

JOHN MANSELL



ITALIAN WESTERN

VIOLENT IMAGE, SAVAGE SOUNDTRACK

THE MUSIC OF SPAGHETTI WESTERNS

PREFACE BY SUSAN DiBONA

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Classic Western movie soundtracks: all of us have heard them in some form or other - at the movies, in reruns on TV, in commercials, or on the radio.

Who among us, of any age, wouldn't recognise that harmonica tune from Once Upon a Time in the West by Ennio Morricone, or the legendary theme from The Magnificent Seven by Elmer Bernstein? These iconic musical moments are woven into our cultural fabric in the western hemisphere.

These are musical themes that make us sit up and listen. They create memories, and they reawaken them as well.

Origins of the musical style we all know and love can be traced back to the 1850s. At that point, a recognisable Western style of music began to develop, reflecting the unique mix of peoples who converged in the southwestern US. The region was a melting pot of Native Americans along with a diverse group of Africans and settlers of largely Celtic, Spanish, German, and Anglo-Saxon descent.

Young men traveled across the land to work as cattle herders and cowboys, bringing their traditional folk songs with them. They created poems, and often rewrote lyrics to their traditional folk songs more fitting to their circumstances. Their songs became a mode of communication on long journeys or artful shouts to help herd their livestock (the so-called "holler"), or to tell wistful tales of the loves they had left behind in search of adventure - and a livelihood.

Their instruments were practical, portable for travels. Playing them was a skill they acquired informally, one passed from parent to child over generations and geographical borders. The most popular instruments of choice were the fiddle, the guitar, or the harmonica.

The cowboys and settlers roamed the swath of land containing Texas, Oklahoma, and Arizona. They encountered Mexican musicians who had begun to develop a distinct style of waltz and polka music as well: they had adapted the German influences of their neighbours with the use of small brass instruments and the accordion.

Reels and jigs came to the Old West by way of the Appalachian fiddle style. These musical elements became intertwined as various groups interacted, giving birth to new varieties of popular music.

Later in the century, quintessential American composers such as the Texas-born Scott Joplin (son of labourers who sang well and also played the fiddle and banjo), popularized Ragtime (an African-American marchlike piano style which later influenced both jazz and Classical music by European composers such as Satie, Debussy, and Stravinsky), which is often heard being played on the saloon piano in Western films.

The singular multiculturalism that prevailed in the Old West became the very origin of the vast musical treasure trove of the Western Soundtrack as a distinct art form. It continues to enrich motion pictures and impart a profound dimension of grit and realism to the stories told on screen.

The strength of the Western Soundtrack is this: it gives staying power to the stories and images in the minds of audiences.

The illustrious UK film music critic John Mansell, in this wonderful volume, will present interviews with contemporary film composers, unexpected anecdotes, and new perspectives on this still-evolving genre of film music.

This book is not only for lovers of the Italian Western Soundtrack genre, but for all readers who are curious to take a deeper dive into what goes into making a film score.

Susan DiBona, 15 December 2024, Praia a Mare, Italy

