



Top Scores #19: Manchester By The Sea & Lesley Barber

Description



Manchester by the Sea is a critically acclaimed American drama film released in 2016. You probably heard about it since it took by storm most of the awards shows of that year, even taking Best Screenplay and Best Actor at the *Academy Awards*.

The plot follows Lee Chandler (Casey Affleck), a janitor who loses his brother to a fatal heart attack. As a result, he is entrusted with the care of his teenage nephew Patrick (Lucas Hedges). It is a tough story that dives into the treatment of profound and persistent grief. It talks about complicated human experiences such as grief, loss, and guilt, posing the question of how we can go on from an event so tragic that it is nearly impossible to recover from.

Making a score representative of such profound character, and compelling and heartbreaking stories is truly an exceptional challenge. Cue **Lesley Barber**.



Lesley Barber on the Nappily Ever After Premiere

Lesley Barber

Lesley Barber is a Canadian composer for film and theatre. She has titles of the caliber of *Late Night*, *You Can Count on Me*, *Mansfield Park*, *Irreplaceable You*, *Hysterical Blindness*, and 30+ credited scores under her belt. Impressive or what?

Right after Barber finished her university degree at The University of Toronto, he spent several years scoring and composing for the theatre scene in Toronto. During this period she composed music for

more than 20 theatrical productions. She was commissioned by orchestras for her compositions and she spent the better part of a decade working as a renowned conductor and orchestrator.

Barber has pretty much focused on her film scoring career since- with the occasional orchestral performance of her compositions where she is featured as the conductor.

After the success and long due recognition that came after *Manchester by the Sea*, Barber was featured on *The Hollywood Reporter Composer Roundtable*, joining scoring giants like Hans Zimmer, Nicholas Britell, John Debney, Hauschka, and other talented composers and scorers.

Barber was chosen to work on the project because she had worked with director Kenneth Lonergan for *You Can Count On Me*, and Lonergan was confident that Barber could deliver a score needed for such a film.

Barber was given the script and got to work on the first musical themes. After she has created the musical themes she got an orchestra and dived right into it. She created music that evoked the sound of the ocean, with lightness and tension. She took inspiration from the New England Church culture, drawing from Calvinist and Pilgrim music and emphasised on the voices.

While recording the different elements of her compositions, Barber played around with spaces and acoustics. To record the vocals reflective of Lee's interior landscape, she sent the sheet music to her daughter Jacoba Barber-Rozema. Jacoba was in university majoring in opera singing, she then **recorded the vocals from her dorm room via Skype**. Barber said that the confined space made for a perfect sound.

For later scenes, where there are scenes of flashbacks of happier times, Barber recorded her daughter in open and spacious auditoriums, to get a sound that would give the feeling of freedom and peace. Orchestration was later added onto the tracks.

When recording was finished, instead of delivering demos to Lonergan, she gave him almost finished versions of the tracks, so he could have a **better sense of the music while editing the film**.

After the initial screening of the movie at the Sundance Film Festival, Barber had to rework and simplify some of the tracks because the film itself had to be cut down a bit.

Nowadays Barber continues to have a successful and fulfilling scoring career. Her latest projects include the American comedy drama *Late Night* which you can find on Amazon, and the american romantic miniseries *Four Weddings and a Funeral* which you can find on HULU.