

Composer Sharon Farber On Hypnotic Hitchcock Influences for Her Score of 'Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power'

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(Photo: Nina Menkes)



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Whether you agree or disagree with Nina Menkes' thesis of sexuality on camera in *Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power*, you cannot deny that you will never look at sexuality on camera the same way again. I felt like my eyes were opened to how directors subconsciously (or consciously) film women's bodies for the silver screen. How does lighting or editing favor a man versus a woman? How long does it linger? Backed by an epic score by Sharon Farber, *Brainwashed* leads us down a rabbit hole and teaches us how our ears and minds can connect with what we see on screen.

Was Menkes film trying to hypnotize me? Or, maybe, it was trying to wake me up. The first thing I noticed about Farber's score was how much it felt like a circle. There was a roundness to the score that kept coming back to inevitable dread and elation, and the composer told me how she wanted to draw us in.

"What is brainwashing? When someone, in a way, hypnotizes you to think in a certain way, you essentially become brainwashed to think a certain way. The hypnotization is there in the music to enhance that feeling. I used a lot of subtle percussion like the cello, the harp, or the vibraphone to create a magical or fantasy world. It makes us question if we are in a real world. What are we watching and what are we seeing? The circular motion is there because this cycle never ends. It repeats again and again and again. Until someone can come in and tell us that the king is naked, we don't pay attention to it."

A character can be in a position of power over another character in a story, but then a director might shoot a scene from that character's perspective and fall into the traps that Menkes' hits home. Farber had the same reaction to Menkes' material as I did, and it was something that we kept coming back to.

"I've never even questioned it until I scored this movie. It's so embedded in us—these images. We just take it as is, and we never question anything. We might say, 'This is too much,' but I don't think we ever sit and think about it in this much detail. A twelve year old girl today is using a filter to look better online, so what does a fifty year old woman need to do? It's so disturbing, and it's sad. How does that come off the screen and affect us in real life? It was totally fine for someone in the 70s to put their hand on someone."



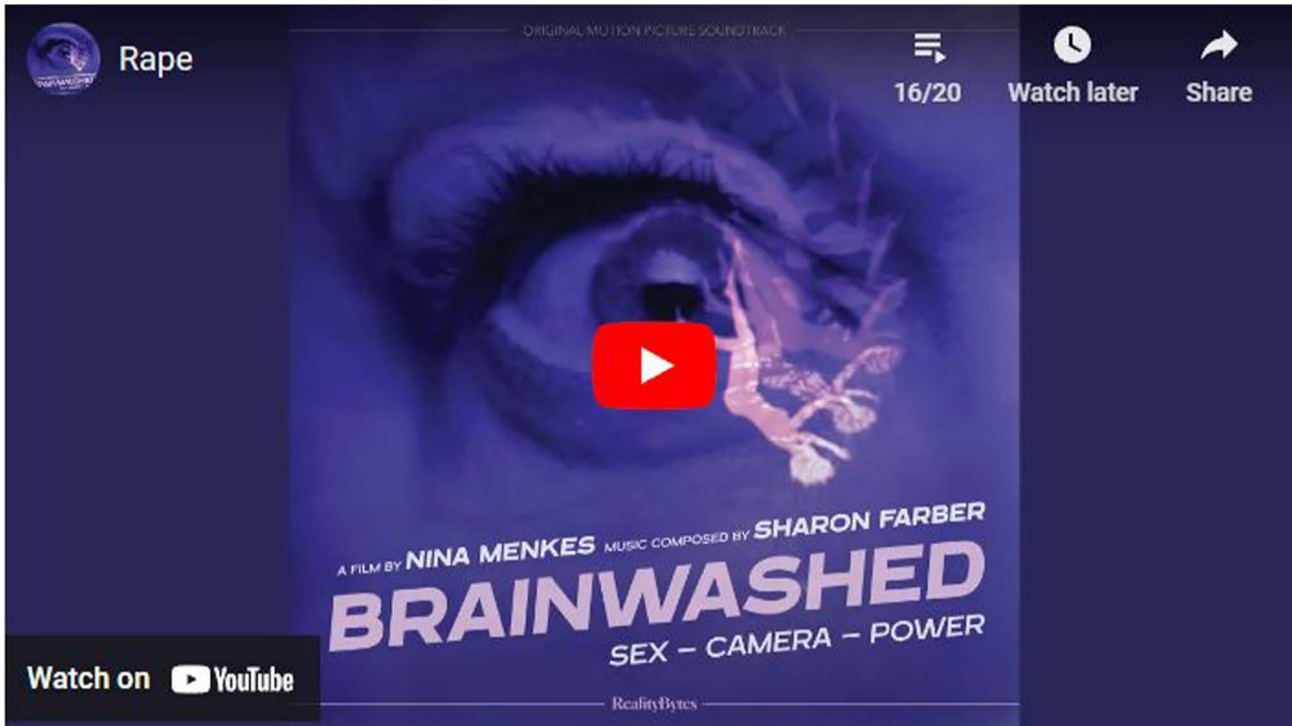
The main titles are so dreamy and they recall a Hitchcock film (Farber told me that Menkes used the music from *Vertigo* as a temp score) before a sinister feeling washes in on us. Farber was tasked in balancing that dreaminess with a constant undercurrent of darkness.

"All of a sudden you can feel that it's not happy because it's in [a] minor [key]. It's not in major. It's sending you to another reality, and it's very Hitchcock since Nina temped it with *Vertigo*. I use a lot a lot of the low strings and woodwinds below it. It starts softly, but when we go to the main titles, it feels like two motifs or ideas on top of each other. Nina used [that score as temp] because it is very haunting and very beautiful. As the story unfolds and we get to the harsh reality how these images contribute to our rape culture, then the music becomes darker and heavier. I used a lot of low brass to class with low woodwinds to create this mass sound. I wanted the sound to be thick like you couldn't breathe."

Something to note about Farber's score is how seamless it works between film clips and Menkes' staged analysis. Menkes could be talking about Buffalo '66 and then mention something about Blade Runner, but the music needed to be smoothed between all the jumping around. Farber had to put these puzzle pieces together by discovering the key from the original film.

"That was the hardest part. It couldn't pull us out of the story. I had to figure out the musical key that the clip was in—like G minor—and then make a transition from wherever I was into that key. But then there would be another clip and then another right after each other, and then the music from that clip would be in E flat minor or something. It was really a big puzzle to put all the

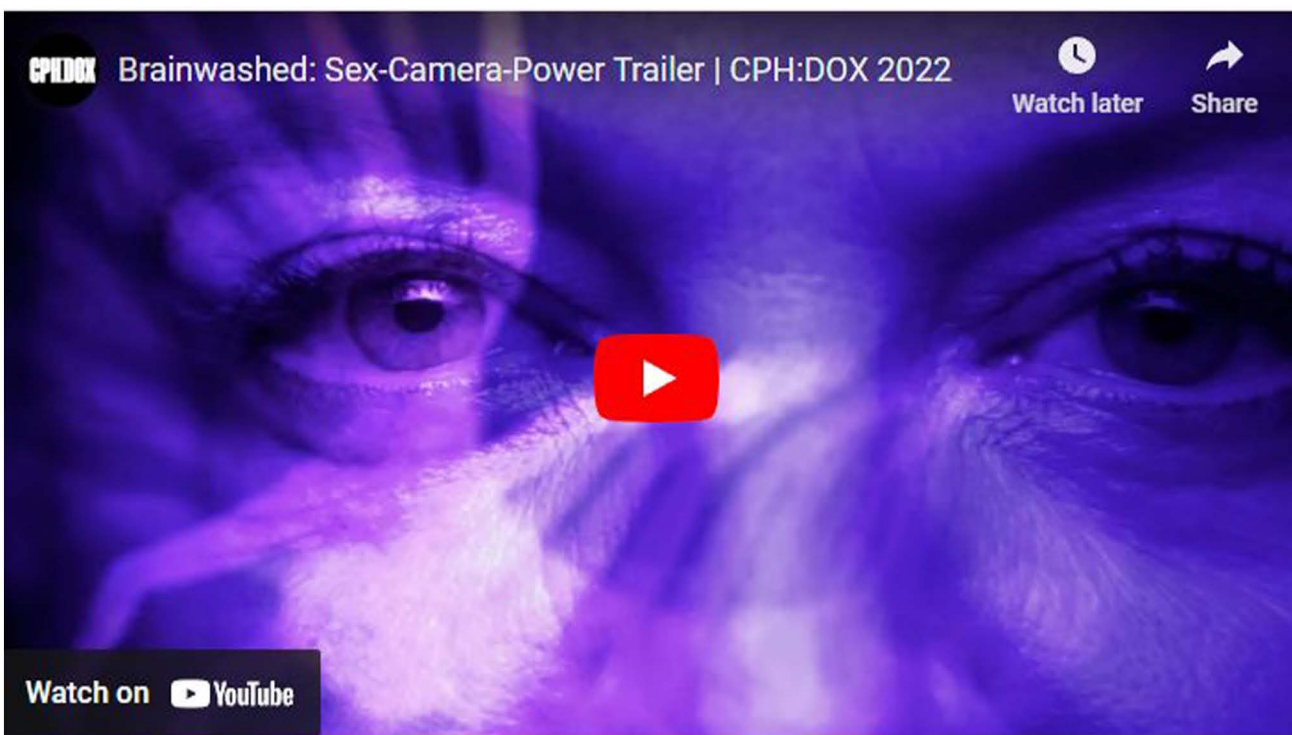
pieces together. If the clip didn't have any score, I would have to write something and plug it in there, but I had to keep in mind that modulation between the keys. It had to be glue to work on the subconscious of the viewer.”



The longest track of the film is titled, 'Rape,' and it segued towards the themes of the film. The music takes a noticeably darker turn, and it feels like a character disassociating from a heinous act. Those themes that Farber introduces early on—the swirling, almost whimsical circle—is slowed down. We instinctively feel that something is wrong.

“Nina said from the beginning, ‘Don’t give me Star Wars. Give me something real that I can work with.’ For me, composers love writing dark music, so it was something that made me feel like that I came up with the right idea. I put them together in a way that felt very raw. I wanted you to feel it to your core. Listening to that track, you need to feel unsettled. It feels like something is about to burst. It’s bubbling and bubbling, and we have been through this for so many years. Now it’s exploded, and we have to keep talking about it without fear.”

Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power *is in theaters now.*



Tags: ORIGINAL SCORE



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Joey is a writer currently living in Columbus, OH. He is a proud member of GALECA, Critics Choice, and HCA. He is a Rotten Tomatoes approved critic, and he has also appeared in Xtra Magazine. If you would like to talk to Joey about cheese, corgis, or Julianne Moore, follow him on Twitter or Instagram.