Analysis of the Film Score for the Ball Scene in *Cinderella*

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Abstract. Over the past several decades, the study of film music has evolved into a vital area of interdisciplinary research, encompassing insights from musicology, media studies, semiotics, and auditory theory. Researchers have increasingly recognized film scores not merely as decorative accompaniments but as narrative devices that shape audience perception, emotional response, and character interpretation. Foundational theories in radical listening — such as Roland Barthes's distinction between geno-song and pheno-song, Kilburn's aspectual hearing, strategical uses of silences, and notions such as punctum and studium — have laid the groundwork for analyzing the coded and affective dimensions of musical sound. Building on these frameworks, they foreground the listener's subjectivity and the influence of social identity, memory, and technology in shaping auditory experience. Despite the growing body of literature, relatively few studies have conducted comparative, multi-dimensional analyses of similar musical scenes. This paper aims to contribute to this field by analyzing the music in the film *Cinderella* produced by Disney — before, during, and after the scene of the ballroom dance — to investigate how musical elements construct atmosphere, signify character transformation, and communicate underlying ideological values.

Keywords: Film score, Cinderella, Film scenarios, Disney.

1 Introduction

Film scoring plays a crucial role in improving audiences' movie experience in sense of emotional experience and artistic value. Understanding how the improvement is achieved can provide a detailed and imitable example of applying the concepts, and it is also valuable for offering an in-depth analysis of a specific case. Earlier studies have shown how music impacts viewers' emotional engagement, including their resonance with the characters and understanding of the storyline. However, there is a lack of case studies focusing on specific scenes in movies. Therefore, further analysis on specific scenes is valuable. By applying those concepts and opinions, this paper aims to analyze how music in movie *Cinderella* influence viewers' perception of movie. This research will prove that the texture of sound, silence before, after the music and between the phrases, of music; also, the earlier told story and visual part will of film will enhance the efficiency of music in impacting viewers' perception.

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2 The Role of Music Before the Ball

2.1 Pheno-Song and Geno-Song

The distinction between "pheno-song" and "geno-song" introduced by Barthe helps explain how music communicates beyond language. The pheno-song refers to formal, culturally codified musical structures, while the geno-song expresses the materiality of the voice—the breath, grain, and body within the sound — which might emerge in the expressive physicality of the dance or vocal delivery [1]. The songs in *Cinderella* develop around one motif, with no particular climax and verses, using mostly animation and breathy vocals to convey the musical expression. By seeing the music in a "geno" form, the score not only enhances the understanding of the characters' expression but also highlights the larger social dynamics at play. With her appearance, surroundings, and misty song progressions combined, they illustrate Cinderella's lower social class standing.

The music where Cinderella's fairy Godmother was building the pumpkin carriage with magic builds excitement for the upcoming ball. The springy and humorous lyrics and music foreshadow the amazing metamorphosis to occur. Thus, the song's tone changes from one of melancholy – prior scenes of Cinderella being treated like a maid – to one of optimism, signifying Cinderella's journey from oppression to empowerment. People can experience this musical change as a forerunner to the amazing transformation of the somber girl to a princess clad in a puffy blue dress and the iconic glass slippers. Cinderella's emotional journey is reflected in the music's gentle build-up, which gets her ready for the ball's transformative event. Music contributes to shaping the audience's anticipation of forthcoming developments in the films narrative [2]. The conflict between the minor toned music and the novel comical tune symbolizes a promise of freedom that the ball will bring.

2.2 Music as a Reflection of Cinderella's Inner World

Generally uniting the marks of grief and longing with a faint but mounting sense of hope, the pre-ball music also depicts Cinderella's inner world. By comparing Cinderella's dreams with her reality, many musical motifs convey this conflict between hope and sorrow. Cinderella's emotional depth, yearning for independence, and faith in a brighter future are all conveyed through the music. Her internal conflict is depicted by the tension between various musical compositions, especially those in the minor and major scales. Here, the theory of "musical punctum" can be used to identify Cinderella's emotional core and show how certain musical moments punctuate the story in poignant, visceral ways [3]. As she gets ready for the ball, the music changes from darker, shimmering to lighter, joyful tones, symbolizing her desire for change and her faith that her wish to participate in the royal invitation and be no longer maltreated can come true.

The music in these scenarios with Cinderella is not arbitrary; rather, it gives the character more nuance and transforms her from a passive character in the story to someone actively dreaming of a different existence. Although the music's intentional monot-

ony alludes to the monotony of her everyday existence, the song's sparse language suggests that she is open to change, which gives the listener an emotional connection to her process and serves as the basis for her ultimate transformation to freedom.

3 Music During and after the Dance at the Ball

3.1 Music During the Dance – A Symbol of Transformation

One of the most recognizable scenes from any version of the story is perhaps the one in the ballroom where Cinderella dances with the prince. At the beginning of the ball, Cinderella was nervous, which the audience can discover through the actress's acting and the story. The actress took a deep breath and hold it afterwards, also her trembling voice and her staring eyes. From the earlier story, audiences know that Cinderella was having an underprivileged life: treated by her stepmother and stepsisters as a housekeeper and scarce in material. She is nervous when she is at palace — a place for the royal family, somewhere stands for a way more luxurious life; somewhere she has minimal chance to get in. After audience are well-informed by the acting and earlier story, they can easily understand Cinderella's nervousness. As a result, the music will be associated with the feeling of nervous. Because different context led to audience having different understanding on the same piece of music, as context determines the listeners' interpretation of their reaction [4]. The quiet dynamics will be considered as an auditory way of expressing Cinderella's nervousness: As silence is an unexpected source of discomfort for many of us. This is a physical reaction completed by amygdala, a reaction we heritage from our ancestors through the gene. Because people in million years before need to stay alert while silence, which usually suggest danger [5]. In order to emphasize the acting, the music stops.

People's voice gets quiet but also with some changes when they are nervous or uncertain. This characteristic of voice is transformed to the dynamic of music, where the overall dynamic is low but still contain some variety created by typical waltz rhythm — Um-chat-chat. As audience bring themselves into the character in various extent, feeling the nervousness themselves; they can be resonant with the expressed nervousness in music in deeper extent — this is mood congruence, the consistency between person's emotional state with the broader situation and circumstances being experienced by the person at the time. The identified nervousness further creates the atmosphere of nervousness, as the context of film makes music an incredibly integral device to influence the emotional response of an audience while also assisting in psychological transportation [6]. Because silence itself is a type of music that inspire emotion [7]. On the other hand, the music can shape audience's interpretation of a scene. In this case, audience can resonate with the nervousness presented in the scene in a deeper extent. In conclusion, background music and visual scene simultaneously impacts and be impacted on audience's interpretation on each other [8]. Similar to the Music Video cases, that perception of music will be affected by visual of video [9]. With background music, the emotion expressed by a film tend to be stronger [10].

The dance is set to climactic music that illustrates the pinnacle of Cinderella's transformation from mistreated servant to adored princess. Here, the music is frequently

extravagant, using shimmering brass and large sweeping strings to portray the elegance of Cinderella's new character and the lavishness of the ball. From earlier scenes until the present, the tone is solemn, with the rich, melodic orchestral score acting as Cinderella's newfound sense of value and how other people perceive her appearance.

This can be accessed by the doctrine of pheno-song, with it being music that clearly renders the character's outward appearance or persona at one point in time. The song in the dance is used to emphasize Cinderella's physical transformation, her rising from the dark into the lime light, and how she manifests greater confidence and grace. The beauty of the music is an expression of Cinderella's new status and how she charms the prince and everyone around her. Her dance with the prince is one that mirrors her own personal growth as an individual and an experience that celebrates her true beauty, both in and out.

Additionally, the scene's music provides a "studium", illustrating the social and cultural conventions that control the ball, the prince's court, and Cinderella's entry into these establishments [3]. The extravagant visual grandeur of the ballroom and the pomp of the music allude to Cinderella's entry into a realm of cultural capital that was previously inaccessible to her. This is a recognition of the fairy tale's class structure because Cinderella's transformation into a princess is a reflection of her ability to uphold the standards of grace, beauty, and refinement that the court values.

If the audience listen to the music without the background mentioned above, they will tend to consider it as a classical music which is elegant — a vague and general feeling on it. They are not able to tell the specific feeling that the music brings. As musicians outperformed non-musicians on fine-grained auditory psychophysical measures. In another word, musical training enables people to perceive more details in sound, resulting in more specific and accurate analysis on music [11]. The dynamics will only be considered as a general way of starting a phrase, a piece of music. Because most of the audience are lack of musical analytical skills, also has no sufficient time to analyze it deeply as they are watching a film, which means the feeling are highly rely on the first impression.

The audience cannot sensitively identify the minor difference between various classical music but tend to roughly categorize them into the major category of elegant classical music, which is the general impression of classical music.

3.2 The Silence and Music after the Dance – The Return to Reality

The music shifts once more as midnight falls and Cinderella is forced to return to her everyday existence of serving her toxic stepmother following the magical dance. The transient nature of Cinderella's transformation is followed by a change from the ballsy music of the ball to a somber, if not eerie, musical mood. This dramatic change from the elaborate orchestral themes to the sparse, austere music after her departure is indicative of her tumultuous new life. It highlights how the magical and fleeting character of the spell brackets her elevated position, even though it is real for a brief moment. This passage's melodic phrases' pauses highlight the fleeting nature of the situation and convey feelings of loss and longing.

Classical music usually had a gap between each phrase. Contrasting with the instrument-playing piece, it makes them more "exciting" to the audience. If the music consistently plays without minor gap, audience will soon get bored with the created feeling. The rest prepare audience better to feel the emotion for the following music.

Shortly after the audience breathe with music, actress, and actor, the emotion is built up into the next level at the next phrase, which is expected by the audience, but the breath delays the time of resolution/satisfaction of expectation. The key of music is F major, and all phrase ended at C7 chord, which is the dominant-seventh chord that is tended to be resolved by the following tonic chord at the beginning of the following phrase. Silence enhances audiences' satisfactory feeling as dominant-seventh chord are resolved, because the delay builds the tension further.

Another interpretation of the musical silences is that they represent the gap between Cinderella's ideals and reality. According to Lincoln's story in Eagan's work, these silences can often represent moments of tension and emotional reflection. In *Cinderella*, the pauses, too, serve as emotional pauses as well, giving the viewer a chance to ponder Cinderella's sorrow as it suggests how short her fairy tale existence was. They evoke feelings of longing and a return to her earlier, more constrained existence. Nevertheless, when the music eventually returns to a more cheerful tone, they also highlight Cinderella's tenacity. The slow reappearance of the entire orchestral score demonstrates that although the evening's magic has faded, Cinderella's emotional and psychological metamorphosis is still a recurring aspect of her personality. This aligns with Kilburn's idea of "aspectual hearing", where individual subjectivity — shaped by cultural memory, gender, and emotional experience — alters how sound is perceived [12]. Here, the listeners are led to distinguish between Cinderella's transient illusion and her ongoing internal metamorphosis.

4 Conclusion

The music in *Cinderella* is one of the main players in the film as it develops, not just a background score to the pictures. The music reflects the shift in mood, the character development, and the cultural context of the story, starting with the melancholic overture before the ball and continuing through the big orchestral accompaniment to the dance and the silences when the transition is reversed. We can show how music not only improves our comprehension of the characters and their emotional landscapes but also resonates strongly with the cultural and social contexts in which the narrative takes place by using the concepts of musical punctum, pheno-song, geno-song, studium, and silences. The ball scene emphasizes the eternal nature of this classic fairy tale by serving as more of an evocative reminder of Cinderella's inner and outer transformation than a spectacle event.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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