

SOUNDTRACKS

Exploring Film Music



A. The Purpose of Music in Film

Film Music is a type of **DESCRIPTIVE MUSIC** that represents a **MOOD, STORY, SCENE** or **CHARACTER** through music, it is designed to **SUPPORT THE ACTION AND EMOTIONS OF THE FILM ON SCREEN**. Film Music can be used to:

- Create or enhance a mood (though the **ELEMENTS OF MUSIC**) ->
- Function as a **LEITMOTIF** (see D)
- To emphasise a gesture (**MICKEY-MOUSING** – when the music fits precisely with a specific part of the action in a film e.g. cartoons)
- Provide unexpected juxtaposition/irony (using music the listener wouldn't expect to hear giving a sense of uneasiness or humour!)
- Link one scene to another providing continuity
- Influence the pacing of a scene making it appear faster/slower
- Give added commercial impetus (released as a **SOUNDTRACK**) – sometimes a song, usually a pop song is used as a **THEME SONG** for a film.
- Illustrate the geographic location (using instruments associated with a particular country) or historical period (using music 'of the time').

D. Leitmotifs

LEITMOTIF – A frequently recurring short melodic or harmonic idea which is associated with a character, event, concept, idea, object or situation which can be used directly or indirectly to remind us of one not actually present on screen. Leitmotifs can be changed through **SEQUENCING, REPETITION** or **MODULATION** giving a hint as to what may happen later in the film or may be heard in the background giving a “subtle hint” to the listener e.g. the “Jaws” Leitmotif



B. How the Elements of Music are used in Film Music

PITCH AND MELODY – **RIISING MELODIES** are often used for increasing tension, **FALLING MELODIES** for defeat. Westerns often feature a **BIG THEME**. **Q&A PHRASES** can represent good versus evil. The **INTERVAL OF A FIFTH** is often used to represent outer space with its sparse sound. **DYNAMICS** – **FORTE (LOUD)** dynamics to represent power; **PIANO (SOFT)** dynamics to represent weakness/calm/resolve. **CRESCENDOS** used for increasing threat, triumph or proximity and **DECRESCENDOS** or **DIMINUENDOS** used for things going away into the distance. Horro Film soundtracks often use **EXTREME DYNAMICS** or **SUDDEN DYNAMIC CHANGES** to ‘shock the listener’.

HARMONY – **MAJOR** – happy; **MINOR** – sad. **CONSONANT HARMONY OR CHORDS** for “good” and **DISSONANT HARMONY OR CHARDS** for “evil”. **SEVENTH CHORDS** often used in Westerns soundtracks.

DURATION – **LONG** notes often used in Westerns to describe vast open spaces and in Sci-Fi soundtracks to depict outer space; **SHORT** notes often used to depict busy, chaotic or hectic scenes. **PEDAL NOTES** – long held notes in the **BASS LINE** used to create tension and suspense.

TEXTURE – **THIN/SPARE** textures used for bleak or lonely scenes; **THICK/FULL** textures used for active scenes or battles.

ARTICULATION – **LEGATO** for flowing or happy scenes, **STACCATO** for ‘frozen’ or ‘icy’ wintery scenes. **ACCENTS (>)** for violence or shock.

RHYTHM & METRE – 2/4 or 4/4 for Marches (battles), 3/4 for Waltzes, 4/4 for “Big Themes” in Westerns. **IRREGULAR TIME SIGNATURES** used for tension. **OSTINATO** rhythms for repeated sounds e.g. horses.

C. Film Music Key Words

SOUNDTRACK – The music and sound recorded on a motion-picture film. The word can also mean a commercial recording of a collection of music and songs from a film sold individually as a CD or collection for digital download.

MUSIC SPOTTING – A meeting/session where the composer meets with the director and decides when and where music and sound effects are to feature in the finished film.

STORYBOARD – A graphic organiser in the form of illustrations and images displayed in sequence to help the composer plan their soundtrack.

CUESHEET – A detailed listing of **MUSICAL CUES** matching the visual action of a film so that composers can time their music accurately.

CLICK TRACKS – An electronic **METRONOME** which helps film composers accurately time their music to on-screen action through a series of ‘clicks’ (often heard through headphones) – used extensively in cartoons and animated films.

DIEGETIC FILM MUSIC – Music within the film for both the characters and audience to hear e.g. a car radio, a band in a nightclub or sound effects.

NON-DIEGETIC FILM MUSIC – Music which is put “over the top” of the action of a film for the audience’s benefit and which the characters within a film can’t hear – also known as **UNDERScore** or **INCIDENTAL MUSIC**.

E. History of Film Music

Early films had no soundtrack (“**SILENT CINEMA**”) and music was provided live, usually **IMPROVISED** by a pianist or organist. The first **SOUNDTRACKS** appeared in the 1920’s and used existing music (**BORROWED MUSIC** – music composed for other (non-film) purposes) from composers such as Wagner and Verdi’s operas and ballets. In the 1930’s and 1940’s Hollywood hired composers to write huge Romantic-style soundtracks. **JAZZ** and **EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC** was sometimes used in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Today, film music often blends **POPULAR, ELECTRONIC** and **CLASSICAL** music together in a flexible way that suits the needs of a particular film.

F. Film Music Composers and their Soundtracks



Jerry Goldsmith
Planet of the Apes
Star Trek: The Motion Picture
The Omen
Alien



John Williams
Star Wars
Jaws
Harry Potter
Indiana Jones
Superman, E.T.



James Horner
Titanic
Apollo 13
Braveheart
Star Trek II
Aliens



Ennio Morricone
The Good, The Bad and The Ugly
For a Few Dollars More
The Mission



Danny Elfman
Mission Impossible
Batman Returns
Men in Black
Spider Man



Hans Zimmer
The Lion King
Gladiator
Dunkirk
Blade Runner 2049
No Time to Die



Bernard Herrmann
Psycho
Vertigo
Taxi Driver

Computer and Video Game Music



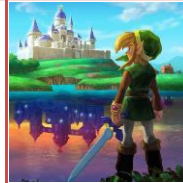
Early Computer and Video Game Music



Early video game music consisted primarily of **SOUND EFFECTS** (an artificially created or enhanced sound used to emphasize certain actions within computer and video games), **CHIPTUNES** or **8-BIT MUSIC** (a style of electronic music which used simple melodies made for programmable sound generator (PSG)

sound chips in vintage computers, consoles and arcade machines) and early sound **SYNTHESIZER** technology (an electronic musical instrument that generates audio signals that may be converted to sound). **SAMPLING** (the technique of digitally encoding music or sound and reusing it as part of a composition or recording) began in the 1980's allowing sound to be played during the game, making it more realistic and less "synthetic-sounding".

How Computer and Video Game Music is used within a Game



Music within a computer or video game is often used for **CUES** (knowing when a significant event was about to occur).

Video game music is often heard over a game's title screen (called the **GROUND THEME**), options menu and bonus content as well as during the entire gameplay.

Music can be used to **INCREASE TENSION AND SUSPENSE** e.g. during battles and chases, when the player must make a decision within the game (a **DECISION MOTIF**) and can change, depending on a player's actions or situation e.g. indicating missing actions or "pick-ups".

Musical Features of Computer and Video Game Music

JUMPING BASS LINE

Where the bass line often moves by **LEAP (DISJUNCT MOVEMENT)** leaving 'gaps' between notes



STACCATO

ARTICULATION
Performing each note sharply and detached from the others.
Shown by a dot.



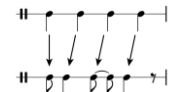
CHROMATIC MOVEMENT

Melodies and bass lines that ascend or descend by semitones.



SYNCOPIATION

Accenting the weaker beats of the bar to give an "offbeat" jumpy feel to the music.



How Computer and Video Game Music is Produced



Fully-orchestrated **SOUNDTRACKS** (video game music scores) are now popular – technology is used in their creation but less in their performance. The composer uses **MUSIC TECHNOLOGY** to create the score, it is then played by an **ORCHESTRA** and then digitally converted and integrated into the game. Video game **SOUNDTRACKS** have become popular and are now commercially sold and performed in concert with some radio stations featuring entire shows dedicated to video game music.

Character Themes in Computer and Video Game Music



Characters within a video game can also have their own **CHARACTER THEMES** or **CHARACTER MOTIFS** – like **LEITMOTIFS** within Film Music. These can be manipulated, altered and changed – adapting the elements of music – **ORCHESTRATION** (the act of arranging a piece of music for an orchestra and assigning parts to the different musical instruments), **TIMBRE, SONORITY, TEXTURE, PITCH, TEMPO, DYNAMICS** – depending on the character's situation or different places they travel to within the game.

Famous Computer and Video Game Music Composers and their Soundtracks



Koji Kondo
Super Mario Bros. (1985)
The Legend of Zelda (1986)



Michael Giacchino
The Lost World: Jurassic Park (1997)
Medal of Honour (1999)
Call of Duty (2003)



Mieko Ishikawa
Dragon Slayer (1993)



Martin O'Donnell and Michael Salvatori
Halo (2002)



Daniel Rosenfield
Minecraft (2011)



Rom Di Prisco
Fortnite (2017)

