

# COMPOSING FOR FILM

## Master's Degree Programme

The Conservatorium van Amsterdam (CvA) provides a high-level master's degree programme designed to accommodate the aspirations of composers wishing to specialize in music scoring for film and other audio-visual representations. The CvA is the first conservatory in Europe to offer this specialization.

The two-year master's programme will provide a profound training based upon a multidisciplinary teaching framework aimed at fully equipping students for the scoring demands of contemporary film & audio-visual industries. By means of lessons, lectures, workshops and excursions given in cooperation with the Nederlandse Film en Televisie Academie (NFTA) and special guest teachers (composers, film directors), students will be given the opportunity to work with professionals on gaining knowledge in different aspects of the film scoring industry (artistic, creative, technical, business).

Students will gain experience in dealing with film scoring assignments and film projects by NFTA students, developing not only creative but also interpersonal skills through the different levels of cooperation necessary to fulfill these projects. During their last semester students will work on scoring a complete film, mentored by their teachers and finally having the opportunity of recording part of it with live musicians at the CvA studios.

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## ADMISSION

### Admission requirements

The Composing for Film master's degree programme is primarily designed for those with a bachelor's degree in music composition or equivalent. Candidates with a bachelor's diploma in another musical field may be admitted, provided that they show proficiency in music theory and a sufficient level in composition skills.

### Entrance exam material

In addition to the completed and signed application form and the other documents, students are requested to send:

- \* an audio recording (on CD or Mp3) which includes a maximum of 15 minutes original composition(s) material, preferably written for audio-visual projects (MIDI recordings acceptable)
- \* written score(s) (preferably in Finale or Sibelius) or musical drafts (schematic score) in cases where traditional musical notation does not apply
- \* DVD(s) with films and original scores by the students are also very welcome

\* a motivation letter stating the student's reasons for wishing to enter the program

Candidates will be selected to be interviewed by the entrance examination committee based on their submitted material, as well as aspects such as general film knowledge, perceptive skills and insight into dramatic uses of music, and collaboration skills.

## **Contact**

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## **PROGRAMME STRUCTURE**

### **Learning Objective**

The Composing for Film master's degree programme prepares the student for all facets of a professional career as a composer in contemporary film music industry. Students who have finished the programme will have sufficiently developed perceptive skills and structural awareness with respect to film drama. Parallel to this they will have gained the scoring experience and competency to meet with various film categories and situations while being attentive towards up to date developments in movie production.

### **Structural Overview**

The two year master's degree programme is broken down into two periods (one per year) both consisting of theoretical and practical lessons as well as projects (two per year).

The following methods of instruction will be employed:

**Group lessons:** theoretical lessons on scoring, conducting to picture, drama, film history, sound, technology (MIDI sequencers, ProTools, Synchronization). These subjects aim to provide the students with basic skills and background knowledge essential to film music scoring processes.

**Individual lessons:** practical lessons on drama spotting, developing motivic and thematic music material, scoring for separate film fragments and scoring for film sequences in context. In the course of these subjects the students will gain practical experience and develop mastery of film scoring techniques.

**Workshops:** in the form of compact educational seminars, students will be instructed upon diverse additional aspects concerning the film music industry.

Seminars may include:

- \* music notation using Finale
- \* career / film music business introduction lectures on issues of contracts, licensing, publishing, copyright, etc.
- \* scoring for commercials
- \* audio-visual synchronization, use of ProTools

Workshops may involve educational activities in the form of projects such as:

- \* attendance of film music recording sessions
- \* post-production sound studio sessions (demonstrations on sound design and use of ProTools)
- \* excursions to School of Sound (every two years), film festivals (IDFA, IFFR, NFF)

The content of the programme (including information on credits and on the part of the curriculum that will be taught at the NFTA) will soon be announced.

## **Evaluation**

During the course of the academic year the students will be required to produce homework assignments for both theoretical and practical lessons. These assignments will include analysis of films on diverse levels with respect to drama and musical content/structures. Practical assignments will involve all different scoring tasks aiming to progressively developing film music composition competency. Punctual and satisfactory completion of the given assignments as well as active class participation and workshop presence will determine the student eligibility to the second academic year and to the final exam stage.

## **Final Exam**

Assuming that the student has successfully completed all the necessary subjects involved in the programme, he is expected to conclude his study with a final exam. During the last semester of the programme, the students will be assigned with a complete film including sound (dialogue & sound effects) for which they will have to compose a full film score:

- \* the assigned final exam film score will have a duration of maximum 30 min.
- \* as a whole the score will be recorded with MIDI equipment
- \* the programme will enable students to have 10-15 min. of their final exam score recorded at the CvA recording studio with live musicians. These projects will be considered as and valued as CvA orchestra projects.

The student's skills in drama perception, scoring and arranging as well as his recording/production results (referring to both MIDI and live performed music) will be evaluated. It should be taken into account that students are expected to conduct the part of the score that is to be recorded with live musicians themselves. All preparatory stages leading up to the final exam will be under the guidance of the teachers involved.

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## **SUBJECTS**

The program follows a threefold structure divided into:

- 1. Technical**
- 2. Drama - *Theoretical & Practical***
- 3. Scoring - *Theoretical & Practical***

### **1. Technical**

In order to reproduce their scores and synchronize them with the movie fragments, all scores for the assigned films of the practical part should be produced with MIDI equipment. For students less experienced in the use of MIDI equipment, the Technical part functions as a preparatory step for the Practical lessons. It involves acquiring certain technical skills in the sound studio that are necessary to be able to start working on the assigned films. During these lessons, the students will work on learning essential aspects of equipment as well as programmes that are commonly used in film music industry.

Students who have experience in composition and orchestration may submit samples of their work for evaluation in order to be exempt from part or all of the preparatory stage of the programme. Samples will consist of CD and/or appropriate transcripts.

### **2. Drama**

#### ***Theoretical***

The theoretical part involves the analysis of films focusing on music scores, aiming at study and awareness of music functionality as well as the role of music in the communication of meanings and emotions in different film categories.

The film corpus is distributed in categories in such a way as to address different narrative styles and different modes of representation in the cinema. Each category involves two films, the first one to be analyzed in class and the second one to be analyzed by the students as a homework assignment once the first one is concluded during the lessons.

#### ***Practical***

**Identification / Spotting / Sketching / Creating a Temp-track**

\* The students will be given an assigned film and will be working on the identification of different moods and spotting of important moments by making a sketch of music cues throughout the whole film.

\* The next step involves selecting stock music from the Composing for Film workgroup section at the CvA library, matching the music cues and editing them on the film as a temp-track.

### **Composing Themes & Motives**

\* This second stage involves learning how to deal with film as a unity. In this context, simple themes/motifs will be composed to accommodate the selected music cues decided upon during the previous stage. Themes may be built around specific a) character(s), b) mood(s), c) idea(s) / situation(s) and will further provide the main thematic / motivic material of the assigned film (See **3. Scoring - Practical**).

## **3. Scoring**

### ***Theoretical***

#### **Arrangement & Development**

Several film scores will be analyzed in context of different thematic approaches. Example of film score analysis dealt with during the theoretical part: Bernard Hermann's *Vertigo*: breakdown / analysis of the score, deconstruction of thematic material and study of the ways of development of its motivic material. Readers, powerpoints and musical written scores will be used during the lessons to facilitate a multilayered understanding of the different issues that will be approached. The students will be expected to watch the films intended to be studied in class beforehand, in order to not only be aware of the plot but also of different mood settings, turning points and layers of meaning.

### ***Practical***

#### **Assigned Film**

As a next stage to the **Drama - Practical**, students will proceed to work under the supervision and guidance of the teacher on actual scoring. This will be done progressively on three different levels which will all involve:

- \* learning to work from certain thematic/motivic material adjusting and arranging it for different purposes
- \* learning how to make choices with respect to rhythm, harmony and instrumentation
- \* learning how to extract motivic material from a basic main theme and to build upon it.

## **1. Scoring for isolated film fragments**

Learning to deal with diverse moods and score accordingly for assigned film fragments addressing different dramatic settings. Students will be asked to score for assigned

fragments from various films and they will be expected to produce MIDI recordings of these scores, ready for synchronization with the assigned fragments. After completion, all results of the same assigned film fragment will be evaluated in class. This way, the students will learn from each other's approach while at the same time they will experience a simulated situation of evaluating scoring results with a director.

## 2. Scoring for fragments within film context

This next stage addresses a more unified approach towards film where film fragments are treated as part of a filmic context and not as isolated units. Various films that have been dealt with during the **Drama - Practical** will be re-addressed for the purposes of working on thematic development and arrangement with the goal of producing scoring results that are interrelated both musically and dramatically within their filmic context. This practical will be a preparatory stage for the **final exam** of the master's degree programme.

## 3. Scoring for NFTA student film projects

Under the supervision of teachers involved, students will partake at an early stage in short film projects by NFTA students. This will help them develop a deeper understanding of constructive collaboration relative to other film disciplines.

## 4. Scoring for an Assigned Final Exam Film

During the last semester of the programme, the students will be assigned a complete film including sound (dialogue & sound effects). This will be the main material for their final exam, for which they will have to compose a full film score.

## THE END



*Artistic Direction:* JURRE HAANSTRA  
*Research & Programme Development:* LENA CHATZIGRIGORIOU

*Note: Lessons at CvA will be in English, lessons at NFTA will be in Dutch. All students should have at least a basic knowledge of the Dutch language.*

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