

# “A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN”: THE MUSIC OF TWIN PEAKS ACCORDING TO COMPOSER ANGELO BADALAMENTI AND MUSIC EDITOR LORI ESCHLER FRYSTAK

INTERVIEWED BY ANDREAS HALSKOV

It is virtually impossible to think about *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) without instantly recalling the music. Using leitmotifs in different variations and a combination of popular music and original tracks, composer Angelo Badalamenti and music editor Lori Eschler Frystak created a score that informed the atmosphere in *Twin Peaks*, while cueing the subtle shifts between different characters, places, genres and moods. I have talked with Badalamenti and Frystak about their work on *Twin Peaks*, focusing on some of the most vivid scenes and sequences and a few of the most heartrending, memorable themes from the series and the prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992). What follows is a double-interview with Angelo Badalamenti and Lori Eschler Frystak (credited as Lori L. Eschler). Badalamenti has become something of a celebrity, and his long-standing musical partnership with David Lynch, starting with *Blue Velvet* (1986), has been thoroughly documented. Frystak, on the other hand, is a lesser known collaborator of David Lynch, yet she has worked with Lynch on both *Twin Peaks*, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* and *On the Air* (ABC, 1992), before leaving the film and television industry.



FIGURE 1. A CLASSIC SCENE FROM *TWIN PEAKS* (ABC, 1990-1991) THAT FEATURES THE SONG *PENNSYLVANIA 6-5000* AND A HEARTRENDING VARIATION UPON *LAURA PALMER'S THEME*.

## “ENTERING THE TOWN OF TWIN PEAKS”: THE BEGINNING OF A MUSICAL PARTNERSHIP

**H** *You have often worked with David Lynch, Angelo. How did you get to work with him on Blue Velvet, and how would you describe David Lynch as a director and the musical collaboration you have with him? To me, your collaboration is reminiscent of the creative collaborations of, say, Sergio Leone and Ennio Morricone.*

**AB** First of all, I met David Lynch when he was doing *Blue Velvet*. I received a phone call from one of my friends, and Fred Caruso was working with Isabella Rossellini, and they were having some difficulties with her. They needed someone to help her, and David and Isabella were not happy with the people who were working with her. So they called me in, and they said, “We know that you work with singers. Could you come in and help”. I wasn’t really interested, to be honest, but I came in, and we recorded a little cassette with me playing the piano and her singing Bobby Vinton’s song. We were recording the last scene, and David he said, “This is peachy keen, this is the ticket”.

They wanted to use a song by This Mortal Coil, but Dino De Laurentis didn’t want to pay for the synchronization license, so Dino thought that maybe I could do it. The bottom line is that Isabella came in to me with a little piece of yellow paper saying “Mysteries of Love” with a few lines on it, and I said, “This is not a song. It’s a poem, but there’s no hook, there’s nothing to latch on to”. So I thought that I would call him back, and I called up David to say that I wasn’t sure what he wanted. “Make it feel timeless, like the waves of the oceans”, he said, and I said, “Oh, I see”, and of course I didn’t see. I had no idea what he was talking about. He came in and asked me, “Do you know any singer who sings like an angel – angelic, ethereal” – and I said, “Yeah, I know this singer called Julee Cruise”. And it was love at first sound.

Like Leone and Morricone, David and I have been lucky to have a great creative relationship. I usually call it *a marriage made in heaven*. In terms of the process, I did *Blue Velvet* in the traditional way, which is where a director shows you a mostly edited film and then you score it, but on every project since we have talked about it before we even started shooting. And a lot of the music of *Twin Peaks* was done before we started filming. David would even play the demos and have the actors move to the tempo of the music. It’s a marriage made in heaven. Let’s face it, very few times have a director and a composer really hit it off like a team. It’s like Danny Elfman and Tim Burton, Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann or Sergio Leone and Ennio Morricone.

**H** *How about you, Lori? You had not worked with David Lynch prior to Twin Peaks. How did you get to be a part of that show?*

**EF** I was very lucky. My friend Jon Huck was the sound recordist on the pilot. Apparently, he told David about me and for that I’m really grateful. Like David, I’m also from Montana. I was called in for an interview, and we met and spoke about the music and Montana, and he made the decision right on the spot. I floated about a foot off the ground for at least 2 years after that David and much of the team that he assembled had never done television. I think that was one of the big deals about it. Also, *Twin Peaks* was in post-production at the very beginning of television surround sound. When we were mixing the final sound (dialogue, sound FX, and music) we were very focused on getting the mix just right so it would sound good on the best home theatre system but also on the most modest little mono speaker that someone might be using. And again, everything you hear was intentional.

**H** *You were a music editor on Twin Peaks, and I have heard you say that David Lynch likened the process to “painting around the bushes”. What was the point of that analogy, and how would you describe the musical or aural side of Twin Peaks?*

**EF** I can’t speak for what David meant when he said that. It was during my job interview with him, but I interpreted him to mean that the music should be integral, subtle, and somewhat mysterious. The music and audio in *Twin Peaks* had to go hand in hand. Each detail was intentional and if it distracted from any important element or wasn’t essential in telling the story, it was eliminated.

**H** *The music that you have done for Twin Peaks has an airy and otherworldly character to it, which is beautifully underscored by Julee Cruise’s singing voice. How would you say that this ethereal quality fits the tonality and themes of Twin Peaks?*

**B** I feel that Julee’s ethereal quality works so well with *Twin Peaks*. In most cases in *Twin Peaks*, the music and the lyrics of the song are in total contrast to the madness of the vocals – this ethereal, angelic voice in this ruckus of The Roadhouse. In the ruckus of beers flying through the air at The Roadhouse, we have Julee singing a beautiful, slow-tempo song, and it’s so outrageous. You would never have that kind of song in a place like that. But the beautiful thing is that, in addition to the way that they contrast what’s going on, it fits the general tone of the show and it fits Laura.



FIGURE 2. ANGELO BADALAMENTI AND DAVID LYNCH HAVE BEEN MUSICAL PARTNERS EVER SINCE *BLUE VELVET* (1986), AND THEIR PARTNERSHIP IS DESCRIBED BY BADALAMENTI AS A "MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN." PHOTO: COURTESY OF ANGELO BADALAMENTI.

The songs with Julee serve a two-fold purpose: They contrast the visuals and they set the tone for the show. Often, the thing that works best is a song or piece of music that goes against the visuals, something that functions as a contrast or a counterpoint.

## ICONIC THEMES AND HARROWING THEMATICS

*After discussing different musical collaborations and how Badalamenti and Frystak came to be a part of Twin Peaks, we went into a deeper exploration of Twin Peaks, discussion some specific sequences, scenes and leitmotifs.*

**H** *Falling* is the main theme of *Twin Peaks*, and in many ways that track sets the mood and tonality of the show. What is it musically that makes this particular piece so interesting, and how does it fit the tonality of the show?

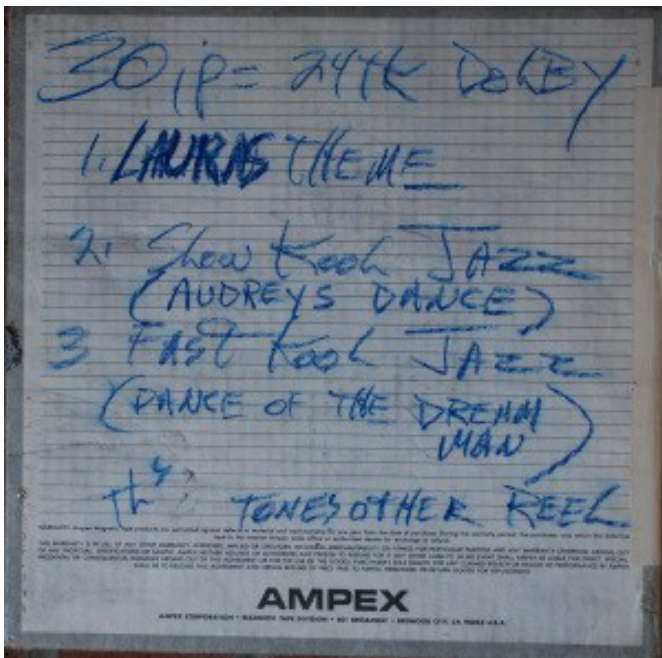
**B** First of all, Andreas. We were so lucky that all of the different instrumental versions of *Falling* worked so well [...]. When we wrote the song, and I did an instrumental version, David thought it would be a perfect theme. Those opening baritone notes turned out to be magical. You could be anywhere, and all you had to hear was those notes, and you would know that it was *Twin Peaks*. It's just amazing how we caught the tonality of the show. The musical sections of *Falling* keep building to a climax. It keeps building and going to a climax, and then David's lyrics go *Falling*. The music and the lyrics of *Falling* mirror the two sides of *Twin Peaks*. For years, nobody knew which instrument it was, but it was a tuned down electronic guitar sound. It was an electronic guitar that was lowered.

**H** It seems as if some of the elements from *Falling* reappear in the *Sycamore Trees* track which is performed by Jimmy Scott in the final episode of the series. Was that meant as a sort of mirror-version of *Falling*, just as the black male performer could be seen as a mirror-version of the fair-haired female singer at *The Roadhouse*? Did you use some of the same elements intentionally to underline the theme of mirroring and doubling?

**B** No. That was not intentional at all. However, if there was some mysterious, subliminal thing going on, well that's cool.

**H** In *Twin Peaks*, you use a number of leitmotifs, and this to me has a strong effect of making us think about a certain person, even when he or she is not there. I particularly love *Laura Palmer's Theme* and the way that it pops up very subtly in different scenes throughout the series. Could you describe *Laura Palmer's Theme* and how it reflects the ambiguity of the entire show?

**B** *Laura Palmer's Theme* has two contrasting sections, which created a musical identity for the whole show: It introduced a dark, mysterious and foreboding element – that minor chord leitmotif – but it also set a hypnotic tone for the entire show. But the second section segues from that minor into a major chord, and it related totally to the emotions of *Laura Palmer*. It's a wonderful story how that was written. David Lynch came to my office across from Carnegie Hall, and David said to me, "I have this show. It's called *Northwest Passage*". I was sitting at my piano – my Fender Rhodes – and



FIGURES 3-4. ANGELO BADALAMENTI'S MUSICAL NOTES AND THE FENDER RHODES ON WHICH HE RECORDED THE ICONIC THEMES FOR THE SHOW. PHOTO: COURTESY OF DANIELLE & ANGELO BADALAMENTI.

he started saying, "We're in a dark woods, and it's kind of foreboding". He constantly asked me to go slower, and we were going so slow that I thought we were almost going in reverse. And then he said to me, "Now there's this little girl", and we went from the minor to the major chord. The hair on David's arms was standing up... Then it falls down. Falling is a very important to David. Even in *Blue Velvet*, Isabella Rossellini says, "I'm falling", and it seems there is a connection there.

**H** *The use of leitmotifs is a very traditional scoring principle, known from Wagnerian opera and classical Hollywood films. There are so many different variations of the different themes, however. Could you, Lori, say a few things on how different variations of a theme (e.g. Laura Palmer's Theme) were used to create different moods within the show?*

**EF** *Laura Palmer's Theme* was great in the way that it developed from a very simple repetition of a figure in a minor key to the very beautiful romantic and sad part that eventually resolved back to the simple minor theme. This made it really effective and satisfying. The simple part was used as dark clues were being discovered in the story line. Sometimes the clues would tie into Laura and the theme would evolve to the beautiful part and as the character(s) in the scene would reveal a memory or share a moment of grief the theme would ease into the very sad part that would eventually lead back to the dark mysterious theme. It was

perfect because each new discovery surrounding the murder followed this path from mystery to beauty to sadness and back to darkness. Of course other characters, like Audrey, or Ed and Norma had different leitmotifs because their stories weren't so intense.

**H** *Perhaps you could say a few words on the sequence where Maddy is killed, where we segue from Rockin' Back Inside My Heart to The World Spins, before cutting to the Palmer residence where we hear the ominous sound of the record player (which is also heard underneath the animalistic slow-motion growling of Leland/BOB as he kills Maddy). That sequence seems very interesting in terms of sound and music editing.*

**EF** That scene was so scary and disturbing. The first time I watched it without sound effects or score, and it seemed finished, like it didn't need anything more. *The World Spins* was a beautiful piece of music to lead into and out of the murder because it starts out just sort of lulling us into a hypnotic state and we sort of find ourselves frozen and defenseless while we watch the murder. Then the song transitions to this sad, sad part when they cut back to *The Roadhouse*. The score under the murder is so subtle but it seems to keep us grounded in the terror of the scene. Also, the sound of that record player just says to me that Leland's record is over, now things are going to get very serious.

## "A BENNY GOODMAN-LIKE DANCE": POPULAR TUNES AND CONTRAPUNTAL MUSIC

**H** Another interesting example from *Twin Peaks* in terms of music is the scene where Leland dances to *Pennsylvania 6-5000*. Could you say a few words on that scene and how the music changes both in terms of style and mood?

**B:** You are going against what's happening. Laura has died, and he's doing this crazy, Benny Goodman-like dance. David loves that kind of thing, like in *Blue Velvet* where Ben is singing *In Dreams*. But then, in the end of the scene, the mood changes, as we hear *Laura Palmer's Theme*, as if we're back to reality. By the way, Ray Wise has told me that when they were shooting that scene, Ray actually cut his hand on the glass, and they kind of improvised the rest of the scene.

**EF** That scene with Leland dancing to *Pennsylvania 6-5000* was wonderfully done because what I saw was a father who was losing himself in grief. It played very well that way and only much later down the road do we find out about Leland and realize that the early scene had another whole level of inner torment happening. There was another scene in which Leland was singing *Mairzy Doats*. On the surface, it just seemed like he was going a little crazy over the loss of his daughter. That song has such a naive feeling and to me it stirred up this feeling that Leland was really struggling to connect with his innocent self.

**H** In general, David Lynch seems to have a thing for slightly sentimental 50s-like music. There is one scene in the episode "Coma" (2.02) which is interesting. Here James, Maddy and Donna sing *Just You As a viewer, however, I don't know exactly how to feel – whether the scene is melodramatic or intentionally off. The acoustics don't seem to fit (there seems to be a mismatch between the physical room and the musical room), instruments are introduced even if they aren't part of the scene visually, and James' singing voice is notably different from his speech voice. What was the idea here? It reminds me of the ending from Wild at Heart.*

**B** David and I just wrote this song, and David just wanted this song that could work for the three of them and the whole point of the melancholy of that piece was to underscore the relationship between James, Donna and Maddy. It was a song that emotionally worked really well for them, and, yes, the scene is similar to the ending of *Wild at Heart*. That all comes from David's head. He does those kinds of outrageous things, like the scene in *Blue Velvet*.

**EF:** In context, David had just finished *Blue Velvet* so maybe he still had some of that 1950's music playing around in his head. He really loves a huge variety of music, as did most of the directors on the series – everyone was very enthused by the music.



FIGURE 5. A PIVOTAL SCENE IN *TWIN PEAKS: FIRE WALK WITH ME* (1992) IN WHICH LAURA'S SENSE OF SADNESS AND DESPAIR IS MIRRORED IN THE MUSIC AND THE ETHEREAL VOICE OF JULEE CRUISE.

## THE HEART OF DARKNESS: FROM *TWIN PEAKS* TO *FIRE WALK WITH ME*

After discussing the television series, we turned our attention – however briefly – to the prequel *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*.

**H:** The title sequence of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* is quite different from the title sequence of *Twin Peaks*, and one noticeable difference is the music. In the opening of *Fire Walk with Me*, we see a television screen tuned to a dead channel – we see some blue static, and we hear a slow and noticeably darker theme involving whistles, piano and a (muted) trumpet. There is a sadness and a darkness to this theme, which differ from the theme of *Twin Peaks*. Which feelings and moods were you trying to evoke, and how would you say that *Fire Walk with Me* differs from *Twin Peaks* in terms of mood and tonality?

**B:** I just caught that theme. It's just a small, jazzy kind of tune. It has this Miles Davis-like or bluesy theme. It's really interesting, and it sets the mood for the film, albeit a very different kind of mood and tone compared with *Twin Peaks*.

**H** A strong moment in *Fire Walk with Me* is underscored by the track *Questions in a World of Blue*. To me this fits Laura's frame of mind perfectly, neatly underscoring her sadness, as she looks in the mirror and cries by the booth in the bar. Were your different songs in *Twin Peaks* and *Fire Walk with Me* primarily used to mirror the feelings and psychology of the different characters (apart from establishing a general mood)?

**B** The whole thing about *Questions in a World of Blue* works in an emotional way, but, even more, the culminating scene with *The Voice of Love*. If you see that angelic scene and hear that music against Laura – this tortured soul going to a better place – that to me is a culmination. It just tears your heart out. The intent there was to show no mercy and to go with it.

For more on the music in *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), see Halskov, Andreas (2015a). *TV Peaks: Twin Peaks and Modern Television Drama*. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, and Id. (2015b). 'Between Two Worlds: The Competing Moods of David Lynch'. *16:9*, April 19, 2015 (<http://www.16-9.dk/2015/04/between-two-worlds/>).

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