Music Copying & Finale, Part 1
Excerpt from the "Lizard's Guide to Music Copying"
by Lee Monroe

Using Finale for music preparation has revolutionized the music copying field. Prior to computer music notation if you wanted to learn music copying it was like getting an apprenticeship with an elderly wizard. You had to find a situation where you could learn the art of copying, usually on the fly.

When I first came to town in 1981, I was only interested in performing. I was a hot shot in college and I had a few contacts in the area. I secured a nice townhouse apartment and was ready for the life of a working full-time musician. Oh, I forgot to mention how incredibly naive I was.

It was mentioned to me that there was an opening for music copyist at the WDW Music Library. I had copied to some extent in college but had absolutely no interest in doing it now. After 6 months of paying for my too expensive apartment (I couldn't even afford furniture) and eating on about $8 a week, I seemed to develop some additional motivation to pursue this copying gig. Fortunately for me they were still looking and I began my career as a professional music copyist. I was also very lucky to start in a situation with several other experienced copyists. I was able to observe and train with these gentlemen at a pace not normally afforded new copyists. These opportunities are few and far between and I will be forever grateful for that period.

Today's copyist has many advantages as well, the most important being that you will not be required to develop a "hand" for music copying. With the availability of hand music fonts, new copyists or arrangers can produce musical parts that are comparable to any professional hand copyist. If you are currently a "Hand" copyist or brand new to the copying field, here are a few suggestions about how to make that first foray into using the Finale computer music notation program for music prep.

Getting Started: Start off with the right equipment, my suggestions are strictly from a copyist point of view and does not take into account the myriad amount of equipment available for midi and mixing work.

If you don't already have a computer, you should take a careful look at what is available. There are many great bargains out there with ample computing power. In fact almost any desktop or full size laptop on the market would have sufficient power to run Finale. Ask advice of computer savvy friends or someone else you trust that has a good body of knowledge. You will need a decent sound card, most come with something on the order of a Sound Blaster card and speakers (including sub woofer) would be okay. You must decide on the size of your monitor, depending on your budget I would suggest at least a 17" screen. I personally have a 21" at home and the office, It provides an incredible amount of vision. I would particularly suggest this size if you intend to use Finale for arranging. The decision between a PC or Mac are not nearly as significant as in the past. Most of my copyists are PC based but I have several that use Mac and we have no compatibility problems.

You will want a keyboard input device. It is possible to do Finale without some sort of midi keyboard but it is not that much fun or is it efficient. There isn't a real need to get anything fancy, you should be able to get an input device in the $100 range that would work fine.

Think about how you will arrange your equipment in your work place. Take into account where you want the computer keyboard and monitor in relation to your midi keyboard. If you use a music stand to support the source material (suggested) then you will also need to provide for that. I have my computer keyboard slightly off to my left (I use the number pad for note values) and the monitor just above it. I play the midi keyboard with my right hand and position the music stand to the right of the monitor, so that I can see any anomalies with Finale as I am entering information.

Learning Finale: I constantly hear and can personally attest to the fact that Finale has somewhat of a learning curve. The latest versions are much more user friendly but it still can be very challenging. One of the reasons so many professional copyists use Finale is that it can notate anything needed by a commercial copying gig. Once you learn where everything is and with the ability now to macro many different functions, Finale is a very complete and competent music notation program.

There is only one way to really get Finale under your fingers and that is to start entering music as soon as possible. Take every different kind of score that you can get your hands on and start entering notation. The tutorials that are provided with Finale will give you an extremely basic sense of the program and if you are new to computing I suggest that you do them. In today's market you need to already have your copy chops together before you will have any significant opportunities. Many people contact me who have a peripheral knowledge of Finale and want to learn to be copyists. I try and help these people when I can, but my mainstay copyist are highly skilled and there is no need for me to take a chance on anyone who isn't near that level. I was very lucky when I started, the same opportunity would not be there for me today.

Commitment: If you really want to learn Finale like the back of your hand, then make that commitment to yourself to try and do as many of your gigs as possible with Finale, even if it takes you longer initially. Out of necessity, you will learn to get around Finale. When my company made that decision, we went cold turkey. We set a date and dove in. At first, there were only three of us and we taught ourselves the program. Every day brought a new discovery by someone. We made ourselves stick with it right in the middle of a very busy time for us. One night I remember spending a half hour on a single bar of drums trying to figure out layering and slash notation, knowing I had to finish a full orchestra arrangement for the following morning. I refused to compromise and staying with the program under that stress ingrained it even more than normal.

It is also very important to continue using the program even during work lulls. I find it very easy to lose the second nature of the program after only a few days of inactivity.

When I help people to learn Finale, I only give them the surface stuff at first. There is so much depth there, that the student needs to have points of reference or all that you teach him will go over their head. It is much easier, of course, if you know others that do Finale and can answer questions that stump you quickly. Don't immediately rely on this person for reference though, try and find the answers yourself first. You will learn much more about the program just from the effort.

My next article will deal with specifics of how we utilize page margins, our settings and other tidbits of producing music with Finale.

Mr. Monroe is the co-founder of Express Music Services, a music production company. His company was one of the industry leaders in transforming hand fonts into computer fonts and utilizing these fonts professionally. In 1997 he became the sole owner of EMS. EMP publishes a free weekly newsletter entitled Staff Notes that offers down-to-earth, real-world advice and information for teachers and students of all ages. Staff Notes covers topics in performance, arranging for bands, percussion how-to, vocal techniques, interviews with industry professionals and other great stuff. Visit Express Music Publishing on the web at:
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