

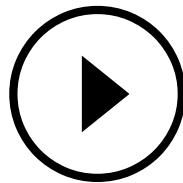
Spencer's Journey

Music Composition Student Sees Future in Movies After VTD Collaboration

Although he has not had the chance to attempt it yet, Senior Spencer Cuppage has always felt like he wanted to score a movie.

Now after composing the music for “Luma’s Journey,” one of the ten featured videos in the [Virtual Technology & Design \(VTD\) /Music Composition](#) Lionel Hampton School of Music (LHSOM) concert in January, he knows he wants to take on that challenge.

“I was very excited when this project came along because, after having gone through it, I found myself more capable of tackling something like this,” the Boise native said. “Going through the process of lining up all your timings with the video, figuring out how long to hold notes and knowing everything that has to happen musically for the end product to look right.”



Story Design

Before he even had a chance to start thinking about music, Cuppage and his VTD partner, Joey Cisneros, spent hours coming up with a story for Cisneros to build in a virtual world. The two partners connected early in the process, talking about stories ranging from science fiction to action/adventure to help build their plot.

“It was a very collaborative, very cool part of the process,” Cuppage said. “We would question everything, ‘Why would the character do this?’; ‘What would it look like if we tried this?’; and ‘How do we connect the story from this point to a point further down the road?’”

Once the storyboarding was done and the plot was set, Cuppage started composing. Because of the many obstacles that Luma faced during her journey — including falling out of a boat and sinking, waking up in an underwater world, exploring the new world and eventually resigning herself to being part of that world — the score needed to evoke almost every possible emotion.



Spencer Cuppage.

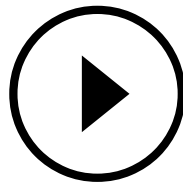
“You can see where moods change quickly from one theme to another, so the structure of the composition has to show that,” he said. “But I liked the challenge of following a story and creating based on a character, because it’s so different than just writing ambient music.”

Cuppage created rough musical tracks that he played alongside the storyboards and then he and Cisneros would compare notes.

“It was great to hear the rough tracks alongside the storyboards because that allowed us to make sure the feeling of the music was timed in with the graphics,” Cisneros said.

In addition to following the emotional rollercoaster of Luma, Cuppage also needed to musically represent the theme of the project: bioluminescence, which is the production and emission of light by living organisms.

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An Illuminating Experience

He decided to use an alternative way to play a common instrument to find the sound he was looking for.





Prior to this project, I just composed. The music led me, and it was just me and the music. My participation in this was equal parts story and music, and I think knowing the story helped me create musically.

— Spencer Cuppage, senior

“When Luma wakes up in the underwater world, you hear a really light sound that I thought sounded like bioluminescence,” he said. “That was produced by using a bow on a vibraphone, which is usually played with a mallet.”

Cuppage and Cisneros cross-collaborated on both parts of the project: the visuals and the music. The result was an amazing video and a reminder for Cuppage about the importance of collaboration for cumbersome projects like film scores.



Spencer Cuppage and Joey Cisneros.

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Finding new ways to compose was a success for Cuppage. That, and seeing his creation on a huge screen and hearing the applause after it finished.

“Amazing,” said Cuppage, about the concert. “The whole project was fun but to see it on the big screen and have the orchestra play it exactly like you imagined it, is something I’ll never forget.”

Article by [David Jackson](#), University Communications and Marketing.

Photos provided by University of Idaho Visual Productions.

Published in April 2023.

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