

For SCL's SCORE

Musical Development in Film Scores

**By
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In a previous article I discussed Walter Scharf's clever technique of scoring the final sequence first followed by the film's beginning in order to create structural "bookends" to a film's musical score. In this article I'd like to continue explaining Walter's approach by dealing with the middle of a film score or how one might approach the development from after the beginning scenes to before the film's climax.

Before I go on, I should add parenthetically that Scharf's work method advocates scoring the penultimate moments as the third sequence, the scenes following the initial exposition as the fourth sequence, working back to front to the inner core of the story. His viewpoint (one that I share) is that after remembering firsts and lasts, audiences remember what dramatically followed and preceded these moments.

We spend so much time underscoring the nature and development of characterization and action in a film, that we often lose sight of a musical statement's right to develop on its own terms. You might think "No, that's concert music. Film music's function is to be subordinate and act as a counterpoint to the visual." Well, in the best Talmudic fashion you are right and I believe I'm also correct; the two are not mutually exclusive. There is a method to accomplish both. Here is a shorthand, procedural outline to aid in making your scores develop musically as well as dramatically.

1. As you first go about scoring the final act, compose and assign a personifying energy (motif, texture, rhythm, color or harmonic progression) to each essential character.
2. Reconcile their relationships with each other and the action of the climactic scene itself. For example, if one character is a melodic motif and another is a jagged rhythm and a third a singular harmony or texture, then an ensemble expression can be constructed using all three of those parameters simultaneously.
3. In the initial scenes in Act I introduce each character's parameters in a style that keeps the other elements minimally exposed. For example, a melody can play itself, a chordal texture can slip in and out discretely, an individual instrumental color can solo, etc.
4. Now the development begins in the middle scenes by first asking these questions:
 - A. How has the character changed (or not changed) from the previous scenes?
 - B. How has the mood (reflected by the action) of the current scene darkened, lightened, contrasted, or supported the story's previous history?
- C. What actions or character traits in this scene will propel us eventually into a future scene?

- D. Most importantly, how can I reflect these changes in pure musical terms?
For example increased scenic activity or tension may mean either directly reflecting it in heightened tempo or number of notes, or dramatically contrasting it by suspending a tempo or rhythm and opting for an intensified texture or harmony.
5. From a developmental point of view in the middle scenes, the fun now is constantly referring back to the PAST, PRESENT, and FUTURE of your characters' energies (motifs, textures, rhythms, colors or harmonic progressions) and making each scene come alive by reconciling the development of that pure musical idea with the characters' growth and the concurrent contour of the action.

Remember the best film scores are more than just subservient counterpoint; they are integral musical expressions that are singularly true to their own intrinsic definition and destiny.

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