

Composer Interview – Terry Huud



Do you have any formal musical training?

Carnegie Mellon University on the east coast.

Do you think this influences your compositions in any way (positively or negatively)?

First learn the rules. Then learn to break them. (I forget who said that! But its true!)

Can you expand a little on why you feel this statement is true? There are so many composers out there without a formal education nowadays, that are quite successful – do you think that statement will always remain true?

I don't think it's a statement to be taken as 'truth' as per say. But I DO believe that if you know all the rules you have at your disposal a tremendous asset of incredible knowledge that you can rely on if your in a pinch. If you have no skills of knowing the rules of orchestration and inspiration leaves you and you find yourself relying on talent alone when things get rough then your stuck. The advantages to breaking the rules is that it allows you to not sound like everyone else. Danny Elfman was submerged in a set of rules and had a good time breaking them.

What equipment do you use?

Macs and Pcs. 7 computer farm at the moment.

Whats your main DAW, and how do you find it?

Logic pro 7 is my choice although we have 8 on one machine. There's no substitute for it. We have all of the major DAWS here at the studio. I keep going back to Logic.

What VSTs do you use, and what are your favourite ones?

We use a lot of East West stuff. Project Sam (most recently "Symphobia") Oh-lots of things really. Vienna's stuff is great, West Gate Studios woodwinds, Kirk Hunter, Sonnivox. For synthy stuff I love Camel Audio. No one does it better. If I didn't have a job I'd be camping out on their doorstep all day long until they hired me to work for them.

But we have so much stuff here really. I try and use all of it – but its impossible.

Do you play any instruments? If so, what do you play and for how long? How have they influenced the type of music you make today?

Piano/keyboard. (30 years I'm guessing) Some wind instruments. (still in search of the perfect wind controller-know of any?) I'm pretty good at pounding out a rhythm on my pads. Looking to buy a Zen Drum though.

Whats your favourite instrument that you own, and that you would like to own and why?

Some day I must get that aluminum grand piano on Melrose. That things amazing. Simply amazing...

How important do you think it is for a composer to have his own style and why?

It helps to define you. It may limit you initially but it helps make your staying power greater in the future. Unfortunately it's difficult to nurture since most films the director wants you to sound like Bernard Herrmann or Hans Zimmer!

What types of media have you composed for and which is your favourite?

TV-film-advertising-web, etc. I prefer film. It's more creative. TV is good but the deadlines are horrendous.

What is your process for composing, especially if you are composing for a particular film/game?

I love getting involved early on. I like scripts. So many of my peers don't but I do. It gives me the "flavor seed" of the film. Everyone argues that the SCRIPT is NOT the film but I still think the heart and soul resides in the script.

I'll read the script. Jot down some ideas, either notes on note paper or midi mockups. With sci-fi I have fun. The first thing I do at the work station is setup pallets of sounds. I go through just about every soft synth I have and make/create sounds that I feel 'talk' the most about the film. I really enjoy that part. Then the grueling part is the themes. It's not that themes are necessarily HARD for me. It's just that I become so attached to them that I know they are going to go through rejections/revisions and that's a hard part for me. I've gotten better over the years regarding that. Lol. It also depends on the director. Some guys push you to the very end with the themes. Others LOVE everything you do first out the gate.

The WORSE things regarding themes is where a director INSISTS on one for something that there's no need for. That drives me crazy because instinctually I know there shouldn't be a theme for that so my mind draws a blank but I know I'd better come up with a few or the director will be displeased.

After themes are approved it's easier sailing. Insert theme here- there- do variation on, etc, etc. The underscore follows. I watch the show and play live into the sequencer my thoughts. Orchestration follows.

Who would you consider to be your musical influences?

I draw from every where and anywhere. Way too varied. Modern hip stuff as well. My peers that tell me hip hop sucks need to have their ears cleaned.

Everything classical from Bartok – Mahler–Stravinsky–to film composers like Jerry Goldsmith, Bernard Herrmann, Mark Isham, etc, etc. Recently of course I love listening to HGW (Harry Gregson) listening close had taught me allot about slicing and dicing loops within loops to give a good modern percussive edge. I really studied him close for "Civic Duty". It paid off. 😊

If you did have large clients, how and where did you get the job?

I just went in demos to editors. I walked into one show (Dimension Films project) and the editor had tempted my album music (Opus 2: Penumbrae) all through the show. (Children of the Corn) Strange feeling. I haven't quite gotten over seeing my old work temped into new movies. It's weird enough when its someone else's but when it's yours it becomes so personal. It's like – "What – ! That's all wrong. I didn't mean THAT to be for THIS..."

Have you ever had to work with a client who was not near you – i.e.. on the other side of the world – so physical meetings were impossible? If so, how did you deal with this?

Not so much clients but I collaborate with other musicians world wide. It works very well. Taking the time differences in mind can get hairy!! Lol. Its 2 am and you really need that guitar track from the guy in Germany and he's asleep!!!

What form of marketing/promotion do you use, if any, and which was the most popular?

I don't. I have an agent and manager for that. I still remain very proactive though. Very necessary for success.

Have you ever had a client who was hard to deal with, and if so, what did they do and how did you deal with it?

I have had some difficult clients. Many times it's for political reasons. Often I'm not supposed to work in a certain country but creative wants me very badly so it becomes a paper work nightmare. You have to find your allies. You have to go in and know immediately WHO is on YOUR side. Team up with them. As a composer your often all alone. It's YOU against THEM. Make friends. Make allies. Exploit that.

Do you have any tips for people starting up in the music industry, on how to market themselves, get jobs, and get started off in general?

Stay ProActive. Talk to people. Get out of your house. So many composers are introverts. You need to meet people and network your ass off. Go to dinners. Meet directors. Join organizations. Writing music is 5% of the work. The rest is business.

Do you ever get writers block, and if so how do you deal with it?

I get burned out if that's what you mean. At that point you'd better be really skilled because your skill will be forced to take over where talent dries up.

How would you define success?

If your really happy with what your doing then your a success. If it becomes laborious and you dislike going to work that day – then it's time to quit.

What would you consider to be the top 5 most important skills of a composer nowadays (including networking, and compositional skills)?



Plaguers

– PERSONALITY to deal with EVERYTHING they throw at you.

– ORGANIZATION of yourself. File organization, theme organization, song organization. Really spend time on that – you'll benefit so much in the fut ure from doing so.

– ORIGINALITY

– PERSEVERANCE (especially for new comers but that doesn't mean you don't need it later because sometimes jobs are few and far between.)

– FLEXIBILITY – Learn to do other things. Composing is great but not everyone gets to do it full time. Learn to program synths. Do your own music sound design and maybe someone will hire you to do theirs. **Write for music Libraries**, Program sounds for soft synths. Get to know developers and do demo tracks for them. Be flexible but try and stay in your field. NEVER taker an office job. lol...

What ultimately are your goals?

Keep on writing.

Well – personal goals for music? I have one that everyone thinks is funny. I want to buy one keyboard workstation and try and do an entire score on just THAT work station. No fancy string libraries – no expensive samples – no live players, etc. Just the sounds that come with the keyboard. And I want to do it in someone else's place. No familiar surroundings! hahah – silly isn't it!?

If you could change one thing in the music industry, what would it be and why?

Make ALL film directors AND producers aware of how music operates within the structure of a film. Oh and make EVERYONE aware of Music Publishing. I'm tired of giving educations on Music Publishing to everyone. lol.

I have an idea. All directors should take a "Film Music Appreciation" course before they begin their project. Might acclimate them a bit.

If you could plot your progress to your current success, what would your say would be your main achievements that led you to your current position?

I would have to put emphasis on networking most. Keeping a level head and dealing with problems in a mature manner helped as well. Took me awhile to learn that one. I was hot head at the beginning of my career. That doesn't work. A Bernard Herrmann attitude in today's climate doesn't cut it.

Where do you think the film music industry is going in the next few years?

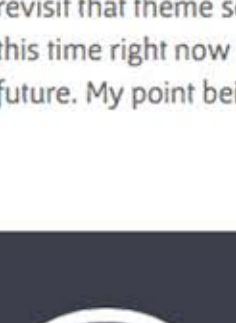
It will continue along the lines it's going. It's becoming more and more celebrity driven. BT, Clint Eastwood. Celebrities are being made into composers now. People love celebrities. We live in a sometimes 'odd' culture.

What are your other interests outside of music?

Other interests? Not much time for those!! (laughs) I'm a pretty good pool player. 😊

Over the past while, I've done a few things that I've found useful such as keeping notepads everywhere to jot things down. Have you picked up any habits over the years that you've found useful?

Yes. Record EVERYTHING. Do LOTS of variations. You'll need them someday. And while your on a film and come up with a theme, create subfolders of variations. Your inspired at the moment and chances are you'll have to revisit that theme so do it NOW while it's fresh in your mind. I wish there were 42 hrs in a day. Really. If I spent this time right now writing a cue for myself instead of doing the interview I know I would use that track in the future. My point being: You can never write or record TOO much! You'll ALWAYS use it. 😊



Written by: Emmett Cooke

Emmett Cooke is an Irish composer for film, tv and video games. His music has been used around the world by high profile companies including Sony Playstation, Ralph Lauren, ABC, CBS, NBC, Lockheed Martin and many more.