

Course outline: Composing for Film and Television

The MA in Composing for Film and Television is a specialisation within the broader **MA in Film and Television**.

The MA Composing for Film and Television course is developmental and progressive.

In year one, students are taught the techniques and contexts which inform writing music for the screen. The first term comprises an intensive process during which students compose to a variety of exercises, each one chosen to focus on a particular problem of film composition. These exercises are completed by each student and discussed in seminars and individually assessed. In term two, further exercises concentrate on issues having to do with scoring for live instruments, the combination of live and electro-acoustic elements and the integration a limited range of sound design into film scores. In addition, students will begin engaging with projects generated by other students at the NFTS. This process will continue and dominate the third term. Each student contribution to those films will also be assessed. Students will also participate in visits from industry professionals.

In year two, students' activities will be dominated primarily by work generated from other parts of the school. The composing students are very much in demand working on potentially 6 Graduation Films while also having the opportunity to score for the Graduation Shows from the Television Entertainment Department. Lectures, seminars and the occasional workshop will be provided to clarify and expand issues arising from those projects. As in year one, students will also participate in visits from industry professionals.

Indicative course content is as follows:

Music studio operation

Basic Technology Training

Students are instructed in the use and procedures of the music studios for generating music from synthesisers, samples and their manipulation via Logic Audio.

Acoustic Music Techniques

Music Arranging

Combining Sampled Sound with Live Instruments

Music Management - Business Affairs and Contracts

Together with producing students, the obligations of contractual responsibilities are addressed using various contract models. The roles of PRS, MCPS, synchronisation licences and secondary uses of music are explained and discussed. Booking procedures for musicians and studios are also covered. This module gives a general understanding of the professional obligations of Producers and Composers concerning music rights in both and film and television productions.

Music & Image

The fiction production exercises in the first year give composing students an opportunity to collaborate and realise other people's ideas. The musical input in the films is discussed with the directors, producers, and sound designers prior to shooting. These techniques are extended to documentary and animation, where the narrative function of the music is fluidly transformed and progressed through the picture edit in close collaboration with the director and editor.

Year One

“Springboard” Cross Specialisation Introductory Workshop (duration 1 week)

- an introduction to the moving image, looking at cinematic and televisual language through the prism of storytelling
- the workshop investigates how the main crafts of cinema and television, screenwriting, cinematography, visualisation, editing, sound and music each relate to the way filmmaking puts across narrative ideas.

Non-collaborative Workshops

Through a structured series of exercises and seminars the students explore and develop different techniques of film music composition with emphasis on response to:

- aesthetic
- image
- relationship of music in time and space
- scanning the frame
- storytelling
- subjective and objective character development
- subtext

Cross Specialist Modules

These modules create a space to experiment with ideas, craft and screen language. The common link for us as film-makers is that our creativity lies in our “response” to memory, text, character, space, sound, etc. – and to other human beings. We must develop skills that allow us to communicate that response. Often, preconceptions, assumptions and over-rigid preparation can prevent us from seeing what is around us and therefore limit what we are capable of communicating.

Throughout these modules we encourage you to open up to your environment and the material you are working with. You will discover strategies that match your responses and develop ways in which you can play with ideas, screen language and,

last but not least, your audience. We will develop ways of looking at character and examine the differences between the “invented” and the “real”.

Specific modules stress the collaboration between the various filmmaking disciplines often allowing students to change roles and responsibilities. Productions involve all the departments working together in a professional environment. All modules, unlike workshops, are formally assessed. Cross specialist modules include:

- **Without Images** – Sound Designers, Composers and Editors create a narrative or abstract sound piece
- **Animation Projects** – exercises working with sound and music in a variety of animation styles
- **Sound & Music in Documentary** – a documentary film which introduces the aesthetics involved in the making of a visual essay, a style of documentary making which promotes an understanding of factual storytelling within a poetic framework.
- **Beyond Time** – a short fiction film which focuses on visual storytelling
- **First Year Film** - Throughout the first year ideas and scripts will be developed for a 5-10 minute fiction film which is shot and edited during the autumn term. Sometimes these films are based around a shared theme or genre. Scripts will be developed by the producers and directors in conjunction with cinematography, production design and sound. The composers provide the music and the films are edited and mixed by the end of the year.
- **Question Documentary** – a documentary film created from in depth research and film.

Music Screen Studies

Participation in Screen Arts programme and discussions to include all aspects of film analysis. Specific sessions on the use of music in films and studying film classics aim to look at the work of established composers, the use of music to emphasise different genres, musical approaches to styles both national and international and placement of music within the film.

Music Composition

- composition for narrative drama
- composition for non-fiction projects
- commercials & stings
- themes

For MA Composing students studying at the NFTS means participating within a filmmaking environment surrounded by other specialisations. There is the chance to interact and become involved in all the processes of film and programme making from initial development through to the final mix. Students are in demand from fiction, documentary and animation directors who need music for their films, providing a rich variety of opportunities for composing in many different styles.

The NFTS regards student self-motivation as important. Composing students are expected to study scores, go to concerts, compose, conduct and play wherever possible to enrich their musical lives. Visits are arranged to music recording studios and a variety of industry professionals are invited to the NFTS to talk about their

work. These include composers, library music experts, music recording engineers and agents. Film and Television Directors are also invited to talk specifically to the composing students from time to time.

Year Two

Advanced Composition

Digital Film Project (Cross-Specialisation with Fiction Directors)

The composers score a 25-minute Fiction project shot on digital format. By the end of this module the composing student should be able to demonstrate, through their work, an industry standard awareness of music for screen as well as working efficiently and creatively within a team.

Graduation Projects (Documentary, Fiction, Animation, Science & Natural History, Games, TV)

Composing for the graduation films provides a further opportunity to develop the creative and technical skills required for screen music composition for documentary, animation and fiction. Students develop a deeper understanding of how music works in film and the importance of communication of ideas to further develop and enhance the story and moving image.

Good organisational skills, time management and the prioritising of tasks are essential in these final productions.