

FILM MUSIC CONCEPTUALIZING WITH THE 5W MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the adaptation and application of Earle Hagen's Five Questions model in film scoring practice and education. The author employed the model in professional work and teaching, making modifications based on practical experience. Key findings include the model's versatility in addressing both individual scenes and entire films, its effectiveness as a communication tool with filmmakers, and the need for specific adjustments to enhance its utility. The adapted model comprises five questions: WHY, WHAT'S, WHERE, WHAT, and WHO, each addressing crucial aspects of film scoring. The approach proved beneficial in teaching, helping students grasp the primacy of filmmaking in film composition and providing a framework for organizing their approach. While the study demonstrates the model's effectiveness, further research is recommended to quantify its impact on student learning and professional outcomes. The adapted Five Questions model offers a balanced approach to stimulating artistry in film scoring, combining structure with creative freedom.

Author Keywords

Film scoring, Earle Hagen's 5W Questions model, Education, Adaptation, Conceptualization

CCS Concepts

Applied computing → Sound and music computing; Performing arts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Film and other audiovisual media are interdisciplinary art forms. The work of a composer in film scoring is different from working with music alone, since the need and ability to collaborate with filmmakers are crucial. The hard thing is to conceptualize, a subject often neglected as a collaborative process by both filmmakers and composers. By doing film scores I learned that a film composer is a film worker first and a composer second. I realized that if I came prepared to meetings, and talked to filmmakers in their filmmaking lingo, work proceeded more smoothly. I felt I needed a method to make the collaborative conceptualization work smoothly. When I started to teach, I felt the need for a model to make the conceptualization more understandable and effective. Books about film scoring often referenced, like Michel Chion's *Audiovision* [1], or Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies* [2], give little practical help to the film composer. These books, and others, address the subject of concept for music thoroughly, from the analytical perspective, and with focus on the narrative and psychological functions of film music already made. A composer needs more than this. A composer needs tools.

There are handbooks for film scoring where conceptualization is described, like the most known and used: *On the Track* [3] and *Complete Guide to Film Scoring* [4]. Though most of these books explain the problems they do not address any clear methods to overcome them. One exception is Earle Hagen's book *Scoring for Films* [5]. Hagen describes five questions the film composer must ask himself before starting to compose.



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Earle Hagen's Five Questions as stated in the book (p.168) are:

WHAT? *** What kind of music shall I write?

WHO? *** Who will play the music in the scene?

WHY? *** Why should there be music in the scene?

WHEN? *** Where should music start and when should it finish

WHERE? *** Where does the music belong in the scene

Hagen states that the most important question is WHY, then in the order WHERE, WHEN, WHAT and WHO. He also gives some more in-depth explanations about the importance of each question.

My research questions are:

-In what way does this model benefit the practice of film scoring?

-What changes or variations to the model might be needed to make it more effective?

-How does this model support teaching in film scoring?

2. METHOD

My method was to use Earle Hagen's questions, described above, as a model in my own practice, and later in my teaching. In my own practice, I employed the method in almost all my work, not only film scoring but also theatre and other forms. I tried different approaches to the use of the model and changes to the model based on artistic and communicative needs in professional productions. Later I used the amended model with students.

3. RESULTS

The immediate finding when trying the model in my own practice was that I needed a model to conceptualize a whole film rather than single scenes as described by Hagen. By trying the model in whole projects, I found that it worked well when upscaled to a whole film, chapters in a film, single scenes and even part of scenes.

I also discovered I could use the model in communication with filmmakers, rather than it being a model just for the composer.

If I could not find the answer to WHY myself, I simply asked the filmmakers. This also served well as a model of communication for all the other questions. WHO though is a very musical thing, perhaps more of a musician's question, but I often received answers to the WHAT or WHO question first, before WHY. The filmmaker had "a feeling" but could not communicate the WHY.

The most important finding was that WHY is a complex question, and therefore I started to divide WHY into two separate questions: WHY and WHAT NARRATIVE.

The second most important finding was that the order Hagen puts the questions in, are not only the order of importance since they are all interlaced, meaning that you can't answer the last question without answering the preceding ones.

I also found that the WHERE in Hagen's original is less important as a main question. WHEN and WHERE could combine into one question – WHERE. The answer could then be divided into two parts: general and detailed. The detailed answer would result in a Master Cue list, which consists of a list of music in a film or other media with multiple uses.

All the questions can be enriched with sub questions, tailored for each specific project. For instance, the WHAT'S question could use the Stanislavsky questions for acting as applied by Lee

Strasberg[8] as sub questions, when working with characters in a movie.

These changes gave a 5W slightly different from Hagens original. When working with students I have mainly used my own amended method, as listed below.

- 1.WHY? *** Why should there be music.
- 2.WHAT'S? *** What is the narrative/ point of view of the music
- 3.WHERE? *** Where does the music belong – (and starts/stops)
- 4.WHAT? *** What kind of music shall I write?
- 5.WHO? *** Who will play the music?

When using this method in teaching I found that students got good help from it. This method gave them an insight into the filmmaking process, essential to a film composer. Most students realized, by using the method, that film music is all about making movies, not making music. The order the questions are placed pulls the focus from the music (WHAT and WHO) to the story to be told (WHY and WHAT's). The model also seems to be a good way for the students to organize their studying in the subject.

I have noticed some problems for students though. When using the model, they sometimes have a hard time distinguishing WHY from WHAT'S. Quite often they fall into WHAT's immediately, without considering the WHY first, but still, this is better than starting with one of the last questions. The students also have a hard time remembering the five W:s. An acronym would probably be easier remembered.

4. DISCUSSION

I found that Earle Hagens questions could be used as a starting point to develop a method that could benefit film scoring practice by using it in my own practice. Other ways of describing conceptualization in the literature are less hands-on and less useful, in my opinion.

Most handbooks on film scoring are commercial products made to sell the dream of being a film composer to aspiring composers. This means that "the business" are always important chapters and these books often describe inherited working conditions from mainly American commercial film production as "rules". One example is from Guerilla Film Scoring [6]: "The director is like a general telling you what the mission is" (p. 61) and "Your first task is to become familiar with the directors experience and internalize his artistic vision" (p. 65). In my own opinion this is not an artistic approach, since it neglects the composer's input or voice. Other books might have a more artistic but sometimes vague approach. In From Score to Screen [7] for instance: "Trust your instincts", or less vague, in On the track: "...defining and develop the focused central idea is the first step towards creating a successful film score..." Both examples shows the problems, but no real solution. More to the point is what Richards Davis states in Complete Guide to film scoring (p. 130): "The major decisions (...) are: where the music will begin and end (...) What it should sound like, and what role it will play in the relation to the drama." These *decisions* are the same as Earl Hagens *questions* minus the most important one (WHY) and the least important one (WHO). In Davis text they are also put in the opposite order from Hagens. What Hagen does, that few others do, is trying to organize a way of thinking that will

benefit the narrative approach to conceptualization of music in a film.

On the other hand: Hagens most important question WHY is not covered very well in his book and his answers to the question are more like answers to the actual narrative. I divided his question into two questions, since I find that The WHY is mostly about the overall where answers could be: "This film needs music to tell the story", "This film needs rhythm", or "this film need Immersion". My question WHAT'S is dealing more with the details like "who's the Villain? what time of day is it? or "this movie is all about love"

While working with students, I have the opinion that they strive for models all the time. They want a line-out for their lives and, of course, their studies. They want rules. Often, teachers (in Sweden at least) do not tell them what to do explicitly, rather than telling them to "find their own way." I embrace this way of teaching, but still, I think students need some guidelines to help them. Methods to find answers are much more useful in an artistic environment than static rules or vague recommendations.

In my opinion, the 5W model gives the students a good start into Film scoring. This is a "hands-on" model to be artistic or stimulate artistry in the best possible way.

5. CONCLUSION

My amended version of Hagens five questions turned out to be a good method in my own practice. It also simplified my work with students, since it gives them a tool to use when learning, and yhat is possible to stick to in their work life. There are possibilities to develop the method further. Nevertheless, I only have primary result on the ways the model affects students learning, and this needs to be studied further to possibly become a good part of pedagogical science. Studies one how this model affects the students work in education and after their education could benefit the pedagogical sphere.

6. REFERENCES

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