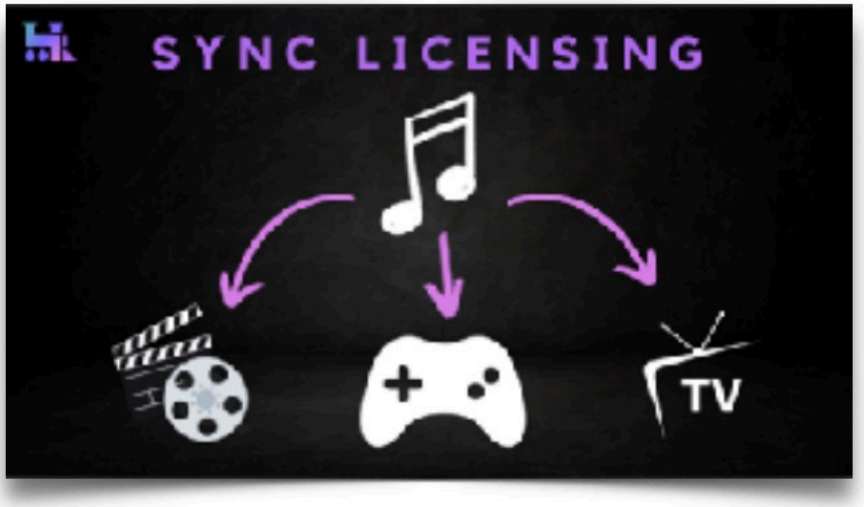
How to Get Your Music in Movies, TV Shows, and Video Games (A Simple Guide)



Want to make money from your music and get it heard by thousands of new fans? Placing songs in TV shows, movies, and video games is one of the best ways to do it. And the good news? There are more opportunities than ever before.

Why Bother with Placements?

Getting your song on screen isn't just about the paycheck (though that's nice). When your music appears in a popular show or game:

- You earn licensing fees and performance royalties
- New fans discover your music
- It builds your resume and credibility
- Your song gets heard by people who might never find it otherwise

The best part? TV and movies need ALL kinds of music – rock, country, hip-hop, instrumental, even songs that sound like they're from different decades. If your music doesn't fit what's on Top 40 radio, don't worry. Film and TV might still be a perfect home for it.

What Are Music Supervisors Looking For?

Music supervisors are the people who find songs for shows and movies. Here's what they want:

Songs that sound like current hits or classics – but without the huge price tag. They want that *feel* without paying for the real thing.

Universal lyrics – Think themes like love, new beginnings, overcoming challenges, feeling good, enjoying life. Avoid specific names, places, or details that might conflict with a scene.

Upbeat tempos – Surprise! Slow, sad ballads are actually the hardest to place. Energetic, positive songs work better.

Clean versions available – If your song has swear words, have a "clean" edit ready.

Broadcast quality recordings – Your recording needs to sound as good as what's on the radio. The good news? You can absolutely achieve this in a home studio with the right skills and equipment.

How Good Does Your Recording Need to Be?

The recording you submit is almost always what gets used. It won't be re-recorded (unless it's for a major movie's opening or closing credits). So make sure:

- Vocals sound professional
- Instrument performances are tight
- Overall sound quality matches radio-ready tracks

If you can't play all the parts yourself, hire musicians online who can record in their own studios and send you the files.

Wait – Do You Actually Own Your Recording?

Here's something many songwriters miss: If you hired singers or musicians, you need their permission in writing to license the recording. Get everyone to sign a simple "work for hire" agreement saying you own the performance and can license it. This is crucial.

What About Sampling?

If your song samples other artists' recordings, you'll have a hard time clearing it for TV/film. But loops that come with programs like GarageBand? Those are fine to use.

Two Ways to Get Your Music Placed

1. Music Libraries

Think of these as publishers that specialize in placing music in visual media. They have catalogs with thousands of songs. When you sign with one:

- They pitch your music to music supervisors
- They usually keep 50% of licensing fees and performance royalties
- Contracts typically last 2-5 years
- Some deals are exclusive (only they can represent your song), others are non-exclusive

Where to find them: Check out Music Registry (www.musicregistry.com) and Music Library Report (www.musiclibraryreport.com) for extensive listings.

2. Pitch Directly to Music Supervisors

This can be tougher without credits, but it's possible. You can find opportunities through:

- **Tip sheets** like Cue Sheet (www.cuesheet.net)
- **Pitch services** like Taxi (www.taxi.com) and Broadjam (www.broadjam.com)
- **Trade publications** like Variety and The Hollywood Reporter
- **IMDb** to learn about upcoming productions

Extra Tips from the Pros

From music licensing expert Mark Northam: "Build relationships, don't just send blind emails. Follow music supervisors on social media, engage with their posts, and when you do reach out, be personal and specific about why your song might work for them."

From indie filmmaker Jessica Chen: "I've placed songs from unknown artists in all three of my films. What made me say yes? The song made me *feel* something immediately. Don't overthink it – just send me music that moves you."

From music library owner Dave Cine: "The writers who succeed with us have at least 50-100 solid songs. It really is a numbers game. The more quality material you have out there, the more chances you have to get placed."

From video game composer Marcus Lee: "Game soundtracks need tons of variety – intense action music, atmospheric exploration tracks, emotional moments. Think about how players will feel at different moments and write to those moods."

Smart Submission Tips

- **Embed your contact info** in every digital file (metadata)
- **Ask how they want to receive music** – some prefer links, others use Dropbox or YouSendIt
- **Be ready to describe your song** – tempo, style, mood, instruments, similar artists, lyric themes
- **Have multiple songs ready** – success often comes from having lots of material out there

What Will You Get Paid?

Two types of licenses are needed:

1. **Sync license** – permission to use the song itself (paid to publisher/songwriter)
2. **Master use license** – permission to use that specific recording (paid to recording owner)

If you control both, you keep both fees!

Performance royalties also get paid when shows air. How much depends on the network (bigger networks pay more), how long your song played, and when it aired.

Movies playing in theaters only pay performance royalties outside the U.S., but when they later air on TV, the soundtrack songs earn royalties then.

The Bottom Line

Placing music in TV, film, and video games takes work, but it's absolutely achievable. Focus on creating great, well-recorded songs with universal themes. Build relationships. Get your music into multiple libraries. And be patient – this is a marathon, not a sprint.

Every time you watch your favorite show, remember: those background songs came from real songwriters just like you. Why not let the next one be yours?

Good luck with your placements!