*[Star Wars “Darth Vader” Intro Plays]*

Some film scores are so memorable that when we hear the music, we automatically think about a specific scene or an emotion.

It's a reminder of the effects film scores and soundtracks have on enhancing the message the director is trying to deliver.

So what effects do film scores and soundtracks have on cinema?

*[Film score by Hans Zimmer]*

Before going too far, let's distinguish the difference between a soundtrack and a score. A soundtrack contains songs independent from the movie itself. A film score is written specifically for what is happening on the screen. While Most films make use of both, I want to focus on film scores and other ambient sounds.

To really understand the importance of the film score, we can compare final cuts of a movie with cuts with the music removed. The iconic shower scene in ‘Psycho’ is so much less frightening without its score.

*[Shower Scene with Score] (plays quieter in the background for the paragraph)*

*[Shower Scene without the Score]*

This scene where Marion Crane gets stabbed to death is so psychologically effective with the film score because the screeching sound of the violin mimics sounds we biologically associate with stress and danger. This makes the scene significantly scarier and more unsettling.

*[Film Score of ‘Jaws’]*

The Film score for ‘Jaws’ creates a different unsettling feeling. Here, the audience knows that something bad is about to happen, but the characters in the movie don’t know, which adds suspense to the scene. We are warned of the danger through the film score and have no choice but to watch the horror unfold. As the music slowly speeds up, so does the camera movement, and the audience feels psychological terror from the disorder of the music and the anticipation of the inevitable.

*[‘Dunkirk’ Film Score continue into background music]*

Film scores can also heighten the intensity of a scene, or an entire movie. Consider Christopher Nolan’s ‘Dunkirk’. I remember watching this movie at the theater. I just assumed it was the horrific visuals of war that made me feel tense. But the effect is driven by a sound illusion in the score.

In Dunkirk’s film score, ‘The Mole’, composer, Hans Zimmer takes advantage of an auditory illusion caused by something called a Shepard tone.

*[Explanation of Shepard Tone] 20ish sec*

*[Playing Shepard Tone in ‘The Mole’ in background]*

The film score creates this sound of rising tension that carries the screenplay forward, leaving many audiences, including myself, clinging to the seat while watching the movie.

*[Some type of ambient noise]*

The power of sound in films even extends to the ambient noise that is used to impact the audience.

A great example of this comes from one of my personal favorite films, ‘Saving Private Ryan’. The opening scene is acclaimed for its accurate depiction of the horrific event on D-Day.

*[Saving Private Ryan scene]*

Instead of using any background music, sounds of gunshots, explosions, and cries for help overwhelm the audience’s auditory senses. This particular scene immerses each audience member sonically to make them feel as if they are on the battlefield.

*[Hans Zimmer background music]*

Our brains often subconsciously react differently to a visual given the music or sounds playing behind it.

The psychology of sound is one of the most important cinematic techniques in film. The emotional and thematic potential of these techniques is limitless and I have only scratched the surface.

Maybe you should watch your favorite film again, and pay closer attention to how the sound enhances the film.

Thanks for listening.