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God's Lonely Men : Bernard Herrmann's musical voice for the lonely and tortured men of cinema

Clare Nina Norelli

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God's Lonely Men:

Bernard Herrmann's musical voice for the lonely and tortured men
of cinema.

Clare Nina Norelli

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October 2008

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Thesis Abstract

Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975) has long been regarded as one of the most important composers of film music. Emerging during a time when the majority of film scores worked primarily with the physical action onscreen or what was immediately obvious in the dramatic narrative, Herrmann's innovative compositional style instead focused on the unconscious and the psychological states at work. The following thesis is a discussion of the key elements of Herrmann's unique film score style and, via case studies of the three lonely male protagonists in the films *Citizen Kane* (Welles, USA, 1941), *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, USA, 1958) and *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese, USA, 1976), an investigation into how he gave a musical narrative to the tortured characters he scored for onscreen.

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Table of Contents

Thesis Chapters:		Page
1.	Preamble	1
2.	Introducing Bernard Herrmann.....	4
3.	Creating the Sound of the Psyche	7
4.	Case Study One: <i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941)	13
5.	Case Study Two: <i>Vertigo</i> (1958)	24
6.	Case Study Three: <i>Taxi Driver</i> (1976).....	32
7.	Conclusion	42
8.	Bibliography	43
9.	Discography	46
10.	Filmography.....	47

List of Figures:

Fig. 1: Brown's "Hitchcock chord".....	8
Fig. 2: "Power" motif from <i>Citizen Kane</i> as heard in "Prelude"	15
Fig. 3: "Rosebud" motif from <i>Citizen Kane</i> as heard in "Prelude".....	15
Fig. 4: Herrmann's waltz theme (tempo as per "Valse Presentation")	20
Fig. 5: Herrmann's development of "Rosebud" in "Kane meets Susan" cue	22
Fig. 6: "Vertigo" figure from <i>Vertigo</i> 's "Prelude".....	28
Fig. 7: "Love" motif from <i>Vertigo</i> extracted from "Prelude"	28
Fig. 8: Cooper's reduction of "Love" motif, in harmonic context (excerpt).....	29
Fig. 9: Reduction of Herrmann's motif, "Loneliness," as heard in "Prelude"	34
Fig. 10: Herrmann's snare drum figure in "Loneliness"	35
Fig. 11: "Romance" as heard on saxophone, performed with swing in "Prelude"	37
Fig. 12: Herrmann's "Madhouse" motif as heard in <i>Psycho</i> 's "The Madhouse" cue.....	39

1. Preamble

1.1. The Origin of Film Music

From the inception of cinema in the late nineteenth century through to the end of the silent era in the late 1920s, there were numerous roles that film music undertook in the cinematic experience. In her book, “Unheard Melodies, Narrative Film Music,” Claudia Gorbman lists the initial functions of music in the era of silent film as

- a) A logical choice for support in creation of the cinematic spectacle, given it was previously used to accompany other forms of spectacle (e.g. opera) prior to the invention and development of cinema.
- b) A means in which to mask the distracting sounds of the noisy projectors in early cinema.
- c) Maintaining a semiotic function by assisting the audience in identifying such elements of the narrative as time, setting and characters, describing musically what could not be described by speech.
- d) Creating a pulse in which to support the editing and movement on-screen.
- e) Creating a spatial dimension that “compensated for the flatness of the screen.”
- f) Appeasing audience members who may have found the actors onscreen detached from their voices as ‘ghostly’.
- g) Helping to bond cinemagoers together, one of the major appeals of the cinematic experience.¹

The initial forms of musical accompaniment used in the cinema were rather unsophisticated, usually consisting of a single pianist playing well-known tunes and classical pieces on an old, often untuned piano. If the pianist were an intuitive musician they would improvise to the shifts in mood and setting onscreen but more often than not the accompaniment was unrelated to the filmic narrative and the pianist simply played whatever music they happened to recall at any given moment.

As cinema matured as an art form and its directors and producers treated cinema as an artistic medium, it wasn't long before these producers realised the power music had in shaping their creative visions. In 1909 the Edison and Vitagraph companies began distributing lists of suggested material to be used by theatre accompanists for their films. These lists enhanced the musical

¹ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies, Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 53.

accompaniment greatly and enriched the audience's experience in the cinema. The use of music in cinema continued to evolve and by the 1930s, when technological advances saw sound incorporated on to the film medium, music's role was further cemented as a tool to be used in the shaping of a cinematic vision. By now composers were employed specifically to write new material for film and a new form of musical composition emerged.

1.2. The Birth of the Film Composer

In the 1930s many Europeans were flocking to the United States of America to escape the persecution threatened by the rise of the Nazi party in Germany. Some of the émigré were composers who decided to try their luck in the American epicenter of film production, Hollywood. Among the composers were Max Steiner (1888-1971) and Erich Korngold (1897-1957) who having had experience in writing for visual mediums such as opera and Broadway theatre, took the compositional techniques they'd developed in these mediums and employed them in cinema. Working closely with sound effects and dialogue tracks, these composers set the standard for the working relationship of music and film. Creating a perfect dichotomy, they realised that music could enhance the filmic narrative but also remained aware that the music should not create a distraction to this narrative.

In these early years of film music however, film distributors and creators were still wary of film music not having an explicit relation to the filmic narrative. As Steiner recalled

They [producers and directors] felt it was necessary to explain the music pictorially. For example, if they wanted music for a street scene, an organ grinder was shown. It was easy to use music in nightclub, ballroom or theatre scenes, as here the orchestras played a necessary part in the picture.²

This strong adherence to the visual narrative also gave rise to a practice known as "mickey-mousing", described by Royal S. Brown as, "the split-second synchronizing of musical and visual action so called because of its prevalent use in animated cartoons."³ In other words, a musical mimicry of the physical action depicted onscreen. Despite these limitations, some film scores that emerged during this period such as Steiner's moving score for the enduring *Gone with the Wind*

² Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Films*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1992), 22.

³ Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 16.

(Fleming, 1939, USA), were still rich in intelligent musical material that was devoid of the film music clichés that were emerging.

The composers in the period of the early sound film set the film music conventions that composers of film music in the 1940s would follow and subsequently refine. One such composer who emerged in Hollywood in the early 1940s was the highly idiosyncratic and innovative Bernard Herrmann.

2. Introducing Bernard Herrmann

2.1. Early Life and Career

Herrmann was born in New York on June 29, 1911 and brought up in a household that espoused a love of the arts. During his formative years Herrmann spent much of his time at the New York Public Library as, being of a scholarly persuasion, he was rendered somewhat socially awkward and prone to the taunts of other children. As Herrmann biographer Stephen C. Smith notes, this probably helped in “shaping Herrmann’s artistic empathy with the outcast and strange that would serve him well in later dramatic scores.”⁴ During his time in the library he would read tragic and highly individual writers such as D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and the psychoanalytical writings of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who helped develop in Herrmann a fascination with psychoanalysis and the idea that anxiety is associated with love and loss.⁵ The ideas he encountered in the work of Freud would feature heavily in his compositions, most notably in his collaborations with director Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980).

After continuing his musical studies at New York University and receiving a fellowship to study at Julliard, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) employed Herrmann in 1934 to write incidental music for educational programmes and to conduct the CBS Symphony orchestra. In 1937, Herrmann scored for an innovative new program at CBS called “Columbia Workshop”, writing musical cues (individual pieces of music that make up radio, film or television score, usually assigned to a shift in an aspect of the filmic narrative) for a program that featured a series of unusual stories. For one particular script, he was required to score for the sound of a man turning into a sycamore tree. Paying close attention to the script’s narrative and subsequently deeming the man’s transition to be a pleasant experience, Herrmann stated

I scored the cue for strings, harp, celeste and flute – all delicate instruments- and composed a theme which was wistful, but not too sad. After all, the man turning into the tree was a postman, and his feet were tired. He was glad to be at peace.⁶

At this early stage in his career, Herrmann was already showing an aptitude for scoring for emotion and shifts in psychological state rather than just for action. Through his work at CBS in scoring for

⁴ Steven C. Smith, *A Heart a Fire's Centre: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

programs such as “Columbia Workshop”, Herrmann also became aware of the function of music in supporting the scripted performance. Herrmann stated in July 1938

When the audience says ‘The orchestra is playing,’ the music director has failed his purpose. Attention is distracted from the drama, and the whole aim of the cue music is defeated. That is why I rarely use a symphony orchestra for the Workshop, but employ a mixture instead, going easy on the strings. My idea is to disassociate the minds of the audience from the thought of an orchestral accompaniment, so they can fix their attention on the drama itself.⁷

In 1941, in scoring Orson Welles’ (1915-1985) *Citizen Kane*, Herrmann had made the transition from radio to film. Through the compositional techniques he had learnt in radio, Herrmann was particularly suited to work in film given his sensitivity to script narrative and his empathy and subsequent understanding of the characters within the narrative he scored for.

2.1.1. The Influence of Charles Ives

As well as a respect for composers of the past, Herrmann also had a reverence for many composers of his own time, most notably the American composer, Charles Ives (1874-1954). Herrmann championed Ives’ work during his CBS broadcasts and in an article written in 1932, Herrmann presented himself as particularly enamoured with Ives’ music, describing Ives’ innovative compositional technique

Ives was developing thirty years ago a musical technique which today the moderns declare are their innovations.

The way of example: in 1890 Ives was writing poly-tonality, which, in 1910, Milhaud introduced in popular garb. In 1902 he was producing poly-rhythms, atonality and tone clusters which many years later Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Ornstein received credit for originating. Let it be clearly understood that the above composers were not aware of Ives’ work, any more than Ives had been aware of their compositions, thirty years ago.⁸

The influence of Ives’ compositional technique, as outlined above by Herrmann, manifests itself in many of Herrmann’s film scores. For example, the use of poly-tonality can be detected in

⁷ Ibid, 62.

⁸ Bernard Herrmann, “Charles Ives,” The Bernard Herrmann Society (Accessed October 2008) <<http://www.bernardherrmann.org/articles/archive/trend/>>

Herrmann's score for *Vertigo* through his use of a chord (to be discussed further) comprising of both minor and major harmonies. Ives' utilisation of vernacular American music (e.g. as heard in his work, "A Symphony: New England Holidays", written between 1904 and 1913) no doubt inspired Herrmann's score accompanying Kane's rise to power in *Citizen Kane*. The sequence boasts dance styles such as cancan and ragtime, both of which would have been popular in the US in the 1890s when this portion of the film is set.⁹

⁹ Bernard Herrmann, "Score for a Film," in *Citizen Kane: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes]. (Melbourne: Preamble, 1991).

3. Creating the Sound of the Psyche

Bernard Herrmann believed that cinema and music were inseparable and that film music, “essentially provides an unconscious series of anchors for the viewer.”¹⁰ It was this awareness of the idea of an audience unconscious that helped him to develop a number of compositional techniques culminating in the creation of a unique and influential film music. For films dealing with characters that were psychologically disturbed or emotionally damaged, Herrmann was able to construct musical scores that “when carefully placed under a dialogue track, increased the import of the spoken word, lending dialogue a greater significance than it might otherwise have had.”¹¹ As Jack Sullivan quotes in his article, “Psycho: The Music of Terror”, Brown describes of Herrmann’s ability to tap into the anxiety and aggression of the American cultural psyche

A tension is created between the indefiniteness of the harmonic language and the exaggerated definiteness of the rhythmic idiom, which in many places is so relentless, so heavily accentuated, that the listener is aware not so much of temporal divisions as a subliminal pulse suggesting primordial violence.¹²

In his unique use of such compositional elements as harmony and tonal colour, as well as using short musical material as motifs in variation and repetition, Herrmann was able to create a second, non-diegetic (sound that is not part of the filmic narrative on-screen) musical voice for the characters in the dramatic narrative he scored for. Herrmann stated that, “Film music must supply what actors cannot say. The music can give to an audience their feelings. It must really convey what the word cannot do.”¹³

3.1. Herrmann’s Harmonic Language

Herrmann’s harmonic language demonstrated a preference for the use of minor tonality and dissonance associated in Classical music with attributes such as instability and melancholia. As Norman Cazden explains

In [Western] musical harmony the critical determinant of consonance and dissonance is expectation of movement...A

¹⁰Ted Gilling, “The Colour of the Music: An Interview with Bernard Herrmann,” *Sight and Sound* 41, no.1 (1971/72): 37, 36-39.

¹¹ Matt Williams, “The Trouble with Benny,” The Bernard Herrmann Society (Accessed August 2008) <<http://www.bernardherrmann.org/articles/bio/troublewithbenny/>>

¹² Jack Sullivan, “Psycho: The Music of Terror,” *Cineaste* 32, no.1 (2006): 26, 20-28.

¹³ As per Track 11 “Bernard Herrmann On Film Music” on *Bernard Herrmann Film Music* [CD] (Milan: 35643-2, 1993).

consonant interval is one which sounds stable and complete in itself, which does not produce a feeling of necessary movement to other tones. A dissonant interval causes feeling of necessary movement to other tones. A dissonant interval causes a restless expectation of resolution, or movement to a consonant interval...Context is the determining factor¹⁴

In the context of the dramatic narrative of the films Herrmann composed for, his use of dissonance “destroys sanity and gives rise to violence, which is symbolic with evil, even murder.”¹⁵ By avoiding anticipated harmonic resolution and in using harmonic suspensions, Herrmann was, as I will explain further, able to evoke a feeling of unease and trepidation in the listener.

In his article, “Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational”, Brown highlights a particular chord (Fig. 1) used frequently in the Hitchcock/Herrmann partnership. Brown writes that in combining both a major and a minor third with a seventh interval, the resultant chord has an ambiguous quality in that it implies no clear tonal centre. This ambiguity thus elicits a visceral feeling of dread and anxiety in the listener/viewer “whereby the musical language familiar to Western listeners serves as a point of departure, only to be modified in such a way that norms are thrown off centre and expectations are held in suspense for much longer periods of time than the listening ears and viscera are accustomed to.”¹⁶

The “Hitchcock chord”, as Brown refers to it, features prominently in Herrmann’s score for *Vertigo* in relation to the neurosis of the film’s male protagonist, Scottie.

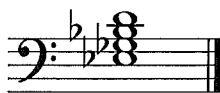


Fig. 1: Brown’s “Hitchcock chord”: a minor major-seventh comprising of two major thirds (‘G \flat ’-‘B \flat ’, ‘B \flat ’-‘D’) and one minor third (‘E \flat ’-‘G \flat ’). The chord is ambiguous in that it has the qualities of both ‘G \flat ’ major and ‘E \flat ’ minor.

The ambivalence of Herrmann’s harmonic language and the composer’s indulgence in dissonance and suspended resolution meant that the appearance of traditional, anticipated cadences was given extra significance and often used to highlight the importance of an event onscreen. For example, in *Vertigo* the death of Judy at the very end of the film is intensified via the use of a resounding ‘C’

¹⁴ Appears in the publication: Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 230.

¹⁵ Irwin Bazelon, *Knowing the Score: Notes on Film Music* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975), 89.

¹⁶ Royal S. Brown, “Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational,” *Cinema Journal* 21, no.2 (1982): 17, 14-49.

major chord. The harmony prior to the appearance of this chord as Scottie leads Judy up the tower staircase is highly dissonant and nebulous, so when the chord emerges abruptly it signifies to that there has been a change in the filmic narrative that requires attention.¹⁷ By employing this major chord in the context of a harmonic flow that is constantly shifting, Herrmann exploited its tonality in order to give Judy's death greater resonance with the listener/viewer, and to also suggest Scottie's triumph over his sufferance from vertigo.

Combined with a propensity to write in descending musical movement (often using parallel chords), of which Brown describes as a "descent into the irrational"¹⁸, Herrmann's use of harmony imbued the characters on-screen it accompanies with an emotional complexity that could not depicted or implied by vision alone.

3.2. Timbre

One of Herrmann's greatest gifts as a composer was his ability to fully exploit the emotionally evocative potential of timbre and awareness that "each film creates its own variety of musical colour."¹⁹ Insisting on orchestrating his own scores (an uncommon practice for composers in Hollywood film scoring), Herrmann once stated, "I can't understand having someone else do it. It would be like someone putting colour to your paintings"²⁰. Herrmann experimented with different combinations of instruments, resulting in a veritable palette of musical colour. Through his use of timbre, Herrmann was able to reinforce elements of the filmic narrative such as character and location as well as to signify what was not already apparent to the audience. For example, in the science fiction film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Wise, USA, 1951), Herrmann used the otherworldly tone of the theremin coupled with dark, low registered brass to give a voice to the alien 'Other' that disturbs and seemingly threatens the occupants of Earth. Through using low register in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and many of his other film scores, Herrmann exploits the low-frequency phenomenon that creates a visceral, vibrating sound that purports to physically disturb the listener via its vibrations.

In Herrmann's score for *White Witch Doctor* (Hathaway, USA, 1953), an orchestra is used in combination with a large percussion section comprising of instruments such as marimbas and an African break drum. To mainstream film goes in the 1950s, this would have signified the film's

¹⁷ Antony John, "The Moment That I Dreaded and Hoped For": Ambivalence and Order in Bernard Herrmann's Score for *Vertigo*," *The Music Quarterly* 85, no.3 (2001), 539-40, 516-544.

¹⁸ Brown, 21.

¹⁹ Smith, 363.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 81.

'exotic' location of 1907 Africa. An obscure baroque instrument known as the serpent was also used in this film score as Herrmann found that the instrument's "grossly distorted timbre was the ideal accompaniment for the tarantula that briefly scales Susan Hayward's shoulder."²¹ In scoring *Psycho* (Hitchcock, USA, 1960) Herrmann wrote for an orchestra only comprising of strings, explaining that in using only this instrumental timbre he was able to "complement the black-and-white photography of the film with a black-and-white score."²² As Steiner theorised in regards to Herrmann's use of solely string timbre in *Psycho*'s score

...just as the 'no color' images of a black and white film are able to convey all the emotions and visual effects the director wishes to express, so the string orchestra has the capability – with the limits of its one basic *colour* – to produce an enormous range of expression and a great variety of dramatic and emotional effects, with all the gradation in between.²³

In his sensitivity to the use of musical colour, as demonstrated in the aforementioned examples, Herrmann also found that a simple motif of just a few notes could be transformed, giving it limitless potential. In changing the instrumental scoring of a motif associated with a character in the film, Herrmann could signify a change in the character's mood or their psychological disturbance.

3.3. Herrmann and the Musical Motif

As well as his skill in orchestrating, Herrmann possessed another compositional strength that suited film scoring – the ability to construct whole film scores derived from only one or two short musical motifs. In regards to his preference for short motifs, Herrmann, referring to motif as a "short phrase", stated in an interview with Brown that, "The short phrase is easier to follow for an audience, who listen with only half an ear. Don't forget that the best they do is half an ear."²⁴

Herrmann realised earlier on in his radio career that in using motifs in repetition, the listener's attention would not waver and through applying this to film, the listener would remain focused on the dramatic narrative and consequently the film's atmosphere would be maintained. Referring to these motifs as "brief musical cells," Graham Bruce explains the power of this technique in Herrmann's film scoring

²¹ Appears in the publication: Smith's *A Heart a Fire's Centre: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 176.

²² Ibid, 236.

²³ Ibid, 238.

²⁴ Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 291.

At the level of the single musical cue, the brief musical cell, because of its flexibility, offers the potential of an active interrelation with dialogue, action and editing. The importance of the musical modules, however, lies not merely in their flexibility in relation to any single image sequence. The structural potential of these simple, cellular units lies also in their generative qualities, their possibilities for expansion, variation, and development, giving rise to a score of organic unity. More importantly, the interrelation of these expansions, variations, and developments provide a potent means of creating narrative structural patterns across the filmic text²⁵

It was also in variation or development of these motifs, that Herrmann was particularly suited to films dealing with psychological material as his variations often “derived from the psychological states he felt at work in a particular film rather than for external (i.e. visual) character traits.”²⁶ By varying a motif using rhythm, harmony or musical colour (as discussed previously), Herrmann signified changes in character’s state of mind as well as suggested a transition in the filmic narrative. As noted in the subsequent case study, Herrmann’s score for *Citizen Kane* is a strong example of how his treatment of motifs strengthens the filmic narrative and conveys the thoughts and emotions of characters onscreen.

3.4. The Effectiveness of Herrmann’s Film Music Style

It was through his treatment of motifs, the understanding of the effect of musical colour and his use of harmony that Herrmann was able to develop his own film music style, a style that exemplified an understanding of what his role as film composer was - the ability to always support and strengthen filmic narrative musically, and never to impose on it.²⁷ This awareness of his role as composer also led to his understanding that silence, or knowing when *not* to score, could be utilised as a powerful compositional tool. In a scene in *Taxi Driver* in which the film’s male protagonist, Travis Bickle, is shown alone in his apartment talking to himself and acting out violent fantasies, Herrmann did not contribute a musical cue. The result is that the noise of the street outside Travis’ apartment is heard clearly on the soundtrack and Travis’ loneliness and his isolation from the world is depicted more effectively onscreen. As also exemplified in his scores for *Citizen Kane* and *Vertigo*, in remaining subservient to filmic narrative, Herrmann was able to strengthen the portrayal of a complex character onscreen.

²⁵Graham Bruce, *Bernard Herrmann: Film Music and Film Narrative* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1985), 36.

²⁶William Darby and Jack Du Bois, *American Film Music: Major Composers, Techniques, Trends, 1915-1990* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 1990), 349.

²⁷Joel Broeck, “Music of the Fears,” *Film Comment* 12, no.5 (1976): 56, 56-60.

The following three case studies outline how Herrmann's aforementioned film music style gives a voice to the central men of *Citizen Kane*, *Vertigo* and *Taxi Driver* , who all share the quality of being lonely and disturbed in some way whether it be through trauma, romantic obsession, mental illness or a combination of the three.

4. Case Study One: *Citizen Kane* (1941)

I don't think any word can explain a man's life. No, I guess Rosebud is just a piece in a jigsaw puzzle – a missing piece.

Thompson, *Citizen Kane*.

4.1. Creating *Kane*

Whilst working at CBS, Herrmann met Welles during his scoring work on the drama series “The Mercury Theatre on the Air” and in 1939 he approached Herrmann to score his first film – *Citizen Kane*. Clearly aware of Herrmann’s intuitive talent as a composer and the important role music would undertake in the film, Welles allowed Herrmann much freedom and time in the writing of the film’s score, often editing his film’s images to Herrmann’s “incisive vignettes.”²⁸ In an article for the New York Times in 1941 on his score for *Citizen Kane*, Herrmann wrote of the optimum conditions he had as a composer for the film

I had heard of the many handicaps that exist for a composer in Hollywood. One was the great speed in which scores often had to be written – sometimes in as little as two or three weeks. Another was that the composer seldom had time to do his own orchestration. And again – that once the music was written and conducted, the composer had little to say about the sound levels or dynamics of the score in the finished film.

Not one of these conditions prevailed during the production of *Citizen Kane*.²⁹

In Hollywood at the time it was unheard of to involve the composer so much in the filmmaking process but Welles’ radio experience had instilled in him an understanding of the power of music in supporting dramatic narrative. By allowing him to work freely, Welles afforded Herrmann the opportunity to be fully active in helping shape *Citizen Kane*.

Film critics have often referred to *Citizen Kane* as one of the greatest motion pictures ever made, and as Charles Higham reflects, the film is “an anti-American classic, the exact antithesis of the work of [directors] Ford or Wyler or Cukor in the period.”³⁰ *Citizen Kane* is a scathing dissection of the American dream, an anomaly amongst the other films of its day that often served cinemagoers as an escape from the ravages of the Great Depression, reminding them that the dream of prosperity

²⁸ Broek, 56.

²⁹ Herrmann, *Citizen Kane: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes].

³⁰ Darby and Du Bois, 350.

was still alive and well. Most notably, Welles and his fellow screenplay writer Herman J. Mankiewicz (1897-1953) reportedly modelled the film's central character, Charles Foster Kane, after American newspaper magnate, William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951). The film generated much controversy and though Hearst tried preventing the film's release, RKO Studios resisted and the film opened on May 1, 1941. On the controversy surrounding the film, Herrmann said in 1975, "'Kane,' in my opinion, was totally misunderstood. It's not really a picture about Hearst: it's a picture about wealth and power."³¹

As Herrmann suggests, *Citizen Kane*'s plot is a study of the corruptive influence of wealth and power via the portrait of a man (Kane) who, despite his financial success, dies a lonely death, alienated and miserable. *Citizen Kane* is at its essence, as William Bayer describes, "...the story of a man who gains the world and loses his soul."³² Throughout the film, a reporter by the name of Thompson searches for meaning in Kane's last word ("Rosebud") via a series of interviews with people who were close to him, desperately trying to understand a deeply complex man who gave little of himself away.

4.2. The 'Citizen' Sound

In creating his score for *Citizen Kane*, Herrmann approached the film in an entirely different way to other composers working in Hollywood at the time. Rejecting the common practice of scoring a film with almost non-stop music, Herrmann instead constructed a score made up of "short, terse themes that reflect the fluidity of the editing."³³ Herrmann also attributed his approach to writing his first film score to his experience at CBS, stating that he used musical cues that may only last a few seconds, orchestrated for "unorthodox instrumental combinations" and that "sound effects were blended many times in *Citizen Kane*, with the music, to add intensity to certain scenes", all techniques Herrmann had developed in his radio scoring.³⁴

4.2.1. Kane's Motifs

Central to the strength of *Citizen Kane*'s score in supporting the dramatic narrative is Herrmann's use of two musical motifs. Herrmann outlined the two motifs and admitted that their usage was "practically imperative, because of the story itself and the manner in which it is unfolded" and that the motifs were utilised in order "to give unity to the score as a whole"³⁵ Firstly, a motif was

³¹ Smith, 75.

³² William Bayer, *The Great Movies* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973), 148.

³³ Broek, 57.

³⁴ Herrmann, *Citizen Kane: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes].

³⁵ Ibid.

assigned to the attribute of Kane's ambition and power (which I will call the "Power" motif) and is first heard in the opening scene of the film in Herrmann's corresponding musical cue, "Prelude." As the camera pans over Kane's vast estate, highlighting Kane's isolation from the outside world, the motif is heard in the bassoons and muted trombones and introduces the "gloomy atmosphere of Kane's forbidding estate and his death" (Fig. 2).³⁶ This gloomy atmosphere is evoked due to the low registers of these instruments, working with the aforementioned low-frequency phenomenon.



Fig. 2: "Power" motif from *Citizen Kane* as heard in "Prelude".

Comprising of five notes, the ominous motif drops a semitone, rises a semitone and then drops the interval of a tritone. In Western medieval music the tritone, the interval of augmented 4th, was prohibited as it was associated with the devil and as Bruce notes, the motif "bears a distinct similarity to the plainsong hymn "Dies Irae" with its implications of imminent retribution."³⁷ Therefore, Herrmann's musical implication here is of the Faustian nature of Kane in that he will ultimately suffer for choosing power and wealth over those close to him.

The second motif in the score, to be referred to henceforth as "Rosebud" (Fig. 3), is assigned to Kane's childhood innocence and his freedom from responsibility, the time in his life where Kane felt most at peace. The "Rosebud" motif, like "Power", is also made up of 5 notes and is first heard in "Prelude" in the bassoons and trombones just after the second appearance of "Power" in the bass clarinets and contrabassoon.³⁸



Fig. 3: "Rosebud" motif from *Citizen Kane* as heard in "Prelude".

"Rosebud" almost appears to be a mirror image of "Power" in its movement, this time moving up the interval of a semitone, down a third, up a fifth and then down a fourth.

³⁶ Tony Bremner, "Notes on the Music" in *Citizen Kane: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes]. (Melbourne: Preamble, 1991).

³⁷ Bruce, 45.

³⁸ Charles Higham, *The Films of Orson Welles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 25.

Bruce notes that these two motifs work together (as exemplified in “Prelude”) and also independently within Herrmann’s score to offer a musical commentary as to the nature of the mysterious Kane.³⁹ As discussed above, the two motifs reflect the conflicting polarities of Kane’s psyche; “Rosebud” represents his humanity and more moral intentions, whilst “Power” represents the corruptive influences that eventually destroy him. Throughout the film, the motifs are used to signify a shift in Kane’s emotions or thoughts and, depending on the dramatic narrative and the character’s perspective of Kane involved, manifest themselves through repetition, variation and development thus acting as “generative units which form the basis of more extended, complex pieces.”⁴⁰

4.3. A Musical Portrait of Charles Foster Kane

The development of these motifs also coincides with the influence the other characters and dramatic narrative have in how Kane evolves as a character.⁴¹ Kane is a man who is tortured by an event in his childhood and corrupted by wealth and the power it permits, subsequently going on to victimise those closest to him. However, in torturing his loved ones he pushes them away, denying himself of any possible happiness and dying a lonely man.

4.3.1. “Rosebud” and the Loss of Innocence

Kane’s destiny is shaped by a particular event in his childhood. In his investigations, Thompson visits the memorial library of the banker Walter Parks Thatcher and peruses a section of Thatcher’s diary that details his involvement with Kane. As he reads we are given a visual flashback to the first meeting of Thatcher and Kane. This flashback highlights Kane’s humble childhood, showing him at play in the snow with his beloved sled, Rosebud, clearly happy and content. Herrmann’s “Rosebud” motif is heard here rapidly in the flutes and then in a prolonged, romantic-sounding form on the strings that signifies Kane’s youthful amusement and, coupled with Kane’s frolicking on screen, what appears to be an idyllic childhood. As the boy plays outdoors, Thatcher is inside Kane’s home in talks with Kane’s mother, who has recently become heir to a gold mine and is signing away custodial rights of Kane as well as management of her assets to Thatcher. After discussing Kane’s inheritance of his mother’s fortune when he reaches the age of twenty-five, Thatcher states that, “He [Kane] is to come into complete possession.” Immediately after Thatcher’s comment Kane’s

³⁹ Bruce, 45.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 45.

⁴¹ Ibid, 46.

seemingly emotionally distant mother calls for him and a statement of the “Power” motif is heard on muted French horn, heavily accented as if to make a stern point.

Coupled with the coldness of the interaction between Thatcher and Kane’s mother onscreen, Herrmann’s use of the motif in this scene is the primary technique used in suggesting that the pair were the guilty parties in the robbing of Kane’s innocence and the subsequent corruption of him as an individual. When Thatcher goes outside to meet Kane and take him away, Kane aggressively refuses to go and uses his sled to knock him down. In the soundtrack, the first two notes of the “Rosebud” motif is heard on oboe before being cut-off by the first two notes of “Power” on the French horns after which a full appearance of “Rosebud” is heard in the strings. The visual narrative coupled with Herrmann’s economical use of the two motifs intimates that a tug-o-war is going on between Kane’s future and past in that Kane is not yet ready to part with his childhood and accept the responsibilities a fortune endows. This event proves traumatic to Kane and is crucial in the development of his character in the film.

After Thatcher has taken Kane away to a new life, the scene closes with a final shot of Kane’s beloved sled abandoned outside his childhood home as snow falls slowly over it. Commenting on the powerful symbolism, Herrmann quotes the “Rosebud” motif in a solitary bassoon with an accompaniment of tremolo violins playing dissonant 2nd intervals as the sled is shown slowly disappearing⁴². The richly sonorous tone of the bassoon’s lower register in combination with the use of string tremolo (often used in film scores to convey romantic or dramatic sentiment) gives a mournful quality to the use of “Rosebud” in this scene and the overall effect is that Herrmann’s score functions as a requiem for Kane’s lost childhood and innocence. When Kane was removed from his Mother and Father it was his defining moment, the “point where his life changed irrevocably for what appears to be the better, from a materialistic viewpoint, but which actually leaves him vulnerable and alone,”⁴³ and as exemplified in his treatment of the “Rosebud” motif here, Herrmann helps highlight this.

4.3.2. “Rosebud” Motif and Loneliness

When Kane’s second wife, Susan, threatens to leave him, he begs her to stay imploring of her, “You mustn’t go. You can’t do this to *me!*” When Susan leaves, Kane goes on a rampage, trashing her room and throwing about her possessions. When he comes to a snow globe on her dresser (the scene

⁴² Bill Wrobel, “Herrmann’s “Citizen Kane” Film Score Rundown by Bill Wrobel,” Film Score Rundowns (Accessed September 2008) <<http://www.filmscorerundowns.net/herrmann/citizenkane.pdf>>

⁴³ Kelly Burgess, “Citizen Kane,” SparkNotes (Accessed August 2008) <<http://www.sparknotes.com/film/citizenkane>>

within baring a distinct resemblance to his childhood home), Kane stops, picks it up and appears to be in contemplation. After Kane handles the globe and utters “Rosebud” he tearfully begins to walk out of the room, his loneliness highlighted as he passes the hired help who are all shown observing him from a distance.

This scene is accompanied by Herrmann’s musical cue, “The Glass Ball”. Opening the cue is the “Rosebud” motif (clearly a comment on where Kane’s thoughts are at) on solo flute accompanied by an ostinato of a crotchet rhythm on cello, double bass and bass drum that evokes the gloom of a funeral march in its steady pace and low register strings. In working with pre-established cultural codes of Western funeral music, Herrmann helps garner a feeling of sadness in the listener/viewer and implies that Kane has suffered a great loss.

Herrmann’s score for Kane’s sullen exit from Susan’s room is in direct contrast to the harsh, digetic noise of Kane violent behavior in the previous scene⁴⁴, an ingenious means in which to convey that Kane has fully grasped that he is now truly alone and must come to terms with his loneliness. The cue continues in its quotations of “Rosebud” in the dirge-like rhythm reinforcing the memory of Kane’s loss as he passes a hall of mirrors, his multiple reflections further accentuating his loneliness.

The scene closes with a final statement of the “Rosebud” motif, foreboding in its employment of low register strings. As opposed to the aforementioned use of the motif during Kane’s frolicking in the childhood flashback scene, the dark musical colouring created in the use of the lower instrumental register and the slow pace of the “The Glass Ball” cue evokes a morose mood that highlights the dissatisfaction and sadness that Kane feels with his life despite his immense wealth and power. Through using the “Rosebud” motif in this musical cue and its corresponding scene, Herrmann also reinforces that Kane longs for the simplicity and happiness he had in his childhood, a simplicity he thought he had attained in marrying Susan.⁴⁵

4.3.3. “Power” and Kane’s Rise

The “Power” motif is also used in relation to his business practices and interactions with colleagues and developments of the motif can be heard in Herrmann’s musical cues related to these interactions onscreen. In his musical cue, “Galop”, that underscores a montage showing Kane’s rise

⁴⁴ Bruce, 56.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 56.

to power, the “Power” motif is used in reflecting “Kane’s youthful enthusiasm.”⁴⁶ However, given Herrmann’s use of the motif prior to this montage e.g. in “Prelude”, it also implies that this quest for power will ultimately destroy him. When Kane fires his best friend Leland from his newspaper because he is about to write a negative review of Susan’s operatic performance, a statement of the “Power” motif is heard in muted French horns. The ominous atmosphere created by the cue’s orchestral colour plus the “Power” motif’s implications suggests that Kane is changing and the power bestowed in him has begun to ‘go to his head.’

4.4. Perspectives

Citizen Kane is told from six perspectives; that of the public, that of Thatcher, that of Kane’s business partner, Bernstein, that of his best friend, Leland, that of his second wife, Susan and that of Raymond, his butler. Each of these perspectives are years in the making and as such are “hazy recollections and idealisations”⁴⁷ of Kane, who was always somewhat of an enigma to those around him even whilst he was alive. In employing and varying the two motifs as well as through his instrumental colouring within his score’s short musical cues, Herrmann helps in shaping these perspectives, particularly of those concerning Kane’s interaction with women.

4.4.1. Mother and Her Influence

When Kane was torn away from his mother during his childhood, he was traumatised by the incident and consequently Kane recalls this trauma at various points in the film. As Laura Mulvey describes, in reference to Freud’s theory of the unconscious, “...a memory that is apparently forgotten is also preserved, to return, if called on, at a later date,”⁴⁸ and we see evidence of this in such instances as Kane’s discovery of the snow globe (with use of the “Rosebud” musical motif) in the aforementioned “The Glass Ball” scene. Throughout the film we also see this trauma manifesting itself in Kane’s treatment of women, as he never recovered from what appeared to be a traitorous act by his mother. As mentioned previously, Herrmann uses the “Power” motif in the childhood flashback scene in relation to Kane’s mother’s actions to comment on what appears to be the corruptive influence she had upon him. Herrmann’s score reminds the listener/viewer of this trauma and the influence Kane’s mother had over him by quoting both the “Rosebud” and “Power” motifs in Kane’s dealings with the subsequent women close to him.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 52.

⁴⁷ Burgess, SparkNote on Citizen Kane <<http://www.sparknotes.com/film/citizenkane>>

⁴⁸ Laura Mulvey, *Citizen Kane* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992), 54.

4.4.2. Emily Kane & The Breakfast Montage

Shortly after a scene in which Leland is describing Kane's marriage to his first wife, a socialite, Emily, the film cuts to a montage that is set over the course of their nine years of marriage. Comprising of six short scenes set at their breakfast table, the montage shows the disintegration of their marriage beginning in the first scene with their being affectionate newlyweds and culminating with their being emotionally distant and cold towards each other. For this montage Herrmann wrote a waltz theme in the style of the waltzes that came into prominence in European ballrooms in the mid-eighteenth century (connoting sophistication to the listener, perhaps like Emily in the film) and used the theme in variation to comment on the slow change in Kane's personality over these years and his treatment of his wife.⁴⁹

First heard when Kane announces to his colleagues that he will be marrying Emily in Herrmann's musical cue, "Valse Presentation," the waltz's theme draws its material from the "Rosebud" motif (Fig. 4).

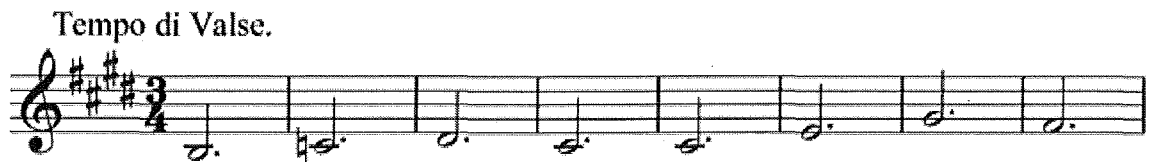


Fig. 4: Herrmann's waltz theme (tempo as per "Valse Presentation").

Using the theme given in Fig. 4, the "Rosebud" motif can be extracted from bars 3 through 7 through arranging the notes as 'D#'-'E'-'C#'-'G#'-'D#'. Therefore Herrmann's waltz theme, in having its basis in the "Rosebud" motif, suggests that Kane has filled the void created by his mother's absence with the love of Emily.

The first scene shows Kane subjugated in that he is doting on Emily, clearly infatuated and willing to put her ahead of his work. Herrmann's score here is essentially a second statement of the theme outlined above, harmonically 'stable' in its use of major tonality and, given the implications of using major tonality as previously discussed, emphasises that Kane is content in his married state. The second scene opens with Emily sighing, "Charles", and uses the first variation by Herrmann of his waltz theme, played "Allegro Scherzando" in staccato by flutes.⁵⁰ The urgency of this variation

⁴⁹ All orchestration and other score information for this cue obtained from Bill Wrobel's film score rundown of the *Citizen Kane* score (Accessed September 2008)

<<http://www.filmscorerundowns.net/herrmann/citizenkane.pdf>>

⁵⁰ Bruce, 53.

is conveyed via the use of staccato and a quick tempo, coupled with Emily's complaints that he spends too much time at his newspaper (the music is almost mimicry of what Kane would consider Emily's nagging), and is the technique Herrmann uses to show that Kane is starting to feel suffocated by his marriage. Visually, their growing apart is also emphasised by their sitting on opposite sides of the table as their view of each other somewhat obscured by a vase on the middle of the table.

The second variation of the waltz theme in the third scene of the breakfast montage is even more urgent still (with a "Presto" tempo) and heard in the clarinets in E minor with an accompaniment by the flutes playing the same theme transposed a fourth below, on the dominant of 'B'. The strong harmonic relationship of the 4th interval coupled with the parallel movement of the two melodic lines suggests Kane's authority, as in classic film scores the parallel movement of 4ths often connoted a powerful figure within the film's narrative (e.g. Steiner's "Main Title" for *King Kong* (Cooper & Schoedsack, 1933, USA)). These associations are brought up in the listener/viewer and thus help in supporting the dramatic narrative when Emily is shown onscreen powerless and at Kane's mercy, urging him to stop writing negatively about her uncle in his newspapers. As Kane denounces her uncle (the President of the United States) for being weak in that he is clearly manipulated by others in his administration, the "Power motif" is heard in muted horns beginning on the note 'E'. In using the motif here, Herrmann signifies Kane's hubris and his contempt for the weak and also hints at Kane's ambition for Presidency. The motif's implications is also supported by the dialogue that follows when, after Emily states that her uncle "...happens to be the President, Charles, not you", Kane quips, "That's a mistake that will be corrected one of these days."

In the fifth scene of the breakfast montage, Emily pleads of Kane, "...people will think!" before Kane barks, "What I tell them to think!" The final variation only allows the first two notes of the waltz theme to come through before being cut-off by a stern quotation of the "Power" motif (though the motif's last note is varied) in the trombones, paralleling Emily being interrupted by Kane. Here, supported by Herrmann's suggestive score and the dialogue, Kane demonstrates an arrogance that owning a powerful newspaper engenders in him and a clear contempt for his wife.

In the sixth and final scene the couple are shown at breakfast speechless, shooting each other loveless looks, their relationship in such a dire state that they are not even able to communicate with each other. Herrmann's score is given a "Lento" tempo marking here and the orchestration of the theme heard in muted strings accompanied by an ostinato in the harp and celesta on the second and third beats, the sparse orchestration suggesting in this final scene that Kane and Emily's marriage is essentially over.

Herrmann's variation of the waltz theme in the breakfast montage strengthens the dramatic narrative greatly, hinting at unconscious elements of Kane's psyche that are at work through his quotation of both the "Rosebud" and "Power" motifs. This montage is an example of how, according to William Darby and Jack Du Bois, Herrmann "consistently strives to make music that will suggest what is not visually apparent and so reinforce what the viewer is inferring."⁵¹ Through his use of musical colour, motivic manipulation and tonality, Herrmann's score is able to convey the change in Kane's character over the years, a change that could not have been depicted as powerfully by image and dialogue alone.

4.4.3. Destroying Susan

When Thompson interviews Leland, he offers an account as to how Kane met his second wife, Susan. When Kane first encounters Susan, she invites him up to her room and Herrmann's cue, "Kane meets Susan", begins. As Kane enters Susan's building, an ascending, arpeggiated figure begins in the harp (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Herrmann's development of "Rosebud" in "Kane meets Susan" cue.

If the notes in this figure are arranged 'C#'-'D'-'B'-'F#', the figure 'spells' the "Rosebud" motif. Herrmann then, is suggesting that Kane is beginning to find another replacement for what he lost in his childhood in Susan given she presents herself in a simple, childlike manner.⁵² In using the harp within this scene, Herrmann also imbues Susan with an ethereal air, as the instrument has previously been used in Western music to connote the celestial and divine. Kane begins to see her as an angel that has come to free him from his marriage and to offer him another chance at happiness and, by association, his childhood.

After the first bar of the harp figure, the "Rosebud" motif appears fully on flute, thus consolidating its use in this scene. In the scene that follows in Susan's apartment and Herrmann's cue for it, "Susan's Room", free developments of "Rosebud" appear as Kane engages in childlike games with Susan, reinforcing that he is becoming thoroughly beguiled by her.

⁵¹ Darby and Du Bois, 349.

⁵² Roger Hickman, *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 162.

When Thompson interviews Susan, she recounts life with Kane in a defeated, tired manner, as she is a broken woman who has suffered from alcoholism as a result of his treatment of her through their marriage. Through the course of the film's depiction of Kane and Susan's marriage, Herrmann's "Power" motif slowly begins to dominate the "Rosebud" motif that was prevalent in the scoring of the earlier scenes of their romance.⁵³ This musical narrative thus comments on the dramatic narrative; that Kane's corruptive influence is gradually destroying Susan's childlike innocence and simplicity. Herrmann's "Power motif" is used extensively in the scenes of their isolated life at Xanadu, where they are far from the outside world. The motif is used in free development as well as in its entirety and the musical colouring of the score is somber in its use of low register brass, strings and woodwind.⁵⁴ In using the "Power" motif with this colouring, Herrmann is suggesting that the couple is unhappy as a result of Kane's stubbornness and refusal to back down. This is particularly clear when Susan suggests, in her boredom, that they visit New York. Kane replies sternly, "Our home is here Susan," and the "Power" motif is heard in trombones. The use of the motif reiterates Kane's need to dominate Susan and suggests, within the context of the film's dramatic narrative, that in controlling her he is able to prevent the likelihood of her abandoning him as his mother had in his childhood.

4.5. The Result

As Irwin Bazelon notes, *Citizen Kane* remains, "...a brilliant example of the total fusion of music, sound and symbolic imagery. Herrmann's slow, ominous array of sounds intones dramatic doom."⁵⁵ As exemplified by the relation of score to narrative discussed above, Herrmann's score imbues the film with greater meaning and strengthens the film's symbolism. Even Welles was aware of Herrmann's contribution to the film stating, "Fifty percent of the success of *Citizen Kane* was owed to Herrmann's music."⁵⁶ In *Citizen Kane*, Herrmann's music allows the listener/viewer insights into Kane's tortured psyche that are not apparent to them in the filmic narrative alone. In further refining his compositional technique for dramatic narrative with *Citizen Kane* and gaining himself an esteemed reputation, Herrmann became a sought-after film composer by many directors, including the great 'master of suspense', Alfred Hitchcock.

⁵³ Ibid, 162.

⁵⁴ Bruce, 54.

⁵⁵ Bazelon, 98.

⁵⁶ Appears in publication: Dan Auiler, *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 138.

5. Case Study Two: *Vertigo* (1958)

This is the moment that I've dreaded and hoped for....

Judy Barton, *Vertigo*.

5.1. The Hitchcock/Herrmann partnership.

In 1955 Herrmann and Hitchcock collaborated on their first film together, the black comedy, *The Trouble with Harry* (Hitchcock, USA, 1955). Hitchcock was a director who understood implicitly the power of music in film, stating in an interview published in the 1930s that its use is

...atmospheric....to create excitement. To heighten intensity....it is the psychological use of music, which you will observe, they knew something about before talkies, that the great possibilities lie. It makes it possible to express the unspoken. For instance, two people may be saying one thing and thinking something different...But I think you can get at the underlying idea with the right background music.⁵⁷

Hitchcock's conceptualisations as to the role of music in film were perfectly suited to those of Herrmann and the pair worked on six films together from 1955 to 1964. Though the two were very different men, personality-wise, Smith notes of Herrmann that "...no composer was more attuned to the complex moral subtext of Hitchcock's work or better understood its origins."⁵⁸ Hitchcock's films were deeply rooted in psychoanalysis (in particular Freudian theory), concerning themselves with neurotic individuals and sexual repression and Herrmann's studies of Freud imbued him with an understanding of Hitchcock's art that few other composers possessed. In recognising the psychological themes at work in Hitchcock's films, Herrmann was able to give Hitchcock's "detached images" and characters an emotional quality they otherwise lacked.⁵⁹

5.1.1. Collaborative Process on *Vertigo*

Hitchcock, unlike many directors, allowed his composers to take an active part in the filmmaking process and, as Herrmann explained in an interview in the early 1970s, "[the composer] always work[s] with Hitchcock from the beginning, from the time of script."⁶⁰ He went on to say that, "[Hitchcock] depends on music and often photographs a scene knowing that the music will

⁵⁷ Auiler, 139.

⁵⁸ Smith, 192.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 192.

⁶⁰ Ted Gilling, "The Colour of the Music: an interview with Bernard Herrmann," *Sight and Sound* 41, no. 2 (1971/72): 38, 36-39.

complete it” and that Hitchcock’s films “depend enormously on music to build the nutcracker of suspense.”⁶¹ Hitchcock would sometimes invite the composer to visit the set and discuss if music were to be used in a scene or not and as Herrmann mentions, the scene would then often be cut to suit musical suggestions.⁶²

For *Vertigo*, Hitchcock planned on using more music than he had previously in his films, and his sound and music notes were highly particular. Often his notes called for Herrmann’s music to ‘speak’ for the characters onscreen due to the small amount of dialogue in the script. For example, in what Herrmann calls the “recognition” scene (when Judy is revealed to Scottie after being made-over to look like Madeline), Hitchcock specified: “...when [Judy] emerges and we go into the love scene we should let all traffic noises fade, because Mr. Herrmann will have something to say here.”⁶³ Despite Hitchcock’s specific requirements of the use of music in the film, Herrmann was still given much freedom in his creation of *Vertigo*’s score and the result was one of cinema’s most powerful and moving unions of music and image.

In January 1958 the pair began work on what was to be their most ambitious project together, the psychological thriller, *Vertigo*. An interpretation of the Tristan and Isolde myth, *Vertigo*’s dramatic narrative concerns an ex-police detective, Scottie Ferguson, who suffers from a condition known as acrophobia or vertigo (a pathological fear of heights) and becomes obsessed with a woman called Madeline who believes to be possessed by a dead woman named Carlotta. Scottie becomes obsessed with this woman, they fall and love and when she dies he seeks to recreate this romance with a second woman, Judy. In her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Mulvey notes that the erotic drives of some of Hitchcock’s characters lead them into compromised positions and Scottie is a perfect example of this.⁶⁴ Scottie is pushed over the precipice, psychologically, in his bid to attain his fetishised, feminine ideal, Madeline, and as I will discuss, Herrmann’s pervasive score reflects this. As Smith describes, *Vertigo* is “Hitchcock’s most uncompromising film, and Bernard Herrmann’s fullest realisation of his favourite dramatic themes: romantic obsession, isolation, and the ultimate release from death.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid, 38.

⁶² Smith, 362.

⁶³ Ibid, 220.

⁶⁴ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 841.

⁶⁵ Smith, 219.

5.2. *Vertigo*'s Score

Herrmann's score for *Vertigo*, like the dramatic narrative it is supporting, is highly Romantic in nature given its use of the full range of orchestral colour and his 'emotional' writing. Even Herrmann admitted in an interview that the score was written with the "drive of the emotions" in mind.⁶⁶ Of particular influence was the chromatic harmony found in Richard Wagner's (1813-1883) music drama, *Tristan und Isolde*. Sharing the same subject matter as *Vertigo*, Wagner's work has been much discussed in relation to Herrmann's score for *Vertigo* as, for example, both composers use complex harmonic suspension to generate a sense of anxious longing in the listener mirroring that of the doomed lovers of their texts. However, despite the influence of late Romantic composers, Herrmann's score for *Vertigo* also took inspiration from the composers of his day and as Kevin Mulhall writes

Herrmann took advantage of the expanded orchestra pioneered by the romantics and created a style that combined the grand orchestrations of late-romanticism with the harmonic language of the modernists. The score for *Vertigo* is dominated by romantic and neo-romantic precepts but there are times when the composer reacts against the emotionalism he so openly embraces.⁶⁷

Herrmann's extensive tastes in music served him well in scoring *Vertigo*, as he was able to draw from a wide range of musical influences, adopting "the mode of expression that he felt most appropriate to the individual cue."⁶⁸ By "exploiting harmony for disturbing effect"⁶⁹ and using compositional elements such as ostinato to sustain suspense in his score (e.g. when Scottie is shown pursuing Madeline around San Francisco on screen), Herrmann was able to underscore Scottie's neurosis and his debilitating obsession with Madeline and give a musical voice to him, particularly in scenes with little to no dialogue.

5.3. "Prelude" as Microcosm

As in *Citizen Kane*, Herrmann utilises the motif technique to unify his score for *Vertigo*. In Herrmann's cue for the opening credit sequence, "Prelude", Herrmann uses a motif that is heard subsequently in the film to signify Scottie and Madeline's love.⁷⁰ This motif, that I will henceforth

⁶⁶ Brown, 292.

⁶⁷ Kevin Mulhall, Untitled in *Vertigo: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes]. (Studio City: Varese Sarabande, 1995).

⁶⁸ Cooper, 17.

⁶⁹ Kathryn Kalinak, "The Language of Music: A Brief Analysis of *Vertigo*" in *Movie Music, The Film Reader*, ed. Kay Dickinson (London: Routledge, 2003), 17.

⁷⁰ Cooper, 21

refer to as “Love”, when combined with the other musical material in “Prelude”, essentially allows Herrmann’s cue to function as a summation of Scottie and his neurosis and the dramatic narrative that is to follow, a microcosm of Scottie’s world within *Vertigo*.

5.3.1. Scottie’s vertigo in “Prelude”

“Prelude” opens with an arpeggiated, ostinato figure in ‘Eb’ (Fig. 6)⁷¹. Heard throughout the prelude in the strings, harp, celesta, vibraphones and woodwinds, Howard Goddall notes that in using instruments traditionally used to signify childhood in Western music, Herrmann could “subliminally indicate the idea of a haunted past or ruined innocence.”⁷² Herrmann’s intimation that Scottie is a tortured individual is also achieved via other compositional techniques which I will discuss subsequently.

The figure, which I will now refer to as “Vertigo”, is in a duple meter with accents on the first and second beat of the bar, with emphasis on the first. Traditionally in the duple meter the accent falls on the first beat of the bar and consequently this is what the listener, who has learnt to hear duple music in this way, would expect. However, as the “Prelude” cue progresses Herrmann begins to displace this accent and the effect disrupts the listener’s expectancy, causing unease. For example, as Kathryn Kalinak notes, “In measures 12 to 15...[Herrmann] begins a restatement of the arpeggiated chord in the flutes on the second beat of the measure instead of the first, which disturbs the pattern”, thus leading to a feeling of agitation in the listener.⁷³ Adding to this disturbance in the listener’s expectancy is Herrmann’s use of dissonance at the turning points (accented notes) of the arpeggios in the “Vertigo” figure. In using the jarring intervals of a major 2nd and a minor 2nd between the two melodic lines, Herrmann employs dissonance (exaggerated via the use of accents) to generate further agitation in the listener. Further contributing to this agitation is the fact that the arpeggios of the “Vertigo” figure also make up Brown’s “Hitchcock chord” (with a major 6th added in the first bar of each pair) discussed earlier in this paper in relation to creating anxiety in the listener.⁷⁴ Lastly, Herrmann’s use of contrary motion in the figure, with its simultaneous ascending and descending movement, mirrors Scottie’s ambivalent neurosis for he embodies both a “fear of falling and a desire to fall.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid, 23

⁷² Quotation from: Howard Godall’s 20th Century Greats: Bernard Herrmann (Season 1, Ep.3), Directed by Francis Hanly and David Jeffcock (London: Tiger Aspect Productions, 2004).

⁷³ Kalinak, 18.

⁷⁴ Cooper, 37.

⁷⁵ Robin Wood, quoted in Brown’s “Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational,” *Cinema Journal* 21, no.2 (1982): 40, 14-49.

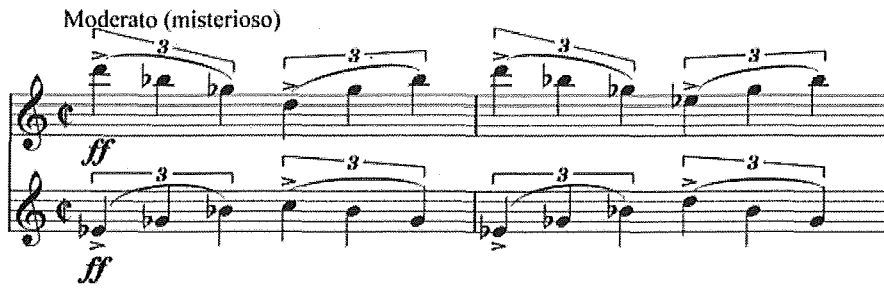


Fig. 6: “Vertigo” figure from *Vertigo*’s “Prelude”.

Through its use of the aforementioned, Herrmann’s “Vertigo” figure functions as the musical equivalent of a bout of Scottie’s vertigo. Throughout its use within the “Prelude” cue, Herrmann also varies the tempo the motif is played, another means in which to tamper with listener expectancy. Herrmann’s “Vertigo” figure, in allowing the viewer/listener to experience Scottie’s vertigo vicariously, thus enables them to empathise with Scottie’s psychological condition and further strengthens his characterisation on screen.

5.3.2. The “Love” Motif in “Prelude”

The “Love” motif is heard throughout the film and comes to signify Scottie’s obsessive love for Madeline. The motif occurs after a rising scale starting on D (the 7th) that is performed trilled (suggesting agitation) on flutes, clarinets and vibraphones and is coupled visually with the pattern of dizzying spirals emerging from a woman’s eye (later revealed to be Madeline’s), a precursory comment on the relationship between Scottie’s vertigo and his obsession with Madeline. The anticipation of resolution caused by the rising scale allows the “Love” motif to have greater resonance, as its appearance ends the harmonic tension that the scale produced.

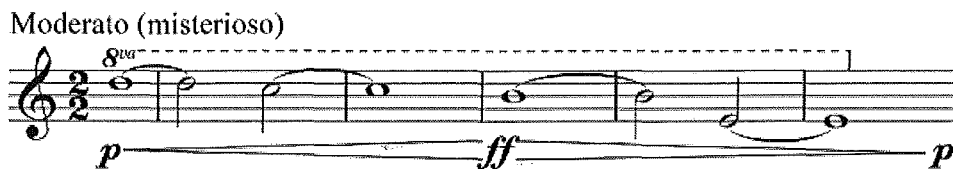


Fig. 7: “Love” motif from *Vertigo* extracted from “Prelude”.

The motif itself is a suspended figure comprising of four notes and is heard in the heralding brass, functioning in the “Prelude” cue as a harbinger of Scottie and Madeline’s doomed romance (Fig. 7). The motif’s slow, downward movement suggests a longing and a desire to fall down into the abyss, just as Scottie respectively longs for Madeline and literally feels the sensation of falling in his bouts of vertigo in the film. Aside from the downward movement, this longing is also suggested via the

use of suspension in the shifting harmony and, as I have previously mentioned, is achieved through the listener's anticipation of cadential resolution.

Using David Cooper's reduction of the score at bar 39 when the motif appears (Fig. 8), the first bar suggests a tonality of 'Ab' major with the addition of the fourth, a 'D'.⁷⁶ Given that the interval of a third in Classical harmony is often the "pillar of stability," as it signifies the key and mode of the music,⁷⁷ in the context of 'Ab' major the use of the 'D' suspension in the upper voice until halfway through the second bar creates a need for a resolution to the third, the 'C'. This occurs in the second measure of the bar, giving 'relief' to the listener through till the end of bar three. However, no sooner is the listener granted this harmonic resolution than Herrmann employs the same technique all over again, this time in the key of A minor and engages the suspension of the seventh interval of 'B' to the 5th, 'E', once again an interval with a powerful relation to the tonic of 'A' in the context of Classical harmony.

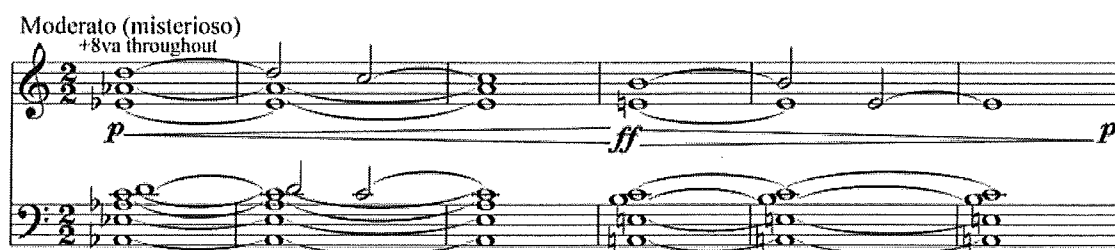


Fig. 8: Cooper's reduction of "Love" motif, in harmonic context (excerpt).

The cadential resolution of this passage is also hindered by the unpredictable nature of its rhythm. In a duple meter the listener would expect the resolutions to occur on a strong beat i.e. the first however, Herrmann does not do this and instead allows the resolutions to occur on the second (weaker) beats of the bar (2 and 5 in Fig. 8). By displacing the cadences this way, Herrmann contributes further to the feelings of anxiousness in the listener.

In creating a motif that effectively conveys Scottie's obsessive love of Madeline through the techniques outlined above, Herrmann contributes to the overall identification of the listener/viewer with Scottie's obsessive love. Herrmann's "Love" motif signifies from the onset of the film via such musical implications as downward movement and the 'longing' conceived in anticipating harmonic resolution, that Scottie's obsession with Madeline will eventually destroy him and send him further down into the abyss.

⁷⁶ Cooper, 38.

⁷⁷ Royal S. Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," *Cinema Journal* 21, no.2 (1982): 20, 14-49.

5.3.2.1. The “Love” Motif Elsewhere in the Film

The “Love” motif established in “Prelude” permeates *Vertigo*’s entire score and functions as a constant reminder as to where Scottie’s thoughts are; with Madeline. For example, In Herrmann’s short musical cue, “3.A.M.”, the “Love” motif appears three times in the strings. The cue accompanies a scene showing Scottie wandering the San Franciscan streets in the early hours after having been released from a sanitarium for treatment pertaining to trauma over Madeline’s death. Prior to the first entrance of the “Love” motif, Herrmann establishes new musical material to coincide with Scottie’s release. However, this new material does not have much time to develop, as it is cut short by the entry of the “Love” motif. Herrmann tells us here that no sooner than Scottie has been ‘cured’ of his fixation with Madeline (represented musically by the new material) is he already pining for her and has returned to his obsessive state.⁷⁸ The sparse musical colouring, as Bruce notes, also “complement[s] the visual resonances of the shot in suggesting [Scottie’s] loneliness.”⁷⁹ In using the “Love” motif that has come to signify Scottie and Madeline’s romance in *Vertigo*, Herrmann’s “3.A.M.” cue conveys the dramatic narrative at this point in the film as there is no dialogue or any visual indicators depicting their romance during this scene. Here, like many other scenes in the film, Herrmann’s score gives a voice to the lonely Scottie who is wandering in silence, alerting the listener/viewer to what he is thinking and feeling.

5.4. What “Prelude” tells us about Scottie

By assigning a motif for both Scottie’s neurosis (“Vertigo”) and his obsessive love (“Love”), Herrmann gives us clues, as early as the opening credits, as to the neurosis of Scottie. By linking these two motifs in his cue, “Prelude”, Herrmann also links Scottie’s condition of vertigo with his obsession with Madeline.⁸⁰ Both afflictions cause him to behave in a disturbed manner and in using the two motifs Herrmann suggests that his vertigo and obsessive love are intrinsically linked. As Antony John notes, the relationship between the “Vertigo” figure and the “Love” motif’s keys (essentially ‘Eb’ minor and ‘A’ minor respectively) is that of a tritone.⁸¹ As with its use in *Citizen Kane*’s “Power” motif, Herrmann’s employment of the tritone implies that sinister forces are at work and this proves to be the case as the film’s dramatic narrative unfolds and Scottie’s neurosis manifests itself via his obsession with Madeline.

⁷⁸ Mulhall, *Vertigo: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes].

⁷⁹ Bruce, 148.

⁸⁰ Brown, 33.

⁸¹ John, 519.

5.5. The Legacy of Herrmann's Score for *Vertigo*

Vertigo is one of the most widely analysed films in cinematic history and Herrmann's complex score has also garnered much attention from film music theorists. As Brown notes, when it came to scoring his films, "Hitchcock sought a music that expressed in its own aesthetic terms what the filmic style was expressing in its particular manner."⁸² In Herrmann, Hitchcock found a composer who possessed a rare intuition as to the meaning behind his images and dialogue, a composer who was able to translate musically what Hitchcock was implying on screen. Despite falling out with Hitchcock at the end of the 1960s, Herrmann's powerful scores for Hitchcock masterpieces *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, USA, 1959) and *Psycho* (Hitchcock, USA, 1960) drew the attention of a new school of filmmakers who emerged in the 1960s, yielding new and exciting compositional opportunities for the increasingly disillusioned Herrmann.

⁸² Brown, 45.

6. Case Study Three: *Taxi Driver* (1976)

Loneliness has followed me my whole life. Everywhere. In bars, in cars, sidewalks, stores, everywhere. There's no escape. I'm God's lonely man.

Travis Bickle, *Taxi Driver*.

6.1. The Rediscovery of Bernard Herrmann

Martin Scorsese (b. 1942), was one of the most important directors to emerge in the 1970s. An avid cinemagoer with an encyclopedic knowledge of film, Scorsese was part of a new wave of Hollywood directors who were well versed in their art, having studied classic Hollywood cinema as well as foreign filmmaking. When it came to choosing a composer for his new feature, *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese was adamant about Herrmann scoring the picture stating later that Herrmann was his “first and last choice.”⁸³ Scorsese was impressed with the scores Herrmann had contributed to cinema and in particular, his work for *Vertigo*. In his forward for Dan Auiler’s book chronicling the making of *Vertigo*, Scorsese professes a love for the film and notes that Herrmann’s score was “absolutely essential to the spirit, the functioning and the power of *Vertigo*.”⁸⁴ Aware of Herrmann’s strength in scoring film’s that dealt with the psychotic and the neurotic, Scorsese literally begged Herrmann to score *Taxi Driver*. Scorsese later reflected about his insistence on Herrmann as the composer for *Taxi Driver* in relation to the central character, Travis Bickle, writing that, “Bickle was the kind of person who didn’t listen to anything but the voices in his head, and I was convinced that the only person who could capture this state of mind was Bernard Herrmann.”⁸⁵ Eventually Scorsese convinced a reluctant Herrmann to work on *Taxi Driver* and as Smith notes, the film’s “rich, tragic character study proved irresistible” as, like many other films Herrmann had worked on, it proved to be a “brilliant psychological portrait of festering evil.”⁸⁶ The pair discussed the score in detail for roughly two months with Herrmann visiting the set during shooting in New York in 1975.⁸⁷

Taxi Driver centres on Travis Bickle, a lonely cab driver who commutes through the New York streets at night, perceiving filth and depravity wherever he goes. A Vietnam veteran, Travis sees himself as above the “scum” he encounters during his work and as the film progresses he becomes increasingly more disturbed. The film culminates with Travis exacting a chaotic, bloody revenge on a group of degenerates, later being revered for his violent actions and treated as a hero.

⁸³ Martin Scorsese, “On Bernard Herrmann,” in *Taxi Driver: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes]. (New York: Arista, 1998).

⁸⁴ Auiler, Xiii.

⁸⁵ Scorsese, *Taxi Driver: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes].

⁸⁶ Smith, 350.

⁸⁷ Scorsese, *Taxi Driver: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes].

Travis is a lonely man; an anathema; and Scorsese's depiction of Travis' perspective via his camera work onscreen (e.g. the use of point-of-view) coupled with Herrmann's score allows the listener/viewer to fully inhabit Travis' world. The tenacious relationship of image and music in *Taxi Driver* draws the listener/viewer so close to Travis that they are able to "feel his embarrassments, paranoia, infatuations and most important, his loneliness, as if they were [their] own."⁸⁸

6.2. A New Approach

Like the scoring for *Citizen Kane*, Herrmann employs predominantly low ranges and dissonance in order to elicit a sense of foreboding in *Taxi Driver*. The film's overall sound however, is a marked departure from Herrmann's previous efforts due to its decidedly 'jazzy' influence. After being requested to write a cue in a jazz style for a particular scene, Herrmann enlisted the help of Christopher Palmer (1946-1995), to adapt a previously written theme due to Herrmann's experience in the genre being limited.⁸⁹ Herrmann was so pleased with the cue that he incorporated it into much of the film's score. The result of the jazz influence is that it works on several levels with the film's dramatic narrative. Firstly, given the cultural codes already in existence and its previous use in cinema (e.g. Elmer Bernstein's (1922-2004) score for *The Man with the Golden Arm* (Preminger, USA, 1955)), jazz music often connotes seedy urban nightlife to the listener/viewer. Given much of the film's dramatic narrative is centred on Travis' nighttime travels through the seamier side of New York, this connotation helps establish the context of Travis' world for the listener/viewer. In relation to the character of Travis, David Butler notes that the use of jazz also establishes "an effective sense of displacement" as the "nostalgic swing of a bygone age distances [Travis] and hints further at his alienation."⁹⁰

6.3. Establishing Travis in "Prelude"

Taxi Driver begins visually with Travis' taxi shown casing the streets of New York, emerging from steam rising from the sewers and coupled with a red-hued lighting that evokes the fires of hell. Our first glimpse of him is of his eyes, thus setting up Travis' perspective from the film's inception. Kramer suggests that the "windshield of the taxi is the lens through which Travis views the city, and the taxi itself is a vehicle of loneliness and isolation."⁹¹ For this opening credit sequence, Herrmann, as in his scores for *Citizen Kane* and *Vertigo*, wrote a cue entitled "Prelude" that establishes musical

⁸⁸ Sarah Kramer, "Taxi Driver," SparkNotes (Accessed August 2008)
<<http://www.sparknotes.com/film/taxidriver>>

⁸⁹ Smith, 351.

⁹⁰ David Butler, "The Days Do Not End: Film Music, Time and Bernard Herrmann," *Film Studies* 9 (Winter 2006): 56-57.

⁹¹ Kramer, <<http://www.sparknotes.com/film/taxidriver>>

material to be heard throughout the film.⁹² The resultant score, with its heavy use of brass, percussion and the sultry tone of the saxophone, bares two distinct musical ideas and, as with the case of the two motifs in relation to Kane in *Citizen Kane*, offer two facets of Travis' personality that are intrinsically linked; that of his troubled mind and that of his need for love to save him from his private torture.

6.3.1. The "Loneliness" Motif

The first musical idea to appear in Herrmann's "Prelude", of which I will now refer to as the "Loneliness" motif, is a chromatic figure that descends the interval of a minor 2nd and is heard in muted brass (Fig. 9).⁹³ In the scoring of 1940s films of the film noir genre, brass instruments were often employed in opening sequences, as demonstrated by Miklós Rózsa's (1907-1995) score for *Double Indemnity* (Wilder, USA, 1944). The 'commanding' timbres of these instruments are traditionally associated in Western music with heralding someone or something of importance and power and this association was utilised in many film noir film scores to signify to the listener/viewer the powerful malevolence that permeated what was to follow.



Fig. 9: Reduction of Herrmann's motif, "Loneliness," as heard in "Prelude."

As with the scores I have previously discussed, Herrmann once again plays on listener expectancy in creating tension. "Loneliness" comprises of a 'G' minor 7th chord resolving to a 'C' 9th. This prolonged resolution, exaggerated by the suspension from the 6th ('A') to the 5th ('G') in the upper voice, causes tension as the listener waits for the resolution to occur.

The "swell and fall" created by the crescendo and subsequent decrescendo after the resolution in "Loneliness" also suggests the violent urges as they surge through Travis' psyche and his attempts

⁹² On his score rundown for *Taxi Driver* <<http://www.filmscorerundowns.net/herrmann/taxidriver.pdf>>, Bill Wrobel notes that apart from "Prelude", Herrmann did not give any of his cues official names. I will refer to the cue names given on the *Taxi Driver* soundtrack recording listed in the discography.

⁹³ Bill Wrobel, "Herrmann's "Citizen Kane" Film Score Rundown by Bill Wrobel," *Film Score Rundowns* (Accessed October 2008) <<http://www.filmscorerundowns.net/herrmann/taxidriver.pdf>>

to repress them.⁹⁴ As Philip Brophy discusses, the motif's oscillations replicate the "inhale and sigh" of Travis' tired breath due to his being a "spent body...an emotionally exhausted and psychologically drained being into whose empty hull has seeped into the city's social sewer."⁹⁵

6.3.1.1. Snare Drum Figure as Travis' Instability

As the "Loneliness" motif is heard crescendoing in volume, it is accompanied by an incessant, aggressive rhythm in the snare drum (Fig. 10).⁹⁶ The function of the snare drum here is to connote Travis' background in the army (given its use in military bands) as well as to hint at his rapidly deteriorating mental state. The improvisational sounding rhythm on the side drum grows in volume as well as in speed and climaxes on the second chord of "Loneliness" (bar 3 in Fig. 9).

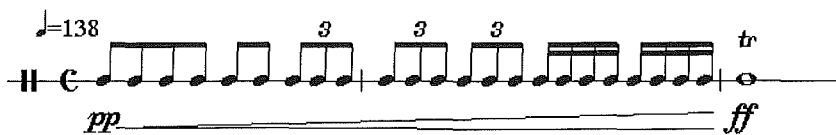


Fig. 10: Herrmann's snare drum figure in "Loneliness."

The result is that the snare drum figure is perceived almost subliminally by the listener/viewer via its slow crescendo causing the listener/viewer gradual unease due to the snare drum's abrasive tone and the figure's unsteady and unpredictable rhythm. As Smith writes of Herrmann's use of percussion in *Taxi Driver*

The increasingly brutal battery of percussion could mirror the steady tick of Travis' meter, his throbbing mind ("twelve hours of work and I still can't sleep"), the meaningless beat of the passing city dwellers, or simply the mounting tension that Scorsese methodically builds.⁹⁷

In combining the rhythmic intensity of the snare drum figure with the use of harmony and dynamics in "Loneliness" as describes above, Herrmann therefore allows the listener/viewer to get a sense of Travis' agitation with his surroundings and his increasingly fragmented (like the rhythm itself) mental state. "Loneliness" is developed subsequently in the film's score depending on Travis's mood or behaviour during the scene concerned and also supplies material for the second musical idea to be discussed subsequently, "Romance."

⁹⁴ Bruce, 66.

⁹⁵ Philip Brophy, *100 Modern Soundtracks* (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 234.

⁹⁶ Wrobel, <<http://www.filmscorerundowns.net/herrmann/taxidriver.pdf>>

⁹⁷ Smith, 351.

6.3.1.2. Travis' "Total Organisation" – Expanding "Loneliness"

As the film progresses and we observe Travis becoming increasingly psychotic, Herrmann's score becomes more harmonically dissonant and unresolved, a reflection of Travis' state of mind. The use of "Loneliness" dominates over "Romance", suggesting that Travis' misanthropic preoccupations are taking over his more human need for love.

When Travis picks up a disturbed passenger who is threatening violence against his wife and her lover, a development of "Loneliness" is heard in Herrmann's musical cue for the scene. Now the two note, major second descent has been expanded into a figure of four descending semitones (upper voice 'Eb'/'D'/'Db'/'C') in low registered brass and woodwinds (just as "Loneliness" is scored in "Prelude"). This figure functions as an ostinato, repeating until half way through the scene when the cue ends. In repeating these dissonant, darkly coloured chords, Herrmann builds tension into the scene as Travis is confronted by the overtly aggressive man who appears to share, or perhaps manifest, Travis' own revenge fantasies. This figure, with its "slow sinister murmur of soft brass and woodwinds,"⁹⁸ is heard subsequently in the film (e.g. as Travis watches a politician on television whom he plans to assassinate) to indicate Travis' psychotic contemplations.

6.3.2. Saxophone Theme: "Romance"

In bar 23 of "Prelude" the second musical idea, of which I will now refer to as the "Romance" theme, is heard on saxophone (Fig.11). Given previously existing cultural associations between the timbre of the saxophone and sensuality, here the saxophone connotes Travis' erotic drive, which is ultimately shown in the film to be a source of his undoing.

The saxophone melody of "Romance" begins on 'A' and 'G' (the notes of the upper voices in the chords of "Loneliness" as illustrated in Fig. 11) and continues in a whimsical, semi-improvised style (the player embellishes Herrmann's melody slightly) using the same key and harmonic progression as "Loneliness". In also accompanying the saxophone melody with other instruments commonly found in jazz music e.g. vibraphone and double bass, the erotic connotations of the style being reinforced further in the listener/viewer.

⁹⁸ Bruce, 69.



Fig. 11: “Romance” as heard on saxophone, performed with swing in “Prelude”.

In the official music timing notes for the film, the jazz theme is referred to as the ‘melody in the head’ and as Butler highlights, Herrmann’s “Romance” theme is “a representation of [Travis’] own internal voices” and “expressive of Travis’ alienation from the “scum” of his surrounding and his yearning for companionship and romantic love...”⁹⁹ In film, jazz is also employed to signify that a character onscreen is ‘down and out’ or in a hopeless situation e.g. when the character, Jim Stark, is shown drunk in the opening credits of *Rebel Without A Cause* (Ray, USA, 1955). Travis himself is aware of his isolation from the rest of the world, and he later describes himself in a voiceover of a diary entry as, “God’s lonely man.”

6.3.2.1. “Romance” and Women

“Romance” is also used in Travis’ interactions with two women in the film; Betsy and Iris. Betsy represents to Travis, as Madeline did to Scottie in *Vertigo*, the embodiment of feminine perfection. When Travis first encounters Betsy onscreen, the harp is heard at the beginning of the scene’s musical cue (“Betsy’s Theme”) playing a rhythmic variation of “Loneliness” before “Romance” is heard on the saxophone. As with Herrmann’s scoring of Susan’s first appearance in *Citizen Kane*, the use of the harp gives Betsy an angelic quality (she is also shown onscreen dressed in white) and supports the voiceover of Travis reading from his diary stating, “She appeared like an angel out of this filthy mass. She is alone. They cannot touch her.” As Bruce notes, “Herrmann makes a connection between Travis’ obsessive preoccupation with that “filthy mess” on the one hand and its obverse in his idealised version of pure womanhood on the other” and, as I mentioned earlier, this is reflected musically as the “Romance” melody is essentially a development of “Loneliness”.¹⁰⁰ By assigning the “Romance” melody to Betsy and considering the implications noted by Bruce, Herrmann is stipulating that Travis’ fixation with Betsy is bred of the same irrationality as his psychotic inclinations.

When Travis’ affections are rejected by Betsy, he slowly turns his attention to a child prostitute, Iris. Travis becomes obsessed with ‘saving’ her from her pimp, Sport, in what appears to be a bid to

⁹⁹ Ibid, 56.

¹⁰⁰ Bruce, 65.

alleviate his guilt over appearing perverted to Betsy. Travis first meets Iris when she takes his cab along with Sport and after being aggressively removed the cab by Sport, “Romance” is heard on the soundtrack. Eventually, Herrmann transfers the “Romance” melody from Betsy to Iris in the film’s score as Travis is shown onscreen taking more of an interest in Iris and Betsy becomes somewhat sidelined.¹⁰¹ In transferring the “Romance” melody to Iris, Herrmann has enforced that Travis has moved on from Betsy (whom he accuses of being “like the rest of them”) and that he has now bestowed the role of the purifying “angel” in his corrupt world on to Iris.

6.3.2.2. “After the Carnage”

For the scene at the end of the film in which Travis finally exacts his bloody revenge on Iris’ pimps, Herrmann deliberately used “Romance” in the scene’s musical cue, “After the Carnage,” in order to offer a motive for Travis’ actions. As Smith quotes of *Taxi Driver*’s co-producer, Michael Phillips (b.1943), reminiscing about Herrmann’s use of “Romance” in the scene

Benny explained that the reason he did it was to show that this was where Trevor’s fantasies about women led him. His illusions, his self-perpetuating way of dealing with women had finally brought him to that bloody, violent outburst...I had never thought of it in terms of what Benny said, but Bobby (De Niro) [who played Travis] and I both said, ‘God, he’s right.’ Absolutely. Perfect.¹⁰²

The scene of carnage itself is shot with no musical cue, allowing the extreme noise of the gunshots and screams to have a greater impact. Herrmann’s cue begins during the long tracking shot that follows Travis’ ambush onscreen, highlighting the bloody mess he has made. “Romance”, is now heard in a distorted form on the loud, commanding tone of the French horns accompanied by harp and a steady, crotchet rhythm on timpani, having now been stripped of its jazz influence and consequently, its sensuality. As Darby and Du Bois observe of the orchestration in this cue, “The disparity between such lush instrumentation and the visual squalor implies a heavy-handed irony, as though the film had to point out the futility and the absurdity of its central character [Travis] with a rather high-level kind of mickeymousing [sic].”¹⁰³

Herrmann’s treatment of “Romance” therefore suggests that though his means were bloody, Travis has now rid himself of the unrealistic idealisations of love and humanity he was previously fixated with. In also using the vibraphone and the harp (previously associated with Betsy) subtly in the

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 68.

¹⁰² Smith, 352.

¹⁰³ Darby and Du Bois, pp.361-62.

background accompaniment, Herrmann reminds us of the warped notions of love that led to Travis' extreme actions in the first place.

6.3.3. Relationship between “Loneliness” and “Romance”

Though there is a strong contrast between the timbre and style of the two musical ideas, as I have discussed, Herrmann links them melodically and harmonically. As Brophy notes, despite its romantic connotations, “Romance’s” “allusions to love [are] decrepit and acrimonious.”¹⁰⁴ In linking the two musical ideas Herrmann is therefore making the argument that Travis' idealisations of romance (“Romance”) are associated with his base, violent erotic impulses (“Loneliness”).

6.4. “Madhouse”

In his score for Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Herrmann included a small fragment of musical material that had previously been used in the Interlude of his original work, “Sinfonietta for Strings.”¹⁰⁵ The fragment appeared in what came to be known as “The Madhouse” cue in Herrmann's score for *Psycho*. “The Madhouse” accompanies a scene in which the psychopathic Norman Bates speaks of his disdain for sanitariums and the purpose of the cue here is to signify his psychotic tendencies. In *Taxi Driver*, Herrmann recycles what I will now refer to as the “Madhouse” motif (Fig. 12), in order to convey a similar sentiment as to Travis' state of mind. “Madhouse” is comprised of 3 notes that have the highly dissonant relationship of a minor 7th interval with each other. This dissonance combined with Herrmann's propensity to write the motif in a very low register results in creating a mood of foreboding and intense doom.



Fig. 12: Herrmann's “Madhouse” motif as heard in *Psycho*'s “The Madhouse” cue.

6.4.1. Liquor Store

The “Madhouse” motif is first heard in *Taxi Driver* when Travis is shown onscreen entering a liquor store. Heard in the dark timbre of the low register woodwinds and strings on ‘F’-‘Eb’-D, Herrmann varies the motif slightly by descending further, adding a ‘F#’ and ‘C’ which forms the interval of a

¹⁰⁴ Brophy, 235.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, 47.

tritone (refer to the interval's implications as discussed earlier in this paper). Whilst in the store Travis shoots a man who attempts to rob the clerk and this marks the first violent act he commits in the film. In employing the "Madhouse" motif moments before Travis' commits the murder, Herrmann pre-emptively signals the violence that is to come and given the motif's associations in *Psycho*, signifies Travis' increasingly psychotic tendencies.

6.5. Rearview Reflection: Herrmann's Final Comment

After being treated as hero despite his bloody murder of Iris' pimps, Travis is shown returned to his job as a taxi driver. However, Herrmann's score is utilised in suggesting that Travis has not changed one iota and is likely to resume his violent preoccupations. In the final scene, whilst Travis is driving through the streets of New York (as in the beginning of the film), he is shown glancing into his rear view mirror, double-taking at his reflection as if he has seen something that has disturbed him. Travis' agitation onscreen is further strengthened by a particular technique used in the score. Scorsese had requested that this scene be accompanied by a 'sting', a film music device used to highlight a sudden impact or movement on screen, usually by means of a musical accent. As Scorsese reflects of his exchange with Herrmann regarding the scene

I told him I needed a little sting for the shot at the end of the picture when Travis suddenly looks back in the mirror – the sure sign that he was still a ticking time bomb. He recorded it on the glockenspiel, and when I listened to the playback I thought it wasn't quite right. "Run it backwards," he said. As usual, he was right.¹⁰⁶

The resultant effect is highly abrupt, as the 'sting' is flanked by the use of "Romance" and its appearance is unexpected and sudden. This un-expectancy is created in playing the 'sting' backwards, as its appearance begins with the decay of the chord crescendoing to the initial resonance of the sound of the instrument being struck by mallets. The 'sting' essentially mirrors the agitated double-take made by Travis and suggests that though he appears to have returned back to normality, he is still unstable.

The notion that Travis is still a "ticking time bomb" is also once more commented upon musically in *Taxi Driver*. Through the credits, as Travis' point of the view from his taxi is shown onscreen, the "Romance" theme is heard on the soundtrack, followed by "Loneliness". Instead of resolving the closing music, Herrmann ends the score using the "Madhouse" motif, making the final

¹⁰⁶ Scorsese, *Taxi Driver: Bernard Herrmann* [CD liner notes].

statement that Travis, despite the heroic rhetoric in newspapers and letters from Iris' parents regarding his slaughter of her pimps, is still an incredibly disturbed individual who is likely to strike again.

6.6. The Resultant Score

Taxi Driver was Herrmann's last film score and he died the night the recording of the soundtrack had concluded. As Scorsese reflected, Herrmann's music became "integral to the experience of the movie" as he "understood the film perfectly, the sense of Travis being haunted and obsessed, the inevitable feeling that his obsessions will lead to slaughter, and the realisation that the massacre at the end was not the end of Travis' violence."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

7. Conclusion

The influence of Bernard Herrmann's film music work is undeniable, as his unique style imbued the films he scored for with greater meaning than could be conveyed by the filmic narrative alone. Herrmann also wrote some of the most memorable film music in the history of cinema. For example, his musical cue, "The Murder", for the infamous shower scene in *Psycho*, has been oft-quoted (most recently in the children's film *Finding Nemo* (Stanton & Unkrich, USA, 2003))¹⁰⁸ and has since come to signify an act of violence or murder in popular culture.

By manipulating dissonance, motifs and timbre as well as working with pre-existing musical cultural codes in his film scores, Herrmann was able to signify what was not immediately apparent to the audience from vision alone. As the three case studies of *Citizen Kane*, *Vertigo* and *Taxi Driver* demonstrate, Herrmann gave a musical voice to the three male protagonists and directors Welles, Hitchcock and Scorsese were all astutely aware that Herrmann was a composer that would add to the impact to their films. By allowing Herrmann to work freely and creatively, they knew the result would be advantageous. Kane, Scottie and Travis are all depicted as highly troubled and lonely individuals within their worlds who say little of their conditions and emotions. In his intuitiveness to the onscreen narrative and ability as a composer to score for the unconscious, Herrmann was able to empathise with these men and give a voice to their plight as they themselves were unable to do.

¹⁰⁸ As per Bernard Herrmann's entry on The Internet Movie Database (Accessed October 2008) <<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002136>>

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