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Hitchcock's Music



Synopsis

For half a century Alfred Hitchcock created films full of gripping and memorable music. Over his long career he presided over more musical styles than any director in history and ultimately changed how we think about film music. This book is the first to fully explore the essential role music played in the movies of Alfred Hitchcock. Based on extensive interviews with composers, writers, and actors, and research in rare archives, Jack Sullivan discusses how Hitchcock used music to influence the atmosphere, characterization, and even storylines of his films. Sullivan examines the director's important relationships with various composers, especially Bernard Herrmann, and tells the stories behind the musical decisions. Covering the whole of the director's career, from the early British works up to *Family Plot*, this engaging look at the work of Alfred Hitchcock offers new insight into his achievement and genius and changes the way we watch and listen to his movies.

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Customer Reviews

Probably the most memorable musical sound in cinema is the slashing strings of the shower scene in *Psycho*, a supreme example of how music can heighten image. It isn't too surprising that the

example should come from a Hitchcock film; over the past two decades, critics and academics have paid increasing attention to how Hitchcock used music because he was so good at doing so. In *Hitchcock's Music* (Yale University Press), Jack Sullivan, a professor of English and of American studies, has given a guide to the music (or frequently, silence) in all of Hitchcock's sound films, with stories about Hitchcock's work with composers and how soundtracks became formed as particular pictures progressed. Sullivan knows the films better than almost all of his readers will, and while much of Hitchcock's music is memorable, Sullivan writes of it in such detail that even Hitchcock fans will find themselves wishing that they had instant recall of each particular phrase or tune. I myself went back to listen to the early talkie *The 39 Steps* after reading Sullivan's chapter about it, because although I have seen the movie many times, I could not remember the music or how important it was to the plot of the film. This then is a wonderful reference book, and it will drive Hitchcock fans back into their DVDs to attend to the master with new ears. Sullivan begins, of course, with Hitchcock's first picture after his silent days, *Blackmail*. Hitchcock used the music in this initial film the same way he would use it throughout his career, like using a harp for a demonic sequence (when harps are usually angelic) and using cheerful music as an irony to what is being shown on the screen. Using a musical tune as an important part of the plot is one of Hitchcock's many tricks.

If you're a Hitchcock fan, you already know how well Hitchcock used music in his films. Hitchcock was the ultimately leader/collaborator--he knew what he wanted for his films and had a strong instinct which collaborators would do the best job of bringing their talent to his films. His work with Herrmann is celebrated but he worked well with other film composers as well. When Hitchcock's instincts betrayed him (as the author of this book points out) it's usually because his commercial instincts took the lead over his artistic ones; "Torn Curtain" a flawed Hitchcock film with a number of marvelous set pieces would have been much improved with the original music that Bernard Herrmann composed. Hitchcock fired Herrmann when he didn't deliver a commercial score with a hit song or melody that could pull in a lucrative profit. Sullivan also accurately points out that while Hitchcock was great at collaboration he ultimately was THE boss and would get rid of things he felt didn't fit in with his decisions (right or wrong) for a film. Hitchcock at his best (as Sullivan accurately points out) knew the impact of music to enhance a film not distract from it. Once Hitchcock had control of his films, he pushed the various composers he worked with (from Steiner, Rozsa to Herrmann) to follow their muse just making sure that it fit in with his ultimate vision for the film. He may have been a micromanager but he gave the composers that worked on his films tremendous

freedom on some projects. For example Herrmann envisioned the "score" for "The Birds" to primarily be the sounds (electronically created) of the creatures themselves. Herrmann's instincts were in perfect synch with Hitchcock's and the result was a great film "score" that perfectly complimented the film.

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