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# Piedmont Wind Symphony adds music to classic 'Frankenstein'

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Posted: Sunday, October 25, 2015 12:15 am

By *Tim Clodfelter* *Winston-Salem Journal*

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Tim Clodfelter

A scene from "Frankenstein," starring Boris Karloff as The Monster.



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It's alive!

When the horror classic "Frankenstein"

was originally shown in movie theaters in 1931, it didn't have a musical score because of the technological limitations of film in the early days of sound cinema.

Thursday night, it will have one, when the Piedmont Wind Symphony presents a live concert performed in synch with a screening of the movie at Reynolds Auditorium, using a score written in 2002 by renowned composer Michael Shapiro.

"This is one of those transitional films," said Michael Troy, the artistic director and conductor of the symphony. "It's just four years after 'The Jazz Singer,' when sound was introduced. They were typically relying on the pianist or a theater organist to sit there and improvise around the film.

"So it sat all these decades without a proper score, and Michael Shapiro — it obviously resonated with him — thought he would help complete it. I think it's a great thing for the film; it's obviously a blending of something old and something new at the same time."

In an email interview, Shapiro said that he was drawn to "Frankenstein" for several reasons.

"First, the performances and the direction. Colin Clive (Dr. Frankenstein) and Boris

## Want to go?

**What:** The Piedmont Wind Symphony presents "Frankenstein!"

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

**Length:** 70 minutes

**Where:** Reynolds Auditorium, 301 N. Hawthorne Road

**Cost:** \$22; student tickets are \$18, and special bulk and family rates are available.

**Information:** Call (336) 721-1945 or go to [www.piedmontwindsymphony.com/tickets](http://www.piedmontwindsymphony.com/tickets)

**There's more:** After the performance, patrons are invited to Hoots Roller Bar at West End Mill Works, 840 Mill Worlds St. Suite 110, for a screening of the acclaimed 1935 sequel "Bride of Frankenstein." There is no cover charge.

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Karloff (the Monster) were genius performers, and their conflict as portrayed by director James Whale resounds to this day. The Monster's makeup in particular is unique and has never been equaled in my opinion."

He was also drawn to the notion of writing music to accompany a movie that had sound, unlike the more common practice of writing a musical score to accompany a previously silent film.

"I was challenged to meld music into spoken dialogue and action, moving the

drama along with my music."

And, beyond all that, he was drawn to what he described as the humanity of the central story. "The sorrow and the pain on all of these great faces, from young to old. The themes of hubris, resurrection, science v. religion, love and hate, the Prometheus legend, mythological figures, catharsis, it's all here."

To date, there have been more than 20 productions of the score, Shapiro said. He was commissioned to write the score in 2001, and it had its world premiere with a live orchestra in 2002 at the Film Society of Lincoln Center's Jacob Burns Film Center in New York.

He said response to the score has been "resounding.... People love the combination of new music with an old talking film. They seem challenged and thrilled by it."

Troy said that he had been trying to do a concert that blends a film and music for several years, and had what he described as "a few near-misses" looking into silent productions including Charlie Chaplin movies and the 1928 French film "The Passion of Joan of Arc."

"I'm also an old movie buff. I really just enjoy watching a lot of the older films," he said. "When I started working with the Piedmont Wind Symphony, it was still kind of in the forefront of my mind."

When he heard Shapiro's score, he realized it would be a perfect opportunity.

Troy said that he recently spoke to students at Wake Forest University and found that none of them had seen the movie, but they were familiar with the iconography such as Karloff's sunken face — said to be the result of him removing his dentures before the cameras rolled — and the elaborate monster makeup. And the familiar phrases from the film such as Dr. Frankenstein's excited cry of "It's alive!" when he resurrects the Monster.

"This is a great opportunity for people to come out and really see the origin of all these things we all know so well, but we get to see it in its first and authentic form, and you get to see it with live music," Troy said.

And the production also provides an unusual challenge for him, as he has to watch the movie while he is conducting and make sure the orchestra of about 40 players remains in synch with what is going on on the screen.

"It's a different kind of conducting than I typically do on concerts," he said. "You're kind of having to collaborate with the film."

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