



Top Scores #2: JÃ³hann JÃ³hannsson & Sicario

Description



When it comes to composing scores for thrillers, there is often a trap that many composers fall into, one that can only be described as “Hans Zimmer syndrome”. From *Gladiator* to *Batman* to *Pirates of the Caribbean* the predictably epic and grandiose scores have become such a mainstay of blockbusters, so much so that they rarely build tension.

That is where Icelandic composer Johann Johannsson’s score for the 2015 thriller, *Sicario* is different. The soundtrack carries the tension of a thriller score, but approaches it from a different angle. Instead of grandiose orchestral pieces and sweeping melodies, Johannsson worked with the theme of

the “subterranean”. He wanted it to sound as if it was emanating from the earth, from the intertwining warrens of the Mexican drug trade the story of the film revolves around.

Johannsson’s score achieves this by almost exclusively employing descending instrumental movements. With the pitch of the instruments starting high and gradually grinding lower and lower. Moving away from the flourishing violins and pianos of his previous works, in *Sicario* Johannsson relies almost exclusively on lower register orchestral instruments such as cellos, euphoniums and tubas. Another important characteristic of the score is its droning, pulsating rhythm. Driven by concert timpanis and distorted bass drum samples it forces each piece along, building momentum and finally charging at the listener in a rattling crescendo.