

## Die unabhängige Filmmusikseite!

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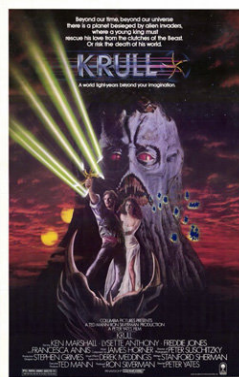
[Start](#)  [Artikel](#)  Edwin Wendler: Too Hollywood

Edwin Wendler: Too Hollywood



*As opposed to writing an article about a composer, we asked Hollywood composer Edwin Wendler to report about his unexpected experiences in the capital of film music.*

[back to the German version!](#)



I watched with excitement as Prince Colwyn rescued his beloved Princess Lyssa from the fangs of The Beast while at the same time saving his home planet, **Krull**, from total destruction. Shortly thereafter, as my parents and I were leaving the Gartenbau Cinema in Vienna, the main theme of **Krull**'s score would not get out of my head. To this day, it is still happily flying around in there.



Equipped with a first-class music education – Thank you, Vienna Boys Choir! – and a collection of more than 1000 film music CD's, I informed my parents a few years later that I wanted to become a film composer. My parents were not thrilled, and I didn't want to blame James Horner because he certainly

could not have foreseen, while composing his score for **Krull**, that, as a result of his impressive work, an 18-year-old would have a serious conversation with his parents a few years down the road.

Military service, a position as an assistant director, legal studies, Japanology, musicology, and psychology drove me into a depression from which there was only one way out: composing! This resulted in an album which I would have liked to call, *Music Which Nobody Wants To Listen To*. *Music My Mom Doesn't Like At All* would also have been a fitting title.

When I applied for composing work with several Austrian directors, I either didn't get any reply at all or statements about my music being "too Hollywood" and consequently, useless for the Austrian film market. An Austrian film club of the name Magellan-Film came to my rescue. A friend



(Sascha Peres) of a friend (Thomas Zbornik) recommended me as composer for a Magellan short film. I had a lot of fun composing its score. On subsequent projects, I would also get to write the screenplays and direct, which I did simply in order to give myself the opportunity to compose music which was considered "too Hollywood" by the rest of Austria. My infinite thanks go to all the "Magellans" (Michael Roscher, Helmo

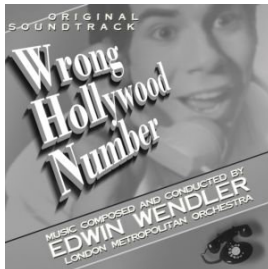
Pape, Thomas Jaksch, ...) who helped me so much on those fantasy projects (in the tradition of **Krull**, although with somewhat smaller budgets).



Despite their considerable skepticism, my parents enabled me to study at UCLA Extension in Los Angeles. Gerald Fried taught us there how to deal with eccentric producers and directors. Dennis Dreith explained to us what music budgets and composer contracts ought to look like. Steven Scott Smalley demonstrated how to correctly notate the patented Hollywood brass sound. The most important lecture,

however, I received in a screenwriting class, when Tara Ison advised us to never quit, to never get discouraged, to never get daunted. How right she was!

My studies were followed by several years of luck (a work visa, a loyal manager, good contacts in the film industry) and bad luck (little money, less money, no money). Sometimes it is necessary to only eat one meal per day for a while, in order to be able to buy a new computer monitor because the old one broke down. This is the side of Hollywood which is not often found in magazines, tabloids, and "making of" featurettes.



An unending number of no-budget short films eventually led me to a project (**Wrong Hollywood Number**) whose director promised me the London Metropolitan Orchestra. At first, I didn't believe him but JoséAntonio W. Danner saved all his money (while living in his car!) to make this dream a reality. Andy Brown organized the recording session with his LMO. Mike Ross-Trevor sat at the mixing console. I stood on the conductor's podium. Ten days later, I stood behind a counter at a post office in

Vienna, in order to make enough money to fly back to L.A. and pay for the music mix. The legendary Dennis S. Sands agreed to mix our music at Signet Sound for a fraction of his usual fee. Because of his recommendation, the music was mastered by the brilliant Patricia Sullivan who praised my music quite a bit, which moved me a lot because she normally works on projects by Danny Elfman, Thomas Newman, Alan Silvestri and John Williams.



The resulting music recording found its way into the hands of composer Paul Haslinger whom I had met 10 years prior at a film music symposium in Vienna. Paul invited me to his studio. Why? I had no clue. Without being aware of it, I was being interviewed by Paul on that fateful day. A few weeks later, I was working on the NBC television series, **Fear Factor** while Paul composed on the feature film, **Into The Blue**.

During that time, my name appeared in several end credits next to the somewhat confusing job description, "Additional Arrangements by". Paul Haslinger is an undisputed master of electronic music, and I learned a lot from his multifaceted craft: sound manipulation, interesting applications of



"loops", mixing-tricks, etc. The most important lessons, however, did not originate in music production directly, but they consisted in the discovery of the actual circumstances, under which film music is often produced: confusing file formats, temporary music (and the

pressure to adequately replace it), the necessity of humor (especially when you have nervous producers and directors sitting in your studio), the art of always staying one step ahead, and the dominance of fear ... more about that later.

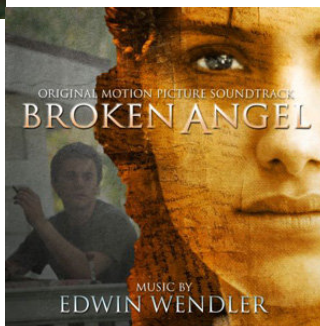


Before my time with Paul Haslinger, I was known in limited film music circles as "the orchestra guy". After Paul Haslinger, I was suddenly "the Haslinger guy", which caught the attention of John Ottman and Stephen Trask – attention which I had never asked for, by the way.

Both gentlemen awarded me further, confusing "Additional Arrangements" credits. The work was a source of great fun, and I was very happy about, and thankful for, the income and the new experiences. I was even happier, though, about the kinds of movie projects which allowed me to link my name with the unambiguous job description of "composer" ("Music Composed by"). Incidentally, none of those projects came to me as a direct result of a recommendation by Haslinger, Ottman, or Trask.



While looking for a composer replacement on his internet series, **The Interior**, director Helmut Schleppi received a demo from my manager. The original composer had had to leave the project due to a scheduling conflict. Interestingly, a few Haslinger tracks had made their way into the "temp track" ... evidently, I was the right guy for the job – a job which provided immense fun.



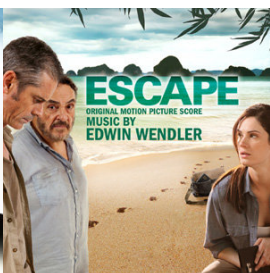
Thanks to Helmut, I received composing assignments on the following feature films: **Broken Angel**,

**Christmas With A Capital C**, **The Mark**, **Escape**, and **The Mark**:

**Redemption**. Even though Helmut himself directed only one of those projects, he was, directly or indirectly, responsible for all those assignments. For this I am eternally grateful. James Chanin, David Weinstein (**Azureus Rising**), Cassie Jaye (**The Right To Love: An American Family**), Will Halby (**Bulletproof**) and other directors / producers have been helping my career consistently. Many heartfelt thanks to them!

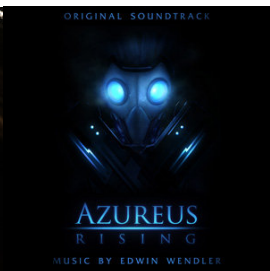
Personal contacts are nectar and ambrosia to the Hollywood film industry.





"Every contact is a good contact", is the mantra here. The undisputed deity of the film industry, however, is fear, which most often manifests in the form of "political correctness". Film composers, for instance, are often haunted by the fear of losing a client because of not

being sufficiently subservient, or because of an inability to make one's own music similar enough to the temp music. There may be younger, less experienced composers who will work for less money, or even for free. One's own style of writing may not be "cool" enough. A client may find out that a ghostwriter actually worked on the music.



As for myself, I work hard at not giving fear a chance. Nobody is immune against fear but life is too short to be constantly living in fear. Fear is "too Hollywood" for me. As a composer, I find it crucial to be on the side of the directors and producers.

Sometimes, it is necessary to voice one's opinion, especially if you know that that opinion can be helpful to the project in accordance with the filmmakers' intentions. In other cases, it is best to simply follow instructions, but without simply copying the temp music. Sometimes, working for free is necessary in order to help an extremely talented director, who simply may not have any money, turn his vision into reality. I love the challenge of merging my own composing style with a genre of music that I may not like very much: every music genre has aspects which are musically interesting and exciting. And I don't employ ghostwriters. My music production company is called Ghost Free Music for a good reason.

Some composers seem to forget that the fun of music is not an obstacle or a byproduct, but that it is the most important thing in the life of a musician. The fun of music is the antidote against fear. The fun of music can never be "too Hollywood".



Edwin Wendler is a former Vienna Choir Boy and the composer of the scores for **Escape** (released on Perseverance Records), **The Mark**, **The Interior** (also available from Perseverance Records), **Home: The Horror Story**, **Broken Angel**, and **Christmas With A Capital C**. He composed music for the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> seasons of the NBC television series, **Fear Factor**. Wendler worked as an arranger for composers Paul Haslinger, John Ottman, and Stephen Trask on the following feature films and TV series: **Into The Blue**, **Turistas**, **Gardener Of Eden**, **Sleeper Cell: American Terror**, **The Losers**, **The Resident**, **Unknown**, **So Undercover**, and **Little Fockers**. He is currently working in Los Angeles.

Special thanks: Philippe Blumenthal, Victor Kaply, Ken Clark, and Christian Landschützer.