

The Effect of Music Theory in Hollywood Film Scoring

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Abstract

Film music has developed for nearly 130 years. In those years, the film industry has experienced war, depression, despair, and hope, but with the change of new technology and new trends of thought generation after generation, film music has developed and matured. For more than a century, the film music industry has been brilliant, it has left many immortal music masterpieces on the film and television. This paper will consider three aspects — the background of film music, Hollywood film music theory, and the importance of Hollywood film music. The objective of this paper is to provide some useful information for the fans of film music.

Keywords: film music, Hollywood film music theory, imitate film music

1. Background

Music has been an integral part of visual entertainment for thousands of years. It plays a variety of roles in various platforms, such as opera, musical theater, and variety shows. Sometimes it is an integral part of the entertainment, while other times it is an accompaniment to other forms of visual or verbal content. It can also be used to enhance the spectacle or create an emotional reaction for the audience. There are two intentions of how the music is being selected: First is to enhance or control or motivate the mood of the audience, and the second is to create a more sophisticated atmosphere. Celluloid films were the earliest examples of showing images in a silent manner (Scaruffi, 2007). Without music accompaniment, the movie would be lacking. Initially, it was up to the theater musicians to choose the music they would like to play in the movie. As time went on, film producers started to exert more control over the music they wanted to use. They would even specify the music to be featured in the movie, including a special arrangement for the occasion. It is interesting to note that during the silent era, Charlie Chaplin was one of the most prominent entertainers. He composed the music for some of his own movies such as *City Lights* (Scaruffi, 2007).

1.1 The Early Years of Film Music

The techniques employed for synchronizing recorded sound with film were developed in the late 1920s, leading to new opportunities for the use of music in films other than a live accompaniment. The first “talkie” movie was released by Al Jolson in 1927, and the movie’s title is *Jazz Singer*. The movie featured Jolson singing as well as other scenes where music accompanied the action, similar to earlier silent movies. These two kinds of scenes serve as examples of the two genres of music in movies that still exist today: First is diegetic or source music, which is music that is heard or performed by characters in the movies. The second is nondiegetic music, also referred to as underscoring. It is background music that shows the audience a mood or other features of a scene or character (Burkholder et al., 2019, p. 873). While marking a shift of how music was utilized in film, it also sparked a debate. Some argue that using music in film can compromise the artistic integrity of both the music and the film.

Composers and filmmakers may clash over the balance between artistic expression and commercial appeal. Other discussion on whether music in films genuinely enhances the narrative and emotional experience or if it distracts the viewers from the storytelling. Another debate might center on the cultural implications of using

certain types of music in films, including issues of cultural appropriation and the global impact of Western cinematic practices. The importance of music in the finished product was also acknowledged. There were numerous awards given for this contribution, such as the Academy Awards for Best Score and Best Song, both of which started in 1934 (Scaruffi, 2007).

Camille Saint-Saëns is widely recognized as the first composer to write an original film score. He wrote the music for the film *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise* (*The Assassination of the Duke of Guise*), Op. 128, in 1908. Saint-Saëns was compelled to compose it for twelve players (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, five strings, piano and harmonium), since the Salle Charras in Paris, where the movie was to be screened, was small (Macdonald, 2019).

“I realize from my royalties that my music is a presence in cinemas, which have become a godsend for me,” he stated in 1915. This could be a reference to the increasing popularity of his instrumental pieces, such as “Danse macabre” Op. 40, which was also included in the scoring for silent movies. Thus, *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise* is a turning-point in the history of film music (Macdonald, 2019).

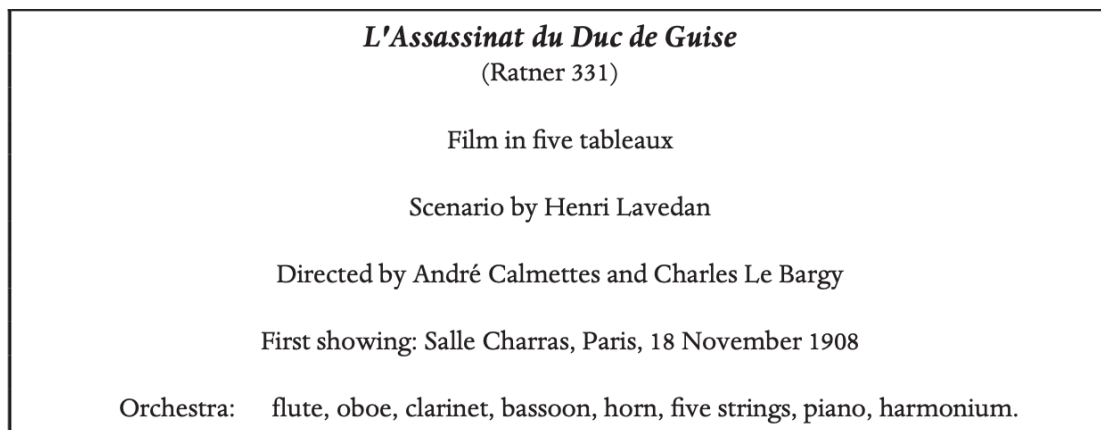


Figure 1. *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (Macdonald, 2019)

There are other examples of film music that were borrowed from various sources, such as works by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov or Sergei Rachmaninoff. This process involved modifying the orchestration, tempo, or length of the piece to match the visual action and emotional tone. Rimsky-Korsakov's symphonic suite *Scheherazade* Op. 35 could be rearranged to evoke an exotic or adventurous atmosphere in a movie. For example, the American musical film — *Song of Scheherazade* (1947), directed by Walter Reisch, features a love story, centering around an alluring dancer, who inspired Rimsky-Korsakov's famous *Scheherazade* (Predota, 2019). Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18, known for its emotional intensity, could conceivably be quoted to underscore dramatic scenes. One notable movie that borrows from Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 is *Brief Encounter* (1945), directed by David Lean, which prominently features the second movement (*adagio sostenuto*) of the piano concerto to enhance the emotional and dramatic impact of the movie (*Brief Encounter Theme Is UK's Top Classic | UK News*, 2005).

Max Steiner's score for the famous romantic American movie *Casablanca* (1942) features the German and French national anthems, thus demonstrating the effectiveness of borrowed materials (Scaruffi, 2007).

Viennese Composer, Max Steiner (1888-1971), was often referred to as the “father of film music.” He was a child prodigy, who conducted his first operetta at the age of twelve. By the time he turned professional, he worked full-time in the music industry as a composer, arranger, or conductor at fifteen. Steiner studied with Gustav Mahler, and he worked for Broadway productions for fifteen years as a film composer with PKO Pictures in Hollywood (Lai, 2022).

Steiner secured a wide following because of his theme for *Gone with the Wind* (1939), “Tara's Theme” is one of the most recognizable melodies in film history, capturing the epic and romantic essence of the story. ‘Leitmotif’, also known as leading motive, is a term pioneered by the 18th century German composer, Richard Wagner. It is often used to synchronize the music with the visual action, often designating specific motions with musical effects. Strong associations are used in the music to portray mood, character, and place; for instances like employing symphonic Romanticism for dramatic movements, primitivism to portray the African environment, and the utilization of modernist techniques, such as harsh dissonance to depict extreme emotions like fear and

terror. These characteristics collectively help to define film score (Burkholder et al., 2019, p. 875). Steiner innovatively imitated Wagner in his use of leitmotifs, where specific themes are associated with characters or ideas to create a cohesive and emotionally resonant score that deeply enhanced the story. These pioneering techniques (lush orchestration, memorable melodies) were used in other films, such as *King Kong* (1933), *Now, Voyager* (1942), and *The Searchers* (1956) that influenced generations of film composers (Rodda & Steiner, 2023).

Many other European composers, such as Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Dimitri Zinovich Tiomkin, played pivotal roles in shaping Hollywood film music. Their music was inspired by the musical language of Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Debussy. Hollywood studios contributed to the growth of film scores that were completely incorporated into the dramatic action, such as the music for an opera, as composer Korngold famously put it, “an opera without singing”. Korngold’s *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940) are celebrated for their orchestration and dramatic intensity, while Tiomkin, influenced by European music traditions, made a significant impact on Hollywood with his diverse scoring style. He was known for various genres, including thrillers like *Strangers on a Train* (1951) and *Dial M for Murder* (1954), as well as American Western movies like *High Noon* (1952). Both composers brought their rich European musical heritage and classical training to the American film industry, as a result, creating esteemed scores. (Burkholder et al., 2019, p. 873)

Music played an important role in animated films, such as Walt Disney’s groundbreaking animation *Steamboat Willie* (1928) and the Bugs Bunny cartoons composed by Carl Stalling to full-length features, starting with Walt Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) which featured a score by Frank Churchill. All of these film genres grew to rely heavily on music to drive the audience’s emotions and provide context for the action on screen (Burkholder et al., 2019, p. 874). Some music for different film genres is described in the next section.

1.2 Music for Different Film Genres

During the war years, there was a great opportunity for filmmakers to create both equivalently patriotic and emotional music. Many prominent composers were involved in this movement, including Irving Berlin and Dmitri Shostakovich (Scaruffi, 2007). Berlin provided the music and lyrics for *This Is the Army* (1943), which was a central part of the United States’ propaganda efforts (Lehman, 2018). It celebrates bravery and sacrifices of the men and women serving in the armed forces. Through its songs, performances, and storyline, the production aims to honor the dedication and commitment of those who serve their country, simultaneously instill a sense of national pride and unity among the audiences. In addition, it also showcases the spirit of camaraderie and resilience in the face of adversity (Bergreen, 2022). In the Soviet Union, the government controlled every aspect of the citizens’ life, including music; thus, leading to the formation of the Union of Soviet Composers (Burkholder et al., 2019, p. 886-888). Shostakovich was being condemned and censured for socialist realism. In order to support for himself and his family, Shostakovich was coerced into writing film scores, like *Встреча на Эльбе* [translit. Vstrecha na Elb’e; Meeting on the Elbe] (1949) and *Падение Берлина* [translit. Padenie Berlina; The Fall of Berlin] (1949) (Schwenk, 2014).

Many of the films that were released after the war were set in a war-time setting. A few notable examples include *The Dam Busters* (1955) with its march by Eric Coates, *633 Squadron* (1964) by Ron Goodwin and *The Great Escape* (1963) by Elmer Bernstein (Lehman, 2018).

After World War II, film music began to incorporate more diverse influences, including jazz, avant-garde, and popular music. Henry Mancini exemplified this trend of blending traditional orchestral elements with contemporary sounds. The scores of Mancini, which at times seemed designed to maximize possible use of their individual cues in a LP soundtrack album, could effortlessly transition between traditional orchestrated backing that reinforced the story and highlighted unique songs and enduring instrumental themes. Other popular music-trained film composers, such as John Barry and Ennio Morricone, also adopted this tactic (Cooke, 2010, p. 189). Mancini’s work covered a wide range of genres, including comedies, dramas, and thrillers. Famous films such as *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961), in which he composed the Oscar-winning song *Moon River*, and *Days of Wine and Roses* (1962), highlight his ability to adapt his musical style to different cinematic contexts. He also scored for *Charade* (1963), *Touch of Evil* (1958), and *Wait Until Dark* (1982), all of which demonstrated his unique ability to enhance the narrative and emotional impact of the films through his music. Thus, his work has had a profound influence on film music that seamlessly blends sophisticated orchestral techniques with popular music elements (Cooke, 2010, p. 189).

The evolution of Hollywood harmony continued into the modern era with composers like John Williams, who revitalized the orchestral tradition in films like *Star Wars* (1977). He worked closely with George Lucas, the creator of the original *Star Wars* trilogy and Steven Spielberg, who directed the film *Jaws* (1975). Apart from his prominent collaborations with Lucas and Spielberg, he also contributed to two other immensely popular film franchises: *Home Alone* (1990) and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (2001) both directed by Chris

Columbus (Cooke, 2010, p. 234).

Music theories that apply to Hollywood film music will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

2. The Hollywood Harmony

The ‘Hollywood Harmony’ concept of Frank Lehman aims to analyze the various elements of the film music industry’s “Hollywood Sound.” It focuses on three main factors: the first one is the continued evolution of 19th century tonal practice. The second one is chromaticism using consonant triads as a key component of the Hollywood sound, and the last one is chromatic style’s association with depictions of amazement in cinema. Some of the compositional resources used include chord successions, pitch relationships, and tone idioms (Lehman, 2018). For instance, when someone refers to a piece as “sounding like film music,” the characteristic that makes it so is the treatment of pitch. The jump-scare stinger chord and the delayed cadence are two examples of how the transformation of a chord’s tone into an expressive device can be done through a common process.

The richness of Hollywood’s harmonic language is largely attributed to its incorporation of various idioms. There are a variety of harmonic quirks that are uncommon or distinctive from other styles, yet they appear in the cinematic tonality. Some of these characteristics include the proclivity for chromaticism, which is an inheritance of the Impressionist and Romantic practices (Lehman, 2018). Contrary to diatonicism, chromaticism refers to the employment of notes or chords (marked by accidentals) that are not included in the main key’s diatonic scale. Chromaticity was a kind of dissonance for melodic and harmonic expressiveness in the Baroque and Classical periods. Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*’ is one example that shows how chromaticism and diatonicism coexisted during the Romantic era. It transcended tonality in the 20th century, and in atonal and twelve-tone works, as its importance within the diatonic system is no longer relevant (Koh, 1991, p. 30). For example, there is the “slide” progression, which is a rare and delightful harmonic motion in 19th century repertoires. It can be described as a once-in-a-symphony type of occurrence in works by Franz Schubert or Johannes Brahms (Lehman, 2018).

The slide keeps the middle note of a harmonic triad constant and moves the outside notes up or down to form another triad, such as C# minor to C major or B major to C minor. The word “S” has become a common thing in contemporary film composers’ vocabulary (Lehman, 2018). It has been used in various types of films, such as *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Inception* (2010), and *A Beautiful Mind* (2001) (Lehman, 2018). It is an example of “Neo-Riemannian theory in the movies”.

2.1 Neo-Riemannian Theory in the Movies

	Transformation	Action on CM/Cm	Definition
Basic	T_n	$T_2(CM) = DM$ $T_2(Cm) = Dm$	Transpose by n-many semitones
	Parallel	$P(CM) = Cm$ $P(Cm) = CM$	Go to parallel major/minor
	Leading Tone	$L(CM) = Em$ $L(Cm) = A \flat M$	Go to leading-tone exchange major/minor
	Relative	$R(CM) = Am$ $R(Cm) = E \flat M$	Go to relative major/minor

Figure 2.

Hugo Riemann created the concepts about the “paradigmatic” (this-for-that) and “syntagmatic” (this-with-that) links of major and minor triads. He was considered as the most prominent music scholar in Europe around 1900. The standardized tonal harmonic progression consists of I-IV-V-I (or tonic-subdominant-dominant-tonic) progressions, even if one (or more) of these primary triads were altered, as long as it preserves the syntactic function of the primary triad. This is Riemann’s notion of function (Riemann, 1893; Neumeyer & Neumeyer, 2014, p. 479). For example, in the C major, the progression C-F-G-C could be changed to C-d-G-C without changing the grammaticality of the harmonic progression because the d still contains subdominant function, or predominant function. The case of the letter as a triadic root represents the tonality; upper case stands for major, lower case for minor, REL (RELative), Lewin’s English-language term for Riemann’s conversion of F to d,

refers to any transformation that modifies a triad's tonality while keeping two common tones divided by a major third (Neumeier & Neumeier, 2014, p. 480).

One of the main areas of research that has been carried out following the work of American music theorist, David Benjamin Lewin (1933-2003), who explored group-theoretical possibilities of the Riemannian transformations. In 1989, Brian Hyer presented a study on the three transformations, which are PARallel, Leading Tone and RELative (abbreviated as PAR, LT, and REL respectively), and how they can generate groups. Richard Cohn focused on the three main elements of the voice – P, L, and R – and he developed a variety of chord progressions that were pleasing to the ear and could be easily changed. Adrian Childs stated: “The initial works on the theory of the neo-Riemannian transformations focused on the operas of Richard Wagner, however, a fundamental problem emerged when it came to the analysis of the complex harmonic vocabulary of the composers. According to the researchers, the composers who seem to be most suited for the analysis of neo-Riemannian transformations rarely limited their vocabulary to simple triads.” The transformations were then applied to the excerpts from various works from the 19th century (Neumeier & Neumeier, 2014, p. 481-2).

There is tension between the inherent complexity of filmic pantriadicism and the need to resist theorization. Therefore, it is often said that the idiom is at once well-understood and intrinsically challenging. One of the most significant systems that Riemann created was the tonic, subdominant and dominant. It is the basic function that modern music theorists take for granted.

In Riemann's scheme, minor pitch changes can be brought out through the chord's tone identity without affecting its underlying structure (Lehman, 2018, p. 96). Instead of treating functional displacements as intrinsic properties, Lewin proposed that Riemannian transformations should be treated as actions on a chord. This concept, as depicted by the diagram below, is referred to as *Harmonieschritte*, which is similar to how one would perform actions on a chord (Lehman, 2018, p. 96).

Here are some examples of Neo-Riemannian progressions in movie music: Elliot Goldenthal's approach to film scoring is distinguished by his ability to blend different musical genres and his innovative use of sound. His use of chromaticism is primarily influenced by German late Romantic models, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, and the early style of Arnold Schoenberg. The majority of Goldenthal's compositions feature triads in peculiar pairings that wildly swirl. Simultaneously, the characteristics of functional diatonicism, particularly V - I motions, can be unexpectedly rare. In his *Public Enemies* (2009) soundtrack, the minor dominant is found in an epic lament and is an example of fairly typical diatonic syntax. Nonetheless, situations such as the merely functionally allusive N progression in *Demolition Man* (1993) are more widespread (Lehman, 2018, p. 97).

Figure 3.

For example, in Figure 3 from *Final Fantasy* (2001). The A minor chord transforms to Eb minor. This diminished 5th interval is also a devil's interval, which is a combination of notes that create a malicious atmosphere, thus depicting how the giant spirit monster is towering over the soldier, who had accepted her demise (Lehman, 2018, p. 97).

Figure 4.

Another excerpt is Figure 4, when DM modulates to Dm in a scene from *Titus* (1999). This modulation demonstrates the scene when the soldiers brought back the corpses and performed a ceremonial war choreography. The key of D Major represents triumph, while D minor is often associated with Mozart's Requiem in D minor (Lehman, 2018, p. 97).



Figure 5.

The last excerpt, as seen in Figure 5 is from “Michael Collins” (1996). The A minor key depicts the solemn scene in the aftermath of the unsuccessful 1916 Dublin uprising, as the Irish soldiers surrendered to the British. The change to C Major coincides with a fallen soldier, being carried off by his comrades (Lehman, 2018, p. 97).

In the next section I will discuss how Hollywood film music is recreated.

3. How Hollywood Film Music Progressions Is Recreated

Scott Murphy is a renowned professor of music theory at the University of Kansas, with a strong focus on film music. He shares his insights through various platforms, including academic publications and accessible online content. He has a YouTube channel where he demonstrates techniques used in Hollywood film music, aiming to make these concepts understandable to a broad audience (Neumeyer & Neumeyer, 2014, p. 471).

His work includes analysis of major tritone progressions in film music, as evidenced by his study on the 2002 film *Treasure Planet*. In art music, the tritone progression has a long and varied tradition of extra-musical connection. The Romantic and post-Romantic repertoires of the late 19th and early 20th centuries would become some of the most significant sources of inspiration for Hollywood music (Yorgason & Eason, n.d.).

For example, “Pandemonium” from Berlioz’s *La damnation de Faust* opens with a major tritone progression (MTTP). This MTTP is a triadic manifestation of the time-honored *diabolus in musica*, which is occasionally related with the devil or hell. Another well-known example of MTTP is found in Stravinsky’s *Petrouchka*; whilst Richard Strauss created a minor version for his opera, *Elektra*. In general, the tritone progression functions as a concise symbol of Romanticism itself, particularly when it is emphasized and separated from tonal syntax (Yorgason & Eason, n.d.).

There are four steps to recreate the progressions in Hollywood film music. The first step is to learn how to play a major triad; an uppercase M for major. For example, pick a note on the keyboard, and that will be the root of the triad. For instance, using the note ‘G’ as the root of the triad. From this root note, move four half steps notes to the right, and it will be B. Now from the B, move three half steps to the right and it will be D. Therefore, creating the three notes of G-B-D, creating a major triad, also known as a 4-3 chord (O’Donnell, 2018).

The second step is to learn to play a minor triad. Since the major triad has a 4-3 progression, the minor triad is 3-4. For instance, using the note ‘C’ as the root of the triad. From this root note, move three half steps notes to the right, and it will be Eb. Now from the Eb, move four half steps to the right and it will be G. Therefore, creating the three notes of C-Eb-G, creating a minor triad, also known as a 3-4 chord (O’Donnell, 2018).

Step three is to measure the distance between the triads. For example, I will use the triad ‘G-B-D’ to represent Major, and ‘C-Eb-G’ to represent minor. The root of a triad is the leftmost note, in this case, G and C respectively. There are five half steps between the notes G and C. With both the G-B-D and C- Eb-G triads being played, resulting in a major -5- minor, its abbreviation – M5m. This is shown in the picture below Figure 6 (O’Donnell, 2018).

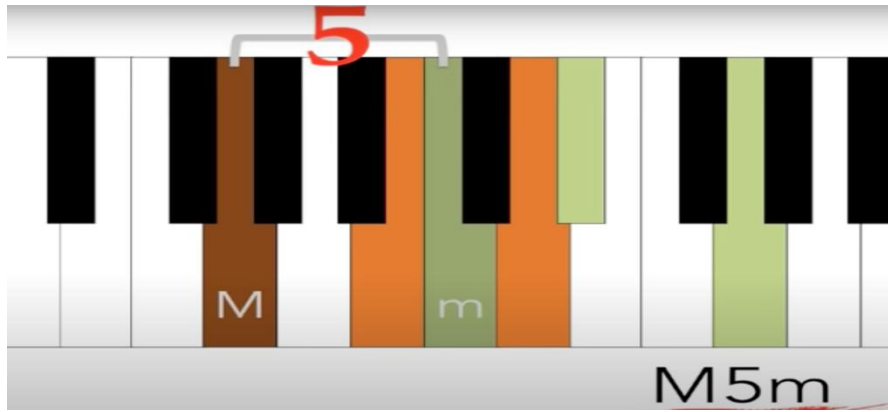


Figure 6.

Step four: memorize certain combinations of triads and their associations. Now we know how to play major or minor triads and have learned to measure the distance between those triads and know how to label the combination of triads (O'Donnell, 2018).

Below are ten triad combinations, commonly found in Hollywood movie music. For example, a mysterious movie moment will use a minor to major, and some of these associations have been around in Hollywood for quite some time.

All of these are still fairly common in contemporary films, music and other multimedia, such as television shows and video games. For example, M2M: which describes protagonism. The triads of Db-F-Ab and Eb-G-Bb was used in Alan Silvestris' *Back to the Future* (1985). Chord M6M depicts the atmosphere of being in outer space. Triads A-C#-E and Eb-G-Bb can be found in James Horner's *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982). Howard Shore's *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001) utilized M8M (G-B-D and Eb-G-Bb), to depict the fantasy world. M4m symbolizes sadness and loss. Bb-D- F and D-F-A are related keys. An example of the M4m chord can be found in *Lost* (2004), a series that Michael Giacchino composed for. M5m portrays the setting of the Middle Eastern. G-B-D and C-Eb-G are depicted in David Arnold's *Stargate* (1994) (O'Donnell, 2018).

Step five is understanding the inversions and applying them as compound intervals.

On the piano game board, the pattern repeats after one octave (or twelve half steps), as shown in the diagram below (from G to G) — Figure 7 (O'Donnell, 2018).

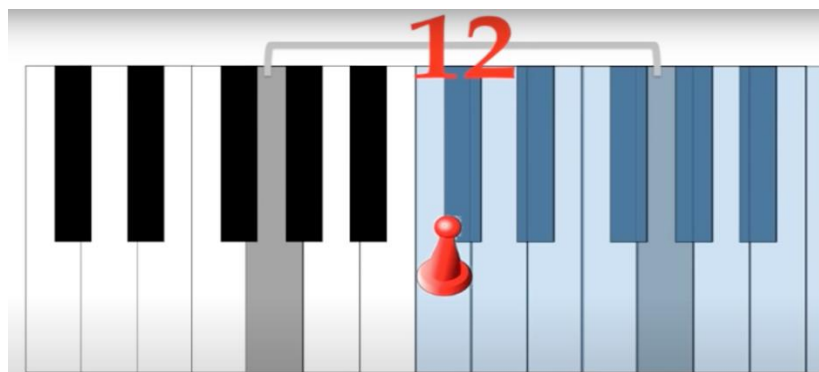


Figure 7.

The layout of the piano keyboard can be modified to become the layout of a game board, as shown in the diagram below Figure 8 (Murphy, 2015).

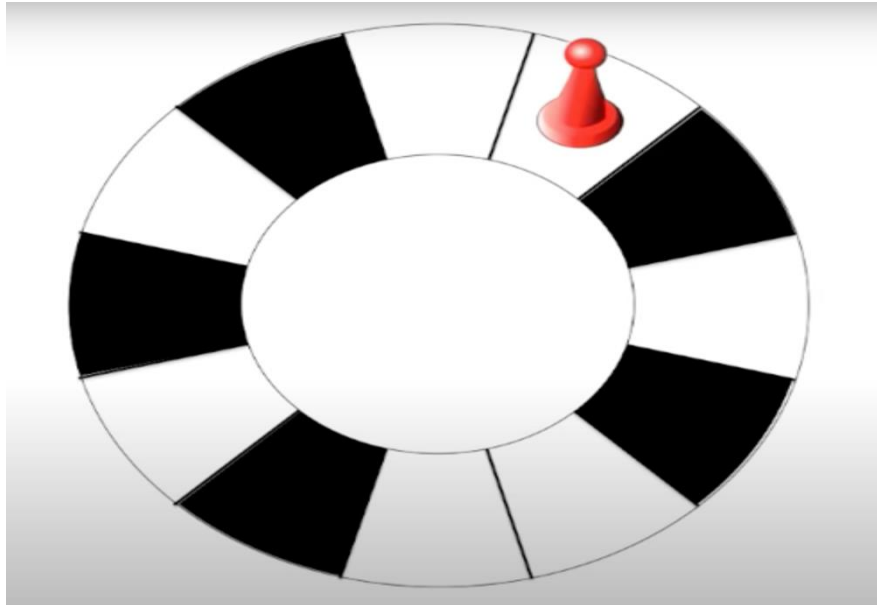


Figure 8.

If starting on C, when moved forward three half steps, it will land on Eb. When moving backwards nine half steps, the result is the same.

For instance, in *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, the M8M chord consists of Ab-C-Eb and E-G#-B. Building on the 4-3 progression, which means four half steps up from the root (from Ab to C), and then three half steps up from the second note (from C to Eb). Based on the diagram below, the '3' in the 4-3 progression can be rewritten as '-9', thus transposing the Eb to an octave lower (Murphy, 2015).



Figure 9.

The use of chromatic mediant relations would be talked about in the following part.

4. Chromatic Mediants

Chromatic mediant relations are used in a lot of film, music, and video game music, as it is a stylistic feature. Mediant means the diatonic iii chord or vi chord in the key of C major. The mediant (iii) and submediant (vi) are secondary chords in the harmonic framework of a key. For instance, when the key is major, the secondary chords will have a minor quality. Em is the mediant, and Am is the submediant, as shown in the diagram below (O'Donnell, 2018).

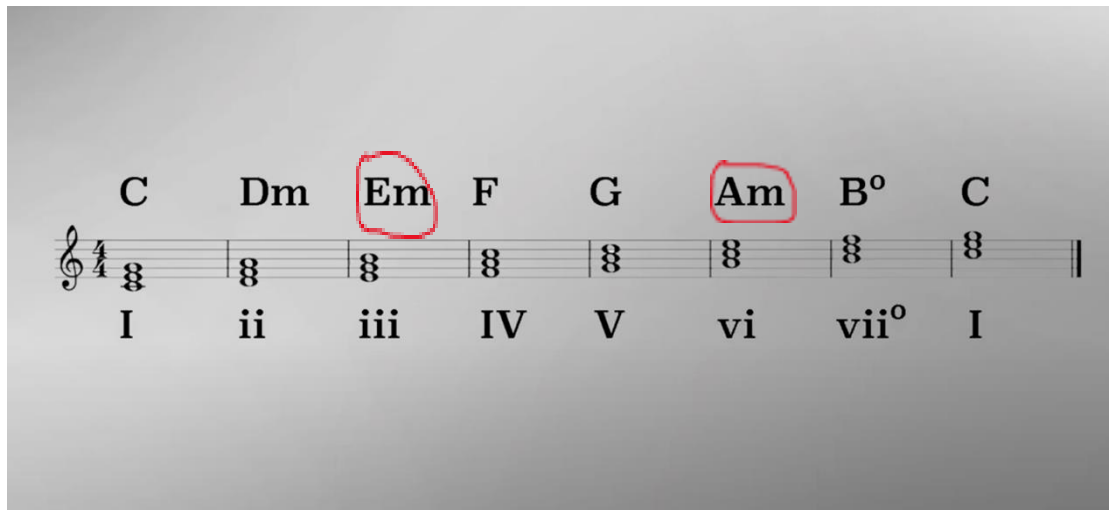


Figure 10.

Chromatic means any note that does not belong to the diatonic key. For example, in the key of C, the B-flat would be a chromatic note. Therefore, in order to build a chromatic mediant chord, the pitches of the diatonic chord have to be altered.

Here is a chart that shows all the types of alterations that can be made to the mediant chords (O’Donnell, 2018).

Types of major chromatic mediants	
I-iii-I	I-vi-I
I-III-I	I-VI-I
I-bIII-I	I-bVI-I
I-biii-I	I-bvi-I

Figure 11.

For example, in the key of C Major, the diatonic notes of the mediant are E-G-B, creating an E minor chord. In order to alter it into a chromatic mediant, the G in the mediant chord can be raised by half a step, turning it from G to G#; as a result, creating a major mediant (III) chord of E-G#-B. By moving the note by half a step, the chord has changed its tonality entirely. The following diagrams indicated the diatonic chords refers to Figure 12 and altered chords refers to Figure 13:

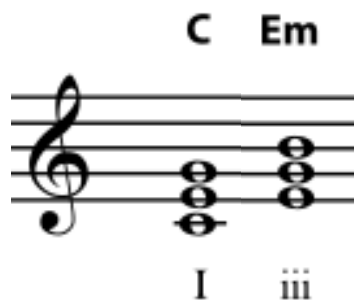


Figure 12. (diatonic chords) (5.5 *Beginning Harmonic Analysis*, n.d.).

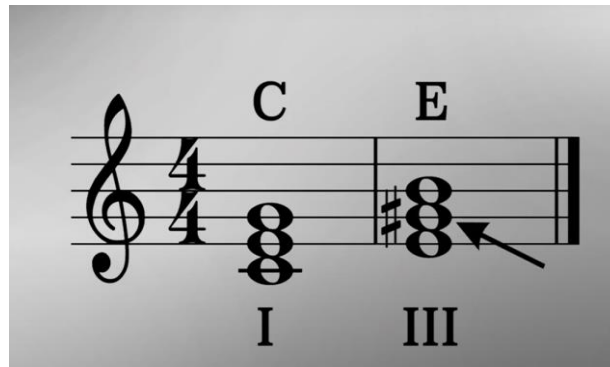


Figure 13. (Altered chords) (O'Donnell, 2018)

An example is the song *Belle*, from the Disney movie *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), written by Alan Menken. As marked in the image below, the DM progressed into a FM, instead of the diatonic Fm (MENKEN, n.d.).

Figure 14. (MENKEN, n.d.)

The second option is to turn the diatonic mediant chord into a flattened major chord (b III). When the root and the fifth notes are lowered down half a step, resulting in the chord Eb-G-Bb (O'Donnell, 2018).

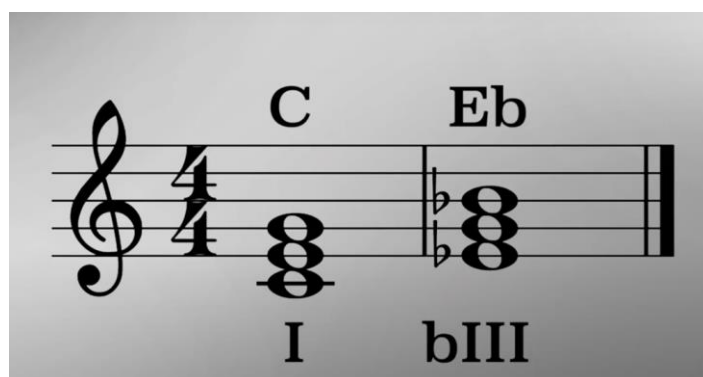


Figure 15.

An example is *Hail to the Princess Aurora* from the Disney movie *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), scored by George Bruns. The diagram below shows the use of the flattened major mediant from CM to EbM (Hal Leonard Corp, 2002, p. 41).

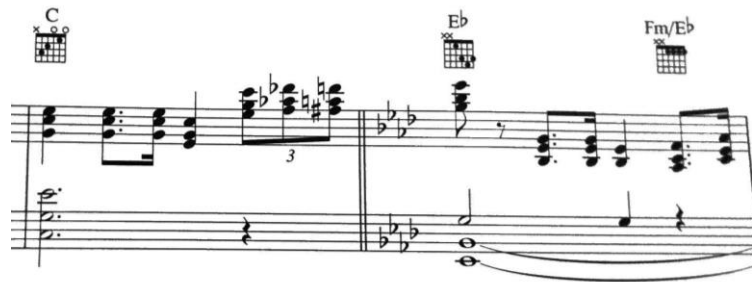


Figure 16. (Hal Leonard Corp, 2002, p. 41)

The third way for the alteration, is to lower all of the notes of the diatonic mediant chord by half a step. This results in a flattened minor chord (biii), with the notes consisting of Eb-Gb-Bb (O'Donnell, 2018).

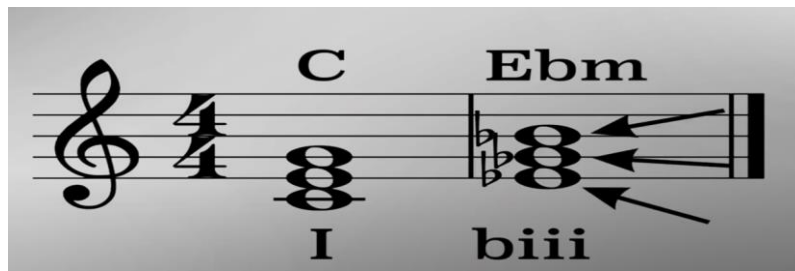


Figure 17.

The following pictures shows the I - vi progression from C major to its relative minor, A minor. Its minor quality adds contrast to the primary major chords, enriching the harmonic possibilities and providing greater emotional variety in musical compositions (O'Donnell, 2018).

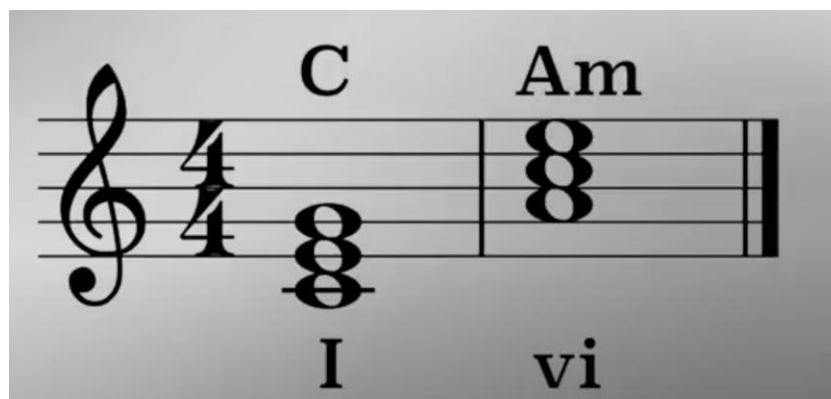


Figure 18.

The submediant chord can be altered by raising the third note by half a step, by turning it into a major sixth (VI) chord, with the notes A-C#-E (O'Donnell, 2018).



Figure 19.

Another option for chromatic submediant is to flatten both the root and the fifth, thus creating a flattened major sixth (bVI) chord, with the notes of Ab-C-Eb (O'Donnell, 2018).

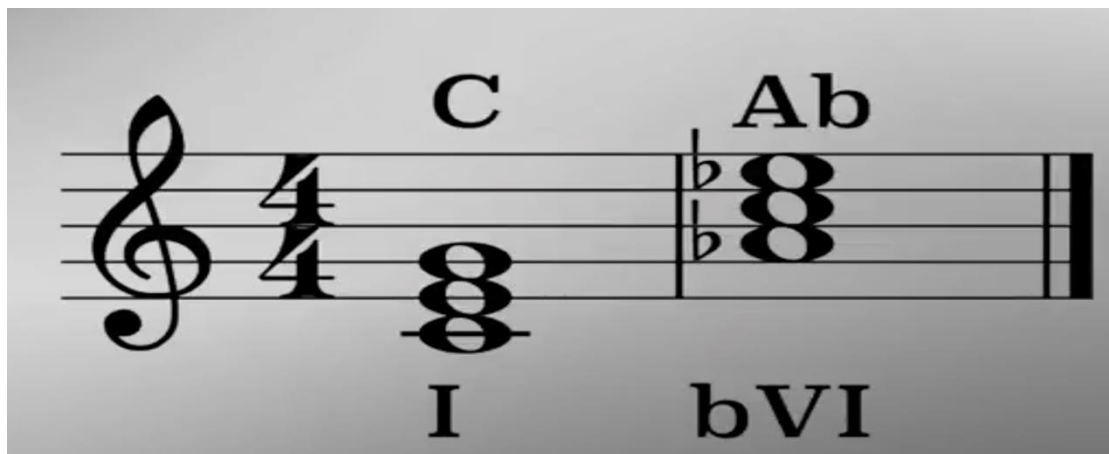


Figure 20.

An example is taken from the theme of Aragorn and Arwen, which is the song *Aníron*, featured in *The Lord of the Rings* Original Motion Picture.

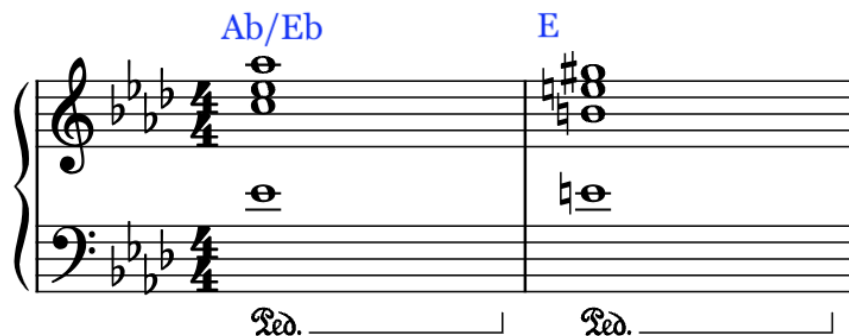


Figure 21. (Musescore, 2022)

The third option to create a chromatic submediant is by flattening the entire minor submediant chord. This brings about a flattened minor sixth (bvi) chord, with the notes of Ab-Cb-Eb (O'Donnell, 2018).

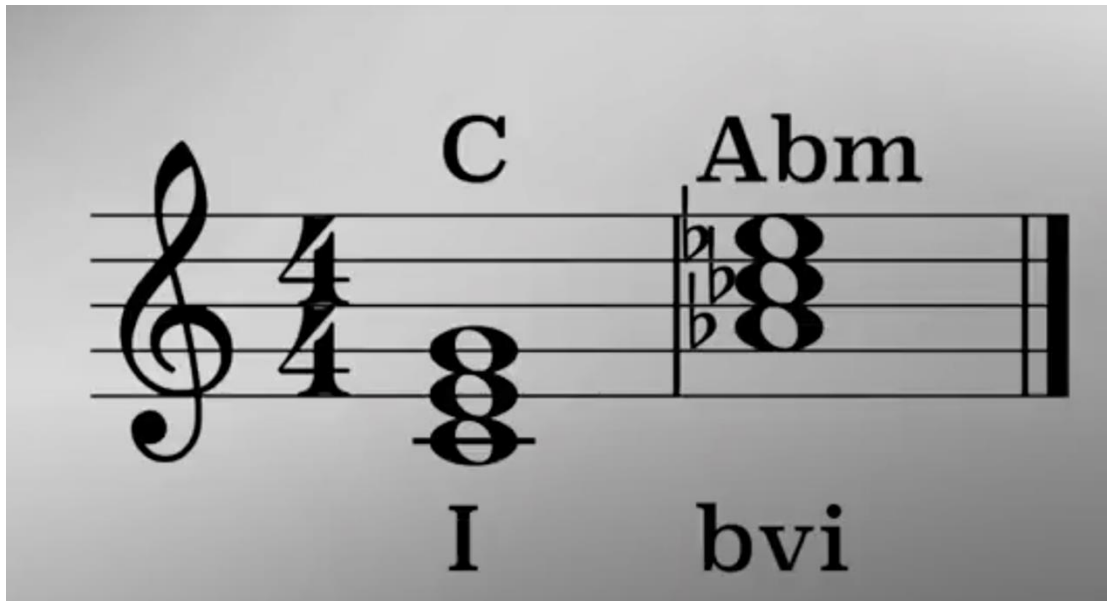


Figure 22.

Next, I will demonstrate using the minor keys. The following diagram shows the diatonic chords in the key of C minor. Similarly to the major key, the mediant chords are still III and VI. The only difference is that in a minor key, the mediant and submediant are diatonically major chords (O'Donnell, 2018).

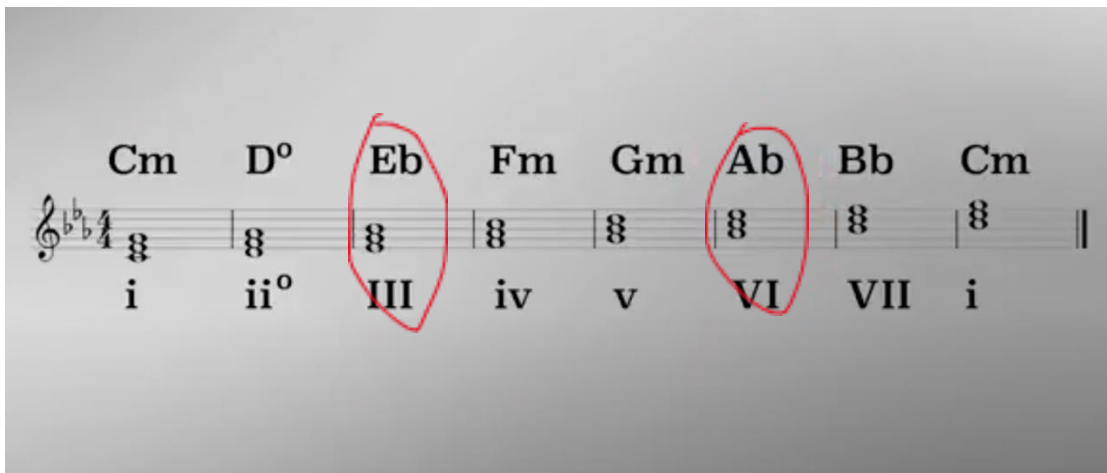


Figure 23.

Here is a chart, showing all the types of chromatic mediant in the minor key (O'Donnell, 2018).

Types of minor chromatic mediants	
i-III-i	i-VI-i
i-iii-i	i-vi-i
i-#iii-i	i-#vi-i
i-#III-i	i-#VI-i

Figure 24.

The diagram below shows the diatonic tonic and mediant chords in C minor (O'Donnell, 2018).

The diagram shows a musical staff in C minor (one flat) and 4/4 time. The first measure contains the tonic chord, C minor (Cm), represented by a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 4/4 time signature. The chord is shown as a triad of notes: C3, Eb3, and G3. Below the staff, the Roman numeral 'i' is written. The second measure contains the mediant chord, Eb major (Eb), represented by a treble clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 4/4 time signature. The chord is shown as a triad of notes: Eb3, G3, and Bb3. Below the staff, the Roman numeral 'III' is written.

Figure 25.

This diatonic progression is often heard in film music. A notable example is *Clowns Attack* from *Batman* (1989), composed by Danny Elfman. As seen in the diagram below, the piece starts in Bm and shifts to Db in the fourth measure.

Figure 26. (*Batman: Clown Attack, Sheet Music for Piano Accompaniment, n.d.*)

Other than the diatonic mediant, it is very common for Hollywood film composers to incorporate chromatic mediant chords. The first altered chord will be the flattened minor mediant chord (biii). Based on the diagram below, the key signatures are already marked in red, the only note that has to be altered is from G to G \flat (O'Donnell, 2018).

Figure 27.

Another alternative is to raise the root and fifth of the mediant chord, thus turning it into a sharpened minor ($\#$ iii) chord – a regular E minor chord (O'Donnell, 2018).

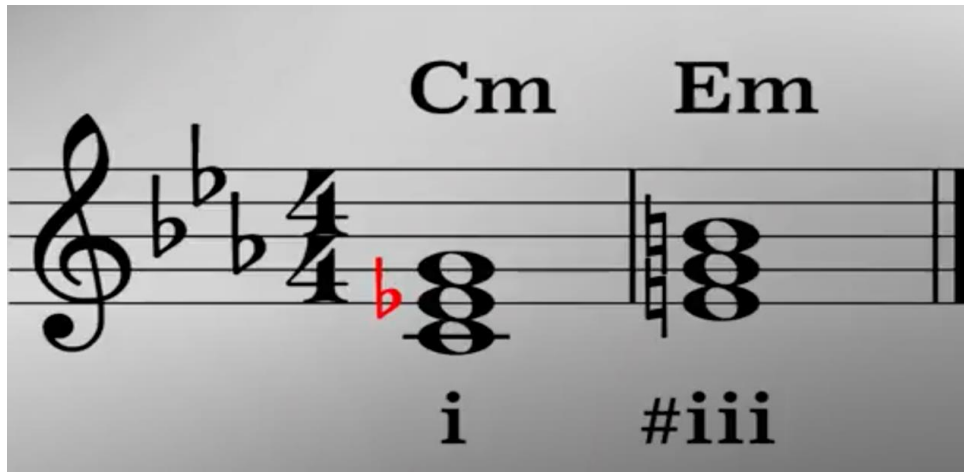


Figure 28.

The diagram below shows the score from the famous “Duel of the Fates” scene from *Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace* (1999), composed by John Williams (*Duel of the Fates*, n.d.).



Figure 29.

The last altered mediant is to turn the #iii chord from the previous example into a sharpened Major (#III) chord, altering it from E minor to E Major (O’Donnell, 2018).

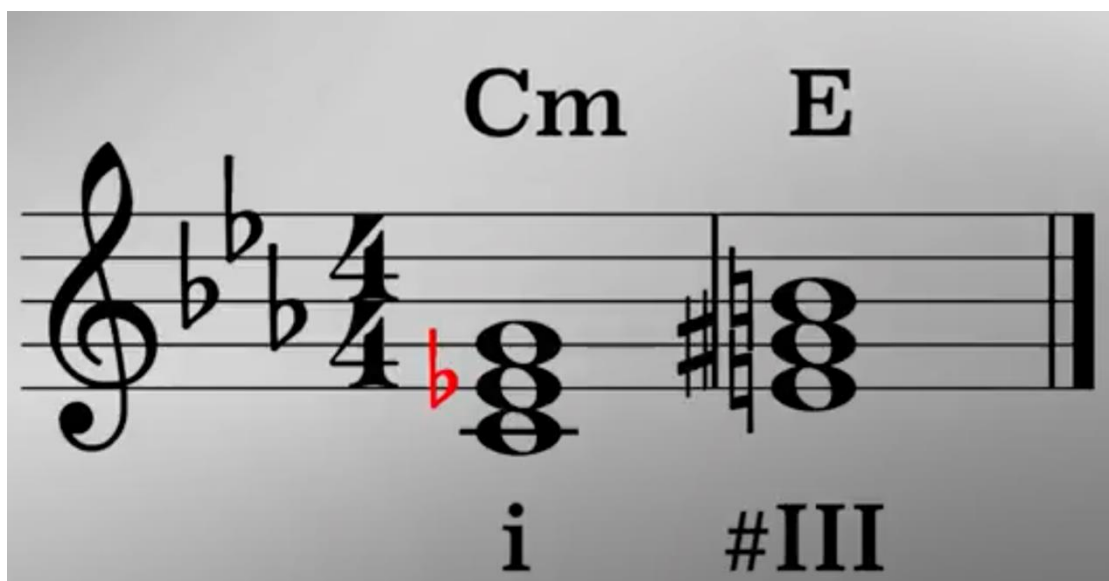


Figure 30.

The following examples that will be discussed are the altered submediants. Since the submediant (VI) chord is already a diatonic major chord in minor keys, we can change it to minor instead, by flattening the third note (O'Donnell, 2018).

The image shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The first measure contains the Cm chord (C3, Eb3, G3) with a red flat under the Eb3 note. Below it is the Roman numeral 'i'. The second measure contains the Abm chord (Ab3, Bb3, Eb3) with red flats under the Bb3 and Eb3 notes. Below it is the Roman numeral 'vi'. Above the staff, the chord names 'Cm' and 'Abm' are written in large black font.

Figure 31.

An example is from Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) and the scoring was by Danny Elfman. The diagram below is taken from the song *This is Halloween*, which depicts the minor submediant chord - Abm (Hal Leonard Corporation, 2016).

The image shows a musical score for the song 'This is Halloween'. It features two systems of music. The first system is labeled 'Corpse Chorus' and is in Cm. The second system is labeled 'Vampires' and is in Abm. The lyrics are 'This is Hal-low-eeen, This is Hal-low-eeen, Hal-low-eeen! Hal-low-eeen!'. The score includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. Chord diagrams for Cm and Abm are shown above the respective systems.

Figure 32.

Another option is to sharpen the submediant chord, thus altering it from AbM to Am. We can obtain that alteration by raising the root and fifth notes by half a step, as seen in the picture below (O'Donnell, 2018).

Figure 33 shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first chord is Cm (C minor), represented by a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a chord of C4, E-flat4, and G4. Below it is the Roman numeral *i*. The second chord is Am (A minor), represented by a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a chord of A4, C5, and E5. Below it is the Roman numeral *#vi*. The staff is divided into two measures by a bar line.

Figure 33.

And then we have the sharp major 6, which is we just move everything up by a half step (O'Donnell, 2018).

Figure 34 shows a musical staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The first chord is Cm (C minor), represented by a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a chord of C4, E-flat4, and G4. Below it is the Roman numeral *i*. The second chord is A (A major), represented by a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a chord of A4, C5, and E5. Below it is the Roman numeral *#VI*. The staff is divided into two measures by a bar line.

Figure 34.

So that's the basic concept in both major and minor.

How Important is Film Music

Successful musicals frequently found their ways into Hollywood films in a few years, and the public was immediately exposed to successful musicals through recordings, amateur, production spreading, and later, high school theater groups.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II created a variety of Broadway's most popular compositions, including *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *South pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951), and *The Sound of Music* (1959). *Oklahoma!* acts as their first collaboration. Not only did the musical have an unprecedented run of more than two thousand performances, it also played a crucial role in the evolution of the integrated musical.

The story happened in Oklahoma around 1900, which was full of humorous and dramatic subplots. The characters are shaped not only through speech, but also through song. The story centers on American folk history and the happiness of rural life that attracted Americans during war time and the early postwar years (Neumeyer & Neumeyer, 2014, p. 917).

Rodgers and Hammerstein not only experimented with avant-garde themes of racial discrimination and interactions between Polynesia or Asia and the West, but also employed non-Western musical components to create a feeling of place, as depicted in “South Pacific” (Neumeyer & Neumeyer, 2014, p. 918).

Leonard Bernstein (1910-1990) was a prominent figure in both Broadway and classical music. His well-known composition is the musical for *West Side Story* (1957). Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is retold in *West Side Story*, with rival gangs in place of the feuding families. Bernstein was afforded enough opportunity to incorporate a diverse range of musical elements into the context, such as jazz, Afro-Caribbean dance traditions, and soaring melodies found in Tin Pan Alley AABA formulas (Neumeyer & Neumeyer, 2014, p. 918).

“Cool” from *West Side Story* Act I, which alternates between the tense energy of bebop and cool jazz, represents the characters’ youthful exuberance and the urban American backdrop. Bernstein represented the confusion and anxiety of modern life (through atonality) and the blending of old and new techniques by combining styles with elements of modernist classical music embodied in a fugue on a twelve-tone theme. The *West Side Story* score demonstrates how much Bernstein was influenced by Rodgers and Hammerstein’s integrated musical, which he once referred to as the “authentic American style of opera.” *West Side Story* is illustrative of Bernstein’s style in that it blurs the lines between musical comedy, tragedy, and opera while contrasting extremes of style to achieve a significant goal. His fusion of jazz and classical elements is reminiscent of past examples of this kind of music, such as Milhaud’s *La creation du monde* and Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, as well as the tendency of contemporary jazz, for example Miles Davis and Duke Ellington, who drew inspiration from classical music and view themselves as artists rather than performers. The musical has been adapted into a movie, which was directed and co-produced by Steven Spielberg in 2021 (Neumeyer & Neumeyer, 2014, p. 918).

5. Conclusion

Music always works side by side with films, as music can highlight the film’s emotion, and create a specific atmosphere. In addition, film music can portray the characters’ personalities and reflect the emotional changes in characters’ thoughts, because music can often resonate with people’s emotions. We often find that music plays a powerful role in promoting the unique aesthetic effect in film works. In today’s view, film and music have been inseparable, as they develop together. Since the days of silent films, it seems that music in film has come a long way. As a result, music has become a powerful tool to create a successful film.

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