

Penka Kouneva-Schweiger Private Masterclass in Media Composing and Score Analysis December 2023

Grammy-winning composer and studio orchestrator Penka Schweiger has composed on iconic video games (*League of Legends*, *Prince of Persia*), the Netflix Animated Series *Dragon Age: Absolution*, a NASA theme park at the Kennedy Space Center, and numerous feature films (the Oscar contender *Aga*, Sony Pictures releases - *Encounter* and *Devil's Whisper*, and Cannes and Berlinale favorites). In 2019 she was invited by composer Joe Kraemer to co-compose The CW primetime TV Series, *Pandora*. Penka holds a Ph.D. in composition from Duke University and is known as a great mentor who has helped over 70 young composers cultivate remarkable careers in Hollywood. She is excited to share her knowledge and passion for score analysis with early-to-mid-career composers. Questions: penkakouneva@gmail.com

What is it?

- **12 weeks of intensive study including:**
 - **10 Weekly guided scoring assignments:** 1:15 - 2:00 minutes scoring to picture
 - **10 Weekly 30-minute private mentoring:** Review & written feedback on your scoring assignments + answering your questions (weekly scheduled private lesson on Zoom).
 - **10 Weekly 75-minute Lectures:** score analyses presented by the instructor in a small group on Zoom. Each week we analyze selected cues from 5+ original soundtracks.
 - **Weekly guided independent study** (“homework”: soundtrack listening, score study, reading of articles, interviews, blogs, “behind-the-scenes” videos and relevant content: ~3 hours).
 - **Two “off” weeks for catching up** on reading, revisions and soundtrack study
- The Composer Master Class focuses on composing mastery, techniques and skills via **analysis of great soundtrack cues** and **weekly feedback on your original compositions** (industry-tailored assignments).
- The ideal Master Class taker would be:
 - a recent graduate **seeking to create industry-level demos to pitch for scoring jobs**
 - an emerging composer striving to ‘level-up’
 - Anyone who wishes to compose demos for scoring jobs and analyze great scores.
- The Master class will take **12 weeks (3 months)**. Two “off” weeks will take place to give you time to complete your scoring assignments & revisions, and catch up on all score study & soundtrack listening.
- Intensive weekly composing (to picture and not to picture) and weekly feedback on your cues gives you a **competitive edge and a body of work** polished at the industry standard that you can submit & adapt for future scoring opportunities.
- You will craft **nine original compositions by the end of the course**, from your original idea **to a fully produced & mixed demo**. You can use these for future demos for actual jobs, and on your reel.
- Weekly score analysis of cues, reading and study materials presented by the instructor. All scores are current, masterful scores by Hollywood composers. Score analysis is a core component of the curriculum. All score PDFs, charts, presentations & reading materials will be provided by the Instructor.
- The learning is industry-oriented and personalized.
- Cost \$1,000 USD (tax-deductible in the US as a *vocational expense / educational expense* via the Instructor’s corporation Penka Kouneva Studios, Inc.)

Prerequisites:

- Music program bachelor’s degree or similar
- Ability to read orchestral scores
- A few film, game, additional-music, or concert music credits (entry-level; student projects are OK)
- **Working proficiency** with music production and mixing *a graduate-level sounding demo* with virtual instruments. This skill will be expected, commented on, but not covered in detail. (There are many other classes that focus on Music Production.)

- You will receive feedback on your production skills. “Graduate-level sounding demo” is defined as a realistically sounding emulation of the ensemble you are composing for, with well-balanced instrumental lines, dynamics and expression – the skills you’ve learned in your bachelor’s program.
- Commitment to a scoring career, or actively exploring opportunities.
- Commitment to completing the class (contract will be signed).

Curriculum + Weekly Scoring Assignments

Composing Assignments – in red

1. **THEMES and THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT.** Compose themes and “audition demos” for scoring jobs. Compose two 1-minute themes not to picture but to keywords, reference mp3s and concept (storyboard, “mood book”). Due the following week.

How do you go from receiving a *Brief for a demo*, to composing a theme, to delivering a fully produced, competitive mockup in 4-6 days (a typical deadline for demos on scoring jobs)?

Methodology: 1. Decipher the assignment. Consider the clients’ expectations. Analyze their “style guides.”

2. “Research & Development”: **listen to soundtracks**, review the syntax & style of this “genre.”
3. Distill *elements relevant to this project*.
4. Gather your ‘**building blocks**’ (sample libraries, instruments, plug-ins, ideas). Does this demo call for a hybrid score? Electronic score? Traditional orchestral score?
5. Compose dozens of ideas, discard many of them.
6. Compose the specific *theme* and/or “**musical signature**” for this job. 7. Sequence, *synthestrated*, revise.
 - Analysis: Steve Jablonsky – Theme for *Gears of War 2*
 - Nathan Barr – *Uncle Frank*
 - Penka Kouneva – *Claire Vick, Airplane*
 - Neal Acree – *World of Warcraft - Battle for Azeroth*

2. **HARMONY, RE-HARMONIZATION & COUNTERPOINT.** Use harmony, counterpoint, modulations for thematic development, variations, contrast, building a dramatic arc in a cue. Extend ONE of your themes from Week 1 also expanding it emotionally.

Analysis: Sarah Schachner – *Anthem* video game (Thematic development)
 Harry Gregson Williams – *The Martian* (Making Water) (counterpoint, thematic contrast)
 Joe Kraemer / Penka Kouneva – *Pandora*, Ralen’s themes (re-harmonization)
 Penka Kouneva – *Solar Flare* (inspired by *Ebrietas – Bloodborne*: thematic development), *Chime Sharp* game

3. **RHYTHM, METER & TEMPO** in Media Scoring. Score a 1:15 street fight to picture (Limité).

Analysis: Penka Kouneva – NASA “*Heroes and Legends*” Theme park – *Gemini 8*
 Ludwig Göransson – *Oppenheimer* – *Can you hear the music?*
 Steve Jablonsky – *Skyscraper*, *Red Notice* soundtracks - action cues
 Alexandre Desplat: *The Secret Life of Pets 2*
 Steve Jablonsky - *Gears of War 2* – soundtrack

4. **THREE-DIMENSIONAL ORCHESTRATION, TEXTURE, ARRANGEMENT.**

Score a cue – choose one clip (ENC Uber driver, Genius doc, 3M TV spot).

Analysis: Neal Acree *Overwatch* Dragons
 Steve Jablonsky – *The Tiger’s Apprentice* animated feature
 James Newton Howard – *Red Sparrow*
 Austin Wintory – *Abzu* video game
 Acree/Tuller – *Animal World* feature film
 Penka Kouneva – *Storming* from *H-Hour* video 1st person shooter; Wagner *Die Walküre*

5. **FORM: classically-inspired forms & syntax in media scoring**

Compose a suspense-action-aftermath cue (Pandora: Xander Eve)

Analysis: Justin Hurwitz – *The First Man* – #31 *The Landing*, #5 *Armstrong Cabin*

Carlos Rafael Rivera – *The Queen’s Gambit*
Jessica Curry – *Everyone’s Gone To The Rapture* video game
Bear McCreary – *LOTR The Rings of Power* S1 Amazon
Bernard Herrmann – *Psycho*
Lolita Ritmanis – *Blizzard of Souls* (period drama war film)
Borislav Slavov - *Divinity: Original Sin 2* video game
Kouneva – *Forest* from TWA

6. FORM: pop & rock-inspired forms & syntax in media scoring. COMEDY genre.

Score a 1:50 cue to picture based on a conceptual brief, “style guides (mp3s) and an animatic (DAA Hira’s entrance).

Analysis: Neal Acree - *Revelation* fantasy video game
Thomas Newman – *Elemental* (Animation feature film)
Mark Orton – *The Holdovers* (comedy)
Mark Orton - *Twelve Mighty Orphans* (Americana)
Zimmer / Balfe / Slavov – *Crysis 2* video game
Kouneva - *Dragon Age: Absolution* Netflix animated series

7. ANALYSIS OF GENRES: DRAMA. Tropes & musical signifiers.

Collaborative techniques, implementing feedback, understanding “directorese.”
Getting out of a creative bind (“writer’s block”).

Score a drama cue (2 clips to choose from – *Blue & Pandora Ascension*).

Analysis: Sharon Farber – *Brainwashed* documentary
Nathan Barr – *House With Clocks In Its Walls*
Alexandre Desplat - *Eiffel*
Christopher Young – *The Core* soundtrack
Anthony Willis – *Saltburn* OST

8. ANALYSIS OF GENRES: HORROR & THRILLER. Tropes & musical signifiers.

Score a 1:00-2:00 Horror-SciFi cue to picture (ENC *Magnetic play* or *Applewood Book Reading*).

Analysis: Bear McCreary – *10 Cloverfield Lane*
Marco Beltrami - *A Quiet Place* #1 and other Beltrami scores (orchestral design)
Danny Bensi & Saunder Jurriaans – *The Gift*
Drum & Lace - *Cobweb*
Penka Kouneva - *Legends of Runeterra* - Shadow Isles; *Applewood*

9. ANALYSIS OF GENRES: SciFi, FANTASY, SUPERHERO.

Score a 1:15-1:30 cue to picture (choose from SciFi OR drama theme – PAN sizzle, G5 game, AoC game).

Analysis of genres: tropes & emotional signifiers.

Analysis: Atli Orvarsson - *Silo* Season 1
Marco Beltrami – *Hellboy*
Benjamin Wallfisch – *Shazam*
Steve Jablonsky - *Ender’s Game*
Gareth Coker - *Ori and the Will of Wisps*

10. ORIGINALITY & INNOVATION in media scoring.

Analysis: Hans Zimmer *Dune*
Hildur Gudnadottir – *Joker*
Stephanie Economou – *Ruby Gillman Teenage Kraken*
Neal Acree – *World of Warcraft Shadowlands*
Johann Johannsson – *Arrival*
Blizzard – *Diablo 4* OST

LIST OF LECTURES, BLOGS and SLIDE DECKS for WEEKLY INDEPENDENT READING

- WEEK 1** –
- The Collaborative Composer (blog)
 - Temp Score (blog)
 - Methodologies for Score Study (blogs by 4 leading Hollywood orchestrators)
 - Selected 20th orchestral works inspirational for media composers (a list for independent study)
 - Steve Jablonsky – Gears of War 2 Theme – memorable theme & thematic development (blog)
 - Theme and Thematic Development
- WEEK 2** -
- Composer Artistic Development (Slide Deck)
 - Pandora TV series lecture (Slide Deck in 03 Analyze folder)
 - Composer Sarah Schachner – interviews (in 03 Analyze folder)
 - Composer Harry Gregson-Williams – interviews (in 03 Analyze folder)
- WEEK 3** -
- Methodology: Listen, Distill, Select (blog)
 - Winifred Phillips GDC lecture (video), Meters (video)
- WEEK 4** -
- A basic roadmap of best practices for using orchestral instruments (blog)
 - MIDI & Orchestration Lecture (Slide Deck)
 - Tchaikovski Serenade – Analysis
 - Overtone Series (chart)
- WEEK 5** -
- Academy of Scoring Arts: Form & Analysis Slide Deck & *Rebirth of Id* scores & mp3s
 - Classical & Pop Forms – blog
 - Career Development – Attendee Questions (Chance Thomas May 2021 Seminar)
- WEEK 6** -
- Cultivating a Career as a Media Composer (Slide Deck from a 2-hour lecture)
 - Comedy composers and their soundtracks
 - Tips for networking
- WEEK 7** -
- Chance Thomas – Interpreting *Directorese* + What drives the mood in music?
 - Penka Kouneva – Interpreting *Directorese* (blog)
 - Dealing with Writer’s Block (blog)
 - John Rodd (Mixing Engineer extraordinaire) GDC lecture & MIX interview
 - List of Scores with Guitar as the main instrument
- WEEK 8** -
- *Encounter* lecture & Collaborative Process on a low-budget indie feature film
 - Horror music ideas and musical syntax
 - A pitch email to Production Music Library (a good template that delivers results)
- WEEK 9** -
- All questions I’ve been asked by emerging composers (blog in 3 parts)
 - Jesse James blog “You Will Find Success If ...”
 - US-based and Canada-based opportunities for composers
 - 2023 Best Soundtracks by Daniel Schweiger
 - Why film composers fail by Mark Northam, edited by PK
- WEEK 10** -
- Originality and Innovation (blog)
 - Great recent innovative scores to study (list)