# Saul Bass

The 1950’s in America were a period of considerable innovation and cheerfulness. The visual arts reached large acceptance during this period branching from museums into everyday life through the work of graphic designers. Amongst those designers was Saul Bass, one of the most influential, for not only his ground-breaking credit titles but also his long-lasting logos and successful posters. Saul Bass wanted to set the prime underlying core of a movie’s story by projecting it in a metaphorical system. When compiling any list of innovators who revolutionised the shape of movies, it would have to include Saul Bass. This was because with Saul Bass on-board, a credits sequence became a distinctive and memorable element of any film.

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Before the beginning of World War II, movies credits consisted of the company’s logo and title credits being set with music. However, Saul Bass single-handedly changed this by recognising that opening credits had a lot more potential and could set the tone for a movie as opposed to only displaying crew and cast names. Bass would continue to create many intuitive designs and title sequences which would have an impact on the entire film industry forever.

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Saul Bass and the beginnings.

Before Saul Bass became a legend in the industry, he graduated at James Monroe high school and began studying part-time at the Art Students league in Manhattan before moving on to attend Gyorgy Kepes at the Brooklyn College. Bass began his work in the 1940s where he spent time in Hollywood doing print work for film advertisements. Bass became known as a graphics designer who would make minimalist, eye-catching logos for known companies including “Bell” or “Quaker”. Later Bass would join forces with film maker Otto Preminger who requested Bass to design a poster for the 1954 movie “Carmen Jones”. Otto Preminger was so stirred with Bass’ work that he requested Bass to produce the title sequence for the film as well. During this collaboration, Bass first realised that the movie title sequence had potential in advertising to sell the product by hooking in customers before the movies actual beginning. Bass realised then that the title sequence could be used to set the tone, texture and emotion of the film ahead through effective use of typography mixed with striking, moving images to create something evocative. Bass was one of the first to recognise the possible potential in creating innovative opening and closing sequences for movies. Bass however also created logos such as those for AtandT or the continental airlines logo which would stand the test of time with his average logo lifespan being around 30 years, some logos being used for as long as 43 years without any changes as seen in the “Warner communications” company logo or the “Lawry’s foods” logo which is around 58 years and containing only minor changes. More of these statistics can be found here. <http://annyas.com/saul-bass-logo-design-then-now/>

These new-age title sequences proved to be very effective as they gave the audience a good first impression of the film allowing them to have an established bit of knowledge before the film initially began. Before Saul Bass introduced dynamic title sequences, the audience would mostly ignore and avoid title sequences instead choosing to do something else or come later, when the actual movie itself started. The introduction of intriguing title sequences proved effective, and they became an industry standard being used in many films after their first appearance. This had a positive effect on the industry as it led to better reviews, more interest in movies and better feedback as the audience felt these new title sequences gave a soft introduction to set up a relative mood for the movie and showed a movies theme. However, as a result of this popularity, increased numbers of directors who searched for aspiring movie opening would do so on their own as opposed to hiring someone for this job. This led to Saul Bass and his wife, Elaine, who he met in 1960 during their collaborative work on the opening title sequence for “Spartacus” to move away from title sequences into focusing more on film making and bringing up their children during the 1960s. In regard to this, Saul Bass stated that “we did not worry about it: we had too many other interesting projects to get on with. Equally, because we still loved the process of making titles, we were happy to take it up again when asked.”

Saul Bass eventually found a way which would set the tone of a movie during his time creating content. Bass done this by aiming to symbolise, summarise and establish the mood or attitude of the following story, this would be the next step in creating a bridge to expressing the story in a metaphorical way so that the audience would have emotional resonance with the movie. During the creation of the title sequence for “The Big Country” Saul Bass recognised that the title sequence could also be used as a prequel to the films story where the title sequence showed the beginning of the story. Bass recognised that this approach would be useful through contributing to the storytelling process which could give information about the character, establish the world or what was happening before the movie began, however, in “The Big Country” this approach contributed to expressing the vastness of the land which was mostly empty and unpopulated in open areas. Movie title sequences turned out to be a work of art as they demand the audience’s attention in return giving a unique experience by presenting clearly what the viewers will venture into through these unique title sequences which tell their own stories.

Saul Bass began using a large range of fonts of which some were his own adaptations to express the mood of the movie, this proved effective as it was soon visible that fonts relating to the movie theme highly reflected to the audience the movies attitude. The font selection became highly important since it was displayed alongside moving pictures during each title sequence and having a font that felt “right” in relation to the pictures being displayed made the audience more connected emotionally to the movie from the start. Another entity that was changed by Saul Bass for title sequences was the inclusion of matching colours for the fonts which made advertising more successful as title sequences became a symbolic part of films where the font colour, style and unique addition of moving pictures set one movie apart from another resulting in a fan base which could recognise and remember a movie for its use of font and pictures. Another factor which Saul Bass changed was music as he was the first to implement music into the title sequence which the audience would remember and associate with the movie improving the “durability” of movies as audiences would soon talk about such movies and be more liable to re-watching these movies due to such content presented in the title sequences.

The art of the title sequence is in the heart of advertising and when viewers are able to recall the music played during the title sequence, the images displayed on the screen to give an idea for the viewers to follow on or the actions and world presented during these sequences then the company/artist have accomplished successful advertising making their movie memorable. Saul Bass knew about this which is why his innovations still live on today in more than one industry becoming widespread through the whole advertising sector. These title sequences were therefore also adopted into new forms of film media including TV advertisements where designers would advertise movies for people to catch a glimpse of before they would book a ticket in the cinema, it was also introduced in another huge market area being TV series which became popular after adopting Saul Bass’ style, digital streaming services such as Netflix and very importantly videogames featured on consoles, pc and even mobile even though they have only recently been able to match the quality of TV and film also produced title sequences for a long time. Because of these adaptations Saul Bass still lives on today through his work and the style he introduced into the industry.

In short, Saul Bass hugely impacted the entire industry, his logos would last the test of time with some having minor changes whilst others still going on without any changes since he himself created them. However his largest innovation lied in title sequences where his addition of text, immersive moving pictures, matching music and fonts would make all other creators of not only film but tv series and even videogames consider adding these features to their advertising campaigns proving to have create a fan base which remembers movies for much longer than was before Saul Bass’ change on the industry, the result of this was more movies from the same series for example “bad boys” which was first created in 1995 with a second part created in 2003 and due to its music and intriguing title sequence the fans have not stayed quiet asking for a third film which is said to be released in 2019, 24 years after the original release. The “bad boys” movie title sequence is highly influenced by Saul Bass with simple moving pictures which show the audience the theme of the movie whilst showing the world in which it will be set. Other movies such as “the hateful eight” are almost identical to Saul Bass’ “the big country” years later showing how ahead of their time Saul Bass’ sequences were. TV series such as “Cowboy Bebop” also took influence from Saul Bass where “cowboy bebop”

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# Saul Bass: A Life in Film & Design