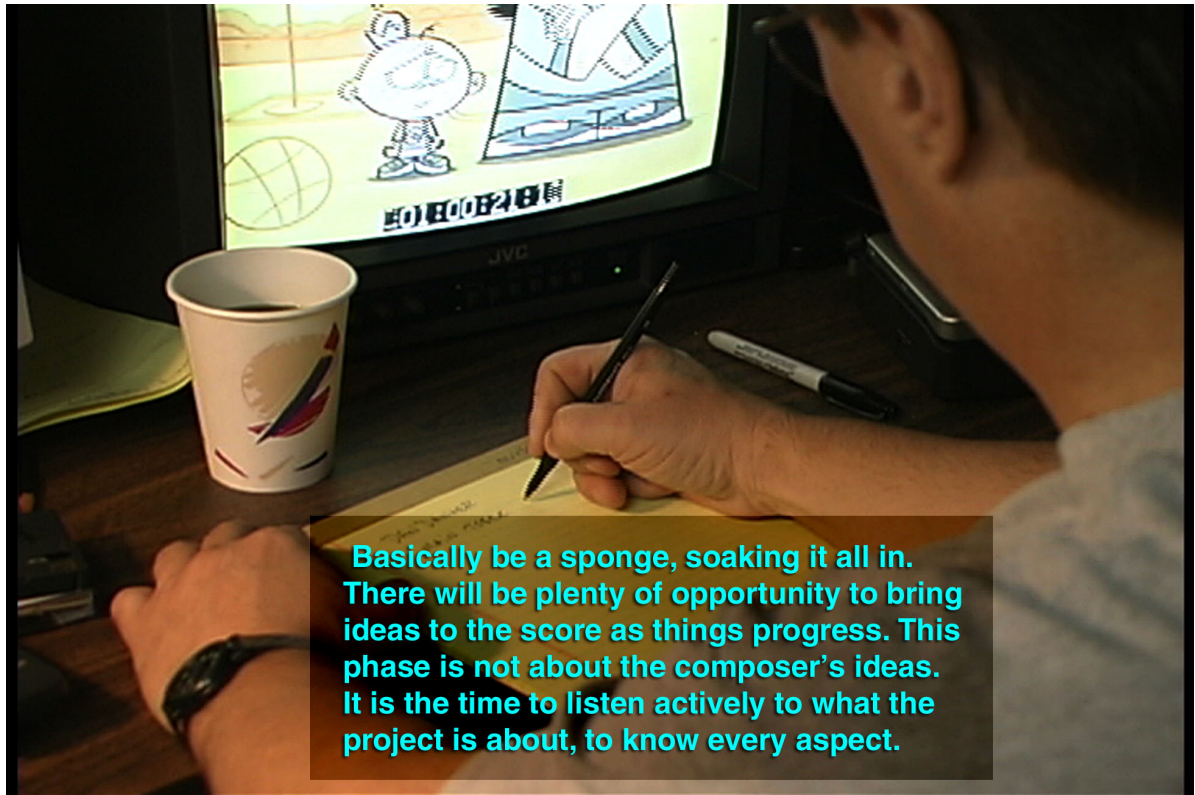


# The SEVEN STEPS of SCORING

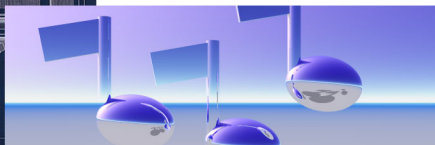
by  
Ron Jones

Composing music to underscore a Film, Television Show or even a game doesn't happen in one stroke, it is a multi-layered process. I have discovered that this was a process after spending several years as a composer working on TV and Film scores. It seems less like art to break scoring down to its various components, but in doing so, a greater understanding of this very rich and complex art form. Understanding the process can help those involved in creating a score far more effective. Let's take a walk through the 7 steps of scoring.





## Musical Building Blocks



### 2. Musical building blocks

Now that the composer has a clear concept of the project and what the Producers want and need from the score, it is time to sharpen the pencils and start writing some musical material.

Just like a builder uses the components of wood, steel, concrete, glass to construct a building, so the composer needs materials to build the score with. The materials are varied. Most times it is a melody or several melodies that are very helpful to create. People when listening to music seek order. They focus naturally on who or what is carrying the melodic part. Everything else is secondary. In addition to the melodic content several other musical materials are necessary. Also of key importance is the Style of the music, the rhythm, orchestration and harmonic content. Each aspect can change things dramatically. In my experience, more conflict between composers and producers over style than the notes. This

stage must be done right or everything, including the success of the project will be put in shaky ground.

### p.3

If you don't think music has much impact, just do it wrong and you will see how powerful a score is. Once the materials are appropriate to the project you can move on to the third step of the process.

## STEP THREE Choosing where the *music* goes.



### **3. Choosing where the music goes**

Is called Spotting, because now we choose the spots where music starts and stops. This step is very important in that it determines those scenes, those moments in which music will crash the party.

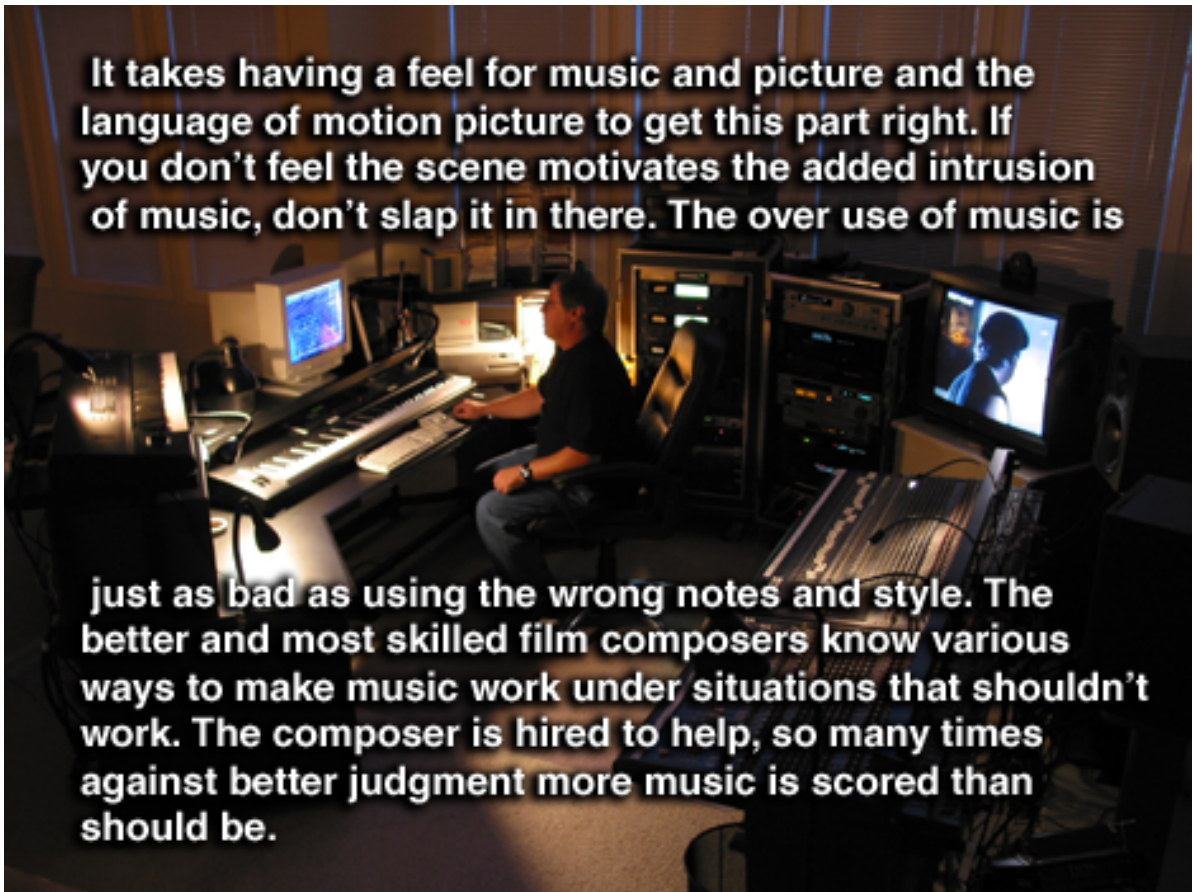


If the places are chosen well, the audience is not aware (most of the time) that music is being placed into the scene. They just feel the music doing something, while they are concentrating on the story being presented. Of course there are cases where music needs to stand out in front, like in a Musical or an Opera. For the most part it is better to use music to support, not overwhelm the scene. Of course, timing is everything. If the music comes in too soon it can ruin the moment or it goes out too fast or hangs on too long.



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It takes having a feel for music and picture and the language of motion picture to get this part right. If you don't feel the scene motivates the added intrusion of music, don't slap it in there. The over use of music is just as bad as using the wrong notes and style. The better and most skilled film composers know various ways to make music work under situations that shouldn't work. The composer is hired to help, so many times against better judgment more music is scored than should be.

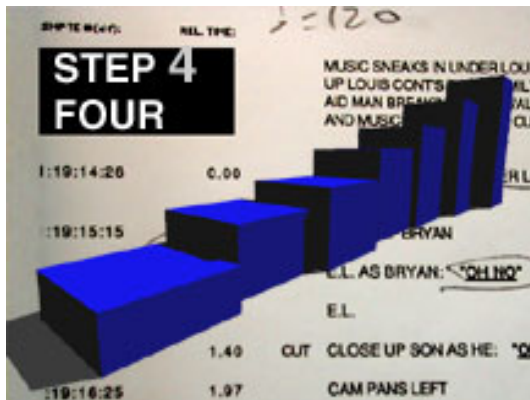


Then when the dubbing of the sound with picture these cues are usually dropped. It is rare in human DNA to have the capacity to know this aspect of what is right when it comes to spotting. With desire and effort, along with experience you gain an understanding of this.

The main thing is to never underestimate the importance to good choices of music starts and stops. Music editors are very experienced in this phase. If you can get one, do it.

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## Preparing CUE SHEETS



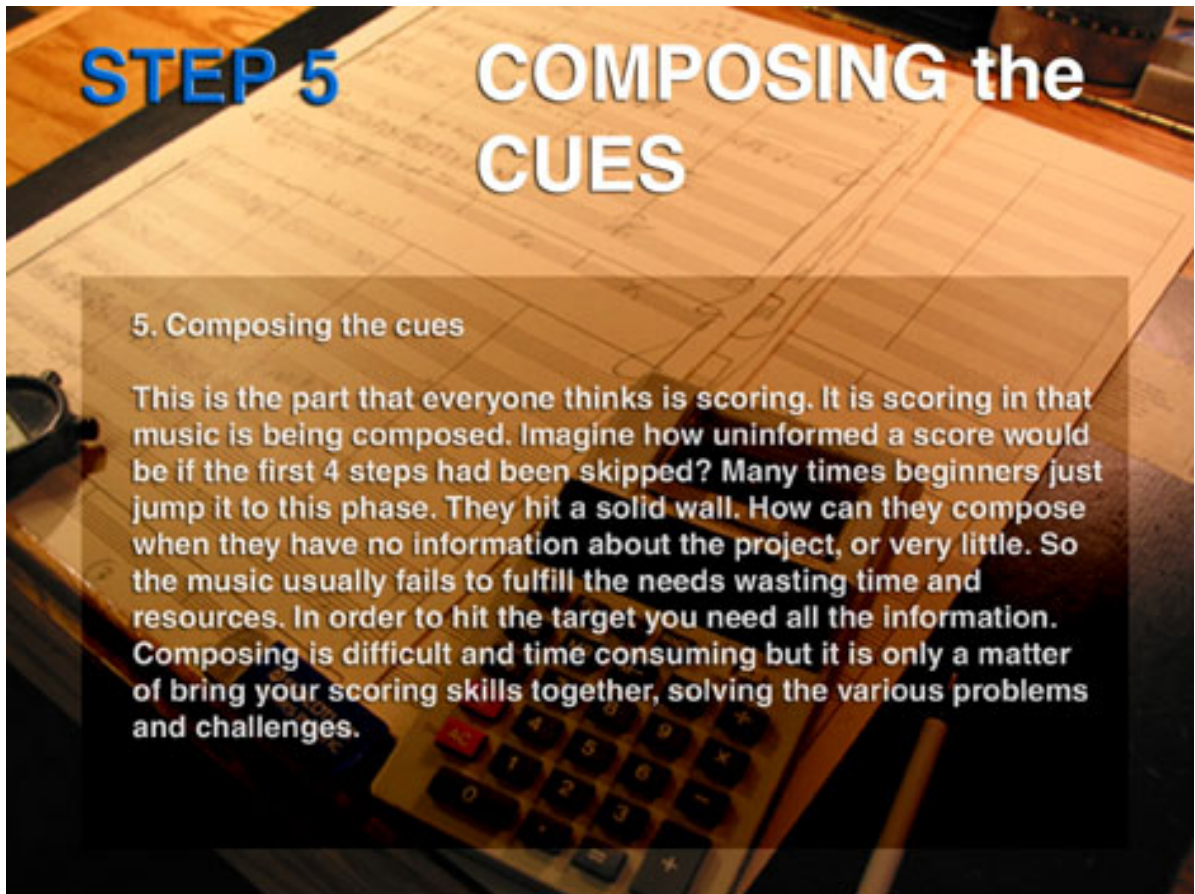
### 4. Preparing Cue Sheets

Traditionally it is the music editor that prepares detailed notes for the Composer, called Cue Sheets. With all of the non-linear computer software programs that are in use today, many composers just do their own notes. Cue sheets cover all the action, dialogue and camera moves of the cue starts and stops chosen in the previous phase.

Next to these details, running in parallel are the notations of the time code where each even occurs. If that was not already very complex a third stream of data is calculated that being the minutes and seconds from the start of the cue. With this information the composer has precise coordinates as to when things happen within the cue. The choices are made by the composer as to what to hit or ignore. The cue sheet gives ultimate flexibility, because everything is there from a timing point of view.



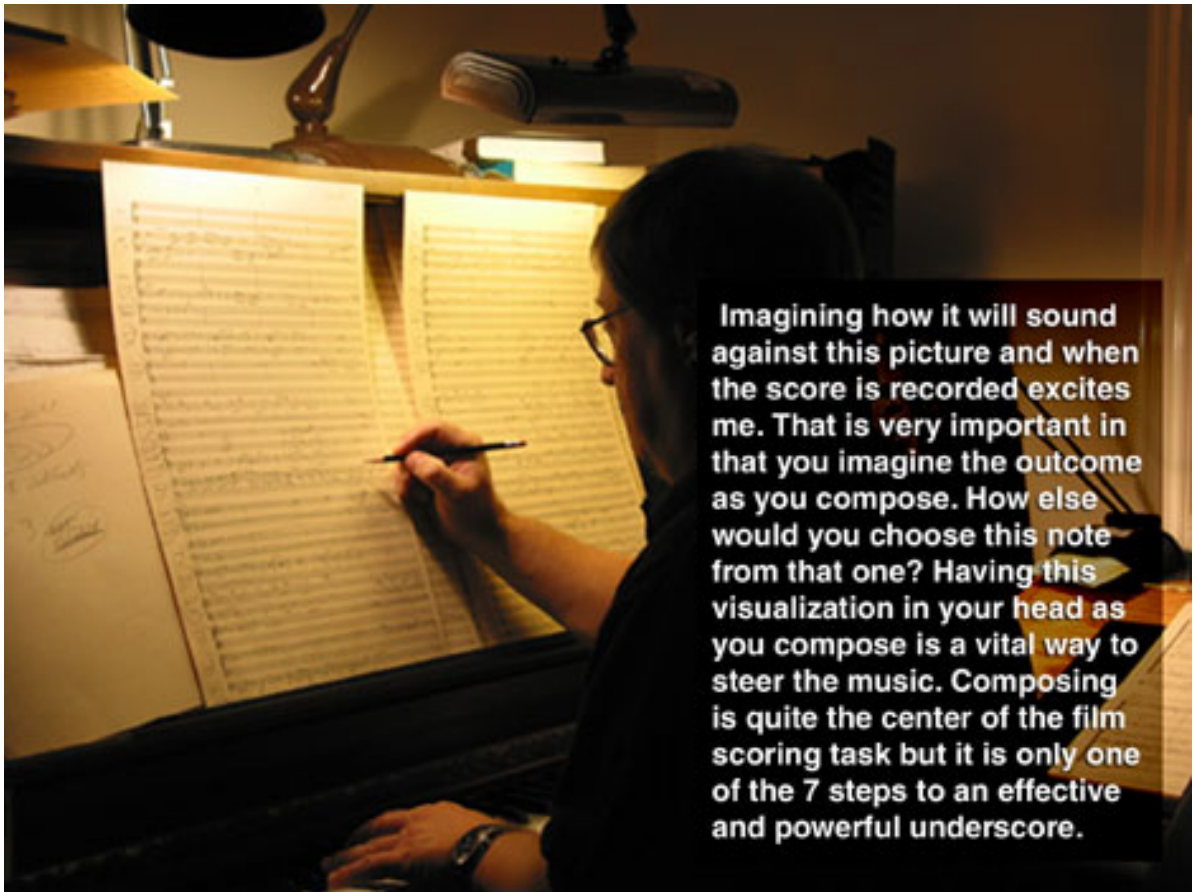
*Cue sheets cover all the action, dialogue and camera moves of the cue starts and stops chosen in the previous phase.*



If you have already created the musical building blocks then scoring a cue is construction work. In this phase, you are a craftsman and a builder of music that supports the scenes that have been spotted. Of all of the cue specific aspects, I believe it is tempo, which needs to be selected first. When you have the tempos or speeds selected, you can calculate that tempo with the timings on the cue sheet that you need to play. It sounds very complex now, doesn't it? Yes, it truly is.



Someone wanting to be a film composer will in one way or another have to come to terms with this challenge of complexity, or do something else.



STEP SIX

6

*Seeing It against*  
**PICTURE**



**6. Seeing it against picture**

When a cue or a bunch of cues are finished being written it is time to see how they work against the picture. As you composed you played it against your imagination. Now the parts that make up the score can be sequenced in music software.

Then when they are all sequenced entering each note, volume and all other musical expression data, it is a good idea to lock the sequence to picture and see how it works. Some people don't really write notes down on paper. They combine this phase with the composing phase.

I think that is all right in a basic sense, but the music will only be as good as your piano playing. The pencil can write far more complex music than one could possibly improvise into a sequencer on the fly.



For me and my standards and the complex nature of my music, I prefer composing first, then sequencing. This way you can focus completely on each aspect separately instead of juggling between the two. Why try to do too many complex tasks at the same time?



With the cues sequenced against picture you can make changes or sign off on them. At this point it is a good idea to layback the cues after making the necessary adjustments to a video so the Producers can see what you have done.

*Ron Jones is doing a rough mix of music to picture.*



It is a pain to compose long and hard only to send off the rough cues on videotape to the producers only to get a page or two of changes. This is really not a big problem. The goal is to please yourself as well as the people you are working for. So it goes with the territory and it is a vital part of making the score as good as possible.

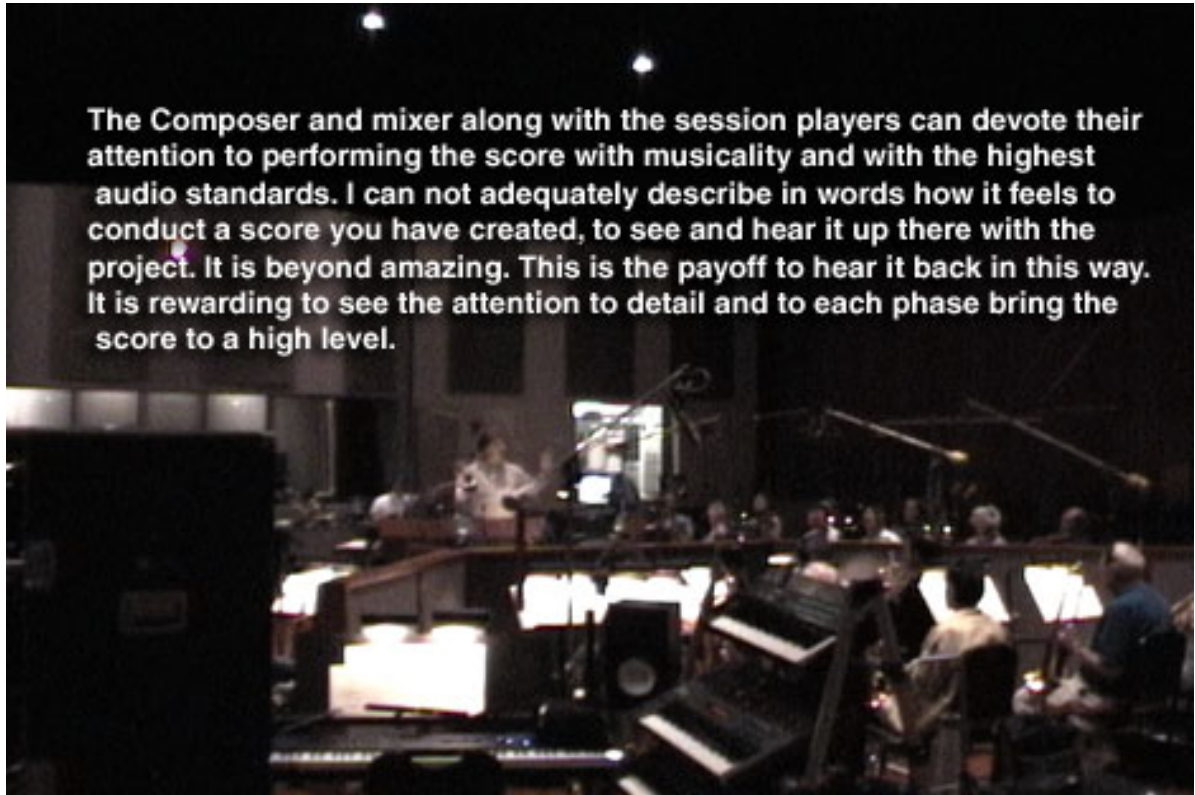


## 7. Recording the Score

The final phase of the scoring process is the most rewarding. Now it is time to record the score that you have worked so long and hard to make great. If you are recording with live players, you will have had the parts copied for the players. Live studio musicians are the best way to bring life to the score as well as human expression.



The other option is to record the music without live players via electronic means. Sometimes a combination might work really well. However it is realized at this phase the score has already been approved and tweaked.



It does not take a genius to do the scoring job. It takes patience hard work and experience, combined with a good capacity to solve problems. Anyone can learn technique, but there is a special intuitive quality possessed by all great film composers. That can't be taught.

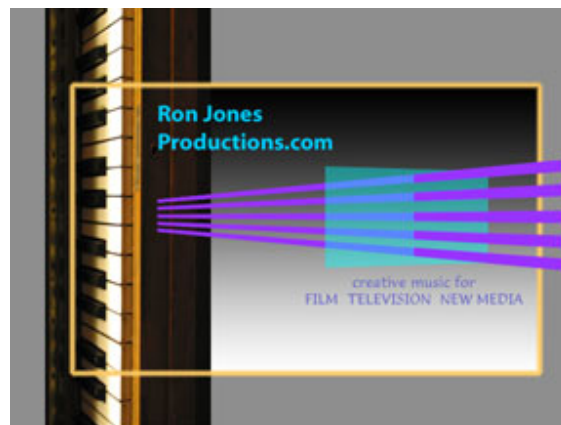
Following the process can help to get the score to that place where it all comes together. Both composers and producers benefit from knowing and using this path. Next time you watch a film, listen for signs of the 7 steps of scoring.





**Ron Jones conducting full orchestra session at Paramount Studios.**

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