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Module Title: Creation (ADAD7004_LON)
Assignment Title: Film Scoring - Portfolio

In this day and age of a constantly changing music industry, musicians need to be more versatile in order to keep up. Having been a keyboard player for many years yet composing commercial music for a living, I took this opportunity to delve into a long-repressed ambition to compose film scores.

The aim of this project was to put together a portfolio that would show my abilities as a film composer, in as many styles as I possibly could, which would make me more employable in the field. In order to achieve that goal, I had to research a variety of film scorers' approaches which led me, amongst other things, to watch Masterclasses of some well known film composers and read quite a few articles. I also read 'On The Track' by Fred Karlin and Rayburn Write, as it covers all the different aspects of film scoring, different approaches and interviews with several leading film scorers.

Usually, after a movie is shot, there is a spotting session carried out with the director where music decisions are taken regarding each cue (Savage, 2008). Obviously, as I wanted to re-score excerpts from existing released movies, I had to act as both the director and the composer. In an ideal situation, the music would be performed and recorded by an orchestra, band, instrumental soloists, choir, vocalists or synthesisers. However, In real life, budget and other constraints led me to upgrade my sound library and plugin arsenal to allow me to create the score by myself.

Thriller

The first films I searched for were films that were originally done without musical scoring and that is how I came upon "No Country for Old Men". No Country for Old Men is a 2007 American Neo-Western crime thriller film based on Cormac McCarthy's 2005 novel of the same name. The film is about a Texan welder who finds two million dollars from the remains of several drug runners who have all killed each other in the middle of the desert. A psychopathic killer peruses him for the money in the desert landscape of 1980's west Texas (IMDB, 2007).

The movie is an interesting, quirky mix of a straightforward thriller with suspense sequences, and a western. Dennis Lim of The New York Times stated: "There is virtually no music on the soundtrack. In some of the most gripping sequences what you hear mostly is a suffocating silence" (Lim, 2008). This approach is quite unique as the audience is not guided by the score and in a sense loses that comfort zone.

A common technique in film scoring is "characterising", whereby the composition describes a character in the film through musical lines that imply and describe their actions, motifs, and psychological feelings and reactions. For example, for the central character in Superman (1978), John Williams took a correspondingly straightforward, heroic, bigger-than-life march-like approach (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

I wanted to give the main character a musical line or sound that would reflect the fact that although he is the hero in the movie, he is also a complete loser.

After downloading the movie, I marked a few scenes until I found a scene that worked for me. Hans Zimmer's "click" method was very useful for this scene, which in practice means: watching the scene and deciding on a tempo according to the vibe of the scene, cuts, the speed people walk in, and any other subjective reasons (Zimmer, 2020).

75 bpm seemed like the right tempo. The slow tempo served both the feel of the character's mind-set, which is centred around a disappointment in life, and the shift into fight or flight mode as the situation switches into suspense.

Before getting into the writing, I researched Texan music, as this is where the movie is set - I found out that Texan music is rather eclectic as Texas has long been a fertilised ground for the development of many music styles such as Tejano and Conjunto music, Rock and Roll, Western Swing, Jazz, Punk Rock, Country, Hip Hop, Electronic and many more (Texas University, 2020).

I decided to go for the more obvious, common style that most people expect and can relate to when watching a western which is Country music with a flavour of Blues and some Rock.

As Christopher Young once said: "Our first responsibility when we sit down to write a score is that it has to say something and it has to make a point immediately" (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

The sound of the guitar is quite prevalent in this style, but as opposed to the sweet, calm music that characterises the style, I wanted to bring out more quirky, scary, almost horror aspects as well as sarcasm towards the "hero" of the movie. I marked a guitar line with my synth sound and finalised it during the live session with the guitar player, who at first imitated my synth lines but then came up with his own guitar-orientated lines, which I later used sporadically throughout the scene.

As a pianist, I have a tendency to write the music using a piano sound. After creating a basic score, I start to orchestrate the parts and substitute the piano with other sounds/instruments. In this score, the piano remained a major accompaniment instrument, and worked best with its minimalism (especially in the scarier/suspenseful parts) as well as with the more rhythmic sections.

I am very happy with the results as I feel that I managed to make a satisfying transition between the first part of the scene which is a more quirky western style into the second part which is frightening and finishes with a modern American/country dramatic style of music that helps the audience understand what is going in the confused narrow mind of our main character.

However, if I had to score the music for the entire movie, I would probably stretch my music ideas and use them sporadically throughout the movie. A criticism I have is that, as per this scene, there might be too much music, but on the other hand, it serves my purpose, which is eventually creating a demo reel.

Action

Another scoreless scene that I found was on Spitfire's website which was part of a best score competition for a scene from "Westworld".

Westworld is an American science fiction western that was produced by HBO. The story takes place in Westworld, a fictional, technologically advanced Wild West themed amusement park, populated by android "hosts" (HBO, 2016).

Although I didn't apply for the competition, I decided to score the music for this action-chase scene and use it in my portfolio in order to demonstrate scoring abilities in this style.

For this action scene, I used a technique called "phrasing the drama", where the composer divides the scene into small segments and composes each segment separately. It is possible to keep the main or core musical theme as well as intertwine lines and accents that reflect changes in the scene such as emotional shifts, movement changes, middle of action break downs, etc....

If a composer chooses to compose accents in the score, it is known as "hitting the action". It is more common to hit certain moments in the action while using the technique of phrasing the drama (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

Don Davis, who, amongst many others, composed The Matrix franchise and the television series, Beauty and the Beast, once said: "More often than not, the note I get is, 'Don't hit all this stuff, play through it.' But then when I don't do that, I get the notes, 'Why didn't you hit this?'"

(IMDB, 2020) (Karlin and Wright, 2004)

As I did not have a director to give me notes, I made all the decisions; how to "phrase" the scene, which action points to hit and when to shift the musical mood. Graeme Revell, who composed - Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2011), Daredevil (2003), Freddy vs Jason (2003), Sin City (2005) and many more, said - "We're asked to hit every cut and every eyebrow raised these days, so you've got to find a way to do that without sacrificing musicality. You have to do it all the time" (Dinner, 2005) (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

I followed Don Davis and Graeme Revell's advice and methods and scored the scene in segments; hit some action parts in obvious and strong musical moments (missile blast, motorbike hitting a street post) and other hit points in a more subtle way (main character hallucinating, cars starting the chase).

In a scene like this, I have the freedom to compose music that doesn't relate or link to a main theme. Furthermore, when hitting accents and changing the mood in short segments, I don't have to come up with a catchy melody but rather support the scene with appropriate harmonies, instrumentation or a general vibe.

Drama

The movie, Gravity, left a deep impression on me a few years ago when I first watched it. I chose to compose the scene where one of the two astronauts decides to sacrifice his life in order for the other one to survive; a scene which originally did not have much music in it.

Gravity is a 2013 science fiction thriller film directed by Alfonso Cuarón. It stars Sandra Bullock and George Clooney as American astronauts who are stranded in space after the mid-orbit destruction of their space shuttle, and attempt to return to Earth. Although Gravity is often referred to in the media as a science fiction film,

Cuaron, the director, saw the film rather as "a drama of a woman in space" (Berardinelli, 2013).

As the composer, I know how the scene is going to end, but the audience does not. I know that one of the astronauts is going to die, but I do not want to reveal that in my music, or as it is described in the book "On the Track" - "Don't tip the story!" (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

I decide to play the audience's point of view - we see a suspense scene where the 2 astronauts are out of the spaceship, dangling in space, one of them has their foot tangled in her anchoring safety cable as she is holding the other's cable and his weight is causing her foot to come undone. I composed suspense music and yet tried not to give any hint of what was coming. Once one of them lets go of the rope, the woman astronaut that is left needs to stay strong and do everything she can to survive; that's the cue where I transitioned into a sad but powerful score.

For the sad/powerful part, I only used a string section; I tried to do it as I went along, one part at a time, or just as chord progression, but it did not sound right and the parts did not blend well. I went back to my orchestration book by Samuel Adler and refreshed my memory in strings range, voicing, articulations and voice lead (Adler and Hesteraan, 2002).

Then I used Sibelius and wrote the arrangement step by step, according to the rules. The result was amazing and satisfying and the strings sounded right and in the correct voicing. But there was still something missing. Finally, I recorded a female voice on top of the strings and also in the following segment in order to express the female astronaut's devastated emotions echoing the voice in her head.

A major technical issue that I was facing, was to get rid of the original score yet keep the dialogue and follies, which were crucial for the scene. After some research, I found out that Audacity has a feature called Voice Isolation that should have been able to do it. The results were quite bad as the sound got distorted and the music did not "disappear". I used Premiere to split the 5.1 audio channels, took only the Centre and finally, after talking with some colleagues, I used Izotope RX8 which is designed to be the essential toolbox for cleaning and repairing audio. RX removes hiss and buzz, eliminates clicks and crackles, and repairs distortion and even gaps in audio. It helped me to "clean" everything that was left on the Centre track except for the dialogue and follies (Jordan, 2015).

The final score lived up to my expectations; it did bring, the space environment, the suspense, the sadness and the loss as well as the female astronaut staying strong. Yet musically, I was not overly happy with the decision of adding the female voice to the string part as it made it a bit too old fashioned and "over the top" for this scene so I decided to blend it further in the back of the mix. On the other hand, I did like the live voice touch after that part when the music turns down and becomes background, as the voice line is telling us what and how she feels at that moment.

Suspense/Middle Eastern

Working for many years in the Israeli music industry, I have accumulated a lot of experience in composing Middle Eastern music. I think that by mixing classical and pop music, which I am also well versed in, together with lines, sounds and instruments from the Middle Eastern genre, would give me an advantage in the film scoring industry.

Fauda is a successful Netflix show, originally made as an Israeli television series developed by Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff drawing on their experiences in the Israel Defence Forces. The series tells the story of Doron, a commander in the Mista'arvim unit. The unit is comprised of Israeli soldiers who disguise themselves as Palestinians who live and work in Gaza. They pursue a Hamas arch-terrorist known as "The Panther" (IMDB, 2015).

I decided to compose a new opening theme to the show as well as music for the scene that comes before the opening titles.

Although the original tune had no Middle Eastern features, I felt that I should find the balance between Arabic and Western/Cinematic music because in my opinion, Fauda tells the story of both sides, the Israeli and the Palestinian, and shows the conflicts and consequences that both sides need to deal with; therefore this should be demonstrated by the music.

As an Israeli, I am familiar with so many first-hand stories about the subject and feel very close and emotional about the situation.

Yet Rachel Shabi, who writes for The Guardian, criticised the show for its politics and its "relentless machismo" (Shabi, 2018).

According to Yasmeen Serhan of The Atlantic, "Viewers who are hungry for a Palestinian perspective on the conflict would do well to urge Netflix to commission a Palestinian-created series, because Fauda will probably prove a disappointment" (Serhan, 2018).

Although I have experience and knowledge in this style of music, I conducted some research and looked up some similar TV shows in that genre such as: Tehran, which is an Israeli espionage thriller television series (STAFF, 2019), Homeland, an American spy thriller television series (IMDB, 2011), Inside the Mosad, which is a Netflix documentary about dozens of former agents from the Mossad (Netflix, 2017) and The Spy, which is another Netflix show based on the life of Israel's top Mossad spy Eli Cohen (Andreeva, 2018).

By analysing the music of these shows, I found that some of the composers chose to ignore any Middle Eastern elements or motifs in their main opening themes, and rather composed action and suspense style Hollywood music.

As I wanted to use those Arabic elements, my instrument palette, apart from my basic string section, piano and percussion, included an Arabic violin from the library of Middle East Strings by Native Instruments. I also booked a live session with an Oud player which doubled on the main theme as well as played some short Arabic lines that I have later used sporadically throughout the scene. The Oud lines on top of the pad drones gave an authentic sound to the scene and to my surprise, empowered the suspense.

Another effective tool that is often used by film composers is the Motif. It is used throughout movies in different variations and it allows the composers to give a certain unity to the score. Motifs are short, easily manipulated and are particularly valuable today as many films really do not allow for long musical lines.

Probably, one of the most famous motifs is the scary motif from Jaws (1975) that was composed by John Williams and comprised of only two bass notes. Jerry Goldsmith once said, "You try to start out with something that immediately the audience can really associate with, whether it's three notes, four notes, whatever it is, something that registers upon them" (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

I did play a three-note motif using the Arabic violin and that immediately gave the effect that set the mood I was looking for.

I have sent the results to some colleagues in Israel and got good feedback which gave me the confidence that the score is authentic and serves the scene.

Comedy

Along the years, I realise that my tendency is to compose dramatic and suspense/ action music. I wanted to challenge myself with a lighter style; up-beat and fun. I decided to find a good comedy scene and re-score it.

Comedy is not usually the type of movie I watch, so I asked some friends for recommendations on movies. The names that came up were:

American Pie, Groundhog Day, You don't mess with the Zohan, There's something about Mary and a few more.

After browsing through quite a few, I chose to compose the opening 5 minutes of the film - Stranger Than Fiction.

Stranger than Fiction is a 2006 American fantasy comedy-drama movie directed by Marc Forster, which stars Will Ferrell and Emma Thompson. The story is about an I.R.S. auditor Harold Crick who suddenly finds the story of his life being narrated yet only he can hear it. The narration begins to affect his entire life, from his work, to his love-interest, to his death (Mojo, 2006).

In order to keep the music vibrant and light, I used Marimba and Vibraphone as my leading percussive instruments, and as the genre is Comedy, I used major chords as my first choice of harmony.

The composer, Thomas Newman, for example, uses percussion in some of his scores. In the movie, American Beauty (1999), he uses a lot of mallet sounds; in Pay It Forward (2000), he alternates between a very percussive, driving piano and subtle steel drum sounds; in The Player (1992) he has different abstract percussion sounds that go perfectly with this film's individual combination of a Hollywood satire mixed with the murder mystery genre.

Another example would be Elmer Bernstein who composed Ghostbusters (1984); he said: "The music that I wrote doesn't ever make any attempt to make jokes. In general, I would let the music be a little more exaggerated in a comedy than in a serious drama." (Karlin and Wright, 2004)

Before starting to compose the music, I had to solve a big technical problem: on top of the original score that was recorded throughout the scene, there is a narrator part which has a very important role in the scene and background sounds like street bustle, cars, office, teeth brushing and more. I found the script of the movie online

and asked a friend who is an actress to record the narration parts for me in the same posh accent as the original one (Emma Thompson). As I have got some background in recording voice overs and dubbings, I felt confident recording the whole thing in my recording studio. I have also recorded a few more small parts for the people in the office, especially the parts where we can see their lips moving. As these parts are very small (only a few words), I recorded the voices of a couple of my friends and myself.

For the background effects, I have used some of Logic's library sounds as well as Splice sound bank and some Office background sounds that I found online. One challenge was to cut the teeth brushing sound effect from the original movie sound track; I cut the sound in parts where there was no underscore, edited it and planted it in the right places in the scene instead of the brushing sound that had music in the background.

The other challenge for me was to find a tune that would characterise the vibe of the movie and will be used as the main theme/melody throughout the scene but will also be used as an underscore when the narrator is talking. Balancing between the music and the dialogue can obviously be controlled by turning the music volume up and down, but also by changing the dynamic of the arrangement as well as having a smart orchestration that blends smoothly.

This scene takes place in New York; some of it is in a busy office, some on the street and some in a flat. For the office part, I changed the overall feel of the score as I was inspired by movies like 9 to 5, The Wolf Of Wall Street and Wall Street and came up with a twisted variation of a rock/blues typical chord progression, that serves the feel of an office as well as keeping the awkward comic vibe of the movie. This approach is called an Overview which is a film scoring technique and it sums up the emotional vibe of a movie.

In The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings (2001), Howard Shore used orchestral and choir sounds in order to create the atmosphere of a mythological world instead of focusing on the portrayal of the main character. In another example, the main title music for Edward Scissorhands (1990) expresses the fairy tale/fantasy quality of this film (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

Out of the office setting, the main character got his own musical line that reflects his inner thoughts which is also being portrayed in the movie by the narrator.

This specific scene was a challenging but a satisfying one to work on, as it not only needed new music, but also follies and VoiceOver, which I had to mix together and finally balancing the three elements according to the development of the scene.

Epic/Periodic

Out of all the film genres, Epic is my favourite which led me to compose an opening title music for an epic, periodic (17th/18th century), war-type TV show/film. I watched quite a few shows in the genre such as Braveheart, Rome, Game of Throne but finally I chose Outlander's opening title as it had the blend of two periods; one older than the other while the more modern part is from the early 20th century with a fantasy touch to the storyline.

Outlander is a historical drama television series based on a fictional novel series of the same name by Diana Gabaldon. The main character Caitriona Balfe, a married former World War II nurse who in 1945 finds herself transported back to Scotland in

1743. There, she encounters the dashing Highland warrior Jamie Fraser and becomes entangled in the Jacobite risings. A distinguishing feature of the show is its use of Scottish Gaelic (Hughes, 2014).

Although a typical opening title main theme music would be no longer than 1:00 - 1:15 minutes, I wanted to create a longer piece of music in order to be able to show a more extensive musical ability and in order to have a bigger choice of excerpts for my demo reel. In order to extend the original footage of the opening title video, first I downloaded a few more opening scenes from later seasons as well as some fight scenes. Then I downloaded Adobe Premiere (which costs £16 per month, student price), watched some beginners YouTube tutorials and started to edit. Premiere is a very intuitive, user friendly software, and thanks to the tutorials, I managed to work with it and create a decent video.

Epic periodical movies, quite often use orchestras that consist of a big strings and horns section as well as a few percussion players that would play timpani and large cymbals to create a "bigger than life" effect (Will, 2009)(Cinématique, 2017). Like Hans Zimmer and Danny Elfman explain in their Masterclass, I created an instrumental palette on my Logic that would provide me with a basic starting point and dictate the tone/colour and atmosphere of the composition (Zimmer, 2020) (Elfman, 2020). For that, I used Albion One by Spitfire which provides amazing string sections as well as allowing me to control the articulation of each instrument up to the smallest detail. Also in the pallet, I added massive percussive drums, woodwind and piano.

As part of my research, I listened to Scottish folk music & Celtic music that fits with the epic atmosphere and features bagpipes, guitars, flutes, and piano. The Last of the Mohicans and Game of Thrones main theme are great examples of a good mix between epic, suspense and periodic music (Immortalsongs, 2012).

After listening and being inspired by the epic Scottish music, I asked myself, what is this movie all about. In my view the answer was - love, war, honour, pride and Pagan rituals. I felt that composing music that describes the main characters would not work here, I thought it would be better to give the audience a taste of the vibe of the whole story. As was explained earlier, this approach is called Overview music as opposed to Character music.

I think the score that I came up with serves the story very well and has many lines and parts that would have been useful had I composed the whole movie. As mentioned before, a 2-minute opening theme is a bit long for a TV show, but works well for the purpose of my demo.

Original songs in movies

In order to achieve a little more than can be done with solely music, film scorers use or compose songs that have lyrics that are relevant to the plot or suggest the characters' inner thoughts and feelings.

In Toy Story, Thomas Newman wanted to establish the strong relationship between Woody and the Andy (the boy) and for that he used the song 'You've Got a Friend in Me' by Randy Newman. The song, Ghostbusters, by Ray Parker Jr. reflects the whole Ghostbusters story line and In the James Bond series, each film has a different title song that indicates the direction and era of the story. (Karlin and Wright, 2004)

I wanted to use a song that I had already composed for the stage production of 'Jungle Book' and incorporate it into my portfolio. I thought that by re-editing the song and adding a few cinematic sounds (pads, drones), it would be more natural and organic to the film. For some inspiration, I looked through films in the same genre like The Jungle Book, The Lion King, George Of The Jungle, to name a few.

The composer, Randy Newman, writes his songs as "stand alone" songs and then integrates them into his scores whenever possible. "Where I can use it, I'll use it. It isn't like just playing it over and over. There'll be chord changes that you can use or motivic development" (Karlin and Wright, 2004).

There have been songs that have improved the films they were incorporated into. Furthermore, there have been songs that have been a success before being used in or written for a film and the cinematic platform has propelled them forward and turned them into hits. Seal, for example, originally released Kissed From a Rose in 1994, but only a year later, in the "Batman Forever" soundtrack, the song earned the singer three Grammy Awards for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Male Pop Vocal Performance. In the famous opening scene of Saturday Night Fever, starring John Travolta, the song "Stayin' Alive," became one of the most classic disco songs of all time (Tschinkel, 2018).

As I had all the stems from my original arrangement, I was able to re-arrange and re-mix the song; so, for example, I added some atmosphere pads and an African choir right at the beginning to get the audience straight into the feel of a jungle environment. I recreated the build-up of the progression of the song much more slowly in order to create more drama, and just before the big finale I added a new break-down.

Editing a video according to a song was a new challenge and forced me to be much more accurate with the 'cuts' especially as it is a very up-beat song that should be reflected in the visual; i.e. fast, vibrant and fun.

Conclusions

Reflecting back on my work on this project, I have come to realise that I truly enjoy film scoring and would love to develop a career in it. From the feedback that I have received from my colleagues, it seems that I am moving in the right direction. I found that I can relate and convey my thoughts and ideas into a score that can support and enhance visuals. One significant piece of feedback that I received from my course mentor was regarding my ability to pay attention to small details, which is an important asset for a film scorer.

Though, I feel that there is so much to learn and develop which I believe will come with experience; for example, I think that I over played melodic parts in order to create a memorable tune when in some cases, composers create an atmospheric or moody soundtrack through using very few notes or using the right sounds. Another area that I feel that would improve with experience is the level of my mixes.

Most of the videos in my project are too long to be used in a demo reel. I chose to score long scenes in order to gain the experience of a real film composer. Having long scenes gives me the ability to cut at least two to three cues from each scene; that way, I would have many cues to show and select for my demo reel. Choosing the right cues is a challenge as they would need to level up with the industry's standard,

get to the point very quickly (no time for buildup) and be unique. Also, I would need to change my demo reel according to the style of movie that I would be applying for which would be viable as I have a range of cues to choose from (Teehan, 2020).

Obviously, my portfolio cannot cover all styles and genres but, with the practice I accumulated through this project, I know that if I was asked to compose a sample for a job, I could do it fairly quickly, with or without a picture.

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