Developing wider listening – film music: part 2

KS4/5

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Introduction

Last month, part one of our journey through the world of film music took us from the silent movie age to the 'talkies' and beyond, into Hollywood's Golden Age where blockbuster films with scores composed by big-name composers became all the rage.

This month, we'll continue our journey from the 1950s to the present day, picking out, as before, some worthwhile examples and identifying some performing, composing and listening activities that can help your students increase their knowledge of this vast, colourful musical genre.

This will help GCSE and A level students understand more about the prescribed music they study and the unfamiliar music they encounter, either on their course or in an exam, and will help other students' enjoyment of the music they meet through their own playing and listening. Not least, of course, it will increase students' awareness and understanding of the role that music plays in their favourite movies.

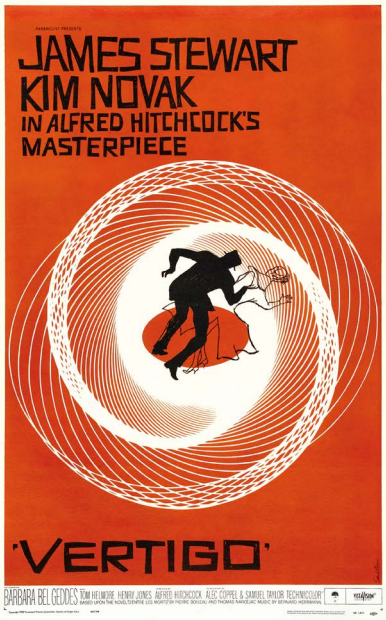
A listening activity to start

We ended last month's resource with a look at 'mickey-mousing' – the art of placing bespoke music directly against the actions of characters, mostly in cartoons, to emphasise in a melodramatic way the comedy, mood or emotion of a scene.

Let's begin with a listening exercise designed to give students more insight into how the elements of music can be used in composition to do the job that mere pictures cannot.

This is the stampede scene (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=x__EVvWUT3A**) from Disney's original version of *The Lion King*, which was made in 1994. Musically the film is best known for the timeless songs composed by Sir Elton John and Sir Tim Rice, which became the foundation of the stage production that has been running on Broadway and in the West End since the late 1990s. A vast amount of the music written for the film, and for its remake in 2019, was actually composed by Hans Zimmer, whose music we met in part one of this resource.

This was Zimmer's first animation score, and as he lost his own father as a child he felt strongly that the music for this scene should play a significant emotional part, functioning not only to emphasise the danger and fear caused by the stampede but also as a requiem (Zimmer's description) to Simba's father, Mufasa.



Movie poster for Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo (1958)

Play the first segment of the scene (from the beginning to 0:38) as many times as you need to your students and get them to discuss and write answers to the following questions:

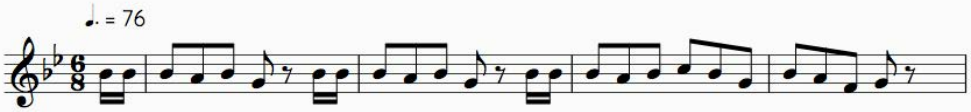
1 Name the instruments or sonorities that play the main melodic material:
- (a) at the very beginning.
- (b) from 0:12 when we see the aerial view of the stampede.

2 In the first seven seconds of the segment, up to the close-up on Simba, how does Zimmer use musical elements to:
- (a) describe the impending danger of the stampede?
- (b) describe the speed of the stampede?

3 Describe the use of voices in this segment.

4 In the main part of the segment, from 0:07 to 0:37, describe how Zimmer uses the following musical elements to create the sense of chaos and fear:
- (a) rhythm, metre and tempo.
- (b) tonality and harmony.

The main melody of this section is shown below.
As a brief analysis and composing exercise, you could ask students to do the following activities:



1 Watch the scene up to 0:59. How does Zimmer use the age-old technique of repetition and contrast in his treatment of this melody?

2 There are various ways to harmonise this melody, using the primary chords Gm, Cm and D (major or minor) and the modal flat 7th chord of Fm. Get your students to experiment with playing the theme in different harmonisations, changing (or not changing!) the chords at different times. Ask them some follow-up questions, for example:
- How does Zimmer harmonise the melody? Does he change it? How does he use pedal notes?
- What does he do to the tonality at 0:59? What effect does this have on the mood?

Some notes and suggested answers to the questions above:

1 (a) Violins/upper strings (b) Female voices
2 (a) High notes, chromaticism, repetition, dissonance, crescendo (brass chord), choral 'shout' (b) Fast triplets, low drums, cymbal roll
3 Wordless singing (mainly to a 'yeah' type of sound), homorhythmic, two- or three-part, frequent shouts/screams, glissandos
4 (a) Fast tempo, 6/8 (compound) time, cross-rhythms, constant quaver motion from drums, 'stab' chords, homorhythm (b) Minor key, modal harmony, dissonance, cluster chords, pedal notes

At 0:59 Zimmer uses a technique commonly used in film music, known as a chromatic mediant. By modulating, without preparation, up a minor 3rd, from G minor to B flat minor, he increases the tension and sense of drama. There are many examples of this in film music, and either or both of these two videos explore the concept more:

- **www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIvV77tLK9c**
- **www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlys5drfG_o**

The second video begins with a compilation of chromatic mediant chord and key changes in films. My favourite usage, though, is in this scene (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTff04cFsRw**) from James Horner's music for *Titanic* (1997). For example, check the key changes out at 0:19, 0:43 and 3:06 (the last one underscores the famous 'I'm the king of the world' line).

The 1950s and 1960s

Hollywood's film studios had enjoyed increasing success during and immediately after the Second World War as increasing desires to escape from the hardships of wartime and post-war life drove more and more people into movie theatres, accelerating the rise of what we now call 'popular culture'. Films were now more commonly appearing in colour, after movies like *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) broke new ground in this respect, and directors sought to amaze audiences with daring stunts and special effects, or tug on their heartstrings with love stories. Movie stars like Ingrid Bergman, Clark Gable, Rita Hayworth, Cary Grant, Katharine Hepburn and James Stewart commanded large fees to appear in movies, and many composers sought to increase their popularity by writing music for films.

Thrillers

There was a growing market for thrillers in the 1950s and 1960s too, and these allowed composers to draw on their creative powers to bring audiences to the edge of their seats, sometimes even before anything happened on screen.

One of the greatest figures in this field was the British director Alfred Hitchcock, who famously worked with composer Bernard Herrmann in films such as *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Psycho* (1960). (See Music Teacher, November 2017, for a resource devoted to Herrmann's music for *Psycho*.) Hitchcock and Herrmann became masters in the use of silence as a dramatic tool, and Herrmann's music was full of short motifs, dissonance and unusual instrumentation.

In this short clip (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktdhfx9_dyE), film composers Gustavo Santaolalla (*Brokeback Mountain*, 2005) and John Williams discuss the use of silence and extreme instrumental registers in Herrmann's music for *Psycho* and Williams's for *Jaws* (1975).

Williams refers at the end of this clip to Herrmann's music for 'Scène d'amour' from *Vertigo*, which you can watch here (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=8317VVohgMo**) if you're interested in exploring Herrmann's marriage of music with Hitchcock's groundbreaking direction and the stellar performances of James Stewart and Kim Novak. The orchestra (mainly strings) seems to rise, fall and spin in sync with the emotions of the characters on scene. It's unlikely a director could allow a screen embrace to last for so long without such music!

The Western

The 1950s and 1960s also saw the meteoric rise of the Western, and some of the greatest, most enduring film soundtracks of the time were written for this movie genre. Two leading composers of music for Westerns were Elmer Bernstein, whose best-known scores are for *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and John Wayne's *True Grit* (1969), and Ennio Morricone, who scored over 400 films including those directed by legendary Italian director Sergio Leone, the originator of the 'spaghetti western' genre. Morricone's best-known scores are for *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), both starring Clint Eastwood, as well as *The Mission* (1986) and *The Hateful Eight* (2015).

Morricone's haunting theme for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is possibly the most recognisable film theme ever written, so it's worth spending a little time looking at it.

Composing activity: using motifs

Here's a performance of Morricone's theme from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* by the BBC Concert Orchestra at the 2011 Proms (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdlha8npU10**).

As your students watch it, ask them to note its key features. What stands out, in terms of instruments, use of the main motif, unusual effects and so on?

As a composition exercise, invite students to experiment with the use of a short signature motif, such as the two-note one in Morricone's score. This motif was designed to imitate the sound of distant coyote calls, and gives the impression of the vast, hot landscape in which the film is set. The motif acts as a question phrase, and three- or four-note answers in a lower register come from muted brass. Can your students compose a similarly evocative, atmospheric, balanced theme?

Once they have something, they can go back to the Morricone original to look at how he accompanies the theme, with a repetitive rhythm, backed up by drums, and simple bassline.

Film meets rock 'n' roll

In the 1950s and 1960s, many films featured the music of well-known music stars of the day, as Hollywood capitalised on the huge success of rock 'n' roll stars and bands, and those artists maximised their musical success by venturing onto the big screen (whether they could act or not).

The 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle*, about a rebellion in a school, featured one of the first big rock 'n' roll hits in the shape of 'Rock Around the Clock' by Bill Haley and his Comets (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnN_zSApOiw**). In the 1960s, Elvis Presley, the Beatles and Cliff Richard all made successful movies and released singles and albums off the back of them. The popularity of film and TV shows featuring bands also led to the rise of the first 'boy bands', such as the Monkees, who were formed for a TV comedy show in the mid 1960s.

1960s blockbusters

Meanwhile, some memorable film scores emerged in the 1960s, and the careers of many major names in the world of film music also started in this decade. Henry Mancini wrote the music for the Audrey Hepburn classic B*reakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and the dark comedy *The Pink Panther* (1964), which starred Peter Sellers as the bumbling detective Jacques Clouseau. Both these films are known for their themes – the song 'Moon River' was sung by Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (w**ww.youtube.com/watch?v=uirBWk-qd9A**), and the instrumental theme for *The Pink Panther* (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIbNIJ5A5qU**) became a jazz classic in its own right, featuring in the animated TV series of the same name and probably played by just about everyone who learns the saxophone.

Meanwhile, a certain British spy character made his first appearance on the big screen in this decade. *Dr. No* (1962) and *Goldfinger* (1964) were just two of 11 James Bond films scored by John Barry in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and French composer Maurice Jarre burst onto the scene with his music for *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and *Doctor Zhivago* (1965). Also part of the European takeover of film music in the 1960s was Italian Nino Rota, who became famous for his music to films such as *La dolce vita* (1960) and *The Godfather* trilogy of the 1970s.

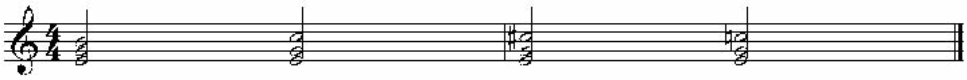
The James Bond leitmotif: an activity

Borrowed from Wagner's iconic music-dramas, which (complete with high drama, stories of legends and awesome audio-visual effects) were the 19th-century operatic equivalents of the modern movie blockbuster, the leitmotif – a motif or theme associated with a character, object, emotion or concept – became popular among film composers.

The James Bond theme, written not by John Barry but by Monty Norman, is of course one of the most famous character themes from the movie world. In his music for the Bond films, Barry (and subsequently other Bond composers such as David Arnold and Thomas Newman) would pepper the score with little reminders of this iconic theme, whenever Bond made an appearance.

Start by playing the whole James Bond theme, best heard in its original usage for the 1962 film *Dr. No* (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-IDfoZuQLM**).

Now ask your students to work out how to play the four famous chords that underpin the theme. They are best represented in E minor, so that they are easy to play on a guitar or keyboard by simply raising or lowering the top note by a semitone:



After they've spent some time playing with them in different rhythms (and perhaps with a tonic E pedal bass note) on their instruments of choice, invite them to look at the way Barry and his fellow Bond composers have used them. Here are some clips to investigate.

▶ *Diamonds are Forever* (John Barry): **www.youtube.com/watch?v=y79O2QoeO5k**

The theme begins, with lower strings playing just the first two chords, when Bond makes a surprise entrance. The four chords cycle round, getting gradually louder and more rhythmic, as the dialogue finishes. As the scene cuts to the departure of the hovercraft, the recognisable melody, played on brass, begins.

▶ *You Only Live Twice* (John Barry): **www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIIIflu2cik**

In this scene, where Bond's burial at sea in Hong Kong harbour is faked, the theme is used very slowly at the start. This is also a good example of Barry's use of repetition to set a mood, as the divers deal with the 'body' in the depths.

▶ *Goldeneye* (John Altman): **www.youtube.com/watch?v=oMX7_z4ixFQ**

The orchestral version of the theme is cut up and used in snippets during this memorable tank chase scene.

▶ *Casino Royale* (David Arnold): **www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKysEIVJfBs**

This climactic scene at the end of *Casino Royale* is the first and virtually the only time composer David Arnold (who scored five Bond movies) used the theme, on lower strings at first, to announce Bond's presence before he appeared in shot.

You could develop this activity into a composition project. Giving students snippets of Norman's theme as raw materials, and perhaps a brief storyboard of a film scene, they could use live instruments or DAWs to compose their own underscore for a new Bond movie. Keep the timings brief, perhaps in the form of a cue sheet like the one below:

0:00-0:06	Long lens establishing shot of a desert landscape.
0:06-0:11	Camera moves in on a camel train silently moving across the top of a dune.
0:11-0:20	The silence is rudely broken by a dune buggy suddenly appearing, leaving the ground as it breaks the top of a dune. Bond is driving. Close-up on Bond's face.
0:20-0:40	More buggies appear over the ridge, in pursuit. The chase continues. Shots are fired at Bond who swerves to avoid them.
0:40-0:45	Close-up on Bond, who turns and fires a single shot.
0:45-0:52	Close-up on the lead buggy, which explodes as the shot hits its fuel tank.
0:52-1:05	More shots from Bond. The other buggies either explode or crash/turn over.
1:05-1:12	Long-range shot of Bond's buggy disappearing towards the sun.

Students will need to discuss and plan:

- How they will use musical elements to set the scene – vast desert, heat, stillness, etc.
- How to keep to the times in the cue sheet, and yet structure their music effectively.
- How they will underscore the sudden appearance of Bond's buggy and tell the audience that it is Bond.
- How to underscore the chase, using musical elements to suggest speed, quick turns, danger, etc.
- How to underscore shots and explosions.
- How to relieve the tension as Bond's buggy disappears over the horizon.

The 1970s and 1980s

Film music becomes electronic

The popularity of European film composers in the 1960s didn't mean that Americans were being overlooked. Perhaps one of the most inspirational film composers of the decade was Jerry Goldsmith, whose music for films such as *Planet of the Apes* (1968) broke boundaries as he experimented with avant-garde ideas and electronic instruments. As synthesisers grew in popularity in the 1970s music scene and computers started to become involved in music making in the 1980s, so film music followed suit as composers turned their backs on orchestras in favour of recording studios and electronic scores.

Most notable in this field, following Goldsmith's pioneering work, were Wendy Carlos (*A Clockwork Orange*, 1971; *Tron*, 1982), Vangelis (*Chariots of Fire*, 1981; *Blade Runner*, 1982), Giorgio Moroder (*Midnight Express*, 1978; *Top Gun*, 1986) and Brad Fiedel (*Terminator*, 1984). Other composers, like James Horner in *Aliens* (1986), combined electronic music with orchestral scores – a technique championed by Don Davis in *The Matrix* films (1999 onwards), Horner in *Titanic* (1997) and, of course, Hans Zimmer.

Fiedel's 'soundscape' theme for Terminator can be found here (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpMg1upIdow**), and is worth listening to and discussing.

John Williams

Despite all of the interest in electronic music, one composer almost single-handedly ensured that the classic orchestral film score did not die out. John Williams burst onto the scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s, writing the music for disaster movies such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974) before winning an Oscar with his music for *Jaws* (1975), already mentioned a few times in both our resources, and the second film in his remarkable collaboration with director Steven Spielberg.

Williams's legacy is astonishing. Composing for all but five of Spielberg's films, he created some of the most memorable music associated with the genre. His long list of credits includes *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Empire of the Sun* (1987), *Schindler's List* (1993), *Jurassic Park* (1993) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). When Williams viewed a rough cut of *Schindler's List* with Spielberg, he was overcome with emotion and said, 'I think you need a better composer than I am for this film.' Spielberg replied: 'I know, but they're all dead.' Both director and composer won Academy Awards for their work on this film.

Schindler's List is quite possibly one of Williams's most haunting scores, featuring Jewish violinist Itzhak Perlman. This stunning performance of the theme by Perlman, with conductor Gustavo Dudamel, is well worth watching (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLgJQ8Zj3AA**).

Of course, it's not just Spielberg's films that John Williams is known for. After a recommendation by Spielberg to fellow director George Lucas, Williams was engaged to write the music for *Star Wars* (1977), taking Holst's *The Planets* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* as inspiration and creating probably the best-known film theme ever written. Williams scored all nine major *Star Wars* films, as well as *Superman* (1978), the first three Harry Potter films (2001 onwards) and countless others. He has been nominated for a staggering 52 Oscars, winning five times.

This montage (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZro-9CL_Io**) of John Williams themes, from *Jaws* to *Jurassic Park* and set against clips from their films, is an excellent overview of his style, and his ability to compose memorable, dramatic music that encapsulated everything about each film. An interesting side note is that Williams often used the London Symphony Orchestra for recordings, conducting them himself.

Finally on Williams, this excellent video (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=1z5YmjSgyoo**) draws parallels with Holst, Stravinsky and Wagner in the *Star Wars* soundtrack, and explores how Williams writes themes for characters (such as Rey) and creates 'epic' soundscapes.

Crossing over: film music in the 1990s and 2000s

In the 1990s and 2000s, a number of musicians moved from pop or classical music into film composition, perhaps in a nod to the increasing blurring of the dividing lines between these genres. Hans Zimmer began his career as a pop musician and producer, appearing, for example, in the video for the Buggles song 'Video Killed the Radio Star' (1979) (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8r-tXRLazs**) which also featured future pop production supremo Trevor Horn (ABC, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Art of Noise, Seal). Zimmer played and produced for a number of European bands and started out in the world of music-to-picture by composing TV jingles and theme tunes, including for the UK quiz show *Going for Gold*.

Early on in his career, Zimmer teamed up with Stanley Myers (*The Deerhunter,* 1978; *Wish You Were Here*, 1987) and worked with him on a number of films, learning much of his craft from his older mentor. Zimmer and Myers became interested in marrying electronic and orchestral music in their scores, and when Zimmer was approached to compose the music for *Rain Man* in 1988 he created an innovative sound world using synthesisers and steel drums, earning himself an Oscar nomination. Zimmer's electroacoustic scores made him an in-demand composer, underscoring blockbusters such as *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *The Lion King* (1994), *Gladiator* (2000), *Black Hawk Down* (2001), some of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* films and many, many others. There's a fantastic, if quite detailed, video about Zimmer's techniques in the film *Interstellar* (2014) here (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6HtAuofNQ4**). (For more on Hans Zimmer, see Music Teacher, August 2018.)

British composer Michael Nyman made his name in the minimalist style championed by US composers like Philip Glass, Steve Reich and John Adams. He collaborated with director Peter Greenaway on a number of his films, such as *The Draughtsman's Contract* (1982) (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHiJkLmclkA**), and perhaps most famously with Jane Campion for *The Piano* (1993) (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo9G9C6KvC**E).

Another 'crossover' film composer is Danny Elfman, who began his musical career as a singer-songwriter as part of the 1980s new wave genre. Elman has written themes for iconic TV shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Desperate Housewives*, and has scored over 100 films, including *Batman* (1989), *Men in Black* (1997), *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005). He has been nominated for an Academy Award four times, though is yet to win.

Today's film composers

Of course, there isn't enough room in this resource to do justice to the ever increasing number of talented film composers working today. Among the leading ones, which include already mentioned Hans Zimmer, James Horner, John Williams and Danny Elfman, I'd be remiss not to mention a few others, which students may like to investigate further.

Rachel Portman was the first female recipient of a composing Oscar for *Emma* (1996) and has scored numerous films including *Chocolat* (2000), *Never Let Me Go* (2010) and *A Dog's Purpose* (2017). Thomas Newman has had a four-decade career scoring for films as diverse as *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *The Green Mile* (1999), *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Skyfall* (2012). James Newton Howard has scored over 100 films and has nine Academy Award nominations to his name. He's been active since the late 1980s, scoring *Pretty Woman* (1990), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *I Am Legend* (2007) and *The Dark Knight* (2008), among many others.

Canadian Howard Shore is best known for his iconic music to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001 onwards), and Frenchman Alexandre Desplat has received seven Oscar nominations, winning for *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) and *The Shape of Water* (2017). He also wrote the music for *The King's Speech* (2010) and *The Imitation Game* (2014). Finally, American Alan Silvestri began as a TV composer in the 1970s and went on to score such iconic films as *Forrest Gump* (1994), *The Polar Express* (2004) and many of the Marvel films.

Listening activity: The Avengers

Let's finish with a listening exercise based on Silvestri's theme for Marvel's *The Avengers* (2012) (**www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZjPDI-xDWs**).

Play the full theme three or four times, and ask students to answer the following questions.

1. At the beginning, is the music in 2, 3 or 4 time?
2. At the beginning, is the music in a major or minor key? Does it end in the same key it began?
3. Name the instrument(s) playing the theme when it enters at 0:16.
4. How many times is this short theme played between 0:15 and 0:48?
5. Describe how the various themes are accompanied throughout the track. Mention use of instruments, rhythm and harmony in your answer.

Suggested answers:

1. It is in 4/4 time.
2. The music begins in a minor key, and ends in a different minor key (G minor, modulating to C minor in the middle and ending – via a chromatic mediant – in E minor).
3. Horns.
4. Four.
5. Mainly strings and percussion, accompanying with fast-moving, repetitive rhythms using quavers and semiquavers. The rhythmic accompaniment is doubled by snare drum and punctuated by full orchestral chords, including bass drum and cymbals. The harmony uses slowly changing chords, often over a tonic pedal, rather like the chords in the James Bond theme.