

Score to Screen: A Study of Emotional and Dramatic Elevation in Films Through Mychael Danna's Scores

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Abstract : This paper dives into the powerful intersection between film music and storytelling and how it elevates the visuals while primarily focusing on Mychael Danna's compositions for the study. Danna, an Academy Award-winning composer, is known for his brilliant ability to mix non-Western and culturally rich instruments with minimalist techniques. This unique approach forms the backbone of the analysis here. We take a close look at key scenes from films like Life of Pi, Moneyball, The Good Dinosaur, and Little Miss Sunshine, where Danna's music plays a crucial role in shaping the story. By breaking down how these scores impact the scenes emotionally and dramatically, we can see how his music becomes part of the narrative itself. The paper blends different approaches to get to the heart of this scene-by-scene breakdowns, music theory, audience survey, and even insights directly from Danna. It discusses how his scores deepen the emotional connection and give more weight to the visual storytelling. The research also dives into the use of leitmotifs, cultural authenticity, and how his music can psychologically impact the viewer, making the story even more powerful. This study reveals how film music, especially Danna's, doesn't just sit in the background. It's often the driving force behind the emotional and narrative core of the film, anchoring the visuals and shaping the way the viewers experience the story.

Keywords : ethnomusicology, psychological impact, film scores, cultural music, compositional techniques, emotional storytelling

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