

VIVEK  
MADDALA





**Hi Vivek, welcome to VENTS! How have you been?**

I'm doing well. Very busy at the moment between scoring films and TV series, and producing other artists.

**The son of an economist - what draw you into the music scene and were you initially drawn into the film and TV field or how did that happen?**

I've been playing music since I was a small child, and started composing when I was around 7 years old. So it's been an enormous part of my life for nearly as long as I can remember. I didn't come from a particularly musical family, but somehow I always had music swimming around in my head. When I was around 8 years old, the Hitchcock film *North by Northwest* appeared on television, and the iconic Bernard Herrmann score made a huge impression on me. It's when I realized that film scoring could be in my future.

**Having worked in both TV, film and even theater - does your approach tends to change depending on the format?**

Fundamentally, I think it's much the same. The inspiration for the music comes from the characters on screen (or on stage), from the writing, and from the directing. Ultimately, I try to compose music earnestly--from "inside" the characters--helping to draw the audience into the situations the characters are experiencing, reflecting the mood, pacing, and style of the film. Ultimately, my goal is to serve the dramatic intentions of the film makers and, ideally, to create something more evocative or beautiful than even they ever imagined.

**How has your studies in Berklee have helped you shaping your skills in music? Do you put in action anything you learn from your time there or it was simply an overall nice experience?**

I didn't study composition or film scoring at Berklee, but rather was in the performance program. So my studies affected my music composition skills indirectly. Overall, my Berklee experience broadened my musical understanding and helped make me better at executing my musical ideas (in terms of performance as well as production).

**Let's talk about your new work on an iconic show Tom and Jerry - you are not stranger to classics though having worked on the restoration of *The Mysterious Lady*, did this show then felt familiar or was it a whole experience?**

Scoring an animated television show like *Tom and Jerry* has a lot in common with scoring classic silent films, like the several I did for Turner Classic Movies / Warner Bros. In both cases, the picture and the music are like co-equal partners in telling the story. In many cases, the music conveys more emotional depth than what can be rendered visually on-screen. Also, in both the "*Tom and Jerry Show*" and the silent films, I've drawn musical inspiration from late 19th-Century European Romanticism, from the French Impressionist school, and from early American jazz. Additionally, on both I've felt inspired to fuse more modern elements of contemporary music into the scores, while still carefully honoring the traditions that each came from.

**As we all know, besides some rare occasions, the whole series relies on music - I am guessing most of the score was then written at picture?**

Yes, the whole series is quite music-centric. Every episode contains wall-to-wall score, and the music functions on many levels: to communicate the physical action on screen; to create an expressive depth to the characters (who, otherwise, are intrinsically two-dimensional); to establish a sense of

tempo and atmosphere for the overall scene; sometimes to foreshadow what is to come or allude to something that already happened; sometimes to play against picture, punctuating irony; often to form an allegorical reference. So I always score to picture, as it is essential to the way the show functions. Sometimes, however, I will come up with musical themes away from the picture--but always with the picture in mind.

**Just as the original, did you use the music to highlight a moment or you actually took a different approach?**

Speaking of which, how much did you respect the music on the original show? Did you re-watch the cartoons again to mimic the music or just grab the feel and put your own spin in it?

I studied carefully the original 1940s "*Tom and Jerry*" episodes and their brilliant music scores (by Scott Bradley). My intention was to channel much of what was great about the classic "*Tom and Jerry*" scores (both musically and dramatically) into my new scores for the series, but while imparting my own musical "voice." Indeed, I believe the new scores sound very much like me.

**You are mostly known for your jazz background, did you bring some of that influence into this score?**

Yes, absolutely. The scores are mostly orchestral, but invariably some of my affinity for John Coltrane and Miles Davis finds its way in.

**What were some of the challenges?**

At this point, the main challenges are not artistic, but logistical and scheduling. In most cases I have about a week to conceive, execute, and complete a "*Tom and Jerry*" score--including all composition, MIDI programming, orchestration, recording, mixing, etc. And I believe I've got 39 episodes to score this season, plus they've added songs for some episodes (sung by some of the show's characters), which must be written in advance. So the schedules are fast and relentless--which keeps things busy and fun.

**Few people didn't like *The Looney Tunes Show* because according to them it didn't respect the original source, how close to the old *Tom and Jerry* would this one be? Would you call it a reboot, a remake or more like a follow up?**

I think this new "*Tom and Jerry*" show resembles more closely the original 1940s "*Tom and Jerry*" than did any of the subsequent installments of the show. Over the years "*Tom and Jerry*" developed a reputation for having the main characters engage in intense violence. But our show draws inspiration from the original where the rivalry between *Tom and Jerry* is more comedic. Also, not infrequently, the two pair up to pursue a common goal or solve a problem. I believe the music honors the tradition of the original music scores, albeit with some modern flair.

**What else is happening next in Vivek Maddala's world?**

I'm scoring independent feature films quite regularly, in parallel with my television scoring. A few months ago, a film I scored named *White Sun* premiered at the Venice Film Festival, followed by a North American premiere at the Toronto film festival, and is now touring the festival circuit. I have others as well coming out soon. I also finished producing an album for a new artist, called "*The Oopsadaisies*," and I'm currently producing four tracks on the new *Gingger Shankar* album for Concord Records. I also perform quite regularly with *Gingger Shankar*, with the band *String Theory*, and with others.