



Hidden Remote



Behind the music: Brandon Campbell on Netflix's *The Letter for the King*



by Victoria Davis 5 months ago

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*Composer Brandon Campbell, known for his work on *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld*, goes behind the music of his latest project, Netflix's *The Letter for the King*.*

Most famous for his work on *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld*, film composer Brandon Campbell has spent five years composing some of the darkest, most twisted and incredibly jarring scores in television history. Now, Campbell is changing gears ever-so-slightly. Not too quick to leave his medieval roots behind, Campbell is the composer for Netflix's *The Letter for the King* and shared with Hidden Remote some behind the music facts and secrets about the inspiration for the show's western, modernized soundtrack.

The six-episode show follows the adventures of a (very) young teenage squire named Tiuri, who takes it upon himself and his merry band of teenage fighters and riders to embark on an epic, albeit perilous, mission across the three kingdoms to deliver a secret letter to the King. Along the way, Tiuri discovered that there's much more to him than just bravery, but that supernatural powers might also flow through his veins, as well as the enemies that seek to destroy him and his mission.

The Letter for the King is based, somewhat loosely, on a [novel of the same name](#), first published in 1962 by the Dutch author Tonke Dragt.

Some viewers have [described the show](#) as "*Game of Thrones* meets *Lord of the Rings* meets *Willow* meets *Goonies*," the show certainly has its own style when it comes to music, incorporating Dark Ages themes with the Wild West and hard rock, as well as some eerie supernatural chanting, soloed by Campbell himself. So, let's get [behind the music](#).



Hidden Remote: Having composed for other medieval-based television series like *Game of Thrones*, was that a reason you were drawn to this series?

Brandon Campbell: What really drew me to this project was that this story was more adventure than action and the chance to write a lot of thematic music. Fairly quickly into the process, when

we were figuring out the musical identity for the show, we decided to incorporate Spaghetti-Western elements with trumpets and guitars and fiddles mixed in with a more orchestral and modern-type sound.

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Hidden Remote: You also have experience with that western-style having composed the music for *Westworld*. And your music for *A Wrinkle in Time* had that adventure aspect you love. How does the music for *The Letter for the King* compare to those other scores that you've done?

Campbell: *Game of Thrones*, *Westworld*, those projects are so wildly different even if it doesn't seem like that on the outside. And *A Wrinkle in*

Time is a lot more adventure than anything else but the music is quirky because the story is a little quirky. It was never dark like how *Westworld* is. That show is very unnerving with so many electronic sounds and *Game of Thrones* was also very dark and twisted, just like its music.

In *The Letter for the King*, I got to use instruments I really haven't used before in scores like trumpets or proper fiddles or wider soul vocals. It's an adventure that combines a lot of different and new musical elements together.

Hidden Remote: Had you read the book before getting involved with the project?

Campbell: I hadn't. I went back and forth with whether I should read the source material or not and for this one I decided not to. The show is based off the novel but it's not a true representation of the original story, and I'm sure the music would have been different if we had been drawing more from the book.

And that western-style wasn't even my first instinct when I was working on this series. We arrived there after several discussions with William Davies. Will said it was supposed to be a western masquerading as a medieval adventure.

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I was actually really hesitant to have so many western sounds, but looking back it works so well. I can't imagine the show without that music. The way they frame the shots on the mountain top on horseback or the way they're trotting along with the vistas in the background, it's easy to see they were inspired by these classic cowboy films.



Hidden Remote: What was the original plan for this music? Were you planning on having fiddles and guitars at all or just orchestral sounds?

Campbell: There was always going to be guitars and this Americana music theme throughout the show. So it was going to be like the wild west, but with a more orchestral base.

The villain, Viridian, had an orchestral music theme for his character. But Davies didn't really want that, he was worried it was too much like *The Lord of the Rings*. So we tried to go with music that was a little more modern. Every time Viridian shows up now it's this low, distorted, grating sound, and I'm whisper chanting in the background. That's just one of the things that evolved.

Hidden Remote: Wait, it's your voice that's chanting with the music?

Campbell: Yeah! Viridian's theme was a late departure from what we'd originally intended and there wasn't much time left to pull it together. I had this idea to do a whispered chant to highlight the supernatural themes in the show but it was too late to pull our choir together, so I did eight takes of myself with different inflections of whispering. It kinda worked!

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Hidden Remote: It's funny that you also mentioned *The Lord of the Rings* because people are describing this show as part *The Lord of the Rings*, part *Game of Thrones*, part *The Goonies*. With so many different themes packed into this show, how did you decide what instruments you would bring in?

Campbell: One of my favorite things about film music is that it's not like concert music. There's no limit to what instruments and colors we can play with. It's not until toward the end of episode three where we think that Tiuri may have supernatural powers where he's in control of the world around him and that's the first time we use any choir at all to illustrate that supernatural element. Or when everyone is in the tavern and this bar fight breaks out that's also still supposed to be fun, that's when we brought in the fiddles.



Hidden Remote: Another big difference between this show and *Westworld* and *Game of Thrones* is how good-natured it is. Was that a theme you also tried to reflect in the music?

Campbell: Definitely. That's another reason I was drawn to the show. It's been several long years of doom and gloom and I love how much variety this show has in its music. There are moments where it's appropriately dark, but it's not twisted. The music is never sinister. Our hero Tiuri, his music theme is almost innocent. There's nothing that mature about it.

Hidden Remote: Do you have any favorite scenes as far as the music goes?

Campbell: Well Will's favorite sequence is one I'm also a huge fan of. In Episode 2, we see Tiuri ride across the screen on horseback and he ends up on top of this hill looking out onto this valley and he sees these Red Riders in the distance coming for him and it's the first time we have that western music. Will just loved that scene and always referenced it for the rest of the series.

I also loved the last scene of the series that, without giving too much away, ends really hopeful and proud and combines all the music themes from the entire series. From a purely musical geek standpoint, that was my favorite. It's also been fun watching it all put together and seeing special effects blended with the music that I didn't get to see while I was working with clips. It makes me proud to be a part of something like this.

Hidden Remote: This show couldn't have come at a better time because it's only six episodes, it's lighthearted, and the perfect show to binge during this quarantine.

Campbell: Yeah, everyone is stuck at home and gets to watch TV and we're all quarantined and seeing doom and gloom every day, so it's nice to watch something like this that's positive and fun and innocent. It's a feel-good coming-of-age journey and with good music. Though I hope everyone enjoys the show whether or not they enjoy the music. It's a little quirky and different, but it's fun.

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Will you be streaming *The Letter for the King*? What are some other shows on Netflix with note-worthy soundtracks? Let us know in the comments below!

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