
DANNY ELFMAN'S HORROR FILM MUSIC ELEMENTS IN THE FILMS BY TIM BURTON

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1. Introduction

Growing up I have seen many films, but one film has always stood out for me: *Corpse Bride* (2005). As soon as we got the DVD of this film, I must have watched it at least 20 times. This film marked the start of my love for Tim Burton films and music by Danny Elfman. After *Corpse Bride* I have seen many other films by Tim Burton. What has always intrigued me about his films, is that the storylines are quite dark and often use dark colours. This insinuates that Burton's films could be horror films,¹ but this is not always the case. The question this raises is to what extent the music in his films features horror elements.

The main question in this thesis is: To what extent does the music of Danny Elfman in films by Tim Burton express fright? In this thesis I am focusing on the music itself, because I want to find out whether it is obvious from the music alone that it is frightening or not. This is why this thesis does not feature an audiovisual analysis, but purely musical.

The films by Tim Burton featuring music by Danny Elfman have not been researched in detail, more specifically, they have not been researched in combination with horror film music. In this thesis I want to add to the theoretical framework that exists about horror film music, by analysing two films, applying the existing theoretical framework. In order to find out whether the music expresses fright or not, I have decided to analyse two Tim Burton films with music by Danny Elfman: *Beetlejuice* (1988) and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999).²

I have chosen these films mainly because of the differences between them. Both films have themes that are often used in horror films, such as ghosts and murders, but the films are not that frightening. This is mainly because of the humour that is featured in the films, which makes it lighter to watch and does not make you focus on the frightening parts. However, there is a difference in the way horror is treated in both films. Because of the point of view of the film, *Sleepy Hollow* can be seen as a more frightening film than *Beetlejuice*. In *Sleepy Hollow* the viewer does not know who the murderer is, who the Headless Horseman is, and how it is possible that a headless person murders people. This creates a lot of suspense and as viewer you want to know how the mystery unravels. *Beetlejuice* on the other hand lets the viewer experience the story from the point of view of the ghosts. Where ghosts are usually seen as the scary characters of a film, here you know who the ghosts are and that they are not frightening at all. This results in a kind of parodic view on horror films. Furthermore, these

¹ Horror films and not thrillers, because thrillers are more often psychological, which is not necessarily the case in horror films. Horror films are usually more gory and feature actions that do not need much explaining.

² See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094721/plotsummary> and http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0162661/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stry_pl for summaries of *Beetlejuice* and *Sleepy Hollow*.

films are some of the most well-known Tim Burton films, however there is not much analysis of these films, which is another reason to analyse these films specifically.

Since there are different views on horror films, it is interesting to study whether these views are reflected in the music. What can be expected is that the music of *Sleepy Hollow* resembles horror film music elements better than the music of *Beetlejuice* and would thus express more fright. This thesis will try to find out which horror film music elements are present in both films and how they differ from each other. First, the common elements in horror film music will be identified in the theoretical framework. Following this the music of both films will be analysed in order to establish which elements that are found in the theoretical framework are present in the soundtracks. Lastly, the two soundtracks will be compared to see if they express fright.

2. Theoretical Framework

Horror films are meant to frighten the audience and the music helps to achieve this goal. I know for a fact that there are people who turn off the sound of the film when the story gets too frightening. By turning off the music, it is thought that the frightening effects disappear, but does this mean that when you hear the music on its own it is frightening? Or are the audio and the visuals too much related in the sense that when you take one away it is not frightening anymore? Although the relationship between the audio and the visual in horror films makes for an interesting research, I am studying the musical elements of the music to find out whether it expresses fright. Multiple authors, like Isabella van Elferen and Joe Tompkins, have given their views on which musical elements are important in horror film music. Of these musical elements, there are several which reappear in different texts. In this part of my research, I will give a summary of the most common musical elements to figure out which are thought of as frightening. I have divided these elements into three parts: instrumentation, harmonics and dynamics, and scare tactics.

2.1. Instrumentation

One of the most important musical elements in horror film music is the instrumentation. Instruments that are mainly used to convey fright are brass instruments, strings, specifically violins, percussion, organs, harp, and human voices.³ Using certain instruments cause certain associations. As Tompkins mentions, using brass instruments is associated with music for horror films.⁴ Stingers and stabs are often used as a scare tactic. These are sudden, loud sounds that startle the audience. Using instruments that can easily be played loudly is well-suited for this, thus brass instruments are often used.

Another instrument that is often used for this is percussion. With percussion it is easily possible to create a sudden loud noise, which is able to scare the audience.⁵ Thus, percussion can be used as a scare tactic.⁶ Besides playing percussion loudly, it can also be played softly, but this is not useful as scare tactic, yet it can build tension. Besides the dynamics of the percussion, part of its specificity is also that most do not produce sound with a certain pitch. Using percussion is more about the effect that it has, rather than a melody it can create.

³ Joe Tompkins, "Mellifluous Terror: The Discourse of Music and Horror Films," in *A Companion to the Horror Film*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley and Sons, 2014), 186-204.

⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁵ Tompkins, "Mellifluous Terror," 196.

⁶ Ibid.

Strings are another very common choice for instrumentation. The sound of violins is associated with the human voice. They can make ‘shrieking’ sounds, which has frightening connotations.⁷ As Van Elferen explains, using violins – especially when playing atonal melodies – it is suggested that something odd or horrible is about to happen.⁸ Tompkins explains that the violin can sound like humans in pain,⁹ and since horror films are often about people who are in pain, this instrument is very applicable to it.

Another very important instrument in horror film music is the organ. The organ is associated with the ‘ghostly’.¹⁰ According to Julie Brown, there are multiple elements of the organ that bring along frightening associations.¹¹ First of all, it can be seen as an English pun. Besides being a musical instrument, organs are also the insides of the body. This is not necessarily frightening, but bodily organs are often used in horror films to create a gory effect, which can be frightening. However, it is questionable whether anyone, especially non-English speaking people, would think of this pun when hearing an organ. In my opinion, this association is too far-fetched to actually create a frightening effect.

Secondly, the organ has a strongly religious reference. An organ is usually placed in a church, which is a common location for a horror film. A common theme for horror films is that someone is buried in a churchyard and starts haunting the place. Thus, churches and its churchyards can be seen as frightening places. Since the organ is an instrument that is always present in a church, using it in a horror film it refers to a haunted place. The association might even go further than this. When hearing an organ, it is also possible to think of death in general. This results from the association with a churchyard, but it does not necessarily have to be at a churchyard. Especially when the audience knows they are watching a horror film, the association with death is easily made. In contrast, when watching a romantic film and a certain melody is played on an organ, the more common reaction would be to think of a wedding.¹²

Thirdly, there is the visual aspect of the instrument. As Brown mentions, “huge objects evoke awe and terror.”¹³ Since an organ is a gigantic instrument, it is able to frighten the audience. However, this only has an effect when the instrument can actually be seen by the

⁷ Ibid., 190.

⁸ Van Elferen, “Gothic Film Music: The Audiovisual Uncanny,” in *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 50.

⁹ Tompkins, “Mellifluous Terror,” 190.

¹⁰ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 44.

¹¹ Julie Brown, “Carnival of Souls and the Organs of Horror,” in *Music in the Horror Film*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-20.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Brown, “The Organs of Horror,” 5.

audience. Besides the physical size of the instrument, the sound is also huge, especially when it is played in a church. A church has an acoustic that causes sound to be heard in every corner of the church. Lastly, there is also the case of carnival organs. These are able to play music on their own accord, referring to the uncanny.¹⁴

A third instrument that is often used, and also specifically by Danny Elfman, is the human voice. There are usually no lyrics when the human voice is used, but the voices produce sounds, using only vowels. This is often thought of as ‘ghostly’. Especially since the sounds are not produced by characters in the films, they are disembodied, which has the implicit connotation of being gothic.¹⁵ As Van Elferen explains “Without evidence of embodiment voices are uncanny, as vocal sound always suggests physicality.”¹⁶ Because of this, the use of the human voice is suitable to horror and gothic films.¹⁷

Besides voices, music can be disembodied in general. For instance, nondiegetic music does not have an onscreen source, thus you do not know where it comes from. As Van Elferen claims, this can be haunting.¹⁸ However, this does depend on the kind of nondiegetic music. There are also non-horror films that feature nondiegetic music, but which is not necessarily haunting. To me, the combination of the disembodiment of the music with other musical elements, like orchestration and musical effects, is what causes the music to be haunting. Voices are always present in films and you could think that the voice comes from within the film, this gives voices the disembodied effect that nondiegetic musical would not always have.

2.2. Harmonics and Dynamics

Alongside instrumentation, the harmonics of the ‘horror music’ are also important to study. Van Elferen summarizes the formulas for the harmonics, which also feature formulas for dynamics, in horror film music:

Dissonance and atonality suggesting the absence of a musical basis; diminished and augmented intervals or chords – especially the ‘devilish’ tritone – in excess of harmonic rules; destabilising glissandos; extremely small intervals, for instance in chromaticism, or extremely large leaps; thickly

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 39.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Even though there is a difference between horror and gothic films, both feature elements which are applicable to both genres, which is why I also apply the elements mentioned in the chapter about gothic music by Van Elferen to his thesis.

¹⁸ Ibid., 40.

filled textures or sparsely instrumented scores; fast crescendos or slow diminuendos; the sforzando of stingers; the contrast of pianissimo against fortissimo; extremely fast rhythms against drones or repetition that seem to stop time.¹⁹

As Janet K. Halfyard explains, the use of the tritone is typical for the music of Danny Elfman,²⁰ because of its musical symbolism.²¹ In a chromatic scale, the tritone is on the sixth semitone, causing an association with the number six, or 666, which is associated with the devil. The word ‘tritonus’ was first used in the 9th- or 10th-century organum treatise *Musica enchiriadis*, and was nicknamed ‘diabolus in musica’, because it was seen as unstable and theorists would not define it as a consonance.²² Thus, by using the tritone, the composer uses classical conventions. The presence of the devil is a common theme for horror films, thus the connotations of the tritone with the devil cause the tritone to be appropriate to horror film music. The harmonic formulas as quoted by Van Elferen besides the tritone, are mainly used to cause a feeling of discomfort.

Dissonance is another element that is often related with creating scary music.²³ Dissonances are seen as ‘wrong’ notes in the context of the music, thus that something is wrong with the music.²⁴ This indicates that in the film something is wrong as well, resulting in a frightening moment, because it feels like something is about to happen.

2.3. Scare Tactics

Besides instrumentation and harmonics, there are specific musical techniques that are often used to scare the audience. Some of these are repetitious drones, broken chords, clashing dissonances,²⁵ and chromatic chords.²⁶ These functions are related to the harmonics which I have mentioned before.

Van Elferen summarizes the music of the gothic film in four musical elements.²⁷ First, the music imitates sounds like squeaks, footsteps, and voices.²⁸ This could for instance give the feeling that there is someone present when there is not. The second element is the meaning

¹⁹ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 69.

²⁰ Janet K. Halfyard, “Mischievous Afoot: Supernatural Horror-comedies and the *Diabolus in Musica*,” in *Music in the Horror Film*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²² William Drabkin, “Tritone,” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, accessed June 23, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/28403>.

²³ Tompkins, “Mellifluous Terror,” 195.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁵ Tompkins, “Mellifluous Terror,” 190.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁷ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 67.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

of music.²⁹ Music evokes certain memories and feelings, many of the memories are universal, related to how music is used in other films and the musical conventions that are used in films. By exploiting this in horror film music, it is possible for the music to render the audience to feel frightened. The third element Van Elferen mentions is musical excess.³⁰ Musical excess is reached by “emptying out musical signification.” The use of musical excess is related to the excessive character of the gothic. In order to reach this, many harmonic features are used, making the music excessive, conforming to the excessive character of the gothic. The last element is that of musical transgression. In gothic films there are often liturgical scenes, like churchly or pagan rituals and hallucinations. By using liturgical music in scenes that play in places like churches or during a pagan ritual, there is musical transgression. The musical transgression can have the same effect for the audience of a film as it has for participants in a ritual: the audience can move “into and beyond their own associations.”³¹

Other scare tactics include brass stingers, crash chords, and string harmonies.³² All these tactics are sudden loud noises which startle the audience. There are often unexpected events in horror films, which can be emphasized by using these scare tactics. Hearing a loud sound that comes out of nowhere while seeing something that is unexpected, makes the moment more noticeable and scary.

²⁹ Ibid., 68.

³⁰ Ibid., 69.

³¹ Ibid., 71.

³² Tompkins, “Mellifluous Terror,” 196.

3. Analysis

The music of *Beetlejuice* and *Sleepy Hollow* are very different, just like the films themselves, yet I do believe that there are similarities between them. In these analyses I will look at the instrumentation and the harmonics of the music, and which scare tactics are used. For both films I will analyse the “Main Titles”. I have chosen this, because these parts introduce the music of the rest of the film. After hearing the “Main Titles” you have a certain expectation for the rest of the soundtrack. Also, the remaining music of the soundtracks feature music in which elements of the “Main Titles” reappear, thus the “Main Titles” of *Beetlejuice* and *Sleepy Hollow* are representative for the entire scores. Not only does the rest of the music rely on the music that is given here, the “Main Titles” also set the mood for the film. With this music the film is introduced, giving a sense of what kind of film you are going to be watching. These analyses are based on the way the music sounds, described by listening to the music and analysing it using my personal perception as a musicology student and horror film fan, thus no musical transcription is given. In order to find out whether music expresses fright or not it is mainly important to study the way the music sounds, not how it is written exactly.

3.1. “Main Titles” – *Beetlejuice*³³

3.1.1. Instrumentation

The instruments that are used in the “Main Titles” of *Beetlejuice* are: synthesizer, percussion, different brass instruments, voices, strings, piano, and clarinet. These are almost all very common instruments in horror film music. What is interesting about this piece, is the way the voices are used. Where in horror film music voices usually do not sing any lyrics, there is a part where a voice has lyrics (00:12). This one sentence, “Daylight come and he wanna go home,” catches the attention of the listener. This raises questions such as what is going on with this sentence and why is it so different from the rest of the music. After having seen the entire film, the listener will know what the use of this sentence was. There is a scene in the film in which the ghosts take over the bodies of the people in the house and let them sing a song.³⁴ This song features the sentence which has been sung in the “Main Titles” of the film. Thus, the use of this one sentence foreshadows music that is going to be played later on in the film. However, in the “Main Titles” this sentence is slowed down at the end, resulting in an

³³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GorM-UQ68Q8>. Accessed June 29, 2017.

³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQXVHITd1N4>. Accessed July 16, 2017.

eerie sounding sentence, which raises the feeling of it being cut from other music into this music, which is true because of the song that is sung later in the film.

Different instruments play the melodies in this music. At first there is an angular melody by the horns, then a fast melody with pralltrillers by the clarinet, and lastly a staccato melody by the trombones. The violins also play a short melody with sixteenth notes, alternating with the horns. The choice for having horns and trombones playing a melody is not surprising, because of the commonness of these instruments in horror film music. These brass instruments play in a low register, creating a dark atmosphere, which is similar to what horror films are often made to look like. The kind of melody that is being played by the violins is also very suitable. This is because violins are often used to imitate the human voice and to make a ‘shrieking’ effect. This is exactly what happens in this melody. The moments the violins play are short and there are moments when they suddenly burst out, this comes in unexpectedly and thus attracts the attention of the listener.

3.1.2. Harmonics and Dynamics

In this piece of music, there is a tritone present. However, it is not that obvious. In her article, Halfyard shows that there is a tritone in the melody of the horns in the beginning.³⁵ Between the first note and the last is an octave between two A, and in between a D sharp is played, this is a tritone with the first A. Yet, when listening to the music it is not very audible, you only notice it when looking at the sheet music. Whereas Halfyard claims that the tritone in this case introduces devilishness to the music,³⁶ when listening to the music it is not that obvious, thus this effect is rather far-fetched. When performing a close analysis to the music this is a possible effect, but when only listening to the music it is not necessarily a connotation that listeners would have.

From 00:36 until 01:47 there is the constant repetition of the piano and low brass playing the same nervous rhythm over and over again. This rhythm is a combination of quarter notes on and off the beat. Because of the tempo and the rhythm, the music sounds like someone is running and is out of breath, as if a chase is happening. Being chased is also something that happens in horror films, making this rhythm ideal for this genre. Over this rhythm three melodies are played, by the horns, the violins, and the clarinet, which each are played twice. Between the two moments when the melody by the horns is played, the violins play their melody which features crash chords. This creates a big contrast, because the melody

³⁵ Halfyard, “Mischief Afoot,” 25.

³⁶ Ibid.

by the horns is quite low and dark, and then suddenly there is the sound of high chords in the violins. This part features many instruments playing different melodies and rhythms, such as trumpets playing stingers, drum rolls, a lot of brass at the same time, and many voices. This music sets two different kinds of music together. There are crash chords and stingers, which are typical for horror film music, but at the same time there is dancelike music, which is not often used in horror film music. This creates a kind of confusing music, which results in sounding quite uncanny.

3.1.3. Scare Tactics

Elements that have been mentioned as part of instrumentation and/or harmonics are often used as scare tactics. Repetition creates a feeling of timelessness,³⁷ the music just goes on and on, and you have no idea of how long it has been going on. The continuity this creates leads to a bigger effect when that rhythm stops being played. Every time a rhythm that has been played for a while stops, it is sudden, surprising the listeners and making them wonder what is going to happen next. Also the use of stingers and crash chords are scare tactics. These are usually parallel to shocking moments in the film.³⁸ In this case, the stingers are played when the film and its actors are introduced, there are no shocking moments yet. However, when analysing the music on its own, this can be seen as a way of expressing fright.

As explained in the theoretical framework, voices are used to create a ghostly effect, which is featured in the “Main Titles”. This could either just mean that this film is frightening to a certain extent, but it could also be a reference to the ghosts that are the protagonists of the film. Just like the use of the one sentence that is sung to foreshadow that the entire song will be played, the use of vowel-singing voices could be foreshadowing to the ghosts that will appear. The use of voices also relates to the first element of gothic film music as described by Van Elferen.³⁹ Even though this element is said to be about imitating sounds like voices, there are actual voices here. This is imitating the sound of ghosts, thus it still conforms to the description. Of the four elements, besides the first, the third element is present as well.⁴⁰ As shown when describing the harmonics, there are quite some harmonic features in this music, creating an excessive character in the music.

³⁷ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 69.

³⁸ Tompkins, “Mellifluous Terror,” 190.

³⁹ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

3.2. “Main Titles” – *Sleepy Hollow*⁴¹

3.2.1. *Instrumentation*

The instruments used in this piece are the following: strings, brass, bells, oboe, clarinet, flute, and voices. Most of these instruments are common choices for horror film music. The woodwinds are not that common, but the kind of melodies they play are suitable for this type of music. The first melody that is played is by the oboe, accompanied by flute and chimes. This melody is quite slow, consisting of quarter notes with at the end an appoggiatura. This melody creates a more romanticised feeling in the music, being quite lyrical compared to the fast rhythm, sixteenth notes that alternate between two notes that is played by the strings. This string rhythm has been audible since the beginning of the music. Because of the contrast, an ominous sound is created. Right after the oboe melody, the lead is taken over by different brass instruments, making a crescendo and then being joined by violins playing downwards in a chromatic line. The violins then play the same melody as the oboe first played. The rest of the music is mainly background music.⁴²

Even though the use of woodwinds is not that common for other horror film music composers, it has become a trademark for Danny Elfman. For this score, a symphony orchestra has been orchestrated. However, Elfman does give certain parts extra attention, and for this specific score, it is the voices that receive extra attention.⁴³ This is especially noticeable at the end of this part. The music then quiets and all that is left are the voices and some strings and chimes in the background. This emphasizes the sound of the voices, which only sing vowels. These voices sound quite sinister, which creates a ghostly effect. For this film, the use of ghostly references is very logical, because the murderer, the Headless Horseman, seems to be a ghost.

Lastly, there is also a small part set aside for the organ. At the climax of the first crescendo, at 00:23, long notes are played by the organ. This is only played in the background and it does not reappear in the rest of the music. Here there are hardly any voices yet, which make the biggest reference to ghost. As explained in the theoretical framework, the organ is also often associated with the church and with ghosts. The effect this has is that it already introduces the idea of ghosts, which is later expanded by the voices.

⁴¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVAChdVbV_o. Accessed June 25, 2017.

⁴² With background music I mean to say that there is no melody that gets your attention, it is just chords and rhythms that play alongside each other. As listener, it is hard to singalong to the music. The music is also rather softly played, with only sometimes a crescendo or sforzando.

⁴³ Alison McMahan, “The Films of Tim Burton,” in *The Films of Tim Burton: Animating Live Action in Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. Alison McMahan (New York: Bloomsbury Academy, 2014), 211.

3.2.2. *Harmonics and Dynamics*

What is most noticeable about the dynamics of this piece, is that the music is generally played quite softly, with moments of a crescendo or sforzando. This also shows the contrast between pianissimo and fortissimo, which multiple times is marked by the sound of crashing cymbals. These moments lead to the thought that something is about to happen, for instance the murder of a man. Since this effect is already noticeable in the “Main Titles” it results in becoming a recognisable feature in the music, and it starts having frightening connotations. These connotations already start in the “Main Titles”. This is also something that is done in other films. Because of this, it is possible to identify this as a frightening element when only listening to the music.

Another important aspect of this music is repetition. The music starts with a fast rhythm played by the violins. This rhythm goes on for about a minute, and because of how fast it is and the rather high register in which it is played, it causes a nerve-wrecking feeling. The rhythm does change slightly and is later joined by celli, but it still creates the same effect. The repetition builds tension, it becomes the standard of the music, so when it eventually stops, it is very noticeable and it will lead to a feeling that something is about to happen, just like the quietness after a climax. Repetition is also present in the melodies that are played. The oboe starts with a melody, this is then taken over by trumpets which play the melody in a slightly different manner. This lyrical melody is a big contrast to the fast rhythms that are being played by the strings. It romanticises the feeling of the music. Where it is first quite low and dark, here the instruments play a melody in a higher register. After this, the violins take over the main melody, which resembles the second half of the oboe melody.

There is also a large variety in the orchestration of the music. At some points the music is thickly orchestrated, many instruments playing different rhythms and melodies at the same time, while there are also moments of sparsely orchestrated music. Especially the beginning and ending of the music are sparsely orchestrated compared to the middle part. As mentioned before, the ending dies out and mainly voices are left. The beginning mainly features violins with some brass. During the oboe melody there is not much music under it, except for the violins repeating the same rhythm constantly.

3.2.3. *Scare Tactics*

The chromatic rhythms by the violins as described in the harmonics part, can be interpreted as scare tactics. Even though Tompkins describes the scare tactic as chromatic *chords*, these

lines do also create a certain feeling of discomfort.⁴⁴ This is especially because of what it sounds like. You hear lines that go down, but the previous note is repeated after the next note, making it sound like a kind of zigzag. The effect this makes is a sound that resembles a person saying “oooh” when playing a ghost.⁴⁵ The recreation of sounds that are implied to be ghostly sounds, lead to a creepy atmosphere in the music.

The lines in the violins are chromatic, and because of these chromatic movements, there are also incidents of dissonance in the music. The “Main Titles” also end on a dissonant chord which does not resolve. This leaves the listener out in the open and with a feeling of unease.

Besides these tactics related to harmonics, there are also scare tactics that are related to the instrumentation. The use of voices is the clearest example of this. The use of uncanny voices are mainly present in the last part of this music. As said before, the music here creates a ghostly feeling, relating to the storyline of the film. Besides the voices, the choice for using violins is also suitable in order to create scary music. Especially the use of the shrieking violins that are heard at the end when a crescendo reaches its loudest point.

The chimes that can be heard bring out scary associations as well. As Van Elferen explains, one of the musical elements of gothic music is musical transgression, which is related to liturgical music.⁴⁶ At different moments the chimes sound like church bells (02:36), referring to a liturgical place. This reference is suitable since *Sleepy Hollow* features a scene in a church.

The function of the voices in this piece together with the organ and the liturgical references show that of the four musical elements of gothic film music the first and fourth are present.⁴⁷ The third element, musical excess, is also present, because of the chromaticism, the contrasts in pianissimo and fortissimo, both the thickly filled textures and the sparsely orchestrated parts, stingers, and repetition.

⁴⁴ Tompkins, “Mellifluous Terror,” 195.

⁴⁵ This is from personal experience of when pretending to make ghostly sounds.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 67-70.

4. Comparison

When comparing both analyses, it is obvious that both films feature many horror film music elements. However, they both feature different elements. In the “Main Titles” of *Beetlejuice* you can hear different instruments than in the “Main Titles” of *Sleepy Hollow*. The main difference here is that both feature melodies played by woodwinds and brass, but in *Beetlejuice*, the main melodies are played by horns, clarinet, and trombones, while in *Sleepy Hollow* these are played by oboe, brass, and violins.

The kinds of melodies that are played are very different. The melodies in the music for *Beetlejuice* are all very different from each other. Where the one melody uses longer notes, the other consists of sixteenth notes. The rhythms that are used in these melodies are not necessarily elements of horror film music; the rhythms make the music sound more dancelike. This does not necessarily express fright, but the instrumentation and the underlying music do cause the music to have a lot of horror film music elements that express it. This is very different to the music for *Sleepy Hollow*. Here the melodies all have rhythms in common, and some melodies even are the same, only played by different instruments. These melodies are a lot slower and more threatening. The music of *Beetlejuice* mainly expresses fright through repetition, voices, quick melodies by violins, stingers, and melodies by brass instruments. These elements are also present in the music for *Sleepy Hollow*, but especially the use of voices is more frightening here. The music ends with mainly scary-sounding voices. This is very prominent here, while the voices in *Beetlejuice* are less prominent. Another important aspect in the music of *Sleepy Hollow* are the liturgical references. These references are mainly made through the use of chimes that sound like church bells and the voices that sound like ghosts.

When comparing both scores to the musical elements that make gothic music according to Van Elferen,⁴⁸ it seems like the “Main Titles” of *Sleepy Hollow* are more gothic than the “Main Titles” of *Beetlejuice*. This is also what I experience when listening to both scores. The music of *Beetlejuice* does have anxious making moments, but the music of *Sleepy Hollow* really is able to work on your nerves. This is because of the more mellow character of the music, which emphasizes the frightening effects that are present. For the score of *Beetlejuice*, the frightening effects disappear in the colossal entity of the music. This does relate to the storylines of both films. *Beetlejuice* is more of a parody on horror films than *Sleepy Hollow*. As it turns out, this can be traced back to the music.

⁴⁸ Van Elferen, “The Audiovisual Uncanny,” 67-70.

5. Conclusion

In order to answer the main question, “To what extent does the music of Danny Elfman in films by Tim Burton express fright?” I have described multiple views on horror film music and I have given an overview of what I think are the most important aspects of horror film music that different authors have given. When a soundtrack conforms to multiple of these elements, the music is able to express fright.

Where *Beetlejuice* features a lot of different musical styles, which do feature horror film music elements, *Sleepy Hollow* is more of a unity, with a frightening feeling all throughout the music. So even though the amount of horror film music elements in both films do not differ that much, the music of *Sleepy Hollow* is able to create a more frightening feeling than the music of *Beetlejuice*. The music of *Beetlejuice* is more parodic in the sense that a lot of elements can be recognized, but because of other elements, the effects are not the same.

The lack of existing literature on the subject of horror film music causes there to be many other interesting subjects left to research. This thesis is a small addition to the discourse of horror film music. In order to expand the literature on this subject, it would be interesting to actually examine the response of an audience. For instance by asking people – who do not know the films and people who do know the films – to listen to the music and describe the feelings they get with it. By doing that, you could show what the general reception of the music is.

Another element that would be interesting to consider, is the combination between music and images. I have only studied the music on its own, because I wanted to know to what extent the music would express fright, without having images to influence the expressions of the music. However, it would also be interesting to see if the outcome would be different if the images were examined along with the music.

Lastly, to answer my research question, I have chosen two films by Tim Burton with music by Danny Elfman. However, they have produced many other films together in the same genre. In order to be able to give a full answer to the question, it would be of use to first of all discuss the entire scores of both films, but second of all, to also examine the music of more films. By doing this, it is also possible to establish a more general argument about the music composed by Danny Elfman, which can elaborate on the conclusion I have given about the two films *Beetlejuice* and *Sleepy Hollow*.

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Films

- Beetlejuice* [feature film] Dir. Tim Burton. The Geffen Company, USA, 1988. 92mins.
- Sleepy Hollow* [feature film] Dir. Tim Burton. Paramount Pictures, USA, 1999. 105mins.