

Music Theory A: Critical Discussion 3

Critical Discussion 3: GENREBUSTERS

Conceptual Question:

Does a particular film genre demand a particular style of music?

Feedback Question:

What are the three key ideas on this topic that you would like to translate into your own practice?

The Good the Bad and the Ugly (1966 Dir. Serge Leone, Score:Morricone)



Clip: 02:39:00

- Neorealism elements??
- The 3 protagonists face off for the final prize at the centre of a graveyard, like some of ancient colosseum. It is a an epic scale ritual space complete with crucifixes.
- This Musical cue follows directly on the previous one which sets this scene up with very similar material, part of the ratcheting up of tension. A setting up of the stage so to speak.
- Starts with glock (Gflat/F E flat B flat) cycles around recalling the obsessive and maddeningly circular path they have taken to get to their money! The Timpani rolls and clearly states that E flat harmonic root established in the beginning of the film. Once again a reiteration of this circular path idea....Sonata form like? This Crescendos to the steel strike. Piano takes the spinning E flat minor Glock motif (F G flat E flat B flat). Bullets and castanets provide a rhythmic staccato counterpoint. Long sweeping Cymbal roll. Then organ sustained. Various harmonic shifts to subdominant and C flat major secondary dominant chord. Rhythmic timpani enters like some sort of death knell, and walk to the scaffold. Crescendo through the Dominant B flat, then we are back in E flat with the majestic mariachi trumpet melody...the Bolero like passage building intensity further. The size of the ensemble grows as we move through the cue moving into more of a large scale orchestra with Choir, this is another way of signalling a ratcheting up of tension where the stakes are life and death
- The music is really what carries the scene! And the visual edits correspond in a very deliberate way to the musical cues. Closeups only, guns, faces, more rapid edits as the climax builds, closeups become more extreme then rapid cuts until the shots are fired.
- The trumpet melody itself is typical of Morricone in that it leaves out the 6th degree of the scale (Aeolian mode)- these big trumpet melodies advance the significance of these confrontational scenes in the films' narrative. - Leinberger
- Central role of the perfect 5th in the melody- open sound reflecting something primal , open and unending, the archetypal frontier!
- So in what way does this film need a score like this?? As the Western genre changed and developed into something more nuanced than just a simplistic portrayal of the Heroic American on the frontier, the music reflected and heightened this shift. This music is eccentric and edgy, always pushing the boundaries of convention, taking things to the extreme.
- This film is really a subversion, at times satire and deconstruction of the western genre. Morricone's score parallels this subversiveness with instrumentation eg using the electric guitar, use of external and unlikely musical sound sources like bullets and animal cries, big overblown trumpet solos etc Overall this creates a sound world that is extremely tactile kinetic, visceral , hyperreal almost dreamlike in its symbology.

- “for Morricone in particular, (music) became a foreground event demanding the attention of even the most inattentive viewer. No longer a device to reinforce the on-screen drama, music became part of the narrative, often indistinguishable from the blaring sound effects of gunfire, cannon fire, and locomotives..”
Leinberger
- Any film Genre rather than demanding a particular style of music, has music within that is an inseparable part of the Genre itself. A genre is like a tightly woven bundle of elements visual, sonic and narrative each totally dependant on the other. Discuss?!

There Will Be Blood

(2007, Dir. Paul Thomas Anderson , Score: Greenwood)

Clip: 00:28:00

- Kalinak “A composer’s input can be revelatory. P T Anderson, referring to TWBB say “ To make a film, the final big collaborator you have is the composer. Greenwood was really one of the first people to see the film. And when he came back with a bunch of music, it actually helped show me what his impression of the film was. Which was terrific , because I had no impression””
- “a crucial function of the music is to establish and comment upon the physical setting, not merely via stereotyped musical associations (as in the classical cinema, westerns and nonwesterns alike), but by investing the locale with a sonic presence, which at times takes on an omniscient quality or in some cases even seems to function as an agent guiding the action..... -McDonald



- Play Clip-
- open 5th melody basis typical of the western genre (interspersed with rhythmic gunshot!)
- Occurs at a pivotal moment in the film where the 3 main characters meet .
- Eli and Daniel exchange their false dialogue. Firstly the lie about being there just to hunt quail and then Eli’s pretence at generosity offering them a welcome and a meal.
- A minor basis (dorian) with the D and F# resolving to C and A.... so the dark and brooding 5ths in the lower strings/piano goes somewhere that could be positive and is kind of golden and shiny but is pulled back into the darkness, this parallels Daniel’s character arc through the film and the films central theme of amazing potential and possibility that ultimately declines and is corrupted.
- Bartok string quartet style extension of the basic melody suggesting the slippery oily nature of Daniel’s character. There is Also a sadness and longing here, perhaps of an innocence lost....
- Use of the Martinet- sounds like a guitar with long sweeping sustain. Sounds kind of magical and links in with the idea of a golden wistful possibility.
- last statement of 5ths motif is played by a larger ensemble and finishes when HW (the innocent child) sticks his foot accidentally in the oil.
- There Will Be Blood portrays an era of unbounded possibility and its decline....where the music and sound design seek to defamiliarize our filmic experience of the West. McDonal - The music takes us somewhere away from a classic orchestral Western score into somewhere very strange, dislocated and unnerving.
- Discussion point: Ultimately Scifi and the Western have a lot in common: where space and technology is the new frontier of strangeness and hardship offering boundless potential for exploration, pursuit of ambition, and building of character. What musical aspects of this film would feel out of place in a sci-fi context???
- Discussion point 2: if a goal of many genre films is ultimately to create a sense of dislocation and strangeness
- 2001 a space odyssey

The Homesman (2014, Dir. Tommy Lee Jones, Score: Beltrami)



Clip: 01:35:30

- this Cue is one of the darkest and most violent sections of the film when Briggs burns down the hotel.
- Starts with a low Piano note reversed creating a crescendo
- punctuating percussion
- very dry recording of strings tritone pizzicato (devils interval)
- Twisting detuned glisses of high strings
- Electronic drone from a rapid looping delay.
- things rattling around in lots of reverb and delay juxtaposed against very dry sounds
- the music underlines Briggs' character and fractured internal state- his Subtle intensity and violence, he responds ultimately with violence and revenge to help him solve his inner turmoil
- Dance like character with the rhythmic pizzicato, totemic and primal - macabre!- Briggs can't help himself he is compelled to continue this dance of reaction and revenge. Musical reference to George Crumb- Black Angels
- The percussion sounds reflect the violent smashing of the lamps and the jump of the flames.

- the string melody enters as he leaves the building and men are jumping burning from the windows. The slow descending semitone is suggestive of something tragic, Briggs is trying to do the right thing but is actually unredeemable, he is broken by the unrelenting landscape
- use of slide guitar and chimes here references the traditional western genre vibe Hollow and empty nothing but the wind sweeping across the land
- the stealing of the pig refers to earlier conversation with Cuddy where she refers to him as possibly being "More a disgusting pig than an honest man"
- with a different type of music here one could be more pulled into a feeling that revenge on these corrupt and thoughtless men might be a good idea. In fact this is music that helps create a sense of ritualistic sacrifice and bloodletting rather than a simple exchange of action and revenge.

3 key ideas I would like to bring into my own practice:

- Sense of experimentation and rule breaking in all 3 films Morricone- instrumentation, the way the music breaks from the visual narrative and creates its own unique driving force in the film. Beltrami- inventing instruments, creating new sounds Greenwood- taking over avant garde musical ideas and putting them to use as a source ambiguity, fracture and dislocation.
- the sense that music can provide a whole other stream of subconscious movement and development apart from the more obvious verbal narrative.
- a sense of spatialisation achieved through different recording techniques and use of different levels of dryness and reverb. Can help suggest so many critical things: primal, hollow characters, pain and sorrow, lushness and fullness etc

