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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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| **Semester 1** |

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

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The concept of Film Score Composition is often one that is not fully appreciated considering the necessary processes required to become a Film Score Composer. An aspiring Film Scorer must have prior knowledge and training in the three steps of Film Score Composition: Spotting, Composition and Orchestration. They must then be aware of the available pathways into the Film Industry, which could be gained from schooling or prior connections with film makers.

To become a film score composer, a composer must be knowledgeable in compositional techniques and harmonic devices as well as orchestration techniques and it is preferable that they can write for a variety of different styles. They must also be aware of other movie score’s sounds as well as the sound and techniques of certain writers of contemporary, classical or other film scores. Knowledge of different styles and other composer’s or film’s sound is necessary in order 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

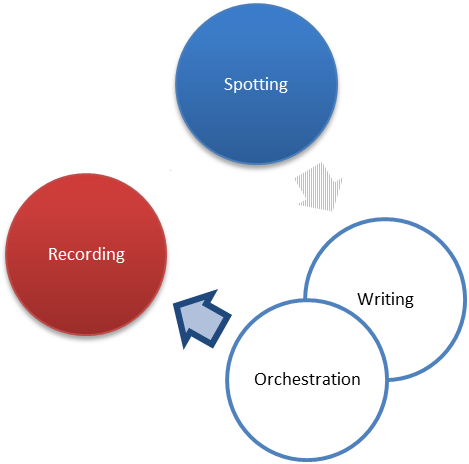


Figure 1: Visual Representation of the Film Scoring Process

Towards the end of film creation, the selected composer for the film is invited into the set to watch an unedited, “rough cut” of the film. This allows the composer to see the style of the film and after conversations with the director, allows the composer to start creating musical ideas which would be suitable for the film. This is subject to exception, however. For example, if a particular scene involves specific use of a musical score such as a dance scene with an original composition, then a composer is invited into the film creation process much earlier where they will then write appropriate music for the scenes in question. Precise timings and cue times are discovered during this process, 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. These timings allow 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 melodies and harmonies suitable for the film in question. This process requires a combination of knowledge in compositional techniques and knowledge of the film’s style, which is gained during the spotting stage.

Different composers write music in a variety of different ways. Some composers may write their score completely by hand, whereas others may use traditional notation software such as Sibelius or Finale. Sound production software and sequencers such as Pro Tools, Cubase and Sonar are also used by a variety of composers. However, most often composers will use a combination of all three methods.

Orchestration

Orchestration describes the scoring of the written melodies and harmonies for an ensemble suitable for the style of the film. The ensemble used to score the film may change depending on the style of the film or the director’s wishes however a large orchestra is most common. A notable example of different instrumentation is *The Incredibles*, composed by Michael Giacchino which has many references to Big Band instrumentation.

Writing is usually a separate process to Orchestration and is even commonly done by a separate person, the Orchestrator. However, some composers may combine the two stages by writing their melodies straight into the appropriate ensemble. The writing stage usually involves writing melodic and harmonic ideas on a “piano mockup”, where all ideas are condensed and represented on a piano stave. These mockups which are then given to the Orchestrator in question can be very simple, containing just the melody and harmony or can alternatively be extremely detailed, giving cues to which instruments should play specific notes and phrases. Some composers may work specifically with a certain orchestrator in order to retain a specific style. 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. Students in Adelaide have a variety of options at Adelaide University, which being the Elder Conservatorium of Music presents a variety of available courses which ultimately lead to having the knowledge required for Film Scoring. There are also similar options at an interstate level at institutions such as the Australian Institute of Music (AIM) in Sydney which presents a course specifically for Film Score Composition. There is no “clear-cut” way to becoming a Film Score Composer however, thus there is many different (however similar) alternatives to the presented below. However, 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 melodies and harmonies for which to be scored. That being said, the courses aimed at composition teach an understanding of musical theory and compositional techniques as well as in-depth analysis of a wide variety of music. This analysis then allows the student to grasp the quality of scores which professional and classical composers display, further inspiring the student to employ the techniques which he or she has observed in their future writing (Walter Piston, YEAR).

It is also necessary for a composer to have knowledge in playing an instrument. One benefit of this is having knowledge in an instrument means knowledge in the playability of the instrument and what is appropriate for it to play. Playing an instrument also opens doors for playing in ensembles, which 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 other composers’ sounds and techniques which they may use and how to mimic that sound, it is also considered necessary for a composer to have their own style of writing. This is demonstrated when considering the styles of John Williams and Hans Zimmer; John Williams is known for writing Romanticism, which is 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. It should be noted that Williams also demonstrates adaptability to a variety of styles in the Star Wars’ score, demonstrated by the fanfare like 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 that of Inception in 2010. Zimmer also demonstrates adaptability in styles when comparing the styles of 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 then unobtainable since an aspiring film composer cannot get work in the industry, thus cannot gain experience. This can be solved by two pathways: connections or film colleges. It is important, however, 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 do not make it as they do not promote themselves.

Connections

Connections can be difficult to obtain. There are ultimately 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 in order to get into the film industry, one must move to the film industry.

Professional connections can also be made through working other jobs in the film. These jobs could include: playing in the Studio Band or Orchestra; being employed as the Orchestrator, which is often not credited and is considered a much lesser role; 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 may ask the school for a sample of their composers and occasionally employ one of their composers. This will then ultimately allow 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.