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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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Film Scoring is the process of creating music for a film or visual media. It is made up of three elements: Spotting, Composition and Orchestration.

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An aspiring Film Score Composer must demonstrate practically gained knowledge of the three processes and also in compositional, orchestration and harmonic techniques. They must also have an ability to write for a variety of styles and 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 and are obtainable through tertiary education. Once having the knowledge and qualifications needed for composition, connections will need to be made in order to become employed in the industry.

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.

***What is Film Scoring?***

Spotting

An unedited, “rough cut” of the film is shown to the selected composer during conversations with the director, which allows the composer to see the style of the film so they can then start creating suitable musical ideas. If a scene such as a dance scene involves use of a musical score or original composition however, the composer is asked into the film’s creation process much earlier so they can write appropriate music. 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, precise timings for when something frightening suddenly appears are needed to add suspenseful music, which reaches a sudden climax when the 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. Knowledge in compositional techniques and of the film’s style (gained from Spotting) is needed for this process. Some composers may write their score 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 many composers. However, most composers combine 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, Orchestration is usually a separate process to Writing and is often not credited in the film. 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. Some composers may work specifically with a certain Orchestrator to retain a specific style. This is evident with Danny Elfmanm composer of *The Simpsons*, *Beetlejuice*, and *The Corpse Bride* who frequently works with orchestrator Steve Bartek.

Once having the knowledge of what Film Scoring involves, an understanding of the elements involved to become a Film Scorer is more evident. These elements include: Prior Training and Professional Connections.

***Prior Training***

As an Adelaide based student seeking to become a Film Score Composer, I have a variety of options which will help me acquire the knowledge for Film Scoring. These include: courses at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, Adelaide University; and interstate institutions offering similar courses, such as the Australian Institute of Music (AIM) in Sydney. There is no “clear-cut” way to become a Film Score Composer, thus there are 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 as knowledge in the playability of an instrument allows exposure to appropriate writing. Playing also opens doors for playing in ensembles, which then allows the composer to learn techniques from the surrounding players and pieces.

It is also 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. Many 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 is 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 schools for a sample of their composers, occasionally employing 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).

***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. (1312 words before this)

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| John Williams | Danny Elfman |
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