

**Film Project 2:**  
**Writing a Dramatic Background Cue**

**Overview:**

You will choose a clip from Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds*. (Clips contained in the “filmproj2” folder.) After studying the video and creating spotting notes, you will compose a background cue for the clip. At the end, we will bounce our work down to a single QuickTime file which can be viewed on a computer or burned to DVD. You will be graded using the general rubric for Music Technology projects (see copy contained in this textbook).

**WORKFLOW:**

**Phase One: Spotting Notes (the planning phase)**

**Step 1 (dramatic decisions):**

What is the general mood of the scene? What emotions or ideas would I like to evoke? Focus your ideas by listing descriptive words (for example: loneliness, heroism, growing tension, neutral, etc.).

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**Step 2 (musical decisions):**

How will my music set that mood or impression? Decide upon the musical parameters that will achieve your desired result.

Tempo (fast or slow?, accelerandos or rallentandos?, free-form (no tempo?):

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Texture (many layers or few? (thick or thin?), loud or soft?, evolving?):

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Timbre (instrument sounds to be used):

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Compositional devices to be used: for example, scales, harmonies, ostinatos, etc.

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**Step 3 (Timing Notes and hits):**

What key moments on screen would you like the music to reinforce? (These are called “hits”.) What might the music do at those moments? (Note: You should only plan on *key* moments. The goal is not to write down everything that happens.)

<u>Time</u>	<u>On-screen event</u>	<u>What will the music do?</u>
<u>0:22</u>	<u>boy enters house</u>	<u>introduce “mysterious” ostinato</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**Phase Two: Composing**

With a plan in place, you’re ready to begin composing!

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**Reminders and Tips:**

- In most film scenes, there is an ebb and flow of tension (more vs. less tension) and of motion (slow movement vs. faster action). The music should generally support and follow this.
- Don’t overwrite. Film underscoring is not concert music. It should support the film, not overshadow it.
- Silence and space can be very effective. Be willing to write thin textures of just a few layers.
- Pace the music. Allow room for the music to grow when the action demands it.

*As always, save often!*