Music

The function of music in film

Learning and Teaching Directorate, Secondary Education © NSW Department of Education, July 2018

The function of music in film

Credits

- An obvious use of music in film (as there are words on the screen).
- Sets the mood for the type of film - action, drama, horror, romance, comedy etc.
- The end credits these days can often be a popular song not featured in the film, but used in trailers to promote it.

https://youtu.be/lQ-vyftT7nA

Mood and atmosphere

- Allows the audience to understand how everyone in the scene is feeling or the general mood of the occasion.
- Camera will look at everyone (not focus on one person).

https://youtu.be/LL--prfnuJ8

Dramatic effect

- Can create contrast or highlight something in the scene.
- Can sometimes be a ‘ta-dah’ moment or involve the use of tension in the music.
- Camera will often pan out.

https://youtu.be/Owq_aBJ9G6Q

Sense of locale

- Can give a sense of the time or place in which the film or a particular scene is set.
- Can involve music from a particular time period, genre or culture.

https://youtu.be/tLZQ_xQEHGY

Character emotion or identification

- A small theme (or motif) can be associated with a particular character and may identify them as being a ‘hero’ or ‘villain’ (for example, the Jaws theme).
- Helps the audience connect with the emotions of the character without any dialogue.
- The camera will focus on one character (unlike mood and atmosphere that looks at everyone in the scene).

https://youtu.be/r4kiXh8YOzk

Pace and action

- Generally a chase/running scene or a fight scene.
- The music will reflect the movement on the screen.

https://youtu.be/WLqCug7otCw