



Giacchino Squeaks Out a Winner With 'Ratatouille'



Courtesy of Disney Publicity

Composer Michael Giacchino walks the red carpet for the premiere of Disney/Pixar's "Ratatouille," for which his original score won a Grammy and Academy Award nomination.

Earning a Grammy win and Oscar nod for his score to last year's Disney/Pixar animated hit, composer Michael Giacchino describes recording in Los Angeles with 'the best musicians in the world'

BY LINDA RAPKA, OVERTURE MANAGING EDITOR

If you are a fan of animated films, hit TV series or popular video games, chances are you know the work of composer Michael Giacchino.

His colorful and energetic score for "Ratatouille," an animated feature about a Parisian rat-turned-master chef, earned Giacchino a Grammy as well as his first Academy Award nomination for Best Original Score, an honor shared with two fellow Local 47 members (first-time nominee Marco Beltrami for "3:10 to Yuma" and seven-time nominee James Newton Howard for "Michael Clayton"). The film was director Brad Bird's follow-up to "The Incredibles" for which Giacchino wrote an equally formidable score, earning him two Grammy nominations and the L.A. Film Critics Association Award for Best Music Score.

His path to TV and film began with video games. In 1997 Giacchino was approached by the newly formed DreamWorks Studios to score the PlayStation video game based on Steven Spielberg's box-office hit "Jurassic Park: The Lost World." Spielberg liked the music so much he wanted it to be fully orchestrated instead of synthesized. A longtime fan of the Local 47 musicians whom he'd listened to on film soundtracks during his formative years, Giacchino has since become one of the leading advocates for using

Los Angeles musicians on scoring projects.

Giacchino's work scoring video games over the next several years, including Spielberg's popular "Medal of Honor" video game series, led to his involvement in the ABC television shows "Alias" and "Lost" created by writer/director J.J. Abrams – the producers of the show contacted the composer because they were fans of the games he had worked on. He soon came to the attention of Brad Bird and other directors and his film-scoring career took flight, establishing him as one of the most sought-after composers in Hollywood.

Michael Giacchino spoke with the *Overture* the day after the Oscars about his recent accolades and what it's like to work in Los Angeles with whom he calls "the best musicians in the world."

First off, congratulations – "Ratatouille" fared very well in the award department, earning a Grammy as well as your first Academy Award nomination.

Thank you. I wasn't able to attend the Grammys because we were recording at Warner Bros., and I was with a bunch of the orchestra members that played on "Ratatouille" when we found out

> Michael Giacchino *continued from page 1*

that we won the Grammy. That was a lot more fun than actually having been there. I went on the loudspeaker and said, "Hey guys, you just won a Grammy!" I was in the middle of writing and getting ready to score "Speed Racer" when I heard "Ratatouille" was nominated for an Academy Award. I had so much on my mind – I think my parents had a lot more fun with that than I did. It's probably good that you don't have too much time to think about these things. At the Oscars, a lot of my friends in my band were playing in the pit orchestra, so that was fun. You know, most of the time I'm stuck holed up somewhere writing, so the only sociable part of my job is when I'm with them, and it's great.

What influences do you draw from when composing a film score?

I have a very eclectic taste. I listen to anything and everything. I always have, even while growing up. I love jazz and classical music, and the fusion of both. The idea of a jazz orchestra is great. But I'm comfortable keeping 'em separate or doing both – I'm comfortable doing new things. And I know the guys here [in Los Angeles] will just get it. I don't have to worry about the thing I'm trying to do working or not as far as the musicians, because they'll know exactly how to do it. I've been a lot luckier than most composers being

able to do it here.

It sounds like you really enjoy working with Local 47 musicians.

It's the greatest. Los Angeles is my first choice no matter what. I grew up loving that idea of a town that creates entertainment, and when I came out here I wanted to be a part of that process. It's been a part of my charter to be part of that, and it's an identity that Los Angeles has in particular that no one else does. It's true that the world is getting smaller and you can go anywhere to record, but you've got the best people in the world here. I could not have taken "Ratatouille" or "The Incredibles" to just any place – those scores go from jazz to classical and are all over the map, and these guys just know how to do it. A lot of the musicians I grew up listening to, and I'm awestruck every time! To be able to work with people I listened to as a 10-year-old kid with headphones – Frank Morocco, Abe Laboriel, Tony Mason – there's just no one else like them in the world.

You spent the better part of your childhood making 8mm stop-motion animated films using your brother's ping pong table as a sound stage for miniature movie sets.

One of my favorite things to do was find records in my dad's collection and

put music to them and make the music work with the film. This started my whole interest in film scores.

What was one of your favorite self-made childhood films?

There's one that my brother starred in. He's upstairs supposed to be doing homework and imagines himself to be Luke Skywalker.

You're currently working on "Speed Racer," the live-action big-budget version of the 1960s animated Japanese series, set to open in May.

As a kid I was obsessed with "Speed Racer," so this was a dream job. Plus the Wachowski brothers were directing it. They have a very specific, original take on filmmaking. A lot of other people would not have done this justice. I'm just so picky about these things, but for them I was like, "Absolutely!" We scored for two weeks straight in February.

You actually finished recording a day early.

That's how good the musicians are – we finished early. I'm not one to sit there and be laboring over a cue. It's more of a feeling – if it's right, it's right, and we'll move on. I know we were losing a day of work, but I think it's good to show the studio that we can get work done early and efficiently. Part of the



reason big studios leave [Los Angeles] is that it's so expensive, so it's important to take a more responsible approach to the process so the studios see that you can do work in Los Angeles without it being unreasonably expensive. And the musicians were great about it. I told them, "It's your own fault for being so good!"

You have another remake project lined up after this – "Star Trek."

We're going to start working on that around October. I'm doing "Star Trek" because J.J. Abrams is directing it and I would follow him everywhere. He's one of my favorite filmmakers. It's relationships that guide a lot of these things. These are guys I don't have to question whether it's going to be good or if their intentions are proper – it's always gonna be great.

For updates on Michael Giacchino's latest projects, visit his website: www.michaelgiacchino.com.