USC Thornton School of Music, Department of Screen Scoring

Course Title: Introduction to Scoring for Movies & Television

Course Number: SCOR403 (2 Units, a single 2-hour session per week)

Term; Day; Time: Fall-2017; Mondays; 10:00–11:50 am

Class Size: 16 maximum

Location: TMC G150

Instructor: Eric Schmidt

Instructor Contact: schmidtguy@att.net.   cel 818-282-2974

Office & Office Hours: TMC G150: use email to set up appointment

Course Description:

This course offers study, training, and practice in the art and craft of composing music for movies and television. The class features lectures, audio-visual demonstrations, composition/scoring assignments, and in-class critiques. Students compose and produce scores on laptop computers using basic composing, sampling, and music-preparation software (required). Except where noted in the schedule, each session is divided as follows: 1 hour of lecture and 1 hour of critiquing the weekly scoring assignments.

Learning Objectives:

This course is designed for composers and other musicians interested in exploring and attempting to meet the challenge of creating underscore for films and television. The course presents a thorough overview of the composition techniques and technological applications involved in the process of integrating underscore music into film and television projects. At the completion of this course, students will possess the knowledge and skill set needed to perform basic scoring of short films and television projects.

Prerequisites:

Students should possess a basic knowledge of music composition and theory. In addition, students should arrive having had practical experience using either Sibelius or Finale as well as sequencing software, i.e., Logic Pro, Digital Performer, Cubase, etc. While students who have taken MTEC 443 and/or MTEC 445 are well prepared, others lacking such technology training and/or experience may wish to take advance advantage of such web-based tutorials as those provided by Lynda.com, YouTube, or other sites.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required:

All students will need a laptop that is equipped with one of the music notation programs (Sibelius or Finale), one of the sequencing programs (LogicPro, Digital Performer, Cubase, etc.), and a sample library of orchestral sounds (Native Instruments Komplete, EastWest, Garritan, etc.)

Readings:
- <u>Required Text</u>: Bellis, Richard. The Emerging Film Composer: An Introduction to the People, Problems, and Psychology of the Film Music Business. (www.richardbellis.com)
- <u>Recommended Text</u>:Davis, Richard. Complete Guide to Film Scoring: The Art and Business of Writing Music for Movies and TV (2nd Edition). Berklee Press

Grading:

Standard grading is based on the following: 60% for homework (composition and reading assignments); 20% for the 2 class reports; 10% for the final project ; and 10% for class participation. Most weeks (see schedule below), students are assigned a writing assignment of one "cue" (usually a single musical piece for a scene from a film or television project). They bring their computer-produced cues to the next class meeting, where they are played in class and critiqued by the professor, who invites additional comments from the class members. (Note 1: As the semester proceeds, and their knowledge of the subject increases, all students are expected to increase their level of contribution to the in-class critiques. Note 2: There is a practical aspect to this methodology: It is customary in the film and television industry for the composer's submitted cues to be critiqued by the filmmaking team, leading to requested modifications and re-writes.)

Course Schedule:

   <u>Session 1</u>:
- Orientation: class expectations, format, schedule, grading.
  Introduce commonalities and differences between concert and film composition; your "job" as a film scorer; timing and sync issues. A brief history of film scoring.
- **Lecture Topic:** "How To Begin": Setting your limitations. How to select harmonic language and instrumentation. Setting up your template.
  Discovering the pace of the scene. Examine 5 chord progressions.
- **Assignments:** (1) Based upon lecture material, create chord progression and then expand into solo piano piece from assigned cue sheet scene description. Sequence and make a recording. Bring into class for critique next week .
  2) Read Intro and chapters 1 & 4 in Bellis book.

   <u>Session 2</u>:
- Critique student piano cues.
- **Lecture Topics:** "Composing Tools.1": Listen to and examine 8 printed scores that introduce a variety of compositional tools: Including, triadic, non-triadic, shifting tonalities, voice leading,bass line movement, use of various meters and odd phrasings. How to spot a scene.
- **Assignment:** From the provided cue sheet, compose a cue for 5-part string ensemble and sequence for delivery and presentation at next class meeting.

<u>Session 3</u>:
- Critique student cues.
- **Lecture Topics:** "Composing Tools.2": Listen to and examine 4 long cues with a focus on form and structure, motivic development, use of ostinato figures and keyless writing.
- **Assignment:** From the provided cue sheet, compose a cue for piano, strings, and winds; then sequence for presentation in next class meeting;

<u>Session 4</u>:
- Critique student cues.
- **Lecture Topics:** "Melodic Construction": What makes them memorable and what do they have in common. Examine 13 'great' melodies and analyze. Discuss ways to break out of 2 and 4 bar phrasing
- **Assignment:** Compose and sequence a cue that captures a broad emotion. (We will not compose to a cue sheet or film this week). It should feature a strong melody. Present in class next week.

<u>Session 5</u>:
- Critique student cues.
- **Lecture Topics:** "Orchestration": A brief history of the orchestrator. Defining the orchestration job today. From sketch (2-line to complete), to midi and audio mixes. Examine industry standard score and part preparation. Discuss instrument ranges and uses.
- **Assignment:** From assigned piano sketch, orchestrate and print out score and parts for prescribed ensemble. Turn in hard copies of each next week in class. (Instructor will collect them and make notes).

<u>Session 6</u>:
- Share and discuss your challenges, and successes, in your assignment.
- **Lecture Topics:** "Composing Tools.3": 12-tone, the "drone",use of odd meters, non-triadic writing, use of synths, loops and sound design elements. Examine five cues using these techniques.
- **Assignment:** Compose and then sequence to video a cue for a provided clip of an scary or tension filled scene. Present in class next week.

Session 7:
- Critique student "spooky" cues.
- **Lecture Topics:** "History and Gear": A brief history of the film scoring business in Los Angeles. An overview of computers, sequencing programs, including Digital Performer, Logic Cubase, and ProTools. Sequencing tricks of the trade.
- **Assignments:** (1) Produce an 8-10 minute report on selected film score. Include history, education and credits of the composer. Select one scene and analyze the cue. Present in class in 4 weeks.
  (2) Read chapter 5 of Bellis book.

Session 8:
- **Lecture topic:** "The Sketch and The Business". How to create a clean sketch on paper or using in a sequencer. Examine sample sketches from 2 to 12 lines. Discuss career possibilities and business models, including income streams, agents, package deals, and budgeting.
- **Assignments:** (1) Prepare a piano sketch or midi sequence for a scene from a provided film clip. Prepare audio file of cue. (Next week we will pass this sketch to assigned partner who will orchestrate the cue for specified ensemble.
  (2) Read chapters 2 and 3 of Bellis book

Session 9:
- Students exchange sketches with their partners and discuss.
- **Lecture Topics:** "Recording Session Preparation": Explore how to manage your composing time and what needs to be prepared ahead of time to realize an efficient and successful recording session.
- **Assignments:** (1) Orchestrate a full score and prepare an audio sample of your partners cue (2) Prepare a 8-10 minute report on assigned television series. Include history, education and credits of the composer. Select one scene and analyze the cue. Present in class in 4 weeks.

Session 10:
- Present and critique 'partner' orchestration cues.
- **Lecture Topics:** View "Sylvester & Tweety-Salieri" episode.
  Discuss the WBros. style.
  "Odds And Ends": Discuss any areas that students wish.
  (Can include composition, ethical, business, artistic vision, dramatic expression or technical issues.)
- **Assignments:** (1) Complete your movie report.
  (2) Prepare your TV report.

Session 11:
- Students present their movie reports.
  Lecture Topic: none
- **Assignment:** Student will select a scene from a film of their choice. Compose, for piano or a rough mock-up, for presentation in class next week.

Session 12:
- Critique students mock-up cues
- **Lecture Topic:** "Running A Session": Review everyone's role, studio setup, conductor selection, score and part preparation.
- A**ssignments:** (1) Re-write previous week's assignment as required, then orchestrate and copy parts for in-studio ensemble recording session. Prepare any synth stems required. (2) Read chapters 6 and 7 of Bellis. (3) Complete your TV report.

Session 13:
- Students present their TV reports
- **Lecture:** Differences in composing for television and video games.
- **Assignment:** Complete composing and sequencing your cue.

Session 14:
- Present your cue, including audio recording syned with film and printed out scores (for each class member). Explain your creative choices.
- **Assignment:** Read chapters 8 and 9 of Bellis.

Session 15:
- Review semester materials. What did we learn?
- Discuss the Bellis book.
- Do I really want to be a film composer?

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards*https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the *Department of Public Safety* http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.htmlprovides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/*will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology

Statement for Students with Disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity:

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis:

In case of a declared emergency, if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.