

THE FUNCTION OF MUSIC IN FILM

Story, Sound and the Moving Image

Lecture 5

RESEARCH IN CONTEXT (ADAD5003)

function of film music

key concepts

- historical and cultural context
- emotional underscoring – narrative connection, psychoacoustics
- thematic 'hooks' and the musical motif
- melodic and rhythmical structure
- textural language- instrumentation and orchestration
- harmonic language ('no minor chords')
- musical dynamics and impressionistic silence

historical and cultural context

- Film music can help define **place and space** – both **culturally and historically**
- Eg. Think: period drama – what is the possible musical sound world?



Bright Star | 2009 | Jane Campion

emotional underscoring

narrative connection,
psychoacoustics

- To intensify or relax pace – emotional dynamic
 - To reflect emotion
 - To create 'unspoken' thoughts
 - To parallel or underscore the action
 - To create atmosphere of time and place
 - To create comedy
-
- Mostly **non-diegetic** (but not always)
 - **underscoring** the plot...mood characterisation, situational context...emotional commentary
 - 'Mickey-mousing' – meticulous cue-by-cue scoring

the shepherd tone

*emotional underscoring
and
psychoacoustics*



DUNKIRK (2017) – Christopher Nolan





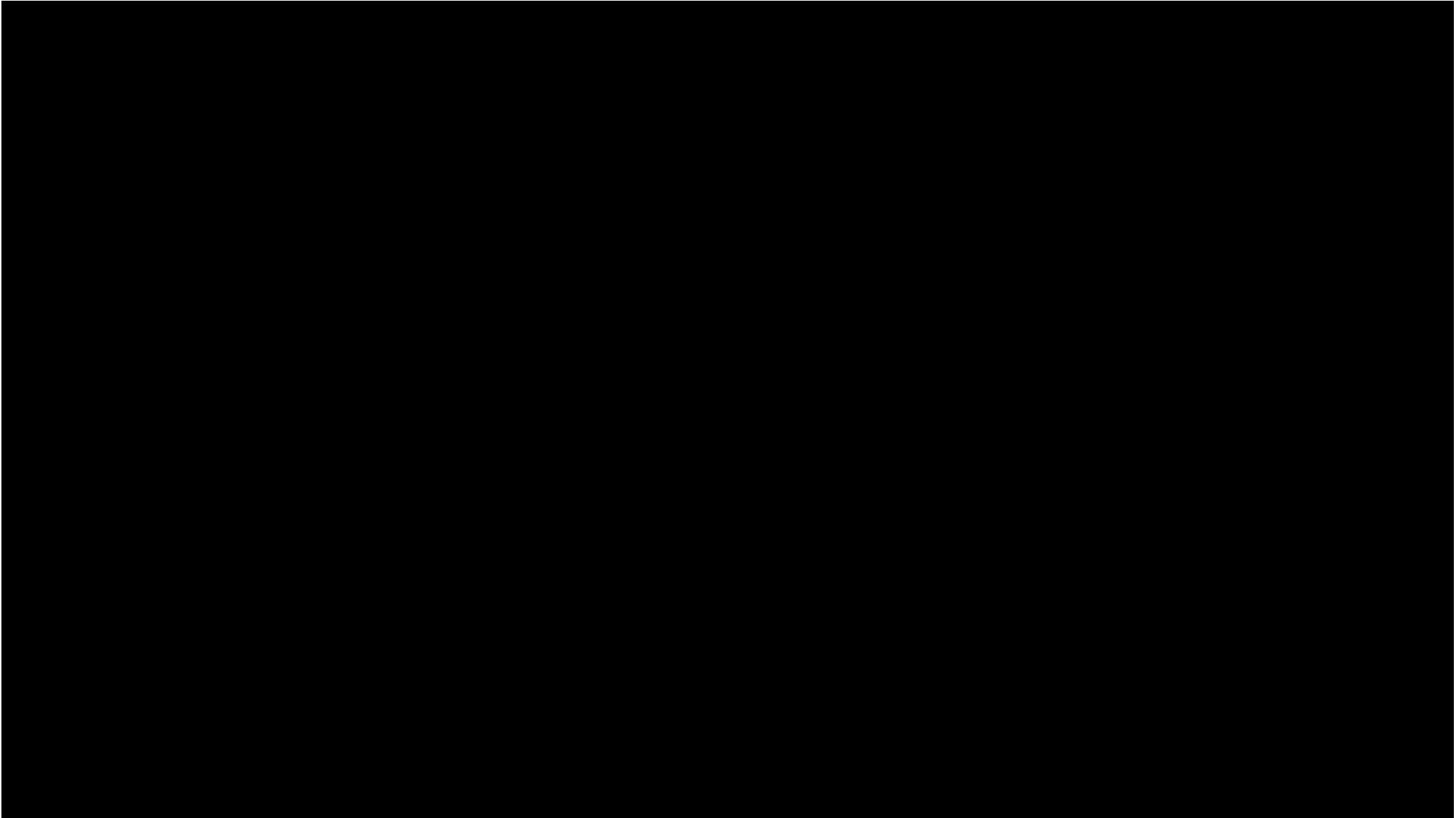
Chernobyl Film Score

The score incorporated some sound recordings from an actual nuclear power plant.

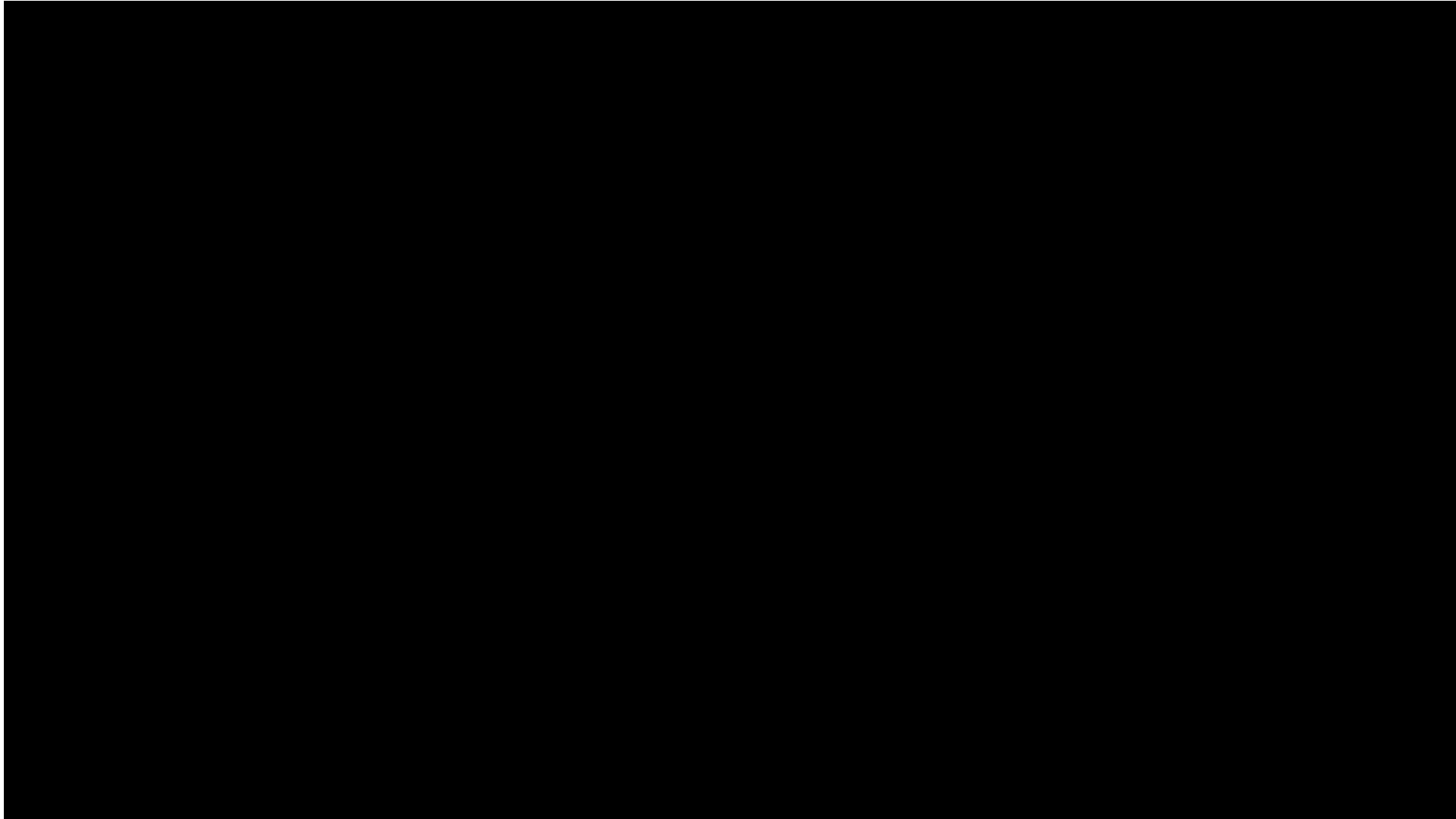
Hildur Guðnadóttir

Icelandic composer Hildur Guðnadóttir received an Emmy last night for her score for HBO's historical drama miniseries *Chernobyl*.





Chernobylite – *survival-horror* game



Chernobylite – Scanning the Environment

melodic and rhythmical structure

- **melody** – thematic, cellular patterns, sequence, flowing, lyrical, ostinato
- **melodic properties** - pitch, tone, colour, duration, dynamics
- **rhythmical** – regular-irregular, syncopated, energetic, stasis, repetitive, flowing, driving, strident...

Psycho (1960)

Bernard Herman



leitmotif

thematic 'hooks' and
the musical motif

Handwritten musical score for Princess Leia's Theme, featuring a leitmotif. The score is written in D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The first system shows the first four measures, with chords I, (ii°7), (I), and (ii°7) indicated below. The second system shows measures five through eight, with chords bII, vii, 7, bii, and bVI6 indicated below. The third system shows measures nine and ten, with chords iv6 and V indicated below, followed by a double bar line.

Princess Leia's Theme



*the
nerdwriter*

textural language

instrumentation and
orchestration

- **What's the instrumentation and arrangement?**
- timbre
- pitch,
- range and registers
- contrapuntal, canon, fugal
- orchestral instruments
- electro-acoustic
- electronic and experimental
- world music – expanded sound world



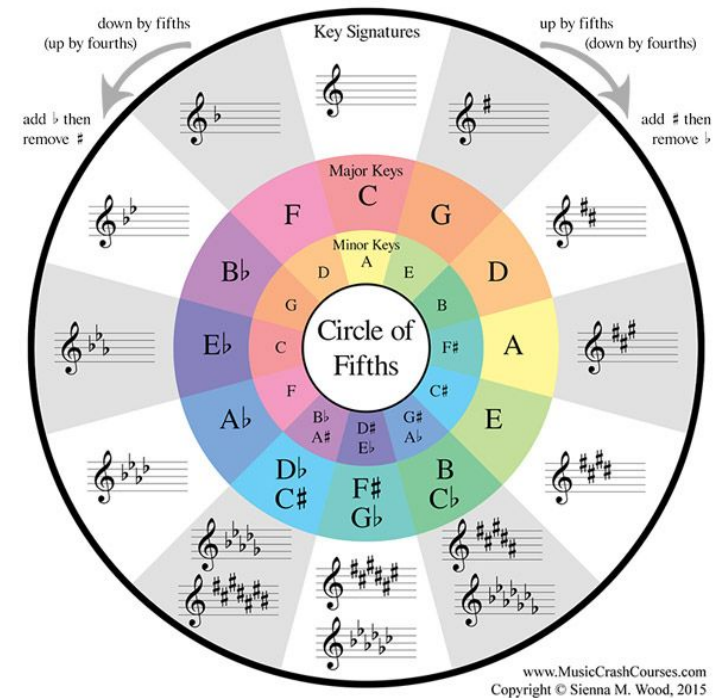
MGM

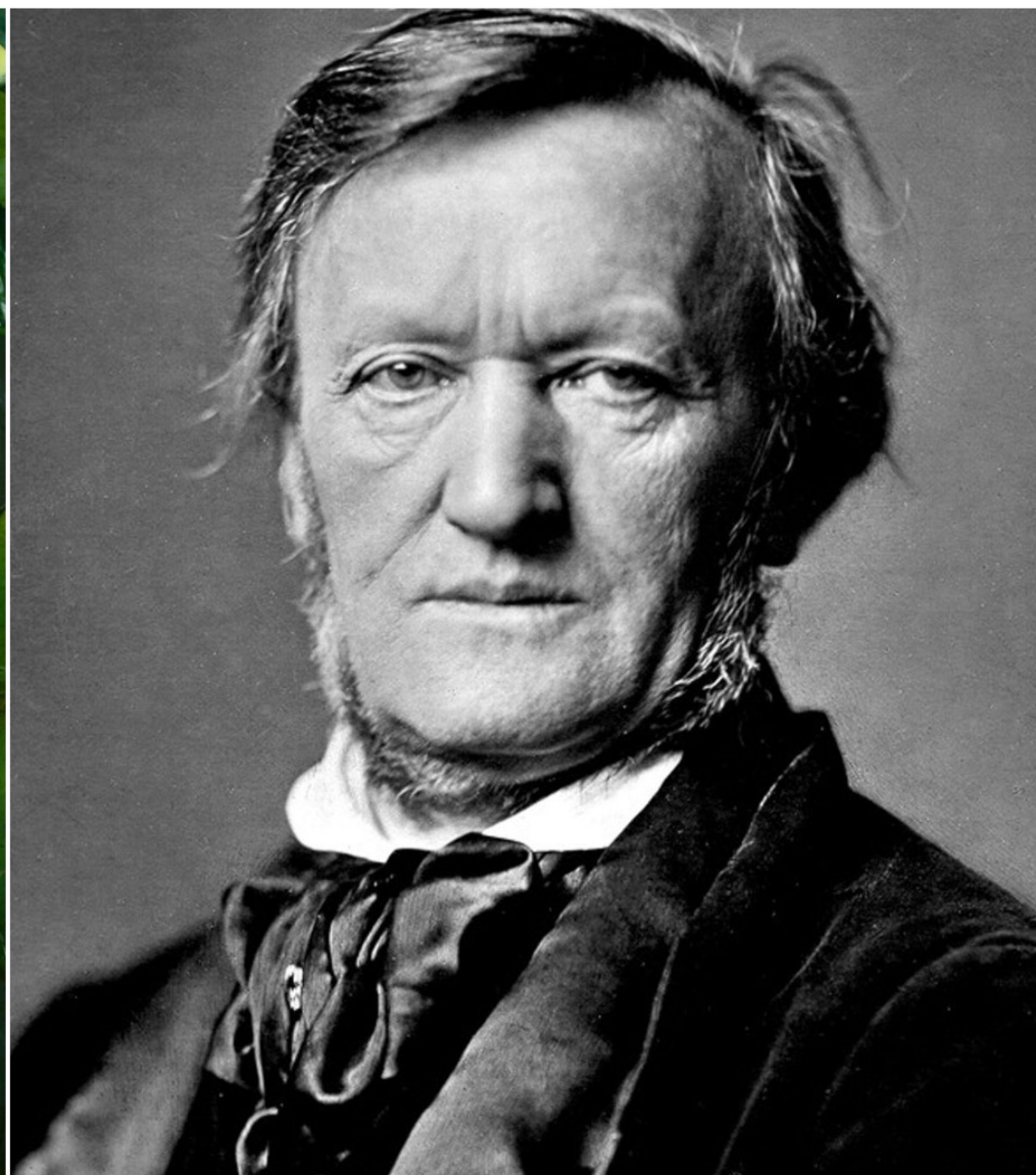
‘no minor chords’

harmonic language

“No music in an MGM film is to contain a minor chord.”

- major (happy) minor (sad) chords...
- consonance v dissonance
- Harmonic language – The **vertical** dimension in music
- tonal – atonal
- voicing's





‘Melancholia’
as
Wagnerian Music
Drama

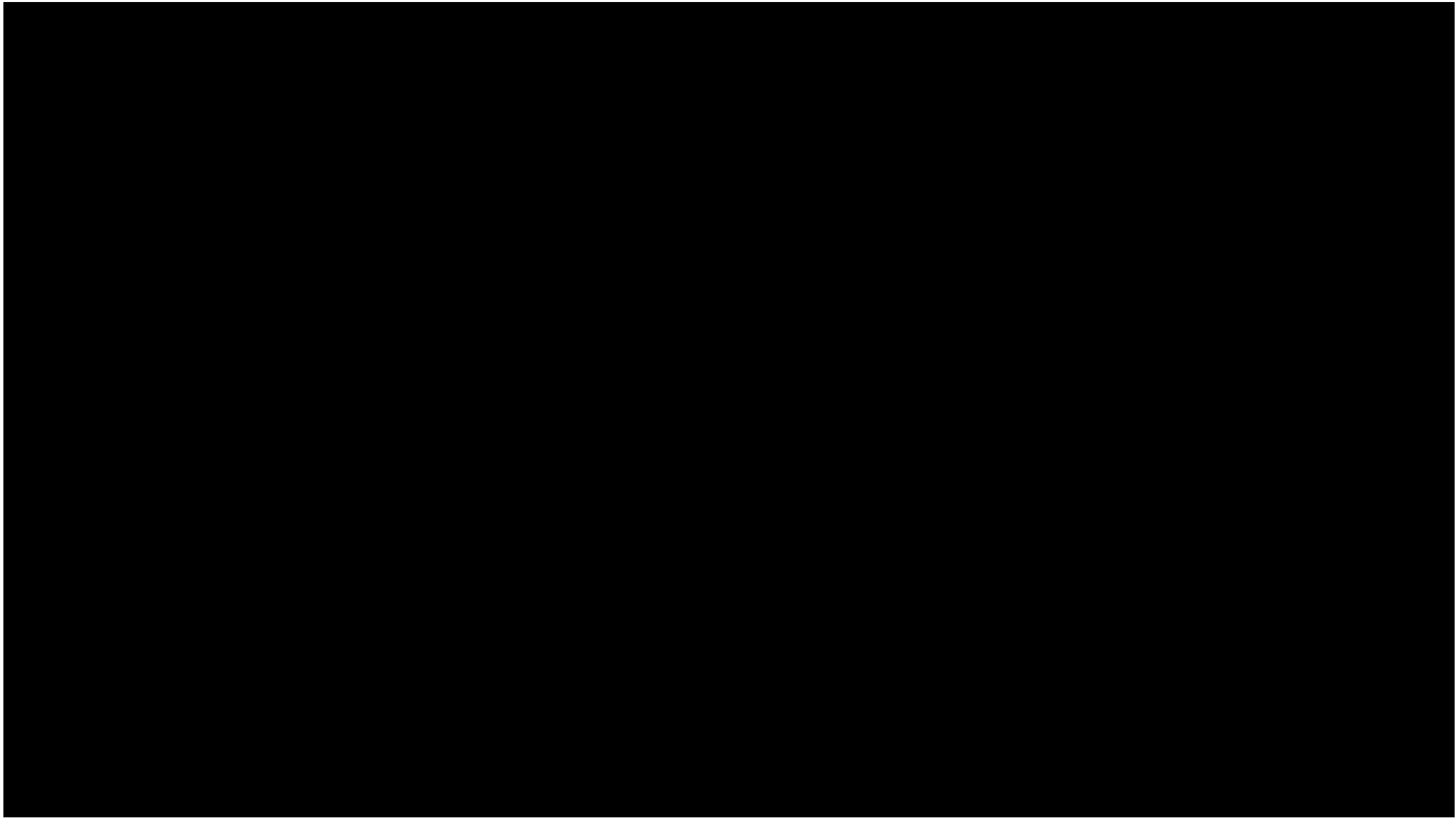




the *tristan* chord

after *Tristan and Isolde*
by Richard Wagner

- Pivotal moment in History of Western Music when tonality collapses – extreme '**chromaticism**'
- Second Viennese School – Schoenberg
- Atonality



dynamics and impressionistic silence

- loud, soft – *crescendo, piano*
- Italian terms – useful to learn
- *accelerando, diminuendo*...speeding up, slowing down
- silence – not absolute but relative

Film Score v Soundtrack

- A **film score** is the music composed specifically for the movie to serve and enhance the story. It is usually instrumental only so as not to compete with **dialog**. It is also called **underscore**.
- The term **soundtrack** can usually refers to only the just songs in a movie, excluding the score.

NOTE:

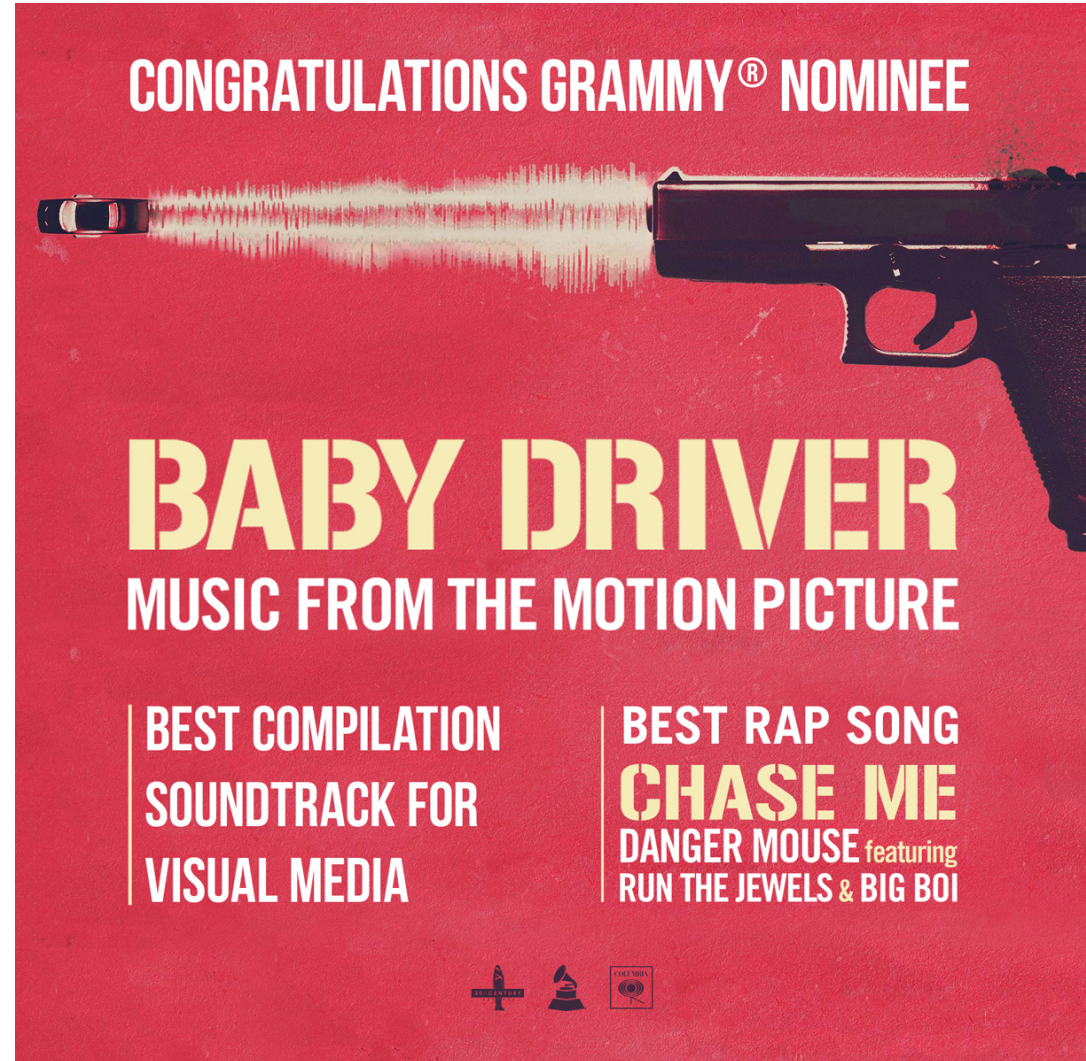
Original **scores** are often referred to as original sound tracks (**OST**), and will usually be released along-side the mainstream **soundtrack**. ... The original **score** is mostly instrumental **music** that was composed for the **film**; the **soundtrack** is a collection of popular **music** that influences the **film** or is featured within it.

Function of the Soundtrack

Baby Driver

Beyond Cultural Context

The music Baby listens to becomes a major part of the movie's score and also serves to punctuate many of the film's amazing chase sequences;



Compare and Contrast

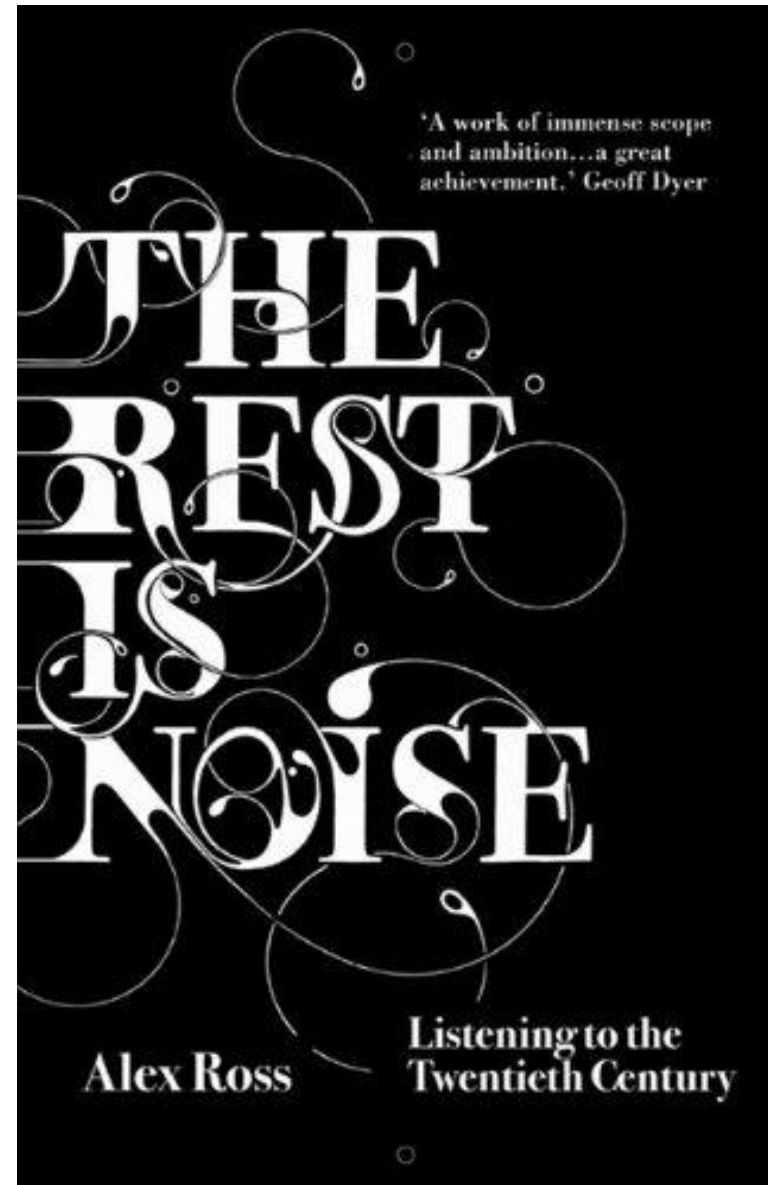
King Kong

1933 v 2005

Max Steiner v James Newton Howard



*The Rest is
Noise*





Shutter island | (2010) | Martin Scorsese



- Opening scene begins with a mysterious and distinctive shot
- We see only thick fog which encourages the audience to see what appears next
- This type of shot builds a strong feeling of misery and suspicion
- The audience do not have an idea of a specific location
- Tension is created through deep, low instrumental music which makes the audience think about the place and change the mood
- It gives the impression that something is hidden
- Use of fog is effective as it creates a cold and unpleasant atmosphere

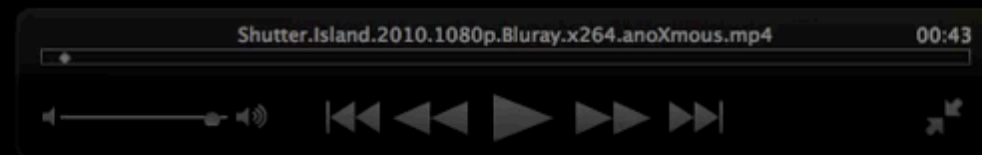


INGRAM MARSHALL



FOG TROPES • GRADUAL REQUIEM • GAMBUH I

BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS 1954





Arrival (2016) – Denis Villeneuve

CHAPTERS

- 00:00 **HEPTAPOD
COMMUNICATION**
- 04:05 HUMAN
COMMUNICATION
- 07:55 HEPTAPOD SHIP
TEXTURES
- 09:00 BIRDS
- 09:36 HAZMAT POV

ARRIVAL

SOUND DESIGN COMMENTARY

ACTUAL SOUNDS FROM THE FILM



Contemporary Film Scoring – New Aesthetics and Compositional Techniques

Mica Levi

Film Music Composer



Under the skin (2013) Jonathan Glazer



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<https://www.worldsoundtrackawards.com/en>