

The Characteristics of Film Music and Its Function in Film Works

Shumeng Shen¹

¹ Department of Film and Image, Cheongju University, South Korea

Correspondence: Shumeng Shen, Department of Film and Image, Cheongju University, South Korea.

doi:10.56397/SAA.2024.06.22

Abstract

Film is a complex medium with multiple elements and art forms. It integrates various elements such as picture, sound and text, which together present the artistic language of film. Among these elements, music is a powerful artistic element. Through the combination of music, the picture creates different environmental atmosphere, shows the characters, promotes the story plot, and deepens the theme of the work, thus enhancing the appeal and artistic expression of the film. Based on this, this paper will analyze the characteristics and functions of film music, and explore the artistic value and practical significance of film music in film works.

Keywords: film music, peculiarity, film work, feature

1. Introduction

Film music can be traced back to the birth of film itself. The development of motion pictures began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, initially as silent films. In the silent film era, music was originally scored by a live band or pianist to enhance the emotional experience and atmosphere of the audience. This soundtrack is performed in real time according to the needs of the film's content and scenes. With the development of the film industry and the advancement of technology, film music has gradually evolved and developed. In 1927, the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, was released, ushering in the era of sound films. The appearance of sound film revolutionized the function and form of film music. The music is no longer just played live, but through a recorded

soundtrack, perfectly integrated with the content of the film. Since then, film music has become an indispensable element in film production. Composers began to write original music for films, creating scores based on the film's plot and atmosphere. The development of film music is closely related to the development of film technology and cultural trends, and it constantly evolves and ADAPTS to the needs of different times and audiences, becoming an indispensable and important part of film production.

2. The Concept of Film Music

Film music is an art genre. When we talk about the concept of film music, we are referring to music specially composed and arranged for a film work. Film music is an important part of the film, it includes film score, original music,

insert songs, etc., aimed at enhancing the audio-visual effect of the film, strengthening the emotional expression, and creating a specific atmosphere and situation. The film music we want to analyze mainly covers the following aspects: 1) Score: Score is the music specially created for the film, created by the composer according to the plot, rhythm and emotion of the film. The score is designed to closely integrate with the picture and plot of the film, and enhance the visual and emotional expression of the film through the rhythm, melody, harmony and instrumental arrangement of the music. 2) Songs: In addition to the soundtrack, some movies also include existing songs as insert songs. These songs are often used to express the emotions of the characters or to advance the plot, and together with the soundtrack form the musical portion of the film. 3) Original Songs: Some films create original songs for specific scenes or plots, which become unique elements of the film, used to express the mood of the characters or show the theme of the film. 4) Sound effects and sound design: In addition to the music itself, film music also includes sound effects and sound design. Sound effects and sound design can create a sense of space and three-dimensional, so that the audience can feel the three-dimensional surround effect of audio. Through reasonable sound distribution and acoustics, the audience can feel the sound from different directions, and enhance the sense of reality and experience of the scene. Good sound and sound design can make a film more vivid, shocking and memorable, and bring a richer and more profound viewing experience to the audience.

3. Characteristics of Film Music

- (1) Service for visual content: The main function of film music is to provide support and foil for the film picture and plot. The composition and performance of a film score must be in harmony with the rhythm, emotion and plot of the film to create a specific atmosphere and mood.
- (2) The integration of music: Film music is a part of the film work, and closely combined with the picture, dialogue and sound effects, together constitute a complete audio-visual experience. A film score must fit in with the picture and editing, in keeping with the rhythm and beat of the film.
- (3) Expression and creation style: The creation method and style of film music will be affected

by the film type, scene, emotion and other factors. According to the needs of the film, the composer needs to create a score that fits the specific scene and emotion. Therefore, the styles of film music may be more diverse and flexible, including symphonies, folk music, electronic music, etc.

- (4) Function and effect: The function of film music is to strengthen the emotional expression, atmosphere creation and plot promotion of the film, and to provide the audience with a richer and deeper audio-visual experience. The success of film music depends not only on the quality of the music itself, but also on how well it integrates with the film as a whole.

The characteristics of film music mainly lie in its creation purpose, integration and form of expression. Film music is an art form that serves the film, and its creation and performance are limited by the needs and requirements of the film itself. The creation and use of film music needs to consider the overall atmosphere and emotional needs of the film, as well as the audience's experience and emotional resonance. It has more outstanding artistic function and richer appeal than ordinary music. The display mode combined with the picture highlights its unique aesthetic value. Excellent film music can enhance the artistic quality of the film, deepen the audience's understanding of the film and emotional connection.

4. Function of Film Music

- (1) Emotional expression and emotional setting: Movie music can effectively express the emotions and emotions of the characters. Through the melody, rhythm and harmony of music, various emotions such as sadness, tension and joy can be created to enhance the emotional resonance of the audience, so that the audience can more deeply understand the inner world of the characters and the development of the story. Music such as the opening of a movie can immediately create a specific emotional tone, indicating the atmosphere of the story is about to unfold. A mystery film may open with mysterious and tense music, or a romantic film may begin with a warm and moving melody.
- (2) Atmosphere and setting: Music can create a specific atmosphere and situation, helping to establish the scene and background of the film. Suitable music can enhance the tension and suspense of the film, guide the audience to focus on the important plot of the story, and enhance

the tension of the story or the emotional impact of the climax. For example, the climax scenes in movies are usually accompanied by exciting music, which enhances the emotional experience of the audience through the rhythm and melody of the music. For example, battle scenes or moments of important decisive battles are accompanied by intense music, heightening the audience's sense of tension and high emotions. Different styles of music can interpret different times, places and emotions, presenting a more real and vivid film world for the audience.

(3) Plot drive and rhythm control: Music can influence the rhythm and sense of rhythm of a film, helping to drive the development and twist of the plot. Music can provide hints at turning points in a story. By changing the tone or tempo of the music, the audience can feel the foretaste of a major change in the plot. In action or suspense films, music can be synchronized with visual action, enhancing the sense of rhythm and audiovisual effects, and making the audience more engaged in the development and dynamic changes of the plot. With the development of the story, the background music can be changed to match the development of different plots. For example, when the protagonist is facing a challenge or deciding a crucial moment, music can turn from calm to tension or excitement, enhance the audience's sense of tension or anticipation, and control the rhythm of the story through music.

(4) Character development and personality display: Certain movie music is closely associated with a particular character or setting, becoming a symbol of character characteristics. Through the combination of music, the character's personality and internal characteristics can be more deeply displayed, so that the role is more three-dimensional and has a distinct personality. Each major character may have their own unique theme song or musical element that expresses their emotional state and inner world. These pieces of music can evolve as the characters grow and change, helping the audience gain a deeper understanding of the psychology of the characters.

(5) Creating a unique style and audio-visual memory: Some film scores become classics because of their uniqueness and association with a particular film, becoming one of the signature elements of the film, creating a unique style and audio-visual memory. The classic film score often becomes an important memory point for

the audience, which is closely connected with the plot and theme of the film. For example, movie theme songs are often original songs, created specifically for the movie, usually used at the beginning or end of the movie, or played during a key plot in the movie. Classic movie theme songs often become representative works of movie music, such as *My Heart Will Go On* from *Titanic*, *007 series* theme song, *Star Wars* theme song and so on. These theme songs not only played an important role in the movie, but also became a classic pop music, deeply loved and respected by the audience.

In general, film music plays multiple roles in film works. It is not only to fill the blank of the picture, but also to add depth, tension and emotion to the film through the language expression, emotional transmission and atmosphere creation of music, making the film work more vivid, touching and unforgettable.

5. Realistic Significance of Film Music

As a form of artistic expression, film music has important practical significance, which brings positive influence and significance to social and cultural life on multiple levels:

(1) Emotional communication and resonance: Film music, through its unique language and expression, can deeply touch people's emotional world, prompting the audience to resonate and connect emotionally. This kind of emotional communication can help people better understand their own and others' emotional experiences, enhance interpersonal relationships, relieve psychological stress, and enhance the cohesion of social communities.

(2) Cultural inheritance and identity: film music, as an art form with unique cultural characteristics, carries the cultural memory and spiritual identity of a specific era and region. Excellent film music works can inherit and carry forward the values, aesthetic concepts and historical memory of a specific culture, and promote cultural inheritance and exchange.

(3) Artistic innovation and aesthetic education: Film music, as an art form, constantly promotes the development of artistic innovation and aesthetic education. Excellent film music works can stimulate the audience's interest in music and art, expand aesthetic vision, cultivate aesthetic sentiment, and promote people's artistic quality and creativity.

(4) Social reflection and ideology: Film music

often expresses musicians' reflection and thinking on social reality and human destiny, triggering audiences' thinking and discussion on social, political, humanistic and other levels. Excellent film music works can promote the awakening of social consciousness and the promotion of social change.

(5) Economic and industrial development: Film music, as an important part of the cultural industry, is of great significance for promoting economic growth and industrial development. The prosperity of the film music industry not only provides employment opportunities and economic income for musicians, creators and producers, but also brings development opportunities for related industrial chains, such as recording engineering, music production, music copyright and so on.

The practical significance of film music as a form of artistic expression lies in its social value and cultural influence, which can promote emotional communication and resonance, inherit cultural identity, promote artistic innovation and aesthetic education, trigger social reflection and ideological discussion, and bring impetus and vitality to economic and industrial development.

6. Peroration

Starting from the characteristics of film music, this paper makes an in-depth analysis of the functions of film music, and clarifies the functions of film music in the aspects of emotion expression and mood setting, atmosphere creation and scene setting, plot promotion and rhythm control, role shaping and personality display, as well as creating unique style and audio-visual memory. It also expounds the realistic significance of film music from many angles. Film music is not only an indispensable part of film art, but also an art form that can independently convey emotions and ideas. Through rich musical language, it endows the film with profound emotion and meaning, enhances the audience's aesthetic experience, and has important artistic value and cultural significance. It complements the performance of cinematography, director and actors to create a complete and profound work of cinematic art.

References

- Chattah J. (2023-08-23). *Film Music: Cognition to Interpretation*. Taylor and Francis.
- Hexel V. (2023-05-02). *Movie Music Moments*. Taylor and Francis.

DOI:10.4324/9781003280897.

- Lampl K. (2023-08-23). *Film Music: The Basics*. Taylor and Francis.
- PASCAL R. (2023). The Musical Idea Work Group: Production and Reception of Pre-existing Music in Film. *Twentieth-Century Music*, 20(2), 136-156.
- Wan Liping, Zhao Mingyu. (2021). On the narrative function of music and sound in film and television. *Music and Sound Research*, (01), 144-153.
- Zhai Naexi. (2024). Analysis on the integrity of music and plot in movies. *Drama House*, (04), 157-159.