



USC University of
Southern California

SCOR-403 Introduction to Scoring Movies and Television

FALL 2023 - Mondays, 10:00-11:50 TCM G 150

Instructor: Lolita Ritmanis

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Office hours by appointment

Course Description:

Practical composition course introducing the unique art and craft involved in writing and integrating music for film and television.

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 music production tools. Students will present their own works and critique works of others throughout the semester. Business and production expectations will be outlined and leveraged as a part of the course.

Each class meeting will consist of a lecture and a listening session for in-class constructive criticism and critiques. Be prepared to play your works-in-progress at each class meeting. While we won't be able to listen to everyone's work every week, each student should be ready to play their music each week. Assignments are due at 8:00AM uploaded on the day of class.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Connect their music to stories
- Interpret and enhance visual stories
- Apply musical concepts as storytelling devices
- Expand their abilities as composers and storytellers
- Gain practical experience of how to score to picture.

Prerequisite(s):

Students should possess a willingness to apply music composition and theory in the pursuit of collaborating in the visual storytelling process. Students should have an open mindset to learning new concepts while connecting to music technology toolsets. Proficiency with a DAW/sequencer of the student's choice is required. The ability to deliver professional looking scores and parts for musicians in a range of genres is expected.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required:

All students will need a laptop that is equipped with music production tools.

Required Textbook

The Emerging Film Composer - Richard Bellis

Lesson 01 - Monday, August 21st, 2023**Introductions, class expectations****What is the role of a film composer?****Objectives**

- Define different types of music in film
- Describe different functions of music in film
- Develop a connection between music and emotions

Reading Assignments

- Read - Introduction from course text
- Watch the following video: <https://youtu.be/YGtrq9Qnx6I>

Assignment

- "Convey an Emotion" - Compose two short pieces (each 32 measures in length, approx.) that each convey a different emotion. Name your audio files with your name and generic title only. Submit notation of your themes. Submit a text document with the intended emotion for each file.
- Write a short review (300 words) - reviewing the music from a film this past year - it's emotional and dramatic impact, etc.

Lesson 02 - Monday, August 28th, 2023**Music and Emotion - the Dramatic Arc****Assignments due this week:**

"Convey an Emotion"

Film score review

Objectives

- Understand the power of music in helping to create or reinforce the story arc.
- Describe various musical techniques in achieving dramatic impact.
- Understand basic filmmaking and visual techniques.

Reading Assignments

- Read - Chapter 4 "Spotting" from course text
- Become familiar with filmmaking and visual techniques - <https://filmglossary.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/term/>

Assignment

- Spot a short landscape scene (video provided). Students compose "to picture." Students are allowed to use thematic material from Lesson 1 as a starting point for this assignment if they choose, or compose a new piece. Due: Quicktime with music laid in to picture

If you want to work with the video in your DAW you can use this tutorial to learn the basics about the setup <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QIYImDsxp6a0pyHt5p3KLw2a8J9WxeEz0OKksWv3bwM/edit?usp=sharing>

For exporting video from Logic see the following

https://drive.google.com/file/d/19IKbQePIR-XeESw-q6skHBPeqgnhUk7V/view?usp=share_link

Monday, September 4th - no class (Holiday)

Lesson 03 & 04 - September 11th

Music, Emotion, and Perspective

Assignments due this week:

Landscape scene

Objectives

- Identify story perspective
- Connect perspective with musical storytelling
- Describe musical gestures as they connect to emotions

Assignment

- Using the provided video from an independent film (instructor will provide) write a music cue that reflects the emotion of the scene.
- Write your cue in your DAW of choice and deliver a bounced quicktime movie file that combines the music with the production audio track from the original video file.

Reading Assignments

Read the following article: <https://www.reelcrafter.com/blog/how-film-music-helps-build-emotion>

Lesson 05 - September 18th

Temp scores: Emulation as a Tool for Discovery

Assignments due this week:

Independent film cue

Objectives

- Understand the various ways a temp score can impact the final score

Assignment

- Using the provided video (instructor will provide) write a music cue that emulates the temp score in the original clip. Write your cue in your DAW of choice and deliver a bounced quicktime movie file that combines the music with the production audio track from the original video file.
- Write a one page reflection essay on a film composer of your choice that you admire.
 - State the composer
 - Discuss their success in the industry
 - Describe two or three musical traits of the composer you admire

Reading Assignments

- Read - Chapter Nine from course text
- Film Composer Research
 - Watch the following interview with John Williams as he discusses the composer Alex North. <https://youtu.be/iKq1c-wpVe4>
 - Also watch this article on the Alex North score to 2001: A Space Odyssey <https://youtu.be/wLviS-7bXKo>

Lesson 06 - September 25th, 2023

Working with the Director or Producer - Getting Started Documentary Scoring

Assignments due this week:

Temp score emulation

Composer essay

Objectives

- Begin to understand the process of spotting a film or TV show and interacting with the director or producer.
- Examine the landscape of documentary scoring

Reading Assignments

- Read - Chapter Five from course text
- Read this article <https://jamiethierman.com/2020/06/a-directors-guide-to-communicating-with-composers/>

Assignment

- Using the provided video (instructor will provide) write a music cue for the opening of a documentary film. Write your cue in your DAW of choice and deliver a bounced quicktime movie file that combines the music with the production audio track from the original video file.

Lesson 07 - October 2nd, 2023

Constructive Criticism and Process of Revisions

Midterm Assigned

Assignments due this week:

Documentary cue

Objectives

- Practice giving and receiving constructive critiques
- Connect to importance of showing works in progress (WIP) with the film score process

Reading Assignments

- Read the following articles <https://web.archive.org/web/20191203131558/https://www.sandiegowriters.org/constructive-criticism-in-the-workshop-setting-by-calliope-quessenberry/>
<https://leapica.com/blog-constructive-criticism/>

Assignment

- Complete final revisions of your music cues to date based on the notes given.
- Prepare for Midterm Presentation
 - Choose any film you have access to show clips from in class. Try to have the clips trimmed and ready to show specific sections (as opposed to one long movie file).
 - Identify the main musical theme/identity of the score and create a simple transcription that provides the musical essence, this can be a lead sheet with melody and chords or a score reduction type of transcription
 - Build a presentation which takes the audience through at least three separate cues which utilize the theme/musical identity in different ways. Be prepared to describe how the musical decisions the composer made are connected to the needs of the picture.
 - Your presentation should be between 5 - 8 minutes.
 - Submit your presentation file to facilitate the classroom showcase.

Lesson 08/09 - October 9th & October 16th

Midterm Presentations

Objectives

- Develop public speaking skills
- Analyze the effectiveness of music with picture
- Facilitate an engaging and compelling discussion about music and film

Lesson 10 - October 23rd, 2023

The Orchestrator, Arranger, Performer

Objectives

- Understand the importance of orchestration and arranging in media music.
- Discuss the various support roles in the world of media composing

Assignment

- Orchestrate one of your themes from Lesson 1 for piano, and string section. Submit PDF

Lesson 11 - October 30th, 2023

Songs in Film and Television

Assignments due this week:

Orchestration Assignment

Objectives

- Understand the role of songs in film and television.
- Explore the role of a music supervisor, and the path to getting songs placed in a film or television series, as well as being hired to write a song for a production.

Assignment

- Compose a song for a film or television series. Leadsheet of song and either live presentation of the song or a very basic demo due in class.

Lesson 12 - November 6th, 2023

Animation

Assignments due this week:

First draft of song

Objectives

- Understanding the landscape of composing for animated films and TV series.

Assignment: (CHOICE of one or the other)

- Compose the theme for an animated TV series (video provided) **OR**
- Share a 2 minute presentation of your favorite animated TV series theme (song or instrumental). What do you like about it? How does it help sell the show? Who is the composer? The artist?

Lesson 13 - November 13th, 2023

Assignments due this week:

Animation theme **OR** Animation theme presentation

Assignment:

Finalize song demo

Lesson 14 -November 20th, 2023

GUEST LECTURE

Lesson 15 November 28th, 2023

Building a Career - Wrap Up

Assignments due this week:

Final draft of song - In class review.

Student presentations of songs.

Grading Breakdown

Grading will be based on completed assignments as well as engagement, dedication, curiosity, integrity, and immersion in the class. Recorded and written assignments must be uploaded by 8:00AM on the due date. Unexcused absences will be reflected in the final course grade.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Please do not share or otherwise distribute class materials, music scores or recordings produced by me or any students in the conduct of this course without expressed permission.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

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/research-and-scholarship-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.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) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

Office of Equity, Equal Opportunity and Title IX - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
eeotix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776
osas.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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

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.

[LiveSafe Mobile Safety App](#)

[TrojansAlert Emergency Notification System](#)

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Thornton Emergency Services

Thornton Emergency Response Team: If evacuation or other actions are needed, members of the Thornton Emergency Response Team will provide verbal instructions.

Thornton Business Continuity Team: Multi-channel messages will be sent to your phone, text, and email providing next steps in the case of an emergency or significant unexpected disruption to facilities or operations.