

MUSICAL SCORE

Music enhances the emotional impact of a film by reinforcing the mood of a scene or by hinting at unspoken conflicts or feelings. Its effectiveness was so well understood that even “silent” movies were generally accompanied by some type of music. Some early filmmakers commissioned musical scores from well-known composers, as Sergei Eisenstein did for his 1925 silent film *The Battleship Potemkin*. In 1933, Max Steiner composed the first modern-style score for the film *King Kong*. Steiner’s innovations set a standard for Hollywood film scores that is still followed today. His score provided a musical illustration of the story, and he also pioneered the use in films of individual themes, or leitmotifs, for different characters and situations. A good example of a leitmotif is the two-note theme that signals the appearance of the shark in *Jaws*.



Composer Franz Waxman (in front of podium), director James Whale (seated) and conductor Gilbert Kurland at a recording session for *Bride of Frankenstein*.

As you listen to the film clip your teacher has chosen, try to identify as many musical themes as possible. List the themes using the characters’ names or a brief reference to the situation or emotion represented by the music.

Pick two of the themes. What does the music tell you about each character or situation? For example, is the music light-hearted? Sad? Threatening?

How does each theme use pitch, melody and rhythm?

Does the musical theme reveal something about the character that you would not have known without it?

MUSICAL SCORE TERMS

CUE: A short piece of music written and performed in relation to one of a film’s scenes or segments. All the cues together make up the film’s score.

LEITMOTIF: A short musical phrase representing and recurring with a character, situation or emotion. The device derives from 19th-century opera.

SONG SCORE: When songs completely or principally make up a film’s musical score.

SPOTTING SESSION: A meeting between the composer, the producer and the director where they decide how and when to use music in the film. Usually the composer does not begin to work until after the spotting session.

