



Illustrious professor Michael Sweet, a composer and associate professor in the Film Department at the famous Berklee College of Music, has been the audio director for more than one hundred video games.

Sweet was the co-founder and creative director of AudioHead, and he has created numerous emotionally immersive, award-winning experiences for games, broadcasts, and sonic branding.

Sweet has composed numerous network identities, including but not limited to HBO, VH1, Comedy Central, and CNN. His other works can be heard on the Xbox 360 logo and on award-winning games from Cartoon Network, Sesame Workshop, PlayFirst, iWin, Shockwave, RealArcade, Pogo, Microsoft, Lego, AOL, and many other platforms.

He composed the Xbox 360 start-up sound and has won awards from the Independent Games Festival (IGF). He also won the BDA Promax Award for best sound design for a network package (HBO Zone) and has been nominated for four Game Audio Network Guild (GANG) awards.

Sweet is a highly sought and frequently featured speaker at prestigious industry events and institutions, including the Game Developers Conference, the Montreal Game Summit, Audio Engineering Society (AES), Savannah College of Art and Design's GDX Conference, New York University, and Parsons School of Design.

We appreciate that Michael has taken some time for a brief interview with Game Music Jobs.

1 Please tell us a little about yourself. Why did you choose to work at Berklee College of Music?

At Berklee, I'm the Artistic Director of Video Game Scoring and have scored approximately 130 games across my career. I've composed and created sound design primarily for kids and casual games, including Lego, Sesame Workshop, Cartoon Network, and others. Some of my most recent games include *Dear Reader* for Apple Arcade, *Walden*, *A Game* for Playstation 4, and *Killer Queen Black* for Nintendo Switch.

2 Many Grammy-nominated artists have come out of Berklee; your alumni have worked on Halo 4, Gears of War 5, Fez, Call of Duty Modern Warfare, Diner Dash, and many more. What factors help Berklee excel in creating quality professionals?

Some of the skills needed to succeed in the video game industry include composing ability, adaptability, drive, mockup, and production skills, adeptness with technology, and business skills. Berklee strives to teach a wide variety of skills with a goal of graduates initially paying next month's rent with music and audio, but then how to create an artistic vision for a life in music.

3 Film and video game music composition are competitive fields; what advantages does a formal musical education offer aspiring artists?

Berklee strives to give a well-rounded education to students with an emphasis on creative, business and technology skills. Higher education is extremely competitive, and we continuously look at the curriculum of competitors in our field and make sure that graduates have the best advantages that we can offer. Formal education through a university is not a necessity to succeed, but it has many advantages such as a focused curriculum to help hone skills more quickly and effectively than if someone tried to find those resources on their own. In addition, the community of a formal education can be a real advantage in terms of learning, networking after university, and supporting one another.

4 As a composer, how essential are interpersonal and communication skills when working with film and video game teams?

The ability of a composer to listen to the game developer, receive feedback about their music, and make changes to a composition are incredibly important. Communication and interpersonal

skills, along with creative flexibility, are some of the key attributes of survival in this highly competitive market. Being able to describe a compositional idea in words can also be invaluable when pitching an idea to a potential game developer to help sell yourself as a composer.

5 *Berklee has both film and video game scoring programs. How do these programs differ from each other?*

Berklee's video game scoring courses and film scoring courses compliment and build from one another. Film scoring focuses on telling a story through melody, intervallic relationships, and orchestration whereas video game scoring emphasizes interactive scoring methods such as horizontal resequencing and vertical remixing which react quickly to player decisions. Both emphasize teaching modern music production and composition techniques, hybrid scoring, as well as writing for live ensembles recorded in our studios.

6 *Is the approach to musical scoring different for movies and video games? If so, what are those differences?*

With film and television scoring, the composer knows when events are going to happen based on what the editor delivers. In a video game, the player acts as the editor - making decisions in real-time. This means that the music in a game needs to be reactive to those player choices, and do so in such a seamless way that the player stays in the experience as opposed to having them wonder why there was a dramatic shift in the music. Students at Berklee gain experience writing seamless transitions for video games, and utilize other

interactive music techniques to help immerse the player into an uninterrupted game experience.

7 *Do all film and video game music jobs require that composers work on-site? How often is it that projects are composed remotely from home studios?*

Most video game composers are hired as contractors under work for hire agreements. There are exceptions where there are staff composer positions though primarily in lower to mid-tier game developers, as well very small of AAA Game Developers such as Riot Games, Blizzard, and Capcom. At the low and mid-tier levels there may be a single audio person which handles both the music and the sound design, and some implementation. At the higher levels, the work becomes more specialized. Sound designers, implementers, and audio directors are more frequently staff positions at game developers and publishers.

Contract video game composers sometimes write from home studios, but successful composers frequently have a writing studio outside of their home. Shared composer writing spaces and studios are common in metro areas such as Los Angeles. Live recording of musicians is common in the game industry especially in AAA games - and if the group is larger than 1-3 players composers will hire larger studios for recording.

8 *After graduation, what career avenues are available for composers?*

The skillset of a graduate is quite a large toolset in composition and technology. Commonly graduates become assistant composers if available; in essence, continuing

their education in almost a mentoring role. But there are many different paths that a graduate can go into including: orchestration, technology support (building and fixing DAW rigs), instrument creation, synthesis, sound designers, game audio implementation, game audio QA (quality assurance), copyists, music supervision, music editing, note trackers and many more. In many ways the path to being a composer can be a crooked line of opportunities which need to balance the real needs of paying rent, and honing the creative composing skills for the right kinds of projects.

9 *What qualifications would aspiring composers need when applying to study with Berklee?*

Currently, Berklee has an audition process which has applicants show their musical skill level on their instrument. In those auditions, the instrument skill level is important, but other aspects are also taken into consideration such as composition, songwriting, production skills, and more. For students considering a scoring career, having some compositions as part of their application and audition process can be very important. Knowing more about musical language (e.g. harmonic theory, orchestration) as well as the technology that modern music is composed with (DAWs, sample-based libraries, synthesis, effects) can also help better prepare students for Berklee.