Spring 2019

The Use of Music in the Cinematic Experience

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SOUND AND EMOTION:
THE USE OF MUSIC IN THE CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE

A Capstone Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts
with Honors College Graduate Distinction at
Western Kentucky University

By
Sarah M. Schulte
May 2019

*****

CE/T Committee:
Professor Matthew Herman, Advisor
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Dedicated to my family and friends
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the help and support of so many people. I am incredibly grateful to my faculty advisor, Dr. Matthew Herman. Without your wisdom on the intricacies of composition and your constant encouragement, this project would not have been possible. To Dr. Ted Hovet, thank you for believing in this project from the start. I could not have done it without your reassurance and guidance. Additionally, thank you to John Martin and Jordan Weiss, who have been such valuable mentors and teachers to me.

I would like to thank the Honors College at WKU for creating an environment that enboldens curiosity and inspires creativity. Additionally, I would like to thank the Office of Research for its generous financial support of my project through a FUSE Grant. Without this support, I would not have the opportunity to actively continue this research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their continuous support in all of my endeavors. They have always inspired my eagerness to learn and create, and their endless encouragement through this process gave me the courage necessary to see it through. For this and everything else, thank you.
ABSTRACT

To portray the radical importance of music in stimulating emotion within cinema, to appeal to an audience’s selective attention to sounds, and to detail the process of creating an original film score, I have scored WKU student Tori Mills’ short film *Come Up for Air*. Film music is traditionally defined as any music that accompanies a film, though today it more specifically refers to music intended to advance the film’s narrative. Music has played an increasingly important role in transmitting emotion to film audiences, feeding the psychological connection between spectator and on-screen action. To achieve this emotional connection, a film composer is faced with compositional choices with regard to harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation choices, as well as with technical options ranging from virtual instrument manipulation to live orchestral recording. In composing the original score for *Come Up for Air*, I used virtual instrumentation coupled with specific harmonic and rhythmic choices to convey the protagonist’s shifting mood from frustration to understanding, and from youthful hope to defeat, thus facilitating empathy in the audience toward the main character. To test my success in enhancing an audience’s emotional connection to a film through music, I have surveyed students in two sections of a Music Appreciation class. Each class watched the film both with and without my original score. While the survey results were inconclusive with regard to the emotional impact of the music on the audience, they do show, along with the director’s approval, that my attempt to serve the narrative was successful.

Keywords: Film, Music, Underscore, Emotion, Spectator, Composition
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PRESENTATIONS

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Film music, or any music which occurs during a film, was first introduced at the turn of the 20th century. Over its relatively recent history, film music has evolved from music that merely provided fanfare and accompaniment to music that serves to support the film’s narrative. There are three kinds of sound that exist on film. They are music, sound effects, and speech. While each of these elements has become increasingly important in modern cinema, music is the only medium that has existed alongside film from the beginning, despite being the least obviously important in deepening the narrative. However, it is clear that film music, specifically an underscore, serves an important role in establishing a film’s setting and mood, as well as in indicating emotion to the spectator.

The origin of film music is not altogether clear, nor was the development of the modern film score a quick and ordered evolution; however, it is important to identify these stepping stones so as to understand the demand for and the significance of music to cinema. The history of film music can be divided into four distinct eras: the “silent” film, the early sound film, the “classical-style” Hollywood film, and the post-classical period.¹

MUSIC IN THE “SILENT” FILM ERA

In the late 19th century, technological innovation in photography and videography by inventors such as Thomas Edison, whose “Kinetoscope” was a precursor to motion pictures, led to the first public exhibition of motion pictures by Auguste and Louis Lumiere. The Lumiere brothers, inspired by Edison’s and others’ creations, developed their own “Cinematographe,” a moving image device that was far more accessible than Edison’s bulky invention. Unlike Edison’s invention, which only allowed for a single person to view moving images through a peephole, the Cinematographe allowed for projection to a screen, thus anticipating what eventually became the modern movie theater. During this time, technology did not allow for sound effects and dialogue to be directly recorded with motion pictures; as such, it is dubbed the “silent” era. During the very earliest motion picture exhibitions beginning in 1895, audience members reported the vigor of the pictured actions to be “unnatural and ghostly without some form of sound corresponding to such visual vitality.” Because of this, music played at the site of exhibition to communicate narrative information that the film itself could not provide.

The musical accompaniment during this early period of cinema does not match the modern expectation for a film score, but neither, too, does the content of these early

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2 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 17.
3 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 14.
4 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 17.
5 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 17.
motion pictures compare to modern films. In the beginning, motion pictures documented real-life happenings, such as watering gardens or cycling, rather than narrative-driven dramas. As cinema grew more popular, the first motion pictures were enhanced to improve the audience’s experience, embellished by the commentary of a lecturer, behind-the-scenes sound effects, and often music. As most of these early showings occurred at vaudeville theaters, it is likely that the musical accompaniment to motion pictures mirrored that of vaudeville. Vaudeville music at the time would likely have been provided by a pianist or by a small three- to five-piece orchestra. Guidelines for early orchestral film accompaniment were vague, as evidenced by one film production company’s instructions cited by Wierzbicki: “Each film in the program should be accompanied by a separate and generally suitable piece of music.” As such, early film accompaniment was noted by a lack of universal practice, and by 1909 there was a demand for “appropriate” music by film audiences. According to one critic cited by Wierzbicki, “Bad judgement in the selection of music may ruin an exhibition as much as a good program may help it.” It is clear, then, that even in the early, silent days of cinema, musical accompaniment wielded considerable power over the audience’s general enjoyment and interpretation of the motion picture. This set the precedent for the modern

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7 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 26.
8 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 26.
11 Wierzbicki, Film Music: A History, 34.
understanding of the film/music relationship, wherein the music is expected to either resemble the visual action or contradict it in a purposeful way.\textsuperscript{12}

A landmark for film music arrived in 1908, when composer Camille Saint-Saens penned the first original score for a dramatic motion picture, \textit{L’Assassinat du Duc de Guise}. The idea of the “underscore,” or music which accompanies a dialogue or visual scene, dates back to the earliest operas, when composers used music to establish in the minds of audience members “a sense of mood or locale.”\textsuperscript{13} While this was a momentous occasion in and of itself, Saint-Saens’ score was also unique for using a technique in which a “specific musical gesture is ‘cued’ by onscreen action.”\textsuperscript{14} This included not just “hits” and “stingers,” or short musical passages that correspond with dramatic moments, but also modulations and silences that aligned with camera cuts.\textsuperscript{15} This stylistic choice was ahead of its time, as most film critics of the time discouraged such imitative scoring. By the mid-1930s, after the advent of sound recording on film, scoring techniques similar to those used in \textit{L’Assassinat} would become the norm.

In 1914 the American Society for Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) formed, marking a shift in the relationship between the film industry and music publishers.\textsuperscript{16} The primary purpose of ASCAP was to protect its members’ performance rights. The organization established “tariff schedules” through which composers received payment whenever their pieces were performed in for-profit situations.\textsuperscript{17} By 1915,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Gorbman, “Narrative Film Music,” 189.
\end{footnotes}
original film music had grown in popularity; however, due to ASCAP regulations the fees to use original music could be exorbitant depending on audience size and other factors. As such, film exhibitors tended to only pay for the ASCAP-protected material if the films were expected to be highly lucrative.

1915 also saw the composition of J.C. Breil’s music for *The Birth of a Nation*, marking a milestone year for film music. This was the first composed film score written solely for a large, well-rehearsed orchestra.\(^{18}\) Although this type of film music was successful in the largest cities where movie palaces could afford to host such orchestras, these showings were expensive and did not translate well to smaller theaters.\(^{19}\)

In the years surrounding World War I, film music faced many developmental changes. The size of these theaters grew substantially, which rendered solo piano accompaniment obsolete. Most of these movie theaters had orchestras on payroll and many of them installed orchestra pits, as well as a new instrument called the “theater organ.”\(^{20}\) Films, too, grew in length and in scope. By this time, music in films had clearly been established as subservient to the narrative of the film. The movie audience circa 1915 continued to be psychologically dependent upon familiar film-music tropes. At the same time, audiences would bore of exactly repeated music, requiring the music to be reworked and varied each week.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\) Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 49.
\(^{20}\) Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 46.
\(^{21}\) Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 50.
In the 1920s, film audiences continued to embrace the “silent” picture. At the beginning of the decade, American movies became dominated by a few companies, including Paramount Pictures, the Fox Corporation, and Warner Brothers. These companies joined several smaller production companies into one entity and moved from the East Coast to Southern California, thus forming Hollywood as a creative cinematic community. The following year was notable for the D.W. Griffith’s film *Dream Street*, which opened in New York on April 12th of 1921. Though it was a box office failure, *Dream Street* remains of historic value as it was the first feature film to contain a recorded song. The sound system used to achieve this required a disc or a cylinder, which meant that a technician had to struggle to synchronize the film projection with the recorded music on two separate devices. This proved an unreliable system; as such, it would be a few years and additional innovations in recording technology before recorded music would popularize.

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23 MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film Music*, 4.
24 MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film Music*, 4.
MUSIC IN THE EARLY SOUND FILM ERA

In 1926, Warner Brothers funded one of the most significant moments in cinematic history: the premiere of Alan Crosland’s *Don Juan*. Although technically still a silent film as there was no dialogue, this film was the first to use a pre-recorded soundtrack that included both music and sound effects. The score was recorded on three large discs, each one corresponding to a reel of film. These discs had to be changed by the projectionist at the end of each reel. Although this screening was met with enthusiasm from the public, Warner Bros. was faced with the immense financial risk attached to the massive sound-equipment installation that had to occur in order to show these Vitaphone features to a wider audience. Thus, the transition to talking motion pictures, or “talkies,” could not occur immediately due to the time and resources required to equip movie houses and studios for sound. Although sound films were being produced, silent versions were also made available for those theaters that could not host sound. At the same time, music and sound effects were being patched over old silent films in order to bring them to life. Despite sound cinema being a new phenomenon, silent films had become almost instantly outdated. This was further emphasized by the release of another Warner Bros. and Alan Crosland collaboration in 1927, *The Jazz Singer*. The film became the first feature-length movie with not only a synchronize recorded underscore,

but also synchronized singing and dialogue in several sequences.  

While the underscore for the film was written in the traditional live orchestral way, the use of synchronization allowed for musical subtleties that previously had not been possible. Various musical motifs and themes had a significant artistic role in setting the mood, introducing characters, and anticipating action, thus setting the precedent for common techniques that would arise in the classical era. By 1928, “it had become clear that even the worst sound film would make more money than the best silent picture,” and so it seemed in the best interest of movie houses’ and studios to equip themselves for sound. Although the development of movies with recorded dialogue and scores would revolutionize cinema, it would also cost the livelihoods of thousands of musicians, whose labor had brought silent cinema to life.

Despite the success of sound films, there did not yet exist a uniform sound system across all of the Hollywood companies involved in the production of talkies. The Vitaphone and Movietone processes were the most popular; however, a significant moment occurred when RCA developed the sound-on-film system called Photophone. A slight modification to this equipment in 1928 led to the eventual establishment of a fixed sound system across movie houses. The success of Don Juan and The Jazz Singer instigated a spree of sound films, and by the end of the decade hundreds of features with

31 MacDonald, The Invisible Art of Film Music, 13.
32 MacDonald, The Invisible Art of Film Music, 6.
33 MacDonald, The Invisible Art of Film Music, 14.
synchronized music and at least partial recorded voice tracks had been produced by Hollywood studios.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} MacDonald, \textit{The Invisible Art of Film Music}, 14.
The 1930s brought in the classical-style Hollywood film, and along with it a new approach to score and synchronization.\textsuperscript{35} By 1935, film and audio technology developed so that dialogue, sound effects, and music were independently controllable in terms of placement and volume levels on three separate sound tracks.\textsuperscript{36} Cinema itself had transformed from loose recordings to precisely edited features. This, along with the ideas of pioneer film composers such as Max Steiner, led to a “classical” style of film scoring in which the music served primarily “to explain, and not obscure, the narrative.”\textsuperscript{37} The so-called “Golden Age of Film Scoring” coincides almost exactly with the Golden Age of Hollywood, approximately 1935 through 1955, both designating a period of economic vitality and technological developments.\textsuperscript{38} This is also the time period in which the modern scoring process formed. Once the directors and editors had compiled a rough cut of the film, directors would consult with composers in “spotting sessions,” during which they would view the film footage and determine the specific moments in the film where the underscore ought to enter and exit.\textsuperscript{39}

The classical-style film is notable for a number qualities, including the following: judicious use of nondiegetic music (music without a source in the content of the film); direct correlation between the music and the implied narrative content; high level of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[35] Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 133.
\item[37] Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 137.
\item[38] Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 139.
\end{footnotes}
synchronization between underscore and narrative action; and the use of Wagner’s concept of leitmotif as a structural framework.\textsuperscript{40} This also introduced the idea of “selective attention to sounds,” wherein the underscore is intended to emotionally support the narrative content without being consciously heard by the audience (Edwards). At the same time, the underscore is not necessarily a mere mimicry of the visual emotion. Instead, music is often an indicator of emotion, signifying to the spectator the film characters’ response to a situation or signaling a budding relationship among two characters.\textsuperscript{41}

In the late 1920s into the 1930s, composers and filmmakers began to use new and more consistent techniques. In 1928, Walt Disney, a young filmmaker of animated shorts, incorporated synchronized sound into his animated short \textit{Steamboat Willie}, the third film featuring Mickey Mouse.\textsuperscript{42} Disney was one of the early filmmakers who seemed to understand the full value of music with regard to the audience’s reception.\textsuperscript{43} The film was a great success and, while Disney’s early animations were roughly drawn, the effectiveness of the close synchronization between sound and picture ensured their importance. This technique, the origin of which is rooted in Saint-Saens’ 1908 score, became known derisively as “Mickey-Mousing” due to its association with the popular Disney character.\textsuperscript{44} Composer Max Steiner, who later became known as the “Father of

\textsuperscript{40} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 140.
\textsuperscript{41} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 142.
\textsuperscript{42} MacDonald, \textit{The Invisible Art of Film Music}, 15.
\textsuperscript{43} MacDonald, \textit{The Invisible Art of Film Music}, 15.
Film Music,” popularized this technique in his score for Cooper and Schoedsack’s *King Kong* (1933). Granted a larger music budget than was typically permitted for a Hollywood film, Steiner composed a landmark score for a forty-six-piece orchestra. The score provided music for most of the film, which was out of the ordinary for the time. Another film scoring technique popularized by Steiner was an operatic approach invented by opera composer Richard Wagner referred to as a leitmotif, or “leading melody.” With this method, the composer writes a melody in a round and balanced way, involving a returning theme. This is utilized in his score for *King Kong*, in which a three-chord leitmotif is assigned to Kong’s character. The audience is introduced to this motif in the main title, and it returns when Kong enters the film later. Wagner was also known to underscore his operas, accenting dialogue and action with music. Steiner adopted these musical approaches in his film scores, and as such, his *King Kong* would launch a style of scoring that would endure into the next twenty years.

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45 Schreibman, “On Gone with the Wind,” 46.
47 Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 133.
MUSIC IN THE POST-CLASSICAL FILM ERA

Around 1958, a new wave of film music referred to as “post-classical” formed, a style of film music which carries into present day. Whereas the classical period was defined by a purely symphonic sound, this new era of film scoring came to involve music which either wholly, or in part, does not sound like symphonic music.\textsuperscript{48} So, too, has this new style of film scoring experimented with the classical-style narrative in that the music often serves the content, design, or purpose of the film in various ways. According to film composer Elmer Bernstein, two events signaled the end of the golden age of film music. The first was the success of Dimitri Tiomkin’s title song for Zinnemann’s \textit{High Noon} (1952), which resulted in free advertising for the film due to the popularity of the song on the music charts.\textsuperscript{49} The second event was Bernstein’s own score for Preminger’s \textit{The Man with the Golden Arm} (1955), which incorporated jazz elements, thus leading to the popularity of jazz and pop music as film accompaniment. While many classical film composers such as Bernstein and David Raksin viewed the rise of popular music in film scores as “crass commercialism” and, ultimately, the product of poor taste, it is also clear that popular music as film music proved to be extremely lucrative as well as, at times, creatively effective.\textsuperscript{50}

The 1960s witnessed a new wave of movements in politics, civil rights, and artistry, and this translated into film music. Part of this can be attributed to the rise of the

\textsuperscript{48} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 189.
\textsuperscript{49} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 190.
\textsuperscript{50} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 192.
independent, or indie, film. As Hollywood’s monopoly on the film market became less and less, so too did creative freedom increase with regard to music. Film directors began incorporating a technique known as “ironic contrast,” wherein incongruent music is used to either sublimate or make more horrifying a violent or immoral scene.\textsuperscript{51} An example of this is the infamous rape scene in Stanley Kubrick’s \textit{A Clockwork Orange} (1971).\textsuperscript{52} The film’s gang of delinquents, led by the central character Alex, attack a writer and his wife. While they carry out the horrendous act, Alex breaks into song and dance with the Gene Kelly classic “Singin’ in the Rain.”\textsuperscript{53} As a traditionally euphoric song in the world of Hollywood, the juxtaposition of this joyful song and a horrible act of violence adds to the horror of the scene, and ultimately deepens the narrative.\textsuperscript{54} As a whole, this era often referenced the idea that the meaning of film music is largely up to the interpretation of the spectator, thus leading to the “eclecticism” that came about in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{55}

While soundtracks of popular music grew more common in cinema, the growing demand for action and science-fiction films ensured the survival of orchestral underscores.\textsuperscript{56} Popular music did not effectively convey the mood and intensity of action-filled movies; thus, most filmmakers used orchestral scores to underscore such scenes

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\textsuperscript{52} \textit{A Clockwork Orange}, directed by Stanley Kubrick (New York: Warner Home Video, 1972), DVD.
\textsuperscript{53} Gene Kelly, vocalist, “Singin’ in the Rain,” by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown, recorded 1952, MGM, Vinyl LP.
\textsuperscript{54} Boltz, “The Cognitive Processing of Film and Musical Soundtracks,” 1.
\textsuperscript{55} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 199.
\textsuperscript{56} Wierzbicki, \textit{Film Music: A History}, 210.
\end{flushleft}
(Howard Shore’s *Lord of the Rings* (2001), for example).\textsuperscript{57} The 1980s and 1990s introduced the “blockbuster” film with the help of enhanced theater audio.\textsuperscript{58} Subwoofers and loudspeakers created “surround sound,” allowing for music and sound effects to maximize on aural stimuli.\textsuperscript{59}

Perhaps the most important debate of the post-classical period is that of the definition of film music. Whereas some critics argue that film music is only that which serves the film’s narrative content, others believe that film music is any music that occurs in a film.\textsuperscript{60} However, upon reviewing film history and the context in which film music is used across decades, countries, and genres, it is clear that film music affects the audience’s interpretation of the narrative as much as any other filmic element; thus, any music incorporated into a film is valuable narrative content.

\textsuperscript{57} Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 210.
\textsuperscript{58} Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 209.
\textsuperscript{59} Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 209.
\textsuperscript{60} Wierzbicki, *Film Music: A History*, 216.
Numerous studies have shown that film music serves as an important secondary source of emotional influence in cinema. For example, Vinovich (1975) demonstrates that film music is capable of steering an emotionally neutral scene into a particular emotional direction. This is due in part to music’s ability to increase the spectator’s sense of inclusion, emotionally involving him or her in the story through aural stimulation.\(^{61}\)

Why, though, are spectators typically unaware of the emotional effects of film music? Evidently, if a spectator is emotionally affected by a scene, he or she will credit this to the actors rather than any other filmic component due to the human element.\(^{62}\)

The purpose of film music is not limited exclusively to emotional impact.\(^{63}\) Other significant ways in which film music can communicate meaning are as follows: setting the overall mood of a film; reflecting a character’s internal thoughts and feelings; and illustrating or establishing narrative structure.\(^{64}\) A study by Hoeckner, Wyatt, Decety, and Nusbaum (2011) showed that film music can influence a character’s likeability, as well as the spectator’s certainty of understanding a character’s thoughts and feelings.\(^{65}\)

Moreover, Bullerjhan and Guldenring (1994) concluded that participants’ interpretations

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\(^{62}\) Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 2.

\(^{63}\) Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 2.

\(^{64}\) Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 3.

\(^{65}\) Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 3.
of the emotion in film music affected their emotional understanding of a ten-minute film clip. Film music is also effective in foreshadowing and cueing, in that an audience’s expectations of the film’s narrative are “systematically influenced” by the underscore.

Music also has the ability to affect a spectator’s moral judgement of the film. Steffens (2018) conducted an experiment wherein two excerpts were taken from the films *A Simple Plan* (Excerpt 1) and *Amour* (Excerpt 2), so chosen because of their morally ambiguous content. Sam Raimi’s *A Simple Plan* (1998) follows three men who find a suitcase of money in a forest and, after much discussion, decide to take it. This specific act is questionable in that it is morally objectionable to steal; however, the suspected owner of the suitcase is already dead. Michael Haneke’s *Amour* (2012) is about an elderly couple whose love is put to the test when the woman becomes paralyzed after having suffered a stroke. As she suffers, the woman begins to divulge to her husband that she has been having thoughts of suicide. Excerpt 2 shows the husband telling his wife a story, then suddenly using a pillow to suffocate her to “redeem” her from suffering.

Specific musical stimuli were chosen for the experiment, with each excerpt being assigned one negative stimulus (EG1) and one positive stimulus (EG2). For Excerpt 1, the intended emotion for EG1 was tension, versus EG2’s happiness. Excerpt 2, on the other hand, deals with the intended anger of EG1 versus the love/tenderness of EG2. To avoid revealing the purpose of the experiment and thus influencing results, no questions related to the film music were asked in the survey. Instead, moral perception was

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69 Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 5.
measured using the German version of the Moral Foundation Questionnaire (MFQ-30). It was expected that the music activating positive emotions would “increase the perceived rightness” of the depicted actions and that, accordingly, the music inducing negative emotions would reduce the perceived moral rightness of the film actions.\(^7\) While the study produced mixed results regarding the effect of music on moral judgement, overall, it established that music can inflect moral judgements in the context of films. However, only one of the four cases succeeded in manipulating the intended emotions. As such, it can be concluded that such factors as the level of moral ambiguity of a scene, the intensity of the visual actions, and the venue and volume of the music can impact the emotional effectiveness of the underscore.\(^7\)

From a composer’s perspective, it is useful to understand the history of music in film and of studies of its impact on spectators, as it reveals consistently successful compositional techniques as well as spectators’ expectations. Film music frequently borrows from itself; as such, it is invaluable for a composer to understand common scoring techniques so that he or she may satisfy audience expectations by using familiar tropes, while also creatively tailoring it to the film at hand.

\(^{70}\) Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 11.
\(^{71}\) Steffens, “The Influence of Film Music,” 12.
CHAPTER 3

CREATIVE DECISIONS IN TORI MILLS’ COME UP FOR AIR

In an effort to detail the process of creating an original film score, I have scored WKU student Tori Mills’ short film Come Up for Air (2018). I attended the WKU Film’s annual showcase in the spring semester of 2018 where I viewed the student films produced. The story in Tori Mills’ Come Up for Air strongly resonated with me, and upon noticing the film had very little music, I realized it could benefit from an original underscore. Come Up for Air follows protagonist Katie, an elementary school-aged girl, through her struggle to process her father’s battle with lung cancer as she navigates the challenges of growing up.

In order to gain the tools necessary to pursue this project, I attended the Film Scoring Summer Program in Varna, Bulgaria, in July 2018. During this program, I spent three weeks studying under film music professionals, including Hollywood composer Christopher Young (Hellraiser, Drag Me to Hell, Spiderman 3). Through this program, I learned how to score films from the three different possible approaches: Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) realization, live recording, and MIDI-live hybridization. I also composed cues for a variety of film scenes and emotional ideas, as well as for varying ensemble sizes, ranging from solo piano to a 38-piece orchestra. This experience gave me the tools necessary to compose an original score for a film.

There are three criteria that an underscore ought to meet to successfully support and contribute to a film’s narrative: the music enters and exits at dramatically appropriate
times, is tonally appropriate both harmonically and texturally, and supports rather than imposes on or conflicts with the story.\textsuperscript{72} The entrances and exits of cues are typically determined in a spotting session between the director and composer. It is then up to the composer to ensure that the musical tempo and beats match the onscreen action, whether it is as directly obvious as using hits and stingers or not. Harmonic and instrumentation decisions should also support the visuals. For example, a scene featuring a young girl playing with dolls in her room would likely not warrant a full orchestral underscore, but rather something more intimate and whimsical. Collectively, these decisions come together to support the narrative. I kept all of this in mind when composing the score for Tori Mills’ film.

At the beginning of the fall 2018 semester, I contacted director Mills asking if I could meet with her to discuss collaborating on an original score for her film \textit{Come Up for Air}. During our first meeting, I provided examples of my previous work in composition and film scoring for her reference. We discussed our personal film tastes so as to gain an understanding of each other’s artistic visions. After the director and I agreed that I would score \textit{Come Up for Air}, we examined Mills’ expectations of the music in a spotting session. During this session, the director and composer decide on the entrances and exits for the underscore. Typically, film directors will insert pre-existing music into the film as a “temporary track” or “temp” track to demonstrate the timing of the cues as

well as the intended musical mood of the scene.\textsuperscript{73} The temp track is essentially a blueprint for the score, a “musical topography of score, songs, culture, and codes.”\textsuperscript{74} Mills’ film already had such a track, thus demarcating the four moments in the movie where she conceived music would occur. In addition to the temp track, film directors will use specific emotions and references to musical examples to communicate their vision for the score, and sometimes the director will even have an opinion with regard to specific instrumentation. For example, Mills stated that she imagined the fight scene at the school, in which Katie picks a fight with a peer, to be carried by percussion instruments. More broadly, this spotting session made it clear that while Mills believed an underscore would benefit her film, it would also be necessary for the score to be small-scale. A large, orchestral score would be out of place in characterizing a young girl in her bedroom; as such, I opted for a small ensemble of primarily string and percussion instruments.

There are three typical technical approaches a composer can take to realize a film score. The first is the more traditional method, wherein a composer notates the full score, typically with the help of an orchestrator, which is then performed by professional musicians and recorded in a studio setting. With this method, the composer also determines whether or not to record to a metronome, or to click, which can affect the feel of the recording. In general, recording to click tends to be more accurate but often less musical than recording without click. The other increasingly more common approach, especially for non-Hollywood productions, is MIDI. This approach involves the


\textsuperscript{74} Sadoff, “The Role of the Music Editor,” 1.
composer working through a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), an electronic application used for recording, editing, and mixing audio. The composer uses a MIDI keyboard to control software instruments, which have been created by audio engineers who meticulously record instrument samples. Thus, rather than hiring musicians and paying for studio time, a composer can self-produce an entire score from their computer. Many composers will use a hybrid of these two approaches, wherein they mix recordings of live instruments with software instruments to create a more accurate and realistic sound. For *Come Up for Air*, I used only MIDI-controlled software instruments to fully realize the score. I incorporated EastWest’s Composer Cloud, Tina Guo Artist Series, Soundiron Emotional Piano Player, Orchestral Tools’ Berlin Woodwinds, and CineStrings CORE into my compositions.

The film opens on a shot of Katie lying in her bed with a magazine in her lap that she appears to have fallen asleep reading. As Katie is the focal point of the narrative and this scene, the purpose of the opening cue is to introduce her character and world. While the narrative as a whole confronts adult issues, specifically life-threatening illness, this opening scene is innocent, and the music ought to reflect as much. Thus, I opted for instruments with light and playful timbres. I decided to use a nylon-stringed guitar for the opening arpeggios to highlight the intimacy of the moment. The arpeggiated triads that introduce the film roll upwards in an effect intended to mimic the action of waking up. Pizzicato, or plucked, violins then join in on the upbeats to emphasize the light, floating nature of the cue. Finally, bells enter with the leading melody. The story becomes increasingly somber as the spectator follows Katie through her day. In an effort to foreshadow Katie’s conflict, I decided to hint at the melancholic nature of the narrative
from the beginning. As such, the opening melody, though in a major key, is played by a low bell with added reverberation to give it a sense of uncertainty. This also contributes to the feeling of being underwater, which adds to Katie’s fixation on buying and installing koi fish pond. Her obsession with the pond is significant to reinforce through the music as it reflects her childlike way of processing her father’s illness. While her father struggles to breathe through his failing lungs, Katie fixates on creatures that do not require lungs to live. As Katie approaches her father’s chair and the pair begins to talk, the music quickly fades out. It is typically expected that the main title cue end prior to the first dialogue so as not to muddle the characters’ words. Again, the purpose of an underscore is to highlight the narrative as opposed to disrupting it.

The next scene with a musical cue follows Katie as she watches her father smoking a cigarette outside of the house. In a fit of frustration, she tapes his pack of cigarettes shut. In this scene, there is a sound effect of a ticking clock. This effect became a sort of roadblock in the scoring process, in that the ticking did not line with the scene cuts. As such, it needed to be decided whether to write the score to the scene cuts or to the clock, or to eliminate the ticking effect entirely. The director determined that she prefer the underscore line up with the cuts. However, upon watching the scene with the underscore fitting the cuts and the ticking opposing the rhythm, the director ultimately decided that this dissonance added symbolic meaning to the film, demonstrating Katie’s inner turmoil. Thus, the underscore and the ticking clock actively conflict as an artistic choice of the director.

For this scene, I assigned the arpeggiated notes to the mid- to lower- register of a piano to express the melancholic mood of the moment. When Katie stands and walks
over to the pack of cigarettes, the arpeggios double time with an added guitar to mimic the hurriedness of her actions. At this point, the bell is reintroduced, tying this cue into the main title to achieve a cohesive sound representative of Katie’s character. While there is a high degree of frustration evident in Katie’s face during this scene, her frustration is borne out of sadness and a sense of loss rather than anger. Moreover, because this is not the true actional climax, the music ought to anticipate the climax but not overshadow it. In terms of harmony, the cue does not resolve to the tonic, or the tonal center. This was an active choice to suspend the tension, as the primary conflict of Katie processing her father’s illness remains unresolved.

The building tension regarding Katie’s sense of neglect from her family, specifically her father, comes to a head in the fight scene at her school. Because this cue is the most dramatically important moment in the film and, due to its necessary stylistic differences from the rest of the film, it was the most challenging to approach. Taking into consideration the director’s vision for a more percussive cue, I used brushes on a snare drum to build the suspense of Katie slowly walking toward the girl. In this scene, the music matches specific hits and punches in what could lightly be considered “mickey-mousing,” so as to fully convey the intensity of the scene. Once again, I incorporated the bells to build on the spectator’s recognition of the sound. The low bells match the action of the punches, and the low, reverberating timbre is intended to leave the spectator feeling uneasy and tense.

The final cue of the film is the longest, as it follows Katie from just after her conversation with her father and the signing of her detention slip to the end of the film when Katie goes to bed and hears her father coughing. To highlight the drama of this
scene and allow for an extended climax, I introduced the cue with a low, sustained cello. When the scene cuts to Katie walking into her sister’s room, the piano picks up a very slow ostinato in a minor key, indicating a melancholic mood. I reintroduce the bells as Katie reaches her sister’s desk and sets down the detention slip. The melody in the bells indicates the kinship of the gesture, and it is evident that Katie is trying to apologize to her sister for her actions, as well as share in their mutual sadness regarding their father. As the sisters hug each other, the piano cuts to full sustained chords, which extend the drama of the moment. The scene cuts to Katie in her bed, and because the room is smaller and Katie is alone, I mimicked this in the music by removing layers of instrumentation and utilizing a kind of drone note. This carries through until Katie’s father coughs, then the film fades to the credits. The melody for the credits is minor, low, and dark, which is intended to indicate that this is not a true happy ending for the film’s protagonist.

After sending the finished cues to the sound editor for final mixing and mastering, I met with the director to determine whether the score fulfilled her expectations. Fortunately, Mills found the score to be the perfect fit to her film.
CHAPTER 4

HYPOTHESES

I anticipate that the film showing with music will overall be more emotionally impactful to the audience. I expect that surveyors will mostly feel more empathy toward the protagonist Katie than toward all of the characters as a whole. With regard to question eight on the survey regarding moral judgement [see Survey Methodology below], I believe that this will be the least consistently answered.

While I do think the showing with music will ultimately be more emotionally successful to the audience, the results may be affected by the order in which the audience viewed the films. I expect that most audience members will be more emotionally impacted the first time they watch the film than the second, since they will already be familiar with the film at this point in the survey.
CHAPTER 5

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct a survey which would determine the importance of my score in emotionally connecting to a film spectator in Mills’ *Come Up for Air*, I applied for IRB Certification. I contacted Mrs. Sarah Berry of WKU’s Music Department to request using her Music Appreciation students as survey subjects. Upon receiving a letter of support from Mrs. Berry and obtaining IRB approval (ID: 7985608), I prepared to conduct my research. On Friday, April 12th, I attended Mrs. Sarah Berry’s Music Appreciation class in the Fine Arts Center to survey her students. First, I read the following script to the class:

“Hello, my name is Sarah Schulte. I am a senior at WKU collecting data for my Honors thesis. I will be showing you an approximately 10-minute film. We will watch the movie once, then I will ask you to kindly fill out the first page of an anonymous survey. Do NOT turn the paper over at this time to look at the second page of the survey. Then, we will watch the movie a second time. After the second showing, I will ask you to complete the second page of the survey. Before watching the film, I will pass out an informed consent form that gives me permission to use these survey results for my research. I will read this form out loud and then answer any questions you might have. Thank you for allowing me to take up your class time for this project. Please let me know if you have any questions.”
After reading this script and the IRB informed consent form aloud to the class, I passed out anonymous survey forms to obtain information regarding the survey subjects’ emotional responses to the film.

The class watched the first showing of the film. This took approximately ten minutes. Next, they spent five minutes completing the first page of the survey. Then, the class watched the film a second time. Finally, the class had ten minutes to complete the rest of the survey. I conducted this survey in two sections of Music Appreciation. The first class watched the film without music before watching the film with music. The second class watched the film with music before watching the film without music.
RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The first section of the class contained 16 surveyors, ages 18 to 29. With regard to their emotional connection to the film after the first screening of the film (without music), ten of the surveyors, or approximately 63%, agreed that they were emotionally moved by the film and/or felt empathy toward one or all of the characters. Only eight of these surveyors agreed directly with statement one; thus, only 50% of surveyors were emotionally moved, regardless of empathy toward characters, by the first showing.

After the second showing of the film (with music), the six surveyors who indicated that they were not emotionally moved by the film nor experienced empathy toward the characters were no more emotionally impacted by the second viewing. Two surveyors who answered neutral to “I was emotionally moved by this film” after the first showing changed their responses to “agree” after the second showing with music. Thus, after the second showing (with music), 75% of the surveyors agreed that they were emotionally moved by the film. This suggests that the presence of music in the second showing could have improved the audience’s emotional connection to the film. Moreover, this disproves my theory that surveyors would be less emotionally impacted by the second viewing of the film due to redundancy or familiarity with narrative content.

I anticipated that the majority of the surveyors would feel more empathy toward Katie (the protagonist) than toward the other characters in the film. In the first section, eight of 16 surveyors, or 50%, indicated that they felt strong empathy mainly for the lead character after the first showing (no music). After the second showing, 11 of the 16
surveyors, or approximately 69%, marked that they felt strong empathy mainly for the protagonist; thus, watching the film a second time (with music) increased three surveyors’ empathy toward Katie.

With regard to question four of the survey, nine surveyors did not believe that the main characters’ actions were morally appropriate after the first screening (without music). Three surveyors agreed that her actions were morally appropriate, and four were neutral. After the second screening, all nine of the surveyors who originally did not agree that the main characters’ actions were morally appropriate maintained their answers. All four of the surveyors who originally answered neutral maintained their answer. Finally, of the three surveyors who answered “agree” after the first screening, one changed their answer to “neutral” after the second showing. As I anticipated, this question had the least consistent results, suggesting that the music did not likely play a significant role in the surveyors’ moral judgement of the film’s protagonist.

When asked if they noticed any differences between the first and second showings of the film, only seven surveyors, or approximately 44%, in the first section identified that only the second screening contained music. Three surveyors identified differences that were not present, and the remaining six surveyors did not notice any differences between the two screenings. This suggests that I had some success in appealing to the audience’s selective attention to sounds.

The second section of the class contained 18 surveyors, ages 18 to 21. With regard to their emotional connection to the film after the first screening of the film (with music), 15 of the surveyors, or approximately 83%, agreed that they were emotionally moved by the film and/or felt empathy toward one or all of the characters. However, only
50% of the surveyors agreed with statement one, indicating that they were emotionally moved by the film. Interestingly, in both sections, only half of the surveyors agreed with statement one after the first showing (with music). After the second showing (no music), approximately 67%, or 12 of 18 surveyors agreed that they were emotionally moved by the film. This does not support my claim that the screening with music would be more emotionally impactful than the non-music screening. I expect that the surveyors better understood the story after watching the film a second time, thus facilitating a deeper emotional connection to the film.

In this section of the class, 14 of the surveyors, or roughly 78%, expressed that they mainly felt empathy toward the lead character in both the first and second showings. Overall, compared to the results of the first section, my expectation that the majority of the audience would mostly feel empathy toward the protagonist was correct. There is also evidence to support the conclusion that my score assisted in conveying Katie’s thoughts and feelings to the audience, thus facilitating empathy. However, the increase in empathy toward Katie between the music and non-music showings is not substantial enough to strongly support this claim. This could instead, or in addition to, be attributed to the audience having more narrative information by watching the film again.

As far as the moral appropriateness of the main characters’ actions after the first screening, only three surveyors, or roughly 17%, agreed that her actions were morally appropriate. Seven surveyors did not believe that her actions were morally appropriate, and the remaining eight surveyors were neutral. After the second screening, two of the surveyors who originally disagreed with the main characters’ actions changed their answer to “neutral.” Of the eight surveyors who were neutral toward this question after
the first screening, two of them changed their answer to “disagree.” Finally, of the three surveyors who answered “agree,” one changed their answer to “neutral.” Thus, after the second screening, only approximately 11% of surveyors agreed that Katie’s actions were morally appropriate. This further supports my expectation that the moral statement would be the most ambiguously answered and the least supported by the music.

With regard to differences between the first and second showings of the film in the second section of the class, only three surveyors, or approximately 17%, noticed that the first screening contained music whereas the second did not. Of the remaining 15 surveyors, nine either identified differences that were not there, or stated that they noticed narrative details they had previously missed. This further illustrates that I was successful in appealing to the audience’s selective attention to sounds. Across both classes, though more significantly in section two, the majority of surveyors did not recognize that one screening contained music and the other did not. Additionally, the rate of those who did notice the music may have been higher due to the surveyors’ expectations of there being a difference between the two showings.

In terms of the spectators’ emotional connection to the film, there is no obvious correlation between the presence or absence of the music and the surveyors’ response to question one, excepting some direct comments. For example, one surveyor from the first class wrote the following: “The second showing had music that helped carry the theme and intended emotion.” The two originally “neutral” surveyors in the first section of the class changing their response to “agree” after watching the film again with music might suggest that the added music made these spectators more emotionally invested in the film. However, this also occurred in the second section when three neutral surveyors
answered “agree” to this question after the second showing without music. This would suggest that, while the music might have some affect on viewers, the spectators’ emotional connection was deeper in the second showing primarily because the viewers had more narrative information after watching the film a second time.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The object of this research was to present an example of the film scoring process from start to finish in the context of a century-long history of film music so as to demonstrate the importance of film music in an audience’s emotional connection to and narrative understanding of a film, as well as to appeal to spectators’ selective attention to sounds. I hope this study can be used as a tool for filmmakers, composers, and consumers to gain a better understanding of the purpose and nature of film music.

My study examines the varying contexts in which film music is used across history, as well as common techniques and trends that have found success in the medium. It is clear that for film music to be successful, it ought to be tonally appropriate both harmonically and texturally. Wagner more specifically introduced the idea of the leitmotif, or leading melody, which became popularized by film composers like Max Steiner. Additionally, the traditional operatic technique of undercutting action and dialogue with music to emphasize dramatic moments took root in the idea of mickey-mousing, which found great success particularly in action-heavy films, such as animated Disney pictures. Modern film music accompaniment also incorporates popular music that might be familiar to listeners in new and different ways, whether to utilize ironic contrast or to pull from the audience’s existing emotional association with that song.

Film music serves many important purposes in cinema, most notably being its ability to convey emotion to spectators. Other meaningful ways in which film music can
communicate meaning are by setting a film’s mood, echoing a character’s internal thoughts and feelings, delineating narrative structure, and clarifying morally ambiguous moments. A film composer achieves these feats by ensuring that the underscore enters and exits at dramatically appropriate times, is thematically appropriate both harmonically and texturally, and supports rather than imposes on the narrative. This involves working closely with the director to achieve his or her artistic vision through specific choices regarding melody, harmony, rhythm, and instrumentation. The point of achievement for the film composer is reflected in the phenomenon of selective attention to sounds, in that if the composer is successful, the spectator will not consciously realize the music is present in the film.

This study put these techniques and theories to the test. Through composing an original score for Tori Mills’ *Come Up for Air*, I detailed the start-to-finish process of scoring a film. To determine whether or not my score was successful, as well as to test the emotional impact of music on a film audience, I surveyed two sections of Mrs. Sarah Berry’s Music Appreciation course. While these survey results were inconclusive regarding the impact of music on an audience’s emotional connection to the film, they do prove that I was successful in appealing to the audience’s selective attention to sounds. If I were to conduct this experiment again, I would include a version of the film that is scored oppositely to the tone of the narrative so as to dramatically test the influence of music on audience perception. Ultimately, my final meeting with the director and the survey results show that my attempt to serve the narrative of Mills’ *Come Up for Air* was successful.
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Tankel, Jonathan D. "The Impact of The Jazz Singer on the Conversion to Sound."


APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Surveyor Information

Age: 
Gender: Male 
Female 
Prefer not to say 
Class at WKU: Freshmen 
Sophomore 
Junior 
Senior 
Major: 
Minor (if applicable):

Survey - Showing 1

Instructions: Read the following statements and circle the answer which best describes your reaction.

1. I was emotionally moved by this film.
   Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

2. I felt strong empathy toward all of the characters in this film.
   Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

3. I felt strong empathy mainly for the lead character (the young girl).
   Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

4. The main characters’ actions were morally appropriate.
   Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

PLEASE STOP HERE
APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT CONT’D

Survey - Showing 2

Instructions: Read the following statements and circle the answer which best describes your reaction to the film.

5. I was emotionally moved by this film.

Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

6. I felt strong empathy toward all of the characters in this film.

Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

7. I felt strong empathy mainly for the lead character (the young girl).

Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

8. The main characters’ actions were morally appropriate.

Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

9. I was more impacted by the first than the second showing of this film.

Highly Disagree       Disagree       Neutral       Agree       Highly Agree

10. Did you notice any differences between the first and second showings of the film? If yes, explain.

11. Comments
APPENDIX: IRB LETTER

DATE: April 10, 2019
TO: Sarah Schulte
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB
PROJECT TITLE: [1411837-1] Sound and Emotion: The Use of Music in the Cinematic Experience
REFERENCE #: IRB 19-381
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt from Full Board Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt from Full Board Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by an implied consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a MINIMAL RISK project.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Robin Pyles at (270) 745-3360 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.