A FISTFUL OF DRAMA: MUSICAL FORM IN THE DOLLARS TRILOGY

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ABSTRACT

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In 1964, Italian film director Sergio Leone forever influenced the western genre with his landmark film *Per un pugno di dollari* (*A Fistful of Dollars*). With its stylized violence, barren landscapes, endless deserts, crafty villains, and rogue hero with no name, this film established a new kind of western: austere, stylish, cynical, and violent. Complementing this new style was an eclectic and abrasive music track by composer Ennio Morricone. His unique orchestration, timbres, and pacing defined a style of film composition that would influence innumerable films to come. *A Fistful of Dollars* grossed over $4.3 million in its domestic run, and acted as the launching point for two more immensely successful spaghetti Westerns, *Per qualche dollaro in più* (*For a Few Dollars More*, 1965), and *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* (*The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 1966). These films also featured scores by Morricone, and all three together are frequently referred to as the *Dollars* trilogy.

In his *Dollars* trilogy, Leone emphasizes dramatic episodes through careful musical placement. The cues created by Morricone and utilized by Leone help accentuate the plot line of each film by using material developed in the main title theme throughout the movie. This method is referred to as developmental scoring, a compositional type first described by Roy M. Prendergast in *Film Music: A Neglected Art*. There, he defines the “developmental score” as a compositional method of unification where the title theme serves the function of an exposition in a classical sonata-allegro form, presenting material to be used throughout the score. Naturally a developmental score cannot contain the same musical functions as the classical sonata or rondo form, as there are not any preconceived formal musical expectations in a film’s soundtrack.
There are, however, similar generic characteristics. The episodic nature of a Western aligns itself well with that of a sonata or rondo; different zones and action-spaces are carefully placed into an overarching dramatic line that sets forth important ideas, repeats them over time, provides contrast and tension, and finally builds toward a triumphant return of thematic material to close out the work.

Using the title music as a starting point, this document aims to address the local and long-term dramatic structures created by the soundtracks of the Dollars trilogy. Drawing on two important bodies of analytical work—Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida’s Ten Little Title Tunes and William Caplin’s Classical Form—each title theme is shown to contain micro-cells of musical gestures that carry associations of other musical forms, particularly pop songs, folk tunes, and television and film themes connected to the Old American West. Fragments of these titles carry coded messages of the West, as well as important information regarding the protagonists, villains, and locations of the three films. These musical cells—as well as their instrumentation, timbres, tonal areas, and melodic shape—are then used to generate the remaining tunes of the soundtrack. The result is a highly inter-connected score that shapes the dramatic episodes of the Dollars trilogy films while magnifying the mythology of Leone’s American West.
This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful family and friends for their constant love and support.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCING THE ELECTRIC GUITAR COWBOY

A lone rider heads into town, riding a homely donkey and dressed in garb befitting of a bandit. The camera draws back as he moves closer to town, showing a barren desert village littered with rocks and sand. A bell tolls in the distance and residents of the town scamper between the buildings; on the outskirts live the women of the village—widows, dressed all in black. The most prosperous resident is the coffin maker. The villagers who earn a keep are quick with a gun and kill without reservation.

This is the new west, a west through the eyes of Italian filmmaker Sergio Leone. *Per un pugno di dollari* (1964; *A Fistful of Dollars*) would forever change the way moviegoers viewed the American west. Leone’s hero was not the unquestionably just, law-abiding, clean-cut gunslinger portrayed in American cinema (particularly in the films of John Ford). The Italian Western’s hero was just barely a hero. He was manipulative, smart, gritty, and not as bad as the bag guys—but close. He rarely spoke, and when he did it was pregnant with meaning. When he was thinking he continued to have a monologue, but his interior world was expressed through silence, facial expressions, and music.

To make sure his picaresque west was appropriately scored to reflect this new style, Leone needed a composer with the same views of the old west as his. He found this in Ennio Morricone, who up until the time of production of *Fistful of Dollars* was known mostly for his avant-garde concert music, written in the vein of near-contemporaries Luciano Berio and Luigi Nono. The success of their collaboration was partially due to their shared distaste for the overly

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1 This is not to say, however, that Leone was not influenced by John Ford. Take, for example, the O.K. Coral scene from *My Darling Clementine*. The climax of Wyatt Earp’s (Henry Fonda) showdown with the Clanton gang occurs when a wagon rolls through, kicking up dust and giving Earp and his brother a cover to move closer and take out their enemies. A similar scene happens in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* while Blondie (Clint Eastwood) and Tuco (Eli Wallach) take out Angel Eyes’s (Lee Van Cleef) gang.
symphonic styles of classic westerns, which they found to be excessive and too noisy. In interviews, Morricone often bemoans directors’ unwillingness to simplify a film’s soundtrack for the sake of the audience.

A human being cannot decipher more than two different levels of sound at the same time. I’m not speaking of just music. Physically, the brain cannot receive more than two sounds at a time. If a director mixes in the general sound column dialogue and the sound effects as well as the music, the human ear cannot distinguish the music. What one hears is a very confused noise.

What made the collaboration pleasurable for Morricone, and showcased Leone’s great filmmaking talent, was the amount of space that was given to the music. Leone never “toppled” the sound; he let each musical cue, piece of dialog, and sound effect have its say in the sound mix of his films.

The two also shared a similar view of the portrayal of western mythology. In later interviews regarding their opinions of the west, Morricone commented, “Leone never really shared the American psychology, to which he manifestly preferred a more Italian reality—a

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down-to-earthness.”

Along with this visual and psychological view of the Italian’s American west came an Italian sound.

I wanted to hammer out a kind of music which was more pressing, more troubled, more of a kind of a direct experience. So I used the Sicilian guimbard and the marranzano [‘Jew’s harp’], a Mediterranean instrument which is also played in North Africa and Asia.

Morricone’s sound would also fall back on instruments used in an arrangement he released two years prior. This song, “Pastures of Plenty” by Woodie Guthrie, was arranged by Morricone for American tenor Peter Trevis and was released in Italy as an RCA single in 1962. The arrangement included a strong vocal line accompanied by “an insistent rhythm, whip-cracks, bells, hammers, and a brief scale of sixteenths on a flute.” 6 The chorus, consisting of a male-voice choir and strings, is identical to the Fistful of Dollars theme. 7 This striking instrumentation would become one of the most important features of the film, and would be used by Leone over the course of its narrative to play a role in the dramatic process.

The result of their collaboration was a “highly evocative post-modernist stew, one that juxtaposes static ostinatos with ear-bending themes; surf guitars with mariachi trumpets; wordless grunts and whistles with mellifluous singing.” 8 During its domestic run, Fistful of Dollars would gross over $4.3 million, and would go on to spawn two sequels starring the Man with No Name: Per qualche dollaro in più (1965, For a Few Dollars More) and Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo (1966, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly). Leone and Morricone would also collaborate on other immensely popular Italian Westerns, including C’era una volta il West (1968, Once Upon a Time in the West) and Giù la testa (1971, Duck, You Sucker/A Fistful of

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4 Christopher Frayling, Something to do with Death (London: Faber & Faber, 2000), 155.
5 Frayling, Something, 155. Both terms used here refer to the Jew’s harp.
6 Frayling, Something, 156.
7 Frayling, Something, 156.
Dynamite). Because of the proximity of release dates for *Fistful of Dollars, For a Few Dollars More*, and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, as well as the shared leading man (Clint Eastwood), these three movies are often referred to as the *Dollars* trilogy (see Figure 1.2). Their similarity in style, landscape, and cinematography also lends to the appropriateness of this grouping.

![Italian theatrical posters for *A Fistful of Dollars* (left top), *For a Few Dollars More* (left bottom), and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (right).](image)

**Figure 1.2:** Italian theatrical posters for *A Fistful of Dollars* (left top), *For a Few Dollars More* (left bottom), and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (right).

The immense success of the first film—both in theaters and soundtrack sales—led Morricone to rely on similar instrument groupings, thematic treatment, and cue usage over the course of the following two releases. Throughout the trilogy Morricone developed an authorial signature that revolved around three salient compositional features: long, lyrical melodic lines,
unusual tone colors, and the use of multiple themes as an overarching structural principle.\textsuperscript{9} This is not to say, however, that Morricone was striving only for completely unique and unusual scoring for the trilogy. In a 1989 interview with \textit{Premiere}, he commented: “When I begin a theme in a certain key, say D minor, I never depart from this original key. If it begins in D minor, it ends in D minor. This harmonic simplicity is accessible to everyone.”\textsuperscript{10} Morricone was able to create a score that was catchy, strikingly original, and accessible to the audience, and Leone gave his music the time and space needed to be truly memorable.

This accessibility contributed to highly successful record sales of each film’s soundtrack album. Morricone’s scoring provided diverse themes that created ear-catching cues and tracks suitable for radio play. Placing the soundtracks within the spectrum of the record industry, we can see that there are important characteristics to his music tied to their commercial success. The first is that the features stated above (long, lyrical melodies; unusual tone colors; beautiful mellifluous singing) when combined with the instrumentation of the films functioned as pop hooks within European and American record markets. The success can also be partially attributed to the “flipping of the meaning-making process;” music added to a film image track for value can in turn use the association/memory of the film to add value to the soundtrack album itself.\textsuperscript{11} Leone and Morricone organized the generic elements of the score into set pieces, elevating the sound to a position comparable to the image. In Jeff Smith’s opinion, as well as my own, the music was not just \textit{comparable} to the image, but was \textit{equal} to it in function and presence.

\textsuperscript{9} Smith, 136.
\textsuperscript{11} “Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music: Jim Buhler, Anahid Kassabian, David Neumeyer, and Robynn Stilwell,” \textit{The Velvet Light Trap} 51 (Spring 2003), 80.
The commercial success of the soundtracks is an important part of the Dollars trilogy’s achievement, and their influence can be seen all over popular culture, e.g. The Simpsons and Kill Bill. Even more amazing, however, are the unique characteristics and treatment of music in each film. These wonderfully memorable cues created by Ennio Morricone are used by Sergio Leone to shape the structure and dramatic plot in each of the three pictures. The placement of each cue within the timeline of the film, as well as its relationship to the dialog and/or visual action, accentuates the narrative and contributes to the story-telling process.

Each film (with the exception of For a Few Dollars More, which will be addressed in Chapter I) begins with an extended title sequence containing a carefully penned musical theme that is then laid over a sequence of stylized silhouettes of horseback riders, gunfire, and shootouts. The title then becomes a presentation of much of the motivic material to come in the movie, establishing the essential musical idioms to be used throughout the film. This method is referred to as a “developmental score,” a compositional type described by Roy M. Prendergast in Film Music: A Neglected Art. There, Prendergast defines the developmental score as a compositional method of unification where the title theme “serves the function of an exposition in a classical sonata-allegro form,”12 presenting material to be used throughout the score. Essentially, the title theme contains micro-cells that can be placed strategically throughout the film, representing characters, locations, and previous plot points. Naturally a developmental score cannot serve an identical musical function to the classical sonata or rondo form; as Prendergast himself states, “unlike sonata or rondo form where the listener has certain

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preconceived formal expectations concerning the music, with film there cannot be any real formal expectations in the traditional sense of the word simply because there are none.”

The concept of sonata-allegro form can be invaluable, however, as a backdrop to describe the occurrences of cues within film, especially in the Dollars trilogy. Conceptually, the sonata form is an architectural tool that outlines a methodology of musical processes over the course of a piece. The episodic nature of a Western aligns itself well with the episodic nature of a sonata; different zones and action-spaces are carefully placed into an overarching dramatic line that sets forth important ideas, repeats them over time, provides contrast and tension, and finally builds toward a triumphant return of thematic material in its original form. Just like an exposition containing separate yet complementary themes, a title can be broken down into thematic cells that represent characters, situations, and expected goals within the unfolding drama. These cells often act as commentary to the action, helping to recall or express ideas previously experienced visually yet effectively represented aurally. The orchestration also plays a key role in the associations between sound and image, as well as stereotypical instrumentation and gestures used to denote “good,” “evil,” “sorrow,” and many other emotions.

As a result, the full structural analysis of each film would be incomplete without an in-depth analysis of each title theme. Therefore the first analytical chapter, Chapter II, will be devoted to each film’s Title. Methodologically, this chapter will rely heavily on two important bodies of analytical work: Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida’s Ten Little Title Tunes, and William Caplin’s Classical Form. Each title will be “dissected” using Caplin’s models for analysis in Classical Form, and will be analyzed further by relating its musical gestures to musemes discussed in Ten Little Title Tunes.

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13 Prendergast, 244–245.
Once the titles have been addressed, Chapter III will discuss each film’s music’s function as a developmental score. The analysis will involve looking at each film as a structural whole, discussing components of the scoring and placement of sound as it applies to the soundtrack as a basic unit of analysis. This will show how Leone and Morricone create a unified sonic structure that contributes to the coherence of the narrative. Chapter III will also trace musical gestures from the Titles as they are used to generate new musical themes throughout each score. Morricone often relies on key centers, instrumentation, and melodic contour to connect songs in the soundtrack. Each tune maintains unique characteristics befitting the scene in which they participate, yet is noticeably connected to the Title’s musical content. Because Morricone has yet to make the scores for the Dollars trilogy available, I will refer to timings as reference points for musical events rather than the bar numbers one would normally encounter in a musical analysis.

Chapter IV will present conclusions: that the title music contains coded musical gestures, and that the soundtrack as a whole is comprised of material generate from those titles. This chapter will also discuss the effectiveness of the analytical methodology used, how they relate to Leone’s conception of aural space, and provide recommendations for further study. Production information on the spaghetti Westerns of Leone and Morricone is included in Appendix A.

Before addressing the Dollars trilogy analytically, this introductory chapter will cover topics in film music studies, as well as provide brief overviews of the analytical methods used in the rest of the essay. For production and copyright information please refer to the multiple appendices at the end of the document.

Music’s Presence in Cinema

Exactly when music was first expressly coordinated with film and narrative is unclear; it is apparent, though, that this transition happened relatively quickly. Why cinema attached itself
to music so adamantly is open to speculation, but may be the result of to two important issues: 1) music was needed to cover up noise from the projector as well as the audience, and 2) music was needed psychologically to quell fears of darkness and silence. In addition to these, Claudia Gorbman points out a few more important functions of music in silent films: it had accompanied other forms of “spectacle” before, and was an effective convention; it had semiotic functions, as music inherently contains coded information regarding historical, geographical, and atmospheric setting, and could compensate for the characters’ lack of speech; it provided a rhythmic beat that could be utilized for editing and movement; its spatial dimension compensated for the flatness of the screen; and it bonded the spectators together.

Eventually, movies were sent to cinemas with cue sheets that described what music should be played, and when it should occur in the timing of a film. In 1924, Ernő Rapée published a large volume entitled *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists*, which provided short pieces evoking moods for specific situations, such as “happiness,” “railroad,” “sea storm,” and “funeral.” The notion of music’s expressive capabilities was not a new sensation; the history of narrative in music can be traced through chant masses telling Biblical stories, baroque operas embracing the *Doctrine of Affections*, and Romantic tone poems conveying characters and concepts through color and instrumentation, etc.

With the rise of popularity in cinema, as well as the ever-growing amount of films being produced each year, directors strove to set their works apart from the crowd. This desire eventually led to composers scoring for films, creating new works to be united with the visual media. As films became available to millions of viewers across the globe, individual pictures

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16 Brown, 14.
garnered audiences larger than any single work could have in a live performance. Composers were given a vehicle to have their works performed for audiences larger than any classical “art” music composer could have ever dreamed. Film scoring became, and continues to be, a way for composers to gain recognition and achieve commercial success.

Music’s presence in cinema, therefore, raises interesting questions. Over time soundtracks have shifted between commercial necessity and compositional ingenuity, which leaves us to ponder: what exactly is music’s role in a film? Depending on the director and composer, a soundtrack can have drastically different functions from film to film. If the director and composer work side-by-side during the production process, one can expect a more dramatically charged interaction between the image and sound. However, is this not the case when music is written to sell records, or when pre-existing material is used instead of something newly composed? Can music reconcile personal style, thematic organization, and orchestration with commercial imperative?

Film music scholarship strives to address these concerns in a way that is meaningful with respect to the music as well as the film. While some separation of the music from the image is unavoidable in analyzing its contents, the sounds of a film—if created for that individual film—should always be considered in regards to its accompanying images. When it comes to Morricone and the Dollars trilogy, the interaction of image and sound is integral to the overall development of the narrative. Key to the following discussion of music and structure will be the concepts of orchestration, thematic organization, timing, characterization, production, and style. For Leone and Morricone, music was like dialog, communicating the inner world of the character with the audience. The formal design of the soundtrack therefore takes a formal role in the films themselves, with a uniqueness that is difficult to find in any other filmmaking team.
Methodology

In *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions in The Instrumental Music of Beethoven, Haydn, and Mozart*, William Caplin extensively catalogues phrase types in music of the three preeminent Classical era composers. The text acts as a revival of *Formenlehre*, an abandoned subdiscipline of music theory that classified musical structures. In his introduction Caplin states that Schoenberg and Ratz were his inspiration for *Classical Form*, and immediately establishes his intent to limit his investigation to the “core repertory of the high Viennese classical style.”¹⁷ Even with this limited scope, Caplin’s text provides invaluable discussion on formal structures in music, from local-level theme groups to large-scale forms.

Going beyond the Classical era, one can find countless examples of periods and sentences—the primary phrase forms established in Caplin’s text. Although harmonic tendencies in music have changed drastically over time, the definitions in *Classical Form* can be easily adapted to fit a different repertoire. Matthew BaileyShea’s writings on the music of Wagner provide excellent examples of this. The complex harmonic language of Wagnerian operas makes them difficult to fit into a Caplinian model; however, utilizing the proportional aspects of sentential forms provides a valuable method for addressing the developmental foreground of Wagner’s post-*Lohengrin* operas. As a result, BaileyShea’s texts provide an excellent study in how analytical systems can transform our discourse on music of all kinds, even ones that seem problematic.

The beauty of the sentential form is its musical economy. What that entails—especially for the purpose of this document—is the reappearance of musical material in the short- and long-term scope of a piece. Take, for example, the most well-known and referenced example of an

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Ideal Type sentence in music literature: the beginning of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in F minor (see Example 1.1). The opening of the theme establishes a basic idea that becomes the “building block”18 of the theme. This idea is then repeated, helping the listener learn and remember the motivic material. These repetitions are the presentation phrase of the theme, as the two introduce and reinforce the basic idea. Following the presentation is the continuation phrase, made up of fragmentation of the basic idea and an acceleration of harmony; these are not mutually exclusive, however, as fragmentation often leads to harmonic acceleration, and vice versa. This acceleration drives the theme to a cadential idea that “grows naturally out of the proceeding measures.”19

Example 1.1: Beethoven, Piano Sonata in F minor, op. 2/1, mvt. 1, mm. 1–8.

Movie themes provide an extensive surplus of sentential forms, where composers often use repeated motives in localized theme groups as well as larger scale thematic transformations. The repetitive nature of the sentence is useful in strongly establishing motivic material that will eventually be used and transformed in a soundtrack. Each of Morricone’s title themes for the Dollars trilogy use sentential forms, which focus on the repetition of important musical ideas (or basic ideas) and fragmentation of motivic material. Caplin’s methodology offers a theoretical basis to describe the formal tendencies of the titles, and can help illuminate important motivic features that will be used in the overall structure of the Dollars trilogy scores.

Some of the earliest and most influential work on analyzing popular and film music has been by Philip Tagg. Tagg is co-founder of the International Association for the Study of Popular

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18 Caplin, 10.
19 Caplin, 11.
Music, and has published extensively on popular music, film music, and musical semiotics. His two largest works to date are *Ten Little Title Tunes* (co-written with Bob Clarida, 2003) and *Kojak: 50 Seconds of TV Music* (2000). Both of these texts strive to address the shortcomings of conventional musicology regarding the analysis of popular music, and both present methodological alternatives for analyzing music and its meaning.

Tagg’s methodology for analyzing popular music is what he calls *musematic*. This type of analysis breaks down passages of music into *musemes*, which he defines as “minimal units of musical meaning.” These musemes can be stacked or stringed together, creating combinations of musical ideas that are often associated with other musics in mass media. These associations in turn create *sociomusical* implications, where the music is found to be representative of a symbol or icon. A classic example pertinent to this essay is the rhythm $\text{ ijq ijq }$. This rhythm is often associated with a galloping horse, and can be found throughout all three of the *Dollars* trilogy films, as well as other tunes associated with the American West, including the *Bonanza* theme, Rosini’s *William Tell Overture/Lone Ranger* theme, *Hang ’Em High, The Rifleman*, and many others. Over time, the galloping rhythm has become the “sonic embodiment of speeding horse flesh,” which can clearly be traced through common musemes in these and many other Western tunes. Tagg’s discussion of this rhythm, as well as many other musemes associated with westerns and the American West, will be heavily referenced in Chapter II.

Although Tagg never expressly uses his musematic analysis to describe film music, his methodology proves effective in discussing themes of film scores. By comparing themes with sociological connotations, we can find what emotions are conveyed and what information is

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21 Tagg and Clarida, 293.
shared with the audience through music. Alterations of the themes over time in a film can also illuminate important changes in affect.

Any analytical work on film and music would be at a great loss without Claudia Gorbman’s influential text *Unheard Melodies*. The book is both practical and theoretical, identifying principles of composition, mixing, and editing based upon Max Steiner’s “Hollywood” style. Gorbman addresses mostly classic Hollywood cinema in her text, providing thoughtful analyses of a few films, and as a result lays the foundation for academic writings in film sound and music. She considers music in relation to the narrative world of the film, balancing both the concept of composing *for* a film as well as music *in* a film.

While discussing Max Steiner as a model, Gorman outlines six key principles relating to the mixing, composing, and editing of sound in a film. Her discussion takes into consideration both the external motivations of a soundtrack as well as the internal, narrative-driven functions a soundtrack can carry.

I. *Invisibility*: the technical apparatus of nondiegetic music must not be visible.

II. “*Inaudibility*”: Music is not meant to be heard consciously. As such, it should subordinate itself to the dialogue, to visuals—i.e., to the primary vehicles of the narrative.

III. *Signifier of emotion*: Soundtrack music may set specific moods and emphasize particular emotions suggested in the narrative, but first and foremost, it is a signifier of emotion itself.

IV. *Narrative cueing*:

   —*referential/narrative*: music gives referential and narrative cues, e.g., indicating point of view, supplying formal demarcations, and establishing setting and characters.

   —*connotative*: music “interprets” and “illustrates” narrative events.
V. **Continuity**: music provides formal and rhythmic continuity—between shots, in transitions between scenes, by filling “gaps.”

VI. **Unity**: via repetition and variation of musical material and instrumentation, music aids in the construction of formal and narrative unity.22

Gorman’s outline also includes a very important seventh point: “A given film score may violate any of the principles above, providing the violation is at the service of the other principles.”23 Not every theory can be all-encompassing; while each of these issues are apparent in sound and music in cinema, it is rare to find all six points operating in a single film. However, Gorbman qualifies that these issues should be looked at as items in a discursive field rather than “monolithic system with inviolable rules.”24

There are some issues with her approach in *Unheard Melodies*. Anahid Kassabian points out that “each principle isolates one aspect of the process of a film’s music’s function, but only one,” and goes on to say that Gorbman’s scheme “does not allow for differences in perceivers’ relations to the music, nor for how they might differ in perception of meaning and emotion when the specific scene is analyzed as an entire unit.”25 This brings up an interesting point in film scholarship, particularly in the role of the analyst and critic as an interpreter of meaning. An analysis with the perceiver’s viewpoint in mind is difficult to qualify, although this should be something that is sensitive to any analyst or theorist. After all, scholars are still perceivers; they live in and respond to the same culture (which is easier to qualify in contemporary cinema as opposed to classical Hollywood cinema; luckily, film is still considered a modern art form). The scholar’s response to cinema—as well as many other texts—should still be considered valid,

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22 Gorbman, 73.
23 Gorbman, 73.
24 Gorbman, 73.
even if his/her response is not identical to everyone else’s. Gorbman’s text is groundbreaking in that it encourages analysis of sound in film as a narrative process rather than a superfluous additive.

That being said, Gorbman’s outline of principles provides a solid foundation for the discussion of a film’s soundtrack. While not applicable to every film in the history of cinema, her outlined principles highlight issues that transcend nearly all collaborations of image and sound. In contemporary cinema, directors have developed increasingly sensitive attention to the representational and symbolic possibilities of sound in film. Sergio Leone is a prime example of this; his attention to detail and control of sound design in his films is a topic that will be frequently referenced throughout this essay. In this study of the Dollars trilogy we will find that Leone’s use of sound is most strongly associated with narrative cueing, continuity, and unity, and his deconstruction of the other principles listed above highlight the complexity and uniqueness of his story telling.

Deleted Scenes & Timings

Due to the popularity of the Dollars trilogy, there are multiple versions of each film on VHS tape and DVD. Within the recent DVD editions, modern film studios have gone through each film and restored audio and video to higher qualities expected from a digital format. In addition, many DVD releases include recovered scenes that were deleted from the theatrical release. Many special editions DVDs—the Dollars trilogy included—have reinserted the deleted scenes into the main feature on the DVD. This deletion of scenes typically happens when films are brought over from Europe for an American release, and the American studio wants to make them shorter. This

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26 This issue is addressed further in “Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music,” 79–80.
is the case for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, which raises interesting issues regarding its soundtrack.

When United Artists was planning the release of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* in 1968, they decided to cut nearly 18 minutes of footage, including the scene where Angel Eyes (Lee Van Cleef) finds a Confederate encampment while searching for Bill Carson. This deleted scene introduces “Il Forte” (The Strong), one of the main themes for the film. As a result, this theme does not make its entrance until much later in the film, when Tuco (Eli Wallach) and Blondie (Clint Eastwood) run into a carriage full of deceased Confederate soldiers in the desert. This causes confusion when comparing the American theatrical release to its soundtrack, because the theme comes in later in the film than on the album. However, when the deleted scenes are taken into consideration, the order of cuts on the soundtrack match those of the film. Additionally, there are continuity issues when the deleted scenes are not included, which greatly effect character development and information about events in the plot.\(^{27}\)

Taking these matters into consideration, I have decided to make the timings for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* based on the Italian release of the film, which includes the footage removed before release in America. For this I used the 2004 MGM two-disc special edition release of *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. The other two films of the trilogy were released with few alterations (non of which effected the soundtrack in any way),\(^{28}\) so missing footage is not an issue for *A Fistful of Dollars* or *For a Few Dollars More*. Timings for these two films are taken from their respective collector’s edition DVD sets, which were both released in 2007.

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\(^{27}\) A longer discussion of the deleted scenes can be found in Charles Leinberger, *Ennio Morricone’s The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: A Film Score Guide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 56–57.

\(^{28}\) In *Few Dollars More*, United Artists removed a short scene where the sheriff of Tucumcari told Mortimer that the other bounty killer’s name was Manko. I assume this is because they wanted to market Eastwood’s character in *Few Dollars More* as the same sharpshooter he played in *Fistful*. 
References made to and excerpts taken from any of the Dollars trilogy scores will be referenced as: Name of Theme, Title of Movie, Time in Movie.

Transcriptions and Copyright

As mentioned above, Morricone has never released his original scores for any of the Dollars trilogy. However, there are many sources of transcriptions from the three films available in print form. While compiling the needed examples for this document I relied heavily on Sergio Miceli’s Morricone, la musica, il cinema, Charles Leinberger’s Ennio Morricone’s The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: a Film Score Guide, Maestro Claudio Riffero’s transcriptions printed in Ennio Morricone: The Best of, published by BMG music in 2004, and a PDF file published by Philip Tagg on his personal webpage. A few transcriptions are my own, and these are based on the music from the theatrical releases rather than soundtrack albums. To differentiate the origins of the musical examples each caption will contain the initials of the transcriber (EK for myself, SM for Miceli, CL for Leinberger, PT for Philip Tagg, and CR for Riffero).

All of the Figures and Examples throughout this essay are under copyright protection, which can be found in Appendix B.

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29 Sergio Miceli, Morricone, la musica, il cinema (Milan: Ricordi, 1994).
30 Charles Leinberger, Ennio Morricone’s The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: A Film Score Guide (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004).
CHAPTER II. SETTING THE THEME

You ask most people what the films were about, and they can’t tell you. But they tell you, “the look” [he mimes throwing the poncho over his shoulder] and the “da-da-da-da-da-dum” [he hums the opening notes of The Good, the Bad and the Ugly theme], and the cigar and the gun and those little flash images that hit you ... 

In classical cinema—particularly classical Hollywood cinema—an audience’s first exposure to music in a film is during the opening credits. This sequence was used in films to acknowledge the actors and staff behind the production of a film. While the credit sequence was on screen, the film’s title music played. Music during these beginning credits helped pass time while the credits were displayed on screen, but also helped to situate the viewer inside the narrative about to unfold on screen. Today the majority of the credits are placed at the end of the film, granting the opening a freer role in establishing the narrative, as opposed to being mostly concerned with the external factors of the film’s production. Composers have come to utilize this time on screen for establishing their compositional framework of the film. Music can establish traits that will permeate the film in the form of themes, instrumentations, and motives. The music can also create a new sound environment, inviting the viewer to change roles from a bystander to a participator by painting the aural picture of the images to come. The music during this sequence, then, is “an invitation to imagine, to transform the sounds and images we are about to hear and see into paths of access to imaginary places, people, and stories.”

Music is often a component of rituals and ceremonies, heralding the beginning of the experience about to commence. Across cultures, music acts as a signifier and definer, catching the attention of participants, and perhaps reminding them of a past time and place, or a forgotten

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memory. There is a power behind music that helps a participant feel a sense of community with others, and can prepare them mentally and spiritually to be absorbed into a world of fantasy and myth. Modern day rituals, such as church services, parades, and performances of many kinds often utilize music to signal the beginning of the ritual, preparing observers for the coming experience. Much like ceremonies and rituals, cinema relies on music to take hold of individual perception and prepare an audience for the coming spectacle. Music can even create anticipation for the experience, inviting the viewer imagine and let themselves be absorbed into the fantasy and action. Claudia Gorbman provides an interesting metaphor for this kind of musical treatment. In her discussion of music’s relationship with the listener/viewer, she describes its role as something that lessens the defenses of the spectator, increasing their susceptibility to suggestion. This is akin to the methods of the hypnotist inducing the “trusting subject”: soothing voice, repetition, rhythm, suggestion of pleasantly enveloping imagery, and focusing the subject’s own attention on one thing to the exclusion of others. Music in narrative cinema has suggestiveness comparable to a hypnotist’s induction, including a harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic effect that “lowers the thresholds of disbelief.”

Director styles often greatly impact the placement of music within the opening credits of a film. Normally, the credits function as a frame that contains a film inside, acting as an enclosing structure for cinematic narrative. This means that the music does not always have a material cause in the film; it is not something that the narrative can interact with, or that the characters would ever consciously perceive. What often happens, though, is the provocation of a

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3 Biancorosso, 47.
4 A further discussion of music’s role in establishing ritual can be found in Biancorosso, 47–48. He provides an interesting comment on Nietzsche’s discussion of bacchic music rites (in his first endnote for the chapter, found on p. 91), referencing the intensity of effects produced by music in those rites. More could be said about Nietzsche’s views on music and ceremony; however, that discussion goes beyond the scope of this essay.
5 Gorbman, 6.
6 Gorbman, 6.
state of mind “appropriate to the appreciation of a film,” something that “socializes the emotional and cognitive shift the spectator undergoes in preparing oneself to a cinematic narrative.” Signature tunes and title tunes can therefore be said to have three main functions:

- **Reveille**: to attract the attention of potential listeners to the fact that something new (as yet undefined) is about to be presented;
- **Preparatory**: to provide listeners/viewers with an idea of the types of mood, action, people, and environments likely to appear in the subsequent presentation;
- **Mnemonic identification**: to facilitate memorization, recognition, and identification of particular people, places, moods, and actions.

To achieve these goals, title music must be composed with a particular approach. As Philip Tagg discusses, title themes can be written with *internal musical coherence* in a way that typical nondiegetic or underscored music often lacks. Because underscoring is edited to synchronize with the visual and verbal rhythms of the image, it is edited to fit the picture. Title music, on the other hand, exists on its own terms with the sequence of images being edited to it, not the other way around.

Many Hollywood film scores create their “credit frame” with a standard symphony orchestra, adding unique or descriptive instruments only when needed in the narrative. By doing so the composer and director can save the large orchestral numbers and more interesting tone colors for climactic moments within the narrative. Ennio Morricone, however, wastes no time in displaying his full array of tone colors and gestures, creating an immediate connection between the picture’s cues and the listener/viewer. On first viewing, the importance of the

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7 Biancorosso, 51.
9 Tagg and Clarida, 110.
10 Leinberger, 70.
instrumentation and musical fragments may not be apparent; however, in the first cue of each film (the first short musical occurrence after the completion of the title sequence), audience members are exposed to music that prepares them psychologically for the cinematic experience, while at the same time aurally acquainting them with the mythological world of Leone’s American West.

While Tagg was conducting his research for *Ten Little Title Tunes*, the title theme for *A Fistful of Dollars* was included in his revolving playlist of 25 film and television titles. Due to low turnouts in the session where this theme was included, Tagg ultimately decided to exclude *A Fistful of Dollars* and instead use the title from *The Virginian*.11 He does, however, mention Morricone’s compositions from this film and the other *Dollars* movies frequently, particularly when discussing *The Virginian* and musemes (musical cells) that carry connotations of Western characteristics (horses, cowboys, lone rider, cattle, desert, the country, traveling, hero, and many others). Test subjects listening to *The Virginian* even name people, populations, and titles directly relevant to the *Dollars* trilogy (Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef, Mexicans, Spaniards, Whites, Latin Americans, MGM, *Good, Bad & Ugly*). Clearly there are musical cells, idioms, and implied extramusical content in *The Virginian* that tie back to the *Dollars* trilogy, and to Westerns in general.

*A Fistful of Dollars*

A logical starting point for this discussion is *A Fistful of Dollars*. This is the first of the three *Dollars* trilogy pictures, and was released in Italy on September 16, 1964. Although it is not heralded as the first “true” (European) Western—this honor is given to Spanish-produced *Tierra brutal/The Savage Guns* released in 1962—it is generally regarded as the “path-breaking

11 Tagg and Clarida, 113.
spaghetti Western that ‘made’ the genre.”

Fistful of Dollars was scripted and directed by Italians (Sergio Leone and Duccio Tessari), starred Italians (Gian Maria Volontè, Mario Brega), Germans (Marianne Koch, Wolfgang Lukschy), and Spaniards (Pepe Calvo), and was scored by an Italian (Ennio Morricone). Loosely based on Akira Kurosawa’s Yojimbo, Fistful of Dollars tells the story of a lone gunman entering a small town devastated by two rival families, each of which is involved in smuggling. He joins up with both gangs, pitting them against each other and manipulating them for his own purposes. In the course of the film he is savagely beaten, escapes and nurses himself to full health, and returns in glory to destroy the villain and leave town with money in his pocket. The salvation of the small village is merely a side effect of his adventure.

As alluded to in Chapter I, the concept of the hero in Leone’s Westerns is not clear-cut. Unlike John Ford’s heroes—e.g., Wyatt Earp in My Darling Clementine, or Capt. Kirby York in Fort Apache—the Leone hero was just barely a hero. Compared to the classical Western,

Fistful of Dollars and its immediate followers presented the change from a hero ending up fighting for the good values of society against the selfish money interests of a villain to a hero who was mainly driven by selfish money interests in a situation where those same good values of society had no real representative, and no relevance, and the villain represented an increased super-violence against the defenseless.

In spite of this cynical view, it is important that Leone still had a hero at all. Introducing his hero would be a challenge; in a world where good and bad are nearly indistinguishable, how was the audience going to tell the difference?

Here, Leone could rely on Morricone’s title theme. In its preparatory role, the title could provide key information to the audience in regards to the characters, mood, and action that would

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12 Bert Fridlund, The Spaghetti Western: A Thematic Analysis (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 4. The use of the term “spaghetti Western” in this essay will hold to Bert Fridlund’s (2006) definition: “spaghetti” refers to Italians having roles in the production of a film, particularly in financing, participation behind the scenes as directors, writers, cinematographers, or composers, and/or significant roles in front of the camera as lead actors, making up the majority of the actors involved.

13 Fridlund, 294.
appear in the picture to come. The title that he created would lay the foundation for the rest of the film, aurally preparing its audience for the cynical world of the film, and at the same time reassuring them of characteristics that made it a “true” Western.

As the opening credits begin, the listener/viewer is greeted by a sequence of stylized silhouettes of horseback riders, gunfire, and shootouts (see Figure 2.1). The technique used to create this sequence was rotoscoping, where animators trace over live-action movements frame-by-frame. Leone’s decision to include this type of animation for the title sequence carries unique and sophisticated symbolism.

![Fistful of Dollars Title Sequence](image)

**Figure 2.1:** Stills from the title sequence, *A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964).

Figure 2.2 is one example of the rotoscoping of a scene in *Fistful*. Based on the composition of the shot, it is easily assumed that the villain is far away, while the hero is holding the rifle. As an audience member, one would expect to see a point of view closest to the hero, as this is the character a viewer usually feels a connection with. This is clearly not the case once the actual scene plays out at the end of the film (at approximately 01:32:51); here, the hero (Clint Eastwood) is in the background being shot by the villain (Gian Maria Volontè) in the foreground. By using animated silhouettes in the place of action cuts from the picture, Leone disguises the
characters and situations of the film, and hides the identities of the hero and villain. What the listener/audience is experiencing is Leone’s vision of the west; not the “real” American west, but rather the Wild West as filtered through old movies, fumetti, and pulp novels.

**Figure 2.2:** Example of rotoscoping, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:01:40/01:32:53.

This sequence is crude, fast, and violent, and is emphasized and dramatized further by Morricone’s score. The cuts and scenes used for the opening sequence fit well into the fast-paced and somewhat unconventional theme penned by Morricone. For the film, he decided to utilize an assortment of colorful tones and instruments, including human whistles, acoustic and electric guitars, soprano recorder, and unusual percussion (anvil, whip, etc.). He also included gunshots and loud grunts, which combined with his “Italowestern” orchestra to set the stage for a new type of Western tale. Throughout this sequence, Morricone relies heavily on the timbres in the presentation of the title, rotating through the established list of instruments when thematic motives were repeated.

To reinforce the importance of the title’s gestures, Morricone relied heavily on repetition. As a result, the audience is met with foreground repetitions of key melodic fragments, both in terms of length and instrumentation. The purpose of the opening, seen in Example 2.1, is clear: to set up the key of D minor/dorian, to prolong it with scalar motion, and to arrive on D. With a Moderato tempo, it is safe to assume that the basic ideas would be approximately two measures in length, making up four measure subphrases and an overall phrase length of eight measures.

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14 A *fumetti* is a comic book, and the term typically refers to one illustrated with photos rather than drawings.
This size would fit within a more conventional model of phrase length as prescribed by William Caplin’s *Classical Form*, which is transcendent in both classical and popular forms of music. As the title progresses we see that this is not the case; the basic idea is five measures long, and the total phrase length (including the introduction) is 28 measures long. When the arrival on D occurs in m. 8, there is a definite pause and moment of respite. There is not, however, any sort of cadential motion. The strumming acoustic guitar accompanying the melody maintains its D minor chord, avoiding any sense of arrival while the melody pushes forward. As the tune continues we find the opening gesture repeated, and retrospectively realize that the first five measures of melody were the presentation of a basic idea. Morricone finally gives a half cadence at mm. 12–14, cued by the acoustic guitar accompaniment moving to an A minor chord. The A minor chord is problematic in the traditional sense; there is nothing dominant about this chord. However, the change from D to A, highlighted by the change in strumming pattern, emphasizes a motion between the two chords and signals the halfway point of the title. The opening perfect fourth gesture returns a third time at m. 14/15, complete with the opening guitar motion and scalar movement. At this point the listener/viewer is bombarded with the title’s basic idea, and the tension has been built up for an impending resolution. As the third repetition unfolds the melody reaches its climax, leading into an “extended dissolution toward the cadence.”\(^{15}\) This dissolution is the theme’s continuation, which uses intervallic material from the basic idea and arpeggiation of D minor chords. There is finally a cadential idea at mm. 24–26, which attempts to resolve the tension created during the continuation.

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Example 2.1: Title theme, *Fistful of Dollars*, mm. 1–28 (00:00:01–00:00:31). [SM]
As hinted at above, neither the half cadence nor the final cadence is as truly satisfying as those found in classical literature. The first arrival in mm. 12–14 is on a minor dominant, and the final arrival at mm. 24–26 moves through G major (iv) and B♭ major (vi) chords before arriving again on D minor (i). From a prototypical standpoint, neither progression would be considered a true cadence, as neither contains the leading tone C♯ in the guitar accompaniment or in the melody. However, this theme should not be considered traditionally tonal. When looked at through the lens of popular music, this type of motion is quite common. Rock, pop, and soul tracks tend to conceive of harmonies as indivisible units rarely subject to voice-leading principles, unlike classical tonality that supports linearity and polyphony. Progressions in popular music are generally strophic, and as a result are cyclic in nature. The use of the submediant and subdominant support this cyclical tendency, seeing as the two are often interchangeable within repetitions of similar patterns in pop tunes. Attempting to force a classically informed harmonic cadence onto this passage does it little justice. Morricone’s avoidance of tendency tones, as well as his instrumentation reminiscent of popular and folk tunes, does not feign any concern of traditional tonality, just as Leone’s images rarely adhere to a traditional sense of Western storytelling.

Morriconne’s penchant for pop-music-inspired progressions (in his film scores) comes in large part from his own compositional background. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Morricone was employed as a writer and arranger of pop songs for Italian RCA. Around this time, tunes like Rawhide and Apache had hit the charts in Europe, with the minor-modal Apache
reaching number 2 on the Italian charts in 1960.\footnote{Dario Salvatori, 25 anni di Hit Parade in Italia (Milan: Mondadori, 1982), 183.} When Morricone was hired to arrange the minor-modal ballad *Pastures of Plenty* (Woodie Guthrie) for American tenor Peter Tevis in 1962, he was already familiar with the idioms established by American Western title tracks. His success in arranging stemmed largely from his mastery of current idioms, and his ability to combine them with the avant-garde “without making the end result sound pretentious.”\footnote{Tagg and Clarida, 370.} For *Fistful*, this meant the combination of ear-catching melodies, electric guitars, and pop-influenced minor-modality with unusual tone colors and sparse instrumentation. As Sergio Miceli states, “whip, anvil, tubular bells and a run of semiquavers entrusted to the recorder—it was all in place before” *A Fistful of Dollars*\footnote{Tagg and Clarida, 370–71.}

Utilizing his knowledge of pop-music idioms proved effective in establishing a catchy tune. Interestingly, the more avant-garde characteristics of the title seem like less of a break from conventional composition than his melodic and harmonic phrasing. Through the lens of Caplin’s *Classical Form*, the insertion of a third repetition does not fit in with any of the traditional phrase forms addressed in his text. Instead, Morricone’s title for *Fistful* falls more in line with Matthew BaileyShea’s “loose sentential pattern,”\footnote{BaileyShea, 12.} where the music makes an initial statement, repeats it (sometimes more than once), moves into a continuation gesture with a melodic climax, and concludes with a cadence. Much like BaileyShea’s conclusions about Wagner’s sequential repetitions, we see that this title passage is an *expansion* of conventional sentence proportions. By expanding the theme, Morricone sets himself up with longer spans of time in insert melodic gestures and short cues that could be extracted and reused throughout the film.
After the initial statement of the title shown in Example 2.1, Morricone repeats the entire opening section. This second statement (Example 2.2) is far from an exact repetition; the orchestration is thickened, with more tone colors added and the introduction of a new musical cue. Morricone’s choice of instrumentation to personify the Man with No Name carries special meaning. When Sergio Leone approached Morricone to score *Fistful of Dollars*, nearly all of the filming was completed. To share his thoughts about the film, Leone took Morricone to see *Yojimbo*, Akira Kurosawa’s film that inspired it. Clint Eastwood’s character was meant to be an exaggerated version of Toshirô Mifune’s lead in *Yojimbo*; a sometimes comical, yet cerebral and calculated, accidental hero. Along with an exaggerated presentation of the lead, the film itself was to be *picaresque*, with a roguish hero guided through a plot divided into separate episodes that spin the tale. As Morricone recounts, “he [Leone] seemed to know exactly what he wanted, and some of my music, which he had listened to, already contained a grotesque, slightly comic irony, which suited the Clint character.”

The descending flute gesture is just that, with its light and quick motion representing an ironic personification of a Western hero. Rather than being large, bold, and as loud as the bullets coming out of his gun, Clint Eastwood’s hero was reserved and cunning, putting on the demeanor of an unassuming gun-for-hire while he constructed the demise of the rival gangs from the inside. The flute represents an outside, foreign element in the film. The Man with No Name is a lone gunman, the lone *gringo*, and the only hope of peace in a town full of death.

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23 Frayling, *Once Upon a Time in Italy*, 92.
Example 2.2: Repeat of opening section, Title, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:00:31–00:00:43. [SM]

The title for *Fistful of Dollars* also contains two other important musical ideas. Once the main melody is established and repeated, an extended electric guitar solo is introduced. This is the first instance of the melody changing instruments; the human whistle controls the melody for the initial statement and subsequent repetition. The steely Fender guitar, with low-reverb and a
clear melody, may seem outside of the aural jurisdiction of the American west. How exactly could an electric sound represent an era before electricity? Again, it is important to note the influences of the popular music industry, not of the Western film genre. The clean Fender sound had been firmly established in the ears of American and European viewers by 1964. The title theme from *Rawhide*—penned in 1958—contained a melody played by a clean solo Fender (as released by Wray and the Ray Men\(^\text{24}\)). The Shadows’ hit *Apache* (1960) also contained a Fender guitar solo. In 1961, the electric guitar was used in *Ghost Riders in the Sky*, a successful cover of the original 1949 tune rendered by the Ramrods. These hits “demonstrated that even US listeners were becoming receptive to the notion of electric-guitar cowboys.”\(^\text{25}\) Christopher Frayling has also commented that Morricone’s “main title themes usually consist of a simple electric guitar line sounding rather like *Riders in the Sky*.”\(^\text{26}\) For Morricone, it was important to provide music that was familiar to the audience. The use of instrumentation readily accessible to his audience provided what Gorbman calls a “for-me-ness,” an element to the music that creates a connection between a listener/viewer and the cine-narrative complex.\(^\text{27}\) In a sense, the Title could lessen an audience member’s defense towards the fantasy structure of the narrative, increasing the spectator’s “susceptibility to suggestion.”\(^\text{28}\)

Structurally, the guitar melody is blatantly simple, especially when compared to the opening section of the theme. The melodic line contains similar repetitions of motivic material, although this time around introduces a contrasting idea within a shorter span of time. What this means the electric guitar solo has a unique musical formal structure, one that is much different

\(^{24}\) Tagg and Clarida, 369.
\(^{25}\) Tagg and Clarida, 368.
\(^{27}\) Gorbman, 5.
\(^{28}\) Gorbman, 5.
than the sprawling and lyrical melody of the Title’s main theme. The guitar solo starts with a short, simple lower-neighbor motion that keeps in line with the D-centered tonality. This new material is then contrasted in mm. 4–5 with the original basic idea of the opening material (Example 2.1) moved down an octave. The guitar’s basic idea is then fragmented and combined with a sustained A that acts as the phrase’s cadential idea. This new combination of material creates a Hybrid 1 form, as it combines the antecedent of a period with the continuation of a sentence. The entire theme group is repeated again with the contrasting idea transposed to F, and ends with an expanded cadential idea akin to that of Example 2.1. There are two possible explanations for the expansion in Example 2.3: 1) a desire for heightened tension leading up to the eventual arrival on the Dm tonic chord, and 2) to make “aural space” for the added tone colors made up of the bell, anvil, whip, and male grunts introduced earlier in the Title.

Example 2.3: Electric guitar solo, Title, Fistful of Dollars, 00:00:55. [CR, EK]

Harmonically, this solo also falls in line with the previous material with the exception of two details. First, there is finally a leading tone C# introduced in the opening gesture, giving strength to the implied minor tonality. This is offset, however, by the complete avoidance of an
A major chord which would act as the dominant of the mode. Rather than making a harmonic motion rooted in tonal music—after all, much of classical cinematic music is rooted in traditional tonality—he transposes the continuation (beginning in m. 11) up a third to tonicize F, the relative major. Here, Morricone is using harmonic treatment akin to traditional Italian music in minor keys, particularly Italian marches. In the overall tonal structure of the solo, the F major chord changes the cadential motion to i–III–IV–VI–IV–i, an even stronger pentatonic progression than established in the opening. Progressions containing I, III, IV, and VI occur quite frequently in popular music, and were frequently used around the time of *Fistful*’s release.²⁹ As a result, Morricone utilizes the change in harmony to hearken back to traditional Italian music and the aesthetic of current pop-music idioms. He also maintains close ties to the main melody of the title by reusing its basic idea as the guitar solo’s contrasting idea (mm. 4–6 of Example 2.1).

The last section of the title sequence introduces another musical idea important for the film: the male chorus. What makes Morricone’s use of the chorus so unique is its treatment; rather than using the chorus as an accompaniment to a solo melody, the chorus itself acts as an instrument that emphasizes rhythmic units and harmonic progressions. Morricone is well known for his instrumental use of the human voice in his film compositions. As he told Burlingame and Crowdus,

> The human voice is at the disposal of all composers. Why don’t others use it? I love the human voice, because it is an extraordinary instrument. It doesn’t go through a piece of wood or metal, it comes directly out of the body and can be the most expressive and malleable instrument.³⁰

The chorus used in *Fistful of Dollars*—as well as *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*—was I Cantori Moderni di Alessandroni, a group led by Alessandro

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²⁹ Examples include Boyce and Hart, “I’m Not Your Steppin’ Stone” (1966); Spencer Davis, “Gimme Some Lovin’” (1966); Animals, “I’m Crying” (1964).

Alessandroni, who happens to also be the performer behind the crisp, clear whistling as well as the clean, low-reverb Fender guitar solo. Alessandroni’s choir is used expressly for its timbre, which is clearly heard due to the complete lack of text. The chorus section also realizes a harmonic element that has been avoided until this point: the dominant. However, the meaning of the dominant is subverted because of its participation in a sequence of parallel motion leading back to F, the relative major. This preference of the relative major over the dominant fits the aesthetic of traditional Italian minor-mode songs, as well as third relations (F to D, D to B♭, etc.) that are so often used in popular music. The motion back to D in this chorus then beckons the return of the opening thematic material of the title sequence.

Example 2.4: Male chorus, Title, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:01:37. [SM]

As the first of the three *Dollars* films, *Fistful of Dollars* set the precedent for the treatment of each title to follow. Many of the characteristics established here—D minor/dorian harmony, pop-influence progressions, electric guitar solos, etc.—would be reused in similar fashions for the following two films. Combining mnemonic identifiers with popular instruments and Western rhythms let the title theme set the stage for the narrative and the spaghetti Western genre.
For a Few Dollars More

Just months after the release of Fistful of Dollars, Leone was already at work on For a Few Dollars More. For a year following its release, Fistful of Dollars was still being shown in theaters, and at this point Morricone and Leone met to see the film at Quirinale Cinema in Rome to reevaluate their first joint venture and discuss their next. Because the second film was made so quickly, there was little time for the two to discuss the Title or themes in depth. Morricone was left to his own devices to construct a title that would prepare the audience for the complex narrative of For a Few Dollars More. In Fistful, there was just one main character to introduce, but in Few Dollars More there were two: the Man with No Name (again Clint Eastwood), and Colonel Mortimer (Lee Van Cleef).

Following in the footsteps of its predecessor For a Few Dollars More begins with a similar solid red screen, a callback to the rotoscope introduction of the earlier film. This time, however, the red cuts to a shot of open countryside where a lone horseback rider travels across the plains (see Figure 2.3). At the same time, the foreground sound effects of a man whistling, loading his gun, and lighting a cigar sets the action; the horseback rider is about to die. This musicless sequence takes its time, playing out over a minute and nine seconds before the title theme enters. The sounds Leone exposes during the opening of the film are just as important, if not more so, than any composed score. These sounds from normal, everyday life, take on the role of preparation commonly left to the title. Everything in that silence—the loading of a gun, the lighting of a cigar—are all isolated from the scene, mixed in the front-center channel of the stereo so they are present and obvious to the listener/viewer. There is a strong psychological implication to this treatment of sound; these are sounds of the reality of the film, and the reality of the protagonists. A similar treatment of sound is revisited in the famous opening of Leone’s
Once Upon a Time in the West (1968), where the first twenty minutes of the film are scored only by isolated, concrete sounds from the environment. Reflecting on Leone’s opening to the later film, Morricone stated that “a sound, any sound at all from normal everyday life—isolated from its context and its natural place and isolated by silence—becomes something different that is not part of its real nature … in a way, it becomes a kind of fantasy.”

Figure 2.3: Stills from the opening sequence, For a Few Dollars More (Sergio Leone, 1965).

When the title finally does sound, Morricone toys with listener expectation by avoiding the acoustic guitar sound characteristic of Fistful’s title track. As seen in Example 2.5 he uses a new instrument, the Jew’s harp, to establish the tempo and rhythm. Everything about this melody is shorter than its predecessor. Instead of four introductory measures, Few Dollars More has only one. The basic idea here is about two measures long, unlike in Fistful where the basic idea was approximately five. Additionally, this title lacks a third statement of the basic idea (which made Fistful’s title fit BaileyShea’s concept of the loose sentential pattern); here after the second statement of the basic idea is a clear continuation beginning with similar motion but quickly accelerating into sixteenth-note gestures. The result is a title theme that fits Caplin’s Ideal Type much more closely than that of the previous film. The melody begins with a two-measure basic idea, which is then repeated (although transposed to emphasize A rather than D), and then cuts straight into a continuation at mm. 6–7.

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31 Frayling, Once Upon a Time in Italy, 96–97.
Example 2.5: Title theme, *For a Few Dollars More*, mm. 1–16 (00:01:09–00:01:43). [SM]

The phrase lengths and contours are nearly identical in Examples 2.5 and 1.1. Both contain two measure basic ideas, which are then repeated and followed by a continuation and cadence. Each example contains a basic idea that begins by establishing tonic by leaping up a perfect fourth and arriving on it on a metrically accented beat (in both cases, beat one), which is followed by some sort of descending motion before the repetition. Morricone’s continuation relies heavily on the opening perfect fourth gesture, using it to begin each fragmentation of the melody in the continuation. He is essentially “beating” the perfect fourth into the listener’s ear; clearly this is an important interval. Twelve minutes into the film, Leone and Morricone show the audience that the soprano recorder motive in Example 2.5 represents the Man With No Name/Manco (Eastwood), in much the same way that the descending flute motive did in *Fistful of Dollars*. When Manco approaches White Rocks to find Baby Cavanaugh the title theme
begins to play, with the recorder motive repeating every few seconds. This is the first time the
audience sees Manco in the film, and by including this motive—mixed in the center front
channel of the stereo—it is quite clear that Manco and the motive are connected. This is also the
case for Colonel Mortimer and the Jew’s harp. The title sequence begins with the Jew’s harp
establishing D as an important pitch (in this case the tonic), setting the tempo, and introducing
the listener/viewer to its unique timbre. As the first episode of the film begins, the audience is
introduced to Mortimer as he is hunting down Guy Callaway in Tucumcari. When Mortimer
unwinds his satchel full of custom weaponry (00:10:13), the Jew’s harp plays a single note cue.
From this point onward, the sound of the Jew’s harp is associated with Mortimer.

Once the opening melody of the title is established, it is repeated in a similar fashion to
that of Fistful of Dollars. The melody begins again, this time with a thicker orchestration of
percussion, recorder, and acoustic guitar. Additionally, loud male grunts are introduced, another
signature sound established in Fistful. Once this repeat has sounded there is an electric guitar
solo (Example 2.6), retaining the qualities of that clean, low-reverb Fender sound (which had
become popular in tune connected to Westerns). Accompanying the electric guitar is an acoustic
one, strumming a pattern characteristic to Western tunes, and often associated with them. The
rhythm introduced in m. 3 of Example 2.6—\[\text{ijq}\]—is often used to represent the sound of a
galloping horse along the countryside. Horses and horse sounds have been institutionally linked
to the West; as mentioned in Chapter I, this rhythm is found in many Western title themes (e.g.
the Bonanza theme, Rossini’s William Tell Overture/Lone Ranger theme, Hang ’Em High, The
Rifleman\(^32\)). The connotation is that of the free, traveling spirit associated with the mythology of
the American West. Looking back on Fistful of Dollars, it is actually surprising that Morricone

\(^32\) These examples are taken from the iTunes Essentials “Westerns” playlist, available through the iTunes store. A
similar listing of songs are mentioned in Tagg and Clarida, 293–296.
did not include this rhythm in its title, even though he could have easily used it in the guitar accompaniment.

Example 2.6: Electric guitar solo, Title, *For a Few Dollars More*, 00:01:57–00:02:23. [SM]

So why use this rhythm in *Few Dollars More*? Well, unlike its predecessor that centers on a single location, *Few Dollars More* takes place in many different towns, and has showdowns in multiple places. The protagonists—Manco and Mortimer—travel around much more than the Man With No Name did in *Fistful* both before and after the movie’s crux, the robbing of El Paso Bank. Horses were their means of transportation, and with the amount of bounty hunting the
protagonists did, it is no wonder that the horse is a big part of their existence. The gunshots throughout the opening signal the sound of their iconic weapons, while the horse rhythms in the guitar represent their trusty steeds. For the cowboy—or in this case, the Western bounty hunter—the horse was “empowerment with no strings attached, pure freedom, ‘the rhythm of torrents.’”

One of the most important musical gestures in the electric guitar solo is the perfect fourth, which ties back to the opening interval of the title’s main melody as well as Manco’s recorder motive. When the guitar solo begins at 00:02:00 the very first sound is Manco’s motive, complete with its perfect fourth interval and the sixteenth-note pattern that follows. The pitches are the same, and the metrical placement remains intact. As the solo continues, most of the melodic material is made up of arpeggiated tonic chords, making the passage into an extended prolongation of tonic material. The form of the solo is also reminiscent of the opening melody; one measure of introduction, a basic idea of approximately two measures, which is then followed by a continuation made of basic idea fragments and an expanded cadence. The harmonic progression is also borrowed from the title’s main melody—i, VI, and IV—continuing to showcase pop-music-inspired pentatonic harmony.

After this the main melodic material returns, and Morricone utilizes the sound of the male chorus yet again. This time around, the chorus has its own short melody that relies on register to heighten tension and build towards the final repeat of the title’s main melody. Much like the guitar solo, the chorus melody in Example 2.7 contains arpeggiations of the tonic triad, as well as the iv chord in measure 3. Throughout this Title, as well as Fistful’s, D dorian/minor has been consistently outlined, arpeggiated, and emphasized at cadential moments. Until this point, the mode has just been a characteristic of the melodies being discussed. However, there is more to D dorian/minor than just composer preference. Throughout Austro-Germanic history, minor key

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33 Tagg and Clarida, 291.
and modal melodies have been consistently emblematic of sad or bad. When used in slow tempos, the minor key can set moods of sadness, lamentation, and melancholy, while faster tempos often denote terror, worry, or threat. Zooming further out from this ethnocentric approach to mood in music, it can be seen that many other parts of Europe rely on the minor key for this type of mood setting. Modalities, particularly minor modalities, are often used as a signifier of ethnicity, or the other, a something from somewhere else.

Example 2.7: Male chorus melody, Title, *For a Few Dollars More*, 00:02:42. [EK]

This provides a fascinating spin for the theme of a Western; perhaps there is something distant and archaic about the tragic tale of the cowboy? Morricone’s D dorian/minor modality sets the stage for something mythic, a bygone tale of the lone gunman. This can be seen as the case particularly for Mortimer, who is set up to be a victim of American advancement during the late-nineteenth century. The progression out West, thanks to the development of “those damn trains!” has taken a sharp-shooting military man and changed him into a cold-blooded bounty hunter. The pentatonic undertones, emphasized by the flat seventh and progressions through IV and VI, also hearken back to Western-referential music, particularly those of the American frontier. Tunes like “Oh Susannah,” and “Coming Round the Mountain,” and the many classics that include the cowboy yodel “yippee-kay-ay!” all center on a pentatonic sound. For Morricone, this minor/modal/pentatonic tonality can prepare the audience for the tragic and mythological world of the cowboy, and also reference past tunes associated with the Old West.

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34 Tagg and Clarida, 319.
35 These songs, as well as a handful of others using pentatonic harmony, can be found in Tagg and Clarida, 325.
In 1966, United Artists announced plans to release Leone’s two Westerns, *A Fistful of Dollars* and *For a Few Dollars More*, in America. The decision was due largely to the immense success of the films in Europe, as well as the popularity of Morricone’s scores on European radio. In addition to these two releases, United Artists provided Leone with a budget of $1.6 million (US) to finance a third picture to release later that year. The studio hoped to market the films along the lines of the James Bond films that had been recently brought over to American theaters after their success in the United Kingdom. A timetable was then set to put *Fistful* and *Few Dollars More* in American theaters a few months apart, in hopes of building interest in a Christmas release of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. During the first four months of its American run, the third film earned $3.8 million, and released a largely successful soundtrack album through RCA.

Morricone was again called upon by Leone to pen the film’s score. This time, however, the collaborators had more production time to meet and plan out the musical ideas behind the new film’s narrative. Unlike *Fistful* and *Few Dollars More*, Morricone and Leone could develop musical ideas and have them composed before the production and filming began. As a result, the use of musical cues and themes is much more complex and dramatic. *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* was a film made on a much grander scale, a tale of greed in the midst of a deadly war. Rather than one or two heroes, this film had three: a good guy who was not all that good, a bad guy who was not much worse than his surroundings, and an ugly guy who shared the same traits as the other two. Each man had his own establishing scene, showing his motivations and means for survival in the Wild West. Their fates were distinctly established and unavoidably intertwined.

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36 Smith, 135.
To lay the aural foundations for the three main characters, Morricone would rely exclusively on instrumentation. In the previous films, each protagonist was associated with an instrument that played a distinct musical cue, with the cues representing the individuals as well as preparing the listener/viewer for the mood and setting of the film. This time around, Morricone used an identical musical gesture to represent all three characters.

The very first shot in the title sequence involves an animated version of the three main characters (see Fig. 2.4). When the animated representations of the “good” (Clint Eastwood), the “ugly” (Eli Wallach), and the “bad” (Lee Van Cleef) appear on screen, the melodic gesture sounds (Example 2.8). The combination of imagery and sound in the title sequence lends a great deal to the dramatic intentions of the film. Each visual occurrence of the characters is essentially identical: a white figure on horseback with a splash of red over a white background. These three figures enter in the same order as their epithets appear in the Italian title: “il buono” (“the good”), “il brutto” (“the ugly”), and “il cattivo” (“the bad”). However, at this point the three men are indistinguishable, with the exception of the instruments used for their versions of the musical cue. As Sergio Miceli describes, the three very distinct sounds are the “flauto diritto soprano” (soprano recorder), “due voci virili, trattate elettronicamente” (two male voices treated electronically), and an “ocarina bassa” (bass ocarina). The first sound is immediately recognizable, as the soprano recorder has been used in previous films to represent Clint Eastwood’s protagonists. That instrument retains this characterization, representing Blondie who is set up as “the good.” The two male voices utter the motive in a pitched yell reminiscent of a coyote, and characterize Tuco (Eli Wallach), “the ugly.” Last is the bass ocarina, relying on the low register and smooth timbre to represent Angel Eyes (Lee Van Cleef), “the bad.”

37 Miceli, 134.
As a result, we have an introduction to the characters that make them visually indistinguishable but aurally distinct. This will become an important point for the film; although the three are supposedly different, they are all motivated by greed. The way they carry themselves, kill indiscriminately, and continually attempt to get the best of their comrades make their roles in the narrative difficult to separate. Morricone does his part by using the same motive to represent the three protagonists. Leone also gives the audience obvious clues to their roles by putting their titles (“the good, “the ugly,” “the bad”) on the screen at the end of their establishing epithets at the beginning of the film. He then repeats the process at the very end of the film, just in case the viewer loses track along the way.

The motive established in this short sequence develops into the most important musical cue of the entire movie. To make sure the listener/viewer gets the hint, Morricone uses this motive as the basic idea of the film’s title theme. While the music is presented, a visual sequence

\begin{example}
\textbf{Example 2.8:} Main motive, \textit{The Good, the Bad and the Ugly}.
\end{example}
similar to that of *Fistful of Dollars* begins (a hint of this is seen in Fig. 2.4). This time around the rotoscoped images are much more detailed, allowing the facial expressions of the main characters to show through. Interestingly, many of the key episodes of the plot are exposed during the title sequence. These include the scene from Fig. 2.5 (left), where the band of prisoners play “La Storia De Un Soldato” (The Story Of A Soldier) while Tuco is being beaten by Angel Eyes’s goon Wilson, and the moment just before Blondie and Tuco are captured by Union soldiers (Fig. 2.5, right). As a result, the listener/viewer is prepared visually for what is ahead: a world full of brutal, violent, and greed-ridden men that make no attempts to change their situations. As Frayling explains, “Leone makes no attempt to engage our sympathy with the characters, but watches the brutality of his protagonists with a detached calm: they are brutal because of the environment in which they exist.”

The audience is lucky that Leone’s title sequence is so visually appealing, because Morricone’s title music, which is catchy yet incredibly repetitious and formulaic, and leaves little to the imagination. The repetition is an important feature of the theme, however, because it drives home the narrative link between the main characters. Morricone wants to ensure that the viewer/listener is well informed musically; the viewer should know the motive presented, and be aware of the instrument timbres and what/who they represent.

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38 Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns*, 160.
After a two-measure introduction the main motive comes back, this time as part of the Title’s melody. Much like the sentential structures discussed in the previous title themes, Example 2.9 uses and reuses a small melodic cell (motive a) to begin the basic ideas. This time, however, the small melodic motive begins each repetition. The only contrast is provided in the second measure of each idea, where pitches finally change (motive b). The first statement in mm. 3–4 establishes the D minor/dorian tonic in a nearly identical fashion to the title themes of Fistful and Few Dollars More. Stress is given to this D based solely on duration, seeing as the pitch is approached by a descending fourth rather than a fifth as might expected. Moving from G down to D is reminiscent of the pentatonic harmonic motions that have been used previously, and hearken back to popular music tendencies as well as pentatonic modalities relating to folk tunes. To help the listener/viewer hear a distinction between the ideas, Morricone makes sure to change the final pitches of each statement of motive b. In m. 6 the second basic idea ends on a C, implying a half cadence due to C’s role as the flat seventh of D. Because there is no guitar or other pitched accompaniment, the melody has to portray the harmonic motion. The held high D in m. 7 acts as the high-point of the phrase, while the two eighth notes in m. 8 help the melody move into its cadential motion. Due to the similarity of each basic idea repetition, increased surface rhythm activity is needed to signify the approach of the cadence. The melody then arrives on D on a metrically stressed beat and lasts for an entire measure.
Example 2.9: Main melody, Title, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, mm. 1–10 (00:00:07–00:00:29). [SM/EK]

Typically, repetition of this kind would involve some sort of model-sequence activity.\(^{39}\) This is clearly not the case for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, because the motive as-is becomes an important dramatic marker throughout the course of the film. To prevent the mundane, Morricone uses juxtaposed timbres to add interest to the melody. A soprano recorder plays each statement of the motive a, while the two-quarter/dotted-half note motion that follows is a distinctive “ua-ua” (or “wah-wah”) sound made by two male voices processed electronically (motive b). Both of these sounds were used in the introductory sequence (Fig. 2.4) to represent Blondie and Tuco, so there is little surprise they play a role in the title. Missing, however, is Angel Eyes’s bass ocarina. This may be Morricone’s hint to us that Angel Eyes, while playing a large role in the narrative, may not make it to the end credits.

The importance of the duality of these sounds and their juxtaposition also relays the codependence of Tuco and Blondie throughout the film. As Cumbow observes, “As in *A Fistful
of Dollars, there is a tendency for the triangular opposition to resolve itself into two-and-one. Most often, of course, Blondie and Tuco are the two and Angeleyes [sic] is the one.”⁴⁰ This is magnified by the running joke between the two, where each has his own version of the phrase “there are two kinds of people in the world.” One is in the noose while the other does the cutting. One has the gun while the other does the digging. Blondie and Tuco share an uneasy comradery based on distrust and necessity. It seems fitting, then, to have them represented in sounds so distinct, yet both clearly present in the title. The way the two sounds take their turns in the motivic material of the title is almost in dialog, with Blondie’s sixteenth-note motion driving the action while Tuco’s desire for the gold draws them back to the larger picture: $200,000 in gold.

This is not to say, however, that Angel Eyes’s bass ocarina is entirely absent from the title sequence. When the melody repeats—adding percussion, organ, and other instruments in a manner similar to the previous titles themes—motive a is played by his bass ocarina. The motive b “ua-ua” is also replaced, this time by a human whistle that up until this point has been the go-to instrument for the Title melodies in the previous Dollars trilogy films. Tuco’s coyote yell also has a turn, but later in the title. In a sense Angel Eyes gets his say, but his story is secondary to the adventures of Blondie and Tuco.

Much like the previous title themes, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly contains a contrasting section comprised of an electric guitar solo. The treatment of the solo section is very similar to both Fistful and Few Dollars More; it borrows the opening perfect fourth interval for its basic ideas, has an extended continuation section, and uses increased surface rhythm activity to drive toward the cadence. What is unique to Example 2.10, however, is the treatment of the cadence at the end. Rather than give a square arrival on D to round out the solo, the guitar ends

on the flat seven. To build up tension for the return of the main melody, it then moves up a halfstep to C♯, using it as the leading tone of a large half cadence event that resolves once the main melody repeats.

Example 2.10: Electric guitar solo, Title, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 00:00:53–00:01:25. [CL]

When the melody does re-enter, Tuco’s coyote yell takes over the melody for both parts of the motive. His yell rounds out the three complete statements of the melody, much like his yelling ends the film itself. The repetition of the melody with coyote yells and “ua-ua”s leads into the third contrasting section of the title. In *Fistful* and *Few Dollars More*, this contrasting section was left to a male choir. This time around, the contrasting section is given to a chorus of trumpets with the male choir taking the backseat.

The use of trumpets in the title is not something Morricone did with the other *Dollars* films, as it was generally reserved for the *deguello* themes for each film (which will be discussed in Chapter III). For this film the trumpet represents the soldiers of the Civil War, whose sorry tale is woven into the narrative alongside the three protagonists’ quest for the gold.

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41 *El Degüello* is the name of the trumpet call played before the storming of the Alamo fortress by the Mexican Army in 1836.
It seems fitting, then, for the trumpet to have a larger role in the title sequence. The trumpet is used more frequently throughout *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* than in the previous two titles, and each time it enters the narrative is focusing on the plight of the soldiers.

The light use of the male chorus in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* also makes room for Edda Dell’Orso’s wordless soprano vocals, which is an important musical instrument throughout the film.

Every Gun Has Its Own Tune

The title music of *Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More*, and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* plays a critical role in establishing the world in which the dramatic narrative takes place. Leone’s vision of the west was gritty, violent, and cynical, but most importantly, his view was rooted in the mythology of the Old West set by his American predecessors. His movies pay homage to the tales of Hollywood’s Westerns, yet Leone makes them his own by creating a mythology based on mythology. These films were his idealized conception of the West, and Morricone’s title themes embodied that mythology. By utilizing instruments, harmonies, and melodies reminiscent of the old West, as well as idioms from the spectrum of popular music, Morricone set the tone for the new Italian Western genre, as well as Leone’s fantastic tales.

Once the audience is emotionally and psychologically prepared for the Leone’s Western world, the title sequence ends and the narrative begins. However, just because the title ends does not mean that its role ends, or that the music stops acting as a gateway between the listener/viewer and the drama. The music takes on a structural role, connecting the episodes of the narrative into a cohesive dramatic unit. Each entrance of musical material is structurally significant, which leads us to Chapter III.
CHAPTER III. DEVELOPING THE SCORE

Out of his intuition, Sergio understood a very important thing—that film and music share a temporal dimension; they rely on time for their existence. We need to see a film in the time it takes to screen it. We need to listen to music in the time its composer imposes on us ... Film and music need attention, transmission, that makes use of time. If you respect the temporal nature of both film and music, you get the best results.¹

A central concern to theoretical discussions of cinematic music is the hierarchical relationship between sound and image. This concern shows itself in many forms, as in the debate over Wagner’s influence on film music, and in reaction to Adorno and Eisler’s proclamations of redundancy in drama and sound. The general consensus is that music’s purpose in film “is an augmenting function and cannot be reduced to a relation of mere redundancy to image and drama.”² Even if music encourages passive emotional engagement in film, it still carries “narrational force as a kind of ‘close-up,’ drawing attention to a particular event, object, or emotion in the frame that would be perceived differently with other or no music.”³ Music continues to provide commentary on the drama, regardless of how redundant or parallel it may seem.

The term parallel carries an interesting connotation. Two objects are parallel when they exist side by side and have the same distance continuously between then. In math, parallel lines never meet; if two roads run parallel, they never cross. More abstractly, however, objects can be considered parallel when they are simultaneously performing complementary operations (as in computing), or when they occur or exist at the same time or in a similar way. The more mathematical definition fits into Adorno’s views of music and cinema. If music is merely

¹ Ennio Morricone in an interview with Christopher Frayling, printed in Frayling, Once Upon a Time in Italy, 97.
³ Paulin, 73.
superfluous, then its role in film is consistently distanced from the image. Based on the role of music in contemporary cinema, it seems more likely that music and image (as objects) are simultaneously participating in the overall narrative process of a film.

As we saw in Chapter II, music within the title sequence can convey crucial information to the audience, signifying genre and location, and sometimes previewing large-scale dramatic developments. Each title has its own formal structure, utilizing basic ideas and fragmentations to drive the melody. Additionally, harmony and instrumentation are used to create a bridge between the reality of the audience and the “reality” in the narrative. The titles even have the power of foresight, establishing characterizations of the film’s main players and carefully using them in the title sequence to hint at their relationships and fates in the narrative. In a sense, the music connects meaning of a symbolic nature with the drama and surface action. This highly suggestive role of music continues as Morricone and Leone use motives from the Title theme as cues throughout the picture.

What makes the use of music throughout the Dollars trilogy so unique is how it participates in the dramatic developments on screen. Leone was famously meticulous in the sound design of his films. In the post-production stages, Leone often pushed the sound technicians to rid the soundtracks of any inessential noises, as he wanted to isolate sounds that were important to the narrative and improve their quality, which sometimes left large spans of time in ambient silence. He treated music the same way; it was important that he mixed the music equally with other sounds and dialog, carefully making sure not to keep it too low or cover it with other sounds. As a result there are rarely moments of source music in Leone’s films (Westerns, particularly), and when there are they typically act contrapuntally to the dialog, taking turns occupying the aural space of a scene.
Leone felt that music and film shared a temporal relationship. As Morricone stated above, both rely on time for their existence. It makes sense, then, to make their relationship parallel and to use music to shape the dramatic developments on screen. With the methodology behind Leone’s mixing process, the sound was given space by the visuals, and the visuals were given depth by the music. To elaborate, we can use *Fistful of Dollars* as a quick example. When the Baxters and Rojos meet at the graveyard there is no music. The only sounds in the mix are gunshots and yells. This episode encompasses nearly eight minutes, and is broken up by a scene where Joe (Clint Eastwood) takes Marisol to the Baxter’s home, but even then there are only 15 seconds of music. Leone uses one short cue (made up of the main motive shown in Example 2.1) up until the hostage exchange that takes place nearly ten minutes after the graveyard. He could have easily had Morricone score the entire graveyard scene, perhaps using string tremolos for added tension. Instead, Leone relied on the sounds of the environment to score the scenes. The action centers on gunshots, yelling, laughter, and a gun handle knocking on wood; the “real world” sounds are all that is needed to support the action. In turn, the lack of scoring during this sequence gives the music more space through silence, which creates more emphasis when Morricone’s scoring reappears. The result is a sophisticated give-and-take between image and sound.

A director’s style is the main factor in the interaction of sound and image, yet there are several general formal resources at the disposal of director and composer when compositing a film. Essentially, music in the *Dollars* trilogy functions in a *characterizational* capacity. The music connects with individual characters, groups of people, locations, events, and establishes an aura of time and place. Additionally, the music takes part in the large-scale organization of the narrative in each film. The placement of cues (as shown above) is deliberate and carefully
executed. Leone will only use a sound when it is absolutely necessary, fitting Prendergast’s statement that “good film music is used sparingly and only at those moments where it will be most effective.”\(^4\) This poses a unique problem for film music composers. In absolute music, form is dependent on short time spans of repetition and contrast containing little or no interruption (in terms of sound versus silence). In film, however, there can be long spans of silence, action, or dialog that complete separate musical cues. This leaves plenty of time for the listener/viewer to “forget whatever musical material they may have heard earlier.”\(^5\)

The composer, then, can fall back on one of several generic formal resources to maintain unity in his/her scoring. Prendergast offers three examples of formal unity typically used by film composers:

- **Leitmotiv**: the most commonly used resource, which began in the operas of Richard Wagner. “Film composers picked up on the basic idea of having a different melody for each character in a film.”\(^6\) The melodies can be altered and inserted throughout a film, with the alterations giving the listener/viewer an indication of a character’s state of mind in any given scene. This fits with Max Steiner’s mandate that “every character should have a theme.”

- **Monothematic**: a commonly used device, where a composer derives the scoring of an entire film from one tune, typically a pop song.

- **Developmental Score**: a formal structure that bears resemblance to the leitmotiv score and can be loosely compared to the sonata-allegro form of the Classic era. The title music of

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\(^4\) Prendergast, 231.
\(^5\) Prendergast, 231.
\(^6\) Prendergast, 231.
the score “serves the function of the exposition in classical sonata-allegro form in that its function presents the musical material to be used throughout the score.”

These three formal types are prominent in both contemporary and classical cinema. Each share important characteristics, most notably the reliance on a single tune or musical idea to generate the score. The concept of the developmental form is one of resemblance more than adherence, as there is no “definite sequence of formal events in a film score as there is in a sonata-allegro movement.” The arrangement of materials is based more on the film’s dramatic needs than on any musical concerns.

Much like a sonata movement, a film derives its artistic content based upon short- and long-term goals (medial caesura, cadences, thematic rotations, etc.). The interaction of action, dialog, and music create tensions that drive towards resolutions, creating dramatic subunits that fit into the large-scale narrative structure. In a developmental score, music from the Title is used to signal the beginnings and endings of dramatic episodes, providing commentary on the achievements of characters and progression of the plot. All of these episodes build towards the final goal of the film, were the major conflict is (ideally) resolved. After this the Title returns to signal the ultimate resolution of the narrative; as Gorbman points out, “musical recapitulation and closure reinforces the film’s narrative and formal closure.”

Looking back on Prendergast’s definition of the developmental score, there is an obvious reliance on the Title music to generate the film’s musical material. Morricone and Leone do rely heavily on the Title theme to provide cues throughout the film, reusing instrumentation and melodic gestures to create new musical ideas. This results in three different roles for the soundtrack similar to principles outlined by Gorbman in *Unheard Melodies: narrative/referential*.

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7 Prendergast, 234.  
8 Prendergast, 234.  
9 Gorbman, 82.
cueing, where the music (particularly short cues) relies on past associations of gestures to provide formal demarcations; connotative cueing, when a theme acts as a parallel process to the image, relying on music’s ability to influence mood to interpret and/or illustrate a dramatic event; and 3) continuity, where the music (almost always the Title theme in its original form) provides formal unity of different narrative events by sounding during scene changes, or by aurally signaling that separate scenes are connected by content. These musical/narrative events are then strengthened by Morricone’s repetition and variation of instrumentation and musical gesture, contributing further to the unity of both the soundtrack and the overall structure of the film. Each of the Dollars films uses music in this capacity, creating associations between musical gestures/themes and dramatic ideas, and then carefully placing them throughout the narrative to comment on the action as well as drive the plot towards the climax.

The following discussion will continue where that the title themes left off, addressing the musical materials generated from the title theme and their places within the narrative structure of each Dollars film. Knowledge of the plots of each film is assumed.

_A Fistful of Dollars_

Once the Title theme enters its final melodic repeat, Leone cuts to the dust and rocks surrounding San Miguel. This town will be where nearly all of the action takes place; it is assumedly located just south of the Mexican-American border near the Rio Bravo. Within five seconds of the cut the audience sees a donkey trotting across the screen, and a pan upwards reveals a man in a poncho on its back. This is a stark difference from the lush landscapes and glorious terrain of the old American Western, where cowboys rode trusty steeds and galloped proudly across the land. Eventually the rider reaches a destination, a water well, and takes a drink. He notices a young boy run across the screen and sneak into a house through a window. When the man in the poncho
raises his head the flute gesture from the Title sounds; from this point onward, the gesture is associated with the man (who is eventually revealed to be the protagonist of the tale).

Before long the boy is caught and kicked out of the house. Two large men chase him away, shooting as his feet to scare. When the larger of the two notices the stranger (from this point on referred to as “Joe”) at the well (Figure 3.1) the first derived theme begins (see Example 3.1). For this cue, Morricone extracts the strumming pattern from the guitar accompaniment of the Title. The low register and acceleration of rhythmic value creates an agitated sound, characterizing Chico’s surprise in seeing the stranger, and also helping to interpret the dramatic event. Morricone’s use of this gesture acts as connotative cueing, taking advantage of the source material created by the Title, yet changing in instrumentation, timbre, and register to illustrate the mood of the scene. Also fitting is how this gesture recalls the structure of the Title; the guitar accompaniment is the first sound of the Title theme, while the use of similar material here is the first occurrence of scoring in the narrative. This opening episode also involves the first moment of conflict in the film, as Joe and the audience eventually discover why the boy is sneaking around, and with whom Chico is associated. Once Chico and his compadre leave, Joe notices a woman (Marisol) in the window; once he catches her gaze and flashes a quick smile she slams the window shut, stopping the music. The action of the episode has finished, resulting in the music ending as well. The agitated sound of the piano changes perspectives three times. At first it reflects Chico’s interior space, magnifying his surprise and angst. Once he leaves it becomes Joe’s song, and the camera reflects this by centering on him at the well, pondering what he just witnessed. Once he notices Marisol in the window it becomes her music, reflecting her anger and helplessness. When she sees that he is an outsider she scowls and shuts the window, and the interaction of the people in this episode stops.
Figure 3.1: Chico notices Joe at the well, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:04:10.

Example 3.1: “Almost Dead,” *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:04:09. [EK]

The next cut begins the next episode, where Joe is finally introduced to San Miguel. He has gotten back on his donkey and is now riding towards town. With the previous episode over, the Title can resume its original role as a guitar accompaniment. As it does this, he rides into the desolate town and sees women running into their homes, each one dressed in black. The melody of the Title comes in for the first time, signaling that the narrative is moving on to the next episode. While riding he passes a dead man on the horse, with the sign “adios amigo” attached to his back (see Figure 3.2). Almost immediately he is greeted by Juan de Dios, the bell ringer, who sets the mood of San Miguel. Rival factions run the town, and men who go there either end up rich or dead. Joe is once again thrust into conflict, and the piano’s agitated rendition of Title material sounds again. Throughout this and the previous episode, “Almost Dead” shapes the modules of the narrative and characterizes the drama of the action.

Figure 3.2: Joe sees the dead man and his sign, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:06:03.
In typical cowboy fashion, Joe heads to the cantina for liquor and information. The place is empty with the exception of the owner, Silvanito, who unwillingly becomes Joe’s sidekick. Immediately after learning of the warring gangs in town, Joe concocts a plan to make money off of the rivalry. As he walks outside and calls out to Don Miguel Rojo (Figure 3.3), the film’s main theme sounds (see Example 3.2). Without knowing that the track is called “Theme from *A Fistful of Dollars*,” an audience member would be hard-pressed to automatically realize it was the main theme of the movie. Dramatically, however, the designation makes sense. As Joe heads to the Baxter’s to show off his gun slinging, it sets a mood of loss and lament. This seems fitting for a scene with shooting, but not a scene involving the hero killing off villains. Luckily, Leone cuts the theme as Joe begins his confrontation with the four Baxter thugs, showing that the theme does not represent death or suffering *in that instance*. When the theme returns again at 00:33:01, the Baxters are preparing to meet with the Rojos to negotiate a truce. There is no shooting involved this time, however, the Baxters create a link between the two thematic recurrences. During the hostage trade-off starting at 00:51:27 we again hear the theme, with both gangs having an equal role in the scene. Placing the track at these carefully selected points implies that it ties these events together. The result is that the theme does not represent death, the Baxters, the Rojos, or even the actions in these scenes; what it *does* represent is San Miguel. Each instance involves one of the two rival gangs that control the town, and within these episodes a decisive plot action takes place. In the first instance, Joe’s actions help him join the Baxter’s gang. In the second, the Baxters and Rojos are so preoccupied with each other that Joe can go to the graveyard and plant the two dead soldier decoys. In the third, the two gangs exchange prisoners, and Marisol is briefly united with her family. With this hostage exchange, Joe finally learns the reason for the young boy’s sneaking around in the opening episode, and subsequently realizes he
can use Ramón’s love for Marisol to his advantage. The main theme also sounds when Joe is healing himself in the coalmines (01:24:54), and when he returns to San Miguel for the last time to save it from the Rojos (01:29:50). Because nearly all of the action of *Fistful of Dollars* happens in San Miguel, and the plot revolves entirely on the salvation of the village, the use of this theme to connect the above scenes makes its designation appropriate.

**Figure 3.3:** Don Miguel Rojo watches Joe, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:13:23.

Although there are many differences between the main theme and the Title theme (Example 3.3), it is not difficult to find similarities between the two. The most obvious are the similar key areas (D minor/dorian) and phrase structure. Even with differing opening intervals, the importance of A and D remain; in the Title the A leaps a perfect fourth to D, while in the main theme D jumps a perfect fifth up to A. The proximity of interval size and shared pitch classes generates a referential tie between the two themes. Additionally, each basic idea ends
with a sustained note of at least a dotted half, creating resting points throughout the themes that are similar in character. As a result, this main theme supports the scenes by underscoring them and bridges important episodes together that are separated by time and space in the film.

![Whistle]

**Example 3.3:** Melody, Title, *Fistful of Dollars*, 00:00:05.

The most obvious use of the Title theme throughout the score of *Fistful of Dollars* comes from direct repetition of the flute motive. Practically any time something important happens to Joe the flute sounds. The majority of the entrances are edited in such a way that they sound at the same time as a cut in the visuals. When Joe rides into town after the episode at the well, the flute motive sounds at the exact moment that the camera shows him traveling into town, away from the camera. When he takes on Baxter’s men to win the favor of Don Rojo, the flute motive enters at the same time as Joe lifts his head to stare them down. Just before the massacre at Rio Bravo, Joe and Silvanito head across the screen with the flute motive and Title playing loudly and proudly in the background. These are just a few of the many instances where the flute is used. This motive acts almost entirely as commentary to the drama; each entrance signifies an important event, particularly instances where Joe is about to discover vital information or take an important action. The cues magnify Joe’s role in the drama, and punctuates significant dramatic events throughout the film.
For a Few Dollars More

Instead of focusing on a single hero between two opposing gangs, Few Dollars More centers on two rival bounty killers—Manco (Clint Eastwood) and Colonel Douglas Mortimer (Lee Van Cleef)—and their unstable partnership against a maniacal villain El Indio (Gian Maria Volontè) and his gang. The focus, then, has changed to what Fridlund calls the doubled hero constellation;¹⁰ rather than the hero being one point of a triangle fixed against the two opposing gangs, Few Dollars More sets its triad as two complementary heroes against one villain. Each character of the triad has their own introductory episode, establishing individual personality traits, affiliations, and unique abilities. While being introduced, Leone and Morricone lay out musical gestures—derived directly from the Title music—that will characterize the protagonists throughout the film.

Due to the increased complexity of narrative created by having two main protagonists, each of the bounty killers is given a lengthy episode to portray their style and character. The first bounty killer to receive screen time is Mortimer (Van Cleef) as he arrives in Tucumcari after making an unlisted train stop. As soon as he sees a poster announcing a $1000 reward for Guy Callaway he steps into action, hunting him down at a hotel (where a pianist is playing music at the piano, the first moment of source/diegetic music in the Dollars trilogy) and killing him with his superior weaponry. Mortimer’s extended stock gun and long-range riffles are characteristic of his personality and style, made up of deliberate distance and scare tactics. As he unravels the satchel holding his weaponry (Figure 3.4), Mortimer’s cue sounds: the Jew’s harp. The sound is fitting for the character, but more in its placement than any timbral quality. In the title sequence, the first instrument heard by the listener/viewer is the Jew’s harp. Being the first of the protagonists to make an appearance on screen, it makes sense that his character is associated with

¹⁰ Fridlund, 122.
that sound. The Jew’s harp remains with him throughout the picture, reappearing in moments that are tied to his lifestyle as a bounty killer. When he collects the bounty from the sheriff of Tucumcari (00:11:39), the cue sounds just as he grabs the cash from the sheriff’s desk. After his run-in with Wild (Klaus Kinski) at the hotel tavern (00:44:55) the cue sounds again, showing that the confrontation has sparked his interest. We also hear the Jew’s harp when Mortimer bests Manco in the mock duel with his long-range weaponry (00:57:02). All of these moments are critical to Mortimer’s role in the drama, and the gesture helps to aurally unify his dramatic events.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 3.4:** Mortimer grabs his rifle, *Few Dollars More*, 00:10:14.

As Mortimer collects his bounty on Guy Callaway we are introduced to Manco. Upon leaving the sheriff’s office Mortimer sees a poster for the capture of Baby “Red” Cavanaugh, and the sheriff informs him that Cavanaugh was last seen at White Rocks. Someone else had already asked about him, though; a man that goes by the name of Manco. The view immediately cuts to a man walking his horse through the rain into White Rocks (Figure 3.5). Audience members who have seen *Fistful of Dollars* immediately recognize him as Joe, the protagonist of the previous film. He continues to wear his signature poncho, and this time around he is riding a horse instead of a donkey. Although there is no biographical information given to create a direct connection to the hero of the previous film, it is safe to assume that Manco and Joe are the same person. The music signifies his role as the second protagonist of the film; as soon as Manco appears on

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11 Leone does assert that “the protagonist was the same,” quoted in Frayling, *Spaghetti Westerns*, 146.
screen his recorder motive appears (see Example 3.4). The sound of the quick soprano recorder motive provides a stark contrast to Mortimer’s Jew’s harp. Each time Mortimer’s gesture sounds, there is just a single note played. The nature of his gesture implies reserve, distance, and interior calculation that characterize Mortimer’s style.

![Manco arrives in White Rocks, Few Dollars More, 00:12:25.](image)

**Figure 3.6:** Manco arrives in White Rocks, *Few Dollars More*, 00:12:25.

![Example 3.4: Manco’s soprano recorder motive, Few Dollars More, 00:12:16.](image)

**Example 3.4:** Manco’s soprano recorder motive, *Few Dollars More*, 00:12:16.

Manco, on the other hand, is much more hands-on and direct. When he takes out Baby Cavanaugh he uses his hands, punching him and kicking him around before eventually shooting him. Later he personally evicts a hotel patron to get the exact room he wants. The repeated pitches in his soprano recorder motive carry an air of persistence, all the while referencing the title music. As Mortimer and Manco investigate each other, Mortimer finds a shot of Manco posing with two of his bounties lying dead on the ground (Figure 3.6). Clearly, Manco is not afraid to pose for a shot of his victory. When Mortimer stops on this page of the newspaper Manco’s soprano recorder sounds again, letting him (and the audience) know that Manco is a force to be reckoned with, and that Mortimer will not be able to hunt down Indio without Manco’s interference.
Figure 3.6: Manco in the El Paso newspaper, *Few Dollars More*, 00:48:15.

Much like Mortimer’s Jew’s harp, Manco’s recorder sounds in important structural points throughout the film. During Mortimer’s run-in with Wild, Manco is standing in the background observing. As Mortimer walks away, the camera moves to a shot of Manco, who at that moment realizes Mortimer is a rival bounty killer after the same prey. The audience’s window into Manco’s comprehension is the use of the soprano recorder, which emphasizes the importance of this realization to the plot. The recorder continues to follow Manco through the film, entering when Manco successfully joins Indio’s gang, and again a few minutes later when he kills three of Indio’s bandits. This moment is crucial to the success of Indio’s bank heist. Manco and the three bandits were meant to act as decoys, causing the El Paso police to leave the town unprotected during Indio’s robbery. When Manco’s deception succeeds, and the men are dead (Figure 3.7), his flute motive appears. This time, however, it leads to the entrance of the guitar solo and chorus of the Title theme, which then bridges the end of the current episode with the beginning of the next: the bank heist. Here the music takes on two roles: it creates a *formal continuity* during the scene shift, and also uses the Title material as a *narrative cueing* that provides a formal demarcation at this critical narrative event.

Figure 3.7: Manco kills three of Indio’s men, *Few Dollars More*, 01:09:16.
The third point of the above-mentioned dramatic triangle is El Indio, an unpredictable, calculating, and undeniably brutal villain. Indio also has an air of mystery, which is shown over the course of the narrative to be fueled by an obsession with a woman from his past. We find later that this obsession stems from a woman that is dead; she—Mortimer’s sister—shot herself while being raped by Indio, a reaction to his brutal act as well as the murder of her husband. The audience’s window into his unstable psyche comes from a complex mix of flashbacks and brutal murders, scored by an equally complex combination of source music and underscoring.

Once his gang rescues him from prison, Indio immediately sets off to get revenge on the man who turned him in. After killing the man’s wife and child, Indio takes on his former captor in a gun duel. The duel is controlled solely by a pocket watch melody, which we later find out is a watch that belonged to Mortimer’s sister. The melody in Example 3.5 is simple and haunting, and over time takes on the complex role of connecting Indio to Mortimer. In order to maintain musical unification of the soundtrack, Morricone keeps “Carillon” in D minor. He could have easily put the pocket watch’s tune in a different key; after all, the pocket watch represents a rare instance of the characters interacting directly with a music-making object. However, Morricone wanted to make sure his themes never departed from their original key (as mentioned in Chapter I, he believes that maintaining key areas is a harmonic simplicity that “is accessible to everyone.”12). This key area becomes an important element when the “Carillon” theme becomes a mediated sound, an issue we will return to shortly.

12 Fagen, 106.
As Indio begins the duel with the man who had him imprisoned, the watch begins as an element audible to both gunmen. Before long, however, the watch melody becomes a mediated or extradiegetic sound as underscoring comes in and takes over the soundtrack. Strings and an acoustic guitar join the mix, beginning an aural-geographical shift in the scene’s music. The cutting of the visuals and the shift in musical source are an issue of foreground and background recognition; the music is, at first, seemingly an element that the two gunmen experience. The camera supports this by framing the men individually, showing each one’s expression as they wait anxiously for the melody to end. However, the camera cuts up and zooms out, showing the entire interior of the room where the showdown is taking place. This removes the audience member from the action and forces them to be an outside observer, forcing them to recontextualize their observation of the showdown. Do the characters hear all of the music in the scene? Are we meant to think that the orchestral addition is for our (the audience’s) benefit? Whichever is the case, the shift between the two musical “realms” creates a psychological conflict befitting of the scene. As the audience is removed from the scene, so is the source music.

This intellectual conflict of source vs. underscoring (diegetic vs. nondiegetic, etc.) is something that takes place “behind the scenes,” so to speak. A true psychological conflict of
aural geography is something that an individual audience member maps onto the experience; naturally, Leone and Morricone cannot force the audience to impose a designation upon the source of the music. Our decision between diegetic and nondiegetic music stems from the belief that these forms of musical interaction are mutually exclusive, like the music exists in “separate realms, almost like two adjacent bubbles.”\textsuperscript{13} Instances much like the one being discussed here occur frequently in cinema. Once example mentioned by Stilwell is Dorothy singing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” in \textit{The Wizard of Oz}.\textsuperscript{14} It seems perfectly reasonable that she is singing along with an orchestra, even though it is assumed that she cannot hear the orchestra. This interaction is not strictly diegetic, and instead seems more satisfying when considered \textit{metadiegetic}, meaning that the music exists somewhere between diegetic and nondiegetic.

Dorothy’s singing is like a musical narration, where “her voice meets the nondiegetic orchestra in a metadiegetic space of longing for a happy place far away.”\textsuperscript{15} The “Carillon” melody is also like a musical narrator, helping to interpret the dramatic implications of the scene. This metadiegetic moment in the soundtrack can provide an illustration that verbal articulation never could thanks to music’s power of emotional subjectivity. As Fawell points out, “the division between sound in the film and the musical score soundtrack is bridged by these internal segues. They tend to make the soundtrack less superimposed, more organic, something that breathes with the force of the film.”\textsuperscript{16}

Not long after the strings and guitar breach the boundary between diegesis and nondiegesis, an organ abruptly enters playing the movie’s main theme. This in turn is which is

\textsuperscript{14} Stilwell, 196–197.
\textsuperscript{15} Stilwell, 197.
\textsuperscript{16} Fawell, 191.
taken over by a trumpet, giving the theme a deguello-like tone. This is where the key area of Example 3.6 becomes an important musical element. In order for the blending of the main theme and the pocket watch melody to work, they would need to be in the same tonality. We know Morricone was sensitive to harmonic simplicity, so it makes sense for both the external/diegetic pocket watch and the internal/nondiegetic main theme to retain the D minor tonality. This is also an obvious connection between these themes and the title theme (Example 3.7).

Example 3.6: “La Resa Dei Conti” (The Big Gundown), Few Dollars More, 00:27:25. [SM]

Another salient connection between the two themes is the double-neighbor figure that occurs in m. 6 of Example 3.6 and throughout the continuation section of Example 3.7. Although the figure is transposed between the two, the link formed between the Title and “La Resa Dei Conti” is quite noticeable. As a result this theme is also generated from the Title, creating unity by referencing previous musical material.
Once the melody of “La Resa Dei Conti” takes its course, the pocket watch returns and the music becomes diegetic. As the melody comes to a halt, Indio fires and kills his former captor. Not long after the end of this sequence we see a flashback to the fateful night of his attack on Mortimer’s sister as well as his acquisition of the watch. The so-called “B-story” conflict is then established; Indio is not only a madman worth a lot of money, but is also the villain that caused the death of someone close to Mortimer. The music in this sequence, then, emphasizes the main dramatic conflicts of the film. This conflict, in turn, drives the narrative towards its eventual resolution; after all, “without a goal, there can be no content.” At the end of the film, Mortimer finally gets his showdown with Indio, and the pocket watch again combines with “La Resa Dei Conti.” This scene features similar visual editing and soundtrack mixing as Indio’s showdown with his captor. The result is music that creates continuity between the two scenes in both presentation and formal unity. In the end Mortimer comes out victorious, avenging his sister and ridding the world of the maniacal murderer. As he rides off into the sunset and Manco collects the gang as bounty, the Title theme returns to close out the narrative.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

For the third installation of the Dollars trilogy, Leone developed a tale centering equally on three characters. This continued the triangle constellation established in its predecessors, using a set of similar actors to take each point of the triad. The Man with No Name is back, continuing his laconic style of marksmanship and even donning the same poncho in the final episodes of the film. Lee Van Cleef returns as Angel Eyes, a calculating manipulator wearing a suit and smoking a pipe. Eli Wallach supplants Volontè as the Mexican bandit, taking the role of a flamboyant

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thief and quick-drawing gunman. Each man has an essential role in the drama, and each man is represented by his own musical timbre (see Example 3.8).

Example 3.8: Main motive, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*.

As each big player is introduced they are given a still frame with the phrase “the ugly” (Tuco), “the bad” (Angel Eyes), and “the good” (the Man with No Name, referred to as “Blondie” by Tuco). There is an obvious lack of distinct features to make one of the characters any more bad or good than the others, with the exception of Angel Eyes who was “a strict heavy, just a mean son of a bitch – nasty, because he could smile doing it.”18 Because each man is considered a protagonist in the grand scheme of the narrative, a viewer would be hard-pressed to tell who was who without Leone’s helpful captions (see Fig. 3.8).

Figure 3.8: Stills showing “the ugly,” “the bad,” and “the good,” *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 00:05:27/00:17:09/00:29:07.

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18 Lee Van Cleef in an interview with Alex Cox in 1978. Printed in Frayling, *Once Upon a Time in Italy*, 108.
As discussed in Chapter II, each character has his own take on the Title’s main motive. Tuco’s version is described as a coyote yell, while the ultra-low bass ocarina characterizes the bad Angel Eyes, and the recorder represents Blondie. As the narrative unfolds, the cue follows each character towards their goal: $200,000 in gold coin buried at Sad Hill Cemetery. The first episode involving two of the main characters occurs within the first half hour of the film. Tuco has been hunted down by three bandits, and is “rescued” by Blondie. As Tuco looks up to see the face of his savior, his coyote-yell gesture sounds. At this point neither he nor the audience knows what Blondie’s motive is, so the gesture stays in Tuco’s ballpark. Unbeknownst to Tuco, Blondie is about to turn him in for his $2,000 reward. We find out, though, that Blondie is running a scam; after collecting the bounty he saves Tuco from hanging by shooting off the rope. When his presence is revealed, and we realize that he will save Tuco, Blondie’s version of the motive sounds. The blonde-haired savior now has control of the narrative. The gesture’s role in this episode is one of reassurance; the instrumentation and placing of cues within the scenes helps the audience figure out the scam as it unfolds.

After the second attempt of their scam, Blondie realizes that Tuco is no longer gaining interest (“It’s getting tougher … the way I figure, there’s really not too much future with a sawed-off runt like you. ‘Cause I don’t think you’ll ever be worth more than three-thousand dollars.”). Blondie breaks up the partnership and leaves Tuco to walk through the desert while he goes off to find another wanted partner. Before he rides off, his still (Figure 3.8, bottom) is shown on screen; he may not be all that good, but he seems so when compared to the other two. Once the action reconvenes, Blondie rides off into the distance and the title theme begins playing. The return of the full title gives the audience a hint that their partnership is not over yet,
providing a formal demarcation as well as establishing music that would come back in a referential role further down the line.

The former partners meet again when Tuco and his three compadres find Blondie at the hotel. Tuco sends the three to enter Blondie’s room through the front door, except Blondie hears one of their spurs during a stop in troop movement outside. As soon as they swing open the door he wipes them out with ease. As he returns his gun to its holster his recorder motive sounds, signaling success. However, as soon as his gun hits his holster Tuco’s coyote sound returns, this time taken from the “ua-ua” quarter note motion of the Title melody (motive b from Example 2.9). The two have been reunited (Figure 3.9), much like the dual motives of the title theme’s basic idea. However, Blondie escapes Tuco thanks to a canon ball hitting the hotel, and as Tuco realizes this Blondie’s recorder sounds again. The motive combines with the visual of an empty noose to let us know that Blondie survived.

**Figure 3.9:** Blondie and Tuco reunited, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 00:47:52.

As Tuco hunts down Blondie, the Title music returns. In this instance, however, the Title theme is in tact, and acts as the support of a montage sequence following the chase. Here, the Title theme underscores the traveling sequence, acting as a bridge between Blondie’s escape and eventual recapture. Here the music takes on two important roles by referencing past narrative events and unifying the montage of Tuco’s chase with the scenes before and after his search. Eventually Tuco forces Blondie through the desert, and just before blowing Blondie’s brains out on the sand a carriage of dead soldiers comes nearby. One of the soldiers is Bill Carson, who
imparts vital information regarding the location of $200,000 in gold to the protagonists. Tuco finds out the name of the cemetery where the gold is buried, and Blondie hears the name of the grave. When Carson dies, Tuco is left with no means too get the name except through Blondie. This tiny bit of information saves Blondie from further torture in the desert, and puts the cards back in his hand. As he passes out from exhaustion the Title enters to help interpret the scene, letting the audience know that Blondie is okay. His motive plays again once the two have arrived at the mission; Tuco tries to get him to share the name, but Blondie knows he has Tuco in his control if he keeps the secret. Once again, the Title music adds commentary to the scene, showing that Blondie is ever resourceful and will survive his strained partnership with Tuco. With his bit of information, Blondie runs the show for the rest of the film; each remaining entrance of the main motive belongs to him.

When he and Tuco finally arrive at Sad Hill, they find that Angel Eyes beat them to the punch. He tosses down a second shovel, expecting Blondie to help dig. As this happens Angel Eyes gets his own cue, generated from a variation of the “ua-ua” motive of the Title’s basic idea played in the low register of an electric organ. The alteration of the motive is emblematic of situation, providing a certain amount of interpretation of the event. Because he is holding a gun, he thinks he is in control. We soon realize this is not the case, as Blondie kicks open the grave and Arch Stanton’s skeleton is the only thing inside. By not playing Angel Eyes’s ocarina variation of the motive, the music hints that this is not the end. We soon see that they have to earn the money, and do so by a showdown in the dried-out lakebed in the center of the cemetery.

Throughout all of these scenes, direct quotations of the Title theme help link episodes spread out across the course of the film. Being labeled as “the good,” it is not a surprise that the majority of the cues belong to Blondie. After all, he is the one that rides off into the sunset at the
end of the film. In one last gesture of good faith, Leone provides a reminder of who was who (see Figure 3.10). As each still is shown the three protagonists have their motives sounded one last time, rounding out their stories and bringing the film to a close in a similar fashion to how it began. Along these lines Jeff Smith states,

> Of course, the larger irony pointed up by this devise is that the characters’ moral codes are virtually indistinguishable. Although the title of the film signifies them in terms of stark oppositions, the melodic identity of the leitmotivs suggest a fundamental similarity between them, and thus, a certain blurring of the lines between “the good,” “the bad,” and “the ugly.”

As Blondie rides off into the horizon the Title begins to play, framing the picture and drawing the trilogy to a close.

![Stills from The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly](image)

**Figure 3.10:** Stills reminding us of “the ugly,” “the bad,” and “the good,” *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 02:55:33/02:55:36/02:55:39.

As important as the motive is to the film, there are quite a few other themes that play an important dramatic function. There are actually four themes in total throughout *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*: the Title, “Il Tramanto” (The Sundown), “Il Forte” (The Strong), and “Il

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19 Smith, 149.
Deserto” (The Desert). The last three of the four listed all share characteristics with the Title theme, particularly in relation to tonal areas and instrumentation.

The first theme to sound after the Title is “Il Tramanto,” which enters as Angel Eyes rides up to the home of Stevens, a former Confederate soldier. Angel Eyes has been sent there by Baker, one of three soldiers who stumbled upon a cash box containing $200,000 in gold coins. A low-reverb Fender plays the theme in an almost chant-like manner. The theme stays in D minor/dorian, using the flat seventh to emphasize a natural minor mode. A single chromatic pitch is included, F#, which creates an unsettling resting point at the end of the first melodic unit (the first stanza of Example 3.9). The phrasing, while containing completely new melodic motion, functions in a similar fashion to the Title; each phrase begins with the exact same pitch content, with the exceptions of the second and fourth stanzas that are transposed to begin on F and C respectively. Morricone then uses this theme to generate secondary material, relying on the guitar sound and chant-like characteristics of theme to create a tune emblematic of Tuco’s brother, Padre Ramirez (see Example 3.10). Although the tune is not taken from the title, it is still generated from an important theme of the film. The result is a referential cueing that provides an aural unity new to the trilogy, relying specifically on instrumentation and timbre to unify the tunes rather than any specific narrative event.
Example 3.9: “Il Tramanto,” *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 00:06:17. [CL, EK]  

Example 3.10: “Padre Ramirez,” *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 01:24:49. [CL]  

Although the key has changed, the tone and character of the two songs are undoubtedly related. As the accidental partners leave the mission, “Padre Ramirez” plays one last time as Tuco tells Blondie about his brother. Almost immediately Tuco’s thoughts turn back to the gold, and the title then charges back in. The entrance of the Title at the point rounds out the sequence, bidding farewell to Padre Ramirez and reaffirming the goal of the gold.

“Il Forte” (Example 3.11) enters much later in the film as Angel Eyes happens upon a Confederate encampment. The soldiers are downtrodden, injured, and starving. As their melody sounds, a mood of anguish and majesty washes over the scene, complete with bugle calls and a soaring and beautiful countermelody sung by a wordless soprano voice. In contrast to the opening Title, “Il Forte” is in B♭ major/G minor, a key one flat removed from the previously
established key of D minor/dorian. Reading the melody as a pitch collection of B♭, we find that the theme is written in B♭ pentatonic, a transposition of the pentatonic collection present in the Title. There is also similar intervallic content, as the theme opens and closes with a perfect fourth motion. The countermelody of the soprano takes on an important dramatic role when “Il Forte” returns later in the film as Tuco and Blondie stumble across a carriage of Confederate soldiers. Operating as a feminizing motive, Morricone uses the soprano to characterize the gold coins that the protagonists will lust over. The soprano returns in “L’estasi Dell’oro” (The Ecstasy of Gold), near the end of the film, as Tuco frantically searches Sad Hill Cemetery for Arch Stanton’s grave.

Example 3.11: “Il Forte,” The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, 00:49:42. [CL]

In a similar fashion to “Il Tramanto,” Morricone uses “Il Forte” to generate secondary thematic material. Blondie and Tuco, dressed in Confederate uniforms, are intercepted by a troop of Union Army soldiers. They are immediately captured and taken to Batterville, a Union Army prison camp. As they march into the camp with the other prisoners of war, “Marcetta” (Short March, Example 3.12) enters, played only by a single harmonica that is joined by whistling at m. 17. The march is in D major, which is parallel to the D minor/dorian used in the Title and “Il Tramanto.” This tune is an embellishment of “Il Forte,” relying on similar phrase structure and melodic contour to link the two themes together. The music link is strengthened by the dramatic link created by the narrative; “Il Forte” and “Marcetta” are only used in scenes centering on the Civil War and its soldiers, either Confederate or Union. The fact that both sides of the war share
the same music is an interesting statement. To the protagonists, the Civil War is just a nuisance keeping them from the gold. There is no moral allegiance for them, nor does their background create any loyalty to one side or the other. “Marcetta,” in turn, leads to the sole instance of diegetic music within the film, “La Storia de un Soldato” (The Story of a Soldier, Example 3.13).

Example 3.12: “Marcetta,” The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, 01:31:05. [CL]

Example 3.13: “La Storia de un Soldato,” The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, 01:41:08. [CL]
The sentimental tone of the song provides a stark contrast to the action it supports. This interlude of diegetic musical material also challenges the audience’s grasp of the aural geography of the soundtrack. The audience realizes at this moment that the song is something interacting with the characters. However, when Angel Eyes found the Confederate encampment earlier in the film, the music was nondiegetic and functioned as an interpretive musical theme. Recognition of this contradiction in source happens as soon as Angel Eyes nods his head; this realization “unfurls backward,” and the audience must reevaluate the song and its origins. The somber mood of the song is easily attributed to the sorrow of the soldiers at the encampment, and it is safe to assume that the tune is meant to do just that. But when it comes directly out of the mouths and instruments of the soldiers it takes on an even stronger dramatic presence. Rather than using music to strengthen the audience’s perception of the film, this disorientation of origin makes the audience more susceptible to the effect the theme has along the way. The changes of source also force the audience to take heart to its occurrences, and strengthen the connections the theme has to both narrative events and the secondary material it helps generate.

As soldiers in the yard sing and play the tune, Angel Eyes and Wallace beat and torture Tuco. In this instance, the music again toys with audience perception, taking a tune associated with the soldiers and masking its meaning during the brutal beating. If music is meant to reduce the distance between the audience member and the screen, what does this mixture of “La Storia de un Soldato” and the Tuco’s torture represent? The combination of the two seemingly unrelated ideas is disorienting, yet the use of this theme during the torture sequence may be communicating something important that the image cannot. We know from Leone’s careful attention to the soundtrack of his films that using “La Storia de un Soldato” in this instance is not

20 Stilwell, 191.
mere coincidence. The brutal history of Andersonville Camp in Confederate Georgia is well
documented in historical literature and in motion pictures. As Leone explained,

What interested me was on the one hand to demystify the adjectives, on the other
to show the absurdity of war … The Civil War which the characters encounter, in my frame of reference, is useless, stupid: it does not involve a “good cause.” The key phrase of the film is the one where a character comments on the battle of the bridge: “I’ve never seen so many men wasted so badly.” I show a Northern concentration camp … but was thinking partly about the Nazi camps with their Jewish orchestras. […] The American Civil War is almost a taboo subject, because its reality is insane and incredible. But the true history of the United States was constructed on a violence which neither literature nor the cinema had ever properly shown. As for me, I always tend to defy the official version of events – no doubt because I grew up under Fascism. I had seen first hand how history can be manipulated.  

For Leone, and perhaps Morricone as well, the Union prison camp could be used to project their views of the Civil War and its atrocities. Batterville Camp was modeled after Andersonville, which is interestingly associated with the winning side, not the losing side. The combination of these elements—the disorientation created by the “fantastical gap” of diegetic and nondiegetic sound, the shameful behavior of both sides of the Civil War, and Leone’s desire to demystify the history of the War—was Leone’s attempt at a more realistic depiction of violent conflict and the lack of true heroes in The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.

The use of the theme clearly shows that there is no escape for the inmates; only the Union soldiers are safe. The location of the camp (in the film, seeing as Andersonville was in Georgia, not Texas) fit with the movement of Carson’s regiment, and the complete lack of moral code inside its walls was perfect for Angel Eyes’s method of gathering information. As soon as he gets the name of the cemetery from Tuco, Angel Eyes decides to become Blondie’s new partner. The original partnership is dissolved, and “the good” and “the ugly” are once again separated.

Musically, this song is related to “Marcetta” due to the shared tonal center of D major. The two

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21 Frayling, Something, 204.
22 Frayling, Something, 204–205.
themes also sound similar because of the common pitch content. The highest pitch of mm. 1–4 of Example 3.12 is A, while the same is true for mm. 1–4 of Example 3.13. The statement at m. 9 of Example 3.12 begins on G, while G is the highest pitch of the second subphrase in Example 3.13. In a fashion consistent with that of the Title, “La Storia de un Soldato” begins each phrase with identical rhythmic figures, and nearly identical pitches. As a result, this secondary theme also relates to the Title, generating an important musical gesture from the material presented at the outset of the film.

The last of the four themes in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is “Il Deserto,” the theme that accompanies Blondie’s torturous journey though the desert at gunpoint (see Example 3.14). The theme is essentially an “orchestral fantasia developed out of a chromatically ascending and descending melodic figure and two repeated motives”\(^\text{23}\) that combine into an undulating, highly unstable moment within the film’s score. “Il Deserto” is a clear example of connotative cueing, as the music takes on a dramatic function of illustrating and interpreting the visual action. Blondie’s forced journey seems never ending, and the haunting English horn melody (Example 3.14a) plays as he and the audience wonder if he can survive the desert. The undulating ostinato figures (Example 3.14b–c) create a sense of ambiguity, while the avoidance leading tone (G\(^\#\)) in the horn melody diverts any tonal stability. We are left, then, with a musical uncertainty that rivals Blondie’s uncertain fate.

\(^{23}\) Smith, 139.
Example 3.14a: “Il Deserto” English horn solo, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 00:59:06. [CL]


Example 3.14c: “Il Deserto” Ostinato/Hemiola, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, 01:01:04. [CL]

The relationship between the Title and “Il Deserto” is nearly as ambiguous as the later theme itself; the two are in completely different keys (even if “Il Deserto” has only an implied key of A major/minor), have different time signatures, and are based upon contrasting musical gestures. In a more conceptual matter of thinking, the two are related *because* of their contrast. The tonal area of A acts as the dominant to D, creating a large section of music that generates a definitive harmonic interruption. This interruption triggers a desire for the return of the over-arching D tonality. The cue that follows “Il Deserto” is “La Carrozza Dei Fantasmi” (The Carriage of the Spirits), which is nearly identical to “Il Forte.” While this does not return us to D for a resolution, it does drive the harmony back *towards* D. Much like the Title, which moves
from G down to D melodically, the tonal areas of these cues must move through G before finally returning to D when the Title makes its return. This return happens as Blondie tells Tuco that he knows the name on the grave. The Title, along with its tonal area of D, can return now that Blondie is certain to survive his partnership with Tuco.

A Partnership Without Tricks

For the three Dollars films, music and image combine to create an overarching concept of form. As the narrative follows characters through differing locations and actions, the music helps characterize, identify, and unify important dramatic events, all the while defining whose cause it was singling out. In Fistful, the derivation of material was relatively simplistic, as the film centered on one protagonist in one location. With two protagonists, For a Few Dollars More relied on more derivations of the title theme to help underscore the drama, and took advantage of the “fantastical gap” between diegetic and nondiegetic musical space to characterize the multifaceted relationship of the main players. The Good, the Bad and the Ugly had the most complex web of characters and interactions, which led to the need for a bigger score and more themes to differentiate locations and actions. By generating the remaining score from the opening material, Morricone created distinct themes that doubled as underscoring to the long-range implications of the narrative.

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CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

He was an all-movie man ... He slept it, ate it. He was tense, but he had some kind of magical touch. The director is a kind of conductor with his orchestra. He has hired the musicians and he’s the one who has the flavor and control of what you’re doing. As an instrumentalist, I enjoyed having him wave the baton.¹

After the Dollars trilogy, Leone and Morricone continued to collaborate on Western film scores. Their next collaboration, C’era una volta il West (Once Upon a Time in the West, 1968), would have all of its musical themes composed and recorded before any filming took place. Leone actually shot the film with the music playing on set, using it to guide the actions and expressions of the actors. He also carefully placed obvious visual citations of the Westerns that inspired him, including High Noon, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, Two Rode Together, The Fastest Gun Alive, Night Passage, Run of the Arrow, and countless other classics.² His methodology was effective because of his love of cinema and his passion for sound. The effectiveness of narrative was due in large part to the dramatizing affect of musical positioning, and Once Upon a Time in the West was the culmination of his aural insights. Naturally, this cultivated sensitivity to sound was due in large part to the Dollars trilogy. The articulation of form and thought in these films would not have been possible without the Dollars trilogy films; as Morricone said himself, “A Fistful of Dollars was the starting point.”³

The special attention paid to the sound of Leone’s films is a hallmark of his directorial style. This is not to say, however, that he was the only director who paid careful attention to the aural mix of his films. Italian films, at least through the 1970s, where filmed in complete silence with the sound dubbed in during post-production. This approach to sound engineering was incredibly taxing on the director, sound team, and actors. As Eli Wallach recounts,

¹ Interview with Eli Wallach, printed in Frayling, Once Upon a Time in Italy, 117.
² Christopher Frayling provides an extensive list of these citations in Once Upon a Time in Italy, 59–63.
³ Frayling, Once Upon a Time in Italy, 96.
Sergio had shot the film silent, which is how they do an Italian production. So every single line had to be dubbed. You spoke the language you knew. The man who plays my brother spoke not a word of English, not a word. It was a very difficult thing to recapture the outdoors, the shootings, the battle, the desert — in the dubbing room. Sergio stood beside me for seven straight days. He checked each line, even though he spoke no English. I’d say to him, “But I’m on a horse, I’m in the desert!” “Don’t worry, just do it. Just say the line the way you think you would say it.” So I’m standing in the studio in New York pretending to be on a horse in the desert.4

Even without knowing English, Sergio wanted to have a hand in every aspect of the sound mix. His attention to detail became his signature, and led to his Eastwood-fronted spaghetti Westerns having an innovative and characteristic sound. As Clint Eastwood comments,

I think Sergio’s films changed the style, the approach to westerns. They “operacized” them, if there is such a word. They made the violence and the shooting aspect a littler larger than life, and they had great music and new types of scores. […] A film has to have a sound of its own, and the Italians – who don’t record sound while they’re shooting – are very conscious of this in the post-production department. Sergio Leone felt that sound was very important, about 40 per cent of the film … Leone will get a very operatic score, a lot of trumpets, and then all of a sudden, “Ka-pow!” He’ll shut if off and let the horses snort and all that sort of thing. It’s very effective.5

Each sound was meant to be organic, blurring the lines between superimposed tracks and something that “breathes with the force of the film.”6 The world of the actors was strengthened by interior sound, often characterized by music, while the exterior world was supported by sounds within the film—horses, grunts, gunfire, and the hot desert wind. Music has been present in cinema from the very beginning, often being presented as a commodity. This approach “has masked the aesthetic dimension of (mainly) Hollywood composers’ work and, implicitly, has prevented both proper understanding and due placement in the musical canon.”7 Music is reduced to a subordinate role to the image, and in the case of classical narrative, is subordinate to

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4 Frayling, *Once Upon a Time*, 117.
5 Frayling, *Something*, 150.
6 Fawell, 191.
the narrative as well. This viewpoint can do a large disservice towards much of film’s illustrious history, particularly the films discussed in this essay.

The parallel role of music and image in the Dollars trilogy presents a fantastic study in the stylistic methodology of Sergio Leone. Watching the films with a pair of headphones on makes the experience even more intriguing; with the left and right channels of the stereo clearly divided, someone listening/viewing the film can hear where sounds shift channels. Any time the camera’s perspective changes, the sound moves in a similar fashion. If two men are talking—one on the right, one on the left—a cut to the man on the left sends the dialog into the right channel, and vice versa. By doing this, Leone creates a sense of a direct psychological connection between the audience and the interior realm of the film. The physical shifts of sound mimic the shifts that would happen if the audience member were in the world created on screen, as if the viewer were actually there.

The placement of sound in the audio mix was carefully monitored by Leone. He had a strong sense of the interior world of the actors, and understood that music could connect with that world and magnify it. Each of his Westerns shows this sense of interiority, as they use music to “lead characters to reflection and memories.”8 Leone’s placement of Morricone’s music throughout the film also takes on the role of a narrative magnifying lens, taking a moment of realization and introspection and bringing it to a level that an audience member easily grasp. He also utilizes the associations the music has with characters and plot ideas, helping observers follow the grand scheme of each film as it is altered and distorted by the sometimes sporadic episodes of action.

Because the action and characters are so carefully introduced and exposed over time, it is no wonder that Leone and Morricone would utilize music in a uniting fashion. By generating

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8 Fawell, 173.
secondary musical themes from the introductory title music, each cue and theme takes part in a larger scheme of dramatic unification. The music takes our hand and guides us through the film, adding assurance in moments of uncertainty and ambiguity, heightening tension and the expectation of resolution, and ultimately driving the entire narrative towards a climactic moment of closure and release. For Leone, the music could do more than just support his narrative; it could be equivalent to the image. In the Dollars trilogy, music sits in a privileged spot.

The aim of this document is to show that musical structures, both local and long-term, can reconcile theoretical concepts of musical and dramatic form. The careful placement of musical cues and themes create a lifeline for the audience, placing buoys in the sea of a convoluted plot for the audience to latch on to as the drama unfolds. Morricone’s skillful generation of themes draw their fundamental characteristics from a central idea—the Title theme—and connect seemingly disparate dramatic episodes through a coherent musical plot. Leone’s careful attention to sound mixing allows these musical ideas to be clearly heard by the listener/viewer and to contribute to overarching dramatic development of sound.

If a musical theme, gesture, or short cue was in the sound mix of the film, Leone placed it there for an express purpose. He took advantage of the fantastic compositions penned by Ennio Morricone to paint his fantasy world of the American West, repeating important gestures and playing on their associations to pop music, folk songs, or even the Old West itself. For each of the Dollars trilogy films Leone took advantage of music’s socializing power, preparing his audience for a stark, cynical, and mythological presentation of his American West.

Leone’s placement of cues throughout each film provides more than just an object for analytical study. His methodology was instrumental in the shaping of contemporary cinema, influencing an entire generation of European and American filmmakers. However, addressing
the films and their influence without paying due attention to their musical structure does a great disservice to Leone’s attention to detail and intuitive understanding of the power of music. On the flipside, discussing the Dollars trilogy soundtracks without addressing the role they play in structuring the narrative undoes the majesty of Leone’s grand visions. Morricone’s scoring is a beautifully polished window into the workings of each film’s dramatic world. The music can suggest internal processes of a character as a substitute for dialog, letting an audience member experience the drama by internalizing it and creating a personal, psychological connection. Music becomes its own character, showing them emotions that a proud face will not, and expressing emotions that dialog cannot. As Fawell states, “In Leone’s films, when the music dies the dream ends, and we are shocked back into a much less gorgeous, much more brutal world of exterior time.”

Recommendations for Further Study

Ennio Morricone’s scoring for the Dollars trilogy offers a fantastic example of musical economy. Prendergast’s concept of the developmental score is entirely befitting of the treatment of Morricone’s themes and cues, yet lacks the theoretical depth to address what types of formal musical expectations, besides merely borrowing musical gestures, can be attributed to this style of film composition. This document addressed the local-forms from a Caplinian perspective, and then followed the generic features used to generate the remainder of the score. For the purposes of this essay, the themes generated from the title music were addressed for their local, individual qualities in relation to the images and characters they supported. The next step in this type of film music analysis—for these films and many others—is to treat the entire soundtrack as a basic unit of analysis, which would “allow us to think about the musicality of the soundtrack as a

9 Fawell, 188.
whole, that is, the way it is structured as a sonic entity.”¹⁰ This kind of analysis would ideally go beyond the salient, surface-level connections created by shared musical gestures and consider the entire soundtrack (e.g., dialog, effects) as components of an overarching dramatic/musical hybrid form.

One possible future direction for this kind of analysis would be discussing the soundtrack in relation to a pre-existing musical-formal methodology. For the developmental score an analytical system built upon the sonata-allegro and rondo forms could provide an interesting backdrop for a total-score analysis. As Hepokoski and Darcy establish in Elements of Sonata Theory, a typical sonata form contains different zones or action-spaces that are placed within the architecture of a movement of music. A composer is faced with “the task of creating an engaging musical pathway through pre-established, generically obligatory stations,”¹¹ maintaining a dialog throughout a work against a background of set norms. The whole system of developing a sonata movement is highly complex, with each large-scale unit (exposition, development, and recapitulation) having its own interior structure (themes, episodes, transitions, etc.). At any point there can be two or more default level options in a work, allowing for highly individualistic expression while still following—in some sense—the norms of the genre.

The choices made by a composer in a sonata or any of its successive zones take part in an overarching dialog fit into a backdrop of “flexible action-options, devised to facilitate the dialogue.”¹² Individual action-zones, or episodes, are essential to the rotational aspect of the sonata movement as a whole, meaning that a sonata has a tendency to cycle repeatedly through large blocks of thematically differentiated material. The entire guiding force of the sonata is the

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¹⁰ “Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music,” 87.
¹¹ Hepokoski and Darcy, 9.
¹² Hepokoski and Darcy, 11.
expressive and dramatic trajectory “toward generically obligatory cadences.” Cadences create goals on two levels (locally and long-term), with the content coming afterwards. After all, “without a goal, there can be no content.”

Because Hepokoski and Darcy’s study is meant to discuss a particular genre of absolute musical works, the analytical approach of *Elements* cannot fully address the implied musical structures of a film soundtrack. However, the approach laid out by Hepokoski and Darcy provides important conceptual issues that hold true for the analysis of any large-scale structure. As an analytical exercise, applying the authors’ views of hermeneutic considerations and generic structure is very useful for the cinematic soundtrack. It is important to remember that the kinds of expectations set forth in a sonata movement cannot directly apply to film music because a film’s soundtrack does not have any formal musical-generic expectations. However, the dialog implied by the normative procedures in *Elements* works well within the scope of Prendergast’s developmental score. Form-as-dialog helps us understand that procedures in a musical work can be changed and deformed over time for expressive purposes.

The changes of habitual characteristics in film music also relates well to the authors’ views on hermeneutic interpretation. Listeners have certain pre-conceived notions of what to expect in a musical work, especially in the case of sonata movements from the late-eighteenth century. While formally there cannot be expectations for a film’s soundtrack, there are functional expectations for a film. Music is generally accepted as a secondary function in a film, meant to underscore the action and play a role as an “unheard melody.” However, there is much meaning to be found if the music stops to emphasize the delivery of a line of dialog, or if speech or effects

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13 Hepokoski and Darcy, 13.
14 Hepokoski and Darcy, 13.
act in a symbolic manner (that is, musical).\textsuperscript{15} The music can, and should, be appreciated as an element of the soundtrack, with the silence, dialog, and effects all being taken into consideration. Also important to a hermeneutic approach to film music analysis is considering the appropriation of musical styles, the historical patterns of music in theater and in relation to film, the psychology and cognition of the audience, and the nature of rhythm and “temporality” in the sound mix of a film.\textsuperscript{16} Attention to these elements in an analysis would be meaningful to films of all kinds, and could address concepts that are approachable by all film enthusiasts, musician and non-musician alike.

\textsuperscript{15} “Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music,” 87.
\textsuperscript{16} These and other important analytical issues are mentioned in Neumeyer, 8–9.
REFERENCES

Printed Sources

“Panel Discussion on Film Sound/Film Music: Jim Buhler, Anahid Kassabian, David Neumeyer, and Robynn Stilwell.” The Velvet Light Trap 51 (Spring 2003): 73–91.


Film Sources

Leone, Sergio. *A Fistful of Dollars*. Rome: Jolly Film; Madrid: Ocean Film; Munich/Monaco: Constantin Film, 1964.


APPENDIX A. THE WESTERNS OF SERGIO LEONE AND ENNIO MORRICONE

*Per un Pugno di Dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)

**Directed by:**
Bob Robertson (a.k.a. Sergio Leone)

**Selected Cast:**
Clint Eastwood – The Stranger
Johnny Wells (a.k.a. Gian Maria Volontè) – Ramón Rojo
Sieghardt Rupp – Esteban Rojo
Antonio Prieto – Don Miguel Rojo
Marianne Koch – Marisol
Wolfgang Lukschy – John Baxter
Margherita Lozano – Consuela Baxter
Richard Stuyvesant (a.k.a. Mario Brega) – Chico
Joe Edger (a.k.a. Josef Egger) – Piripero, the undertaker
José Calvo – Silvanito

**Script:** (uncredited)
Duccio Tessari, Victor Catena, Sergio Leone, Fernando Di Leo; from the screenplay *Yojimbo* by Akira Kurosawa

**Story:** (uncredited)
Sergio Leone (after Kurosawa)

**Art Director, Set Decorator, and Costumes:**
Charles Simons (a.k.a. Carlo Simi)

**Photography:**
Jack Dalmas (a.k.a. Massimo Dallamano), assisted by Federico Larraya

**Process and Color:**
Techniscope and Technicolor

**Sound:**
Edy Simson

**Editor:**
Bob Quintale (a.k.a. Roberto Cinquini)

**Titles:**
Luigi Lardani

**Music:**
Dan Savio/Leo Nichols (a.k.a. Ennio Morricone)

**Guitar, Whistle, and Choral Arrangement:**
Allessandro Allesandroni

**Choir:**
Il Cantori Moderni di Alessandroni; soprano, Edda Dell’Orso

**Music Publishers:**
RCA Italiana

**Producers:**
Harry Columbo (a.k.a. Arrigo Colombo), George Papi (a.k.a. Giorgio Papi)

**Production Companies:**
Jolly Film (Rome), Ocean Film (Madrid), Constantin Film (Munich/Monaco)

**Distributed in USA by:**
United Artists (1967)
**Per Qualche Dollaro in Più/For a Few Dollars More (1965)**

**Directed by:**
Sergio Leone

**Selected Cast:**
Clint Eastwood – Manco  
Lee Van Cleef – Colonel Douglas Mortimer  
Gian Maria Volontè – El Indio  
Luigi Pistilli – Groggy  
Klaus Kinski – Wild, the hunchback  
Josef Egger – the old prophet  
Mario Brega – Niño  
Mara Krup – hotelier’s wife  
Kurt Zipps – hotelier  
Panos Papadopoulos – Sancho Perez  
Aldo Sanbrell – Cuchillo

**Script:**
Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone (and  
Sergio Donati, uncredited)

**Story:**
Sergio Leone, Fulvio Morsella

**Art Director, Set Decorator, and Costumes:**
Carlo Simi

**Director of Photography:**
Massimo Dallamano

**Process and Color:**
Techniscope and Technicolor

**Sound:**
Oscar De Arcangelis, Guido Ortenzi

**Editors:**
Eugenio Alabiso, Giorgio Serralonga

**Titles:**
Luigi Lardani

**Music:**
Ennio Morricone, conducted by Bruno Nicolai

**Whistle and Choral Arrangement:**
Allessandro Alessandrini

**Choir:**
Il Cantori Moderni di Alessandrini

**Guitar:**
Bruno D’Amario Battisti

**Recorded at:**
RCA Italiana studios

**Producer:**
Alberto Grimaldi

**Production Companies:**
PEA (Produzioni Europee Associate, Rome), Arturo Gonzales (Madrid), Constantin Film (Munich/Monaco)

**Distributed in USA by:**
United Artists (1967)
Il Buono, il Bruto, il Cattivo/The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966)

Directed by:
Sergio Leone

Selected Cast:
Clint Eastwood – Blondie
Eli Wallach – Tuco Ramirez
Lee Van Cleef – Angel Eyes
Aldo Giuffrè – Captain Clinton
Luigi Pistilli – Padré Pablo Ramirez
Rada Rassimov – Maria
Antonio Casale – Jackson, a.k.a. Bill Carson
Antonio Casas – Stevens
Livio Lorenzon – Baker
Mario Brega – Corporal Wallace
Enzo Petito – Shopkeeper robbed by Tuco
John Bartha – sheriff
Al Mulock – one-armed bounty hunter

Script:
Age (a.k.a. Agenore Incorcci), (Furio) Scarpelli, Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone (and Sergio Donati, uncredited)

Story:
Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Leone

Art Director, Set Decorator, and Costumes:
Carlo Simi

Director of Photography:
Tonino Delli Colli

Process and Color:
Techniscope and Technicolor

Sound:
Elio Pacella, Vittorio De Sisti

Editors:
Nino Baragli, Eugenio Alabiso

Titles:
Luigi Lardani

Music:
Ennio Morricone, conducted by Bruno Nicolai

Lyrics:
Tommie Connor

Orchestra:
Orchestra Cinefonico Italiana

Solo Performers:
Bruno D’Amario Battisti (guitar), E. Wolf Ferrari, I. Cammarota, F. Catania, Michele Lacerenza (trumpet), N. Samale, Franco De Gemini (harmonica), F. Traverso

Choir:
I Cantori Moderni di Alessandroni

Whistle:
Alessandro Alessandroni

Vocals:
Alessandro Alessandroni, E. Gioieni, F. Cosacchi, G. Spagnolo, Edda Dell’Orso

Music Publishers:
Eureka Edizioni Musicali

Producers:
Alberto Grimaldi

Production Companies:
PEA (Produzioni Europee Associate, Rome)

Distributed in USA by:
United Artists (1968)
C'era una Volta il West/Once Upon a Time in the West (1968)

**Directed by:**
Sergio Leone

**Selected Cast:**
Claudia Cardinale – Jill McBain
Henry Fonda – Frank
Jason Robards – Manuel “Cheyenne” Gutierrez
Charles Bronson – Harmonica Gutierrez
Gabriele Ferzetti – Mr. Morton
Paolo Stoppa – Sam
Woody Strode – Stony
Jack Elam – Snaky
Marco Zuanelli – Wobbles
Frank Wolff – Brett McBain
Lionel Stander – trading post owner and bartender

**Script:**
Sergio Donati, Sergio Leone

**Story:**
Dario Argento, Bernardo Bertolucci, Sergio Leone

**Art Director, Set Decorator, and Costumes:**
Carlo Simi

**Director of Photography:**
Tonino Delli Colli

**Process and Color:**
Techniscope and Technicolor

**Sound:**
Claudio Maielli, Elio Pacella, Fausto Ancillai

**Editor:**
Nino Baragli

**Music:**
Ennio Morricone, conducted by Ennio Morricone

**Music Edited and Recorded:**
RCA Italiana, S.p.A.

**Harmonica:**
Franco De Gemini

**Vocals:**
Edda Dell’Orso

**Whistle:**
Alessandro Alessandroni

**Vocals:**
Edda Dell’Orso

**Executive Producer:**
Fulvio Morsella

**Producer:**
Bino Cicogna

**Production Companies:**
Rafran, San Marco

**Distributed in USA by:**
Paramount (1968)
Giù La Testa/Duck, You Sucker (1971)
A Fistful of Dynamite

Directed by:
Sergio Leone

Selected Cast:
Rod Steiger – Juan Miranda
James Coburn – Seán Mallory
Romolo Valli – Dr. Villega
Antonio Domingo – Col. Günther
Reza/Gutiérrez
David Warbeck – Seán’s fried Nolan (in flashback)
Maria Monti – Adelita, woman on the coach
Rick Battaglia – Santerna
Franco Graziosi – Don Jaime, the governor

Script:
Luciano Vincenzoni, Sergio Donati, Sergio Leone

Story:
Sergio Leone, Sergio Donati

Art Director:
Andrea Crisanti

Set Decorator:
Dario Micheli

Costumes:
Franco Carretti, Tirelli, Pompei, Nathan, Western Costume

Director of Photography:
Guiseppe Ruzzolini

Process and Color:
Techniscope and Technicolor

Sound Editor:
Michael Billingsley

Editor:
Nino Baragli

Music:
Ennio Morricone, conducted Ennio Morricone

Orchestra:
Unione Mscisti di Roma Symphony Orchestra

Music Publisher:
Bizio — Sam (Milan)

Producer:
Fulvio Morsella

Production Companies:
Rafran Cinematografica, San Marco Films, Miura, Euro International Films

Distributed in USA by:
United Artists (1971)
Il Mio Nome è Nessuno/My Name is Nobody (1968)

Directed by:
Tonino Valerii

Some Sequences Directed by:
Sergio Leone

Selected Cast:
Henry Fonda – Jack Beauregard
Terence Hill – Nobody
Jean Martin – Sullivan
Leo Gordon – Red
Neil Summers – Squirrel
R.G. Armstrong – Honest John
Steve Kanaly – first false barber
Geoffrey Lewis – Wild Bunch leader
Piero Lulli – sheriff
Mario Brega – Pedro
Marc Mazzacurati – Don John

Script:
Ernesto Gastaldi

Story:
Fulvio Morsella, Ernesto Gastaldi, from an idea by Sergio Leone

Art Director:
Gianni Polidori

Costumes:
Vera Marzot

Director of Photography:
Giuseppe Ruzzolini (Italy, Spain), Armando Nannuzzi (USA)

Process and Color:
Technicolor and Panavision

Sound:
Fernando Pescetelli

Editor:
Nino Baragli

Music:
Ennio Morricone, conducted by Ennio Morricone

Music Publishing:
Nazionalmusic

Guitar Solos:
Bruno Battisti D’Amario

Executive Producer:
Fulvio Morsella

Producer:
Claudio Mancini

Production Companies:
Rafran Cinematografica S.p.A. (Rome), Les Films Jacques Leitienne s.r.l. (Paris), La Société Imp. Ex. Ci. (Nice), La Société Alcinter s.r.l. (Paris), Rialto Film Preben Philipsen GMB & Co. KG. (Berlin)

Distributed in USA by:
Universal (1973)
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