SUBLIME

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arts

I spy with my musical eye

After years of writing music for other people's films Michael Nyman has started making his own. He tells *Luke Leitch* why

"I like to see something that I didn't suspect was there. As a film-maker I collect events."

Above, stills from Motion, *a short film by Michael Nyman, far left, stills from* Nyman's Guns and Dolls

First night

More muscle needed: a revival of Sam Shepard's Simpatico — p16

Nyman's debt to that background is not merely creative freedom, though when providing music for other people's films. "There is a lot of playfulness. I'd use my own material in the way any other film-maker or editor would have the courage to use it." In Motion, Jarrod Nyman filmed in a secondary media as he was being interviewed. Looking back, he realised that each time he was asked a question, he hesitated before answering.

"Again, I had one of those eureka moments that I have as a film-maker but don't necessarily have as a composer. I thought what we should do is to answer the speech — remove my answer to the questions, because I don't like the sound of my own voice and I've been ignoring the same answers to the same old questions year in year out — and the hesitation would trigger a piece of music." There will be five versions of the same film at the De La Warr — for speech is replaced with a different piece of his music in each, stretching from a TV theme tune to Be Bop Gregorian.

Nyman obviously relishes the artistic possibilities of his new medium. Not just the satisfaction of stumbling upon moments to reflect on film, but the technical aspects that follow. A technophile junkie, Jarrod particularly unhappy that his beloved Mac Air is yet again on the blink; he is fascinated by the freedom that Final Cut software ("you can do anything") gives him to manipulate the raw footage. Would he be tempted to graduate from video art to feature film? He tilts those glasses on to his head and rubs his eyes. "I don't know, unless I could do it quickly. Having been around film-makers — I've known Peter Greenaway since 1969 — and seen the amount of time and energy that goes into making features, I can't imagine that I would ever be that interested in a subject to do all that preparation."

The early film in Videoffit with a subject that he consciously set out to capture records a journey on the number 38 bus on the last day on the Routemaster. Nyman's first made into London Peter Chingford around the '38, and it lingered one of his first collecting metals, three bus tickets. He still uses it today — he's still annoyed to have missed one last month, on his way to Buckingham Palace for his CBE investiture — and says "If I ever write my autobiography it would be called 'There and Back on the 38'. In it is a Proust-ful that Nyman records the conversations between two newly met Scottsmaker aficionados talking with love and increasing intensity about their shared passion. But when they realise that they are caught between finally they quickly backpedal. Behind them sits Nyman, unusual, but shoulder rolling in helpless laughter.

Unless exquisitely structured — and it so rarely is — video art can be the most self-indulgent, baffling and inept rambling of all contemporary art forms. Nyman's films, though, have an added dimension that elevates them above the schlock: there are five-and fragments that tap straight into the restless, shifting preoccupations of Penelope who filmed them.

Videoffit by Michael Nyman opens at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, East Sussex, on Saturday and runs until Mar 15 (01424 229455; www.dlwp.com)