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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Unsung Force in Children's Motion Picture: How musical underscore contributes to
the quality, safety, and enjoyability of films targeting child audiences

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

Crystal Frost

2018

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2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Unsung Force in Children's Motion Picture: How musical underscore contributes to the quality, safety, and enjoyability of films targeting child audiences

Crystal Frost

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Ian Krouse, Chair

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted on the emotional and psychological effects music has on children, very little research exists on the relationship between children and the music that underscores their movies. No formal studies exist on compositional approaches to the scoring of children's films. Most significantly, the rapidly growing interest in media effects on children is lacking in a crucial way: focusing entirely on the visual and thematic content of motion picture, it underestimates the role underscore (aka 'background music') plays in how visual and thematic content is perceived and processed. My research, which explores these relationships from musical, cinematic, developmental, and educational perspectives, will serve as a gateway to new approaches for scholars in each of these fields, bringing new insight to the table. This exploratory study will merge existing theories across several disciplines, and prime readers in lesser-known concepts, defining new and often misused terms. Understanding the ways in which underscore impacts child audiences

will not only serve as a tool for improving motion picture to better fit their needs and preferences, but it will also unveil lesser known compositional principles for producing underscore that specifically engages with and speaks to children, improving the overall quality and impact of the visual and thematic content.

Keywords: Children, Film, Underscore, Composition, Media Effects, Music, Soundtrack, Communications, Development, Family Movies, Motion Picture, Visual Media, Film Theory, Mickey-Mousing, Media Violence, animation

The dissertation of Crystal Frost is approved.

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2018

Dedicated to my Dad, the person whose passion for music and appreciation for film fueled my own throughout this journey—and the only person on earth who has listened to every note of music I've ever written! Love you, Dad.

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Acronyms

FQF	Four-Quadrant Film.....	8
GFF	Golden Family Film.....	11
CFM	Children Film Music.....	27
TEA	Techniques, Effects, Approaches.....	41
CAUV	Compositional Approaches to Underscoring Violence.....	67
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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

These videos are to be viewed for educational purposes only.

Gibby - Video File

A film by Greg Lyon | Music by Crystal A. Frost

First Love - Video File

A short film by Cecilia Albertini | Music by Crystal A. Frost

Pet - Video File

A short film by Graciela Sarabia | Music by Crystal A. Frost

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Crystal Frost

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FILM HIGHLIGHTS

Gibby (2016)

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Best Short Film, Massachusetts
Independent Film Festival, 2015

Pas a Vendre (2013)

Best Foreign Short, Burbank
International Film Festival, 2016

Crowbar (2011)

Feature Film, Chemical Burn
Entertainment, 2014

COLLABORATIONS

Stepped On (2014)

Carrot & Pickle (2016)

Matt Groening Initiative Selections

Doubleblind (2013)

Collaboration with UCLA Department
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Los Angeles Women's
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"First Love"; a short film by Cecilia
Albertini.

Oregon Bach Festival (7/7/16)
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Part I: Foundation

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Chapter 2 - Study Parameters & Terms

1. Introduction

Film has great communicative power, which is why the film medium dominates the ever-expanding media effects debate. There is much controversy over the suitability of various film content for children consumers—both thematic and visual—but the discourse is indefensibly flawed. It almost entirely overlooks the role music plays in all of this. The way a scene is scored directly impacts the way it is received and interpreted, as evidenced by several studies and film music perception models.¹ Filmmakers rely on music to communicate with their audience. Depending on the film, the information being communicated also varies. On the surface, most films communicate some form of story or narrative,² and music plays a crucial role in the narrative's cohesion and clarity. But on a smaller scale and much deeper level, films seek to communicate and induce an empathetic response to various kinds of visual stimuli. Whether the filmmakers characterize their movies as art or simply as money-makers — whether their goal is to bring about awareness, to entertain, or to make money — family movies as a whole share one common goal: appealing to child audiences. They all follow various versions of the same formula to accomplish this. However, there is one component that is always present and relied upon for emotive and communicative purposes: this common denominator is underscore.

¹ Cohen's 2001 model, Lipscomb & Kendall's 1994 model, and Kendall & Carterette's 1990 model, all discussed extensively in Tolchinsky's article "The role of music communication in cinema." (2004)

² There are a few exceptions, such as educational, non-narrative films for children. However, the medium is primarily comprised of narrative films.

The ways in which music alone directly influences children are heavily researched, as is the relationship between children and media.³ However, the ways in which musical underscore indirectly influences what children take away from visual media is all but ignored. One observational study seeking to develop a greater understanding of children's relationship with music involved interviewing elementary age children. Upon being asked why she likes music, one 6-year-old girl replied simply with "Music helps stories along."⁴ This may only be a shred of anecdotal evidence, but nevertheless, it is eye-opening to the reality that even children recognize the narrative power and potential of music.

Since underscore is inherently meant to blend in, (or, as often quipped, to "go unnoticed,") it is superficially understandable why it is left out of the conversation. After all, its only purpose, in this view, is to add interest and dimension to the visual content. Underscore, by universal definition, means "to underline; emphasize."⁵ Since its job is to complement—not to add to—the film content created by the writer and director, it is somehow off the hook for any of the effects that the thematic or visual content may have on young consumers.

These often held views could not be more wrong. Ironically, the film music that is most noticeable, such as the main title (MT) of a movie,⁶ (eg. John Williams' iconic

³ Valkenburg, Pattie M and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski. *Plugged In: How Media Attract and Affect Youth*. New Haven, Connecticut, USA. 2017

⁴ Campbell, 2000, page 32

⁵ Merriam-Webster definition of "underscore"

⁶ Main Title (MT), often mistakenly called the "main theme," refers to the music that accompanies the opening—"main title"—sequence of a film or show. While "main theme" is not entirely incorrect, films and shows usually play the main theme music throughout the film in various forms, muddying the distinction between variations and the theme in its fullest form, which we hear in the opening sequence. As such, Main Title is essentially the *main* main theme.

overture to *Star Wars*) is less relevant to the visual media effects discourse because it is impactful on its own, and in a sense—separate from the film. It can be appreciated as a standalone piece of music and is usually recognized as such. The impact of music that is meant to be noticed is significant and not to be ignored, but its impact often does not extend very far beyond that of setting a general mood. (Other more-or-less directly impactful forms of film music include songs and diegetic music.⁷) Returning to the *Star Wars* analogy, take a moment to compare Williams' *Star Wars* opening credits to a full episode of your favorite TV series. The MT music is the star, comparable to the main character of the TV show, and spotlighted in a similar way. Underscore, on the other hand, is the thread that runs through the entire film; the foundation on which the film stands. Within this TV show analogy, underscore is like the show runner: out of the spotlight, unrecognizable, unknown to the audience, and largely forgotten. However, without him, *there would be no show*.

Extensive qualitative research has proven time and again that musical underscore influences the viewers' emotional response according to the wishes of the director and composer.⁸ The underscore quietly influences the viewers emotions, essentially "telling" them how to feel about what is happening on screen. This use of music can be described as extrinsic stimuli. Though some psychologists argue that these emotions are artificial and fade shortly after the film ends,⁹ this speculative

⁷ Film music that is taking place within the story; this can take many forms—a character has their car radio on, a character is attending an opera, a character is singing in the shower, etc.

⁸ Flach, Green, Hackley, Rubin, Copland, and Lipscomb

⁹ Brown, Steven. *From Mode to Emotion in Musical Communication*. McMaster University. In this lecture, Brown states on slide 25 that these are not emotions but rather *cognitive representations* of emotions. I disagree, but cannot go into it further as it does not directly relate to this monograph. I encourage readers to download the lecture slides, however, because many of his other observations and models are enlightening.

conclusion is inconsistent with the conclusions arrived at by studies on the effects of the visual content.¹⁰ Like any other genre, family films consist of more than just visual stimuli, so why shouldn't the musical stimuli and visual stimuli, along with the thematic and narrative content, be analyzed as a collective whole? Why is underscore consistently excluded in related studies on children's multimedia? By comparing the various methods that composers use for handling film content targeted at children specifically, I hope to shed light on the often-overlooked role played by musical underscore in these films. My hope is that this research will enlighten and serve both sides of the media effects debate, effectively enabling the discourse to become more informed, and future research studies more useful.

Psychologists have found that children in the prime stages of development (between ages 2 and 11¹¹) are the most universally malleable—in this case, meaning simultaneously resilient and manipulable. During these early stages, children are more resilient to certain forms of psychological distress than infants and adolescents. This is because preadolescent children (under 11) are not bound to a particular set of beliefs yet, still relying on authority to direct them, and pre-school aged children (over 2) have established 90% of essential cognitive scripts and are therefore capable of forming new

¹⁰ Cantor, Joanne. "The Media and Children's Fears, Anxieties and Perceptions of Danger." *Plugged In* Ch 11. University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2017

¹¹ There is some debate over whether this stage begins closer to age 2 or age 3. Age 3 is found to be the age at which children can understand narrative and follow a story from beginning to end. However, it is shortly after age 2 that the average child has developed more than 90% of cognitive scripts, making that "toddler" stage the most variable.

¹² "Media and Violence" from *Plugged In*, Chapter 7 pages 11, 14, 15, and 17

ones.¹² Incidentally, the stimuli and media content children are exposed to during this stage of life has an enormous impact on how they will turn out in their adult life.¹³

Family movie underscore plays a critical role in how child audiences process and interpret both the visual and thematic content of a film.¹⁴ This fact is completely ignored in current research across all relevant disciplines. It is my hope that this monograph will be a strong 'first step' in filling this major gap in the research. Considering visual media's increasingly influential role in children's lives to date, it is crucial that we take into account all aspects of what they are consuming, rather than focusing entirely on visual and thematic content. This deeper understanding of the ways in which underscore impacts child audiences will enable educators, composers, and developmental psychologists alike, to expand their "toolboxes" in a more informed way for more effective curriculum, scores, and treatment plans. Educators will gain insight into the ways in which film can enhance their curriculum, and even improve students' attention and comprehension of concepts. This research may open new doors for developmental psychologists who, with a deeper understanding of the communicative power of underscore on children, may wish to incorporate film into treatment plans. Composers, particularly those who are interested in scoring family movies, will walk away from reading this with an array of tools and insight on how to effectively score children's films with the children's needs in mind.

In my efforts to avoid any major ethical arguments that would otherwise inevitably come up in such a conversation, this monograph attempts to introduce a new

¹³ Media & Violence from Plugged in as well – Ch 7

¹⁴Lipscomb, Scott D. and David E. Tolchinsky. "The role of music communication in cinema." 5

element to the media effects conversation and increase scholarly insight into the ways in which musical underscore is a determining factor where particular visual media content falls on the spectrum of "negative" and "positive." I steer clear of the major ethical debates by a) focusing on *universal principles* for what constitutes "negative" and "positive" content in children's entertainment media, and b) focusing on film composers' varying techniques, effects, and approaches to scoring said content. I also present a multitude of perspectives across numerous disciplines, in order to refine the issue for more systematic investigation and formulation of new research questions in the future.

2. Study Parameters & Terms

2.1 - Four Quadrant Film (FQF)

When asked very generally about his views on the role music plays in children's movies, Scott Holtzman — Executive Vice President of Music Affairs at Disney Motion Pictures — initially responded by saying that Disney doesn't make children's movies. "We make family movies," he said.¹⁵ I realize that, while this particular paper uses the two interchangeably, what is deemed appropriate terminology varies from field to field.¹⁶ Though the company itself may seem to favor their children consumers, movie theater statistics¹⁷ show that their highest grossing movies were a success with all age categories. Disney Motion Pictures in particular thrives on making movies for the whole family, the goal being to make every movie a Four-Quadrant Film.

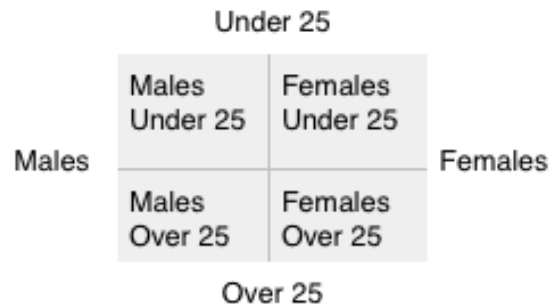


FIGURE 2.1 - GENERAL FILM DEMOGRAPHICS QUADRANTS

For the sake of simplification, Holtzman indicated that film demographics are usually summarized using four main quadrants: Men, Women, boys, and girls. A Four-Quadrant

¹⁵ This is quoted from a personal conversation between myself and Holtzman. This is an informal and unofficial source.

¹⁶<https://screencraft.org/2013/11/22/four-quadrant-film-10-essential-elements/> 22 Nov 2013

¹⁷Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Theatrical Market Statistics, 2016

Film (FQF) is a film that succeeds in reaching and entertaining audiences from all four quadrants. It was no surprise that the overachievers at Disney approach each new motion picture with the goal of making it a Four-Quadrant Film. Based on information I've gathered, Disney's four Demographics quadrants may look a little different from the standard quadrants illustrated above. I've made two models that take these variants into

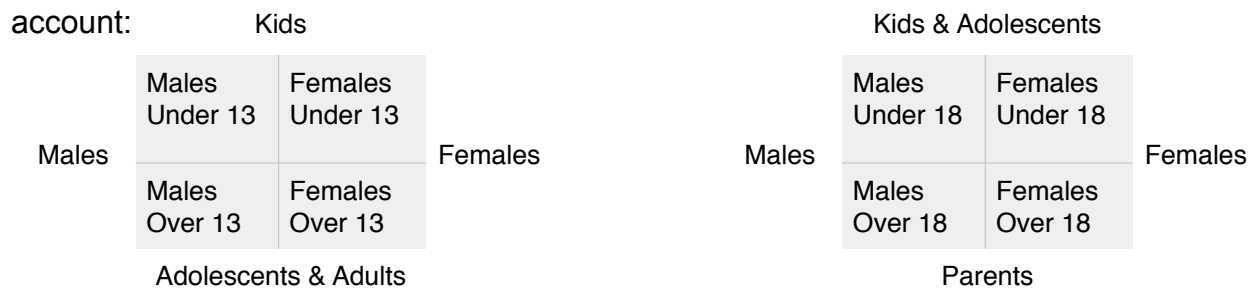


FIGURE 2.2 - DISNEY FILM DEMOGRAPHIC QUADRANTS

2.2 - Limited to Hollywood Films

This monograph almost exclusively deals with western cultural trends and concerns in cinema and, therefore, almost exclusively analyzes Hollywood films with theatrical releases. Apart from the more obvious reasons for such a limitation—such as language barriers, limited access to international films to review, not to mention the fact that ethnomusicological discourse on this matter could turn into a great tangent—there is also simply a cultural lag when it comes to child-oriented cinema. Noel Brown, author of *The Children's Film: Genre, Nation, and Narrative* describes it perfectly:

"While children's film was part of the fabric of commercial cinema from an early date in the United States, Britain, and much of continental Europe, not all national cinemas have an extensive history in the production of child-oriented films. In general, a flourishing tradition of children's cinema is dependent on

several factors: a cultural belief that (indigenous) children's culture, and children's cinema specifically, is important and desirable; an industrial manufacturing and distribution base; the availability of creative talent; and a ready-made market for the consumption of such films. In commercial cinema, this market is usually a paying audience; in non-commercial cinema, generally it takes the form of organised performances for children (e.g. matinees, festival exhibitions or screenings in schools). A further requirement is a political will to permit or to facilitate such production. In state-supported systems, this typically rests on recognition of the potential ideological value of children's films, or a paternalistic desire to meet children's particular ethical, behavioural and entertainment needs. The most basic prerequisite, of course, is an industrial base for manufacture and distribution. During the early silent era, such conditions were largely restricted to countries such as North America, continental Europe and Russia."¹⁸

It is worth mentioning that in many nations, particularly Japan, the smaller emphasis on children's film production is strictly a cultural difference, as "other forms of children's culture more strongly prevail." Despite the fact that western culture has largely adopted and interpreted various Japanese animation trends (i.e., anime, manga) as child-oriented, children are not historically the target audience in Japan where said visual media is being produced. (Brown, 31) Since this monograph is concerned with the motion picture targeting children, I determined it best to steer clear of such "gray area" productions, just as I steered clear of PG-13 movies. Ultimately, I determined that any comparisons I make would be unfair due to Hollywood's cultural, legal, and

¹⁸ The Children's Film: Genre, Nation, and Narrative

socioeconomic "head start," which, aside from the comparatively minimal restrictions and censorship, was coupled with greater access to resources, both in production and post-production of motion picture.¹⁹

2.3 - Limited to G and PG Films

Because of the gray area that exists within the target audience of PG-13 movies, I restricted my study to G and PG films to minimize potential counter-arguments regarding compositional trends in children's movies. Additionally, given the fact that underscore's contribution to depictions of violence in children's films is entirely overlooked, media effects became a primary focus of this study. G and PG films being mostly FQFs, they are still supposed to be almost exclusively appropriate for children. This makes any portrayal of violence that much more serious and worthy of discussion. Most existing research and discourse surrounding cinematic violence focuses on PG-13 and R-rated films for the simple reason that more overtly violent content exists to converse about. However, such connections between media violence and violent behavior is almost exclusively relevant to adolescents, and not grade-school age children. Additionally, all adolescents were children first, and children's films are responsible for introducing several forms of physical violence and *many* forms of thematic violence to their impressionable target audience — themes such as death and corruption. See Chapter 6 on Media Violence for a more in-depth discussion of this particular study parameter.

2.4 - Golden Family Film (GFF)

¹⁹ Brown elaborates on this fact a little more, explaining the ways in which authoritarian regimes didn't see value in creating visual media specifically for children until 50 years after the United States.

Golden Family Films (GFFs) are family movies (either animated or live-action) that were groundbreaking during their time of release, set new standards in the industry, and are universally beloved by children—especially multi-generational child audiences. GFFs are films that should be able to serve as models for filmmakers, composers, educators, researchers, and any other groups or individuals seeking to understand and/or improve children's cinema from the standpoint of what the children *themselves* need, want, and enjoy.

I coined this term because there is no existing vocabulary for categorizing children's films according to the quality, success, and overall positive reception by child audiences. This is likely due to the fact that most rating systems rely on numbers. Still, I required a term that would instantly denote to readers when a film is particularly noteworthy. It is derived from the concept of the "Golden Age" in various historical eras, which denotes the segment of time during which an era's defining factors were at their best, strongest, and/or most fruitful.²⁰ While a golden age of children's films may exist in cinema history, that debate is not particularly relevant to this study presently. However, the same concept — the same use of the word "golden" — is applicable to family movies on an individual basis. I have written a shortened definition of GFF below, and you will find that it could almost be used interchangeably with the definition of golden historical eras.

²⁰ An ad-lib of the merriam-webster definition. The term could also be compared to the concept of the "golden child," but it is misleading since "golden child" often implies that the child is favored but often without reason.

Golden Family Film (GFF) - A family movie that is representative of the sub-genre's greatest successes as evidenced by a wide-ranging variety of polling, reviews, ratings, nominations and/or awards, enduring popularity, significance.

This definition begs clarification of how "success" is measured, and which successes constitute a Golden Family Film, since little related empirical data exists, and most of the sources listed in the definition are opinion-based. So I will begin by affirming that *success* is indeed very subjective, as is the process of determining which successes constitute a Golden Family Film. So, rather than producing some disingenuous way around this information gap, I will list my criteria for defining and determining both terms.²¹

Questions for measuring a film's success:

- Did it receive national recognition?²²
- Did it make a profit?
- Did it receive high ratings, especially on multiple rating systems/scales?
- In the case of 21st century films, did it appear on multiple Kids-Must-See" lists on movie blogs and in entertainment magazines?
- Did multiple generations of children enjoy this film equally? (In other words, did the magic of cinema as utilized by said film transcend time?)
- Did the film win awards?
- Was it a Four-Quadrant Film (FQF)?

²¹ "Success" and "Golden Family Film (GFF)"

²² Or even better, international

Despite using empirical data from multiple sources to support my claim that the films I will cite are noteworthy GFFs, my determination of which movies are worthy of analysis is still not 100% objective. The two subjective criteria for determining whether a film qualifies as GFF:

1. The number one criteria and minimum requirement for a film to be defined as "golden" in this monograph is that the film was objectively successful among child audiences, especially when the film transcends time and is beloved by more than one generation of children.
2. The musical underscore needed to be a contributing factor to the film's success, as determined by information collected at the time of the film's release, as well as any newer information available pertaining to the 21st century child audience's response, when applicable. This is due to the fact that this monograph is almost exclusively concerned with child audiences, as opposed to audiences as a whole; an important point to acknowledge regarding this particular decision is that many successful PG-rated movies were only *tolerated* by child audiences while exceeding the expectations of their grown-up counterparts.²³ Many such films are significant — sometimes even groundbreaking — contributions to cinema, and should not be overlooked in academia. It is only inaccurate to classify them as GFFs in this study because they do not fit the criteria.

2.5 - Definition Summary

Humorizer Term used in this monograph to denote any compositional technique specifically used for the purpose of adding humor to a

²³ Sixteen Candles, Where the Wild Things Are, The Gremlins (1984), Return to Oz

moment or scene that would otherwise be deemed unfunny by the majority of audiences.

Violence	"Intentional acts (i.e., to cause harm, to coerce, or for fun) where the aggressor makes some physical contact that has potential to inflict injury or harm." ²⁴
Child Audience	The NPAA categorizes children viewers in their Theatrical Statistics Manual as children ages 2 through 11. Unless otherwise noted, the use of the term "children" in this monograph follows this criteria.
Foley	Area of sound design concerned with the reproduction of everyday sounds for cinematic overlay (i.e., footsteps)
Diegetic	Describes film music that occurs <i>within</i> the film and is embedded in the story and action in some way or form. (i.e., a character playing an instrument, a character's car radio, etc.)
Non-Diegetic	Describes any original film music that does not occur within the film via embedment in the story and action. (i.e., underscore, montage sequences, etc.)
Library Music	Library music refers to precomposed music cues that can be purchased for use in a film; usually only turned to for small commercial projects and/or to save money on a composer.
Source Music	Refers to soundtrack material in film that is not part of the original underscore; usually refers to licensed pop music of sorts.

²⁴Yokota, F. and K. Thompson. "Violence in G-Rated Animated Films." *Medicine and the Media* 283 (2000), 2716.

Part II: Context

Chapter 3 - Historical Context: The Children's Film & Rise of Multimedia

Chapter 4 - Relevance Today: Existing & Missing Research²⁵

²⁵ Overview of existing research in 2 of the 6 relevant disciplines discussed in 4.1 (Media Effects & Music) are not included due to the fact that they are covered extensively in Part III.

3. Historical Context: The Children's Film & Rise of Multimedia

Media Effects Studies is now essentially its own field. Most Communications degrees require at least one course on the topic. One can major in Social Studies at many universities in Schools or Departments of Communications and Journalism.²⁶ As our media industries grow and expand, so does the provocation and loudening of the Media Effects Debate. There is much to debate, given that empirical research “reveals neither a dystopian paradigm, in which all media are problematic for youth, nor a utopian paradigm, in which youth universally benefit from media.”²⁷ The industries whose advancements seem to stimulate the most debate are social media and visual media in the form of motion picture - video games, television and film.

We are living in a unique era where we can see, before our very eyes, progress taking place across all fields of study at a dizzying rate. Technological advancements in particular are largely responsible for enhancing our quality of life, opening doors, improving communication, and expanding possibilities and opportunities for present and future generations. Technological advancement runs parallel to Media significance and influence on how society runs, especially in the digital age. Since the rate of technological advancement has skyrocketed in the new millennium, so has the rate at which multimedia has embedded itself in our culture and our everyday lives. Media in its various forms are increasingly relied upon by children and adults of all ages, in both public and private sectors, for both educational and entertainment purposes. And, as

²⁶Examples include University of Virginia and University of Oregon, both of which describes the Media Studies Department as one which focuses on, "The forms and effects of media: books, radio, film, television, photography, print, digital, and electronic media...with particular emphasis on the mass media of the modern and contemporary period." <https://mediastudies.virginia.edu/undergraduate>

²⁷ Valkenburg, P. M, J. T. Piotrowski. "Youth and Media." *Plugged In*. Yale U. Press. (2017)

with any rapid cultural change, there is always an opposition. Those who fear that the negatives outweigh the positives will begin to research potential negative effects. Historically, the faster a form of progress takes place, the greater the level of concern.²⁸ In the case of multimedia, such concerns revolve primarily around how and to what extent children's exposure will impact their behavior, development, overall intelligence, and growth. Motion Picture, the primary concern of this monograph, is no exception, inducing societal concerns as early as the first two decades of the 20th century, shortly after the film industry was born.²⁹

During the silent film era, any movie that was not family-friendly was atypical.³⁰ At that time, the very art of film was associated with family fun in western culture, and viewed as an escape from the turmoils of everyday life. One survey conducted in London in 1917 found that more than 90% of pre-adolescent children attended movies on a regular basis.³¹ Both Hollywood and the early British film industry produced films "for an overarching 'family audience'," with large quantities of silent films featuring similar thematic content to what we see in children's cinema today, such as "literary adaptations, animal films, and child-star films."³²

The Committee on Public Information (CPI) began during World War I, and was the first organization in the United States that was concerned with the effects of media.

²⁸ Valkenburg, Patti M. and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski. *Plugged In: How Media Attract and Affect Youth*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.

²⁹ Suying, Wah "A Brief History of Media Effects Research." (From a presentation)

³⁰Brown, Noel. *The Children's Film: Genre, Nation, and Narrative*. Columbia University Press, Wallflower Press. 2017

³¹ Brown, "Genre, Nation, & Narrative," 27

³² Brown, Noel. "Genre, Nation, and Narrative," *The Children's Film*. Columbia University Press, New York. 2017. 30.

³³In the 1920s, when movies became mainstream entertainment, the CPI became convinced that frequent visits to the cinema had a significant impact on the attitudes and behaviors of people. This triggered the launching of a series of studies on the effect of films, one of the largest being The Payne Fund Studies - a compilation of thirteen studies whose purpose was to discover the real impact movies can have on the younger generation. The general findings were that "Movies influence both children's attitudes and behaviors, stimulate emotions, and negatively affect health." ³⁴ Still, no specific action was taken to control cinema-going until the "post-1930 surge in adult-oriented films," particularly of the crime [*Manslaughter* (1930), *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931)] and sex [*Animal Crackers* (1930), *The Road to Ruin* (1934)] genres, prompting a "tightening of censorship restrictions intended to return the screen to a more acceptable, family-friendly footing."³⁵ The most notable move to control film content at this time appeared in the form of the Hays Code which, though passed in 1930, was not enforced until mid-1934.

In an exemplary demonstration of the United States' culture at its best, Hollywood filmmakers wasted no time protesting the roadblock, instead throwing their energy into paving a new road on which their industry could continue to grow. Seeming to thrive on the adage *when one door closes, another opens*, filmmakers and producers simply turned their attention to children's films, fully committed to making this genre just as profitable as the last. As a result, "This drive to 'clean up' the screen coincided with a

³³ Pizzitola, Louis. *Hearst over Hollywood: Power, Passion, and Propoganda in the Movies*. Columbia University Press, New York. 2002

³⁴ Wah Suying, Lim Jia, Yi Chua, Wen Xian, Faith Tharavathi, Sithi Banh, Yong En. *A Brief History of Media Effects Research*

³⁵ Brown, *The Children's Film*, 2017, 31

new and profitable wave of child-friendly productions (including Shirley Temple's vehicles)."³⁶ In England, after various failed attempts to encourage and/or continue the production of child-oriented motion picture, it wasn't until the 1950s that The Children's Film Foundation was born and children's films became both produceable and profitable once again.

By the turn of the 21st century we were dealing with too many technological advancements and media inventions - or potential 'catalysts' - to count: video games, mp3 players, computers, internet, smartphones, etc. Not surprisingly, this spurred an ever-growing demand for faster communication (aka Social Media) and entertainment media, contributing to the expansion of the film and television industry, and the complete transformation of the gaming industry; what began with arcade games in the 80s, gameboys and home computer games in the 90s, playstation and similar gaming platforms in the 2000s, and Virtual Reality (VR) today.

3.2 - Film Scoring

An article in Film Score Monthly³⁷ breaks down the process a film composer goes through on each new project from beginning to end into nine steps. This monograph is concerned with steps 4, 5, 6, and 7:

1. Meeting filmmakers, reading script, screening the film
2. Spotting the film
3. Planning budgets and recording schedules
4. Conceptualizing

³⁶ Brown, *The Children's Film*, 2017 31

³⁷<http://www.filmscoremonthly.com/features/skelton.asp>

5. Working out timings / synchronization
6. Composing
7. Orchestrating
8. Recording
9. Dubbing

Sound was introduced to film in the year 1929 and shortly thereafter, original underscore became the new standard for feature films. Approximately one decade after this new standard was set, renowned American composer Aaron Copland presented his perception of the "new ways that music and film interacted."³⁸ Copland's broke down underscore's role to five functions:

1. Creating a more convincing atmosphere of space and time
2. Underlining psychological refinements—the unspoken thoughts of a character, or the unseen implications of a situation,
3. Serving as a kind of neutral background filler
4. Building a sense of continuity
5. Underpinning the theatrical build-up of a scene, and rounding it off with a sense of finality.³⁹

Aaron Copland, *What to listen for in Music* (256-58)⁴⁰

³⁸ Skelton, www.filmscoremonthly.com

³⁹ Retrieved not directly from Copland's book but from Skelton's article on Film Score Monthly. Full text accessible via goodreads as well: *What to Listen for in Music* by Aaron Copland - Goodreads. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/99126.What_to_Listen_for_in_Music

⁴⁰ The Undeniable Emotional Impact of Music in Film. <https://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/the-undeniable-emotional-impact-of-music-in-film/>

From the beginning of sound embedment in film, renowned film theorists have expressed similar views on the function and role of underscore in cinema.⁴¹ Without placing much significance on the child audiences' viewing experiences, the general consensus by film theorists regarding underscore's fundamental purposes supports—even bolsters—my personal assessment that underscore is needed and relied upon by family movie filmmakers to a greater degree than those of other genres. I will elaborate upon this general consensus in the remainder of this sub-chapter.

Jean Mitry, a film theorist of the 1950s, claimed that underscore "imparts to film what it lacks: the notion of temporality." (Kalinak, 23) Essentially, he argued that it is the very nature of film to visually interrupt itself, weakening itself in an inevitable way on its own. In my view, film does lack the ability to singlehandedly provide viewers with a sense of escape into another world, or reality, because it lacks the ability to manipulate viewers into experiencing the sense of altered time necessary to do so. In this view, underscore serves to smooth out these figurative "wrinkles." Child audiences are statistically much more likely to have their engagement in the narrative disrupted by these wrinkles, given their selective attention spans⁴² and still developing focused attention.⁴³

A more contemporary film theorist, Claudia Gorbman, shares a similar view to Mitry, claiming that, "Bringing sound into film reconstructed time into a 'relentless

⁴¹ The film theorists cited in the proceeding section were all introduced to me by Kathryn Kalinak in her Oxford University Press edition to the VSI series: *Very Short Introduction to Film Music*. See monograph bibliography for more information.

⁴² <https://day2dayparenting.com/qa-normal-attention-span/>

⁴³ Amso, Dima. "Visual attention: its role in memory and development." *Psychological Science Agenda*. 2016. <http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2016/01/visual-attention.aspx>

linearity," with music being "the one sound element capable of freeing up that temporal representation." (Kalinak, 24) Kalinak, author of Oxford's *Film Music* edition to the VSI series, in congruence with Gorbman's views states that Gorbman's theory serves as an explanation for "why music is called upon to attend film's most fractious moments in terms of time – flashbacks, montages, and slow-motion sequences – that threaten the unity of the film." (Kalinak, 24) In other words, musical underscore is crucial in scenes where rapidly changing visual stimuli threatens to interrupt the flow of the film and bring viewers out of the "escape."

Since kids' attention spans are much more limited, the risk of their 'escape' into the narrative is much greater. The aspect of underscore that promotes continuity is, therefore, much more crucial much more often! This supports my own hypothesis that underscore is a much greater determining factor in whether or not child audiences will stay engaged. This is yet another reason why children's films have a lot more riding on music than films intended for older audiences. To use Kalinak's words, films targeting child audiences run a much greater risk of viewers experiencing scenes as "fractious moments" and disengaging from the narrative altogether.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Kalinak, Kathryn. *Film Music: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, Inc. New York. 2010

4. Relevance Today: Existing & Missing Research

4.1 - Research Gap Discovery

Originally, I hoped to collect aggregative data, particularly through interviews — both conducted by myself, and interviews previously conducted and transcribed by others — with film composers and executives in the industry who have experience with children's motion picture. I believed that, if I could find multiple qualified views on the underscore requirements and needs of child audiences as compared with adult audiences, I could take the distinguishable differences and focus on those techniques in my monograph.

However, it became apparent that no matter how I modified the intricacies of my research goals and thesis, the details and answers my research required were known by no one. Not even experienced film composers of family movies demonstrated strong opinions, or even any semblance of awareness, regarding the ways in which musical underscore "requirements" vary among target audiences of a film. Additionally, scrupulous exploration of past interviews with family film composers and executives only verified that they too — the interviewers and journalists — entirely overlook the significance of such a topic. This made me realize that, as described by research expert Robert E. Stake, "the answers are not known by people but will [instead] rise out of the observations and analysis of the data..." also known as *interpretive data*.⁴⁵

Had I wanted to ask more generally about their compositional techniques and approaches to underscoring films, interviews as aggregative data would have proven useful. However, since I was in search of answers regarding [what I experience as very

⁴⁵ Stake, Robert E. *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work*. "Stating the Problem," 81

obvious] distinctions between family movie and non-family movie underscore, I was going to have to rely on interpretive data. Why? Because the distinctions between the two genres, despite how real they are, prove largely unintentional on the part of the filmmakers and composers, hence the lack of research conducted on the topic. In fact, my research indicates that composers largely do not consciously score, say, a chase scene in a family movie, differently than a chase scene in an action movie, despite the fact that comparable chase scenes in both genres continuously verify that very notion. Rather, composers seemed defensive of their scores when I ventured out of the box to make such a comparison of their methods. Composers claim that they approach all films the same, and differences among the target audiences is not a factor beyond very obvious circumstances.⁴⁶

Few people in the film or music industries, as evidenced by thorough research, have contemplated child audiences with the depth I required, forcing me to delve even deeper⁴⁷ into unknown territory: the fields of psychology, media effects, and communications studies. Thorough investigation of all potentially relevant literature across each of these disciplines, revealed a substantial research gap. Therefore, my study became largely interdisciplinary, despite the fact that, as a film composer, my original intention was to focus solely on compositional techniques and approaches to underscoring children's films. Since so little attention has been paid to the subject and

⁴⁶ Though not specifically an example of compositional awareness, an example of "obvious" music need variances of child audiences as required by someone in a similar position of power would be that of the music supervisor choosing NOT to license a hip hop track with explicit lyrics for a movie seeking a G rating by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA).

⁴⁷ "Even deeper" because the subjects of film theory and child development are already outside of my major.

the significant role music plays in children's visual media consumption, my thesis was redirected.

	Children	Film / Visual Media	Music
Communications	X	X	X
Media Effects	X	X	X
Psychology	X	X	X
Public Health	X	X	X
Public Policy	X	X	X
Education	(X)	X	X
Pediatrics	(X)	X	x
Child Development	(X)	X	X
Film / Visual Media	(X)	(X)	(X)
Music	(X)	(X)	(X)

TABLE 4.1 - INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AREAS⁴⁸

It is no secret that the subjects of music, film, and children are addressed across numerous social studies disciplines. The table above demonstrates where I discovered research relevant to this paper, pertaining to each of these three individual topics (children, film, and music) but conducted *outside* of the topic's assumed disciplines.⁴⁹

I want to simplify my explanation of the research gap with a very basic illustration of the existing research:

⁴⁸ The World Health Organization's definition of health is used for the sake of maintaining consistency with the Brown and Walsh-Childers article, which, among the sources for this study, addresses 'health' surrounding media effects to the most in-depth degree. Health is defined as: "A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."

⁴⁹ An X in parentheses (X) indicates where research has indeed been conducted, but it is more or less obvious because the topics already correlate. (For instance, 'Education' and 'Children')

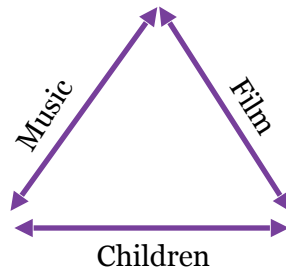


FIGURE 4.1 - CHILDREN FILM MUSIC TRI-RELATIONSHIP

In addition to the boundless research that exists on each of the individual *subjects* that make up the diagram above, three *relationships* exist where the arrowheads meet, which are significantly researched as well: (a) the relationship between music and film (aka "film music") (b) the relationship between children and music, and (c) the relationship between children and film. As a matter of fact, several disciplines *outside of* music and film are responsible for some invaluable research pertaining to these three relationships. Some have been mentioned already, such as within the fields of communications and media effects. But for the sake of organization—and to more clearly illustrate the existing research gap—the table below outlines areas wherein thorough research on these three two-way relationships (and the one tri-relationship) *does* exist across the six most relevant disciplines.

	Film Music	Music & Children	Children & Film	Film Music & Children
Communications	X	X	X	
Education		X	X	
Film Studies	X		X	
Media Effects		X	X	
Music	X	X		
Psychology	X	X	X	

TABLE 4.2 - RELEVANT EXISTING RESEARCH AND RESEARCH GAP

As you can see, the research gap is significant. Not only is the tri-relationship overlooked, but it is overlooked across ALL affected disciplines. The only fields excluded from this study, which may or may not include some superficial research on this tri-relationship, is business and/or marketing.

So why has no one within these numerous related disciplines considered the significance of how these three components interact to the point of conducting a single formal study on the matter? For example, has no one in the film industry seen the value in studying the way in which underscore impacts children, despite showing a great interest in the relationship between children and film as a whole? The impact of film music on *people* is addressed, but never children specifically. Existing discourse in film studies surrounding child audiences and children's film are plentiful, but underscore is never mentioned. Similarly, within the fields of music and music education, the relationship between children and music is emphasized, both in research and in practice. Even non-music educators see great value in exposing kids to distinguished musical works and musical instruments at a very young age for developmental purposes. However, they too have neglected to recognize the value in studying the ways in which music for motion picture contributes to such development.

It seems that the problem lies within individuals' disinterest in stepping too far out of their own area of expertise in their research, afraid to delve into fields that are not their specialization. The logic behind this choice is understandable, but it must be resisted. Interdisciplinary research is invaluable, which is why I am venturing out of the comfort zone that is my specialization: to begin filling this gap.

Before we can answer the question of why music is so critical for ensuring that a film achieves a positive and accurate reception by child audiences, we must first, at minimum, examine the related research and empirical data that exists across all relevant disciplines, regarding the three relationships presented in Table 4.2. Using this information, we can more accurately assess the tri-relationship: how underscore contributes to a child's comprehension, reception, and overall enjoyment of a film.

4.2 - Communications

To my knowledge, no research—or even available documented discussion—has been conducted on the rhetorical power of musical underscore in children's films, not to mention the ways in which it could affect its target audience. One particular music blog, *Thinking on Music*, briefly described the history of persuasive communication and the areas of study where music is beginning to seep into the conversation. In this article, "Music as Rhetoric."⁵⁰ author Jonathan Friedmann states: "Rhetoric, the art of persuasive communication, has origins in the earliest human civilizations," first acknowledging how persuasion by speech was a pillar of classical education for centuries, in many cultures. However, persuasion by music, is only recently becoming "a minor, though enriching topic of philosophy and musicology." In addition, it appears that most existing research involves music and lyrics, rather than the persuasive potentials of music alone. Though he cites no sources formally, the article itself is informed and references examples in support of his points, which could be fact checked without much difficulty.

⁵⁰ Friedmann, Jonathan L. "Music as Rhetoric." *Thinking on Music*. 16 Nov 2012. <https://thinkingonmusic.wordpress.com/2012/11/16/music-as-rhetoric/8>

The most insightful study among the minimal existing related research is a Communications Studies Master's thesis, which analyzes the "rhetoric of social change" in the underscore of a particular documentary.⁵¹ Approximately one half of one chapter contains thoughtful insight into musical underscore as a rhetorical tool, discussing the integrated rhetoric of film scores. However, the chapter itself is on Documentary Films as rhetorical tools, particularly to bring about awareness or social change. As a result, though much of the observations and analyses are insightful, its relevance to family movies and fiction movies in general is tangential and therefore limited.⁵²

Another related study was conducted at UC Berkeley, which acknowledges musical underscore as a relied-upon rhetorical tool for storytelling. However, the study specifically focused on radio shows and podcasts, to which there is no visual component. Additionally, the purpose of the study was to introduce and establish the efficacy of a software entitled UnderScore, which is "a set of semi-automated tools designed to facilitate the creation of such [musical] underlays."⁵³ Though the study goes into detail about the particular ways in which underscore contributes to audience reception of a story, it only acknowledges the task as a challenge for radio producers, and makes no mention of actual film composers. This lack of recognition renders the reliability of their research questionable at best, especially since it seemed to be more focused on promoting a software more so than analyzing the software's efficacy, as the abstract claimed was its intention. Even if we overlook the biases, it still only looks at

⁵¹Hackley, Brianna. "Rhetoric of Social Change in Documentary Film Scores: An Analysis of The Cove." *SJSU ScholarWorks*, 2012.

⁵² Hackley, 2012

⁵³ Rubin, S., Berthouzoz, F., Gautham, J. "UnderScore: Musical Underlays for Audio Stories."

music from a technical standpoint, and pays little attention to how such a rhetorical tool affects audiences beyond the clarity of the storytelling and enjoyment of the story itself.⁵⁴

4.3 - Education

In elementary music education specifically, several studies have been conducted regarding children's relationship with music on a general level. One study (Hair, 2000, 66) focused on comparative analyses of children's verbal descriptions of music with adults' descriptions of music — adults who also don't have a formal music education. The several different studies which were analyzed had similar results: while accessing the necessary vocabulary to describe music is difficult for anyone lacking in a formal music education, the incorrect descriptive vocabulary used by children to describe music is very different from the incorrect descriptive vocabulary used by adults to describe music. The significance of this lies in the area of communication, and suggests that adults should be cautious in interpretations of children's vocabulary. It also determines that, "Advances in technology allowing multimedia presentations of sounds, language, and moving graphics may provide new opportunities for helping children form and label concepts of music."⁵⁵ While this study was geared towards music educators, it demonstrates the significance of what kids notice in music, how they receive it, and how it differs from that of adults. These findings support my own assessment that children therefore have different needs musically when it comes to film music as well, and family movie filmmakers and composers should take these needs into account. It also

⁵⁴ Rubin, 2012

⁵⁵ Hair, "Children's Descriptions of Music," 2000, 66

supports my theory that children will experience the visual and thematic content completely differently from adult audiences, depending on how it is scored.

Some speculative research surrounding the benefits of increasing the incorporation of film in elementary education has been conducted, albeit to a lesser degree. The discussions seem to favor one of two methods: (1) incorporating film studies into our education system in a formal way where it can be elected as an art class similar to or in place of music and visual art, (2) incorporating film as a means of educating difficult-to-grasp concepts in courses like government, economics, and the hard sciences. Improving educational cinema as its own genre, perhaps with state funding, could greatly improve the quality of our education systems. In conversations about the role music and film play in education, something often brought up are the benefits each could serve on developmental and cognitive sociological⁵⁶ levels. For instance, one study indicated that engaging with musical instruments will enable children's brains to "hear and process sounds that they couldn't otherwise hear," and that such a distinction between sounds could, "aid in literacy, which can translate into improved academic results for kids."⁵⁷ Though the study emphasized that these positive results were much greater in kids learning musical instruments, the same principles apply to active listening. Just as some films are made for passive viewership and others are made for active viewership,⁵⁸ it is the music that inspires and encourages active

⁵⁶Wikipedia: Cognitive sociology is a sociological sub-discipline that studies conditions under which meaning is established through processes of turning abstract but logical assertions into concrete ones. focusing on "the series of interpersonal processes that set up the conditions for phenomena to become 'social objects,' which subsequently shape thinking and thought." (In this case, cinema would be the 'social object.') -*Oxford Bibliographies online in Sociology*

⁵⁷ Locker, Melissa. "Music Can Alter Your Child's Brain." *Time Magazine*. 16 Dec 2014

⁵⁸Columbia University film studies professor and author Annette Insdorf discusses this in an interview on Fareed Zakaria's GPS on August 5th 2018 in relation to her newest book release, *Cinematic Overtures*.

listening—rather than passive listening—that would be responsible for such breakthroughs in academia.

On the cognitive sociological level, as well as an overall relational level, such benefits of a greater incorporation of film in education systems is outlined at great length by Film Nation UK, a charity in the United Kingdom which, "Aims to put film at the heart of children and young people's learning and cultural experience."⁵⁹ The branch of this charity known as Filmclub, is already beginning to prove these benefits, despite the fact that the charity itself is not even a decade old. For example, autistic children have been shown to have an easier time relating to their peers when viewing a movie with them. This is due to the fact that emotional connections between viewers and cinema are often much more universal than in everyday life, generally inspiring laughter and tears at the same moments in all viewers, regardless of their differences. Similarly, in a roundtable discussion among members of the charity, everyone agreed that, "A key value of film in education...[is] that it [is] a great leveler." Whether it is due to one's socioeconomic status or learning disabilities, film—like music—is a universal language that can "help break down barriers—emotional and otherwise," between and among developing young minds.

4.4 - Film Theory

"Knowledge of film form and technique is necessary to anyone seeking to define the parameters of children's interests in this medium."⁶⁰ The study conducted by Cox

⁵⁹ Swain, Harriet. "Film can have a leading role in education." *The Guardian*. 19 Nov 2013

⁶⁰ Cox, 1982, page 232

sought to identify elementary schoolers' interest patterns. She limited the study to 4th and 5th graders, and narrowed her research by focusing on children's preferences as they pertained to the form (narrative vs. non-narrative) and technique (live action vs. animation.) The study involved 344 children, and Cox collected their ratings on twenty-four different short films using empirical analysis method called the Friedman Two-way Analysis of Variance.⁶¹ In this study, narrative films are defined as "films which [are] told as a story through a connected succession of events involving plot, setting, and characterization," whereas non-narrative films "centered around a central idea or theme but were not told as a story." I am inclined to simplify these film form definitions to the simple terms of 'fiction' and 'non-fiction / educational.' The study found that 4th and 5th graders overwhelmingly prefer narrative film forms, as opposed to non-narrative films. The study also found that children preferred live-action films to animated films, so long as they were also narrative. If they had to watch a non-fiction educational film, the children then overwhelmingly preferred to learn through the animation technique.

The fact that live action narrative films were preferable to animated narrative films was particularly surprising to me since, in my lifetime, the family film market has been flooded with animated films, while live-action family films remain increasingly sparse.⁶² However, I suspect that this particular result of the study was largely due to the fact that none of the animated films used in the study were Disney. It is no secret that Disney set high standards for animation quality; standards that were already in

⁶¹ It is my presumption that it was impractical to conduct a study involving such a large number of children using a feature-length film.

⁶²Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). *Theatrical Market Statistics*, 2016

place decades before this study was conducted. I suspect that the children were simply unimpressed with the animation.

This particular study was lacking in another way as well: it did not include any discussions with the children, making it unclear as to the more specific reasons why children did not like certain films. That is, however, the nature of empirical two-way analyses of variance. And regardless, the most important discovery in this study as it relates to my own, was the fact that children strongly prefer narrative films. This discovery is demonstrative of how crucial it is for the narrative components of a film to be strong in order for it to be appreciated by child audiences. As previously summarized, the narrative film form involved a "connected succession of events, setting, and characterization," ALL areas which rely heavily on underscore for successful application. If any of these narrative components are weak, the filmmakers risk losing their young viewers' comprehension and interest. Without a clear narrative, the film would not be engaging for a child; and without appropriate underscore, there would be no clear narrative.

Kummerling-Meibauer addresses some often-overlooked attributes in the evolution of the children's film in her article published in the *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Media*:

"...the increasing complexity of modern children's films demonstrate that the typical properties of children's films are becoming increasingly similar to those of films targeted at an adult audience. This convergence applies to both themes and the narrative strategies of children's films, as we can observe in their increasingly frequent treatment of difficult, sensitive, or "taboo" subjects, as well

as in their directors' use of complex narrative and aesthetic devices such as first-person, retrospective, multiple perspectives, the combination of different temporal levels, and intermedial allusions to other films."⁶³

Although she does not say so directly, Kummerling-Meibauer appears to agree with my own assessment that children's films are almost all FQFs now. Though her use of the word "becoming" is questionable due to its ambiguity, her observations are well-aimed. Film as an art has increased in complexity on all levels—narrative, thematic, visual, and aural. The cruciality of this fact is only enhanced by the "growing tendency among those who produce children's films to take the art form and its audience seriously," Kummerling-Meibauer points out, referring to the filmmakers' increasing use of complex narratives and aesthetic devices as addressed in the excerpt above. Despite children's "limited cognitive abilities and knowledge of the world," directors, nevertheless, employ these various techniques, albeit in a limited sense. The ever-increasing complexity of children's cinema could be for a number of reasons, including social acceptability and resources to tell certain narratives respectfully that would have possibly been offensive if addressed in the past. (Women's rights, race relations, animal abuse, etc.) Whatever the reason, these observations regarding the evolution of children's cinema could have significant applications in fields outside of filmmaking, such as media effects and education.

However, I was disappointed to find that, despite her detailed and thoughtful arguments regarding the need for more research on children's cinema, she too ignores music in her listing of reasons for the genre's significance. Since child audiences are

⁶³ Kummerling-Meibauer, 39

taken so seriously as audience members on both the thematic and visual levels, it is only sensible to stress the equal significance of *all* stimuli contributing to children's reception of FQFs. The information processing necessities of an art form that involves its audience to be engaged both visually AND aurally is such that child audiences in particular, in their limited cognitive abilities, must call on the powers of all to get the best possible grasp of the film's message. Not only do no studies definitively prove, but no studies even *argue*, that the stimulatory powers of visual content exceed that of music and other auditory content.

4.5 - Psychology

A strong theory surrounding the psychological function of music in film suggests that the "meaning of a film is altered by the music as the result of two complex cognitive processes," in a model called Congruence-Associationist, which was invented and tested in 1988 by scholars Marshall and Cohen.⁶⁴ The model tested several components of film music's impact on how a movie is received, though it of course only tested adult audiences. Still, the empirical evidence of their findings is relevant. The study found that musical underscore directly influenced how audience members evaluated the music in terms of potency (whether it is strong or weak), and activity (whether the music is active or passive.) The subjects were also asked to evaluate whether, in their opinion, the music was good or bad, which was much more difficult to measure. Overall the only commonality among most of the test audience members was the fact that music deemed "good" was based on the congruence — the relationship

⁶⁴Lipscomb, Scott D. and David E. Tolchinsky. "The Role of Music Communication in Cinema." 2004 Music Communication. Eds.: Miell, MacDonald, and Hargreaves, Oxford U. Press. 4

between sound and image. Though not directly related to my study, these findings are demonstrative of how important synchronicity between sound and image is when it comes to the film-viewing experience, thus supporting the notion that music is as crucial as visual content in the media effects conversation.

The second half of Marshall and Cohen's study is even more directly related to this monograph, being that it deals with the ways in which we viewers unconsciously assign meaning to the movies we watch based on how it is scored. The study found that any instance of music does indeed "alter [the] meaning of a particular aspect of the film"⁶⁵ for audience members. Given that the test subjects were all adults, one can only imagine the kind of altered meaning that must be experienced by children, depending on the underscore in their films.

Not to be confused with moods, which we usually use to define our general state of mind, emotions are stronger and shorter, and multiple can be experienced at once. Often "linked to unconscious physical reactions," John Powell, author of *Why you like Music*, explains to his readers that, "if an emotional response is music-related, it will be synchronized with the music—that is, the music will trigger the emotion."⁶⁶ Psychologists and anthropologists have long agreed that most emotions are linked to human survival, some being obvious, such as fear triggering the fight-or-flight response in the amygdala.⁶⁷ Though "the part of the brain the initiates the automatic part of the fight or flight response, the amygdala, can't distinguish between a real threat and a

⁶⁵ Marshall and Cohen, 1988, page 109

⁶⁶ Powell, John. "Chapter 3: Music and Your Emotions" *Why You Love Music*. (31-32) New York, 2016.

⁶⁷Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) "Stress Recess: Fight or Flight." Stress and Management Reduction. University of Texas. https://cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/Level_One/fof.html

perceived threat," the emotional and resulting physical responses are always real.⁶⁸ This is no different than when we watch movies. If a villain is chasing the protagonist, or if a beloved character is killed, our emotional response is very real. Since musical underscore, then, only intensifies these responses, it is understandable why cinema—which combines narrative, visual, and thematic content, with this added dimension of music—is so stimulating and thus, worthy of deeper and more specific analysis. A deeper understanding of child audiences experiences could open our eyes to new angles and approaches in developmental psychology.

Finally, I will briefly discuss another psychological study on Visual Attention, which proved instrumental in bolstering some of my ideas for further research. A 2014 study found that, "Children with lower IQs have lower recognition memories." High IQ children, however, would perform similarly on memorization tasks when their visual attention was interrupted somehow. The researchers deemed this significant because of a 2016 study they went on to conduct, which ultimately revealed significant evidence to suggest that focused attention skills (most often referring to 'visual' attention) play a larger role in bolstering memory performance, and in some cases actual IQ scores, than memory training exercises themselves! When merged with the film theories mentioned previously, which universally agree that music all but vanquishes film's weakness of "choppiness," there is potential that professionally underscored educational cinema may be the perfect means through which to teach kids content in this potentially ideal format of uninterrupted visual stimuli. When the findings of these studies are combined, it suggest that lower IQ children would be able to strengthen their focused attention skills,

Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) "Stress Recess: Fight or Flight." *Stress and Management Reduction*. University of Texas. https://cmhc.utexas.edu/stressrecess/Level_One/fof.html

and in turn perform more competitively with the higher IQ kids. For more on the significance and potentials of these findings, refer to the chapter seven.

Part III: Analysis

Chapter 5 - Techniques, Effects, and Approaches (TEA) common in family movie
underscore

Chapter 6 - Underscore Violence: What's appropriate and Why?

5. Techniques, Effects, and Approaches (TEA) Common in Family Movie

Underscore

5.1 - Mickey-Mousing

Perhaps the only underscoring technique that is more-or-less universally recognized in the music and film industries as one intended for use in children's motion picture is known as mickey-mousing. A common misconception is that the term applies specifically to animated films. Another common misconception is that the term applies only to content produced by Walt Disney. However, the term was simply born of the animated content produced by Walt Disney. His earliest cartoons, which starred the most famous mouse in visual media history, were of the first to employ the technique. In fact, they invented it seemingly without even realizing it. Walt Disney and his composition team seemed to unanimously view the precise mimicry of visual action by appropriate musical gestures (aka "Mickey-mousing it") as the necessary and therefore automatic approach to underscoring these cartoon stories. At a time when sound was still a relatively new feature in motion pictures, people were used to live accompaniment in the form of loops and parlor music when watching a movie. As a man known for making his dreams a reality, Walt Disney simply exploited the new sound technology to make the cartoons even more magical and engaging, always seeking to make his artistic visions even more of a reality.

At a fundamental level, mickey-mousing can be defined as a compositional technique that involves playing the music directly on the action of the scene, usually for the purpose of adding humor, communicating, or to simply exaggerate the actions of the scene. There is much controversy among filmmakers and composers regarding the

appropriateness of mickey-mousing. It earned itself a bad name early on due to many animation composers' tendency to overuse it. Here are two excerpts of the technique being described in both negative and positive lights:

"Those who objected to Disney's technique for selecting music and lyrics—as he did for Snow White, which critics considered too literal—coined the term "Mickey Mousing." From then on, "Mickey Mousing" became widely used in Hollywood as a derogatory term to refer to any use of sound in the movies that was considered too pointedly precise, predictable, and literal."⁶⁹

"Though Walt Disney himself was not a musician, music was given a distinct, almost central, role in the creation of his cartoons. Special techniques such as Mickey-mousing or the click track were developed by composers and used to synchronize this music and animation. These processes really began with Disney and have formed the basis for all music synchronized to cartoon animation. From the very beginning with Mickey Mouse, to The Silly Symphonies, to the beloved classic Disney movies music has been an ever-present and developing center. Walt Disney, though not a composer himself, hired a number of key composers from which we have many cherished melodies. Unlike most other cartoons Disney's were focused on using music of the classical style rather than the popular style. The music from a number of classical composers was used or drawn upon as a model. Disney had a special purpose for the music in his animated films."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Monaco, 53

⁷⁰ Gage, "A Walk through an American Classic." <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=musicalofferings>

It is my personal opinion that mickey-mousing is highly versatile and under-appreciated. The remainder of this sub-chapter describes its many uses and the many purposes it serves in children's films.

To enhance or exhibit a character's personality or persona

Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* contains a most colorful example of mickey-mouse underscore being used to help illustrate the personality of characters. As a large platter is passed down the long dining table, each "Who-ville" character who the platter is passed to, lifts the lid only to find a smaller platter with a smaller lid, and so on. As the characters pass the platters, each one is accompanied by a unique arrangement of the theme's primary motif. This continues until the smallest platter reaches the end of the table and is opened by Cindi Lu Who. She, being the story's primary symbol of kindness, innocence, and naivete, is accompanied by a single perfectly-in-tune bell.

*Mickey-Mousing as supplemental Foley*⁷¹

Today, sound design and composition are seen as two entirely different jobs within the post-production stage of filmmaking. However, when the embedment sound was first introduced to film, composers were often relied upon to fill in the gaps. This is where mickey-mousing in composition merges with sound design, also known as foley: "As every professional filmmaker and videographer knows, even the most gorgeous footage and brilliant camera work can lose power when unaccompanied by sound. For maximum emotional impact, foley sound, like ADR, must match the actions in the video that was filmed."⁷²

⁷¹ See 2.5 - Definitions Summary for more on Foley

⁷² Hibbard, Matt. *Premium Beat*. "Recording Foley and Sound Effects: The Fundamentals." 2015. <https://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/recording-foley-and-sound-effects-the-fundamentals/>

The most creative use of mickey-mouse scoring as supplemental foley occurs in *Snow White*, Walt Disney's first feature-length animated motion picture during the seven dwarves mining song, "Heigh Ho." As the seven dwarves sing in the diamond mines, they are simultaneously working away. Though *Snow White* did have separate sound design and music departments, composers were placed in charge of all of the sound in this scene. Therefore, the composers incorporated numerous mallet instruments into the underscore to fill the role of underscore, foley, and accompaniment — a one-of-a-kind occurrence in movie music history.

The 2nd noteworthy example of mickey-mousing fulfilling this role in children's cinema came to my attention via *TV Tropes* ⁷³ while working on an unrelated project. It occurs in *The Cat and the Hat*, and is borderline diegetic music. "While attempting to get back the pet dog, Nevins, the two main protagonists attempt to sneak in, all the while the sound of their footsteps punctuated by the Cat playing on his whiskers. The children both look at him, and he replies, 'I thought the moment needed something.'" ⁷⁴

⁷³ tvtropes.org

⁷⁴ Mickey Mousing | All The Tropes Wiki | FANDOM powered by Wikia. http://allthetropes.wikia.com/wiki/Mickey_Mousing

Mickey-Mousing for Communication

This application of mickey-mousing is very useful between characters who don't speak but whom audiences are still supposed to connect with. Usually this is the case with animal friends and sidekicks. This usage is so plentiful that it earned its own table:

<i>Pocahontas</i>	Raccoon & Bird	<i>Beethoven</i>	Beethoven the dog
<i>Cinderella</i>	Lucifer & Bruno	<i>Tangled</i>	Royal Horse
<i>Frozen</i>	Moose	<i>E.T.</i>	E.T. the alien
<i>Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>	Esmerelda's Goat	<i>Gibby</i>	Gibby the Monkey

TABLE 5.1 - MICKEY-MOUSING FOR COMMUNICATION EXAMPLES

One fun example takes place in Disney's *Cinderella*, when Jack and Gus must sneak around the evil cat, Lucifer, in order to rescue Cinderella's beaded necklace as the final touch of their collaborative surprise with the birds: to sew Cinderella a dress for the ball. The mickey-mousing in this scene⁷⁵ is so carefully crafted that the composers even managed to work recognizable character themes, which are familiar to viewers at this point, into what would otherwise be a difficult task in a scene requiring non-stop mickey-mousing.

At 0:33 as Lucifer spots the mice getting away from under his chair, and as the mice's "getaway music" plays, Lucifer's jaw drops. This is perfectly synchronized with a chromatic ascending triplet figuration in the trombones. The effect is, not only to exaggerate the cat's jaw dropping for the sake of humor, but also to emphasize his anger, since the cat himself cannot speak. This is an example of mickey-mousing primarily for the purpose of communicating emotion. Albeit in an exaggerated matter

⁷⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RI9_tD8jT0

and achieving humor as a result, the main function is communication of a character with no dialogue. The only human-like phonations he can make are his evil hiss-like laughs which, in turn, are usually not accompanied by any underscore at all. Because the mice can speak, they do not require mickey-mousing underscore for the same purpose.

The second noteworthy example in *Cinderella* occurs between Bruno the dog and Lucifer the house cat, in a scene involving Bruno dreaming about killing Lucifer.⁷⁶ Bruno the dog, is the only other character in Disney's original *Cinderella* who needs to communicate but cannot speak. Therefore, his scenes utilize communicative mickey-mousing as well, in addition to the usual other purposes. In this particular example, the underscore actually aids in a "dialogue-less" conversation between Bruno and Lucifer, while Cinderella attempts to casually play mediator so that they will stop fighting.

Though I've established that the majority of communicative mickey-mousing occurs between animals or characters where at least one cannot speak. However, there are two excellent human examples as well. The first example is from *Little Mermaid* (1989), which is one of the few instances where consistent mickey-mousing as communication is used on a character who technically can speak. Even in this case though, it is used on Ariel when her voice has temporarily been stolen by the sea witch. The second example occurs in the film *Babes in Toyland*. Another mute character who child audiences are supposed to bond with despite his inability to speak, is "Tweedle Dumb," the sidekick to Tweedle Dee, one of the funniest characters, to which the mickey-mousing also contributes. Not only is it functioning as a communication device in place of his voice, but it is also playing the role of "humorizer" here as well.

⁷⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZ7Dm4rjSHc>

Mickey-Mousing to Energize or Build Suspense

The first example I'll discuss where mickey-mousing is employed as a compositional device to energize a scene and build suspense, is the Bicycle Chase Scene in *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*.⁷⁷ An example of mickey-mousing in one of its subtlest forms: where more prominent underscore (in this case, thematic material) is occurring simultaneously. (The other form of "subtle" mickey-mousing occurs when the synchronization ends periodically, particularly avoiding moments where it would become too noticeable or exaggerate an action too much.) Overall, Williams' underscore in this scene demonstrates a concerted effort to add energy to this chase that would help make it more exciting than scary. In fact, one of the top 5 most highly rated comments on this scene's most viewed YouTube posting describes it as, "One of the most uplifting scenes in cinema history."⁷⁸

The most noticeable mickey-mousing in this scene's underscore can be heard during the close-up shots of the children's feet pedaling rapidly in attempt to evade the police and other grown-ups chasing them. As they pedal, rapid step-wise ascending triplet figurations (usually in the flutes) can be heard repeatedly, in a cyclical manner, matching the motions of their cycling legs. The orchestration of this repeated figure varied, but the one consistency was that the figuration always occurred in a very high register, and by very few instruments, making it camouflaged much of the time. It's possible the potential for subtlety of the high register contributed to Williams' orchestration choice.

⁷⁷4:29 - posted March 16, 2011 - Peter Montag - Created June 1982 - Universal Pictures <https://youtu.be/Ct6O2nSOMII>

⁷⁸ SNJ

Still, the successful scoring of this scene didn't come easily, being that "subtlety" and "mickey-mousing" are two terms that rarely go hand in hand. This scene is, in fact, an excellent example of the challenges mickey-mouse underscore presents. During the scoring session for this scene, John Williams himself was conducting to picture. However, allegedly, Williams was having so much trouble getting the orchestra to synchronize, that Stephen Spielberg told him to stop trying and to just conduct it in whatever way "feels right," and he would re-edit the film to match. This shows us that, click tracks can only do so much. Even masters of their craft like John Williams can, at times, struggle to successfully realize their mickey-mouse score. The lesson here is that mickey-mouse underscore can be incredibly effective; magical even. But unless the exact intended synchronization is achieved, it will sound unprofessional and silly.

This is one of the reasons why I am skeptical about the general consensus, found in the limited existing mickey-mousing literature, that composers avoid mickey-mousing because it is "cheesy." There is an implicit virtuosity in this that even untutored audiences can appreciate. I believe that, more often than not, mickey-mousing is only avoided because of how challenging it is to get right. The fact is, the technique is intimidating for even composers as experienced and beloved as John Williams.

Another instance where mickey-mousing is used to provide a burst of energetic suspense in viewers occurs in *How to Train Your Dragon* during the Forbidden Friendship scene. Although this scene is actually a montage scene, which therefore requires a completely different style of underscore, it opens with a bit of noteworthy mickey-mousing. When Toothless grabs the fish from Hiccup's hand, composer John Powell underscores the action, which is meant to be very startling, with a cymbal crash

and fortepiano bass and cellos playing an octave that introduces the principle pitch of the following montage scene's underscore. Without scaring the audience, John Powell clearly saw the value in giving viewers a small taste of what the protagonist, Hiccup must have felt having a dragon's mouth clenching down on something close to his hand.

Mickey-Mousing to add Humor

Though many believe *this* is the sole purpose of the mickey-mousing technique, the fact is it is only the *original* purpose, along with keeping the visual content interesting and colorful⁷⁹ so as to engage young audiences.

The only reason there isn't a section specifically for "exaggeration" is due to the fact that the very nature of this technique is to exaggerate, or give a "boost" to the visual content. The careful synchronization to the action is the equivalent to taking a highlighter to printed text. The same way you may have different colored highlighters for different types of content, the same goes for the different purposes for using mickey-mousing to exaggerate visual content. Exaggeration is, however, almost always associated with the "humor" category of the many purposes mickey-mousing serves, which is why I am elaborating upon it here.

One film which makes excellent use of mickey-mousing as a means of adding humor is *Peter Pan*. One example takes place during a scene that I will refer to as "I'm a codfish."⁸⁰ In the final act, Captain Hook has surrendered, and instead of killing him, Peter Pan simply orders the pirate captain to call himself a codfish. Hook tricks Peter Pan into thinking he is humbled and surrenders, doing as he's told by calling himself a

⁷⁹ Colorful musically — instrumentally and timbrally. When the technique began, colored motion picture would not become a reality for decades.

⁸⁰<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DujJfXlr-Ds>

codfish. But when Peter's back is turned, Captain Hook tries to "hook" Peter from behind. This attempt backfires and Hook accidentally falls from the ship directly into the mouth of Croc. This instance of Mickey-mousing is relatively standard, the falling of Hook being underscored with rapid descending chromatic scales.

What makes this part unique, however, is when the pirate flag falls down after him. Just as when a feather or other porous item is dropped from the air, its falling motion is unpredictable. The mickey-mouse underscore highlights this motion nicely with atonal descending arpeggios in a defeated-sounding bass clarinet, humorizing while simultaneously emphasizing this symbol of the pirates' defeat.

Mickey-mousing is often used as a means of lightening the mood or minimizing the tension in a scene that could easily be perceived or experienced as dark or scary. The first sword fight scene in *Princess Bride*, for instance, is an example where mickey-mousing functions as a "humorizer" in this way. In addition to lightening the mood by making the characters engage in light-hearted conversation, it is also seemingly choreographed to the underscore. "The music stops every time a stroke is parried. The music and the dueling both stop to allow the characters to perform acrobatic feats and talk to one another."⁸¹ It indirectly communicates to young viewers that they don't need to be scared - this is a silly fight.

Some psychologists and parents express concern about acts of violence being depicted as light-hearted or even beautiful in films. However, rarely do any of the psychological studies conducted on this topic seem to give music a significant amount of credit for this. And, while I personally find their concern somewhat flawed, they should

⁸¹ tvtropes.org

at least address their concern with an understanding of the hard source of the light-heartedness, instead of focusing solely on the violent images themselves. When focusing only on visual stimuli, the conversation is limited to things like cinematography and director intentions, which only indirectly addresses the actual "threat". However, should they wish to address the phenomenon directly and objectively, they must stop to contemplate why the violent act in question feels sugar-coated. Upon doing this, they would find that one of the main sources is not visual at all, but musical. See section entitled 'Media Violence' for more thorough analysis and discussion on this topic.

Mickey-Mousing for Magic

Things that children aren't used to seeing, like a pumpkin turning into a carriage, need mickey-mousing to communicate to kids that this is magical and amazing. (Cinderella, Harry Potter) It adds meaning to the scene, and even supports logos, improving the suspension of disbelief by supporting the magical event that just took place in such an affirmative way. In its most recognizable or cliché form, this type of underscore will appear as harp flourishes in sync with something that transforms or emerges out of thin air (*Cinderella*) or as ascending scales or figurations, often in woodwind instruments, in sync with something that defies gravity, floating or arising from the ground (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, 2000), or when something magical occurs that is unexpected. For more on underscoring magical moments in children's films, refer to the voice chapter for additional examples.

The table below organizes the examples discussed, along with a few other noteworthy examples, for more convenient study, review, and reference:

Film / Show	Purpose	Scene / Episode	Link
Cinderella	Communication	Bruno Dreams of Killing Lucifer	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZ7Dm4rjSHc
	Humor	Jack & Gus Sneak Around Lucifer	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RI9_tD8jT0
	Magic	Pumpkin Turning into a Carriage	
Snow White & the Seven Dwarves	Foley	Hi Ho! Mining Scene	
The Grinch Who Stole Christmas	Personality	First WhoVille feast	
Loony Toons	Humor	Woody Woodpecker	
Mickey Mouse	Humor	Pluto & Mickey's new Elephant	
Peter Pan	Humor	Legend of the Croc	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLxuuDApT38
	Humor	I'm a Codfish Scene near Finale	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DujfXlr-Ds
How to Train Your Dragon	Energize / Suspense	Precursor to "Forbidden Friendship" Montage Scene	https://youtu.be/I5JHOYmfPpo
E.T.	Energize / Suspense	Bicycle Chase Scene	https://youtu.be/Ct6O2nSOMII (4:29)
	Communication	E.T. tries to Talk	
The Cat in the Hat	Foley	Sneaking Up the Stairs	
The Princess Bride	Energize / Humor	Sword Fight between Wesley and Montoya	https://youtu.be/WDIZ_SXx5gA
The Little Mermaid	Communication (humans)	Eric getting to know Ariel	
Babes in Toyland	Communication (humans)	Tweedle Dee and sidekick Tweedle Dumb	
Hunchback	Communication	Esmerelda's Goat gets Jealous	
Harry Potter	Magic	Wingardium Leviosa	
Matilda	Magic	Matilda makes objects fly	

TABLE 5.2 - MICKEY-MOUSING EXAMPLES

Mickey-Mousing to establish Pathos

This final usage of mickey-mousing is equally significant to the others, despite the fact that it has yet to be acknowledged or discussed in any available existing research. We've discussed the great extent to which mickey-mousing is relied upon to exaggerate, highlight, or intensify moments, actions, and unspoken words for the sake of communication. However, mickey-mousing as communication serves an even greater purpose at times: to establish, induce, or clarify emotions of characters or the emotionality of a scene when it is otherwise more or less difficult to convey through visual content alone. Children understand the emotionality better when it is exaggerated. Subtler things are harder to understand, and mickey-mousing can actually help expand the emotionality and emotional awareness of children. (However, it can also do the opposite, which will be discussed later.) Even when the characters make it very clear what viewers are supposed to feel, mickey-mousing aids in the production of instant empathy from the viewer, and it makes the emotions viewers are supposed to feel much more obvious. Since children often must question their own understanding of various types of human/character interactions, they seem to respond more favorably to films that avoid detracting from the child's viewing experience in this way.

On the other hand, mickey-mousing also serves as a technique for inducing apathy by making light of—or minimizing the severity of—violent content. Mickey-mousing can also establish pathos by helping to reduce the intensity of an emotional response, essentially by confusing it. This applies to all forms of underscore, but mickey-mousing in particular has the very covert power of understating / whitewashing / sugar-coating / down-playing a violent act by replacing it with amusement. For example,

the sword fight in *Princess Bride*; early mickey mouse and loony toons - particularly the one with the woodpecker where porky the pig shoots at him and tries to poison him - the whole episode revolved around trying to murder Woody, trying to kill in every way possible, essentially. (bombs, rifles, poison were all use in a matter of 8 minutes.) For more on the various ways in which violence is underscored, refer to the CAUV triangle and discourse in Chapter 6.

5.2 - Use of Voice

The use of voice and choir in family movies is often taken for granted as a crucial component of cinematic underscore. The timbral and registral variety alone make the tone-setting possibilities endless. The range of emotionality in the human voice is also unmatched by any musical instrument. As with mickey-mousing, this versatility is especially important, and often exploited, by film composers in children's films. Unlike mickey-mousing, which is usually associated with children's motion picture, the implementation of voice as an instrument in otherwise orchestral underscore is a technique utilized across all genres for similar purposes. Its relevance in this monograph, however, isn't just the technique itself but the frequency with which it is used in certain family movie contexts, which makes it especially worthy of analysis.

For the Magical, Mythical, and Otherworldly

John Williams reserves the use of high register choir in his orchestration for very significant magical moments; usually ones that are crucial to the plot. For instance, in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the strongest use of choir is when Harry Potter successfully conjures a Patronous considered extremely advanced magic, in the climax of the film, saving his Godfather's life, as well as his own. In reserving the use of

choir for very significant moments, Williams leaves room for himself to draw child audiences back into the narrative when it matters most.

In order to assist child audiences in following a story, film composers have specific formulae for "signaling" to their young viewers when something important is happening. One study suggests that the human voice is the best auditory method with which to grasp a child's attention, being that it is one of the first cognitive scripts ever formed.⁸² Whether this relates to Williams' underscoring methods is unknown, but the correlation is interesting nonetheless.

For Humanization / Relatability

John Powell implements a lot of singable themes that are full of hope, mystery, excitement, and emotion in his score for *How to Train Your Dragon* (HTTYD). The music intensifies and deepens the friendship between Hiccup, the hero, and Toothless, the injured dragon he finds in the woods. As composer Bruce Broughton⁸³ describes it, HTTYD is essentially a love story. When falling in love, words alone cannot express what one is feeling. The underscore, then, must speak for both Hiccup and Toothless, and it must speak to both the mystery and the pure joy that surround their deeply beautiful friendship as it builds. This is why the montage scene⁸⁴ in which these two characters meet and make this connection is so crucial to the story. Moreover, this is why this particular scene's underscore must ensure each child's ability to sense their connection and relate to it on some level. The children also need to be able to fall in love with a dragon that, until this point, was portrayed as a dangerous and murderous

⁸² Valkenburg, 108

⁸³ Broughton's family film scores include *Homeward Bound*, *Eloise*, and *Rescuers Down Under*

⁸⁴ "Forbidden Friendship" scene: <https://youtu.be/I5JHOYmfPpo>

creature. John Powell locks all of this into place when Hiccup and Toothless first make physical contact at the end of this scene. Hiccup reaches out his hand, closes his eyes, and waits. In the underscore, a single solo female voice sings a delicate variation of the theme previously established in the montage scene. The humanization effect of the solo voice is breathtaking and moving. The lullaby-like quality of the melody, as well as tone of voice, suggest that Powell was going for tenderness comparable to that between a mother and child. This was a beautiful and particularly appropriate choice, given that the film's target audience can relate to this kind of love better than any other.

When Death Comes Knocking / Intimidation

There is an intimidating quality to the choral ensemble itself that is rarely discussed. In fact, film composer Danny Elfman exploits it all the time in his scores for Tim Burton movies, such as *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Edward Scissorhands*.⁸⁵ Unless at a live concert where one can see the ensemble, choir music can sound like a thousand voices to the untrained ear. What else comes to mind when you think of a thousand individuals acting as one? An army. A formula that seems to have gone untraced is the army-like quality of choral underscore in such scenes as: villain introductions, battles, and any other scene wherein the composer wishes to boost the intimidation factor. If a composer wishes to exploit the intimidation potentials of the choral ensemble, there are many ways to do so: (a) using articulatory effects to evoke a listening experience of being sung "at" instead of sung "to", (b) using stark dynamic contrasts to keep the audience alert, (c) using march-like meters and tempos common in war traditions; and finally, (d) using homorhythmic textures to enhance the sense of

⁸⁵ <https://composerfocus.com/orchestration-in-the-style-of-danny-elfman/>

unity among the "oncoming" group. Especially when coupled with the "singing 'at'" effect, this will serve to enhance the intimidation effect.

Whether intentional or not, each of the compositional TEAs outlined above is exploited by film composers in their use of choir for purposes of intimidation. My favorite examples are outlined in the table below: David Newman's use of voice in his children's film underscoring is not terribly different from Danny Elfman's, at least in terms of the purpose it serves. He uses it in *Anastasia* often, enhancing horrific moments with canticle-like, syllabic choral passages that are almost reminiscent of the ritualistic string passages in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in tone.

Star Wars: The Phantom Menace	Duel of the Fates	Battle Scene	https://youtu.be/9Uvad9uSc9k
Anastasia	Defeating Rasputin	Battle Scene	https://youtu.be/lrGlfJdbUHY

TABLE 5.3 - BATTLE SCENES WITH UNDERSCORE VOCALS

6. Cinematic Violence

As established in Chapter 2.5, Most conversations surrounding cinematic violence focuses on PG-13 and R-rated films for the simple reason that more overtly violent content exists to converse about. Indeed, the connection between media violence and violent behavior in adolescents is an important discussion in and of itself. However, all adolescents were children first, and children's films are responsible for introducing several forms of physical violence and *many* forms of thematic violence to their impressionable target audience — themes such as death and corruption. In fact, one recent observational study conducted by UCLA psychological researchers found that death of a significant character is two-and-a-half times more likely in a children's animated film than in a film for adults, and murder of a significant character is three times more likely (Fleur, 2014). Depending on how it is handled, this could either be beneficial or detrimental to the child's development. The American Academy of Pediatrics continues to express concern over mounting evidence of potential harmful effects of violence and death in children's media, especially given the fact that, apart from sleeping, media consumption is now the leading activity for children and teenagers; in fact, the average 8 to 10-year-old spends nearly 8 hours in front of the television each day. However, pediatricians and psychologists alike admit, albeit sometimes reluctantly, that the "Important positive and prosocial effects of media use should also be recognized." (Strasburger and Hogan, 2013) Brown and Walsh Childers approached this aspect of the media effects conversation from a policy making perspective, which was surprisingly insightful in its simplification. They believe that increasing "awareness of health issues among policymakers...may contribute to

changing the context in which people make choices about their health." (454) Though the policymaking component is irrelevant in this conversation, I appreciate both the objectivity and simplicity of their assessment. They categorize media effects in two ways: Intended / Unintended and Positive / Negative, described it the following excerpt:

"The effects of the media may be intended by the message producer, as is the case when health educators develop public information campaigns, or may be unintended, as is the case when viewers adopt unhealthy behaviors that are portrayed only for entertainment value on television programs. The outcome may be either positive or negative from a public health point of view." (Brown and Walsh Childers, 454, ch 17, Table 17.1)

Further acknowledgement of the potential for intended positive effects are pointed out in one of the only existing quantitative studies on death in children's G-rated animated films, determining "films that model appropriate grief responses could help children to gain a deeper [and healthier] understanding of the meaning of death." (Colman, 2014) The question that remains is, what approaches to underscore support appropriate grief responses?

In order to avoid the ethical debate, my research focused on objectively identifying and differentiating various portrayals of violence in children's film, and how the underscore contributes to each of these representations - whether by simply acknowledging it, sugarcoating it, or enhancing it.⁸⁶ It is for the reader to then take this information and determine which representation of violence is "better" or "worse." Bringing to light the ways in which music contributes to film violence will enlighten both

⁸⁶ See the CAUV triangle for further explanation of these three approaches.

sides of the media violence debate and enable the discourse to become more informed and future research studies more useful.

Cognitive script theory refers to "hypothesized knowledge structures that outline how everyday events unfold." (Hanson) Some developmental psychologists, such as Robert Abelson and Roger C. Shank, examined script theory through a lens which focused on the ways in which these "hypothesized knowledge structures" are responsible for storing and organizing information, and for shaping our interpretation of how the world works. (Manansala, 2013) Scholars and professional in Communications and Media Effects have clung to cognitive script theory, particularly the Huesmann Information Processing Model,⁸⁷ as a means of justifying and giving clout to their own theory: that exposure to certain content in media can influence children's development and behavior. By the age of three, children already have developed many behavioral (or "cognitive") scripts and are prepared for activities that require greater information processing, such as following the narrative of a story or film. Not only do scripts "guide expectations and behaviors in everyday situations" (Abelson & Shank), but they do the same in imaginary situations, such as in guiding our expectations for how something will play out in a film. Studies indicate that, to grasp and maintain a child's interest for a 75+ minute movie, it must strike a fairly specific balance between *predictable* (supporting their existing scripts), and *surprising* (leaving room for the child to experience something new).⁸⁸ Behavioral scripts "help children understand, interpret, and predict what will

⁸⁷ "Script Cognitive Theory" by Francel Manansala. October, 2013. *Established psychological blog*. <http://francestaar.blogspot.com>

⁸⁸ Valkenburg, "Media and Violence" *Plugged In*, Ch. 7: 2017

happen in future scenarios" (Oswalt, 2008), hence the cruciality of thoughtfully produced underscore and thematic content in the films targeting them.⁸⁹

Furthermore, as early as age 9 children begin experiencing early adolescence, with which comes independence. And by age 13, virtually all children have reached adolescence, at which point they inevitably become increasingly disengaged from their parents and teachers, and unreceptive to authority.⁹⁰ It is for this reason that I believe the movie violence debate should not focus so much on PG-13 vs R-rated violence, and instead turn their attention to the violence present in PG and G-rated movies, which are some of the primary media influencing children during their most impressionable stage of life. Of course, PG-13 and R-rated content *is* available to children younger than thirteen via streaming services like YouTube or an adult accompanying them to the cinema. However, if we are to identify the impact of media violence, we must place a greater emphasis on the content that is *made for* them, instead of simply what is available to them.

A huge component of the Media Violence Effects debate involves discourse on which type of "cinematic violence depiction" is worse for children viewers: stylized, symbolic, "artistic" violence that often looks past the consequences of violent acts — OR realistic, oftentimes gory violence, that is more graphic but also more demonstrative of the realities of violence and its consequences. Musical underscore is never considered in this debate, and yet music is a huge factor in determining which of these two categories each violent movie scene falls into. For instance: Throughout Disney's

⁸⁹ <https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/early-childhood-cognitive-development-information-processing/>

⁹⁰ *Psychology Today*, 2013

Peter Pan, acts of aggression and/or violence almost always induce laughter, such as Captain Hook being pushed into a crocodile's mouth, or Tinker Bell abusing Wendy. When the music is removed, audience response to acts of aggression change drastically.⁹¹ It is only because of the underscore that such acts can be portrayed as humorous and light-hearted. In the case of *Peter Pan*, the technique most often employed to achieve this effect is mickey-mousing. The effect of mickey-mousing under acts of violence fit into category of sugarcoating which I will expand upon later in this chapter.

Conversely, Disney's *Lion King* portrays acts of violence, (or, in this particular case, murder) in a more somber, dramatic light through use of empathetic orchestration methods such as the incorporation of human voice. To briefly elaborate on the content of the Voice in Underscore sub-chapter, choral music triggers a range of cognitive scripts in most children, one of which is an empathetic response. (Other early associations children have with choral music are discussed in the "voice" subchapter on family movie Underscore Techniques.) The human voice in general triggers an empathetic response in children from as early as 3 months, which we've established is when cognitive scripts begin to form. I believe it is for this reason that choral music, and other uses of human voice in underscore, are so effective, and therefore so commonly employed, in children's films.

Before proceeding to the following sections which delve deeper into the varying approaching to underscoring media violence, it is important to acknowledge that some children are more vulnerable than others when it comes to exposure to violent stimuli.

⁹¹ Film music quantitative research study (2013?) on film music entering before or after an event, informing viewers interpretations of characters' emotions

One psychological study was conducted to determine the ways in which a child's means of processing information correlates to his or her emotional response to violence and found that those favoring the left cerebral hemisphere for information processing had a stronger emotional response to violent content in film. This is significant because "left-brained" children are more common than "right-brained" children.

Since its initial discovery in the late 1970s, studies continue to reaffirm the asymmetry that exists between the human brain's left and right cerebral hemispheres, wherein certain types of problem-solving and information processing take place. It has long been theorized that every human is genetically predisposed to the unconscious favoring of one of the two hemispheres, giving that particular hemisphere the upper hand in any cognitive processes that require the two sides to work separately. Given the substantial differences between the functions of the left and right hemispheres, our genetic predispositions directly impact the manner in which we process information. "When a child is confronted with a cognitive learning situation, the two hemispheres act as independent problem-solving organs, sharing some of the input and output facilities...effectively preventing further development of the [weaker] mode." (Galín) "A left hemisphere advantage would yield what might be called a discursive (word/number) bias; whereas a right hemisphere advantage would yield a non discursive (picture/sound/imagistic) bias."⁹²The above 'disclaimer,' although arguably off-topic, is significant in case this exploratory research is used as a gateway to more in-depth psychological studies surrounding this issue because it provides insight regarding the children whom are at a greater risk of being negatively influenced by the media they are consuming.

⁹² Karl, 78

6.1 - TEA for Underscoring Violence

One example where the violence in a family movie was supported rather than nullified by the underscore, occurs in *Babe: Pig in the City* (1998), the sequel to the controversial but successful family movie *Babe* (1995). In a scene lasting over two minutes, a dog is strangled to death by his own leash after accidentally running off of a bridge, leading to his eventual drowning in the river below, as other dogs look on. The scene was graphic—visually not sugar-coated at all. The most common approach for a composer scoring a film they know to be targeted towards children, if given the choice, would be to attempt to create underscore that somehow makes the scene more tolerable for children. However, this is of course, subjective. Every composer will have a different approach to what they deem appropriate underscore.

Nigel Westlake, who scored the original *Babe* film as well, took a somber approach to this somber scene with a low-register, *lentissimo*, a cappella choral underscore. The music does not convey horror but rather deep mourning. The use of a cappella voices at such a slow tempo indicate an attempt to humanize the horrific and lengthy scene by empathizing with - and appealing to - what would be the calmest possible audience reaction: sadness. Justifying their sadness and allowing them to embrace that reaction was the only way Westlake's underscore could be perceived as lessening the impact of such a graphic scene. However, without enhancing the violence, the music still serves and reflects the horrors of the scene.

This film, which received a G rating by the MPAA⁹³ and was marketed as a family movie, performed terribly in the box office. With a budget of \$90 million, the film's gross income in the United States totaled only \$18.3 million. Even positive reviews, which claimed the 1998 film was "underrated," acknowledged its dark tone, to which the drowning scene is only one of many examples. One such positive review explains it well: "Like *Return of Oz*⁹⁴, [*Babe 2*] is the opposite of cuddly. It's breathtakingly, spine-tinglingly perverse and dark ... it often feels like a fable at children's expense, rather than for them." Ultimately, the film's major flop is evidence that the film was unsuccessful in reaching its target audience.

Again, whether sugarcoating violence is ethical is another conversation entirely, as is the debate over whether sugarcoated violence is better or worse than accurate depictions of violence. What makes these observations relevant in this conversation, however, is the fact that it demonstrates just how instrumental and influential underscore is in setting the tone and directly affecting the audience's emotional reaction. This power should not be taken lightly, especially when it involves an audience as impressionable as children.

As explained in the introductory section Interdisciplinary Research and Unifying Existing Theories, my research, including the few interviews I was able to conduct, all indicated that the vast majority of film composers with experience scoring both family movies and non-family movies claim that there is little to no variation between their

⁹³It is unclear how a film exhibiting such a violent death of an animal could earn a G-rating from the MPAA. My only speculation is that it was somehow due to the fact that the dog is portrayed as a "villain" in the scene, and his accident occurs whilst chasing our protagonist, presumably with the intention of killing him.

⁹⁴referencing the sequel to *Wizard of Oz*, which also performed much worse in the box office than its predecessor.

approaches to underscoring each of the genres. However, a distinct formula for underscoring violence seems to exist, even if it is not in any formal capacity. Whether intentional or not, I chose to map and organize these approaches in a model that could be used for future research studies on the topic:

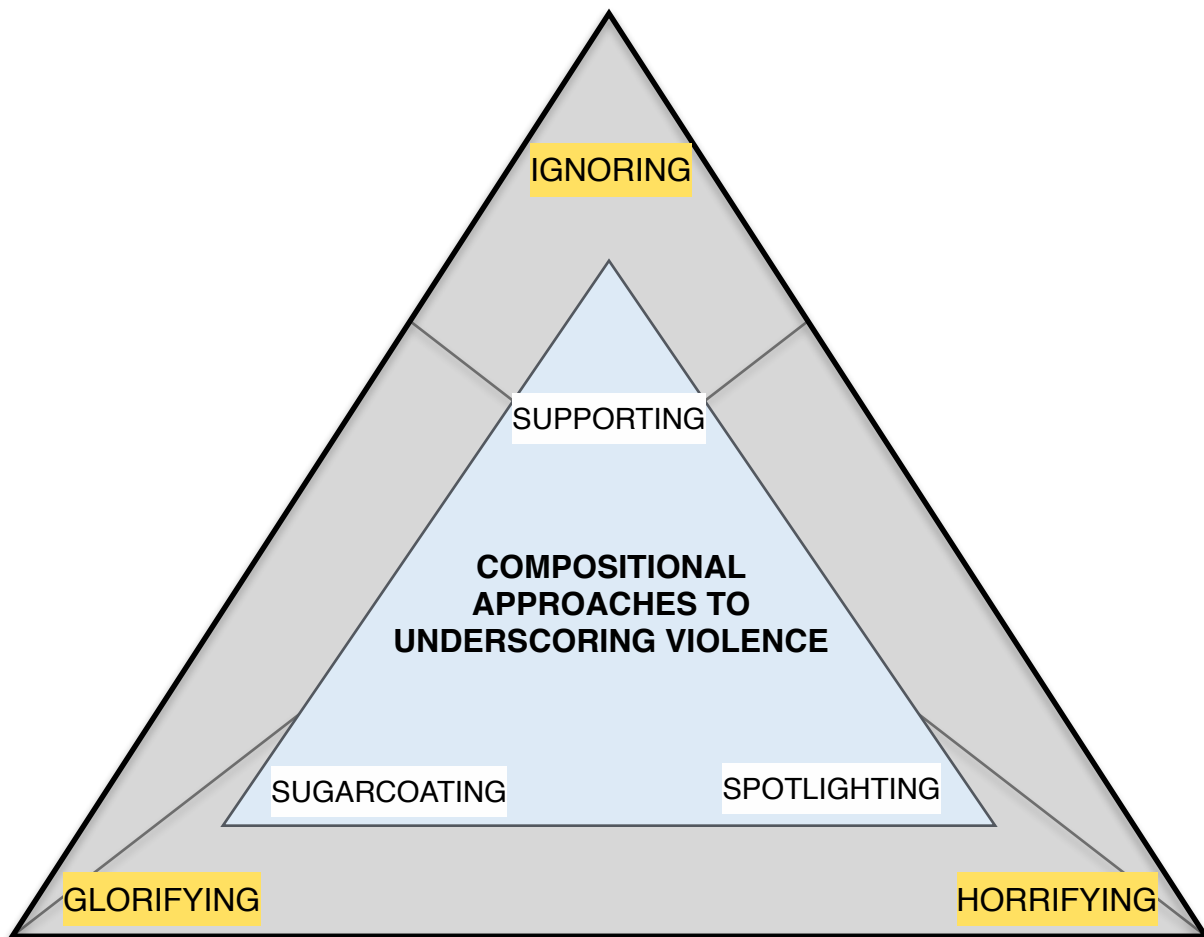


FIGURE 6.1 - COMPOSITIONAL APPROACHES TO UNDERSCORING VIOLENCE (CAUV) TRIANGLE

The inside triangle represents the most common approaches to scoring under violence, and the outside triangle represents what those approaches become in their most extreme form. There are three general approaches, and each point on the triangle represents one. The top point of the triangle, "supporting" is the one that represents what is generally considered to be the most conventional and safe approach. The

bottom right point on the inside triangle, "Spotlighting," tends to be the most risky approach in family movies but the most common approach in movies intended for adult audiences. "Sugarcoating" is the most common approach to underscoring violence in family movies, as well as the most significant. This is due to the fact that it is demonstrative of composers' incredible ability to transform one's emotional response to visual content from what is logical, without the consumer even realizing it. Considering the impressionable and vulnerable child audiences being targeted, the significance of this impact is quite extraordinary.

As previously stated, the three points of the outer triangle represent the extreme or "fringe" versions of their corresponding inner triangle points. These extreme approaches, which essentially exaggerate their inner triangle counterparts, are rare in children's films but still happen often enough that they are worth discussing. While death is not excluded from the term "violence" as it applies to the CAUV triangle, underscoring death—particularly on-screen death—has its own set of requirements, compositionally. Because of the surprising frequency with which on-screen death occurs in children's movies,⁹⁵ all death examples are reserved for their own separate discussion later in this chapter.

While all three approaches on the CAUV triangle serve to influence how child audiences receive and experience the violent content being shown, Spotlighting and Sugarcoating are especially capable of manipulating child audience's emotional state. Spotlighting refers to underscore that serves to pick out and accentuate the violence, and/or emphasize it, bringing it to the forefront so much so that it may leave children

⁹⁵Colman, Ian. "Cartoons Kill: casualties in animated recreational theater in an objective observational new study of kids' introduction to loss of life." *The BMJ* 349 (2014).

scarred or give them nightmares—especially when the cinematic violence in the film relates to a child being separated from their parent.⁹⁶ I discovered a link between Spotighting underscore and violence against and/or separation from family members in children's films. This is extremely concerning, given that death and/or separation from parents is extremely common in children's films,⁹⁷ and the only longitudinal study ever conducted on children's nightmares determined that separation anxiety was one of the greatest bad dream risk factors.⁹⁸ Depending on one's interpretation of the violent scene, this music may enhance the horrors, making a particular violent act out to be even worse or more horrific than it would otherwise seem without music, or enhance the drama. Additionally, though it may seem futile, the way in which a violent scene against a villain is underscored often seeks to legitimize the violence against such a villain.

Sugarcoating is essentially the opposite of Spotighting, referring to the act of masking the violence rather than emphasizing it. Sugarcoating can distort children's perception of the seriousness of whatever violent act is taking place. It fits the universal definition of sugarcoating, which Merriam Webster Dictionary defines as the act of making something "superficially attractive or acceptable."

Dance-like TEA for making danger and violence exciting

One primary method for underscoring violence, which can be categorized as Sugarcoating, Supporting, OR Spotighting on the CAUV triangle depending on the

⁹⁶Simard V; Nielsen TA; Tremblay RE; Boivin M; Montplaisir JY. Longitudinal study of bad dreams in preschool-aged children: prevalence, demographic correlates, risk and protective factors. SLEEP 2008;31(1):62-70.

⁹⁷ "Cartoons Kill" study

⁹⁸ Simard, 63

particular scene, is to compose something dance-like. You may be thinking "Of course. Children's films often are musicals with plenty of songs one could dance to." This is not incorrect. However, these are not the scenes I am referring to. This seems a necessary time to reiterate the fact that all of the underscoring TEA discussed in this monograph are precisely that: underscore. While it is fairly easy to make a musical number have dance-like qualities, it is much more difficult—even risky—to use dance-like qualities in underscore that is accompanying something violent; especially in a children's movies. With that in mind, allow me to present three examples—one for each point on the CAUV triangle.

The dance-like approach to underscoring violence shows up in many forms, the most obvious being literal—a jig, a square-dancing style segment, etc.—usually landing itself somewhere along the sugarcoating—glorifying spectrum of the CAUV triangle. One example occurs in Disney's *Tuck Everlasting* during the jailbreak scene. In this PG-rated live action Disney movie, the third and final act of the film involves two brothers breaking their wrongly-convicted parents out of jail. Given that the audience, by this point, knows that these brothers cannot die,⁹⁹ the producers of the film are more easily able to justify having two of the film's protagonists shot by a prison guard multiple times on camera. Still, whoever was in charge of overseeing the music for this scene didn't want to take any chances. Using the "sugarcoating" approach, which feels borderline glorifying if not for the fact that the violence is being committed by the prison guard, the composer underscores the scene with delightfully mischievous, high-energy jig. The jig

⁹⁹ The story revolves around the plot point that a particular family living in turn-of-the-century United States, has been living there since colonial days, unable to die due to a magic spring they discovered and drank from in the woods.

begins as the brothers approach the prison, as if to groom its most sensitive viewers into experiencing the scene to come as humorous rather than violent. The guard shoots them, and the jig cuts out abruptly. But as the immortal brothers rise from the ground and continue towards the prison, the jig starts up again, inducing laughter in the audience. The prison guard's fear as he continues to shoot is nothing but humorous, all because of this dance-like sugarcoating underscore.

The dance-like approach to underscoring violence can also be more subtle, earning the description not for mimicking a particular dance tradition but for its meter (usually 3/4 or 6/8) and consistency of tempo, which gives the scene a continuous feel that avoids any added unpredictability that may bolster the scariness of it all. These cases usually would fall somewhere along the Supporting—Ignoring spectrum of the CAUV triangle. One example can be found in *Happy Feet* during the Seal chase scene. Dance-like rhythms smooth out the unpredictability of the chase, but in a way that supports the scene's content naturally, rather than attempting to dictate the audience's emotional reaction.

Finally, I'd like to share two examples of dance-like underscore in violent scenes which fall along the CAUV triangle's spotlighting—horrifying spectrum: one is from *Matilda* and the other from *Cars*. Both approaches are interesting because they maintain the scariness quite well, but transform it in a "halloweeny" sort of way. As is the case with other examples of Spotlighting underscore, this "halloweeny" dance-like underscore almost feels like failed attempts at Sugarcoating, comparable to making a bad joke that leaves its audience offended rather than amused. Still, neither of these examples goes so far as fall on the Horrifying end of the spectrum. That said, one UCLA

sophomore¹⁰⁰ defined the example from *Cars* as exactly that: horrifying. Recalling his own terror while watching it as a 10-year-old boy, this student said he still looks back on it as the scariest scene he'd ever watched at the time. I cannot confirm or deny whether this reaction was shared by many other kids at the time of the film's release though, hence my decision to claim it as an example of Spotlighting rather than Horrifying.

Film	Scene	Location on CAUV	Link
Cars	Tractor Tipping Gone Wrong	Spotlighting	https://youtu.be/J4-7Kvhbthg?t=2m5s
Happy Feet	Seal Chase	Supporting	https://youtu.be/-0f67QE-HP8
Tuck Everlasting	Jailbreak Scene	Sugarcoating	https://youtu.be/yiLEHMUTyek
Matilda	Pigtail Hammer Throw Scene	Spotlighting	https://youtu.be/ntirWguFrFM

TABLE 6.1 - DANCE-LIKE TEA FOR UNDERSCORING VIOLENCE

In *Star Wars: The Phantom Menace*, John Williams demonstrates the efficacy of the use of silence in underscoring violence in children's movies, falling on the Supporting—Ignoring spectrum of the CAUV triangle. It is clear that the strategy and/or goal was to minimize stimulation altogether, in a scene that is already rich with it. The "Pod race scene" is approximately 16 minutes long. Musical underscore only enters in the final three minutes. John Williams' approach seems to indicate a desire to keep children viewers' anxiety level at a minimum. This is a very VERY long action scene for a PG rated family movie. You witness multiple characters' die, although most of them are aliens who have not had many lines throughout the film. Still, it is a violent scene with on screen death of innocent characters. The stimulation level is high already,

¹⁰⁰ Isaiah Holmes, UCLA student, class of 2020, permission to interview & signed waiver.

without music. The sound design necessary for a scene involving a race of vehicles built with alien technology is extreme on its own. John Williams' underscoring approach to this scene was highly appropriate given all of these circumstances.

Later in the film, however, there is another long violent scene, but this one takes the form of a lightsaber duel between three major characters, one of whom dies. Refer to chapter 5.2 for more details on this particular scene's underscore.

6.2 - TEA for Underscoring Death

Sometimes the wisest decision a composer can make is not to compose at all. One of the main keys to achieving a successful film score is knowing when to let the scene speak for itself; recognizing when underscore would interfere or detract from what is going on. Recognizing such moments in a film is much easier said than done, and composers—particularly those who are most experienced composing for the concert hall—tend to over-compose and over-orchestrate. As such, developing compositional techniques for writing large-scale underscore is often easy compared to developing the intuition and self-restraint required for writing minimalist underscore. But many scenes call for minimalistic or silent underscore, and in family movies, this is particularly common in death scenes.

If one were to pay especially close attention during death scenes in family movies, you will find that two approaches in particular tend to be favored by composers: the sudden silence approach and the fortepiano approach.

SUDDEN SILENCE APPROACH	FORTEPIANO APPROACH
<p>While often preceded by a high-energy action, chase, or fight scene, this approach is to remove all music at the time of death, leaving the audience to process their own feelings and reflect on their personal emotional reaction, instead of subconsciously relying on the music to dictate their feelings.</p>	<p>Often preceded by a build-up of energy in the scene and a crescendo in the underscore, this approach gets its name from the musical dynamic " < <i>fp</i> " which indicates that a tension build-up in the score will be suddenly softened, whether by dynamics or by a sudden pull-back in the orchestration.</p>
<p><i>Princess Bride</i> - Montoya Kills Count - https://youtu.be/d5TiaQeuNO0 <i>Snow White</i> - Death of the Evil Queen - https://youtu.be/4AjjYU0fJ94 <i>Toy Story</i> - Sid blows up Combat Carl - https://youtu.be/wN2O8MigyXc</p>	<p><i>Lion King</i> - Death of Mufasa - https://youtu.be/LGtJn-L5xEs <i>Bambi</i> - Death of Bambi's mom - https://youtu.be/eHr-9_6hCg</p>

TABLE 6.2 - TWO APPROACHES TO UNDERSCORING DEATH

Both of these approaches require intuitive and conscientious decision-making¹⁰¹ on the part of the composer, as well as the impeccable self-restraint and overall discipline described above. Indeed, the initial spotting session with the director will help the composer with their initial sketches in that it provides them with a basic outline of where the music will enter and exit. However, that is where the help ends and the composer is left to his own devices. Will the music fade out or stop abruptly? Will there be any pauses or will the scene be scored from beginning to end? Will there be a build-up of any kind? What is the energy like? Is this scene particularly scary, and if so, should the music play it up or down? How are child audiences supposed to feel about this death? Happy, sad, relieved? Is the death on-screen or off-screen? These are only a few of the many questions a film composer must consider when approaching a death scene in a children's film, because the underscore can make all the difference in ensuring both (a) that the director's intended message is received accurately, and (b)

¹⁰¹ Particularly with regard to timing, (where music enters and exits) and orchestration (when it should be big and when it should be minimal)

that the death itself is tolerable and/or appropriate for child audiences. (Obviously "b" is left to the composer's discretion, at least at first.)¹⁰²

Another model for analyzing the underscore of on-screen deaths involves three steps, and may be preferable to those who find that the Sudden Silence Approach and Fortepiano approach share too many similarities. This model is also more conducive to analyses of longer but less intense death scene:



FIGURE 6.2 - CRESCENDO FIRMATA REST (CFR) APPROACH

The most beautiful example of the CFR approach in a family movie occurs in *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* during Darth Vader's death.¹⁰³ It is also an excellent example of the versatility of the leitmotif in underscore. In the film's final duel, Darth Vader transforms to the good side of the force, saving his son Luke Skywalker's life and ending the life of the evil emperor. The audience knows his time has come though, due to severe injuries he acquired during battle. John Williams begins the death scene's underscore with violin harmonics playing the "Imperial March" leitmotif with all dotted eighth notes removed, giving the usually high-energy theme a more tired, weak sound. When Vader collapses on the ground and his son runs to his side, the theme plays again, this time in an airy low-register flute solo, which also adds to the tiredness and weakness of the cue. Then a third time the motif is heard, but this time in a French horn

¹⁰² Obviously directors can request a specific energy or quality or instrumentation implemented by the composer, but the composer is still the one writing the music.

¹⁰³ <https://youtu.be/TNDwCsFzS8c>

solo as Vader says to Luke: "You were right. Tell your sister you were right." This instrument choice seems to support the nobility of the moment and the message. And then finally, just as Darth Vader dies, in an incredibly moving gesture, John Williams uses low-register harp solo over a mournful bass pedal to play Darth Vader's theme one last time, just seconds after his on-screen death. What makes this moment especially significant is the fact that it is the last time the Imperial March is heard in the entire *Star Wars* trilogy. The death of Darth Vader coinciding with the final occurrence of the Imperial March leitmotif is the reason for my unofficial rebranding of the theme to "Darth Vader's Theme." Being that the harp is associated with innocence and Godliness, the underscore here so beautifully illustrates the finality of Darth Vader's transformation from evil to good, as if to assure audiences that this villain-turned-hero is now in a better place.

Part IV: Conclusion

Chapter 7. Recommendations for Further Research

Bibliography

7. Recommendations for Further Research

The areas of study I find particularly important for encouraging further research — simply due to the fact that they are areas that could be particularly influential — are education and developmental psychology. Further research in these areas should not be limited to music education or music therapy either. For example, in “Children's Descriptions of Music”¹⁰⁴ the author examines and compares two studies on vocabulary and word choices children use to describe music, comparing them to the vocabulary and word choices of adults:

Flowers (1990) compared the music vocabulary from three fifth grade American music textbook series. Only 54 terms were common to two of the three series, only twelve words common to all three. She stresses that educators "need to get together on expectations [for vocabulary presented]."

Flowers (1984) compared the categories of written verbal responses of children (grades 3-4) with non-music college students. She found that children's responses referred to extramusical timbre, or tempo characteristics, while the college students referred to extramusical, tempo, and pitch/melody. There was a smaller number of categories for children than adults.

This is interesting and seems to suggest that children are more impacted by timbre than young adults. It is possible that, should children describe music according to its timbral qualities more often than adults, various timbres in underscore—depending of course on their associations with said timbres—could contribute to how the film's visual, thematic, and emotional content is interpreted to a greater degree. This could be

¹⁰⁴ Hair, 48

examined further, from a compositional standpoint as well as from film educational standpoint. There is potential for improving the accuracy with which the film content is communicated to and received by children viewers.

Something else that I personally intend to explore further, and would encourage others to look into as well, involves a new hypothesis regarding the potentials for educational cinema, especially depending on how it is scored, to drastically improve the ability to remember educational content in lower IQ grade school kids. This idea emerged from my unification of two unrelated theories: one from film theory, and the other from developmental psychology.¹⁰⁵

One recent psychological study¹⁰⁶ found empirical evidence that developing visual focused attention as children is a bigger contributor to our memory performance as children and adults than actual memorization activities and training. High IQ kids naturally have better memory performance than lower IQ kids. However, the controlled experiment they conducted found that when the children's visual attention to whatever they are trying to learn was interrupted, regardless of what it was, they all performed the same, regardless of IQ. The researchers believed that this could mean our ability to pay attention visually plays a bigger role in memory performance than actual memory training! This already has implications that film may be a better way to teach kids certain topics — particularly those involving a lot of memorization — and this alone is something worthy of further research.

¹⁰⁵ Amso, Dima. "Visual attention: Its role in memory and development." *American Psychological Association*. Newsletter Article, January, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Amso, 2016

When reflecting upon the general consensuses among film theorists discussed in chapter three,¹⁰⁷ it becomes clear where music comes into all of this. Multiple generations of film theorists agree that the one inevitable flaw in a standalone motion picture is its innate choppiness¹⁰⁸ and the resulting lack of temporality. This weakness particularly impacts the medium's large body of narrative works because it diminishes the film's ability to engage audiences and hold their visual attention, hence their reliance on underscore, which we've established serves to add a sense of temporality and smooth out this "choppiness" on multiple levels.¹⁰⁹ Speaking anecdotally, it has been made abundantly clear to me over the years that producers of educational movies invest very little money in music overall, and seem to see little value in hiring professional composers and music supervisors to do original music, due to the amount of readily—and cheaply—available library music that can be found. However, unification of the psychological study on visual attention and the film theorists' general consensus shed light on a new hypothesis: that underscore's ability to engage viewers and hold attention could be used to improve educational cinema, which in turn will arguably stand as a better means of learning memorization-heavy content due to its ability to maintain viewers' visual attention better than lectures and books. The fact that children remember film content equal but not reading material equally reminded me of The Guardian article cited previously, wherein one member of Filmclub in the UK described film as the "great leveler." Though the member was talking about leveling kids of different background and

¹⁰⁷ See pages 21 and 22

¹⁰⁸ due to the necessity of flashing and skipping from image to image and scene to scene

¹⁰⁹ Visually, and with regard to the narrative as well. This was cited in the Film Theory section of this monograph.

demographics, it also couldn't be more true in this context as well. There is a great deal of evidence to support the notion that kids who struggle in school do not struggle to keep up with content learning when the information is presented via high quality cinema. It just requires engaging music that can smooth out any potential visual interruptions, so that children can benefit from the visual learning process and improved memory performance that results.

Further research should be conducted on the underscoring of *near* death in kids movies. The examples are abundant, too abundant to include in this monograph, hence my decision to stick with actual death in chapter 6. Still, there is much to be studied and considered here, especially if we are to begin tracing violence patterns and trends in kids' movies and comparing the corresponding target audience's reactions.

Additionally, there is much more to be explored in the area of voice. Instead of just focusing on the role it plays in certain contexts and the register of voices in those contexts, we should also delve into vowels and articulatory phonations. There is much research already on the associations humans have with specific vocalizations lacking verbal clues. (It's how we know crying means we are upset and laughter means we are happy!) These are significant communication devices. Research provided in this monograph on music communication and music as rhetoric could be merged with research on our associations with various voice "colors." This could then be used to compare and contrast trends in underscore.

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