

- **Title Slide 1 & Slide 2- Introduction:**

**Title Slide-**

Brief Introduction/thank you.

The curriculum that I will be discussing with you today began as my final project for my masters degree and has really blossomed into a labor of love. As I was thinking about different topics for my final project, I began to reflect on my prior teaching experience.

Up to that point in my career I had dodged teaching general music. I knew at some point, I would be asked to teach courses outside of band or orchestra. So I wanted to develop something that I could take with me into my classroom and I began researching MS/HS general music courses.

I discovered several challenges in regards to teaching general music at these levels.

1. There are few ready made curriculums that exist and the ones that do exist are not engaging or relevant!

Are Bach & Beethoven important figures in music? Absolutely! Are your typical middle school/high school students going to care about them? NO!

2. The second issue with the curricula that do exist, they do not allow for hands-on learning opportunities, nor do they connect with real world experiences.

This led me to think back to what first interested me in music.....and it was FILM MUSIC! From a young age, I noticed the music in movies and TV shows that I watched and It was one of the reasons that I wanted to join the band in middle school.

Which brings me back to an engaging & relevant curriculum. Films, Television, Netflix, etc are an important part of our culture and that is why I designed a music technology curriculum that solely explores the film music industry. This is an industry that very easily blends into a music technology class, as this is how music is being composed for films today.

I think there is a negative stigma in our profession about the classes we are asked to teach outside of band, orchestra, or choir and It doesn't have to be that way. I truly enjoy teaching this class and I am just as excited each day to teach this class as I am my orchestra classes. Not only do I enjoy teaching this class, but it has been a booming success now at two schools. The first school I implemented my curriculum in, we piloted it with just 8th grade the first year and it was such a success that it was being offered to all three grade levels, and was an integral part of their journey to STEM certification. This is the first year we are offering this course at my current school. I was interviewed by the student media

production team prior to course selections for this year and through that had 60 students sign up the first year that they split across two semesters.

### **Slide 2 Closer of Intro-**

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of teaching music tech, I want to share some of the unique opportunities that this class offers. The point that I drive home to my students whether it was MS or now my HS students, is this is a real career field that we are exploring. We are getting these students early enough that if this is something that interests them, we can set them down that path. It may not be composing, but the jobs that we explore are: orchestration, performing, audio engineers (you don't have to be the best musician to get jobs in this industry, you have to know how to work the technology!), music lawyers, music preparation, etc.

If you think outside of the box, this is also an opportunity for students to hear from people in this industry! Here are a few guests that my students were able to speak with: Blake Neely, showed us his studio, broke down a scene for us, and answered questions. Timothy Williams: met with both adv. Orchestra and music tech and covered a variety of fields.

**This class can be a huge asset to your program (and make you look really good to your admins :) !**

### **Slide 3- Outline:**

If you want to take notes, you can. However, my email address will be on the screen at the end and if you send me an email, I will share my presentation with you that has everything we are going to go over today.

Similar to band, orchestra, & choir, there are many different approaches to teaching a music tech class. My experience in making film music as the focus of our music tech class has worked really well for my students. Even if you decide to go in a different direction, I still hope to give you things to consider and offer strategies for planning a music tech curriculum.

And I want to start with planning to teach a music tech class, as there are several things you will need to consider and plan for prior to seeing students. I understand at a conference like Midwest that some of you may already be teaching a music tech curriculum and are looking for new ideas, so I am going to move rather quickly through most of this part. So bear with me!

- **Slide 4- Preparing For A Music Tech Course:**

First & foremost, whether you are being asked to teach this class or are wanting to teach this class. Don't just assume your administrator knows what is required for a music tech class.

Before you begin to think about what you are going to teach your students, you need to educate your administrator on what you will need for this course! This may seem silly, but you need technology in order to teach music technology :) You laugh, but I have a colleague who was asked to teach this course and it was surprising to their administrator that they needed computers..... you need to make sure your administrator is on the same page.

Then plan for the unexpected. Twice now on day 1 of this course I began it with only half of our computers! Obviously that is not ideal, but I made it work both times and you can too. If we have time later during the presentation I will explain how, but for the sake of time I want to keep moving.

Furthermore, you will need to be able to briefly state what your class is about!  
**When asked, I explain that in my class we study music from film and use technology to create music for film!**

### **Equipment & Money-**

Students will need access to some sort of D.A.W (Digital Audio Workstation), a fancy word for the software your students will use to create their film scores, as well as individual desktop & laptop computers (chromebooks & iPads will not really work). You need the ability to import and edit videos. Soundtrap is awesome and there are many great music tech programs that use soundtrap.....for the purposes of this course it doesn't work well because you can't import and sync to videos.

Depending on the area that you teach in, funding may present a challenge.

I taught in a rural Title 1 school and my budget for the class was around \$400-\$800.00 depending on the year. With the pushes for integrating technology into classes, there is money out there! Whether it's through grants, your community, or asking your board members.

Especially if your admin is wanting you to teach this course, this gives you a bit of leverage for help in finding the funding for this course.

As far as software for this class:

For PC's the program that I use is called MixCraft. I will show & talk more about

this in a few moments.

What I really like about Mixcraft is the massive instrument & sound library, which includes several categories of film score specific audio loops. Downloading the software is very easy and they include a teacher's guide that offers quite a bit of information on the program and even sample lesson plans!

25 licenses for my middle school class cost \$800.00, those licenses served around 75 students per semester. In my current position I teach around 32 students per semester and it was around \$1,050.00.

If you are fortunate enough to have Macs at your school, then for the purposes of this course Garageband works fine. Garageband is fairly common so I am not going to spend much time discussing it.

The final item that I use quite a bit in class is a projector and speaker (for our lectures, listening, viewing, and demonstrating the computer program).

#### 1. **Class size/ set-up/ management -**

Ideally this is a semester long class and I try to limit the class size to 25-35. If you are in 55 minute classes, I wouldn't go past 25. Because you want your students to have that individual time for feedback! For the block schedule I am finding that 32 is the magic number.

At middle school I set my chairs up in my class in four "pods" of five by alphabetical order. In doing so this was a tremendous help with classroom management.

On the screen you can see how I have the band room set up for lectures and viewing examples and thankfully, this year I have my own space in our computer lab. This allows me to spend more individual time listening and critiquing student projects.

Describe set up @ HS.

○ **Slide 5- Preparing For A Music Tech Course:**

**You are A Composer! -**

In order to teach this class in the way that I am presenting, you have to actively practice composition! I know that can be a terrifying statement to some, because I was once in your shoes. I was in an orchestration class in my undergrad but never really did anything with it after I graduated, and honestly I found arranging/composing very intimidating.

My professor that was working with me when I was designing this curriculum made a good point, you can't teach a class about composition if you don't know how to compose! So I've been working on this for about five years now and I have some examples to share.

These examples are two fold:

1. I'm going to share 3 projects from over the years so you can hear the progress made, what I learned and how I was able to incorporate various aspects into lessons.

2. I want you to be able to hear some of the samples and plug-ins you can incorporate into your classes or for your own personal use. Many of these are free, but I will point out the ones that are not that you may be interested in.

1. Score The World Theme- four note melody, tied into students' first theme project. Scored with labs (free).

2. The Ocean- Don't demo, but explain how this process can benefit your whole music program and how this experience benefited the orchestra students. Talk about the CueTube.

3. Spring- Demonstrate the BBC Symphony Orchestra sample library (free) and this project tied everything that I have learned and was able to complete in two weeks (with a newborn baby).

- **Slide 6 My Music Tech Curriculum:**

**SLIDE - Course Objectives**

Now the moment you've all been waiting for.....

Objectives- Pretty clear and simple. I have a few other goals as well for this class that aims to prepare them for high school and beyond:

Preparing students to present in front of people, we present each project as well as present research projects.

Note taking

Thinking critically about music, ex: why don't you like this piece of music?

Achieve this through daily listening logs, with guiding questions or thoughts set by myself.

**SLIDE - Units**

These are my core units and I have experimented with the order and I decided that the order on the screen has a good, logical flow.

Units 1-4 are what I consider "the meat" of this course and this course builds to these units and then we branch out from these units. So I'm going to walk you through how I teach these units to my students.

### **Introductory project/goals:**

#### **Teaching Students To Think Critically-**

This is the first time that many of your students are going to be asked to think creatively. Oddly enough, your “gifted” or “straight A” students are going to be the ones who typically struggle in this class, because there is not something that they can memorize, be spoon fed, and expect to regurgitate to pass a test! What is really fun about this class is even if you assign the same scene you are going to get 30 different sounds and approaches!

This can be a tough skill to teach but the more you teach this class the more ideas you pick up in how to help students, “think outside the box”.

First and foremost as this is a class about film music, listen to and break down a lot of examples for them. After all, how are they going to get better at creating music, if they are not listening to the type of music you want them to create? We start many classes with a listening assignment or discussion. I will discuss beforehand the things that I want them to really focus on and why I am asking them to focus on it.

I try to keep examples as relevant as I can. Especially if I know there is a movie they have all seen recently and my examples are constantly being updated and changed each semester as new films are released.

If at all possible I try to have the visual cues included in the examples that I pull.

Here is a brief example of a cue that I would play for the students and I will walk you through the things that I want them to focus on.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S176AKQhcCk>

This is what I would tell my students prior to playing:

I’m going to play the first 30 seconds of this theme and I want you to tell me how many layers of music do you hear? If this confuses them, you could also ask, what is the number of the loudest sounds that you hear? (Play example) After I played that much, I’ll pause it and ask if anyone needs to hear it again? However, with this particular example I’ve yet to have a class stumped and they answer, 2.

After we identify the two layers with the melody being in the electric cello ( most of them will say guitar and that is ok because it allows me to talk briefly about the cello) and the rhythmic drum groove, I have them focus solely on the rhythm and will play it a second time. After they have heard it twice, I clap it for them and have them clap it with me. With anything, the first time through it may be rough, but they get it. Usually one of the first scenes we create music for is an action scene from one of the Marvel films, I explain that this would be a great rhythm

they could use in their project as this rhythm helps to carry momentum.

Once we get to the beginning stages of creating music, I start with what they know. A question I ask as we explore how music fits together is: When you hear a song on a radio, how is it constructed? Think about the lyrics.

They immediately get it! A verse, chorus, etc that connection allows me to explain how most instrumental music is constructed with different ideas getting labeled by letter and we start with a composition in ABA form using Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. The premise of their first project is they have been hired by PBS Kids to create the music for a commercial using Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, they may use any instruments and the song can be in any genre. They often get a chuckle out of this and I explain, to get the big “cool” projects you have to work your way up!

I have them figure out Twinkle by ear in the key of C. We have USB keyboards and I give them their range and usually the first measure. After they figure this out: I show them three chords I, IV, V and I have them listen to their project and determine the best sounding chord. The last part we add is the rhythm and typically this is made from their loops in the program. This simple project gets them thinking about melody, harmony, and rhythm and how to line those up.

The examples above are examples with the full class, and I do want to mention how to help students individually when it is time to start composing with different scenes! When I have a student who is “stuck” musically, it usually stems from them not thinking about their scene.

**The scene always will dictate musical decisions!**

Things that I point out to them: look for visual clues within the scene: who is the camera focused on? has the scenery changed? how many characters are in the scene/what are they feeling? Motion of the scene, fast, slow, etc.

Once we walk through their scene, most of the time they will figure out musical directions to pursue.

Finally, another thing I have them do from time to time is to watch and listen to the original scene and we will discuss what the composer did musically in the scene that they are working on. I do not mind at all if they try to emulate the things they hear.



### **Theme Music Unit:**

This unit is the first large unit in the curriculum and it also includes the first major project. I usually spend about three-four weeks in this unit.

The opening of this unit we discuss why and how composers use themes, we then listen and watch several examples of what we discussed so the students can better understand what we are discussing.

Example of this:

I usually don't even need to play this example but I will ask, who can hum Darth Vader's theme music? I will usually have several students that can. For students who are unfamiliar I will play about 30 seconds of the imperial march and then I will play the opening from Return of The Jedi where Darth Vader is arriving at the Death Star.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQB2NXfJev0>) (49-2:00)

For the sake of time, I will simply point out what we listen for and discuss. On the first viewing, I ask students to identify how many times that theme is played.

The second viewing we discuss how the theme is being used, we know he is in the ship because his theme is playing and as his ship gets closer or his name is mentioned, the music gets louder. Students are seeing and hearing how a theme can be used in different ways.

Example of this:

Another approach we discuss is using layers in your theme music. I played the WW theme for you guys a minute ago and I bring it back for my students to see visually how those layers that were discussed earlier are used in motion.

Example: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWuafJtMrBE>) (up to 1:25)

Notice that at the opening of this scene we hear the layer that was in the drums as WW runs into the battle and then we finally get the second layer, which is the melody when she starts to fight.

Applying this:

As we are still pretty new to the software and this topic as a whole, the students are assigned the same scene. We will go through the process that composers go through when they are hired for a project.

We will spot this scene together with no audio. Spotting is when the director & composer meet to discuss where the director would like music and what type of music.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YKeuNcHY9c>)

Things that I ask students to notice as we spot this scene: Who is in the scene, are they good or evil? What is the motion of the scene? Is the camera focusing on anything specific?

As we watch this scene we can break it into four parts: The intro which has the antagonist of the film, confusion and suspense as something crashes from the sky, the return of the hero, and finally the confrontation of the hero & villain. So we will need four musical ideas for this project.

The next step after spotting is adding temp music to this scene. Directors use temp music because many of them do not know how to communicate musical ideas to composers, so they place previously composed music in their rough cuts of the film so the composer has an idea of what the director wants.

The purpose of this is for the students to begin to think about what type of sounds go well together and to find music with the appropriate tempo for this scene.

Finally, I would have students practice finding the instruments that they used for the audio tracks and they would begin to compose ideas for these sections. In the beginning I try to have them compose a melody line & a rhythm line to support their melody.

After we complete this video, the students get a choice of three, 2:00-3:00 minute scenes where they will go through the above process on their own. I have a few student examples to show you. I have a few high school examples and a couple of middle school examples. I tried to find a variety in their background as far as how much exposure they've had in music classes. At the high school level particularly being in a larger suburban area I really didn't have any students who have had NO music classes of some degree. However, teaching at a smaller rural middle school was more common as they did not offer many music classes.

What I'm mainly looking for in these first projects: Are the sounds they select appropriate for the scene and is there a theme (sometimes you may need to listen REALLY hard to find it)?

### **SHOW EXAMPLES.**

The students really enjoy this unit because I have all the instruments out for them and either myself or the band/orchestra students demonstrate for them. I also go through all the percussion instruments and allow the students to play on them with my guidance. This class is usually one of their favorite days!

I walked you guys through the process of our first major unit. I am going to approach this unit a bit differently and walk you through the actual assignment you would give your students, as the process for this assignment is similar. (Assignment broken down on slides).

Because there is still quite a bit of exploring to do in the first project, I allow the students to have a lot of freedom as far as choices in instrument selection and how many instruments. Starting with this project, the guidelines get tighter.

The premise of this project is a director has hired them to compose music to a documentary on sharks. This director has a very specific idea of what the music should sound like and the students are tasked with trying to execute the musical form and emotion of the original video from a detailed brief from the director.

**(Pull Mixcraft Template for this project).**

The students will download a template that I created for them as well as the video w/temp music.

In the template that I created for the students, I set up a trap to see who actually listens to the original video, per instructions. There is a specific form to the tempted video they are to follow and I mislabeled several of the later markers to ensure they are actually listening to the original video and not just going off of the markers in the template.

In the video itself, since the documentary is about sharks, 95% of your students are immediately going to start thinking about dark/scary, jaws music. However, I ask the students to listen to the inflection in the narrator's voice. He is not speaking in a dark and scary tone, it's actually quite light-hearted and so their instrument choices need to match that! This is also the first project, where they practice balancing music with dialogue.

Since I have explained the original video, I am just going to play one of my 8th grade students' projects.

**(Play example).**

The students typically show a lot of musical growth with this portion of the unit. After we complete this project together, I allow them a few scenes to choose from

and they follow the same guidelines and process ( 4 note melodies, use markers to help you determine musical ideas/form , using traditional and specific instruments).

### **Pull Aubrey's Godzilla Project.**

This student does a great job of applying the previous material from the shark project to a project of her own.

### Composer Spotlight Project:

Now that we have discussed two larger units & projects for those units, I want to give you an example of a smaller project. I try to have some sort of smaller project or lesson in between major units because it is really taxing on the students from a creative standpoint if you don't give them a chance to decompress between large projects.

As this class focuses on film music, obviously there will be discussion on the composers who create this music and I like to show my students interesting interviews or recording sessions that I come across.

Because there are so many talented composers in today's industry we can't cover them all. This assignment allows for the students to research and learn about various composers throughout the years and it also allows for them to practice presenting in front of people.

Going back to my research in my masters project, something that in that project was the film music industry is not a very diverse industry. There are very few women and there are even fewer people of color in this industry. With that being said in the past 3 years of so there have been more composers in these minorities receiving opportunities, such as, Pinar Toprak who composed Captain Marvel, and Kris Bowers who composed the music for several large NetFlix projects. One of the reasons I created this assignment is for the students to learn more about these composers.

I have composers divided into three categories for this assignment: Established Composers, Younger Composers, & Minority Composers. The student will choose one composer from each category and research their life and career. Finally the student will listen to the music of their selected composers and will select a cue to share with the class.

Even though I consider this a "smaller" project, as you can see it covers quite a bit.

- **Slide Resources:**

**SLIDE - Resources**

(Running short on time, skip this section)

Briefly describe each resource:

**Mixcraft Educational Page (mentioned earlier):**

You can find a downloadable version of the teacher manual for mixcraft. It has a lot of specific information about the program if you or a student is having trouble and you need to look something up. They also provide sample lesson plans (some are pretty good and of course others are not feasible). Their support team is also fairly quick to respond and very helpful.

**Score! A Film Music Documentary & Podcast:**

This is a fantastic documentary that was released a few years ago and they have expanded what their work from the documentary to make a summer podcast as well.

Epicleff Media is the name of the company that produced both the documentary and podcast. They interviewed many of the biggest composers in the industry today and through the documentary they discuss: the history of film music, the process of scoring films, the technology that is used, and they got to see behind the scenes recording sessions. This is a great resource for you as the educator that gives you a lot of knowledge and examples. I wouldn't recommend showing this film from start to finish because they jump all over the place, and there are a couple of inappropriate scenes. The podcast is another fantastic resource and they actually set up a YouTube page where they will post the podcasts, so if you hear a clip that you would like to share with your class you have that option available.

**Facebook Groups- I Teach Music Tech & Film Music & Orchestration Applied:**

There are several groups out there, but I would recommend two.

"I Teach Music Tech" is a great group to get general ideas about teaching a music tech class. As I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, my approach is a little unique as my class just focuses on film music and the film music industry. If you want to branch out and cover other topics this is a great group for gathering other ideas and resources for teaching a music tech class.

“Film Scoring & Orchestration Applied” is a fantastic resource for gaining ideas in composing for films/video games, and general technology questions for composing media music. I also like the scoring challenges that they post. Not only do you need to practice the composition side of this so you better understand the process, struggles, and software for your students! But you can use the examples they post for projects in class!

I will score an example for each lesson and share with my students. I learn something new and find new things to point out for my students, each time I go through the process.

**PICK UP HERE!**

- **Slide - Closing & Questions:**

**SLIDE- Closing:**

In closing, I want to leave you with a quote on why I believe film music is worthy of study, especially at a younger age.

Film composer Hans Zimmer stated in a 2017 interview,

I think one of the responsibilities we have as film composers in Hollywood, or anywhere, is we're the last people on earth who on a daily basis commission orchestral music. Without us orchestras might just disappear and I think that would create a rift in human culture that's much larger than a bunch of musicians out of work. I think it will be such a loss to humanity.

Film music is what started my love of music and connecting back to my opening point of this being a culturally relevant curriculum, this genre presents an opportunity to bridge the gap between "classical" and popular music.

Questions?

Thank you!