

The A- Z of Media Music Terms

A – Animation

The technique used frequently in film, which creates the effect of continuous movement, through capturing a sequence of images or frames.

B - Bernard Herrmann

(b. NY, 1911; d. Hollywood, 1975)

Known mostly for his work with Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles, Herrmann wrote 49 film scores throughout his life. The musical stabbing effect used in his score for *Psycho* (1960) is probably the most frequently quoted and recognised of his film music.

He proved his originality by using the electric violin and electric bass in the soundtrack for *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), one of the first examples of electric music in film.

<http://www.bernardherrmann.org/>

C – Composer

Without the composer, there would be no music. Simply put, a composer writes original music for musicians to perform.

Some modern day composers stand by the tradition of pencil and manuscript paper to write music, whilst many opt for arguably the more time-effective method of computer notation programmes or sequencers. Notation software for composers includes Sibelius and Finale; sequencers include Digital Performer, Cubase, Pro Tools and Logic Pro. With the significant reduction of music production software prices, contemporary composers come in many different guises. The accessibility of notation software and sequencers means that more and more people are becoming “bedroom” composers, able to create soundscapes just using sample libraries.

There are many organisations supporting composers, including: British Music Information Centre, British Academy of Musicians and Songwriters, Musicians Union, Society for the Promotion of New Music, The Society for Producers and Composers of Applied Music.

“The first requirement for a composer is to be dead.” (Arthur Honegger, “Je suis compositeur”, 1951)

“A good composer does not borrow, he steals.” (Igor Stravinsky)

D – Diegetic

Diegetic music refers to any music or sound that is from the “source”, or from within the world of the film itself. For instance, in musicals, music acts mostly in a diegetic manner, as the music is heard and interpreted by the characters. The music soundtrack acts as an addition to the script, the narrative or the plot: it is not within the film, and is therefore *not* diegetic music.

E – Elfman

(b. 1953, Los Angeles)

Commonly found working alongside Hollywood director Tim Burton, Danny Elfman (1953, USA) is an incredibly significant present-day Hollywood film composer. He cites Bernard Hermann and Nino Rota as his key compositional influences, and his influential soundtrack filmography includes *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) *Planet of the Apes* (2001), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), *Ed Wood* (1994), *The Nightmare before Christmas* (1993), *Batman* (1989) and *Big Fish* (2003).

Elfman’s style is very distinctive, often described as haunting, spooky, melancholic, enchanting, ghostly, bewitching, spellbinding, eerie, otherworldly, fantastical, magical, gothic, dark, and fairytale-like.

F – Film Music

“Film music obviously does not exist in a vacuum. It shares with the image track (and other elements of the soundtrack) the ability to shape perception. Film music’s power is derived largely from its ability to tap specific musical conventions that circulate throughout the culture” (Kalinak, 1992: from Dickinson: 21, 2003)

“One of the most widespread prejudices in the motion-picture industry is the premise that the spectator should not be conscious of the music. The philosophy behind this belief is a vague notion that music should have a subordinate role in relation to the picture. . . . Financial considerations and technical interest are concentrated on the actor; anything that might overshadow him is considered disturbing”. (Adorno & Eisler, in Dickinson: 25: 2003).

“Music has persisted as an integral part of the sound film because it accomplishes so many things at once. Its freedom from the explicitness of language or photographic images, its useful denotative and expressive values easily comprehended by listeners raised in the nineteenth-century tradition, its malleability, its spatial, rhythmic, and temporal values, give it a special and complex status in the narrative film experience” (Gorbman, in Dickinson: 39, 2003).

“Music draws filmgoers into a film’s world, measure by measure” (Kassabian: 2001: 1)

G – Gorbman (Claudia)

“Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music”
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987

This is one of the most influential film music texts, and also one of the most difficult to find. Gorbman is commonly quoted in film music discussion and enquiries.

H – Henry Mancini

(b. 1924 Ohio; d. 1994 Beverley Hills)

During his lifetime as a film composer, Mancini scored over seventy films, including *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *The Pink Panther*. He was also a respected TV composer, scoring for such programmes as *Peter Gunn* and *The Thorn Birds*. Mancini is often noted as one of the film music pioneers of bringing jazz elements into film music.

I –

J – Jazz

So, "what is jazz?". There is no clear cut answer to this, but jazz can be defined as a musical art form developed by multiple cultural influences at the beginning of the 20th century. Most notable is the blend of African American music with Western musical techniques. Jazz style trademarks include improvisation, use of the blues scale, syncopation, and swing rhythms. Krin Gabbard is a key contemporary jazz theorist and commentator: he has explored many theories of jazz, including ideas surrounding the use of jazz in film, contextualizing such concepts in the history, the current climate and the future of jazz. The 1950s saw a boom in the jazz soundtrack, and this concurrently developed a negative relationship between jazz and sleaze, and sin: jazz music in 1950s film offered up the associations by white Americans of sleaze, seediness, drug abuse, prostitution, criminality and vice. Royal S. Brown also relates film music to Barthesian notions of "icities", suggesting that 'the entire jazz genre tended to attach itself in the cinema to the "-icity" of "lower-class" people involved in sleazy dramas of sex, drugs, and/or crime.' (Brown: 1994: 183). In contemporary cinema, however, there seems to have been a turn-around in the cultural connotations of jazz, and is now increasingly associated with style, the high-life and sophistication.

<http://www.hand-made-music.co.uk/articles/jazz-in-film.html>

K – Korngold (Erich Wolfgang)

(b. Brunn, 1897; d. Hollywood, 1957)

A child prodigy pianist and composer, Korngold's career covered both concert and film music. He is one of the biggest names of Classical Hollywood film music, having composed for such films as *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Sea Hawk* and *Captain Blood*.

"Music is music whether it is for the stage, rostrum or cinema.

Form may change, the manner of writing may vary, but the composer needs to make no concessions whatever to what he conceives to be his own musical ideology"

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1946)

L – Leitmotif

The term leitmotif derived from the European Romantic tradition of composition, and is commonly linked with German Romantic composer Wagner. Often termed as a “calling card” (i.e., a signal of intent to arrange a meeting with its recipient), a leitmotif is a repeated melody in a film score attached to a character or concept intended to change, alter or manipulate audience understanding of the narrative. The leitmotif works on two levels, or aural emphasis and visual depiction: individual motifs can be used to trigger connotative interpretations of the narrative, or to amplify visual, on-screen action. Effectively, the leitmotif is used to guide the audience through the narrative, using repeated musical cues. A good example of the leitmotif in modern Hollywood cinema can be heard in Star Wars: Darth Vader has a theme, which, when heard, gives different connotations depending on context.

M – Mickey-Mousing

Originating from early animation, the term Mickey-Mousing is used to describe music that mimics on-screen action.

For example....

A small mouse scampers very quickly through a forest: there might be a mimicking effect of high staccato notes in quick succession, stopping only when the character pauses.

A large, morose bear plods slowly through a forest: the notes might fall directly on each of the character’s steps, possibly lower in pitch.

In both cases, therefore, the music would be mimicking the characters actions directly; the music would be showing “Mickey-Mousing”.

N –Non-diegetic

Most mainstream Hollywood films have music soundtracks which are not directly derivative of the film, but are something peripheral, which charges the film with external musical impetus: music which occurs outside of the on-screen action is commonly referred to as non-diegetic music.

Kalinak, in her book on the Classical Hollywood Film Score, suggests that non-diegetic music is “Music which does not emanate from or occur within the world posited by the film. (It is heard by the spectators but not experienced by the characters).” (xiv, Kalinak; 1992)

O –Orchestrator

To orchestrate is to score original music for a group of instruments. Orchestrators (or sometimes groups of orchestrators) are often called upon to orchestrate large-scale film music works, and are involved in the music preparation stage of film music production. Orchestrator’s often deal with the “sketches” of composers, and use their expertise to give the melodies life, colour and vitality. They are experts in the balance of the orchestra, the blending of the instruments, the pitch ranges and so on: this orchestral proficiency allows the composer’s sketches to reach their absolute potential, as the orchestrator always has in mind the capability and the limitations of the ensemble.

P – Piano

With the birth of cinema, came the inevitability of musical accompaniment: whether to underscore emotional or thrilling moments, to prevent the discomfort of “silence” in film theatres, or simply to block out the sound of the projector, music was first documented to be used by the Lumiere brothers in 1895. Commonly used for musical accompaniment was the piano: pianists could play from standardized collections of “musical moods”, in order to change quickly between scenes: the pianist could flick easily between “Hurry Music (for duels)” to “Cowboy Music”, or from “Storm Scene” to “Death Scene”.

The most recognized books as *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music* (by J. S. Zamecnik), *Kinothek* (by Guiseppe Becce, and *Motion Picture Moods* (by Erno Rapee).

Q –

R – Romanticism

The European backbone of Classical Hollywood film music (including Steiner and Korngold) ensured that the musical tradition of European Romanticism had a hold on early cinema soundtracks. Their training and expertise in such areas as music drama and opera was particularly useful and significant for film scoring; the *leitmotif* was naturally adopted by film composers, as a way of structuring their music and to reinforce the audiences understanding of the plot.

S – Steiner (Max)

(b. 1888, Vienna; d. Hollywood, 1971)

Max Steiner is a key figure in the Golden Age of Hollywood cinema. Born in Austria, his film music carries a distinct European flavour, very definitely influenced by European musical tradition. His key scores include *King Kong*, *Gone with the Wind* and *Now, Voyager*: throughout his musical career he got nominated for 26 Academy Award nominations, and won 3 Oscars.

T – Tremolo strings

A typical film music convention to connote suspense is the use of tremolo strings. The string player rapidly repeats the same note (or sometimes different notes), back and forth, to create a kind of shaking or trembling effect.

U – Underscoring

The term underscoring could potentially cover all forms of non-diegetic media music: simply put, it is music which is used under the on-screen action. Arguably, to underscore means to highlight or emphasise: however, any combination of music with visuals will inevitably lead to some kind of emphasis or accent whether it is intended or not.

V –

W – Williams (John)

(b. 1932 New York)

A formidable force in contemporary film scoring, John Williams is continuing the tradition of orchestral scoring for film, and the use of thematic musical material. Williams has a string partnership with director Steven Spielberg, and have collaborated on many projects including *Jaws*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and more recently *Catch Me If You Can*.

X –

Y –

Z – Zimmer (Hans)

(b. 1957, Frankfurt)

Hans Zimmer has been musically involved in some of the biggest blockbusters in recent times, including *Crimson Tide*, *True Romance*, *Gladiator*, *Pearl Harbor*, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. He runs his own studio, called *Remote Control Productions*, alongside other composers such as Steve Jablonsky and James Dooley.

www.hans-zimmer.com/