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LIVE PERFORMANCE AS A CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE WITHIN A COLLEGE
PROGRAM

By
JAMES R. WIGGINTON

A RECITAL PAPER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music in Media Composition and Arranging
in the School of Music
of the College of Music and Performing Arts
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Submitted by James R. Wigginton in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Composition and Arranging for Media.

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Introduction

The topic of this paper is one that cannot be researched or studied directly. Rather, it must be broken into its critical elements, examined, and then processed and reassembled into a whole, practical, and useful tool. The phrase “cinematic experience through live performance” would likely be received by most people with a common—or at least similar—understanding of what it means. However, when inspected through the scholarly lens, the word “cinematic” is exposed as ambiguous and arrantly vague. Thus, how does one apply an amorphous concept to an observable event, and how does its application significantly optimize the potency of that event?

Years before I became the director of a top pop rock ensemble at a prestigious music school, I was writing drum corps shows, arranging choral works, and serving as Minister of Music/Music Director in churches since the age of fifteen.¹ I also grew up “on the stage,” as my family was a touring band. Through these experiences and through watching other professionals, I learned that certain sights, sounds, and events could draw particular emotional responses from a crowd: chuckles, belly laughs, tears, chills, or standing ovations. While I had a solid idea of how and why these concepts and techniques worked, learning that there was actual hard science and research that provided explanations for its efficacy has helped me refine my approach in implementing and teaching artists how to exploit them. In defense of my use of the word “cinematic” in the

¹ I am 51 at the time of this writing.

title of this paper, I will justify its appropriation by providing explanations and descriptions from field experts, identify its key features, and present a cohesive definition that illustrates its suitability. Applying this concept to live performance is congruous as I posit that, by definition, “cinematic” as an experience—immersive, engaging, exciting, authentic, relatable—is most compelling when consumed in groups.

I am tailoring this writing toward college commercial music² majors, as well as toward their ensemble directors and administrators. Of course, I use these same principles when coaching my professional artists: staging, patter,³ spontaneity, and all elements that create these evocative moments. However, teaching and presenting such moments within a college setting often is met with limitations and challenges including budget, resources, personnel, venue rules, and talent pool. Working within these boundaries must be approached as a learning opportunity that fosters creativity, resourcefulness, and underscores the importance of preparedness in both director and student artist. Whatever the skill level and budget, the application of the principles explored in this paper will guide artists and ensembles of all means towards the concept of the live cinematic experience.

With technology reshaping education and the entertainment industry, music schools continuously evolve to remain relevant. Whether singer, instrumentalist, or programmer (music technology major), the music school is an ideal environment for

² Commercial music refers to the genres of pop, rock, country, jazz, and any others that fall outside the realm of traditional classical music.

³ Patter is a rehearsed speech, like a sales pitch, that is designed to produce a desired response from an audience. In music performance, patter simply refers to any spoken communication from the artist to the listener, but still to produce a desired response.

learning the art of cinematic experience through live performance. Because music school students are surrounded by peers, faculty, and crew that share similar goals during a four-year program, learning specific and powerful skills such as those described within the following chapters supports the case for pursuing a music career via a college program. It also drastically changes the tone—and reply—to the question “what is the ‘street value’ of a bachelor’s degree in Commercial Music?” Granting an audience a “cinematic experience” implies that the listeners will not only hear great music, but will also be caught up in a communal happening that supersedes the notes being played and sung. From performer to support crew to audience member, everyone wins.

Chapter 1

Defining and Adapting Cinematic Concepts

In his article “Cinematic,” John C. Kelly defines the word in question as “. . . a portmanteau word with a multiple and complicated meaning so that, even if it is used among *conoscenti* [sic], it is hard to be sure that speaker and listener have the same facet of meaning in mind” (Kelly 1964, 420-21). When searching for ways to be “more cinematic,” the information found is typically comprised of helpful tips on how to make wedding videos (or any social media content) appear a certain way. The meaning of the word in this application is reduced to an aesthetic—an attempt to appear more “high-end” to garner more clicks. In order to assert that “cinematic” is an apt, attainable, and desirable descriptor for live commercial music performance, I will examine specific methods used by film industry professionals and show how each can cross over from the screen into live commercial music concerts.

In an interview with Terry Gross, filmmaker Martin Scorsese speaks of a special aspect of cinema called *inference* (Scorsese 2013, 13:40). In filmmaking, inference can be prompted, for example, by showing one shot and then strategically following it with another in such a way that the observer sees in the mind’s eye a third image that does not exist in the other two. Scorsese concludes, “. . . that has been called, appropriately, I believe, film language” (Scorsese 2013, 14:32). This inference he speaks of is also a hallmark of great songwriting. There is a saying within the songwriting community:

“Say it without saying it.” Why not say exactly what is meant to be conveyed? Why would a filmmaker not simply show exactly what is meant to be understood? Sometimes they do, and that is called “being too on the nose.” The power of the inference concept is simple: the message is more effectively received when the audience is guided and allowed to feel the sense of discovery and reckoning on their own.

Film language, or “cinematic language” as it is most often called, is comprised of many elements found on many lists. Some of these lists lean more toward the technical aspects: film selections, lens choices, and filtration. Others, while not alienating the aforementioned elements, lean more toward the evocative: color and lighting, use of dialogue (“patter”), timing, sound, performance, and *mise-en-scène*.⁴ While there is much to be gained from studying all of these techniques, it is this second list (cherry-picked for this purpose) that I believe to be most applicable to live performance. When going through these devices and considering how each one transfers from filmmaking to live performance, the essence of the cinematic language—and ultimately the definition of “cinematic” as it pertains to this topic—becomes evident.

Color and Lighting

Although color and lighting are two different elements, they are often listed together. I also choose to discuss them together also because the lighting is often the main provider of color in live performance. The idea of presenting music and color together as a single and immersive experience has been attempted for centuries.

⁴ *Mise-en-scène* can be roughly translated as “placed into the scene.” In filmmaking, this French phrase refers to everything that is placed in sight and its arrangement. Objects, colors, and the placement of characters, among other things, contribute to visual storytelling effecting the mood and emotional intention of the scene.

Numerous inventions dating back to the 1500s were fashioned in hopes of allowing the artists' viewers to experience their works as they did (Jakob 2021). Using methods such as rigging harpsichord-style keyboards so that depressing each key would reveal or project a corresponding color for that note, these composers, artists, and inventors were resolute that both the hue and intensity of colors would heighten the experience of music as well as visual art. One of the most significant works composed with a "color organ" in mind is *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* by the great synesthete Russian composer Alexander Scriabin.⁵ Written into the score along with the rest of the orchestral instruments, organ, and choir were cues for specific hues, intensity, and annotations such as "a ray of light penetrates the gloom" (Gawboy and Townsend 2012, 12). Assigning such epithets as "bloody haze," "fantastic ripple," and others like those seen in Figure 1.1, it seems clear that Scriabin wished to create an immersive experience in which color, lighting, and effects would ensure that the audience's perception would better align with his musical intentions. This is precisely the purpose of light design in a commercial music concert.

While the significance of different colors varies throughout cultures and many articles written on the topic appear to be based on conjecture, there is a solid body of scientific research on the psychology of color. Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung—a pioneer in this field—stated that "colors are the mother tongue of the subconscious." Jung

⁵ Synesthesia is a neurological condition which causes any of the five senses to be "crossed." For example, a synesthetes may perceive certain tones as colors, as is the case for Alexander Scriabin (and other notable musicians).

encouraged the use of colors in art therapy⁶ asserting that colors affect mood and emotion (“Color Meanings & Symbolism” 2011).

Figure 1.1. Excerpt from Alexander Scriabin’s *Prometheus*, measures 15-25 showing notation for *luce* (color organ) on the top staff along with Scriabin’s annotations (Gawboy and Townsend 2012).

Colors are proven to improve performance, change the perception of time, improve or worsen mood, and even improve the effects of placebo pills (Cherry 2020). Color associations are exploited in marketing, advertisements, and in social media posts. In sales, red typically reads as power, blue conveys trustworthiness, and white is calm and clean, to name a few (Labrecque and Milne 2012, 714). With color proven to have such sway over the consumer’s impressions and decisions, performers and directors would be remiss to not study, choose, and use them with intention.

When color is provided through costuming and set pieces, those departments must work in tandem with the lighting designers to build complimentary schemes, as the colors chosen, the ratios used, and how they are lit are done with great purpose. In her book *If It’s Purple, Someone’s Gonna Die: The Power of Color in Visual Storytelling*, Patti

⁶ Jungian Art Therapy focuses on healing from traumatic events by using art expression to address compulsion, addictions, and self-destructive behaviors.

Bellantoni analyzes six spectrum colors as well as six characteristics of each and gives marvelously specific cinematic examples of how each color is used to influence our emotions, and even foreshadow a character's death—that particular color being purple (Bellantoni 2005, 204).

Given the influence of color and its wide strategic applications in film, it seems obvious that we should exploit its potential in live popular music shows. Most live shows use lights, but by studying their implications the colors could be more strategically chosen to fully harness their evocative possibilities. Given that an audience's perception of a character is greatly influenced by color (namely warm versus cool colors), the performer's intentions could be more fully realized by applying this cinematic principle (Matbouly 2020). By simply being made aware that color psychology both exists and is routinely used by film and media professionals to summon specific responses, a music school's ensembles could make purposeful decisions when designing their shows. For example, a student vocalist would consider the message of a song as well as how and what they want the audience to experience and then identify corresponding color schemes that would most likely support the intention.

Once a principal color for a particular moment is chosen, there is usually a need to identify complimentary colors. A primary tool for this is the Color wheel⁷ as shown in Figure 1.2. By studying its purpose and various techniques, one will learn how to choose a key color, a certain number of accent colors, and the correct ratios for each scheme.

This is useful as well as very rewarding when exercised skillfully.

⁷ The color wheel schemes consist of monochromatic, analogous, complementary, split complementary, triadic, square, and rectangle. Each scheme will result in a set of colors along with the ratios that guide each color's use.

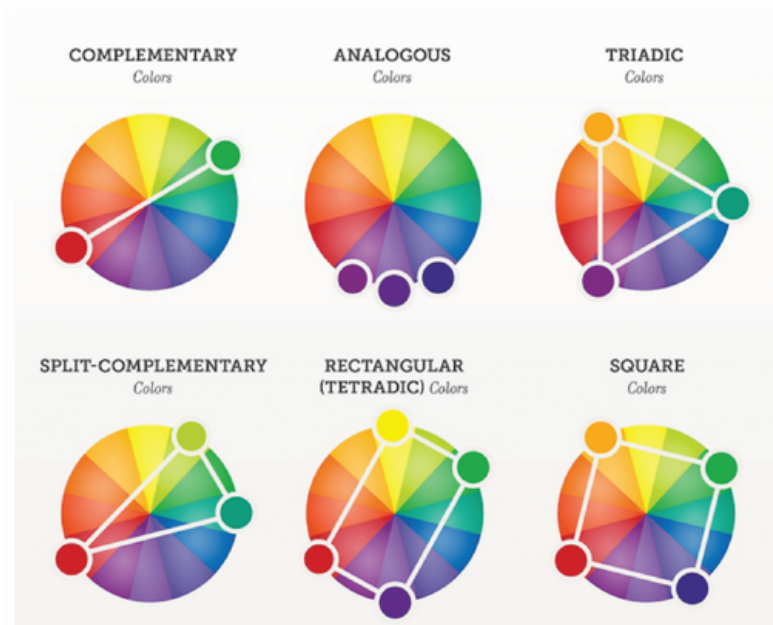


Figure 1.2. Color wheel chart depicting six schemes (Khan 2018).

Dialogue

The cinematic language element of dialogue as it correlates to live music performance could arguably include song lyrics, with the artist taking great care with phrasing and physicality to heighten their effects. As a discussion regarding the skillful and artistic delivery of song lyrics leans more toward the element of performance, I will discuss dialogue only pertaining to the artist's patter communicating with the audience. Patter, along with banter among ensemble members, is analogous to cinematic dialogue as so much information is conveyed during these moments. Many singers are plagued with great anxiety at the thought of speaking between songs or even addressing the audience in any way apart from singing. In fact, it is true that some people fear public speaking more than death, ranking it as their number one fear (Croston 2012). Because of this, singers are often reluctant to think through and rehearse their patter. Instead, they "wing it"—which seldom turns out well—or avoid talking altogether. While there are

many resources and studies available that examine the fear of public speaking, or “glossophobia” in general, there seems to be only anecdotal advice (mainly from other stage and vocal coaching found on YouTube) for artists needing to up their patter game from the stage. While there are some worthwhile offerings, I can better serve the reader by putting forth techniques and advice that I have gathered and implemented over these past thirty years in my profession regarding building a dialogue between artist and audience.

Is it a dialogue if only one person is speaking? There is often a storytelling element that can certainly be considered a monologue, but the main goal of patter is to build trust and connection, thereby creating an emotional dialogue between stage and house. A sign of that solid connection is evident in certain coveted vocal responses: whoops, whistles, or even audience members talking back to the performers. Only once that bridge is built does the artist reach solid ground for fully engaging, dialoguing, and creating a communal experience that goes deeper than the songs alone.

Performers—students and professionals alike—often ask, “Where and when should I talk during a show?” While there is a thorough discussion of patter techniques in Chapter 2, a basic framework is warranted here. An artist can talk to the audience for introductions, to tell a story (about the band, or a funny and relatable personal anecdote), to fill time so that the guitarist can change instruments (or change a string) to introduce a song that has an interesting history, and showcase their own personality. Maintaining a repertoire of stories, one-liners, and gags (“shtick”)⁸ ensures that the performer is never

⁸ Shtick is a gimmick or a routine that is derived from an artist’s personal performance style. Examples would be having snappy one-liners to shout back at a heckler, or a humorous line when something goes wrong on stage. The point is to never be caught speechless.

caught off-guard, keeping the show moving and the audience entertained. At different points in the show, the artists and band members should be encouraged to joke and banter amongst themselves. This gives the audience an insider's look and makes them feel a part of the moment. Lastly, an artist must wholeheartedly thank and praise the audience, the sound and light crew, the bar owner, and anyone else whose efforts contributed to success of the event.

Although it is "improvised" (rehearsed improvisation), show patter is very much a script that guides the audience from one moment to the next. It should convey the artist's personality, motivate the audience to feel emotionally invested and included, provide seamless transitions, and produce memorable and spontaneous moments. If the artist's patter accomplishes these goals, it serves a similar purpose as a well-written movie script.

Timing

Cinematic time is the imaginary timeline created through editing to convey the timespan in which the narrative occurs. "Timing," however, refers to the art of delivering a line or an event at the perfect moment for optimum effect. Whether in a piano sonata, a pop ballad, or a comedic routine, the "pregnant pause"⁹—to give one example—is an easily recognizable example of timing and a perfect illustration of why mastering it is important. The pause gives the audience a moment to catch up and build up an expectation for what is to follow (Thomas 2022). The artist can then either deliver what is expected or hit them with a twist. Done well, this unexpected event will elicit the desired reaction: laughs, chills, and even tears of empathy.

⁹ The pregnant pause is a pause in action that builds up suspension in the viewer to heighten the dramatic or comedic effect of what follows.

The pacing of a singer/songwriter's show is often like that of a romantic comedy. The songs are about conflict, crisis, and sometimes resolution. The transitions can be more casual and there is usually a lot more patter, as there is most likely a story behind every song. For example, even with full band, huge production, and a lot of up-tempo songs, an Ed Sheeran show still has a warm and uplifting romcom feel to it. The pacing of a high-energy pop rock show—like the ensemble I direct known as “PHNX”—is much more like an action-adventure feature filled with adrenaline-inducing moments of tension and release. The anticipation is palpable before the curtain lifts. The audience feels a communal adrenaline rush as the lights dim and once the show begins, they are on a proverbial rocket ride to the moon. The strategic calmer moments only serve to intensify the chill-inducing climax(es) at the show's end. The transitions must be tight, but tight does not mean fast. If the drummer stalls the count-off for the next song, the applause dies out and the energy drops. If he starts too soon, the audience will feel as if their applause has been cut off rather than appreciated. Getting the timing right is a “feel” thing that demands the ability to read a room, gaining insight into what does and does not work, and striving for a specific emotional effect so that the audience is not left guessing how to respond.

Sound

When speaking of sound as part of cinematic language, it should be assumed that there is much more to be considered than simply the volume or even the quality of the sound system. Emotions embedded within sounds provide context as well as a sort of augmented reality. “Arguably, the primary function of sound in both film and interactive media is the structuring and communicating of an emotional truth. This function

harnesses the pre-attentional ability of sound to create mood. It happens before rational logic, is pre-conscious and visceral and therefore has the capacity to affect us in a primal way” (Leung and Ward 2008, 85). This description of only what is heard when experiencing a film should also be considered when designing live sound for popular music concerts. In film, sound tells the emotional truth—it is less concerned with factual truth. In live commercial music performance, the artists and sound designers/engineers are also mostly concerned with sounds that convey emotional truth that may be counter to real life. Equalization, reverb, delay, echo, and countless other effects are artistically employed to enhance and heighten the intended emotion of the moment.

Music, dialogue, sound effects, and ambient noise (or background noise) are the elements that make up the composite audio experience of cinema. The relevancy to live performance of the first three in this list is obvious: music being the overall medium on display, dialogue being patter and banter, and sound effects being the many electronic means by which the reality of sound is augmented (reverb, delay, compression). I suggest that “ambient noise” may be thought of as extension of the desired soundscape: drones, airy pads, non-tonal textures, nature sounds, obscured voices, and emotionally-embedded sounds that create an immersive environment. These are slightly different than “sound effects” in that ambient sounds are sustained and constant (within a specific timeframe) for the purpose of inducing a communal experience. Examples of ambient sounds to encourage communal emotional responses are common in electronic dance music and worship music: i.e., a low drone that slowly evolves into a cluster chord, then resolves either into a consonant ending or crescendos into a song intro. As electronically-created ambient textures are foundational for many pop producers in creating evocative

tracks, these sounds are typically performed by running tracks through programs like Ableton Live or Logic along with the live players. Apart from the actual songs, creating ambient soundscapes for a show's opening sequence or as transitional (bumper) music creates suspense and drama or levity when needed, and ties together a cohesive theme, thereby delivering the immersive cinematic experience.

Performance

Just as the performance of an actor is key to the scene, the manner in which musicians deliver the song to the audience is paramount to the audience's experience. Vocal delivery, guitar tone choices, pedal effects, gestures (both subtle and grand), and interaction with the audience are just a few of the talents that performers present to their audiences. While each aspect is worthy of its own thesis, the purpose here is to illustrate the correlation between film acting and popular music performance. The actor's intention is to convincingly portray a character, while the music entertainer's intention is to convey a relatable persona that supports an intended brand. The techniques used to execute both objectives are similar, and it is still the skill and artistic choices of both that can make or break a moment—or a career.

The audience's perception of what they hear is greatly influenced by what they see, considering the dyadic nature of live performance (Metallinou et al. 2015, 518). While one can certainly experience psychophysiological effects from listening to music recordings, the visuals presented by the artist's physical performance add another level to how the music is processed by the observer. Asserting that a musical experience triggers muscular activity and physical responses through associated memory to motor imagery,

Arnie Cox's "mimetic hypothesis" speaks to the perceptual and cognitive processes through which music becomes embodied by the listener (Cox 2001). In my own observations through three decades of coaching artists, it seems true that the pose a singer holds while hitting the anticipated high note (for one example) delivers as much information to the observer as the sung note itself. Whether the audience feels a sense of confidence, joy, or exhilaration versus struggle, nervousness, or indifference hinges on the body language of the artist. Likewise, instrumentalists must be aware that most people in the audience have no idea what knobs and pedals they are using, nor do they care. While those are crucial skills, it is the visual that accompanies the great tones and articular riffs that will deliver the desired effect. Just as performance in cinematic language entails so much more than the actor saying the lines correctly, commercial music performance relies on—in addition to great musicianship— facial expression, the manner of walking from one point to another, and physical cues to emphasize the intended message of that moment. The audience is much more likely to fall into emotional alignment when they are given clear cues from the stage.

Mise-en-scène

A final item, *mise-en-scène*, deals with the purposeful placement of items into a scene. Depending on their placement, the scene could convey any number of impressions: calm, panicked, cozy, or confused. These items contribute to the narrative: character personalities, inference, and foreshadowing (consider the red coat in *Schindler's List*). In fact, *mise-en-scène* encompasses every bit of visual information set before the audience, including where and how the actors—in our case, musicians and singers—are placed. I have a client, Leah Colon, who uses a yellow stool in all of her

shows. Yellow is typically associated with joy and positivity which is analogous to Ms. Colon's brand. The stool itself is a support—it holds her up and is placed downstage center, denoting confidence, strength, and balance. In my own shows with PHNX, the *mise-en-scène* begins with the show poster. I try to create a strong emotional image with the placement and arrangement of the singers and also include items (or even events) that the audience will hopefully recognize in the performance.

In the poster for the PHNX 2014 show entitled *FireFlight* (see Appendix B, 88), the centerpiece is a trio of artists in front of an enormous moon. The young man in the center, wearing night clothes, has been blindfolded with a red cloth. One woman, bejeweled in rubies and presented as possibly an antagonist, is trying to keep his blindfold in place as he lifts one side up. His expression is powerfully emotional, showing fear, curiosity, and awe. The other young lady appears very innocent and is holding him back in a gesture of protection. In a distant grey tree, there is a long red silk fabric blowing in the night breeze. There are many *mise-en-scène* elements within this artwork that foreshadowed some powerful moments in the show. Perhaps the most powerful was the red silk. About thirty minutes into the show, I created a dramatic soundscape to build anticipation as the audience witnessed a set of forty-foot red aerial silks¹⁰ lowering from the ceiling, center stage. Then, very slowly, a team of aerialists (four couples) took their positions as three additional silks dropped and began breathtaking performances accompanied by the ensemble.

Over many years of directing and producing shows for the purpose of giving both the student artists and their audiences a thrilling experience and after researching and

¹⁰ Aerial silks are ribbons of fabric from which aerial acrobatic artists perform. The art itself is also known as “aerial silks.”

considering the elements of film language, I have developed a brand of ensemble performing that can be accurately described as a cinematic experience through live performance. Considering the learning and entertainment benefits gained from the intentional application of these foundational filmmaking concepts to the production of live commercial music shows, I propose this unambiguous definition of “live cinematic experience”: an approach to live music production that utilizes elements of visual storytelling intentionally aligned with music, movement, and spoken word to heighten audience response and induce a communal emotional experience.

It is indeed true that some of the most memorable performances can include nothing more than a great songwriter and his guitar—no lights, no sound system—just talent and an honest connection. In fact, I recommend including such simple moments even in the largest of productions. The information in this paper is to give some applicable tools to enrich artists, bands, and ensembles of any size, and is equally applicable to music students and non-students alike. We as music educators must make every effort to equip our student artists with viable talent stacks, giving them an edge that could increase their value in an oversaturated market.

Chapter 2

The Art and Science of Creating “Moments”

In 1991, American filmmaker Joseph Ruben’s *Sleeping with the Enemy* was released in cinemas worldwide. This psychological thriller is filled with anxiety-inducing moments and jump scares, and has a white-knuckle ending that would have most viewers climbing their seats to hide from the screen. Throughout the film (which I attended with some friends) the audience in the theater was a rather unruly, rowdy crowd. Everyone was screaming and jumping at the same moments and then laughing at each other for getting so frightened. At the movie’s climax, the whole crowd was screaming “Shoot him! Shoot him!” along with the colorful language that often accompanies such outbursts. How could this experience have left such an impression, even thirty-one years later? Why does recalling it even now evoke a feeling of community? This event was powerful due to the effect it had on “us the audience” rather than “me the individual.” The sensation of “surviving” these events presented through cinematic language caused a group of strangers to feel a communal bond. If I had viewed the film at home either alone or with friends, there would have been no moment of aligned emotions to leave such an impression as to write about it three decades post.

Collective emotions, communal emotional experiences, and the causes of each are topics that I recommend be explored by all directors and artists. These moments can be positive events like my experience at the cinema, or when your hometown team wins

the State Championship. They can also be very destructive such as mobs burning down neighborhoods or when an eyewitness “remembers” things that never happened (Chew 2018). Two forms of consciousness exist within us all: the individual and the collective. While the individual form drives our own distinctive beliefs and modes of action, the collective consciousness is accessed (even persuaded/provoked) through common societal values, beliefs, or moral attitudes—pejoratively referred to as “group-think” and herd behavior. This theory of collective consciousness was published by French sociologist Émile Durkheim in his 1893 doctoral dissertation *The Division of Labour in Society*. From these concepts, psychology professor Bernard Rimé suggests that experiences of communal emotion can “induce in individuals a shift between two parallel cognitive modes” (Michel 2019). Rimé’s research shows that an experience of collective emotion may prompt a condition he calls alignment (Garcia and Rimé 2019, 621). The default “individual” mode is overridden and the communal mode takes over, often in a very overwhelming fashion. This can explain the transcendent emotions of ecstatic dance¹¹ in group worship experiences or mobs of soccer fans trampling people to death after a game. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will focus on the positive and symbiotic effects of the collective emotional experience.

For performers, educators, and ensemble directors, studying the triggers that can bring about alignment—thereby creating these moments of collective emotion—would prove to be very rewarding for everyone involved in musicking.¹² We can gather from

¹¹ Ecstatic dance encourages participants to abandon ego and freely move as they are inspired by music and rhythm. Used as a form of meditation by religious, pagan, and secular groups, it is believed to release stress, alter consciousness, and provoke a strong feeling of connectivity to others.

¹² A term coined by musicologist Christopher Small, musicking includes any activity involving or related to music performance. It holds the performers at the center, then encompasses the audience, the crew, the janitors, quite literally everyone and everything involved (required) for a music event to occur.

the work of Durkeim, Rimé, and many others that an audience with basic shared values and common belief systems would likely be vulnerable to as well as searching for communal emotional experiences. Just as with charismatic evangelical worship services, the rewards of collective emotion—a feeling of freedom, openness, belonging, and acceptance—can inspire individuals to gather for a group experience rather than doing the same activities alone. This is true for any group that gathers for the purpose of encouragement, motivation, and accountability such as CrossFit, community sporting leagues, and book clubs.

Since the dawn of rock ‘n’ roll, experts in the fields of musicology, theology, and psychology have been interested in how many concert goers have asserted that their experience at a popular music concert was a “religious experience.” The genres of rock ‘n’ roll and metal have particular triggers, such as African tribal rhythms and repetition as well as certain guitar frequencies that are shown to reliably sway the audience into alignment (Livingstone, Palmer, and Schubert 2012, 552). These amplified sounds appeal to the listener’s central nervous system, pushing the entire crowd willingly toward a communal sense of ecstasy (Eurich 2003, 59). Electronic dance music also has these triggers, but with an additional one: the “drop.” This is a point in the track at which there is a sudden dynamic shift followed by a ramp up—typically a snare sound playing eighths then subdividing until it becomes a roll, along with the obligatory whooshing sound—which is completed with a resolved sound along with the bass “drop.” This effect creates an intense sensation of tension and release. It is the suddenness of this particular feature that qualifies it as a contributor to a theory spearheaded by anthropologist Alan Fiske: *kama muta* theory.

Sanskrit for “moved by love,” *kama muta* differs from other forms of collective emotional experiences due to its defining trigger: a sudden intensification of communal sharing. While my example of the EDM “drop” might be a slight departure from Fiske’s original concept, that particular musical device does bring about a sense of “we’re all in this together.” That sense of belonging and bodies moving together in sync to music that everyone is there to enjoy can indeed be not only thrilling but also comforting. A more direct example would be more of a heart-warming moment that takes one by surprise. The sensations and signs that one is experiencing *kama muta* include tears, lump in the throat, chills, a hug reflex (a hand to the chest gesture), vocalizations such as “aww” (phonology varies between cultures), a feeling of floating, and exhilaration (Fiske 2018). In a study that spanned nineteen nations and fifteen languages, Fiske and team concluded that *kama muta* is a “distinct positive social relational emotion that is evoked by observing or participating in sudden intensifications of communal sharing” (Zickfeld et al. 2019, 421). In light of this finding, the idea that “music brings the world together” should be reason enough for artists of all kinds to learn how to implement triggering features into their work.

As a result of distancing due to the recent pandemic, many artists (including Belmont ensembles like my own PHNX) livestreamed their concerts and/or posted them online. The artists that wished to be effective in their art were faced with the challenge of creating engaging experiences that would translate through media. It is during situations such as these that creators must draw upon all the aforementioned cinematic and psychological tools—color, lighting, patter, etc.—along with clear camera angles and movements so that the viewer is never left guessing what to feel or where to look. A

recent study showed that people watching a livestream reported having more feelings of kama muta than when watching pre-recorded shows (Swarbrick et al. 2021). Just the salience that the show was live and that others were watching at the same time was enough for some to feel connected during periods of isolation and distancing.

Simply being aware that these concepts exist (and studying them) can help artists—whether student, director, or professional—make intentional artistic decisions that could not only increase the chances of success in a tough market, but could also be life-changing for someone watching. To be worth the efforts of both presenter and attendee, a concert of commercial music must be so much more than simply a string of songs. Tom Jackson, stage coach, speaks often of the importance of “moments.” He is referring to specific events that happen on the stage that create a point of engagement, not just a few times, but rather between and within every song and throughout the entire show. Jackson teaches that songs are just the vehicles to transport your audience from moment to moment (Jackson 2019). There are musical moments in which the band can do something unexpected by dropping down to just kick and bass as the lead vocalist improvises words and melodies, followed by a “pregnant pause” before “slamming hard” into the final chorus. Bands can create humorous moments with banter or running jokes, taking care that audience is included as inside jokes do not read well from the audience.

Many people will recall DiCaprio’s character Jack Dawson shouting, “I’m the king of the world!” in James Cameron’s 1997 film *Titanic* but they may not know that the iconic line was not in the script (Vivinetto 2019). Just as some of the most memorable moments in movies were improvised by the actors, perhaps the most poignant events in live performances are those that happen “off-script.” There can and should be

spontaneous moments. For example, the lead singer's mom—who had once pursued a singing career—has driven eleven hours to see this show. All throughout his childhood, she brought him up on stage and they performed together. During this show, he tells the audience a little about this, and then—seemingly stopping the show to do so—tries to find her in the crowd and says into the microphone, “Mom, you remember the words to ‘Don’t Give Up?’ You think we could do it now?” Immediately the audience feels a rush, a bonding that they express through whoops and cheers of encouragement. The setup of this true anecdote created such a precious moment that the whole room felt breathless and misty-eyed when the crew helped her onto the stage. That would have been enough, but it did not hurt that she had an outstanding voice. When the two of them came together in sonorous harmony, the room leapt to its feet with cheers, arms raised, and applause. Did his mom know he was going to bring her up? Was it rehearsed or completely spontaneous? Either way, all that mattered is that it was enthusiastically received by the audience. They were given the gift of communal connection and the coveted experience of *kama muta*, a powerful, magical moment that no one present will ever forget.

How does an artist plan to be spontaneous and how can an ensemble director teach this skill? First and foremost, the moments must be honest, sincere and well-executed, whether truly unplanned or otherwise. I teach my artists how to be genuinely off-the-cuff through a sort of experiential therapy.¹³ For example, I introduce a scenario in which the mic on the kick goes out and the crew rushes on stage to check lines and

¹³ Experiential therapy is a technique used by therapists to help clients identify emotional triggers caused by trauma, disappointments, or self-esteem. It uses props, activities, and guided imagery to relive and reimagine events with the goal of releasing negative feelings of shame or anger.

deal with the issue. What can the artist do during this time to keep the audience engaged, and possibly turn an awkward moment into something special? This is where the previously mentioned “schtick” pays off. I have my artists watch themselves performing a song in two ways: from the audience and through their own eyes. They are instructed to take note of everything—their outfit, their shoes, the floor, interaction with the band, the lights, colors, smells, etc. As a final piece of guidance, I tell them the following:

Watch the performance three times all the way through in three different ways: 1. Everything goes perfectly and the audience is really engaged, 2. You perform very well, everything seems fine, but the audience is not all that into it (what could you do differently on-the-spot to possibly win their trust?), and 3. Something goes wrong: you fall up the stairs, the drummer breaks a head, your pregnant background singer gets sick! How can you not only keep the show going, but also use this opportunity to build trust and community amongst everyone there? Run through different scenarios and come up with a list of ways you could turn this into a great moment.

Spontaneity is a performance skill that can get artists out of sticky situations such as broken string, missed entrance, forgotten lyrics and can also allow them to deliver some of the most memorable moments of the show. While there are all kinds of moments to be realized and created, from musically astounding events to staged spectacles, some of the greatest moments in a show often “weren’t supposed to happen.” Perhaps it is the suddenness of these moments and the satisfaction of a resolution that make them feel profound, relatable, and heartwarming—the signs of *kama muta*. By learning the craft of creating moments, an artist allows the audience to process the information as individuals, and simultaneously feel the power of collective emotion. An artist that can bring a crowd of strangers together through a connective emotional experience may have those individuals recounting it thirty years into the future.

Chapter 3

Assembling and Leading a Dream Team

A fundamental skill that an ensemble director must acquire and maintain is the ability to assemble the right team; one that is capable of delivering impactful moments that connect the audience to the performer as well as to each other. Many schools that have commercial music programs offer learning and performance training through various ensembles, each of them specializing in different genres: country, bluegrass, rock, and jazz, to name a few. As the performance styles of different ensembles varies to best suit the genres as well as the vision of the directors, the type of student artist that proves to be a good fit differs for each group. The director of a jazz choir that consists of twelve singers and a rhythm section may look for voices of a certain color and weight, for specific ranges, and for voices that can blend well. Instrumentalists must be well-versed in jazz, play well together, and be able to solo at a high level. Therefore, directors need to formulate an audition process—whether for singers, instrumentalists, or digital musicians (sequencers/programmers)—that gives the students a great experience where they feel as if they were fully heard and ensures that the desirable attributes for that particular ensemble are effectively showcased.

Since 2005, I have directed Phoenix, (stylized as PHNX¹⁴), Belmont’s pop rock ensemble that showcases highly-skilled student artists who are pursuing a career in this

¹⁴ I stylized Phoenix as “PHNX” when the French band of the same name came into prominence with their hit song “Lisztomania” in 2009.

genre. As is true for most Belmont ensembles, PHNX presents one show each Fall and Spring semester, and performs features in other major shows such as *Christmas at Belmont*. Our brand is “dramatic, jaw-dropping entertainment” and a bit “over-the-top.” Since its inception, I have edged our performance style toward this immersive and emotional “rocket ride” experience for which we are known. This necessitates taking on student artists that each individually have the potential to bring these moments.

Of all elements of cinematic language, it is, after all, the element of “performance” upon which every other effort depends. Consequently, when adjudicating auditions I am tuned in to the telltale traits of a potential PHNX member: personable, engaging, enjoyable, musically impressive, and in control of the entire moment from entrance to exit. “Edgy” and “quirky” are desirable attributes only if they present as genuine and if the talent can support it. Big “belty” notes and licks, no matter how skillfully done, are only of interest if they come from an authentic emotional urgency to connect with the audience.

Acceptance into PHNX is much less about who is the best singer and more about who can bring the most impact to a live show. Within a ten-minute slot each student presents two three-minute cuts (a current hit song and a second of their choosing) through which they must display their style, relevancy to current music trends, entertainment value, and talent stack.¹⁵ Casual, friendly chat during the process displays their banter ability, shows personality, and often signals whether or not they would make enjoyable bandmates. The audition along with a questionnaire they have filled out prior to entering the room gives me a sense of work ethic and a “just roll with it” positive attitude—traits equal to if not

¹⁵ Talent stack refers to a list of supporting skills and the order in which they are stacked. i.e., a singer who may not have the best voice can dramatically increase his appeal with a valuable talent stack: pro-level keys player, arranger, stage presence, quick wit, choreographer.

greater than talent. If I am interested in a certain vocalist, I search through Spotify, YouTube, and any social media platforms where they post performances to better get a feel for their style. If there is not much online but I am still interested, I will call them back in requesting that they come prepared to present some other aspect of their art I may want to explore further. For the band members, I look for the same traits. Players must exhibit a type of showmanship that balances authority with sheer entertainment abilities, as well as a unique talent stack. Often, I will take on a singer or a player who is not quite ready because the potential is great enough to be worth the risk. It is then my responsibility to cultivate this raw potential into a marketable talent.

The PHNX program is designed to simulate as true-to-life of a professional “hiring” experience as possible within an academic setting. Each member signs a syllabus stating that they understand the expectations and are willingly participating. Class time is referred to as “rehearsal,” and—as in the professional world—on time is late and early is on time. Each member is empowered to contribute ideas, provided that there is a plan for effectively communicating and executing those ideas. These specifics are worth mentioning because, to achieve their highest level, it is crucial to create a learning environment in which creativity is encouraged, everyone is respected, and professionalism is expected.

Assembling an ensemble of highly-gifted student artists that are capable of producing these awe-inspiring performances full of memorable and thrilling moments is only the beginning of the list of challenges. Clear direction and competent leadership are needed to channel this room full of immense talent and strong personalities into the path of creativity and community. Conveying upfront that all will contribute to a single vision

(presented by the director) rather than individual visions greatly aids in avoiding chaos. By appointing inner leadership within an ensemble, students tend to have a greater sense of ownership, which builds trust between director and participants. In turn, by spreading out responsibilities the director is freer to guide the program as a whole rather than micromanaging, which devalues motivation and weakens trust (Costill 2020). While the needs of different ensembles may vary, I will explain the key players that have proven invaluable in the PHNX program:

1. Music Director (MD) is a student band member that guards the overall quality of the show. This includes accepting the vocalists' charts, offering corrections, and rehearsing the charts with the band. The MD works with each artist to identify and create "moments" within each song and keeps the rehearsals on track.
2. Graduate Assistant (GA) is a graduate commercial music major (of any discipline) that is capable of stepping into the role of the faculty director when needed. He or she sends out group communications to address matters from schedule changes to reminders to adhere to professional protocol.
3. Vocal Captain is a vocalist chosen for their arranging, blending, and leadership skills and is capable of running a vocal rehearsal.

This student crew is what leadership expert John C. Maxwell would call "the inner circle." He states, "Hire the best staff you can find, develop them as much as you can, and hand off everything possibly can to them" (Maxwell 2008, 117). "Staff" transfers perfectly to ensemble members and those entrusted to manage assigned duties.

There is one last consideration I would like to explain with regard to ensemble member selection. As there are so many students auditioning for very limited openings, I

must occasionally evaluate which artists of equal offerings really need the opportunity. For example, if I have three female artists who would fit perfectly but I only have one opening, I need to weigh out which student could most benefit from the opportunity. As an example, assume that one student is in her senior year, already has a publishing deal as well as a tour booked for the Spring, and has never auditioned for PHNX before. Another student is a sophomore, has an impressive talent stack, is equally as marketable as the other student, and this is her second attempt to get in to PHNX. Even though her resume is not as impressive, I would consider the second student for the one available spot as she may benefit much more from the experience. To be clear, it is only when I have a few artists of equal market value and only one opening would need of opportunity be a consideration.

Once the results are posted, I encourage any student that was not accepted to contact me if they wish to discuss their audition and reasons for my decision. As these are often my own students, this transparency dispels the students' feeling of awkwardness and gives them honest feedback and direction moving forward toward the next goal. The hope for all students is to gain the opportunities and experiences they desire, and to be placed into an environment in which they are challenged but not overwhelmed to the point of discouragement.

Assembling and leading the best combination of talent for a specific ensemble requires a clear vision, confidence, flexibility, and a willingness to take risks. As we are setting ourselves up to lead this team of highly marketable talent, we as directors must in turn be consistently improving, staying current with trends and styles, and always

considering the value of our own talent stacks. In short, if we lead by example and by serving other, we are leaders worth following.

Chapter 4

Building the Live Performance Cinematic Experience

As each student accepted into the program brings unique offerings, the PHNX show is built around the artists, their individual style, and what song they choose to be their feature. After I get a feel for the dynamic of this group, I come up with a concept and theme. This gives framework for the overall look and feel of the production—lighting, costuming, poster artwork, and *mise-en-scène*. Students will also consider the overall concept when choosing a song. While rehearsal time is treated as a professional setting, in truth not every singer comes in with the ability to write a great chart, arrange for horns, or communicate with a band or audience. Helping them to raise these skills to a professional level is the most rewarding part of my job.

Each vocalist is free to choose a song he or she wishes to perform in the upcoming show with the following guidelines: the song must be a current release, or it can be an original song that is truly competitive with current radio hits (as determined by me or by professional hit songwriters). They are responsible for charting the song correctly, sending it to the music director, and creating immersive visuals that complement the show's theme, including color scheme, props, costuming, and choreography if they wish. Each artist is assigned a production day and time during which they rehearse with the band, learning how to communicate clearly what they want from them while also taking advice from the MD and others. They may choose from any

of the other singers to serve as background vocalists (BGVs) if the song calls for it, then teach the parts and have them ready to put together with the band upon their second scheduled rehearsal time. The players must come in ready to play the songs, with charts marked and corrections made. The band must also come up with their own instrumental feature that satisfies four criteria. It must have:

1. a strong, rhythmic and melodic hook (a trigger for synchrony)
2. plenty of rhythmic and punchy lines
3. equal appeal to the music “geeks” and the casual listener
4. an ending that causes eyes to widen and jaws to drop (i.e., a kama muta moment)

Indeed, the audience counts on the PHNX band feature to bring a communal emotional experience, and this set list ensures that it delivers. Additionally, each solo must be packed with skill and personality. All guitars—including bass—are on wireless packs so that they can better engage the audience and show relationship between each other, thus fortifying the sense of community. As the drummer and keys player(s) are confined to their instruments, there are creative ways to get them closer to the audience. The drummer could come forward with hand percussion to join a singer and acoustic guitar for an intimate moment. As for the keys player, I can testify that when the keytar comes out, the audience reaction is always strong and enthusiastic. Certainly, a show can be highly successful without these additions. These are merely the concepts that I have found to be highly beneficial learning opportunities, and that are largely responsible for cultivating the cinematic and compelling style that audiences expect from a PHNX performance.

Once all the songs have been chosen by the students, I then look at that list and see what the show needs. Songs added to the show to “fill in the gaps” or to provide a specific moment are referred to as “production songs.” As the student artists are required to be current with their selections, the show will always need the “throw-backs.” A 90s Girl Group medley or the like brings great drama and excitement with powerful harmonies, pyrotechnic vocals, and a sense of nostalgia that basically guarantees the audience experiences something significant as a community. The show also needs group numbers, especially the opener and closer(s). These two events must be carefully crafted as they serve as each singer’s entrance and their exit. The opener is arranged so that singers come out onto the stage as a way of first contact with the audience. For example, a single artist comes out onto the stage singing the first lines; she is followed by another that joins her, then a trio comes out in harmony, and so on until each vocalist has had an opportunity to sing directly to the audience. By the final chorus, everyone is out singing and there is purposeful movement as the song pushes to its final climax. Spontaneous and unexpected moments are added, such as the band coming forward and taking the mics. When the audience realizes what is happening, they express their delight as the band starts singing a cappella. To go a step further, the vocalists make their way to the instruments and begin accompanying the band members as they sing downstage. This stunt takes a lot of work and planning, beginning with auditions and considering talent stacks. The song must be strategically chosen: harmonies that sound impressive but are not too difficult, instrumental parts that the singers will be able to play well, and the song must be something the audience will want to hear.

The closer is a three-part event that is designed to set the audience up for optimum responsiveness to alignment, which is ultimately what they came for. The first part is a “goodbye” moment, which features one member who is particularly charming and good with audience connection. This is the only moment in the show where things seem to come to a welcome standstill—a moment to breathe. Because the emotional pressure has been so high throughout the show, this suddenly relaxed and very personal moment evokes feeling of reflection, humor, and tears. Many have described this moment as something like saying goodbye to a best friend. After a bit of patter, possibly a story or a “spontaneous” tribute to someone special, the artist sings a song with lyrics that are yearning, nostalgic, and hopeful. When she or he says “goodnight,” the next phase of the closer begins: a high energy song like the opener in which everyone makes a singing entrance as a way of saying “thank you and good night.” This reinforces the personal connection with each artist and allows their individual fans and families to show support. The ending comes at the audience like a storm, drenching them in lights, spectacle, and incredible musicality. The singers execute the “PHXN Push” in which they end up in a line spanning the stage and then, on a musically significant moment, they “push” forward to the end of the stage, ending the song in a photo-worthy pose. The band then kicks back into a vamp as one charismatic vocalist gives introductions and thanks everyone involved. The third and final event is often a reprise but with added spectacle, such as a drumline enters from the back and ends up onstage, a bagpipe ensemble appears, a dozen belly dancers with flame fans, confetti cannons (all of which I have done), anything that brings a sudden intensification of emotion. The goal is to go a

bit further than expected and then add even one more level of “wow factor” that keeps building until the very last cutoff.

While the entire show is intentionally packed with emotional triggers, it is that final and sudden intensification —the gift of kama muta —that seals the deal. Leaving the audience with physical sensations of exhilaration, chills, buoyancy, warmth in the chest, and tears right at the last moment essentially ensures that individuals will recall this event as communal experience, thereby heightening its significance in their memory. A powerful personal confirmation occurred when celebrated singer Amy Grant waited in line after our Spring 2022 production to tell me, “The whole show felt like a giant hug!”

Chapter 5

The Cinematic Elements of *PHNX: FREE*

PHNX: FREE, our 2022 Spring show was set to be the ensemble's "come-back" show, as circumstances such as calendar issues and the pandemic had prevented us from presenting our full concerts since 2018. The theme of "*Free*" was one of liberation and restoration—once bound wings spread and soar. The artwork (see Appendix B, 89) depicts a beautiful young woman bursting forth from flames. Her expression is defiant and determined. There is a toppled empty cage lying on the burning grass. In the foreground, broken shackles lie in the mud. There are several *mise-en-scène* elements that will appear in the show: the rows of lanterns, the woman's majestic feather dress, and a black mask lying in the field. The references to the mythical phoenix rebirth should be evident, but other obscure details are included to hopefully build a connection when the audience spots them in the live performance. Seeing something familiar and then learning its significance draws upon the cinematic element of inference. Naturally, the color scheme is at work here. While colors have different interpretations, intentions, and effects, combination and context add clarity. For this poster, yellow signifies enlightenment; brown, resilience; and red (a deep red that colors the entire field) signifies courage, anger, love, and religious fervor (Wolchover 2011).

On the show's event list there are thirty items—some are songs, some bumper music, others might be non-musical elements such as planned spontaneous events that the sound and light crew need to be aware of and take part in. Every event is listed along with who it involves, their mic numbers, staging and lighting cues, and space for personal notes. This document is shared digitally throughout the process so that information can be added and edited by individuals and then hard copies are distributed to all involved during production days. As there is very little stage time allotted before presenting these very ambitious shows, organization, communication, and great working relationships are crucial.

“PHNX Rising: Opening Sequence” (see Appendix A, 46) is an original work based on “Infernal Dance” from Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* (Stravinsky 1999). As the house lights dim to black, a male voice sternly instructs the audience to “please listen carefully,” followed immediately by sounds of clanging metal and falling debris with the light show emphasizing the weight of the moment. Over drones and sounds of failing electrical currents, a boys' choir sings a haunting melody in a clear but strange language as stern public service announcements are heard but too faintly to be understood. A soulful Carnatic female voice breaks through in the distance, pausing for moment as a woman's deep, heaving breaths are heard. An actress runs and falls center stage, her belabored breathing very present in the sound mix. As she raises her face, she is shown to be wearing a black full-face mask with white tape over the eyes and mouth. She struggles to get it off, looks at it with disgust, and casts it away. As she takes a last final deep breath and exhales (which is heard loud in the mix and panned center), the music suddenly crescendos and she panics and runs away as the male voice once again instructs

everyone, “Please listen carefully.” The crescendo builds into a “drop” as eight men in tactical gear and powerful flashlights rush into the hall from all directions. Their search for the lady is accompanied by a furious rock fusion arrangement of Stravinsky’s “Infernal Dance.” The “Compliance Squad” performs fast, choreographed flashlight hits to match the two sets of three quarter note accents, then move back into scanning the audience, looking for their escapee. One man finds the mask and holds it up for the others to see. It is the same mask from the poster, lying in the field. The Squad all run off in the direction the woman ran, leaving the band as main feature as the arrangement moves into a gospel jazz moment written to allow for some showy matched licks and soaring solos. As the moment reaches its climax and holds on a diamond (a fermata), the woman’s voice is heard—splintered, distorted, modulation, and seems to come from all over the room. “The phoenix is dead,” her strangely electronic voice repeats over the haunting boys’ melody. After a pause, she is heard very clearly this time, defiant and strong (reflecting the woman’s expression in the poster), “Long . . . live . . . the phoenix!” There is an immediate blackout, then the downbeat of the next song, “The Phoenix” by Fall Out Boy, hits hard and fast as the show begins.

The opening sequence served to set an uneasy, unnerving, yet very engaging mood. It was mysterious, exciting, and inferred why the show was entitled “FREE.” It also sent the very strong statement, “PHNX is back!” For weeks after the show, we learned that people had their own takes on what certain things symbolized, and we could not ask for a better outcome; people were still thinking about it. They had a communal emotional experience very much like one might have watching an action/adventure movie with a charismatic audience that will be remembered for possibly years to come.

“The Phoenix” is the opening number during which each singer makes a singing entrance as a way of greeting the audience (per the method described in the previous chapter) and allows the audience to cheer on their friends, family, and favorites. The outfits of the singers and band are stylish, some are outlandish, but all are on brand, incorporating browns, reds, and yellows, and feathers anywhere possible. The light show design is extremely active and in sync with the song’s hits setting the audience up for alignment.

An example of planned spontaneity can be found in events numbered 16-18 on the event list seen in Figure 5.1. “Technical Difficulties” is a moment in which an artist begins the next song and the mic glitches and then goes out. A crew member comes out and asks him to exit the stage while they deal with the problem. There are no vocalists on the stage, so the Front of House (FOH) controller loudly asks the bassist, “Isaac, please check the mic,” as he was in close proximity to it. Isaac, who is known for his excellent playing skills as well as good humor, obliges. Through a series of very convincing gags, the entire band ends up with microphones singing “Too Much Heaven” by the Bee Gees accompanied by vocalists on instruments. In essence, the band and the vocalists switch places. For practical and pedagogical purposes, this presents instrumentalists with the opportunity to work on singing and performance skills and vocalists with a reason (and a deadline) to work on playing instruments, adding value to their talent stacks. For a “sideman” guitarist to get hired for the more prestigious gigs, the ability to sing the harmonies is required. For showmanship purposes, this event creates a moment that generates laughter as well as exuberant applause. The cinematic language elements that make this moment successful are timing and performance.

15	DISCO MAN	3:12	Alex 1	3,4,5		S	H	Retro feel, disco ball, platforms and outlandish bell bottoms. Strike stands.
16	"Technical Difficulties"	1:00	Chris 6 begins a song while the mic fails... Isaac does schtick checking the mic, as the band grabs b	6				Fake-out mic check. Crew runs onstage to fix the problem, asking Chris to leave the stage. Jason yells from the console. "Isaac...we need a mic check please."
17	TOO MUCH HEAVEN	3:30	Band Vocal Feature	4,5,6,7,9		S	H	Run bubble machines from balcony, left and right.
18	HEAVEN play-off	:30				S	H	30-second reprise for applause

Figure 5.1. PHNX 2022: *FREE* Event List showing the event number, event title, run time, artists involved with microphone number, background vocalist mic numbers, indications for use of tracks, string, and horns, and production notes for the crew.

The emotional arc of this show transports the audiences through the thrilling opening sequence, a section of feel-good Top 40 Pop Rock music delivered with sensational vocals, and then into a deeply haunting moment ushered in with an a cappella arrangement of “Dust in the Wind” by Kansas that was arranged for this show (see Appendix A, 73). The vocalists enter the stage in near darkness, blindfolded, and space themselves along the very edge of the stage. The accompanying drone, low in pitch with slight dissonance, serves to set the mood as well as give the vocalists the pitch to begin the arrangement. Their exit reveals me standing on the set behind them, wearing the same tunic as the escapee, but also the tactical pants of the “squad.” As the light comes up on me, I raise my face to reveal I also am wearing the black mask with white tape covering eyes and mouth. As the intro to “Cathedrals” by Jump Little Children (see Appendix A, 78) begins, I let the mask fall to the floor. This is another surprise for the audience as they would never expect me to be in the show. Accompanied only by guitar and the full string section, I sing lyrics that evoke images of futuristic dystopia, but also mirror some current events of governmental control—a very subtle form of protest music.

During the song, the audience sees the escapee recaptured by the Squad, and her mask is forced back on. At the final moments of this song, the Squad is spread throughout the house, flashlights slowly scanning the room. At the song's final moments, I sing an unfinished line as the music stops (a pregnant pause). The house is completely dark except for the Squad's flashlights that all focus on me as I raise my arm to shield my eyes. An abrupt blackout occurs as the strings play the final chord. *Mise-en-scène*, sound (including effects of falling metal and debris), color/lighting, performance, inference, and timing all work together to create this powerful moment. To cap off this section and to bring the energy level back up, a talking drum and other hand percussion gradually lead the group in Sting's "If You Love Someone Set Them Free."

One last moment I would like to describe is the show's third and final "ending," Rihanna's "Don't Stop the Music." The creation of this moment required a lot of rehearsal and planning, as it was built around patter between one of our vocalists, Summer Joy Roberts, and the audience. While this was a written script, she needed to deliver it in such a way that it seemed spontaneous. There were several hits and cues that had to be timed with the band, as well as a challenging call and response during which she would split the audience up into three groups and teach each one a part to sing. The audience did not see how much effort the moment took to create. Instead, they saw a fantastic, charismatic singer whom they had already witnessed and built a bond with during show step out in the middle of the song to talk directly to them. Her words were inspirational and encouraging, building further trust for what she was going to ask them to do. "I'm gonna do something really special right now. From the moment I snap my fingers until the stroke of midnight, you are all PHNX! 1 . . . 2 . . ." and then her finger

snap echoes through the room (augmented reality accomplished with sound effects) and is greeted with excitement and applause. The result was the entire audience—now granted “PHNX status”—on its feet singing loudly in three-part harmony (that Summer had just taught them as part of this moment) along with the performers on stage until the song’s explosive ending. We were, for that moment, all PHNX, all aligned in a powerful communal emotional experience.

I insist that a great show is not merely a string of songs. Instead, we take these songs, fill them with intentional moments, and arrange the song order in such a way that the audience senses a narrative arc: a beginning that establishes the mood, a middle that provides contrast (feeling like either the end of an act or the beginning of the next), and an ending that leaves the crowd breathless. When this is the goal, both the entertainment value and learning possibilities are greatly heightened.

Conclusion

Having quantified a congruent meaning of the word “cinematic” and then detailing the elements of its language, I have found that the same methods used by filmmakers to garner specific responses from viewers are highly effective when applied to live commercial music performance. Through examples from my own show productions, I have demonstrated how, by applying the elements of cinematic language, an audience can be guidance into a state of alignment—that is, musical synchrony in which the individual’s sense of communal identity increases. I have proposed that the concept of the “live cinematic experience” is an approach to live music production that utilizes elements of visual storytelling intentionally aligned with music, movement, and spoken word to heighten audience response and induce a communal emotional experience. This concept can be explored and implemented into college commercial music ensemble programs as it requires learning unique and advantageous skills to prepare students artists—as well as the supporting crew—to compete in the music business.

Considering the immense attendance at pop music events, is it fair to assume that there exist measurable reasons why individuals seek out these group experiences. By explaining and teaching the science behind the powerful moments that encourage alignment causing audience members to experience a strong sense of collective emotion, ensemble directors can guide their student artists to create ideal environments for these

moments to occur. Utilizing the concept of *kama muta* triggered by the sudden intensification of the sense of community can provide a show's most heart-warming, chill-inducing, and memorable moments. To clarify that I am not endorsing inauthentic performances for the sake of manipulation, I will restate two previously made points. First, individuals choosing to gather into an audience of strangers expect to experience something as a community that could not happen on their own; these concepts provide the means to deliver those experiences. Secondly, for any of these concepts to work, they must all come from a place of authenticity—if it is not *in* you, it will not come *out* of you. This requires that directors wisely choose student artists have an aptitude for genuine interpersonal connection and coaching them through staging and timing techniques.

While there is an abundance of useful anecdotal information on commercial music performance and stage techniques available, I have provided through this writing my proven methods and reasonings backed by science-based research to aid ensemble directors, artists, and support crews in confidently making intentional artistic choices that will best ensure their audiences receive a thrilling experience. Those involved in building and presenting these shows—namely the student artists—will benefit from the necessity to sharpen some skills while learning new ones, as creating memorable moments demands an impressive talent stack from each participant. By supporting ensembles that teach and present this style of immersive and commercially-viable performances, a music school will benefit by proving itself relevant to the needs of young artists pursuing a professional career in commercial music entertainment.

Throughout my career, I have told students, “Remember, performance is not about you; it is all about what you bring to your audience.” When an artist learns to give

the audience what they want, the artist in turn will always improve—reflecting on the message they are sending, learning the difference between selling a moment and being gratuitous, and honing the art of gaining the trust of a room of strangers. They are not attending a show to merely hear songs, but rather they showed up to experience the moments the artist presents through the songs. Live commercial music performance taught and presented with the intention of creating a cinematic experience is a valid and valuable concept that provides unique opportunities and challenges for career-oriented music students, increases the viability of a commercial music degree, and most importantly grants all involved a compelling sense of togetherness—the real reason we are all so moved to create, to compose, to play, and to sing.

Appendix A: Scores

Score

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

PHNX 2022: FREE

IGOR STRAVINSKY
JAMES R. WIGGINTON
Arranged by James R. Wigginton

Freeflow distopia ♩=72

The musical score is arranged in a system with 14 staves. From top to bottom, the staves are: Piccolo, Tenor Sax, Trumpet in Bb, Trombone, Percussion, Timpani, Synth, Spoken Voices, Carnatic Female, Boy Soprano, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *ff* and a tempo of ♩=72. The Percussion part includes markings for taiko toms (3), bass drum, and dynamics *ff* and *p*. The Synth part has dynamics *mp* and *pp*. The Spoken Voices part includes the instruction "Male voice: 'Please listen carefully.'" and a dynamic marking of *f*. The Boy Soprano part includes lyrics: "Rei - na, Nah - vei. nah vu." with a dynamic marking of *mp*. The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of instruments and vocal parts.

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PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

2
9

Picc.

T. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

Synth

PSA

CF Vox

Boys

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

f Ahn - gie - li

p Female heaving breaths...slowing...

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

3

13

Picc.

T. Sx.

13

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

13

Perc.

Timp.

13

Synth

13

PSA

Indistinct radio voices crescendo until A

...inhale....long exhale.

13

CF Vox

Sbih ri

Boys

13

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

4 It's coming ♩ = 180

Picc. 17

T. Sx. 17

B^b Tpt. 17

Tbn. 17

Perc. 17

Timp. 17

Synth 17

PSA 17

CF Vox 17

Boys 17

Vln. I 17

Vln. II 17

Vla. 17

Vc. 17

D.B. 17

mf *cresc.* *mp*

play randomly, not together
pizz.

f Male voice: "Please listen carefully"

tu, *rai.*

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

7

29

Picc.

T. Sx.

29

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

29

Perc.

Timp.

29

E. Gtr.

E.B.

29

B3

29

Pno.

29

Synth

29

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

sfz

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

8

33

Picc. *sfz* *mf* *fz* **B**

T. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp. *mp* *fz* *sfz* chug/palm mute

E. Gtr. *mf*

E. B.

B3

Pno. *sfz* *fz*

Synth. *f*

Vln. I *sfz* *mf* *f*

Vln. II *sfz* *mf* *f*

Vla. *mf* *f* pizz.

Vc. *sfz* *mf* *f* pizz.

D.B. *mf* *f* slide pizz.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

9

37

Picc.

T. Sax.

37

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

37

Perc.

Timp.

37

E. Gtr.

E.B.

37

B3

37

Pno.

37

Synth

37

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

11

45

Picc.

T. Sx.

45

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

45

Perc.

Timp.

45

E. Gtr.

E.B.

45

B3

45

Pno.

45

Vln. I

pizz.

arco

Vln. II

pizz.

mf

arco

Vla.

mf

Vc.

D.B.

pizz.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

12

49

Picc. *ff* *mp* **C**

T. Sx. *pp*

B♭ Tpt. *pp*

Tbn. *pp*

Perc.

Timp. *mf* *ff*

E. Gtr. harmonics tapped would be cool
chug/palm mute

E.B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I *ff* *p*

Vln. II *ff* *p*

Vla. *ff* *ppizz.*

Vc. *ff* *p*

D.B. *ff* *p*

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

53 Picc. *mf*

53 T. Sx.

53 B⁺ Tpt.

53 Tbn.

53 Perc.

53 Timp.

53 E. Gr. *8^{vb}*

53 E. B.

53 B3

53 Pno.

53 Vln. I

53 Vln. II

53 Vla.

53 Vc.

53 D. B.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

14 D

Picc. *ff*

T. Sx. *ff*

B \flat Tpt. *ff*

Tbn. *ff*

Perc.

Timp. *ff*

E. Gtr. *ff*

E. B.

B3

Pno. *ff*

Vln. I *ff*

Vln. II *ff*

Vla. *ff*

Vc. *ff*

D. B. *ff*

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

16
65

Picc.

T. Sx.

B^b Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

E. Gr.

E. B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D. B.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

E 17

Picc.

T. Sax.

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

E. Gtr.

E. B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

69

B \flat M7 B \flat aug G m/B \flat G/B

B \flat M7 B \flat aug G m/B \flat G/B

mf

mf

mf

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

18

73

Picc.

T. Sx.

73

B[♭] Tpt.

Tbn.

73

Perc.

Timp.

73

E. Gtr.

harmonics ad lib.

E5

F

E.B.

73

B3

73

F⁶

E5

F

Pno.

73

Vln. I

mp

pp

mp

Vln. II

mp

pp

mp

Vla.

mp

Vc.

mp

D.B.

mp

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

19

77 F

Picc.

T. Sax. *mp* *mf*

B♭ Tpt. *mp* *mf*

Tbn. *mp* *mf*

Perc.

Timp.

E. Gtr. $F^{\flat 9}$ $D\text{maj}7$ $E7\text{sus}D$ $A\text{sus}2/C\sharp$ $A2$

E. B. $F^{\flat 9}$ $A\text{maj}7$ $B7\text{sus}A$ $E\text{sus}2/G\sharp$ $E2$

B3

Pno. *mf* *f* *mf* *

Vln. I *f* *mf*

Vln. II *f* *mf*

Vla. *f* *mf*

Vc. *f* *mf* *f* *mf*

D.B. *f* *mf*

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

20

Picc.

T. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

E. Gtr.

E. B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

DM7 E7sus/D CM7 G2 Dmaj7

AM7 B7sus/A GM7 D2 Amaj7

mf *f* *mf* *f*

f *p* *f* *p*

mf *f* *mf* *f*

f *f* *f* *f*

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

85

Picc.

T. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

E. Gtr.

E. B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

mp

f

ff

E sus7/D A2 a C#m5/D# B/D# D#m5

B sus7/A E2 c G#m5/B# F#Bb Bbm5

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

22
89

G

Picc.

T. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

E.Gtr.

E.B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

f

ff

E5

B5

B5

ad lib. distortion

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

93

Picc.

T. Sx.

B. Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Timp.

E. Gtr.

E. B.

B3

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

mp

ff

H

Daug7#9/C

B5 C5 A5 B5 C5 A5 B5 C5 A5 N.C.

ff

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

24
97

Picc.

T. Sx.

97

B \flat Tpt.

Tbn.

97

Perc.

Timp.

97

E. Gtr.

ff *cresc.* *fff*

E. B.

cresc.

97

B3.

ff *cresc.* *fff*

97

Pno.

cresc. *fff*

97

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

101 Picc. *n.*

101 T. Sx.

101 B♭ Tpt. *sfz*

101 Tbn.

101 Perc.

101 Timp.

101 E. Gtr. *ad lib. distortion*

101 E. B.

101 B3

101 Pno.

101 Vln. I

101 Vln. II

101 Vla.

101 Vc. *solo ad lib.*
mf

101 D.B.

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

26 **Freeflow distopia** $\text{♩} = 72$

105

Picc.

T. Sx.

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc. taiko toms

Timp.

E. Gr.

E. B.

B3

Pno.

Synth. *p*

PSA 105 Female voice: "The Phoenix is dead."

Boys *p* Oh,

Vln. I *n.*

Vln. II *n.*

Vla. *n.*

Vc. *mp*

D.B. *mp*

PHNX RISING: OPENING SEQUENCE

Count off for "The Phoenix" immediately. 27

109

Picc.

T. Sax.

109

B♭ Tpt.

Tbn.

109

Perc.

Timp.

109

E. Gtr.

E. B.

109

B3

109

Pno.

109

Synth

109

PSA

109

Boys

109

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Long.....live..... the Phoenix."

oh.

n.

n.

Vocal Score

Dust in the Wind

PHNX 2022

Written by KERRY LIVGREN
& STEVE WALSH

Arranged by James R. Wigginton

Rhapsodic ♩ = 112

p Oh. Oh.

f *mp* *slower* Oo. I

ad libitum
close my eyes

a tempo *mp*
on - ly for a mo - ment, then the mo - ment's gone.
Gone.

2 Dust in the Wind

14 *mf*

Gone, — gone. — Oo. — All my

17 *p* *mf*

dreams — All my dreams pass be - fore my eyes,

dreams

20

a cur - i - os - i - ty.

22 Dust... All they are — is

Dust Dust in the wind. the wind.

Dust in the wind, the

25 dust in the wind. *appassionata*

Oh, all they are — is dust... **solo tenor ad lib. f* in the

wind.

Dust in the Wind

3

28

Oh, wind. Oh, ah.

Oh, Oh, ah.

32 *ff con urgenza* Dust, on.

Don't (don't hang on.) hang on.

36 *molto rit.* Oh, it slips a -

No - thing lasts for - ev - er but the earth and sky. Oh, it

Oh, it

40 *a tempo* way,

fff slips, it slips a - way, a - way, and

slips, it slips a - way, a - way, and

4 Dust in the Wind

44

all your mon - ey ___ can't an - oth - er min - ute buy, ___ high!

48

mp Dust in the wind, oh, ___ *p* all we are ___ *f* is dust in the wind.

52

pp Dust, ___ oh ___ *mp* ev' - ry - tying is *f* dust in the in the wind. Oh, ev' - ry - thing, oh, *molto urgenza*

56

wind. Oh, ___ ev' - ry - thing is dust ___ in the ev' - ry - thing, oh,

Dust in the Wind

5

60

ffz *p*

slide

wind.

slide

63

molto lentamente
pp

n.

In in the the wind.

Score

CATHEDRALS

PHNX 2022: FREE

Written by JAY CLIFFORD

Arranged by James R. Wigginton

Reverent and resigned $\text{♩} = 85$
 First time, rubato, ad lib
 2nd x straight forward.

Acoustic Guitar *mp*

A

Solo
 In the sha - dows _____ of tall build - ings, of fall - en an - gels on the ceil - ing _____

Ac. Gtr. *mp*

Solo
 Oil - y feath - ers _____ in bronz and con - crete, fad - ed col - ors, piec - es left in - com - plete.

Ac. Gtr. *mp*

Vln. I *pp* — *p*

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

2

CATHEDRALS

14

Solo

The line moves slow - ly past the e - lec - tric fence, a - cross the bord - ers, be - tween con - ti - nents.

Ac.Gtr.

14

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

B

18

Solo

In the cath - e - drals of New - York and Rome, there is a feel - ing that you should just go home

Ac.Gtr.

18

Vln. I

pp < *mp* *p*

Vln. II

pp < *mp*

Vla.

pp < *mp*

Vc.

pp < *mp*

D.B.

CATHEDRALS

C

Solo
and spend a life - time find - ing out just where that is. ___

Ac.Gtr.

Vln. I
mp *p* *n.*

Vln. II
p *n.*

Vla.
p *n.*

Vc.
solo *mf*

D.B.

D

Solo
In the sha - dows ___ of tall build - ings, ___

Ac.Gtr.
mp

Vln. I
mf slide

Vln. II
mf slide

Vla.
mf slide

Vc.
mf

D.B.

CATHEDRALS

30

Solo

the arch - i - tec - ture is slow-ly peel - ing. Mar-ble stat - ues and glass di - vid - ers...

Ac.Gtr.

mp

Vln. I

pp < *mp*

Vln. II

pp < *mp*

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

34

Solo

some-one is watch - ing all of the out - sid - ers. The line moves slow - ly through the num-bered gate,

Ac.Gtr.

Vln. I

Div.

Vln. II

Div.

Vla.

Vc.

Div.

D.B.

CATHEDRALS

E

38

Solo

— past the mo - sa - ic of the head of — state. In the cath - e - drals of New-York and Rome,

Ac.Gtr.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc. Unis.

D.B.

42

Solo

there is a feel - ing that you should just go — home and spend a life - time find - ing out just where that

Ac.Gtr.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

CATHEDRALS

7

G *rit.* **H** *a tempo a cappella*

Solo: In the sha - dows of tall build - ings, of o - pen arch - es end - less - ly kneel - ing. Son - ic land - scapes,

S: Ah. A - men.

Ac.Gtr. 56

Vln. I 56

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Solo: ech - o - ing vis - tas, some - one is list' - ning from a safe dis - tance. The line moves slow - ly in - to a fad - ing light;

S:

Ac.Gtr. 62

Vln. I 62 vocal cue

Vln. II 62

Vla. 62

Vc. 62

D.B. 62

8

CATHEDRALS

I

67

Solo

a fi - nal mo - ment in the dead of ___ night. In the cath - e - drals of New-York and Rome,

S

Ac.Gtr.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

71

Solo

there is a feel - ing that you should just go ___ home and spend a life - time find - ing out just where that

S

Ac.Gtr.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

CATHEDRALS

9

75

Solo

is. Oh. In the cath-e - drals of New-York and Rome,

S

Ah,

Ac.Gtr.

75

Perc.

75

Vln. I

mp *mf*

Vln. II

mp *mf*

Vla.

mp *mf*

Vc.

mf

D.B.

79

Solo

there is a feel - ing that you should just go — home and spend a life - time find - ing out just where that

S

ah. Oh.

Ac.Gtr.

79

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

10
K

CATHEDRALS

molto rit.

Solo
is. Oh. Hm, oh.

S
A - men.

Ac.Gtr.
83

Perc.
83

Vln. I
83
p

Vln. II

Vla.
p

Vc.
p

D.B.

CUE: BLACKOUT AND
FLOOR TOM "(3)BOOM (4)BOOM" PLAY.

88

Ac.Gtr.
88

Perc.
88

Vln. I
88
pp *n.*

Vln. II
pp *n.*

Vla.
pp *n.*

Vc.
pp *n.*

D.B.

Appendix B: PHNX Artwork



Artwork for PHNX 2014: *Fireflight*



Artwork for PHNX 2022: *FREE*

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