

Words: Robyn Morrison Photo: Matt Bishop

TYLER BATES GUN FOR HIRE

American film composer Tyler Bates has over 60 films to his name and has also just finished writing music for Marilyn Manson's *The Pale Emperor*. He talks to Robyn Morrison about what it's like to soundtrack people's lives for a living.

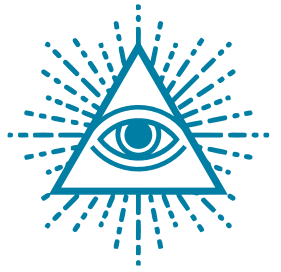
T Tyler Bates is a composer in hot demand. He recently penned the score to the films *Guardians Of The Galaxy* and *John Wick* to go with an impressive arsenal of previous scores dating back to 1983, and has worked with Rob Zombie (*Dawn Of The Dead*, *Halloween* and *Halloween II*), Zack Snyder (*Sucker Punch* and *300*) and Matt Dillon (*City Of Ghosts*) to name just a few.

More recently, Bates completed work on a soundtrack of a different nature; the ninth studio album from Marilyn Manson, entitled *The Pale Emperor*. During his visit to Australia as part of Manson's band for the Soundwave

Festival tour, Bates spoke about his involvement in the writing of *The Pale Emperor* and how he applied his film score techniques to this album.

The partnership between Bates and Manson was born when the pair met on the set of popular US TV series *Californication*.

"The season finale episode culminated in a concert at the Greek Theater in Los Angeles for a fictitious rockstar played by Tim Minchin," Bates remembers. "They decided to stage a real rock concert, I got to know him and a couple of days later we played another concert – it was Manson, Steve Jones,



Tim Minchin and some other great artists on the bill.

“Manson and I got to know each other over the course of a year. When he finished touring, he asked if I’d like to get together and talk about music.”

And talk they did.

“The chemistry was pretty strong. We started writing music side by side in the studio and before we knew it, it became an album. It wasn’t, ‘Let’s make an album.’ It was more, ‘Let’s see what it feels like to make music together.’ He outlined a few of his objectives; he wanted to explore a bit more of a bluesy side and a raw vibe.”

With the enormous body of work Bates has credited to his name, it’s unrealistic to expect that he could be involved in every project on offer. He explains how he chooses between opportunities.

“I see what the vision is for it,” Bates says. “It’s usually outlined by a director as far as a movie is concerned or a show creator for a television show. Obviously, talking to producers, you can tell if they’re in harmony with those key creative people and, if they are, it’s generally going to be a pretty interesting experience if the material is good.”

Bates says it’s the same with video games.

“If the developer has a great track record and they’re really passionate, you know it’s probably going to be something really good,” he continues. “I’m looking for that in people. It’s not about just getting a gig in my life. I’ve done about sixty movies. Every time I do one, it’s like leaving a piece of my kidney on the table. I give everything I have of myself to everything that I do.”

“I want the experience to be great so it can’t be money that governs those decisions. It has to be about what’s the opportunity creatively and what’s the opportunity spiritually, to grow from the experience. Hopefully you have something successful that people enjoy.”

Bates explains when he’s writing for different mediums, he approaches it by understanding the point to the film, the video or the album.

“I look at what the story telling is about. In the case of Manson, I think he wanted to explore a new way of making music and me, being ensconced in film and television, my process is different. It’s not about writing guitar riffs and giving them to a singer to turn into a song. It’s about composing music very specific to a storyteller.”

In that sense, Bates rarely starts composing without a specific brief in mind.

“I don’t write a tonne of music for movies that’s not deliberately written,” he admits. “That’s how we did *The Pale Emperor*. It was literally me understanding where Manson was in his life at that moment and what he may have been missing creatively – what he wanted to explore – and me also thinking as a fan and another artist, ‘What do I want to see in him that would be engaging, interesting and intriguing?’ It was up to me to begin to bring that process out in him.”

How does one do that exactly? “My experience in film is that I have to create a process with which everyone can seamlessly and naturally become engaged in the creative process,” Bates explains. “They don’t feel ostracised because I’m speaking in literal terms about music, which they don’t understand. It’s conversational and I think I’ve done that so much that it’s just the way I approach the creative process. Manson wasn’t even thinking that he was in a recording studio, that people are in another room watching him record. It wasn’t like zipping through thirty songs of demos. He would tell me what was going on in his life that day and that became somewhat the script for what we were doing

that night – I would score it so to speak. It was more about capturing a moment in a conversation or a story and taking it from there.”

Much of *The Pale Emperor* was recorded live, with Bates adding embellishments after laying down the tracks.

“The basic tracks were me on guitar and him singing. Simultaneously, I programmed some simple drums so we could start working on something. He was writing pages and pages of lyrics at home and bringing them into the studio. Sometimes something would hit him and he’d open up a text on his phone that he sent to his girlfriend or something and he’d start singing that to a melody. I urged him to sing more in metaphors and paint pictures and allow people to interpret what he sang for themselves.”

Of all the scores and projects that Bates has worked on over the last several decades, *The Pale Emperor* has been one of the most interesting times of his life, he says.

“I feel really good about the record that Manson and I made together. I think it was something we both benefited from spiritually and creatively and, at the end of the day, we loved the record – we made it for us. Nobody knew we were making a record; his manager, his label people... nobody knew. The first time his manager heard a song, he heard the record. It wasn’t mixed but he heard it. It was like we had this creative flow that was hitting and we were in it.”

For Bates, that’s the thrill.

“It makes things in the world resonate differently when you’re in a creative buzz.”

Whilst they were creating *The Pale Emperor*, Bates was in the thick of the *Guardians of The Galaxy* soundtrack as well as writing for *Salem*.

“I’d just written *Cupid Carries A Gun* two weeks before,” he says. “I caught two parts of the song and put it against the picture (of *Salem*). I showed it to the show creator. He said it was great and asked if it was Marilyn Manson. I said, ‘Yeah’ and he said ‘F**k, we could never have that.’ I said, ‘Manson and I wrote it together so if you love it, I think we could work it out.’ It worked out and it’s a perfect title for the show. It’s caused a positive impact on the show. It really helps calibrate the show. As soon as everyone working on the show heard it, they knew exactly what the show was.”

At the same time, Keanu Reeves and the producers of *John Wick* paid Bates a visit in his studio.

“We had an afternoon party there one day (with Manson) and listened to the record. Those guys were freaking out and asked if they could put ‘Killing Strangers’ in the movie. They used the song twice and the version in the movie is not the mixed version that’s on the album; it’s the demo version! We didn’t get to the mix by the time we had to put it in the movie.”

After that, Manson asked Bates to come on the road with his band.

“I said f**k it, let’s do it. I love playing music, I love the energy with the fans and I love seeing Manson enjoy playing,” Bates says. “He’s having fun again and I see him being a better version of himself.”

Marilyn Manson and his band are touring through to August 2015 on the *Hell Not Hallelujah Tour*.

Bates continues to work on the television series *Salem* as well as another show *Kingdom*. Along with these two shows, Bates has two other shows in the pipeline and another movie, with details to be released at a later date. He’s also in talks with Manson to write more music together.

The Pale Emperor is out now via Cooking Vinyl Australia. **H**