

# Movies, Music, Manipulation: Studying the Mechanics of Film Music

Alasdair Reid

Email Address:	info@fubest.fu-berlin.de
Time Slot:	Mondays, 1:30 p.m.
Language of Instruction:	English
Contact Hours:	45
ECTS Credits:	6

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## Course Description

Film is, in the minds of most people, primarily a visual entertainment - we talk of *watching* a film or going to *see* a movie. So when a filmmaker as respected as George Lucas states '*...sound and music are 50% of the entertainment in a movie*', many folks are taken by surprise. But why? In this course (which requires no pre-existing film or music education to fully enjoy) we will take an in-depth look at how music and sound help elevate the narrative of a film, manipulate and enhance a viewer's emotional journey across different genres and stories, and survey how the use of both has evolved in filmmaking over the course of 125 years.

We will begin with a discussion of how music and sound help bring to life the stories in film, proceeding to the stylistic origins of film music in the European classical tradition (if you believe John Williams wrote all those famous themes straight off the top of his head, then think again!). This will be followed by an investigation into what the transition from silent film to 'The Talkies' meant for Hollywood and the evolution of film music as we know it today. Our second task will be to situate the role of music in some of the most vital cultural movements of film history. For example, we will consider Prokofiev's music in Soviet-Russian war epics, why folk music was a natural fit for neo-realist Italian films and how the influence of music use in the French New Wave stretches all the way from the 1950's to the work of Tarantino in the present day. In our third unit, we explore the importance of songs in movies and how they can be used to build narrative beyond what the viewer sees on screen.

Each week of our fourth unit will focus on a genre, including action & adventure, horror, musicals, comedy - with detailed discussions of representative works in these genres from a variety of time periods and locations. For instance, during our week on musicals we will consider how the early history of the genre was situated in Hollywood, but quickly spread internationally including creative re-workings, such as *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*) and the truly global production, *Dancer in the Dark*, before coming full circle and returning to the USA with *Barbie*. Certain composers, such as Hans Zimmer and John Williams, have become mainstays within the film music canon; we'll examine some of their most beloved works and then ask the question - where to next? Dominated for decades by creators of a narrow type, film music has struggled to overcome the movie studio's resistance to new voices - in the final two units of the semester we'll look at emerging composers and compositions that are already reshaping the landscape of film music as we know it.

## Learning Objectives

Whilst fundamentally a historical review of music and sound's use in movies, this course also opens the door for students to develop a better understanding of how stories are constructed and communicated via filmmaking. As a creative art, the evolution of film music has been driven by cultural and technological change - with this in mind we will examine not just what happened over the history of film music but ask the question 'why?' By the course's end, students will have gained:

1. A deeper appreciation and insight into the creation of movie soundtracks and their importance to the storytelling process in film.

2. Critical thinking skills, developed through contextualising the cultural, geographical and historical forces that have shaped the journey of film music over the last 125 years.
3. Written and spoken communication skills that allow the student to more effectively construct and articulate their opinions, arguments and ideas.

### Student Profile

Should be in their fourth semester of college/university education or beyond.

### Assignments and Grading

Midterm exam: 300 points

Term-Paper: 300 points (to be submitted no later than **21:00 / 9pm on Monday, 4th May 2026**)

Independent Project report: 200 points (to be submitted no later than **21:00 / 9pm on Monday 13th April 2026**)

Reading responses in class: 100 points

Class participation: 100 points

Completion of the Midterm Exam as well as the Term Paper is needed for a grade.

FUB Grade	Points of 1,000
1.0	980-1,000
1.3	950-979
1.7	900-949
2.0	850-899
2.3	800-849
2.7	750-799
3.0	700-749
3.3	650-699
3.7	600-649
4.0	500-599
5.0	< 500

### Attendance

Attendance in class is **mandatory**. We also expect you to be **punctual** out of respect to both your instructor and your fellow students. An absence for more than half of a particular day's session will be considered an absence for that day.

If you cannot attend class because you are ill, please **notify your instructor** by e-mail (not via messenger service or through another student) before class. Any absence **without a notification** of your instructor before class will automatically be considered **unexcused**.

Absences because of **illness** are **excused**; however, for the **third** sick day and every other sick day after that (per course), you will need to turn in a **doctor's notice** ("Attest" in German) in order for them to count as excused, too. It is **your** responsibility to keep track of your absences and to know when a doctor's note is required. No doctor's notice issued more than three days after the day of illness will be accepted.

If you miss an **exam** due to an excused absence, your instructor and the FU-BEST team will arrange a make-up exam for you; you may also be entitled to a term paper **deadline extension**. If you, however, do not fulfill all course requirements needed for a grade by the (later) date determined by the program, passing the course is no longer possible.

Please also note that if you miss **more than half** of a course's sessions (even if due to excused absence), passing the course is no longer possible.

Personal travel and visits by relatives or friends are **not** accepted as reasons for absence (i.e., absences for these reasons always count as **unexcused**).

Regarding **unexcused** absences, please note the following:

- Any unexcused absence has consequences for at least the participation portion of the grade.
- Two unexcused absences lead to a lowering of the course grade by a fraction.
- Three unexcused absences will result in a 5.0 (equivalent to an "F") on the transcript.

## Literature

Online readings on the FUB platform Blackboard.

Readings will be drawn from scholarly and journalistic sources, such as Mera and Burnand's *European Film Music* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishers, 2006), Sider and Freeman's *Soundscapes: The School of Sound Lectures 1998-2001* (Wallflower Press, 2003), and Hubbert's *Celluloid Symphonies* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011).

In addition to readings, this course will include the focused viewing and listening of film. Due to the comprehensive nature of this course, we will not be viewing full films in or outside of class. Rather, we will focus on isolated film clips in order to understand the function of music and sound in film in a detailed and thorough manner.

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Course Schedule

Calendar	Topics, Readings, etc.
<p><b>Session 1</b></p>	<p><b>Unit: An Introduction to Film Music</b>  <b>Topic: What Does Film Music Do?</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goodfellas (USA, 1990), Psycho (USA, 1960)</li> <li>• Reservoir Dogs (USA, 1993), Fargo (USA, 1996)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The Role of Music” from Ford’s The Sound Of Pictures (2010), pp. 1-12.</li> <li>• “Chapters 1-4” from Karlin + Wright’s ‘On The Track’ (1990), pp. 3-44.</li> <li>• ‘Composing For The Coen Brothers’ from Sider’s Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures, (2003), pp. 195-208.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 2</b></p>	<p><b>Unit: An Introduction to Film Music</b>  <b>Topic: Silent And Not So Silent Films: From Live Music to Early Recordings</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L’anatomie du conscrit (Anatomy of a Draftee – France, 1905) and other selected Gaumont synchronized-sound Phonoscenes,</li> <li>• The Jazz Singer (USA, 1927)</li> <li>• The Broadway Melody (USA, 1929)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Playing the Pictures: Music and the Silent Film (1895-1925)” from Hubbert’s Celluloid Symphonies (2011), pp. 1-34.</li> <li>• “All Singing, Dancing, and Talking: Music in the Early Sound Film (1926-1934)” from Hubbert’s Celluloid Symphonies (2011), pp. 109-132.</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metropolis (Germany, 1927)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 3</b></p>	<p><b>Unit: Situating Film Music</b>  <b>Topic: Europe + The Golden Age of Hollywood</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• King Kong (USA, 1933), Captain Blood (USA, 1935),</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Rebecca: music to raise the dead” from Sullivan Hitchcock’s Music (2006), pp. 58-80.</li> <li>• “Wagner’s Prelude” from Hickman’s Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music (2005)</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rebecca (USA, 1940)</li> </ul>

<b>Session 4</b>	<p><b>Unit: Situating Film Music</b></p> <p><b>Topic: Musical Style, Nationalism, Propaganda, and the Imagined Past in Epic Films</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Александр Невский (Alexander Nevsky – USSR, 1938), Dunkirk (UK, 2017), Listen To Britain (UK, 1942)</li> <li>• Ladri di biciclette (Bicycle Thieves – Italy, 1948)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov, “Statement on Sound” (translated from the Russian, pub. 1928) in <i>Film Theory and Criticism</i> (1999), pp. 360-362.</li> <li>• Cooke’s “Early Sound Films In The Soviet Union” in <i>A History of Film Music</i> (2008), pp. 1-5.</li> <li>• Brody + Gabbard, “Louis Malle’s Elevator To The Gallows” (2016), pp. 1-5.</li> <li>• Dyer, “Music, people, and reality: the case of Italian neo-realism” in <i>European Film Music</i> (2006), pp. 28-40.</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Броненосец «Потемкин» (Battleship Potemkin – USSR, 1925)</li> <li>• Ascenseur Pour L’Echafaud (FRA, 1958)</li> </ul>
<b>Session 5</b>	<p><b>Unit: The Function of Film Music</b></p> <p><b>Topic: Music: Manipulator of Emotions</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Star Wars (USA, 1977), Schindler’s List (USA, 1993)</li> <li>• Batman: The Dark Knight (USA, 2008), Sherlock Holmes (USA, 2008)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Playing The Drama’ from Karlin + Wright’s ‘On The Track’ (1990), pp. 127-161.</li> <li>• ‘Hans Zimmer’ from Schrader’s ‘Score: The Interviews’ (2017), pp. 65-86.</li> <li>• ‘A Field Guide To The Musical Leitmotifs of Star Wars’ from Ross, <i>The New Yorker</i>, (2018)</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close Encounters of the Third Kind (USA, 1977), Star Wars Leitmotif Montage</li> <li>• Interstellar (USA, 2014).</li> </ul>
<b>Session 6</b>	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>

<p><b>Session 7</b></p>	<p><b>Unit: <i>The Function of Film Music</i></b></p> <p><b>Topic: How Songs Define The Movies</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fish Tank (UK 2009), Trainspotting (UK, 1996),</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chp 6 'West Side Story &amp; Saturday Night Fever' from Grant's <i>The Hollywood Film Musical</i> (2012), pp. 1-16.</li> <li>• 'Constructing Consensus, Encouraging Difference' from Sider's <i>Soundscape: The School of Sound Lectures</i> (2003), pp. 170-183.</li> <li>• Chp 7 'Scoring Trainspotting' from Smith's <i>Trainspotting</i> (2021), pp. 1-9.</li> <li>• 'Soundtrack: The Perfect "Quentin Tape"' from Bailey's <i>Pulp Fiction</i> (2013), pp. 1-11.</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saturday Night Fever (USA, 1977)</li> <li>• Pulp Fiction (USA, 1994)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 8</b></p>	<p><b>Unit: <i>How Music Builds Genre</i></b></p> <p><b>Topic: Musicals</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Les parapluies de Cherbourg (The Umbrellas of Cherbourg – FRA/GER, 1964), Dancer in the Dark (International, 2000)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohan, "Introduction: Musicals of the Studio Era" in <i>Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader</i> (2002), pp. 1-15.</li> <li>• Heldt, "The Next To Last Song: Dancer In The Dark (and The Sound of Music)" in <i>Music and Levels of Narration in Film</i> (2016), pp. 162-170.</li> <li>• 'Introduction' from Grant's <i>The Hollywood Film Musical</i> (2012), pp. 1-5.</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet Me in St. Louis (USA, 1944)</li> <li>• Singin' In The Rain (USA, 1952)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Session 9</b></p>	<p><b>Unit: <i>How Music Builds Genre</i></b></p> <p><b>Topic: Horror</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Låt den rätte komma in <i>Let the Right One In</i> (SWE, 2008)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Johan Söderqvist (composer for Låt den rätte komma in) interview with Maintitles: Film Music Community</li> <li>• 'Secrets of The Shining', BBC radio interview with Gordon Stainforth (2019), <a href="http://www.gordonstainforthbelper.co.uk/BBCprogs/Paul%20Lavery_%20From%20Daniel%20Blake%20to%20Carlos%20Acosta;%20Secrets%20of%20The%20Shining.mp3">http://www.gordonstainforthbelper.co.uk/BBCprogs/Paul%20Lavery_%20From%20Daniel%20Blake%20to%20Carlos%20Acosta;%20Secrets%20of%20The%20Shining.mp3</a>, 13:19-39:36</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Shining (USA, 1980)</li> </ul>

<b>Session 10</b>	<p><b>Unit: How Music Builds Genre</b></p> <p><b>Topic: Action &amp; Adventure</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Adventures of Robin Hood (USA, 1938), Heat (USA, 1995)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Carpet, Wallpaper, and Earmuffs: The Hollywood Score (1935-1959)” from Celluloid Symphonies (2011), pp. 169-208.</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Per un pugno di dollar (“A Fistful of Dollars” – ITA/GER/SPA, 1964)</li> </ul>
<b>Session 11</b>	<p><b>Unit: How Music Builds Genre</b></p> <p><b>Topic: Comedy + Rom Com</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Great Dictator (USA, 1940), Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain (<i>Amélie</i>) (FRA, 2001), Notting Hill (UK, 1999)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daubney, “Music as a satirical device in the Ealing Comedies” from European Film Music (2006), pp. 60-72.</li> <li>• ‘Styles + Genres: Comedy’ from Karlin’s On The Track (1990), pp. 459-465.</li> <li>• Leach, “How to Score Comedy” on tutsplus.com <a href="https://music.tutsplus.com/tutorials/how-to-score-comedy--audio-20733?_ga=2.29427900.248381407.1546869389-16967257.1515665612">https://music.tutsplus.com/tutorials/how-to-score-comedy--audio-20733?_ga=2.29427900.248381407.1546869389-16967257.1515665612</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ladykillers (UK, 1955),</li> </ul>
<b>Session 12</b>	<p><b>Unit: The Evolution of Scoring</b></p> <p><b>Topic: Sound As Music in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</b></p> <p><b>Film Selections</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under The Skin (UK 2014), The Zone of Interest (USA, 2023)</li> </ul> <p><b>Readings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 Interviews with Johan Johansson (2016), pp. 1-10.</li> <li>• 3 Interviews with Mica Levi (2013-2016), pp. 1-7.</li> <li>• ‘The Sound of The Zone of Interest’ Dolby Institute Podcast, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_TZTCQ53ss">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_TZTCQ53ss</a>, (2023) 0:00-41:09</li> </ul> <p><b>Viewings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrival (USA, 2016)</li> <li>• Sicario (USA, 2015)</li> </ul>

**Session 13****Unit: *The Evolution of Scoring*****Topic: Where To Next? New Voices in Film****Film Selections**

- Joker (USA, 2019), Tenet (USA, 2020), Oppenheimer (USA, 2023)

**Readings**

- 'Hildur Gudnadottir' Score: The Podcast, <https://youtu.be/0uNgcKYpWPs?si=BoDQb2MfNmluXiKL&t=820>, 13:40-1:05:40
- 'Ludwig Göransson' Score: The Podcast, [https://youtu.be/sGVeTRGy4lQ?si=doZW1\\_net4ZJqs2-&t=1663](https://youtu.be/sGVeTRGy4lQ?si=doZW1_net4ZJqs2-&t=1663), 27:51-1:27:00

**Viewings**

- Chernobyl (International, 2019)