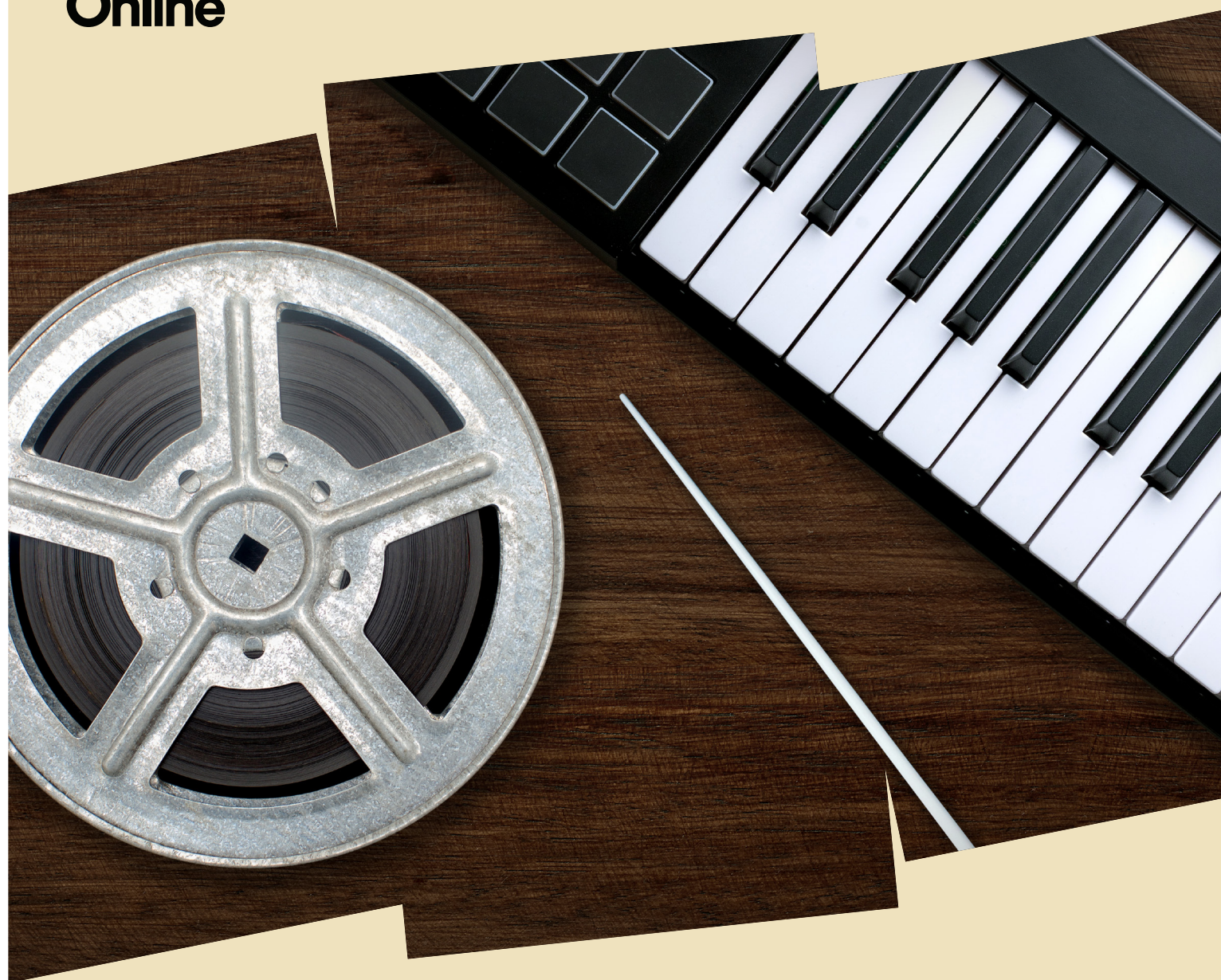


**Berklee  
Online**



# **Music for Film, TV, & Games**

**Digital Handbook**

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# Welcome!

Whether you're just beginning your musical journey, advancing your career, or simply seeking a community that shares your passion, you belong at Berklee Online. I encourage you to explore this handbook, and learn how we can help you confidently develop your craft and build your musical future.

All the best,

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Mahoney'.

**Jonathan Mahoney**

Dean of Pre-College, Online, and Professional Programs

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# Finding Film Composition Work

By Jeanine Cowen and Alison Plante

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From the Online Course  
*Professional Film Scoring Skills 1:  
Collaboration and Communication*

**Getting work requires actively seeking it:** most film composers do not have clients beating down their doors, and even composers represented by agents have to do most of their own legwork. Different locales connect communities of filmmakers and composers in various ways. Some locations work entirely by word of mouth, others expect professionals to be actively engaged with industry organizations and conferences. Getting to know the filmmakers in your area is the first step to finding work and making career-spanning connections that can keep you busy writing music.

Unlike in a standard job search you won't find "Composer needed" listed on the major online job sites. You will sometimes find films seeking a composer on Craigslist, Facebook, or other messaging sites; however, if you have found such a listing, so have hundreds of other composers with whom you will be competing—and the budget is likely to be low.

That said, there are some boards you should keep an eye on at least as you get started. When you become a Berklee Online student or alum, you have access to the Berklee Career Manager. Sometimes there are also listings posted through local industry groups or colleges; read on for more information about how to locate these.

# Fish Where the Fish Are

If you want to catch fish, will you have more luck going to a body of water or to a fisher's convention? This answer, and the corresponding maxim about fishing where the fish are, may seem obvious. Yet, many composers start out looking for work at the equivalent of the fisher's convention: organizations, networking groups, and venues where they are likely to meet other composers rather than filmmakers. What are the equivalent of the rivers, lakes, and oceans in which filmmakers "swim"?

Most filmmakers start out in film school. A student collaborating with a filmmaker who is also just learning their craft is the most equal relationship you can form, and the place you're most likely to find filmmakers who haven't yet bonded with a composer.

If you're lucky, the filmmaker will go on to success in the industry, and if this relationship starts off on the right foot, they might carry you along with them as they rise. A quintessential recent example of this trajectory is filmmaker Ryan Coogler and composer Ludwig Göransson. They met as students at the University of Southern California and Göransson scored Coogler's student film *Locks*.

Famously, Coogler and Göransson went on to work together on the increasingly successful films *Fruitvale Station* (2013); *Creed* (2015); *Black Panther* (2018)—for which Göransson won the Oscar for Best Original Score—and *Sinners* (2025).

Obviously, this kind of direct chain of success is not common. However, even if the filmmaker you work with directly doesn't have this kind of meteoric rise—or doesn't bring you along with them for the ride—these early collaborations are often crucial to getting future work because of word of mouth between filmmakers, which we'll discuss further.

You may have the best luck going in person to any local film schools in your area, as the opportunity to meet people face to face is a huge benefit. You can also reach out electronically to various programs via their social media or by locating relevant faculty contacts. One list of top film schools is the annual list in the *Hollywood Reporter*.

## Film Festivals

For some filmmakers a festival run is a first step towards getting funding for a feature based on their short film, or for building

buzz, or securing a distribution deal. For others it's an end in itself: a way to get significant audiences for their film as an end goal, especially for shorts, art films, and documentaries. In both cases, the filmmakers are going to be there in person if they can, so this is a great place to cast your fishing lines as an emerging film composer. This is especially true if you have scored one or more films in the festival, but it can be a worthwhile investment of your time and money to attend festivals even if you don't have a film playing there.

Where will you find filmmakers at festivals? First of all, at films, of course. There are often Q&As with members of the film team after screenings, which will help you put a face to a name. And you will be surprised how often you meet directors and other film team members in line, so be sure to make small talk with your queue neighbors. If you do have a film in the festival, the best way to make connections is usually at parties reserved for filmmakers and presenters, so definitely plan to attend those, armed with your elevator pitch and business cards.

If you really want to “level up” your festival game, the best thing you can do is volunteer. Festivals are typical non-profits and rely on a significant amount of volunteer assistance, from staffing the

information booth to managing lines. Not only can volunteering get you free admission to the festival, it really is the best way to get to know others at your level in a deeper way, through working together towards a common goal. As you might expect, many festival volunteers are filmmakers themselves, and even those who are not will be knowledgeable about film and may be able to point you towards useful connections.

There are several major international film festivals that you should at least be aware of:

- Sundance
- South by Southwest
- Tribeca
- Telluride
- Cannes
- Toronto
- Berlinale
- Hong Kong International Film Festival

However, you shouldn't discount smaller, local film festivals—especially if you are trying to meet local filmmakers—and genre, culture, or theme-specific festivals, such as the Boston Science

Fiction Festival or the Pan African Film Festival. The major international film festivals listed on the previous page are most useful to those who already have a foothold in the industry, so you may have better luck starting with some of the lesser-known ones, especially if you have some connection to their theme.

A good source for locating film festivals is FilmFreeway, a method filmmakers can use to submit their film to multiple festivals at once and which therefore maintains an up-to-date, categorized list of film festivals.

## Industry Organizations and Conferences

Again, think about where the “fish” are, and you’ll realize that we’re talking about groups that attract filmmakers, not musicians: so NAMM and the like are not your best bets. In terms of national conferences, you’re looking for organizations of directors, or organizations that cater to filmmakers’ needs, such as showcases for film and editing technology. Set up a Google Search Alert for the kind of conference that appeals to you and be ready to travel.

As with film festivals, there are some major international organizations that you should keep an eye on for events they offer, but which are not probably where you will get your early leads and can be difficult to access. Some of these are guilds or unions which exist for most of the major film trades other than composers. Organizations in this category include:

- The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences
- The Director's Guild of America
- The American Society of Cinematographers

Some of these groups have local chapters in different regions, so even if you are not located in Hollywood you may be able to find events that you could attend. You will also need to research your local scene to find groups of independent or documentary filmmakers, or other relevant groups. Sometimes it's as easy as searching online for where you're located, and typing "film organization." Even if there isn't one in your city, the search engines are usually smart enough to find one near you.

In terms of finding these “relevant groups,” think about what makes you unique as a filmmaker, and start from there. For example:

- Alliance of Women Directors
- Film Fatales
- Women in Film
- Black Association of Documentary Filmmakers

Sometimes related to organizations as listed above, and sometimes independently curated, directories of filmmakers and listings of films in production are the final tools that you should make use of. You won’t land as many gigs per lead with that strategy as you will via the places outlined above, but you don’t have to. Directories make it easy to reach a large number of prospects quickly, so even if these “cold” leads are less promising individually, if you contact enough of them, the law of averages holds that you’ll likely end up landing a few of them.

Directories are often kept by the organizations already described, but you can also get contact information along with credit lists and

bios easily in one place from IMDb Pro. This platform requires a subscription fee, which you may or may not find to be worth paying at the moment.

In terms of Hollywood films in production, in addition to IMDb Pro, you can access the “films in production” list from trade publication *Variety*. And keeping up on industry news in both *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* is a good idea in the long run in any case. Don’t expect to find your first film to score here, however; this tends to be a more useful tool once you’ve gotten a few feature film credits.

## Word of Mouth

While it’s important that you remain active in all the ways listed on the previous pages; in the end most of your work will come to you through word of mouth.

In terms of how to use this to get a film this week, of course it’s of limited value. However, it’s crucial to have this in mind at all times as you both get gigs and complete them; that they will function as your calling cards for all your future work as well.

Collaborating on a film is the everyday task of a working film composer, but before you can become a working film composer, you will need to make an effort to actually meet and connect with filmmakers. This will be a continuous cycle for you as a film composer. You can try to make such connections online, but a face-to-face encounter is usually more meaningful. Regardless of how you connect though, if you put in the work, and seek what opportunities for networking and engagement with filmmakers exist for you, you will be one step closer to getting that everyday work.

**Jeanine Cowen** and **Alison Plante** are the authors of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Check out their bios on the following pages, or learn more about the other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

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**Interested in exploring this course further?**

[\*\*Learn More\*\*](#)



Instructor Spotlight:

# Jeanine Cowen

Jeanine Cowen is Chair of the Screen Scoring program at USC Thornton School of Music. She is an active composer, music producer, and technologist, working primarily with sound and music for visual media. Her compositions can be heard in *The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo*, the off-Broadway play *Rapt*, and the game *Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar*.

At Berklee Online, she co-authored *Professional Film Scoring Skills 1: Collaboration and Communication* and authored *New Media Economics*.

**What piece of music (whether it be from film, TV, or a game) first made an impression on you?**

It was definitely “Pictures at an Exhibition” by Mussorgsky orchestrated by Ravel.

**What is your go-to soundtrack/score that you are currently streaming most?**

Honestly, I still listen to playlists on Spotify from the *Uncharted* series of video games. There is so much that works for the game and musically in those scores. I’m also a big fan of the *Game of Thrones* scores even today.

**What do you wish you could have told yourself early on as a composer?**

To keep up my chops as a performer! It is so valuable to be able to pick up an instrument and to be comfortable with it.

**What video games are you playing right now?**

I have been playing a lot of VR this year as well as family-oriented games. *Beat Saber* is tons of fun. *Moss* delivers such a great experience. *I Expect You to Die* is a fun VR puzzle game. Honestly, anything on the Switch!



Instructor Spotlight:

# Alison Plante

Alison Plante is the program director of the Film Scoring master's program at Berklee Online, and a professor in the Film Scoring department at Berklee College of Music. Her scoring credits range from documentaries for PBS and the History Channel, to national television ads, independent films, live action and animated shorts, theater, and more.

At Berklee Online, Alison co-authored the *Professional Film Scoring Skills 1: Collaboration and Communication* graduate course.

**What is your go-to soundtrack/score that you are currently streaming most?**

Recently I've been listening a lot to the soundtrack from Pixar's *Soul*, with music by Jon Batiste, Trent Reznor, and Atticus Ross, since I love the interplay between the jazz and electronic components of the score.

**What do you wish you could have known early on as a composer?**

That working as a composer was a viable option.

**How do you get inspired and into the composing mindset? Where is your favorite place to write music?**

I do most of my writing in my studio at my DAW rig, so I try to keep my workspace bright and cheerful—I have some art up that I like, and change out knick-knacks based on the project I'm scoring to stay in the relevant mood.

**If you're a gamer, what are you playing right now?**

I play quite a bit of *Civ 6*, and I've also been playing some text adventures—which as a genre has come a long way since I played Infocom games like *Zork* as a kid!



## Student Stories

# Free Video Begins a Berklee Journey

By Talia Smith-Muller

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**Pedro Osuna** remembers having one earbud in when he ate with his family at the dinner table as a teenager. He wasn't listening to music, or a podcast. He was learning about music production from a free Berklee Online lesson through Coursera.

When Pedro graduated from Berklee College of Music with a bachelor's degree in Film Scoring in 2019, he was the recipient of the George Delerue Award, the most prestigious award given by the Berklee Film Scoring department. His journey had come full circle, from being a teenager taking Berklee's free massive open online courses, to earning his degree from Berklee's campus in Boston.

“The free courses reach a massive amount of people who work in music and want to make a career out of it,” says Pedro. “For me, there were many factors why I decided to go to Berklee, and Berklee Online was one of them.”

Pedro grew up in Granada, Spain playing classical piano and violin and later joined the Granada Professional Conservatory, where his interest in composition grew.

“When my teacher left the room, instead of practicing the piece, I would play whatever I wanted, and that was my favorite thing,” says Pedro. “Instead of sitting down and playing scales, I would sit down and play the mood that I was in. I didn't really like studying one piece because it's based on repetition, and I got super bored so I would improvise in the style of the composer. So for me, from improvisation, I got into composition.”

In Granada, Pedro struggled to find places to study film scoring and remembers scouring the internet for how-to videos. He googled search terms like “learning film scoring” and “how to score films” when he came across Berklee Online’s free videos in Coursera.



**I realized I wanted to do [this] for the rest of my life ... I love music, I love films, and I love doing both.**

- Pedro Osuna

Pedro had such a voracious appetite for learning online that his consumption methods became more sophisticated over time. With the help of a harmonica holder, he was able to multitask while watching lessons by placing his phone where the harmonica would go in front of his face: like a Digital Age Bob Dylan.

While studying at the conservatory, Pedro applied what he learned in his online lessons by composing in his free time. At age 16, he began orchestrating for Spanish film composers and began a

mentorship with Carlos Martín. Two years later, he moved to Boston to attend Berklee College of Music on scholarship.

“I realized that when I was composing on the computer, or writing, or doing music in general for projects, I could sit down for 11 hours and my body would hurt and I wouldn’t even notice,” says Pedro.

“Time went by really fast. I realized I wanted to do that for the rest of my life. I saw that I love music, I love films, and I love doing both.”

Pedro thrived during his four years at Berklee. He worked as the assistant conductor for Berklee’s Contemporary Symphony Orchestra and scored a dozen short films and documentaries. In 2018, he worked as a composer’s assistant for the Netflix original Spanish television series, *Elite* (look up the trailer on YouTube), and later that year he conducted a performance for Ramin Djawadi, the composer for *Game of Thrones*.

He admits that halfway through his time at Berklee, he hit a burnout point. After not making it into an advanced film scoring class at Berklee, Pedro doubled down on his workload and was not taking care of himself. He developed carpal tunnel syndrome in both hands, was not eating regularly or getting enough sleep. He remembers

hallucinating one night from exhaustion, thinking there were mice in his apartment when there were not.

“I’ve always been one of those blue-sky people that they say is always super happy, but I couldn’t say no to any project, and there just wasn’t time for self-care,” says Pedro. “I realized I was just sad, and I didn’t feel good.”

Pedro realized that he needed to address his mental and physical health. He began sleeping more, exercising, and tracking his moods with apps. As he started feeling more in control of his life, success followed and he was accepted into the advanced film scoring course.

“It’s super, super competitive and, like most rejections, it meant I wasn’t ready for it yet,” says Pedro. “So I had to work harder. I’m grateful I was able to be part of it, especially because the other composers this year were wonderful and I learned a lot from them and from [professor] Sheldon Mirowitz.”

Pedro’s recent collaborations include *The Legend Hunters*, *Klaus*, and *James Bond 007: No Time To Die*. Whatever is next, he now knows how to better navigate the ups and downs of life as a film composer.



Instructor Spotlight:

# Gina Zdanowicz

Gina Zdanowicz is an Emmy-nominated sound designer and music composer for games, film, and TV. Her love for video games, sound, and technology began at a very early age and grew into a decade-long career. Her work can be heard on more than 100 game titles from award-winning games such as *Just Cause 3*, *BioShock 2*, *CrimeCraft*, and more.

At Berklee Online, Gina is the co-author and instructor of the *Game Audio 101* course.

**What piece of music (whether it be from film, TV, or a game) first made an impression on you?**

In video games it was *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*.

**What do you wish you could have known early on as a composer?**

Really understand how to tell a non-linear story through sound. I didn't fully realize the need to plan for supporting the player driven changes throughout the game.

**Where is your favorite place to write music?**

In my home studio with my cats.

**What is a video game that was not critically well-received, but has a fantastic score?**

I think *Ōkami* was underrated as a game and had a beautiful soundtrack.

**What video games are you playing right now?**

*Animal Crossing: New Leaf* when I want to relax. Otherwise I am diving in and trying to complete the latest *God of War*. I plan to move onto *Hades* soon after.

# How to Compose Immersive Music for Interactive Media

By Michael Sweet

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From the Online Course  
*Interactive Scoring for Games*

**Using interactive music in a game setting** can create a score that is unique, constantly evolving, and able to move the storyline and emotional context forward. This style of musical score is contrary to the traditional linear film-scoring method of music composition. Scoring for games organizes musical events in relationship to gameplay events that are occurring in real time through choices of the player, as opposed to a pre-sequenced order. Because of this significant difference, we create scores by using several varied compositional techniques.

The interactive music techniques that I'll describe here take longer to compose than a linear cue for a movie or television show. When scoring for games, the composer must build variability into the composition itself, so that when it's integrated into a game, the music will change based on the player's decisions.

It is difficult to test every possible outcome a player might encounter and every possible music combination within a game. Video game composers need to be cognizant of the limitless possibilities and also be open to allowing their music to playback differently on each playthrough based on the players' decisions.

Each interactive compositional technique has various advantages and disadvantages to why you might want to choose one over another when you are scoring for games, depending on what type of game it is. In addition, many of these fundamental techniques can be used in combination. Let's explore some common interactive composing techniques that composers utilize in video games:

## Horizontal Re-Sequencing

Horizontal re-sequencing refers to the ability for the music to respond to a game event by switching from one musical cue to another. The composer can sometimes customize the way that the engine switches from one cue to another. Some examples might include crossfading between the cues, waiting until the next downbeat or musical phrase to end before playing the next cue, or playing a musical transition to bridge the two cues.

The term horizontal re-sequencing is derived from how composers typically look at the horizontal axis in a DAW (Pro Tools, Cubase, etc.), which represents time. Since one cue can follow another cue based on a game event, we are re-sequencing the order of the playback of those cues.

Probably the most common horizontal re-sequencing technique used in scoring for games is looping. Looping refers to the ability for a music cue to repeat itself without the player hearing any loop point. In gameplay, it allows for the music to be extended for players that may take longer to get through a level or spend more time in an area than the designers had originally intended.

## Vertical Remixing

Vertical remixing refers to the ability to add or remove instrument layers during gameplay, like when Sonic goes into high-speed mode, and a drum loop appears on top of the current music. This technique is commonly used more frequently when there are rapid changes between states, because adding layers to the same musical cue can be less incongruous than switching between two different cues. For instance, when players work their way through an openworld game and fight enemies, it may be too much to switch between a separate explore and battle cue. More common in scoring for games is a set of layers that fade in and out as needed by the action of the game for a smoother player experience.

# Digital Signal Processing

Digital Signal Processing (or DSP for short) is a term that's used for applying real-time effects to the music. These effects include EQ filters, panning, reverb, delay, distortion, and more. Games often utilize effects on the music to enhance gameplay. In the snowboarding game *SSX Tricky*, the bass frequencies are filtered out using an EQ whenever the player flies into the air after a jump. The bass returns after the player lands. In combat games, the music is often filtered so that the high frequencies are lowered to signal low health to the player. Other DSP effects can also be used for dramatic effect within video games.

## Musical Stingers

A stinger is a short musical phrase that's played on top of the music to signal a game event to the player. Stingers are often played when a goal is reached, a player dies, or treasure is found. When scoring for games, stingers should be written in such a way that they're not dissonant with the current key or progression of the music. Stingers are usually played when a game event happens, but depending on the underlying musical engine, stingers can also be played on a

specific beat or at the end of a musical phrase. The stinger can be an effective way of signaling prominent events to the player.

## Instrumental and Arrangement Alteration

Another interactive music technique used when scoring for games is to change the lead instrument or ensemble based on a specific game event. This subtle change in the music is less harsh than switching to an entirely different music cue. Changing out the lead instrument will generally leave the tempo, harmonic progression, and melodic development intact. Changing out the entire ensemble is more dramatic but similar to contemporary arranging, where different instruments take over parts in the music.

## Tempo Alteration

One of the earliest interactive music techniques found in scoring for games, tempo alteration began as early as the '70s in arcade classics like *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders*. Game events trigger tempo changes; increasing the tempo generally increases the tension in a

game, while slowing it down does the opposite. In many cases this technique may not work as well with audio stems, because of the audible artifacts you hear in the tempo-manipulated audio. This technique is used more commonly when the video game uses direct MIDI and Mod playback engines.

## **Harmonic Approach, Melodic Adaptation, and Note Manipulation**

The ability to change the chord or melodic progression dynamically during gameplay can be a unique way to enhance the dramatic storytelling of the game. Key and modal changes that trigger based on a game event can be very powerful during gameplay. Additionally, simple note manipulation or randomization may increase the length of time a player can listen to a piece of music before the player feels the repetition of a music cue. Although this technique is possible to harness by crossfading between audio files, it is generally used more often when the composer is able to embed standard MIDI files within the game to trigger custom virtual instruments.

# Randomization

Randomization is another common technique used in scoring for games to reduce repetition. Below are some ways that composers utilize randomization:

- Randomizing the order of the playback of musical phrases, changing the musical form.
- Randomizing the start point within a music cue so that it doesn't always begin in the same section.
- Randomizing musical stingers. If the player dies a lot in the game, it may be repetitive for the player to hear the same musical stinger every time the player dies. The composer could create a variety of death stingers instead of having just a single version.

It's important to become well acquainted with these compositional techniques: horizontal re-sequencing; vertical remixing; digital signal processing; musical stingers; randomization; instrumental arrangement and alteration; tempo alteration; harmonic approach, melodic adaptation, and note manipulation; and randomization. But what's more important than knowing what the techniques are

is knowing how to execute on them. You'll need to experiment extensively with all of them so you'll be able to know which technique to use in which situation. If a game calls for horizontal re-sequencing, you'll want to be well-versed in how to build cues that flow well with each other, rather than trying it out on the fly. The same goes for all of the techniques, and really, everything within the fields of composing and gaming: practice makes perfect.

**Michael Sweet** is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Discover which video games he's playing right now on the following page, or learn more about other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

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**Interested in exploring this course further?**

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Instructor Spotlight:

# Michael Sweet

Michael Sweet is an associate professor in the Film Scoring department at Berklee College of Music, and led the development of the game scoring curriculum. He is an accomplished video game audio composer and has been the audio director for more than 100 award-winning video games from Cartoon Network, Microsoft, Sesame Workshop, Gamelab, and more.

At Berklee Online, Michael authored the *Interactive Scoring for Games* course.

## **What do you wish you could have told yourself early on as a composer?**

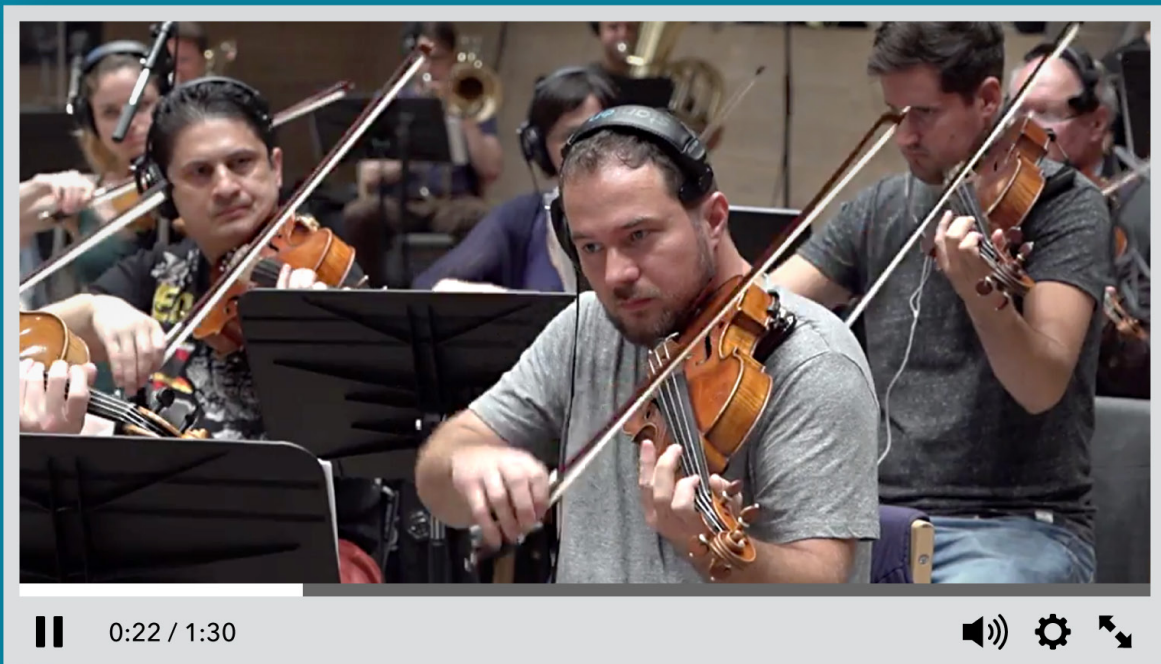
Be yourself, and curate an audience that likes working with you, and you working with them. Even though I love film, it took me a long time to realize that loving film was not the same as being a successful film composer. I was able to find my audience with game developers, but only after spending time convincing filmmakers unsuccessfully to work with me.

## **How do you get inspired and into the composing mindset?**

The most challenging part of composing is to remember that a ‘composing mindset’ is a creative place, and not one that just needs to turn in the next piece of music to a client. Time is always the enemy—so the best thing for me is to build in time within a job for me to experiment, and sometimes fail—otherwise my music starts to sound generic without taking any risks.

## **What video games are you playing right now?**

I just finished playing *Cyberpunk 2077*, and *The Last of Us 2*. I’m currently playing *Ghosts of Tsushima*.



## Student Stories

# Student Film Scores Resonate in Budapest

By Pat Healy

A lot can happen in 15 minutes. You become keenly aware of this if you're a student in Sean McMahon's *Composing the Orchestral Film Score* graduate course. The four students in McMahon's course participated in their first remote scoring session, where each

student was allotted 15 minutes to work remotely with the Budapest Scoring Orchestra. On the other side of the students' speakers were more than 60 musicians performing and recording multiple takes of compositions that the students had written over the previous weeks.

"I was really blown away at how the musicians in Budapest were able to make each and every element have its moment," says Alex Spiers, one of the four Berklee Online students in the scoring session.

"It speaks volumes about the difference between programming music and the value of real, live human beings playing music. The expressiveness is just something that you can't imitate and it was really cool to get to see that."

Spiers and his classmates learned a lot about the value of working creatively with real, live human beings in McMahon's course. The four students struck up a friendship as they went through Berklee Online's Film Scoring graduate program as the first cohort. Their fellowship spans generations: Spiers is a 28-year-old church music director in Chicago; Brett McCoy is a 54-year-old software engineer in Germantown, Maryland; Francesco D'Agostino is a 23-year-old music assistant in Naples, Florida; and Scott Gordon is a soon-to-be-retired high school band director in Richmond, Virginia.

“Each one of us has learned so much from each other,” says Gordon. “Whenever any one of us has something to say, we’re always very constructive, and if we have a suggestion, we’re really working for each other’s excellence as much as our own.”

In addition to their scheduled class times, the four classmates would meet on Zoom to do what they call a “pregame,” where they’d hype each other up before the week’s Live Class, and give each other constructive criticism on their music. Going into the session with the Budapest Scoring Orchestra, this same camaraderie continued.



**I’ve listened to it at least 100 times ... it’s so awesome sounding. It was a life-changing experience.**

- Brett McCoy

“During the session, as soon as someone would finish, we would hop on and congratulate each other—it was kind of a love fest, helping to encourage each other and helping with the nerves,” says Spiers.

The students all listened on their computers as the orchestra performed their 90-second compositions. After the first runthrough, the students typed directives to the conductor, and the orchestra gave it another shot, altering their performance according to the students' suggestions. D'Agostino was the first student to watch and listen to his work being performed. To relay feedback, the students communicated over instant messaging, and after the orchestra finished that very first take, no words were showing up in the text box, radio silence for a minute.

“We were just trying to get the hang of it, trying to gather our thoughts,” explains D'Agostino. “It was a mix of going from the mock-up to listening live and just trying to figure out where stuff could be a little bit better and just wording it all through text. So it was just both of those things together, and that was a little bit overwhelming. It took me a little bit of time. But once I got into the groove, I was just rolling.”

McCoy recalls one of the more rewarding moments of the session: “I was looking at the cello players because my piece has a lot of low strings doing very rhythmic stuff and one of the cellists was headbanging.”

Watch the recording session of the Budapest Scoring Orchestra, performing works by these students: **<http://berkonl.in/Budapest>**

While the session was full of both nerves and excitement for the students, they all seem to agree that the course had fully prepared them for the opportunity and helped with their successes.

“We were well-guided to be very well-prepared for the event,” says Gordon. “I think everyone, from Berklee to us as students, were wanting this to be a superior performance. And so, we were given very clear step-by-step instructions to make sure we covered all the details.”

Instead of using preexisting films to score, McMahon wrote scenes for films that don’t exist: one was a chase scene from a movie he called *Dirty Cops* and the other was a dramatic battle scene from one he called *Lunar Threat*. He says because rights clearances are often tricky, it made more sense to make up the films so that the students could write pieces befitting big summer blockbuster types of movies.

“It gave me a chance to create a scene where they could do something big and theatrical,” says McMahon. “Because if you have

an opportunity with an orchestra, you don't want them just to play drones. Sure, there are plenty of film music cues that use drones, and that's fine, but this was going to be their calling card piece. I wanted them to have a great demo."

It's safe to say that the four students are satisfied with their demos. They now have professional recordings of their compositions for their portfolio. All of them say they've listened to their tracks multiple times.

"I've listened to it at least 100 times: Sometimes I just want to listen to it because it's so awesome sounding," says McCoy. "It was a life-changing experience."



Instructor Spotlight:

# Sean McMahon

Sean McMahon is the chair of the Film Scoring department at Berklee. He is a composer and an orchestrator whose credits include *Spider-Man 3*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, and more. He has also scored video games such as *Jump Dewds!* and *Strata*. McMahon holds a bachelor's degree in Film Scoring from Berklee College of Music.

At Berklee Online, Sean authored and instructs the graduate course *Composing the Orchestral Film Score*.

**What is your go-to soundtrack/score that you are currently streaming most?**

Lately I have been listening to *The Queen's Gambit* by Carlos Rafael Rivera.

**What is a movie that was not critically well-received, but has a fantastic score?**

A very interesting score from John Williams that almost no one has heard is *Images* from the late seventies. It does not sound like a “John Williams” score at all. Williams experiments with all sorts of interesting timbres and sounds produced by traditional Japanese instruments. I recommend that anyone interested in film music listen to it.

**What do you think is the biggest advantage of being a composer during this particular time in history?**

The big advantage is that there is now more content being created than ever. Traditional delivery platforms such as YouTube, Hulu, Netflix, Prime Video, etc., are now commissioning content, not just delivering it. That means that there are more shows and opportunities than ever before.

# **'Halloween' Theme: So Many Uses for Synth it's Scary**

By Michele Darling

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From the Online Course

*Synthesis, Sampling, and Sound Design in Film Scoring:  
Electronic and Textural Resources*

**The music from the 1978 film *Halloween*** was revolutionary, not just because director John Carpenter also composed the score, but because of Carpenter's adventurous use of early synth pads and stabs, which helped him create one of the most powerful and creepiest soundtracks of all time.

The late 1970s were a pivotal time for electronic music in the soundtrack format, and music like this was previously the domain of science fiction, but Carpenter discovered that the new electronic sounds lent themselves well to the horror genre.

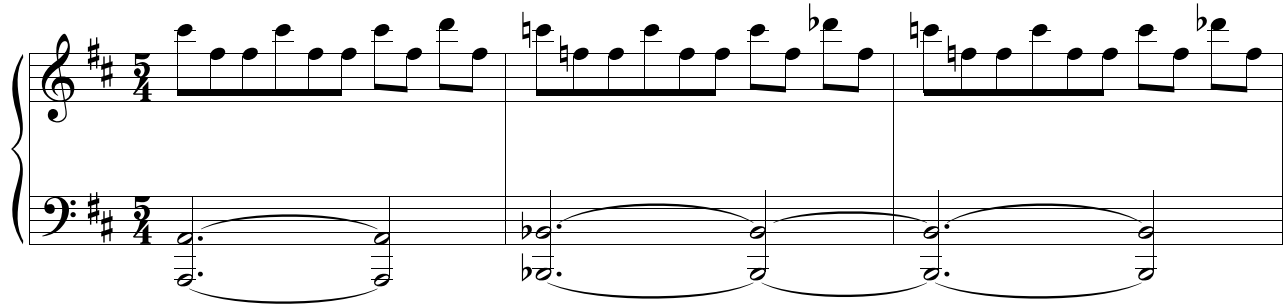
*Halloween* was a low-budget film, which cost around \$300,000. There weren't enough funds to pay a film composer, let alone an orchestra. Carpenter had a bit of previous musical experience, so he booked a studio in LA and connected with Dan Wyman—and eventually engineer Alan Howarth—to help him realize the soundtrack with synthesizers. The challenge was that they had to record the music without synchronizing it to picture since the technology had not been invented yet. They played and recorded the music to a click and a stopwatch, then matched it up with the film later on the 35 mm mag stock at the film studio. It's amazing, the score works so well and captures the frightening vibe perfectly.

On his website, Carpenter tells the story of composing for the film: “[The script for] *Halloween* was written in approximately 10 days by Debra Hill and myself. I screened the final cut minus sound effects and music, for a young executive from 20th Century Fox. She wasn’t scared at all. I then became determined to ‘save it with the music.’ I had composed and performed the musical scores for my first two features, *Dark Star* and *Assault on Precinct 13*, as well as many student films. I was the fastest and cheapest I could get.”

Carpenter has said that his biggest influences as a composer were Ennio Morricone and Bernard Herrmann, the latter of whom is best known for his score for *Psycho*, which is the film that inspired *Halloween*. He says the rhythm of *Halloween*’s main title theme was inspired by an exercise his father taught him on the bongos in 1961, the beating out of 5/4 time.

“There is a point in making a movie when you experience the final result,” he writes on his site. “For me, it’s always when I see an interlock screening of the picture with the music. All of a sudden a new voice is added to the raw, naked without-effects-or-music footage. The movie takes on its final style, and it is on this that the emotional total should be judged.”

Let's take a look at the main *Halloween* theme:



The main theme from the film is actually very simple yet incredibly memorable. This could be because of its haunting dissonance or its relentless drive. One of the techniques Carpenter uses to make us feel unsteady is the irregular time signature. As he mentioned, the piece is in 5/4: the syncopation is created with accents in groups of 3, 3, 2, and 2. The initial pace in the groups of three is set, but then is suddenly changed to groups of two, making it feel as if it's pushing us forward and creating an unsteadiness.

Look up the opening credits of the movie. Note how the uneasiness of the music works with the zooming in of the jack-o-lantern. A piano plays the 10-note melody in eighth notes. The C# to F# (Tritone) repeats three times and then the C# raises a minor 2nd to D and returns to F# (creating a minor 6th). The entire melody descends one half step, C to F (TT), creating a feeling of falling

and leaving what was the original key. The chosen intervals of tritones and minor 6ths that then descend by a minor 2nd all create dissonance and tension just by the inherent nature of the intervals.

Whole notes (playing every 10 notes) in the low brass and layered electronic strings play the tonic to give us an impending doom and a slight feeling of grounding. Tucked underneath the melody is a steady pulsing electronic rhythmic percussive sound almost sounding like a foot keeping time played in unrelenting sixteenth notes. All of these parts together create a suspenseful and dissonant theme that is incredibly unsettling.

Let's take another look at the main theme in a different context. Look up the "Speed Kills" scene online. (Warning, there are spoilers ahead, and some legitimately scary scenes.)

The theme occurs as a car drives by the girls. Jamie Lee Curtis' character Laurie notices the car. Her friends think it's a friend, but it's really Michael Myers, the killer. As Laurie's head turns and watches the car pass, the pulse of the music matches the speed of his driveby. As soon as he stops—once the girl yells at him—the music surges in volume. Then it slowly fades as his car finally passes.

The simplicity of this theme is highly effective with its steady pulse in 5/4 time and the recognizable melody. The tick-tock clock-like nature of the electronic percussive sound in relentless sixteenth notes suggests Michael's unrelenting drive to kill. It truly is what makes this scene so frightening. There's no gore here, but we know the threat is imminent, and the continuous, steady, and unresolving, music holds us in anticipation; we know this threat will continue.



Let's take a look at another scene (this one is definitely gorier). Again, just do a quick search online. It's called "The Chase." The following music cue, "Michael Kills Judith," occurs when Laurie sees her murdered friend on the bed in a position representing Jesus

dying on the cross. For context, Judith is Michael's sister, who he killed at the beginning of the film. It is her gravestone that we see on top of the bed.

The mysterious three-note synth melody is immediately recognizable as the "Michael Kills Judith" cue, establishing the fact that Michael has already killed Laurie's friend. The synth lead sound is made of a triangle wave with dissonant minor 2nd layers. It's interesting to note that as the sound is held, you can hear a wavering or pulsing, similar to a vibrato. This steady pulse in the synth sound keeps time with Michael's relentless mission, which has a terrifying effect on the audience.

Notice that just after the stinger, which is meant to surprise the viewer, a piano enters playing descending minor 2nds in steady eighth notes. The synth pad that accompanies the piano descends in scale with the piano, going deeper into the drama and the potential demise of our heroine.

This is the ultimate tension in the film! The music takes us through the terrifying ride of Michael hunting Laurie through the house until she is temporarily safe in the house across the street with the kids.

At about the 1:22 mark we are once again reminded of the three-note synth motif, which references Judith's murder from earlier in the movie. Hearing the same musical motif makes us more fearful that Laurie will meet the same fate.

It's interesting to note that, when Michael attempts to stab Laurie in this scene, the music dies out. The silence during the most intense part of the film leaves us unsettled, as if the rug has been pulled out from under us. We stand in silence with Laurie as we wonder if she's going to be alright. The music begins again when we realize she is still alive and Michael continues to move towards her with a simple yet steady single-note piano rhythm.

It is this sort of technique, and the courage to keep the score simple that makes Carpenter such a master of horror music. Notice also that many of the score sounds in Halloween came from synthesizers but were emulating traditional instruments such as piano sounds, harpsichord sounds, strings, brass, and bass.

Carpenter says the scoring sessions took two weeks "because that's all the budget would allow."

He dubbed the music in late July and finally saw the picture with an audience in the fall.

“About six months later I ran into the same young executive who had been with 20th Century Fox,” he recalls. “Now she too loved the movie and all I had done was add music. But she really was quite justified in her initial reaction. ... My plan to ‘save it with the music’ seemed to work.”

**Michele Darling** is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Discover which film score she is currently streaming on the following page, or learn more about other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

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**Interested in exploring this course further?**

**Learn More**



Instructor Spotlight:

# Michele Darling

Michele Darling is the assistant chair of the Electronic Production and Design department at Berklee College of Music. An accomplished sound designer, composer, recording engineer, and educator, she worked as part of an Emmy-winning production team at Sesame Workshop, where she composed music, worked on sound design, and recorded voice work.

At Berklee Online, she authored the grad course *Synthesis, Sampling, and Sound Design in Film Scoring: Electronic and Textural Resources*.

**What piece of media do you think is a prime example of music and visuals coming together to create a masterpiece?**

Francis Ford and Carmine Coppola's score for *Apocalypse Now* is one of my favorite classic examples.

**What is your go-to soundtrack/score that you are currently streaming most?**

I'm fascinated by Ludwig Göransson's score for *Tenet*. I'm spending some time unravelling the storyline and enjoying the reverse sounds.

**What do you wish you could have told yourself early on as a composer?**

You are capable. Just get out of your own way. Stop trying to force it and let the music and visuals lead.

**How do you get inspired and into the composing mindset?**

I watch the visuals several times until I start to feel emotion. When I feel immersed in the emotion, I start to play on the keyboard and come up with musical elements and sounds that align with the emotion. Then I have a basis to work off of and I can build on it.

# World-Class Courses

With Berklee Online, you have more than 300 courses to choose from, including more than 30 courses focusing on music for film, TV, and games. The offerings include:

- **Film Scoring 101** [↗](#)
- **Game Audio 101** [↗](#)
- **Audio Post Production for Film and TV** [↗](#)
- **Game Design Principles** [↗](#)
- **Interactive Scoring for Games** [↗](#)
- **Orchestrating the Film Score with Live Sessions** [↗](#)





## Tips of the Trade

# How to Break into Game Audio Design

By Ashley Pointer

You enter the war zone and achieve a triple kill streak in *Call of Duty*; you hit your opponent with a combo in *Super Smash Bros*; you battle the undead in *Resident Evil*. The sounds you hear fuel your adrenaline, get you pumped up, and help create your experience.

Behind these video games are people and teams who are responsible for the audio that is keeping you locked in.

When Gina Zdanowicz isn't teaching *Game Audio 101* at Berklee Online, she's running her own sound design company, Serial Lab Sound. Her passion for video games started as a child in the '80s. Playing one of her favorite games, *Super Mario NES*, she noticed how the music would make her feel as she explored the different levels. Being pushed towards playing musical instruments by her parents and her natural inclination to technology made this career choice an easy one, even though back then, it wasn't the most popular profession.

"I think I had some kind of force of nature watching over me," she says. "I was always interested in how things work. Back then we didn't have the internet—It wasn't the stone age, but we didn't have the internet, where I could go on and say, 'Hey, I'm really interested in games and music, what do I do?'"

This curiosity led her to Berklee where she studied Music Synthesis. At the time, this was the best major to prepare for a career in game audio design. You can hear her work on more than 100 game titles

such as *Runewards*, *Wolfenstein: Youngblood*, *Just Cause 3*, *BioShock 2*, and *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified*, just to name a few.

Since Gina graduated, Berklee has introduced a game scoring curriculum. One of the people to come through that program is Renzo Heredia. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Electronic Production and Design and Film Scoring with a minor in Video Game Scoring and is now working for Sony as a Technical Audio Designer.

Berklee Online has adapted the campus' game scoring curriculum, offering courses and a certificate program that can prepare you for a career as a game audio designer, like Gina and Renzo. Below they offer some tips to consider if you'd like to compose for video games.

## Compete in a Game Jam

Game jams are a great way to break into the video game design scene. They are events where you and a team have 48 hours to make a game from scratch. Usually game jams have a theme and each teammate tackles different elements such as the storyline, visuals, audio, and code and work together to have a finished product by the

end of the two days. Renzo competed in several game jams and says that they are what really helped him earn some credibility in the field early on.

“We made a platform called Hoop Snake, and I became known as the Hoop Snake guy because I made a song—it’s still on SoundCloud, and I made a song that anytime the snake powers up, a ballad for Hoop Snake plays,” he says, with a smile. “That’s something that made people laugh, and people go, ‘Oh Renzo, you’re the Hoop Snake person. How are you?’ whenever I would go to a video game meetup.”

Renzo says the game jam was a great way for him to practice his game scoring skills, especially with the added pressure of competition. But most importantly, it was helpful and to meet others who were interested in the same field. Down the road, these connections can be invaluable.

“I know that everyone from that project did happen to continue working on games,” says Renzo. “That Global Game Jam was helpful, not just for me, but for everyone else on the team.”

# Freelance Your Audio Design Work

While most game audio design jobs are based in Los Angeles, freelancing provides the opportunity to work from anywhere in the world. Sometimes it can even be the stepping stone to working in-house at the company of your choice or starting your own company; or it might just be the right destination for you. However, there are both pros and cons of freelance work just as with any other work.

“When you’re working freelance, obviously you have to make sure that you’re invoicing, and that you’re working out a good payment,” says Gina. “You also have to generate the business, too, so you have to be out there networking. And you can’t wait until you’re finished with one project to say, ‘Okay, now I’m going to look for my next.’ It’s this continuous process.”

With this type of work, much of the battle is putting yourself out there to get the work flowing. Gina stresses the importance of meeting people and relationship-building.

“I think the biggest thing is networking, which can be pretty difficult,” she says. “I’m a pretty shy and introverted type of person but I think my passion for wanting the career in audio outweighed that shyness and introversion. So, I just got out there, and I started to go to conferences around that time games were becoming a bigger thing.”

At one of the conferences, Gina met Jason Canter, who brought her in to do the audio for projects like *BioShock 2*.

## Explore In-House Audio Design Opportunities

Once you’ve gotten some footing in the field, try exploring in-house opportunities at a company. Keep your eye on job sites and specialty sites like **jobs.gamesindustry.biz** for opportunities.

“It’s been a blessing. I’ve been very fortunate to be with the team here,” says Renzo of his work at Obsidian. “I think what I enjoy the most is, even as an associate audio designer, I can still ask anyone here questions.”

Working in-house guarantees a consistent pay timeline as well as a team of people to learn from and connect with that are all in the same field. Unlike freelancing, you don't have to worry about contracts, health insurance, or when your next job will come.

## Study Game Audio Design

Berklee Online has several options ranging from a professional certificate in Game Audio Design and Production to a bachelor's degree program in Composition for Film, TV, and Games. We recommend starting with the following three courses that will provide an introduction to game audio design, help you prepare a solid foundation, and develop the necessary skills to succeed.

### ***Game Design Principles***

With this course, you'll learn an overview of video game design, and explore the iterative process of coming up with ideas, prototyping, testing, and revising, that is at the heart of the video game industry.

### ***Game Audio 101***

If you have no experience with sound production or engineering, this course will give you the tools needed to work at a game

development company or as a freelance game audio professional. By the end of the course you will be able to create video game soundscapes incorporating dialogue, sound design, and music.

### ***Game Audio Production with Wwise***

This course is designed for the musician who wants to compose music and create unique sounds and creature voices for video games. This class focuses on both the creative process of designing unique audio and the practical challenges of putting that content into a game, and will prepare you for all major aspects of game audio production and implementation.

In addition to the skills you acquire through taking a few courses, networking opportunities are plentiful, especially in a field like gaming. Think about the last time you found yourself in a conversation with someone you learned was a fellow gamer. Imagine getting to share that sort of enthusiasm on a regular basis. The difference is that the people you'll meet in class are also looking to break into the field or may already be in the field, and when one of them is looking to recommend a friend for a job, they'll likely be looking at you.



Instructor Spotlight:

# Tim Huling

Tim Huling is a composer, orchestrator, producer and educator who works in music for film, TV, video games, the concert hall, and more. His credits include films such as *Georgia Rule* and *Mad Money*; TV shows such as *Little People, Big World* and *Inside Passage*; and video games such as *Planetary Annihilation* and *Skyrealm*.

At Berklee Online, Tim authored and instructs *Film Score Analysis*, as well as *Culminating Experience in Film Scoring 1* and *2*.

**What piece of media do you think is a prime example of music and visuals coming together to create a masterpiece? Do you have a classic example and a modern example?**

*Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark*, John Williams; the 2015 live action version of *Cinderella*, Patrick Doyle.

**What do you wish you could have known early on as a composer?**

Information flows in all directions, so industry contacts of any kind can, and probably will, lead to unexpected opportunities.

**How do you get inspired and into the composing mindset?**

Free improvisation on an instrument helps get things going, along with a cozy cup of coffee to wake me up, or an herbal tea to calm me down! If I am struggling to find the right idea for a project, I might lean on my bag of tricks: Write three different versions of the thing that are substantially different from one another; or call my collaborator and discuss the project further—character motivation, character’s inner life, overall spirit of the project, etc.

# What to Consider When Composing for Film and TV

By Ben Newhouse

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From the Online Course

*Music Composition for Film and TV 1*

**The fundamental role of music in film** is to enhance the emotions that the audience is experiencing. While this may sound straightforward, it is not uncommon for the emotional content of a scene to be extremely complex. When the musical direction of a scene becomes a question, it is valuable to ask, “What do we want the audience to be feeling at this moment?” The answer to that question will guide you in deciding what type of music to compose.

## The Complete Audio Landscape

When you go to a concert, the primary audio element is the music. When you go to a movie, the music must share the airwaves with dialogue and sound effects. An effective musical score will take into account these other audio elements, considering them to be much like a counterpoint to the music.

## Dialogue

In most cases, the music should make an effort to avoid the dialogue. Typically, the dialogue directly delivers the plot to the

audience and most producers/directors deem that to be more important than the music and sound effects. In the case that music or sound effects should distract from an important line of dialogue, the music or sound effects will likely be removed entirely.

There are multiple compositional approaches for keeping music subordinate to dialogue. For brainstorming purposes, a list of possible techniques for achieving this includes:

- Take the music out entirely. Scenes with a lot of dialogue often have no music at all.
- Compose smooth textures without a lot of rhythmic movement. Sustained strings generally play well under dialogue. Accented brass and sudden percussion hits are distracting.
- Consider timing carefully. Often, musical entrances and changes can be placed in the subtle pauses between words in the dialogue.
- Use small instrumentation. It is commonplace to score moments without dialogue for full orchestra and then pull back to smaller instrumentation when dialogue enters.

- Limit melodic content during dialogue. A great melody demands the attention of the listener, which, in most musical situations, is a desirable result. However, in scenes heavy with dialogue, we want the audience to be focused on the dialogue and story. For this reason, music structured as harmonic accompaniment—but with no melody—can play very naturally under dialogue.
- Use predictability to your advantage. Like melody, music that changes and evolves in unexpected ways demands the attention of the listener. When writing your next symphony, this is a goal to which you should aspire. However, during scenes heavy with dialogue, we want the attention of the audience focused on the dialogue. Music that evolves slowly and is somewhat predictable shifts the listener's attention away from the music—and to the dialogue. For this reason, repetitive music like minimalism often feels extremely natural when set to picture.
- Avoid the pitch range of the dialogue. It can be beneficial to identify the approximate pitch range of the actors' speaking voices and then avoid those ranges musically.

It is not necessary to attempt all of the techniques above when composing music for a scene with a lot of dialogue. Rather, employing just one of the above techniques is often sufficient.

# Sound Effects Considerations

Just like dialogue, the composer should consider the sound effects in their composing process and treat them as ideas that act as counterpoint to the music. Some considerations when working with sound effects:

- In scenes heavy with sound effects, consider using no music: gun fights, car chases, etc. Such scenes often fill the air with sounds of clashing metal and explosions. In many cases, those effects are extremely detailed and sufficient to drive the energy of the scene.
- In scenes with clashing metal, consider limiting your percussion. Clashing swords and similar sounds directly compete with cymbal crashes. Often, action music built primarily with driving strings and brass is a better alternative for such scenes.
- It is not the role of music to literally recreate the sounds of events on the screen. The composer need not—and should not—put a tam-tam crash and bass drum hit at the moment of a big explosion. Literally portraying that explosion is the job of the sound effects. The music, on the other hand, should portray the emotional implications of that explosion.

# Highlighting Visual Events

By definition, the discipline of film scoring involves aligning music with visual images on screen. This means the composer must make a series of decisions regarding the timing of the music—when the music should start, stop, and change emphasis.

Music should start/stop when there is a change in the emphasis and meaning of the picture. Such a change can be initiated by:

- a shift in dialogue
- a change in camera position
- a change in setting, and/or a change in the action (such as a car driving off or a character discovering an opened door)

One of the primary tasks of a film composer is to match the pacing of the music to the pacing of the visual images. The “tempo” of the visuals is determined by several factors, including the speed of picture cuts and the content of the on-screen action. While

the tempo of the visuals cannot be described in precise beats per minute, they can be expressed generally (such as up-tempo or down-tempo) and the music should match accordingly.

## **Musical Characteristics**

It is helpful to maintain a list of musical characteristics we can employ when there is a shift in the contour of a scene. Below is one possible list:

### **Make a Change in Instrumentation**

- Move melody or musical ideas from one instrument to another
- Increase overall instrumentation
- Decrease overall instrumentation

### **Make a Change in Harmony**

- Modulate to a new key
- Arrive at an important point in the progression, such as a resolution to tonic or a deceptive cadence

- Increase or decrease the harmonic rhythm
- Change the harmonic language, e.g., shift from major to minor key

## **Make a Rhythmic Change**

- Increase or decrease the tempo
- Increase or decrease the rhythmic subdivision
- Change the meter

## **Miscellaneous Changes**

- Stop the music entirely (or start it!)
- Switch to a new melody or musical idea entirely
- Change the overall counterpoint structure
- Change the overall pitch register

Like our previous list regarding dialogue, not all of the techniques listed above need to be used simultaneously. Often, employing just one of the techniques above is sufficient for highlighting a shift in the contour of the picture.

# Other Roles of Music in Film

While the primary role of music in film is to heighten the underlying emotional response of the audience, music can play additional functions. Music can help establish a film's setting, using musical references to establish location and time period. In addition, music can function as source music, meaning it originates from something on screen (such as a TV or a radio).

## Setting Location and Time

There are a great number of insinuations that can be made with music. A solo accordion will make the audience think of Paris. Gregorian chant will make an audience think of medieval times. A didgeridoo will make the audience think of Australia. A bebop tune will make the audience think of the United States in the mid-1900s.

These musical references can be stated directly or mixed with orchestral score to place the setting of a film in a specific location and time. As one example, the score to *Braveheart* incorporates bagpipes and Celtic harp to set the film in medieval Scotland.

# Source Music

Source music is music that emanates from something within the picture, such as a television or radio. Source music can range from purely incidental music (such as background music at a bar) to music that's pivotal to the plot of the film. In general, source music is not the responsibility of the composer. Rather, most projects employ a music supervisor who is responsible for selecting source music and securing the rights to use it.

## Framework for Analyzing Scenes

A great deal of the composer's work is done when analyzing scenes, deciding what emotions are important to the scene and what kind of music will best enhance those emotions. In this topic, we will look at a basic framework—four questions to answer about a scene—that can be used to analyze a scene. The framework can be used by the composer as a starting point for making creative decisions, and also as a means for framing a discussion with producers and directors about the creative direction of a project.

## Genre

Determine what style and genre of music is most appropriate for a scene. Here, the answer could be large orchestral music, top-40-style pop music, 1930s jazz, or another genre.

## Emotion

Determine what emotion the plot elicits. The answer could be sadness, joy, euphoria, terror, or something else. Emotion is a broad spectrum; think about the feelings elicited by a romantic comedy versus those of a horror film.

## Intensity

Determine what energy level the visuals of the scene elicit. Scenes with frequent picture cuts and a lot of visual activity tend to elicit a high energy level. Scenes with few picture cuts and intimate dialogue between two indoor characters tend to elicit a low energy level. Thus, a scene's energy could be low, moderate, or high.

## Contour

Determine how the scene changes and shifts over time. Many scenes start with one emotion and shift to another. Other scenes start with one energy level and shift to another. When analyzing a scene, determine what changes occur and the timings at which they occur.

We've discussed a variety of issues that arise when composing music to picture, but the most important thing to focus on is the emotional content of each scene, and choose how you want to use your music to align with that.

**Ben Newhouse** is the author of the Berklee Online course from which this lesson comes. Discover what advice he would offer a young composer on the following pages, or learn more about other lessons in this course by clicking the link below.

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**Interested in exploring this course further?**

**[Learn More](#)**



Instructor Spotlight:

# Ben Newhouse

Ben Newhouse's commercial music has been used in more than 3,000 episodes of television, including projects for ABC, CBS, NBC, and most major cable networks. Newhouse's music is the soundtrack for the Disney DVD logo, several independent films, and Las Vegas stage shows. Ben received a "Distinguished Faculty Award" from Berklee Online in 2015.

Ben is the author and instructor of *Orchestration 1* and *2*, and *Music Composition for Film and TV 1* and *2* at Berklee Online.

**What piece of music (whether it be from film, TV, or a game) first made an impression on you?**

I remember being extremely moved by Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings" when I first heard it. The piece still moves me to this day. When I first heard it, it really opened my eyes to the emotional power of orchestral strings.

**What is your go-to soundtrack/score that you are currently streaming most.**

I stream a lot of James Horner's music. I just love his melodies. The main theme from *The Rocketeer* makes me feel like I am flying. I also love the harmonic progressions in *A Beautiful Mind*.

**What do you wish you could have told yourself early on as a composer?**

As a composer, part of your job is to build up your name as a brand. Composers from Beethoven to John Williams are more than just composers. They are also brand names. Your job is to find a way to put a "wow" after your name. "Beethoven ... Wow!" "John Williams ... Wow!" "Your name ... Wow!"



## Instructor Interview

# Orchestrating the Biggest Blockbusters

By Berklee Online

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You know who **Jon Kull** is, even if you don't know that you know who he is. You've heard his orchestrations in films like all of the *Hunger Games* movies, the *Maze Runner* movies, *King Kong*, *Avatar*, *Black Panther*, *The Mandalorian*, and so many more. In this snippet

from the *Music Is My Life* podcast, Jon discusses his three-decade-long Hollywood film orchestrating career.

### **How did you decide that your career track was going to be more orchestration than composition?**

Just through the kinds of jobs I was getting. I was still pursuing composition and getting a few things here and there, nothing really big. But I was also getting hired as an orchestrator thanks to a large part of the work that I've done for Randy [Miller, a classmate at the University of Southern California and professional orchestrator] ... another one called *Into the Sun*. Randy got another member of our class involved in orchestrating for him early on, and then put me on later on both of those pictures. But then through that, he also recommended me to his work for [film composer] Robert Folk. So I ended up working on a few of his films he orchestrated.

I got married in 1995, and started having kids. We had two daughters not too long after that. So I saw at that point that this is potentially a good way to earn a living, and it was something that was in music and I'm still involved with film music and I found I liked it.

**How closely do you usually work with the composer?**

Well, you get to a certain point, and some relationships move closer and they trust you. It can take a little while to get to that point. Other people want to check out what you've done and will come back to you sometimes about things. So it's kind of all over the place. I think that as an orchestrator if you develop a longstanding relationship with a composer, that's really the best circumstance, I would say. Because you get in the foxhole with them and you start to get a feeling for their tendencies, what they like, what they don't like, and what you need to do to give their music the best representation of them for the orchestra.

**Who have been some of your most key collaborators?**

One composer that I did a lot of orchestration for early on, was Christopher Young, and that was again through a USC connection, Pete Anthony. He brought me on board, first proofing stuff for him and then gradually assigning me a cue here and there, and that just grew over time. But I do a lot of work for Chris through Pete. So that was an important early-on relationship. I also did some apprentice work with Pat Russ, a terrific orchestrator, and great mentor, and friend also. Pat at that time was doing a lot of work for both Elmer Bernstein and Maurice Jarre, so he would bring me on to proof

stuff that he did. He would toss me stuff and say, “Here do this.” So I got on all that and then actually it got to a point there on a few projects where he said, “I got some source stuff. Stuff that needs to be done. We’re going to need a waltz for a party [scene in a film], like a quadrille orchestra.” So I would get that kind of stuff, utility



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- Jon Kull

stuff that needed to be handled, but it’s one of those things that he didn’t want to spend a whole lot of time on, so he would just give it to me. Then later I got to work for James Horner. I was starting with *Troy*, which was a rescore, a rather famous rescore actually.

### **Yeah, what’s the backstory with that?**

I don’t know the entire story, only sort of the general sketchy details, but the film apparently tested well. The director was over

the moon with Gabriel Yared's score. But then they tested it again and somehow I think they may have gotten a comment back about the music or something, or something else that is unrelated. But they somehow ended up not being as enamored with the score as they were, and somehow it just got tossed about three weeks before they had to get it done.

Randy Kerber was the principal orchestrator at the time, and I got a call from him and Conrad Pope was on it, Eddie Karam was on it, and there was me. It was my first experience with working on a Horner film, and there really wasn't time to think about anything. It was just like, "let's turn it out."

It's a really rewarding experience too. I got to go to the final session. It was about 10 minutes long ... and it was packed to the gills: They had a 100+ orchestra, plus the women's choir that had flown in, plus a vocalist that Horner liked to use. Then five grand pianos all lined up right next to the recording booth, behind a conductor. The place was just full. That was an overwhelming cue, an overwhelming musical experience. We spent all morning on it, and they got a great take. That was really a high point, one of the high points for me in terms of orchestration work.

**Okay, let's move on to the lightning round! What piece of music (whether it be from film, TV, or a game) first made an impression on you?**

The first movie I can recall the score really grabbing me was probably 2001: *A Space Odyssey*.

**What do you wish you could have told yourself early on as a composer?**

Don't take rejection personally.

**How do you get inspired and into the composing mindset?**

I'll sometimes play through piano pieces (Bach being especially good for getting the gears turning), but a deadline usually ends up being all the inspiration I need.

# Your Career Path

Ever wonder what kinds of careers exist in music for film, TV, and games? You may be surprised to learn that there's more to it than just scoring. The opportunities are even broader:

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Instructor Spotlight:

# Phil Sheeran

Phil Sheeran is a composer, guitarist, and recording/mixing engineer, who has arranged and orchestrated music for film trailers, television, and multimedia projects. His work can be found in numerous productions by Miramax/Disney, A&E, Fox Sports, Warner Brothers Entertainment, Super Bowls XLV and XLVIII, Sci-Fi, Biography, MTV, and Telepictures.

At Berklee Online, Phil authored the course *World Music Composition Styles* and instructs *Orchestration 1*.

**What piece of music (first made an impression on you?**

“Mission Impossible” by Lalo Schrifin, using a rhythmic Argentine Tango idea for a 5/4 theme of eighth note groupings of (3+3+2+2 ) similar to how Astor Piazzolla used them in “Nuevo Tango.”

**What piece of media do you think is a prime example of music and visuals coming together to create a masterpiece?**

The film *The Last Samurai* scored by Hans Zimmer is a great World Fusion composition of cinematic and world music elements.

**What is your go-to soundtrack/score that you are currently streaming most?**

*Passages* by Philip Glass and Ravi Shankar—Orchestral music meets Indian music as a World Fusion project. It’s really an amazing collaboration.

**What do you wish you could have told yourself early on as a composer?**

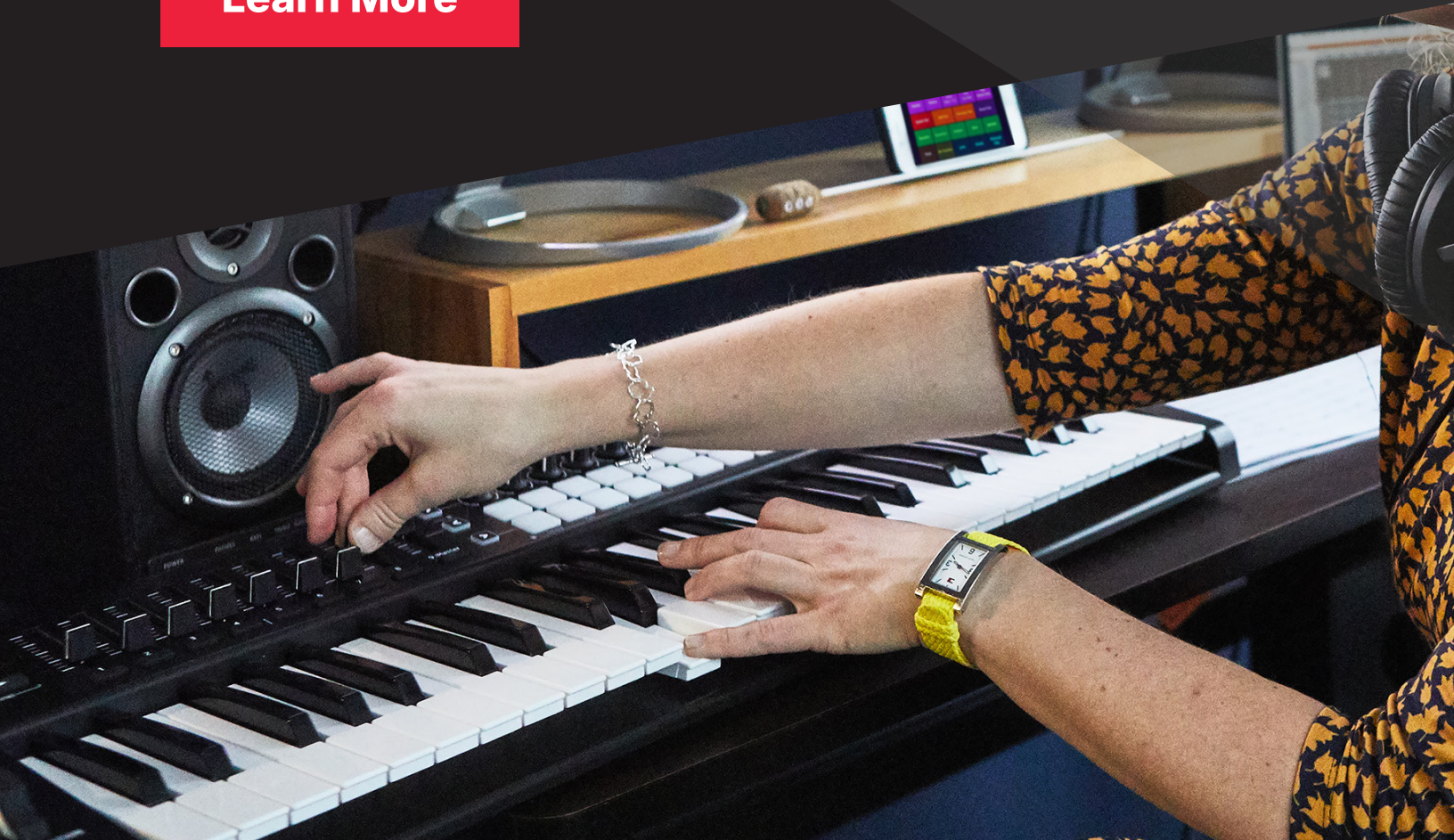
Stay the course and follow your voice. So many times we reject great ideas due to what is popular or successful and that often influences us in a different direction artistically.

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