

MUSIC IN FILM: the short Producer's Guide

as written for IFFMH & the Mannheim Meeting Place

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CHAPTER 1: FIRST NECESSARY STEPS REGARDING MUSIC in your FILM

STEP 1: Think About Music while In-Development

From even the moment you have decided to produce, but especially when you have your director on board. A COMPOSER should from then on be considered as a “talent” you have to cast and involve early enough in the process.

STEP 2: Brainstorm with the Director

Go through the script with the director for a first “*music spotting session*”.

- I. Together make an initial approach of what kind of music is wanted and especially in how many and which key scenes (if any) you will need music. This results in an approximate calculation of how many minutes of original score you will need; less or more than 30'? Around an hour or more?
- II. Clarify what is wanted musically for the storyline: more atmospheric/effective music or more story/character-oriented themes and melodies? Or both?
- III. Will you want to record with an orchestra and if yes of what size; if not then start defining the desired alternatives you should aim for.

Now after the above you will know early enough certain requirements regarding:

- i. The “talent” you will aim to hire for the score, like what kind of status, style and experience in the genre they have already;
- ii. How many minutes of music you'll eventually ask the composer to write.
- iii. Apart from the original score if you'll need to license songs and if yes approx. how many.

STEP 3: Work on an Initial Music Budget & Co-Production Services Structure

Based on the conclusions of “*step 2*” define the following:

- I. A proper approximate music budget. It's mandatory to distinguish the composer's creative fee (a number you feel at the moment realistic) from the production costs. (*note: more on “Budgeting” in chapter 3*)

- II. If the music services, including the composer's position, should be provided from a co-producer then you should start assessment there. Fees, composers' availabilities, studio and musicians costs vary from country to country, not just from continent to continent. Please research and add average realistic numbers based on the desired territory to your Budget.
- III. Depending on the project contemplate if a famous and acclaimed composer would increase the chances to obtain a co-producer and funds. If the answer is 'YES', then *double* the creative fee's number you were initially thinking to put on (I).

STEP 4: Seek/Hire & Put the Composer to Work

Composers always welcome the "more time to compose" factor. Although it seems they become more productive when they have a *rough edit*, they actually use most of their time to compose the most important and major elements of the score - e.g. make initial demos of themes and certain melodies or soundscapes - before they see anything. Make them use this time before you commence principal photography. (**note:** *more about how to make the right choice of a composer on Chapter 2*).

*By far the most major **advantage** of having your composer on board the production early, you don't need to lay down temp-tracks on a rough cut. Temp-tracks disorient composers, limit them creatively and often create hassles in the communication with directors. The absence of temp-tracks allows them to truly create ORIGINAL specifically for your story, fitting to the vision of the director, while making the whole process and the communication with the director many times more constructive.*

Summary: the Advantages of the above steps for the Post-Productions Process

- Defining if Music Services will be provided by a **Co-Producer** or not.
- More accurate **Music Brief** for the composer who will eventually step in.
- More accurate **Budget Plan** of music-related services for your production.
- Less Music Production effort and headaches for anyone involved in **Post-Production**.
- You won't face last minute Composer's **availability** problems.
- **More Time** to seek, find and negotiate terms with the Composer.
- **More Time** for more efficient brainstorming & better thought-out compositions that will result in a better score.
- Enough time to approach a **Famous Composer** and perhaps use his participation in your financing and co-production strategy.

CHAPTER 2: HOW TO FIND the RIGHT COMPOSER for your PROJECT

There are three requirements a composer is supposed to fulfill:

- a) fit **artistically** into your project and compose aesthetically fitting music for it
- b) fit within the desirable **creative fee** range you define
- c) have the right nationality to fit the **co-production** scheme and facilitate any possible **tax-incentives**.

STEP 1: Outsource your Research

If neither you or your co-producer know where to start looking then approach any of the following:

- I. a composer's agent
- II. a music supervisor
- III. an editor and a sound editor
- IV. a post-production manager/supervisor
- V. an orchestra contractor or recording studio manager

AVOID asking Sound Designers and Sound Engineers. They come from a technical, engineering world, and rarely have the knowledge or the capacity to make an appropriate suggestion for a composer.

STEP 2: Discover & Examine Specific Requirements of Specific Nominees

If his/her **nationality** is a pro and not a con for your desired financing then you only need to examine the following parameters:

- I. Availability*
- II. His initial reaction and ideas on the script or the synopsis he read and if it's compatible to the director's vision.
- III. His typical fee for similar projects and his flexibility about that.
- IV. His willingness to make a demo specifically for you (1-2 minutes max.).
- V. His production capacities & his working pace. (**note:** more on this on Chapter 3 and the "Low Budget Alternatives")
- VI. His typical negotiation terms on Masters and Publishing ownership.

If you approached a famous composer and he both wants and he's available to work on your project, then sign a contract as soon as possible and use his name for publicity and to raise funds. Like that everyone will stick to the initial made - and signed – promises. (note:** more on fair formulas for contracts depending on a composer's front-end fee in Chapter 4)*

CHAPTER 3: BUDGETING MUSIC

This is how your **Music Budget breakdown analysis** should look like, for Budgets devised for recording with an orchestra (even a small one) in a studio:

1. COMPOSER'S CREATIVE FEE – Services Breakdown:

- Composing X minutes of Music
- Orchestrating X minutes of Music
- Draft Programming & Delivery of Demos/Mock-ups
- Recording Supervision & Mixing Supervision (if needed)

2. MUSIC PRODUCTION COSTS – Services Breakdown:

- Programming/Finessing Sampled parts of the Composition
- Studio rental - space & equipment - for the defined number of recording & mixing days
- Studio Engineer and other staff
- Copyists for the score sheet preparations
- Musicians/Soloists
- Conductor

The principle of distinguishing the creative fee from the production costs will help you with:

- I. your negotiation with the composer,
- II. oversight of the post-production services costs (music and non-music related),
- III. a clearer overview of the film's needs both creatively (composer's pure composing/orchestrating working hours) and production-wise (programming, studio costs or any other way of producing the requested deliverables).

Getting Creative: the LOW BUDGET ALTERNATIVES

If a composer has a wide range of personal production capacities, like e.g. a regular team and a studio and musicians he knows and trusts for the Music Production Services, then an original score for a film can also be produced as follows:

- I. Minimize to the absolute essentials the **minutes** of music you need composed.
- II. Minimal **instrumentation** in order to avoid studio recording with an orchestra.
Example: a string quintet and 2-3 more special instruments are sufficient.
- III. **Record fewer physical instruments** in a smaller size professional studio for the melodies.
- IV. **Digitally Sample** (program) the rest of the orchestrated music on computers.
- V. One **Orchestrator** and one **Programmer** to assist the Composer
- VI. One **Sound Engineer/Mixer** for the deliverables for the Final Mixing

CHAPTER 4: COMPOSER'S AGREEMENT TERMS & NEGOTIATION POINTS

The **Negotiation Points** and possible solutions when it comes to the *front-end fees* of composers are:

- Ownership of Masters Rights
- Ownership of Publishing Rights
- Composer to be Licensor of the Soundtrack Album
- Back-end compensation from sales or other set milestone
- A future project preliminary agreement (not binding)

VERY IMPORTANT NOTE: NOTHING RELATED TO THE OWNERSHIP OF MASTERS & PUBLISHING RIGHTS AFFECT ANY OF THE PRODUCERS' RIGHTS IN RELATION WITH THE UNLIMITED WAYS OF USAGE OF THE MUSIC FOR ANY AND ALL MEDIUMS WHEN SYNCHED WITH THE PICTURE! MASTERS & PUBLISHING INDICATE ONLY THE OWNERSHIP & POST-USAGE OF THE MUSIC CREATED OUTSIDE OF ITS SYNCH WITH THE PICTURE. AT ALL TIMES PRODUCER KEEPS ALL RIGHTS TO USE THE MUSIC IN RELATION WITH HIS/HER PICTURE!

Regarding **Masters & Publishing** the *TYPICAL* formulas are:

- **HIGH CREATIVE FEE:** Producer owns both Masters & Publishing
- **MEDIUM CREATIVE FEE:**
 - a) Producer owns Masters, Publishing is co-owned with Composer on a 50-50 basis.
 - b) Producer owns Masters, Composer (if famous) owns Publishing or co-ownership ends after e.g. 2 years and Publishing goes to Composers hands.
- **LOW CREATIVE FEE:**
 - a) Masters are co-owned by Producer & Composer, Publishing is owned by Composer
 - b) Masters & Publishing owned by the Composer

Real Examples of a Successful Deal:

(a) A Hollywood composer, whose typical fee for US projects is \$300.000, scored the music for a Czech-Slovak co-production for \$20.000. Music was recorded in Prague. It has been voted the best soundtrack of the year in Czech Rep.

(b) A composer with a worldwide following scored a Spanish film for 1/3 of his typical fee. Later, it went on to win multiple BEST MUSIC Awards and help the film sweep another dozen of them in the national Academies Awards.

In both cases the Composers kept ownership of Masters & Publishing Rights but they offered their BEST SERVICE and were committed to the projects!