

Functions of Film Music

MICHAEL CLAYTON (*Luis Zanforlin*)

Cue One

The cue starts with a low synthesized percussion, which establishes a slow constant pace and suggests tone of the film. At **00:37** the score synchs the cut to Michael Clayton's close-up with heavy electronic low hits, perhaps suggesting the protagonist's heavy feelings; this synch point also kick starts a percussive ostinato that moves the scene along without giving away any plot points or specific emotions. At **00:32** Michael Clayton's car crosses the hit-men's car, however this is not accented by the cue for we are not yet supposed to know of the importance of this event. When Michael's car stops at **01:04** the music switches to a very low dynamic score composed of fainted mysterious high frequency pads, which fade out completely as Clayton opens his window. The quality of this mysterious instrument suggests an almost heavenly presence in the outside and as the music fades out Michael leaves the car in order to find out more about it.

Michael opens the car's door and at **01:23**, when he is completely out of the car the score cues the mysterious xylophone sounding synth in low dynamics but with a more clear quality to it. On **01:44** the movie cuts to the long shot of the three horses and the score synchs with an ethereal pipe organ performed in low dynamics. The drop in pace matches the film's sudden drop in action and presents the viewer with the question of the significance of the horses so that when it is clarified during the film you will be able to recognize it. As Michael approaches the horses the music dynamics goes higher as if they are the source of this ethereal divine music emphasizing even more the importance of the horses to the protagonist.

At **03:00** Michael's car explodes but not on a downbeat of the score with the instruments performing in low in dynamics making this event very unexpected; it also cues low frequency tensioned pads and starts a slow pace rhythm with electronic percussion that moves the film along reminding the viewer of the films pace established on the beginning of the cue. The cue ends with a fade down on the movie's crossfade making it unnoticed and delicately dragging the viewer inside the film.

The cue is tense and emotionally ambiguous, it sets the movie's tone and pace, and sets up the horses as a significant element in the film. It's simple in texture matches the viewer's lack of information about the movie leaving no questions answered.

Cue Two

The cue starts with a faster pace and with a more rhythmically complex percussion underlining the action, unlike the first cue now we know that this is also a chase scene. At **04:48** Michael stops his car and the score synchs with tensioned strings and a raising percussion track, now the viewer is aware that Michael is angry and dealing with a choice. At **04:54** the cue synchs the cut to Michael's accelerating car with a rhythmic low base synth and a percussive track taking the viewer back to chase mode and perhaps suggesting Michael made up his mind. As the scene cuts to a close up of the hit-men the score synchs

it with a low percussive whoosh sound effect indicating that it is he against Michal. At **05:56** Michael's car crosses the antagonist's and the music synchs it with the same whoosh sound effect for now we know the importance of the hit-men's car. As the antagonist's car turns around at **05:19** another whoosh is played inferring this is his evil musical motif, at that moment a xylophone-sounding instrument starts a minor chord ostinato adding to the complexity of the music and giving it a sad emotional tone. As the chase moves along a thick-tensioned strings crescendo increases the emotional complexity of the scene and keep the viewer engaged. At **06:11** the scene cuts to the interior of the hit-men's car where they appear to be lost, the music once more synchs by introducing a plucked string ostinato that adds even more complexity to the cue. Michael then leaves his car and looks at the horses on **06:23**, this is synched by a heavy distorted guitar power chord but unlike the first cue the music is still rhythmically rich and the synch point serves as a reminder of what he is looking at instead of the question of what he is looking at. The music starts to raise its dynamics and at **06:54** it is so loud the hit-men's dialogue becomes second plane, which tells the viewer that it isn't as important as the action.

At **07:05** the score raises to a negative accent at the cut to Michael's close up matching the character's newly found peace from his stressful drive. The mystical xylophone returns and we now associate it with Michael's son's innocence, which he now noticed to be important. As Michael expresses sadness with his eyes at **07:35** the score cues the pipe organs, it is as if the thought of his son makes him notice he is being judged by a divine intervention in the shape of the horses making Michael ashamed of his past actions. This seems to be emphasized in **07:41** as an organ note synchs to Michael looking at the sky as if looking for God's forgiveness. At **07:55** the scene then cuts to the interior of the antagonist's car where the hit-men asks for the phone which detonates the car bomb, at that moment the mystical xylophone changes the harmony to a tranquil major chord suggesting Michael has been cleansed and that the car bomb will signify his rebirth as a new person. The car explodes without any musical reinforcement; it is on the cut to Michael's face on **08:03** that a low wet percussive hit cues Michael back to earth to face his final act of redemption. On the long shot of the bridge at **08:24** the cue synchs a mid range synth that draws the viewer away from the action until the crossfade to the next scene on **09:08** ends the cue.

The second cue's fast rhythmic pace underlines chase element of the scene, its textural complexity resembles the story's complex plot, which the viewer is now aware of and the contrast between the first cue and the second makes the scene repetition incredibly effective in hooking the viewer into the drama and intensifying the movie's emotional value.