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MUS 131 Section 1

Movie Music Paper

The Omen is a 1976 horror film about Robert Thorn, an American ambassador, whose family has been wrapped up in several mysterious deaths that seem to be connected to his son, Damien. The score was composed by Jerry Goldsmith and later went on to win the 1977 Academy Award for Best Original Score. Unlike some films, the soundtrack is not present throughout but is used to enhance specific scenes. It does this in two main ways: creating tension and making the scene more emotional.

Throughout the film, the score does an excellent job of building tension in the scenes, one such example is when part of the mystery surrounding Damien's birth is revealed. At 1:00:41, Thorn is speaking to a photographer who has begun to piece together the truth about his son. As it is throughout the movie, the violins play a prominent role in creating suspense during the scene. While the photographer questions Thorn and approaches the key clue to the story's mystery, the violins gradually crescendo which creates the expectation of a dramatic answer. The violins then begin to diminish when it is learned that Thorn's real son had died shortly after birth and then a somber melody is played.

In the beginning of the film, there a scene where Thorn and his wife are walking with their son, Damien, and turn around to find he is gone. Starting at 10:06, string instruments begin to play, showing the tension the characters feel not being able to find their son. This leads the audience to believe that something has happened to Damien, putting the listener on edge, but then at 10:26, the music quickly transitions into a cheerful tune using a harp once he is found.

This sudden shift in tone subverts the audience's expectations that were set with the beginning of this piece. The violins create an eerie tone meant to put the listener on edge but suddenly they play a brighter theme with the accompaniment of a flute.

The suspenseful music is also used to subtly create tension in the film. At 1:38:00, Thorn is searching a bedroom for a reason not fully known to the audience and as he opens the drawers, a harp and other accompanying instruments perform what sounds like an ascending scale, as if to reveal the item he is searching for. However, when he opens the first drawer there is nothing, so he begins to search another, and the score follows the same pattern. This causes the audience to be unsure not only what it is but when he will find what he is looking for.

Goldsmith's compositions also can give the audience a glimpse into the thoughts of the characters. Shortly after the scene where we learn the truth about Thorn's son, it is revealed that the photographer is fated to be killed (1:02:07). The soundtrack comes in with booming brass instruments that give the sense of an impending doom for the character. The violins also come in as an almost shriek to convey the photographer's discomfort and dread of knowing his death is near.

One of best scenes where the music showed the inner thoughts of the character is where Robert is taking a plane back to his home where he must kill his son Damien (1:34:26). The song first is loud upon the reveal that he is bringing the ceremonial knives required to kill his son, but then it quiets down as it pans up to Thorn. Without the music, it is somewhat difficult to know what Thorn is feeling as he is staring blankly into space. The score could easily have had a sound similar to when the audience learned of the photographer's fate, but instead it plays a melancholy tune. This conveyed to the audience that Thorn is deeply troubled at the thought of killing Damien, his son.

The Omen is a horror film that is able to enhance its storytelling through the use of the musical score. Overall, the music does not overpower any of the scenes and is used only to its maximum effect. It accomplishes this in a few ways, such as helping build tension for dramatic reveals and making the audience guess when to expect something exciting. From a storytelling standpoint, the music reflects what the characters are feeling in the story. Rather than having the script tell the audience what the character is thinking, the score makes us feel as if we are in the character's shoes.