The influence of music on visual media is difficult to quantify, as both have been intertwined since the earliest days of film, with organists playing for the black and white “silent” movies. This tradition never stopped, as music has continued to be used in films, television programs, commercials, video games, and other visual media. The use of music in visual media is not only to make the viewing experience more enjoyable but to also add to its narrative. An artist’s choice of musical genre is one of the most important tools for telling their narrative. Each musical genre has its own culture or subculture that it’s associated with. My capstone project demonstrates the effect of music and sound on one’s perception of visual media by presenting two videos, each accompanied by three divergent genre compositions and each suggesting different narratives to the audience.

The integration of music in commercials is one of the simplest examples to establish the connection between music and narrative. My first piece, “That\_\_\_Taste,” utilizes an old Lucky Strike Cigarettes commercial produced with stop motion animation. The original music used for it was a square dance reel. It makes the video appear upbeat, positive, and friendly, and was an appropriate choice for the time period and as an accompaniment for the visual art style of the video. However, for this section I want to demonstrate that, with a different choice in genre, an advertisement could appeal towards a different audience and subculture. As an added compositional challenge, all the music in Part I was composed to be played simultaneously. Meaning that the harmonies, compositional structure, and orchestration of all three of the pieces had to planned out at the same time while still appealing to their separate particular demographics.

**Part I “That\_\_\_Taste”**

The video for Part I is from a commercial for Lucky Strike Cigarettes from 1948. The first composition is “That Elegant Taste,” a neo-classical waltz in Bb minor performed by a string quartet. This piece appeals to older, more affluent, and more traditional audiences. It is fast, smooth, and pretty but with a slight dark edge. The second composition is “That Cool Taste,” a jazz quartet in Db major. This piece appeals to a more playful, funky, and slightly older, demographics. It is light-hearted and bubbly. The third piece present is “That Sophisticated Taste,” a combination of the classical and jazz quartet. This work appeals to those that enjoy classical and jazz music, as well as those that view themselves as sophisticated or musically educated. It is rich and playful, yet still with a dark edge. The third composition, and fourth piece in the series, is “That Sexy Taste,” an industrial dance work with a chromatic harmonic scheme based around Bb. This work appeals to more sexually open, rebellious, and younger demographics. It is heavy, steady, and exceptionally dark, like the gothic culture that it is commonly associated with. The fifth piece presented, “That Complex Taste,” is all of the pieces combined, creating an extreme yet still harmonious sonic experience. This muti-combo work appeals to those that seek intense, intellectual, and progressive musical experiences.

**Part II “S\_\_Anticipation”**

The second video is a short scenario. It is a night scene with a woman in a car in the rain. She goes outside for a smoke sheltering under an umbrella. Other than that, nothing else happens in the video. Part II of *The Effect of Music on Visual Media* is a perfect example of how music influences a scene’s narrative. Because there is no verbal narrative, it is the music and sound that sets the tone and emotion of this video. The first composition for this video, “Sweet Anticipation,” will use elements of pop, R&B, reggae, and electronic dance music (EDM). This makes the visual media appear as a music video, feeling sleek and sexy. In this scenario the music is the focus of the narrative, and the visual media accompanies it. The second composition for this film clip, “Secret Anticipation,” presents nature sounds with a gravelly voiced narrator. This soundscape is in the style of film noir. This creates a feeling of realism, while also portraying suspense and mystery. The audience is left with questions about what is going on, based off of what they can, or can’t, see or hear in the video. What is she doing out in the rain waiting alone in the dark? Is someone coming to meet her? Is it a possible romantic encounter or is it something more threating? These questions are left unanswered in this musical scenario. In this iteration, what is happening behind the scenes is more interesting than what is actually happening on the screen. The third composition for this video, “Scary Anticipation,” is a horror soundtrack. This piece also incorporates natural sounds but they sound more surreal than those used in the second composition. The music and sounds suggest a narrative of a creature lurking just out of the woman’s sight. She is completely unaware of this, but it’s completely clear to the audience that, even though they can’t see anything, “something bad is going to happen.” The woman, being unaware of the danger until it’s too late, vanishes with a scream, leaving the audience uneasy with just the car in the rain. In this scenario, the audience was aware of the danger while the character on screen is not. This demonstrates that music can create narratives completely outside of the material presented visually.

On a deeper level, my capstone project examines music in the contexts of cultural perception, commercialism, and its use as a narrative device. It is my desire to demonstrate when music used for visual media is well thought out and appropriate, then the visual media’s message becomes clearer and deeper. If the music is not carefully crafted or chosen, it can change the media’s narrative into something that the original artist did not intend. So, all visual artists must think of the genre and style of music they want to accompany their work, in order for their desired narrative portrayed to be clear and effective. Sonic artists also need to know how their art influences visual media, so that they can meet the expectations of the visual artists they collaborate with. When incorporated properly, the right music choice can help the visual material appeal to broader audiences or transform soundless visuals into a life-like experience. Thus, all artists must respect all genres and musical styles, as the power of music enriches and informs the narrative of the human experience.

Composition, musical performance, music and film editing/mixing, narration, vocals, and script by –

Arion Tanabe

Additional Performers –

“That Elegant Taste,” “That Sophisticated Taste,” and “That Complex Taste”

Nicole Allen, Violin I & II

Maya Mokofisi, Viola

Hannah Shute, Cello

“That Cool Taste,” “That Sophisticated Taste,” and “That Complex Taste”

Tanner Bayles, Alto Saxophone

Alexandra Shea, Clarinet

“Sweet Anticipation”

Jessica Wells, Vocals

All downloaded sounds from the open-source sound library Soundly -

Soundly. Oslo, Norway. Accessed March 20, 2023. [getsoundly.com](http://getsoundly.com/).

Visual media clips –

“Lucky Strike Cigarette Commercial: Square Dance” (1948). Perlinger Archives. Accessed September 15, 2022. <https://archive.org/details/LuckyStr1948_2>

Multiple videos. Coverr. Accessed Jan 5, 2023. <https://coverr.co/>

Software used –

REAPER. <https://www.reaper.fm/>

MAX/MSP. <https://cycling74.com/products/max>

Sebelius. <https://www.avid.com/sibelius>

Logic Pro. <https://www.apple.com/logic-pro/>

Hardware –

Yamaha S90XS Music Synthesizer. <https://usa.yamaha.com/>

2i2 Scarlet Focusrite. <https://focusrite.com/en>

2019 Mac Book Pro. <https://www.apple.com/mac/>

Brands –

Lucky Strike. <https://www.luckystrike.com/>

Nissan. <https://www.nissanusa.com/>