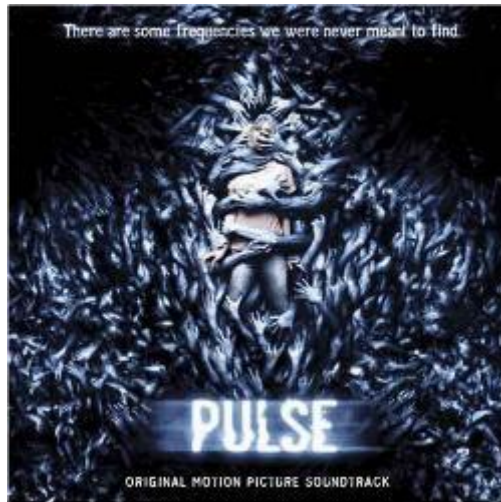




## Composer Elia Cmiral talks about the score for Pulse and the unique way it was created

By Patrick Luce Aug 5, 2006, 13:44 GMT



For Pulse, composer Elia Cmiral has crafted a contemporary electronica/modern orchestral score meant to match the director Jim Sonzero's vision of the [film](#), traditional elements of a horror score, and honor what inspired him in the original Japanese film Kairo.

Born in Czechoslovakia, Elia Cmiral quickly established himself as one of Europe's leading young composers after graduating from the prestigious Prague [Music Conservatory](#). His music can be heard on television (in a number of hit series like Nash Bridges) and the big screen (where he has scored films like Ronin, and Stigmata).

This year in addition to Pulse, Cmiral scored the dark drama Journey to the End of the Night, directed by Eric Eason for Millennium [Films](#), which premiered at the 2006 Tribeca Film Festival in New York.

Cmiral recently took some time out of his busy schedule to answer a few questions for us about the Pulse score, the unique way he pieced the music together, how he came up with the film's sound, and how it compares to past work.

M&C: How does the music for Pulse differ from past scores that you have made for films (such as Ronin) or the work you did early in your musical career (such as at the Prague Music Conservatory)

Cmiral: Every score and film is different and ultimately dictates the right approach. And it's my job to decide which one is the right one. My score for Pulse differs in many ways from my previous work. I was on this project for six months, and I used longer breaks between writing to do another movie.

For Pulse, I actually wrote three scores thanks to many changes and great dynamics. Many cues ended up with double digit versions. The movie went through a long reshaping process and I had to follow the changes and constantly come up with different ideas for the same scenes. It's a very creative process and not an easy one but looking back I am glad I went through this and found in myself new resources.

To score Ronin, was like – here is the movie, write the score and the recording session is in six weeks. Writing film scores in Europe was a very different story. The method used for scoring was very different from how we do it here.



M&C: How did you set about crafting the music for Pulse, and how does your choice for the score's style (which is described as a contemporary electronica/modern orchestral score) reflect the movie's plot.

Cmiral: The approach to the score was a challenge from the beginning. The producers wanted the orchestral, classical horror score. They didn't want a cheesy rock and roll or electronic score. First I thought how can I do it? How can I create a score for a movie about wireless communication technology, paranoia and phantoms?

Then I saw the Japanese film Kairo on which Pulse is based. I realized it's actually a great idea, but to make it work I had to invent my own soundscape and seamlessly incorporate it to the orchestra. I am not talking about electronic mock-ups of the orchestra where sampled strings substitute the real ones, but inventing the original sounds supporting the nature of the plot. And these sounds would be part of the orchestra pallet.

So, in the very beginning of the process, with one of my programmers I developed a number of significantly recognizable sounds which I used throughout the whole score. For example, one of them is an extremely low single pulse tumbledown— Hey this is for the Pulse movie!--which shakes subwoofers in the theater. Director Jim Sonzero loved it, and we used it much more then I originally planned.

To work with Jim Sonzero was a great experience. The work was intense. Jim made me explore every possible or impossible musical and sonic corner. He was always very open to suggestions, especially unconventional solutions. He was very detail driven, like myself. I loved it.

M&C: It is my understanding that the score was put together in a different way than just working with an orchestra and involved using an ISDN connection from your home in Los Angeles to conduct a sixty piece orchestra located in the Czech Republic. You also used three programmers to handle the huge amount of sound design -including five orchestrators, synths and percussion programming, a programmed choir and live voices. This sounds like a massive undertaking. Did it feel that way while you were conducting it? Was this your first time to approach scoring a film in this manner?

Cmiral: To coordinate the massive programming together with orchestra with constantly changing movie versions was naturally a challenge. I anticipated a lot of sound design and I wanted to make

sure that my soundscape would seamlessly blend with it. It took two programmers besides me plus my engineer with whom I've been working since Ronin to keep up with different versions. The same method was used for the programmed choir in which we just added a couple of live voices for color (including Cmiral's voice). Electronic soundscape, choir and orchestra had to form an organic pallet where every part is equally important.

The orchestral part of the score was written for 60 piece orchestra and recorded in Prague using an ISDN connection. There is a set-up in Santa Monica ready to go. It's a good system especially when the time pressure of productions doesn't allow for a flight to Europe. The whole session was carried in the Czech language - which is fun for me. I had five orchestrators to help me orchestrate the score from my demos in less than one week. When I got all the recorded cues from Prague, not a single cue fit right where it was written because of changes to the picture. It all had to be edited. This was my second experience recording in Prague and I am happy with the result.



M&C: How do you go about designing the music for a "horror" film and how important to the film do you feel that score is?

Cmiral: In a "horror genre" the music has an important role. It plays unsettled undertones and suspense. We use faulty scary stings, misleads and surprises for the audience when the time comes. This helps to move the plot forward but without telegraphing what will happen. It brings depth and emotion to characters and helps the audience to care about them.

M&C: Do you feel that it is the score's job to transport the audience into the story so that they really get into what is happening on screen? How do you make that happen?

Cmiral: Writing the score, I chose the moments when I stay in a subtle background, as well as moments when I play a noticeable theme or an aggressive, fast and groovy chase or fight. All this has to be done in perfect timing to match the scene.

M&C: How does this score compare to the original film's music, and did you look at that film's score for any inspiration while you were crafting this score? Did you want to set it apart from the past film or were you concerned with comparison at all?

Cmiral: The film Pulse is based on the 2001 Japanese movie Kairo. While Kairo is more haunting and mysterious, Pulse tries to be a bit bigger and scarier, portraying ultimate terror and paranoia without any protection. Pulse is preserving the original Kairo concept but the tools are different. The idea

behind Kairo made a deep impression on me when I saw it. It inspired me.

My score is an interpretation of Jim's vision - the paradox in our communication technology, resulting humans' isolation and losing natural human interaction.

My music is reflecting these feelings, and when I was writing it the only thing I had in my mind was how to support the movie, how to connect certain scenes, when and how to use Mattie's theme, how to stay emotionally and creatively connected with the movie. Any intellectualizing and comparison aspects are simply not in my world.



M&C: What future projects can fans look forward to hearing from you?

Cmiral: I am currently helping a friend who is a director with his project. There are another couple of things in my mind but I am also very superstitious and don't like to talk about things in advance.

The 'Pulse Soundtrack' is now available at [Amazon](#). Visit the [soundtrack database](#) for more information and a complete track listing. Visit the [movie database](#) for more information on the film. Kairo (Pulse) is now available on DVD at [Amazon](#) and [AmazonUK](#). Visit the [DVD database](#) for more information.