

SOUNDTRACK: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MUSIC IN THE FILMS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY QUENTIN TARANTINO

By

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Thesis under the direction of Peter Brunette, Ph.D., Reynolds Professor of Film Studies

This thesis will examine the significance of pre-existing music in writer and director Quentin Tarantino's feature-length films *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, *Kill Bill Volume I* and *Kill Bill Volume II*. This examination will show that the music in these films not only plays a pivotal role in setting the mood of a scene, verbalizing the thoughts of the characters, and paying homage to specific genres of film, but also strongly influences the emotions and perceptions of the audience.

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INTRODUCTION

Quentin Tarantino is a writer and director of films widely known for his nonlinear storylines, pert dialogue, excessive violence, and 60s and 70s era music scores. Tarantino has an impressive knowledge of television, movies, and film history and deeply admires exploitation films, Hong Kong action cinema and Spaghetti Westerns. His films often duplicate and incorporate the themes, style and music of a wide assortment of film genres.

Tarantino got his start in film while employed as a video store clerk. In 1987, he wrote the script for *True Romance* and sold it in 1992, followed by the sale of another script entitled *Natural Born Killers*. This eventually led to *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), the first film he wrote and directed, followed by *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003), and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* (2004).

In all of the films written and directed by Tarantino, the soundtrack music plays an integral role. As he states, “The thing I’m coming from is listening to music to be the guide to a movie” (Miklitsch, 289). The music he uses as his guide shares several common characteristics: “It is old and it is referential to distinct musical, film or media genres” (Garner, 192). Tarantino uses this music to connect his audience to the physical and emotional sensations of the characters in his films. If the audience is connected, then they will understand the emotions associated with the character or be intrigued by the juxtaposition of the aural and visual elements in the scene. Therefore, as Frith generally states, music “becomes our teacher, making sure we got the film’s emotional message” (79). Tarantino’s soundtrack also works as an aural companion to the film’s narrative, which allows it to unravel the characters’ personalities, verbalize their feelings, set the

tone of a scene, serve as homage to cinema, or simply demonstrate what happens when different film genres are fused together.

The lyrical content of the music in Tarantino's films also plays an important role in giving "voice to feelings and attitudes that [are] not made explicit by other structures of the text making these features of character more legible" (Smith, 170). In some instances, a central character is seen selecting the music and then playing it via an LP record on a turntable, an audio-cassette in a car stereo, a reel-to-reel tape recorder, or by radio, because, as film author Ken Garner states, "a character is seeking to project their private mood enhancement on to other characters as well" (203). This not only affects the relationship between the characters in the films, but it also connects the music to the film's narrative structure.

The music comprising Tarantino's soundtracks is not specifically scored for his films. He borrows from a wide variety of musical genres ranging from soul, pop and surf to foreign film scores. Frith points out that "stylized music appeals to our ability to draw on film references" (83), which assists in the audience's understanding of the meaning behind its use. Even though these songs were not specifically recorded for Tarantino's films, they are still functionally appropriate. According to film music author Jeff Smith, a "compilation score's tendency is much less likely to be used as an element of structural and rhythmic continuity instead, filmmakers frequently use songs as a way of establishing mood and setting and as a commentary on the film's characters and action" (155). As Tarantino says, "For me, the use of music in movies is one of the most cinematic things you can do. Just like rock n' roll...it catches something, in you, all right in the same way you can have the right kind of music and apply it to a scene and get that

effect...that action scene is the equivalent of rock and roll, it opens your pores up, it gets you all cut up and you're just into the excitement and the emotion of it all" (Romney, 125).

Tarantino is certainly not the first director to use a compilation score. As film author Harlan Kennedy states, "Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* is the apotheosis of the 'golden oldies' approach to film music. It is music as social history: sonic time capsules exploding scene by scene as we recognize the chart-toppers we grew up with and the eras they textured and defined. It is film music as a playful invocation of history and bygone culture streamlined by a modern sensibility" (40). One can find the same aural construction in Tarantino's films. However, Tarantino extends his approach to film music by including scores from other films.

There can be a drawback to building a soundtrack with recycled music. As Smith mentions, "Indeed [the compilation score] can carry a certain potential for distraction, but their referential dimension can also be exploited to 'speak for' characters or comment on a film's action. If the song is already well-known, then the matter of song lyrics becomes more a question of recognition rather than cognition. Instead of deciphering lyrics, audiences simply apply what they already know –a title or chorus– to the specific dramatic context that is depicted in the film" (166). This can sometimes interfere with the intention of the director. Tarantino does not let that issue bother him. Indeed, when he uses music from Spaghetti Westerns or Blaxploitation films, he wants the audience to connect it to the visuals, but he also wants to shock the audience with the inappropriate use of other styles of music that presumably don't "fit." The intention here is not to isolate the audience, but to emotionally stimulate them.

Tarantino is quick to criticize music that plays in a film without purpose. As he states, people will put “some old ditty that everyone knows and then build a little montage around that song...It’s mostly lazy film-making unless you’re doing it for a specific reason, I don’t think you should do it” (Romney, 139). He goes on to mention that placing music into films just for the sake of selling a soundtrack creates a dulling effect. In order to avoid this effect, Tarantino believes that one should take a methodological approach to film music. As he says, “You’ve got to find the opening credit sequence first. That starts it off for me. I find the personality of the piece through the music that’s going to be in it. If there’s going to be no modern music in the movie, then that becomes the personality of the piece, but if there is, it’s the rhythm that I want the movie to play at, the rhythm of the film. Then it’s a simple matter of me diving into my record collection and finding the songs that give me the rhythm of my movie” (Woods, 171). The fact that Tarantino is using music from his personal collection undoubtedly makes the marriage of music and film reflective of his nostalgic personality.

The point of this thesis is to analyze the use of music in all five films written and directed by Quentin Tarantino. Examining how music works in his films will not only demonstrate its varying functions, but will also reveal Tarantino’s personal motives behind its use. To do this effectively, it is necessary to break down certain scenes in the films and discuss how the music works in tandem with the action and how it affects the audience’s perception of the characters. It is also necessary to include theories on film music provided by those who have written extensively on the subject. Their analyses will assist in understanding the “whys” behind the use of music in Tarantino’s films.

In Chapter One, I will discuss how the music in *Reservoir Dogs* works to unravel character personalities and demonstrate how it acts as a mouthpiece for the characters. Chapter Two will explore the use of music in *Pulp Fiction*. Tarantino uses music in this film to set the tone of a scene. Chapter Three will look at *Jackie Brown* and how Tarantino has expanded his use of music to include scores from other films in an attempt not only to serve as homage, but to bring the characters in the film together romantically. Chapter Four will discuss *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, which is the first time Tarantino uses music to bring together the themes of the East and the West. Finally, Chapter Five will discuss the aural and visual similarities of *Kill Bill Vol. 2* to the Spaghetti Western films Tarantino greatly admires. This chapter will attempt to answer why he chose to model his film after this genre and whether or not he effectively captured its elements.

CHAPTER ONE

RESERVOIR DOGS

Released in 1992, *Reservoir Dogs* was directly responsible for changing Tarantino from an unknown screenwriter into a hailed filmmaker. The film kicks off Tarantino's postmodernist approach to cinema by blurring the pop cultural boundaries of the past and the present.

Reservoir Dogs' plot centers around seven men involved in a botched jewelry heist. Tarantino switches between what happens before and after the robbery, slowly revealing the consequences of their actions. As the men try to figure out what went wrong, their true characters are revealed.

Tarantino's musical approach to *Reservoir Dogs* involves taking previously released popular music and strategically placing it throughout his film. These paradoxical musical moments function in tandem with the scenes in which they are placed, in order to assist in the unraveling of the characters' personalities. Tarantino's choice of music and its placement also have an uncanny knack of speaking for the characters during instances when they choose not to, or are unable to, speak for themselves. Therefore, the music acts as a signifier of what the character may be feeling at a particular moment in the film. In Simon Frith's essay on film music, he states, "As spectators we are drawn to identify not with the film characters themselves but with their emotions, which are signaled pre-eminently by music which can offer us emotional experience directly" (86). In *Reservoir Dogs*, this is achieved through the tempo of the music or even through a moody melody which acts as a trigger for evoking a sense of sympathy or anger from the audience. This makes it easier for one to understand what the character is feeling.

Reservoir Dogs' soundtrack is comprised of source music rather than a composed film score. As Tarantino explains, "I wanted to go for the super sugary bubblegum sound of the early 70's. One, is because some people are annoyed by it and two, because I have affection for it. I grew up with it. It's my childhood" (Dawson, 80). Tarantino has said that he liked the idea of "having an invisible character" running through the film, so he creates, K-Billy, a fictional radio disc jockey, who introduces many of the songs heard in the film via a voice-over. In other words, there is not a visual picture of K-Billy nor is there, except in one instance, a shot of a radio broadcasting his voice.

The opening scene in *Reservoir Dogs* is a prime example of how important music is to Tarantino and his film. In fact, the very first line uttered in the film is, "Let me tell you what 'Like a Virgin' is about." The dialogue in the opening scene of the film is dominated by the topic of music. This opening scene consists of eight men, sitting around a table in a diner, delving into metaphors about Madonna's "Like a Virgin." The conversation eventually moves onto other Madonna songs such as "True Blue" and "Papa Don't Preach." Then, a character, who we later discover to be named Nice Guy Eddie, asks the men if they have been listening to "K-Billy's Super Sounds of the 70's weekend." Thus, another music topic begins as he goes on to talk about misunderstanding the lyrics in the song, "The Night the Lights went out in Georgia." These conversations are extremely useful to the audience. These men's personalities are revealed through their opinions on music. Therefore, it provides insight on the characters, which in turn makes it easier to understand their behavior later on in the film.

Tarantino's first functional use of music in *Reservoir Dogs* comes just after the diner scene when he uses *George Baker Selection*'s "Little Green Bag." He states, "I did

the opening credit sequence for *Reservoir Dogs*, and I think it's one of the best scenes of the entire movie, just all those guys walking out in their black suits with 'Little Green Bag' on the soundtrack. Does 'Little Green Bag' have anything to do with the movie? No, but it's just the right sound, and the right feel" (Romney and Wooten, 130). This is true, but what Tarantino fails to mention is that the lines in the song speak volumes about the film's characters. The opening lines of the song serve as an example:

*Lookin' back on the track for a little green bag,
Got to find just the kind or I'm losin' my mind
Out of sight in the night out of sight in the day,
Lookin' back on the track gonna do it my way.*

The lyrics have a direct correlation to these characters, who are about to heist some jewels. The camera focuses in on each individual face as we hear the line, "looking back on the track for a little green bag." The lyrics serve as a translator for what these characters could be thinking. The "little green bag" could be perceived as the jewels these men are after. They are desperate for easy money, thus the line, "got to find just the kind or I'm losin' my mind." Then, they plan to meet in a warehouse until it is safe for them to leave ("out of sight in the night out of sight in the day"). The final line of the verse states, "lookin' back on the track gonna do it my way." This is a foreshadowing of how each of these men will eventually reveal their true selves to one another.

As the men continue to walk in unison, a closer look at their faces, their expressions, and body language, all seem to say, "Sure I'm walking with you, but that doesn't mean I'm *with* you." This attitude is proven later on in the film as the characters begin turning on each other. The closing line of the song accurately depicts their situation as it states, "But there is only loneliness to find." As the film progresses, the independent nature of the characters materializes. The only exception to this is the relationship

between the characters Mr. Orange, who is later revealed to be an undercover cop, and Mr. White, a career criminal who develops a bond with Mr. Orange, as well as Nice Guy Eddie and his father, Joe, the ones who conceived the idea of a jewel heist.

An important point made by film music author George Burt, who does not specifically refer to *Reservoir Dogs* in his book, mentions that film music can “interact with the intrinsic meaning of the sequence, as distinct from a surface-level meaning; it is addressed to what is implicit within the drama not what is explicit (such as the visual action), that is, to what you cannot see but need to think about” (7). An example of this occurs during a brief flashback scene with Mr. Orange, when he is paired with a brief bit of singer Sandy Rogers’ “Fool for Love.” The song has subtle connections to his personality, but it also acts as a warning that negative consequences may soon unfold.

The scene begins with a close up shot of a telephone ringing as a female singer, Sandy Rogers, croons, “foool for love.” The use of this line in tandem with the ringing phone subliminally suggests that Mr. Orange is a fool for getting involved in this risky undercover operation. Then, the crackling and high pitched singing of Sandy Rogers takes over the scene. After Mr. Orange puts on his jacket, he walks over to his gun just as she sings, “You're a foool for love/What he wouldn't doooo for love.” Then a shot of his hands putting his gun in an ankle holster and, then, a wide shot of him paired with the lines, “He's a fool, a fool for love.” Then we hear, “Born a fool, you got to follow the rule, always a fool.” These carefully choreographed lyrics imply that Mr. Orange “loves” being a cop, but the lyrics also suggest that he’s a fool for taking this risky undercover assignment. As if Mr. Orange can’t take the preachy tone of the song, he walks over to the stereo and shuts it off, which in turn stops the music.

Since this scene comes much later in the film, it is easy to connect Sandy Rogers' song to Mr. Orange's personality. The audience has already witnessed Mr. Orange's gunshot to the stomach, so when one hears the lyrics to "Fool for Love," it makes sense for it to be playing in the scene. After Mr. Orange shuts off the music, he grabs his keys and then hesitates a moment. He then walks over to a container of change and digs out a wedding ring and puts it on. Perhaps Sandy Rogers has reminded him of a prior relationship where he was warned not to be a "fool" for his job. One also can't help but wonder if the music didn't put some doubt in his head as to whether he can pull off this assignment. As he stands looking at himself in a mirror, he firmly states, "You're not going to get hurt...because you're super cool." This could be perceived as Mr. Orange's response to Sandy Rogers' song, and an insight as to how he really feels about the undercover operation.

Throughout *Reservoir Dogs*, the music also functions as a mouthpiece for the characters in a scene. The singer becomes the voice for the character when he is unable to, or chooses not to, speak aloud. Joe Tex's "I Gotcha" is an effective example of how this works. The song can be heard during the frenzy of violence being inflicted on a cop held hostage by three men: Mr. Blonde, an unstable lackey of Joe's, Mr. White, and Mr. Pink, a paranoid conman. The lyrics state:

*I gotcha, uh-huh, huh
You thought I didn't see ya now
Didn't ya, uh-huh, huh*

*Don't hold back, now
Give it here
Don't say nothin', just give it here*

As the character, Nice Guy Eddie, talks on the phone about Mr. Blonde capturing a cop, the song continues to wail, “I gotcha, uh-huh.” Joe Tex tells the audience what Mr. Blonde, Mr. White and Mr. Pink are thinking, which is that they are frustrated by the botched robbery. Therefore, they take out their anger (“don’t hold back now”) on a law enforcement figure. Tex even cries out as the three men repeatedly kick the cop. It is as if Joe Tex is witnessing what is going on.

Then, the lines “Don’t hold back, now, give it here/Don’t say nothing, just give it here” are sung at the same time as Mr. Blonde pulls on a roll of duct tape. In this instance, Joe Tex is speaking for Mr. Blonde. The scattered tempo of the song also contributes to the chaos of the scene. The horns and drums get increasingly panicked as the cop continually gets punched and thrown around. It is a very catchy tune, and that’s what makes it so dangerous. The music easily blurs audiences’ senses to the point where they get caught up in the energy of the scene. Therefore, for a brief moment, there is no regard for the cop’s well-being. However, once the music stops, the audience is released from Tarantino’s musical hypnosis and can begin to fully grasp the twisted nature of Mr. Blonde, Mr. White and Mr. Pink.

One of the most widely discussed scenes in *Reservoir Dogs* involves the 1973 song, “Stuck in the Middle with You,” performed by *Stealer’s Wheel*. In this important scene, the music functions in multiple ways. First and foremost, “Stuck in the Middle with You” functions as a mouthpiece for both of the characters which help to express their feelings. However, Tarantino also uses the music, a lot like he did with Joe Tex’s “I Gotcha,” to shock the audience by meshing together a happy-go-lucky song with violent images. This occurs during a pivotal scene in the film, when the character, Mr. Blonde,

decides he wants to torture his hostage, a cop. The scene is choreographed so well with the music that it plays out like a music video. However, one can't help but be affected by the twisted nature of Mr. Blonde and the painful expressions of the bound cop.

As "Stuck in the Middle with You" begins, the bound and tortured cop can only helplessly eye Mr. Blonde as he sings along with the lines, "I've got a feelin' that somethin' ain't right/I'm so scared in case I fall off my chair." Tarantino subtly pairs lyrics with what is occurring in the film. While it is Mr. Blonde who is mouthing these words, one believes that these lyrics are being sung on behalf of the gagged cop. The line, "Stuck in the Middle with You" also works in describing the placement of the characters in the warehouse. Mr. Blonde physically stands between the wounded character, Mr. Orange, and the cop.

Film historian Ken Garner explains that "We know Mr. Blonde's goal is to torture the cop for fun; perhaps his conduct is so disturbing because we see him self-consciously topping-up his high state of arousal, dancing around to the music, much as we might in executing more innocent tasks. This characterizes our everyday use of the radio for arousal purposes as a morally neutral act: arousal doesn't know what it's for, only we do" (Garner, 202). Mr. Blonde's intention is indeed to torture the cop, and it is clear that the music encourages him. He gets caught up in the tempo of the song and finds himself choreographing his violence to the music.

Mr. Blonde eventually slices off the cop's ear. As he holds the cop's severed ear, he asks him if he can hear him, and, since the cop's mouth is taped shut, the music works to speak for the character. In this case, Gerry Rafferty has to do the pleading for him, thus, the crying out of the lyrics, "Ple-ee-ee-ee-ee-ease, Ple-ee-ee-ee-ee-ease."

“Stuck in the Middle with You” also works to cleverly describe the unstable persona of Mr. Blonde. Although most of the lyrics go unheard because of dialogue or screaming, they are equally relevant. The lyrics state:

*And your friends they all come crawlin'
Slap you on the back and say
Please...
Please...*

When Mr. Blonde is torturing the cop, one can perceive that he takes satisfaction knowing that, when his “friends” (Mr. White, Mr. Pink and Nice Guy Eddie) return, they will be impressed by what he has done. Thus, the line, “slap you on the back,” which alludes to a congratulatory gesture.

The use of music to make a dramatic point is explained in Burt’s book on film music, and can be applied to the disturbing interactions between Mr. Blonde and the cop. The author introduces this theory via an example of a character losing control of a situation and becoming angry. As Burt states, “In musical terms, we might associate this rise in intensity with the high point of the melodic line. However, a musical gesture or line in the score could just as well be taken in the ‘opposite’ direction, ending on a low pitch as a person screams” (6). Burt’s explanation is that the music implies that the person has “bottomed out” or that a “point of no return has been reached.” This is what is happening with Mr. Blonde. While the musical tempo of “Stuck in the Middle with You” is indeed uplifting, the behavior of Mr. Blonde is not. The playful tone of the instruments and the lack of intensity in the vocal chorus suggest that Mr. Blonde takes great pleasure in his sadistic activities.

After Mr. Blonde finishes taunting the cop with his own severed ear, he throws it down and then tells the cop he’ll be right back. The music continues to speak for the cop,

“Trying to make sense of it all /But I can see there makes no sense at all/Is it cool to go to sleep on the floor/I don't think that I can take any more.” Mr. Blonde proceeds to walk out of the warehouse and closes the door behind him. The music stops playing and the happenings of the outside world, such as traffic in the distance, kids laughing, and a car alarm blaring, suddenly begin to be heard.

This brief moment allows the audience a chance to collect thoughts and reflect on what has just occurred. This is necessary because the audience has just gone through a plethora of emotions that began with amusement (the first few bars of “Stuck in the Middle with You” paired with a humorous dance), then a feeling of intensity as Mr. Blonde threatens to harm the cop, and finally horror at witnessing the severing of an ear. As Mr. Blonde re-enters the warehouse with a can of gasoline, Gerry Rafferty is reaching the part of the song where he sings, ‘Ple-ee-ee-ee-ase!’ in falsetto, unbearably stressing the cop’s predicament and, just like that, the audience is snapped back into the warehouse’s dark world.

In the final moments of *Reservoir Dogs*, while both Mr. White and Mr. Orange lay shot, and Mr. Orange confesses to being a cop, the police make their entrance into the warehouse. Mr. White cries out as he holds his gun to Mr. Orange’s face. As he is challenged by the police to drop his weapon, he shoots Mr. Orange and then, in turn, is shot by the police. The scene goes black, and Harry Nilsson’s mock calypso, “Coconut,” begins playing as the credits rise.

The lyrics and the sedative tone of the music bring a profound close to the film. The silliness of the song’s refrain (“You put de lime in de coconut, you drank 'em bot' up”) along with the comedic tone, releases the tension of the film’s final few moments. In

this instance, Tarantino uses music much differently than he does in other scenes throughout the film. Here, the music accompanies the credits rising over a black screen. There are no visual connections to any of the characters in the film, only a brief aural allusion to Mr. Orange's painful gut injury as Nilsson sings, "Doctor, ain't there nothin' I can take?/I said Doctor, to relieve this belly ache." The music acts as a therapeutic device more than anything. Tarantino is allowing the audience to distance themselves from the film in order to get them to realize that what they have just seen is a reflection of life and not life itself. Without the influence of visuals here, one can also draw their own conclusions about the character's fate and whether it was justified in the film.

Reservoir Dogs juxtaposes the pleasant feelings associated with listening to music with the moral repulsiveness of the film's characters. This clash of emotions puts a disturbing spin to the film. Tarantino demonstrates that a cheerful song doesn't always have to be accompanied by a cheerful scene. A cheery song placed in a dreary scene can actually have the opposite effect, much like what takes place in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick takes the cheery "Singin' in the Rain" and uses it during a brutal rape scene. This makes the scene even more disturbing because, just like the scene in *Reservoir Dogs* which uses "Stuck in the Middle with You," one can't help but be shocked by the inappropriate use of the song. Of course, this is why Kubrick and Tarantino used it.

The music in *Reservoir Dogs* also functions in two other important ways. First, the music serves as an aural commentary on the character's personalities. Through the music, one is able to see the brutal nature of Mr. Blonde or even the lack of confidence Mr. Orange has in himself. Secondly, Tarantino's use of pop music works to

communicate for the characters. In a way, the music itself acts as the narrator of the film. Where there is no dialogue, the lyrical content of the song assists the audience in understanding what is going on with the character. However, these musical functions do not end with *Reservoir Dogs*. Tarantino continues the technique with *Pulp Fiction*, but, as we shall see, with a slight adjustment.

CHAPTER TWO

PULP FICTION

In 1994, Quentin Tarantino released *Pulp Fiction*. Critics and the public alike lauded the film for its non-linear plot, divergent dialogue, and numerous pop culture references. *Pulp Fiction* won the 1994 *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival. Tarantino and co-writer, Roger Avary, received an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

Pulp Fiction is a revolving door of plots and characters centered around two hit men Jules and Vincent, who are trying to deliver a briefcase to their boss. Through fragmented storytelling, we meet the mobster boss' wife, Mia, whom Vincent is asked to take out for the evening, and Butch, a boxer who, paid to take a dive, fights hard and accidentally kills the other boxer instead and escapes with the money.

Pulp Fiction relies on the energetic melodies of surf music instrumentals, a genre of popular music associated with 1960s surf culture, to set most of the film's tone. Therefore, the characters' thoughts are sometimes expressed instrumentally rather than vocally. *Pulp Fiction* is not a surfing film, but this style of music provides a distinct kind of musical intensity in order to complement the film's verbal and visual exaggeration (Garner, 196).

Surf music is not the only driving musical force behind *Pulp Fiction*. Tarantino structures scenes around other genres of music such as R&B, Pop, and Rock, whose appearance is mostly controlled by the characters. Radios are tuned, record needles are picked up and tape machines are begun, allowing the characters to reveal their personality traits without speaking. This is done in an attempt to cleverly inform the audience of other aspects of the characters' personalities without the assistance of extended dialogue.

It also, in a way, “elevates the audience to the same heightened state of arousal of [Tarantino’s] characters” (198), which may make it easier for the audience to understand why the characters behave as they do. Overall, Tarantino allows the mood of *Pulp Fiction* to be guided by varying styles of music, a process which works in two ways. First, it sets the tone of a scene through the rhythm and texture of the music, and, second, the lyrics verbalize the feelings of the characters.

The most effective example of how a scene in *Pulp Fiction* relies on the rhythm and texture of the music to set its tone comes at the opening moments of the film. After two hoods stand up to declare a robbery, the shot freezes, and the first chord of Dick Dale’s “Misirlou” rips into action. Dale’s furious chords make a clear directorial statement about the tone and mood of the film. As Tarantino states, “To me, opening credits are very important, because that’s the only mood time most movies give themselves. Having ‘Misirlou’ as your opening credits, throws down a gauntlet that the movie just has to live up to” (Barnes and Hearn, 99).

Dale’s tune energizes the audience through most of the credits, until it abruptly switches, via a radio tuner, to *Kool and the Gang*’s “Jungle Boogie.” As the next scene opens, the song can be heard on the radio as Jules and Vincent drive along. The characters have obviously taken control of the music. The change in music alters the aural landscape of the scene. “Jungle Boogie” has brought the tone of the film from an up-tempo mood down to a casual feel. The song serves to quell the vibratos of “Miserlou” and helps bridge the gap between the opening credits and the next scene. This technique assists in easing the audience into the film’s plot.

A second example of how the rhythm and texture of music set a specific tone is when Tarantino uses it to capture a state of drug-induced euphoria. As the brisk, heavy bass line of *The Centurians*' "Bullwinkle Part II" begins, Vincent opens his case of drug paraphernalia. The dreamy guitar chords come in as the scene moves between slow motion glimpses of Vincent preparing to shoot up and him driving to Mia's house. The music is of the surf style genre and, ironically, a wave is formed in the bloody liquid being pushed through the syringe. The music acts as if it has been injected with drugs as well. A shrill saxophone helps close out the scene as Vincent drives along with a euphoric expression on his face. "Bullwinkle Part II" succeeds in conveying the feelings of being high, without having to do so verbally.

The first time in *Pulp Fiction* where song lyrics speak for the characters is also the first time the audience is introduced to the boxer, Butch, and his boss, Marsellus. The two men are in a bar discussing their deal to throw the fight as Al Green's "Let's Stay Together" is playing. The camera does a long take of Butch listening to an off-screen Marsellus as the song keenly crafts itself around Marsellus' dialogue. Marsellus' speech is riddled with pauses, which allows the lyrics of "Let's Stay Together" to be heard. Once again, Tarantino allows the music to explain the emotional state of a character. This is crucial because Al Green aptly describes the feelings between the two men.

As author Claudia Gorbman mentions in her book, Unheard Melodies, "The real reason for music is that a piece of film, by its nature, lacks a certain ability to convey emotional overtones...many times in many films, dialogue may not give a clue to the feelings of a character" (67). "Let's Stay Together" provides such additional articulation to the conversation between Butch and Marsellus in the following scene.

As Butch listens to Marsellus tell him that he will be happy after he throws the fight, Al Green sings, “I’m so in love with you/Whatever you want to do/It’s all right with me.” While Butch may not be “in love” with Marsellus, it is obvious that he has a lot of respect for him. Butch’s “love” is more about the love of Marsellus’ position of authority. Butch’s face confirms this feeling as he admiringly gazes at Marsellus. Then, as Marsellus tells Butch that he probably has two fights left in him, Al Green sings, “Oh let’s, let’s stay together” in an attempt to get Butch to empathize with Marsellus. As Marsellus hands Butch the money, Al Green tunefully asks, “Why people break up/Oh turn around and make up/I just can’t see/You’d never do that to me (would you, baby?).” These lines describe what Marsellus is thinking, and foreshadow Butch’s behavior later on in the film. Then, as Marsellus tells Butch that, once he’s in the Caribbean, he will realize that he (Marsellus) was right, Al Green blissfully sings, “let’s stay together/loving you whether, whether times are good or bad, happy or sad.” The reason this scene is so remarkably effective is that Tarantino pauses the conversation long enough for the music to be heard, which affects the tone of the scene and assists in revealing the thoughts shared between these two men.

Curiously, whenever Butch and Marsellus are together, music is always playing. Gorbman points out another important role of film music, which may bring a better understanding as to why Tarantino chooses to do this. She states, “Music enters to satisfy a need to compensate for, fill in, the emotional depth not verbally representable” (67). In other words, playing music when Butch and Marsellus are together serves as an expressive device. These two characters exhibit an image of strength therefore; the music informs the audience of how these characters feel on the inside. Since Butch and

Marsellus both consider themselves strong individuals, it would be wrong for Tarantino to have them speak of their weaknesses. Letting the music do it for them keeps their image consistent while still allowing them to trade thoughts and express their true emotions.

Butch and Marsellus' final scene together takes place in the basement of a pawn shop and is also accompanied by music. As the owner of the shop, Maynard, and a security officer, Zed, take Marsellus into a back room to rape him, *The Revels*' "Comanche" begins. The shrill, choppy saxophone playing helps darken the mood of this uncomfortable scene. The music dulls as the door closes, but Butch can still hear the strain of the music. The sax drives the emotion of the scene as Butch unties himself and escapes up the stairs. As the hollow drums and the pumping bass seep upstairs, Butch grabs a samurai sword and decides to go back down to rescue Marsellus. The song ends upon the stabbing and killing of Maynard. Butch and Marsellus finally speak to each other without the underlying presence of music, thus, breaking the cycle of relying on music to communicate. Perhaps, Tarantino felt it necessary to break this cycle because it was the best way for Butch and Marsellus to resolve their conflict. Now that they have communicated with each other, without the assistance of music, their relationship can be clearly defined, thus ending the tension of unanswered questions.

Pulp Fiction's music also works to verbalize the emotions and intentions of Vincent and Mia. Their thoughts for one another are communicated through specific pieces of music. The scene in Jack Rabbit Slim's is a fitting example. As Mia forces Vincent to enter a Twist contest, Tarantino makes good use of Chuck Berry's "Never Can Tell." The music and the scene definitely function as a moment of escapism for the

audience, but it also serves as a way for Mia and Vincent to finally become comfortable with each other. The lyrics are subtly used to describe their unfolding relationship.

As Mia and Vincent begin to dance, Chuck Berry belts out, “It was a teenage wedding, and the old folks wished them well/You could see that Pierre did truly love the mademoiselle/And now the young monsieur and madam have rung the chapel bell.” Obviously, there is not a wedding going on here, but there is a union of sorts. Up until this moment in the film, Mia and Vincent feel awkward because they do not know each other, and, on top of that, she is married to his volatile boss, Marsellus. Vincent is obviously growing fond of Mia, thus the line, “You could see that Pierre did truly love the mademoiselle.” “You Never Can Tell” encourages Vincent to forget his gangster life, and allows him and Mia to finally connect. As the next scene shows, this connection is crucial in saving Mia’s life.

After the dance contest, Vincent and Mia return to her house. Vincent excuses himself to go to the bathroom, while Mia stands at a reel-to-reel machine. She presses play and *Urge Overkill*’s “Girl You’ll be a Woman Soon” begins. Once again, Tarantino lets the character take control of the film’s music. The lyrics serve to translate the characters’ thoughts while taking the form of a moral commentary. The singer repeatedly warns the characters of an impending dilemma.

Mia excitedly mouths along with the opening lines, “Girl, you’ll be a woman...soon.” As she dances back and forth in front of a column, the camera passes behind it, giving the appearance that it is slyly dancing along with her. She continues to thrash about in the living room, as the lyrics take on a foreshadowing tone, “I love you so much, can't count all the ways I've died for you girl/ and all they can say is, ‘He's not

your kind.” As Burt states, “On occasion it is important for music to connect with meanings of a symbolic nature that transcend the surface meaning of dialogue and action” (17). Vincent has not verbally stated his desire for Mia, but one can tell these are his feelings by the moral struggle he is having in the bathroom. Vincent struggles with the notion that he is Mia’s date, but not her boyfriend. Burt also mentions that overall meanings become apparent through shifts in emotions over lengthy time spans and “music that corroborates these shifts, ties in with the overall dramatic presentation of the story” (17) and that seems to be what is going on here. The music that Mia chooses to play can be heard in the bathroom as Vincent tries to talk himself into having one drink and then leaving, even though he’d rather stay and act on his emotions. Since Vincent can hear the music coming from the other room, one can also perceive that this moral monologue is a response to the music.

As the song continues to play, Mia waits for him on the couch. She reaches into his coat pocket and finds a bag of heroin. As the singer shakily croons, “Now it’s up to you...Girl, you’ll be a woman soon,” Mia, thinking it is cocaine, decides to snort it. The line is perhaps a direct reference to Mia’s upcoming overdose. This near-death situation may make her realize it is time to be a woman rather than a reckless girl. As her nose begins to bleed, and she begins to have a seizure, the song speaks for her through the lines, “Please, come take my hand...Soon, you’ll need a man.” After Vincent finds her, one can’t help recall the song’s refrain, “And I’ll never know when I come around what I’m gonna find...girl, you’ll be a woman soon.” Tarantino’s skillful placement of music into the lives of the film’s characters has shown its communicative powers.

Tarantino's use of music in *Pulp Fiction* compliments the film's intensely emotional scenes. The music serves to elevate the audience to the same heightened state of arousal as the characters. Since the characters are sometimes shown selecting the music, one has to believe that the song reflects their emotions. The lyrical content of the film's music also plays a vital role in revealing a character's psyche. Since the characters are not willing to speak about what they are feeling, the soundtrack serves to clarify facial expressions, as well as represent the characters' conscience.

There is one important musical instance in *Pulp Fiction* where the music breaks free from these expressive functions. In one thought provoking scene, the music acts as a satirical commentary on the deviant behavior of Mia and Vincent. As Claudia Gorbman mentions, background music invites the "spectator to contemplate" and helps "make a spectacle of the images it accompanies." Therefore, it "evokes a larger-than-life dimension which, rather than involving us *in* the narrative, places us in contemplation of it" (68). Gorbman's theory can be applied to the following scene at Mia's house.

Tarantino appears to use Dusty Springfield's "Son of a Preacher Man" to garnish the scene with unrelated music, but a closer listen and look reveals a great dichotomy. As Vincent enters Mia's house the song begins to play. The interior of the house is decorated in white, which could imply purity, but these characters are far from pure. Vincent serves himself an alcoholic drink, while Mia snorts cocaine off of a mirror. "Son of a Preacher Man," however, is a song about the innocence of first love. This creates a moment of dissonance because the deviant behaviors of Vincent and Mia are totally unlike the characters in Springfield's song.

As George Burt states, “It is important that music is neither more profound nor more superficial than the character actually is...you can take a very trivial person and make him absolutely ludicrous by giving him a presence, a depth of feeling, or a power of appearance which isn’t and shouldn’t be there” (18). Tarantino’s use of “Son of a Preacher Man” creates an audiovisual paradox. The mingling of music and images prompts the spectator to think about what Tarantino is trying to say about these characters. The music can’t help but be perceived as a sermon in morality for Vincent and Mia. Perhaps this is why Tarantino has Mia abruptly stop the music by roughly picking up the record needle.

Tarantino’s musical technique in *Pulp Fiction* has been slightly transformed since *Reservoir Dogs*. One can easily see the same nostalgic tendency; however, the music in *Pulp Fiction* tends to be more active, in that it works harder to arouse the audience’s emotions. As Burt states, “Music can be a powerful aid in the attempt to shape and thus dramatize the emotional curve of a scene in ways that are consistent with the narrative line” (59). The mixing of hazy sounding surf music and druggy visuals in the scene where Vincent injects heroin works well because the music effectively captures his euphoric feeling. This could still be achieved without the music because the audience could see that he is getting high, but the woozy rhythm of the music is an attempt to make the audience experience the high.

Throughout *Pulp Fiction*, it is quite noticeable that Tarantino was a bit more meticulous in his selection of source music than he was in *Reservoir Dogs*. Well chosen source music, as Burt mentions, is “the best possible means of fulfilling an environmental expectation or need and thus [being] of value in the characterization process” (Burt, 74).

Tarantino does this in *Pulp Fiction* by extending the play time of the music in several scenes of the film. This allows plenty of opportunity for the audience to absorb the music and apply it either to the characters' personality or their emotional state in the scene.

Tarantino not only uses music to bring out the personality traits of the characters in *Reservoir Dogs*, but there are also moments he uses it for shock value rather than as a compliment to the scene, and this is where the choice of music slightly differs between the two films. Tarantino's next film, *Jackie Brown*, continues the trend of using music to complement a scene, but he also begins crafting music as homage to the cinematic past.

CHAPTER THREE

JACKIE BROWN

Tarantino released *Jackie Brown* in 1997. The film is an adaptation of Elmore Leonard's novel, Rum Punch. Tarantino's casting of Pam Grier as the film's main character was perceived as a salute to the Blaxploitation films of the 70s. Critics had mixed feelings about the film, partly for its lack of daring aesthetics, but also for its long and, in some instances, stagnant storylines.

Jackie Brown is about a streetwise, 40-something flight attendant who supplements her income by smuggling cash into the country for an arms dealer. When she gets caught by the cops, she must decide whether to turn in the arms dealer or protect her livelihood. With the help of an eager bail bondsman, Max, she concocts her own plan, which involves setting up the arms dealer and running away with the money.

Tarantino's use of music in this film differs from his previous two films, in that most of the songs in *Jackie Brown* are drawn from soul music reminiscent of the Blaxploitation films of the 70s. Therefore, one of the first functions of the film's music is to serve as homage to Blaxploitation films, which are films that usually take place in the ghetto and have plots that tend to revolve around pimps, drug dealers and hit men. These films were made by black filmmakers who targeted black audiences by casting nearly all black actors and actresses. *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) and *Shaft* (1971) have been credited with kicking off the genre.

The characters in Blaxploitation films are usually larger than life and star black "heroes" that always win. The dialogue is crude, the drug and sex scenes extreme, and the violence excessive. The themes in these films vary from social protest to straight-on

revenge. This genre of film was the first to use funk and soul music as a soundtrack. Curtis Mayfield, Willie Hutch, and Isaac Hayes are just a few of the composers that helped create the soulful scores to these films.

As a boy in elementary school, Tarantino greatly admired Blaxploitation films, especially the ones starring Pam Grier. The bulk of the aural nods in *Jackie Brown* are to the 1973 film, *Coffy*, which starred Grier. According to author Robert Miklitsch, “The quite audible presence of classic soul music in *Jackie Brown* obviously reflects Tarantino’s desire to showcase Pam Grier, albeit not the ‘mythical’, ‘super-bad-mama’ that audiences like Tarantino tend to associate with her younger, ‘badder self.’ Rather, as the director himself has said, it’s ‘*Coffy* 20 years later, *Foxy Brown* 20 years later” (304). In other words, Pam Grier plays Jackie Brown as a woman who has got it together. Grier’s previous characters, Foxy Brown and Coffy, did have it together, but in a vigilante way. Jackie Brown is still as tough as these characters, but she doesn’t have to shoot anyone to show her strength.

Other than serving as homage to Blaxploitation films, *Jackie Brown*’s music functions in two other ways, the first being as an indicator of Jackie’s street smarts. As with *Pulp Fiction*, music is used to reveal a character’s persona. In the case of Jackie, whenever she is accompanied by music, the lyrics usually deal with someone trying to overcome the difficulties of living in a tough neighborhood. Second, the music functions to slyly reveal Max’s affectionate feelings for Jackie and bring them closer together. Since Max never verbalizes his feelings for Jackie, Tarantino relies on music riddled with romantic overtones to show the audience that Max is falling for her.

Tarantino opens and closes *Jackie Brown* with “Across 110th Street,” a song originally composed for a 1972 Blaxploitation film of the same name. This is the first example of homage to this genre of film. The song’s presence does assist in capturing the aural feel of a Blaxploitation film, but it is primarily used to signify Jackie’s streetwise personality. However, as Jackie’s image changes, the song’s meaning changes along with her. As Miklitsch mentions, its use “invokes that larger cinematic ‘structure of feeling’, Blaxploitation, which remains the audiovisual source for the character of Jackie Brown and her inimitable predecessor, Foxy Brown” (291).

As the opening credits begin, Womack’s descriptive song about surviving the ghetto through strength begins to play, shortly followed by a tracking shot of a profiled Jackie standing on a mobile airport walkway. Dressed neatly in a stewardess uniform, she coolly glides in front of a multicolored wall. Since she enters the frame in tandem with the opening lines of the song, it is clear that Tarantino wants the audience to know where Jackie is from and what she wants:

*Doing whatever I had to do to survive/I’m not saying what I did was alright,
trying to break out of the ghetto was a day to day fight/Been down so long, getting
up didn’t cross my mind/I knew there was a better way of life that I was just
trying to find.*

Therefore, the music also serves a narrative function. Jackie has depended solely on herself for her survival. She has garnered strength from her experiences and no longer relies on inappropriate behavior to get what she needs in life.

As “Across 110th Street” continues to play while Jackie treks through the airport, Tarantino combines shots of varying angles of her stern face and confident walk with the music in order to show that she is a capable woman with a troubled past, but has come through all right with most of her morals intact. At the beginning of the film, “Across

110th Street” plays a vital role in helping the audience understand Tarantino’s image of Jackie being a reformed product of the ghetto.

However, when Womack’s “Across 110th Street” is played again at the closing of the film, the audience has complete knowledge of all that is Jackie Brown. One has witnessed her running money for an arms dealer, misleading investigators, getting the arms dealer killed and stealing money. Jackie’s image has changed and so has the symbolic nature of the song. Therefore, the song means something different at the end of the film, which is that she is a victim of her circumstances. In a lament to herself, Jackie chooses to sing along to Womack’s song (“Doing whatever I had to do to survive”). This puts her in a more sympathetic light. Therefore, the closing image of Jackie Brown squashes the confident swagger of the opening Jackie Brown.

The closing moments of the film begin as Max blankly stares at Jackie driving away, while the smooth opening melody of “Across 110th Street” plays. The shot then cuts to a close up of Jackie’s face, as she drives along in contemplation. When Womack sings, “I’m not saying what I did was alright,” it makes sense to the audience, because of Jackie’s behavior throughout the film. Jackie’s image becomes one of a woman with a guilty conscience. A slight smirk emerges from her lips as Womack sings, “You don’t know what you’ll do until you’re put under pressure/Across 110th Street is a hell of a tester.” Jackie realizes that she resorts to “110th Street” techniques when pushed too far. As she begins mouthing along to the words, a troubled expression hangs over her face. She inhales deeply before mouthing the line, “You can find it all in the street,” which indicates that she agrees that it is a shame to have to find solutions to one’s problems

through illegal behavior, but she had no choice. In a gesture that radiates disappointment, Jackie subtly shakes her head and then bites her lip as the screen goes black.

Jackie's disappointment with herself is in stark contrast to a scene earlier in the film that pairs her with Randy Crawford's "Street Life," which is used to suggest that Jackie revels in her street smarts. Jackie's image has slipped some since the opening of the film, but her confidence remains because she can use her savvy knowledge of the streets to get herself out of a dilemma.

As Jackie drives to the mall to make the money switch, Crawford's song begins. She is filmed in profile as she drives along with a slight smile. The song exudes her cool confidence, which is different from the feeling of assurance that Jackie displays during the opening scene of the film. This time, her hair is down, and her body is more relaxed. She is entertained by the notion that she is putting her street smarts to use, and the music seems to encourage that feeling. The music appropriately plays along as she takes pleasure in the fact that the tune is talking for and about her:

*I play the street life/Because there's no place I can go/Street life/
It's the only life I know...the type of life that's played/A temptin' masquerade/
You dress you walk you talk/You're who you think you are.*

As she enters the mall, she stands still, hesitantly looking around as the music's tempo slows and the vocals cease. This is Jackie's deep breath, and the song compliments that feeling. After she regains her composure, she continues her confident stride as the song's horns blare on, and Randy Crawford intently sings:

*Street life/It's the only life I know/Street life/And there's a thousand cards to play
Street life/Until you play your life away.*

It is too late for Jackie to back out of her plan, so she might as well continue on to the department store where she is to make the money exchange. In order to survive, Jackie must fully embrace her streetwise stigma.

Another example of Tarantino's homage to Blaxploitation films can be heard through the use of music from the 1973 film, *Coffy*. Tarantino uses this to great effect during the "Money Exchange –For real this time" portion of the film. The mood of the scene relies heavily on two tracks from Roy Ayers' soundtrack to *Coffy*, "Aragon" and "Escape." According to Ken Garner, "the funky brass riff of 'Aragon' is an opening and ending theme, associated specifically with the object of the sting –the money –playing while Jackie hides the money under the towels, and when Max calmly walks out with the bag near the end" (198). Incidentally, "Aragon" is used at the beginning of *Coffy*. Tarantino's placement of "Aragon" in *Jackie Brown* also indicates the beginning of something as well, the heist.

"Escape" also draws parallels to a scene in *Coffy*. The song is used when Grier is taken away to be killed by the mob, and also when she makes her escape. Tarantino cleverly pays homage to this scene by creating another opportunity for Grier to be freed from an intense situation. Jackie's "escape" is from her financial struggle and a life of deceit.

Homage is not the only function of music in the film, as Tarantino uses it also to express feelings of romantic longing. Max Cherry's growing affection for Jackie is revealed through several songs played throughout the film. While Max never declares his love for Jackie, the music says it for him. Tarantino effectively uses two particular songs in the film, neither of which appear in Blaxploitation films, to symbolize Max's growing

fondness for Jackie. This technique is discussed in Michel Chion's book, Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen. While Chion does not mention Tarantino's film specifically, his explanation can be applied to *Jackie Brown*. He states, "Music can directly express its participation in the feeling of the scene, by taking on the scene's rhythm, tone and phrasing. In this case we can speak of *empathetic music*, from the word empathy, the ability to feel the feeling of others" (8). Tarantino's use of *Bloodstone's* "Natural High" and *The Delfonics'* "Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time," serve as examples of empathetic music.

The first time Max meets Jackie is when he picks her up from the county jail. As she begins walking up the sidewalk, Max admiringly stares at her as *Bloodstone's* "Natural High" begins to play. The camera slowly zooms in on his face as the lyrics state:

Why do I keep my mind on you all the time/And I don't even know you/Why do I feel this way/Thinking about you every day/And I don't even know you.

Max hasn't said one word to Jackie yet, and, already, he has become smitten with her. The lyrics assist in showing Max's initial attraction to Jackie. After Max introduces himself to Jackie, he offers her a ride home. She accepts and, as they walk to his car, the line, "I'll take to the sky on a natural high," is sung. Jackie Brown is Max's natural high. The song's lyrics are smothered under their conversation as Max drives them to a bar. However, there are a few pauses in the conversation that allow for the instruments to flood the car with romantic melodies. *Bloodstone's* song sets the stage for Max's long journey toward Jackie's affection.

The next morning, Max arrives at Jackie's apartment to retrieve the gun she stole from his glove box. Jackie's apartment is where Max's feelings for her change from slight attraction to infatuation. *The Delfonics'* "Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time"

serves as an example of this because the audience witnesses the intoxicating effect the song has on Max.

After Jackie asks him to come into the apartment, one of the first things Max focuses on is her turntable and a pile of LP records. While they wait for coffee to brew, Jackie asks Max if he would like to hear some music. Jackie chooses an album, and the shot cuts to a close-up of the record needle dropping into the groove of the record. As the intro to *The Delfonics*' "Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time" softly plays, Jackie moves her hands in appreciation of the arrangement. Max sits at the table with his eyes fixed on Jackie as the opening lines sing, "I gave my heart and soul to you, girl/Didn't I do it baby.... didn't I do it baby?" Max says it's "pretty" and asks her who it is, she tells him it is *The Delfonics*. "It's nice," he replies.

Jackie's choosing to play "Didn't I Blow Your Mind This Time" seems to suggest that she is attracted to him as well. She didn't have to play a song with romantic overtones. She could have played something with less emotion. She is the one that fuels Max's fire and it is his desire for her that plays an important role in *Jackie Brown*. If Max were not so smitten with Jackie, he probably would not be as willing to help her. The music assists in taking their relationship from business associates to romantic confidants.

The Delfonics have seemingly cast a spell over Max as it becomes quite noticeable that he takes delight in Jackie's sensitivity to their music. His reaction to it shows that he is just as sensitive to the music as she is, and his facial expression confirms this. He sits in Jackie's kitchen with an enamored grin on his face every time she speaks. The opening line of the song "I gave my heart and soul to you girl," refers to his willingness to listen to her and give her advice. When Max comments that the music is

“pretty” and “nice,” he really means is that Jackie is pretty and nice, but it’s far too early in their relationship for him to tell her that. This exchange between them is an example of what is stated in the book, The Technique of Film Music, “All music is either the expression or the stimulant of human emotion” (Huntley and Manvell, 143). In *Jackie Brown*’s case, the music of the *The Delfonics* functions as an expressive device.

The song has such an impact on Max that he purchases a *Delfonics* cassette as a way to keep Jackie in his thoughts. Later on, after the practice run of the money exchange, Max is shown inserting the cassette tape into his car’s player. He mouths the opening lines of “Didn’t I Blow Your Mind This Time” as he drives along. What he couldn’t say to her in her apartment can now be said in the privacy of his car. The music encourages Max’s affectionate feelings towards Jackie, and his full commitment to her.

“Didn’t I Blow Your Mind This Time” is used again near the end of the film. Even though Jackie is not with him during this scene, the song’s lyrics evoke romantic images of her. This is what inspires him to carry on with the plan. The scene begins as Ordell, the arms dealer, decides to use Max’s car to drive them to Max’s office. Jackie lures him there by telling him that she has his money. What Ordell doesn’t know is that Jackie intends to kill him. As Ordell pushes the cassette into Max’s car stereo, “Didn’t I Blow Your Mind” begins to play. A puzzled Ordell says, “I didn’t know you liked the Delfonics.” As Max sits rigidly in the passenger seat, he calmly replies, “They’re pretty good.” The song helps keep him cool, but is also a sly reference to Jackie’s slick tactics; Jackie is pretty good at pulling the wool over Ordell’s eyes. Then the line, “I gave my heart and soul to you, girl” is sung, which refers to the sacrifice Max is making for Jackie.

The final shot of this musical scene is of Max and Ordell, from an outside perspective, driving up to Max's place of business. The words, "Didn't I blow your mind this time, didn't I, oh/Didn't I blow your mind this time, didn't I" radiates from inside the car. Earlier in the film, these words were directly related to Jackie's feelings toward Max. In this instance, however, the words function as a mouthpiece for Max. He is the one symbolically asking if he blows Jackie's mind because he actually goes through with her plan. He successfully brings Ordell to her so she can kill him. Even though, at the end of the film, Jackie expresses her appreciation to him with "less than 10%" of half a million dollars and a few kisses, he does not get her. Instead, he gets to keep a memory of her through the music of *The Delfonics*.

Tarantino has mentioned in an interview that, "In the case of *Jackie Brown*, old-school Soul is the rhythm and feel this movie takes place to. Not high energy stuff, but Bill Withers, *The Delfonics* song you hear. That's how we're supposed to take it in" (Peary, 200). Tarantino also uses Soul music as a way for Max and Jackie to connect. Max uses it as a constant reminder of Jackie, and as a way to get closer to her. Jackie uses music, mostly unintentionally, to encourage Max's affectionate feelings so he will help her pull off the heist.

The strategic placement of songs in *Jackie Brown* functions to reveal affectionate emotions, evoke character strength, and pay homage to Blaxploitation cinema. Compared to *Reservoir Dogs* and *Pulp Fiction*, Tarantino's musical technique in *Jackie Brown* has been altered. To set a specific cinematic atmosphere for *Jackie Brown*, he relies on music scores from a specific genre of films, unlike in his two previous films.

With his next film, *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, Tarantino continues his homage to the cinematic past by attempting to capture particular themes of two genres of film. He does this by using film scores from Spaghetti Westerns of the 60s and Kung Fu films of the 70s. An intriguing aural and visual collision occurs as Tarantino creates an East meets West scenario.

CHAPTER FOUR

KILL BILL VOL. 1

After a six year hiatus, Tarantino released *Kill Bill Vol. 1* in 2003. The film was originally planned to be four hours long, but Tarantino, on the advice of his distributor, decided to split it into two films. *Kill Bill Vol. 2* was released six months after *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. Tarantino stated on the *Kill Bill Vol. 1* DVD that both volumes of *Kill Bill* involve the fusing of Japanese Samurai films of the late 60s and early 70s with Sergio Leone style Spaghetti Westerns from the same era. Critics balked at the violent visuals when volume one came out, but praised it for its skillfully choreographed action scenes.

Uma Thurman teams up with Tarantino again to play the main character known only as The Bride. *Kill Bill*'s plot is driven by revenge. As we learn only much later, the Bride was once the fifth member of a deadly team of assassins, but when she decides to retire and get married, her boss, Bill, is displeased. Her former cohorts, along with Bill, show up at the wedding and kill everyone there. The Bride survives a bullet to the head, and, after coming out of a four year coma, decides to seek revenge against her four assassins and Bill. The story concludes in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*.

Tarantino's use of music in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* differs from his previous films in that he creates a soundtrack based on two specific genres of film: a style of martial arts film known as Kung Fu and Spaghetti Westerns of the 60s. The end result is an audio and visual meeting of East and West. The music in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* does function as homage to these two genres of films, but it also works to mimic the mood of these films. As author D.K. Holm states, "One of the most important discoveries that Tarantino conveys to the audience through his use of music is how similar at root Spaghetti Westerns and Asian

action films happen to be. He uses the music for one, over scenes he re-creates from the other, and vice versa. Both genres are mostly about revenge, and both have a Saturday matinee level of morality (an eye for an eye) that nevertheless has complexity” (48).

Kill Bill Vol. 1 incorporates numerous visual elements of Kung Fu cinema such as swordplay using Japanese Samurai swords, the energetic spraying of blood from the stumps of cut off limbs, scenes of decapitation, and numerous bodies being cut down. Tarantino then chooses to pair these visuals with Spaghetti Western scores. However, in several instances, he also uses soundtracks and even sound effects from Kung Fu films. In order to fully comprehend the Kung Fu elements used in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and recognize Tarantino’s moments of homage, it is necessary to briefly sketch in some details of the genre.

Kung Fu cinema originated in Shanghai in the 1920s, but after the 1949 revolution, production moved to Hong Kong. Most of the Kung Fu films Tarantino was influenced by were released by the Shaw Brothers production company, which at the time was the largest privately owned film studio in the world. Even before the opening scene or credits of *Kill Bill Vol. 1* begin, the Shaw Brothers’ famous logo appears. This is not a Shaw Brothers produced film, however; rather, the logo is part of Tarantino’s attempt to recapture some of the visual elements of Kung Fu cinema.

According to the electronic version of the *Bright Lights Film Journal*, “These films are artistically unique, influenced by all the artifacts of Kung Fu culture, both high and low; comic books and classical Chinese literature, TV serials and traditional Chinese painting, superstitious beliefs and pulp novels. They take place on an abstract historical plane (like a fairy tale) that is then given the trappings of contemporary life” (Garcia).

The plots usually center on good overcoming bad, or honesty defeating corruption. The antagonist usually dies, and the hero lives on. Bruce Lee was a name famously associated with this genre of film. He starred in Kung Fu films such as *Fists of Fury*, *Enter the Dragon*, and *Game of Death*.

One of the most glaring examples of how Tarantino takes elements of Kung Fu cinema and places them into *Kill Bill Vol. 1* occurs when The Bride arrives in Tokyo. The audience is immediately greeted with Al Hirt's *Green Hornet* theme, which comes from the TV series of the same name. The high tempo trumpet plays as we see an animated map of The Bride's flight to Tokyo, followed by a shot of the Yakuza gang called the Crazy 88's riding on motorcycles. In the TV series, *Green Hornet*, Bruce Lee plays the Hornet's lethal sidekick, Kato, who wears a uniform consisting of a black suit, white shirt, with a thin necktie and black mask with raised corners. The Yakuza bodyguards in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* are also dressed in this uniform. These references to the *Green Hornet* TV series not only assists in generating a Kung Fu atmosphere in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, but they also give Tarantino the opportunity to show his appreciation for this genre of television.

Kung Fu films were not necessarily known for their music, but Tarantino lifts several scores from them for *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and has no problem justifying it. In an interview he states, "In all of the Shaw Brothers' Hong Kong movies, they ripped off Hollywood scores constantly: They'd take them straight from the soundtrack albums and just plug them in, oftentimes, their use of score –their choice of random stuff that you would not think would work in a Kung Fu score –worked magnificently" (Callaghan, S10). Tarantino does this multiple times in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* with great effect. For example, he uses a score from a 1973 Kung Fu film entitled *Lady Snowblood* during a scene

between The Bride and O-Ren Ishii, one of the assassins who helped wipe out the wedding party. Additionally, in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*, Tarantino uses many of the same devices and plot points of *Lady Snowblood*, including its non-linear narrative, the theme of revenge, the titling of chapters, the snow covered background, and the score entitled “The Flower Carnage” is sung by the film’s star Meiko Kaji.

Kaji’s song is used just after O-Ren Ishii’s scalp is sliced off by The Bride. As O-Ren Ishii collapses and dies on the snow-covered ground, the strangely romantic melody of the song begins. The tone of the song infuses the scene with a feeling of loneliness as The Bride walks away from the body and sits down to gather her thoughts. The lyrics are sung in Japanese without the aid of English subtitles. However, when looking at a translation of the lyrics, it becomes apparent that the words fit The Bride’s current emotional state as well as her mission of revenge. The lyrics state:

*I'm a woman who walks at the brink of life and death
who has emptied my tears many moons ago.
All the compassion tears and dreams
The snowy nights and tomorrow hold no meaning
I've immersed my body in the river of vengeance*

Tarantino’s use of “Flower of Carnage” suggests that The Bride has a philosophical connection to the lead character in *Lady Snowblood*. The similarities between The Bride and Lady Snowblood are hard to ignore because both characters, like so many other characters in Kung Fu films, are so bent on exacting revenge on those who did them previous harm, that they are willing to risk serious injury or death.

Not all of Tarantino’s aural references to Kung Fu films are as symbolically complex as *Lady Snowblood* and in some instances; he gives only a brief nod to the genre. The first example of this occurs through the use of a score from the 1972 revenge

film, *Female Convict Scorpion Jailhouse 41*. The score is entitled “Champions of Death” and is used as The Bride, with sword in hand, continues to fight her way through numerous Yakuza gang members. As the score crackles to life with its tempered horns, The Bride quickly makes her way through the room, slaying anyone in her way. The score is only played for 24 seconds, but it still serves as a subliminal reference to a female revenge Kung Fu film, one with a song entitled “Champions of Death.” This is another instance where Tarantino shows that he very purposefully chose the music in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and did not randomly select soundtracks from the Kung Fu genre.

Another example of Tarantino’s brief nod to the genre is demonstrated through his placement of the pulsating siren sound from the TV series *Ironside*, scored by Quincy Jones. This same siren is also used in the 1973 Kung Fu film *Five Fingers of Death*, directed by Chang-hwa Jeong. In *Five Fingers of Death*, the lead character’s hands are crushed by foes in a fierce attack. However, he is able to retrain himself and turn his hands into powerful weapons. Whenever he comes under attack, they turn red and a siren begins to blare.

Tarantino attempts to achieve this same aural and visual effect briefly in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. Since The Bride has also been assaulted by foes in the past and is seeking revenge, Tarantino deems it logical to use the same effect from *Five Fingers of Death* with The Bride whenever she crosses paths with one of her aggressors. However, it is not her hands that turn red, instead, the camera focuses tightly onto her eyes, and, then, as the siren blares, the audience is shown a brief flashback image in translucent red of that particular character harming her. Tarantino uses this effect repeatedly in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* as a signal to the audience that a moment of revenge is at hand.

Clearly *Kill Bill Vol. 1* contains several instances of aural elements from Kung Fu cinema, but the film also has aural elements of Spaghetti Westerns. These are films from the 60s and 70s that were made and financed by Continental filmmakers, mostly from Italy. Spaghetti Westerns are imitations of the Westerns created in the United States and were filmed on location in Spain because it closely resembled the American Southwest. The plots of these films almost always involved a renegade gunslinger whose prime motivation is money. According to the book, Spaghetti Westerns –the Good, the Bad and the Violent, “The characters are rough men; men who, like the landscape, didn’t give an inch. Only the fittest survived in this hell. Their faces weathered, dried from the sun, often missing teeth or an eye. These people can only be controlled by raw, brutal strength” (Weisser, xi). Often, a villain in these films is made to “suffer the same type of penalty he inflicted upon others.”

Filmmaker Sergio Leone is one of the names most famously associated with the Spaghetti Western genre. *A Fistful of Dollars*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* are some of the most well-known films he has directed. Lee Van Cleef and Clint Eastwood are a few of the familiar faces in Hollywood acting in these films. Spaghetti Westerns died out in the late 70s, but are often looked back upon with great fondness, not only for their great cinematography, but for their memorable musical scores.

Ennio Morricone was one of the most popular film music composers of the Spaghetti Western genre. His composed film scores added an aural dimension to the already dense visuals of the Leone Spaghetti Westerns. According to www.imagesjournal.com, Morricone’s “hoofbeat rhythms, whistling themes, and the use

of human voice as an instrument became the standard for scores. His haunting tunes became an audible presence –punctuating action, accelerating a chase scene, or driving a showdown to its conclusion. A bell, a whistle and a cracking whip announce the quick death of a bandit or a lonely trumpet plays a dirge for those who are about to die” (Nudge).

According to film music scholar Jeff Smith, “Working with director Sergio Leone, Morricone gave prominence to his scores by treating generic elements, such as showdowns and gunfights, as occasions for extended musical exposition” (131). Tarantino also uses this technique throughout *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. In one instance, he uses Morricone’s “I Giorni Dell’Ira” from the 1968 Spaghetti Western film *Death Rides a Horse*. Morricone’s dramatic choral chanting score is paired with a showdown between the Samurai sword wielding Bride and O-Ren Ishii and her Yakuza gang. By using this mesmerizing and emotionally charged music from this specific genre of film, Tarantino captures the heightened musical mood of a showdown displayed so many times in Spaghetti Westerns.

Tarantino doesn’t limit himself to Morricone’s work, as he also uses composer Luis Bacalov’s score entitled “The Grand Duel (Parte Prima).” The score is from the 1972 Spaghetti Western film, *Big Showdown*. Bacalov worked as an assistant to Morricone and made his greatest mark with scores for Spaghetti Westerns. Tarantino uses Bacalov’s sullen score with a flashback scene that involves O-Ren Ishii’s father trying to fight off members of a Yakuza gang while their boss sits in a chair sadistically laughing. O-Ren Ishii’s father gets punched around and then is thrown to the floor, whereupon a Yakuza gang member slays him with a Samurai sword. O-Ren Ishii quivers under a bed

as her mother is then thrown down onto the same bed and is slain by the Yakuza boss's Samurai sword. The brooding harmonica, soft strings, and a melodic female wail convey the scene's feeling of helplessness and loss.

As George Burt states, "There are many 'classic' film scores that, when heard without the picture, have the power to evoke the essential character of the images for which they were intended. This is due, in part, to the process of association; having grown accustomed to hearing the score with the picture, images from the story appear unbidden to the mind's eye when we hear the music alone" (11). In this case, Burt is talking about listening to the music from a film on a stereo without the actual images from a film. However, this concept can still be applied to what Tarantino does with Armando Trovajoli's score, "I Lunghi Giorni Della Vendetta." The score comes from the 1966 Spaghetti Western film *The Long Days of Vengeance* directed by Florestano Vancini.

Trovajoli's score is used in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* after the slaying of O-Ren Ishii's father. Accompanied by the strum of a guitar and the dramatic sound of a rising trumpet, the camera slowly pans up the Samurai sword used to kill O-Ren Ishii's father. Then there is a close up of one of the Yakuza gang members smiling at his actions followed by a cut to a young O-Ren Ishii under the bed hissing with her eyes angrily fixed on the Yakuza member. This scene is visually reminiscent of Kung Fu cinema, but the way it is put together with the music reminds one of a villain in a Spaghetti Western who has just gunned a man down in front of his family. Granted, the effect Burt mentions earlier does work better if one has seen how Trovajoli's score and Vancini's scene were originally

presented, but “I Lunghi Giorni Della Vendetta” still manages to magnify the tragic mood of this scene.

In addition to manipulating Spaghetti Western scores, Tarantino is also able to skillfully use Zamfir’s “The Lonely Shepherd,” which is an intriguing choice because Zamfir is not associated with Kung Fu cinema or Spaghetti Westerns. He is a Romanian pan flute player whose easy listening style usually evokes a sense of spiritual tranquility. In an interview from the special features section of the *Kill Bill Vol. 1* DVD, Tarantino discusses the use of Zamfir’s music. He states, “There is a piece of beautiful music from Zamfir the pan flute guy that’s used in a crucial scene and closing credits. When it was played for me, I thought, this is amazing, this is Japanese Samurai meets Sergio Leone. This fusion is what the whole movie is about.”

Tarantino uses “The Lonely Shepherd” during the scene where Hattori Hanzo, a Japanese Samurai sword maker, presents a custom made Samurai sword to The Bride. The pan flute intensifies and then pauses as Hanzo takes the sword out of its sheath and looks it over. The pan flute then energetically flutters as Hanzo hands the sword to The Bride. The title of Zamfir’s song has its own irony, of course, because, like the Shepherd, The Bride works alone in seeking her vengeance. The dramatic instrumental pauses and the fluctuating melodies have the same emotional characteristics as a Morricone piece. Therefore, it is the tone of the song that captures the mood of both the Spaghetti Western score and the Japanese Samurai.

According to D.K. Holm, “The sound and vision mélange works because *Kill Bill* is about Tarantino’s ability to absorb all of these different influences and mix them together so that it turns into something both familiar and not, while also suggesting

correlations between Samurais and gunslingers” (157). Tarantino also demonstrates that Kung Fu cinema and Spaghetti Westerns are so close in themes of revenge and honor that the style of music used in either of these genres works efficiently in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. Therefore, a Spaghetti Western score can accompany a Kung Fu scene and not appear awkward because it is used in a context that is consistent with the mood of the film.

As we shall see in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, Tarantino continues with the Western audio and visuals, but relies less on Eastern sounds while still stressing Eastern visuals. It is not entirely clear why Tarantino decided to focus more on the Western elements in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. Since he split *Kill Bill* into two parts, perhaps he felt it was necessary to give the second volume a contemplative feel. *Kill Bill Vol. 1* tended to be overwhelming at times, due, in part, to the rambunctious mix of music and Samurai fighting. *Kill Bill Vol. 2* has moments of aural and visual contemplation similar to Spaghetti Westerns, which give the audience the opportunity to absorb the symbolism of the scene. However, though Tarantino chooses to mix in several other genres of music, it does not affect the overall musical feel of the film, for it is still blatantly Spaghetti Western meets Kung Fu cinema. Throughout *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, Tarantino makes certain that his homage to these two great genres never loses its aural or visual roots.

CHAPTER FIVE

KILL BILL VOL. 2

In April of 2004, Tarantino released the second “volume” of *Kill Bill*. Some critics preferred volume two over volume one simply because the storylines were filled in and the characters were developed. The tone of volume two fluctuates from vertiginous to somber. The critics also admired the slower paced moments of *Kill Bill Vol. 2* because it seemed to give the film a more lean and focused feel.

Kill Bill Vol. 2 finds “The Bride” venturing into the American Southwest and Mexico in a quest to kill the final two assassins who helped wipe out her wedding party, and to seek out her former assassination squad boss, Bill. As The Bride finds each of the assassins, first Budd and then Elle Driver, she has flashbacks to the day of her wedding, her training by a strict martial arts master named Pai Mei, and her relationship with Bill. At the end of the film, The Bride and Bill finally converge in a deadly showdown.

As discussed in Chapter Four, *Kill Bill Vol. 1* brings together the aural and visual elements of Kung Fu cinema and Spaghetti Westerns. For the most part, *Kill Bill Vol. 2* continues to merge East and West, but Tarantino mentions on the commentary track of the *Kill Bill Vol. 2* DVD that the film is “much more the Spaghetti Western” than *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. Perhaps Tarantino feels this way because volume two shares the same visual construction and themes of revenge of Sergio Leone directed films such as *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* and *A Fistful of Dollars*, as well as Sergio Corbucci’s *Navajo Joe (A Dollar a Head)*.

Tarantino had asked Morricone to score *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, but was turned down. However, Morricone has been quoted as saying that he “believes that Tarantino found his Spaghetti Western score” (Bracewell, 39). Of course he did, since he plucked them right from him. His use of Morricone’s film scores from *A Fistful of Dollars*, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and *Navajo Joe* play a huge role in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. As author Jim Smith states, “Morricone’s music has a tendency to underline character states and emotions, suggest setting, and even comment on similarities of character and narrative actions” (153). Tarantino finds himself doing the same thing with Morricone’s music in his film, which assists in keeping most of the aural and visual aspects of the Spaghetti Western genre intact. However, Tarantino does take a few liberties with Morricone’s scores by pairing them with samurai visuals and modern technology, which ends up adding an intriguing postmodern element to the film.

This chapter will examine the Spaghetti Western elements in *Kill Bill Vol. 2* by looking at specific scenes from *A Fistful of Dollars*, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, and *Navajo Joe*. To do so effectively, it is necessary to compare and contrast the visual and aural elements of the Spaghetti Western films to Tarantino’s film. This analysis will assist in providing an explanation as to why Tarantino chooses to model certain cinematic moments of his film after this particular genre.

Let us begin, then, with Ennio Morricone’s “Il Tramonto” from Sergio Leone’s best known film, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. The film centers around three men (thus, the film’s title) competing to find some hidden gold buried in a Confederate cemetery. “Il Tramonto” appears near the beginning of the film. The motif of the light plucking of a guitar accompanied by a sustained note begins as a little boy, perched on a

donkey, is startled by a lone man on horseback approaching from the distance. The boy scurries inside as the man approaches the front of the house. As he gets off of his horse, there is a brief, but rising, soft note on a wind instrument. This awkward note acts as a signifier of the character's personality. As author Christopher Frayling, states, "In *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, each of the characters ironically categorized by the title has a distinctive 'insignia,' such as a trill or whine (sung, whistled or played) taken from the opening bars of the main title theme" (165). In this case, the gloomy pitch of the instrumentation is a signifier of a "bad" character. As the man ties up his horse and walks toward the camera, the guitar picks up in intensity. The camera remains focused on his squinting face as tense notes of the guitar continue and then abruptly stop as the man enters the doorway to the house.

Just as it does in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, "Il Tramonto" functions in *Kill Bill Vol. 2* as parallel commentary music. A fitting example of this occurs during The Bride's wedding rehearsal at a chapel. As The Bride decides to go outside to get some air, she hears a few notes on a flute being played just outside the door. The plucking of the guitar accompanied by the sustained note begins as The Bride is startled by the sound of the flute. As she peers at the doorway, her breathing increases as she slowly makes her way outside. When she walks through the doorway, she sees Bill sitting on a bench playing the flute. Just as it heralds "the bad" in *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, the same brief soft puff on a wood instrument can be heard. In this case, "the bad," is Bill. The guitar continues towards its climax as the camera shifts back and forth between the face of The Bride and a tight shot of Bill playing the flute. As Bill looks up at The Bride, the intense notes of the guitar reach their end.

“Il Tramonto” works as a narrative agent in both films in that it assists in creating a feeling of suspense during a dramatic meeting. In *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, the sinister tones of the score suggests a negative connotation associated with Angel Eyes’ (the man on horseback) approach to the house. The same thing can be said for *Kill Bill Vol. 2* when the apprehensive Bride comes face to face with Bill. “Il Tramonto” also sets an intense tone while introducing these “villains” to the audience. The nervous plucking of the guitar acts as a signifier to the audience that a dark moment of the film is about to unfold. In the case of Leone’s film, a few moments after Morricone’s score is played, the villain (Angel Eyes) shoots the people inside the house. This is similar to what happens in Tarantino’s film. Shortly after the score is played, Bill shoots The Bride. “Il Tramonto” functions similarly in Leone and Tarantino’s films because they allow the score to reinforce what is already there rather than smother the scene with dialogue.

Tarantino uses another Morricone score in *Kill Bill Vol. 2* to great effect. He picks a score from Leone’s film *A Fistful of Dollars*, which is simply called “A Fistful of Dollars (theme).” Perhaps Tarantino picked this score because both films contain a conflicted character bent on correcting the wrongs inflicted by their fellow man. Morricone’s score functions musically in the same manner throughout several scenes in *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. Its purpose is to aurally enhance the rousing visual confrontations between characters. In *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, Tarantino only uses it once during a confrontation between The Bride and one of her former cohorts, Budd. However, after the music ends in both films’ scenes, it is followed by dire consequences. Joe guns down his antagonists in *A Fistful of Dollars*, while Budd buries his alive.

The plot of *A Fistful of Dollars* involves a stranger who comes to a town called San Miguel. The stranger, who is sometimes called Joe, manipulates two rival families, the Rojos and the Baxters, both of whom are trying to gain control of the town. “A Fistful of Dollars (theme)” is used six times in the film. However, there are two instances in the film where the score is used in the same manner that Tarantino uses it in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. Morricone’s score assists in upping the melodramatic overtones brewing between the film’s characters. For example, in one particular scene in *A Fistful of Dollars*, as Joe stands in the middle of town calling out to Don Miguel Rojo, the theme lingers in the background as Joe firmly tells Don Miguel that he wants to be hired to work. Morricone’s score breaks into the foreground as Joe dramatically walks toward three of the town’s men who shot at him earlier. As he walks by a coffin maker, he confidently tells him to get three coffins ready. The melody of the horns quickens, and a dramatic vocal chorus chimes in as Joe gets closer to these three men. Shortly after the score fades away, Joe guns the men down.

In another instance, the theme once again plays a crucial part in adding to the dramatic elements during a final showdown between Joe, Ramon Rojo and his men. Just after Joe blows up some buildings with dynamite, Ramon looks toward the smoky ruins. Then, the steady dark strings of the theme begin followed by the sullen horns. Joe then proceeds to walk out of the smoke to face Ramon and his remaining men. As Joe stands still in the smoke, the music attempts to mimic the terse visuals, the horns increase their tempo and the vocal chorus begins as the men all walk toward each other. The music fades out as they all get ready for the showdown.

In *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, the theme is used in the same manner during a showdown between Budd and The Bride. Just after Budd shoots The Bride with a shotgun loaded with rock salt, the “A Fistful of Dollars (theme)” softly enters the scene with string instruments followed by a brooding horn that matches the defeated image of The Bride. As Budd approaches her, the horns briefly blare in a manner that matches Budd’s celebratory demeanor. Just as in *A Fistful of Dollars*, the music here lingers in the background as Budd leans over The Bride and snidely states, “Well, that gentled you down some, didn’t it?” As Budd squats down, he sadistically adds, “I can’t image how much that shit must sting.” In what appears to be a response on behalf of The Bride, Morricone’s score bursts into the foreground with emotionally charged horns that are combined with a dour vocal chorus. The Bride then looks up at Budd and spits blood onto his face. She lies there angrily huffing as the dramatic melody of the music increases in attempt to help convey her anger. Budd responds by quickly turning The Bride over onto her stomach and inserting a syringe into her buttocks. Then, in an act of symbolic mimicry, the music ends at the same moment The Bride passes out.

The “A Fistful of Dollars (theme)” succeeds in working as an effective thematic tool in both *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* because it increases the tension of the showdowns. The fluctuating volume of the horn along with its dramatic melodies encourages the feeling of conflict. One can sense that Joe is about to gun down the town’s men and, of course, have a deadly showdown with Rojo. The same feeling occurs when Budd stands over The Bride as she lies helpless on the ground. One can only feel that things are going to get worse for The Bride, and the somber music complements that feeling.

The “A Fistful of Dollars (theme)” is also flexible enough to steer these scenes, and works hard to complement the dialogue. The music acts as an exclamation point to the action taking place in the scene. Just as happens in Leone’s film, Tarantino makes this score work in *Kill Bill Vol. 2* by matching up the dramatic melodies of Morricone’s score with the dramatic elements of the scene. Interestingly enough, according to author Robert Frayling, the tunes in *A Fistful of Dollars* “were not particularly original, in fact, one can often recognize phrases from other Western themes, or from popular tunes of the moment, in Morricone’s scores, and he is especially fond of hijacking ‘quotes’ from Beethoven and Bach” (165). It seems like Tarantino is not alone when it comes to borrowing pieces of music from various sources. If it worked for Morricone, then it certainly works for Tarantino.

The Sergio Corbucci film, *Navajo Joe*, is the source of the Spaghetti Western score that Tarantino is able to best integrate into *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. Curiously, Morricone uses the pseudonym Leo Nichols, instead of his own name, in the credits. The first of the two scores used is entitled “A Silhouette of Doom,” and in both films it stresses the sadistic nature of the villain. The score is used numerous times in *Navajo Joe*, but there is one instance that is parallel to Tarantino’s use of it in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. Tarantino finds himself using the score twice, but, in one case, the score comes off more powerfully than in the other.

In order to understand the characters in *Navajo Joe*, it is necessary to give a brief plot summary. The lead character, Navajo Joe, is the only survivor of a massacre inflicted on his tribe. He seeks revenge on a band of outlaws headed by a man named Marvin

Duncan. Navajo Joe demands that the people in the nearby town of Esperanza pay him a dollar for every scalp he takes from the outlaws.

As mentioned before, “A Silhouette of Doom” is used numerous times throughout *Navajo Joe*, but the best use of the song occurs in a scene where Duncan has caught Navajo Joe. He decides to torture him because Navajo Joe knows where the people of Esperanza have hidden their large stash of money. In this particular scene, “A Silhouette of Doom” emphasizes the stony-hearted personality of Duncan. The sporadic sounds of a low keyed piano note, with two horn instruments alternating sustained sharp notes, begin as Joe lies tied up on the ground, no doubt feeling as low as the music. As Duncan puts his boot on Joe’s neck, the music picks up tempo and the stressful sounding notes of a string instrument begin. Duncan then says to Joe, “Damned Indian, where did you put all that money? I know you would rather get a slug, but that’s too simple. First you will have to tell us where you put our money. Now, will you talk?” Duncan then gets a whip, and the music wanes a bit and then turns frenzied and piercing as Duncan begins viciously whipping Joe.

“A Silhouette of Doom” is used quite similarly in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, and, rather appropriately, as it further darkens the scene. The score comes at the beginning of the film. The low keyed piano note plays along with the sustained sharp horns as the credits run over a black background. Bill can be heard saying, “Do you find me sadistic? Now, Kiddo, (The Bride’s last name) I would like to believe that you are aware enough even now that there is nothing sadistic in my actions.” Then a close up shot of The Bride’s bloodied face appears as Bill says, “This moment, this is me at my most masochistic.” The music then wanes a bit as Bill shoots The Bride in the head. A few moments later,

there is a cut to The Bride driving in her car and talking to the camera. She sums up what happened to her after she got shot, and, then, when she mentions that she is going to “kill Bill,” the music turns frenzied and piercing just as it does in *Navajo Joe*.

Tarantino could see that “A Silhouette of Doom” was used in *Navajo Joe* to portray Duncan as a callous individual; therefore, it made sense for him to use the same method when it came to portraying Bill as a callous character. The coarse tones of “A Silhouette of Doom” not only enhance the gloomy atmosphere hanging over certain scenes in both films, but it also assists in building up the narrative. The mingling of brooding music and threatening dialogue captures the essence of the evil nature of these characters while still evoking feelings of sympathy for Navajo Joe and The Bride when they are clearly at the mercy of these villains.

Tarantino effectively uses another Morricone score from *Navajo Joe* as a kind of bookend at the closing of *Kill Bill Vol. 2*. The score is entitled “The Demise of Barbara, and the Return of Joe.” Filled with a twanging guitar, a melodious string section, beautiful choral singing and an intense vocal chant, it, too, appears with great effect near the end of *Navajo Joe*. The music and the visuals work hand in hand to make the demise of Duncan and Bill all the more riveting.

In *Navajo Joe*, “The Demise of Barbara, and the Return of Joe” plays shortly after Duncan and Joe have a brief shootout on a mountain. Joe is able to take away Duncan’s gun and slap him around. As Joe walks back to grab a hatchet to kill him with it, Duncan pulls a gun out of his own boot and shoots Joe, but Joe quickly turns around and throws a hatchet into Duncan’s head, killing him instantly. Then, as the camera focuses in on the wounded Joe, the twang of the guitar begins, followed most noticeably by the ghostly

vocal chant that evokes a sense of finality. As Joe stares at the lifeless body of Duncan, the music begins to take on a celebratory tone. The scene and the music swiftly end as Joe is filmed in profile blankly staring up at his horse.

In *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, “The Demise of Barbara, and the Return of Joe” is used in the same context as it was in *Navajo Joe*, which is to stress the finality of the antagonist’s demise. The score plays shortly after The Bride uses the “five point palm exploding heart technique” on Bill. This technique causes a person’s heart to explode after taking five steps. After a brief conversation, Bill stands up as Morricone’s score bursts into life. He locks eyes with The Bride and then turns away to take his five deadly steps. He collapses and dies on the fifth step as the score plays on. The music ends just after the camera focuses in on The Bride wiping away her tears. Even though the string arrangement and the haunting background choral singing have a slightly sorrowful tone, the energy of the vocal chanting can be perceived as a celebratory cry. The Bride has accomplished her mission of revenge.

The aural and visual components of the Leone style Spaghetti Western are used in *Kill Bill Vol. 2*, not to remake a Leone film verbatim, but to create a postmodern Leone world where Leone’s themes would interact successfully with specific elements from some of Tarantino’s favorite film genres. As Tarantino says, “What *Kill Bill* is, is me taking the films I love...and doing them my way, doing what I always wanted to see done with the material” (Beck). The “material” in this case, is the theme of revenge, the celebration of violence, and music that fits into every action. Tarantino ends up stealing the scores of Ennio Morricone in the process, but it does not disturb the schematic

elements of *Kill Bill*. Like Leone, Tarantino tailors the mood on the screen to fit the mood of the score.

Critics have complained that Tarantino's hijacking of Spaghetti Western scores is, indeed, plagiarism, but he is certainly not the first to go this route. Take *A Fistful of Dollars* for instance; Leone takes so many elements from Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*, it could be considered an unofficial remake of the film. Morricone can be accused of the same thing as well, for he has taken "every period of musical history [and] ransacked [it] for inspiration" (Kennedy, 40). Granted, Tarantino could have hired a composer to recreate the Morricone sound, but using the scores directly from the Leone films gives serious depth to his homage. Besides, Tarantino wants the audience to feel the same level of enthusiasm he does for the Spaghetti Western genre and the works of Morricone, which is important because, after all, it's what helped inspire *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and *Vol. 2*.

CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of the music in all five of Quentin Tarantino's films has a lot to do with how he perceives music. Tarantino believes that songs in general work as miniature movies. As he says, "Bob Dylan totally told little movies. The songs on *Blood on the Tracks*, 'Tangled up in Blue,' 'Lily, Rosemary and the Jack of Hearts' –that's a movie with a beginning, a middle and an end and sub-plots and everything" (Romney, 122). Knowing that Tarantino views music as "miniature movies" gives us a better understanding of why he picks particular songs to accompany scenes in his films. He is looking at the music as a way to extend the storylines in his films. The soundtrack has the responsibility of not only for setting the tone of the scene, but also bringing clarity to emotions not fully expressed by the characters. This all works seamlessly because Tarantino hears the song first and then writes a scene around it. Therefore, it is no surprise that the music has such a remarkable impact in his films.

Looking at all of Tarantino's films as a whole, the progressive dependence on music is unmistakable. There is a noticeable shift in the purpose of the music as well. For instance, the majority of the music in *Reservoir Dogs* has the simple function of acting as a mouthpiece for the characters or as a way of revealing their personalities. There is also a tendency to shock the audience by pairing perky 60s and 70s era songs with disturbing images. However, with *Pulp Fiction*, he lets the rhythms of instrumental songs control the tone of a scene. This style of music also assists in the communication of the characters' feelings. He also makes it a point to show the characters taking control of the music via reel-to-reel machines or record players. This can be perceived as a way

Tarantino informs the audience that music is an important part in his life; therefore, he wants the role of music to be just as important in his characters' lives.

The musical technique in *Jackie Brown* marks the first time that Tarantino uses music to duplicate the themes from another genre of film. It is also the first time that the audience has become aware of his admiration of Blaxploitation films, particularly those that star Pam Grier. He uses the music to bring the elements of her 70s Blaxploitation film persona, Foxy Brown, into his film. He also uses the repetition of a song to show the growing level of affection one character has for another. This music also works to bring these two characters together into a romantic relationship, something that the music had not done in Tarantino's previous films. *Jackie Brown* is the most musically mature of all his films because the majority of the songs work to showcase the strength and romantic inclinations of the characters' persona rather than the deviant elements.

The music in both volumes of *Kill Bill* is allowed more "screen time" than in any of his other films. The tendency in these films is to emulate the aural themes of Spaghetti Westerns and Kung Fu cinema by using music directly from specific movies in these genres while the music in *Kill Bill Vol.1* and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* encompasses a wide variety of styles ranging from punk to Spanish rock. What is most noticeable, however, are the scores from the Spaghetti Western and Kung Fu films, around which he centers both volumes of *Kill Bill*. There is also a tendency to choreograph the music to the violent actions in the scenes. Most of these scenes play out like a music video which sometimes disturbs the narrative flow of the movie. Tarantino has made it clear in numerous interviews that his motives for using elements from these two genres is to simply create a postmodern version of a Spaghetti Western and Kung Fu film. Therefore, the

experimental structure of *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and *Kill Bill Vol.2* makes these films the most aurally intriguing of all Tarantino's films.

Claudia Gorbman argues that "any music [is] sufficient to accompany a segment of film. Whatever music is applied to a film segment will do something; will have an effect because the spectator automatically imposes meaning on such combinations" (16). How, then, does this affect how one perceives the music in Tarantino's films? It is true that any music will make the spectator react emotionally, but what matters to Tarantino is that, the majority of the time, the music makes what he perceives as the "proper" emotional impact on a scene. If something other than "Stuck in the Middle With You" was chosen to accompany the "ear slicing" scene in *Reservoir Dogs*, the audience may not have ever known the sadistic tendencies of Mr. Blonde. Replace the energetic rhythms of the Kung Fu scores used during the fight scenes in *Kill Bill*, and we miss the point. The key to Tarantino's success in avoiding music that is perceived as just "sufficient" is that he writes all of his film scripts with a specific piece of music in mind. By being purposeful in its selection, Tarantino ensures that the music in *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Jackie Brown*, *Kill Bill Vol.1* and *Kill Bill Vol. 2* plays an active role in the film's narrative structure, and, just as importantly, that it does something the audience will want to remember.

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