

# Comparative listening exercise (Psycho and the Sea Hawk)

<b>Name of film</b>		
<b>Year</b>		
<b>Instrumentation</b>		
<b>Major or minor?</b>		
<b>Melody</b>		
<b>Harmony</b>		
<b>Rhythm</b>		
<b>Dominant aspect of music</b>		
<b>Mood</b>		
<b>Comments</b>		

## Example answer table

<b>Name of film</b>	<i>The Sea Hawk</i>	<i>Psycho</i>
<b>Year</b>	1940	1960
<b>Instrumentation</b>	Full orchestra (prominent strings and brass, with percussion punctuation)	Strings only
<b>Major or minor?</b>	Major	Minor
<b>Melody</b>	Fanfares and sweeping string melody	One scalic melody used
<b>Harmony</b>	Rich and mainly major chords	Harsh, dissonant
<b>Rhythm</b>	Fanfare rhythms at beginning	Driving, ostinato, strong
<b>Dominant aspect of music</b>	Melody	Rhythm
<b>Mood</b>	Exciting, romantic, adventure	Tense, scary
<b>Comments</b>	Music is in sections and has two main ideas (fanfare and theme melody)	Music is based on short fragments or motifs; very clear rhythmic drive

# The role of the composer and the nature of film music

Although there are various parallels between the compositional techniques used by the film composer and composers of concert music (especially opera and programmatic music), their working methods are quite different. It may be useful to summarise this as follows:

1. Although both film and concert composers very rarely get to write what they want (even concert composers are usually fulfilling some form of commission with certain stipulations), the concert composer rarely has to have his or her music approved by a selection of people at every stage of its development. The film composer's own vision or idea of what the score should achieve must be subservient to those of the director, music supervisor, executive producer and/or any number of other senior people working on the film. This often leads to cues going back and forth between the composer and the studio, with myriad revisions and cuts needing to be actioned as the project goes on.
2. Film music is composed to a far tighter deadline than most forms of concert music. It is not unusual for film scores of 70 to 80 minutes of music needing to be composed in a matter of weeks (the turnaround times for television music are even more severe). This not only has an impact upon the kind of music that the composer writes, but on the working methods used to achieve this. It is also the main reason why many film composers use assistants of various kinds (orchestrators, arrangers, programmers and technicians), and why much of the process of film composition has made full use of the recent advances in music technology.
3. A film composer is more likely than other contemporary composers to use synthetic elements in their scores (samples, synthesiser parts, sound design) on a regular basis. Very often these synthetic elements are combined with acoustic instruments, whether a handful of soloists or a full symphony orchestra.

The composer's main role within film and television music is therefore as a **facilitator**: to compose music which will enhance the finished product, but to bear in mind that that product is not primarily a *musical* one. Lest much of the above may seem to imply that the film composer has a tougher time than concert composers, it should be pointed out that film composers are generally better paid. Furthermore, the nature of the music's genesis and its role within the film set it apart from most other kinds of music, incidental or not. Here are some points to bear in mind when considering a recording of film or television music:

1. The music that is written for film is not always supposed to be heard in isolation. While there are clearly moments in the film score which are supposed to be consciously listened to by the audience (normally for a dramatic or informative reason), much of the time it acts subliminally and a dimension of its meaning and purpose is lost when that music is heard away from the visuals it was designed to accompany. Exceptions to this are consciously arranged concert suites of cues from films, or an extended version of a titles sequence, both of which are designed primarily for listening to as music.
2. Music in films must compete with a great deal of other aural phenomena, such as dialogue and increasingly loud sound effects. At the mixing and dubbing stage this can cause arguments between composers/music editors and sound designers. Some subtle musical effects are lost due to these louder noises drowning them out. This is not apparent when listening to a soundtrack CD.
3. The music is tailored to synchronise with the film precisely, whether through the music being composed to the latest cut, being conformed to it from an earlier version of the cue, or having been

made to fit by the music editor to accommodate film edits after the music has been recorded. This can result in music that may make little musical sense (structurally, harmonically, etc) when heard away from the film.

It is an oft-cited fallacy that film music is only doing its job if you're not aware of it. This is simply not true for many of the functions music must play in film, but it is true that a lot of film music must necessarily act subliminally and unobtrusively to allow more important elements (dialogue, action) hold the viewer's attention.

4. Tracks on a soundtrack CD often comprise several short cues edited together rather than specific cues within the film. This is to enhance their value as music and to make the album seem less fragmented than the real score actually is. It does of course mean that much of the music in the film doesn't make it onto the soundtrack and that the music heard on the soundtrack is not necessarily the same as it is in the film.

A final point on comparing film music in a commercial recording and hearing it on a DVD is that TVs and DVDs in Britain play at 25 frames per second, rather than the standard 24 frames per second of the original 35mm film. This has the effect of playing everything 4% faster and thus all sound is higher in pitch than actually recorded, by just under a semitone. Although this phenomenon is confusing, the CD will play at the proper pitch of the score and so provides a useful reference to what the composer wrote.

## The process of scoring a film and the role of technology

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The impact on music technology on film and television scoring has been immense in the last two decades. The advent of fast, reliable and affordable computers, powerful sequencing software and sophisticated virtual instruments and sample libraries are just three elements which have enabled film and television composers to work faster and more efficiently than ever. It is now possible to run a movie from a QuickTime file in perfect sync with your sequence, while listening to your intricate orchestral mockup all without need of anything other than a laptop, audio interface and speakers. This would not have been possible even a few years ago, but standard disk space, RAM storage and processor power seem to be improving in computers on an almost monthly basis.

A result of this technology, the process of creating a score is very different to the one Max Steiner would have known in the 1930s. Although composers now may start with exactly the same equipment that Steiner would have (keyboard, pencil, paper), the sequence of events that brings a film score into being may look something like this:

1. The **composer** works on a specific cue, having obtained precise timings for its start and stop, having discussed which features of the cue should be highlighted and also whether there are any 'sync points' – an event on screen which needs precise musical emphasis.
2. A sequencer is used to create a tempo map, to record musical ideas and to develop a sketch or demo of the cue that can be played against the picture (often also controlled by the sequencer). In the case of an orchestral score this will normally be in the form of a mockup using sampled instruments. This is usually shown to the **studio** (usually via the director) at this stage for approval. Some of the tracks laid down at this stage (synth lines, pads, electronic percussion and some sampled instruments) will end up on the final score – they may be recorded separately as audio tracks at a later stage.

3. The sequencer data (MIDI file or score printout) is passed onto an **orchestrator** or **arranger**, normally with a recording of the sketch of the cue. The orchestrator is responsible then for producing a full score of the cue, taking note of the instrumentation available and fleshing out the sketch to be a proper realisation of the music.
4. This process is repeated until all cues have been composed. Some of these cues will already have had to be revised in the light of comments from the studio, some will have to be conformed (edited to fit) a new cut of the film as it has been edited.
5. Once the orchestrator/arranger has finished the master scores for each cue, the generating and printing of parts is often passed onto a **copyist**, whose responsibility is to prepare parts for recording.
6. The score is recorded (usually to a **click track** to keep the players and conductor in time with the tempo required) at a studio. Any required **overdubs** (specialist solo instruments or solos, vocals, choir) are recorded separately, normally after the bulk of the score has been recorded.
7. The score is mixed under the supervision of the composer and/or music editor before being delivered to the studio for the **dub** (the process of putting all final sound onto the finished film).

# Gone with the Wind listening exercise

You will hear an excerpt from the opening titles music from the film *Gone with the Wind*.

The excerpt is made up of four sections: introduction, main theme, B section and main theme restatement.

Listen to the music, which will be played four times, and answer the questions below.

1. What word below best explains the music of the introduction? Put a ring around your answer.

Solo

Fanfare

Waltz

Scherzo

(1 mark)

2. Below is the rhythm of the melody and countermelody of the first part of the **main theme**:

$\text{♩} = 60$

Melody

Counter melody

a) Name one instrument playing the **melody** line .....

b) Name one instrument playing the **countermelody** line .....

(2 marks)

3. The main theme as given above is repeated with slight changes before the music moves onto the **B section**. List three things that are different in the repeat of the theme in this section.

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 .....

(3 marks)

4. The **main theme** section is in F major. In what key is the **B section**?

.....

5. In the restatement of the **main theme** different instruments are playing the melody. Name **two** of these.

Instrument 1 .....

Instrument 2 .....

(2 marks)

**(Total: 10 marks)**

# Planet of the Apes listening exercise

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You will hear an excerpt from the opening titles music to a sci-fi film from the 1960s. Listen to the music, which will be played four times, and answer the questions below.

1. The music makes use of some unusual musical instruments and sound processing effects. Below is a list of these, labelled **A** to **E**. In the spaces next to each of them, place them in the order in which they are first heard, using numbers **1** to **5**.

- A** Quiet harp chords with multi-tap delay ('echo' effect) .....
- B** Bass slide whistle note, downwards *glissando* .....
- C** Fragmented flute melody .....
- D** Piano repeated notes with harmonic overtones .....
- E** Loud, long gesture with prominent percussion .....

(5 marks)

2. Which word below best describes the tonality of this music? Put a ring around your answer.

Major                      Modal                      Minor                      Atonal                      Bitonal

(1 mark)

3. Describe how the pulse/rhythm of the music changes in this extract.

.....

.....

.....

(3 marks)

4. The music of this film score is written with a technique properly known as serialism. Name one other 20th-century composer who wrote music using this technique.

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(1 mark)

**(Total: 10 marks)**

# Spider-Man 2 listening exercise

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You are going to hear an excerpt from the opening titles music to a film from 2004. Listen to the music, which will be played four times, and answer the questions below.

1. The music has a slow introduction before a fast-moving idea is heard in low strings. What word below best describes this idea? Put a ring around your answer.

Scale                      Pedal notes                      Ostinato                      Double-stops                      Arpeggio  
(1 mark)

2. Which term below best describes the tonality of this extract? Again, put a ring around your answer.  
(2 marks)

Mainly major                      Mainly minor                      Atonal Modal                      A mix of major and modal

3. Name two different time signatures used in this excerpt.  
..... (4 marks)

4. Which genre of film do you think best fits this music? Choose from the selection below and give reasons for your answers.

Murder mystery                      Romantic comedy                      Western Superhero/adventure  
.....  
.....  
.....  
..... (3 marks)

**(Total: 10 marks)**

# Listening exercises answers

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## **Gone with the Wind**

1. Fanfare.
2. a) Violins, cellos (octave lower), flute.  
b) Horns.
3. Violins play an octave higher, countermelody is different, ends on perfect cadence rather than imperfect cadence.
4. B $\flat$  major.
5. Trumpet, trombone, flute.

## **Planet of the Apes**

1. The correct order is **D, B, E, A, C**.
2. Atonal.
3. Starts with regular repeated notes, but then becomes irregular/unpredictable. By the time the flute melody enters, the pulse is steady, though rhythm is fragmented.
4. Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Stravinsky or any viable alternative.

## **Spider Man**

1. Ostinato.
2. Mainly minor.
3.  $\frac{3}{4}$ ,  $\frac{4}{4}$
4. Superhero/adventure – mark any reasonable combination of factors as correct, from fast tempo, noble horn chords, exciting/dramatic string patterns, contemporary musical elements like electronics.

# 'Davy Jones Theme': fill in the blanks

Section	Start time (CD)	Key	Tempo	Texture/style
A	0'00"	D min	Slow	Music-box version of theme (16 bars)
B	0'35"	D min	Slow	inverted A pedal at beginning
C	1'13"	D min		
D	1'38"		Fast	
E	2'01"	G# min	Fast	
F	2'23"	N/A	Fast	Drum pattern from before
G	2'36"	B min		

# Doctor Who: fill in the blanks

Section	Start time (CD)	Key	Theme/function
A	0'00"	E min	Introduction
B	0'16		
C	0'55"		
D	1'08"		
E	1'40"		
F	2'00"		
G	2'44"		

# Recommended further reading, listening and viewing

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## Books on film music

*Overtones and Undertones: reading film music* by Royal S. Brown  
(ISBN: 978-0520085442, California 1994)

*Film Music: a neglected art* by Roy Prendergast  
(ISBN: 978-0393308747, Norton 1977, revised 1992)

*Film Music in Focus* by David Ventura (ISBN: 978-1906178253, Rhinegold 2008)

Brown's book covers the semiotic and interpretative demands of understanding what film music is trying to say, through examining various cultural references inherent in the scores. It is interesting but not recommended for GCSE students. Roy Prendergast's book is also really only teacher-friendly, but this classic text covers more ground more lucidly than more recent additions to the field. David Ventura's book has already been mentioned and is a recommended guide that GCSE students will be able to absorb for themselves.

In addition, Rhinegold's *Focus* guides on *Goldfinger* and *Batman* are primarily intended for A-level Music Technology students, but provide useful case studies and detailed analyses of cues from the scores to these films. Both are highly recommended further reading and may be used to provide working material for teaching this topic.

## Soundtrack compilations

Generally, compilations provide even more CD-friendly tracks than official film releases (the original soundtrack or OST), and it is to the latter that your attention is recommended. However, as an introduction to different composers' styles and ideas, the Silva Screen *Incredible Film Music Box* (SILCD 1181) and *100 Greatest TV themes* (TVPMCD 807) box sets are an inexpensive way to cover a lot of ground. Silva Screen's recordings generally derive from 'take-downs' of the OST or film rather than the original scores themselves, and so certain elements of the scoring may not be entirely authentic. Having said that, their composer compilations of Nino Rota and Max Steiner are excellent.

## Recommended viewing

Each syllabus aside from CCEA has recommended repertoire for film music and you should consult your chosen syllabus' specification for advice on this. However, all agree on the inclusion of John Williams and Hans Zimmer, John Barry and others get honourable mentions. David Ventura's book covers a wide range of scores and is a good place to fill out the historical background, but the key is to cover a range of styles from the 1930s to the present day. It should be left to the teacher what is best to cover, and what will best suit the students to be taught. It might be a good idea to approach this from a genre point of view (i.e. scores from horror, western, comedy and thriller films, for example) and to cover as many of the listed functions above in your study. There is far more to film music than just the opening titles music or main theme, and restricting yourself to this leaves much of the work of film scores a mystery.

## Internet sources

[www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) – the essential internet movie database.

[http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Mark\\_Ayres/DWTheme.htm](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Mark_Ayres/DWTheme.htm) – Mark Ayres' well-researched internet article on the history of the *Doctor Who* theme.

[www.soundonsound.com/sos/jun07/articles/drwho.htm](http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/jun07/articles/drwho.htm) – essential reading for students of *Doctor Who*. This includes an interview and article on Murray Gold's work and contains links to further reading on the original theme, as well as providing valuable insights into the role of technology in a contemporary screen composer's work.

<http://en.epochtimes.com/news/6-1-24/37283.html> – an illuminating article on the use of current sampler instruments such as the Vienna Instruments series within the film industry, showing the impact of technology on contemporary film and television scoring.

[www.gresham.ac.uk](http://www.gresham.ac.uk) – a quick search will bring up Roger Parker's recent free public lecture series on film music at Gresham College in London. All lectures have video and audio files for downloading, and a transcript of each one. They provide a useful background and are of good general interest.