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Melodies Behind The Scenes

The Invisible Art and Power of Film Scoring

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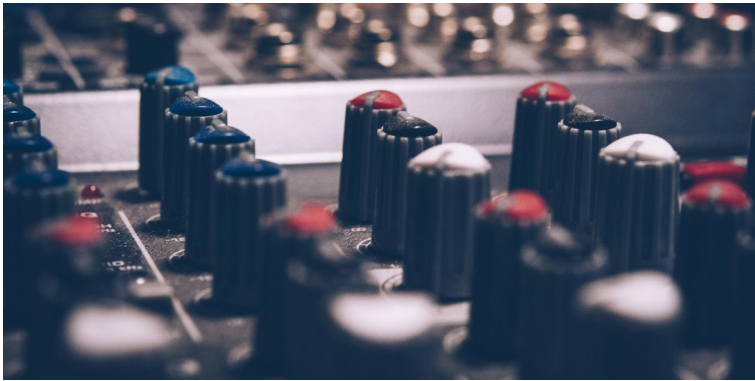
When the final credits roll on a movie, audiences typically leave the theater with memorable scenes and lines etched in their minds. However, there is one aspect of films that can be found underlying every powerful cinematic moment but is far less visible than its counterparts: the film's score. As the invisible heartbeat behind many of your favorite films, it's nearly impossible to imagine the cinema world without music. Music has served as the vehicle that transforms stories into full emotional experiences and yet is still an area of cinema that most don't consider. Whether it's the swelling, lush strings of a love scene or the eerie dissonant space that can heighten suspense, film scores play a pivotal role in shaping how we perceive and feel about the characters and narratives unfolding on screen.

The practice of marrying music to film dates all the way back to The Silent Era of film. It was very common during this time for the music to be provided by each individual theater where some would use a phonograph while others would employ live musicians often composed of a pianist

and a small ensemble¹. However as the ability to sync sound with moving pictures becomes a more accessible practice, music then becomes an essential part of the film world. As we start to progress through the years, more and more films begin to be underscored by traditional orchestral music as studios would begin to employ full orchestras just to keep up with the amount of movies being produced².

However, something that's imperative to mention is that every film that had an original soundtrack used the exact same instrumentation no matter

the theme or style of the film. It was unheard of for composers at the time to venture outside of a classic orchestra, but as technology has evolved over time so too has the art form of film scoring. Today, many composers use a wide range of digital



tools such as DAWs (digital audio workspaces), unconventional instruments, and fusions of different genres to push the boundaries of what film music can be in the future.

As a job, a film composer is responsible for every aspect concerning the film's original music whether that be hiring the musicians, managing the composition and recording process, and

1 <https://www.film-independent.org/blog/know-score-brief-history-film-music/>

2 https://magazine.uc.edu/editors_picks/recent_features/filmscore.html

budgeting for any bit of this process³. While that may sound like a daunting task, most film composers work with the producers and other professionals on the team so that the composer can truly focus on creating a memorable soundscape for mesmerizing scenes. Many successful film composers have both a strong



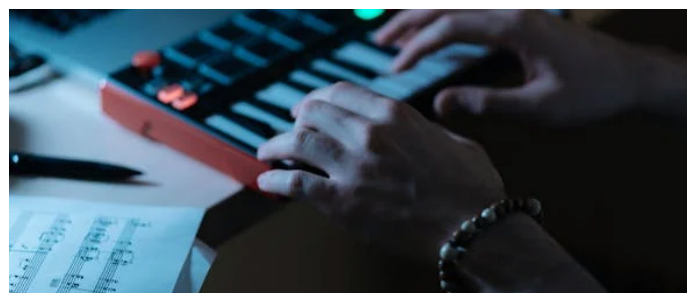
foundation in music and music theory or a degree in music composition or a related field. Although that is not a requirement, it proves to be vital as many get the opportunity to write through different styles of music during this time of formal education. Beyond formal education, the two areas that are absolutely vital for today's film composers are having a nice portfolio and being versatile in the art that you produce. These two tend to work hand in hand as the best sounding portfolios tend to feature different styles of writing. More directors are wanting composers to create soundscapes rather than individual songs and that becomes increasingly difficult if your composer hasn't ventured out of traditional orchestras.

At its core, being a film composer is about shaping the way the audience feels and responds to what they're seeing on the big screen. Think of John Williams' score for *Jaws* in 1975. The simple yet iconic two-note motif became the theme for lurking danger which helped to evoke dread in the audience even before the shark was seen on screen. It's the idea of emphasizing the emotions and stakes that really make film scoring

vital to movies.

Beyond the theater, the music behind the films often serves as the unifying language that everyone can understand. In many respects, film composers are cultural ambassadors, as they often introduce different cultural sounds to broader and more mainstream audiences. Think of Ennio Morricone's groundbreaking work in *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* in 1966, which blended traditional orchestral music with electric guitars and whistling to create a unique sound for the Spaghetti Western genre. As well as serving as a connection point between film and cultures, film scores have also served as the driving force behind our societal experiences. Many social movements have found themselves underscored by music found in films. Take the 2014 historical drama film *Selma*. One of the most impactful tracks from the film, “Glory”, became a protest anthem for modern social justice as it managed to capture the essence of the Civil Rights Movement while equally resonating with a new generation hungry for change.

This is where I came into the fold. I can vividly remember seeing many films and walking away not thinking about what I just saw, but rather moved by what I just heard. My biggest example is the 2019 film *Avengers Endgame*. While I enjoyed the emotional rollercoaster the film took me on, the biggest take-away for me was the song “Portals” composed by Alan Silvestri. I found myself moved more by the heroic sounding brass and the stratified strings rather than the action taking place on screen. This was the start of my musician journey. It led me to understand that film composers are more than just musicians: they're storytellers. Their role in film, although constantly overlooked, cannot be understated. They are the true architects behind our emotional and cinematic journeys, and they wield an extraordinary amount of influence on both cinema and culture.



3 <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-a-film-composer-and-what-does-a-film-composer-do-3-film-scoring-tips-from-hans-zimmer>