

Symposium presentation:

Film score examples. Jurassic Park 37 sec, everything else at beginning

Judging by your recognition of these tracks, I think it's safe to say that film score has become ubiquitous in the life of the average individual. Every time we power on a electronic device or walk through a shopping mall we here some type of film score.

In fact, Christopher Brooks, author of the book on film scoring called *Visual Music*, connects the advent of film score to technology, which makes sense because film in itself is a technological advantage. He uses the word "software" to refer to all the electronic media used today. He says, "*All this 'software' has two things in common: it needs music and it pays money. I'm not saying that scoring the next game boy hit will buy you an estate in Bel Air, but there are now more opportunities than ever for composers.*"

Film score has made its way to the forefront of music composition. Because of its popularity, it has become a subject for many scholars and composers to consider very closely. One of the functions of the music historian is to categorize certain styles of music and trace their musical ancestry. Of course, film score, since it began in the 20th century, falls squarely in the Modern Era of music history. However, even though film scores bear the marks of modern music in many ways, they are, in themselves, a Romantic endeavor. Of course, due to its occurrence in the modern era it is affected by modern music history, but it is inherently Romantic due to its function.

No intelligent discussion about the purposes of film score and the compositional techniques employed during its creation can continue without a brief history of film score. Perhaps this may surprise you, but film score didn't begin as a stylistic choice. Music during film was actually a practical countermeasure to muffle loud movie equipment and audience noise. Movie houses would often hire a pianist who had learned a wide variety of repertoire that he could choose from based on the mood of the film. As you might expect, once film companies began realized that their movies were being accompanied, they began to publish lists of pieces that would be appropriate for the film. In fact, many of the companies compiled pieces, both new composition and classical standards, and published them in huge volumes that were separated by subtitles such as "Oriental Music" or "Spanish or Mexican Scenes".

At first, the musical offerings were only supposed to cover up noise. They were a way of covering up other sounds that may be distracting for the viewer. However, it wasn't long before movie companies realized that music really affected the film. As Irwin Bazelon, an early film composer said, "*It was discovered that, acting in a catalytic way, music could alter viewer's perception of the dramatic links between words and images; that it could stimulate feeling and reactions.*" From then on, film score became very important to movie companies for two reasons. First of all, the music was used to elicit desired reactions from viewers. The music was actually working in tandem with the acting and visual stimulation of the film in order to create the atmosphere that the director wanted to convey. Second, individualistic scores provided an incredibly marketing tool. This was illustrated by our exercise earlier. Everyone knows that a preview is for star wars once they hear those famous trumpet melodies in the theme.

This individualism that directors sought after was easy to produce, since film score arose during the Modern Era of music, which is marked by an incredibly wide variety of compositional styles which then leads to individualism. In fact, the famous John Williams wrote about this in his forward to *On the Track*: "*In the past, most composers approached the world of film music from a variety of backgrounds. They began by studying concert music or playing jazz, rock, or pop music, orchestrating for other composers,*

*writing arrangements for vocalists and big bands, working on theatre productions, creating and producing television commercials, and in general, exploring all styles of music...The broad experience gained from this eclectic background was, and is, probably the best preparation for a film composer."*

It's true that the Modern Era has had significant impact on film score, particularly considering the variety of music present in film score. Some modern techniques like technological scores and atonal harmony also appear in film music. However, film score in itself is by definition a Romantic endeavor. The Romantic Era of music history is marked by several distinctions. Three stand out in particular: individuality, emotional expression, and programmatic music. Consider this definition found in my music history text book, *A History of Western Music*: "*Writers and musicians promoted new artistic ideals for music that focused on individuality, originality, fantasy, expression of pure emotion, and transcending conventional limits in pursuit of deeper truths.*"

It is utterly necessary that a great film composer be individualistic, because aural identification has become a vital marketing tool for movie companies. Just think about the Disney theme or the Star Wars theme, or the Pirates of the Caribbean theme, or the Mission Impossible danger music, or the songs from Frozen. All of these movie titles or company titles most likely cause you to remember the music that you've heard accompanying them. This was incredibly important in the Romantic era. Composers were either expressing themselves or expressing a specific programmatic element when they wrote. Their music had to be unique if it was worth listening to.

Of course, the key inspiration for individuality is emotional expression. There's a reason we call the Romantic Era the Romantic Era. The composer of this time, as well as other artists and philosophers, idealized (romanticized) human emotion. It became the ultimate goal of every piece to properly portray the desired emotion. Film score's primary purpose is to elicit very specific emotional responses from the audience. The primary goal of a composer is to properly express that desired emotion.

Finally, film music is by definition programmatic music. Programmatic music is music that represents something else. The music's meaning is entirely tied to the object, emotion, person, etc. that it is written to portray. It goes without saying that film score is programmatic. It's in the title. Film score is written to represent and further its film. At the end of the day the music supports the film; it's not about the music, it's about the film. Scholar Royal S. Brown wrote this about film score in his article, "How Not to Think Film Music", "*But, of course, a quick listen to most film-music cues, even for the title sequences reveals that, while they borrow forms and styles of classical music, they more often than not lack much of the narratological backbone of that music.*" This quote explains perfectly the need that film score has for its movie. In fact, without its movie, film score is often not worthy to be considered high-level composition. It's what the film score does for the movie that makes it worthy of study. I may even argue that film score is the most programmatic music there is, although it may be tied with opera.

In conclusion, film score is certainly a Romantic endeavor even though it arose during the Modern Era.