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FILM MUSIC ANALYSIS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Introduction

Music in film, as well as in series, advertising, and computer games, has certain features that are common to these types of audiovisual production. It is a unique symbiosis of visual and sound components, specific functions, that determine this music (compared to autonomous concert music), and especially its general popularity. With this article, we try to look under the imaginary hood of film music, with its functions and possibilities, which can be taught successfully and help to make teaching attractive. Due to the limited scope of conference papers, the listed analytical approaches represent only a selection of options; they are not intended to be a comprehensive interpretation.

Film music in (music) education

We can generally view film music in education from two perspectives (Musil, 2018):

1) Teaching film music:

This approach sees film music as the aim, the main topic about which the pupils/students should learn. It may include the history of film music, either in the form of a traditional successive explanation or, more specifically, within a context of specific film genres, periods, composers or compositional techniques, socio-cultural background, etc. Other viewpoints focus on different functions of music in films (see below), its meanings, psychological overlaps, and, of course, the educational potential of film music. The possibilities of such a type of didactically focused work on concrete examples were also described by other authors (see, e.g., Maas & Schudack, 1994; Müller-Hansen, 2017). In any case, this type of teaching suits specialized study programs more (film composition,

direction, production, …) at conservatories, music academies, or within thematic seminars, online courses, and workshops. Nevertheless, we can find a use for it in musicologically oriented study programs as well.

2) Teaching with film music:

The second approach represents the educational situation where film music is neither the content nor the goal, but rather a mediator of a teaching procedure, i.e., film music helps to reach other than the purely "film-musically" oriented educational aims. Thematically related goals are those that reflect the filmmaking process or the understanding of film as a complex work of art with an explanation of its elements, forms, functions, and even aesthetic qualities. However, teaching with film music may be very useful in the cross-curriculum area, projects, or within overlapping topics, not necessarily in music education. We can assume that film music is attractive to pupils/students with the premise that cinematographic, television, or other media production lies in the center of interest of (not only) young people. Films and their music, therefore, arguably remain more embedded in their memory and can be successfully and effectively adapted for given teaching conditions and, by that, be of great help in meeting various teaching objectives (Musil, 2019).

The advantages of film music in (music) education
This section presents the positive aspects of teaching with film music. Although we could discuss how film music appeals to the applicants (and generally those interested) to study it and, in some cases, to choose it as a profession, we do not need to convince any of these people of the possibilities and beauties of this artistic area. Accordingly, let us introduce some thoughts that could help answer why working with film music at school is profitable.[1]

1 All the mentioned aspects represent a subject of possible deeper investigations within a research project or at least a literature review.

We may sometimes have a hard time *motivating* pupils/students to listen to (work with) music of a specific genre. Film music could be a solution, at least in the beginning. Although today film music is usually seen as a genre, we do not have to follow this view. Namely, film music is an area in which various styles and genres come together, not only orchestral, but also jazz, pop, rock, world music of every kind, and even national folklore. In this regard, we can consider film music well-known to many pupils/students, and we can, therefore, use it to help get closer to genres that the pupils may not prefer. With this point, a related aspect stands out: *popularizing* various music genres via film music.

As films and TV series are an essential part of *cultural* and *social life* and dominate the audio-visual consumption of most people, understanding the creative process, where music plays a distinctive and important role, seems to be essential knowledge. Where else should then be the space for teaching how this phenomenon is made, how it works, and how it can enrich us?

Last but not least, working with film music promotes *creativity* (as music in general does), but the music accompaniment of an audio-visual work is principally never alone as a sound element; it always appears (or at least should always appear) as a part of a film where many arts combine, work together. With creativity, the development of *analytical skills* comes hand in hand, which are addressed in the following sections.

Analyzing the sound: What does film music do?

The symbiosis of visual and sound components, mentioned in the introduction, brings a range of possibilities for the analytical work of pupils/students or the teachers/lecturers who use them. There are various forms of film music in the sense of genre, origin, technical equipment, and compositional approaches. Teaching can lead through classical musical analysis (macro- and micro-tectonics, form, work with motifs and themes, instrumentation, etc.) but also more didactically

friendly analytical tasks such as: *Search in the lyrics of the song for connections with the plot of the film! Do you know which instrument plays the main melody? Find the leitmotif!* (etc.) We could call this approach "Audio-specific film music analysis". However, in the center of our interest is its final functional connection with the image, i.e., "Visual-specific film music analysis". Music from a film or other audiovisual work takes on several functions. They can be genre-specific or dependent on the type of production and the purpose of the given work. The following interpretation will focus only on selected functions of film music which, according to the author of the text, best represent its possibilities and are, at the same time, easy to understand due to the possible use in education.

Evoking and intensifying emotions

Probably the most discussed and most important function of the film accompaniment is to make the emotional integrity of the story complete. Emotions are meant here not only in the sense of heightened sentimentality but also in the general sense of the word, i.e., for inducing or intensifying the moods outlined by the image. In this sense, music acts as a commentary on the film's events (Lissa, 1965).

Sometimes, however, the music may not agree with the plot. It can be intentionally used in contraposition. The reasons for doing so can be purely comedic or ironic, when the contradiction deliberately downplays the film's events, or it is a tool to accumulate tension because the contradiction of visual and sound stimuli often creates a much stronger emotional charge (especially in unexpected moments of the plot). In combination with the use of silence, which we know from horror, thriller, but also action genres, such initially inappropriate emotional targeting of the sound component paradoxically has a stronger effect than when using "adequate" music (see, e.g., King, 2010).

Let us also mention the possibilities of music to indicate the feelings and thoughts of the characters, which are hidden on the screen. In the same way, music has the ability to outline the

direction of the story or to refer back to what has already been shown or told.[2]

Since there is not enough space for a detailed analysis of teaching situations in this paper, let us try here (as with the following functions) at least to formulate some questions that could inspire the didactic processing of this function or be used as they are during the analysis or discussion with pupils: *What kind of scene do you imagine when you hear this music? Does the music correspond to the original film scene in terms of content, mood, etc.? What musical means help to create such a mood?*

Strengthening continuity – smoothing film cuts

Film music can play a role that is not entirely obvious at first glance, which is partly related to the mentioned ability to outline the further direction of the story with its mood. Filmmakers have always dealt with the problem of the story in terms of real time. In the two-hour film, the plot itself can take place over several years. An important component are film cuts that move the story forward in space and time. Cuts are, of course, sometimes used to intentionally interrupt the flow of the plot (hard cut). Otherwise, it is almost always necessary to soften the transition.

To do so, we can use music as a transfer – *sound bridge* – over the cut (Buhler in Donnelly, 2001). In this case, the music softens the transition between temporally or spatially disparate scenes. Its function is thus a kind of technical support for the fluidity and cinematic continuity, which is broken by a cut.

Sometimes, it is technically quite simple to blend two music tracks, one of which mingles into the other in parallel with the

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[2] Here, we also mention musical motifs (especially so-called *leitmotifs* or *reminders*), which are repeated at certain points in the story and with which film composers work both in the sense of preserving musical continuity and referring to something in the past that influences the present direction of the plot – see, for example, Max Steiner's reminders in *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942) where the song *As Time Goes By* serves as the source.

image transition. However, these techniques are usually not sufficient for the needs of a non-violent film transition.

Two basic procedures have been adopted for the terms *sound advance* and *sound lag*. The former represents the use of music that starts before the scene in which it belongs and thereby smoothly prepares the transition through the cut (or even several cuts in montage sequences). (cf. Buhler & Neumeyer, 2016). If used appropriately, the change is not noticeable and distinct to the viewer. The *sound advance* may appear in a concert scene when the music starts playing at the end of the previous scene, where neither the concert setting nor the orchestra itself can be seen. Moreover, this method does not always belong to music. Sound effects or noises work similarly (see *sound link* a *sound match*, Buhler & Neumeyer, 2016, p. 78).

Sound lag refers to the continuation of music/sound from the previous scene. It is, therefore, the opposite principle, also softening a film cut and, if necessary, preserving the mood. There are many examples of *sound lag*. The main title sequence transitioning to an open space scenery at the beginning of *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977), and all the subsequent episodes, can be considered a kind of this method.

Possible questions for didactic processing in this regard can be: *How many scenes were connected by one piece of music? Was the music based on the content of the first or the second scene? How would the scene have looked if the music hadn't softened the cut?*

For the sake of interest, it is useful to mention a specific kind of music that helps to connect diverse scenes, called *recurrent transition*. This term was adopted (deduced) by the author of this article for short repetitive pieces of music that are relatively stable, unchanging and are mostly used in TV series (sitcoms, soap operas and "eternal series", but also dramas). They often start at the end of a scene and move to the next scene, like *sound advance*, but the source of the music is not part of the scenes (see below for film diegesis), which is otherwise a fairly typical

feature of *sound advance/lag* techniques. In some cases, these transitions (of which there are several) are accompanied by stylized, also repeating image sequences, often foreshadowing the following scene. The meaning of *recurrent transition* lies, again, in a musical/sound signal announcing a change of place or time. This signal is, however, much more straightforward and quicker than a standard musical transition. The main difference is, of course, its repetitive nature. In addition, we can sometimes predict where the next scene is set according to the image sequence that is attached to a given musical motif.

Illustrating and highlighting the visual

A sub-function that film music offers is *highlighting a particular moment*. Sometimes, this function is called *descriptive*. In this regard, we can generally use the term *underscoring* or *illustrative music*. The synchronization of music and image is largely related to this topic, here no longer as a stage of technical processing of a film, but as a style in which the composed music underpins the given scene (Neumeyer, 2014).

The practice of film symphonism and the composer Max Steiner as a pioneer of *non-diegetic music* (see below) is considered to be a relatively close synchronization. In addition to many new approaches to film composition, he also introduced a close cooperation between visual and musical components, where significant visual moments are emphasized by music (Buhler in Donnelly, 2001; Neumeyer, 2014). Still, "Steiner synchronization" has not achieved such consistency as the *mickey-mousing*.

As the name suggests, we find examples of this principle, especially in animated films and series or silent grotesques. The term *mickey-mousing* (in general, the terms *stinger* and *sweetening* are also used), referring to a close connection between image and music, directly arose from its use in early Walt Disney production (Goldmark in Neumeyer, 2014; Buhler & Neumeyer, 2016; Newhouse, 2020). Even this term was not protected from critics and is still used today rather as an abusive

term for music that stubbornly and, according to some, unnecessarily copies what is happening on the screen (Disney principle). (Prendergast, 1992; Keller, 2005). However, the musical accompaniment to animated films must, first of all, respect the requirements of the target group, which, in most cases, is the young generation of viewers. For them, the imitation of sounds and movements becomes an important means of entertainment and, above all, of understanding. *Mickey-mousing* should, therefore, not be criticized in certain genres. After all, it is easy to work with pupils in the sense of finding different forms of *mickey-mousing* in the original animated films of the Disney studio (not animated films with dialogues) and analyzing how they work, what musical tools are suitable for what, etc.

Suppose we step out of the "absolute" dependence of the image and music component to the use of musical illustration for selected moments. In that case, we find that it is used very often in films and seeks to contribute, sometimes even to explain the situation or highlight an important moment that the audience would otherwise pass without noticing, or at least without a significant effect.

Helping to reach geographic or historical accuracy

The following functions refer to the semantic level of the film, and the spatial and temporal classification of the plot. This means, for example, a reference to the geographical area where the film takes place. In this case, we are talking about *locational music* (e.g., Cooke, 2008), for which there are multiple terminological equivalents. *Reference* or *link music* is probably the most accurate. In connection with historical references, it would be more appropriate to use the term *period music*, which in this respect describes its nature more precisely.

Composers often work with musical instruments as carriers of meaning outside the film world. Although it can be considered a source of undesirable descriptiveness, its use happens to be expected. At the sound of the accordion, many people automatically think of France and, in some cases, even

Argentina (thanks to the tango dance). When properly styled, the guitar refers to a Spanish or Mexican location. No doubt most composers would represent Scotland with an instrumentation containing bagpipes. Distant countries require the use of local traditional instruments. In India, it would most likely be the sitar or the sarangi (bowed string instrument); China and Japan are characterized by various melodic drums and percussive instruments, tam-tams, taikos, gongs, or traditional string instruments similar to zithers. Despite this, film and concert composers often use conventional citations, e.g., national anthems, as an instantly identifiable reference to the local destination.

Although in the eyes of performers and experts in the given ethnomusicological field, the use of these instruments may insufficiently reflect all the features of particular national folklore and musical traditions, mainstream film music is primarily about identifying nationally specific means by an ordinary viewer.

However, regional designation and compositional techniques used to evoke the atmosphere of a historical period are not the only criteria. Composers sometimes, simply by stylizing a particular instrument or using unique musical texture in a given location, predetermine its later fixed semantic determination, which is used for the same purposes in the film genre after that. A prime example can be the typical "Coplandian" instrumentation of American westerns,[3] or even more specifically, a harmonica in the same type of locations. It was used both by Ennio Morricone in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Leone, 1968) and by Martin Böttcher in the films about Vinnetou. Other composers then followed this musical idiom.

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[3] Aaron Copland, an American composer who contributed to film scores and inspired generations of composers, in addition to his influential concert and modern ballet work. He helped to create an "American sound", which will remain in his legacy mainly for compositions with a patriotic feel. In the field of film music, most often for the "cowboy idiom" in pictures from the Wild West (cf. Cooke, 2010, p. 83).

Concrete examples of the analysis of music's local and temporal focus in teaching emerge quite clearly from the previous explanation. It is recommended to focus on typified (national) instruments: *What location do you imagine when you hear this instrument?*; on the knowledge of historical musical means: *What instruments would you use for the period of the early Middle Ages / early 20th century /...* Alternatively, using class brainstorming to summarize musical means typical of different (not geographically determined) locations/environments (space and extraterrestrial civilizations, military, magic and sorcery, and more) may be attractive.

Presence of music in film diegesis (source vs. background music)

Since the advent of sound film in the 1920s, the theory of film music has been accompanied by the question of the origin and presence of music in film. Two basic forms of music were defined according to its real source. The criterion was whether it is a fixed part of the diegesis ("the film world") or a "classic" musical background, today often called an "original motion picture soundtrack".[4] That means this is not a function, at least not primarily. Nevertheless, it is an area that should be understood and can be taught well.

The term *diegetic music* (*source/on-screen music*) has been used for music whose source can be seen in the displayed scene. (e.g., Gorbman, 1987; Brown, 1994; Chion et al., 1994; Neumeyer in Buhler et al., 2000; Buhler & Neumeyer, 2016). As such, it co-creates the film scenery (diegesis), and its form can be of various kinds – from the musicians as actors or extras to a radio or hi-fi sound system playing in the background of the scene. It also mostly has adequate (sometimes intentionally

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[4] The term *soundtrack* is imprecise in this regard, despite its frequent use by professional and lay people. From a technical point of view, a film soundtrack traditionally combines several sound components – music, spoken word (dialogue), and sound effects. Therefore, it should not be synonymous with film music, for which it is a superior term (cf., e.g., Stilwell in Donnelly, 2001; Audissino, 2014).

imperfect) sound quality. *Diegetic* is also considered to be music whose source is not seen but can be sensed, for example, muffled music from the next room (cf. Buhler & Neumeyer, 2016). Therefore, the generally accepted criterion is whether any film characters can hear or react to the music.

It might seem that the most examples of *diegetic music* can be found in music films. But the truth is that it appears across film genres.

The opposite case is *non-diegetic music* (*extra-diegetic/off-screen music*, also *incidental/background/pit music*) (Gorbman, 1987; Chion et al., 1994; Buhler et al., 2000), which serves as a suitable musical accompaniment, the source of which, however, cannot be found on the screen. Non-diegetic music tends to be dominant in film practice. It is the one that everyone thinks of when someone mentions film music. It is composed (as opposed to diegetic music, which is, in many cases, archival, borrowed from elsewhere) and typical for the given film. However, it cannot be claimed that its opposite, *diegetic music*, has lost its importance. Instead, filmmakers use it for other purposes other than accompanying.[5] Very often, there is also a continuous transition from *diegetic* to *non-diegetic music* or vice versa. For these, the concept of *trans-diegetic music* was introduced (besides other, mostly more general or ambiguous terms) (Taylor, 2007; Hunter, 2012), and the creators of films/series usually use them for the transition between scenes or for a local or time shift. They are, therefore, combined with the *sound advance / sound lag* techniques (see above).[6]

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[5] In the past, *diegetic music* was preferred due to its greater believability and natural sound environment of the scenes. In some instances, the "blind" desire for realism has been taken to an extreme and has become counterproductive. For example, the source of music did not match what the spectators heard (cf. Cooke, 2008).

[6] This theory is still in the assumption stage and must be further analyzed and refined by the author. It might also be supplemented with more precise terminology.

Questions/tasks arise for teaching-learning activities, such as: *Look for the source of music in the scene! See if the actors are actually playing the instruments! Was there a transition from diegetic to non-diegetic music during the scene?*

There are other concepts based on these principles (*supra-diegetic* or *music/audio/sound dissolve*, *meta-diegetic music*, etc.), the interpretation of which is beyond the scope of this overview. In addition, they refer to the specific, albeit not marginal, use of music in films. Applying those advanced concepts to the school environment in one way or another requires a thorough knowledge of the initial two terms.

Conclusion and discussion

The previous text, which, as has been said, presents an overview of selected analytical approaches for the possible use of film music in education, does not have the ambition to oppose the so-far published publications, textbooks, or other methodical materials on teaching with the help of film music. Instead, it points to the need for a systematic approach to this area if the musical component of audiovisual works is to be adequately analyzed and understood in its entirety. Of course, the question arises whether it is possible to accommodate all mentioned aspect in general education. Is there even room for that under standard conditions? This is the fundamental difference between "Teaching film music", where film music is the content as well as the goal, and "Teaching with film music", which can be occasional, tied only to a particular topic, and above all, not necessarily related to the field of music education (hence the parentheses surrounding the word "music" in some chapter titles). The article, therefore, serves primarily to initiate a discussion about the forms and methods of using film music in education, given its characteristics and its connection to the visual component of films. Furthermore, the theories and analytical approaches presented here are a starting point for further research by the author, including his intended monograph on detailed analysis of film music in education.

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