

FRÉDÉRIC PRÉBOLIN

Interview — Press Kit

1. How did you become a pianist and composer?

I am first and foremost a pianist. I studied at the Bordeaux Conservatory, but my vocation began much earlier, when I discovered a Chopin ballade as a child. It was a revelation and made me want to devote myself to the piano.

Although I was passionate about classical music, I did not immediately turn to composing for the screen. That came gradually, even though, looking back, I believe the connection between music and images had always been there. From my first encounters with the piano, images would appear spontaneously in my mind.

Later, meeting a great calligrapher opened up new perspectives, especially through musical improvisation connected to gesture and image. I then began collaborating with young filmmakers and took part in a project around a documentary on India. All these encounters shaped the way I approach music for the screen.

Even today, when I look at an image, music comes to me almost immediately, as if my fingers were spontaneously translating what my eyes discover.

2. Where does your inspiration come from when you look at an image?

My relationship with images is quite distinctive. When I first see an image, the emotions it conveys are not necessarily what inspire me. My fingers react first, almost instinctively.

At the piano, I look for a melody or a rhythmic impulse, often carried by my left hand. As soon as these first elements take shape, I can almost immediately imagine the overall musical direction, sometimes even its orchestration.

That is when the emotion appears. It grows out of what I express musically and the dialogue between the image, my fingers and my imagination. I do not try to translate an emotion that is already there; I discover it through the music I create.

3. What is the balance between instinct and reflection in your work?

My improvisation unfolds in two stages. First comes an instinctive, almost immediate impulse, as my fingers find a melody, a rhythm or a musical colour. Then comes a more conscious stage, when I truly enter into a dialogue with the image.

Years of accompanying silent films have shaped a relationship with images that is not only emotional, but intellectual as well. My classical training gave me the tools to build music, but I do not want intellectual analysis to systematically come before the act of creation.

“My training gave me the tools, but instinct is what guides my creativity.”

4. What place does music for the screen hold in your work today?

Music for the screen now has a central place in my work as a composer. I need to draw inspiration from images, stories, characters and the atmospheres they can evoke.

I do, however, distinguish between two approaches to composition. When I write a work for the concert hall, such as the piano concerto I am currently working on, I begin with the musical material itself. I build my sound world, and only afterwards might images appear in my imagination. When I compose for the screen, by contrast, the image is the starting point.

These two approaches complement each other, but they call on different creative processes. Although I continue to write instrumental music, music for the screen currently occupies the largest place in my artistic projects.

5. How would you describe your musical signature?

I believe my music has a deeply narrative quality. Whatever I compose, I naturally tend to tell a story. It is not always a conscious choice; the story often emerges on its own, almost in spite of me.

Sometimes a single harmony on the piano is enough to create a setting, an atmosphere, an entire imagined world. A melody, a harmony or a musical movement can become part of a story that takes shape intuitively.

Perhaps that is why music for the screen has such a special place in my career. It allows me to extend this natural instinct for storytelling by bringing two forms of expression into dialogue: image and music.

6. You sometimes say that your music does not entirely belong to you. What do you mean?

I believe musical creation never comes from nothing. It is part of a heritage, a musical memory we carry within us, sometimes unconsciously.

My classical training gave me tools, a language and a sensibility shaped by the composers I admire, especially Chopin, Debussy and Ravel. When I compose, I naturally develop my own world, while knowing it also bears traces of all the music that has formed me.

That is what I mean when I say my music belongs to me, but not entirely. Its expression is personal, yet it draws on a collective memory and a musical heritage larger than myself. Perhaps composing is also about transforming what we have received into something that feels like our own.

“My music belongs to me, but it carries the memory of the music that came before it.”

7. How do you move from improvisation to composition?

I like to describe my way of composing as a thousand-piece puzzle. At first, all the pieces are there, but scattered. That is what happens when I begin creating: musical ideas arrive instinctively, sometimes in no particular order.

Then comes the stage of construction. I have to bring the elements together, find their place, organise the ideas, and work on the writing and orchestration. In music for the screen, this process also responds to the director's intentions.

I believe my role is, above all, to serve the image and the director's vision. Intuition gives me the pieces of the puzzle; composition lets me put them together.

“Instinct gives birth to the music, but dialogue with the image and the director gives it its final shape.”

“Intuition gives me the pieces of the puzzle. Composition lets me put them together.”

8. How important is improvisation to you?

What I love most about improvisation is discovery. I do not necessarily have a complete vision of the music when I begin to play. I discover it gradually as the elements take shape.

My improvisation is not a display of virtuosity. It is a way of following the image as closely as possible, responding to what it tells, with instinct and openness.

I distinguish between improvisation built in the mind beforehand and a more instinctive kind. In the latter approach, which I favour when accompanying images, the musical structure is not necessarily decided in advance. I do not want to impose a pre-established piano structure on the image. Instead, I let myself be guided by what I discover. Improvisation then becomes a form of listening, attention and ongoing dialogue with the image.

9. Could you tell us about your show *Fred fait son cinéma*?

Fred fait son cinéma is a show in which I improvise at the piano to silent films I have never seen before. I particularly enjoy this experience because it brings me back to the freedom at the heart of my artistic approach.

I discover the images as the music takes shape in the moment, following the situations, characters and events. My experience on stage, especially with theatre companies, has taught me that every performance is unique. Even when a play is rehearsed, there is always an element of unpredictability. The same is true of a concert: no two performances are exactly alike.

I like being drawn into the unknown, not to put myself in danger deliberately, but because that element of surprise makes me more responsive, more inventive and more alive musically. In *Fred fait son cinéma*, the creative dialogue takes place mainly between the screen and me. The audience is there and brings something to every performance, but the image itself remains the source of my improvisation.

“What I love about improvisation is discovering a story at the same time as I invent its music.”

10. What connects your film work with your instrumental compositions?

The first connection is naturally the piano. It is my instrument and my starting point, the place where I develop my first musical ideas. I also love orchestration. I do not think only in terms of the piano; I enjoy imagining instrumental colours and the possibilities of the orchestra.

That range is particularly important in music for the screen. One scene may call for the simplicity of a solo piano, while another may need a fuller orchestral score.

I also enjoy working with musicians from different cultural backgrounds. Each encounter brings a different sensibility, a new sound colour and another way of thinking about music. These exchanges enrich my musical language and expand the possibilities for creation.

11. If you had to describe your musical world through an image, what would it be?

I would choose a starry sky. To me, the stars evoke mystery, vastness and the curiosity that leads us to imagine what might exist beyond what we know. They also suggest a sense of sharing: the awareness that we all belong to something much larger than ourselves.

And then there is the colour blue, the deep blue of the sky, to which I feel particularly attached. It reflects an intimate part of my sensibility, my imagination and my dreamlike nature.

“My music is a starry sky: mysterious and immense, with every note a star. A little dream, a little curiosity, an endless sharing, in a deep blue hue.”