

Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational

by Royal S. Brown

[Hitchcock] only finishes a picture 60%. I have to finish it for him.

—Bernard Herrmann¹

While it may very well be that Alfred Hitchcock was the “master of suspense,” he was also, and perhaps even more strongly, a master of the irrational. When we think of Hitchcock’s films, the images that immediately come to mind are those of a villain falling from the Statue of Liberty, a hero being attacked by an airplane in the middle of nowhere, and a nude woman being stabbed to death in a shower. In these, and many other, instances, the violence has the aura of a mythic predestination far removed from the causality of everyday existence, even though the latter, in Hitchcock, almost always serves as a point of departure. The things that happen to Hitchcock characters rarely occur for reasons these characters—and sometimes even the audiences—can understand. And the often grotesque settings for key events further remove everything from the domain of reason and understanding.

And yet, from the artistic and human points of view, Hitchcock was the most rational of beings. Even though the director was fully aware of the “beneficial shocks” he provided to his public, most of his discussions on his film making center around the importance of style and the painstaking care he took putting his sequences together. As is well known, the physical act of actually shooting the film had less importance to him than the meticulous setting up of shots before a single frame of film was ever exposed. And to anyone who goes beyond narrative involvement, the results of this care are immediately evident in the finished product, whether in the composition of a single shot, such as the *Pietà* scene from *The Lodger*, or in the editing of an entire sequence, such as the famous 78-shot/45-second shower scene in *Psycho*. From this perspective, the relationship between the director’s art and its subject matter bears a strong but perhaps not unexpected resemblance to Greek tragedy as defined, for instance, by Michael Grant:

For it is in the myths, even the cruellest myths, that Sophocles sees the permanent human battleground, accepting their horrors with his dramatic (if not altogether with his moral) sense, and more than Aeschylus adhering to their traditional framework. Yet these stories would be

nothing without the poetry, for there comes a point, and this is reached by Sophocles, where form is so nearly perfect as to achieve the autonomous originality of a new concept. This is also true of the contemporary Parthenon in which, likewise, the achievement depends not on lavish ornament but on a simplicity modified by subtle constructional and stylistic effects. These, like the effects of Sophocles, 'triumphantly escape, but just escape, the prosaic.'²

Grant's discussion of Euripides's *The Bacchae* provides another enlightening parallel with Hitchcock: "Its excitement is enhanced by the tension between the strange, savage myth and the classical severity of its presentation—by the contrast of a more than usual state of emotion, as Coleridge put it, with more than usual order" (p. 279).

One might think, then, that this tension between mythic irrationality and artisan rationality would suffice to create the desired artistic impression. Hitchcock obviously felt this way when he initially tried to avoid using music behind the *Psycho* shower scene.³ Yet even the Greeks did not rely simply on the mythic narrative and its acting out to counterbalance the "more than usual order" of their plays' formal structures. In order to express those forces that escape the everyday and that cannot be communicated by means of normal or even poetic parlance, the Greeks turned to the art that has the fewest obvious ties with what we normally consider to be reality—music:

The great dramatists were therefore composers as well as poets, actors, playwrights, and producers. . . . When we read a play such as the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus, it is as if we were seeing only the libretto of an opera to which all the music, dances, and stage directions are missing. It is so clearly a lyric drama that the music itself must have been the principal means by which the poet conveyed his meaning. Euripides' *The Bacchae*, on the other hand, has far greater intrinsic dramatic substance, but even here the emotional intensity of the individual scenes often rises to such a pitch that music had to take over where the words left off; just as when a person is so overcome with feeling that words fail, and he resorts to inarticulate sounds and gestures.⁴

As Hitchcock discovered, the existential distance and the emotional gap between a movie audience and what is transpiring on the screen are so great that even the sight of a knife repeatedly entering the body of a nude woman, and even the sounds of her screams and gasps, did not create sufficient visceral involvement in the scene. What was needed—and what Hitchcock got at the instigation of *Psycho*'s composer, Bernard Herrmann—was music, and a very particular kind of music, as we shall soon see, to fully communicate the sequence's irrationality *on its own terms*.

It would seem that, even by his personality, Bernard Herrmann was destined to come together with Alfred Hitchcock because of the

age-old principle, "opposites attract." Hitchcock, whether in his deliberately cultivated public persona, his radio and television interviews, or on the movie set, was forever the calm, rational being, the very prototype of British unflappability. At the opposite extreme, the American-born Herrmann was possessed of an almost legendary irascibility. Director Brian De Palma, for instance, has given a revealing and yet warm account of the composer's bursts of temper during his initial work on the film *Sisters*.⁵ But Herrmann's emotionalism did not show only a negative side. He was a romantic in every sense of the word. I have a strong memory of the composer breaking into tears and sobbing unashamedly following a screening, in the Summer of 1975, of De Palma's second Herrmann-scored film, *Obsession*. Not only was Herrmann obviously moved by *Obsession's* ending, he was also quite sorry to see the conclusion of a project towards which he had felt particularly close. Oliver Daniel, formerly of B.M.I., has provided the following overview of Herrmann's personality and of the way it translated into his music:

Oscar Levant has remarked on Herrmann's "apprenticeship in insolence," and well he might. Those who have worked with him know that he can be insulting, vehement, raucous, and even brutal. But those who know him better are aware that he can also be kind, sentimental, tender, and loving. He has withal a capacity to inspire devotion as well as anger. Having worked with him at CBS for over a decade, I can attest to that. And it is no surprise to find *Sturm und Drang*—Herrmann fashion—abruptly alternating with almost sentimental serenity in his works.⁶

And as Unicorn Records' Oliver Goldsmith, another longstanding Herrmann acquaintance, wrote a little over a year after the composer's death in December 1975, "As, of course, is well known, Benny was not the easiest of men to get along with and he could be extremely irrational and outspoken, often for no particular reason. In this respect he naturally made himself unpopular with many people; but underneath his gruff exterior he was a kind and generous man in whose company I spent many happy hours and whose loss I very much regret."⁷ The affective depth of Herrmann's music was precisely what Hitchcock's cinema needed, what, in fact, it had sorely lacked even in certain masterpieces of the early 1950s such as *Strangers on a Train*. And so, in 1955, Alfred Hitchcock, the cool, British classicist who became an American citizen, and Bernard Herrmann, the fiery, American romantic who spent the last years of his life in London, came together for the first of their seven collaborations, *The Trouble with Harry*.

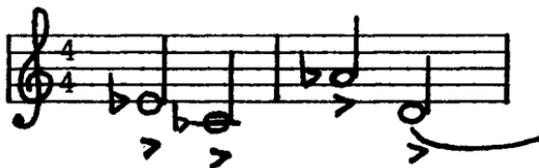
I

At first glance, *The Trouble with Harry*, with its picture-postcard

settings shot in Technicolor and its extended but decidedly non-suspenseful black humor, seems like atypical Hitchcock. Yet this strange amalgam of British humor and the American ethos was one of the director's personal favorites among his films, and, according to Taylor (pp. 234-35), he even screened it for James Alardyce, who scripted Hitchcock's television monologues, in order to give the writer an idea of the desired persona for "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," which began the same year as *The Trouble with Harry* was shot. Bernard Herrmann saw the film as the most personal of Hitchcock's efforts,⁸ and he used the score as the basis for a musical sketch of the director entitled "A Portrait of 'Hitch.'" Just as *The Trouble with Harry* is atypical Hitchcock, Herrmann's bantering and scherzo-like music does not immediately bring to mind the composer's better known scores, nor does it seem to pave the way for the great collaborations that began with *Vertigo* in 1958. And yet a rapid glance at several details in the music for the title sequence reveals devices, mostly harmonic in nature, that are already wholly characteristic of the Herrmann/Hitchcock collaboration.

One thing Herrmann obviously fathomed, consciously and/or unconsciously, in Hitchcock and his art was the perfect ambivalency: for every dose of the calm, the rational, and the everyday, there is a counterbalancing dose of the violent, the irrational, and the extraordinary. In *The Trouble with Harry's* Prelude, one way in which this ambivalency can be felt is in the contrast, as the music unfolds, between the more ghoulish passages and the jocular main theme. Perhaps even in choosing the keys of G-flat major and the related E-flat minor, Herrmann may have intended a musicological ambiguity, since these two keys, which have six flats, have exact, enharmonic mirror-images in the keys of F-sharp major and D-sharp minor, which have six sharps.⁹ But the essence of Herrmann's Hitchcock scoring lies in a kind of harmonic ambiguity whereby the musical language familiar to Western listeners serves as a point of departure, only to be modified in such a way that norms are thrown off center and expectations are held in suspense for much longer periods of time than the listening ears and feeling viscera are accustomed to. The opening, four-note motive, played by the horns, establishes the key and mode of E-flat minor but ends on an unstable D, the seventh note in the harmonic minor scale on E-flat:

EXAMPLE 1



Following a downward, E-flat minor run, Herrmann establishes a characteristic accompaniment figure, played in the low strings, contrabassoon, and clarinets (both bass and regular), which is a typical instrumental sound for the composer:

EXAMPLE 2



Here, the music already hints at the kind of seventh-chord that will become the aural trademark for *Vertigo* and *Psycho*. Were, in fact, the root E-flat to be added beneath the D, B-flat, and G-flat of Example 2 that later form the chord of Example 4 below, the resultant chord would have a structure identical to the one in *Vertigo*'s Prelude. But *The Trouble with Harry*'s much less ominous nature does not allow that E-flat to creep in. Instead, Herrmann suddenly turns to a motive, played in the clarinet, that will soon blossom into the Prelude's main theme and that suddenly switches to the major mode in G-flat, the related major of E-flat minor:

EXAMPLE 3



But before allowing the main theme to take full shape from the above motive, Herrmann turns the notes from Example 2 into a bona fide chord in the horns. Always repeated five times, this figure will assert its obsessive presence throughout *The Trouble with Harry*:

EXAMPLE 4



At this point, the chord has a double identity: following, as it does, the motive in Example 3, the chord can be considered as the augmented triad, in the root position, of G-flat major; or, considering its earlier context and the way it brusquely interrupts the motive in Example 3,

mood. The same effect occurs, but in an opposite sense, with the interval of the third, which abounds in Herrmann and in particular in the Hitchcock scores, in a manner that is disproportionate with its nonetheless frequent use in Western music. The harp figure in parallel, major thirds in Example 5, for instance, represents a typical sound in Herrmann's music. Defined as "the most characteristic interval of the Western harmonic system,"¹⁰ the third normally acts as a pillar of stability, often signaling not only the key involved but also the mode (major or minor) as well. One might think, then, that the stability of the third would, in Herrmann, counterbalance the instability of the oft-used seventh. In fact, however, the third, when isolated from the major or minor triad, can be manipulated so that its identity becomes quite ambiguous. The classic example of this, perhaps, is the opening of the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Even though that initial, G-G-G-E-flat motive signals the beginning of one of the most solidly minor-mode movements ever penned, the interval itself is a *major* third! Our hearing of it as C minor rather than as E-flat major depends on our acquaintance with the movement as a whole and also, perhaps, on the motive's downward direction.

As can be seen, then, the true major-minor identity of a triad depends only on the positioning of its component thirds:

EXAMPLE 6

MAJOR TRIAD

MINOR TRIAD

minor 3rd
major 3rd

major 3rd
minor 3rd

What Herrmann began to do with great consistency in his Hitchcock scores was to isolate the characteristically Western interval of the third from the minor/major or major/minor equilibrium of the tonic triad. The augmented interval of Example 4, for instance, contains *two* major thirds, which, as we have seen, can be considered as belonging either to G-flat major or to E-flat minor. Add the lower E-flat and you get what I will refer to as the "Hitchcock chord," a minor major-seventh in which there are two major thirds and one minor. The figure in Example 5 is essentially the chord of Example 4 broken and doubled in nothing but major thirds from its own configuration. Like the triad in Example 4 from *The Trouble with Harry*, then, and like the four-note seventh chords of the later films, the isolated, two-note interval of the third takes on a character, a color of its own, much as it does in Debussy's piano *Prélude* entitled "*Voiles*," or, in a manner that foreshadows Herrmann even more closely, the Prelude to Act III of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, where slowly rising, parallel thirds evoke the desolate

settings of a run-down castle overlooking the sea. Furthermore, the preponderance of *major* thirds in Herrmann's essentially *minor*-mode settings seems to be an integral part of the general tendency towards downward musical movement, whether in the motivic figures (such as those of Examples 1 and 3), in the harmonic progressions, as we shall see more closely further on, or in the instrumentation. Although the relationship between this downward movement and the element of the irrational should be obvious (some specific, visual tie-ins will be brought up further on), it does not just characterize the Herrmann/Hitchcock scores but rather can be noted in many of the composer's efforts, from the pioneering *Citizen Kane* (1941) to the much less subtle *Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958). What characterizes the Hitchcock mode are the ways in which this downward tendency is counterbalanced to reflect the unique equilibria of Hitchcock's cinema, and, even more important, the ways in which subtle, harmonic colorations make that descent into the irrational felt as an ever-lurking potential.

Indeed, even as early as *The Trouble with Harry*, Herrmann broke with standard practices—and certainly with the Viennese traditions that had dominated much of film music—by making harmonic profile, which he added to his already developed sense of instrumental color, the most important element of his movie music. To an extent, it can be said that all the Hollywood composers of the first and second generations (Herrmann more or less belonged to the latter) fashioned their scores in a manner that follows quite closely American composer Roger Sessions's description of the Wagnerian *leitmotiv*:

The "dissonances" in Bach or Mozart have a significance, both "musical" and "emotional" far different from that often lent them by hearers nurtured on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century music, in which dissonances are rather individual features than organic portions of a musical line. Here the influence of the Wagnerian leit-motif—more often than not extremely short and characterized by a single harmonic or rhythmic trait—is paramount. Its introduction is often motivated by dramatic, not musical necessities and once introduced it intentionally dominates the scene, to the obliteration of what surrounds it. The musical coherence is there, to be sure—but in a passive sense; the detail is more significant than the line, and the "theme" more important than its development. It is all too seldom noted to what an overwhelming extent the reverse is the case in the earlier music.¹¹

But the direction followed by Herrmann's predecessors and contemporaries was towards the creation of themes which, if longer than the usual leitmotif, would nonetheless *immediately* arouse the audience; the bulk of the work in their film scores was given to such themes. In the death scene from William Wyler's 1939 *Wuthering*

Heights, Alfred Newman's score repeats Cathy's theme, in various garbs, an incredible number of times. In many instances, in fact, it could be said that the purpose of the big Hollywood theme was not so much to involve audiences directly in the specifics of a given film but simply to put their emotions in gear on a more generalized level. Erich Korngold's main theme for the 1942 *King's Row*, for instance, owes its regal nature to nothing more than the film's title, which the composer misunderstood as indicating the kind of pomp and circumstance he had so skillfully handled in earlier endeavors.

From the outset, Bernard Herrmann never had a great deal of use for themes per se. In fact, what in Herrmann often strikes the listener as a particularly attractive melody actually owes most of its character to a striking harmonic progression or coloration, with instrumental hues also playing a considerable role. This can certainly be said of even one of the composer's most lyrical scores (and one of his personal favorites), the music for Joseph Mankiewicz's *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947). The core of most Herrmann themes generally consists of a motive a measure or two in length. The extension of such a motive into what resembles a theme more often than not is accomplished by the repetition of the motive, either literally or in harmonic sequence. *The Trouble with Harry's* principal melody is formed almost entirely from the repetition of the half-measure, three-note figure bracketed in Example 3. The reasons for this technique can be seen as follows:

1) As Herrmann has stated, "I think a short phrase has certain advantages. Because I don't like the leitmotif system. The short phrase is easier to follow for audiences, who listen with only half an ear. Don't forget that the best they do is half an ear" ("Interview," p. 66).

2) The "short phrase" also serves as a more manipulable building block better suited than a developed "theme" to the rapidly changing nature of the cinema and its edited flow of images. It has always been obvious that the larger forms of musical composition and the cinema could not work together. No composer has ever sat down, for instance, and written a symphony intended to be used as a film score (certain works, of course, such as Herrmann's "*Hangover Square* Concerto," have been made a part of a film's narrative); and when, conversely, works such as symphonies, concertos, and/or sonatas have been raided for use in a movie, they have inevitably been chopped into small segments. Even such a convention-shattering director as Jean-Luc Godard discovered that he could not use the theme and eleven variations he had asked Michel Legrand to do for *Vivre sa vie*, itself intended as a theme and eleven variations; instead, Godard resorted to

using one part of one variation throughout the film.¹² What is not generally considered, however, is that melody itself, as it is more often than not put together in Western music, implies certain structural formalities that can be adapted to such musical genres as the opera but that have much less in common with what is going on in the cinema. The basic unit of Western melody tends to be the so-called four-bar phrase (*vierhebigkeit*), implying certain principles of symmetry and parallelism so that the typical theme is made up of two four-bar (or -measure) phrases that must be answered by another pair of four-bar phrases, etc. As Herrmann has said, "the reason I don't like this tune business is that a tune has to have eight or sixteen bars, which limits a composer. Once you start, you've got to finish—eight or sixteen bars. Otherwise the audience doesn't know what the hell it's all about" ("Interview," p. 66). A composer such as David Raksin has gotten around the "tune" problem by composing asymmetrical melodies often formed from individual measures of different meters. Turning in the opposite direction, Herrmann all but eliminated melody per se from the film score.

3) Melody is the most rational element of music. Precisely because it organizes a certain number of notes into a recognizable pattern, conventional melody generally has little trouble finding a niche for itself in the conscious mind. This is not to say that melody cannot stir the emotions, or that the return of a particular theme cannot have a deeply moving effect on the listener. But even in these instances, the organization of the themes gives a coherency to the work as a whole; and the very nature of melody very often allows it to have specific associations. While somewhat the same effect can be obtained with the motive and/or the short phrase, as Wagner's operas certainly prove, its use permits a shift in emphasis from the horizontal movement forward of music to a more vertical immediacy that is particularly inherent in its harmonic and instrumental components. It can be seen, then, how much of early American cinema lent itself to melodic logic, but that Hitchcock's movies demanded something quite different.

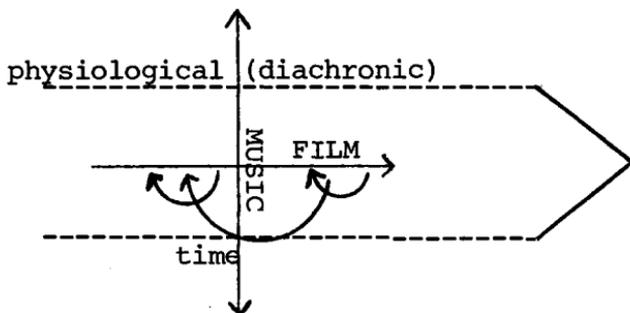
The anti-"tune" tendency in Herrmann's music goes hand in hand with the composer's isolation of harmonic colors. Whereas, in normal musical practice, the identity of a particular chord generally depends on its position within the context of a melodic flow, the lack of such flow in a composer such as Herrmann allows the chord or chords—and also the instrumental coloration—to speak more for themselves. The technique is not without its pitfalls, as one can hear in a number such as the Overture to *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* which, with its facile, sequential repetitions, often borders on the puerile and amateurish.

But it would seem that Hitchcock provided Herrmann with the impetus to develop certain devices and to carry them further than he had previously done. One reason for this might be the *musical* nature of Hitchcock's cinematic style. Certainly, one of the keys to the Hitchcock touch would have to be considered the manner in which the entire body of shots of a given film follows a prearranged plan, so that any one particular shot, much like the "normal" musical chord discussed above, has meaning only when considered in the context of the shots surrounding it and, more broadly, within the temporal elaboration of the entire artistic conception. In this sense, one can set Hitchcock against a much more static, pictorially oriented director such as Jean Cocteau, who used the cinematic frame as a pretext for what often amounts to a succession of dazzling still shots. The Hitchcock technique can also be opposed to that of conventional directors whose use of "invisible editing" tends to create the illusion of a coincidence of cinematic and "normal" time. Like all great artists, Hitchcock managed to come up with forms that neither call excessive attention to themselves nor melt passively into the walls of the everyday. And with the director's particular genius being linked to the *temporal* unfurling of a given formal conception, the overall effect is very much like the one described by Claude Lévi-Strauss for music:

Below the level of sounds and rhythms, music acts upon a primitive terrain, which is the physiological time of the listener; this time is irreversible and therefore irredeemably diachronic, yet music transmutes the segment devoted to listening to it into a synchronic totality, enclosed within itself. Because of the internal organization of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilizes passing time; it catches and enfolds it as one catches and enfolds a cloth flapping in the wind.¹³

Although Herrmann, with his non-thematic devices, had already been heading towards a more nearly pure film-music genre that would not cut across the grain of inherently cinematic procedures, the composer obviously sensed that he would have to further stifle Western music's natural tendency to organize itself into temporally elaborated blocks, in order not to gild the lily of Hitchcock's ingeniously organized, filmic totalities or to cut into their effectiveness by setting up conflicting movements. Thus, for example, Herrmann began to rely even less on the types of dramatic shifts from major to minor mode that one can find in numerous romantic composers such as Tchaikovsky; instead, he devised a chordal language that *simultaneously* has major and minor implications. With this, and with the long stretches where no harmonic resolution takes place, so that the harmonic colors stand even more strongly on their own and so that the listener-viewer remains suspended, Herrmann created a *vertical* synchronicity that sets

up a strong opposition to Hitchcock's *horizontally* created synchronicity:



And, of course, the immediacy of effect in Herrmann's music fortifies and stresses the deepest emotional content of individual Hitchcock shots or sequences.

II

In his next two films for Hitchcock, the 1956 remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *The Wrong Man* (1957), Herrmann did not exactly have the leeway he was later to acquire. Perhaps the main reason for this is that both films have their points of departure in music. In the true story of *The Wrong Man*, the protagonist is a string-bass player in a band at New York's Stork Club. The film opens with Hitchcock himself speaking a few words, behind which Herrmann's music introduces a somber, two-note motive that will later be heard after the plane crash in *North by Northwest*. There follows a night-club scene in which a rather innocuous Latin ditty alternates with a more characteristically Herrmannesque motive. Prominent in some of the soundtrack music further on is a string bass played *pizzicato*, giving a mildly jazzy flavor to the music and also reminding us of the protagonist's job. Both versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* center around a composition for soprano, mixed chorus, and orchestra, Australian-born composer Arthur Benjamin's "Storm Cloud Cantata." For the 1956 remake, however, Herrmann not only re-orchestrated the music, he is actually seen conducting the score in the twelve-minute Albert Hall sequence, one of the true *tours de force* in Hitchcock's cinema. Interestingly, since the non-stop music of the cantata drowns out all dialogue once it starts, Hitchcock's style changes noticeably, and in many ways the film at this point takes on the appearance of a silent movie. The Benjamin¹⁴ cantata, plus the

song “Que sera sera” (by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans) performed twice by Doris Day in the film, left little room for *The Man Who Knew Too Much* to acquire a distinctively Herrmannesque musical profile.

Nonetheless, the second *Man Who Knew Too Much*, even more strongly than *The Trouble with Harry*, reveals in many of the diverse soundtrack-music cues a solid Herrmann/Hitchcock “sound” beginning to take shape. The following elements are worth noting:

1) A figure in the “Storm Cloud Cantata” is virtually identical to the initial woodwind figure that follows the introductory bars of the *North by Northwest* Overture.

2) Rising and falling arpeggios in the high strings over third-chords in the vibraphone after James Stewart has heard from the kidnappers over a police phone dramatically change the character of the film at this point.

3) Perhaps the key suspense scene in the film, other than the Albert Hall sequence, occurs when Doris Day and James Stewart discover Ambrose Chapel, while Hitchcock’s cross-cutting reveals to the audience that this is the spot where the couple’s kidnapped son is being held. The descending, four-note motive of Example 7A, which is in D minor, strongly resembles both in motivic configuration and harmonic context, several passages from the *North by Northwest* score; it is also reused note-for-note (including the repeated D, albeit in a different rhythm) in *Vertigo*’s nightmare sequence:

EXAMPLE 7A



pizz. violins (later bowed violas)

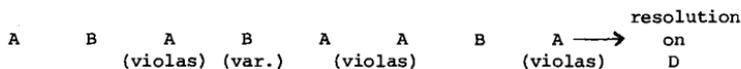
clarinet & bass clarinet (one octave lower)

The measures that follow, in which the high violins play parallel, major thirds over the same repeated D, strikingly foreshadow the habanera motive from *Vertigo*:

EXAMPLE 7B



The two above figures, which alternate regularly, with minor variations, throughout the beginning of the Ambrose Chapel sequence, form a musical cue that lasts close to a minute and forty seconds, arranged as follows:



The "A" part of the cue offers an excellent example of a Herrmann "short phrase," while the "B" segment is essentially pure, harmonic color. In addition, the repeated D, while helping to establish the key of D minor, enhances the suspense quality of motive 7A above, since the expected D below the E (the last note of the motive) does not arrive until the end of the cue. The repeated D also refuses to allow the cue to modulate, thus creating a feeling of stasis that aids in the isolation of the parallel thirds in Example 7B. Given the two contrasting sections of the cue, one might expect that their alternation would follow the editing, which mixes shots of Doris Day waiting outside the chapel with shots inside revealing the place where the kidnapped boy is being kept. Yet, precisely because the more static nature of the music keeps its movement forward from interfering with that of the editing, the music is allowed to express in its own rhythms the opposition communicated at a different pace by the cross-cutting, so that, in fact, the final four segments of the musical cue all accompany a series of shots inside the chapel. Furthermore, with the repeated D linking the entire musical cue, Herrmann is able to stress that what appears to be an opposition is also the inside and outside of the same situation.

4) Further on in the Ambrose Chapel sequence, Hitchcock shows great sensitivity to the levels of musical meaning within the filmic situation with the following succession that ends up in the reuniting of the couple and the kidnapers:

a) having twice played a recording of the cymbal-crash climax of the "Storm Cloud Cantata" for the would-be assassin, the parson/kidnapper, Mr. Drayton (Bernard Miles), drops the needle a third time at the same place on the disc for his own satisfaction;

b) a musical segue cuts into this source music and brings back a more dramatic version (in keeping with the mood of the cantata) of the motive in Example 7A as the film takes us back outside the chapel for the arrival of James Stewart. As he and Doris Day discuss what they will do, the music from 7B returns;

c) this gives way to organ music followed by a hymn sung by the congregation as the couple enters the chapel. In a droll piece of business that not only signals the importance music has taken on for his “couple who knew too much” but also links them directly, at this point, to the Draytons, Hitchcock has Stewart and Day sing to each other, to the tune of the hymn, the strategy they are plotting!

In *Vertigo*, the juxtaposition of various levels of music will take on an even deeper significance.

III

By the time he finished *The Wrong Man*, Bernard Herrmann had already done for Hitchcock what he had not previously been able to do and was to do only once again: he had scored more than two films for the same director.¹⁵ As for Hitchcock, the director found himself in the happy position of having assembled

his own little group, which included his cinematographer Robert Burks, his camera operator Leonard J. South, his television cameraman John L. Russel [who was also the cinematographer for *Psycho*], his editor George Tomasini, his composer Bernard Herrmann, his personal assistant Peggy Robertson, his costume designer Edith Head, and a number of actors with whom he felt thoroughly at home. (Taylor, p. 266.)

The presence of Saul Bass, who did the titles for *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho*, did not hurt matters either. One has to think that the establishment of a solid rapport with many of the most important artists and artisans who can contribute to the realization of a film helped bring Hitchcock to the peak he reached in his next three films, *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960). One also has to feel that the opportunity to become immersed over a period of time in the style and manner of a great artist such as Hitchcock helped Herrmann produce not only what most would consider to be his masterpieces as a film composer but also to pen music that gives the impression of being a totally inseparable part not only of the films for which it was composed but also an extension of Hitchcock’s personal vision.

Not surprisingly, the music for *North by Northwest*, a comic-thriller respite between the tragedy of *Vertigo* and the horror of *Psycho*, does not immediately strike the listener as offering a typical Herrmann/Hitchcock sound. Indeed, Herrmann designated as “Overture” the fandango (a quick, Spanish dance) that opens *North by Northwest*, while the initial music for *Vertigo* and *Psycho* is entitled “Prelude.” To the listener, *North by Northwest*’s Overture appears to be a kind of set piece easily separable from the body of the film, while

Vertigo and *Psycho*'s Preludes seem inextricably attached to the cine-musical action that follows the title sequences. And yet the delicate balances between film music and film obviously perceived by both Hitchcock and Herrmann dictated an interesting reversal. Both the *Vertigo* and *Psycho* Preludes, which segue into new musical cues heard behind the post-title sequences, reach a brief point of resolution on D. Herrmann did write a snappy, two-chord conclusion to bring the *North by Northwest* Overture to a decisive conclusion in A major (the Overture opens in A minor). But it was obviously felt that the Overture as originally scored separated the title sequence too much from the film, all the more so since there is no musical segue from the title to the ensuing New York City shots. Therefore, the Overture's final two chords, although performed on both the phonograph recordings made of the work, were cut from the film, so that the music—and therefore the film—remains suspended on a sustained seventh chord that never resolves, a device used fairly frequently in the early days of film scoring.

One might also expect that the lighter nature of *North by Northwest* would allow for more expansive themes in its Overture, while the gloomier character of *Vertigo* and *Psycho* would justify a non-thematic stasis in their music. Yet the *North by Northwest* Overture contains not one example of anything that could be designated as a theme on the cue sheet.¹⁶ Instead, it is made up of numerous, brief motives sewn together in sometimes audaciously chromatic harmonic progressions and presented in brilliant orchestral colors, with totally unhumable interval leaps being the order of the day. In fact, the rhythmic character of many of these figures has more importance than their fragmented melodic contours, so that their reprise in the Mount Rushmore finale is on occasion played only in the percussion. The use of these figures throughout *North by Northwest* often creates a balletic relationship between film and music considerably different from the more operatic relationship one finds in film scores from Hollywood's earlier generation. Comments such as those by Roy M. Prendergast, who refers to the *North by Northwest* Overture as "One of Herrmann's lesser efforts in his motivic approach to film scoring,"¹⁷ are typical of the refusal to take into account the full scope of the relationship between a score and its film.

Unlike *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo* and *Psycho* immediately establish the type of harmonic color, already discussed, through the pervasive use of the "Hitchcock chord." In *Vertigo*, this chord, formed by adding a major third above a root position, E-flat minor triad, is first heard as a repeated series of contrary-motion arpeggios played in the

high strings, winds, and vibraphone; the figure is heard throughout much of the Prelude:

EXAMPLE 8



The identity of this chord is reinforced, twelve measures into the Prelude, by an unbroken, sustained presentation of it in mid-range brass:

EXAMPLE 9



The strings-only *Psycho* music presents an identically structured chord—this one built up by adding a major third above the root position B-flat minor triad—in the upper register, while the lower register configuration stresses more the augmented nature of the chord in a manner not unlike what we have already seen in *The Trouble with Harry*. This chord, repeated five times in a characteristic rhythmic pattern, becomes a motive of sorts for the first third of the film (as do several other of the obsessively repeated figures from the Prelude):

EXAMPLE 10



Near the end of *Psycho*, just before Lila Crane (Vera Miles) touches Mrs. Bates's mummified body, the high violins sustain a chord on C-sharp-A-F that suggests the Hitchcock chord with the root missing and is identical in structure with the *Trouble with Harry* chord dis-

cussed earlier. The very nature of these chords, with their simultaneously minor/major aura, immediately throws the viewer/listener off the rationalized center of normal Western tonality into a more irrational, mythic domain in which oppositions have no implications that will be resolved by the passing of time but exist only as two equal poles of the same unity. Both *Vertigo's* and *Psycho's* Preludes maintain this framework by having their respective "Hitchcock chords" act as a focal point, continually repeated throughout the 1' 11" length of the former and the 1' 50" length of the latter. The Preludes for both films conclude on a D unison. The dreamier *Vertigo* Prelude, marked "*Mod-erato assai*," accompanies a dazzling succession of slowly turning, colored, geometrical whorls that appear against a black background and that have their point of departure in a woman's eye. In the music, the D on which the Prelude will conclude is almost constantly present, both as the top note of the "Hitchcock chord" and from time to time in the bass. In measures 3–5, for instance, unisons beneath the arpeggiated figure of Example 8 move from D to C, suggesting the harmonic relationship between the Prelude (in D Minor) and the ensuing "Roof-top" sequence (in C minor) and then, in measures 6–9, from a lower E/flat back to D. While *Vertigo's* Prelude, then, suggests tonality, it generally lacks the sense of harmonic movement characteristic of Western music and instead creates a sense of stasis that seconds the feminine orientation of the title sequence and its imagery, not to mention the whole Orphic bent of *Vertigo's* narrative and structure. Indeed, Herrmann will later use a similar technique, already noted for a segment from *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, to suggest not only the painting of Carlotta Valdez but also the apparent reincarnation of the Spanish woman in Madeleine: Carlotta's "theme" plays, initially in parallel, major thirds, over a repeated D, the characteristic habanera rhythm of which——provides the audience with a musical point of reference for Carlotta's Hispanic origins. The repeated D in a habanera rhythm will likewise dominate the "Nightmare" sequence.

In *Psycho's* Prelude, the Hitchcock chord is repeated so often and at such musically strong points that it seems to be not only a point of departure but a point of return as well. The Prelude also goes beyond any other Hitchcock music, Herrmann scored or otherwise, in its array of jarringly dissonant chords, the bitonality of which reflects on the film's ultimate narrative theme. But the lack of harmonic movement is counterbalanced by a frenetic rhythmic drive—the Prelude is marked "*Allegro (Molto agitato)*"—that goes beyond even *North by Northwest's* opening fandango in intensity.¹⁸ In fact, the *Psycho* Prelude moves along at such a headstrong pace that it can move in and out of almost conventional resolutions without the audience ever getting a

chance to relax on them. Thus, the Prelude's first motive, which starts off as a simple breaking up of the Hitchcock chord, strongly suggests the key of D minor by transforming the D-flat of the Hitchcock chord into a leading-tone C-sharp:

EXAMPLE 11

This potential of *Psycho*'s particular Hitchcock chord to be utilized as a rather kinky cadence chord is borne out by the end of the Prelude, in which a differently voiced version of the opening chord, repeated a number of times in groups of four in the high violins, finally gives way to a single, pizzicato, unison D, thus creating something not unlike a V → I cadence with the fifth (A) as the top note and the D-flat/C-sharp leading tone prominent in the chordal construction. All of this seems to second the much more linear movement of the black and white, horizontal lines of Saul Bass's title sequence, not to mention the more phallic orientation of *Psycho*'s particular brand of violence.

But, although the Prelude, like any good prelude, in many ways sums up the entire work to follow it, it at least comes to a point of rest, which is more than can be said of *Psycho*'s conclusion, as we shall see in a moment. Hitchcock immediately picks up on this by giving the audience, in the film's first shot, an excessively precise orientation in time and space, something he almost never does (*Notorious* is the only other example that comes to mind): over an aerial shot of Phoenix, Arizona, superimposed titles give us the name of that city, along with the date (Friday, December the eleventh) and even the time (2:43 p.m.). To accompany this, and the descent implied by the aerial shot, Herrmann segues from the Prelude to a descending series of ninth chords, the openness of which strongly contrasts with the Prelude's more claustrophobic chordal language. Furthermore, the key that can be felt in the chords of this "City" cue and that is suggested in their spelling in the score, which has no key signature, is that of A-flat minor, a key which, in its number of flats (seven) and in the tritone relationship of its tonic note to D, is about as far from D minor as it is

possible to get. Thus Herrmann, in his post-title music, and Hitchcock, in his presentation of what seems to be a very ordinary lovers' tryst, set up a marked polarity between the night world of the title sequence and the day world of "The City." The attempts to keep these two worlds separate will, of course, come to an end when Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) and Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) come together in a seemingly accidental way that is actually set up to be felt as strongly fatalistic. Once this meeting occurs, the two worlds become inseparable, as Hitchcock suggests by the film's penultimate shot, in which a few frames showing the face of Norman's mummified mother lead into the film's final shot of Marion's car being dragged up from the quicksand. Herrmann, in turn, resorts to bitonality for the film's final chord: over a D unison in the bass (the last note of a motive that will be discussed further on) we hear a chord that brings together the A-flat minor of "The City" with the D of the Prelude:

EXAMPLE 12



From this there is no escape!

Unlike the *North by Northwest* Overture, both the *Vertigo* and *Psycho* Preludes also contain passages that have themes of sorts. Indeed, in *Vertigo*'s Prelude, following a series of rising trills in the woodwinds and strings, the arpeggiated figure, while continuing, suddenly abandons the Hitchcock-chord configuration and switches, in a manner recalling the transition from *Psycho*'s Prelude to the "City" cue, to a series of more open, broken ninth chords, the top notes of which—D-C-B-E—form the backbone of *Vertigo*'s principal "love music," which is, in fact, how this twice-heard segment is labeled on the cue sheet (these same four notes are also played, not always in sync with the above, in the orchestra beneath the arpeggiated figure). Furthermore, the harmonization of these notes in the broken chords of the arpeggiated figure is identical to the harmonization, in unbroken chords, of the principal love theme. Thus is Herrmann able, with the two contrasting portions of *Vertigo*'s Prelude, to suggest the two sides of the hero's "vertigo."

Herrmann likewise breaks up the *Psycho* Prelude's obsessively repeated chords and motives with a theme repeated at three different points and labeled "*Psycho* Theme" on the cue sheet. *As a theme* (as opposed to separate motives expanded in harmonic sequences), it is paradoxically more developed and self-contained than anything to be found in *Vertigo* or *North by Northwest*. Working chromatically around the key of D minor, the twelve-bar theme starts off in E-flat minor, modulates to E minor, and finally ends up on an F beneath which a form of the Hitchcock chord can be heard alternating with another chord, thus acting, as I have already suggested, as a point of return as well as a point of departure. Unlike *Vertigo's* love theme, which appears throughout the film and is linked to a very specific element of the narrative, the "*Psycho* Theme" remains an inseparable part of the Prelude music and is heard only within that context when it appears twice more during the first third of the film. In contrast, the Hitchcock chord and arpeggiated figure from *Vertigo's* Prelude return only for a brief eleven seconds during the "Beauty Parlor" sequence towards the end of the film, where a close-up of Kim Novak's face suggests the opening shot of *Vertigo's* abstract title sequence. As far as *Psycho's* Prelude is concerned, one has the impression that the limiting of its reappearances, in various forms and with or without the "theme," to the first third of the picture—the last time it shows up is as a brief snippet starting with the figure in Example 11 as the detective Arbogast (Martin Balsam) begins his search—corresponds with the "red herring" nature of the film's initial action. For while the *Psycho* Prelude has a much more ominous cast to it than *North by Northwest's*, like the latter its fast moving, frenetic pace also suggests the flight and pursuit that are what the opening of *Psycho* seems to be about. Once the shower scene abruptly changes that impression, the remaining music takes on a much more static quality and the Prelude is forgotten—save in the brief Arbogast cue—except in the subtlest of ways, including the occasional appearance of forms of the Hitchcock chord.

IV

The following additional observations, presented in no particular order, are to my mind among the more important of the many that can be made concerning the music in *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho*:

1) It has been remarked often enough that Herrmann's music for *Psycho* offers a rare example of a film score composed for strings alone.¹⁹ As composer/musicologist Fred Steiner has noted, "such a device imposes strict limits on the available range of tone colors."²⁰ A

quotation Steiner gives from a Herrmann interview shows that the composer obviously intended the restriction of tonal color as a musical equivalent of Hitchcock's exclusion of spectrum colors in favor of blacks, whites, and all the various greys in between: "I felt that I was able to complement the black and white photography of the film with a black and white sound."²¹ If, as Steiner points out, the use of black-and-white photography and of strings-only music can actually be considered as enhancing the expressive potential rather than limiting it, the music and photography also have the effect of giving the audience even fewer than the usual number of links with "normal" reality onto which to grasp, since *Psycho* offers neither the usual array of colors associated with everyday objects (and it must be remembered that, by this point in film history, more and more Hollywood films were being shot in color—*Psycho* was Hitchcock's last black-and-white film, and only the second one since *I Confess* in 1952) nor the usual diversity of instruments of the symphony orchestra in general and the film-score orchestra in particular.

2) Another way in which *Psycho* cuts its audience off from normal reality is by its total avoidance of "source" music. The absence of any music coming over a radio, phonograph, or what have you, has the function of heightening the effect of the film-music convention whereby the appearance of soundtrack (as opposed to source) music generally "means" that something out of the ordinary is happening or is about to happen. Since *Psycho* has no source music, the appearance of *any* music tends to heighten expectations. This sets *Psycho* apart from the much more open *North by Northwest*, which not only makes spectacular use of large orchestral forces, it also contains a substantial amount of source music. Indeed, *North by Northwest*'s first, post-title musical cue is cocktail-lounge music played on violin and piano in the Plaza Hotel. As it happens, this particular song, the McHugh/Adamson "It's a Most Unusual Day," serves as an ironically light-hearted presage of things to come. More noteworthy, however, is the ambiguous way in which apparent source music slips into apparent soundtrack music at the very moment the love affair between Thornhill (Gary Grant) and Eve (Eva Marie Saint) begins to get steamy. As soon as Thornhill enters the dining car on the 20th Century Limited, we hear an innocuous piece of background music by Andre Previn entitled "Fashion Show," which MGM undoubtedly dug up out of its own vaults (probably from the 1957, Previn-scored *Designing Woman*), since it is the type of music Herrmann steadfastly refused to write. The audience's impression is undoubtedly that this is background music being piped into the dining car to create a relaxing ambience, and it is, in fact, allowed to run for three and a half minutes to its end

as Eve and Thornhill talk. Coincidentally, however, the Previn music concludes shortly after Eve “unmasks” Thornhill and begins to openly suggest that they spend the night together. A five-second break occurs during the following dialogue:

Eve: And I don't particularly like the book I've started.

Thornhill: Ah.

Eve: You know what I mean?

Then, as Thornhill begins his next line (“Oh, let me think.”), we hear for the first time the love theme, composed by Herrmann. (Typical of the film/music industry is the fact that the love theme is indicated on the cue sheet as “Song from North by Northwest” and is even assigned a different publisher from the rest of the score.) In fact, both the Previn and the Herrmann cues are soundtrack music that *can* be considered as source music, given the manner in which they are presented. But both the musical quality of the Previn cue and its use in the sequence to back up preliminary small talk cause us to perceive it as source music linked with the prosaic realities of train travel. The more lyrical nature and the chromatic modulations of Herrmann's love theme, and the association of it in the sequence with the warming up of Eve and Thornhill's liaison, cause us to associate it with the calmer irrationalities of sexual love and therefore to *feel* the cue as soundtrack music that will undoubtedly reappear in subsequent love scenes, which in fact it will.

But it is *Vertigo* that has the farthest-reaching implications in the relationship established between source and soundtrack music. Unlike *North by Northwest* and *Psycho*, *Vertigo* opens with *three* segued musical cues: the Prelude, the Rooftop, and a work of “classical” music that Midge (Barbara Bel Geddes) has playing on her phonograph as she and Scottie (James Stewart) discuss the consequences of the rooftop incident, during which a police officer has fallen to his death because of Scottie's vertigo. As can be seen, the final of these three cues is an obvious example of source music,²² identified in at least one article as the Mozart symphony heard further on in the film, and indicated in the script as Vivaldi. In fact, the source music is the second movement of an obscure Sinfonia in E-flat, Op. 9, no. 2, composed around 1775 by Johann Christian Bach, the youngest of Johann Sebastian's many sons. Although the change in setting from the rooftop sequence to Midge's apartment carries the audience out of nightmarish irrationality—and a totally athenatic musical accompaniment—into a world of order that includes the classical strains from J. C. Bach's Sinfonia, the C-minor key of that work's second movement provides at least one link with the preceding sequence. More important, however, is Scottie's rejection of that music: shortly after peevishly telling his

ex-fiancée, “Midge, don’t be so motherly. I’m not going to crack up,” Scottie asks her to turn off the phonograph, which she does.

The gesture seems innocuous enough; yet it is symptomatic of Scottie’s refusal to accept the normal world, or even one of the better examples of music it has to offer. Even this early in the film, Hitchcock and Herrmann are able to take advantage of the soundtrack-music-versus-source-music opposition as one of the delineating factors in the on-going give-and-take between the irrational and the rational. This delineation is stressed in an even more pointed—and poignant—fashion in the two sequences that open the second half of *Vertigo* (following the apparent death of Madeleine and the inquest scene). The first of these two sequences begins with a shot of Scottie at Madeleine’s grave; this is followed by a dramatic, overhead shot of Scottie lying in bed. Playing behind these two shots, a soft version of the love theme communicates Scottie’s obsession for the dead Madeleine. It is indicative of the *musical* nature of Hitchcock’s cinematic style that the nightmare sequence that follows is foreshadowed more strongly by the camerawork than by the music per se: the overhead shot of Scottie lying in bed suggests the nightmare to follow by creating a quasi-musical sense of anticipation, not only because of the bizarre point of view it gives us of an ordinary scene but also because the looking-down-from-above perspective has already become an integral part, and therefore a visual theme of sorts, of the two previous sequences leading to death (the police officer’s and Madeleine’s). The ensuing nightmare sequence, which is accompanied on the soundtrack by Herrmann’s grotesque reworking of the habanera (Carlotta) theme, thus acts as a darker parallel of the film’s initial (rooftop) “nightmare.”

Similarly, the post-nightmare sequence, which takes place in a sanatorium room with Midge trying to bring Scottie back from the depths of complete depression, gives a more somber parallel of the initial Scottie-Midge sequence discussed above. Here, however, there is a short break between the nightmare and the classical music, which has changed from J. C. Bach to the second movement (which is in the key of F major) from Mozart’s Symphony No. 34 in C (1780). This piece is *deliberately* played on a phonograph, as of the first shot within the sanatorium room, by Midge in an effort to use it as therapy to bring Scottie back to rationality.²³ Unlike the first Scottie-Midge sequence, where the classical music remained a casual part of the overall ambience of everyday order (which Scottie nonetheless rejects), here it plays an active role, in a setting that suggests irrationality, in the attempts of the film’s most normal character (Midge) to restore rationality. Scottie’s rejection of her—he remains totally impassive and im-

mobile throughout the sanatorium sequence—indicates an even deeper alienation because of the marked jump forward in musical quality from the J. C. Bach *Sinfonia* to the Mozart Symphony. Interestingly, the soundtrack music picks up again in the low strings with the final, long shot of Midge (the only point in *Vertigo* where the *soundtrack* score *begins* with her in frame, and only the second time in the film where it is heard with her at all) at the end of the sanatorium corridor, signaling the departure of this bastion of the everyday from the film, and then continues, after a brief interlude in strings and harp, with a wistful version of the love theme as Scottie seeks “Madeleine” in San Francisco. The whole way in which “present” source music is contrasted with off-screen soundtrack music in *Vertigo* seems almost to be a comment on the function of film music in general: this “invisible” music that film audiences have always accepted as an integral part of the movies is almost always associated with the invisible, the bigger-than-life side of what transpires within the filmic narrative. And when we have a character such as *Vertigo*’s Scottie Ferguson who is tragically attracted to what *is not*, then even Mozart and Johann Christian Bach are powerless to pull him out of the world, whether love or nightmare, that is reserved for the soundtrack score.

3) The love music in *Vertigo* certainly stands as one of the outstanding components of this remarkable score, which I would consider as the greatest film score ever composed. Donald Spoto even makes a comparison between Herrmann’s love music and the “*Liebested*” from Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*.²⁴ Herrmann’s outrageous statement that he would have cast Charles Boyer in the lead role and set the film in sultry New Orleans (see “Interview”) shows the importance he attributed to *Vertigo*’s love element. Yet, with his feeling for nuance that particularly characterizes his Hitchcock collaborations, Herrmann does not immediately pull out all the stops. The first time Scottie sees “Madeleine” in the film, the score introduces a secondary theme (Madeleine’s theme) which, while suggesting the love theme, remains much more restrained in its mid-range instrumentation and more closely knit melodic line. A similar use of a subordinate musical theme can be noted in *Spellbound*: the first time Gregory Peck sees Ingrid Bergman, it is not Miklós Rózsa’s famous love theme from that picture that we hear on the soundtrack, but rather a much tamer, but nonetheless lyrical, theme. In *Vertigo*, it is Madeleine’s theme that is heard, along with the habanera, throughout Scottie’s first encounters with her, including her jump into San Francisco Bay. It is only as the couple is driving to the Sequoia forest that the love theme appears for the first time. Once the latter fully blooms later on, however,

Madeleine's theme is ingeniously incorporated into it as a second phase of the melody.

One of the most striking uses of Madeleine's theme, however, does not occur in *Vertigo* but in *North by Northwest*. Following the famous cornfield sequence (for which there is no music, save at the very end), Thornhill traces Eve to her hotel room. As she opens the door and sees Thornhill, the soundtrack music starts with *North by Northwest's* love theme. The motivic nature of this theme, however, allows Madeleine's theme, in the same, mid-range and low-string instrumentation and same key as when it is first heard in *Vertigo*, to suddenly take over. If this seems like little more than a simple tie-over from one film to the next, it should be remembered that *Vertigo* contains a very similar scene. When, after the sanatorium sequence, Scottie sees Judy Barton (also Kim Novak, who has played the role of Madeleine in the film's first half), he follows her back to her hotel room. Although the latter sequence has no music, Judy and Eve find themselves in the identical situation of having to conceal their surprise upon seeing, at their hotel-room door, the man they had helped set up. Herrmann's revival of the Madeleine theme in *North by Northwest* both stresses the parallel between the two scenes and the similarity between the two heroines. *North by Northwest's* love theme, on the other hand, never takes on the intensity of *Vertigo's*, since the Eve/Thornhill love never acquires the quality of the fatalistic obsession of the Scottie/Madeleine love.

4) Another carry over from *Vertigo* to *North by Northwest* is the highly dissonant, bitonal chord first heard in *Vertigo* (along with frenetic harp glissandi) during the subjective shot as Scottie, hanging onto a gutter, looks down many stories to the street below. The chord later reappears in the two tower scenes and in the nightmare sequence:

EXAMPLE 13



(It should be noted that this chord is not only bitonal but also bimodal, since its component chords are a D-major triad superimposed over an E-flat-minor triad. Here again, Herrmann's harmonic language simultaneously suggests major and minor, although in a somewhat different way from what we have already seen.) In *North by Northwest*, this identical chord is played, minus the harp glissandi but in an obviously parallel situation, as Thornhill hangs onto a Mount Rushmore ledge

with one hand and onto Eve with the other. Furthermore, the brass unison that slowly rises in octave steps as Leonard (Martin Landau) steps on Thornhill's hand somewhat recalls the one-octave descents that repeat on different pitches in the brass over a chromatic ostinato during the first part of *Vertigo's* rooftop sequence. Also, as I have suggested elsewhere,²⁵ one wonders whether the Spanish flavor of *North by Northwest's* Overture and of certain reappearances of music from it was not at least unconsciously inspired by the Hispanic implications of the Carlotta Valdez element of *Vertigo's* narrative and the habanera Herrmann devised for it. It might also be noted that one of *North by Northwest's* prominent motives, a slow, moody succession of descending triplets first heard during the kidnapping sequence at the film's outset and generally associated with Van Damm, the chief villain (James Mason), and his deeds, makes a brief, earlier appearance in Herrmann's score for Nicholas Ray's 1951 *On Dangerous Ground*.

5) If, as I have already mentioned, the general tendency of Herrmann's motives and occasional themes is to move downward, both the *Vertigo* and *Psycho* scores contain prominent passages of parallel upward *and* downward movement (which, paradoxically, can be elaborated only in the music's horizontal movement) as well as passages of mirrored, contrary motion. In terms of the affective impact on the listener, the effect would seem to be quite similar to that of the major/minor ambiguity that has already been observed. In *Vertigo's* opening motive (see Example 8), the down-up motion of the top line is opposed by the up-down motion of the bottom. In the ensuing rooftop sequence, the chromatic string ostinato that runs beneath the brass octaves keeps the triplet figuration (considerably sped up) and presents a mirrored, up-down motion. The relationship between this type of up-down tension and *Vertigo's* narrative and structures should be apparent. As an example of the former, the vertigo represents, as Robin Wood has noted, both a fear of falling and a desire to fall.²⁶ Structurally, as Wood also suggests, this conflict is inherent in the simultaneous zoom-in, track-out shot Hitchcock uses to communicate Scottie's vertigo subjectively. In *Psycho*, the whole film can ultimately be seen as a series of descents (from Marion's compromised position in her love affair—the opening hotel-room shot even shows her lying down with John Gavin's torso towering over her—and her stealing of the money to the sinking of her car in the quicksand) counterbalanced by attempts, figurative or otherwise, to rise again (Marion's termination of the sexual trysts, her repentance over the stolen money, the final resurfacing of the car from the swamp, not to mention the psychologist's bringing of everything into the "light" of psychoanalytic rationality). The ambiguity of meaning in the raising of the car is

expressed both by the brief appearance of the mummified face and by the dramatic drop (a minor ninth) of the final note in the three-note motive (see below, Example 15) heard for the last time just before the score's final chord. That bitonal, final chord (see Example 12), then, transfers the ambiguity to the vertical simultaneity inherent in chordal structure.

If, in *Psycho*, the score and the filmic structure and narrative tend to go their separate ways in suggesting descent and ascent, there is one striking example where music and cinematic movement complement each other in a manner that in certain ways sums up the entire Herrmann/Hitchcock music/movie relationship. In the sequence where Lila climbs the hill towards the imposingly gothic house where she hopes to find Mrs. Bates, Hitchcock, using cross-cutting, alternates objective shots of Lila with subjective shots (her point of view) of the house. At the same time, the camera continues to track in towards the house, which becomes larger and larger in the frame (ultimately being replaced by the front door) and back from Lila in the objective shots (which might be said to represent the house's point of view!), thus bringing closer and closer together the house and the person the audience is certain will be the next victim there. On the music track, Herrmann starts with a sustained F in the violins over another sustained F four octaves lower in the cellos and basses. Just above the bass note, the cellos (later the violas) play a four-note motive that rises a semitone at the end. Herrmann then proceeds to slowly bring down the violin line in half steps while, in contrary motion, the bass line and the four-note motive rise in half-steps:

EXAMPLE 14

etc.

This sequence repeats a total of twenty-four times during the fifty-two-second “Hill” cue until the violins and the first notes of the motive both reach a common F-sharp as Lila and the house also come together. The music then “resolves” on—what else—a D-A-sharp-F-sharp chord—the Hitchcock chord minus the root. Once again, what Hitchcock accomplishes in the horizontal movement of the editing

Herrmann suggests more vertically thanks to the simultaneity afforded by the textures of Example 14.

In a totally different vein, Herrmann uses a rising, chromatic sequence in a *North by Northwest* cue to almost satirize this often abused staple of the film-music language. Thornhill and his mother (Jesse Royce Landis) find themselves in an elevator filled with people, including the two heavies who are out to get Thornhill. As the elevator *descends*, Herrmann almost impudently *raises* an octave leap, repeated four times in the violins, a half step upward some six times, creating a classic film music suspense sound that leaves the audience expecting the worst. Instead, the music abruptly cuts off on a chord as Thornhill's mother sarcastically asks the heavies, "You gentlemen aren't *really* trying to kill my son, are you?" Hitchcock's ironic comment on the entire chase-thriller genre is echoed by Bernard Herrmann's comment on the entire chase-thriller-music genre.

6) Finally, the three notes mentioned above as closing *Psycho* form an extremely important motive, which Herrmann has called the *real Psycho* theme, that not only plays an extremely important role in *Psycho* but that also has a strong importance in Herrmann's overall musical vision. First heard during the cue labeled "The Madhouse," during which Marion suggests to Norman that he should perhaps put his mother in a home, this slow-tempo motive is formed of a rising minor seventh and a falling minor ninth, the latter an especially dissonant interval to the Western ear (a rising, minor ninth that opens the last movement of Bruckner's 9th Symphony casts its somber shadow over the entire movement to follow):

EXAMPLE 15



It has been noted by Graham Bruce²⁷ that these three notes represent a distortion of a much calmer motive associated with Marion Crane. Repeated a number of times in a descending, chromatic sequence during the initial hotel-room sequence, this motive likewise contains three notes in a rising-falling pattern; in this case, however, the interval is a very consonant fifth in both directions, thus forming a calm and static figure that begins and ends on the same note. As Bruce indicates, the opposition of these two three-note motives seems to support the line, "We all go a little mad sometimes" and to delineate Norman's madness and Marion's sanity as two sides of the same coin, a characteristic Hitchcock theme. It is also interesting to note, how-

ever, that the “madness” motive has its roots far back in Herrmann’s musical career. One form of it is associated with a generalized violence that follows one man’s attempts to “subdue the beast”: at the very end of Herrmann’s cantata “Moby Dick” (1936–38), a solo clarinet plays an F, rises to a D-flat (a minor sixth rather than a minor seventh) and then gives way to a contrabassoon playing a C below the F (the minor ninth) as Ishmael speaks the line, “And I only am escaped alone to tell all this.” In his 1950 opera, *Wuthering Heights*, Herrmann has the clarinets play a rising minor seventh from E-flat to D-flat but then drop a semi-tone to the C below D-flat, rather than the C below the E-flat, as the servant, Ellen, catches Heathcliff by the arm. She then leads him to a mirror and sings the following:

Do you mark those two lines between your eyes? And those thick brows, that instead of rising, arched, sink in the middle? And that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk, glinting under them, like devil’s spies?²⁸

Such might be a description of Norman Bates. Herrmann, at the end of his career, brought back the motive one final time to suggest how he saw the psychotic “hero” of Martin Scorsese’s 1975 *Taxi Driver*, which was to be the composer’s last film score (*Taxi Driver*, released after the composer’s death, is dedicated to Herrmann’s memory).

V

Psycho was to be the last, great Herrmann/Hitchcock collaboration. For his next film, *The Birds* (1963), Hitchcock, as Taylor points out, “did not want music in the ordinary sense of the term, but with Bernard Herrmann he worked out a complete pattern of evocative sound and ‘silence’ which was then realized in Germany by Remi Gassman and Oskar Sala, specialists in electronic music” (p. 276). In many ways, then, *The Birds* continues the desolate atmosphere of *North by Northwest*’s music-less cornfield sequence, in which Thornhill’s life is threatened by an attack from a flying object (in this case a plane). What “music” there is on *The Birds*’s soundtrack is entirely toneless and seems to be electronically modified bird calls. The one point in the film where “real,” tonal music pops up is the “source music” song sung by the school children just before they are attacked by the birds. The uniqueness of this one appearance of musical normalcy heightens, by contrast, the bleakness and brutality of the irrational atmosphere that hangs over the film. Whether or not Herrmann would have scored the film differently had he been given a chance is uncertain; he appears, however, to have approved of the results and, in an interview, points with some pride to *The Birds* as an electronic score.²⁹

The 1964 *Marnie*, although a continual delight to the Hitchcock buff in its continuation of many of the master of suspense's favorite themes and techniques, remains minor Hitchcock and minor Herrmann. Unlike any of the other Herrmann/Hitchcock collaborations, in fact, *Marnie* is a theme score, with the striking melody, heard as of the title sequence, constantly reappearing, in various guises, throughout the movie. The theme itself, which is strongly foreshadowed in Herrmann's *Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* score, is characterized, harmonically, by a *major* seventh chord that considerably opens up the sound from the Hitchcock chord. Also characteristic of the theme, however, is the use of the whole-step downward sequence that came to be something of a tic during the composer's last decade. Noteworthy is the almost literal reuse of the *Marnie* theme's first period as the main theme for François Truffaut's Hitchcock tribute, *The Bride Wore Black* (1967), the main character of which is also a woman on the wrong side of the law.

By the time Hitchcock reached, in 1966, *Torn Curtain*, his third film for Universal, film music was in the midst of its "pop tune" crisis, whereby studios began to see marketable songs as a profitable spin-off product from their movies. Universal obviously realized that such was not Herrmann's forte, and asked Hitchcock to find a different composer for *Torn Curtain*. According to Taylor, Hitchcock insisted on keeping his long-time composer, attempting, however, to reach a compromise with him in order to get a score that would not make Universal's corporate hair stand on end. One suspects that, had Herrmann come up with music resembling that of his *Marnie* score, there would have been little problem, even though Universal obviously felt that even this music was not marketable. But Herrmann's attitude had always been, "If you don't like my music, get another composer." He apparently—and quite rightly—saw *Torn Curtain* as a film that justified neither the pop-tune approach nor the type of John Addison-scored fluff it finally ended up with. And so, for the first time in his Hitchcock collaborations, the composer turned (perhaps somewhat spitefully) to an outrageous, but quite effective, orchestration, eliminating altogether the violins and violas in favor of the more "iron-curtain" sound of twelve flutes of various types. Herrmann also called for a beefed-up brass section that included sixteen horns, nine trombones, and two tubas! When it came time to record the score, Hitchcock, according to Taylor, sat through the first two cues and then stormed away, thus ending perhaps the most fruitful director/composer collaboration the cinema has yet seen.

Like the film itself, Herrmann's music, although occasionally exciting, reveals little of the expert tautness that marks the trilogy of

Vertigo, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho*, not to mention many portions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*; nor is there the lightness of touch that makes *The Trouble with Harry* a minor masterpiece. Following *Torn Curtain*, Herrmann was picked up by the same French director, Truffaut, who was one of many non-American film people to recognize the true artistic stature of Alfred Hitchcock well before the latter came to be taken seriously in American circles. And at the very end of his career, Herrmann was “rediscovered,” much to his delight, by a new generation of American directors, in particular Brian De Palma and Martin Scorsese. The composer’s last efforts include several highs—especially the two Truffaut collaborations and De Palma’s *Sisters* (but not, in my opinion, the latter’s *Obsession*)—and a few lows as well, including *Twisted Nerve* and *The Battle of Neretva*. As for the post-*Psycho* Hitchcock, perhaps only in the 1972 *Frenzy* did the director regain something of his lost form; and even here, one must regret the Ron Goodwin music that replaced an apparently far more interesting Henry Mancini score that suffered the same fate as Herrmann’s *Torn Curtain*.

VI

It is obvious that one thing that inspired Bernard Herrmann to produce his Hitchcock masterpieces was the director’s obvious sensitivity to music in general and to the film-score/film relationship in particular, a fact that Herrmann himself has admitted. Even Hitchcock films that do not contain notable scores reveal such nice touches as the song-writer’s tune that is not completed until the resolution of *Rear Window*’s mysteries. In the same way that the Hitchcock style carries his suspense thrillers well beyond the usual limitations of the genre, his use of music carried the film score past many of the established Hollywood conventions towards becoming, in many different respects, an integral part of his films. The rapport that the director came to establish with Bernard Herrmann showed that Hitchcock was not seeking the type of one-for-one relationship between music and filmic action that one finds in many movies. Instead of the more operatic relationships one finds within older cinema, in which film and music tend to move much more in sync with each other, Hitchcock sought a music that expressed in its own aesthetic terms what the filmic style was expressing in its particular manner. The general lack of direct interference between film and music in the Herrmann/Hitchcock collaborations allows the full communication of the deepest strata each art has to offer.

In order to reach this point, Herrmann had to find a compromise between the “Mickey Mouse” techniques of one-for-one scoring and

the standard musical forms, the elaboration of which would have clashed with Hitchcock's precise cinematic developments. Herrmann accomplished this in particular through a continuing reliance on the "short phrase," through his proven skill at manipulating instrumental color, and most especially through his creation of a particular *harmonic* language that in many ways offers the vertical image of Hitchcock's horizontally elaborated vision. What might be called the musical intertextuality—the various harmonic and motivic carry-overs from one Herrmann/Hitchcock film to the next—offers one proof of the broader, more generalized emotional levels aimed at by Herrmann. Indeed, when I asked the composer whether, in *Vertigo*, he would have composed a different score more suited to the particular voice and style of Vera Miles had that actress taken the role of Madeleine/Judy, as Hitchcock had intended, instead of Kim Novak, he gave a very revealing answer: "No, because the thing was the drive of the emotions" ("Interview," p. 67). But what Herrmann aimed at was not just emotion per se, as did so many earlier composers with their big themes, but rather the channeled kinds of emotions engendered by the *oeuvre* of a particular creative artist with whose work prolonged acquaintance allowed him to identify. The specifics of each individual film, however, allowed each score to take on its own character.

Ultimately, what makes the greatness of the Herrmann/Hitchcock scores is that the musical solutions Herrmann came up with for Hitchcock's particular brand of cinema seem in many ways to be the only ones possible. For a director primarily concerned with showing the eruptions of the irrational, potential and otherwise, within the context of a solidly established ethos, perhaps the only thing to do was to take the triadally oriented harmonic system familiar to listeners within that ethos and, while using it as an ever-present base, turn it against itself. In one of his supreme moments as a film composer, Herrmann musically brought to the surface, in his famous music to accompany the *Psycho* shower scene, the subliminal pulse of violence which, in 1960, still lay beneath the surface of American society. With his violins first building up a jarring chord in descending, major sevenths and then returning in screeching, upward glissandi, Herrmann reminds us of Thomas Mann's fictional Adrian Leverkühn using vocal glissandi in his *Apocalypse*. Describing the latter work, the narrator of *Dr. Faustus* reminds us that "ordering and normalizing the notes was the condition and first self-manifestation of what we understand by music. Stuck there, so to speak, a naturalistic atavism, a barbaric rudiment from pre-musical days, is the gliding voice, the glissando . . . ; certainly, these images of terror offer a most tempting and at the same time most legitimate occasion for the employing of that savage device."³⁰

So perfect does Herrmann's solution seem that it has been widely imitated in post-*Psycho* films that express the actual upheaval of which Hitchcock's film was the presage. As Brian De Palma, who brings in snippets of the *Psycho* score in his 1976 film *Carrie*, has put it, "we used a lot of the *Psycho* violins when we were screening the film before it had a score. We found it very effective, and we couldn't find anything better. Consequently, when we recorded the score, we recorded something very similar to that violin sound. It's a great sound, probably one of the best in cinema. So, thank you, Benny Herrmann."³¹

A Discography of Herrmann/Hitchcock Scores

All scores are conducted by Herrmann unless otherwise noted:

1. *Vertigo*. Muir Mathieson, cond. Mercury MG 20384 (out of print). Reissued on Mercury Golden Imports SRI 75117.
2. "Music from the Great Movie Thrillers" (excerpts from *The Trouble with Harry*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *Psycho*, and *Marnie*). With the London Philharmonic Orchestra. London Phase 4 SP 44126.
3. *Marnie*. Sound/Stage Recordings (pirate label) 2306.
4. *Psycho*. With the National Philharmonic Orchestra. Unicorn RHS 336; reissued on Unicorn 75001 (out of print).
5. *Torn Curtain*. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Elmer Bernstein, cond. Filmmusic Collection FMC-10; also issued on Warner Brothers BSK 3185 (out of print).
6. *North by Northwest*. London Studio Symphony Orchestra, Laurie Johnson, cond. Starlog/Varese Sarabande SV-95001(D); also issued on Unicorn/Kanchana DKP 9000.

Excerpts of No. 2 above have been reused on other London Phase 4 recordings devoted to Herrmann's music.

Notes

1. Royal S. Brown, "An Interview with Bernard Herrmann (1911–1975)," *High Fidelity*, 26, no. 9 (September 1976), 65. Hereafter referred to as "Interview."
2. Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 222–23.
3. This fact has been documented by James Naremore in his *Filmguide to Psycho* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 22. It has also been brought up by John Russell Taylor in his *Hitch: The Life and Times of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Pantheon, 1978; rpt. New York: Berkeley, 1980), p. 264.
4. William Fleming, *Art and Ideas* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1955), pp. 33–34.
5. See Brian De Palma, "Murder by Moog: Scoring the Chill," *The Village Voice*, 11 October 1973, p. 85; rpt. as "Remembering Herrmann," *Take One*, 5, no. 2 (May 1976), 40–41; 39.
6. Oliver Daniel, "A Perspective of Herrmann," *Saturday Review*, 51, no. 28 (13 July 1968), 49.
7. Oliver Goldsmith, from a letter dated 16 March 1977 and sent to Dr. Harry M. McCraw of the University of Southern Mississippi.
8. See Herrmann's brief comments on the album jacket for "Music from the Great Movie Thrillers" (see Discography).

9. Since the score for *The Trouble with Harry* was unavailable to me, I can only assume from listening to the recording and the film soundtrack that the keys and the notation in general are as I have mentioned. In all cases, however, I have used accidentals rather than giving a key signature, as this corresponds to Herrmann's practice. In this paper, examples 1–5, 7A, 7B, and 14 were all obtained by listening; other examples from Herrmann's music come from the scores themselves or from quotations of these scores in various articles and books.
10. Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, 1969), p. 848.
11. Roger Sessions, "The New Musical Horizon," *Modern Music*, 14, no. 2 (January/February 1937), 59–66; rpt. in *Roger Sessions on Music, Collected Essays*, ed. Edward T. Cone (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 47.
12. See my "Music and *Vivre sa vie*," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 5, no. 3 (Summer 1980), 319–33.
13. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked, Introduction to a Science of Mythology: I*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 16.
14. Whether by accident or design, the first name of the character played by James Stewart in this film that climaxes in the "Storm Cloud Cantata" is Benjamin.
15. In 1962, Herrmann did the music for a third Henry King film, *Tender Is the Night*, eight years after his last King collaboration. François Truffaut later used the composer for two successive films, *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Bride Wore Black*. It is quite probable that Herrmann would have become the official suspense-film composer for Brian De Palma who, after *Sisters* and *Obsession* (both Hitchcock tributes), would have involved the composer in *Carrie*; Herrmann's death in December 1975 cut short the fruition of that potential tandem.
16. For purposes of royalties and copyright, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (A.S.C.A.P.) keeps on file a complete breakdown, with precise timings, of every single musical cue heard in any manner in the final cut of a given film. Even Cary Grant's mumbled few seconds from the Lerner/Loewe "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face" are listed on the *North by Northwest* cue sheet.
17. Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music, A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Films* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1977), p. 138.
18. The tempo used in the film—quarter note = 160—is considerably faster than what one hears on the recording—quarter note = 132—although the composer conducts in all cases.
19. Another interesting experiment in the limiting of instrumental color can be noted in the David Snell music for Robert Montgomery's 1942 mystery thriller, *Lady in the Lake*. Using a Christmas carol as a point of departure, Snell scored *Lady in the Lake* for a vocalizing, a cappella chorus, while Montgomery tried the unusual experiment of deploying an entirely subjective camera throughout the film.
20. Fred Steiner, "Herrmann's 'Black and White' Music for Hitchcock's *Psycho*," *Film Music Notebook*, 1, no. 1 (Fall 1974), 28–36 (Part I), and 1, no. 2 (Winter 1974–75), 26–46 (Part II). The quotation is from Part I, p. 31.
21. *Ibid.*, Part I, p. 32. The interview quoted is Leslie Zador, "Movie Music's Man of the Moment," *Coast FM and Fine Arts*, June 1971, p. 31.
22. The paradox here is that the J. C. Bach work was actually performed by the studio orchestra, conducted by Muir Mathieson, who takes it at a rather fast pace, and

- “laid in” on the soundtrack. It becomes source music only by association (with the phonograph) and not in fact.
23. Like the J. C. Bach work in the initial Scottie-Midge sequence, the Mozart here is performed at rather too fast a tempo, leading one to wonder whether or not there was a deliberate intention on someone’s part—Hitchcock’s, Herrmann’s, or perhaps even conductor Muir Mathieson’s—to throw the audience slightly off center in this manner.
 24. Donald Spoto, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock: Fifty Years of His Motion Pictures* (New York: Hopkinson and Blake, 1976), p. 299.
 25. See my “North by Northwest by Hitchcock by Herrmann,” *Fanfare*, 3, no. 6 (July/August 1980), 12–15.
 26. Robin Wood, *Hitchcock’s Films* (London/New York: A. Zwemmer/ A. S. Barnes, 1965), p. 74.
 27. Graham Bruce, who teaches at the College of Advanced Education in Queensland, Australia, is preparing a doctoral dissertation for New York University on the film music of Bernard Herrmann. The idea mentioned here is contained in a rough draft of his chapter on *Psycho*.
 28. From the libretto adapted from the Emily Brontë novel by Lucille Fletcher, included in the recording by Unicorn Records, UNB 400, p. 21.
 29. See Irwin Bazelon, *Knowing the Score: Notes on Film Music* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975), p. 234.
 30. Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus, The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 374.
 31. Royal S. Brown, “Considering De Palma,” *American Film*, 2, no. 9 (July/August 1977), 58.

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