

# Music

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*The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.*



Movies have always been a form of entertainment for the last century. Whether they were used as educational or for purely entertainment, they've always had some sort of musical accompaniment. Whether it was pre-recorded or played during the movie at the theater, music has always been there. The real question is why?

Music is defined as vocal or instrumental sounds combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion. Purely through this definition we are able to see what makes music so important to movies. From the beginning of movies such as *Don Juan* (1926) to movies like *Star Wars* (1997) music has become an essential part in eliciting emotions from the viewers.

Music has been around for as long as anyone can remember as a form of entertainment and as a release of emotions. It must be natural for humans to combine two types of entertainment together which gives us music in films.

Originally, movies had no prerecorded sound track or some famous artist performing music for the film. These silent movies had no sound but they did have music. "Movie theatres and other dream palaces provided pianists, Wurlitzers, and other sound machines, and some films were produced with complete musical scores. Most early silents were accompanied with a full-fledged orchestra, organist or pianist to provide musical background and to underscore the narrative on the screen" (Silent) The use of music has always been to help create and lead the story of what was going on in the film it was also used for a more practical reason; it "helped mask unwanted noise from the projector and street, in rooms lacking soundproofing" (Kaets). In the [the lions cage](#) scene from Charlie Chaplin's *The Circus* (1928) you are able to hear the orchestra at the theater playing music in the background to give the scene emotion.

Eventually music and sound effects became prerecorded. *Don Juan* (1926) "was the first Vitaphone feature film in which music and sound effects were integrated into the film action" (Feaster). This film was not, however, as successful as they had hoped.

*The Jazz Singer* (1927) was the first movie with recorded sound. "Warners' risky investment of a half million dollars with Western Electric in the Vitaphone sound system brought profits of \$3.5 million at the box-office with this landmark talkie. It was a huge success, responsible for transforming Warners into Hollywood's hottest film factory. The commercialization of sound-on-film, and the transformation of the



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Photo Credit: Screen capture from *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

industry from silent films to talkies became a reality with the success of this film." Due to the overall success of this movie, we now have the films we have today with prerecorded sound tracks. Due to music in movies we have scenes like [the end of all things](#) scene from *Lord of the Rings* (2003) that are able to depict the tone of the film and gives the sense of hope to the viewers.

When one goes to a movie, it is expected that there will be some sort of soundtrack that accompanies the movie. Whether the music is part of the scene or some kind of background music, it is always there. It has become such a usual occurrence that we don't really realize it is just background music playing for the viewer; not for the actors on the set. The real question is why? Why is music played during movies?

As Feiles explains, "Music unquestionably affects our mood. We tend to listen to music that reflects our mood." Producers tend to choose music that fits with the scene. They would not put funny music into a scene where someone had died. It would not fit with the emotions that they are trying to create and make the viewer feel during their experience.

According to Hillary Schaefer, studies have been conducted where one group would watch a scene with music while another group listens to the sound track of a scene and describes what is going on in a scene. Through studies such as these, it is clear that the use of different types of sound can cause different emotions. For example, why do scary movies music frighten us so much? A study conducted had shown that there is "a connection between horror movie music and the screeches of young frightened animals. Researchers believe there are biologically-ingrained reasons why sudden, dissonant sounds and minor chords make us apprehensive" (Haggins). The show *Brain Games: Don't be Afraid* discussed this very topic; that the high pitch tones are to imitate the sound of babies crying. This sound is a primal instinct of danger for humans. An example of scary music can be found in [this audio track](#).

Music can be used as a story telling device. According to Dennis Costa, music is used to set a time period of a movie with how old or new the music sounds. He also talks about how music can be used to characterize the characters by revealing thoughts and feelings they have at that moment. Th music can also set the overall tone of a scene in general. In this [clip from Star Wars](#) the music has been completely removed. The hope, pride, and happiness is completely taken out of the scene with the loss of music. The scene is now dry and bland, and has an overall comical effect due to the awkwardness of it all. The absence of music can completely ruin a scene which is supposed to end the movie on a hopeful note.

An example of how completely changing the music can change the mode of the scene is [demonstrated in this video](#) which sets the same scene from *The Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003) to different musical scores.

In essence, music has had a long and important role in films; from creating a tone to the movie to effecting the emotions of the viewer. Since the earliest films that had live music performed in the theater to synchronous music in *Don Juan* to the first talked, *The Jazz Singer*, music has made an important part of movies. Music will always be in movies to create a sense of emotional attachment to the film.



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Photo Credit: Screen capture from *The Jazz Singer* (1927)

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