

For SCL's SCORE

Giving a Dramatic Score "Size"

By
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You've all heard that drama is "larger than life" and depicts "heightened realism" but how is this reflected in a music score?

One of the many lessons that I learned from Walter Scharf is that a score has to have "size". This was Walter's way of suggesting that the quality of a score has to be of an increased importance to enhance the dramatic features of the visual. It has to communicate to you that what you are looking at (and hearing) is far more significant than you might first think and "attention must be paid".

This has little to do with the style of the visual. Whether it is a documentary, animation, a comedy, or a drama, the size of a score enhances the overall theatrical effect.

Consider this: even "reality" shows like *Survivor* or *The Apprentice* have heroic underscoring that make even an establishing exterior shot look and sound like a crucial moment.

So, what is the attitudinal process of adding "size" to a musical score? Think the following:

1. Nothing is as overt as it initially seems.
2. There are no little people as characters. All possess the latency for making huge differences in the larger story.
3. Characters and events should be considered for what they could ultimately become, not what they presently are or were.
4. Everything has the potential for building to a critical climax.

With this working approach, your musical invention will not be matter of fact. You will seek to create musical moments of "size". You will search for a longer melodic line, a slightly more urgent rhythm, an enhanced harmonic or contrapuntal sophistication, a more elaborate orchestration, and, in general, a deeper import to your underscoring opportunities.

Critics of this method suggest that it might be heavy-handed, or overemphasize a visual moment making the drama a melodrama. This is not the intention of advocating "size". While adopting the enhancements suggested above, one must be always mindful of the larger issues like pace, balance, and inevitability.

The best film scores not only have "size" and are appropriately married to the film's larger intent, but also bring a theatrical knowingness, and, yes, even a bit of philosophical worldliness to the task at hand.

So, make your characters and scenes "larger than life" and have a "heightened reality" by treating them with greater consequence and musical importance. In this way, not only will your scores be assessed as having "size" but your artistry will also rise in stature.

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