

THE ORCHESTRAL MUSIC SCORE FOR GAMES: UNION VERSUS NON UNION COSTS

By Michael Conway Baker, OBC

Email: mconwayb@shaw.ca

Phone: (604)929-8732 Fax: (604)929-0164

Website: <http://www.michaelconwaybaker.com>

2440 Treetop Lane, North Vancouver, B.C. V7H 2K5

1. INTRODUCTION

When I first made my proposal to give a talk about union versus non-union costs for orchestral scores for games (June 2003) I was unaware of G.A.N.G. negotiations going on with the A.F.of M. (Union) which would result in a fee scale tailored to the video game industry. As things now stand, the per hour cost of a Union musician (\$60) is not much more than the approximately \$50 cost per musician hour that most non-union orchestras charge (but one Seattle non-union orchestra charges \$55 per hour). The higher cost of hiring union musicians is due, primarily, to the addition of pension, health and welfare 'benefits' that are added on (non-union musicians do not receive these benefits). Other union costs that are involved, like 'doubles', section leader fees, etc. are seldom charged by non-union orchestras. Given all this, I soon realized that, were I to "stick to the facts", my presentation would be over in about ten minutes. I could easily present such facts in the form of written documentation without any recourse to verbal elaboration. What could I offer, beyond these facts, that would be of interest to the video game community? (My first "factual" presentation put my wife to sleep!). What follows is my valiant attempt to inform, possibly entertain and, hopefully, not put you all to sleep.

I am a composer. When I was a student I followed the advice of the great German composer, Paul Hindemith, and wrote music for every orchestral instrument. My passion for music, clear at a very early age, drove me to listen and play every instrument I could get my hands on. But it was my first experience hearing a live orchestra, at the age of seven, that began a life-long study of, what many composers and music lovers feel to be, "the greatest musical instrument ever conceived" --- the symphony orchestra.

In dealing with the pros and cons of Union and Non-Union orchestras I wish to make it very clear that I am offering my own personal opinions. My perceptions of orchestras, Union and Non-Union are based on my own experience. No doubt there is value in the "facts" presented here, ie: Union rates for a variety of uses, and non-union rates which are usually all-inclusive. Facts are facts, and no doubt they are helpful in determining which route a producer can take. But, as human beings, we often seek information via the experiences others have. We ask our friends about auto mechanics when we need our cars repaired; doctors when we are in need of medical attention. In the context of a producer's need for a music score, the logical person to turn to is a music specialist.

I like making analogies -- and the process of creating and producing music is not unlike building a house. Like the house builder who explains why using certain materials can substantially give, and add value to the structure, I'm going to begin with how an orchestral music score can add to the value of your game.

2. "WHY AN ORCHESTRA?"

In January of this year, 2004, the Hollywood Reporter published an article on the ever increasing use of orchestral music scores for games. "Video game music no longer is relegated to insidious if, at times beloved, jingles played out on chintzy-sounding synthesizers. Much more often today, it consists of well-heeled epic score music written by top composers and played by the same orchestras that perform music for many of Hollywood's best films."

"The video game music revolution is both a product of and a reason for the larger gaming boom."

This last statement is enough to answer the question: "Why an Orchestra?" The fact that better music scores translates into greater recognition (awards) and more revenue will result, I think, in the ever increasing use of the orchestra for game music.

Some examples: EA's "Medal of Honor: Rising Sun" (88 piece orchestra and 32 voice choir); EA's "Ultima X: Odyssey" (86 piece orchestra); Sony's "EverQuest II (85 piece orchestra)

3. A LOOK AT THE ORCHESTRA

I have scored quite a few feature and TV films but only one which had a documentary made about the recording of the music. I found the editor's imaginative use of dissolves, from orchestra to scene, captured the essence of how orchestral music works with film. The 60 musicians performing, on camera, are from the Vancouver Symphony, a Union orchestra.

For your comparison, the last clip -- not on camera -- has the Non-Union L.A. East (Utah) 65 piece orchestra playing on the track. (Audio Visual Item 1)

4. THREE FILM CLIPS

Video Clip number 1. Scenes 1 and 2 from Sci Fi movie "Starlight", Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, 60 piece Union orchestra. Scene 3 is a clip from a feature called "Savage Land", The clip is a stagecoach chase scene. The recording was made in Salt Lake City by the L.A. East Orchestra. The recording used a 65 piece Non-Union orchestra.

The first three scenes are from a feature Sci Fi film called "Starlight". This was a very low budget project that took five years to make. The filmmaker had previously produced a number of films, but this was his first feature. Despite the fact he had very little money for a music score, he obviously felt it worth while to go to the trouble of raising the money for an orchestral recording. He expressed the hope that the orchestral score would give his film a "prestige" factor that the film desperately needed. He was so excited about having a full symphony orchestra play over an hour of originally composed music, that he made a documentary called "The Making of the Music for Starlight." His disappointment came, however, when he was informed by the union (AF of M) that "extra payments" would have to be made if he wished to release a sound track album.

The third clip, a stagecoach chase scene, is from a feature "Western" called "Savage Land". The producer insisted on a "buyout" because he wanted to release a sound track album without having to pay "new use" fees -- which he would have had to do under an AF of M contract. His only option was to go Non-Union. I wrote and produced his score on the understanding it would be with a non-union orchestra. We recorded the music in Salt Lake City using the L.A. East (Utah) symphony orchestra. There were 65 musicians performing on the sound stage.

The producer/director's production company released a sound track album.

At this point a game producer might well ask why, aside from the cost, he should spend money on an orchestral score which is going to be heard, for the most part, on a gamer's small speaker system. Early television program producers asked the same question. They felt the small size of the TV medium did not require the kind of money and attention to a music score that large screen (theatrical) productions required. Ironically, quite the opposite was, and is, true: Television dramas are MORE dependent on music to compensate for the reduced impact of the small screen. Video games, because they are visually dependent on small screens (at the moment) are in an analogous situation. Both mediums need good sound and good music to increase involvement. Game producers, like early television producers, are becoming more and more aware of what a good music score can do. Like many major film producers, game producers are hiring highly talented composers to score their games. These high-level composers use symphony orchestras!

Early filmmakers, like Disney, knew well the emotional impact that good music, recorded by a symphony orchestra, can have on audiences. Listen to this excerpt from Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" which Disney used to express the extreme emotion of a dinosaur fight in his film "Fantasia". Keep in mind that Stravinsky's music provided ALL the emotional impact on the sound track: There are virtually no sound effects (earth shaking footfalls, dinosaur roars, etc.) throughout the entire film. The music does it all!

5. EXCERPT FROM STRAVINSKY'S "RITE OF SPRING."

This music was so powerful at its 1913 Paris premiere that it caused a riot. One man, caught up in the rhythms of the music, literally pounded these rhythms out on the head of the man sitting in front of him. The man, whose head was being pounded, was so involved, he was, apparently, oblivious to the assault!

This recording was made by the New York Philharmonic with an orchestra of about 90 players. Needless to say, the New York Philharmonic is a Union orchestra.

6. MUSIC FROM THE TV MINI SERIES "THE LAST SEASON".

The next musical example comes from an orchestral score I wrote for a Canadian mini series. Consider, as you listen, that the union orchestra was made up of only 51 players. An important aspect of the music you are about to hear -- particularly relevant to games -- is the fact that this music was written for television and was, necessarily, heard by tv audiences on the small speakers found in most tv sound systems -- especially 15 years ago! Never the less, the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corp.) producers felt that only a symphony orchestra could produce the kind of visceral impact necessary to a story which dealt with the extreme violence found in many professional hockey games. (Does this type of orchestral music work for the same kind of thing found in video games? I'll let you decide.)

7. EXCERPT FROM HOLST'S "MARS", FROM HIS SUITE "THE PLANETS"

My final example will sound very familiar. This is an excerpt from "The Planets" by Gustav Holst. John Williams, the composer of the music for the Star Wars movies knew this piece well!

This music was written in 1913 by Gustav Holst to characterize "Mars, the god of war". Although there are many recordings of this music made by Union orchestras this particular recording was made by a non-union Eastern European orchestra.

We have heard excerpts from recordings made by Union and Non-Union orchestras. I, personally, would be hard pressed to tell the difference in quality between them! All these orchestras demonstrate a very high level of orchestral playing.

8. WHAT CONSTITUTES A SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA?

The symphony orchestra is made up of four basic sections of musical instruments: Winds, Brass, Percussion and Strings.

In order to achieve a "full" orchestral sound there needs to be a complete representation of each section. I have determined that this can be done with an orchestral complement of a minimum of 40 players. This will allow for double winds, (2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons) 2 trumpets, 4 French horns, three trombones, tuba, 2 percussion players, and

strings. (Violins, violas, cellos, basses) Needless to say, there can any number of additions to this complement, but 40 will produce "that" sound.

9. WHAT IS A UNION ORCHESTRA?

In North America, any group of musicians, who perform and/or record in the United States and Canada using an American Federation of Musicians (AF of M) contract is a "Union" orchestra. Since the AF of M is the only union representing musicians in the U.S. and Canada, those wishing to engage the services of union members are obliged to sign appropriate contracts and agreements with this union. The chief consideration regarding unions is the reality of a binding contract between the parties involved. Such contracts spell out the terms and conditions the employer must agree to when hiring union musicians.

10. WHAT IS A NON UNION ORCHESTRA?

Any group of musicians who perform and/or record but who do so WITHOUT signing a union contract or agreement -- AF of M or foreign -- are considered to have performed and/or recorded in a NON UNION capacity.

11. THE "PROS" OF A UNION ORCHESTRA

The "pro" aspect of a Union orchestra relates, mainly, to benefits accorded the musicians performing under an AF of M contract. As well, being a member of a union has, particularly in the U.S. and Canada, long been considered the mark of a professional. Most major orchestras in both countries insist their players be members of the AF of M. Although being a member of the Union does not guarantee high quality musicianship -- I know of no Union local who audition musicians. (Professional orchestras do, on the other hand, audition their players.)

Musician's Unions offer a variety of attractive benefits to members. If a musician is fortunate in finding steady employment, these benefits can add, hopefully, to a better quality of life.

For the potential employer of musicians there is the expectation that Union musicians who play in professional orchestras will have achieved, and maintained, a high standard of musicianship.

Contacts for the major Union symphony orchestras in the U.S. may be found at:
www.southernmusic.com/orchestras.ktm

12. THE "CONS" OF A UNION ORCHESTRA

(Insert Document Slide-AfofM Scoring Music for Video Games)

The "con" aspect of a Union orchestra relates, mainly, to the employer/producer. In order to record music with an orchestra made up of members of the AF of M, the employer/producer

must sign a contract, which spells out binding terms and conditions. Such terms and conditions are generally non-negotiable. (There is no such restriction on non-union orchestral organizations.)

For the benefit of those considering hiring a Union orchestra for a video game the AF of M publishes an explanation of the rules and conditions found in their contracts. This information can be found on the AF of M web site called: "Scoring Music for Video Games"

Here are the first two pages:

The American Federation of Musicians

Scoring Music for Video Games

Original Music for Animated/Video Game or Educational Software, or Dedicated Console Platforms

According to the current provisions, each video game project is scored based a one-time agreement that states there will be no obligations for further payments based on game sales. Also, the game producer has three scoring options to choose from based on the planned use(s) of the music. These provisions are constantly being refined to better meet the evolving needs of the video game industry, so prior to any scoring project producers are strongly advised to contact the AFM.

Scoring Options:

Multi- Platform		Single Platform	Games in Development
50 or more musicians	\$180.00	\$175.00	\$144.00
49 or fewer musicians	\$198.00		

All options require a 3-hour minimum session as well as a Pension payment and a Health and Welfare payment.

Multi-Platform:

Music recorded under the multi-platform rate may be used in sequels of the same specific franchise/series without additional payment. Additionally, music may be used without additional payment on repackaged, re-released or bundled version of original product and/or expansion packs, add-ons, patches, updates.

Single Platform (or Dedicated Platform):

This option is intended for projects that will not be ported to new platforms and will not have any sequels. If the game is then released on other platforms, a 25% payment of the original wages and pension would be made to the musicians. No additional payment is due for repackaged, re-released or bundled version of original product and/or expansion packs, add-ons, patches or updates of same. Using the music in any other game or software (including sequels to the original) would require a new-use payment.

Games in Development and Demos:

Special rates have been created for recording music for games in development or demo games. Upon release to a single platform, the producer would then pay an additional 50% of the wages and pension paid at the Development Rate, adding a 25% payment of the Single-Platform Rate for each additional platform to which the game is released.

General Provisions of All Three Options

Promotional Use

Promotional use is free for:

- electronic press-kits
- advertising or review purposes
- to otherwise solely promote the original product

There is also no extra charge for filming at sessions for "making of promos" for the above uses and/or for inclusion as value added content in the product software.

Soundtrack and Other New-Use of Music

Soundtrack albums will be subject to the same terms and rates for soundtrack albums found in the current AFM Basic Theatrical Motion Picture Agreement.

Other Terms and Conditions

- Scale for Leader and Contractor is double the side-musician scale.
- Scale for musician playing alone is double the side-musician scale.
- Non-Playing Contractor required for sessions of 11 or more musicians.
- Pension Payment equal to 10% of scale wages.
- Local Health and Welfare payment of \$17.94 for each day.
- No limits to the minutes of music recorded.
- Doubles are 50% for the first and 20% for each after that.
- The AFM shall receive 25 promotional copies and shall be credited on packaging or software credit crawl. The Contractor and Supervising Copyist shall also be credited and so shall the Orchestra Name if recording is done in a Local where applicable.
- Report Forms: All sessions must be reported on a B-7 Report Form. Specific software or platform must be listed in memo box.
- Music Preparation is paid in accordance with the applicable rates for Low Budget Films in the Basic Theatrical Motion Picture Agreement.
- Breaks, Overtime, Cancellations, Length of Call, Hold Period, Premium Time, Cartage and all other general terms are governed by the AFM Basic Theatrical Motion Picture Agreement.

These terms and conditions are subject to change. For the latest information please contact:

**Chris Millner
The American Federation of Musicians
Electronic Media Services Division West Coast Office
3550 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1900
Los Angeles, CA 90010
(213) 251-4510 x 202
cmillner@afm.org**

More information may be obtained by contacting Chris Millner of the AF of M at: cmillner@afm.org or by phoning: (213) 251-4510.

13. THE "PROS" OF A NON-UNION ORCHESTRA. COMPARING RATES BETWEEN UNION & NON-UNION.

The pros of hiring a non-union orchestra relate to two things: money and restrictions. Most non-union orchestras charge \$50 per musician hour. This can be compared to the AF of M "Scoring Options" which are stated in their "Scoring for Video Games" document. The rates posted are: Multi-Platform, 50 or more musicians, \$180 per three hour session if 50 or more musicians are used; If Single Platform, the rate is \$175 per three hour session. For 49 or fewer musicians the Multi-Platform rate is \$198. The Single Platform rate of \$175 stays the same. These rates are higher than the non-union rate, but not by much (Basically, \$60 per hour per musician) See the AF of M web site for complete information.

The main "pro" of recording with a non-union orchestra is the "Buyout". This means that, once having "bought" the recording, the producer can use the recorded music without restriction or reporting for any use. The AF of M, on the other hand, will require payments for "other" uses such as sound track albums.

14. THE CONS OF A NON UNION ORCHESTRA

There are a very small number of non-union orchestras in North America. Most non-union orchestras are to be found in Europe, which means there is the "distance factor" and "language factor" as well as travel and accommodation costs. Then there is the question of quality of performance. Unions are prone to pronounce that anyone not in their union can not be as skilled as those who are. Needless to say, statements like this are self-serving. The fact is, there are union musicians who are sub standard and non- union players who are consummate musicians. The non-union film orchestras located in Europe, Seattle, Salt Lake City and Vancouver, Canada are good examples of non- union orchestras whose members demonstrate a high caliber of musicianship. Such orchestras are capable of producing excellent sound tracks. Never the less, the majority of skilled musicians are to be found in North America's Union orchestras. Contacts for North American non-union orchestras are:
Salt Lake City: (LA East Film Orchestra) dona@nonstopmusic.com
Northwest Sinfonia: simon@simonjamesmusic.com
Seattle: Filmuse@aol.com
Vancouver, Canada: <http://www.pacificphilharmonic.com>

15. RECORDING IN CANADA

Union recordings done in Canada are done using the appropriate AF of M contracts. The rates are the same as in the U.S., as well as all the restrictions and conditions as outlined in the AF of M document "Scoring Music for Video Games" already mentioned.

Non-Union Recordings in Canada:

The Non-Union rate is \$50CDN per Musician Hour with a basic 2 hour minimum. There are no restrictions on the use of the music (i.e. a total 'buyout'). The producer is free to use the recording for any future purpose. At present, the only non-union orchestra of professional musicians is located in Vancouver, Canada.

For information, contact www.pacificphilharmonic.com.

However, in both cases, because the Canadian dollar is valued at less than the U.S. dollar an automatic saving can be achieved. The current rate, as of this date, Feb./2004, is one US dollar equals 75 cents Canadian. As a result, recording in Canada can mean a 25% reduction in all costs.

16. EUROPEAN UNION AND NON UNION ORCHESTRAS

In Europe, there are many orchestras. Almost all the orchestras offer complete buyouts, even when a musician's union (as in Britain) is involved. (If they don't -- walk away!) A lot of these orchestras came into the market place after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There is no question that the level of musicianship is very high. After all, many were heavily subsidized by the Soviet government. Now they are in the world market flogging their wares -- like everyone else! Rates vary considerably and many of these orchestras seem willing to negotiate fees.

Two Eastern European orchestras that have been used a lot by film production companies are Prague and Budapest. Eastern European orchestras are represented by: Forte Music: <http://www.fortemusic.net> (However, a "representative" will, necessarily, charge a fee for the service. Direct contact with the orchestras should be considered.)

Costs for these orchestras are less than those in Britain and North America. The following are some quotes for 15 minutes of orchestral music:

The National Polish Radio Symphony: 56 players for a 6 hour session \$10,050 USD; The Slovak Philharmonic: 56 players for a 6 hour session \$7,789 USD; The Slovak Radio Symphony: 56 players for an 8 hour session \$6,960 USD; The Moravian Philharmonic: 56 players for a 6 hour session \$5,072 USD.

None of these orchestras would send a demo or give me a breakdown of costs. (Studio, engineering, mixing, etc.) It seems to me it would be pretty risky to entrust new orchestral music under these conditions.

However, there is the "distance factor" and, except in Britain, a "language factor." An experienced composer/music supervisor should be able to negotiate fees with these orchestras! Considering the relatively short length of game scores, travelling to foreign countries just doesn't seem feasible.

Two further contacts for Eastern European Orchestras are:
Sazonoff@hotmail.com and, for the Russian State Symphony Orchestra who record in the Mosfilm recording studios: <http://www.geocities.com/cinemaorchestra/mypage.html>

17. RECORDING IN BRITAIN (UNION)

The British orchestras in London come under the umbrella of the British Musician's Union (BPI) I was told the "basic rate" for recording in England is 77 pounds per musician per hour. (\$140.00 USD) Contact for this orchestra is: info@sinfonia-of-london.com
Producers interested should contact them and ascertain: Is this a complete buyout? Are there limitations on the number of minutes per session? (There were none at my sessions!)

Contacts for British Orchestras:

I searched through Google using: "Directory of Recording Orchestras in England" for my search. The first listing gave me virtually every recording orchestra located in England, beginning with the four major recording orchestras in London. These orchestras belong to the British Musicians Union. However, the Union rules for recordings are more flexible than the AF of M. The rate is based on the number of recording hours used. A total buyout is offered. For this reason, many major film production companies have recorded there. The rates per hour per musician are 77 pounds (\$140.00USD). I have recorded with both the London Symphony Orchestra and the Sinfonia of London Orchestra.

18. FINDING THE RIGHT ORCHESTRA & STUDIO MEANS FINDING THE RIGHT COMPOSER/MUSIC SUPERVISOR

I'll use the house building analogy again. I don't know about you, but if I decided to build a house I would never attempt to do it by myself. I would hire an architect/builder whose talents suit my particular requirements. Such a person would be responsible for dealing with the thousands of details of producing my vision. Yet, as someone once said of music in films, "Everyone is an expert when it comes to music." Like all of us, I have "tinkered" with things I know little about -- often disastrously. (My last tinkering resulted in calling the plumber!) It's one thing to communicate one's "vision" to an artist. It's another thing to pick up his paintbrush and mess about with the painting. (Unless, of course, you are an artist yourself -- in which case why would you need someone else to paint the picture?)!

My point is: that when it comes to the production of a music score find a specialist, in the form of a music supervisor or composer, to do the job. Like the architect/builder his reputation will be on the line. If the composer doesn't orchestrate, an orchestrator must be found who can translate the composer's musical thoughts. The specialist's job is to find the best performing musicians and studio available for the budget. There are hundreds of details in the production of a music score. Find someone who can attend to them all.

Most professional composers/music supervisors I know are deadly serious about finding performing and recording talent. He or she will be able to tell you the pros and cons of recording with this or that orchestra in this or that studio. Of course there will always be the question of money. It is up to the composer/music supervisor to provide a comprehensive breakdown of what is needed and the costs involved.

19. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE COMPOSER

The November issue of Canadian Musician featured an article on video games called "This Ain't No Bleepin' Pong" which consisted of interviews with composers well known for their video game scores. Among them was, Clint Bajakian whose credits included "Star Trek: Klingon Academy;" and scores for Sony Computer Entertainment America; Sony Online Entertainment; BioWare; Microids and Atari. Mr. Bajakian feels that a qualified composer should: "Study the music of classic composers. Analyze their music. Write musical pieces in the styles of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schoenberg, Webern, etc. Go to classical concerts. Develop a thorough understanding of harmony, the principals of melody, counterpoint, instrumentation and orchestration. Work on piano and conducting along with any other instrument of choice. Study composition with a master and line up live performances or recordings of his works. Develop a voice that is his own, and always stay true to it as he creates."

In other words, the composer, like any other professional, should be well trained.

For film, tv and games, the composer should have experience with fulfilling the dramatic needs of the visual medium. My experience with composers is that they either have that special "dramatic sense" to score effectively, or they don't. I believe that good film composers can write for a variety of visual mediums and can easily make the transition from one medium to another. This is why many recognized film composers are now doing game scores. Peer recognition in the form of nominations and awards for scores is one way for a producer to find a good composer. (A composer's fellow composers make the nominations!) Most film composers are familiar, if not adept, at providing a wide variety of music from hip-hop to symphonic. But if we are talking about hiring a composer to produce a symphonic score it certainly makes sense to hire a composer who can orchestrate! Or who, at the very least, can work with an orchestrator in a knowledgeable fashion.

20. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE MUSIC SUPERVISOR

The game producer who feels out of his depth when trying to deal with the innumerable details of music production should consider hiring a MUSIC SUPERVISOR. The most qualified music supervisors I've known were, themselves, composers -- but composers who truly understood the business end of producing music scores. This individual KNOWS when the composer has produced something special; he KNOWS when the orchestration is really good; he KNOWS that the studio, engineer, recording, etc. is first rate. I think of the Music Supervisor as

analogous to the Line Producer on a film shoot. This is the person who is responsible for quality control. Ask anyone in the film business and they will tell you how important the Line Producer is! Add to this the fact the individual who takes on the various tasks of music supervision CAN SAVE THE PRODUCER A LOT OF MONEY! One of the major skills of music supervision is that of NEGOTIATING fees/costs in the areas of music production. He negotiates with studios, orchestras, soloists, engineers,-- even cartage companies! One of the most valuable assets of a good music supervisor deals with negotiating with writers, publishers and record companies for any existing music the producer wants/needs for his project. Obtaining the rights for existing music can be a minefield! Horror stories abound about film and tv producers (and I'm certain Video Game producers) who have been caught in the quagmire of dealing with copyright holders. As a film composer I have had to help many a producer out in this area. My first experience with this was with, believe it or not, the song "Happy Birthday". The producer came to me to tell me someone actually owned the rights to this 15-second song. They asked for \$4000 dollars. Since the song was already a part of the film, the producer paid it! Another film producer/director/writer "just had to have" 30 seconds of a Rolling Stones song. He found out it cost \$35,000 just to use the music -- NOT the recording! I composed a "sound alike" for him that cost a few hundred dollars. No one knew the difference!

I learned, early on, to convey to anyone, who would listen, that dealing with publishers and record companies is torturous! This last example is why I feel the composer/music supervisor can be one of the most valuable assets on any project that deals with copyrighted music.

21. PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND PRIORITIES

I personally do not separate "film orchestras" from orchestras who don't do film scoring. I have a memory of attending a scoring session in England where John Williams was recording one of his Star Wars movies. When I asked a few of the players if they watched the screen the inevitable answer came back: "We're too busy reading the music and giving the conductor what he wants!" And during the 1980's I music supervised a series of film and tv shows from Los Angeles. These were scored in Vancouver with musicians who had little or no experience with film music. The studio, on the other hand, was well prepared for recording film scores. I was told that MGM, who had done the first session, called a meeting of the music department heads of all the major studios in Los Angeles. The Vancouver session tapes were played on the MGM sound stage. Everyone was impressed. We thus began a series of MOWs and feature film recording that has continued for many years.

As to priorities, the obvious first consideration is the level of musicianship of the orchestral musicians. But, second, and just as important, is the engineer. In this regard I believe the head engineer is key to producing great recordings. (Years ago I attended a John Denver recording session which utilized an orchestra. (I had been asked as an "observer" to give my input.) There was over one million dollars worth of gear. The studio was "state of the art". John Denver was great! The recording was awful! I blamed the fiasco on the head engineer who simply did not know what an orchestra was supposed to sound like! A few years later I attended a David Foster/ Vancouver Symphony session. I got a call from a friend who said: "You've got to get down here (to the session). There's this English engineer who's getting

fantastic results." I went down and, sure enough, found an elderly, very mild mannered Englishman named Eric Tomlinson, sitting at a crude mixing board. (I found out, later, that he was world famous as a recording engineer.) The results were, indeed, fantastic. I ended up helping him mix the live recording. Later, when I received a commission to write and produce a music score for an ice ballet, Eric was the first person I went to for advice! On his recommendation, I recorded, with Eric as engineer, at Abbey Road Studios in London with a 75 piece orchestra. We produced over three hours of music for the project and a soundtrack album was released.

22. ESSENTIAL PERSONNEL AND THEIR COSTS.

THE COMPOSER: He or she is responsible for creating the music. Usually \$50.00 per page of orchestrated music. (The same as the ORCHESTRATOR.) Some production companies use a "rule of thumb" of \$1000 per minute of finished music as a composer's fee.

THE ORCHESTRATOR: I do my own, but in the case of a composer unskilled in orchestration an orchestrator is hired. This is an essential element for an orchestral score. As the great composer and orchestrator Rimsky-Korsakov was fond of saying: "Orchestration IS composition!" Costs are usually around \$50.00 per page of orchestration.

THE ENGINEER: The key person who is responsible for set up, microphone placement (absolutely crucial!) mixing levels, and final mixing. The Engineer can also function as an "adviser" for the composer during recording sessions. Costs vary, but \$50 to \$100 per hour is usual. Top engineers will negotiate a fee.

THE CONDUCTOR: Sometimes the composer. but I prefer to be in the booth where the real decisions are made. (I used to conduct but found myself running back and forth to hear playbacks. Not very efficient!) Conductors usually get double or triple what the orchestral musician gets -- and rightly so!

MUSIC SESSION SUPERVISOR: This is a person with a lot of experience recording orchestras. They have "great ears" for this. The session supervisor monitors the time and keeps things "on track" often attending to details overlooked by everyone else. (In England, for a recording I did with the London Symphony, I hired James Burnett, head of the BBC Transcription Service. I thanked him every day for his help!) Costs are negotiated but range at about \$50 to \$100 per hour. The Music Session Supervisor is also hired to assist the composer with booking, negotiating all financial deals, organizing travel and accommodations, etc. The fee is usually \$50 to \$100 per hour.

CONTRACTOR: Contracts the orchestra and, particularly in the hiring of Union musicians, fills in the innumerable forms, and makes certain all contractual details with the Union are taken care of. Innumerable phone calls to musicians must be made to assure that orchestra personnel are "booked". This person receives double or triple scale.

COPYIST & MUSIC LIBRARIAN: Transfers the composer's orchestrated "short score" to full "conductor's" score. (Every instrumental part must be copied into full score sheets.) In addition, the copyist must see that individual parts are copied and provided every orchestral player. All this is very labor intensive! The copyist also attends every session in the capacity of music librarian. The librarian's job is to attend to fixing any mistakes and, if need be, re-copying orchestral parts. (Importantly, for every composer, the poor copyist is the traditional "scape goat" for any and all mistakes in the music!) Most of the time I negotiate an "all in" fee with my copyist. For games I would budget \$2000.00 to \$3000.00 for copying.

23. "HARD" AND "SOFT" COSTS

In budgeting for anything, there are usually "hard costs" and "negotiable costs". In house building, the "hard costs" are the materials. In orchestral recordings, the "hard costs" are the musicians fees. Please keep this in mind when considering the budgets that follow.

24. QUALITY OF MUSICIANSHIP AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE COSTS

The quality of musicianship when recording will, obviously, affect the cost of the recordings. High calibre musicians will be able to produce high quality recordings in markedly less time than mediocre musicians. Since time is money, the equation can be expressed as: high quality = less money. I have been at sessions where, in one instance, it took 15 "takes" to get the acceptable result that another orchestra, with better musicians, achieved in 3 "takes". The longer it takes to produce the music, the more has to be spent on musicians, studio time, engineering, music supervision, etc. etc. Who is going to pay for the extra time?

25. THE "COMPOSER FACTOR" AND THE BUDGET

I have seen whole orchestral sessions eaten up with questions about mistakes in the players parts. "Excuse me", says a bassoonist, "but is this a B flat or a B natural?" "How do you want us to phrase bars 12 to 18?" says the First Flute player. I have attended recording sessions where the composer sits at the piano trying to fix his composition/orchestration while the orchestra sits and waits. The clock ticks and money goes out the window. When I am faced with an orchestral recording, I try to "prep to the teeth". Maybe John Williams has the budget to fix and change stuff during the recording (I saw him do this at one of his sessions). But I have never had that luxury.

26. THE MIDI MOCKUP

Almost every film producer/director I have worked with has wanted to hear some kind of version of the music before the orchestral sessions. Sometimes, its enough for the composer to play his musical creations on the piano. Today, composers are expected to provide MIDI (synth/sample) mockups of the music. Needless to say, this will take up the composers time and possibly hard costs for an engineer. A generous producer will often provide some kind of budget for the mockup. In many game scores the mockup can be so good as to enhance the orchestral score in a mix. In any case, time to create the mockup is time well spent!

27. MUSIC BUDGET FOR A UNION (AF of M) ORCHESTRA

Note: As with all budgets, numbers are always subject to change. Increasing the number of musicians, for instance, from 50 to 88 will obviously affect other areas of a fixed budget. This can lead to the old "robbing Peter to pay Paul" principle of budgeting. (The addition of MIDI effects, for instance, may have to be considered.) Also, a contingency fund is always a good idea on any project. (Again, the house building/renovation analogy: when have renovations EVER come in 'on budget'?)

Let's consider a breakdown of a \$50,000.00 music budget recorded by a Union orchestra using a 50 piece orchestra. The 50, or more piece orchestra rate for Multi-Platform is \$180.00 per musician per three hour session.

- a. For a 50 piece Union orchestra the cost would be \$9,000.00 for 15 minutes of recorded music. (A three hour session) For Union orchestras we must add 10% for pension, Health & Welfare. (\$900) I would add another \$8,100 to cover taxes, payroll, administration, contracting, doubles, Music Supervision, etc. to round this figure off to \$18,000.
- b. Studio Rental, Engineer and assistants, Set up, Cartage, Mixing, Editing, Leader and Conductor, Concert Master, Session/Music Supervisor, Management and Payroll, copying and layout, etc. \$8,000. (Note: Half of this will probably go to the copyist!)
- c. Composing the music: \$10,000
- d. Orchestrating the music: \$10,000
- e. Contingency Fund \$4,000.

**TOTAL COSTS FOR 15 MINUTES OF ORCHESTRAL MUSIC WITH A UNION ORCHESTRA:
\$50,000.00**

Producers who wish to use the music for "other uses", like sound track albums, should consult the AF of M's "Scoring Music for Video Games" and/or contact Chris Millner at (213) 251-4510 x 202 or cmillner@afm.org

28. MUSIC BUDGET FOR A NON-UNION ORCHESTRA

- a. Again, these figures are based on an orchestra of 50 players. Calculating on a \$50 per musician hour for a 3 hour session the base costs come to \$7,500. I would add a reasonable amount for taxes, administration, payroll, contracting etc. and add another \$6,000. This rounds the musician's costs to:\$13,500
 - b. I would budget \$8,000 for studio, engineering, mixing, music supervision, copying and tape costs
 - c. Composer costs will not change. Composing for an orchestra of Union or Non Union players entails the same work. \$10,000
 - d. Orchestration costs will be the same. \$10,000
 - e. Contingency \$4,000
- TOTAL COSTS: \$45,500.00

This leaves us with a difference of \$4,500.00 between the Union session and the Non-Union session.

(Note: Most Non-Union orchestras do not charge for "doubles" and section leaders which I why I have given them less in the "musician's budget")

If I am permitted one "plug" it would be the following: RECORDING IN CANADA WILL AUTOMATICALLY SAVE 25% ON ALL COSTS FOR BOTH UNION AND NON-UNION RECORDINGS!

With regard to "new" or "other" use fees, there shouldn't be any. Non union orchestras offer "buyouts". There are no "conditions" which apply to the use of the music. The employer "owns" the recording and can, for instance, put out a sound track album at no extra cost.

29. THE PACKAGE DEAL

This happens when the producer has a set limit for the production of the music. A typical package deal would have the composer agree to a set "all in" fee to provide 15 minutes of orchestral music (or 45 min. as in a feature film, etc.). A typical package deal involving the Union and Non Union budgets listed under #16 & 17 (Music Budgets) would be to have an agreement between producer and composer whereby the composer ". . . agrees to write, orchestrate and produce a orchestral recording of the music track for _____ video game for the sum of \$40,000." The composer then becomes the contractor and deals with all the details of producing the film score. I have a simple 5 page contract outlining all the responsibilities of the composer which I use all the time. Producers and composers like these agreements because it makes hiring lawyers unnecessary. (One producer told me he saved at least \$5000.00 in legal fees!) This is a quite common procedure with film producers in Canada and is becoming the norm in the U.S. The exception is usually with major film production

companies like Disney, Universal, & Paramount who like to divide up the various responsibilities.

30. FINAL THOUGHTS

No doubt there is a lot more to be said about the pros and cons of union and non-union orchestral recording costs. Approaching a fixed budget, as in a "Package Deal" where all the costs are "all-in" is obviously going to be different than dealing with a flexible budget. There are issues of what the producers intentions are for the future use of the finished recording. Where the producer wishes a 'buyout' this will obviously affect the choice of going the union or non-union route. For overseas recording, the costs of travel and accommodation must be considered. It has to be established if the producer has a separate budget for such costs or if they are to be included in the music budget. Costs for travel and accommodation could escalate, for instance if a large number of people are allowed to attend the sessions (when I recorded in England at Abbey Road Studios, the producer brought an entourage of his whole family and thought he could include all travel and all accommodation expenses as part of my music budget!). Had I allowed him to do this, I would have had to reduce the size of the orchestra as well as the number of recording sessions.... NOT!

These are the kinds of considerations which not only affect the overall music budget, but must be addressed before any contractual agreements are signed.

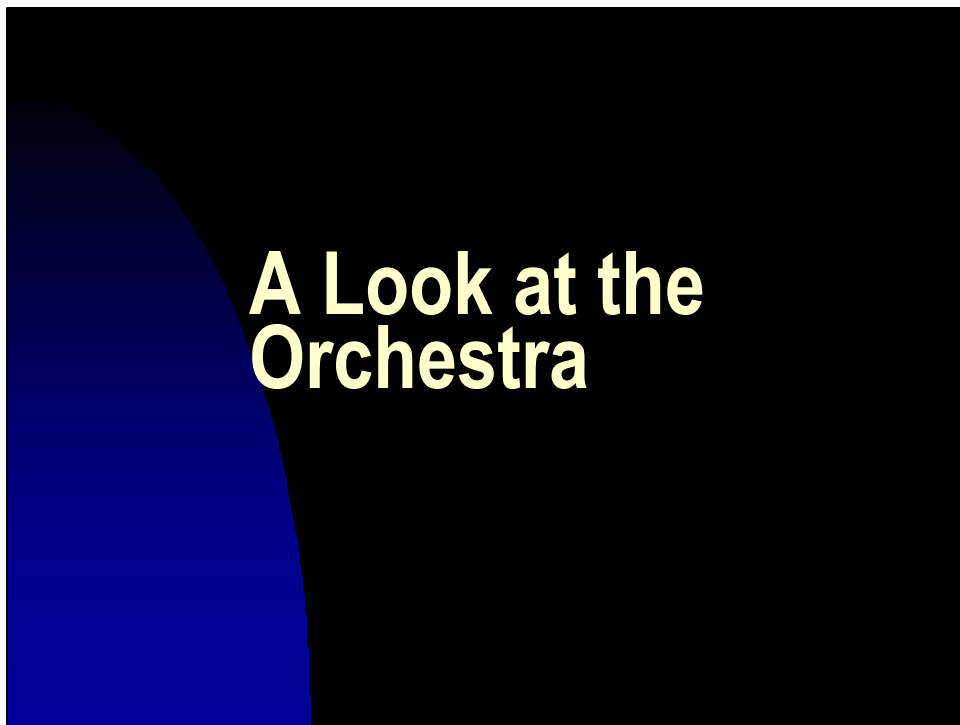
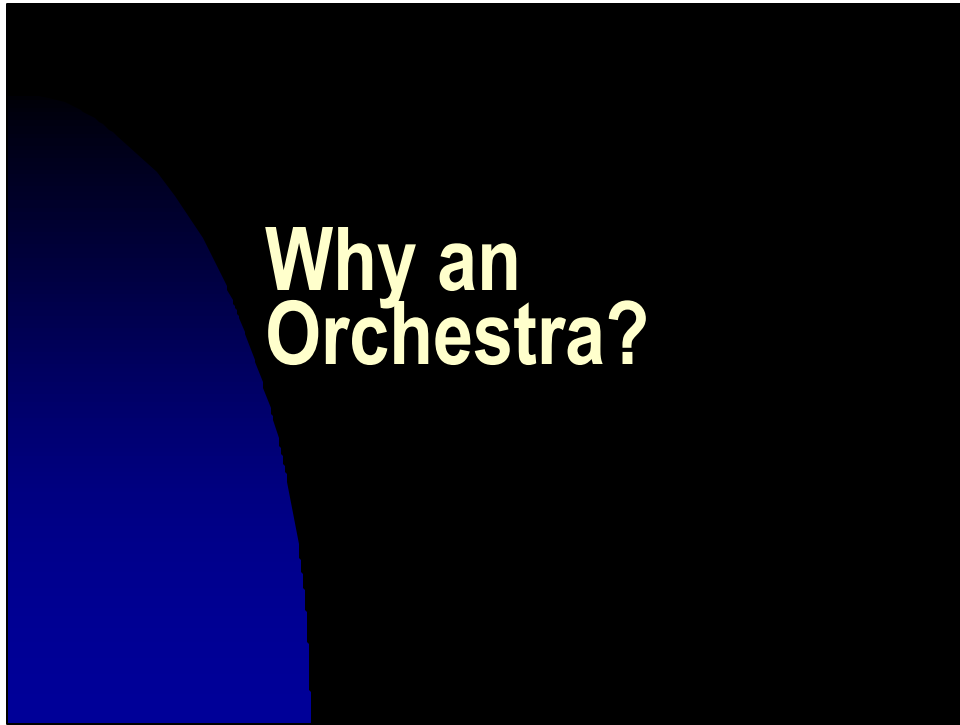
I hope I have imparted the benefit of my own experiences (which span a 30 year period) with regard to recordings with both union and non-union orchestras.

Lastly, we should keep in mind the constant changing of the market and resources available to us. Being in the Information Age, we use the internet. As we know, information changes daily and, no doubt, this will apply to everything I have brought to your attention in this presentation.

The Orchestral Music Score for Games: Union versus Non Union Costs

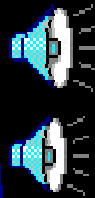
Michael
Conway
Baker

Introduction





•Music from the TV Mini-Series “The Last Season” (composed and orchestrated by Michael Conway Baker)



•Excerpt from Holst’s “Mars”, from his Suite “The Planets”





What Constitutes a Symphony Orchestra?



•What is a Union Orchestra?



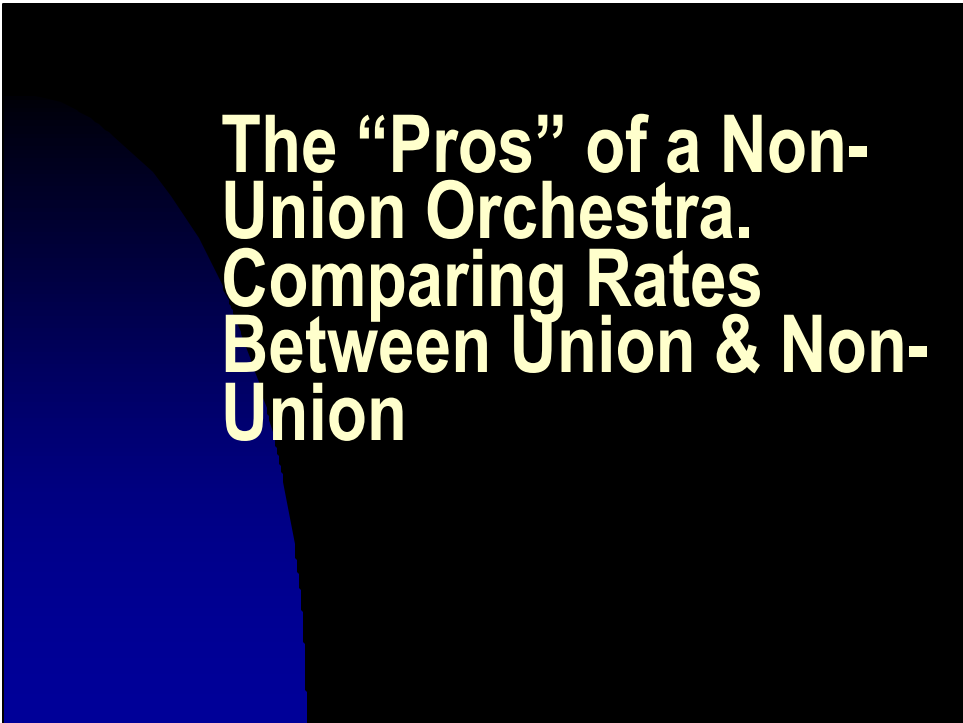
What is a Non-Union Orchestra?




The “Pros” of a Union Orchestra



The “Cons” of a Union Orchestra



The “Pros” of a Non-Union Orchestra. Comparing Rates Between Union & Non-Union




The “Cons” of a Non-Union Orchestra



Recording in Canada





**Finding the Right
Orchestra & Studio
Means Finding the
Right
Composer/Music
Supervisor**



**Qualifications for
the Composer**




Qualifications of the Music Supervisor



Personal Considerations, Experiences and Priorities



Essential Personnel and Their Costs



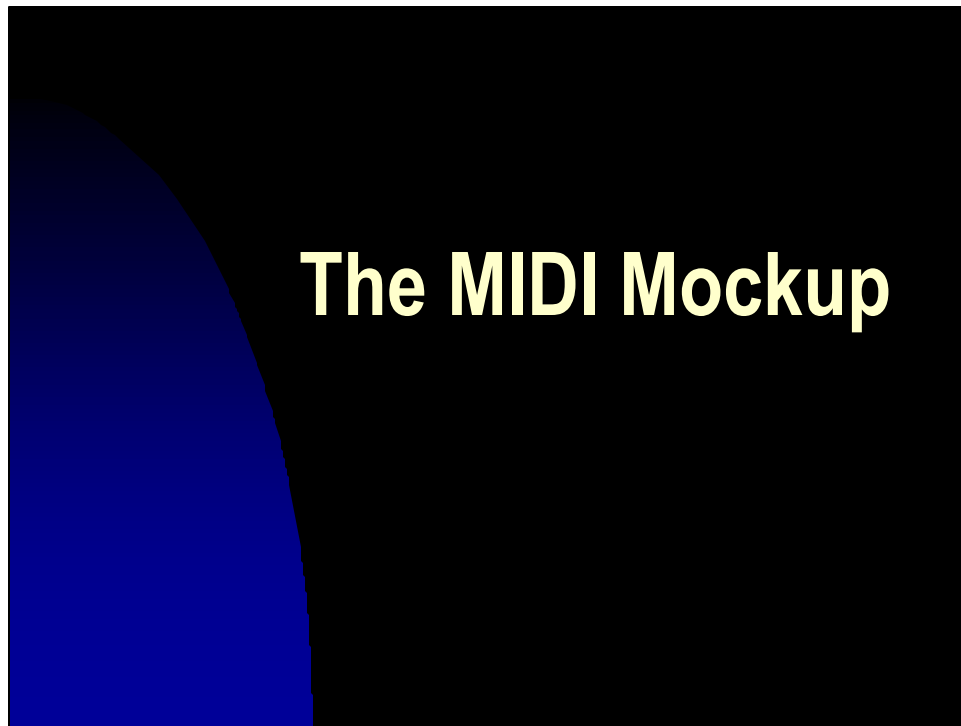
“Hard” and “Soft” Costs



Quality of Musicianship and How It Affects the Costs



The “Composer Factor” and the Budget





Music Budget for a Non-Union Orchestra



The Package Deal

