

## Browsing the Suggestive Catalogue: Music in Modern Fantasy Films

On the notion of otherness in movies as a function of the musical dressing

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One could claim that music is always the sonorous unfolding of a fantasy world regardless of the kind or style of music and how it is used. Although we hear it, music is neither concrete nor tangible. It is transient and unfolds quickly in time, slipping away as fast as it emerges. Music leaves both listener and performer in a state of constant change. It is considered its own language, but more than that, it creates parallel world that is experienced primarily as an auditory event or series of incidents. Mercilessly temporal, the world of music often serves as a retreat into the imagination. Music is always fantasy.

This article surveys the role and operation of music in modern fantasy films by investigating and analysing parts of the soundtrack of two prominent, fairly new examples of the genre, *The Lord of the Ring. The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2002).

The term Fantasy or Fantasia has existed in the history of western European music since at least the Renaissance. First used to describe instrumental versions of vocal motets, the term Fantasy/Fantasia has been used increasingly to categorise music of an improvisatory or investigative nature that does not meet specific standards or norms; a Fantasy or Fantasia is more freely formed, challenging the musical standards and norms of a given epoch. In the Baroque era, the term Fantasy could be applied to a freely formed but carefully notated piece built upon extended chromatic progressions and phrases, peppered with embellishments. In the Classical era, the Fantasy grew to include and,

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indeed, depend upon the performer's facility, flexibility, and skill. In the Romantic era, Fantasy encompassed a wide variety of forms, ranging from the instrumental equivalent of a song cycle to improvised virtuoso variations on a given theme.

Apart from a few pieces, the genre – and term – Fantasy fell out of use in the twentieth century, possibly because the concept of formal genres and styles had become insignificant. As a result, the relatively close link between bourgeois music culture, with its enhanced cultivation of the emotive and sensuous, and Fantasy, a musical genre that reached its peak in the nineteenth century, persists.

The fact that the style and composition of film scores seem to be heavily influenced by music of the Romantic Period and imitations of it is, however, not necessarily related to the development of fantasy as musical genre. It might also be that composers who scored film music in early sound movies were educated in the traditional styles of Western European music, dominated by Romantic examples, techniques, and practices.

### **Music in Film**

The idea that music and sound add value to film scenes and sequences, suggesting or clarifying the visual narrative, is very convincing in many ways. This axiomatic concept of film music is generally attributed to the French composer and theorist Michel Chion although this approach goes back to the early days of sound movies. (Cook, 1998)

At first glance, this point of view might imply that the score is applied to the film and not a genuine part of it, merely sharpening or completing a point made by other elements of the film. However, this is not Chion's understanding. On the contrary, he continues to maintain quite the opposite: film music - and sound - cannot be detached from the film. He makes his position clear with the apothegm: "There Is No Soundtrack." (Chion 1994). I share his view; I even claim that we cannot speak of music in film, only of references to music or musical allusion. (Knakkegaard 2009)

When watching a film, one experiences its score as an integral component of the artifact. One cannot talk of the film on one hand and its score on the other. Whenever

the music is discussed separately, it is done in the same way as the dialogue, the acting, the narrative, the scenes, the settings, and so on. This type of critique views music or any other component as detached from the totality of the film, placing it into another arena. In the case of the music, this foreign context is typically that of film music as a genre, or music in general, or even, that of music theory, semiotics, and so on.

In recent years, a growing interest in silent movies has led to the establishment of societies and festivals, "culture feature programs" and dedicated websites<sup>2</sup>. Neil Brand, one of the leading accompanists in this field, states that the accompanist's role in the drama "... is the character you don't see."<sup>3</sup> In a recent interview on Danish Radio<sup>4</sup>, Brand's point of view is supported by Ben Model, another accompanist, who was trained as both an actor and musician. His background itself supports Chion's and Brand's points of view, and does not oppose their approach. The music that accompanies silent movies becomes an element or role that is added to the film, integrating with and completing the narrative and the film as a whole.

The important issue is that music is an integrated – and integral -- element in the film; it is not subject to independent reflection. This is exactly the reason why film scores can be so manipulative and suggestive within a film. To the degree that music is not heard or analysed as a detached element, the viewer's experience of the film is so much the stronger, especially if the music carries culturally indexed content. Whether a film score is original or previously composed, its main function is that of the referential, the associative, which, at a subconscious level, evokes acknowledged structural archetypes within the practices of a cultural discourse. Some of these are even developed in close interaction with film as genre.

The choice - and application - of a film score energises the narrative and scenes in a way that is not merely supplemental. Music might confirm what seems already

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., <http://www.stummfilm.info/>, <http://www.dfr.dk/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.neilbrand.com/nbframe.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.dr.dk/P2/Kulturnyt/Udsendelser/2008/09/16162909.htm>

to be included, but music contributes by deepening the general feel of the scenes and events.

Music is not only capable of supplying a film with the sense of general mood and character, whether sinister and threatening, careless and joyful. It is also able to support the film's sense of tempo and anxiety and to connect different scenes and takes in terms of time, location, and geography.

In the following pages, music is viewed in the light of theory, momentarily detaching it from the film at hand, but I continue to relate it to other elements of the film.

### **Frame of Understanding**

In this essay I will approach the question of how film music works by combining psychological, semiotic, pragmatic and cultural insights, attempting to join them into a single frame of understanding.

The *psychological* understanding of (film) music stresses the emotive and affective, gestural qualities of music, and often focuses on how musical proportions resemble the prosodic communicative practices that we have known from early childhood. In an attempt to pinpoint the psychological factors underlying the sense and perception of music, Ulrik Volgsten draws on Daniel Stern's model of the development of the self. (Stern 1985) Volgsten claims that the way we experience and value musical phrasing is tied to the sonorous aspects of preverbal vocal communication between baby and mother, enabling "the intuition of an affective core underlying the other's behaviour, an intuition of the other's affective states." (Volgsten, 2006:80) The competences that allow us to perceive simple musical phrasing are established at the earliest stages of self-development. The resulting abilities are the basis of our use and understanding of complex musical phrases and structures that are themselves built upon simpler structures. (See also Lerdahl & Jackendoff.) Volgsten refers to this as "affect attunement" and suggests that its use enables us "to denote the musical phrase in terms of 'masculine' and 'feminine,' of being 'happy' or 'sad,' or being expressive of any other kind of emotion." (ibid., 81)

Volgsten's line of inquiry lays the groundwork for the concept of film music as a trigger of regression. (Gorbman 1987) As long as the score is not heard consciously – a high ambition among many film composers – music and musical means in the broadest sense discreetly adjust the audience's mode of sensing to a prelinguistic, narcissistic state.

To a certain degree this viewpoint does not differ radically from that of Susanne K. Langer, although she does not explicitly rely upon the element of learning as precondition: Musical expression does not only resemble but evokes "the pattern of sentence—the pattern of life itself, as it is felt and directly known" (Langer 1953, 31), the dynamic form and not the specific content of feeling.

Music can also be viewed from a cognitive position, investigating the relationship between the experience of sound and sound events as carriers of - indexed - information, signs, and the organisation of a musical piece, its structure. In a broader sense this semi-*semiotic* perspective includes categories such as dynamics, intensity, frequency, speed, texture, contour, all leading to an understanding of music that resembles the way "real" sounds are interpreted. Here loudness signifies proximity or size; gradual changes in volume might also signify movement from one position to another. This is similar to the way in which frequency peaks give witness to size and especially the weight of objects, exposed or hidden.

Film music acts in much the same way as sound in general. It can endow a scene with a sense of proportion, direction, and dimension while it challenges the screen's reference to a Euclidean room by virtue of its transcendent, other-worldly status (insofar as it is non-diegetic). Being "positioned" outside the visual frames and the narrative, non-diegetic music generally appears as immersive, generating a certain atmosphere, "a kind of 'wrap-around sound'" (Donnelly 2005, 13), but at the same time it completely surrounds the film's audience and inevitably serves as a guiding interpreter of the nature and character of a scene. Even if "music makes space and time pliable, subject to contrast or distension" (Chion 1994, 82), the pliability is restrained by the type and means of musical expression that delimit the imminent interpretations and anchor the viewer's

understanding of a scene. This is similar to the way a text is able to guide the reading of an image. (Barthes 1977, 38ff) Regardless of its “musical” character, music dominated by lower-pitched sound always seems to evoke a sense of gravity and seriousness, whereas high-pitched sound often but certainly not always evokes a light and carefree atmosphere. The high-pitched human scream, however, can also signify angst and fear.

There are fundamental elements of film music that refer to circumstances characteristic of our auditory experiences, independent of the genre and style of the music in question. Thus, part of the effect of film music is tied to sonorous implications independent of musical setting and means of excitation. However, the immersive qualities of film music also draw heavily on references to well-established categories of non-film music. In this respect the efficiency of the musical means of expression is dependent upon the audience’s knowledge or sense of cultural, historical, and stylistic implications. This points towards *pragmatic* and rhetorical implications that are closely connected to musical as well as filmic discourses and dependent upon specific cultural learning.

In many films, there are obvious links of a synesthetic nature between the atmosphere and gestural aesthetics of nineteenth-century music and the grandeur and drama of the settings – and, often, the pathos of dialogue and performance. The extended use of the lower-pitched symphonic brass and contrabasses, and also synthesised “deep” sounds, gives rise to a feeling of gravity and seriousness, often supporting or engendering the sense of anxiety and worry. As part of the film’s expressive means, music acts highly suggestively, indicating a powerful and mighty universe dominated by strong spiritual and paranormal elements.

### **Music in Modern Fantasy Films**

In the case of major fantasy films, the element of musical standardisation seems surprisingly evident: Not only does the music demonstrate close affinity with western European classical tradition, it is very often written by or in the style of prominent contemporary composers such as John Williams and Howard Shore, who have distinguished themselves as composers of excellent heroic and epical scores. John

Williams’ highly influential scoring for major series such as *Star Wars* (all except *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* [2008]), *Indiana Jones*, (all films in the series), bear witness to this.

Thus, music in fantasy films belongs to a fantastic universe as it derives from or refers to primarily the musical discourse of the nineteenth century. As the music of, especially, the Romantic era is aimed strongly at spirituality (part of the century’s preoccupation with mythological and philosophical issues), the music is well suited to provide a sense of the metaphysical and other-worldly. It can hardly be considered a coincidence that it corresponds with the dramatic universe of the nineteenth-century romantic music and poetry exemplified by Schubert’s Lieder, Wagner’s operas, and other works.

### ***The Lord of the Rings · The Fellowship of the Ring***

The use of archaic musical language supports the notion that fantasy is somehow a phenomenon of the past. However, the reference to the past does not bring the past to the present. Instead, the opposite occurs; the present is taken back to the past, exposing the film in an archaic atmosphere regardless of the chronological time of the film. Even films – and not only those that belong to the fantasy genre - whose dramatic situation is set in the present are very often garnished with a score that is historically anachronistic. This seems to be common to film music in general.

Howard Shore’s score for Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), is a compelling example of the use of historic and archaic styles of music in fantasy films. The table below shows that, within the first ten minutes of the film, the musical setting presents many different musical idioms and allusions to music styles of the past. Some of the observations as well as other examples from the score are dealt with in greater detail in Table 1.

**Table 1 The first ten minutes of *Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring*:**

Time	Scene -Action	Music
0:00:00	Intro –Prologue – voiceover	Gregorian chant-like but female singing on extended drones
0:00:48	Dark screen (cont. voiceover) Title presentation → Casting of rings	Brass and noise leading to exposition of Main Theme – (signifying the Ring) nineteenth-century in shape, harmonisation and orchestration. Concrete sound (fire) is added. Main theme is continuously exposed. No noticeable rhythmic impetus.
0:01:38	Another ring was made	Sudden use of marcato and decisive rhythmic patterns. A kind of march with a strong upbeat to second beat
0:02:17	Battle scenes (voiceover cont.)	Sudden use of clear melodic lines bearing similarity to the opening of the thirteenth-century Latin hymn <i>Dies Irae</i> , exposed with a strong accentuated, almost driving rhythmic feel and heroic atmosphere supporting martial implications and leading back to the march. The march now enveloped in loud choral singing similar to the use of choir in Karl Orff's <i>Carmina Burana</i> but in this context supporting the notion of war and evil. Strong double beats in Grand Cassa Return of <i>Dies Irae</i> allusions
0:03:57	Chopped-off hand hits the ground wearing the ring	Short motive from J.S. Bach's <i>Tocatta and Fugue in d-minor</i> at first orchestrated for strings later for brass stands out shortly as part of the continuation of the section described above. Subsonic synthesised sound as the evil force is defeated and spreads an inverted mushroom wave.
0:04:20	Isildur lying on the ground; grabs the finger with the ring	Return of the main – ring – theme followed by a sequence without musical elements
0:04:46	The ring is lost in the water	Return of the main – ring – theme

0:05:20	Gollum discovers the ring “My precious” Mountains Gollum in the caves Gollum loses the ring.	Dark brass voicing  Ascending melodic lines Main theme is continuously paraphrased Harmonic progressions without a significant thematic profile or contour
0:06:26	Bilbo picks up the ring.	Main - ring – theme returns
0:06:56	Scenes from The Shire	Short exposition of the leading Hobbit / Shire theme followed by harmonic progressions orchestrated for woodwinds, clarinet (for the first time), and strings
0:07:20	Gandalf is driving through the forest.	No music is heard except for Gandalf singing. Only peaceful sounds of the forest
0:08:04	Gandalf and Frodo start laughing.	Joyful antiphonal- or vamped bass as a short prelude to the presentation of the full version of the leading Hobbit / Shire theme here performed by Irish whistle or recorder accompanied by strings
0:08:30	Gandalf starts telling Frodo news from the world.	Light variations on the Hobbit / Shire theme set out in harmonic sequences leading more and more towards a genuine folk music feel and setting. The violin / fiddle is the leading instrument supporting the sense of folk music.
0:09:58	Children gathering around the approaching Gandalf	Musical breakthrough in which the Hobbit / Shire theme is suddenly executed in a British national romantic setting and form making strong references to the works of Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams
0:10:15	Gandalf sets off the fireworks.	Return of the fiddle violin sequenced variations
0:10:34	Frodo and Gandalf both declare that they are glad that Gandalf is back in the Shire.	Return of the – original - Hobbit / Shire theme performed by Irish whistle, recorder or exotic flute

Besides these allusions to various music styles, forms of expression, and particular historical pieces – a feature that is not specific to music in fantasy film but quite common in mainstream film music as a whole – the music shows characteristics that can be judged on a more neutral, less idiosyncratic level, regardless of style. For example, the orchestration is generally of a low-pitched or dark character, which on the psychological level suggests a somewhat sinister atmosphere and a world of huge proportions. The

tempo is slow, giving rise to the notion of the slightly reserved and dignified, but also of the threatening and tense. All in all, the style and density of the music evoke a strong feeling of suppressed power and heavy forces.

The melodic, counterpunctual, and voiced lines are generally formed stepwise, showing only few significant intervals and a prevalence of falling endings, which evoke a sense of the confined and suppressed. This is supported by the orchestration described above. Whereas the general feel and character are dark dominated by the lower registers, the themes stand out in higher registers, implying that they are clearly profiled.

The scoring is well executed and highly economical, preventing it from getting in the way of the narrative or stealing the picture. On the contrary, it mixes with the film as a whole and supports the narrative in a precise and efficient manner.

### Framing the *Ring*

In the case of the Ring motif, the orchestral exposition of the theme leads to an impression of isolation and loneliness. The theme does not only reflect an ill-fated character by means of its narrow falling contour, it paradoxically has a kind of vulnerability. (Fig. 1) Obviously, this has nothing to do with the ring itself, but signifies that it triggers its evil magic and affects whomever is close to it, one way or another. Examples are numerous, and the musical theme occurs twice during the opening voiceover: the first, as the narrator says the ring "... betrayed Isildor to his death" [0:04:46] and the second when it is pointed out that "It was picked up by the most unlikely creature imaginable. A Hobbit. Bilbo Baggins." [0:06:26]



Fig. 1. LotR: Ring theme

However, the theme does not occur every time the ring is shown or mentioned. The adaptation of the opening motif of the Dies Irae (introduced when prehistoric battle scenes

are shown), functions as a kind of *leitmotif*, suggesting the possible consequences if Sauron regains possession of the ring. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2. LotR: The opening bar of Shore's adaptation with the first bar of the Dies Irae hymn below

The Dies Irae adaptation serves as an alternate sign of the ring. It seems to indicate the power of the ring and serves as a foreshadowing of death and destruction if the ring falls into the hands of Sauron. However, this motif first stands out clearly when Bilbo Baggins pulls the ring out of his pocket on Gandalf's command; he is told to leave it behind when he travels from the Shire [0:22:30]. Soon after this, we hear the motif again as the writing on the ring becomes visible to Frodo [0:29:40]. This is remarkable; the ring theme was heard when Frodo saw the ring for the first time as he entered Bilbo's house.

The relationship between the two themes seems obvious: The Ring theme is referential illustrating its magic and alluring power, whereas the Dies Irae adaptation is a connotative indication of the ring's dangerous and destructive powers. It seems that the reference to Dies Irae is deliberately included, reflecting its use in numerous other films where it almost exclusively acts as an indication of death and fall<sup>5</sup>. In accord with this, the theme is often heard when the Black Riders, the Nazgûl, appear.

### Projections of the Present

Enya's *The Council of Elrond* [01:21:30] accompanies the solemn scene in Rivendale in which Arven and Aragorn declare their love for each other and Arven confirms that she will forsake immortal life in order to marry Aragorn. In a way, Enya's piece externalises

<sup>5</sup> Among the many examples of the use of the Dies Irae theme in film music are Gottfried Huppertz' scoring for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Dimitri Tiomkin's music for Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953), Miklós Rozsa's score for George Sidney's *Young Bess* (1953), Bernhard Hermann's music for Brian de Palma's *Obsession* (1976), Jerry Goldsmith's score for Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* (1982), Elmer Bernstein's music for Angelika Weber's *Marie Ward* (1984), Elliot Goldenthal's music for Marco Brambilla's *Demolition Man* (1993), and Hans Zimmer's music for Allis and Minkoff's *The Lion King* (1994).

the film, as the music connects with a particular field of significance: a discourse, established independently of the film and of film in general, with the everyday music heard through mass media. Music brings forward not only the notion of fantasy but also – and more importantly -- ideas of purity, order, and idealised love. Enya’s music draws heavily on idioms that are related closely to folklore, authenticity, and romance. The sum of these characteristics forms a sense of nostalgia, suggesting a connection between fantasy and history. Here, fantasy is an emblem of a paradise lost, and history is understood as a continuous process of decline from idealised primitivism to civilised alienation. At the same time, however, the scene reaches into current time; the conception of the one and only eternal love continues to hold the position of an idealised social institution in modern culture. The music lacks any mark of modernism and belongs unmistakably to the discourse of popular music. Its atmosphere and character are those of the romantic as embodied in the New Age music of the past two decades. Furthermore, Enya’s music signifies the modern concept of ecological thinking, a sense of purity and healing, the idea of getting back to the core of nature.

The use of New Age music also takes into account the audience building a dialectic split, which joins the past and mysterious with the familiar and mundane.

### **Paradoxical Time**

Neither the music of Shore nor of Enya refers to the apparent setting of the narrative. (Both, however, interact with the film in terms of mood and character.) None of the music in the film refers to the time or place of the narrative unless we say the Shire or Hobbit themes are historical paraphrases of folk music.

With the exception of references to the opening bar of the Dies Irae and modal tonality, the score does not correspond to the time of the narrative in any way. Even though the setting of *The Lord of the Rings* is fictional and not synchronised to historical time, the references in the film suggest the late medieval era. Similarly, there are references to the modern calendar in the case of Bilbo Baggins’ birthday party. The narrative carries a sense of old but historic times, which are not paralleled in the music.

Although the Dies Irae adaptation could suggest a medieval reference, the theme has become a cinematic aural icon, signifying death and decline in numerous films regardless of the setting and time (note 51). The theme simply indicates death on the pragmatic level.

There are other correlations between narrative threads and musical agents in the film, but I will discuss only one more example here.

### **Twentieth-century Musical Language as Signifier of War and Aggression**

Moving beyond nineteenth century musical influences, I turn now to Bartok, Stravinsky, and Orff, and the ways in which their music has been used in contemporary films. The dramatic, rhythmic drive and modern orchestration occur mainly in battle scenes and especially in scenes involving the Uruk Hai, Isengard, or Mordor. In several cases the noise of the battle scenes and the Uruk Hais’ noisy activities are underscored by modernistic or neo-classical music language. The music is also integrated with realistic sounds of battle, especially hammering and fighting. This is the case in the scene where the Uruk Hais are fashioning swords and other weapons in the open-air smithy.

The use of this technique leads to a psychologically strong effect, as the music is closely integrated into the scenes and becomes part of the sonorous surroundings. The guiding principle is a form of musicalization; the concept can be toggled so that the sounds and noises in the scene may be organised according to the music. (Knakkergaard 2009)

The extended allusions to Orff’s 1937 *Carmina Burana* (used in many fantasy films) indicates a predilection for simple musical forms and clear-cut phrases, signalling a medieval universe with remnants of a heathen world, identified by a mixture of the martial and the mystic.

### **Summing up *The Fellowship of the Ring***

Generally the score of this film builds an auditory universe that is characterised by a strong element of sentiment, force, and contrast on the one hand and of ease, peace and

simplicity on the other. The use of the symphonic scoring is reserved for scenes that deal with the foreign and dangerous, and with threat and horror. Although the ring theme belongs to a musical typology of intimacy and comfort, the theme acquires an uneasy quality when arranged on a rich, dark background that questions its simplicity. Contrary to this, scenes that visualise or refer to the Shire or to Hobbits are underscored by a musical language that is simple and easy to comprehend; it is arranged for a small ensemble in plain settings.

These characteristics are supported semiotically. The dynamics and density of the orchestral passages correspond to the scenes they escort, endowing them with a sense of force, intensity, and grandeur. Music performed by smaller ensembles is softer and more transparent, generally manageable and uncomplicated. Likewise, orchestral passages tend to be marked by driving rhythms enhanced by strong percussion; passages for solo instruments and smaller ensembles are typically articulated more loosely.

The scoring relies on techniques and aesthetics that are particular to Western European music culture although many of the instruments are not indigenous to Western Europe. The score supports a strong sense of tonal centre; the melodic lines and harmonic implications fall within the discourse of traditional western music in terms of shaping and tonality. The music is rich in references and allusions to famous pieces of music, enabling familiarity and a level of comfort.

### ***Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone***

John Williams' music for Chris Columbus' 2001 film of J. K. Rowling's bestseller *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* resembles Howard Shore's score for *The Lord of the Ring – The Fellowship of the Ring*. Williams, however, has chosen a different path in terms of the general character and feel of the music. Brighter orchestration and a less burdened movement prevail. Most of the music evokes a light and carefree atmosphere, suggesting an overall sense of comedy and joy. The music helps the film to fit into the category of family entertainment.

The observations on the scoring of the first ten minutes of the film listed in Table 2 reveals how Williams has managed to achieve a scoring of high integrity without desisting from detailed variation that allows for deepening and characterisation of the shifting scenes. The table is followed by a more detailed discussion of these matters.

**Table 2 The first ten minutes of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone***

Time	Scene -Action	Music
0:00:00	WB logo	Main Theme I in Horn accompanied by stepwise melodic ladders in strings
0:00:18	Intro - Owl on Privet Drive Road sign	Melodic line (Magic Theme) in Glockenspiel
0:00:36	Professor Dumbledore comes walking out of the dark.	Traditional chromatic ladders in strings supporting anxiety and mystery Atmosphere is not heavy or light
0:00:49	Dumbledore stops up to start switching out lights in Privet Drive.	Return of the beginning of Magic Theme in woodwind (possibly high bassoon). Symphonic orchestra harmonics supporting lights switching off.
0:01:14	Dumbledore stops switching out lights and the cry of a cat is heard.	Return of the Main Theme I in horn almost unaccompanied
0:01:22	Cat transforms into Professor McGonagall and joins Dumbledore.	Musical accompaniment with clear affinity to twentieth-century symphonic music (e.g., Stravinsky's <i>Firebird</i> )
0:01:59	Hagrid arrives with baby Harry Potter.	Heroic horn version of Main Theme I accompanied by chromatic runs in strings
0:02:21	Conversation between Hagrid, Dumbledore and McGonagall	Return to musical accompaniment with clear affinity to twentieth-century symphonic music
0:02:37	Dumbledore carries Harry Potter to the doorstep.	Continuation of the scoring right above but with Main Theme I added in woodwind (oboe or English Horn)
0:03:12	Dumbledore places Harry Potter on the doorstep.  Harry Potter is lying on doorstep. Hagrid snuffles.	Stepwise falling melodic line gradually orchestrated broader and deeper as the tempo is falling simultaneously. Cadence-like ending. Morendo and deep strings
0:03:36	Dumbledore places letter on top of Harry Potter.	Return of Privet Drive / Magic Theme in Glockenspiel



0:03:50	Title screen	Full blown orchestral version of Main Theme II with melodic line in doubled horn
0:04:00	Harry Potter is woken up by his Aunt Petunia.	Music ends in cadence as Harry Potter opens his eyes.
0:06:08	Snake rises a little as Harry Potter talks to it.  Snake rises high up communicating. Harry Potter asks if the snake misses its family. Dudley falls into the snake's cage.	Music starts with long note in woodwind gradually broadened with more and more instruments coming in. Atmospheric and non-thematic. Accentuated ascending notes in horn Broad soft chords in strings envelope the scene sentiment. Music gets darker with a stronger impetus.
0:07:04	Snake escapes from the cage and causes panic.	Light high-pitched comedy music performed with a dry, jumping feeling.
0:07:31	Dudley discovers he cannot get out of the cage.	The light comedy music theme turns into a jumpy variation on Main Theme I.
0:07:44	Uncle Vernon discovers that Harry Potter has caused the snake's escape as well as Dudley's confinement. Harry Potter is locked up in the cupboard under the stairs.	Sudden darkening of the music with strong deep resting notes in brass and double-basses as part of a dissonant chord  The music's dissonant quality stops.
0:08:13	Owl arrives with letter.	Main Theme I in horn returns accompanied by stepwise and chromatic runs in strings
0:08:50	Harry Potter hands Uncle Dudley letters but keeps his own for himself.	Music ends
0:08:55	Uncle Dudley looks at Harry Potter's letter.	Light comedy music from above returns.
0:09:06	Owl comes flying with letter again.	Stepwise and chromatic runs in strings anticipate the return of Main Theme I.
0:09:22	Uncle Vernon tears letters into pieces.	The flow of the music is halted and is continued into pizzicato in deep strings not forming a clear continuous rhythmic pattern thus gaining a sneaky character.
0:09:38	More owls deliver letters to Harry Potter.	Return of the above stepwise and chromatic runs in strings, this time with the heroic Main Theme II on top

Williams's scoring of the first ten minutes is highly homogeneous although it combines musical elements of different characteristics and expressions, and is also implemented in different orchestration. This is accomplished by a strong sense of economy and a stringent use of similar or identical musical approaches towards scenes of corresponding observation. A large amount, if not most, of the film's musical themes are introduced during the opening scenes.

Generally, the music tends to refer to a consistent idiom that resembles the neoclassical tradition of the first half of the twentieth century. But it does so in a diluted form and does not restrict itself to that idiom. Some of the elements -- chromatics, orchestration, and defined motives -- clearly point back to the nineteenth century and to practices of, for instance, the tone poem. Another feature of the musical setting is that it resembles much of Williams' other film scores. We cannot ignore this feature, because of its possible consequences for the construction and acknowledgement of the drama.

### Leading Themes

As the table above shows, there are three prominent themes in Williams' score: Main Theme I (fig. 3), Main Theme II (fig. 4), and the Magic Theme (fig. 5), are presented in the first ten minutes of the film. The two Main Themes are also used extensively in other Harry Potter films, thus functioning as signature themes.

Main Theme I (0:00:03) in some way resembles the themes of other Williams pieces, for example, *Starwars* and *Indiana Jones*. Although written in three-quarter time, which does not apply to the other two themes, *Harry Potter* has a similar masculine, bold, heroic character. This is achieved through the choice of horns, its vivid tempo, and also through its characteristic opening interval of the fourth.



Fig. 3. *Harry Potter*. Main Theme I

Main Theme I is related to Main Theme II, which we hear the first time the title, “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone,” appears [0:03:50]. Main Theme II relates even more closely to other Williams’ music and it appears to be more notably shaped to signify action and adventure. Again this is achieved by the choice of horn and by its intervallic implications. Here the rising interval is more prominent, being repeated and, the third time, expanded from the interval of a third to a fourth. The rhythmic realisation from weak to accentuated beats stresses the interval, and the theme is endowed with a sense of vitality and energy.



Fig. 4. *Harry Potter*: Main Theme II

The Magic Theme, which is heard in the Glockenspiel the first time we see the Privet Road sign, is connected to the others in a subtle way as it recycles some of the intervals and the meter. However, the three-quarter meter, which initially supports the connection to the other themes, is not maintained. Three-quarter time alternates with five-quarter, and with the use of the fragile Glockenspiel, establishes the theme’s magic character.

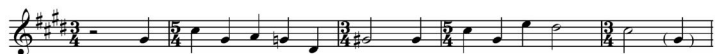


Fig. 5. *Harry Potter*: Magic Theme

In general, the thematic material presented at the beginning and used throughout the film, secures unity and coherence. Much of the accomplished differentiation in the musical scoring is due to the application of different orchestration techniques and settings.

### Comfort, Peace, and Love

Seen from the perspective of the western European musical tradition, most of music in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is kept within a mildly dissonant atmosphere. There are, however, passages, that deviate from this and expose a harsher and more dissonant sound universe. Likewise, some scenes are accompanied by music of a highly consonant

and soft character, generally supporting an emotive sensation in relation to scenes of sentimental content.

An example of the last type is the scene in which Harry Potter spends his first night in Gryffindor sitting on the windowsill, apparently daydreaming while the others are sleeping [0:47:38]. The beginning of the scene – before we see Harry – is accompanied by a theme that in style and character resembles the solemn and peaceful orchestral music for which prominent, twentieth-century English composers such as Elgar, Holst, and Vaughan Williams are known. To the average western European audience, the particular musical idiom probably has a sort of national and even pastoral quality signifying core values of traditional, bygone English culture. It is highly suitable to accompany scenes of the interior Hogwarts castle (with a look back at noble life in the countryside of Old England).



Fig. 6. *Harry Potter*. Opening bars of the sentimental theme shown above the “corresponding” passage from Stravinsky’s *Firebird*.

As Harry Potter comes into the picture [0:47:55], the music progresses into a generally stepwise and over-arching cantabile passage, which in its opening motive is closely related to the well-known passage from *The Round of the Princesses* in Stravinsky’s *Firebird* (Fig. 6). The musical disposition endows the scene with a sense of Harry’s emotions, as he first looks out the window then turns towards his owl, Hedwig, to caress it. He turns again and lifts his head to look out the window dreamily (and directly into the camera). Thus the music is highly supportive and even manipulative, as it points up the emotive quality of the scene.

### 20<sup>th</sup>-century Musical Language as Signifier of War and Aggression - Again

To accompany the battle scene on the oversized chessboard, Williams draws upon idioms of the classical tradition of the first half of the twentieth century [01:57:11]. Unpitched percussion instruments suddenly dominate the scoring and support a feeling of danger, and aggression, and the scoring alone provokes anxiety and fear. At first, the percussion instruments form a stable, march-like core, on which the pitched instruments build lines and blocks of sound that penetrate the score irregularly. This procedure simultaneously causes more emotional effects: the heady sense of soldiers on the move, approaching quickly and requiring swift and precise responses from the chess players, Harry, Hermione, and Ron. The insertions of pitched sound cause the illusion of danger coming from more unpredictable quarters, and, at the same time, interacting with the sound effects that support the action.

As the game develops, the stringent quality of the march is abandoned and the amount of unpitched percussion is expanded. The result of these changes is a strengthening of the unpredictable character of the drama, suggesting a sense of the accidental and chaotic.

Quite remarkably, the chess scene is heralded by a short motif (fig. 7) that is heard in *The Fellowship of the Ring*: another adaptation of the Dies Irae opening motif:



Fig. 7. *Harry Potter*. Grave motif resembling the opening of Dies Irae.

The motif is performed in a very slow tempo and scored in low registers outlined by horns, thus endowing the scene with a grave, heavy feeling and a sense of suspense.

### Summing up *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

Although the music of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is characterised by uniformity and integration, the use of shifting orchestration, dynamic contrast, and of nearly specific references to established music styles and works implies that the musical

framing of the film compellingly directs the emotions of the audience. The shift from orchestral voicing, profiled by the familiar and reassuring sound of horn, to the frail and transparent sound of the Glockenspiel in the opening scenes, epitomises this procedure. The music is, in this respect, psychologically integrated seamlessly into the film as it supports the move from everyday life in Privet Lane to the magical universe of fantasy.

Whenever the music leaves the domain of the well-known and familiar to early modern sonorities of the twentieth century, that shift signifies anxiety and stress, and the music supports a related sense of the foreign and unknown. The arrangement of the music and the use of musical styles rest upon the assumption of different psychological responses to different types of music and different categories of sound.

Semiotically the music is shaped closely in accordance with the filmed scenes. The dream-like atmosphere, evoked by the somewhat unfamiliar sound of the Glockenspiel (played in a hesitating manner) is considerably softer and more blurred compared to a symphonic passage. The softer quality of the Glockenspiel -- in contrast to the full symphonic sound -- gains semiotic value that exceeds its psychological effect. In other words, the characteristic sound and expression are framed and partly isolated. Furthermore, as the sound of the Glockenspiel resembles other types of chimes, there is a connection to religious activities: chimes and bells are widely used in such cultural contexts as signifiers of gatherings, processions, sacrifices, supporting the magical moment's sense of the ceremonial and esoteric.

All in all, the scoring of *Harry Potter* does not only rely on the established film scoring practices and musical codes of western European musical discourse, but also draws heavily on codes made familiar in Williams' own body of work. The similarity to other examples of Williams' music for blockbuster films -- modern classics -- suggests that his music builds a genre of its own, allowing for cross-references as it plays with established musical metaphors. The music draws from a source that, in one form or another, is known to most of the audience; it leads to a form of intertextuality that allows for unconscious cross-referential links to other musical settings of fantasy films,

supporting exactly the sense of the otherworldly and imaginative leading to an ever-reassuring subject positioning.

There are, however, instances where the scoring draws directly on musical archetypes that are well established within the western European discourse. Among them is the short passage where the new students walk to their rooms after their first meal at Hogwarts [0:46:04]. The scene is accompanied by martial orchestral music in the style of the American Civil War classic, "Battle Hymn of the Republic", best known for its refrain "Glory, Glory Hallelujah." As the students process, the music adds a carefree, adventurous, and slightly comical atmosphere to the scene, as if the students were setting out on a field trip. Likewise, the magic Glockenspiel music suddenly expands into rousing orchestral arpeggios -- often heard in nineteenth-century tone poems -- as Ollivander finds out a proper wand for Harry Potter [0:26:04]. This technique is well known from numerous Walt Disney animated cartoons.

### Conclusion

The music for the two fantasy films discussed here is carefully prepared and composed to interact with the films in a way that appears highly homologous with their narratives. Whether it is the cruel and ominous fantasy world of *The Fellowship of the Ring* or the more juvenile, comedy-drama of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the music supports the face value of the narrative. It adds depth to scenes by anchoring their dramatic content and never seems to question them. Thus, the music is neatly integrated and interwoven into the film artifact.

The amount of musicalization (see p. 11) is modest and only occurs eminently in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The scoring of both films is generally kept within traditional musical expression; the soundtrack as such holds a strong musical orientation. This gives the impression that the music is autonomous and somehow detached from the rest of the cinematic elements. But, in truth, the music is carefully prepared to support and interact with the other elements: the music never stands out on its own.

Full pieces of music are the exception, suggesting that the free form and character of the musical Fantasy are the organising principle for fantasy film scoring (as well as for other films). The recurring themes and leitmotifs assume different disguises and settings but point in this direction. Any inner formal binding of the music would prevent it from integrating with the rest of the film's components. Thus, the free and formally unpredictable nature of a musical fantasy is the most viable form.

The film scores make extensive use of semiotic and pragmatic means to support the notions of proportion and dimension, as well as time, tempo, place, and locale. The music supports the emotions from the soft and sentimental through the joyful and aroused to the frightened and aggressive. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* the music generally suggests a strong sense of unity and coherence brought about through structural and sonorous similarity and variation. By employing highly contrasting elements and refined, differentiated orchestration, the music for *The Fellowship of the Ring* stresses the dramatic diversity of the narrative: from the careless, loving, and peaceful to the fearful, threatening and violent. In this way, the score supports the experience of a complex and troubled universe, an effect achieved by a subtle combination of psychological, semiotic, and pragmatic means.

The music is in both cases Eurocentric, supporting the notion of dramatised fantasy worlds as elements of modern western mythology. At the same time, it is quite remarkable that, apart from the use of Enya's music in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, none of the films discussed uses musical styles that can be considered up-to-date or contemporary. There are no direct references to either classical or popular music forms of the twenty-first century, no R&B, no Minimalism, no Electro. Except for the occasional use of synthesised sounds, the orchestrations make use entirely of acoustic instruments mostly belonging to the western European symphony orchestra, fostering the security of the well-known, familiar, and generally manageable<sup>6</sup>. This type of scoring builds a world of certainty and

<sup>6</sup> The use of the rock musical idiom as part of the prominent ball scene in *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire* (2005) [1:16:05], scored by Patrick Doyle and not by Williams, does surprisingly break with this principle. The effect can be heard as somewhat disturbing in the otherworldly atmosphere of the magic universe.

confidence, endowing the music – and the film – with a touch of the harmless, the absence of contemporary musical styles and expressive means secures temporal displacement, allowing us to escape from everyday life into a well-defined world of good and bad.

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