

USC Thornton School of Music Department of Screen Scoring
SCOR503A ADVANCED SCORING FOR MOTION PICTURES AND TELEVISION

Instructor: Eric Schmidt

e-mail: schmidtguy@att.net
website: jericsschmidt.com
phone: (cel) 818-282-2974
classroom: G150, Tuesdays 10:00-12:00 a.m.
office hours: by appointment.

Course Description:

The curriculum is designed to explore a myriad of composition techniques that are invaluable in the film scoring 'deadline' oriented work environment. It is constructed to allow the student maximum "hands-on" experience. It will examine in detail the many different musical styles that a working film composer may be called upon to produce. The student will study and then produce a series of music cues in the style of classic Warner Bros and Disney animation, and contemporary film and television scoring. They will have an opportunity to record, with a live orchestra, an original composition of their own.

Two other components are also addressed. The first, conducting, will focus on the specialized techniques, methods and terminology that are present in a professional scoring session. Two class periods are utilized, preparing the students to conduct their own compositions at scheduled recording sessions. The second area, includes topics such as: sound-a-likes, temp tracks, pre-records, ghost-writing, session prep and the work flow, and career management. Each student shall have numerous opportunities to present their work, in class, for evaluation by the instructor and other class members.

Requirements, Exams and Grading Information:

Student evaluation in SCOR503A will consist of a variety of factors and includes: take home assignments, in-class participation and recording session performance. No exams or tests are given.

Grading is divided into five components and evaluated upon the following criteria:

1. Composition - 4 assigned cues (65%)
 - Proper use of specific compositional tools discussed.
 - The ability to follow the given instructions* and the overall effectiveness of the composed cue within the assigned 'style' (your first jobs will require this).
 - On time completion of a professionally competent and sounding work.
2. Conducting - 2 sessions, (5%) two in-class sessions.
 - Use of classroom *discussed conducting techniques*. (*Did you try?*)
 - Conducting clarity and clearness of instructions to recording personnel.
 - Presence and ease on podium.
3. Class Participation (10%)
 - Regular and engaged classroom attendance.
 - An ability to gracefully accept criticism of ones work.
 - A willingness to offer helpful, insightful and meaningful critique of others.
 - Professional presentation of the assigned report.
4. Class Report (10%)

A professional looking visual/audio presentation (using something such as Powerpoint) that is a 6 to 8 minute musical analysis of a television series selected by the instructor. Include a brief biography/credits on the composer and analysis of music cues from several scenes.

5. Final Project (10%)

Regular and engaged attendance is mandatory. The designed curriculum relies extensively on in-class presentation, student involvement and instructor critique. As there is no text book, being present and taking detailed notes is of paramount importance. Attendance will be taken during each class session and will factor prominently in the students final evaluation. After two unexcused absences the grade will automatically be lowered one level. Students may approach instructor ahead of time, to discuss any future class absence that is due to a conflicting schedule involving another SMPTV program element.

Recommended class materials:

1. Richard Bellis “The Emerging Film Composer” (required)
2. Karlin/Wright “On The Track”
3. Music sketch and score paper

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 instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Their phone number is 213-740-1776.

Week 1: Introduce class format, focus, schedule and requirements.

How to handle your student films.

Lecture on basics of conducting and specifics for scoring sessions.

Composition Tools.1

“How To Begin” methods for starting the composing process.

Harmony as the driver of drama.

Assignment 1: Practice conducting in front of a mirror.

Assignment 2: Prepare 4-8 bar harmonic progressions reflecting

two of the following dramatic categories: joyful, triumphant, mysterious,

eerie, horrific, sad, majestic or hopeful. Sequence for 4-5 part string section

and piano. Add a melody, if you wish. Make audio file and upload to my teacher folder on the SMPTV server. Title as “your last name/“category”.

Present and critique next week in class.

Week 2: Present, in class, harmony assignment.

Lecture: on the techniques of composition utilized in the music of the classic Warner Bros. style of animation.

Assignment 1: Compose and sequence a 1:00-1:30 Warner Bros. style cue.

Sync with picture and place on the server. Due next week.

Assignment 2: Select two film cues that you believe present a ‘great’ melody. Prepare a lead sheet of each (following format provided).

Make a pdf copy and email to Eric by Monday.

- Week 3: Present and critique assigned WB cues.
Lecture: Composition Tools.3
Melodic writing. What makes a great melody, what do they have in common.
Examine 'great' classic melodies.
Assignment: Select a video from the server and compose a cue that's 1:00-1:30 in length. Create a memorable melody. Choose an ensemble that is appropriate. Sequence and present in class next week.
- Week 4: Present and critique your 'melodic' cue.
Practice conducting in class. View ES conducting video.
Discuss prep for upcoming session.
Assignment 1: Prepare a 6-8 minute long musical analysis of a specific TV series assigned by instructor. Due week 13/14/15.
Assignment 2: Practice conducting.
- Week 5: Review your first session.
Composition Tools.2: Creative ideas for composing loops.
The concept of 'bricks' in composition.
Lecture: on the techniques of composition for a Disney production.
Assignment 1: Prepare a 1:00-1:30 cue in the Disney style. Due next week.
- Week 6: Present and critique assigned Disney cue.
Review prep work for your next session.
Assignment 1: Practice conducting.
- Week 7: Lecture: How to write for ensembles utilizing a combination of synths and live players (not just overdub soloist). Examine scores to Quack Pack, Hercules and Tasmania.
Composition Tools.4: How to handle 'the drone'.
Assignment: Select a scene, compose and sequence a 1:00 'drone' cue. Be creative, but FAST. Time yourself.
- Week 8: Present cues. (Quickest time wins a fabulous prize).
Lecture: Composition Tools.5: 12-tone technique. Where it works and how.
Assignment: Select a scene, compose and sequence a 1:00 '12-tone' cue. Be creative, but FAST. Time yourself.
- Week 9: Present and Critique cues.
Lecture: on sound-a-likes, temp tracks and pre-records.
Assignment 1: Produce a piano arrangement of each assigned title.
- Week 10: Present and critique assigned "sound-a-like" cues.
Lecture: Composition Tools.6: Structure and Form. Analyze 3 cues.
Go over parameters of this classes upcoming recording session (Nov.18).
Assignment: Select a 1:30-2:00 cue for our live session. Compose and sequence a mockup. Post to server for review in class next week.

- Week 11: Present your mockups in class.
Lecture: Composition Tools.7 “Schmidty’s Helpful and Inventive Tricks”
Examine the use of non-triadic harmony, floating tonality, bass line ostinato, changing meters, using small ensembles, “copy and paste”.
Assignment 1: Make any composition/orchestration changes.
- Week 12: Lecture: “Ghostwriting”, its perils and pitfalls. Union rules and other ways.
Discuss HR article on agents. Orchestration fees.
The work flow. What to expect and how to prepare. Discuss “work flow” and how to organize for a large session.
Assignment : Finish your TV report.
- Week 13: 6 students present their TV report. Review for upcoming session.
Assignment 1: Complete orchestrating and prep your parts.
Select your conductor.
Assignment 2: Read “The Emerging Film Composer”, by Richard Bellis
- Week 14: Recap session.
7 students present their TV report.
- Week 15: 7 students present their TV report.
Review semester material.
Discuss the Bellis’ book.