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The Cinematic and Musical Connections between The Slasher and Giallo Horror Genres in

Film

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Arts in Music

at

The University of Waikato

by

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2024

History

Slasher

America in the 80s wasn't all disco and drugs as most people think. The decade started with the election of Ronald Reagan into presidency. His idea of Reaganomics, which was a trickle-down economic system that would put more money in the pockets of the rich and eventually "trickle down" to the less wealthy, was an idea that appealed to the masses on both sides of the wealth disparity. The wealthy saw it as an opportunity to make more money while those who were poor saw it as an opportunity to gain wealth. Reagan's ideas of conservatism were supposed to solve the looming financial decline that threatened the American economy, but this plan led to the recession of 1982 which was one of the worst recessions in America since the Great Depression. This was also the time of the AIDS crisis which led to the death of more than 700,000 Americans¹. All of this plus the stock market crash of October 1987 caused a lot of societal unrest especially in the youth. Teens and young adults of this time didn't receive the same future and financial security that was promised to their parents².

All this unease and change was reflected in the horror films of the time, however within blockbuster film "unlike the 1970s, when hard-hitting movies addressed controversial subjects, lighthearted fare seemed to reign supreme in the 1980s"³. The rise of cable television also allowed for the blockbuster boom of the 80s. The popular music of the time also saw a

¹ Mullen, Matt. 2018. "1980s: Fashion, Movies & Politics," *HISTORY*.

² Kvaran, Kara M. 2016. "'You're All Doomed!' A Socioeconomic Analysis of Slasher Films," *Journal of American Studies*, p. 954.

³ Mullen.

significant quantity increase with the production of channels such as BET and MTV which allowed for black entertainment and debut artists, respectively, to become more accessible to most of the country at once and while seeing slashers in theatres was a common teenage pastime, this was also the time of home video. Rockoff says that “renting a video, making some popcorn and plopping down in the confines of the home was both cheaper and more convenient than trekking to a movie theater”⁴.

Moreover, there was the stock market crash of October 1987 which caused a lot of societal unrest especially among youth. There was a rise in the popularity of horror in America at this time as well. The mass success of films from the 70s such as *Jaws*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Carrie* and *The Exorcist* helped horror enter the mainstream of American entertainment in the 80s. This entertainment boom did nothing to hide the societal unrest. The fall of the middle class caused many youths to feel as though their futures were obsolete. This collapse in hope for their future success was reflected within slashers. The failure of the government and adult figures in their real lives was reflected on the big screen through the failure of every adult in those worlds to come to the aid of teens being stalked and killed⁵.

Giallo

Italy in the 60s may seem, in retrospect, a picturesque time, however there were many societal issues on the rise. The move from the countryside of the South to the Northern cities

⁴ Rockoff, Adam. 2011. *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland), p. 9.

⁵ Kvaran, p. 959.

started the social revolution (1958-1963), developing into the major industrial revolution in 1964 and the rise of consumerism. Most Italian families went from having outdoor bathrooms and no running water to televisions in almost every home⁶. This seemed like a good change in Italy, but with the overarching presence of the Catholic Church still looming over everything, by 1968 there was a rise in terrorism known as the “years of lead” that targeted “policemen, politicians, lawyers, judges, university professors, union leaders, industrialists, and unclassifiable bystanders.”⁷.

All this violence was directly paralleled through the rise in Italian horror using Giallo. These films were directly influenced by the crime fiction literature of the 30s, popular during the reign of the Italian Fascists. Maher talks about how the development of crime fiction is linked to the Italian Fascist regime and their policies regarding the production and consumption of culture. The popularity, easy access, and cheap production of gialli in the 30s was not something this regime particularly approved of⁸.

This paper sets out to define the horror film subgenres “slasher” and “Giallo” as products of their time, namely the 1980s America and 1960s Italy. These genres will be compared cinematically, and the role and style of music incorporated into these films will be analyzed and compared using my own personal composition of the film *A Bay of Blood* (1971), a film that shares many commonalities between the two genres cinematically.

The Cinematic Comparison of the Giallo and Slasher Sub-Genres

⁶ Drake, Richard. 1999. “Italy in the 1960s: A Legacy of Terrorism and Liberation,” *South Central Review*, p. 62.

⁷ Drake, p. 63.

⁸ Maher, Brigid. 2020. “Foreign Settings in the Fascist-Era Giallo: Italian Writers’ Creative Explorations of Criminality and Cultural Difference,” *Modern Italy: Journal of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy*, p. 164.

The Italian horror subgenre of the late 60s and the American horror subgenre of the early 80s can both be easily distinguished from each other by their filming style, origins, among other aspects. They do, however, hold many cinematic similarities.

Giallo can be defined as “A group of low-to-medium budget Italian thrillers made between the 1960s and late 1970s/early 1980s (peaking in the early 1970s) with a sensational approach to sex and violence. This type of Giallo is associated with certain directors and stars and characterized by certain tropes, stylistic qualities and an enjoyably kitsch datedness in their production design and fashions.”⁹. It is also said that “Some of the most commonly identified markers of Italian Giallo film include: the presence of an amateur detective and a traumatized killer, the stylization of violence and a tendency towards narrative incoherence.”¹⁰.

A typical *slasher* is not something as easily defined. There have been many attempts to compact the genre into something easily identifiable. The most basic explanation would be “a maniac with a knife slaughtering a group of young, good-looking teenagers in a myriad of gruesome ways”¹¹ but this definition includes movies that aren’t slashers such as *The Evil Dead* (1982), *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* (1988), and even *Pumpkinhead* (1988). To make it more specific, a slasher requires a killer who is or at one point was human (no ghost or creatures). This killer uses any type of melee weapon (usually a knife), but never a gun. The killer’s terror is directed at an unsuspecting group of teenagers. Although the kills are gore-filled and seemingly unjustified, the killer’s choice of these specific teenagers is revealed at the end of the film, either

⁹ Hunt, Leon. 2023. *Mario Bava: The Artisan as Italian Horror Auteur* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic), p. 89.

¹⁰Kannas, Alexia. 2019. “The Italian Giallo,” in *The Routledge Companion to Cult Cinema* (London; New York: Routledge, 2020.: Routledge, p. 77.

¹¹ Rockoff, p. 14.

through some past trauma from childhood or some wrongdoing of a past generation. This predisposition for violence is one of the main comparison points for both subgenres.

The socio-political state of both Italy and America at the time of the formation of their respective subgenres were, comparatively, quite similar. In Italy, “The development of crime fiction . . . is inextricably linked, in complex and sometimes paradoxical ways, with the Fascist regime's changing policies and processes regarding cultural production and consumption. [...]The reading public's increasing enthusiasm for gialli in the 1930s was against the backdrop of a regime that began to disapprove quite strongly of this kind of writing, and particularly its accessibility to the public, thanks in part to the low cover price of books in series like Mondadori's ‘Libri Gialli’.”¹² This growing enthusiasm led to movie adaptations of said books as well as the start of horror films in Italy.

Similarly, in America “The [horror/slasher] film genre first emerged in the late 1970s and flourished during a time of economic and cultural shift in American society. In the United States postwar prosperity and New Deal liberalism, which ushered so many families into the middle class, was crumbling [...] For middle-class American adolescents who were coming of age in this era, it became very clear that they were not going to have the same advantages and opportunities as their parents.”¹³ This unrest and uncertainty in America were reflected in the horror films of the time. Unemployment among the youth (age 16-24) was almost twice the national average¹⁴. These films were made during the time in America of “a weak economy

¹² Maher, p. 164.

¹³ Kvaran, p. 956.

¹⁴ Kvaran, p. 957.

coupled with governmental cuts to social welfare programs gave teenagers in particular a deep sense of insecurity” and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* released in 1984, the same year that Ronald Reagan ran for reelection and released his famous campaign advertisement declaring it “Morning in America”, but this decade of “financial anxiety and economic pessimism” was not what he envisioned¹⁵.

Although the slasher was on the rise within the US, most of the slashers and films that inspired the genre came from Canada. It can be said of the tax shelter period that “abuse was rampant; not just of the tax laws, but of cinema itself”¹⁶ and therefore movies were made for all the wrong reasons. Those reasons being mostly greed and profit rather than actual studio enjoyment.

“American studios and distribution companies would often pick up Italian exploitation films (among others) for North American distribution”¹⁷. Though the genre is still considered to have a cult following within the US, there were a few that made it to mainstream popularity. It is said by Koven that “while the slasher films [...] may disguise their Canadian national origins as a generic “America”, so too did the Italian *Giallo*” using dubbing seen in many *Giallo* films today. It was common practice for the actors to film their dialogue scenes in their native tongue and later have scenes dubbed over to assimilate to the country they were distributed to. Cinematically they are both copy-paste style subgenres that model film plot and structure off a singular movie. For the *Giallo* subgenre the first movie could be considered *I vampiri* by Ricardo

¹⁵ Kvaran, p. 955.

¹⁶ Koven, Mikel J. 2014. “The *Giallo* and the Spaghetti Nightmare Film,” in *The Italian Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute), p. 255.

¹⁷ Koven, p. 256.

Freda¹⁸ while for slashers, they can be seen as based off either *Black Christmas* by Bob Clark or *Halloween* by John Carpenter¹⁹. It's been said that "it's possible to see the seeds of the *Giallo* in almost every aspect of *Halloween* and the multitude of films that followed"²⁰ This film can be linked both cinematically and sonically to the Giallos of the previous decade. This copy-paste style of filming has also led to both subgenres being labeled as cheaply made, repetitive, or trashy by many viewers²¹.

Killers in both styles share similar characteristics. For slashers, "[they] prefer melee weapons that let them get up close and personal with their victims and almost never use firearms."²² In the same vein "As the precursor to the American slasher pic, *giallo* films are loaded with an array of sharp objects for the killer to slice or hack into their victims, including kitchen knives, pocketknives, razors, axes and syringes, but the killer's methods can put these implements to work in bizarre ways"²³.

Although the target demographic for slasher films was adolescent males, they obviously had appeal to young females as well²⁴. It is a common belief that most victims in slashers are women, but statistically, the kill count is skewed more toward the male demographic with almost all final survivors being females. The term "final girl" comes from this commonality.

¹⁸ Koven, p. 269.

¹⁹ Ménard, A. Dana, Angela Weaver, and Christine Cabrera. 2019. "There Are Certain Rules That One Must Abide by": Predictors of Mortality in Slasher Films," *Sexuality & Culture*, p. 622.

²⁰ Koven, p. 252.

²¹ Koven, p. 78.

²² "Slasher Movie." 2010. *TV Tropes*.

²³ Kannas, p. 78.

²⁴ Kvaran, p. 958.

Within the Giallo genre the intended audience was broader. It has been said that “gialli capitalized on the conservative fears of modernity, among them women’s liberation, the sexual revolution, and the dissolution of the patriarchal family home”²⁵. These being some of the goals of early gialli, it can be determined that the audience was society in general as opposed to a specific demographic.

These cinematic parallels are what make both subgenres unique within the horror genre. They take many cinematic ideas from each other and make them into a piece of work that is entirely their own. Both Giallo and Slasher films are distinctly different, but they are also distinctly comparable.

Musical Characteristics of Giallo Films

The Giallo film genre has a unique musical style. The genre has been described as choosing “dramatic visuals and music over narrative logic, which arguably is what makes them so memorable”²⁶. Early Giallo balances dark and jazzy sounds with light and bouncy bossa nova. Later Giallo takes on a more progressive musical stance with the use of prog rock both in music and in composers. It can appear Giallo films prefer beauty over reality both cinematically and musically. Beautiful and satisfying music is used as a way of offsetting the violence occurring onscreen instead of mirroring the tragedy. In a way it is more anxiety inducing to have to music

²⁵ Edwards, Matthew, and Fernando Gabriel Pagnoni Berns (eds.). 2023. *Bloodstained Narratives: The Giallo Film in Italy and Abroad* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi), p. 216.

²⁶ Greco, Amanda. 2016. *Music for Murder in Yellow Minor: The Giallo Film Score* (Caméra Stylo), p. 24.

reflect something in opposition to what is occurring visually. Seeing as sight is processed faster than sound, it can be more jarring to have the sound disconnect from the sight. It sends mixed signals to the brain. Although these film scores share a common denominator of beautiful music over gruesome killings, there is a lot of musical variance among the genre defining composers.

Bossa Nova is a genre of music that originated in Brazil in the late 1950s. This style of music is a type of samba that combines with American jazz elements to usher in a new type of sound. It is a common 4/4 pattern of song that places emphasis on the 4th beat. There is an emphasized presence of Spanish drums such as conga and clave while also relying more on horns and classical guitar to carry melody rather than strings. The guitar is plucked using the fingers rather than a typical guitar pick. The bass drums emphasize the down beats while the clave is used to drive the eighth notes. Films that utilize this technique include *Blood & Black Lace* (1964), *Strip Nude for Your Killer* (1975), and *Suspiria* (1977).

Blood and Black Lace is a Giallo film that embodies all the typical markers of a Giallo. The opening credits are set to the main musical theme of the film. All the characters are introduced to the viewer shrouded in random set pieces and bright, colorful lighting. The bossa nova sounds are what drive these opening credits. The drums are loud and driving the beat along, the strings are smooth and swelling, while the trumpet is blaring the melody over everything. Moving to the opening scene, there is an opening kill that takes place on a dark and stormy night, which is a common marker of a Giallo. There is also percussion sprinkled throughout different scenes to draw attention to certain people or clues as to the murderer. Some instruments included are conga drums, triangle, and even chimes.

Strip Nude for your Killer is a lesser known Giallo film by Andrea Bianchi based on the screenplay by Giallo author Massimo Felisatti. Much like the plot of *Blood & Black Lace*, there is a gloved killer after a group of models after one of them is murdered. In *Strip Nude for your Killer* the bossa nova is played after each kill scene as an abrupt cut back to the reality of these people. It's used as a way of unsettling the audience. The opening death is set to a dark, jazzy piece including synths and drum kit that immediately cuts to an upbeat and bouncy bossa nova piece as we are introduced to some of our main characters at an indoor pool setting. Many of the kill scenes are set to a slower tempo jazz piece while water is heard running in the background. This mix of diegetic and nondiegetic sound is common within other Giallo such as *Don't Torture a Duckling* that combine both sound types into something unsettling for the viewer.

In Music for Murder, *Profondo Rosso* is discussed as a film whose “music often treads within the wilds between diegetic and nondiegetic”²⁷ but for different reasons. There is a lullaby used throughout the movie that is connected to the trauma of the killer and is used as a leitmotif to signal when someone is going to die. This lullaby is played throughout the film both diegetically and nondiegetically. Claudia Gorbman even refers to some uses of the lullaby to be “metadiegetic” (music from the subjective perspective of the character) since some within the film refer to hearing the song having played in their head so when the song is heard, the viewer can't be sure whether the song is playing out loud to the character or we the viewer are hearing what is playing in their mind.

²⁷ Greco, p. 31.

Suspiria is one of the most well-known Giallo films to date. Made in 1977 by well-known Giallo film director Dario Argento, this film follows an American girl who has recently moved to Italy to pursue a dance career at a prestigious school there. She arrives at the school late at night in the pouring rain to a locked door and not a soul in sight. This unease is amplified through the music. The main theme of this film is played on celesta. This instrument that is usually associated with more family friendly films such as *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, *Pinocchio* and *Harry Potter* has now been used to set an uncomfortable atmosphere of impending doom.

Stylistically, the composers of this genre vary widely, however, at the core of Giallo film scores there is a strive for progression. Pushing the boundaries of what is known and accepted is a common goal for these films. Argento is probably most known for this in his works. Simonetti, keyboardist for the Goblins explained that “much of the music was written before the film was shot and Argento would then play the music on set to inspire the right mood for shooting”²⁸.

Claudio Simonetti worked on the soundtrack of this movie with his band of the time, Goblin. He has since worked on other Argento films such as *Opera*, *Phenomena*, and *Profundo Rosso*. Simonetti’s band, Goblin, was a popular prog rock (progressive rock) band most well known for their “eerie and ominous tone” that they achieved using irregular time signatures and dissonant chords as well as loud and abrasive electrical instruments. This tone is used to create variety in sound over many different Argento film soundtracks while keeping, tonally, with Argento’s directorial style. Goblin’s music has also been described as “a vortex of repetitive themes and leitmotifs that flow deceptively between the realm of diegetic and nondiegetic”²⁹.

²⁸ Greco, p. 29.

²⁹ Greco, p. 31.

This lack of distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound within Giallo is a commonality. In the film *Don't Torture a Duckling*, the sound is blended between the in-film world and what the viewer hears. The vocals that open the film as the camera pan over the skyline make it seem as if there is a woman somewhere singing this lament. Even when the music cuts in, there is still no way to tell. This technique is used throughout the film. The vocals are never identified as either being within the universe of the film or only within the viewer's ear. This has a jarring and unbalancing effect on the audience.

Another well-known film score composer of this period would be Ennio Morricone. Born in Rome, Italy in 1928, with over 400 scores under his belt, Morricone was well known for his work on both Italian Giallos and American Westerns. His work on the *A Fistful of Dollars* trilogy allowed for him to flourish musically in the American Western genre during the 60s and even help define the sound of the spaghetti western genre. The horror genre is one that Morricone found much success in as well during the 70s. Working with some of the most well-known Gallo directors including Dario Argento, Aldo Lado, and Lucio Fulci, Morricone was able to apply his musical talents to the horror genre. *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, *The Cat o' Nine Tails*, and *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* are the most well-known Giallo films he has worked on. Morricone's scoring can be described as "experimental atonal jazz with haunting disembodied vocals [...] reminiscent of future gialli scores"³⁰. Seeing as Morricone was a member of the experimental music group, Gruppo di Improvviiazione Nuova Consonanza it would make sense that his compositions would help define the sound of a genre. His compositions are meant as a reflection of what is being seen on screen whereas Goblin's are

³⁰ Greco, p. 29.

“repetitive themes, strange sounds, and progressive rock beats are visceral [...] with some themes also acting as a leitmotif for bodily harm.”³¹

Fabio Frizzi is a composer also known for his work on Giallo films. Born in Bologna, Italy in 1951, Frizzi was a young composer who worked on over 100 soundtracks including *The Beyond* (1981), *A Cat in the Brain* (1990), and *Pieces* (1982). It is said of Frizzi that he commonly used “[...] analog synthesizers, with their fuzzy sound adding a layer of creepiness to his downbeat melodies. Still incorporating elements of electronic, classical, and rock music into his scores with help from vintage instruments”³² in his compositions.

Musical Characteristics of the Slashers Subgenre

Film soundtracks aren't just used to add ambience of depth to a scene. Often, there is the intent of evoking a certain emotion or reaction from the audience. There is an intent to get the audience to react a certain way to given musical cues. Music swelling allows for emotions to rise, slow piano music might be indicative of something sad or contemplative, loud and arrhythmic music might be a way of creating tension or anxiety. The horror genre is no exception to this use of sound. Many horror soundtracks today, “avoid memorable melodies in favor of musical textures, and use atonality as well as destabilization of pitch or harmony with various musical techniques such as glissandi, tremolos, or tone clusters” to create more suspenseful scenes.

³¹ Greco, p. 24.

³² *Apple Music*. [n.d.].

This is not just indicative of modern horror music, however. Musically, the 80s were a time for new and louder sounds especially in the United States. The new drum machine caused a boom in popular music at the time because unlike the ones previously, this machine allowed for digital samples to be used. There were also “[...] swing factors, shuffle, accent, and real-time programming, all of which have since rooted themselves in beat box technology.”. There were only about 500 of these drum machines made, but they had such an immense impact on the music industry that many drummers feared they would become unemployed and therefore learned how to use these machines. The distinct sound of this drum machine, for example, can be heard on almost every hit Prince had after 1980.

This widespread use of the drum machine in pop music extends to the horror genre of the time. The slasher genre of the 80s is a subgenre of horror that has over 200 films attached to it made within one decade. All these films follow a set structure modeled after the original *Halloween* (1976) by John Carpenter which is a movie in and of itself based on *Black Christmas* (1974) by Bob Clark. John Howard Carpenter, born January 16, 1948, is a director, screenwriter, and composer most well-known for his work on *Halloween*, *The Thing*, and *The Fog*. The *Halloween* movie is an ode to horror. A masked killer stalks the streets of a suburban neighborhood and brings terror to a small town on a night where fun and frights coincide. John Carpenter took not only visual inspiration, but musical as well from both *Psycho* and *Suspiria*.

In *Psycho*, the bathtub scene is iconic, not just for the plot twist it provides halfway through the film, but also for the musical decisions made. Lerner discusses in *Music in the Horror Film* about the high-pitched screaming of the victim emulated in the strings while also repeating the same note staccato as an emphasis to the stabbing of the knife. In this way the music is representing both the victim and the killer. Within *Suspiria*, the unending repetition of

the main theme (a dissonant play on the well-known church song *Jesus Loves Me*) throughout the film both played double time, and half speed in different points to portray suspense or dread.

Both these films take simple melodies and use them as a way of adding suspense.

Carpenter talks about how the score for *Psycho* used “the basic sound of a particular instrument” such as strings or bass to create a score that was imposing and powerful through dissonant sound and arhythmic beats which that was what impressed and inspired him most. The iconic piano theme used to signal the arrival of Michael Meyers in this film would become the theme song for the franchise as a whole and one of the most recognizable horror themes to date. John Carpenter used a simple piano melody in 5/4 time inspired by a drum exercise his father had taught him in the 60s. This simple time exercise, when applied to any minor or dissonant scale, creates a disjointed sequence that provides the basis of the *Halloween* theme.

The impact of the soundtrack to *Psycho* was significant, with the music providing a blueprint for later slasher film scores. This included repetitive use of the main theme and more of a focus on . . . “[...] unresolved dissonance, atonality, and timbral experimentation as part of its characteristic stylistic qualities” throughout the genre. This became more prevalent in popular slasher films of the time. One example is *Friday the 13th* (1980) by Sean S. Cunningham. This film takes place at a summer camp where someone is killing off all the counselors before they can open for the new summer season. The soundtrack to this film uses the drum machine to layer vocal samples over a more ambient soundtrack. This use of voice is a way of bringing the audience into the film. It is unclear whether the sounds of “ki ki ki . . . ma ma ma . . .” are also heard by the characters therefore the line between diegetic and non-diegetic is blurred. This sound heard throughout the film are a fragmented version of the phrase “kill mom”. This is a hint

as to the killer in this film as well as giving a voice to the disembodied Jason who doesn't appear until the end of the film.

Although the use of ambient noises within soundtracks are common (i.e. tires screeching, bird songs, footsteps, etc.) the use of voice in a non-vocal capacity is not that common. Most vocal sounds within slashers are traditional vocal performances either diegetic or non-diegetic.

The technique of sampling location sounds to use in the soundtrack was used in the *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) movie by Wes Craven as well. It is more prevalent in this film than most before it. There is a stylistic choice made in these films to use the diegetic sounds when in the dream realm as a signal that Freddy, the killer, is present. There is no specific theme used like most leitmotifs, but this switch in sound source is used in the same way.

The Use of Music in Film

This section will discuss the steps and methods I have personally taken within my composition to recreate the musical stylings of both genres. By recreating these sounds, I will demonstrate how the music influences the viewing experience. The movie that I will be recomposing for is *A Bay of Blood* (1976) by Mario Bava. This film has been chosen because it is a late stage Giallo film that is also considered to be a direct influence on the slasher genre, therefore it is a film that directly connects the two genres discussed in this paper cinematically. This film bridge allows for the movie to be viewed through both a slasher and Giallo lens in a visual and musical sense. This connection to both genres cinematically should allow for my

personal musical composition to distinctly place the film in either genre based on common musical techniques and tropes.

The use of *A Bay of Blood* is a way of taking a film with not much musical scoring displayed and showing the potential of the scenes through my own rescoring. The lack of music within the film is a method used within visual media to ground it. Seeing as this film exists between the Giallo and slasher genre, there is an attempt at something new and experimental. This technique of creating jump scares without the use of the score to build anxiety is used more often today for jump scares in movies such as *Donnie Darko* (2001), *Insidious* (2010), and *The Prodigy* (2019).

Influence

There are many composers who have influenced my personal style, one example being Weezer. Weezer is a California-based band that formed in 1994 with their debut self-titled album known also as “The Blue Album”³³. They are most well-known for songs such as “Island in the Sun”, “Say it Ain’t So”, “Beverly Hills” and “Buddy Holly” which all show heavy rock influence, despite their more palatable pop presentation. Rivers Cuomo, the songwriter and lead vocalist of the group “[...] has cited KISS as a major influence on his work and one easily hears KISS’s merge of forceful hard rock and shameless pop in Cuomo’s writing”³⁴.

Frank Ocean is a New Orleans based artist known for his impact on the R&B genre as well as 2010s music in general with his debut album *Channel Orange*. He is most well-known

³³ *Apple Music*. [n.d.].

³⁴ *Apple Music*. [n.d.].

for songs such as “Thinkin Bout You”, “Nights” and “Novacane”. Every song of his tells a complete story within the lyrics that is mirrored within the composition of the piece rather than supported like most music. The individual stories told in each song fit into the overarching theme of the album so listening through the album creates a satisfying story with connecting chapters.

Alexander Borodin, a 19th century Russian composer and chemist, was a founding member of “‘The Five’ or ‘The Mighty Handful’ – Rimsky-Korsakov, Cui, Borodin, Mussorgsky, and Balakirev – whose aim was to build on the pioneering work of Glinka and develop a distinctively Russian school of composition.”³⁵ He took great inspiration from the folk music of Russia, which contributed to his nationalistic music style. Borodin, as an artist, is appreciated today, having some of his music adapted for Broadway in the musical *Kismet*. These lush and moving melodies that favor the lower resonant instruments such as cello, bass, and brass are part of what inspires me in Borodin’s music as well as his cyclical melodic lines.

These are three artists who have created their own space within the music world by creating and defining their own genres. Frank Ocean is said to have “...established himself as a generational artist uniquely suited to the complexities and convulsive changes of the second decade of the 21st century”³⁶. Weezer has been described as a combination of “... big, joyful arena rock with leader Rivers Cuomo’s shy guy reticence, metal riffs with nerdy lyrics, and goofy humor with obsessively precise pop craft”³⁷. These are artists who have, in some way,

³⁵ Philip, Robert. 2020. *The Classical Music Lover’s Companion to Orchestral Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 106.

³⁶ *Apple Music*. [n.d.].

³⁷ *Apple Music*. [n.d.].

shape or form, set the standard for what music can be within a certain genre and even expanded on what the genre can contain.

Composition

There are many types of composition processes. In *Musical Imagery in the Creative Process*, one composer suggests that “When you begin to compose, do it all with your brain. Do not try the piece at the instrument until it is finished.”³⁸ Although this may work in some instances, I find that attempting this method allows for parts to fade with time, as well as a complete loss of the idea in general. There is also no room for change once it is placed in the real-world soundscape. Much of the rescoring I have done did involve a type of “mental rehearsal” before it was put to paper but, much of it was created through the gathering and experimentation of different instrument combinations.

Bailes and Bishop said, “The model is simple and proposes two phases: (1) the generative phase, in which mental representations are created; and (2) the exploratory phase, in which interpretations of the representation are explored.”³⁹ This two-step process is what I most implemented within my creative process. Ideas that formed unobstructed in my mind were then expanded on and molded to fit the themes and ideas within the context of this film. This does, however, lead to a sporadic composition schedule. Although I physically kept a consistent agenda at the studio, not every visit was consistently productive. Inspiration and motivation

³⁸ Bailes, Freya and Laura Bishop. 2012. “Musical Imagery in the Creative Process,” in *The Act of Musical Composition*, ed. by Dave Collins (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing), p. 57.

³⁹ Bailes and Bishop, p. 58.

fluctuated from session to session. Moving from scene to scene allowed for the continued renewal of inspiration. Rather than sticking with one scene or composing in chronological order, the ability to switch between them allowed for many ideas to be developed at the same time.

The composer's mind has been described as "the most perfect instrument in the world"⁴⁰ but the process of taking the ideas and realizing them is a complicated one. Many of my studio sessions were left with a feeling of discouragement. The best thing for me to do in these situations was switch to another part or program or even a different project. Stockhausen says, "I remember that very often when I'd worked until late at night, I gave up; the brain continued working on the problem during my sleep, and I knew the solution next morning"⁴¹ which is a process that has worked well for me as well.

Bailes and Bishop talk about how "Imagery in the form of mental rehearsal enables the performer to experiment with alternative interpretations without the need to attend to technical demands and without interference from auditory or motor feedback."⁴² This mental imagery is more of a technique to be implemented outside of the studio. Finding solutions to problems such as how to resolve chords or shape the music can be solved through this mental rehearsal.

Analysis

⁴⁰ Bailes and Bishop, p. 60.

⁴¹ Bailes and Bishop, p. 61.

⁴² Bailes and Bishop, p. 56.

The first shot of the film opens on a close-up shot of a large body of water. As the film cuts between different shots of the water and surrounding area, the opening credits play over top. This is the song used in most films to establish the tone of the rest of the film to follow. The opening shot for *A Bay of Blood* is also used to establish the main location at the center of this film's plot. The bay is the epicenter of this film and the main plot points revolve around this place. It is almost its own character in the context of the film.

The main goal for my opening piece was to introduce the main instruments that would be used throughout the rest of my composition as well as set the tone for not only the score but the film itself. The conga drums open to set the rhythm, which is then cut into by the sweeping strings with the main theme of the score. This technique is used to cause a bit of confusion. The listener is required to take a second to reestablish the down beat. There are more establishing shots of the location, but from further in shore. The rest of the instruments are added in one by one to build to the climax of the piece marked by the timpani. The music then begins to fade as the opening shot ends and we cut to the house of the water. The chime sound is used for the first time here over the freeze frame of the house. This sound will be used throughout the rest of the scenes as an indicator for something yet to come. It is meant to make the viewer focus on the scene.

Within both the slasher and Giallo genre, these instruments are commonly used. The drums are more specific to Giallo, but they aren't completely uncommon in slasher films. The toy piano is an instrument used within general horror films while the strings have been used since the beginning of film music. The melody for the main theme was inspired by Giallo scores such as *Seven Blood-Stained Orchids* and *Don't Torture a Duckling*. Both film scores implement the idea of using a certain sound to indicate to the audience that something is coming. The

female vocals paired with the echoing strings from the opening return throughout the film during tense, anxiety building scenes, such as sneaking through a house or hiding from the killer in *Don't Torture a Duckling*. The repetition of running water in *Seven Blood-Stained Orchids* is used to signal the start of a kill scene. This is an idea I have tried to mirror in my work.

We then cut to a closeup of a wheelchair as an old lady is wheeling around her house in the dark. The creaking and rolling of the wheelchair are sounds I added myself. They are interspersed with conga drums and triangle. As she approaches the window, there is an echoing guitar sound that fades in and out. The leisurely pace of the guitar is almost unnerving as there is an obvious building of tension meant throughout the scene. As the camera suddenly zooms in on the old lady's face, there is an echoing gasp that mimics the echoing guitar as well as a chime sound as she is hung from a noose and removed from her wheelchair. The slow guitar melody returns with the addition of toy piano, and the camera pans up to the face of our killer as the music fades out. There is a noise outside that the man goes to investigate. As he opens the door the guitar fades back in as an indicator that this kill scene isn't quite over yet. As he re-enters the scene of the crime to place her suicide note on the table, there is a sudden cut to a knife. The "ki ki ki" sound is reminiscent of *Friday the 13th*. These more synth/electronic sounds in this scene were meant to place it within the slasher genre where plot twists in the opening kill are more common than giallo films.

The drive scene follows this. As the couple drives off into the darkness of the night, their children watch from the window. I have taken the chords used in the end credit scene and changed them to fit a minor key. This is a simple technique used to create a more melancholic sound. The late-night drive through this dark tunnel of trees seems endless. The repetition of the chords overlaid with the dissonant and high-pitched strings builds tension for the scene. They

don't speak to each other during the drive and the unease between the two of them is clear in their expressions. As they pass the sign to their destination, the chimes are used to signal to the viewer that this information will be essential to the plot of the rest of the movie. The car then pulls up to one of the houses on the bay as the music fades. There are disconnected and arhythmic drums scattered over the brief dialogue.

This is the third iteration of this scene that I have scored. The first featured a bouncier and more up-tempo piece that was more reminiscent of the Chocolate Tunnel scene in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. The keyboard setting used for this first iteration leaned more into the synth sounds of the slasher genre. The metallic and electronic sound was prominent in this and although the music worked for the scene, it didn't connect well to the rest of the score. In a full playthrough sense, it stuck out from the rest of the score of the film. The second iteration took a completely opposite take with a slow and heavy bass and guitar motif with dissonant string chords on the off beats. Although this fit with the score more sonically, the music felt too weighed down for the scene. The drive felt long and dragged out while also lacking any real tension needed for the scene. The balance of this idea came in the third iteration. The chords played on the synth keys start when the children are first seen in the window. The reverb placed over the synths creates an almost echoing effect that keeps the kids in the back of the mind of both the audience and the characters.

The discussion scene directly follows the drive. There is a lot of discussion of the location and much of the plot of the film is laid out here by the couple who live on the property. This three-minute scene introduces the characters, their role in the film, and almost all the motivations for the characters in the film. The deaths at the beginning of the film are also explained. As this scene is meant to give the viewer vital information, I have composed a simple

bossa nova piece to play in the background as radio noise. It consists of marimba, guitar, piano, voice, and conga drums. This simple composition is set in C Major to create a simple and cheerful sound. There is an emphasis on the 4th beat and the voice takes the lead while the rest of the instruments act as the rhythm section by playing the chords and allowing for more melodic freedom in the vocals. It allows the viewer to focus on the scene. The dialogue is the main device used to build tension within this scene. The vocals on this track have no real words, but the point of the music here is to fill the space between words in this discussion. It isn't meant to command the scene, but rather act as something for the silence between words to fall back on. A staple of the Giallo film is the bossa nova. *Strip Nude for Your Killer* features a bossa nova piece that follows directly after the opening kill. The use of bossa nova in Giallo is commonly used to open and/or close the film, but it is often used to break up the tension in the film.

As the young couple go out to the boathouse to talk to Simon, we enter the body reveal scene. There is now doubt and suspicion created between the couples as they all sneak around the bay for different reasons. As the couple approach Simon to question him, Frank is seen to be on the phone. Everyone in this movie is meant to be untrustworthy. The cricket noises lead into the conga drums as the triangle sounds. The slow and arhythmic plucking of the guitar as Frank is on the phone seems to start to lead into a more succinct melody but it quickly fades away and the staccato keyboard strikes signify the upcoming horror. The wife, Anna, is seen sneaking through the woods near the bay to spy on the young couple as they go to question Simon. As the camera zooms out from the bay, the chimes sound to indicate that the discussion to come will have some important reveals. The discussion with Simon as the camera cuts between him and the couple creates a sense of divide between the two parties. It is also clear that Simon is hiding something from them. As the husband continues to question him and the music continues to

build up from the drums, Rennie turns to explore the boat. As Walter keeps talking with Simon, the piano hits continue to pick up in tempo until the movement under the sheet is revealed to be the dead body of Rennie's father. The quick zoom out from the body is overlaid with a cacophony of sounds. The shocking banging of bells and chimes and slides adds to the shock of the dead body with the octopus on its face.

While Rennie continues to gag, the triangle, drums, and piano strikes fade. This lack of rhythm paired with an increase in frequency and sound is common in many slashers such as *Don't Go in the Woods*, *The Wind*, and *The Prey*. All these movies feature people in the woods sneaking around while someone else watches them from a distance, usually the killer of the film. They all also use this method of building up sounds combined with the steadily increasing tempo to a big payoff.

We then cut to the interior of Ventura's house as Walter and Rennie stagger in. The rhythmic guitar plucking from earlier has returned as an indicator to the audience that although the characters think they are safe here, there is still danger lurking. There is also the scattered drum sound that mimics the one two rhythm of a heartbeat. The tension from earlier is building again as Walter walks around the house in the dark. The slow descending bass interspersed with the triangle chime, almost feels like the beginnings of a jump scare. As Rennie enters the bathroom, the sounds start to get closer together in octave. The bass descending line becomes more clustered with more notes added in while the dissonant guitar chords drop down in octave and the triangle is removed entirely. The drums also increase in frequency but keep their steady one two tempo. Then as Rennie gasps and the camera zooms in and out of her face, there is another cacophony of sound before the camera cuts to the bathtub that is revealed to be filled with many dead bodies.

As Rennie and Walter walk through the woods the bass harp plays a descending and punchy loop of G E C# A# A G creating a disjointed 3rd inversion A major chord with a minor 7th. Putting the 7th in the bass creates an incomplete feeling which is emphasized by the chromatic half step from A# to A. This is then joined by the toy piano on the off beats to add movement and strings which add a rising tension to the scene as someone is spotted carrying a dead body to the lake. As the saxophone enters, Rennie and Walter sneak closer to the lake to investigate and the camera cuts to the perspective of the person carrying the body on the pier. High strings come in as well as drums after the body has been dumped into the water while we wait for the face of the person to be revealed. While Rennie and Walter head back toward the road, the music crescendos as a car passes, almost catching the couple in their headlights. The melodic loop is then paused, and the chords are instead stacked to add more dissonance as Laura enters Ventura's cabin. When the camera cuts to a bloody hand in the doorframe, the music stops, and a drum roll is heard until Ventura drags himself into frame. As Laura is sent away to find Simon, the triangle begins to chime, and the one two rhythm of the drums returns while she runs through the woods.

The cut to the interior of the cabin as Laura looks around for Simon indicated something soon to come. I have used the saxophone in a descending riff as an indicator for the demise soon to come. The feeling of dread is amplified by the sustained high note overtop this motif that enters as Simon does. The conga drums are keeping the rhythm while creating a sense of uncertainty in their stilted pattern. The strings emphasize the direction this scene is going while also emphasizing the dialogue. There are a lot of plot points that are being revealed within this scene and the music is there to draw attention to these details and reveals, while also building to the climax of the scene when Simon lunges for Laura's throat. The chimes are paired with the

camera's zoom into the pot of boiling water to emphasize focus on this piece. Although she does succeed in slashing Simon with the scalding liquid, the music has subtly indicated to the audience since its entrance that Laura was not going to survive.

Her death scene is highlighted by the pulsing and dissonant strings as an attempt to replicate her fading heartbeat as she is choked. This technique of using the music to represent a real-world object has become mainstream since Hitchcock's *Psycho* which had the strings mimic the striking of the knife. This technique was a staple of the slasher era of films. Even horror films that didn't fit into the slasher genre implemented this technique. Films such as *Jaws* and *The Shining* take this idea and apply it to the monster and the weapon respectively.

This moment of contemplation after watching Simon kill Laura places the audience in his world. We have just witnessed this horrific death and now we, like Simon, must sit with the consequences of his actions. This moment of contemplation feels like a final scene to this film. There are slow and drawn-out close-up shots of Simon slowly wandering the woods. Within the actual film this is emphasized through the lack of music and the simple background sounds of the nature around the bay, but I have taken my opening theme and slowed it down. This return of a familiar melody adds to the feeling of an ending. This building of the strings and chords, swelling as Simon reaches his final location feels like the slow building of tension. The framing of Simon within the broken and red stained glass is used as foreshadowing for his death in the next shot. I have added in the chimes as an added auditory signal for this scene. As the music fades, so does the life from Simon's body. The added dissonant chords over his attempts to fight off his killer are used to keep the tension extended through the end of this scene. Throughout the movie Simon has shown himself to be one who shouldn't be underestimated. This moment could

still end in his favor or at least with another death on his hands before he passes. However, the music begins to fade along with his life.

This is then followed by Rennie and her husband searching for some documentation. There is still some anxiety in their search, but also a bit of relief as now everyone who was against them is dead. They rush through their search for these documents so they can get home and avoid suspicion before the police arrive. The slow saxophone motif has returned as with the addition of strings, cymbals, and conga drums one by one. A simple repeated descending chromatic scale creates a sense of things coming to an end. The loss of power allows for a pause in the music. The drums, maracas, and triangle are then used to follow Walter through the scene as they slowly build tempo before the strings build as Walter tries to find his wife and light his lighter. The strings continue to build until the cymbal crash as the man, Frank, who was assumed to be dead, crashes through the darkness. Although the framing of this scene was more reminiscent of a slasher film with the long shots of characters shuffling through and calling out into the darkness, the strings and drums are intended to give the feeling of a Giallo. The classic stacking of chords along with the discombobulated and disconnected drum rhythms are used frequently within the Giallo genre.

As Rennie calls out for her husband in the silence of the dark, the two men fight. In the dark it's unclear who has come out of the fight alive. The zoom into Rennie's face fades into her face. The chime sound as the scene transitions adds a sense of foreboding to a seemingly happy ending. There is a call out from the children and then a bang as a gun goes off. The couple fall to the ground and the toy piano plays over this scene as the audience realizes they are dead.

The end credit scene is the final twist of the movie. The plot has been so convoluted and drenched in character assassinations. There have already been three false endings. This light and

bouncy string piece is in the aftermath of the final death of the movie. There is a simple chord progression played in the strings without any melodic complication. The rhythm, melody, and chords are all simple and repetitive. The lower register of strings is built up throughout the piece to add depth to the piece. The guitar is the only instrument playing on the offbeat as a way of keeping the piece from dragging. This, played over the children running through the field, is an attempt to signal to the audience that the film has reached its ending. The lack of actual resolution in the chords and the constant repetition of this idea is used to keep the audience from feeling any real relief. The final two characters who were thought to have succeeded in their plans of owning the bay are now dead after being killed by their own children. This lack of actual resolution to the film is reflected in the music. The final chord played over the black screen with THE END in bold letters leads the audience to wonder if it will ever actually be over.

Process

This opening kill scene was the most difficult and time-consuming piece to score. There is a woman in a wheelchair rolling through her sprawling mansion and looking forlornly out the windows as a storm rages on outside. I used an echoing guitar to reflect the emptiness of the mansion. The slow and steady pace of the repetitive two note guitar sound is reminiscent of the Jaws theme. The original plan was to have sporadic guitar chords plucked and echoed to show the vast emptiness of the mansion, but the use of more than one note at a time seemed to create more tension than was needed. This scene then eventually reaches a climax as she is then killed only for her killer to be revealed and then he himself is killed. The guitar then becomes the knife

as it is stabbed into the back of the man. The echoing strings begin to layer over each other and create a clattering sound that reflects the chaos of this scene. That is two deaths and two killers within 3 minutes. The tone for the film has now been set. There is always more to be revealed. This idea will be reiterated throughout the rest of the scenes from this film.

The most difficult part of this opening kill scene was getting all the foley sounds to fit within the scene. Many of the sounds used were my own recordings such as the rolling wheelchair, the footsteps, and the door creaking on its hinges. Other sounds such as the thunderstorm and the voices came either directly from the film or were gathered online. The aligning and sound balancing of the sound design was one of the more tedious and time-consuming processes within my work.

Conclusion

Through composing within the context of two different horror genres, I was able to show the similarities both cinematically and musically for Slasher and Giallo films. They both have distinct instrumentation that fits within the context of the time they were created. The Giallo film takes musical inspiration from bossa nova which was popular in Italy at the time while the slasher takes more inspiration from synths and drum machines and more electronic based music as was popular during the 80s in America. Both genres, at their core, want to scare the audience visually and sonically, but their approach to this is different.

The use of Giallo style allows for a more theatrical viewing experience. Cinematically the focus is on the gore that can be shown as well as the ridiculousness of the kill scenes within the parameters of a typical slasher format. A Giallo film either draws you in more or detaches you from the violence on screen depending on the musical techniques utilized. The disconnect

between the vibrant and, at times, distracting music within the film lets the violence exist in the context of the movie and not in real life. There is supposed to be a confusion of feeling between beautiful sound playing and ugly sight in screen. This disconnect can, in some cases, create more fear and confusion for the viewer. It is comparable to the recent trend within television shows of using well known 70s and 80s songs over intense fight scenes in television shows. Popular artists such as Elton John, David Bowie, and the Beatles have been featured over battle and fights in shows such as *Legion* (2017-2019), *The Umbrella Academy* (2019-2024), and *Preacher* (2016-2019).

Visually, slasher films are meant to entertain the audience with as little effort as possible, hence the similar storyline, almost identical plot structure, and many sequels. The cinematic goal is as much horror as possible on the smallest budget possible. The slasher style of music allows for more of an immersive viewing experience with the goal of drawing the viewer into the horrors of the film. There is a direct connection between the sound playing and what is on screen as far as tone. The point of the music is to draw you into the scene and draw a direct connection between sound and sight. The viewer is meant to be scared by both the sound and the scene. The building of anxiety can be heard in the soundtrack through the dissonance and slow building of sound which then leads to jump scares.

Slashers that follow this more well-known method include *The Prey* (1983), *Terror Train* (1980), and *Prom Night* (1980). This is a more common musical approach in horror that is still used today in popular horror such as *The Possession* (2012), *IT* (2017), and *Scream* (1996).

It's clear that each of these genres has its purpose in the choices made musically and cinematically. They even make stepping outside of the norm what is expected within these films. The audience becomes used to expecting the unexpected. Even though the approach varies

vastly, the result is the same. Terrifying viewers by connecting reality to fantasy and leaving a lasting impression on their audiences.

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