"Adventure is out there!": Pastiche and Postmodernism in the Music of *Up*

Bradley Spiers
Wilfrid Laurier University

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Abstract

Film music scholarship has historically focused its attention between two clear-cut scoring practices; the classical Hollywood score and the popular music score. This study attempts to break that mould by investigating the pluralistic trends found in Michael Giacchino's film score for the film *Up* (2009), examining the motivic growth of specific leitmotif, and charting how that musical theme is set in a variety of musical. Unlike the classical Hollywood scoring model that is outlined by writers like Claudia Gorbman and Jeff Smith, these diverse musical settings pass through a plethora of distinct genres and styles—both "highbrow" and "lowbrow"—that have hitherto been unseen in film music history. These musical settings allow Giacchino to imbue specific leitmotifs with connotation of diverse musical histories, styles and traditions. The ultimate result is a binary system of signification, with the leitmotifs introversively signifying themes and characters within the film's diegesis, while the diverse musical settings extroversively signify sights and sounds in the wider world. By synthesizing diverse musical styles into one musical thread, Giacchino's film scores illustrate the power of music to draw on well-known musical genres from Western culture to enhance audiences' narrative understanding. In this way, Giacchino's work in *Up* straddles inspiration from both the classical and popular Hollywood score, adopting the diverse timbres, styles and aesthetics of the popular score, while still retaining the consistent use and development of a leitmotif that is found in the classical score. I call this new hybridized scoring practice the "pastiche score."

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In his collaborations with Pixar Animation Studios, Michael Giacchino has consistently crafted film scores that reflect a diverse range of musical genres and styles. These works, which include *Up* (2009), *Ratatouille* (2007), and *The Incredibles* (2004), are examples of musical pluralism as they draw on a myriad of musical traditions: from eighteenth century romanticism, to early big band, and contemporary popular styles. Given the large and diverse range of musical genres that Giacchino's film scores manifest, a new postmodern trend in film music can be seen to emerge which draws from a range of styles that has hitherto been unheard of in traditional Hollywood scoring practices. By synthesizing diverse musical styles into one musical thread, Giacchino's scores illustrate the power of music to draw on well-known genres from Western culture to enhance audiences' narrative understanding. This article will explore this musical hybridity by examining how Giacchino's score for the film *Up* reflects diverse musical traditions.

Nota Bene

In film music scholarship, theories of postmodernism have largely remained uncultivated; they are typically referenced in the writings of major film music scholars, but without the terminology that traditionally accompanies the discourse. In Claudia Gorbman's seminal study on film music, *Unheard Melodies*, she writes: "[Music] inflects the narrative with emotive values via cultural music codes. A music cues signification—eerie, pastoral, jazz-sophisticated, romantic—must be instantly recognized as such in order to work."[1] Jeff Smith would later remark in his study, *Sounds of Commerce*, that:

> The romantic idiom continued as an option throughout the fifties, but it no longer wielded as strong an influence as Hollywood composers began to broaden the classical score's range of styles. At one end of the spectrum, strong dissonance, polyphonic textures, modal writing and atonality surfaced more regularly in the works of Bernard Herrman, Miklos Rozsa, Leonard Rosenman and Jerry Goldsmith. At the other end, various jazz and pop elements appear in the scores of David Raksin, Elmer Bernstein, Johnny Mandel and Henry Mancini. And despite a major revival in the Korngold-styled score of John Williams, Romanticism's hold on film scoring was further weakened by the incorporation of rock, folk and soul

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1. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 4.

elements in the 1960s and 1970s, and
electronics, minimalism, and even New Age
elements in the 1980s. By the 1990s,
romantic-styled film music was still being
composed, but it was merely one stylistic
option among many.[2]

Although both Gorbman and Smith do not declare the
presence of postmodernism in Western film scoring practices,
their writing certainly suggests that postmodern trends can be
found. Their focus has, instead, largely rested on two well-
defined scoring practices that have been used in Hollywood
since the sixties: the popular music score and the classical
Hollywood score. I, however, suggest a third option which
accounts for stylistic traits found in both Hollywood scoring
practices: the pastiche score. This option reflects the influence
of postmodern aesthetics on the scoring procedures of
Hollywood, yielding a score that displays a hitherto unseen
diversity and range of musical content.

Giacchino's pastiche scores logically contain elements
from both the popular and classical schools of scoring. On
one hand, Giacchino's motivic use is reminiscent of the
leitmotif technique that is traditionally seen in the classical
Hollywood score. As film scholars have employed the term,
leitmotifs are musical motives associated with characters,
settings, narrative themes, or other filmic ideas. A memorable
leitmotif—such as David Raksin's *Laura* melody, or John
William's *Star Wars* theme—immediately encourages the
audience to recall specific cinematic content that mimics the

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2. Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*
(New York: Colombia University Press, 1998), 7.

theme's initial sounding.[3] On the other hand, the pastiche score also features many staples of the popular music score: the use of song forms, rhythmic and coloristic expressions, melodic functionality (including "blues" notes or pentatonicism), and non-standard timbres. For the most part, these elements pertain less to the actual melodic content of the score, and instead, they are more concerned with *how* those melodies are articulated. While the classical Hollywood model is typically restricted to romantic and contemporary art music genres, the popular music score (and, by extension, the pastiche score) encapsulates most musical traditions: jazz, blues, Latin, rock, funk, and many more. Within the pastiche score, these diverse traditions function fluidly, allowing for a single *leitmotif* to be orchestrated in any number of musical settings. I refer to these "musical setting" as a motif's *framing function*.[4] Although Giacchino's *Up* score features *leitmotifs* that reoccur consistently throughout the film, each reoccurrence of a leitmotif is often articulated using a different *framing function*. As a result, a single melodic unit can be set in a

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3. Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce,* 8. While popular scores utilize a similar device, their thematic organization serves a different purpose; they makes use of riffs and hooks which do not undergo the rigorous variation and development that occurs with a *leitmotif*. Instead, as Smith asserts, they are used to "sell the song" by providing a memorable musical idea that is shaped by economic means.

4. My theory of framing function should not be confused with terms such as orchestration or musical setting. While *orchestration* descriptively describes how a musical work is arranged for performance (for example, its style, instrumentation, rhythm, harmony, tempo, dynamics, etc.), the *framing function* engages in a more egalitarian collaboration with a leitmotif to articulate narrative understanding. Through the use of the framing function, a *leitmotif* can be orchestrated in a diverse array of musical environments.

variety of musical environments, each of which provides the audience with valuable narration.

Although it is tempting to view the *leitmotif* and *framing function* as two autonomous entities, these elements are, in fact, constantly influencing one another. For instance, according to Gorbman, the *leitmotif* acquires meaning because it "absorbs the diegetic associations of its first occurrence."[5] In this sense, every reoccurrence of the *leitmotif* functions as an auditory sign for its original context. By extension of Gorbman's theories, I argue that the nondiegetic framing function of a *leitmotif's* first occurrence will also dictate how we understand subsequent occurrences of that *leitmotif* in different framing functions. This theory emerges from the basic tenets of the primacy effect, which states that items introduced at the beginning of a set are more readily available for recall than the material following it.[6] As a result, the framing function of a *leitmotif's* first statement will always provide the maximum signification to that initial diegesis; it functions as "home" for the motif and it is in that context that the theme is most readily understood. I call this first framing function the *primary framing function*. For instance, in Giacchino's score for the film, *The Incredibles*, the "glory days" motive (Ex. 1) is heard at the beginning of the film and becomes associated with the driving jazz-rock rhythm of its initial statement. This becomes the film's *primary framing function*. Although the "glory days" motive does reoccur throughout the film in different framing function—such as

5. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 26-27.

6. David Bordwell, "Minding Movies," *Observation on Film Art* (blog) (March 5, 2008) http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=2004.

when it is stated in an Afro-Cuban jazz or Western classical style—these statements function as only subtle references and it is only in the context of 1960s big band style that the theme is able to most fully signify its initial diegesis.[7]

Example 1: "The Glory Days" Motif

The basic *leitmotif* and *framing function* dichotomy is a reflection of two distinct sign systems: one looking inward to themes and ideas embedded in the score, while the other looks outward to sounds that take root in external reality. As Mark Slobin has previously examined in his collection *Global Soundtracks*, these two sign systems are based on the theories of introversive and extroversive semiotics.[8] The *leitmotif* functions as an introversive sign, signifying "sounds that point to other sounds or musical events within the work

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7. In many cases *leitmotif*s will often have implied contexts where specific musical elements are demonstrative of genre—whether these are a specific mode or scale, a chordal implication or a particular rhythm. For instance, a *leitmotif* that is composed in the jazz tradition might be constructed to imply a certain chord progression or make use of "blues notes." Statements such as these make the implication of genre more concrete.

8. Mark Slobin, ed., *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 8.

itself," whereas the framing function is an extroversive sign, signifying sights and sounds in the external world (typically outside of the film's diegesis).[9] The implied mixing of melody and orchestration allows Giacchino to craft a score that yields almost infinite potential for hybridity, taking diverse styles and genres and removing them from their original context. These assorted musical traditions are used as culturally coded signs supplementing the audience's narrative understanding and creating a score that is most assuredly postmodern.[10] Giacchino uses this hybridization to great effect in his score for the film *Up,* where, restricting himself to only a few *leitmotifs*, he weaves a musical narrative that skillfully augments the viewer's emotional and narrative understanding of the film.

      Up, directed by Pete Doctor, was Giacchino's third score for Pixar and it featured a nostalgic look back to the days of the "fearless" explorers as they traversed the globe and explored exotic lands. The film draws its inspiration from a wide variety of adventure sources: from the early Hollywood adventure serials, to more contemporary exploration works such *Indiana Jones* or *Land of the Lost*. As M. Keith Booker remarks: "*Up* is essentially an entry in the adventure film genre, a sort of eccentric, children's version of the Indiana Jones films, with a dash of The Lost World,

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9. Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 2, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 539-542. Taruskin writes that these basic distinctions began to emerge during the 18th century with "the rise of harmonically governed forms articulated through *thematische Arbeit*."

10. Culturally coded musical signs is here defined as signs that connote themes, settings or elements that are commonly understood in Western culture

thrown in for good measure."[11] Embedded in this action adventure tale are aspects of the melodrama: exploring the idea of love and loss as is demonstrated through several main characters in the film. Musically, Giacchino instills a sense of nostalgia into the score by infusing the work with styles and aesthetics that belong to the generation of Karl and Muntz, the film's geriatric protagonist and antagonist respectively.

The film follows Karl Frederickson, an older man coping with the recent loss of Ellie, his wife of many years. To fulfill both of their dreams, Karl attaches thousands of helium-inflated balloons to his house in order to fly to the exotic land of Paradise Falls (located somewhere in South America). At the same time, Charles Muntz, the discredited explorer/colonizer (and boyhood idol of Karl and Ellie), has become obsessed with finding the elusive giant bird nicknamed Kevin (similar in look and stature to the now extinct moa bird). When Karl and a stowaway, Russell, stumble across the object of Muntz's desire, they are forced to fight their way through the jungle in order to save Kevin and get to Paradise Falls.

11. M. Keith Booker, *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Message of Children's Films* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 110.

Example 2: Ellie's Motif and Muntz's Motif

Musically speaking, almost the entire work is constructed from two main *leitmotifs*: "Ellie's motif" which depicts Karl's relationship with his deceased wife Ellie and "Muntz's motif" which depicts Karl's relationship with Muntz (Ex. 2). Like Giacchino's previous Pixar scores, these motifs are articulated using a variety of musical styles and undergo constant transformation throughout the work.

"Muntz's motif" is the first musical material heard in the work, introduced during the opening title sequence.[12] The first statement of this motive can be heard as the young Karl returns from the theatre, balloon in hand and emulating his

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12. "Composing for Characters," *Up*, DVD, directed by Pete Doctor and Bob Peterson (Burbank: Walt Disney Home Pictures. 2009). "Muntz's motif" is first heard diegetically as source music for the newsreel at the opening. Recorded on a 16mm optical track, the undulating sound interjects a sense of authenticity into the news excerpt. Even though this setting—which, is deeply evocative of early adventure film music such as the Max Steiner score *King Kong* (1933)—is the first instance of Muntz's motif, the sound quality destabilizes the audibility of the theme, making it almost indiscernible for the average listener.

role model, Muntz. The motive, which features a simple construction, emphasizes the ii-V-I harmonic framework that is a staple of jazz and Tin Pan Alley writing. This interpretation is emphasized by its smaller jazz ensemble. The theme is played by the muted trumpet while the saxophone, violin, clarinet, bass, drum set, and a range of other percussion provide accompaniment. This setting provides an allusion to the swing style of the twenties and thirties in an attempt to elicit the experiences and histories of both Karl and Muntz.[13] In this way, the use of jazz becomes part of the nostalgia and melancholy that are seen in those two characters; he uses an older musical style to depict an older generation. In the same way that both characters dwell on the past—Karl grieving for Ellie and Muntz obsessing over his reputation—the jazz setting of the primary framing function provides signification for their own past. The simplicity and innocence of this setting (along with the image of Karl's child-like exuberance) provides the primary framing function for Muntz's theme.

The second major statement of the motive ventures out of the early big band style and instead becomes aligned with the music of the late Romantic era. Occurring after Karl and Russell have been introduced to the explorer (following a

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13. "Interview—Michael Giacchino" [video]. (2009). Retrieved November 1, 2010, from
http://www.filmsnmovies.com/video/4218/up_michael_giacchino; As Giacchino says: "I kept thinking about what styles of music must Karl have lived through in those seventy-eight years. Starting back to the early thirties, which was still pulling from the end of the twenties and moving into some swing stuff, then moving into big bold adventure music. For me, I kept drawing on what are some of the things he enjoyed as he was growing up, and how can incorporate all of these into the film?…"

"misunderstanding" when Muntz's dogs take them prisoner), the new statement of Muntz's motive underscores Karl and Russell's first sight of Muntz's famous airship, "The Spirit of Adventure." In this statement, the jazz-like rhythms of the *leitmotif's* primary framing function are supplanted to highbrow romanticism, marked by dense enveloping harmonies, extensive sequential activity, and large orchestration. The initial piano display, evoking the piano music of composers like Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninoff, features expansive chords (typically spanning several octaves) and elaborate sequential activity: both of which are staples of the late romantic piano concerto. This style can be readily heard in such works as Rachmaninoff's *Variations on a Theme by Paganini,* Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto no. 1* or even Gershwin's *Variations on 'I Got Rhythm.'* "Muntz's motif" now features a sophistication that was not present in the primary framing function. In his book, *Why Classical Music Still Matters*, Laurence Kramer explores how the romantic concerto setting works to sentimentalize a theme. He writes,

> In the Romantic concerto the piano encounters an "objective" expression of feeling in the orchestra and proceeds to make it "subjective"—internal, personal, authentic, deep—by combining it with expressions of response: rippling scales and arpeggios; countermelodies, often in inner voices; enrichments of texture; sensuous chord progressions; changes of harmony. The resulting dialogue is the defining characteristic of the genre. It depends on carefully preserving both the objective and subjective

> perspectives, neither of which is meaningful without the other: the objective lacking meaning, the subjective lacking reference…The genre helps create and uphold the dream, the myth, of a deep subjectivity immune from manipulation or constraint by external force.[14]

Giacchino's use of these "expressions of response" subjectively transforms Muntz's theme around the ideals of piano concerto genre. While the *leitmotif's* primary framing function embodied a simplicity and naivety of youth, this new framing function instead *civilizes* the theme by placing it in a setting that is deeply evocative of high romanticism. Furthermore, this musical union further augments the viewer's narrative understanding, representing Karl's own idealized and matured view of Muntz.

Karl's idealized version of Muntz comes crashing to the ground when the explorer's obsession is revealed. Like the colonialists that Muntz represents, the explorer's disposition turns sour when he learns that Karl and Russell possess the key to locating the giant bird, Kevin. As a result, he turns to lying, treachery, and deceit to overpower the duo and accomplish his goal. Giacchino's score plays a pivotal role in the deconstruction of Muntz's identity, accomplished by distorting the *leitmotif* by changing the framing function. In this setting, the motif is moved to the minor mode, where it is played slowly in haunting low register of the flute. Accompaniment is now provided by an arpegiating

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14. Laurence Kramer, *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2007), 100.

vibraphone and tremolo strings (Ex.3). The dissonance of the framing function creates suspense and tension while providing a foil for both the jazzy primary framing function and the passionate and romantic setting of the previous scene. This anxiety-ridden framing function becomes evocative of the suspenseful scores of Bernard Hermann, playing on the famed composer's use of quiet dynamics, minor modes, and increased dissonance to convey tension and anxiety. As Slobin writes:

> All films are intertextual, meaning any given viewing evokes memories of earlier moviegoing…Music's basic nature of being composed of many different elements—rhythm, tempo, instrumentation, melodic line, tone colour, etc.—allows it to comfortably control levels of transtexuality, from the very hidden to the most blatant quotation.[15]

Using the style and aesthetic of Hermann, arguably the master of the suspense film, Giacchino uses culturally coded signs that have entered into the discourse of film music. The evocation of these styles (along with the psychological response that the suspense score elicits in listeners) twists and distorts Muntz's original theme, and functions as a musical signifier for Muntz's demonization.

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15. Mark Slobin, ed., *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 29.

Nota Bene

Example 3: "The Explorer's Motel," mm. 1-8; Muntz's theme

Muntz's antagonism continues throughout the film and, appropriately, the simple and jazzy setting of the primary framing function is rendered obsolete; it can no longer suitably represent young Karl's admiration for his boyhood hero. Instead, Muntz is stripped of his original theme and dons the role of the primitive.[16] Giacchino underscores this antagonism in the music with common primitivist tropes: heavy use of drums (specifically tom-tom and timpani), angular dissonant harmonies, and unconventional and inconsistent rhythms (all stylistic elicitation of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*). In the end, Muntz's motif undergoes extensive development and the framing function traverses a diverse range of musical genres and styles. These differing musics—ranging from light jazz, intense romanticism, and subtle suspense—each function as culturally coded signs that a postmodern audience will be able to grasp and use to provide further understanding of the narrative.

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16. Interestingly, as was seen in previous Disney films like *Tarzan* (1999) and *The Lion King* (1994), Pixar sidesteps any colonialist or racial underpinning by excluding indigenous peoples into the Paradise Falls landscape. In this case, the primitive Muntz fulfills that role in this adventure narrative. See M. Keith Booker, *Disney, Pixar, and the Hidden Message of Children's Films* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 65.

Giacchino's mixture of framing function and *leitmotif* is a manifestation of postmodern styles and ideas. Through the use of the framing function, Giacchino exercises a masterful control over the contents of his scores and draws from an almost unlimited supply of musics to provide a setting for specific meaningful motives. While Giacchino's scores denote both internal aspects of the narrative (introversive semiotics) and external sights and sounds of the "real world" (extroversive semiotics),[17] his real innovation is found in the remarkably broad palette of his extroversive allusions. By drawing from an extensive range of musical styles and traditions—jazz, Western art music, minimalism, contemporary popular genres, Latin, and other diverse musical styles—Giacchino's music features a postmodern pluralism that exploits the audience's understanding of these individual tropes. The use of diverse musical signs imbues the films with an additional layer of narrative depth and subsequently enhances the audience's understanding of these works. While it would be the height of hubris to suggest that Giacchino's Pixar scores are alone in their employment of the pastiche score, it cannot be denied that Michael Giacchino has been a major innovator in musical practices of

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17. Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 2, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 539-542. As Taruskin writes, these sign systems have their basis of harmonically organized form. While prior to this innovation, composer were forced to "represent the sights and sounds of the natural world and the mood and feeling of the human world," the new forms of the Classical period allowed for introverted sign systems such as key relations and modulations to convey meaning (the most basic being the relationship between tonic and dominant or home keep and subordinate key).

signification. Giacchino's use of the pastiche score's diverse array of allusions to a multitude of Western musical styles yields a film score in *Up* that is not simply evocative of a single musical tradition, but instead succinctly reflects the postmodern aesthetic.

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