

A VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

Often Heard, But Not Seen

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

For this picture, I used my violin to symbolize the orchestras and the players. I also used some sheet music and then splattered paint on it. The splashes of color tie back to what Mr. Chez said about music being like colors. The violin and the sheet music are both essential elements to creating the music for entertainment, and I wanted to show that.

PHOTO CREDIT: PAULA MILA SAN JUAN

RECOGNIZING THE ORCHESTRAS THAT MAKE FILM AND THEATER SPECIAL

BY PAULA MILA SAN JUAN

When we watch movies, our attention is mostly on the storyline and the actors, but sometimes it's the music that gets stuck in our heads. And when we watch musicals, we'll pay more attention to the words, but sometimes the instrumental part is just as good. The thing is, the music, the backbone, isn't always immediately recognized. It's normally something that we think about in the back of our minds, an afterthought. We praise actors for their amazing performances, and they deserve it, but the orchestras also deserve recognition. Orchestras have to master a skill: playing well, but not playing over the actors. The members of these orchestras in film and theater have to be great instrumentalists, but become accustomed to not often being complimented or acknowledged.

If you don't listen for it, it can be surprising to realize how much music is present in film and theater. But when you really pay attention, you understand just how much music is there, and how important it is. In popular movies, the score is often iconic, and one of the first things that comes to mind. The score of a movie is the music that is played in the movie. If someone randomly mentions "Star Wars," "The Imperial March (Darth Vader's Theme)" might immediately start playing in your head. The music that John Williams wrote in 1980 is still one of the most iconic parts of "Star Wars." Thinking of this, Nestor Torres, Latin Grammy-winning flutist and jazz musician says, "One person can impact so many other [people]." Williams wrote this more than 40 years ago, and we still think of it when we think of "Star Wars."

Not only is music immensely present in entertainment, it is also immensely important. "I feel like movies wouldn't be the same without the orchestra," Freya Thakar, a seventh grader who plays the piano, says. "If you had no music, it would be very silent, and there would be no emotion. You're just listening to people talk, it would be very boring, like a podcast." Music can bring out emotions, and make a scene so much more deep. An emotional scene with sad music can really tug at our heartstrings. Suspenseful music can give you a premonition that something is going to happen. It really has the power to change and strengthen a scene. "It's indispensable," Torres says. He thinks that the ultimate purpose of music is to "touch the lives of those who listen." Not only can music be so powerful, but it can also be the finishing touch for a scene. It's a bit like the cherry on top, a sprinkle of salt. "It's what brings everything together," says Torres.

Music can also bring back memories. In some cases, if you listen

to the score of the movie, it can bring back the memory of a scene, which is an amazing experience. "There's no sensory experience that can compare to listening to the sound of music," Torres says. A certain song could bring back sounds, smells, sights and even emotions that you have associated with that song. "When we hear the melody or the music, we immediately go to where we experienced it," Torres says. When he thinks about one of his favorite movies, "Cinema Paradiso," the feelings that go along with the movie come back to him.

Music can also enhance an experience. In opera, the orchestra is always there, adding to the performance. The orchestra is playing in an area just in front of the stage, below the audience, called the pit. The orchestra is hence called a pit orchestra, and being part of one is no easy feat. Mr. Chez, Summit-Questa's music teacher, was part of a pit orchestra. He says it was worth it, but, "You have to work your way up." You definitely need to have experience to be part of a pit orchestra.

Being part of a pit orchestra is an incredible experience, and you are held to a higher standard. Musicians may have to play several instruments, especially in the brass, woodwind and percussion sections. Percussion players are often expected to play several instruments, even in traditional orchestras, but in pit orchestras this applies to brass and woodwind players, as well. Once, Mr. Chez had to play a recorder solo (his main instrument is the clarinet). He also sang as a background character. Torres says that he has great admiration for multi-instrumentalists and says their talent is "phenomenal." Besides having to play several instruments, the musicians also have to have a delicate balance of concentration. "You have to pay attention not only to your own part, but the others," Mr. Chez says. As in any orchestra, musicians have to pay attention to their parts in addition to the parts of their fellow musicians, and the actors.

Not to mention, theater is unpredictable. Anything can happen. If the orchestra messes up, it might be unnoticeable, a slight mistake. But, as once happened to Mr. Chez, the actors can mess up. If this happens, it is going to be more noticeable. In Mr. Chez's case, the main actress forgot what to do, so the conductor told them to repeat the music as she improvised her part.

If you are a musician, you might be able to notice music a little easier than others. Both Mr. Chez and Nestor Torres experience this. Mr. Chez says that after receiving his music degree, he also realized how much work is put into anything musical. "I appreciate more details about whatever I hear," he says.

Another benefit to music for film and theater is how much musicians enjoy playing it. It is super exciting to be able to play something from a movie or an opera that you know. "I love it, I absolutely love it," says Torres, and adds that music teachers should try to give students opportunities to play music they recognize. "Honestly, I feel like when you play songs from movies, it's different, it's better than playing classical music, because it's more fun," Freya says. For young music students, it might get them more enthusiastic about playing their instrument if they can do it to music they recognize. It is super satisfying to hear it come together, and it might be easier for the student to learn, as they already know what the piece sounds like. Freya says, "Sometimes on the piano, you're like, 'How does it go?' 'What's the rhythm?' but if you know it, like 'Hedwig's Theme,' [it's easier]."

A great feeling for the musicians is to be recognized. After all, everyone likes being appreciated and applauded for their work. In the case of these musicians, the spotlight is rarely on them. When the audience throws roses to the actors, they never expect anyone to throw a rose to them. This is why when you acknowledge them, they feel extremely special. "It's always a really special feeling," Mr. Chez says. And don't forget the composers! They're the ones who thought of the music, who found the notes and the rhythms. Torres says, "That one person, the composer, has such an impact." Everyone involved in the music has such an important role.

The orchestra, and everyone who helped make the music possible, are often taken for granted. Mr. Chez thinks that if the pit orchestra was removed, we would notice. We would realize that something is missing and the piece of entertainment is not complete. Then, when we add the orchestra back in, it would be more recognized. We would realize just how important the orchestra is, how much it adds to everything.

When you think of an opera, musical or play, you might think of the sets on the stage. The bright, colorful sets really complement everything, and give the performance context. Mr. Chez makes a beautiful comparison: The music is like the colors we use for the sets. The color of the sets can make them so much better, so much livelier, give them an extra touch. And music is like that, it makes it complete. Next time you watch a movie, or a musical, or an opera, take a moment to listen to the music, appreciate what it makes you feel, and remember the people who made the music possible.