



Top Scores #15: Chernobyl & Hildur Guðnadóttir

Description



Image: Michael K  t  r

Icelandic composer **Hildur Gu  nad  ttir** has had an incredibly rich and varied career, from playing as a cellist with the likes of **Throbbing Gristle**, touring with **Animal Collective** and **Sun O))),** releasing her own albums, and most famously creating some of the most original scores in TV and Film in the last few years. Her alternative career beginnings, training at classical music schools yet eschewing the traditional approach, makes her an exciting choice for score composition. She won an Oscar for **Best Original Score** for her work on the 2019 film **Joker**. This made her the first female composer to win the award since the category was created in its current form in 2000.

Today, however, we  ll be focusing on her work on the HBO series **Chernobyl**, a TV drama focusing on the aftermath of the 1986 nuclear disaster at the eponymous Ukrainian power station. Instead of using classical instruments, Gu  nad  ttir constructed the score from field recordings she collected from a decommissioned nuclear power plant in Lithuania. She combined sounds from the pumps, reactors and turbine halls, as well as manipulating her own voice to build the music and capture the radiation permeating through the environment.

Back in her Berlin studio, she experimented with her recordings, manipulating them to make them audible and categorising them into the two aspects of the story: the nuclear disaster and human suffering. Speaking to [IndieWire](#) she said,     The radiation was going to be connected to the space with actual sounds and the human side, which was the reason for all of this happening in the first place, [evoked] human error, loss, and grief. As I read the script, these feelings were really raw to me. And the best way for me to access these emotions personally was to use my voice for the choir parts.    

Gu  nad  ttir processed her vocals to digitally recreate the reverb of the turbine hall, allowing them to fit in with the very specific sound world she was creating. As she told [The Guardian](#), it was important for the power plant     to be a voice in itself. I wanted to understand the feeling of what must have gone through people    s heads as they were trying to navigate through that disaster.     The result is an eerie, atmospheric soundtrack with an emotional core that heightens the impact of this story of human error and human suffering, caused by an unseeable yet devastating force.

Listen to the full Chernobyl score by Hildur Gu  nad  ttir here: