

FILM MUSIC

Purpose of Film Music

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

- Create or enhance a mood
- Function as a **LEITMOTIF**
- Provide unexpected juxtaposition/irony (using music the listener wouldn't expect to hear giving a sense of uneasiness or humour!)
- Link one scene to another providing continuity
- Influence the pacing of a scene making it appear faster/slower

Leitmotifs

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



How the Elements are used in Film Music

PITCH AND MELODY – **RIISING MELODIES** are often used for increasing tension, **FALLING MELODIES** for defeat. **Q&A PHRASES** can represent good versus evil.

DYNAMICS – **FORTE (LOUD)** dynamics to represent power; **PIANO (SOFT)** dynamics to represent weakness/calm/resolve. **CRESCENDOS** used for increasing threat, triumph or proximity and **DECRESCENDOS** or **DIMINUENDOS** used for things going away into the distance. Horror Film soundtracks often use **EXTREME DYNAMICS** or **SUDDEN DYNAMIC CHANGES** to 'shock the listener'.

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

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

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

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

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

Film Music Key Words

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

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

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

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

History of Film Music

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

Film Music Composers and their Soundtracks



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



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



James Horner
Titanic
Apollo 13
Braveheart
Star Trek II
Aliens



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



Danny Elfman
Mission Impossible
Batman Returns
Men in Black
Spider Man



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



Bernard Herrmann
Psycho
Vertigo
Taxi Driver