

# The Days Do Not End: Film Music, Time and Bernard Herrmann

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• David Butler

In 1949, the composer Aaron Copland outlined five 'ways in which music serves the screen'.<sup>1</sup> The first function identified by Copland was music's ability to create a 'more convincing atmosphere of time and place'.<sup>2</sup> This potential for music to establish quickly the historical setting of a film's diegesis has remained the dominant theme in discussions of the temporal qualities music can bring to mainstream film. Claudia Gorbman's pioneering study of film music, *Unheard Melodies* (1987), echoes Copland in Gorbman's establishment of seven principles of the classical Hollywood film score. Once again, where time is mentioned (in relation to the principle of 'narrative cueing') it is in terms of the referential and signifying properties of music to locate the film in a particular time and place:

Strongly codified Hollywood harmonies, melodic patterns, rhythms, and habits of orchestration are employed as a matter of course in classical cinema for establishing setting [. . .] If one hears Strauss-like waltzes in the strings, it must be turn-of-the-century Vienna [. . .]; harps often introduce us to medieval, renaissance or heavenly settings.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, the composer and lecturer David Burnand, speaking at the first 'School of Sound' in 1998, referred to 'time and place', if the filmmaker wanted to evoke a historical period, as one of the four key dramatic functions of film music.<sup>4</sup>

Although undoubtedly an important function, it is odd that discussion of the temporal possibilities of film music has tended to remain rooted in music's ability, through its associational qualities, to evoke a particular moment in history. A wider consideration of music and time is also

absent from Jerrold Levinson's discussion of film music and narrative agency and his survey of fifteen functions that 'critics and theorists have observed film music to perform'.<sup>5</sup> I make these comments not as a criticism of any of the writers mentioned above. Copland, Gorbman, Burnand and Levinson all note that their respective lists are not intended to be complete and definitive (as Copland says 'we have merely skimmed the surface') but, as I hope this brief introduction has established, the relationship between music and time in film has usually been addressed in rather narrow terms.<sup>6</sup> The lack of wider attention accorded music's temporal functions in film is surprising. Time and music are intimately related and the consequences of that relationship can have a significant impact on our understanding and perception of the passage of film time: both within the world of the film and our own experience of the film unfolding before us ('story time' and 'viewing time' as David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson put it).<sup>7</sup> Drawing on the work of St. Augustine and David Epstein for his study of popular music and time, Simon Frith argues that:

The past is no longer here; the present has no duration by definition; the future is not here yet [. . .]. We can only measure something "in time" when it no longer exists in time; when it is over. We can only be measuring something "which remains fixed in memory." [. . .] David Epstein adds that time is not "about" music (a way of describing "music itself"), it *is* music: "music *structures* time, incorporates it as one of its fundamental elements. Without time – structured time – music does not exist." And I would add (following St. Augustine)

that without music, structured music, time does not exist.<sup>8</sup>

As with the writers on film music I have already referred to, I do not claim to offer an exhaustive study of the ways in which music relates to issues of temporality in film. It is my hope here, however, to go a small way toward expanding the 'functions' of film music by discussing *three* ways in which music can assist our understanding of a film's temporal properties. These temporal functions can be summarised as *anachronism*, *navigation* and *expansion*. To explore these functions, I have chosen as a case study the composer Bernard Herrmann (1911–1975) and his score for *Taxi Driver* (1976) as a particular focus. Herrmann and *Taxi Driver* are far from being arbitrary selections. As the first composer to offer a sustained and significant alternative to the principles of the classical Hollywood score (established in the 1930s by composers such as Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold), this paper will argue that one of the distinctive features of Herrmann's composing for film was his understanding of the potential for music to distort and expand the audience's perception of film time. Although referring to a wide range of films, I want to concentrate on *Taxi Driver* as a summation of Herrmann's compositional style and the temporal functions fulfilled by it. In extra-textual terms alone, it is difficult to think of a film score marked more poignantly by the passing of time than *Taxi Driver*. As is well known, Herrmann died in his sleep the very night after completing the recording of the score and Steven Smith's account of the *Taxi Driver* sessions, in his biography of Herrmann, emphasises this sense of time running out, as an ailing Herrmann returned to Hollywood following a self-imposed exile in London:

From the beginning, everyone realised *Taxi Driver* was to be no ordinary two days' work. Visitors filled the studio. "It was an emotional homecoming in many ways," Scorsese recalled. "The first day on the recording stage, all the musicians came around just to greet him and pay their respects." [. . .] Music editor Erma Levin turned to Marian Kline and

whispered, "Take a good look at Bernard Herrmann. It's the last time any of us will ever see him."<sup>9</sup>

## Anachronism

One of the most ironic aspects of the emphasis on the ability of film music to establish a film's historical setting is the fact that few scores in the classical Hollywood era actually provided any meaningful or extended use of authentic 'historical' music. Within the same section on creating a 'convincing atmosphere of time', Copland noted that 'not all Hollywood composers bother about this nicety. Too often their scores are interchangeable [. . .] The lush symphonic texture of late nineteenth century music remains the dominating influence'.<sup>10</sup> Rather than endorsing Copland's first function, the vast majority of classical Hollywood film scores feature an *anachronistic* use of music, albeit one motivated by standardisation rather than artistic decisions regarding the use of musical anachronism to comment on or modify the audience's response to the on-screen action.

The dominance of large-scale orchestral film music in the tradition of late nineteenth century romanticism is a given of film music criticism. Whether it's Korngold's score for *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) or Howard Shore's music for *The Lord of the Rings* films (2001–3), mainstream Western film music has tended not to explore at length much further back in time than the middle of the nineteenth century. It may be for many listeners that the general sound of a 'classical' orchestra is enough to signify 'old' and 'history' without specifying a particular period. Given his stated aim that 'we always knew we wanted the score to feel old, as if it was found somewhere, in a vault, and they had uncovered it', Shore's soundworld for *The Lord of the Rings* films is surprisingly conservative.<sup>11</sup> Despite inventive use of a range of instruments from non-European or pre-nineteenth/twentieth century cultures (including the Hardanger fiddle, the monochord, ney, rhaita, sarangi and musette), these instruments tend not to be foregrounded (the Hardanger fiddle and evocative theme for Lothlórien are notable

exceptions). The overriding impression of the score is for more familiar groupings of brass and strings with a temporal setting for the music which feels more post-Wagner than mythic pre-history (contrast this Middle-earth soundworld with the more distinctive combination of 'old' instruments [the shawm, the racket, the tabor and the rauschpfeifen] in David Cain's score for BBC Radio's 1968 version of *The Hobbit*). One of the most important reasons for this pull toward Western orchestral music post-Wagner in mainstream film music is, as Gorbman has argued, that romantic tonality enabled 'quick and efficient signification to a mass audience' by virtue of possessing a recognisable set of semiotic functions, accumulated over time.<sup>12</sup> Romanticism was perceived by its adherents, as Caryl Flinn has summarised, to express emotions via sounds which 'were something everyone could understand' and, although a flawed and Eurocentric perspective, it was clearly one shared by classical Hollywood practice.<sup>13</sup> This perception is still on display in films such as *The Lord of the Rings*. Peter Jackson has acknowledged the dual purpose of Howard Shore's epic score in providing an emotional link between the film and its audience as well as 'telling you a lot about the cultures of this world' but the extent to which the score can indulge the latter, and construct an 'authentic' ancient soundworld, is inevitably in deference to the perceived needs of the audience, especially if one considers Jackson's assertion that film music 'totally guides your emotions when you're watching a film'.<sup>14</sup> Arguably, the needs of such a film (financial performance not being least among them) demand a familiar musical code to create that emotional link in as wide an audience as possible.

As Copland observed, there were exceptions in Hollywood: Miklós Rózsa, for example, gained a reputation in the 1950s for his attention to historical research in evoking 'authentic' soundworlds for period epics such as *Quo Vadis* (1951), *Ben Hur* (1959) and *El Cid* (1961). One of the most refreshing aspects of Bernard Herrmann's first score, for *Citizen Kane* (1941), is its use of various vernacular forms from the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century (polkas, gallops, ragtime) to chart Charles Foster Kane's youth and early adulthood. Even then, the tendency in these scores was to *allude* to historicity rather than a slavish recreation of a particular period's style. In his book, *The Art of Film Music* (1994), the composer George Burt asserts that:

Precision regarding historical era and musical style is not always that critical. The dramatic needs of the story can be met as well, if not more effectively, by association involving a more generalised concept as by historical documentation. For example, there have been many films about the life and time of Jesus. Even if Western music from that specific time had been preserved in written form (and to my knowledge, none has), we must wonder if it would match the sweeping grandeur and significance of that moment in history, particularly as it is represented on the large screen. Instead, many film scores have successfully captured the impact and spirituality of that era through reference to more recent musical styles and techniques.<sup>15</sup>

The somewhat obvious point to make here is that the film audience does not necessarily hear anachronistic music as 'wrong'. Much, of course, relies on an audience member's musical awareness (as Burt notes, 'only a highly sophisticated listener or a well-schooled musician or musicologist could differentiate between European music of the 1450s and that of half a century later').<sup>16</sup> Neither does it follow that our understanding of the associations generated by a particular musical idiom guarantee a particular interpretation. The cultural code attached to music may operate as an effective (albeit often clichéd) shorthand (bagpipes for Scotland, brass bands for Yorkshire, accordions for Paris etc) but it can all too easily result in generalisation and misinterpretation. Claudia Gorbman falls into this very trap in her comment that 'if one hears Strauss-like waltzes in the strings, it must be turn-of-the century Vienna'. But it could also be a walk through medieval Sherwood Forest (as it is in Korngold's delightful use of a waltz for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*) or a spaceship in transit to the Moon in the early twenty-first

century (as it is in *2001: A Space Odyssey* [1968]). These two counter-examples, one classical and the other non-classical, use anachronistic music in differing ways, the former to reinforce the emotional tone of the film (a joyous swashbuckling romantic adventure) and the latter as ironic comment to convey insight into the film's subtext.

I am more interested here in the deliberate use of anachronism, rather than its default use (i.e. late orchestral romanticism as the standard idiom for classical Hollywood film music). The ironic effect of juxtaposing Johann Strauss' 'Blue Danube' waltz with images of space travel has been noted often but one of the most insightful readings of this striking audio-visual combination is by Timothy Scheurer, building on the observations of Royal Brown. As Scheurer suggests, the use of a late nineteenth century waltz provides more than just a comic interlude:

The composer Irwin Bazelon in fact states, 'The waltz is Muzak – an endless flow of rerecorded, sentimental musical pap, heard in any air terminal the world over'. The music, then, is conventional, written in the idiom of not only muzak but of much of film scoring since the 1930s, and as a result it suggests a world of order, circumscribed behavior, values, norms, and manners – a world much like ours, except 30–odd years in the future [ . . . ], we are witnessing extraordinary technological achievement that has now become part of our ordinary everyday lives.<sup>17</sup>

In a film concerned with the development and progress of the human race, the use of Strauss' nineteenth century imperialist Euro-pop conveys a sense of humanity's worldview being preserved in the past and placed on hold. For all the technological achievements on display here, human beings are not yet ready to progress to 'something wonderful'. The connotations of this anachronistic use of music can thus offer the audience member useful tools with which to make sense of a film whose meaning is notoriously ambiguous. Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), for example, features a score by John Barnes that combines traditional African drums and percussion, wood flute and harp with

synthesizers and electric bass. This combination of 'ancient and modern' in the score acts as an effective correlate for a film which crosses temporal boundaries (and is narrated by a character known as the Unborn Child), charting the journey of a Gullah family to mainland America at the beginning of the twentieth century but suffused with the echoes of their African roots. 'I remember and I recall', says the Unborn Child and the score, rather than following actions or individual characters' emotions, provides the aural equivalent of the Gullah community's journey in its fusion of musical styles that indicate where they have come from and where they are going. With its non-linear structure and rejection of a host of classical cinema techniques, Toni Cade Bambara admits that *Daughters of the Dust* 'demands some work on the part of the spectator whose ear and eye have been conditioned by habits of viewing industry fare that [ . . . ] addicts us to voyeurism, fetishism, mystified notions of social relations, and freakish notions of intimate relations [ . . . ]. But [ . . . ] the reward is an empowered eye'.<sup>18</sup> Bambara is right to draw attention to Dash's distinctive visual style and its attempt to convey the 'Black experience' through its use of unconventional frame rates and shot composition but the music plays a significant role here too. Barnes' score, in its use of past and present forms co-existing, imparts a strong sense of 'cultural continuum' that, as with the 'Blue Danube' in *2001*, can aid audience understanding of an unfamiliar approach to film form.<sup>19</sup>

If *2001* uses 'historical' music out of context by incorporating it for scenes set in the future, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* (1974), the third part of his 'Trilogy of Life' (*The Decameron* [1971] and *The Canterbury Tales* [1972] being the others), employs musical anachronism through the use of Mozart (1756–1791) for a film set centuries in the past, long before Mozart was born. The effect here, again, is to provide an understanding of the film's thematic concerns. Although Pasolini would come to reject his stated aims in the Trilogy, at the time he claimed that these were the 'most ideological films I have

ever made'.<sup>20</sup> Patrick Rumble outlines Pasolini's project in the Trilogy as being to celebrate

the bodies and pleasures available to a pre-capitalist, non-industrialised society in the *Decameron*, in *Il fiore* [*Arabian Nights*] he celebrates an analogous 'peasant' society, that of the Third World, with which he came to identify with more and more in his own life. For Pasolini, it was a society still on the margins of consumer capitalism, where the bodies and imaginaries of the people had yet to be fully 'homologated' by the culture of neocapitalism. For Pasolini, non-Western societies and traditions exist as cultural hold-outs providing a potential point of resistance to the cultural hegemony of the economic centre.<sup>21</sup>

The means that Pasolini employed to celebrate these bodies have been the source of considerable criticism, both then and now. Pasolini's aesthetic and conceptual strategies engage dangerously with the worst excesses of Orientalism as defined by Edward Said and, as Maurizio Viano observes, 'Third World faces and places are enlisted in what seems yet another version of old colonialist projections'.<sup>22</sup> The use of Mozart's music complicates the film's portrayal of Third World bodies and sexuality further.

Pasolini utilises a range of music in the film: a rather brief score by Ennio Morricone, music recorded on location and, somewhat incongruously, the third movement from Mozart's String Quartet Number 17 in B flat (K458), composed in 1784. The Mozart is heard at length in two sections of the film: the arrival of the slave girl, Zummurud, at a mysterious city after her escape from the Forty Thieves and the conclusion of the film as Zummurud's master and lover, the naïve youth Nur ed Din, is at long last reunited with his partner having spent the best part of the film in pursuit of her and getting repeatedly sidetracked and waylaid. What does the Mozart bring to the film? A kneejerk response might interpret it as a troubling imposition of European culture onto a non-European text but I would suggest, without dismissing the uneasiness generated by its use, that there is something more subversive at work

here. In part, there is the possibility that Pasolini is making a musical joke through the use of this particular string quartet, also known as the 'Hunt Quartet', for the lovers' pursuit but, of more relevance to Pasolini's political concerns, there are ideological ramifications as well. The use of Mozart, the epitome of Western classical music, for scenes of a sexual encounter between a black slave girl and an Arab youth continues Pasolini's stated aim to celebrate and legitimate pre-capitalist, Third World sexuality (however patronising Pasolini's presentation might be, as well as compromised due to the two actors being Italian). Pasolini appropriates one of the seminal figures of Western art music as the musical background to a relationship between characters traditionally denied any agency, never mind the acknowledgement of being capable of possessing a joyous sexuality, in mainstream Western cinema. The cultural authority carried by Mozart is conferred on Zummurud's and Nur ed Din's lovemaking lending it (and their bodies) a cultural authority that, Pasolini would presumably have argued, confronts Western consumerism with images and concepts it has struggled to accept and sought to exclude.

All of the examples of anachronism that I have discussed thus far have expressed aspects of their respective films' thematic interests and subtexts. But anachronistic music can operate at a more local level too, expressing the specific thoughts and concerns of an individual character. In this sense, anachronistic music takes on a narrating function that relates it to characters in the film and their state of mind as opposed to the example from *Arabian Nights*, which operates more in terms of what Jerrold Levinson describes as 'music of additive status, assignable only to the implied filmmaker'.<sup>23</sup> A good example of anachronism which functions as music that seems to 'issue from, be in service of, the agency one imagines to be bringing one the sights and sounds of the film's world' can be found in the Tina Turner biopic *What's Love Got To Do With It?* (1993).<sup>24</sup>

Based on Turner's own biography, the film follows her career through her work and relationship with Ike Turner, the subsequent

breakdown of that relationship and her 'escape' from Ike before closing on her triumphant comeback as a solo artist in the mid-1980s. Throughout the film, the music – both diegetic and non-diegetic – represents the contrast and conflict between Ike and Tina. A 1968 London concert segues to a 1974 concert in Los Angeles – but the same song is seamlessly carried over between the two performances, suggesting the static nature of Ike's musical ideas and his refusal to move on from the R n' B and soul which has made his name. Tina is physically abused and beaten by Ike for commenting on his style and professing her admiration for the new wave of British pop and the relationship, romantically and artistically, disintegrates. In the film's dramatic centrepiece, Tina finally runs out on Ike in desperation, fleeing to the first safe haven she can reach and begging a hotel manager for a room for the night even though she hasn't enough money. The sequence is interesting in musical terms for its use of anachronistic music. At various points in the film a melancholic theme is heard for Tina at moments of despair or sadness. This theme is initially understated. But when Tina snaps and begins her escape from Ike, the theme, for electric guitar, develops into a soaring solo, leaving the melancholy behind. The music then, in terms of Tina's career at that time, 1976, is anachronistic – it's an idiom she was not playing in but is indicative of the soft rock that she would eventually endorse in the 1980s when her career would be resurrected with the 1984 album *Private Dancer*. The use of anachronism within the context of an individual's personal history thus conveys, in this case, information to the audience (particularly if they are familiar with Tina's career) about where the narrative is heading (Tina *will* make the musical shift that Ike has been preventing her from doing) and the personality of the cinematic narrator (although beaten, Tina is not defeated and the music emphasises her defiance and courage in adversity).

Bernard Herrmann's score for *Taxi Driver* also employs musical anachronism as a means of imparting information about the state of mind of

its cinematic narrator, in this case the unreliable narrator that is Travis Bickle (always assuming that Tina is telling us the truth of course). As Levinson observes, 'Herrmann's music does not serve merely to inform us about Travis's mental life, or to second redundantly what other elements of the film establish about his mentality, but rather enters into making it *fictional* in the film that Travis's mental life is a certain way at a certain time'.<sup>25</sup> The anachronism in *Taxi Driver* takes the form of a tender melody for alto saxophone with the backing of small jazz band and string accompaniment playing in the mainstream/swing idiom. The connection between Travis (Robert DeNiro) and the jazz melody is made forcibly in the film's opening section: two times the music segues, from a pattern of slowly swelling ominous chords with martial overtones in the snare drum, to the jazz melody as the camera shifts to a close-up of Travis' eyes, establishing a link between this music and Travis' point-of-view. Indeed, although Travis admits that he does not know much about music, the official music timing notes for the film refer repeatedly to the jazz theme as the 'melody in the head'.<sup>26</sup> It is not that Travis actually hears this tune but that it is a representation of his own internal voices. I have written at length elsewhere about the function and 'meaning' of the jazz melody in the film in terms of what it tells us about Travis and summarise it as being expressive of Travis' 'alienation from the "scum" of his surroundings and his yearning for companionship and romantic love', albeit a yearning that is bound up with his sexual and violent impulses.<sup>27</sup> For the purposes of this article, however, the important thing to note are the connotations of using an anachronistic jazz idiom as the 'sound' of the central character's inner thoughts, in a film set on the streets of mid-1970s New York. Travis does not see himself as being part of his contemporary world – he is, as he puts it in his diary, 'God's lonely man' – and the use of an 'old-fashioned' style of jazz creates an effective sense of displacement, especially as Travis drives through the city at night taking in this urban safari of 'all the animals' with fascination and repulsion. As I have

suggested elsewhere, a funk, disco or pop soundtrack, all of which were then in fashion (particularly in Blaxploitation films), would have connected Travis to his contemporary surroundings whereas the nostalgic swing of a bygone age distances him and hints further at his alienation.

There were plans to turn the jazz melody into a hit record. The lyricist Diane Lampert, a friend of Herrmann's, considered the melody to be the best 'he has ever come up with for a single hit potential' and devised a set of lyrics for the melody titled 'Pumpkin'.<sup>28</sup> Lampert described her lyrics as 'streetwise', although the end results are quite bizarre and somewhat disturbing ('Pumpkin on the street, for sale soft and sweet, an angel too good to eat; Pumpkin don't you know, that you will lose your glow, and one day your juice won't flow; Pumpkin juice perfume, Diana in full bloom, aroma fills the air, filling up all my loneliness': do they reflect Travis' thoughts toward Iris, the child prostitute, one wonders?) but Lampert seemed to have missed the point: Travis' 'melody in the head' was not intended for popular hit potential – quite the reverse.<sup>29</sup> 'There never has been any choice for me', intones Travis and, in retrospect, Herrmann's choice of an anachronistic musical idiom for his final protagonist seems equally unchangeable.

## Navigation

The referential function of music has been addressed at length in writing on film music. Justin London, for example, discusses referentiality in relation to the device of the leitmotif, employed most famously in the music dramas of Richard Wagner.<sup>30</sup> The leitmotif takes the form of a musical phrase or 'token' that is associated with a particular character, object, place, concept etc and can thus, once the connection is established and understood by the audience member, refer to that character or object even if they are not present on-screen. Although Adorno and Eisler, writing in the 1940s, discredited the use of the leitmotif in film music ('the leitmotif has been reduced to the level of a musical lackey, who announces his

master with an important air even though the eminent personage is clearly recognisable to everyone') and claimed that films had no need for the device, London demonstrates the effective use that the leitmotif can be put to.<sup>31</sup> For London, the leitmotif can:

- 1) Underscore the obvious presence of a character, place, and so forth that is clearly visible on screen;
- 2) Indicate the presence of someone/something that is otherwise obscure (out of the frame, hidden in the scene, in disguise, and so forth); and
- 3) Indicate the "psychological presence" of a character or idea, as when character A is contemplating the absent character B – we see A while hearing B's leitmotif.

Leitmotifs couple a capacity to refer with a sense of emotional expression.<sup>32</sup>

The referential function of the leitmotif means that it is also a helpful device for audience orientation – as Adorno and Eisler note, 'they have always been the most elementary means of elucidation, the thread by which the musically inexperienced find their way about'.<sup>33</sup> This virtue of the leitmotif makes it a particularly helpful device for navigating a non-linear narrative structure when it might otherwise be unclear *when* in the narrative we are. One of the reasons that a film such as Pasolini's *Arabian Nights* can be so confusing for audiences used to mainstream narrative and editing practices is that he dispenses with familiar methods of indicating the film has shifted spatially and/or temporally. Maintaining the original structure of 'tales within tales' from *The Arabian Nights'* oral origins, Pasolini switches tales without clear transitional editing devices such as dissolves or on-screen text and opts instead for straight cuts. Similarly, there is a lack of music to suggest that we are somewhere and 'somewhen' else (as a contrast, think of the transitional devices, which include music, in, say, *Casablanca* [1942] to indicate that we're going into Rick's past).

A good example of the ability of music to help us navigate moments of non-linearity is Gillo

Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1965), which features a remarkable score by Ennio Morricone. The film begins with a pre-credit sequence in which a member of the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) is coerced to inform the French military about the whereabouts of the FLN activist Ali-la-pointe. The ensuing credit sequence consists of shots of the French paratroopers moving in on the hiding place of Ali and his comrades, holed up behind a fake wall. The whole sequence is scored with military drumming and horn figures offering a 'call to arms' and, most memorably, a driving arpeggiated ostinato figure in the bass notes of the piano that rises and falls but is repeated again and again, refusing to give in (an effective musical representation of the interminable cycle of violence in the film: the same basic ostinato, with different instrumentation, is used for the FLN's violent activities as well). Continuing for over two minutes, this repetitive theme has a considerable amount of time to imprint itself on the audience's memory in connection with the image of the French forces moving into action. After the theme subsides and the paratroopers locate their target, Ali is ordered to give himself up. A close-up on Ali's eyes blurs and becomes indistinct then dissolves to an establishing shot of Algiers with on-screen text informing us that we are in 1954. This visual temporal shift is accompanied by a downward glissandi, which slows down over the course of its four-second duration, imparting, in tandem with the visuals, an effective sense of sliding back in time.<sup>34</sup> The film then shifts to an account of how Ali became involved with the FLN and then switches between a variety of story threads: Ali, the Frenchmen who plant the bombs in the Casbah, the Algerian women on the bombing mission, Colonel Mathieu and his forces, Ali and his comrades. Much later, toward the end of the film, Ali is seen waking up at the dawn of a day he promises will bring 'fireworks'. Pontecorvo slowly builds up the sense of impending doom, of time running out: a curtain is pulled to one side and we see in the background the fake wall tiles behind which Ali and his friends were hiding at the beginning of the film – a visual cue for the

perceptive spectator who has noted the mise-en-scène from that earlier moment. There is a burst of machinegun fire followed by the snare drum pattern that began the opening credit sequence and then the insistent piano arpeggiated ostinato: the final confirmation that we have come full circle and the flashbacks have caught up with the events at the film's outset. This time, we do not see the French forces arriving – less than thirty seconds of the 'paratroopers in action' motif is enough to indicate they are coming, such is the strong audio-visual connection established in the credit sequence.

In *Taxi Driver*, awareness of the referential function of film music provides us with the means to make sense of one of its most curious moments, one in which music is prominent. The vast majority of the film is relayed from Travis' point-of-view with the jazz melody expressing, as we have established in the previous section, his inner thoughts. Yet there is one instance of the jazz melody playing in which Travis is not present: the scene where the pimp, Sport (Harvey Keitel), is dancing with the twelve-year old prostitute, Iris (Jodie Foster). In Paul Schrader's original script the scene clearly takes place away from Travis – Iris is uncomfortable and Sport tries to reassure her of how much she means to him ('I'm nothing without you') in a slow dance. In the script, Sport is described as putting some 'slow soul music on the stereo' but in the film the record he plays to seduce Iris is none other than Travis' 'melody in the head': the jazz theme for alto saxophone. It's a moment that calls into question our understanding of the melody's previously established referential function.

How do we interpret this scene? We could read it as it is scripted – that it actually happens: as Michel Chion states quite matter-of-factly 'Bernard Herrmann's main theme, heard as pit music throughout much of the film, crops up as the music on a phonograph to which the pimp and his young hooker dance'.<sup>35</sup> If this is so, then Sport's use of Travis' personal theme to seduce the very girl Travis is trying to rescue is one of the bleakest ironies in all film music. But there is another way of interpreting this scene that alters our understanding of where and when it is

taking place in the narrative – to arrive at that interpretation it is necessary to detail carefully the relationship of the soundtrack to the visual information. The lead-in to the scene, not in Schrader's original script, is comprised of a shot of Travis looking out of the window of his parked taxi cab. The camera dissolves to a shot of his point-of-view which tilts up as it surveys an apartment block. We then shift to the interior of one of the apartments and the scene between Sport and Iris develops with Sport putting the jazz melody on the record player before beginning his slow dance with Iris (in this version of the scene as filmed, Iris, following a meeting with Travis in a diner in which Travis tells her about Sport's criminal activities, expresses to Sport her discomfort with her job). *Before* the scene can reach its natural conclusion, however, it is brutally interrupted by the sound from the impending scene: Travis practising in the firing range (to camera). Three gunshots are heard over the image of Sport and Iris dancing, before the camera closes in on Travis shooting in the range via a series of jump cuts. The effect is of Travis blasting away the offending image of Sport and Iris embracing. The transition is a classic example of what Kenneth Macgowan termed the 'shock cut' with 'cutting across time and space by keying the moves to a startling line', in this case a startling sound.<sup>36</sup> Taken as a whole and guided by our awareness that the jazz melody refers to Travis' psyche (and thus discounting the possibility that *Taxi Driver* exists in a world like *Laura* [1944] in which much of the music, diegetic and non-diegetic, alludes to David Raksin's theme for the mysterious title character) a different interpretation of this scene emerges in which the dance between Sport and Iris can be understood as being a projection of what Travis *imagines* is taking place in the apartment, and his delusion that Sport is appropriating his personal theme to deceive Iris furthers his hatred of Sport and the world that he represents. An understanding of the function of the leitmotif in film music, then, transforms this scene into a more complex moment that adds to the film's already compelling psychological portrait and takes the scene out of

a more straightforward linear sequence of events.

### Expansion

Film music is often discussed as aiding the rhythmic flow of a scene, uniting a series of disparate shots into a continuous montage for example and speeding up the passage of story time. As Michel Chion notes:

Music can aid characters in crossing great distances and long stretches of time almost instantaneously. This use of music is fairly frequent, ever since the beginning of sound. In King Vidor's *Hallelujah* protagonist Zeke moves through several locales during the singing of one spiritual, "Going Home": a boat on the Mississippi, the roof of a train, a prairie [ . . . ]. In Vidor's film music gives the characters winged feet; it functions to contract both space and time.<sup>37</sup>

In this final section I want to discuss the ability of music to create the opposite effect, what Chion calls 'temporal immobilisation'.<sup>38</sup> Although acknowledging the potential for music to generate this effect, Chion does not offer any detailed examples beyond noting that 'Morricone's music is crucial' in creating the effect during the lengthy confrontation scenes in the films of Sergio Leone.<sup>39</sup> The one example that Chion does provide, also from Leone, refers to the use of sound rather than music, at the beginning of *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968). Much more remains to be said on the ability of music to immobilise and expand our experience of time in film.

Simon Frith poses the question of whether music can extend a sense of the present. The answer, suggests Frith, is that 'if "the present" is actually defined by a quality of *attention*, then music does indeed expand the moment, by framing it'.<sup>40</sup> For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the potential for music to immobilise time was also related to the attentiveness of the listener:

Because of the internal organisation of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilises passing time; it catches and enfolds it as one catches and

**enfolds a cloth flapping in the wind. It follows that by listening to music, and while we are listening to it, we enter into a kind of immortality.<sup>41</sup>**

This awareness of the listener's attentiveness was at the core of Bernard Herrmann's distinctive compositional style for film – the first significant break from classical practice in mainstream film music.

Herrmann's style has been discussed at length by numerous writers as well as being the subject of television and radio documentaries. As William Rosar's editorial in an issue of *The Journal of Film Music* devoted to 'Herrmann Studies' asks: 'Bernard Herrmann: The Beethoven of Film Music?'<sup>42</sup> Herrmann's style does not, therefore, require significant reiteration here but it is useful to identify certain key features, namely: the rejection of extended melodic lines; the emphasis on instrumental and harmonic colour; distinctive groupings of instruments as opposed to a reliance on the large-scale orchestra; a predilection for small musical 'cells' and the use of the ostinato device in particular. This shift to a compositional style founded on smaller musical units and repetitive structures, although evident in Herrmann's earlier scores, really comes to the fore with his film music in the 1950s, beginning with *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). As Royal Brown summarises, the short phrase gave Herrmann's film music a rapid response quality by being a 'more manipulable building block' than a lengthier melodic line.<sup>43</sup> For Herrmann, the advantages of the shorter musical phrase were, in part, related to his opinion of the listener's attentiveness: 'the short phrase is easier to follow for audiences, who only listen with half an ear. Don't forget that the best they do is half an ear'.<sup>44</sup>

The repeated nature of the ostinato device is fundamental to the sense of expanded time often generated by Herrmann. As Frith states, 'repetition (which is central to our understanding of rhythm) is equally central to our understanding of time – it is only as things recur that there can be said to be movement *in time*'.<sup>45</sup> Frith identifies the musical 'movement' of minimalism as being the site of considerable

exploration of the creation of 'timelessness' in our experience of music. Despite being a label that many of its exponents reject, minimalism came to prominence in the 1960s through the work of composers such as La Monte Young, Pauline Oliveros, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass. The composer and musicologist David Cope summarises the recurring traits of minimalism as including silence, brevity, continuities 'requiring slow modulation' and repetitive patterns: all of these core features of minimalism are on display in Herrmann's film music, making his work a genuine forerunner to the minimalist movement.<sup>46</sup>

For Frith, the 'experience of "timelessness" actually describes an out-of-the-ordinary attention to time'<sup>47</sup> and I would suggest that this principle is at work in Herrmann's use of the ostinato. As the short phrase is heard repeatedly the audience is given the opportunity to memorise its structure and anticipate its return, the legato tempo of many of Herrmann's ostinati making them easier to commit to memory. Roy Prendergast cites the experience of the composer Laurence Rosenthal at a performance of Japanese theatre in which the repetition of a simple musical device took on an intense dramatic effect: "'the use of a simple low drum would act as a kind of emotional counterpoint to the scene. You would only hear it about every ten seconds and after a while you knew it was coming and the effect had something terrifying about it'".<sup>48</sup> Although excelling at terror and the fantastic elsewhere in his music, Herrmann's ostinati are often at their best (the device can become unintentionally banal if over or inappropriately used) when used in sequences intended to convey routine, loss of purpose or the drawn-out nature of a task (think of Scottie tailing Madeleine through the streets of San Francisco in *Vertigo* [1958]). One of the finest examples is the cue titled 'Thank God for the Rain' on the CD release of the complete *Taxi Driver* score and heard in the early stages of the film as Travis, reading from his diary, describes his new job as a taxi driver for the first time over shots of him at work. The cue is founded on a steady, rising walking bass figure (four basses

were used by Herrmann for the score) over which a sustained chord (alternating between the brass and the woodwind) increases in volume until the bass pattern begins to climb all over again with a different sustained chord, now playing more quietly than the first. The effect is of a gradual increase in tension then its eventual dissipation as the sustained chords swell and are then released: a musical inhalation and exhalation of breath. Herrmann maintains interest through subtle modulations in his chordal language and instrumentation (there are rich textures here with rumbling woodwinds in the lower register and glistening chimes from the vibraphone) but the essential pattern is of a structure that lasts eight seconds and is repeated again and again (twelve times in the cue as recorded). If we are conscious of this structure repeatedly rising and falling then we are also conscious of its passing in time. There is clear structure here but no indication of narrative resolution (within the micro-narrative of this musical pattern): it is a perfect evocation of the aimlessness of Travis' life at this stage in the film. As he says later, 'the days go on and on. They don't end [. . .] All my life needed was a sense of some place to go'.

If Herrmann, in the above example, is able to expand our experience of story time through repetition and a steady rhythmic pulse, elsewhere in his music he excels at the suspension of time through offering no indication of what is to come next. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* provides an outstanding example in the form of Herrmann's cue for the first encounter between the alien visitor, Klaatu (Michael Rennie), and the US military gathered round his spacecraft, waiting for him to emerge. The tension is palpable without the score: the army are poised to strike, waiting for an indication of the alien's intentions. A doorway slides open in the spacecraft and Klaatu appears, his face hidden behind his helmet, walking toward the soliders. He holds out his hand, grasping some kind of cylindrical device – is it a weapon? Herrmann scores the sequence for maximum tension, employing long sustained notes (for two theremins in the high and low registers respectively), with subtle chordal accompaniment

(the tritone to the fore) and distant shimmerings from the gong, recorded further down in the mix. There is even less musical progression here and the lack of progress gives us (and, by implication, the army) no clue as to whether Klaatu's intentions are hostile – the use of the tritone, with its tonal restlessness, operates as an effective insight into the tension of the soldiers: as they wait for the situation to resolve itself so too do we wait for Herrmann's cue to resolve itself tonally but he denies us that reassurance.

It is difficult to think of anybody exploring the possibilities of temporal suspension and expansion more fully than Herrmann at this point (the early 1950s) in mainstream film music. There are brief snatches in other composers' work – one thinks of the striking moment at the beginning of *The Killers* (1946) where the Swede (Burt Lancaster) waits implacably for the hitmen to arrive and end his life. Following a characteristically busy sequence, Miklós Rózsa's score is reduced to nothing more than a low, sustained drone in the horns as the image track cuts between shots of the Swede's expectant face and his view of the door to his room. We know that the killers are outside the door waiting but when will they strike? Rózsa's drone offers no clue as to when it will end – and neither does it offer any sentimentality or comment on the Swede's life (the lack of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic development as well as instrumental colour means there is little associational potential for the cue), in keeping with the Swede's resignation to his fate and the existentialist tone of this most seminal of noir scenes.

In his article on music and uncertainty, Leonard Meyer comments that 'the human need to envisage leads us to conceptualise the world as being more or less predictable. But continual succession without functionally ordered structure (as in cosmology, evolution, and human history) creates the uncomfortable uncertainty of *unordered endlessness*'.<sup>49</sup> Herrmann's ostinato structures provide a clear sense of time passing but other composers since Herrmann, particularly those working in non-mainstream cinema, have employed an effective abandonment of structure to complicate our ability to determine the

passage of time. Edward Artemiev's electronic music for Andrei Tarkovsky's films, particularly *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979), is especially adept at distorting audience perception of story time in sequences such as Berton's car journey in *Solaris* or the journey into the Zone in *Stalker* undertaken by the writer, professor and their guide. Familiar structures of melody and harmony (even familiar textures of sound) give way to waves and pulses of electronic noise and, in *Stalker*, the reassuring cla-clack of the train track is overwhelmed by Artemiev's electronica: we are given time to scrutinise these characters' faces, lost in their thoughts, contemplating the terror of a world and universe which no longer make sense.

## Conclusion

If I could summarise the examples I have discussed here as one function, to add to the various lists of the functions of film music already existing, it would be that music can establish and transform our perception of time in film – both story time and viewing time. The temporal properties of film music have tended to be referred to in passing or covered by an 'umbrella function' that does not specify time. For example, the eight functions of film music outlined by Annabel Cohen could accommodate some of the instances I have detailed under headings such as 'it communicates meaning and furthers the narrative' or 'music heightens the sense of reality of or absorption in film'.<sup>50</sup> Although I have addressed several ways in which music relates to our understanding of time in film, this paper can only be a tentative introduction. Our understanding of how, and to what extent, music can expand our experience of diegetic time, for example, would benefit from empirical data and a cognitive psychology approach, as Cohen recommends for the study of film music in general.<sup>51</sup> As I hope to have demonstrated, there are rich possibilities available to composers and filmmakers willing to utilise the temporal qualities of music that go far beyond telling us what century a film is set in.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 Aaron Copland, 'Tip to Moviegoers: Take Off Those Ear-Muffs', *New York Times*, (6 November 1949), section 6, 28.
- 2 Copland, p. 28.
- 3 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, Indiana University Press, 1987: 83.
- 4 David Burnand, lecture given at the 'School of Sound' (18 April 1998).
- 5 Jerrold Levinson, 'Film Music and Narrative Agency', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds) *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, pp. 257–258.
- 6 Copland, p. 28.
- 7 David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 'Fundamental Aesthetics of Sound in the Cinema', in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (eds) *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 195–197.
- 8 Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 149–151.
- 9 Steven C. Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann*, University of California Press, 1991, pp. 354–355.
- 10 Copland, p. 28.
- 11 Ed Symkus, 'In Tune with Tolkien: Alumnus Howard Shore Scores a Classic', *Berklee News*, (21 December 2001) <http://www.berklee.edu/news/2001/12/hobbit.html> (accessed 13 July 2006).
- 12 Gorbman, p. 4.
- 13 Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia and Hollywood Film Music*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 24.
- 14 Quotation taken from the documentary 'Music for Middle-earth' included on disc four of the special extended DVD edition of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, released December 2002 in UK.
- 15 George Burt, *The Art of Film Music*, Northeastern University Press, 1994, p. 68.
- 16 Burt, p. 68.
- 17 Timothy E. Scheurer, 'Kubrick vs North: The Score for 2001: A Space Odyssey', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 25:4 (Winter 1998): 178.
- 18 Toni Cade Bambara, 'Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: *Daughters of the Dust* and the Black Independent Cinema Movement', in Manthia Diawara (ed.) *Black American Cinema*, Routledge, 1993, pp. 132–133.
- 19 Bambara, p. 124
- 20 Patrick Rumble, 'Stylistic Contamination in the *Trilogia della vita*: The Case of *Il fiore delle mille e*

- una notte', in Patrick Rumble (ed.) *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, University of Toronto Press, 1994, p. 210.
- 21 Rumble, p. 217.
- 22 Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice*, University of California Press, 1993, p. 271.
- 23 Levinson, p. 278.
- 24 Levinson, p. 258.
- 25 Levinson, pp. 261–262.
- 26 Music timing notes for *Taxi Driver*, Martin Scorsese Collection, Special Collections, American Film Institute.
- 27 David Butler, *Jazz Noir: Listening to Music from Phantom Lady to The Last Seduction*, Praeger, 2002, p. 159. For a full discussion of my reading of the music for *Taxi Driver* and Herrmann's, at first glance surprising, decision to employ jazz elements, see the section 'The Melody in the Head: The Retrospective Illusion of *Taxi Driver*' pp.156–166.
- 28 Memo from Diane Lampert to Martin Scorsese, 26 December 1975, Martin Scorsese Collection, Special Collections, American Film Institute.
- 29 Lampert. Arista *did* release a soundtrack album alongside the film featuring a series of funk and pop reworkings of Herrmann's music, arranged by Dave Blume, which demonstrate just how far removed Herrmann's score was from contemporary idioms. Herrmann's score did not feature extensively on this album – much to the chagrin of the critic Tom Shales: 'what matters to them is that a botched and mangled track from "Taxi Driver" might get the air play on a soft-rock station that a faithful recording of the score would not [. . .] what should have been a stunning document has been turned into just another piece of puff in the publicist's universe' (Tom Shales, '*Taxi Driver*: Setting the Record Straight', *Washington Post* [25 April 1976]: page unknown).
- 30 Justin London, 'Leitmotifs and Musical Reference in the Classical Film Score', in James Buhler, Caryl Flinn and David Neumeyer (eds) *Music and Cinema*, University Press of New England, 2000, pp. 85–96.
- 31 Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*, The Athlone Press, 1994, p. 6. (Originally published in 1947) One wonders what Adorno and Eisler would have made, for example, of the intricate system of leitmotifs that Howard Shore weaves throughout his score for the three *Lord of the Rings* films – Shore's leitmotifs are far more detailed and developed than the mere 'signposts' Adorno and Eisler believed film music reduced the device to.
- 32 London, p. 89.
- 33 Adorno and Eisler, p. 4.
- 34 The source of this sound is difficult to identify and I would suggest that it is a piece of tape manipulation. I am aware that my writing does not do this moment justice: it's an extremely difficult sound to describe in words [and does not appear to have been part of Morricone's score as it is absent from the music CD] and brings to mind once again the old adage that writing about music is like dancing about architecture.
- 35 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 81.
- 36 Quoted in John Schultheiss, 'Annotations to the Screenplay', in John Schultheiss (ed.) *Abraham Polonsky's Odds Against Tomorrow: The Critical Edition*, The Center for Telecommunication Studies, 1999, pp. 147–148.
- 37 Chion, pp. 81–82.
- 38 Chion, p. 82.
- 39 Chion, p. 82.
- 40 Frith, p. 151.
- 41 Quoted in Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music*, University of California Press, 1994, p. 72.
- 42 William H. Rosar, 'Bernard Herrmann: The Beethoven of Film Music?', *The Journal of Film Music*, 1:2/3 (Fall-Winter 2003), page unknown.
- 43 Brown, p. 154.
- 44 Brown, p. 154.
- 45 Frith, p. 151.
- 46 David Cope, *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer*, Schirmer Books, 1997, p. 216.
- 47 Frith, p. 154.
- 48 Quoted in Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, p.169.
- 49 Leonard B. Meyer, 'Music and Emotion: Distinctions and Uncertainties', in Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda (eds) *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 357.
- 50 Annabel J. Cohen, 'Music as a Source of Emotion in Film', in Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda (eds) *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 258.
- 51 Annabel J. Cohen, 'Film Music: Perspectives from Cognitive Psychology', in James Buhler, Caryl Flinn and David Neumeyer (eds) *Music and Cinema*, University Press of New England, 2000, pp. 360–377.