

The Blood Diamond

The Story, Function of The Music, Tendencies

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Introduction

In the field of movie production, film scoring is essential; it helps reveal the film genre as the music sets the mood of the plot. Music: Science and art, functions as an emotion enhancer. It helps illustrate movements, create atmosphere, produce a sense of space, fictitious imaginations, creates a perception of time, and cleverly controls the viewer's perception.

It has been proven that soundtracks control the emotions of the viewer as it does in the "Blood Diamond." Obviously, the music sets the geographic and cultural references for the "Blood diamond film."

The "Blood Diamond" is an adventure and drama film that relates the true story of the Sierra Leone genocide where the people fought and killed fiercely in a political war that generated into one of the most controversial tribal wars around a stone called "Diamond."

The music enhanced the story and the physiological consequences of the images even though the music has not been pronounced at all times.

Successfully, the composer wrote all original themes and some of the source music for the movie. The approach of the hybrid orchestration confirmed the composer's skills and professionalism as the production techniques enhanced its function. The music is effective in each scene even though they might not be one's favorite.

It is then safe to say: One doesn't have to like a soundtrack, but it's still good as long as it is effective.

The Blood Diamond – Synopsis

In the year 1999, the country of Sierra Leone was dismantled by an atrocious civil war involving government soldiers and rebel forces. Cruelties such as the amputation of people's hands to stop them from voting were revealed in the "Blood diamond."

The Blood Diamond: directed by Edward Zwick, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Connelly, and Djimon Hounsou, is the story of a fisherman "Solomon Vandy" aka "Djimon Hounsou" whose ambition is to see his son become a successful doctor someday.

Writing by Charles Leavitt, the story reveals the tragedy of Solomon Vandy's misadventures leading to the non-fulfillment of his wishes.

1999 in Sierra Leone, the "Revolutionary United Front rebels" (RUF), invaded Solomon's village, he was kidnapped and forced to work in diamond mines while his son was brainwashed and changed into a rebel cruel killer. Unfortunately, The rebel's commandant known as captain poison (David Hairwood) caught Salomon hiding a huge pink diamond, he found in the field.

The diamond trade was used to finance the RUF war as it has become evident when the Anglo ex-mercenary Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio) from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) was caught trading arms for diamonds with a (RUF) commander, and smuggling the stones into Liberia; which final destination supposedly was the South African Colonel "Coetzee's possession."

Unfortunately, the diamonds got confiscated and the government army pushed the rebels out, causing Salomon and captain poison's arrest in a "Rafle" than imprisoned in the same penitentiary with colonel Coetzee in the Sierra Leone's capital city "Freetown."

As a former employer, Danny Archer was feeling guilty for colonel Coetzee's imprisonment and the lost of the diamonds. Immediately, after overhearing about the hidden diamond, archer offered Solomon an arrangement of release from prison and the trades of the hidden diamond against helping him find his family.

After the escape, Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly,) the American journalist that was helping Salomon find his family soon discovered that Archer's only intentions were to still the hidden diamonds instead, but Maddy the humanitarian would help Archer only if he reveals the secret of the true diamond market in order to stop the "bloody stone's" commerce away from Africa. Archer was constrained to disclose the information and was granted the permission to use the press cortege to get to the hidden diamond in Kono.

After their convoy's attack, Solomon and Maddy stumbled across the South African mercenary troop under the command of colonel Coetzee. The force was preparing to retake Sierra Leone so The two men decided to leave the camp. After a long nightly walk, they end up at the river valley where the diamond was hidden. Unfavorably, Salomon is reunited with his brainwashed son who refuses to recognize him. Here the RUF rebels are also massively sent to find the diamond. Unfortunately, many of their fighters and miners were killed and in the midst of the turbulence, Salomon killed captain poison after a brief mental illness. After realizing that Coetzee was planning to kill both Salomon and Archer upon finding the diamond, Archer kills colonel Coetzee and his two soldiers while Salomon was forced to find the diamond.

Lacking prudence, Archer gets shot as he was trying to still equipment from a body but hides his wounds and secretly arranged for a plane to rescue him but the pilot commands Archer to get a rid of Salomon and his son Dia. Sadly, Archer loses consciousness as the headed to the next airstrip on top of a hill. Knowing that he was slowly dying, he told Salomon to carry on with his son and hardly tries to hold off the soldiers that were following them, and successfully made a phone call asking Bowen to help Salomon and Dia. Archer dies peacefully as he enjoyed for the last time the beautiful African countryside.

Finally, Salomon successfully exchanges the diamond for a considerable amount of money and reunited with his family. Bowen the humanitarian was able to reveal the deal and the atrocity of the "Blood Diamond" commerce to the world. Happy ending, Salomon smile is featured in the last scene of the film.

The Composer

James Newton Howard is currently a songwriter, record producer, conductor, keyboardist, and a film composer, but best known for his film scores. James Newton Howard was born June 9, 1951. He began his music studies at a very young age. He attended the Thacher School in Ojai, California, the Music Academy of the west in Santa Barbara, California, and the University of Southern California, but dropped out to tour with Elton John. He has scored over a hundred films. The distinguished composer is known as a fast composer. He started with *Head Office* (1985) in 1985. He has been nominated for eight Academy Awards.

James Newton Howard best scores comprise *The Dinosaur*, *The Fugitive*, *Pretty Woman*, *the Prince of Tides*, *The Village*, *King Kong*, *Batman Begins*, *I am Legend*, *The Dark Night*, *Green Lantern*, *The Hunger Games*, *Snow White and the Huntsman*, *The Bourne Legacy*, *Catching Fire*, *The Sixth Sense*, *M. Night Shyamalan*, *The Blood Diamond*.

James Newton Howard joined a rock band after dropping out of college and had the privilege of working as a session musician with Diana Ross, Ringo Star, and Harry Nilsson, but didn't get his success until auditioning with Elton John and end up arranging strings for a few of his songs. His first film composition debut was an opportunity offered by his manager.

James Newton Howard earned multiple awards and nomination for his work. He is till an active composer as he elegantly composed "The Blood Diamond Soundtrack."

Function of the Music

The Main Title

Geographic Reference

The music of the main title established the tone of the entire movie and defined the geographic, cultural, and social settings, of each scene.

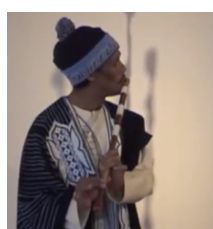
The African language so well articulated by the lead vocalist is narrative and allows a clear geographic and cultural identification.

The lead vocal of the “Mandingo griot” chant has a melodic contour that influenced the entire cue.

Who are the Mandingo Griots?

The Mandingo people of Sierra Leone are an ethnic group in Sierra Leone and West Africa. The Sierra Leonean Mandingo are descendants of the Mandinka warriors from Guinea and they speak the Mandinka language as their native language.

The Mandingo are known for their Cora playing, and their Djembe drumming, but mostly for keeping their oral tradition through their griots, which are singers that tell stories and proverbs by improvising melodies that fit a circumstance. Their melodies are usually built on a “Lydian scale” but not performed as in a western traditional style.



Chmaj7(#11)

Fula Flute

Fl.

We may also conclude that the music is Narrative in the main title cue.

1. Foreground

In the fullground, James Newton Howard told the story with the music using the vocal of the griot that is originally a storyteller. However, his arrangement and orchestration emphasize the hybrid characters of the theme.

The harmonization of the main title enhanced the melody as well as exposing its tropical characters.

Blood Diamond_Titles

James Howard Newton

Rubato

The musical score is presented in a system with five staves. The top staff is for Fula Flute, the second for Voice, the third for Keyboard [Strings], the fourth for Fl., and the fifth for Tape Smp. Str. The score is in 4/4 time and marked 'Rubato'. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The music features a slow, expressive melody in the voice and keyboard parts, with a focus on harmonic texture and melodic contour. The voice part begins with a long note, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The keyboard part provides a harmonic accompaniment with sustained chords and moving lines. The flute and string parts are mostly silent, with some light textures in the strings.

2. Middle ground

In the middle ground, the ethnic woodwind approach also sets the tone of the movie. The instrument emulates the articulations of the “Fula flute” which is a woodwind used by the Fula or Fulani people who represent the third major ethnic group in Sierra Leone.

The percussive rhythm of the djembe also indicates the geographic setting of the story in the middleground. The choir patch is used to perform contrapuntal melodies that blend apparently with the harmony in the middleground.

3. Background

The background includes a brilliant combination of orchestral instruments for instance, strings, and synth pads in most cues in the movie.

Cue – Crossing the Bridge

The theme is composed in a compound duple meter, which is common in the Mandingo culture.

The music of this theme expresses sadness.

Foreground

Here again the instrumentation sets the geographic, cultural, and social settings of the scene.

The Griot singing style establishes the mood, and the geographic setting and creates a sadness and desolation ambience.

Middle ground

1. The cue starts with an ostinato that creates a solid rhythm in the middle ground. The pattern is played with the Balafon, and the Djembe, which are some of the main instruments of the Mandingo music.

2. The strings carry a memorable melody in the middle ground, setting a sad mood.

3. Another instrument sounding like an electronic sax, probably a synth, emulates the “Fula flute.”

Texture

The percussions create a tropical or precisely an African atonal texture.

Background

The strings establish the harmony in the background creating a pad that flows nicely through the chord progression.

Cue – Village Attack

This cue is epic and gives a heroic and battlefield sensation.

The instrumentation is a bit different and much effective in this cue as the presence of strings, distortion guitar, and percussions enhance the battlefield and murder sensation.

Cue – Ruf Kidnaps Dia

Mood and Function of the music

The intro, performed with a synth in the lower register gives the sensation of a danger in close proximity, which is increased by the meter changes and the variation of sequences.

Foreground

The Fula woodwind and the griot vocals here again emphasize the geographic setting of the scene in the foreground.

Cue – Archer and Salomon

1.Repetition

The theme is a repetition of the motif that was played by the strings as middleground in Cue 2. It is performed with a guitar this time.

Notice that the same motif was set as middleground in cue 2 but as foreground in cue 5.

2 Moods

The mood of this theme is sad and emotional due to the chord progression, instrumentation, repetition of the motif and the ambiance created by the production techniques such as the creation of space with reverbs and delays.

Middleground and Background

The marimba and balafon creates a rhythmic texture in the middleground while the tonal pad defines the harmony in the background.

Cue List

Cue #	Start	Stop	Length
01 – The Blood Diamond – Titles	1:44	2:72	1:28
02 – Village Attack	3:27	4:84	1:58
03 – G8 Conference	6:35	9:11	2:76
04 – Solomon and Archer Escape	15:57	17:69	2:12
05 – Ruf Kidnaps Dia	28:52	31:62	3:01
06 – Did you bury it?	33:27	34:62	1:35
07 – Fall of Freetown	41:20	45:62	4:42
08– Crossing the Bridge	49:30	52:31	3:01
09 – Solomon Finds Family	55:55	57:64	2:09
10 – Archer sells Diamond	72:12	73:51	1:39 Repeated at the end.
11 – Maddy & Archer	85:00	86:53	1:53

12 - Your Son is Gone	96:20	97:00	00:80
13 – Archer & Solomon	97:55	99:09	1:54
14 – Solomon helping hand	100:31	100:39	1:08
15:00 – Your Mother Loves you	116:41	118:63	2:22
16 – I can Carry you	120:41	121:71	1:30
Though I'd Never Call	125:13	128:68	3:55
17 – London	130:36	133:75	2:39

Source music

In the film, African popular music is used as source music in the market place scene. The chosen genre (Soukous,) airs predominantly on the African continent, which allows it popularity.

Soukous is a dance music that emanated from the Belgium Congo and French Congo during the 1940's and gained popularity throughout the continent. Soukous music is also called Rumba and could be much syncopated including sudden tempo changes from medium to very fast allowing an exiting variation of mood which could start from somewhat happy to happier! However the source music of the market place in the movie kept one medium tempo but still carries the happy mood of the typical African trading area.

Its orchestration includes rhythm guitars, lead guitar, bass guitar, lead vocal, and background vocals. All instruments excepting the vocals are performed in series of ostinato, and maintain a strong rhythmic pattern in the middleground.

Another source music in the music is an original song of the late famous South African artist "Myriam Makeba" entitled "Jikele Maweni" meaning the retreat song. The popular piece is a South African medium tempo song that tell the story of Quote: "how the Xhosa people from South Africa grow in rural areas including their activities and change their lives when they move into Johannesburg mines to star a new life and activities in the mines." The instrumentation includes Percussions, rhythm guitar, bass guitar which frames the accompaniment for the vocal. The South African vocal adds a tropical sonority to the background while the lead vocal is maintained as the foreground. We can see that the source music also contributes to settings of the dramatic mood.

Repetition – Music Editing

The themes has been developed elegantly assuring a less obvious construction of the sound track.

The composer successfully kept a continuous thematic development by changing the rhythm of the main theme, its instrumentation, or simply the tempo. Some instrumental backgrounds have become sound effects, creating a texture on other cues.

However, the editing work allows a few repetitions that add the proper sonic atmosphere to the image.

The cue “ Crossing The Bridge” demonstrates the characteristics of repeated materials. The form stays the same as it is in the main theme but the instrumentation as changed. The melody is kept but performed by the strings instead of the guitar. In addition, the lead vocal intensifies the Griot chanting style, creating a greater world music mood which gives the impression that the music has changed but in fact all this great changes are built on the same chord progression while keeping the same melody. Another remark is how the intro of the “Crossing The Bridge” cue seems to be different but here again we are dealing with the same musical form but another set of percussion has been elegantly added (edited), and the editing continues.

Apparently some transitions from a cue to the next were discretely parallel, and effectively ties several scenes as needed.

It would be fair to mention the starting or ending of the music before and after the sound effects. Remarkably, the music ends or is ducked just before the big effects or starts right after a big explosion. The ducking could have been done in the mix session but the starting or ending of the music I believe is the music editor’s role.

I’d like to briefly address the work done by the “Music Mixer.” The eternal “Loudness War” issue is resolved in the “Blood Diamond Film.” I can hear the dialog, the sound effects, and the music perfectly even though the music was a bit much ducked at times. I could invite someone to watch the “Blood Diamond Film,” not to hear it.

Final Thought

It will be fair to consider how the Soundtrack established and enhanced the tone of the “Blood Diamond” film despite the repetitions of just a few themes. The composer effectively described the scenes emotionally, geographically, culturally, and socially, he also established the period of the story. I would like to mention that the drama was well played.

In my opinion, the story is a reality that most do not like to reveal. Could it be that the precious diamond is a stone that most people desires? Why, and what makes it so valuable? Is it true that an engagement or wedding band “diamond ring” is a sign of a love that last forever? It seems like most people do not realize what humanity suffers in order to get the diamonds to the corner jeweler. The diamond trade sustains “Militias,” terrorizing the most peaceful populations. The paradox is that these diamond trade help finance many wars, killing the same people that are suppose to wear the stone as a sign of love. This connection of death and diamonds are facts that make one think that the famous sign of love is stained with blood!

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