

March 6, 2012 6:52 pm

Lights, camera, music

By Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson



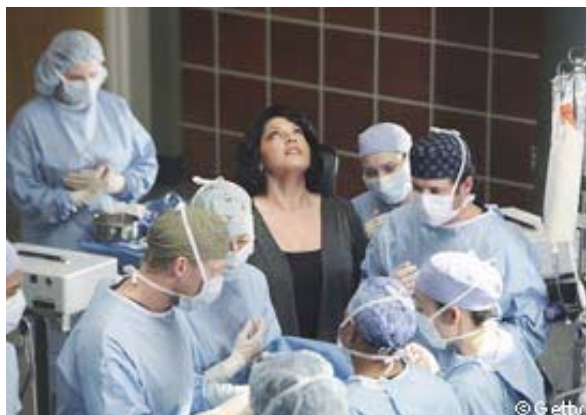
If you shed a tear at the end of season two of *Grey's Anatomy* (below), Alexandra Patsavas is probably to blame. When Izzie cradled a dead Denny to the strains of “Chasing Cars” in 2006, emotional fans rushed to buy the Snow Patrol song, helping establish Ms Patsavas’s reputation as one of the music industry’s most influential figures.

Ms Patsavas is not a record label executive or a band manager. Instead, she is a music supervisor, part of a small but expanding industry of experts who help directors pick soundtracks that add another dimension to their work. With television shows such as *Gossip Girl*, *The O.C.* and *Mad Men*, and films including the *Twilight* trilogy, she has had the same effect on many bands’ sales, by introducing new listeners to the likes of Muse, the Black Keys and Death Cab for Cutie.

“As the music business has changed, the music supervisor has moved from the side to the centre of marketing meetings and publicity plans,” Ms Patsavas says, at a Hawaiian restaurant in Pasadena, California, with surf-themed music in the background. Her company Chop Shop Music Supervision is around the corner in a three storey building

Her success suggests that The Buggles were wrong. In the age of *The Voice*, *Glee* and *The X Factor*, video doesn't kill radio stars; it makes them. Such TV hits are just outsized examples of a phenomenon that is generating ever more income for music artists and the companies behind them.

"Synchronisation" revenues from pairing up music soundtracks with TV shows, films or advertisements will earn the owners of the rights about \$1bn this year, according to Enders Analysis, the media research company. That represents about 18 per cent of music publishers' \$5.6bn global revenues, up from about \$800m or 15 per cent in 2005, Enders says.



The growth of "sync" has cushioned the blows of piracy and tumbling CD sales for record labels and music publishers, which employ teams of people dedicated to getting their songs played on screen.

It has also created an opportunity for entrepreneurial, independent music supervisors, such as Ms Patsavas, who can pick and choose from bands signed to any label, or

to none at all.

She is reluctant to put numbers on her success, and looks nonplussed when asked about the sales boosts for which she can take responsibility. "You're talking to the wrong person. It's exciting when it has that positive effect, but it's the side-hustle," she says. A music supervisor's first job is to find music with the "texture, vibe and feel" to fit each project.

The first meeting with a TV or film director or producer is mostly about "cadence", she says. "We go through the script page by page and talk about where a director may see songs."

They also discuss what music each character would listen to, what posters would be on their walls, and what their first concert might have been. For *The O.C.*, she and series creator Josh Schwartz even discussed the stickers on the wall of the Bait Shop, a fictional club built for the show.

Performers who once worried that a teen movie would harm their credibility have become eager allies. "Bands understand that this is a way to reach fans that might not otherwise hear their music," she says. Many now even write new songs for soundtracks.

Ms Patsavas, now 43, got into the business as a music fan whose teenage tastes included

The cost of licensing a song can vary widely according to its renown. Ms Patsavas declines to discuss numbers but before our meeting one music publisher told me of a blunder by a rival who charged \$62,000 for a hit to appear in a film when it could have fetched \$250,000.

Ms Patsavas works on 10 to 15 music supervision projects a year, which might include feature films, TV series or even pilot shows with no guarantee of being aired.

Notes and quavers: tips for a start-up

Alexandra Patsavas's route from music fan to entrepreneur has lessons for other creative people with commercial aspirations.

● **Start small:** Ms Patsavas worked her way up from the post room – the launch pad for executives including Barry Diller and David Geffen – and good mentors helped hone her craft even on B-movies such as *A Bucket of Blood*. When setting up on her own, she kept expenses low by working from home.

● **Learn first:** She moved across the US for work from her native Illinois to California but Ms Patsavas advises others to try the job first. “I get a lot of calls from aspiring music supervisors who say: ‘I live in Biloxi – will I have to move?’ My answer is ‘Find an aspiring local film-maker and do the job’.”

● **Remember basic rules:** It can all be boiled down to: “Find an aspiring director; learn about music licensing; really love music.”

The supervisor must haggle over such fees and then cut through a web of rights to a song, sometimes within days. Songs may be credited to several publishers, with EMI having rights in the US and Sony ATV in Europe, for example.

“I really enjoy the administrative side,” Ms Patsavas says. “All the creative impulses in the world are valueless unless the supervisor can deliver cleared music in time.”

With seven staff and some part-time help, she also takes her role as an employer seriously: “I believe in [health] insurance and a 401(k) [retirement plan]”.

Pondering pensions is a long way from her initial start in the music business at the University of Illinois, where she booked bands from Smashing Pumpkins to They Might Be Giants. Many came via an agency called Triad Artists, where she went to work in 1990, moving to Los Angeles to start in the post room.

She then took a junior role in the vice-president's office at BMI, the US royalties-collecting society, moving up to its film and TV department where she made important contacts.

In 1994 Roger Corman, mentor to movie directors from Martin Scorsese to James Cameron, hired Ms Patsavas to work at Concorde Films, where she earned her first film credits for the rock soundtracks of 30 or so B-movies such as *Caged Heat 3000* and *Piranha*.

After a year at another low-budget film company, PM Entertainment, it was time to set up her own company. “I

Success started to build in this word-of-mouth business with *Happy Texas*, a film that went down well at the Sundance Film Festival and then TV shows *Roswell* and *Boston Public*.

Once labelled “the hottest talent scout in the business”, she has taken her knack for finding new acts that resonate with fans a step further by setting up her own label, Chop Shop Records, which has signed a handful of bands including Anya Marino, The Republic Tigers and Scars on 45.

“A music supervisor in today’s new music business is often introduced to new music very early on because these placements have become important financially and an important part of the story of how a band reaches fans,” she explains.

Ms Patsavas admits she is not sure what will come next for the business. But, she points out, “I’ve been improvising since 1995”.

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