

SILENTS SYNCED

Contemporary Soundtracks Reintroduce Silent Classics

BY REBECCA PAHLE

Brought To You By

SPOTLIGHT
CINEMA NETWORKS

Today's moviegoers require variety, both in what they see and in the cinemas they choose to patronize. In both cases, Spotlight Cinema Networks is a dedicated supporter of the cinema industry, partnering with art house, dine-in, and luxury cinemas through their in-cinema advertising network and providing exciting exclusive content via their CineLife Entertainment® event cinema division.

In partnership with Spotlight Cinema Networks, BOXoffice PRO is proud to present Indie Focus, in which we explore the wealth of experiences that cinemas—from the high-end luxury and dine-in theater to the beloved community art house—offer their audiences.



➔ Spooky season approaches and with it comes a new concept called Silents Synced, pairing classic silent films with classic albums, allowing moviegoers to experience both in a new way. Josh Frank, founder and owner of Blue Starlite Mini Urban Drive-in in Austin, Texas, created the series. Appropriately, Silents Synced (silentsynced.com) kicks off on October 4 with the grandfather of all vampire films, *Nosferatu*—seen (or heard) as never before, with two of alt rock’s most esteemed albums, Radiohead’s *Amnesiac* and *Kid A*, as the soundtrack. In advance of the CineLife Entertainment release, BOXOFFICE PRO spoke with Frank about Silents Synced’s journey—created by an independent exhibitor, for independent exhibitors—to the big screen nationwide.

How did you come up with the concept for Silents Synced?

It really started 20 years ago when I was playing around with *Metropolis* and discovered that Nine Inch Nails’ double album *The Fragile* basically synced up with it perfectly. I was fascinated with the idea that beloved albums could somehow magically just work with silent movies. And then, when I opened my little drive-in movie theater in Austin, Texas, 15 years ago, I got my friends together for a private screening. I wanted to show them something to see if the concept of a drive-in in an alleyway could work, so I showed them my edit [of *Metropolis* and Nine Inch Nails]. They loved the drive-in, but they also loved that. It stayed in my head.

“We’re thrilled to be a partner in distributing [Silents Synced] because we believe in the power of event cinema combined with alternative music’s most enduring artists. This is a concept that should work equally well for independent, indoor, and drive-in cinemas, as it offers attainable event cinema that will appeal to multiple generations of current patrons, as well as music fans.”

Bernadette McCabe
EVP, CineLife Entertainment

Then, a couple of years after that, I was invited by Black Francis of the Pixies to work with him on his rescoring of [1920’s] *The Golem* for the San Francisco International Silent Film Festival. It screened in the big, beautiful Grand Theatre. I’m watching a hero of mine score this silent movie, and that had a profound effect on me.

All those things connected when the pandemic hit, and I saw how my peers were in need of more content. I was doing fine, because I had the drive-in and I was actually the only cinema open in [the area]. But even I was having issues, because what had once been my signature, classic movies, was now being screened by everyone. And I knew that, when the pandemic ended, my peers would not have a lot of content to put on their screens. All those things together got me thinking about alternative content and about how we as independent cinema owners can take care of ourselves and look out for one another. I challenged myself to create intriguing and alternative content that I could provide independently and then share with my peers.

It’s about time someone made the concept of pairing classic films with classic albums work for cinemas. People have been syncing *The Wizard of Oz* with Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* for decades.

One of the holdbacks is, obviously, rights. But I’m insane, so I took it upon myself to learn how those work and to reach out to all the labels myself and try and work with them to come up with a way to do it. I was going to the labels with something that nobody had really done before. It was a challenge for them, too. I stepped into solving this particular challenge of how to bring all these elements together to do it legitimately. It’s been done illegitimately for decades, as you said, but how could we do it such that it would be useful to other independent cinemas? Unless it was legitimate, it wouldn’t help other people.

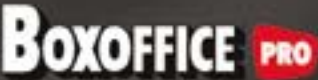
Basically, I sat down with this challenge

The Boxoffice Podcast is your weekly podcast all about the cinema industry.

Every week we break down major industry news, dissect box office results and connect with studio and cinema executives to talk market trends and industry shifts in theatrical exhibition and entertainment at large.



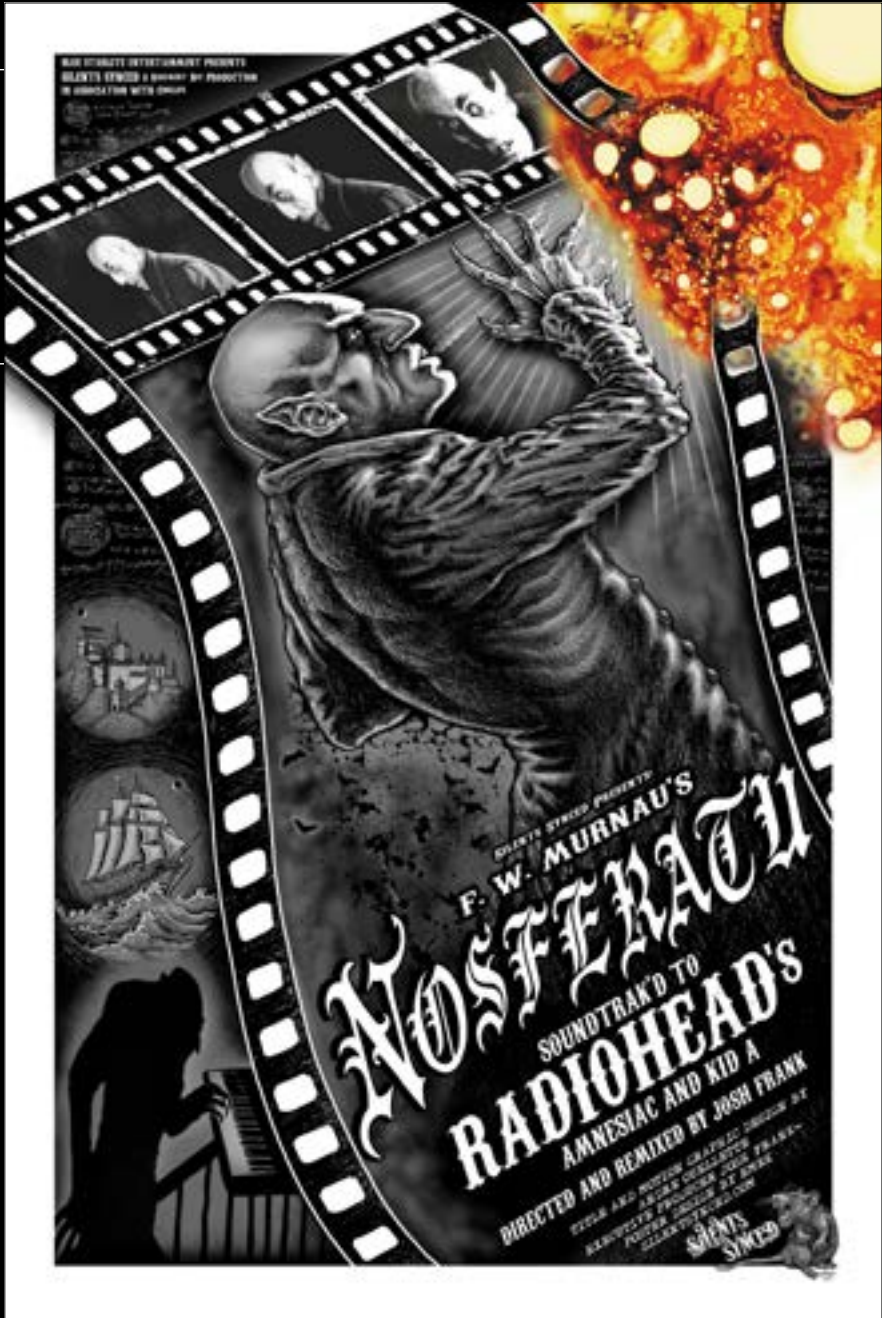
Search for *Boxoffice Podcast* on your favorite podcast app.



of, “Let’s come up with something that can be reproduced.” [It wasn’t just about Silents Synced]: It was about the idea that an independent cinema could come up with a good concept that they could then offer to other cinemas and create a new tier of content. That was what excited me the most about it. I knew that I could make these, because it was something that I discovered early on I was good at. There are a lot of creative decisions that have to be made; it’s not putting the album over the movie and saying, “Good night!” I brought in an effects guy, and I asked, “How do we make the visual and music experience even cooler? How can I take the places where the music and the movie come together so perfectly and make them even better?” There was a lot of work that went into doing this first one, and once I started experimenting with different albums and different movies, I realized there are a lot of them that I can make work really beautifully. And that’s when I realized, “This is my content idea. It’s my event cinema idea, the one that I’m going to offer.” A friend of mine encouraged me to reach out to the bands and send them demos of what I was doing and see if they’d even respond. I sent out four demos within a month-long period, and every band’s manager got back to me immediately and said, “This is frickin’ cool. What do you need from us to do this?” It was really this beautiful, exquisite corpse of a concept.

And, like you say, it’s a business concept in addition to being a creative concept. Cinemas like the Texas Theatre in Dallas have had great success with events pairing screening with live scores, but most cinemas don’t have the resources to make that work.

The thing is, live scores on sound films are freaking awesome. People have been doing them for decades, and they’re beautiful, but the problem is they’re not scalable. And they also cost a lot to produce because you need a whole live



band. There are a lot of elements that have to come together. My idea was, “Can we harness that same magic in a way where you can put it on a DCP and give lots of theaters the opportunity to create a rock concert movie experience?” I didn’t want to replace the live score experience, because it’s completely different. I feel like this is complementary. It’s another level of that kind of experience.

The timing for the first Silents Synced is great. I caught a rep screening of Nosferatu last October, and it still plays really well. And then there’s the Robert Eggers version of Nosferatu coming out in December.

That was kind of happenstance.

Originally I was going to lead with a different film, but that one got stuck in production, so I moved on to the one that was ready, the Radiohead one. The best month to release, obviously, was October. And then, of course, Eggers’ *Nosferatu* is coming out in December. That wasn’t on purpose, but it’s great for Silents Synced, because a lot of cinemas that aren’t going to be playing Eggers’ [*Nosferatu*] can do complementary programming for [the Radiohead version of] *Nosferatu*. And people who are huge fans of *Nosferatu* in general will get a chance to see both of them, which is awesome.

And younger people who are maybe familiar with Robert Eggers but haven’t

seen the original Nosferatu can catch up before the new one comes out.

Exactly. And it also gives us a bump past the initial release [in October]. Some theaters are booking it specifically because Eggers’ movie is coming out in December. They’re booking [our *Nosferatu*] in early December.

How did you come to work with CineLife Entertainment on this release?

I’ve worked with them through Spotlight Cinema Networks for a number of years. They’re just really good people, and they’re the best of the business in so many ways. When I was shopping around for distributors, there were a number of them that were interested, but I didn’t know them. This had become my baby. You know what I mean? So that’s why I thought, “I should really talk to CineLife Entertainment. I know they know how to do it. Maybe I should see if they’re interested.” When I told them about it, they were super pumped. They were the only ones out of all the distributors I talked to that, at least on the surface, did not show they had any doubts. Like it was a no-brainer. To me, that’s all I needed. The people who immediately say yes, those are the people you want to go into battle with.

And repertory cinema is doing so well right now. Younger audiences are really excited about going to independent cinemas and experiencing these older films. At this point, Amnesiac and Kid A are old albums too, I suppose.

It’s funny. When I was a teenager, my parents took me to see *Grease*. They would point at the screen and say, “This was our life. This is what we were into.” It’s been about 20 years since the albums [used in Silents Synced came out]. This is [my generation’s version of] taking your kids to the art house cinema that you used to go to and watching a classic movie where the soundtrack is by one of your favorite bands when you were your kids’ age. It’s that cyclical thing. That’s what we can capture

as art house cinemas: We’re not just a place for the people who have been coming to art houses their whole lives. We’re a place to give younger generations their first-time experiences with something that could become a big part of their lives. Silents Synced was designed in that way, in the custom of midnight movies like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or David Lynch films—all the wonderful and weird and subversive stuff [that has become part of moviegoing culture]. It’s born of the cool feeling that I had when I was a teenager going to the movies. That’s the experience I’m hoping people are going to take away from Silents Synced.

What silent movie/album pairings do you have in the works?

The next one will be R.E.M. with Buster Keaton’s *Sherlock Jr.* It uses two of their classic albums, and I know that the band is pumped about it. Radiohead, they’re like The Beatles. They’re not involved. They thought it was cool, and they said, “Go for it, kid!” But R.E.M.’s management and REM are like, “This is really cool.” And they’re going to help promote it and get the word out to their fans.” It’s really awesome. The next one after that is either going to be They Might Be Giants or Pearl Jam. With Pearl Jam, the album is Vs. And with They Might Be Giants, it’s songs from their entire catalog [paired with] another Buster Keaton film, *The Cameraman*. That one is so much fun, and it’s very sweet. That’s one of the really exciting things about making these: You really feel like you’re making a whole new film. In the end, if it’s done right, you’re experiencing the movie in a way you’ve never experienced before. You’re having emotions that you’ve never had from watching it. The same with the music: You’re experiencing new feelings, new emotions, to the music that you’re so used to. The context makes it all the more exciting. ♥

For information on booking Silents Synced, email drew@spotlightcinemanetworks.com

NEW AND USED

MARQUEE ~SIGN~ LETTERS

.....

**We Sell & Buy
Slotted & Snap Lok
Sign Letters**

.....

**Bay City
Cargo**

800-545-8956
mike@pilut.com
baycitycargo.com

THERE IS NO CLOUD

It's just your theater relying on someone else's computers, oh, and also, hoping the Internet doesn't go out on either end!



Don't rely on a slow, cloud-based POS for your theater!

Over 30 Years of 100% Uptime.

Sensible Cinema Software

www.sensiblecinema.com

