Film Music:
Origins to 1940s
“Silent Era”

• No silence, more sound than now
• Wall-to-wall music (continuous music)
• Music covered up sound of loud projector
Beginnings: Experiments

• Edison/Dickson – Kinetoscope/Kinetophone (Phonographs and film in 1891/1895)

Ex: “The Dickson Experimental Sound Film”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6b0wpBTR1s

• Kinetoscope parlour opens in 1894
• Individual peepholes
Beginnings: Experiments

Lumière Brothers (France)
Ex: “Arrival of a Train”
• First public projection, Dec. 28, 1895
• “Birth of Cinema”
• Piano accompaniment

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dgLEDdFddk

• Max Skladanowsky doing same thing at same time in Berlin
Beginnings: Narrative Film

Georges Méliès – “A Trip to the Moon” (1902)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_FrdVdKlxUk

• Original music unknown
• Likely popular or light classical, operetta, etc.

Japan: Benshi – actors with Kabuki or Noh background
Brazil: Fitas Cantatas – singers behind the screen
Beginnings: Narrative Film

Ex: Edwin Porter – “The Great Train Robbery” (1903)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bc7wWOmEGGY

• Original music unknown
Cinemas

• Films often shown in Vaudeville theatres
• 1905, first nickleodeon in Pittsburg, PA
• Huge growth:
  • By 1907, almost 3000 in US
  • 1910: 10,000 in US

• Music could be pre-recorded; played by pianist, sometimes with a drummer or singer; or non-existent
• Popular music most common
Developments in Film Music, c.1910-1920

**Musical Accompaniment:**

- Performers in cinemas: organist/pianist or orchestra/group

**Wurlitzer Theatre Organ:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiKJgN8OjBs

**Effects:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiIhblgXBSMU

- Small orchestras (5-10), or up to 50 performers
Developments in Film Music, c.1910-1920

Compilation Scores

• Adaptations of classical works
• Arrangements of patriotic, religious or popular songs
Developments in Film Music, c.1910-1920

Cue Sheets

• First in 1909
• Describes each scene of a specific film
• Describes which music to play at which point
• Suggests specific instruments and sounds, etc.

Developments in Film Music, c.1910-1920

Anthologies

• Less exact, used for any film. Ideas of moods
• Also 1909:

*Motion Picture Piano Music: Descriptive Music to Fit the Action, Character, or Scene of Moving Pictures*
Developments in Film Music, c.1910-1920

Original Scores

• First fully scored film with original music

Ex: *L’assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908)

• French film
• Music by Camille Saint-Saëns
• Performed by live orchestra
• 5 scenes and prelude (continuous sound)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqvrHv7sz8E
The Birth of a Nation (1915)

- Directed by D.W. Griffith
- First Auteur of film: control

- Music by Joseph Carl Breil (1870-1926)
- Leitmotifs for main characters

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3kmVgQHIey
00:3:00 and 3:03:00
1920s

- Film Studios established in 20s: MGM, Fox
- Studio system in place by 1930s

**Music in 1922 (survey of theatres):**

- 45% organ
- 25% piano
- Almost 30% orchestra (includes small chamber ensembles)

1920s: new musical score for almost all films
Early Sound

• Refers to music with film, not performed live

• **Vitaphone** (1926): coordinated phonograph with film
  • Sound of orchestra available to the masses, not just big city theatres

• **Movietone** (1928): sound on film, big improvement

*Don Juan* (1926)

• First feature with sound (music only), Vitaphone
The Jazz Singer (1927)

• Dir. Alan Crosland
• Score by Louis Silvers
• First feature with spoken dialogue and music
• Transitional film: mostly without spoken voices
• Al Jolson, vaudevillian, blackface minstrelsy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22NQuPrwbHA

• “You ain’t heard nothing yet!”
1930s: Early years of sound

• End of 1920s, change over to sound on film
• Depression: lots of theatre musicians out of work
• By early 1930s, sound on film was the norm
Steamboat Willie (1928)

• Coordination of visuals with music & sound effects
• Carl Stalling (1888-1974), silent film organist and orchestra director

• New process: Click track
• Highly synchronized sound

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBgghnQF6E4
Max Steiner (1888-1971)

• One of the earliest film composers
• Austrian composer of operettas
• 300+ films

*King Kong* (1933)

*Gone With the Wind* (1939)

*Casablanca* (1942)

• 3 Academy Awards,
• 15 nominations
King Kong (1933)

- Max Steiner score
- Starting at 20:00, almost wall-to-wall music
- Brass, percussion, harsh harmonies
- Terrifying sound
- Thematic transformation

1:53:00, Kong theme, sound of elevated train in score
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNubHc8apPE

Empire State Building: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuRQH_hLcTw
Mid- to Late-1930s

• Golden Age for film attendance and production
• Most studios have music departments with composer as head:
  RKO: Max Steiner
  Warner Bros: Max Steiner, Erich Korngold
  MGM: Herbert Stothart
  20thC Fox: Alfred Newman
  Paramount: Victor Young

All have “fanfare” music to go with studio logo
Ex: Fanfare compilation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6sPbGm4sP8
Mid- to Late-1930s

Three Major Composers:
1. Max Steiner (Austrian)
2. Erich Korngold (Austrian)
3. Alfred Newman (American)

Classical Film Score Style:
• Austrian-Germanic symphonic style, operatic elements
• Leitmotifs
• Studios were not looking for innovation
Franz Waxman (1906-1967)

- German-born
- 2 Oscars: *(Sunset Boulevard, 1950)*

Ex: *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935)
- Classical film score characteristics

Titles: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdLyTa7ZmQM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdLyTa7ZmQM)

Monster and Bride motifs: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1lzq-E3o7Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1lzq-E3o7Y)

Violin scene: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wRVfza1Rj8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wRVfza1Rj8)
Erich Korngold (1897-1957)

• Austrian-born
• Film composer 1935-47
• 20 film scores – adventure and romantic drama only, no westerns or horrors, etc.

Ex: *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)

• Swashbuckler
• Formula for Action film music
• Swordfight: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFqCSbV-Ag](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaFqCSbV-Ag)
Musicals of the 1930s

• Big during Depression (Escapist films)
• 1935-1940: 1900 songs written for musicals
• Big stars: Shirley Temple, Judy Garland
• Many based on Broadway shows

Ex: *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)
• Opening: [https://vimeo.com/127148604](https://vimeo.com/127148604)
• Overture
• Wordless choir
1940s and Film Noir

Both an **Approach** and a **film genre**

**New musical style:**
- Smaller ensembles
- More selective use of instruments (solos)
- Less music than 1930s
- Jazzy sounds
- Less classical orientation
Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975)

- Julliard School of Music, classical violin

Style:
- Non-popular
- Typically non-electronic (exceptions)
- Shorter cues
- Dissonant (irregular rhythms, non-lyrical)
Citizen Kane (1941)

• Directed by Orson Welles (also star and producer)
• Music by Bernard Herrmann (First film)
• Film noir musical style

Opening:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-r0b_XeRkG4
Laura (1944)

• Directed by Otto Preminger
• Music by David Raskin
• Film noir
• First role of Vincent Price
• Jazz influence
• Monothematic: one song throughout film, but with variations

• Opening:
Miklós Rozsa (1907-1967)

- B. Hungary, studied music in Germany
- Leader in creation of film noir musical style

- 12 Academy award nominations, 3 wins

*Ben-Hur* (1959) – Oscar (his third)
Spellbound (1945)

• Dir. Alfred Hitchcock
• Music by Miklós Rozsa
• Best Picture Oscar
• Film noir
• Theremin

• Opening credits:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plwWTV2gCsQ
• Overture of three main themes:
  Paranoia, love, and danger

• Dream sequence:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyPe1Jahyfo
Casablanca (1942)

- Dir. Michael Curtiz
- Music: Max Steiner

- Music quotes national melodies ("Marseillaise" and "Deutschland über Alles")
- Source music: US Pop (12 songs)
- "As Time Goes By"

- Opening:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pYG1Vbgq0o