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FILM SCORING IN CONTEXT: SCENES FROM *PINCH POINT*

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Introduction

In the early Summer of 2021 I was invited by Ethan Nix, a graduate of OSU School of Film, to assist with his most recent feature, tentatively titled *Pinch Point*. Originally, I had volunteered my services to be a part of the production of the film, mixing and recording sound on set. Because of my interests, it became clear that I could also provide the musical scoring for the film. The interdisciplinary nature of film, music, and visual arts drew me to the task – and further it seemed like an appropriate opportunity to continue this work as part of my academic studies, culminating in this thesis project.

I have prepared for analysis five scenes from Nix's *Pinch Point* that I have scored. I will investigate in detail how each decision was made, analyze the creative and technical processes at play, and make careful examination of the choices that are present to a film score composer. Accompanying each analysis there is an embedded video. Musical description is certainly viable, but the problem of ambiguity in terminology has motivated me to include these excerpts as a way of ensuring the reader can access and experience the materials for the sake of clarity. In addition, it is necessary that these analyses be accessible to a reader with limited knowledge in film music. Music being an abstract artform, my concern is always that the clarity of the process shows through, rather than subjecting the reader to terminology of the field they may not be familiar with. My goal here is illumination by clarity of process, not obfuscation, and I hope that through this combination of examples and background information, the reader will be able to gain some knowledge of the process of film music composing.

The creative process and production of films are in many ways a complete form of interdisciplinary art. It is both a departure from and a continuation of the long tradition of static visual arts. From painting to photography, and ultimately to film, it is easy to see film's role as a culmination of centuries of artforms. The dilemmas of film scoring today stem from histories grounded in 19th century Romantic and post-Romantic idioms, especially those exemplified by the German Romantic composer Richard Wagner (1813-83). While another thesis could be written about the political, cultural, and economic implications of this process, my intention here is rather to frame film and more specifically film music as an integral part of the history of art.

Film music has been a kind of a "lost child" in some ways – historically it has been dismissed by concert hall composers as commercial and consequently frivolous, as opposed to the serious music produced by "real composers." However, in the last fifty years it has since come into its own as a respected artform accompanying a growing understanding of its role. The functions of film music are many, from aiding in narrative functions, to constructing environments and ambiences, to its early utilitarian roles. This role has changed over time as both technologies and ideas about the production of films have shifted and given birth to new movements. Technologies often motivate change, and the role that film music occupies today has been shaped just as much by the technological innovations of engineers as it has by artistic trends.

Unlike prose, music analysis presents a problem for writers. It is easy to describe a scene to some degree of detail using concrete adjectives – words like "large" and "red" mean something to us that we all generally agree on. Music on

the other hand has very few such words, and those that do exist are typically specialized vocabulary for those who have training or musical backgrounds. Attempts to re-position our day-to-day descriptors for music are often at best ambiguous and at worst totally misleading. What does it mean to say a piece of music is warm, exciting, sexy, scary, or ecstatic? How does that translate into our aural realizations – and further, how much of this is cultural conditioning? These are questions I will return to later.

Debates about the function of film music have often been rather circular, rehashing issues that were seemingly settled decades before. Should film music serve to aid the film subconsciously, or should the music call attention to itself? Are films better suited to be scored by pre-existing music, designed simply to call up certain emotional connections? And at a more basic level, should films be scored at all?

Historical Background

Film and music being to some extent ephemera, it remains to this day difficult to accurately trace the initial examples of music in relation to film. Despite its relatively short history, much of early film history has been reduced to personal accounts and newspaper articles. In order to answer (albeit briefly) the huge question of "what is film music," I will trace its development from the earliest days of moving pictures in the late 1800s through to our present day. In doing so, I hope to illuminate how film makers, theorists, and the general public have viewed and approached film music, and consequently how this has informed my own practice.

Our experience of film today is much different than it was in the early 20th century. While film today is nearly always accompanied by recorded music, this wasn't always the case. The idea of the silent film almost carries a caricature of itself, but our experience of these films today is often accompanied by a recorded score that had been added later in a re-release. This is neither historically accurate, nor are silent films the genesis of film. In fact, the first moving pictures with accompaniment were part of an invention by Thomas Edison in the late 1800s, the kinetophone.[1]

Figure 1: The Kinetophone[2]

This sound was neither synchronized nor was it particularly loud – in order to experience the kinetophone, one had to look into a small viewer while putting in a stethoscope-like pair of headphones. This was not a film in the sense that we understand it today. Only with the introduction of the projected film strip by the Lumiere brothers in the late 1890s was the general public able to

[1] Kathryn Marie Kalinak, *Film Music : A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions: 231 (Oxford University Press, 2010). 31-33

[2] "Kinetophone," accessed April 16, 2022, https://the-public-domain-review.imgix.net/collections/kinetophone-actor-audition-ca-1913/Kinetophonebis1.jpg?

experience film on a larger scale. Projections allowed many people to view a film all at once, opening up the film to be something housed as a public gathering space.

The role of sound in these early projections is murky. Some historians claim that these early films were usually accompanied by some sort of music, especially in Europe. This would have been live accompaniment, either solo piano or a small quartet or quintet of instruments.[3] There are various accounts of people being disturbed by moving images accompanied by silence, as well as accounts of rowdy audiences and loud projectors. All of these points have been both used as justification for the birth of film music as well as having been accused of being revisionist history at various points. While we are fairly certain that there were often piano accompaniments at these early films, we do not know if this music was played during the film itself or just during intermission and other liminal times. Either way, it is clear that at films inception it was the visuals that drew people in, not the music or even potentially the accompanying lectures and sound effects. These early films were very different than our own: while we are familiar with the distinction between documentary and narrative films, these early films were little more than one or two minutes of pedestrian activity. It would not be until Edison's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903)[4] that mass audiences were introduced to film as a narrative medium.[5]

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[3] Kalinak, *Film Music*.
[4] Edwin S. Porter, *The Great Train Robbery*, Western/Action (Edison Manufacturing Company, 1903).
[5] James Eugene Wierzbicki, *Film Music : A History* (Routledge, 2009). 26

It was during this time that film also began to move from exhibition spaces to vaudeville theaters. These were spaces that already employed musicians, and we are fairly certain that films shown there were accompanied by some kind of music. It is unlikely that a vaudeville audience accustomed to the stimulation of a live band would be comfortable sitting through ten or twelve minutes of silent films without musical accompaniment.[6] Through this brief era, the film gained some of its own identity, and was quickly rehoused once again to its own space – the Nickelodeon.

Nickelodeons were small movie theaters, predecessors to the cinemas of today. They were inexpensive and affordable to most, and the lack of dialogue in silent films meant that language barriers were not an issue. Because of this, they quickly became mingling places of the lower classes and immigrants. During this time, audience demand for films rose sharply, and the quantity of films required to keep Nickelodeons running rose accordingly. Musical accompaniment was left up to the individual house, resulting in a stark difference in quality of music between houses with more money and those with less. As audiences became accustomed to hearing music, they began to demand higher quality music. This became a problem for Nickelodeons and film houses – because films were delivered with no real score, there was no guarantee that any one house would have an at all appropriate accompaniment.[7] The trope of the drunk film pianist reared its head in this moment, and whether it is based in fact or not, it helped justify the need to standardize the accompaniment of films. People would become

[6] Wierzbicki. 27
[7] Wierzbicki. 30-33

upset that pianists would play quick ditties during funeral scenes, or otherwise entirely inappropriate music. According to film historian/theorist Peter Larsen, the fact that people complained about this at all shows that people were in fact both paying attention to and attempting to co-ordinate film and music.[8]

Enter the cue sheet and compilation score (see fig. 2). Variously attributed to both the Edison company and film producer Max Winkler, the introduction of the cue sheet in 1910 provided a ground for a film accompaniment to stand on. Containing a list of scenes and suggestions for musical ideas – sometimes written out passages, other times merely stylistic guidelines – cue sheets began to somewhat standardize the musical experience of theatergoers.[9] It was during this time that two major shifts occurred. Films finally found their ultimate home, the theater, and changes in film technology allowed for longer feature films to be produced. This was a period of solidification of film music conventions too, although perhaps not entirely the same ones we are familiar with today. Film historian and theorist Kathryn Kalinack observes:

> From the sources that we do have, we can see that by the 1910s, in the United States and Western Europe film music had gravitated toward providing a few functions: identifying geographic location and time period; intensifying mood; delineating emotion; illustrating onscreen action; and fleshing out characterization. Accompanists came to rely on musical conventions (some might say clichés) to do so such as tremolo for suspense, pizzicato for sneakiness, and dissonance for villainy. In fact, mood music became so central to silent film accompaniment that it was often played on the set to motivate the actors during filming.[10]

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[8] Peter Larsen and John Irons, *Film Music* (Reaktion, 2007).
[9] It is here that many musical stereotypes began – Frederic Chopin's "Funeral March" (Piano Sonata No. 2) served as the basis for many somber scenes
[10] Kalinak, *Film Music*. 43

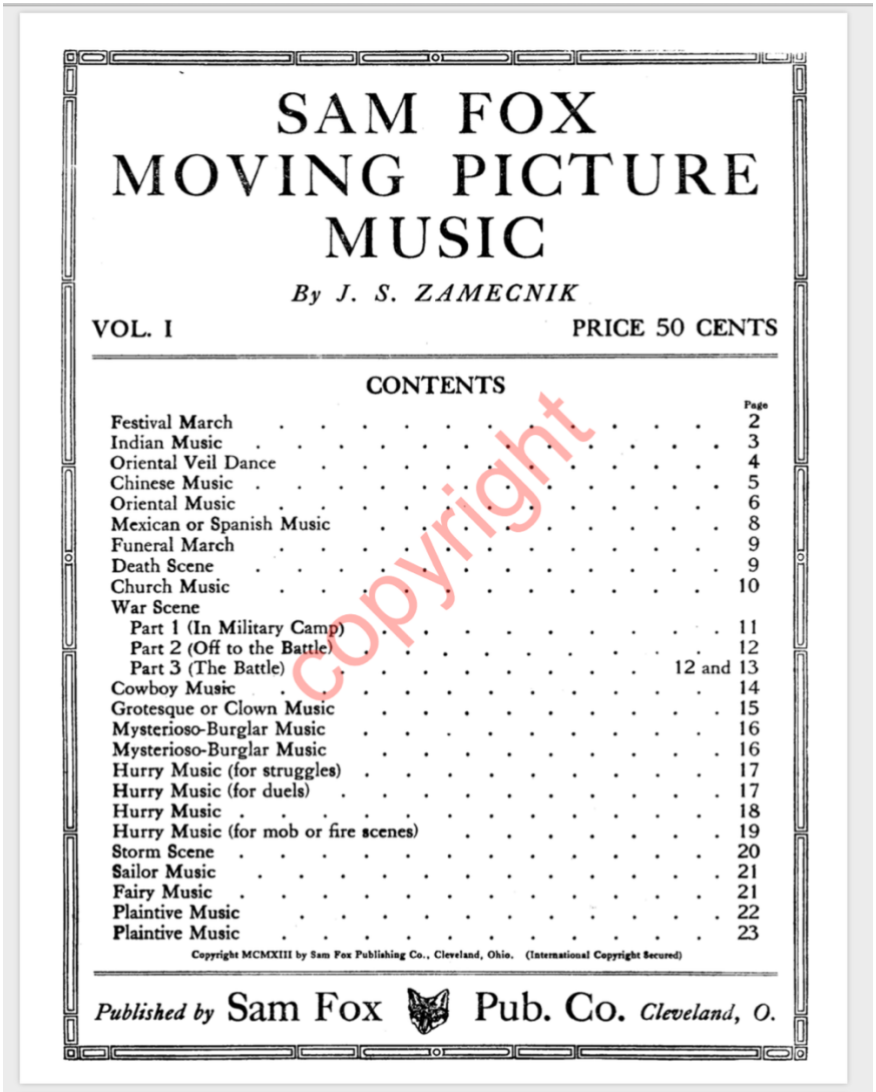

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Figure 2: Cue Sheet from Sam Fox Pub. Co.

To be clear, the process at the time was still highly individualized for each theater. Some larger theaters had sophisticated musical directors, often trained in Europe in classical forms. These directors would at times create entire orchestral scores for their theater's own orchestra, in essence composing a personalized score for each film.[11] Smaller theaters would typically rely on their pianist or small ensemble of musicians to either improvise a score or draw on popular or

[11] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 35-40

public domain songs at the time. It is essential to understand that at this point, these musical decisions were entirely out of the hands of film directors. However, while it would be a while before commissioned film scores became the norm, it is also during this time in the mid-1910s that the first examples of scores written specifically for film appeared. Camille Saint-Saens[12] (1835-1921), penned the score for *L'assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908)[13] in 1908, while Griffith's controversial yet influential *Birth of a Nation* (1915)[14] had its own specially constructed score. These films share some differences – while Saint-Saens composed an entirely original score, *Birth of a Nation*'s score by Joseph Breil drew on a mix of originally composed music and already existing music, in part due to its length. Notably, Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* was used to great effect during a climactic scene, setting the stage for the musical vocabulary of action films to come.[15]

In many ways, Richard Wagner is the godfather of film music. There is a concept (first coined by German philosopher K. F. E. Trahndorf) popularized by Wagner in the 19th century to describe what he hoped audiences would experience at his operas, termed *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Literally translated it means "total artwork," and is used to describe art that is in its nature collaborative and interdisciplinary. While it would be almost a half century between Wagner's death and the introduction of sound films, there was a sense that the combination

[12] Saint-Saens, along with Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, was among France's most famous composers at the time
[13] Charles le Bargy and Henri Lavedan, *L'Assassinat Du Duc de Guise*, Historical (Pathé Frères, 1908).
[14] D.W. Griffith, *Birth of a Nation* (Epoch Producing Co, 1915).
[15] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 41

of music, visuals, and the theater of narrative film combined to create a whole in a way quite similar to Wagner's ideas about his operas. The importance of film development to 19th century romantic artforms is essential in understanding both the origins and the musical vocabularies of contemporary film music.

Examples of scores embodying *Gesamtkunstwerk* are few and far between in this early period of film. Scores like those of Saint-Saens or Breil required their own rehearsed touring orchestra to be properly performed, as they relied on precise timing to achieve their effects. Throughout the early 1900s, hundreds of attempts at creating synchronized recorded sound were realized, but none to any real effect. Almost comically bad, most of these attempts were unable to keep up the synchronization between sound and image for more than a couple minutes before something in the mechanism would inevitably go wrong (comedically immortalized in *Singin' in the Rain, 1952*).[16] Like many artistic shifts before it, the advent of the sound film was due to a shift in technology.

Previous efforts at synchronizing sound with image failed due to the impracticality of attempting to synchronize a phonograph with a spinning plate at the front of the audience with a projector running at a totally different speed at the back of an audience. In the mid 1920s, a combination of improved sound amplification thanks to developments in radio and the invention of sound-on-film allowed sound to finally be easily synchronized with images.[17] The first two such "talkies," as they were somewhat disparagingly dubbed, were Alan

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[16] Kalinak, *Film Music.*
[17] James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer, *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). 290-293

Crosland's *Don Juan* (1926)[18] and *The Jazz Singer* (1927).[19] While *Don Juan* gained some popularity and notoriety for its synchronized sound, it is *The Jazz Singer* that film history remembers as the first true talkie. Understanding why requires understanding the difference between *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* music.

Diegesis is a Greek word that refers to the narrative or plot of a story. When we refer to diegetic music, this is meant to indicate music that is part of the filmic world, plot, or narrative. Normally, this is music that comes from somewhere on screen that we see, whether that be a band, an orchestra, or simply someone singing. Think of the famed cantina scene in *Star Wars* (1977)[20], in which a bar band is shown to be playing, and the accompanying music is assumed to be what the band is playing. Non-diegetic music – sometimes called extra-diegetic music to avoid the implication that it is somehow out of the norm – is all the music that is not part of the filmic world. To return to *Star Wars*, the introductory theme in the opening sequence is quite definitively non-diegetic – there is no connection or implication that the fanfare is somehow coming from the credits.

In the case of *The Jazz Singer*, lead actor Al Jolson shocked audiences when he broke into song during the film. Although this music and sound is diegetic, it is not merely that the sound is a recording of a performance. To quote film historian James Wierzbicki:

> In real life Jolson was a singer, but in this landmark 1927 film he was an actor portraying a singer. It may be that Harry Warner entered into the Vitaphone project [a film sound synchronization technology] believing that audiences would be interested only in "musical" pictures. The phenomenal

[18] Alan Crosland, *Don Juan* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1926).
[19] Alan Crosland, *The Jazz Singer* (Warner Bros. Pictures, 1927).
[20] George Lucas, *Star Wars* (20th Century Fox, 1977).

success of *The Jazz Singer*, however, convinced many in the film industry that the time for "talking" pictures had indeed arrived.[21]

In other words, *The Jazz Singer* was revolutionary not only because there was dialogue and music synchronized to the images, but that the music and dialogue was diegetic, integral to the film itself, creating a sense of spontaneity that had not yet been experienced by film-goers. However, not everybody was pleased about this transformation.

Hollywood, which at this point was solidifying its much-vilified studio system, was especially resistant to the change. Silent films allowed Hollywood a global monopoly – its extra-linguistic nature meant that with a quick translation of the film's title and whatever brief title cards might be present, a film made in California could be shown in India with little problem.[22]

People also complained about what they perceived as a downgrade in the imagination required to view a film. In a silent film, more is left to the audience to interpret about the nature of the characters. Voices, some people believed would ruin this effect of an alternate reality. Soviet theorists and filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevelod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov had an even more dire view. In their 1928 Statement on Sound, they predicted that sound would destroy cinema as they knew it.[23] European and Soviet cinema being so predicated on montage theory – using contrasting imagery and scenes as building blocks to a greater meaning – their proposed solution was to argue that sound must always be used as a kind of counterpoint, running contradictory to the

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[21] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 94
[22] Kalinak, *Film Music*.
[23] Sergej M. Eisenstein and Jay Leyda, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, A Harvest Book 153 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1977). 257

supposed narrative of the film.[24] While their ideas in this regard may not hold entirely accurate for the state of films today, they also rather accurately predicted that sound films would result in dramas and melodramas becoming the newest craze.

As the 1920s came to a close, two major shifts rocked the film industry. First, as films were able to be distributed with their own scores, the need for theaters to have their own orchestras diminished. In the midst of the Great Depression, thousands of musicians lost jobs. At one point, theater houses were among the largest employers of musicians in the country. This shift caused conflict between Hollywood and labor unions – arguments which would continue into the 1960s and shape the way that orchestras are used.[25] The second shift was technological and involved the introduction of multitrack recording. Multitrack recording allows for multiple tracks of audio to be recorded at once and be "mixed" later.[26] This was a monumental shift in process: before its invention, any film with sound would have to be mixed during the filming process in real time, with no opportunity for error.[27] Because of the impracticality of balancing an orchestra with actors' spoken dialogue, there was rarely (if ever) music during dialogue. The 1930s changed this. Suddenly, music was able to accompany any part of the film, be added later, and could simply be turned down during dialogue.[28]

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[24] Ironically, Eisenstein went on to create extensive collaborations with Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev
[25] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 135
[26] Mixing is the process of balancing the various volumes of recorded audio after they have been recorded.
[27] Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer, *Hearing the Movies*. 315-335
[28] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 137

This technology opened up options for film composers. The role of music during this time shifted considerably. While during the 1920s film music was largely diegetic due to practical reasons, film critics and theorists began to compartmentalize music as purely subservient to the plot. However, in 1933 Max Steiner – who had not two years earlier waxed poetic about how music should always stay out of the way of the film and be used sparingly and with intention – composed a score for *King Kong* (1933)[29] that is now seen as the template for the modern film score.[30] Steiner was the music director and film composer at RKO Pictures, one of the largest studios in Hollywood. A German immigrant (as were many other film composers at the time, having come to the US fleeing Nazi persecution), Steiner had studied classical music extensively. Bringing with him a vast knowledge of late Romantic techniques and vocabularies, Steiner's score for *King Kong* was unrelentingly compatible with the imagery, while also being almost entirely non-diegetic.[31] Although it would likely be criticized today for being too extensively "Mickey Moused" – the practice of precisely aligning music rhythms and idioms with movement – Steiner paid close attention to the tonal and narrative shifts in the film, developing a highly synchronized score that changed pace and tone with the developments of the film.

Given the success of *King Kong*, other film composers quickly took note, and the style became common practice. It is here that what is known as the "spotting session" began. In a spotting session, directors and composers (or sometimes just one or the other) will watch the film without any score, taking

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[29] Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, *King Kong* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1933).
[30] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 139
[31] Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer, *Hearing the Movies*. 77

note of scenes and moments that seem to need scoring and often specifying what kind of music the scene may need. Said Steiner of the practice, "I simply do not read scripts unless it is absolutely necessary."[32] Moving into the mid 1930s is the birth of what we now refer to as Hollywood's "golden age," or alternatively the "classical style" of Hollywood cinema. On the state of film scores at this time, James Wierzbicki says the following:

> By 1938–9—by the time at which, according to Bazin, cinema's "level of classical perfection" had finally been reached—the efficacy of extra-diegetic music was taken for granted. By this time, too, the conventions according to which extra-diegetic music figured into a filmic product were more or less clearly defined.[33]

It is here that the earlier mention of 19th century Romanticism becomes clearer. Peter Larsen presents two narratives for explaining this influence: "one historical-biographical, the other narrative-structural."[34] The historical-biographical explanation, Larsen says, is more widespread. It claims that many film composers came from a European background or at least a background of the opera house or Broadway theater. Major early composers such as Max Steiner and Erich Korngold both came from Vienna, importing with them a culture that was steeped in the romantic and early modern ideals of Strauss, Wagner, and Mahler. Larsen says, "Hollywood composers wrote the music they had learnt to write."[35] The other argument, the narrative structural explanation, offers some insight into why these composers were chosen in the first place. Film theorist Roy Prendergast claims that these early film composers looked to Romantic forms

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[32] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 138
[33] Wierzbicki. 140
[34] Larsen and Irons, *Film Music*. 95
[35] Larsen and Irons. 96

(especially Opera) as an easy way of creating narrative structure in the film.[36] Kalinack further argues that the emphasis on melody in Romantic music has the added effect of deeply drawing the listener in – our popular music being melodically focused, we are culturally conditioned to listen for melody.[37]

By the mid 1950s, producers and viewers alike began to wonder about the possibilities of scoring beyond the classical Hollywood style. Modernism, which had been the predominant musical style in the early decades of the 20th century, had begun to bleed over into the film world. Fortunately for film composers, music that had previously been rejected in the concert hall found a home in cinemas. Avant-garde trends in music became a way for films to embody a kind of cool emotional realism. The influence of the "2nd Viennese School" composers – a group of composers including Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg – had already become an established trope. In particular, their approach to atonality[38] became indistinguishable from psychological drama and horror film scores, despite their intentions to the contrary. Unfortunately, these composers considered their music optimistic or even futuristic and had very little to do with anything involving fear. It is unlikely, for example, that Webern was attempting to evoke a "murder scene" when composing *Five Pieces for Orchestra*! However, film's ability to solidify cultural connotations resulted in these musical vocabularies becoming established conventions within scoring, which continues into contemporary scoring.

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[36] Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise : Listening to the Twentieth Century* (Picador, 2008).
[37] Kalinak, *Film Music*. 11, 82
[38] Meaning intentionally lacking a tonal center

Moving into the 1960s, that Hollywood begins to explore the compilation film score. Although popular music had been used before, in previous eras the film had promoted the song, rather than the other way around. Starting in the 1950s, rock and roll songs had begun to be introduced to films, and theme songs took center stage. *Blackboard Jungle* (1955)[39] used the song "Rock Around the Clock" (recorded by Bill Haley and the Comets) to infamous effect as part of its opening sequence, setting the stage for hundreds of movies to come. Suddenly, everybody wanted a pop tune for their next movie – even Alfred Hitchcock, a director known for his experimentation with music and style, insisted on having a potential hit song ("Que Sera, Sera") at the center of his film *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956)[40].

The breakdown of the Hollywood studio system into the 1960s also influenced the way that scores were written. Rather than being financially supported by a larger institution, each film had to be independently financially successful. This in part led to an emphasis on title themes, leading in turn to criticism – each song "had to be able to live its own life, independent of the film."[41] Films like *The Graduate* (1967)[42] or *Harold and Maude* (1971)[43] were scored entirely by pop songs of a single artist – Paul Simon and Cat Stevens, respectively. Just as importantly, the low budget *Easy Rider* (1969)[44] had the first

[39] Richard Brooks, *Blackboard Jungle* (Loew's Inc, 1955).
[40] Alfred Hitchcock, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Paramount Pictures, 1956).
[41] Larsen and Irons, *Film Music.* 149
[42] Mike Nichols, *The Graduate* (Embassy Pictures, 1967).
[43] Hal Ashby, *Harold and Maude* (Paramount Pictures, 1971).
[44] Dennis Hopper, *Easy Rider* (Columbia Pictures, 1969).

compilation soundtrack made up entirely of current rock bands – Steppenwolf, The Byrds, The Band, Jimi Hendrix, among others.

Although there was some use of electronic music had been first used in 1950s science fiction and psychological dramas (notably on *Forbidden Planet* (1956)[45], featuring an experimental electronic score, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), featuring the first electronic instrument, the theremin),[46] by the 1980s films scored entirely with synthesizers were common, in part due to the ability of these more modern synthesizers to produce a far greater range of sounds appropriate for a film score. Larsen notes Vangelis' score for *Bladerunner* (1981) as an example of an amalgam of all the trends at the time: synths, rock composers, and blurred lines between diegetic and non-diegetic music. He says:

> On the whole the music of present-day mainstream films is characterized by large contrasts and fluid transitions between formerly separate genres. The traditional sharp division of labour between symphonic, non-diegetic music and diegetic popular music has virtually disappeared. The entire musical spectrum from folk music, pop, rock, electronica and jazz to traditional and modernistic orchestral music is represented, often in unexpected combinations and effective mixes.[47]

There is also a sense, according to film historian James Wierzbicki, that the experimental scoring of the 1960s began to wear on the average viewer. Umberto Eco remarks upon this effect as a historical trend in art in the postscript to his 1983 novel *The Name of the Rose:*

> The historic avant-garde tries to settle scores with the past… it arrives at the abstract, the informal, the white canvas, the slashed canvas… But the moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further, because it has produced a metalanguage that speaks of impossible texts (conceptual art). The

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[45] Fred M. Wilcox, *Forbidden Planet* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1956).
[46] Robert Wise, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (20th Century Fox, 1951).
[47] Larsen and Irons, *Film Music.* 184

postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past… must be revisited.[48]

People wished for a return to some sense of normalcy in film scoring, even if that meant sacrificing some of the "popular" avant-garde approaches employed at that time. John Williams is often credited with popularizing this approach with his soundtracks for both *Jaws* (1975)[49] and *Star Wars* (1977)[50]. This apparent return in the 1970s-80s to classical film scoring ideals with its lush accompaniments and the introduction of surround sound paved the way for the eclecticism of the scores of many contemporary films today. While Larsen cites the much-lauded *Bladerunner*, Wierzbicki offers *Batman* (1989)[51] as an example of a film that exudes a sense of eclecticism – Prince's pop scoring lives in tandem with a "Wagnerian thunder."

As we move into the 21st century, many film critics have taken a stance along the lines of "what's good is what works."[52] History is not progressive, and one could argue that what we create now has no urgency to be better or more groundbreaking than what was created one hundred years ago. The 2000s have seen a boom in the holistic potential of sound – music encompasses not only the composed score but every sound within. Sound effects blur into music, dialogue becomes source material for score. The interplay of the visual and the aural is as much the score as any individual part of the music.

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[48] Umberto Eco, "Postscript," in *The Name of the Rose* (Bloomsbury, 1983).
[49] Steven Spielberg, *Jaws* (Universal Pictures, 1975).
[50] Lucas, *Star Wars*.
[51] Tim Burton, *Batman* (Warner Bros., 1989).
[52] Wierzbicki, *Film Music*. 217

Methodology

As a writer and composer, why is a historical perspective important or even relevant? In part, knowing history can be reassuring, situating one's own practice with a context of other practitioners. Considerations such as the placement of music in relation to dialogue or the relation of music to narrative have already been discussed widely. Reading and understanding both the social and political implications of these decisions can help one understand what it means to make those choices. While there are examples of people succeeding blindly in almost any discipline, this is not a practice to depend on. I believe there is a value in being aware of the broader scope of options and references that are made available by historical awareness.

Of course, being aware of historical context can also be daunting – or even inhibiting. Creativity is often stifled by the sense that "it has all been done," and so knowing that there is a hundred years of a history of remarkable creativity behind you can be overwhelming. And perhaps in that there is an argument for proceeding a little more blindly, not occupying yourself too much with what has already been done and looking towards what is possible. In some ways, this would reflect my approach and awareness as a composer as well – I am not a classically trained musician but am part of the growing subset of rock-musician-turned-film-composer that we have seen develop in the last thirty or forty years. Popular artists such as Johnny Greenwood of Radiohead, Danny Elfman of Oingo Boingo, and Frank Zappa have all crossed over from the rock sphere into more classical realms, and as in the case of Greenwood and Elfman, have built much of their current success through the film world. Even Hans Zimmer, who is arguably

the most sought-after current film composer, began his musical career as part of the new-wave band The Buggles. Conversely, minimalist composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass have merged the other way, entering popular music through their vast influence on film music.

Here again is where our understanding of history comes in – in the last decades, film composers have shown that it is possible to make successful works of film music by utilizing a computer-based studio setup which includes audio software, digital workstations, plugins, sample libraries, and most importantly – no need for the bulky hardware of the past, which demanded large dedicated studio space. The advent of the personal studio and digital audio workstation (DAW) has enabled the production of professional sounding recordings without access to state-of-the-art recording studios. And while A-list film composers such as Hans Zimmer or Alexandre Desplat have nearly unlimited resources at their disposal, the central tenet remains the same – it is possible to create effective and complex scores without the need for a full live orchestra and the resulting enormous overhead costs.

In some ways it is interesting to see how the role of the composer has become what so many in the 1930s and 40s were desiring. The role of the music director is certainly still important, and compilation scores have not gone away (think of the success of the *Guardians of the Galaxy* franchise and its use of nostalgia through the songs of the 1970s), but there is a freedom given to the contemporary film composer that allows for flexibility in orchestration that simply was not available to those working seventy or eighty years ago.

STUDIES/ANALYSIS OF SCENE SCORING IN *PINCH POINT*

Each scene is presented alongside multiple versions or sketches of the scene. These versions differ in instrumentation, timing, and other aspects of film scoring practice that were referenced in the previous historical overview. My goal is to articulate the process of choice that is an essential part to scoring a film. To best demonstrate this, I have also included examples that were for me unsuccessful to further illustrate the process and development of the scenes provided.

Opening Scene

An opening sequence, perhaps more than any other scene, can set a tone for the entire film. I consider an opening sequence as an opportunity to create a kind of prelude that references something essential about the film. From a purely practical standpoint, a poorly articulated opening sequence can be difficult to recover from. Conversely, a well-crafted title sequence may remain in people's memories as a highlight of the film – such as John Corigliano's opening score for *Altered States*.[53]

Such an opening sequence is often referred to as a theme. This begs the question – what is a theme? As discussed earlier, the idea of a "theme song" for a film became quite popular during the golden age of Hollywood. In some ways, this has led to any music that plays during an opening sequence to be viewed as a theme song, when often this music is as incidental as any other music in a film.

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[53] Ken Russel, *Altered States* (Warner Bros., 1980).

Any musical vocabularies that are introduced at this point establish the vocabularies that will likely continue to be used throughout the film. This is a constraint that must be considered, and as such requires careful attention to the details of such a sequence.

In this opening scene, we begin with a conversation between two people, discussing the potential of aliens. Although both members appear quite invested, there is also a sense that this is not to be taken quite seriously. After they finish their conversation, one of the characters walks away and is shown walking for about a minute until he reaches a house, has a brief conversation with another character, and enters the house.

As such, approximately half the scene consists of silent walking. There are few environmental sounds – occasionally a car will pass by. The first consideration is then where to start the music. Does the music underscore the opening dialogue, potentially emphasizing the dramatic side of the conversation, or does it serve merely as a gateway between scenes? After some early experimentation, it became clear that music should begin after the dialogue finishes and the walking begins. Beginning the music much earlier seemed to simply distract from the conversation. In addition, interspersing ambient sounds within the dialogue came across as more a car horn than music.

Walking also offers ample opportunity for choreographic underscoring. Walking is inherently rhythmic and provides a relatively consistent sense of time and pace for a scene and its music. In my compositional process, this provided both a constraint and a starting point. Knowing I wanted to match the rhythmic

sense provided by the walking, I was able to determine what kind of tempo and rhythmic intensity seemed appropriate.

The first version of this scene was created using entirely acoustic instrumentation. This arose out of both practicality and a sense of artistic intention. From a practical perspective, I play guitar and piano. It is easier to directly play a musical figure on an instrument, capture it as it is, and then modify the sound in post processing to either create electronic sounding effects. Artistically, it is also a way to create unique sounds that don't rely on expensive equipment. An acoustic instrument is inherently unpredictable, and it is this unpredictability that can work in your favor to create unusual and fascinating effects.

Guitar and ukulele feature prominently in this scene, although with the ukulele masquerading as a more generic stringed instrument. Small bursts of digitally modified guitar and piano serve as foils to the otherwise recognizable and unaltered acoustic backdrop. The music shifts with each cut, emphasizing the characters movement through space.

https://youtu.be/6BB5nBd7nJs

However, there are still parameters at play that present problems. Although the acoustic instruments provide a unique sound, what do they suggest contextually? Acoustic guitar carries with it potentially folky or even Country/Western associations, which in the context of this opening scene may not make sense. Part of understanding historical and cultural perspective is understanding that movie-goers respond to music in pre-programmed ways. As previously mentioned, music that carries with it certain meanings in the concert

hall may lose these meanings when put in the context of film scoring. Further, while acoustic instrumentation provides a unique sound, this sound is also not one that viewers are typically used to in film music. As previously mentioned, film music since the late 1980s and 1990s has become increasingly reliant on digital synthesizers to create full and lush sounds. Viewers are used to these sounds, and when presented with less polished sounds (as is always the case with acoustic instrumentation), it may come across as unfinished. Coincidentally, this is also the first scene that I completed for the film.

The second version of this scene (which I coincidentally composed last out of all these scenes) is largely digitally created, using a MIDI [54]keyboard and digital orchestra samples. While rhythmically it shares some similarities with the acoustic version, harmonically it is quite different. While the first scene relied on greater harmonic shifts to create continuity and drive the scene forward, the electronic version is harmonically more ambiguous. Music that is harmonically ambiguous tends to act as an open canvas – choreography, tone, and melody are all freed from the constraints of more traditional harmonic structure. Traditional harmonic structures have established emotional responses and conventions. Simply put – minor is sad, major is happy. We are culturally trained to understand these conventions without much thought.

https://youtu.be/OJlEtPkiaCA

[54] MIDI is a protocol that allows musical information (such as loudness, attack, length, and note) to be transferred from a controller (such as a digital keyboard) to a computer or other device and be recorded. This recorded information can then be edited and used to play back any number of digital instruments, allowing for ease of editing. Rather than re-record an entire section, it is possible to simply edit the relevant recorded MIDI information and re-record a small section.

There are also fewer layers to this instrumentation. An upright bass sample, light percussion, a simple trumpet melody, and acoustic guitar are all that are used for the duration of the scene. As such, the music draws less attention to itself, allowing the movement of the scenes to speak for themselves. This instrumentation is also much more contextually ambiguous than the acoustic version, save for the trumpet which might evoke a sort of thrilling or mysterious film noir sensibility. And although the music is largely digitally created here, the very end contains a bit of recorded acoustic guitar. As an effect, a lone acoustic instrument among digital instruments can serve to further a sense of realism that may be lost with entirely digital instrumentation. Digital music can sometimes be like seeing the strings in an early science fiction or contemporary bad CGI — at what point is it obvious that it is simply a man in a monkey suit, or a poorly made orchestra sample on a MIDI keyboard?

Carole's Approach

This scene is another in which choreography is not merely relevant, but fundamental. In this scene, a crazed mother by the name of Carole is coming to threaten her son's roommates, arriving totally unannounced. Her movement reflects this – jerky, out of place, unsettling. My musical goal became to highlight this sense of unease while also not falling victim to overdramatization. I feel that I solved this problem by introducing some amount of comedy through the music. Although this can easily become cartoonish or mocking, there is some humor to be found in her movement and emphasizing this may resolve the issue of overdramatization.

The first version of this scene features acoustic piano. Improvisation played a central role in this part of the process. Because the scene was short, it was possible to play the scene on loop while I accompanied on piano to produce material. In the end, the take that I used was part of that improvisational process – sometimes a sketch turns out usable. With some light editing and mixing, the acoustic piano sketch became a harmonic basis to which a trumpet and guitar part were added.

https://youtu.be/ydIOoPWksDE

I think of this process as a type of musical collage. Like a Ship of Theseus, it becomes a circle of refinement, continually replacing and improving each part and musical element until all the parts create an ensemble that satisfies the needs of the scene. This early sketch of the scene demonstrates this well.

https://youtu.be/_PT3s8ZxdOI

In this sketch, there are aspects of the final version at play, and yet there is still the sense that it is not living up to its full potential. Carole walking behind the tree is in itself choreography and presents a multitude of musical possibilities and opportunities. This is a delicate balance however – as the composers of early animations and films found out, it is all too easy to "Mickey Mouse" the music, aligning every movement with rhythmically corresponding sound.

Further, this scene is in some ways the definition of a transitionary scene. There is no action directly happening, only the setting up of action to come, transporting the viewer from A to B. Because of this, drawing too much attention to the music may distract the listener, annihilating the subtle metaphysical trickeries that are film cuts. On the other hand, with no music at all the viewer is

similarly confused – what is the attitude of this character? Why is she here? Ultimately, the problem is how we characterize an as-of-yet voiceless character.

Here is another version. In this version, I reference musical vocabularies that are more akin to the conventions of horror films. Ghostly voices and random and dissonant piano and percussion gestures paint Carole as a lunatic possibly willing to do anything. And because this version does not use any acoustic instrumentation, it may also evoke a somewhat ominous or even sociopathic environment.

https://youtu.be/REhkwxB1tJI

In both versions of the scene, where the music begins and ends is important. In the original, the music fades out before the cut to the interior of the house, allowing the sound of knocking on the door to breathe. The second bleeds over, partially obscuring the knocking, but also serving to underscore the character on the couch's reaction. Conversely, in the first, the music does not start until a somewhat significant amount of time after the cut from the starting campfire scene, while the second fades the music in before the cut, serving to smooth over the transition from one scene to another. Neither way is particularly more "correct" than the other, rather my intention here is to show how this affects the pulse and rhythm of the scene. Allowing the scene to begin before the music starts forces your eye to make the first judgment, while priming the viewer with music before the scene change is a more forceful decision about the relevance and tone of the following scene.

Riley and Ana

This brief scene depicts an ambiguous romantic tension between two characters. In creating the score for this scene, it was important me to produce a score that was suggestive of tension to come later in the film as opposed to being simply sentimental. The obvious choice in this case is to be harmonically ambiguous. Avoiding high tension and resolution in harmony obscures and neutralizes generic melodramatic effects, allowing the visuals to speak more for themselves. In the two versions of this scene and the initial included sketch, there is no obvious tonal "home", no one pitch that is obviously the center of everything. This lack of harmonic grounding combined with freely flowing rhythmic ambiguity also conveniently serves to emphasize the natural motions of the characters in the scene – Riley and Ana – ultimately synthesizing both visual and temporal arts.

In this initial sketch, I emphasized using music figures that were devoid of accent and sharp attacks. This involves literally removing the beginnings of notes, letting chords fade in rather than starting abruptly. One of the advantages of digital technology is the ability to easily (and importantly, reversibly) modify sound – cuts, pitch shifts, and speed changes are all relatively simple. In this case, the sound was created by slowing down and chopping up a recorded piano acoustic piano, using this as a harmonic basis, and then fading this sound in and out. The lack of attack was intended to mirror the way that each movement occurs, as well as to allow the music to rest in the background rather than drawing attention to itself.

https://youtu.be/78Jg59hE1ys

While this is not in itself an unsuccessful sketch, I include it to highlight some issues. First, while in theory a digitally modified piano can sound organic, in reality it often ends up sounding electronic and without subtlety. There is an artificiality to the sound that I do not find matches the romantic tension. This highlights the delicate balance of audience engagement and disengagement – the wrong music and *even the wrong timbre* will remove the viewer from the emotional intent of the scene.

To solve this last issue, I made an edit to the environmental sounds in a later sketch. The cricket sounds are a clear indication that this action is taking place outside. However, what happens when this sound disappears? In this version of the scene, I faded the crickets out at the end, inviting the viewer to perceive the intimacy of the experience of the characters on screen. While the movie screen and a pane of glass may separate us, removing the environmental sounds and leaving just underscoring allows for emphasis of their emotional interplay.

https://youtu.be/lapqsl--LCk

This version also obviously differs in tone and instrumentation. It is still solo piano, however this time the piano is recorded acoustically and unmodified. It is sparse, yet each note still happens in accordance with a character's movement – watch the movement of Riley's hands, the shifting of both Ana and Riley on the guardrail. The music is hardly present, yet still clearly emphasizes that this is a point of interest in the film. Something is happening between these characters, and my intention is to manipulate the audience into paying attention to those subtle character cues, whether consciously or not.

What this version of the scene lacks is a sense of continuity between itself and the previous scene. While it is obvious that Riley stands up to go outside, the first piano note may come across as jarring. I sought to fix this in yet another version of the scene, this time created entirely using MIDI. One of the advantages of MIDI, and one of the reasons it has become so integral to film scoring, is the ease with which music can be edited. Timing, instrumentation, dynamics, attack, and even melody and harmony are all simply presented as modifiable attributes. For this scene, I wanted to have the control to place entrances of notes precisely where they felt natural without having to re-record an acoustic part every time in the hope that it worked in my favor.

While the MIDI piano and string sounds may sound slightly more artificial, it allowed me to make subtle changes to entrances that smooth over the continuity of the scene. For example, observe how the low cello line enters with the camera changing focus right before the cut to the outdoors. Small variations create subtleties in a scene in ways that are hard to quantify.

https://youtu.be/-b9zY34H2zE

Riley, Pete, and Mike on the Porch

This might be the most melodramatic scene out of all of them. In it, two characters (Pete and Riley) learn from their friend Mike that two bodies were found in the woods and begin to suspect that one may be their missing roommate, Marcelo. Opening with a slow shot of Pete and Riley sitting on the porch, the tone is slow, and contemplative, a hot and humid Ohio summer day interrupted only briefly by two exceptionally cheery passerby.

Because of the intensely emotional gravity, and because the scene is rhythmically slow-paced, my instinct was to write brooding yet potentially optimistic music underscoring the whole scene. I wanted to smooth over these rhythmic transitions, creating a more cohesive scene out of something that could otherwise be interpreted as lackluster or even boring. Out of this come rhythmic issues as well as tonal and emotional issues, all of which must be handled musically.

https://youtu.be/CEkoJ55reYM

The result is not terrible, although somehow seems to carry no narrative dynamics. Everything feels like too much. The music starts almost immediately and doesn't stop until the very last scene transition. Riley's emotional turmoil is made unnecessarily more melodramatic, and the piano and orchestra come across as at best unoriginal and at worst both superficial and overwrought. Additionally, "smoothing over" those changes of pace at the beginning of the scene only served to make the scene to appear even longer.

That isn't to say there is nothing of merit here – this idea could potentially be reworked and edited down to be much more minimal. The piano and string instrumentation could probably be changed to come across as less sentimental, and the rhythmic issues could be resolved with better timing. However, as a proof of concept and as part of the process this version of the scene served as an indication that this scene should move in an entirely different direction.

This other version of the scene allows the beginning to breathe – the music is far more sparse. Ultimately, those rhythmic changes are not something that need to be minimized or removed, but instead contribute to the pace of the scene.

The two cheerful passersby serve as a rhythmic juxtaposition to Mike's plodding approach to the porch.

https://youtu.be/LzzGE6-GDrM

Different instrumentation also contributes to this effect. Strings are sustained, long, and flowing. In contrast, the electric piano sound has a quick release. This allows space for both the environmental sounds and dialogue to breathe. We are not completely removed from the space but are still given subtle emotional suggestions. After the dialogue is over, this version of the scene uses an organ accompanying the electric piano. This sustained sound may be effective in inviting viewers to consider the turmoil and perspectives of Riley and Pete in a similar way that the removal of environmental sounds may. However, the actual sound of an organ invariably evokes imagery relating to religion and processional rituals that are related to the church, such as weddings. These connections of course have nothing to do with the scene and consequently could create confusion. To reiterate, no matter how sophisticated one may consider the audience to be, there is an inherent embrace of musical cliches. This is not meant to be condescending, but rather is about cultural associations – tenor saxophone is sexy, guitar is Western/Spanish, organ is church, piano is sentimental, low strings are ominous.

Consider this alternative version of the scene, which uses a French Horn quartet sound instead:

https://youtu.be/gOdGkTcipJI

This sound is more neutral, and although I do not like it as much from a purely musical perspective, it seems to fit the scene in a way that the organ might not, potentially avoiding some of those associations.

Consider also this early version of the scene, in which I overcompensated for the music arriving too early in the first version. Here, no music happens until Mike's approach. While this is not entirely unsuccessful, those aforementioned rhythmic shifts are left open ended a little too long. Shifting the entire music back a couple of seconds also allowed Riley's dramatic pacing at the end of the scene to ruminate in silence. It is essential to remember absence of music can be the most powerful effect.

This points to the larger problem of score placement. As seen in the history section of this thesis, where music included and has always been a central topic in film scoring. The introduction of dialogue further complicated this issue, and it is clear from early talking films that composers struggled to find that balance. On the set of *Dark Victory* (1939)[55], actor Bette Davis famously quipped something along the lines of, "either I'm going to climb those stairs or Max Steiner is going to climb those stairs, but I'll be damned if Max Steiner and I are going to climb those stairs together!"[56] Davis understood that her descent up those stairs was going to win her accolades and, recognizing the power of Steiner's score, was not happy about the potential of attention being diverted from her performance and towards Steiner's score. The presence of scoring may not always be welcome,

[55] Edmund Goulding, *Dark Victory* (Warner Bros., 1934).
[56] The authenticity of this statement is unclear, but the sentiment remains – there is a sense that music and the film are often in conflict with each other

though fortunately in the case of Steiner and Davis, both were nominated for awards for their performance!

Beach Scene

This is the last scene of the studies, and it is also the longest. In some ways, it is three scenes in one, and represents what is likely the emotional climax of the film. In it, Pete declares to his friends that their roommate Marcelo is gone forever after speaking with a cult leader, Ana and Mike have a conversation about Mike's personal disagreements with Riley, and Riley and Ana talk about their relationship and their future. The challenge here was creating a sense of continuity and relation between these three different yet related scenes while also maintaining their individuality. The scenes represent each character coming to their own realizations about their lives, and thus there is an emotional through line.

For this sequence, I determined that strings would create such a continuity. While perhaps melodramatic, if not "cheesy", in certain scenarios, there is a reason that historically strings have been used to score films. Their ability to play both short and sustained notes, their melodic and dynamic range, and their perceived neutrality[57] have allowed them to take on many roles. While in other scenes harmonic ambiguity was the goal, here the score takes on an expressly more classical Hollywood approach referencing the cultural triggers that have already been established. Strings and piano are very successful at

[57] Of course, neutrality here can be debated. There are certainly stereotypes associated with strings, and much of their "neutrality" comes merely from the fact that they are used often, which is in a sense circular.

accomplishing that goal more than most other instruments because of the long-established connections to timbre and musical vocabulary.

There are risks in using this kind of instrumentation and standard harmonic language. It is not without cause that filmmakers and composers in the 1960s began to move away from the classical underscoring traditions. This also speaks to the effect that minimalism and its purposeful ambiguity has had on film music since the 1980s. Soaring strings during melodramatic moments is perhaps *the* film music cliché. Employing that trope at this point in history requires at the very least acknowledging the potential of a scene reduced to the hackneyed and trite.

https://youtu.be/OtQzOgAv8Zw

The initial shot of the house panning to Pete leaving the porch sets itself up well for music. There is both a visual-aesthetic balance to the image itself, as well as a balance in the motion between the camera and Pete walking. Understanding camera movement as choreography presents an opportunity for building suspense in the situation. Shifting the musical focus from the camera movement to Pete's walking allows for a logical conclusion to the music in the beginning. Harmonically, it is important in this scene to not resolve anything completely until the scene is over. The last note of that opening theme hangs as Pete begins to talk, suggesting there is more to come.

This stopping and starting of music also allows for the development of a theme. When the music comes in again before the cut, it is thematically similar to the initial material. This thematic similarity provides a sense of relation between the two scenes, telling the viewer that these two events are somehow emotionally

and narratively interrelated. As the scene moves from Ana and Mike's conversation on the porch to Ana and Riley's conversation at the lake, we again revisit a similar harmonic theme, though with more dense instrumentation. Music does not play through any dialogue in the scene until the very end of Riley and Ana's conversation at the lake, serving to underscore Ana's dramatic proclamation that she might be moving to Chicago. Withholding the music until this point creates a sense of contrast. Consequently, underscoring dialogue becomes intentional and draws attention to itself, rather than simply a constant backdrop.

An early sketch of this scene explored similar ideas, albeit with different harmonic content.[58]

https://youtu.be/NlrN7HAta28

In this sketch, it is apparent that the idea of a theme was brewing, although it became quickly too repetitive. What worked for the opening no longer made sense in the emotional context of the end. It is important that the illusion of continuity of space created by the filmmaker be paralleled by music in some sense. To have scenes changing with thematically static music is rarely successful. Music in a score can change narrative implications but not the underlying structure, and when the music does not enhance what is already there it becomes painfully obvious the two are at odds.

On the other hand, in this scene it was tempting to fall victim to excessive scoring, to "gild the lily" so to speak. Another early version of the score for this

[58] Note: this sketch was recorded on a laptop microphone and is a very early rough sketch. It is in no ways suitable for a final score, but I have included it to demonstrate the process.

scene was far more dramatic and musically more densely than the scene required. This becomes especially clear during the panning shot of the trees in the dark. What is a simple transitionary establishing shot becomes, because of this music, far too important, consequently taking away from the emotional dilemmas of the scenes that precede and follow.

https://youtu.be/koKZ3lb7gwA (Busy Version)

https://youtu.be/ddRtwq6aJqY (Original version for comparison)

A final note on continuity – this scene transitions at the end to a scene of a band playing in a basement. This music was not composed by me and was present already in the cuts I was given. In order to gracefully exit the scene and transition once again into another location, it was important that the underscore be in the same key as the song that plays afterwards, creating a coherent transition. Although this is a minor detail, it provides a creative restriction and is nonetheless an important logistical part of the process that must be paid attention to.

CONCLUSION:

My intention (and hope) is that through the presented analysis, the reader will understand the process and decision making I have employed in creating this film score. My decisions and score have been made keeping historical context in mind. In providing a brief historical survey, my intention is to demonstrate these developments were intentional and informed rather than arbitrary.

This film is a student work, and as such is limited by budget constraints, availability of equipment, locations, and the quality of performance of actors.

Creating a score for a project with these limitations can be problematic and oddly complicated. Many of the actors are first time actors, and because of this the performances may be somewhat limited– it was at times difficult to feel that the music was sufficiently supporting a somewhat ambiguous performance. At the same time, however, this has also always been the role of film music. From its early stages, critics have argued that film music serves a utilitarian role, whether that be covering up projector noise, selling records, or compensating for an otherwise lackluster film. While I don't believe this to be fully true, I think there is something to be said for understanding the role of the composer as providing reinforcement to the intention of the film. Scoring is somewhat akin to chess, having to anticipate what is coming while also remaining aware of what already is. Every choice carries consequences – intended or not.

While it is not practical to discuss every sketch and idea that became part of my process, but I would like to at least mention some generalizations that became clear to me. In film, music has a tendency to embrace the convenient or obvious, by being either comedic, ominous, or melodramatic. For me, the process has been about investigating the multiple layers that might result in a more subtle approach. When scoring, it is important to recognize that the music is specific to the needs of the moment, as opposed to an abstract composition intended for concert performance. Further, as previously mentioned, I am not a classically trained musician. I am a musician who has spent years exploring many different types of music, and for that reason film music interests me. Film music is and has always been an eclectic mix of popular and classical vocabularies. I

have found that limiting oneself to a single musical vocabulary rarely makes for a particularly interesting or effective score.

Finally, these two aspects work well in tandem. With a wide vocabulary available, it would be impossible to make any decision without constraints. Film's visceral and immediate nature can allow for relatively quick decision making. For me it is obvious when I feel something does not work, and although it may take time to find what it is one is looking for, it is nearly just as obvious when something is closer to being successful. Because this project was part of a thesis and not a commercial venture, I was able to truly investigate the actual practice *Gesamtkunstwerk* that film represents, which provided an invaluable avenue for inquiry into process.

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