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## Star Wars and John Williams: A Rediscovery of the Classical Film Score

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**John Williams and Star Wars:  
A Rediscovery of the Classical Film Score**

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of the Arts  
of Bard College  
by  
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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To my father, who inspires me to be a better man even to this day.

I would like to show my deepest gratitude to a number of individuals, whose help and influence made me the person I am and inspired me to newfound levels of enjoyment of music:

Professor James Bagwell, my adviser and mentor, whose diligence and effort in all aspects of his life is only surpassed by the compassion he showed me from my first to my last day at Bard.

Professor Christopher Gibbs, who helped me rediscover my love of music history.

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And all the professors, staff, and classmates at Bard College, who helped make college a wonderful and truly enjoyable experience.

And a special thanks to my sister, my saving grace and lifelong hero.

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## **Introduction**

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If one were to go to the American Film Institute's list of the best scores in Hollywood history, they would find a film about a farmer, a princess, a mystic, and a smuggler who take on an evil knight with the help of two bumbling droids, sitting at the top of the list. There are a number of reasons for this, but undoubtedly it is due to the film's revival of a tradition long thought dead in Hollywood at a time when filmgoers needed it most. The score bespeaks heavily of both film composers of the early days of film as well as concert-hall composers of the late nineteenth-century and into the twentieth century, updated for 1970s audiences and imbued with an energetic drive to the music that parallels the excitement and sense of adventure on the screen.

Chapter One begins with the advent of the classical film score in Hollywood as well as its grandfather, Max Steiner. This chapter will seek to clarify both the approach to scoring for films of the day as well as the stylistic influences of scoring. Other composers discussed include Erich Wolfgang Korngold, whose manner of composition endure to this day, and Miklós Rózsa, whose pioneering work on period epics like *Quo Vadis?* (1951) and *Ben-Hur* (1959) continued the style of symphonic scoring even as films began to drift away from this genre of composition. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of each composer's most influential work in film composition.

Chapter Two will explore the time period of the 1950s to the 1970s as it pertains to film music and the industry in general. This chapter focuses particularly on the growing trend of popular music and song-based soundtracks rather than symphonic scoring in films, as well as the modernization of symphonic orchestras. Using Bernard Herrmann as the preeminent composer of the latter style and Henry Mancini the pioneering figure of the former, the chapter also

includes acknowledgments to the careers of symphonic composers Alex North and Ennio Morricone, whose combined output and influence rival that of the first film composers. A short summary and analysis of four movies with impressive soundtracks rounds out the chapter.

Chapter Three focuses exclusively on John Williams's career and style of music before doing a close analysis of specific sections of the score to George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977). This chapter analyzes Williams's approach in scoring for a modern audience using outdated techniques, and how it is enormously successful in its deliverance. An in-depth look at the opening of the film examines the usage of image and sound synchronization, underscoring, leitmotifs, and other classical film score styles in introducing the world and its characters to a new audience.

The paper ends with a brief examination of the success of the film score to *Star Wars* as well as its pervasive influence on Hollywood film scoring techniques from 1977 to contemporary times.

*“The cinema is a direct avenue to the ears and hearts of the great public and all musicians should see the screen as a musical opportunity.”*

- Erich Wolfgang Korngold<sup>1</sup>

## **CHAPTER ONE:**

### Film Music of Hollywood’s “Golden Age”

#### Introduction

One cannot examine about the Golden Age of Hollywood, from the mid-1930s until the late 1940s, without discussing three of the most esteemed film composers of the time: the Austrian-born composers Max Steiner (1888-1971) and Erich Korngold (1897-1957), and the Hungarian composer Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995). It comes as no surprise that these magnanimous men all hail from central Europe at this time; the Austro-Hungarian capital city of Vienna, Steiner and Korngold’s birthplace and city of residence, was flourishing culturally, with a prominent theater and opera world and a variety of folk music from the neighboring regions of Bohemia and Hungary to draw inspiration from - the same sources of inspiration that a young Rózsa would cite as his first love in music. However, their arrival in Hollywood and America in general was rather different: Steiner journeyed to New York a poor man after being detained as an enemy alien in Britain during World War One, and clawed his way to the top of the Hollywood elite; Korngold arrived in Hollywood many years later as a “second Mozart” and a godsend, and was treated as such; Rózsa landed in Hollywood well after the others only after a combination of hard work, luck, and some distortion of facts. To say these composers were talented is an understatement; Rózsa’s mansion that sits atop Hollywood Hills tells its own story

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<sup>1</sup> Emilio Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 7.



of success few have achieved in the world of music,<sup>2</sup> while Korngold's and Steiner's collective work in the film industry is considered on par with Edison's technological breakthroughs in electricity.<sup>3</sup>

### Max Steiner

Of all the composers to come out of the Golden Age of Hollywood, none is more prominent, and more polarizing, than the composer Max Steiner. Perhaps most famous for RKO's *King Kong* and Warner Bros.' *Gone With the Wind*, Steiner wrote over three hundred scores for the cinema in his nearly forty years in the business, a staggering achievement in modern days and a Herculean effort in contemporary times. Steiner's contemporary Erich Korngold, by comparison, only composed nineteen film scores in a span of twelve years, from 1935 to 1947, after which he retired from scoring for the film industry. In those same years, Steiner wrote an astounding 101 scores while not being afforded the same royalty-like treatment that Korngold was given. Steiner was just one of many film composers who operated under the "conveyer-belt" mentality of churning out movie scores at an unrelenting clip during the 1930s, which continued well into the 1950s. Known for his catchy, simple melodies, for pioneering the use of original, non-diegetic music in film, and for his love of the "mickey-mousing" technique, which involved catching physical actions onscreen with musical accents in the score, the composer was loved by many, disrespected by few, and taken for granted by virtually all who hired him.<sup>4</sup> Never before, and arguably never since, has Hollywood experienced a legend who worked tirelessly to help deliver the most perfect film he could craft. He worked up until his

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Silman-James Press, 1997), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 137.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Thomas, ed., *Film Score: The View from the Podium* (Cranbury, NJ: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1979), 75.

body could work no more, with failing eyesight and declining physical health effectively ending his career, although he attempted to conceal it for many years. Steiner stopped scoring in 1965 and died December 28, 1971, after a painful and protracted bout of cancer. With his death came the severing of the last link of Old Vienna and the loss of the first individual studio composer to win fame for his achievements.<sup>5</sup>

Maximilian Raoul Walter Steiner was born May 10, 1888 to wealthy Viennese parents who were immersed in the culture of the city; Gabor Steiner, his father, owned his own theater in Vienna, and his grandfather Maximilian Steiner, after whom he was named, was good friends with the composer Johann Strauss, Jr. and managed the famous Theatre-an-der-Wien.<sup>6</sup> Like Erich Korngold, Steiner was given the opportunity at a young age to study with some of the world's best composers, including Gustav Mahler, Johannes Brahms and Robert Fuchs. His parents sent him to the Vienna School of Technology, but when that proved unsuccessful, he went to the Imperial Academy of Music; here, he completed a four-year course in just one year.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Well-versed in the world of theater and opera, Steiner wrote his first major work at the age of sixteen, an operetta entitled *Beautiful Greek Girl*. Incidentally, this was the same age at which Erich Korngold wrote his own first one-act opera.<sup>9</sup> The operetta ran for a full year and launched Steiner into a career of conducting across Europe in 1906, from Moscow and Hamburg, back to Vienna for a time, and finally landing in London, where he would spend the next eight years of his life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mervyn Cooke, *A History of Film Music* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 93.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 143.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 144.

It was in 1914, while Steiner was working in London, that his life and career changed rather dramatically. War had just broken out across the continent, and Steiner suddenly found himself labeled an alien by the British government. Fortunately for the composer, he was given special treatment and was able to emigrate to America. Arriving in New York in December of that year, the industrious Viennese composer made a name for himself for fifteen years in the musical theatre world, starting out as a copyist for Harms Music Publishing,<sup>11</sup> before building a reputation as orchestrator, arranger, and conductor of many stage shows. Interestingly enough, throughout this period on Broadway, Steiner had very little time for actual composition and had nothing tangible to prove to the studios: his only composition for Broadway, *Peaches*, lasted only two weeks before shutting down.<sup>12</sup> It was while working on Broadway that Steiner was offered a job at RKO to do a film version of his most recent production, Harry Tierney's *Rio Rita*. The executives were impressed with what Steiner was able to get out of an orchestra of just thirty-five musicians - notably, each of them played multiple instruments, giving the orchestration a depth and richness usually associated with sprawling symphonic orchestras. The worsening mood surrounding Broadway as well as the rest of the country, having been hit hard by the financial crisis the year before, helped spur the young Steiner into making his decision.<sup>13</sup> He was hired in 1929, beginning an epic career in film scoring that lasted virtually until his death in 1971.<sup>14</sup>

Steiner arrived virtually simultaneously with the abandoning of the musical film in Hollywood, and was hired to replace most of the musical staff that was cut from the budget. Even musical movies, of which there was an immense glut in Hollywood at this time, were

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 73.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 144.

beginning to suffer at the box office alongside most of the other genres of film.<sup>15</sup> Steiner was asked to run the music department from the onset of his hiring and was given a reduced orchestra and little time to compose and record for each film. As a result, his first few projects mostly focused on providing main title music and end titles, as there was little time to record much else. Furthermore, diegetic music - music that can be explained by actions on-screen, like a quartet playing for the characters during a dance sequence<sup>16</sup> - was practically the only music commonly found in movies at this time. Steiner recalls the process with bemusement: “[The producers and directors] felt it was necessary to explain the music pictorially. ...Many strange devices were used to introduce the music...in order to justify the music thought necessary to accompany [a love scene], a wandering violinist would be brought in for no reason at all.”<sup>17 18</sup> However, it was with *Symphony of Six Million* in 1932, produced by the legendary David O. Selznick and starring Irene Dunne, that Steiner and the studio first ventured into the process known as underscoring, or providing music to enhance the emotional impact on the audience, rather than depicting it on-screen diegetically. The picture was a success, due in no small part to the music,<sup>19</sup> and Steiner and the studios both continued pushing the boundaries of what could be done with music in movies. Writes Thomas, “It was Steiner more than any other composer who pioneered the use of original composition for the background scoring for films.”<sup>20</sup>

As Steiner’s musical involvement in films became more pronounced, so did his style of composition, one feature of which became quite polarizing and infamous within the film music

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<sup>15</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Richards, “Diegetic Music, Non-Diegetic Music and ‘Source Scoring,’” *Film Music Notes* (blog), entry posted April 23, 2013, accessed March 4, 2016, <http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/diegetic-music-non-diegetic-music-and-source-scoring/>.

<sup>17</sup> Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Hollywood Film Music Reader* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>18</sup> Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 147.

community. Steiner had a rather unusual talent for “catching” actions on-screen musically - giving a musical rendition of an action in the film. Famously, Steiner caught actor Leslie Howard’s limp in the film *Of Human Bondage* and put it to music. In *The Informer*, Steiner applied a similar strategy, starting many of the musical entrances directly on a physical action, like a door slamming shut; this gives the music an “unconscious” reason for being in the particular scene.<sup>21</sup> Steiner also spent weeks testing out a leaky faucet to measure out the intervals of time in which water dropped, so that he could set each drop in actor Victor McLaglen’s cell to music. This contributed to one of four Academy Awards won for the film that year, although it was attributed to the music department as a whole; individual composers would not receive recognition for their scores until 1938.<sup>22</sup> Composers like Leopold Stokowski thought Steiner’s methods were ingenious, while Aaron Copland was less than enthusiastic about this so-called “mickey-mousing,” named after the Disney character, whose actions were virtually always mimicked in the underlying music. Miklós Rózsa agreed with Copland, commenting that film music should “adopt the tempo, the rhythm, and the mood of the scene...it should be synchronized more with the dramatic content than with the actual pictures, movements, and irregular happenings.”<sup>23</sup> Directly related to this is Steiner’s pioneering invention of the click track, a method of synchronization of music to picture. This degree of accuracy allowed Steiner to showcase different moods for the different shots and actions on-screen in a way that had never been done before. This close synchronization of music to action is at its best with films containing a heavily dramatic plot; *King Kong* is just one example that we shall return to later, while films like the suspenseful film *The Informer* or *The Charge of the Light Brigade* work just as well.

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<sup>21</sup> Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 55-6.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 34.

Steiner composed his first big score at RKO with 1933's *King Kong*. The movie was an incredible gamble for the studios - the production budget was massive for that time and the whole film hinged on making Kong believably terrifying to audiences of the time. They feared the gorilla was too mechanical and absurd-looking and asked Steiner to simply use music from the backlog, rather than bother writing anything original. However, the director, Merian C. Cooper, told Steiner in private he would fund Steiner if the composer would write a full-fledged score with as big an orchestra as he needed. The result is an eighty-piece orchestra playing nearly an hour's worth of original music, bringing to life the Eighth Wonder of the World and both terrifying and thrilling audiences all across America in 1933. Steiner called *King Kong* a "picture made for music," and indeed it was one of the first of its kind - without Steiner's score, the movie would not have been a success, RKO would have declared bankruptcy, and the world of film music would be a completely different industry altogether.<sup>24</sup>

Life for Steiner took an upswing after *King Kong*; suddenly, he was the composer that producers could rely on to save their films from impending disaster. Given only a few weeks, a small budget, and an even smaller orchestra, Steiner wrote score after score, saving the production and earning little in return. For his work in 1935's *The Informer*, director John Ford hired Steiner beforehand to stave off any problems, and the resulting collaboration earned them multiple Academy Awards, including one for Steiner, his first of three. In 1936, Selznick founded his own production company, and Steiner wrote three film scores that Selznick produced during this time. Steiner would have liked to work with the producer exclusively, but he was used to a much more rapid production timeline and decided to accept a long-term contract

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Pratt, "The Film Music of Max Steiner with Emphasis on King Kong (1933) and Gone With the Wind (1939)," Music for the Soul, last modified September 3, 2009, accessed February 12, 2016, <https://michaelpratt.wordpress.com/>.

with Warner Bros., provided he could continue to work with Selznick on various productions from United Artists.<sup>25</sup>

Steiner arrived at Warner Bros. in 1936 and wrote his first of fifteen scores for Errol Flynn movies that same year - coincidentally, it was a year after Korngold wrote his first score at Warner Bros. for an Errol Flynn action/adventure movie, although he would end up scoring half as many as Steiner. While Steiner managed to perform exceedingly well on the Flynn action movies - author and historian Roy Prendergast wrote that the music for the Flynn film *The Adventures of Don Juan* was “as glorious a romp as the film; it is the type of film where Steiner seems at his best”<sup>26</sup> - they weren’t what he preferred; his love of theatre and European opera lent itself best to the Bette Davis romantic dramas, for which he wrote eighteen scores. Years later, the actress still fondly remembered his intuition for the dramatic: “Max understood more about drama than any of us.”<sup>27</sup> With fifteen Flynn movies and eighteen Davis movies alone, Steiner had an incredible output at Warner Bros., but the composer didn’t stop there. Over the course of his career, the composer averaged around eight scores a year (compared with Korngold’s self-imposed maximum output of two scores); each score was demanding in both symphonic color and in length, at around forty or fifty minutes each. Steiner would write some 150 scores over the course of nearly thirty years working for Warner Bros. This staggering feat, on top of the work Steiner did at RKO prior to 1936, demonstrates just one side of the magnitude of Steiner’s musical and workmanship skills. Steiner was one of many composers who persevered under the intense pressures from the studios; says Rózsa of his own experience, “The demands made upon composers and musicians in the film industry are of a kind that stagger belief. Seemingly only a

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 149.

composer knows that it takes time to write music.”<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that Steiner, like most film composers, did a fair amount of self-plagiarism and repetition of musical ideas, especially as his career waned, but this doesn’t detract from the fact that Steiner knew how to tell a unique story each and every time, even when writing multiple film scores simultaneously, as was the case in 1939.

The year 1939 remains to this day one of the most important years in Hollywood history. That year, Steiner worked on no less than twelve scores, including a three-hour score for *Gone With the Wind*, Selznick’s masterpiece two years in the making. This film score features a total of sixteen themes and nearly 300 musical segments, and was undoubtedly the longest score ever written at this point in cinematic history. Because Steiner was also working on music for multiple other films at the same time, the score to *Gone With the Wind* occupied him for twelve weeks, averaging twenty hours a day of work on it with the help of a doctor and copious amounts of Benzedrine, and only being able to complete the orchestration with the help of five other orchestrators, including legendary Hugo Friedhofer. Unbelievably, the competition was so fierce that although *Gone With the Wind* earned thirteen nominations and won eight of the awards, it did not win the nomination for Best Score for Steiner - that award went to *The Wizard of Oz*’s composer Herbert Stothart. *Gone With the Wind* was also notably snubbed for Best Actor, with Clark Gable’s role falling to Robert Donat’s performance in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*.<sup>29</sup> Regardless, the film was regarded as a clear winner - emcee Bob Hope referred to the whole show as “this Selznick benefit”<sup>30</sup> - and it was in no small part due to Steiner’s memorable and monumental score.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> “1939 Academy Awards Winners and Nominees,” Film Site, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.filmsite.org/aa39.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 151.



One of the most important aspects of Steiner's work and his approach to writing music for films was the way in which he perceived the music. To him, it was not an art, but more of a craft, knowing when to start and when to stop, when to bring the music to the foreground and when to recede into the background. Remarks Steiner on the subject: "A lot of composers make the mistake of thinking of film as a platform on which they can show off. This is not the place."<sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> However, Steiner was nevertheless quite skilled in an art unto his own, that of creating simple yet appealing tunes and motifs for the diverse plethora of characters across the spectrum of movies he worked on, from Tara's Theme in *Gone With the Wind* to Kong's three-note motif in *King Kong*.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly enough, both Korngold and Steiner thought of opera and film in close similarity, as the comparisons between the two are inherent and obvious; Steiner declared Richard Wagner as "the Number One film composer,"<sup>34</sup> while Korngold famously suggested that, "Come to think of it, *Tosca* is the best film score ever written."<sup>35</sup>

While *King Kong* and *Gone With the Wind* are two of Steiner's most notable scores, the success didn't end with them. Of the twenty-plus scores Steiner wrote for Westerns, none is more notable than *Dodge City*, which was written the same year as *Gone With the Wind*, and *They Died With Their Boots On*, made two years after. In *Dodge City*, the tone is set immediately with the title itself - an "epic of Western Americana, all about empire building and progress"<sup>36</sup> - and Steiner follows through with a stately theme that is simple yet expansive, depicting with music the entertaining if historically inaccurate story of cattle driver-turned sheriff Errol Flynn as he reclaims Dodge City, Kansas from lawless, greedy brutes. Every action

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 157.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 157.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

sequence has a delightful melody attached to it; when the three heroes spot a train carrying their boss, Flynn declares, “Let’s pay our respects to the Colonel,” and the orchestra adds its own gallop to the ensuing chase, filling the scene with life and energy. In a way, the whole score does this with the film, keeping pace with the action and adventure and even pushing it forward at times, succeeding at what a score is fundamentally meant to do and keeping audiences thoroughly engaged and entertained.<sup>37</sup>

*They Died With Their Boots On* is a rather interesting film to discuss, for many reasons. The central theme of the movie is the depiction of the morally conflicting character of General Custer, from his earliest days at the academy to his final stand at Little Bighorn. Again, Flynn is marvelous, this time as the dashing Custer, and Olivia de Havilland is splendid as his love interest, although perhaps this could be chalked up to familiarity with Flynn; the two had already been lovers in seven previous films together. One of the most interesting aspects to note is the fact that the real-life Custer chose the Irish jig “Gary Owen” as his regiment’s march, and so Steiner heavily incorporated the song into the movie, particularly in the climactic battle at Bighorn. It is here that Steiner duels with his own themes, the “Gary Owen” music versus what he wrote as the Indian theme, with mounting, tense key changes as the battle rages on. However, because the visual is so extraordinary and the music is so seamlessly added into the background, it is barely heard and can only be subconsciously felt.

While his most important and enduring works are from his first decade in the business, Steiner was able to remain equally as busy throughout the 1940s, producing nine or ten scores annually for Warner Brothers. He also is alone amongst all the musicians in Hollywood in a rather curious but befitting distinction: starting with the initiation of the music categories in

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 153.

1934, Max Steiner was nominated for an Oscar every year through 1949, winning three Oscars in that span of time.<sup>38</sup>

One of Steiner's biggest concerns with movie music was how to keep it catchy without sounding familiar or drawing too much on classical or operatic music. This is partially due to an unfortunate experience Steiner had with his wife when they saw a movie together and heard the song "Tales from the Vienna Woods" being played as background music. Says Steiner of the moment: "At this point, two people in front of us started to argue about the identity of the music...It taught me a lesson: Never use music people have heard before because it may detract from concentrating on the film."<sup>39</sup> Steiner also believed in underscoring only to a point, and found films with too much music to be bothersome; he believed that "the music should be heard and not seen. The danger is that music can be so bad, or so good, that it distracts and takes away from the action."<sup>40</sup> So while Steiner did use the "Gary Owen" jig that Custer adopted as his march, this was an exception rather than the rule for him as he preferred to avoid recognizable music in films. Steiner once declared that "I prefer not to have source music,"<sup>41</sup> which is arguably exactly what "Gary Owen" is, and is interestingly quite opposite the approach that another great composer, Miklós Rózsa, who will later be discussed at length, would employ in his compositions.

Nevertheless, a lack of source music in Steiner's scores did not hurt him in the slightest, as evidenced by his many awards and incredible popularity over his many decades in the industry. Steiner's last score was for the 1965 film *Two on a Guillotine*, when the composer was seventy-seven years old. He retired that year, but kept up a fantastic illusion of being in good

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<sup>38</sup> Laurence E. MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film Music: A Comprehensive History* (New York, NY: Ardsley House, Publishers, Inc., 1998), 109.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

health when all evidence pointed to the contrary. For his eighty-second birthday party, on May 10th, 1970, he wore all of his medals and ribbons and donned a Beethoven wig. When Albert Bender told him he looked better than Beethoven, Steiner quipped, “I should hope so -- he’s dead.”<sup>42</sup> Steiner was unable to reconcile the fact that his health could not keep up with his mind and his drive to work, and finally succumbed to cancer on December 28th, 1971. With his death came the end of a long tradition of Old Hollywood film composers, and the loss of the pioneer of original, non-diegetic music for films, whose influence endures to the present day.

### *Erich Wolfgang Korngold*

When one speaks of the great composers of Hollywood’s Golden Age, Korngold’s name is sure to come up, as his scores are some of the richest and most memorable of the thousands that came out of Hollywood during those years; to think that Korngold only wrote twenty such scores in his time there, therefore, is incredible, especially in contrast with Steiner’s output of literally hundreds of scores, or even Rózsa’s work on nearly one hundred films. While Korngold wrote relatively few scores, they are incomparable in quality and style, although it is unfair to compare these scores to those of composers who, had they worked under Korngold’s hospitable conditions, might have produced equally substantial scores.<sup>43</sup> To say Korngold made an impact on the way scoring is done for films, however, is an understatement: his understanding of composition technique, his detail to orchestration, and his stylistic influences were recognized worldwide and are all still visible today, most notably in the way John Williams composes and

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 158.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 160.

orchestrates.<sup>44</sup> Korngold's late-Romantic style of composition, although not progressive, was steeped in familiarity and was the key to his success with audiences; this would be replicated years later in Williams's symphonic scores, most notably in *Star Wars*.<sup>45 46</sup>

One of the most important influences attributable to Korngold's success was his upbringing and fame as first a child prodigy and then a celebrated classical, Romantic-style composer in Europe. Born to affluent Viennese parents, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, named after his father Dr. Julius Korngold's favorite composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, was considered the "gifted younger son" and given lavish attention to his innate musical abilities. Not every composer comes to America with approval from the great Richard Strauss himself.<sup>47</sup> When Strauss heard the young Erich Korngold's music for the first time, he declared, "This firmness of style, this sovereignty of form, this individual expression, this harmonic structure - one shudders with awe to realize these compositions were written by a boy."<sup>48</sup> Strauss wasn't the only famous/esteemed composer to take notice; Gustav Mahler considered the boy a musical "genius" at the tender age of ten and Giacomo Puccini loved the boy's one-act operas, written at sixteen, so much that he announced "the boy has so much talent he could give us some and still have enough left for himself."<sup>49</sup> Of course, it is of no surprise that these three noted composers loved the budding musician's works; after all, Korngold's music was said to have "a Straussian orchestral color, a Mahlerian feeling, and the melodic concepts of Puccini, all of them somehow

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<sup>44</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 94.

<sup>45</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood* (New York, NY: Marion Boyars, 1990), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 160.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

melded and dominated by a strong Viennese character,<sup>50</sup> topped off with Korngold's own charm and quick wit mixed into the music.

In 1908, at the age of eleven, Erich Korngold wrote his first major work, a ballet-pantomime entitled *Der Schneemann*, or *The Snowman*. The piece premiered in the presence of Emperor Franz Josef at the Vienna Court House, and was subsequently performed all over Europe. By the age of sixteen, Korngold had moved on to operas, writing his first two one-act operas within a year of each other, both in 1914. The operas, *The Ring of Polykrates* and *Violanta*, were small in stature but powerful in emotion, especially to the composer himself. Bruno Walter, who conducted all of Korngold's operas, said upon viewing Korngold play the operas on the piano, "The experience of hearing him play and sing for me the two one-act operas (*Polykrates* and *Violanta*) which I was going to perform at the Munich Opera House will remain unforgettable. One could have compared his interpretation of his works on the piano to the eruption of a musical dramatic volcano, if the lyric episodes and graceful moments had not also found their insinuating expression in his playing."<sup>51</sup>

Korngold entered the military service in 1916, serving for two full years before leaving, but his musical career was undisturbed by his time in the military; indeed, it is said that Korngold spent most of his time simply playing piano for various officers and continuing to compose. His first composition after leaving the service was a score for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, followed by the towering *Die tote Stadt* in 1920, most of which was written while in the military.<sup>52</sup> The opera was a resounding success, first presented in Hamburg and performed all over Europe and by the Metropolitan Opera in New York City (and ironically imitated in the

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<sup>50</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 162.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 167-8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 168.

1958 Hitchcock film *Vertigo*, scored by Bernard Herrmann<sup>53</sup>). Following *Die tote Stadt*, Korngold continued expressing his love for the Strauss dynasty and the theater, re-orchestrating many of Johann Strauss' lost scores and writing music in a similar style, namely the opera *The Miracle of Heliane* in 1927. However, it was in 1929, the same year Max Steiner ended his time on Broadway and opened a new chapter in his life in Hollywood Hills,<sup>54</sup> that Korngold began his longtime association with Max Reinhardt, the man who would eventually sway him to work in Hollywood and change his career forever. These collaborations continued throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s; Korngold was still conducting performances of *Helen Goes to Troy* even in 1953, long after he had left the film industry.<sup>55</sup>

By the early 1930's, Korngold's reputation as a child prodigy-turned operatic giant earned him a luxurious lifestyle and numerous perks, including being awarded the title of Professor Honoris Causa by the President of Austria at the age of thirty-three and teaching classes on composition and opera at the Music Academy of Vienna.<sup>56</sup> Thus in 1934, when Reinhardt called upon Korngold to adapt the Mendelssohn score for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for film, Korngold accepted the generous offer, unable to resist the call to adapt a great work of music for a medium new to the composer. By late 1934, he and his family had moved to Los Angeles and begun a new chapter in their life.

While Reinhardt chose only the best actors as well as the best composer for the job, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a total flop at box offices; nevertheless, it has survived the years due in large part to Korngold's rich scoring for the film, which was basically a re-orchestrated

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<sup>53</sup> Alex Ross, "The Music That Casts the Spells of Vertigo," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), October 6, 1996, Movies, accessed March 6, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/06/movies/the-music-that-casts-the-spells-of-vertigo.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 144.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 169.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 170.

version of Mendelssohn's score and supplemented with other works by Mendelssohn.<sup>57</sup> By recording the score in layers - prerecorded for certain sections, while others were recorded in real-time with the actors - Korngold executed one of the most complicated scores Hollywood had ever seen, with a lasting impact on the music directors of the time and the industry in general. The marriage of such a film, Shakespearean in nature but Germanic in style, to the music of Korngold, which was still Mendelssohn's music but realized to its fully romantic self by Korngold, was the beginning of many such films for the young Austrian composer, full of swashbuckling heroes, grand vistas, and the consistent promise of adventure and romance.

Having an innate sense of timing is a rare gift that not enough film composers and conductors possess; Korngold had it in spades. This was first demonstrated during production on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and continued for all of the movies Korngold worked on. For the Austrian composer, who had little mechanical aptitude, click tracks and headphones were not only unnecessary but also detrimental to the music, much to the amazement of the sound engineers and technicians on set. The composer never used cue marks or timing sheets, another necessity of contemporary film composers. Even a stopwatch, Max Steiner's favorite tool, was a source of confusion for Korngold. The best "equipment" he could use was his own inner rhythm and his incredible knowledge of music. On Korngold's habit of choosing rubato over exactitude, Cooke writes that "[Korngold] sometimes wrote carefully notated rubato effects into his melodies so that the illusion of spontaneity would be created without sacrificing the regular beat necessary for reliable coordination with the images."<sup>58</sup>

It was while working on the flop film *Give Us This Night* that Korngold began his association with the Errol Flynn adventure-romance movies that made the actor so successful.

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 171.

<sup>58</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 95.



Warner Bros. approached Korngold to view their latest movie *Captain Blood*. The movie was a delight to him, as the adventure and drama was irresistible to the composer, and he was immediately on board. He was given only three weeks to compose a fully-fledged score for the film, however, and realized then the struggles of film score composers. Lacking sufficient time to create original themes for each of the characters as well as effective music for the high points of the movie, Korngold turned to his orchestrator Hugo Friedhofer and asked him to use part of the Liszt tone poem *Prometheus* for the climactic battle at sea as well as the swordfight between Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone.<sup>59</sup> The mixture of original music by Korngold and re-orchestrated music by Liszt worked out in the composer's favor, as the score reflected the onscreen drama and captured the adventurous, daring nature of the hero, lifting the movie to fabulous success and bringing Errol Flynn into the spotlight as the "foremost movie swashbuckler."<sup>60</sup> *Captain Blood* was the first of seven Flynn movies scored by Korngold; combined with Max Steiner's fifteen scores, Errol Flynn remains to this day one of the most musically supported actors in cinematic history.<sup>61</sup>

With *Captain Blood* an almost guaranteed hit in theaters, Warner Bros. pressed Korngold to sign a contract with them under any conditions he so chose. Korngold refused the contract, and when Warner Bros. asked him that year to also work on *Anthony Adverse*, Korngold repeatedly turned it down until finally he agreed to give it a view and decide for himself. As with *Captain Blood*, Korngold was hooked, as the movie struck him as simply a variation of an opera, and treated it as such. In truth, this was Korngold's way of approaching most films that he eventually scored, and this attitude is deeply reflected in the score of *Anthony Adverse*, which

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 173.

projects the feeling of “an opera minus singing.”<sup>62</sup> The music was so spectacular that it won him his first Academy Award, in 1936, although the award was bestowed upon the music department rather than Korngold himself.

Although Korngold enjoyed writing film music, and both Warner Bros. and the public were in ecstasy over his sweeping scores, the Viennese composer yearned for his home country, and returned in 1937 to finish writing and stage his newest opera, *Die Kathrin*, in Vienna. Expecting to find the Austria he left many years before, Korngold was instead confronted with a reality counter to his dreamlike expectations; Hitler’s Nazi Germany was mobilizing and the safety of the European Jew was in question. At his friends’ insinuations, and his ailing son’s need for a warm climate in which to recuperate, Korngold returned to California, where he would remain until after the war subsided. Korngold once remarked on his flight from his homeland: “We thought of ourselves as Viennese; Hitler made us Jewish.”<sup>63</sup>

Upon returning to Hollywood, Korngold decided to commit himself to Warner Bros. and film music in general. The studio was so eager to exclusively have him that they allowed him to dictate the contract to an extent that was completely unprecedented, even by his counterpart Steiner, who had also won an award for Warner Bros. by this time. Korngold negotiated into his deal a maximum of two scores a year, as well as the ability to veto working on a movie that he did not like, and was given an extraordinary amount of time to work on a film’s score in comparison to most film composers of the day. This was in stark contrast to Steiner’s conditions, who “had left the studio under a cloud when he dared to ask for a pay rise and was

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<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 174.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel Bernardi, Murray Pomerance, and Hava Tirosh-Samuels, *Hollywood’s Chosen People* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 48, accessed February 27, 2016, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/stevensonlibrary/detail.action?docID=10715445>.

summarily replaced.”<sup>64</sup> Possibly the most important part of Korngold’s contract negotiations was the fact that the music would not be tampered with in any way in the editing room, and that he would furthermore retain rights to the music so that it could not become the property of the studio, as was the case with most of the music written for film at this time. This would prove important in the rebirth of Korngold’s music in the 1970s, beginning with limited releases of *The Sea Hawk*;<sup>65</sup> it was at this time that a young composer and admirer of Korngold’s by the name of John Williams saw his film music career began to take fruition.<sup>67</sup>

When Warner Bros. asked Korngold to work on their biggest production yet, a movie called *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Korngold declined. He felt it was a beautiful movie but was not given enough time to compose a score worthy of the film’s stature. He gave a formal apology, and Leo Forbstein personally journeyed to the composer’s house in February of 1938 to attempt to change his mind. Korngold was still hesitant about accepting the immense responsibility, but was affected by something that had happened earlier that day - the announcement that Hitler had met with Chancellor Schuschnigg of Austria and had annexed the country, an event that became known as the *Anschluss*. Korngold, deeply disturbed by this and believing his European livelihood to be over for the foreseeable future,<sup>68</sup> reluctantly agreed to work on the film on a week-by-week basis with the guarantee that he could drop out at any point. Forbstein agreed, and the final result was what is considered “the pluperfect example to that time of the blending of film image and music.”<sup>69</sup> *Robin Hood* emerged as one of the preeminent films of the time, with the perfect casting of Errol Flynn as the titular character and Olivia de

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<sup>64</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 94.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 97.

<sup>66</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 65-6.

<sup>67</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 461.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 176.

Havilland, who was in Korngold's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as the love interest Maid Marian. Like the film as a whole, the music that depicts these characters and sequences is energetic, funny, joyful and altogether a masterpiece unto its own.

After *Robin Hood* came numerous historical pictures, most famously the 1940 nautical drama *The Sea Hawk*. In this film especially, Korngold's music brings to life the daring adventures of Errol Flynn and his crew, bringing once more the romantic and sweeping score style to a film so over-the-top it might come off as ridiculous, were the music not so enjoyable. Following this came a bit of a departure for Korngold with two scores featuring more dissonant and modernistic scores, for 1941's *The Sea Wolf* (not to be confused with the previous year's nautical adventure film) and 1942's *Kings Row*. With Korngold's score to *Kings Row*, the film that made future President Ronald Reagan famous, audiences were once again captivated by the themes, especially the dramatic brass fanfare later quoted by John Williams in *Star Wars*<sup>70</sup> and the eerie theme that accompanies Louise Gordon's gradual realization of the extent of her father's malicious behavior,<sup>71</sup> as well as the rousing orchestration throughout the film; the score was so popular that audiences asked for copies of the music and for available recordings.<sup>72</sup>

After *Kings Row*'s success as well as that of his next film, *The Constant Nymph*, Korngold's career took a gradual but inevitable turn for the worse. His next few film scores were luscious but ultimately wasted, with some suggesting that they were even obtrusive and out-of-place with the actions on screen; the music was "like an expensive suit hanging on a scarecrow."<sup>73</sup> It was only with Korngold's final film score, the 1946 film *Deception*, that the composer was able to change his approach to scoring. Unlike most of his films, the music in

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<sup>70</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 461-2.

<sup>71</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 75.

<sup>72</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 97.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 180.

*Deception* is quite absent in the background, and when music is heard, it is rarely Korngold's own. Composers like Beethoven, Chopin, and Haydn are used, mainly as plot points, but only a half-finished version of Korngold's eventual cello concerto (Opus 37) is heard in the movie. This was the final film that Korngold would score in his life, although he would subsequently return to film multiple times to give advice, make a cameo appearance, or provide portions of music for films.<sup>74</sup>

Erich's father Dr. Julius Korngold died in California, where he never felt at home and where he wished his son had never gone, in 1945, around the same time that the war ended in Europe. The loss of his father coupled with the loss of his love for film music prompted Erich Korngold to consider whether he was satisfied with his life. After refusing to renew his contract with Warner Bros. in October of 1946, Korngold said, "I shall be fifty next May, and fifty is old for a child prodigy. I feel I have to make a decision now if I don't want to be a Hollywood composer the rest of my life."<sup>75</sup> He had become disenchanted and disillusioned with the process of writing music for films, quipping that "A film composer's immortality stretches all the way from the recording stage to the dubbing room."<sup>76</sup> He returned to writing music for the concert hall in the last ten years of his life, composing a symphony, an oft-performed violin concerto, and several other works which largely utilized thematic material from his films. In 1949, hoping to reconnect with his past and relive the spectacle of the cultured Vienna of his childhood, Korngold and his family moved back to the Austrian capital, where *Die Kathrin* was staged a year later to resounding cynicism and mockery by the critics. *Die tote Stadt* fared better, but

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<sup>74</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 181.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 181.

suffered many production complications and was labeled as “old-fashioned nonsense” by the media.<sup>77</sup>

In 1954, three years before his death, Korngold was asked to return to film to arrange and supervise the scoring of a Wagner biography entitled *The Magic Fire*, as well as conduct in recording sessions. For the film, Korngold made a remarkable three-and-a-half minute homage to the spectacular sixteen-hour-long Ring Cycle, considered Wagner’s pinnacle in music, and was astonished when asked if he could cut twenty seconds from the piece for the film. It was only at the end of his career that the nonsensical politics of the film industry finally penetrated his own bubble of affluence and influence, and he once more retreated from the industry, this time for good.

Erich Korngold died in his adopted home of California on November 29th, 1957, after suffering a heart seizure. The next morning, a black flag was raised over the Vienna Opera House, as the city that adored the *Wunderkind* but scoffed at the film composer paid its tribute to its native son. When asked to comment on this gesture, his widow paused for a moment, then quietly remarked, “It’s a little late.”<sup>78</sup>

The great irony for Korngold is his fear of forever being remembered as “just” a film composer and losing to history what he loved most - the opera, the unending possibilities in tonality, and the enduring culture of Old Vienna. Both he and the people surrounding him, including his father and many critics, believed that he had wasted his talents on scores for film, which were viewed by the public and then locked away seemingly forever.<sup>79</sup> As a matter of fact, twenty years after his death, RCA Victor took a gamble and released an album of Korngold’s music; when this proved wildly successful, they continued releasing music by film composers,

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 182.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 87.

including some of Korngold's music for the concert hall. In 1975, the record company even released a recording of *Die tote Stadt*, which had been successful upon its revival in New York City.<sup>80</sup> In a way, without Korngold's film music being written and released to the public, he very well may have lost his fame as a classical composer.

### Miklós Rózsa

The most important composer to consider when discussing the end of the era known as the Golden Age (arguably ending sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s) is a Hungarian composer named Miklós Rózsa. Famous for such historical dramas like *Quo Vadis*, *El Cid* and the monumental epic *Ben-Hur* and his revolution in musical authenticity,<sup>81</sup> Rózsa also worked on a number of gritty crime dramas classified as the first generation of *film noir* at a time when such movies were only just beginning to be accepted by the public, and was heavily influential in depicting psychological confusion and tension in his music with scores to movies like *Spellbound*, which won him one of his three Academy Awards. His film music tended to push the limits of what was allowed in films, utilizing polyphonic textures and atonality to his advantage like contemporaries Bernard Herrmann and Alex North, both of whom will be discussed in Chapter 2.<sup>82</sup> However, unlike Steiner and Korngold as well as many other film composers of the day, Rózsa was able to balance a double life of film and classical music. His *Theme, Variations and Finale* as well as his *Violin Concerto* are standard repertoire and have

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 84.

<sup>81</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 187.

<sup>82</sup> James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, eds., *Music and Cinema* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 255.

been recorded by numerous artists.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Rózsa, like Steiner and Korngold, never viewed film music as a lesser art than classical, “serious” compositions, only that they were to be approached differently in their manner of composition.<sup>84</sup> After forty-four years in the business and an output of over ninety scores written for various films, Rózsa retired to California in 1981, where he lived out the rest of his days until his death on July 27th, 1995.

Miklós Rózsa was born in Budapest, Hungary in April of 1908 to a family of wealth and culture. One of young Rózsa’s first musical inspirations was that of the native gypsies of northern Hungary, whose influence can be heard throughout Rózsa’s film career. The young composer was especially fascinated by the vitality and the color of the sounds the music produced, and sought to replicate it as faithfully and diligently as possible in his own work.<sup>85</sup> There is an innate uniqueness about the native music of Hungary, which Rózsa spoke of at length: “Hungarian peasant music is unique, it has no connection with other musical cultures, just as the Hungarian language is unconnected with other languages. Our gypsy music is especially valuable, as Brahms discovered long ago and as Bartók and Kodály made apparent with their marvelous treatments. There is a certain oriental color in the gypsy scale, and it is a very useful palette to have in one’s heritage.”<sup>86</sup>

Although Rózsa’s father was strongly in favor of his son receiving a broad education at the University of Leipzig, believing that the art of composing was an unprofitable career choice, there was no doubt that the gifted musician was meant for a life of music-making. Within a year of study there, and with the help of esteemed German musicologist Hermann Grabner, Rózsa enrolled in and graduated with honors from the Leipzig Conservatory of Music, thus beginning

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 114.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 26.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 26-7.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 122-3.



his distinguished career in music. Initially, however, it seemed as though his father might be right: after graduating in 1929, Rózsa moved to Paris in 1932 and wrote a string of compositions which were praised and well-received but earned him little income.<sup>87</sup> After a joint concert with the French composer Arthur Honegger, Rózsa again found a wealth of praise flowing to him but little actual wealth, and asked Honegger how his French counterpart was so well-off. Honegger replied that he was writing for films, which surprised Rózsa, and he realized he too could do this successfully; unfortunately, it took many years for the composer to gain traction, and only with the help of friends already in the business.<sup>88</sup>

Rózsa's 1934 ballet *Hungaria* ran for two straight years in London, and it was here that he received a message from an old friend, the French film director Jacques Feyder, whom he had known during his time in Paris. The two saw Rózsa's ballet together, and Feyder told Rózsa that he was "the greatest composer alive,"<sup>89</sup> and that he should be writing music for movies. Says Rózsa of the conversation, "I said I'd never thought about it, mostly because I didn't write fox-trots. He replied, 'You're out of your mind. I don't want fox-trots, I want serious music.' Said I, 'In films?'"<sup>90</sup> Feyder, unswayed by the composer's naïvete, asked him to write the music for his upcoming picture *Knight Without Armor* (1937), directed by Hungarian-born Alexander Korda. Korda and Rózsa had never heard of one another, however, and Korda refused to sign him as a result. It was only when Feyder invented connections of Rózsa's that the composer never in fact had did Korda sign him; after the undeniable success of the movie, however, Korda

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 28.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 117.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

put Rózsa under contract for most of the movies he made over the next four years and helped launch an impressive film career lasting many decades.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps more so than both Steiner and Korngold, Rózsa both benefitted from and suffered due to what can only be described as “movie type casting,” as Rózsa himself called it.<sup>92</sup> As music historian Tony Thomas expounds, Rózsa’s career can be broken up into four neat sections: first came the exotic and the tropical, made famous by such pictures like *The Jungle Book*, *The Thief of Bagdad* and *Sahara*. These films, especially *The Jungle Book*, relied heavily on the scores carrying the pictures, and newcomer Rózsa proved more than adept at handling the heavy burden. Like many of his scores, *The Jungle Book* is elaborate in its textures and effectively paints a brilliant picture of the jungle and its diversity of animals.<sup>93</sup> The hard work was worth it, as Rózsa won the first of a remarkable seventeen nominations with his score to *The Thief of Bagdad*, followed by nominations for *Lydia*, *Sundown*, and *The Jungle Book*.<sup>94</sup>

Next came a series of movies featuring protagonists who were either mentally unstable or suffered from a psychological condition, the most prominent among them 1945’s *Spellbound*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock and winning Rózsa his first Oscar.<sup>95</sup> For *Spellbound* and two other films, *The Lost Weekend* and *The Red House*, Rózsa heavily relied on the rarely-used Theremin for his scores. With a sound evoking the wail of a thousand women, it strangely yet perfectly fit with Rózsa’s mentally imbalanced protagonists, most notably with Gregory Peck’s amnesia-riddled doctor in *Spellbound*. The score won Rózsa his first Oscar, and it was the only Oscar the film won, although serious controversy arose over the music between producer David O.

Selznick (who worked with Max Steiner on many projects, and who wanted Bernard Herrmann

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 28.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>93</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 119.

<sup>94</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 165.

<sup>95</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 121.

for *Spellbound*), director Hitchcock and Rózsa himself. While Rózsa enjoyed the score, he said that “Alfred Hitchcock didn’t like the music - said it got in the way of his direction.”<sup>96</sup> With *The Red House*, again Rózsa put to use the Theremin to convey mental imbalance in its protagonist, a farmer with a terrible secret related to the little red house in the woods. All three of these film scores are terrific examples of not just the acute Theremin usage but also Rózsa’s own distinctly rich orchestration and his uniquely Hungarian style in composing for film.<sup>97</sup>

In 1947 Rózsa signed a contract with Universal and was suddenly thrust into strange and unfamiliar territory with crime dramas like *The Naked City* and *Brute Force*, both with producer Mark Hellinger; this was preceded by Rózsa’s first project with Hellinger, the 1946 hit crime drama *The Killers*.<sup>9899</sup> These films, easily identifiable as American *film noir* classics, feature thickly textured scores that are otherwise unlike much of Rózsa’s other scores for his pictures. This was a genre that Rózsa helped evolve a “new and influentially gritty musical style well suited to the uncomfortable angst-ridden atmosphere” that dominated Hollywood post-World War II.<sup>100</sup> Favoring tense rhythms and contentious chords, there is still melodious content to the music, especially the recognizable theme from *The Killers* (informally known as the “dum-de-dum-dum” theme), the score for which Rózsa was awarded another Oscar nomination; the theme was so memorable that it, perhaps unintentionally, inspired the music for the *Dragnet* franchise, prompting Rózsa’s publishers to sue Schumann, *Dragnet*’s composer, for copyright infringement.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> “Miklós Rózsa: Biography,” IMDb, accessed March 3, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000067/bio>.

<sup>97</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 99.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 29.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 121.

<sup>100</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 166.

<sup>101</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 95.

The final, and most prominent, era of the composer's career was at the studio MGM and focused on the historical epic realm, beginning with *Quo Vadis?* in 1951 and continuing with such pictures as *Ivanhoe*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Moonlight Moonfleet*. While composers had been scoring films for years with informal use of what was termed "locational music," or music that conjures up a geographical location aurally, much of this was literal-minded, like Steiner's work in *Casablanca*, or otherwise stereotypical and factually inaccurate.<sup>102</sup> With Rózsa's entrance to period dramas came a revolution in "musical authenticity"; Rózsa believed strongly in having authentic music support a trend in filmic realism at the time.<sup>103</sup> The greatest of these epics was, of course, the monumental 1959 film *Ben-Hur*. This brought Rózsa his third Oscar, and is arguably both his greatest and his favorite score.<sup>104</sup> The type-casting in this field continued well after *Ben-Hur*'s success and became a source of concern for Rózsa, as he was then asked to score for *King of Kings* and *El Cid*, both of which were scored in 1961 and were too similar to the many previous movies he had made at MGM. The concern arose, however, simultaneously with the drift in Hollywood away from grand, visionary scores and into pop music and easily digestible soundtracks and Rózsa received fewer and fewer opportunities to break out of the mold in which he found himself trapped. While Rózsa lamented the decline in the "artistic integrity of filmmaking," he believed that the changing times found him, like Steiner and Korngold before him, somewhat out of his element and a part of an older generation of composers and artists who didn't understand the newer cinematic concepts.<sup>105</sup> He retired in 1981 after completing the score to Steve Martin's black-and-white comedy *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*, an homage to 1940s film noir films including *The Killers* and *Lost Weekend*, both of

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<sup>102</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 90.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 124.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 124.

which Rózsa contributed scores to.<sup>106</sup> Rózsa is perhaps one of the most accessible composers of film music as well as of classical music, with almost all of his forty-five non-film compositions recorded along with two-thirds of his film scores.<sup>107</sup> Miklós Rózsa died at the age of eighty-eight on July 27, 1995, ending an illustrious and wholly unique career, as well as a musical link to Eastern European music that pervaded American symphony halls and movie theatres and continues to resonate with audiences worldwide.

### Movie Analysis (1933-1959)

Although many of the thousands of films produced during the Golden Age of Hollywood are worth discussion, three in particular loom large; 1933's *King Kong*, whose score by Steiner changed the way moviegoers and composers alike thought about music in film; 1938's *The Adventures of Robin Hood* by Erich Korngold, whose score elevated the expectations of the quality of film music and is considered the exemplary Hollywood score; and Rózsa's score for the 1959 production of *Ben-Hur*, which falls outside of the standard timeframe of the Golden Age but is deeply indebted to its predecessors and is highly Romantic in nature. All three of these scores are on the American Film Institute's list of the "25 Greatest Film Scores of All Time,"<sup>108</sup> and all are stellar examples of the respective composers at the height of their skill and fame. The following discussion is a short analysis of each of these film's scores and their significance to the rest of film music culture of the time and of today.

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<sup>106</sup> "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid: Connections," IMDb, accessed March 3, 2016, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083798/trivia?tab=mc&ref =tt\\_trv\\_cnn](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083798/trivia?tab=mc&ref =tt_trv_cnn).

<sup>107</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 124.

<sup>108</sup> "AFI's 25 Greatest Film Scores of All Time," American Film Institute, accessed December 16, 2015, <http://afi.com/100years/scores.aspx>.

## KING KONG ANALYSIS

One of the most important scores, and certainly one of the most influential, to have ever been composed was Steiner's scoring of RKO's *King Kong* (1933). The film was a major success, much of which is attributed to the score; *King Kong* is often identified as the inaugural film of the classical Hollywood style of scoring,<sup>109</sup> and is considered the score that exemplified what music in movies could do.<sup>110</sup> Considered the first truly non-diegetic film score of its kind, the score ushered in a plethora of possibilities for film composers and established both a style and technique used not only throughout the Golden Age of Hollywood, but well beyond it and into modern-day movie music, with movies as recent as *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (1997) as well as, naturally, Peter Jackson's 2005 remake of *King Kong*.<sup>111 112 113</sup> Although there is much to discuss concerning this score, two aspects of the score will be explored: the use of diegetic and non-diegetic music, and the variations on the theme or leitmotif that represents Kong throughout the film.

From the start of the film, there is a declamatory, roaring version of the Kong theme from the low brass, introducing the character of Kong in its simple and chromatic leitmotif (see Ex.1 in Appendix 1). This was a staple of Steiner's scoring habits as well as of his contemporaries, many of whom emulated a tradition that began with Wagner's usage of leitmotifs in his operas or *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>114 115</sup> These three notes, usually in a chromatic descending pattern but

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<sup>109</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 14.

<sup>110</sup> David Allen, "'King Kong' by Max Steiner (1933) and James Newton Howard (2005): A Comparison of Scores and Contexts," *David Allen - Music Composer* (blog), entry posted February 7, 2014, accessed February 8, 2016, <http://davidallencomposer.com/blog/king-kong-max-steiner-james-newton-howard-comparison>.

<sup>111</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 88.

<sup>112</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 373.

<sup>113</sup> Allen, "'King Kong' by Max Steiner," *David Allen - Music Composer* (blog).

<sup>114</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 85.

<sup>115</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 80.

sometimes ascending or in a mixed form of descending and ascending, gave the audiences an idea of the scope and the terrifying power of Kong<sup>116</sup> and allowed for incredible flexibility on Steiner's part to rescore it or use it in a multitude of scenarios.<sup>117</sup> Most crucial was to showcase the evolution of Kong through the development of his leitmotif. After the opening fanfares and a brief depiction of the native music to be revisited later in the film, we hear the strings open into a lush and reflective (and Romantic Eurocentric) version of Kong's theme as the final card of the introduction appears, reading a faux-Arabian proverb about beauty staying the beast's hand, "and from that day, it was as one dead." This usage of the theme suggests that he is not simply the two-dimensional terrifying beast that the opening motif declares; in this regard, here and throughout the movie, Steiner makes the impossible achievable and turns a mechanical gorilla, which was the producers's worst nightmare and spelled potential doom for RKO as a studio,<sup>118</sup> into a sympathetic and multi-faceted character to the average moviegoer.<sup>119 120</sup> Palmer describes this transformation of the theme as necessary to "explain to the audience what is actually happening on the screen, since the camera is unable to articulate Kong's instinct feelings of tenderness towards his helpless victim."<sup>121</sup>

The careful use of music and the illusion that Steiner paints in making it sound diegetic is important to realize and occurs throughout the movie to astounding success. The first noteworthy moment is about twenty minutes into the film, when the ship is approaching Skull Island through "this infernal fog," as Jack Driscoll refers to it, to the tune of not thematic material but rather a low and tense ostinati which gives way to seemingly diegetic drumming

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<sup>116</sup> Pratt, "The Film Music of Max Steiner," *Music for the Soul*.

<sup>117</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 88.

<sup>118</sup> Allen, "'King Kong' by Max Steiner," *David Allen - Music Composer* (blog).

<sup>119</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 88.

<sup>120</sup> Pratt, "The Film Music of Max Steiner," *Music for the Soul*.

<sup>121</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 28-9.

from the island.<sup>122</sup> The music seems to emerge from the fog, although with Driscoll's mention of the drumming coming from the island, the audience is thus distracted from the non-diegetic strings and focuses on what they are supposed to hear.<sup>123</sup> When the crew lands on the beach and stumbles upon the natives' ceremony, we are treated to the theme of the native tribe's music, rife with musical stereotypes and elements of "nativicity."<sup>124</sup> The audience excuses it as diegetic as we see drummers, dancing and a general celebratory air that is usually accompanied by music. We can assume that there is no full orchestra present with the natives; however, as Cooke puts it, the non-diegetic music is "therefore a *locus classicus* of the promotion of suspension of disbelief."<sup>125</sup> This idea of non-diegetic music disguised as diegetic sometimes translated into a literal-mindedness with Steiner. After returning from the confrontation on the beach with the natives, we hear a lush romantic scoring as Ann and Driscoll declare their love for one another; in the subsequent shots, the music abruptly cuts out as we see the captain and Denham, then returns when we see the lovers, suggesting that the music is localized and diegetically synonymous with the prevailing mood, that of love, surrounding the two of them. These are but a few examples of the way in which Steiner is able to use music to convey emotions and meaning in both subtle and forward ways of approach.

## **ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD ANALYSIS**

If ever there was a score that was the hallmark of the "typical Golden Age film score," there may be no better example than Erich Korngold's score for 1938's *The Adventures of Robin*

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<sup>122</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 89.

<sup>123</sup> Allen, "'King Kong' by Max Steiner," *David Allen - Music Composer* (blog).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 88.



*Hood*.<sup>126</sup> Considered his most famous score as well as the second to win him an Academy Award, Korngold's talent for brilliant themes and musical maturation in accordance with plot and character development is on full display throughout.<sup>127</sup> Like many of Korngold's scores, the music is authentically Viennese in style and form, from the waltzes to the underscoring present in the balcony scene to even the Merry Men theme that begins the movie. This was a common practice of many composers of the time to score films in traditional, Western orchestration and style despite the film's geographical and historical setting; it was only with Rózsa's historical epics, along with the work of Victor Young, Bernard Herrmann, and others, that this began to change in Hollywood.<sup>128</sup> <sup>129</sup> The film was beautiful and appealing to Korngold, but he felt he could not do it justice due to his inherent nature as a composer: "I am a musician of the heart, of passions and psychology; I am not a musical illustrator for a ninety-percent-action picture."<sup>130</sup> Nevertheless, the score was an instant hit and endures to this day as one of Korngold's most memorable, as well as being a trademark example of the Golden Age of Hollywood scores.

One of Korngold's best attributes, made famous by Steiner's work but used by nearly all of his contemporaries, is the use of the leitmotif to add clarity and continuity through the film. While a leitmotif is a musical gesture that is unique and musically distinctive, with contour and direction rather than simple arpeggiation or something resembling a stinger chord,<sup>131</sup> it is by no means a static idea. On the contrary, leitmotifs like the Merry Men theme undergo transformations over the course of the film to reflect the plot and character development. This

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<sup>126</sup> Mark Richards, "Thematic Transformation in Korngold's 'Robin Hood,'" *Film Music Notes* (blog), entry posted September 22, 2013, accessed March 12, 2016, <http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/thematic-transformation-in-korngolds-robin-hood/>.

<sup>127</sup> Jonathan L. Friedmann, "The Jewish Roots of Hollywood Music," *Western States Jewish History*, no. 1 (2012): 49, accessed February 18, 2016, EBSCOhost.

<sup>128</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 255.

<sup>129</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 96.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>131</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 88.

theme is the opening of the film and sets the mood for the entire picture with a jaunty march that reflects both the fighting capabilities of the men of Sherwood Forest as well as their gaiety and humor in the face of danger.<sup>132</sup> After the men have successfully ambushed Sir Guy of Gisborne and his party, unburdening them of their spoils and celebrating with a feast, we hear the theme now in a waltz form that is more Strauss than Saxon in style,<sup>133</sup> showing Korngold's preference for the romantic qualities of scoring over the historically accurate. The theme even disguises itself when Robin Hood and his men themselves are disguised within Nottingham Castle, as now the leitmotif is in a minor key and is supported by the dominant of the key, rather than the normal tonic - suggesting the situation for Robin and his men is perilous and unclear if they will survive the encounter.<sup>134</sup> However, Robin Hood prevails to the tune of what Cooke calls "a miniature and solidly crafted Straussian symphonic poem that deftly supports the action without losing continuity (and at the same time manages to incorporate diegetic fanfares)."<sup>135</sup> The score is lavish if not as epic as some of its contemporaries, notably the music for *Alexander Nevsky* by Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev;<sup>136</sup> however, its steady stream of fresh musical ideas along with the original theme's thematic development helped to humanize the drama and relate to the characters more closely, especially Robin Hood and Maid Marian's star-crossed love. The tone Korngold establishes is one that will endure for many years through the Golden Age and is rediscovered in part by John Williams for the return of classical adventure romps like *Robin Hood*.<sup>137</sup> For a composer who didn't want to write music for an "action picture," Korngold certainly did an amazing job of balancing action music with appealing themes and crafting a

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<sup>132</sup> Richards, "Thematic Transformation in Korngold's," *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>133</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 96.

<sup>134</sup> Richards, "Thematic Transformation in Korngold's," *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>135</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 96.

<sup>136</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 50.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

unified score that elevated the picture and set the standard for what Hollywood film scores should aspire to be.

## **BEN-HUR ANALYSIS**

Legendary Hungarian film composer Miklós Rózsa was famous for his historical epics and their devotion to the reconstruction of classical antiquity in music, and *Ben-Hur* is considered the prime example of Rózsa's fight against musical anachronism, much of which can be attributed to composers of the 1930s like Korngold and Steiner.<sup>138</sup> Although this score alongside Rózsa's other period epics still operated within the conventions of Romantic, Westernized tonality that was common practice of the era,<sup>139</sup> the score adapted to the changing pressures of the 1950s and pushed the boundaries of what could be accomplished in music accompanying a film, and was certainly well-received by the public, winning one of the then-record-breaking eleven Academy Awards.<sup>140</sup> With this score as well as those like *Quo Vadis?* a few years before and *King of Kings* just after, Rózsa managed to balance historical accuracy with a focus on keeping the average moviegoer enjoying the music; with *Quo Vadis?*, the need for monody in his music was outweighed by the fact that it would “not be sufficiently entertaining or emotionally appealing” for the listener.<sup>141</sup> Rózsa was able to replace the romantic chromaticism of standard Hollywood scores while keeping the music lively and engaging;<sup>142</sup> in this regard, his

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<sup>138</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 188.

<sup>139</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 255.

<sup>140</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 188.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 127-9.

<sup>142</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 188.

music for *Ben-Hur* more than any other represented the end of the Golden Age of Hollywood.<sup>143</sup>  
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While the musical style is thoroughly Rózsa and unique in approach, the orchestration and characterization retain the style of the 1930s and 1940s, with a large orchestra and plentiful use of leitmotifs and thematic development.<sup>145</sup> One of the most notable instances of this is the use of the pipe organ to represent the figure Christ. Rózsa remarks in an essay that the producers wanted him to use the Theremin, continuing his tradition from movies like *Spellbound* and hoping for “that spellbinding, supernatural, and eerie sound. But you can’t use electronics for the first century, so I opted for the pipe organ.”<sup>146</sup> In remaining consistent with contemporary composers, Rózsa only opted for the pipe organ, usually accompanied by strings, when Christ was either present or was felt; for the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Christ is visually present and is preaching but his voice is not heard, and Rózsa believed that “it became the job of the music in this sequence to intimate the revered words of the Sermon.”<sup>147</sup>

With the various marches throughout the movie, Rózsa opted again for authenticity, thoroughly researching what little could be found on ancient Roman and Greek music and, when that did not suffice, sticking to “my own Roman inventions” that were first used with *Quo Vadis?* just a few years prior. While innovative and influential, some of this music still drew on what Cooke calls “the romantic mannerisms of earlier soundtracks, [but] also on clichéd gestural associations.”<sup>148</sup> Even Rózsa believed it wasn’t the most authentic approach to his films at

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<sup>143</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 167.

<sup>144</sup> Mark Richards, “Thematic Transformation in Rózsa’s Score for Ben-Hur,” *Film Music Notes* (blog), entry posted October 27, 2013, accessed March 13, 2016, <http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/thematic-transformation-in-rozsas-score-for-ben-hur/>.

<sup>145</sup> Richards, “Thematic Transformation in Rózsa’s,” *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>146</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 134.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

<sup>148</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 187.

times; the composer, discussing his following project *King of Kings*, admitted that “From the musicological point of view, it might not be perfectly authentic, but by using Greco-Roman modes and a spare and primitive harmonization, it tries to evoke in the listener the feeling and impression of antiquity.”<sup>149</sup>

Like Steiner and Korngold, Rózsa created leitmotifs for each of the characters, but in a slightly altered way from the predictable. One theme is applied to the friendship between Judah and Messala, such as it is; when their friendship dissolves, another theme emerges, that of hatred.<sup>150</sup> These themes evolve over the course of the film and take on various roles; interestingly, the two themes coalesce during the crucifixion scene near the end of the movie, after Messala has died; it can be argued that the themes are broadening in scope and the friendship theme can be also applied to Christ and his absolute love for humanity, while the hatred theme can equally pertain to the Romans’ fear and disgust of the man who claims to be the Messiah.<sup>151</sup> This usage of the leitmotif helped paint a concise picture of the man Judah, yet intensify his emotions in a way dialogue could not hope to attain, as viewers get a better understanding of who he was based on his strong connections with Messala as well as his love interest Esther.<sup>152</sup> With the use of the traditional leitmotif, championed by opera composers and brought to film by Steiner and Korngold, combined with a Hungarian authenticity and a modernistic atonality to his sound, Rózsa’s *Ben-Hur* forever changed the landscape of what music in films could hope to be and brought to an end Hollywood’s fabled Golden Age.

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<sup>149</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 135.

<sup>150</sup> Richards, “Thematic Transformation in Rózsa’s,” *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

*“Where there is no dialogue, no sounds, just the visual - you’d better say something interesting. I don’t know who started this theory of the best film music being that which you don’t notice, but it isn’t true.”*

- Henry Mancini<sup>153</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO:

### Modern Style, Film Soundtracks and the New Hollywood

#### Introduction

In 1946, the American film industry was booming and profits were at record highs, the totals reaching 1.7 billion dollars; a little over fifteen years later, the money made had dropped to just half that number, while production costs had skyrocketed. Two key events occurred in that span of time that largely contributed to the dramatic decline in American cinema: the dismantling of the studio’s monopoly over theater chains in 1948 and 1949, and the invention and commercial success of the television at nearly the same time. Concerning the former, the case known as the Paramount Antitrust case proved to be the first major blow to studios as they lost both the right to own theaters as well as the right to control which theaters would show their films; this resulted in an incredible loss of influence as well as revenue for all of the major studios. The introduction and popularization of television in the 1950s only worsened the situation, as selling big-budget films became a near-impossible job to do when competing with the silver screen.<sup>154</sup> With four million television sets in American homes by 1950, the number of TV viewers was for the first time equal to that of radio listeners - another victim of the influx of

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 269-70.

<sup>154</sup> Simon Hickman, “A History of New Wave Cinema - Part Three: New Hollywood (1967-1969),” *New Wave Film*, last modified 2013, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.newwavefilm.com/international/new-hollywood.shtml>.

television.<sup>155</sup> Consequently, the 1950s and early 1960s saw many studios scrambling to adjust or downsizing their business; many were forced to do both, like the titanic MGM Studios in 1949.<sup>156</sup> RKO was hit hardest and closed permanently in 1956, while many other studios went into a survival mode of sorts during this time.<sup>157</sup> Soon, studios were being bought up by international entertainment companies, who viewed the film industry as just one branch of opportunity for selling their products via a multimedia market.<sup>158 159 160</sup>

Many efforts were made to entice people back to the theaters, including technological gimmickry - it was from this crisis that 3-D movies arose, along with other flashy but short-lived technological ideas of the time like Cinerama (a full analysis of which can be found in MacDonald, page 116), “Percepto,”<sup>161</sup> and stereophonic sound - the latter of which was introduced to audiences with great effect in the 1952 film *Julius Caesar*, scored by Miklós Rózsa.<sup>162</sup> Epic films that were produced at this time, with MGM leading the charge, were another attempt to bring audiences back to the theaters with the promise of extravagant spectacle that could not be replicated on the silver screen - *Quo Vadis* and *Ben-Hur* are two such examples, both scored by Rózsa.<sup>163</sup> However, while some of these films worked in their favor, many were utter flops - *Cleopatra* (1953) is the notable film in this regard although it was not alone in its big-budget failure - and studios were at a loss as to what to produce.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 114.

<sup>156</sup> Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 99.

<sup>157</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 23-24.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>160</sup> Hickman, “A History of New Wave,” *New Wave Film*.

<sup>161</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 21.

<sup>162</sup> Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 100.

<sup>163</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 116.

<sup>164</sup> Hickman, “A History of New Wave,” *New Wave Film*.

An important development in the 1950s was the emergence of a new kind of musical, where diegetic songs took the forefront and non-diegetic music was confined to the background of the film.<sup>165</sup> While the early part of the decade featured movies like *An American in Paris* (1951) and *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) with a striking balance between scoring and soundtrack, the traditional style began its decline over the course of the decade, to be replaced with newer and poppier musicals.<sup>166</sup> With these films as well as the everyday life dramas of the decade came the advent of what would be known as the “modern style” of composing, which scrapped many of the old ideas like the leitmotif and Mickey-mousing, and instead incorporated external influences like jazz, twelve-tone music and atonality.<sup>167</sup> Jazz, for example, which was long associated with criminals or African-Americans, was revisited and reconfigured, first with Alex North’s score for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) and most notably by Elmer Bernstein in *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), employing a jazz ensemble instead of the regular classical orchestra and therefore placing it out of the classical style of film music; this was expanded upon with *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959), using music by Duke Ellington and featuring a prominent cameo by the jazz legend in the film, while the music was associated with a respectable protagonist in the form of a white lawyer (Jimmy Stewart) who plays piano and loves jazz.<sup>168</sup> With *Forbidden Planet* (1956), the old Neo-Romantic style of composing feels an entire world away, as Louis and Bebe Barron composed music for the film solely using “electronic tonalities” and writing in a purely modernistic style.<sup>169</sup>

1952 marked the release of one of the most important films in terms of the evolution of film music. *High Noon*, with music by Dimitri Tiomkin, was innovatively Western in feeling,

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<sup>165</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 21.

<sup>166</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 117.

<sup>167</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 21.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-3.

<sup>169</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 117.



with the inclusion of the song “Do Not Forsake Me” evoking a similar sentiment. The success of this song prompted producers in Hollywood to realize the importance of songs in film, hoping to increase revenue with advertisements and commercial recordings of these songs. As a result, title songs became a fad throughout the decade and caused a number of issues between the producers who were hoping to increase turnout and the composers who were tasked with accomplishing this. Many composers adapted, including Henry Mancini and contemporaries; a few did not, with the infamous example being Bernard Herrmann, whose genius and temperament were both legendary in Hollywood and will be discussed at length in this chapter.

The most noteworthy complication for film composers that arose from this shakeup in Hollywood procedure was in 1958, with the strike of American Federation of Musicians, known as AFM. This strike paralyzed production of film music in Hollywood and sent work overseas; *Vertigo*'s score, for instance, was recorded in London by Muir Mathieson instead of Bernard Herrmann.<sup>170</sup> Eventually a new contract was agreed upon by the Musicians Guild of America (MGA), which allowed for greater flexibility in recording sessions for the studios and offered higher pay to the musicians; with this came the gradual dismantling of the classical orchestra and the subsequent utilization of smaller ensembles in films like *The Man with the Golden Arm*.<sup>171</sup>

With the 1960s came an unofficial but definitive changing of the guard. Although musicals were still being made, and winning Academy Awards for their work - *West Side Story* (1961) and *The Sound of Music* (1965) are but two examples - the rate of musicals had dropped off considerably. Symphonic music was considerably out-of-vogue; Herrmann's scores for Hitchcock were some of the only films featuring truly symphonic music of the time, and even that was a stretch compared to the music of Steiner and Korngold years before. The grandfather

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<sup>170</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 24.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

of film music himself, Max Steiner, was still active at the beginning of this decade, along with the other greats like Franz Waxman, Alfred Newman, and Miklós Rózsa; however, one by one they saw opportunities taper off. Steiner retired in 1965, while Dimitri Tiomkin ended his career a few years later; Waxman, who was younger than the others, succumbed to cancer in 1967 after little activity since 1963.<sup>172</sup> Symphonic music was of course still being written, as mentioned above, with a notable example being Alex North's score to *Spartacus* (1960) and Herrmann's music for Hitchcock's films as well as movies by Truffaut; however, the dominant trend was towards the jazz score and the modern style of composing, with Henry Mancini leading the charge.

As the changing of the guard brought about the end of the Old Hollywood, from film composers retiring or passing away to the outdated Production Code finally expiring in the mid-1960s, a new crop of directors and film composers was emerging. This included the ones already mentioned, like Mancini and North, as well as composers like Elmer Bernstein, Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams. These composers, as well as film directors like Jean-Luc Godard and Mike Nichols, became the faces of what would be known as the New Hollywood school. Beginning with *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate*, both released in 1967, very few of these New Hollywood films adhered to the idea of the "blockbuster" format; most of the movies being made were anti-establishment works born out of the death of the Production Code and were considerably more graphic in depictions of both violence and sex.<sup>173</sup> This era was markedly different from the Golden Age of Hollywood - more than ever, the director was deferred to and given considerable more respect by the newer and younger executives in the business.<sup>174</sup> This chapter will examine the evolving nature of film music from this time, beginning with Bernard

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<sup>172</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 176-7.

<sup>173</sup> Hickman, "A History of New Wave," *New Wave Film*.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

Herrmann's paramount contributions to the industry and ending with the arrival of soundtracks in films.

Bernard Herrmann

Of all the Hollywood composers of the mid-twentieth century, none is more resounding than the great Bernard Herrmann. Many of his fifty film scores have adorned several of the most celebrated American films, including spots on American Film Institute's (AFI's) Top 25 Film Scores for *Psycho* and *Vertigo* (at #4 and #12, respectively).<sup>175</sup> His film music is not hailed as masterful simply because of the movies it accompanies- his first major film score was for *Citizen Kane*, listed as #1 on AFI's Top 100 Films list<sup>176</sup> - but because the music is intrinsically noteworthy and masterfully handles a multitude of styles and techniques.<sup>177</sup> Forever an outsider to the Hollywood community, much of which was due to his own volatility, irascibility, and stubborn refusal to yield to the changing nature of music in film and the arrival of pop music<sup>178</sup>, Herrmann was famous for butting heads and making enemies in the film music community. Equally famous, however, was his love of honest and genuine individuals in the business, rather than film composers who were in it only for the profit, and his love of music never faltered between concert and film.<sup>179</sup> Although he may have considered himself a failure by the time of his death in 1975, Herrmann was anything but: his music revolutionized the process of film scoring, bringing about obsessive ostinato techniques along with a dark Stravinsky-like timbre

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<sup>175</sup> "AFI's 25 Greatest Film Scores," American Film Institute.

<sup>176</sup> "AFI's 100 Greatest American Films of All Time," American Film Institute, accessed December 29, 2015, <http://afi.com/100years/movies10.aspx>.

<sup>177</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 209.

<sup>178</sup> Ross, "The Music That Casts," *Movies*.

<sup>179</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 236.

that evokes a brooding quality to its nature and what musicologist Royal S. Brown labeled as “music of the irrational,” a fitting description especially for films like *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *Psycho*.<sup>180 181</sup>

Bernard Herrmann, born Max Herman, was born in New York on June 29, 1911 to Jewish-Russian parents who were not musical; even so, they raised an incredibly gifted child who would go on to study composition in his hometown, first at New York University and later at Juilliard.<sup>182</sup> Interestingly, even with such a rich background foreign to Americans, his music would never reflect his heritage; nor would his love of all things American, most notably his pioneering of Charles Ives’ music, make its way into his music either.<sup>183 184</sup> Herrmann would go on to study composition with musicians like Bernard Wagenaar and make a name for himself conducting a variety of ensembles, including an orchestra he formed himself called the New Chamber Orchestra.<sup>185</sup> By 1933, he was working at CBS Radio as the staff conductor and music programmer, which eventually led to regular composing for the radio series “Music in the Modern Manner.”<sup>186</sup>

After making a name for himself composing for the radio, Herrmann arrived in Hollywood with the radio and theater legend Orson Welles. Welles’ radio broadcast in 1938 called *War of the Worlds* cemented his reputation as a dramatist and propelled him onto the big screen, though he was viewed continuously with suspicion by Hollywood insiders even before production of *Citizen Kane* had begun.<sup>187</sup> Like Welles, Herrmann - who was Welles’ musical

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<sup>180</sup> Ross, “The Music That Casts,” Movies.

<sup>181</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 209.

<sup>182</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 66.

<sup>183</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 243.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>185</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 66.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>187</sup> Ross, “The Music That Casts,” Movies.

director from 1936 until 1940 on the series *Mercury Theater on the Air*<sup>188</sup> - was also not trusted by the Hollywood community, and both his music style and his passionate personality did not make matters easier for him. Arriving at the peak of the Golden Age of Hollywood - Erich Korngold's career was in full bloom, and Max Steiner was still a frightfully dominating personality in the business - Herrmann refused to conform to the clichés of film composition or what was expected of him by the often musically illiterate and ignorant producers.<sup>189</sup> However, this was perfect for Welles' directing style, and the resulting synthesis of film and music is an essential aspect of why *Citizen Kane* is often labeled the best film in American history.<sup>190</sup> The partnership between these two young outsiders is particularly notable concerning the level of sensitivity Welles gave to Herrmann and his music, something of an aberration for a director and producer to do at this time; even more interesting and unique is Welles' willingness to alter some of his visual shots to conform to musical passages that were composed and pre-recorded.<sup>191</sup> This level of amiability might have been borne of their preexisting relationship, as Herrmann composed the music for Welles' radio dramas while working at CBS in the late 1930s;<sup>192</sup> regardless, it served him well with writing leitmotifs of an unusual kind compared to the more mainstream film music being produced at this time. To think that this was not the peak of these two young men's careers, but the bright beginning, is a startling fact; to them, it was just another movie that they made to the best of their respective abilities.<sup>193</sup>

Herrmann and Welles worked next on *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), again directed and produced by Welles; however, when RKO edited Herrmann's score and interjected music

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<sup>188</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 250.

<sup>189</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 209.

<sup>190</sup> "AFI's 100 Greatest American Films," American Film Institute.

<sup>191</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 210.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

<sup>193</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 263.

not written by the composer, Herrmann removed his name from the credits, a prime example of his dedication to his music as well as his tendency to descend into tantrums.<sup>194</sup> <sup>195</sup> Herrmann moved back to New York and spent over a year continuing his conducting career, something he was able to sustain almost his entire time in Hollywood.<sup>196</sup> The two collaborated again with the 1944 adaptation of *Jane Eyre*, with Welles relegated to acting duties. Herrmann's score is once again equally, though uniquely, memorable as it was for *Kane*, with the melodic lines suggesting a dark undercurrent to the secretive nature of Thornfield Hall.<sup>197</sup>

Herrmann began his immensely famous and well-documented collaboration with director Alfred Hitchcock in 1955 with the film *The Trouble With Harry*. The volatile composer and the master of suspense would combine for eleven years and nine films together, including a cameo by Herrmann in the 1956 thriller *The Man Who Knew Too Much*<sup>198</sup> (Hitchcock, of course, made appearances in nearly every film he made, carrying instruments in three of his cameos<sup>199</sup>). However, it is his score to Hitchcock's masterful *Vertigo* (1958, starring Jimmy Stewart and Kim Novak) that is considered Herrmann's greatest score with Hitchcock and arguably some of his best music ever.<sup>200</sup> <sup>201</sup> It is the combined genius of Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Herrmann that makes this film and its corresponding score, respectively, their greatest achievements in cinema.<sup>202</sup> Right from the opening credits, Herrmann and Hitchcock describe to us what this film will be about, with Saul Bass' design of swirling patterns and explosive colors giving a

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<sup>194</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 236.

<sup>195</sup> Clint O'Connor, "Mr. Movie Music: Cleveland celebrates the amazing career of composer Bernard Herrmann," Cleveland.com, last modified April 18, 2014, accessed April 12, 2016, [http://www.cleveland.com/moviebuff/index.ssf/014/04/mr\\_movie\\_music\\_cleveland\\_celeb.html](http://www.cleveland.com/moviebuff/index.ssf/014/04/mr_movie_music_cleveland_celeb.html).

<sup>196</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 250-1.

<sup>197</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 84.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 152.

<sup>199</sup> "Alfred Hitchcock Cameos," Alfred Hitchcock, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://hitchcock.tv/cam/cameos.html>.

<sup>200</sup> Ross, "The Music That Casts," Movies.

<sup>201</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 159-60.

<sup>202</sup> Ross, "The Music That Casts," Movies.

visual sense of vertigo to the audience that will be replicated by the protagonist throughout the film. Herrmann's music imitates this vertigo, with a dizzying motif in the strings and harp that is both ascending and descending, setting the foundation for a wholly unstable world in which the movie takes place.<sup>203</sup> <sup>204</sup> The aforementioned protagonist with vertigo is Scottie Ferguson, a retired detective who discovered his disorder through an unfortunate accident. He is hired by a friend to tail the man's wife, Madeleine, who is acting strangely and may be possessed by the spirit of a long-dead woman named Carlotta Valdez. Herrmann's music reflects Ferguson's wary apprehension and eventual affection for Madeleine, as the music develops and becomes fully romantic with Ferguson's realization that he is in love.<sup>205</sup> One of the most striking moments in the film is the first time Scottie tails Madeleine; the lack of dialogue renders the scene, in effect, a silent film with lush underscoring and cryptic chords that enhance the tension and suspense for the audience.<sup>206</sup> As the film becomes bleaker and Scottie more obsessed, the music turns to a darker timbre, all the while maintaining the fixation on Scottie's interest. In the climax of the film, as Scottie has finally turned his new love interest Judy into his vision of Madeleine and the two embrace, Herrmann turns to Wagner's "*Tristan und Isolde*" for inspiration. The "Love-death," or *Liebestod*, idea is sublimely quoted in this passage, entitled "Scene d'amour," along with many other cues from the opera.<sup>207</sup> However, this is not due to simple laziness or a shortage of time; Herrmann's usage of these themes is darkly unique, as the melodic contour is still his own and only the ghostly memory of Wagner is present in the music, like the memory of Madeleine that hangs over Scottie and the film overall.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ross, "The Music That Casts," Movies.

<sup>204</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 160.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>206</sup> Ross, "The Music That Casts," Movies.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

Herrmann continued his string of successes with Hitchcock with the 1959 thriller *North by Northwest*, about a businessman wrongly suspected of being a double agent. The businessman, played by Cary Grant in one of his strongest dramatic roles ever, is continually hunted and pursued as he tries to piece together what is going on around him. Herrmann takes this confusion and terrifying yet thrilling story and delivers some of his most exciting music ever written for a film, with a turbulent if not altogether tuneful theme that parallels the film's rollicking and dangerous atmosphere.<sup>209</sup> This was followed by Herrmann's work on *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963), both equally masterful works by Hitchcock. With *Psycho*, Herrmann decided to complement the decision of filming in black-and-white, something of an abnormality by the 1960s, by using only strings in his score as its own aurally monochrome texture (see Appendix 2, ex.1).<sup>210 211</sup> The effect is chilling and tense; the most memorable moment in the score is the usage of the violins in the shower scene, whose shrill and birdlike jabs evoke the brutality and horror that is occurring onscreen, all the while subtly linking the murder of Marion Crane (from Phoenix, another avian-inspired allusion) to a man obsessed with birds.<sup>212</sup> <sup>213</sup> With *The Birds*, Herrmann decides, rather unusually, to forego the traditional film score and opts instead for solely electronic bird calls as atmospheric music, and therefore serving merely as sound consultant on the film; the resulting effect is as eerie and as suspenseful as any musical score Herrmann had composed to date.<sup>214</sup> Herrmann's final collaboration with the esteemed yet

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<sup>209</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 168.

<sup>210</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 255.

<sup>211</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 274.

<sup>212</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 181.

<sup>213</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 277.

<sup>214</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 196.



irritable director would be for the 1964 film *Marnie*, poorly received yet featuring some of Herrmann's most beautifully expressive music to date.<sup>215</sup>

Herrmann's nine film-long relationship with Hitchcock came to a dramatic and rather public end in 1966 with the film *Torn Curtain*. As discussed previously, the producers and studios of the 1960s believed in exploring any and all opportunity for moneymaking, and Hitchcock's films were no exception. For them, theme music was the way to go, and true to form, Herrmann resisted. When Herrmann went ahead and wrote his own score for the film, ignoring Hitchcock's pleas for a more jazzy and with-the-times score, the director abruptly and decisively kicked him off the project, ending their ten-year partnership and friendship for the rest of their lives.<sup>216</sup> Herrmann sought out directors who would give him the respect he felt he needed and would allow him to write the score he wanted, rather than what the producers desired,<sup>217</sup> landing him with French director Francois Truffaut. It was for Truffaut in 1966 that Herrmann composed his only score that year, for the film *Fahrenheit 451*, based on the book by the same name. The score is considered one of Herrmann's best non-Hitchcock film scores, with wondrous music depicting a bookless world on fire.<sup>218</sup> Regretfully, neither Hitchcock nor Herrmann ever fully recovered from their fallout. It is said that Hitchcock's films after 1966 couldn't live up to the films of the golden decade before; and Herrmann was unable to return permanently to Hollywood, a self-imposed exile in London for the remainder of his life until *Taxi Driver* in 1975.<sup>219</sup>

That same year, three events would occur that would have a lasting impact on Hollywood. First was a brilliant score for Brian de Palma's *Obsession*, the plot of which closely

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<sup>215</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 199.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 206.

<sup>217</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 210-11.

<sup>218</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 207.

<sup>219</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 288.

mirrored another movie that Herrmann had scored, 1958's *Vertigo*.<sup>220</sup> The music in turn emulates elements of *Vertigo*; the theme utilizes ominous-sounding brass chords that harken back to the pointed stingers in *Vertigo*'s opening theme, and both movie themes use a descending two-note pattern, similarly done in *Taxi Driver*'s opening music.<sup>221</sup> Herrmann's music for *Taxi Driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese, is unique like all of his scores, but for a markedly different reason: the primary style is jazz, something that was a source of contention when working with Hitchcock a decade previous.<sup>222</sup> Like all of his music for film, the theme is hauntingly melodic and beautiful if tinged with subversive emotions, most notably the rage that the protagonist (played by Robert De Niro) develops toward society over the course of the film. The final event occurred the night of the final recording session for *Taxi Driver*, on December 23, 1975. That night in the studio proved to be fateful to a young man who was fast becoming one of the most iconic directors in Hollywood of that or any time. Steven Spielberg, fresh off his success with that summer's blockbuster *Jaws*, was asked by Scorsese to stop by the studio as he and Herrmann put the final touches on *Taxi Driver*. Spielberg recalls meeting Herrmann for the first time and being awestruck, watching as he smoked a cigar and ignored the ashes falling on his chest and focused on listening to the playback. The composer finished listening, got up and retired to his hotel room, dying in his sleep due to cardiovascular disease.<sup>223 224 225</sup>

Herrmann died at the age of sixty-four, ending his career with only the slightest of declines in quality for his film scores; his score for *Taxi Driver* easily rivals his music for Welles' *Citizen Kane* more than two decades previously. Following news of his death,

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<sup>220</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 256.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, 256-7.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>223</sup> Ross, "The Music That Casts," *Movies*.

<sup>224</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 255.

<sup>225</sup> O'Connor, "Mr. Movie Music: Cleveland," *Cleveland.com*.

Herrmann was awarded nominations for both *Obsession* and *Taxi Driver* - his first nominations since *Anna and the King of Siam* in 1946, and becoming the first composer to be nominated posthumously twice in the same year.<sup>226</sup> Although he ended up only with one Academy Award to his name, for *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1941), along with a smattering of other nominations - interestingly, none were for Hitchcock films, although public opinion would supersede this fact and help land *Psycho* and *Vertigo* on AFI's Top 25 Scores list - Herrmann will live on as one of the most daunting, impressive, and driven composers to have graced not only Hollywood and concert halls, but the lives of millions of cinemagoers worldwide. Scorsese aptly summarizes it in the final shot of Herrmann's last film, *Taxi Driver*: "in gratitude and admiration to the memory of Bernard Herrmann."<sup>227</sup>

### Henry Mancini

Considered one of the main architects of what was to become the modern style of composing for films, Henry Mancini wrote for countless movies alongside a plentiful list of TV dramas. His influence on record albums may only be surpassed by his influence on scoring and the usage of theme songs in movies, which went hand in hand with the commercial aspect of a soundtrack. Known for his light and bouncy film music, Mancini became one of many typecasted composers (like Miklós Rózsa before him), even though his serious and sublime works for film are just as worth analyzing as his immensely popular theme songs and soundtrack suites. Mancini's success in reinventing the scoring technique and sound was bittersweet; it proved to be so immensely successful that producers made "pop" music the standard to which all

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<sup>226</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 257.

<sup>227</sup> Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood*, 287.

movies of the 1960s would have to adhere, which was encouraged by the record companies who stood to make a profit from it.<sup>228</sup> Mancini ended up working in the film industry for almost forty years, composing an incredible output of music for all types of films, including no less than twenty-two films directed by Blake Edwards. In early 1994, Mancini was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and on June 14th passed away, leaving behind an impressive body of work that many attempted to replicate and a void in Hollywood that was never replaced.

Although considered one of the most popular and celebrated composers of the 1960s, and in the film industry in general, Henry Mancini was not always a lover of music. His parents were immigrants from Italy and settled in Pennsylvania, where the elder Mancini worked in the steel industry but maintained his music-making in his spare time (the father played flute in a local brass band<sup>229</sup>). The young Henry, born Enrico Nicola Mancini, confessed later in life that he received little enjoyment from his forced piccolo lessons from the age of eight onwards; however, it was when he began arranging music that his wonder of music truly took hold.<sup>230</sup> Soon, Mancini was at the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied composition for just one year before being drafted into the Army. It was shortly after returning stateside, following the conclusion of World War II in 1945, that he accepted a two-week offer for an Abbott and Costello movie called *Lost in Alaska* (1952). This temporary job from Universal evolved into a six-year internship that proved instrumental in shaping the kind of orchestrator and composer Mancini would eventually become.<sup>231 232</sup>

In the final year of his time at Universal, Mancini wrote a jaunty and tuneful score for Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958), which was reedited almost past the point of recognition, yet

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<sup>228</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 267.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, 271.

<sup>230</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 166.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>232</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 272.

was still a source of pride for the young composer.<sup>233</sup> The movie was a moderate success, but suddenly Mancini was laid off with nowhere to go, until one day he happened to run into producer Blake Edwards. Edwards had a pitch for a new television show and asked Mancini if he was interested in collaborating. Mancini said yes, and it proved to be a turning point in his career.<sup>234</sup> With a hard-hitting and simplistic ostinato to open the theme, the show, an NBC detective series called “Peter Gunn,” was a huge success and, coupled with the “Mr. Lucky” series, would earn Mancini the first of many Grammys and land him firmly in the land of film scoring, where he continued his collaborations with Edwards for over thirty-seven years.<sup>235 236</sup>

The year 1961 would see one of Mancini’s most memorable scores come to life, with help from Audrey Hepburn. *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, like so many films of the time, was required to have either a theme song or some other form of prominent composition that could then be marketed by the producers. This task usually fell to outside composers, but Edwards, who by now had worked with Mancini on both “Peter Gunn” and three films at Universal, knew his composer and convinced the producers to use Mancini. With the knowledge that Hepburn was not classically trained, Mancini kept it tuneful yet easy to learn, diatonic yet lively; thus the beloved movie song “Moon River” was born, upon which much of this film score’s success depended and whose popularity furthered the exploitation of theme songs in films.<sup>237</sup> While the film features other styles and tonally different music, from the jaunty New York City music to the jazz numbers in Holly’s (Hepburn) apartment, and even prominently features usage of the stinger chord technique that was found in such Golden Era films like *King Kong* and *Anthony Adverse*, to name a few. However, the score overall, largely in part due to the presence of

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<sup>233</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 182.

<sup>234</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 272.

<sup>235</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 182.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 183.

“Moon River,” continued the dominant trend of jazz in films and more commercial-friendly music to appeal to both the public and the producers.<sup>238</sup> For his work on the film, Mancini received two Oscars - for the score and for “Moon River” as best original song - which guaranteed him as a household name for the next few decades in Hollywood.<sup>239</sup> The soundtrack is critical in influencing films all throughout the 1960s and beyond, notably including 1967’s *Cool Hand Luke*, with music by Lalo Schiffrin and starring Paul Newman,<sup>240</sup> as well as being referenced by such composers as John Williams, who uses it for the 60’s prom scene in the 1989 film *Born on the Fourth of July*.<sup>241</sup>

The following year, Mancini worked with Edwards and lyricist Johnny Mercer on the score for *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), which again developed from a single theme or song, making the score monothematic in material. The titular song won for both Mancini and Mercer their second consecutive Oscars for Best Original Song, and for good reason. The song is used in a variety of ways throughout the film, almost like a leitmotif in the way Steiner employed them; the song develops from its original setting and adapts to the situations that the characters find themselves in. By the end of the film, with our two protagonists separated and falling apart, they seek reunion and are accompanied with a heartbreaking rendition of their ballad, heightening the tension and emotion present on screen.<sup>242</sup>

While many of Edwards’ films and Mancini’s corresponding scores were up-tempo and upbeat in style and tone, including 1963’s *The Pink Panther* and its many sequels, Mancini was given an opportunity to work on an uncharacteristic Edwards’ film, a period piece entitled *The Great Race* (1965). While the traditional opening song was once again present in his score - a

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<sup>238</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 184.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 331.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 192.

song reminiscent of old Dixieland tunes, entitled “The Sweetheart Tree” - the score’s styles are varied and feature humorous nods to old silent films of the 1920s.<sup>243</sup> This trend of captivating and trendy theme songs continued throughout the late 1960s and into the 70’s, first with *Two for the Road* in 1967, again starring Audrey Hepburn and directed by Stanley Donen, and later with 1970’s *Darling Lili*, returning to form with Blake Edwards.<sup>244 245</sup> *Darling Lili* marked the rather surprising first time that Mancini had written a score for a musical before, in spite of the numerous nominations and awards received in the previous decade. However, with the help of longtime collaborator Johnny Mercer, Mancini secured an Oscar nod for the song “Whistling Away the Dark,” which is the most celebrated song in a soundtrack of otherwise outstanding works by Mancini and Mercer.<sup>246</sup> This was one of five scores and soundtracks for films that Mancini worked on that year; other notable examples include the gloomy *The Night Visitor*, which relies heavily on its reduced orchestration and dissonant harmonies, built up in part by the usage of out-of-tune pianos and harpsichords and which displayed his less-used creative underscoring side, and his score to *Sunflower* (directed by Vittorio De Sica), which also received an Oscar nomination later that year.<sup>247</sup>

The 1970s for Henry Mancini were dominated by comedies and especially two Pink Panther sequels, both of which were flops; however, two films stand out as worth mentioning from the decade. *White Dawn* (1974), directed by Philip Kaufman, features some of Mancini’s most compelling, if unusual, music for his films. Utilizing a theme that was pre-written, Mancini provided colorful orchestration that showcased the three main characters, stranded sailors in an Eskimo village, as well as supplementing the film’s minimal dialogue with lively interjections

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<sup>243</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 203.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 229.

that reveal no hint of the somber ending to the film<sup>248</sup> Kaufman loved Mancini's music so much that when filming *The Right Stuff* (1983) he recycled the Eskimo theme and used it to accompany John Glenn (Ed Harris) in his orbit around the Earth.<sup>249</sup> *10* (1979) was a standout for not only Mancini but Edwards' directing and the stellar performances by leads Dudley Moore, newcomer Bo Derek, and Julie Andrews, who had been married to Edwards for nearly ten years at this point. For the film, Mancini received another Oscar nomination, but the highlight was in fact not an original composition, but an arrangement of Ravel's *Bolero*, which was featured prominently in the film and reignited interest in the French composer for many years after the film's release.<sup>250</sup>

One of his final outstanding compositions for film was for the 1982 film *Victor/Victoria*, directed by Blake Edwards once again and starring Julie Andrews in the titular role. Despite the six original songs for the main cast that could potentially originate from the 1950s than either the film's setting of the '30s or its production in the 80's, the score won Mancini his final Academy Award, for "Best Original Song Score and its Adaptation, or Adaptation Score."<sup>251</sup> However, Mancini's personal favorite was the score for the 1970 film *The Molly Maguires*, set in rural Pennsylvania not dissimilar to his own hometown of West Aliquippa. The score is widely considered his magnum opus, although not nearly as universally loved as his earlier and more famous works like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* or his involvement with the *Peter Gunn* show.<sup>252</sup> The score is unlike many of his more popular works, with a beauty that is tinged with sadness prevalent throughout the film's music; while his usual humorous side is still noticeable, the

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<sup>248</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 249.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 300.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 275.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 297.

<sup>252</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 168.



accordion's theme that defines the movie speaks of melancholy and wistfulness of a bygone era that is rarely found in Mancini's works.<sup>253</sup>

Just two months after his seventieth birthday, on June 14, 1994, Henry Mancini died after a sudden and painful battle with pancreatic cancer. His music for films was envied by younger film composers who desperately tried to emulate both his entrance into the industry as well as his technique and color, and producers found themselves short a composer who could both write a score that enhanced the movie and then could also turn that same score into a profitable record album for the company.<sup>254</sup> Said longtime collaborator and lifelong friend Blake Edwards of Mancini's work, "There are times when I feel he's embellished the effectiveness of the scenes by fifty percent, he's made them come more alive than I had imagined. A lot of my success is due to his scoring."<sup>255</sup> Indeed, both movies and moviegoers benefitted from this extraordinary man who accomplished so much with so little, and who will forever be associated with the young British woman in that little black dress, staring longingly into an empty Tiffany's on an early Manhattan day.

### *Ennio Morricone and Alex North*

Two composers who emerged from the Golden Age of Hollywood with a new view on film music worth discussing are Ennio Morricone and Alex North. Both highly prolific, the two composers were influential in the world of film scoring, although neither of them was much recognized by the American media or by the Academy during their formative years of composing; Morricone's first Academy Award win came in 2016, for his score to Quentin

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<sup>253</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 276.

<sup>254</sup> Thomas, *Film Score: The View*, 164.

<sup>255</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 276.

Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* (2015), while North was finally recognized by the Academy in 1986 and given an honorary lifetime-achievement award.<sup>256</sup> Each has produced significant contributions to the cinema, however; North's score to *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) broke considerable ground for including jazz sounds to film, while Morricone's flexibility in scoring and coloring assisted a number of genres from the Spaghetti Western films by Sergio Leone to films like *The Mission* (1986), not to mention innumerable European films.<sup>257</sup>

Alex North (1910-1991) was a composer whose music for films was "less obvious than most,"<sup>258</sup> yet proved directly influential in many films to come, from Mancini's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* to Lalo Schifrin's work on *Cool Hand Luke* (1967).<sup>259</sup> Growing up an experienced pianist, North eventually studied at The Juilliard School in New York as well as the Moscow Conservatory in the early-1930s; upon returning to America, he received commissions for multiple ballets as well as advice from Aaron Copland, the preeminent American composer of the 20th century.<sup>260 261</sup>

North got his first major break in Hollywood with the help of Elia Kazan, with whom North had collaborated on a stage production of *Death of a Salesman*. When Kazan began work on his new film out in Hollywood, he specifically asked for North to write the score. The result is an incredible masterpiece for the 1951 film *A Streetcar Named Desire*, whose story of sexual longing and promiscuity in New Orleans was beautifully complemented with North's jazzy orchestration breaking down barriers and opening the way for more styles in background film

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<sup>256</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 125.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>258</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 239.

<sup>259</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 208.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>261</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 241.

scores apart from the traditional symphonic score.<sup>262</sup> Later that year, North would score the film version of *Death of a Salesman* and receive nominations for both that score as well as *Streetcar*; however, the nominations ended up being just two of fifteen nominations that Alex North would receive in his lifetime without ever winning any of the awards.<sup>263</sup>

Although North's preference lay in scoring for the more personal and intimate dramas that he could connect with, the composer worked on a number of large-scale epics on par with Miklós Rózsa's scores like *Ben-Hur* and *King of Kings*; some outstanding examples include *Spartacus* (1960), *Cleopatra* (1963) and *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965). North felt that writing scores for lavish epics like these was not of his capabilities, as he once remarked that "I like to say something that has to do with myself personally and mold it so it fits the content of the film. ...How can you illustrate with music anything so magnificently illustrative as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel?"<sup>264</sup> Nevertheless, his successful scores for these films, particularly *Cleopatra*, the otherwise-dismal flop of a film, resonated with audiences for their ability to personalize even the grandest of characters ever to grace cinema.<sup>265</sup>

Although North has made considerable contributions to the film industry, including a notable score for the Robin Williams movie *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), he is probably most famous for a score never heard until over twenty years after its conception. For Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), North wrote an impressive score with an optimistic fanfare to accompany the sun's rising over Earth, but Kubrick ended up favoring his own temporary tracks to the score North had written. These tracks, most significantly the opening of Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* as well as *The Blue Danube* by Johann Strauss, Jr. and

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<sup>262</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 123.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>264</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 245.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 245.

some works by 20th-century composer György Ligeti, became the now-famous soundtrack to the film; however, North's score to the film would have been just as impressive if not more so, argues Thomas.<sup>266</sup> The score was eventually recorded in the early 1990s, just a few years after North passed away in 1991, with Jerry Goldsmith conducting London's National Philharmonic Orchestra. Says Goldsmith of the late composer, "My respect for him was more than musical. He was a rare blend of creative talent, compassion, and humanity."<sup>267</sup>

Ennio Morricone (1928- ), an Italian composer who was relatively unknown in the United States until writing scores for the Western trilogy of Sergio Leone films, starring Clint Eastwood as the "Man With no Name," is another composer worth studying in detail. Although he is most famous for the 1966 film *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, especially its theme's near-obnoxious vocal yells and accompanying grunts, Morricone has written scores for around four hundred films, making him easily the most prolific film composer to date and surpassing even the grandfather of film music himself, Max Steiner.<sup>268</sup> This may be in large part due to his chameleon nature as a composer; his style is interestingly fluid and adaptable to each picture he works on, and although he is most closely associated with Spaghetti Westerns, he has written music for the theatre, for chamber groups and symphonies alike, and for countless genres of film.<sup>269</sup> Harlan Kennedy's assessment of Morricone as a film composer summarizes it best: "If Morricone has achieved anything single-handedly as a film composer, it's the perfection of a fusion between the classical composing methods of the Steiners or Korngolds and the eclecticism

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<sup>266</sup> Thomas, *Music for the Movies*, 248.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>268</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 310.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 310-11.

that has informed music culture since the 1960s and that is typified by the pile-on-the-pop-songs brand of movie score.”<sup>270</sup>

Born in Italy in 1928, Morricone received extensive classical training as a student at the Conservatory of Saint Cecilia in Rome, where the great 20th-century Italian composer Ottorino Respighi had served as Musical Director from 1923 to 1926.<sup>271</sup> Morricone’s first film score came for the 1961 film *Il federale*, by the Italian director Luciano Salce; just three years later, he would have over a dozen film scores under his belt by the time he was offered to work on *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).<sup>272</sup> This score as well as its two sequels, *For a Few Dollars More* (1965) and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), elevated the films to classics, and an arrangement of the three movie’s main thematic material, compiled and conducted by Hugo Montenegro, only increased Morricone’s popularity in the United States.<sup>273</sup> Morricone’s score for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, featuring its raucous main theme and the hit song “The Ecstasy of Gold,” helped redefine the Western genre from the grandiose Elmer Bernstein scores and the ballads written by Dimitri Tiomkin. Suddenly, Morricone’s music was the best representation of the volatile and law-bending world known as the Wild West.<sup>274</sup> This trend continued with Leone’s film *Once Upon a Time in the West*, considered one of his greatest Westerns ever; likewise, the score is one of Morricone’s finest.<sup>275</sup>

While Morricone has written an output that not only rivals but surpasses Steiner’s body of work, with over four hundred film scores, two scores in particular stand out amongst the rest. In 1978, past the two hundred-score mark and yet still without an Oscar nomination to his name,

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<sup>270</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 311.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 221.

Morricone was finally awarded a nomination for his work on Terrence Malick's beautiful *Days of Heaven*. Considered one of the greatest American films ever,<sup>276</sup> the Oscar-winning cinematography by Nestor Almendros clearly was influential in setting the mood for Morricone's score. The melancholy tone of the score reflects the nature of the leads, played by Richard Gere and Brooke Adams, with elegiac music conveying the contentious relationship the two have both with one another as well as with the Farmer, played by Sam Shepard. Alongside Morricone's lush score is the theme from one of the movements to Camille Saint-Saens' *Carnival of the Animals*, known as "The Aquarium". The theme accompanies the opening credits and is used in a variety of ways, like an original theme, throughout the film.<sup>277</sup>

The other score is for a much bleaker film, about a relevant topic even for 1989's time. That year, famed director Brian de Palma created a Vietnam war drama entitled *Casualties of War*, whose topic was just as heart-wrenching as the title suggests. In the film, a young soldier, played by Michael J. Fox, fights in the endless jungles of Vietnam and witnesses his comrades brutally rape and murder a woman, in spite of his efforts to spare and then save her life.<sup>278</sup> Morricone's moving use of bowed strings and wordless voices is poignant and perfectly showcases the depravity of war; the lack of words is especially crucial, as it allows the music to transcend nationality, language or any other self-imposed divisions between humanity.

Despite never having won an Academy Award, or perhaps in part because of it, Ennio Morricone was finally recognized by the Academy in the 2007 Academy Awards, given an award for his "magnificent and multifaceted contributions to the art of film music."<sup>279</sup> In early

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<sup>276</sup> "The 100 Greatest American Films," BBC, last modified July 20, 2015, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20150720-the-100-greatest-american-films>.

<sup>277</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 269.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, 333.

<sup>279</sup> "Ennio Morricone Finally Gets an Oscar," Moviefone, last modified December 14, 2006, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.moviefone.com/2006/14/14/ennio-morricone-finally-gets-an-oscar/>.

2016, exactly half a century after his work on *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Morricone was finally given an official Oscar for his work on a Western of a very different sort - this one from the American director Quentin Tarantino called *The Hateful Eight* (2015). After being snubbed for so many years, everyone went into the hall expecting Morricone to walk away with an Oscar that night. Harvey Weinstein, producer of *The Hateful Eight*, expressed his confidence a few nights before that year's Academy Awards, adding that they were going to "bring down the house" that night.<sup>280</sup> Ennio Morricone has provided scores to hundreds of films and been referenced, parodied, or paid homage to in countless more. His theme from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* is one of the most recognizable melodies in cinematic history, and his prolific output is only outweighed by the sheer quality of each of the scores. Most impressively, at eighty-seven, the Italian composer is still actively working in both film and concert halls. His scores have influenced both American and international cinemas for over half a century, and will undoubtedly continue to for many years to come.

### Soundtracks in Movies, 1967-1975

To discuss the importance of soundtracks in films over the second half of the twentieth century is to attempt an entire dissertation on the subject; however, four such compilations for film are worth discussing in detail here. *The Graduate* (1967) is perhaps the most important of the four, with its success jumpstarting an interest in pop music for films of the following decade; *Easy Rider* (1969) was one such film whose success with album record sales led to imitators for years down the road. With *American Graffiti* (1973), George Lucas's film about growing up in

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<sup>280</sup> Christopher Rosen, "Oscars 2016: Ennio Morricone Wins Best Original Score for The Hateful Eight," Entertainment Weekly, last modified February 28, 2016, accessed April 19, 2016, <http://www.ew.com/2016/02/28/oscars-2016-ennio-morricone>.

northern California in the early 1960s, a soundtrack of over forty songs from the era fill the film with nostalgia and an upbeat reminiscence of the teenage years cruising through town with friends. *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) is quite the opposite, with a stark yet carnival-like film depicting a real-life hostage situation in New York just three years previous supported with a soundtrack that consists of just three songs in total. Each of these films is extraordinarily unique in their approach to using music for their respective films, warranting a close if succinct look.

The year 1967 reflects a turning point in both American cinema and, on a broader level, the sentiment of the American people. Dragged into yet another war for which they had little support for, suspicious of governmental authority, and not nearly as seduced by escapism and spectacle like the previous generation, the Baby Boomer generation was able to overturn the established film industry leadership in large part thanks to two films from that year: *Bonnie & Clyde* and *The Graduate*. Both films feature rebellious protagonists who are at their core innocent, reflecting the majority of the viewers who saw the films; however, it is *The Graduate*'s soundtrack that matters most when discussing the appeal to the young generation. Following his success with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) at the box office and the Academy Awards, winning an outstanding five Oscars amongst thirteen nominations that year, Mike Nichols was allowed to direct *The Graduate*; almost immediately, convention went out the window, as Robert Redford was passed up for the lead in favor of a New-York theater nobody named Dustin Hoffman, even though Redford was favored for the role and matched the description of the character in the 1963 book more accurately.<sup>281</sup> Even more notable is the use of music in the film. While the original compositions by film composer Dave Grusin are commendable, it is the popular music, particularly by folk-rock duo Simon and Garfunkel, that stands out.<sup>282 283</sup> Most

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<sup>281</sup> Hickman, "A History of New Wave," New Wave Film.

<sup>282</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 212.



of the songs are inserted into the movie merely offering a sort of omnipresent yet detached commentary on the ongoing plot; one song, however, clearly is intertwined with the story of Benjamin Braddock, Mrs. Robinson, and her daughter. That song, Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson," became a top-selling hit that year, and the idea of using popular songs as not only a way to appeal to the young generation and make money in the process, but also to serve as commentary on the film's plot, proved too good to be true. In subsequent years, many films fell victim to the greed of producers, who valued revenue sources over musical suitability and dramatic intention, and just as the film industry was forced to change its mindset to suit the young generation's demands, so too did the music of films change to suit the executives' needs, for better or for worse.<sup>284 285</sup>

*Easy Rider* (1969), directed by Dennis Hopper, produced by Peter Fonda, and starring both, is an exceptional film with a compelling and complementary soundtrack. Considered one of the movies that helped bring about the New Hollywood to cinema, along with films like *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966, with a score by Alex North), and *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967), the film was plagued with production problems mostly stemming from Dennis Hopper's manic behavior and erratic temperament but was eventually released in theaters, quickly becoming the perfect example of the 1960s anti-establishment youth as well as the prevalent drug culture of the time.<sup>286</sup> Among the music used for the movie are some songs by the influential band The Byrds, two band members of which (Roger McGuinn and David Crosby) provided the basis of Fonda and Hopper's characters.<sup>287</sup> Along with songs by Steppenwolf, the

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<sup>283</sup> Hickman, "A History of New Wave," New Wave Film.

<sup>284</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 212.

<sup>285</sup> Hickman, "A History of New Wave," New Wave Film.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Michael Walker, *Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock and Roll's Legendary Neighborhood* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006), 210.

Jimi Hendrix Experience, and Bob Dylan, as well as an original song by McGuinn called “The Ballad of Easy Rider”, the soundtrack defined both a movie and a generation and helped unleash an onslaught of rock soundtracks in cinema.<sup>288</sup>

In 1973, American moviegoers were treated to a slice of the past with newcomer George Lucas’s retro coming-of-age film *American Graffiti*. Based largely on his own experience of growing up in Modesto, California and his enamoration of cars, drag races and diners, the film was both an instant financial success and an enduring classic.<sup>289</sup> The plot centers around four high school friends the summer after their high school graduation as they spend a night on the town; the film is told in short vignettes and depicts their struggles with both friendships and bracing for what the future might hold.<sup>290</sup> The soundtrack features forty-one songs from the late 1950s and early 1960s, including songs by the Beach Boys, the Monotones and an ingenious use of Buddy Holly’s song “That’ll Be the Day,” accompanying the scene when John (played by Paul de Mat) banters with a car full of women and persuades one of them to come join him in his car, only to discover that it’s a too-young sister of Judy, a teen named Carol.<sup>291</sup> The song is diegetic, or heard by the characters in the scene as well as the audience; however, the song is also reflecting the dynamic between the two, as John’s initial hopes of a fleeting romance are dashed with the arrival of Carol. As Mark Richards points out, the song seems to be “the perfect way to describe any possible romance between the two.”<sup>292</sup> This is not the only instance in which the song operates not only on the nostalgic and mood-setting level; many of the songs manage to

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<sup>288</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 221.

<sup>289</sup> “American Graffiti,” Lucasfilm, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://lucasfilm.com/american-graffiti>.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Richards, “Diegetic Music, Non-Diegetic Music,” *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

operate in a kind of middle ground between the diegetic and non-diegetic, otherwise known as *source scoring*.<sup>293</sup>

In the documentary “The Making of American Graffiti,” Walter Murch, who worked on sound editing and re-recording music for the movie, discusses at length the use of music as an attempt at “world-izing” it and lending a realism to the film. One of the more notable examples of this is a scene at about halfway through the film, when Curt has been kicked out of a car and is at both a literal and metaphorical crossroads in his life. In this moment, he is wondering in what direction his night will go, and is consistently being haunted by this almost spectral apparition of a beautiful blonde in a white T-Bird, who he is pursuing the whole night. Over this scene, we continue to hear the Regents’ rendition of “Barbara Ann,” which was playing previously in the car that Curt was just kicked out of. The music continues although the car is absent now, and fills the street with its sound as Curt runs after the blonde in the T-Bird, lending an ethereal air to the scene.<sup>294</sup> Murch goes further, suggesting that the music in the film acts not only as a point of realism, but also as a modern-day Greek chorus that offers commentary on the scenes presently occurring.<sup>295</sup> Director George Lucas talked about the soundtrack of the film, whose forty songs used up the majority of the eighty thousand dollars allotted to music,<sup>296</sup> as almost one big sound effect in of itself. Says Lucas, “Because I had the music completely through the movie, and the music was treated more like a sound effect than it was traditional score, I used the absence of music and sound effects to create the drama, which normally what you’d do is you’d use the music to create the drama and the sound effects to create the realism. I used the music to create

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<sup>293</sup> Richards, “Diegetic Music, Non-Diegetic Music,” *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>294</sup> “American Graffiti - Making of,” video file, 1:16:42, YouTube, posted by DVDC0llect0r, August 21, 2015, accessed April 20, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chctErvYHSY>.

<sup>295</sup> “American Graffiti - Making of,” video file.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

the realism and the sound effects to create the drama.”<sup>297</sup> Following the outstanding success of the film - raking in over \$55 million after just a budget of \$700,000<sup>298</sup> - a double-record album was released in August of that year, quickly becoming one of the best-selling recordings of 1973.<sup>299</sup> That music’s success, as well as the reissue in 1977 of the film, helped pave the way for a direct sequel (*More American Graffiti*, 1979) as well as rekindled interest in the early ‘60’s culture, and launched both George Lucas’s career to stardom as well as those of his then-undiscovered cast.

*Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) has an interesting soundtrack in that it also depicts the realism of the time in stark contrast with Lucas’s *Graffiti*. With that film, we were treated with almost unending music, forty-one songs that were representative of the times; with *Dog Day Afternoon*, directed by Sidney Lumet and starring Al Pacino, the soundtrack totals just three songs, only one of which we hear in great detail.<sup>300</sup> Concerning sound in the film, its strength rests more on the *lack* of music rather than the inclusion of it, so that when music does make its appearance, it is immediately noticeable and dramatic in nature. This is first evident in the opening scene of the film: beginning with a montage of Brooklyn in August of 1972, the film eventually reveals our two main characters, Pacino’s Sonny and John Cazale’s Sal, sitting in a car listening to the song that accompanies the opening. This song, Elton John and Bernie Taupin’s “Amoreena,” is heard throughout the scene as non-diegetic and sets the stage for the entire film before eventually becoming diegetic as it emanates from the car that our anti-heroes, along with their co-conspirator Stevie (Gary Springer), sit and wait in. The radio is turned off after a moment, and the music is left out of the film until Sonny is in the bank for some time, after which it is heard

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<sup>297</sup> “American Graffiti - Making of,” video file.

<sup>298</sup> “American Graffiti,” Lucasfilm.

<sup>299</sup> MacDonald, *The Invisible Art of Film*, 246.

<sup>300</sup> “Soundtracks: Dog Day Afternoon,” IMDb, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0072890/soundtrack>.

only distantly over the radio and the occurrences are few and far between. Like *Graffiti*, music is not used to heighten the dramatic element of the film, and is instead used as an element of a documentary-style film; when music is needed to aid the realism aspect of a movie, then music makes its appearance, without lingering for too long or being included unnecessarily in scenes that are stronger without it. This was not limited to *Dog Day Afternoon*, but rather is just one example of the style of filmmaking evident in the 1970s, which favored gritty realism and strong actors carrying the success of the film over big orchestral sounds and even bigger budgets. That all changed when a young man named George Lucas and his newly-met collaborator John Williams met in 1975 and went on to create one of the most celebrated American films of all time and unquestionably the greatest score to ever accompany a film.

*“He has rediscovered something that was very popular and important in the 1930s and 1940s...John Williams is actually one of the greatest storytellers of all time.”*

- Steven Spielberg, “Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame Ceremony,” June 23, 2000

## CHAPTER THREE:

### John Williams and a Close Analysis of the Music of *Star Wars*

#### John Williams

“John Williams is probably the most successful composer in film history.”<sup>301</sup> This statement is from an analytical book on the film music of John Williams, an American composer who dominated the final thirty years of the 20th century cinema, reinvented the way film music was to be composed, and has continued to be prolific in today’s times. He is one of the most award-winning Hollywood personalities of our time, with five Academy Awards to his name as well as twenty-one Grammys, four Golden Globes, five Emmys, honorary degrees from multiple prestigious American universities and, most impressively, forty-nine Oscar nominations - second only to Walt Disney.<sup>302</sup> Yet up until recent years, his work has been largely ignored by scholars, both American and international, and his image has been firmly associated with consumerist America and imperialist Hollywood cinema. Columnist Tom Shone wrote in 1998 that “if, as some argue, American cinema has conquered the world, then Williams can lay claim to have written the victory march.”<sup>303</sup> This pessimistic and dismissive view has produced a serious consequence in the denial of Williams’s most important contribution to film music: that is, the

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<sup>301</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 3.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 4.

revival of the classical Hollywood score.<sup>304</sup> Much has been written about the powerful marriage of Williams's music with Spielberg's vision (see Cooke, page 461), and three of his five Academy Awards have been borne of this fruitful relationship. Even more has been written on the frequent claim that he single-handedly saved the classical film score from a generation of pop soundtracks and electronic music in film, to the point of being overstated and dramatically simplified.<sup>305 306</sup> However, it is John Williams's sweepingly romantic scores accompanying films like 1977's *Star Wars* as well as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *E.T: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and *Jurassic Park* (1996), that inspired a new generation to explore the wonders of symphonic film music.<sup>307</sup> He is still active today, having recently worked on the newest *Star Wars* film entitled *The Force Awakens* (2015) and is currently working on the 2016 film *The BFG*, based on the Roald Dahl book of the same name.

John Towner Williams was born in 1932 to Esther Towner and Johnny Williams. Growing up in New York, the younger Williams was exposed to a plethora of musical sources - his father was a percussionist in the CBS Radio Orchestra and a member of the six-piece band known as the Raymond Scott Quintette,<sup>308</sup> which excelled at a revitalized form of swing music in the 1930's. Although the younger Williams was most proficient with the piano, he also learned to play the trumpet and trombone along with the bassoon and clarinet (interestingly enough, Spielberg himself was also a proficient clarinetist and was even a part of the recording sessions for 1975's *Jaws*<sup>309</sup>). However, piano soon became Williams's obvious choice of instrument and he began actively pursuing a career in solo classical performance. He studied with Robert Van

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<sup>304</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 4.

<sup>305</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 456.

<sup>306</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 234.

<sup>307</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 81.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, 86.

<sup>309</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 461.

Eps, a noted pianist based in Los Angeles who also was a notable film score orchestrator, and it is here that the first seeds of film were most likely planted in the young future composer's head.<sup>310</sup> During his time in the military in the early 1950's, Williams made strides as a conductor, arranger and film composer with a score for a documentary about the Maritime Provinces of Canada, where he was stationed.<sup>311</sup> Upon returning stateside, he studied at The Juilliard School of Music in Manhattan with esteemed piano instructor Rosina Lhévinne.<sup>312</sup>

In 1956, Williams moved to Los Angeles and applied for the role of pianist in Columbia Pictures' resident orchestra, thus entering into the world of film music by way of performer rather than arranger or composer. Of the many films to which he contributed on piano, some notable examples are *Some Like it Hot* (1959, music by Adolph Deutsch), *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961, music by Henry Mancini), *West Side Story* (1961, music by Leonard Bernstein), and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962, music by Elmer Bernstein). The most prominent of all of his contributions is the famous riff that opens the theme to Henry Mancini's music for *Peter Gunn*, a television series that kicked off in 1958 and aired until 1961.<sup>313</sup>

Gradually, Williams found his work and energy divided into two equally influential fields: serving as orchestrator for such composers as Dimitri Tiomkin and Adolph Deutsch, and flexing his composing muscles for thirty-nine one-hour TV shows a year.<sup>314</sup> This meant that the deadline was the law, and operating procedure was to get it done quickly rather than skillfully: "What I wrote may not have been good - it probably wasn't good; but the main idea was to get it done, and I got it done."<sup>315</sup> This high-pressure working environment was intensely similar to the

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<sup>310</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 86.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, 88.



old studio way of doing things that Max Steiner labored under, although the television world was rather smaller in proportion.<sup>316</sup> What Williams may have lacked in creative output for these shows, he made up for in learning experiences; this was continued under the tutelage of the contemporary greats of Hollywood, including Franz Waxman, Alfred Newman, and Bernard Herrmann, although Williams once confessed that Conrad Salinger's influence as an orchestrator was strongest on him: "I learned a tremendous amount from him - mostly from looking at his scores. -...I think I learned more from Conrad Salinger than anyone else, even though I don't write anything like him."<sup>317</sup> This influence, combined with the experience in television working under high-pressure schedules, was a major factor in the shaping of Williams's neoclassical style of composition as well as his own work habits.<sup>318</sup>

After a few projects in film, including a 1964 remake of *The Killers*, whose original score was composed by Miklós Rózsa, Williams found himself in a similar situation as the Hungarian composer, pigeonholed in the mid-1960's into raunchy comedies followed by the disaster movie genre, including notable scores for *The Poseidon Adventure* (1972) and *The Towering Inferno* (1974).<sup>319</sup> While sometimes constrained in this regard, Williams was still able to showcase a multifaceted understanding of movie scoring, with an Americana Copland-inspired score for *The Cowboys* (1972), a monothematic and haunting score in the style of *Laura* (1944, score by David Raksin) for *The Long Goodbye* (1973), and incorporate popular culture dance rhythms into both comedic and dramatic scores (*The Towering Inferno* is an example of the latter, while 1967's *A Guide for the Married Man* is the former).<sup>320</sup> While the young Williams felt obligated, like so many other contemporary film composers, to include at least one pop song in many of his scores,

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<sup>316</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 88.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, 90-91.

he found the task to be at times distasteful: “It’s a practice that can be vile and obnoxious...It isn’t a great thing for the art of music vis-a-vis film scoring;” however, he also acknowledged that the music industry was, after all, a business as well as an art, and popular songs made revenue for the industry.<sup>321</sup>

Thus, the composer was able to straddle the two worlds with his penchant for using the long-discarded technique of leitmotif as well as his love of underscoring in his films where applicable.<sup>322</sup> In an early 1970’s interview, Williams sounds less like his contemporaries, especially Mancini, and more like a second Korngold: “I think a composer should think of the dialogue as part of the score; he could write it as accompaniment for a violin concerto rather than compose a score to exist on its own.”<sup>323</sup> Orchestration is also markedly different: instead of Mancini’s characteristic usage of woodwinds for romantic scenes, Williams evokes the classical style with strings, most notably in *The Killers* as well as *Penelope* (1966).<sup>324</sup> However, this idea of being the bridge between two worlds truly comes to fruition with Williams’s work on *Jaws* in 1975.<sup>325</sup>

The mid-1970’s was a turning point for Williams, as he was building his resume with a four-movie partnership with director Mark Rydell, with whom a mutually beneficial relationship was borne: Williams once stated that the director was “very comfortable with music....it’s very good to work with him on a certain kind of scene in a movie.”<sup>326</sup> This ease of partnership earned Williams his first Oscar nomination, for *The Reivers* (1969) and incredible praise for his work on 1972’s *The Cowboys*, most notably by up-and-coming director Steven Spielberg, who

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<sup>321</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 91.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 92; 98.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 98-9.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, 108.

approached Williams later in 1972 and asked him to compose the music for his film directorial debut. Spielberg remarked that the Americana sound heard throughout *The Reivers* made him yearn to meet “this modern relic from a lost era of film symphonies.”<sup>327</sup> The resulting work, 1974’s *The Sugarland Express*, made it easy for Spielberg to decide who should compose for his next film, the ambitious thrilling disaster-like picture *Jaws*; not only did the two work well together, but at that time Williams was *the* composer in Hollywood to get when it came to disaster movies.<sup>328</sup>

Right from the start, the production for *Jaws* was a nightmare. Favoring realism and on-set shooting over studio recording, Spielberg found himself filming at sea and plagued by technical difficulties that resulted from this decision. The biggest problem was with the shark itself, a mechanical monstrosity that sank to the bottom the first time it was put in the water and was altogether a thoroughly unconvincing lead character.<sup>329</sup> Because of this, the shark is conspicuously withheld from the audience until the final act of the film, and all scenes featuring the shark up until this point utilize point-of-view shots or other visual indicators that the shark is just below the surface of the water.<sup>330</sup> Fearing the film would be a box office flop, if not cut altogether from reaching theaters, Williams’s score had to turn a puppet into a monster and make the implausible impressive; this significantly echoed the problems that Cooper and Selznick had with their own puppet over forty years ago, until Steiner saved the film with his score for *King Kong*.<sup>331</sup> Just as Steiner’s score not only saved the film but ushered in a classical era of composing for films, so too did Williams’s score bring about a neoclassical film score style in

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<sup>327</sup> Joseph McBride, *Steven Spielberg: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 222.

<sup>328</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 109.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

1975 and onwards.<sup>332</sup> The term *neoclassical* can be defined simply as a new take on a classical approach to the concept, be it filmmaking or scoring - in the case of collaborations between Williams and Steven Spielberg, it is often both. Audissino defines films of this time that are “neoclassical” in style as films that “overtly paid homage to the classical Hollywood tradition and imitated that style.”<sup>333</sup> Because of Williams’s attempt at paying homage to the work of the classical composers with techniques and structure found commonly in classical scores, while remaining updated and relevant for contemporary audiences, the composer therefore can be labeled as neoclassical as well.<sup>334</sup>

The most notable aspect of this score is its depiction of the lead role, the massive man-eating shark that terrorizes a sleepy New England town. While Spielberg expected a traditionally dissonant and unnerving motif, Williams opted for something simpler and arguably more realistic to the character with a pulsating rhythmic idea with no melody or historical associations with it at all.<sup>335</sup> In this way, the motif was more primitive and instinctual than melodic and sonorous (see Appendix 3, ex.1). The repetitive and rhythmic motif was also effective in its ability to be easily deconstructed and reconfigured for varying scenes, providing an aural version of the shark’s movement through space, as Audissino describes it.<sup>336</sup> This technique, along with Williams’s adherence to the spatial movements of the beast, is standard of classical Hollywood composers, audibly recalling the three-note motif that defined a monster and a movie in 1933. This theme recalls not only Steiner and *King Kong*, but also a hint of Bernard Herrmann and his driving rhythmic figures to his scores, most strikingly in the opening sequence to Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960). The oscillation between two notes a half-step apart also brings to

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<sup>332</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 110.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid, 112.

mind the final movement of Antonin Dvorak's grand "New World Symphony" (see Appendix 3 ex. 2).

The motif's orchestration is also paramount to its success: with the use of a low and dark timbre for the abyss in which the monster resides, this motif is sharply contrasted with the more melodic, Westernized music for the humans who live ashore.<sup>337</sup> This is most fully realized with music like the high school band playing early in the film (with director Spielberg contributing on clarinet to add an amateur-like quality to the sound) or with the chase at sea that draws upon a certain Austrian composer's seafaring scores: "It suddenly becomes very Korngoldian...you expect to see Errol Flynn at the helm of this thing. It gave us a laugh."<sup>338 339</sup>

The use of symphonic scoring and simple leitmotivic qualities rarely found in films of the time paid off for all parties involved, as the film was the first since the end of the classical era of film scores to gross more than \$100 million - eventually earning \$260 million in domestic theatres and over \$400 million worldwide<sup>340</sup> - and earning Williams a multitude of awards, including his second Academy Award and his first for original music.<sup>341</sup> A variety of reasons can be used to explain this win over scores by Alex North and Jerry Goldsmith from that year, but the undeniable explanation is Williams's conviction that non-diegetic music could still work in films and yet be accessible to contemporary audiences, as critics compared his score with those of the earlier generation: "This was an important part of what we got from the movies once, and there are many signs that many [of] us want it back again."<sup>342</sup> Spielberg himself has

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<sup>337</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 114.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

<sup>339</sup> Jon Burlingame, "John Williams Recalls Jaws," Film Music Society, last modified August 14, 2012, accessed March 26, 2016, [http://www.filmmusicsociety.org/news\\_events/features/2012/081412.html](http://www.filmmusicsociety.org/news_events/features/2012/081412.html).

<sup>340</sup> "Box Office History for Jaws Movies," The Numbers, accessed March 26, 2016, [http://www.filmmusicsociety.org/news\\_events/features/2012/081412.html](http://www.filmmusicsociety.org/news_events/features/2012/081412.html).

<sup>341</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 117.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

said that the score was responsible for half of the film's success;<sup>343</sup> coupled with Spielberg's imagery and visionary instincts, it is no wonder that Americans were scared out of the water that summer.<sup>344</sup> The score was also hugely beneficial to Williams himself. Says the composer about the film: "With Spielberg, it was the beginnings of our relationship really, and a lot of opportunity came my way as a result of it, including the *Star Wars* films."<sup>345</sup>

### George Lucas and the Making of *Star Wars*

In 1971, George Lucas premiered his feature-length directorial debut, the story of which was based on one of his undergraduate projects while at USC. The film, *THX 1138*, was not an immediate box office success upon release, but has become a cult favorite over the decades, especially following the release of *Star Wars* a few years later. The film was a "dazzling technical achievement" that showcased Lucas's unique skills as a filmmaker, based in large part on his experiences at USC under the tutelage of Lester Novros and others; however, the film was considerably lacking in fresh plot points as well as creative ways for executing the story.<sup>346</sup> The story is simple dystopian science-fiction: a world ruled by a Communist-inspired party that prohibits emotions, pleasure or intercourse, and everyone is given a name consisting of three letters and four numbers, our main character THX 1138 being just one example. The storytelling is flat and lacking in momentum, as the characters feel indistinguishable and caricature-like and the world is simply a rehashed Orwellian landscape.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 110.

<sup>344</sup> Burlingame, "John Williams Recalls *Jaws*," Film Music Society.

<sup>345</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 118.

<sup>346</sup> Julie Herbert, ed., *Celluloid Symphonies: Texts and Contexts in Film Music History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 359-60.

<sup>347</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 69.

When Lucas's next film, the energized and sophisticated *American Graffiti* (1973), was released, audiences couldn't believe it was the same director. Says Lucas, "After I finished *THX*, I was considered to be a cold, weird director, a science-fiction sort of guy who carried a calculator. ...So I thought, maybe I'll do something exactly the opposite. If they want warm human comedy, I'll give them one, just to show I can do it." Both movies are personal to Lucas; while *THX 1138* was representative of him as a filmmaker, displaying his technical achievements and understanding, *American Graffiti* delivered the humanistic side of Lucas, with its homage to growing up and figuring out who one is as a person in some of the most transformative years of one's life.<sup>348</sup> With *Graffiti*, Lucas turned a meager \$700,000 budget into one of the most profitable movies in history and was finally able to begin production on his so-called "space opera," a film that would eventually be given the title of *Star Wars*.<sup>349</sup>

When George Lucas began his search for a film composer who could write what he envisioned, he turned to his friend and counterpart in the industry, Steven Spielberg. This was in early 1975, before Spielberg's *Jaws* would open that June, and Spielberg was still working in close association with Williams on the film. Says Lucas, "[Spielberg and I] were talking about the film...and I said, 'I want a classical score, I want the Korngold kind of feel about this thing, it's an old fashion [*sic*] kinda movie and I want that kind of grand soundtrack they used to have on movies.' And he said, 'The guy you gotta talk to is John Williams. He made *Jaws*, I love him, he is the greatest composer who ever lived. You gotta talk to him!'"<sup>350</sup>

Lucas and Williams met a few months later, at which time Williams viewed the movie and reportedly read the script, contrary to his own habit, although this has been thrown into

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<sup>348</sup> Herbert, *Celluloid Symphonies: Texts and Contexts*, 360.

<sup>349</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 69.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

question by Williams himself;<sup>351</sup> immediately following this encounter, the composer made the critical decision of convincing Lucas to use original music for the film. Lucas had been working with a temporary track throughout pre-production, listening to music by Late Romantic composers like Gustav Mahler, Richard Wagner, Gustav Holst, and Richard Strauss, as well as film composers like Korngold and Miklós Rózsa,<sup>352</sup> and was aiming to make a film with a similar soundtrack to another sci-film made nine years previous - that of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Williams, however, believed the film was best served another way: "2001 and several other film have utilized this technique very well. But what I think this technique doesn't do is take a piece of melodic material, develop it and relate it to a character all the way through the film. ...For formal reasons, I felt that the film wanted thematic unity."<sup>353</sup>

To achieve this unity, Williams and Lucas decided on a familiar approach to film scoring and looked to the past for answers. Film composers like Miklós Rózsa and especially Erich Korngold were used as inspiration for the style and tone of the film score, as well as the late-Romantic composers that made up the majority of Lucas's own temp track. However, the studios were skeptical of this approach: if science fiction spelled failure at the box-office, a symphonic orchestral score in the classical style of Korngold was even more so. Few studios wanted anything to do with this film at first - 20th Century Fox only picked it up after United Artists and Universal both abandoned the project - and 20th Century Fox Records even planned to not release a tie-in album record with the film.<sup>354</sup>

Although the film was perceived by the studios as science fiction and woefully marketed as such (and therefore a guaranteed flop in 1970s theaters), it is anything but. The setting is *terra*

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<sup>351</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 235.

<sup>352</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 71.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, 73.



*incognita*, as Williams puts it, but the story is a thoroughly universal story experienced throughout history, from stories of samurais like the ones in *The Hidden Fortress* (1958, directed by Akira Kurosawa) to heroic westerns like *The Searchers* (1956, directed by John Ford) and most notably the *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* serials of the 1940s that Lucas grew up watching.<sup>355</sup> In this way, the film is almost a super-genre of sorts, blending the Western with the Eastern, the mythology with the science fiction, the comedic with the epic, and even the future with the past, as evident in the film's opening text: "A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." And although the weighty philosophical texts of Joseph Campbell were an undoubted influence on Lucas's mythology for *Star Wars*, the film is remarkably lacking in philosophical subtexts - a far cry from the enigmatic *2001: A Space Odyssey* and its symbolic Star-Child, or *The Planet of the Apes* (1968) and its on-the-nose subject material.<sup>356</sup> The closest it approaches this philosophy is in using the archetypal story of a hero's journey, which Campbell expands on in length in his work *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. To briefly summarize, the journey begins with an introduction of our hero in a sympathetic and understanding light, so that many can relate; there is then the *call to adventure*, when our hero takes the "first step into a larger world," as mentor figure Ben Kenobi remarks to Luke halfway through *Star Wars*. Throughout the journey, the hero is tested and must endure painful ordeals to accomplish the mission, but in the end the hero triumphs and returns home a changed character. This is roughly the structure of *Star Wars*, but with an interesting twist that speaks to *The Hidden Fortress*'s influence: the main character, Luke Skywalker, is not introduced at the onset of the film, but instead after the viewer follows around the two lowly droids, R2-D2 and C-3PO, as they escape from the besieged Rebel ship and wander about the deserts of Tatooine. Upon meeting our hero Luke, we discover that

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<sup>355</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 69.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

he is just a young man who is torn between his duties to his family and his yearning for adventure and wonder beyond his confined world, instantly relatable and universally familiar while remaining compelling to watch. As the film progresses, we meet his mentor Ben Kenobi, a noble Jedi Knight played by Alec Guinness, who aids Luke in his discovery of the ability known as the Force. The two heroes, with the droids and help from a smuggler and his sidekick (Harrison Ford and Peter Mayhew, respectively), embark on a dangerous mission to rescue the captured Princess from the evil Empire and deliver the stolen Death Star plans to the underdog Rebel Alliance. The group of heroes prevails, defeating Darth Vader and destroying the dreaded Death Star, and the film ends with a regal and instantly iconic ceremony that celebrates our heroes as they receive medals of honor from the Princess and the Rebellion. The film's structure is deeply indebted to Campbell's philosophy, rarely deviating from the age-old story of a hero and his adventures through time and space. For a film with such a mythic and straightforward plot, an equally familiar soundtrack had to be employed. Fortunately for Lucas, Steven Spielberg had recommended the perfect man for the job.

### *Star Wars: A Score Summary and Analysis*

John Williams once declared that both the film as well as the score's successes are easily attributable to "some cross-cultural connection with the mythic aspects of the film...The films [*Star Wars* and its sequels] surprised everyone I think - George Lucas included - in that they reached across cultural bounds and beyond language into some kind of mythic, shared remembered past."<sup>357</sup> This approach of grandeur rooted in a universal mythology makes sense when considering the target audience of the film. Both Lucas and Williams understood this

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<sup>357</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 236.

film's purpose was for a younger generation that wasn't raised on the Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers serials that Lucas's generation had adored. Williams once remarked that "I have no pretensions about [the *Star Wars*] score, which I wrote for what I thought was a children's movie. All of us who worked on it thought it would be a great Saturday-morning show. None of us had any idea that it was going to become a great world success."<sup>358</sup> Williams expressed a similar sentiment in a 1997 interview with Craig Byrd: "In my mind I was thinking of it as a kind of Saturday afternoon movie for kids really, a kind of popcorn, Buck Rogers show. A good, you know, sound and light show for young people."<sup>359</sup> To achieve this, Williams wrote themes that were simple, distinct, and memorable to showcase each character in their own light, and help aid even the youngest listener with predicting what will occur based on the established musical ideas. If Vader or the Empire make an appearance on-screen, most likely their three-note motif will accompany them throughout. If the Force is mentioned, the theme makes itself known. Said Williams on the subject, "The emotion would have to be large, a sense of good versus evil made palpable. Simple tunes would be the key."<sup>360</sup>

The primary goal of the film's score was to ground the storytelling in a shared musical history, since much of the film centered on far-off worlds, unknown characters and unseen sights. In a 1997 interview, Williams enthused that "...the music was - this is actually George Lucas's conception and a very good one - emotionally familiar. It was not music that might describe *terra incognita* but the opposite of that, music that would put us in touch with very familiar and remembered emotions, which for me as a musician translated into the use of a nineteenth-century operatic idiom."<sup>361 362</sup> Although there are no direct quotations of classical

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<sup>358</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 462.

<sup>359</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 236.

<sup>360</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 73.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

composers in the film score, there are both subtle and obtuse nods to them, from orchestration techniques to rhythmic ideas and similar-sounding cluster chords. Williams remarked of this intentional decision: “[A] lot of these references are deliberate. They’re an attempt to evoke a response in the audience where we want to elicit a certain kind of reaction.”<sup>363</sup> The references are not constrained to just late-Romantic composers of European descent; the “Burning Homestead” track, which accompanies the scene when Luke returns home to discover his aunt and uncle murdered by the Empire, notably features a quotation of the “Dies Irae” chant from the Mass of the Dead, scored in a style reminiscent of Berlioz’s “Symphony Fantastique” for trombones. However, the most common quotations and musical concepts found in the score are of late-Romantic composers like Holst and Strauss as well as elements of twentieth-century dialects like avant-garde and pandiatonicism - diatonic music without the limitations of functional harmony - that Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland championed.<sup>364</sup> For example, Cooke notes that the eerie opening of Part II of Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* is undeniably used as the model for the Dune Sea of Tatooine theme, while the opening movement of Holst’s *The Planets*, entitled “Mars, the Bringer of War,” was consciously borrowed as energizing music to launch the film (a full analysis of the opening scene can be found below).<sup>365</sup> The sequels are no different, as the Imperial March theme written for the evil Darth Vader has a strong connection to the Tchaikovsky ballet *Swan Lake*, while fellow Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev can be found in the Ewoks’s parade music in *Return of the Jedi* (1983).<sup>366</sup>

The most powerful and successful aspect of the *Star Wars* score, which can be found in all subsequent sequels as well as prequels to the movie, is its use of the leitmotif technique. A

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<sup>362</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 236.

<sup>363</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 77.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

<sup>365</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 463.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, 463.

leitmotif, in the simplest sense, is a musical figure that can be used as representative of either a person, place or even something as vague as a concept - in *Star Wars*, for example, the supernatural and mystical presence of “the Force” has its own theme, as do characters and settings. These musical tokens, which can be defined either melodically or harmonically, are often given the name of leitmotif after Richard Wagner’s extended use of the technique in his operas like *The Ring of the Nibelung*. As Justin London describes it, “the use of leitmotifs in filmic contexts is generally regarded as a stylistic continuation of Wagner’s musical practice, one that links the musical techniques of late nineteenth-century Germany and the ‘classic film score.’”<sup>367</sup> This connection is crucial to *Star Wars*, serving as an enormous link to a shared musical past - both to Steiner’s pioneering work as well as Wagner himself. Indeed, many similarities exist between Wagner and Williams: writes Prendergast, “In his book, *A History of Western Music*, Donald Jay Grout points out that, ‘For Wagner, the function of music was to serve the ends of dramatic expression.’ This statement could just as easily be applied to the function of music in a film.”<sup>368</sup>

There are quite a few themes present throughout the score, including themes for Luke, Leia, and Ben Kenobi, which is usually referred to as the “Force theme.” The Empire has a three-note motif, while the Rebels have their own abbreviated theme. Even the Jawas, scavengers of Tatooine whose primary role is to introduce the droids and vicariously the audience to our main hero, are given their own Prokofiev-inspired leitmotif displayed throughout the opening act of the film.<sup>369</sup> The most significant of the themes is the first theme heard in the film, that of Luke Skywalker. Williams describes this theme as being “idealistic and heroic” with an upward flourish that defines both the character as well as the spirit of the film itself: “[the theme has] a very uplifted kind of heraldic quality. Larger than he is. His idealism is more

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<sup>367</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 85.

<sup>368</sup> Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, 40.

<sup>369</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 72.

the subject than the character itself, I would say.”<sup>370</sup> By contrast, Leia’s theme, romantic in nature and scored beautifully for the timeless French horn, Williams’s lifelong love,<sup>371</sup> displays both her regal upbringing as well as her spunky personality in both its shifting tonality and its secondary theme. Both the Luke and the Leia themes prominently feature an ascending interval to open the introductory motif; however, the slight difference between the two - Luke’s theme begins with a perfect fourth followed by a perfect fifth, while Leia’s is a major sixth - is a crucial difference. Luke’s theme is, as Williams puts it, larger than life, undeviating and repetitive in its contour and imbued with a boyish understanding of adventure across the stars; Leia’s theme is steeped in a major key setting yet features variations in tonality that bespeak of a wisdom beyond her years (see Appendix 3, ex. 3 and 4; ex. 5 compares Luke’s theme to *King’s Row*).

A key element in Williams’s use of the leitmotif is its development that parallels the characters’ arcs over both the first film as well as the trilogy as a whole. Many composers of the 1930s would insert character themes each time the character in question entered a scene, without further development of the music that depicted the transformation of said character over the course of the movie; Williams by comparison creates, as Paulus puts it, a “web of leitmotifs in a Wagnerian sense” that transform throughout the films, fill multiple roles and purposes in the movies, and are interrelated thematically to one another.<sup>372</sup> Both Luke’s and Leia’s themes, for example, begin on the dominant of the key; Luke’s then climbs to the tonic, while Leia’s reaches the major third above the tonic. While this opening ascending jump is commonplace in Williams’s music, especially post-*Star Wars - Superman* (1978) has a nearly identical opening theme to Luke’s theme, for example, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *E.T: The Extra-*

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<sup>370</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 240.

<sup>371</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 75.

<sup>372</sup> Irena Paulus, “Williams versus Wagner or an Attempt at Linking Musical Epics,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 31, no. 2 (December 200): 157-8, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/310840>.

*Terrestrial* (1982) both have similar contours to their melodies<sup>373</sup> - it cannot merely be explained as a Williams mannerism, and indeed must be looked at as interconnected thematic material.

Luke's theme and its development is just one example of this intricacy. When we first hear it, it is accompanying not the main character's first appearance, but rather the opening credits. This extends the importance of Luke's theme beyond his character, since it serves also as both the main title music and the backbone to the *Star Wars* musical landscape. The next time we hear it, the theme is played immediately after we hear Luke's name for the first time, in an almost too-transparent manner. Leia's theme is treated similarly, as the opening phrase of the theme is heard the first two times she makes her appearance in the film. Both of these times, she is still hiding in the recesses of her diplomatic ship, the *Tantive IV*, and as such her theme is dominant in those scenes; when she is captured, however, her theme disappears from the scene in which, bound and guarded, she boldly converses with the evil Darth Vader.

When we first witness Leia on board the besieged ship, her theme is not the first theme we hear; instead, it is the Force theme that accompanies Leia as she stealthily hides the Death Star plans within R2-D2. This is an example of the level of craftsmanship involved; knowing that the message will eventually be revealed to both Ben Kenobi and the audience, Williams connects the visual image of the plans for Ben Kenobi with the character's musical cue. Interestingly, we hear the Force theme in its fullest realization in the track "Hologram/Binary Sunset," providing music for some of the most iconic imagery in both the world of *Star Wars* and pop culture in general (see Appendix 3, ex.6). As Luke leaves the dinner table, he wanders outside and beholds the twin setting suns; Williams's theme, led first by the French horn and then by the full string ensemble, conveys Luke's pull towards a destiny outside of the farm and amongst the stars. Ben Kenobi by this point has only been mentioned, just a few minutes before

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<sup>373</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 464.

by the hologram of Leia, and will not be seen for a little longer, yet the theme is strongest even without his presence. As Buhler puts it, “Moments like this one when the music seems not entirely bound up with its semiotic function are what gives this music its mythical character. The music seems to intuit connections that are beyond immediate rational comprehension.”<sup>374</sup>

The “Force theme” is the most commonly used theme in the film, fitting just as neatly in ceremonial marches and battle music as well as the poignantly scored “Binary Sunset” scene. Richards links the versatility of the theme to its contour, which mirrors the narrative structure of the film and as such can be labeled the “struggle” contour, similar to the hero’s journey and struggle.<sup>375</sup> The theme is broken up into four main ideas, with the first three comprising a slow ascending motion and with the fourth collapsing from the climactic high G and landing on the tonic where we started from. With this phrasing, Williams conveys a “striving quality” that is representative of our heroes and their struggle against the forces of evil.<sup>376</sup> Running parallel to the narrative structure, the “Force theme” never actually resolves in the film until the Throne Room scene; this resolution accompanies and mirrors the Rebels’ destruction of the Death Star and triumph over the Empire.<sup>377</sup>

As themes are introduced in the film, so are their multiple purposes within the context of the film. For example, the Force theme is applied not just when Ben Kenobi is present, but also when the Force is as well, and evolves from this application to take on the role of fate in the film. When Luke returns to his farm after meeting Ben Kenobi for the first time and finds his aunt and uncle slain, the theme returns in an augmented and heightened version, played by the strings

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<sup>374</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 44.

<sup>375</sup> Mark Richards, “John Williams Themes, Part 1 of 6: The Force Theme,” *Film Music Notes* (blog), entry posted March 2, 2013, accessed April 29, 2016, <http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/john-williams-themes-part-1-the-force-theme/>.

<sup>376</sup> Richards, “John Williams Themes,” *Film Music Notes* (blog).

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.



instead of the French horn. This rendition of the theme tells the audience what the visuals only suggest: that Luke has reached a crossroads in his life and that the only option is to learn the ways of the Force and stop the Empire's newest battle station. When Ben Kenobi sacrifices himself in the duel with Vader aboard the Death Star, the Force theme poignantly fills the scene, and from then on is used as a musical synonym for the presence of the Force.<sup>378</sup> Over the course of the film, the theme expands from representing both Ben Kenobi and the Force, and becomes synonymous both with the struggle as well as the victory of the Rebels against the Empire, notably in the climactic trench run on the Death Star.<sup>379</sup> Like the Luke theme, the Force theme is very much an expansive theme that serves as a kind of overarching and unifying structure for the music of the film. Says Williams, "I think of Ben Kenobi's theme as reflecting both him and also the Jedi Knights...It also serves to represent the Force, the spiritual-philosophical belief of the Jedi Knights, and the Old Republic."<sup>380</sup> Because its presence is constant and its use is manifold, the Force theme truly is what Wagner would label a "thematic image," serving as the "core of narrative and musical happenings."<sup>381</sup>

This is best realized in comparison with the Leia theme. In the Force theme, the first idea concludes with a descent from the minor third scale degree to the fifth scale degree, a jump of a minor sixth. The Leia theme begins with a major sixth leap from the fifth scale degree to the major third scale degree. It is therefore reasonable to argue that these introductory motifs are mirror images of one another. Williams continues this linkage of themes in later installments, basing the Han and Leia love theme in *Empire Strikes Back* (1980) off of Leia's theme and

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<sup>378</sup> Paulus, "Williams versus Wagner or an Attempt," 165.

<sup>379</sup> Mark Richards, "Celebrating Star Wars Themes," *Film Music Notes* (blog), entry posted November 8, 2015, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.filmmusicnotes.com/celebrating-star-wars-part-1-of-6-uses-of-the-force-theme/>.

<sup>380</sup> Paulus, "Williams versus Wagner or an Attempt," 166.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*, 166.

combining Luke's theme with Leia's to create the "Luke and Leia" theme found in *Return of the Jedi* (1983) (for a full analysis of the Luke and Leia theme, see Paulus 170-171).

While the themes are arguably interconnected and written similarly, it is not clear if they were composed in this regard. For *Star Wars*, Williams was writing music for just the one film, as there was no discussion of potential sequels at that point in time; any semblance of unity between the three films comes truly from simple development of the themes introduced in *Star Wars*, and perhaps simple instinct. Says Williams on the matter, "I suppose it was a natural but unconscious metamorphosis of musical themes that created something that may seem to have more architectural and conscious interrelatedness than I actually intended to put there. If it's there, to the degree it is there, it's a kind of happy accident if you like."<sup>382</sup>

#### Main Title and Imperial Attack: A Close Analysis

"A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..."

This is the proclamation that opens the movie and is considered one of the most famous lines of text to accompany a film in the history of American cinema. Written in bold blue lettering against a solid black background, this shot is the first thing moviegoers saw immediately following the 20th Century Fox Fanfare, written by Alfred Newman in the mid-1930s. This music is particularly important, as not only is it the studio's official fanfare, but it also brings to mind an older style of composing which had been largely absent the two decades previous to *Star Wars*, what Buhler terms "an earlier 'heroic' era of filmmaking."<sup>383</sup> With its

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<sup>382</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 237.

<sup>383</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 33.

mythic intent and its vague description, the single line of text sets the stage for the rest of the film. This is both the quietest and the most intimate moment in the entire film, as Williams's score occupies a vast majority of the film, but is distinctly absent here.<sup>384 385</sup>

In the next shot, the music is synchronized perfectly with the visual, and Lucas's space opera becomes a world unto its own in that singular moment. The B  $\flat$  major tonality of Newman's fanfare moments before is reaffirmed in the opening brass-heavy chord, with a preference for the B  $\flat$  over the D and the F and therefore creating an almost transparent imbalance to the sound; this is synonymous with the giant letters in gold and black that have replaced the intimate blue letters of before.<sup>386</sup> In line with the mythos of *Star Wars*, Buhler writes that "this is the nodal point - the original image of plenitude - from which everything else in the series flows: the mythic aura of *Star Wars* is born of this synchronization of music and image."<sup>387</sup> With this stinger-like chord, played by the full orchestra, two traits of the past are instantly reaffirmed with one chord: the use of the symphonic sound and the tight adherence to synchronization of image and music (see Appendix 3, ex.7).<sup>388</sup>

One important note, a fact glossed over by Buhler, is that this opening was not the original idea for the score. One of the final tracks to the accompanying CD is a compilation of "Alternate Main Titles," the majority of which begin with a crescendo from a dominant-to-tonic leap.<sup>389</sup> This was soon abandoned, writes Audissino, because "as the title appears suddenly from the black, so music should accordingly appear suddenly from the silence."<sup>390</sup> Similarly, as the

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<sup>384</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 74.

<sup>385</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 462.

<sup>386</sup> Buhler, Flinn, and Neumeyer, *Music and Cinema*, 33.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>388</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 74.

<sup>389</sup> "Star Wars - Creating the Main Title Theme [Recording Session Audio, 1977]," video file, YouTube, posted by SGTBizarro, May 29, 2015, accessed April 19, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FG3nNGqANhE>.

<sup>390</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 74.

gold text that proclaims the film's title is immediate and overwhelming to behold but regresses into the stars rapidly, so too is the music overwhelmingly B ♭ major from the full orchestra before most of the instruments drop out, leaving the violins on tremolo and the brass beginning their quartal harmony fanfare. This gives the illusion of an overwhelming chord that is then suddenly hollow, just as the words appear awe-inspiring but quickly recede into the distance.

John Williams explains his approach in writing the opening theme to *Star Wars*, noting its parallel to the image on-screen:

The opening of the film was visually so stunning, with that lettering that comes out and the spaceships and so on, that it was clear that music had to kind of smack you right in the eye and do something very strong. ...I tried to construct something that again would have this idealistic, uplifting but military flare to it, and set it in the brass instruments...so that we'd have a blazingly brilliant fanfare at the opening of the piece. And contrast that with the second theme that was lyrical and romantic and adventurous also.<sup>391</sup>

This theme is divided into three parts, with the first theme being the Luke leitmotif orchestrated predominantly for brass, followed by the more romantic idea that consists of the second theme, and returning to the Luke motif to conclude the opening credits. In line with the synchronization of image to music, each theme corresponds to a paragraph in the scrolling text that opens the film: "It is a period of civil war," for example, is almost perfectly synchronized with the opening of Luke's theme, while the paragraph beginning with "During the battle..." corresponds to the more lyrical paragraph and the final theme is matched up with "Pursued by the Empire's sinister agents."<sup>392</sup> This is almost too obvious a move for Williams to make, as it is reminiscent of such openings as Steiner's score to *King Kong*. That score introduces the Kong theme as it is most commonly heard - brash, terrifying, and world-defining - before abruptly switching to a

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<sup>391</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 74-5.

<sup>392</sup> "Star Wars - Opening Scene (1977) [1080p HD]," video file, YouTube, posted by Marcelo Zuniga, March 9, 2015, accessed April 29, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHfLyMAHrQE>.

bittersweet and emotional incarnation that accompanies the pseudo-Arabian proverb describing how Beauty would kill the Beast, synchronized perfectly with the changing images on the screen.

As the text dissipates into the stars, so too does the theme, leaving us with quietly oscillating strings and harp voicing uncertain tonalities, warning us of the events about to transpire. As the flute solo plays lyrically yet still lacking a clear definition, the camera begins a slow pan down and the string section responds, playing furiously and rising in volume until an overwhelming and unified pitch sounds; this low C is synchronized with the sight of the planet Tatooine as well as its nearby moons. Out of this immense pedaltone, the first instance of what might be called the “Rebel Fanfare” appears; this theme is comprised of minor thirds stacked on one another to create a diminished chord that signifies their constant peril. Before we can hear the theme in its fullest realization, however, Williams interrupts with the first of many nods to past composers - in this instance, “Mars, the Bringer of War” by Gustav Holst is employed, to dramatic effect. Both the music and the message are congruent with the actions on screen, as a tiny Rebel ship speeds past on-screen, followed immediately by explosions and flashes from the lumbering and terrifying Star Destroyer, whose presence is godlike and obviously violent in comparison with the outgunned Rebel ship.<sup>393</sup> While the music in this scene is considerably dwarfed by the explosions and laserfire between the two ships, Williams’s decision to use an ostinato figure that is rhythmic more than melodic in nature, combined with snatches of the Rebel Fanfare, still manages to be clearly heard over the sound effects. This pounding musical idea, only heard in this singular moment, is brought to a dramatic close with the final chord occurring simultaneous with a direct hit to the Rebel ship.

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<sup>393</sup> Audissino, *John Williams’s Film Music*, 76.

The dramatic opening to *Star Wars* sets the stage for the rest of the film, filled with instantaneously recognizable motives that will entertain and delight adults and children alike for decades to come.

## Conclusion

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On May 25, 1977, *Star Wars* premiered at what was then known as Mann's Chinese Theater in Los Angeles and immediately spread across the country like wildfire. Producer Gary Kurtz fondly recalls that day with bemusement: "On opening day I was on the East Coast and I did the morning-show circuit - 'Good Morning America' and 'Today.' In the afternoon I did a radio call-in show in Washington and this guy, this caller, was really enthusiastic and talking about the movie in really deep detail. I said, 'You know a lot about the film.' He said, 'Yeah, yeah, I've seen it four times already.' And that was opening day. I knew something was happening."<sup>394</sup>

The summer of 1977 became the summer of *Star Wars*, as the film became inescapable and was soon the highest-grossing film of all time, beating out *Jaws* for the distinction after just six months in theaters (Filmtracks *Star Wars*) and maintaining it until being upstaged by Spielberg's 1982 film *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*.<sup>395</sup> 20th Century Fox, the reluctant owner of a perceived B-movie that would be seen by only a handful, suddenly was one of the richest studios in Hollywood. Lucas himself would earn a fortune from the film, giving both Spielberg and Williams a small percentage of the total revenue earned from the film; concerning Williams, Lucas believed that the film's success would have been remote if not altogether impossible without the score provided, and awarded the composer a one-percent share of the film's profits.<sup>396</sup> Records sales of the score itself were absurdly high, as it sold 650,000 copies and grossed \$9 million by mid-July that same year; the soundtrack went on to sell four million copies

<sup>394</sup> Noelene Clark, "'Star Wars': A look back on opening day in May 1977," *L.A. Times*, May 25, 2011, accessed April 25, 2016, <http://herocomplex.latimes.com/movies/star-wars-a-look-back-on-opening-day-in-may-1977/>.

<sup>395</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 77.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

and became the best-selling symphonic album of all time. The soundtrack album also won Williams a Grammy nomination, unprecedented for a classical symphonic score, as well as an Academy Award win, a Golden Globe, and three Grammy Awards.<sup>397</sup> The film's overwhelming long-term success was at least partially indebted to Lucas's ingenious use of merchandising, which helped both profits and popularity of the film soar above expectations.<sup>398</sup> Two sequels were immediately called for, and Williams's symphonic sound was suddenly desired for an endless number of films. Beginning with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), Williams would land a string of successful scores through the end of the 1970s and well into the 1980s, especially with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *E.T.* (1982).<sup>399</sup>

Directly because of the success of *Star Wars*, the London Symphony Orchestra suddenly was in demand nearly as much as Williams himself was. Williams was able to collaborate with the LSO on many of his best scores, including all of the *Star Wars* films (seven to date, with more in production), as well as the *Indiana Jones* trilogy and many others. Symphonic music in general was quickly on the rise in the film industry, with many composers now looking both to the past as well as to the future in composing. Elmer Bernstein continued writing his jazz-inspired music but imbued now with a sense of "pastiche romanticism" in its scoring for Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* (1993).<sup>400</sup> Jerry Goldsmith was another composer influenced by *Star Wars*' nostalgic look back: when work on *Alien* (1979) commenced, Cooke writes that Goldsmith wanted the score to "have a romantic breadth more akin to the approach in Williams's *Star Wars* but the director insisted the emphasis be on terror and accordingly jettisoned the

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<sup>397</sup> Audissino, *John Williams's Film Music*, 77.

<sup>398</sup> Cooke, *The Hollywood Film Music*, 233.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>400</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 456.



composer's main-title music."<sup>401</sup> However, Goldsmith was able to achieve his vision when working on the revived franchise of *Star Trek*, beginning with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* that same year.<sup>402</sup>

While *Star Wars* and its sequels have never made it onto the esteemed *Sight and Sound* list of the ten greatest movies of all time (*Vertigo* currently sits atop this list, as *Citizen Kane* had previously), the franchise's historical impact cannot be understated. More than any other film, *Star Wars* spurred a technological innovation in the film industry not seen since the days of *The Jazz Singer* (1927) with the inclusion of sound in film. The film medium's audience grew exponentially, both in America and worldwide, due in large part to the success of *Star Wars*. *Star Wars* was not the first blockbuster film of the 1970s - *The Godfather* (1972), *American Graffiti* (1973) and *Jaws* (1975) all grossed more than \$100 million, with *Jaws* earning over \$470 million in a record-breaking summer. Nor was it the only blockbuster of 1977, with Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and John Badham's *Saturday Night Fever* recording profits over \$200 million. However, none of that could compare to *Star Wars*, which made over \$800 million that year. The onslaught of merchandise, adjusted for inflation, was over \$1 billion dollars, which in turn was diminutive compared to the over \$3 billion grossed worldwide from ticket sales. In short, the Age of the Blockbuster had arrived, and John Williams had written its score.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Cooke, *A History of Film Music*, 459.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 459.

<sup>403</sup> Mark Clark, *Star Wars FAQ: Everything Left to Know about the Trilogy That Changed the Movies* (Milwaukee, WI: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2015).

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## Appendix

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### Appendix 1

Example 1: King Kong's Theme (Max Steiner, *King Kong*, 1933)

#### King Kong's Leitmotiv



Example 2: Christ's Theme (Miklós Rózsa, *Ben-Hur*, 1959)



### Appendix 2

Example 1: Prelude (Bernard Herrmann, *Psycho*, 1960)

The image shows the musical notation for the Prelude from Psycho. It consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln.), Violin II (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vlc.). The music is in 4/4 time and features a complex, rhythmic pattern. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. Measure numbers 53, 54, and 55 are indicated above the first three staves.

## Appendix 3

Example 1: "Main Theme," (John Williams, *Jaws*, 1975)

Musical score for Example 1: "Main Theme," (John Williams, *Jaws*, 1975). The score is in bass clef and consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line starting with a half note G2, followed by a quarter note F2, and a quarter note E2. The lower staff has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, with two accents marked *sfz* and a dynamic marking *mf*.

Example 2: Symphony Number 9, Antonin Dvorak, 4th Movement: mm. 1-3

Musical score for Example 2: Symphony Number 9, Antonin Dvorak, 4th Movement: mm. 1-3. The score is in treble clef and consists of three staves: Violino I, Violino II, and Viola. The tempo is marked *Allegro con fuoco. M.M. ♩ = 152.* and the dynamic is *ff*.

Example 3: "Luke's Theme," (John Williams, *Star Wars*, 1977)

Musical score for Example 3: "Luke's Theme," (John Williams, *Star Wars*, 1977). The score is in treble clef and consists of two staves. The upper staff has a melodic line starting with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note F4, and a quarter note E4. The lower staff has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, with two accents marked *sfz* and a dynamic marking *mf*.

Example 1. John Williams, *Star Wars*: Luke's theme / main title theme





Example 7: "Main Title," (John Williams, *Star Wars*, 1977)

The image shows a musical score for the opening chord of the "Main Title" from John Williams' *Star Wars* (1977). The score is written in 4/4 time and features several instruments:

- vln.** (Violin): A long, sustained note in the upper register, marked with a fermata.
- ww, vla.** (Woodwind, Viola): A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest.
- ww, vc.** (Woodwind, Violoncello): A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest.
- trpt.** (Trumpet): A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest.
- hmn.** (Horn): A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest.
- tbn.** (Trombone): A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest.
- tuba**: A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter rest.

The score is written in 4/4 time and features several instruments: vln., ww, vla., ww, vc., trpt., hmn., tbn., and tuba. The music is in a key signature of one flat (B-flat major) and starts with a 4/4 time signature. The opening chord is a B-flat major triad (B-flat, D, F) sustained across the first measure.

Example 1. *Star Wars*, Main Title, opening chord.