Chapter 10
FILM MUSIC IN CONTEXT

This chapter will discuss a whole range of practical, creative and historical areas and issues and is designed to help and inform composers who want to write for film and television. Most of the contextual issues involved in composing music for the moving image have been embedded into chapters within this book; the following pages contain more general information which could be of interest to scholars and professionals alike.

The chapter will be divided into the following areas

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Subverting the norm

One of the fundamental reasons film music works at all as a concept is that it successfully engages the emotions of the listener / viewer. Life doesn't come with its own musical accompaniment; it doesn't need to because we're *living* it. But when we go to the cinema we are asked to suspend our own reality and instead believe in someone else's reality; quite literally to live someone else's ideas. In this context music works well to bridge the emotional void which separates us from the two-dimensional images on a screen.

Sometimes music is merely meant to be a polite addition to the images, to help people digest the emotion properly, but sometimes the most memorable uses of music are where it skews our reality and confounds our expectations, exciting us, drawing us in and taking us 'somewhere else'. Many of the examples we look at in this book are where the music subverted and challenged what we expected to hear. Our aural cognition and musical judgment, just like every part of our life, is based on our ability to classify and categorise what we hear. We do this by often subconsciously comparing it to music we've heard before. This is how we arbitrate the vastness of what music is. If we had no mechanism of classification or categorisation visually and aurally, the world would be a permanently disorientating and chaotic place. Every experience would be 'the first time'. Therefore to challenge someone's expectations musically is potentially a potent but subtle form of manipulation.

Film music sometimes works because it simply confirms what we expected and wanted and therefore fulfills an aural need. But some film music also succeeds because it often offers us things we didn't expect, didn't see coming and hadn't prepared for. Extreme examples of this might be serious dissonance, which often has the effect of making us feel uncomfortable. This may make us more receptive to the visual stimulation of a film simply by setting an appropriate tone. Much more subtle ways of offering us aural situations we didn't expect might make us feel unsettled, disorientated, perplexed or confused. The more we examine how successful film music is constructed in terms of its use of harmonic, melodic, rhythmic or instrumental tradition, the more we realise that some of the greatest examples of film music communicate so well precisely because they don't conform to what we expected.

Commercial songs are the same in some respects, but although the current misleading ethos is that songs 'all sound the same' because they have to pander to precise methods of construction and systems of production even to get heard, if we seriously analyse most successful songs we will find that there is nearly always something special, something we didn't expect, something that attracted our attention and fired our emotional responses. People would like to pretend that these small, slight and subtle distortions in patterns, chords, melodies or production are peculiar to each song. People also sometimes like to believe that any song's ability to communicate with listeners is so embedded in deep abstract psychological and metaphysical issues that it is virtually impossible to rationalise, much less derive any general meaning which might apply to everybody who listens to it. These views perpetuate most of the myths which surround the art of composition and succeed in shrouding it in mystery. It's only a mystery why and how music communicates if you choose not to find out. True, we are all different and we listen in subtly different ways according to our emotional intelligence, experiences and intellect, but still the vast majority of the reasons most things musical communicate in the ways they do are completely understandable.

How do we make music fit the picture?

Thomas Newman said "Less definitely is more. People are watching in real time, but you're not writing in real time". This is one of the great truisms about how music is created. We listen to music in real time and we listen from left to right, from start to finish. Listening is a linear experience with a predefined time limit, unlike, for example, visual art; there is no time limit on looking at a painting. In music things are not replayed for us physically unless we stop and reverse or fast-forward the recording. We cannot keep returning to one particular section as a matter of course; we do not have complete control and the context of our comprehension is not wholly our own. I say this because, by complete and stark contrast, this is not how we *write* music. We compose in sections and we compose at a radically different pace than the eventual product is heard. The biggest problem therefore is constantly trying to conceptualise what the 'real-time version' will sound like whilst still creating it.

When you get close to an impressionist painting it sometimes becomes a blur. But from a distance it makes sense. Artists therefore had to constantly 'zoom out' and evaluate how it would look to the viewer. Composers have to do a similar thing with their music. They have to zone out of 'relative time' and into 'real time' to see if what they've created sounds good at the speed of its eventual delivery and in context of its eventual surroundings. Because composers lack the ability for the speed of conceptualization and creation to match the speed by which the music is consumed, there is sometimes a mismatch in the process and a disparity in how the piece communicates. Therefore part of the job of a successful composer is converting their ideas into something which will be understandable for what it was meant to be. The message takes ages to perfect but is relayed in real time; we have to ensure the message does not get lost in translation.

One of the reasons budding film music doesn't always work as well as it might is because it can sound contrived, unnatural, forced and occasionally clumsy. Sometimes composers are trying to say too much in the relatively brief amount of time the piece has. Sometimes potentially effective music might be spoiled by clumsy delivery or indulgent orchestration or production. Maybe in many ways there is often simply too much music *in* music. Certainly the music of Thomas Newman, John Powell, Craig Armstrong, Michael Nyman and the numerous other great film composers who understand how to slow the 'rate of music within music' down, seems to regularly hit a nerve with viewers. One of the reasons films like *United 93*, *Road to Perdition*, *Gatacca* and many, many more, communicate so vividly is because they contain music which seems to deliberate; to ponder. This does not mean such music is necessarily 'going slower'; merely that it is constructed in a way which allows its nuances to breathe and be heard and allows listeners to the luxury of interpretation. Sometimes music needs to allow us the time to listen, not just hear. It needs to allow us to appreciate, to comprehend, to reflect and understand; this is when music becomes an experience rather than simply an event.

Clearly this kind of approach cannot work for every type of film but there is a general feeling that perhaps sometimes music simply tries too hard. Music is an extension of someone's thoughts and opinions, someone's point of view and it is also sometimes an extension of ego. In songwriting this is entirely fitting but with music for the moving image your music fulfills a function and serves a purpose. Indulgence and ego therefore are not the dominating forces in film music that they are in songwriting. 'Good' film music is perceived as good because the function of it good; what it's doing is good. Film music is 'good' because it succeeds in immersing itself with the pictures and creating 'one' experience. Therefore the kind of musical ego needed to write songs has to be supplanted with a more pragmatic and functional imagination which can carve ideas into specific units of time, forgetting how it stacks up as 'music' and concentrating instead on how it works functionally. Perhaps in many ways what Thomas Newman and other expressive composers have managed to do is to take excessive ego and opinion out of the music and allow these to be a product of the listener.

Composer Jerry Fielding said "Bad film music intrudes and italicizes moments that have no need of such emphasis". This is very true and always has been. Certainly it's much more obvious in older films where subtlety was rare but in some ways it's just as much of a problem now. In 1940 someone listening to the kind of music Craig Armstrong wrote for *World Trade Centre* or John Powell wrote for *United 93* would find it hard to figure out how such music would succeed in italicizing the emotion. This is because people, and audiences, were guided on how to feel much more aggressively than they are now. That said, sometimes immensely emotional scenes and situations are spoiled by having music which succeeds in intruding and highlighting rather than increasing the emotion. Thankfully some modern films allow the viewer the freedom to interpret and one of the vehicles for this is the music they use. They feature music which leaves many doors open for interpretation.

How do film composers manage to turn it round so quickly?

As a composer of music for the moving image you can't wait for the great inspiration. Conceptualizing is essential but you cannot simply sit around waiting for it to show up. Your time is limited. Typically film score composers might get anything between 4 and 6 weeks to complete a score, inclusive of orchestration, production and recording. As I have alluded to elsewhere this horrendous lack of time in which to perfect your ideas can be stressful but it can also create its own dynamic. It highlights the need for discipline and the clear need for a fundamental grasp of music structure and harmonic dynamics. What most film composers have as standard is a huge bagful of ideas, concepts, approaches and methods. Any number of these may form the basis of the initial ideas for a new project.

Into their existing templates which reflect their understanding and methodologies come new ideas which might give one particular score a specific identity. Having an approach and a style forms the basis of a composer's identity. This is how composers turn it round so quickly. So when James Horner talks about how a film speaks to him being at the core of his conceptual process, this is the point where he decides on a basic approach, which in turn triggers more specific ideas in terms of instrumentation and harmony, which Horner often interprets as 'colour'.

Little of this process is genuinely random or to do with spontaneous unbridled inspiration; it is the result of an immense database of knowledge, distilled through an eclectic and vivid imagination. This is how and why composers such as Horner turn it round so quickly and develop an identifiable style. This is also how Beethoven and Mozart and the rest of them turned it round so quickly. I do not mean to suggest that each new piece they write is simply a different version of the last piece; merely that what enables them to carve out a successful and distinct identity is to do with supreme ability, almost limitless understanding and imagination and, finally, process.

The main reason the audience knows more than the characters is because of music.

As a composer of music for film you are not simply writing to accompany moving pictures; you're sharing in the telling of the story. You tell the story in a subtly different way to the pictures, but you are sharing the storytelling duties nonetheless. People use their eyes better than they use their ears; because people have a greater understanding of moving images they find it easier to rationalise a moving picture. Their understanding of how to interpret music is usually not as strong because, for most, music lacks a visual dimension: they can't *see* how it does it. They can't see how or why it affects them. This is why music is so powerful; because its meaning is not quite as absolute as pictures or words it is more open to subtle interpretation. Whilst composers retain the power to be direct and unsubtle, they also have to power to tell a story more subtly, in a vague, oblique way.

When does drama become melodrama?

We cringe when confronted by hammy overacting. When we look at older films, although we may love and cherish them, we have to occasionally acknowledge that some of the acting, composing and directing techniques are, by today's standards, rather too obvious. One of the principal ways in which films can be ruined is when the music turns the drama into *melodrama*. How much is too much? How much is enough? For composers of 'normal' music, e.g. music written for commercial consumption *as music*, this is perhaps not as much as an issue, because there is *only* music; you will hopefully know when enough is enough. You will know when you've overcooked it. But for composers of music for the moving image where the music is part of a larger construct, it is often difficult to underwrite, to understate. It's easy to be seduced into going too far. The effect needed from film and television music is supplementary, and in *addition* not just to the image but the sound design and dialogue. You go too far when you overstate your case musically; usually this is instrumentally, melodically and in context of orchestration. You go too far when you crowd the drama.

In the distant past, film music tended to be mainly duplicative in nature and function. Film music precedents, rituals and traditions were, and to a degree still are, important; without the defining techniques and approaches of pioneers like Max Steiner there might not have even *been* a film music industry. Film music carries with it the burden of heritage from the so-called 'golden era' where music was inherently descriptive and almost universally duplicative. Its job was to carve out a musically emotional dimension for the film to accompany the pictures. Seemingly there was no other context to music; no greater role. Some movies still require the same model today but increasingly new generations of film composers are providing often subtle emotional commentaries on the film, rather than simply a sequence of cues designed to fit the picture. They are telling the same story but in a different way. This is not to say that this is an entirely new way of thinking and working; there are many films from the past where music is used in different ways. The point is that in the past a majority of directors and producers used film music in an obvious, descriptive and often clumsy way; they had quite rigid formulaic ideas about what the role of music was. As a result young aspiring composers can often over-score when they essentially follow an old scoring model, which far too many directors will want them to do.

One of the great problems is that many student directors tend to listen more to *film* music than 'music'; at university level new and aspiring directors are taught about all aspects of a film but pitifully little is taught to educate and enlighten would-be directors about music. This is an important observation because if student directors simply listen to existing film music and end up giving composers temp tracks to inspire them, film music risks becoming a specific genre, a style. I say this because the real strength of film music has traditionally been that it was inclusive of many musical styles and approaches.

When music is overcooked

Part of the baggage from the past is the concept of 'hit points' in moving image where a composer faithfully 'hits' (or acknowledges musically) every big or obvious visual change. Some movies need this kind of approach but again, increasingly directors want more from music and composers are finding new ways of matching the on-screen dynamics without literally hitting or duplicating everything.

One of the principal ways descriptive or duplicative writing has become cliched and overdone is to be found in TV nature documentaries. Initially such programs weren't scored; it was considered a little distracting to have 'music' (seen as 'entertainment') within nature documentaries. When eventually directors experimented with music its use would be sparing, perhaps limited to intro, outro and edit points or scene changes. Today nature documentaries are wildly successful commercial products which enjoy huge budgets and high worldwide viewing figures. They often have wonderfully filmic, crafted, lavish full orchestral scores. But not everyone supports this; some think that the constant, rousing, densely orchestrated classically romantic music detracts from the power of the documentary, rather than supporting it. Certainly specialists in nature recording (people who spend days crafting techniques which enable them to record distinctive sounds of nature) are sometimes not overly keen on how their work has been devalued and demeaned by the brash, sweeping brushstrokes of orchestral music. Chris Watson, a renowned specialist in nature recording, told me of situations where he would, for example, spend days perfecting a series of small microphones built on a coat hanger, which was placed in the ribcage of a dead animal in order to capture the sounds of predators feeding. This is the level of detail to which specialists go in order to capture the sound to match the pictures, but such specialisms are increasingly cast aside in favour of an increasing tendency towards the heavy orchestration and unsubtle brushstrokes of brash romanticism. Such writing invariably includes a reliance on 'mickey mousing' – a term first coined to describe the way cartoon music follows every important piece of on-screen action.
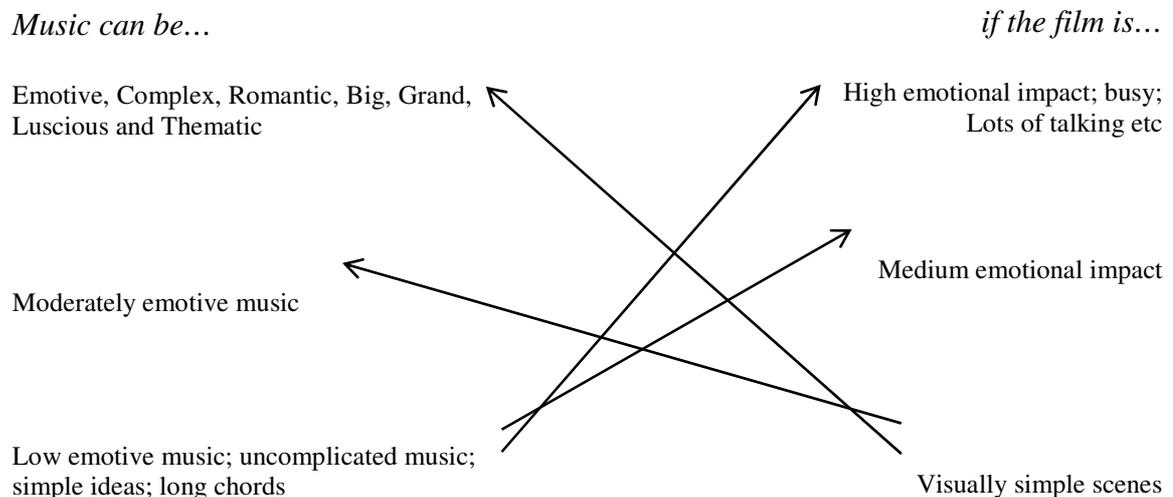
Orchestrating over the din

One way music can crowd a film is not necessarily in terms of composition but in terms of orchestration. Don't forget that your music is entirely notional until it is applied to the sounds and instruments which bring it to life. In this respect arranging, orchestration and production are crucial; they represent the ultimate prism through which your music will be enjoyed and understood. How music *sounds* is the ultimate, final and only arbiter of how music *is*. If you score a scene which includes children's voices with mid-to-high instrumentation, you might be crowding the dialogue. Equally if you're confronted with low, resonant voices, you have to orchestrate and/or mix your way out of sonic trouble. Hans Zimmer's contribution to *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight* utilizes his trademark low and textured mixture of orchestral instruments and sampled sounds, which work brilliantly well; but what is also a triumph is the production, which navigates the often dense textures of the sound design and the sibilance of Christian Bale's voice.

Scoring around dialogue

In early films composers simply avoided placing music over dialogue. Music was used where dialogue *wasn't*. The perceived artificiality of music was considered at odds with the naturalism of human speech. Music's job was to punctuate scene changes and score over 'establishing shots', scene changes and other edits. It was assumed that the public couldn't possibly concentrate on dialogue if there was a 'racket going on behind it', and it was also assumed that the use of music over or under dialogue would lead to diluted, dull music that would then cheapen the art form.

It was okay for music to accompany image, but not dialogue. This was of course wrong. Good writers can create effective music that conveys extra feelings the dialogue cannot deliver. Also they were wrong about the audience; for the most part people do not need two brains and two sets of ears to interpret music and dialogue together. They interpret it as one, because it has been conceived as one by the composer. If the composer has done a bad job the public will be confused and irritated by the bad mix of music and dialogue. The most important thing is that two different forms of expression can co-exist if they're not created in ignorance of each other.

The ability to score round dialogue is important. You have to write the kind of music which doesn't need to keep having enormous holes carved out of it in order to accommodate the dialogue or sound design. Music which is continually dipping in and out can become tiresome, distracting and predictable. Also audience concentration is something composers have to bear in mind. Music is usually the last creative element to go onto a film, so the job of a composer is not just knowing what to write, but, as Jerry Goldsmith said, 'knowing where to write it'. A sense of architecture is paramount. As an extremely general rule of thumb (and as the simplistic diagram below, shows) it's best to avoid big, complex music when the scene has lots of talking or heavy dialogue and/or sound design. Scenes where there is plenty of talking or other sound which is important to the plot, are best scored lightly.

Music can be…   *if the film is…*

Emotive, Complex, Romantic, Big, Grand,
Luscious and Thematic

High emotional impact; busy;
Lots of talking etc

Moderately emotive music

Medium emotional impact

Low emotive music; uncomplicated music;
simple ideas; long chords

Visually simple scenes

Audience concentration and the role of music

When the audience sees lips move *as well as* hearing the character's voice, the music may be fractionally easier to apply. When people see what they hear they tend to understand it more. But when viewers can hear a voice but *cannot* see the lips moving (such as in off-screen dialogue or narration) they perceive the movie and the dialogue separately and then join the two together; this means they have one more thing to concentrate on. Be observant of the textures of the speaking actors. As we have established elsewhere, the term 'music to moving image' is a little misleading or incomplete. You're also writing music for *existing sound*, which is just as much of a challenge to navigate as writing to moving *picture*. 'Speaking' tends to have a moving, evolving texture which mostly manages to punctuate music and stand out against the more consistent textures of instrumentation; but still its best to avoid something as distracting as melody during important dialogue. Composer Alex North referred to 'orchestrating out of the vocal range'; we need to interpret this as 'scoring *around* the dialogue range'

Solos tend to take your mind away from the spoken word. They both tend to be singular, particular and unusual. In any case irrespective of solos, avoid extreme highs and lows over dialogue. Music that is too demanding to listen to will distract the audience, especially where something visually important is happening, or under dialogue; but that needn't always be a bad thing. Sometimes you want to distract, to confuse and befuddle. But in general, unless you are attempting to make some bold point or deliberately trying to wrong-foot the audience, needlessly complex or demanding music might not work with dialogue.

Whose point of view do you play?

We have looked numerous times in the book at this issue, in much detail and in many cases specific to the movie we're analysing. But in general terms it's important to realise that movie music has a multitude of possibilities. It can play the story or the fiction: the two are not always the same thing. The fiction refers to the on-screen events and depictions whereas the story can often be much more complex, deep and meaningful. This book contains numerous examples where the music plays the underlying story; something which sometimes the film is not always capable of articulating or wants deliberately to leave to the undergrowth of audience interpretation. Music can play the character, it can play the scene or it can play the overview. It can play it long or play it short. Music contains the potential for more possibilities in terms of what it *says* than any other aspect of the creative process of filmmaking.

How to stimulate your intuition

Intuition is not, despite its inference, something that always flows naturally, spontaneously and without provocation. People talk about intuition as if it is a naturally occurring phenomenon or even a 'gift', but this can be misleading. Sometimes you need to stimulate your intuition by not 'overthinking' something or accidentally blocking naturally creative instincts with intellect. Try to respond emotionally and react as an audience member, *then* translate your emotions into music. Sometimes it's better to watch the images again and again, making notes about general issues like what kind of approach you might employ, what kind of instruments / samples you might use. These general observations will enable you to make good creative decisions. Too many composers simply rush to the keyboard with the pictures rolling and try and immediately carve out a response. You need avenues, methods, structures in place to channel your intuition and emotion into cold, hard, actual music

Sometimes a large part of the initial process is not about writing, it's about conceptualizing; sorting out your emotional responses and what you as a person and an artist see in the pictures. Also, try to avoid too much detail in the early stages of composition. This may block you in, creatively. Try to avoid the quicksand of detail until there is a need for it. Once a musical genre / approach for a specific film is established a composer should blend in his or her own aesthetic tendencies; making it their own and adapting it into something unique. The importance of analysing the film before you jump into writing music is important. Most successful composers spend hours conceptualising. Writing music is only *partly* about writing music; mostly it's about thinking. Composing is an act which sometimes needs to be the *result* of a process, not its beginning.

Many filmgoers say they don't often consciously notice the music, but that doesn't mean their subconscious mind isn't reflecting on the interplay and thematic connections between the music and the film. Indeed a common mantra amongst film watchers is that they 'don't hear the music but they would notice if it wasn't there'. This seems to give currency to the notion that whilst they aren't often conscious of hearing music, in all probability they *listen* to the interaction, which is a different, deeper process.Filmgoers tend to be aware of music when it is at its most obvious. Visual edits and / or crossfades can be used as a narrative device to indicate a transition in time or place. Most of these require music and such music tends to be heard and listened to.

Music and Image

The first step toward understanding existing film music is to hear it as music and then see it in its larger construct – with the image. Try not to think of 'great music'. Film music does not exist in a vacuum; it is not written to neccasarily function as a stand-alone musical experience. If it was, the self-same music may fail as film music. Music purely for listening carries the burden and expectation of being entertaining in its own right; it carries the burden of having to function on its own. The type of music often used for film does not always function brilliantly well simply as music; it is not meant to. Film music shares with the image and other sounds to shape an overall composite perception.

Classical Film Scoring

Classic film scoring techniques, which have remained largely unchanged in 80 years, did not simply spontaneously appear with the development of movies. They inherited a legacy of the concept of musical accompaniment which dates back thousands of years. Accustomed though we are to speak of the films made before 1927 as 'silent', the film has never been, in the full sense of the word, silent. The main use of music in film, initially, was to drown out the awful noise of the projector. 'Film Music' was not initially seen as an artistic benefit to a film experience. Its use was pragmatic; its role purely functional. Music removed the strangeness of a silent film; audiences were unused to the collective intimacy of a darkened room and to a degree music helped this situation. The interesting aspect of all this is that music not only neutralised distracting noises, it also neutralised technical flaws within the film itself. This aspect of its heritage is arguably still intact. Music was used for its form rather than its content. It was used for what it *did*, not what it *was*. One early alternative to music was the 'film explainer' – a person who would narrate the film. The interesting thing is that we tend to think of this idea with the same sense of absurdity as early film pioneers probably thought of music.

The authenticity of the film score

The majority of silent films were shot without any thought of music. Most times when you hear a silent movie with an accompanying score, it is not really authentic. Some had music added after the event, whereas some silent films, made after the possibility of synchronisation, were made with suitable gaps to accommodate music. Thus the early relationship between image and music was not about context or synchronicity or art. It was about crude function and commerciality. That said, Irving Thalberg, an MGM producer in the 1920s, was remarkably complimentary about the inclusion of music in the silent film era, saying, "There never was a silent film. We'd finish a picture, show it in our projection room and come out shattered. It was awful. Then we'd show it in a theatre, with a girl down in the pit pounding away at a piano, and it would make all the difference in the world." adding, "without music there wouldn't have been a film industry at all." When silent films turned into 'talkies' studio heads brought over some of Europe's most prominent 'classical' composers. They became advisors and orchestrators, involved in rescoring existing classical works. So, even back then, nobody had seriously envisaged specially commissioned original music. People thought only of 'music', not specially commissioned music. This wasn't because they couldn't afford commissioned music; it is simply because *nobody had thought of it.* People take the concept of specially commissioned film music for granted, but this is only because it has established itself as a concept. We have Max Steiner, arguably the godfather of film music, to thank for this. People say that often the first person to suggest something or do something or invent something receives disproportionate praise for something that would have been done eventually *anyway*. This is because we look at the great ideas and inventions through the flawed perspective created by the passage of time; we simply assume *someone* would have done it eventually.

Even now most people think it absurd to suggest that the film/music relationship ought to be the other way around (movies put to music). We think it odd that directors would devise a plan for a film around the emotional contours of a piece of music. Although this has been done it is very rare. And yet, if it were the norm, we would probably accept it without question.

Eventually Max Steiner (who had been an advisor to film companies regarding the use of classical music) convinced producer David Selznick to let him compose some original music. The 'commissioned film score' was born. But still there are critics of the use of film music and even critics of the use of sound in films. Inevitably such critics tend to be 'cultural theorists' or occasionally crusty academics that mainly inhabit a vast 'paraworld' of their own thoughts and opinions without giving real credence to the world in which everyone else lives and functions. Cultural theorist Rudolph Arnheim said, in his book 'Film as Art' "it is obvious speech cannot be attached to the immobile image (paintings, photography), but it is equally unsuited to the [silent] film, whose means of expression resemble those of a painting. The essence of cinema is basically visual. Every sonic intervention ought to limit itself to a justified and necessary act of integration."

Placement, Architecture and Economy

Max Steiner said in the 1930s: "the toughest job in film scoring is knowing when and where to place it [music]". In other words it's not always what you do but *where* you do it and even *if* you do it. This is because the primary reason for film music is its function. It isn't simply there as music; it's there for a *reason*. The *reason* is why it works. Therefore if the function or placement of music is wrong, the music itself will sound wrong. When music sounds wrong it is usually the placement which is bad, not the music; after all, what *is* bad music? It is often the judgement of what the music *does* which is at fault, not the music. Essentially there is no such thing as 'bad music'; there is only interpretation and judgement. The interpretation and judgement of film music is invariably tied up in how we hear it in conjunction with the pictures, in other words, the function. The problem of overuse of music in film still exists today; Danny Elfmann said, "Very often the biggest disagreement I have with a director is simply them wanting as much music as they do". Certainly if we look at the modern film industry music tends to be overused. It's interesting to note that many films whose music lives on actually had comparatively little music. Perhaps a good example of this is *Out of Africa*, which won John Barry an Academy Award despite having just over thirty minutes of music for a two hour film. Does over-usage of music affect the value of music? Of course it does; therefore part of your job is to say 'no'. Part of your job is to protect the heritage of film music and protect its future by defending it against hostile interpretation.

When, for their excellent book 'On the Track' by Rayburn Wright and Fred Karlin, film directors were asked how music affects a film, there were some frank and interesting views expressed. Francis Ford Coppola said "Music is a big factor in helping the illusion of the film come to life - the same way music brings back different periods of our lives". This is an important and astute observation. Whenever we hear music we remember, the memory it triggers is of something tangible, whether it's a place or time or a person. The use of music in film can exploit that same kind of emotional power; the power music has to *remind* us of a feeling. Director Alex Cox said he thought music was overused and suggested that "someone should do a film without any music at all". This is a common mantra amongst many directors but it is probably down to frustration over the way music is used and how much is used, not the actual concept of music's inclusion in film.

Commercially successful films without music tend sometimes to be documentary-style, hand-held camera oriented projects where the inclusion of music would be absurd when trying to present something as if it were documented fact (such as *Cloverfield*). Cameron Crowe, who made *Jerry Maguire* and *Almost Famous* said "The best soundtrack music by-passes your mind and goes straight to your soul." This is reminiscent of the famous TS Elliot quote in which he said "true art communicates before it is understood". This is an important point; as we discussed before, perhaps one of the main reasons music *does* communicate is because there normally is no tangible or rational process of understanding, of comprehension. For most cinemagoers, film music just *is*. The effect it has on us is not something we can easily rationalise; this is its most endearing characteristic and its great strength.

Guy Hamilton, who directed, amongst others, such notable films as *Battle of Britain, Goldfinger, Force 10 from Navarone* said, "I cannot improve on Maurice Jaubert's [quote] 'We do not go to the cinema to hear music. We require it to deepen and prolong in us the screen's visual impact". Of all quotes this is probably the most profound and the most correct. The problem of music's inclusion in film, therefore, is probably the amount used. The composer inevitably gets the blame for this but in essence these are usually directorial and production mistakes, not musical ones. Sidney Lumet said [music] "should be treated as another leading character." This is another interesting observation and indeed in many films which contain landmark scores, the music's inclusion was so profound that it *did* function almost as a character. Reportedly when asked who played E.T., Spielberg replied "John; he played the Shark too" [in *Jaws*]. Martin Scorsese said "music and cinema fit together naturally. There's a kind of intrinsic musicality to the way moving images work when they're put together." This is the first quote where a director has acknowledged the real creative kinship which exists between music and image. There is indeed a musicality (a pace, tempo, emotion) to most films, visually. Rather than music being seen as 'in addition to' film, it could be argued that film's most natural partner is music.

Basic tips and tricks

When you look at a scene you intend to score, think about the moment you want to music to make its point – to become 'well established' – then work back from there to work out the best spot to bring in the music initially. Divide the lead-up into bars and beats, which will show you structurally how long you have in terms of the 'relative time' of *music* until the hit. This will make the hit sound 'in context' and not sound forced or contrived. The audience probably won't notice the cue starting and stopping, but they are aware that it is crafted to make its point at a particular moment.

Film music is not conceived or constructed like other music. Although it is experienced sequentially it is rarely composed sequentially, even within a specific scene or cue. Musical changes during a scene will have a great deal of emotional impact on the content but equally music which remains aloof from visual subtleties can be effective; visual angles and perspectives change within a scene so sometimes music is the one constant factor which binds a scene together. Sometimes if a scene is 'still' or nothing of note happens visually, the music may be required to make the difference – the music's function becomes narrative.

Film and television drama scores can sometimes appear to be filled with dissonance and complex harmonies. It's interesting to note that music which is complex harmonically is often simple structurally or rhythmically or texturally. For music to be dissonant in all ways may present a challenging listening experience. Try to remember where your music fits in the grand scheme of things. Remember, this is not 'real' music; this is not music for music's sake, this is music to accompany picture. This is music which, over and above everything, has to have a salient function. Your music is a part of that film, not the other way round.

Transition between time and place

Music can help to tell a story by underscoring the transition between time and place.
Given that very few films occur in real-time, music's job is to accentuate often massive shifts in time and place which means its impact can be pivotal to a film. When musical changes happen a moment before the visual cut, they have the effect of drawing us into the change – preparing us, as it were. Musical transitions which are frame-accurate will have more of a segmented and regimented feel.

Sampled v 'the real thing'

For years the central narrative regarding the use of synths and later sample libraries was 'are they as good as the real thing'. The giant shadow cast by the development of ever-more sample synths, modules and samples was obsessed with one issue: how close to reality was it? There was an almost limitless pursuit of sonic perfection; as if that was what 'musical reality' was. The breath-taking irony is that now we are at a point in history where samples are so utterly perfect, so devoid of the tiny, almost imperceptible nuances that make music human, that they have in some ways ceased to sound 'normal'. To sample a note is not to sample its use but its unilateral sound. So much of the character of music is tied up in performance, so using sample libraries has to go hand-in-hand with a detailed and realistic knowledge and understanding of what real instruments sound like.

The obsession with sonic perfection tended to overshadow the much bigger issue of how and why we use sounds and instruments in the first place. What is their function? What do they do? As with many technological advances the primary motivation was 'can we do this?' not 'should we do this?' The point I make is that from a 'film music' perspective technology is used to serve the music. That is its primary function. Why and how and in what situation or context we use instruments (real or sampled) are questions arrangers and orchestrators constantly ask. But often composers with a small grasp of arranging can have a romanticised idea about instrumentation, almost as if the reason for the success of a particular instrument is merely its inclusion; that all it need do is exist.

As an arranger or orchestrator you constantly ask yourself what the *function* of the sound or the instrument or the section is. As an orchestrator you do not simply and spontaneously envisage groups of instruments on an indulgent whim. Function is the primary guiding principle. What gives an instrument its inherent beauty is what it plays, not what it is; in other words, its function.

What gives an instrument its function is a combination of the player and the composer, arranger, orchestrator and/or producer. It's never about the sound; it's about what we do with it. Technology is the same; it is an instrument.

Regarding the use of samples, people were understandably preoccupied with getting the most realistic sound possible but often this was to the detriment of an understanding of why they wanted the sounds in the first place. One cannot simply throw an instrumental texture at a piece of music and hope for the best just because it 'sounds real'. Similarly, often would-be arrangers and orchestrators are preoccupied with instrument ranges and understanding the intimate workings of every instrument, almost as if arranging and orchestration is purely a science. Knowing 'how' to write for an instrument in terms of its limitations is easy compared to knowing *what* to write. Being armed with technical knowledge does not in itself make an arranger out of you. What makes an arranger out of you is using your imagination to develop ideas and carve out an instrumental identity. The quality of professional orchestral sample libraries is now so good that it is no longer a debate about whether the sounds 'sound real', it's once again a debate about what we do with the sounds; whether we use them at all and if we do, how?

Play or click?

One simple observation is that strings always sound better when 'played in', not 'clicked in'. If you click the notes in you can often spend ages trying to manipulate the kind of relationship between two successive notes (by overlapping audio samples) which would be entirely natural in *performance*. If you closely examine your fingers when playing a simple slow string line into a keyboard there is sometimes a crossover when briefly, both notes are being played. This imitates the string section insofar as when, for example, eighteen 1st violins move from one note to the next, there are invariably subtle differences in articulation resulting in a tiny, almost imperceptible blur. To an extent this is part of their sound, so performing string lines on a keyboard using fingers tends to replicate this. Non-keyboard players sometimes say that 'clicking' is the only way, but even if keyboards are not your instrument, as a musician you will be able to 'mock up' a successful rhythmic interpretation of the line even if melodically it is wrong. When you've successfully played in the rhythm, simply change the actual notes in midi.

A mistake that some people make when using sampled strings is quite simply the number of voices they play at any one time (when playing a chord). If you were arranging a chord for a 40-piece string of, say, Cmaj7, even with 40 people you would spread the voicing only between four and six parts. Even with a 60-piece string orchestra you wouldn't normally go beyond 6 note chord voicings. The inherent beauty of hearing a chord is directly relevant to experiencing a combination of the individual notes *and* the composite sound they produce. This is in essence why harmony works; because it communicates a combination of several notes and an overarching identity relatively easily; it transmits an intrinsic uniqueness. If, on the other hand, you were to score a 20-part chord, no one voice would penetrate; we might hear the top, the bottom but simply a blur in the middle.

Most importantly, whether you're using fantastically accurate samples or not, if you don't voice strings like real strings are voiced, you will end up with a sound which sounds like it's a synth. This tends to happen quite a lot; budding film score composers who lack arranging skills will use top quality samples by way of attempting to short-circuit the need for knowledge of chord voicing. The unavoidable reality remains that irrespective of the quality of the string samples you use, they have to be scored as 'real' strings would be in order to sound like 'real strings', just as actual string players would need to play the right kind of voicings for the chord to 'work'.

As an example, if you simply laid both hands on a keyboard triggering string samples and played a chord of F with all ten fingers, immediately you lose the authenticity of a 'string sound'. Whereas if by comparison you played proper voicings, even with a texturally limited older synth string module, you can sometimes achieve convincing results. Authenticity isn't always about the 'sound'. Also, using sampled sounds gives you the ability to mix any sound louder than another. An orchestra does not; it has a natural dynamic between instruments and sections. If you are trying to mock-up an orchestra and you mix sounds in a way that does not *replicate* a natural acoustic environment, again you will lose some authenticity. To an extent an orchestra is a self-mixing environment where the size of instrument group is in ratio to the size of *another* instrument group.

People sometimes assume that getting the best out of sampled sounds is solely about production and mix, but the best way is to learn the way an orchestra sounds is to listen to it in its natural environment. The mix is less about personal choice and much more dictated by tradition. This sounds like an obvious statement to make, but if you want to score string samples realistically, listen to real strings recorded and also listen to real strings playing acoustically.

Often the benefit of 'real' instruments is romanticised. People will doggedly use real pianos rather than sampled sounds or digital pianos, but unless you're on a pristine acoustic piano often the sampled sound works better sonically and in context of consistent action. There are issues to think of when using samples of brass or woodwind, which don't tend to always work as convincingly as strings. For example real trumpets and trombones don't always have the same attack at the beginning of every note. The first note of a phrase is attacked slightly differently than the third or fourth note in a line, which will often sound smoother. But sampled sounds invariably capture *a note* not the third note or fourth note in a phrase. The note will sound like its being played for the first time because as far as the sample is concerned, *it is.* You can easily end up with quite a caricatured, mimicked and raspy rendition of the sound unless you use the software to alter the attack.

Instruments chosen for a midi orchestra using sampled sounds are limited only by your imagination, your sequencer and the recording tracks available. This leads people to imagine that any orchestral combination can work in the real world. Real orchestras are much more limited. If authenticity is what you're after there are specific combinations that work.

Number crunching

Particularly with strings, people often midi-orchestrate using too many tracks – too many sounds, too many instruments per section and too many fingers on the keyboard. The success and authenticity of the string section is about ratio, size and perspective.

A 60-piece string orchestra would be divided up:

16 people playing 1st Violins
14 people playing 2nd Violins
12 people playing Violas
10 people playing Cellos
8 people playing Basses

A 40-piece string orchestra would be divided up:

12 people playing 1st Violins
10 people playing 2nd Violins
8 people playing Violas
6 people playing Cellos
4 people playing Basses

A 40-piece 'studio' string orchestra would be divided up:

12 people playing 1st Violins
12 people playing 2nd Violins
8 people playing Violas
8 people playing Cellos

A 23-piece string orchestra would be divided up:

8 people playing 1st Violins
6 people playing 2nd Violins
4 people playing Violas
3 people playing Cellos
2 people playing Basses

Technology can give you a false sense of reality. For example, Midi can make all instruments audible no matter what range they're in or what type of instrument they are. Real orchestras don't work that way. Also, sudden changes in tempo whilst sampled sounds are in the middle of a complex passage are easily achievable but real orchestras would rarely do this. Traditionally tempo changes are usually written to happen at convenient *musical* times – when little is going on. This is something which is embedded into the way music is written for orchestras; this is authenticity at work.

Most modern sequencers such as Logic or Cubase have the ability to create gradual tempo changes that will slow down your music and land on a certain bar / frame. This means they will divide the BPM slowdown by the number of bars/beats available and deliver a perfect slowdown. This is almost impossible to do with a real orchestra and is therefore something you'd never hear. Therefore it is complete unauthentic. To produce it synthetically may well work technically but it might sound odd musically because it loses its sense of reality. In reality orchestral slowdowns, speedups and even normal performance is littered with small almost imperceptible inconsistencies.

Sampled sounds, along with ever-more precise sequencers, have created their own 'perfect' dynamic which is often at odds with what music can actually do and what people are used to hearing. To be clear, this is not an anti-technology rant; if your idea is to create new and bold musical environments, fine. Hans Zimmer and many other composers have successfully merged real orchestras, technology and synthesis and in doing have created whole new textures and filmic experiences. But if your idea is to replicate a 'real orchestra' it's best to keep within the limitations of what a real orchestra is capable of. Even Zimmer, with all his technology, uses an orchestra mainly in an authentic way. The extra textures he employs create a secondary sonic gloss but the initial instrumental harmonies and groupings are largely untouched. Obviously there are exceptions such as parts of his score for *Hannibal*, in which he used a string section of cellos and basses playing at the extremes of their ranges.

The big problem with the overuse of technology is that, in the same way musical styles and genres tend to dominate the landscape for a limited period of time, the overuse of specific technological aids can lead to music sounding formulaic. There has been a tendency amongst sample makers to create ever-more perfect libraries; this is to be applauded but it has led to a worrying trend of recording and sampling a deluge of fully-formed cliched filmic orchestration tricks, lines and loops found typically in many movies. This represents an evolution of the sample library concept from merely producing accurate renditions of notes to producing caricatured and cliched musical sequences. This is similar to the evolution of home keyboards for the amateur market which often contain full, 8-bar grand intros and outros to help the amateur performer produce something which gives the impression that the player is better than they are.

Relying on the 'click'

The existence of the 'click track' inherent in sequencers is important and invaluable, but it tends towards a situation where most composers now rely on it perhaps more than they ought to. Obviously when syncing music to picture the click-track is particularly important. But a device designed to enable multi-tracking and keep us all in time has in some ways ended up making some composers succumb to a lure of a regular beat even when perhaps there is no need. Especially when dealing with orchestras, rigid timing can sometimes be a hindrance and can once again create problems when trying to create authenticity. Real orchestras are rarely exactly in time. In concert conditions there is no click track and most of the time the emotion generated by an orchestra comes from the human element of real musicians and the direction of the conductor. Metronomic sequences (used when mocking-up an orchestra) can lead to music having an unreal rigidity. This is especially relevant when dealing with slow, expressive sections which attempt to emulate a real orchestra. In such circumstances the existence of a click-track (even though it's obviously not heard on the finished version) offers a level of rigidity and precision that simply wouldn't be there in a real orchestra. So much of the character of the orchestra is tied up in the swelling of textures and the subtle, almost undetectable rise and fall of tempo.

When using sequencers and orchestral sample libraries to emulate a soft, slow or expressive sound, ask yourself whether the click is needed. Also, when producing such music, try to play-in the instruments, not click. The humanity, emotion and expression inherent in the act of your performance will create a more natural result.

Common mistakes

Great music, great film; awful combination: too many young composers think primarily of their music purely as 'music' which means they try to craft something which is 'musically' good or musically impressive. Often music which is successful for film and TV doesn't work well in its own right.

Normally when people write music they design it to be listened to, understood, rationalised and enjoyed as entertainment and/or art. Although this may seem like an obvious statement, as we have said before music for the moving image is shared with the image and other sounds to create one experience. Viewers do not focus on the music, so the music needn't pander to the usual structural niceties which are so embedded in 'normal' music. Make sure that structurally your cues are right in terms of length. There is nothing worse in music for the moving image than the music for a cue sounding rushed, artificial or contrived. Often this can happen because you've written the kind of phrase which sounds like it belongs in a longer piece of music. Whatever theme or chord sequence you employ has to sit comfortably.

Beethoven and Bob Marley both said: 'music dictates its own speed'. What they meant was that music will almost stubbornly refuse to 'sit right' if it exists, even slightly, at the wrong speed. Odd though this sounds composers don't really write music as such; they uncover or discover that several pre-existing notes and chords sound well together. Composers do not invent notes or chords; they simply place them in the right order. Essentially composers are, first and foremost, musical architects. Certain combinations of harmony, melody and instrumentation will work better at one speed than another speed. This is often a dynamic that we can't control. There is almost a natural equilibrium to music, some of which can't be changed without the consequence being that it doesn't sound authentic or 'sit right'. Sometimes the biggest mistake a composer can make is to rush the piece; take it too fast. Composers sometimes discard music they presume isn't working, when all that's wrong is something within the phrase isn't sitting right.

Stylistic cohesion

Any good film score will have stylistic cohesion. While a score may have many different musical elements and styles to accompany different scenes, there will nearly always be a strong bond. This bond can be in terms of a common and consistent harmonic approach or common and consistent instrumentation and texture. 'Sonic palette' is important. If every cue sounds texturally different there will be no sonic signature, no textural consistency or aural personality. This does not mean you have to write every cue to sound the same or that you can't have diversity; simply that there is normally a need for a palpable musical consistency and identity. Even the best of films have problems building tension without the aid of music, but if music overplays these tensions it can sound melodramatic and overstated; caricatured and exaggerated. There are moments when a whisper speaks louder than a scream. Sometimes total understatement and writing contrary to the scene actually tends to italicise the emotion more.

Practicality and pragmatism

Whenever you start a new project, whether it's a big-budget film or a low budget television documentary, there is a need to put your thoughts, opinions and plans into words. There is a tendency to rush to into the studio and begin responding immediately. There is a tendency to romanticize the process of composition and presume it's down to naked and unprovoked inspiration, but given the time span accorded to most moving image projects you cannot simply rely on being inspired in the right way every time. Music for moving image is primarily about function; how does the scene function and what can music bring to make it function better. Whether music sounds 'cool' or 'awesome' as music is secondary. Given this, the approach to composing has to be practical and pragmatic. When I first started doing TV I was unused to the tight turnaround so inevitably rushed straight to the studio. Eventually I learned that, even if all you have is three days, its best to spend a decent amount of time deciding the kind of thing you think will be appropriate (in terms of style, instrumentation etc) before you actually start writing. Music for the moving image lives or dies according to how good the idea was; the music is an extension of the idea, it is a consequence of the plan.

As boring as this may sound, it is a good idea to list all the scenes you have decided to score / have been asked to score in sequential order. A second list, which sorts the scenes by what you want the *function* of the music to be, is a good idea. This will acclimatise you to the concept that film music lives or dies by its function. A third list, sorting all cues into whether you envisage melody, harmony or texture being the dominating force, is also a good thing to do. Try to find out exactly how much music is required in total.

Then you'll have a feel for whether the project allows you to have several themes or just the one, and whether it allows you to have two sonic / textural / harmonic templates or one singular template which arcs over the whole film. Remember that the film has to have a musical identity – it's not going to have one if you're sweeping from one style to another – electronic to jazz to classical. Try to decide on a 'template' which is beneficial to the film in general.

Composer as storyteller

When you drill down to the heart of what we do, as creative artists, you realise that we tell stories. In songs, in poetry, in books, in paintings, what we say is 'what if…' Music for the moving image helps carve out a road map for the telling of someone else's story. Your music, even down to the tiniest cue, is a journey. Music, like life, is linear, not random access. A song or a symphony or a film score is revealed to the listener one note, one chord at a time; one bar at a time. This is why pacing is so important.

Sometimes as a composer doing TV or film drama projects, you might be required to tell the story that *hasn't* been told. I have worked with directors who would talk about what the fiction was and what *story* was and which one they wanted the music to address. Sometimes they say that the underlying subtext is too hidden; the music can unlock this and allow the viewer to realise what the film is *really* about. Because people can easily digest and understand what they see, pictures are frequently less able to encourage interpretation from the viewer. What people see is more definite and obvious than their experiences of hearing and listening to music. The emotions and meanings music seem to suggest within us, whilst existing, are more open to suggestion and interpretation, and in a filmic sense this is their great strength; the subtle nuances of a discreet narrative subtext are perhaps better delivered when they are implied, suggested and insinuated by music – something people are affected by but don't know how or why.

Aural Logo and Sonic Signature

Thematic music in television creates an aural logo at the start of the show. In many ways the introductory theme has become an endangered species in recent times, certainly for television drama. Its directly communicative capabilities to create a distinct mood are sometimes now at odds with the current desire for subtlety and introspection. Theme tunes give a show an almost caricatured and exaggerated identity – the theme is used all through the series and becomes just as identifiable to the audience as any of the characters. Writing a theme tune is therefore a different process to writing material *within* a TV show or drama. Your music is required to present an aural equivalent of a 'still picture' of the show. Theme tunes are especially important to identify 'Soaps'. The drum intro for *EastEnders* is iconic, as is the original arpegiated piano intro into *Emmerdale*. *Coronation Street* without its musical introduction is unthinkable. The music prepares the viewer and it partly frames the context in which the show is seen and heard. Successful American shows which play the world over, such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Hill Street Blues* (to name only a few) would never travel as well without the music. The music is a unifying experience. Introductory theme music for more subtle TV drama may have to be designed to 'bleed into' the opening scene. Opening themes are frequently written without an absolute identifiable musical ending. These considerations have to be factored into the conceptualization process. Themes which are in need of a definite ending but don't have one will sound odd. The lack of an absolute ending doesn't just affect the ending; it dictates how you construct the whole thing.

Composing as 'frozen improvisation'

Stravinsky once described composing as 'frozen improvisation'. This is true; although prior conceptualization liberates the thinker in you, try not to go to the keyboard with a completely 'done deal' in your head. Allow flexibility. Be open to the sound you never expected but discovered accidentally. That said, for quick turnaround projects it is advisable to work with a sonic palette set up – one you have conceptualized from watching the pictures but before you've written anything. Simply walking to the piano or sequencer without *any* firm preordained idea is dangerous for quick projects.

Try and decide on a template and then work towards it. What composers need in as much abundance as inspiration and imagination is a pragmatic realistic sense of economy, purpose and focus.

The hand of history
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The 'Studio System', in place in the 1930s and beyond in America, was a highly developed system of what amounted to 'divided labour'. This ensured that music departments worked at optimum capacity on a many films simultaneously. Within music departments there were 'chase' specialists and 'main title' specialists. But the division between composer and orchestrator has stood the test of time and still exists today. During the so-called 'golden era' copyright usually rested with the studio. Often composers did not appear in the credit roll. Composers were considered craftspeople not artists. Many composers were able to orchestrate but were effectively prevented from doing so by powerful unions. Max Steiner and Erich Korngold established fruitful relations with their orchestrator Hugo Friedhofer and we can probably thank him more than anyone for the success of orchestral music in film.

Orchestrators wield tremendous artistic power over composers by helping them define their artistic voice. It is hard to envisage how successful Danny Elfman would have been in articulating his unique and distinctive voice without the help and support of Steve Bartek. Equally one cannot overstate the importance of Herbert Spencer's interpretations of John Williams' arrangements on films like *E.T* and *Close Encounters*. Orchestrator Edwin Powell's influence on the entire Twentieth Century Fox 'violin heavy' sound shouldn't be underestimated either. Given that Hollywood film music was, and still is to a large extent, dominated by the orchestra, one of the main ways composers achieve a distinctive voice lies within how they interpret and use the sounds the orchestra has to offer and/or how they use new or bold harmonies and melodies within an orchestral context. Bernard Herrmann was one of those composers who took the basic model of orchestral music but interpreted it in a bold and innovative way. Although most orchestral composers followed the system of strong conventional melodies and lush harmonies (derived from the symphonic traditions of the romantic era) Herrmann tended towards short phrases.

He said, "I think a short phrase has certain advantages. The short phrase is easier to follow for audiences, who only listen with half an ear. Don't forget the best they do is half an ear. I don't like this tune business. It has to have 8 or 16 bars, which limits a composer. Once you start you've got to finish – 8 or 16 bars. Otherwise the audience doesn't know what the hell it's all about". There are no 'tunes' in *Psycho* and yet it remains one of film's greatest scores. People do not walk down the street humming the music from the shower scene and yet it remains one of cinemas most iconic musical moments. Music does not have to be simple or melodic in order to be *remembered*; it simply has to be simple and melodic in order to be *repeated*. Despite writing music which lay outside the norm, Herrmann is remembered as being one of Hollywood's most pivotal composers. Quite how this would have worked out if he'd been made to work with an orchestrator all the time is an interesting question.

His music for *Psycho* has been absorbed into pop culture. George Martin said his string accompaniment to the Beatles song 'Eleanor Rigby' was inspired by Herrmann's score to *Psycho*. Unlike traditional Hollywood composers who tended to load films with music, Herrmann scored sparingly and pointedly avoided emotional underscoring. Legendary Hollywood composer Miklos Rozsa said, "One of the things I quickly came to realise about Hollywood was there simply was no style as such. Many of the early people working in Hollywood were former Broadway conductors, songwriters and vaudeville artists. The general idiom was conservative. I introduced certain rhythms and harmonies which wouldn't have caused anyone familiar with serious music to bat an eyelid [but in the opinion of a Paramount executive] the only place for eccentricities was Carnegie Hall not a film studio".

So the 'golden age' was perhaps not as golden as we're lead to believe. It was golden in terms of the money made by the studio but in terms of artistic freedom and innovation it was perhaps more 'bronze'. The studio system was a well-oiled and fabulously efficient method of producing music quickly, where musical directors, composers, orchestrators and musicians were simply kept on staff to produce, at short notice, whatever was asked of them. But the studio system was backward-looking, patriarchal and institutionalized.

The way music was used – what I have referred to as the *function* of music – more often than not served to reinforce established idealistic historical and societal narratives, which made some of the music into a kind of subtle censorship (something I discussed in the chapter entitled 'The Meaning of Music'). The use of music in film within the all-powerful and dominating studio system became a symbol of western dominance. Herrmann was never a darling of the studio system, not least because he insisted on orchestrating his own music, something which didn't sit well when working within 'the system'.

If Hollywood film music is still formulaic this is at least partly due to the fact that most composers do not orchestrate their own music. It is often the orchestration which lends film music more than a whiff of formula and the mix which gives it the distinctive Hollywood sheen. If you resist the urge to give your music to someone else to interpret instrumentally and texturally you may retain more of your original 'voice'. Composers like Michael Nyman and Wojciech Kilar are often paraded as examples of composers whose music lies outside the 'Hollywood sound'. This is seen as a comment on their use of harmony and melody and in many ways it is, but one of the things which really distinguish the palpable individuality of their music is the sound – the orchestration – which does not have the usual Hollywood sheen.

How should film music be heard?

With 'normal music' the weight of the experience is carried by the music (and usually lyrics). But when musical cues within film are punctuated by large portions of dialogue, sound design or simply 'time without music' and when the length of a music cue is not determined by the composer, music often cannot be structured in a 'musical' way. Leonard Roseman said "the form is that of the film. What we are dealing with is a literary form, not a musical one." As a composer of music for the moving image your job is to respond to a literary concept. David Raksin said that the purpose of film music is not to be 'noticed for itself'. He said that "music's great usefulness is the way it performs its role without an intervening conscious act of perception." In other words when we write music to picture we ought not to be demanding that people attempt to perceive and rationalise the music alone, only as part of a greater construct.

Many commentators have suggested that part of the problem all composers inherit today is that music has become triumphalist; that music has become bigger than itself. Music's function in society has become enlarged and engorged; we hear 70% more music than we did forty years ago but there is not 70% more time in each day. Music has, some believe, degenerated from being a listening experience to becoming an almost permanent soundtrack to our lives. Everywhere we go we hear music. Music is used much more aggressively in general and it tends to be used more overtly in film, sometimes rendering the combination of film and music an indulgent unsubtle act resembling a pop video rather than a motion picture.

If music is used in this italicised way, up-front, in-your-face, like as if it is the latest piece of technology, it risks suffering the fate associated with any temporary passing fad. In music the word 'counterpoint' is applied to situations involving two or more lines where each line has a sense of independence or integrity of its own. But when combined they make a statement that is infinitely greater than the sum of their parts because we – our interpretations - are involved in the process. Music and film, being different media, both possess a sense of singularity; but when they are played together a great deal more is expressed than either could have managed on their own. This is what we have to protect.