

# Why Use Music at All? 1

## 1.1 Getting Started

I think music is one of the most effective ways of preparing an audience and reinforcing points that you wish to impose on it. The correct use of music, and this includes the non-use of music, is one of the great weapons that the filmmaker has at his disposal.<sup>1</sup>

*Stanley Kubrick, director*

### *Understanding the Needs of the Project*

During the conceptual stages of any media project an understanding should evolve as to what the project as a whole should achieve—creatively, narratively, and perhaps commercially. A grasp of the scale and scope of the project will firm up as the concept takes shape. These considerations will determine the needs of the project in terms of budget, logistics, and production timelines. Furthermore, initial thoughts on genre, style, tone, and underlying (post-)production aesthetic may form. It is never too early to think about any and all component parts of the project. Some scripts will cite a specific location, such as Times Square. Whether or not that actual location is feasible depends on the production budget, scheduling, shooting permits, etc. Circumstances may dictate that an alternative location be dressed to look like Times Square, to reduce production costs or to benefit from tax incentives in a different filming location. Perhaps the script ends up developing in such a way that a generic town square will do. Sometimes a project banks on famous

talent and much effort may go into securing that person. Early planning may stipulate a particular kind of setting for the project, such as a landscape, a season, or time period. Ideas for visual flair and other attributes may arise (sets, costumes, special effects), some soon to be dismissed along the way, others to be developed further.

Thought can and should be given to sound and music as well. There are many ways in which sound and music can transform your project. Asking some questions including “what will we *hear* of what we *see*?” or “what will we *see* of what we *hear*?” may stir some fruitful creative thoughts. Although sound and music may not actually be created and/or fixed until production and post-production, early planning can catalyze useful reflection on the nature, role, and functions of sound and music in the context of the project as a whole.

### *Considering the Role and Function of Music in the Project*

Can music play a role in the project at hand? Should it? Will it? Why use music at all? There are many compelling examples of films that use no music at all, or very little. As Kubrick says in the opening quotation to this chapter, the non-use of music can be perfectly reasonable and highly effective. Alfred Hitchcock’s psychological thriller *Rope* (1948) uses no composed underscore after an initial opening title. Set in an apartment on a single evening, the film relies only on source music, when Phillip (Farley Granger) plays Poulenc on the piano. The confined setting of the film, like a stage play, reasonably precludes the use of music that might feel intrusive. Sidney Lumet’s *Network* (1976) uses no composed music. The film’s contemporary setting and *vérité* style arguably require an immediacy from which musical underscore might detract. Although they are of a horror genre, where music can play a highly effective role, *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) and *Cloverfield* (2008) also operate without music. In both films, the narrative logic of a handheld camcorder point-of-view renders music superfluous. Austrian director Michael Haneke consistently uses only source music, i.e., music the characters can hear. German director Maren Ade pursues the same strategy in *Toni Erdmann* (2016). In the most compelling and creatively rewarding projects where no or very little music is used, this non-use has been carefully considered and planned. In each instance, the absence of music arguably required as much creative deliberation as the presence of music. It is for these reasons that Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1963) and Darren Aronofsky’s *Mother!* (2017) credit

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composers as music consultants (Bernard Herrmann and Jóhann Jóhannsson respectively), even though no original music is used.

On the other hand, there are countless examples of audiovisual multimedia that do use music to powerful ends. Media music can be a valuable asset for immersive storytelling. Music may come in many forms and guises (see later in the chapter). It may be newly composed for a project or compiled from existing sources. Media music may be of any musical style, form, and instrumentation. Considering whether to use any music at all may lead to broader considerations: How heavily will the project rely on music? How much music should there be? These are questions that can be asked early on, even if they may not be answered until further down the line.

Music is exceedingly effective as a structuring and framing device. Well-judged placement of music can completely transform the viewing or gaming experience. The highly dramatic crop duster sequence in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1956, score by Bernard Herrmann) is left un-scored until the plane crashes into the truck (and the main character escapes unharmed). Just by looking at the final film, it is of course impossible to know what creative considerations and discussions went into this scene. But it seems likely that Hitchcock, who was certainly aware of the power of music, planned this selective non-use early on. In other suspenseful scenes, *North by Northwest* features music prominently—for example, during the climactic chase on Mount Rushmore. Sergio Leone chose to leave the opening reel of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968, score by Ennio Morricone) un-scored, instead placing heightened emphasis on sound effects and, in conjunction with a slow visual and editing pace, effectively highlighting a sense of discomforting heat and inactivity in the scene. Numerous films make effective use of the sparse placement of music, selectively delineating the structure of the film with music entries and, in turn, giving added importance, a voice, to music when it is used. The judiciously sparse use of music can be highly effective.

### Takeaways

- Project planning in the early stages should consider sound and music.
- The absence of (original) music deserves as much creative deliberation as the presence of (original) music.
- Media music is an asset at the media creator's disposal for immersive storytelling.

## 1.2 Rules and Principles

There are **no fixed rules** for the use of music in audiovisual multimedia. Although music has always accompanied moving images from long before the advent of synchronized sound, no hard and fast rules have emerged that dictate how media music should sound or what it should do. If ten experienced media composers were asked to score the same scene, working to the same brief, and with the same resources at their disposal, they would nevertheless all come up with different music solutions. Whilst on the one hand this introduces a certain level of uncertainty to every new project, it also opens up a multitude of exciting possibilities. Historically, we can of course observe prevalent modes of practice in a chosen canon—for example, how a certain set of filmmakers preferred to use music or how a group of composers happened to score films in similar ways. For example, in her 1987 book, “Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music,” the scholar Claudia Gorbman chose to focus on so-called Classical Hollywood films, a period in Hollywood filmmaking that formed a unified body of works, with underlying scoring principles that could, in hindsight, be observed and summarized.<sup>2</sup> Gorbman highlighted that music in classical Hollywood films tended to be orchestral scores in the so-called new-Romantic style. She also showed that “**narrative film music**” followed certain principles in the ways it related to the other “**narrative vehicles**” (dialogue and sound design): Music would be devised in such a way that it would remain “inaudible,” subordinated to the other narrative vehicles and not drawing conscious attention to itself. Gorbman tied this in with Classical Hollywood films’ general aim to mask the technical artifact that is “film,” i.e., hiding cameras and microphones, building convincing sets, employing certain editing techniques, etc., basically anything that might distract the viewer from fully immersing themselves in the narrative. Whilst Gorbman’s analysis was fascinating, the scoring principles she observed are not universally applicable to films outside the Classical Hollywood canon. And scoring principles are not rules anyway, just a collected view on what was commonly done because it had proven effective and what would, therefore, likely work again.

In the ever-evolving field of audiovisual multimedia, no one is interested in insisting on rules. Of course, there are some conventions that are fairly fixed. For example, where dialogue and sound design are present in a film or TV show or game, music will often stay out of the way, sonically, so as not to obstruct those elements. Then again, there are many examples where music overpowers the dialogue, for dramatic or other expressive reasons. Media music continually evolves as a storytelling tool among other elements. Style and genre conventions will inform creative ideas, as will current trends

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and prevalent industry standards. When considering music as an expressive asset, you need not worry about how things *should* be done but, instead, how you might best achieve the desired effect. Observing past practice can bring inspiring insights and help avoid costly mistakes, redundant workflows, and inefficient planning. You may come across examples you particularly like or dislike. Whenever this happens, it is worth exploring what can be learned about the creative process that led to a particular result. It is worth asking, “How did they do that?” especially if the result seems worth emulating. But there should always be scope for subversion, to challenge what has come before, to hack processes, and to do whatever feels right in order to pursue the most effective and creatively rewarding product possible.

Incidentally, in the right context, **any music can be media music**, regardless of style, instrumentation, no matter when it was written or by whom. There are endless possibilities when it comes to finding the “right” music for a project. The task is to clarify the dramatic, emotional, narrative needs of the project and to determine what role music should play. There may never be one quick answer to this and it is worth allowing time and creative thinking space to work towards solutions. It is never too early to invite collaborative partners to join the creative process. A composer and/or music supervisor can interface with ideas even at treatment stage and may help energize and inspire the development of the project. Even though at the earliest stages there may not yet be a budget for development, let alone production, a creative team may speculatively come together, their collaborative effort in turn improving chances for getting the project off the ground. Throughout the collaborative process, you might ask what the obvious solution to any given creative challenge would be. You might also ask what the opposite of the obvious, perhaps an unconventional, even shocking, solution would be. Veering to the left or right of the proverbial middle of the road can produce fascinating results. Remaining mindful of and articulating your own set of references and bearing in mind that your collaborators will have their set of references as well, ultimately there is always the intended target audience to consider, and they, too, will have a set of references and will receive the product from that perspective.

### Takeaways

- There are no fixed rules for the use of music in audiovisual multimedia.
- There are some conventions that have proven helpful. For example, music will often stay out of the way of dialogue, sonically.
- Any music can be media music, in the right context.

### 1.3 Film Music as Language

Pictures can universally signify an object: Show someone a picture...



...and they will think, “tree.” Spoken or written language can convey meaning by prior agreement and convention: Person reads, “tree” and pictures...



...a tree. The word “tree” is of course an arbitrary convention in just one language. Other languages use different words to signify the same thing: “Baum,” “arbre,” “árbol.” Although, in the right context, media music can serve as an effective storytelling tool, it does not hold inherent meaning on its own. There is, arguably, no such thing as “sad” or “happy” or “scary” music because **music is not indicative**. As an abstract art form, music will make listeners think or feel different things, their response to varying degrees determined by prior conditioning, current situational experience, and state of mind. Unlike written and spoken words, music certainly cannot communicate specifics such as “the beautiful princess lived in a lovely castle and enjoyed cake for breakfast.” Susanne Langer refers to music as an “unconsummated symbol” that in the

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Figure 1.1 Notation Example.

context of audiovisual media is “consummated,” or channeled into meaning by the medium it accompanies.<sup>3</sup> Music can be thought of as a language (it contains signifiers that seem to be saying something) that cannot be reliably and predictably decoded by the listener (unclear signified). A musical phrase may *seem* to be communicating *something*, but one cannot fix that meaning. Play someone this... (Figure 1.1)

...and it may not say anything to them or make them think of anything in particular. Of course, some listeners may have prior associations with a particular piece of music or a style of music. So, when they hear that piece or music of that style, they may be reminded of prior associations. When drawing on **music as a storytelling tool**, as narrative music, it is helpful to reflect on these cultural and contextual (“semantic”) associations because they will shape the audience’s perception of music in the context of the final project. One person’s love song is another person’s break-up anthem. What sounds foreign to a local audience may sound perfectly “at home” in a foreign market.

Although there are some musical compositions that tell specific stories (so-called program music such as Prokofiev’s “Peter and the Wolf”), these stories are prescribed in and framed by the works’ respective titles, program notes, or spoken narrative. The fact that music alone is a **signifier without a definitive signified** actually makes it a *more* powerful and flexible storytelling tool in an audiovisual **context**: In order to guide the audience towards the intended meaning and narrative result, whatever that may be, music is **mediated** by and must be **channeled** by the other component parts of the audiovisual experience.

### Takeaways

- Music is a signifier without a definitive signified.
- Music is not indicative.
- Music comes with the baggage of audiences’ prior associations.
- Media music must be channeled by the other component parts of the multimedia experience.
- Narrative music exists among other storytelling tools.

## 1.4 How Overt or Subtle Should Music Be?

How noticeable or prominent should music be? A project may feature music overtly or in subtle ways. Many media creators in recent decades have opted for a “subtle” approach to music, especially film and TV directors. “I need very little here”; “I want nothing too big”; “I want to have something quite sparse and quiet,” are fairly typical instructions to the music team. Opting for an understated or simple or quiet musical solution may be the perfect choice for a scene, a character, and a project as a whole. But such musical restraint should be carefully considered. It must not be borne out of a fear of expressive music. Demanding restraint of a composer is absolutely fine, so long as they are allowed to understand the reasoning behind the request. Subtlety should not mask a lack of vision, sense, or aims and dramatic purpose for music on the part of the project owners. Too many films and television programs over the years have fallen for the minimalist trap, opting for cowardly musical underscores that are barely audible, subdued, and non-expressive. These kinds of scores are really dull for a composer to write and rarely the best creative solution. There absolutely is a time and place for restraint. Some of the most compelling film scores know when to let the film breathe, when to rest, where to remove all but the bare minimum of musical expressivity. A measured and understated approach to scoring can be the appealing opposite of something garish or pompous or melodramatic. A competent composer will be the first to request that certain moments in a project remain un-scored or be given only a very sparse musical treatment. Some great examples of subtle scoring solutions include:

- *The Dark Knight* (2008)—Mel Wesson’s contribution as “ambient music designer” facilitated the seamless fusion of sonically conceived music and musically conceived sound design. The technologically enabled creative process made it possible for the film to have a staggering 130 minutes of “music,” which at times operates at extremely low relative volume levels (compared to dialogue and sound design).
- *Moonlight* (2016)—Nicholas Britell’s beautiful score is sparsely placed throughout the film and judiciously allows extended passages without music.
- *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014)—The placement of music toys with the ambiguity of source (on-screen or off-screen). Antonio Sanchez’s solo drumming subverts the notion what constitutes a “score.”

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- *No Country for Old Men* (2007)—Although some subtle synthesizer tones allegedly survive in the final film, composer Carter Burrell, who worked closely with the Coen Brothers on this project, eventually talked himself out of a job: The team jointly agreed that music could and would not add anything of use to this film. Crucially, this was a mutual decision that organically emerged from the creative process.
- *Mother!* (2017)—Darren Aronofsky worked with composer Jóhann Jóhannsson for several months, going as far as screening versions of the film with music, before then deciding the film worked better without composed underscore. Jóhannsson was eventually credited as “Music and Sound Consultant,” not dissimilar to Bernard Herrmann’s consulting on Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1963).

There absolutely is also a time and place for bold and in-your-face scoring solutions. For example, TV and online commercials commonly rely on prominent music placements, because it is well understood that music is an effective ally in quickly setting the tone in a format where everything is compressed into just a few seconds. The need for immediacy is served well with poignant music placements. Numerous feature films and video games contain segments in which music is given prominence, if only temporarily. Where music is pushed to the foreground of the soundtrack, the audience is more likely consciously to notice it. Some examples of effective bold music uses include:

- *Psycho* (1960)—Even though Hitchcock originally wanted the groundbreaking shower scene without music, Herrmann presented him with a score for the scene. The director finally conceded that the scene worked better with music. There is nothing subtle about music in this scene, the shrieking string stabs brutally mirroring the knife stabs.
- *Ex Machina* (2014)—The result of the close collaboration between the director Alex Garland and the composers Geoff Barrow and Ben Salisbury, music in this psychological thriller is prominently placed in the soundtrack. The score drives the increasing tension forward and is strikingly effective. It may also be one of the few instances in the history of film music where (spoiler alert!) music “lies” to the audience, early on siding with Ava (Alicia Vikander) and suggesting that Nathan (Oscar Isaac) is the one to be feared.
- *Requiem for a Dream* (2000)—Clint Mansell’s unforgiving *Lux Aeterna*, which has been used many times in commercials and film trailers since the release of this film, is just one of several cues that are allowed to make

a strong statement and help heighten the sense of terror and dread in this drama.

- *Love Actually* (2003)—Yes, it's probably cheesy, and, yes, it's a rom-com, but when, near the end of the film, young Sam (Thomas Sangster) runs after his would-be love interest, a rousing music cue amplifies our collective sense of joy.
- *Star Trek* (2009)—Michael Giacchino's majestic theme for the starship Enterprise is given prominent placement in J.J. Abrams's entries to the franchise, surely to the delight of invested fans.
- *Blade Runner 2049* (2017)—Paying sonic homage to the score for the original *Blade Runner* (1982), Hans Zimmer and Benjamin Wallfisch's synthesizer score is foregrounded several times in Denis Villeneuve's visually stunning sequel.

On every project, opportunities for musical prominence should be discussed, carefully weighing up dramatic and aesthetic implications. In paying close attention to the expressive and creative possibilities that arise from using music in a project; in exposing oneself to a range of musical ideas and influence; and by inviting a capable composer and/or music supervisor along during a project's early planning stages, all creative stakeholders will be in a better position to make reasoned suggestions regarding music, and all scoring choices can emerge organically from the collaborative process.

### Takeaways

- There is a time and place for restraint, but subtle music uses should not mask a lack of vision, sense of aims and dramatic purpose for music on the part of the director.
- There is a time and place for bold and in-your-face scoring solutions.

## 1.5 Conventional Roles and Functions of Narrative Music

The following overview of the roles and functions narrative media music has conventionally played is fairly comprehensive, but it should not be considered prescriptive or dogmatic. Always feel free to explore new possibilities and push boundaries on your next project. Media music never acts in isolation but contributes to the cumulative effect of all storytelling tools. When analyzing multimedia, it may become apparent that wherever media music occurs, it tends to serve several purposes at once. (See Table 1.1.)

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**Table 1.1 Overview: Conventional Roles and Functions of Media Music**

Added Value	Music raises the aesthetic quality and effect.
Creating Atmosphere and Setting the Tone	Music sets up the prevalent experiential atmosphere or tone of the project.
Delineating Structure	Music acts as a structuring device in film and other audiovisual media.
Direct Attention	Music provides focus and point-of-view perspective in narrative situations that might otherwise be ambiguous.
Establish Characters	Music identifies individual characters or characterizes a protagonist in a certain way.
Comedy	Music creates a sense of, supports, or amplifies comedy.
Provide Continuity	Music provides sonic continuity between shots.
Supporting Dialogue	Music accompanies dialogue to a narrative and dramatic end (e.g., pacing, development, emotional charge).
Geographic Location	Music establishes a geographic location by using instruments and musical styles typical of a place or country.
Further Meaning and Narrative	Music tells the audience/player something that is not already implied or apparent in the visuals or from context.
Establish Time Period	Music indicates a time period by using period instruments and musical styles.
Dramatic/Narrative Pace	Music provides a sense of higher speed and urgency.
Indicating Mood and Stirring Emotions	Music evokes an emotional response from the audience or indicates the mood of a scene, character, etc.

*Added Value*

Media music will, in synergy with other audiovisual elements, raise the overall aesthetic quality and effect for the audience or player. The scholar Michel Chion has called this contribution “added value.”<sup>4</sup> It is up to the creative stakeholders to channel the intended cumulative aesthetic to the desired effect, whatever that may be. Intention and outcome will differ greatly depending

on the project at hand and aesthetic considerations may not always be easy to articulate. Where active discussions do take place (certainly in advertising!), aesthetic aims can be served by music, among other elements.

- In *TRON: Legacy* (2010), for example, Daft Punk's sleek and calculated synthesizer score elegantly serves the glossy visual style of the film, envisioned by director Joseph Kosinski, who had previously only worked on commercials.
- In *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), Mark Mothersbaugh's score is predominantly orchestral and dignified during scenes that are set in Asgard and on Earth. By contrast, scenes set on the zany planet Sakaar are accompanied by playful vintage synthesizers reminiscent of 1980s arcade games.

### *Creating Atmosphere and Setting the Tone*

Music can be highly effective in setting up the prevalent experiential atmosphere or tone of the project. The use of a particular melody, a chord progression, a choice of instrument or instrumental colors, a musical style, and general mood or attitude in the music can all work towards establishing an intended tone. Using music to create atmosphere is of course also commonplace in everyday life, where atmospheric background music is omnipresent in restaurants, supermarkets, shopping malls, theme parks, hotel lobbies, and even elevators. Visitors and customers subliminally are being primed for their experience, be it luxurious, relaxing, fun, or exciting.

#### Main Titles and Opening Cues

Opening title themes (or “**main titles**”) or overtures used to be a common device to engage the audience and set the tone for the film or TV show (see also Chapter 6). Perhaps by coincidence, some of these opening titles proved so powerful that they served as effective branding tools as well, staying with the audience long after the film or episode had finished. Some of the best-loved film and TV scores are arguably best remembered for their respective main title. Without exception, main titles will aim to set the tone and atmosphere in line with the film or show they introduce, including *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *Braveheart*, *Mission: Impossible*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Game of Thrones*, or *Westworld*. Even in the absence

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of an opening title or overture, music in multimedia can serve as a **tone-setter** or **primer**.

- *American Beauty* (1999)—The cue Dead Already accompanies Lester Burnhams's (Kevin Spacey) opening monologue. The sparse nature of the music leaves space for the monologue, while also setting a jocular tone that prevents this segment from feeling overly serious or sentimental. The tone of this opening is broadly indicative of the ensuing film.
- Music in the opening passage of the Coen Brothers' *Fargo* (1996) establishes a grounded and perhaps somewhat bleak tone for this crime drama set in wintery Minnesota.
- The first composed cue in *The Social Network* (2010), Hand Covers Bruise, can be heard as Mark Zuckerberg walks across the Harvard campus back to his dorm after his girlfriend has just broken up with him in a bar. The cue comprises an undulating synthesizer buzz, a short piano motif, and sparsely placed deep bass pulses, creating an atmosphere of foreboding, a sense of something important being about to happen (the invention of Facebook).

### "Cool" Music

The concept of "cool" is an elusive and shifting attribute: What was "cool" yesterday is "lame" today. Music can contribute to the notion of "cool" if desired but this effect must be gauged in a contemporary context (i.e., what is "cool" right now?) and with the intended target market in mind. The use of a pop music idiom and electronic instruments certainly made *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984, the cue Axel F) feel modern and hip at the time of its release. The music for *Top Gun* (1986, the cue Top Gun Anthem) and *Days of Thunder* (1990) followed the same trend, albeit with a different musical style. John Powell's music for the *Bourne* franchise (for example, the cue Treadstone Assassins from *The Bourne Identity*, 2002) relies on electric guitars, edgy strings, and rhythmic loops, providing a contemporary edge. Ramin Djawadi's score for *Iron Man* (2008, Mark II) is similar in this respect. The opening title for HBO's *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) is the song Woke up This Morning by the band Alabama 3, which greatly contributed to setting the show's cool tone. The exciting blend of synthesizers and large orchestra helped create the sleek and glossy style of Kosinski's *TRON: Legacy* (2010, Son of Flynn) reminiscent of fashion or make-up commercials the director had previously focused on.

## Romance

Music is an excellent aid when it comes to indicating **romance and sensuality**. Love themes, suggestive of a love interest within the narrative, are among the most common stock devices for musical underscoring.

- *Blade Runner* (1982)—For his Love Theme, composer Vangelis uses saxophone, a scoring cliché that probably no longer has currency, but was exceedingly effective at the time.
- *Avatar* (2009)—In The Bioluminescence of the Night, ethereal glass mallets, gentle synths, and strings for the cautious romantic outing of the two protagonists.
- *Star Wars—Return of the Jedi* (1983)—Luke and Leia Theme starts off quietly with a solo horn and then gradually builds, suggestive of the tentative and unsure bond the two characters feel between each other.

Music need not flag a specific love interest but can also serve to set a romantic, sensual, or outright sexual tone more generally:

- *Basic Instinct* (1997)—Jerry Goldsmith’s full orchestral score adds sensuous depth to this twisted thriller—for example, with the cue Pillow Talk.
- *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015)—In the cue Did That Hurt? Danny Elfman works with visceral sonic texture and different timbres, ranging from warm to cold, gentle to abrasive.
- *The English Patient* (1997)—Gabriel Yared’s nuanced and fragile score elegantly supports the unfolding romance, for example, in the cue As Far as Florence/Rupert Bear.

## Crime and Sleaze

Jazz and other popular music idioms are commonly used to accompany criminals and **crime thrillers** such as *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999), among many others. There is perhaps an unsavory quality about criminal characters and their illegal activities that is not best served by more traditional scoring styles. A notable exception is Michael Kamen’s score for *Die Hard* (1988), where the composer adapts “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, Op. 125—“Choral:” IVb Presto—“O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!” to accompany the main villain Hans Gruber, giving him an air of sophistication and

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German-ness. John Paesano's music for Marvel's *Daredevil* (2015–) reserves a recognizable theme for the main character (Main Title), underscoring the rest of the show with driving rhythms underneath a blend of strings, guitars, and throbbing synthesizers. **Film noir** in particular draws on jazz to complement its distinctive visual style—for example, in *Chinatown* (1974) and *Taxi Driver* (1976, the music from Main Title recurs frequently throughout the film). There are scoring staples including saxophone, jazz combo (piano, upright bass, drums), big bands, and seductive strings that immediately help set a *noir* atmosphere. Tom Ford's neo-noir *Nocturnal Animals* (2016, Wayward Sisters) selectively opts for a beautiful strings theme that is reminiscent of Bernard Herrmann's work for Hitchcock.

### *Delineating Structure*

#### Structural Relationship between Music and Image

Music can act as a structuring device in film and other audiovisual media. Filmmakers as far back as Sergei Eisenstein have explored and theorized the structural implications of using music in conjunction with the moving image. When music and visuals are combined, they enter into a structural relationship, among others. This may be noticeable at the macro-level (e.g., a film's act structure, a TV episode, a video game level), or the incidental micro-level (e.g., how much relates to visual cuts or movement within the image). Where a composer provides original music for a project, they can act as structurer, actively shaping the cumulative structure of “music + moving image” as experienced by the audience or player.

#### Narrative Structure

Narrative structure can be delineated by the presence and absence of music. Music may serve as a structural **marker** and provide **punctuation marks**, by providing audiovisual coincidence (an event in the music occurring at the same time as a visual event or cut), or by use of judiciously placed music start and end points. Music can also help **separate** sections in the visual medium—for example, a studio logo from the beginning of a film (see also Chapter 6). Another time, music may **bind** together separate sections—for example, leading from one scene to another. Music may be used to hold together **montage**

**sequences** (see also Chapter 5), which are commonly used in film and television to indicate passage of time, travelling a distance, making progress. Music may also help set the **pace** of a scene or segment, with musical attributes such as pitch, rhythm, and tempo interacting with the audiovisual flow in such a way that the resulting effect is one of increased or decreased speed (see also Chapter 8). For example, fast and highly rhythmic music will often accompany chase and fight scenes, whereas contemplative or romantic settings are accompanied congruently by slow and calm music.

### “Form” in Music

The respective form and structure of music and moving images may not immediately be compatible. When describing a piece of music, the term “**form**” refers to the structure of the musical composition as a whole. Traditionally, there have been shorter forms, such as a song or a prelude, and relatively longer forms, including symphonies and operas. Concepts of forms govern the way a composer organizes musical material over the course of a composition. Some of these concepts are fairly strict, such as a Bach-style fugue (hear, for example, the fugue from Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 586, II. Fugue) or a so-called sonata-allegro form (for example, Piano Sonata in D Major, K.381: I. Allegro, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart). These traditional forms stipulate exactly how melodies and harmonic structure may be organized. Other forms are more flexible, such as the symphony, which can take on a wide range of inner structures, including the number of movements and overall length. Since most media music compositions comprise relatively short pieces, called “cues,” the overarching form is not often discussed. A composer may consider using thematic material across a number of cues within a longer film or video game (see also Chapter 6). But they will not normally plan thematic layouts in the way they would when writing a string quartet in the style of Beethoven.

Contrarily, with the composition of interactive video game music, there are structural implications that must be considered, and music produced in such a way so that different score elements can be flexibly recombined to accompany real-time gameplay. Music may need to loop as long as it takes a player to get to a certain point in the game. Music may also need to shift gears suddenly—for example, if the player chooses to attack an opponent. The composer will liaise with the programmers and audio director to plan and implement music with the game engine.

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## Structure in Music

It should be kept in mind that musical compositions do have structure. This structure can be devised flexibly to suit the needs of the project, but nevertheless there is a sense of structural coherence and integrity that a composer will hope to achieve and maintain. You will not normally need to discuss the structure of a cue, let alone the detailed measure-by-measure development of a composition. But thinking of structure in music can helpfully intersect with structural concerns in the narrative and visual editing. There are overlaps and synergies that can be explored, and the composer should welcome a dialogue with the team to address these structural concerns. Composer Marco Beltrami (*World War Z* (2012), *Logan* (2017)) feels that “people today are so afraid of giving music or themes space to breathe and play out. Compare Hitchcock or Leone: There is so much space (for music).”<sup>5</sup> Orchestrator and conductor Jeff Atmajian agrees: “If you think of somebody like Hitchcock or Sergio Leone, the way they would shoot long scenes [...] where they knew music would be the only thing that would make that really work. They left that space for it.”<sup>6</sup> Academy Award-winning composer Gabriel Yared (*The English Patient* (1997), *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)) conceives of film and music as conversation: “In a spoken conversation, if one person speaks, the other is silent. Give music space and room. Invite music to elevate film.”<sup>7</sup> Considering the structure of the narrative alongside structural aspects of music, you may choose to allow extra space for music in some places.

- The Main Title from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) is a good example of an opening title theme, where music is given the time and space to develop.
- In a memorably lyrical moment, Luke Skywalker faces the binary sunset in *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977), and a rousing complete statement of the Luke Skywalker/Force Theme is provided by full symphony orchestra.
- There is a lovely scene in John Favreau’s live action adaptation of *The Jungle Book* (2016) after Mowgli has helped the elephants rescue their baby from a sinkhole: Composer John Debney is given time to quote an extended passage of the main melody from the song “The Bare Necessities,” in a heart-warming rendition with full orchestra (Mowgli and the Pit from 2:24)

*Direct Attention*

Music can provide focus and point-of-view perspective in narrative situations that might otherwise be ambiguous.

- *Altered States* (1980)—John Corigliano’s unsettling score mirrors the main character’s drug-induced mental journey.
- *Vertigo* (1958)—Bernard Herrmann’s score features a number of themes that differentiate Scotty’s love interest Madeleine from her alter ego, Carlotta (for example, in the cue Scotty Trails Madeleine), also highlighting Scotty’s infatuation with her/them.
- In video games, music is a valuable asset to guide players towards a goal and steer them in a particular direction. Working in conjunction with other sound and visual elements, music can motivate players in the gameplay progress or dissuade players from veering too far off course.

### *Establish Characters*

Music can help identify individual characters, effectively labeling or branding them early on in a narrative. The most obvious way music can help establish character is by use of **character-specific themes or motifs**. These may be melodies, chord progressions, or, in the case of the *Terminator* franchise, simply a recognizable drum pattern (e.g., in Main Title Terminator 2 Theme.) A character’s theme is first established by accompanying the character with their musical theme. Later on, the character may then be referred to by music alone, in their absence. When a musical theme is assigned to the character, it will usually be indicative of their character traits and intentions. The theme not only identifies the characters, it also *characterizes* them. A story’s hero, villain, love interest, interloper, benevolent elder will receive very different musical treatments. Some scores use only one, or very few, recurring themes (e.g., *Jaws* (1975)) whereas other films have dozens (the *Star Wars* franchise and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy each have more than 40 recurring themes.) Musical themes need not be attached to a specific character but can serve a film as a whole. Alan Silvestri’s theme I’m Forrest ... Forrest Gump for *Forrest Gump* (1994) or Henry Mancini’s Moon River for *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) are distinctive themes that are not necessarily attached to their respective main character but rather the narrative as a whole. In both examples, however, the thematic material helps set the main characters in a certain sympathetic light.

Music can serve more generally to **characterize a protagonist** in a certain way. For example, it is a bit of a cliché that villains love classical music, presumably pairing an evil streak with intellectual highbrow taste. Hannibal Lecter enjoys Bach’s Goldberg variations (Goldberg Variations, BWV 988: Aria) in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). Alexandra listens to a private performance Brahms’s String Quartet in C Minor in *Marvel’s Defenders* (2017).

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By contrast, the emotional or psychological fragility of characters can be suggested by use of empathetic music, as is the case in:

- *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962)—Elmer Bernstein’s gentle theme for Boo Radley (the cue Boo Who?).
- *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)—Gustavo Santaolalla’s understated theme for Ennis Del Mar and Jack Twist (e.g., the cue Brokeback Mountain 1).
- *Moonlight* (2016)—Nicholas Britell’s soothing theme for Little (Little’s Theme).

Music can also **distance the audience from a character**, or characters from each other, instilling a sense of alienation or otherness in:

- *Planet of the Apes* (1968)—Jerry Goldsmith’s largely atonal score for a film that depicts a clash of culture between humans and highly evolved apes (e.g., Main Title).
- *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1999)—James Newton Howard’s haunting score accompanies the clash of Japanese and Caucasian communities in post-WWII 1950s US
- *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)—Music helps render a sense of “foreignness” in this British-American epic, an historical drama film based on the life of T.E. Lawrence (e.g., Overture).

## Comedy

Music is invariably called upon to help create a sense of, to support, or amplify comedy. There is a long tradition in music history for musical comedy—for example, *opera buffa* and *operettas* are lighthearted and comedic in terms of music but also in terms of subject matter and situational comedy. In a film or TV show, if a scene is not funny, music is unlikely to succeed in making it so. Music in comedy can come in different guises and serve different purposes, but timing is often key: the way music is fitted to a scene and where music starts and stops can make a big difference to whether or not a scene is funny. There is **slapstick** comedy in which musical gestures often are closely synchronized to the on-screen action, essentially mimicking sound effects. Taken to an extreme, such close matching of musical gestures and on-screen actions is called “mickey-mousing,” pioneered by composer Carl W. Stalling, who worked for Walt Disney on the groundbreaking animation *Steamboat Willie* and the *Silly Symphonies* series and later for Warner Bros. on *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies*.

Having established that the quirky nature of some jazz music can be drawn upon for comedic effect, notably with Henry Mancini's The Pink Panther Theme, countless straightforward **comedies**, films, and TV shows draw on a similar musical palette. In recent years, the prime-time soap *Desperate Housewives* and comedy shows *Ugly Betty* (2006–2010), *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (2015–), and *The Good Place* (2016–) all draw on lighthearted musical underscoring for comedic effect. It could be said that in these examples lighthearted music is in agreement with the comical setting of the respective show.

Music can conjure a sense of low-stakes mischief in **crime-comedies**, providing the requisite tongue-in-cheek tone predominantly with composed underscore (in, for example, Soderbergh's *Ocean's 11* (2001, e.g., Boobytrappin) or Spielberg's *Catch Me If You Can* (2002)) or with a combination of composed and compiled music (e.g., *The Nice Guys* (2016), Theme from "The Nice Guys"). Jazz, funk, and other pop music idioms often are the go-to here.

**Romantic comedies** commonly rely on music to maintain a light and humorous tone even when at times a character may be struggling with heartache etc. Whilst much of the comedy is, once again, situational (not relying solely on music), score and song choices can go a long way towards helping the audience remember that the program they are watching is less than serious. By contrast, Elmer Bernstein's serious and highly dramatic orchestral score for the spoof comedy *Airplane!* (1980) proved that comedy music need not be funny at all. In fact, the juxtaposition of ultra-serious music with a farcical setting can bring hilarious results. Since then, the same effect has been used in many films and TV shows, including:

- *Zoolander* (2001)—David Arnold underscores this spoof (fashion) crime thriller with *faux* spy/action music.
- *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997)—George Clinton's serious quasi-Bond score provides a dramatic musical backdrop to the comedy.
- *Robin Hood—Men in Tights* (1993)—Hummie Mann's tuneful and bold orchestral score for this Mel Brooks spoof of Kevin Reynolds's star-studded film is every bit as ambitious as Michael Kamen's original.

### *Provide Continuity*

In audiovisual multimedia, a range of filming and editing techniques help the audience suspend their disbelief and critical distance. Music is an additional asset that can provide continuity across multiple shots, sonically "gluing"

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together what is visually separate. Especially with increasing editing speeds, continuous music can fulfill a binding and unifying function, be it in busy action sequences or during a visual montage. Countless video games since the earliest days have drawn on music for an added sense of continuity, including runner games, shooter games, strategy, and puzzle games. Music can help bridge temporal and spatial jumps or gaps in the narrative. These include transitions to a flashback or visions of a distant future that suddenly appear to a character. A connection can be made between different characters across time periods, as, for example, in *The Hours* (2002), by use of continuous music. When characters travel a long distance in the space of seconds, music can help bridge the distance. In *The Muppets* (2011), the characters point out the “traveling by map” trick to humorous effect.

### *Supporting Dialogue*

The idea that music can support the spoken word to a narrative end, be it sonically, emotionally, and/or dramatically, perhaps dates back all the way to *recitative* in sixteenth-century opera and oratorio. In audiovisual multimedia, music can help with the pacing of the delivery of lines (akin to punctuation), underline and emphasize key points, and develop along dialogue to gradually build tension, or mystery, aggression, benevolence, etc. If music and dialogue are not only to coexist but also work effectively in conjunction, joint planning of these elements is required. There are countless inspired examples for music supporting dialogue. To name just a few:

- When the Joker, brutally beaten by Batman in the interrogation room sequence in *The Dark Knight* (2008), finally agrees to name the location of Harvey Dent, subtle meandering gongs underpin his evil scheming (he soon reveals that he has also abducted Rachel).
- When *Amélie* (2001) whisks a blind man down a busy street and describes for him all the sights and impressions he cannot see, the accompanying music grows increasingly energized, paralleling the blind man’s experience of joy.
- When Riggan experiences yet another moment of crisis in *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014), he has a fight with his imagined super hero alter ego. Frantic drumming highlights Riggan’s (Michael Keaton) chaotic inner turmoil and punctuates the dialogue to visceral effect, further amplified by the noise caused by Riggan trashing his dressing room.

## Geographic Location

Where are we? Music is highly effective in establishing a geographic location. Using specific instruments and musical idiosyncrasies of a country or region, music can serve as subliminal shorthand:

- shakuhachi flute = Japan
- didgeridoo = Australia
- throat singing = Tibet
- samba rhythms = Brazil
- gamelan = Indonesia
- balalaikas = Russia
- bagpipes = Scotland.

These are just some of many musical clichés that reliably flag entire cultures. Despite the term’s negative connotation, clichés are of course just signs that signal well. If media music is effectively and quickly to signpost a geographic setting to an audience, then these wholesale appropriations of musical cultures can be perfectly suitable. For some projects a purist approach may be required that reflects musical cultures more truthfully—for example, by working with musicians from that culture. Other times it can be acceptable for stylistic adaptations to be quite superficial. Composer Alf Clausen once said that whenever he had to write “ethnic” music for *The Simpsons* (1989–) he would spend no more than twenty minutes on researching the respective culture before composing his cue.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, a composer might spend months researching musical customs if an accurate rendition is desired.

- *A River Runs through It* (1992)—Copland-esque strings, harp, solo violin and a sustained simplicity of tonal language serve this film set in early twentieth-century Montana ([A River Runs through It](#)).
- *Brokeback Mountain* (2005)—Breaking away from Wild West clichés, strings and acoustic guitar nevertheless help establish a rural Western setting ([Brokeback Mountain 1](#)).
- *Brave* (2012)—Patrick Doyle provides vivacious tunes on bagpipes and fiddles for a fairytale set in the Scottish Highlands ([The Games](#)).
- *The Hunt for Red October* (1990)—Basil Poledouris’s score skillfully helps tell apart the Russian and American sailors, including inspired use of Russian hymns sung by the Red Army Choir ([Main Title](#)).
- *The Lion King* (1994)—South African singer Lebo M opens [Circle of Life](#) and immediately transports the audience to Africa. Tribal percussion and choirs supplement the orchestral score throughout.

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- *Prometheus* (2012)—The unusual and strained sound of high French horn in the opening cue Life, paired with ethereal choral hums are suggestive of an alien world.
- *Ratatouille* (2007)—Michael Giacchino’s score evokes the French setting by use of acoustic guitar, piano, accordion, and by quoting the French national anthem in the Main Theme and in Welcome to Gusteau’s.
- *Syriana* (2005)—Syrian/Lebanese percussion and strings in a distinctive tonal language help transport the audience to the Levant (Beirut Taxi).

Sometimes the nature of a musical score appears to disagree with the geographic setting of the film. In *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), three trappers protect a British colonel’s daughter during the conflict between the French and Native American tribes. Trevor Jones and Randy Edelman’s orchestral score is distinctly biased towards a white Western cultural realm, possibly to make the film palatable for the presumed target audience (Main Title). Maurice Jarre’s synthesizer score for *Witness* (1985) blatantly contradicts the rural setting in an Amish community (Building the Barn). This was a conscious choice made by the composer: director Peter Weir wanted a score that was cold and had emotional distance. As a result, the tone and style of the music does not support the geographic setting of the film.

## Dream State

Rather than an actual geographic location, music may also **suggest a dream state** and it may also help differentiate between characters’ real-life experience versus a dream reality.

- John Corigliano’s ambitious aleatoric score for *Altered States* (1980) accompanies the main protagonist’s drug-induced hallucinations.
- Hans Zimmer’s score for *Inception* (2010) amplifies the mesmerizing visual experience and highlights the life-threatening stakes in the dream world the characters enter (Dream Is Collapsing and Time).
- Newman’s score for *American Beauty* (1999) does not clearly distinguish in tone between Lester Burnham’s dream-states and waking hours but the music provides sympathetic beautiful padding in the dream scene in which Angela appears to Lester, bedded on rose petals on the ceiling (Arose).
- Karen O and the Kids devise a child-like and largely comforting score for *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009), possibly suggesting young Max is dreaming his encounter with the large wild beasts (Igloo).

### *Further Meaning and Narrative*

There are many different situations in which music can tell the audience something that is not already implied by context, or apparent in the visuals, or expressed in spoken words by the protagonists. There are many different ways in which this can be achieved. For example, a character may seem at ease and look friendly, but music suggests that something sinister is afoot. Perhaps the character has ill intentions towards someone, or they are struggling with an inner conflict or obsession. Jonny Greenwood's score for *There Will Be Blood* (2007, *There Will Be Blood*) may at first seem incongruous with the story of a gold digger who lives the American Dream to become a wealthy oil tycoon. Considered in the broader context of the story, however, it becomes apparent that the music primarily focuses on the corrupting effects of greed and wealth on the individual. In a similar fashion, albeit by different musical means, Greenwood focuses on the troubled inner world of Freddie Quell (Joaquin Phoenix) in *The Master* (2012).

Music can also foreshadow a narrative development. In *Star Wars—Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), music suggests that young Anakin will one day turn into Darth Vader, whose theme can be heard on a subtle oboe when young Anakin puts on his backpack outside his hut. Invested fans have speculated that Supreme Leader Snoke, first seen in *Star Wars—Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (2015), is the fabled Darth Plagueis: The latter was mentioned to adolescent Anakin by Senator Palpatine in *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (2005) and speculation over the two characters being one and the same arose because the musical theme (low male voices singing) used to accompany both is very similar (*Snoke*).

### *Establish Time Period*

When are we? Music can help indicate a time period by using period instruments and musical styles. Individual approaches can range from purist to liberal. With a purist approach, music will strive for an accurate emulation of the music of the particular time period that is being depicted in the narrative.

#### The Past

This may require direction quotation from past repertoire, which incidentally can serve as excellent shorthand to indicate a time period. A more liberal approach

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will borrow or emulate aspects of period music but adapt and embellish that music to serve other needs in the project. Depending on the project, composed or compiled music may best serve the purpose of establishing a time period.

- *American Graffiti* (1973)—George Lukas’s breakthrough film uses a large number of licensed pop songs for this film set in 1962.
- *Glow* (2017–)—Set in 1980s Los Angeles, this show aptly draws on licensed songs in conjunction with period props and outfits.
- *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988)—For this film, set in eighteenth-century France, composer George Fenton adapts George Frederick Handel [1685–1759] in his composed underscore. The film also uses existing pieces of the time period, including Vivaldi, Gluck, and Bach.

### The Future

Where a narrative is set in the future, composers and music supervisors may explore different types of music:

- *Blade Runner* (1982)—Vangelis opts for synthesizers for the film’s futuristic setting but also a saxophone for the love theme, a popular sound when this film was made ([Main Titles](#)).
- *Minority Report* (2002)—John Williams’s score for this film is fully orchestral and largely shuns synthesizers or drum grooves that one might have expected from this futuristic action-thriller ([Minority Report](#)).
- *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)—Kubrick famously opted for a compilation score comprising existing pieces by Ligeti ([Lux Aeterna](#)), Khachaturian, Richard Strauss, and Johann Strauss II.

### Outliers

There are many outliers in which music does not reflect the time period in which the narrative is set. There can be any number of reasons why one may choose to opt for other musical solutions. Pure or adapted period music may feel ill-suited to serve the project, or it may fail to engage and appeal to the intended target audience.

- *Mr. Turner* (2014)—Mike Leigh expressly did not want a period score but instead agreed with composer Gary Yershon that they would focus on the increasingly abstract nature of Turner’s paintings ([Mr. Turner](#)).

- *Gladiator* (2000)—This film, whose targeted mainstream audience would hardly recognize what authentic ancient Roman/Germanic music sounded like, has a large-scale orchestral score in a popular music idiom, featuring Australian singer Lisa Gerrard (Now We Are Free).
- *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992)—This fully synthesized score was a commercial hit in its own right but, stylistically, has nothing to do with the film's fifteenth-century setting.

### *Dramatic/Narrative Pace*

Music can help provide a sense of higher speed and urgency in a scene or segment, pushing the action forward by use of rhythmic patterns, agitated musical lines, and energetic gestures. Any chase sequence, escape, countdown, or deadline in the narrative will benefit from music.

- *Unstoppable* (2010)—Harry Gregson-Williams's loop-based score provides relentless drive, amplifying the effect of Tony Scott's high-octane visual style.
- *The Italian Job* (2003)—John Powell's score for this re-make of the 1969 original is fast-paced and highly energetic, effectively distracting from the fact that some of the action is actually rather slow-moving: For example, in the Tunnel Run segment, the Mini Coopers are driving quite slowly.
- *Dunkirk* (2017)—Zimmer's score helps deliver a breathless experience by use of incessant ticking and clicking (Supermarine.)

### *Indicating Mood and Stirring Emotions*

Music may not be intrinsically emotional, but media music can effectively evoke an emotional response from the audience. In the right context, music can move an audience to tears, make them cheer for the hero, or jump with fright. Finding the emotional truth of each moment in the narrative is one of the great challenges for all media creators and composers. Music can be an ally to help amplify the emotional charge of a scene or segment.

### Action and Adventure

In epic **adventures** (*Ben Hur* (1959), *Star Wars* franchise, *Gladiator* (2000), *Indiana Jones* franchise, and *Game of Thrones* (2011–), to name a few), music

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can whisk the audience along and enfranchise them to a collective struggle and an emotional journey. The use of large-scale instrumental forces and grand musical gestures (brass fanfares, heavy percussion, bright strings) helps underline a sense of greatness of the characters portrayed and the importance of their actions. The individual audience member is enticed to empathetically join in with a collective struggle. **Hymns and anthems** are part of cultures worldwide, sung to uphold a sense of unity, belonging, and collective (national) pride. In multimedia, anthem-like music can be drawn upon to conjure the same effect. For example, the aptly named Top Gun Anthem in *Top Gun* (1986) uplifts the victory celebrations after aerial combat.

The plight of one becomes the plight of many (including that of the audience):

- when a **struggle is overcome** (for example, in the cue Run Forrest Run in *Forrest Gump* (1994), when young Forrest escapes the kids that are taunting him).
- when a narrow **escape** succeeds (as, for example, in the L.A. getaway sequence in Emmerich's *2012* (2009)).
- when a sports **trophy is won** (see countless sports movies).

**War epics** and **military conflict** are frequently accompanied by large-scale scores. The style of music in such projects can vary, depending on budgets, time period depicted, target audience, etc. For example, three films depicting submarine warfare receive very different musical treatments:

- *Crimson Tide* (1995, Main Theme)
- *Hunt for Red October* (1990, Hymn to Red October (Main Title))
- *Das Boot* (1981, Titel)

Even where the same conflict is depicted, music can be very different depending on the director's intentions. One might compare, for example, these two Vietnam films:

- *Apocalypse Now* (1979)—The use of Wagner's pompous Ride of the Valkyries remains controversial.
- *Tigerland* (2000, Tigerland)—Nathan Larson's score for this Joel Schumacher film is surprisingly small-scale, using a solo *k'ni* (a Vietnamese violin-type instrument), drums, and electric guitar.

## Triumph

To help evoke a sense of heroic triumph, or generate a sense of ritual or ceremony, distinguishing a great individual (= the hero) from the masses (in the narrative and also the audience). Michael Kamen's theme for *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991, Robin Hood Prince of Thieves), Williams's themes for *Superman* (1978, Theme from Superman) and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981, Raiders March), and Elmer Bernstein's theme for *The Magnificent Seven* (1960, Main Title and Calvera) are just a few of the greatest heroic fanfares in film music.

## Awe and Wonder

There are many ways in which music can help create wondrous atmosphere or highlight a character's amazed response to a situation. A range of instruments may provide sounds that are unusual or unfamiliar to the audience, or a tonal palette may be devised that sounds dark or mesmerizing.

- The musical dialogue with the aliens near the end of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977, Wild Signals), where music gradually evolves into a colorful sonic mesh, is a good example.
- Music underlines the stunning visuals and amplifies Casey's sense of awe as she first explores the futuristic city in *Tomorrowland* (2015).
- The cue Ice Dance in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) beautifully complements the visuals when Edward creates ice sculptures, to Kim's amazement (incidentally, winning her heart).
- Scotty's impeding obsession with Madeleine becomes obvious in the way she is framed in the restaurant in *Vertigo* (1958, cue Scotty Trails Madeleine), both visually and musically.

Depictions of magic reliably rely on music for added sparkle and wonder. One might consider, for example, the transformation sequence, in Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast* (1991, Transformation), Elliott's first encounter with E.T. in *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982, the cue Meeting E.T.), and the *Harry Potter* franchise, famously Hedwig's Theme.

## Horror and Fear

Horror and music are perhaps inseparable, but music is also called upon more broadly every time a sense of fright, fear, or trepidation is to be

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indicated (felt by a character) or induced (in the audience). Sometimes the use of music will be overt and in-your-face. Other times, subtle gestures suffice to achieve a desired effect. A wide range of styles of music can be effective in a horror context. There are many films and games where perfectly lovely music may accompany terrifying visuals, the resulting effect being all the more troubling. Reversely, harmless images may be accompanied by a harsh musical noise-scape, together delivering a frightening experience for the audience.

Some films, including Hitchcock's masterpiece *Psycho* (1960, Murder), rely on aggressive gestures to parallel the on-screen action. James Newton Howard, who composed the score for *The Sixth Sense* (1999, Hanging Ghosts), is confident that his music has a profound impact on the film: According to him, it "wasn't scary without music, I guarantee you."<sup>9</sup> Contrarily, music in *Stranger Things* (2016–, Stranger Things) tends to be more broadly atmospheric, largely eschewing sudden or aggressive scoring devices.

Jason Graves's award-winning scores for the *Dead Space* games (2008, Dead Space Theme) is a prime example of extrovert and visceral horror music, setting a new benchmark for truly horrific underscoring. As ever, music does not operate in isolation, but it is the implementation of music among other elements that makes for terrifying game-play. The *Doom*, *Halo*, and *Resident Evil* series, among so many others, also draw on music in ingenious ways, often relying on dark and brooding colors and/or sudden heavy impacts.

Benjamin Wallfisch's score for *It* (2017, Every 27 Years), Komeda's score for *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, Main Theme), and Andrews's score for *Donnie Darko* (2001, the cue Cellar Door) all use lullabies, children's voices, and generally cute and cuddly music, which heighten the resulting sense of horror in the context of the other storytelling elements. The powerful effect resulting from the unlikely juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous "music + narrative context" is similar to very serious music operating in the context of comedies (see earlier examples).

### Sadness and Tragedy

Music will reliably be of service in moments of sadness, tragedy, and loss. A careful balance must be struck between the other storytelling elements, and also considering the context in which a sad moment occurs, so as to not tip the emotional balance over the top. Invariably, for the audience to feel sad, characters and situations must be prepared and constructed.

Music alone will not make for a sad scene, but a certain kind of music used in the right context will help bring tears to everyone's eyes. The familiar cliché "cue the violins" is indicative of scoring tools of a bygone era that may no longer be effective. Once again, it should be stressed that there probably is no such thing as "sad music." There is, however, a range of different musical solutions that will help make a scene or scenario feel sad, if used at the right time and after suitable preparation. Investible characters, a plausible and engaging plot, compelling stakes, and a convincing delivery (by the actors) all contribute towards the successful setting up of a sad scene. **Timing is essential:** Cueing music too soon might prevent an audience from engaging with the scene. Cueing it too late might mean missing an opportunity. There are a vast number of films and TV shows that have tackled sadness, tragedy, and loss: Compare the uses of music therein. Some obvious examples include:

- *Beaches* (1988)—There is nothing intrinsically sad about Bette Midler's song Wind beneath My Wings, but when it is heard in the film, it is utterly devastating, its lyrics relating to the story the audience has followed up to this point.
- *Titanic* (1997)—Jack's death is accompanied by a simple flute tune that is related to the main theme (My Heart Will Go on), in its understated manner nevertheless amplifying the emotional charge of the moment.
- *Good Will Hunting* (1997)—Music stays almost completely clear of the "It's not your fault" scene, in which a psychiatrist (played by Robin Williams) has a breakthrough with his patient Will Hunting (Matt Damon), entering only at the very end when Will has already broken down.
- *Dancer in the Dark* (2000)—Music in this challenging quasi-musical provides an aesthetic counterpoint to the bleak place where the main character Selma Jezkova (played by Björk) lives. The execution scene, led up to by the song 107 Steps, sets up perhaps one of the most devastating moments in the film.

### Takeaways

- There is a wide range of conventional roles and functions of media music that are tried and tested.
- Always feel free to explore new possibilities and push boundaries on your next project.
- Media music never acts in isolation but contributes to the cumulative effect of all storytelling tools.

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