

David Russell

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer these! it's much appreciated!

How long does it actually take for someone to see success in this job?

> you start with a deep question! Success is a very individual measurement. I know people who have scored 100 movies but since they haven't become a household name, they feel they've failed on some level. If success is just getting a gig, that can happen quickly although it is really hard to sustain, especially these days. The industry has changed so much since I've been here. Getting gigs and sustaining oneself on those jobs is more how I look at success (along with writing music I'm proud of). It's somewhat a constant struggle. But I'd say you need to give it 5 years. I had my first television series in about 3 but the next gig was even harder to get. It's a strange strange business.

What do you do to convey a certain emotion in your music?

> there are some time tested techniques we all use for certain circumstances. Film and tv music is interesting in that we have to somewhat play with audience expectations. Sometimes that means using tried and true techniques. Someone dying? Cue the oboe solo. War music? Bring in the drums and brass.

How do you deal with writer's block?

> I guess there are three main ways I deal with it. One is to do something else. Watch tv, go for a walk, sleep. Something to take your active mind off the problem. There are times I just call it a day. Many times when I do that, I will wake up hearing what I should do. It's like the answer needs to simmer in the background.

Another thing is to listen to something else that is kind of what you are going for. It isn't to rip it off, but sometimes you may find an element that unblocks the problem. It could be a tempo, a texture, an approach, something that fires your imagination.

And when those don't work you just have to press through. Sometimes you simply have to keep trying until something falls into place. This recently happened to me writing something for Lucasfilm's trailer dept. I had something but it wasn't working like I wanted. I just had to wrestle it until it finally all fell into place.

How do you deal with writing music under pressure such as deadlines?

> After a while you get used to it on some level. But at the same time, you never get used to it. It can be terrifying to think something has to be done in little time. You just have to do the best you can. I think we all realize not everything we write is going to be genius. I've always felt that to be a professional you have to get to a level where your bad day is still pretty good. At least by the audience's standard. Our own standards are often rarely met.

Do you find that you lose the passion for composing when doing it so much for money?

> Not so much in the way I think you mean it. Sometimes it is hard to keep the passion because it is a business. That means there are deadlines and restrictions beyond your control. Then if the budget isn't great, that's when it gets the hardest. Then if you are successful in that gig, you may get to do it all again, for little money. It's the grind that is the hardest part. You will often see media composers who have side projects. Either writing for the concert hall, a side band or some music project completely different from what they are known for. Those often help keep the passion.

What did you do to expand your clientele?

>For me, this is the hardest thing to do. Even harder than writing on an extreme deadline. Things were VERY different when I got here in the 90s. Then it was just meeting people in the industry who might recommend you for gigs etc. Now, with social media, it is so different. It is easier to meet people in some respects, but harder to differentiate yourself. I try to go to events where there are people other than composers present. When you go to an Emmy and everyone is a composer,

not likely to meet many you don't already know. But when I go to the event for Animation, I meet a lot more people who actually might hire me!

What skill do you find yourself using that you didn't expect to?

> Spreadsheets and databases lol. A lot of how we keep track of things, what's done, what's left to do etc, is through a spreadsheet or database. There are a lot of organizational things that need to happen, especially if you are recording with a live orchestra.

What advice do you have for someone getting into the field?

> These days it is imperative to have two main skills. And they really need to be developed at the same rate. Of course, the music. Writing music to picture is number one. That doesn't necessarily mean being able to write complicated music. It can. But I've worked with people who cannot read music and are scoring big films. But they know how to write to picture. They know their voice and how to use it. The other is the technology. One really needs to know how to use a DAW and sample libraries to be able to get across their ideas.

After that it's just meeting people and convincing them to hire you. That doesn't mean taking just any non-paying gig to get a credit. It means knowing your worth. Knowing what you can bring to a picture.

How has your job changed with the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Spotify?

> My specific job, writing music to picture, hasn't changed much because of streaming. The process is pretty much the same as it was 20 years ago. Netflix has opened up a whole world where everyone wants to have their own streaming service. I think we are at the beginning of a boom with these services trying to find content. Streaming has greatly affected the business of things, however. A lot is

still unknown about how to compensate writers in a streaming world. It's an incredibly deep topic with a lot of different factors. Including how composers will be able to make a living.

What would you do differently at the start of your career if you could back and do it over again?

> For me, I'd go to the USC film scoring program. I was accepted but decided I had had enough school for a while. So much of how people survive before they get their own career going is through a network of alums from various programs. But that's if I were to start again back when I started. If I were to start now, I'd do something similar but I'd score a lot of student films. That was harder to do before the internet exploded.

What is your overall goal now that you're in this profession?

> I'd like to get my own show again. It's been a while and I've learned so much since then. It's really about keeping a consistent life and writing good music. For me, I'd like to have a respected name and pass some of what I know along. And score a theatrical feature that played nationally! Lol

What is the process like from start to finish on a project?

Traditionally, Film and TV are most different in terms of time. Episodic TV is often done extremely quickly. I've heard of people having 3-4 days to score a full episode. So a lot of it is going with the first idea. There isn't a lot of time for ideas to gestate or for much back and forth between a composer and director/producer. If the film has a decent schedule, themes can develop and mature. Shows that have commercial breaks also mean that there will be bumpers that you don't get in films. This affects the flow of the show and likewise the music. For example, with a 30 minute tv show, you may have an opening section about 1-3 minutes long (sometimes longer, sometimes shorter), then the credits, then a commercial. After that starts the body of the show. Typically there will be 3 acts of 5-7 minutes separated by commercials. Because the story is broken up, the music follows that form. This is often reflected in shorter cues.

With film, there are none of these constraints. The story, and thus the music, can develop at whatever pace the filmmakers choose. Music is also less often married to picture in film. By that I mean, tv music very often follows cuts closely where film music can be more thematic crossing cuts and not hitting picture.

It seems television that doesn't have commercials, HBO, NETFLIX etc, lives somewhere in between. Their storytelling isn't as constrained by 30/60 minutes time slots and commercials so they have more freedom. But it still seems less than a film because there is still an episodic element.

The process is essentially the same except for those points above. You start with a spotting session where all the relevant people watch the film/show and talk about where music starts and stops and what the music should do. Sometimes with TV, the show will have temp music so that can serve as the spotting session. Then the composer writes. Depending on time, there are demos made and notes given by the director/producer. Once cues are approved the next step depends on if there will be a live session. If not, the composer will polish the MIDI versions, have them mixed and then sent to the dub session. If there is a live session there will be transcriptions of the MIDI files and orchestration/copying followed by the recording. This is then mixed and sent to the dub session.

Typically stems are sent to the dub (the dub is the final mix of music, dialog and sound FX). Stems are essentially submixes so that they have a little control over instrument groups. For instance, with Rebels I think we were sending Strings, Brass, Perc, Choir, Winds and maybe Misc stems. Often they don't change our mix much but this gives them a bit more control if something is fighting another element. Once they do that, they lay back the complete soundtrack and make a master version of the film/show.

Carlos Chafin

How long does it actually take for someone to see success in this job? Depends on talent and the opportunities they can explore. Sometimes it can take years, depending on the goal. Almost never overnight.

What do you do to convey a certain emotion in your music? I do research, usually checking out what film composers are doing in a similar situation. Sometime

ideas just come to me, but trying to not over produce and overthink things, keep them honest is the best.

How do you deal with writer's block? Do something else or write something you know isn't it to get it out of your system.

How do you deal with writing music under pressure such as deadlines? I deal with it well, I like deadlines and pressure, that's when I do my best work.

Do you find that you lose the passion for composing when doing it so much for money? No, I need the money so it's fine by me. I have a tougher time writing for just writing sake. I get so critical of myself when writing for "Art"

What did you do to expand your clientele? Put my work out for review and in rewards shows. I also called on people and used referrals from people I worked for.

What skill do you find yourself using that you didn't expect to? Being outgoing and connecting people. I was an introvert early in my life. I realized that wasn't going to work so I've forced myself to be outgoing. It's been a journey, but well worth it and I don't think most people I work with would ever suspect that was once the case.

What advice do you have for someone getting into the field? Learn as much about related industries as possible. That would include anything in digital media production.

How has your job changed with the rise of streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Spotify? Yes, we have more independent movie work, but part of that is the area is growing in related industries.

What would you differently at the start of your career if you could back and do it over again? Nothing different really, but there are many more educational options than when I was young. I would use those to get further faster. I designed the AMPT program at VCU for that very reason, so people coming out of school could jump start their careers.

What is your overall goal now that you're in this profession? To never retire, but to cherry pick my projects to be more rewarding than just anything I'm asked to do. What is the process like of a project from start to finish? Learn about it, bid it, meet the creative folks behind it, schedule and begin the work, get feedback, make changes, deliver it and collect the money or whatever reward happens to materialize.