

Introducing Film Scoring Concepts in a MIDI Production Course: A Balanced Approach

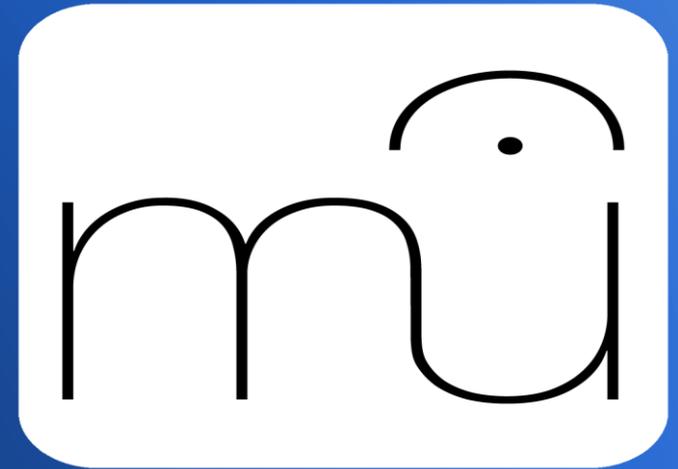
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Student Demographics

- A) Undergraduate students currently enrolled in an A.A.S. Degree in Music Performance, Sound Engineering and/or Music Business.
- B) Undergraduate students currently enrolled in a B.M. Degree in Music Business, Performance or Education. Course is taken in the second year.
- C) Students generally have little prior knowledge of composition, arranging and post-production concepts.
- D) Students may have prior experience using digital audio workstations including Pro Tools, Logic, Reason and notation programs including Sibelius, MuseScore and Finale.

Primary Teaching Platforms



Basic Course Competencies

Create original music and sound design for short-form visual content.

Edit and mix soundtrack elements to support the visual media narrative.

Utilize digital audio workstations and simple music notation for creative effect.

Understand file formats, codecs, keyboard shortcuts and digital gain staging.

Create basic scores for visual content through diverse music platforms.

Optimize MIDI parameters to enhance performance authenticity.

Identify structure, form and pacing of music and sound to support visual content.

Logic Advantages

Robust sound library with loops, virtual instruments and software synthesizers.

Ability to work with video.

Ability to synchronize 3rd party software via ReWire.

Commonly used by film composers, arrangers and musicians.

Useful for quick melodic “sketches” and mock ups.

Powerful standalone editing, mixing, and synchronization platform.

Reason Advantages

Integrates with Logic via ReWire for blended applications.

Expanded audio recording, mixing and editing platform.

Creative sound design platform using digital synthesis and mixing.

Expanded sound libraries with Reason ReFills.

MIDI optimization and editing parameters.

MuseScore Advantages

Free, open-source music notation program with good libraries.

Intuitive and easy to assimilate, particularly for novice composers.

Multiple exporting options including Wave and MIDI files and PDF scores.

Reliable and user friendly on Macs and PCs.

Generates clean scores, a useful alternative to Logic's Score Editor.

Project Objectives

Students create original music and sound design for 60-90 second commercial.

Use music and sound design to match pacing, edits and tone of commercial.

Mix, edit and deliver a final MIDI mock up, simple PDF score and QuickTime video of final project.

Any combination of virtual instruments, loops and notation programs.

Music Spotting

Students identify the key transitions within the video edit.

Students identify the role of the “temp track” in the original video.

Students create a basic cue sheet of sections within the video to create new music.

Students may optimize the marker locations in Logic based on the project.

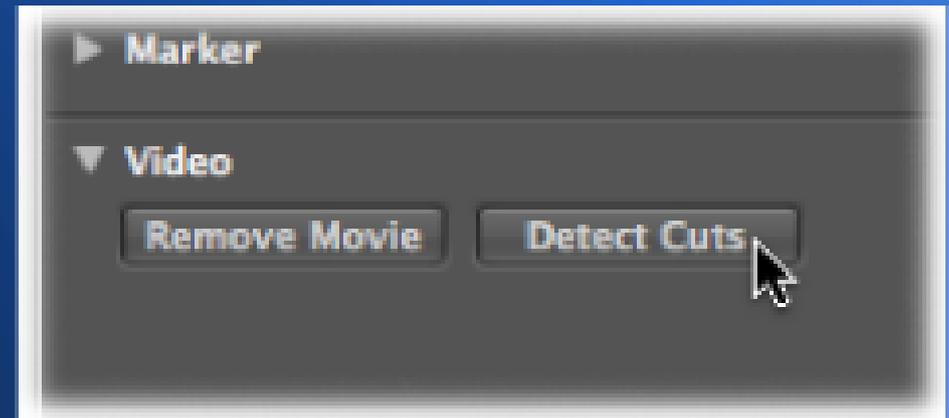


Image courtesy of Apple Logic 9 User's Manual.

Notation Scoring Options

Students may want to use the notation editor to synchronize their parts.

MuseScore has an option for external synch with YouTube.

This is helpful for those students with a more traditional background.

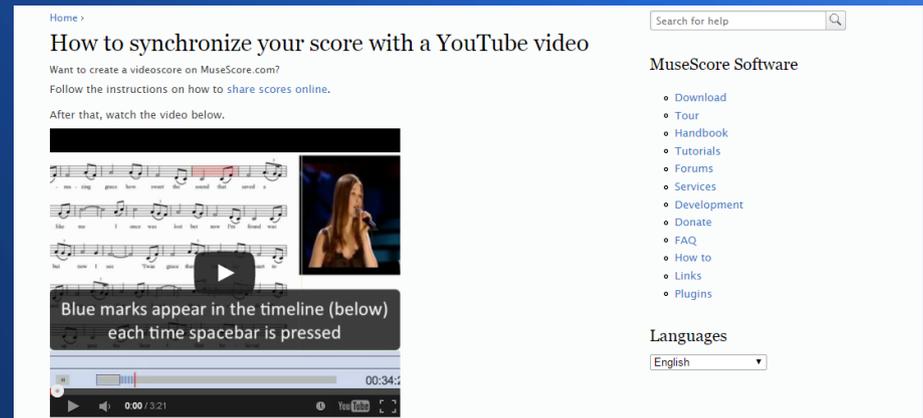


Image courtesy of MuseScore.org

DAW Scoring Options

Many students will prefer to start with existing loops, sequences and virtual instruments in Logic.

Using Beat Detection and Elastic Audio, students can lock their parts to specific sections of the video while detecting the “road map” of the score itself.

It's important to reinforce composition exercises with supporting discussions about sample rate, file formats, and basic audio fundamentals and MIDI differences.

Blended/Hybrid Approaches

Students may use Reason's Subtractor to create tasteful sound design elements.

Parts created in Reason “slave” to Logic's interface.

Reason has extensive possibilities, which can be easily routed into Logic via external MIDI controls.

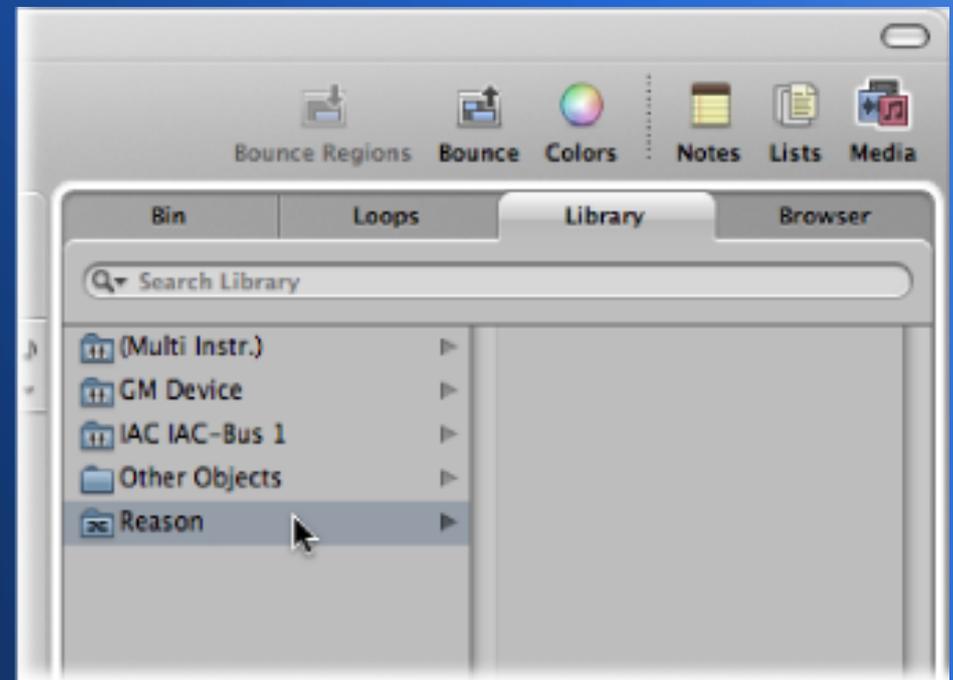


Image courtesy of Apple Logic User's Manual

Humanizing MIDI

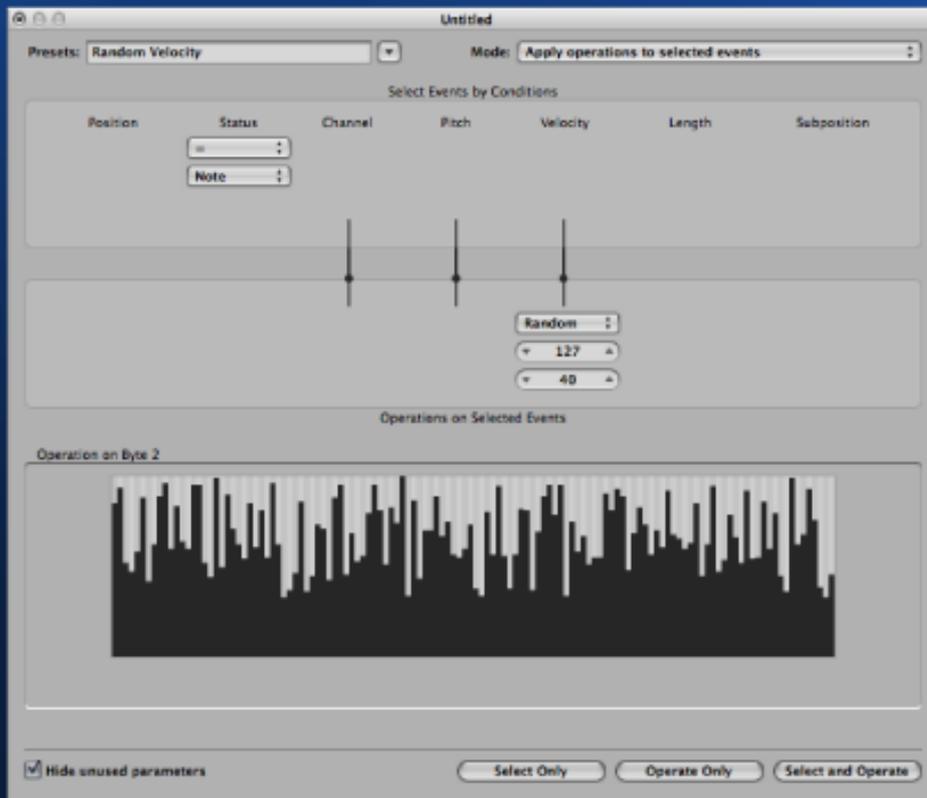


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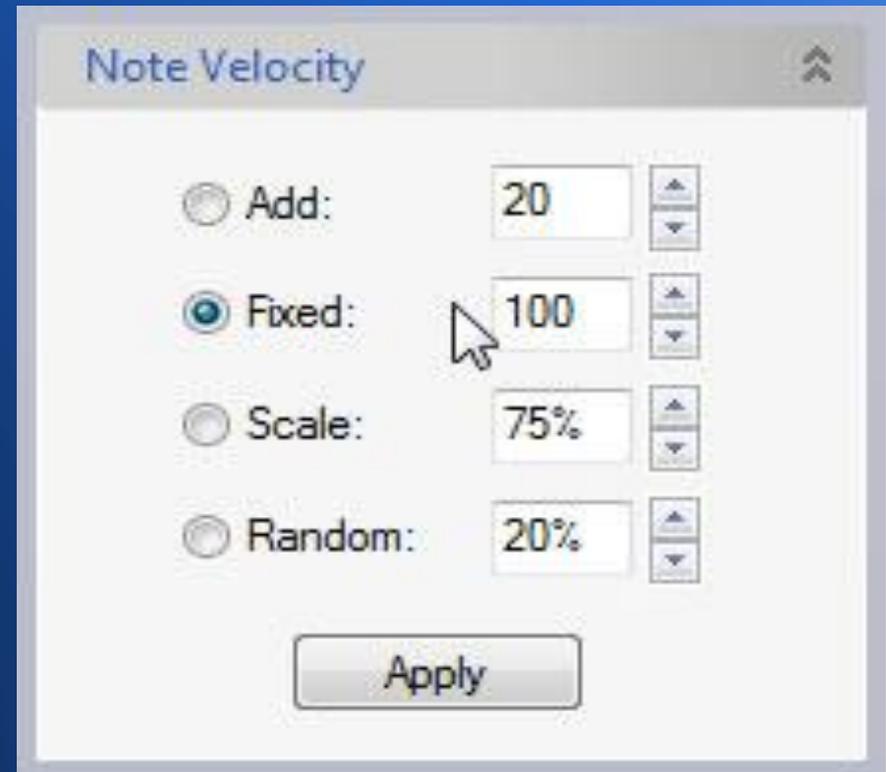


Image courtesy of Propellerheads.se

Ways to Optimize MIDI Performance

Volume and pan automation for crescendos.

Velocity and Pitch Randomization for “imperfections”.

Tasteful use of filters and EQ for instrument blend.

Tasteful use of dynamics processing and reverb for proper placement in acoustic spaces.

Using high quality sample libraries and careful use of quantization.

Manual adjustment of piano roll note durations.

Reminding students their performances should not be too “perfect”, but hopefully supportive of the visual media they are composing for.

Working Both Directions

Students may want to export their score notation from Logic to MuseScore as an XML file for correction and clean up.

Working oppositely, if the music is scored primarily in the notation platform, students can export the general MIDI file, import to Logic and improve it using nice sample libraries.

Suggested Timeline

Week 1: Music Spotting Sheet, Description of Visual Elements.

Week 2: Creation of Melodic Content and Short Cues.

Week 3: Harmonic and Simple Orchestration Basics.

Week 4: Sound Design Elements, Editing and Mixing.

Week 5: Final Delivery, Peer Evaluation and Reflective Essay.

Additional Classroom Discussions

The role of music (diegetic vs. non-diegetic) in scores for commercial media.

Balancing sound design elements vs. music in the mixing process.

Performance realism vs. non-standard instrumentation.

Basic timbral characteristics of instrument families.

Critical listening and analysis of basic form, instrument range and “shape” of the piece.

Supplemental listening of effective scores in commercials, film trailers and games.

Abstract instrumentation.

Audio and MIDI properties and basic fundamentals.

Simple mixing and notation strategies to optimize musical content.

The role of music during transitional scenes and “hits” within the score.

Members of a production crew, meeting deadlines and business considerations.

Final Considerations

Careful listening, basic analysis and identification of musical form should be stressed.

There are many useful ways to create interesting content, encouraging students to be open in their musical pathway is essential.

Rather than composing in a particular style, students should consider how their soundtrack elements *enhance* the visual story, rather than distract the listener.

Some lab time should be dedicated to learning the key commands of the software. This is akin to muscle memory when learning scales and instrumental technique.

Encourage students to bring external hard drives and back up their work in multiple places!

Using loops, sequences and sample libraries is not intended to replace real players. However, when used effectively, they can be wonderful tools for inspiring compositional aesthetics and creativity.

Multi-sensory learning is really important. Students should watch the video again and again, listen carefully to the temp track and their own compositions. Monitoring on headphones is useful, but so is playing back on nice speakers whenever possible.

Use care when mixing for final delivery, making sure all elements are dynamically sensitive, rather than clipping.

Additional Resources

Logic Pro User's Manual

<https://documentation.apple.com/en/logicpro/usermanual/>

MuseScore

[Http://musescore.org](http://musescore.org)

Propellerhead's Reason

[Http://www.propellerheads.se](http://www.propellerheads.se)