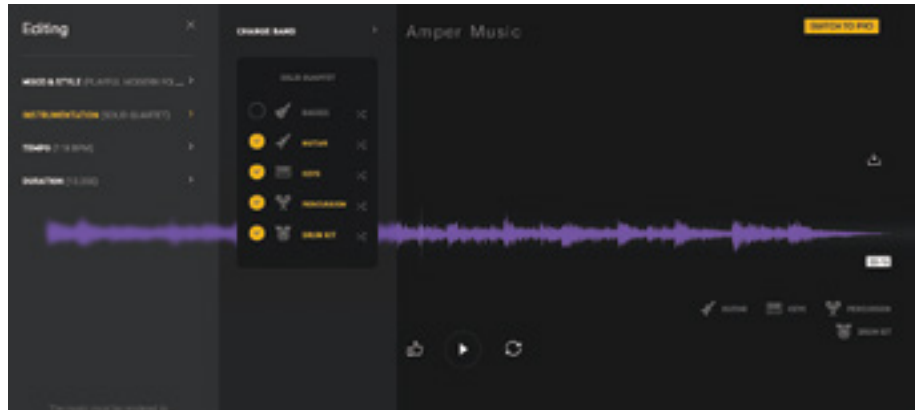


Original Music at Your Fingertips



Music Alumnus Cofounds Personal AI Music Composer, Amper

When sourcing music, media agencies look for samples that are high quality, customizable and legal to use — a tricky combination when factoring in strict timelines and limited budgets. With his name on sound design credits for major movie titles like “Inception,” “The Dark Knight” and “The Accountant,” Sam Estes (Music, ’00) understands the challenges of creating music for film and media.

Traditional music composition is a time-intensive and expensive process, so media agencies often turn to online music libraries — which lack in quality and originality — instead of working with composers. A producer of a short online video could spend hours looking for a song that perfectly fits his or her theme and budget. At the same time, when agencies do hire composers,

they spend 90 percent of their time programming rather than writing music.

To address these industry pain points, Estes cofounded Amper Music, an artificial intelligence music composer that allows users to create and customize unique, royalty-free soundtracks without having musical experience. With Amper, a unique score is produced based on musical attributes selected by the user. The software currently offers four main styles — classic rock, modern folk, ’90s pop and cinematic. After selecting a style, users specify keywords such as *ambient* or *playful* to determine the mood. Amper produces a music sample matching outlined criteria, which can be further customized by band, instrumentation, tempo or duration. A cymbal swell or a “jingle hit” can even be added as accents. The rendered music track can then be downloaded and added to the video.

Amper’s cloud-based software also allows a producer to make edits on a tight schedule, organize all projects online from any computer, communicate soundtrack ideas, collaborate in real time on new musical ideas and streamline editing. “Amper offers collaboration tools for media professionals

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and musicians to better work together,” said Estes. Its application program interface, or API, allows developers to integrate Amper’s AI technology into their products, opening the door to an entirely new landscape for innovation.

Since Estes and cofounders Michael Hobe and Drew Silverstein released their open beta in January 2017, Amper has secured sign-ups from a number of major media companies, publishing houses and creative agencies around the world. As the software matures and receives more user feedback, music selection will continue to improve. “We teach the computer, and the more info we feed it, the better it’s getting,” said Estes.

Active involvement at Cal Poly influenced Estes’ hands-on approach in developing Amper. “I did everything at Cal Poly: conducting classes, choir,

band. I also minored in technical theatre and designed sound for some of the shows,” said Estes. “Now, I’m applying Learn by Doing to our business. I get my hands dirty and learn everything I possibly can.”

His background in music also gives him an appreciation for the potential opposition to using computer-generated scores in lieu of employing musicians. “Of course, we aren’t trying to replace musicians. We encourage people to hire musicians as much as possible. Amper’s target audience is production teams who don’t have the budget for a composer to begin with,” said Estes. “We look at this as a tool for musicians and composers. Everything we do, we put through that lens: Is this going to be collaborative? We want to change the industry for the good.”

Left to right: Cal Poly alumnus Sam Estes is a cofounder of Amper Music; Amper’s music composer at work; Estes in the audio booth.