

USC Thornton School of Music

Department of Screen Scoring

SCOR503A ADVANCED SCORING FOR MOTION PICTURES AND TELEVISION

Semester: Spring 2021
Units: 2
Instructor: Eric Schmidt
Meets: Tuesday 10:00 a.m.-11:50 a.m
Location: online
Office: online, by appointment
Contact: jeschmid@usc.edu (cel) 818-282-2974

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.

Beside composition methods, topics such as: sound-a-likes, temp tracks, pre-records, ghost-writing, session prep and the work flow, and career management will also be addressed. Throughout the semester 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 - 8 assigned cues (70%)
 - 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. 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.
3. 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%) Select the student film that you believe is your best score.

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 (representing 14% of classroom time) 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 Scoring 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

Week 1: Introduce class format, focus, schedule and requirements.
How to handle your student films.

Composition Tools.1

"How To Begin" methods for starting the composing process.

Harmony as the driver of drama.

Assignment 1: Prepare 4-8 bar harmonic progressions reflecting one of the following dramatic categories: joyful, triumphant, mysterious, horrific or sad. 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 our server. Title as "your last name/"category". Present next week in class.
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 instructor by next class meeting.

Week 2: Present, in class, harmony assignment. Instructor will critique.
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.

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 your selected '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.
Discuss prep for upcoming orchestration class recording session.
Assignment 1: Prepare a 6-8 minute long musical analysis of a specific TV series assigned by instructor. Due week 13/14/15.

- 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: Prepare a 1:00-1:30 cue in the Disney style. Due next week.
- Week 6: Present and critique assigned Disney cue.
Assignment: Continue work on your report.
- Week 7: Lecture: How to write for ensembles utilizing a combination of synths and live players (not just overdub soloist).
Examine scores to several series.
Composition Tools.4: How to handle ‘the drone’.
Assignment 1: Select a scene, compose and sequence a 1:00 ‘drone’ cue.
Be creative, but FAST. Time yourself.
- Week 8: Present ‘drone’ 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, copyright concerns and pre-records.
Assignment: 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.
Assignment: Select a 1:30-2:00 cue for our live session. Compose and sequence a mockup (it can be a bit of a sketch).
Post to server for review in class next week.
- Week 11: Present your mockups in class for critique.
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: Make any composition/orchestration changes to your piece.
- Week 12: Lecture: “Ghostwriting”, its perils and pitfalls. Union rules and other ways.
What to expect and how to prepare for a session. Discuss “work flow” and how to organize for a large session. Orchestration fees (2-3 ways).
Assignment: Finish your TV report.
- Week 13: 8 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 recording session.
 8 students present their TV report.
 Assignment: none

Week 15: 4 students present their TV report.
 Review semester material.
 Discuss the Bellis’ book.
 Assignment: Prepare your finale project, a student film of your choice.
 Place on the server.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421

studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

studentaffairs.usc.edu/sssa

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu