

Rafaella:

Hello and welcome to another episode of Below Decks where we dig into some of the research questions, stories, and generally tangential interesting things that went into making Trice Forgotten. I'm Rafaella. My pronouns are she they. And I'm the director of the series as well as one of the writers. So today very excitingly, we are going to talk about the music. Last time Nemo talked a little bit about the process of the sound design and this week we are going to talk more about what went into creating the music itself. This is coming out towards the end of the series, either after episodes eight or nine. We're not entirely sure, but we'll steer clear of spoilers just in case. We are thrilled to be joined today by our guest Sam Jones, who I'm gonna ask him to introduce himself. Sam, please tell us what have you done to contribute to Trice Forgotten <laugh>?

Sam:

Hi. Yeah. I'm Sam Jones he him and I am resident composer of Rusty Quill and composer of the score, but Trice Forgotten. Very happy to be here. Hello!

Rafaella:

Yeah, our score! Sorry. <laugh> <laugh>

Sam:

Scores the word. Yeah,

Rafaella:

It's one of the reasons I'm very excited to be doing this episode cause the music is an element of the show that we know that listeners have consistently loved. And of course we are also joined by Nemo, who definitely doesn't need an introduction at this point, but Nemo give us one anyway.

Nemo:

Hello. I'm Nemo Martin. My pronouns are they them. And I am the creator of this show. Yes, I can confirm. I get many, many DMs about the music and I'm like, Hell yeah. And I know your website off by heart now Sam <laugh>. And I'm like, here's the SoundCloud and here's it on Spotify. You can stream it. Go, go, go.

Rafaella:

Yeah, I think, how can we have, the music has been one of the most asked questions about the series. So I'm gonna kick off by asking Sam, you, as you said, you're the resident composer for Rusty Quill. What does that mean? Tell us more about that and what you do.

Sam:

Crikey. I mean, what it means is I've been friends with Alex for about 29 years, <laugh>. And he asked me when he started the company to write him some music, some theme tunes for some podcasts he was doing. And that hasn't stopped. And so that's what that means. It means that he stuck with me and yeah, I mean we just kind of ended up with parallel careers and we always said let's work together. And he's always been very loyal to me as a composer. So he consistently asks me to write music to various podcasts that Rusty Quill are doing, which is all very exciting. Very interesting work.

Rafaella:

So because you've done so many, is this sort of a blanket approach to finding your way into creating the music for a show? Or what is it depend on, What makes it different?

Sam:

Well, what makes it different is the content is so varied. Every podcast is so, so different. But in terms of approach, that's something that I guess Alex and I kind of got to grips with early on. I mean, there is no one way to do it but it, it's all kind of changed over the years really depending on very practical things like money and what... the growing team in each podcast has wanted. So for instance, when I spoke to you about this early on, I kind of already had a method of doing things which is like, this is what you are going to need when it comes to editing it all and that's sort of the amount of music you're gonna want and stuff like that. But essentially my questions are always the same at the beginning of the process and I just want an idea of energy and tone that the two questions that I ask, avoiding any sort of semblance of musical parlance.

I don't want to hear what the director or producer wants specifically musically at first. I don't want to know because 90% of the time, no matter how good they are musically isn't exactly what they want. And Alex will attest to that as well. He would always say, I really want more trumpet here. And I'm like, No, you don't, you don't want trumpet <laugh>. Not that I have anything against trumpets. In fact, the first notes I wrote for him were trumpet in the gaming podcast. Anyway yeah, I try and keep it really a non-music specific conversation at first to make it very about tone and about the energy of stuff. And specifically for this, it was about who or what or where needs music and what needs to be represented musically because there's quite a long form I mean podcast in a series, it's a long narrative structure so it's quite hard to, without actually sitting down and scoring it minute by minute, which we knew we couldn't do for this. To know what you're gonna need for however many episodes is quite tough to predict. So that those were kind of our initial conversations I think.

Rafaella:

Yeah, well the music was one of the first elements of directing the show that I interacted with. So having written my episodes of it and having worked with Nemo on a bit of the script editing of the series in terms of, Nemo can attest, we spent long hours kind of going, does this make sense if we put this clue here and this reveal here. So by the time I go talk to you Sam, I had the shape of the show very definitely in my head. But it absolutely was a process instead of going, where do we need music, and it being... almost a bit of a guessing game. You can kind of never know absolutely, but you're going; alright, as a director I'm kind of going okay with my sort of director and my dramaturgy brain on, I guess, my script editor brain in gear, I'm going, okay, well I think that we are gonna want to save X, Y, and Z things for the end.

It's really tempting to spend all of our resources at the beginning of the series, but actually this is who we need to prioritize or these are the characters that we need to prioritize and which is of brilliant and exhilarating but also terrifying. Cause I said you are mostly just kind of guessing about what you're going to need. And fortunately for us, the music has worked out incredibly well on this show.

Sam:

Very glad.

Rafaella:

Going back to picking up what you said about not initially wanting any kind of, I was gonna say musical notes, which is a terrible unintended pun, but you know what I mean, Specifically musical terminology, I'm just wanting vibes. That was something that I found incredibly helpful because I'm not a musical person at all. Should we talk about, cause also Nemo, I was drawing very much on our conversations for then these conversations I had with Sam. What were the early vibes that we wanted to put in place for this series?

Nemo:

Yeah, it was interesting hearing Sam talk about scoring the entire show because I was like, oh yeah, of course that would've, somebody would've had to think about that. Cause I completely had only realized just now that wouldn't be possible. <laugh> having this conversation but knew that there were three or four bits of music in the show, especially Ahn's flute was pretty early on because she's really sneaky, she sneaks up on people and it's really hard to do that without a visual component to how to tell that she is coming, how to foreshadow her basically. And I was like, oh the flute would be a really interesting way to do that. Obviously Alestes's childhood backstory being the key one.

Rafaella:

Yeah, we did have these sort of key pieces of music that are in universe that are inside and absolutely Ahn's flute is one of them, which it's such a clever way of having a sort quite sinister character I think sort of arrive in the background of a scene on audio, the lullaby I was saying Nani singing, which we have had an episode two. So that's alright for me to talk

Nemo:

About <laugh>. Yeah.

Rafaella:

Oh can you think of any other, other in universe pieces of music,

Nemo:

The one that I found the most funny Siva singing the Alexander song

Rafaella:

Singing the British Grenadier?

Nemo:

Yes, that's it. Yeah. <laugh>.

Rafaella:

Yes. That was a joke that I could not quite resist but I think the flutr and the lullaby then went into defining the tone of the music and the tone of the show as a whole. Cause they're both quite haunting pieces of music and I think that is something that became very apparent that for all that this is an nautical epic and a sort of rollicking pirated venture. Ultimately the characters are informed by these things that they can't let go of or are trying to let go of. Especially Alestes obviously being constantly sort followed around by her own past. Yeah. Sam does that kind of seem, thinking about those early

conversations that we had about how this should sound both in terms of its genre but also how it's different from what we normally think of this genre as being?

Sam:

Absolutely. And I remember specifically the lullaby being very early in our conversations and actually I remember it being a puzzle for me to solve at one point cause I being over eager as I am had already started the main title and then was talking just going forwards what to do. And then those dimension of the lullaby and me needing to realize its importance narratively and then finding a way to weave that in and lullaby is one of those happy things that literally happened as soon as I, which doesn't happen, but I literally just sat down and played it and had the words in front of me and the tune came to mind. And that was nice because when that happens to me, I dunno, usually you get nervous about when that happens. You're like, no, this needs to be changed. But actually it felt right and just with very straightforward musical influence really it's just this idea of a pentatonic, scale five note scale, which is seen all across folk music across the world.

And so it just seemed right and I managed to find a way to get that into the main title quite subtly in the end, but because it's quite bombastic <laugh>. But yeah, yeah, absolutely. Those were conversations very early on and specifically because the main title was the first venture, I guess it was important to get that sense of adventure but also really put you in place straight away and to get that tone bang on took a couple of goes I think. But yeah, that was a really fun thing to integrate those, like specifically the flute as well. That's something I remember us talking about quite a lot and really wanting that to be as accurate as possible and just really feel right. And that immediately as soon as we had those discussions was like, right, we need to get it recorded by a really good player and all of this. And those were very early decisions in this process for me as well.

Rafaella:

So that's a very nice segue into talking about, tell us about that instrument cause yeah, one of my memories from the process, hearing an early draft of the theme, which was already sounding brilliant, but then I remember you sort of saying, Oh this thing I've put in a temporary instrument but we're actually going to record with a different instrument. And when I then heard that I was like, oh my god, it sort of lifted it into a whole other dimension. Yeah,

Sam:

Well this project more than any I've done is one where the recorded elements have changed. It completely just made it. And I've been very, very fortunate with the players I've had record for this. Well flutes firstly I mean we talked very early on specifically wanted a Sao Truc, which is this Vietnamese bamboo flute, which brewed very, very difficult <laugh> to get hold of. And I try the best sort of avenue I had to try and get someone was actually my Erhu player who I'd already had in place. I was immediately, as soon as I knew well what I needed for Alestes, I knew I needed an Erhu, and I happened to know someone and I was like, do you happen to know any Vietnamese Sao Truc players? It just proved very, very difficult. But up my sleeve I did have a reserve option. And to call him a reserve option is a bit mean cause he's, he's this veteran of Hollywood film recording <laugh>

Nemo:

Oh my god.

Sam:

A guy called Tony Hinnigan who has played on Avatar, on Braveheart, on Titanic. There's actually a funny story, <laugh> is. So he came over to my studio to record and he brought about five travel cases full of flutes.

Rafaella:

Oh my god, <laugh>.

Sam:

And he said that's less than half his collection. I knew him by reputation and was very lucky to get him in, and because of the nature of those flutes, the mechanics of them and them being built in certain scales and not being what we call chromatic, so they can't change between keys. You have a different flute for every key and he had to bring lots to be able to build up these melodies and get the right sound as well. And in the end I think we tried out a few different ones actually. We tried out some Chinese flutes called Dizis and we tried out various bamboo flutes that are identical to the Sao Truc and we eventually arrived at the right sound, the right pitch.

And what he gave was just a great performance. I mean you can hear it, it just really changes it. It's something you cannot demo. But I sent it to you and I think the first thing I said was this will sound different, it will sound better. And I think that that's been proven. The player just changes it. And while I'm there as well, I'll talk about the Erhu as well. Again very fortunate to get Wan who, a friend of mine from college who is a successful Erhu session player and live player and, wow, I mean all I had was a cello sample and I told you immediately this is gonna sound very, very different.

Rafaella:

Yes I remember this, yeah.

Sam:

And he was one of those sort of dream recording artists basically they just send you back three versions, the version that you ask for, the version you say you can play around with and then their version and you always use their version because it's the best one. And it was so nice to work with him. It all had to be remote of course cause he's over I think in Hong Kong he was amazing as well. And that these are the things that I think brought it to life and really put you in place. That's the thing that helps set that tone, set the scene as well. Yeah. So very, very fortunate to get those two in particular. There were other people who recorded as well more mostly Western instruments, but they again lifted it to just be a different thing really.

Rafaella:

I remember, this is a question we kind of went over a lot early on was being very concerned about getting our sense of place of this show is set kind of in and around the Indian Ocean. These are our character. And I think I just remember sort repeatedly going, it's not Pirates of the Caribbean <laugh>, we can't do Pirates of the Caribbean because first of all we're not in the Caribbean. But also secondly it's not through that kind of Western gaze. It's not centering a group of white people. So yeah that was the first question was how do we touch on what is kind of stirring and familiar about the idea of the nautical epic and the thing that makes you go, oh yeah, we're off on an adventure and at the same time go but you are being invited to look at this genre in a different way. Which very much came from Nemo, the

conversations we'd had about your sort of love-hate relationship with the genre of nautical epic. So we were trying to reflect that in the music.

Sam:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean that that's my favorite thing to do as well is kind of negotiate those challenges. I like to write something that's fusion-ey but getting that precise balance was the challenge here. I think it had to have an element of that nautical epic. Right? And I think early on as well, you wanted a bit of a contemporary edge as well that had a bit more beat to it. But then finding a way that the massive orchestral stuff, you often hear the Hans Zimmer-ry Pirates of the Caribbean stuff is just one element of the things you're hearing. And that was a really, really nice challenge with this.

Rafaella:

So that's the theme. Let's about some of the other music in the show. Cause we, you alluded to this at the beginning, Sam, with sort of saying we have to try and predict what music we're going to need. So let's talk about that because we have different beds for different characters and obviously I feel like I'm claiming a lot of credit over the music. <laugh>, you started with Alestes I think. So tell us about writing a, well first of all, what does that mean when you writing a bed for a character?

Sam:

Well it's perhaps unfair to say I was writing the bed specifically the way that I do these things now, knowing that everything's going to be edited later is basically designed to extract just loads of assets to use the library term. Just tons and tons of little files that can be used for different situations. And they're all taken out from these suites that I do. And in this case it ended up being that the suites represented specific characters of most importance in the narrative and that offered the biggest tonal range. And so how we started was, yes with the lesses, but making sure that that suite covers as many tonal beats as possible. Essentially within that suite there's just different arrangements of the theme. And from that I can then take out what we call music beds, which are essentially flavours, pads, textures, things that you associate with a character that can be placed underneath dialogue, underneath, just anything to give you a musical kind of tonal anchor, if that isn't too pretentious, to latch onto while you are following the story really. And the music bed is the kind of simplest form that the music can take. So it's not theme driven, it's not grabbing you by the collar musically and dragging you through. There's no need for that. That's what the dialogue's doing, it's just giving you a feeling. And so it can be very simple textural stuff, but it's got the sound qualities of that character.

Nemo:

I've been finding it really interesting listening to, cause you've uploaded it to Spotify now, so I do just listen to it. <laugh>. Yeah, I have been finding it really interesting cause I didn't hear any of the music until it was in the episodes really. And so listening to the songs and hearing them individually and by character, so there are five tracks, the main theme, Alestes, Anh, Siva and then Gammon. And it has been really interesting listening to the episodes now after I've heard the suites and being like, oh that's where that's pulled from and it's really thematic <laugh>. And I'm like, if I didn't write the episodes, I would write an essay about how the sound editors have used themes to hint at certain things. You can really find a lot of interesting, hmm, not spoilers, foreshadowing in the episodes just by listening to the character suites.

Sam:

I mean that's great. I can't take credit the editors, I kind of relinquish responsibility. I basically give them endless folders and sub folders of what this music is for them to use and they take it away in this case. And that's great. I'm glad that that's going well. But that, that's kind of what we discussed early on is making sure that there was enough to do that because in an ideal world I'd be able to score the whole thing. But if you actually tally up the minutes, I mean it's many films worth isn't it? And it's just budgetary and practical concerns. You just can't do it. So it's doing it in a way that's intelligent and hopefully sensitive to what's gonna be needed. But yeah, absolutely, it's all, what you hear on, finally now is on Spotify, I'm rubbish with uploading music, <laugh> <laugh> as listeners to other podcasts know. But yeah it is there and you know can hear everything in there. I don't think I've written anything new as a of music bed or a sting or I've not created anything new. It's all just extracted from those arrangements. It gives it a bit more coherence that way and a bit more focus to represent those characters.

Rafaella:

It's also, it's a great way of thinking about character from my sort of director perspective, it was a really useful tool early on for thinking about character being asked this question, what is the tonal palette of each of these characters? And obviously again with unlimited time and budget we would've gone on to do it for every single character in the show. And again we had to prioritize. And those are the, those are the four characters, Alestes, Ahn, Silva, Gammon that we sort ended up focusing on for different reasons with Alestes I remember the conversation, we were talking about her, her darkness and her drive, but also that there's something very childlike in the core of her and that her fundamental desires really stem from childhood. So how could we bring that little kind of bit of, oh I suppose it's hope, but no I think it's love basically I think how could we bring that little bit of love kind of into the foreground of her character Occasionally, Ahn is kind of partly a plot motivated decision to focus on her cause like you said, Nemo, she sort of appears in the background of seems and she often sort of heralds that something big is about to go down.

She tends to pop up at moments of high drama, Silva's our way into the world and he's who we start with. So he's focusing on him and obviously you have to have a set of villain music. So kind of had to be Gammon because he obviously has to represent as well as being a threat in and of himself, he has to represent all of the existential threats to this crew. And I, my most of justification to myself of why we didn't then get to go on and do Baker and Noor and Inez is kind of like, well they're all wrapped up within the main theme. They're all, they exist as a unit, as a crew, as well as individually and they're all present in that theme. I think that's what I'm gonna tell myself anyway.

Nemo:

And I think season one as well, it is about unwrapping who Silva and Alestes are specifically and Gammon and Ahn and the others have to fall into them a little bit. Like that's kind of the plot of season one is how can Alestes control this group of people. So yeah, I think it's the right choice.

Sam:

The choices you've made as well naturally kind of offered musical variation as well. It naturally is colorful musically because they're such varied characters. And so I think that's always a bonus when you are bringing that music in the edit to have so much to play with and so much that you can immediately identify to as different from another, like Gammon for instance, it's clearly more Western influenced music than the rest. So that's a nice contrast to everything else. And then, I mean going back to Alestes, Alestes is definitely my favorite of the suites because it, it's just so much fun to write. But that, just going back to what you said Raf, about the tonal range for Alestes, that was really interesting because there

has to be that sense of danger, that sense of adventure, integrating heritage as well both, Chinese and African, that was really cool musically to try and get that together. And then there has to be the sensitivity, the musical explanation for why do you like that, you know?

Rafaella:

Yeah

Sam:

And so there was scope, I think you actually requested more as well the scope for more emotional arrangement. And yeah, that actually turned out to be one of my favorite bits of Wan playing the Erhu is he just did this amazing interpretation of this melody that you can hear it at the end of the suite on whatever you listen to it on. Yeah it's just got very simple orchestral strings under it. But then this Erhu performance above, it's incredible.

Rafaella:

Well you're always thinking very much, but this is a little bit like oh how the sausage gets made, so you know, stop listening now if you don't want to think about these characters being constructed by people who want to make you cry but you are always thinking ahead kind of going, alright well where is the emotional heartbeat of the show? Where are the moments that kind of sock you in the gut? Where are they going to reside? And obviously so many of those are about Alestes sort of searching for this relationship with her parents. So yeah, I think that's why I made that request for their, to give us more that where from which we could create these moments of these kind of, and again, I sort of don't mean this literally, but these sort of minor key moments for Alestes. Cause I think she is a character who exists in major key in kind of bombastic sort of larger than life so much of the time. So the ability to see her energy drop, which also is reflected in the fact that she you know has these moments of physical exhaustion and physical vulnerability. You see it's all, everything's connected. It's all connected as above, so below <laugh>.

Sam:

Yeah, bittersweet music is always I think the most fun stuff to write. It's the most complex emotionally and it's actually, it's always nice to do those kinds of arrangements. So yeah, that was probably my favorite of the <laugh> the suites to do. But yeah, also I'm the one I'm happiest with I think cause it should be weird to hear a guzheng this Chinese zither that everyone recognizes from every Chinese film <laugh> that it's got, like Hero is full of that stuff. Mixing that with of African tune percussion and drums and it is, they should feel weird, but I hope that it's kind of made coherent and makes sense cause that is a Alestes character, so I really wanted that to work so happy with that one.

Nemo:

<laugh>. I mean I personally love it a lot and every time I listen to it I get very happy. <laugh>.

Sam:

Oh I'm glad.

Rafaella:

Yeah, I think we are we're heading towards wrapping up, but before we go Nemo wanted to ask you about, there's a piece of music that in the end didn't make it into the show. Do you want to talk about that?

Nemo:

Yeah, my ongoing desire to make Trice Forgotten into a musical <laugh>

Where if we had all the budget in the world and all the money, every episode would have like five songs into it because I love writing musicals. But in episode five, Trawl the characters apart from Alestes, were going to sing shanty to show that they're working together now or they, they're coming together and I actually wasn't a big part in production so I don't really know much of how you Raf and Sam worked with something like the Shanty. How were you planning on going towards it? So basically I had written some lyrics into the script and then was like, "Ha, now it's your problem" <laugh>.

Rafaella:

Well I think that's sort of partly what it was, was because it's all your fault Nemo, <laugh> because you'd written the lyrics... no, because it wasn't a preexisting sea shanty, which as I am sure many listeners know, but that one of the purposes of those is to create a rhythm while a crew is kind of hauling on the ropes, which is what our crew is doing in that episode, so it's a very natural place to have a sea shanty. But yeah Nemo had written one into the script and then essentially became a process of we, if we are not gonna do this beautifully, then we are not gonna do it at all and we'll save that, we'll shelve it for further down the line. So I think we were kind of trying to find someone with a sort of specialism in that kind of folk music sort of sea shanty, to kind of to compose to it.

But then we also, it was after we'd finished recording, so it was sort of a scheduling thing as well. We couldn't get the cast back together to record it. And it actually ended up having an effect on the storytelling of the episode, and I think in a positive way because what it meant was we sort of saved that beat of, oh the crew is working perfectly in unison now. So if you go and you listen to that episode, even when they're kind of going, "haul, haul" you know

I think Baker kind of giving the rhythm, they're not quite in time with each other. So actually there's a little thing, there's still episode five of the show, they're, they're not quite functioning in this sort of perfect harmony yet as a crew. They're still just about getting by. So I think kind of narratively, it ended up being a good decision to, to save that as well.

Nemo:

Yeah, definitely forced the content to come before my desire <laugh> to just put the sea shanty in. cause I was like, it's a nautical epic, it has to have a sea shanty in it. They all have to come together and sing the song. But you are right. When I was listening to the episode, I was like, yes, they should not be together yet. And when they do come together in the future, it will be so much more earned because everyone will know that it, it's like, yes, they are working together, that is group cohesion.

Rafaella:

Yeah, and there's also, cause they're sharing their stories while they're doing that hall as well. So Baker tells us the Glooscap story and Noor talks about Yemen. So they're just starting to open up to each other and I think also if you then had the shanty on top of that, it's almost too many set pieces in a way. So there's also so about the rhythm of the whole episode as well. But I mean again, this is, I always feel like I've spent five minutes sort of justifying why we couldn't do something, but I do genuinely think it was,

it's a beautiful possibility. It's not a kill your babies, it's a save your babies for the future and it's something that we have to look forward to.

Nemo:

Yeah, I saved it in a separate document and I'm like, ha ha ha. Yeah. So future seasons in my head are built around the fact that, sorry Sam, the rest of the show, if we get the ability to make more of this show, is all a musical season two, season three sung through in its entirety.

Rafaella:

To get cracking on that, Sam <laugh>, we await the demos in our inboxes.

Sam:

Jolly good.

Rafaella:

This is a good time to introduce our Kickstarter, for Trice Forgotten the Musical...

Nemo:

<laugh> Live on stage West End exclusive!

Rafaella:

All performed by Nemo.

Nemo:

Oh yeah, a hundred percent. Yeah. Everyone would be really excited to hear me sing definitely

Rafaella:

With that image of Nemo performing their solo Trice Forgotten rapidly, multi rolling through the entire cast. Yeah, that is a very lovely place to bring it to close. Before we do Sam, thank you so much for coming in, talking to us. Where can we find you? Well,

Sam:

Absolute pleasure Raf. Yeah, you well you can hear some of my music on Spotify very slowly uploading things. I have a website, but that's only, okay. And imdb, you can see what I've worked on. I'm one of very many Sam Jones composers, so good luck finding me. But yes, continuing to work on Rusty Quill stuff so you can see me around for sure

Rafaella:

And Nemo, where can we find you

Nemo:

As ever I am on Twitter and Tumblr at Zeus - japonicus or you can just type my name in or if you're in the Trice Forgotten tag, I'm also there, <laugh>

This transcript was exported on Nov 14, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Rafaella:

And as of I am on at Rafaella Marcus on Twitter. Thank you so much Sam and thank you Nemo. So until next time, it is goodbye for me, Raf and goodbye from Sam and Nemo.

Nemo:

Goodbye.

Sam:

Bye!

Rafaella:

Bye!