

Compositional Process of Film Music by Samantha Yetter

Scope:

- ★ The intent of this project is to study the current practices of leading film composers, and to use knowledge gained from that to create original examples of short film scores. Part of this project will include learning new software programs, such as Dorico and ProTools

Methodology

- ★ Research famous film composers to learn their compositional process, primarily through Masterclass courses of Hans Zimmer and Danny Elfman; document compositional techniques, processes, tricks, tips, and any other important information
- ★ Generate pre-compositional plan for original compositions based on Masterclass courses and research
- ★ Use compositional advice from Hans Zimmer and Danny Elfman to compose short clips that explore different tones, moods and styles
- ★ Use online tutorials and videos to learn ProTools and Dorico

Comparison of Danny Elfman and Hans Zimmer Masterclass Courses

Danny Elfman	Hans Zimmer	Compare
More thematic style of writing, style also "old-fashioned" compared to new aged	More atmospheric style of writing	Mood of film can inform musical choices
Likes using percussion and instruments he has access to in order to create unique rhythms and patterns	Sound Diary to get ideas down everyday even before film appears	May need to compromise with director on what music should sound like, if you have something different in mind you can do a version of yours and directors to get them on your side
Creates sample palettes that matches the tone of the film	What is the story you are trying to tell with the music?	Each feel/find tempo of the scene due to the editor naturally
Uses synths to get different new rhythms, also experiments with marimba to find different rhythms. Can use unusual instruments for different tones	Unique sound palette created for each movie	Determine in the beginning composing process the tone and style of the movie
Likes to have 3-4 big ticket pieces in movie then fill in the rest with different types of "fun" music	Believes film music is to let audience feel something and they complete the emotion of the film/scene	There is a type of rhythm to the movie that can be found in the editing style and momentum of the film
Writes a melody or phrase before full edits and make transformations to lengthen or shorten as needed	Harder for him to capture an idea with a non-set tempo, uses a hard tempo in sound diary	All composers are very insecure about their work
Decides if a film is thematic to give character definition right away or hold off and let audience decide	Begins with imagining the characters and composing like a conversation as a "question and answer"	
The camera edits reveal the type of musical language you will compose	Music is like a language, write how you would speak	

Results of Master Class Courses and Research:

- ★ These are the most important ideas I took from this study. The source of the idea is indicated in parentheses. Items that are highlighted will be discussed in further detail below

- Where to begin composing, Pre-Compositional Process, Elfman/Zimmer
- Analysis of the film and characters, Zimmer
- Tone of the film, Elfman/Zimmer
- Conversations with the directors, Zimmer
- Rules for your composition, Elfman/Zimmer
- Sound experimenting, Elfman/Zimmer
- **Sound Diary**, Zimmer
- Creating Synths, Zimmer
- **Scoring to Picture**, Elfman/Zimmer
- Scoring under dialogue, Zimmer
- How to create place/perspective, Elfman/Zimmer
- Understanding how to use tempo, Elfman/Zimmer
- How film frame affects scoring, Elfman/Zimmer
- Example of Composed Music "Sherlock Homes", Zimmer
- Compositional Ideas, Elfman
 - Linking Fragments and transitions
 - Shabby notes can turn into a riff
- Finding compositional ideas, Elfman/Zimmer
- **Understanding tone of film**, Elman/Zimmer
- Deadlines, Elfman/Zimmer
- Animation writing vs live action, Elfman
- Changing your composition approach, Elfman
- **Chasing a moving edit**, Elfman/Zimmer
- Mixing, Zimmer
- **Themes or not**, Elfman/Zimmer

Pre-Composition Process

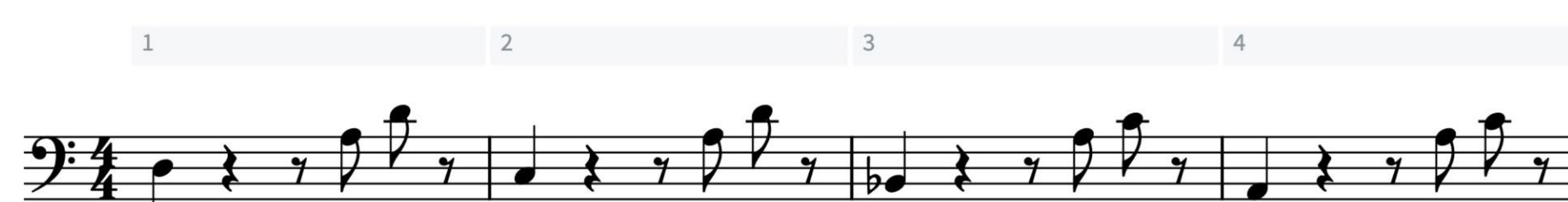
Example: Bridgerton (Season 2)

- ★ Original Composer Kris Bowers, with Wrecking Ball covered by the Midnite String Quartet
- ★ A **Pre-Compositional Process** in composition is used to decide the parameters for a composition prior to act of composing. The first step is to decide what role the music has in the film. Will the music be imagined in the characters mind (diegetic) mind or played for the audience (non-diegetic)? Will it flow naturally with the scene or against it?

Understanding Tone of Film:

- ★ Both Hans Zimmer and Danny Elfman decide the tone of the film before they even start composing.
- ★ Hans Zimmer decides the tone of his compositions with some of these guidelines in mind:
 - What is the story you want to tell with the music?
 - What is the vibe and/or color of this film and how does that relate to the music?
 - What has the director and composer discussed about the colors throughout the score?
 - What sort of nuances will be involved throughout the music?
 - Creates a sound world with synths to form a color for the music
- ★ Danny Elfman decides the tone of his compositions with some of these guidelines:
 - Begins with a feeling of tone, not a story, imagines something out of nothing
 - Elements in film will tell you the type of music to write
 - Builds a template of the musical tone music he thinks he will use, and builds all the colors he thinks of before he starts writing
 - Animated films can lead to more thematic type writing, depending on the style of the film
 - The score determines the intensity and shape of the film; need a unique tone for the whole film
- ★ Questions: What tone did I choose? Why did I choose it for this scene? What instruments should I use to help convey this tone to an audience member? How did that melody/harmony musically affect the composition?
- ★ The Tone/Mood I chose for Bridgerton: Troublesome. I wanted this as my mood because this whole season is the anticipation of Kate and Anthony, the two main people dancing in the scene, falling in love. But Kate is supposed to be setting up her sister to marry Anthony, not herself. Therefore this dancing scene leaves the bystanders wondering what is going on between them
- ★ I wanted to have a string quartet, similar to the original Bridgerton music, to incorporate instruments that would have been historically accurate. I also had the idea of a more contemporary harmonic and rhythmic structure
- ★ When first starting the pre-compositional process, my first idea was a separated double bass motif. This wasn't the theme or melody, but a starting idea to get the "Troublesome" tone to reflect the conflict of the characters

Separated Double Bass Motif



Sound Diary:

- ★ This compositional tool was mentioned by Hans Zimmer. A sound diary is a musical journal where you write any ideas, rhythms, patterns, melodies, etc. you may have for a film
- ★ You write in the sound diary everyday without deleting anything material. The tempo is uniform throughout the whole journal
- ★ The result of keeping a journal for a film is that you are constantly generating material. There is a need to compose many pieces in extremely limited amounts of time. This lets you have an abundance of material so when you start composing the final pieces, you have choices to pick from rather than generating all fresh ideas. This helps to increase your output while cutting down on extraneous time spent creating material
- ★ Here is an excerpt of my "Sound Diary" for Bridgerton

Scoring to Picture

- ★ Hans Zimmer's tips for scoring to picture:
 - Does music stop or continue momentum of scene?
 - Action scene music should begin a frame before the image appears on screen
 - Scenes can overlap with music
 - What do you want your audience to imagine this scene?
 - How do you react to the film?
- ★ Danny Elfman's tips:
 - Depending on the editing of the film, how can you make compositional ideas longer/shorter?
 - Find the pace of the scene or the rhythm of the scene
 - Compose through the seams of the scene
 - Tempo may be changed slightly
 - Don't want audience to feel stop and start of scene

Example: Animated Short Film

- ★ Short Designer: Matthias Strasser
- ★ In Hans Zimmer's masterclass course, some important details include the the dialogue of the scene and the color of the scene. The scene I am scoring changes colors drastically from the beginning to the end.
- ★ The Tone/Mood of this Animated Short Film: Happy fun, then turn to mournful and heartbroken
- ★ This short animated film has a very abbreviated story compared to Bridgerton. That being said it moves through a wide variety of emotions quickly. I wanted the music to move at a comfortable pace so the audience doesn't feel rushed in spite of how quickly the story moves. I was able to pick a tempo that aligned the rhythms to the movement of the lights in the beginning of the film
- ★ To help determine how to line up music with various points of the film and also how to determine the tempo between those points you can use Dorico's **markers**.
- ★ Markers helped me plan out my composition. An example is when I started with a simple melody for the child in the story to illustrate the peaceful scene at the beginning. But then at measure 15, something disrupts that, and I wanted to show a change in the music there

Themes:

Example: Bridgerton (Season 2 and Short Film)

- ★ A theme in music is defined as a melody that is repeated. This can morph into many different sounds and forms in music.
- ★ These are some examples of how Hans Zimmer thinks of themes as he composes:
 - Simplest thing to set into motion
 - Need to make decisions and cut some ideas
 - Themes are a question and answer
 - Is the music adaptable to variations?
- ★ This is how Danny Elfman thinks of themes as he composes:
 - Themes can give a feeling, not only a character
 - Animation can have themes or not
 - Do you want or need a theme or melody audience can hum?
 - How are you using the theme throughout the film?
 - Is the theme doing what it needs to be doing throughout music?
- ★ In Bridgerton, the melody I chose is below. In creating this, I wanted it to function as a separated and legato melody. This is to show the transformation of emotions from the beginning of Kate and Anthony being forced to dance with each other and then realizing that an underlying romance is forming

- ★ For the Animated Short Film, I wanted to have a melody right in the opening, and when the deforestation marker occurs, have that melody change in pitch and rhythmic value. This is to add extra weight to the scene. I wanted to hear the happiness from the child in the beginning turn to despair from the perspective of the Orangutan.