

Thesis

Creative Music Production

By Alex Silver

Approaches to Composing a Film with No Original Score

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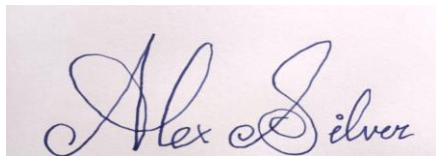
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Date

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Introduction

Film scores are the unspoken dialect used to translate, while enhancing emotional depth when integrated with visual accompaniment and thematic developments. The synchronization of music in film has become synonymous since the 1927 “Talkies” to present.

However, when Alfred Hitchcock created the classic thriller, “The Birds” in 1963, He decided against using an accompanying score and in doing so challenged the tradition of abiding by typical cinematic format.

The question as to why Hitchcock decided to exclude a score from the film deserves consideration.

According to Evan Hunter in his memoir “Me and Hitch” Hitchcock had decided there would be no score for “The Birds” and despite Hunters efforts to convince the legendary director to change his mind, Hitchcock replied: “No. No music.”

As quoted in Zach Schonfeld, “The Sound of the Birds” *Inverse*, 20 Feb 2024

Although the film’s rate of success was ensured despite the absence of non-diegetic ¹music, The aim of this current project is not only to compose an original score to accompany the full feature film but also to focus primarily on composing creatively while taking influence from both a classic and modern approach to film scoring. Another goal of this project will be to ensure that the score is integrated in such a way that the visuals of the film are not overshadowed, but only enhanced corresponding with the various emotional themes presented in the film.

Literature Review

Resource 1 – A Heart at Fires Center – The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann – Steve C Smith

Since the purpose of this project is to score a full feature thriller directed by Alfred Hitchcock and even though Bernard Herrmann had scored numerous films with Hitchcock apart from the film “The Birds”, the information on Herrmann’s creative process on scoring “Psycho” will prove invaluable to understanding how Herrmann's style of composing is important in context with enforcing underlining emotions throughout the film.

In chapter 12, Hitchcock mentioned how much the film relied on the music Herrmann to add levels of tension which may have been missed without the use of an accompanying score.

"Psycho was their collaborative masterwork, a film that, as Hitchcock admitted at the time, depended heavily on Herrmann's music for its tension and sense of pervading doom."

Smith, page 236

The chapter continues to work through many creative choices made by Herrmann on various cues to add suspense while indicating the possibility of an anticipated disturbing situation.

One example mentions that Herrmann used the prelude at three separate times throughout the film and his arrangement of string chords played in a descending phrase when the scene that is referred to as “Hitchcock’s lazy montage of the downtown Phoenix” takes place. Herrmann’s use of creating variational shifts with the prelude's ostinato ¹on separate cues and different textural instrumentation and played at different tempos help set the shift in dynamics and different intensity levels.

"After the strident, contrapuntal urgency of the prelude (which is recalled three times in the score), Herrmann abruptly shifts tone with a series of placid, descending string chords as Hitchcock's lazy montage of the downtown Phoenix begins - the audience begins its wait for action."

Smith, page 238

The fact that these slower textural variations are related to the prelude cue, the anticipation and tension remains however at a different level of intensity.

¹ a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm. (Oxford Languages, Dictionary)

"Throughout "Psycho", Herrmann maintains the prelude's promise of violence through a favorite device, the ostinato, subtly altered within a cue by shifting instrumental textures.

Smith, page 238 - 239

Another observation also states that in another scene, Herrmann structures a cue which corresponds with the camera movements as it focuses on the open window. The tempo used is much slower to help convey a separate emotional response referred to "as if into a vortex."

"Herrmann's music further slows down, making the effect all the more agonizing and drawing us vertically down "as if into a vortex" as Russell's camera descends into an open hotel window."

Smith, page 238

Another example of how important the use of music within the feature film refers to a scene where the character Marion is driving. Hitchcock had mentioned that different narrations would be placed in the scene from the perspective of her mind, however Hitchcock still felt that this would not be enough to indicate a sense of dread without music present. This was on cue in which the opening title "the prelude" was reintroduced to help the audience arrive at the conclusion that a dreadful situation was inevitable.

"Hitch said to me, Well, we'll put in voices occasionally from her mind - that they're missing the money now...' I said, 'That's all right, but that still doesn't make it terrible.' That's when we both agreed to bring back the music we'd related to the opening of the film, which again tells the audience, who don't know something terrible is going to happen to the girl, that it's got to."

Smith, Page 239

In relation to one of the most pivotal key moments in the film "Psycho" the way in which Herrmann used clues from the films preceding to inspire not only fear but also adding a clue that could easily be overlooked. The antagonist Norman Bates displays an interest in taxidermy of birds, so Herrmann not only composed the sounds to emulate the stabbing of Bates knife and Marion crying out but also to represent the sounds of birds high pitched screeching.

In achieving this Herrmann used a combination of articulations such as Sul ponticello² (playing near the bridge), Rapid stabbing on the down bow staccato³ and high-pitched glissandi⁴ was used to create the iconic cue still widely known today for its association in horror.

"Linked powerfully to Psycho's visuals: the violin bridge slashes relate not only to the stabbing motion of Bates's knife and Marion's cries, but also to the imagery of Bates's stuffed birds, which hover throughout the films design. (When asked for his own description of what the cue signified, Herrmann chose one word: "Terror.")

Smith, Page 239

² An eerie, raspy and metallic-sounding effect (rich in dissonant overtones) is achieved by bowing near the bridge. (Essential Dictionary of Orchestration)

³ Meaning to detach or separate, this technique is affected by playing short bow strokes (The Study of Orchestration 4th edition)

⁴ A common technique to all string instruments, it is accomplished by sliding one finger on one string from one pitch to another. (The Study of Orchestration 4th edition)

Resource 2 – The Film Music of John Williams – Reviving Hollywood’s Classical Style – Emilio Audissino

Herrmann's stylistic techniques and approaches offer a foundation to emotive film scoring. His ability to build tension through textural instrumentation and use of leitmotifs⁵ to enhance emotions was a key element in the score “psycho”.

To provide contrast, a modern counterpart to the mid-twentieth century works of Herrmann is that of late-twentieth century composer, John Williams.

Williams has expanded on these concepts while adding his own signature style of blending classical influences within his neo-Hollywood scores.

In chapter 7 a case study of the 1975 classic “Jaws” will reveal useful insights into Williams’s approach to creating tension and explanations on how and when to build tension to provide the best emotional response.

“In a film with several false alarms, the music is consistent with its function of incarnating the beast to point that, as Jerrold Levinson notes, it is “the only reliable signifier of the shark.” when the shark is not around, the music is absent.”

Audissino, Page 124

Although the shark's thematic motif written by Williams is based on a minor second interval, its functionality proves not only useful for inspiring dread. His methods highlight just how versatile and impactful a simple idea can be.

His rhythmic changes as the music slows down and builds momentum as the shark attacks are key to the overall dynamics of how that tension is played out over the course of the film.

⁵ a recurrent theme throughout a musical or literary composition, associated with a particular person, idea, or situation. (Oxford Languages, Dictionary)

"I fiddled around with the idea of creating something that was very...brainless...like the shark. All instinct...Meaning something [that] could be very repetitious, very visceral. and grab you in your gut, not in your brain... So, the simple idea of that bass ostinato, just repeating those two notes and introduce a third note when you don't expect it and so on. It could be something you could play very softly, which would indicate that the shark was far away when all you see is water. Brainless music gets louder and gets closer to you, something is gonna swallow you up."
Williams,

Audissno, Page 126

William's use of dynamic modulation and tempo shifts adds an additional layer of suspected tension which gives a deeper emotional range as well as the additive and subtractive use of introducing or the removal of instrumentation to enforce emotional fear as shark attacks anticipated.

"Violins and violas abruptly join cellos and contrabasses in playing the ostinato, followed by the horns menacingly presenting the second motif associated with the beast, the "shark motto."

Audissino, Page 128

These dynamic techniques will prove useful in calculating how to adapt similar concepts when sculpting a versatile thematic plan for the birds in the "The Birds" feature while adapting textural concepts displayed in Herrmann's score work.

Resource 3 – Treatise of Instrumentation – Hector Berlioz & Richard Strauss

Conducting essential research on two influential composers is crucial in the early stages in sculpting a functional plan.

While their principles are similar, they are expanded upon later by Williams, yet their distinctive sonic signatures and approaches remain unique in how they convey emotions throughout the scoring process.

In Section 1, chapter 1 Berlioz, as revised by Strauss, discusses how various string articulations can not only represent change in rhythmic shifts but also numerous textural, harmonic and timbral qualities.

"For, the grand, broad staccato (grand détaché porté), which is intended to give the string as much sonority as possible by letting it vibrate after the bow has struck it vigorously (this is particularly suitable for pieces of a proud, magnificent character and of moderate speed)."

Berlioz, Revised by Strauss Page 19

The relevance of repetition when using staccato articulations also highlights the importance of tempo and how these changes affect the tonality of the articulation.

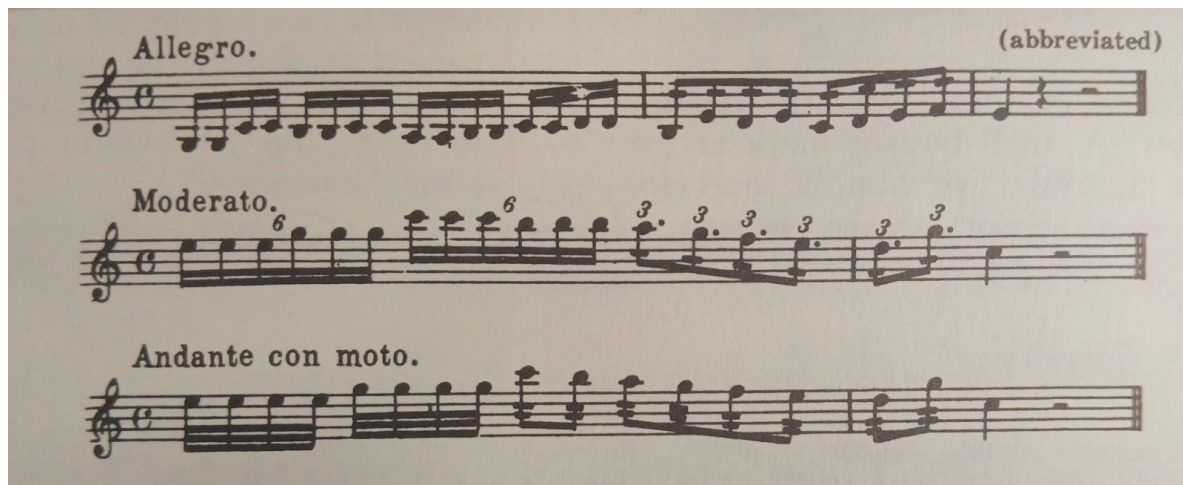


Fig. 1 Staccato Articulations set in various tempos highlighting use of repetition.

"Notes repeated two, three or four times (according to the tempo) give more power and vividness to the tone of the violins and are suitable for various orchestral effects in all kinds of shading."

Berlioz, Revised by Strauss Page 19

Strauss later discusses the fundamentals of using octave and unison doublings of string instruments. He explains the different palettes created and the reasons a particular doubling might be chosen.

"Frequently the first violins are doubled on octave lower by the second violins in order to give greater power to a passage. But unless the tones are extremely high, it is much better to double them in unison; the effect is incomparably stronger and finer..."

Berlioz, Revised by Strauss Page 53

This will prove useful when experimenting with various textures, including harmonic and timbral sounds that Herrmann would have used in "Psycho". However, its application is not limited to Herrmann's approach as it can also provide insight into Williams scoring methods in composing.

Resource 4 – The Study of Orchestration – Samuel Adler

In relation to understanding principles and functionality of how to work with articulations with dynamics modulation like Williams. The Study of Orchestration provided technical information which will be a helpful framework when exploring various ways of expressing emotion and layering tension. One common dynamically fitting articulation mentioned is separate bow staccato.

"Staccato passages can be played loud or soft and may be performed in one of two ways."

Adler, Page 26

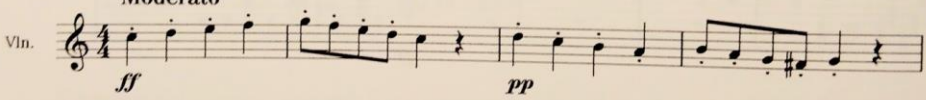
Separate bow staccato delivers a sharper energetic sound as each bow stroke gives a clear textual sound and can often be used to emphasize rhythmic clarity in notes. This articulation would be useful in tense scenes.

SEPARATE-BOW STACCATO

This technique is effected by playing short, separate bow strokes (Examples 2-31 and 2-36).

EXAMPLE 2-31. Separate-Bow Staccato*

Moderato

Vln. 

Because staccato bowing separates or leaves a space between the notes, this passage could sound approximately like this:

EXAMPLE 2-32. Separate-Bow Staccato as Played

Moderato

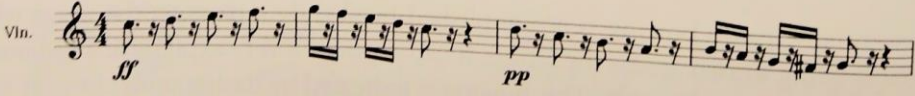
Vln. 

Fig. 2 Separate Bowed Stacato Examples.

Pizzicato:

Another practical articulation mentioned in “The Study of Orchestration” widely used by both composers was Pizzicato. This involves the player plucking the strings to create a muted percussive sound. The sound and pitch caused by this articulation is dependent on the force of the pluck, making this articulation versatile when controlling dynamic modulation for suspense.

"The thickness of the string and the size of the instrument greatly affect the volume of the sound and the duration of the pitch that it plucked."

Adler, Page 37

Natural Harmonics:

As mentioned previously, most orchestration principles are utilized by both composers, however it is their unique style which shows their contrasting styles. The next key element mentioned which is required for any score is the use of natural harmonics to create different textual layering of sounds from various instrumentation and articulation.

""the ways of obtaining natural harmonics on the cello are identical to those for other string instruments; cello harmonics are even more secure because of the greater length and weight of the strings on the larger instrument."

Adler, Page 86

The use of natural harmonics, when bowed heavily, can be effective when attempting to evoke unsettling moments through use of dissonance. When bowed delicately, suspense can be built as developed by the delicate strokes, creating a sense of vulnerability in order to heighten sensitivity in the audience.

Resource 5 – Fundamentals of Musical Composition – Arnold Schoenberg

Articulations are essential to the enhancement and creative process of experimentation with various rhythmic and harmonic textures when aiming to create multiple layers of original suspenseful and intense pieces of music. Thematic development is also another key essential to the scoring process which can guide story and character development.

Melodic Considerations: Cadence and Contour:

The melody will usually contrast with what came before it as the cadence⁶ occurs. This practice helps create a unique cadence contour⁷. When the change occurs, the melody can follow the harmony by increasing the speed of the notes (example: staccato) or slow down by using longer notes (example: legato).

Faster note values tend to be used most in cadences which lead to a resolution or decrease in tension. Rhythmic increases are more popular to build suspense and tension.

Rhythmic Variations:

Schoenberg also highlighted the importance of Rhythmic considerations and how variations of the same melody can be repeated with additional minor changes to the overall melody. These variations can often sound as if they are detached from the original melody. This same rhythm can thereby remain the same if the melody should change drastically. This gives the overall music a clear sense of order and structure in the sense that one element of music is continuing while the other counterpart diverts.

"Since the consequent is varied repetition of the antecedent, and since variation does not change all the features but preserves some of them, distantly related motive forms might sound incoherent..."

Schoenberg, Page 30

⁶ the melodic or harmonic ending of a phrase, section, movement or complete composition. (Essential Dictionary of Music Notation Volume 1)

⁷ a way in which something varies, especially the pitch of music or the pattern of tones in an utterance. (Oxford Languages, Dictionary)

However, In the context of writing music for a thriller, experimenting with Schoenberg's principle of varied repetition could allow for more chaotic soundscape, where the rhythmic elements remain constant, but the melodic content is altered.

This approach seems essential for introducing unsettling elements to the original score which contributes to the overall psychological tension in the film.

Resource 6 – Scoring The Screen – The Secret Life of Film Music – Andy Hill

Providing more insight into methods and techniques used by Herrmann, in a case study of Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 classic psychological thriller "Vertigo." In chapter 1, Author, Andy Hill explains a thorough in-depth analysis of key scenes and how Herrmann conveyed emotional layering without using "cliché" Hollywood scoring formats currently being used at the time.

"Indeed, Herrmann never plagiarized anyone but himself (he had a fondness for recycling his best ideas). therefore, his choice to infuse the Vertigo score with the harmonic DNA of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde, in particular, the Prelude and the Liebestod..."

Hill, Page 5

Hill mentions how the use of chromaticism,⁸ at the time, had become a Hollywood essential method for many composers in conveying such emotions in a score. Herrmann however was often known for his individuality in his style of composing and imitating what fellow composers were doing was simply not in his nature. Herrmann felt the use of unresolved suspensions⁹ was more impactful to expressing a deeper sense of emotion in his works.

"... A more lasting effect was its expression of heightened emotion as an unresolved chain of suspensions, leading to unexpected places harmonically... The half- diminished seventh chord has an astringent quality that makes it especially good for evoking the "string" of frustrated desire."

Hill, Page 6

⁸ in music, the use of notes foreign to the mode or diatonic scale upon which a composition is based. (Britannia)

⁹ in music, a means of creating tension by prolonging a consonant note while the underlying harmony changes, normally on a strong beat. (Oxford Languages, Dictionary)

Resource 7 – Creative Strategies in Film Scoring – Ben Newhouse

Understanding and Incorporating topics in relation to creative approaches presented in “Creative Strategies to Film Scoring” by Ben Newhouse are key to achieving a well-structured plan of action when considering how synchronized music should be composed to evoke the best emotions possible.

In Chapter 4 – Emotion, Newhouse discusses the importance of how music should be complimentary to the story and serve only to enhance the emotions that appear as the story progresses. Music should not act independently of these emotions being represented. Newhouse also refers to a scene in “Jaws” where Williams does not add additional music when it is not required, therefore allowing dynamic space for when emotions are at their highest, allowing music to make these emotions even more impactful.

"As Brody is chumming the water, there is no music. Music here is unnecessary as the emotions are vague and muted. In addition, music at this point would lessen the surprise to come, a decidedly undesirable outcome. When the large shark suddenly lunges out of the water, the full orchestra comes in equally suddenly. By going from no music to a fortissimo hit, the music makes the surprise more surprising..."

Newhouse, Page 20

Visual and Musical Energy:

In Chapter 5 – Energy Level, Newhouse proceeds to validate the importance of synchronizing visual energy with musical energy. Consequently, low energy visuals should equally be met with low energy music and vice versa.

"Most commonly, the musical energy level is designed to match the visual energy level, low-energy is created to match low-energy visuals, and high-energy music is created to enhance high-energy visuals."

Newhouse, Page 31

Resource 8 – Complete Guide to Scoring - The Art and Business of Writing Music for Movies and TV – Richard Davis

In Chapter 14 – Creating the Music, Richard Davis includes a valuable excerpt from Elmer Bernstein under the subheading: Intent and Concept. The quotation provides Bernstein's systematic process when beginning the planning methods before scoring the film. His process includes a list of questions which help better understand the film, which allow for decisive analysis and decision making to enhance the film.

"Elmer Bernstein has composed the scores to over 200 films, and is quite familiar with this process:

"What is the film about? What is the function of music going to be in this film? Why are we having music in this film, what's it going to do? So, I start with those kind of thoughts - it's a kind of intellectual process rather than a composing process."

Davis, Page 131, 132

Bernstein's series of detailed questions can prove a useful tool when at the early stages of composing, allowing better consideration and unbiased reasoning for important decision making, which will only add more depth to the creative process. Having a clear template of questions to follow can help better understand the film so informed decisions can be made to better compose with the goal of emotionally enhancing the film's score to the best of one's ability. This template devised by Bernstein will not only provide an invaluable versatile blueprint for the scoring of "The Birds", but also for future scoring projects from any genre.

Methodology

The research design will primarily focus on analyzing approaches and techniques comparatively on both mid and late twentieth century composers Bernard Herrmann and John Williams.

The aim of research based on these composers will be to provide insight into both stylistic scoring approaches while serving as influences in the decision-making process.

Other resources will provide fundamental key aspects on orchestration and instrumentation essential to originally experimenting with techniques mentioned in key findings from both composers.

In addition, some resources will provide context in how to apply findings in a more practical way based on composing for film methods and creative decision making.

All research will also focus on enhancing the emotional impact in which a musical score can be delivered within a film through various thematic and textual compositional techniques.

Upon completion of this artifact, a comparative will be created of pivotal cues, both captured with music and without for display within a peer review to measure emotional response based on absence and inclusion of an accompanying score.

In relation to techniques commonly used by Herrmann, a focus on the way in which he builds tension through use of harmonization and dissonance through string orchestration and use of up-down motions of ostinatos, textural and utilization of harmonics.

In relation to Williams, the primary focus was on thematic development, where distinctive leitmotifs were composed for all characters, locations and significant elements such as “The Birds Theme” which played an important role in the film. Variations of these leitmotifs were also composed when specific characters would interact with one another so that a level of versatility amongst themes was anticipated at the early stages of thematic development.

The choice of instrumentation was also influenced by both composers, specific to particular elements and techniques which personally stood out. While considering their techniques and style, an attempt was made to incorporate these elements while maintaining a sense of originality to scoring while adapting them to suit the requirements of the on-screen visuals with the goal of enhancing moments.

The pace of a film scene is a crucial element to film scoring, as it influences the choices of instruments and the orchestration of cues. When experimenting with different sections, a series of questions were devised to ensure the music served a purpose with the scene.

Questions such as: What is the purpose of the music in this cue? How are the various sections of the orchestra complimenting the scene”. Through trial-and-error, it became clear that music composed can often sound perfect on its own but when played in isolation. However, when paired with on-screen visuals they can end up complementing or become a distraction. From this experience, orchestration would often have to be stripped down and in some cases re-written with the primary focus of the pace of the scene along with scenes with dialogue.

The first half of the score primary focuses on a thematic compositional style influenced by Williams. While there are subtle undertones to try and suggest to the audience that a shift in the story is possible but uncertain, the dynamic framework was intended to lure the audience into a false sense of security. Thereby allowing a much more dynamic shift when the pace of the story begins to change dramatically. As the need for tension and suspense arises, the use of dissonance in orchestration, particularly with various string instrumentation, transitions more into Herrmann's style.

The use of string ostinatos was primarily influenced by Herrmann, particularly his technique of shifting by only a few semitones in an up-down motion. This technique was incorporated using instruments beyond strings such as harp, celeste and various woodwind instruments.

The technique of doubling of instruments was also incorporated in a similar method which Williams would orchestrate his own music to build on existing instruments as well as incorporating counterpoint motifs and adding new sonic layers to the overall composition. This technique was used throughout most of the score as it allowed for greater depth and complexity in orchestration, enhancing emotional impact and adding layers of texture to the composition.

After the implementation of these techniques and methods, the score develops a rich layered sound which enhances the film's narrative. The following analysis will examine how these techniques and methods are applied in specific scenes.

Analysis

Thematic Development Process:

During the early stages of the scoring process, most of the thematic sketches were composed on piano to ensure that themes for characters, places and moments were considered before any instrumentation or orchestration took place. This process occurred while reflecting over spotted session notes while attempting to convey the correct emotion or at least to have themes which had the capability to shift into the emotions required as the film developed.

In relation to “The Birds theme” or Leitmotif, the documentary; Music by John Williams was particularly insightful when he spoke about how he created the theme for the shark in “Jaws”. He mentioned that his rationale was based on the simplistic fact that since the shark was from the bottom of the sea, he was directed to use note placement in the lower register and used a minor second interval. Using similar rationale, “The Birds Theme” was created in an opposite approach while taking influence from William's approach. Therefore, the Theme was composed in the higher register using high register woodwind instruments to act as the bird's leitmotif whenever they are on screen or suspected of being on screen. Flutes and Piccolo were used with staccatissimo and tenuto articulations which also emulate the sounds which birds make when orchestrated as they appear in the “Birds Theme”.

Technical Development:

When the development of all themes was completed, they were all recorded into two separate MIDI¹⁰ tracks. One track would be the left hand (which would be used for the foundation of creating harmonies as well as chord structuring) and the second track would be the right hand (which would predominantly be used for creating melodies as well as foundational areas for counterpoint).

¹⁰ Acronym for musical instrument digital interface, The means whereby an electronic musical instrument can communicate with other MIDI instruments and computers. (Oxford Languages, Dictionary)

Tempo mapping was the next crucial step in setting the correct pace as scenes shift and change based on on-screen visuals as well as actions and dialogue. Issues did arise in the beginning where specific cues had not been locked in which caused previous and proceeding cues to become shifted out of sync from which they had been written. Fortunately, prints of these cues had been made individually so resynchronization of the cues which shifted could be resynchronized by using the printed cues as references.

Instrumentation & Orchestration:

String Techniques:

Within the “Opening titles” first cue, various string instruments are used to progressively build tension while remaining in the low register. The cue begins with a continuous long bowed double bass to which other string instruments are added using different textual sounds such as flautando in octave doublings as the cue progresses. Drawing influence from Herrmann's stylistic approaches when composing with various string ensembles. Regarding compositional choice of instrumentation influenced by Williams, the choice was made to create an arpeggiated harp which would set above the strings and add a sense of wonder and overall ominous tone to the cue while allowing room for counterpoint to occur naturally as the cue develops. To match the pace of the onscreen visuals of birds flying from side to side, the decision was soon made to add an equally paced ostinato using spiccato strings which would stand out over the harmonization and shifts were later added by five semi-tones lower as string harmonization required. The up down pattern was majorly influenced by Herrmann is evident in “Temptation” from the Film “Psycho”.

Ostinato Techniques:

During the cue called “Children's Chant”, the cue begins with a four-note string ostinato which moves between the high and low register as each shot changes from the character sitting on the bench and the birds gradually grouping in the background. The use of these register shifts was orchestrated this way to represent the character being grounded in the lower register and the birds of flight and flocking together by using the higher register. Additional articulations such as pizzicato and staccato were also used as the scene progressed.

When the scene hits a pivotal moment which comes just before the character begins to realize that the number of birds around her have increased massively in number, the decision to shift compositionally became paramount as it was the moments the character began to feel a sense of dread. The way in which the cue shifts instrumentally is where “The Birds Theme” reoccurs in the woodwind section and the ostinato is removed and now the focus has shifted dramatically. The use of suspended and dissonant strings helps to make the dramatic shift as the string ostinato stops while heightening the tension.

The following cue (Wave 3), “The Birds Theme” is presented again under dissonant strings, doubled with a low tonal drone to outline that the theme belongs to the Birds. Like Williams in the film “Jaws”, The audience should expect tense and serious moments when the theme is played. As the birds take flight to begin their attack, the theme disappears, and sound of dissonant strings intensifies as additional doublings of high register strings are added followed by a doubling of various low register woodwinds to create a rising ostinato which shifts one semitone at a time.

Williams' extensive use of doubling multiple instruments while conveying a sense of switching musical phrasings between instrument sections led to experimentation over this cue. The rising woodwind ostinato is eventually doubled by Spiccato strings and choir sopranos which follow the same note arrangement to add additional layers of colour and to increase tension similar to how shepherd's tones¹¹ are used.

The use of minimal percussion was also used to set the pace as the bird attacks become more violent. During a moment when a girl ends up falling, a hit point was used where most of the percussive strings and woodwind instrumentation is removed, and new timpani percussion is added to increase the feeling of dread to match the onscreen visuals. To mark the hit point, the use of tutti hits as well as string clusters were added to graduate smoothly from the shift in the score's dynamics.

¹¹ Music) a superposition of sine waves, separated by an octave, whose relative amplitude may be varied to give the illusion of a rising or falling note. (Your Dictionary.com)

While the dynamic shifts during this moment of violent attacks, the use of timpani hits are given additional accents orchestrated an octave from the original creating an up down motion which is a common classic technique used by classic composers such as Max Steiner in “The Island – The Railing” from King Kong and Jerry Goldsmith with “The Sarcophagus”.

Survey Results:

To collect data results based on how the accompaniment of an original score enhances a film's emotional impact. A short survey was created using two separate cues and each cue had two versions. One with only the film audio and the other version would include both the film audio and additional score. Each candidate would watch one of the four versions assigned to them and complete a short list of questions which were designed to be similar across all versions to provide insight into the research question as well as maintaining unbiased results.

After conducting the survey results based on one cue with the addition of an accompanying score, when candidates were asked how the music affected their overall experience of the scene, 100% of candidates indicated a positive impact from the music.

Regarding the emotional response to the scene with the addition of an original score, candidates described a range of emotions invoked by the music. These included emotions such as eerie, fear, tension as well as melancholy and intrigue.

When asked whether the score enhanced the scene's atmosphere, 100% of candidates indicated positively that the score complimented and enhanced the scene.

In relation to attention focus, when asked whether the accompanying score distracted or enhanced the visual elements within the scene. 100% of candidates indicated that the music enhanced the scene.

Regarding the role of music and storytelling, candidates were asked whether the music helped convey the story or message of the scene, 100% of candidates indicated that the score played a significant role in supporting the narrative.

In summary, the survey results based on this pivotal scene demonstrates that the addition of an accompanying score consistently enhances the scene's emotional impact, atmosphere, attention focus and storytelling within the scene. The results show that the candidates' feedback was unanimously positive, which reinforces the significance of the role music plays in shaping the viewer's experience. These results will provide valuable insight into the effect music has when accompanying a film which will be further analyzed in the discussion. *(For full survey results, see appendices.)*

Discussion

As discussed in analysis chapter regarding the survey results, candidates responded differently to the same scene when exposed to the accompaniment of an original score versus the same scene with no score. This highlights a substantial key shift when comparing emotional engagement perceived and narrative interpretation.

Overall Impact:

Candidates responded more negatively to the absence of an accompanying score, with many feeling that the scene lacked emotional depth and engagement. In contrast, those who experienced the scene with an accompanying score, the music seemed to enhance their emotional connection and overall perception of the scene.

Emotional Response:

As mentioned previously, the results indicate that candidates who had experienced the scene with music reported emotions such as fear and tension. In contrast, those who viewed the scene without music expressed mixed emotions, with some candidates feeling confused or bored, while others found the lack of music unsettling without the use of a score.

One candidate also mentioned that the repetitive melody sung by the children throughout the scene created an eerie mood and even suggested that the singing paired with the developing situation, gave the impression that the birds were mocking one of the main characters on screen.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that through the absence of music in scenes like this allows the audience to form their own interpretation of the emotions being conveyed as the lack of music shifts the focus to the visuals and the other elements present in the scene.

Atmosphere Perception & Music Preference:

When asked whether the absence of music in the scene made it more realistic or less engaging, 75% of candidates responded that the scene felt less engaging.

Those who had watched the scene with music were asked whether the style or genre of the music matched the scene's context. All candidates unanimously agreed that the music was well suited to fit the scene's context.

Overall, the survey results suggest that the absence of music in the scene led to a less engaging experience for most candidates. In contrast, those who had viewed the scene with music all agreed that the style and genre of the music complemented the on-screen visuals and demonstrates that the composition enhanced the candidates overall emotional connection and overall perception of the scene.

Focus on Visuals & Attention Focus:

When asked if the lack of music made them focus more on the visual details present in the scene, 75% responded affirmatively. Candidates who had watched the scene with music all agreed that the music enhanced the overall experience of said scene.

The results indicate that the absence of a score prompted candidates to focus more on the visual details in the scene. Alternatively, candidates who experienced the scene with an accompanying score felt the music significantly enhanced the overall experience.

Emotional Response & Music and Storytelling:

When candidates were asked if they found it harder to connect emotionally with the scene without music, 75% of candidates agreed that it was.

Alternatively, when candidates watched the scene with music and were asked if the music helped convey the story or message of the scene, 100% of candidates agreed that it did.

The results clearly show that the absence of music made it more difficult for candidates to emotionally connect with the films scene. In contrast, when other candidates were shown the scene with music, all candidates felt that the music enhanced the storytelling, confirming the important role music plays in conveying a films narrative and how the combination of music with on-screen visuals can enhance the emotion impact on an audience.

The Scoring Process:

Organization and preparation before the scoring process were crucial so the creative workflow could begin. Additional time spent on building a full orchestral template proved essential, ensuring that the creative process of scoring could proceed smoothly.

This setup allowed for easy experimentation with various textural and sonic harmonizations and doublings, as ideas and sketches could be moved between instruments, adjusting instrument ranges when necessary.

This approach allowed ideas to be constructed around key thematic concepts, often starting with a single piano track. Harmonies could be developed across multiple instruments based on a single chord progression, and melodies could be transferred between instruments to create a full orchestral palate.

It was through this process that the scoring for most cues began, especially when scenes called for thematic compositions.

For future projects, developing thematic ideas on the piano proved to be an excellent starting point for composing thematic sketches.

However, based on the experience of this project, results could be further enhanced by devising a complete tempo map for the film before creating sketches.

This approach would increase the chances of hitting every key point, rather than composing with just a general sense of what the scene is trying to convey and avoiding the need to make shifts in previously written sketches.

Upon further analysis of the workflow developed during this scoring project, while having access to a full orchestral template enhances the creative process, limiting the set of inspiring instrument tracks within a separate folder could reduce time spent on experimentation just for the sake of it.

In essence, refining the balance between flexibility and structure within working within the orchestral template could lead to a more focused and efficient workflow moving forward.

Conclusion

The primary focus of this thesis has been to explore how the role of an accompanying score can enhance as well as influence a film's emotional impact.

The film chosen to allow this creative process in composing was Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*, a film which originally lacked a traditional score.

Through extensive research conducted on two influential composers, Bernard Herrmann and John Williams, their Methods, techniques and styles of composition were analyzed to provide insight on how to approach the scoring process.

When beginning the scoring process, Williams thematic approach of working through ideas on the piano proved valuable in many ways. The use of a single instrument helped create a sense of focus, allowing the creative flow to unfold more naturally while translating the emotions needed for characters.

This approach allowed for experimentation to see if the scale and key could work on a more versatile level. For example, experimenting with major and minor scales helped explore how the theme could shift to reflect changes in character emotions, as is common in film scoring.

Once themes for characters, locations and elements had been created, the sketches were brought into the project session, where they often served as reference points. In most cases, they were incorporated into specific cues, marking the start of the instrumentation and orchestration process.

Another approach commonly used by Williams which was particularly insightful when scoring the theme for the birds, was similar to his method for composing the shark theme in *Jaws*. The use of a reoccurring leitmotif proved effective and will be further explored in future scoring projects.

In relation to Herrmann, influences were drawn from his orchestration with strings, his distinctive style of harmonization, and use of dissonance to enhance suspenseful moments. His techniques on structuring, motifs, leitmotifs and ostinatos significantly influenced the approach to guiding tension throughout the entire scoring process.

Ultimately, all the methods and techniques explored and developed throughout the compositional scoring process demonstrate that an attentively crafted score is essential in shaping a film emotional impact, and these insights will continue to refine future compositional projects across all forms of scoring.

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Appendices

Survey Results:

Full survey results for Cues 1a and 1b and cues 3a and 3b.

Cue 1a film audio only:

1. **Overall Impact:** "How did the absence of music affect your overall experience of the scene?" (Positive/Negative)



Cue 1b film audio & score:

1. **Overall Impact:** "How did the music affect your overall experience of the scene?" (Positive/Negative)



Cue 1a film audio only:

Emotional Response: “What emotions did the lack of music evoke during this scene?”

Responses

uncertainty, felt like it could be the prelude to an important scene

I was expecting something to happen or have some kind of suspense with the absence of music, but the short scene only had landscape and nothing interesting happened in the scene to justify the lack of music. Music would definitely bring greater emotion to the narrative of the scene.

Optimism, calm, peaceful

Cue 1b film audio & score:

Emotional Response: “What emotions did the music evoke during the scene?”

Responses

Slight eeriness, makes me think something bad is going to happen to her

Adventure and curiosity

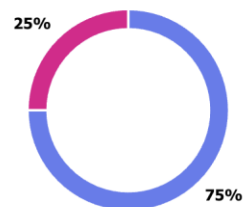
Happy, adventurous, jolly

Anticipation, suspense

Cue 1a film audio only:

3. **Lack of Music and Visuals:** “Did the absence of music affect how you perceived the visuals?” (Yes/No)

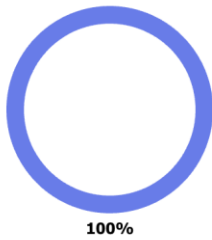
● Yes 3
● No 1



Cue 1b film audio & score:

3. **Music and Visuals:** "Did the music complement the visuals, enhancing the scene's atmosphere?" (Yes/No)

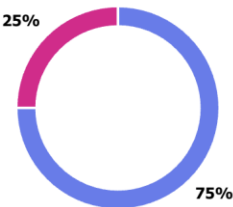
● Yes 4
● No 0



Cue 1a film audio only:

4. **Memorability:** "Would you remember this scene more if there had been music?" (Yes/No)

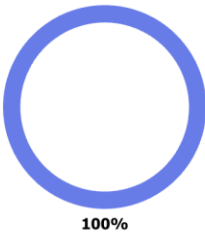
● Yes 3
● No 1



1b film audio & score:

4. **Memorability:** "Would you remember this scene more because of the music?" (Yes/No)

● Yes 4
● No 0



Cue 1a film audio only:

5. **Atmosphere Perception:** "Did the absence of music make the scene feel more realistic or less engaging?" (Realistic/Less engaging)

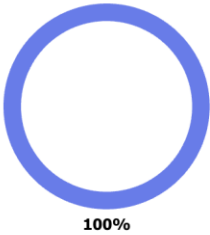
- Realistic 2
- Less engaging 2



Cue 1b film audio & score:

5. **Music Preferences:** "Did the style or genre of the music fit the scene's context?" (Yes/No)

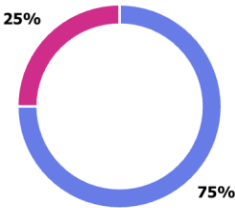
- Yes 4
- No 0



Cue 1a film audio only:

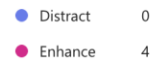
6. **Focus on Visuals:** "Did the lack of music lead you to focus more on the visual details?" (Yes/No)

- Yes 3
- No 1



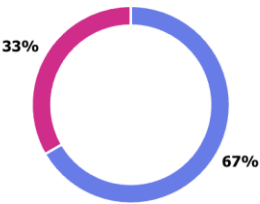
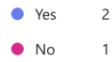
Cue 1b film audio & score:

6. **Attention Focus:** "Did the music distract you from the visual elements or enhance them?" (Distract/Enhance)



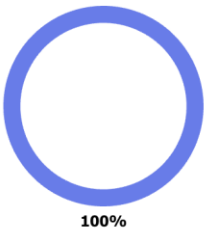
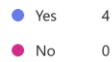
Cue 1a film audio only:

7. **Emotional Response:** "Did you find it harder to connect emotionally with the scene without music?" (Yes/No)



Cue 1b film audio & score:

7. **Music and Storytelling:** "Do you think the music helped convey the story or message of the scene?" (Yes/No)



Cue 1a film audio only:

Preference for music: "Would you have preferred this scene to have music, and why?"

Responses

i would have preferred music, some subtle ambient music in the background to help the viewer engage with the scene

In a larger context, perhaps this scene makes sense without the music, but only shown this way, the music was definitely missing.

No, as it made me focus more on the scene

Music may have been able to build on the story and/or add subtle undertones critical to the overall plot

Cue 1b film audio & score:

Comparative Experience: "How would you rate this scene compared to similar scenes you've seen with music?" (1-5 scale)



Cue 3a film audio only:

1. **Overall Impact:** "How did the absence of music affect your overall experience of the scene?" (Positive/Negative)

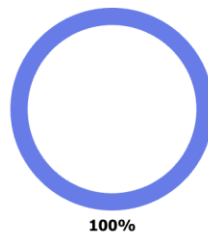
● Positive 2
● Negative 2



Cue 3b film audio & score:

1. **Overall Impact:** "How did the music affect your overall experience of the scene?" (Positive/Negative)

● Positive 4
● Negative 0



Cue 3a film audio only:

Emotional Response: “What emotions did the lack of music evoke during this scene?”

Responses

Confusion. Context. Meaning

Boredom

I found the lack of music paired with the scene very unsettling in a good way

The kids are singing a song so there is an element of music in the scene. There is an eeriness to the kids singing a repetitive melody which is solidified with the pan shot to the crows. The numerous crows reflecting the numerous kids sings but creates a sense of mockery to the woman.

Cue 3b film audio & score:

Emotional Response: “What emotions did the music evoke during the scene?”

Responses

Eerie feeling, melancholy

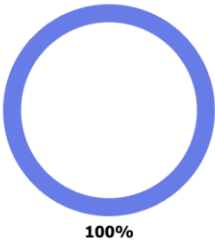
Fear. Intrigue. Concern

Fear, tension

Cue 3a film audio only:

3. **Lack of Music and Visuals:** "Did the absence of music affect how you perceived the visuals?" (Yes/No)

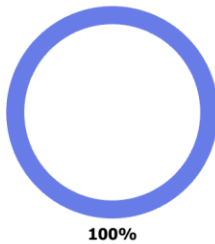
- Yes 4
- No 0



Cue 3b film audio & score:

3. **Music and Visuals:** "Did the music complement the visuals, enhancing the scene's atmosphere?" (Yes/No)

- Yes 4
- No 0



Cue 3a film audio only:

4. **Memorability:** "Would you remember this scene more if there had been music?" (Yes/No)

- Yes 2
- No 2



Cue 3b film audio & score:

4. **Memorability:** "Would you remember this scene more because of the music?" (Yes/No)

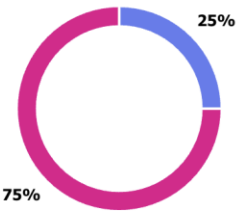
- Yes 2
- No 2



Cue 3a film audio only:

5. **Atmosphere Perception:** "Did the absence of music make the scene feel more realistic or less engaging?" (Realistic/Less engaging)

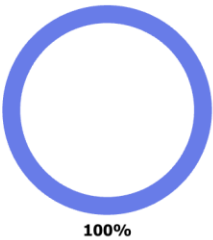
- Realistic 1
- Less engaging 3



Cue 3b film audio & score:

5. **Music Preferences:** "Did the style or genre of the music fit the scene's context?" (Yes/No)

- Yes 4
- No 0



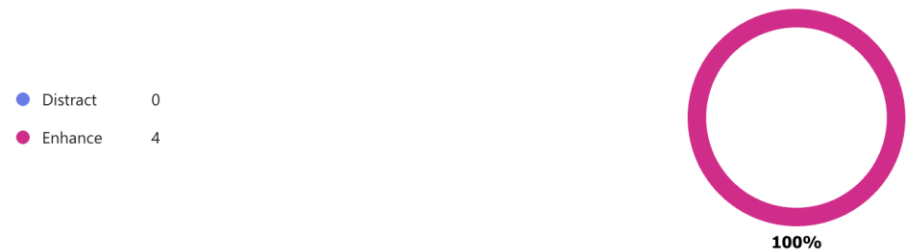
Cue 3a film audio only:

6. **Focus on Visuals:** "Did the lack of music lead you to focus more on the visual details?" (Yes/No)



Cue 3b film audio & score:

6. **Attention Focus:** "Did the music distract you from the visual elements or enhance them?" (Distract/Enhance)



Cue 3a film audio only:

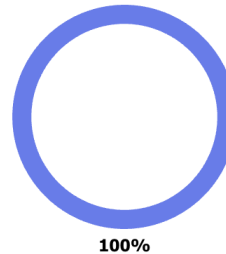
7. **Emotional Response:** "Did you find it harder to connect emotionally with the scene without music?" (Yes/No)



Cue 3b film audio & score:

7. **Music and Storytelling:** "Do you think the music helped convey the story or message of the scene?" (Yes/No)

● Yes 4
● No 0



Cue 3a film audio only:

8. Preference for music: "Would you have preferred this scene to have music, and why?"

Responses

Yes. There needed to be some music to assist the story at, and to inferior some emotion

I'd prefer to have music in here because I think it's a great combination with visuals to fully experience an art of film

While I think they both have merit I'm always a fan of more sparse score for more unsettling scenes

I think there is an element of music in this scene with fits the story the scene is trying to convey. I think if there was music more in the traditional sense in the scene, it would feel more like a modern production but this music would need to complement the song that the children are singing. It would have the potential to enhance the eeriness of the scene but I feel for this particular scene the lack of music is very deliberate, and it would make sense to not feature music in such a sense if it is early on in the film in order to allow tention to build as the film progresses.

Cue 3b film audio & score:

8. Comparative Experience: "How would you rate this scene compared to similar scenes you've seen with music?" (1-5 scale)

