

Daniel Levin '00

Composing a life in music

WRITING FILM SCORES ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR LEVIN

To know, at age 10, what your life's work is to be is a rare gift, and **DANIEL LEVIN '00** is one of the fortunate few to have received that gift.

"For me, there was never really a question," he says. "I just felt called to do it. It is a real vocation and once I hit middle school I didn't think about it; it just seemed the most natural thing."

That "most natural thing" is to compose music, and Levin has been working as a professional composer, arranger, orchestrator and teacher since 2006. No sooner did he complete his bachelor and master of music degrees at Indiana University Jacobs School of Music than he packed up and moved out to one of the world's most competitive arenas for composers: Los Angeles, California.

"I wanted to try my hand at film scoring, and the people who have the work are in Los Angeles. The way to become known and to be taken seriously is to be there and since it takes time to become established, I decided to take the leap of faith and move there," he says.

With awards from "Down Beat" Magazine, the Turner Classic Movies Young Film Composers Competition and the San Francisco Song Festival, Levin is steadily building a career as a sought-after musician and composer. He has composed film scores for numerous independent features, short subjects and web series, and has collaborated on several projects with Christopher Nickel, a Vancouver, Canada-based film and television composer and conductor. "For some reason I tend to get a lot of comedies, which have their own challenges," he says. "Since music interacts with everything else on screen, it changes how you conceive the music."

Levin is becoming known for his ability to orchestrate in a variety of musical genres and recently orchestrated music for a concert at Carnegie Hall that featured internationally-known singers Sarah McLachlan, Loreena McKennitt, Andrea Corr and Hayley Westenra.

Levin also teaches music students at the Musicians Institute in Hollywood, works with early childhood and elementary students at a local Montessori school, serves as the accompanist at the First Baptist Church of Monrovia-Arcadia, and teaches piano to a few private students. It is not uncommon for him to work at least 60-70 hours a week.

He was thrilled to receive his first major commission from John Vaida, chair of the visual and performing arts department, for a work to celebrate the October, 2014 dedication of the new Kirby Center for Creative Arts. His piece, titled "The Creative Spirit," refers back to the Sem music and art AP course by the same name and celebrates the joy and beauty of the creative arts. He also was very pleased to have his music appear on the same

program as a work by Sem music teacher and orchestra director Anthony Kubasek, one of his Sem mentors; Kubasek premiered his piece titled "Celebratory Overture," an orchestral setting of an alma mater he had written for Sem in 1991.

Because he took mostly music courses while in college, Levin relies heavily on his Sem education in his everyday life. "I really feel indebted to Sem because of the amazing education I received here," he says. "I was saved by all the APs I took and in some ways I feel that I received the academic aspect of my college education at Sem. I rely on that education when I teach and when I work on rewriting the curriculum for our music theory courses at the Musicians Institute. I still refer to the style guide that we used in Mr. Carver Collins' classes."

In his address to the student body during the 2014 Founders Day assembly, Levin emphasized that the time management skills and education he received at Sem have helped him succeed in the highly competitive music field in Los Angeles. "I am constantly drawing on the rigorous, classical liberal arts foundation I was given here to enrich my life both as a musician and as a person. Every day I try to apply that knowledge and to act with the integrity and grace that characterize this school," he told the students.

As he looks to the future, Dan Levin plans to continue composing, orchestrating, writing for film and teaching. He wants to try his hand at longer form classical pieces (he has begun work on a violin concerto) and to challenge himself as a composer to keep expanding his own palette. But his greatest pleasure is to write for the silver screen.

"If you're watching a film and you forget you're watching because you're so into the story and what's happening, then the film maker and everyone involved did their job. I hope that someday I'll be involved with films that do everything that well because it's just amazing, a transporting experience," he says. "I guess my main aspiration as a musician is to try to attain my potential as a composer, whatever that may be."

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