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Film Music Types

The film, *The Birth of a Nation*, was the first masterpiece in the history of film that elevated filmmaking to become an art form that is known today. Other than being the first film to have an original score, the content of the film glorifies the Ku Klux Klan and ultimately represents the defense side to segregation in the South. The film directed by D. W. Griffith, utilizes three types of music: adaptations, arrangements, and original. The score for the film was composed by Joseph Carl Briel, and since the film had an original score, very few theaters showcased the film since not only the producers were in charge of the film's music, but those were the only theaters that can support a full orchestra to play the music alongside the film.

The first type of music utilized in *The Birth of a Nation* is adaptations. Music in films that are adaptations are substantially borrowed from an existing composition to be used in the film. The music that is borrowed or adapted into the film is largely intact and recognizable with some alterations to suit the needs of the film such as mood or tone of a scene. Generally music that is adapted comes from classical works. The reason why classical works are more commonly adapted into films is because they allowed less of a need to compose new music for a film. If a classical piece is able to convey such emotion or mood that the film needs, why not use it in the film? Furthermore, classical works are familiar to many from the performers to audience hence there is less worry about how the music affects the tone and emotion of a scene because many have heard and understand its meaning. Finally, classical works have very little copyright protections, hence other than familiarity there is very little difficulty or punishment for incorporating classical pieces into films. There

are many adaptations are used in many scenes of the film such as Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 (*The Storm*), and Richard Wagner's *Rienzi* Overture, and *Ride of the Valkyrie*. Both of Wagner's pieces are adapted into the horse-riding rescue scene of the Ku Klux Klan.

The second type of music that was utilized in this film are arrangements. Similar to adaptations where the source of the song comes from a borrowing of previous works, only the melody is utilized rather than large portions of a pre-existing work. This melody is then given a newly composed accompaniment to be called an arrangement since it is an arrangement or both old and newly composed works rather than an adaptation where large portions of old works are adapted into the film with minimal changes. Some music in *The Birth of a Nation* that are arrangements are spread along in various scenes of the film. A popular tune of the time "*Where Did You Get That Hat?*" was used to evoke a playfulness in scenes where Tod and Duke become playful, and when they die on the battlefield. "*Auld Lang Syne*" plays when Cameron, a southerner, seeks refuge in a cabin with former Union soldiers suggesting acceptance and reconciliation. Arrangements of melodies that are well-known to the populus are used primarily to arouse emotions and set the mood of a scene.

The final type of music that was utilized in the film *The Birth of a Nation* was original music. Unlike the two previously mentioned music types: arrangements and adaptations, original music is music that is newly composed, there is no borrowing or adapting previously made works, it is the original music for the film. Some songs that are considered original for the film include "*The Motif of Barbarism*" which utilizes the syncopated rhythmic gestures found in music of African Americans, is utilized to represent Africans in general and the theme for mulatto Silas Lynch. Another song that was considered original is actually one of the six leitmotifs. This original song was named "*The Perfect Song*", and it represented the love theme for Elsie and Ben. This love theme became the best-known original song for the film.