

## **Final Reflection on My 2020 Summer Enrichment Experience at Berklee Online**

This summer, I took a 12-week course at Berklee Online titled Music Composition for Film and TV 1. The course provided me with a thorough understanding of techniques for writing music in the style of big budget Hollywood films and TV programs.

### **On My Own**

Each of the twelve weeks of my film scoring program concentrated on a different genre of scoring, which included ballads of love and positive emotions, ballads of sadness and sorrow, horror and scary music, high-intensity action music, magic and fantasy music, and supernatural grandeur. I studied most of the course lessons on my own via the online portal. The course material provided examples of each genre with detailed analyses of the scores and cues. I learned the common features of each genre in their harmony, melody, tempo and rhythm, and orchestration, and attempted to emulate these in my own works.

I received 3-4 assignments a week, ranging from discussions to orchestrations to composing melodies and scoring scenes. The final project for every week was to score a scene or write music for an equivalent. I wrote music for a trailer, a TV show main theme and bumper, two love scenes, two sad scenes, two horror scenes, two action scenes, a fantasy scene, and a supernatural library cue. On the twelfth week, I compiled my best works into a 3-minute audio demo—which could hypothetically be submitted to directors to obtain a job—showcasing a variety of genres. My favorites to score were the love and sad scenes, since these required the most melodic content. I love writing melodies, but it was also fun to experiment with less melodic genres, such as horror and action.

### **Zoom Classes**

Every Wednesday I attended a Zoom Class with my professor and the other students in the Music Composition for Film and TV 1 section (about 14 people). At these classes, my professor elaborated on the genre of the week, and provided tips and insight into how to approach scoring the final weekly project. For example, during the second week of Sad Themes, he suggested places to begin the music and what mood should be portrayed by the music. In that specific scene, it began with a light conversation which later took a turn for the dark, at which point the music should either start for the first time or transition to a more somber mood to highlight this change.

In other classes, my professor chose to discuss film scoring in general, broader and higher-utility techniques, or tips for utilizing Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs). One class was dedicated entirely to Logic (a type of DAW, and the one I and many other students used), and he demonstrated importing a movie and scoring it in the DAW. In the final Wednesday class, my professor provided an overview of his timeline for scoring a movie: (1) coming up with an overall concept/approach, (2) spotting session (meeting with the director to decide which scenes need music and what purpose that music should serve), (3) writing the themes/leitmotifs, (4)

writing the first theme, the second theme, and so on, (5) and finally returning to the beginning to revise each scene (one of the most important phases).

## **Zoom Masterclasses**

Every Monday was a masterclass with a different successful film composer (many of whom have written music for Hollywood blockbusters). Guests included Harry Gregson-Williams (*The Chronicles of Narnia, Shrek, The Martian, The Meg*), Junkie XL (*Justice League, Deadpool, Batman vs. Superman*), James Newton Howard (*The Sixth Sense, King Kong, Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them, The Hunger Games*), Christophe Beck (*Frozen 1 and 2, Ant-Man, Pitch Perfect*), and many more. The students were able to ask questions via the chat box on Zoom, some of which were then picked and answered by the composers.

There were a few key ideas that many of the masterclass guests mentioned, one of which regarded technology. It became immediately evident to me during the first week of my program that technology is extremely important in the film scoring world. In order for directors to approve a cue, composers must make a mockup of their music using a Digital Audio Workstation such as Cubase, Logic, Ableton Live, Digital Performer, and Pro Tools. According to many of the film scorers, the best way to get a start in the film scoring world is to acquire an assistantship with an existing composer in the business. Assistants generally do not help with the actual creative art of composing, but rather work with the DAWs and music production (with which the composers do not want to work). Thus, being a tech wiz allows you to enter the business, even if your main goal is not to work with technology.

Another common topic was overwriting. Several Q&A questions concerned the idea of overwriting and knowing how much is enough. I, personally, struggled with overwriting in many scenes, especially those with a lot of dialogue. Christophe Beck actually identified overwriting as the defining characteristic separating beginning composers from professionals. He noted that it takes a lot of skill to know when one note is enough, or when two notes is enough (as in John Williams' *Jaws* theme).

Many of the film scorers also emphasized the idea of storytelling. This, in itself, is the single factor distinguishing film scoring from regular composition. As such, the music should be written in a way that enhances the storyline, rather than detracting from it or emphasizing a different mood. Junkie XL explained the best way to improve storytelling: first, write a melody and know its harmonic implications; then, take it into different forms (anything from love to heroic to action) and be able to seamlessly transition from one form to another.

## **Final Thoughts**

This experience has taught me that I should not be afraid to leave my comfort zone to seek out new things. I never imagined that I could learn so much and have such fun creating music. Previously, I considered composition to be a fun hobby, idolizing John Williams without truly diving into film scoring. Now, I can guarantee that film scoring is a possible career path for me.

It has been an incredibly educational and insightful journey. Looking back on the past twelve weeks, it is unbelievable to see how much I have learned, how many amazing connections I have made, and how many works I have created in such a short amount of time. This wonderful opportunity is all thanks to the Garwin Family Foundation; it has opened my eyes to a thoroughly fascinating field that successfully combines my love of creativity, music, and storytelling.

Though I am sad to see it end, I plan to continue to score anything and everything I can get my hands on, as well as compose more classical music not to picture. Thank you, GFF, for providing me with the chance to expand my interests and giving me an outlet for creative expression.