

MasterClass



# HANS ZIMMER

—  
Teaches Film Scoring





## ABOUT **HANS ZIMMER**

Hans Zimmer was born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1957. As a child, he disliked the discipline of formal piano lessons and received no formal training in music. He joined a band, and self-taught himself how to compose. A turning point in his career came when director Barry Levinson hired Hans to score the film *Rain Man*, which won the Oscar for Best Picture of the Year and earned Hans his first Academy Award nomination for Best Original Score. In 1994, Walt Disney Animation Studios approached Hans to score *The Lion King*, for which he won an Academy Award for Best Original Score, a Golden Globe and two Grammys. To date, Hans has composed over 150 films.



## 1. **INTRODUCTION**

### CLASS WORKBOOK

Hans's Workbook supplements each lesson with Chapter Reviews, Take It Further opportunities, and Assignments. This printable PDF is filled with places for you to take notes as you go.

### THE HUB

Share your works in progress, and ask your peers for help and support if you've hit a roadblock, in [The Hub](#).

### OFFICE HOURS

Submit your questions on the MasterClass site and keep your eyes peeled for Hans's personal responses.

### HANS'S FILM SCORES

Have Spotify or YouTube handy to listen to the official soundtracks for each of the films Hans discusses.

## **HOW TO USE HANS'S MASTERCLASS**

Welcome to Hans's MasterClass! The exercises in this workbook are designed to teach you the craft of film scoring from the art of creating themes to commanding musicians. Use Hans's workbook to follow along with the video lessons, and share your assignments with the MasterClass online community to put his teachings and experiences into practice.

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## THEMES

*“You can actually express some fairly good things about the human condition in notes that you might not be able to express quite as brilliantly in words.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Find the Simplest Tune That Carries Your Story
- Choose a Key Strategically
- Themes as Questions and Answers
- Creating a Theme: *Sherlock Holmes*
- Creating a Simple Tune: *Interstellar*

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Whether you’re scoring a film as vast and grand as *Interstellar* or as ominous as *The Dark Knight*, your process begins with a simple tune. As a composer, your job is to create an original, yet familiar theme that pushes the story forward. The theme should tell the parallel story that the director set out to tell, not just exist on its own as a concept. Use this as your only restriction, but be completely free when setting out to create the theme.

To do this right, you’ll want to choose a key that gives you the room to express a full range of emotions. With a clear idea of where your story can go, introduce a motif at the start that you can build upon throughout the composition.

Set yourself up for success at the beginning by choosing a home key. Hans takes this approach, rarely using many key changes. Hans mentions he likes to write in D, which gives him the solid ground and freedom he needs to create an original theme.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans mentions Ludwig von Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 5* as an example of a composition that begins with a few simple notes and builds into a dynamic story. Listen to it again, and think about how the simple notes could build to the different “personalities” that Hans mentions every good theme needs.

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Practice choosing a key strategically by thinking through each key—how does each key sound to you? How does it make you feel? Write down the emotions or keywords that you associate with each key, and use this as a guide to choose a key for your next theme.
- Hans suggests thinking about a theme as a set of questions and answers. Find a scene you love in a film, and create an original score by setting up a question and answer motif. Think about the fact that you know how the scene ends before the audience does, and establish a question at the beginning knowing how the scene will conclude. Write a cue that highlights those questions and answer them. Share your compositions with your peers in [The Hub](#).



### 3.

## STORY

*“I can tell you everything that you need to know in one word: story.”*  
—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Live in the World of the Story
- Learn the Rules of the Story From Your Director
- Establish Rules and Break Them

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Your job as a composer is to tell a story; stick to the story and never abandon it. You will develop a score that coexists elegantly with the images and words, and colors the world the director creates. To do this, you must live in the world of the story. To begin living in the world of the story, learn the rules of it from your director. Hans would rather sit down with the director than read the script, to try to get at what’s in the director’s head. Your goal is to arrive at a common language that informs how you’ll approach composing for the story.

In that first conversation, learn the rules of the story from your director. Hans says that the rules can often surprise you, and can give you a framework from which you can build the score. Working within these rules is like playing a game. The rules help us avoid arriving at a mashup of different Play-Doh colors.

For Hans, the rules for Sherlock were “maintain intellectual integrity” and “don’t be pretentious,” but still have fun. Only once you’ve established a strong framework of rules for yourself to build from, you can then start to break those rules to add a bit of “freshness.”

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans shares the story of sitting with director Terrence Malick for nearly a year prior to shooting *The Thin Red Line* to underscore the importance of understanding Malick’s unique vision for the film. Read [the script](#). Note where Malick’s insight and input impacted the outcome.

### ASSIGNMENT

- Practice writing a theme by working within a set of rules that a director might give you. If you need inspiration for a rule: Think about a director you’ve worked with or research one online, and write a theme that’s inspired by that director’s favorite band. Stay within the rules and ethos established by that band. Then write one cue that breaks those rules to add some freshness. This exercise takes you out of your comfort zone and functions as a study in satisfying your director, a crucial skill of the successful film composer.

# 3. NOTES

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## DIRECTORS

*“You and the director make a pact that you’re going to do this movie together... even if it means you have to kill him sometimes.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Have Conversations to Sneak up on the Film
- Some Questions Are for the Producer
- Begin Collaborating Before Filming Begins
- Music Can Influence the Direction on Set
- Remind Your Director of Their Intentions
- Speak in Plain English (or German)
- Avoid Temp Music
- Keep the Laboratory Open
- Qualities of a Great Director
- Trust Each Other
- Support Each Other in Pursuit of Your Best Work

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Films aren’t made by committee. Your duty is to follow the director’s lead and create a shared musical vision. If you jump into discussing music specifically or even technically, you may miss important subtext that informs the director’s intention. Hans makes a habit of starting conversations with directors as early as possible and allowing that conversation to inform how the music will shape the story. Avoid having those “reality” conversations that are imagination-killers, and save those for the producer.

Hans likes to write music as soon as possible, even before filming begins, to help influence the direction on set. He avoids temp music because it can pigeonhole him into something that limits his freedom and creativity. The most effective environment exists when everyone on set works towards serving the story, and uses their individual voices (and talents) to do so. Trust your collaborators’ instincts and help influence their creativity by giving them your music early on in the process.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Watch one of your favorite movies and take note of the way the score enhances the story. Now mute that movie and play the soundtrack to one of Hans’ movies—*The Dark Knight*, *Sherlock Holmes*, or even *The Lion King*—over the film. How does the composition change the story? If this were given to you as temp music, how would you approach writing your own score?

### ASSIGNMENT

- Think about one of your favorite directors. Find an interview in which he/she talks about the making of one of his/her films. Use this as a jumping off point to create your own version of a score that’s informed by how the director talks about their intentions behind the film. How can you translate the director’s approach to telling the story into a score that helps serve that narrative? Share your theme with your peers in [The Hub](#).

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## 7.

# SOUND PALETTES

## CHAPTER REVIEW

“I hear the world maybe more than I see the world.”

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Create Unique Palettes for Different Story Atmospheres
- Study Light and Color
- Create Your Own Samples
- Sample Musicians You Love
- Creating a World Through Sound

Sound palettes are used to design the world of the film and give them unique atmospheres. Hans discusses how instrumentation helped to distinguish day from night in Gotham City. As an iconic fictional city, it needed its own distinct sound.

Hans considers music and image as complements to one another, and attempts to create sound palettes that coexist with the cinematographer’s approach to telling the story. Hans thinks every composer should study light, color, and editing to help with the world-building.

With the observation and deduction skills of Sherlock himself, Hans studied the baggage that came with such a familiar character and the expectations of the audience. Letting the film’s era and setting inform the instrumentation, Hans created a dangerous and exotic version of the beloved character. He thought about the colors and sounds of Victorian England to inform his own sound palette to the film. Hans tells us that it’s important to set up the sound palette early in the film, to inform and invite the audience on the journey into the world that your sounds help build.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans references cinematographer Vittorio Storaro’s book *Writing With Light*, and the way he uses light in film. Learn more about [Storaro’s work](#).
- Hans made his own samples using his favorite cellist Anthony Pleeth, who is featured in *The Dark Knight* and *Hannibal*. Which musicians would you like to add to your sample library? Join the discussion with your MasterClass peers in [The Hub](#).
- Given the prevalence of electronic instruments in contemporary film scores, Hans finds it important to create ways for acoustic artists to find exciting work. [Read about](#) one way Hans set out to do just that while creating the *Sherlock* soundtrack.

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## **SOUND PALETTES**

### ASSIGNMENT

- Think of one of your favorite cities, and one of your favorite periods of time. Now combine those two and create a sound palette for that city and time. Consider the sounds, colors, sights, and how a DP might shoot a film set in that place. What instruments would you use to build that world? What sounds would help color that world? Draw inspiration from Hans's conception of Victorian England.

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## 8.

# CREATING WITH SYNTHS

“The great thing about synthesizers is you can have a completely fresh palette for every project you work on.”  
—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Building From Sounds
- Creating a Sound From Scratch
- Play with Expression
- Build Your Own Abstract Instrument

### CHAPTER REVIEW

The synthesizer is an adaptable tool for the modern composer’s toolkit. Hans likes to experiment with new sounds and create his own. He builds his sonic palettes from scratch for each film, starting with “Hans’s Starter Patch.” Hans views the synth as an outlet for experimentation and fun, as well as a door to musical avenues down which he never anticipated going. Hans guides you through the way he begins to build sounds with his synthesizer.

Hans says that it doesn’t matter what program you use. He uses Cubase, but also mentions Logic, Pro Tools and Ableton as worthy programs.

Zimmer fact: Hans used a pipe organ sample collection to begin writing the score for *Interstellar*. Paired with a MIDI CC #11, he added unique expressions to each line. The only issue was that the acoustic organs couldn’t recreate the same expressions when they went to record.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans has worked with director Christopher Nolan many times throughout his career. Learn about [Nolan’s cinematic style](#).
- Hans talk about [creating the score for Interstellar](#).
- Hans points out that electronic instruments like the synthesizer allow composers to sample acoustic instruments to create pioneering soundscapes. The first all-electronic film score was composed by Bebe and Louis Barron for the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*. Listen to the *Forbidden Planet* soundtrack and note the ways it contrasts with other film scores of that year.

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## CREATING WITH SYNTHS

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### ASSIGNMENTS

- Pull out your synthesizer and prep your palette. Pick your favorite synth and create a cue based on a patch you produce from scratch. Compose a three minute long track and share your theme tracks, along with the type of synthesizer you used, in [The Hub](#). For synthesizer newbies, check out a [beginners guide](#).
- Share a photo of your setup with your peers in [The Hub](#), and share tips for organizing your sonic library.

# 8. NOTES

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9.

## SCORING TO PICTURE

*“Sometimes, the job of the music is as simple as be entertaining.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Consider the Whole Story First
- Recognize When Music Isn't Needed
- Don't Always Hit the Cut
- Let the Audience Complete the Emotion
- Liven Up Exposition Scenes
- Help Tell a Complicated Story

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Adding to his rule from chapter 3 on story, Hans recommends considering the entire story first to decide on the rules and instruments that are appropriate for the narrative. Establish a framework for the themes and palettes that works for the entire story, and then “whack in” something that’s completely new to bring a layer of freshness to the audience’s experience.

You’re working in an environment of total insecurity. All of your collaborators are worried that what they’re creating isn’t perfect. The actors, director, cinematographer, etc., will look to the last collaborator on the film, the composer, to help fix the problems they see. It’s your job to ignore their insecurities and know when music is needed and when it isn’t.

Know also when to avoid Mickey Mousing; don’t always hit the cut. By doing so, you can give the audience too much information about what emotion they should feel, which takes them out of the journey. Take them on the journey with you, don’t take it for them. And if the story is complicated, use music to your advantage to entertain them and help tell the story.

### ASSIGNMENT

- Pick one of your favorite films. Find two scenes in it—one that has music and one that doesn’t. Consider why the decision was made to leave that scene unscored. How would you approach scoring the scene that doesn’t have music? Does your potential score add to the scene or take away from it?

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## SCORING UNDER DIALOGUE

### CHAPTER REVIEW

*“It doesn’t matter that you’ve just written the nicest and most beautiful piece of music of your career. If it interferes with the story, bin it, chuck it, throw it in the trash.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- It’s Not Volume, It’s Perspective
- Aim for the Best Sound System
- Coexist With Dialogue

Writing the underscore for a film can be a daunting task. Hans re-emphasizes that your writing must enhance the story and not detract from it. Some composers will write directly around dialogue, and others will very carefully construct their mixes and tempos to fit overtop.

You may be tempted to turn the volume up or down, but Hans argues it’s not volume, it’s perspective. If your character or dialogue is close to the audience, and you mic your orchestra appropriately, perspective will impact perceived volume. The further away you position your mics, the more natural roll-off of higher frequencies you will have. Think about the sense of space that mic’ing your orchestra can bring. The placement of a sound source can create depth and add a new layer to your score than just increasing volume.

Hans encourages students to write for the best cinema experience possible. Your scores will be played in many different environments with varying sound quality, but you should write for the best sound systems possible.

This chapter also reminds you that story doesn’t have to be told strictly through dialogue. Christopher Nolan, writer and director of *The Dark Knight*, made specific decisions about when the music would do the talking for the characters.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans talks about his approach to scoring *Black Hawk Down*, and allowing the score to hit the action one frame ahead of the action on screen. This creates a sense of tension, the idea of an event coming out of nowhere. Watch the film and think about the difference in feeling and emotion had he approached it by hitting the action and hitting the cuts.

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## **SCORING UNDER DIALOGUE**

### ASSIGNMENT

- Pick one of your favorite films. Now find a dialogue scene where a character is placed either close to the audience in the frame, and find a dialogue scene where a character is placed far away in the frame. Think about how you'd place your instruments in the sound field relative to where your characters are in the scene. Share the scenes you chose with your peers in [The Hub](#), and discuss with them how they'd approach scoring and recording to those scenes.



11+12.

## TEMPO & *SHERLOCK* *HOLMES SCENE*

*“The drummer for the film composer is the editor.”*  
—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- The Editor is Your Drummer
- The Click is Your Friend
- Find Your Tempo
- The Film's Tempo
- Good Tempo

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Finding the right tempo might be intuitive by this point in Hans' career, but it isn't that way for everyone. Your editor will be your guide as you narrow in on the tempo that best fits the scene at hand. Use the edit as the drum for your score, and determine a BPM from which to build your score that coexists with the edit.

Hans will start composing by setting a metronome. The click is steady, reliable, and serves as your grid as you map out the pace of the drama. Hans used to watch a scene, then turn the picture off to write, and turn it back on to see if his composition and the scene matched up. Now he's able to identify common bpm's. He mentions that 80 BPM is a great starting point, as it is seductive but easily fits with faster paced scenes. 60 BPM is a bit slower and easier to get more profound, whereas 140 is a bit more energetic and dancy.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Some people will calculate the tempo of a scene by using a digital tempo finder like [this one](#). In whichever digital audio workstation you're using, set markers at the beginning and end of the scene you'd like to calculate. Put the time stamps in and the calculator will give you a range of tempos that could fit, as well as their margin of error. Try this technique and see how it works for you.
- The click of a metronome can help you score to picture. Find a metronome that works best for you, either a physical one or a digital version right in your browser.

11+12.

## **TEMPO & SHERLOCK HOLMES SCENE**

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Use a metronome to identify the tempo of some of your favorite scenes. Try an exposition or dialogue scene and compare it to an action scene (we recommend the Bane vs. Batman fight scene mentioned in Chapter 10: “Scoring Under Dialogue”).
- Now that you know what the tempo of that scene is, can you create a score for it in an alternative tempo? If you pick a fight scene with a fast tempo, can you score that scene with a purposefully slow tempo? How does that affect the mood of the scene?

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13.

## MUSIC DIARY: *SHERLOCK HOLMES*

*“I have to go through this diary process, so that I’ve answered all the questions that I’ve had for myself.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans breaks down how he begins a film score. Once he has an understanding of the story from the director, he’ll start writing. He keeps a music diary in which he writes and captures his ideas from day to day. He doesn’t edit prior work, instead moving on and continuing to develop certain ideas to find the right themes and styles for the film.

Music diary tips:

- Start writing, even if you don’t think it works. You can always leave it out of your score.
- Don’t go back and edit your own work. Keep writing! You might find that an old, untouched piece works better for a different section of the film.
- Don’t worry about transitions between pieces; you’re not creating a full score just yet.
- You can play with tempos in your diary as well.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Listen to Franz Schubert’s *The Trout*, which is referenced as an influence of Moriarty’s theme in *Sherlock Holmes*, then listen to Moriarty’s theme and compare.

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Begin your own music diary and note if it helps you get started. What are your getting-started strategies? Share your process in [The Hub](#).
- Hans uses the diary process in order to never throw any idea away, even if he thinks it doesn’t work in the moment. He may come back to it later and realize it worked perfectly. Practice this by picking a scene, and writing a new score to that scene each day of the week. Try a completely new approach everyday, but always keep your old attempts in the diary. At the end of the week, go back and listen to your original approach. Compare versions and see what ideas worked in each variant that you originally thought were unsuccessful.

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## CHARACTER

*“At the end of the day I suppose everything I write is a version of me.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Getting to Know a Character
- Give Them a Backstory
- Relate to Your Characters

### CHAPTER REVIEW

When you’re creating the theme for a character, you can get to know the character in two ways: read the script and interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions, and ask the director to tell you their stories. It’s all about understanding their past, their hopes and dreams, and any crucial moments that made them the way they are. Understanding their journey, and how they react to the obstacles on their journey, will help inform their musical themes.

Relate to your characters and find common ground so that you can construct their theme from your own imagination and emotional truth. Starting from scratch may seem daunting, but if you begin with your own experiences, you have something from which to build.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans tells a story of thinking about James Hunt starting a budgerigar farm after he quit racing. He used that knowledge and created his own backstory for the character when writing the music for Rush.
- Take a look at Robert Shaw’s “Indianapolis monologue” in the film, *Jaws*. Note how the monologue imbues Shaw’s character Quint with actions and intentions, and think about how you might have used that speech to inform the way you’d approach writing music for the film.

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Think about a close friend and create a character theme for him/her. Take inspiration from Hans and try to create a backstory for your friend. Relate to him/her, come up with a trait that you share, and create a theme that builds from that trait. Thinking back to the Sound Palettes chapter, how does his/her name announce the culture he/she comes from, and how can that knowledge help build the sonic palette behind your theme? Share your themes in [The Hub](#) and provide feedback for your classmates.

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15-17.

## CHARACTER THEMES

*"I need to know what the spine of that character is. Sometimes I need to know what his heart is, but really, it's what makes the thing tick."*

—Hans Zimmer

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans breaks down his methods for creating strong character themes. He describes how he came up with the themes for Batman, the Joker, and Captain Jack Sparrow. When creating a character theme, try to expose what the audience cannot see. Ask the questions: "What drives the character?" and "What is the character hiding from us?" Relate to your characters, make it personal, and find the part of the character that resonates with you.

For Batman, rather than creating the expected and typical heroic theme, Hans decided to create a simple two note progression in order to highlight Batman's struggle with coming to terms with his parents' deaths.

When creating the character theme for the Joker, Hans wanted to build on the Joker's sense of anarchy. Rather than working with the archetypal evil villain sound, Hans created the opposite: a subtle, quiet theme rooted in a punk attitude that had the audience leaning in, creating an enormous amount of tension and never releasing it.

For Jack Sparrow, Hans built on what he learned about the rules of the world for Pirates of the Caribbean from his conversations with Gore Verbinski. He thought about the pirates as the rock n' rollers of the middle ages, and started with a boogie. He watched what Jack was doing on screen to give himself more rules to work within and came up with keywords like "romantic," "heroic," "naughty," and "wicked." Hans wanted to create a theme that reflected the parts of Jack Sparrow that resonated with him, and in the process wrote an unforgettable piece of music.

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**CASE STUDIES:**  
***FROST/NIXON* +**  
***THE DARK KNIGHT***

CHAPTER REVIEW

“This is a beautiful cake  
with a knife in it.”  
—Hans Zimmer

*FROST/NIXON*

Hans walks us through several scenes of *Frost/Nixon*, breaking down his process for scoring to the world and tension of the “boxing match” between David Frost and Richard Nixon. Hans was faced with the challenge of giving the audience something new from a film that was adapted from a well known play. Hans talks about how there should be a sense of panic for all the characters. He thought of the film as a boxing match, and used that framework as his rule to create the score.

He also gives us an example of when he knew a scene didn’t need a score—when the writing, acting and cinematography all work well enough together to hold the tension, without needing music. Hans underscores the importance of working with the right musicians; he couldn’t achieve the cold, detached feeling from the piano until he found the right musician to work with.

*THE DARK KNIGHT*

Hans breaks down how he approached writing the “action” scene from *The Dark Knight*. This is a pivotal moment in the movie and Hans had to decide how to create the most tension out of a situation where the explosion never happens. The scene itself is surprising for a blockbuster film, and Hans wanted to create a surprising score that gives an enormous amount of space, which helps create tension, slows everything down, and focuses the audience’s attention to the story, rather than the action.





## WORKING WITH MUSICIANS

*“Be creative. Invent. At the end of the day, that’s the job, invent.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Handpick Your Players
- Write for Specific People
- It’s Not the Notes, It’s the Performance
- Test the Limits of Instruments
- Write to Their Strengths

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans handpicks his players according to their strengths. He looks to their performance and ability to bring an emotional depth to the notes that other players wouldn’t be able to. Hans avoids working with a large orchestra with a bunch of players playing indifferently. A few, expressive players can resonate louder and bigger than a 102-person orchestra.

It’s your job as the composer to write to their strengths, and the strengths of their instruments. Write with specific players in mind, so that you don’t find yourself working with a player who can’t execute your vision. Find those collaborators who will find a solution rather than make up excuses for why they can’t create a certain sound.

At the end of the day, Hans tells us that you want “authentic passion,” and you want to work with musicians who will take the tune you wrote and “set fire to it.”

### ASSIGNMENT

- Imagine one of your favorite instrumentalists—your favorite guitarist, cellist, drummer, etc—and write an original cue with that person in mind. Take note of what attributes or qualities of their playing justifies what you’re trying to achieve in your writing. How are you writing this cue differently than if you were to hire any other musician? Share your cues and what you observed in [The Hub](#).

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21+22.

# WORKING WITH MUSICIANS: THE ORCHESTRA

## CHAPTER REVIEW

*“If you’re not clear about the emotional intention of the music, it’ll sound like shit.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Earn Their Respect
- Maximize Efficiency to Get the Performance You Need
- Communicate in Terms of Emotion & Story
- Get in the Same Room
- Listen for the Players Who Aren’t Telling the Story
- It’s Not Theatre, It’s a Recording

The orchestra is there to support you, and your shared goal is to make the score the best it can be. Your job as the composer is to get the most out of your orchestra. You must first earn their respect, and inspire them to support your vision. Write something for them that they haven’t done before and learn how to communicate with them in terms of emotion and story. Be clear and confident about the emotional intention of the piece you’ve written for the story.

Maximize performance and efficiency by writing the notes down on paper, creating a demo and mocking up the score. Hans discusses the importance of being in the same room as the orchestra. He says, “Music happens in real time” and you have to be there to be a part of it. You can start to train your ear to find the players in the orchestra who don’t understand the emotional intent of the score. Ultimately, stop being technical, and just like with your directors, communicate in the simplest possible way.

### ASSIGNMENT

- Think about your favorite cue from a favorite score. How would you imagine yourself communicating/directing a section of the orchestra to perform that cue? Write down the words and emotions that remind you of this cue; try to avoid writing down any technical words that could hinder receiving the best performance possible. How would you have communicated the emotions behind the Joker’s theme to the cellist?

21+22.

NOTES

Lined area for notes consisting of approximately 25 horizontal lines.

## FEEDBACK & REVISIONS

*“Revisions are just about getting it to be better... understanding what we’re trying to say in the scene and just getting better at executing it.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Make Revisions a Collaboration
- Revise Early and Often
- Show it to Your Music Editor First
- Getting a Yes or No From Your Director

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans tells us that revisions should be a conversation between the composer and director, rather than about giving feedback and notes. It’s a collaboration, the goal of which is trying to find and write the best music for the story.

Revisions happen early in the process. During the diary process, Hans is figuring out his way into the score, and revising his intention as he gets more precise about the rules for his score.

Take comfort in knowing that even for Hans, showing his music to the director is an emotionally tough experience, and he becomes fragile in the process. Show it to your music editor or a key collaborator first, and ask a very simple question: “Is it shit?”

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Create a small group with your classmates and take turns providing feedback on your piece. If you have tips for communicating with your editors and directors, share them in [The Hub](#). If you have revising techniques that help you create better pieces, share them as well!
- One of the scariest parts of the process is getting a “no” from your director. Pick a favorite cue that you’ve written for the class so far, and imagine your director has rejected it. Write an alternative version for that cue from scratch that still achieves the emotion and tells the story you set out to relate when you wrote the original cue.

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## AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

*“The first and selfish truth is I write for myself because the seconds of my life are ticking by...and I want to write music that I like.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Find Your Doris
- Test in Front of an Audience
- Get Executives in the Audience, Too

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Find your Doris. Hans has created a persona for whom he writes. This helps him ground his approach to ensure that he’s giving his audience an escape, an experience that she wouldn’t have in her day-to-day life. Write for Doris, and then test the score in front of an audience to see if you’ve achieved the escape they’re looking for.

The audience will tell you if your score enhances the film, or, as Hans would say, absolutely ruins it. Hans shares a story about his experience of screening *Sherlock Holmes* in front of an audience.

Testing your composition is a great way to find if you’ve missed the mark or served the story, and taken the audience on a journey with you.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Watch the slow-motion explosion scene from *Sherlock Holmes*. Do you agree from the studio’s perspective that the scene could have been scored to match the explosions a bit more? Hans’s takeaway from this experience was that the studio, while on his side, understandably became nervous, until they sat in the audience and noticed the reaction.

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Create an audience persona for whom you’d like to think about when you’re writing music. Hans based Doris on a lot of his early experiences when he witnessed people trying to make ends meet and escaping to the movies. Write down a persona, and share it with your peers in [The Hub](#).
- Hans likes to put studio executives and “experts” in the audience as well, so they can feel the audience’s reaction to his scores. Practice getting feedback from an expert and a non-expert and compare their notes. Show a cue you’ve written to a fellow composer (there are plenty to work with in [The Hub](#)), and show the same cue to a friend or family member. How do the notes differ? See what you learn from both, and think about how the expert’s notes might have changed had they listened to the cue with an audience full of non-experts.





25+26.

## WRITING TIPS

*“Anybody’s got access to something that they can go and make a great score with.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Write Every Day
- Start When They Start
- Write in Diary Form to Figure out the Movie
- Stay Organized
- Ask New Questions With Your Work
- Break Rules (Elegantly)
- Don’t Rely on Muscle Memory
- Find Your Story to Beat Writer’s Block
- Don’t Be Limited by Budget
- You Only Need Passion to Start Writing

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans suggests several ways to help you begin the process of writing a film score. Confront the terror of a blank screen by starting a music diary in which you write for imaginary scenes. Experiment with combinations of different instruments for a single piece; transform a piano solo into a string quartet as a way to explore character and themes. While brainstorming, sit on your hands to keep your fingers from straying to the keyboard and playing the same old same old. Think of your musical task as a question and seek different ways to ask it. This might take the form of making an unusual musical choice that the audience isn’t expecting, but one that makes sense. When writing, keep in mind that the ultimate goal is to give the audience an interesting experience.

Hans emphasizes that composers shouldn’t be limited by budget, but that you should always fight for the appropriate budget to be able to write the music that serves the director’s vision. But figure out how to tell the story, and if it’s a big blockbuster movie, remember that it could benefit from modest instrumentation, much like the solo violin in the *Sherlock Holmes* explosion scene. At the end of the day, all you need is the passion to start writing.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- In this chapter, Hans references John Powell, a fellow film composer. Read [this interview](#) with Powell to gain insight into another professional’s perspective on the industry. Learn about the challenges and rewards of scoring a film, and explore further many of the concepts that Hans covers in this lesson such as working with a budget and collaborating with directors.
- Hans talks about how technological advances have changed the process of scoring a film. Read more on the subject in [this interview](#) with Dan Carlin, Chair of Berklee College of Music’s Film Scoring Department.

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NOTES

Lined area for notes with horizontal ruling lines.

## HANS'S JOURNEY

### CHAPTER REVIEW

*"I just love being part of this other band which isn't just musicians, but directors, writers, actors."*

—Hans Zimmer

#### SUBCHAPTERS

- Falling in Love with Movies
- Growing as a Storyteller
- Getting to Los Angeles
- Learning in the Real World
- Balancing Family & Work

From sneaking into a cinema at 12 years old, to scoring his first films in London, to moving to Los Angeles, Hans emphasizes that his love of storytelling pushed him to become the composer he is today. This helps inform his number one rule: Stick on the story. The music he loved told stories, and he approaches filmmaking from the perspective of a learner: none of us know what we're doing and we're making it all up as we go along. Writing from that perspective gives you the freedom and flexibility to try new and crazy things with your scores..

#### TAKE IT FURTHER

- A 12 year old Hans snuck into a theater in his hometown to see Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*. He was deeply affected by Ennio Morricone's score, which he cites as the initial impetus for his career choice. Listen to Morricone's score. Share your own story with your classmates on [The Hub](#); post a link to your favorite film score or describe the first time you remember being deeply impacted by the music in a film.

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## LEARNING BY LISTENING

*“I’m trying to listen beyond the words. I’m trying to not hear the words, I’m trying to hear the tune.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- Learn How to Listen
- Dissect Music
- How to Watch Films for Their Music
- Hans’ Musical Influences
- Find Music that Touches You
- Hans’s Recommended Film Scores

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans breaks down the one quality that makes a musician great: the ability to listen. Learning how to listen can unlock new opportunities, new paths for your music to explore. Listening is about communicating, and not reacting to just the words but trying to hear music when you’re speaking with your director. When you’re listening to your fellow musicians, listen beyond just the notes they’re playing, and listen for how they play those notes, what emotions they’re expressing in their performance.

Hans gives us his biggest musical influences and what he listens to in his down time when he’s taking a break from working on a score. If you need inspiration for music to learn from, start with the B’s: Berlioz, Bartok, The Beatles, and banjo music.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans continually revisits and dissects Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 2. He also greatly appreciates Hector Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique*, specifically its 5th movement, “Dies Irae.” Listen to these pieces and identify the elements that make them fascinating for Hans. Hans hears Bernard Herrmann, as well as John Williams’ *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in “Dies Irae.” What other film scores or composers does the movement evoke for you?
- Hans says there’s no better way to learn than by listening to an orchestra. Treat yourself to a concert or opera ticket and bring a notebook to the theater. Take notes about specific movements that spoke to you and elements of the music that struck you as interesting or different. Look to these notes for inspiration the next time you’re writing a piece.
- Hans recommends the following film scores: *Midnight Express* by Giorgio Moroder, *Once Upon a Time in America* by Ennio Morricone, and *Hanna* by Chemical Brothers.

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## LIFE AS A COMPOSER

*“There is no plan B.”*

—Hans Zimmer

### SUBCHAPTERS

- There is No Plan B
- Have the Courage to Struggle
- Watch Movies and Talk to the People That Made Them
- Getting in the Door
- Take Risks
- Listen to Your Voice
- Test the Limits of Your Talent
- An Artist’s Life

### CHAPTER REVIEW

Hans talks about life as a musician and what to expect if you want a career in music. He is quick to point out that it is not for everyone, and you have to be willing to struggle if you want to succeed.

Getting in the door and getting noticed is half the struggle, but sometimes originality is all it takes. Don’t focus too much on what other people might want to listen to. Rather, make sure that the music you’re creating gets you excited.

Test the limits of yourself and your talents. Take risks. Constantly push past the boundaries that other people have imposed on you. Be passionate about your work and ask questions.

### TAKE IT FURTHER

- Hans was inspired by the “crazy behavior” and passion that Werner Herzog brought to filmmaking. He watched *Burden of Dreams*, a documentary about the making of one of Werner’s earliest films, *Fitzcarraldo*. Watch *Burden of Dreams*, and live by their example: you aren’t wasting your life if you believe in what you’re doing, and you’re willing to live in brutal conditions in the jungle to get it done.

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## FINAL THOUGHTS

### CONGRATULATIONS!

*“Here’s what old guys like me know: The seconds of your life are ticking away, and they’re better spent [making music] than listening to me.”*

—Hans Zimmer

• You’ve finished your Masterclass with Hans Zimmer. We hope you feel inspired to go out and score your own films. We want to make sure that your experience with Hans and your peers doesn’t end when you finish watching the video chapters. Here are a few ways to stay in touch:

- Join [The Hub](#) to connect with your peers.
- Contribute to the lesson discussions after each video lesson and read what others have to say
- Upload your relevant assignments to the Hub for peer feedback
- Submit an Office Hour question to Hans Zimmer

## NOTES

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# MASTERCLASS

HANS ZIMMER TEACHES FILM SCORING

