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Music as brand, with reference to the film music of John Towner Williams (with particular emphasis on Williams's 'Main Title' for Star Wars)

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Chapter four

Semiological analysis

In terms of carrying meaning music can be seen as non-referential in that each sound in itself does not contain a specific meaning, unless such meaning is assigned to it by the cultures or communities in which the sound functions (see Middleton 1990; Agawu 1999). In a socio-cultural environment, the sounds that we use to communicate are given precise meaning mostly in the context of conversation and active interpretation. In a song, the lyric directs the meaning of the song through the words. Yet, this does not mean that music in itself does not carry meaning. On the contrary, music is invariably the medium through which the most immediate and expressive meanings occur. Thus, when the piece of music, especially art and film music, does not contain a lyric that gives a clear indication of what the meaning of the music is, the framework is to some extent open to independent interpretations, seeing that words carry a more defined semantic content. The meaning that we assign to music (without the context of a lyric) is, for the most part, determined by the context of our cultural codes. Although music may not be a language per se, it still carries very definite emotional codes within certain parametric combinations (Agawu 1999). Branding and relaying aspects of identity through music then become a challenge that requires an analysis of how music identity markers function in the multi-cultural global village. Such markers may be understood as message carriers that convey both identity and meaning (Middleton 1990).

Seeing that semiotics is concerned with the structuring of a system in order to communicate, we need to look briefly at the concept of music as a type of language-system first, and then at how music surpasses that function in becoming a myth. This, in essence, is a post-structuralist/postmodern view of the function of a created language system. Music as myth in its secondary signification mode would then give us an idea of how music in popular culture can be seen and experienced as a brand, i.e. a commercial identity marker that creates a lasting memory with the average listener in a selected socio-economic demographic through a potentially intellectual-emotional audio experience (Barthes 1972). The two poles that coincide at this point are the purely musical language system and the cultural, contextual meaning attached to this communicative system.

1. Music as an autonomous communicative system

Music makes sense if understood in terms of the context in which it was made to function within a particular demographic (Middleton 1990). In Chapter Three, I dealt with music as a text, the parameters of which can be dissected in order to find out how the music works as a layer within an audio brand. I have chosen a few of these pitch-based parameters to serve as analysis categories within a semiotic context. The musicological approach in Chapter Three does not embrace the semiotic or referential aspects that I need to deal with in this chapter. Therefore, parametric combinations are more apt here with regard to their predisposition to meaning within a social, political or

cultural context. The selected parametric combinations of which music as an autonomous communicative system is comprised are the following:

- Consonance vs. dissonance
- Home key and tonic vs. other keys and structural pitches
- Melody vs. harmony
- Foreground vs. middle ground and background
- Repetition vs. new material
- Durational values

1.1 Consonance vs. dissonance (melodic and harmonic)

Consonance in film music is primarily concerned with emotions or experiences that leave us feeling a certain degree of control, hope and happiness. Dissonance, on the other hand, is normally associated with unease, conflict and the anticipation of discomfort. In *Star Wars*, the Princess Leia theme is fairly consonant (in melody and harmony) throughout, in terms of its relationship to the protagonist's personality. The Darth Vader Theme, on the other hand, is made up of a series of chromatic harmonic progressions, including a number of dissonant intervals in the melodic theme. This obviously relates to the Darth Vader character's antagonistic personality. The Western notion of consonance vs. dissonance (the question of resolution between tension points in a film score) is an important signifying aspect in film music as an autonomous communicative system, as it relates directly to the emotional transference from the on-screen characters, conflicts and narrative.

1.2 Home key and tonic vs. other keys and structural pitches (melodic)

The melodic line is an identity marker that, more than the harmonic or timbral parameters, defines the musical theme. Cubitt (2000) suggests that the way in which music creates meaning can be compared to the way a storyteller uses sounds and plots to take the listener on a journey. He states that both a melody and storyline are made up of sounds that create a sense of characters, milieu, conflict, romance or other emotional connectors, as well as normally signalling a return to peaceful living, with all the central conflicts in the specific narrative being resolved. Many tales, myths and legends follow this overarching structure and, similarly, music can be seen as adhering to the same structural pattern that creates meaning, namely that of telling a story. As Cubitt puts it:

> Like narrative, melody promises a dual enjoyment, a pleasure in order and a pleasure in its disruption. Melody must disrupt the perfection of the tonic just as any good story has to begin with a departure, a mystery or some similar intervention into the 'normal' state of affairs; and, like the narrative, in its departure from the norm, melody must contain a promise to return to the narrative closure of restored order. The tonic functions as a good marriage at the end of a realist novel: having dealt with the thrill of loss and trouble, it can only guarantee our pleasure by confining it within the reassuring closure of the restored tonic… (Cubitt 2000:143).

Structural pitches relate to the pitch centres in a melody that contribute significantly in terms of positioning, duration, range, etc., in order to make the melody unique, 'hummable', or recognisable. (Refer to Chapter Three, Figures 2.1, 2.3 and 3.1). The melodic intervals in *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' start off with the dominant (Bb: F), and then move up an interval of a perfect fourth to the tonic (Bb: Bb) There is then a further ascent of a perfect fifth to the dominant degree (Bb: F). The melody slurs down from the sub-dominant (Bb: Eb) to the supertonic (Bb: C) and then ascends up to the tonic (Bb: Bb). The melody then returns to the sub-dominant (Bb: Eb), ending on the supertonic (Bb: C). The interval types that form the structural basis of the melody are typically associated with Western notions of warfare, hunting (the ascending perfect fifth) and creating the expectation of an important message (the ascending perfect fourth). Thus, the intervallic references as they are used in *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' are very apt, as they create an audio brand that complements the visual brand.

1.3 Melody vs. harmony

Middleton (1990) suggests a way in which to analyse music in popular culture under two main headings, the first being syntactic, the latter semantic. With the syntactic analyses, music as text signifies on its own terms, i.e. the analysis contained in Chapter three. In the semantic analyses, the connotations that we have learnt to assign to music are analysed in order to understand how those connotations have been made, and how the music supports them.

Another syntactic (or music-as-text) method of analysis that Middleton investigates is Nicholas Ruwet's model of pitch importance. This relates directly to the understanding (or meaning) of a melody. This analysis model is known as the paradigmatic analysis, based on the concept of equivalence. Equivalence in this context means that the role of repetition and variation in a melody is pivotal to the meaning of that melody. The melody normally consists of two dimensions: first, the pitch element, and second the durational aspect. Ruwet's paradigmatic analysis focuses on both these dimensions. (Refer to Chapter three; see Figures 1.1 and 2.1.)

The harmonic syntactic technique that Middleton investigates is based on Schenkerian analysis and deals with harmony progression. Middleton identifies modified versions of strict Schenkerian analysis that can be applied to Jazz, Blues and Rock. This technique forms the basis of harmonic analysis for a wide range of music genres, and for the identification of various harmonic progressions. (Refer to Chapter three, Figure 4.1). The mode in which *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' is heard is the major mode, with most of the harmonic progressions being made up out of major type triads as well. This major-mode sound is predominant throughout the 'Main Title', and one can translate these melodic-harmonic codes as affirming a sense of adventure, excitement and a war-like journey that will most probably conclude with a comfortable and victorious ending.

1.4 Foreground vs. middleground and background (i. t. o. being noticeable to the ear)

Western art music since the Renaissance is normally homophonic in texture, i.e. consists of melody and accompaniment. The melody stands out as the main narrative, while the accompaniment (combined harmonic and rhythmic interests) creates the milieu in which the narrative is unfolding. Björnberg (2000) quotes Tagg as saying that, in terms of a cultural context, the melody versus the accompaniment is equivalent to the individual versus the environment, or one can also see it as foreground versus background. Björnberg goes on to say that:

> These are frequently consistently identifiable with separate musical 'voices'; however, the structural specificities and polysemic nature of music also allow for the same 'voice' to alternate between various functions, such as a guitar first playing a riff as part of the background, then switching to fill in the vocal line as a 'secondary character' [middle ground], and subsequently becoming the 'main character' in a guitar solo [foreground]' (Björnberg 2000:353). (Refer to Chapter three: Textural aspects.)

In *Star Wars'* 'Main Title', the melodic aspect is both the most memorable and the most audible (regarding auditory prominence, dynamics and register) and therefore serves as the foreground. The middle ground in this excerpt is strings, unpitched percussion, brass and bassoon. This level serves to create rhythmic interest in the 'Main Title', as well as a sense of march-like vitality. This speaks of war, of a march towards an adventure that is about to unfold. Background material consists of the piano tremolandi, violin section tremolandi, flute tremolandi, piccolo tremolandi, clarinet tremolandi and harp decorative passages. In the background, the energy of the 'Main Title' is given a glamorous shimmer with the use of tremolandi in the higher registers in woodwinds, piano and violins. This helps to lift the 'Main Title' from a warlike theme to a glorious adventure through the positioning of the high tremolandi in the various brighter sounding instruments.

1.5 Repetition vs. new material

Middleton (1990) points out that repetition, as used in structural systems (of which music is an example) constitutes the basis that any language (structural communicative system) requires in order to function. He identifies two types of repetition: the one is based on a melodic phrase, a meaningful memorable unit ('discursive'); the other is the cellular unit of a pattern, called a riff ('musematic') (Middleton, 1990). The 'Main Title' from *Star Wars* can be identified as containing a 'discursive' repetitive feature throughout the 'Main Title', as well as throughout the entire six-episode saga. The role of 'musematic' repetition should not be discarded in the 'Main Title', as the durational museme (Chapter three, Figure 1.1) constitutes the durational building block for the melody. The accompaniment to the Darth Vader theme comprises mainly repeated 'musematic' rhythmic and even harmonic riffs that are varied and repeated in the similar or near-similar rhythmic and harmonic

grids. Interestingly enough, it seems that with ‘discursive’ repetitions, although highly effective and memorable, the amount of ego-energy needed for translation and assimilation is higher than that needed to translate and assimilate ‘musematic’ repetitions (Middleton 1990). Repetition in terms of film music is crucial for anchoring the listener in a specific emotive-audio framework. The way in which film music is repeated throughout a film requires, of necessity, the use of variations in register, timbre, tempo, dynamic and rhythmic interpretation in order for the repetition both to engrain itself with the listener as the ‘sound’ of the film, and also to communicate an aspect of the particular narrative to the audience.

1.6 Durational values

Tempo, time signature (metre), pulse and the durational aspect of the melody/museme are the other dimensions of the ‘hook’ in music that an audience finds meaningful. The ‘Main Title’ theme of *Star Wars* is written in a steadfast 4/4 time signature, with a strong pulse (traditionally) on the first and third beats respectively. The tempo is relatively fast, with a very frequent number of triplet figures in both the melody as well as the accompaniment, which creates a sense of moving faster towards a goal, creating a sense of anticipation and exhilaration. The main melody’s durational values vary from triplet quavers/eighth notes to semi-breves/whole notes, with the semi-breves/whole notes being balanced out with triplet crochets/quarter notes throughout the unfolding of the ‘Main Theme’ melody. A march-like energy is also conveyed through the use of steady metre-bound rhythmic patterns overlapped with triplet-type rhythmic patterns; this notion is further solidified with the use of ‘military’ type instruments such as the trumpet (melody), brass section (accompaniment) and the snare drums and cymbals.

These six elements in music help to give us an idea of how the music creates meaning on its own and how it functions in an autonomous communicative system; in other words, how the sounds we hear and appreciate as music work together. In our Western culture, this coherence carries meaning in order for us to perceive music as pleasing or alarming.

Middleton (1990) also states that the meaning in music is based on two pillars — first, the value that the listener receives from listening to the music, and second, the pleasure that the listener experiences by listening to it. One can say that the pleasurable aspect of music functions as a delivery-vehicle for the value that the listener draws out of a listening experience. This means that the significance attached to a set of audio codes within a specific socio-cultural context is, for the most part, only interpreted effectively if the music is pleasurable to the target audience.

So far we have focused on music and semiotics in the context of the audio-visual medium (Chapter two), as an independent entity (Chapter three) and as a carrier of potential pleasure within a specific cultural context. Let us now further investigate music as a delivery-vehicle for meaning or communicative values.

2. Music as myth

Middleton (1990) draws a further strong connection between a piece of music and its genre: for example, when Strauss's *Blue Danube* is heard, the Western genre that comes to mind is the waltz. Scott Joplin's *Entertainer* brings with it the connotation of the ragtime genre; Wagner's *Lohengrin* conjures up late-Romantic epic opera and John Williams's *Star Wars*' scores in turn give rise to images of Wagner's late-Romantic epic operatic style or Gustav Holst's late nineteenth-century symphonic genre. In terms of structural linguistics, this referring of a subject or symbol to another larger type is called 'indexical' (Middleton 1990). The first section of Holst's *The Planets (Jupiter)* carries codes that are similar to *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' (bars 1 – 9) in terms of consonance, modality and repetition. When decoding Jupiter, the same type of feelings, meanings and 'images' occur as when listening to *Star Wars'* 'Main Title'. In other words, the codes that the *Star Wars* score contains and which, in part, make it a unique text, also connect it to a larger collective musical sub-conscious that in turn functions as its basic reference point. In regard to music functioning as a semiological medium, we are now connecting to a different purpose, that of myth-creation.

Secondary signification (myth-making) has to do with the creation of a culture-specific new structural communicative system based on the primary significant communicative system: pictures, language, music, clothes, and food are among the multitude of myths that have been created since the beginning of time (Barthes 1972). Middleton (1990) also points out that the essential idea that forms part of most primary signifying musical events is the prevalence of the relationship between musical motifs that create meaning in terms of timbre, repetition, variation and so on. These relationships between the various events are defining factors in creating the all-important structure of the primary signifier – music. This relationship and how it achieves its meaning was discussed earlier on in this chapter.

According to Middleton (1990:223), the structural linguist, Lévi-Strauss, believes that secondary signification (myth creation) is closely related to the way in which music means so much more than what is notated in the score:

> For Lévi-Strauss, myth is a structured system of signifiers, whose internal networks of relationships are used to 'map' the structure of other sets of relationships; the 'content' is infinitely variable … myth is seen as a 'science of the concrete': it does not signify, it *is*; it does not deal in representation of the world but in *reciprocal correspondences* – between myths, between elements, and codes in myth, and between these and other structures which can be thought of as analogous, and which therefore 'mean' each other.

Star Wars, then, can be seen, not only as a piece of music that signifies the movie, but also as conveying the experience(s) that the audience might associate with the music outside the immediate context of the film. The relationship between the visual and audio brands is therefore not the only relationship that is apparent. The connection between the audience (or

listeners) and the 'Main Title', for example, might signify a variety of other meanings based on the context in which the subsequent hearing of the theme might occur or the way in which the theme is 'used' by the listeners on a frequent basis (for example as a tool for promoting self-confidence before entering a business meeting). In this way, the 'Main Title' not only anchors the listeners to the film, but also to a more personal meaning involving the listeners' relationship to the 'Main Title'. When *Star Wars*' parties are held or *Star Wars*' societies meet, the 'Main Title's role is also that of a social identity, rather than simply a commercial identity marker.

What myth in music also refers to is that one text — for example, the *Star Wars* 'Main Title' — not only serves as text (containing multi-modal meanings on various levels) in terms of the film itself, but also in terms of interconnecting with other epic movies that came before it (for example Max Steiner: *Gone With the Wind*), that were composed at the same time (for example John Williams: *Superman*) or that were composed after it (for example Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard: *Gladiator*). These movies' soundtracks collectively 'mean' each other in various ways, by containing the same kind of structural relationships in terms of musical semantics, and also 'mean' with regard to their predecessors on which they are founded – Wagner's epic music dramas, Korngold's, Elgar's and Holst's symphonic works. These works, to which the contemporary scores refer, contain the seed of structural relationships that are perpetuated and given new life and meaning in contemporary media and cultural contexts.

I now complete the latter part of Tagg's Methodological Paradigm for analysing popular music – that involving the ideological method. In Chapter Two, I briefly discussed and applied a basic version of Tagg's Hermeneutic-Semiological Method to the first nineteen bars of the 'Main Title' from *Star Wars*. In order to find a more focused meaning in popular music, Tagg suggests that stylistic and time-specific genres and pieces/songs should be analysed within their specific socio-temporal context, confirming that a riff or a modality in Baroque music might not necessarily 'mean' in the same way as it does in 'Rock' music.

2.1 Semiological analysis of the first eight bars of *Star Wars'* 'Main Title':

The following analysis is based on two very simplified formats for contextual analyses contained in *Studying Popular Music* (Middleton 1990) and *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music* (Björnberg 2000) respectively. It should be noted that there are far more to semiological analysis than what is presented here.

Although orchestral film music relating to an epic narrative does not, strictly speaking, qualify as popular music, I would like to apply these formats in order to affirm the ways in which film music achieves its meaning within popular culture.

Refer to Appendix C (see markings relating to 2, 4A and 4B).

1. Melody vs. Accompaniment (Analysis of Museme Stack):
This involves the horizontal succession of pitches that is foregrounded ahead of the rest of the sounds and which functions as accompaniment (middle ground and background) to the melody.
2. Melody (indicated on score in Appendix C)
3. Type of relation between Melody and Accompaniment
4. Accompaniment: A] Bass, and B] Other Parts (indicated on score in Appendix C)
5. Type of relation between: A] Bass and B] Other Parts

<table>
<tr><td>2. Melody</td><td>3. Type of relation to Accompaniment</td><td colspan="3">4. Accompaniment</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Focused, driven, forward-moving, ascending lines (adventure), regal and hunting (ascending intervals of consecutive fifths in the brass), epic (circular: repeated melodic and rhythmic musemes).</td><td rowspan="2">Clearly defined against accompaniment. Accompaniment frequently mimics rhythmic musemes which, in turn, creates a strong coherent feature, resulting in a multi-layered rhythmic and pitch texture.</td><td>4. A] Bass</td><td>5. Type of relation</td><td>4.B] Other Parts</td></tr>
<tr><td>At first mimicking the melodic rhythmic pattern, then solid in its own rhythmic pattern. Contains an agile nature, vital, grounded.</td><td>Independent of melody, yet because of mimicking parts in accompaniment, there is coherence between both. Varied accompaniment is less prominent and more decorative.</td><td>At first heard in a pure homophonic texture. Varied repetition, high-pitched ornamentative flairs heard over mimicking parts.</td></tr>
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Table 2.1 (Application of analytic model by Middleton, 1990)

6. Discursive Repetition
7. Symmetry
8. Musematic Repetition
9. Motorial Flow
10. Dynamics
11. Harmonic Framework
12. Timbral Aspects

6. Discursive Repetition	Melody repeated a number of times in ‘Main Title’: see Chapter two. Clearly identifiable repetition in popular culture means prominence and a greater degree of memorability.
7. Symmetry	Classical symmetry intact for melody: see Appendix C, b.4 – 18.

8. Musematic Repetition	Rhythmic, pitch musemes consistently repeated in melody and accompaniment. This means unity and congruency.
9. Motorial Flow	A] Textural layers consist of the foreground, middle ground and background layers with melody being foregrounded. The multi-layered flow is pioneered by the melody, backed by the rhythmically driven middle ground, and elevated to a mythical level via the backgrounded shimmer produced by the tremolandi in various high range timbres. B] Temporal density and regulation of sound events: denser, varied sound portions from b.11 – 18. The various parametric layers and combinations are building up to a point of tension, a sense of conflict or excitement.
10. Dynamics	Stable 'FF' for the most part. The dynamic level indicates that the music is triumphant, announcing an important message.
11. Harmonic Framework	See Harmonic Progression at bottom of pages of Appendix C. Basically a constant tonic-dominant progression that indicates a pattern of tension-release energies that would be typical of an epic, warlike march.
12. Timbral Aspects	Brass (melody, foreground) is traditionally prominent; accompaniment features other instrumental timbres that consistently carry complementary rhythmic musemes. Brass timbres are normally associated with war, adventure and hunting in Western culture. Brass instruments such as trumpets also signify royalty. The 'hero' is also associated with the french horn.

Table 2.2 (Application of analytic model by Björnberg, 2000)

Thus, we can conclude from these two very simplified formats of contextual analyses normally used to understand the meaning of popular songs, that film music's meaning can be diffused by using the same tools that one would need to diffuse meaning from a popular song. The significance of the 'Main Title' according to the popular formats for music analyses is the same as that of the analysis of the 'Main Title's inherent musical relationships discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

3. Repetition and meaning

Gorbman cites Royal Brown as arguing that:

> music can *generalize* a film event – that is, it encourages the spectator to receive the event not in its particularity but on a mythic level. Thus,

> when the Western hero rides over a ridge and looks out on the vast landscape before him, or when the heroine of a melodrama embraces her child for the last time, the almost certain presence of orchestral music on the soundtrack in each case – music that is virtually assured to channel a certain field of readings – helps to foster emotional identification. (Brown, in Gorbman 1999:42)

So, by repeatedly being exposed to a number of films in the dramatic genre, for instance, the audience becomes accustomed to the music medium (for example orchestral), the typical melodic contours (for example, ascending in a mostly step-wise fashion to a prime pitch), the typical emotionally-charged harmonic structures (for example: Tonic major – Dominant minor – Supertonic diminished – Dominant major 7^{th} – Tonic major), as well as the other music parameters such as timbre, tempo, texture, dynamics and register or range. These specific parametric combinations usually share the common goal of expressing one kind or variation of angst, for instance, and the commonality that occurs when musical variations of particular emotions are heard repetitively through a variety of dramatic movies becomes a code that the audience (mostly subconsciously) becomes familiar with. What was purely an aesthetic musical expression has now become film music that is founded on post-Romantic ideals of self-expression.

These parametric combinations also signify emotional expectations that become stock aural signifiers, for example the low strings, slowly moving down a chromatic scale in a soft dynamic signifies uneasiness, and with this uneasiness there is bound to be a sense of foreboding and a measure of angst, according to the cinematic codes to which we have become accustomed. For Brown, the music's function is more than simply that of an accompaniment to a visual scene; it actually carries with it codes that make the scene more meaningful. The recurring use of these codes creates familiar experiences through film music as used in most dramatic films, and this makes it easier for the general audience to unpack the emotional signifiers that the music carries. In this sense, Brown sees film music as being a myth in its own right, as existing on an independent mythic level that shares meaning through its co-presentation with a visual medium (Brown, in Gorbman 1999).

According to Tagg (1989), film music can actually contain meaning in itself, as the "aspects of musical style and melody, as developed in television and film, carry a surprising degree of semantic precision even when heard outside their audiovisual context" (Gorbman 1999:43). Meaning in music, as in any other medium that is anchored in sound, can be argued to be non-representational. Yet, in a cultural context, sounds have taken on a meaning to which a specific culture or group of people respond; for example, sirens, ring tones and church bells. The signification of music, as do sounds in any language, attains meaning from the culture-specific context in which these sonic signifiers function.

4. Postmodern narrative

Brown (in Gorbman 1999:43) points out that the scoring of music for film has developed from what was a flexible aesthetic, to a more postmodern and popular inclusive music scoring. Brown suggests that the flexible prominence of scored music in films from the earlier part of the twentieth century has given way to two modes of placing music and film, i.e. the way music is scored relates differently to the narrative of the film. The one mode involves the use of composed film music on the same level of prominence as the film, as in Peter Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*. The other mode includes the use of pre-existing pop music to illustrate, comment on or contradict the visual narrative, as in *Forrest Gump* (Brown, in Gorbman 1999). In *Heavenly Creatures* the scored music takes on a role of its own in order to communicate a different narrative, one that speaks of excess and irony instead of the usual amplification of emotional subtexts. Lapedis affirms this notion by stating that in *Forrest Gump* the pop music scoring includes songs from the 1960s, pop songs that speak about anti-war sentiments, love and sex. Yet these songs are, for the most part, inter-textual: rather than remaining in their original setting (Lapedis 1999). Thus, the songs are used to deliver ironic or profound commentary on the visual narrative. For example, when Forrest Gump is playing table tennis, the pop track 'Break on through' by The Doors is used, yet traditionally this track's own internal narrative speaks about anti-establishment values. The character of Forrest Gump is anything but anti-establishment, and one is left with a sense of irony when the hard rock sound and pounding rhythm is attached to two men playing a mere table tennis game (Lapedis 1999).

Lapedis (1999) further affirms Brown's notion of parallelism in modern (or postmodern) film scoring: the use of music in films has evolved into more than only highlighting the narrative through various degrees of audible diegetic and non-diegetic music. Rather, the music functions on an equal par with that of the visual narrative. As Lapedis makes clear, "This, therefore demands an approach which foregrounds the importance of the musical soundtrack [including the use of pop music as commentary on the visual narrative]: one that positions it as parallel to the visual and as having a discreet and intrinsic meaning in addition to its function within or beyond the diegesis" (Lapedis 1999:369). This 'intrinsic' meaning in film music can more easily be decoded by today's film going audience than in the late 1800s when the cinema experience was more of a novelty and filmgoers could perhaps only relate to the film and its accompanying piano or ensemble music through turning to their opera or popular music show experiences.

The use of pop music to accompany visuals on a screen was not new to the 1970s: in the late 1800s, the piano or even small theatre orchestras were used to create a sense of musical magic so the audience could relate better to the strange two-dimensional images on a flat screen. The noises of the projector and other technical devices needed to be filtered out as well, and 'live' music was just the way to secure a spellbound audience (Gorbman 1988). The pieces that were played then were well-known classical pieces; one could even say, popular pieces by classical composers such as

Tchaikovsky and later on Schoenberg. For certain stock silent film scenes, such as a chase scene, Grieg's 'In the Cave of the Troll King' *(Peer Gynt Suite*) could, for example, have been used. In this way the audience could identify with the music (because they were familiar with it) and also connect or anchor the meaning to the visual narrative more easily. This anchoring function is the prime objective of original film and pop music in films, and assists the audience in connecting or introducing an emotional framework to a scene (Gorbman 1999).[5]

Conclusion

In this chapter I first analysed the opening few bars of the 'Main Title' in a musical parametric context, highlighting inherent musical relationships that, in turn, signified cultural references. I then applied a combination of two contextual analyses normally used for the semiological investigation of popular music (songs), in order to see what the outcome would be – either an affirmation or a rejection of the analysis of inherent musical relationships. The results for all three contextual analyses were very similar, if not identical, which indicates that film music does in fact carry meaning. *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' 'means' in that it refers to music our culture has adopted as signifying adventure, war, hunts, and an epic journey with an expected outcome. The various inherent relationships between the different musical parameters all work together to affirm a homogenous sound image or sonic identity marker (audio brand) that 'speaks' to an audience that in turn relates to its 'voice'. The 'Main Title' co-exists with, and to some degree encapsulates, the *Star Wars* film (visual) brand, yet the 'Main Title' also 'means' on its own in terms of a sonic entity. It can therefore be seen as a myth that exists independently, carrying with it the potential to create myriads of various contextual relationships with listeners, with John Williams' fans, with Williams' Boston Pops target audience, and with *Star Wars* 'groupies', for example.

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[5] Neumeyer, in his study of diegetic music in *Casablanca* draws attention to the care that went into choosing the specific popular tunes that were performed in the dinner-theatre throughout various scenes, as well as how well the lyric narratives relate to the main storyline (Neumeyer, in Gorbman 1999). The latter is another powerful example of 'sympathetic' narrative between music and storyline.

Chapter five

Commercial analysis

The final chapter aims to investigate the thoughts and nature of commodified art – music in this case, and how it relates to the 'Main Title' from *Star Wars*. The next crucial step is to identify what defines an audio brand and to determine whether film music can be seen as an audio brand.

1. Adorno vs. Benjamin

A number of critical theorists such as Adorno and Benjamin have had much to say on the nature of art, the role reproduction plays, as well as the reception of art by a commodity- driven audience. For Adorno, the artwork has a dual character that makes it vulnerable to transformation into a mere commodity: the dual nature of an artwork straddles opposing poles between the subjective-objective expression of the composer and the defining set of conventions which exemplify the cultural context within which he or she lives and works. This results in an artistic expression contained in a culturally relevant mould, a palpable mediation between pure art and audience, if you will (Paddison 1993). The existence of this space between individual artistic energy and its framing within culturally relevant conventions is beneficial to the varied interpretation of the artwork in itself. Yet, Adorno believes that the distributional and marketing aspects of commercial capitalism destroy the interpretational space necessary for artwork to 'sound' on its own terms, thereby creating a mainstream audience that will buy what they are told to buy by music and media companies, losing most, if not all, of their own taste for independent music (Paddison 1993:199). According to Adorno, in this new commodified era, independent music also loses its freedom to be interpreted in different ways; for example, media companies confine specific meanings to Mozart's 40th Symphony, preventing the audience from inventing or tuning into their own interpretations (Paddison 1993:201). Adorno clearly states "profit takes the functionless [autonomous art] into its service and thereby degrades it to meaninglessness and irrelevancy. The exploitation of something useless in itself, something sealed and superfluous to the people on whom it is foisted – this is the ground of the fetishism that covers all commodities, and the musical ones in particular. It is tuned to conformism" (Adorno, in Paddison 1993:200).

Whereas Adorno focuses more on the content and form of the autonomous artwork, Benjamin concentrates on the technique used to incorporate the artwork into a commodified culture-object (Middleton 1990:64). For Benjamin, the 'aura' of an artwork has the same energy as the term 'autonomous' that Adorno would typically use. Middleton offers the following comment on this aspect of Benjamin's philosophy:

> [the] disintegration of aura in the modern world [is explained] by reference to social changes, but more often he stresses the role of technological developments – especially the new importance, quantitatively and qualitatively, of mechanical reproduction. This not

> only affects the distribution, function and meaning of existing works but also stimulates new artistic techniques, new modes of production and new social relationships, shifting art from the sphere of ritual or disinterested contemplation to that of everyday life and political struggle (Middleton 1990:64-65).

Benjamin, as a modern art critic, sees art, with specific reference to film, as a constructed medium (Middleton 1990:65). Film may thus be seen as a constructed reality, represented by a constructed narrative, music and sonic messages designed to make this artefactual form seem more real. In other words, one is dealing with a copy of reality that serves as virtual reality in the name of art and collective socio-cultural experiences.

In relation to constructed art, Benjamin draws more attention to the possibilities of socio-cultural relevance via the use of technology with, and in, the artwork. His major inspiration in relation to technological and art symbiosis is the Brechtian theatre that encouraged him to focus on the artist embracing a new, more culturally integrated role. As he puts it:

> An artist's contribution from now on, he says, must be assessed by reference to his positioning within the process of production. Using the methods offered by the new technical media, he must become a self-aware participant in the total apparatus of production. He must work towards an *Umfunktionierung*, as Brecht called it – a transformation of the apparatus – which will result in new fusions and relationships between media, genres and techniques, new, more collective production processes, and a new, more participative role for audiences. (Benjamin, in Middleton 1990:66).

Adorno also states that the control of art by commercial corporations would mean the death of the autonomous artwork that existed as the highest expression and meaning of man and which should require no validation other than its own (Paddison 1993:200,201). Whilst Benjamin is of the opinion that the role of commercial corporations did indeed limit the aura of the artwork, he also accepted that such corporations contributed to bringing the artwork to the attention of many more appreciators than had been the case up until the late nineteenth century (Middleton 1990:66).

A final point that needs to be made here regarding Benjamin concerns the merging of two historically opposed creative and production spheres — namely that which is carried over and produced by the oral tradition, and that which emerges from the classical notated tradition. (Further reference to these two spheres of creation and production is made in Chapter Three.) With art music becoming more culturally mainstream, oral traditions are influenced by art/notated traditions and vice versa. Take, for example, the influence of missionary work in the late 1800s in South Africa, and the assimilation of traditional African music into the notated tradition of high art. In this regard, one thinks, too, of the South African anthem, *Nkosi sikelela i'Africa*. Another example of assimilation can be seen in contemporary art music with composers such as Steve Reich and Phillip Glass (e.g. Glass's

score for *The Hours*).[6] Both these composers are influenced by oral traditions, and use elements of these within their high art compositions and film scores.

2. *Star Wars*: the commercial side

Lucasfilm Ltd. owns the rights to all *Star Wars* elements, which include the music as this has been composed, arranged, orchestrated and published, as well as the performance and recording rights for the *Star Wars*' series. As a multi-media conglomerate, Lucasfilm Ltd. 'tells' their target audience what qualifies as good music by having John Williams's award-winning music finely honed for the very purpose of helping to make their constructed narrative a mythic experience. The musical theme might have taken on another sense of structure and timeframe from that which we are now used to if the 'Main Title' had, for instance, been composed to serve as music to mark the opening of the Olympics. Yet, the 'Main Title', particularly as it forms an integral part of the *Star Wars* omni-brand, co-exists in a time and space that now makes it unlikely for the music to be disassociated from the film.[7]

This is one of the rare occasions in pop culture in which traditional notated art music has become the vernacular of the mainstream target audience. Of course, John Williams had been writing music for television shows for a number of years before Spielberg took note of Williams's unique audio branding. Williams's art music techniques created a unique audio brand characterised by vivid melodies, defined harmonic progressions, vibrant orchestration colours and strongly articulated rhythmic patterns. The combination of commercially relevant film-making and newly composed art music which was seamlessly synchronised to these visuals, created an omni-brand mould that is still being exploited and recast to this day.

Besides newly created art music, traditional art music (for example by composers such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach) is also used with commercial success, and has received a positive reception from audiences in films ranging from *Out of Africa* to *The Fifth Element*. Therefore, in spite of what Adorno believed about the control and forced functionality of art in the hands of capitalist technological media moguls, art music has rarely ever had such a wide and successful reception.

The reception of technology-based art, as Benjamin perceived it, plays a decisive role in its success, both commercially and even aesthetically.

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[6] Reich and Glass respectively produce music legacies that are influenced by oral, i.e. non-art traditions. Other examples include the intentional use of oral traditional elements such as typical Middle-Eastern vocal techniques and inflections in recent mainstream Western Films such as *Gladiator* (Hans Zimmer and Lisa Gerrard, 2000; vocalist: Lisa Gerrard) and *The Four Feathers* (Music: James Horner, 2002; vocalist: Rahat Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan). In *Black Hawk Down* (Director: Ridley Scott, 2001) the film's composer, Hans Zimmer, chose to have all the hand-picked performers improvise for most of the film on the theme he created; this resulted in a remarkably austere and poignant collaboration of creative and improvisatory energies that is more typical of the oral tradition.

[7] See footnote on page 65.

Nowadays, the success of an artwork lies not only in its inherently unifying and varied elements but also in the way in which it speaks to the culture and context from which it has emerged. This makes commercial polls such as the Billboard charts and the Grammy awards valid barometers by which commercial music can be measured and validated. Today, oral and notated music traditions live together in harmony more than ever, and the aim is not only to speak an artistic truth but also to be rewarded with a commercially successful response. This is where the idea of branding is prevalent and non-negotiable. Branding not only plays on the need to create something desirable, but also, for the most part, taps into our desire as consumers to acquire the glamorized products which we do not necessarily even need.

3. Audio branding

Sonic identity creation – or audio branding, as I propose to call it – has been used in so many films; for example, *Psycho*, *Gone with the Wind* and *Lord of the Rings*. Beside the actors, narrative, milieu and visual branding or logo, the film music plays a defining role in making these movies memorable and unique. Each film needs to stand out in a welter of other films being released in Hollywood, Bollywood, and at independent and international film festivals. One crucial medium in which a film is given a unique style and made memorable is through its music. In most successful movies, the leitmotif technique is a crucial way of grafting the audio brand into the psyches of the audience, for example the *Star Wars* 'Main Title'. This principle has been transferred to television advertisements in order to make the product-melody association powerful enough to be indelibly inscribed upon the target audience's memory. Besides having a leitmotif that stands out, the audio brand also needs to be heard repeatedly in order to establish cultural and commercial validity. Memorability (refer to Chapters three and four) is one of the most powerful factors to consider when a brand manager approves a marketing campaign: the more memorable the advert is (including the audio branding), the greater the chance that the potential target audience will become loyal consumers (Ries and Ries 2000). Since its inception in 1977, the *Star Wars* 'Main Title' has been heard repeatedly in a huge array of formats and media: on television, in cinema and on radio, pod-casts and other media. It has become a for science fiction fanatics, as well as for lovers of modern art music and film music, etc. Even when the 'Main Title' is heard as parody, the *Star Wars*' film series brand and this sonic identity are further promoted and engrained in the listener's psyche.

3.1 Branding values

In order to establish film music as a brand in terms of branding laws, I now turn to Al Ries as a leader in branding and marketing. Not all of his branding laws apply to music but I utilize four that do indeed mesh well with music. Earlier in this dissertation I discussed the origin of branding, its history and how we make commercial use of it. Yet, although I find Ries's definition simplistic, it is nevertheless meaningful. Ries (2000) defines a brand as a word (noun) in the mind of the consumer, and his four laws that are relevant to music may be listed as follows:

i. Exclusivity: Ries states that the aspect of exclusivity is crucial, i.e. that there is no other product on the market quite like yours.
ii. Leadership: Ries then suggests that in order to succeed in branding one needs to dominate the product market in which you are active.
iii. Visibilty: one needs to be visible to your target market/audience.
iv. Quality: enhance your brand's quality by adding value to your brand. This is achieved by being a specialist in your commodity field, as your consumers will perceive you as being more skilled, informed and validated (Ries and Ries 2000).

I now turn to an evaluation of how Williams's film music for *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' functions within these proposed branding laws.

In terms of the brand name, Williams has a unique 'sound' that comes to mind. The collaboration between Williams and Spielberg is another brand name association. This is an important commercial aspect that is present in Williams's *Star Wars*' sound, a sonic identity that distinguishes the film (and its soundtrack) from other films in similar genres. This sonic identity can be defined as consisting of a striking melodic motif captured in a clearly defined rhythmic context. This melody is then based on basic pivotal harmonic chord progressions that stay focused on a pitch centre, yet incorporate chromatic chords in a way that adds mythic value to the sonic identity (refer to Chapter Four). The audio colours are carefully chosen in terms of how they express the overriding message/narrative of the film. In *Star Wars*, Williams chose the timbre of mainly military (brass, snare drum and cymbals) and emotive instruments (strings and woodwinds). To the background level Williams normally adds trademark ornamented woodwind-flairs, as well as a harp-celesta-piano combination. These aspects of sound form the main sonic identity or audio brand of a film, which in turn is authored by the composer. This sonic identity is also applicable to most other Williams's audio brands for films, such as *Schindler's List*, the *Indiana Jones* films, *E.T.*, *Jaws* et al.[8]

I would now like to examine the four selected branding laws as these relate specifically to the 'Main Title':

i. Exclusivity: Williams's sound in itself is unique, yet the sonic markers for *Star Wars* are created with utmost skill (refer to Chapters Two, Three and Four) in relation to the visual context, the inherent musical parameters, as well as to their semiological content.
ii. Leadership: in terms of the financial remuneration of composers, Williams has become a leader with his 'sound', being closely associated with some of the greatest films and most gifted film directors of this age, and winning various global media awards. The *Star Wars* sound has definitely become an identity marker that has, since 1977, led the way for the next generation of sci-fi films.

[8] *Sleepers* was a definite break from the normal sonic identity mould that we associate with John Williams, in that there is no clearly defined melodic device that is as memorable as the one in *Star Wars*. Williams also opted for much darker timbres, lower registers and the near-continuous use of the electric bass guitar.

iii. Visibility: the association with Spielberg and Lucas (*Star Wars*) also brought visibility for Williams's music that translated into having his 'sound' projected in cinema theatres worldwide from the 1970s right up to the present. Winning awards such as a Grammy or an Oscar is an honour that every composer dreams of, and Williams has won several of both.
iv. Quality: Williams has defined his quality of 'sound' by continually creating sonic identity markers that are contextually effective, aesthetically pleasing, skilfully created and which relate well to the audience (refer to Chapters Two, Three and Four).

Williams's sonic identity marker for *Star Wars* as represented by the 'Main Title' is successfully defined as constituting a brand according to the criteria that Ries sets out. A proposed definition for an audio brand might then be: a sonic identity (for example musical theme) that is skilfully created for a specific cultural context (for example film). This identity is well composed musically and conveys an effective meaning in terms of its target audience. Furthermore, the sonic identity needs to be unique in its sound category and hence memorable to its target audience.

4. Branding and desirability

Desire plays a significant role in the creation and redefinition of identity, and the music that accords with the images that create physiological or primal desire co-exists on an emotional yet cognitive level with the visuals. Examples of this cognitive co-existence can clearly be identified in MTV Music videos, so much so that the visual desirability fostered by the music video is conjured up automatically once the audio track is heard over the airwaves or via an iPod. Frith explains the difference in perception experienced by the mass consumer when looking at an advertisement for a pair of Levi jeans on the one hand, and a music video on the other: "[t]he difference lies in the assumption that a song (unlike a pair of jeans) is authored. In both pop and fashion ads … we're offered images with which to identify, bodies, and faces on which to project desire' (Frith 1990:215). Frith goes on to say that, as a consuming mass audience, we relate to rock stars on a deeper level than we do to a gorgeous model in a fashion advertisement, because a rock star is a multi-modal expression of desire in human form. As an audience, we tend to think of a music star as a multi-modal 'subject' in whom we are most likely to see something of our (sometimes mythical) selves, as opposed to a mere mono-dimensional 'object' of desire (Frith 1990).

As a 'subject', the rock star elicits greater levels of identification within the consumer: the voice of the rock star is still the crucial medium through which identification takes place, yet the 'look', the biographical history, the aspirations that the rock star might share with the media, are all touchstones for their cult followers (Cubitt 2000).

With regard to John Williams and his music for *Star Wars*, there is a divergence from the superstar tradition: we are not as familiar with John Williams's face as we are with Spielberg's or Bogart's, yet we know his music

(his audio image), and for many of us that might be a decisive factor when choosing to see a movie or not. Some of the movies for which John Williams created audio brands include a variety of narratives from biographical films (*Seven Years in Tibet*) to a sexual abuse narrative rooted in a Catholic boys' boarding school (*Sleepers*). Yet, the fact that John Williams created the audio brand in each case ensured at the very least a strongly defined audio experience crafted with detail, deep narrative understanding and creative genius. In spite of Williams's isolation from the experience of visible stardom, his music reflects the faces – not of himself, but of the directors, producers, omni-brands/films and the actors that gained considerable cachet through the sound of Williams as *auteur* (audio brand creator). The characters in *Star Wars* are also attractive, likeable and project very human qualities. The score supports this, and in this way becomes a carrier by which its desirability is transferred to the audience.

5. Musical meaning: understanding and enjoyment

In *Studying Popular Music*, Middleton (1990:3) defines this genre as being either 'well liked' or 'well favoured'. 'Well liked' would perhaps be the phrase that the more sophisticated upper classes in Britain would use to denote music composed by and for the masses or lower classes. 'Well favoured' could mean that these popular songs were successful in the opinion of the music critics who mattered at the time. And yet, 'well favoured' could also mean that these popular songs could be seen as songs belonging to the masses, such as traditional songs. It is very possible to view John Williams's music as falling into both of the above-mentioned categories: well favoured by many critics and well liked by scores of cinema-going listeners. It certainly is clear that the decision makers for the films in which Williams featured as composer definitely held him in high regard for his skill and ability to communicate commercial narrative (although drawing on a 'high' art tradition) to a mass audience. In order to assimilate music, the audience needs to translate the codes and then derive some form of meaning from them.

Middleton reduces meaning in commercial music to two aspects: understanding and enjoyment. Musical understanding and enjoyment relates directly to the listening audience's ability to decode the music in terms of value (understanding) on an intellectual or emotional level and also on a physical or kinesthetic level of pleasure (enjoyment) (Middleton 1990). However, it is not only the deciphering ability that is crucial here: the value of taste – which in turn relates to the contextual grouping of competence – is also another social by-product of music (Middleton 1990). This lucrative by-product of music as commodity has given rise to various modalities for music and what it represents in taste and contextual, multi-valent experiences. Broad (Rock, Pop, Hip-Hop) and narrow (Baroque, 80s Punk Rock) spheres of music preference have been identified and targeted, with new mergers being created between these spheres on a regular basis. The notion of supply and demand comes into effect here, with branding techniques being the lure that draws the customers.

Music channels such as *MTV*, *VH1* and *Classic FM* are global (and regional) leaders in zoning in on customers through a branded lifestyle approach. In creating an audio brand (Madonna, for instance) this is only relevant and sustainable when the particular audio brand is able to influence the star's (*auteur's*) target audience in regard to mannerisms (sayings, personal quirks), fashion style, kinesthetic style (ways in which the target audience mimics the audio brand when dancing, either in private or in public). To some degree, socio-political views, and obviously a 'sound' experience that makes the audience want to sing along or dance to the music of the audio brand are also important factors (Middleton 1990). John Williams does not typically fall into the radio-play audio brand mould, yet his music is mythical, not only because it is mostly epic in nature (repetitive and memorable), but also because his *auteurship*, as expressed through his respective audio brands, co-exists with the faces and stories that many of us relate to in *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *E.T.* and *Indiana Jones*, amongst others. The fact that he himself is not the visual audio brand in this case does not detract from the fact that his commercial success and creative genius sets him apart from other composers and traditional art audio brand creators.

It is unlikely that every person in the cinema will pay detailed attention to the music or audio brand for the full duration of a film's screening. The intention of the director is usually made clear to the relevant composer at the start of each audio branding project: the composer will then decide whether he needs to create a more generic audio brand (for example *Armageddon* in which the title song is the most memorable audio brand aspect) or a more defined audio brand (for example *Star Wars*, in which the main instrumental theme is the most memorable audio brand). This intention relates directly to the sonic brand that the audience will receive and remember during their viewing experience.

5.1 The listener's cultural context

The average cinema goer's listening context can be seen as being based on the cinematic culture that has been prevalent since the 1950s. Epic scores, for example by Elmer Bernstein for *The Ten Commandments,* Miklos Rosza for *Ben Hur*, David Raksin for *The Omen* (not to forget the Disney animated movies which always make use of either traditional or commercial 'art' music, for example *Fantasia*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Finding Nemo*) form the foundation for the way music is used to create, amplify and comment on film narrative. The golden age of the Hollywood cinema created a legacy of orchestral, hugely epic music to which the average listener became accustomed. With the introduction and identification of more sub-cultures, Rock and Pop started to play a more definite role in drawing in younger customers, with culturally relevant music, narrative plots and actors. Most Western cinemagoers have grown up with television and film, and have therefore been consistently exposed to the ways in which music signifies and functions.

In terms of the commercial aspect of film music, as receiver the audience or listener plays a crucially important role. I will eschew a formal demographic-

based analysis here: instead, I will base my conclusions on research conducted in the field of popular culture by Middleton (1990) regarding the ways in which listeners are categorized. This, in turn, will give us an indication of how the commercial value of a piece of film music can signify in monetary terms.

5.2 Competence of listening experience

According to Middleton (1990:250), the listening experience can be divided into three modal categories: the Auratic Mode, the Critical Mode and the Everyday Mode. The Auratic Mode refers to what most people agree on to be music, they find a sense of identity reflected in this particular kind of music, they have developed a taste for it, and they also experience a sense of emotional continuity while interacting attentively with the music. The Critical Mode refers to the shock effects and internal contradictions within a piece of music that will normally make the listener listen to the music critically in order to establish whether in fact this particular piece is music or simply noise. The Everyday Mode refers to a wider reception environment in which the listener is not fully aware of the music and the music functions as mood enhancer, or muzak.

In Graph 1.1 below I aim to illustrate how the average listener would probably receive John Williams's *Star Wars* audio brand in relation to the above-mentioned listening modes as well as the four extra-musical aspects that influence the average listener's competence with regard to a specific listening experience. These aspects involve (A) a disposition to pay attention to music, (B) appropriate music for the occasion, (C) the listener's recognition of the codes, and (D) the situation in which the listening session is taking place (Middleton 1990:250).

As indicated by Graph 1.1, the Auratic Mode of listening is mostly found within a film containing an epic narrative and an epic audio brand such as *Star Wars*. The Everyday Mode might also be prevalent in most of the film; yet poignant scenes such as the 'Overture', the 'Throne Room' scene and the 'Credits' will more readily draw the listener's attention to the music. With regard to the four extra-musical aspects present during a viewing of an epic such as *Star Wars*, the emphasis will fall more on the occasion, and the appropriateness of the music for that occasion. A disposition to pay attention to the music and a recognition of the musical codes will also be active, yet these indicators might vary in intensity according to how much attention the listener pays to the music overall (collectively and to the main theme) and the cultural context which the listener inhabits.

Nowadays, the Hollywood Golden Age has given way to a more diversified commercial branding of sub-cultures and genres focused on targeting more minute sub-cultural groups in order to grow potential loyal mega-target audiences. This means that the cinema context in which viewers grew up in the 1950s is vastly different now in the twenty-first century. In the meantime, established film genres such as action, drama and comedy continually take on

new brand faces and cultural touchstones in order to maintain and grow an ever-evolving, more critically aware pop culture audience.

5.3 Modes of listening

The Everyday Mode (Middleton 1990:250) seems to be the most active in relation to the listener's disposition to pay attention to music in the cinema. This is the place where the listener can relax and escape from the stresses of everyday life. The music, in fact, then plays a less significant role than the visual register, unless the listener is consciously aware of the music in the film.

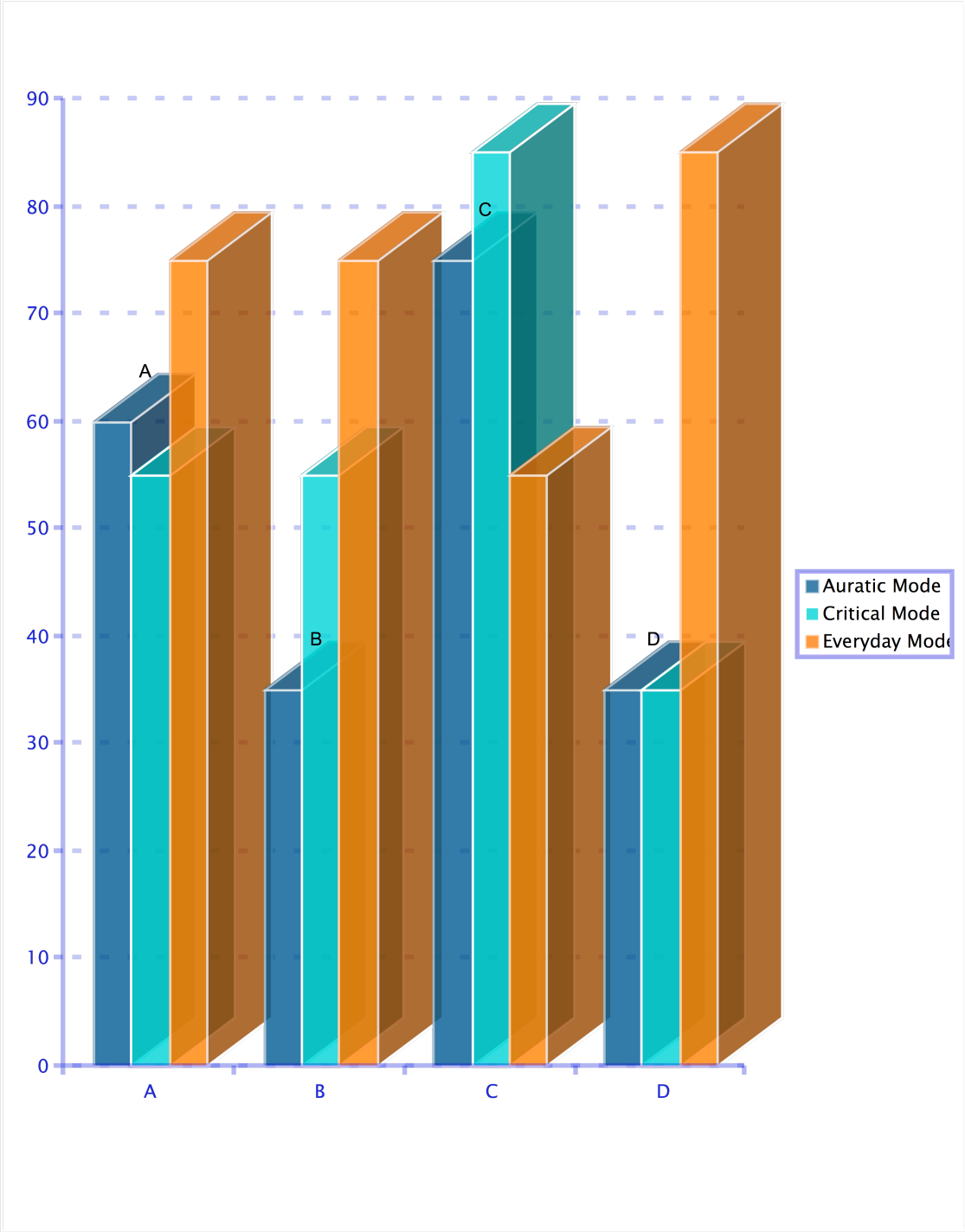
The Auratic Mode (Middleton:250) seems to predominate during the cinematic experience as the relaxed listener absorbs music that has been heard before in a great variety of films, yet it is the Everyday Mode that seems to be most active when it comes to distinguishing the appropriateness of the music while in the cinema. When identifying whether perceived sound is music or noise while watching a film, the Critical Mode (Middleton 1990:250) is the most active.

Regarding the occasion of the listening context, it is once again the Everyday Mode that is most active, as it requires only a slight awareness of music to be activated. Cinematic experiences enhance the Everyday Mode greatly, yet it is because of the Everyday Mode that the myth as omni-brand can become a greater reality to the listener.[9] It follows, then, that most of Williams's fans fall into the category of the Everyday Mode. This means that they will spend money on the film and also on the soundtrack that Williams has composed, paying attention to the movie and, while the soundtrack plays, also appreciating the music.

Three proposed mindsets relating to Auratic, Critical and Everyday Modes of a suggested listening, as applicable to *Star Wars'* 'Main Title':

Graph 1.1 (Three proposed mindsets based on Middleton's three listening strategies, 1990:250)

[9] See footnote on page 65.



Reading Graph 1.1:

A: Disposition to pay attention to the music (0 = unlikely, 100 = likely)
B: Appropriate music for occasion (0 = unlikely, 100 = likely)
C: Recognition of the music codes (0 = unlikely, 100 = likely)
D: Occasion relating to the physical context (0 = unlikely, 100 = likely)

Conclusion

In closing, when it comes to branding and the commercial focus on a target audience, it is important to be aware of certain aspects such as the context of the audio brand, the way in which it is musically composed, the meaning that the target audience will derive from it, as well as the question of visibility and exclusivity. These are just a few of the commercial notions that are crucial in creating and positioning any kind of brand. Having discussed four applicable branding laws, and *Star Wars'* 'Main Title' qualifying in each branding law, we can now accept the notion of audio branding. We also know now that the target audience's listening competency needs to be taken into account when it comes to audio branding creation and its commercial validation.

Chapter six

Conclusion

It is fascinating to live in a time in which anything can be branded and commodified to serve a suitable need. Adorno's trenchant arguments against such an art-degrading, capitalist society are valid to some degree, as are Benjamin's views on the usefulness of having art created, copied and integrated into a new culture of 'shared' and 'functional' art.

In Chapter two, the context of the film music took precedence, as the role of music in conjunction with the visuals forms the cultural context of film music as audio brand. Williams's ability to narrate through the music came to the fore here, as the on-screen action was reduced to a background text for the epic. In Chapter three, I analysed the score as a 'text' to find out if it complied with musicological rules of tension and release, and it did. Chapter four focused on the ways in which music 'means', and I argued that music does have specific cultural references, especially when it comes to the 'Main Title' from *Star Wars*. In Chapter five I discussed the notion of sonic identity markers and how branding could be seen as a commodity that relates strongly to a target audience's cultural context. I also looked at Ries's laws of branding and how these may be applied to music and Williams's *Star Wars* in particular, and found that Williams's music can, in fact, be seen as an audio brand.

1. General audio branding grids

There are many fields to investigate in relation to the kind of success that current audio brands enjoy in relation to their inherent values, as well as the commercial values which their target markets absorb and respond to. Target audiences are also evolving constantly and this creates opportunities to combine emerging music styles and genres with existing ones. Although the level of decoding might vary individually, as well as from one cultural group to the next, there seems to be a general grid where most people (in Western society) respond to music in relation to basic emotional, visual and sonic narratives. It is this grid that might either expand to include more audio brands, remain unchanged or even become more constricted. If the general audio brand grid is becoming wider, then the opportunities to incorporate more emerging audio brands within existing ones are inviting and ready to be explored. However, if the general audio brand grid is, for the most part, remaining unchanged, this constricts the inclusion of new emerging audio brands, as well as the propagation of existing mainstream audio brands. Conversely, if the main audio brand grid is diminishing, this might also be an indication that the time is right for a more sustained focus on treating emerging audio brands as exclusive brands in their own right. Nevertheless, the important question might be to what degree each or any of these general audio brand grids manifest themselves in the various demographic sections of society. Hopefully, this will indicate to what extent the *auteurs* of various films, songs, productions, shows; television programmes, etc. can predict a positive reception from the existing or emerging target audience.

Television channels dedicated to music (MTV, MTV Unplugged, VH1, Channel O, etc.) relate directly to audio branding with regard to creating an audio brand for themselves, as well as propagating the audio identity that their target audience relates to without marked deviations. The inclusion of VJ's (visual jockeys) has also given rise to a more personal popular culture identity for some of these music channels, with the result that the attractive VJ's become the faces and sonic (articulate monologue) brands for the respective channels. In other words, they become the channel incarnate, the visual, personal version of the channel's values in human form. Another brand that has played a strong role in creating a general audio brand grid is *Classic FM*. This radio station has gone one step further, in that their branding strategy has been designed to speak to a select, high profile target audience that is willing to buy into a lifestyle brand that speaks to their collective sense of exclusivity, education and informed opinions on wealth, entertainment, etc. *Classic FM* follows Ries's laws of singularity (exclusivity) and consistency, in that their generic audio brand (i.e. broad-spectrum classical music) is associated with a sophisticated lifestyle that, for the most part, covers health, wealth and entertainment. These two laws have been successfully applied to the *Classic FM* brand over the past three years at least (Ries and Ries 2000).

2. *Star Wars*

Turning to *Star Wars*, we have seen that this audio brand resonates with audiences from diverse demographic contexts, which means that, in itself, *Star Wars'* audio brand falls within the general audio branding grid that has remained largely unchanged. The music itself is valued by so many people from different backgrounds by virtue of its adventurous sound, its associations with the world beyond what we presently know, its love-hate narrative and longing for love, as well as its desire for belonging to, saving and valuing human lives, to mention only a few qualities. Ries makes clear that a defined strategy, focusing on the target market's reception, and a long-term plan for sustainability regarding the success of the brand, is crucial in order for the brand to make a visible and sustained imprint in today's branding environment (Ries and Ries 2000). Ries also states that the essence of the branding process is the creation of identity, and it is specifically here where the name of the brand needs to be unique and more than simply effective. This is because the consumer's mind differentiates one brand from another via a process of perception that in turn is based on various factors, one of which is sound, e.g. the sound of the brand name (Ries and Ries 2000). *Star Wars* consists of two strong nouns that together create the first perception of the omni-brand.[10] Even without having seen any of the films in the *Star Wars* series, the name generally conjures up images of sci-fi adventures and epic battles. To some

10 Omni-brand is a term used to refer to the complete integration of various brands (audio, visual, narrative, etc.) that is usually at work within a multi-dimensional artistic project (for example opera, film, television and theatre), and how these respective brands work together in order to create a greater, more Wagnerian 'gesamtkunstwerk' effect. (Each respective brand is independent in its own right, yet fully functional and effective in the integrated omni-brand.)

degree, this phenomenon also relates to *Star Trek* and *Buck Rogers*, which were both successful television shows during the 1970s and early 1980s.

3. Final summary

At the beginning of this dissertation, the task at hand was to determine how an audio brand could be defined. Various analyses were employed to determine the relationship between music and film, music in terms of its culturally referenced meaning and, finally, how branding laws could be applied to music. The notion of an actual audio brand is full of potential: further research and fieldwork will hopefully yield more tangible definitions, demarcations and demographic profiles. With greater understanding and application, audio brands will achieve greater standing among laymen and professionals alike.

Audio brands vary in strength: this results in an uneven process of decoding the meaning and pleasure within each audio brand, which directly affects its commercial viability. This brings us to the role (currently and future) of audio brand creators. Is the profession of audio brand specialist a viable career path for many in the future? Will audio brand creators simply construct audio brands without paying much thought to the various audio-branding parameters, or will they conduct more research in order to zone in on stagnant, emerging and merging demographics? Will they have the foresight to invest in ways of integrating skilled musical techniques within new cultural contexts? How will meaning in music change, and how will the audio brand creator be able to stay ahead of these potential changes? These are just some of the questions that I aim to address with ongoing research.

We now know that an audio brand creates a sense of identity which the listener or buyer associates with a specific socio-cultural context. The listener's identification with the meaning (value and pleasure) inherent in the audio brand is crucial when it comes to the commercial aspect of the brand. For the most part, the audio brand carries a visual connotation that is essential to the mental bi-modal imprint of the brand within the potential buyer's psyche. It is bi-modal in the sense of the two dimensions that relate directly to sight and sound – the 'look' (i.e. visual identity marker) of a sound (in the case of a film it would be the visuals; for vocalists it would be their own physical image) – and the sound itself (i.e. sonic identity marker), where both sight and sound are inextricably linked. To strengthen the bi-modal imprint, attention has to be paid to the various ways in which meaning is achieved for the listener/buyer. The listener's subjective interpretation of the music relates, in turn, to socio-cultural expression through the listener either singing along, mimicking any of a huge array of performance gestures (vocal, instrumental, dance) evoked through the song, and even creating new words for songs when the actual words cannot be remembered (Cubitt 2000). In *Star Wars*, the visuals that immediately come to mind as the audience hears the 'Main Title' are the faces of the actors (for example Harrison Ford), the props (for example R2D2) and narrative of the movie. However, there is only one 'sound' or audio brand that is recalled; namely, the audio brand created by John Williams.

Finally, the type of orchestral music that was created by John Williams for *Star Wars* is reminiscent of Tchaikovsky's colourful ballets and also of Holst's *The Planets*. Williams's music for *Star Wars* focuses on the sci-fi lover, yet the music signifies differently in various contexts. *Star Wars'* inclusion of various sub-narratives (i.e. the meanings that the 'Main Title' carries, as well as the range of musical themes that were assigned by Williams to other main characters in the *Star Wars* saga) broadened the target demographics so that they included a much wider target audience than a typical mono-narrative sci-fi film. John Williams is regarded as a genius in his own right, an audio brand creator par excellence who has left us (as audience and audio branding communities) with a varied and multi-layered legacy of high art, cultural awareness and incandescent melodies that have forever changed the way film music is received. His modest beginnings in the industry have seen him grow from one international film success to the next, receiving many awards, a feat reserved for few. The commercial and artistic relevance of music in our ever-changing cosmopolitan community is a reflection of how much we value both sound-based communication and those who are skilled in creating audio brands and their target audiences.

This new benchmark in audio branding is built on the legacy of composers such as Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Bernstein and Williams. It is because of composers (first-generation audio branders) such as these that the audio branding community is able to create new audio brands, knowing that one day soon our brands will serve as a blueprint for the next generation's audio-brand creators to follow.

Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendices

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