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**“Between tradition and modernity –
The eclectic approach of Joe Hisaishi to
Miyazaki’s “Spirited Away” soundtrack”**

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“...The Hollywood style of using music to introduce characters and explain what’s on screen is a method that I don’t normally use in Japan...” (Joe Hisaishi, 1999)

Thesis

In the world of Japanese animation movies, the way composers work on the creation of the soundtrack is quite different from the way we’re used to in the western world.

The creation of what is called an “Image Album”, often based on simple suggestions and ideas about the movie, before it is actually completed is one of the most relevant differences.

The music created for this album, which is published as a trailer months before the movie itself, sets the boundaries within which the composer should remain while composing the final soundtrack.

There are many consequences to this habit: the music is used often as a simple commentary to the scene (or to the emotions that are expressed or that are proper to a specific character) without a proper syncing, and many editing and re-writing or re-orchestrating techniques are involved, in order to use the pre-existing material in a proper way.

With this paper, I would like to concentrate on the soundtrack of Hayao Miyazaki’s “Spirited Away”, written by his usual collaborator Joe Hisaishi. Through a selection of different cues I will analyze the relationship between the Image Album and the final soundtrack as well as the editing and re-orchestrating techniques that allow Hisaishi to adapt the themes to the actual

images. Due to the frequent “commentary” nature of the music, I will also concentrate on the symbolic role that it has in relation to the dramatic action.

The Image Album and its boundaries

The Image Album is a collection of compositions based on general hints, ideas, drawings, key words (as in the specific case of Joe Hisaishi and Hayao Miyazaki), provided by the director to the composer. This album fulfills different purposes related both to the creation of the movie itself and to the marketing strategies proper of the industry of animation movies in Japan.

On one hand this album, released several months *before* the movie it corresponds to, it serves as a publicity for the movie itself; on the other side, and this is typically seen in the relation between Miyazaki and Hisaishi, it serves as a source of inspiration for the director and animator while working on the images.

“Trans – Revista transcultural de música” published in its number 16 of 2012 an important paper from Marco Bellano, professor of History of Animation at the University of Padova (Italy). In his “From Albums to Images – Studio Ghibli’s Image Albums and their impact on audiovisual strategies”, Bellano points out how the creation of this first collection of music has a deep impact on the creation of the final soundtrack.

It is clearly evident that this first album defines the boundaries within which the composer should remain since both the audience and the director, become accustomed to the music that has been created before the final images have

been finalized. It is also very interesting that this practice generates a different relationship between music and images: music is created on its own and, for this reason, its formal structure is necessarily stronger and usually takes the structure of concert pieces (or songs) more often than in the usual “western” soundtracks. As a consequence, the most frequent use of this music is that of a “commentary” to the general feeling and meaning of the images, in a way that appears to be the natural opposite of the technique of “mickey mousing” introduced by Walt Disney’s cartoons.

What Marco Bellano suggests is that this technique also relates to the classical way of using music in the traditional Japanese theatre “No” and “Kabuki”.

“...[the] gebikan (which translates as “dramatic accompaniment”)... approach...in based on the use of recurring pieces that serve as a commentary for characters, locations or moods.” (Bellano, 2012: 2).

It is also true that Hayao Miyazaki’s movies are mainstream in their country (and in the last 15 years, huge successes also in the western world) and that, of course, the taste of Japanese audience is largely influenced by western movies. Even if animation cinema is still the place where the *gebikan* approach resists the most (Bellano, 2012: 3) it is evident that it is necessarily mixed with a more modern style. For this purpose, Joe Hisaishi, mixing the two approaches, uses a set of techniques: re-arrangement and re-orchestration of the themes; their repeated use; and a heavy use of editing. These become the tools that the composer, together with the music editor (in this case, no less than the director

Isao Takahata, co-founder of Studio Ghibli¹ with Hayao Miyazaki) needs to use as part of the final composition of the soundtrack, as will be demonstrated in this paper.

Miyazaki and Hisaishi

a. A 30-year-long relationship

The relationship between Hayao Miyazaki and Joe Hisaishi (real name Mamoru Fujisawa, his alias-name comes as a homage to the American musician and producer Quincy Jones) is one of the longest in the history of cinema, starting in 1984 with the movie “Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind” and lasting until what is supposed to be Miyazaki’s last movie (“The wind rises”, 2013). It is obvious that, in such an amount of time, the musical style of Hisaishi has changed and evolved. His first “eclectic” approach (mixing minimalistic and electronic music with some more orchestral sounds, as seen in “Nausicaa”) has progressively developed in a more coherent “orchestral” style that still features some gentle electronic touch (as in the “Spirited Away” soundtrack). This is partially due to his increased ability in handling orchestration, as he himself admitted when talking about the rewriting of Nausicaa’s soundtrack for the English-dubbed version released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment in 2005 (Hisaishi, 2014). It’s in fact typical for Studio Ghibli’s composers to be orchestrators, conductors and performers of their own

¹ Studio Ghibli was founded by Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata after the success of “Nauicaa” in 1985. Since that date all of their movies have been produced there. (<http://www.studioghibli.it/storia/leorigini-dello-studio/>)

music (Bellano, 2012: 8). It is also noticeable that, due to the explained process of composing music, each of the 10 movies they created together have generated a great amount of records. It is sufficient to say that “Nausicaa” has an Image, an OST, an Orchestral, a Drama and a Piano Solo album version!

The relationship between the two artists was celebrated in August 2008 with a huge concert at the Nippon Budokan of Tokyo. Hisaishi played and conducted his music for Miyazaki’s movies with an orchestra and choir of 1200 musicians, with an audience of 14000 people, for two evenings in a row.

b. “Spirited Away” (“Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi”)

This is the seventh movie by Hayao Miyazaki and his most successful. With a production budget of 19 million dollars (10% of these provided by Disney), the movie ended up earning more than 330 millions being the most successful movie ever made in Japan and being acclaimed in the whole world as a masterpiece. It also won the Academy Award for the best Animated Picture in 2002 as well as the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival the same year.

The soundtrack won the 6th Mainichi Film Competition, the Tokyo International Anime Fair in 2001 and the 17th Japan Gold Disk Award for the Animation Album of the Year.

The film tells a story about the passage from childhood to the adult age: Chihiro is a bored 10-year-old child that, once having entered by chance into the spirits’ world (in a way that resembles that of Alice in Wonderland), needs

to undertake a path of personal growth to free herself and her parents (transformed into pigs) before going back to her life as a new, mature person. Her innocence, compassion and a newly discovered altruism (also driven by love) will be the keys for her success.

Other than this main subject, many of the recurrent topics of Miyazaki's movies are present: the criticism to modern consumerism (the parents are transformed in pigs after bingeing in an empty restaurant); the nostalgic remembrance of ancient Japan; and the ecological theme (for sure his most recurrent one: in the bath house a river spirit is freed by Chihiro from all the human garbage that poisons him while Haku, another river spirit, is unable to escape from the spirits world because his riverbed has been covered with concrete and houses).

Analysis of the "Spirited Away" soundtrack techniques

a. Adapting a theme

The most important theme in the movie is the one associated with the character of Chihiro/Sen.

This is one of the themes of the soundtrack that come directly from the Image Album and, in both cases, is proposed as the first track of the CD's. It is a perfect example of the technique of use and re-use of the thematic elements and of how orchestration is used to adapt the same material to the particular situation where it is played.

It is also very interesting to note that each time this melody is presented, after the exposition of its three parts, a different conclusion is provided, according to the specific action to which it's associated.

Other than that, this particular cue serves as a good example to show how in this movie, as well in most of Miyazaki and Hisaishi's movies, music is used as a commentary to feelings and as a psychological tool more often than it is used as a normal "western" underscore, strictly attached to the images via the use of precise sync-points.

The way the thematic material is presented in the first Image Album (with the title "To the River of that day") is quite different in comparison to how it's employed in the OST Album and, therefore, in the movie. It's a gentle pop song that features a female voice, mainly accompanied by piano and synths. After an introduction that is not heard in the movie, the three main ideas that compose this theme are displayed in the same order in which they are played in the movie and then repeated and varied to complete the normal form of a pop song.

The movie version (entitled "One Summer's Day") starts with a totally different introduction played by a piano (Ex.1):

Ex.1 - Introduction

The musical score for the piano introduction is written in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure contains a chord of G4, B4, and D5. The second measure contains a chord of G4, B4, and D5. The third measure contains a chord of G4, B4, and D5. The fourth measure contains a chord of G4, B4, and D5. The bass staff begins with a bass clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first measure contains a chord of G2, B2, and D3. The second measure contains a chord of G2, B2, and D3. The third measure contains a chord of G2, B2, and D3. The fourth measure contains a chord of G2, B2, and D3. The word "Piano" is written to the left of the staves.

The harmony in fourths provides a suspended feeling that is not related to the images of a normal family moving inside a car. This theme, deeply related to the main character (Chihiro/Sen), works like a frame to the whole movie that has a circular structure. It's not by chance that the first word pronounced in the movie is the name "Chihiro" (names will have a central symbolic role as they define the identity of the characters): music works like a general announcement of what will come next and, while providing a strong sense of magic and suspension, suggests the idea that innocence will be one of the keys for Chihiro's success. The three cells that compose the melody (A – B and C, Ex.2,3 and 4) are played in a very gentle way by a piano lightly accompanied by one synthesizer followed by a light string orchestra. The combined sound of piano and strings will occur often when the action is referred to Chihiro and to her childish innocence and purity.

5 Ex.2 - Main Theme - A

10

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts at measure 5 and ends at measure 9. The second system starts at measure 10 and ends at measure 14. The music is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The melody is in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The accompaniment consists of chords, primarily dyads in fourths, with some triplets. The overall mood is gentle and suspended.

14 Ex.3 - Main Theme - B

Musical notation for Ex.3 - Main Theme - B, measures 14-17. The piece is in 2/4 time. Measure 14 starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The right hand plays a series of chords and eighth notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note bass line. Measure 15 continues the bass line and adds more complex chordal textures in the right hand. Measure 16 features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 17 concludes the phrase with a final chord in the right hand and a bass line ending on a half note.

18

Musical notation for Ex.3 - Main Theme - B, measures 18-20. Measure 18 shows the right hand playing chords and eighth notes, with the left hand continuing the bass line. Measure 19 continues the bass line and features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 20 concludes the phrase with a final chord in the right hand and a bass line ending on a half note.

2 Ex.4 - Main Theme - C

21

Musical notation for Ex.4 - Main Theme - C, measures 21-24. The piece is in 2/4 time. Measure 21 starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The right hand plays a series of chords and eighth notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note bass line. Measure 22 continues the bass line and adds more complex chordal textures in the right hand. Measure 23 features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 24 concludes the phrase with a final chord in the right hand and a bass line ending on a half note.

25

Musical notation for Ex.4 - Main Theme - C, measures 25-28. Measure 25 shows the right hand playing chords and eighth notes, with the left hand continuing the bass line. Measure 26 continues the bass line and features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 27 continues the bass line and features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 28 concludes the phrase with a final chord in the right hand and a bass line ending on a half note.

29

Musical notation for Ex.4 - Main Theme - C, measures 29-32. Measure 29 shows the right hand playing chords and eighth notes, with the left hand continuing the bass line. Measure 30 continues the bass line and features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 31 continues the bass line and features a 7-measure rest in the right hand. Measure 32 concludes the phrase with a final chord in the right hand and a bass line ending on a half note.

This same melody occurs on three other occasions in the movie, always carrying a strong symbolic meaning related to the growth process that Chihiro needs to undertake to save her parents (victims of their senseless consumerism) and escape from the world of the spirits.

The first time it appears is at 48.29 in the movie and with the title "Day of the river" in the OST album, referring both to Haku, the river spirit, and to the title of the track on the Image Album. It appears when Haku accidentally gives Chihiro her stolen/forgotten name after she had been named Sen, until this point of the story. It's the first important milestone in the growth of Chihiro/Sen and the music, which is not directly related to the images (Sen eating rice), is used as a symbol for it. At this point Chihiro is finding with difficulty the courage to start her adventure (she starts crying) but, at the same time, the music itself reminds that her innocence and her first contact with love (that of course cannot take an adult form) will help her grow as a person and therefore succeed. The second time it appears at 1.29.09 in the movie and this new arrangement is not present in the OST album. It happens when Chihiro takes an important and difficult decision in order to help Haku. He is dying because of a spell: she will undertake a train trip with no return to save him. It's the moment when the self-centered and egoistical Chihiro that we saw at the beginning of the movie, finally disappears to leave room to a new compassionate, altruistic person capable of love (that is, overall, altruistic...). Again, music is used to mark a milestone in her growth: when the A part of the theme is played, it is mixed with the synth sound that relates to Haku, standing as a symbol of their germinating love. For the same reason, this time the theme is doubled with a gentle oboe that adds a particular sweetness to the melody

and, later, by a warm and beautiful French horn. Again, the relation with the images and the action displayed is way weaker than the one with the evolution of Chihiro. While the music is playing another character is telling Chihiro that a monster is devastating the spirits' thermal baths where they all live and work. There is no sign of this tension in the music that is simply relating to the main character of the story and to her growth.

The last time it appears is at 1.58.07 in the movie and the title of the track is "The return". It takes place when Chihiro has already saved her parents and given Haku back his name and with it, his freedom. The music closes as a frame to the story. The new arrangements, with the melancholic piano or a simple string orchestra, heard when Chihiro shows her maturity resisting to the temptation of turning back (perhaps as a symbol of a new, different, Orfeo?), convey a set of different emotions. There is the sense of ending of a big adventure, the idea that the circularity of the story is in reality the starting point for the new life of Chihiro, the sense of nostalgia for the momentary separation from Haku. Again, the music is related to the inner world of the character and serves as the structure of the movie only with its final cadence, accompanying the conclusion of the plot.

b. Influence of the music on the final movie

Hayao Miyazaki is known for listening to a lot of music while drawing and animating. In the documentary "How Ponyo was born", produced of course by Studio Ghibli, he explains that he was listening to Wagner while

drawing and that this influenced the choice of the name Brunhilde² for his character.

It is also evident that the Image Album for the movie he was working on is one of the main influences in the workflow and the final result.

There are two tracks of the Image Album that “survived” in their original form (or at least with non-significant modifications) to the transition from the Image Album to the movie, and consequently to the OST album.

The impact of the cue that on the Image Album is called “Sea” is, however, quite unique. It has been evident to me, since the first time I saw this movie, that images and music are linked here in a different way, dancing and melting together like as if the music had the main role, and the images were created following its pace. This scene kind of breaks the movie in two parts, even if we’re close to its ending, and the slow rhythm and unusual length, due to the relation with the music, assumes quite an important symbolic role. We’re watching a long trip on a train that stands as the final step of Chihiro towards her adult age. She is supposed to come back on foot from this trip (to an unknown destination, at this point) but, due to its length, this is clearly impossible. That’s because once the status of “child” has been left there is no possible comeback and, in fact, this scene shows the first time that Chihiro is leading her small group of friends like an adult.

After a gentle chord played by a synthesizer, a slow arpeggio played on a piano begins in the low register, opening the cue (Ex.5):

² Brunhilde is the real name of Ponyo and comes from the name of the daughter of Wotan in Wagner’s “Der Ring des Nibelungen”.

34 Ex.5 - The sixth station

The musical score for Ex.5, titled "The sixth station", begins at measure 34. It is written for piano and synth. The piano part (bottom staff) features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. The synth part (top staff) consists of a sustained chord in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand.

As I mentioned, strings and piano are the main “Chihiro instruments” and since the whole scene is basically symbolizing her growth, these are the instruments dominating the cue.

The main melody is then heard (Ex.6) and, after a brief development, the typical suspended harmony in fourths, which refers to Chihiro from the first cue, is played again, this time only by the high strings (Ex.7). Needless to say, this is another sign of the centrality of the main character in this sequence, even though the beautiful images of the train and the stations sunk in water are shown.

41 Ex.6 - The sixth station - Main Melody

The musical score for Ex.6, titled "The sixth station - Main Melody", begins at measure 41. It is written for piano and synth. The piano part (bottom staff) features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. The synth part (top staff) consists of a sustained chord in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand.



Ex.8 - Sootballs - Main Theme

$\text{♩} = 126$

The musical score is for the 'Main Theme' of 'Sootballs'. It is written for five instruments: Cor Anglais, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Contrabassoon, and Horn in F. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 126. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 4. The Cor Anglais, Clarinet in Bb, and Horn in F parts begin in measure 3 with a melody marked *p*. The Bassoon and Contrabassoon parts play a steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout, also marked *p*. The second system contains measures 5 through 8. The Cor Anglais, Clarinet in Bb, and Horn in F parts continue their melodic lines, while the Bassoon and Contrabassoon parts continue their accompaniment.

The orchestration resembles that of the “Dance of the Little Swans” of Tchaikovsky’s “Swan Lake” and again, the main difference among the two

versions resides in the quality of the production: samples in the Image album and a real wind orchestra with horn and piano for the movie soundtrack. A good example for the eclectic approach to this soundtrack is provided by the strict leit-motiv technique adopted for the “sootballs”, since their melody is presented every time they appear. After the first appearance, already mentioned, the melody, cut in small cells and varied to accompany the images (Ex.9), is presented again in a track that can be found also in the OST album with the name “Bathhouse Morning” and appears finally at 87.15 in the movie, right before Chihiro decides to leave to save Haku’s life.



It is also interesting to notice that the original Image Album version is closed with a short reprise of the theme (varied and modulated) that could have been prepared for an eventual re-use in the movie. It is actually never heard in the final soundtrack.

c. Editing and re-orchestrating

As mentioned earlier, editing techniques have an important role in the way music is “applied” to the images. This habit has probably developed throughout the relationship between director and musician, since this is

especially true in the first soundtracks composed by Hisaishi for Miyazaki's movies: pre-existing recordings published in the Image Album were adapted to fit images, frequently with evident cuts or fades.

As we will see in the two following examples, this technique is still largely applied in this movie.

The third track of the Image Album is a song (featuring different male and female voices) called "Gods". It contains several Japanese-traditional elements in terms of instrumentation and structure. The way it is sung, the percussive and metallic sounds and the main harmonic instrument, the koto, place this cue in the traditional music realm and it's in fact associated with the masques of the spirits that appear to be part of the Japanese tradition (Boyd and Nishimura, 2004)

This happens again whenever the thermal baths and the inside happenings are displayed. Since it appears to be an element of the ancient Japanese life, to which Miyazaki frequently pays tribute in his movies, it is always associated to music that sounds "ancient" in terms of instrumentation and style.

However, it is interesting that in an interview published the 25th of June of 2014 on the site www.studioghibli.it, Hisaishi explains that, partially due the high number of different divinities that are shown in the movie, the inspiration for the traditional cues comes from the Balinese, African and Middle-Eastern music, mixed with the folk style from Okinawa.

The first time the track is heard is at 13.19 in the movie and is titled "Procession of the Spirits" in the OST album. A scared Chihiro watches the spirits getting off the boat that takes them to the thermal baths. There are only a few elements of the original track that survive in the soundtrack. Of course the various

traditional elements (koto, percussions and metals) are still present in the cue, but the sung melody is replaced with a more cinematic brass orchestration that mixes the traditional sound with a more usual soundtrack sound.

However, compared to the OST Album track, this cue appears to be missing its introduction and simply, abruptly fades out while Chihiro escapes running to a small hill, without any real syncing to the images.

Actually, the whole track is played entirely only the second time it's heard, at 30.32 in the movie. This time the cue appears to be carefully synced to the images, especially in the introduction part, that was cut the first time.

At every change of frame, of Chihiro and Rin walking into the structure of the thermal baths, the light pizzicato strings accompaniment leaves room to heavy and deep brass chords that outline the severity of the big building. This time the cue is so perfectly adapted to the images that it appears to have been re-written for this specific sequence, starting with the material present in the Image Album and then, later, heavily edited for the previous sequence.

Even more complex is what happens with the cue that in the OST album version takes the name "Yubaba". It is referred to the main negative character although there are no real evil characters in this movie: everyone has good and dark sides.

Hisaishi, in the quoted interview, says that he encountered the worst difficulties in musically defining the character of Yubaba, precisely because of her complexity. However, the introduction to her cue is quite interesting (Ex.10) leaving the whole weight of her presentation to a piano solo hitting two notes at the opposite extremes of the keyboard, in a very effective and peculiar way.

Ex.10 - Yubaba - Introduction

The musical score is for a piano introduction in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The tempo is marked 'liberamente' and the dynamics are 'ff'. The piece begins with a half note chord in the right hand and a half note chord in the left hand. In the third measure, there is a triplet of eighth notes in both hands. The piece ends with a half note chord in the right hand and a half note chord in the left hand.

The following material is largely based on what composes the track “The night is coming” on the Image Album. The piano and harp arpeggio, which constitutes the basis of the original cue, is played on the OST by the sole harp at a slightly faster pace. The other “sonically strong” element of the cue is a synth-pad resembling a choir and it is identical on both cues.

Even the thematic material, exposed at first by strings, and by brass in a later section is the same on the two cues, with the only main difference being that the same piano notes heard on the intro, are repeated on top of the pre-existing music.

As usual the Image Album features only sampled sounds that in the actual soundtrack are replaced by the real orchestra, generating a hybrid cue of orchestral and synthetic elements.

Even if the music here has been largely re-written using the original material of the Image Album, the editing techniques have been used intensely to make it fit the length of the images.

Comparing the published soundtrack to what is heard when the scene concerning Yubaba begins, at 34.40 on the movie, it can be noted that only the

second half of the cue has been used, and also that it has been cut to finish abruptly, inserting the same notes as the introduction.

The central section of this same cue, that features a sort of disturbing lullaby played by one celesta (Ex.11), is heard only a few minutes later, when the giant baby, son of Yubaba, is presented.

Ex.11 - Yubaba - Celesta's lullaby

The musical score for Ex.11, 'Yubaba - Celesta's lullaby', is presented in two systems. The first system shows the right-hand melody and the left-hand accompaniment for the first two measures. The second system shows the continuation for the next two measures. The melody in the right hand is a simple, repetitive pattern: a quarter note, an eighth note, a quarter note, and a quarter note with a sharp sign. The left hand accompaniment consists of a quarter rest followed by a half note. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The score is labeled 'Celesta' on the left side.

A different version of this lullaby, extended, varied and orchestrated with pizzicato strings in addition, is heard again in the movie at 01.19.55 when Yubaba talks to her giant baby to calm him. Even a simple harmonic analysis of this small $\frac{3}{4}$ melody, with the augmented 5th in the 3rd measure and the repeated tritone on the left hand, makes evident that the chosen tone is slightly disturbing and weird, if compared to a lullaby.

The criticism implied towards this character is quite evident and is outlined by his music: the giant baby of Yubaba, over protected by his mother, cannot grow normally since he's subjected to her senseless fears. Again, the consequences of Chihiro's actions will give him the chance to move freely in the world learning, finally, how to develop normally.

Another interesting re-use of pre-existing material can be heard at 1.47.17 in the film: Chihiro and his small company are arriving at the humble house of Zeniba, Yubaba’s sister, driven by a lamp hopping on one foot (a clear homage that Miyazaki pays to John Lasseter’s Pixar, since he’s involved in the re-writing of the dialogues for the English version of the movie).

The scene takes place at night, the atmosphere is suspended and a complex figure, resembling two gentle arpeggios can be heard. It appears to be treated with some delay, or maybe edited and overlapped in a time-free way, to enhance the sense of magic (though certainly not fear) and uncertainty proper to the scene.

These are the arpeggios (Ex.12) that open the OST Album track n. 18, “The house at the swamp bottom” but those on the soundtrack album aren’t subject to this overlapping (or delaying) treatment:

Ex.12 - The House at the Swamp Bottom - Sample Figure

Again in the Image Album it is possible to find the source material for this arpeggio. On the track n.2 ("The night is coming") at 02.36 the same material is heard, presented by the sole piano and harp within a totally different context. It is, of course, easy to find many other examples of cues that compose the final soundtrack that have their original source material in the tracks of the Image Album, but I would like to consider one last example of editing and re-use of one cue.

d. "New" material and its use

It is evident that using only the previously existent material couldn't create the whole soundtrack. Furthermore, two of the songs published on the Image Album were not used in the final soundtrack.

Some of the cues have been written specifically for the images, presenting the characteristics of a more standard western way of composing for movies: they follow the action closely and use sync points.

One clear example of this writing technique can be found at 20.59 in the movie: Chihiro is walking down a big stair and, due to its dimension; every step is difficult and dangerous. The music literally follows every single step and movement of the character in a way that resembles the classic "mickey-mousing" technique. When one of the steps breaks, Chihiro is forced to a big run down the stair that ends, safely, against one wall.

As mentioned, the music follows the action: a fast figure in the higher strings, mixed with runs on the harp and ascending pizzicatos in the lower strings, follows closely her action.

This cue is present also in the OST Album, with the title “Sen’s Courage”: the published version contains the segment that we hear on the movie, without major edits.

What is less common is that the same segment is heard again in a different part of the movie, at 1.06.42, when Chihiro escapes from the bath building to start her last trip on the train. This time all of the “mickey-mousing” elements are, of course, not synced with the images up until the moment where Chihiro needs to run on a pipe that risks collapsing under her weight: it’s basically the same action seen when she was running down the stairs and the same figure of strings and harp are played, in a re-recorded version that fits the shorter length of the action.

However, the out-of-sync “mickey-mousing” elements are effective in generating a light tension that underline the adventurous escape from the building.

Conclusions

The way a soundtrack is conceived in the Japanese animation cinema is quite different from the way it’s done in the western mainstream one.

This is particularly true in the specific case of the long-lasting relation between Hayao Miyazaki and his composer Joe Hisaishi.

The common practice of creating an Image Album, published as a trailer to the movie some months before its release, sets the boundaries of the musical material that should be heard in the final soundtrack and, on the other side,

inspires the work of the director, sometimes reversing the normal hierarchy between images and music in a movie.

The increasing international success of Hayao Miyazaki's movies, together with the progressive changing of the taste of Japanese audience towards a more globalized direction, have, nonetheless, dictated the need of a more standard way of conceiving the music written for the images.

The consequence, as this paper has tried to explain, is the need of an highly eclectic approach to the composition that mixes "commentary" technique, coming from the Japanese classic theatre; leit-motives, associated both to characters or to feelings and states; re-orchestrations and re-writings of the same material; edits and, finally, more standardized original cues written for specific sequences.

All of these elements are present in the complex soundtrack of "Spirited Away".

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