

# Music in Contemporary Thriller Series

A Comparative Analysis of the Music in  
*Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*

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I see Linnea Vestre as responsible for adding me to the 'binge-watch generation' in the first place; was it not for your at times quite obsessive interest in quality television series, I might have failed to discover all the wonderful worlds and stories in which I have immersed myself in recent years. Thanks also for being there for me throughout this process.

Last, but definitely not least, thank you for actually reading this thing. I hope you enjoy it. I would also like to warn you that even though I have not deliberately revealed all the plots, this thesis contains plenty of spoilers for the first seasons of the series I analyse, and I therefore advise you to watch the series before reading this thesis if you ever intend to. Consider yourself warned.

Oskar Holldorff  
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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In this thesis I examine if there are any shared traits in the music, and in the use of this music, in contemporary North-American thriller television series that rely heavily on electronic sounds. The three series I analyse are *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*.<sup>1</sup> In order to limit my research somewhat I have decided to focus solely on the first seasons of these shows. The majority of the thesis is of a theoretical nature; however, I have applied the results of my analyses in the making of four musical cues as an exemplification of the findings I make. This practical portion amounts to 10% of the total thesis. The analyses I conduct are of a comparative nature, as I look for common traits in order to gain increased understanding of contemporary thriller scoring.

Throughout this thesis I draw from various musicological researchers, many of whom specialise in film and television music research, and on film sound, in addition to books written by and for composers in film and television, and I specifically focus on a selection of theoretical models. A large portion of the thesis revolves around analyses of the three texts.

In this chapter, I provide a background for my choice of subject matter, introduce the three series to be analysed, outline the methodology for my research, and provide a structural overview of the thesis.

#### Background

This research is motivated by two technologically driven changes that have taken place relatively recently. These revolutions, in the fields of composition and broadcasting respectively, make researching music in contemporary television series highly relevant.

##### *Digital Audio Workstations and the advent of modern scoring techniques*

Since the birth of the profession, the process of composing for films and media has gone through radical changes. If one investigates the responsibilities held by a *Golden Age* composer like Max Steiner, one realises that film composers used to be part of a system based

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<sup>1</sup> Drew Goddard, *Daredevil*, Netflix (2015); Graeme Manson and John Fawcett, *Orphan Black*, Space/BBC America (2013); Sam Esmail, *Mr. Robot*, USA Network (2015).

on broad division of labour.<sup>2</sup> Steiner's job was to compose the music. Although it is no small task to compose the music for a film, the division of labour meant that Steiner only had to focus on composing, and as such was able to score a large number of films every year.<sup>3</sup>

Modern film composers, although of course still requiring significant prowess in the fields of composing and arranging, must possess a much broader set of skills than their Golden Age counterparts. According to film composer Jeremy Borum, 'today's film composer is responsible for each step of the music team's process.'<sup>4</sup> Although most productions that strive for a certain standard of quality still employ at least a music editor, a mixing engineer, and an orchestrator if required, the modern film composer must in many cases wear some of these hats herself. Most significantly, technological changes have led to a complete change in the way media composers typically work. The dominant way of working is presently *not* to write notes on paper, play them for the director, and subsequently have the music performed by an orchestra; today, media composers work on computers, utilising *DAWs* (Digital Audio Workstations), such as Logic Pro, Live, Pro Tools, Cubase, etc. They employ both physical instruments and sample libraries. They need to be able to play these instruments, and for virtual instruments, this includes being very proficient at programming MIDI.<sup>5</sup> One must additionally be able to craft an adequate mix of the music. In this thesis I analyse the music of three relatively young, up-and-coming composers whose most famous work may yet lie ahead of them. They have all embraced the new technologies that are available to them, and utilise them to a large extent in very electronically based scores.

The radical changes in the modern media composer's job description, workflow, and tools make it highly relevant to analyse contemporary films, series, games, and commercials (and also the use of music libraries<sup>6</sup>), because these changes most certainly affect the musical output. Carol Vernallis argues that this sonic change may be seen as part of a larger

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on Hollywood's Golden Age of film scoring (approximately 1930-1960), see for example one of the following: Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Mervyn Cooke, 'Hollywood's Golden Age', in *A History of Film Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); or Peter Larsen, *Film Music*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 76-145.

<sup>3</sup> Larsen, *Film Music*, 85-87.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Borum, 'Introduction', in *Guerilla Film Scoring* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), Kindle edition.

<sup>5</sup> MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) is a technical standard mainly employed in conjunction with virtual instruments.

<sup>6</sup> Music libraries are online libraries that store original music created by composers that can be licensed for a production in return for money.

audiovisual trend, claiming that modern cinema is defined by ‘intensified audiovisual aesthetics.’<sup>7</sup> This concept builds on David Bordwell’s theorisation of *intensified continuity* in the visuals of modern cinema.<sup>8</sup> If contemporary cinema, then, has developed a new aesthetic, this thesis can be regarded as a step in the direction of understanding how, and to what degree, this intensified idiom applies to modern television series.

### *Streaming and the upsurge of television series*

The format of modern television series interests me in part because of the relevancy of the topic. Television has in over half a century been an essential part of the daily lives and the cultural capital of much of mankind. Yet there is not a lot of musicological research on music in television when compared to the research conducted on music in film. Research on music in television only began to emerge as a discipline 20-25 years ago—although there are a few earlier exceptions.<sup>9</sup> The lack of research on music in contemporary television series has now become quite a gaping issue, as the advent of streaming services—such as Netflix, HBO, and many others—and shows with high production value aimed towards young adults—for example *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad*, *The Walking Dead*, *Sherlock*, *Westworld*, *Legion* and so on—has seen the popularity of the format skyrocket.<sup>10</sup> Many so-called television series are created specifically for such streaming services, and do not always air on television; for example, *Daredevil* is created specifically for Netflix. Viewers will not watch the show unless they actively choose to; it will not simply appear on their television screen without any user action. Annette Davison argues, ‘with the advent of digitisation [viewers] are offered a variety of options for content delivery; in other words, they can determine where, when, and how they view that content.’<sup>11</sup> The question of how modern platforms affects television series, for

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94.

<sup>8</sup> David Bordwell, ‘Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film’, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>9</sup> There was some research on music in television in Germany in the 1970s; see James Deaville, ‘A Discipline Emerges’, in James Deaville (ed.), *Music in Television: Channels of Listening* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011). Additionally, there was Philip Tagg’s incredibly detailed analysis of fifty seconds of *Kojak*, in Philip Tagg, *Kojak—50 Seconds of Television Music: Toward the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (Uppsala: Musikvetenskapliga Institutionen, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> A case in point is the 200% increase in the use of the word *binge-watch* experienced in 2014, and its coronation as ‘Word of the Year’ by Collins English Dictionary in 2015. (Source: *BBC News*, ‘Binge-watch is Collin’s dictionary’s Word of the Year’, accessed 14.11.2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-34723515>.)

<sup>11</sup> Anette Davison, ‘Title Sequences for Contemporary Television Serials’, in John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.

example by reducing the need for an instant grabbing of attention and removing the need for commercial breaks, requires research.

### **Primary question**

The primary question of this thesis is as follows: *To what extent do contemporary North-American thriller series that rely heavily on electronic sounds possess shared traits in their compositions and in their use of this music in the audiovisual context?* The reasons for why I find this particularly interesting to explore are, as explained above, the emergence of new compositional tools and tasks, and new viewing habits and preferences, which in turn are likely to produce new television-musical tendencies. The topic is also interesting to study because of the relatively low amount of research on music in contemporary television series. I have opted to analyse three shows because I want to locate musical trends, and analysing only one or even two series would not, in my opinion, offer a sufficient quantity on which to base compelling arguments on common tendencies in thriller television scoring. However, was I to include more than three series, the thesis could have easily been regarded as too superficial, as I would probably not be able to analyse each show as thoroughly as I would want to. As such, I find that three series strike a good balance.

### **Introduction of the texts**

In this thesis, I analyse the music in *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. All three series consist of 10-13 episodes per season á 40-65 minutes (normal episode length is around 45 minutes), and all three rely heavily, although not exclusively, on electronic sounds. The plot of the shows all revolve around one protagonist, and his or her friends or acquaintances, attempting to stand up to a larger corporate conspiracy.

*Daredevil*, or *Marvel's Daredevil*, is a modern series based on the superhero franchise of the same name. It was created for Netflix by Drew Goddard, although Steven DeKnight served as showrunner for much of the first season. The series is set in the well established 'Marvel universe' in a bleak version of Hell's Kitchen, New York. Lawyer Matt Murdock (Charlie Cox) is living a double life as a vigilante. Blinded as a child, his remaining senses are supernaturally keen, with particular emphasis placed on his extraordinary sense of hearing. Along with his friends Foggy (Elden Henson) and Karen (Deborah Ann Woll), he attempts to protect Hell's Kitchen and its inhabitants from a complex criminal network, with Wilson Fisk (Vincent D'Onofrio) as the season's main antagonist. Reporter Ben Urich (Vondie Curtis-

Hall), Fisk's right hand man James Wesley (Toby Leonard Moore), Matt's girlfriend Claire (Rosario Dawson) and Fisk's love interest Vanessa (Ayelet Zurer) are the other most central characters of the first season. The tone of the series is somber and mature, with the moral dilemmas of vigilantism and gentrification at its core.

*Daredevil* is scored by John Paesano. The musical approach is often quite minimalistic, and much of the time the visuals are either accompanied by subtle drones or textures, or are without musical accompaniment whatsoever. However, the music can sometimes get quite massive and fast-paced during action scenes, visual montages and other scenes that perhaps require such a dramatic sound. Orchestral instruments such as strings and timpani are used in combination with electronic timbres for a 'hybrid' sound.

Canadian science fiction thriller *Orphan Black* was created by Graeme Manson and John Fawcett. In addition to playing protagonist Sarah Manning, lead actress Tatiana Maslany plays an impressive number of secondary characters, including first season's antagonists Helena and Rachel, and Sarah's partners-in-arms Cosima and Alison. The reason for having the same actress play multiple characters is due to the fact that Sarah is one of several clones. After witnessing one of her clones' suicide, Sarah assumes a fake identity as police officer Beth Childs. As she survives a number of assassination attempts and other obstacles, Sarah unveils an intricate and seemingly ever-expanding net of dark secrets. Other central characters for the first season include Sarah's brother Felix (Jordan Gavaris), her daughter Kira (Skyler Wexler), her foster mother Siobhan (Maria Doyle Kennedy), Beth's boyfriend Paul (Dylan Bruce), and police officer Art (Kevin Hanchard).

Composed by Trevor Yuile, *Orphan Black*'s score has the most varied sound of the three shows, containing a vast array of different instruments. The perhaps most defining musical component of the show that gives the sound of the score a clear identity, is a large number of electronic sounds with an edgy, unique character. The music is very often closely synced with the visuals and features a lot of synchronised effects, such as cymbals, brass crescendos, and electronic hits. Most *Orphan Black* episodes are scored almost continuously.

Created by Sam Esmail, *Mr. Robot* is a psychological thriller dealing with social injustice, hacking, delusions, and social anxiety disorder. As in *Daredevil*, *Mr. Robot* mostly takes place in New York. Protagonist Elliot Alderson (Reми Malek), a cybersecurity engineer, is a hacker vigilante and part of the anti-capitalist *fsociety* hacktivist group. Struggling with

social anxiety, drug addiction, and memory loss, Elliot is not your typical confident protagonist. Most of the time our viewpoint is from within Elliot's mind, and the audience experiences Elliot's delusions as truth. Other important characters include Elliot's closest friend Angela Moss (Portia Doubleday), the ambitious and ruthless Tyrell Wellick (Martin Wallström), member of *fsociety* Darlene (Carly Chaikin) and Mr. Robot himself, the leader of *fsociety* (Christian Slater).

*Mr. Robot* is scored by Mac Quayle. The first season of *Mr. Robot* is the most restricted of the three shows with regard to instrumentation. Most of the music is focused around synths. Pulsing eight-note bass lines and synth arpeggios are used extensively, along with drones and pads. Drum machines, synth melodies, and electronic effects are also common. Reflecting the protagonist's digitally oriented life, the score rarely includes acoustic instruments, except for the occasional use of acoustic piano with a long reverb.

## **Methodology**

In this section, I outline the various methodological approaches I have applied in this thesis, and discuss some of the issues that should be considered when utilising these methodological strategies.

### *Textual analysis*

I have decided to disregard many possible approaches in favour of textual analysis. I do not perform research on how the music is produced nor how it is received, although the thesis touches upon these questions on a few occasions. This thesis is concerned with the somewhat problematic idea of the music itself, although I also consider its narrative role and its interaction with the visuals and the rest of the soundtrack. Now, music, or indeed the entirety of a television show, does not exist in a vacuum, and thus I do not claim that this research offers a 'complete' analysis of the music in these three series. Arguably, the restricted format of a Master's thesis does not permit such holistic analyses, at least not when analysing three television series simultaneously. As such, my research neither draws from sociological, psychological, nor cognitive theory, although they would all be relevant fields to visit in relation to contemporary thriller scores in a differently focused research. Instead, this thesis mainly leans on musicological research regarding film music, popular music, and film sound. As the analyses I conduct in this thesis are first and foremost textual, my research does only to a certain extent concern itself with how the music was made or how, where, and by whom it is

received and perceived. However, my reasons for choosing this topic, as outlined previously in this chapter, relate to the changes in the composition processes and the increased relevance of television series, which respectively relate to how the music is created and to the manner in which it is consumed. Therefore, it has been natural for me to include perspectives of production and consumption in this thesis on some occasions, even if they are not my primary focus.

This analysis of music in television series can be labelled an *interobjective comparison*; I describe music by means of other music, comparing different works within more or less the same genre and sociocultural context as I aim to locate some elements that the music of the three series have in common.<sup>12</sup> I do not do this in order to prove some absurd, small-minded idea going somewhat like ‘all television music is the same’, or ‘all modern film music sounds the same’. I think you can find common traits in most genres and eras of music in audiovisual media; indeed, the so-called Golden Age of Hollywood film scoring can be recognised by a strict, and quite narrow, set of idiomatic codes. Furthermore, I like these series, and I like the music in them, and therefore have no reason to want to drag them through the dirt. Since relatively little research has been conducted on television series made in the present decade, my aim is to map some common denominators in order to better understand some of the music that millions of pre-dominantly young adults are exposed to. It has to be emphasised that each show sounds different from the other two, and that by identifying similarities, one also sees differences more clearly. Regarding the facts that a modern composer has new tools at hand, and because of the increased focus on and new platforms for television series, it is natural to expect some changes in the musical idiom of contemporary television series compared to older productions. By discussing the music in three contemporary series and comparing these, this project represents the beginning of an attempt to map some of this new aesthetic. Comparing these series to older thriller series from the 1990s and 2000s would be very interesting indeed, yet that is unfortunately not possible to do within the framework of this thesis.

I have made an attempt to utilise Peter Larsen’s two-step method for film music analysis, outlined in his book *Film Music* (2007), while analysing the music of the three series. ‘The most practical procedure,’ Larsen argues, ‘is to divide the analysis into two

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Tagg, ‘Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice’, *Popular Music* 2 (1982), 48-49.

phases, beginning by concentrating on “the music itself”, attempting to maintain a certain distance from the overall film narrative, and then to change perspective and allow the film to be the overall context of the analysis.’<sup>13</sup> As such, I first analyse the music in isolation in chapter two, using soundtrack albums where possible in order to remove the music from the context of the narrative. Then, in chapters three through five, I analyse the music in conjunction with the rest of the elements that add to the whole of a production.

I generally avoid using the term *soundtrack* when writing about the music of an audiovisual production, as a typical film includes many other sounds on its soundtrack in addition to music: dialogue, diegetic noise, and sound design all play a part in generating the sound of a production. The distinction between music and sound design is not always clear, and this is particularly true in contemporary thrillers. In general, and with plenty of exceptions, sound design is about creating the sounds we expect to be in a scene, and matching these as closely as possible to the image. However, music will often highlight on-screen actions—for example a slamming door—and when a low hit synchronises perfectly with the visual action of the door slamming *and* hits precisely on the downbeat of the music, there is no way of knowing whether this low hit is the work of a composer or a sound designer, or a combination of the two.

In order to simplify matters, I attribute the authorship of the music to the series’ main composers in my analyses in this thesis. This is, however, not likely to be precisely the case. John Paesano (*Daredevil*) and Mac Quayle (*Mr. Robot*) employ two additional composers each: Braden Kimball and Joshua Johnson, and Julian Scherle and Michael Tuller respectively. (I have not been able to find such additional composers on *Orphan Black*. They may not exist, or they may be uncredited.) Additionally, there are music departments in every show, usually consisting of editors, supervisors, assistants and so on, who all influence the music in some way. All shows also have sound departments, typically including far more people than the music department, that are responsible for all sounds of the shows other than music. Then, of course, we have the directors and/or creators of the shows, who theoretically have the power to influence the music to an even larger degree than the composer has; these people are the ones in charge of the show, and it is their decisions that usually apply. As such,

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<sup>13</sup> Larsen, *Film Music*, 42.

they could also be said to have, if not authorship, then at least considerable influence on the direction of the music.

Nevertheless, it has to be underlined that composers are in charge of a much higher proportion of the musical process today than they have usually been throughout history. Since they are the ones that, after all, have their name underneath the credit of ‘Music by’, I refer to them as the composers of the music I analyse, even though that may not, strictly speaking, be correct in all cases.

In this thesis I write about music using descriptive and metaphorical terms such as ‘fluid’, ‘cinematic’, ‘epic’, ‘transparent’ and so on. While these kinds of terms are imprecise, one is often forced to use them when one attempts to describe sound. By and large I find these kinds of terms helpful, as they offer a way of describing a sound so that readers may instantly gain an approximate idea of what kind of sound is being discussed. However, these terms only make sense within the context of a framework consisting of socio-cultural conventions of meaning. A reader hailing from a different socio-cultural framework than myself may attribute different meaning to some of the terms I use, and this may of course lead to some confusion. As such, I attempt to avoid using an unnecessarily excessive amount of metaphorical terms or jargon.

Many musical parameters can be said to function in the same way. Textual analyses are typically technical, and the analysis I conduct is no exception. I point to various musical parameters, and show through specific examples what their functions are. However, textual analyses are also interpretative, and this is important to underline. Although there may arguably be some exceptions to this—Michel Chion, for example, argues that the rapid tremolo-effect is a cross-cultural signifier of danger and/or fear<sup>14</sup>—much music will take on different kinds of meaning depending on the individual listener. However, I analyse a combination of music and moving images, and compare between different works within more or less the same genre. When a certain musical parameter, for example a harmonic progression, is used in ‘similar’ kinds of scenes across different television series, then this may tell us something of what composers, and perhaps directors, expect this chord progression to signify.

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<sup>14</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 20-21.

I do not rely on notation, mainly because, as Philip Tagg puts it, ‘popular music (...) is neither conceived nor designed to be stored or distributed as notation, a large number of important parameters of musical expression being either difficult or impossible to encode in traditional notation.’<sup>15</sup> In classical music, the composer’s written score is regarded as the ‘composer’s intentions’, and is therefore normally regarded as the analytical object. However, in popular music—which arguably includes the music analysed in this thesis—the object of study is the recording itself.<sup>16</sup> Notation of popular music is reductive, and although it can be helpful in some cases, it reveals very little of sound and interaction with visuals, for example, which are both key elements of this thesis.

Many terms I use can be regarded as niche, as I employ jargon from film music and electronic music. As such, having some acquaintance with musical terminology might prove beneficial, although I attempt to describe as many terms as possible that I do not regard as common knowledge. I will not be explaining rudimentary terms—for example, I expect my readers to know the distinction between a chord and a melody—but I will explain more specific expressions as I use them. I feel the need to explain two terms right away, as they are words that I employ frequently in this thesis, and may perhaps cause some confusion if they go unexplained:

*Film score* (or simply *score*)—as a noun, a *score* means the totality of the music for a film (or a television series). Note that this term differs from the classical music score, where it is normally attributed to the full notation of a piece of music. In modern film music, since much film music relies on other means than an orchestra, the term is normally attributed to the *sounding* music rather than notation. Pre-existing music, for example background music or featured songs, are not typically regarded as part of the score—this applies to all three shows I analyse, as per the music included on the soundtrack albums.<sup>17</sup> Employed as a verb, *to score a film* means to create the music for a film. *A soundtrack* is often used in the same way as a *score*, for example in the abbreviation *OST* (*official soundtrack*), and in *soundtrack album*,

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<sup>15</sup> Tagg, ‘Analysing Popular Music’, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Susan McClary and Robert Walser, ‘Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles With Rock’, in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 282-283.

<sup>17</sup> However, the pop score, popularised in the 1960s and -70s, tackles this differently. So also with productions that incorporate re-arranged popular music as part of the score, for example *Westworld*.

but as I have previously explained, this term comes with its set of problems, as it should encompass all sound included in a film, and not just the music.

*Cue*—a piece of originally created music within the larger context of a film score. The term normally refers to a musical start, and lasts until the music stops.

### *Applied analysis*

I attempt to solidify some of the claims I make in my analyses by composing pieces of music based on common traits. This is an uncommon procedure in music analysis, but I argue that by creating music based on common traits, I am able to provide thorough examples of how these traits function. If I succeed in creating a sonic idiom relatively similar to the three series, then this will also strengthen my argument that the music in these three series pertain to a common aesthetic. Furthermore, going through the process of creating these cues has led to a more thorough understanding of the process of composing music in the style of contemporary thriller shows, which enhances the quality of my analysis.

These compositions are based on analyses I make on aspects of each show's musical sound in chapter two, the audiovisual analysis based on the *attention continuum* in chapter three, and on the *musical archetypes* I introduce in the fourth chapter. Each composition represents one such musical archetype, moving through various stages of the attention continuum and different imagined scenarios based on analyses conducted on each respective archetype, employing a sound based on the analyses in chapter two. The discussion on themes, motifs, leitmotifs, and character scoring in chapter five has also informed the compositions, although to a lesser extent than chapters two, three, and four. Being a trained musician with experience in music production and composition, I believe I possess the required competence for the task. This music was made with the aid of a DAW (Logic Pro X), sample libraries, and virtual instruments, which are all key tools in modern film scoring.

### **Outline of thesis**

In chapter two, I discuss important aspects of the sound of the three series by categorising the music based on 'textural layers', a concept developed by Allan Moore.<sup>18</sup> I also draw from my own knowledge regarding music production.

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<sup>18</sup> Allan Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 14-15.

Then, in chapter three, I discuss some audiovisual analytical concepts, before delving deeper into one of them: Anahid Kassabian's heuristic model of the *attention continuum*.<sup>19</sup> I use this model for audiovisual analysis of the three series, focusing on similarities between music and its interaction with the other elements of the productions by analysing specific scenes based on their positions within the attention continuum. I also discuss some strengths and weaknesses of the attention continuum.

In chapter four, I introduce a concept I call *stylistic archetypes*. The goal of this concept is to map the most common musical styles present in the series. These stylistic archetypes lean heavily on the analyses in chapters two and three, and I apply these archetypes through analyses of individual scenes from all three series.

I then turn to discuss the use of musical themes and motifs, along with analysing how some characters are scored, in chapter five. I also discuss the use of pre-existing music, and the concepts of *diegesis* and *intertextuality*.

Finally, I summarise common traits in the music, and also the most significant differences, in chapter six. I then apply the results to musical examples of my own making. These musical examples draw from all previous chapters, but are organised by way of the stylistic archetypes introduced in chapter four. In the end of this thesis, I attempt to provide some answers to the thesis' primary question.

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<sup>19</sup> Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 52-55.

## Chapter 2

### Textural Layers

In this chapter, I will discuss some aspects of the sound of *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. I do this by grouping the most essential sounds in each series into categories based on *textural layers*, explained below, and describing the sounds covered by each such category. I then compare the results of my analysis at the end of the chapter. Please note that parameters such as key, mode, time signatures, tempo, etc., will not be discussed in great detail in this chapter—that is something I analyse more thoroughly in chapter three. In this chapter, I will primarily focus on some important aspects of the *sound* of the music.

Where possible, I refer to tracks on soundtrack albums rather than scenes from the series in this chapter.<sup>1</sup> I do this because this chapter's focus is supposed to be solely on the originally composed music of the three shows, and not on the interplay between music and other elements, which will be discussed in chapters three through five. *Mr. Robot's* double soundtrack album has proven especially sufficient to this case, as it seems to include every originally composed cue of a certain length. Because of the more strictly curated content of *Daredevil* and *Orphan Black's* soundtrack albums, it has been necessary to also include some examples from specific episodes that do not appear as tracks on the albums. I henceforth put the title of the cue in quotation marks when referring to tracks on the soundtrack albums.

In his book *Song Means* (2012), Allan Moore introduces his concept of *textural layers*.<sup>2</sup> While mainly intended for popular music analysis, these layers can be helpful in the analysis of film music; particularly, perhaps, in cues that lack one or more of these layers. The textural layers have informed my categorisation in this chapter. Additionally, in my comparative analyses in chapters three and four, I point to some instances where the emphasis on one of these layers, or a layer's absence, serves as a common denominator for certain scenarios. Moore's four layers are:

—the *explicit beat layer*: nominally unpitched sounds playing beats,

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<sup>1</sup> John Paesano, *Daredevil (Original Soundtrack Album)*, 2015; Trevor Yuile, *Orphan Black (Original Television Score)*, 2015; Mac Quayle, *Mr. Robot, Vol. 1 (Original Television Series Soundtrack)*, 2016; Mac Quayle, *Mr. Robot, Vol. 2 (Original Television Series Soundtrack)*, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Allan Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 14-15.

—the *functional bass layer*: deep, typically monophonic notes normally playing the root note of harmonies,  
—the *melodic layer*: higher, typically monophonic notes playing both primary and secondary melodies,  
—and the *harmonic filler layer*: the typically polyphonic layer that normally contains the greatest amount of instruments/sounds.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I look to position the most frequently heard musical sounds in the series within Moore’s textural layers. My reasons for doing so are in order to achieve a better understanding of the most important components of the score, and to combine these categories with the ones based on audiovisual interaction in chapters three and four. My method has to this regard simply been to watch every episode and listen to the soundtrack albums while noting which elements are commonly used, and how these elements are employed.

However, Moore’s layers do not take audiovisual interaction into consideration, since Moore developed the concept with popular music in mind. As such, I have decided to add one more category to the four outlined by Moore. It is very much a category based on audiovisual interaction, and since it is an important component in the shows, and as it does not fit well with any of Moore’s layers, I decided to add to the model with my category of *one-shot visual enhancers*—short, non-repeated sounds that emphasise an on-screen change or action. Jeff Smith points to non-diegetic sounds that punctuate visual effects as one of the hallmarks of the intensified audiovisual aesthetics in modern cinema (as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis).<sup>4</sup> Smith places particular emphasis on two types of sounds, namely reverberant drumbeats and ‘swooshing’. Both these sound effects, and many more, are commonly heard in all three series.

### **Textural layers in *Daredevil***

On some occasions in this thesis, I use the somewhat paradoxical expression ‘scored by silence’. I am of the opinion that silence can be a very effective compositional technique, a position also held by Claudia Gorbman: ‘The effect of the *absence* of musical sound must

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Smith, ‘The Sound of Intensified Continuity’, in John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 345-346.

never be underestimated'.<sup>5</sup> Of the three shows analysed in this thesis, this approach is most regularly employed in *Daredevil*. Long stretches of the series are without music, and when music is employed, it is likely to be subtle. However, when the situation calls for it, the music can be massive and bombastic, and the music in *Daredevil* is therefore very dynamic. Instrumentally, composer John Paesano relies heavily on drones and textures for continuity and a sonic background, while gritty electronic sounds in combination with strings, timpani, and piano provide most of the foreground. Other instruments are included on some rare occasions.

### *Harmonic filler layer*

The arguably most essential part of *Daredevil*'s score is atmospheric textures in all shapes and forms—dark and unsettling, clean and beautiful, or eerie clusters. These textures typically form the musical basis of the many minimalistic soundscapes in *Daredevil*. When I write 'atmospheric textures', or simply 'textures', I refer to sounds which have a long *attack* and *release*, an ambient character and that are used to play very long notes or chords that typically do not change over the passage of time.<sup>6</sup> Presets (sounds set beforehand by the instrument's manufacturers) of this quality can commonly be found categorised as 'textures', 'atmospheres', or 'drones'. These categories tend to overlap as they are all 'ambient', have long attack and release settings, and tend to include some form of subtle movement in tone. In addition to being found in presets, sounds such as these can also be made by users, either through synthesis or by processing sounds. Paesano seems to be using both approaches, often having atmospheric and complex synth sounds play along with reversed strings and piano, all processed through dense reverb. These textures may usually be labelled as 'sneakers', as they typically fade in slowly and are often not meant to be actively noticed by the viewer. The textures are generally not rhythmical, although they are occasionally accompanied by a simple rhythmic pattern. Moreover, it is very uncommon that they are closely synchronised to the picture. They instead add a fluid, often eerie quality to the visuals.

The tonality of these textures varies according to the nature of the narrative. Typically, the textures will have an open character with clearly defined tonality. Minor chords with an

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<sup>5</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Michigan: BFI, 1987), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Attack and release refer to the section of a synth which deals with the temporal qualities of the sound, namely the *envelope*, often known as the *ADSR*, which stands for attack, decay, sustain, and release. A long attack means that the sound uses quite some time before it reaches its maximum volume, while a long release indicates that the sound fades slowly in volume after the player stops playing it.

added ninth are common—the ‘Wilson Fisk’ cue is a great example of this. However, moments that are supposed to be experienced as disturbing or frightening are often accompanied by clusters instead, and this lack of common tonality helps convey a feeling of uncertainty and dread. An example of the efficiency of this technique can be experienced in episode eight, ‘Shadows in the Glass’ (33:37-35:16).<sup>7</sup> In this episode we learn about main antagonist Wilson Fisk’s past, and realise he is a deeply traumatised man. He speaks with head of the Chinese mafia, Madame Gao, who subtly threatens him. This scene is accompanied by a texture in harmonic minor. As Madame Gao leaves, some notes start playing outside of the scale, and right before Fisk topples his table in anger, a tritone crescendos into an ominous cluster, highlighting the mad anger boiling inside of the antagonist. Sometimes these effects are more sudden, like when Karen is kidnapped in episode eleven, ‘The Path of the Righteous’ (46:09-46:34). Here, a sudden clustered noise-like textural sound is combined with a *hit* as a hand clasps over Karen’s mouth, creating a moment of horror. The term ‘hit’ is typically used in sound libraries to describe short, sudden, and often dramatic-sounding percussive sounds.

Pianos are sometimes processed in order to create textures, reverse effects, or rhythms. An example of this is the ‘Ben Urich’ cue, which contains a myriad of creatively processed pianos. The reversed piano in this cue seamlessly blends with the synth pads, creating a very ‘organic’-sounding texture. Paesano also uses the piano frequently ‘as is’, with no more obvious processing than a generous dose of reverb, such as in the beginning of ‘Fogwell’s Gym’. These pianos are more or less always played softly and sparsely, and are often heard in sentimental moments in *Daredevil*. While piano can fill the melodic role, it most often functions as harmonic filler.

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<sup>7</sup> When I refer to time-codes for *Daredevil*, I refer to Netflix time-codes, as this was the platform of the series’ initial release. I also use Netflix time-codes for *Orphan Black*, although for a different reason: the DVD version published in Scandinavia plays at a higher speed (resulting in a higher tempo and pitch on the soundtrack) than the Netflix version, which I believe plays at original speed. *Mr. Robot* is at the time of writing not available on Netflix. The streaming platforms in Norway where the series is currently available, HBO Nordic and Viaplay, both play at higher speeds than the original broadcast (NRK played the show at original speed, but each episode ceased being available three weeks after broadcast). The official DVD released in Scandinavia and Finland is also sped up, and since I have no better option, I use time-codes from the DVD. Depending on whether a scene I refer to occurs early or late in the specific episode, this may mean a time difference ranging from a few seconds to around two minutes if original speed is used as the reader’s reference (and vice versa for the other shows).

The strings in *Daredevil* are among the most important and varied components of the score. At times they can be described as ‘lush’ or ‘epic’, often in the form of a full section playing long lines. At other times they may play more rapid sequences, as in the ‘Worthy Opponents’ cue. They can be dark and sinister, or they can be sparse and fragile. Tremolo and staccato are techniques often used in action scenes (‘Hallway Fight’ includes examples of both tremolo (1:01-1:07) and staccato (3:12-3:20)). More exotic techniques such as active use of overtones or *col legno* bowing (using the stick of the bow) are also frequently employed; an example of the former can be heard in ‘Man Of Ill Intent’ (1:20–1:52), while ‘Stick’ is a cue which relies heavily on its *col legno* strings. Although normally playing in sections, solo strings are not uncommon in the score. Unlike the piano, which is virtually always supposed to be sentimental, strings are used to convey a wealth of different emotions in *Daredevil*. They are most often used as part of the harmonic filler layer.

#### *Explicit beat layer*

Percussion is used quite sparingly in *Daredevil*. However, rapid percussive effects can be heard in most of the fight scenes where the protagonist is involved, bringing intensity and movement to the scenes. Striking a drum is also arguably the musical action most closely resembling the act of punching, and as such percussion can function as what Philip Tagg calls an *anaphone* in these scenes.<sup>8</sup> Tagg defines ‘anaphone’ as ‘the use of existing models in the formation of (musical) sounds’.<sup>9</sup> Electronic kicks and snares are often employed in these scenes, for example in ‘Hallway Fight’ (1:06-1:43), along with sixteenth-note effects. These rapid effects are often played by a sound reminiscent of a swooshing sound, like a stick or nunchuck flying rapidly through the air, as heard in ‘Hallway Fight’ (1:18-1:52)—once more an anaphone. At other times, this rapid effect can be played by a filtered electronic kick (‘Hallway Fight’, 3:01-3:22), or by other sounds that share some of the characteristics of one of the two sounds (for example ‘Passenger Side’, 0:39-1:09; and ‘A World On Fire’, 0:37-1:00).

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<sup>8</sup> Philip Tagg, ‘Towards a Sign Typology of Music’, in R. Dalmonte and M. Baroni (eds.), *Secondo convegno europeo di analisi musicale* (Trento: Università degli studi di Trento, 1992), 369-378.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

Timpani<sup>10</sup> are also often included in action scenes. Paesano often highlights the low frequencies of the timpani and applies a lot of reverb to his orchestral percussion. As a result, the timpani sound muffled yet big, with a decidedly ‘cinematic’ streak. In very dramatic moments the timpani are sometimes coupled with snares, tubular bells and/or anvil hits, as in the season finale (42:49-43:23), for an extremely ‘epic’ and climactic feel.

Note that the more rare montage scenes in *Daredevil* also typically include the explicit beat layer. However, the choice of percussive sounds varies, from electronic percussion, through timpani, and even to including acoustic drum kit on one occasion.

#### *Functional bass layer*

Synth bass is the instrument that is most commonly used to provide the functional bass layer. The synth basses are often pulsing, playing eighth- or sixteenth-notes in order to add a driving rhythm to the music. This can for example be experienced in the main theme and in ‘Fogwell’s Gym’ (0:40 and onwards). These pulsing synth basses are often wide and bright, and have a gritty, distorted character. They are mostly reserved for action scenes. However, pulsing synth basses can on occasions also be more understated, like in the ‘Union Allied’ cue.

The synth bass is not always pulsing. One example of a cue that uses a simple, understated synth bass is ‘Ben Urich’. Distorted and reverberated synth bass is also used in order to provide deep blasts, as in ‘Worthy Opponents’—perhaps coupled with deep brass. Deep legato strings are also, I believe, sometimes responsible for providing the functional bass layer. These are mixed to blend in with the rest of the music and can be difficult to pick out, as I believe to be the case in the first part of ‘A World On Fire’.

#### *Melodic layer*

The sound playing the melody in the main theme (0:17 and onwards) has a very piano-like character. I regard this to be one of the signature sounds of Paesano’s score. The sound occurs quite frequently in *Daredevil*, not exclusively during the title sequence. It is often used to play sparse melodies on top of a quiet soundscape, as in the ‘Union Allied’ cue (1:10 and onwards). The sound is arguably unique—whether it is generated by tuned noise, a heavily

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<sup>10</sup> On some occasions in this thesis, my use of the word ‘timpani’ may be wrong, or at least a simplification. Sometimes, the sound I call ‘timpani’ may be derived from another big drum instead, or it may even be synthetically generated. However, I use ‘timpani’ whenever I describe a big drum sound that sounds like a timpani, or when generalising a large amount of big drum sounds, like here.

processed piano or something else entirely is hard to tell—and it is a central element to the score. It is very often dubbed by piano, for example in ‘A World On Fire’. On some occasions the piano takes on the leading melodic role by itself, for example in ‘Avocados at Law’. Both piano and the synth sound in question are mostly reserved for emotional moments in the narrative.

String sections playing long melodic lines are employed on some occasions, for example in ‘The Suit’ (1:16-2:15). However, more often these strings will play short, arpeggiated, repeated motifs, like in the main theme or in ‘Worthy Opponents’. Although perhaps not qualifying as melodies in a conservative interpretation of the term, these motifs nonetheless arguably often fill the role of the melodic layer.

#### *One-shot visual enhancers*

One-shot effects closely synchronised with the action is a wide category including many different sounds. Paesano uses these sonic effects relatively sparingly, but they are nonetheless often heard in modern hybrid thriller scoring and might therefore be considered part of the style. Such effects can be heard several times in most episodes of *Daredevil*.

One example is the reversed, high-pitched *rise* prior to Matt’s battle with Wilson Fisk in the final episode (‘Daredevil’, 44:09), closely synchronised to a camera change. A ‘rise’ is a crescendoing sound, typically building into a musical hit or climax. On this occasion, however, the rise crescendos into silence. Another example of a one-shot visual enhancer in *Daredevil* is the low hit as the camera focuses away from Fisk during one of his and Vanessa’s dates in episode five, ‘World On Fire’ (44:05). Note that the two sounds described above stand in contrast to one another: the former is high-pitched, rising in volume and dry in terms of reverb, while the latter is low-pitched, fading in volume and drenched in reverb. They nevertheless serve roughly the same purpose, that is, they both highlight an on-screen detail. Moreover, they both occur at the end of a musical cue—although this is not always the case with sounds within this category. What is characteristic, however, is that sounds in this category will highlight a visual detail. Another sound often employed to this end is the electronic bass drop, for example when the elevator opens in episode seven, ‘Stick’ (1:07). This bass drop is coupled with a downwards-sliding tremolo cello, and these one-shot effects may indeed sometimes be acoustic instead of electronic. Timpani will often be used to highlight an on-screen detail; these may be muffled, or they can be bright and massive. An

example of the latter is found in episode six, 'Condemned' (29:45-29:49), in which Matt slams his fists thrice into Russian mafia leader Vladimir's chest, performing a rather brutal form of CPR. Here, the massive timpani, enhanced with anvil hits, are synchronised with Matt's strikes.

### *Summary*

Daredevil relies on textures, strings, and piano for its harmonic filler layer. The textures are often synthetic, but are occasionally derived from acoustic instruments like piano. They can be clustered, atonal, or have a clearly defined tonality. Piano is mostly used for emotional moments, whereas strings are used in a number of different kinds of scenes. The explicit beat layer is typically only found in action and montage scenes. Electronic drum sounds are often accompanied by rapid effects such as a swooshing sound or a filtered kick drum, while timpani drenched in reverb is also used. The functional bass layer is mainly covered by synth bass, which can be gritty and pulsing, or subtle and clean. The most important sounds covering the melodic layer are piano and the piano-like synth sound heard in the main theme; however, strings sometimes play melodies as well. One-shot visual enhancers include a large number of sounds, both acoustic and synthetic.

### **Textural layers in *Orphan Black***

In terms of dynamics, *Orphan Black* is *Daredevil*'s opposite. The show features near wall-to-wall scoring, and silent moments are few and far between. In general, the music is also less subtle than *Daredevil*'s, as various percussive and melodic sounds play on top of synth textures at most times. The music itself is usually more forward-sounding, both in the fact that it is louder in the total mix, and in that it employs less reverb. *Orphan Black* also features a very high number of different sounds; this eclecticism is so apparent and consistent that it has to be regarded as part of the sound of the score. However, composer Trevor Yuile ties this large range of sounds together by employing a number of unique synth sounds that serve to give the score a clear sonic identity.

### *Harmonic filler layer*

As stated above, *Orphan Black*'s score has a number of sounds unique to the show, which help distinguish its sound from other shows. Most of these sounds are electronic and/or heavily processed and are difficult to describe. They tend to consist of a rather thin timbre,

often rich in overtones; they include some kind of movement in tone and volume, typically of a ‘fluttery’, uneven kind; and they are often processed to sound glitchy and/or *bitcrushed*. ‘Bitcrushed’ means a sound that has been processed through a bitcrusher, a processing tool that reduces sound fidelity. These sounds can function as anything from atmospheric textures to melodic lines, and there are quite a few variations of them. The sounds that are most often used as part of the harmonic filler layer are mentioned in this section, while the ones that can be said to have a more melodic role are placed in the melodic layer section.

One of the most prominent textural synth sounds in *Orphan Black* appears in isolation in the last third of the cue ‘An Honour’ (1:51). This atmospheric patch rises and falls in volume and has a ‘glassy’ characteristic. ‘Glassy’ is a descriptive word often found in synths and sample libraries, and is used to describe sounds that have a fairly similar character to the sounds you can achieve by playing on (stemmed) glasses. Another example of a sound in a somewhat similar vein is the sequenced synth in ‘Alison Kills’ (0:09-1:16). It is a pulsing and filtered sound with a fairly complex timbre playing eighth-notes. A third sound that can be described as harmonic filler, although it might be even better to call it a sound effect, is a sound that is very difficult to describe; it is a descending, creaking sound, and opens the ‘Rachael’s [sic] Home Videos’ cue.

*Orphan Black* also includes harmonic filler sounds that are less unique-sounding. As in *Daredevil*, the piano can fill both the harmonic filler layer and the melodic layer; or indeed something in between, as is arguably the case in the rest of the above cue. Synth textures more akin to the ones in *Daredevil* are also sometimes used, for example the atonal texture in the background of the ‘Sequence of Events’ cue. Unlike *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* rarely includes beds of strings, but staccato strings can be heard every now and then. At this point it is worth repeating that *Orphan Black* includes a very large number of additional sounds that are used infrequently. Many of these can be regarded as harmonic filler, but I will not list all of them.

#### *Explicit beat layer*

*Orphan Black*’s soundtrack album only contains a limited number of cues, and I find that these are not always representative of the general style of the music in the first season.

Therefore, it is beneficial to listen to some of the cues that are not included on the soundtrack album; for example a cue in episode five, ‘Conditions of Existence’ (32:35-34:19). The cue is introduced with a brushed cymbal. Throughout the cue, a percussive, metallic sound plays a

sixteenth-note pattern, giving the cue some forwards momentum and urgency. One minute and 25 seconds into the cue, when Sarah receives a photo of her daughter from Paul, a second percussive sound enhances this sensation. This sound is of the same character as a distorted timpani, but lacks the depth associated with the instrument; as a result it does not dominate the cue or make it sound ‘epic’ like fully fleshed timpani hits would. These sounds can be placed in the large and hard-to-define category of ‘cinematic percussion’. Once more I draw from sample library jargon in an attempt to describe and categorise these sounds. ‘Cinematic percussion’ can perhaps best be described by excluding what it is not. It is not usually used to describe standard acoustic or electronic drum sounds, and it does not typically include instruments that a percussionist would use in a popular music setting. However, percussion used in classical music, and dramatic sounding timpani in particular, is included in some of these sound libraries. Other sounds associated with ‘cinematic percussion’ include a large range of samples, sometimes organised as rhythmic loops, that are not commonly used as percussive sounds outside of film scores.

When it comes to high-intensity action scenes, Yuile relies a little less on timpani than Paesano does, often using electronic percussion instead. This percussion is used in much the same way as in *Daredevil* though, enhancing the most dramatic moments in the show. An example of Yuile’s approach to dramatic percussion can be experienced in episode seven, ‘Parts Developed in an Unusual Manner’ (30:43–31:39). Here, timpani (notably more bright and with less reverb than what is usually heard in *Daredevil*) play at regular intervals. The moment Paul alerts Sarah of danger (31:23), the timpani are accompanied by hard-hitting, aggressively gated percussion. When the action ends, low timpani drenched in reverb play the final note for an ‘epic’ ending.

Sometimes the percussion is more heavily based on electronic drum sounds, often excluding timpani altogether. One example is the busy, high-intensity cue that plays when Delphine searches through Cosima’s belongings in episode eight, ‘Entangled Bank’ (30:20-31:45). The basis for this cue is a high-tempo drum and bass pattern. The electronic drums mainly consist of a kick, two snares and a hi-hat (with the occasional ride cymbal), while a low tom highlights certain beats. The two snares have different functions; the one in the foreground functions like a conventional snare, while the one in the background plays more frequently and helps intensify the rhythm. The drums are distorted and heavily

compressed, and rhythmical stutters are used in the place of more conventional drum fills. The rhythm is broken up thrice, before a deeper hit drenched in reverb finishes the cue.

#### *Functional bass layer*

Describing the above cue without discussing the synth bass does the piece no justice. As the drums play the busy beat, the distorted, bright synth bass with a hint of modulation—a light flanger, perhaps—plays a Locrian pattern, including a minor second and a tritone. This, when combined with the drums, gives the cue a very edgy feel. When the beat is broken up the first and the second time, other sounds in a higher register take over, temporally transposing the music up a perfect fourth. High intensity scenes are often accompanied by edgy synth bass patterns such as the one described here. The Locrian mode or related scales are often employed, the tempo is high, and the bass will typically sound distorted and bright. In this cue, one could question whether the bass corresponds with Moore's functional bass layer, or indeed the melodic layer instead, as it takes a leading role within the cue.

Most of the time though, synth bass is used in more subtle ways. A scene involving Sarah in episode nine, 'Unconscious Selection' (15:34-16:36), shows how the synth bass can add weight and movement to a cue without being in-your-face and busy. As Sarah checks on a sleeping Kira, a bitcrushed synth, piano, a synth texture, and a vibraphone-like sound are the only components of the cue. When Siobhan grabs her shotgun, a synth bass sneaks in, simply playing the root note of the chord, emphasising a chord change that just took place. This particular chord change is especially common in *Orphan Black*. The chord change moves the cue up a minor third, before moving it back down again. This gives movement to the cue without having to change any other parameter. The moment we cut to Art, the cue is transposed down a major third, and the synth bass starts pulsing, granting more urgency to the cue. The synth bass itself is of a fairly 'neutral' character; it is filtered with a low-pass filter and does not draw attention to itself. Note that piano can also provide dramatic bass notes, as in 'They're Killing Us' (0:48 and onwards).

#### *Melodic layer*

*Orphan Black* features a 'Previously On' cue that opens the majority of the episodes, and this cue includes one of the show's unique, fluttery synth sounds. The bitcrushed, thin timbre that irregularly rises and falls in volume is probably not something viewers will have heard elsewhere. This sound is not used in order to play melodies, but its central positioning in the

front of the *sound-box*<sup>11</sup> takes up the space usually associated with the melodic layer, and so its role is indeed to fill the melodic layer, even if it does not play a melody.<sup>12</sup> The thin, glitchy timbre in ‘Duncan’s Demise’ (1:11-1:49) also has a melodic quality in spite of its fragmented tone. Its irregular, quickly changing and fragile-sounding timbre has a sound quality that can be associated with granular synthesis, and it is used occasionally throughout the first season of *Orphan Black*.

Pianos and mallets mainly fill the same roles in *Orphan Black*’s score. Most of the time, these instruments are used to play simple chords or melodies in an ‘unobtrusive’ manner; the instruments rarely draw unnecessary attention to themselves, avoiding complex melodies or colourful chords in favour of simple, long notes, often at the forefront of the musical soundscape. The mallets typically employed by Yuile are, I believe, glockenspiel and vibraphone.

Later in the previously discussed episode nine, Felix offers advice to Alison (26:26-28:06). The beginning of the scene consists of Alison’s leitmotivic sounds. The sound in the foreground seems to consist of at least two layers; on top we have a glockenspiel, and underneath a fluttery synth plays the root note. These two sounds are almost always used in conjunction with a pulsing, textural synth that can be heard in the background—together, these sounds create Alison’s soundscape, which will be further explored in chapter five. In addition to these sounds, a plucked piano and a low-key percussive hit provide a rhythmical foundation. The glockenspiel plays a variation of Alison’s leitmotif sparsely. As Alison gets emotional, this cue is replaced by another, piano-driven piece of music. At first it only includes piano playing softly in minor, emphasising Alison’s sadness, combined with a droning glass synth. However, as Felix gives his positive pep talk, the cue moves from minor into major, and Alison’s glockenspiel sound joins in, making the cue a little bit more upbeat.

Piano and mallets are mostly used in two kinds of cues; in the ‘general’, subtly driving underscoring that is so common in *Orphan Black*, and in the more sentimental cues. However, piano can be used in horror settings as well. The ‘We Meet Helena’ cue includes various

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<sup>11</sup> The sound-box is a heuristic model which aims to visualise an imagined sound-space. See, for example, Moore, *Song Means*, 20-26, or Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Anne Danielsen, ‘The Natural and the Surreal: changes in the perception of popular music sound’, *Organised Sound* 18 (2013), 71-80.

<sup>12</sup> The same can be said of rap vocals in hip-hop or growling vocals in metal—these sounds normally fill the role of the melodic layer even if they do not inherit explicitly melodic content.

sounds derived from a piano: the sound of the sustain pedal being pressed becomes a cluster-sounding rhythmical element; the rhythmical plucking of piano strings provide the bass; and 'random' notes pressed at 'random' times grant unpredictability and a feeling of atonal horror.

#### *One-shot visual enhancers*

Much of *Orphan Black*'s music is closely synchronised to the visuals. Cymbals, low percussive hits, and brass and/or piano cluster crescendos are used especially often to this end. An example of the use of such effects can be experienced in episode eight, 'Entangled Bank' (14:03-14:10). A brushed cymbal can be heard the moment Sarah, disguised as Beth, enters the picture. A cymbal swell finishes the cue as the screen goes black, creating a pause for the possibility of a commercial break. With the screen still black, a low percussive hit signals the return to action. All these effects are visual enhancers, closely synchronised to the picture.

Brushed cymbals are very often used to mark a scene change. In episode eight, this happens when we shift from Felix's apartment to Sarah and Alison in a car (26:51). The cymbal also marks the end of the musical cue. Later in the episode, the same cymbal is combined with a low percussive hit as Aldous Leekie opens a door (29:01). Then, as he closes the door at scene change, a timpani hit drenched in reverb dramatically enhances the impact of the glass door. The moment Olivier Durall dies further into the episode is marked by a brass cluster crescendo followed by a low percussive hit (39:04).

Other kinds of rises and hits are also occasionally used in order to enhance the visuals. These tend to be more complex and difficult to describe. An example can be heard in a scene featuring Leekie (32:45), once again in episode eight, leading into a camera change. This rise consists of several different timbres, all rising in intensity and some in pitch as well. Because of the fact that a complex patch like this one is time demanding to create, we can assume that the sound probably derives from a preset. The camera angle following the rise only lasts for a second before the camera shifts to Delphine. A low percussive hit marks this change of camera angle as well.

In 2016, I conducted an interview with composer Alexander Andresen regarding his score for *The Third Eye*, a Norwegian thriller or *nordic noir* television series. Andresen has worked under Trevor Yuile for three years. Here, he illustrates Yuile's concern with closely matching the music with the action on screen (translated from Norwegian):

[Trevor Yuile] taught me to simply watch the scene without music a couple of times, and work on the scene with just a metronome to find the right tempo initially. (...) When the metronome hits on certain things that work, a door slamming or a character starting a run on the first beat of a bar, if the tempo flows with the scene, then we have nailed the *bpm*,<sup>13</sup> and that is when we start writing the music. I learnt that from [Yuile], and I use that [method] regularly.

### *Summary*

*Orphan Black* includes some unique synth sounds—some are harmonic fillers, while others can be regarded as part of the melodic layer. Piano and strings can also fill both roles. Other synth textures also cover the harmonic filler layer, and mallets sometimes provide the harmonic layer. During dialogue and low-intensity scenes, low-key percussion from a wide range of sound-sources often provide the explicit beat layer. During action scenes, or scenes with high intensity, hard-hitting electronic drums are commonplace, and timpani are often included as well. The functional bass layer is mostly covered by synth bass, and again we can divide between high- and low-intensity scenes; in the former, the bass is typically aggressive, bright and wide, whereas in the latter, it is subtle, centred and filtered. Piano occasionally provides the functional bass layer as well. One-shot visual enhancers appear very frequently in *Orphan Black*; common ones include brushed cymbal, low percussive hits, and brass and/or piano cluster crescendos.

### **Textural layers in *Mr. Robot***

The score for *Mr. Robot* is strictly electronic, with the exception of piano, pre-existing music, and other occasional acoustic sounds. The frequency of music and silence falls in between the other two shows; there is much music in *Mr. Robot*, but there are also long pockets of silence. As in *Daredevil* and *Orphan Black*, synthetic textures, drones and pads play an important role in *Mr. Robot*'s sound. However, composer Mac Quayle also relies heavily on rhythmically sequenced synth patterns—this is perhaps the most recognisable feature of *Mr. Robot*'s score.

### *Harmonic filler layer*

Long, slowly evolving synth textures is a very important component of *Mr. Robot*'s score. These may be atmospheric drones in the same vein as many of those in *Daredevil* (an example can be heard in the opening cue of the show, '1.0\_1-Hellofriend.wav'); complex and evolving

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<sup>13</sup> Beats per minute, the most common way of measuring tempo in music.

textures that are not necessarily tonal (for example ‘1.4\_1-Squ4rewiththeuniverse.wma’); or more conventional synth pads playing chord progressions (for example ‘1.2\_3-Therealshayla.wav’). In the latter two examples from the soundtrack album, the textures carry the cues almost by themselves, and this is not uncommon. However, more often these textures will be used in conjunction with other sounds, functioning as ‘glue’ that ties musical elements together. Sometimes a synth texture may even tie different scenes together, serving to connect them into one continuous narrative. An example of this is a drone running the length of several scenes in episode six: ‘eps1.5\_br4ve-traveler.asf’ (30:07-34:08).<sup>14</sup> Starting at the end of a scene with Angela, the synth drone plays continuously in several scenes featuring Elliot while other musical sounds fade in and out. This drone serves to add continuity to the narrative, and also lays down a musical basis on which the composer has the freedom to introduce or remove other elements without breaking the musical continuum.

Although they are all synth sounds that share the traits of long attack and release settings, and generally fulfil the role of the harmonic filler layer, the sonic characteristics of these textures are otherwise subject to change. Sometimes they will consist of a fairly clean pad sound, like the drone just described or the pad used in the ‘1.0\_4-M0rphine.aac’ cue. At other times the textures may have a glassy timbre, like the one heard in ‘1.0\_5-Pierreloti.au’, or they may be atonal and/or distorted, as in the previously mentioned ‘1.4\_1-Squ4rewiththeuniverse.wma’ cue. These sonic approaches are the most common for textural synth sounds in *Mr. Robot*.

Rhythmically modulated synth sounds are as prominent as the long synth textures, and are a key component of the *Mr. Robot* score. These synths may be arpeggiated, pulsing, or otherwise sequenced tones, repeated and modulated over time. The opening seconds of ‘1.0\_3-Fucksociety.mp3’ showcase both an arpeggiated synth bass and another synth playing an arpeggiated pattern in a higher register at the same time. These synths sound like basic subtractive<sup>15</sup> synths and play eighth-notes in minor, both of which are common tendencies in *Mr. Robot*. The patterns also alternate in key, moving up and down a minor third, mirroring the chord change analysed in the *Orphan Black* scene featuring Sarah, Siobhan and Kira on

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<sup>14</sup> Again, I emphasise that the *Mr. Robot* time-codes refer to the sped-up official DVD released in Scandinavia and Finland, and not to the original speed.

<sup>15</sup> Subtractive synthesis is the most common form of synthesis, and is based around (mostly) basic wave forms, such as sine, saw, square, triangle, and noise, and the filtering of these—hence the name ‘subtractive’, as one filters out frequencies in order to shape the sound.

page 23. Note that the difference between an arpeggio and a repeating ostinato or motif is blurry at best. I choose the term arpeggio because it is the most commonly used term for describing the effect built into many synths in which notes are sequenced linearly after each other, playing automatically when keys are pressed. Whether this effect is actually engaged or simply mimicked is of little consequence, as the synth will sound arpeggiated either way.

Another form of rhythmic modulation is to have a sound *pulse*. This means that the individual note does not necessarily change, but switches from ‘on’ and ‘off’ in a rhythmical fashion. This effect can also be achieved by using an arpeggiator, or in multiple other ways.<sup>16</sup> The effect does not have to be absolute; the ‘off’ setting could simply be at a lower amplitude than the ‘on’ setting, and the switching between the two extremes may be abrupt or gradual. An example of a cue that is dominated by such pulsing synth sounds is ‘1.1\_6-Believe-In-Erasing.au’.

Rhythmically modulated synth sounds in *Mr. Robot* are many and varied. Although they typically play in the meter of 4/4, subdivisions and patterns are all subject to variation. Quayle seems to employ rhythmical variation on all kinds of synths; bass synths, bright synths, and percussive timbres may all be modulated in a rhythmical manner. At times even synth pads are given a pulsing movement, for example in ‘1.1\_5-Illusionofchoice.mp3’ (1:16-3:17).

#### *Explicit beat layer*

Accounting for the percussion in *Mr. Robot* is complicated. This is because much of the rhythmic content is played by the rhythmically modulated synths already discussed. An example of this complexity can be heard further into the ‘1.2\_1-IwillbeCTO.m4p’ cue (1:08-1:41). The rhythmical motif heard here is based on a rhythmically sequenced synth bass pattern, but a synthetic snare plays on the fourth beat of every bar. Additionally, a few subtle hits play as well—some of them hard-panned to right or left, and some in the centre. On top of this, various synth sounds fade in and stop abruptly in a rhythmical fashion, functioning as rises into the snare hit. All of these sounds have rhythmical qualities and partake in the rhythmic design, but strictly speaking, only the snare and the other hits are percussive sounds. Another similar example is ‘1.7\_2-Darlenesgun.aac’ (0:37-1:21), in which the pulsing bass

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<sup>16</sup> For example by side-chaining a gate or a compressor, by using a tremolo effect, by manipulating an amplification sequencer, and more.

synth, the repeated glassy synth, and the distorted and filtered pulsing synth fading in at the end all fall into the category of rhythmically modulated synths, leaving only the electronic hi-hat as a percussive sound. As such, due to the consistent use of rhythmically modulated synths, the percussive instruments I list and describe below do not encompass a complete overview of the rhythmical elements in *Mr. Robot*.

As in the two other shows, ‘cinematic’ timpani hits are used in *Mr. Robot*; however, they are used sparsely and rarely, and they often seem to be electronic sounds rather than actual timpani. Examples include the very first hit in ‘1.4\_2-Impenetrable.sd2’ and the percussive low-end impacts in ‘1.9\_2-Wearefinallyaw4ke.ra’. These hits are muffled and include a lot of reverb, and do not sound quite like actual timpani, but rather like a synthetically designed percussive sound with the same function as the ‘cinematic timpani’. In a few cases these hits are performed by a brighter sound, which sounds a little more like real, heavily processed and brightened timpani or taiko. These hits can be heard on ‘1.5\_1-AskingtheImpossible.m4p’ (0:18-2:30).

Other percussive sounds seem to be dependent on the cue, as there are few common denominators. The one thing these sounds have in common is that they all seem to be electronic. ‘1.4\_2-Impenetrable.sd2’ and ‘1.9\_2-Wearefinallyaw4ke.ra’ (0:15 and onwards) feature heavily compressed electronic drum kits, while ‘1.8\_2-Mostdangerouscar.m4p’ (1:39-2:14) features what sounds like one or several pre-fabricated drum loops, perhaps enhanced with additional patterns of Quayle’s design. ‘1.4\_4-Exploitingtyrell.wav’ includes a distorted and filtered one-bar drum loop including a noise rise (1:34-1:48)—this is also the case in ‘1.9\_3-Johannaphishes.wav’ (0:18 and onwards), but the loop is not the same one. ‘1.3\_1-Ichosethis.ogg’ (0:24 and onwards) and ‘1.3\_5-Da3m0nsneverstop.caf’ (1:23-1:54) both feature the same characteristic drum loop. Because they are the opening and closing cues of episode four, this has perhaps been a deliberate choice in order to enhance continuity and grant the individual episode a sonic identity of its own—see more on this in chapter five.

### *Functional bass layer*

The synth basses used in the score are very often rhythmically modulated, as discussed in the *harmonic filler layer* section. The synth basses that are not rhythmically modulated are often very subtle; these bass sounds simply serve the rest of the music, providing deep root notes

without drawing attention to themselves. For an example of this we return to ‘1.2\_3-Therealshayla.wav’. 29 seconds into the cue, a bass synth appears. However, it has the same slow attack as the pad, and the high frequencies are filtered out. Therefore, the bass is barely noticeable, but it gives the otherwise bright texture a deep foundation. In ‘1.3\_5-Da3m0nsneverstop.caf’ the bass is more noticeable, but again its main functions are to offer the cue harmonic movement by shifting the root note, and to fill out the low end of the frequency spectrum. Quayle even sticks to this minimalistic approach in many driving and/or psychedelic cues, for instance in ‘1.3\_2-Everyrev0lution.ra’. However, in the last third of the cue, the low pass filter is opened up a bit, allowing for a slightly more prominent and aggressive tone before the filter is closed again.

### *Melodic layer*

Reflecting the dominant idiom of electronic music, the music in *Mr. Robot* is largely circular rather than linear. There seems to be a greater focus on sound, and on the continuous evolution of sound, than on evolving melody. The melodies that are used in *Mr. Robot*’s score are typically short, repeated motifs, played either by a synth or a piano. Examples include ‘1.1\_3-Oneor0.wma’, which is based on a short synth motif, and ‘1.1\_4-Hateurself.ra’, which is built around a short piano motif. The main theme is composed in the same way, with the main motif played by a piano-like synth sound, and an additional, secondary motif played by another synth sound.

There are a few exceptions to this, though, as some rare cues focus on melodic and harmonic progression. One such cue is ‘1.1\_5-Illusionofchoice.mp3’, where a melody played on a glassy synth takes centre stage. ‘1.2\_1-IwillbeCTO.m4p’ is another example of such a cue. This time piano plays the melody. In both cases, the melodies are sparse and in minor key.

### *One-shot visual enhancers*

There are considerably less one-shot visual enhancers in *Mr. Robot* than in the other shows. This does not mean that the music is not closely synchronised with the visuals, but Quayle often matches specific instrumental elements of a cue to a visual detail instead of having specific one-shot sounds for this purpose. One interesting technique often used in *Mr. Robot* is integrating the sounds that at first seem like one-shots, repeating them after the first in-sync one. One example of this can be found in episode eight, ‘eps1.7\_wh1ter0se.m4v’, where a

deep piano note fades in as we get a close-up of a safe (2:50). This seems like a one-shot; however, more in-fading piano notes keep playing for the rest of the cue, emphasising little details, mostly camera changes. The ‘one-shot’ description becomes problematic, as a one-shot is not generally repeated again and again. Another example is located in episode seven, ‘eps1.6\_v1ew-s0urce.flv’, in which an electronic drum hit enhanced with plenty of reverb and delay matches a visual cut, only to prove to be the start of a drum beat (10:20).

There are also occasions where one-shot visual enhancers *are* used as one-shots. One such example is when glitchy sounds match the camera diving and shutting off as Elliot breaks the third wall in episode eight, ‘eps1.7\_wh1ter0se.m4v’ (38:54-39:03). However, these instances are few and far between.

### *Summary*

*Mr. Robot*’s harmonic filler layer is covered by atmospheric synth textures and pads, and also by rhythmically sequenced synths, and occasionally by piano. The explicit beat layer includes timpani, or timpani-like sounds, electronic drums and, occasionally, percussive loops. However, the rhythmically sequenced synths of the harmonic filler layer are the only rhythmical elements in many cues. The functional bass layer is covered both by sequenced synth bass, which is sometimes a little forward-sounding and occasionally performs short motifs, and by more subtle and restricted synth bass without rhythmical movement. Piano and synth sounds fill the melodic layer, often playing short, repetitive motifs, although longer melodies are used on a few occasions. Finally, one-shot visual enhancers are fairly rare in *Mr. Robot*, and many of the ones used are integrated into the rest of the music through repetition.

### **Summary**

Although this chapter has only been about instrumentation and sound, we are already able to single out some common denominators. Of course, all the shows rely on electronic sounds—I knew that from the outset, as that was one of the main reasons why I picked these shows. The electronic sounds used cover all of Moore’s textural layers, although the melodic layer is much less commonplace than the other three layers. The harmonic filler layer includes textures and pads. These are prominent in all three shows, although they all have a slightly different tone; *Daredevil*’s textures are ambient and sparse, the ones used in *Orphan Black* are typically thin and wobbly, and *Mr. Robot* often uses both basic synth pads and dense textures. However, these sounds share many characteristics and fill the same role.

Synth bass is another element which all three shows use extensively. We can separate between understated synth basses that simply provide bottom end to a cue, and more aggressive, open (in terms of filtering) and wider (in terms of stereo image) synth basses that take more of a leading role. There are also occurrences of rhythmically sequenced synth bass in all three shows, which often adds a steady drive and rhythmical movement to cues. Synth bass is the instrument that first and foremost functions as the functional bass layer in the three shows.

The explicit beat layer is also covered by electronic drums and loops, although timpani or other ‘cinematic’ percussion which is not necessarily electronic is also sometimes used to provide this layer. Timpani, or timpani-like sounds, are used in much the same way in all three shows—both as part of the explicit beat layer, and as what I call one-shot visual enhancers. One-shot visual enhancers are included in all three shows, although they are most common in *Orphan Black*, and fairly rare in *Mr. Robot*. Additionally, all shows use sparse piano, typically with much reverb. These pianos normally play either chords, a melody, or a combination of the two, and fill the harmonic filler layer or the melodic layer accordingly.

Of course, there are dissimilarities as well. The shows have three different approaches regarding acoustic instruments—*Daredevil* includes a selection of acoustic instruments with a particular emphasis on strings, *Orphan Black* includes a large variety of acoustic instruments, and *Mr. Robot* hardly includes any acoustic instrument besides piano. Additionally, the shows have different mixing aesthetics, with *Orphan Black* going for a slightly more direct, present, and intense sound than the other two shows.

In this chapter, I have mapped out the most common instruments, sounds, and processing techniques of each show, and seen that the series share a number of similarities, along with a few differences. In the following chapter, I intend to explore how the music interacts with the visuals, and vice versa, as I analyse the shows with the aid of audiovisual theory.

## Chapter 3

### The Attention Continuum and Audiovisual Interaction

In this chapter I turn to look at how the music of the three shows interact with the other elements of the productions. The most important component of this chapter is my attempt to group similar cues, excluding pre-existing music, into Anahid Kassabian's five positions on the *attention continuum*, explained further into the chapter. To my knowledge, the attention continuum has so far not been employed in a scope comparable to what follows in this chapter, and as such, this chapter showcases some of the model's strengths and weaknesses thoroughly for the first time. Throughout this chapter I refer to additional audiovisual theory, with Claudia Gorbman's principles, outlined below, holding a particularly central role.

#### Audiovisual theory

Since I in this chapter explore how music interacts with narrative, visuals, dialogue, etc., I will in the following section explain the most significant audiovisual theories that I lean on.

#### *Gorbman's principles of composition, mixing, and editing*

One of the most widely referenced theoretical models in film music research is Claudia Gorbman's seven principles of composition, mixing, and editing in classical film music, introduced in her book *Unheard Melodies* (1987).<sup>1</sup> I incorporate this model into my analysis because it is a widely acknowledged and highly applicable model for explaining various concepts in film music. Even though Gorbman's model was designed specifically for the dominant musical idiom during Hollywood's Golden Age, I argue that these principles hold sway in all three contemporary thrillers analysed in this thesis to a great extent. This point will be clarified through examples I analyse in this chapter. Gorbman's model is based on seven principles:

- I. *Invisibility*: the technical apparatus of non-diegetic music must not be visible.
- II. *'Inaudibility'*: music is not meant to be heard consciously. As such it should subordinate itself to dialogue, to visuals—i.e., to the primary vehicles of the narrative.
- III. *Signifier of emotion*: music may set specific moods and emphasise particular emotions suggested in the narrative (cf. #IV), but first and foremost, it is a signifier of

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<sup>1</sup> Claudia Gorbman, 'Classical Hollywood Practice: The Model of Max Steiner', in *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Michigan: BFI, 1987), 70-98.

emotion itself.

IV. *Narrative cueing*:

—*referential/narrative*: music gives referential and narrative cues, e.g., indicating point of view, supplying formal demarcations, and establishing setting and characters.

—*connotative*: music ‘interprets’ and ‘illustrates’ narrative events.

V. *Continuity*: music provides formal and rhythmic continuity—between shots, in transitions between scenes, by filling ‘gaps’.

VI. *Unity*: via repetition and variation of musical material and instrumentation, music aids in the construction of formal and narrative unity.

VII. A given film score may violate any of the principles above, providing the violation is at the service of the other principles.<sup>2</sup>

The first principle is static, and is the norm in all *non-diegetic* music.<sup>3</sup> The principle of invisibility is never broken in any of the series I analyse, and I shall as such not be paying further attention to it. The other principles have informed my analysis to a great extent. In this chapter I refer to certain principles on many occasions whilst analysing the combination of music and images in my attempt to reach an understanding of how the music works. I also find that this model works very well in tandem with the attention continuum and with *stylistic archetypes*—the latter is explained in chapter four—as the principles can help explain audiovisual tendencies in various categories within both systems.

#### *Chion’s audiovisual contract*

In his book *Audio-vision: Sound on screen* (1994), Michel Chion discusses a variety of ways in which sound and image affect one another in film.<sup>4</sup> Sound is in this context not limited to music, but includes the entire soundtrack. I include some of his concepts in my analysis, and I list these concepts here.

At the heart of Chion’s theory of sound and image lies his concept of *added value*, which he defines as ‘the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or remembered

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<sup>2</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 73.

<sup>3</sup> *Diegesis*, and the difference between *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* sound, will be discussed in chapter five. For now, it is sufficient to know that diegetic sound is meant to be perceived as part of the narrative and heard by the characters in a scene, whereas non-diegetic sound is meant to function as external commentary *not* heard by the characters in a scene. For a problematisation of the concept of diegesis, see Anahid Kassabian, ‘Music, Sound and the Moving Image: The Present and a Future?’, in Derek B. Scott (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Music*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009, 43-58.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994).

experience one has of it, that this information or expression “naturally” comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, this phenomenon occurs when sound adds meaning to something visual. As Chion points out, this also works reciprocally—image may add meaning to sound.

The principle of added value is especially at work when there is synchronisation between sound and image. A *point of synchronisation*, or *sync point*, is a moment in which a visual event and a sound event meet in synchrony. *Synchresis* is the joining in the audience’s mind between an auditory phenomenon and a visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time. Chion also contrasts between tight and loose synchronisation, claiming that the latter often has a less naturalistic and more poetic effect.<sup>6</sup>

Chion argues that sound *temporalises* the image—meaning that sound can exert considerable influence over how we perceive time in a scene. He lists some parameters that influence temporal animation, arguing that an uneven, unpredictable sound is more animating than a smooth, continuous sound. Furthermore, a higher tempo may animate a scene to a higher degree than a lower tempo would, and Chion also argues that a sound rich in high frequencies commands perception more acutely.<sup>7</sup>

Without the principle of added value, film music would in all significance be pointless, as the music would not have a function within the narrative and the presentation. The fact that music adds something to the images, and vice versa, is the most foundational premise for this chapter. The other concepts of synchronisation and temporalisation will be discussed in the analyses I conduct in this chapter. Chion also distinguishes between *empathetic* and *anempathetic* music.<sup>8</sup> This distinction will be discussed in chapter five, as there are very few instances of anempathetic music in these series, and the few examples I have located are all pre-existing music, and not original score. The original music tends to be empathetic.

#### *Kassabian’s attention continuum*

Anahid Kassabian’s *attention continuum* is a fairly simple system describing the degree of attention music is granted by the audience as opposed to other components of a scene. In other

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 58-65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

words, the system aims to categorise how much attention a viewer pays to the music compared to the degree of attention paid to the other elements of the production, such as the visuals, dialogue, sound effects, and so on. The system consists of categories placed on a continuum between the binaries of high attention and low attention. The continuum has, to my knowledge, not been employed in order to analyse music in television series. I am interested in finding out whether the system works sufficiently well for this purpose, and intend to explore some of its strengths and weaknesses when employed as a methodological tool in a comparative television music analysis. The concept is outlined in Kassabian's book *Hearing Film* (2001).<sup>9</sup> She marks five points on the continuum, which I will summarise in the following paragraphs.

The first category is that of the musical main theme. The main theme is often presented such that an audience will give it their full attention. This is particularly true in television, where the main theme often occurs during a main title sequence, where there is typically no aural and little visual action with which the music competes for attention. An audience may also be acquainted with the theme beforehand, and through repetition a listener will often be able to recognise the theme whenever it plays, thus paying attention to the theme through recognition.

Kassabian's next category is scenes in which music is the only sound on the soundtrack. Not having to compete with any dialogue or sound effects means that the ears have nothing other than music to focus on.

Her third category is quite similar, containing scenes in which music faces 'very little competition from other aural or visual material'.<sup>10</sup> The music is still offered a great deal of attention—however, in this category there are other low profile sounds on the soundtrack.

The fourth mark on the continuum is 'scenes in which there is a great deal of visual action, usually with both sound effects and music, but little or no dialogue'.<sup>11</sup> The sheer competition music faces in these scenes means that the audience will not be paying much attention to it. Kassabian writes: 'In these instances, music often provides a sense of pace and unity without commanding much attention'.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 52-55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

The final point on this imaginary continuum is when music is used as background to dialogue. Kassabian cites Alfred Newman when arguing that music in dialogues should normally be minimalistic: ‘It seems to me that dialogue furnishes rhythm, thus a minimum of orchestral motion is desirable’.<sup>13</sup> She also refers to Quincy Jones, who implies that a composer needs to be cautious with the music if there is plot exposition in the dialogue. The audience will generally attempt to pick out what is being said, meaning that their ears will not focus on the music. If the music is of such a nature that it demands the audience’s attention, then the audience may miss out on the dialogue. As such, most composers will generally use fairly minimalistic music when underscoring dialogue.

### **Positions within the attention continuum**

I have found that positioning musical cues into the five steps of the attention continuum, and analysing and comparing these, is an interesting and rewarding method for gaining increased understanding of how music can function similarly across different productions. As such, I do not only consider attention—I analyse many musical and audiovisual parameters in the attempt to find common tendencies in the various stages of the attention continuum. In this section I have picked cues that I felt fit well with their respective positions on the attention continuum, as outlined above, and I offer descriptions of the music and its interactions with the rest of the production.

#### *Position 1: Main theme*

The main theme, and particularly the main title sequence, holds a commercially important position within television series; Annette Davison writes, ‘The title sequence is today a vital tool in generating and conveying brand identity.’<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the main theme ‘must satisfy the prospective viewer while also remaining interesting to the returning viewer and fan’;<sup>15</sup> meaning that the music should ideally strike a balance between immediate satisfaction and intricate details that reward repeated listening.

The series have three different approaches with regard to their main theme. *Orphan Black*’s main theme is written by Two Fingers—an alias for Brazilian electronic musician

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>14</sup> Anette Davison, ‘Title Sequences for Contemporary Television Serials’, in John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Amon Tobin—and not by Trevor Yuile, who is otherwise scoring the series. Yuile never employs this theme in the score. The instruments used in the main theme differ a little from the rest of the score; specifically the use of an acoustic drum kit, vocals and an electric piano. However, the heavy and creative processing of these instruments fits well with the score, as does the hard-hitting style and the ambivalent harmonies. This separation of the main title from the rest of the score can make the theme feel unattached, but this may in effect also make it more striking.

*Daredevil*'s main theme is written by the series' composer, John Paesano (albeit in cooperation with Braden Kimball). As a result, the theme's qualities match the overall musical style of the show. Additionally, Paesano's score revisits the main theme often and in various ways. By exposing the viewer to the theme over and over, the theme becomes unanimous with the series. On the other hand, because of the fact that the theme does not separate itself clearly from the rest of the score (as opposed to *Orphan Black*), and is repeated very often, the theme may come across as less striking.

*Mr. Robot* does not feature a main title sequence, and as such identifying the main theme is a much less straightforward process than in the other two shows. We can, however, speak of a main theme due to its frequent occurrence throughout the series. One version can be listened to on the track '1.0\_8-Whatsyourask.m4p' on the soundtrack album. As creator Sam Esmail writes in the booklet accompanying the second volume of the soundtrack: 'I don't believe in theme songs, but if *Mr. Robot* were to have one—that was it'.<sup>16</sup> This theme is played during many of the most defining scenes of the series; for example, it plays on four occasions during the first episode. The main theme seamlessly blends with the rest of the score, and many viewers might struggle to even identify this piece of music as the main theme.

As such, the three series have different approaches to establishing a main theme: *Orphan Black*'s main theme is exclusively played during the title sequence; *Daredevil*'s main theme is played during both the title sequence and as part of the score; and *Mr. Robot*'s main theme is only played as part of the score, and is not presented in a title sequence. However, the themes themselves share a number of musical similarities. They are all driven by a fairly unique-sounding keyboard instrument which in each case is difficult to define in simple

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<sup>16</sup> Mac Quayle, 'Digital booklet - Mr. Robot, Vol. 2', in *Mr. Robot, Vol. 2 (Original Television Series Soundtrack)* (2016), 7.

terms. *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* both feature keyboards playing sequences alternating between the major and the minor. In *Orphan Black*'s case this keyboard sound is probably a heavily processed electric piano, and in *Mr. Robot*'s main theme the corresponding instrument is a synth sounding almost like an electric piano. The melody of *Daredevil*'s theme is played with a piano-like synth sound, eventually dubbed by piano octaves, while another piano-like sound plays arpeggiated chords during the first round, similar to the *Orphan Black* theme. *Mr. Robot* and *Daredevil*'s themes include the same concept of a pulsating synth bass hitting every eighth-note, and that of an electronic drum kit fading in and increasing in force. The two themes are also in the same key, and both melodies are played at the beginning of every other bar. All three themes are in 4/4, although *Orphan Black*'s theme has a swung rhythm. Moreover, all themes build in intensity and have new elements introduced along the way.

Despite several similarities between the main themes of these series, there are also some differences. For example, the tempos differ, with *Mr. Robot*'s theme playing at the fastest tempo and *Daredevil*'s at the slowest. The lengths also differ; *Daredevil*'s theme is much longer than *Orphan Black*'s, whereas the length of *Mr. Robot*'s theme cannot be defined, as there is no pronounced *definitive* version of it.

In summary, there are differences in the employment of the main themes in the series, and this affects whether their positioning on the attention continuum as highly attention-grabbing can be justified. For example, the main theme in *Daredevil* is given a very high degree of attention in the main title sequence, but will often not be given a high degree of attention if it is included in a high-intensity scene. The themes share many musical similarities, for example the gradual introduction of new elements and the reliance of arpeggios and keyboard instruments.

### *Position 2: Music as the only sound on the soundtrack*

There are not many examples of scenes in which music is the only sound on the soundtrack in any of the three shows. There are several scenes that get close to this, but there is usually some degree of diegetic sounds in these scenes, and it might therefore be more accurate to place these scenes in the third category rather than in the second one. In fact, when excluding pre-existing music,<sup>17</sup> I have only been able to find one scene that fits into this category. The one scene that qualifies for this position is found in episode nine of *Mr. Robot*,

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<sup>17</sup> Pre-existing music, and its relationship with the attention continuum, is discussed in chapter five.

'eps1.8\_m1rr0r1ng.qt'. The scene in question is a time-lapse scene, spanning several years over the course of twenty seconds (6:02-6:42). Prior to the scene, we are located in Mr. Robot's shop some time in Elliot's childhood. Just before Elliot and Mr. Robot walk out of the shop, a haunting and simplistic piano piece starts playing. As they exit the store, the camera zooms out so that it captures the 'Mr. Robot' sign over the shop. There are still diegetic sounds, but at the moment the time-lapse initiates, the diegetic sounds disappear. There is a 'windy' sound in the background, but it can be regarded as part of the music as it is not supposed to be diegetic, and is there purely for effect. The piano piece is composed by Quayle, it fits the tone of the show, and it does not carry the connotations of a pre-existing piece of music. The music is also synced with the on-screen action.

Since scenes in the second position of the attention continuum are so extremely rare, I largely disregard this category in this thesis. However, this points to a striking similarity between the three series, namely that they avoid this second category of music as the only sound on the soundtrack.

### *Position 3: Music faces little competition from other material*

The third category in Kassabian's attention continuum regards scenes that contain little aural or visual competition for the music. As such, it has similarities with the second category, but it is a much larger category due to its inclusion of scenes that contain some audio other than music on the soundtrack—in effect, low profile diegetic sounds and sound effects. The scenes in this category contain a low degree of visual action, since visual action moves attention away from the music. I regard this category as more relevant to the subject matter than the second category, since a fairly large number of scenes from all three shows fit into this category. Pre-existing music is often used in these scenes, and I discuss some examples of this in chapter five, as I wish to focus on originally composed music in this chapter.

A common feature of all the three series is that the scenes that fall into the third category of the attention continuum typically depict a single character, thus excluding dialogue. Since there is little visual action, meaning has to be added in other ways. The choice of music may therefore often be based on the type of character included in the scene, as well as on the actions of that character in the specific scene. I will offer a few examples of this, starting with another scene from *Mr. Robot*. In episode seven, Elliot burns a CD with all his files on his murdered girlfriend Shayla, before wiping the data (13:13-14:28). The only

element, apart from Elliot's sparse voice-over, which makes us understand that this mechanical act is an extremely emotional moment for Elliot, is the music. The long, atmospheric tones playing a slow and simple chord sequence in minor leave the audience in little doubt of Elliot's mournful state of mind. The music signifies Elliot's emotion, acting out Gorbman's third principle.

In a fairly short scene in episode nine of *Orphan Black*, 'Unconscious Selection', police officer Art walks along the train platform on which his partner committed suicide, and discovers a video camera (28:07-28:31). The music in this scene is driving, including rhythmical elements like cymbals, kick, snare, timpani and pulsing synth bass. The music is not very emotional; it has a fairly high amount of energy, is slightly mysterious and builds towards a tiny climax in the form of a brass cluster crescendo typical of *Orphan Black*. This crescendo starts building the moment when we look at Art through the video camera, and at the same time the bass falls by a minor third, creating a point of synchronisation where the visuals and the music change at the same time. The sync point implies that Art has discovered something. Without this synchronous change the scene would be almost incomprehensible, as there is no dialogue and very little action to guide the audience. As such, in this scene, as well as in the last one, the music *adds meaning* to the scene. Even if the music itself is very different in this scene than in the previous example, and adds meaning through synchronisation rather than by signifying emotion, the role of the music is in both examples to infuse meaning into scenes that without the music would not have communicated the same information.

A scene in episode nine in *Daredevil* ('Speak of the Devil'), in which Matt decides to don his vigilante gear, include elements of both of the above musical approaches (38:30-39:58). At first the music is fairly driving and mysterious, in almost the same vein as the *Orphan Black* cue. The arpeggios from the main theme are at the front of a low string section, backed up by a steady kick drum. As we see Matt's chest, which contains some of his deceased father's items, the arpeggios and the kick drum are faded out, and we get a more sentimental and atmospheric moment. This pattern is repeated as Matt pulls out the chest and opens it, but now the emotional music is more lingering as Matt's father's theme plays on the piano-like synth sound over an atmospheric soundscape. Then the music gets more rhythmical once again, building towards the next action/montage scene. Again, the music and the visuals

combine to express emotions and provide narrative cues that they would fail to communicate clearly in isolation.

In summary, scenes in category three often depict one character. The music's role will typically be to comment on the emotions, personality, or situation of this character. This music can either be originally composed music or pre-existing music, and the audience will typically be paying quite a bit of attention to the music. The music varies quite a lot from scene to scene because of the fact that its primary role is to add meaning to the scene, often based on the actions and personality of one specific character. Relevant to this third category of Kassabian's attention continuum is Gorbman's principle number three: *music signifies emotion*.<sup>18</sup> However, her fourth principle, that of *narrative cueing*, is also relevant in a number of these scenes, for example the synchresis in Art's scene that occurs when a visual change coincides with a musical transposition.<sup>19</sup> Michel Chion's concept of *added value* is very clearly at play in all three examples, since when isolated, neither the visuals nor the music tell the same complete story as when the two elements combine.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Position 4: Much visual action, little or no dialogue*

The fourth category within the attention continuum model contains scenes that include a large degree of visual action, usually accompanied by plenty of sound effects. One example of such a scene is the opening scene of episode seven of *Daredevil* ('Stick'), where a man working for the yakuza runs down a stairwell in order to get his gun. The moment we see the man running, rhythmical sixteenth-note driving electronic music starts playing, with plenty of timpani hits adding drama to the scene. The high tempo of the music does not precisely match the man's steps, but it nevertheless evokes a feeling of stress and movement. The thin and distorted timbre of the bass synth, along with the complete lack of full-bodied tonal instruments like strings or synth pads, adds a touch of desperation to the cue. When the man crouches to fetch and load his gun, the sequenced synth bass drops out, emphasising that the man is no longer running. When he has finished loading the gun, he stops to listen for a couple of seconds, and at the same moment there is a musical break. As he rises and starts running again, the music picks up where it left off. The man stops again, and the music stops, leaving space for textures and one-shot effects to add suspense to the scene. This kind of action scoring can be

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<sup>18</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 79-82.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-89.

<sup>20</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 5.

interpreted as a mild form of *mickey-mousing* (a term based on the extremely illustrative music in the earliest Walt Disney cartoons), as it mimics the visuals very closely. This is the norm in action scenes in *Daredevil*, contrasting the otherwise fluid and sparse scoring of the series.

The chase scene and subsequent clash between Sarah and Helena in the third episode of *Orphan Black*, ‘Variation Under Nature’ (35:51-39:07), functions similarly. Fast-paced music is used when Sarah runs, and when she slows down, rhythm is suspended. A crescendo coincides with Helena’s strike at Sarah. As Helena’s twisted and frightening character takes over the scene, the music becomes atonal and clustered. There is less movement on the screen, and as such, less rhythmical elements as well. The moment Helena decides not to kill Sarah, piano is introduced, bringing with it a sense of sensitivity—the music helps illustrate Helena’s change of mind. As Art enters the scene, the musical tension is heightened again, until we see Helena drive off and there is a break in the narrative.

The first season of *Mr. Robot* does not include any fast-paced, intensely dynamic action scenes like the two scenes discussed above. However, the show contains quite a few scenes that fall in between categories three and four. I discuss this, and the fact that the attention continuum seems to fail to address these scenes, further into this chapter.

Based on the above examples, and on many other similarly functioning scenes in *Daredevil* and *Orphan Black*, I would argue that the vast majority of the music in Kassabian’s fourth category is very similar in the way that it mimics the on-screen action. The most prominent of Gorbman’s principles evident in these scenes is the principle of *narrative cueing*; especially its sub-category of *illustrative cueing*, with musical effects mimicking the action taking place visually. Even though the music is rhythmically rich and has a high intensity, the viewer will not be paying attention to the music. This is due precisely to the fact that the music is so closely synchronised with the visuals; if a busy beat would continue when a character stopped and listened, for example, or if a fast-paced scene was only accompanied by a chord or a melody and not by rhythm, the music would probably have been noticed, as it would contradict the action taking place on the screen. This attention generally seems to be unwanted in scenes that contain much action, and the music instead serves the principle of *inaudibility*.<sup>21</sup> Musical traits that these scenes have in common are driving rhythms at high

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<sup>21</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 76-79.

tempos, constant dynamic changes, many rises and hits, and the omission of melody. The reason for not including melody is again probably down to the intent of avoiding unwanted attention, as a melody would pull the audience's attention away from the visuals and onto the music.

#### *Position 5: Dialogue*

Kassabian's final mark on the attention continuum—dialogue scenes—is also the vastest category, since the series I analyse are full of dialogue scenes. As such, there are scenes that contradict the general tendencies I present, but the music represented in the dialogue scenes of *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* typically follows some common conventions. As I have done with the other categories of the attention continuum, I will present these tendencies through examples from the series.

As we get a shot of Alison's house after the main title sequence in episode four of *Orphan Black* ('Effects of External Condition', 3:19), and as Sarah knocks on her door in the following shot, one of the show's 'signature' synth sounds is playing atop an atmospheric synth texture along with a subtle kick drum and a synth bass. As Sarah and Alison start talking to each other, both the synth sound, the kick, and the bass are faded out, leaving only the atmospheric synths. This is in order to avoid getting in the way of the dialogue, and once again serves Gorbman's principle of 'inaudibility'. There is also a slight amount of 'ducking' in this scene; when the characters speak, the music decreases a little in volume. When Sarah speaks of her daughter Kira, Kira's leitmotif is played on a piano, and this is another example of narrative cueing. Sarah is concerned though, and as such the theme plays in minor rather than its customary major, mirroring Sarah's emotions. Changing the key of a theme from major to minor, or vice versa, is a technique dating back to Max Steiner and his contemporaries in Hollywood's Golden Age;<sup>22</sup> as is the aforementioned ducking. When Alison asks whether Kira is Sarah's biological child, kick drum, bass, and the signature synth are reintroduced, highlighting a tension that would be hard to notice otherwise. One of the main functions of this scene is to hint to the fact that all of the clones except Sarah are unable to have children. Alison subtly expresses her frustration, but it is the piano playing subtly in minor at the same time that underlines this as an emotional issue. As such, the music in this dialogue serves to signify Alison's emotions.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example the numerous uses of leitmotifs in *Casablanca* (1942).

The opening scene in episode five of *Daredevil*, ‘World on Fire’, is another fine example of the various functions music may serve in a dialogue. The first fifty seconds belong to the third category of the attention continuum; a piano piece plays as Claire looks into a mirror. As the dialogue between her and Matt ensues, the music ends. The dialogue is scored by silence for two minutes; then, as Matt starts to describe how his supernaturally keen senses function, a musical texture of synth and piano is slowly introduced, reaching its climax when we actually see what Matt’s world looks like inside his mind. Here, music signifies emotion in a different way than I have discussed so far: it serves to aid in the representation of the irrational. No real person possesses as phenomenal senses as Matt does, but according to Gorbman, music ‘helps to hypnotise the spectator, bring down defences that could be erected against this realm of [the irrational]’.<sup>23</sup> The music disappears when Matt finishes his description, and this underlines that the purpose of the music was indeed to aid in the representation of the irrational. However, more emotional music is quickly added to the scene as Matt expresses his concern for Claire’s safety. The music mirrors the emotional music in the *Orphan Black* scene just described; it is emotional music played by a piano-like sound in minor, this time playing the main theme, which is also associated with Matt. The music continues playing while the two kiss, serving to highlight the emotion in the scene, until Matt gets up to make himself ready to leave, at which point the music is quickly faded out. The two talk about which strategy to use in order to take down the criminal network in Hell’s Kitchen, and because this is important information, there is no music to get in the way. However, the last word is scored with an ominous texture and a muffled timpani hit, in order to highlight the name being uttered: ‘Vladimir’. This is an example of narrative cueing, as the ominous music underlines Vladimir’s position within the narrative as a villain. The first shot of the next scene is of Vladimir, and the texture ties the two scenes together, serving another one of Gorbman’s principles: *continuity*.<sup>24</sup>

A more obvious example of the principle of continuity can be found in *Mr. Robot*, episode six (‘eps1.5\_br4vetraveler.asf’). On 21:59, a long sequence of various dialogue scenes with Elliot in them ensues. In the first scene, Elliot talks to his close friend Angela on the street. The dialogue is at first only accompanied by background noise, but as Angela expresses her anger towards the corporation they are looking to take down, *E-Corp*, pulsing

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<sup>23</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 79.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-90.

synth music in minor is introduced. We also hear Elliot's thoughts in a voice-over.<sup>25</sup> Next, Elliot walks into his block and finds Mr. Robot in the stairwell. They discuss Elliot's next move, and this scene is scored by the same kind of continuous, driving synth-based music as the scene before it. Elliot's voice-over returns on 26:02, and the music changes, but it never stops. We are taken to the next scene inside Elliot's apartment without any effect in the soundtrack highlighting the change—the music is all about maintaining continuity. The same thing happens when we shift to the following scene, this time inside a car. A voice-over occurs again, before we jump in time and place once more as Elliot is inside a prison, talking to an inmate. Again, if we only listened to the music, we would not know that a scene change had occurred. The musical cue gradually grows less rhythmical and more atonal and psychedelic. At the end of this scene, the music stops somewhat abruptly, highlighting a break in the narrative as we are taken to Angela instead of Elliot. The continuous sequence of dialogue scenes has ended.

The music in the above series of scenes in *Mr. Robot* does not serve the dialogue in the same way as the two examples prior to it does. The music signifies emotion to a certain extent; the pulsing synth in the beginning can make the audience feel Angela's excitement a little more than they would had the music not been rhythmically driving, and the atonal music in the end lets the audience know that Elliot is playing a dangerous game. However, the cue does not serve the principle of 'inaudibility', as the music is quite noticeable because of its rhythmical elements. In this particular example, the principle of continuity has simply claimed precedence, as the music ties the narrative together. This is, in other words, an example of a sequence that contradicts many of the tendencies we generally find in dialogue scenes, in order to serve another principle. This phenomenon—breaking with one principle in order to serve another—is Gorbman's seventh and final principle.<sup>26</sup> The use of continuous stretches of music across several scenes occur in all three series, but are more common in *Mr. Robot* and *Orphan Black* than in *Daredevil*.

### **Imperfect system?**

While I have found the attention continuum very useful when conducting my analyses, it must be regarded and applied as a heuristic system and not a rigid one. The system has some

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<sup>25</sup> These voice-overs are almost always scored, which helps explain why music is introduced just before this voice-over.

<sup>26</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 91.

weaknesses and imperfections, which mainly have to do with scenes that do not fit perfectly into one category. I particularly find the gap between categories three and four to be a large one.<sup>27</sup> Quite a few scenes fall in between these categories, for example a scene near the end of episode four in *Mr. Robot*, ‘eps1.3\_da3m0ns.mp4’ (39:45-41:58). The first part of the scene—in which Angela sabotages the company she works for—fits into category three, as the visuals move at a slow, lingering pace. The scene is scored by a mysterious and fluid whole tone based synth texture. However, as a co-worker enters the scene at 41:11, the music suddenly gets more rhythmical. A driving electronic beat follows the co-worker’s movement, growing a little bit in intensity as both the audience and Angela realises that she needs to hurry. When Angela exits the office, the cue fades out. This is not a scene that contains a great deal of visual action; yet there is a lot of tension, and the music reflects this. The moment the driving cue begins, the audience will no longer be paying attention to the music—they will be paying attention to the fact that Angela is in danger, and the music serves to underline this danger. The cue is rhythm-based, contains no melodies, and is fairly closely synchronised with the visuals, even including a tritone brass crescendo combined with a noise rise to emphasise a camera change. As such, the music functions very similarly to the music I have analysed in category four scenes, meaning that this scene falls in between the third and the fourth category. I have encountered several more of these kinds of scenes that do not fit perfectly into the third or fourth category, but possess traits from both.

There are also combinations of categories four and five in these series, perhaps most notably the ‘previously on’-sequences often included in television dramas. *Orphan Black* has such a sequence in the beginning of every episode except the first one. These sections consist of a flurry of scenes, most of them containing key bits of dialogue, and it can be difficult to understand everything happening on the screen, particularly if you have not watched every episode prior to the one you are watching. These sequences always include the same piece of music, which is a pretty massive, driving cue with many elements, including pulsing synths, aggressive percussion, various rises and hits, cymbals, piano, and more. The attention continuum does not currently take into consideration scenes that both include lots of visual action *and* much dialogue. Although these scenes are fairly rare, they occur at least once every episode in the case of *Orphan Black*, and as such I felt the need to comment on this vacuum.

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<sup>27</sup> Although, of course, my interpretation of the model is not above scrutiny.

When discussing the second point on the continuum, and dismissing it as near irrelevant to the subject matter, I deliberately avoided the fact that by and large every episode includes at least one scene that falls into this category: the end credits. These are normally scored, and the music will almost without fail be the only sound on the soundtrack—although there are exceptions. However, it would arguably be wrong to claim that the music commands near full attention in these scenes, as it should in a category two scene. At this point, the majority of the audience will not be paying attention to the show anymore. They will most likely either have turned it off, muted the sound, skipped to the next episode, or they will talk to the person next to them about what they just watched. The audience will regard the episode to be over, but as an analyst I have to give the end credits some attention, and question whether it is possible to make space for them somewhere on the attention continuum; at the moment, they do not fit anywhere.

I also question why Kassabian picked out scenes with the main theme in them as scenes in which full, or near full, attention is given to the music. In the main title sequence this is definitely true;<sup>28</sup> however, sometimes the main theme will play in scenes with lots of visual action, and with competing sound effects as well. In one scene in *Daredevil* belonging to category four (episode twelve, ‘The Ones We Leave Behind’, 29:22-29:34), the arpeggios from the main theme actually compete with a different chamber music piece playing simultaneously. In this case, the main theme is obviously not given full attention from the audience, even if some might recognise the main theme. In *Mr. Robot*, most of the audience will not even be able to recognise the main theme, as it is not introduced in a main title sequence, and will not necessarily give it their full attention whenever it plays.

Finally, there is the case of Elliot’s voice-overs in *Mr. Robot*. These normally occur several times per episode and can be regarded as one of the show’s trademarks. The voice-overs are most of the time scored by arpeggiated and pulsing synths, which would normally make the words difficult to pick out. However, as they are voice-overs and not sounds supposed to emanate from diegetic sources, Elliot’s voice can sit very loudly in the mix. Additionally, diegetic noise will usually be low profile during voice-overs. These scenes do not fit into any of the existing categories. However, there is a logic to why the voice-overs are accompanied by relatively high-profile music. The same concept that is at play when we ‘see’

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<sup>28</sup> Although many viewers opt to skip the main title if they are well acquainted with it.

through Matt's senses in *Daredevil* applies in the voice-overs: having a character talk directly to the viewer, breaking the fourth wall, can be experienced as irrational. The music serves to dull this sensation.

### **Summary**

Although the attention continuum has its imperfections, it can be a good model for the purpose of breaking down and organising the various scenarios of where the audience's attention is directed. It can also be helpful to the process of pointing out musical tendencies in various kinds of scenes, but the continuum should perhaps be supplied with more specialised categories dependent on the subject matter, which is what I attempt to do in the next chapter. The attention continuum is not a perfect system that can be applied to every scene in every production—in fact, most productions of a certain duration will probably include scenes that contradict the system, or fall in between categories—but I regard the attention continuum to be highly functional as a general guideline for breaking down the various scenes of a television series into categories, having proved to be an accurate model in the vast majority of the scenes I have analysed in the three series.

In this specific case, I found that the second position of the continuum was largely superfluous, and by and large decided to disregard the category. The question of whether this resonates with most productions, or whether it is only specific to the subject matter, needs further research. The other categories served as a very helpful way of organising various scenes. Within the positions, there are some similarities in the music, its functions, and the way it is employed.

For the first position of the attention continuum, I pointed out some of the similarities and differences between each of the main themes, including the inclusion or exclusion of the themes in the score. I also pointed out that the audience may not always, seemingly contrary to Kassabian's suggestion, pay full attention to the main theme whenever it is played—although this certainly is the case in many scenes, particularly in the main title sequences.

The third position contains music that is fairly prominent and faces little visual and sonic competition. Music and images often combine to produce added value, with the music adding meaning to understated visuals. The music itself may be of many different styles depending on what the music is supposed to communicate—these styles will be explored in

the next chapter. The music usually signifies emotions in these scenes, but may also provide narrative cueing.

I found the fourth category to be very homogeneous. The majority of these scenes will include fast-paced, rhythmically based music closely synchronised with the on-screen action. The music evolves over time, its dynamic matching the intensity of the action, but it rarely includes much melodic material as this would steal attention away from the visuals. Complicating matters a little are scenes that fall in-between categories three and four. I think it is important to recognise that the attention continuum, although it can be hugely beneficial and helpful, does contain some imperfections.

The fifth position is by far the largest one, and its main functions are to signify emotion within dialogues and provide narrative cueing and continuity, all while normally remaining fairly ‘inaudible’. Dialogue scenes are often scored by synth textures or other atmospheric sounds, and rhythm is often suspended or downplayed when a character speaks. The volume of the music tends to be fairly low during dialogue, and the audience will not be paying attention to the music, as their ears focus on picking out the words being spoken. When a particularly important part of a dialogue occurs, the music will typically either change, be dropped out, or be introduced; this change in the underscore will ideally be noticed subconsciously by the audience, serving as a cue to help the viewer pay extra attention to the dialogue. The music may also comment on the dialogue—in our examples, we had a leitmotif in minor when a character was spoken of in a concerned way, sentimental music in an emotional part of the dialogue, and ominous music when a villain was spoken of. However, the music in this category seems to largely follow the flow of the dialogue, which is subject to evolve and transform throughout a scene, making subcategorising different kinds of scenes difficult. A method which may be more beneficial is identifying the various kinds of dialogues that exist in the subject matter, pointing out what kinds of characters the dialogue is between, and paying attention to the characters, plot information, and emotions contained in a dialogue. When combined, this information should be able to provide an ‘explanation’ for how the music is used in a large portion of the scenes in this fifth category in the three series.

The attention continuum has so far been a neglected concept in film music research since it was introduced by Anahid Kassabian in 2001. In this chapter, I have suggested that utilising the attention continuum can indeed be a constructive and logical way of breaking

down different scenes into categories, which again serves as a great aid in the attempt to understand why a scene is scored by a specific kind of music—particularly when combined with analytical audiovisual models like Gorbman’s principles of film music and Chion’s concept of added value.

In the next chapter, I identify four musical styles that are prominent across the shows, building on the analysis of the series’ sound and instrumentation, and on the attention continuum.

## Chapter 4

### Stylistic Archetypes

The attention continuum provides a good platform for categorising degrees of attention, and to uncover some tendencies based on the results. However, placing scenes into the attention continuum does not offer a satisfactory overview of the musical *style* of the series. This is why I intend to use the categories outlined in the previous chapter in combination with what I call *stylistic archetypes*. By this I mean music that shares certain musical similarities *and* are used in a similar manner across the three television series, suggesting a certain stylistic framework that extends beyond the boundaries of a single show and composer. In my previously mentioned interview with Alexander Andresen, the composer offered two examples on how he dealt with this phenomenon in Norwegian thriller series *The Third Eye*; he used soft, looping acoustic guitar harmonics in most of the emotional scenes, whereas action scenes were scored using ‘the big drums that all television shows use’. Similarly, Kevin Donnelly describes learned reactions to musical codes: ‘we have learned that a swelling bank of sweet strings literally “tugs at our heart strings”, while we have also learned that a “stinger” (a sudden blast of music) in a horror film means we should react directly to the shocking action on the screen before us’.<sup>1</sup> My intention here, then, is to point out and categorise what I deem to be the most commonly heard ‘types’ of music in all three shows combined, excluding the use of pre-existing music, and to substantiate my claims with numerous examples.

The four categories below are a result of careful listening to and viewing of the shows, combined with the research on and application of the attention continuum in chapter three, and also with the analysis on aspects of sound in chapter two. These categories contain music from all positions on the attention continuum, but are not reserved for one exclusive category each. For example, *driving* music can be applied to all positions on the continuum, yet it will sound different depending on which position it is used in conjunction with. Most of the cues in the three shows fit into either one or a combination of these stylistic archetypes. The ones that do not fit are either pre-existing music and/or diegetic music, music connected to some specific characters—for example some of the music associated with Alison in *Orphan Black*,

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 6.

Fisk in *Daredevil*, or Tyrell in *Mr. Robot*—or, in some rare cases, music composed for special scenes or occasions that stand out from the norms of the shows. These exceptions will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Driving music**

The first stylistic archetype, *driving* music, is an important component of all the three series. Recognisable by pulsing synths and/or driving percussion, or in some cases rapid string staccatos or other pulsing instruments, the driving cue can create tension and momentum in dialogues, or accompany fast-paced movement in action scenes. It can also be used in scenes in which music faces little competition, which means that driving music is applicable to all positions on the attention continuum. The minor key, and related modes such as Locrian, Lydian, and harmonic minor, are the predominant scales; driving cues in major are extremely rare.

The driving cue fits into every position on the attention continuum, except for the second one (as discussed in the previous chapter, the second position on the continuum is largely irrelevant to the subject matter). All the main themes of the shows may in fact be considered driving cues due to their driving rhythms and arpeggios. The remaining positions of the continuum may be divided into two broad categories with regard to driving music: the cues of low to medium intensity often heard in positions three and five, and the high intensity cues in position four.

Michel Chion argues that sound can temporalise the image,<sup>2</sup> and of the musical archetypes outlined in this section, the driving cue is the archetype that first and foremost exerts this quality. A steady rhythmical drive of a certain tempo can create a sensation of momentum and urgency that otherwise would not necessarily be apparent. This phenomenon is made very obvious in episode eight of *Mr. Robot*, ‘eps1.7\_wh1ter0se.m4v’ (21:13). In the scene in which Elliot talks to Whiterose, the leader of a Chinese hacking collective called the *Dark Army*, he is afforded no more than three minutes of time. An atmospheric texture (another musical archetype, outlined below) accompanies this sequence when Elliot is bewildered and hesitant. Then, as he realises he is running out of time, Elliot outlines his next plan. At this moment, a synth bass and an electronic beat including driving electronic eighth-

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 13-16.

note percussion start playing, emphasising the race against time (22:13). A low synth fifth emphasises a spoken warning from Whiterose directed at Elliot (22:47), functioning as narrative cueing to help the audience understand the ominous meaning of the words. Then, at 23:18, the driving cue transforms back into an atmospheric texture again, combined with a much slower rhythm, as Whiterose wraps up the meeting; the race against time is over.

However, directly after the meeting, a new, more intense driving rhythm picks up (24:10). The music consists of a sequenced eight-note synth bass playing the root note, combined with sixteenth-note electronic percussion and psychedelic, pitch-drifting synths. This cue starts a few seconds before scene change, which allows the viewer to prepare for the increased intensity of the following scene—a common technique in all three series. Elliot participates in a new race against time, and as he walks along a busy street, filmed by shaky cameras that change angles rapidly, his thoughts are racing in the form of a voice-over. However, as he tells himself to calm down, the driving music fades out, and is replaced by a calm, harmonic synth pad/processed strings texture (24:45). A few minutes later, the same thing happens again—Elliot races against time to the sound of pulsing synths, which are suspended when his mission is finished (27:58-28:22).

Driving cues can, as we have seen, be effective when a race against time is happening on the screen. However, these scenes are far from the only scenes in which driving cues appear. In the fourth episode of *Orphan Black*, ‘Effects of External Conditions’, investigators attempt to piece together information on a murder case (11:17-12:42). The scene is accompanied by pulsing synth bass and electronic percussion playing eighth-notes, while atmospheric synth textures fade in and out. Three notes are emphasised: the root note, the flat fifth, and the flat ninth, placing the cue in the Locrian mode. The function of the driving rhythms is mainly to create a sense of forwards momentum and urgency. The action in the scene is goal-directed, a common denominator for all the scenes in this category thus far. This is not the case with every driving cue, but it is a common tendency. The use of driving music also has to do with retaining attention; if the scene had been scored by silence, it would arguably have been experienced as less exciting, and, since none of the information presented in the scene is new to the audience, might have caused attention to drop. The cue is suspended both times Sarah has to perform an action, creating a break in the continuity, which further

helps keep attention—these sudden breaks, heralded by brushed cymbals, can serve as a wake-up call for viewers who had let their attention drift for a moment.

*Daredevil* has fewer low intensity driving cues than the other series, but when it comes to high intensity driving cues in action scenes, this show has the highest quantity. The four and a half minutes sequence shot fight scene at the end of episode two, ‘Cut Man’, is one of the most iconic scenes from the first season of *Daredevil* (46:51-51:16). In this scene, Matt takes out an entire squad of Russian criminals in order to rescue a kidnapped boy. (This cue can also be listened to in isolation on the track entitled ‘Hallway Fight’ on the soundtrack album.) The sounds prior to Matt’s arrival are entirely diegetic. When our hero is about to reveal himself, driving music is slowly introduced. A swooshing sound, mentioned in chapter two, is the first one we hear in anticipation of Matt’s appearance, combined with pulsing synths playing the root note. They are joined by a synth bass and electronic percussion—a kick drum combined with a subtle and filtered noise pattern playing the same eighth-note pattern as the swooshing sound. When Matt enters the picture, rhythmically pulsing strings, possibly enhanced with a string-like synth sound, are introduced, along with what I believe to be a distorted solo cello. The root note is transposed up a minor third, and the strings play a major chord, moving via a minor chord before playing a dissonant tremolo as Matt moves closer to the kidnappers. Our blindfolded hero stops to listen by the door, and the tremolo is replaced by a soft texture and a muffled timpani hit. A high strings cluster chord and a noise rise prepares the viewer for the impact of the first punch and the beginning of the fight. Up until this point, the music’s primary function has been to create tension and anticipation.

As soon as the fighting ensues, the cue becomes rhythmical. It leans on electronic drums playing a steady beat and a distorted synth bass playing eighth-notes, with dissonant strings, timpani, the swooshing sound, and various rises and one-shot effects fading in and out, adding colour and variation to the cue. When a door is shut in front of the camera, blocking our view of the action, the high frequencies of the drums and the bass are filtered out. This only lasts until the door is kicked down; we see the action again and hear the music clearly. It is as if the drums and the bass are playing in the room in which the action is taking place. In order to emphasise this sensation, Paesano transposes the score down a half-note when the filter is opened. There is a break in the fighting after around twenty seconds, and the music takes a break at the same time. The bass and the swooshing sound are filtered, the

drums stop playing altogether, and the strings play a high dissonant chord. A single string note—possibly a cello, although this sound may also be an ‘ethnic’<sup>3</sup> string sample, or another physical instrument—takes centre stage for a moment, until the filter controlling the bass and the swooshing sound is gradually opened, heralding a return to the fighting. The first on-screen impact is not perfectly timed with the music; this is probably down to the composer not wanting to disrupt the beat and break the continuity. By this point, the fight has become more based on stamina than on strength and skill as the participants have all taken a beating and are tiring. The music reflects this by being more shallow; the bass is playing higher up and is even more distorted than before, the strings are playing high, thin notes, and fewer elements are being used. The result is a sound with less depth and less energy, highlighting the desperation of the fight. This seems to be a conscious choice in order to focus on realism and violence, moving away from the more spectacular approach in the beginning of the fight. Another seemingly conscious choice is the fact that the music sits quite far back in the mix in terms of volume, possibly in order to have the fight seem more ‘raw’ and realistic.

Although the vast majority of driving cues in the series are of low to medium intensity, *Orphan Black* does include some driving cues of high intensity as well. In the last episode of season one, ‘Endless Forms Most Beautiful’, the scene leading into the main title swaps between two locations: police come to arrest Sarah on the ground floor of Siobhan’s house, while Helena attempts to escape in the basement (4:02-5:04). Musically, the driving cue that accompanies this scene has clear similarities to the *Orphan Black* scene analysed previously in this section, as the synth bass pattern is the same, alternating between the root note and the flat second. However, this time the bass is moved further upwards to the minor third, transposing the cue temporarily in the process, before moving to the fourth step. Prior to the bass, occasional timpani hits and other orchestral percussion pierce atmospheric synths, which once more play in the Locrian mode. The timpani start playing more rhythmically seconds before the pulsing synth bass is introduced. Rapid sixteenth-notes are coupled with accented

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Ethnic’ is a term that in my opinion is usually best avoided, as it is used to describe any instrument that does not sound Western, and as such only makes sense through stereotypical Western eyes. When discussing soundtracks in the Hollywood tradition however, the term is frequently used about sounds that share a certain quality of sound. Because ‘ethnic’ sounds have an important position (often as signifiers) in a large number of scores in the Hollywood tradition, I have decided that it is a sufficient way to describe such a sound where the exact instrument used is difficult to pin-point. In this case, the ‘ethnic’ string sound may for example be a Chinese erhu, but the ‘ethnic’ sounding effect might also have been made on a number of other kinds of string instruments, including a regular viola or cello.

hits. The synth bass hitting the fourth step is synchronised with the police breaking into the house, and as Sarah puts her hands in the air, the cue changes—the music gets less driving and more chaotic and psychedelic. Timpani keep driving the cue onwards, however, now accompanied by gliding, clustered synths. The cue ends with Kira and Helena's leitmotifs as the camera focuses on these characters respectively (in Helena's case, on her absence).

In summary, driving cues can be found in all relevant positions on the attention continuum. They are recognisable by a pulsing and/or driving element, typically synth or percussion, playing rapid and/or steady patterns. The music is typically tightly synchronised with the action, normally providing numerous incidents of narrative cueing and sync points. Although there are certain bars of changed length due to the focus on matching images with music, all the examples discussed in this section have been in the metre of 4/4. Driving cues in the fourth category of the attention continuum are usually more intense, dynamic, and rapidly changing than driving cues in categories three and five, which in turn are more continuous and steady. The perhaps most important function of the driving cue is to create a sense of urgency and momentum.

### **Atmospheric music**

I have already touched upon *atmospheric* music in chapter two, using terms like 'drones', 'textures', and 'pads'. In some ways the opposite of driving music, an atmospheric cue is usually used in the context of dialogues, and is normally not meant to be actively noticed. We can therefore mainly attribute atmospheric music to the fifth position on the attention continuum, dialogue scenes. Atmospheric sounds are an easily overlooked, almost ever-present workhorse in all three contemporary thriller series, appearing either by themselves in an atmospheric cue, or in combination with one or more of the other archetypes. Recognisable by fluid sounds with long attack and release, atmospheric cues come in various forms. I will offer examples of the most common of these.

In episode three of *Daredevil*, 'Rabbit in a Snowstorm', Ben Urich talks with a retired organised criminal in search of information (08:12-09:36). As they talk, they are scored by long, atmospheric tones, which blend with a considerable amount of background noise. These long notes have a reasonably defined tonality, playing mostly in a minor scale with some notes venturing away from it, and they are combined with occasional subtle metallic hits with a long reverb. The choice of sounds is not coincidental; the characters are situated by the

docks, out in the open, and the metallic clanks sound almost like far-away construction work. In the same way, the long, atmospheric tones are somewhat similar to the quite loudly mixed sound of flowing water. These are anaphones. A scene with a similar setting on the docks in episode six of *Mr. Robot*, ‘eps1.5\_br4ve-trave1er.asf’, functions in a similar way (31:57-34:24). Although this cue consists of a combination of atmospheric and driving music, as it is a more intense scene, it includes the same kind of far-away metallic hits and long, atmospheric sounds. However, it has to be emphasised that although the music’s sound-box sometimes reflects the size of the visual setting, this does not have to be the case.

Moving back to the *Daredevil* scene, the cue sneaks in when the man that Ben is talking to speaks of murder; the music emphasises his words. Since there is already a fair bit of background noise, there are no rhythmical elements in the music that might further blur out the speech. This is an important property of the atmospheric cue: the lack of rhythmic percussion and melody means that it does not get in the way of dialogue. Instead, the audience *feels* the music without paying much attention to it, and as such it can be used to underline elements of speech. As the man warns Ben to stay out of trouble, the atmospheric synths turn more dissonant, and a noise-like atonal texture is synchronised with a pat on the arm, making the audience more likely to feel the weight of the words, while the key is transposed down a whole note to enhance this effect. As such, Gorbman’s principles of inaudibility and narrative cueing are at play here. The utility of these ‘inaudible’ narrative cues is illustrated by the words of classical Hollywood composer David Raksin:

The purpose of film music is not to be noticed in itself. Its greatest usefulness is the way in which it performs its role without an intervening conscious act of perception. It is most telling when the music registers upon us in a quiet way, when we don’t know it’s actually happening.<sup>4</sup>

Employing atmospheric cues can also be an effective way in which to uphold the principle of continuity. A scene change follows directly after the sequence I described, as we are taken to Karen at her desk. The music continues seamlessly, gradually evolving into a more pulsing and emotional cue. This musical continuity hints that Karen is doing research on the very same case that the previous dialogue revolved around. The cue crescendos before it stops

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in George Burt, *The Art of Film Music* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 5.

abruptly, synchronising with the sound of the door being opened by Foggy. Karen's thoughts are disturbed, and the continuity is broken.

The first scene (excluding the 'previously on'-section) in the third episode of *Orphan Black* is a dialogue scene between Sarah, Cosima and Alison in the latter's living room (1:01-2:40). This is also an atmospheric cue with a clearly defined tonality. The most important sound of the cue is an atmospheric synth playing perfect fifths, with other atmospheric synths and subtle percussive sounds occurring occasionally. Again, none of the sounds get in the way of the dialogue, as there is no real melody or rhythm. The key is minor, and the cue is transposed up a minor third and back again for variation, after which it shifts to the dominant. As Alison breaks the premise of the show to Sarah ('we're clones'), a minor third is added to the dominant, introduced alongside a distorted note in order to underline Alison's words, as this is a revelation intended for the viewers as well as for Sarah. This is another example of how atmospheric textures can provide narrative cueing without being actively noticed. The cue is then brought up to the tonic again, as the distorted note and the lower atmospheric tones fade out. The texture changes as a new synth is introduced, allowing the voice of Alison's foster daughter to cut through, before a processed mallet sound starts playing—mallets and soft pianos are often associated with children in *Orphan Black* (and mallets are additionally often associated with Alison).

Less tonal textures are not uncommon in any of the three shows. In the first episode of *Mr. Robot*, 'eps1.0\_hellofriend.mov', Elliot goes on an imagined rant against society, as we are shown images from our own reality (11:43-12:40). Here, a low atmospheric root note plays underneath an atonal, slightly 'windy' atmospheric texture. The texture increases and decreases slightly in volume at irregular intervals, and tremolo is used for further animation of the sound. This atmospheric cue is used to underline Elliot's words, yet it also signals that we move away from Elliot's physical world. When his psychiatrist calls him back from his thoughts, the texture is swept away in an instant. Here, then, music in a sense signifies the supernatural, as Elliot's inner thoughts are directed at the audience, rather than at other characters within the narrative.

As we have seen, the atmospheric cue is largely reserved for dialogue scenes, and its chief characteristic is timbres that possess long attack and release. Atmospheric cues mostly avoid the explicit beat and melodic layers, and although they can consist of creatively

processed pianos or strings, they are usually based on synth textures. In part because of the omission of the explicit beat layer, atmospheric cues often do not contain a clearly defined rhythm or metre. Atmospheric cues may be tonal or atonal, and do not seem to place a specific preference on a certain key or mode. Although atmospheric cues can provide narrative cueing, they normally do so in a more loosely synchronised way than the driving cue does. Emotions are also sometimes signified through atmospheric music, and this is often done in combination with one of the two below categories.

### **Sentimental music**

The two former categories have been defined mainly by their sonic characteristics. The two remaining ones, however, are defined mostly by their imbued sentiment, and can be regarded as opposite to one another. They do not cover all kinds of feelings, as many feelings are typically expressed through driving or atmospheric cues. These two last categories, then, is my attempt to map the musical cues that are not necessarily recognisable by driving or atmospheric qualities. In these categories, the most significant of Gorbman's principles is the third one: music signifies emotion.

By *sentimental* music, I simply mean music that accompanies sentimental scenes; and by sentimental scenes, I mean scenes in which characters express tender feelings like sadness, love, compassion—but not aggression or fear, as those emotions are better connected to the last category. In these scenes, the music typically emphasises emotional relationships between characters. Additionally, characters whose main function in the narrative is their tenderness, love, fragility, or friendship are often scored in a sentimental way. There seem to be some general tendencies in the music in these types of scenes. The most common musical tendency is sparse notes or simple chord progressions played slowly. These notes or chords are often based on basic minor or major scales, although Mixolydian, Dorian, or harmonic minor are sometimes employed as well. The sounds usually employed are piano, or piano-like sounds, for the melodic layer, with atmospheric synths usually providing the harmonic filler layer. However, there are exceptions to this, such as atmospheric sounds playing a sentimental cue on their own, or strings providing the harmonic filler layer instead of atmospheric synths. The scenes scored with sentimental music are either in the third or fifth position on the attention continuum.

There is no foolproof system to what specific emotion goes with a specific scale, progression, or instrumentation. There are a few similarities, though, which I will point out as we move along. One such similarity is between Kira's leitmotif, heard on many occasions in *Orphan Black*—for example in the first episode, 'Natural Selection', when Felix confronts Sarah about her neglecting her daughter Kira (28:56-29:12)—and the music accompanying a flashback in *Daredevil*'s episode ten, 'Nelson v. Murdock', in which we see Matt and Foggy bonding (23:17-24:49). Both of these scenes are about a strong bond between two characters, and both are accompanied by piano playing over an atmospheric soundscape. Kira's leitmotif is in Mixolydian mode, whereas the piano in the *Daredevil* scene switches between major and minor, before ending up in Mixolydian towards the end of the scene. In both cases, the piano moves from the major tonic, to the flat seventh, and back to the major tonic.

Prior to the flashback scene, Foggy feels betrayed by Matt as their friendship is having a breakdown (19:45-20:19). The music here is a low atmospheric synth that sneaks in, playing a simple bass line, while *Daredevil*'s piano-like synth sound plays a very stripped down version of the main theme, including only four notes. A sparse synth texture plays in a higher register near the end of the cue. Harmonically, the cue starts in the minor tonic, and moves to the third and second steps before returning to the minor tonic. In the *Orphan Black* scene, Kira's motif transforms into a more sad cue (29:09-29:35). The two elements involved are the same as before—piano over atmospheric synths—but now the piano plays a minor tonic chord, lingering, before moving to VI (the subdominant to the major tonic). At scene change, the piano finishes the cue on the major tonic, signalling a jump in time as the tension of the previous scene is now gone. Sadness, and friction between friends, are often scored with simple cadences in minor with piano or piano-like sounds over atmospheric textures.

There are also similarities in some scenes depicting love between characters. In episode three of *Mr. Robot*, 'eps1.2\_d3bug.mkv', Shayla shows Elliot her craft project, revealing a side of her Elliot did not know about, after which the two kiss (21:58-24:10). This scene is scored by atmospheric synths playing chords in major. The same music is used in episode nine, 'eps.1.8\_m1rr0r1ng.qt', when Gideon receives emotional support from his husband (12:07-13:22). In *Daredevil*'s eleventh episode, 'The Path of the Righteous', Karen caresses Matt on the cheek, asks him to stay safe, and gifts him a balloon (7:22-8:14). This scene, too, is scored by an atmospheric texture playing chords in major—although the scene

ends with a minor chord to underline that everything is not right. These scenes can be regarded as a combination of the sentimental and atmospheric categories; the harmonic progression and the scenes themselves are sentimental, while the instrumentation is atmospheric. It is worth noting that *Daredevil* furthers a contemporary trend present in the scoring of superheroes, pointed out by Janet Halfyard, in the fact that the ‘music plays instead to the emotional drama of the superhero, as much as, if not more than, to the heroism of his actions.’<sup>5</sup>

Sentimental music first and foremost signifies emotion, and may accompany scenes in the third or the fifth position of the attention continuum. They can be recognised by simple chord progressions and sparse melodies, with pianos and atmospheric synths as the most commonly employed sounds. There are some tendencies dependent on the kind of emotion being shown; the most obvious tendency being that sadness and discord is scored in minor scales, whereas major scales are used in scenes depicting love and friendship.

### **Sinister music**

I have decided to group cues that signal evil and bad intentions, accompany the horrific, and hint of psychedelia, confusion and chaos. These kinds of cues are fairly common in all three series, and do not normally fit perfectly into any of the other categories. *Sinister* music is most prominently used in conjunction with antagonists, excessive and horrific violence, and, particularly in *Mr. Robot*, a character having a mental breakdown. I have identified three slightly different approaches within this category: *ominous*, *psychedelic*, and *horror* music. However, all styles can be heard in positions three, four, and five of the attention continuum, and there is a great deal of overlap between the approaches and what they signify, which is why I have decided to group them together into one category, as opposed to three separate archetypes.

I refer to cues that are used in conjunction with antagonists and other villains, and that have a somewhat unsettling character, as *ominous*. Although the word is largely synonymous with sinister, I decided to call this specific approach *within* the larger category of sinister music by a different name in order to distinguish the two concepts. Minor and Locrian are the modes usually employed in ominous cues, while clusters are also common. Ominous cues are

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<sup>5</sup> Janet K. Halfyard, ‘Cue the Big Theme? The Sound of the Superhero’, in John Richardson, Claudia Gorbman, and Carol Vernallis (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 192.

usually situated around a deep root note, usually synth bass or an atmospheric drone, although brass and piano are not uncommon for this purpose either. This kind of music is much used as narrative cueing (the texture accompanying the word ‘Vladimir’ from the dialogue section of the attention continuum in chapter three is a good example), and ominous motifs are often tied to specific villains, like Fisk in *Daredevil* or Tyrell in *Mr. Robot*. One of the motifs connected to Wilson Fisk is deep blasts, often played by brass or aggressive synth bass and manipulated with filters and distortion. Although also appearing in episode three, ‘Rabbit in a Snowstorm’, these blasts are only obviously tied to Fisk when they play repeatedly while he kills one of the Russian mafia leaders at the end of episode four, ‘In the Blood’ (from 49:14), in an extremely violent fashion. These blasts play at steady intervals until the victim is dead. Then there is a pause in which Fisk and Wesley speak, before the blasts are gradually filtered in and enhanced with timpani, and the episode ends. This approach is mirrored in the final scene of *Mr. Robot*’s sixth episode (‘eps1.5\_br4ve-trave1er.asf’), in which the gangster Vera shoots his own brother, before revealing to Elliot that his girlfriend Shayla has been killed on his orders (from 39:11). Deep synth bass blasts, enhanced with a timpani-like sound, are accompanied by a drone and dissonant polysynth tones. The cue gets more and more intense until we see Shayla lying dead in the trunk of a car, at which point the episode ends. Low, steady blasts like these are popularly called ‘braaam’ or ‘the Inception sound’, and have become a common sound in thrillers after Hans Zimmer used this technique in Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster movie *Inception* (2010).<sup>6</sup> These ‘braaams’ may be less overt and repetitive; when Matt meets Fisk in person for the first time in episode nine, ‘Speak of the Devil’, two ‘braaams’ flank an atonal atmospheric soundscape pierced by a few percussive hits (23:04-23:26). Low blasts are not a required component of an ominous cue. In episode six of *Orphan Black*, ‘Variations Under Domestication’, Paul mixes pills into a whiskey bottle intended for Sarah (10:34-11:09). This scene is scored with an atonal texture, ‘creaking’ and pulsing synth sounds, and a subtle kick drum playing seemingly at random. The cue is ominous, but it also has a hint of psychedelia to it.

The word *psychedelic* is somewhat problematic, as psychedelic music is a genre within popular music, and this is not what I am describing—even if a fluid sound and

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<sup>6</sup> Adrian Daub, “‘BRAAAM!’: The Sound that Invaded the Hollywood Soundtrack”, *Longreads*, December 2016, accessed 14.1.2017. <https://longreads.com/2016/12/08/braaam-inception-hollywood-soundtracks/>

atonality are common denominators. I have opted to call intense, often atonal cues that accompany characters going through something very stressful, even to the point of having a mental breakdown, psychedelic, in lack of a better word. The morning after he has killed a person, *Mr. Robot* antagonist Tyrell walks towards his office filled with anxiety (episode eight, 'eps1.7\_wh1ter0se.m4v', 9:24-10:42). The music in this scene consists of a dense synth texture, with more glitchy synths and occasional electronic hits playing on top of it. As dialogue ensues, and Tyrell crashes into a co-worker, the synth texture diminuendos and is replaced by a more dissonant rhythmic figure. This rhythmic pattern keeps being pierced by glitchy synths and electronic percussion, seemingly at random. The music is not closely synchronised with the visuals. The rhythmic pattern recedes during Tyrell's conversation with his assistant, leaving way for a thin, bitcrushed and distorted sound and drifting atmospheric synths. The cue ends on an ominous note with a loud synth bass swell. Psychedelic cues are not necessarily connected to villains. Just before the main title in the first *Daredevil* episode, 'Into the Ring', Matt beats up a criminal, throwing punch after punch to the face in a blind rage (7:23-7:35). A synth bass drones, over which glitching, atonal synths crescendo, growing in force to underline Matt's madness and the horror of the situation, until a hit synchronises with a black screen before the main title plays.

*Horror* cues mainly accompany extreme violence, fearful moments and gore. Helena's leitmotif in *Orphan Black* is a combination of psychedelic and horror music. In the first scene of episode four ('Effects of External Conditions'), Helena has broken into a house, using its bathroom to mend her wounds (1:05-2:47). The scene focuses on close-ups of blood, and the music is full of twisted, atonal sounds of many sorts playing seemingly at random intervals. Piano playing a bass pattern is introduced after a while, creating a tonal centre, along with some electronic percussion. The camera then cuts to the living room, where a little boy walks towards the bathroom and Helena, and the music becomes atmospheric, as two synth drones play a diminished ninth interval. A steady yet twisted bass pulses, creating a little bit of momentum to match the slow pace of the boy. Atonal sounds are introduced, growing slightly in intensity as the boy walks closer to the door. The music gives way for the creaking of the door, before bursting into Helena's leitmotif at a very high intensity as we see the scars on her back. The intensity increases even more as Helena smiles at the boy and closes the door, ending in a clustered brass crescendo before the main title starts.

While discussing the fourth position on the attention continuum in chapter three, I analysed a scene in which a yakuza member runs to fetch his gun in *Daredevil*'s seventh episode, 'Stick'. Let us continue where we left off (0:44-2:17). Up until this point, the scene has been accompanied by intense driving music. However, as the Japanese man waits in front of an elevator for his enemy to arrive, pointing a gun towards the elevator door, a suspenseful atonal texture is only disturbed by the sound of the elevator itself and the occasional timpani hit every time the camera angle changes. As the elevator door opens, an electronic bass drop is coupled with a down-sliding cello tremolo. Donnelly argues that the string tremolo is 'the staple of much horror film music'.<sup>7</sup> The man immediately fires his gun, only to find that the elevator is empty. An electronic hit coincides with a camera change in a sync point. A high-pitched rise builds into the next hit, which is heard the moment a sword suddenly touches the man's throat. Another hit sounds as the camera focuses on the gun in his hand, immediately followed by a rise as the hand holding that gun is chopped off. High-pitched scraping on multiple violins enhances the horror of the scene. All sounds are clustered and without a tonal centre. While Stick, the owner of the sword, interrogates the yakuza member, a clustered, bright, and subtly moving texture plays in the background. Using a bright texture might very well be a conscious choice by the composer; as Chion argues, a sound rich in high frequencies commands perception more acutely than a sound without much high frequencies.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Donnelly writes that 'music in horror films often attempts a direct engagement with the physical: for example, through the use of the very high (like the stabbing strings in the shower scene in *Psycho*) or the low (deep stingers or drones)'.<sup>9</sup> The sound then recedes for a moment, before doubling back along with a swooshing sound, crescendoing into the moment Stick kills the yakuza member. An atonal hit is synchronised with the strike. The last seconds of this scene are very similar to the last section of the Helena scene: dramatic percussion and an atonal soundscape play steadily, synchronising with camera changes and crescendoing until the elevator door is closed and the main title takes over.

Although there are differences between the three approaches, ominous, psychedelic, and horror music all signify something negative—usually villains, violence, or mental breakdowns—and all three use atonality and clusters. Sinister cues are used in positions three,

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<sup>7</sup> Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound*, 91.

<sup>8</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 13-16.

<sup>9</sup> Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound*, 105.

four, and five of the attention continuum, and may be subtle, bombastic, or anywhere in between. Close synchronisation is more common in horror cues than in psychedelic and ominous cues, which in turn tend to be more fluid and continuous.

### **Summary**

Building on the knowledge gained from analysing the series through the lens of the attention continuum, combined with the sound-focused analysis I conducted in chapter two using textural layers, the four musical archetypes, each describing a general style, account for the vast majority of cues in all three series.

*Driving* cues are recognisable by rapid sub-divisions played by percussion, synths or strings, and conjure a sense of urgency, movement and momentum. We can separate between cues used in positions three and five of the attention continuum, where the intensity is usually fairly low and the musical elements quite consistent, and cues in the fourth position, which have a high intensity and often rapidly changing textures. Driving cues have a tendency to be closely synchronised with the visuals, and normally have a clearly defined rhythm and tempo in 4/4.

One can recognise *atmospheric* cues on the use of textures with long attack and release that are normally but not necessarily synth-based, combined with the absence of clearly defined rhythm and tempo. The textures range from tonal to atonal. The atmospheric cue is the driving cue's opposite in that it does not add momentum to the visuals, and neither is it particularly closely synchronised with the visuals—although atmospheric cues often emphasise on-screen events more loosely. Atmospheric cues are hardly ever used in action scenes, and rarely in scenes in which music faces little competition, but they are very common in dialogue scenes.

*Sentimental* cues are primarily used in scenes in which a bond between characters is expressed or implied, although some characters are also scored in a sentimental manner even if the scene does not contain sentimental thematic. Sentimental music is common in positions three and five of the attention continuum. The combination of piano (or piano-like sounds) in the foreground and atmospheric synths (or other atmospheric sounds) in the background is the most common instrumentation. Simple chord progressions and sparse playing and arrangements are other norms.

The last category of *sinister* cues consists of three different approaches that share a number of similarities, and are all connected to negative feelings, events, or characters. They fit into positions three, four, and five on the attention continuum, and can be recognised by low, often aggressive root note emphasis, distortion, dissonance, and various atonal sounds played seemingly at random. Great dynamic differences are also common, especially in horror cues. Horror music is normally closely synchronised with the action, whereas psychedelic and ominous cues are more loosely synchronised, if at all.

In the next chapter, I will analyse how the series employ themes and motifs, score certain characters in certain ways, and employ pre-existing music.

## Chapter 5

### Motifs, Character Scoring, and Pre-existing Music

So far, I have discussed aspects of sound, style, and audiovisual interaction in *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. However, I have yet to discuss some crucial elements of the music in all three shows. In this chapter, I analyse how some themes and motifs are employed in the three series, and discuss how some characters are scored in certain ways. I then turn to discuss some ways in which the series use pre-existing music.

#### Musical themes, motifs, leitmotifs, and character scoring

We have already touched upon the term *theme* while discussing the main themes of the shows, but I will here attempt to define the term, and look at more ways in which themes are used in the three series. According to Peter Larsen, a theme is usually based on a melody, in contrast to a *motif*, which can be based on harmony, rhythm, melody, or a combination of the three.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, William Drabkin points out that themes can be fairly long and must qualify as ‘complete units’, whereas motifs are ‘regarded as the shortest subdivision of a theme or phrase that still maintains its identity as an idea’.<sup>2</sup> According to Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, ‘the development of motifs is a powerful compositional device for the film composer, allowing him to bring an overall sense of unity to his score and still leave room for variety.’<sup>3</sup> Both motifs and themes have to be repeated in order to be recognised as a motif or a theme, and this repetition serves Claudia Gorbman’s principle of *unity*,<sup>4</sup> since musical repetition helps to establish an identifiable musical entity. Gorbman writes that the ‘repetition, interaction, and variation of musical themes throughout a film contributes much to the clarity of its dramaturgy and to the clarity of its formal structures’.<sup>5</sup> Note that the terms *theme* and *motif* are often used interchangeably. For example, Gorbman defines a theme ‘as any music—melody, melody-fragment, or distinctive harmonic progression—heard more than once during the course of a film. This includes “theme songs”, background instrumental motifs, tunes

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Larsen, *Film Music*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 44-45.

<sup>2</sup> William Drabkin, ‘Motif’, in John Tyrell and Stanley Sadie (eds.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On The Track: A Guide To Contemporary Film Scoring* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), 176.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Michigan: BFI, 1987), 90-91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

repeatedly performed by or associated with characters, and other recurring non-diegetic music'.<sup>6</sup> As such, Gorbman has a much wider definition of the term than Larsen has. However, I rely on Larsen's and Drabkin's definitions of theme and motif in this thesis.

A related term is *leitmotif*, which is a motif that is connected to a specific character, location, concept, idea, etc., within the narrative. German composer Richard Wagner is generally acknowledged for pioneering this technique on a large scale in his work *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1876), and the leitmotif has been a commonly employed compositional technique in cinema at the very least since the matching of sound to picture became increasingly common. Again, one of the most important functions of leitmotifs is to create a coherent score. Kathryn Kalinak, writing on the leitmotif's popularity in the Golden Age of Hollywood, argues that 'through repetition and variation, leitmotifs bound a series of temporally disconnected musical cues into an integrated whole.'<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the associative power of the leitmotif can be formidable. Kalinak writes that in the Golden Age, 'leitmotifs heightened spectator response through sheer accumulation, each repetition of the leitmotif bringing with it the associations established in earlier occurrences.'

#### *Themes, motifs, and character scoring in the analysed series*

Motifs and leitmotifs in particular play important roles in the music of both *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. The themes heard in the three shows are mostly restricted to the main themes. However, many of the leitmotifs in the series can be described as themes, as they often consist of a complete musical idea mainly based on melody. Conversely, the main themes may themselves also be regarded as leitmotifs, as each main theme signifies its respective show, and is in two out of three cases also employed as the protagonist's leitmotif; *Daredevil*'s main theme plays in scenes with Matt in them, in a sense becoming Matt's leitmotif, and *Mr. Robot*'s main theme is also Elliot's character theme. Additionally, even if some characters are scored by leitmotifs, characters may also be scored by a certain sonic 'palette', without necessarily employing a specific theme or motif. In the following section, I will offer a few examples on how leitmotifs are employed across the series, while also showing how certain characters are scored differently from other characters in the three series.

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<sup>6</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 104.

I have already touched upon many of the most significant leitmotifs in the three shows in this thesis. In the previous chapter, I discussed how, for example, Kira's piano-driven leitmotif in *Orphan Black* falls into the stylistic archetype of sentimental music. In the scene in question, Kira was mentioned, and so her leitmotif played even though she was not physically in the scene. Similarly, I discussed how Helena's leitmotif, in the stylistic archetype of sinister music, was used to underline her *absence* in a scene. This shows that a leitmotif can signify a character without the character's physical participation in a scene.

The fact that these characters' leitmotifs fit so well with a stylistic archetype can probably be attributed to their respective character types: Kira is Sarah's only child and of immense sentimental value to Sarah, whereas Helena is a religious fanatic and a serial killer. The final 'obvious' leitmotif in *Orphan Black* belongs to Alison and, to a lesser degree, her husband Donnie, and this leitmotif does *not* fit into any of the stylistic archetypes. This is probably because Alison is a bit of an eccentric character; her brusque and hysterical personality is unique, both within *Orphan Black* and in the context of the other two shows, and since she also has a large amount of screen time, she is scored with music that functions as an exception to the musical norm. In chapter two, I discussed the sounds associated with Alison; a glockenspiel-synth combination playing on top of a pulsing atmospheric sound. Melodically, the leitmotif is flexible. The melody normally involves chromatically descending notes; however, this movement may either be initiated from the root note (episode six, 'Variations Under Domestication', 11:07-11:21), or from the fifth step (11:25-11:43), or it could avoid the chromatic movement altogether (12:16-12:50). Explaining this flexible approach, composer Trevor Yuile said in an interview about the music in *Orphan Black* that he 'had the idea that it should be a palette per character'—as opposed to a rigid melodic leitmotif.<sup>8</sup>

In the same interview, Yuile stated that Sarah had her own chord progression. I suspect that he refers to the temporary transposing of cues from the tonic to the minor third, which happens in many scenes including Sarah that use the driving stylistic archetype. This also happens sometimes in scenes portraying Elliot in *Mr. Robot*; including the first episode, 'eps1.0\_hellofriend.mov', when Elliot attempts to defend servers from a cyber attack (27:40-29:01).

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<sup>8</sup> *Clonecast*, '9 - Composer Trevor Yuile! (w/ co-host Adrianna DiLonardo)' (17.06.2015), podcast.

However, Matt in *Daredevil* is not scored in this way. As previously stated, *Daredevil*'s main theme is often used in scenes that focus on Matt. However, a variation of the main theme is connected to the relationship between Matt and his father, Jack. It is the same cadence as the final round of the main theme (i-VI-iv-V), with the exception of the third chord (IV) being major instead of minor, evoking a more heroic and emotional feeling that is often channeled through the use of the Dorian mode, which this chord is an example of. The theme is particularly predominant in episode two, 'Cut Man', where much of Matt and Jack's backstory is revealed through flashbacks. It is first played when Jack, within his son's earshot, agrees to lose a boxing match on purpose in order to provide for Matt (21:47). The leitmotif can again be heard when Matt tells Claire that she cannot give in to fear, transitioning into another flashback of Matt and his dad (31:50). It plays again shortly after, when Jack, inspired by Matt's words, decides to win the boxing match instead of losing on purpose (33:39). In this episode we learn that Matt used to patch up his father after fights, and the next time we hear the theme is when Matt asks Claire to do the same for him (42:33). Finally, the leitmotif plays when Matt rescues a young boy in the end of the previously discussed 'Hallway Fight' scene, saying 'let's get you home to your dad' (50:28). The sentimental leitmotif is used on a few more occasions throughout the season, and it seems to always be tied to the relationship between Matt and his father in some way. For example, in a scene in the ninth episode ('Speak of the Devil') that I discussed in chapter three, the theme can be heard as Matt opens up a chest containing his vigilante gear along with his father's boxing outfit, reminding us of their emotional and relational bond (39:28).

There are more leitmotifs in *Daredevil*. Wilson Fisk's associates, and James Wesley in particular, are connected to one motif; the Russian mafia are afforded another one. Both of these are sinister, stereotypical villain motifs, focused around a descending minor third sequence and a tritone respectively. After the Russian mafia is eliminated halfway through the season, their motif is adopted by other organised crime members, making this motif more of a generic criminal villain motif. This is what Kalinak calls a *migrating leitmotif*; the reusing of a leitmotif in conjunction with another character or concept than that which it was initially used in connection with.<sup>9</sup> Investigative reporter Ben Urich is consistently scored with a

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<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Kalinak, 'Disturbing the Guests with that Racket: Music and Twin Peaks', in David Lavery (ed.), *Full of Secrets: Critical Approaches to Twin Peaks* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 87-91.

leitmotif, or rather, a sonic 'palette'. The leitmotif is titled 'Ben Urich' on the soundtrack album, and small portions of it, or of its sound, are played most times Urich is on screen. The theme has an open feel and mainly consists of pianos processed in an ambient way, granting it an organic and emotional character that resonates with Urich's warm and clear-sighted personality. Urich's music is a combination of the atmospheric and sentimental stylistic archetypes.

The main antagonist in *Daredevil*, Wilson Fisk, has no less than three leitmotifs. Two of these are only motifs, musical concepts that are revisited throughout the score in conjunction with Fisk's character. One of these motifs is deep blasts, as I have already discussed under the ominous subcategory of the sinister stylistic archetype in chapter four. The other motif is solo cello trills, alternating between a perfect fifth and a minor sixth. The motif is clearly connected to Fisk when he explains the reason for his actions to Vanessa in episode five, 'World on Fire' (43:03-44:10). It can also be heard in episode six, 'Condemned', when Matt first speaks to Fisk (33:16). These ominous motifs are even sometimes combined, for instance after the first fight between Fisk and Matt (episode nine, 'Speak of the Devil', 52:00-52:27).

However, Fisk's theme, simply titled 'Wilson Fisk' on the soundtrack album, is only introduced in episode six, 'Condemned'; first when Ben Urich attempts to figure out who is in control of the crime network in Hell's Kitchen, looking at a king of diamonds card, which connects Fisk to his more commonly known name among long-time followers of the franchise, The Kingpin (3:16). The theme consists of electric piano playing eighth-notes, sometimes dubbed by palm muted electric guitar, and an electric bass. These instruments play over an uncomplicated, 'clean' atmospheric texture, often playing a minor eleventh or a minor ninth chord. The fact that the predominant instruments in Fisk's theme are rarely used in the rest of the score helps the viewer identify the theme. The leitmotif does not fit into any of the stylistic archetypes; as with Alison, this different style of music is used to set Fisk apart from the other characters in the narrative. Whereas Alison's sonic 'palette' can be described as a twisted combination of light and sinister, Fisk's theme feels solid, grounded, and somewhat reflected. The music is in minor, and moves at a slow pace with few alterations. The theme plays again in the same episode when Urich talks to the police officers bribed by Fisk (18:42), and another time in the same setting a few minutes later (25:27). When Matt speaks with Fisk

for the first time ten minutes later in the episode, the theme plays once more (35:27). For the remainder of the season, Fisk's theme is played in some of the situations where his character is involved in some way, although he physically may sometimes be off-screen. One example is in episode ten, 'Nelson v. Murdock', when Karen persuades Ben to visit a nursing home (29:54). Fisk's mother lives there, but Ben does not know this at the time, and it is not mentioned in the scene. As such, Fisk's theme is used in order to foreshadow a narrative event—a clever narrative cue.

There is a clear parallel between the music associated with Fisk and the main antagonist in *Mr. Robot's* first season, Tyrell Wellick. Tyrell, too, has a number of leitmotifs associated with him, being a complex and intelligent antagonist like Fisk. Prior to the main title sequence of episode three, 'eps1.2\_d3bug.mkv', we follow Tyrell as he attempts to book a meeting with the board of *E-Corp*; failing to do so, he pays money to a homeless man before beating him up (0:40-5:37). The sequence starts with a sparse piano melody in minor over fairly slow, pulsing synths, including thin synth bass thrusts drenched in reverb, as Tyrell prepares for the meeting. A bright pad playing a minor ninth chord sneaks in, reminiscent of Fisk's minor ninth texture described above, before a pulsing synth bass and electronic drum loop takes over. The piano and synth bass are reintroduced as Tyrell talks with his boss. When Tyrell meets the homeless person, more aggressively driving music with a 'galloping' synth bass rhythm in 6/4 starts playing. All of the cues heard so far—the piano, the synth bass, the pad, the drum and bass loop, and the driving music in 6/4—are leitmotifs associated with Tyrell (although one could also argue that this is one large leitmotif divided into several smaller parts). When Tyrell is then fired from the company by the very same boss in episode nine, 'eps1.8\_m1rr0r1ng.qt', the same piece of music plays again, including all of the above leitmotifs (22:43-26:07). This is an example of using *music blocks*—Kevin Donnelly's term for the recycling of music in television series<sup>10</sup>—in a way that creates a musical link between the two scenes. Another example of this can be found in episode eight, 'eps1.7\_wh1ter0se.flv', when Tyrell is being interrogated by the police (34:07-34:23). This time it is only the driving music in 6/4 that is copied. At other times, the music may be reworked even if the same leitmotif plays. For example, in the same episode, the piano that plays Tyrell's sparse melody in minor is replaced by a pulsing polysynth, making the cue

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 119-124.

more driving as Tyrell looks to avoid being interrogation (13:09-14:10). At 15:57-17:33, the same leitmotif accompanies a scene in Tyrell's home. This time the piano plays the melody, but now the cue is dressed up in a disharmonic synth texture, which lends a psychedelic quality to the cue. The ending of the cue is a combination of driving electronic music and Tyrell's minor ninth pad.

The following is not necessarily related to character scoring, but it is related to motifs. Most episodes in all three series have a certain motif, sound, or other musical idea that is revisited often in the score, which creates a sense of unity within the episode whilst also serving to give each episode a somewhat unique identity. As we have already seen, *Daredevil's* second episode, 'Cut Man', is dominated by Matt's father's leitmotif, which plays five times during the episode. This is also the case with *Mr. Robot's* first episode, 'eps1.0\_hellofriend.mov', in which the main theme, which is also Elliot's leitmotif, plays four times. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the large amount of music in each episode, this tendency is found less often in *Orphan Black*.

As we have seen, all three series rely on leitmotifs, with some characters even afforded their own sonic palette, either instead of, or incorporated into, a leitmotif. Characters with a lot of screen time that have a unique or complex character are often given one or more leitmotifs, and characters that share an emotional bond with the main character seem to also normally be afforded one; although the latter does not seem to be the case in *Mr. Robot*, perhaps because the combination of Elliot's social difficulties and amnesia makes bonding very difficult for him. The main characters themselves are often associated with the main theme, with the exception of *Orphan Black*, probably because the main theme is not written by the show's composer. Most leitmotifs fit into stylistic archetypes, yet others—Alison's palette, Fisk's theme, and arguably also Tyrell's piano motif—do not. The leitmotifs are, with very few exceptions, reserved for scenes in which the persons or concepts that they refer to are included, either physically or figuratively.

### **Pre-existing music, diegesis, and intertextuality**

Popular music has frequently been used in film ever since the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927), was introduced.<sup>11</sup> Films whose soundtrack consisted more or less entirely of pre-existing music became increasingly common around the time of the disintegration of the

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<sup>11</sup> Larsen, *Film Music*, 147.

studio system associated with Hollywood's Golden Age, as filmmakers looked for alternatives to the symphonic score.<sup>12</sup> The series analysed in this thesis are mainly based on originally composed music, yet they all use pre-existing music as well. Since they all have this in common, it is natural that this thesis includes a discussion on how, why, and where pre-existing music is employed in *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black*, and *Mr. Robot*, even if this is not the primary focus of the thesis.

Claudia Gorbman defines the filmic *diegesis* as 'the space-time universe and its inhabitants referred to by the principal filmic narration.'<sup>13</sup> I have had no reason yet to discuss the difference between *diegetic* and *non-diegetic* music in this thesis, because the music we have discussed up until this point has exclusively been *non-diegetic*—it neither has a visible source on the screen nor any implied presence in the action, functioning instead as "external" commentary on the action'.<sup>14</sup> However, some instances of pre-existing music in the series can be described as *diegetic*, because of the fact that the music either has a visible source—such as emanating from a radio—or an implied source, for example background music in a diner; that is, even if speakers are not shown in a scene, they have an implied presence, primarily based on the audience's expectations derived from experience of background music in real-life diners.

Another interesting feature to discuss concerning the use of pre-existing music is *intertextuality*. Originally coined by Julia Kristeva,<sup>15</sup> referring to the web of references in any text, the term was then redefined in a more restrictive sense by Gérard Genette to refer to 'a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts; that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another.'<sup>16</sup> The most important form of intertextuality for the subject matter in this thesis is that of *quotation*. Serge Lacasse defines quotation as 'the actual insertion of an excerpt from a given text within another'<sup>17</sup>—which is exactly what takes place when I quote Lacasse, or when pre-existing music is used as part of

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<sup>12</sup> See Julie Hubbert, 'The Compilation Soundtrack From The 1960s To The Present', in David Neumeyer (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 21. Gorbman builds on definitions by Gérard Genette and Etienne Souriau.

<sup>14</sup> Larsen, *Film Music*, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotikè* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Serge Lacasse, 'Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music', in Allan F. Moore (ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 38.

another text. He further divides between *allosonic* and *autosonic* quotation, both of which are relevant to this thesis. Autosonic quotation is the inclusion of a sample of a pre-existing recording within a text, whereas allosonic quotation is the use of pre-existing music without using a sample of the original recording itself. Lacasse identifies allosonic quotation as a ‘sameness of spelling’, and autosonic quotation as a ‘sameness of sounding.’<sup>18</sup> For instance, a cover song is an allosonic quotation, whereas a sample from a recording inserted within another text is an autosonic quotation. Over the following pages, I use the terms *diegesis* and *intertextuality* actively when I analyse the use of pre-existing music in *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black*, and *Mr. Robot*.

#### *Pre-existing music in the analysed series*

Very often, scenes that include pre-existing music in *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* fall into the third category of the attention continuum. As these scenes often depict a single character and do not include much dialogue, meaning has to be added in other ways. The choice of music may therefore often be based on the type of character included in the scene, as well as on the actions of this character in the specific scene. An example of one such case is when Alison cleans Felix’s apartment in episode nine of *Orphan Black*, ‘Unconscious Selection’ (9:30-10:10). The scene is accompanied by an old-fashioned jazz instrumental track. The choice of music suits Alison’s appreciation of order, safety and cleanliness, while making her look more like an old-fashioned housewife than she perhaps deserves; that is, the music’s stylistic properties invoke the early twentieth century, a period in which one of (Western) women’s society-inflicted ideals were, in general, being ‘good housewives’. Robert Hatten divides between stylistic intertextuality, which this is an example of, and strategic intertextuality, which we will see examples of further into this section.<sup>19</sup> In the words of Mark Spicer, ‘*stylistic intertextuality* occurs when a composer adopts distinctive features of a pre-existing style without reference to any specific work in that style’, whereas ‘*strategic intertextuality* is more pointed, occurring only when a composer makes deliberate reference to a particular earlier work or works’.<sup>20</sup> Alison often serves as comic relief in an otherwise grim show, and the music emphasises this; even if her actions are not comical, they are absurdly

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> 1985; referred to in Mark Spicer, ‘Strategic Intertextuality in Three of John Lennon’s Late Beatles Songs’, in David Carson Berry (ed.), *A Music-Theoretical Matrix: Essays in Honor of Allen Forte (Part I)*, *Gamut* 2/1 (2009), 353.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 353-354.

‘daily living’ compared to the other action, and worthy of a cue that differentiates itself completely from the rest of the score and comments on Alison’s actions and character. The music disappears when Felix enters the apartment and starts talking, as Felix’s character and actions do not fit with the old-fashioned music, and also in order to avoid getting in the way of the dialogue.

An example of a hybrid approach, containing both pre-existing music and originally composed music, can be experienced in the opening scene of *Daredevil*’s eighth episode, ‘Shadows in the Glass’. Antagonist Wilson Fisk is having a nightmare; the sinister texture in minor, along with Fisk’s pained expression, tell us so. However, as he wakes up and collects himself, the texture gives way to Johann Sebastian Bach’s ‘Cello Suite No. 1 in G’ as we follow Fisk’s morning routine. Aligning classical music with an intelligent and sophisticated villain is a technique made popular by the first *Die Hard* movie (1988);<sup>21</sup> Tyrell is also aligned with classical music in *Mr. Robot* in order to portray him as a sophisticated antihero (for example in episode eight, ‘eps1.7\_wh1ter0se.flv’, 12:02-12:45). In this scene, Fisk comes across as a calm and collected man with attention to detail, cooking an omelette with great care before choosing his attire with utmost consideration. He seems at peace and radiates an appreciation for this morning routine. The tranquil, harmonic music greatly enhances this sensation—the only instrument in the piece is a cello, never interrupted by other instruments, the tempo ebbing and flowing at the cellist’s will, creating a sense of complete control and content. Additionally, ‘Cello Suite No. 1 in G’ is arguably Bach’s most famous cello suite, and aligning Fisk with a well-known piece from the classical canon serves to infuse a certain sophistication into the character. This image is strengthened further by Fisk’s appreciation of abstract painting, fine dining, and fine clothing, shown not only in this scene, but on many occasions throughout the first season. However, as Fisk opens a drawer containing his father’s cufflinks, the cello is replaced by an ominous cluster containing strings and synth drones, and as he turns around to look in the mirror, the music crescendos before a percussive hit strikes at the moment when Fisk’s younger, bloodied self is reflected in the mirror. The tranquil cello suite has given way to horror music as we realise that Fisk was deeply traumatised as a child. Fisk wears the disturbing memories of his abusive father, who Fisk ended up killing, quite

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<sup>21</sup> For more on the scoring of the intelligent and nuanced anti-hero, see Robynn J. Stilwell, “‘I Just Put A Drone Under Him...’”: Collage and Subversion in the Score of *Die Hard*”, in *Music & Letters* 78 (1997), 551-580.

literally on his sleeve. The choice of music in this scene shows how Fisk's persona, while per the 'Cello Suite' attempting to radiate sophistication and control, is haunted by violent and unsettling memories, which the horror music serves to underline. Another rise is synchronised with the lights being switched off, and the main title begins.

Sometimes, instead of the music casting a specific light on a character, as described above, the lyrics of a pre-existing song may comment on an element in the plot. For an example of this I turn to the pilot episode of *Mr. Robot*, 'eps1.0\_hellofriend.mov', in which Neil Diamond's version of 'If You Go Away' plays over a montage sequence in which Elliot ponders whether he should join *fsociety* or not (46:42-49:09). The lyrics are told from the viewpoint of a person begging his lover to stay with him, but when applied to the narrative in *Mr. Robot*, they emphasise the dilemma currently taking place inside Elliot's mind. The character of Mr. Robot in a sense becomes the narrator of the lyrics, promising Elliot the world if he would only join his group, and the pre-existing recording is given new or revised meaning.

As briefly mentioned in chapter three, Michel Chion distinguishes between *empathetic* and *anempathetic* music.<sup>22</sup> Empathetic music takes part in a scene, such as sentimental music does in an emotional moment, or driving music does in action scenes, and so on. Anempathetic music, on the other hand, is music that remains seemingly unaffected by the visual action. The originally composed music for the three series is usually empathetic, and as we have seen, this is also typically the case for the use of pre-existing music. However, there are some rare instances in which pre-existing music is used anempathetically. An example of this is when Tyrell Wellick seduces the wife of one of his employers on a rooftop building before choking her to death in *Mr. Robot*'s seventh episode, 'eps1.6\_v1ew-source.flv' (33:09-35:15). The moment the two kiss, electronic pop song 'Two Weeks' by FKA Twigs starts playing, becoming a contemporary soundtrack to what at first looks like a love scene. The lyrics of the song, sung from the perspective of a person attempting to seduce another person already in a relationship, seem to fit very well with the scene, and as such the music starts empathetically. However, as Tyrell starts choking the woman, the music continues seemingly oblivious to the action on the screen, creating an anempathetic imbalance as the woman struggles for survival, only to be killed by Tyrell in cold blood. It may in fact be

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<sup>22</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 8-9.

argued that the use of anempathetic music makes the scene more disturbing than it would have been had it been scored by empathetic music instead, as the anempathetic music serves to alienate the act, highlighting the killing as inhumane. The music then stops abruptly when Tyrell stands up, allowing his horror to communicate clearly with the audience. The sudden silence also functions as a parallel to the life that just ended on screen.

We have not yet come upon an example of allosonic quotation, the recreation or (re)performance of pre-existing music; this is indeed more rare in the three shows. One rather complex example that may be considered an allosonic quotation can be found in the final scene of episode nine of *Mr. Robot*, ‘eps1.8\_m1rr0r1ng.qt’, in which Elliot shows Tyrell the *fsociety* headquarters and discusses Elliot’s reasons for being a hacktivist (44:29-46:36). During this scene, a piano version of Pixies’ ‘Where Is My Mind’ plays. This version is played by French pianist Maxence Cyrin, and could be misinterpreted as an allosonic quotation because most of the audience will only be familiar with the original Pixies’ version. However, this version of the song was released on Cyrin’s *Novö Piano* album from 2009, and is therefore itself an example of a *hypertextual* practice. Lacasse defines hypertextuality ‘as the production of a new text (hypertext) from a previous one (hypotext)’,<sup>23</sup> and recognises instrumental covers as an example of hypertextuality.<sup>24</sup> Further complicating matters, the original Pixies version was used in David Fincher’s film *Fight Club* (1999), a vastly popular film that has a very similar plot twist to the one in *Mr. Robot*, which has just taken place in this very episode. As such, the use of ‘Where Is My Mind’ is also a reference to *Fight Club*, a reference that, due to the popularity of *Fight Club* and the easily recognisable hook in ‘Where Is My Mind’, many viewers might recognise. Intertextuality is here used in order to convey a plot that is similar in the two texts: the music provides an association to another film, *Fight Club*, where a character realises that another character is a production of his own mind, which is what happens to Elliot in the final two episodes of the first season of *Mr. Robot*. This scene is also a rare example of a dialogue scene in which pre-existing music plays a prominent role. The first shots of the scene are synchronised to the music, which is not commonly done during dialogue scenes. The dialogue itself is of a sparse nature, and there is no background noise, which helps justify the choice of having more prominent music. Additionally, the music is subtly ducked during the dialogue, allowing the words to be heard.

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<sup>23</sup> Lacasse, ‘Intertextuality and Hypertextuality’, 40.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

### *Two kinds of pre-existing music*

The music discussed so far in this section are all cases of pre-existing music, not composed for any of the shows in mind and written by someone other than the series' composers. I have found that one may divide pre-existing cues of this kind into two categories depending on their function within the narrative. The first category of pre-existing music is meant to convey a certain meaning and demand attention, whereas the second category contains pieces that are chiefly meant to be locational, diegetic background music. Bach's 'Cello Suite', for example, is meant to grab the viewer's attention and convey a certain meaning, bringing with it all of its inherent qualities, including its history, its use in other works and so on, and is an example of the first category of music. All the cases of pre-existing music discussed so far can be said to fall into this category. Another example of this type of cue can be found in the same episode that the 'Cello Suite' appears in (episode eight, 'Shadows in the Glass'), when we are first taken into a flashback from Fisk's childhood. The Rolling Stones' 'Brown Sugar' plays while we are presented images of early 1970s' Hell's Kitchen (11:21). The music serves to transport us into the period in time of the song's popularity, and also brings with it its history and the cultural and political qualities connected to the song. 'Brown Sugar' is then shown emanating from a radio in the apartment where Fisk and his parents live (11:53).

Fisk's mother turns the volume down, and the music is relegated into background music, thereby fitting better into the second category, which contains background music supposed to be diegetic. Music like this is often played in bars, restaurants and other places where one would typically expect music to be played; to continue the *Daredevil* references, this kind of music can for example be heard in Vanessa's art gallery and in the bar Matt, Foggy and Karen frequent. Normally, but with some exceptions, these pieces of music will not be well known, and little emphasis will be placed on the music. This kind of music is exclusively reserved for dialogue scenes, and the music sits far back in the mix. Any synchronisation with the music is very uncommon, and the music does not comment on the narrative.

An example of this can be found in the first episode of *Orphan Black*, 'Natural Selection', when Sarah meets Felix at a bar (4:27-7:08). 'Meet Me At The Muster Station', a guitar-driven rock song by Canadian indie band PS I Love You, is introduced at a loud volume the moment we are inside the bar, and plays while the two greet and talk; although the

volume is reduced considerably once Felix starts the conversation. The choice of music might gain a few ‘cred points’ for the small percentage of the audience who recognise the song, but for the most part, I believe the song was chosen in part because it is relatively unknown; it does not grab the audience’s attention, allowing the viewer to focus on the dialogue instead. The music serves as background music for the remainder of the scene; it does not comment on the narrative, and only serves as a diegetic, locational signifier. However, the music is not actually diegetic in the strictest sense. At 5:00, a slight jump in time occurs; Sarah and Felix had been standing, but now they are sitting at a table. However, the music plays continuously, serving to smoothen what might have otherwise been a slightly disruptive cut. Further into the conversation, when Sarah discusses the suicide she witnessed previously in the episode, horror-infused atmospheric music is introduced, partially drowning out the background music, as the background music does not itself comment on the dialogue (5:53-6:34). When Sarah has finished her recounting of the incident, this non-diegetic music disappears, leaving us with the diegetic music once more—we are back to the ‘here and now’.

We find similar examples in *Daredevil* and *Mr. Robot*. In *Daredevil*’s eleventh episode, ‘The Path of the Righteous’, Karen and Foggy have a conversation at a bar (40:07-43:39). This scene is accompanied by Heartless Bastards’ ‘Only For You’, but it is playing at a low volume in the background, and does not demand attention. The music starts once our viewpoint is from inside the bar, and stops immediately once we are outside it. One example from *Mr. Robot* works in the opposite way of the ‘Brown Sugar’ example from *Daredevil*. In a flashback scene in the beginning of episode seven, ‘eps1.6\_v1ew-s0urce.flv’, we see Elliot’s first meeting with Shayla on the street outside the block they both live in (3:34-6:06). The Cure’s ‘Pictures Of You’ plays from a van at a very low volume while the two talk. However, when Shayla leaves, the music is turned up dramatically, and the ‘Mr. Robot’ title appearing on the screen coincides with vocalist Robert Smith’s lyrics: ‘If only I’d thought of the right words, I could have held on to your heart.’ His words refers to the narrative, because Shayla is now dead, in part because Elliot in a sense said ‘the wrong words’ instead of ‘the right words’ in this very scene. The music is then abruptly cut off in synchrony with the screen going black. This kind of narrative commentary and visual synchronisation was possible because the dialogue ended, taking the scene from category five to category three of the attention continuum, allowing the music to take a more prominent role.

In conclusion, pre-existing music is used fairly frequently in all three shows, and each episode normally includes several examples of this. There is a notable difference between the choice of pre-existing music, and in the audiovisual interaction, in categories three and five of the attention continuum; but this difference, as shown by the ‘Where Is My Mind’ scene in *Mr. Robot*, does not have to be absolute.

### **Summary**

*Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* all rely on themes and motifs, and certain characters are scored in certain ways by employing leitmotifs and specific sonic palettes. A few of these instances do not fit into the stylistic archetypes established in chapter three, which perhaps sets the themes or motifs in question, and/or the characters scored in this way, apart from the rest, serving to aid in the creation of unique identities for certain characters and scenes. Through repetition, motifs and themes help in the establishment of Gorbman’s principle of unity, and leitmotifs can additionally be effective as narrative cues—for example when Fisk’s theme plays prior to Karen and Ben’s visit to the antagonist’s mother. Some motifs and themes can also signify emotion, for example Matt’s father and Kira’s leitmotifs.

The series also use numerous examples of pre-existing music, covering a wide range of genres and periods, including both well known and more peripheral pieces. We can divide between pre-existing music used in categories three and five of the attention continuum. In the third category—scenes in which music faces little competition—the music will normally be non-diegetic, play at a high volume, and is also often synchronised with visuals. Additionally, the music may comment on the narrative in one way or another. In dialogue scenes on the other hand, the pre-existing music is typically diegetic, plays at a low volume, is not subject to synchronisation, and does not usually make any comment on the narrative other than as a locational signifier.

In the next and final chapter, I will summarise what I consider to be the most significant commonalities and differences between the music in the three series, before showing how I applied these results to four musical cues of my own making.

## Chapter 6

### Comparison, Applied Analysis, and Conclusion

My goal with this thesis was to find out to what extent contemporary North-American thriller series that rely heavily on electronic sounds possess shared traits in their compositions and in their use of this music in the audiovisual context. This is a relevant and intriguing research question due to an increased reliance on new compositional tools, methods, and norms, along with an escalated interest in television series fuelled by the emergence of online streaming services. In order to answer my research question, I have analysed sound and instrumentation, categorised scenes by way of both the attention continuum and stylistic archetypes, and discussed character scoring and pre-existing music in *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. Throughout this process, I have discovered many similarities in the music of the three series, and I have also deemed it expedient to compose music based on these similarities. In this last chapter of the thesis, I will reflect on the theoretical models I have utilised, and summarise the commonalities and differences in the music of *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* that have been discussed in this thesis. In the latter part of this chapter, I explain how I incorporated some of the shows' common traits into musical cues of my own design, before rounding off the thesis with a conclusion.

#### Reflections on applied theories

This thesis has leaned on several theoretical models regarding film music and sound. Allan Moore's concept of *textural layers*<sup>25</sup> was of great benefit in chapter two, where I attempted to discuss some aspects of the sound of the three series. The layers allowed me to structure the chapter logically and consistently, instead of dissecting the sound of each show per 'instrument group', which is what I had initially attempted. Because we were dealing with film music, and Moore's model was designed with popular music in mind, I deemed it necessary to add another layer to Moore's existing four. The additional layer of *one-shot visual enhancers* included the sounds that were most commonly used in conjunction with visual details to create *sync points*.

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<sup>25</sup> Allan Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 14-15.

Claudia Gorbman's seven *principles of composition, editing, and mixing in classical film music*<sup>26</sup> have, perhaps surprisingly, been of great benefit to this thesis. I found that these principles applied perfectly to the texts, even though I analyse contemporary television series, and Gorbman designed her principles in correlation with Golden Age films. I was able to point out numerous examples of the principles of 'inaudibility', *signification of emotion*, *narrative cueing*, and *continuity*, while also occasionally discussing the remaining principles of *invisibility*, *unity*, and *the breaking of one principle in order to serve another*. Similarly, Michel Chion's overarching concept of audiovisual *added value*, including concepts like *synchresis* and *sync points*, *temporalisation*, and *empathetic* and *anempathetic* music has offered a theoretical foundation for my audiovisual analyses.<sup>27</sup>

Anahid Kassabian's *attention continuum*<sup>28</sup> was given its own chapter, for two reasons. First, I recognised that her five-step division of scenes based on how much attention the music is demanding was a sensible way of categorising scenes into smaller, more manageable parts, and that it could reveal similarities and differences between the three series in how the music worked with the visuals and the rest of the soundtrack in different kinds of scenes. Second, the model has to my knowledge not been utilised in order to uncover film-musical norms other than that of attention, which it was designed for, and therefore my reasonably thorough and novel approach regarding the attention continuum might benefit film music research in general, proving that this model is a solid and helpful tool that can be successfully employed in film and television music analysis. The model is not without its flaws; the uncritical isolation and highlighting of the main theme, the futility of the second category to the subject matter, and the numerous examples of music that falls in between categories are all examples of cases in which the attention continuum falls short, and I believe that the model has potential to be significantly bettered was it incorporated and tested in more studies.

In order to supplement the categories of the attention continuum, I created my own model of *stylistic archetypes*. I did this since I found that although the attention continuum revealed much about the way in which music was combined with images, there were still

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<sup>26</sup> Claudia Gorbman, 'Classical Hollywood Practice: The Model of Max Steiner', in *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Michigan: BFI, 1987), 70-98.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 52-55.

numerous examples of vastly different musical styles in scenes that fell into the same categories of the continuum. The four archetypes are therefore based on musical style rather than on degrees of attention, and I found that when combined with the attention continuum, and supplemented with the additional foundation of the analyses on textural layers and audiovisual interaction in chapters two and three, the stylistic archetypes revealed a large number of similarities in the music of the three shows. The stylistic archetypes were developed with *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* in mind, and should the concept be applied to other texts, some archetypes might need to be added, removed, or altered. For example, sinister music may be absent in a romantic comedy, and one might instead find instances of parodic or comical music. In the same example, the sound and the instruments employed would be different to what I have described in this thesis, meaning that many of the details of the archetypes would no longer apply. However, the concept of dividing different cues based on musical styles is something that I regard as a sensible approach to film music analysis, and I hope to see more examples of this systematic manner of doing so, as it helps to uncover film-musical trends that might otherwise be overlooked. Furthermore, I believe that the employment of these particular stylistic archetypes would be applicable to many contemporary television series and films within the thriller genre without the need for additional customisation of the archetypes.

In the first part of chapter five, I discussed the commonly used musical terms *motifs*, *themes*, and *leitmotifs*. I offered definitions of these terms, but I did not lean on further theoretical models. However, in the latter half of the chapter, I discussed *intertextuality*, and here I did lean on specific theory: most prominently Serge Lacasse's division between *autosonic* and *allosonic quotation*,<sup>29</sup> and Robert Hatten's definitions of *stylistic* and *strategic* intertextuality.<sup>30</sup> Since I have applied these concepts exclusively to pre-existing music they only inform a small segment of this thesis, but nevertheless provided an important theoretical foundation for my analysis on pre-existing music.

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<sup>29</sup> Serge Lacasse, 'Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music', in Allan F. Moore (ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Referred to in Mark Spicer, 'Strategic Intertextuality in Three of John Lennon's Late Beatles Songs', in David Carson Berry (ed.), *A Music-Theoretical Matrix: Essays in Honor of Allen Forte (Part I)*, *Gamut* 2/1 (2009), 353.

## **Common traits**

In this section I attempt to summarise the most important similarities I have found between the three series, and I intend to structure the summary differently from the order of which the analyses took place. I structure the summary by way of the stylistic archetypes; first discussing the sonic properties of the stylistic archetype in question (drawing mainly on information gathered in chapter two), before looking at the employment of said stylistic archetype according to the attention continuum (chapter three), and finally discussing musical variations dependent on the emotions/personalities/narrative cues being communicated (chapters four and five). I structure the summary this way for three reasons. First, the stylistic archetypes is the most unique concept that I introduce in this thesis, and as such exploring and explaining them as much as possible might prove beneficial. Furthermore, looking at the prior chapters in light of the stylistic archetypes helps to clarify the stylistic similarities between the three series. Finally, I have divided my own musical cues, explained further into this chapter, by way of the stylistic archetypes, and as such this structure is the most tidy, as it will then apply to the whole chapter.

As previously discussed, most of the music in the three series fit into one or a combination of four stylistic archetypes: driving music, atmospheric music, sentimental music, and sinister music. The majority of the themes, motifs, and leitmotifs of the shows also fit into one of these stylistic archetypes.

### *Driving music*

Across the three series, driving music is recognisable by pulsing and arpeggiated synths. These synths operate both in mid and high register as part of the harmonic filler layer, and in the lower register as the functional bass layer. These sounds sometimes possess melodic properties as well, including fills and repeated motifs, and the melodic layer may also include acoustic sounds such as piano or strings (although strings are largely avoided in *Mr. Robot's* score). Electronic drums and drum loops often provide the explicit beat layer; however, the pulsing synths normally provide a rhythm of their own, and drums are therefore not always needed. Atmospheric synths are sometimes used to fill out the harmonic filler layer. One-shot effects acting as visual enhancers are not uncommon. Driving cues generally play in either natural or harmonic minor, although Locrian and Phrygian are common modes as well. Most driving cues are in 4/4, but this is not a requirement, as some cues use alternative time

signatures. Single expanded or shortened bars are common in order to match the visuals closely.

As I discuss the use of stylistic archetypes on the various stages of the attention continuum, we need to remember one striking similarity between all three series: category two, scenes in which music is the only sound on the soundtrack, is insignificant due to the lack of scenes that fall into this category. I will as such not be referring to this category further in this thesis, focusing instead on categories one (the main theme), three (scenes in which music faces little competition), four (scenes with a lot of visual action), and five (dialogue scenes).

Driving music can be used on all stages of the attention continuum. The first category of the continuum is the main theme, and the main themes of all three shows fall into the category of driving music. All of the main themes include most of the musical elements listed above, although the *Orphan Black* theme employs some more uncommon instruments for this context, perhaps due to the fact that the theme is composed by an electronic musician, and not by the composer of the show's score. The themes are all based on repeated harmonic sequences, increase in intensity, and have new elements introduced along the way. However, the manners in which the shows employ their respective main themes differ greatly.

Driving music functions reasonably similarly in positions three and five of the attention continuum. The music typically has a sense of forward momentum, but is not very rapid or dynamic. It is often synchronised with the visuals—for example a camera cut creating a sync point with the downbeat—but it does not necessarily have to be. The music is very often based on repeated motifs or loops, and is often transposed for variation; transposing the cue a minor third up or down, or both, is particularly common. In a few category-three-scenes, driving cues can create so much tension and momentum that the scenes almost feel like action scenes, even if the action on screen without the music is fairly undramatic and static, and this results in scenes that seem to fall in between the third and fourth categories of the attention continuum.

In action scenes, driving music takes on a new, more intense and dynamic form. Here, the music will be synchronised as closely with the visuals as possible, often resulting in many starts and stops, and irregular changes in patterns, sounds, and keys. Electronic drums and drum loops are used a lot more here than in categories three and five of the attention

continuum, and timpani sounds, often drenched in reverb, are also common. One-shot visual enhancers are particularly prominent in action scenes, in order to add to the spectacle by way of audiovisual synchresis. Due to a desire to infuse the scene with as high intensity as possible, the music often plays at a high tempo, and more importantly, with rapid subdivisions in drums and synths. The synth bass tends to be wide, bright, and often distorted in action scenes, whereas it is usually more centred and filtered in the other positions of the attention continuum.

### *Atmospheric music*

In all the three series, atmospheric music usually relies solely on synth pads, textures, or other atmospheric sounds. As such, the harmonic filler layer is often the only layer present in atmospheric cues. However, the functional bass layer is often represented in the form of a subtle synth bass or single-note synth pad filling the bottom end. When the explicit beat layer or the melodic layer is added, this will often result in the cue either becoming a combination of driving/atmospheric or sentimental/atmospheric respectively. Throughout the three series, atmospheric textures are often used in cues of another archetype in order to fill out the harmonic filler layer. Atmospheric music can be either tonal or atonal, and varies greatly in terms of modes and harmonies—however, for cues that are exclusively atmospheric (i.e., not combined with another archetype), a minimum of harmonic movement seems to be the norm.

Atmospheric music is used almost exclusively in dialogue scenes. Although one could think that this would amount to a small quantity of atmospheric music when compared to the above driving music, which fits into all categories of the attention continuum, this is not actually the case. Dialogue scenes are by far the most common type of scene in all of the series, and the atmospheric cue is perhaps the most common way of scoring dialogues—although driving music is also frequently used in dialogue scenes in *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. (Using no music in dialogue scenes is also common in *Mr. Robot* and *Daredevil*, particularly in the latter.) Because of the lack of rhythmic and melodic content, atmospheric music does not interfere with the dialogue to a large degree. Due to the fluid character of atmospheric cues, visual synchronisation with the music is less precise and direct than it usually is for the other archetypes. However, atmospheric cues often provide subtle narrative cueing, for example by almost unnoticeably sneaking in during an important part of a dialogue, highlighting certain words, moods, or other details.

### *Sentimental music*

Sentimental cues rely heavily on atmospheric sounds for the harmonic filler layer. These atmospheric sounds tend to play simple harmonic progressions in major, natural minor, harmonic minor, Dorian, or Mixolydian. In addition, this is the one stylistic archetype in which the presence of melodic elements is more common than their absence. Piano is the instrument that most often provides the melodic layer, often adding to the harmonic filler layer with simple chords as well. Mallet instruments or piano-like synths can also fill the melodic role. The melodies themselves tend to be simple and sparse.

Sentimental cues can be heard in categories three and five of the attention continuum. The cues tend to be more prominent and lengthy in scenes in which they face little competition, whereas they in dialogue scenes often provide a more subtle signification of emotion when a bond between two characters is implied.

We can divide between sad cues, which are normally composed in minor, and cues that symbolise love or friendship, which are most often composed in major, Dorian, or Mixolydian. However, these rules are far from absolute, and combinations of the two approaches are also possible. The leitmotif pertaining to Matt's father in *Daredevil*, which perhaps specifically signifies *the emotional bond* that Matt shares with his deceased father, has a bittersweet characteristic, likely because of the fact that Jack, who was largely a good father, died when Matt was still a child. The theme starts in the 'sad' minor, then moves to the more 'happy' or 'hopeful' Dorian for the third chord, then further onwards to harmonic minor before completing the cycle to the 'sad' minor tonic. This alternation between what can be labelled as 'sad' and 'happy' chords suggests a bittersweet quality, as the cue contains both negative (sad) and positive (happy, hopeful) qualities.

### *Sinister music*

The last stylistic archetype is that of *sinister* music, which I have divided into three sub-categories: ominous, psychedelic, and horror. What the three styles of music have in common is that they all signify something negative, and not in a sentimental way like sadness. Moreover, they all use atonality and clusters in order to communicate this negativity. I structure this section by analysing one sub-category at a time, since the differences between the styles are significant.

*Ominous* cues are often recognisable by repeated synth bass and/or brass blasts, so-called ‘braaams’, for the principal bass layer. This is usually combined with the perhaps most important and consistent feature of ominous cues: semi-clustered and unsettling textures, providing a sinister harmonic filler layer. Where the textures are less clustered, they tend to play in minor, often additionally employing tritone intervals.

Ominous cues are most common in positions three and five on the attention continuum. In dialogue scenes, the ‘braaam’ sound is less common, and the focus on clustered textures is greater. These cues are often used in conjunction with villains; although the main antagonists are sometimes scored in different ways in order to set them apart from the rest of the villains (as shown by Fisk’s and Tyrell’s large array of leitmotifs). Ominous cues tend to start suddenly, in synchronisation with the visuals, but do otherwise not tend to be closely synchronised with the on-screen action.

*Psychedelic* cues often have a fairly fluid and continuous character leaning on synth textures, but unlike atmospheric cues, psychedelic cues are very dense in terms of instrumentation, and often change timbres rapidly. Atonality is common, and so is distorted, bitcrushed, and glitching timbres. The most important layer in psychedelic cues is by far the harmonic filler layer, but the principal bass layer is also usually included in the form of a synth bass drone.

Psychedelic music is usually used in position three of the attention continuum, although these scenes may include some dialogue as well. These cues can usually be heard when a character is extremely anxious or has otherwise lost control of his or her emotions. Psychedelic music is also used in some situations where a sequence of events becomes blurry and chaotic, which happens on a few occasions in *Mr. Robot*.

One of the most important properties of *horror* music is that the music will usually be tightly synchronised with the visuals. However, there is typically no explicit beat layer—although percussive sounds are used with irregular intervals, many of which are synchronised with visual details. The harmonic filler layer normally consists of atonal, unsettling sounds, often rich in high frequencies and highly varied and interchanging. One-shot visual enhancers are used very often. Clusters and atonal atmospheric sounds are also common.

Horror music is not usually used in dialogue scenes (although sometimes employed in more intense scenes that include snippets of dialogue), but can be used in both action scenes

and scenes in which music faces little competition. Horror music is usually employed in scenes that depict blood and gore, extreme violence, or otherwise horrifying moments.

*Other similarities—motifs, character scoring, and pre-existing music*

There is very little music in the three series that do not fit into one of the stylistic archetypes (or a combination of them); the few instances that do not fit are normally meant to ‘stand out’. Most of the themes and motifs employed in the three series also fall into one or a combination of the stylistic archetypes. This is also the case for leitmotifs and character ‘palettes’, which all three series make fairly extensive use of. Throughout the three series, a character’s leitmotif (or palette) is typically employed when the character is either present in a scene, or is implied in some way. Moreover, a leitmotif is usually limited to one character or concept, although there are also a few examples of *migrating leitmotifs* (that is, leitmotifs that take on new meaning and are used for several characters or concepts). I have located one leitmotif/character palette in each series that fall outside of the stylistic archetypes, and it seems as if they adhere to a common strategy: deviating from the norm benefits the construction of a unique identity for each character, and also adds variation to the score. Additionally, the music for specific episodes from each show are often constructed around some musical motif or sound, which establishes unity within the episode whilst also providing the episode with a certain musical signature that sets it slightly apart from other episodes. These motifs do not have to be connected to characters, although the music of some episodes is indeed structured around a specific leitmotif.

Pre-existing music is used in all three series, normally in categories three (scenes in which music faces little competition) and five (dialogue scenes) of the attention continuum. The music functions differently depending on the category, as the music is much more prominent in scenes where it faces little competition than in dialogue scenes. One commonality between these three series is that they often use pre-existing music to comment on the narrative in some way, for example through lyrics (for example The Cure’s ‘Pictures Of You’ in *Mr. Robot*) or cultural signifiers (for example Johann Sebastian Bach’s ‘Cello Suite No. 1 in G’). The music may be diegetic, non-diegetic, or a combination of the two. Intertextuality naturally occurs when pre-existing music is used, and there are several interesting examples of both stylistic and strategic use of pre-existing music in the series. The former seems to be the most common approach, where the general style of the music is more

important than the specific piece; for example background music in bars and restaurants in all three series. Strategic intertextuality is used more rarely, but often to great effect—for example the use of ‘Where Is My Mind’ in *Mr. Robot*, which points to the use of this specific song in a film (*Fight Club*) with a similar plot.

## Differences

The aim of this thesis was to identify common tendencies in the music of the three series. During this process, I also came across certain differences, and I see these as equally important, even if I do not emphasise them as much as I do similarities in this thesis. Differences between texts belonging to relatively similar genres and contexts can provide insight as to how one may create a text with a unique identity, even if the text is part of a genre or style. Although this thesis aims to show that there are many similarities in the music in the three series, one cannot ignore the fact that there are pronounced differences as well, and I will attempt to summarise some of the most significant ones here.

As explained in chapter two, parts of the instrumentation differ between the shows; *Mr. Robot* relies almost exclusively on synths, strings are a key element in *Daredevil*, whilst *Orphan Black* includes a vast array of different sounds derived from a multitude of sources. Furthermore, *Orphan Black* has a more ‘present’ tone than the other two shows, emphasising bright frequencies and utilising less reverb. The show also has a very high density of music, whereas *Daredevil* has a comparatively low amount of music with regard to the total length of the show; the density of music in *Mr. Robot* amounts to a quantity somewhere in between these two extremes.

*Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* contains significantly more driving music than *Daredevil*; in the latter show, driving music is mostly reserved for action scenes. Because driving music in categories three and five are generally more repetitive than in category four, this means that the scores for *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* come across as more loop-based than the *Daredevil* score. Furthermore, *Mr. Robot* includes no clearly defined action scenes, and so the driving music in *Mr. Robot* and *Daredevil* is generally employed in almost mutually exclusive positions in the attention continuum, except for the first category of the main theme. *Mr. Robot* also has a higher quantity of psychedelic music and a lower amount of sentimental music than the other two shows.

### **Music based on the findings**

For this thesis, I have composed and produced four musical cues with the intent to represent each of the stylistic archetypes, emphasising the three shows' common characteristics. I did this in order to provide practical examples of the series' common features when it comes to their musical scores. My aim is that these four cues will be heard as fairly similar to the music in all three shows, and that they will serve to demonstrate some of the common characteristics identified throughout this thesis. If I succeed in this, it may be argued that in spite of the differences between the music in the three series, they can be said to belong to a common aesthetic or style. Instead of attempting to copy the exact sound of each show, I have tried to compose original cues based on the stylistic framework that I have presented in this thesis. In the process of composing these four cues, I have leaned on the analyses on sound and instrumentation conducted in chapter two; the variations according to a scene's position on the attention continuum in chapter three; the establishing and description of the four stylistic archetypes in chapter four; and, to a lesser extent, the discussion on motifs, leitmotifs, and character scoring in chapter five. My discussion on pre-existing music in chapter five has not been relevant for my compositions for obvious reasons.

In order to get the most out of what follows, I recommend listening to each respective cue while reading the information on it. While I make no claims as to the quality of my compositions, I want to underline that the music lacks its intended *added value* (as explained by Michel Chion);<sup>31</sup> this music is meant to play alongside images and other sounds, as part of a larger context. Kevin Donnelly writes:

A piece of music used in a film will normally have far more impact than when heard outside that context, irrespective of whether it has been written for the film or not. In fact, I am constantly amazed at how good a mediocre song can sound when allied to images in a film. Correspondingly, CDs of incidental film music can often seem to lack something without their image counterparts. The context of the music is crucial, and is the cradle of its power.<sup>32</sup>

I therefore ask the listener to bear in mind that the presentation of these cues is somewhat incorrect, and attempt to picture the described visuals alongside the musical experience.

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<sup>31</sup> Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Kevin Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 14.

### *Cue 1—Driving*

The driving cue is, broadly speaking, divided into two sections, although these sections can be divided further into several smaller parts due to the dynamic nature of driving music. The cue begins at a fairly low intensity, and is meant to accompany either a dialogue scene or a scene in which music faces little competition. As previously discussed, driving music in these two stages of the attention continuum are very similar. A pulsing synth bass pattern in 4/4, in the same vein as what is commonly heard in *Mr. Robot* in particular, is the first element that is introduced, along with a subtle electronic kick drum. The first downbeat is meant to be synchronised with a visual element. The synth bass does not contain much top end, and it is positioned in the centre of the stereo field—these tendencies are normal for driving scenes in positions three and five of the attention continuum. Piano, drenched in reverb and delay and preceded by a reversed piano note, plays an alternating three-note pattern at regular intervals. Various atmospheric noises provide harmonic filler content. The cue is loop-based, and has new elements introduced along the way.

The cue eventually transposes down a minor third in order to create variation; a technique often used in *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot*. A filtered atmospheric pad is introduced, along with a synth playing harmonies with the piano. A cymbal is heard, and the cue is temporally suspended, as an imaginary on-screen happening disrupts the flow of the scene; perhaps the protagonist is asked a question, or stops to listen. The cue then moves back to the original key, as the synth bass pattern gets slightly more intense, and a bitcrushed melodic synth provides additional variation. The cue is subsequently transposed up a minor third, before a dramatic rise precedes the reverse transposition. The latter transposition is meant to be a sync point.

At this point the cue plays at a higher intensity, featuring a wide, bright synth bass playing a Locrian pattern. A melodic, bitcrushed, and glitching synth provides the melodic layer. Locrian mode and bitcrushed, glitching synths are particularly prominent in the high-intensity driving cues of *Orphan Black*. The explicit beat layer now consists of an electronic snare drum and a rapid cymbal loop. After three bars of this, the cue crescendos into a hit, meant to be synchronised with the end of a scene, perhaps followed by a main title sequence or a commercial break. For the crescendo, I used a brass cluster—again typical of *Orphan*

*Black*, but also found in the other two series—in addition to a complex rise, and subsequent hit, edited from presets.

The second part of the cue is supposed to accompany a scene with lots of visual action, specifically a fight scene, and is particularly inspired by the action music in *Daredevil*, as this is the show out of the three that contains the most action scenes. As such, I have decided to include both a large string section and a solo cello (both based on samples), just as we find in the ‘Hallway Fight’ scene. This second part begins softly, with a pulsing synth bass and whooshing sounds providing a rhythmical and tonal foundation on which the solo cello, echoed thereafter by a synth, plays two long notes. This two-note downwards motion recurs several times in the cue. The synth bass diminuendos, creating a void that is filled by crescendoing strings, a bass drop, and a noise rise leading into a more aggressive part of the cue. We can imagine that this crescendo leads into the beginning of a fight scene, which is then synchronised with the ensuing downbeat.

The beginning of this imaginative fight scene is simply scored by a wide, distorted synth bass pattern in minor in combination with a drum loop, which I have manipulated to ‘stutter’ occasionally for variation—a technique sometimes employed in *Orphan Black*. This lasts four bars, before the cue takes on a different sound, provided by a complex synth pad, strings, a rapidly pulsing synth bass, timpani, and electronic drums, as the original drum loop has the high frequencies filtered out. This sequence, also lasting four bars, is meant to accompany a changed camera angle, perhaps filmed from further away, as lower frequencies travel further than higher frequencies. This sensation of feeling further away from the action is enhanced by a large amount of reverb. Changes in the sound such as this one infuse action scenes with momentum, spectacle, and dynamic. Another string crescendo and one-shot sample, sounding somewhat like a reversed cymbal, herald the next change in sound.

Now it is the low frequencies that are filtered out; when combined with distortion and bitcrushing, this results in a thin, gritty sound, as we are back to the synth bass and drum loop combination. However, both the drum loop and synth bass patterns are different from the first. After three bars, another one-shot reversed sound drenched in reverb coincide with the abrupt stopping of the drum and bass sequence, as a synth and solo cello play a falling two note motif. This lasts two bars, and then the characters pause for a moment, before a noise rise heralds a return to the fighting.

The next part is aggressive and transposed down a minor third for variation. It lasts for eight bars, and includes more stop-start motions, synchronised effects, and the two-note falling motif. Then a string and noise crescendo builds towards the penultimate punch (or similar) of the fight, meant to synchronise with the following hit, after which one of the participants are defeated. The pulsing synth bass continues until a reversed sound effect, meant to be synchronised with a visual detail (such as the screen going black), signals the end of the scene.

### *Cue 2—Atmospheric*

My atmospheric cue is divided into three parts. These parts are all on the same stage of the attention continuum, since atmospheric cues normally only accompany dialogue scenes. The first part of the cue starts as a ‘sneaker’, intended to fade in during a dialogue scene. The music is in Dorian mode and drenched in reverb, as I attempt to match the ‘openness’ of the imagined dialogue scene, which takes place in an open landscape, for example on the docks. The cue consists of two atmospheric synth drones mainly providing the functional bass layer—however, their complex tonal structure also means that elements like ‘swooshing’ and high overtones bleed into the harmonic filler layer. Additionally, another pad and reversed piano drenched in reverb provide further content for the harmonic filler layer, and three long synth notes play something that can be interpreted as either melodic or harmonic filler, or both.

The cue is then transposed down a whole step, emphasising something happening on screen (for example a scene change), or on the soundtrack (for example an important part of the dialogue). The volume intensifies along with the scene—perhaps a person is being threatened. A windy sound and ambient metallic percussive hits are placed into the periphery of the sound-box depth-wise, emphasising distance and a cold, outdoors environment. Both sounds are anaphones—the windy sound being the most obvious anaphone for wind, whilst the metallic hits sound like faraway construction work, reinforcing the imagined visual scenery.

The windy and swooshing sounds create a transition between the second and the third part of the cue as it moves into its final, atonal phase. The music is now based on noise without much tonal content, which is the case for much atmospheric music in the series, particularly in *Daredevil* and *Mr. Robot*. This music perhaps seems more hostile, and its atonality and slightly distorted timbres indeed move it in the direction of sinister music, with a

psychedelic touch. However, the music only includes atmospheric sounds, and we can therefore call it a combination of atmospheric and sinister music.

### *Cue 3—Sentimental*

The sentimental cue starts out as a combination of sentimental and atmospheric music—the only components of the first part of the cue are two combined synth pads playing a chord sequence, and another synth pad playing the deep root notes of the chords. The chord progression is a simple one in major, and moves at a slow pace. The music is supposed to accompany a scene in which two characters express their love for each other. Because of the lack of melody, this music would fit well with a dialogue scene, although it could arguably be used in a scene where the music faces little competition as well. This is the longest section of the cue, and is particularly inspired by the love music in *Mr. Robot*, accompanying both Shayla and Elliot in episode three, and Gideon and his boyfriend in episode nine.

The music then moves to minor, and a simple piano line, dubbed by a synth, is introduced. This section is supposed to accompany a scene that is meant to communicate sadness, grief, or another ‘negative’ sentimental feeling. Like the previous part, this section might be used both in categories three and five of the attention continuum, but due to its inclusion of a melody that demands attention, this music would perhaps be best suited to the former category. Examples from the series that share this ‘feel’ are when Sarah and Felix discuss Kira in the first episode of *Orphan Black*, and when Foggy confronts Matt in episode eight of *Daredevil*.

An eight-note pulsing rhythm created from a piano sound introduces the final part of the cue. The piano takes on a more dominant role, playing chords as well as a simple melody. Here, the imagined scene depicts friendship or an otherwise unromantic, friendly bond between characters. The mode is Mixolydian, as we move from the tonic to the flat seventh, then back to the tonic, mirroring both Kira’s leitmotif in *Orphan Black* and Matt and Foggy’s flashback scene in *Daredevil*’s eighth episode.

### *Cue 4—Sinister*

The sinister cue is divided into four parts. The first part is heralded by a clustered, unsettling texture, combined with repeated ‘braaams’ that get continuously louder as the cue progresses. This is an *ominous* cue, and is supposed to accompany a scene with one or more villains. The cue is fluid and continuous, and the only part of it meant to be synchronised with the visuals

is the beginning of the cue—as in the scenes with Vera in *Mr. Robot*'s sixth episode, or like the scene in which Fisk kills Vladimir in the end of the fourth episode of *Daredevil*.

The *psychedelic* section is just as fluid as the ominous part before it, but in place of the 'braaams', there are now various sounds playing at random intervals, along with an atonal synth sequence. Distorted sounds processed with tremolo start appearing, increasing in force and building towards a hit, mirroring the scene in which Matt beats up a kidnapper in the intro to the first episode of *Daredevil*.

After the hit, we delve into the *horror* section of the cue. This is meant to accompany a horrific action scene, and is as such supposed to be closely synchronised with the visuals. The section is constructed around rises building into synchronised hits, with patches of unsettling, atonal and often bright sounds in between. Timpani and other percussive sounds play at random intervals—these are also meant to be synchronised with visual details.

The final part of the cue, introduced by another rise and hit, is a combination of sinister and driving music, and mirrors the end of the horror scenes of both Helena (episode four of *Orphan Black*) and Stick (episode seven of *Daredevil*)—in both cases, the characters are given a driving, unsettling, and bombastic cue, driven by timpani and increasing in intensity before the screen goes black and the main title sequence begins. This final section of the sinister cue is meant to do the same, ending on a very low piano note meant to synchronise with the screen going black, followed by the main title sequence.

### *Summary*

The four cues described above are not meant to fit *perfectly* into all the three shows. For example, the latter half of the driving cue (the fight scene) differs slightly from much of the music in *Mr. Robot*, and the ominous part of the sinister cue (the first part) would stand out somewhat in *Orphan Black*. However, I am of the opinion that the cues contain obvious similarities to the music of all three shows, and that these similarities affirms my claim that these series share relatively similar common musical aesthetics.

### **Conclusion**

Music in contemporary North-American thriller series that rely heavily on electronic sounds share some common denominators, both in their compositions and in their use of these compositions in the audiovisual context. This is made obvious by the analyses conducted in this thesis on sound and instrumentation, character scoring, and pre-existing music, along

with the findings from the processes of applying the attention continuum and the stylistic archetypes to the series. The musical cues I have composed for this thesis substantiate the above claim, as they possess similar qualities to the vast majority of the music in the three series, and are composed based on the findings of this thesis.

In fact, there are unspoken rules for what kind of music typically goes with certain types of scenes, and these rules are rarely broken. When they are broken, it is either because of (a) a character that is scored in a specific way in order to construct a unique identity; (b) the use of pre-existing music; or (c) a more uncommon type of scene or scenario, for example a scene leading into the main title, or a scene that is meant to stand out. If the reason for breaking the rules are none of these, then the music would probably be paid attention to for the wrong reasons, as it would cease to be ‘inaudible’, moving attention towards itself and away from the narrative. A case such as this does not occur in any of the first seasons of these three series.

However, the composers (and the other people serving in roles concerned with the music) have had space to express themselves within these confines. Some sonic traits are common denominators—the reliance on many kinds of synths, piano, and timpani for example—yet the remaining instrumentation is diverse, with each show radiating its own sonic idiom different from the others’. The processing, and the musical techniques used, while sharing some similarities, are also different.

When working on this thesis, I realised that many of the traits that the music of *Daredevil*, *Orphan Black* and *Mr. Robot* share also seem to be present in several other contemporary thriller and drama series. These musical qualities seem to correlate with recent technological development in compositional tools, the most prominent of which is the DAW. Furthermore, interest in television series has increased dramatically during the past few years, no doubt propelled by the emergence of large-scale streaming services. I hope that the information presented in this thesis may be used as part of a larger project of gaining an increased understanding of the music that is part of the daily lives of a seemingly ever-growing amount of people in the age of streaming media.



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