



PSYCHO

Bernard Herrmann (1960)



POINTS OF INTEREST:

- How the music creates tension and horror
- How the limited orchestration is fully exploited
- How the music reflects the on screen action
- Modernist as opposed to Romantic style of composition (American vs European influence).

'PRELUDE', 'THE CITY', 'MARION', 'THE MURDER (SHOWER SCENE)', 'THE TOYS', 'THE CELLAR', 'DISCOVERY', 'FINALE'

HARMONY AND TONALITY:

- Avoids traditional tonal centres and keys
- Atonality in Murder and Finale
- Basically tonal in Marion.
- Highly dissonant and chromatic harmony
- Chords used for the sound, rather than for the tonality.
- Non-functional harmony
- 'Hitchcock' chord (minor chord with added major 7th)
- Complex vs conventional harmony
- Chord clusters
- Augmented 4th chords
- Diminished 7th and half diminished chords
- Parallel chord movement

TEXTURE:

- Varied string textures
- Ostinato textures
- Monophonic, homophonic, homorhythmic, polyphonic and fugal can be found at different points.

CONTEXT:

- Herrmann: Conductor and composer often associated with films by Alfred Hitchcock. Other films include 'Vertigo' and 'North by Northwest'
- Born in New York, he had a varied and Modernist influence in composing.
- Insisted on artistic freedom in his music for film. Orchestrated his own scores in a detailed way.
- Broke the mould of previous film scoring style: atonality, dissonance, ostinati and leitmotifs.

RHYTHM, METRE AND TEMPO:

- Tempi chosen for each cue matches the moods/psychological intentions.
- Incessant quaver movement, syncopation, downbow accents, rhythmic displacement, moto perpetuo in faster cues.
- Use of augmentation of Marion's theme in 'Toys'.

MELODY:

- Uses repetition and sequence to develop longer melodic structures from motifs..
- The Steiner motive: upwards semitone figure. Used as an ostinato, doubled and inverted, augmented and inverted, as a verticalisation (chord) in the bass.
- Fugal texture in 'Cellar' uses an 8 bar subject and 2 countersubjects.

SONORITY:

- Uses only orchestral string section.
- Conventional 5 part string section: 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass.
- Strings play con sordino (muted) for entire film apart from shower scene.
- Various string textures:
- Hammered chords
- Pizzicato
- Fingered tremolo
- Octave doublings (lush Romantic style)
- Shrieking, extreme ranges, sffz

STRUCTURE:

- Use of leitmotif unifies musical cues.
- Extension of Wagnerian model: develops leitmotif rhythmically, melodically, harmonically and texturally.
- Despite modernist influence, often uses balanced phrasing of 2,4 and 8 bar units.