



## Behind the Music Part 7: The Lord of the 200 Flutes

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After a 30-minute train ride along the picturesque lake of Zurich, one arrives in the village of Reichenburg. Sandro Friedrich lives here with his family in a beautiful house with a view over the village, slightly outside of the center of town. One would never guess that here in this idyllic country setting, the romantic, delicate, lyrical and sometimes harsh and dramatic sounds for movies such as *Der Medicus* (The Physician, 2013), **The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones** (2013), the SEGA videogame **Total War—Rome II** (2013), and the US TV show **Quest for the One** (2012), are created. Sandro Friedrich works here in his home studio. He is a multi-instrumentalist, and has a collection of over 200 flutes. With instruments such as ney, duduk and shakuhachi, he adds dramatic dimension and ethnic color to works by celebrated film music composers including Shigeru Umebayashi, Howard Shore, Atli Oervarsson and Ingo Ludwig Frenzel.

For the seventh part of the series "Behind the Music", Sandro Friedrich (49 years old) speaks with me about his passion for music, his self-created job niche as a creator of ethno-sounds and his collaborations with film music composers and stage performers. He also talks about the reason that he is one of the few musicians who can get a positive result from contributing to sample libraries.

Sandro Friedrich welcomes me warmly to his house, where he lives with his wife and two children, and shows me his home studio: A room with acoustic foam on the ceiling, a mixing board, microphone and computer. Spread over the light colored sofa on the opposite wall, the desk, and two spacious cupboards is a huge arsenal of flutes and other wind instruments. He reaches into the cupboard and removes a strangely shaped instrument made of clay, and immediately produces the characteristic whistling sound from Ennio Morricone's "Ecstasy of Gold" from **The Good, the Bad and the Ugly** (1966). Then he demonstrates a Turkish ney—a simple tube with an open top, without a mouthpiece. With this flute, among others, he performed live with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Orchestra in Luzern. Together with this orchestra, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Chorus and the soprano Kaitlyn Lusk, he took part in the recording of Howard Shore's "Lord of the Rings Symphony" (Howe Records, 2011, in cooperation with *Bayerischen Rundfunk*).

Lying next to the microphone is the score for "Stone Cross Part I" from *Der Medicus*, by film music composer Ingo Ludwig Frenzel. "I spent a lot of time on this project. All in all, I recorded about twelve hours of music with various flutes, duduk, bagpipes and tin whistles for Ingo", He says. Sandro Friedrich plays wind instruments for about fifty projects per year. For most projects, he spends two or three hours

recording in his home studio. “For **City of Bones** (2013) I recorded around eight hours for Atli Oervarsson. That was enough.” He played various short phrases and melodies on fourteen different flutes to provide a choice, edited them, and sent them immediately via internet as mix-ready tracks to the composer of the epic film music; fast and efficient. “This is where I see a great advantage to my offering as a musician. With my home setting, I can deliver ready-to-mix samples and tracks within a short time, and modify them as requested”, Friedrich says. This seems to be especially interesting for film music productions, which are about two-thirds of his work.



Sandro Friedrich is playing the Japanese Bass-Shakuhachi

### **“Music was my escape”**

Sandro began to make music in primary school, where he played recorder. At the age of 13 he discovered South American and Irish flutes, and was fascinated by them. “I soon began to look for other flutes. Also, people kept bringing me flutes from other countries after they knew I was interested”, the musician remembers. He built up not only an impressive collection of ethnic wind instruments, but also a wide spectrum of expertise and a far-reaching network of contacts. “Meanwhile, it sometimes happens that in the search for specific sounds, I’ll drill new holes in my flutes and close others with bee’s wax, or order custom-made instruments from specialized flute makers.”

Over the years, his relationship to music has changed a lot. “Originally, music was extremely important to me as a vent for my blocked emotions. As a rather introverted teenager, it helped me to express my feelings. Today I see music as more of a

luxury, because it doesn't have the original therapeutic necessity. At the beginning I was much more emotionally attached to my music. Now I can fall much more easily into the world of emotion created by a composition, and let it go again afterwards. This is even more useful, because for film and TV productions I often have to convey strong, quickly changing emotions. It's occurred to me that on the screen, people are usually dying when my flutes are featured in the score. I hope that's not a reflection of my playing!" (Laughs)

In his free time, Sandro doesn't listen to music very often. "I tend to be concentrated on the music when I listen to it. I relax better without it." But he prefers to listen to world music, often with the intent to study other performances on ethnic wind instruments. He also gets inspiration from his other passion, hiking and trekking. "I like to spend my vacations with my family, but I also like to go on hiking trips that last several weeks, for example in northern Europe, or Yosemite National Park in California." He often brings a tin whistle on these trips.

### **International Clients**

His talent is increasingly in demand. "2013 was my best year, to date", says Friedrich, who also works as a teacher in a Swiss high school. 60 to 70 percent of his jobs come from Germany (most recently, he's been playing alto saxophone for composer Stephan Eicke's music for the audio drama *Sherlock Holmes: Die neuen Fälle*). About 10 percent of his jobs are connected with projects in Switzerland, and another 10 percent actually come from Hollywood. About two-thirds of his jobs are film music projects, and the rest are CD productions. Among others, he's played for Tina Turner's project "Children Beyond" (2011), and live concerts with harp virtuoso Andreas Vollenweider, and concerts for composer Shigeru Umebayashi with director Dirk Brossé. He's particularly enthusiastic about live performances. "The live performances that go with the CD productions and the possibilities of musical interaction are a pleasure and an inspiration. I especially enjoy the minimalistic compositions of Shigeru Umebayashi, and the incredible possibilities in his music for expressing emotion. It's fantastic."

In the last few years, the demand for ethnic flutes in music projects has grown. "Of course I'm very happy about that, and it enriches my daily life. It would be great to be able to spend more time doing this." While most musicians are rather annoyed by the growing popularity of sample libraries, Sandro Friedrich believes that they contribute to the increasing demand for his work. "More and more composers are actually getting to know the potential of ethnic instruments as additional color for their compositions because of professionally created sample libraries. In the past, not many people realized the effects that these instruments can create." He isn't particularly afraid that he will be replaced by sample libraries. "It's true that the sample libraries keep improving in sound quality and variety, but with ethnic instruments in particular, it's still easy to hear the difference between a 'canned sound' and a line that was played by a musician for a specific project." For him, sample libraries are still more of a blessing than a curse. He took part in the creation of the sample libraries *Ethnoworld 4* and *5* for film music composer Marcel Barsotti (*Die Paepstin*, 2009) and the company *Best Service*.

### **From meticulous requirements to free improvisation as co-composer**

When Sandro Friedrich gets a job request, there are different possibilities. "There are musicians and composers who approach me with meticulous requirements, including

details such as the vibrato frequency on specific notes. Most composers send me a score and a playback. Then we have a consultation via telephone or Skype regarding expression, octave position, interpretation and more. Others have more general ideas and give me space for my own ideas and suggestions. In cases like this I can often improvise for the most part, or act as co-composer, which can help to maximize the individual qualities of expression of the chosen instruments, including their cultural contexts.” He finds all of these possibilities exciting. The first is connected more with technical challenges, and the second more with creativity and ingenuity. As a composer, Sandro Friedrich has a catalogue of around 100 pieces that are dealt with by his management. Many of his compositions are catalogued by their emotional expression, through which they can be accessed at request for licensing.

He first had to discover that there was a large demand for his talents in the area of film music. He remembers: “When I originally tried to build up my career as studio musician, I sent out mailings to various companies, musicians and composers. The greatest response came from the world of film music, which I previously wasn’t aware of. It seems that my ethnic sounds lend an exotic, foreign touch to predominantly western orchestral film music, and this is especially useful when a foreign location is part of the film story.” Sandro Friedrich also appreciates the collaboration with film music composers. “They are usually very clearly aware that they are providing a service. That means they are usually reliable, communicate clearly concerning desired sounds and music styles, and see music in a pragmatic way.”

### **Finding a niche**

Sandro Friedrich has created a niche for himself with the way he works from his home studio. “A composer doesn’t need to hire me to come to a studio for a day for a few measures or minutes of music. Usually one or two Skype consultations are enough to discuss the ideas and the purpose of the music. Then I receive a score from the composer – if it’s available – and record the desired sounds in my home studio. I bill the composer for the time I actually have the instrument in my hands. There are no travel costs.” Friedrich sees another advantage to his way of working. “I can also edit my recorded tracks with specialized software depending on the kind of flute, and pitch the recording to the desired key. This is specialized knowledge that is very dependent on knowing how the instrument is usually played and how it should sound. I need different kinds of editing for different instruments. Then I deliver the recordings via internet to the composers and producers, and make the desired adjustments afterwards.” This way of working is appreciated by both composers and their sound technicians. In this way, he can also make lucrative use of his extremely technical education at the Swiss federal technical university (ETH) in Zurich as an electro engineer, which is a rather unusual background for the music business. “With this way of working as a musician, I’ve found the ideal combination for my musical and technical skills, as well as my satisfaction from the emotional expression of music. I can also use my language skills.” After this one hour discussion, Sandro Friedrich returns to his recording studio, picks up a medieval shawm and begins to work on his next project.