

Listening to Movies: Film Music and the American Composer

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INTRODUCTION

I entered college a naïve 18-year-old musician. I had played guitar for roughly four years and was determined to be the next great Texas blues guitarist. However, I was now in college and taking the standard freshman music literature class. Up to this point the most I knew about music other than rock or blues was that Beethoven was deaf, Mozart composed as a child, and Chopin wrote a really cool piano sonata in B-flat minor. So, we're sitting in class learning about Berlioz, and all of the sudden it occurred to me: are there any composers still working today? So I risked looking silly and raised my hand to ask my professor if there were composers that were still working today. His response was, "Of course!"

In discussing modern composers, the one medium that continuously came up in my literature class was that of film music. It occurred to me then that I knew a lot of modern orchestral music, even though I didn't really know it. From the time when I was a little kid, I knew the name of John Williams. Some of my earliest memories involved seeing such movies as *E.T.*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and *The Empire Strikes Back*. My father was a musician, so I always noted the music credit in the opening credits. All of those films had the same composer, John Williams. Of course, I was only eight years old at the time, so in my mind I thought that John Williams wrote all the music for the movies.

However, I was not alone in my obliviousness of music being written in my own time. When I asked a friend if he knew any of the works of John Williams, he said "no." So I then asked him to name his ten favorite movies. Out of the ten, three had music composed by Williams.

Through my realization of how film music had become one outlet for today's composer, it occurred to me that I had already been exposed a good deal of music composed in the last 80 years. As I've grown musically, I've increasingly paid attention to film composers and their works. I began to look into the history of film music.

THE COMPOSERS

Aaron Copland

Born in 1900 in Brooklyn, Aaron Copland was one of America's foremost composers. Studying piano from an early age, he started composing early in life. In 1921 he traveled to Paris, where he became a pupil of Nadia Boulanger's. From the late-1920s through the middle-1930s, Copland was actually able to make a living from his music, something few

composers of the day were able to do. Copland gained acclaim in the 1930s for such works as the ballet, *Billy the Kid*. After achieving his first successes as a composer, Copland turned his eye towards Hollywood and the musical possibilities that the film industry offered.

Copland's first venture into film scoring came with *The City* (1939), a 45-minute film that played daily at the New York World's Fair. While not a major Hollywood production, *The City* led to director Lewis Milestone hiring him to score the film version of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1939). That film was a great success, and soon Copland received an offer to score yet another film, *Our Town* (1940), directed by Sam Wood. Both *Of Mice and Men* and *Our Town* earned Oscar nominations for Copland. He also extracted specific cues from these early films to make his five-movement suite for small orchestra, *Music for Movies* (1942). Copland remarked, "It struck me that a suite might successfully mirror in musical terms the wide range of American scenes in the three films for which I had written music" (Pollack 347).

Copland's next foray into film was a second collaboration with director Lewis Milestone, *The North Star* (1943). The film was made in order to gain support and sympathy for the rising Soviet Union. Because of the amount of music to be contained in this picture, Copland worked on it for several months. The movie later caused controversy for its pro-Soviet views and was largely ignored by the public despite some good reviews and six Oscar nominations, including one for Copland.

Copland and Milestone worked together again on the John Steinbeck adaptation of *The Red Pony* (1949). While the film itself was only of average quality, the score written by Copland has been described as his best work in film. Copland used some of the cues he had written for this film to make a six-movement suite. *The Red Pony Suite* was premiered in 1948 by the Houston Symphony Orchestra and it "became one of the few truly successful concert works so adapted from a film score" (Pollack 430).

Copland's last Hollywood film was *The Heiress* (1949). For the score Copland evoked the world of mid-19th-century New York. Copland also employed the use of character motifs more extensively in this film than in earlier films. As the film was finishing up post-production, the director and Paramount Pictures asked Copland to make changes to the score, mainly to the opening theme. Copland refused, so the studio hired Van Cleave to make the changes for them. The music to the opening of the film now had Van Cleave's music, eventually giving way to Copland's music. Pollack quotes musician Andre Previn describing the arrival of Copland's original music in the opening titles as "suddenly finding a diamond in a can of Heinz beans" (Pollack 436). Outraged, Copland disowned most of the score used in the film. In a strange twist, after three nominations, the score to *The Heiress* finally earned Copland an Oscar.

Compared to the rest of the film composers in this unit Aaron Copland composed very little for film. However as a man and as a composer he has influenced countless

composers in today's film industry. Every film score that has come since is a tribute to Copland.

Bernard Herrmann

Bernard Herrmann was born in New York City of a Russian-Jewish background. His father bought him a violin at an early age and took him to many of the cultural attractions in the city. Herrmann studied with composer Gustav Heine. One of his classmates was future film composer Jerome Moross, who recounted an early encounter with the young Herrmann as follows:

I always sat in the back of the class so the teacher wouldn't disturb me while I composed. One day I looked up and saw a boy sitting across the aisle twirling his hair and studying the Mahler Fifth Symphony in a miniature score. He looked at me and said, "D'ya know Mahler?" I said, "Mahler stinks." He got quite angry, grabbed what I was writing, tossed it back, and said, "Dishwater Tchaikovsky" (Smith 17).

Heine's teaching was more towards the traditional than Herrmann would have preferred. At the time Herrmann was being influenced by the music of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. However, the lessons gave him a foundation upon which he was free to experiment.

In 1929, while still in high school, Herrmann enrolled at NYU, where he studied composition with Phillip James and conducting with Albert Stoessel. His work with the latter later led to his enrollment at Juilliard.

Along with Moross, Herrmann became part of the Young American Composers group in New York headed by Aaron Copland. Herrmann remained a very opinionated person among his young colleagues. As mentioned in *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*, "After anything at all was played at one of their meetings, Herrmann would often exclaim, in his thickest Lower East Side accent, "It stinks!" (186).

In the early thirties, Herrmann was hired as the assistant to CBS Radio's music director Johnny Green. In 1938, he was hired as a composer and conductor for the CBS Radio drama series, "The Mercury Theater on the Air." This led to Herrmann meeting the young Orson Welles. Herrmann would later compose the music for Welles's infamous broadcast of H.G. Wells's "The War of the Worlds." This meeting led Herrmann into his career as a film composer when Welles invited him to score his movie, *Citizen Kane* (1941).

Herrmann's most memorable work in Hollywood was with famed director Alfred Hitchcock. The relationship lasted from his work on Hitchcock's *The Trouble With Harry* (1955) until their ill-fated collaboration on *Torn Curtain* (1966). In the late fifties

Herrmann composed some of the most memorable film music with *Vertigo* (1957), *North by Northwest* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960). The last of the three demonstrated Herrmann's habit of using some of his own previously composed themes, as he derived some of the music from his *Sinfionetta for Strings* (1935). Hitchcock later accused Herrmann of doing the same thing for Alex Segal's movie, *Joy in the Morning* (1965); some of the music in the film resembled music Herrmann had written for Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964).

This great Hollywood partnership sadly ended with Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*. Herrmann, going through depression from a recent divorce, ignored the studio's request for a "pop" score and instead delivered a suspenseful, challenging one. His decision to go against the studio's wishes strained the two artists' relationship beyond repair. In Smith's book, Herrmann recounts his last phone conversation with Hitchcock, in which he said to the director, "Look, Hitch, you can't outjump your shadow. And you don't make pop pictures . . . I don't write pop music" (273).

Herrmann did little of note in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His final great work came when a young Martin Scorsese hired him to score his latest film, *Taxi Driver* (1976). Herrmann's film music always seemed to combine his influences of Debussy and Stravinsky, along with American jazz. A good example of this is Herrmann's opening theme to Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* with its Stravinsky-esque opening followed by the jazz saxophone solo playing the main motif. A disturbing look at one man's mental decline amongst the darker sides of urban life, the film became a classic, and Herrmann's score would surely have put him back into the Hollywood spotlight. Unfortunately, he died in his sleep on Christmas Eve in 1975, one day after the final recording session for the film.

Herrmann's music has been revived quite often over the last 10 years. When director Gus Van Sant remade Hitchcock's *Psycho*, he called on composer Danny Elfman to rework Herrmann's score. Elmer Bernstein similarly adapted Herrmann's score to *Cape Fear* (1962) for Martin Scorsese's 1991 remake. For the final sequence in the movie, Bernstein also revived sections of Herrmann's discarded score to *Torn Curtain*.

Elmer Bernstein

Elmer Bernstein was born in New York City in April of 1922. As a young man he studied piano with the intention of being a concert pianist. However, when he showed a talent for improvisation, his teacher, Henriette Michelson, arranged a meeting with Aaron Copland. Copland arranged for Bernstein to study composition with Israel Citkowitz, one of his own students.

At the age of 21, Bernstein joined the Army Air Corps, where he got a job arranging music for Glenn Miller and the Army Air Force Band. By 1949 he had written music for over eighty programs on Armed Forces Radio. This work led to a job at NBC scoring some dramatic works. Soon his talent caught the attention of Hollywood.

Working for Columbia Pictures, Bernstein's early work on the films *Saturday's Hero* and *Boots Malone* (both 1951) largely went unnoticed. It was his work on *The View from Pompey's Head* (1955) that caught the attention of director Cecil B. DeMille. When DeMille was working on his newest film, *The Ten Commandments* (1955), he was in search of a new composer since his usual partner, Victor Young, had recently died. DeMille was apprehensive about working with any new composer, but he allowed Bernstein to score a sequence as a test. Liking what he heard, he hired Bernstein on a week-by-week basis with no contract.

In the same year, another movie with a Bernstein score, *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), came out. This score earned Bernstein his first Oscar nomination and solidified his place in the Hollywood community.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Bernstein was one of the most popular film composers working. In 1960, he wrote one of his most celebrated scores, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), which evokes a style reminiscent of Aaron Copland's ballets, *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. Bernstein himself said that he wanted in this film to pay homage to Copland. To quote an interview with Bernstein printed in *Film Music*: "*The Magnificent Seven* score really benefited from the fact that for years I'd wanted to do an American type of theme as it was something I knew a great deal about, partly because of my own interest in American folk music, and also because of my relationship with Copland" (40). Bernstein's score uses many themes of Western America along with styles from Mexican folk music. The Latin elements come out in the rhythmic guitar strumming in "Strange Funeral" and the mariachi style trumpet and guitar work in "Fiesta/Celebration." This film score combined with Copland's *Of Mice and Men* and Jerome Moross' film score to *The Big Country* helped define the use of American folk music in the Hollywood film score.

Bernstein worked actively through the last half of the twentieth century and continues to be a hard working composer in Hollywood today. In 2003, he was nominated for an Academy Award for his work on *Far From Heaven* (2002).

John Williams

There is probably no other living American orchestral composer as popular as John Williams. He has won numerous awards for his compositions and has recorded many best-selling albums. He has composed music for almost 80 films.

John Williams was born in New York City, the son of jazz drummer, Johnny Williams. As a child he studied piano, trombone, trumpet, and clarinet. In high school, he arranged and composed music for the school band. Later he went to UCLA and studied piano and composition with Bobby Van Epps. After a two-year stint in the Air Force, he studied at Juilliard. In New York he began to get recognized for his piano

abilities and his talent as an orchestrator. He finally moved back to Hollywood, where he studied with Arthur Olaf Anderson and Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco.

He got his first film composing credit with the 1959 Lou Place film, *Daddy-O*. In 1974, he started his fruitful partnership with the young director, Steven Spielberg. After hearing Williams' score to *The Reivers* (1969), Spielberg approached him about work on his upcoming film, *Sugarland Express* (1974). They next teamed up for Spielberg's film, *Jaws* (1975). For this film, Williams created one of his most memorable scores, one that even today still evokes feelings of dread and fear.

It was through Spielberg that Williams got the job to score George Lucas' film, *Star Wars* (1977). Little did Williams know that this film would make him a household name and would lead to even greater musical compositions in the film's sequels. In his scores to the original trilogy, Williams uses character motifs much in the same way that Wagner did in his operas. One of the most memorable of these motifs is the "Imperial March," or what has come to be known as "Darth Vader's Theme." The low rumbling of the march makes its first appearance in the first film in the cue, "Imperial Attack." It is in the second film, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), that we first hear the complete motif for the Darth Vader character. In listening to the scores for both *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* (1983), we hear this motif weave in and out as Williams sculpts the music to fit the film's changing moods. From the booming brass of "Imperial March" to the mournful flute and harp of "Darth Vader's Death," Williams takes this melody and constantly varies its emotional possibilities. In an interview with Craig Byrd in *Film Score Monthly*, Williams spoke of how these themes evolved from the first *Star Wars* film:

I suppose it was a natural but unconscious metamorphoses of musical themes that created something that may seem to have more architectural and conscious interrelatedness than I actually intended to put there...the functional aspect and the craft aspect of doing the job of these films has to be credited with producing a lot of this unity in the musical content the listeners perceive.

Since then, John Williams has worked on countless blockbuster films. He was nominated for over 30 Oscars and won for his scores to *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and his highly emotional score to *Schindler's List* (1993). Through the 1980s, Williams also made a name for himself as conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra. Today he continues to be one of the most sought after composers for everything from film to music for the Olympics.

Danny Elfman

Danny Elfman was born in 1953 in Amarillo, Texas, though he mostly grew up in Los Angeles. His father was a teacher and his mother was a novelist and screenwriter for

television. He tried his hands at being a musician as a child trombonist, but to his teachers he seemed to have little talent and received little encouragement.

In his early years, Elfman became aware of the power of film music, especially that of Bernard Herrmann. In an interview with Elfman printed in *Film Music*, Elfman recalls, “It was during a screening of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) that I first became aware of film music and of an artist who created the film music – Bernard Herrmann . . . From that point on, if I saw Bernard Herrmann’s name in the beginning of a movie, I knew there was something special. . .” (147).

When Elfman was eighteen, he followed his brother Richard to Paris. Elfman originally went with an interest in acting; however, he became exposed to various orchestral instruments and his musical interests soon developed. In Paris, he had his first performance on the violin with a music group called the Grand Magic Circus. It was with this group that Elfman would compose his first piece, one for mandolin. He would later travel to West Africa, where he developed a strong love for percussion and ethnic music. Unfortunately, while in Africa he contracted malaria and was forced to return to the United States.

In 1980, Elfman worked with his brother Richard on a film called *Forbidden Zone*. With his brother, he started an experimental musical group called The Mystic Knights of Oingo Boingo. Along with writing new experimental music, the group did arrangements of 1930s jazz tunes by Duke Ellington and Django Rheinhardt. Most of the arrangements and solos were transcribed by Elfman by ear. Eventually this musical group gained underground success and fame in the 1980s under the shortened name, Oingo Boingo. Elfman and the group did some minor film work in the eighties, even appearing in the movie *Back to School* (1986). Most of their film work consisted of providing title songs. It was as a member of Oingo Boingo that Elfman developed an important friendship with Steve Bartek, who later orchestrated most of Elfman’s work.

Much like the relationships between Herrmann and Hitchcock, or Williams and Spielberg, Danny Elfman formed a long-time partnership with the director, Tim Burton. This relationship started on Burton’s film, *Pee-Wee’s Big Adventure* (1985). At first Burton hired Elfman because he was a fan of Oingo Boingo. After the success of the movie, Burton employed Elfman on almost all of his projects.

In the late 1980s, Elfman developed his style with his scores to *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Batman* (1989), and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) (the latter two were both nominated for Grammys). In an interview in *Film Music*, Elfman states:

If there’s no theme it’s just lots of orchestration, and it could be brilliant orchestration but it’s really only a huge temp score to me. . . If you look at the composers of the Golden Age they understood it perfectly – the balance between theme, style and orchestration. . . Ultimately I think a composer’s real style and

certainly my own isn't the writing of the theme, but what you do with it – how you take it, turn it inside out (158-159).

In 1996 Elfman paid tribute to Herrmann in the score to Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks*. When talking about the score, Elfman pointed out the influence of Prokofiev and other composers, but overall he sees it much in the style of Bernard Herrmann's score to *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Today Elfman is one America's most popular film composers. One of his latest scores, *Big Fish* (2003), earned him a third Oscar nomination. Among film composers in Hollywood today, he is considered a bit of a rebel. His style remains very modern and comic, as demonstrated by his theme to the television show *The Simpsons*, and his latest works seem to have drifted more into the styles of rock music and minimalism. Elfman is also one of the few highly regarded film composers working today who has almost no formal musical training.

THE CURRICULUM

Teaching

This curriculum will be taught over one six-week period after the students have had a basis in music history from the Baroque through the Romantic periods. One goal will involve studying the evolution of music in American film through the 20th century and into the 21st. This will include analysis of how music in a film helps develop a scene and conveys the emotions of the characters in the story.

We will study the use of motifs for characters in the film. This element originally will be touched on during our study of Wagner's operas. We will use this time to look at such motifs in Williams' score to *The Empire Strikes Back*, namely "Yoda's Theme" and "The Imperial March." For a more recent example, we will look at the motifs from John Williams's scores to the Harry Potter films. We may also touch on parts of Herrmann's score to and Bernstein's revision of *Cape Fear*.

The students will be able to make comparisons between composers of various periods. This will include comparisons of Bernstein's music for *The Magnificent Seven* to the music of Aaron Copland. The students will be able to analyze the use of American folk music in Copland's *The Red Pony*, Bernstein's *The Magnificent Seven*, and Moross's *The Big Country*. I will bring in examples of American folk music as well as folk music from Mexico to use as a context for these three scores. In the beginning, the students will be asked what kind of elements the folk music has that the music of Beethoven and other Romantics do not. The students will then hear segments from all three film scores in order to consider what was done to give the scores more of a folk-like flavor.

More specific comparisons will include the use of the saxophone solo in Herrmann's theme to *Taxi Driver* and Williams' theme to *Catch Me If You Can*. This will include a look at how these two composers use these solos to enhance the overall mood of the picture. We will also listen to jazz of the forties and fifties to see how Herrmann uses those elements to convey a feeling of urban life. Comparisons can also be made to Herrmann's earlier works, particularly his work on *Vertigo* with Alfred Hitchcock.

Reaching the Students with Music

The study of orchestral music in the public schools often stops with the early ballets of Stravinsky. Unfortunately, today's youth feels little connection to composers of the past. While I may feel a relationship to Joaquin Rodrigo or Mauro Giuliani, most students associate this type of music with boring old people. However, when students hear certain film music they identify right away with something familiar. I have taught from third to eighth, and in each one of those grades, no matter what their backgrounds, there are students who can hear the opening of John Williams' *Jaws* and instantly have an association with it. The students also know the music of John Williams through the *Harry Potter* movies. Students who watch *The Simpsons* are exposed to the music of Danny Elfman, even though many don't realize it.

One of the most effective tools I've used in teaching children about music from the past is imagery. Students can hear Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* or Beethoven's Seventh Symphony and create images of what that music represents to them. Film music is a great source for this type of teaching, because most of the music is created with a particular image in mind.

Students can see a scene in a movie or create their own story and imagine the type of music that would go along with it. One lesson plan may be to give the class a small one-act play and then divide the class into groups. Each group gets a different set of musical pieces to choose from and they arrange their own soundtrack to the script. They can either use entire pieces or segments of the different pieces. Students can see how this relates to how some film directors choose to use pre-composed music for their films. This is evident in Oliver Stone's use of Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* in his film *Platoon*, or the numerous uses of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in film.

Materials

Various CDs will be needed for this curriculum. Many of the CDs can be checked out of the Houston Public Library. One of my most valued teaching tools in teaching my general music class is the use of a computer music service. The two biggest ones today are iTunes and Rhapsody. For me, Rhapsody is best for teaching in the classroom because you only pay a monthly subscription service and you are then able to access an enormous library of recorded music.

Videos will be needed as well. Obviously, not all of the movies can be viewed because of inappropriate subject matter. The two movies to be used for a more lengthy study will be *The Red Pony* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. Certain scenes from others may be used, but should be previewed and used at the teacher's discretion.

For the lesson plan involving the play, teachers can consult with the school's theater teacher or English teacher for an appropriate script. This will also be good way to demonstrate teaching across the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

From my early days as a student in college getting my degree in music and my teaching certificate, one of my goals has always been to bring my love of music to the classroom and encourage the students' own love of music. While I don't expect my students to come out of my class with a love for Beethoven, Chopin, or Rodrigo, it is important to me that they come out of the class with a deeper awareness of the music around them and the importance it has on our own culture. Teaching music from the movies offers a great way to get students to relate to different styles of music.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Aaron Copland, *The Red Pony*, and the American West

Objectives

The student will compare and contrast the use of Western American folk themes in Copland's score to *The Red Pony* to that of Copland's *Billy the Kid* and Bernstein's score to *The Magnificent Seven*. For additional contrast, you may also use some of Copland's other works, such as his *Sonata for Violin*.

Materials Needed

Tracks from both scores including "Walk to the Bunkhouse," and "Grandfather's Story," as well as tracks from the other works to be used as a contrast to the film scores. A video of *The Red Pony* will be needed. You will also need a CD player, and the students will need pen and paper.

Procedure

Begin this lesson plan with a writing prompt on the board. Play the recording of "Walk to the Bunkhouse" for the students in the class. Have the students write a paragraph on what images the music produces. After they are done, have them discuss what about the music produced these images. You can lead into a discussion about the evocation of the American West on music. As another example, you can use "Fiesta/Celebration" from Bernstein's score to *The Magnificent Seven*, where the Mexican and Western flavor will be more apparent to a middle-school student.

After you have introduced these themes to the class, have the class view *The Red Pony*. For a young audience today the movie will seem rather dated, so you might want to discuss certain plot and musical points and the score at times to make sure the whole class is keeping up with it. After the video is over, discuss with the students how the score helped define the emotions in some of the scenes in the movie. You might replay certain scenes like Tom's fight with the buzzards. Discuss how Copland used dissonant musical textures to heighten the sense of fear in the scene.

Now go back to "Walk to the Bunkhouse." Have the students distinguish between the two themes going on in that one cue. Have the students figure out which theme goes with which character (the changing-meter theme goes with Billy, while the more melodic theme seems to represent Tom).

Finish the lesson by having the students compare and contrast the cues from the film score with that of Copland's other works. An example I would use would be the "Allegretto Giusto" movement from his *Sonata for Violin*. Have the students write a paragraph on what makes the two works similar and how they are different. What makes the cues from *The Red Pony* have a more Western feel while the *Sonata for Violin* has a more abstract feel for its day? Have the students examine these things in their paper, citing examples.

Lesson Plan 2: Bernard Herrmann and Mood in *North by Northwest* and *Psycho*

Objectives

The student will analyze how Herrmann created various moods in *North by Northwest* and *Psycho*. The student will listen to different cues and view the corresponding scenes to establish a connection between the music and the emotion of the scene.

Materials Needed

Tracks from both film soundtracks, including "Main Titles," "Abduction of George Kaplan," and "Crash of the Crop Duster" from *North by Northwest* and "Prelude," "Temptation," and "Clean Up" from *Psycho*. Videos of both films (although *Psycho* cannot be viewed in its entirety, certain scenes may be used with teacher discretion and administrative permission). For comparison use you may also want a copy of Herrmann's *Sinfionetta for Strings*, which contains many of the same motifs from *Psycho*; and four CD players.

Procedure

Begin by having the students list different moods that film music can evoke. They can use such words as "dark, scared, adventurous, hyper," etc. Establish four listening stations in the classroom, each with a CD player. Divide the class into four groups and send each one to a station. Have each group listen to a track assigned to their station and pick a mood to go with that track. The students must back up their choices by citing the different orchestral techniques. Afterwards discuss with the class about certain cues

suggesting certain moods; this can include such things as the use of all strings in the score to *Psycho*. Now show the students some of the scenes from the movies that used these cues. Discuss how the different cues reinforce the emotions and storytelling of the scenes. In some cases you can use scenes from *Psycho*, in which there is just the score and no dialogue. Also, there is an edition of *North by Northwest* on DVD that has a feature where it only plays the score and nothing else with the movie.

Have the students go back to their desks and take out a sheet of paper. Have the students listen to the “Prelude” from *Psycho*. After they have listened to the piece, have all the students write a one page story based on their interpretation of the music. It must be a full story with a beginning, middle, and end. Have the students discuss what about the music gave them the idea for their stories. How did the mood of the music affect the mood of their story?

After they have completed that task, have the students flip over their papers. Have the students listen to the “Main Titles” cue from *North by Northwest*. After they have listened to the piece, have the students repeat the previous assignment with the new music. If you need to have the students complete this part of the assignment on two separate days so that they don’t get the two opening themes confused. Once they have written their second story, have the students compare and contrast their two stories. Ask the following questions: Why was the first one different from the second? What about the different themes changed the moods of their stories?

For a homework assignment, have the students write a new story using a song of their choosing. The story must be one page in length and the student must back up their ideas citing musical (and if applicable, textual) examples from their song.

Lesson Plan 3: John Williams and Darth Vader’s Theme

Objectives

The student will analyze the use of the motif to represent characters in a film, musical, or opera. The student will identify the different orchestral techniques used with a motif to help identify the different emotions in the story.

Materials Needed

Tracks from John Williams’ soundtrack to the Star Wars trilogy, including “Imperial Attack,” “Imperial March,” “Duel,” “The Emperor Arrives,” “The Emperor Faces Luke,” and “Darth Vader’s Death.” Videos of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. The students will need to have paper and pen.

Procedure

Take a day with the students to watch the video of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Begin with a review on the subject of leitmotifs. Examples from the 19th century can include Berlioz’s *Symphonie Fantastique* and the Valkyries’ theme from Wagner’s *Ring of the*

Niebelungen. After the review is finished, ask the students to identify the melody from the soundtrack that they believe represents the character Darth Vader. Have students attempt to sing the melody. If the students are having a hard time vocalizing the melody, play different melodies from the film score on the piano (or whatever instrument is available) and have the students identify which one is associated with Darth Vader.

Have the students fold a piece of paper in half. On the top half of the paper, have the students answer the question, “What changes could you make in Darth Vader’s theme to reflect different emotions?” The students can use different instruments; change the tempo; or change the pitches, rhythms, or accents of the melody itself.

Discuss with the students the different ways the melody is used throughout the film. Have the students listen to “Imperial March” and “Darth Vader’s Death.” Make sure that the students can identify the motif in both pieces. Ask the students what changes are made in the melody between “Imperial March” and “Darth Vader’s Death.” Their answers should include things like the tempo change between the two (the first being a vigorous march, while the second is slower and more melancholy). They can also talk about the instrumentation, such as the brass section in “Imperial March” versus the use of the harp and the flute in “Darth Vader’s Death.” Have the students describe the different emotions that are created due to these changes.

Further examples can be used with such tracks as “Duel,” “The Emperor Arrives,” and “The Emperor Faces Luke,” all of which use the motif of Darth Vader in different ways. With the last two tracks mentioned you can also do a comparison with the students between Darth Vader’s theme and the Emperor’s theme. How are they different, and what do the two themes say about their characters?

If your students have a good background in the use of different timbres, you can contrast Darth Vader’s theme with that of Luke and Leia. Have the students decipher how Williams uses the timbres and orchestration to create a contrast of good and evil.

Once this has been discussed in your class, have the students answer the following question on the bottom half of their paper: What differences in the motif does Williams make in order to better suit the story? Have the students go into details regarding the instrumentation and the general treatment of the motif to answer this question.

Lesson Plan 4: Creating a Film Soundtrack

(Depending on class size and length of meeting time, this could be a fairly long project.)

Objectives

The students will analyze a play and a selection of orchestral recordings in order to arrange a soundtrack to the scene or scenes selected. This will begin as a group project, but will evolve into a class project.

Materials Needed

A one-act play or other script with multiple scenes; CDs of various orchestral music; a digital video camera; and a computer with digital video editing software such as iMovie or Windows Movie Maker.

Procedure

First you will need to decide on a short play or a short set of scenes for the students to perform. This resource can usually be obtained by your school's theater teacher. Once you have settled on the script, make copies for all of your students.

Start with a class reading of the script. Have the students discuss the story that is being performed and the different character motivations. Once the students have a good understanding of the story, divide them up into groups. Describe to your class how the director of a film may choose to use pre-written music for their movie rather than have a composer write the music from scratch. For examples you can use Oliver Stone's use of Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, or John Landis' use of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* in *Trading Places*. Give each group a selection of different orchestral pieces previously discussed in class. It would be best to pick a selection of pieces that have been discussed in class.

Have the students analyze the overall story of the play and the moods that might be conveyed throughout the various scenes. Have the students choose music for the opening and ending of the play and for the different scene changes. They may use segments of certain pieces of music or the entire work depending on the length. The students must give a justification for the different pieces and be able to explain why a particular piece of music should go where they say it should.

After each group has done this, have them get back together as a class. Decide as a class on which pieces should go where for the play. After that is done, assign various acting parts and crew duties to class members. If you have to time to hold actual auditions in class, do so. Once parts and jobs have been assigned, begin filming the play as a movie. Have the students act out the scenes until you have everything on film. Then work with the students on editing the film and using the music in the appropriate place.

As the teacher you will need to have a basic knowledge of the various video-editing programs. Both iMovie and Windows Movie Maker have tutorials and help menus to help you learn how to utilize these programs. If you want to do the editing yourself, that's fine; otherwise you can assign editing duties to two or three students.

Once you have finished editing, have a movie/popcorn day in class and show the class's finished product so that they can appreciate their work.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Pollack, Howard. *Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1999. Contains valuable information on Copland's film work as well as his and Bernard Herrmann's involvement in the Young American Composers group in New York.
- Russell, Mark and James Young. *Film Music: Screencraft*. Boston: Focal Press, 2000. This book offers various comments on the works of Herrmann, Bernstein, and Elfman.
- Smith, Steven C. *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann*. Berkley: U of California P, 1991. Biography of composer Bernard Herrmann, which includes great chapters on his work with Hitchcock.
- Thomas, Tony. *Film Score: The View from the Podium*. NJ: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1979. Provides good information on Copland, Herrmann, and Bernstein.

Supplemental Resources

Books and Websites

- Cooper, David. *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001. For more in-depth analysis of Herrmann's style in film scoring.
- Elfman, Danny. *Edward Scissorhands: Excerpts from the Isolated Score and Commentary*. 2001. Ryan Keaveney and Klauut Media. 1 May 2004. <<http://elfman.filmmusic.com/edwardscissorhands/index.html>>. This website has excerpts from Elfman's score to *Edward Scissorhands* along with commentary from Elfman (in Real Media format).
- Karlin, Fred. *Listening to Movies: The Film Lover's Guide to Film Music*. New York: Schirmer/Thomas Learning, 1994. This is a good book on film music, easily accessible for non-music teachers.
- Morgan, David. *Knowing The Score*. New York: Harper Collins, 2000. Comments on scoring by Elmer Bernstein, including his work on *Cape Fear* in which he adapted Herrmann's discarded score from *Torn Curtain*.

Discography

Bernstein, Elmer. *The Magnificent Seven*. Koch International 7222, 1994.

Great recording of the Bernstein score.

Copland, Aaron. *Copland: Music for Films*. RCA 61669, 1994.

Recording of most of Copland's important film scores.

Herrmann, Bernard. *North by Northwest (Original Film Score)*. Unicorn, B000006KI4, 1993.

Contains tracks from Herrmann's score to the film.

Journey to the Stars. Phillips Classics Productions 46403, 1995.

Includes "Outer Space" from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Russell, Mark, and James Young. *Film Music (Screencraft)*. Focal Press, 2000.

The CD that accompanies this text includes the theme from *Psycho*, the theme from *The Magnificent Seven*, and the theme from *Edward Scissorhands*.

Williams, John. *By Request: The Best of John Williams and the Boston Pops Orchestra*. Phillips 420178, 1987.

Includes the march from *Superman*, the theme from *Jaws*, and the Imperial March from *The Empire Strikes Back*.

_____. *Star Wars Trilogy: The Original Soundtrack Anthology*. Arista 11012, 1993.

Great recordings of all the cues from John Williams's score to the Star Wars trilogy.

Filmography

North by Northwest. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Warner Home Video, 2000. (136 minutes)

Film with score by Bernard Herrmann; DVD contains special feature that isolates the soundtrack.

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Universal Studios, 2003. (109 minutes)

Film with score by Bernard Herrmann; DVD contains "Making of..." special in which Herrmann's score is discussed.

Red Pony, The. Dir. Lewis Milestone. Lionsgate/Fox B00009NH9W, 2003. (89 minutes)

Film with score by Aaron Copland.

Star Wars Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back. Dir. Irvin Kershner. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1980. (124 minutes)

Film with score by John Williams.

Superman. Dir. Richard Donner. Warner Home Video, 2001. (151 minutes)

Film with score by John Williams; DVD contains special feature that isolates the soundtrack.