



Visitors: The Music

GLASS: The first film I did was with Godfrey. It was Koyaanisqatsi, and we began working '77 and '78... Coming out of the experimental theater world, which is where I came from and I had been working in, I had been writing music for plays since I was twenty. I didn't write my first film score until I was forty one, so for twenty years I had been working in more traditional ways of matching images with music... though by industry standards they were unconventional. I developed a very precise concept of how it worked. I would see the image being here and there was a distance between the music and the image and between the spectator and the image, and the music was the way that we get to the image. When the spectator uses their own imagination to make that journey, the experience becomes very personal.

I've done a lot of commercials. The commercials basically are dictating exactly what you're supposed to feel. When you work in the theater arts it's quite different. We expect the spectator to complete the message, and what they bring to the message is what makes it personal, so that I often describe it as a distance.

I was very fortunate to work with Godfrey as my first filmmaker because he didn't know anything about writing film music either. He didn't know and I didn't know, so we made it up. And I took ideas that I'd been working with in the theater, which was experimental theater. That would be besides the Americans, but the Europeans would have been people like Jeney and Beckett, very cutting-edge stuff at that time.

REGGIO: [Philip] looks at everything ad nauseam. I don't want him to write note one until he's been completely marinated in the image. In this shoot he went to Louisiana, he went to the swamps, he's come out to Brooklyn when we were in the studio, comes over to this studio frequently. He's in effect hammered by us with these images because more than what I tell him, it's his response to the image, and knowing Philip, it's his response in the moment.

KANE: We didn't have any music at all until very, very late in the edit process, until we actually had a film. We worked without music for six months of editing, but in that time we would have Philip come to the studio and watch assemblages. You know, first we call them assemblages—they're not really edits yet—to do what Godfrey calls marinating him in imagery, which we would do silently. We'd watch hours and hours of assemblages, little edits, little ideas that we were coming up with, some of which stuck through 'til the end and many which didn't. But they were illustrating the language of the film, and then at a certain point Philip feels that he has it and he's ready to start writing music.

We started to get the new music in and then we began the process of trying to articulate, as a group, Philip, Godfrey, the whole crew, what it is that we liked or didn't like about the first rounds. And it's a very tricky process because you're trying to put into words something that's pretty difficult to describe. We went through about a two week process of trying to find the voice of the music, and then Philip just got it. And then we were off to the races.

REGGIO: Composers tend to write in the medium that they're in at the time, the "period," they call it, of composition. The period of composition Philip's in right now is orchestral, but it's symphonic orchestral with big highs and lows. The first piece of music that came in was like that and it was gorgeous, but it would blow this film out of the water. So after a number of discussions and writing pieces—Philip is remarkable in that he wants criticism, he wants feedback—it finally came clear. He says, "Oh, I get it, Godfrey." He says, "You want me to write music for the attention of the audience, not in any way to illustrate this image." Now, he knows that already, but "for the attention of the audience" was a breakthrough, so I got what I wanted.