

Music and Image: A Pedagogical Approach

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I feel that music on the screen can seek out and intensify the inner thoughts of the characters. It can invest a scene with terror, grandeur, gaiety, or misery. It can propel narrative swiftly forward, or slow it down. It often lifts mere dialogue into the realm of poetry. Finally, it is the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience.

Bernard Herrmann¹

The concept and power of music has long eluded precise explanation. Music exerts a direct, albeit seemingly intangible and subpsychological, effect on our emotions and being. On a daily basis music can directly affect our emotions and reactions to particular circumstances, as well as our perception of how time passes. When linked to a visual image, whether moving or still, music can directly affect the way in which we perceive that particular image.

The following ideas may suggest a possible approach to the beginning student of film music. To this end, I ask that readers place themselves in the role of students.

¹Tony Thomas, *Film Score: The View from the Podium* (A. S. Barnes and Co., 1979), 143.

To begin with, I would ask you to look at the picture given below.²

Example 1.



As you look at the image, you may or may not experience a feeling for the figure, or even a specific notion of what it represents. Try to place it in a time period reference (of course, this may or may not be influenced by your knowledge of art history). Think about the attitude this person might portray or how he might think. Is this a happy person? A noble person? Perhaps evil or sad or depressed? Poor or wealthy? It seems merely to be the likeness of a figure from some place or era in the past and does not offer any specific insight or information.

²*Portrait of a Boy*, bronze, early third century, B.C.

Next, while looking at the same picture (a slide of the head on a large screen will give a much more vivid effect), play the music to, for example, the opening of Jerry Goldsmith's score to *The Omen*.³ Suddenly one seems to perceive this person's thoughts, his place in time, his attitude, and so forth. Most of us will tend to have comparable feelings about the image, but they will not be exactly the same for all of us. Play the same music several more times and notice how you start to pay attention to different parts of his head and how the figure seems to come to life. Clearly the music really does affect our approach to this figure.

The next step would be to play different types of music while looking at the image; the music should, in each case, change our first perception of the young boy. For an example of an "up-tempo" piece from the roaring Twenties, listen to "I'm Gonna Charleston Back to Charleston" from *The Great Gatsby*.⁴ It is apparent that period music from the Twenties is going to evoke that period in time; however, the music does more than that. It enlivens the figure, which has now become happy and carefree in a manner that, I believe, exceeds the confines of the period of the Twenties. Contrasted to the effect of *The Omen's* excerpt, his hairstyle is perceived in an entirely different way; the facial expression, especially the eyes and mouth, seems entirely different.

At this point we might logically examine other psychological uses and implications of music. Various *mundana*, *humana*, and *instrumentalis* aspects of *musica* have been discoursed upon and discussed throughout the entire history of music, and indeed, of Western Civilization. Modern music therapists employ music and sound in a variety of ways, from helping relieve psychological

³Jerry Goldsmith, "Ave Santani," *The Omen* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1976): side A, band 1. Original sound track recording, conducted by Lionel Newman, record BJL1-1888, Tattoo Records, 1976. 1976 Oscar for "Best Score."

⁴R. Turk and L. Handman, "I'm Gonna Charleston Back to Charleston," *The Great Gatsby* (Paramount Pictures, 1974): side 2, band 1. Original sound track recording, music supervised and conducted by Nelson Riddle, record PAS 2-3001, Paramount Records, 1974.

tension, to lowering blood pressure, to aiding in putting irregular heart rhythms back to normal (this is accomplished by playing music at 60 BPM). To be sure, music therapy, as well as psychology and brain research, is in its infant stages; little is actually known from a factual, scientific aspect of how music affects human behavior and perception. However, this much is known: music is not merely a placebo. It has been proven to have a very definite effect upon the human psyche. The concept of a kind of “music of the spheres” on a small and grand level is inescapable. We speak of the “pulse of the city” (to use a *Dragnet* turn of phrase). New York City has an entirely different rhythm, tempo, and feel than, say, Eagle Rock, Iowa (the mythical town in *Cold Turkey*), or Los Angeles, or Tokyo, or than London, England. To paraphrase John Cage,⁵ it is virtually impossible to perceive silence. Even if one were in a totally sound-proofed room, one would still hear the sound of one’s own body (and, I suspect, the music of the spheres).

Let us explore another possible musical setting for the same image above and notice how some musical selections will have a much more drastic effect than others. For example, a Bach two-part invention will probably stimulate your imagination far less than, say, the main theme from *Taxi Driver*.⁶ The “Taxi Driver” theme, which is designed to be seductive and cosmopolitan, will tend to elicit vivid thoughts and imagination. The Bach will have an effect, but the thoughts evoked will more likely be in the realm of the scientific or intellectual, suggesting a museum quality.

⁵John Cage, *Silence* (1939-61), 23, “He who has entered an anechoic chamber, a room made as silent as technologically possible, has heard there two sounds, one high, one low—the high the listener’s nervous system in operation, the low his blood in circulation. . . .”

⁶Bernard Herrmann, “Theme from Taxi Driver,” *Taxi Driver* (Columbia Pictures, 1976): side 2, band 2. Original sound track recording, record AP 4079, Arista Records, 1976. The final recording session for the score was at Burbank Studios on December 23, 1975; he died in his hotel room that night. The intensities of the recording sessions and ill health are considered to be the main contributors to his death.

Even if a particular piece of music is a typically representative composition from a specific period in time, that does not mean that that time period will be inevitably superimposed upon the visual image. A prominent example of this is Kubrick's use of the "Blue Danube Waltz" in *2001* at the start of the space ship sequence.⁷ The use of this music was effective and even startling upon first hearing, (especially since, as you may recall, it directly followed the man-ape throwing the bone up in the air) but hardly brought us in a logical progression to the nineteenth-century Vienna of Johann Strauss. The effect will, as we have mentioned, be different for different persons, and comparison of the various effects is certainly worth talking about in class.⁸ Similarly, the use of Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony*, as well as excerpts from Rossini and others in *Breaking Away*,⁹ elicits very little to no period response in us. An interesting assignment might be for students to identify examples of period music which they felt did indeed elicit a specific response.

How much of this is based on preconception and/or prior experiences should also be discussed; however, the essential point is that different types of music do indeed alter our perception of an image in unique and various ways.

Below are given several more images that might be useful for comparison.

⁷Stanley Kubrick, director, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, (MGM, 1968).

⁸Jerry Goldsmith comments in Thomas, *Film Score: The View from the Podium*, 227-28, that "my reaction to what I see and hear in other people's films is . . . entirely emotional—and sometimes painful. I remember seeing . . . *2001* . . . and cringing at what I consider to be an abominable misuse of music. I had heard the music Alex North had written for the film . . . and I thought what Kubrick used in its place was idiotic. . . . The use of the *Blue Danube* waltz was amusing for a moment but quickly became distracting because it is so familiar and unrelated to the visual. . . . It is a mistake to force music into a film, and for me *2001* was ruined by Kubrick's choice of music. His selections had no relationship, and the pieces could not comment on the film because they were not part of it. So I come back to my theory that a score is a fabric which must be tailored to the film."

⁹Peter Yates, producer and director; music adapted by Patrick Williams, *Breaking Away* (CBS, 1979).

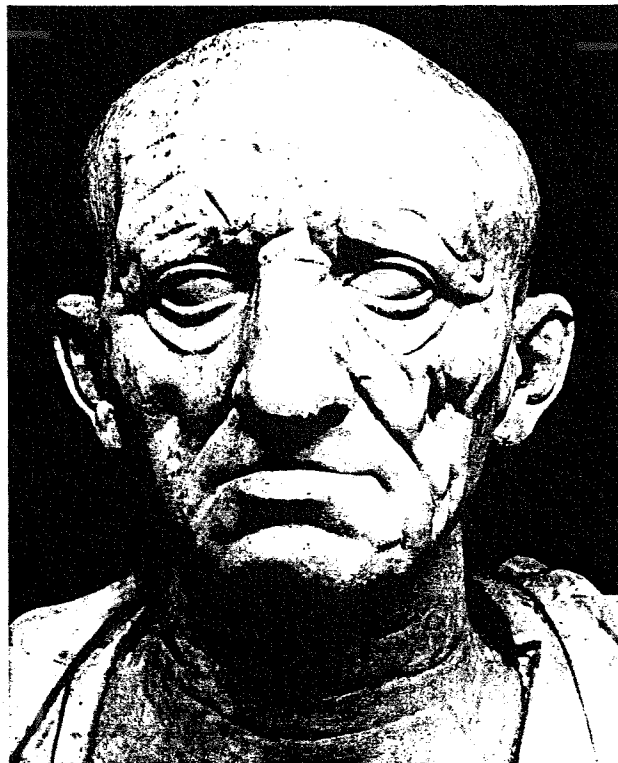
Example 2. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503-05).



Example 3. *Portrait of a Man* (c. 250 A.D.).



Example 4. *Portrait of a Roman* (c. 80 B.C.).



A picture will affect the perception of the music, but to a much lesser degree than the reverse. To discover this, look at the above images while playing the excerpt from *The Omen*. Then try the same while playing the *Gatsby* excerpt. You will, in all likelihood, discover that the music has a profound effect on your perception. For all practical purposes, all images will possess more or less the same quality with the same music. There are obviously image variations that, say, either a specifically strong “horror” or “violent” image will have on the music (see Examples 5 and 6 below; it is hoped that one would be able to find a more horrifying picture!). If, for instance, one were to play the *Omen* theme against one of the pictures below, followed by a lighter excerpt such as Spike Jones’s “Clink Clink Another Drink,”¹⁰ one would find this to be the case. Students are encouraged to explore various applications of this concept: for instance, the train robber’s gun in Example 6 may change from an ominous weapon to a seemingly harmless cap gun, depending upon the type of music played.

The relationships which exist between a still image and music are also applicable for a “moving picture.” In addition, music (and sound) acts as a cohesive link between scenes, cuts, and dissolves.¹¹ If one were to watch a film without any sound at all, one would immediately find that the flow of the picture would be very choppy, and the cuts from shot to shot and scene to scene would become annoyingly apparent. Watch the same sequence with just music (SFX and/or dialogue is not necessarily needed in this instance) and the filmic cuts will appear to be much smoother.

Another functional aspect of music is to make film time appear to pass at a different, and usually quicker, rate than if the music were not present. Bernard Herrmann used to give a lec-

¹⁰Carling and Olman, “Clink Clink Another Drink,”(Belwin-Mills Music, Ltd., date unknown), *I Went to Your Wedding: Spike Jones and His City Slickers*: side 2, band 2. Record INTS 5052, RCA Records International, 1980.

¹¹Another use is to “mask” or hide unwanted sounds, such as soft, but still perceptible, “off camera” sounds that the director/editor does not want the audience to hear.

Example 5. Robert Wiene, director, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919 German Expressionistic film); Cesare the Somnambulist abducting Jane, the innocent victim.



ture/demonstration on how music affected our perception of the passage of time. The example he used was a long shot that slowly moved from an evening moonlit, misty, treelined view, to a close-up of the exterior of a Victorian mansion.¹² His point was that without music, the sequence was not only boring, but seemed to take an excessively long period of time to dolly up to the house. With music, however, the length of time seemed exactly right (and much faster than the silent version). It is interesting to note that the music Herrmann composed was not fast, but rather quasi-mystical: slow, sustained tones in low strings, interlaced with moderately fast

¹²Orson Wells, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (RKO Radio Pictures, Mercury Production, 1942).

Example 6. Edwin S. Porter, director, *The Great Train Robbery* (The Edison Company, 1904); in the motion picture, the above leader of the band of outlaws takes aim and fires directly at the audience.



woodwind lines. The music was haunting and interesting enough to divert the audience's total attention away from just the visual element, and consequently, to perceive time passing much faster than it actually was.

A favorite example that I like to use involving the passing of time is the first part of the opening scene to *A Trip to the Moon*.¹³

¹³George Méliès, *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (Star Film, 1902). The score was written by the orchestra leader of the Olympia Theatre in Paris and is credited as being one of the first films for which an original score was composed. This film, as well as many other silent films, is available from Blackhawk Films; in addition, most collegiate film departments and some video stores also carry silent films.

The action which takes place in the first part of the opening scene, during which the astronomers plan the trip, ("The Scientific Congress at the Astronomic Club") is essentially as follows: the main body of the membership enters; girls parade in with telescopes, present telescopes to some of the astronomers, and then exit. The head astronomer enters, bows to the congress, ascends a podium and motions for the congress to sit; the telescopes change into chairs (via stop camera technique, invented by Méliès); the membership sits and the leader presents his plan to the congress of

The feeling and pace of the opening scene can be drastically altered by employing different types of music. First I begin with playing the visual scene without any music; then I ask the class for their interpretation of what they have seen. The students' interpretations tend to be very diverse and not very well focused. (It may be useful to point out how slowly the action seems to proceed, as in *The Magnificent Ambersons* above). Next I play an eleventh-century sequence¹⁴ to accompany this scene, and repeat the question. I find that their perception has drastically changed and become rather opinionated. Some students view the scene as some sort of ancient, solemn event. The girls appear to be "parishioners" of some sort, processing to a medieval non-religious sacrificial rite; the telescopes take on the appearance of either a quasi-religious object or a mace of some sort, and the Merlin-like medieval costumes of the astronomers appear to be religious robes. The head astronomer seems to be a high priest chanting to the congregation and one senses not an argument but rather an antiphonal chant. The meeting place takes on the appearance of a church, grotto, or heathen shrine. Some students see the chairs and telescopes vanishing and some don't; numerous other variations of interpretation will surface. Most significantly, the class's interpretation will certainly be a lot more graphic with, than without, the music.

The above exercise may then be followed by music of different types, and the resultant effects compared and discussed. Examples of music that work are lively Renaissance instrumental pieces (for

how they will get to the moon (includes a blackboard demonstration). A back-and-forth discussion ensues, followed by an argument and lively squabble. The astronomers are sorcerer-like, bearded and dressed in medieval robes with tall pointed hats; the girls, who were from the Folies-Bègere, are scantily clad (for the time) in shorts. The meeting room has the appearance of the lower depths of a castle.

¹⁴The Sequence "Victimae Paschali" (eleventh century) may be found in Parrish and Ohl, *Masterpieces of Music Before 1750* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1951), 10.

example, Susato's *Fanfare* "La Mourisque"),¹⁵ Mozart's Symphony No. 34 (last movement), Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 (Movement 1), the main title from Bernard Herrmann's *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the main theme from *Jaws*, and the main theme from *The Pink Panther*.

Different music can drastically transform our perception of the scene and pacing. The music dictates how fast or slow we perceive the tempo of the girls' entrance. Their "march steps" seem to sync with the music, despite the tempo of the music: with the chant they seem to be walking very slowly and in a religious manner, while with the livelier music they are moving faster, with a certain spring to their step. If march music were to be played, they would seem to be the rifle bearers of a marching band and be in step with the tempo of the music. Occasionally, accents in the music will accidentally coincide with a particular action in the scene. Sometimes this happens with the Tchaikovsky excerpt when the telescopes turn into chairs. When this syncs up, everyone notices the magical transformation. The silence in the Tchaikovsky is very dramatic and endows the entrance of the chief astronomer with anticipation. (Keep in mind that silence is sometimes far more dramatic than sound.)

When the head astronomer is proposing his plan to the general body of astronomers, what the audience imagines him to be saying can be drastically altered, depending on the type of music accompanying his presentation. The reactions of the general council of astronomers are likewise perceived in various lights. The reactions are in a direct relationship to the type of music: slow, serious music will elicit a slow, serious interpretation; similarly, comic music will cause us to perceive the dialogue in a light, almost carefree vein.

The lively baroque music tends to make the scene scientific but still fun, while the Mozart turns the scene into a Restoration

¹⁵Tielman Susato: *Danserye* 1551, arranged by David Munrow, for full wind band and tabor. From the soundtrack album of the Anglo EMI film *Henry VII and His Six Wives* (record SFO-36895, Angel Records, 1972): side 2, band 1; music arranged, composed, and directed by David Munrow.

drawing room comedy type of the *She Stoops to Conquer*¹⁶ genre. The Herrmann transforms it into a mysterious futuristic space adventure. *Jaws* is, of course, recognizable; it elicits laughter but does give a definite tone to the scene. *The Pink Panther* works wonderfully; the breathy low tenor sax gives the main astronomer (when he enters) a very “hip” and suave attitude, and the talking brass of the “Pink Panther” theme turns the squabble of the congress into a “fun party.”

It should be noted that it is common for directors and/or film editors to listen to, and sometimes even physically splice in, prerecorded music during their editing of the film. This music is commonly referred to as a “temp track,”¹⁷ and affords the director/editor an opportunity to get a feel for the mood, pacing, and length of a scene.¹⁸ I have known directors who will not begin to edit a scene until they play what they feel is appropriate music against it, because they know from prior experience that music may, and probably will, drastically effect the mood and pacing of the scene.

By being in the wrong place at the wrong time or with too much presence, music tilts the delicate balance that

¹⁶Written by Oliver Goldsmith (1731-1774). *She Stoops to Conquer, or, The Mistakes of a Night*, was first published in 1773.

¹⁷Short for “temporary track,” which, sometimes, is anything but temporary. The most notable example is *2001*. Director Stanley Kubrick originally commissioned Alex North to compose a score; however, during the film editing process, Kubrick used a temp track and became so fond of the prerecorded music he decided to include it permanently in the film. The “Blue Danube,” “Zarathustra,” and other cues are a result of this “temp” track and were not originally intended to be part of the musical design of the film.

¹⁸Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On the Track* (Schirmer Books, 1990), 39, in their excellent and completely thorough tome on film scoring techniques, list four basic “reasons why filmmakers use temp tracks: (1) to help them finish editing their film; (2) to help them screen their film for the producer(s), studio, and/or network executives and preview audiences during various stages of postproduction; (3) to establish a concept for the score; (4) to demonstrate that concept to the composer.”

must be maintained between the blending of visual and aural images in order not to destroy the film's dramatic force.¹⁹

Music gives the listener many different sensations and effects simultaneously. It must, however, be remembered that one can effectively concentrate on only one primary stimulus at a time. The human make-up is such that given the choice between visual and aural perception, visual sensation will prevail. Therefore, music, when it accompanies an image, must be secondary.

The primary consideration of music that accompanies an image is to create a certain, and very often intangible, feeling or sensation or mood. Erno Rapée compiled an interesting collection of precomposed music that was used by many silent film musicians of the day for the creation of particular moods.²⁰ Example 7 below is from Rapée's anthology and illustrates "sadness"; the outside borders of each page of his book contained the various moods, with appropriate page numbers for easy reference.

Idealistically, every motion picture is different and music must accentuate its action and bring the entire idea and storyline of the film into an acceptable focus. Much film music is stereotyped or formulized, but there is a good reason for that: besides the fact that in many instances a filmmaker must simply get the product (generally referred to by producers as "property") out quickly, most films are designed to be commercial entertainment, and audiences, as well as film producers, have certain expectations of the type of music that should accompany a particular situation. With the possible excep-

¹⁹Irwin Bazelon, *Knowing the Score: Notes of Film Music* (Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1975), 127.

²⁰Erno Rapée, *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists* (G. Schirmer, Inc., 1924, reprinted by Arno Press, 1974), 678 pages.

Example 7.

Aéroplane	2	630
Band	5	
Battle	10	
Birds	21	
Calls	273	
Chase	599	
Chatter	28	
Children	31	
Chimes	259	
Dances	39	
Gavottes	39	
Marches	102	
Mazurkas	48	
Minauets	54	
Polkas	61	
Tangos	94	
Valses lentes	78	
Valses	65	
Doll	129	
Festival	140	
Fire-Fighting	151	
Funeral	160	
Grotesque	165	
Gruesome	169	
Happiness	202	
Horror	173	
Humorous	174	
Hunting	186	
Impatience	194	
Joyfulness	202	
Love-themes	209	
Lullabies	231	
Misterioso	242	
Monotony	250	
Music-box	254	
National	281	
Neutral	467	
Orgies	487	
Oriental	496	
Parties	523	
Passion	571	
Pastorale	564	
Pulsating	567	
Purity	591	
Quietude	591	
Race	599	
Railroad	608	
Religioso	616	
Sadness	621	
Sea-Storm	651	
Sinister	663	
Wedding	671	
Western	665	

Prélude

F. Chopin. Op. 28, No. 20

Edited and fingered by Rafael Joseffy

Largo

21881

tion of source music,²¹ music is secondary, no matter how great the

²¹Source music is music that emanates from a particular “source,” such as a radio or someone playing “live” on camera. An excellent book on the subject is Irene

music and inferior the film. There is a Hollywood street saying that, depending on your point of view, may or may not hold some truth: good music has never saved a bad picture; however, a lot of good pictures have saved a lot of bad music.

Students should be encouraged to investigate their own preconceptions concerning what constitutes musical meaning. A crucial point to keep in mind is that in many instances what matters is the general feeling that the piece of music conveys, not the exact tune or melody. If one sees a gathering of monks walking outside a medieval monastery during the early morning, does it matter if one hears the chant *Adoremus in Aeternum* or *Salve Regina* or *Regina coeli* or *Ave Maria gratia*? Of course not. We are dealing with entertainment and effect, and what really matters is that a chant is being heard rather than, for example, Scottish bagpipe music (unless, for some special reason, that is what is called for in the scene). We do tend to speak in terms of categories and types of music. Granted, the exact sound of the music would be different for all of us, but “horror music” does conjure up a certain kind of music in our mind, such as low, slow, undulating synthesizer notes or a high sustained violin note or a digitally time-delayed drum machine shaker attack (in the manner of John Carpenter’s *Halloween*). So does the type of music that accompanies a John Wayne “western,” or an “action-packed adventure film,” or a scene where “boy meets girl, they embrace and then passionately kiss.” All these, and more, are specific moods and textures that require a specific, identifiable kind of music in order to call up specific (albeit very personal) mental images. An audience (and producer for that matter) has certain expectations that must be fulfilled, and it is the composer’s mission to meet those expectations and not get in the way of the picture. That is the fine line that music for film must tread. The primary function of music is to accompany and enhance the image, not for the image to accompany the music.

Kahn Athins, *Source Music in Motion Pictures* (Associated University Presses, Inc., 1983), 190 pages.

Music serves the drama and creates in the subconscious an idealistic and sometimes irrational dimension against which the naturalistic components play. One could compare the music's function with the role of a Greek chorus, painting the drama and underlining and psychologically enhancing the action.

Miklos Rozsa²²

²²Thomas, *Film Score: The View from the Podium*, 34.