

Filmmaking



Composing Music for Film and Television

The Process of Creating an Original Music Score

by Niall Byrne



my pocket
guide FILM, TV & MEDIA

Introduction

You are a musician, a songwriter, an orchestral arranger with dozens of themes that could make a great music score. But where to start? What is the process of creating an original music score for the screen? How do you communicate with directors and producers who don't necessarily express musical ideas in a clear way? How much can you be paid? What is the overall budget allocated to a composer to create a music score?

In this book written by Niall Byrne, one of Ireland's most successful music composers, we will answer these important questions, taking you through the various steps you need to understand when creating a music score for a film project, whether it's a short film, a feature film or a TV series.

Why have a music score?

Most film and television projects benefit from having an original music score. A music score can add a heightened emotional layer that can often take a film or television drama to higher level, greatly increasing its chances for success. Of course, the need for a music score, its scale and budget, will largely depend on the genre of the project.

A detective drama for television may require a varied music score to cover action scenes without dialogue. A feature film with a social realist agenda, such as a film by the English director Ken Loach, may need a minimal score or none at all. Some film directors, such as Woody Allen, will favour using existing songs rather than an original score to enhance the

storytelling. A high-end period drama may have the need for an orchestral approach, which is often going to be quite costly, but if you, the composer, are experienced enough to deliver a high-quality orchestral score, then a good producer or director will recognise the value of spending more to achieve a finished product with high production values.

And, if the budget doesn't allow for an orchestra, then a smaller scale approach of using, for example, a small string ensemble or even just a violin and piano, can work equally as well. Sometimes this smaller scale score can achieve a great degree of emotional intensity without breaking the bank.

Every project has different needs as far as a music score is concerned. And every project has a budget. Working with the director and producer to deliver the score that will contribute to the success of the project within that budget is all part of the job. There are no rules, only guidelines.



Every project has different needs when it comes to the music score.

What is the first step in creating a score?

The Spotting Session

The process begins with an initial discussion between you, the composer, and the director of the project. In some cases, the producer or the editor may also be involved in this discussion, but more commonly it is the director. Once you are on board and the project is 'locked' (the picture edit has been completed) then you will have what is called a 'spotting session' with the director. The editor may also attend this session.

In a spotting session, you and the director will discuss where the music is going to be placed