

TURNING MUSIC STUDIES INTO VIDEOS

Notes used in Skype presentation at NIMiMS symposium,
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Preliminaries

This document consists solely of notes to a Skype presentation.

The content of this presentation was originally conceived as part of a workshop, not as the 'one-man show' it actually became.

This presentation requires access to the following video files (the URLs are live and clickable):

1. The Kojak Theme
http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/KojakScore_VP8.webm
2. Jackson Browne: *Lives In The Balance*
http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/JacksonBrowneLivesInBalanceAll_VP8.webm
3. *How the West was Won* (titles)
http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/MacahanTitSeqs_VP8.webm
4. *NYPD Blue* Title Sequences: semiotic music analysis (v2)
<http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/NYPD-Cumul170925.webm>
To avoid buffering problems it's best to download this 36-minute video to your computer before playing it. N.B. This file is temporary and will eventually be overwritten by a final version (check Tagg's video listing at <http://tagg.org/ptavmat.htm#Video>).

Intro

The four videos (see above) will be used to raise technical, musical, aesthetic and ideological issues about music studies. The main issues are:

- what use are videos in music teaching and research?
- what types of material and approach are most conducive and efficient in video form?
- what technical and legal problems are involved in posting videos on line and how to circumnavigate those difficulties

I'll start with three short video examples. The first is for those who read musical notation and is less than one minute in length.

The second is a 4-minute music video from the 1980s and can be usefully viewed by those unfamiliar with musical notation and music theory: it involves song, lyrics, and preexisting video footage as well as instrumental sound.

The third is, like the first example, entirely instrumental and involves no notation or music theory skills. It illustrates how video can be used to comment on music without interrupting or overriding the music.

EXAMPLE 1 (KOJAK) http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/KojakScore_VP8.webm

That's what I call a simple 'synchronised score'. The means of production needed to create it were, in addition to a standard 21st-century computer:

1. an audio recording of the theme
2. music notation software to produce the transcription
3. image editing software to format, resize, annotate and tidy up the transcription
4. video editing software to synchronise audio and video to a final video file

— It's also worth noting that a change of screen is like turning sheet music pages: the visual change needs to occur just before the change in audio because musicians always read notes in advance of what they have to play.

—I should also explain that I tend to invert black on white to white on black (easy to do in monochrome)— because the default background colour for images in the software I use is black. You don't have to invert if you add a bottom layer of full-screen white or some other light colour to your video editing.

What's the point of a synchronised score like this?

It's good in analysis classes for students who can decipher standard musical notation because:

[1] tonal and basic rhythmic information is visible and identifiable with the sounds with which they're synchronised.

[2] you don't have to read the score on-screen or on paper, then have to find the original audio, then play it and then juggle your attention to and fro between vision and sound.

[3] you can isolate and focus on particular passages or sounds that occur together as music and image, e.g. 0:27 to 0:34, and repeat them (try it!). You can of course extract those seven seconds as a separate video file and play it as a loop, if you want (<http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/Kojak27-34LoopInstrux.webm>). This is an important advantage because it's often necessary to concentrate on batches of “now “now-sound” in the extended present. If you only let the music just “flow on” uninterrupted it's impossible to understand structural and semiotic detail in the music because it risks being overridden by whatever comes next.

[4] it can act as a good structural basis for semiotic analysis: at least you'll be able to unequivocally identify and indicate which sounds, located at which point in time, you may want to refer to later.

Ex 2. Jackson Browne: Lives in the Balance

http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/JacksonBrowneLivesInBalanceAll_VP8.webm

Means of production same as for Kojak except the original text to audio is a music video that I downloaded from YouTube

This video includes virtually no musical notation at all. I have included the original video footage and have added 5 more types of information:

- top left in red: harmonic and bass annotations
- top right in green: annotations about instrumentation
- bottom left in yellow: English lyrics
- bottom right in cyan: Spanish subtitles
- centre left in white: times of section starts

That's by far too much information to take in during one playing of the video.

Since it's about such an important topic, it's important to analyse

this song and its meanings quite thoroughly so I would suggest the following order of events if presenting the analysis in class:

1. audio only
2. original audio with original video
3. audio and lyrics as written text
4. ex. 4, special attention paid to the lyrics (English or Spanish)
5. ex. 4, focus on section start times (establish episodic form)
6. ex. 4, focus on instrumental annotations
7. ex. 4, focus on harmonic and bass annotations

The risk of misunderstanding this song is high if any of these aspects is ignored.

Caveat: Jackson Browne's vocal persona is an important feature, as is the political and ideological context of the song (not included in ex. 4).

Ex. 3. Macahan titles (How the West was Won, TV)

http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/MacahanTitSeqs_VP8.webm

I'm showing this video because of its relevance to the US illusion of boundless free space and limitless resources to exploit and squander. I'm talking about the blinkered arrogance of climate change deniers and Trump supporters. In this video please note the role of key changes for a supposedly inexhaustible supply of new frontiers, of the military snare drum accompaniment associated with John Wayne and the US cavalry liquidating first-nation Americans, or of the Ballad of the Green Berets massacring the Vietnamese in Vietnam, not to mention the heroic horn calls of Superman. The advantages of using video to criticise such nonsense is obvious here because commentary on the music's ideological dimensions can be supplied as written text without overriding the music or interrupting its flow.

Bridge

Example 4 is different. It's much longer than any of the previous examples and uses many different types of presentation technique. It's also something I'm working on at the moment and I'd like to ask you how you think I should finish the production, what

else it should include, etc. It contains several technical errors of which I'm aware and which can be instructive to highlight.

Example 4: NYPD Blue Title Sequences (36 mins)

<http://tagg.org/Clips/HTML5/NYPD-Cumul170925.webm>

4.1. 00:00-00:26

1. *What's the underscore here?* My own version of the *NYPD Blue* theme's 'B' section, discussed later. I recorded it using East-West symphonic samples and Sony Acid Pro as software. I saved the results to a WAV file that I imported into the project.
2. *Fair Use statement.* I've made several musematic edutainment videos that I've posted on YouTube and which have been taken down because YouTube's Shazam-like robot diligently identifies passages from music I've used, usually as IOCM, but which is under copyright. In fact I'm not breaking copyright law at all but that makes no difference to YouTube because I foolishly ticked that I'd agreed with all 80 pages of Terms and Conditions that online corporations throw at us. I'm simply not allowed to contest the robot's findings, even if the robot is in contravention of US federal law. No room here to discuss this issue. If you want to know more about your rights to cite as an educator, student or researcher, go to <http://tagg.org/FairUseUScode.html>. I no longer post my productions on YouTube. Instead I use Vimeo (<https://vimeo.com/>) and my own website (<http://tagg.org/ptavmat.htm>).

4.2. 00:27-02:03 *Preempt misunderstandings and set up the video's main topics. Practical issues:*

1. Some voiceover passages need rerecording (excuse: new mic and unfamiliar audio software). Several sound recording errors later on, too (explosive 'P's mainly).
2. More important: Sound from various sources (recordings, downloads, etc.) are notorious for having differing sound quality, different output levels. Most sources need treatment in audio software to make them sound consistent and so as not distract the listener/viewer.
3. Always good to set up the main issues at start and to

preempt misunderstandings, e.g. music is important and is at the basis of most TV title sequences.

4. Interviews available on line often need radical editing.

4.3: 02:03-03:13 *Title sequences with timecode*

— Always good to include time code so that audio and video events can be pinpointed unequivocally.

— If your video analyses a particular piece, always include that piece uncommented near the start of the video.

4.4: 14-04:30 *Title sequences with basic musical notation*

— Any text you include on screen must be visible, i.e. in a colour visible against the background over which it is superimposed (maybe use 'outline' and 'shadow' functions in Photoshop).

— Ensure that notation is exported to a transparent image file (PNG, PSD, etc.) if you want to superimpose it on another image.

4.5: 04:30-5:29 *Episodic form orientation*

At this point the essential structural aspects of the music have been located and identified.

4.6: 05:29-11:14 *Essential theory and method*

- tempo and surface rate (05:44)
- visual editing (07:01)
- mode (07:56);
- basic semiotic theory concepts (08:44)

In semiotic theory section a lot of boring white text on black background; difficult to visualise and difficult to avoid, so why not use talking head shots? Because they're technically problematic and because I hate having to see myself on screen.

4.7: 1:14-15:43 *IOCM for 'A' section* (drums; library music sites)

[1] If you're going to use anything you see on your computer screen in the video, you'll need a reliable screen-capture app (I'm using CaptureWiz). Make sure audio capture is also available when necessary.

[2] Screen capture resolution is not always brilliant. You'll need to use zoom-in a lot if you want to show details of what's displayed on screen.

[3] For the AO, IOCM and PMFC rectangles I've used Photoshop. Create the most complex screen first and save it as one image file. Then delete each element backwards until you just have the first element left. Name the files xxx3, xxx2, xxx1 if your complete model consists of three elements. Add arrows on a separate track and pan them in your video editor if you want to animate them.

4.8 15:42-23:23 'B' section IOCM (conclusions at 20:20)

[1] Juxtapose original from AO with IOCM so similarities of sound are obvious.

[2] Download suitable images from the web to use to illustrate your point and to avoid having to use yourself as talking head.

[3] I made my own recording of the sostenuto string pad so that it would exclude the original's ticking drums and so I could add or mix up oboe/cor anglais when necessary.

[4] Change of pace/mood reflecting change in actual AO. Also makes a long edutainment video like this one more tolerable.

4.9: 23:23-25:41 *Why NIMiMS is necessary!*

[1] Here the important thing is the words I say, so a talking head with legible subtitles is the least ineffective procedure to get the message across. Leads to editing problems. Impossible to remember what comes next. Teleprompter unaffordable. Notes have to be checked. Head never ends up in same position! Cross-fades not always convincing. Jump cuts look ridiculous. Any suggestions?

[2] Important to introduce epistemological issues when they relate directly to the concrete details of analysis.

Of central importance in this section are the following passages.

"Using the procedure just shown, I connected the *NYPD Blue* theme as an analysis object (AO) with paramusical phenomena linked to music that sounds like it (the IOCM). That process led to the deductions" presented in the video between 23:45 and 24:17...

Those deductions “are important because they’re based on intrinsically *musical* reasoning and because the *sonic materiality* of music is usually absent from studies of the audiovisual, even, bizarrely enough, from studies of popular music. By using interobjective comparison to identify *commonalities of musical structure and connotation* inside the same broad musical repertoire, the deductions I just presented recognise the existence of an actual *music* culture that is certainly part of a larger body of cultural production but which is neither equatable with that overall culture, nor with its verbal or visual constituents. (Remember here that words and images are the two symbolic systems most likely to be favoured by cultural and communication studies scholars.) My point here is that *if you don’t know what the specifically musical aspect of culture brings to an audiovisual production, then your understanding of that production will be inadequate.*” [23:24-25:30]

5.10: 27:53-end: *Drums and Subway: smack and boom, old and new, war, etymophony and connotative precision*

[1] This is a temporary ending. Where do I go from here? (Tip: Vaughan Williams, Holst, World War I, postwar English utopias)

[2] What did the ‘warlike’ drums represent in urban North America in the 1990s? What possible war was being waged?

[3] What does the ‘pastoral’ represent in 1990s North America? How on earth can the police be ‘pastoral’?

Caveat

The above text are merely NOTES that I used in the presentation. They do not cover every word nor even every topic that was discussed. I intend soon to post a short document listing some of the technical, formal, practical and aesthetic aspects of *Turning Music Studies into Videos*.