

An introduction to music creation and composition and its differences / similarities with film music

Manuel's talk engagingly combined the knowledge and thoroughness of a scholar with the passion of an experienced art practitioner. He started from outlining some of the fundamentals of music theory (e.g. melody, harmony, timbre...), only then to show that their very abstract nature falls short of guiding the composer's creativity and experimentation. Indeed, the crucial missing link in music theory – at least in so far as composition is concerned – is the principle of repetition, which alongside variation and contrast helps the composer think of (and create) musical pieces in terms of discourse. In terms of theoretical background, Manuel drew on a convincing parallelism between the structure of language and the structure of music: the abstract elements of music (e.g. harmony, melody, timbre) would correspond to the abstract elements of language (e.g. phonetics, syntax, semantics), whilst the concrete elements of music (e.g. instruments and other sonic agents) would correspond to the physicality of produced speech. The third and last level, discourse, concerns the actual structure of the musical piece unfolding through time, not unlike the verbal utterances and texts created by speakers in everyday practice. All in all, this holistic view convincingly emphasises the similarities between verbal art and musical art. In the second part of his talk, Manuel transitioned to film music, surveying the functions of music in films (e.g. emotive, structural, narrative, aesthetic) and arguing that genuine film music is never simply 'added' to films, but becomes an intrinsic part of them, interlaced with other semiotic modes (e.g. photography, camera movements, dialogues and so on). To prove the point, he showed us the initial scene of *The Shining* (1980), by Stanley Kubrick, twice: the first time accompanied by the original, eerie and ominous track; the second time accompanied by a commercial track used to advertise a popular touristic destination. The effect proved as estranging as hilarious, and many of us could not hold back a giggle. The presentation and debate concluded with the public asking Manuel to share some of his own film music, which left us charmed for its beauty and the way it really seemed to "converse" with the scenes shot by the directors.

Talk by Manuel Velázquez, 27th November 2019

Report by Davide Castiglione, 5th December 2019