

Report

Learning to make the pictures sound good

Academic education in composition and sound design for film and media in Europe

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International Film Music Biennial 2002

Last summer - 23-30 June 2002 - the International Film Music Biennial took place for the fourth time in Beethoven's birthplace, Bonn in Germany. The event was established in 1995 by the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany and since 1999 has been organized in cooperation with the Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen.

The programme consisted of the competition for the International Prize for Film Music, round-table talks to provide opportunities to present ideas, impart knowledge and discuss improvements in cooperation, workshops and work presentations. Concerts of prizewinners and distinguished film composers were offered to the participants. During the International Prize for Film and Media Music Gala the Erich Wolfgang Korngold Prize was presented to Mikis Theodorakis for his oeuvre of film music.

Meeting of European film and music schools

A three-day symposium in the auditorium of the Kunstmuseum Bonn, presented by Larry Sider, initiator of the School of Sound, provided a survey of training models in the fields of sound design and applied composition for film and the media in Europe. Lecturers and students of 15 European colleges of music and film schools presented examples of their work and reported on their experiences and training programmes. All but one of the participating schools happened to be located in Northern and Eastern Europe. Remarkable was the omission of institutions from France and Italy, countries known for their extensive film tradition. The programmes of the different courses can broadly be divided into three categories: traditional courses, integrated courses and multi-disciplinary institutions.

Traditional courses

The majority of institutions that were represented were traditional music and film schools, that is to say, with a traditional approach to film compo-

sition or sound design. Many teach the practical side of things and pay little attention to theory, let alone research and development.

The film and television music class at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Munich (Germany) favours working in the German-Austrian musical tradition, but also keeps a conscientious eye on popular American film composers. The school is very well to do. Students have their work performed by the Munich Symphony Orchestra and there are seven teachers against six students!

The Royal College of Music, London (United Kingdom), while working in the tradition, stands in the middle of the world. The college has a thorough postgraduate course (M.Mus.) in Composition for Screen, which is a 13-month, full-time programme, which at the moment is attended by six students. As the school has no film department there is a close collaboration with the London International Film School. Some theoretical study is done on film music repertoire, merely by course leader Miguel Mera. The course welcomes many visiting guest lecturers with international fame.

In Slovenia, Professor Jani Golob teaches film music composition at the Music Academy, Ljubljana, which is connected to the Radio Film and Television Academy. As yet the latter has no special sound department although plans are in the making. The lessons take the form of an added module during the last year of the four-year composition course.

The Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts (United Kingdom) is also known as the 'Paul McCartney Fame School' (Paul McCartney being the patron). Along with education concentrating on performing arts there is a three-year course resulting in a BA Honours degree in Sound Technology. Teaching focuses on pop musicians interested in sound technology, theatre sound, studio technology and sound design and composition for the media. Working with 'pop- jazz- and mouse-musicians' lecturer Ian Gardener prefers a 'non-academic and intuitive' approach in his 12-week course on film music. The school attracts many foreign students.

At the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen, Potsdam Babelsberg (Germany) one can go for a Diploma in Sound Engineering (Diplom-Toningenieur FH), which involves location sound, sound production and post-production. The production of original film music is also possible. As at most schools in Germany the technical facilities are generous.

Young and ambitious are good qualifications for the sound department of the University of Arts, Belgrade in Yugoslavia. There is room for seven new students each year of their four-year programme. In 2001 the first graduates in sound design were delivered since the start in 1997.

Support and development of the 'traditions of cinematic expression' are seen as the main purpose by the sound design department of the University of Art and Design, Helsinki Finland. BA (after three years), MA (after two more years) and Doctor of Arts are the possible degrees.

The Dramatiska Institutet is located in Stockholm, Sweden. At this college for film, radio, television and theatre only four students are admitted to a course of six terms in sound editing. Attention is paid to

dramaturgical analysis and the narrative role of sound, but the course leader expressed a peculiar aversion for theory during his presentation.

The well-known Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School forms an attraction for students from all over the world. The film department has 131 students. Sound technology and film music are among the training subjects, but have no separate departments. Here again practical work is considered as the most important aspect of the very traditional teaching programme. Oddly, most students go abroad after their studies since there is no film industry of any importance left in Poland.

The programme at the Academy for Music, Film and Television FAMU in Prague (Czech Republic) radiates old-fashioned, traditional solidity and delivers sound-recording engineers and sound designers for the cinema, television, radio, music studios and theatres.

There is a four-year composition and arranging course at the Rotterdams Conservatorium, in the Netherlands. Here it is possible to specialize in composition for film.

Upcoming directors at the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie, Berlin get instruction in film sound and music marked: 'Sound changes images'. One composer, a sound library and a sampler are available to awake the awareness for sound.

Integrated courses

Only one institute qualifies for the second category where a more integrated approach is found. Sound design and film composition are closely connected.

The Bournemouth Media School (United Kingdom) is too young to have a tradition (established in 1992) but it has already gained a world reputation for computer animation. The Digital Music Studio is a centre for musical composition and education, where Composition for the Screen and Sound Design for the Screen are taught as interrelated disciplines in postgraduate courses. The first aim is 'to enable composition students to develop professional skills in composing for film, television, computer games and related media' and 'to enable sound design students to develop the technical competencies necessary to work in a variety of production and post-production environments'. Possibly because the school is part of a university without any other music provision (Bournemouth University) the school displays a tendency to perform profound theoretical analysis and argumentation. Research is done on perception and the creative potential of the media.

Multidisciplinary institutions

Multidisciplinary institutions form the third category, where composition and sound design are possibilities from a broad supply of related courses.

The Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Utrecht (the Netherlands) is a large school with faculties in the fields of Art, Design, Music, Theatre, Art and Technology, Art and Education and Art and Economics. The Faculty of Art, Media and Technology is divided into image-related courses and music- and sound-related courses. Composition for the

Media is the course in 'composition for film, television, radio, computer games and Internet'. The Sound Design programme 'trains students to be professionals in concept, design and production of sound for the stage, old and new media and the recording studio'. During the course, students often work together with other students and professionals in different media and disciplines. Composition and Sound Design are considered to be closely interrelated without a strict dividing line. Possible degrees are B.Mus. and BAT (Bachelor of Art and Technology). During a subsequential course of one or two years students can sharpen their insights through Advanced Theoretical Studies and studies in Music Technology, Composition in Contexts and Music Production, resulting in MA, M.Phil. and EMMA (European Media Master of Arts) degrees. Among graduate projects are audio computer games for the blind and research and development on adaptive composition algorithms for computer games.

Barcelona (Spain) is the residence of the Institut Universitari de l'Audiovisual(IUA). The Audio-Visual Institute is an interdisciplinary centre of the Pompeu Fabra University 'devoted to a range of activities related to digital technologies in the media, comprising Education and Production as essential parts of Research'. The institute has no composition or sound design courses but is involved in undergraduate and doctoral programmes in Audio-Visual Communication as well as in Informatics Engineering (specializing in Communication) and Computer Animation. Digital tools for composition and sound design are developed in close cooperation and dialogue with 'professionals, the industry and society at large'. There was a demonstration of a tool in development that can separate a voice from a stereo sound file and thereupon perform all kinds of processing on the voice alone.

Conclusions

It was a unique opportunity to get a lot of schools together in one place. The meetings were an informative and instructive experience for all participants, although time only allowed for a brief introduction by each school. There were discussions on several subjects. The well-known complaint was shared that sound and music often come as an afterthought in film and television production. More education on this subject for directors and producers seems important. The Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie, Berlin showed their interest in taking the lead. The necessity for the schools to draw more from the rich European cultural sources and put more trust in their own voice in cinema instead of following the American industry was expressed.

Plans were made to extend the forum on the Internet and for cooperation amongst participants. Recent developments in technology and work fields are certainly inviting them to do so and it is important to keep European cinema and television a living art.

Sound as such is becoming increasingly important in contemporary music and film and the division between sound and music is in places becoming more blurred. Whether this a good thing is open for discussion but this trend is hardly reflected in any of the education pro-

grammes. The media industry inclines to concentrate on skills acquisition through selected providers and tends to ignore more academic education. However, to keep this an artistically and economically challenging industry it seems not sufficient for the education sector to teach skills alone. Research must be done to have the answer to future developments. Not research out of academic interest as such, but for the practical reason that the media landscape is constantly changing. For example: cinema was the art-form of the twentieth century; computer games are the new art-form for the future and already the financial gain from games outgrows the profits from the film industry. Because of lower production costs, games offer opportunities to start production even on a small scale. The interactive aspect of games, however, demands music and sound with an adaptive character and forces new ways of thinking about form in composition and sound design.

Links and contacts

School of Sound, London, UK

www.schoolofsound.co.uk

Hochschule für Musik und Theater, Munich, Germany

www.musikhochschule-muenchen.mhn.de

Royal College of Music, London, UK

www.rcm.ac.uk

Music Academy, Ljubljana, Slovenia

www.agrft.uni-lj.si

Liverpool Institute for the Performing Arts, UK

www.lipa.ac.uk

Hogeschool für Film und Fernsehen, Potsdam Babelsberg, Germany

www.hff-potsdam.de

Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Belgrade, Yugoslavia

http://fdu@talja.fdu.bg.ac.yu

University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland

http://jussi.etto@uia.fi

Dramatiska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

www.mh.luth.se

PWSFT, Lodz, Poland

www.filmschool.lodz.pl

FAMU, Czech Republic

www.f.amu.cz

Rotterdams Conservatorium, The Netherlands

www.hmd.nl/rc

Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie, Berlin

www.dffb.de

Institut Universitari de l'Audiovisual(IUA), Barcelona, Spain

www.iua.upf.es

Bournemouth Media School, UK

<http://media.bournemouth.ac.uk>

Hogeschool voor de Kunsten, Utrecht, The Netherlands

www.hku.nl

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