Master in Scoring for Film, Television, and Video Games

Advanced Scoring 1: Narrative Analysis

In this course, students explore the conceptual and collaborative processes that result in the successful creation of music for visual media. Scoring for film, television, and video games is essentially musical storytelling, and the composer cannot hope to do this without the tools for narrative analysis. Through in-depth examination of script, style, finished scenes, and exemplary scores, students learn methodically the steps that successful composers take in preparation for scoring, as well as strategies for getting past the first blank page. The ability to conceive the shape of the score before a single note is written is critical, and this begins in: 1) collaboration with the filmmaking team; 2) analyzing dramatic intent; 3) spotting the film for music; 4) determining the function of music; 5) developing a music concept that supports directorial intent; and 6) determining the elements of the music itself, including style, instrumentation, and genre. Students will analyze entire projects and explore a diverse range of eras, genres, dramatic ideas, musical vocabularies, forms, styles, and orchestrations.

Directed Studies in Linear and Interactive Scoring 1

An advanced practicum that provides individual students mentoring in scoring a range of visual media projects and introduces them to the one-to-one filmmaker-composer collaborative model. With active support and critical appraisal from senior faculty and professional advisors, students are challenged to conceptualize and execute a plan for scoring a variety of projects, both narrative and non-narrative, linear and non-linear, that reflect the current diversity of global visual media. Drawing on both
previously acquired music skills and scoring techniques learned in the co-
requisite Advanced Scoring 1: Narrative Analysis, students will
demonstrate the ability to convey creative intentions, respond to critical
direction, and work intensively to meet deadlines set in tandem with their
faculty advisor. Scoring assignments will be drawn from a balanced
representation of linear and non-linear visual content selected by faculty in
collaboration with the student, utilizing electronic scoring techniques
and/or live-player scoring sessions with students functioning as
composer/conductor, or composer/producer.

**Video Game Scoring Techniques**

This course offers an intensive study of applied approaches to scoring for
video games. An awareness of the deep and rich history surrounding music
in interactive arts will be gained through analysis and discussion of
example scores and projects. Students work extensively with the
application of technology across multiple genres to compose and apply
fundamental video game compositional methods to various projects.
Students will write simple to moderate-level interactive scores, employing
the most commonly used methods in the industry. In addition, students
will discuss and learn about specific business issues that include an
overview of the video game and interactive industries including contracts,
licensing, toolsets, and job opportunities. The course begins to prepare
students for entry-level work at a game development company or as a
freelance game music professional, including experience with typical game-
music workflow, and approaches to scoring video games. This course is a
foundation for the Advanced Video Game Scoring course, which involves
the creation of more advanced and complex interactive scores with direct
application of middleware technologies.

**Dramatic Electronic Composition**

This course is an advanced tutorial in the use of new technologies for
composing, recording, and notating music for visual media. It is
recommended for all graduate scoring students who are not already
thoroughly familiar with the use of sequencing software and professional
sound libraries. Students will be introduced to the most widely used
sequencers and to both orchestral and non-orchestral libraries, as well as
to the compositional expectations that these tools have created. Over the
last two decades a technological revolution has engendered a new musical
and narrative language for making and using music in media. This revolution in the methods of music making has not only led to an enormously expanded palette of sounds and compositional techniques, but has fundamentally transformed the ways that music is used in storytelling. This course will focus on the new techniques (musical and technological) and aesthetics of contemporary dramatic composition. The use of synthesizers, advanced methods of sound design, advanced sequencing techniques, modern production techniques, electronic compositional methods, the use of non-traditional music in the scoring process, and the aesthetics of modern filmmaking narrative will all be investigated.

**Master Film Composers**

During the relatively short history of the cinema, a handful of inventive composers have had an outsized impact on the language of film scoring all students must master if they wish to practice the craft. Just as an art student might study Rembrandt to learn how to use light or Hopper to master photorealism, aspiring film composers can save themselves many painful steps by “going to school” on the greats. In each offering of this course, students will examine at close range the work and career of a selection of seminal figures in film scoring history. By studying their contributions to film music vocabulary, as well as the trajectory of their careers, students will gain valuable lessons in the art and profession of film scoring. The course will focus on three aspects of film scoring that are often overlooked in the study of film music:

1. Students will study complete scores and the collaborative processes from which they emerged, with particular emphasis on the filmmaker-composer relationship. Archival records of historical composers and interviews with living composers will shed light on these areas.

2. Students will explore how a single composer develops his or her voice, technique, and unique sonic signature through the course of a career. This is an extremely valuable perspective for the budding composer, who also must find and develop his or her own voice.

3. Students will focus on what a film scoring career looks like—its perils and pitfalls as well as its peaks. This is of great practical use to the student readying to enter the field.
Advanced Scoring 2: Genre and Form

In this course, students become familiar with the musical requirements and expectations of a wide range of cinematic categories and forms, from classic genre film to episodic television comedy and drama to documentary and opinion/propaganda pieces. The conventions of genre are now an established part of every composer’s vocabulary. They can be violated, subverted, or updated, but they must first be mastered. Areas of study include the following:

- comedy, both feature and episodic, including comedic montage and timing
- classic drama, including death of principal character, abandonment, and triumph
- action and suspense, including the chase, natural catastrophe, cloak and dagger, and sports
- period drama, including devices to establish time and place
- romance, including development of the romantic theme, and technique for leading to the moment of the kiss
- science fiction, fantasy, alien worlds, alternate realities, supernatural events
- horror, stalking, assault and murder
- reality TV, including the use of sound design and synthetic non-melodic patterns
- classic TV and feature-length documentary, as well as persuasive or propagandistic

As a focused continuation of Advanced Scoring 1, students will further strengthen skills in scene analysis, character reading, psychological persuasion and enchantment (esp. with respect to lowering threshold of belief in sci-fi and fantasy). Genre scoring also allows composers to explore more deeply their own emotional and psychological processes in order to produce scores that support content in all varieties of visual media, including interactive experiences. Taken in tandem with FS-531, Directed Studies in Linear and Interactive Scoring 2, as the second phase of a theory and practice sequence.
Directed Studies in Linear and Interactive Scoring 2

The second semester continuation of the advanced practicum course that provides students individual supervision in scoring a range of visual media with attention to aesthetic, dramatic, and technical considerations. Taken in tandem with FS-520 Advanced Scoring 2: Genre and Form, projects will focus on genre and type-specific applications of visual scoring craft. Drawing on a full range of previously acquired music skills and scoring techniques, students will convey their creative intentions, respond to critical direction, and work intensively to meet periodic deadlines. Scoring assignments will be drawn from a balanced representation of linear and non-linear visual content, utilizing electronic scoring techniques and/or real-time, live-player studio sessions with the students functioning as either composer/conductor, or composer/producer. Students will also complete their collaboration scoring a video game project created by a video game design program at a partner institution.

Advanced Dramatic Orchestration and Conducting

This course provides an advanced tutorial in the auxiliary skills of orchestration and conducting without which even the most talented composer cannot fully realize his or her work. Although at the top levels of the craft, these tasks are frequently assigned to specialists, at the beginning of a career, the ability to orchestrate and conduct one’s own work is a critical advantage. The technique of dramatic orchestration, as contrasted with concert orchestration of long-form pieces, is an art in itself, and will be thoroughly examined. Specifically, extended dramatic techniques for strings and percussion, effective use of the brass section, orchestrating for minimalism, and integration of non-orchestral, global, or electronic instruments in the score will be examined. Students explore differences in orchestration for television, film, and video games, orchestrating for small and unusual ensembles, and advanced overdubbing techniques combining sequence and live instruments. The conducting-to-picture unit will first familiarize the student with general baton technique and podium comportment, working with small ensembles until confidence develops. Eventually, complex pieces involving meter and tempo changes with picture will be introduced, along with clicks, streamers, and punches.
Advanced Video Games Scoring and Implementation

This advanced course builds on the techniques learned in FS-615, Video Game Scoring Techniques. In this course, students explore complex interactive scoring techniques and direct application of middleware technologies (Wwise and Fmod). Students focus on advanced interactive composition techniques including designing and composing thematic elements and motifs that work across multiple cues. Students also explore advanced recording techniques and session flow for video game music. This course prepares students strongly for entry-level work in music at a game development company or as freelance game music professionals. Students experience advanced game music creation workflow using version control technologies, sound design and editing, batch file conversions, and modern approaches to scoring to video games. Additionally, students explore advanced topics in the video game and interactive industries including contracts, licensing, toolsets, and job opportunities.

Global Music Traditions

This course is an introduction the tonal vocabulary and the instruments of selected world folk and art music traditions, and presents the student with the challenge of writing pieces that combine indigenous and Western orchestral traditions in a visual and dramatic context. The musical palette of the composer of music for the screen is no longer limited to the colors of 19th century Romantic or 20th century Modernist concert music. The approach of artists such as Thomas Newman, Mychael Danna, and Alberto Iglesias owes much to their embrace of folk traditions, ranging from African ceremonial music and Indonesian gamelan to Pakistani Qawwali, Al-Andalus, and other Mediterranean and Middle Eastern forms. As the language of cinematic expression becomes more universal, the music that supports it must strive to escape the confines of convention and stereotype and aim for a multi-modal language. This course seeks to outfit composers with the tools to move beyond those limits, and set out on the path of global artistry.
Culminating Experience in Scoring for Film, Television, and Video Games

Master of Music—Scoring for Film, Television, and Video Games students are required to complete a culminating experience that will serve as both a practicum and a bridge to the professional world. The tangible end product of this experience will be a master’s thesis which may take the form of an original score, a scholarly paper and/or research project, or other enterprise that offers an original solution to the “problem” of marrying music to visual media, specifically, film, television, and video games. The thesis will be conceived and developed as part of directed study coursework, and will be realized in the final seven-week semester. In conjunction with preparation for delivery of the thesis (e.g., final orchestration, preparation of pre-lay elements, final drafting of paper or execution of business plan), all students will undertake a professional internship related to the goals outlined in their thesis proposal. These internships may occur in composer studios, music production and/or supervision companies, post-production houses, entertainment companies, etc. The student will work in consultation with his/her faculty advisor and/or the program director to develop his/her unique project and internship plan, the goal of which is a professional outcome. A thesis committee composed of the advisor and two other faculty members will evaluate the final project that results from the culminating experience. The three-person faculty team will serve as the examining committee.