

Composing from anywhere – emergence of the handheld composition studio

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Prediction: *The next five years will see the emergence of the handheld Music composition studio.*

The notion that Composing for Film and Media requires a traditional studio or home studio to complete work of industry standard is being turned on its head. The introduction of new technologies and workflows has seen the emergence of new modes of working. What once required many personal and physical hardware tools can now be completed either on laptop or tablet devices.

Emerging technological markets will see these technologies shift to smaller interfaces (smartphone technologies) that will increasingly allow users greater creation options. Lumafusion (a pro level video editing program) already exists on the iPhone. This allows users to create top tier videos in the palm of their hands. We will see this shift to a broader scope of software applications on smartphone platforms.

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into software plugins (Ozone elements) further enhances the possibilities that mixing can be undertaken effectively on a Samsung Galaxy or Apple iPhone. Additional plugin software further reduces the reliance and requirements of a specialised room treated for unique sound characteristics and physical equipment.

Composing from Anywhere

The journey towards pocket composing (the use of smaller technologies) to complete complex tasks such as Film and Media composition has become significantly less complicated to complete anywhere as the emergence of new tools (Cloud computing and portable digital platforms) has allowed for Composers to work remotely. They are free from the confines of a specific working space.

The 1980s film *Electric Dreams* made some bold predictions surrounding the use of the computer and the possibilities of Artificial Intelligence. Presented as a Romantic Comedy with a twist, the film explores the possibilities of diverse network protocols to execute complex commands. One fact is glaringly obvious throughout the film: The Computer (lovingly referred to as Edgar in the film) requires a large amount of physical equipment.

Composers once sought rooms of studio equipment to undertake the work of film and media composition. The innate requirements of the job meant that either a large studio (think the scoring stages in Burbank California) or a smaller boutique style studio were required. While both environments can be aesthetically pleasing to work in, the emergence of smaller, portable digital technologies has made a significant number of these requirements less important. In essence, we are free from the confines of set spaces.

New Compositional tools for an old medium

The process of composing for Film and Media has morphed in recent years due in large to the emergence of digital technologies (Virtual Software Tools VSTs) and virtual working environments. Greater computing power has contributed to samples that are more versatile and realistic. Each iteration of VSTs makes the process of composition easier.

For instance, a Composer based in Melbourne can now hire a fully equipped symphony orchestra such as the Budapest Scoring Orchestra to perform and record film cues remotely without leaving the country. Increasing budgetary constraints of local productions make this option ideal when local musicians cannot be source. There is a myriad of factors at play in this scenario including: the quality and availability of players.

The introduction of new options and tools allows for a broader perspective of expression within the medium. This represents a move away from the traditional studio system where each Movie Studio (Warner Bros, Paramount etc) employed their own inhouse orchestra and session musicians. The golden era of 8 Horns and 10 offstage Trumpets as the norm for a score shifted some time ago.

An advantage of VSTs is the ability to recreate the enormous sounds of blockbusters without the associate costs. Imagine that in 2025 we hold more computing power in the palm of our hands than the Allies in 1945. The ability of our chipsets and programming will continue to emerge. Whilst the Metaverse may have been a commercial failure, it's conceptual alignment with workspaces of the future was proof of concept that the studio can be anywhere that the Composer is.

A Studio within our pockets

A further area of advancement is the use of portable digital technologies such as the laptop and iPad. Neither technology is relatively new to the tech industry. However, the introduction of the iPad pro represents a move forward. Each iteration of iOS offers users new and more flexible options that allow for higher functionality and productivity. The adaptability of either touch response or hard input devices (Keyboard and Mouse) offers a strong use case for widespread accessibility.

The newer chipsets and functionality of recent models has given software developers greater flexibility in creating apps that both mimic and surpass the usability of desktop apps on a traditional computing platform. Additionally, the integration of Artificial Intelligence into operating platforms is a further enhancement of the capabilities of emerging devices. These algorithmic tools align with the model of studio in pocket.

Support of physical peripherals such as Audio Interfaces, MIDI Controller Keyboards and traditional keyboard and mouse further enhance the functions of the device. The initial iteration of tablet technologies may have been clunky and obtuse. The newest generation presents possibilities. An all-important gamechanger of the next five years.

Scoring in the Ether (Film scoring on an iPad)

Recent technological developments have paved the way for pro (professional) apps on the iPad Pro. The recent release of both Logic Pro and Final Cut pro provides excellent functionality for composers looking to gain portable momentum away from the traditional studio environment. Previously, composers would require a laptop with limited portability.

Additionally, the use of apps such as Staff Pad with its ability to purchase professional level sound libraries (Cinesamples and Spitfire Audio) are a step in the right direction for the device and composers. Imagine the use of Staff Pad on an iPhone 16 Pro attached to a computer monitor or TV. Ultimate flexibility and portability.

A composer can now use staff pad to notate their ideas with the Apple pencil (The main input device is the Apple Pencil) and create a fully realised score for String Orchestra with excellent sound samples on par with EastWest samples. The ability to use and manipulate these sounds in a portable environment will change where and how music is created. To adapt to the emerging status quo is to survive and thrive.

Moreover, the stems (the name for an individual instrument/track when exported) can be exported as audio or xml to be read in a program such as Logic Pro. The added benefit that Staff Pad can support video and timecoding further enhance its ideal stance as a future tool. Predictably, this will shift to smartphone technology.

Implications

Technology has shifted at a rapid pace. The smart phone that someone has in their pocket has more computing power than the computer NASA used for the first Moon landing. The continual adaptation of current and new tools as they emerge will continue to provide the impetus for Composers to disengage from the traditional studio environment and move to a completely portable mode.

Samsung with their Dex platform for smartphones (inhouse proprietary) set the bar for the possibilities of using a mobile phone for portable computing. A Laptop and iPad may provide the screen real estate and computing power for now. But one day soon we may compose scores for Film and Media in the palm of our hands.

Roli recently released their Piano M and Airwave. The technology itself is not a new concept. The Theremin used the technology of sound manipulation long before the concept. Additionally, the Power Glove for the 1980s Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) was another iteration. What has changed however is the shift from requiring a dedicated physical space to a portability factor.

Imagine the year 2030. We have in our hands an immense possibility to shift the status quo away from any semblance of dedicated physical space to the ultimate portability. The studio could fit easily within a satchel. The core of the studio will be the smart phone. Our peripherals may include a VR Headset that acts as a monitor interface (for ultimate portability) and a Midi Keyboard (emerging technologies mean this may too be a technology of the past).

The next five years will see the emergence of the handheld Music composition studio. We can fondly remember the studio technologies of the past. Enjoy the physical environment they provide. But, in many ways they are akin to the Yellow Pages phone book. There is a nostalgia for the halcyon days of older technologies. They may spark brief moments of joy. Their days however are long gone.

The prediction is that the physical studio space will be used for specialised projects. The emergence of portable technologies will define the film industry in the coming decade. Composers will have access to vast technological opportunities. Their ability to work from anywhere, any place, and any time will become priceless. To compose on a train or in the hallway of a busy shopping centre will become a gamechanger to the industry at large.

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