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| Woodville High School |
| Film Score Composition |
| What is Film Score Composition and what do you need to do in order to become a Film Score Composer? |
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| **Nathan Cummins** |
| **Semester 1** |

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| Research Project: Stage 2 – External Component Assessment Type 2: Outcome |

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Film Score Composition is often not fully appreciated considering the processes required becoming a Film Score Composer. Aspiring Film Scorers must demonstrate practically gained knowledge in the three steps of Film Score Composition: Spotting, Composition and Orchestration. They must also be aware of pathways and connections needed into the industry which could be gained from schooling.

Knowledge in compositional, orchestration and harmonic techniques as well as having an ability to write for a variety of styles is necessary for an aspiring composer. They must also be aware of the techniques used by other composers and their compositions, including movie scores and contemporary music. These skills are necessary to be adaptable per the director’s wishes.

I will be exploring each element of Film Score Composition while presenting the career pathways available for myself as an Adelaide student and aspiring Film Score Composer. I will then compare and contrast the career pathways of two successful composers, demonstrating the variety of pathways into the industry.

DIAGRAM HERE, SUMMARISE

***What is Film Scoring?***

In order to become a Film Score Composer, an aspiring composer must understand the three processes of Film Scoring: Spotting, Composition and Orchestration.

Spotting

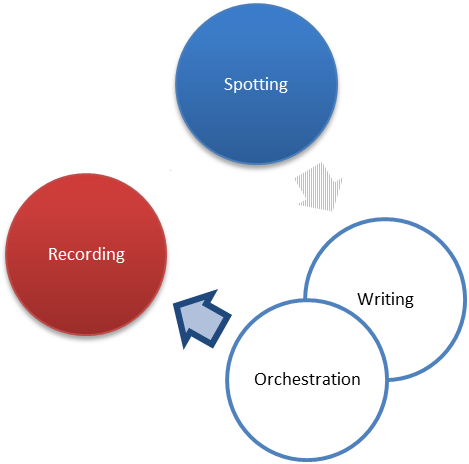


Figure 1: Visual Representation of the Film Scoring Process

Towards the end of the film’s creation, an unedited, “rough cut” is shown to the selected composer. This, as well as conversations with the director allows the composer to see the style of the film so they can then start creating suitable musical ideas. This is subject to exception, however; for example, if a particular scene such as a dance scene involves use of a musical score or original composition, the composer is asked into the film’s creation process much earlier so they can write appropriate music for the scenes in question. Precise timings and cue times are discovered during Spotting, allowing the composer to write specific themes and melodies for each scene. In a horror film for example, a composer must have precise timings for when something on the screen suddenly appears, intended to frighten the audience, allowing the composer to add suspenseful music to the scene which reaches a sudden climax when an abrupt appearance is made.

Writing

The writing stage involves the creation of suitable melodies and harmonies, most often onto a “piano mockup”, where all musical ideas are condensed and represented on a piano stave. This process requires a combination of knowledge in compositional techniques and knowledge of the film’s style, gained from Spotting. Some composers may write their score completely by hand, whereas others may use traditional notation software such as Sibelius or Finale. Sound production software such as Pro Tools, Cubase and Sonar are also used by a variety of composers. However, composers will most use a combination of all three methods.

Orchestration

Orchestration describes the scoring of the written melodies and harmonies for a suitable ensemble. A large Orchestra is most commonly used, however the ensemble may change due to the film’s style or the director’s wishes. *The Incredibles*, composed by Michael Giacchino is a notable example of references to other instrumentation, in this case a Big Band.

Commonly done by the Orchestrator, Writing is usually a separate process to Orchestration. The Orchestrator is not often credited in the film. However, some composers may combine the two stages by writing straight into the appropriate ensemble. The piano mockups from the Writing stage given to the Orchestrator can be very simple, containing just the melody and harmony or can alternatively be extremely detailed, cueing which instruments should play specific notes and phrases. To retain a specific style, some composers may work specifically with a certain Orchestrator. This is evident when considering composer of *The Simpsons*, *Beetlejuice*, and *The Corpse Bride* who frequently works with orchestrator Steve Bartek.

***Prior Training***

Once having the knowledge of what Film Scoring is, the prior knowledge and training involved is more evident. To gain the knowledge for Film Scoring, students in Adelaide have a variety of options at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, Adelaide University. Interstate institutions offer similar options, such as the Australian Institute of Music (AIM) in Sydney, presenting a course specifically for Film Score Composition. There is no “clear-cut” way to become a Film Score Composer however, thus there is many different (although similar) alternatives to the presented below. Most pathways require knowledge at a Stage 2 or Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) level.

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|  | Course | Required Knowledge | Duration |  |
| Certificate | Certificate III in Music | AMEB Grade 5 Practical; or AMEB CPM Advancing Step 1-2 AND AMEB Grade 3 Theory; or equivalent | 1 Year (full-time or part-time equivalent) | Less 🡨 Preference 🡪 More |
| Certificate IV in Music (Classical) | AMEB Grade 6-7 Practical AND Stage 2 Musicianship; or AMEB Grade 4-5 Theory; or equivalent |
| Certificate IV in Music (Jazz) | AMEB CPM Advancing Step 3 AND Stage 2 Musicianship; or AMEB Grade 4-5 Theory; or equivalent |
| Diploma | Diploma in Instrumental Music | - | 1 Year part-time equivalent only |
| Diploma in Music (Jazz) | AMEB Practical Grade Advancing Step 4 AND AMEB Grade 5 Theory | 1 Year (full-time or part-time equivalent) |
| Diploma in Music (Classical) | AMEB Grade 7 Practical AND Stage 2 Musicianship; or AMEB Grade 5 Theory; or equivalent |
| Bachelor | Bachelor of Music, Classical Performance Major | Stage 2 Solo Performance or at least Grade 6-7 AMEB practical, plus Stage 2 Musicianship or AMEB Grade 5 Theory | 3 Years (full-time or part-time equivalent) |
| Bacherlor of Music, Jazz Performance Major |
| Bachelor of Music Studies, Composition Major | Stage 2 Solo Performance; OR, AMEB Grade 6-7 Practical and Stage 2 Musicianship; OR, AMEB Grade 5 Theory. |
| Other | Bachelor of/Diploma in Music, Composition and Music Production (at AIM) | - | 2 Years | Interstate |

Table ##: *Adelaide University and AIM courses for a Film Score Composing pathway*

It should be noted that it is considered impossible to teach composition. As with anything requiring creativity, the composer themselves must be naturally talented and creative enough to create the melodies and harmonies. That being said, composition courses teach an understanding of musical theory and compositional techniques as well as analysing a wide variety of music in depth. This analysis allows the student to grasp the quality of professional and classical composers’ scores, further inspiring the student to employ the techniques observed in their future writing (Walter Piston, YEAR).

Knowledge in an instrument is also necessary for a student, as knowledge in the playability of an instrument allows exposure to appropriate writing, also opening doors for playing in ensembles. This will then result in the composer learning techniques from the surrounding players and the pieces which are played.

It is important to note that while having knowledge of and being able to mimic other composers’ sounds and techniques, it is also necessary for a composer to have their own style, demonstrated when considering the styles of John Williams and Hans Zimmer; John Williams is known for Romanticism – music similar to the style of the Romantic era. This music is suitable for Epic films and love scenes, such as the many in *Star Wars*. Williams demonstrates adaptability to a variety of styles in the *Star Wars’* score when considering the fanfare opening theme in contrast to the love themes; alternatively, Hans Zimmer is known for combining Electronic instruments with Orchestral. This sound is often looked for in modern contemporary films such as *Inception* in 2010. Zimmer also demonstrates adaptability in styles when comparing his score of *The Lion King* and *Inception*.

***Professional Connections***

Skill is not the only thing required in the film industry. Most often, directors will not accept an aspiring composer without any experience. This creates an issue: experience is unobtainable since an aspiring film composer cannot get work in the industry. This can be solved by two pathways: connections or film colleges. It is important to note that salesmanship is of an extreme importance. “It's equally important to be a salesman, and that's not really a skill composers have developed,” says Lukas Kendal (1998), demonstrating the fact that many composers not promoting themselves do not make it.

Connections

Connections can be difficult to obtain. There are many ways to make connections, whether it be through; personal friends; connections made in university with directors or other such roles; or even connections made through performances. “Oh definitely, you need to move to the industry to become part of it. I moved to Los Angeles and tried from there” says Hans Zimmer (2004), composer of *The Lion King*, *Inception* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*, demonstrating the fact that one must move to the film industry in order to get into it.

Professional connections can also be made through working other jobs in the film, including: playing in the Studio Band or Orchestra; being employed as the Orchestrator; or ultimately even being a cameo role or an infinite amount of other roles in the film. Working as an Orchestrator, however, allows the aspiring composer to gain demonstrable experience.

Film Colleges

Film Colleges such as the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) which offer film scoring courses and degrees often make efforts to promote the composers in house and market their ability. Some directors approach the school for a sample of their composer, occasionally composing one. This then ultimately allows the composer to gain experience, thus have easier entry into future employment. “I have offered roles to the Australian Guild of Screen Composers and AFTRS, it’s not uncommon,” says Dasent Peter (2003).

***INCLUDE THIS?***

***Case Studies***

To demonstrate the diversity of available pathways to film score composing, the pathways of two prolific Film Score Composers John Williams and Danny Elfman will be compared briefly. Their prior training, entry into the industry and a few of their compositional techniques will be compared.

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| John Williams | Danny Elfman |
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THEIR TECHNIQUES, THEY HAVE THEIR OWN STYLE TO SELL THEMSELVES AS DIRECTORS SEEK A CERTAIN STYLE. JOHN WILLIAMS ROMANTISISM IS WANTED FOR EPIC FILMS, HANS ZIMMER’S COMBINATION WITH ELECTRONIC IS OFTEN SEEKED FOR CONTEMPORARY MOVIES.