

Music in film essays example

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Music in Silent Films

According to Kassabian, music in films has three main functions: first - that it is used for identification, then for setting the mood, and finally as a form of commentary for the film (53-56). Oftentimes, the type of music used for identification is quite different from the music that is used for setting the mood and making a commentary. In silent films, music is used mostly to set the mood, and to provide unity when there is disconnect between the visual and the auditory when watching a film. The music is the only thing that the viewers hear because the director or the creative person of the film wants the viewer to unify all that he is seeing at the moment with what he may be thinking of or feeling at the moment. Thus, the use of music, especially for silent films would be to enhance the mood, and perhaps bring out the desired emotions in the viewers. That music is used to enhance the mood, means that the viewer will be able to comprehend not only what is physically happening in the film, but also the psychological processes underpinning what he is viewing at the moment. Music is also helps the viewer identify what the film is all about in a silent movie.

The film “ The City” as taken from the website of You Tube is a film produced by the United States government in 1939 that was probably made to entice people to begin to move away from the crowded and polluted cities towards the suburbs. The music, along with the narration, was used to differentiate between life in the city and life in the suburbs. When the scene of the boiling cauldrons filled with molten iron was shown, the music was quite noisy and dissonant, with loud sounds beating incessantly while the narrator was also talking in a loud and fast tone. The emotions of the viewers are tugged at

when the music turns mellow and shows images of children who seem to be trapped in a toxic world full of smoke and steam. The suddenly soft tones mirrors the angelic faces of the children against a polluted backdrop. The heart-tugging string section helps the viewer wonder why the city as a center of industrialization cannot even provide the city laborer with the most basic of needs such as water. The music in the city way of life is loud, banging and filled with tones that sometimes are not in harmony. The notes are discordant and one feels discomfort in his chest while listening to this segment. This is perhaps to emphasize how convoluted and messy life can be in the city, and that it is no place to bring up children (or to live in for that matter).

On the other hand, the music accompanying the presentation of the suburbs is light and very lyrical. The use of the smaller woodwind instruments such as the flute gives the viewer a sense of lightness and easiness. The children have their own rooms, and are able to rest very well and become good students as well as they now have rooms to study in. There is likewise plenty of room to play in and experience being close to the soil once more, just like the older generations. The music is pleasant to the ear and conveys a message of happiness, delight and satisfaction on the part of the viewer. Living in the suburbs is heaven compared to the hellish life in the city.

Gorbman on the Standard Hollywood Film Score

Carla Gorbmann emphasizes a feature or quality of Hollywood Film Scores that she terms as “inaudibility”. This means that music for films in Hollywood was meant to be inaudible, or that it was meant not to be heard consciously by the viewer. Film scores should be second only to the

narrative, or the dialogues and the visuals, but that they support the themes of the movie. For example, if the movie was about a raging river, then the music should “ flow” from scene to scene and promote fluidity all throughout the picture. Thus Gorbman posits that the standard Hollywood film score took on a more supportive role - that of quietly bringing to the fore the message of the movie rather than presenting itself as a score that was apart from the narrative and the scenery (Koppes and Black 48-66).

Thus, if one was watching a film wherein there was fighting between the Americans and the Germans, the music would have to be perfectly “ inaudible” - that is, it had to aid in the flow of the story rather than being appreciated for its own merits. The music would have to help enhance the victorious American forces who would triumph over the Axis Powers, and would have to send the message that democracy does indeed triumph over dictatorial regimes.

Peking Opera and the Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution was not very cultural in the sense of the term - in fact, much of Chinese culture had been obliterated during this time. Mao Zedong caused the burning of many books, the destruction of temples and Buddhas which were very ancient, and stifled intellectual learning by allowing only his own publications and books to be studied in all institutions of learning. The Peking Opera had been in operations since the late 18th century, and it had featured a wide variety of art forms such as music, vocal performance, dance, mime and acrobatics (Goldstein 3).

At the time of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the original Peking Opera was denounced by Mao as being feudalistic and bourgeoisie, and the same was

replaced by a Revolutionary Opera (Chang and Halliday 155-156). The role of the new Revolutionary Opera was that of communicating the ideology of the Communist government of Chairman Mao, and thus the old cultural presentations and forms of the existing Peking Opera were all done away with. Instead, the new Peking Opera or the Revolutionary Opera had to be one that would present ideas such as the essence of hard labor, of communal ownership, of sacrificing for the state instead of sacrificing for one's own family. It is said that there were initially a total of eight model operas, the production of which was overseen by Madame Jing, the wife of Chairman Mao Zedong. The operas resorted to telling the tales of the struggles of the revolutionaries against the affluent classes of society. These operas also highlighted the work of the People's Liberation Army and of Chairman Mao's central role as the purveyor of change in the country. These new operas, however, still followed the format of the original Peking Operas. Soon more art forms evolved, such as the Ballet form of the Red Detachment of Women, which was presented to President Richard Nixon during his state visit to China in 1972. All the model operas were then presented not only on stage, but were also played on the radio, printed in comic magazines, and became the only entertainment for about 800 million Chinese citizens during this period in Chinese history.

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