

# Art and architecture essay examples

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## **The Shirt – Shelly Niro**

The Shirt by Shelly Niro is a great example of work, in which we see how all its elements work together to create the right impression. Such productive element as a sound design works here to allow us to immerse ourselves in the culture of the Native Americans. Thus, the music used in the film is as important as settings, costumes and acting.

Sound design in The Shirt is meant to support the message of the film. It does not work separately from other elements, but is used to help in telling the story and creating the images in the film. Usually, sound design includes such elements as sound effects, backgrounds, dialogues and monologues. In The Shirt, we observe the lack of special sound effects, but the emphasis on the backgrounds.

The Shirt is a message film, which expresses authors' attitude to the situation that the Native Americans face nowadays. Using such a simple and familiar product as a shirt, authors send a message to the audience. The Shirt is a collective work of the director - Shelly Niro, actors, editor and a music writer Elizabeth Hill. With this film, these people try to draw attention to the problem of the gradual disappearance of the Native Americans' culture (Niro).

The Shirt has a simple structure. Each time we see a woman in a shirt, we read a different message on it. And each message is followed by frames of the local nature with signs of modern life. The camera captures either raging stream of the river carrying pieces of ice, or the waterfall and the rainbow over it. Each frame is followed by continuous indigenous music.

At the end of the film we see another younger woman in the same shirt. The

film ends with the frame, in which we see the gloss of white icicles above the water. Simplicity and lack of visual effects help the viewer to focus on the idea of the video, as well as enjoy the music and the beauty of nature.

Throughout the film, we hear the music peculiar to Native Americans. This indigenous music resembles sounds of wind and rain. It has a slow pace and a regular rhythm. The combination of music, nature and the image of the Native American woman helps to feel the “ spirit” of the film and take thought on the theme (Niro).

The indigenous music in *The Shirt* helps to integrate picture and sound into a complete whole. From scenes with a river, a waterfall and a flying bird to frames with women in T-shirts, we see how the sound works to join these elements. Sound design includes every multimedia component used in the film. There is only one musical composition in *The Shirt*, no dialogues. The monologue develops without pronouncing words, but by sending a video message to the viewer.

At the beginning we hear dominating rain sticks. Then, the guitar and vocals join the rain sticks. Melodic tune without words makes music more expressive and helps to create the right impression. Throughout the film, the music is soft and length-sustained. The melody is soft with rattle sounds. It corresponds to landscapes - vast spaces, green field and strong river.

Through music, authors of the film focus our attention on the problem by increasing the tempo and the volume when there is a new message on the shirt. So music here is an essential element for putting stress and concentration of viewers' attention on the message.

Scenes shift again and again, but we hear the same music on the

background. This effect helps to join all the components of the film together. The native music also shows the viewer that all the land he sees belonged to the Native Americans in the past.

Whether we see a beautiful free flow of the river, filled with life, or towers and wires of power lines that represent the progress, the same sounds accompany each frame. Open landscapes and natural environment shift, and we see apartments and the river bank under a concrete with an iron fence - these things embody some limits of freedom. Using the same composition shows the audience that everything we see in these frames concerns the life of natives.

All elements of the film combine well with each other. The native music also harmonizes with the natural lighting. Like the music, the accents of lighting highlight important parts of the film. Light intensity also increases. For example, a frontal lighting emphasizes the importance of facial expressions and combines with a small increase of the music volume.

In most of the film we see a middle-aged serious Native American woman. She is dressed in American-style clothes: folded American flag as a bandana on her head, sunglasses, light blue jeans and a T-shirt. Every day on the streets we see many people dressed this way, and each of us sometimes dresses the same way (Niro). But although woman's clothing is in American style, we guess the features of the Native American in her face. The background music helps us to feel the wrongness of this image, the difference between the essence of a person in front of us and the “cover”. The music in *The Shirt* connects not only the film elements, but also two generations of natives represented by two actresses. A young girl at the end

of the film is the younger generation of the Native American people. Her smile expresses her generation's positive attitude to the contemporary American society.

This attitude can be understood in many ways. Young people do not want to be different from their peers, unwilling to continue the tedious struggle for the right to think and live differently. It is easier for them to adapt to the reality. When we see the younger woman, we may notice that the music subsides considerably and even becomes sad.

The most important message: “ And all's I get is this shirt”, is highlighted by progressive rhythm and loudest singing. In this way, the authors want to emphasize the most important message written on the shirt. Then, follows a frame, in which we see icicles. They have a beautiful intricate shape and sparkle in the sun (Niro). Perhaps this frame symbolizes the “ frozen” culture of the natives. Their cultural heritage is as beautiful as these icicles.

The role of sound designer in *The Shirt* was given to Elizabeth Hill. She created the composition specifically for this film. Thus, her music managed to provide the continuity for *The Shirt*. This composition does not only sound, but it also speaks and tells the story of the natives.

A talented author Elizabeth Hill, who wrote the composition for *The Shirt* is a singer and a songwriter from the Six Nations of Grand River territory. For this reason, the theme of the film concerns her. Elizabeth's music is inspiring and evoking tears and laughter together. She is a Mohawk that are one of the original nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. Elizabeth's Indian name refers to singing. Her music has traditional country roots and is steeped for a lifetime in her Mohawk culture (ElizaBeth Hill Official Website).

Elizabeth Hill has already released five CDs. In February 2005, she released a special CD, “ Peacemaker's Lullaby” that features songs in the Mohawk language. For Elizabeth, the study of the Mohawk language has been a journey through history, beliefs, communities and dialects.

Being fearlessly creative Elizabeth composes and records music for dance theatre, films and even libretto. She also scored another Shelly Niro’s film “ Kissed by Lightning”, which premiered at the 2009 Imaginative Film Festival. This film was recognized the Best Indigenous Film.

Also we can hear Elizabeth’s Mohawk language compositions in one of Canada’s most successful dance companies. Still her work for The Shirt was the first and successful for Elizabeth and has inspired her for new challenges (ElizaBeth Hill Official Website).

The Shirt is a great example of the film which can be used to study a particular production element. Such elements as camera, set design, lightning, acting style and sound design here work together, creating a special mood. The music in this film helps to create a persistent image in the viewer’s head that carries important information.

The Shirt is an important example of a film that deals with the social issue. Such works help to convey to the audience the importance of the problem of national minorities in the US.

## **Works cited**

Niro, Shelly. " The Shirt." IsumaTV. N. p., n. d. Web. 6 June 2014. .

" ElizaBeth Hill Official Website | Songwriter, Composer and Performing Artist." ElizaBeth Hill Official Website | Songwriter, Composer and Performing Artist. N. p., n. d. Web. 6 June 2014. .