



DDF 102 – Music for Film

Week 12: Mickey Mouse and Digetic Music

Mickey Mousing

Very likely I've already cautioned you about "Mickey Mousing". This is when the music mimics the on screen action too closely, and it's a very common error in student film scores. The term comes from the cartoons of the 30s and 40s where the music always reinforced the screen action. It's OK for Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny, but it looks plain awful on live action movies. The effect is corny and slapstick.

However there is one situation where it can be of use, and that's in animation. There's a task this week that will get you to explore some possibilities here.

Digetic Music

In John Ford's *Stagecoach* there is the classic cavalry to the rescue scene.

The stagecoach of the title is being chased by the Indians. Inside the coach one of the passengers, Hatfield, has said that he won't let Lucy, also a passenger, get captured by the Indians to face a "fate worse than death". The Indians are closing in. Hatfield discovers that he's down to his last bullet. He puts his gun to Lucy's head. Lucy is praying.

The music swells. There might be a touch of trumpet in the music.

Lucy says, "Can you hear it? Can you hear it? The bugle. They're sounding the charge."

And yes, in the orchestral soundtrack we can pick out a bugle.

Only then do we cut to the cavalry riding to the rescue.

In this scene the bugle is first glimpsed only in the middle of the orchestral soundtrack, and then later becomes part of the **digetic** soundtrack. The digetic sound is the sound that is in the story, as opposed to the **non-digetic** sound that is the background music.

Sometimes this can be used as a joke. In an episode of *The Two Ronnies*, Ronnie Corbett is walking through a mysterious house. In the hallway there is a curtain that drops to the floor, and at the bottom we can glimpse two shoes sticking out, as if someone is hiding behind the curtain. As Corbett nears the curtain eerie string music swells. As he pulls aside the curtain the music reaches a climax – but behind the curtain there is a string quartet. "We have to practice somewhere," they say.