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Buena Vista's "Apocalypto"



Warner Bros. Pictures' "The Departed"



Sony's "The Da Vinci Code"



Focus Features' "Catch a Fire"



NOTES

It's time once again to hear what the experts are saying about the songs and scores that will receive an extra push come Oscar season

Compiled By Ada Guerin

On Feb. 20, 2007, the final polls will close at 5 p.m., which should provide plenty of lead time for Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences members to do their music homework. But it always helps to have a cheat sheet. Although it's still anyone's game, following is an early peek at some strong front-runners vying for Oscar consideration.

APOCALYPTO

Buena Vista
Composer: James Horner
Log Line: Mel Gibson takes us back 3 millennia to chronicle the decline of the Mayan civilization.
Main Theme: "Although we have yet to hear this, we are very excited about the possibilities," says Mitchell Leib, president of music and soundtracks for Walt Disney Pictures & Television/Buena Vista Music Group. "The film is entirely in Mayan dialect, which sets

(up) an incredible landscape for an original score. When Mel announced he was doing this film, composers were lining up at the chance to work with him. He is just one of those filmmakers that can tell a story with visuals and doesn't have to depend heavily on dialogue. He is adept at letting the (crafts) tell the story."

BABEL

Paramount Vantage
Composer: Gustavo Santaolalla
Log Line: Another ensemble piece from director Alejandro González Iñárritu (2001's "Amores Perros," 2003's "21 Grams"), this drama tells multiple stories tied together by the theme of communication — or lack thereof.
Main Theme: "The movie is extraordinary," Paramount Music group president Burt Berman says. "Gustavo has worked with Alejandro on several of his projects. This is an astounding, haunting and emotional score with three interlocking stories. The movie

makes a great statement about where the world is today, and the music is on the frontier of making that statement in a nonlinear way that is incredibly engaging."

THE BLACK DAHLIA

Universal
Composer: Mark Isham
Log Line: Noir stylings provide plenty of atmosphere in this look at the sleaze and corruption surrounding one of Los Angeles' most notorious unsolved murders.
Main Theme: "Isham does what he does best here: He uses his trumpet," says Kathy Nelson, president of film music for Universal Music Group and Universal Pictures. "His

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evocatively bluesy jazz score is very noir in intention. He uses his trumpets and brass to guide you emotionally. It's a classic, sexy and dangerous sound."

BLOOD DIAMOND

Warner Bros. Pictures
Composer: James Newton Howard
Log Line: A propulsive score helps tell the tale of an amoral diamond smuggler who teams up with a South African mercenary on a quest to recover a rare pink diamond.
Main Theme: "'Blood Diamond' is what can be referred as a 'RUF diamonds' — RUF as in the (Sierra Leonian Revolutionary United Front) rebellious movement of 1989-90," explains Doug Frank, president of music operations for Warner Bros. Pictures. "These are blood diamonds because the rebel army used diamonds to finance their cause, much to the dismay and harm of the local people that they took prisoner — and made them work in these situations, murdered them, murdered their families and they were maimed — just this awful thing. So, it's a real eye-opening explanation of the diamond industry of that period. James, who's at the top of his game, took all this into account when writing the underscore. He utilized great African musicians and vocalists. It rhythmic and percussive, but it is also haunting and extremely melodic."

BOBBY

MGM/The Weinstein Co.
Composer: Mark Isham
Original Song: "Never Gonna Break My Faith" written by Bryan Adams, Eliot Kennedy and Andrea Remanda, performed by Aretha Franklin, Mary J. Blige and the Boys Choir of Harlem
Log Line: An elegiac look at a day in the life of 22 guests at the hotel where Sen. Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1968
Main Theme: "The hardest thing with a

movie like this is that with so many characters in one film, sometimes it becomes the job of the score to connect them," the Weinstein Co. vp motion picture music Rachel Levy says. "Mark's score does just that — he provides an emotional thread. His score was instrumental in tying everything and everyone together in such a magnificent way."
Backing Vocal: "'Never Gonna Break My Faith' is performed by Aretha Franklin and Mary J. Blige, which is amazing," Levy adds. "The queen of soul and her protégée together. They nailed the lyrics, which are so fitting for this movie — it's unbelievable. We know the sad story of the assassination of RFK, and the movie ends on a tragic note, yet the song is really inspirational as it plays over the end credits."

BREAKING AND ENTERING

MGM/The Weinstein Co.
Composer: Gabriel Yared and Underworld (Karl Hyde and Rick Smith)
Log Line: After opening a firm on the rough side of London, an architect develops an unexpected attraction for the mother of the hooligan who has been vandalizing his business.
Main Theme: "'Breaking and Entering' by Gabriel Yared and Underworld is very interesting because it brings the classical together with the electronic," explains the Weinstein Co.'s Levy, who is a fan of the London-based electronic band. "(Underworld) is used to working with technology and obscure percussive instruments, whereas Gabriel creates a more traditional score. So, what you've got is two different worlds coming together to create something beautiful, fitting and perfect for the film."

CARS

Buena Vista
Original Song: "Real Gone," written by

Sheryl Crow and John Shanks and performed by Sheryl Crow; "Our Town," written by Randy Newman and performed by James Taylor
Log Line: High-octane family fun powered by anthropomorphic cars
Backing Vocal: "'Our Town' comes in about two-thirds of the way into the movie, where our (main) character has been on the fence — he's a guy in a hurry who just wants to get to California and win a race," Walt Disney Music president Chris Montan says. "But this small town has started to grow on him. When we (start) the montage and he sees what this town used to be, it changes him. And it affects him for the rest of the movie, and it basically forms what he does at the end of the film. We got very lucky, and we got James Taylor to perform it, which for me was like a dream come true. We work with a lot of famous people, and you get used to being with famous actors. But I think James Taylor, for me, is one my idols, so just being in the studio with Randy and James was probably one of the best days I've had in years. We have a good opening song called 'Real Gone,' which is a big up-tempo rock song, which matches the aura and excitement of NASCAR racing — and it gets a good use. It's probably two-and-a-half, three minutes of prime real estate."

CASINO ROYALE

Sony
Original Song: "You Know My Name," written by Chris Cornell and David Arnold, performed by Chris Cornell
Log Line: Rocker Chris Cornell lends his formidable talents to the traditional James Bond title theme song.
Backing Vocal: "We're bringing an edgier feel back to Bond with Daniel Craig, who is phenomenal in the film," Sony president of worldwide music Lia Vollack says. "We wanted to have a male vocal to bring some of the same testosterone and toughness to the song that Bond has. Chris and David Arnold co-wrote the song — it has the rock 'n' roll thing that Chris brings, and the string arrangement makes it feel classically Bond."

CATCH A FIRE

Focus Features
Composer: Phillip Miller
Log Line: A true story based on the life of a nonpolitical oil worker-turned-radical in apartheid-era South Africa
Main Theme: "Phillip Noyce was keen to hire Phillip Miller because Miller is a very accomplished South African composer," Universal's Kathy Nelson says. "He had an intimate knowledge of the 'freedom songs' that the oppressed black South Africans sang to support their leaders and embolden their spirits as they fought apartheid. The melodic and percussive instrumentation of his score echoes those freedom songs brilliantly."