

I wrote that

As part of composing outfit Music On Screen, Simon May has a list of credits as long as your arm, but his best known work is heard by more people in Britain every week than virtually any other tune. Gordon Masson meets the man who created the 'modern national anthem'.



Simon May recalls how he wrote the theme tune for *Eastenders*, the distinctive music that has started and finished each episode since the BBC TV soap first aired 23 years ago.

'Gerald Glaister, who I worked with on *Howards Way*, was a dear mentor to me and he introduced me to Tony Holland, who in turn put me in touch with Julia Smith.'

Holland and Smith were working on a project called 'E8' and invited May to TV centre. 'They showed me the cast list, as well as the set for Albert Square,' May remembers.

Simon's brief was for something distinctive and melodic. 'They wanted something with a hook so

that if people heard the theme tune when they were out in the garden, they'd come into the house to watch the show,' says May.

'Initially I wrote something I thought would match the programme. The producers hated every aspect of it, but that made it easy, because all I had to do was the polar opposite of what I'd written before.'

Effort number two hit the spot, with the composer tapping into the cosmopolitan mix of the show's characters to write an upbeat theme to balance the gritty story lines.

'I subliminally put in a sitar and gave it a bit of a West Indian feel,' he reveals. 'You won't hear that now,

but it was there. Then there's the whistle at the end that encapsulates

Mark Greenstreet.

'It's an English comedy about

they wanted a hook to make people come in from the garden

the warmth of the Cockney characters that we all meet in life.'

And the trademark drum beat? Simon confesses that came later.

'I usually write music as a longer piece and edit it down,' he explains. 'For *Eastenders* I'd written a Cockney section halfway through, but I didn't have a clue how to get back to the main tempo. Drummer Graham Broad started experimenting with drum fills and, just as the producers Tony and Julia arrived in the studio, he came up with the drum beat we all now know. They thought it was brilliant, so it stuck.'

Music On Screen is owned and run by three partners. 'Simon Lockyer is my second cousin,' says May. 'We've been writing together since he left the Royal Academy of Music 18 years ago. John Brant went to the Brit School and became part of the team six years ago.'

Publisher Jonathan Simon at Moncur Street Music is the 'fourth member of the team'. 'Jonathan is an amazing publisher,' says May. 'He somehow ekes royalties out from parts of the world we haven't even heard of.'

With two studios and their eclectic tastes, the trio pride themselves on being able to handle any brief presented to them — the latest of which is a Gallery Pictures movie, produced and directed by

house husbands, but it has a lovely subtext about human relationships,' enthuses May. 'It has the potential to be the next *Full Monty*.'

May's excitement about the project is palpable, not least because of 'a killer theme song' Music On Screen have written for the film.

'It's called *I'm Drowning* and we've got an 18-year-old guy who has delivered an amazing performance. I really believe it's going to be a big hit record,' continues May.

And with a knack for producing a catchy tune, May could once more be on the verge of something huge.



Eastenders Theme,
written by Simon May
Published by Sony/ATV Music
Publishing