

Berklee Valencia

Music Analysis of the Movie “Chocolat” (2000)

Director: Lasee Hallstrom

Composer: Rachel Portman

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Scoring for Film, Television and VideoGames

The movie *Chocolat* directed by Lasse Hallström begins on a particularly windy day, when a red-hooded woman and her little daughter arrived to a small town in France to open a “Chocolaterie”, a chocolate store. Here they found discomfort and disapproval from some people in the village, influenced by the conservative mayor of the town. But at the end, the sweetness of her chocolate and her vibrant personality end up conquering the hearts of the community and giving a new light to the village. “Once upon a time, there was a quiet little village in the French countryside, whose people believed in *tranquilité*” (Hallström, *Chocolat*) are the very first words little Anouk narrates at the beginning of this beautiful story; but, even before that, this story begins with music. The very first notes set a tone to what you are about to watch, and create excitement towards the rest of the film.

Music and film have a complementary relationship that goes back to between mid-1890s and early 1900s, when music hall orchestras accompanied films seen as part of variety shows. Then on 1905 films moved on to theatres of their own, marking the beginning of music in film (Reay, 6) and ever since they have worked together creating an audiovisual experience we continue to enjoy. Music is used in many ways in film, to accentuate emotions, to enhance the dramatic narrative, or even as a main character. As George Burt presents it “Music has the power to open the frame of reference to a story and to reveal its inner life in a way that could not have been as fully articulated in any other way.” (4) In this particular movie music plays a giant role on how we perceive the story. Written by academy award winner, composer Rachel Portman, born in Sussex, England and known for her work in film scores such as *Emma* and *The Cider House Rules*, the music of the movie *Chocolat* has an identity of its own without losing the witty, romantic and thematically sharp way of writing that characterizes this brilliant composer. Her sound tells a story, it’s magical, almost childish, and characterized

mainly by the beautiful play between woodwinds and strings. Nominated to an academy award, the tone of this movie is set by its music, the use of a particular choice of instrumentation takes the audience to an almost fairy tale like situation, and the relationship between music and characters gives sense to the whole story.

The opening credits of the film, where music starts, make a substantial comment on the tone this movie is going to have (Burt, 4). In the case of this movie, it can be described as if it were a chocolate. The recipe has a particular touch of French music, with a splash of fantasy, written in a story-telling way, while showing the main theme of the movie which will be recurrent throughout the whole film, and tempting the audience, like chocolate. The music of this film is theme-based, meaning that each cue resembles a theme related to one of the characters or actions that are going on. Each character's theme can be closely related to the different archetypes presented by Carl Jung. The first one, my personal favorite, is Vianne, a mixture between *the mother* and *the witch*, being a nurturing and protecting character as well as the curious, seductive, emotional woman (Jung, 81-114), which is represented by a beautiful theme that goes with her personality.

Cond Reynaud's theme, characterized by its formality and his anguish, relates to the archetype of *the father* a stern, powerful, authoritative figure "from whom the decisive convictions, prohibitions, and wise counsel emanate" (Jung, 214) The wind, and the chocolate very tempting and mysterious, always expectant, it's like the *wise old man* an archetype of the spirit "who symbolizes the pre-existent meaning hidden in the chaos of life" (Jung, 35). And finally Roux, representing *the trickster* a cosmic being of divine-animal nature on one hand superior to man due to his knowledge and qualities, and on the other hand inferior because of his impulses and unconsciousness, (Jung, 264), is represented by beautiful adaptations of catchy well known songs.

Each of these themes play a role in the movie almost as important as every character they represent, and every variation of a theme is created to respond the same way the characters are responding. This connection between characters and themes involves the audience deeper inside the movie creating a better and more emotional connection to the film, and creating a personal relationship from the person to the film based on their “Referral System” (Moreno, 217-220).

1. Music Overall

From the beginning to the end, it's important to take into account how music develops on a large scale, its chronology, and its relationship with what happens in the movie. *Chocolat* is a comedic fable about how a person, a relationship or a whole village can change only by trying the small pleasures of life. It's a story about temptation, repression and the powers of the senses; a charming tale about the unleashing of a war that takes place in a small population because of the growing passion and fear developed in the habitants due to the opening of a chocolate store. All these, accompanied by music. It starts with a piano setting a color, then a beautiful melody, and the cue ends with the sounds of the loud and dissonant church bells stating the power and importance of the church in the movie. Music develops along with the story line and its emotional rollercoaster begin with expectation, followed by anger, resentment, fun, temptation, memories, romance, a critical and dark climax to end with happy music playing in the final scene, in a way of a “happily ever after”.

Music on the movie *Chocolat* has a very specific tone, the movie is set in a little village in France, and therefore it has a French influenced sound. Popular French music shares some characteristics with the film score from *Chocolat*; it has some similarity with the French *Musette*, a type of music distinguished by being playful, fast and sensual, all characteristics found in *Chocolat*'s film score that help the tone of the movie

to remain as a romantic comedy, In some cues, even the accordion, that is very typical of the Musette, is used. The melodies display a specific manner of playing that is very similar to the Musette in its tempo and development, this type of music has become very characteristic of France worldwide. Apart from that, some cues feature the high energy of the Can Can and the sexiness of Cabaret music is present in most of the themes and their variations. It also relates to the French Chanson on the homophony that characterizes it. Music in this movie shows many contrasts but remains inside the same line that connects the movie plot, and the characters. It also sets an almost magical tone by keeping similar instrumentation between cues and the peculiar use of the guitar. These characteristics allow the music to have even more leadership in the movie being as important as the story line since it is as if the music was telling the story through its melody lines.

The spotting of this movie is very well done. Not every scene has music, and some cues are so short some might wonder why they are even there, but the constant reminder of the musical tone of the movie helps the audience to involve deeper in the movie and share the character's feelings and sensations. There is one cue that particularly calls my attention; near the end of the movie, the ashes of Vianne's mom fall down the stairs and break into pieces, I expected music to begin right away but that cue takes a while to begin. I don't know if this had a particular intention but I found that it creates an impact on the viewer, a certain anguish and tension that gives more impact to that scene. Like this example, many cues are spotted exactly where they are needed. It's very important not to underestimate where music starts in a scene and how long it plays, for it can make a big difference in the perception of the audience and it can manipulate, how the audience responds to the plot. The movie *Chocolat* has a beautiful balance between

forcing emotions in the viewer without being obvious and always keeping the elegance and the good taste this movie's music has.

The relationship between the film score and the source music in this movie is magnificent. "Source music is introduced into a scene either visually or by reference...these sounds are visually initiated."(Burt, 70) Source music is presented throughout the movie, except for Roux's themes, consisting of French jazz playing on radios in the cafeteria, beauty salon, etc. As mentioned before, the score of the movie has a French vibe, but it's completely different from the French source music coming from the radios, it has its own identity, different instrumentation and the sound itself it's different. Source music in this movie made me think about how post production decisions affect the movie and the craft of film making. Source music comes mostly from a radio, that's why it has a very old radio sound in comparison to the clarity sound of the score. Source music helps the viewer identify approximately the time where the history is supposed to be happening. The importance of the sound itself affects the perception of the movie as much as the music itself. The art of filmmaking is full of decisions that might seem small but are crucial for the movie and this affects the perception of the movie as a whole.

2. Theme based Score

As said before, I summarized the score of the movie in 4 main themes, Vianne, the Cond, Chocolat/Wind and Roux, which appear all over the movie with different theme variations. Apart from these there are also cues throughout the movie that don't relate to any character and exist mainly to support the emotions in the scene, without losing the tone of the movie.

Vianne, the main character of the movie, is a beautiful woman, calm, determined and a loving mother, but also wild, free and seductive, she represents a new role for

woman. As Vianne, her theme shares the same characteristics. This cue, written in D minor, doesn't have a completely minor sound because of the cheerful rhythm chosen for the harmony. Its melodic motion progresses little by little tempting the audience and always leaving you asking for more. It starts with the harmony, playing the rhythm and a couple bars later, the melody comes in, it's a line that repeats over and over again but each time taking it a step further, playing with the instrumentation, assigning different instruments on each appearance of the melody, it's a theme you could listen for hours. It inspires love, and courage. The basic movement of the melody develops in step tones and mostly, except for passing tones, stays inside the harmony while the harmony maintains a constant rhythm almost throughout the whole cue.

Score

VIANNE THEME

RACHEL PORTMAN

Double Bass

D.B.

D.B.

2

VIANNE THEME

22

D.B.

29

D.B.

36

D.B.

Another important cue, nemesis of Vianne's music, is the one for Cond Reynauld. This character is the major of the village, in charge of keeping the "tranquilite", tranquility. The Cond is a very powerful and influential man who doesn't like change. He is a very formal man, conservative and fond of tradition, but on top of everything, against Vianne, and all she represents. The Cond's theme goes perfectly with his personality, characterized by the formal bassoon and the use of French horn, the theme is dark and heavy. There are many different ways this theme develops throughout the movie but its intensity grows mainly by the growth of the strings and the tempo in which it's played. The variations of this theme can be found by it or disguised inside other cues but most of the times played in E minor.

Score

COND THEME

VARIATION

RACHEL PORTMAN

$\text{♩} = 92$

mp

f

3

5

7

I call this next cue the “Chocolate/wind” cue; because it doesn’t represent a character but a mood and a memory on Vianne’s life. The chocolate is very important for her, she is descendant from a French father who married a Mexican woman from the Maya tribe, and therefore, her recipes and traditions are 2000 years old. The Mayan tribe would move from one place to another with the call of the wind, and so did Vianne with her daughter. This cue is exotic, tempting like the chocolate, it’s used for the moments when people would sin and try Vianne’s chocolate, when the chocolate would call people to forget the rules. This theme is also used to bring back memories, to recall from the past the story of grand mere and grandpere (grandparents) or when the wind would remind the main character that it’s time to move. Again its tonality is D minor since it’s a cue that relates to Vianne, but this time it keeps a minor tone, neither sad, nor melancholic, but rather disturbing. The Mayan music is known for the use of the pentatonic scale, not meaning the whole cue is only using pentatonic scale, but that it resembles the particular sound this scale has. The main characteristic is the flute, when this cue is played, the flute has a very particular airy sound, which relates to the ancient flutes from Latin America such as Ocarinas and Lacadón, at time the flute would have the melody, other times the violins take it but mostly it’s shared between woodwinds. (Yurchenco, 15). The movement of the strings is presented in this cue as in all others since it’s a characteristic of this score

Score

CHOCOLAT/WIND THEME

[Subtitle]

RACHEL PORTMAN

[Arranger]

The first system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 3/4 time signature, containing a whole rest followed by a dotted half note G4 and a dotted half note A4. The middle staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 3/4 time signature, featuring a continuous eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a 3/4 time signature, containing whole rests.

The second system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 5/4 time signature, starting with a 4-measure rest, followed by a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, and a dotted half note G4. The middle staff is a grand staff with a 5/4 time signature, continuing the eighth-note accompaniment. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a 5/4 time signature, featuring a bass line with notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, and G4.

The third system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a 7/4 time signature, starting with a 7-measure rest, followed by a melodic line with notes G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, and a dotted half note G4. The middle staff is a grand staff with a 7/4 time signature, continuing the eighth-note accompaniment. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a 7/4 time signature, featuring a bass line with notes G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, and G4.

2

CHOCOLAT/WIND THEME

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 10-12) features a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The treble clef part has a complex melodic line with many accidentals, while the bass clef part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system (measures 10-12) shows the continuation of the bass clef part, which becomes more sparse, with some whole notes and rests. The third system (measures 13-15) shows the treble clef part with a few chords and a single note, while the bass clef part remains mostly empty with a few whole notes.

One of the things that attract me about this score was the selection of music for the character “Roux”. Played by Johnny Depp, Roux is a river rat, a pirate that floats his way into the city through the river with his group. Roux and Vianne hold a short romantic relationship in the movie, but his role is mainly to create controversy and more chaos in the village, he is not welcome and the town begins a “boycott immorality” meaning he or his friends can’t work, sell, buy or walk around the village without being mistreated. Vianne, a fighter for other people’s rights, is against this and becomes friendly with the “pirates”. Roux music is a gypsy jazz. Some of the most well known gypsy jazz standards of all times are played in this movie, including “Minor Swing” by Django Reinhardt or “Caravan” by Duke Ellington, produced and arranged by Bob Last and Malcolm Ross, and recorded by Johnny Depp himself and Malcolm Ross. Although many changes were made, it still conserves the heavy use of ornaments in the phrasing, and thick chord voicing’s with emphasis on bass notes that characterize this type of music leaving aside the percussion. The most interesting thing about Roux’s theme was the passing from source music to score. The character plays the guitar in the movie and his music begins as source music that he is playing, until it eventually becomes part of the score when it continues sounding after he stopped playing and the next scene is happening. At the end we hear this cue again right before the end credits in the town party scene where the conflicts are solved and everyone is happy.

Score

MINOR SWING

CHOCOLAT VERSION

Django Reinhardt
Bob Last and Malcolm Ross

Moderato (♩ = 100)

Acoustic Guitar

Bass Guitar

Ac. Gtr.

Bass

Ac. Gtr.

Bass

Ac. Gtr.

Bass

2

MINOR SWING

Ac.Gtr. ⁹

Bass

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 and 10. The Acoustic Guitar part (treble clef) starts at measure 9 with a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. In measure 10, it continues with eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, followed by a quarter note G4. The Bass part (bass clef) has a steady eighth-note line: G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2 in measure 9, and G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2 in measure 10.

Ac.Gtr. ¹¹

Bass

Detailed description: This system contains measures 11 and 12. The Acoustic Guitar part (treble clef) starts at measure 11 with a quarter note G4, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, and a half note G4. In measure 12, it has a quarter note G4, followed by a dotted quarter note G4, and a half note G4. The Bass part (bass clef) has a steady eighth-note line: G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2 in measure 11, and G2, A2, B2, C3, B2, A2, G2 in measure 12.

There are some other cues in the movie that are not exactly the ones exposed before and are cue for specific scenes that are not played again in other time. These themes relate to the ones of the characters in the rhythms used and the melodic contour. One of the most popular is called “Passage of Time” in E minor tonality and a lot of similarities to the main themes. It’s very catchy and has a new melody that hasn’t heard before in the movie that develops into Cond Reynauld’s theme and later on to Vianne’s theme. Most of these cues stay inside the range of the four main themes and share with them instrumentation, rhythm patterns and style.

Score

PASSAGE PF TIME

Other Music

Rachel Portman

[Arranger]

$\text{♩} = 95$

p

mp

5

9

3. Musical Development

One of the main characteristics of the “Portman’s Melodies” as Matilde Olearte presents is that it has acquired a unique category, as an incidentally symphonic music, with a unique melody supported in the use of woodwinds and strings. Most melodies fluctuate from winds towards strings, which may be orchestral strings or guitar. (3) A perfect example for this is the music for the main titles; this cue begins with a piano and it’s melody starts with a flute that plays the first round and delivers the melody to the strings that comfort it with the rest of the instrumentation. Later on strings will play rhythmic patterns while woodwinds take over the melody and eventually give it back to the strings. It’s like a very subtle conversation between the instrumentation that continuously calls the attention of the listener without pulling away from the plot.

Instrumentation in film scoring is not chosen by chance or taste only. Instruments generate different ways of perception for the viewer, which depends on a cultural collective conscience. I would like to analyze some of the most important instrumental decisions made in the movie starting by the use of the Flute. The flute is one of the oldest instruments ever invented by man, originated in New Guinea by primitive man who found how to make noise by blowing on a broken piece of bamboo (Sachs, 45) and it became popular in almost every culture around the world. The modern flute has a beautiful and clear sound, but the ancestors of the flute differ from modern sound by the amount of air in the tone. The Flute is used in many cues throughout the movie, but in the Chocolate/Wind theme and Vianne’s theme is crucial; Vianne’s mom came from the ancient Maya culture in Mexico, and the temptation sound as well as the chocolate traditions come from her, this is why this specific airy sound of flute was chosen, unconsciously it reminds the viewer of an ancient flute, of the sound of a Mexican tribe. The Maya culture left a legacy of instruments known to

the modern world like the Ocarina, a wind instrument usually made of clay with five holes in it that has a remotely similar sound to a flute. In contrast to this, the flute used for Vianne's theme has a more common modern European sound, the melodies are similar in their structure and in some cues both themes overlap but always keeping apart one sound from another.

The use of bassoon and French horn characterize Cond Reynaud's theme. In the Orchestra, the bassoon is a "slightly conical double-reed instrument, the tube of which is bent back on itself like a hairpin." (Sachs, 316) and the woodwind equivalent of the cello in the string family playing in a low range during the cue. The French horn is sober and teaming with the types of melodies chosen relates to an old cultural sound. The French horn comes from the hunting horn is the 1600 and, as it says on its name, comes from France. It's a great choice to represent the personality of the character being conservative, and fond of the French tradition.

The Guitar is one of the most popular instruments of the modern times and, psychologically, it can take the audience into many directions depending on how it's played. The acoustic guitar in Europe however, seems to resemble of the gypsy sound. It is in Spain that the ancestor of the guitar originated, called Vihuela, and thus the instrument is very well known and use in the country, especially for Flamenco. However, it was no surprise that the use of this instrument migrated at the beginning to other Latin countries, such as Italy, and then to the rest of Europe. (Turnbull, 6) As the character of Roux, the instrument that represents him is characterized by its gypsy nature. The use of the guitar for Roux's theme has a big impact on the audience because of the rhythms it plays and its particular sound. This instrument's history relates to the one of the character. The movie doesn't state where Roux is from, and it's very hard to track the exact origin of the Guitar, There is archaeological evidence of this instrument

in Turkey but there are many cultures that developed string instrument that can take us to the modern guitar. Roux travels from one place to another. The guitar is known for being the partner of the troubadours around history, travelling from one place to another with their music.

Music expresses emotions that can't be expressed with words, its art that reaches to the soul and the perfect complement to any other way of art. The reason that guides us to participate in a musical activity, either to compose, play, or listen, is for the capacity of music to create real and pure emotions in us. These emotions are capable of breaking the monotony of the everyday to bring us back to life. (Sloboda, 9) I recommend the movie *Chocolat* to anyone looking to paint with another color the tones of the heart, let it be filled with joyfulness and freedom. Doing this analysis has made me realize that a film scorer's duty is to create a feeling in the audience that can't be created any other way, and every note written has a purpose and a destiny.

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