



Task 3: Making high-quality soundtracks

In this task, you will learn how to write film music.

This is a free task. Some students love to have as few guidelines as possible, however some struggle with that. If you find it difficult to improvise or come up with something original, please see this as necessary practice; it is vital to be able to mess around to become a composer! You don't have to show this to anyone apart from, possibly, your teacher.

Step 1. Please watch this YouTube clip; it should give you a sense of how powerful film music can be:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rn9V0cN4NWs>

Step 2. A few things to consider when writing film music:

- When we create film music, we might not always want the audience to think too much about the music, so be aware of how loud or soft your music is, and make sure you vary your dynamics.
- Often film music doesn't have clear melodies but instead repetitive rhythms, plain sounds and harmonic patterns that use scales to create certain moods.
- To create a quality soundtrack, you should use moments of silence.
- Tempo is very important – both for this task and in general. A piece that uses 60 beats per minutes (BPM) (a beat every second) will generally calm us down, as this is the same speed as our heartbeat when resting. 120 BPM is roughly the speed of our heartbeat when we do moderate exercise such as dancing. 160–190 BPM is around our maximum pulse and will invoke highly exciting or even stressed feelings. It can be good to change speed in your composition.



The Joy of Composing

with Fredrik Holm

Step 3. Below is a link to a film called *The Box*. At the moment it hasn't got any sound at all. Watch it and take notes on what kind of mood or moods you would like to bring to the film.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtQdWL1Cli8>

Step 4. Use your knowledge of scales to find notes that would enhance the feelings you want in your film. For example, use a minor scale for an emotional ambiance or a pentatonic scale for a more feel-good experience. In this film, I would suggest experimenting with the 12-tone scale. This scale uses all the notes including all the sharps and flats. The 12-tone scale is commonly heard in horror movies as it creates clashes and can be used to find unsettling intervals.

Step 5. Play around on your keyboard whilst watching the film. (This is what many film composers do!) Do this at least three times. On the fourth time, try to remember the bits that you think work best. Then make a recording of your soundtrack (we are not notating this task). You might even be able to add your soundtrack to the film.