

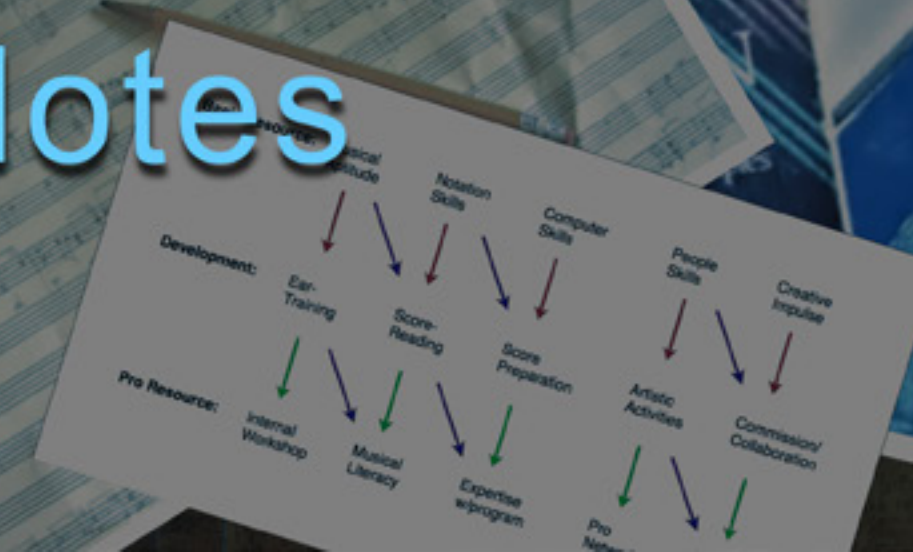
# ORCHESTRATION ONLINE

## INTRO TO ORCHESTRATION

### Course Notes

Texture,  
Balance,  
and  
Function

of  
Music  
Copying





# INTRO TO ORCHESTRATION COURSE NOTES

compiled by Thomas Goss and Lawrence Spector

## INTRO TO THE INTRO TO ORCHESTRATION COURSE

Hello, and welcome to the long-awaited course notes! If you are reading this, you are probably a viewer of my Orchestration Online YouTube channel. Thanks very much for watching, and I truly appreciate all the helpful feedback that I've received since its inception in 2006.

As of this writing, there are still two more video chapters of this course to be uploaded. But nearly all of the main principles of the professional approach to orchestration have been covered. They include:

- Focus on craft
- Developing personal and professional resources
- The right tools for job, both technologically and mentally
- Realistic expectations, tempered self-critique, and professional courtesy
- Musical literacy and improvement of inner ear through score-reading
- Building a network of colleagues through artistic works and collaboration

The remaining two videos will discuss how orchestrators get their works performed, and some final thoughts on the role of the creative artist in shaping society by living a creative life. I hope to have both finished by 2015. In the meantime, have a watch over the first eight videos listed to the right, check over the notes, and please get back to me if you have any suggestions for more information that could be added.

Thomas Goss

April 2014 • Wellington, New Zealand

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These notes are the property of Thomas Goss. But permission is given for the PDF file to be shared between students of the video course, and printed for classroom use.

Many thanks to Lawrence Spector, for getting things rolling again on these notes, after several years of stalling on my part. He deserves much of the credit for their existence. Also a big thank-you to Sam Hayman for work on the final formatting of these notes.

## Part 1: The Importance of Craft

*This was the first video I ever made for the Orchestration Online YouTube channel. I just set up a cheap digital camera on a cardboard box, and started talking off the top of my head, saying all the things that I'd wanted to say to young composers for years. It's unscripted, spontaneous, and a bit rough. I'm still amazed that this is my most watched video. Someday, I'd like to take the footage and add screenshots and music, to bring it more in line with the approach of later videos.*

*This video's really more of an overview, along with laying down the principle of craft as a basis for orchestration training. Many of the points I make here are expanded upon in the rest of the series - not just about the specifics of craft, but some of the attitude that I project here about professionalism as I see it.*

### I. Defining Craft

- a. parameters and limitations (i.e. orchestral range, technique, etc.)
- b. performance practice of musicians
- c. processes and approaches of orchestrators
- d. analysis of orchestral works

*In the first few minutes, I use the term "organic orchestration." This is a forward refer-ence to my video in which I introduce the elements of Texture, Balance, & Function. I make a distinction between that approach and "paint-by-the-numbers orchestration," essentially using well-worn methods of organizing sounds on a page.*

### II. The Benefits of Craft

- a. saving time, leading to increased capacity for professional work
- b. being honest about the capabilities of performers
- c. instant, instinctive access to knowledge that removes creative barriers
- d. delivering the goods on time and in shape

### III. The Consequences of Ignoring Craft

- a. poorly arranged, unplayable music
- b. scores that are hard to understand for players and conductors
- c. sacrificing the practical on behalf of the personal
- d. not being able to compose or orchestrate professionally

*I finished the video by pointing out that intense study of a great work of music, in this case "The Rite of Spring" (Le Sacre du Printemps) by Igor Stravinsky, could teach one an enormous amount about craft. However, that education has to be guided by access to other resources, such as Orchestration Manuals, attendance at orchestral rehear-sals, and personal contact with musicians.*

### REFERENCES

#### Orchestration manuals and writings

My website's page:

<http://orchestrationonline.com/resources/books/>

Orchestration Online playlist:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-\\_ztT5LrjJA&list=PLAB740B91A28110EC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_ztT5LrjJA&list=PLAB740B91A28110EC)

## Part 2: Elements of Craft

*This video and the next were made a few weeks after the first, and were essentially just one long spontaneous talk about craft and resources, but split into two topics. Like the above, they might be updated someday, adding more visuals and music.*

*Something that I should stress here in the notes is that these are some elements of craft, not all. Craft really is a towering subject, with aspects flowing from one topic to another, making it hard to lay down any hard boundaries between some definitions. The elements covered here are those that I felt worth stressing to a developing composer, which might not be covered in their formal course of study. Once again, this is an overview rather than a step-by-step course on each topic.*

### I. Horizontal Continuity

- the linear aspect of each musician's part
- the importance that it makes sense all the way through the score
- check for variety, meaning, significance of musician's role
- the use of preliminary bars to help musicians warm up for featured passages
- writing with the enjoyment of the player in mind, rather than the composer's ego

### II. Instrumentation

- "intuitive knowledge...that respects the performer's strengths and limitations"
- attaining specialized knowledge that is shared by each player and section
- realistic understanding of extended techniques
- analyzing level of technical and emotional demands in a score

*As an example of the last point, I talked about the difficulty for an orchestra in playing Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony convincingly because of the emotional and technical demands. One of the best performances of this symphony I've ever heard was by a youth orchestra, who played with enormous conviction and skill in the 1st and 2nd movements. Unfortunately, they almost completely used themselves up, and had serious problems in the remaining movements - more proof that these factors need attention.*

### III. Literacy (of Orchestral Music)

- score-reading the established repertoire
- familiarity of orchestration techniques through history
- study early examples of music, from the Renaissance through the Baroque
- also study modern works, film scores, chamber music, etc.

*I'd add to the above to really listen to everything: sounds of nature, acoustic spaces, electronic music and soundscapes, machinery, and so on. I've set dog barks to music.*

### IV. Inner Ear

- the main point is to save time, like all other bits of musicianship training
- mental hearing: the ability to internally hear notes on a page of score
- processing of notes becomes faster and more universal
- eventually one can get an instantaneous impression of what's on a page

*I mention in an annotation that you don't have to be Mozart to gain this ability. Start with progressive courses in sight-singing, and combine them with intensive score-reading. Later in this course, I'll discuss how the inner ear and your audial imagination can help you to compose mentally, using an internal orchestra.*

### V. Score and Parts Preparation

- a score is a set of instructions for conductors - respect them!
- parts should be intelligently laid out
- use classic scores for examples of layouts, split systems, and legibility
- "automatic" parts still need proof-reading, as does your score

### REFERENCES

Tchaikovsky, Symphony no. 5: free score on IMSLP

[http://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony\\_No.5,\\_Op.64\\_\(Tchaikovsky,\\_Pyotr\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.5,_Op.64_(Tchaikovsky,_Pyotr))

## Part 3: Personal Resources

*UPDATE: My equipment hasn't changed too much since 2009, except that I now use a 2011 Macbook Pro, and Brother printer that can handle A3 and US Ledger-sized paper. I still favor B4 and US Legal paper size for most normal-sized scores.*

*This video got a few viewers' backs up, who still preferred pen and ink. I personally love to write by hand, and I've even done it professionally, but I simply don't have time to do it anymore. Using a computer increases my speed of scoring by a factor of ten, not even mentioning parts. So when I say "it's just not happening anymore," I mean at the level where a copyist or orchestrator expects to earn a decent living - not that no one should ever put a pen to paper ever again.*

### I. Equipment

- computer and notation software (Finale, Sibelius, etc.)
- MIDI keyboard or other interface
- broadband internet access
- speakers and/or headphones
- decent printer
- sound sets, if mockups are crucial to work - but don't rely on them!

*When I first filmed this chapter, broadband internet hadn't quite become the standard. Built-in sound sets on notation software were pretty squeaky and non-professional. Since then, quality has increased in almost every direction. But the thing that never changes is your own imagination as the fastest, most powerful tool for composing, that doesn't need the crutch of sound sets. I cannot stress this enough: do not rely on the sound of your plug-ins while orchestrating! If you do, your scores will never sound any better than those samples. More information on this ahead in the video...*

### II. Study Scores and Recordings

- sources for free recordings: public/university libraries, YouTube, Ogg Vorbis
- sources for free scores: public/university libraries, IMSLP.org
- other sources on the cheap: used book stores, yard sales, Dover publications

### III. Orchestration Manuals

- every orchestrator must own and use an authoritative manual
- IMO, the most up-to-date is Samuel Adler's "The Study of Orchestration"
- please see REFERENCES of Part 1 for links and videos

### IV. Practical Musical Skills

- may help with expressing a musical idea to a client
- a good way to work out ideas by improvising
- helps to give back some of what a composer is always giving away

*Of course, being able to play in an orchestra, lead an ensemble, or even conduct your own film cues is always a great skill. Most great composers were also performers of their own work. I personally don't have the time anymore, but I'm still active musically for my own work and enjoyment.*

### V. Cultivate Your Imagination

- perhaps the most important resource of all - your musical brain
- daydreaming and tinkering on musical ideas is essential
- ideas should come from within before they're scored
- musical imagination can harness a whole internal orchestra to help compose
- all of this takes time, and often resembles laziness

*This last point is really the most important, and merits its own series of videos, even a television program on the level of Carl Sagan's "Cosmos." The way the mind works on creative goals is individual to each of us, but universal to our humanity and ability to simply communicate. Ultimately, gaining intellectual resources in musicianship leads to a well-ordered, powerful engine for new musical ideas. Every skill and experience can build towards that goal, if accompanied by a great deal of willpower, patience, talent, and intelligence.*

*Where to start? Score-read, score-read, score-read!!!*

## Part 4: Texture, Balance, & Function

*This video should be considered a preview to a series of lectures on the subject which I've given recently to the Composers Association of New Zealand. These lectures are available as a playlist on the Orchestration Online YouTube Channel.*

*It's a simple concept that contains enormous ramifications, and goes to the core of how we experience and make sense of the world around us. Each element contains different facets within it, like psychoacoustics, harmonic resonance, dynamic relationships, timbral individualization, motion, and form. They don't stand alone, but operate precisely because of their interdependency rather than in spite of it. While in a sense they apply to all sounds and even the entire range of sensation, texture, balance, and function are particularly useful in analyzing and orchestrating music. As tools, they have a certain reductive and even predictive power.*

*Someday, I hope to write a book about both the greater scope of these elements, and also their usefulness in quickly grasping the essence of a musical score or series of sounds. For now, though, check out that playlist. I do appreciate hearing how this applies to the way my viewers process music - please let me know.*

### I. Introduction

- a. these elements each essential to good orchestration
- b. orchestras function like a organism made of living people
- c. when one element is ignored, the score suffers:
  - lack of balance makes musical lines and textures slosh together
  - insensitively conceived textures make scores sound synthetic
  - lack of foresight in functional scoring is hard on players and listeners

### II. Texture

- a. vertical aspect: the character of instruments played together
- b. combinations of timbres are the key to creating orchestral color
- c. the way in which texture changes is important, not just one frozen moment

### III. Balance

- a. “the dynamic and timbral relationship between instruments that allow the functions of each part to be clearly heard”
- b. is about landscape, both dynamic and stereophonic
- c. isn't just contrasts of loud and soft; it's also about interrelationships
- d. most effective at bringing out the emotional contours of a score

### IV. Function

- a. the musical role each part plays in the orchestra, sectionally or individually
- b. the horizontal aspect which informs horizontal continuity (see Part 2)
- c. includes harmonic progression, melody, rhythm, counterpoint, part-writing, etc.
- d. well-written part satisfying to musician, helps clarify other functions in a score

### V. Who Cares?

- a. helps to define roles in a score, avoiding all-too-frequent clichés
- b. ear can be trained to recognize textural elements more precisely
- c. off-balance scoring can be prevented
- d. helps to “hear around” the playback of notation software
- e. helps the composer to think critically about the usefulness of each part

### REFERENCES

Lectures on Texture, Balance, and Function

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLleBmAodXliNt6E\\_wdzeGHhS3qmFjEqyB](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLleBmAodXliNt6E_wdzeGHhS3qmFjEqyB)

Gustav Holst, The Planets: free score on IMSLP

[http://imslp.org/wiki/The\\_Planets,\\_Op.32\\_\(Holst,\\_Gustav\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Planets,_Op.32_(Holst,_Gustav))



## Part 5: The Orchestrator At Work

*The thing I remember most about this video is how I was so hugely busy at the time, and yet how making the video weaved seamlessly into the fabric of my commission. I simply filmed what I was doing, scripted the process, and then put the video together on the fly. Though I look a bit disheveled and sound a bit groggy, I still feel this video is one of my better efforts. And I've always liked that March from "Sylvia."*

*In the past 8 months, I've done four commissions in a row that went at an even faster pace than the education concert I was working on here: a rock opera orchestration, a 5-hour radio series, another education concert, and a monumental crossover arranging job for the 2014 Mission Estate Concert. I kept a diary through that last commission, which you can read all about on my Orchestration Online website blog. It goes into far more detail than this short video, and discusses many aspects of the process. As I caution in an annotation at the start, this video is not about the artistic process, but instead covers the practical aspects of undertaking a commission.*

### I. The Contract

- a. a basic stipulation before any work is done, and only accepted if there is time
- b. created through consultation with orchestra manager from my proposal
- c. standard payment of 50% advance, 50% upon completion
- d. salient points: exact instrumentation of orchestra and length of music
- e. contracted to supply a completed score, PDF parts, and a script

### II. The Commission

- a. a 1-hour extravaganza for children ages 2-6 for orchestra and narrator
- b. program includes "catchy" classics, kid's songs, and big-band jazz numbers
- c. music must be carefully programmed to:
  - catch and hold attention - scoring simple tunes is anything but simple
  - length of music must be short and to the point
  - works must be scored to maintain a level of projection above audience noise
  - existing classical works must be rescored as above

### My Setup

- a. 2009 Macbook (as noted in Part 3, now a 2011 Macbook Pro)
- b. M-Audio Keystation 88-key MIDI keyboard to input pitch data
- c. computer monitor speakers
- d. loop for internal audio processing (I now use audio capture software)
- e. Audacity application for transposition or slowing tempo down for transcription
- f. Samsung vertical screen for full-page score view
- g. 250GB hard drive for project storage (now a 1 TB drive)
- h. printer/scanner/copier for US Legal size paper (now a Brother printer A3 size)
  - note: preferred paper size is US Legal or B4 for most projects

*The point I make after all this is that my gear is fairly simple and relatively cheap. My investment is mainly in personal musical skills, so I don't need expensive gear.*

### Scoring

- a. music can have various sources
  - CD's from my collection or from the library
  - YouTube clips
  - my own memory of a song or melody
  - web searches for different versions of lyrics
  - original score of an orchestral work
  - sheet music (but my ear is getting to be the main source nowadays)
- b. consult with presenter for vocal ranges to pick a good key signature
- c. also work out what are good general keys for child sing-alongs
- d. script is the ultimate guide, and the music is adjusted to allow for dialogue
- e. music is scored in one combined Sibelius file, to allow for easy part extraction

*I don't use these procedures in every commission. In a crossover concert, I usually make standalone versions of each song, and let the orchestra librarian worry about bookletting parts and so on. This is because the artists often change their minds about song order, or shuffle songs around over the course of a tour.*

## Part 5 (cont.)

*Also, in a crossover situation, I usually rely on the most current live recording of the artist, as vocal ranges tend to shift downwards over the course of a career - by two to three semitones. Sometimes these recordings are supplied by management, and sometimes are up on YouTube.*

### Scoring Louis Jordan

- a. Choo Choo Ch'Boogie fits the "trains and transport" theme of concert
- b. transcription of 7-piece band to full orchestra
- c. french horns cover piano offbeat chords, but get a break later in score
- d. trumpets and trombones play swing band riffs and breaks
- e. clarinetist plays alto sax for a more authentic swing sound
- f. winds play train-whistle riffs during chorus
- g. The intro and outro are very big and train-like

### Wrapping Up

- a. script and score to be finished within 2 weeks
- b. draft given to conductor, presenter, and orchestra manager for approval
- c. any changes made as per instructions, then parts are extracted
- d. score printed last, after parts have been thoroughly edited
- e. final meetings with presenter and conductor follow, then I attend rehearsals and performances
- f. Balance of contract is also paid

*Nowadays, I usually ask the orchestra to print the score. B4 is a pretty common paper size for a European or Australasian orchestra to have sitting around the office, and they're happy to print it out.*

### REFERENCES:

Diary of an Orchestrator: Mission Estate Project

<http://orchestrationonline.com/blog/>

## Part 6: Biggest Mistakes

*Please note that these are more typical faults of approach than specific flaws in scoring. The latter might include such common errors as scoring piano-like parts for harp, or over-indulging in double- and triple-stops for strings. But those topics should and will be covered in my Orchestration Online E-book Training Series, that will explore scoring orchestral strings, winds, brass, percussion, harp, and keyboards.*

*This video addresses more generalized, seemingly universal errors. As I note in my intro and outro, though, it's not necessarily a bad thing to make mistakes. I made a lot of these as a composer-in-training. If you recognize them, then you can develop into a stronger artist.*

### I. Unconscious Borrowing

- a. Problem: inadvertently quoting melodies or passages from another composer
- b. Cause: having too narrow a range of influences
- c. Solution: musical literacy - a broader range will help prevent emulation of any one influence, and help the composer to listen for accidental copying

*Some viewers really got bent out of shape over this one. Reasoning with them in the comments section of the view page didn't seem to work. I realize what the problem was: deep down, they felt attacked because their range of influences was very much focused on one composer, like Chopin or Grieg. To suggest that somehow they needed to listen to other composers was very scary and insulting, almost like saying they should dump their girlfriends/boyfriends and start dating around. To that way of thinking, a polite observation about broadening influences equals an insult to their sense of musical taste. But it wasn't intended as such.*

*One point I made in the comments really carries the weight of the argument about this problem: "suppose you unconsciously borrow a work that is not only under copyright, but heavily protected? And suppose the piece that you write is done for a commercial or film soundtrack? You could be not only making a huge headache for your director, but also hurting your own reputation. So watch out..."*



## Part 6 (cont.)

### II. Unbalanced Scoring

- a. Problem: scores in which some voices can't be heard and others are too loud
- b. Causes: mixed recordings, especially from films, that balance textures in a way impossible in a live situation; playback from notation software that can make a well-balanced score sound bad, and a badly balanced score sound terrific
- c. Solution: a realistic grasp of the strength and character of the registers of each instrument and section; base instincts on live performance rather than mixes; use internal orchestra as a guide, not notation software playback

*Since this video was shot, the quality of notation software playback sounds and systems has improved quite a bit. But in my view, this just compounds the problem. In order to really capture the infinite subtlety and variety of 80-100 live performers, you would have to spend weeks of time programming and tweaking a track - time much better spent composing or networking in order to get a live performance.*

### III. Uninteresting Textures

- a. Problem: the sound of the orchestration lacks life and energy
- b. Causes: fixation on the musical idea rather than the flavor of the moment or color of the sound picture; inexperience or overly-conservative approach to orchestration
- c. Solution: score-read, score-read, score-read! Use color to underline tension and release; realize emotion through expressions of line, color, and contrast; use all the elements to move music forwards

*I tend to see this problem the most in scores where a beginning composer will attempt to compose in a huge idiom as their first effort: "Grand Symphony no. 1, op. 1 in C# minor." The focus will usually rest on trying to be another Beethoven, with themes, motives, developments, and so on, with huge parts of the orchestra going unused for many many bars. It's a very strong argument for a beginner to compose short works, sketches, and experiments, rather than huge works right out of the gate.*

### IV. Unnecessary Efforts

- a. Problem: music that musicians can barely play, rather than play well
- b. Causes: unfamiliarity and apathy toward the attitudes, working life, and daily challenges of a working musician; inexperience with the consequences of composing unplayable scores (that nobody will want to play them, right?)
- c. Solution: knowledge about each player's capacity and limitations; composing music that they will want to play, and find themselves within rather than being locked out

*I always feel a great deal of pride in a work when the musicians like it. But you don't need to write too simply in order to get a musician to approve of your music. In fact, they appreciate a challenge, even music that doesn't seem to make sense at first, just so long as they eventually see the point of putting some effort into it. My piece "Battle of the Mountains" was questioned at first by the string players of its premiering orchestra - but once they heard the mockup, they became the strongest supporters of the work.*

### Lack of Emotional or Intellectual Depth

- a. Problem: timidity, blandness, or vapidness in scoring
- b. Cause: lack of life experience and exposure to culture
- c. Solution: broaden range of experience, cultural contacts, and exposure to art of different styles, periods, and countries - in short, improve your frickin' mind!

*Interestingly, no one objected to this point at all, though it's closely related to problems of unconscious borrowing and uninteresting textures. The truth of it is that deep down, most artists know that running off to some exotic country or teeming metropolis will stir their muse to greatness; simply because of the novelty and expansion of cultural information. I can safely say that it happened to me, and continues to inspire my world view and creativity. Even just getting out of the house occasionally, or learning to treasure the subtleties and magic of the small place you call home can be enough to stir the pot. It's all in how you open your ears and eyes.*

**Part 6 (cont.)****VI. Hysteria or Over-Intellectualism**

- a. Problem: bashing the listener over the head with your emotions, or speaking down to them from a lofty peak of obvious intellectual superiority
- b. Causes: self-indulgence, and misunderstanding of the needs of the listener
- c. Solution: a sense of proportion and artistic maturity that balances the forces of emotion and intellect

*This problem isn't confined to music students, but reaches all the way to the highest levels of academic achievement, especially over-intellectualism. Different theoretical approaches to music become more important than the actual musical content. Some-times, emotionalism can also be channeled theoretically, resulting in sprawling works of maximalism; some fantastically conceived, others merely an unrelenting earache. But I've got nothing against "isms" and/or theoretical approaches, so long as they reveal the humanity of the composer rather than burying it under a pile of rubbish.*

**VII. Clichéd or Derivative Scoring**

- a. Problem: intentionally sounding like other composers
- b. Cause: inspiration and validation modeled on favorite influences, a common aspect of artistic growth
- c. Solution: make yourself into your own favorite composer; learn to detect what is original in your works, and refine that voice as you compose more works

*I didn't have time to mention how this derivative approach creeps into everything in the commercial world. Directors are themselves fans of certain genres of film, and are no less aware of the great composers and film cues of great cinema. They also have strong musical tastes and preferences, and will often force a composer to rewrite the temp music from a working edit of the film. In fact, the director will pace the footage right to the temp music, so that none of the composer's own ideas will work - instead, he must rewrite Mahler's 7th Symphony and Holst's Planets. I myself once had to rewrite the Dave Brubeck Quartet's "Take 5." So think about that the next time you hear a film composer ripping off a classic cue or opus - they might have had no choice.*

**VIII. Uninformed Instrumentation**

- a. Problem: poor placement of instruments within textures; instruments treated like random elements in a badly painted sound picture; instruments playing out of ideal range, or with lack of strength or sensitivity
- b. Causes: unfamiliarity or apathy about the people who have to play the score, their musical culture and motivations, and a general incompetence with instrumentation
- c. Solution: embrace the essence of each player's possibilities; become more aware of what they value and what motivates them as musicians (and crack an orchestration book while you're at it!)

*This really is a huge problem, and one that I really can't relate to. The world of musical instruments is just so fascinating - everything that they can do, how they evolved, what relation to other instruments, various methods of sound production, and the approach and attitudes of those who play them - I can't understand how one could imagine being a great orchestrator and not wanting to know everything they could about it.*

**IX. Synthetic-Sounding Scores**

- a. Problem: over-idealized and/or repetitive scores that lack humanity
- b. Causes: relationship of software to scoring and conception of orchestral sound; also ease of cutting and pasting
- c. Solution: not to make too many judgements about taste or musical direction, but only to observe that most attempts to impose an artificial framework onto an orchestra have failed in the past; so watch out for this trend, and try to respect the player and the listener while you find your own voice.

*The video ends with personal perspective about making many of these errors myself. How I solved them helped me to find my own unique voice. I've revised some works to make them more useful at this point in my career. But I've abandoned others - which can be liberating. Don't make the path of self-improvement a negative one. "Instead of saying 'what am I doing wrong?' always ask yourself, 'What could I do better?'"*

## Part 7: Career Advice

*This isn't specific advice about building a career in music with contacts, training, and education - for that, check out Part 8 below. Rather, it's the kind of advice you might get from a mentor after your first premiere, long after your admirers have all gone home, and it's the two of you over a pint just before the last call. These bits of advice are the kinds of things that mentors think when they see their prize pupils about to take a bite out of that apple - and they want their own personal history to point the way to wiser choices.*

*In my case, I've limited my advice to things that are universal, both to composers specifically, and to artists in a more broad sense. These are pointers that I don't feel are subjective. "It depends" does not apply here - unless you truly want to be an over-apologetic, self-important, out-of-touch composer who's completely detached from reality, not to mention society. In that case, ignore this video and move along. Greatness and immortality are calling, no sense slowing things down. Your public awaits you, and the engravers want to know what you want on your plaque. The rest of us will be hanging out over here if you ever change your mind, and you'll be welcomed back with no questions asked...*

### I. Examine Your Motives

- a. why do you want to be a composer?
- b. success, wealth, and artistic immortality are not sustaining goals
- c. a lifelong career in composition must arise from deep personal and creative impulses, that cannot be easily silenced
- d. contrary to legend, great artists who attained personal success were mostly practical, meticulous people
- e. the first great freelance composers established a new way that artists could survive without royal patronage, which survives to this day: commissions, performances, publishing, and creative interactions
- f. the above is what's worth living for - not fame, wealth, or immortality - because the level of satisfaction with work has rewards much greater than these things

*At the start of this topic, I quote the eternal Socrates adage: "The unexamined life is not worth living." And it really is true. I'm a student of musical history, especially the lives of the great composers. As a presenter for Radio New Zealand, I frequently dash the legends of these figures while discovering even more compelling truths about them that make them more comprehensible and relevant to our times. The problem is that young composers tend to believe in the legends and dismiss the realities - and this leads to a lot of incorrect assumptions, personal turmoil, and disappointment. A side effect is also Attitude with a capital "A" - "my hero acted like a jerk according to legend, therefore I am going to act like a jerk, and I expect to not only get away with it, but be celebrated for it." No, not really. There are already too many people like that in this world. Be remarkable for not being that way, and you'll be loved and not hated.*

### II. Learn to Walk Before You Fly

- a. many young composers try to be great before they are good; trying to compose symphonies before attempting smaller forms, or full-length film scores before cuing a few shorts or student films
- b. huge, over-the-top works slow down a young composer's career at precisely the moment in which they should be gaining momentum; the time it takes to compose such works could be better spent on establishing one's voice and making essential artistic connections
- c. accept that works of maturity are more capably composed when one has gained the appropriate amount of perspective and credibility to support them
- d. "Build your career one artistic act at a time - and try to make each act count!"

*And despite this advice, I still get huge, sprawling works from teen composers in my inbox. I absolutely applaud their enormous drive and optimism, and to be honest many of these works have very inspired pages of scoring. But even if the entire work is of the highest level of craft and ingenuity, these composers will still face the reality that no one will be likely to perform their work because of its length and its author's lack of established name. This all worries me - so I really can't stress this enough: compose those types of works most likely to lead to exponentially greater creative acts.*



## Part 7 (cont.)

### III. Be a Part of Everything

- the most important word on a typical grant proposal is “community” - composers who are getting the most attention are engaging with their communities
- artistic isolation is no longer a practical model for a career composer
- some of my own favorite works were composed as dedications, memorials, or educational pieces about music, culture, and ecology
- relationships with audience, performers, and organizations have sustained me personally as well as artistically, and encouraged me to greater levels of involvement and inspiration
- know who you are writing for, and be a part of the audience at your premiere

*This advice is not restricted to grant proposals, by the way. The bulk of my commissions comes directly from other sources: orchestras, film composers, songwriters, and artist management. But they still represent communities of artist and listener.*

### IV. Know Your Parameters

- the 3 parameters of professional composers: time, knowledge, and inspiration
- for any kind of project, the amount of time and effort must be determined in advance
- a professional must always have a contract for any formal commission; because composers have been taken for granted throughout history
- in semi-pro exchange-type commissions, have a clear agreement in place
- composers should always be mentioned in promotional materials and concert programs, whether one is commissioned or not
- the best work I have ever gotten out of musicians was when they were paid - the worst has always been when they were doing me a favor for free (this does not include the many dedicated amateur and youth ensembles who put everything they had into performing my works)
- “In conclusion: get paid; pay others; work out exactly what you are supposed to be doing; and do it so well that they want to work with you again every chance that they get. That’s one short definition of being a professional.

*There’s simply nothing worse than working without a contract. I’ve had experiences where I’d been assured of a great deal of prestigious work with a fixed deadline, and then had the client go incommunicado at the very moment when contracts should be signed, work assigned, e-mails exchanged, and so on. Situations like this happen because the people involved don’t understand what you need in order to be involved with their project. That is why you should learn how to politely bring up the topic of contracts and invoicing immediately, and make the client want to prioritize payment as a matter of course. The alternative is that you never quite get your career off the ground, and the entire culture of respect to performers and composers gets eroded.*

### V. Don’t Apologize!

- apologies in advance of creative information projects insecurity
- “It’s no way for a professional to act. Never take it for granted that the audience is not going to like your music.”
- apologizing on behalf of past performers is toxic - future performers will know that they’ll get the same treatment from you
- just make it very clear what it is that you are presenting, whether professional or amateur, because those who are worth working with will understand (and you’re better off not working with those who don’t!)

*I find that artists get most apologetic around other established artists. We don’t want to blow our own horns too much, because that would put us above the people whose friendship we cherish and rely upon. And there’s also insecurity - we can give the most brilliant speech or present the most amazing piece of music - and then afterwards not be sure whether it was a success. I’m just as guilty of this as anyone, so think of this as a lifelong question that will return again in many different ways over the course of a career. The best way around it is always humility, which in our case means to let the work be great rather than its composer, who’s just a human being and happy to stay that way. Let it speak for itself, and let the audience make up its own mind about it. Then it will be your choice whether to accept the praise or condemnation that follows.*

## Part 8: Developing Your Skill Set

*This video is pretty much the apex of my video production skills. It took quite a while to conceive, script, edit, and assemble, and I still think it's one of the best. It's interesting to compare it to Parts 1-3 of this series of Intro videos. It returns to some of the points I made there, but illustrates them in new ways and different contexts. I really enjoyed the whole process of presenting this information, and wish that I could do it all year long. But it's always so much faster to just do the work rather than talk about it!*

### Introduction

- a. the five essential resources of a working orchestrator:
  - a body of work
  - a professional network
  - expertise with tools of craft
  - musical literacy
  - a well-developed internal workshop
- b. other strengths are also evident in certain colleagues, like non-arrogant self-promotion, or good grant-writing skills; but no orchestrator with staying power lacks the first five I mentioned
- c. before working orchestrators went professional, potential for these resources were manifest in the following qualities, respective to the list above:
  - strong creative impulses
  - communication or "people skills"
  - adeptness at writing or using a computer
  - ease with reading notation
  - great musical aptitude
- d. "aptitude" doesn't equal "talent," but is more of a tendency to process music
- e. all of this potential must be accompanied by a strong sense of desire and application - "Each day that you live has to revolve around your music - not your music around the day."

*Time and again I see these five characteristics in my colleagues. They're calling cards: "I've composed this, worked with that person, use this approach, and love that style."*

### I. Creativity

- a. the urge to be creative orchestrally, the height of musical art in my opinion
- b. this urge should be indulged, whether using technology or just your own ear
- c. the best first step is to collaborate with other musicians and artists
- d. "find a decent musician, compose them a work, get feedback from them and learn about their instrument. Rinse and repeat."
- e. eventually, the effect tends to snowball, with more requests, then eventually commissions (but no guarantees - everyone's skill level, motivation and circum-stances are different)

*As I mention in the video, this process and others will be discussed in Part 9: Getting Performed. But suffice to say for now that this is how most composers get to where we are, through working with musicians that help us gain perspective and experience, not to mention a certain level of name recognition (for whatever that's worth!).*

### II. Communication

- a. people skills; or, "the words with which to describe your ideas, the courage to propose them and stick up for them, and the patience and wisdom to get along when people are callous and competitive."
- b. artistic activities help you to define yourself to both yourself and your audience
- c. doing this adds the fabric of culture, and connects you to others, leading ultimately to a professional network
- d. this stream feeds the development path of getting commissions, and vice versa

*The week before a group of young composers under my mentorship were to have their works performed, I had them work on how they'd present them to a moderator. The result was that the works were discussed with confidence, and left a deep impression on the adult members of the sponsoring composers forum. In a way, art is all about communication. Knowing how to explain what you're doing deepens the audience's appreciation of your work, and builds important professional relationships.*

**Part 8 (cont.)****III. Craft**

- a. the ability to notate effectively - from ink on vellum to notation software
- b. the path to this is score preparation
  - a coherent score that conductors find easy to use
  - parts help to ensure successful performances and rehearsals
  - editing for both the big picture and the tiny but essential details
- c. using these professional standards leads to expertise with notation software
- d. experienced orchestrators put pressure on software developers to improve their applications to professional engraving standards
- e. today's composers learn to score from notation software - that's why training in the established process and principles of arranging and score preparation is so essential
- f. "It's important to be accurate, coherent, mindful, and quick - that will give you scores that build your credibility with your colleagues, and add to your growing body of work at a faster pace."

*I cannot stress the importance of craft enough here. How did I end up where I am today? The short answer is craft: I care deeply about it and apply it in my day's work. Mastery of orchestration isn't mentioned above, but also applies here.*

**IV. Literacy**

- a. the foundation for this is strong notation skills, necessary for orchestration
- b. build on this by learning to perceive many events taking place at once
- c. Score-read, score-read, score-read! "But more than this, let your capacity for understanding the structure of concert music inform how you absorb other genres and musical cultures."
- d. this approach stimulates musical literacy, leading to heightened perception about motivations, commonalities, and the universal fabric of music
- e. within that tapestry, it becomes easier to define and isolate your individual voice as a composer: a "life's work that stands on its own, yet is a part of everything around it."

*Notice that I keep approaching musical literacy from different directions. Lack of it cripples your imagination and sense of identity as a composer, no matter how much you love your influences. Someone who only listens to Dvorak will never be able to say anything that he hadn't said. But you can love Dvorak and find new things to say about his approach if you are your own person. A personality is built by exposure to many many people; or in the case of a musical personality, exposure to many many different musical voices.*

**Musicality**

- a. your personal relationship to the very idea of music
- b. this can be developed in basic ways, like the ability to remember simple music
- c. through training, your abilities might someday encompass:
- d. memorization of large passages of music or even whole orchestral works
- e. sight-reading and sight-singing in every key
- f. mental hearing of full orchestral scores
- g. mentally resynthesizing passages of original symphonic music
- h. "Strengthening your inner ear goes hand in hand with a heightened sense of musical literacy, and contributes greatly to the success of all your other potential resources."

*I really like the last paragraph of script: "All of this takes time, but it buys you the type of life equipment that never becomes obsolete - though it may need an update from time to time. Once you get a certain momentum going, then your new understanding of music adds to itself, using your own unique character and experience as a guide. That will only help you on the road to originality."*

*Finalizing all these notes has really made me want to finish this series! When I do, I'll update these notes so you can have further reference if it's needed. See you all soon.*