

Spring 2013
FILM MUSIC (Professor Long)



MUS M410
Genres of Music
TR 11:15-12:30

MUS M510
Topics in Music Literature
F 9:00-12:00

M410 and M510 consider the history of film music from the era of the so-called “silents” to the present day. Because the repertory of individual film scores is vast, the historical survey will be necessarily selective. Our focus will be on “narrative” films, although we will take some time to consider experimental approaches to the music/image relationship. The weekly reading assignments (and discussion of readings) in M510 will be more substantial than in M410.

In common with other music history classes, each course is organized around chronology, style, composers of particular interest or significance, and the cultural and aesthetic contexts of individual “works” (films). The study of film music differs from that of other composed repertoires in a fundamental way, however: for the most part there are no published scores available. Indeed, for much of its history, the film “score” was considered an ephemeral object with no lasting commercial or aesthetic value – manuscript scores created for major studio films were regularly destroyed or disassembled for use in other projects. Most of our judgments will be based on the sound and images before us. Thus, we will devote considerable attention to some basic issues: How do we “analyze” an audio/visual construct? Is film music – as many in the film industry maintained throughout the twentieth century – subsidiary to film’s visual content? How might the musical intelligence of a composer enrich a sound film in essential ways? What is the relationship between a film’s visual style or genre and a composer’s approach to its music? Can we speak of “periods” in film music history? Since music cues (musical segments in sound films) are generally discontinuous, does film music even constitute a genre in the sense we use that word in standard “music history”? How did this special musical practice and its associated conventions come about in the first place? And should non-musical sound (the rest of the “soundtrack”) be understood as co-existent with music in ways that require our analytical and historical attention?

There is no textbook for either class, but weekly reading assignments will be drawn from survey texts, academic and journalistic writing on film, and relevant historical documents. Students will be expected to participate in discussions of readings, of assigned listening, and will generate projects and in-class presentations.