

Silent film assignment notes



Music and the Moving Image 1 (MUSI 223)

1 *Aim*

The aims of this assignment are:

1. to familiarise students with the widespread musical idiom of the silent film era in the USA;
2. to highlight similarities and differences in the categorisation and character of musical moods over time;
3. to emphasise the importance of the European classical tradition in the development of music for the moving image;
4. to enhance listening and analytical skills;
5. to increase sensitivity towards and understanding of widespread forms of musical expression;
6. to improve oral and scribal presentation skills.

2 *General description*

Students are divided into groups, each of which will receive one set of copies of notation taken from Ernö Rapée's *Motion Picture Moods for Pianists and Organists* (1924). The size of groups will vary between 2 and 5, depending on the availability of piano/keyboard players in the class.

1. Each group will receive one set of copies of sheet music covering one or more (depending on length and difficulty of notated material) motion picture moods as listed by Rapée.
2. Each group will play through the notation provided and determine what musically constitutes the mood(s) they have been assigned.
3. Each group will compare the musical structuring of the mood category/categories in Rapée with much more recent examples (recorded) representing the same mood(s).
4. Each group will report on their findings both 'live' in class¹ and in the form of a short written report (700-1000 words).

1. Presentation times will vary according to the number of groups each year. For example, each of 8 groups will have 10 mins for presentation, 5 mins for discussion.

3 *Division of labour*

The group's keyboard player takes responsibility for playing through the notation provided and for making it audible and musically understandable to the rest of the group. He/she is also responsible for explaining in musical-theoretical terms what is typical for the mood(s) assigned to the group.

The group's other members are also responsible for noting the musical common denominators of the mood(s) assigned to the group. They are moreover responsible for planning and running the presentation in class and for producing the written version of the assignment.

Each member of the group should ensure that tasks are evenly divided between those working together in the assignment.

4 *Presentation tips*

The checklists of musical and paramusical expression (see Tagg's *Introductory Notes to the Semiotics of Music*) may be useful when you try to determine the structural and connotative characteristics of the mood(s) you have been assigned to study.

The rest of the class will need to hear your group's *description* of the musical mood(s) in question but it would also be good if everyone could hear short excerpts of how the music actually sound(s). This means that the group's keyboard player might do well to record very short passages of the silent film on to MiniDisc, CD or cassette (especially true if we have no more than the usual, inadequate non-MIDI keyboard at our disposal). Of course, you can play excerpts from a CD of classical piano music, if you can find the relevant piece recorded on that medium.

It is also a good idea to cue up a couple of short excerpts on video or on CD to illustrate the more recent examples of the musical mood(s) you have been assigned.

If a musical mood has changed between the time of *Rapée* and more recent years, that musical change may well reflect a change in the character of the mood category itself. It is worth discussing how our notions of, for example, love, children, horror or the chase differ from those of nearly a century ago.

The written presentation does not need to be in strict essay form. A simple, descriptive report on the group's findings plus some discussion of the issues just mentioned is all that is required.

5 *Assessment*

This assignment counts for only 9% of work submitted on this module. During marking, consideration will be given to the following: correctness of musical description, quality and pertinence of music examples, depth of argumentation, quality of oral and scribal presentation.