

A STAR IS BORN:

The Making of a Soundtrack

By Woodie Stevenson

The film soundtrack process is fascinating, particularly when it is an act of passion as is the case in the recent remake of *A Star Is Born*. The project is the work of Bradley Cooper who produced and directed the film. Cooper developed the film's script and characters for over two and a half years, starting in March 2015. Lady Gaga officially joined the film in 2016, when the film was green lighted. But they were not the first to touch this story.

Cooper and Gaga's version is the fourth remake of the film. The previous version starred Barbara Streisand & Kris Kristofferson (1976). That same year, James Taylor and Carly Simon were also offered the lead roles. In 1954, the first musical version, starred Judy Garland and James Mason. The 1937 version was not a musical; and the lead female role was played by a farm girl. Between 1976 and 2011 it has been reported, according to EW and Rolling Stone, stars Jennifer Lopez, John Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio and Clint Eastwood were all offered roles by Warner Bros. In 2012 Clint Eastwood, as Director, was considering both Esperanza Spaulding and Beyonce. Warner Bros wooed Bradley Cooper as Director, and Beyoncé dropped the project due to pregnancy. (Variety)

Bradley developed the film and its soundtrack over a two-and-a-half-year period. He watched previous versions of the film to set goals and hone character development; ensuring he paid homage to past versions. Cooper is a fine guitar player and a surprisingly good singer in his own right while Gaga was widely regarded as a qualified actress by the time of her 2016 commitment. Her role in FX's *American Horror Story: Hotel* won a Golden Globe. Cooper met Gaga at Sean Parker's backyard in L.A. at a cancer benefit and saw Gaga performing. He was spellbound. "She had her hair slicked back, and she sang "La Vie en Rose", (WMagazine)

Inspirations for Cooper's character are reported to be singers/ musicians Neil Young, Jim Morrison, Eddie Vedder and Waylon Jennings. Jackson Maine, Cooper's character is a rock musician, and alcohol user. His songs needed to be haunting and contemplative. Ally played by Lady Gaga is discovering a new world of music, love and rebirth. Composers hit the mark by emphasizing the key components of the character's style, vulnerabilities and strengths. These character's songs are about love, connection, rebirth, hope and despair.

Songs are recorded live at Gaga's insistence. This technique was also used on films such as *La La Land* and *Les Misérables*. One feels that they are at a concert rather than a movie. Cooper reports that it is his initiative to film from the musician's POV not the concert goer's. The Director's, Cooper and Music Director Lukas, created a film with a firm vision set in the musician's perspective. This makes for a unique, effective and clear film statement. As the film's soundtrack is a significant focus the decision was made to use Dolby Atmos sound. Dolby Atmos is now available for home machines. Dolby Cinema sound is available in 121 theaters nationwide.

In order to keep the music a secret when filming concert scenes recording engineer mixer (Steve Morrow-*La la Land*, *Little Miss Sunshine*) placed a microphone on the performer, they heard the music in their ear to sing acapella to the crowd. Two to ten tracks are the norm with most films and sound mixing. A massive 61 separate tracks were sent to the sound editor at the end of each

day's filming. The sound team set microphones on each instrument, the space, and the vocals. This way each venue would have a unique true to life sound. Music was recorded at actual concerts such as Stage Coach (part of Coachella) a 45-50k guest attendance and Glastonbury (110,000k concert goers where they were given 3 minutes to film. They had just 5 minutes of filming between the planned lineup. They used the concert sound board, significantly reducing the cost while capturing sound that was actual and realistic. Traditionally, "stars" are filmed and then studio recording musicians fill in for over dubs. Cooper and Gaga are responsible and stellar in their singing performances. Gone are the days of studio fill-ins. The lip-synced scandal of Milli Vanilli at the MTV Live performance of 1989, live performances are crucial and, now considered the norm.

There is no shortage of talent in this lineup to create original material. Instead of reusing the 1976 musical works, all the new material was created based on each character in the script. Cooper collaborated on songs for his rock star deity persona Jackson Maine, with various musicians including Lukas Nelson (stars as a band member in film/ musician and son of Willy Nelson), Jason Isbell (Drive-By Truckers "Children of Children", Mark Ronson producer/writer Gaga, Bruno Mars "Uptown Funk", Taylor Swift, Amy Winehouse), Diane Warren (renowned movie anthem writer), Mike Snow and co-band member Andrew Wyatt (producer/writer Liam Gallagher, Carl Barat, Lorde, Bruno Mars), Julia Michaels (Justin Bieber's "Sorry"), and Justin Tranter (writer Britney Spears, Gwen Stefani, Linkin Park, Kelly Clarkson, Selena Gomez, Justin Bieber, DNCE, Kesha, In Real Life, 5 Seconds of Summer, and Fall Out Boy).

For this project Gaga worked with DJ White Shadow (Gaga's albums "Born This Way" and "Artpop"), Hillary Lindsey a long-time associate (Carrie Underwood's "Jesus, Take the Wheel" and for Little Big Town's "Girl Crush, Jason Aldean, Miley Cyrus, Gaga, Lady Antebellum).

Music Director Lukas Nelsen first met Cooper at the 2016 Desert Trip music festival in Indio CA. Lukas is a known respected musician and band member in his own right. His father is renowned star Willy Nelson. The two met again at Bradley's home. Cooper played a recording of himself and Gaga singing Creedence Clearwater Revival "Midnight Special". Lukas reportedly was pleasantly surprised with what he heard. They met more often to develop the soundtrack goals and song ideas. "We'd talk about the soul of performance," remembers Nelson, "and what it really means to connect to an audience; how to connect the way the heroes he was trying to emulate did." (Esquire) Nelsen, Cooper and Lady Gaga worked closely to hammer out the key tracks of the film and soundtrack. They brought in writers such as Jason Isbell and super-producer Dave Cobb. The only song not written specifically is Edith Piaf's anthem "La Vie En Rose" sung by Ally in a club and "Somewhere Over The Rainbow". (W Magazine)

The soundtrack is a work of passion, dedication, and is a clarity of vision. In creating original music, Cooper worked with top musicians, producers and a vocal coach well known to the industry. Cooper said "the music really becomes a character in the movie. There is no lyric that's ever, in any point of the movie, that doesn't have exactly to do with where one of them is or hopes to be or regrets being. That was our launching pad and then it was just about discovering what songs fit in the right places." (EW)

Further writing was done in LA at the Village Studios in 2017. A "writing camp" was hosted. Invitees were Lori McKenna, Natalie Hemby, Hillary Lindsey, and Aaron Ratiere. They worked primarily on songs for Gaga's character Ally. Gaga told the group about her character, she sat at the piano and played "Shallow". McKenna says Gaga was trusting of the team and took their guidance. "There was a moment where we all got choked up," says McKenna. "Whenever that happens when writing a song, it's gotta stay!" (Esquire)

"There were moments when [Gaga] would start crying and I'm like, is this good crying or bad crying?!" Hemby remembers thinking, panicked. "Good crying, right?!" (Esquire)

In this scene Bradley explains his vision for guiding Ally, Lady Gaga in an early scene of the film.

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/movies/100000006145615/a-star-is-born-clip-bradley-cooper.html?action=click&module=RelatedCoverage&pgtype=Article®ion=Footer>

This soundtrack collaboration is presently at no.#1 one on the Billboard 200 chart and has sold 162,000 to date. It successfully paints the style and essence of each character's personality. Not only do the songs tell the film story, for they stand on their own merit. They accessorize, embellish and define. New colors are drawn. This music successfully translates the scripted work and presents the message of new life, rebirth, new love & loss, longing and the struggles of life.

This soundtrack reaches into of our senses and will live on into a new generation.

Track List:

- * Black Eyes: Written by Bradley Cooper and Lukas Nelson, performed by Bradley Cooper
- * La Vie end Rose: Written by Louiguy and Edith Piaff, performed by Lady Gaga
- * Maybe it's Time: Written by Jason Isbell, performed by Bradley Cooper
- * Out of Time: Written by Bradley Cooper and Lukas Nelson, performed by Bradley Cooper
- * Alibi: Written by Lady Gaga, Bradley Cooper, and Lukas Nelson, performed by Bradley Cooper
- * Shallow: Written by Lady Gaga, Mark Ronson, Anthony Rossomando, and Andrew Wyatt, performed by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper
- * Music to my Eyes: Written by Lady Gaga and Lukas Nelson, performed by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper
- * Diggin' My Grave: Written by Paul Kennerley, performed by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper
- * Always Remember Us This Way: Written by Lady Gaga, Natalie Hemby, Hillary Lindsey, Lori McKenna, performed by Lady Gaga
- * Look What I Found: Written by Lady Gaga, Lukas Nelson, Mark Nilan Jr., Nick Monson, Paul Blair, Aaron Ratiere, performed by Lady Gaga
- * Heal Me: Written by Lady Gaga, Mark Nilan Jr., Nick Monson, Paul Blair, Julia Michaels, Justin Tranter, performed by Lady Gaga
- * I Don't Know What Love Is: Written by Lady Gaga and Lukas Nelson, performed by Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper
- * Is That Alright?: Written by Lady Gaga, Mark Nilan Jr., Nick Monson, Paul Blair, Aaron Ratiere, performed by Lady Gaga

- * Why Did You Do That?: Written by Lady Gaga, Mark Nilan Jr., Nick Monson, Paul Blair, Diane Warren, performed by Lady Gaga
- * Hair, Body, Face: Written by Lady Gaga, Mark Nilan Jr., Nick Monson, Paul Blair, performed by Lady Gaga
- * Before I Cry: Written by Lady Gaga, Mark Nilan Jr., Nick Monson, Paul Blair, performed by Lady Gaga
- * Too Far Gone: Written by Bradley Cooper and Lukas Nelson, performed by Bradley Cooper
- * I'll Never Love Again (film version): Written by Lady Gaga, Natalie Hemby, Hillary Lindsey, Aaron Ratiere, performed by Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga
- * I'll Never Love Again (extended version): Written by Lady Gaga, Natalie Hemby, Hillary Lindsey, Aaron Ratiere, performed by Lady Gaga

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Madison Vain, Esquire. Addiction, Tears, and Neil Young: Inside the Making of the A Star Is Born Soundtrack. Oct 4, 2018

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Joey Nolfi. EW. Lady Gaga, Bradley Cooper debut new songs in first A Star Is Born trailer. April 18, 2017T

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