

Course outline: Composing for Film & Television

The MFA in Composing for Film & Television is a specialisation within the broader **MFA in Film, Television and Games**.

The course is shaped progressively over two years. Students initially focus on establishing a strong technical and creative foundation. They then progress through modules which gradually increase in scale and ambition - ultimately leading to the final graduation projects.

Within this framework there is a particular emphasis on guided collaborative projects, in which the composers work with other NFTS students. This includes working very closely with directors and alongside the editors and sound designers as an integral part of the post production team. This provides a great deal of practical experience working on a varied and wide range of projects.

Composing students also have supportive creative and technical tuition in subjects such as orchestration, workflow and delivery of music, software specific sessions and multiple opportunities to record in a world class studio with professional session musicians.

Year One - Modules

The first year contains 6 assessed modules. These are all collaborative projects which involve the composers working alongside students from other departments at the NFTS. These projects grow in ambition, scale, and level of collaboration as they progress throughout the year and are supported through tutorials and review sessions.

- Module 1 – Beyond The Frame
- Module 2 – Without Images
- Module 3 – Moment of Truth
- Module 4 – Without Words
- Module 5 – First Year Film
- Module 6 – Science & Natural History First Year Film.

Module 1 - Beyond The Frame

A collaborative project across Composing, Sound Design, Editing and led by the Documentary Directing students. The teams make a short film (approximately 3-5 mins length), based thematically on an emotion that they have chosen from a poem, artwork, personal experience, or elsewhere. This project focusses on collaboration and the exploration of the creative possibilities of film language, and in particular the relationship between image, sound and music.

Module 2 - Without Images

This is a collaborative project across Screenwriting, Sound Design and Composing in which the teams make a short audio feature (approximately 8-10 minutes length), with the aim to experiment with storytelling in sound.

Module 3 - Moment Of Truth

This is a collaborative project led by Directing Documentary, and across Editing, Sound Design and Composing. Each team will collaborate to make a short film (approx. 5-10mins length) from material shot by the Directing Documentary students, focussing on a defining moment in a subject's life.

Module 4 – Without Words

A collaborative project led by Directing Fiction students and across Cinematography, Editing, Sound Design, Composing, Location Sound Recording and Assistant Directing. The students will create a

short film (approx. 4mins length) within strict parameters (maximum 100 words of dialogue and 2 rolls of 16mm film). Students are encouraged to experiment with cinematic time to create a coherent story where staging, image and sound are used to their fullest potential.

Module 5 – First Year Film

This is a collaborative project led by the Directing Fiction students and across Producing, Screenwriting, Cinematography, Production Design, Editing, Sound Design, Composing, Location Sound Recording, Production Management and Assistant Directing. The students will create a short film (approx. 15mins length).

Module 6 - Science and Natural History First Year Film

This is a collaborative project led by the Directing and Producing Science & Natural History students. The short film (approx. 10mins length) is shot and edited this term. Audio postproduction begins but is ultimately completed at the start of the 2nd Year.

Year Two - Modules

The second year contains 6 assessed modules. These are all collaborative projects and are supported through tutorials and review sessions.

- Module 7 – Question Documentary
- Module 8 – Digi Fiction Film
- Module 9 – Documentary Graduation Film
- Module 10 – Fiction Graduation Film
- Module 11 – Science & Natural History Graduation Film
- Module 12 - Animation Graduation Film

Module 7 - Question

A short documentary film (approximately 15-20 minutes length) led by the Directing Documentary students. Each film attempts to answer a question about something significant in the world selected by each Directing Documentary student. The edit continues from the previous year, is locked and the track-lay and mixes take place in the first half of this term.

Module 8 - Digi Fiction

This is a guided collaborative project led by the Directing Fiction students and across Screenwriting, Cinematography, Production Design, Editing, Sound Design, Composing, Location Sound Recording, Production Management and Assistant Directing. The students will make a short, scripted fiction film (approximately 15 minutes length) shot on a digital format. Composers are expected to begin the collaborative process and begin feeding initial music sketches to the edit, which takes place this term.

Module 9 - Grad Documentary

A fully collaborative project, creating a short documentary film (approx. 15-20 mins length).

Module 10 - Grad Fiction

A fully collaborative project, creating a short fiction film (approx. 15-20 mins length).

Module 11 - Grad Science and Natural History

A fully collaborative project, creating a short science and natural history film (approx. 15-20 mins length).

Module 12 - Grad Animation

A fully collaborative project, creating a short animation film (approx. 5-10mins length).

Other Elements of the Course

Tutorials / Seminars / Workshops

These run concurrently with the assessed modules across the two years and focus on establishing a strong creative and technical foundation, aiming to develop and nurture the skills and understanding required to work within the industry as a professional media composer.

Fundamentals (1st Year)

Weekly sessions that focus on the core principles of composing for Film and Television.

Students are set clips to rescore from existing feature films or television shows in various genres. This work is then discussed in group session in which feedback is given by both the tutor and the other Composing students.

Additionally, these group sessions discuss wider topics such as how music is used in different films, editing theory, and strategies for dealing with the demands and collaboration of directors and producers.

Tech Fundamentals (1st and 2nd Year)

These fortnightly group sessions act as an introduction to essential technical aspects required to work as a composer for media, both at the NFTS and also moving forward within the industry. These include software specific topics, music production, mixing, workflow, deliverables, and technical preparation for professional recording sessions.

The aim of these sessions, for those who are new to the topics being covered, will be to provide a strong foundation from which to build on, and for those who are already more familiar with the topics, it will give them a chance to consolidate their understanding at a more fundamental level. Ultimately these sessions not only aim to highlight certain topics as essential areas of understanding but will also give the students a shared approach and point of reference moving forward together.

Orchestration (1st and 2nd Year)

Group classes and individual tutorials are both held fortnightly.

Group Classes are a core opportunity for score study, aurally and visually, to enhance the understanding of the manipulation of sounds, from whatever source, and to increase the ability to analyse and make use of the fine detail of orchestral/instrumental scores. Also, a refreshing break from creating output and, through protected time for concentrated listening, a valuable chance to enrich stores of inspiration for future use.

One-to One Tutorials are tailored according to interest and experience, in every aspect of sound combination, whether from samples, live players, created sounds, or any other source. Within the framework of preparing for the live recordings, the tutorials explore any element needed, from the understanding of good writing for instruments, to the development of expressive and appropriate notation. Sourcing references to assist in matching the ideas of directors is equally a part of the course.

Recording Sessions (1st and 2nd Year)

Students record twice each year at AIR Studios with a professional team and with professional session musicians. Specific brief and details are discussed in the supporting Orchestration tutorials, Technical Fundamentals and Fundamentals sessions.

Screen Arts (1st Year)

A series of talks, discussions and screenings which aim to encourage the students to explore, debate and reflect upon questions of creative practice. This is a cross-school programme designed to give students the opportunity to engage with the history, contemporary experience and wider culture of the moving image.

Masterclasses (1st and 2nd Year)

Leading professional composers are invited to talk about their work and experiences working within the industry.

“Introducing...” (1st and 2nd Year)

A series of seminars helping to define the key professional roles that operate within the music department and/or deal directly with a composer. A notable industry professional will talk to the students as a group to explain what their job actually is, and how that role interacts with the composer.

Bespoke Sample Libraries with Sonixinema (2nd Year)

Workshop focussing on learning how to make unique and individual bespoke sample libraries. These sessions are led by the commercial sample library company Sonixinema.

Music Editing (2nd Year)

Workshop focussing on music editing. The students will be given stems written and delivered by a composer for a professional project, which they will then re-work to generate new cues for other scenes later in the drama project.

Business Fundamentals (2nd Year)

Sessions that introduce budgeting, recording costs, royalties, publishing, and accounting matters.

Non-Assessed Collaborative Projects

Trimbin (1st Year)

Composers, Sound Designers and Editors are given 30 minutes of picture and sound trims (collected from various other films from past years) and work together in teams to edit a 3-minute film.

Sand Animation (1st Year)

The Composing students score three short films (approximately 1 minute each) that have been created by the Directing Animation students using the “sand animation” technique (a process in which sand is moved on a backlit lightbox to create each individual frame).

Character Of Place (1st Year)

A collaboration across Animation Directing, Production Design and Cinematography. Focussing on the understanding of how Design and Cinematography can help in visual storytelling. This is a fast turnaround of music composed over 36 hours for an animation using the pixelation technique (approx. 20-60 seconds length).

App Factory (1st Year)

This is a collaboration with Games Design & Development to make a completely playable, mechanics-driven game for a mobile device or for a mobile emulator and have a maximum playtime of 5 minutes.

Animatics (1st Year)

This is a collaborative project led by the Directing Animation students, in which the Composers score a short animatic that has been previously created by the Directing Animation students.

Moment Of Consequence (1st Year)

This is a collaborative project with Games Design & Development to create either a mechanics-driven or narrative-driven game, with no longer than 10 minutes in average playtime from start to end. It is based thematically on a “moment of consequence” i.e. before, during or after an emotive and meaningful event in human life. Composers are expected to collaborate throughout the creative process and deliver technically as required.

Grad Videogame (2nd Year)

Working individually or in a pair with another composer, you will collaborate with the Games Design & Development students to make a fully playable game or experience that will be showcased at EGX.

Dissertation

As part of your MFA you are required to submit a dissertation. You will work on this across the two years and will be supported by scheduled tutorials. There are two dissertation options:

- (1) a written dissertation of between 7,000 and 10,000 words; or
- (2) a video essay of between 15 and 20 minutes in duration.

The purpose of the dissertation is to give you the opportunity to undertake independent research, explore the nature of your discipline through working on a subject of your choice and increase your

knowledge of the creative aspects of film, television or games. It gives you the time and opportunity to think about and develop your ideas on the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of your work at the NFTS, and to reflect critically on your own and others' practice.