GarageBand Projects: Film Scoring
Session 3

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Midnight Music
Tips for film scoring success

An approach to film scoring

Step 1: Preliminary activities
Step 2: Basic film scoring project
Step 3: Intermediate film scoring project
Step 4: Advanced film scoring project (longer project)

Project #1 Car & Dog

GarageBand skills

Starting a Movie Project

Using the Movie template
Viewing the movie during playback
Playback
LCD Display

Sound effects

Car sound effects
Lining up the dog bark
Add the dog sound effect
Adding some music for mood
Edit the loop and create a fade-out
Create a contrasting mood

Finishing off

Basic mixing
Sharing your project

Project #2 The Train

Skills covered in Project #2

Blue Pullman video
A little ambience
Fade-ins and Fade-outs (adjusting Track Volume)
Add Drums and/or percussion
Create a driving rhythmic bass loop
Change instrument sound
Prepare to record
Record the bass part
Add your loop to the library
Fill out the part 13
Transpose 13
Sinister Drone 14
Optional extra 14

Project #3 Big Buck Bunny 14

Skills covered in Project #3 14
About this project 14
Decide hit points, mood and themes 15
Add sound effects 15
Create musical hit points 15
Compose bridging music 15

Homework 15
Tips for film scoring success

• Only use movies that you have permission to use
• Make the movies short - VERY short! Less than 30 secs for beginner activities. 1-3 mins for more advanced activities
• Edit the movie before importing it into GarageBand

An approach to film scoring

Step 1: Preliminary activities
• Lots of listening to program-style music
• Lots of watching scenes from movies
• Identify characteristics of different styles of mood music (happy, sad, dramatic, suspenseful)
• Discuss the role of the composer, where they fit into the film-making timeline and how they work

Step 2: Basic film scoring project
• Import movie into GarageBand
• Add sound effects and synch them to the movie (students learn how to synch sound/visuals)
• Add existing mood music (from loop library). Compare two or three options and discuss
• Extension options: create own sound effects

Step 3: Intermediate film scoring project
• Import movie into GarageBand
• Identify hit points and other significant music opportunities
• Add sound effects
• Have students “compose to a recipe”: provide a suggested structure (ie. at bar 9, create a 4-bar drone)
• Provide some free choice opportunities. Advanced/comfortable students can have more flexibility and free choice

Step 4: Advanced film scoring project (longer project)
• Import movie into GarageBand
• Identify hit points and other significant music opportunities
• List all the cues on a Cue Sheet, and include timing
• Add sound effects to the project
• Add musical hit points - use pitched or percussive instruments to create chords
• Compose musical themes or motifs to go with characters, places, or events
• Add music to bridge the hit points (ie. a drone, a heartbeat rhythm played by a drum)
• Compose music to bridge the themes
• Extension: limit student options - use only musical instruments to create sound effects (ie. a wood block for a nut dropping on the floor, glockenspiel for rain). Makes students think outside the square when it comes to sound

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**Project #1 Car & Dog**

**GarageBand skills**

I have done this project many times with students who have ranged in age from year 5 up to year 9 and with many teachers too! This project can work as a simple stand-alone activity, or as an introductory activity for a larger, more in-depth film-scoring project. It helps to start with a simple activity like this one so that students have the chance to learn the tech skills in addition to the musical skills.

The following GarageBand skills are covered in this project

• Importing a movie into GarageBand
• Playback
• Scrubbing
• Movie preview window
• Zooming to see more/less detail
• Using the loop browser
• Adding sound effects
• Adding time markers
• Adding music to create mood
• Shortening or lengthening a region
• Deleting a region
• Adding a volume envelope and creating a fade in or out
• Muting a track
Starting a Movie Project

Using the Movie template

Open GarageBand and click on New Project and choose Movie

- Give your project a title, leave the tempo, time signature and key signature settings as they are and click Create
- Locate the Car and Dog movie and drag it into timeline area (either from GarageBand’s Media browser or from the Finder window)
- Because this is a silent movie, you’ll see a message: “The Quicktime movie Car and Dog.AVI does not contain audio that GarageBand can play” – click OK

Viewing the movie during playback

The movie can now be played back like any other GarageBand project, but first we’ll open Movie Preview window by clicking on the picture in Movie Track header

Once the Movie Preview window is open, you can resize it by dragging the bottom right-hand corner and you can move it by clicking and dragging on the bar at the top of the window

Playback

You can play back the movie in a number of ways:

- Click on the playback buttons on the screen
- Use the Space bar to start and stop playback
- Use the Home and End keys to jump to start or finish
- Use the right and left arrow keys to move through the movie in small increments
- The size of the increment depends upon the zoom level you’re working in. Zoom in using the slider under the Track Headers area. Arrow left and right again to see the effect
**LCD Display**

The LCD display at bottom allows you to view five different modes: Time, Measures, Chord, Tuner and Project. Click on the icon on the left to change this now to Time mode.

**Sound effects**

Watch the movie through and think first of all about the sound effects we could use. Perhaps a car driving sound, a dog barking, a car stopping or crashing at the end.

**Car sound effects**

- Locate car sounds in your loop browser and click on each one to audition it. If you don’t have an appropriate car sound, you can download free sound effects from the internet.
- Find one you like and drag it to the Timeline area, underneath movie track. A new track will automatically be created. Make sure to drag the car sound all the way to the left so that it starts at the beginning of the movie.
- If the sound effect is very short, you may need to lengthen it so that it lasts the duration of the movie.
- Don’t forget that you can continue telling a story with sound after the movie ends: add some sound effects that let the viewer know what happened to the car after if disappeared from view (did it screech to a halt, stop gradually or crash?)
- Play back and watch the movie.

**Lining up the dog bark**

We’ll identify exact moment in the video by adding a hit point.

- First of all, turn off Snap to Grid by going to Control > Snap to Grid.
- Zoom in using slider under the Track headers area if you haven’t already.
- Play through the movie and press the space bar when you see the dog’s head move. “Scrub” through movie backwards or forwards frame by frame using the arrow keys until you find exact moment.
- Press P (which stands for hit point, but which GarageBand terms a “marker”). A yellow triangle will be added to the timeline, just above the movie track.
- Click on marker name in Edit window and rename it “Dog bark.”
Add the dog sound effect

- Double-click on Still Frame (picture) in Movie markers list to jump playback line to that marker
- Find a dog bark sound effect and drag into timeline. Drag it right up to the playback line
- Rewind and playback to check

Some editing
The dog bark effect I chose had repeated barking sounds and I wanted only a single bark, so I edited the effect to remove the unwanted sounds:

- Select the region and hover the mouse at bottom right of the region until it turns into the Resize pointer. Click and drag to the left to shorten the region and remove the unwanted barking sounds
- You can also shorten the region by editing the audio file in the Edit window so you can see more detail
- Rewind and play back to check

Adding some music for mood
Next, we’ll add some music to our movie. Think about what sort of mood you’d like to create for your movie.

- Open the Loop Browser and click on Orchestral. Audition the loops and when find one you like, drag it into the timeline area, underneath the other tracks
- What sort of mood does it create?

Edit the loop and create a fade-out

- If the loop you’ve chosen is too long for the movie, you can shorten the region as we did earlier
- You can also create a fade out so that the music doesn’t stop abruptly, by adding a “volume envelope” to that track and adjusting the sound levels
- Click on the small triangle under the track name (View/hide automation). The track volume info will appear. Click on the volume line to create points and drag the points to change the volume levels

Create a contrasting mood
Let’s try another music loop in a contrasting style. Mute the original track you chose by clicking on the mute button under the track name
• Audition some more orchestral loops and when you find one you like drag it into the track region, underneath your first choice
• Shorten it and create a fade-out if necessary
• Play back the movie
• What sort of mood does this music create?

Finishing off

Basic mixing
The final stage in our film-scoring process is to make sure all the levels of each different track (the sound effects and any music) are balanced with one another.
• Use the volume sliders on each track header to adjust overall track volume
• Use the Track Volume automation settings to adjust volume within a track
• You can also use the track automation settings to adjust panning (sound travelling left to right from one speaker to another)

Sharing your project
Once your project is complete, you can share it with others by going to the Share menu and choosing one of the options:
• Send to iTunes (this will allow you to play the movie with its soundtrack in iTunes)
• Send to iMovie for further editing
• Export Movie to Disk (choose this option if you want to save your finished movie to your computer’s hard drive)
• Burn it to CD (this will only capture the audio portion of your movie)

Project #2 The Train

Skills covered in Project #2
• Importing a movie into GarageBand
• Playback
• Scrubbing
• Movie preview window
• Zooming to see more/less detail
• Using the loop browser
• Adding sound effects
• Adding time markers
• Adding music to create mood
• Shortening or lengthening a region
• Deleting a region
• Adding a volume envelope
• Creating a fade out
• Creating a new software instrument
• Record MIDI using the Musical Typing window
• Creating your own loops & adding them to the library
• Transposing MIDI loops
• Muting a track

Blue Pullman video

Open GarageBand and click on New Project and choose Movie

• Give your project a title, leave the tempo, time signature and key signature settings as they are and click Create
• Locate the Blue Pullman movie and drag it into timeline area (either from GarageBand’s Media browser or from the Finder window)
• Because this is a silent movie, you’ll see a message: “The Quicktime movie Blue Pullman.AVI does not contain audio that GarageBand can play” – click OK

Once the movie is in GarageBand, play it through a couple of times. Brainstorm ideas about what sort of mood the movie invokes. Is there more than one answer?

We’ll create a suspense-style soundtrack to accompany our train video. There’s lots of background material you can share with your students before you embark upon a project like this. Spend some time listening to film music that accompanies suspense/horror scenes. Good - if somewhat clichéd - examples include the Jaws theme (John Williams) and the shower scene from Psycho (Bernard Hermann) and there are lots of others too.

Discuss the musical elements that create tension in these, and other films. Here’s a useful list from Torrington High School’s music technology course material (available online on their website):
• Repetition (of almost anything)
• Drones
• Jagged Articulations
• Dissonant Harmony
• Dramatic Devices
• Ascending Lines
• Increased Volume
• Extreme Register of Instruments
• Emphasis on Passing Tones
• Wide Intervals (especially ascending)
• Alternating Directions

A little ambience
Discuss the sorts of sound effects that could be used in this soundtrack. Don’t forget that you can use music and sound effects to enhance the story. Will the train crash at the end?

• Suggestions: train sound, door opening/closing, newspaper rustling, train horn, train crash
• You can scrub through the movie and add Markers at important points in the movie, so that you have a reference point (don’t forget to turn off Snap to Grid in the Control menu)
• When you’ve found SFX you like, drag it into the Timeline area underneath the movie track
• Again, you can overlap sounds (on separate tracks) to create a fuller effect or to cover gaps

Fade-ins and Fade-outs (adjusting Track Volume)

• You can fade SFX and music in or out by adding a “volume envelope” to that track
• Click on the small triangle under the track name (View/hide automation). The track volume info will appear.
• Click on the volume line to create points and drag the points up or down to adjust the volume level

Add Drums and/or percussion
We’ll add some rhythmic patterns that start slower and become busier. This part of the exercise can be a good time to discuss the concepts of augmentation and diminution with your students. You can either find suitable existing loops, or create your own rhythmic pattern from scratch.

Suggestions:
• Record a “heart-beat” style rhythm using a bass drum. Start slow (augmented) and increase speed as the movie progresses
• Find two or three existing rhythmic loops of a similar style (similar instrumentation) that use contrasting rhythmic patterns – one slower and one faster.
• If you have a couple of contrasting loops, drag the first one in to bar 6 and extend it until around the end of bar 10. Drag the “busier” loop to bar 11 and extend it to the end of bar 18
- Play back your score – the drum pattern should have the effect of increasing the tension

Create a driving rhythmic bass loop

The rhythmic bass loop is going to start low, move up in pitch and then jump down to a very low note. We’ll begin it at bar 9 so that the focus is on the train sounds and then the drum part for the first few bars of the movie.

- Go to Track > New tracks and choose Software Instrument and then click Create
- A new track will be created with the default Grand Piano sound

Change instrument sound

We’ll change the Grand Piano sound to something more suitable like an eerie, mysterious synth sound.

- First, open the Musical Typing window by going to Window > Musical Typing. This allows you to play notes by using the keys on your QWERTY (computer) keyboard
- Bring up the Track info pane by selecting the new track you just added and clicking on the “I” information button
- Then select an instrument family on the left-hand side and a specific instrument within that family on the right-hand side
- Press the letters A – L on your computer keyboard to audition different sounds. I chose Synth Basics > Modern Prophecy
Prepare to record

- Before you record, mute all the other tracks (except perhaps the drum part)
- Go to Control > Metronome and then Control > Count-in to turn on those options
- It doesn’t really matter which bar you start recording for now – the loop you create will be moved

Record the bass part

- When you’re ready, click on record and play 2 bars (something rhythmic on a low C)
- Trim the ends of the loop so that it is exactly 2 bars long
- In editing window at bottom, you can quantise the loop to even the rhythm up: click on Enhance timing and choose the note value from drop down menu (ie. 1/16th)

Add your loop to the library

When happy with your loop, you can add it to the loop library so you can use it in future GarageBand projects

- Select the loop and go to Edit > Add to Loop Library
- In the window that opens, give the loop a name and fill out the other info

Fill out the part

- Drag (move) the loop to bar 9
- While it is selected, press ⌘C to copy it
- Place the playback line at bar 11 and paste by pressing ⌘V
- Paste it 3 more times – until it reaches end of bar 18

Transpose

We can increase the tension by using moving each bass loop progressively up a semitone.

- Select the loop at bar 11 and make sure it is in view in the Editing window and the bottom of the screen
• Select all the notes in that loop (bars 11 and 12) by clicking and dragging a box around them (they should all be green)

• Drag one of the notes up to C# (all notes will move up simultaneously)

• Transpose the loops at bar 13, 15 and 17 in the same way so that each one starts one semitone higher than the one before

**Sinister Drone**

We’ll add a sinister low drone after our bass part

• Leave one bar after the bass part ends with nothing in it (adds to the increasing tension)

• Add a new software instrument track

• Choose a suitable synth sound (or other instrument) for a sustained low note. Something eerie/sinister – I chose Moonbeam

• At bar 20, record 4 bars or so of a very low C

• If you accidentally record a higher C, you can transpose it down as before

• You can enhance the drone by adding a **low end rumble loop** on the track below

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**Optional extra**

• You could also improvise an eerie high part – on another Software instrument track - towards the end. Use a C minor scale.

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**Project #3 Big Buck Bunny**

**Skills covered in Project #3**

All of the skills covered in the first two projects. The process for this movie is the same as for the other two projects, but this time you have more flexibility and freedom.

**About this project**

Open GarageBand and click on **New Project** and choose **Movie**
• Give your project a title, leave the tempo, time signature and key signature settings as they are and click Create.

• Locate the Big Buck Bunny movie and drag it into timeline area (either from GarageBand’s Media browser or from the Finder window).

• Because this is a silent movie, you’ll see a message: “The Quicktime movie BBB4.AVI does not contain audio that GarageBand can play” – click OK.

Decide hit points, mood and themes

Once the movie is in GarageBand, play it through a couple of times. Either as a group or individually, brainstorm ideas about:

  • hit points
  • mood music
  • possible music themes

Create a cue sheet that lists all of the music/audio that will be included in the movie.

Add sound effects

Like before, start by adding sound effects to the project. Don’t forget that students can create their own sound effects from scratch using a simple microphone and can even share them with one another by forming a communal sound effects library.

Create musical hit points

Musical hit points can be created by adding single notes or chords to software instrument tracks. Use the on-screen Musical Typing keyboard, or a MIDI keyboard.

Compose bridging music

Once the main hit points are taken care of, you can add some bridging music in a style that matches the movie: suspenseful, happy, sad, poignant, angry and so on.

Create some software tracks and record the bridging music from scratch.

Homework

I can't emphasize enough how important it is to do these projects YOURSELF from start to finish, before doing them with students. So, work through one or more of the above projects or find another movie and create your own film scoring project which suits the age and skill level of your students.

I will add the movies mentioned above to the course notes page so that you can have a go with each of them.

If you’re planning on finding alternative movies to use with your students, leave plenty of time to search for and edit the movie/s. It can be time-consuming!