

# Analysis of the Roles of Film Soundtracks in Films

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## ABSTRACT

It is well known that when film first appeared in the art world, it was silent or required a live band, and people even referred to silent films as 'the great dumb'. In 1936, Chaplin produced his last silent film, *Modern Times*, marking the death of silent film. The era of sound film was officially opened to realize the unification of audio-visual and sound painting, thus making the film audience wider. This paper focuses on the roles of film soundtracks in films in order to better understand this diversified art form of film. In this paper, four kinds of roles in film soundtracks have been discussed. That is, the soundtracks hint at the development of the film's plot, render atmosphere, express the feelings and thoughts of the characters, and become an icon of the film. The results show that the film soundtracks play a very important role in the overall development and plot promotion of the film, and they are indispensable parts of the film.

**Keywords:** *film, soundtrack, audio-visual language, The Shining, music.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Film is an artistic combination of audio-visual language, and the film soundtrack has been widely concerned with and supported by the rapid development of the film industry. The film's soundtrack is a unique auditory art form, and it plays a very significant role in the film. Film soundtracks are divided into two types based on their placement in the film. One is realistic music, also called objective music, which has the source of sound in the picture. The other is functional music, also called subjective music, which has no source of sound in the picture. Many scholars have studied topics in this field, such as the physiological and psychological effects of film soundtracks on audiences, the role of classical music in films and film soundtracks, and so on. For example, some scholars argue that a probe into the aesthetic characteristics and artistic expression of film music is warranted. For the film, this complete audio-visual system, with the help of the creation of composers and pianists, the works of singers and recorders, and the diversified cooperation with the film picture, realizes the mutual infection and strengthening of the picture and music score, and also realizes the artistic appreciation of the film's original sound, which not only realizes the sensory pleasure of body and mind, but also reflects the life of the film[1].

Some scholars think that the movie soundtrack relationship should be governed by its great aesthetic

characteristics. Music can not only, with frame synchronization, from the angle of positive images, have the effect of supplementing each other, but can also be used with the image formation para relationship, then music and pictures as two parts of a music performance, music from the angle of negative images, opposite each other. In this relationship, sound and music cooperate with the picture from the opposite angle to interpret the theme meaning to be conveyed by the film. There are also different artistic ways of dealing with the content and emotion of music and pictures. If the difference is only "quantitative", it constitutes the contrast of sound and picture. If the difference is "quality", it constitutes the opposition of sound and painting [2].

Through this article, the public can have a deeper impression and understanding of the film soundtrack, so as to better understand the role of the film soundtrack in this period while appreciating the film art.

## 2. DEFINITION OF FILM SOUNDTRACK

Film score refers to the theme music that appears in a film. Generally, it should cooperate with the plot development and the mood of the scene, playing the role of foil atmosphere. The production of music can be done by musical instruments, vocal music, orchestras, or electronic music. As far as the score is concerned, there are two extreme and opposite ideas about the score. One is to try to blend into the structure of the film, as imperceptibly as a dub. The second is to highlight as

much as possible, which makes people feel that as long as these two concepts can be skillfully coordinated with the structure of the whole film, they will be able to produce great power. The true meaning of the soundtrack lies in this collocation. Secondly, films have a variety of rhythm functions, such as subjective rhythm, objective rhythm, the director's psychological rhythm, the audience's psychological rhythm, etc. Music is the only form that is very rhythmically consistent with film; other art forms are slightly less so. In the film, both music and pictures are the means of transmitting information. The latter demonstrates intuitiveness and clarity in conveying meaning, which has evolved into the film's preferred method of conveying meaning. Music and images reverberate, demonstrating significant application value in broadening the category of audience association, stimulating other emotions and feelings, and strengthening the connotation of film works. As one of the sound modeling elements in the film, the soundtrack plays a very significant role in setting up the atmosphere[3].

American film theorist Bob Booker said so about the role of film music in elements of film, and he summarized the methods: (1) accompanies the first letter of the title; (2) heightens the dramatic effect; (3) creates a sense of place; (4) manufactures or foils movement speed; (5) reveals the person's identity; (6) predicts future events; and (7) determines, maintains, and changes mood. After that, he added three kinds, namely: the use of music themes; Music and movement: indirect use of music [4].

Music can express these rhythms through different musical rhythms and musical language, catering to different styles and scenes of the story. To some extent, music plays an irreplaceable role in film. In 1895, the Lumiere brothers' first commercial film was accompanied by a piano. This was the first time in the history of film that film was combined with music, which really realized the projection of film from "silent" to "sound". However, the combination of "sound and painting" in this form cannot achieve the organic unity of music content and film picture, which affects the viewing effect to some extent. In order to perfect this combination, the Edison Patent Company in 1909 selected appropriate musical segments for the scenes of movies. The classification mainly takes the emotion of the film as the clue, and organically combines the types of music clips with similar films.

### **3. THE ROLES OF FILM SOUNDTRACKS IN FILMS**

Film is an art form, and music is an indispensable part of this art form. Music can create a specific mood for a part or the whole film, thus deepening the visual effect and enhancing the appeal of the picture. This kind of music is not simply repeating the content of the picture, but carefully creating a background atmosphere for the

film. Enhancing the artistic appeal of the film can play an important role, including rendering the environmental atmosphere, rendering the atmosphere of *The Times*, rendering local color, rendering national characteristics, and so on.

Music is an auditory form that is distinguished from other arts by a high degree of abstraction. Its ability to generalize characters' feelings and emotions is unmatched by any other art form. Music can reflect people's rich and complex emotional states in a unique way. Every movie has a theme that it wants to express. The various artistic elements in the film, such as directing, cinematography, acting, art, etc., all play different roles within the theme. Film music plays a unique role in deepening the theme of the film by means of music.

#### ***3.1. The soundtrack hints at the development of the film's plot***

The soundtrack has an unsung function in movies — it hints at what's going on in the plot, which audiences often overlook when watching movies because it's not present in front of our eyes in a visual way. For instance, at the beginning of *The Shining*, there is a car driving on a mountain road, and some weird music in the background, which is the mass on *The Day of Wrath*, which is funeral music. The highlight of the whole film lies in the music, which is harsh and strange at first, but after listening to it for a long time, it will make people start to fear, and then, as they follow the plot step by step, it will completely sublimate the horror mood of the whole film.

Therefore, it is understood that the music alludes to the family's subsequent misfortune. Simply using the accumulation of horror elements alone can not make a successful horror film. Relying on the support of the story, contact with the actual background, suspense background and excellent cast, you can call it success. In fact, the family does suffer misfortune later in the series. Sometimes the visual image precedes the picture, foreboding victory and hope in difficult times and hardship and frustration in good times. Sometimes the image appears after the picture, extending the dramatic mood. A lot of horror movies use sound effects to deepen the audience's sense of darkness. For example, in the film *The Shining*, when the boy enters the mirror in room 237, he has a visual blind spot in his imagination. The head is not given directly, only showing hesitation in front of the door and panic after coming out. interspersed with images of her mother inspecting the dimmer equipment. At this time, the ethereal single string sound creates a very strange atmosphere. Because of the closed, narrow lens and dark space, the audience will unconsciously associate with ghosts, ghosts, and other things. Combined with the horror theme of the film, the audience will enter the infinity of MOFA. Following the sound effects and the abrupt echo of the thunk into the

heroine's perspective, feel free to imagine the little boy in room 237, and the father giving birth in the living room [5].



Figure 1 The Shining poster

### 3.2. Render atmosphere

This is the most common use of the film soundtrack, and almost all films take advantage of that. Human beings are accustomed to experiencing objective things from both visual and auditory aspects. The stereo sense of auditory image can be more effectively expressed by combining the auditory image of music, the ups and downs of musical melody, the texture of harmony and counterpoint, and the orchestration with rich colors. By combining it with music melody, movies can more effectively express the three-dimensional sense of auditory image.

Similarly, videos such as “Immersive Makeup” and “Immersive Cooking”, which are very popular on the Internet, use real sound to make the audience feel as if they are personally on the scene. Almost all horror movies take advantage of this. Observing that every time the characters approach danger, the music will become more and more weird. Even if the audience does not see the horror scene, they will still feel spooked by the scary music. In horror movies, the soundtrack sometimes serves more than the plot. Music can create a scary atmosphere and exert a powerful influence at key plot points. In the theory of composition, pitch and length are the most important attributes, while in the general form of music, volume and strength attributes are often put in second place by the composer. However, in a horror film soundtrack, the volume contrast factor plays a crucial role.

Voluminous contrast with the plot, can have an excellent effect. In scenes that create weird atmospheres, the soundtrack is often low in volume, as if nothing is happening. In the sudden scare episodes, the score often suddenly amplifies the volume, or there is a sudden accent.

Therefore, it is necessary to be prepared to be startled at all times when enjoying horror film music. For example, the soundtrack of Psycho creates a fleshly listening atmosphere through the unquiet and dangerous feeling of The Murder alone. The repeated sharp and harsh violin timbre and the horror scene of The Bathroom Murder realize the pleasure of auditory and visual interaction and promote a chilling watching effect. After the film was released, the string music became famous for its screams. On a more technical level, the score in the film “The Happening” is very thought-provoking. The simultaneous appearance of the opening music and the picture is of great significance to the whole film and the guidance of the audience's viewing psychology. Especially in this film, the picture information given at the beginning of the film is relatively simple, the landscape and camera motion remain unchanged, and the content of things in the scene frame is also very simple—the sky and clouds.

In this audiovisual combination, the audience's attachment to the soundtrack is obvious. From sunny days without clouds, to blue sky and white clouds, to overcast clouds, and then to dark clouds, the progressive sense of the picture is obvious. The music is very rich. From the beginning, it produces a sense of disharmony and unknown, which stimulates the interest and curiosity of the audience[6]. In the movie Avatar, the vocals are mostly sung by many people. Such concerts create a sense of mystery, and the choir adds a religious flavor to the proceedings. It has something to do with the environment where the story takes place and the theme the film wants to express. The form is similar to the music of a religious choir, describing the na'vi people's sincerity to nature and love for their homeland incisively and vividly, and also making the audience feel the mysterious colors of Pandora, which is different from the earth[7].

What is more, it relates to the popularity of Tiktok videos. Some of the popular videos on Tiktok have very good music, which can be funny, sad, or dynamic. The music and pictures combine to form a popular video. The soundtrack will become an Internet sensation, with people trying to copy it and make videos of it. Some talented and capable people will remix this music again. Another famous soundtrack that has spread throughout the film industry is MiyazakiHayao's cartoons and Joe Hisaishi's music. Carrying You, the soundtrack of Castle in the Sky, expresses regret for the destruction of civilization in Prada City, but also contains the hope and persistence represented by the protagonist.



Figure 2 Still frame of the opening credits of “The Happening”

### 3.3. Expressing the feelings and thoughts of the characters

In a sense, film is a narrative art, but narrative is not unique to film. Film art, drama, novels and other artistic styles have obvious reasons to exist. To study the effects of film music on the emotions of the characters in a film, it is natural to bring music into the perspective of narration, and see how film music participates in narration and expresses the emotions of the characters in an excellent film. Film narratology is mainly concerned with narrative structure. The development of the story is a dramatic and poetic structure, and other diversified expressions occur. Narrative time shows that film and music are also time-based arts, but the rich narrative time of film includes chronological and reverse chronological order.

Movies often use music to strengthen the psychological activities of characters and reveal their thoughts, feelings, and spiritual outlook. In many movies, when there is a conflict between two characters, the melody becomes hurried and tense. When the characters are on vacation, they play relaxing music. For example, *Black Swan* is a story about an actor’s gradual dissociation from the character, and it takes more than a few techniques to show the unreality of consciousness lost to fantasy. Therefore, a large amount of music in the film plays a key role in enhancing the effect on the basis of visual impact. Ninety percent of the time in the film, music is used to foreshadow. The whole film is based on *Swan Lake*, a symphonic work in the national style of Russian tragedy. The solemn and psychedelic music gives people a sense of “uneasy and nervous” shaking, which well demonstrates the protagonist’s split mental state [8].

Another example is *Angels on the Road*, which is a famous Chinese film. The use of a few songs in “*Angel on the Road*” is a bright spot and an essential part of the film as a whole. Throughout the whole film, it can be found that the “four season song” and the “song bird” appear three times in the film. Emotions are closely linked to the characters and are used to express the feelings of the characters’ feelings, characterizing the service of the characters. When Xiao Hong sang “*Song of the Four Seasons*” in the restaurant, she tied her hair

and sang carelessly, depicting a singing girl’s helplessness and nostalgia for her hometown[9]. What is more, Groot, the orc in *Guardians of the Galaxy vol. 2*, is different from the other protagonists in terms of language. In terms of language, he can only say one thing: I am Groot. But every word he says has a different meaning and mood. At the beginning of the film, Groot’s body language and the music in the film show us a lovely and lively Groot. Through music and dance, it shows us that Groot’s inner world is like a child’s. Even when everything around him is drenched in blood and rain, he can still enjoy the world of music and play happily [10].

### 3.4. Becoming an icon of a film

Often, successful film and television work and their music are mutually successful. In other words, the music is what makes the film or television work. The theme song is an important element in the movie, especially the seamless and beautiful theme song with the story, which not only plays a narrative lyrical role, but also arouses the audience’s resonance, leaving an indelible impression on people. Sometimes a movie may be forgotten, but a popular theme song will last forever.

The 2019 television series *Euphoria* is a great example of this, with all of the music produced by Labrith and his team. The producers went beyond the boundaries of traditional composition and boldly tried to combine different musical styles, breaking, rearranging, and playing backwards to achieve satisfactory results. They just try different things. This kind of magic and confusion makes people feel the dizzy music of spirit, which lays the foundation for the joy of success. When *Forever and Formula ring*, people will tend to think of *Euphoria*. Every time that familiar melody plays, the mind takes us back to that particular scene. Some people commented on this TV series, ‘*Euphoria*’ is a powerful hand grenade thrown at today’s giddy American society.

The plot revolves around a group of 17-year-old high school students in Southern California, and it recreates a typical American high school, with no college entrance examinations or evening self-study, just adolescent boys and girls on the verge of moral and criminal mania being tested. The teenagers here have absurd problems that seem to mirror the current social contradictions. They

were born into a kaleidoscope. More thinking, more choices, more self-destructive impulses. But they are far from corrupt. Instead of dreaming of a grand narrative, they turn and confront the accumulated powerlessness of previous generations. Perhaps for Gen Z, this is their lonely heroism. It's amazing that we can feel these feelings in Labrith's music.



**Figure 3** Euphoria stills

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This paper mainly explores the role of the soundtrack in film and its influence on film. This paper briefly summarizes its function from four different aspects. That is, the soundtrack implies the development of the film plot, rendering the atmosphere, expressing the characters' emotions and thoughts, and becoming the symbol of the film. Through the above exploration, people can understand the role and significance of music in film. Music and film complement each other, and they must be well combined. This is a very creative field that needs to be discovered and explored in order to create better music. There are many functions of the film soundtrack that have not been mentioned in this paper and need to be explored. Future research will combine more films to analyze the performance of specific music types in films.

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