Stone magazine**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2007

Tom Nazziola, Buster Keaton and the BQE Project

Tonight I saw Tom Nazziola's BQE Project perform his brand new original score to Buster Keaton's *Battling Butler* at the Walter Reade Theater. I've known Tom for a number of years, and while he's come to a few of my shows, I've always been working when the BQE has performed. Luckily, I was unengaged this evening, and was really glad I got to hear Tom's scoring work and his excellent 8-piece ensemble. They did a great job, and Tom's score really did the work *Battling Butler* needs...it supported the energy, gags' rhythm and the heart of the piece. BK's *BB* is not one of his greatest, and is somewhat uncharacteristic, but it's a story well-told and with a great supporting cast. If you get a chance to hear Tom and the BQE -- go. The sound is traditional and is scored down to the second...meaning it's not mood music beds that fit, it's more like a real film score timed to each beat of the picture.

- Ben Model (Silent Film Music Accompanist)

Letter of Support

“It has been my esteemed pleasure to commission Tom Nazziola to compose a score for the 1920 silent film, *The Golem*, as part of our New Work/ New York initiative. Both myself and this program are new to Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, in fact commissioning is brand new to Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts, so it suffices to say that neither staff nor audience knew quite what to expect from this experience. It therefore gives me tremendous pride to be able to tell you that the project was in every way an unparalleled success.

From an internal perspective, Mr. Nazziola is a wonderfully creative and intelligent artist with whom I would gladly work again and again. From an audience perspective the fear with a project such as this one is that the music will either outshine the film, or leave the audience confused as to the reason for the pairing. Mr. Nazziola's score avoids both of these potential pitfalls with dramatic success. The score is brilliantly creative while always staying within the world of the film -- it clearly reflects that Mr. Nazziola has made himself an absolute expert on every single moment and emotion within the film; he highlights all beautifully. The music itself is so compelling that the score can easily stand alone as a powerful piece of music in its own right, but *The Golem* will never again be the same without the addition of Mr. Nazziola's score.”

Best Wishes,

Seth Soloway, Artistic Director - Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts

The Berkshire Eagle

(North Adams, Mass)

BQE Project: Making Chaplin musical at MoCA

by Seth Rogovoy

(NORTH ADAMS, Mass., June 6, 1999) - Under normal circumstances to say that an orchestra's performance was unremarkable wouldn't seem like a compliment. But in the case of the BQE Project, which performed in the Cinema Courtyard at Mass MoCA on Saturday night, this is in fact the highest praise. The task at hand was to lend musical accompaniment to the classic Charlie Chaplin film, "The Gold Rush." The art of scoring for film requires a delicate touch. The music should enhance or punctuate the mood or action without drawing attention to itself. It's a subtle task that the multi-talented Chaplin typically reserved for himself, but in the case of the 1925 version of "The Gold Rush" - Chaplin's first film for the nascent United Artists studio he founded - one which he never got around to.

The BQE set out to recreate a soundtrack for the film in the style of the era, and the result was a marvelous pastiche that fully served Chaplin's vision in both

creative and technical terms. Through a combination of percussion, sound effects, comical noises, light-classical themes and jazzy figures, the BQE built a sense of character and tone that echoed Chaplin's visual cues, and executed them with flawless accuracy. In the end, one could have watched the film and have easily forgotten that there were six live musicians performing at the base of the screen. This, ironically, is the greatest compliment that could be paid to a band in such a circumstance. One did pay attention to the orchestra, nevertheless - however much Chaplin's enticing vision played itself out in a beautifully restored print projected onto a screen hung over one of the brick walls of the factory courtyard. Co-composers Tom Nazziola and John Florio drew from a broad palette of sounds and styles for their score, which echoed Chaplin's visual strategy in building character and plot from a few simple, musical devices.

Thus, when we first saw Chaplin wandering through a snowy mountain pass, we heard a light, carefree, almost silly musical figure which we would come to recognize as his theme. This was in contrast to the dark, ominous passage that underlined the introduction of Black Larsen, the homicidal madman. Particular comic routines were accompanied by bright, percussive sound effects or by what we now call cartoon music. The instrumentation included piano, bassoon, flute, clarinet, violin, bass and percussion, allowing for a wide array of moods and tones. Dancehall sequences were accompanied by perky waltzes and rags, and the introduction of the romantic sub-plot was underlined by a bit of ersatz Vivaldi. The famous scene in which Chaplin turns two forks and dinner rolls into a full-fledged production number was scored to a jazzy, soft-shoe dance number.

As for Chaplin, his comic genius has been long well-established. But in case anyone needs reminding, "The Gold Rush" was all the more remarkable for the way in which it anticipated so much of cinematic history to come. This simple tale of a lone prospector seeking fortune in the Alaska gold rush forecasted such filmic mainstays to come as natural disasters (avalanche), murder and violence, crime, mental illness as plot device (amnesia), cruelty to animals, romance, production numbers (the aforementioned soft-shoe dance of the dinner rolls), and even special effects, such as when Chaplin's character morphs into a chicken, at least from the point of view of a half-starved, half-crazed miner, to which the viewers are made privy. Then of course, there is Chaplin himself, whose simple comic character has influenced virtually every comic actor since. Such disparate comic talents as Woody Allen and Robin Williams are unthinkable without reference to Chaplin, and the audience's ovation at the end of the showing was as much for the film as it was for the orchestra.

Filmgoers - or were they concertgoers? - chose between theater-style seating in folding chairs set up on bleachers and seating around tables at MoCA's outdoor café. Snacks and simple dinner fare were available at modest prices. The overall ambiance was part drive-in movie, part outdoor concert, with an intimate feel lent by the enclosed courtyard. One minor technical glitch: a recurrent breeze blowing against the live microphones caused a deep rumbling sound akin to thunder, when in fact there was none, real or cinematic.

Monster success (Mon. March 10, 2008)

By Marian Masone
for The Brooklyn Paper

Music and the movies have always made a great match. From cinema's earliest days, when music served as accompaniment to a film, until today, when film scores can make or break a "talkie," the two art forms belong together.

And don't think that today's cinematic music is merely background for current releases. Many musicians are writing music for new experimental films, as well as creating new scores for classics, like Windsor Terrace resident Tom Nazziola.

As one of the founding members of the BQE Project, a chamber ensemble dedicated to performing live accompaniment to contemporary and classic films, Nazziola knows this field well. And he'll have a chance to show off his musical and cinematic knowledge when the BQE Project (yes, that's a tribute to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway) performs the world premiere of his new score for the 1920 landmark silent film, "The Golem" at the Walt Whitman Theatre in Midwood on Sunday.

The film, directed by German actor Paul Wegener, is a classic in both style and story. A wonderful example of German expressionism in cinema, it draws upon Hebrew legend to tell the tale of a rabbi in 16th century Prague who fashions an inanimate creature out of clay to protect his community from persecution.

Nazziola's score for "The Golem" was commissioned by Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College's "New Work/New York" initiative.

"[This project] has allowed us to work with a great Brooklyn artist and develop and grow our audience," BCBC Artistic Director Seth Soloway told GO. "I knew this could be a great performance for our audience that was hungry for classical music, and it allows us to do something new and fresh."

Nazziola e-spoke with GO Brooklyn about how he came to identify with and be inspired by "The Golem."

"The idea behind The BQE Project is to create 'film scoring music,'" explained Nazziola. "I want to bring any and all instances of audio/visual projects to our audiences with an emphasis on creating music that supports a moving image."

But before the composer even sits down to pen the score, there is the daunting task of choosing an inspiring project.

"I screen countless films until I find something that really resonates with me," said Nazziola. "This can be a long process. My main emphasis is on finding a film that has a strong feeling and direction behind it. This usually involves a well-told story or the delivery of concrete emotions. I have to enjoy the film itself. If the film is strong, the musical ideas will come."

Nazziola said he was immediately drawn to "The Golem" and its underdog subject.

"I was impressed with the intensity of the images (especially of the Golem itself)," he said. "I also thought it would be a great platform for creating a different perspective for my compositional style through studying music of other cultures."

Nazziola spent six months creating the score for "Golem."

"I felt some kind of deep connection with the storyline. Similar to the 1931 classic 'Frankenstein,' the film evokes empathy from the viewer for either the underdog, the oppressed or the persecuted," he said. "I love films that reveal the plight of a person or group of people and allow us to enter that world and possibly gain a new perspective."

"There is also a strong mystical element involved in ['The Golem'] which is something that I relate to on a musical and spiritual level."

Nazziola, who has written music for contemporary films as well as TV, documentaries and animation, is a versatile composer with dreams of scoring for Hollywood.

"I've done a few independent films as well as composing new music for early talkies (classic films) such as Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein' and Josef von Sternberg's 'The Blue Angel,' " said Nazziola. "These are two films that have dialogue on the soundtrack but no film score; they were created in the early 1930s at a time when composing music for film was at its infancy."

"Since I ultimately desire to work on a current film out of Hollywood, scoring early talkies enables me to practice my hand at underscoring until I can segue into the West Coast scene."

All of which brings Nazziola and his seven-member ensemble to the world premiere of "The Golem" score for Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts on March 9.

Conducted by Nazziola, the musicians will play violin, cello, acoustic bass, piano, guitars (electric, nylon and mandolin) and ethnic percussion.

"I mentioned to [BCBC] that 'The Golem' was a film I was interested in doing... [They] actually offered to commission me to compose a new score for this film, which is exactly what one needs to get a major project like this in motion. I've thought about doing 'The Golem' for years and always hoped that there would be an occasion to create a new score for live performance."

BCBC regulars will remember the BQE Project from its 1998 performance there of its first film score reconstruction -- Charlie Chaplin's "City Lights."

Said Nazziola, "I guess we've come full circle."