

The Beat: This Week's Music Releases

by Jenny Haniver
Special to the Ripton Observer

**A Helical Romance, Book II: Helen -
Selections from the Motion Picture
Score**

*Composed by Farrel Harmon & Georgina
Spelvin
Performed by the HV Musical Ensemble*

This limited release comes at a perfect time, as hype begins to build for Book III, which has reportedly started principal photography as of this writing.

It may be hard to believe now, but audiences were skeptical at the announcement of a film adaptation *A Helical Romance*. The first thing anyone asked - myself included - was, "will it keep the format?" *AHR* made a name for itself not only by being a story about two unusual people who each secretly inhabits their own fantastic world, but also from its formal innovation. It's two individual stories, as distinct as their two protagonists. Either story was designed to stand on its own, though reading both of them creates an illuminating experience - filling in the gaps of what the other character experiences when we're not following them. Both stories contain scenes where the characters are together, though

those scenes often take on new meaning when we have the full picture. As we now know, the original story was told in two books, while the adaptation is being told in three.

A Helical Romance tells the story of Helen and Felix, and the ways their individual stories come together, then apart, then repeat - forming the eponymous helix. In Book I we saw Felix's story and all the places where that story intersects with Helen's. In Book II, it's Helen's turn.

Track one, **Opening Titles**, took me back to the theater as soon as I heard those piano notes (apparently the filmmakers call this the Helix Sequence, - a musical bridge between the two stories). The melancholy piano and choir accompany Helen, on a gloomy gray day, on her normal commute to work. But as the camera follows her - sometimes closely, sometimes from afar - we see indications she's anything but normal. Attentive viewers will catch this early (or see it on the second viewing like the rest of us), but as those first notes of synth bass erupt, and Helen's theme begins in earnest, it becomes clear that some of the people we're seeing are ghosts. As her theme carries us forward, the city seems to come alive around her and the camera swoops dizzily around, and sometimes for just a second the world goes all hazy and ashen - all while Helen

herself barely looks up, hardly registering the floating specters peering at her as she walks by.

Harmon & Spelvin have talked in interviews about Helen's personality and how it's reflected in the music that represents her. Her leitmotif, unusually, has no melody of its own; just a bass line and a rhythmic bell. (It was apparently designed to feel evocative but also to feel like it's one half of a greater whole.) But other themes and sounds emerge as well - clocks and other machinery, and clanging church bells. These elements evoke mortality, but they also evoke the torpor of Helen's life at the outset. This is especially clear in track two, **Helen Grieves, the Barista**. Here, we encounter clocklike rhythm as Helen, sleepwalking through her life, works behind the counter at a cafe. Soporific plucked strings and screechy distorted violas convey the alienation of her day-to-day. This scene will be familiar to anyone who's seen Book I, as Felix meets some people at this cafe. The two don't interact here at all, though there's a short "surfacing" effect in the music at the moment when Helen, glancing around the room, sees Felix for the first time. The music then transitions to a strange, sad foreboding, as a ghost - who knows Helen can perceive him - asks for her help, hiding his ulterior motives. (Trivia: Watch the cafe scene in Book I again - as they're leaving, Helen is visible

in the background, apparently talking to herself.)

This leads to the third track, **The Drive and the Chase**. Helen stares dreamily out a car window as the ghost's (still living) friends drive her to a meeting spot. Once again we hear bells, shaking her out of her reverie, and before long, she realizes she's been lied to and is in danger. Pounding drums accompany her frantic escape, and her pursuers as they give chase.

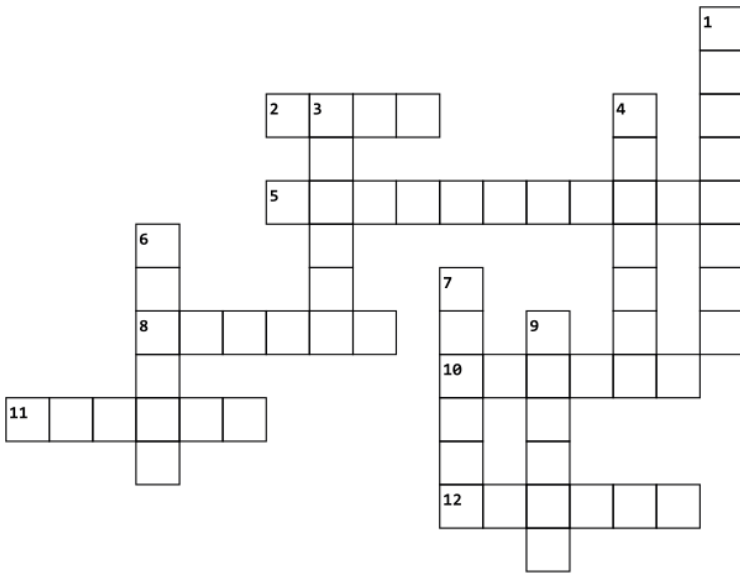
This album is only selections from the score, not the entire thing, so a little time passes between the chase and the next track, **The Sad Story of Helen Grieves**. It's clear what a leap of faith she's taking in finally telling the story of what happened to her, and how it left her with the ability to see and hear the spirits of the dead. A faraway, mournful guitar underscores the years of regret and loneliness she unloads in the course of this conversation, as a choir forms a compassionate counterpoint to the melody. Helen's fear of not being believed is nearly palpable here, and so is the enormity of what she's lost.

Not long after, Helen and Felix are separated once more, and the next time they meet, they're both in danger. In Book I, we learned Felix can travel through a world layered just beneath our own. Here, in Book II, we learn Helen can do this too.

But her world is very unlike Felix's - it's the realm of the dead, and their fractured memories. It's a world like our own, but different - she calls it the Echo. Helen's been avoiding entering it for a long time, but seeing no other way, she takes both herself and Felix into the Echo, where they get to safety by crossing a footbridge long

since torn down. After being ashamed and afraid of her own abilities for so long, there's a wonderful release in track five, **The World Opens Up**. With three knocks, Helen's world does indeed open up, and her theme reprises with triumphant fanfare and powerful percussion. This piece segues into the soft glow of a conversation

Today's Crossword



Across

2. More than four but less than six
5. Not yet a butterfly
8. A split
10. Least common
11. "Wild _____ Can't be Broken" (1991 film)
12. Favorable regard for others or self

Down

1. Current beneath the waves
3. Son of the labyrinth's architect
4. Phil who can feel it coming in the air tonight
6. British spelling for the way a mineral reflects light
7. To go all the way around
9. Make

between the two of them, and we hear the stirring of the *romance* part of the series title as they walk under the stars.

Soon thereafter, we learn not all ghosts are harmless, but Helen's newfound confidence in her power (and in herself) lead her to underestimate just how dangerous they can be. She's reunited with Felix, but her elation is cut short: a poltergeist hovers behind Felix, and waves a knife in the air, and hisses at her not to speak, or Felix will die. In Book I, without the knowledge of the malevolent spirit, it seemed like Helen was just mutely staring, eyes filled with tears, leading to a significant misunderstanding between the two. The ominous sixth track, **Don't Say a Word Now**, conveys her terror and anguish. Eventually, she runs, seeing no other way to save this person she's become so fond of. Her escape is accompanied by a quotation of the sorrowful guitar from earlier, among clattering percussion.

Later, they're reunited once again, leading to the iconic diner scene (where Helen confesses she has a soft spot for 80s power ballads). Not long after this, their hangout officially becomes a date, and the dreamy rush of the evening is captured in track seven, **I Could Just Kiss You**. Harmon & Spelvin have talked in interviews about the high-wire act of

making the music for this scene feel genuine while also evoking the general vibe of a power ballad. Honestly fascinating to see how this nearly identical scene plays so differently in Book I - most (but not all) of what's different is the music. This time, the church bell represents a time jump - the bell peals in what feels like the middle of a love scene, and suddenly we see Helen waking up the next morning. She's slept like a rock for the first time in years. And she wakes up alone.

In Book I we learned what happened while Helen slept, and what called Felix away. But she doesn't know about any of that, and after a series of misunderstandings (and outright lies) as we approach the end of Book II, Helen believes Felix has died - taken by the Monarch of the Dead. The last time she faced a loss of this magnitude, it broke her completely. But now, she is a changed person, and she's done running. She sets out to walk all the way into the Echo to cross into the land beyond and find the person she loves. In track eight, **Into the Dark**, we hear the motif of the Monarch with its ominous, distorted chants. But we also hear a defiant guitar: an awakening in Helen. With those three characteristic knocks, she plunges into the Echo, now in full control of her abilities. Fearless and determined, her catharsis is tangible as she effortlessly overpowers raging poltergeists and vicious spirits. The Helix

Sequence plays again, but faster this time, almost angry. It signifies the cusp of another transition, this time into Book III. At last, love has accomplished what sorrow could not, and Helen Grieves strides with purpose into the dark.

Other music releases this week include **2 Hot 2 Forgett** by **Lunexxtacy**, **Motherfucking Dracula** by the **Future Funx**, **Whird Ersei Hectus** by **QVIIMOVIVO**, and there's also **You Fools We Are Not Oasis But Frightsome Impostors** by **Oasis**, and **Novels: The Very Best of LOVE COMMAND**, by **LOVE COMMAND**.

- *Jenny Haniver*

Surveying report (cont'd from pg. 10): Ripton County will be conducting a land survey in a six-by-six grid this coming week. Progress is expected to go left to right and top to bottom, as before. The following lots are included in the grid: 7D, 3D, 10A, 9D, 6D, 12A.