

COMPOSITION: ELECTRONIC MEDIA II

Feb. 8, 2006

Comments on film-scoring by EMS alum Jonathan Price (BA, 1995)

Hi Harlan,

Say hi to Larry for me! Hope he's well.

I guess the first advice I would give about film music is to ask as many people as possible, because everybody's situation is different, with different goals, and some of the best advice in the world might not apply to your situation.

Location: There's plenty of work to had outside of LA, but most of it is in LA. If you have the means, you could try the USC film scoring program, which is great, and is also a nice way to learn the lay of the land. If you're an LA native, then you have jump on the game. If you can't move to LA right now, don't sweat it. Most of the people coming out here spend a few years scoring student films and micro-budget horror flicks. You could do that in Iowa. In fact, some of the best people I work with here in LA I met, and worked with, in Iowa. Score as much as you can while you're there and stay in contact with everyone you work with.

Gear: More helps, but you'd be surprised how much you can do with cheap gear. One of my first gigs for Universal, I recorded a soloist in a bathroom. And that's all I'm going to say about that. Just make sure that if it sounds sub-professional, fix it using whatever gear you have available. If you're not sure, put on a commercial recording and compare the production value of yours against it. Figure out the problem and then get rid of it, or figure out a way to make it sound like the commercial recording. Ask a friend if you can't figure it out. Learn as much as you can about recording and mixing. Most engineers will tell you it takes a minimum of 3 years behind a board (or a screen as it were) before you really get your chops. Most of the tv and independent film composition gigs out there require that you do your own engineering, so it's a must-have skill.

Work: In all seriousness, it's best to be independently wealthy if you want to be a composer (for any medium). The main problem is that if you find non-composer work to keep alive, there's little time left over for composer work. It's a balance that's tough to find. Marco Beltrami once said that his partner floated him for the first two years out of college while he took non-paying composing gigs. It eventually led to paying composing gigs. Outside of that strategy, you could try finding work as an orchestrator/ghostwriter/synthesist, etc. for a working composer. Send your demo and then follow up with a meeting. Be flattering and eager, but not too pushy. The composer will know how good you are from the demo and will be judging you on how well he/she thinks they can get along with you. After all, you'll have to spend 80-120 hours a week with this person, so they need to know that personality clashes won't be an issue. Also, be patient and occasionally (like every few months) follow up with the composer. He may not have a need for you for a year, but if you wait patiently, you might get a call. As far as finding work as a composer, you could try to work for a composer who will toss you a bone and help you with your career. Other than that, hang out with directors. College is the best time to make connections like that.

That's all I can think of right now, other than: if your film's final mix is in 5.1, mix in L-C-R or 5.1, or L-C-R+sub -- anything with a center channel. If you deliver a stereo mix the stereo spread will get narrowed in the surround matrix. Same applies if you're delivering synth tracks to be mixed into a surround orchestra mix.

Best of luck!

Jonathan

On Feb 1, 2006, at 5:48 PM, Harlan Muir wrote:

- > Hi,
- > My name is Harlan and I am a current student of Larry Fritts at the
- > U of I. I am interested in flim scoring and he told me to look you up
- > and maybe ask some questions. Any recommended paths to follow or
- > suggestions based on experience? Thanks for your time.

- > Harlan Muir
- > p.s. Larry says hi.