

RFS-FJ009: The Salieri Syndrome

Hideeho all you boys and girls out there podcast land. Be sure to stick around after the credits as there's a preview to an upcoming episode you won't want to miss.

Also, I want to give huge thanks as always to song freedom for supporting this show. The variety of music they have on their site runs the gamut. Indie bands. Alt rock. Hip hop. Cinematic scores. And if you want to *legally* license popular music for personal event work from artists like Imagine Dragons, the Afters, One Republic, or oldies but goodies like Eta James, bob dylan, the temptations or frank sinatra, song freedom is pretty much the only game in town. Go to songfreedom.com/radio and use the offer code radio to unlock a standard gold level license worth \$30.

Now, on with the show.

[ddfm fj intro]

[DDfm ident]

All throughout most of my junior high school years I was one of those kids situated pretty well low on the popularity totem pole. I'd play Dungeons & Dragons during lunch with my like three other friends. I was still the charming and outgoing guy you know now, I just never could break through that awkward "glass ceiling" reserved for jocks, cheerleaders and class officers. But there was one talent I had that would change all of that. Break dancing.

[music queue]

You heard me right. When I moved up to high school, my life literally took a 180 degree turn due to that hot dance craze of the 80s. Movies like Beat Street and Breakin' were huge at the box office. And I just happened to be pretty darn good at it. I can honestly say it changed the direction of my life.

It was a Friday morning, the day of the annual high school talent show, my buddy Chris Spencer and I brought the house down with our self-choreographed routine to Midnight Star's "Freakazoid." Freakazoids was one of those songs that when it came on during a high school dance, everyone would freak out (no pun intended) and go crazy.

So when that opening line came on, and we moonwalked onto that stage, the high school audience when ape Sh**.

[freakazoid opening]

I was a star.

[music queue]

No one would ever look at me the same again. Actually, people saw me for the first time. In the immortal words of another Dawson, Jack Dawson to be exact

[kind of the world clip from Titanic]

I was “King of the World”.

music beat

So when my wrestling team traveled to an inner city tournament later that day, I was ready to bring on my A-game during the breaks between matches. We all went out to the school quad where the tourney was held, boom boxes and cardboard mats in hand. I was ready for some serious b-boy battling.

That is where reality gave me a real kick in the ass.

You see, I attended a high school in the suburbs of Los Angeles that at the time was, how shall we say, rather, um white. So, while the ability to do 4 or 5 revolutions spinning on my back at *my* high school was enough to garner a standing ovation, once I went out against b-boys from more, um, culturally diverse environment (i.e. black) I saw what real break dancing was. My abilities paled in comparison to the dudes I saw at the wrestling tournament. Coin drops. Windmills, Head spins. These cats were the real deal. I was just a squirrel trying to get a nut.

I had to face the truth. I was just a mediocre break dancer at best.

[music queue]

Have you ever felt like that? Where in one part of your life, you feel like a superstar because everyone praises your work and skills. Then you go out in the “real world” and feel like a loser. Like you have no business even trying. I suspect that if you’re any kind of artist, at some point you have felt that. Maybe, just maybe, you feel like that now.

Today we’re going to look at this quandary and hopefully, you’ll hear something that will give you some solace.

My name is Ron Dawson, and this is Radio Film School: A filmmaker’s journey.

[Amadeus clip]

I love that movie! I could watch it over and over. It’s “Amadeus”, Milos Forman’s 1984 adaptation of the famous stage play of the same name. It was the movie that won F. Murray

Abraham his first Oscar as best actor in a supporting role for his portrayal of the Italian composer Antonio Salieri.

In this scene Salieri, nearing the end of his life, is an old man who's been moved to an insane ward after having attempted suicide over his guilt in what he believes is the murder of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. A priest has come to hear his confession.

The movie is funny and poignant as it delves into Salieri's life as the court composer for Vienna and a contemporary of the aforementioned genius. Before the appearance of the young, crass and irreverent Mozart, Salieri was "king of the world", as it were. He was the man. The shizit. The most revered and respected composer in the land.

But once he heard Mozart's music and witnessed first hand his sheer talent, Salieri was wounded to the core of his soul. He had a self-actualization that he was nothing, and his art paled in comparison to that of the young, vile, but empirically brilliant Mozart. Salieri actually curses God. Blaming Him for putting this desire in his heart, but not giving him the talent to match.

At the end of the movie, after having told this emotionally exhausting story to that priest we heard in that opening scene, he tells the priest not to worry. That he understands him. That he, Salieri, is the patron saint of mediocre people everywhere.

As a filmmaker, I have definitely felt like Salieri. Too frequently comparing myself to other "Mozarts" and feeling profoundly...mediocre.

But I wondered: am I the only one who has felt that way? Is it possible that even the filmmakers I put on such a high pedestal also feel like Salieri?

[3952 ~ 4036] ok, I'll start

That's Chris Fenner. Last summer I spoke via skype with Chris and two other filmmakers from Atlanta who all do Amazing work. You may remember Chris from the very first Short Ends episode stating he didn't feel like he could justify calling himself a filmmaker; the other two filmmakers were Dan Duncan, a documentary filmmaker and host of the ForthDistrict podcasts; and Isaac Deitz, a music video filmmaker for such artists as Grammy award winning rapper Lecrae.

I spoke to them about Salieri and asked if they've ever felt like him.

[4054 - 4250]

[4305 - 4312]

That's Dan.

[4312 - 4514 - may need to edit down]

[4517 -4527]

That's Isaac.

[4527 - 4804]

[music beat]

There are links to some of their work in the show notes and blog post for this episode. You'll see for yourself how talented they are. So in listening to Dan, Chris and Isaac, I can't help but think of the proverbial "grass is always greener" mindset. Isn't it so easy for us to look at other filmmakers, other photographers, other artists in our field and think, "Man, they've made it. They got the midas touch." Then when comparing to our lives, we feel like we...suck.

But I've done enough of these interviews over the years to know that is not the case. You never know what that filmmaker you admire so much is dealing with. When we return after the break, be prepared for some eye-opening perspective.

[music beat]

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Sponsor Segment

When I first launched this show, I promised you that these sponsor segments would be educational and/or entertaining. I don't think I've done a great job living up to that promise. Well, it's time to make amends.

Since Song Freedom is a sponsor, it only make sense that any educational aspect be related to music. So over the next few episodes of the main show, I want to share some tips on picking music for your productions.

Now, the skill level of my listeners is a wide range, so apologies if for some of you this sounds basic. But my first tip in picking music for your productions is tie the music to your story. Let me 'splain.

Think about what a movie or television show composer does when making a score. They're creating a soundtrack that takes the viewer on a journey just as much as the visuals do. I recently heard an interview on the Slashfilmcast where host David Chen was interviewing Dominic Lewis, the composer for the Amazon original series, Man in the High Castle. Lewis mentioned that before writing any music, he read all the scripts and began watching the episodes as they were completed. He became intimately connected to the stories and the characters.

Sometimes I think filmmakers just try to find music that "sounds good." Or worse, they'll pick a type of music that is popular, without any regard if that music really fits 1) the tone and story of the video or 2) the audience to which that video is targeted.

Know your story, your subject matter and your characters well enough that the music you pick feels like it was scored specifically for that video. But keep your audience in mind too. Let's say you're doing a fundraising video for an inner city school's music and dance program. Your first instinct may be to use a cool break dancing hip hop beat. But let's say the video is being played at a black tie affair attended by a bunch of rich, old white people. In such a case, you may want to go with Mozart over Macklemore.

Of course, you can apply these tips to whatever resource you use. But, if you head on over to songfreedom.com/radio and use offer code radio, you'll get a free, standard gold level license worth \$30. Get your free song today. We thank Song Freedom for their support.

[music beat](#)

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[\[Bradon's instagram comment - 2500 - 2527\]](#)

That's Brandon McCormick. If you're a regular listener to the show, you already know how much I admire Brandon's thoughts and eloquence when it comes to topics like this. He's *a/so* based in Atlanta and runs Whitestone Motion Pictures. Last summer they had recently wrapped shooting a special for the History Channel about the mystery of the pilgrim Colony at Roanoke.

When you look at the production value of Whitestone's work, their number of Vimeo views, and the fact that they're doing work for The History Channel, you can't help but look at their grass and say, "Damnnnnn!. That is one impressive shade of green." But Brandon was quick to share

that 1) no matter who you are, making a living at this gig is hard and 2) even filmmakers like Brandon often feel like... they suck.

[2532 - 2628]

music beat

[2628 - 2825]

music beat

[3009 - 3021] those chapters are so short

music beat

[4038 - 4158] there's no there

As morbid and morose as this may sound, we as human beings, broken, beaten and infallible human beings, when we see other people dealing with the same issues, we somehow feel...better. Here's Brandon again.

[5338 - 5420] ton of people in same spot

[5620 - 5632] at least i'm in good company

music beat

In our quest to be like the Mozart's in our lives, we sometimes get caught in the trap of putting on airs. Or creating art that is not truly from the heart. Now, I'm not talking about doing client work that sucks the life out of you. We've all been there, done that to pay the bills.

No, I'm talking about when we try to produce or create something that is not authentically us just because we think "It's popular." Or worse, when we cower in the shadows, too afraid to share our work at all.

But my friend and colleague Ryan Koral of Epic Motion and Tell Agency has something to say about that. Epic Motion and Tell are award winning wedding and commercial video production companies respectively, located in the Detroit area. Ryan is one of these very thoughtful, pondering filmmakers with a refreshing outlook and perspective. Here's what Ryan had to say.

[4412 - 4515]

music beat

Don't do the world a disservice. Don't be selfish with your art.

But sometimes you feel like your stuff just ain't good enough. That no one will appreciate it. I get it. But on last week's Short Ends episode "The Binge", I had a wonderful discussion with my friend Yolanda Cochran. She recently ended a 6-month consulting gig at Netflix, and before that she was head of physical production at Alcon Entertainment, where she worked for over a decade. There was a part of my conversation with her that I think is apropos for this discussion.

[yolanda 3536 - 3720]

music beat

I started this episode telling the story of how I wowed my high school audience with my rather mediocre breakdancing. I lamented the fact that when faced with the dexterous capabilities of the kids from the other schools, I found my own street dance skills woefully lacking.

But ironically enough, the secret and the answer to my predicament, to *our* predicament as artists, that is, this overwhelming feeling of mediocrity in the face of others whose work we deem so much superior to ours, the secret lies in that high school auditorium, and was conveniently echoed by Yolanda.

I *had* an audience for my dancing. An audience that thoroughly enjoyed my dancing and the style I brought to the stage. They weren't concerned with whether or not I could do a coin drop or a windmill. They didn't care that I could only make 5 revolutions on my back as opposed to fifteen. They loved my performance. They appreciated my skill. The only one who had a problem with my dancing... was me.

May you find the fortitude to realize that there is an audience for your work, and comparing yourself to others will only lead you to disillusionment and despair. I'm not saying you're going to slit your throat or anything. But, you *will* dramatically diminish your enjoyment and fulfillment of your craft. And worse, you may deprive an audience out there who needs to hear what you have to say, or see what you have to show.

So all my fellow filmmaking Freak a zoids... please report to the dance floor!

music beat

Stay tuned to hear about a special challenge and stay after the credits for a preview of a very important episode of the show.

music beat

Radio Film School is a production of daredreamer fm. This episode was produced and written by me with production help from producer Chris Huslage.

Music was curated from freemusicarchive.org, Kevin Macleod's incomepteh.com and songfreedom. Links to tracks and artists are in the show notes.

Speaking of songfreedom, they have been a huge supporter of the show. Be sure to go to songfreedom.com/radio and use that offer code radio to unlock a standard gold level music license worth \$30.

And *you* can be a huge supporter of the show if you go to itunes, subscribe and leave us a rating a review. When you subscribe it helps us get found by other filmmakers looking for a different kind of podcast. And your ratings and reviews help our rankings as well. If you haven't done so already, it would really mean a lot to me if you'd do that.

This issue of comparing yourself to others and feeling mediocre because of it is something that is profoundly pervasive in the creative community. I would like to issue you a challenge. I call it the comparison kills creativity challenge. For the next month, don't look at the work of any other artist within your same field. If you're a genre filmmaker, don't look at any other genre films from your contemporaries. If you're a wedding filmmaker, abstain from lurking on the Vimeo page of Ray Roman, Kevin Shahinian or some other wedding filmmaker whose work you admire. If you make documentaries, only watch narratives. And this challenge isn't just for filmmakers. Whatever kind of artist you are, refrain from looking at, listening to, or reading the work of your fellow creatives that do the same kind of art. Try it for 30 days. Find inspiration in other art forms. In nature. In science. And if you discover something interesting about yourself or your work during this time, leave us a voicemail at daredreamer.fm and we may share your message on the show.

Oh, by the way. What I lacked as a break dancer in high school, I more than made up for as a swing dancer during the 90s. But that's a story for another episode.

Thanks again for listening, and remember, if the story sucks, I don't care what you shot it with or cut it on. Peace out.

music beat

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Previously on Radio Film School

[late nite diary]

[finally...]

[afraid to tell you patrick]

For some time now I've been documenting the progress of my short documentary film "Mixed in America." On the last Filmmakers journey episode "Bridging the Gap" I gave you an update on the film's progress and had some great input from other filmmakers.

But shortly after the show aired, I got a text from my buddy and frequent show guest, JD. He had just listened to the episode and felt compelled to talk to me about the film's progress. So I gave him a call on his phone.

[JD phone call about MIA 22 - 47]

I felt like this was going to be great fodder for the podcast, so I asked JD if I could call him on skype for the show.

[jd phone call about mia 540 to 555]

The following week I had a long conversation with JD about my progress on the film, and he said some things that really kicked me in the butt. Probably more so than any other advice I've had.

[jd mia follow up 2 - 240 to 340]

In a few weeks we'll air this special episode and update on mixed in america. Will JD's words be enough for me to finally get this 5 year project done? Stay tuned to find out.

[jd mia follow up 1 - 1714 - 1732]

Music Used

1. [The Great Break Off by The Insider](#)
 2. [Bach Prelude in C by Man Woman Child](#)
 3. [Lacrimosa \(Mozart\) by Troy Holder](#)
 4. Please Listen Carefully by Jahzzar
 5. [Sonata #13 by Daniel Veesev](#)
 6. [J.S. Bach's Prelude in C by Kevin Macleod](#)
 7. [Egmont Overture - Finale](#)
 8. [Troy Holder - Ode to Joy](#)
-
- [Mozart's Eine Kleine by Advent Chamber](#)
 - [Beethoven's Egmont Overture by Kevin Macleod](#)
 - [Bach Prelude No. 6 by The Use](#)
 - [Turkish Eternity \(Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 11\) by Greg Reinfeld](#)

Venn Diagram - Art

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Bps4LZMCUAErykL.jpg>