



By Carl Verheyen - GJD Contributor

Over the last 10 years I've put all my energy into my solo career and tried to step back from the day to day grind of studio work. But I still keep a hand in it, especially the high quality projects that come in now and again that you just can't turn down. One of the biggest "culture shocks" in this dual career existence occurs when I fly home from some faraway land and the next morning find myself on a major studio sound stage with a 105 piece orchestra and some difficult music in front of me. I go from the elation of playing my own music in front of a live audience for weeks on end, with the confidence and road-honed chops of a well-oiled machine (my band), straight into the frying pan of sight reading a motion picture score with some of the best musicians in the world.... and a whole lot of them!

Never mind the jet lag, your adrenalin takes over when you find yourself in the hot seat. I think the challenge is rethinking your role as a musician. A band leader and solo artist on a concert tour must constantly make decisions based on his or her own artistic integrity, such as set list choices and the ebb and flow of "the show." I work very hard at being the best improviser I can be, and make sure each show is a unique event when the band plays live. But none of these skills come into play when working with an orchestra on a movie date.

I've been working for composer Michael Giacchino for many years and I'm very happy to be among his first call players. I played on Ratatouille a few years back followed by Speed Racer and recently UP and Land of the Lost. But earlier this year I had the privilege of working on Star Trek, and it was (of course) the day after I got home from a long tour!

I like to get to the studio early so I have a chance to check out my rig and make sure everything still works. This is gear that I have not seen in a while because I use altogether different amps and effects on tour, and sometimes things get unplugged or loosen up and need to be line-checked. The next step for me is to look through the music and pull all the instruments out of my trunks that I'll need for the day. A violinist shows up with one instrument and tunes up. On Star Trek I needed electric guitar, nylon string guitar, baritone electric and 12 and 6 steel string acoustics.

When it says "electric guitar" I usually get out a few of them based on the brief instructions on my music. An example would be like this: If it says "Power Chords" I'll pull out my Les Paul, but if it says "Ethereal swells with strings" it means I'll be playing chord voicings exactly with the

string section and swelling them in like I first heard Allan Holdsworth do back in 1982. For this I'm going to pull out a Stratocaster with a wang bar for that extra plus of adding a little manual vibrato to a sparkling chord.

After tuning up all these guitars and selecting the amps and effects I'll need for the sounds required I then turn my attention to the music. A popular myth is that studio musicians have the music in advance. People are always shocked to hear that we have never seen it before the downbeat. But whenever possible I like to go through the stack and set aside anything that warrants a quick look-through. Anything really note-y gets my attention because positions are most important when site reading. After playing the hard parts, I mark in the optimum positions for each passage over the bar like the classical guys do (except I don't bother with the Roman Numerals). I note the tempos as well, because 16th notes at 160 BPM is hard for anyone, including the monster site readers. And I make sure I have a clear line of site to the conductor because many times on a movie session we'll record two or more versions of the same cue. We'll record one version with a click track and then do another take "on the stick" which means you must follow the conductor's baton and your instrument must "speak" with all the other varieties of brass, strings, reeds, percussion, low brass, and sometimes pre-recorded synth tracks. Sometimes we'll record one version for the film and another for the soundtrack CD.

Talk about culture shock! To go from stage to studio is crazy enough, but following a conductor is another level of hair-raising gnarly-ness. How far down is he going to bring the baton for beat one? How will he conduct the bar of 7/8? Each conductor is different; figuring out their styles is a big part of nailing it.

When you look around the room and see all those players and then add in the orchestrators, copyists, sound technicians, film studio people, computer operators, assistants and assistants to assistants, not to mention people just walking around with clipboards doing who-knows-what.....you realize that this session is costing many thousands of dollars a minute and I sure don't want to be the guy that wastes 10K because I'm having trouble with bar 183!

On Star Trek I played some of that ethereal stuff with strings, especially in the scary sections. I added distortion when it was really scary. I also had quite a few simple strums and single note runs with the harp during the various renderings of the main theme. It was a beautiful score and, having seen the movie I think one of the best of the year.

One last bit of comedy: When the orchestrator and the composer told me they were up for this film, I jokingly suggested we do it all with wah-wah guitar. I told them I'd bring down around 8 or 9 different wah-wahs that I've collected over the years and we'd just go wild and pave wah-wah guitar throughout the entire movie. Thankfully they didn't go for it.....it would have been completely tasteless!

Next month I'll share the experience I gained from recording Joe Bonamassa, Robben Ford, Scott Henderson, Rick Vito, Steve Morse and Albert Lee on my latest CD called Trading 8s.....