

ing at least from what our respondents seemed and did not seem to hear. Nevertheless, *The Virginian* clearly communicated something other than a totally traditional Hollywood Western theme of the *Shane*/New World Symphony type, not only because of the significant (though not very convincing) Italian connection, but also because of a wealth of other 'non-Western' VVAs like *CARS* (26.4%), *DRIVING* (11.5%) and *DECKARE/SPY/JAMES BOND* (15.35%). Such responses turned up in connection with *The Virginian* but would be highly improbable hearings of the music to *High Noon* or *How the West was Won*. How can such 'un-Westernlike' VVAs be heard in such an otherwise unequivocal piece of Western music? How can their occurrence help explain the real message of the piece and cast some light on the mythology of the Western? The answers to all these questions require further consideration of other musical, dramaturgical and ideological elements connected with *The Virginian*. The electric guitar is very important in this context.

## ***Why are cowboys electric?***

### ***Cowboys and spies***

According to at least one US critic, *The Virginian* bore a similar relation to its TV antecedents, operating within the genre's established conventions but at the same time foregrounding those conventions to such an extent that viewers could become aware of their artificiality. Writing in *Television Quarterly* (Summer 1982:39), Douglas Brode contends that *The Virginian* offered no less than 'an apotheosis of every TV Western that preceded it,... rendering all other shows obsolete'.<sup>154</sup>

How seriously are we to take this assertion? Well, by 1962-63, when the first *Virginian* episodes aired, Hollywood Westerns were, to quote Frayling again (1981:50), 'suffering ideological traumas'. US production of Western feature films dropped to a negligible eleven, down precipitously from the fifty-four which had been made in 1958. The concurrent 'obsolescence' of televised Westerns which Brode describes is evident in the fact *The Virginian* was the last new Western series to succeed in reaching the US top ten after the 1959-60 season.

Like film, TV spent the early 1960s retooling its heroes, eventually settling on suave spies of the James Bond sort as its most likely saviours: hence the glut of programmes like *I Spy*, *The Man from UNCLE*, *Mission Impossible*, etc. As it did so, TV kept its sturdiest pioneers in the saddle, e.g. Matt Dillon of *Gunsmoke*, the Cartwright family of *Bonanza* (video parallels of Hollywood's atavistic John Wayne product), but showed increasing reluctance to introduce young guns who didn't share some of Bond's dapper charm.<sup>155</sup> We only mention this spy connection because some of our respondents did: 'spy, introduction, 1960s (prod.) [R11]'; 'introduction, *deckare*, rich folks, lots of people' [R118]; 'James Bond' [R176]; 'English, *deckare*, in car' [R354]; 'old (prod.), film, 007' [R379]; 'film, special agent' [R478]; 'exciting, detectives' [R539]. In addition to these, two listeners [R585, 586] associated *The Virginian* theme with the comedy/adventure series *The Persuaders* (starring Tony Curtis and Roger Moore), while seven listeners [R16, 18, 229, 462, 521, 523,

154. Listener 314's characterisation of *The Virginian* as pastiche corroborates Brade's contention.

155. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Roger Moore, the TV Westerns' smooth and worldly Beau Maverick, went on to succeed Sean Connery in the film role of 007.

604]<sup>156</sup> responded with FAST CARS. These FAST CAR and *PERSUADERS* VVAs seem rather incongruous in the context of a Western, Italian or otherwise, but fit well with Bond and his trademark Aston Martin, recalling 354's 'English detective in car'.

Conveniently enough, Bond music shares one obvious trait with both *The Virginian* and Morricone's best-known Western scores: *trebly, reverberant, minor-key Fender guitar*.<sup>157</sup> Here we return again to the perspicacity of Christopher Fraying (1981:165) who, characterising Morricone's scoring, writes 'it is as if Duane Eddy had bumped into Rodrigo in the middle of a crowded Via Veneto'. This is an admirable comparison for our purposes, encompassing as it does: [1] Eddy's signature timbre — 'twang', as in the title to his 1959 album *Twang's The Thang*;<sup>158</sup> [2] Rodrigo's stylised Hispanic folk elements;<sup>159</sup> [3] Cinecittà's iconoclastic insouciance towards Hollywood's mythological sense of history. The nasal timbre of Eddy's twang no doubt has its own 'ethnic' potential, and probably owes some of its immediate success as a spy sound to its similarity with various pre-rock 'Viennese intrigue' sounds like Anton Karas' *Third Man* zither licks (1949). But in the 1962-64 period which produced *The Virginian* (1962), *Dr. No* (1963) and Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), steely Fender guitar was well on its way to becoming an all-purpose excitement/adventure timbre.<sup>160</sup>

All the same, it seems incongruous that the sound of an electrically amplified instrument came to connote the life and times of screen characters most of whom died long before New Yorkers, let alone New Mexico range riders, had even seen a light switch. So, where did the teenage excitement and ringing sound of Chuck Berry's up-tempo guitar come from? Where did The Beach Boys and The Ventures find their sound? What forerunners are there to The Shadows' *Apache*? When and why did cowboy cancioneros go electric? How did the electric guitar get into film scores? We cannot answer all these questions but in order to explain the all-purpose EXCITEMENT-PLUS-ADVENTURE connotations of steely Fender sound, as well as the remarkable musical semiosis of electric sound signifying a pre-electric environment, we will have to sketch a short background.

We will start with *The Virginian*'s immediate electric guitar precursors and continue with a discussion of other, roughly contemporary, Western-related music that clearly informed our listeners' connotations (historical excursion 1). After that we will present a more historical etymophony of electric guitar sounds in relation to music for the moving image.

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156. Couples 16 & 18 and 521 & 523 may well have conferred!

157. The similar modal-minor Fender tune from the detective series *Hawaii Five-0* may well account for *The Virginian*'s otherwise anomalous HULA responses (listeners 463, 511), if they had ever seen/heard that series, which they almost certainly hadn't.

158. Duane Eddy moved to the US Southwest (a region frequently referred to, even though indirectly, by our respondents) at the age of 13, learning guitar, meeting Lee Hazlewood and recording all of his successful material in Phoenix, Arizona during the heyday of TV Westerns (1957-1961).

159. Rodrigo's Aranjuez Andalusianisms may in fact be a case of intra-Spanish exoticism: both composer and concerto are Castillian. Even less Andalusian (or Castillian), but probably just as influential in extending the connotative range of this style, was Miles Davis and his recording of Rodrigo's Aranjuez concerto on *Sketches of Spain* (1959).

160. It is not unreasonable to say that minor-key jazz plus ethnic twang (especially of the Eastern European zither type in relation to the Western Stratocaster twang) equals Cold War spy music, e.g. John Barry's music for *From Russia with Love* (1963) or *The Ipcress File* (1965) and that this postwar semiosis establishes a good three decades' worth of special agent and latter-day private eye cues. See also our *Streetcar* analysis, chapter 9.

***Historical excursion 1: Berry, Shadows, Morricone***

For much of the Western world Chuck Berry's rock-'n'-roll had typified the sound first and foremost as a synonym for teenage exuberance, most often in connection with cars (e.g. *Maybellene*, 1955), dancing (*Sweet Little Sixteen*, 1958) or the more purely self-referential aspects of the rapidly rocking life in general (*Johnny B Goode*, 1958). In the early 1960s, California groups like the Beach Boys and the Surfariis expanded the sound's field of reference to include the similarly exuberant and going-nowhere-fast sphere of surfing<sup>161</sup> (*Surfin' Safari*, 1962; *Wipe Out*, 1963). The Shadows had major UK hits with such big-country numbers as *Apache* (1960), *Wonderful Land* (1962) and *Atlantis* (1963), while also exploring the Stratocaster's more adult cloak-and-dagger connotations in tunes like *FBI* (1961) and *Man of Mystery* (1961). Eddy himself generally concentrated on such Berry-like topics as *40 Miles of Bad Road* (1959) but in the early 1960s he too found that his sound was entirely appropriate for evoking detectives like *Peter Gunn* (1960) and cowboys, as in *The Ballad of Paladin* (1962b) and *Deep in the Heart of Texas* (1962d).<sup>162</sup>

This is where things get interesting. As already inferred, The Shadows had already attempted to reconcile their clean Fender sound to images of the Wild West with *Apache* in 1960 and seem to have been successful in the process, since *Virginian* respondent 600 mentions this tune by name. The Shadows were followed by the The Ramrods, whose successful 1961 cover of the 1949 hit *Ghost Riders in the Sky* demonstrated that even US listeners were becoming receptive to the notion of electric guitar cowboys. This merits an aside from Frayling (1981:165): [Morricone's] 'main title themes usually consist of a simple electric guitar line sounding rather like *Riders in the Sky*.'<sup>163</sup> It also warrants a complete citation of the tune itself which so clearly resembles *The Virginian* on many counts (ex.137, p.369).

(*Ghost*) *Riders in the Sky* by S Jones was a number-one hit for Vaughn Monroe and seems to have been quite influential on rock combos of the pre-Beatles era because The Ramrods, whose Fenderised cover of the song reached number 7 on the UK charts in 1961, were far from the only ones to include it in their repertoire: there are also versions by Dick Dale, The Shadows, The Ventures.<sup>164</sup> It was just as popular as Tiomkin's theme tune for the TV series *Rawhide* (ex.138, p.369 / CBS 1958), which occupied the n°6 slot in a British version by Frankie Laine and n°23 in the USA as performed by Link Wray and his Ray Men (both 1959).

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161.The liner notes for the Surfariis' *Fun City* LP go to great lengths to minimise the affective differences between surfing and hot-rodding, proposing 'fun' as the universal currency of teenagers.

162. For discography of connections between cowboys, thrillers and Latin America, see p.395.

163. Here it appears that Frayling is thinking of *For a Fistful of Dollars*, in particular the track *Titoli*, based on Woody Guthrie's *Pastures of Plenty*.

164.For details of these and versions by Gene Autry and Dean Martin, see [www.allmusic.com](http://www.allmusic.com). The Spotnicks, from Göteborg (Sweden), were popular in the UK, in Germany and Japan. I heard them play (*Ghost*) *Riders in the Sky* at the Regal Cinema in Cambridge in 1962 where they appeared on the same bill as Helen Shapiro. I had then just left The Leys School, Cambridge, whose first rock group — The Ghosts (*sic*) — was formed in 1961. They played *Apache* and, of course, *Ghost Riders in the Sky* [PT]. For further details, see addendum, p.395. See even Lawrence \*Welk (1961)!

2:137 Vaughn  
Monroe (1949):  
*(Ghost) Riders  
in the Sky*

♩ = 132

The score for 'Ghost Riders in the Sky' is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 132. It features a bass line, a vocal line, and accompaniment for snares and acoustic guitar. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The bass line starts with a 'bass pattern' and includes chords C#m, E, C#m, A, E, C#m, A, C#m. The vocal line includes the lyrics: 'Yippie - i - oh! Yippie - i - ay! GHOST RIDERS IN THE SKY'.

[1] An old cowpoke went riding out one dark and windy day; | Upon a ridge he rested as he went along his way, | When all at once a mighty herd of red-eyed cows he saw | A-ploughing through the ragged scars and up a cloudy brow. | Yipee-I-A! Yipee-I-O — the ghost herd in the sky.  
 [2] Their brands were still on fire and their hooves were made of steel; | Their horns were black and shiny and their hot breath he could feel. | A bolt of fear went through him as they thundered through the sky, | For he saw the riders coming hard and he heard their mournful cry.  
 Yipee-I-A! Yipee-I-O — ghost riders in the sky.  
 [3] Their faces gaunt, their eyes were blurred and shirts soaked all in sweat; | They're riding hard to catch that herd but they ain't caught 'em yet, | 'Cause they've got to ride for ever on that range up in the sky | On horses snorting fire. As they ride on, hear their cry:  
 'Yipee-I-A! Yipee-I-O' — ghost riders in the sky.  
 [4] As the riders rode on by him, he heard one call his name: | 'If you want to save your soul from hell a-riding on our range, | Then, cowboy, change your ways today or with us you will ride, | A-trying to catch the devil's herd across these endless skies'. |  
 Yipee-I-A! Yipee-I-O — ghost riders in the sky.

2:138 DTiomkin: *Rawhide* (TV Theme, 1958)

♩ = 116

The score for 'Rawhide' is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 116. It features a bass pattern, an acoustic guitar strum pattern, and a vocal line. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes an intro for male voices, a verse, and a lead vocal line. The lyrics are: 'Rollin', rolling', rollin', Rollin', rolling', rollin', Raw - hide. Rol - lin', rol - lin', rol - lin', though the streams are swol-len, keep them dog-gies. rol - lin', Raw - hide! Thru' rain and wind and weath - er, hell bent for leath - er, wish - in' my girl was by my side. All the things I'm mis - sin', good vict-uals, love and kissin', are wait in' at the end of my ride.' The score ends with a box containing the instruction: 'to chorus, then to verse 2, then chorus, then to verse three in F minor'.

Both *Ghost Riders* (as rendered by the Ramrods) and *Rawhide* (as released by Wray and the Ray Men) feature clean solo Fender sound as main melodic timbre. The songs also resemble *The Virginian* melodically and harmonically, using flat seventh minor modes and oscillating to relative major. These criteria also apply the dorian/aeolian *Apache* which appeared hardly a year after Laine's UK hit with *Rawhide*. *Apache* is an important link in the historical chain of events that made fuzzless Fender into such a sure-fire cowboy cue in the ears of our respondents.<sup>165</sup>

2:139 The Shadows (1960): *Apache*  
(main motifs only)

♩ = 124

The score for 'Apache' shows two motifs. Motif (a) is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 124, featuring chords Am, D, Am and a guitar accompaniment. Motif (b) is in 4/4 time, featuring chords F and Am.

Complete with Hank Marvin's roundly ringing 'twang' and Bruce Welch's slow *William Tell* gallop figures on rhythm guitar, minor-modal *Apache* became a major hit all over Europe in 1960, reaching number 2 on the Italian charts in 1960 (Salvatori, 1982:183), i.e. at about the same time as Morricone was writing and arranging pop songs for Italian RCA. Does this mean The Shadows were a direct influence on the composer of all that singularly influential and highly popular music for films like *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*? Hardly, for Morricone himself does not even recall *Apache*, being unaware of the tune when it was popular in the early sixties. Instead, his reasons for using minor modal electric guitar in cowboy films from the mid sixties should be understood in the following context.<sup>166</sup>

Between 1958 and 1964 Morricone derived most of his income from arranging and conducting popular music (*musica leggera*), activities in which the electric guitar was an accepted part of the ensemble.<sup>167</sup> His use of the instrument for the Italian Western was therefore standard procedure and never intended as a novelty. Morricone also emphasises that his use of modality in Western films was in no way an attempt at sounding Anglo-American instead of Italian or European but rather part and parcel of his own musical style, whether he be writing for film, pop singers or the concert hall. Like any professional composer working in the media, Morricone had to be completely and competently eclectic. Therefore, having to arrange the minor-modal Woody Guthrie ballad *Pastures of Plenty* for US-American singer Peter Tavis in 1962 was no extraordinary task. What distinguished Morricone from contemporaries composing and arranging such music for popular media purposes was, however, his ability to combine current idioms of popular composition with those of the avant-garde without making the end result sound pretentious. Particularly striking in this context is Morricone's clarity of orchestration and attention to timbral detail, stylistic traits that may just as well as come from his knowledge of serial techniques, *musique concrète* or experimental settings of poetry as from his experience of popular music performance and improvisation practices.<sup>168</sup> As Miceli (1994:104) recounts, 'whip, anvil, tubular bells and a run of semiquavers entrusted

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165. Source for ex. 2:139 is the standard 1960 Shadows recording of *Apache* found on *Dance with the Shadows* (1964). For further details, see addendum, p.395.

166. Conversation, Tuesday 26 June 1990, between Ennio Morricone and Sergio Miceli, author of *Morricone, la musica, il cinema* (1994). Miceli agreed to fire our questions about use of electric guitar and minor modes in cowboy films direct to Morricone and reported back to us by phone and fax. Most of the Morricone information presented here comes from that source. Many thanks to Sergio and to Maestro Morricone for their help, time and patience. Morricone has been asked several times whether he was influenced by or aware of The Shadows' *Apache*. He has answered 'no' on every occasion.

167. The CD *La grande orchestra di Ennio Morricone* (1994) includes 14 Morricone arrangements, most of which are original recordings made for RCA or RAI between 1962 and 1964. (Morricone wrote regularly for popular music programming on RAI TV from 1960.) Electric guitar is in particularly clear evidence on track 11 (*Un solo bacio mi hai dato*).

168. For example, in 1958, Morricone joins RAI as a music assistant and quits the job after day one. The same year he follows a John Cage seminar at Darmstadt and attends the first performance of Luigi Nono's *Cori di Didone*. In 1960, when Morricone starts his arranging work for RAI TV, he also has his *Concerto per orchestra* performed in Venice. In 1965, when he receives the *Nastro d'argento* for the music to *For a Fistful of Dollars* (1964), he is also invited to join the Associazione Nuova Consonanza. In the art music and avant-garde sphere it is also worth noting that Morricone received maximum marks in composition on completing his studies with Goffredo Petrassi. On the popular music side it should similarly be remembered that Morricone (aged 15-19) had (i) played trumpet in Costantino Ferri's band at Rome's Florida night club, as well as in Alberto Flamini's band at the hotels Mediterraneo and Massimo d'Azeglio; (ii) performed and arranged music for the popular stage. He also started writing music for radio in 1950. (Details from Miceli, 1994:15-18).

to the recorder — it was all in place before *A Fistful of Dollars*.<sup>169</sup> In fact, the only real difference between Morricone's arrangement of *Pastures of Plenty* and the *Ti-toli* ('Introduction') to *A Fistful* was that Tavis's mellow baritone vocals were exchanged for Alessandrone's world-famous lone-cowboy whistle. The same sort of workaday practicalities lay behind the actual *Fistful of Dollars* theme: it appears to have resulted from: [1] Leone wanting something to remind him of Tiomkin's dramatic De Guella theme from *Rio Bravo* (1959); [2] Morricone adapting music he had already composed for translations of O'Neill plays on Italian TV; [3] the composer encouraging trumpeter Michele Lacerenza to go to town with a florid style of improvisation providing the dramatic sort of GUN DUEL SHOWDOWN mood that combines elements of Miles Davis playing Rodrigo's *Concierto Aranjuez* (1959) and trumpet ornamentation from 'bullfight music' (*corrido*) with certain types of mariachi and flamenco laments (threnody).

From this account it is clear that many of the structural traits we have discussed so far in connection with *The Virginian* (e.g. flat seventh minor modality with electric guitar) were common currency in the professional media world to which Morricone belonged in the early sixties. As we have seen, these and similar means of expression were already connotative of particular aspects of the (US) West, cowboys, fighting and adventure, as well as of other times and other places (see p.238, ff.). According to Miceli, modality provided Morricone with an 'archaic basis' for his music, helping him avoid 'the banal pitfalls of tonality inside the world of popular music'. Of relevance to this discussion is that Morricone refers to such modal techniques in terms of the 'church' or 'Gregorian modes' of his Western scores.<sup>170</sup>

'Archaic and Gregorian electric guitar cowboys'? Neither Vaughn Monroe nor Frankie Laine are likely to have thought in such terms, even less the cowpokes of whom they sing, nor The Shadows, nor most of our respondents. But then, none of these figures are in Morricone's unenviable situation of having to explain their work to musicologists. In fact, the only contradiction here is one of profession and terminology, because much of Morricone's cowboy music contains the same sort of generally archaic or preclassical qualities we mentioned earlier in our discussion of minor modes (p.317 ff.). Moreover, 'Gregorian' plainchant diverges from European tertial tonality just as much, and in the same sort of way, as the Anglo-American ballad tradition which formed the tonal basis of what Tiomkin, Faith and The Shadows latched on to in *Rawhide*, *The Virginian* and *Apache*. This means that although the connections between the cowboy-music worlds of Morricone and of *Ghost Riders /Rawhide/Apache/Virginian* are not those of direct musical influence in one direc-

169. ... 'frusta, incudine, una scaletta di 16<sup>mi</sup> affidata a un flauto diritto... Manca soltanto il fischio umano e il gioco è fatto. In ogni caso, sarà bene ricordare che il modello cinemusicale forse più incisivo del dopoguerranasce, in realtà, da uno stile di arrangiamento preesistente, pensato per la musica leggera, e basato su un principio che potrei definire l'urbanizzazione del folk'. 'In any case', the quote goes on, 'it is worth remembering that some of the sharpest sounds in postwar film music were based on preexisting techniques of arrangement used for popular music purposes and based on a principle that I might define as the urbanisation of folk' (Miceli 1994:104-5).

170. Miceli interprets Morricone's explanations about his use of modality as follows: 'per non cadere banalmente nella tonalità, come l'usato di modi gregoriani nel musica dei film western ha insistito molto sui cromatismi come portatori di 'mobilità', di 'dinamica' all'interno di una cellula modale 'statica', 'immobile'. Questa è una costante nella sua produzione 'seria'. Ha ribadito il suo interesse — da sempre — per il canto cristiano e per la salmodia ebraica (canto cristiano e salmodia ebraica sono definizioni mie: lui non ha usato esattamente questi termini)'. (Fax from Miceli to PT, 27 June 1990, based on conversation between Miceli and the composer, 26 June 1990).

tion or the other, the two worlds nevertheless come over as one in the ears of our listeners: they obviously heard CLEAN FENDER-SOUND TUNE IN  $\flat 7$  MINOR MODE as a connoting a *particular type* of WESTERN.<sup>171</sup>

Summing up this section, we can list the following points:

1. both *Rawhide* and *Ghost Riders* seem to have come over as interesting and exciting enough musically (perhaps because of the non-dominant tonality, the flat thirds and sevenths somehow compatible with blues-based musics) and textually (tough men driving cattle) to function as convincing action cues for members of pre-Beatles rock combos;
2. the popularity of this new style was widespread in Europe (Shadows, Spot-nicks, etc.);
3. Morricone's use of electric guitar in Western films was not influenced by 'Fenderised' versions of earlier minor-mode cowboy tunes like *Apache*, (*Ghost Riders in the Sky* and *Rawhide*) but by his everyday involvement as composer and arranger of *musica leggera* and by an interest in modality that stemmed from a musician's search for 'non-banal', types of tonality.<sup>172</sup>

Although Morricone himself seems largely to attribute his choice of modal-minor Fender material to intramusical considerations, this is only part of the story. Frequently, his musical solution of (what he sees/hears as) musical problems resulted in terse, dense and poignant statements that loaded his cowboy scores with an almost Brechtian type of musical distancing.<sup>173</sup> Such musical *Verfremdung* (e.g. electric guitar in 'Gregorian modes') was hardly a tonally banal thing to do in the early or mid sixties, and it certainly rhymed well with the lesser banality of non-Hollywood Westerns being produced by Leone and others in Italy at the time. But that is not all. In the early sixties, a terse, distanced and steely Fender sound was fast becoming suitable not only for Westerns but for all manner of male adventure. After all, tongue-in-cheek Bond films were already rolling out of Pinewood Studios, *Dr No* having been in circulation for over a year before Morricone began work on *A Fistful of Dollars*. Here we are back to the idea of Fender sound as a general action cue. The Shadows, so influential on the development of British and European rock music and thereby indirectly on the musical perception of many of our listeners, were quite explicit about that quality when baptising their tunes, not least those using minor modes with flat sevenths (the 'rumble' and 'shindig' of exx. 2:140 and 141).

2:140 The Shadows:  
*The Rumble* (1962)



2:141 The Shadows: *Shindig* (1963) – start of middle eight



171. All our listeners' cowboy-related VVAs, in particular those alluding to Spaghetti Westerns, bear witness to the viability of this interpretation. They had, however, missed some of the most salient differences between Hollywood's and Morricone's treatment of the cowboy, Latin and thriller music traditions: the latter was far more open to experimentation across styles and genres,

172. 'La modalità: non è mai stato qualcosa di speciale. È un costante della mia scrittura .... l'ho usato per tutte le musiche - cinema, musica leggera o di concerto' (conversation with Morricone, Siena, July 1990, reconfirmed in phone call with Miceli).

173. Frayling (1981:165), with wonted acuity of wit and journalistic pen, opines that many of the Leone films' 'most successful gags involve Morricone's caricatural soundtracks'.