

Erik Sutch on making time for your creative projects



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As told to Hannah Street Elliott, 2008 words.

Tags: [Film](#), [Music](#), [Production](#), [Process](#), [Multi-tasking](#), [Money](#).

How to do approach music supervision and presenting songs to clients?

I always try to push it really far. I work mainly in commercials where most of the time they want to be safer to what the brand is. I work for a company that has three people and I feel like all three of us are good at different things. A lot of the time I'll get that internal feedback from Jackie or Andrew, my two coworkers, where they'll let me know, "Oh, no. It's a little too far this time." It's never going to be one person making the decision and the track going to air. It always has to go up a chain of command. If I'm the one picking this music or deciding what tracks go to the client it's always nice to first be like, "Hey, what do you think about this?" Just so I'm not looking silly out there.

I think the idea of the music supervisor is that they bring us in to do that—to push it—and to make their brand more interesting and accessible to the youth or to people who are more creative-minded. I think being reeled in is probably the main point of criticism we get from a client, but it's also not really criticism. It's just part of the process. It's just like, "Okay, we're first going to push you very far and then you can tell us how far you want to pull back."

I prefer commercial work because it's often a lot of money. A wild amount of money. You can sync a track and get a ton of money for a musician you like. Then that will probably afford them the ability to go further and do stuff with their work, push their ideas and be able to have higher production value or just live their lives more comfortably. That to me is, I think, the best part of being a music supervisor and what I think makes a good music supervisor... Someone who cares about the artists and really tries to make it interesting for the client.

I think a good music supervisor is also someone who is willing to listen to what the client's needs are and also still steer that towards their own preferences. Even though a lot of what I've pitched is not what I listen to I definitely veer towards things I like. It's fun to get artists I like money from these brands.

What made you decide that it was time to do your own movie?

I always thought I was going to wait until my late 30s to do it. I had been stowing away money ever since I graduated college. Every paycheck I would put a certain amount away.

A few years ago, one of my friends who is a dog walker, came up to me and was like, "Hey, do you ever think you're going to make a movie?" I was like, "Yeah, I think at some point I probably am." He was like, "Yeah, I think you will too. If you ever have an idea, pitch it to me because I'm interested in investing in it." I was like, "Okay, cool."

We put our money together and just ran with it. I was pretty shocked how quickly it was able to come together. It's a good amount of money but it's not anything too out of the realm of what a working person can collect... If you don't want children, you don't really want to own a house, you don't really want to have a wedding or anything like that, you can use that money for something like a movie. That's what I decided to do with it. I was very lucky that somebody else believed in it that easily and that quickly. I didn't want to make a movie unless I had the money to pay people well and on time. I've always heard those complaints from independent films and even bigger films that are just, "Oh, yeah. The pay wasn't great." It's like a nice thank you to them for the work they've done. Saying thank you is nice, too.

Did you have to put your music supervision work on hold? Or did you balance the two?

Since I work remotely I would basically wake up, do my music supervision between 10 and seven, then take an hour for dinner, come back, and work on the film until like three or four in the morning. I never really liked sleeping much, but especially in the last couple years. I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis about two years ago, right when I was finishing the first draft of the movie.

It hurts in the morning so it really makes me push off the morning as much as possible. If there's something that I'm working on at night that drives me to keep working, I'll stay up because it just pushes back the morning more and more. I drink a lot of water and

it helps me stay awake and stay alert and stay actively working. When you're working on something that you really enjoy you'll make the time for it.

What are some of the most useful tools or resources you utilized while making *Careful Not to Cry*?

Being welcoming and kind to the people you're hiring has been the most important and successful tool. Also, just like in terms of more traditional tools, knowing Premiere Pro and the internet at large in terms of casting people. I went on Backstage.com and for \$25 made a posting and cast my entire movie. I think we put a posting up on a Monday and then by Tuesday we had 150 submissions and I auditioned probably 30 or 40 people. Then from there we were able to cast the nine main roles.

How did you deal with creative blocks?

I just sat down and forced myself to write. I think for so many years I looked at writing as this thing like, "Oh, yeah, an idea comes to you and then you write." Realizing, oh no, it's not that. Writing is like any other job. You just do it. You get better at it as you go along.

I would sit down when I had the bones of the story and basically I had the first and last scene written out completely and then I just filled in the middle. I forced myself to not have creative block and to realize, "Oh, yeah. You can go back and you can delete this. Nobody ever has to see this."

You can write something that makes no sense and it's still writing and it's still important to the process. You can just delete it. Nobody ever has to know about that part of the movie or that part of the script or whatever you're writing. That was important for me. Realizing that, "Oh, yeah. You can completely go for it every night and just write and just write, write, write."

I think also having collaborators involved who understood the film and who were interested in making it the best movie it could be helped me not hit any creative blocks because I had plenty of people around to bounce ideas off of.

When I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis that really pushed me too where it was like, "Oh, yeah. You're sick." I have problems using my hands a lot of the time. I'm lucky that I don't have a job that really requires me to use my hands.

It was like, "I don't know if I'll be able to keep doing this." Now I think I proved to myself, "Oh, yeah. You can do this while you're sick." I'm very lucky that both of my jobs, both of the things that I enjoy doing for work I can do without really needing much of my hands.

It's nice with digital filmmaking that you can make things so easily. Still, I feel like the big thing with digital filmmaking is having way more passion and interest in it because that's what makes up for the budget restrictions... That cuts through in every movie that you see.

What is some advice you'd give someone who wants to make their first film?

I remember like maybe five or six years ago I was getting lunch with my friends and I was telling them how I had been stowing money away... even at that point when I had no idea what I wanted to make. They were like, "You're coming at it from such an interesting angle because most people will build up a network of people through working in film but you took a job that would pay you more than working on a film set," so that I could get to a point where I could self-finance this thing on my own.

Just be good to the people that you hire. It sounds corny but that is the most important thing. It makes everybody have a good time on set. You get a better product. Also, just keeping your own interest in the project. There was never a point through this whole thing where I was like, "Oh, I wish I changed this aspect or that aspect of it." I would just change it. I felt like having control over it was important for me. I don't know if I'll ever have that amount of control again since it was my money.

Take all the time you need when you're working by yourself, but the moment you start adding other people into the mix, be extremely respectful of their time. Set deadlines and meet them not for yourself, but for your collaborators. Be on time for everything. Falling behind schedule is a boring cliché for movies, and for art in general. Just be on time or early for everything. Carve out the time to really nail the lighting, too. Go with the more expensive option on set, you will be happy you did when you're in post-production. Good sound will make everything easier. When it's over you'll have your art piece, and your crew will have footage they can add to their reel to continue getting good work. Keep up an environment where they can do their best work.

Erik Sutch recommends:

FILM

Illusions (Julie Dash, 1982)

No Fear, No Die (Claire Denis, 1990)

Morvern Callar (Lynne Ramsay, 2002)

Mudbound (Dee Rees, 2017)

En el Séptimo Día (Jim McKay, 2017)

FOOD

City Subs

El Gran Castillo de Jagua

Natural Blend

NY Dosas

Vegetarian Dim Sum House

MUSIC

Dame

Hand Grenade Job

Lido Pimienta

Sneaks

Jim O'Rourke's Steamroom series (he also just did the audio restoration for Roland Kayn's A Little Electronic Milky Way of Sound which featured additional work by Jaap Vink, these three have been my most listened to this year)

TELEVISION

Pamela Adlon's Better Things

Tig Notaro's One Mississippi

Shaun the Sheep

Twin Peaks

Kazuchika Okada vs. Kenny Omega II

WRITING

After the Flare (Deji Bryce Olukotun, 2017)

Black Hole Blues and Other Songs from Outer Space (Janna Levin, 2016)

How to Kill a City (Peter Moskowitz, 2017)

Human Acts (Han Kang, 2016)

The Pepsi Cola Addict (June Alison Gibbons, 1982)

FIVE MORE

Quilted Northern Ultra Plush (find your comfort and shell out for it)

Dog Beach at Prospect Park

The KT Fellowship Before the Dawn

Einstein on the Beach

Women In Media crew list Google doc / Cinematographers XX

Name

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Vocation

Music Supervisor, Filmmaker



