

# Film Music Unit

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My final project is a unit that could be used in a classroom to study film music. The unit consists of several activities for demonstrating how important music is to a film and the many different ways that it used.

The rest of the unit has a viewing listening guide for an AMC video on the Hollywood Soundtrack, The top 50 films that use classical music, identifying leit-motifs from several film scores including *Star Wars* and *The Wizard Of Oz*, and finally, the use of compilation scores by watching portions of *Forrest Gump*.

## Basic Functions of Film Music

1. Mask or neutralize disagreeable sounds created by viewers (talking, coughing, etc.), The projector, air conditioning, heating systems and noises emanating from outside the viewing environment.
2. Mask or neutralize silence: Prolonged periods of silence seem to disturb audiences; it has been claimed that music is capable of psychologically and physiologically adjusting the audience to avoid eye strain, tension, and fatigue; precedents for the neutralizing silence function comes from life itself with its continuous flow of visual and aural impressions and from other arts of movement such as mime, ballet, circus acts etc.
3. Continuity: Music has been regarded as a means of providing continuity for a medium that has been described as distinct insofar as a film is composed of individual frames and shots; it seems that the independent continuity of music superimposes its melodic harmonic and, rhythmic substructures upon the spectator thereby imparting to the film a sense of continuity which underlies whatever continuity the film itself possesses.
4. Dramatic support: Music provides auditory cues which supplement and comment on the visuals thereby amplifying and reinforcing a films dramatic, emotional, and atmospheric dimensions.
  - A. Leit-Motif System: Recurring Themes which are called upon at the appearance of or reference to a specific mood, character, or situation
  - B. Underscoring the Dominant Mood: Tragedy, doom, happiness, love, conflict, etc.
  - C. Establishing Atmosphere: Time and place
  - D. Imitating or Suggesting Real Sounds: Battle Music, Machine Music, Animal Music etc.
  - E. Reflecting action: Music imitates the rhythm of physical actions depicted on screen: "Mickey Mousing"
  - F. Underpinning the dramatic build-up of a scene and rounding it off with a sense of finality.
  - G. Utilitarian Music coinciding with aural stimuli present in or suggested by the scene; girl practicing piano offstage street bands, whistling etc. The sound tends to be naturalistic

- H. Counterpoint: Where music and images convey contrasting information thus setting up an ironic metaphor juxtaposition: e.g. Image of sleeping child with nightmarish music: images of SAC bomber being refueled with lush arrangement of “Try a Little Tenderness” in opening of Dr. Strangelove
5. Economic: Music promoted as a special feature through the use of theme songs and pre-sold, big name popular entertainers.

***AMC Presents the Hollywood Soundtrack Story: Viewing/Listening Guide***

Film has always needed music, and we’ve always had film music

Much film music history is available in the Library of Congress

Music empowers and enhances a visual image, even when we do not realize it is present

Silent film music: Sources: classics, pops, improvisation (leit-motif common)

Types of Silent Film accompaniment instruments and ensembles

Effects, and elements of affect

Sound on Film

Jolson, *The Jazz Singer*, and Musicals, *Singing In The Rain*

Animated musicals, new art form

Various uses of songs in movies (Laura, Mood)

Title songs mutual promotion, enhance business

Mancini’s *Moon River*

Orchestral film music: European scoring. *King Kong*

Korngold— *Robin Hood*; E. Bernstein—*10 Commandments*

Jazz scoring: *Streetcar Named Desire*

DeMille believed that music supports the story line

Elmer Bernstein helped him realize that it can add dimensions to the story too.

John Williams/Spielberg/*E.T.* symphonic progression

Rachel Portman (*Benny and Joon*)

Bernstein: *Magnificent seven* Music energizes the film and sets model for westerns

Choices/ problems/solution. *Batman*, *City Slickers*

Computers and Midi sounds

Compilation scores: *American Graffiti*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *Forrest Gump*

Soundtrack albums, Promotional and business angles

Film will always be combined with music—It provides that added dimension which can only come from the “beyond speaking and seeing” expressive subtleties/qualities of music

### ***Compilation Scores Exercise***

Describe the popular song or musical treatment for each scene of *Forrest Gump*. Write next to the scene on your sheet.

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Feather                | 14. Forrest visits Jenny      |
| 2. Feather nears Forrest  | 15. Forrest at White House    |
| 3. General Forrest/KKK    | 16. Graduation                |
| 4. Mama and Forrest walk  | 17. Night in barracks         |
| 5. Bed time story         | 18. Jenny's joint             |
| 6. Elvis                  | 19. Outside on the bridge     |
| 7. Forrest meets Jenny    | 20. Good-bye to Mama          |
| 8. Playing together       | 21. Vietnam; camp and field   |
| 9. Chase-braces break     | 22. Hospital letters returned |
| 10. Jenny's house hiding  | 23. Ping-Pong                 |
| 11. Forrest's house-Jenny | 24. Lt. Dan's destiny         |
| 12. 2nd chase-Football    | 25. White House award event   |
| 13. Wallace rally         | 26. War protest rally         |

***Leit-Motif Matching Game***

Match the Leit-Motif to the character, place, or thing.

1. Jawa \_\_\_\_\_
2. Princess Leah \_\_\_\_\_
3. Luke Skywalker \_\_\_\_\_
4. Darth Vader \_\_\_\_\_
5. Forrest Gump's House \_\_\_\_\_
6. Indiana Jones \_\_\_\_\_
7. Hobbits or Shire \_\_\_\_\_
8. The Wicked Witch Of the West \_\_\_\_\_
9. Jaws \_\_\_\_\_
10. Austin Powers \_\_\_\_\_