14 The Western

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The western is perhaps *the* distinctive American storytelling genre, rivalled in cinema only by the musical. Both are spectacular and are rooted in the American drive for both individual exploration/expression (the frontier, the performance) and the formation and celebration of family and community ties (civilization, the ensemble theatrical production). They are also both marked by their 'American' musical style – although exactly what that entails varies over time.

Any genre is a loose collection of elements from character types to narrative tropes and symbolic repertoires. For the western, many of these elements were established before film arrived, in theatrical melodrama, Wild West shows and popular novels. Once captured on film, the narratives shifted emphasis from the action-adventure of the early western films to something more complex and symbolic at mid-century, as the American West became a backdrop to questions of nationhood, masculinity and Cold War ideological conflicts. The genre successfully crossed over to television, where narrative tropes about masculinity shifted from an emphasis on independence towards community and family, as befitted the living room. Although the western apparently faded from screens in the late 1960s and 1970s, that period was one in which many of its narrative tropes – and some of its musical gestures – were transplanted to the new frontier of outer space. When the western re-emerged in the 1980s, it confronted issues long suppressed in its heyday, particularly the treatment of indigenous populations that had been either demonized or erased from the landscape – that spectacular backdrop against which the new nation had mythologized itself.

Coincident with the fading of the western from Hollywood was the rise of the so-called spaghetti western (considered in detail in Chapter 17). The term was originally disparaging but has come to represent not just an industrial structure (westerns made by European – primarily Italian – artists and institutions, and shot mostly in Italy, Spain and North Africa) but a wide range of generic signifiers, including the idiosyncratic musical language innovated by Ennio Morricone.

Given the sprawl of the genre, this essay will touch upon the major trends, both narrative and musical, in the western in Hollywood, the spaghetti western, postmodernism and outer space. In the broadest

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historical terms, the dominant musical style shifted from folk-based at its origins, to an epic Americana symphonism at mid-century, to a studio-mediated pop-based idiom in the 1960s, with a return to symphonism in the 1980s that was both part of a wider cinematic-industrial movement and a nostalgic/revisionist look back from within the genre. The changes were gradual, shifting emphasis from certain elements to others, often affecting the choice of musical style.

While the title sequence in any film functions as an advertisement for the film – showcasing images, sounds and a graphic style that tells the audience roughly what to expect – the western title sequence seems particularly iconic, as it must accomplish not only scene-setting but time-shifting. Westerns are period pieces and, like science fiction, particularly vulnerable to the concerns of the contemporary audience. Title sequences are also usually the most extended period of foregrounded music, with the exception of another element typically featured in the western – the spectacular landscape. The scene of a lone rider or a wagon train traversing the frame against the backdrop of the prairie, a mountain pass or John Ford's all-purpose Monument Valley is an iconic, even defining, feature of the genre. It often appears in the title sequence, the bridge from the title sequence into the body of the film, a contemplative moment within the narrative, or all of the above. These emblematic moments provide a useful point of comparison when covering a wide range of films, and thus will dominate much of this discussion.

Folksong

Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) is usually cited as the first narrative film, giving the western primacy among cinematic genres. Output was steady throughout the silent-film era – genuine historical western figures like Wyatt Earp, Buffalo Bill Cody and Pancho Villa appeared on screen – and silent-film cowboys like William S. Hart and Tom Mix were stars. D. W. Griffith's pioneering film technique was honed in two-reelers, culminating in *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch* (1913); the staging, photography, editing and, unfortunately, the racist narrative of a white woman – petite, fair Lillian Gish in both instances – menaced by the non-white 'other' all find full flower just over a year later in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915).

The accompaniment of silent film, particularly for more modest productions, is a complex topic, one that is difficult to generalize with any certainty, but the use of cowboy songs to accompany these films would have seemed natural, as these songs – along with such portable

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Example 14.1 Opening 'Indian' theme from *Cimarron*.

Brass (8ves)

Tom-tom

accompaniment instruments as the guitar, harmonica and accordion/concertina – were already a part of western lore, through actual practice as well as pulp novels, theatrical productions and Tin Pan Alley tunes. Cowboy songs included working songs that referred to the cowboys' direct experience ('Get Along Little Dogies', 'Old Paint'), sentimental parlour ballads that emphasized a nostalgia for the domestic and the 'girl left behind' ('Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair' [Stephen Foster, 1854]), dance songs ('Cotton-Eye Joe') and minstrel songs ('Oh, Susanna!' [1848], 'Camptown Races' [1850], 'Ring de Banjo' [1851]; all by Foster) that could provide toe-tapping entertainment around the campfire.

Silent-film accompanists used these songs to help score the films, reinforcing the 'rightness' of their style upon the coming of sound. The songs might well be mixed in with more broadly generic cues for suspense or romance, for instance, but also included the stereotypical 'Indian' tropes that developed during the early years of the twentieth century (see especially Pisani 2005, 241–329; also Pisani 1998; Gorbman 2000, 2001; Kalinak 2007, 2012). Early films, both silent and sound, normalize these gestures, helping to dissolve a variety of commercial songs – like those of Foster – into a 'folk' genre.

RKO's film adaptation of Edna Ferber's Oklahoma-set generational saga *Cimarron* (1931) was scored by Max Steiner, who is credited by many with developing the principles of classical Hollywood film scoring. *Cimarron* opens with an art deco sunrise/sunset card (the ambiguity of the graphic black-and-white image works to emphasize both the West of sunset with the potential and promise of sunrise) and a distinctly ominous 'Indian' theme: a modal tune in low brass that accents the flat seventh and a melodic span of a fourth, punctuated by pounding tom-tom in an asymmetrical phrasing that increases the evoked unease: see Example 14.1.

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This gesture blends the heraldic function of a fanfare with the suspense of a recognizable threat (matriarch Sabra Cravat's virulent racism is eventually eased by her Osage daughter-in-law). Once past this opening gesture, however, the underscore of *Cimarron* is not distinctively 'western' or even American (although the French march style of the subsequent part of the overture had become American through adoption via John Philip Sousa around the turn of the century). In the body of the film, source music dominates, though a couple of moments hint at later practice. The '1907' caption appears over a street view, and a saloon-style piano can be heard distantly; the music's presence is roughly justified, but it also serves a transitional function. Similarly, the final extended sequence is a banquet honouring Sabra's new position as Congresswoman. A small cadre of musicians at the extreme left of the screen (not always visible in some prints and broadcast versions) justifies a few dances and marches as we see various characters interacting for the last time. A slow, hymn-like march first heard in the opening titles returns as the matriarch is reminded of her absent husband – a man who is never able to settle into domesticity and continually seeks the excitement of the westward-pushing frontier, and who will be killed in an oilfield accident in the following scene. The film then closes with the dedication of a statue to the 'Oklahoma Pioneer' (a substitute memorial); the march returns and could possibly, plausibly have been played at this event, but it climaxes with the final title card. A similar transition from frame to diegesis occurs at the beginning: a trumpet fanfare ends the orchestral overture, handing off to a cavalry bugle call that creates a bridge from the credit sequence, matching more by gestural than thematic similarity.

Another film that avails itself of that surprisingly common suturing device, John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939) heralds a new generation of prestige western features, blending high production values and weightier narratives with the action and generic tropes in an 'A' version of what had been primarily a 'B' genre, produced in a steady stream throughout the decade. *Stagecoach* star John Wayne had established his career in such films for Monogram and Mascot Pictures. These low-budget, high-output 'B' westerns appeared as both stand-alones and serials. Musically, they were heavily reliant on source music, with underscore largely confined to the titles. Tremendously popular (in aggregate), these 'B' movies would reinforce the western's generic blending of cowboy, parlour and minstrel songs.

An important subgenre of 'B' westerns often excluded from discussion is the singing cowboy film. Republic Pictures produced many with stars Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, and their popularity should not be discounted. These films were successful enough to have a productive run

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from the 1930s to the early 1950s, and the stars are still household names. Rogers had begun his career as a singer with the Sons of the Pioneers, a smooth, six-part harmony group that performed in a style not unlike the swing bands of the era. They continued to perform together as Rogers became a star (a 1942 film directed by Joseph Kane was actually called *Sons of the Pioneers*), and they sang in several Ford films, including *Rio Grande* (1950) and *The Searchers* (1956). Most scholarly examinations of the western tend to start with *Stagecoach* and the arrival of the western as a prestige feature (or follow a star or auteur like Wayne or Ford); and these films have a degree of song performance that shunts the genre identification towards the musical. Whilst genre can be a useful organizing principle, it can also force divisions that are questionable (see Altman 1987; Neumeyer 2004).

Stagecoach displays its indebtedness to song with its 'Musical score based on American Folk Songs' credit, and no fewer than six listed music personnel, none of whom contributed significantly to the score; according to Michael Pisani, the most substantial scoring was by Gerard Carbonara, who is not even credited (2005, 300). This blurring of authorship arguably strengthens the primacy of the folksongs. The cueing of familiar songs (including 'western' favourites like 'Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair') as underscore is smoother, perhaps, than in earlier films, but still within traditions begun in the silent era. As Kathryn Kalinak (2007) has amply shown, Ford's westerns are full of songs, often stressing communal singing, dancing or church service. In this strain of the western, the song is a form of domesticity (both of 'home' and of 'taming') and is often used to symbolize the narrative tension between the individualism of the frontiersman and the pull towards family and community.

Although the musical style started to shift towards something more mythic and expansive in the early 1950s, song was still crucial to several classic westerns in a Fordian manner. Not surprisingly, these scores were written by melodists: *Red River* (1948) and *High Noon* (1952) by Dimitri Tiomkin, and *Shane* (1953) by Victor Young.

Shane's conjunct, flowing melodies are matched by the narrative theme and the landscape in George Stevens's film. Unlike the wide open spaces of Ford, or the widescreen spectacles of the latter 1950s, *Shane* is set on a farm nestled in encircling mountains. The domesticity of the family unit is threatened from outside, even by the (anti)hero Shane, who comes to help but poses a threat to the nuclear family by offering a more active, individualistic male figure for the son and implicit competition with the father for the mother. Young's thickly orchestrated but simply voiced title music follows the tiny image of Shane on his horse over vast scrublands into the sheltered valley. Shane's image increases in the frame, and close-

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ups of a deer and the little boy bring us nearer to the story. As we approach the farm, the mother's singing of a Scots-Irish folksong winds through the thinning orchestral strains in perhaps the most complex counterpoint of the score.

Tiomkin's scores for *Red River* and *High Noon* are quite different. Howard Hawks's *Red River* is more like a Ford western, though the male chorus singing 'Settle Down' in the opening credits is unseen. In its lyrical sentiment and homophonic singing, it calls for domesticity and community, but the vigorous performance preserves the requisite, rough-hewn masculinity of the traditional western. Yet this film is one of the earliest and most explicit in confronting the postwar shifts in American masculinity. Wayne had gone from the rebellious 'kid' Ringo in *Stagecoach* to the hard-nosed, individualistic father figure Tom Dunson, now pitted against the 'new man' in his thoughtful adopted son Matt (Montgomery Clift), willing to talk before drawing his gun – a new model of bravery (see Cohan 1997). Tiomkin's extensive score quotes folksongs, such as the fiddle tune 'Turkey in the Straw'; and Dunson's theme is diatonic, arching, with a straightforward quaver-quaver-crotchet rhythm, none of which would be out of place in a Ford film. However, the chromatic, romantic violins for Fen (Colleen Gray), whom Dunson loves at the start of the film, approach melodrama in their depiction of eroticism and emotion.

Red River also uses a visual trope that seems particularly prevalent in the immediate postwar period: the use of a storybook or diary to frame the film explicitly as storytelling. This may be simply an adaptation of the increasingly ornate title cards of films of the period, but it may also be a function of the generational shift. By the late 1940s, the 'West' was no longer within the living memory of most audiences; it was now 'once upon a time'.

This storytelling trope is transferred to the nondiegetic underscore in Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon*. Tiomkin's song-based score is exceptionally flexible within what seems to be such strict limitations: almost all the musical material is derived from the title song, a standard 32-bar song form with a short coda ('wait along'). The lyrics sketch out most of the important plot points, but they are frozen in time at the crux of the narrative – when Amy (Grace Kelly) leaves her husband Will Kane (Gary Cooper), who is torn ' 'twixt love and duty'. Tiomkin's deployment of this theme draws constantly on the audience's primed knowledge of Tex Ritter's hit version, released before the film. The striking opening phrase 'Do not forsake me' takes on various meanings: Will's plea to Amy and Amy's pleas to Will; and similarly for both Will and the townspeople. The orchestration is lush and romantic for the love scenes, hymnic for the wedding, minor and chromatic for scenes of conflict or spare guitar and

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harmonica for an isolated Will alone; when Amy leaves, Ritter's voice comes in on the line 'You made that promise when we wed', as if we move into Will's thoughts at that moment, shifting the conceptual placement of the music from diegetic to metadiegetic. Even the mix of the soundtrack is brought to bear, with isolated shots of Kane to heighten his sense of isolation: the beginning of Ritter's recording is not just low in volume, but also miked at a distance, an effect repeated as Will grows smaller and smaller in the frame upon approaching the church in fruitless search for assistance from the townsfolk (see also Lerner 2005).

The bridge of the song, that which speaks of conflict, is rhythmic and disjunct in comparison to the broad-ranging, flowing A melody. While this theme is used extensively for Miller and his henchmen, it also functions as a leitmotif for discord between Will and Amy. The one character who stands outside the musical framework of the song is Helen Ramírez (Katy Jurado), who by virtue of her ethnicity and open sexuality stands outside the community; a stereotypical *paso doble* is distressingly imprecise and vague for a character so strong and distinctive.

Tiomkin used the theme-song strategy in later westerns, such as John Sturges's *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957) and *The Alamo* (1960), directed by John Wayne; but he was never again able to be so concise, perhaps because of the very limitations of the 'real time' strategy in *High Noon*. After the Second World War, the western was moving in a different direction, away from the direct and communal implied by the folksong and towards the epic and spectacular.

Manifest Destiny

The opening musical gesture of *Stagecoach* is the future of the western score in chrysalis. While the film's credits, as well as its score, give primacy to folksong, the opening fanfare combines familiar western tropes with hints of things to come. A clip-clop rhythm is haloed by medium-high strings circling like the spin of wagon wheels, and a brass fanfare rings out in angular, uplifting perfect intervals and assertively striding rhythms.

The source of the fanfare's tune is a melody associated with the cowboy song 'Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie'; however, this melody only appears to have become attached to the song in a 1932 collection (Studwell 1994, 66). This version was quickly 'answered' by a very similar tune from western singer-songwriter Carson Robison and his Buckaroos with 'Carry Me Back to the Lone Prairie', on the premise that a cowboy could not conceivably want to be buried anywhere else

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Example 14.2a Opening melody from *Stagecoach*.

Example 14.2b 'Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie'.

Example 14.2c 'I'm an Old Cowhand from the Rio Grande' from *Rhythm on the Range*.

(Catherine A. Robison n.d.). Compounding the signification, the melody also shares some structural traits with the tune of Johnny Mercer's 'I'm an Old Cowhand from the Rio Grande' for the singing cowboy film *Rhythm on the Range* (1936) starring Bing Crosby. (Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers would also have a hit with the song.) Thus, within a seven-year span, we can observe the formation of a small family of tunes functioning across the folk and the commercial realms, and as the orchestration in *Stagecoach* realizes, they share with such traditional songs as spirituals and work songs a phrasing that encourages call-and-response performance, embedding communality in the structure (see Examples 14.2a–c). The song(s) would have been fresh in the ears of a 1939 audience, although an audience today will probably hear the seeds of epic westerns of the 1950s and 1960s. Ford's visual emphasis on movement of people on horseback or in wagon trains through a spectacular landscape (often diagonally across the screen to create perspective) fuses the music with the image of westward movement in a trope that bespeaks 'Manifest Destiny'.

In the postwar era, the United States was taking its position as a superpower, envisioning itself as one nation *under God* (the words were added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 explicitly to contrast America with the 'godless Communists'). While debates about American masculinity were often finding expression in the subtext, American nationality and nationalism were emblematized in these title sequences.

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The 'outside' threat of the Indians (without a trace of irony, alas) that had made a brief, intrusive appearance, both visually and musically, in *Stagecoach* was eventually erased in favour of the unbroken majesty of the landscape and the music. This musical trope is not unrelated to the centuries-old European pastoral, but altered to fit the more rugged landscape of the American West: the undulating arched melodies over smooth, rolling rhythms are transformed into soaring, angular melodies constructed of perfect intervals and gapped modal scales over agitated, urgent rhythms, often wreathed with the spinning strings that impart forward motion. The gentler pastoral, often couched in warm woodwinds, still appears in domestic moments, or more intimate stories, such as *Shane*.

The musical language of the Manifest Destiny trope can be, and usually is, traced back to the American art music of the 1930s, particularly that of composers Virgil Thomson and Aaron Copland. Thomson's scores for two documentaries directed by Pare Lorentz, *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1938), use a simple, straightforward, mostly modal musical language based on American folksongs, hymnody and popular dance music – the same sources as for many western scores. Copland was inspired by the directness of expression in Thomson's handling of his musical materials and simplified his own compositional voice for both musical and political reasons. Copland felt that at a time of such societal stress (the Depression and the trajectory towards war in Europe), it was important to speak to, not over, his audiences (of course, that also would have financial benefit), and as a composer, he searched for a distinctly 'American' voice. During his studies in Paris in the 1920s, he had thought that might include jazz; a trip to Mexico in the early 1930s inspired the symphonic composition *El Salón México* and heralded an influx of additive rhythms (the piece strongly influenced Bronislau Kaper's 1953 score to *Ride, Vaquero!*); and Lincoln Kirstein's commission of *Billy the Kid* (premiered in 1938) for Ballet Caravan was accompanied by a volume of cowboy tunes for inspiration. Copland also scored the documentary *The City* (1939) and cinematic adaptations of *Of Mice and Men* (1939) and *Our Town* (1940), as well as the ballets *Appalachian Spring* (1942) and *Rodeo* (1943), developing a distinctive language that melded Anglo-Irish melodic patterns, quartal harmony, asymmetrical rhythms and metric modulations – and, perhaps most significantly, a spacious orchestration founded on a strong bass, a largely empty mid-range and a sharp, clear upper register (see also Lerner 2001).

Copland's style clearly struck a chord with audiences, and the connection with distinctly American themes in his ballets and films, as much as any specific musical gestures, helped reinforce his position as an American composer. He did not score a film that might be considered squarely

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a western until Lewis Milestone's adaptation of Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1949). Despite the essentially domestic nature of the story and a de-emphasis of the landscape in favour of medium-close shots, the score is a full-blown manifestation of those features of Copland's style most associated with Americanness and specifically 'the West'. Still, while some Hollywood scores might show incidental influence, it was not until 1958 and Jerome Moross's score for William Wyler's *The Big Country* that the Copland-esque Americana style really became stamped on the Hollywood western (see also Whitmer, 2012).

The title sequence of *The Big Country* was designed by Saul Bass, the graphic designer most noted for his stunning, minimalist movie posters and Hitchcock title sequences; although the typeface is the only obvious graphic element, the eye of the advertising designer is evident throughout, as the camera focuses on both the large-scale movement of the stagecoach sweeping through the amber-grained prairie (the sequence is in colour, but the colour palette makes it appear sepia-toned) and close-up detail of the horses' heads, their hooves and the spinning wheels of the stagecoach. Moross's sweeping title theme is composed of three basic gestures: busy, circling high strings and winds; a wide-ranging angular landscape-line melody in strings and brass; and a driving bassline in an asymmetrical rumba rhythm – 3+3(+2) – the last beat of which is silent, but felt. Pulses in the brass punchily subdivide the rhythm.

It is not that Moross and Bass created something new with this title sequence – in fact, quite the opposite. All the pieces that had been building come together in a hugely effective apotheosis. In Sturges's *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), Elmer Bernstein goes even further by adding more active rhythmic pulses in the mid-range. One notable element of the *Magnificent Seven* title sequence is that the landscape itself is frozen in a still image: the music provides more than enough motion. Bernstein would compose many similar, driving-soaring scores during the 1960s and 1970s for westerns, many of them starring Wayne in the last gasp of Manifest Destiny as a (relatively) uncomplicated concept. Even in Wayne's latter films, from as early as *The Searchers* to his final *The Shootist* (1976), the mythic/epic tended to turn from the triumphantly heroic to the tragic.

In this late, arguably mannerist period of the classic Hollywood western, comedy also came more to the fore. Bernstein's distinctive style can also be heard in Johnny Williams's score for *The Rare Breed* (1966), a comic western in which the asymmetrical, driving rhythms and soaring landscape line come together not in the title sequence but in the birth of the distinctly American calf of a Longhorn cow and Jersey bull. Jack Elliott's and Allyn Ferguson's raucous, fiddle tune-based theme for Burt Kennedy's

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Support Your Local Gunfighter (1971) pushes and pulls expectations through wildly asymmetrical rhythms as the camera follows a train through the mountainous landscape – a visual pun on the classical opening for a film in which the 'hero' is afraid of horses. One must know the conventions in order to play with them, as is so brilliantly parodied by the Sheriff riding past the Count Basie Orchestra in Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* (1974), running roughshod over accepted conventions of musical style, historical period, urban/rural and diegetic/nondiegetic. (This striking image is depicted on the cover of the present book.) Brooks would toy with audience expectations of music's placement again by stashing a cellist in the closet in *High Anxiety* (1977), but the presence of the Basie Orchestra also plays into the running jokes surrounding 'Black Bart' (Cleavon Little). The Sheriff reinserts African-American presence into the American landscape in a tightrope parody that plays on racial stereotypes in order to satirize them. The 'justified' musical accompaniment also recalls the singing cowboy films of the 1930s, primarily the series of all-black musical cowboy films starring jazz singer Herb Jeffries including *Two-Gun Man from Harlem* (1938) and *The Bronze Buckaroo* (1939).

The one arena where the heroic elements of Manifest Destiny may have followed unproblematically is to the 'final frontier' of outer space. Whilst the theme to the *Star Trek* television series (1966–9) used quartal harmonies, its soaring 'landscape' line was performed by an otherworldly female voice in an unorthodox studio mix (though an episode that recapitulates the gunfight at the O.K. Corral has a score reminiscent of Copland). Even as late as 1983, *The Right Stuff* was essentially scored as a western; it was cast with such actors as Sam Shepard, Ed Harris, Fred Ward, Scott Glenn and Lance Henriksen, all of whom made a number of westerns in an era when few were being made. The parallel between cowboys and astronauts permeates the film, which treads the fine line of admiring the Mercury astronauts while underlining their flaws with comedic flair.

The Spaghetti Western

The Hollywood western diminished in importance during the 1960s, particularly as American society began to confront some of its political divisions. At the same time, European filmmakers, led by Sergio Leone, took on the quintessentially American genre and reshaped it; and Morricone, Leone's frequent collaborator, radically rewrote its musical language. While the imagery was often similar to Hollywood's (even if shot in South Europe or North Africa), spaghetti westerns were simultaneously more morally ambiguous and more self-conscious about the

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iconic imagery. Morricone, while obviously skilled in orchestral composition, was also adept at popular-music styles and the use of the recording studio.

The opening of *For a Few Dollars More* (*Per qualche dollaro in più*; 1965) is at once homage, subversion and reinvention. A tiny figure on horseback wends its way through the desert landscape, but instead of a magnificent Manifest Destiny cue, or even a folksong, we hear only sound effects: the jingling of harness, the slap of leather, the strike of a match. The sounds are extremely closely miked, as if they are coming from right beside the listener, yet the only person we can see is that figure in the distance. We could interpret this as contorted aural perspective, until a gunshot rings out 'beside' the listener's ear, and the figure falls from his horse like a target in a shooting gallery; the bullet reinforces the distance from audience to image, making us realize we have been at the shooter's point of audition all along. The iconic image is skewered, and when the title cards come up, the graphics jump around on screen to avoid the gunshots that punctuate the main-title cue (most of the cards are 'shot', but Morricone's escapes). The music is primarily composed of a Tiomkin-like male chorus, reduced to rhythmic grunts, surf-style electric guitar and a twangy mouth harp. The studio manipulation required in order to balance these elements, vastly different in volume, is significant, and the spectator is cued to sonic deceptions from the beginning.

The crossover between sound effect and music reaches its apotheosis in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (*C'era una volta il West*; 1968). The squeak of a tin windmill, the creak of a door or floorboard, the whistling of the wind, the crow of a rooster, even the taunting chatter of a character to a caged bird are among the elements that are arranged rhythmically and dramatically to score the opening scene. The blend of sound effect, sparse musical utterances, expectant silences and static staging, such as in the final three-way shootout in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (*Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*; 1966), have become emblematic of the spaghetti western.

The sparse, gritty look and feel of the spaghetti western crossed back to Hollywood at the end of the 1960s. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), scored by songwriter Burt Bacharach, took the contemporary studio approach to scoring in an era when Hollywood films were eschewing orchestral scores, in part for financial reasons given the breakup of the studio system, and in part because the aesthetic choices for 'realism' tended more towards source scoring. Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969) had self-consciously marked an end of an era. The archaic brutal, destructive masculinity of the characters is symbolized by the opening sequence: the bunch rides into a Mexican town past children gleefully watching a swarm of ants devour a scorpion. Jerry Fielding's score layers militaristic snare-drum rhythms,

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guitar flourishes, warm woodwind choirs in the foreground and distantly miked muted trumpet-calls. The terse but elegiac tone presages the echoing trumpet calls of Jerry Goldsmith's score for *Patton* (1970), another period film in which traditional American masculinity is challenged against the contemporary backdrop of Vietnam.

Postmodernism and Revisionism

Although the term 'postmodern' has been endlessly debated, one feature generally agreed upon is the self-conscious assemblage of iconic elements in ways that highlight their constructedness, comment upon or undermine their coherence. While this is most often couched in 'postmodern cool', Lawrence Kasdan's *Silverado* (1985) offers a warm, wry nostalgia. An affectionate homage to the western movies and television of Kasdan's childhood, *Silverado* still manages to comment on some of the things that had been erased from those westerns, such as the African-American experience in the West. The claustrophobic opening, with a shootout inside a small shack, is almost pure spaghetti western visually and in its *musique concrète* construction of the sound-effect-as-music track; but then Emmett (Scott Glenn), having vanquished his many attackers, opens the door and passes through, like Dorothy into the land of Oz: the darkness turns to light, the claustrophobic shack expands to a widescreen vista of the Rockies and Bruce Broughton's main-title cue captures the magnificence of Bernstein's Manifest Destiny idiom.

The debate on how far back to place the 'revisionist' western is complex, and some revisionist themes can be found in the 1950s, but certainly the American western is firmly in a revisionist period by the 1980s. By the 1960s, the treatment of Native Americans was the generic elephant in the room, confronted head-on by a few films like Ralph Nelson's *Soldier Blue* (1970), but otherwise avoided, even in *Silverado*. The issue was at the centre of two revisionist westerns from 1990: Kevin Costner's famous but problematic *Dances with Wolves* and Australian director Simon Wincer's comedic but arguably more convincing *Quigley Down Under*.

One of the ironies of John Barry's score for *Dances with Wolves* is that the racial difference between the white men and the Lakota is unmarked: both are scored by the same post-romantic European-style music (Scheurer 2008; Gorbman 2001). Only the aggressive Pawnee have more stereotypical 'bad Indian' music. Although Wincer's *Quigley Down Under* is a comedy, it still manages to be more trenchant on race and gender than *Dances with Wolves*. Wincer and composer Basil Poledouris had been responsible for the hugely successful television miniseries *Lonesome*

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Dove (1989), based on Larry McMurtry's western novel. The displacement of the western to Australia in *Quigley Down Under* sets the racial conflict into relief. American sharpshooter Matt Quigley (Tom Selleck) is hired by English rancher Elliott Marston (Alan Rickman) to rid his station of vermin. Upon his arrival, Quigley discovers that the 'vermin' is a tribe of aborigines that Marston wants removed from 'his' land, and Quigley teams up to defeat him with Crazy Cora (Laura San Giacomo), whom Marston has essentially bought to service his men. The title sequence is filled with iconic images of boots, rifles, bullets, spurs and so on, and a cheeky transposition of the 'travelling through the landscape' to a sailing ship on the ocean. Poledouris's score is a pastiche of the Manifest Destiny trope, but with nautical flair.

Walter Hill's *Geronimo: An American Legend* (1993) is, like *Dances with Wolves*, an attempt to see the Indian experience through the eyes of sympathetic white men (this story actually has two nested narrative frames: an army officer who engages Geronimo and the army officer's aide, who narrates the film), when the story rightfully belongs to Wes Studi's eponymous hero. Ry Cooder's score attempts to provide a voice for the Native Americans, but – however beautiful – the synthesis of various kinds of Native American music (mostly Yaqui, which is not only the wrong tribe, but the wrong geographical region) is carefully constructed exoticism. By contrast, Cooder's folk, minstrel and war song-based score for Hill's *The Long Riders* (1980) is, despite the occasional presence of the oud, far more historically representative.

Based on a turn-of-the-century *corrido* (a popular narrative song), Robert M. Young's *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) is about a real-life manhunt that resulted from a linguistic misunderstanding. The film follows both the white lawmen, through the eyes of a reporter (a device allowing a critical distance within the narrative common to a number of revisionist westerns), and the Mexican-American fugitive Cortez, whom we encounter seemingly without mediation. Reflecting the narrative crux of the story, the Spanish in the film is untranslated, creating the same linguistic barriers in the film that the characters encountered. The *corrido* itself, at times with male vocals, forms the basis for the synthesizer score, a choice possibly determined by budget but also focusing the temporal distance of the film's point of view.

As the revisionist western sharpens awareness of genre history and narrative tropes, the musical style becomes more flexible, highlighting pertinent aspects of the genre's history in telling the stories now consciously placed in a more knowing frame. In films like Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) and Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), the intimate, personal nature of the stories returns to the folksong aesthetic of an

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earlier time, in surprisingly delicate, acoustic guitar-based scores, even when set against larger-than-life landscapes. The Manifest Destiny trope still exists, but is now found primarily in baseball films, such as Barry Levinson's *The Natural* (1984), scored by Randy Newman, and Young's *Talent for the Game* (1991), scored by Randy's cousin David Newman.

The Morricone–Leone aesthetic had a profound impact on a younger generation of filmmakers beginning in the 1980s, just as Morricone and Leone themselves went to Hollywood. Alex Cox is most noted for his punk-themed films *Repo Man* (1984) and *Sid & Nancy* (1986), but he also directed *Straight to Hell* (1987), an hallucinatory fantasia on a western, and *Walker* (1987), a purposefully anachronistic biopic of American mercenary William Walker, who led a coup in nineteenth-century Nicaragua, as a commentary on 1980s American foreign policy. In both cases, the music by the Clash's Joe Strummer seems initially anachronistic; but that, of course, is the point. In contrast, punk band Chumbawamba's Morriconian score highlights the spaghetti-western elements of vengeance and redemption in Cox's futuristic version of the Jacobean *Revengers Tragedy* (2002). South African director Richard Stanley uses western imagery extensively in both the post-apocalyptic *Hardware* (1990) and the fantastical *Dust Devil* (1993); Simon Boswell's spare musical scores recall both Morricone and Cooder, and the added compilation of heavy metal, industrial disco-punk and Rossini's *Stabat Mater* (1841) works remarkably well to highlight the Biblical subtext of *Hardware*.

The detour into science fiction for elements of the western genre followed the trajectory of Manifest Destiny from the Pacific Ocean to outer space, but with the shifting – and fragmenting – concepts of what it is to be American, the western has changed. Sensitivity to the complexity of American experience, along racial/ethnic, class, sexuality and gender lines has challenged the core principle of white masculinity, opening up new tributaries of musical expression. The genre presently offers fewer overall trends, and more individual takes on, revisions of and even rejections of the long and changing history of the genre. As with any successful critique, however, most of these films are highly aware of the conventions and their rhetorical and symbolic baggage, using them to comment upon the past of the genre as well as contributing to its continued salience.

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