



Analyzing the Form and Function of Film Music in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* within Anthropological Contexts

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Abstract

Background and Aims: This research delves into the intricate world of film music, focusing on the iconic film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" within anthropological contexts. The objective is to analyze the form and function of the film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" within anthropological contexts.

Materials and Methods: Employing a multifaceted methodology that combines anthropological, musical, and cinematic analyses, the study explores how music shapes psychological states, maintains sensory continuity, reveals character's inner activities, and intensifies emotional landscapes within the film. Drawing upon a rich interdisciplinary literature review encompassing film studies, anthropology, and musicology, the research establishes a theoretical framework that guides the analysis.

Results: The results reveal the profound impact of music on the cinematic narrative, with specific examples showcasing how musical choices manipulate audience emotions and enrich character development. The interdisciplinary synthesis of findings emphasizes the interconnectedness of music, culture, and storytelling in this cinematic masterpiece.

Conclusion: This study offers insights into the cultural fusion of Eastern and Western musical elements and highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration between film studies and musicology in advancing film music analysis.

Keywords: Film Music; Anthropology; Cultural Significance; Emotional Impact; Interdisciplinary Analysis

Introduction

The enthralling world of cinema has long captivated audiences, offering a multi-sensory experience that transcends the boundaries of culture and language (Berghahn, 2021; Bax, 2022). Within this realm, the marriage of music and film is a dynamic synergy that often goes unnoticed yet plays a pivotal role in shaping the viewer's emotional journey (Grant, 2012; Donnelly, 2013; Donnelly, 2023). One film that exemplifies this synergy and has left an indelible mark on the world of cinema is Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Released in 2000, this martial arts epic not only astonished viewers with its breathtaking visuals but also enchanted them with its evocative musical score (Van Ziegert, 2013; Zhu, 2013; Deshpande & Mazaj, 2018; Herring, 2024).

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" is a cinematic masterpiece that artfully blends Eastern and Western elements, immersing viewers in a world where ancient Chinese traditions meet the modern cinematic narrative (Santas, 2007; Botha, 2012; Teo, 2013; Tsai, 2023). The film's composer, Tan Dun, deftly employs musical styles and instruments to craft a sonic tapestry that weaves seamlessly through the film's rich tapestry of emotions and actions. This profound integration of music within the cinematic narrative offers an intriguing avenue for exploration at the intersection of film studies, anthropology, and musicology (Rea, 2006; Richardson, 2011; Dubowsky, 2016; Khanetnok et al., 2023; MacDonald, 2023).

Expanding on the historical context of film music within cinema studies, it is essential to recognize the evolution of film scoring techniques and their impact on cinematic storytelling. Historically, film music has transitioned from simple, piano-based accompaniments in the silent era to complex orchestral compositions in the sound era, marking a significant shift in how music interacts with visual narratives (Mahon, 2000; Qureshi, 2000; Greenfield, 2001; Samuels et al., 2020). The emergence of iconic film composers such as Max Steiner, Bernard Herrmann, and Ennio Morricone further propelled the recognition of film music as an integral component of cinematic artistry, influencing subsequent generations of filmmakers and composers alike. This historical trajectory underscores the transformative role of film music in shaping audience perceptions and enhancing narrative immersion, paving the way for contemporary





approaches to film scoring seen in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (Sanders & Banjo, 2022; Richardson, 2011; Dubowsky, 2016).

The research problem at the core of this study is to comprehensively analyze the role of music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" through an anthropological lens. This entails delving into how the film's music serves as a cultural artifact that reflects societal values, traditions, and emotions. Additionally, it seeks to explore how the music influences the audience's perception of the film's narrative, characters, and overall cinematic experience (Kim, 2012; Feld, 2013; Sanders & Banjo, 2022).

This study carries significant importance on multiple fronts. Firstly, it contributes to film studies by offering a novel perspective on the intricate interplay between music and cinema, particularly in a cross-cultural context. Secondly, it enriches the domain of anthropology by unveiling how the film's music becomes a cultural mirror, reflecting the values and ethos of ancient China. Moreover, this research is invaluable to musicologists, as it sheds light on the fusion of Eastern and Western musical styles, a noteworthy hallmark of Tan Dun's composition (Everett & Lau, 2004; Murthy, 2013; Clarke et al., 2015).

To clarify and narrow down the specific aspects of the film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" that will be analyzed, this study will focus on dissecting key musical elements such as melody, harmony, instrumentation, and thematic motifs. By examining how these musical components interact with the film's narrative, characters, and cultural context, the research aims to uncover how music contributes to the cinematic experience. Through this targeted analysis, the study seeks to elucidate how Tan Dun's score enhances emotional resonance, conveys cultural symbolism, and reinforces thematic motifs within the film, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the form and function of film music in this cinematic masterpiece.

Objective

To analyze the form and function of the film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" within anthropological contexts.

Literature review

The fusion of music and cinema has fascinated scholars across various disciplines, and its significance in shaping the cinematic experience cannot be overstated. In analyzing the form and function of film music within anthropological contexts, several key themes and studies emerge that provide valuable insights into our research objective of understanding the role of music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

The Anthropology of Film Music: Anthropological approaches to film studies have gained prominence recently. Scholars like Steven Feld have highlighted the importance of ethnographic research in understanding how music functions within a cultural context (Davis et al., 2015; Gray, 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant when examining films deeply rooted in Chinese culture, such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

The Cultural Significance of Music: The relationship between music and culture is fundamental to anthropology. Studies by Alan Merriam and Bruno Nettl have explored how music reflects cultural values and traditions (Coplan, 2002; Finnegan, 2012). In the case of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," understanding the cultural significance of the film's music is essential in unraveling its anthropological dimensions.

Music in Chinese Cinema: Chinese cinema has a rich tradition of incorporating music as a storytelling tool. The works of Yingjin Zhang and Yuezhi Zhao have shed light on the role of music in Chinese cinema and its ability to evoke emotions, convey cultural messages, and reinforce national identity (Lu et al., 2011; Yang, 2023). These insights provide a foundation for analyzing the use of music in this particular Chinese epic.

The Emotional Impact of Film Music: The emotional resonance of film music is a well-researched topic. Scholars such as Claudia Gorbman have explored how music can shape the audience's emotional responses and enhance their engagement with the narrative. Given the emotional depth of "Crouching Tiger,

Hidden Dragon," it is crucial to investigate how its music contributes to this aspect (Belk & Kozinets, 2005; Schäfer et al., 2013).

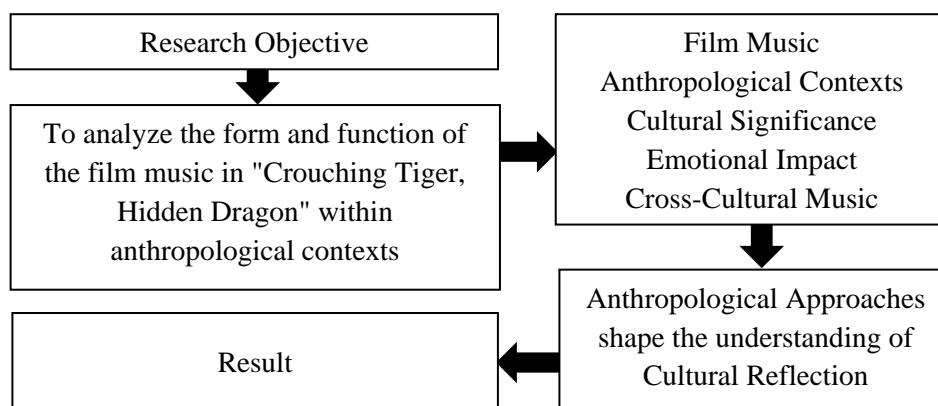
Cross-Cultural Music Integration: The film's composer, Tan Dun, has been acclaimed for his ability to blend Eastern and Western musical styles seamlessly. The studies of cross-cultural music integration by Richard Wolf and others provide insights into the challenges and achievements of such musical fusions, making them relevant to our analysis of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (Litster & Charles, 2022)

Film Music Analysis: Film music analysis methods and frameworks, as developed by scholars like Royal S. Brown and David Neumeyer, offer tools for dissecting the intricate relationships between music, narrative, and character development in cinema (Keown, 2015; Chase, 2020; Jackson, 2021). These methodologies will be instrumental in our analysis of the form and function of music in the film.

In summary, the literature review underscores the interdisciplinary nature of our research objective, which encompasses anthropology, film studies, and musicology. It also highlights the cultural, emotional, and cinematic dimensions that the music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" encompasses, setting the stage for our in-depth analysis within anthropological contexts.

Conceptual Framework

Central to this framework is the notion that anthropological approaches shape our understanding of how film music serves as a cultural reflection, illuminating societal values, traditions, and emotions embedded within the cinematic narrative. By examining the intricate interplay between music, culture, and emotion, this study seeks to unveil the profound influence of film music on shaping the cinematic experience and contributing to cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, as shown in the diagram below.



Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to analyze the form and function of film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" within anthropological contexts. The methodology consists of several interconnected phases, each designed to provide a holistic understanding of how music contributes to the cinematic experience, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The methodology for analyzing the film music

Methodology Phase	Description
Data Collection	Film viewing and audio analysis: Immersive viewing of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and simultaneous analysis of the film's soundtrack. Transcription of key musical segments
Literature Review	An extensive review of relevant literature in film studies, anthropology, and musicology to establish a theoretical framework and context



Methodology Phase	Description
Anthropological Contextualization	Exploration of cultural and societal elements within the film, identifying themes, traditions, and values represented. Study of cultural texts and anthropological theories
Musical Analysis	In-depth musical analysis focusing on melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, and emotional evocation. Relating musical elements to the film's narrative and cultural context
Psychological Impact Assessment	Examination of how the film's music influences the audience's psychological states, including emotional responses and immersion
Narrative and Visual Integration	Analysis of how music interacts with visual elements and narrative structure, contributing to character development and plot progression
Sensory Continuity Evaluation	Investigation into how music aids in maintaining sensory continuity, ensuring a seamless cinematic experience
Character's Inner Activities Expression	Exploration of how music reveals the inner thoughts and emotions of characters within the film
Emotion Building Assessment	Assessment of how music is utilized to build and heighten emotional experiences for the audience
Comparison with Western and Eastern Musical Elements	Comparative analysis of Western and Eastern musical elements within the soundtrack, highlighting cultural fusion
Interdisciplinary Synthesis	Integration of findings from anthropological, musical, and cinematic analyses to form a comprehensive understanding
Conclusion and Implications	Synthesis of research findings to address the research problem and objectives. Discussion of broader implications in film music and anthropology

From Table 1, this multifaceted methodology ensures a comprehensive examination of the film's music within anthropological contexts, shedding light on its cultural, emotional, and narrative significance. It employs a combination of qualitative and interdisciplinary approaches, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between music and cinema.

Results

The exploration of music's role within the cinematic narrative is a journey into the heart of storytelling, where every note orchestrates emotions, punctuates actions, and breathes life into characters. In exploring the film's musical composition, dissecting its profound impact on psychological states, its role in sustaining sensory continuity, its portrayal of characters' inner realms, and its mastery in sculpting and intensifying the emotional landscape. Through meticulous examination, we shed light on the intricate craftsmanship underpinning the film's musical tapestry, unveiling its profound influence within the anthropological contexts of "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon."

1. Emphasizing Psychological Effects

In our analysis of the film's role in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," we first delve into its ability to emphasize psychological effects. Within the fourth movement, "The Eternal Vow," a pivotal scene at 01:09:47 showcases the music's impact. The initial eleven bars of this composition feature the harp, weaving a cheerful rhythm, as shown in Figure 1. This choice in instrumentation successfully engenders a sense of joy, mirroring the romantic union between the characters Yujiaolong and Luo Xiaohu, accompanied by the celebratory mood of Luo Xiaohu's tribe, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 1 The harp part at the beginning of the fourth movement



Figure 2 Luo Xiaohu and his tribe are celebrating

However, as the music progresses, transitioning from the first to the forty-second bar, a cello solo takes center stage, introducing a significantly slower rhythm in 4/4 beats, as shown in Figure 3. This deliberate shift in tempo and mood serves to evoke a melancholic atmosphere. The unrequited love between characters Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu, a theme left unacknowledged within the film's narrative, is subtly conveyed through Luo Xiaohu's nuanced emotions, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 3 The cello solo part at the beginning of the 42nd bar in the fourth movement



Figure 4 The dialogue screen between Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu

Moving on to the first movement, "Night Fight," which unfolds at 00:11:19 in the movie, we encounter an entirely different tonal landscape. Here, percussion instruments dominate from the fifty-third to the one-hundred-fortieth bar, meticulously crafting a tense atmosphere. This musical choice aligns seamlessly with the film's plot, wherein the character Yu Jiaolong infiltrates Baylor Mansion to steal the Qingming Sword, leading to a climactic confrontation with Baylor Mansion's formidable bodyguards.

In the film's second movement, "Through the Bamboo Forest," commencing at 01:35:03, the tension is palpable from the very outset. The viola takes the lead from the second bar onward, sustaining an atmosphere fraught with nervous anticipation, as shown in Figure 5). This mirrors the cinematic portrayal of the intense battle between characters Li Mubai and Yu Jiaolong within the bamboo forest, as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 5 The viola part at the beginning of the second movement



Figure 6 Yu Jiaolong and Li Mubai are fighting in the bamboo forest

In the third movement, "Encounters," which begins at 00:55:01 in the movie, we find yet another layer of tension conveyed through the music. Starting from the eleventh bar, plucked strings from the first, second, and viola harmonize to create an atmosphere of anticipation, as shown in Figure 7. This mirrors the film's depiction of Luo Xiaohu leading his tribe in an attempt to rob Yujiaolong, pitting them against Yujiaolong's bodyguards, as shown in Figure 8.

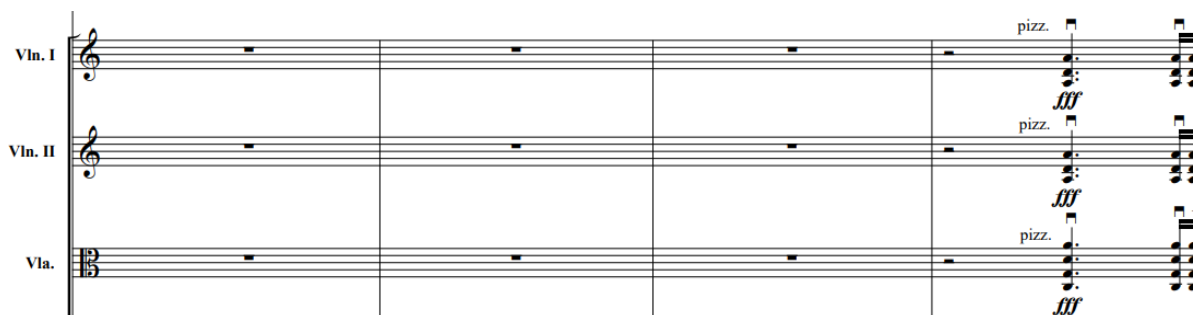


Figure 7 The plucking performance of the string group in the third movement



Figure 8 Luo Xiaohu and his tribe rob Yu Jiaolong

Through these examples, we witness the film's music wielding its power to emphasize and manipulate the psychological states of both characters and audiences, underscoring its integral role in the cinematic experience.

2. Establishing Sensory Continuity

In the context of our analysis of the film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," we focus on the music's role in establishing sensory continuity. The first music piece within the first movement, titled "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," commences at the twenty-eighth bar of the movie at 00:05:49, featuring a synchronized performance by a string orchestra, as shown in Figure 9. This musical interlude artfully captures the bustling ambiance and grandeur of the vibrant city of Beijing. Notably, this segment lacks character dialogues or combat sequences; however, the presence of music serves as a cohesive element, seamlessly knitting together various scenes and enhancing the film's overall narrative continuity, as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 9 String orchestra playing simultaneously in the fifth movement



Figure 10 The bustling scenes of Beijing

Through this musical technique, the film's music demonstrates its unique capacity to transcend language and action, acting as an auditory thread that binds the narrative fabric of the movie together. The strategic use of music in scenes devoid of dialogue or conflict highlights its ability to maintain the viewer's sensory engagement and sustain a coherent cinematic experience.

3. Expressing the Character's Inner Activities

Continuing our exploration of the form and function of film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," we delve into how the music expresses the inner activities of the characters. In the fifth movement, titled "To the South," the second piece commences at 01:23:25 in the movie. The first notes emerge in the twenty-seventh bar of this movement, featuring a flute to create an upbeat atmosphere, as shown in Figure 11. This composition mirrors a scene in the movie where Yu Jiaolong disguises herself as a martial arts expert while journeying southward, engaging in a playful skirmish with multiple individuals in a restaurant. Remarkably, even though this sequence involves combat, it refrains from portraying a tense ambiance. Instead, it employs cheerful rhythms and the crisp sounds of the flute to vividly convey the mischievous personality of the character Yu Jiaolong, as shown in Figure 12.



Figure 11 The flute part at the beginning of the 27th bar in the fifth movement



Figure 12 Yu Jiaolong fights with multiple people in a restaurant

This musical choice demonstrates how film music can serve as a window into the characters' emotional landscapes, providing viewers with a deeper understanding of their personas and intentions. By conveying the playful nature of Yu Jiaolong's actions through the lighthearted melody, the music enriches the

audience's engagement with the narrative. Moving to the fourth movement, "Yearning of the Sword," the third composition unfolds at 00:48:53 in the movie. Beginning in the fifty-sixth bar of the fourth movement, Figure 13 shows this piece employs a cello solo to perform a slow, protracted melody. It mirrors a scene in the film where Li Mubai reminisces about his past experiences with the Qingming Sword while holding the sword, as shown in Figure 14.



Figure 13 The cello solo part at the beginning of the 56th bar of the fourth movement



Figure 14 Li Mubai reminisces in front of the Qingming Sword

In this instance, the film music serves as a conduit for expressing Li Mubai's introspective journey, emphasizing the emotional weight of his connection to the Qingming Sword. The mournful cello encapsulates the character's yearning and contemplation, allowing viewers to share his sentiments in depth. Through these examples, the film's music emerges as a potent tool for revealing and amplifying the inner dimensions of its characters, offering audiences a more profound connection with the film's protagonists.

4. Building Emotions

In the pursuit of analyzing the form and function of film music in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," we focus on how the music constructs emotions within the cinematic experience.

The first piece of music in the first movement, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," initiates at the fifth bar at 00:00:40, when the movie's opening title emerges. It employs a multifaceted ensemble, including the

alto flute, vertical flute, percussion instrument group, violin group, viola, cello, and bass tuba, to deliver an auditory impact that ensures the audience's attention is drawn to the movie's opening title.

The second piece, found in the fourth movement, is titled "A Wedding Interrupted" and commences at 01:14:13 in the film. It adopts a cello solo glissando performance format, as shown in Figure 15, effectively portraying the tense atmosphere as the character Luo Xiaohu confronts the wedding procession during Yu Jialong's wedding, as shown in Figure 16.



Figure 15 Cello solo glissando performance



Figure 16 The scene of Yu Jialong getting married

In the context of these compositions, the film music serves to elicit specific emotions from the audience. The grandeur and complexity of the orchestration in the first movement's opening sequence command attention, setting the stage for the movie's unfolding narrative. Conversely, the cello solo glissando in the fourth movement intensifies the atmosphere, magnifying the tension during a crucial scene. By manipulating musical elements, such as instrumentation and performance techniques, the film's soundtrack becomes a powerful tool for building and shaping emotions, augmenting the overall cinematic experience.

The seventh bar of the music piece, "Farewell," in the sixth movement, occurs at 01:07:53 in the film. This segment utilizes a cello solo to render a melodious and slow melody, as shown in Figure 17, signifying a poignant moment in the movie where Yu Jialong and Luo Xiaohu reside in Xinjiang and develop a deep love for each other. Yet, their physical distance from their hometown fosters a psychological longing for their roots, as shown in Figure 18.



Figure 17 The cello solo part at the beginning of the seventh bar of the sixth movement



Figure 18 The scene of Yu Jiaolong and Luo Xiaohu riding horses

This musical choice masterfully underscores the characters' emotional journey, using the cello's expressive capabilities to convey the deep sense of longing and nostalgia they experience. It demonstrates how film music can be a conduit for evoking complex emotions within the audience, enhancing the storytelling and character development in the film.

Discussion

The analysis of psychological effects achieved through music in the film aligns with existing research on the emotional impact of film music (Gorbman, 2013; Schäfer et al., 2013). The transition in mood and tempo within the "The Eternal Vow" scene effectively underscores the emotional complexity of the characters' relationships, consistent with the film's deep narrative. This aligns with the theoretical principle that music can shape emotional responses in a cinematic context (Gorbman, 2013). Furthermore, the study demonstrates how film music contributes to the audience's psychological engagement, enhancing the immersive cinematic experience (Kim, 2012).

The role of music in maintaining sensory continuity resonates with the concept of music as a cohesive element in film (Donnelly, 2013). The string orchestra's synchronized performance in Beijing's bustling scenes demonstrates the film's skillful use of music to connect disparate visual elements and maintain narrative coherence. This aligns with the notion that music can transcend language and action, becoming an auditory thread that binds the narrative fabric (Everett & Lau, 2004).

The analysis of how music expresses the inner activities of the characters aligns with previous research on music's ability to convey character emotions and intentions (Rea, 2006; Qureshi, 2000). Using the flute to represent Yu Jiaolong's playful nature and the cello's mournful tones to convey Li Mubai's introspection highlights how music enriches character development. This consistency with established theoretical principles reinforces the significance of music in conveying character depth.

Examining how music constructs emotions is consistent with research on manipulating musical elements for emotional impact (Richardson, 2011; Schäfer et al., 2013). The orchestration in the film's opening sequence effectively commands attention and sets the stage for the narrative. The cello solo glissando intensifies tension during crucial scenes. These findings are in harmony with the theoretical understanding that film music is a tool for shaping audience emotions (Santas, 2007).

Conclusion

The study on "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" has provided valuable insights into the cinematic experience through a comprehensive analysis of film music within anthropological contexts. The research methodology combined qualitative and interdisciplinary approaches, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between music and cinema. The results showed that music in the film effectively emphasizes psychological effects, establishes sensory continuity, expresses the character's inner activities, and builds emotions. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection of film, music, and anthropology, highlighting the cultural, emotional, and cinematic



dimensions of music in the film. The study highlights the importance of considering anthropological contexts when analyzing film music. It highlights the intricate craftsmanship of the film's musical tapestry and its integral role in the cinematic experience.

Recommendation

1. The research suggests that future studies on film music should incorporate anthropological approaches to understand its cultural dimensions and role in conveying values and traditions. Researchers can use anthropologists like Steven Feld to explore ethnographic aspects of music in cinema, especially in films deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts. This interdisciplinary approach can enhance our understanding of the cultural significance of film music and its impact on audience engagement.

2. The study "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" highlights the intricate relationship between music, narrative, and character development in film music. By combining film studies and musicology expertise, researchers can develop comprehensive frameworks and methodologies for analyzing film music's form and function. This interdisciplinary synergy can deepen our understanding of film music's emotional, cultural, and narrative dimensions and may lead to innovative approaches to film music analysis in diverse cinematic contexts.

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