

# Analysis of Movie Music from the Perspective of Aesthetics of Music

## Taking "Schindler's List" as an Example

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**Abstract**—Music has become an important part of film art since the birth of the latter. In the subsequent development of film art, film music has become more vivid and novel, playing an irreplaceable role in the history of film art. This paper mainly analyzes the musical aesthetic connotation of film music with the film music in the American classic film "Schindler's List" as an example.

**Keywords**—*aesthetics of music; vision; movie music; Schindler's List*

### I. INTRODUCTION

On the day of December 18, 1895, the French Lumiere brothers first brought the art of the film to the world. The original film cannot make sound, therefore, films in this period were mainly silent film. Even so, in order to avoid the boredom while watching movie, the theater operators will classify some familiar classical music and perform music match with the emotions in the plot according to the needs of the movie plot and mood conversion. In this way, people can watch movie in the auditorium while enjoying the live performance of the band, which realizes the 3D movie effect of changing from a single viewing plane image to a combination of audio and vision. Later, with the development of technology, the live performance of the band was gradually replaced by the shellac disk. The music was recorded in the disk before the movie was on, and was played according to the needs of the movie, so as to completely show the effect of the film. Although this period belongs to the period of silent film, music art and film art have already been connected together, which laid the foundation for the birth and development of film music.

With the development of science and technology, especially the invention of recording technology, there emerged material support for the emergence of sound movies. What people want from music in film art is not only to support the plot and emotion in the film, but also to shoulder more important role in the narration of the film. In 1927, "The Jazz Singer" launched by Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc. marked the birth of the sound film era. Sound became an important part of the film art and the film art has a three-dimensional viewing space that combines both audio and vision. The development of film music also provides possibility for the realization of narrative effect of film. With

the flourishing development of modernist music, such disorderly and creative tendency gradually penetrates into the field of film music. The richness of the form of orchestration and the integration of electronic music are in line with the narrative and individual pursuit in film art.

### II. THE AESTHETIC CONNOTATION OF FILM MUSIC

#### A. The Performance of Music Has a Clear Direction

The basis of absolute music creation is mainly the expression and praise of a certain situation, or just the personal emotional experience of the composer. The appreciator may happen to emotionally resonate with the composer, thus truly feeling the music effect that the composer wants to express. Otherwise the appreciator need to have a clear understanding of the background information of the works and the composer's creative intentions so as to understand the artistic connotation of the musical work more deeply. However, the creation of film music cannot be restricted by the emotional expression of the composer. It needs to regard the needs of the film plot as the first priority, subjecting to the constraints of plot arrangement, screen presentations, and the emotional mood of protagonist. If the music content is inconsistent with plot arrangement then, it will give the audience an abrupt and discordant feeling no matter how beautiful and moving the music is, undermining the advancement and presentation of the film art. From the perspective of the audience's difficulty in understanding music, film music is more likely to make the audience understand and resonate. The audience can experience the aesthetic that the music expresses in accordance to the plot development of the movie and the implication on the screen. So, it can be seen that film music has more obvious certainty and directivity compared with absolute music.

#### B. The Integration of Music and Plot in Film

The combination of sound and picture complements each other and is a major feature of film art. From the perspective of sound, film music can highlight the emotional atmosphere and make the vocal dialogue more vivid. As regards to movie clip with no dialogue, film music is needed to express the inner feelings of a character. At this time, the music mood is completely consistent with the inner experience of the movie character. It is more conducive to the audience to

emotionally resonate with this character. As regards to movie clip with dialogue between the characters, despite the fact that most audience will focus on the content of the lines, while ignoring the melody tone and instrument configuration of the music, film music enhances the vitality of the emotions, making the literary connotation of the lines more intuitive. And the audience's true experience of the lines is still inseparable from the film music.

### C. The "Intermittence" of the Film Music Structure

Absolute music is complete and consistent in time. Once there is an "interruption", the advancement and development of music will be affected, destroying the atmosphere to enjoy music. And film music allows the existence of such "intermittence". The interruption of music will appear many times from the beginning to the end of a movie, while the integrity of film art is unaffected. The existence of such "intermittence" results from the affiliation of the film music and the film picture. The constant change of the plot requires that film music should change with different rhythms and different emotions to match different clips. Therefore, movie music does not need to follow a set of fixed music development programs like absolute music, but to follow the montage structure. Film music often only has a short paragraph, or even a small phrase because of the needs of a certain plot, however, this does not necessarily mean that the film music is incomplete as the opening song, ending song, and the music created specifically for certain scenes in the movie will still be fully presented in the audience's hearing.

### III. THE ARTISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE THEME MUSIC OF "SCHINDLER'S LIST"

Schindler's List is a novel published by Australian writer Thomas Keneally in 1982. It focuses on the tragic fate of Jews during World War II. It was filmed by American director Steven Spielberg in 1993. The director takes black and white photography as the main method to create a historical sense and a dignified and sad atmosphere. Besides, the hand-held camera is used to shoot the documentary, and portraying it into a genre of documentary.

As an important partner of Spielberg, John Williams serves as the composer of the film, as well as the his film "Star Wars". The success of Star Wars greatly improved the reputation of John Williams. His musical talents are also vividly reflected in the "Schindler's List". His film music vividly grasped and accurately described the plot, so that the audience can enjoy the unification of viewing and listening while watching movie and realize the profound connotation of musical works. These classic film music works made him a well-deserved Hollywood master of art. Unlike the stimulating musical effects required in Star Wars to match the grand and spectacular combat scenes, the film music in The Schindler's List is designed to reflect the inner world and the psychological processes of the characters. The content is more delicate and soft, and strictly cooperates with the logical development of documentary films.

The theme music in the "Schindler's List" movie consists of one theme and four variations. The theme music runs

through the film and plays an extremely important role in narrating the film plot. Its melody seems to be closely connected with the sad plot in the movie. Even if the movie ends, as long as the meaningful melody comes to mind, the dark and heavy tragic scene in the movie will appear from the memory of the audience. The complete presentation of the theme music was arranged at the end of the film, in harmony with the joyful atmosphere of Schindler's Jews. With the music, the film gradually changed from black and white to color, forming a distinct contrast with the previously dull atmosphere. But then, the violin played the theme of Schindler. The melody and atmosphere changed. There emerged the scene that the survived Jews today piled stones in front of Schindler's tombstone to express their lament to their compatriots, which makes the audience fall into deep thought along with such a sad picture and imposing music. When there are subtitles in the picture that indicate the end of the film, the background is countless Jewish tombstones. The tone of the piano makes the music atmosphere warmer at this moment, showing the new insight of the survived Jews after the weather-beaten years.

### IV. THE CONSTRUCTION ROLE OF FILM MUSIC IN NARRATING THE PLOT

#### A. The Theme Song and the First Episode of "Schindler's List"

In the film, the Jews were ousted to Clarke. Poor Jew were waiting to be named one by one while a wealthy Jew had no choice but to give his home to Schindler. At this time, the background music is the theme melody of the "Schindler's List" played by French horn and the viola. The rhythm is slow and the music is imposing, depicting the tragic fate of the Jews being ousted from their homes.

When Schindler arrived at the wealthy Jewish's home, there was an arrogant German girl who insulted the expelled Jews, and the music changed from the theme to the first episode, after which the Jews lived in the designated shabby house. And then the Jews became a cheap laborer at the Schindler factory. The first episodes served as background music to support the development of plot. The background music then has only two single tones. Along with the start of transposition, the two tones performed by one single instrument are gradually developed into performed by one instrument group. The effect of accompaniment is more strong and dignified. The melody of the music also changes into strange and fickle from the initial dark and imposing. The first episode is extremely important in this plot, and the change of music complements the psychological changes of the characters, which plays a key role in advancing the plot and realizing the unity of music emotion and character psychology.

#### B. The Use of Suggestive Music Effects

After the horrendous massacre in the film, everything surrounded began to calm down. As the night fell, the Jews hiding thought they had survived, but they did not know that the Nazi brutal search was still on quietly. As regards to the background music then, the string creates a low atmosphere,

the bassoon performs a sad, bleak melody, suggesting that another kind slaughter is about to begin, and the Jews hiding at this moment are totally ignorant of the danger coming soon. One of the clips shows a Jewish climbing out of the piano that had just been hidden accidentally stepped on the pedals of the piano because of panic. This abrupt sound opened the curtain of another slaughter. With the sound of "piano noise", the audience at this moment is not only a bystander of the plot, but an individual who connects their inner tension with the fear of the Jewish people in the movie.

### C. *The Well-tempered Clavier by J.S. Bach*

When another slaughter in the movie is on, there was a very obvious contrast in the film. The sound of the machine-gun fire was accompanied by the music of *The Well-Tempered Clavier* played by a Nazi officer, creating a sharp contrast between cruelty and elegance. *The Well-Tempered Clavier* by the father of German music, J.S. Bach makes people feel holy and bright. The director combines such a bright music with grievous slaughter ingeniously, showing his strong and obvious irony towards the integration of elegant aesthetic taste and cruel and perverted heart of German Nazis.

### D. *The Use of German Folk Music and Jewish Folk Music*

Both German folk music and German art music appear in the film with different angle of application. German art music is mainly used to depict the inner activities of the Germans. The elegance and dignity of art music is consistent with their noble and arrogant behaviors in the film. German folk songs appear in the scenes of German gatherings and conversations. One clip that mostly shows the German national characteristics in the film is when Schindler participated in the German folk song chorus in order to win the favor of and bribe the German officers. The content of the singing is full of German national emotions.

However, the emotional atmosphere of Jewish folk songs in the film is very different from that of German folk songs, and it is mostly sad and imposing music. One of the clips was a Jewish family praying at the candle in front of table. The candle flame shines in the singing of Jewish folk songs, expressing the Jewish strong hope for changing their fate while revealing their inability to change facing the miserable reality. The music then even makes such sad mood stronger and deeper.

## V. THE AESTHETIC CONNOTATION OF FILM MUSIC IN "SCHINDLER'S LIST"

### A. *The Music Content Is Completely Integrated with the Movie Plot*

The music in the film, whether it is the original work of the composer or the integration of art music and folk music, is closely related to the movie plot. During the movie, the film music serves as a subordinate of the movie plot, fully respects the director's creative intention, and highlights the role of auditory sense in perfecting vision sense. The music in the film is mainly divided into two types, one is consistent

with the sentiment of the plot with bleak music to support tragic scene, so that the audience can more truly understand the artistic atmosphere of the tragedy in the plot; the other is the sharp contrast between the musical atmosphere and the plot with combining bright music and cruel slaughter. This contrast does not destroy the narrative nature of the movie plot. Instead, it makes the audience more deeply pondered and realize irony that's beyond words.

### B. *The Music Theme Is Vivid*

The musical theme of the movie has appeared seven times with the use of different instruments, as well as different orchestration techniques. In this way, the seven themes are presented differently, and the difference in musical effects naturally leads to different musical emotions. The first theme was dominated by violin performance. The melodic melody of the violin reflected the helpless mood of the Jews in the face of tragic fate. After Schindler witnessed the horrible cremation scene, he began to plot complex and difficult rescue plans with Stern, the accountant. At this time, the theme music was played by clarinet, and the atmosphere became dignified from the initial sad mood, meaning the rescue is not easy and it must undergo a lot of suffering. The sound effect of the clarinet shows brightness and firmness, reflecting Schindler's determination to achieve the rescue plan. When Schindler realized the rescue plan, the musical theme dominated by violin was on again, and was accompanied by symphony of the strings. Different from the first theme, the theme then is still soothing, while unlike the sad mood before, expressing the Jews' gratitude to Schindler, which in turn let Schindler truly understand the true meaning of life. At the end of the film, the theme music played by piano makes the music a bit bright. This is also a hope and expectation that such tragedy will not repeat itself.

### C. *Ingenious Use of Art Music and Folk Music*

Although the artistic music and folk music in the film are not originally created by John Williams, he arranged them in an appropriate plot, making the advancement and development of the plot more vivid. The German classic art music appeared along with the elegant German party scene in the film, which makes the music sound more elegant and provides more appeal to the interpretation of the noble image of the German in the film. It can be said that if you don't know the soundtrack of a particular episode is a classic art music, it's easy to misunderstand the background music with specially created for the particular plot of the film, which also shows the cleverness of the film composer's in selecting music. The use of folk songs in the film has created a sharp contrast. German folk songs and the Jewish folk songs form a strong contrast, which is also consistent with the Germans in a high rank and the poor and tragic Jewish in the plot.

## VI. CONCLUSION

It can be said that music has played an irreplaceable role in the artistic expression of film art since the birth of the latter. The arrival of the sound film era further made film music an important part of film art. The film music makes it possible to let audience resonate with the emotions of

characters in the film. It also provides effective artistic support for the development of the story. When a movie ends, what lingers in the memory of the audience is not only the plot, but also the film music with rich artistic connotation. The melody in the audience's mind remind them of the wonderful clip of the film, which is also an extremely valuable artistic wealth left behind in the audience's aesthetic realm after watching a movie.

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