# Hearing and Feeling the Black Vampire: Queer Affects in the Film Soundtrack

**Morgan Woolsey**

## I. Introduction: The Soundtrack's Place in Theories of Queer Spectatorship

Published by Bad Object-Choices[1] in 1991, the foundational *How Do I Look: Queer Film and Video* is a collection of six essays, each offering a different engagement with the titular question. This question can be read in at least two ways, with attendant changes in tone and meaning. First, as inquiry into queer representation: how do I, the queer subject, look when I am represented *to an audience*? And second, as an inquiry into queer spectatorship: how do I, the queer subject, look *at film and video*? Bad Object-Choices felt that this title—with its camp humor, changeability, and theoretical flexibility—would encapsulate their shared desire to address issues of representation and spectatorship simultaneously, while bridging the gap between activist and academic discourses.

This efficient semantic flourish is enabled by the reversibility of "look," the verb associated with visual perception which tends to function as a starting point in discussions of representation and spectatorship. But if we try to convey the same reversibility as it relates to aurally-based modes of queer media perception, we encounter obstacles. First of all, two questions would be necessary to address both interpretations of the question: "how do I sound?" and "how do I listen?" This division in conceptual framing has, I think, led to a division in concerns and approaches. There is very little queer media or musicological scholarship that considers the soundtrack, and the scholarship that does (Knapp 1994; Paulin 1997; Haworth et. al., 2012; Buhler 2014; Dubowsky 2016) tends to approach the subject from the representational standpoint ("how do I sound?").[2] Though James Buhler suggests that "asynchronous sound" and "spectacle" constitute potential audiovisual aesthetics for representing queerness in the soundtrack (Buhler 2014, 371-372), the way that these aesthetics foster queer engagement ("how do I listen?") remains under-theorized.

I suspect that this is due in part to the second obstacle one encounters when trying to account for spectatorship in theorizing about soundtracks: a longstanding lack of critical consensus as to whether the aural percep-

tion at work in film spectatorship can be classified as "listening" at all.[3] This is especially pronounced where work on the score is concerned. In Claudia Gorbman's influential formulation of Classical Hollywood scoring practices, for example, she demonstrates that film music's effectiveness is predicated on its ability to remain "unheard." It is not music consciously perceived, but rather a "bath or gel of affect" that "render[s] the individual an untroublesome viewing subject: less critical, less 'awake'" (Gorbman 1987, 5). Put in slightly less nefarious terms, Anahid Kassabian describes film music as "a lubricant to identification processes, smoothing the transition…into fictional worlds" (Kassabian 2001, 113).

This psychic massaging centers predominantly on an audience's emotions, adding intimacy and a "for me" quality to the cinematic experience (Gorbman 1987, 5). So, while the score may play many functions in a film, "it is often assumed that its most important function is as a signifier of emotion" (Smith 1999, 147). We can extend Smith's characterization further in relation to the contexts I'll be discussing in this article: horror, exploitation, and arthouse film. In these contexts, music does not simply signify emotion to an audience; it gives physical presence to that emotion and often seeks a mimetic response from the audience as well (Donnelly 2005, 88).

"How do I feel," then, might best approximate "how do I look's" gratifyingly efficient and collapsible dual focus when analyzing aural perception's role(s) in queer representation and spectatorship. "How do I feel"—like "how do I look"—is a request for feedback: to know the affective and emotional information music conveys in audiovisual representations of queerness. But it can also be read as an inquiry into the affective and emotional processes of queer spectatorship: how does a queer subject *form emotional attachments to a film* or other media object? What musical competencies must they possess? What audiovisual modes of address do they respond to and how do they negotiate with dominant ideology's representation(s) of them?

While the affective-audiovisual analysis I am proposing is important for investigating spectatorship of all kinds, it is particularly important when investigating queer spectatorship, a variety of what José Esteban Muñoz labels, more broadly, "minoritarian" spectatorship (Muñoz 1999). This is because the relation between soundtrack and image track is often the site of surprising and sometimes critique-enabling incongruity. Many soundtracks furnish the willing scholar with moments in which music undercuts or interrupts the mood of a scene, inviting the audience— sometimes quite forcefully—to perceive the actions unfolding differently, against the grain. These incongruous moments invite critiques of domi-

nant ideology; but what kind? Rejection? Reappropriation? Something yet to be theorized? Are such engagements necessarily queer?

One example that illustrates incongruity's importance in queer aesthetics is camp: the well-discussed sensibility and form of engagement we find animating Bad Object Choices' playful naming of their anthology. Camp comes into being most vibrantly in the space opened up during such moments of incongruity, moments that denaturalize and "demystify" (Dyer 1992, 138), forcing a critical distance where rigid binaries of gender and sexuality are concerned. Knowing audiences experience these moments as ironic, as overtly artificial, as hilarious and endearing failures, while unknowing audiences miss the gag. There is a whole constellation of performance modes, affects, and politics that attend these demystifying camp moments.

But the particular "archive of feelings" (Cvetkovich 2003) attending camp—a "repertoire of formalized and often formulaic responses to the banality of straight culture and the repetitiveness and unimaginativeness of heteronormativity" (Halberstam 2011, 109)—has tended to be theorized through a hegemonic white male canon that prioritizes specific performance modes, affects, and politics that may not be as important to other minoritarian forms of spectatorship. What other performance modes, affects, and politics have been overshadowed? How can we locate affective histories of minoritarian engagement with dominant ideology *aside* from camp? How can we delineate those repertoires of responses?

In this article, I argue that an affective-audiovisual analysis of the soundtrack can help us address these questions, with Muñoz's formulation of counteridentification and disidentification—which I will define in the following section—providing conceptual scaffolding. To demonstrate this, I compare the modes of audience address in the soundtracks of two Black vampire films from the 1970s that are not regularly considered in discussions of queerness and sexuality: *Blacula* (music by Gene Page)[4] and *Ganja and Hess* (music by Sam Waymon).[5] Released within eight months of one another, the films perform a similar critical maneuver in replacing the traditionally white aristocratic figure of the vampire with a Black aristocratic figure. As such, they both offer an opportunity for audience counteridentification with dominant representations of sexualized Blackness, and this is reflected in the soundtracks. Page's music for *Blacula* hails from the disco underground, and Waymon's music for *Ganja and Hess* is composed around an oratory gospel and blues frame.

However, the films each complicate this maneuver in a separate way, and this is best observed in the addresses that the soundtracks make to their respective audiences. *Blacula* combines the initial Black counteri-

dentification with an additional and contrasting "paracinematic" counteridentification (Sconce 2007) audible in Page's deft handling of exploitation horror's musical clichés. *Ganja and Hess*, on the other hand, builds upon this initial Black counteridentification and, I argue, invites queer disidentification through its intensely metadiegetic soundscape. I will begin by defining and contextualizing key terms before moving into my analysis of the two soundtracks.

## II. (Sound)tracking Counteridentifications and Disidentifications

In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics,* José Esteban Muñoz outlines a tripartite theory of identification: identification, counteridentification, and disidentification. In this section, I will draw connections between this taxonomy and various scholarly and practical understandings of film music's placement and effects. I will then outline Anahid Kassabian's differentiation between scores that offer "assimilating" identifications and "affiliating" identifications and suggest the utility of these ideas for expanding our understanding of counteridentification and disidentification in the soundtrack.

As the gloss I offered earlier suggests, film music's central role is often seen as encouraging emotional investment and identification, defined by Laplanche and Pontalis and summarized by Muñoz as a "psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides" (Muñoz 1999, 7). This assimilating process has been described by film music practitioners and scholars as operating largely through a recourse to "parallel" strategies (Eisenstein et. al., 1928). In these instances, music reinforces the mood of a given scene, producing "empathetic" effects (Chion 1992) and, more specifically, presenting the audience with a tightly defined or "tracked" emotional pathway for identification (Kassabian 2000; Link 2004). Audiences must recognize what particular cues mean immediately, which leads to a very clear semiotic system. The narrowness of the audience address here would classify this type of film music as what television scholar Jonathan Fiske calls a "readerly text" (Fiske 1987). [6]

How might a soundtrack encourage an audience to counteridentify, to—in another paraphrase, this time of Michel Pêcheux — "resist and attempt to reject the images and identificatory sites offered by dominant ideology" (Muñoz 1999, 11)? Many film music practitioners and theorists have argued that a reliable way to do this is to subvert audience expectation in some way. A favored enactment of this subversion has been the use of audiovisual incongruity "a lack of shared properties in an audiovisual relationship" (Ireland 2017, 21). Early critics Theodor Adorno and Hanns

Eisler argue that if music conveyed its own meanings and played a structural role in determining the meaning in a scene (rather than simply echoing what was already apparent in the visuals)[7] that the dominant ideology of the culture industry would be subverted (Adorno/Eisler 1947). They suggest that substituting a "writerly" (Fiske 1987) musical text would accomplish this, but they allow that other kinds of music could "oppose" the meaning of a scene and change that meaning in the process. This audiovisual juxtaposition, they hope, would allow audiences to synthesize their own meanings (by interpreting the interaction between visual and musical elements in real time). It would also, ideally, allow audiences to have spontaneous emotional responses to those meanings, rather than ones that had been determined in advance by musical clichés.

The idea that music can either be "with" or "against" the mood of a scene is quite pervasive in film music scholarship. However, the reality is far more complicated, especially now that the subversive incongruity suggested by Adorno and Eisler has become a cliché of its own.[8] Taking up Muñoz's third category of disidentification allows us to get at that complexity. Muñoz asserts that direct counteridentification with dominant ideology is not equally available to all subjects.[9] He defines disidentification as a process whereby the subject neither wholly assimilates nor wholly rejects the images proffered by dominant ideology. He describes the process as follows:

> Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this 'working on and against' is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance (Muñoz 1999, 11).

If audiovisual incongruity has been the preferred method for encouraging counteridentification, how might a soundtrack encourage disidentification? Does audiovisual incongruity work, or are different strategies required?

I have found Anahid Kassabian's discussion of the "affiliating" identifications offered by "compiled" popular music scores to be helpful in clarifying my thinking on this top. Briefly, Kassabian argues that "not all scores offer similar paths to identifications" and suggests that there are "two main approaches to film music in contemporary Hollywood: the composed score, a body of musical material composed specifically for the film in question; and the compiled score, a score built of songs that often (though not always) preexisted the film." Where the composed score tends towards

the narrow assimilation I associate with identification, the compiled score tends towards a different process that Kassabian labels "affiliation." This is a more open process because audiences likely have preexisting relationships with the popular songs included in compiled soundtracks and may bring their associations with those songs—their personal histories and their identities—into their engagements with film. Over the course of the book, Kassabian argues that "offers of assimilating identifications try to narrow the psychic field [and] offers of affiliating identifications open it wide" (Kassabian 2001, 3).

As I will demonstrate in my discussions of the soundtracks of *Blacula* and *Ganja and Hess*, both counteridentification and disidentification can be invited via audiovisual incongruity. However, the audiovisual incongruity that opens out into disidentification tends to operate via an audiovisual incongruity that does not point to a specific interpretation or position, but instead offers multiple critiques.

## Paracinematic Counteridentification and Counteridentificatory Sonic Impressions of Blackness: *Blacula* (1972)

In 1972, American International Pictures released *Blacula* (dir. William Crain), a highly lucrative *Dracula* knock-off credited with spawning a short-lived subgenre boom in Blaxploitation horror. Between 1973-1974, roughly fifteen low-budget, Black-cast films featuring Black popular music-inflected soundtracks were released. Generally, these films either relocated Universal's roster of classic ghouls to modern, urban settings (as with *Blackenstein,* 1973) or reworked successful modern horror film narratives (as with *Abby*, 1974). With their Black-majority casts and incorporation of militant attitudes and themes, these films represent a shift from what film scholar Robin Means Coleman labels Hollywood's tokenizing "Blacks in horror" phase to a brief "Black horror" phase[10] in which Black leads and themes were central to the films (Means Coleman 2011, 119). In this shift, we see an avalanche of counteridentificatory performances and narratives, and Means Coleman dubs *Blacula* "the decade's gold standard for recreating a (White) horror classic in the image of Blackness, while also tackling issues of Black pride and empowerment."

In *Blacula*, 18th century Abani Prince Mamuwalde (William Marshall) and Princess Luva (Vonetta McGee) visit Count Dracula (Charles Macaulay) to discuss the Prince's efforts to end the slave trade. When Dracula refuses to help Mamuwalde and transforms him into a vampire, he curses him with the name "Blacula" and locks Luva in a crypt to die. Mamuwalde is awakened in present-day Los Angeles by an interracial pair of effeminate interior decorators who become his first victims. At the funeral of Black

victim Bobby (Ted Harris), Mamuwalde sees Tina (also played by Vonetta McGee) whom he believes to be his lost Luva. The remainder of the plot follows Mamuwalde's seduction of Tina as the police close in on him as suspect in the recent murders plaguing the city's working-class citizens. After a police officer shoots Tina, Mamuwalde transforms her into a vampire, but she is staked shortly thereafter. After declaring that "his only reason for living has been taken away," Mamuwalde ascends into the sunlight, thereby ending his existence.

As might be expected of an exploitation film, there are no instances in which music plays the kind of structural role that Adorno and Eisler believed would assure an active spectator and a counteridentificatory stance: the score overtly mickey-mouses the action throughout. However, I would argue that an examination of Gene Page's music furthers an interpretation of the film as a clear case of counteridenification, though one that drew differing responses from popular audiences and Black opinion leaders. This is because the score sets up opposing, but related, modes of audience address around Mamuwalde depending on whether he is terrorizing Los Angeles or courting Tina: one of paracinematic counteridentification and one offering a counteridentificatory image of Blackness. The score's ability to move freely between these two modes is best understood through a consideration of Page's musical background.

Page is listed as an arranger, composer, pianist, and producer on over 1,000 records from 1962-1998, as well as on hundreds of records released posthumously featuring his previous work. He is especially known for his prolific and high-profile output as an arranger specializing in strings, with his work featured on many hits throughout the 60s and 70s. Significantly, in 1972—at around the same time as he was hired to score *Blacula*—he began a long-term collaboration with Barry White, co-arranging Love Unlimited's "Walking in the Rain with the One I Love." The song was backed by White's famous Love Unlimited Orchestra, an ensemble featuring a large string section, symphonic brass, and percussion, electric guitar, and bass more associated with modern soul ensembles. The following year, Page would go on to co-arrange "Love's Theme," a rare orchestral single to succeed in claiming the #1 spot on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and Easy Listening charts simultaneously. [11]

Page's work with White demonstrates the sonic "image" of Blackness that he would bring to his score for *Blacula*. As Mitchell Morris summarizes, this music sounded rich and emblematized Black capitalism: "the smell of money—new money, the kind most dramatically visible in the entertainment business—always hung about [White's] music." He goes on: "'Love's Theme,' one of the first hits to come out of the disco underground

and achieve popular success…alert[ed] mainstream audiences to the possibilities of glamour and sensual enjoyment within a newly empowered subculture" (Morris 2013, 38). The score, like his work with White, features a combination of symphonic and soul sounds, and in the context of the film this enables him to move flexibly from traditional, clichéd horror scoring (paracinematic counteridentification) to Black musical opulence (counteridentificatory images of Blackness): two very distinct modes of audience address.

I understand the first, clichéd horror mode as inviting a variety of what Jeffrey Sconce labels a "paracinematic" sensibility, which he describes as "aggressively attacking the established canon of 'quality' cinema and questioning the legitimacy of reigning aesthete discourses on movie art" (Sconce 2007, 101-102). He defines the paracinematic in a fashion reminiscent of Sontag's definition of camp, with lists, stating that the paracinematic comprises "seemingly disparate genres as 'badfilm,' splatter-punk, 'mondo' films, sword and sandal epics, Elvis flicks, government hygiene films, Japanese monster movies, beach-party musicals, and just about every other historical manifestation of exploitation cinema from juvenile delinquency documentaries to soft-core pornography" (ibid). Paracinematic sensibilities, then, are trash sensibilities, focusing on the failures of the film industry rather than failures or exaggerations of gender within its successes, as camp often does. The paracinematic sensibility evaluates objects as "bad" and of low cultural standing, and proceeds to use those qualities and features that make them bad to criticize the "mainstream" of filmmaking and film taste.

This first counteridentificatory mode of audience address is set up in the first moments of the film, when Dracula prevents Mamuwalde and Luva from leaving his castle. This sequence is a catalogue of Adorno and Eisler's derided devices for arousing suspense: tritones, low chromaticism, dissonant clusters in the brass and strings, and queasy synthesizer glissandi. These cartoonish musical gestures accompany the film's establishment of Dracula's racism and cruelty, inverting the usual depiction of Blackness as monstrous by casting, in a sense, Mamuwalde and Luva as the victimized Jonathan and Mina Harker. After Mamuwalde is locked in a coffin and Luva left to die with him, the screen fades to black and the cue cross-fades into the film's theme ("The Stalkwalk"). The stylish animated credits sequence rolls.

The second mode of address is introduced here, with music that contrasts dramatically with the previous, paracinematic scoring. A B-Locrian melody in a pedal-enhanced electric guitar is supported by an energetic drum and bass groove and punctuated by syncopated horns playing at oc-

taves. Where the film's opening sequence invited the audience to counteridentify by laughing at exaggerated and recognizable depictions of the white vampire (and inversely form respect for Mamuwalde's dignified responses to Dracula's racism), the credits invite them to counteridentify directly with the film's spirit of Black pride and empowerment. These oppositional procedures occur on different levels and require different forms of engagement from the audience, an observation that expands understandings of how counteridentification can function.

This does not necessarily signal a space for disidentification, though, since Mamuwalde remains a resolutely celebrated figure, even in his vampiric form. When looking at the depiction of Mamuwalde in his vampiric form we can see that the film is engaging with and critiquing the racist dimensions of early depictions of Black monstrosity: *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Rouben Mamoulian 1931), for example. In this form, Mamuwalde terrorizes subjects more marginalized than himself (a gay couple, women, working-class people), furthering, in Means Coleman's estimation, "the film's dismissive, heteronormative rhetorical violence" (Means Coleman 2011, 122). The scoring in these sequences, while identical to the scoring of the pre-credits sequence, does not ask for the audience to consider Blacula as monstrous in the same way as Dracula. The violence in those sequences, through the exaggerated mickey-mousing in the score, becomes comedic.

Contrast this with the first encounter between Mamuwalde and Tina. Walking home along a darkened street, Tina becomes nervous that someone is following her. The chromatic figures from Luva's entombment slowly build in the background until Tina rounds a corner and bumps into Mamuwalde. "Luva," he says. "It's me!" Startled, she breaks free from his grasp. But instead of the previous paracinematic vampire-coded music, a cue related to "The Stalkwalk" (this time a climbing B-Phrygian figure in the brass, along with the familiar opening groove) accompanies Tina running away. Mamuwalde pursues her but is hit by a taxi and the cue fades out. Here, the score, in its invocation of the counteridentificatory sonic image of Blackness, indicates that Tina should not be afraid of Mamuwalde, an indication that is reinforced every time the couple interacts on screen. The taxi driver he encounters should be, and the score's ominous silence tells us as much.

This leads us to the significance of the score's treatment of Mamuwalde's seduction of Tina. Unlike many Blaxploitation films of the time period, *Blacula* disappointed more than one reviewer with its relatively tame erotic content and failure to engage with "the man" in the sexually aggressive manner of a number of American International Picture's other (white-directed) Blaxploitation films. David Pirie, for example, condemns *Blacula*

for displaying a sexual timidity uncharacteristic for American International Pictures' films. He laments that instead of using "the sexual threat which underlies the action [of Stoker's novel] and generates its particular aura of morbid dread" to interrogate the racial dimensions of contemporary sexual politics, *Blacula* falls back on "the worst of all horror clichés, that is, the monster's quest for the reincarnation of his lost love" and lapses into overstuffed sentimentality (Pirie; 1977, 98).

In *Blacula,* Mamuwalde's pursuit of Tina features neither the overt sexual seduction nor the fantastic supernatural seduction that merged in many of the decade's most successful vampire films. As pointed out by Means Coleman, William Marshall plays the titular role in a manner that could be described as fatherly, embracing Tina chastely and kissing her on the forehead. How, then, is Tina seduced? Usually discussed in terms of visual entrancement, a trap for the eyes (recall the haunting visual effect of bathing Bela Lugosi's eyes in light as he gazes intently at his victims in Todd Browning's *Dracula,* who in turn lose themselves in his eyes), seduction in many vampire films is also an auditory affair. The vampire may seduce with an entrancing, supernatural gaze, but often enough the vampire seduces with a sexually suggestive, purring voice and promises of immortality, historically significant love, or of freedom and power more broadly.

Mamuwalde first tries to convince her that she is the incarnation of Luva. While Tina does not reject this idea outright, she has some trouble accepting it, asking: "I don't know what I believe anymore, but help me and I'll try to understand." Mamuwalde responds with a description of his transformation into a vampire as enslavement. When Tina tells him that she will not join him in eternal life, Mamuwalde tells her that she must come to him freely, with love, or not at all: "I will not take you by force, and I will not return." As he rises to leave, Tina begs him to stay, unfastening his cloak as they embrace. This seduction, as in the original *Dracula* narrative, involves the human woman's acceptance of her historical role. Unlike the original narrative, though, there is no hint of sexual coercion. In fact, Mamuwalde states explicitly that he will not "force" Tina to decide to join him as a vampire: she must come to this decision on her own.

Stripped of the sexual and supernatural, this seduction is, above all, a political one, a call for a solidarity and love rooted in a shared cultural history. As Means Coleman acknowledges, "Mamuwalde's amorous feelings for Tina, which she quickly reciprocates, can be viewed as motivating Afrocentric nostalgia for a complete and full Blackness [in Tina and in the audience]" (Means Coleman; 2011, 123). Furthermore, in the context of a Blaxploitation horror film where a certain level of exploitative sexual and violent explicitness is expected, director William Crain and lead ac-

tor William Marshall carefully concentrate on the production of an image of Black masculinity that is aristocratic and gentlemanly in the pursuit of the heterosexual love of a Black woman (though, again, still predatory and murderous where lower- and working-class Black subjects are concerned, as well as queer subjects). Through the vampire narrative, the Black man is given access to a heritage, dignity, and power not available to him via roles in other genres.

Contrasting with many contemporaneous scenes of vampiric seduction, the mood in these seduction scenes isn't menacing or tense, nor particularly erotic or sexual. Instead, it is mellow and relaxed, underscored with a gentle alto flute melody. There is nothing predatory about Mamuwalde's words or actions in the scene, a tone set by the score, replete with Page's characteristically lush string arrangements. This melody first appears after Mamuwalde has seen Tina for the first time about twenty minutes earlier, accompanying his retreat to his coffin where he caresses the purse she has dropped. The alto flute returns, almost imperceptibly, as Tina opens her door at the start of the seduction scene. This cue, which trades the melody from alto flute to tenor saxophone to oboe to strings, accompanied by vibraphone, strings, and electric bass, shifts from background to foreground when Mamuwalde rises to leave, moving into higher registers in the violins, before ceding the melody back to the alto flute as the couple embraces at the end of the scene. Before their passion, signaled by a dynamic swell of the strings, can gather any momentum, it is interrupted by an abrupt cut to the next scene—the police detective unearthing Bobby's coffin—accompanied by ominous chromatic ostinati.

Though Mamuwalde can be seen in these sequences as a complete realization of the upwardly-mobile, heterosexual yet sexually restrained Black patriarch promulgated by activist institutions such as the NAACP, it isn't surprising that leaders from these organizations, including Junius Griffith of the Committee Against Blaxploitation, would look askance at Blaxploitation horror's reproduction of existing stereotypes of Blackness as violent and atavistic (Rhines 1996, 45)—even if those stereotypes were reproduced to be laughed at and rejected or reappropriated. In any case, whether one is responding to the film's invitation to counteridentify directly along with prevailing Black Power images (signaled by Page's luxuriant, funky score) or to adopt a paracinematic stance and counteridentify against Hollywood convention (signaled by Page's overt use of musical horror clichés), both of these musical styles are readerly and offer little room for interpretation. As a result, there is little opportunity for disidentification. For that we will turn to the second film, *Ganja and Hess*.

## Disidentification and Metadiegetic Interlocutors in the Fantastical Gap: Ganja and Hess (1973)

Like *Blacula, Ganja and Hess* (dir. Bill Gunn) invited audiences to engage with and critique representations of contemporary Blackness via the aristocratic figure of the vampire: this time Dr. Hess Green (Duane Jones in his first role after *Night of the Living Dead* 1968). However, Gunn took the source material in a different direction than Crain, much to the chagrin of his producers. Instead of embracing a parodic, paracinematic approach, he took an experimental, art-house one that led both to the film's selection for Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival, and its praise in white-owned but Black-oriented softcore men's magazine *Players* as well. The critic wrote that *Ganja and Hess* was a "provocative metaphor which attends the cosmic sensibility of black life, its spirituality, that hidden layer of potency often inscrutable to the 'plantation bosses'" (AFI 1973).

The embrace of the film in these two divergent spheres—international prestige film and softcore publications—points to its distinct sensibility. Scrambling the coordinates of taste was favored among European makers of what Pirie terms "the sex-vampire film" (Pirie 1977, 6), such as Harry Kümel, in addition to Jess Franco and Jean Rollin, whose films were as surreal as they were sexually explicit, favored scrambling the coordinates of taste. Joan Hawkins labels such films "the horrific avant-garde," meaning films that use tropes and spectacle drawn from horror to explore thematic issues more associated with "serious" or experimental filmmaking (Hawkins 2000, 22-23). *Ganja and Hess*, a film that explores myriad conceptualizations of addiction and hunger through the vampire's central blood metaphor, can be easily categorized in this way.

The plot follows Dr. Hess Green, who is infected with vampirism when his research assistant, George Meda (Bill Gunn), stabs him with a ceremonial dagger belonging to the Myrthian people (a fictional African tribe). Meda, thinking he has killed Hess, then shoots himself, leaving the transformed Hess to feed on his blood. Initially Hess struggles with his vampirism, preying on people in the surrounding urban community (as *Blacula*'s Mamuwalde had), but this is interrupted when Ganja (Marlene Clark), wife of the deceased Meda, comes looking for her husband. Shortly thereafter, Ganja and Hess begin a romantic relationship.

Eventually, Ganja discovers Meda's body and realizes that Hess has killed him. She does not turn against Hess; instead their relationship deepens, and the pair marry. Hess then stabs Ganja with the Myrthian dagger, and she becomes a vampire as well. The couple begin adjusting to their new existence—among other things, inviting a community worker (Richard Harrow) over for dinner, seducing him, and feeding on his blood—but

Hess grows increasingly dissatisfied with his condition. Ultimately, he chooses to end his immortality by attending a Pentecostal church service led by Reverend Williams, who is also his chauffeur (Sam Waymon), and standing beneath a cross' shadow after he has received communion. Ganja does not join him, and the film ends with the community worker rising from the dead and running to join her.

A writerly text through and through, it is easy to see from a summary of the plot that such a film would not invite the kinds of tightly prescribed identification we saw in *Blacula*. But an exploration of the soundtrack reveals the disidentificatory paths an audience might follow, and the audiovisual strategies that mark the way. *Ganja and Hess*' soundtrack was created by Sam Waymon, Gunn's life partner and long-time creative collaborator, who also appears in the film as Reverend Luther Williams. The two met sometime during the late 1960s at a party thrown by Waymon's sister, Nina Simone, for the actress Josephine Premice. Waymon moved into Gunn's Upper Nyack home, where the two would live and collaborate until Gunn's death in 1989. Historian Christopher Sieving says that Waymon

> became Gunn's closest artistic collaborator, making invaluable contributions as composer and musical performer to *Ganja & Hess*, *Black Picture Show* and *Rhinestone Sharecropper*… and as actor to *Ganja & Hess* and *Personal Problems*. That Waymon also frequently served as Gunn's typist, editor, and sounding board makes it all the more difficult to isolate his influence on—or minimize his importance to—Gunn's seventies and eighties efforts (Sieving 2020 (forthcoming)).

As the intimacy of their collaboration suggests, eschewing Hollywood production schedules in which the composer is brought on relatively late in the post-production process to score the film, the soundtrack plays a central symbolic and structural role throughout the film. Waymon's soundtrack is an extremely diverse and busy one, consisting of gospel singing, European chamber music, arrangements of J.S. Bach's "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," Smithsonian field recordings of Bongili (Central African) work chants, "March Blues," a blues song composed by Waymon and performed by Mabel King (who appears as the Queen of Myrthia in several dream sequences), and electro-acoustic underscoring. Sounds of nature mingle with ambulance sirens or human screams, and diegetic music (such as the gospel singing or the blues on Dr. Hess's record player) is often mixed with the score (ominous, electronic drones, for example) and human speech. Multiple cues and sounds are regularly layered one on top of the other, resulting in a chaotic and disorienting aural aesthetic.

What is most striking is that unlike the situation in *Blacula,* here there is no clear distinction between diegetic music and score—one of film music

scholarship's most beloved and oft-violated dichotomies—and this is one of the central ways in which the soundtrack is able to invite disidentification from the audience. Robynn Stilwell labels this liminal space between the score and the diegesis "the fantastical gap" and argues that "[t]he trajectory of music between diegetic and nondiegetic highlights a gap in our understanding, a place of destabilization and ambiguity" (Stilwell 2007).

One common way to draw an audience across this gap is via the insertion of metadiegetic music, music pertaining to a secondary narrator (Gorbman 1987). An example of this would be the secondary narrator selecting music within the diegesis which the audience then hears absorbed into the score, or music relating to a secondary narrator's memories or interiority being broadcast for the audience to hear. According to Stilwell, in these instances

> the character becomes the bridging mechanism between the audience and the diegesis as we enter into his or her subjectivity. This is a space beyond empathy; its location with regard to the diegesis does, however, reach out and engage us in a way that starts to tear at the fabric of the usual conception of diegetic/nondiegetic—or it acknowledges a relationship between audience and film that diegetic/nondiegetic has displaced by concentrating on the construction of the text within its own boundaries (Stilwell 2007, 196).

Metadiegetic music is the central component of the soundtrack's disidentificatory, queering strategies, since much of the narration of the film is carried out by secondary narrators. It is therefore less helpful to divide the soundtrack into diegetic and nondiegetic and more helpful to divide it by association of the music: what narrative space does the music belong to? Rather than cataloguing all of the film's music, I will instead focus on one specific metadiegetic musical example and explore how it directs disidentification in the audience against Hess and towards Ganja. The song in question is "You Got to Learn,"[12] which Reverend Williams (Waymon) sings with his congregation before Hess receives communion and steps beneath the shadow of the cross, and its related cues as they appear in the score.

"You Got to Learn" is present at both diegetic and nondiegetic levels in the film, imbuing its melody and harmonic progression with a kind of power we do not experience in relation to any other music in the film. The melody of this song is the most prominent in the soundtrack, occurring a total of seven times and additionally in two instances in which the accompanying harmonic progression is replicated without the full presence of the melody. The journey of the song through a variety of instrumental and rhythmic permutations leads me to interpret it as a flexible motif that plays a key role in a variety of affective modes at key moments in the film

For example, moving into the second section of the film (in which Hess adjusts to his new "life"), Hess steals blood from a doctor's office, briskly escaping into the street as the melody, here arranged for jazz combo, swells joyfully in the soundtrack. This initial exuberance is musically tied to Ganja's appearance in his life. The next appearance of the melody coincides with the couple's flirtation on the patio after they make love for the first time, in which they dissect a cherry in extreme close-up, commenting on how the fruit's juices look like blood. The instrumentation here is more subdued—a solo vibraphone, hearkening back to Mamuwalde's seduction of Tina—and takes on an intimacy absent in the previous application of the cue. The cue appears again after Ganja tells Hess a personal story that also focuses on personal autonomy in the face of familial and societal rejection.

"You Got to Learn" appears in its full form towards the end of the film, where it is preceded by a seemingly nondiegetic instance of its harmonic progression on guitar (scoring Hess' explanation of how they might end their immortal existence). This slowly fades into the final diegetic performance which, after being exposed to it consistently throughout the film, feels like the culmination of a long journey. The church sequence is made up of close-ups—shot in a *vérité* style—which allow the audience to see the faces and expressions of various congregation members, including soloist Betty Barney. This sequence in the church places lyrics alongside the melody that has been so firmly implanted in our heads throughout the narrative, advising the audience and Hess that "you've got to learn / to let it go / you've got to know / when it's all over." This could refer to Hess' life, and indeed it seems that this is the manner in which that message is received. However, for Ganja, who chooses not to end her vampiric existence, it can be interpreted as letting go of those who no longer support her (as in the story she tells Hess).

Here, she fits very much within the definition Means Coleman lays out in opposition to Clover's "final girl" (Clover 1992): the "enduring woman" (Means Coleman 2011, 135). Unlike the final girl, who—androgynous and white—fights as an exceptional being, battling a singular evil whose defeat signals the end of the film and the contingent return to normalcy, the enduring woman—sexualized and definitively female—is enmeshed in systems of oppression that are ongoing. The close of the narrative very rarely signals rest for the enduring woman, who, as a Black woman, must continue to struggle against systemic oppression and violence. Throughout the course of the film, the many points of view—and metadiegetic musical states associated with them—are absorbed: first by Hess, who responds by ending his existence, then by Ganja, who responds by enduring.

Though Hess, our initial protagonist, may present the audience with

a counteridentificatory image of Black patriarchal wealth (as Mamuwalde had), he is portrayed as cold and distant, so it is the interlocutors' voices that we hear and feel most clearly in the soundtrack. And it is Reverend Williams' voice in particular that pulls the audience through the fantastical gap at the end of the film: from Hess to Ganja. In the end, it is Ganja who is able to absorb the many points of view in the film, productively incorporate the sentiments of Williams' metadiegetic voice, and survive the crushing colonial circumstances in which she finds herself as a contemporary Black woman. These circumstances drove both of her husbands to end their lives (like Mamuwalde), but Ganja endures.

## Conclusion: How Did You Feel?

Through my examination of the modes of audience address enacted by the soundtracks of *Blacula* and *Ganja and Hess*, I have demonstrated that affective-audiovisual analysis can expand current understandings of queer media spectatorship.

This kind of analysis is particularly important in the realm of minoritarian scholarship, which must look to ephemeral and non-institutional sources for information on the past. Once these alternative archives are located, scholars must make sure not to perform erasures and elisions of the kind Halberstam criticizes. The hegemonic queer canon emphasizes a certain set of affects, performances, and politics, so any sensibility rooted in irony or incongruity has a tendency to get elided—its difference erased—under the heading of "camp."

In this article, I have used analysis of the soundtrack as a way to delineate different queer sensibilities and understand their function and significance in historical context. As my discussion of Page's music for *Blacula* demonstrates, multiple parodic strategies may exist within a single narrative, and the incongruities of which those strategies take advantage will greatly influence the sensibility that results. There may be dominant images of counteridentification in constant circulation, but the ways in which subjects are invited to counteridentify can vary (as with the direct and positive counteridentification invited by Page's score and the para-cinematic counteridentification invited by his use of overt horror musical clichés). Furthermore, disidentification—a strategy that is often devalued because of its perceived political passivity—can be drawn out in this kind of analysis and distinguished from counteridentification; its peculiarities and intellectual or political efficacies honored. The disidentification of *Ganja and Hess* exists in the space opened up when high-brow aesthetics are brought to bear on low-brow material, but also when metadiegetic music introduces multiples viewpoints into a scene.

What can soundtracks tell us about attitudes towards sexuality and difference and, by extension, what can they tell us about how those subjects so hailed by those representations might have felt when they were consuming them? Such scholarship serves to historicize the perceived immediacy and naturalness of audience emotional reaction to film, a function that would enrich many forms of cultural history and criticism. The theoretical framework and subsequent analytical approach I have provided here are my contributions to this ongoing task of historicizing the emotional responsivity engendered by film music. By turning an ear to the soundtrack, I aim to understand the intricacies of past sexual and racial sensibilities, asking past minoritarian audiences "how did you feel"?

*Notes*

1. A reading group, collective, and conference formed by Cindy Patton, Stuart Marshall, Judith Mayne, Richard Fung, Kobena Mercer, Teresa de Lauretis.

2. In "Unheard Sexualities? Queer Theory and the Soundtrack," Scott Paulin explores the appearance of diegetic music in *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock 1948) to suggest that film music makes space for queerness: "the most perennially unspeakable and undenotable object of all." While he does raise questions of spectatorship at various points (in fact, he concludes with an observation about the importance of considerations of audience agency), the focus of his analysis is the ways in which music actively constructs normative sexuality and "passively obscure[s]" non-normative sexuality.

3. In *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*, Anahid Kassabian observes that listening "has never come close to having the same intellectual force as 'reading' in literary studies and 'spectatorship' in film studies."

4. Credited variously as Eugene Edgar Page Jr., credited variously as Eugene Page Jr., Eugene Page, Gene Page, Gene, "The Master" Page; Maestro Gene Page, among others.

5. There are several notable exceptions. Both Harry Benshoff and Robin Means Coleman point to the caricatured representation of Bobby and Billy, the gay couple that wake Mamuwalde (Blacula) and become his first victims. More substantially, in "'Let It Go Black': Desire and the Erotic Subject in the Films of Bill Gunn," Marlo David allows that there are "rich possibilities for [queer] readings" in *Ganja and Hess*, but she explores queerness in more depth in relation to Gunn's earlier film, *STOP!*

6. Fiske presents a tripartite taxonomy: readerly texts invite narrow interpretation and allow audiences to uncover a pre-determined meaning easily; writerly texts require more interpretation and thus allow the audience to determine their own meanings; producerly texts are easy to interpret, like readerly texts, but still allow some freedom of interpretation in the audience. Because film music is by necessity immediately intelligible, I would classify it as a readerly text.

7. Chion offers a counter to this argument in his formulation of "added value," a concept positing that when combined, sound and image create a total effect that is greater than the sum of its parts, even if the sound appears to be "redundant."

8. Scenes of horror, in particular, will often deploy cheerful music to highlight the grotesqueries of the action.

9. By way of illustration, Muñoz discusses Vaginal Crème Davis' development of a connection to militant Black Power politics via the figure of Angela Davis, as opposed to the more dominant representation of Black counteridentification, the Black Panthers. Direct counteridentification in this case was blocked by Davis' queerness: "[u]nable to pass as heterosexual black militant through simple counteridentification, Vaginal Davis instead disidentified with Black Power by selecting Angela and *not* the Panthers as a site of self-fashioning and political formation."

10. Means Coleman defines "Blacks in horror" as being made up of films that "present Blacks and Blackness in the context of horror, even if the horror film is not wholly or substantially focused on either one" (6). These films often featured stereotyped representations of monstrous or savage Blackness (as in *Birth of a Nation* or *King Kong*), Blackness as backdrop (as in *White Zombie* or *I Walked with a Zombie*), or Black characters separated from any Black contexts (as in *Night of the Living Dead*).

11. For more detailed chart information, see "The Broadcasting Playlist," *Broadcasting* (Archive: 1957-1993), Feb 04, 1974. 34, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1016877417 ?accountid=14512 (accessed June 7, 2020).

12. According to the AFI citation, "Waymon's distinctive music for Ganja & Hess included two songs, but their titles have not been determined." *Ganja & Hess*. Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1973, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1746219389?account id=14512 (accessed June 6, 2020).

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