

Practical Techniques in Orchestral Recording to Visual Media

Week Three - Roles on the Scoring Stage

In this weeks session, we will go over the various members of the orchestra and other staff that you will be working with on the scoring stage. We will discuss each person's role as it relates to the performers and what is considered appropriate and professional behaviour. We will also discuss the differences between a musician in a traditional orchestra vs a film score orchestra.

- A. Pre-Recording
 - a. Music Editor
 - b. Orchestrator
 - c. Music Preparation Team
 - i. Copyists
 - ii. Proofreaders
 - iii. Music Librarian
- B. On the Stage
 - a. Recording Team - Orchestra
 - i. Conductor
 - ii. Soloists
 - iii. Section Leaders
 - iv. Musicians
 - b. Recording Team - Film Crew
 - i. Director
 - ii. Producers
 - iii. Sound Designers/Music Supervisors
 - c. Recording Team - Recording Engineer
 - i. Recording Engineer
- C. Post
 - a. The Music Mixing Session
 - b. The Final Mixing Session

Pre-Recording

Before you get into the studio, you will have to prepare your materials and music. The following roles are those that you will often come in contact with before getting in the studio.

Music Editor

The Music Editor will often be one of the first people you meet. This role will be tasked with creating temp scores for a film as well as preparing any visual tempo cues once you have provided the mockup. Oftentimes, the Music Editor can also be your Mixer when it comes to finishing and polishing the score after it has been recorded. In your early days, you will likely be fulfilling this role yourself.

Orchestrator

An Orchestra, quite simply put, orchestrates the score based on sketches provided by the Composer. The Composer would create a sketch of the score, melodies and simple harmonies, synced to picture and would provide these sketches, along with timing notes, to the Orchestrator who would then flesh out the score to then be provided to the Preparation Team. Nowadays, this role seems to be dying out a bit as more Composers do orchestration on their own. More often than not, assume that you will be doing the Orchestration yourself.

Music Preparation Team

The music preparation team is made up of three parts: Copyists, Proofreaders and the Music Librarian.

Copyists

The Copyists job is to take an Orchestrated score and make parts for the individual instruments of the Orchestra.

Proofreader

The Proofreader takes all parts for all cues and checks them against the orchestrated score to check for errors and inconsistencies.

Music Librarian

The Music Librarians job is to ensure that all the sheet music for each member of the orchestra is ready and available on the proper music stands on the proper day of a recording session. On large projects with multitudes of cues, having a competent Music Librarian is a crucial necessity.

Film Crew and Music Supervisor

The Producers and Directors will often meet with you to discuss the score, needs for the studio and various other needs depending on the project. One major goal to discuss before getting into the studio is contracting the Orchestra and other Soloists. This is a job often relegated to the Music Supervisor. If you do not have a group of musicians or a studio that you commonly or prefer to use, the Music Supervisor will be tasked with researching and contracting these for you. Most Composers find it preferable to hire Orchestras and Studios that they feel comfortable working with. If you are just starting out you might not have this luxury. Work closely with the Music Supervisor when they are researching and make as many contacts as you can. If you like a specific studio or group of musicians keep their information. Working with people you've developed a rapport with often leads to greater sounding and more quickly produced scores.

On the Stage

When on the Scoring Stage you will deal with three major groups of people: the Orchestra, the Film Crew and the Recording Crew. You will usually also have some of your own staff here (such as Orchestrator or Copyists whose jobs are to make your job a little easier).

Orchestra

Conductor

The Conductor is your main link to the Orchestra. For most of the recording session, you will not be interfacing with the Orchestra unless you are the Conductor. The reason for this is to maintain efficiency and keep the Orchestra comfortable without the Conductor changing. If you changes or adjustments, speak directly with the Conductor. They will relay the information to the requisite musicians and get the performance you want. Be careful not to micromanage. The Conductors job is to get the best performance possible out of the Orchestra. You must have faith in your Conductor to do just that.

Soloists

There are times when a soloist is brought in to record a specific part. This is the case with unique or uncommon instruments and sometimes even individual vocalists. You should have no reservations in approaching a soloist with notes. Soloists usually are not members of the Orchestra itself and generally have more subtle nuances in

their performance that will need to be discussed and perfected. Again, try not to micromanage. Soloists are among the best musicians on their specific instrument and do not need to be coached. When speaking with them, think of it more as a dialogue intended to coax out a wonderful performance rather than laying a road map with no room for deviation.

Section Leaders

These musicians are the heads of their specific sections. These usually come on a per instrument basis but you can also have Brass, Woodwind, String and Percussion Leads. Usually you would not speak directly with Section Leaders. That is a job you would leave to the Conductor. However, if you are in a situation using a smaller B or C orchestra you may find it prudent and time saving to speak with the Section Leaders and their Sections on specific notes. Defer to your best judgement on if this will be appropriate and remember that if it will slow down the pace of work too much, consider against it and speak with the Conductor instead.

Film Crew

Generally, the only people on the film crew you have to worry about are Producers, Directors and Music Supervisors. The Producers job is to make sure the Film is made on time and on budget. Often they will have final say on the project. This is usually because they invested money into the project or because a studio hired them for the job.

Director's are second on the chain of command. It is their project, their vision so make sure you listen well and adapt accordingly. On certain projects a Directors word will trump that of a Producers but on a normal project this is not the case.

Lastly, come the Music Supervisors. Music Supervisors are more of a rarity during Recording Sessions. Most of their work is done prior to getting in the studio. Music Supervisors can give input or suggestions but their word is trumped by either the Directors or Producers of the project.

Recording Studio Crew

The studio crew are, arguably, the most important part of the film score process. Without them nothing would be recorded. Treat them with respect and don't hesitate to ask questions or provide your input. Their job is to make sure that the music you wrote is recorded in a way that everyone can be proud of. In this case you're not their boss. Instead you are their co-worker. Have a discussion with them about various mic techniques or placements. If you feel a section is too quiet then make a suggestion.

Post

There are two main phases to Post-Recording. First is the Music Mixing session followed by the Final Mix.

Music Mix Session

The music mixing session is the last step before handing all the audio off to the Final Mixer. Here you, your recording engineer and any other music specific staff you choose put the finishing touches on the score. This can involve sweetening the recordings with Virtual Instruments, adjusting effect inserts or simply leveling and panning.

In this session, you are in charge. Make sure that everything is perfect here as after this step you won't be able to touch the music again unless the Director decides there needs to be more changes. Once finished with the mix, send it to the Director for approval.

Final Mix Session

You've done everything you could find to make the score as brilliant as it can be. The Director has approved it and now it's time to finish the Film. The score is imported into the session alongside the rest of the soundtrack for the

Film and the Final Mixer, usually referred to as the Re-Recording Mixer, will make it fit with the rest of the sound design.

During this session, if you choose to attend, you will have minimal input. Any comments you provide should generally be directed at the score and the score alone. Anything else should be decided by the Director and the Re-Recording Mixer. Just remember, the Film is the Director's creative vision and anything that is done should be done in an effort to support and enhance that vision.

If you have questions about today's workshop or Film Scoring in general, please don't hesitate to email me at jeffbricemusic@gmail.com