

The Shawshank Redemption

The Birth of an Underscore Language

A musical analysis of Thomas Newman's
original soundtrack and its influence
in the creation of his own sound

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Introduction

I think it's fair to say that Thomas Newman was the first composer to ever really draw me into film music. I think it's also fair to say that he was a big reason why I decided to become a film composer.

Like for many other people, "American Beauty" was a real landmark for me, particularly for its music. And so, yes, I admit it: my first instinct was to write this paper on that film's music. But then I realized that, not only that's probably something that many people have already done, but it would also be so much more interesting to try to understand where did this all come from. When and where was the "Thomas Newman sound" born? So, I thought it would be a very good idea to address that question by analyzing the first legendary film that Newman was a part of: "The Shawshank Redemption".

Now, one could ask: but what about "Scent of a Woman"? Yes, it's true that this was Newman's first real blockbuster, but, not only it never reached the cult and legendary status of the film I chose, but also its music, although truly wonderful, is of another realm. One can already feel that quite characteristic Newman sensitivity in it, but the sound, the timbral character, the colour palette is still not clearly the one that would characterize this composer so much and lead him to the musical unveilings of films to come.

And so, in this paper I will attempt to not only analyze the film's music and its narrative function, trying to answer the question "why does it work?", but I'll also try to explain why this film truly was a turning point in Newman's career and why this was the beginning of "the Thomas Newman sound".

Synopsis

“The Shawshank Redemption” was an American film released in 1994, directed by Frank Darabont and starring Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman.

Robbins plays Andy Dufresne, a successful banker, who was just convicted for murdering his wife and her lover, and whose life is about to take a full turn when he is sentenced to lifetime imprisonment at the Shawshank Prison.

There, he meets “Red”, played by Freeman, a convict who has spent the last 20 years of his life at Shawshank. The friendship that flourishes between them is, in many ways, the core of the film, along with their relationships to other people from that place: Brooks, the librarian; Warden Norton, Captain Haywood and even Tommy.

But there is one other fundamental character in this film, that defines much of it: the idea of freedom. Not physical, but mental, psychological, emotional. The idea of freedom inside of us. This concept is not only something that the film reflects upon permanently, but it is also one of the catalysts of the story and of its outcome. It is Andy’s endless quest for inner freedom that cultivates his resilience inside of those closed walls and, ultimately, allows him to build a perfect plan to escape. It is also this state of mind that drives Red to ultimately believe in something more than life in Shawshank and follow his friend to freedom and the ultimate inner redemption.

Analysis of the music and its narrative and emotional function

There are 36 cues in the film, 3 of which are source music. Among the 33 that compose the underscore, some of them can be considered just as one, since they merge into each other (fading or fading out). In fact, in some of these cases, I've realized, by taking a look at the OST album, that they are, in fact just one piece of music. However, I still decided to consider them as separate cues, from an artistic point of view, since, in my opinion, they represent distinct dramatic events in the film and convey different emotions, moods or atmospheres.

1&2) The film starts right away with an interesting musical aspect: as the titles appear, we're already listening to "If I didn't care", a famous 40's ballad by *The Ink Spots*. As we see the first shot, of Andy's house and his car, in the quiet of the night, we're led to believe that everything is o.k and the film starts in a good mood. When we see Andy's face we see that he looks tired, maybe reflexive or disturbed. But it isn't until the first underscore cue comes in, as he takes something (a gun) out of the front seat pocket, that we understand that something is clearly wrong. So, it's the underscore that actually introduces to us, first and foremost, to the real mood of the film and the situation we're about to witness.

The very next aspect is one that can be completely arguable and I admit I'm thinking way too much outside of the box, but I'm still going to put it out there for whoever wants to think about it: when I listened to the first underscore cue,

as Andy is unraveling the gun, I couldn't help but remember of the initial theme to "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo", by Trent Reznor. Now, I'm not saying that Reznor copied Newman. Not at all! The music is still different (timbrally, harmonically and melodically), as an identity of its own and it's absolutely genius original film music. But still, when I listen to Newman's cue... wow! It just takes me to Reznor's, right away!.. I don't know what it is, but I think it's just the musical content in general: that little "string-like" pad with the piano dissonances and the tense harmony in general, evoke in me similar emotional responses and take me to similar dark, melancholic places. I think the main difference is in the fact that Reznor's timbral palette is colder (which makes sense, being the film set in Sweden, as opposed to Shawshank's middle America), both in the choice of the pads and the those lonely notes in some sort of celesta-like sound. Newman's music is a bit warmer, more organic, since we're actually listening mainly to real, acoustic instruments (despite the existence of some pads and deep hits). Nevertheless, to me, the resemblance in atmosphere, mood and overall emotional expressiveness is still striking and it will always leave me wondering if, by any chance, there is the possibility that, extremely subconsciously, Reznor was influenced by this music and maybe even searching for something of that kind. After all, both films center on men who were unfairly convicted for a crime they didn't commit. And that could be a starting point to a lot of subconscious mind games from an artistic point of view.

While the strings do a pedal in A2, the piano plays these lonely, almost disturbing notes:

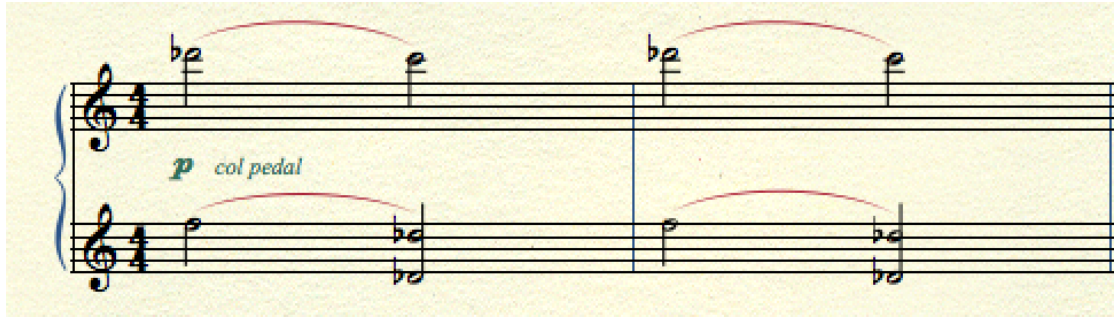


Fig.1 – The first cue's first piano motif

The time doesn't seem to exist, in this part of the cue. The notes seem to enter freely upon the string pad's "musical silence".

This musical silence seems to create the perfect setting not only for the situation that is being portrayed in the film, but also to set the tone for the whole story. It also allows space for the dialog to be clear. The initial piano motif, although appearing once when words are being pronounced, is not even close to disturb anything. It's way too soft., so I don't think there was even much worry about its presence under dialogue.

The second piano motif, on the other hand, appears right when dialogue is taking place. And even though this is new musical content, it doesn't, once again, disturb us from understanding what is being said. On the contrary, it actually creates an expressive contour to the story-telling. To me, it's particularly wonderful how the motif comes in right when Andy is starting to describe what her wife decided to do, when he rejected the possibility of divorce. The motif comes in when he's saying "she packed her bags to go and stay with Mr.Quentin" and, its introduction in this particular spot gives us the feeling that a story is about to be told. The music is also starting to tell a story of its own.

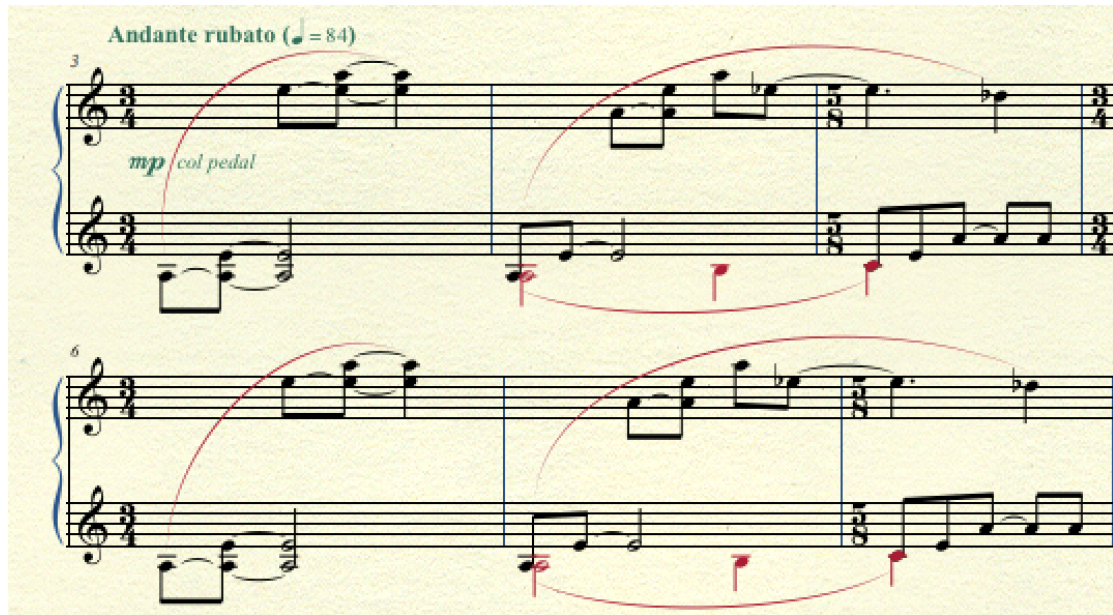


Fig.2 - The first cue's second piano motif

This motif passes on this idea that something happened... something wrong, something devious... there's also a certain coldness in it, which, to me, follows a bit of Andy's cold look and cold behaviour in the court. In the beginning of the film, I think we're pretty much invited to believe that Andy is a strange, disturbed man, one not to be trusted to... we're not exactly supposed to like him. And the fact that this music conveys something suspicious, only helps us to be divided between the melancholy that we were coming from before and the potential disturbed mind of a man that we cannot trust. Ultimately, we're supposed to be thinking: "Did he kill them? Did he not? What if actually enjoyed it?".

Everytime there's a bit of a change in the situation or in the dialogue, the strings make little notes in the low registers, as if to reinforce the dramatic turnarounds that we're watching. And also worthy of note is the fact that everytime the two lovers appear and the story is being clarified we hear the

second piano motif, as if to convey the melancholic and disturbing character of the events that led to the crime. Making us feel ever more doubtful about what to feel towards Andy.

The first piano motif also returns. And it returns exactly when the cold-blooded nature of the crime, and potentially of Andy's, is being revealed. As if this is actually really the "ice" motif (again, as with Reznor's motif in "his" film).

The fact that these two piano motifs appear so randomly and upon the string pads makes me wonder how this was recorded. I would risk to say that maybe the orchestra part was recorded separately from the piano's. Since there's not much of an overall rhythmic/tempo sensation in this cue, it would perfectly be possible to fit in the piano motifs everytime the director and composer found it suitable. And then, with the right mix and perfect amount of reverb, it would fit like a glove together with the orchestra.

3) This next cue is somewhat very descriptive of what we see... and its expressiveness is somewhat contradictory, maybe a little bit like our two main characters, in the beginning: one of them is an almost noble, self-made men of the prison, the other a self-made man outside, but now overwhelmed by the circumstances of life and of his arrival to that terrifying new and completely strange world - Shawshank. In many ways, I find that this cue is a portray of the Shawshank prison on its own, as a paralell world, where the realm of life takes complete new shapes and all feelings and sensations can seem like an illusion or a distortion of what was known to a common man.



Fig.3 - “The Stoic Theme” starting with the Double basses and Cellos (in the bass clef), followed by the violas (in red) and then the violins.

This theme reappears several times throughout the film, often in moments of great dramatic tension. Moreover, it is called “The Stoic Theme” in the OST album, which also says a lot about the intentions of its narrative role in the picture.

4) This cue, with its dissonances in the strings and synth pad (towards the end) expresses perfectly both Red’s first impressions on Andy and this “tal drink of water” ‘s disturbed state of mind as he gradually realizes where he now finds himself at.

6) This cue is one of the main theme’s in the film. I would call it the “melancholy cue” or the even maybe the “Shawshank cue”. It’s so simple, but so expressive. Just a few long pad lines (synths in the mid registers and strings in

high harmonics) to support the harmony of a lonely piano. There's also what it seems like a synth reverb trail line that flows around, to convey this poignant "void sensation". It's like Red says: "when they put you in that cell and those bars slam home, you know it's for real". And this music expresses that feeling of hopelessness so well.

It starts off with this simple motif on the piano:

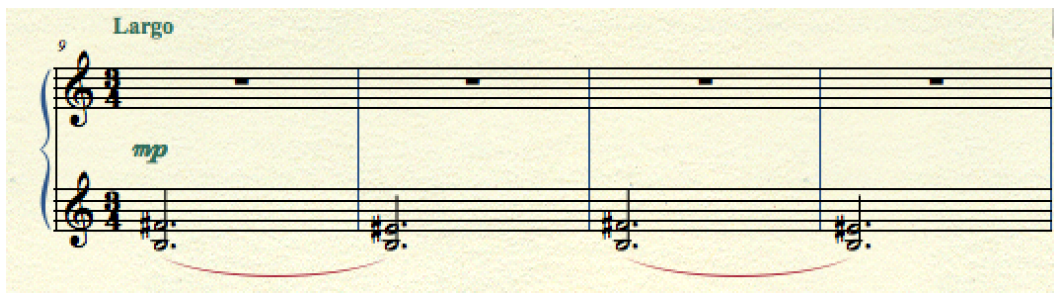


Fig.4 - The initial piano motif on the "Melancholy Cue"

It's hard to say what the time signature is here. It could be 4/4. Or a very rubato 3/4. But then, the theme comes in and its evident its 3/4 feel:



Fig.5 - The "Melancholy theme"

The big catch on this cue is that among those melancholic, hopeless feelings, there's a subtle, yet so everlasting and defining feeling of hope. In fact, that's something that is characteristic to the whole score, in general: the subtlety of hope, no matter how sorrowful or despairing the situation might seem. In that sense, maybe this theme should be called the "Melancholy hope" theme, for instance.

This theme is recurring throughout the film, whether in situations that are particularly dramatic or reflexive, or also often when Andy is the center of the narrative process. In that sense, it could also very fairly be called "Andy's theme".

7) This cue is also very importante, not only because it repeats itself a few times during the film, but mainly for the introduction of an importante character in the score: the oboe. Throughout the film, there are many different cues that include the oboe as a solo instrument, and this is the first of them. In most of those cues, the oboe is clearly used to express a great deal of solitude... maybe even of some kind of inner discomfort... it reminds me of some of Mahler's beautiful oboe solos, in his symphonies and vocal orchestral cycles. But, when Newman combines this timbre with those piano chords, like in this cue, it creates an unusual mist of infinite, cold, almost endless melancholy.

8) This next cue is also worthy of notice, just because it's the first time that Newman decides to quote one of the themes (in this case, "Andy's theme") with a different orchestration. In this little cue, only the strings play, but they quote the piano motif. This motif is also reharmonized to a major mode, thus expressing a certain kind of nobility to it. Or, as Red put it so well "he strolled, like a man in a

park, without a care or a worry in the world". It's in this mode that he lets us know that he likes Andy, almost as if at last revealing to us that Andy is the hero, almost as if giving us the permission to like him and connect with him. And the music, in its moving and smooth contour allows us to embrace this feeling with all our soul.

9) This cue is a true jewel and very worthy of notice for its very particular character and idiosyncrasies. It's the first time in the film that Newman uses percussion. He uses several small percussive instruments (different shakers and woodblocks) together with a steel drum, to create a unique atmosphere. It's the first time in this film that we hear that timbrical approach that he would later on develop as a landmark for "American Beauty". It's also the first and only cue in the film that used pizzicato strings. And what a great use of it he makes! The cellos and the violas combine to do a dynamic rythm, almost ostinato, that fills in the musical canvas with life and, definitely, hope for the future o four heros. This cue is also very descriptive and always appears when there's a sequence of dynamic shots in the film, that is, when a set of action is being portrayed in the film, usually with little or no dialogue. Action this, which is usually in direct relation to the origin of new events in the film.

This cue will be repeat only once more in the film and also in similar moment, when a long sequence of actions that will lead to a new moment in the film is being portrayed. The only big difference in this second time is that this sequence is filled with Red's narration. And still, it doesn't bother me at all. On the contrary it conveys the dynamic motion that that motion in the film

demands. Now, why doesn't it bother, mixing wise? Why doesn't it feel busy?
Great engineer, I suppose...

11) This cue is such a breath of clean, joyful, fresh air in the middle of this score! What a sensible artist Newman proves himself to be, with little precious takes of music like this one.

Not only he was able to pull off a cue that immediately lets us know that the mood of the story has completely shifted, but he does it in such a refined way, that we're already understanding that there's a plot twist happening, even before Red or the follow up of the events lets us confirm it.

Everything is so perfectly thought of that, in the end, it really leaves us wondering if, much more than a carefully planned out cue, this wasn't just a simple and instinctive act of sensibility, by the composer. I like to believe it was. Because even the music expresses that: it's in an improvisational style, with no tempo or time signature. Just a fiddle and a guitar having a little fun together. So pure and so right to the point. The plot has changed and so has my music style and my instrumentation. Even on a very subconscious level, the inclusion of a guitar, playing so freely and carelessly really has a fundamental influence on how we perceive the action. Everything is now calm and cool, because the boys are about to have some fun during the wonderful month of May, working outside of the prison.

Given the improvisational character of the music, it seems to me that it would be quite impossible to actually write it accurately. And it doesn't even make much sense. However, just for reference, I transcribed what it generally sounds like, having the violin on the upper staff and the guitar on the lower.



Fig.6 - The "May" cue, roughly transcribed.

This cue will be appear one more time in the film, also in similar circumstances: a mood change and an importante plot element, after a very dramatic moment, that had had a very dramatic cue. Only this time, not only is a longer and more developed cue, but also, it's a different take of the same music. You can easily tell this by the way the violin phrases, but even more obviously, byt the guitar comping, which, while keeping the same harmony, general rythm and overall character, is clearly different. So, it's basically two different takes of the same music. I can imagine that Newman (who loves to be in close contact with the performing musicians and organize small, more intimate recording sesions) just had the two performers in the studio, showed them what he wanted them to do and then just told them to play freely, recording several takes in one small session.

12) I would like to point out this next cue for two reasons: first of all, just for how beautiful it is. How "noble" it sounds. Just like Andy's greatly altruist

action. Or, even better, as Red says “he just did it to feel normal again”. It’s music of a man who has again found peace, even if it is that of the ethereal kind. But it is peace, nonetheless. Peace in every sense of the word.

The second reason why I’d like to refer to this cue is because this music seems to have been written very particularly for this scene. It fits it so perfectly, and the truth is that we never listen to it again (not even a single quote)... until the very last cue!.. Which is a much more developed, broader orchestrated version of it. In many ways, this cue could then be called the “Freedom theme”. And so, a question is imposed: was it written for this moment of the film or for the ending?

19) This cue alone and this moment in the film are of rare genius, in my opinion. In fact, these 5 or 6 minutes of film are so extraordinary and have such a life of its own, that they could make a great short-film.

It’s hard to actually try to describe this or put it into any words. It’s just so sublime. Everytime I watch this moment in the film, I just feel overwhelmed with feelings. I think this is one of those moments that will live forever in the history of cinema, and particularly in the history of north-american cinematography. And Mr.Newman did a most beautiful job in helping immortalize this moment. The music is just so perfect. It’s one of those cues that you can’t really imagine any substitute for. This is one of those rare moments in which I feel extremely inspired, while at the same time feeling like I could’ve never written anything so beautiful (and probably never will) but, on the other hand, feeling like I would’ve written exactly that same music for that scene.

Even though the film is only half-way through, this is the moment in which I stand up and bow to Mr.Newman and Mr.Darabont. Thank you so much for making this.

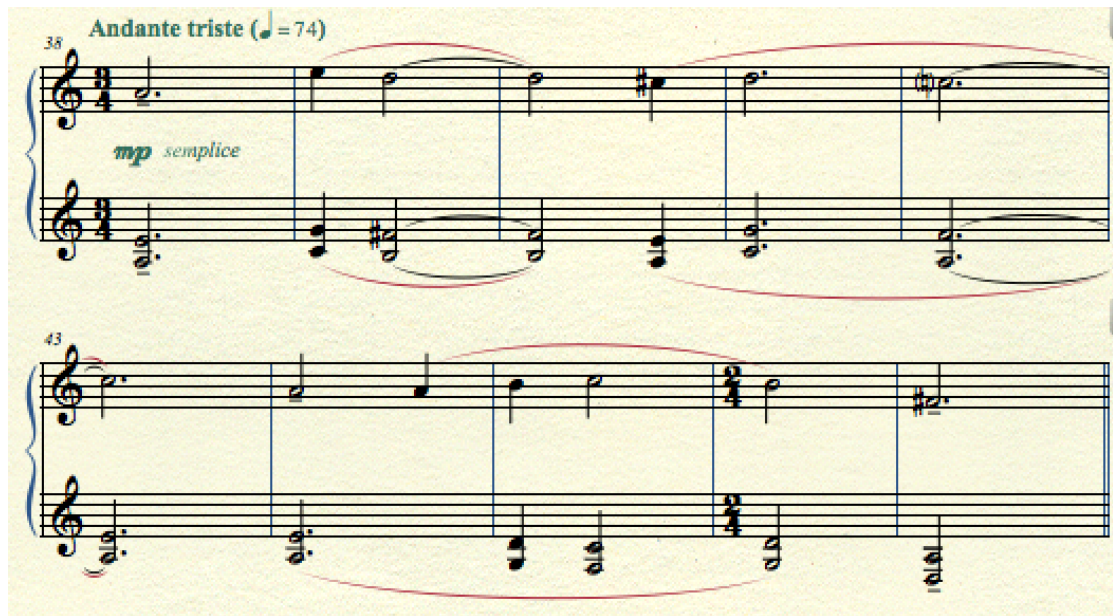


Fig-7 - "Brooks was here" theme.

This cue appears only once in the film (as a whole – it is quoted later on, but not entirely). It can't be considered like one of the main themes or leit-motifs of the story, and yet, it is so striking, so deeply moving, that no one can be indifferent to it. I would actually bet that this is one of the cue that people remember the most. Even if they can't remember how it sounds, they will – to paraphrase the great Maya Angelou – remember how it made them feel. And there's nothing more important than that. In art, just as in life.

The "last but not least" reason for this cue to be so important and defining for us is the fact that, in my humble opinion, this is the inception of the "Thomas Newman" sound. This was where it was truly born. I'm sure it didn't happen over night, but whatever it is that it took the composer to get there, this was its first

true demonstration of achievement. And what an outstanding achievement. Once again, so simple, as usual. A few reverby pads creating the atmosphere, strings to support the harmony and, sometimes, the melodic lines... and that grand piano, full of reverb and overtones, with its motions in paralell fifths. So simple, but so infinitely expressive and efective. A game changer in film music composition for the next generations, including mine, and also the type of sound and harmonic/melodic approach with which Newman would marvel half world with the main theme (“American Beauty/Any other name”) from “American Beauty”.

25) This cue is also worth of notice, since it is another step towards the “Thomas Newman” sound and, most particularly, the “American Beauty” sound.

As the cue starts, we get the feeling that it’s just going to be more of cue n^o9 (which had already been repeated, meanwhile). But, then we are positively surprised: there’s much more to it. We realize something is different right when the violins actually play a melodic line, while the cellos are doing pizzicatos. But the big surprise comes in when we hear the vibrafone coming in with the clarinet melody! Sweet!.. Plus, the clarinet’s role is much more proeminent in this cue, not only playing a shy melody, but actually affirming itself and doing different kinds of articulations in diferent registers. And the whole mood of the cue is not quite the same as in the previous two situations: there’s somewhat of an inquiring, almost sneaky aspect to it, that wasn’t so present before.

There is, though, one common aspect between this and the two other cues of this kind: the context their played in. Once more, this cue comes in to accompany a sequence of dynamic actions that will allow the plot to quickly develop and take us to another moment in the dramatic narration. And once

again, Red is all over the place. But, does it bother us? Does the sound get badly mixed up because of that? Not at all.

These cues that include percussion may not yet be so original and are definitely not yet the “American Beauty” sound. But they do definitely reveal how, 5 years before the Sam Mendes oscar-winning film, Newman was already exploring these timbres, its mixes, and some kind of sound of his own through them.

31) This cue might be the most arguable moment in the score, in terms of its formal structure.

The cue starts with lively strings playing a fiddle-type texture and melody, in the old irish style. A completely new motif in the film, by the way, that we only hear at this moment. That makes a lot of sense, since you don't get to escape from prison more than once. So, for a unique event, a unique piece of music. But, after about a minute, when that section ends, the music shifts moods completely and we start hearing the second piano motif from the first cue of the film. And, the truth is, the music never completely stops, from one mood to the other. There is, at the most, a very subtle cross-fade between the two, but there is trully the sensation that it is all one long cue, connected by some pads. Then, we have a similar situation, about one minute ahead: this theme ends and the music fades out, but we're never really sure if it actually faded out, because another cue is already starting. And this new cue is actually the same one, only this time it starts closer to the beginning, that is, with the first piano motif from the first cue (and then quickly passing on to the second motif). So, where do we stand? Were these three cues different cues or all one big giant cue?

I decided to classify them as different cues, since the thematic material exposed is already pre-existing from different moments in the film. Now, the real news come a bit later on. After quoting the first cue for the second time, Newman starts developing and developing, and growing and growing, both in texture, orchestration, size and mass. We're reaching the big climax of the whole film and, with it, of the whole score. The thematic material for this truly epic moment is composed of three basic motifs: in the low register, we hear a very pesante F-F#-G-F in quarter notes, in a 4/4 time signature, in a repeating ostinato. It's like something inevitable, something bigger than you is about to happen. It's such a simple but such a great line. After this, come in the high strings doing F-F#-A-A#, in the same rhythm as the basses, also ostinato. It's a small counterpoint line that conveys an amazing feeling of tension and release, constantly. And this gets even better if we realize that these two lines are sort of adaptations or "tonal variations" of the "Stoic theme". So, he's actually using main thematic material to create the biggest of his musical climaxes in the whole film! And, you know, this is so great, already, that the cue could probably be almost just like this and it would be fine. But, no, not for Thomas Newman. He knew he needed to add a poignant motif, something that would really make us want to tear down our shirts off, like Andy, in the middle of the rain. Something that would truly convey how brutal that whole scene was. And, thus, he added the horns, with this incredible E-D-C#, in a long note, followed by triplets. It's such an amazing treat of the dissonance (the E in the horns with the F in the strings!), both melodically and rhythmically (3 against 2!).

But, more important than any of these details, this music moves us to the bone and keeps us glued to the screen, filled with glorious hope.

33) This cue is also quite unique in such a way that, not only it's the first time it appears (such as the situation depicted, which is also a one and only), but also, it uses a new timbre. And, guess what? It's percussion, Newman's new favourite playground. It's hard to say what instrument it is, but it is certainly not a western classical percussion instrument. Which is also very revealing of the composer's explorations and experiments with non-traditional instrument combinations, which would lead to the famous "American Beauty" Marimba plus Tabla cue (in the "Dead Already" cue).

The pairing of this percussive timbre with that of the horns makes up for a great feeling of irreversible fate and, almost, bitter destiny. Which is exactly what the picture is portraying.

35) This cue starts off as being a repetition of "Brooks was here". Maybe some sort of way to express that Red was going down the same path as Brooks. But when he decides to turn his fate around, the music shifts to something completely new... maybe, a sort of "Red was here"?

It's very beautiful music, with luscious strings and harmonies reminding some of the main themes. But the real great detail is the care of Newman to use the harmonica, Red's own forsaken instrument. I believe the inclusion of the harmonica solo here, is a very refined expressiveness detail and way to convey a new hope that has, even if very subtly, penetrated the spirit of Red.

The very last cue is basically a big contemplative conclusion/reflexion over our heroes' destiny. A destiny that they decided to build from scratch, through

their belief in hope and in something new. Their belief in change. A change that arose from their friendship and from their will not to become subdued by fear, but to believe in freedom. Inner freedom.

And I believe it is this sense of noble freedom that is, above all, portrayed in the music. It is the freest piece of music in the whole score. The orchestra opens up so wide and so high, it almost feels like my stereo field has, all of a sudden, become ATMOS.

Another curious aspect is that it seems to me like this is the only cue in which Newman uses the orchestra in full, altogether. This is particularly evident because of the woodwinds section. It's the only cue in which you can actually listen to this section playing together, as a tone group. And I feel like this full use of the orchestra, with all the instruments finally together, even if done in a subconscious level, also represents the coming together of the two friends and making amends with their life and their pasts: "Get busy livin' or get busy dyin'".

Conclusions

It's hard to address this section of the paper, because it just seems so much easier to send you off to watch the film and realize all of this on your own. The film and its music were created with what seems to be such artistic sincerity, that it seems almost impossible that one would not, more that think - feel everything that this fine work of contemporary mainstream cinema has to offer.

However, given all the reflection that I've done upon this work, there are, in deed, a few conclusions that make sense and may be worth sharing with everyone.

The first one is about the narrative function of the music in the film and "why does it work?". Now, why does this music work in this film? I think it has to do, first of all, with consistency and with understanding where to vary, where to make the changes, where to create the exceptions, where to insert the new. Generally throughout the score, Newman sticks himself to very simple and coherent orchestration: simple string lines, synth pads, hollow piano chords and melodies. If you ask someone about the soundtrack of the film, this is probably what they'll remember first, because this is the core of the timbral palette and type of musical writing that Newman used. But then... yes, there are amazing, completely antagonical moments to this standard: the percussion experiments, the fiddler with the guitar and, hey, even the full orchestral passages. Those were the moments where Newman knew he had to change the set, where he had to create a new sounscape, because the film and its story were also being taken to new places. And it is by inserting these occasionally different elements from within a very homogenous whole that he achieves something that is

fundamental, both from a filmmaking and musicmaking point of view: coherency in storytelling. Through his music he glues the whole story together and then conveniently highlights all the plot twists and intense dramatic moments almost as entities with a life of its own. But entities that, nevertheless, are firmly attached to the story. Story that, which has a general mood, a general atmosphere which must imperatively be kept together. And Newman seems to be a master in doing that, as, by the way, he has shown us throughout his career.

Another simple reason why this music works so well is because of the thematic treatment. The leit-motif concept is one that has become quite rooted in both composers' ways of writing and our way to perceive the musical writing. It's good to have themes that we listen several times. Not only it makes us feel comfortable throughout the film (because of the sensation of familiarity with what we're listening), but it also helps us easily connect to the different aspects of the film. And, particularly in character driven films and stories, musical themes are almost a must and often play a fundamental role in the way the audience connects to the characters and even places. Well, it just so happens that Newman is a master in writing simple, but very emotionally effective little themes. And not only these themes are very memorable, but they're also very easy to morph around. So, it's a win-win situation for him and his directors. C'mon, who doesn't get out of the film theatre with one his main themes stuck sounding in the head? Whether it's "American Beauty", "The Good German", "Wall-E" or "Revolutionary Road", it's almost impossible not to be carried away by the veil of emotions that these simple themes create upon us. And with "Shawshank", it's nothing less than that. In fact, once again, it seems to me that this is the first of his soundtracks from which we can draw some deeply memorable, deeply moving

and almost even historically and aesthetically changing little themes. If you think about it, theme's like "The Stoic theme" or "Melancholic Hope" can easily become engraved in our minds and hearts, after watching the film. And these kind of themes of his set the tone, both melodically/harmonically and timbrically for many other composers that followed to write music in that style.

There's another, more strictly technical aspect, that is also interesting to refer here: the music under dialogue question. I think it's fair to say that if these two elements don't go together (that is, if the music disturbs us from the dialogue), that means that there's something wrong with the music. But, in our film, that never happens. That is, they never clash. Truth be said, there's not really much music under dialogue, but under monologue., since Red narrates the whole film. And what a precious voice it is, that of Morgan Freeman! But the music pays full respect to it, never disturbing even a bit what is coming out of his mouth. In general, it's pretty clear why: when you have a lot of long string notes and synth pads, it's not so easy to create problems with the voices. But, there are also moments when the piano plays and, more importantly, when the percussion cues are actually being played under dialogue. And it's pretty impressive, almost hard to understand how can it not interfere. It's easy to think that it's a question of mixing and tweaking the EQ as much as necessary to find that sweet spot. Or, even more simple, to just mess with the volume faders. But, still, I believe the question lies, most of all, in the way the music was written. You see, even in the percussion cues, in which you might have a lot of troubling frequencies and lot of transients flying around the stereo field, the music is written in such a way that it won't affect the perception of the voices. Why? Because it's mainly written with ostinatos. You see, when you have mainly ostinatos in your music, what happens

is that, in the first couple of seconds that you're listening to the cue, your brain is detecting the music and, hence, the ostinato motifs. Once those motifs start repeating without much change, you send it to the back of your head and you don't really need to pay attention anymore, because everything that is happening, musically, is very similar and there are no particular new stimulations being made to your mind, in that field. So, your brain can easily focus on what's being said (on the words) and not on whatever musical events are going on. So, everything sounds clear, although in theory might not be that clear.

Finally, and after going through this music over and over again, I'd like to clarify the question about Mr. Newman's style and sound and its origin. First of all, what is the "Thomas Newman" sound? This is, of course, extremely ambiguous and relative. I'd even say that Newman himself would probably totally disagree what I'm trying to define, because he probably doesn't see himself like that, at all, and also because he has done so many different things and written so many different soundtracks. So, I understand that is extremely arguable. And I, too, believe that it's not possible to define the work or the style of such an amazingly talented and diverse composer as him in just a few sentences. So, it's not like I'm trying to actually define anything about who he is as an artist, composer and creator. But, here's the question: if you ask people about Thomas Newman's soundtracks and his sound, what do you think people will answer? I, personally, believe that people will immediately turn their answers to the memories of much of what we hear in this "Shawshank" soundtrack: some reverby synths creating a mood, some static string lines (in the high harmonics, or in the mid/low register) and a lonely grand piano full of

overtones. And, in that grand piano, what will we hear often: parallel fifths in blocks, that accompany a melody. And then, eventually, some of the strings will start doubling the piano melody and maybe even some of the harmony. Oh, and also, very important: sometimes he adds some sort of “ethnic” instrument to the mix, like some kind of indigenous woodwind or something like that.

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that Newman keeps copying himself. I just think that this type of writing comes out very naturally for him and so, if it's beautiful and it fits the film perfectly, why not do it again? Plus, what's amazing is that most of these soundtracks sound really different, anyway. And I think that's a sign of musical integrity and honesty. When you do something just because you're naturally feeling it inside of you, you can't usually go wrong. And Newman has done it this way in several occasions: from “Shawshank” to “Revolutionary Road”, through “Pay it Forward”, “Erin Brockovich” and, of course, the one and only “American Beauty”. He's also done it in other films, too, but just maybe not in such a pronounced way. Likewise, he hasn't done it at all in many other films and that only shows that he's a very resourceful composer. But, it's those times when he's done it that people remember him the most. So, I think that, whether he wants it or not, like it or not, it has become sort of his trademark. Because, all in all, when he doesn't do it, he's music is, in deed, more easily confusable with that of other great film composers. And, on the other hand, when some other composer writes this kind of music, people have the tendency to immediatly think that it is Thomas Newman. So, as far as I can see it, it's his ex-libris. And there's nothing wrong about it. I'd even say the contrary. It's great. It means that he has his own identity as an artist and will, most likely,

leave a legacy for the future. In other words, he's achieved a little bit of immortality.

And it's in this film that he began to explore and create those paradigms that will most likely secure his immortality. I don't suppose I have to tell you again what paradigms those are, since I've repeated that quite a few times already, the last time of which was one page ago. So, I invite you to listen to "Brooks was here" or the "Melancholy Cue" (which you can find under the name "New Fish" in the OST album or on YouTube) and then just listen to, for instance, "Sleepover" from "Pay it Forward"; "What about you", from "Erin Brockovich"; "Route", from "Revolutionary Road"; "Ghosts", from "Road to Perdition" and, of course, "Any other name", from "American Beauty". You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand that there is one sole musical language, one idiom, one same family of textures and colours, one beautiful timbrical group and one type of musical structure.

But, one last time, I say: I'm not criticizing. Not at all. In fact, I'm praising. Thomas Newman has found a voice of his own, has found himself as an artist, has created an original identity and has earned the respect of his peers by doing what he loves and doing it greatly. And, at the end of the day, isn't that what we, as artists, are all searching for?

Cue Sheet

Cue N°	Start	Character	Instrumentation	End	Duration	Comments
1	00:00	1940s Doo Wop/R&B Vocal Ballad	Piano, Double Bass, Drums, Horns, Voice	05:00	Intermittent, during those 5 minutes.	Source Music. Famous ballad by <i>The Ink Spots</i> – “If I didn’t care”.
2	01:43	Atmospheric, Melancholic, Meditative.	Choir (High Voices), Strings, Piano, Pads	06:38	4:55	Underscore.
3	08:52	Dramatic, Descriptive	Strings, Horns, Timpani	10:41	1:49	Underscore. The “Stoic Theme”.
4	12:01	Dramatic, Evokes danger	Strings, Sample (glassy, metallic noise)	12:51	0:50	Underscore. It fades out into the next cue.
5	12:42	Tense...	Deep wobbly low bass	14:16	1:34	Underscore. It fades in from the previous cue and continues on the next one.
6	14:16	Atmospheric, Melancholic	Strings, Piano, Pads	16:30	2:16	Underscore. One of the main themes of the film (“The Melancholic Hope” theme).
7	23:21	Atmospheric, Melancholic	Strings, Piano, Oboe	24:39	1:18	Underscore. More of the same piano motifs from the first cue. Beautiful oboe solo.
8	28:28	Contemplative	Strings	29:01	0:33	Underscore. The same “melancholic theme” motifs but only in the strings.
9	29:01	Dynamic, Descriptive, Suggestive	Strings, Marimba, Percussion (Shaker and Woodblocks), Clarinet	30:17	2:16	Underscore. Very cool strings pizzicato motifs and overall movement of the music, with the percussion. Great note by clarinet.

10	31:24	Tragic and suspense, then descriptive	Low pads, Strings, Clarinets	33:12	1:49	Underscore. The Stoic theme comes in the strings, after the initial tragic moment.
11	33:14	Shiny and Positive	Violin (Irish Fiddle) and guitar	34:07	0:53	Underscore. Very cool mood swing from the previous cue, clearly conveying the interesting plot twist.
12	37:21	Noble	Strings	38:55	1:34	Underscore. Beautiful moment. Just fits perfectly the scene and the feelings it expresses.
13	40:15	Atmospheric, Melancholic	Strings, Piano, Pads	41:13	0:58	Underscore. The “Melancholic Hope “ theme.
14	43:03	Tragic, Suspense	Low pads	45:48	2:45	Underscore. Merges with the next cue.
15	44:00	Atmospheric, Tragic	Strings, Piano, Oboe	45:48	1:48	Underscore. It has the main theme motif, but it has more to it. As if a development section of that piece. In fact, it’s hard to understand if this cue and the previous one are just one cue altogether.
16	46:13	Shiny and Positive	Violin (Irish Fiddle), Guitar and Piano	48:15	2:03	Underscore. Again, it captures the mood change, from tragic to hopeful and even funny. I think this is kind of Red’s theme. The piano at the end seems to evoke the main theme, which kind of seems to be Andy’s theme.
17	50:54	Sad	Strings	51:42	0:48	A new motif. Somehow, sad and hopeless.
18	55:36	Dynamic, Descriptive,	Strings, Marimba,	57:22	1:46	The same cue as n°9, but shortened. Very

		Suggestive	Percussion (Shaker and Woodblocks), Clarinet			cool dynamics.
19	60:52	Melancholic, Atmospheric	Strings, Piano, Pads	65:47	4:55	“Brooks was here” theme. Tommy Newman showing how he made himself Tommy Newman. All those parallel fifths in the piano and the moody pads! What a jewel!
20	67:46	Operatic, Sublime, Peaceful	Orchestra, Two Sopranos	71:02	3:16	Source Music. Duet from the Opera “The Marriage of Figaro”, by W.A Mozart.
21	72:16	Solemn, Dramatic	Strings, Brass	73:03	0:47	Underscore. Very subtle, but so expressive.
22	75:02	Troubling, Announcing	Strings, Oboe	76:27	1:25	Underscore. Great harmonies, dissonances.
23	77:49	Funny, Expressive	Country Band	79:09	1:20	Source Music. Famous country singer Hank Williams’ song “Lovesick Blues” .
24	83:59	Straight up Rock n’Roll	Rock n’Roll band	84:35	0:36	I thought it was source music, but it seems like Mr. Newman might just have written a rip-off of a song and made it underscore.
25	86:50	Upbeat, Dynamic, Inquiring, Sneaky	Strings, Clarinets, Vibes	88:26	1:36	Underscore. Delicious detail of the music entering with Tommy’s eyebrow movement. Great melodic lines (CIs), supported by the lively pizzicato movements and the vibes just creates that unique atmosphere. Tommy Newman is born.
26	90:09	Dark, Tragic	Synths, Pads, Low Strings	92:09	2:00	Underscore. So simple, but so effective, creating this almost scary atmosphere.

27	95:27	Noble but Infinitely Sad	Strings	96:19	0:52	Underscore.
28	99:28	Frightening.	Strings	100:37	1:09	Underscore. Devious sounding. Creepy.
29	102:46	Melancholic, Hopeful, Fearful	Strings, Piano, Pads, Oboe	107:24	4:38	Underscore. "The Hopeful Melancholy" theme. This cue is actually called "Zinuatanajo". So many emotions, and so distant from each other in just one cue.
30	109:07	Melancholic, Announcing	Strings, Pads, Piano, Oboe	110:55	1:48	Underscore. "The Shawshank Theme", again. The dissonances are so incredible. And those oboe lines...
31	114:09	Lively, Cheerful, Ironic, Meditative, Melancholic	Strings, Brass, Pads, Piano	116:39	2:30	Underscore. The music morphs as the storytelling and pictures in this segment.
32	116:43	Suspense, Mellow, Epic	Strings, Brass, Piano, Pads, Synths	121:42	4:59	Underscore. The climax, the most glorious moment of truth.
33	122:03	Irreversible, Determined	Strings (Hard pizz), Brass, Synths, Pads	123:53	1:50	Underscore. The judgment day.
34	123:54	Melancholic, Nostalgic	Strings, Pads, Piano	125:52	1:58	Underscore. The ones who stayed behind.
35	128:25	Hopeful, Melancholic, Dreamy	Strings, Piano, Pads, Synths, Oboe, Harmonica	133:54	5:29	Underscore. So warm and yet, always nostalgic.
36	135:40	Noble, Hopeful, Glorious	Full Orchestra	142:32 (End)	6:58	It's the only cue in which he uses all the WW, or at least in which they play a solo as a section. Also, at 1:38:22 it seems like the cue is over... but then the timpani come in and everything restarts..

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