

Music, Movies and Meaning:

Communication in Film-makers' Search for Pre-existing Music, and the Implications for Music Information Retrieval.

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While the use of music to accompany moving images is widespread, the information behaviour, communicative practice and decision making by creative professionals within this area of the music industry is an under-researched area. This investigation discusses the use of music in films and advertising focusing on communication and meaning of the music and introduces a reflexive communication model. The model is discussed in relation to interviews with a sample of music professionals who search for and use music for their work. Key factors in this process include stakeholders, briefs, product knowledge and relevance. Searching by both content and context is important, although the final decision when matching music to picture is partly intuitive and determined by a range of stakeholders.

CONTEXT

Use of Music in films

- Mood enhancer and narrative aid
 - Essential part of the film itself.
- Meaning transmitted to audience through agreed cultural codes - eg major/minor for happy/sad or consonance/dissonance as light/shade.
- Familiarity might determine meaning
 - Meanings can change

Communication and meaning

If music retrieval systems are to effectively retrieve music for the end user then they need to be able to incorporate the listener's meaning of music. Musical code links the sound and its context, and understanding these codes should help establish musical meaning [1]. Codes become increasingly specific: langue, norms, sub-norms, dialects, styles, genres, sub-codes, idiolects, works / performances [2, 3]. Competences are required to successfully interpret codes and will vary according to experience, background and interests [4]. User centred model would reflect process of meaning-making when choosing music on behalf of others, as meanings shared by User and Owner will be used to determine relevance of music choices [5].

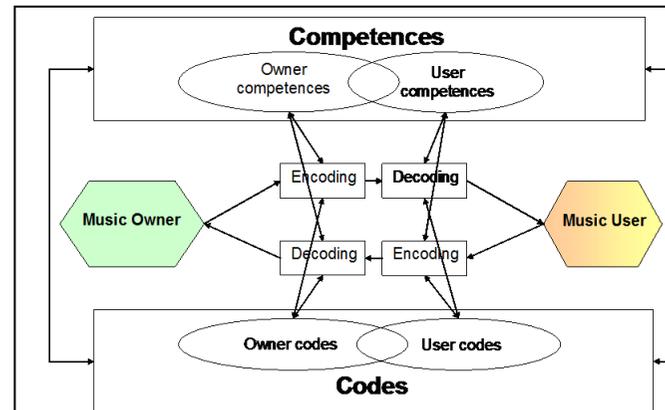
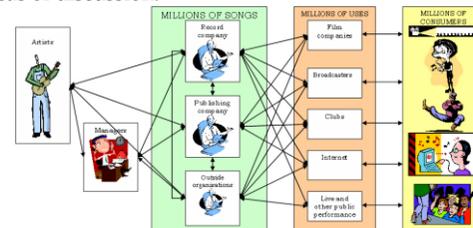


Figure 1 Reflexive communication model [5]

METHOD

User-centred approach; snowball sample, 10 people experienced in use of music with moving images. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Topics and questions focus on process, use, queries, communication, meaning, relevance, relationships. Preliminary analysis focussed on process and common areas of discussion.



FINDINGS

Stakeholders

Music Owners	Music Users
Synchronisation Dept, Legal / Business Affairs, Composer, Performer, Marketing & Promotions, Artists & Repertoire	Producer, Director, Film Editor, Music Editor, Music Supervisor, Client, Director, Ad Agency Creatives.

Each stakeholder is likely to have different motivations, codes and competences, and these are not easily resolved. The criteria behind the decision making will include budget, clearance issues, aesthetic and commercial judgments.

Briefs

User codes are conveyed to the Owner as a brief

- qualities of a product ('speed, power, control, ability', 'beauty, sophistication and intricacy of design')
- key words, such as 'tension, mystery, playfulness and warmth'.

The Owner may have different competences and interpret these emotive connotations of signification differently to the User, although a sharing of codes and competences will reduce this semantic gap.

Product knowledge

Refer to existing searches for similar queries, narrow-down collection in terms of 'sync-friendly' nature.

Respondents spend a large amount of time listening to music in order to familiarise themselves with what is available.

Relevance

Relevance appears mainly to be gauged by 'gut-feeling'

- contextual factors such as target audience, genre, uniqueness, budget, availability, recognisability and chart position
- content features such as tempo, structure, mood, instrumentation, texture are all considered.

Query becomes more concrete, and a further iteration can be made much more specific, when the User can refer to features of offered material as reference points.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Communication between Owners and Users is reflexive and interactive
- Represents an interactive information retrieval system
- Users and Owners not schooled in searching through large collections.
- Primary motivation to find 'best' piece of music to communicate meaning.
- Some search engines available for this type of use
- Human involvement central in the process.
- Systems that meet the information needs of these users should
 - be flexible,
 - incorporate queries by example as well as by matching metadata,
 - allow searching by content as well as contextual information.
- Use determines choice,
- initial query will rarely name a song or an artist except as an example.
- Clearest briefs appear to be moving images.

Using musical meaning to enhance moving images requires an understanding of the contexts and contents of both media and further user research is required to inform successful systems development if these needs are to be met.