

Analysis of the Composition and Application of the Soundtrack for the Film "How to Train Your Dragon"

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Abstract: This thesis focuses on the film series "How to Train Your Dragon" and delves deeply into its creative techniques and practical applications. By dissecting core musical elements such as melody, harmony and rhythm, and in combination with the progression of the film plot and the shaping of characters, this paper analyzes how the score endows the film with emotional layers, creates an atmosphere and promotes the narrative development, and summarizes its value and enlightenment in the artistic creation of film.

Keywords: How to Train Your Dragon Film Score; Creative Techniques; Plot Integration.

1. Introduction

In the audio-visual system of film art, the score has always been an indispensable and important component. Dreamworks Animation's masterpiece, the "How to Train Your Dragon" series, takes the cross-racial bond between the Viking boy Hiccup and the night dragon Toothless as its main thread, and builds an adventure world full of fantasy. The score composed by John Powell for this series deeply integrates musical elements with the plot, adding much color to the film [1]. An in-depth study of the creation and application of its soundtrack is of great significance for understanding the synergy between music and images in films.

2. Second, The Style of the Soundtrack for "How to Train Your Dragon" is Positioned to Align with the Film's World View Setting.

John Powell boldly integrated multiple elements in the style of the soundtrack. On the one hand, drawing inspiration from Nordic culture, in "Forbidden Friendship", a complex rhythm pattern alternating between 4/4 and 3/4 beats is adopted to imitate the rhythm of Viking war drums, combined with the unique Doric mode melody of the Nordic region, creating a strong regional flavor. On the other hand, the introduction of a modern orchestra formation, in the air battle scene, the use of French horns and percussion instruments to build a sound wall, combined with electronic sound effects to simulate the roaring of a flying dragon, vividly presents the fantasy elements and achieves a delicate balance between tradition and modernity. [2]

3. Analysis of the Writing Techniques of the Soundtrack in "How to Train Your Dragon"

3.1. Design and Application of Thematic Motivation

Powell's theme motives tailored for the core characters of the film are highly distinctive. They are not only highly recognizable but also evolve along with the development of the plot. Take the protagonist Hiccup as an example. His

theme melody starts in G minor and is played slowly by the clarinet, accompanied by a slow triplet rhythm, precisely outlining his solitary and sensitive image as a teenager. In "Test Drive", as Hiccup gradually masters the dragon taming skills, the theme melody incorporates string ensemble and xylophone timbres, and the lines become more fluid, vividly presenting the growth and transformation of the character [3]. In "How to Train Your Dragon 2", when Hiccup becomes the leader of the tribe and faces new challenges, the theme motivation introduces a grander brass instrument group, with more leaps in the melody, highlighting his composure and boldness after shouldering heavy responsibilities.

The theme of Toothless is equally brilliant. It adopts an irregular rhythm and a wide range of intervals, using a low brass glissando to express its mysterious nature as a top predator. The addition of a flute trill in the later stage also hints at its gentle side. In the scene where Toothless is captured, its thematic motives are scattered and reorganized. The original low brass glissando becomes intermittent, and when combined with the sharp violin plucking, its fear and struggle are depicted vividly and incisive. When it met Hiccup again, the theme motif jointly performed by the flute and the piano, with the notes flowing smoothly and coherently, fully conveyed the deep emotions between the two.

There are also ingenious interactions and integrations among the character themes. The theme of Hiccup's father, Stogo, is depicted with a heavy trumpet sound to convey his majesty. In the scene of his sacrifice, the theme melody shifts to a soft string and uses a semitone descending, instantly revealing the tenderness in the heart of this iron-blooded father. The battle theme of Astree is integrated into the Hiccup theme segment in the later stage, especially when the two fight side by side. The strong rhythm of the Astree theme interweaves with the melody of the Hiccup theme part, which not only retains the tension of the battle but also implies the warming of their emotional relationship.

3.2. Functionality of Harmony Design

Powell is highly ingenious in the use of harmony. According to the needs of different scenarios, he employs harmonic colors to enhance emotional expression. In intense Battle scenes, such as in "Dragon Battle", diminished seventh chords and augmented fourth intervals are frequently used. Dissonant harmonies combined with rapid timpani render the

conflict between the dragon race and the enemy tense and exciting. The use of diminished seventh chords is like a crisis that may break out at any time in a battle, while the jump of augmented fourth intervals is just like a sudden attack, greatly enhancing the uncertainty and thrill of the battle.

In the emotional scenes, traditional functional harmonies are mostly used for progression. For example, in "See You Tomorrow", the sudden key shift from minor to major, combined with the creativity of the strings, presents the reluctance of the characters when parting and their hope for the future very well. In the scene where Hiccup reuniting with his mother, the background music starts in a soft minor key, and the harmony progresses smoothly, creating a sense of strangeness and caution during a long-awaited reunion. As the emotions between the two gradually release, the harmony slowly transitions to a major key. Warm strings and gentle woodwind instruments join in, perfectly highlighting the warmth and emotion of family affection, allowing the

audience to truly feel the emotional changes of the characters.

3.3. Dynamic Processing of Rhythm Arrangement

Rhythm plays a crucial role in driving the plot forward in the film's soundtrack. In the flight scene, Powell successfully created a sense of speed by using the splinting rhythm and variable speed techniques. Take "Romantic Flight" as an example. The music speed gradually increases from 60BPM to 120BPM, which is in harmony with the high-speed flight of the toothless boy in the picture, making the audience feel as if they were right there. Especially when the Toothless Boy is crossing the narrow canyon, the syncopated rhythm makes the music full of a lively and jumping sense, which perfectly echoes the Toothless Boy's flexible flight posture. The constant change in speed also simulates the ups and downs during the flight process.

The image displays a musical score for a narrative paragraph. It includes staves for Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The Violin parts play a melodic line with some rests, while the Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass parts provide a rhythmic foundation with eighth and sixteenth notes. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

Figure 1. Theme Music Narrative Paragraphs

In the narrative paragraphs, the rhythm design is more delicate. When Hiccup discovered the secret of the dragon race, the gradually increasing wooden fish rhythm and the slow string glissando complemented each other, gradually amplifying his curiosity and nervousness during the discovery process. When Hiccup first stepped into the secret realm of the dragon race, the rhythm of the wooden fish started from extremely weak and gradually increased. Each strike was like a tense heartbeat, and the string glissando was like the mysterious atmosphere in the secret realm. The combination of the two vividly displayed the complex emotions when exploring the unknown.

4. The Integration of the Soundtrack and Plot of "How to Train Your Dragon"

5. The Role of Music in Character Development

The soundtrack, through variations of the thematic motives, fully presents the growth trajectory of the characters. The theme of Hiccup and Toothless has been constantly evolving and changing throughout the series of films. From the initial unfamiliarity and testing, to mutual trust, and then in "How to Train Your Dragon 3", when Hiccup decides to bring Toothless back to the dragon race, their thematic motives appear in a complementary form. The stability of the Hiccup theme and the reluctance of the Toothless theme are intertwined. It profoundly reflects Hiccup's growth from

relying on toothless kids to being willing to let go for its own happiness. In many crucial scenes, the background music further intensifies the characters' emotions. For instance, when Hiccup stands up to protect Toothless, the music suddenly falls silent at first and then bursts out throughout, greatly highlighting his sacrifice. In the climax of the film, "The Ultimate Battle", the soundtrack employs polyphonic counterpoint techniques, interweaving the themes of the dragon race, Viking battle songs and Hiccup. At the most intense moment of the battle, the mysterious melody of the dragon race theme, the passionate rhythm of Viking battle songs, and the part representing courage in the Hiccup theme were presented in a shuttling way among different instrument groups, featuring both confrontation and integration, vividly demonstrating the complexity of the battle and the participation of multiple forces.

In the "Peace Celebration" scene at the end, the soundtrack integrates all the characters' themes and concludes with a major melody, achieving an emotional elevation and echoing the film's theme of peace. In the celebration music, the theme motives of each character were adapted into cheerful rhythms. The brilliance of the brass instruments, the agility of the stringed instruments and the liveliness of the woodwind instruments complemented each other, vividly presenting the joy and hope after the arrival of peace.

6. Conclusion

The soundtrack of the "How to Train Your Dragon" series, with its exquisite creative techniques, has achieved a deep integration with the plot. John Powell, through his ingenious design of musical elements such as thematic motivation, harmony and rhythm, has transformed the score from merely a backdrop to set the atmosphere into a significant force driving the narrative and shaping the characters. His creative experience provides valuable references for the field of film scores, proving that excellent film scores can significantly enhance the artistic expressiveness and appeal of a film. For future film score creation, how to precisely apply musical elements like in "How to Train Your Dragon" and closely integrate them with the plot will be the key to enhancing the artistic quality of films

References

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