

A Study on Composing for Film

by  
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## Abstract

The goal of this creative project is to examine the process of scoring a film, particularly within the drama, thriller, and sci-fi genres. In the written portion, I examine the methods that three different composers used for three different films. These films are *The Lighthouse* composed by Mark Korven, *Under the Skin* composed by Mica Levi, and *Enemy* composed by Danny Bensi and Saunder Jurriaans. I analyze how the scores augment the mood of the films, discussing the instrumentation and composition in each scene. In the creative portion, I have composed the score for a short film where I attempt to implement the methods discussed in the written component of this project. The film follows an isolated man who becomes delusional as his way of life is threatened by outsiders. The score uses chaotic instrumentation and dissonant composition to reflect the story of the film.

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## **List of Terms**

**Aleatoric Performance** - Music in which chance or indeterminate elements are left for the performer to realize (Encyclopædia Britannica).

**Atonal music** - The absence of functional harmony as a primary structural element (Encyclopædia Britannica).

**Cue** - Music written and performed to go with a specific scene or segment of a film (Sweetwater.com).

**Drone** - A sustained tone, usually rather low in pitch, providing a sonorous foundation for a melody or melodies sounding at a higher pitch level. (Encyclopædia Britannica).

**Processing** - Altering the sonic elements of a sound through equalization, compression, or effects (Bureau).



## **Film Music and the Composer**

### **I. Introduction:**

Film is a uniquely powerful form of art. It is the culmination of a variety of artistic mediums and practices, such as writing, acting, visual composition, musical composition, makeup, fashion, set design, and much more. Film has been able to unite nearly all forms of art underneath one umbrella. Yet, what intrigues me the most is film's relationship with music. Alone, both film and music are extraordinarily compelling forms of art, but the siblingship between the two creates the great and wonderful experience in which movies invite us to participate. Each conduct a conversation with the viewer where they tell a story that contains characters and ideas. A film's score can harness our emotions to set the tone of a scene, connect us to characters, and engulf us into the environment of the film.

### **II. The Composer**

The writer and the director are tasked with telling the story of a film's visual narrative. Though there is a story being told through characters and visual events, there are underlying ideas and messages that cannot be told verbally or visually. This is where the film's composer comes in. The composer pulls on the viewer's connection with music to lead them into the story that lies beneath what they see on screen. When talking about film scoring, composer Hans Zimmer (*Interstellar*, *The Lion King*, *The Dark Knight*) says, "there will be something in the images or in the dialogue or in the story or in the conversation you have with the director that points you in a direction. And since music is

subtext, all you have to do is figure out what that subtext is” (Mix with the Masters 3:16 – 3:35). Through examining the story and understanding the director’s vision, the composer gives a voice to the film’s subtext. How they go about doing this can have an enormous impact on the film’s tone and how the viewer interprets the story. A composer can turn an uninteresting sequence of a city scape into a foreboding introduction to a sinister environment. They can take a scene of someone looking out a window and tell a story of longing and regret. By adding subtext and addressing the underlying story, the composer helps the viewer fully understand the characters and setting that the visual narrative is depicting.

A film score tells a story over a relatively long period of time. It allows the composer to create the world that the story takes place in and build upon ideas through textures, tones, structure, and melody. If the film is a drama about a couple’s relationship, the composer might use softer instruments and melodies that convey tenderness, affection, sorrow, and longing. This type of score might use instruments like the piano, strings, light use of orchestra, even synthesizers, and have a more stable structure. On the other hand, if the film is a thriller, the composer might use more intense and suspenseful instruments and melodies to convey chaos, terror, and anxiety. This type of score might use more brass instruments, percussion, as well as piano and strings, but in a different context. Here the structure of the score would be more unstable and unhinged.

### **III. The Tools of Composing**

While the use of instruments and structure are essential for establishing and conveying the tone and pace of the film, they are only part of how the composer tells the story. The narrative is truly constructed through the composer's use of themes and leitmotifs. These are compositional tools that allow the composer to give a voice to characters and places, as well as build upon complex ideas.

### **IV: Themes**

We are all familiar with musical themes in film. To use a hyperbolic example, the John Williams' "Main Title" theme song from *Star Wars* is the undeniable voice of the franchise. It conveys the big picture idea of what the films are about. A grand fanfare with trumpets and strings give way to the idea of an epic story of heroism. The Oxford Dictionary of Music defines a theme as "an unspecific term with several meanings, e.g. in a musical play or film, a theme-song is a song which recurs several times, or has a special significance in a plot" (Oxford Dictionary of Music). Though it is stated as unspecified, themes are essentially statements. They paint a picture of characters and places and tell us what role they play in the story.

### **V. Leitmotifs**

To continue the conversation started by a theme, the composer can use a composition tool called the leitmotif. In *Understanding the Leitmotif: From Wagner to Hollywood Film Music*, the authors define the leitmotif as

[A] short, uncomplicated musical phrase or theme, usually one to three measures, which is employed, and reused, by the composer when he deems it important to

the composition...Leitmotif, then, is not just a musical labeling of people and things (or the verbal labeling of motives); it is also a matter of musical memory, of recalling things dimly remembered and seeing what sense we make of them in a new context. (Bribitzer-Stull p. 8)

Leitmotifs are about recontextualization. As the plot of the film's visual narrative develops, the composer can use leitmotifs to develop the musical subtext. A character's theme can be recast in different scenarios to show how the character is developing. The composer can do this by taking the melody for a theme and change its key or texture to expand upon what is happening on screen. By employing leitmotifs, the composer uses melody to show a change in subtext, motives, and the thoughts of characters.

## **Project**

### **I. Thesis Introduction and Research Portion**

This creative thesis will explore the process of film scoring and will consist of two parts. In the first part I will examine and discuss three film scores by three separate composers. I will look at each composer's communication with their director and how the collaboration between the two determined what type of score the film would have. Then I will examine how the scores support the film itself, and how the composers used instruments, textures, themes, and leitmotifs to tell the story of the film. The three film scores that I will be discussing are *The Lighthouse* (2019) by Mark Korven, *Under the Skin* (2013) by Mica Levi, and *Enemy* (2013) by Danny Bensi and Saundra Jurriaans. The three films that these scores belong to lie within a mixture of drama, thriller, and sci-fi genres. The scores are dissonant, eerie, stressful, chaotic, and often atonal. Though these

films are related by genre and their scores share similar characteristics, the composers' approaches to scoring their respective films are vastly different from each other. These three scores provide an excellent example on the different ways a composer can score a film.

## **II: The Creative Portion**

The second portion of this thesis will contain the creative portion. Drawing upon the three scores discussed in the first portion for inspiration, I have composed a score for a short film that lies within a similar genre to that of *The Lighthouse*, *Under the Skin*, and *Enemy*. I have attempted to implement the methods used by the composers of these three films into my own approach. Through composing this score, I have attempted to demonstrate how film music can influence the viewer's perception of the film and augment the mood that the director is trying to convey through the story.

### **Chapter 1: Preproduction: Defining the Director's Vision**

The best place to start examining these scores is the initial conversation between the composer and the director. Typically, the director has a specific vision for the film and what its music should sound like, and the composer is responsible for helping the director achieve this vision. This dialogue will establish what type of mood the music will convey and what role it will play in the story, what instruments will be used or avoided, and what atmosphere the music will create. Sometimes the director and picture editor will have edited a cut of the film to temporary ("temp") music (pre-existing music that serves as a placeholder for the actual score) to provide a feel for what the score

should sound like. This beginning part of the process is essential for setting the course for how the score will develop.

### **I: *The Lighthouse*. Mark Korven and Robert Eggers**

Set in the late 1800s, *The Lighthouse* is a story about two lighthouse keepers who are tasked with attending a remote lighthouse for one month. When their ship fails to return, the two men begin to lose their mind as the line between reality and sailors' tales becomes blurred. The director, Robert Eggers, was intent on having the film be as historically accurate as possible in terms of dialect, set design, and costume design. However, when he approached Mark Korven to compose the score, he wanted the music to counter the historic element of the film. When asked about this, Korven states, "Everything is historically accurate to the 'nth degree, everything except for music. That historical accuracy is pretty much abandoned because we were looking for a real contrast" (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 02:56-03:08). This contrast is manifested in the instrumentation and composition style.

The instrumentation for the score relies heavily on brass orchestras interspersed with strings and the waterphone. These instruments perform as sonic representations of the world in which the film takes place. Korven states that he and Eggers envisioned the instruments in elemental and mythological terms, such as the wind and the sea, lighthouses, and mermaids. "We were playing on the darkest interpretations of all of these. Glass seemed to work for the light of the lighthouse, and brass, being a wind instrument, suited the wind" (Magazine.ScoreIt.com). When Korven speaks of the glass sound that represents the lighthouse, he is referring to an instrument called the waterphone: a steel plate that is mounted with metal rods. When played with a bow or a

friction mallet (a mallet with a rubber head), the instrument sounds similar to that of a wine glass being rubbed with water. Korven employed this instrument to create a haunting sound that evokes the sound of glass or a mermaids siren song (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 05:51-06:28). Though the waterphone plays an important role in the score, brass is the foundation that drives the score. The sea plays an important role in the film, and Eggers wanted the score to embody that importance (PopDisciple.com). Using swelling brass ensembles, Korven creates a sound that creates the feeling of crashing waves and intense, bitter wind.

Robert Eggers' vision for the score's composition style was embedded in the temp score that he had constructed, which consisted mostly of atonal brass compositions (PopDisciple.com). Korven said that he was primarily influenced by the temp score, attempting to keep the score within the vein of the temp's atonality, yet improve upon it (PopDisciple.com). With the exception of the film's opening shot, the score is nearly devoid of anything resembling melody. The score is chaotic and unhinged in terms of structure. Yet, the chaos and harmonic dissonance has a purpose to the story. Korven states, "We were just looking for musical ways to get inside the heads of the characters, which were pretty messed up! So the music of course is pretty messed up, dissonant, atonal, mad." (HiddenRemote.com). Mark Korven's approach to composing consisted of experimentation and improvisation, often putting his hands to the keyboard and letting the chaos flow out (Magazine.ScoreIt.com).

## **II: *Under the Skin*. Mica Levi with Jonathan Glazer**

*Under the Skin* follows the story of an alien huntress who assumes the form of a human woman to lure victims. However, as she spends more time observing and hunting

people, she begins to develop human emotions. This leads her to abandon her hunt in order to understand the emotions within her. The dialogue and sound in the film is sparse, relying on the score to carry most of the weight in terms of audio. The director, Jonathan Glazer, wanted the score to be composed by a musician who had no prior experience with film scoring; someone who would not unnecessarily manipulate the audience's feelings (Romney). This led him to approach Mica Levi, a musician from the English group Micachu and the Shapes. When discussing Glazer's vision for the film's score, Mica Levi said,

[He was weary of being specific about what he wanted the score to sound like.] He talked about the music working separate from the film. He showed me some films he really loves. But that would've been too short a process. It would have been too restrictive...He spoke about it more like, "imagine somebody just chucked 20 bottles down a hill," or, "what does it sound like to be on fire?" Those are the questions that were getting asked ... (Indiewire.com)

Given this information, it may be reasonable to conclude that there was little temp music for Levi to use as a reference, and Glazer had initially intended for there to be no composed music in the film whatsoever (Film4 17:05 - 18:34).

The instrumentation for the score is minimal, consisting mostly of viola, with some synthesizers and percussion. Though the variety of instruments is small, each has a particular role to play in supporting the story's narrative. The viola plays the most important role, performing in many of the most pivotal scenes. When asked why the viola is so prominent, Levi replied, "A viola is not solid, the sound it produces is like a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy of something, because you get an airiness, and



creepiness, and there's a struggle in that. The vibrato doesn't ring out. It's dead" (Indiewire.com). This instrument represents the protagonist's deceptive and seductive nature. The use of percussion, especially the employment of cymbals, represents the ambiguous alien forces that have come to earth. Levi uses cymbals to create an atmosphere of uncertainty, which she describes as pressure that is being inflicted upon the protagonist and the earth (Jonathan Mena 22:03 - 22:47). Levi explains her use of synthesized MIDI strings as representing the alien's pursuit of human emotions. When she is performing her job of hunting humans, the instrumentation is primarily acoustic, however, as she gets closer to examining her emotions the instrumentation consists of synthesized instruments. This juxtaposition of instruments shows the impossibility of her becoming in touch with human emotions (Jonathan Mena 23:00 - 23:42).

Compared to *The Lighthouse*, the composition for *Under the Skin* has a more stable structure. Mica Levi took a more thematic approach to the score, stating that she sees the film as consisting of five themes that come from the perspective of the alien huntress: "her makeup, the cosmos, the aliens, her job music, and her feelings" (Indiewire.com). These themes are tied to Levi's choice of instrumentation. The huntress's makeup and job music are performed on the viola, the aliens and the cosmos are a mix between cymbals and arpeggiating viola, and her feelings are represented through synthesizers. These themes play a pivotal role in the film. Since the dialogue is minimal, the score is responsible for leading the audience through the mind and feelings of the huntress. The aliens' identity and motives are left ambiguous and are never really shown in the film, leaving their theme to give the audience an idea of who and what they are.

### **III. *Enemy*. Danny Bensi & Saunder Jurriaans with Denis Velleneuve**

*Enemy* follows the story of a college history professor who discovers the existence of his doppelganger, who works as an actor. When the two men decide to meet in person to make sense of the situation, the actor becomes obsessed with taking control of the professor's life. Extraordinarily atmospheric, this film's score envelops the viewer in uneasiness and suspicion. Velleneuve's vision for the score was inspired by Johnny Greenwood's score for the film *There Will Be Blood*, which is largely atonal and dissonant. He wanted the score to be "something linked with the subconscious that would create the feeling of a nightmare" (Vodzilla.com). To accomplish this nightmarish feeling, he approached Danny Bensi and Saunder Jurriaans to compose the score.

The instrumentation for the score is heavily reliant on cello, woodwinds, and drones, occasionally including percussion. Though these instruments create the backbone of the score, the themes and motifs are primarily performed with woodwinds and strings (PulseMusicNetwork).

The composition for the score is dissonant, dark, and ominous, leaning away from traditional cinematic composition and toward the avant-garde. Denis Velleneuve states his purpose for this direction: "The music itself is a character, linked with the subconscious of the character and I wanted the teacher ... to explore and come back in the new reality around him, and the music expresses the tension and anxiety of the character" (Vodzilla.com). Bensi and Jurriaans develop this character using leitmotifs. Throughout the film there is a recurring atonal melody. Its atonality provides an oppressive and divisive tone, representing the tension and anxiety of the characters.

However, when this theme is not in play, there is little to no melody at all. Drones and soundscapes, consisting of only a few evolving notes, make up most of the score.

## **Chapter 2: Score Analysis**

### **I. The Beginning (First Act)**

I will be examining these three scores in context with their respective films, which I will break down according to the Aristotelian plot structure: beginning (setup/problem), middle (conflict), and end (resolution). By following this structure, I will be able to better evaluate the way the music helps tell the story. This section will examine the beginning of the films and how the score helps establish the world and sets up the story.

#### **A: *The Lighthouse* (00:00:00 - 00:50:59)**

Horns establish the sonic world of *The Lighthouse*. The opening shot fades in to show the sea surrounded by fog. Horns playing a single chord rise in volume. A cello breaks the steadiness of the horns and plays an ominous melody. A ship breaks through the fog, containing two men. The horns and cello create an uneasy and foreboding feeling, setting the stage for the story to come. This scene, as Korven states, is essentially the only one that contains melody. “This is one of the few tracks that actually sounds like music ... We wanted a track that would be somewhat accessible to the listener, because you don’t want to hit them with the weirdest thing in the world right off the top” (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 04:56 - 05:33). Given that this introduction is ominous, Korven describes it as the safest point in the film, where everything will soon fall apart for the characters.

The two lighthouse keepers, Ephriam Winslow and Thomas Wake, arrive at the island, where they are to stay for one month. Thomas Wake has worked at this lighthouse for a long time and is a sort of caricature of an old sailor; always telling tales of mermaids, seagulls that embody the souls of sailors, and bad omens. The younger Ephriam Winslow is quiet and secretive and is new to working as a lighthouse keeper. Wake is highly possessive of the light and gives Winslow orders to maintain the establishment but to not go anywhere near the light. After Wake establishes his unquestionable authority, he ascends to the light. Here, the score takes on a glass-like sound, created using a waterphone. The haunting sound continues, alternating between discordant notes as Wake stands in front of the light. The sound is mesmerizing and eerie, creating an atmosphere of mysterious fascination. Winslow watches Wake from outside. He walks towards the ocean and sees something drifting towards him. As he approaches, he sees that the ocean is filled with logs. Then, the logs separate to reveal a body floating in the water. The score departs from the waterphone, introducing tense brass swells. As Winslow rushes forward in terror, the brass continues to rise in pitch. Suddenly, he sinks into the ocean and the music stops. From the depths, a screaming mermaid appears. Suddenly, he wakes up and realizes it was a dream.

Wake gives Winslow orders to attend to the island's cistern. Here, Korven introduces an accordion in the score. The performance of this cue is discordant and uneasy; the accordion seems to moan and creak as Winslow pours powdered chalk into the cistern. As he looks into the murky water, the score reintroduces the dissonant brass swells, heightening a sense of dread. When talking about his use of the accordion, Korven states,

...we didn't want anything that sounded remotely like a traditional melodic accordion. I didn't want to hire someone...that was actually skilled at accordion ... so I picked it up myself because I really wanted a raw track that would be filled with errors and filled with mistakes. Again, really guttural and primitive. (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 06:35 - 07:13)

As the film continues there are scenes of Winslow looking jealously at the light where Wake spends all his nights. These scenes all have the sound of the waterphone creating its haunting, mysterious wail. Just as the month is about to end, Winslow encounters an unconscious mermaid washed up on the shore. The audio becomes muffled, as if it were heard under water. Korven introduces a strange sound into the score. Using a friction mallet rubbing the head of a bass drum, Korven creates a sound akin to that of a whale's call (bigwhitehouse1 00:05 - 00:43). This elevates the foreignness of the encounter. Winslow looks at the mermaid with tearful fear and longing. The mermaid wakes up with a sinister grin and begins to shriek. Winslow runs away in terror back to the lighthouse.

In this beginning portion of the film, Korven does not establish leitmotifs and themes through melody, but specific instruments and textures. He and the director envisioned the score as representing the elements and the environment. The swelling brass embodies the ocean and its dreadful power, the waterphone drone shows the mystery of the lighthouse itself, the accordion gives the island an uneasy and apprehensive feeling, and the friction mallet and bass drum gives the presence of the mermaid a terrifying tie to the ocean and mythology. The instrumentation here sets the

tone and atmosphere for the film, and the lack of melody increases the apprehension and ambiguity of the world in which the characters reside.

**B: *Under the Skin* (00:00:00 - 00:44:52)**

The opening scene for *Under the Skin* shows a black void. A blue light begins to grow in the middle of the void and becomes brighter and brighter. In front of the light is a large white ring that is approaching something that looks like a black planet. The ring engulfs the planet and fades into the shape of a human eye. Glazer wanted the score in this scene to enforce “the capitalized idea of ‘the aliens are coming’” (Film4 video 19:22 - 19:27). As the light grows, Levi introduces the aliens’ theme, a fast tremolo on viola, arpeggiating constantly. Beneath the viola is the steady sound of cymbals, creating an uneasy atmosphere and a feeling of unresolved, growing tension. Levi describes this as, “the alien pressure, the undeniable lifeforce that we can’t understand that’s pressuring [the main character]” (Jonathan Mena 22:39 – 22:47). This scene establishes the pivotal instrument of the score (the viola) and sets the stage for the coming alien presence.

The next scene shows a man abducting a woman, who is presumably dead. After stowing her in a large white van and driving away, we come to assume that this is no human. Her body appears in a white void, where a naked woman takes her clothes. The woman obtains more clothing and makeup from a mall and begins to drive around the city of Glasgow. As she drives by men walking on the street, she stops them and asks for directions. Her approach to the conversations is flirtatious, and she asks each man if they would like a ride home. The score is reintroduced during this sequence. Mica Levi uses cymbals to create an ambience, and pairs it with a slowed down, simple beat. The texture that is created by stretching out the audio for the beat creates an unnerving feeling. The

bass drum sounds too far away from the snare, which catches the listener off-guard. Levi slowly brings in strings that are playing an eerie three-note melody. This melody occurs when the woman successfully obtains her first victim. She finds a man who agrees to let her take him home, but as the two are flirtatiously talking, the camera cuts to show the woman alone with an expressionless face. The introduction of the melody in this scene denotes that something bad happened to the man. The music here informs the audience that even though the woman appears normal, she is not as she seems.

Continuing her prowl, the alien woman seduces another man. As they flirt and banter, the apprehensive beat and melody continue, showing the sinister intent of the woman's character. She takes the man to the house that she inhabits. The room she takes him to is a black void. The music is stripped down to just the beat. As the woman begins to remove her clothes, Levi reintroduces the viola. This time the recording is stretched and looped, atonally changing in pitch. The man walks forward, removing his clothes as well. As he does so, he sinks into the floor, leaving nothing but his garments on the ground. The woman turns around and picks her clothes off the ground and returns to driving around Glasgow. Mica Levi was purposeful with every aspect of the music that plays during the seduction. Levi slowed down a recording of drums to create an uncomfortable and obscure atmosphere. This fills the listener with the notion that something is not natural. "[I]t's got to be broken down to the bare essentials of seduction, in my mind a strip tease. What was going on in the back of my head was what strip clubs have in them now, you know [music like] Dr. Dre. So that's kind of a big influence there" (authoroftheaccident 01:53 - 02:28). The beat establishes the idea of a distorted strip tease, but the theme that plays over it is what really brings the alien's motives to life.

“[T]hat theme is her outfit, her makeup, she’s playing in that scene to seduce the men. It’s like her perfume, it’s something fake and not something she’s really feeling. And by the time she’s alone, she’s a bit worn out, [the music] is a bit tired, it’s not as strong. The makeup is old” (Indiewire.com). The introduction of this theme provides a clear view into the essence of what the woman’s character is: a predator.

The seduction theme is used again shortly after this scene. After finding another man, this time at a night club, he is taken to the dark room. The seduction theme begins again, with the stretched beat and eerie viola. However, Levi uses this scene to develop the theme further. Underneath the viola melody are strings playing a tremolo and a synth playing a bass melody. The synth slides from note to note, enhancing the uneasy feeling that the theme conveys. This variation of the seduction theme, though only altered slightly, changes the perception of the woman. Levi says that the tremolo strings represent the alien forces that are putting pressure on the protagonist (Jonathan Mena 22:39 – 22:47). The presence of tremolo strings in this scene highlights this pressure. The bass melody adds tension to the theme, making this alien predator seem more powerful, yet adding an air of anxiousness.

As the man sinks into the floor, we see that he is floating in a void underneath the room. Another man is floating with him, but he appears to be decaying. Suddenly, the man is reduced to a paper-like pile of skin, floating in the void. Here, the tremolo viola and cymbals are played again. We then see a chute that is funneling flesh and blood into a furnace-like structure. Levi pairs bells and other high-pitched sounds with the viola and cymbals to enhance the horror of the scene. The music in this scene calls back to the opening scene of the film where the aliens were introduced. Just as the second rendition



of the seduction theme increases the feeling of pressure that the woman is feeling, this rendition of the aliens' theme shows us what they are pressuring her to retrieve.

In the first act of the film, Levi relies heavily on instrumentation to develop leitmotifs; the sound of viola, cymbals, and percussion clearly establish its sonic world. While this portion of the film is primarily atmospheric, Levi uses only one melodic theme to add contrast. The theme for the aliens, tremolo viola and cymbals, and the slowed down percussion during the alien's hunt produce an ominous tension. The seduction theme fully realizes this tension by revealing the goal of the protagonist. Levi establishes atmospheric apprehension that dissolves into a sinister melodic theme.

**C: *Enemy* (00:00:00 - 00:31:04)**

An ambient, glassy sound fades in with a shot of a cityscape. As the camera pans across the city, a bass clarinet plays an atonal melody. A voice message of a woman begins. She is telling her son that she is worried about him and the quality of his apartment. The voice message ends, the cityscape and the melody fade out, leaving only the glass ambience. Then, a pair of hands holding a key is shown. Two men are walking down a dark corridor. A cello plays one pulsating note, creating an air of apprehension. The man holding the key unlocks a door and the two walk into a dark room. Strings are introduced, playing a descending melody, heightening a feeling of uneasy uncertainty. A group of well-dressed men are gathered around a stage in the room, which appears to be an underground sex club. The group of men watch as a woman brings a covered platter to the stage. Staccato violins play as the woman places the platter on the floor. The strings begin playing louder, building up anticipation while the men look at the plate with

unknown contents. The cello pulses faster and the woman reaches forward to remove the covering from the plate. Just as she uncovers the dish, a drum strikes, leaving only the ambience and droning brass. On the plate is a large spider. The man who was holding the key puts his hands to his face as he stares at the spider. The strings return to the score and the spider crawls off the plate. The woman comes forward and slowly places her foot on top of the spider. The strings play a long, drawn-out note, and the man looks onward as the woman slowly steps on the spider.

A man is seen walking the halls of a school. The protagonist of the film, a college history professor named Adam Bell, bears the exact resemblance of the man at the sex club. He gives a lecture on the controlling nature of dictatorship. As his students begin to leave class, a bass clarinet begins playing a slow, two-note melody. He begins going about his monotonous life, grading papers, commuting, and participating in an unsatisfactory relationship with a woman. As this montage of his life plays, the same atonal melody from the scene in the sex club plays. Though the melody contains resolve at the end of its phrasing, the atonality in between creates an atmosphere of tension and instability, reflecting the dissatisfaction in Bell's life.

One day, Bell engages in a conversation with a colleague, who recommends that he watch a local film called *Where There's a Will There's a Way*. Bell rents and watches the film, and then goes to sleep. While sleeping, a scene from the film replays in his mind. A woman is checking into a hotel. She hands her bags to a bellhop and begins chatting with a man. Here the music is very dynamic with intense percussion and loud horns. This alarming music fills the seemingly normal scene with anxiety. Bell wakes up from the dream, disturbed. He finds the scene from his dream and notices that the man

playing the bellhop bares his exact resemblance. The music continues the anxiety but is far less dynamic than in the dream. It contains a low drone, with strings playing rising, ominous notes. This helps to reinforce the tense curiosity that Bell is feeling.

After searching the internet for information on this apparent doppelganger, Bell finds that the man's name is Anthony Claire. He locates and visits the talent agency that Claire belongs to. Upon walking in, an employee tells him that they have some of his mail. One of the letters contains Claire's home address and phone number. As Bell drives to the address, a high-pitched drone is introduced. It descends in pitch, creating an unsteady atmosphere. The drone reduces to a slow pulse. Bell arrives at a large, gated apartment complex. Outside the complex Bell finds a payphone and calls the number. A woman answers the phone and addresses him as Anthony. When Bell tries to explain that he is someone else the woman becomes confused. He apologizes and hangs up the phone. Horns begin to slowly rise in volume, and a tambourine shakes before the screen turns black.

Using strings, brass, woodwinds, and drones, Bensi and Jurriaans cast the film under a dark cloud of anxious tension. The two composers recorded the entirety of the score's orchestra in the key of D minor (Robert, Holmes 74:39 - 75:18). This creates a consistently dreary atmosphere for the film. This consistency is disrupted by the atonal leitmotif that plays whenever Adam Bell is being observed, creating a type of off-kilter feeling that something about this man's monotonous life is unwell. Similar to the approaches of Mark Korven and Mica Levi, Bensi and Jurriaans rely heavily on the atmosphere created by the instruments, using melody sparingly.

## II. The Middle (Second Act)

The first act introduced the characters and the world that they inhabit. The second act in the Aristotelian plot structure contains the conflict of the story. The sonic world has been developed, and now the composer must develop the subtext of the conflict that the characters experience.

### **A: *The Lighthouse* (00:51:00 - 01:19:02)**

Just as Winslow and Wake make it to the end of their allotted time at the lighthouse a heavy storm comes over the small island. The two wait for their ship to arrive and take them away, but the ship does not come. Winslow continues his duties through the pouring rain, and Wake digs out a crate-full of alcohol that he had hidden. Here, a brass ensemble rises and falls, representing the rise and fall of waves. The ensemble becomes more and more chaotic as the two men frantically prepare for their extended stay on the island.

As the days begin to pass, Wake and Winslow begin to develop a deep hatred for each other. Wake begins to gaslight Winslow about stealing rations. The only way for the two to cope is to drink. One night, Winslow insults Wake's cooking. Wake replies with a long and intense curse, prophesying that the king of the sea will give Winslow's body to the gulls, leaving his soul to become lost within the sea. During this dramatic speech, Korven sets the tone with the friction mallet on the bass drum. This calls back to the otherworldly feeling of the mermaid. Korven's subtle use of drones helps engulf the viewer into the story.

The next scene depicts a montage of Winslow's wild descent into drunken hallucinations. Korven uses this scene to, as he puts it, "[push] the envelope of what we could do with the brass section" (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 08:47 - 08:51). The scene cuts between Winslow masturbating to a statuette of a mermaid, and hallucinations of him having sex with the mermaid he found on the shore, a man drowning, surrounded by logs, and a lobster trap containing a rotting corpse. The music becomes completely unhinged and chaotic. The brass section swells up and down, rising and blaring with strings making a stuttering noise. The brass synchronizes with the cuts between hallucinations, enhancing the impact of the madness. Compared to the other scenes that were dominated by brass, this one is far more intense. This shows the amount of built-up tension and drunken madness held by Winslow. The music shows how the character is spiraling out of control.

During a night of intense drinking, Winslow reveals to Wake that his name is not Ephriam Winslow, but Thomas Howard. He explains that prior to accepting the job as a lighthouse keeper, he was a logger. There was an accident where a man he was working with, named Ephriam Winslow, was crushed by logs. Howard could have saved him but chose not to because he disliked him. He took the dead man's identity and fled. After telling the story, he looks up to find that Wake is no longer in the room, but he hears his voice questioning him why he spoke about his past. Howard then experiences another hallucination. Here the music takes on a very mysterious and haunting quality. The exact instrumentation is ambiguous, but woodwinds playing stuttering notes can be discerned. Howard is at the top of the lighthouse and sees a body lying on the floor. He reaches out to see who it is and finds that it is himself. A hand grabs Howard's shoulder. He turns

around to see Wake standing naked behind him. Beams of light come out of his eyes and cover Howard. The mysterious music turns into intense, roaring brass. When talking about this scene, Korven says, “it’s probably the most haunting scene in the film musically, and also in the story as well...we used a lot of unusual textures that were layered on top of each other so you wouldn’t be able to figure out exactly what instruments you’re looking for” (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 09:02 - 09:21). The quality of the music shows that Wake’s character is something to fear. The intensity of the brass when paired with his mythic depiction shows that there is something unnatural about him and the lighthouse.

The music in the second act of *The Lighthouse* exponentially rises in intensity. The subtext that Korven brings out is one of distrust, fear, and madness. The score in the first act introduced the sonic world, tying specific instruments with the elements, and establishing the uneasiness of the lighthouse and the island. The score in the second act takes these things and plunges them into chaos, showing how quickly the characters descend into madness.

**B: *Under the Skin* (00:44:52 - 01:26:48)**

After melting down her last victim, the woman walks through the city streets. Suddenly, she trips and falls. As she lies on the ground, a few people come and help her on her feet. This interaction of kindness causes the woman to begin observing the people around her. While she watches the numerous people go about their lives, Levi chooses to introduce a slowly pulsing synthesized string section. The use of strings here adds a feeling of warmth to the scene, suggesting a growing tenderness within the woman.

The woman returns to her hunt. She passes by a man walking on the street and asks him if he would like to ride home with her. Cautiously, the man agrees to go with her. She sees that the man's face is covered with tumors and interacts with him in a kinder way than with her previous victims. She takes him back to the dark room where she performs her seduction. The theme from the previous seduction scenes is present here, performing the same role that creates an uneasy atmosphere. After the man sinks into the floor, the woman begins to leave but stops in front of the mirror. She examines her face for a long while. The woman lets the man go and leaves. As he runs away, the alien man who abducted the unconscious woman at the beginning of the film appears again. The score here is minimal, consisting of ambient cymbals and fast, stuttering viola. Levi uses these two instrumental elements as a leitmotif to call back to the ambiguous alien presence. The man chases down the freed victim and forces him into the trunk of a car. As this abduction occurs, Levi removes the cymbals, putting in a loud percussive bass sound. The sound is fast and repetitive, causing the scene to feel tense and apprehensive. The alien man drives off with the victim.

The woman drives far into the countryside and stops at a small town. She attempts to eat food but finds that she is biologically unable to do so. Distraught, the woman decides to ride on a bus. The driver begins to chastise her for not wearing a coat in the cold weather, and a man begins asking her if she is ok. The woman decides to go home with the man since he showed concern for her. The man lets her stay with him for a while, and the woman begins to gain curiosity about love. One day the two are alone in a bedroom and begin to kiss. In this scene, Levi brings back the warm synthesized strings, adding a layer of real strings alongside it. Though the strings convey a feeling of warmth,

there is something off about it. The pitch of the chords is slightly detuned, and the lead melody glides from note to note, wavering in pitch. This gives the scene a feeling of uneasiness. The two take off their clothes and the man attempts to have sex with her but finds that the woman has no genitals. The knowledge that she is unable to engage with love shocks the woman and she leaves, walking alone into the countryside. Levi was very intentional with her use of synthesizers in this part of the score.

[The fake MIDI strings with the real strings], that aesthetic is important because of her slightly dislocated experience. It's much more natural when she's working, it's more acoustic instruments, and as she gets towards love it's much more synthesized. That's because it's impossible...[The idea of synthesized strings is that it can go on forever], there's no human having to change their bow, it's just there until you turn it off (Jonathan Mena 23:00 - 23:42).

As Levi mentioned, the act of hunting humans is far more natural for her. The use of acoustic instruments during the seduction scenes contrasts to the use of synthetic instruments in the love scene. The synthesizers help to reinforce the idea that the woman is not human. Though she begins to feel human emotions she is unable to fully engage them. The detuned aspect of the synthesizer shows warped feelings that the woman is experiencing.

The conflict in the second act of *Under the Skin* is the woman exploring the growing emotions within her, such as empathy and love. Most of the second act consists of dialogue and silence. Levi's sparse approach to composing this act adds weight to the scenes that are paired with music. The time that the woman spent with the man is almost entirely devoid of music. When the score comes in during her kiss, the warmth and



uneasiness of the music pulls the viewer into the woman's perspective, shedding light onto the depth of film's conflict.

**C: *Enemy* (00:31:04 - 00:55:30)**

Adam Bell returns home and calls the number again. This time, Anthony Claire answers the phone. Bell tells Claire that they look and sound exactly the same, and suggests that they should meet. Claire tells him never to call again and hangs up the phone. His pregnant wife, Helen asks him about the call, accusing Claire of sleeping with another woman. Claire states that it was the man who had called her earlier, suggesting that he is only a crazed fan. Unable to convince her, he leaves the room. Bell had told Claire his name and job. Claire searches the internet for Bell's faculty information and writes it down. Helen, suspicious of Claire, searches his things and finds Bell's information. The score during this scene consists of bass clarinets and pizzicato strings. The melody of the bass clarinets and strings gives the scene a feeling of suspecting curiosity. Reminiscent of the atonal leitmotif, melody does not stay within its key, upholding the feeling of instability that is prevalent throughout the film.

The next day, before Bell begins his class, Claire calls him and says that he wants to meet. Filled with excited anxiety, Bell walks outside. The score reintroduces the atonal leitmotif in a new light. The melody, now played on strings, is supported by chords. This gives structure to the previously instable melody, conveying Bell's wish to bring closure to the unnatural situation. Helen had decided to find out for herself who the man on the phone was and visited the college to look for the man. As Bell sits outside to process the phone call, Helen sees him and is shocked. She sits down on a bench next to him. The stability of the strings is replaced by the familiar bass clarinets, bringing back the instable

atonality of the melody. This causes the viewer to switch from Bell's perspective of excitement to Helen's perspective of shock. Bell looks at her and asks if she is okay. Visibly concerned, she answers yes. Bell treats her with kindness, asking how many months pregnant she is. She replies that she is six months along. He bids her farewell and walks back to class.

Helen returns home to process what she saw. Claire comes back from jogging and begins to berate her about not buying the right type of blueberries. She does not respond and leaves the room. The music here brings out the shock and fear felt by Helen. The atonal leitmotif continues, played on high strings with a steady drone underneath it. When Claire asks what is bothering her, Helen tells him that she went to see Bell. Filled with fear, she asks Claire if he knows what is happening. Claire says that he has no idea what she is talking about.

On the day that he is supposed to meet Claire, Bell wakes up from a dream of a woman with the head of a spider. The score here consists of ambient noise, creating an atmosphere of tension. A string section replaces the noise as Bell leaves to meet Claire. The strings now give a sense of growing dread, as if Bell is traveling to his demise. He arrives at the motel where Claire suggested they meet. The strings are replaced by a low pulsing cello, reflecting the tension within Bell. He arrives at the room and waits. Claire walks in and the two identical men stare at each other. Claire shows Bell a scar on his torso and asks if he has the same one. Bell's silence shows affirmation that he does. The score here consists of steady, droning strings. Claire presses Bell for more information. Bell backs away, saying their meeting was a bad idea. The strings begin to play faster, creating more tension. Bell drives away, leaving Claire with the letter he took from the

talent agency. Claire catches up to Bell on a motorcycle and stares at him. The atonal leitmotif briefly plays before Claire drives away. The string section returns, playing alternating major and minor chords. This highlights the sense of concern and wonder that the characters are feeling. The use of chords here contrasts with the atonality of the leitmotif, giving a sense of stability in the knowledge that the characters have gained.

Bensi and Jurriaans rely heavily on the atonal leitmotif in the second act of the film. The use of this helps to reinforce the conflict that has been introduced in the story. Bensi and Jurriaans add complexity to the conflict by adding stable chords to the instable melody. This contrast gives the feeling that the conflict has been set in motion and cannot be undone.

### III. The End (Third Act)

The third act of the Aristotelian plot structure contains the resolution of the story. In the first act the composer creates the sonic world of the film, in the second act the composer develops the subtext of the conflict. Now the composer must use the established musical elements to bring resolve to the story.

#### **A: *The Lighthouse* (01:19:02 - 01:46:02)**

After his hallucinations and confessions of his true name, Howard flees from the lighthouse and attempts to leave the island in a lifeboat. Wake catches up to him and destroys the lifeboat with an axe. Wake then continues to gaslight Howard, claiming that it was Howard that destroyed the lifeboat. Howard bends to the manipulation. Now out of alcohol, the two mix honey with some chemical liquid and become wildly intoxicated. Howard and Wake laugh hysterically through the night as the ravaging storm tears apart

the lighthouse. Howard wakes up and finds Wake's logbook, where he recommends that Howard be severed without pay. He confronts Wake and begs for another chance. Wake mocks him, calling him an entitled filthy dog. Here, the music becomes very tense. An ensemble of brass continuously rises and falls in pitch, enhancing the unstable feeling of the scene. Howard attacks Wake and begins to hallucinate, seeing the real Ephriam Winslow instead of Wake. As he continues attacking, the hallucination changes to show the mermaid. Korven removes the dizzying brass from the cue and reintroduces the low drone produced by a friction mallet and bass drum. A high-pitched tone is also present that sounds almost like a distorted guitar. Like the brass ensemble, it rises and falls in pitch. The mermaid then changes into the form of Wake, but he is covered in barnacles. A tentacle wraps around Howard's neck, and the distorted Wake cackles. Howard continues to punch Wake, causing him to spit up blood. Howard's hallucination ends, and he sees Wake curled up on the floor.

Korven uses the brass ensemble to reflect disoriented and hallucinogenic state that Howard is in. The brass continues through Howard's initial attack and continues through his hallucination of Ephriam Winslow. The score changes as the hallucinations begin to reflect the mythical aspects of the island. Korven has developed a leitmotif based around the drone created by the friction mallet rubbing against the waterphone and bass drum. This sound plays whenever the presence of the lighthouse or the mermaid is meant to be the focus of the scene. The sound augments the mythical and otherworldly nature of these elements.

After nearly beating Wake to death, Howard brings him outside and partially buries him in the sand. Taking the lighthouse keys from Wake's body, Howard walks

inside and looks at the stairs to the light. Korven bring back the woodwinds from one of Howard's previous hallucinations of being at the top of the lighthouse. The woodwinds play bending high-pitched notes, elevating Howard's anxious curiosity about the light. Howard decides to get a cigarette before experiencing the light. As he begins to light his cigarette, Wake storms in with an axe, exclaiming that the light belongs to him. The woodwinds cease and staccato brass with percussion begin to play. Wake chops Howard on the shoulder, who picks up a metal teapot and strikes Wake in the head. Howard then picks up the axe from the unconscious Wake and drops the blade on his head.

Howard then begins his ascent to the light. The music takes a prominent role in this scene. Korven creates a haunting, curious, and apprehensive atmosphere through the use of the friction mallet leitmotif and glass bowls. "[W]e used a lot of glass, large dessert bowls ... you'd dip your fingers in the bowls and give them a rub...we were looking for something very glass-like that would evoke this huge lighthouse" (Sony Soundtracks VEVO 9:54 - 10:14). Howard arrives at the top of the light. A large spinning box made of glass resides at the center of the room. One of the glass panes opens on its own accord and Howard reaches inside to touch the source of the light. Korven adds a choir on top of the glassy sound, enhancing the haunting atmosphere. Howard begins to scream as he interacts with the light and falls backwards down the stairs. The scene fades to Howard's body lying on the shore, which is being devoured by seagulls. The scene fades and the film ends.

Korven's score helps reinforce the chaos in the story as the characters spiral out of control. The music is unhinged, becoming more intense before Howard finally sees the light. The otherworldly sound created by glass and the waterphone ends the film,

showing how the men were ultimately overcome by the psychosis induced by the island. Korven takes the film from its chaotic and foreboding beginning and resolves it with dissonance.

**B: *Under the Skin* (01:26:48 - 01:42:25)**

The woman walks alone through the woods. She comes across a man who asks her if anyone is with her. She replies that she is alone. The man gives her some advice about traveling through the forest and the two part ways. The scene cuts to the alien man on the motorcycle. He is tracking the woman, perhaps for freeing the deformed man from the aliens' grasp. The woman arrives at a house with a sign that welcomes hikers to take shelter. She goes inside and lays down. The shot cuts to the trees blowing in the mountain side. The score blends with the sound of the wind. A low bass sound and high strings carry one note. This creates a foreboding atmosphere, as if something bad is about to come to an end. The woman raises her head to find that the man she met in the woods is attempting to molest her. She kicks him off and runs into the forest. She comes across an unmanned logging truck and attempts to start it. She accidentally triggers the truck's horn, alerting the man to her presence. She tries to run away but the man catches up to her, forcing her to the ground. Here Levi reintroduces the seduction theme. This shows a terrible irony. The theme meant to show the woman's seduction and hunt for humans has been reversed on her. After attempting to engage with human emotions she has been confronted with the horrors of man. The man begins removing her clothes, but the woman makes an effort to escape his grasp. The man grabs her as she tries to get away and makes a tear in her skin. The man freezes as he sees pitch black underneath her skin and runs away. The beat fades away, leaving only the wailing, scratching sound of viola.

The woman pulls off her skin, revealing a black mannequin-like figure. She looks into the blinking eyes of the face that she had worn. The man returns and pours gasoline onto the alien and lights her on fire. The beat returns to support the viola as the woman runs away, covered in fire. The viola plays a major chord with a tremolo effect. This gives a feeling of finality as the alien breaks through the forest and falls dead on the snow covered ground. The beat and viola fade away, leaving only the sound of cymbals. The scene cuts to the alien man looking across a frozen field. He walks away as if he knows that the woman has died. The woman's body continues to burn, letting off smoke into the sky. Snow begins to fall and the film ends with only the crackling sound of fire.

Like the second act of the film, Levi chooses to take a minimal approach to scoring the third act. The use of the seduction theme in this act provides a stark contrast to its previous use. The theme that once signified her hunt of man has been turned back on her as she is hunted and killed by man. Her emotional experience is brought to an end in silence.

**C: *Enemy* (00:55:30-01:26:48)**

Claire finds out where Bell lives and waits outside his apartment. He sees Bell and his girlfriend walk out on their way to work. Bell drives away and his girlfriend begins walking to work. Claire follows her on his motorcycle. The score here becomes sinister. Horns descend in pitch alongside a steady drone. Strings play brief, fluttering notes and sparse percussion plays alongside them. Claire follows her onto a bus and observes her with a predatory gaze. The music drops to a steady pulsing cello, building up tension. Bell's girlfriend arrives at her workplace and Claire watches her form outside. Claire then goes to consult his mother, asking if she ever had another son. She replies no

and disregards his concern, wanting him to forget about the encounter. Claire then goes to Bell's apartment where he accuses him of sleeping with his wife. Then, he demands that Bell give him his clothes and car, planning on taking his girlfriend on a get-away where he will sleep with her. Bell concedes to Claire's demands. After Claire leaves, Bell decides to take revenge by going to the man's house. Here, the music continues its intensity with loud percussion and pizzicato strings. This reflects the twisted determination that Bell has to take revenge upon Claire.

Bell arrives at the apartment complex, where a security guard mistakes him to be Claire. He lets him inside and rides with him up the elevator. The ambient glass-like sound from the beginning of the film begins to play, making the scene feel apprehensive. The security guard begins asking him about the underground sex club, saying that he needs to go back. He is afraid that he will not be able to as he did not receive a key to the room. Unaware of what he is talking about, Bell says that he will see what he can do. The guard walks him to his apartment and lets him in. A single cello plays on top of the glass-like ambience as Bell puts on Claire's clothing. Helen arrives home. Assuming that Bell is Claire, she asks him why he is home early from visiting his mother. Trying to keep up his appearance, Bell says that he cancelled it. Helen becomes suspicious and tells him that she is going to bed. Now alone, Bell becomes distraught about his decision to take revenge on Claire. He goes and asks Helen if she needs anything, showing concern for her as she is six months pregnant. After mentioning this information, Helen catches on that Bell is not her husband. She asks him to go to bed with her, to which Bell cautiously agrees. Here, the atonal melody comes back in, played on cello. She puts her hand on his and asks if he had a good day at school. Bell is noticeably stunned by this question, and



Helen tells him to forget it. The low, pulsing cello plays underneath the melody, adding even more tension to the scenario. The scene cuts to Claire having sex with Bell's girlfriend. She notices the mark left by Claire's wedding ring. She pushes him off and demands to know where it came from. Claire states that he has always had the mark, attempting to gaslight her. Upset and confused, she demands that he take her home. The scene cuts back to Bell. Unable to go through with his revenge and hurt Helen, he goes to the living room and begins to cry. The pulsing cello continues, now with the glass ambient sound. Strings play on top of these two elements, replacing the atonal melody and adding more anxiety to the scene. Now, the scene turns into a contrast of character, cutting back between Bell and Claire. Helen goes to sit with Bell and asks why he is upset. After saying that he could not sleep, he can only tell her that he is sorry. The scene cuts to Claire in the car with Bell's girlfriend. Claire begins to claim that she is crazy for being upset and starts screaming at her. Cutting back to Bell, Helen tells him that she wants him to stay, even though she knows who he truly is. The two begin to make love. The strings become louder, and the music becomes more intense as percussion and brass are added. Claire continues screaming at Bell's girlfriend. He tries to open her door and push her out of the car. This causes him to lose control of car, resulting in a wreck that kills them both. The music crescendos into a string section playing minor chords, and the shot zooms in to show a crack in the car window that looks like a spider's web.

Helen listens to a radio broadcast that mentions the wreck. Bell puts on Claire's clothing and finds the letter he left with Claire. He opens it and finds black, unmarked envelope that contains a key. Curious to find out about the room the guard had mentioned, Bell asks Helen if she has any plans for the night, saying that he is going to

go out. He hears no response from her room. He walks in to see an enormous spider backed into the corner of the room. Bell lets out a deep breath and the film ends.

Bensi and Jurriaans build up tension throughout the score in the third act. The music becomes an essential part of telling the story, conveying the threatened and fearful state of Bell and Claire. The use of the atonal leitmotif augments the feelings of anxiety within the characters as the film comes to a crashing resolution.

### **Chapter 3: Conclusion**

#### **I: Score Comparison**

Lying within a mixture of drama, thriller, and sci-fi, the scores for these three films share some essential elements. The overarching goal of the scores is to augment tension and create an atmosphere of anxiety. However, the composers go about this in vastly different ways. Mark Korven's score for *The Lighthouse* is heavy-handed and unhinged. The intensity of the brass takes up most of the sonic spectrum, drowning out almost all other sound. This is fitting as the brass is representative of the ocean's power. The eeriness of the glass and waterphone evoke the haunting and otherworldly nature of the light and the mermaid. The instrumentation leaves no room for confusion as to what it represents in a given scene. Mica Levi takes a minimalist approach to scoring *Under the Skin*. While the score for *The Lighthouse* is chaotic and loud, *Under the Skin* is more subtle and structured, relying on a few themes to tell the story of the film. The cymbals create a quiet yet eerie atmosphere, representing the alien presence. The percussion leading up to the various seductions lies subtly in the background as the woman drives around the city. The main moments where the music takes the forefront is during the

seductions and liquification of the men. Though the music is more subtle, it plays a pivotal role in communicating the subtext of the film. Danny Bensi and Saundra Jurriaans' score for *Enemy* can be as heavy-handed as *The Lighthouse*, and even more subtle than *Under the Skin*. *Enemy*'s score relies heavily on atmosphere, with many scenes scored with drones. The score beautifully builds tension from start to finish, carrying the atonal leitmotif throughout the story. During particularly tense scenes, the music becomes intense, using brass and loud percussion. Bensi and Jurriaans' score is far more orchestral than the two other films. Where Korven and Levi use eclectic or synthetic instruments to create jarring or unreal sounding music, Bensi and Jurriaans use orchestra to create a thread of instrumental consistency throughout the score. This keeps a steady tone of anxiety and tension that continuously grows with the plot.

## II: What Do They Bring to the Table in Terms of Film Scoring?

What these scores bring to the table in the world of film music are highly dynamic musical narratives that build tension and augment anxiety. The work done by these composers show that there is not only a multitude of ways to score a film, but the methods used to compose them do not have to be conventional. The scores discussed here range from dissonant to concordant, and ambient to chaotic. They show how important it is for a composer to be dynamic with the score. While the scores for *The Lighthouse*, *Under the Skin*, and *Enemy* have scenes that contain drones and ambient sounds, the composers do not use them as a crutch for a lacking of material. Many times, the scores are intense and loud, but they can equally be subtle and quiet. Where many film scores can simply play the passive role of telling the audience what to feel in a given scene, these scores become an active and fundamental character in their respective films. They

help create the world depicted in the films, associating sounds with places, characters, and ideas. They help the audience read the subtext of the characters and scenarios. They provide great examples of the possibilities that are available to help composers tell stories.

#### **Chapter 4: My Score**

I have directly applied this research through the act of composing a score for a short film. The knowledge I have gained from studying these scores deeply has given me the tools to help me accomplish this. I have used them as a reference for effective composition, and they have given me great inspiration.

I: Defining the Director's Vision. Ian Cox and Isaac Cox.

I composed a score for a film that tells the story of a man who lives a completely isolated life in the forest. He suffers from terrible stomach pains and is convinced that it is caused by some divine presence. Due to his isolation, he has developed strange traditions and rituals with meanings known only to him. He feels a conviction that he alone must protect the forest from outsiders and preserve his sacred way of living. When land developers begin cutting down his forest and building houses, the man begins to have visions that convince him that he must wage war against the outsiders. The director, Isaac Cox, wanted the music for this film to reflect the mentally unstable condition that the character lives. Because the man lives alone in the forest, scavenging and crafting tools to help him survive, the director envisioned ramshackle instrumentation. The main goal at the start of the scoring process was determining the sonic world. We spent a great

deal of time determining what did and did not work for the score, cycling through a variety of compositions and instruments before finding the right combination.

Compositionally, I have attempted to convey the overall feeling of unhinged disrepair present in the character. Though the score spends a large portion of its time within the key of D minor, I have employed some atonality to add instability. I accomplished this through aleatoric performances, using the most compelling parts of the performances in the score. I have manipulated the recordings by stretching out their time, transposing them down to different pitches, and distorting them beyond the recognition of the original audio. By doing this I hope to reflect the twisted world view held by the character.

A variety of instruments were used in the score, such as saxophone, violin, percussion, mandolin, harmonica, kazoo, as well as audio from sound libraries and virtual synthesizers. The director envisioned the saxophone to play the leading theme for the character, given the instrument's ability to sound strange and bizarre. Besides this request, the director presented me with total creative freedom as to how I chose to use the instruments.

## II: Score Analysis

I will be examining my score in accordance with the Aristotelian plot structure, examining how the score develops throughout the film.

### **A: The Beginning**

A shot of muddy water fades in. Trees hang over a stagnant creek. A djimbe plays a steady beat, and strings play a single pulsing note. A descending ominous melody is introduced, creating foreboding atmosphere. A man sits in the forest, crushing dead leaves in his hands. His entire body is cloaked in worn fabric with a piece of driftwood tied to his head. The descending melody continues, now accompanied by low strings and tambourine. The scene cuts to show a man who sits at the top of a tree, observing a neighborhood. A montage showing homes and undeveloped housing ensues. Strings begin to play unsteady notes, creaking as the bow changes positions. Beneath the strings is a stuttering saxophone, accompanied by a djimbe and tambourines. The strings begin to play a repeating two-note melody. The scene cuts back to the man in the tree. Like the cloaked man, he has a piece of driftwood tied to his head. He looks angry as he observes the neighborhood. He begins to climb down from the tree but is overcome by a sharp pain and falls into the shallow creek below. He grabs at his stomach as he picks himself up. A great pain grows within him, and he crawls over to the bank and hunches over. He begins to writhe from the pain, repeatedly striking a nearby tree. He becomes unconscious.

For the introduction, I wanted the score to be minimal. The presence of strings and quiet percussion creates an eerie atmosphere, and the ominous melody enhances the foreboding presence of the cloaked man. The director initially wanted the introduction to

be far more chaotic, but we both came to the conclusion that it needed to be more subtle. The montage of the neighborhood needed to carry a lot of weight, since it is the catalyst of the conflict in the story. When recording the violin for this scene, I moved the bow so that it would make as much creaking noises as possible. I paired this with light tambourine and a two-note melody to make the neighborhood seem more menacing. The most difficult part of scoring this scene was keeping it minimal. Most of the score is very intense, so it felt counterintuitive to cut back on instrumentation.

The man is struck with a vision. No longer at the creek bank, the man walks through a sunlight opening in a forest. Just outside the woods is a house under construction. Here, a drone is introduced in the score. The repeating two-note melody from the man's observance of the neighborhood plays. The notes ascend the scale, creating an increasing sense of distress. The man becomes filled with rage and falls to the ground. He props himself up with a machete and, in a frenzied state of fear and anger, begins cutting down the surrounding brush. The music becomes more tense, with the return of the steady djimbe beat, accompanied by staccato saxophone. Rising in the background is a creaking, moaning sound created by a friction mallet and bass drum. Continuing to be struck with rage towards the encroaching land developers, the man's relentless panic continues. Augmenting this panic, a warped and manipulated recording of a saxophone begins to play, creating an unnatural atmosphere. The two-note melody fades back in, melding with the stuttering saxophone. The man begins to fade back into reality, awoken by the pain in his stomach. Crawling further onto the back, the man continues to writhe in pain as the vision flashes in his mind.

When I approached scoring this scene, I wanted to bring out the fear felt by the character. The presence of other people is completely foreign to him. His unstable mental state and the physical pain he feels in his stomach increases the severity of his paranoia. Needing to reflect this and accentuate his poor physical and mental state, I wanted the instruments to work together to create a sound that felt broken and unhinged. Since the instruments that make up the sonic world were already selected, I experimented with a variety of combinations and chords. One thing that I knew was essential was the two-note melody. I wanted this to become the leitmotif that represented the encroaching outsiders. This would become one of two leitmotifs that I would develop throughout the film.

At first the composition was too heavy-handed with chords and strings. It did not convey a feeling of fear and paranoia, but a feeling of tragedy. Scrapping this, I decided to slowly bring in the strings, keeping them simple and stripped down. Underneath them I placed a quiet drone to give body to the minimal strings. Next, the steady beat made by the djimbe gave a feeling of rising apprehension. What really tied this cue together was the friction mallet and bass drum. Taking direct inspiration from Mark Korven's score for *The Lighthouse*, I procured a few friction mallets. Rubbing the mallet in a circular motion around the head of the drum, I recorded the creaking and moaning sound. I slowed down the recording to bring out the creaking sound made by the rubber on the mallet. When I paired this with the djimbe, it made the character feel like he was in a downward spiral to madness. The scene mostly shows the man in his frenzied panic, so I had to bring out the subtext of what was going on inside him. I put a saxophone sample through some extensive processing and created a sound that was chopped up and stretched. It sounded bizarre, alien, and disorienting. I used this sound to make the scene feel more unhinged.



After bringing these elements together, I brought back the two-note leitmotif, solidifying the melody with the character's fear and hatred. The director felt that the cue really articulated the terrible mental state of the character. He wanted this scene to really show that the character's fear and paranoia would lead him down a road that would lead to disaster.

The music in the first act establishes the sonic world of the film, as well as the compositional structure of the score. The character is isolated and mentally unstable. Fear and anger have begun to invade his life, leading him into a delusional state. I have attempted to show the introductory subtext of the story through structural tension and melodic dissonance.

## **B: The Middle**

After the vision ran its course, the man stands with a look of grave determination. He walks down the creek bed and further into the forest. Here, a low drone is introduced in the score. A deep distorted sound plays the ominous melody from the beginning of the film. It creates an ominous feeling, as something malicious is growing within the character. The man arrives at a small shrine. A brass pot sits upon an old book. Besides the pot are two pedestals, each holding an egg. The man opens the pot and breaks the two eggs open, pouring in the yolks and tossing in the shells. After performing this strange ritual, images of him killing another man flash before his eyes. The melody stops and the drone becomes discordant, creating a feeling of tension. The twisted sound of the processed saxophone begins to fade in and a synthesizer plays a wailing sound. Underneath is a deep bass drum. With a look of great conviction, the man closes the pot and walks into the woods. He stands in the creek and begins to cut the beard off his face

with a small blade. The intensity of the drone and saxophone fade away. A washed out drone that vaguely sounds like strings fades in. The sound creates a feeling of dreariness, like the man is under the influence of some type of entity.

In this scene, I wanted to highlight the pressure being put on the character to rid his land of the outsiders. Additionally, I wanted to build the leitmotif for the character with the ominous melody. This would be the second leitmotif developed throughout the film. The director envisioned it to create the feeling that something was drastically unwell with the man. I wrote the melody to have notes outside of the home key, using a little atonality to create dissonance. For this scene, I played the melody on the kazoo. I then took the recording and stretched it out and re-pitched it, resulting in a very deep, brass-like sound. The score for this scene went through very few renditions. The director's intentions for the music were very defined and not too difficult to execute. The washed out sound of the drone was created through processing a recording of the violin. I wanted the sound to represent the effect that the visions have had on him. He has become so focused on his goal that it has consumed his mind.

After the ritual, the man ties a new piece of driftwood to his head, but this time it is much larger. His body appears to be in a state of atrophy, as he constantly grips his stomach in pain. The music continues to create an ominous atmosphere, consisting of strings and tambourine. He walks out of the woods and finds himself in the backyard of someone's home. Seeing a young boy jumping on a trampoline, the man begins to walk forward with a machete in his hands. The atmospheric sound of the strings is replaced by a blaring saxophone, playing the character's leitmotif. The saxophone is accompanied by a choir singing the same melody, as well as percussion. This pairing gives the scene a

feeling of great intensity. Upon seeing this disturbing figure, the boy runs inside and tells his father about the stranger in the backyard. The father sends the boy to his room and walks into the kitchen. The music goes silent. Suddenly, the man bursts through the door and attacks the man with his machete. The saxophone returns, playing long, drawn out notes. The choir follows suit, and the tambourine performance becomes chaotic. The father blocks the man's attack by hitting him with a chair. He then throws him out the door. Seeing that the intruder is stunned from hitting the concrete porch, the father drags him out into the yard. The man pulls out a knife and stabs the father in the leg. The father pulls the knife out of his leg and drives it through the man's stomach. With the saxophone and choir continuing to create an environment of tension and chaos, drums slowly fade in, rising in tempo. The man pulls a hand-crafted weapon from his belt and strikes the father on the neck. This injures him greatly and he falls to the ground. The man retrieves the knife and delivers a fateful blow into the father's chest. In a state of shock, the man runs and retrieves his machete from the house and runs out the front door. A saxophone begins to play the character's leitmotif. The performance for the saxophone in this scene was improvised, giving the scene an unstable feeling. Underneath the saxophone are strings playing discordant notes, enhancing the stress felt by the character. He runs down the road hunched over from his stab wound. The headlights of cars can be seen behind him as he flees.

The director wanted this scene to show the peak of the character's madness. The music needed to peer directly into the unhinged state of his mind, so it had to sound crazy. I had just finished tracking improvised performances on the saxophone, which resulted in a lot of bizarre sounding recordings. It took a long time to find the right takes

from the saxophone recordings. It was difficult to make a composition out of freeform elements, but the result effectively conveys the intensity of the scene. I had attempted to incorporate the ocarina into this scene. However, I found that the sonic qualities between the saxophone and the ocarina did not work together, especially since I was putting a lot of distortion on the other instruments. After some trial and error, I decided to experiment with choir. Not only did it blend well with the sonic quality of the saxophone, but it helped to give the scene gravity. In the character's mind he is waging war against an unknown enemy. Lead by the deep, divine pain within his stomach, he has arrived at the defining moment of his conviction. The choir augments his delusions of war. I layered the djimbe along with the two instruments, which gave structure to the aleatoric saxophone performance. Tambourine was added to give variety to the sonic spectrum. The director had a few comments about the takes from the saxophone performances. I had initially chosen takes that were long and drawn out. The director wanted more melodic variation, and after sorting through more of the recordings I selected some that fit what he had envisioned.

I have attempted to show the presence of conflict in the music for the second act. The man's mental state has begun to spiral out of control, leading him to take drastic measures to preserve his land. To convey this subtext, I have raised the intensity of the music. The instrumentation and composition have become more dissonant and chaotic, reflecting the mental state of the character.

## **C: The End**

The murder was witnessed by a group of three men who live in the neighborhood. Seeking retribution for the murder, they chase the man down. The man runs through the forest, attempting to escape the vicious outsiders. The sound of shakers and djimbe fade in as the group hunts the man. The deep wailing sound produced by the friction mallet rises, reflecting the feeling of fear felt by the man. He is not able to run fast enough and the group catches up to him. He is tackled to the ground and beat until he becomes unconscious. As the man is attacked, the music becomes more and more tense, with the distorted and manipulated saxophone recording from the man's first vision. In his unconscious state he sees himself walking on the road through the neighborhood. The chaos of the percussion ceases, leaving the sound of a shaker that has been slowed down. It is supported by tambourine and a mandolin. This conveys the shock and disorientation felt by the character. He begins to regain consciousness. The group of men are carrying his body to the creek. Here, the disorienting percussion fades away, and the sound of strings and harmonica are introduced, playing pulsing minor chords. The man wakes up and attempts to free himself. One of the men grabs the plank of wood that was tied to his head and strikes him with it. The man falls into the creek, heavily injured and unconscious.

This scene was more difficult to score. It needed to show the character's feelings of terror, as well as his downfall. In my first attempts at scoring this scene I relied heavily on drones. The director and I disagreed with this route, so I decided to approach it more dynamically. For the chase scene, I chose to rely on percussion to add feelings of stress and terror, showing that the man is running for his life. I employed the friction mallet and

bass drum to enhance the stress. Additionally, I used the highly processed saxophone recording to add chaos. When the men throw the character in the water, the director wanted something that reflected his downfall. He wanted something not only more melodic and somber, but more structured than the music in previous scenes. To build this structure, I used violin and harmonica. This combination of instruments creates a somber and slightly distorted atmosphere. It conveys the feeling that the character's world has fallen apart. The director was happy with the cue, feeling that it connected well with his vision for the scene.

The man wakes up and finds himself washed up on the creek bank. Weak from his injuries, he struggles to stand. He is in a state of shock and despair, as he has failed his goal to fight the outsiders. Strings begin to play minor chords, enhancing the gravity of the scene. The minor quality of the chords conveys his feeling of failure. As he stumbles through the water he is overwhelmed with pain and sorrow, and collapses. The shot fades to black and the film ends.

With this scene I had to determine what the melodic content was going to be. I attempted to use the ominous leitmotif that had come to represent the character, but it did not fit the director's intent for the scene. It needed to show the deep feelings of failure and pain within the character. With this aim in mind, I began using stings to make a chord progression that evoked feelings of despair. The director was particularly happy with the outcome, saying that it fit well within his vision for the ending.

## Chapter 5: Evaluation

Having tracked, arranged, and mixed the score, I will now evaluate it. I will examine how well the score complements the film. Does it develop the subtext of the story and support the visual elements of the film? Do the elements of the music complement each other, with the instruments working together in harmony to create a unified whole? I will also examine additional technical aspects of the score such as its mix.

### I: Is the Score Complementary to the Film?

The film's visuals are very intense and chaotic. There are many things about the character that are strange and undefined. It is not known where he comes from or how he came to live an isolated life in the forest. The pain in his stomach could truly be a divine force compelling him to wage war against the outsiders, or it could be that he has a disease and is so delusional that he believes it is something supernatural. These ambiguous elements come together to create a strange and bizarre story. The score's composition is very chaotic, often having very little rhythmic or melodic structure. The melodic content of the score is mostly dissonant, residing in a minor key. The percussion is distorted and tense. The score tells a narrative of chaos, fear, and ambiguity. This pairs well with the visual narrative, and the music matches the events and atmosphere shown on screen. After examining this, I have determined that the score complements the film well.

## II: Is the Instrumental Arrangement Complementary with Itself?

When I approached the instrumentation for the score, I wanted to primarily use acoustic instruments. I used some virtual synthesizers, but they appear very little throughout the score. Additionally, I used virtual sound libraries for instruments that I did not have access to. Most of the film takes place in the forest, and I felt that acoustic instruments would best fit the visual. I relied heavily on violin, saxophone, and djimbe throughout the score. I distorted and processed the recordings of these instruments, often manipulating their pitch and tempo. This gave them all very strange qualities. Untouched, they would have worked in opposition to each other, but the processing allowed them to work in harmony together. For percussion, I exclusively used hand drums, tambourine, and shakers. These percussive instruments sound very natural, which paired well with the other instrumentation. After examining the instrumentation, I have determined that they complement each other very well.

## III: Additional Technical Considerations

When evaluating the mix of the score, I found that there was a significant amount of low end frequencies that were introduced due to processing. The mixing process took place over the course of arranging and processing the musical elements. The result is acceptable if the music is listened to alone. As of now, the film is still in the postproduction phase. It has very little foley and sound effects. Additionally, the dialogue, though a small amount, has not been mixed. Once the dialogue has been mixed, foley has been fully recorded, and sound effects added, the full score mix will have to be adjusted to compensate for these elements.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This film lies somewhere within the psychological thriller genre. The goal of the score is not only to augment the tension and chaos of the film, but to let the viewer experience the story from the man's point of view. Due to his isolation, the man has a distorted and delusional perspective. He becomes convinced that his physical pain is a divine force convicting him to wage war against the outsiders who are destroying his land. I have attempted to write his musical subtext through chaotic and dissonant composition. The chaotic and unhinged instrumentation shows the degradation of the man's mental state. The composition helps convey the range of emotions that the character feels throughout the story. The two leitmotifs lead the audience through his fear and anger. In the end, the strings show his sorrow and pain. Supported by its score, this film tells a story of fear, anger, and failure, showing the dangers of isolation.

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