

Movie Score Analysis

Movie Score Review Magazine has asked you to write a three-page review of the music in a film. Your job is to analyze the movie's background score, explain how it enhances the movie's drama, provide a detailed description of how the music functions in one important scene, and offer your opinion of the score. Instead of paying you in cash, your paper will be graded by Jean Marshall of Washburn University and be worth fifteen percent of your final grade in MU 104 Movies and Music class.

The following elements are required:

- An opening paragraph that introduces your paper (separate from the plot description paragraph).
- A brief plot summary (one paragraph suggested).
- A description and analysis of the opening music.
- Identification of the musical ensemble that performs the music in the film.
- An explanation of what dramatic elements the score primarily enhances, for example: action, character psychological states, love interests etc.
- An in depth analysis and detailed description of the music in one important scene.
- Your opinion of the score with support from examples from the film.

Further details:

Opening paragraph. Tell the reader, a subscriber to the magazine, what you are going to do. Also, name the movie and its music composer here.

Brief plot summary. Outline the plot for the readers so they know what the film is about. Assume they have not seen it and know little about it. You may "spoil" the film for them by giving away the ending and/or important plot twist if you deem it necessary. They need to know the story to better understand how the music works.

Identification of the musical ensemble. This can be worked into the next paragraph. Simple labels of the ensemble(s) are best like "orchestra," "rock band," or "choir." If a particular musical

instrument is featured like a trumpet, violin, or synthesizer mention that as well. Avoid saying, "I heard trumpets, strings, percussion and a flute," because the word *orchestra* is a more efficient summary. The identification of the music's ensemble can be a separate paragraph, if you like, or worked into the opening music discussion.

Note: You do not need to identify musical instruments in your paper. Take a guess if you feel up to it. If not, try a more general term like "brass" or "strings." If you incorrectly identify a musical instrument, that will not affect your grade.

Opening music. Give the readers a preview of the opening music. Describe it in detail so they can "hear" that music; then tell them what this music causes the viewer to expect from the film. Will it be have action, suspense, romance, for example? Does it reveal the setting or time period? Does this music change its mood? If so, why did it do that?

This music is often played over a credit sequence, but not always. In that case discuss the first music you hear, for example, the music that accompanies the first scene. However if an opening scene (with music) is followed by a beginning credit sequence with music, then discuss the credit sequence music. That is your priority.

Note: the descriptions of the music in this section need not be as detailed as the music you analyze from an important scene.

Tell us:

What does this music establish about the film?

Type of film, action, romance or comedy, etc.?

Setting: time period, location

Content: Will the story be tragic or uplifting or combination of emotional aspects?

Since this is the first music in the film; assume that it is important and consider its role carefully.

Dramatic elements. Inform your readers of what dramatic elements the score plays to most often. In *King Kong*, for example, the score played to character psychological states like fear and romance. In *The Magnificent Seven*, it played to action and the struggles of the main group of characters.

Scene/music analysis. Chose one important scene in the film that has music then analyze and describe the music in detail. You will need to illustrate what happens in the scene in only a few words while providing thorough coverage of the music. Again, describe the music so your reader can “hear” it. Watch this scene many times, noting when the music enters (and why it entered at that point) and exits and how it changes throughout the scene as the drama changes. Explain when the music exits the scene and why it did so at that time. Show your dear readers that you have a complete grasp of how the music functions in this scene so they can understand it as well.

Examples scene/music analysis:

Regarding the description of music, words like “high” (in pitch) or “low,” or “loud” or “soft” don’t say much about the music because these are very general terms and they depict a wide variety of music. Likewise, to say that a flute played a melody does not say enough about that moment in the score. Also, if you state the music was “scary” you must describe the music so that the readers “hear” scary music. This example tells what happened in part of a scene from a movie and describes the music.

Wilma was in a dark room carrying a weak flashlight. She walked slowly across the empty space stopping at the closet where the monster was hiding. The music entered, highlighting the moment she committed to confronting her fears as her shaking hand reached for the doorknob. A single, high-pitched note played softly in the violins; then a second note was added creating a sharp dissonance magnifying the tension as her hand neared the knob. As Wilma opened the door, exposing the darkness within, the low brass played loud, short and harsh chords in quick succession as if violent peril awaited her on the other side. More would follow in an actual paper.

While general terms were used, like *loud* and *high*, they were supplemented by more specific words, like *sharp* and *harsh*, that made the music come alive for the readers.

Also notice that the selection set up the scene:

Wilma was in a dark room carrying a weak flashlight. She walked slowly across the empty space stopping at the closet where the monster was hiding.

Then it described when the music came in and why it did so:

The music entered, highlighting the moment she committed to confronting her fears as her shaking hand reached for the doorknob.

What followed was a detailed description of the music:

A single, high-pitched note played softly in the violins; then a second note was added creating a sharp dissonance

And the context of the music is explained:

magnifying the tension as her hand neared the knob.

This selection did not say:

Scary music played as Wilma reached for the doorknob. The music got louder and faster when she opened the door.

Here, the description is far less accurate, telling the reader very little about the music in that scene. Also keep in mind that the reader has not seen the movie and you will need to explain what is obvious. For example, if the selection had not mentioned that a monster may or may not be in the closet, the reader would wonder why the music seems to be creating suspense.

Note: Avoid choosing a scene whose music is primarily source music, unless source music makes up the majority of the film's music.

Opinion: Finally, you will reveal your opinion of the music score. Focus on whether or not you thought it worked well as a narrative element in the film. Support your view with examples from the film. Example: *The score worked well because it augmented the horror/suspense elements of the movie. For example, when Wilma opened the closet door the music built suspense as she reached for the knob then anticipated the presence of the demon.*

Discussing songs/source music:

Discuss source music only if its use is significant or it is the opening music. If you do analyze the use of a song in your film, make sure to inform your reader why that particular song was used at that moment in the film. Answer the questions: Why that song? Why that portion of that song? Most likely, the answers to these questions will be both in the song's music and lyrics. Do not neglect the lyrics.

Chose only one of the following films. Do not write about the score to a movie not on this list.

Movie Score Analysis Film List

All the President's Men (1976)

Captain America: The Winter Soldier (2014)

Fantastic Mr. Fox (2009)

The Hateful Eight (2015)

JFK (1991)

Saving Mr. Banks (2013)

Snow White and the Huntsman (2012)

Suffragette (2015)

Thoroughly Modern Millie (1967)

Unbreakable (2000)

Deadline: The final deadline for all written papers is Tuesday **05/02/16** by 9:00 pm. No papers will be accepted after this date.

Review: One movie score review is required, worth 20% of your final grade. The review must be of a movie from the Movie Review List. The review must be . . .

1. In written form.
2. Typed, double-spaced. Do not augment space between paragraphs.
3. At least 3 pages in length, not including the title page. All pages must be stapled together.
4. Proof read, edited.
5. Contain a title page, including the student's name, movie title, composer's name, and date of submission.
6. Utilize a font size of 12 points and one-inch margins.
7. Printed on paper. No computer files or emailed papers will be accepted.
8. Be formatted with standard one-inch margins.
9. STAPLED! Or at least paper-clipped. The last week of class I will grade about 80 papers and I won't time to reassemble your unsecured pages.

Final, last, ultimate note: plagiarism in any form could result in a score of "0" on the paper and further penalties enacted by Washburn University.