

COMPOSING FOR THE FILM INDUSTRY

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With expansion of the UK's film industry, more opportunities are opening for musicians. How can you ensure that you benefit from this? **Vinota Karunasaagarar** finds out more from Chris Mitchell, whose career in music has taken him from performing, to teaching, to composing in the film industry

When Shinfield Studios in Reading opens at the end of this year, it will include 18 sound stages comprising a staggering 1 million square feet of production space. As composer Chris Mitchell enthusiastically points out, *'that's 3,000 jobs, just for Shinfield'*. Neighbouring Winnersh Film Studios is also expanding, and estimating another 1,000 jobs.

These aren't the only film studios with plans to grow. Warner Brothers aims to add 400,000 sq ft (37,000 sq metres) to its Leaverton, Hertfordshire studios by 2027, and Shepperton in Surrey is hoping to be the second largest film studio in the world once its proposed extensions are completed. This growth in the film industry will inevitably lead to an increase in jobs in all sectors, including music.

As Mitchell is keen to highlight, *'It's really important to have an overview of what growth in production in the UK means. If you're interested in sound or music, then ask yourself what are all the job openings that could be there for you? Remember different members of the team are needed for every production. For sound this includes location sound recording, sound mixing, Foley, ADR (speech), composing, editing, orchestrating, sound effects and so forth.'*

Websites like ScreenSkills explain the different roles involved in film production so you can see what is available and then work out the skills you need to obtain that job.

REMEMBER THE SKILLS YOU'RE LEARNING ARE TRANSFERRABLE.

ScreenSkills also offers training programmes and funding opportunities. In addition, six BFI-funded skills clusters, including Screen Berkshire, have been launched around the UK to train and recruit the new talent needed.

Mitchell's tri-partite career is an example of how varied working in music can be if you embrace change and don't pigeonhole yourself as one type of musician. He says he began as a freelancer, *'touring, working in recording studios. I was classically trained but I adapted to play in popular styles and with rhythm sections. I was versatile; at that time I also worked for music publishers, arranged music typesetting, and orchestrated for broadcasts.'* Then came part two of his career: *'I guess when we had two boys, the idea of having a regular pay cheque became quite attractive. I saw a job specialising in teaching music production as Assistant Director of Music at Leighton Park School in Reading; I thought I might be there just a few years, but it ended up being 14.'*

The third part of Mitchell's career began in 2019 when he left teaching and went back to being a freelance composer, working in audio and production. *'By this time Leighton Park had a £4m purpose-built music and media department, so it was time to pass on the baton. It's still thriving, this is what happens when you support music in schools – it attracts new talent into the school and there's continued growth.'*



Mitchell was in the privileged position of being able to continue his other work in music while teaching: *'I think that has great benefits because you're able to bring what you learned outside your teaching practice to your students.'* Throughout his career, Mitchell's willingness to learn new skills has been the key to progression: *'I obtained a teaching qualification in order to teach; I also studied an online Pro Tools course with Berklee College in the States, and then three levels of training with Apple in Logic Pro X.'*

Whether you are in higher education, starting out in your career, or teaching students who are thinking about a career, in music, be aware of the career options that working in sound production can bring. Learning about music technology, for example how to use a digital

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audio workstation (DAW), is key to expanding yours or your students' skill set. Richard Llewellyn, UK Education Manager at Steinberg, is keen for schools to invest in music technology and for students to learn how to use it: *'Top media composers use Steinberg software, such as Hans Zimmer, Alan Silvestri, Hildur Guðnadóttir and Ludwig Göransson. Steinberg's Cubase software is not expensive and there are even free versions. All levels of composers (student to professional) start composing in Cubase in exactly the same way, using the same functionality and process for creating music. The higher versions of Cubase add more features that further aid composition. Once you learn the basics, the methodology of creating music in a DAW is the same.'*

To enhance your learning, explore what organisations like ThinkSpace Education and RSL can offer – ThinkSpace provides online courses specialising in music and sound-design for film, games and television ranging from free courses to postgraduate degrees, while RSL offers courses in music production, podcasting and vlogging.

Mitchell has worked with another organisation Resource Production: *'They have been around for 25 years and their mission is to encourage, support and recruit from a diverse range of backgrounds. Wherever you are in the country sign up to their mail shot so you can keep informed.'*



Think about what's going on around you that you can get involved in to gain experience and make connections. If you're a music teacher, are there apprenticeships that your students can apply for? At your school, if another subject requires podcasts, vlogs or webinars, ask how your music students can contribute and gain experience in sound? If you're a musician, experience of working in audio production can be gained in any industry that deals with sound in your area, for example theatres.

Remember the skills you're learning are transferrable, as showcased by Mitchell's most recent work: *'I've worked with Rabble theatre, I've done a radio play, a stage play, and worked as both a sound designer and composer, and a film I produced the score for, Alex Lewis: Mountain, recently won best documentary at the London Independent Film Festival.'*

All photos: Toby Mitchell

Chris Mitchell: chrismitchmusic.com

ScreenSkills: screenskills.com

Screen Berkshire: screenberkshire.co.uk

Steinberg: steinberg.net

ThinkSpace Education: thinkspace.ac.uk

RSL: rslawards.com

Resource Productions:
resource-productions.co.uk

