The Roles of Music in Films

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Abstract. Nowadays, music and film have become intertwined, creating art that resonates with audiences on an emotional and societal level. This raises the question: How does music serve films and their audiences? This question has captured the interest of scholars, directors, and workers in the film industry, profoundly influencing the value and narratives conveyed in films. Extensive studies and research have fostered a diverse range of perspectives, ultimately leading to the conclusion that music plays a significant role in film, while simultaneously films enhance the power of music. Sounds and music shape the atmospheres, tones, and characters in films, and film clips make music sounds in more delicate feelings and emotions. This dynamic relationship highlights the importance of the fusion of these two art forms.

Keywords: Music, film studies, character, narrative, space.

1. Introduction

Music is the composition of sounds, while film is developed through the binding of pictures and graphs. They share a profound connection rooted in the realm of emotion [1]. In music, individuals' emotions are amplified, while in films, they burst forth. As audience immerse themselves in the union of music and cinema, they seek a sense of balance and inner peace through these connections. Music is strategically employed throughout various stages of a film. It often sets the tone at the beginning, fades into the background during transitional scenes, and commonly takes center stage in the climactic moments towards the end. It is through music that films come alive, harmoniously linking the audience together and evoking deep emotional responses that resonate in their hearts. The question of how music influences film and creates value for audiences has become a popular topic.

The paper delves into well-known studies from scholars that explore the influence of music on key aspects of film. For example, Siu-Lan Tan's research on the audience's perception of music among characters and Hung's work on interpretations of narrative through music are reviewed [2]. In addition, prominent directors also dedicated their efforts to studying this dynamic relationship, offering their unique perspectives. Varieties of paper studies, second-hand interpretations, and precise quotes are used in this paper to analyze the impacts of music on films. To provide a focus, contemporary studies often concentrate on three key aspects: that music in films plays various roles, including building character, enhancing the narrative, and creating a sense of time and space. These areas are explored to better understand the profound role that music plays in shaping the emotional landscape of films and its impact on the overall cinematic experience. Other thoughts that contradict these three aspects are also recorded to cover a bigger chance of the audience alliance.

2. Music's Impacts on Film Characters

Music influences the viewer's interpretation of film content, particularly in shaping their views on characters and narratives. Siu-Lan Tan's exploration of music's impact on character perception unveils three pivotal dimensions: the audience's perception of a character's motivational and emotional states, their visualization of a character's role in a scene, and their understanding of the character's interpersonal dynamics [2]. For example, as Dika Newlin featured in her research on Alfred Hitchcock's cinematic masterpiece *Vertigo* (1958), Hitchcock masterfully incorporated music and visuals to heighten the suspense in the opening sequence to mold the character's inner feelings [3]. In this scene, a detective prepares to pursue a suspect across a rooftop, but his fear of heights

poses a significant challenge. music becomes the conduit for expressing his emotional distress. The composition, characterized by fragmented chords and repetitive motifs, emulates the sensation of falling and spinning, thus intensifying the detective's apprehension and evoking a nerve-wracking atmosphere for the audience. By manipulating the musical elements, Hitchcock reached the character's emotions which further heightens the tension within the scene and effectively engages the viewer's senses. Furthermore, when portraying a character's role and function, Marshall Cohen's integration of Heider and Simmel's geometric shapes with original music unveils a thought-provoking paradigm [4]. By pairing strong or weak music with distinct shapes, Cohen delved into the dynamic interplay of perception and auditory stimuli. A classic and notable case involves two triangles, one large and the other small. There are two shapes, a large triangle and a small triangle. Before music is added, the larger triangle appears to be more active and aggressive, and audiences have a stereotypical reaction to the characters based on their shape sizes. However, when the small triangle is accompanied by intense music in a minor key with a gradually accelerating tempo, and the large triangle is complemented by "gentle" music in a major key with a constant tempo, the audience's perceptions are intriguingly subverted. Suddenly, the smaller triangle exudes greater intensity, capturing their attention and confounding conventional expectations [4]. This example demonstrates the influence of music on the audience's perception of characters' physical and mental roles in films.

Furthermore, music can represent the relationships between characters just as effectively as the other aspects previously mentioned. The inclusion of music in films enhances the audience's understanding of these relationships, adding yet another layer of comprehension to the overall viewing experience. In summation, the fusion of music and film is a harmonious duet, where each partner complements the other's strengths. It is through this synthesis that films cease to be mere visual experiences and transform into captivating symphonies of human experience.

3. Music's Effects on Film Narration

3.1. Narrating the Settings

Once viewers have developed an understanding of the characters, their interpretation of the events that unfold in the film becomes crucial. Many studies suggest that this is precisely where the role of music in shaping narrative interpretation comes into play. For instance, Hung discovered that when audiences watched an advertisement for a shopping mall accompanied by classical music, they tended to perceive it as a luxurious place frequented by sophisticated individuals [4]. In contrast, when the same footage was accompanied by rock music, the perception shifted. This finding underscores how the music backdrop has the power to sway people's interpretations of a film location. Even in a dark and grimy setting, the use of classical music featuring soft violin melodies can transform the perception of the place, making it appear bright and full of hope. This technique can be effectively employed in films where the central storyline unfolds in an unsatisfactory and gloomy environment, while the characters within the film may exhibit optimism and a sense of profound pleasure to the surroundings. Here, the choice of music can amplify these high-energy emotions, thereby bestowing a vibrant quality upon the location and the mood of the film.

3.2. Narrating Forthcoming Events

Music also contributes to shaping the audience's anticipation of forthcoming developments in the film's narrative [5]. An experiment outlined by Boltz et al. underscores this point by demonstrating how music, or its absence, concurrently presented with film, can influence the audience's perception of characters' moods and their predictive expectations [3]. In the study, 177 participants watched a selection of excerpts from famous films, each about 1 minute, coupled with different emotions of music ranging from happiness, sadness, fear, to anger. The result of this experiment shows the influence of different types or genres of music on the audience's mood, affecting feelings of anger or happiness. It further reflects how pre- and post-scene music affects emotional responses, as assessed through post-experiment surveys.

Table 1. Means for the Significant Music Placement by Emotion of Music by Rating Scales Interaction.

	Rating scales			
	Anger		Happiness	
Music Emotion	Pre-scene	Post-scene	Pre-scene	Post-scene
Happiness	1.10	0.72	1.43	1.94
Sadness	1.17	0.92	1.02	1.16
Fear	0.99	1.10	1.09	0.62
Anger	1.12	1.42	1.23	1.13

As illustrated in Table 1, in the pre-scene condition, both happiness and sadness music excerpts were associated with higher anger ratings compared to the post-scene condition. However, in the post-scene condition, these same excerpts received higher happiness ratings compared to the pre-scene condition. Surprisingly, fear-including excerpts received higher happiness scale ratings in the pre-scene condition than in the post-scene condition. On the contrary, anger-laden excerpts received higher anger scale ratings in the post-scene condition compared to the pre-scene condition. These preliminary findings suggest that participants' perceptions of characters' emotions are influenced by the specific emotions expressed in accompanying music as well as the timing of its presentation. When the ratings are partial to anger in the pre-scene, audiences experience heightened positive tension with an inclination toward action readiness. This is the time when the audience anticipates the characters in the film to take some actions either for themselves or others and things [6]. In addition, according to some surveys that clearly portray the emotional music's relation to the audience's tensions and action readiness, music evoking happiness and sadness yields a low sense of action readiness in both the pre-and post-scenes, while sadness elicits lower tension as well. These emotions create a stable emotional experience, where the audience anticipates minimal character action. In contrast, the presence of fear results in elevated action readiness but low tension. This indicates that when fear appears in a scene, the audience will not pay much attention to the character's facial expressions but more to the music, showing that fear will make the audience look forward to the character's actions to get out from its current state.

4. Music's Role in Creating Space

4.1. Music's Role in Signifying Space and Time

Alongside character and narrative, music also holds a significant place in its ability to signify place and time [7]. Martin Scorsese claimed that music is a very important element in his films to convey certain temporal and spatial contexts. In his movie *Goodfellas* (1990), the soundtrack uses songs like "Rags to Riches" by Tony Bennett, "Layla" by Derek and the Dominos, and "Gimme Shelter" by The Rolling Stones to capture the atmosphere of the 1960s to 1970s. Similarly, in his *Wolf of Wall Street*, he included a vibrant mix of pop and rock hits from that era like "Hey Leroy, Your Mama's Callin' You" by Jimmy Castor, "Mrs. Robinson" by Simon & Garfunkel, and "Black Skinhead" by Kanye West to encapsulate the financial excess and corruption prevalent during the 1980s to 1990s [8]. Aside from specific songs, directors often collaborate with composers to create original scores that enhance the atmosphere of the films. In *Inception*, Christopher Nolan collaborated with the composer Hans Zimmer to create a distinct score called "Time," featuring a rhythmic ticking clock sound that emphasizes themes of urgency and time. Similarly, Steven Spielberg has also worked with various composers, including John Williams, to achieve a specific sense of time and place in his films. He understands that music can be a powerful tool for creating atmospheres related to different time periods and locations. Films like *Jaws* (1975), *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and the *Indiana Jones* series all bear testament to the significant role of music.

4.2. Contradicting Music's Impacts on a Montage

In the realm of exploring the impact of contradicting music on film imagery, scholars like Gorbman and Siegfried have provided valuable insights. Gorbman suggests that music in a film can either "resemble" or "contradict" the action or mood depicted on the screen. Siegfried adds to this idea, emphasizing the powerful effect of "contradicting" music in achieving creative montage [9]. Larry M. Timm's book *The Soul of Cinema: An Appreciation of Film Music* further delves into the technique of blending music that does not align with the genre of the film [10]. For example, directors sometimes use contrasting music to temper the violence depicted in a scene, incorporating opera or a soft, slow ballad to lessen the intensity. This technique creates a montage atmosphere in the movie, as the different meanings conveyed by the music and the film combine to convey a complex image or message to the audience. This contradictory combination of music and visuals contributes to a mysterious effect, allowing the audience to speculate about the underlying message. Take the film *Taxi Driver* (1976) as an illustrative example. In this movie, Stanley Myers' haunting and melancholic composition "Cavatina," is played. The delicate and beautiful melodies from the classical guitar piece starkly contrast with the brutal and unsettling actions unfolding on screen. This contrast serves to underscore the inner turmoil and psychological disarray experienced by the main character, Travis. By juxtaposing Travis's violent tendencies with a kind of tragic beauty, the use of classical music in this context adds depth and complexity to the scene, intensifying the emotional impact on the audience.

4.3. Profound Relationships between Music and Film

As it is widely acknowledged that music plays a significant role in enhancing the cinematic experience, nuanced perspectives on the relationship between music and film have emerged. Some scholars argue that the dynamic between music and film is characterized by a process of mutual serving, where both art forms benefit from their collaboration. In his book *Music in the Cinema: The Epistemology of Listening*, author David Neumeyer explores the reciprocal relationship between music and film, stating "Music is not simply subordinate to the film; it serves the subject matter of the film, but at the same time, the music industry and its practitioners benefit from their association with film" [11]. This perspective recognizes that music not only enhances the emotional impact, narrative depth, and atmosphere of a film but also gains exposure and recognition through its inclusion in cinematic works.

Conversely, films themselves benefit from the influence and cultural currency of popular music, as it adds to their appeal, marketing potential, and overall artistic quality [11]. Moreover, in an article titled *Music, Film, and Their Mutually Serving Industrie*s published in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, author Tom Stempel discusses the symbiotic relationship between music and film industries. Stempel asserts, "Film can give the industry exposure and keep its songs popular, and the music industry can provide the film business with a soundtrack and a tie-in audience". This analysis underscores the commercial and promotional aspects of music in film, as well as the film's role as a marketing tool for the music industry [12]. For instance, the song "My Heart Will Go On" by Celine Dion from *Titanic* (1997), became a massive hit and classic song of the singer which proves how film can serve as a powerful platform for the music industry.

5. Summary

In conclusion, in the ever-evolving narrative of filmmaking, music stands as a symphonic bridge spanning past, present, and future. It fuses time and place, emotion, and imagery, taking audiences on a journey beyond the realm of words. Although the research shows a tiny quantity of experiments and images for the understanding of the concepts and thoughts, it offers for future research to build on whether film imageries make contributions to the understanding of music elements. For instance, in various music videos, the interplay between visuals and the accompanying music can redefine and reshape the meanings conveyed. Delving into this topic would unravel the intricate ways in which

images amplify or transform the musical experience. This intriguing question offers scholars an opportunity to delve deeper into the synergistic relationship between music and visual elements, paving the way for further investigations and insights in the field. Moreover, an interesting aspect to consider would be the exploration of how specific types of music are intentionally composed or curated to evoke specific emotions or enhance particular narrative moments within a film. What music elements are used and how are they composed to meet and match the film's moods? This line of inquiry would shed light on the deliberate creative choices made by filmmakers and composers, further enriching the understanding of the complex interplay between music and cinema.

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