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ABC's 'Revenge' in tune with Izler Network went with full orchestration for freshman drama

By [Andrew Barker](#)



Izler in a scoring session for 'Revenge' at Fox Studios.

The scene at the Newman Scoring Stage on the 20th Century Fox Lot last week might have seemed a familiar one on the surface: a Prague-born, English-accented composer was conducting a 50-piece orchestra, racing against the clock to complete a tense, classically themed score.

The composer in question, however, was not a grizzled film-music vet but a

puckish 35-year-old former Robbie Williams band-member named Izler (who typically spells his name with capitalization reversed). And the scoring session was not for a big-budgeted cinematic spectacle but for the season finale of ABC's soapy freshman drama "Revenge."

The unusual youth of both composer and show was obvious during the session, as Izler's pre-recording pep talks continually kept things lively. "This is some of my best work right here," the composer quipped before recording a single, droning chord for the title card. "This one probably won't make any sense, so just play the page," he said before a discordant glissando cue, after which he looked to the wall-mounted clock and thanked his players for "saving my ass" by recording so quickly. When the session ended, applause and group hugs were doled out all around.

The celebratory atmosphere was understandable, as the assembled crew had just completed the 22nd episode of the Mike Kelley-created series. Filled with smoky, elaborate film noir-inspired compositions, the skein is unusual for its emphasis on live orchestration of such size and density, though convincing the network to splurge for a full music budget to score a first-year show wasn't as tough as it might seem, the composer insisted.

"I was surprised, because I'd been warned about (working on TV)," Izler said after the final session had wrapped. "Obviously, at the beginning, we were careful not to bankrupt the show before it even got a chance to become popular... But the network has been nothing but great. I think (ABC) really supports live musicians pretty openly."

The finale's 50-piece setup was the largest of the show's run so far, though the ensemble size had been growing steadily throughout the season. "We opened with 22 players, then 30 players, and I did it with all strings at the beginning," the composer recalled. "I figured with such a small orchestra, better to make it like a nice chamber piece, especially since there's so much Bernard Herrmann in the music. I love the 'Psycho' score, which is just strings. But now that we've done the finale, it's quite liberating to be able to use woodwinds and brass."

In transitioning from pop music gigging to scoring, Izler was assisted by stints studying at the Sundance Film Composers Lab and at BMI's Conducting Workshop, and he managed to get his name out with his score to "Natural Selection," which won the composer a SXSW score award and a nomination for the discovery of the year prize at the 2011 Ghent Film Festival's World Soundtrack Awards. Gigs composing for "Shameless" and "30 Rock" followed, but the rigors of scoring for the same show week after week required a bit of an adjustment.

"It's important to have strong themes," Izler said. "Without that, it would be impossible. We record every cue every week; nothing's tracked. I love films which have such strong multiple themes -- 'The Godfather,' 'Atonement' -- but then you realize you have 22 episodes, and you can't just keep hammering on the same theme over and over."

On that note, the composer got a bit of a baptism by fire early in the show's run, when series exec producer and pilot director Phillip Noyce tasked him with writing "the mother of all melodies" for the show's theme.

"It was about 8:00 in the evening when he asked me that, and (Noyce) goes, 'So we're going to have that by morning, right?' I said, 'What do you mean? That's like 10 minutes of music. I usually write three minutes of music per day!' And he goes, 'Yeah, so 10 a.m.?' I went home, just scared stiff as I was writing it, and that became the main theme, and everything sort of evolved from that."

Throughout the discussion, Izler seemed consistently surprised with the role his music had come to play in the series' development. In fact, he recently received an unusual compliment from the scripters themselves.

As Izler recalled: "There was a point in the penultimate episode -- obviously, I can't reveal what it was -- but it was a huge plot point, and underneath, in the script, it said, 'Bring it, Izler.' I couldn't believe they'd actually put that in the script."

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