



Getting Started in Music for Picture

**Understanding the Filmmaker's Creative Vision
To Maximize Your Sync Placements**

by Doug DeAngelis

Inside Hollywood Productions: Why Does a Filmmaker Choose *Your* Music?

It's no secret that every artist is hoping to get their music used on television. The purpose of this e-book is to empower you with the methods and techniques I use as a composer, music supervisor, songwriter, and record producer to achieve the placement of thousands of pieces of music in television and film. It's all about analyzing and understanding the creative vision of the filmmakers, and exploring how your music can enhance that vision.

My first piece of advice to every songwriter and musician who wants to hear their music on TV is to realize that your music has to become part of a larger production that already has a look, a sound, a story, and a style. For years, all of those elements have been honed to satisfaction by the creators, producers, directors, writers, actors, network executives, editors, composer, sound FX editors, and music supervisor. Your music needs to fit their production.

There are two ways that can happen:

The first way is for the filmmakers of the show to intrinsically recognize that the choices you make musically in every aspect of your music, are a creative match to their creative vision as a story teller. That vision can encompass a lot of styles and sounds, but ultimately it appeals to their creative instinct in the same way that each line of dialog in the script, every performance by the actors, and each visual effect appeals to their creative instinct. It's all one big production.

The simple comparison would be how a painter chooses the color palette that fits a picture, or an interior decorator chooses fabrics and accents that match their theme for a home.

Think about it in the context of your own creativity. How often are you out in a public place, and you hear someone talking, and you rush home to put their words into your song lyrics? *Not often!* It happens in special moments, but it has to be something that really connected with you emotionally and creatively, and that you felt would improve your art.

It's creative instinct. No rules or laws - just instinct.

In a perfect world, the filmmaker will hear your music and mentally connect it to their production. They recognize that special feeling, they audition your music to the picture, and if their instinct is correct, they will be inspired to use your music to enhance their creative vision and improve their art.

The better way is for you, the artist, to be proactive and learn to analyze your target productions. Study the production and understand how, when, and why the filmmakers use music to enhance their creative vision. Once you do that, you will learn to recognize if your music is a good stylistic fit, and develop new skills to arrange and produce your music in order to improve their show.

I do this on every piece of music I write, whether it's the end title song of a feature film, or the theme of a game show. My music needs to capture their creative vision. It's a great skill to learn, and once you understand the connection, you'll find that your music will become a much more organic fit with the cinematography, story, characters, editing, visual and sound effects, and the many other elements of the soundtrack.

Three Steps to Get Started Today

STEP ONE: Prepare Your Music for Auditioning to Picture

Organize the instrumental versions of your songs. At minimum, most every music placement will require an instrumental mix for the music editor to tailor the song around the dialog. This is a standard practice, so you will need to have instrumentals ready to go. Make them if you don't have them.

PRO TIP: I like to go a step further, and create multiple versions of each song by stripping down to the critical theme lines, and crafting unique arrangements to cover different scenarios.

STEP TWO: Study Your Target for Music Placement

Start by choosing five of your favorite television shows and films in different genres that you would like to target for placements. You might choose a drama, a romantic comedy, a reality show, a sports show, and a thriller. Record them to your DVR, have them on demand so you can rewind and audition music multiple times.

For this step, it is important to put your creativity aside, and focus on the creative vision of the filmmakers. Make a set of notes as you watch the show, with as much detail as possible on:

- **The Cinematography Style:** Is it bright, dark, futuristic, gritty, slick and polished, or more organic and 'home made' looking?

- **The Musical Score:** Is it orchestral, electronic, guitar driven, minimalistic, percussive, continuous, or used sparingly?
- **The Pace of Your Internal Body Clock As You Watch:** Are you relaxed, nervous, on the edge of your seat with anticipation, reliving your own personal life experiences, or really tense with fear?
- **The Environment and Locations of the Scenes:** Are they primarily studying evidence in a crime lab, or partying in a beach house? The music needs to match the mindset of the characters in motion. Do they use music to enhance those locations, and if so, are they songs or are they using underscore?
- **The Songs Chosen in the Production:** Here is an opportunity to analyze the musical taste of the filmmakers.
- **The Sound Design:** Is the show rich with the details of what your eyes see, quiet and sparse, bombastic with explosions and the sound of big action, or subtle underneath the dialog and story line? Take some special notes on how music interacts to support the sound design.

PRO TIP: Download a video looping app for your phone or tablet. When you identify a scene where you feel connected musically, make a video of the scene with and without the sound up that you can loop and experiment with further.

I personally use Loopideo on my iPad and iPhone. It's free, and you can upgrade to the Pro Version for a few dollars:

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/loopideo-loop-videos/id798990531>

STEP THREE: Audition Your Instrumental Mixes

Once you've watched it through several times and made your notes, you can turn the sound of the program off, or down very low to begin. The first step is visual connection, so begin with your instrumental versions, and try to identify connection between the style of music you write, and the creative vision that the filmmakers produce.

Now it's time to analyze the connection between the filmmaker's style, and your music. Imagine you are the director, and you've spent 6 months filming and editing to perfection. Imagine you have all the music on Spotify to choose from in finding the perfect piece. Every nuance is important, so dig through your notes, and be critical. Here are some things to look for:

Your musical style needs to compliment the cinematography, the score, the locations, the other songs in the show, and the sound design. The music should look very natural when you play it against the show, sinking into the visual style, and matching the environments and the mindset of the characters.

As you hone in on the overall style of the production, you can start to attach your music to specific scenes. Think about tempo, texture and tone, and the energy of the music. It should support the pace of your body clock as you are enjoying the show. You will likely experience some natural tension when doing this step, so try to separate the process of judging your music, and focus on the notes of your emotional state when you were just a viewer.

Once you find an instrumental that feels natural and enhances the scene, audition the vocal version and see how your lyrics interact with the dialog and the storylines. Try to identify a section of the lyrics that elevates the story, but don't get hung up on lyrics yet.

PRO TIP: Use Shazam to identify every song used in the show, and do a Google search of each song. This will offer a lot of valuable information into the music budget, breath of styles, and openness of the filmmakers to use independent songs.

Now That You've Got the Basics

Once you've completed the process, you will have a good starting point to feel where your music works.

Every step here is important in the learning process:

- Prepare your existing music catalog for picture
- Analyze the creative vision of your favorite filmmakers
- Audition your music against your favorite shows and films

The next step is the honing your musical craft to fit picture and enhance the storylines. That's what the filmmaker is looking for in your music.

Soundtrack Production will expand your writing and production skills in order to develop this new musical vocabulary. It will gradually become natural as you develop a true connection between your music and the filmmaker's creative vision.

Once you have these basics down, you will expand into the critical music components and structural elements of every show, as well as the delicate relationship between lyrics and dialog. Always remember... it's all about the filmmaker's creative vision.

I look forward to hearing about your experience as you explore the amazing creative freedom of music for picture!

About Me

Doug DeAngelis is a soundtrack producer, production sound mixer, and audio post-production specialist with more than four decades of experience at the intersection of music, technology, and cinematic storytelling.

His career began at the age of eighteen as a programmer and recording engineer on Nine Inch Nails' groundbreaking debut album, *Pretty Hate Machine*. Over the following decade, he became one of the industry's most sought-after programmers, engineers, producers, and remixers, contributing to hundreds of commercial releases for artists including Michael Jackson, Alicia Keys, Janet Jackson, Chaka Khan, Pet Shop Boys, Jamiroquai, No Doubt, RuPaul, Queen Latifah, and many others. Working with legendary producers in New York, Chicago, Detroit, London, and Los Angeles, Doug helped shape the early electronic dance movement in America, earning credits on dozens of Billboard Dance Chart No. 1 singles and numerous Gold- and Platinum-certified recordings.

Doug later relocated to Los Angeles, where his career evolved into film and television. Today, his work spans the complete soundtrack production process, including Production Sound Recording, Dialogue Editing, Sound Design, Music Editing, Music Supervision, Music Licensing, Original Score Production, and Surround Mixing. His projects have included feature films, scripted television, documentaries, streaming productions, and live broadcasts for Netflix, Amazon, ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CNN, MTV, Lifetime, Nickelodeon, iHeartRadio, and numerous independent filmmakers.

Doug refers to this integrated approach as **Soundtrack Production**—the philosophy that every sonic element of a film should work together to tell the story. Rather than treating production sound, post-production audio, and music as separate disciplines, he approaches them as one continuous creative process from the first day of production through the final mix.

In addition to his work in film, Doug is passionate about education. He teaches Location Sound Recording and Post-Production Audio at the Nashville Film Institute and has taught his Music To Picture courses at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music and Middle Tennessee State University.

Doug is also the Co-Founder and Conference Chair of **A3E (Artists & Advanced Applications Exchange)**, an international conference exploring the future of music production, immersive audio, artificial intelligence, and creative technology. As the founder of **BlackSleeve Media**, he develops interactive technologies for live entertainment and fan engagement, including **Cheer Official**, the leading mobile platform for competitive cheerleading with more than 500,000 downloads.

Based in Nashville, Tennessee, Doug continues to collaborate with filmmakers throughout the United States, helping bring stories to life through exceptional sound.