

Howard Audio strikes a chord with Soul Sisters

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For the third year in a row Adam Howard has had his name on big Cannes wins. Surely not a coincidence we thought... Then we saw his latest work on Chicken Licken's soulful campaign and discovered that he's responsible for both the original music and the final mix.

"Get Adam Howard on line 1!" We exclaimed. Of course, we don't have a 'line 1', but we do have Skype, which is where Adam gave us the body and soul of how this campaign came together and what's behind Howard Audio's Cannes winning-streak.



Cannes Lions Throwback

Not that you need reminding, but back in 2017 Howard Audio nabbed a Gold Cannes Lion for their work on Cadbury 'Pre-Joy'. Adam recalls: "We had to match the terrible sound that was on these pre-existing viral clips. To be given a brief to purposefully make bad sound was a first for me!" A year on and again Adam brought home some Cannes Lions metal, this time a Silver for his 'Hugh Masekela Tribute' in which he played the flugelhorn, Bra Hugh's preferred instrument. After only two takes in studio, Adam nailed the 45" performance, a beautiful ode to a true South African legend. And then this year, in one of the most difficult categories at Cannes, Film, competing against the best in the world, Adam proudly brought home a Silver and Bronze for Allan Gray's 'Father's Share'. In this spot, Adam composed all the original music as well as playing the featured solo, again on his trusty flugelhorn, all the way through.

2017: Cannes Gold Lion

2018: Cannes Silver Lion

2019: Cannes Silver & Bronze Lion

As if bringing home some Cannes goodness wasn't enough for 2019, Adam has composed the original music and also crafted the final mix on Chicken Licken's latest 'Soul Sisters' campaign. Directed by Greg Gray of Romance Films (Yes please!), each spot depicts a scene where a *sister* needs a sprinkling of encouragement, which is provided in the most hilariously joyful way by the trio of Soul Sisters who come to the rescue.

Claudi Potter, Creative Director at [Joe Public United](#), even gave the spots a Special Mention for iDidTht's [Best in Film Craft for June](#) 2019. *Claudi: "The comic timing on this particular spot is really great, and I love the way the music and the performances work together – not just to get a smile from the audience, but to make us connect with this father and son in a more emotional way."*

After meeting with Adam we soon realised that being responsible for sound on commercials like these is way more complex than we thought. For starters there was no flugelhorn in sight! Howard Audio first had to pitch against two other audio companies, this entailed creating one or two pilots of how Adam envisioned the music. "The brief was to create Motown-esque original music, think 'The Supremes', lots of Southern soul." Adams excitedly continues: "I was awarded the job on the two pilots I presented and for this I used professional session singers, the kind you might see at a Motown show. Then we decided that the music needed a more 'funk soul' feel, especially because of the kind of lyrics being sung and the characters. Using that era as inspiration, and the funky rhythm and recording techniques, I gave them another two or three pilot options of where we could take this." Initially, like most Chicken Licken ads, 'Soul Sisters' was set to be a long-format commercial, the kind we've come to expect from the brand. Early on in the process though, Adam noticed that Greg was already toying with the idea of creating individual nuggets of soulful joy.

The three musical theatre actors, who didn't know each other from a bar of soap prior to this project, were of course perfectly cast by Greg. Adam weighs in: "In the back of my mind I thought 'If it doesn't work on set with these actors singing, I could get session singers in.' You know just in case." But when Adam saw the callback videos he realised that the actors were: "Amazing wow, just jeez!"



Greg then based his shot list around the music Adam had created in studio weeks before. "This was pretty intimidating at first, because you're working with an industry legend, you have to deliver!" says Adam. "What I really admired was that everyone knew how reliant on music these spots were." A choreographer was then called in to work with the actors on the delivery of every single line, because even the spoken dialogue had a musicality to it. The team then spent two full days in studio together, crafting each scene until everyone was happy, and the actors could then go away and do some more rehearsals.

What was pretty unusual is that Adam was invited on set with Greg for the entire shoot, in case Greg needed to consult Adam about any musical changes, truly showing the collaborative nature of this project. Although the actors were mic'ed up during the shoot, the prerecorded studio music was used which the actors were lip-syncing to during the shoot. Adam, who was affectionately known as the '4th Soul Sister' on set, adds: "I was in awe of the way Greg worked, the way he thinks about things, and you can just see he is always thinking about visuals, the same way I am always thinking about music."



Once everything was recorded and shot it all went back to Adam in studio where he got to make a good track sound even better.

iDidTht: How many musicians did you use on the Soul Sister music?

Adam: About nine session musicians which consisted of a trumpet, trombone, sax, two guitar players, bass, piano, organ, electric piano and our three singers.

iDidTht: Jeepers, that's a whole concert. How long does something like that take?

Adam: The entire process took about two-and-a-half months. Once production is done it then comes back to me for final mix, which takes about two full days. That's when you craft every little sound from a clock clicking and the ambient noises of the changing room to the reverb in the swimming pool scene for the 'Queen of Chlorine'. Greg was part of that process as well. It was definitely the most collaborative project I've been a part of in a commercial and that just shows that everyone was on the same wavelength from the very word go.

iDidTht: What were some of your highlights working on this project?

Adam: Seeing Greg and our DOP, Paul Gilpin, at work. All those underwater shots were done by Paul in his underwater gear. I'll be honest I would have been gutted if I didn't get this gig. It was so incredible working with a top creative team like Joe Public United, Di Cole and her whole amazing team, Greg Grey and Helena Woodfine, Romance Films, Ricky Boyd...

At this point Adam continued to name literally everyone who worked on this project and how wonderful they each were, and although we totally agree, in the interest of word count, please refer to the bottom of the page for all the sexy credits.

iDidTht: What was client's reaction in the end?

Adam: Just working on the Chicken Licken brand you are reminded of all the legendary campaigns that have flighted before. But wow, I've never seen anything approved so quickly. When we were presenting the final edits the client still

thought they were going to see one long-format commercial, then the team revealed that they were going to show them six commercials instead of just one. The client absolutely loved it and immediately demanded that we play them again.

Bless your soul, Adam Howard! We can't wait to see more of Howard Audio's name in bright lights or, statistically more likely at this point, on more Cannes awards. Contact Howard Audio now for anything flugelhorn- or non-flugelhorn-related: adam@howardaudio.co.za.

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