The Pennsylvania State University
The Graduate School
School of Music

INDIAN IDENTITY: CASE STUDIES OF THREE
JOHN FORD NARRATIVE WESTERN FILMS

A Thesis in
Musicology

by
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

May 2013
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Music in John Ford’s Westerns reveals increasingly complex and sympathetic depictions of Native Americans throughout his filmography. While other directors of the genre tend to showcase a one-dimensional “brutal savage” archetype (especially in the early sound era), Ford resisted this tendency in favor of multidimensional depictions. As a director, Ford was particularly opinionated about music and wielded ultimate control over the types of songs used in his films. The resulting artworks, visual and aural, were therefore the vision of one creator. To investigate the participation of music in Ford’s approach, I have investigated three archetypal products of the Western’s three early periods: *The Iron Horse* (1924), *Stagecoach* (1939), and *The Searchers* (1956).

In *The Iron Horse*, an Indian duality is visually present with the incorporation of friendly Pawnees and destructive Cheyennes. My recent recovery of the score, however, reveals a more complicated reading due to thematic borrowing that identifies white characters as the source of Indian aggression. *Stagecoach* builds upon this duality by adding a third morally ambiguous Indian character, Yakima. This addition and the links drawn musically between white and Indian societies challenge the traditional reading of Apache villainy. *The Searchers* fully integrates this concept of cultural parallels, resulting in a story centered on issues of tribe rather than race. The pairing of Anglo and Indian cultures that are fully realized both visually and aurally thereby deconstructs the concept of virtue determined by race alone. Ford’s use of music brings to light his constantly
evolving portrayal of Native Americans, allowing him to transcend the demeaning stereotypes of contemporaneous Westerns.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was made possible through the support of many individuals deserving of recognition. I must first acknowledge the courses I took over the past two years that were instrumental in shaping this project: Charles Youmans’s film music seminar first directed my attention to the Westerns of John Ford and helped develop my methodology; Guan-Soon Khoo’s course on American film violence granted me a vocabulary with which to write critically about film; and Alan Derickson’s American history course allowed me the freedom to research Native Americans issues in twentieth-century media. I need to especially thank the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at Penn State for supporting me as a graduate student resident during the summer of 2012. With their funding I was able to devote considerable time to research and write a draft of my thesis. Music librarian Amanda Maple deserves significant praise for helping me obtain a copy of the long-considered lost score to The Iron Horse, which conveniently allowed me to investigate three Ford Westerns from three distinct eras. Furthermore, I must express my gratitude to the School of Music, the College of Arts and Architecture, and the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in the College of Arts and Architecture for funding (and thus making possible) my trip to Kiel, Germany where I presented part of my research at the International Conference on Silent Film Sound. Presenting my thesis research and engaging in meaningful dialogue was a highly rewarding experience.
Above all, I sincerely wish to thank the members of my thesis committee, both of whom I have enjoyed getting to know and work with over the past two years. I owe many thanks to Marica Tacconi, my academic advisor and second reader, for her guidance and encouragement in my many endeavors at Penn State. In addition, I am highly indebted to my thesis advisor, Charles Youmans, for his endless enthusiasm and patience throughout this entire process. His insight and mentorship helped shape my many abstract ideas into this final product of which I am very proud. Finally, I must thank my mom and two sisters, Emily and Sarah, for their constant love and support over the past two years.
Introduction

John Ford and His Indians

“The audience likes to see Indians get killed. They don’t consider them as human beings—with a great culture of their own—quite different from ours. If you analyzed the thing carefully, however, you’d find that their religion is very similar to ours.”¹ This remark by director John Ford demonstrates the moral challenge he faced in representing Native Americans on film. As one of the most influential directors of early film, Ford is best known as the father of the adult Western. He produced more Westerns than any other director (roughly one-third of his over one hundred and forty films) and cultivated the genre through an auteur approach. Ford’s narratives, as noted by Ken Nolley, “refer to history, but they do not seriously try to represent it.”² His interpretations render a pastiche of nineteenth-century culture that relies heavily on clichéd public conceptions of the American Indian. Yet, despite his dependence on popular stereotypes rooted in the genre’s literary tradition, investigation of Ford’s music reveals his preservation of their, in his words, “very dignified culture.”³

The visual caricatures of the Indian have caused many to label Ford a racist.⁴ In defense of these allegations, Ford proudly boasted that his work in the Monument Valley

¹. Peter Bogdanovich, John Ford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 94.
³. Bogdanovich, John Ford, 94.
region of Utah often employed scores of Navajo people, helping to support their economy.\(^5\) He also was quick to point out that he was the first director (and possibly the only of his time) to pay American Indians the same union wage as African Americans and whites.\(^6\) These comments do not excuse his continued employment of hackneyed visual characterizations, which likewise are not explained away by the facile observation that he relied on the prejudiced white perspective of the period. However, Ford’s subtle narrative devices and scoring practices weaken these racist charges by breaking down the codified barriers of race in the Western. For this reason, Gallagher claims that Ford was “virtually the only filmmaker to concern himself with racism before it was commercially fashionable to do so.”\(^7\)

By the advent of film, Indians were already well-established character types both visually (headbands and buckskin) and aurally (tom-toms and modal melodies).\(^8\) Wild West shows and the minstrel and vaudeville traditions of the late nineteenth century, defined the popular conception of the Indian.\(^9\) Equally impactful was the Western literary admitting in a 1971 interview with \textit{Playboy}, “I don’t feel we did wrong in taking this great country away from them [the American Indian]. There were great numbers of people who needed new land, and the Indians were selfishly trying to keep it for themselves.” See Philip French, \textit{Westerns: Aspects of a Movie Genre} (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 82.


8. According to Kevin Donnelly, the music in particular “was not based on real Native American music, but more fitted an idea of what Indian music should sound like for film audiences.” J. K. Donnelly, \textit{The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television} (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), 70. Regarding the authenticity of exotic music, Ralph Locke writes, “the exotic object is inevitably constructed from the observer’s language.” See, Ralph Locke, \textit{Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12.

9. When referencing film I use the crude term “Indian” instead of the more appropriate American Indian or Native American, because of the historical Western narrative genre in which they are simply labeled “Indian” (e.g. cowboys and Indians). However, actual tribal names will be used when appropriate.
genre, which developed early in the nineteenth century; successful dime novels have provided the source for countless screenplays. One classic narrative type is the hero-versus-villain dichotomy introduced by Philip Morin Fréneau and fortified by James Fenimore Cooper, wherein a cowboy or pioneer plays the former and an outlaw or Indian depicts the latter. However, according to John Price, “because the film stereotypes were still forming during the silent era there was some diversity in [...] roles of Indians in the stories.”

In fact, American film directors incorporated sympathetic and barbaric treatments without favoring one over the other. Indians were equally portrayed as noble, even tragic, heroes who often helped pioneers or struggled to survive.

A shift in Indian depictions occurred at the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. With the nation struggling financially, many Americans looked to film for an escape and for a hero through whom to live vicariously. To fill this void, filmmakers relied on the vibrant folkloric images of the Wild West and the Plains Indian Wars. The modern Western was born, reducing the Indian character to a single role: the enemy. Brutal stereotypes of the Native American continued through World War Two and into present times, yet a concurrent trend of revisionist Westerns (or anti-Western) emerged at the dawn of the American civil rights movement in the early 1950s. The revisionist Western subverts traditional themes such as masculinity, violence, and race, and gives the Indian characters a multidimensionality that challenges noble and savage roles. Ford’s complex Indian portrayals, however, transcend these widely accepted categorical trends of the Silent Western (1920–1929), the Pre-War Western (1929–1945), and the Post-War

10. Price goes on to say, “the costuming was often more authentic than in later years and there were occasional pro-Indian movies in the earliest silents.” John A. Price, “The Stereotyping of North American Indians in Motion Pictures,” *Ethnohistory* 20, no. 2 (Spring, 1973), 155, (my emphasis).
Western (1946). Throughout his career, Ford challenged the conventional Indian archetypes by offering new faces as alternatives, imparting a moral imperative that is unveiled through close study of his narratives and use of music.

Ford was notoriously controlling of all aspects in his films and was especially particular when it came to music. Richard Hageman, who worked on the music for five of Ford’s Westerns, claimed: “he [Ford] knows in advance what the music is and paces the action of it.”\(^1\) With such an emphasis on the music, it is crucial to consider the score when evaluating Ford’s films. This project, therefore, looks critically at the use of music while tracing the evolving depictions of the Indian characters.\(^2\) In my efforts I have investigated three canonical John Ford Westerns from the genre’s three aforementioned early periods: *The Iron Horse* (1924), *Stagecoach* (1939), and *The Searchers* (1956). Despite the emerging efforts of musicologists and film ethnographers, no serious research has been conducted on the role of music in the changing representation of the Native Americans; my study of Ford’s Indians strives to begin bridging this gap.

Chapter One is devoted to the silent era and looks specifically at Ford’s greatest work from this period: *The Iron Horse*. My recent discovery of Erno Rapée’s previously mislaid film score allows, for the first time, for a comprehensive study of the film with its intended aural component. This chapter builds upon the scant scholarly investigations of the film, using a close reading of the score to show how Rapée’s music plays a central role in shaping our understanding of the Indian characters. While Rapée employs a broad palette of American folk melodies, his borrowed “Indian cues,” rooted in minstrel and


\(^2\) Ethnohistorians such as Robert Berkhofer, M. Elise Marubbio, John O’Connor, and Peter Rollins have outlined this development in film without considering the involvement of music.
vaudeville traditions, signal a villainy that then is undermined by his musical application. Through the use of thematic extensions, white characters are identified as the root of Indian aggression, allowing the Indians to shed their “brutal savage” stereotype. Further complicating the perceived Indian barbarism are the Pawnees, who function as the heroic cavalry, riding in to save the day.

In Chapter Two I look critically at Stagecoach, a film regarded by scholars as the archetypal Western. Stagecoach resists the one-dimensional savage portrayal common of early sound films through its handling of the morally ambiguous Indian woman and the friendly, non-threatening Indian male. With much of the film’s attention focused on the marauding band of Apaches who live beyond the fence of civilization, the less threatening Indian roles recede into the background compared to their position in The Iron Horse. Yet, the purposeful application of musical cues maintains the presence of distinct archetypes and aids the audience in distinguishing friend from foe. Adding to the multidimensional Indian depiction, Ford establishes cultural parallels between the leading white couple and an Indian couple, thereby complicating traditional associations of race and virtue.

Finally, Chapter Three investigates the revisionist Western as represented by The Searchers. Unlike Ford’s earlier Westerns, The Searchers does away with racial distinctions through its construction of parallel cultures and societies. The film still employs traditional Indian brutality, but such deeds are clearly matched by the whites, blurring the conventional markers of culture and identity. Certain predilections of Max Steiner’s score—specifically, shared musical motifs and thematic borrowing akin to The
Iron Horse—delineate mirrored relationships that confirm the breakdown of Western traditions of race.

My study on the music of Ford’s Indians suggests an approach to merging the disciplines of film music and Native American film history. In looking at three seminal Westerns, my analysis reveals an underlying uniformity in Ford’s treatment of Native Americans, indicating resistance to the stereotypes embraced by contemporary directors. Scrutiny of the music in Ford’s Westerns (as he is one of the premier directors of the genre) proves that he always presented complex images of peaceful and hostile Indians. And despite his retention of superficial visual and musical codes, the way in which Ford incorporates music shows that at least one director avoided the phases delineated by film ethnohistorians and blazed his own trail.
Chapter 1

Indian Duality: Ford and Rapée’s *The Iron Horse*

“But you’re a white man!” shouts David, seconds before being bludgeoned with an axe. The vicious Indian’s face fills the frame, allowing us to verify the murderer as indeed a white man in disguise. Deroux, the man in question and the principal antagonist of John Ford’s *The Iron Horse* (1924), is a character who fundamentally subverts the archetypal clarity of Indian identity. A film of massive scope and extraordinary cinematic ingenuity, *The Iron Horse* is Ford’s “silent masterpiece.” Intended as an historical dramatization, the film depicts the construction of the first transcontinental railroad and the struggles of progressing through hostile Indian Territory. Only brief scholarly investigations of this film exist, in part because of the temporary loss of one of its principal attractions: the score by Erno Rapée. With the recent resurfacing of a piano score, a complete version of the artwork with its intended aural accompaniment is now available for study for the first time since its American and worldwide debut in 1924–26 (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Analysis of the score sheds light on Rapée’s compositional methods, but also on the Indian characters’ submissive narrative function.

13. For the international release Deroux’s name is changed to the more German sounding Bauman, a name often used in Ford scholarship due to the ready availability of international print. In 2007 20th Century Fox released a special edition of the DVD that includes both the American and international versions.


15. Rapée composed the score during his employment at the Fox Theater in Philadelphia from November 1923 to August 1925, but it is likely that he wrote it for the Lyric Theater orchestra where the film premiered. Curiously, the newfound score, which was published and circulated with the film, is missing almost all of the works that reviewers of the premiere mention. Likely to avoid copyright
Bringing to life the formulaic plot are varied characters whose intentions, morality, and demeanor go largely unchanged over the course of the film. Rapée’s score reveals a similar strategy in which themes remain unchanged upon repeated iterations, thereby reinforcing the characters’ fundamental qualities. The narrative evolution of the Indian characters ultimately stands in opposition to this consistency and clarity. Naïve viewers of this film often group the Indians as a singular “brutal savage” force—a

infractions, Rapée compiled a substitute score for publication, which is what many audiences of the time would have heard—save for those at the Lyric. Like many silent scores, this one proved easily adaptable for variously sized orchestras such as when Rapée guest conducted the thirty-three-piece Woods Theatre Orchestra for the Chicago opening on November 2, 1924 or when the approximately 70-member Egyptian Theater Symphony Orchestra played it at Sid Grauman’s Egyptian Theater in Hollywood. See Chicago Daily Tribune, November 2, 1924.
problem compounded by their pairing with music that traditionally signals Indian hostility. A close reading of the narrative and Rapée’s score, however, reveals a much more complex role. The white’s manipulation of Cheyenne and Pawnee Indians as aggressors and protectors, respectively, undermines common readings of Indian villainy. Deroux himself further complicates the role of the Indian-as-villain by disguising himself as an Indian while carrying out nefarious deeds. Likewise, through the process of leitmotivic borrowing, Rapée identifies the Indians as pawns of white characters, which further weakens the “brutal savage” reading. The tribes, as well as particular Indian characters, thus present a sharp dichotomy—noble savage/brutal savage—often dismissed as a minor subplot and the score clarifies the complex Indian identity amidst a film built from otherwise simple archetypes.

The Story

The story of *The Iron Horse* deals with the construction of the transcontinental railroad, recalling, as Fox advertised, “the thrills of terror which surged into the hearts of civilization’s advance guard when the war whoops of the Sioux and the Cheyennes shrilled in their ears.”¹⁶ Within the confines of a railroad story, the film follows the adventures of Davy Brandon, whose shrewd father, David, envisioned a railroad uniting America’s East with its West. After finding an ideal route through the Black Hills, Davy’s father is murdered by a two-fingered “Indian” named Deroux—a white man in disguise. Years after the murder, Davy reappears as a Pony Express rider being chased by

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Indians. Seeking refuge on a passing train, he encounters Miriam Marsh, his childhood sweetheart. After a brief reunion, Miriam’s father Thomas, the Union Pacific contractor, grants Davy a surveying position. White Deroux here returns to the story, as he owns land on which the railroad is progressing. Deroux plans to sell the information of the mountain passage at a high price, and is concerned that Davy will foil his plans by offering up these details. In order to prevent this knowledge from surfacing, Deroux conspires with Miriam’s fiancé and an engineer for the Union Pacific, Mr. Jesson, in a plot to kill Davy. After the failed murder attempt, Davy exposes Jesson and defeats Deroux, who again dresses as an Indian during a raid on the tracklayers. In the conclusion of this “super-Western,” Davy and Miriam reunite as an embodiment of the tracks of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific joining at Promontory Point, Utah.17

William Fox intended to capitalize on, and surpass, the popularity of the previous year’s blockbuster The Covered Wagon by producing a Western of massive scope shot on location throughout the American Southwest.18 One reviewer even wrote, “It is another ‘Covered Wagon’ in its fine suggestion of the American spirit.”19 In an effort to exceed the grandeur of The Covered Wagon, Fox enlisted Ford and allotted him “the largest budget of any Fox picture to date, $450,000.”20 By the time production began on New Year’s Eve 1923, Ford had already directed at least fifty films—forty-one of which were

18. An advertisement that ran in the Los Angeles Times declared, “If you thrilled over The Covered Wagon your enthusiasm will know no bounds when you see The Iron Horse.” See Los Angeles Times, February 18, 1925.
19. “Pictures and People,” Motion Picture News 30, no. 11 (September 13, 1924), 1368-a.
20. Davis, John Ford, 52.
Westerns—but had yet to land himself a blockbuster. As he would do in the screenwriting process for many later films, Ford sought authenticity by commissioning extensive research in libraries across the country, including the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, and the archives of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads. Yet when it came to filming, the director all but abandoned his script. In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, Ford admitted, “we never worked closely with them [the writers]. John Russell wrote the original Iron Horse and it was really just a simple little story.” Despite these haphazard methods, Ford earned praise after the premiere on August 28, 1924 for his prodigious artistic ability; it was the first film, according to John Baxter, “to draw attention to him as a stylist.”

**Production and Reception**

The story of the filming, complete with bootleggers, brawls, disease, and even death, is almost more interesting than the film itself. Late in life Ford confessed, “I wish I had time some day to write the story of the making of The Iron Horse.” Living out of circus train cars, the cast and crew endured subzero temperatures and blizzards that stretched the

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25. According to assistant director Kevin Brownlow, the company enlisted its own bootlegger and retells property man Lefty Hough’s claim that “everyone in the company suffered from dysentery. And among the Indians, trachoma was rife.” See Kevin Brownlow, *The War, The West, and The Wilderness* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 390.
filming schedule from four to ten weeks. According to Ford, “it’s by chance that it became a great film. [During bad weather] we had nothing else to do, so we filmed, and little by little, the story developed.” During the ten-week period, Ford enlisted actual Cheyennes, Paiutes, Pawnees, and Sioux to play the story’s large bands of Indians, and instructed them to arrive in their traditional tribal dress to add authenticity and save money. He similarly enlisted roughly forty Chinese men for scenes of the Central Pacific railroad, among which the oldest actually worked on the original rail. Fox often took advantage of these touches of authenticity by exaggerating that the filming used “one thousand Chinese” and “eight hundred Indians;” the actual figures were much smaller, as Indians and Chinese often doubled for one another during filming.

After a drawn-out production period, The Iron Horse premiered at the Lyric Theater in New York on August 28 and received an extravagant promotional campaign including heavy newspaper and billboards coverage and even airplanes “writing in the sky by day and carrying electric signs by night.” Reviewers even noted the transformation of the Lyric itself with “hundred [sic] of yards of silk in a combination of blue and gray.” Six months later on February 21, 1925, the film began its seventeen-week run at Grauman’s Egyptian Theater in Los Angeles. For this engagement Sid Grauman packaged the film with an elaborate eight to ten-act prologue (depending on the week) entitled “The Days of 1863–1869” that included twenty-five to fifty dancing

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29. Davis, John Ford, 54.
30. Ibid.
Arapahoe and Shoshone Indians and Yakama Chief Yowlachie who sang traditional songs. The brilliant spectacle, as noted by Charles Beardsley, “was climaxed by the arrival onstage of two locomotives, there for the driving of the final spike to connect the two great railroads.”

Early reactions to the film fell short of the success for which Fox had hoped. The reviews were largely mixed due in part to its slow pace and recycling of narrative elements from earlier Westerns. While many critics praised the cinematic feat and the celebration of American patriotism, Robert Sherwood of *Life* magazine complained, “as a whole, the picture makes almost no sense; scenes, episodes and situations (some of them highly meritorious in themselves) are hurled together with utter disregard for continuity.” A month after the premiere, *Film Daily* reported, “the business at the Lyric hasn’t been good. In other words, the public isn’t going.” Perplexed, the same writer asked why this would be, “because it certainly is a fine picture. And should be a great box office success.” Business did eventually pick up at the Lyric where the film continued to pack houses twice daily for its eight-month run. Two months after the premiere, reviewer Mae Tinee boasted, “Scenery, Indians, acting—everything about *The

33. The morning after the Grauman’s premiere on February 21, 1925, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a headline declaring, “Every body is still gasping—awed by the most brilliant premier ever staged anywhere.” See *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1925. *The Iron Horse* ran through June 21, 1925, a full four weeks longer than expected to accommodate a Shriner’s conclave taking place in mid June. Grauman took great pride in this prologue and wanted as many Americans to experience it, but according to the *Los Angeles Times*, “Grauman has steadfastly refused to permit his stage production to accompany the picture elsewhere.” See “Iron Horse To Continue By Request: Epic Play of Winning West Carried Over for Shriners’ Benefit,” *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, May 17, 1925. Capitalizing on the spectacle of this event, the Los Angeles Times ran a story in which statistician estimated that “the Shoshone and Arapahoe Indians would have crossed the continent twice if all the pedal energy expanded in war dances in the prologue was executed in a straight line across the country.” See “Iron Horse Has its Innings with Statisticians,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1925.


Iron Horse satisfies.”³⁷ By the time it reached Los Angeles, Fox was heralding it as “The Outstanding Picture of 1925.”³⁸

Erno Rapée

By the time The Iron Horse was released, Rapée was considered the premiere composer, compiler, and orchestral conductor of the New York film scene. After a short but impressive career in Austria, Germany and Hungary, in 1912 Rapée immigrated to the United States and entered the industry working under Samuel “Roxy” Rothafel. In 1917 he was hired as the conductor at the 2,000-seat Rialto Theatre and later at the similarly sized Rivoli before becoming the musical director at the 4,000-seat Capitol Theater in 1920.³⁹ As music director, Rapée tried to educate American audiences on the subject of European classical music. In a New Yorker article he called American audiences “culturally starved” and claimed to incorporate arrangements from the classical canon whenever possible.⁴₀ When Rapée later became the orchestra conductor at Radio City Music Hall, he explained his music selection process as such: “give them what they want but keep the general level high, and keep on improving it.”⁴¹ For Westerns, however, he relied more on popular tunes, because this particularly uninformed audience was, in his

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³⁸. “22nd Annual Announcement: Fox Film Corporation Independence and Strength,” Variety, May 6, 1925, 36.
view, “not quite ready for the classics.” His Fox engagement from November 1923 to August 1925 led to his collaboration on *The Iron Horse*. A year after the film’s premiere, in August of 1925, Rapée was hired by Ufa to be the manager, conductor, and music director of the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin where he taught them presentation methods in “the American way.”

Rapée is remembered above all for his two instructional books for silent film accompanists: *Motion Picture Moods* (1924) and *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (1925). The former is a compilation of 285 keyboard pieces adapted to fit forty various moods with such headings as “Chase,” “Funeral,” “Love Themes,” “Oriental,” and five pieces of “Indian” music. Many of the selected works are arrangements of preexisting classics such as Strauss’s *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, Schubert’s *Der Erlkönig*, and Meyerbeer’s “Coronation March” from *Le prophète*.

In his second publication, Rapée included a short essay on the history and importance of music in film, followed by an exhaustive list of works and recommendations on their potential to match the varied moods and situations on screen. Prior to these publications, Rapée collaborated with William Axt on a similar project composing a series of “moods” for Richmond-Robbins’s (later, Robbins-Engel) *Capitol Photoplay Series*. The series contains over ninety-seven programs (including such titles as “Western Allegro: For Western Scenes, Rodeos, Roundups and Races” and “In the

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42. Ibid., 32.
Clouds: For Aeroplane Themes, Ascent and Descent Flights”), of which Rapée aided in composing only seventeen. Several of these Photoplay contributions appear in his score for The Iron Horse; most important are program 3, entitled “Misterioso No. 1: For Horror Stealth, Conspiracy, and Treachery,” and program 13, labeled “Indian Orgy: For Gatherings, Uprisings, Dances and Festivals.” These two programs, along with a third borrowed from the series, provide notable insight into Rapée’s compositional method and help us understand the Indian characters’ narrative function.

The Score

Rapée’s score to The Iron Horse received consistently positive reviews in the press. Fred of Variety wrote that “the score […] added considerably to the thrill moments.” The critic for Film Daily argued for its importance as an essential component of the work: “by all means secure Erno Rapée’s score to use with the showing. It’s very important, and mighty fine.” Unfortunately, beyond these initial reviews few comments on the music exist due to the score’s disappearance. The only trace of this music during the ensuing decades (besides the separately published title song “March of the Iron Horse”) is a recording entitled “Echoes from The Iron Horse” (February, 1925), logically thought to

45. Rapée and Axt composed program 1–16 and 18. Alone, Axt went on to contribute at least nineteen other programs. The varied programs could accompany both small and full orchestras.
48. While the recovered score was found in the archives of the State Library of Queensland in Australia (March 2012), the exact moment of its loss is difficult to pinpoint. Tag Gallagher’s 1978 dissertation on director John Ford is among the first scholarly mentions of the film being “deprived of the music,” but newspapers as early as 1926 note the use of newly composed music at theaters in Australia and New Zealand. See Evening Post, February 11, 1926, 12.
be a distillation of the score. In fact, Rapée himself arranged this short medley of folk songs to accompany the elaborate prologue to the Grauman’s screenings. Most of the songs—including “Turkey in the Straw,” “Dixie,” and an extended rendition of “Old Black Joe”—do not actually appear in the film score; the only songs that do are “Pop Goes the Weasel,” “Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill,” and the Indian music, labeled below as Indian theme 2.

Ford took an active role in choosing music for _The Iron Horse_. In an era when it was uncommon for the director and composer to collaborate, Ford asserted himself specifically through the song “Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill.” Ford often shared that his “Uncle Mike,” who allegedly helped build the Union Pacific Railroad, taught him the song. As Kathryn Kalinak notes, the director included the song’s lyrics in several intertitles and even instructed the tracklayers to sing and pound their tools in rhythm—their mouths clearly singing the words—thereby giving Rapée no choice in the matter. The song appears four times in the score, each time accompanying the tracklayers’ work. Elsewhere the score relies heavily on familiar songs, as in Ford’s later Westerns. This tendency in particular reflects Ford’s musical taste: Jim Kitses notes that Ford “hated over-scoring, but loved folksongs,” a musical genre with which he was well acquainted.

Rapée found a compromise by maintaining the continuous use of music (a normal practice for silent films) while restricting himself to folk songs, Protestant hymns, and patriotic tunes. Yet here and there he did include original compositions (many previously published), including the title song, which he later published in 1925 with the title “March of the Iron Horse.”

Like the static Western characters (see below), the various musical themes resist development during the film; the iterations of a theme remain exactly the same through its final appearance, save for extensions and truncations. This non-developmental style binds the characters to their musical characterization. For example, “Garry Owen,” an eighteenth-century Irish quickstep, accompanies the Irish trio led by Corporal Casey. Regardless of the mood of a scene, the song always occurs in A major, and through its repetition becomes a leitmotif for Casey’s group. The fixed quality of the themes likewise holds true for the Indian themes. Two interchangeable themes exist for the Indians and both derive from the *Capitol Photoplay Series*: one from “Indian Orgy: For Indian Gatherings, Uprisings, Dances and Festivals,” and the other from an as-yet unidentified program. The theme for white-Deroux is also from the *Photoplay* collection:

“Mistirioso No. 1: For Horror, Stealth, Conspiracy, Treachery.” As one would expect,

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52. Among the songs quoted in the score are “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” (for patriotic moments, especially scenes with President Lincoln); “Tramp, Tramp, Tramp;” “Bonnie Eloise” (used as the love theme); “Lead, Kindly Light” (for the memory of Davy’s deceased father); “Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill” (for track laying scenes); “O Sole Mio” (when featuring the Italian character); “Garry Owen” (for the comic Irish trio); “Pop Goes the Weasel!” (used once for a visual gag); “The Old Hundredth” (for a grieving widow); “Oh, My Darling Clementine” (for a couple who is married, divorced, and remarried); and “St. Patrick’s Day.” Rapée also used eight pieces he and Axt composed for the *Capitol Photoplay Series*, including “Agitato No. 2,” “Agitato No. 3,” “Gruesome Tales, part 1,” “Indian Orgy,” and “Misterioso No. 1.” In addition, four other copyrighted pieces are credited to Rapée, one to Edward Kilenyi, and one to Gaston Borch.

53. It can be discerned from the copyright information that this song is from the Richmond-Robbins *Photoplay* series.
Rapée’s use of music that he himself specifically designed for preset moods and actions relies heavily on standard musical conventions of the silent era.

**Indian Musics**

As evidenced by Rapée’s publications alone, “Indian music” was already a well-worn stereotype by the 1920s. Even if the music scarcely resembled actual American Indian music, audiences by that time could instantly recognize the intended referent. Claudia Gorbman suggests that the public’s familiarization with Indian musics stems from melodrama, fairs, Wild West shows, and popular theater during the nineteenth century (the Indian character being particularly popular in minstrel shows).⁵⁴ Music typically found an outlet in all of these arenas and largely consisted of a repetitive tom-tom figure with a modal melody, often played on “foreign-sounding” instruments. Eventually, a drum and modal melody came to represent the stock “exotic” music employed in depicting non-Western cultures, particularly the Middle East and Asia.⁵⁵ Slight variants developed to help distinguish between the varied “exotic” locales intended, the music’s authenticity often being reinforced by visual elements. Through its fusion with clichéd Indian imagery, “Indian music” thus was widely identifiable by audiences at the turn of the twentieth century.

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One might suppose that the currency of a generalized “exotic” music in film around 1924 resulted from ignorance of what actual American Indian music sounded like. This, however, is not the case. As early as 1880, beginning with Theodore Baker, ethnomusicologists studied and transcribed the music of the American Indians.\(^{56}\) While early attempts at transcription tended to generalize and adjust to Western-based theory, they nonetheless offered a richer source of music than the hackneyed tom-tom with modal melody. By the 1910s there existed not only written transcriptions, but also hundreds of wax-cylinder recordings made by Walter McClintock, Francis La Flesche, and Alice Cunningham Fletcher among others. Sadly, the efforts of these ethnomusicologists and historians arrived too late to make any impact on the entertainment industry, for the musical stereotype had already taken root. Ignoring these resources, film composers opted for hackneyed musical codes that proved instantly recognizable to audiences and reinforced Indian images onscreen—as is the case for *The Iron Horse*.\(^{57}\)

Gorbman includes an inventory of the “unambiguous musical conventions” for Indian music in pre–World War II Westerns: “‘tom-tom’ rhythmic drumming figures of equal beats, the first of every four beats being accented [with] actual drums or as a repeated bass note or pair of notes in perfect fifths, played in the low strings;” and “a modal melody, sometimes monophonically [with the tom-tom], sometimes in parallel


\(^{57}\) In his final Western, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), Ford sought a more authentic Indian music by instructing Alex North, who was in charge of the film score, to conduct research on music of the Cheyennes and other American Indians. See Kalinak, *How the West*, 198.
fourths, often with a falling third concluding a melodic phrase."\textsuperscript{58} These two rules largely dictate the basis for all Indian music in the twentieth century, to which composers add slight variants when accompanying different character types. For the “brutal savage” archetype, the composer might include a descending two-note figure played by a collection of brass instruments with the first note heavily accented and a sustained second.\textsuperscript{59} This two-note motif came to characterize “threatening” Indians and appears in many of Ford’s films: the title music of \textit{Stagecoach} (1939), \textit{Drums Along the Mohawk} (1939), \textit{Fort Apache} (1948), and \textit{The Searchers} (1956); during the wagon raid in \textit{Red River} (1948); and during the opening narration of \textit{She Wore a Yellow Ribbon} (1950). In contrast, typical music for the noble, friendly Indian has slower tempi, diminished tom-tom presence, orchestration of a modal melody with strings or a flute, and accompaniment comprised of “sweet, pastoral harmonies.”\textsuperscript{60} \textit{The Iron Horse} relies on many of these conventions—tom-tom figures, modal melodies on “foreign” instruments, and descending two-note figures—to clearly code the Indian as an exotic Other.

\textbf{Unmistakable Archetypes}

\textit{The Iron Horse} explores a narrative theme common to silent Westerns, depicting good overcoming evil rather than man overcoming self. Dramatic convention required discernible archetypes that experienced minimal psychological change as the stories unfolded. In \textit{The Iron Horse}, the characters who are heroic at the beginning—such as

\textsuperscript{58} Gorbman, “Scoring the Indian,” 235.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. Ford’s films tend to make less use of the “sweet” Indian music.
Davy—remain so throughout; likewise the villainous Mr. Jesson and Deroux continue as they are. At least one reviewer identifies these as distinct archetypes, rather than true “characters,” on the basis of their unambiguous presentation: “There are [...] Indians and soldiers, the hordes of the construction gangs, the camp followers, both men and women, gamblers and dance hall girls.” Even though the music clearly identifies their race, the Indians in the film challenge archetypal clarity by acting as extensions of the good and evil forces, thus stretching the mold by the very fact that they do not make their own choices but take their direction from whites. Not acting on their own accord complicates an identity that would otherwise be archetypally sound, as the film codes the Pawnee and Cheyenne tribes with two classic Indian types: the noble savage and the brutal savage respectively.

*The Iron Horse* continues the practice of nineteenth-century Western novels and early silent films that allowed identifiably “good” Indian characters; only in the early sound era did savagery become an obligatory convention. The nineteenth-century literary practice and its replication in film reduced Indians to two basic roles: noble savage (friend) and brutal savage (foe). Generally, the “noble” roles appear in plots set before the expansion of white civilization, or in stories of assimilated Indians from tribes already conquered by white settlers. Noble Indians often aid the whites as guides or scouts (e.g. Chief John Big Tree’s character, Blue Back, in *Drums Along the Mohawk*). More common, however, is the “brutal” character (or characters, as they typically appear in groups), whose violent attempts to halt the westward expansion of civilization are, in the end, thwarted by the white hero. This enemy is an unmistakably evil character who scalps

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innocent civilians and rapes young women. In both of these roles, as John O'Connor asserts, the Indian remains a one-dimensional character devoid of individuality, thereby keeping moral ambiguities to a minimum.62

The Iron Horse invokes both types: the Pawnee tribe represents the noble savage, employed by the Union Pacific to protect the rails from impending attack by hostile Indians; and the Cheyennes embody the brutal archetype, hired by Deroux to halt the westward progression of the railroad. White men, as it appears, are seemingly inadequate; in battle they must rely on Indians, whose “natural warrior instincts” prove essential to either side’s victory.63 Most important, the brutal and noble Indians serve merely as screens upon which the savagery and nobility of their white counterparts are projected. Here, then, additional dimensions complicate the one-dimensionality described by O’Connor: Indian duality within a single film and their roles as white surrogates.

Such instances of multidimensionality are easily overlooked by an average viewer predisposed to reading Indians as obstacles “standing in the way of civilization.”64 The


63. The public of the time widely believed that all Indian men possessed an innate warring prowess. Romanticized images of the cunning warrior plagued the American Indian throughout World War I, in which twenty-five percent of the adult male Native population fought—more than any other demographic. Prior to combat engagement, many anticipated that “their adroit tactics, sense of strategy, and feats of camouflage, the outgrowth of an ancient training in the science of war” would prove invaluable. An exposé in 1923 attributes this instinctive fighting ability to an extensive history of war, “He could glide through the forest like a deer and without making any noise. The Indian tribes, like nations of the earth at the present time, were often at war. Most of the Indians’ aim in life was war. War, WAR!!!—they loved war.” See Caroline Dawes Appleton, “The American Indian in the War,” Outlook, May 21, 1919, 110; and Lloyd Domingue, “Description of an Indian,” The Chicago Defender, July 14, 1923. For a thorough investigation of American sentiment toward Native Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, and a history of Native engagement in World War I, see Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); and Thomas A. Britten, American Indians in World War I (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

64. Davis, John Ford, 58.
Pawnees, for instance, who gallop in to ward off the attacking Cheyennes, appear only briefly and can be mistaken for another band of Cheyenne warriors. Likewise, the scene in which Deroux enlists the Cheyennes to fight on his behalf is complicated by the interjecting cross-cuts of scenery and overall brevity. Misinterpretation of these two brief but important events leads all too easily to a reading of all Indians as villainous. For example, in her seminal book *How the West Was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford*, Kathryn Kalinak neglects these crucial plot points, writing, “the Indians are represented as having a legitimate interest in destroying the rails. It’s their culture against Manifest Destiny, and the film doesn’t blame them for putting up a fight.” A mutual interest in destroying the rails may exist, but the lack of explicit dialogue from the either tribe weakens this suggestion. Rapée’s thematic implementation, however, fills the void created by the absence of dialogue, clarifying the identities and intentions of the hero and villain, Anglo and Other.

**Brutal Savage: Deroux’s Façade**

Of the villainous acts presented in the film, Deroux commits the harshest by murdering and scalping Davy’s father. In Westerns, Indians typically perpetrate the scalping; transferring this act to the white Deroux marks him as the most sinister character of the film. Moreover, Deroux’s posing as a member of the Cheyenne tribe during this episode suggests that the Indian attacks that occur in his absence are ultimately the responsibility

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66. Ford’s jarring use of Deroux, the white man, scalping another man prefigures the iconic scene in *The Searchers* in which Ethan Edwards, the white protagonist, scalps the Comanche Chief Scar.
of a white character. Apart from the murder of Davy’s father, there occur four additional cases of Indian aggression, the last of which mirrors the first by its inclusion of Deroux. The most challenging question of the plot, then, surrounds the Indians: do they act on their own accord or are they always acting upon Deroux’s commands? Analysis of the music for each attack identifies Deroux as the root source of aggression.

Deroux has multiple themes to match his visual identity. Two Indian themes are employed to match his Indian disguise and a non-Indian theme later appears for the introduction of his white persona. This departure from Rapée’s standard of one theme per character serves a crucial function: it reinforces Deroux’s dual visual identity as both an Indian and a white man, using music to complete his disguise. For example, during the initial attack led by Deroux, one hears the first of the film’s two Indian themes (Examples 1.1 and 1.2). While this is the first time the theme is heard in its entirety, the audience

**Example 1.1:** *The Iron Horse*, Indian theme 1, mm. 1–7: part 1.

![Example 1.1](image1)

**Example 1.2:** *The Iron Horse*, Indian theme 1, mm. 22–24: part 2.

![Example 1.2](image2)

67. This question also plagued critic Sean Axmaker who similarly questioned, “Why is the two-fingered businessman villain (Deroux) also a member of the Indian tribe and given free reign to lead the tribe in attacks upon the whites that serve only his mercenary interests?” See Sean Axmaker, “San Francisco Silent Film Festival 2010: The Iron Horse,” *Parallax View: Smart Words About Cinema* (July 16, 2010). [http://parallax-view.org/2010/07/16/sfsff-2010-the-iron-horse](http://parallax-view.org/2010/07/16/sfsff-2010-the-iron-horse).
previously encountered a snippet of it during a close-up of an Indian Chief, followed by the intertitle, “And others see it [a great nation pushing westward] – but face it in defiance.” Ford commonly used an Indian close-up paired with an “Indian” theme early in the film to create an aural-visual association for the audience (Figures 1.3–1.5). Rapée utilized a conventional technique in which a character’s theme always accompanies their filmic entrance. Indian theme 1 paired with this close-up shot therefore signals that the theme belongs to the Indians and their future actions.

The theme’s second iteration draws on its Indian association as a band of nine Cheyennes emerges from the forest to kill Davy’s father; this time Deroux is present in buckskin fringe and a headband. Following the conventions of Rapée’s technique, Deroux—the murderer and orchestrator of the attack—takes over the theme with his filmic entrance: it now belongs to him. As the faux-Indian Deroux dons the cliché

68. When interviewed by Roxy Theatre Weekly Review about his compositional process, Rapée stated the following: “When it comes to the characters, I figure out one theme for the villain, one for the lovers, and still another for the comic character who is sure to appear.” See “Keynotes: An Interview with Erno Rapee,” Roxy Theatre Weekly Review, April 30, 1927, quoted in Ross Melnick, “Roxy and His Gang: Silent Film Exhibition and the Birth of Media Convergence” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2009), 572.
Indian dress, his aural identity is matched with equally stereotypical Indian music. Later, however, Deroux receives a second, non-Indian theme to accompany the introduction of his white identity.

Even though Deroux is not present during the next Indian attack, the use of his Indian theme signals his agency. Heard for the third time, a truncated Indian theme 1 accompanies a small band of Indians on horseback attacking the tracklayers. This sudden raid, and the abrupt entrance of the musical cue, interrupts the laborers working and singing “Drill, ye Tarriers, Drill.” Once the men fend off the Indian attack the theme ends as suddenly as it began and they resume their merry working tune. There is no tribal identification of these rogue Indians, but the use of Indian theme 1 connects them with the earlier Cheyennes, and therefore also with Deroux. Shortly thereafter a new Indian theme, theme 2 (Examples 1.3 and 1.4) sounds as a caravan of horseback Indians seize and ravage a train and its inhabitants. Indian theme 2 originates from the Photoplay

**Example 1.3:** *The Iron Horse*, Indian theme 2, mm. 1–4: part 1.

**Example 1.4:** *The Iron Horse*, Indian theme 2, mm. 54–57: part 2.
collection and is intended to accompany “Indian Gatherings, Uprisings, Dances and Festivals”—used here clearly for an uprising. Initially the new theme and unidentified tribe mark this as an isolated incident; later, however, we find the theme identified with the Cheyennes and Deroux in the final attack.

The musical cue for the next instance of Indian hostility is integral to understanding the overarching Indian motivation. The scene introduces the adult Davy, now a Pony Express rider, pursued by a dozen mounted Indians. He finds protection after the daredevilish feat of boarding a moving train containing Thomas Marsh, Miriam, Jesson, and Deroux en route to inspect the track’s progress. Revealingly, the Indian chase, which is by no means brief, uses Deroux’s “white” theme (Examples 1.5 and 1.6)—not one of the two Indian themes already heard. The leitmotivic borrowing of a musical marker, well-established with white-Deroux, is a technique Rapée uses intermittently to express an extension of Deroux’s will.

**Example 1.5:** *The Iron Horse*, Deroux’s theme, mm. 1–4: part 1.

![Example 1.5](image-url)

**Example 1.6:** *The Iron Horse*, Deroux’s theme, mm. 14-16: part 2.

![Example 1.6](image-url)
Deroux controls his world by coercing people, through monetary bribes, into carrying out his bidding. To signal Deroux’s influence when he is not present, Rapée shares his themes—both Indian and white—with other characters. The first such instance occurs with the aforementioned Cheyenne murder party; subsequent bribes include Ruby and Jesson, who both act as Deroux’s henchmen in the film. In the middle of the story, Deroux instructs Ruby, a saloon girl, to use her “feminine persuasion” on Jesson, saying, “give him anything he wants not to find a pass through the hills.” Doing as she is told, Ruby talks her way into Jesson’s living quarters and proposes Deroux’s offer: “My friends will make you very rich if you fail to find a shorter pass.” Jesson agrees and the pair kiss passionately, sealing the deal. While Ruby carries out these instructions, Deroux’s theme occurs. Similarly, when Jesson follows Deroux’s instruction to murder Davy, the theme appears again. The music tells us, then, that these characters are merely surrogates of Deroux’s villainy.

For Rapée, borrowing themes signifies an extension of a character’s power. Based on the previous instances of Deroux’s bribery, the use of his theme here during the Pony Express chase confirms him as the source of the Indian action. Curiously, though, none of the characters knows about adult-Davy or, at this point, his knowledge of the secret passage; therefore, the attack cannot be read as a calculated effort to kill Davy. Yet, the use of Deroux’s theme suggests there was a purpose for the attack; it was not a random act of aggression. With Deroux onboard the train, it is also doubtful the Indians intended to destroy the train itself. One explanation remains: Deroux intended to frighten Thomas

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69. Rapée borrows Deroux’s theme from the Photoplay series where it is intended “for horror, stealth, conspiracy, treachery.”
Marsh into ending his encroachment into Cheyenne territory (land that Deroux owns) through the image of Indians attacking the Pony Express (a symbol of westward-moving civilization)—and while it visibly startled Marsh, the attack failed to halt his steady progression.

Prior to the final and most extensive Indian attack, Deroux visits the Cheyenne camp, “inciting the hostile Indians to war.” Indian theme 1 reappears at this occasion echoing the beginning of the film when Deroux worked alongside the Cheyennes. The scene concludes with hoards of Cheyennes mounting their horses and riding away as Deroux says, “my brother, before many suns we shall stop the iron horse forever—.” The subsequent fight scenes (eighteen minutes in total) depict a group of tracklayers besieged by the Cheyennes and begin with Indian theme 2. During the first cue, Deroux sports his Indian attire while directing the Cheyenne forces (Figure 1.6). The Indian music temporarily stalls, however, as Davy escapes on the engine-car to gather help from the nearby boomtown, and it resumes upon his returns to the battlefront with a small militia of men and women.

Figure 1.6: *The Iron Horse*, Deroux in his Indian disguise, instructing the Cheyennes.
Shortly after Davy’s return, the Cheyenne warriors assemble in a line parallel to the train, ready to charge. Parallel and intersecting lines are prolific in Ford’s filmography; this particular counterpoint of Indian/white lines produces a literal cultural mirror, one repeated most memorably in *The Searchers* (Figures 1.7 and 1.8). As the lines dissolve, the fighting ensues and Deroux relocates behind a stack of railroad ties to gain a better aim for shooting at the train. Davy ventures out to defeat this “Indian sharpshooter” and discovers, to his bewilderment, that it is actually Deroux in disguise. Upon this revelation, we hear an abrupt stinger and the music changes to new material that is modulatory and suspenseful. As the cue continues, Davy exposes Deroux’s two-fingered hand, signaling the mark of his father’s murderer, and a fistfight ensues resulting in Deroux’s death.

![Figure 1.7: The Iron Horse, parallel lines and parallel cultures. The white men line the foreground while the advancing Cheyennes are in the background.](image1)

![Figure 1.8: The Searchers, the white search party forms a line in the foreground while the Comanche Indians line the hillcrest in the background.](image2)

Returning once again to the earlier scene in which unidentified Indians decimate a train, the use of Indian theme 2 for the Deroux-orchestrated final attack not only identifies this tribe as Cheyenne but also marks Deroux as its source. Rapée’s score binds
together events that would otherwise seem unrelated, unlocking the source of the Indian hostility. Through the strict use of themes, the music identifies Deroux as the root of aggression, and therefore unshackles the Indians from their hackneyed villainous characterization. Once Davy discovers that the Indian sharpshooter is actually Deroux, Indian theme 2 abruptly stops. With his physical disguise removed, the music used to conceal his identity loses its power. Neither Indian theme is heard again, which confirms their dependence on Deroux’s façade.

**Noble Pawnee: Cavalry Surrogates**

While the brutal savage Cheyennes are the dominant Indian image in the film, the inclusion of Pawnees in the final battle scene provides an important “noble savage” counterbalance. In the film, as in real life, the Union Pacific enlists the Pawnees as scouts and defenders against attack, and it is they who ultimately ride to the rescue and save the day. Toward the end of the monumental battle scene, an intertitle flashes: “Like a sweeping wind, the Pawnee scouts rush to the rescue.” A tribe on horseback in identifiably different Indian dress rides in a single file line toward the battlefront (Figure 1.9). As before, lines demarcate the opposing tribes; this time the Pawnees form a perpendicular line with the Cheyennes. The two tribes personify the individual struggle between Davy and Deroux, and as Davy defeats Deroux, the Pawnees rush in and drive off the hostile Cheyennes.

Through the nature of their arrival and their function in the plot, the Pawnees fulfill the role of cavalry as defined by later Ford Westerns. In *Stagecoach*, for example,
when the coach is besieged by a wild band of Apaches, a group of cavalrymen ride in and drive away the Indians (Figure 1.10). These cavalrymen are essential to the plot’s turning point, but remain undeveloped minor characters. Similarly, in *The Iron Horse* the Pawnees arrive when all hope seems lost and vanquish the forces of evil (Figure 1.11). And like the cavalry in *Stagecoach*, the Pawnees ensure conflict resolution but remain undeveloped minor characters.

![Figure 1.9: The Iron Horse](image1.png)

*Figure 1.9: The Iron Horse*, Cheyenne men in the foreground riding in a horizontal line while Pawnees form a vertical line as they approach.

![Figure 1.10: Stagecoach](image2.png)  ![Figure 1.11: The Iron Horse](image3.png)

*Figure 1.10: Stagecoach*, the cavalry riding to the coach’s rescue.  *Figure 1.11: The Iron Horse*, the Pawnees riding to the train’s rescue.
On the other hand, the musical treatments of these two cavalry groups are markedly different. In traditional cavalry depictions, such as *Stagecoach*, a bugle call and/or a change in musical character signals their arrival, often foretelling the conflict’s favorable resolution. Here, however, there is no change in musical character as the Pawnees rush in; rather, the music of Indian theme 2 continues during their entrance and plays throughout their successful warding off of the Cheyennes. With no aural cue to distinguish between tribes, audiences of the time might well have wondered if this was another band of marauders, especially illiterate viewers or those who simply disregarded the single intertitle that identifies them as friendly Pawnees. There are several possible reasons for this lack of clarifying music upon their entrance. First and foremost, the music would need to remain identifiably Indian, yet somehow reflect a positive Indian presence. Clearly the characteristic pastoral melodies of the “noble savage” would disrupt the energy of the scene. Another possibility is that Rapée, or even Ford himself, wanted to maintain a diminished noble Indian presence, preferring to draw our attention on the savage Cheyennes. This would potentially also explain the lack of female Indians in the film, who often signal peaceable Indians. Then again, a simpler explanation may suffice, namely that live musicians were unable to switch quickly enough to respond to the dramatic revelation and subsequent cross-cuttings.

Many stylistic elements typical of Ford’s later Westerns find their roots in *The Iron Horse*: symbolic use of lines; archetypal duality in dramatic characterization (seen here in the function of the Indian); and reliance on cavalry at the climax of the plot. The score itself, comprising mainly of folk melodies, provided Ford with a template upon
which he built his later Westerns. But more important, Erno Rapée’s score for *The Iron Horse* proves essential for an accurate reading of the film. By looking specifically at the narrative function of the Indian characters and their corresponding music material, we gain a clear understanding of the Cheyennes’ hidden motives stemming from Deroux. With the recovery of this score, the Cheyennes, once considered the villain of the film, gain redemption from their barbaric characterization.
Chapter 2

Friend, Foe, and Other: The Musical Faces of the “Indian” in *Stagecoach*

“*Geronimo*...” In John Ford’s genre-defining Western *Stagecoach* (1939), no word elicits more panic and anxiety than the name of this infamous Apache chief. Geronimo and his tribe, the film’s principal antagonists, fulfill the ubiquitous Indian-as-savage depiction favored among early sound Westerns. Yet, Ford resists a one-dimensional portrayal of Native Americans by introducing two additional characters: the morally complex Indian woman, Yakima, and the friendly non-threatening Indian male who appears in the opening scene. With the inclusion of these novel figures, Ford stretches the narrative possibilities of the Indian characters beyond the noble savage/brutal savage duality found in *The Iron Horse*—a development that naturally creates a similar effect in the music. As in his best known silent Western, Ford here handles music in a unique way for each Indian role: Geronimo’s ever-intensifying theme telegraphs his proximity and the proximity of the impending Indian attack; the Indian scout has no musical marker due to his conflicted position in society; and Yakima’s song provides a feminine presence while anticipating danger for the stagecoach.

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70. In the 2010 documentary *Reel Injun*, Angela Aleiss claims that, “There were a number of films that came out in the 1930s […] and the Indians were the stars of these movies. But the interesting thing about that whole cycle is that they just bombed at the box-office—Americans were not that interested in them.” Director Neil Diamond attests that this lack of interest was caused by a need for “a new brand of hero” during the Great Depression, and therefore the 1930s saw a rise in “brutal savage” depictions. See “The Savage Injun,” *Reel Injun*, directed by Neil Diamond (New York: Lorber Films, 2010), DVD.

71. Countless other Westerns would model themselves after *Stagecoach*, but these films largely avoid Ford’s complex Indian portrayals, which only became the norm in the 1950s.
The distinct musical cues (or absence thereof) rescue the marginalized and less threatening Indian roles from fading all too easily into the background; they provide definition while helping the audience to distinguish friend from foe. Close investigation of the music also reveals a new understanding of the leading couple, Dallas and Ringo, that challenges a traditional racial delineation of good and evil as white and Other. By drawing conscious and subconscious parallels between this white couple and the Apaches, Ford conveys a sympathetic message in which a conventional Anglo society becomes the enemy. In the course of this chapter, I will investigate the three faces of the Indian in *Stagecoach* along with their associated musical material, exposing sympathetic portrayals that heretofore have gone unnoticed.

**Production**

In the 1930s, prior to *Stagecoach*, large motion picture studios all but abandoned the Western. The fact that United Artists allowed *Stagecoach* to become a feature film was both a testament to Ford’s enthusiasm for the project and a business strategy to compete with two other large-budget Westerns the same year: Twentieth Century Fox’s *Jesse James* and Warner Bros.’ *Dodge City*. The gamble paid off for United Artists when the film won several awards (including a place among the National Board of Review’s top

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72. Regarding the low interest in Westerns in the 1930s, John Cawelti writes, “increasing uncertainties of the depression era and anxieties about another world war made the theme of Western regeneration seem ironic and hollow.” The B-Westerns that were produced screened primarily during matinees and triple-features. See John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 89–90.

ten films of 1939) and became one of their highest grossing pictures that year. For Ford, *Stagecoach* was a film of firsts: his first sound Western (his previous Western being the silent film *3 Bad Men* in 1926), his first project filmed in Monument Valley (the first of seven films he shot there), and his first work with John Wayne in a leading role. The methods that he developed in his prior films culminate in this cinematic masterpiece, bringing him into the arena of great American directors.

An infamously hands-on director, Ford involved himself in every aspect of the production, and he was especially opinionated when it came to music. Folk songs, Protestant hymns, and popular nineteenth-century songs pepper Ford’s Western scores and *Stagecoach* is no exception. What the critic for the *New York Times* called the “purely American score” contains fourteen folk tunes, making up a bulk of the music, and was so effective that it later received an Academy Award. The score succeeds despite being written by a team of five men Ford enlisted after firing the intended composer, Louis Gruenberg. While Gruenberg left the production early on, his name remains in the opening credits: “Musical score based on American Folk Songs adapted by: Richard Hageman, Franke Harling, Louis Gruenberg, John Leipold, Leo Shuken.” Conversely, the

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74. *Stagecoach* and Ford himself were nominated for Academy Awards for best picture and best director but lost in both categories to Victor Fleming’s *Gone with the Wind*.
76. Ibid., 54.
credits omitted Gerard Carbonara (intentionally or otherwise), who created the Indian cues—among the only original melodic material in the film.\(^7\)

However many composers and arrangers worked on *Stagecoach*, it was Ford who commanded what was played and when. Of his methods, Kathryn Kalinak writes, “Ford treated music in much the same way he treated dialogue: pared it down to its essence, eliminated the irrelevant, and delivered it simply and without affectation.”\(^8\) This proclivity for paring things to their essence, which he learned from his silent film experience, holds true for most of Ford’s directing choices, including his presentation of the original story concisely orchestrated for screen success.

**The Story**

An adaptation of Ernest Haycox’s short story “Stage to Lordsburg,” Ford’s film tells of a diverse collection of people brought together in their journey from Tonto, Arizona Territory, to Lordsburg, New Mexico Territory.\(^7\) Tag Gallagher calls the film’s characters “as generically and basically conceived as are their adventures,” and claims that their archetypes tend to be overdefined.\(^8\) These distinct archetypes originate from B-Westerns and were likely familiar to audiences of the time. Frank Nugent included a list of them in his *New York Times* review:

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\(^7\) Ibid., 56. Before Gerard Carbonara moved to Hollywood and became a film composer, he was an opera coach, conductor, and concert violinist in New York. Like Erno Rapée, Carbonara contributed to the Richmond-Robbins (later Robbins–Engel) *Capitol Photoplay Series* at least seven additional programs.

\(^8\) Ibid., 9.

\(^7\) Haycox published “Stage to Lordsburg” in *Collier’s* magazine on April 10, 1937, and also wrote “Trouble Shooter” the year prior, which provided the story for *Union Pacific*, the other massively popular Western of 1939.

‘Doc’ Boone, a tipsy man of medicine; Major Hatfield, professional gambler, once a Southern gentleman and a gentleman still; Dallas, a lady of such transparently dubious virtue that she was leaving Tonto by popular request; Mrs. [Lucy] Mallory, who considering her condition, had every reason to be hastening to her army husband’s side; Mr. Gatewood, an absconding banker and windbag; Mr. [Samuel] Peacock, a small and timid whisky salesman destined by Bacchus to be Doc Boone’s traveling companion; Sheriff Wilcox [‘Curley’] and his prisoner, the Ringo Kid.  

Buck, the driver, and Curley essentially play a comedic double-act straight out of vaudeville. As mentioned above, driving the plot is the fear of an Indian raid, which indeed materializes three-fourths of the way into the film.  

On a deeper level, the movie explores societal caste, definitions of love, and shared human emotions. As their journey begins, alliances form between the outcasts, Dallas (Claire Trevor) and Ringo (John Wayne), and the sophisticates, Mrs. Mallory (Louise Platt) and Hatfield (John Carradine). Boone (Thomas Mitchell) and Peacock (Donald Meek) create a third pair—though only through the former’s insistence—but largely keep to themselves. The tension caused by the group’s heterogeneity erodes as the prospects of an Indian attack become more imminent; social distinctions fade through a communal fear. According to one Wall Street Journal reviewer, “it is their apprehension

of danger more than fulfillment which carries the story.”83 Each of the three stops on their journey leaves them more vulnerable to attack (the cavalry escort leaves, Apache spies send word to Geronimo, and the group discovers Apache destruction along their route), and with each stop the crew becomes increasingly closer as a community.84 Eventually, the coach ventures into unprotected terrain and is attacked. After the attack, a fundamental change is apparent in the group through a visible compassion for one another.

The uncivilized setting is essential to these characters’ developments. According to Edward Buscombe, Westerns take place in a territory where the rule of law does not yet exist.85 A fence, literal or figurative, marks where civilization ends and this territory begins: “beyond the fence, possibility is limitless.”86 In the case of Stagecoach, the recurring visual motif of the fence establishes the intended boundaries of law and lawless, white and Other, beginning with the coach’s departure from Tonto. In this shot, Ford deliberately films from inside the fence in order to show the coach trespassing into the untamed Apache land (Figure 2.1). When the group arrives at the subsequent coach stations (with the exception of the destroyed Lee’s Ferry), Ford shows the coach arriving safely within the gates, which close behind the travelers protecting them (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

85. Edward Buscombe, Stagecoach (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 28. This absence of civilization and of a codified moral law is what allows nearly all Westerns to end with acts of violence often justified as the protection of the innocent or weak.
86. Tag Gallagher, “Dreaming of Jeannie,” disk 2, Stagecoach, directed by John Ford (Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 2010), DVD.
Nature and Indian attacks—related forces in *Stagecoach*—pose the most immediate threat outside the thin, easily broken fence of civilization. Without the fortification of a town or wagon station, the men and women of the coach are vulnerable to these untamed elements. While the coach itself creates a microcosm of the community from which they departed and serves as a temporary haven separating its inhabitants from the wilderness, it cannot fully protect them from the dangers that abound in the rough,
dangerous, and uncivilized desert. In a way, “beyond” is exactly where these characters belong, with each being guilty of assorted vices. Alcoholics, thieves, murderers, prostitutes, gamblers, weak (or effeminate) men, and imbeciles make up the inhabitants of this mobile environment. The doors of the coach, then, mark the boundaries of a society comprised primarily of outcasts. Only one trait marks this collective as different from what exists on the other side of their wooden capsule: race. Ford’s fences, therefore, do not separate these parties, but rather provide a line of symmetry, highlighting their sameness, who together lie opposed to conventional society (e.g. Tonto).

After their brief foray into the hostile desert, most of the travelers assimilate back into white society, but two—Dallas and Ringo—search for a home in the wilderness. Despite the inherent dangers of the Wild West, the “beyond” is the place where this couple feels most at home. Ford demonstrates that love between Dallas and Ringo only flowers outside a conventional society in which they are considered second-class. Ringo first expresses his love to Dallas after walking beyond the fence at Apache Wells (Figure 2.4), and in fact, the couple’s most trying moment takes place within the confines of Lordsburg where Dallas reveals her past as a prostitute. This revelation does not change Ringo who, in the end, rides off with her far out beyond the outskirts of town, out into the landscape (Figure 2.5). These two remain outcasts, and therein lies their redemption; they do not fit into society but belong out where the rule of law and judgment do not yet exist—saved from “the blessings of civilization,” as Doc says. Ford’s commentary subverts expectations of good and evil whereby Lordsburg is problematic while the Indian territory, now inhabited by Dallas and Ringo, is a land of infinite good and freedom.
Three Faces of the Indian

While, depending on the context, Indian men in Westerns often portray the role of noble savage (friend) or brutal savage (foe), women rarely fill the latter archetype. In *Stagecoach*, however, Ford deviates from this formula in his portrayal of the initially-friendly Indian “squaw,” Yakima, by having her flee and return to Geronimo and her tribe. Depictions of female Indians in early sound film tended toward peaceful and sympathetic characterizations. Ford’s later Western *The Searchers* (1956), for example, retains this standard portrayal by, at one point, showing approximately twenty Indian maidens sitting cross-legged on blankets, smiling and laughing amiably. Clearly, they

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87. On the Indian woman, Maryann Oshana writes: “The woman’s image has remained consistently backwards and static. The roles for women are clearly defined: if they are not being raped or murdered, they are usually shown as slaves, household drudges, or bodies en masse in camps and caravans.” See Maryann Oshana, “Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth.” *A Journal of Women Studies* 6, no. 3 (Autumn, 1981): 48.
pose no immediate threat. In the same film, the male Indians are identifiably the enemy as they dress in full Comanche Indian regalia terrorizing homesteaders, kidnapping and raping women, and of course, collecting battle trophies by scalping their white adversaries. In *Stagecoach*, the two typical treatments of the male Indian, filled by Geronimo and an Indian Scout, are integrated into the complex female character Yakima to establish three contrasting faces of the Indian, each with its own distinctive musical treatment.

To create Geronimo’s musical identities, the score relies heavily on the well-worn Indian tropes of the past and recalls the Indian themes of *The Iron Horse*. Kalinak writes that, “the Indians, the native population in the West, are positioned as the Other, from whom the wilderness must be wrested,” and that “music helps to draw these distinctions.” Carbonara (et al.) was in charge of creating not only the larger Indian/white distinction mentioned by Kalinak, but also coding the three Indians as identifiably different. To distinguish Indians from whites, he relies on the preexisting signs of Indian music established in the late nineteenth century: descending two-note figures, modal melodies, and tom-tom rhythmic figures—many of which composers still rely on today. David Neumeyer and James Buhler note that all of the prototypical features of turn-of-the-century Indian music are present in the music of *Stagecoach*.

One must wonder why Ford accepted these antiquated musical codes in a film that otherwise stretches the narrative function of Indian characters. At the simplest level, such stereotyped music acts as a form of “Mickey-Mousing” or sound effect, reinforcing the

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images of the screen. Famous Western composer Dimitri Tiomkin suggests that this may indeed have been Ford’s motivation. Regarding why authentic music was not more commonly used for Indian characters, he wrote: “I have used the ‘Indian music’ that everyone knows not because I am not resourceful enough to originate other music, but because it is a telegraphic code that audiences recognise.”

In Hollywood’s studio era, with the norm of wall-to-wall scoring, there was a need to delineate actions, geography, and even characters as efficiently as possibly. Ford, however, generally avoided lushly orchestrated scores such as Tiomkin’s. Why then, in such a sparse score, did he still feel the need to make use of these caricatures? The answer possibly lies in the film’s perspective. Like most Hollywood Westerns, Stagecoach adopts a largely nineteenth-century white viewpoint, one that relies on nineteenth-century fears, clichéd imagery, and stereotypical music. For Ford to present an authentic Western (not an accurate account of history), he must, and does, direct with this perspective in mind.

The three Indian characters in Stagecoach are Geronimo (representative of the savage warrior), the Indian Scout (the useful friend), and Yakima (who exhibits elements of both friend and, ultimately, foe). Musical treatment confirms their archetypal distinctions through a reliance on traditional stereotypes, use of silence, and the substitution of musical cues for a different ethnic Other, respectively. In the following discussion I aim to shed light on these often-overlooked characters by investigating their musical material and narrative implications.

From the first mention of his name two minutes into the film, Geronimo is painted as a fearsome mythic character. For those familiar with the historic figure, the name alone would trigger concern; other viewers would quickly learn of his violent nature from the jarring musical cue: a descending two-note, short–long, minor second motive. This is the first musical cue heard beyond the title sequence (sounding after a telegraph worker utters the name “Geronimo”), a position that points to the importance of the character and foreshadows the inevitable Indian attack. Although Geronimo is the only Indian villain mentioned by name, he and his theme naturally represent the entire band of warriors who travel and attack as one. The intensifying orchestrations of this theme divulge the coach’s proximity to the inevitable chase scene that, as John Price notes, occurs “without historical accuracy or even sufficient fictional explanation.”

Through their association with and location within the wilderness, Geronimo and his men take on the identity of landscape. The intrepid (or perhaps foolish) inhabitants of the coach are subjected equally to perils of the wilderness (the rocky terrain, the heat of the desert, and even a snowstorm) and of the band of Apaches who “infested and terrorized the country” on which they trespass. Joan Dagle identifies this association with nature: “The Apache appear to materialize out of the landscape.”

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92. Mae Tinee, “‘Stagecoach’ is a Treat Loaded with Suspense.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 25, 1939. The snowstorm was not part of the screenplay, but with the onset of an unexpected snowfall and a tight schedule to keep, Ford inserted a few lines to explain the discontinuity of snow in a desert landscape. Curley: “How come you’re taking this road? It’s gonna be cold up there.” Buck: “I’m using my head, those beach-crowd Apaches don’t like snow.”
similarly observes, “[They appear] suddenly out of the landscape, a force of nature not characters in the drama.” 94 I would suggest, however, that rather than simply appearing from the landscape, the Stagecoach Indians are the landscape. 95 Claudia Gorbman indicates that among the adversaries in the classic Western are nature and Indians; yet, in Stagecoach they coalesce as one, sharing the identity of an obstacle to overcome before the travelers can reach their destination. 96 To forge this unity, Ford creates a close relationship between Geronimo’s music and the panoramic vistas of Monument Valley.

The Geronimo theme first sounds in the title sequence. As the theme begins, we see a silhouetted band of Indians on horseback emerge from a backlit butte in Monument Valley. The Indians approach and eventually pass the camera. From this instant, the Indian characters claim ownership of the land, and their musical cue in the key of A minor solidifies this bond (Example 2.1). Ford transitions from the title sequence to the movie proper by showing two figures riding horseback through the picturesque landscape. This is the first clear shot of the valley and the love theme for Ringo and Dallas, also in A (now major), accompanies it. In the opening, then, the parallel keys of A symbolize “the wild” through the images paired with both Geronimo’s theme and Ringo and Dallas’s love theme—a love that can only flourish beyond the fence of civilization. Their love is of the wilderness, just as the Indians are of landscape, and positioning these

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95. Ronald Davis also attests that the Indians are not individualized but rather “remain part of the land.” Davis, John Ford: Hollywood, 101.

themes at the opening of the film further ties the Indians and the couple to nature and each other.97

Example 2.1: *Stagecoach*, the Geronimo theme, opening titles.

The second occurrence of the Geronimo theme enters when the telegraph wires go dead during a transmission.98 Upon this discovery, a cavalryman reads the only word to come across: “Geronimo.” Instantly, a sustained E rumbles in the low strings followed closely by a descending minor second doubled in fourths by the brass (Example 2.2). The truncated motive is now in the key of E (in which it stays for much of the film) and without repeats or pounding tom-tom rhythm. This diminished iteration compared to its first appearance suggests a distance of time and space from the dangerous Indians—though they should still cause concern. As the crew heads out on their journey, the motive sounds briefly upon the utterance of Geronimo’s name. Here, it has a similar treatment (truncated and without tom-toms) but is in the key of C to match the conversational music within the coach. Shortly afterward, Buck inquires about “ranch houses burning,” and the theme recurs as before, this time returning to E.

97. One may argue that these two themes are presented in the parallel modes of A because they are a part of the same opening montage. However, the earlier material of the credit sequence occurs in E-flat major, E major and F major. In addition, these two themes are separated by a bugle call in the key of F major. The use of A for these two themes thus suggests a common linkage (nature).

98. This scene echoes a similar one from *The Iron Horse* in which a man tries to telegraph for help and is shot down by an Indian. Ford cuts to the receiving end where we see scribbled, “Indians attacked train no. 8 near Clay, send help to—” but the line went dead.
After forty-three minutes without any mention or aural cue of an Indian, the theme reappears when Ringo spots Apache smoke signals on the horizon near Apache Wells. The expanded theme and fuller orchestration suggests a closer proximity to Geronimo’s band of Apaches (Example 2.3). Still in the key of E, it begins in paired woodwind fourths with slowly shifting harmonies over the brassy two-note motive followed by a triplet in the lower register. As the coach gets ever closer to Geronimo, the Indian theme develops and matures. This evolution remains evident in the scene in which they discover the Indian-ravaged Lee’s Ferry. The cue begins similar to Example 2.3 but becomes more complex through the addition of new material (Example 2.4). The music quickly subsides as the group’s initial shock wears off, followed by a slight pause and a brief yet dramatic cadence. This codetta consists of a building diminished chord that ends with the two-note Geronimo theme resolving on a seemingly inappropriate C-major sonority.

**Example 2.2:** *Stagecoach*, the Geronimo theme, the telegraph line goes dead.

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**Example 2.3:** *Stagecoach*, the Geronimo theme, smoke signals at Apache Wells.
Still at Lee’s Ferry, Hatfield catches a glimpse of some Indians far away upon the hillside. This is the first moment any member of the stagecoach actually sees an Indian; previously only rumors, smoke, and circumstantial evidence suggested their presence, but now there is proof. A timpani roll preceding the all-familiar, but fuller-orchestrated, Geronimo theme signals the importance of this event (Example 2.5). This scene mirrors the one in which Ringo sees “war signals” on the hills at Apache Wells both musically (see Example 2.3) and visually through the physical action of looking. Ford uses this recurring action, shot from the same angle, to emphasize the closing gap between the two parties. The only difference is the urgency indicated by the music: the first time is lightly orchestrated while the second is much more brazen.

Example 2.5: Stagecoach, the Geronimo theme, Hatfield spots Apaches on the hill.

Perhaps the most memorable shot of the film takes place from atop a hill looking down on the tiny stagecoach traveling through the valley. Accompanying the distant view of the coach is the typical stagecoach theme (based on “Oh, Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie”), which is interrupted by a jarring whip-pan that tears the viewer from the
comforting music and image of progress to a shot of the fearsome, violent Indians. In case the audience missed it, Ford repeats exactly the same shot with the same music. The music material for this excessively dramatic, flagrantly redundant sequence is loud, brassy, and partly new (Example 2.6). Trumpets, French horns, and trombones herald Geronimo’s visual entrance with a new and strident descending modal fanfare (again in fourths) before giving way to the familiar two-note theme. For the first time since the opening credit music, the tom-tom rhythm reappears in the texture and lends authenticity to the “real” Indians now on screen. Here, the audience is finally brought face to face with the menacing tribe, confirming the threat of future attack. Ford leaves the members of the coach unaware of the hillside Apaches to heighten the suspense for the now-informed audience.

Example 2.6: Stagecoach, the Geronimo theme, Apaches on the hill.

Kalinak suggests that this famous scene establishes the Indians as intruders among the landscape, claiming that until this moment, solely the stagecoach theme accompanies the valley. I, however, would posit that, as the land always belonged to the Indians, it is the coach that acts as intruder. Kalinak’s theory ignores subtle details of music-drama association, which change the audience’s perspective from that of a rider in

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99. Ronald Davis notes that the only Indian roll not filled by a member of the local Navajo tribe was for Geronimo’s close-up on the hill. “There Ford used an Apache, whom the director claimed was a descendent of the famous chief.” See Davis, John Ford: Hollywood, 100.
100. Kalinak, How the West, 72.
the stagecoach to that of an omniscient observer. To illustrate the change, Geronimo’s theme immediately supplants the stagecoach theme, tearing us from our identification with the coach. With the long shot, the audience gains the ability to see everything. Once removed from the comforting naiveté of the coach perspective, we realize that the stagecoach, and eventually we ourselves, are encroaching on a land that belongs to the Indians.

Soon after this establishing shot of the valley, the chase scene begins, during which the Geronimo theme experiences several transformations. Throughout the seven-minute pursuit this theme is juxtaposed against the stagecoach theme, both undergoing modulations and abrupt key changes (Table 2.1). The two themes never appear in the same key and the shifts between them are often to distantly related keys. The first theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Key Relationship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>E minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>E-flat Major</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>F-sharp Major</td>
<td>Mediant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>G minor</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Mediant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>E-flat</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Coach</td>
<td>C diminish</td>
<td>Mediant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>C minor → D minor</td>
<td>Parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>D Major → B Major</td>
<td>Parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>F-sharp minor</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>F Major → B-flat Major</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Key Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hatfield</td>
<td>A Major → A minor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geronimo</td>
<td>Ab minor</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugle Call</td>
<td>Bb Major → C Major</td>
<td>Chromatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battle Cry of Freedom</td>
<td>C Major</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.1:** Melodic theme, key, and key relationship of the *Stagecoach* chase sequence. The key relationships correspond with the previously stated key.
to occur is Geronimo’s in its standard E minor, which lowers a semitone once the stagecoach theme takes over. The subsequent Geronimo theme follows suit by lowering to D minor. Reinforcing the chaotic harmonic structure is the metric ambiguity created by hemiolas and short repetitive segments (Examples 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9). Example 2.9 shows the newly introduced theme that is heard throughout the chase; instead of the typical brass, it makes use of shrill reed instruments. The disjointed phrases generated by varying lengths and repetitions upon each occurrence represent the chaotic action while the increasing harmonic instability and ambiguous meter keep the audience on edge throughout the scene. After the cavalry comes to the rescue, neither the Geronimo theme nor any other Indian music appears again in the film, signaling no further threat of attack.

**Example 2.7:** *Stagecoach*, the Geronimo theme, early in the chase.

![Example 2.7: Geronimo theme, early in the chase.](image1)

**Example 2.8:** *Stagecoach*, the Geronimo theme with harmonic instability and metric confusion created by the triple hemiola figures, middle of chase.

![Example 2.8: Geronimo theme, middle of chase.](image2)
**Example 2.9:** *Stagecoach,* the new Indian theme used throughout chase. Bar lines indicate the metric groupings (4+2, 4+2, and 4+3). Future occurrences of this material are rhythmically altered.

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**The Indian Scout**

Geronimo, the villain, is foreshadowed by a musical theme that develops and grows more menacing throughout the film. By its final appearance, it has become loud and unstable.

In contrast with this savage archetype is the second face of the Indian: the noble scout played by Chief John Big Tree.\(^{101}\) Though he occupies the screen for a mere thirty seconds, he is crucial in establishing Ford’s complex portrayal of Indians. Films of the early sound era restricted themselves to a single masculine Indian type—the savage foe; *Stagecoach* complicates this tradition by invoking the noble savage archetype. By incorporating a dual image of the male Indian, Ford challenges preconceived and contemporaneous Western traditions.\(^{102}\)

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\(^{101}\) Big Tree also appears in Ford’s *Drums Along the Mohawk* (of the same year) depicting another friendly Indian in a movie whose main villain is a destructive band of Mohawks.

\(^{102}\) Regardless of this balanced portrayal, Ford still subjects the Indians to stereotyped dress, music, derogatory names.
At the opening of the scene in the telegraph office, the camera centers on Big Tree acting out the role of a friendly Cheyenne. (“Acting” may be an overstatement, as he does not move or even blink throughout his short cameo). He behaves like cigar store Indian, who serves as an advertisement attesting to the authenticity of the product—a real Native American playing the role of an Indian. Most striking in the scene is the five-second close-up on Big Tree after the first utterance of “Geronimo.” Even though he plays a Cheyenne who apparently “hates Apaches worse than we [the white soldiers] do,” Big Tree at first fills the visual void for the notorious warrior, with a menacing close-up lit from below. Shortly, however, aural and visual clues mitigate the threat. Counter to Classical Hollywood scoring practices, no stinger articulates the close-up, and we hear no dialogue; the silence renders him less threatening than the menacing Geronimo theme heard shortly after. Also easing the fear is Big Tree’s odd dress of half cavalry uniform and half native attire, complete with feather, blanket, and braids.

Ford uses silence to distance and therefore add authenticity to his Indians. The absence of a musical marker for the Indian scout provides one example, but Ford renders each Indian voiceless and therefore incapable of dialogue. In this way *Stagecoach* avoids the damaging “Tonto speak,” the hackneyed “yips” and “ughs,” of typically unsophisticated contemporaneous Westerns.103 Like impressionist paintings that require distance to gain an overall effect, Ford establishes an authenticity through a distance from actual Native American culture. Giving the Indian fine details such as a voice or appropriate tribal dress would only distract from the images familiar to most audiences of

103. The term “Tonto speak” originates from the highly successful radio, movie, and television franchise *The Lone Ranger*. Tonto, the Indian sidekick, famously spoke in broken English phrases such as, “Um, that right, Kimosabe,” and “Me think so.”
the time. Moreover, while Geronimo’s presence is expressed musically, the scout has no sound of any kind because he belongs fully to neither an Indian nor an Anglo society. Folk music represents white characters and stereotyped Indian cues signal the Apaches, but Big Tree lives in an in-between world deserving of only silence.

**Yakima: Archetypal Duality**

Ford bends the rule of silent Indians in the case of Yakima, an Apache woman who sings a cleverly deceptive song. Yakima (played by Mexican singer Elvira Ríos) is the wife of Chris (Chris-Pin Martin), the Mexican stationmaster at Apache Wells. She speaks Spanish as we learn from her musical number. Kalinak notes the narrative power of Yakima’s statement: “What is surprising is the way the Other [in this case, Indian] is given a voice, literally, through the film’s music. The narrative is suspended to allow Yakima to sing.” While Yakima’s vocalization contradicts Ford’s distancing silence, he still avoids authenticity by her singing in the non-Apache Spanish language.

Yakima’s Spanish language not only establishes her Otherness but it also masks her soon-revealed malicious intent. While the singing of a Mexican song by an Apache character introduces a potentially confusing incongruity, Buscombe suggests that the audience should not be troubled by this dissonance: “For an Anglo audience, the song in Spanish is a reminder of the alien culture which surrounds the little island of ‘civilization’ in the stage station.”

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104. Musical interludes such as Yakima’s were quite exceptional in Ford’s films.
“exotic music” in the silent era, Buscombe claims that one foreign language is as good as any to establish this cultural difference. In addition, the use of a foreign language adds suspense, temporarily masking Yakima’s ties with Geronimo.

The crew is generally suspicious of Yakima, and rightfully so, as she has the most direct impact on the coach’s endangerment. When setting eyes on her for the first time, Peacock lets out a bloodcurdling scream: “Savage!” As if accustom to such a reaction, Chris nonchalantly responds, “That’s my wife Yakima, my Squaw. […] She a little bit savage, I think.” Gatewood also expresses anxiety about her Apache allegiance, to which Chris reassures, “Sure, she’s one of Geronimo’s people, I think. Maybe not so bad to have Apache wife, eh? Apache don’t bother me, I think.”107 Their initial fear was not without cause, for it is Yakima who orchestrates the four vaqueros to go inform Geronimo of the coming coach and later joins them. Yakima confirms her role as enemy by using her song as a distraction while the four station workers mount the spare horses and ride away into the dark night.

Composed specifically for the film, the song was not in the original screenplay but appeared for the first time in the final draft.108 The lyrics and the melody both establish Yakima’s wish to return to her home and her people. After the short guitar intro, she gives vent to her longing nostalgia:

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107. Notice the dialogue tinged with stereotyped broken English; nearly every sentence ends with “I think.” Not only is it used for comic effect, but it also establishes Chris as a weak character.
108. Kalinak, How the West, 73.
Initially it appears that her longing is for the Apache land in which she once resided; as the song continues, however, the lyrics suggest her “loneliness” is caused by a relationship, a “love” she left back home. While we cannot know for sure, this love may in fact be for Geronimo or a member of his marauding pack. In any case, the lyrics were likely incomprehensible to most audience-members of the time (and even today); for these viewers the words of this foreign language were only meant to establish Otherness or to veil her threat. The musical content itself, however, provides clarity to her words. Ford’s musical team drew a connection between love stories by refashioning Ringo and Dallas’s love theme into Yakima’s song (Example 2.10). The love theme melody itself originated in a song titled “I Love You” from the 1923 Harry Archer musical *Little Jesse James*. As with his use of pre-established character types, Ford here employs a song that already connotes love for those familiar with the popular tune. With its undisguised

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109. Ibid., 60–61. “I Love You” was an odd choice for Ford in that it deviated from his customary use of period music. Some in the audience would have likely recognized the song from the 1923 musical.
reuse for Yakima’s song, the romantic content of her words is apparent regardless of the language. In its transformation, the slightly ornamented melody joins a solo guitar that provides metric stability through an oom-pah pattern (Example 2.11). The love theme recurs in each verse of the mostly strophic song; and, after Yakima tells the vaqueros to leave, the music enters a developmental section before returning for one last verse. Through their intertextual linkage, Ringo and Dallas’s romantic love masterfully intertwines with Yakima and her mysterious lover back home, drawing subconscious parallels, which thereby break down the parameters of good and evil traditionally divided along racial lines. The music highlights their common identity.

**Example 2.10:** *Stagecoach*, Ringo and Dallas’s love theme (top) and the melody of Yakima’s song (bottom). The love theme is written in G major for comparison.

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\begin{music}
% Love theme in G major for comparison
\end{music}
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**Example 2.11:** *Stagecoach*, Yakima’s song.
The love theme’s semiotic double-duty (Ringo and Dallas, Yakima and perhaps Geronimo) blurs distinctions between hero and villain. Beyond the fence, notions of good or evil are relative: they are defined by one’s perspective. Though the majority of the movie expresses a white perspective, the leitmotivic kinship allows common ground and therefore safe passage for the viewer between these worlds of good and evil. In fact, all four characters are misfits (an outlaw, a prostitute, and two cunning Indians), who share their destiny outside of conventional civilization. While thematic connections clarify these similarities, contrasting keys help distinguish the two couples. The love theme for Ringo and Dallas remains in C major for much of the film. This choice seems to conform to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century treatises of key association investigated by Rita Steblin in which C major often represents naïve innocence, simplicity, and purity. The theme at the film’s end, by contrast, is in B-flat major, a key associated with love, tenderness and hope, heard here as the lovers ride off into the landscape. For Yakima’s song the composers chose G major, a rustic and gay key appropriate for idyllic pastoral settings and, here, for the Indians who are effectively part of the wilderness.

Yakima’s G major appears only four times throughout the film, each time foreshadowing the oncoming attack. We hear it first with the stagecoach theme just as Ringo joins the gang; it is of course Ringo who persuades the members of the coach to leave Dry Fork without the protection of the cavalry, creating their first vulnerability. We next hear this key when the cavalry departs and the stagecoach continues into the desert.

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110. Rita Steblin lists the major music treatises that address key relationship and the most commonly cited associations with C major are innocence (cited by eight theorists), simplicity (cited by seven), and purity (cited by six). See appendix A of Rita Steblin, *A History of Key Characteristics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 226–29.
111. Ibid., 287–91.
112. Ibid., 270–73.
alone. Shortly thereafter, the key reappears during the snowstorm—a different peril of nature. And its final appearance in Yakima’s song coincides with the informing of Geronimo, after which an Indian attack on the coach is assured.

With her layered characterization, Yakima embodies both male Indian archetypes. As a woman and the wife of a friend, she seems harmless, and her beautiful love song confirms the impression. Yet, beneath this comforting exterior she is a powerful and resourceful enemy, as we learn when she instructs the men to leave with the horses. Before we learn what these men are doing, we may still view her as a friend. In the morning, however, when she has ridden away with Chris’s horse and rifle, her allegiance to Geronimo is made plain. As Kitses comments, “Her disappearance together with that of the vaqueros and the party’s spare horses confirms Peacock’s comical identification of her as ‘savage’—if you will.” Did she run away for love or loyalty? It is impossible to say, and therefore she remains an ambiguous figure—neither wholly friend nor foe.

In Stagecoach, Ford continues to challenge the conventions of the Western not only by allowing two male Indian archetypes in the same film, but also through the role of Yakima, who further challenges conventions by expanding the possibilities of female Indian roles. Remaining true to the white perspective inherent in the Western tradition, Ford gives the Indians of the film few authentic distinctions of speech or dress; but the music gives a voice to each Indians character-type. Thus, Geronimo possesses a ferocious theme, the scout is mute due to his lack of voice in society, and Yakima wields a

feminine voice whose key suggests danger for the coach. Ford not only extends the narrative possibilities of Indian characters, but also begins to break down the construct of absolute good and evil by creating cultural parallels for Dallas and Ringo—a literary device that Ford explores more thoroughly in *The Searchers*. Ford rescued the Western genre from cheap depictions of old dime novels with a keen eye for details that grant the audience an authentic Western through a fresh lens. Upon completion of *Stagecoach*, Ford went on to direct fifteen additional Westerns, each exploring and developing the construct of Indian archetypes.
Chapter 3

Becoming Indian: The Searchers

John Ford once referred to *The Searchers* as a “psychological epic.”¹¹⁴ Many connect this remark to the film’s disturbing and often brutal portrayal of the adult psyche, yet the psychological dimension also manifests itself by demanding a new level of involvement from the audience.¹¹⁵ In this film, Ford challenges our preconceptions of race, gender, and virtue in the classic Western, thereby dismantling the white-Indian divide. Ford’s sympathetic cultural mirrors, a narrative device first introduced in *Stagecoach*, are fully developed in *The Searchers*. While the film employs traditional Indian villainy, this element finds clear parallels within white society, making it impossible to distinguish cultural identity based on deed alone. Ford also invites viewers to project their own theories and answers for characters’ backstories and motivations, which are often hinted at but seldom fully revealed. For this very reason, *The Searchers* has received considerable scholarly attention.¹¹⁶

Max Steiner’s score for *The Searchers* serves various functions within the overarching umbrella of aiding the audience to make sense of Ford’s ambiguous storytelling. Steiner once admitted that, “if I have to have a score that only the music

¹¹⁶. Peter Bogdanovich comments, “He doesn’t show you anything. He lets you imagine it. The classic directors were judicious; they knew what an audience needed and what it didn’t.” See Peter Bogdanovich, “Commentary,” disk 1, *The Searchers*, 50th Anniversary edition, directed by John Ford (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Entertainment, 2006), DVD.
students [...] understand—that’s not for pictures. That’s not the function of motion pictures. Their function is to entertain, and the music should not disturb anybody.”

Notwithstanding this humble attitude, the music for *The Searchers* serves a more significant purpose than mere entertainment. Steiner’s music confirms the breaking down of Western and Indian archetypes and establishes links between white and Indian societies: specifically between Martin and Debbie, Martha and a Comanche maiden named Look, and most notably between Ethan and Scar. Cases of mirrored identity, while thoroughly explored in scholarship on Ford, have not hitherto been investigated in conjunction with the music. When the film score is taken into account, the boundary between white and Indian dissolves and all characters become essentially Indian.

**The Story**

Three years after fighting for the Confederacy, Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) returns from the Civil War to the home of his brother Aaron. During the visit, stolen glances between Ethan and his brother’s wife, Martha, reveal a romantic past. Within days of his return, Ethan and a rag-tag group of Texas Rangers are lured away to investigate a string of missing cattle, when a band of Comanches attack and burn the Edwardses’ ranch house. Aaron, Martha, and their son Ben are found murdered, with Martha’s bloodied and discarded dress suggesting she was brutally raped. Their two daughters, Lucy and Debbie, are presumably taken captive by the Comanche war chief Scar (Henry Brandon). Distraught, Ethan rounds up a search party of a dozen men, including the Edwardses’

adopted son Martin Pawley, beginning a five-year search to find the missing girls. As the excursion progresses, the party dwindles to only Ethan and Martin, who discover that Lucy is dead. The focus of the search, then, turns toward Debbie as concerns arise over her approaching sexual maturity. Because of the impending threat of violation by Scar, Ethan is intent on murdering Debbie to prevent, or possibly punish, miscegenation.¹¹⁸ Yet in the film’s conclusion, in accordance with old Hollywood customs of happy endings, the pair catch up with Scar, kill him, and save Debbie rather than carry out Ethan’s initial plan.

Screenwriter Frank Nugent adapted the story from Alan LeMay’s original 1954 novel of the same name. Nugent recalls, “He [Ford] gave me a list of about 50 books to read—memoirs, novels, anything about the period. […] Ford asked me if I thought I had enough research. I said yes. ‘Good,’ he said. ‘Now just forget everything you’ve read and we’ll start writing a movie.’”¹¹⁹ While this typical Fordian method is haphazard at best, most of LeMay’s story remained in final screenplay.¹²⁰ To compose the score, executive producer Merian C. Cooper (against Ford’s wishes) contracted Steiner as a favor for an old friend struggling with the new movies and scoring of the 1950s.¹²¹ Ford previously worked with Steiner on The Lost Patrol (1934) and The Informer (1935), and was well aware of his wall-to-wall-music methods. But as discussed in Chapter Two, Ford


¹²¹ This claim is based on a supposition by Jame D’Arc in the liner notes to the 1996 rerelease of the original The Searchers soundtrack—though details about how Steiner became involved remain unclear. Steiner and Cooper worked together on King Kong (1933), significantly launching both of their careers. See James V. D’Arc, “Max Steiner & The Searchers,” liner notes in “The Searchers” Composed & Conducted by Max Steiner (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University/Film Music Archives, 1996), 9.
generally limited music in his Westerns, and he expressed distaste when the *Searchers* score was finished.\(^\text{122}\) Steiner was not to be swayed, however; in a 1967 interview, he boasted of his stubbornness in saying, “I don’t let anybody ever tell me anything. They have no… no influence at all.”\(^\text{123}\) In response, Ford made severe cuts, leaving Steiner to discover during a preview of the film that sections of his score were missing.\(^\text{124}\)

Despite his differences with Steiner, Ford maintained the upper hand, and even coerced him into breaking two of his cardinal rules of composition. On his compositional method Steiner writes, “I never use music people have heard before because it may detract from concentrating on the film.”\(^\text{125}\) Against these words, and perhaps at Ford’s command, Steiner recycled much of *The Searchers*’ “Indian music” from his earlier work on *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941)—cues that provided influential models for many later film composers.\(^\text{126}\) Steiner further explains his methodology as such: “I do not use anyone else’s music in my scores unless there is a direct reference or if another composer’s work is called for in the script.”\(^\text{127}\) But as in all of Ford’s Westerns, *The Searchers* incorporates several period songs that are otherwise uncharacteristic of

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123. Schreibman, “On Gone with the Wind,” 42.
124. In a letter to Steiner, producer C.V. Whitney writes, “I can assure you that the end result is typically American. This, I am sure, is what Mr. Ford wanted to achieve, and I feel he has done it. For my part, I understand your criticism. I am satisfied, however, that the mood of reality in the picture is furthered by Mr. Ford’s cuts.” Letter, C.V. Whitney to Max Steiner, December 5, 1955, Steiner Collection, Box 4 Folder 1, quoted in D’Arc, “Max Steiner & *The Searchers*,” 9.
126. This comment comes from film composer John Morgan as quoted in Jon Burlingame, *Sound and Vision: Sixty Years of Motion Picture Soundtracks* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 2000): 171. Steiner’s score for *They Died with Their Boots On* also makes use of period songs such as “Garry Owen” (heard also in *The Searchers*), and “Boots and Saddles.”
127. Steiner *Film Score*, 80.
Steiner.\textsuperscript{128} That Steiner broke two of his composing principles for \textit{The Searchers} suggests that an obstinate Ford wielded ultimate control over the score, seeing his wishes through to fruition.

Regardless of the quarrels, the score succeeds in creating subconscious links between the white and Indian characters; that is, it confirms a new level of sympathy in Ford’s Western filmography.

**Laurie as Man, Martin as Squaw**

Laurie Jorgensen (Vera Miles) and Martin Pawley (Jeffrey Hunter) present clear examples of Ford’s disintegrating archetypes. Women in Westerns, especially early Westerns, hold distinct positions in the home and the community. The three conventional roles are exemplified by \textit{Stagecoach}: the faithful wife (Lucy Mallory), the righteous harpy (the Ladies Law and Order League), and the prostitute (Dallas). Laurie transcends such conventions, as she is a strong individual akin to the ornery Mrs. Klenner (Edna May Oliver) in \textit{Drums Along the Mohawk} (1939). Indeed, she possesses many qualities associated with the Western male character, and her love interest, Martin, exhibits many of the feminine traits. In a society crippled by fears of miscegenation, Martin’s Cherokee lineage poses several issues for his relationship with the white Laurie, who is herself racist. Yet it is their gender reversal that makes this love between races more acceptable.

\textsuperscript{128} Incorporated into the film score are “Bonnie Blue Flag,” “Garry Owen,” “Jubilo,” “The Girl I Left Behind Me,” “Lorena,” “The Yellow Rose of Texas,” “Shall We Gather at the River,” and “Skip to my Lou.” See Kalinak, \textit{How the West}, 161.
Laurie’s masculinity reveals itself through a unique adaptation of Ford’s popular doorway motif. The visual motif of a doorway is a Fordian staple comprised of a high-contrast shot of an exterior from within a darkened interior. Fences were utilized as the doorways in *Stagecoach* in order to juxtapose safety with the wilderness; in *The Searchers*, however, doorways indicate a darker meaning. Here, Ford’s doorways symbolize the thresholds to spaces prone to invasion: rooms, houses, teepees, caves, and even wombs. Peter Lehman notes that enclosed in each space is safety, darkness, and warmth, and in *The Searchers*, all are easily threatened by foreign assault.\(^{129}\) The door that opens at the outset of the film guards the Edwardses’ home, a home that presents several points of vulnerability: Aaron and Martha’s bedroom (susceptible to Ethan’s longing), Lucy and Debbie (vulnerable to capture and rape), and the house itself (in danger of an Indian raid).\(^{130}\) Later in the film, Ethan and Martin find refuge (protection) from an Indian attack in a cave—an inherently dark and damp space. Lehman reads this incident broadly—“this then is a film about men who actively move between and into womb-like spaces, at times forcing their way in”—describing Ethan’s final entry into Scars tent (on a horse, no less) as a violent “animalistic image of spatial violation and penetration.”\(^{131}\)

If *The Searchers* is indeed about men and wombs, then Laurie’s physical action alone establishes her masculinity. Just as Ethan, Martin, and Scar trespass intimate enclosures, Laurie commits her share of spatial violations. This violation is first seen first

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130. At one point, Ford shoots the Edwardses’ bedroom through two doorways. For Lehman, the shot presents a “doubly intense aura of the intimacy inaccessible to Ethan.” Lehman, “Ford and the Auteur,” 215.
when Ethan and Martin return to the Jorgensens’ for a short stay after some years of searching. The first scene after their arrival shows Laurie carrying two pails of water directly into the bedroom where Martin is bathing. Laurie violates the most intimate of rooms with a smile on her face, while Martin reacts as a modest woman would by covering himself up to the neck with a towel. Laurie notes his feminine response (blushing), saying, “What are you gettin’ so red in the face about? I got brothers, ain’t I?” After a short rebuttal, she retreats enough to acknowledge her womanhood: “I’m a woman […] We women wash and mend your dirty clothes all your lives. When you're little we even wash you.” But with their conversation over, Laurie pretends to exit the room by shutting the door and when Martin finally feels secure, Laurie once again foils the protection of the space by dumping a pail of water over his head.

This short scene establishes Laurie’s machismo and therefore her dominance in their relationship. She assumes a position traditionally reserved for males and does so by forcing herself into places of protection. Later during the same visit, she rapaciously barrels into the Martin’s room with clean clothes, and again he covers himself with a blanket. Before she leaves the room, she plants a kiss on his mouth. Martin not only lies subject to Laurie’s authority but also to her physicality. Similarly, when she learns of his plans to continue searching, she pushes him over; and as he leaves, she forcefully throws a rifle at him. In Westerns, violence in relationships had been a typical right of men, as in *Drums Along the Mohawk* when Gilbert Martin (Henry Fonda) is presented with a beating stick to keep his wife obedient—ostensibly a joke, but carrying a hint of seriousness. By transferring these attributes to Laurie, Ford codes her as a man.
Waiting is an attribute of the Western female Laurie foregoes. Women in Westerns wait, at home or elsewhere, while their partner leaves (to work, fight, etc.); they must remain faithful to their men. In the previously discussed scene, we learn that Laurie and Martin are going steady, but after Martin leaves again Laurie quits waiting and nearly marries the buffoon Charlie McCorry (Ken Curtis). After five years, Martin returns, as fate would have it, on Laurie and Charlie’s wedding night. It is Martin who must reconstruct the relationship by pleading for her affection. As Martin and Charlie fight for Laurie it becomes clear that neither contender is skilled at the manly art of combat (a requisite of Western male heroes). Once the struggle is over and Charlie calls off the wedding, Laurie forbids Martin from returning to the search. This last decree reveals the full extent of Laurie’s masculinity.

It is telling that Laurie is the only character who matches the racist intensity of Ethan’s hatred toward Indians. Her menacing undertones boil over when she pleads with Martin to stay:

Laurie: It’s too late, [Debbie is] a woman grown now.

Martin: I gotta go, Laurie. I’ve gotta fetch her home.

Laurie: Fetch what home? The leavings of Comanche bucks sold time and again to the highest bidder with savage brats of her own? Do you know what Ethan will do if he has a chance? He’ll put a bullet in her brain. I tell you, Martha would want him to.
Here, Laurie expresses what Joan Dagle calls the “socially accepted racism of the white community.”\(^{132}\) Not only is her outrage an embodiment of white society, but the strength of her hatred also matches Ethan’s, the male hero. Perhaps, as Elise Marubbio asserts, Laurie’s racism stems from “jealousy and thwarted sexual desire” of a race notorious in the film for taking sex at will.\(^{133}\) She does everything she can to keep Martin near, but does not possess the ability to exert sexual domination. Interestingly, the racist in Laurie is capable of overlooking Martin’s Cherokee ancestry. In fact, Martin’s femininity works along with Laurie’s masculinity to create an inverted instance of miscegenation, with Martin functioning as a squaw.\(^{134}\)

In Westerns, miscegenation between a white male and Indian woman is considered less deplorable than the opposite. With Martin’s feminine qualities, the balance is made right for his relationship with Laurie. Martin’s female attributes are highlighted by his association with Look. Of the five primary comic characters in *The Searchers* (Martin Pawley, Mose Harper, Charlie McCorry, Reverend Captain Samuel Johnston Clayton, and Look), only two are considered Indian: Martin and Look. Look (discussed more extensively below) is a Comanche woman traded inadvertently into marriage with Martin. When Martin writes of the misunderstanding to Laurie (his only letter in five years), she reacts with rage: “A little Comanche squaw. *Squaw*?!” Look’s comic physicality and simple-minded behavior match Martin’s visual gags and naïveté.

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134. I here use the derogatory term “squaw” due to Ford’s use of the term both in *Stagecoach* with Yakima and in *The Searchers* with the character of Look.
Martin and Look’s shared qualities—feminine, comic, subservient, and Indian—hence bind them together. The rage exhibited by Laurie upon discovering Look seems incongruous with her ability to love a character of similar race. In Martin’s case, however, his cultural trespassing and white upbringing allow her to bend the rule.

Having detailed one example of race and gender reversal, I consider in the following sections some ways in which the music reinforces the overt and covert cultural doublings of the film.

**Martin and Debbie: Cultural Trespassing**

Cultural trespassing is an important theme in *The Searchers*. Comanche tribesmen trespass into white homes, taking children captive, and white men trespass into Indian camps to resolve the conflict. These cases of invasion drive the story, but Martin and Debbie’s portrayals require a broader understanding of trespassing and cultural Otherness. Martin’s cultural identity remains ambiguous throughout the film; we learn that Ethan found him as a child after his family was murdered by Comanches and took him to live with the Edwards family. Thus the racially mixed Martin, one-fourth Cherokee, is adopted into a white family.\(^{135}\) Debbie, conversely, is white and ends up adopted (forcibly) into an Indian family. The parallel was an element introduced by Ford, who changed Martin’s purely white makeup in the original novel. In his essay “Darkening Ethan,” Arthur Eckstein traces the story’s evolution from LeMay’s original novel to Nugent’s final script overseen by Ford, concluding that Ford changed Martin’s

\(^{135}\) In his first scene Martin claims to be one-eighth Cherokee, but later in the film Ethan (the man with seemingly limitless knowledge of Indian matters) describes him as one-fourth.
race in order to establish this narrative link with Debbie. The director likely meant to create a mirror of sympathy and understanding for something that could easily be interpreted as wholly reprehensible: Debbie’s upbringing in an Indian culture.

Aside from his dark complexion and bareback horse-riding, Martin represents the success of cultural assimilation by exhibiting few Indian qualities. Thanks to visual coding, Ethan’s constant ridicule of his non-white status does not interfere with our sense that Martin is fully assimilated. In contrast, Debbie represents the failures of cultural assimilation. Like Martin, she learns the ways of her new culture and becomes a functioning member of their society as one of Scar’s wives. She knows the Comanche language, wears their traditional dress, and when discovered by Ethan and Martin she declares her allegiance by saying, “These are my people. Unt-mea. Go. Go, Martin. Please.” She seemingly accepts her life as a Comanche, and yet when Martin attempts to rescue her a second time, she replies to his, “I’m going to get you out of here, Debbie,” with “Oh yes, Marty. Oh yes, Marty.” In the end, she willfully rides back with Ethan to the Jorgensens’ home—the conversion was unsuccessful.

Tag Gallagher lists important questions raised by this conclusion: “Does Debbie want to go home? Can she be a white woman? Have not the whites destroyed her second family much as the Reds destroyed her first family?” Ford leaves these open for interpretation, but apparently her reentry into white society is possible only through

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137. As Brian Henderson notes, “It is Indians who ride bareback and, in American mythology, it is only Indians who are completely at one with the environment.” Brian Henderson, “The Searchers: An American Dilemma,” Film Quarterly 34, no. 2 (Winter, 1980-81), 15.
138. In the original novel, Debbie is Scar’s adopted daughter, not his wife. She views him only as a father figure and never engage in sexual relations. See Eckstein, “Darkening Ethan,” 7.
Martin’s determination to rescue rather than kill. Adding the element of Martin’s mixed race to LeMay’s novel is therefore necessary for Debbie’s survival. As Dagle asserts, “It is Marty’s ‘hybridity’ that allows him to resist Ethan’s and Laurie’s characterization of Debbie and that prevents him from desiring revenge […]. Debbie and Marty, then, stand opposed to the ideology of ‘racial purity.’” Ford’s decision to make the two most lovable characters racially tolerant cultural hybrids has led many to suppose that he was commenting on the civil rights movement of the fifties and early sixties; however, he also seems to be making a statement on the dangers of assimilation.

Because neither character is fully of one culture, neither is given a distinct musical theme—as was the case for the Indian scout in Stagecoach. For Martin’s filmic entrance, a jocular melody plays as he rides his horse up to the Edwardses’ home; this tune gives the impression of a leitmotif, but the material never returns. Even the key of this would-be theme, F major, is used only once again in the film. Some, including Kalinak, believe that the folksong “Lorena” serves as Debbie’s theme. “Lorena” is indeed a theme used frequently in The Searchers, and on occasion it is associated with Debbie. But the theme is first heard as Martha sees Ethan arrive; thus it initially serves as Martha’s theme or represents the love she and Ethan share. Its return when Martha leads Ethan into her house, then, continues as Ethan lifts Debbie up, visually anticipating the end of the movie when Ethan again holds up Debbie while “Lorena” is played.

141. F major is implemented a second time for the tune “Garry Owen,” which accompanies the Seventh Cavalry’s procession with a captive Comanche tribe. Historically, “Garry Owen” was the Seventh Cavalry’s official song.
143. In his discussion of Steiner’s cue sheet, Jack Smith labels “Lorena” as Martha’s theme. See Jack Smith, “Well, Mr. Steiner, have you ever scored a western?” liner notes in “The Searchers” Composed & Conducted by Max Steiner, 17.
passionately by the violins to creating an aural match. However, the adulterous subject of
the lyrics (We loved each other then, Lorena; More than we ever dared to tell; And what
might have been, Lorena; Had but our lovings prospered well), along with the action of
the scenes in which the theme occurs, suggests that the theme belongs to Martha rather
than to Debbie.

“Lorena” occurs fourteen times within the film, making it the most frequent
theme used. Seven of the instances take place when Ethan is either visually present with
Martha or thinking about her (e.g. when he sees Aaron and Martha enter their bedroom,
or when he realizes his mistake in leaving the ranch vulnerable to attack). The remaining
seven instances occur when Debbie is visually present or when Ethan is talking about the
missing girls. After Martha’s death, her theme is passed to Debbie, who represents a
familial outlet for the affection Ethan once held for Martha. The thematic residue of
Martha is thus triggered whenever Ethan interacts with Debbie.144 Because the theme
being used with Debbie is contingent upon Ethan’s memory of Martha, it cannot serve as
Debbie’s, who has no theme of her own.

Neither Martin nor Debbie possess a musical identity precisely because their
identity is constantly in question: Martin is both Indian and white, a man and yet
feminine, humorous and heroic; Debbie is both a white woman and an Indian squaw, a
child and a grown woman, the living memory of her mother and a wife of her own. The
characters’ volatility makes it impossible to hold them down with a single theme, and

144. In fact, the line at the end when Ethan says, “Let’s go home Debbie,” was altered from the
Nugent’s script in which he says, “You sure favor your mother.” The original script would better link this
occurrence of “Lorena” to Martha, but the meaning remains in the latter version. On the original line, see
Scott Eyman, Print the Legend: The Life and Times of John Ford (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999),
447.
therefore they are not given one. Themes are reserved for more consistent characters such as Martha and Look, whose themes tie them together as white-Indian parallels.

**Martha, Look, and Ethan’s Women**

Look and Martha appear dissimilar on the surface but actually share many attributes. Both assume the traditional feminine roles of Westerns: Martha remains loyal to Aaron even though she loves Ethan, and Look is compliant with her male elders’ wishes by willfully accepting her marriage to Martin—once married she shows affection and subservience to her new husband. Occasionally, both women are separated from the object of their love before ultimately being murdered by men of their cultural opposite. Similar melodic motives are given to both characters’ themes, creating not only a bond between themselves, but also a shared connection to Ethan.

Of Ethan and Martha’s affair, Ford stated: “Well, I thought it was pretty obvious—that his brother’s wife was in love with Wayne; you couldn’t hit it on the nose, but I think it’s very plain to anyone with any intelligence.”

145. There are many visual clues that tell this unspoken tale (stolen glances, prolonged contact, and visual framing of the pair), and there is also telling dialogue. When Ethan first arrives at the Edwardses’ home, Aaron inquires why Ethan had been around their ranch so long before the war. The question goes unanswered, suggestively strengthening the popular theory that Debbie is a

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product of an affair. Later when Ethan returns to the decimated ranch house, he screams for Martha’s name only, whereas the original script has him calling for Lucy and Debbie, not Martha. Filmmaker Brian Huberman remembers a conversation in 1975 in which Wayne admitted, “[Ethan] was no villain. He was a man living in his times. The Indians fucked his wife. What would you have done?” This unabashed admission suggests that Wayne interpreted Martha as his wife. Therefore, in retribution for Martha’s rape and murder, Ethan initiates the crusade to kill Debbie once she reaches sexual maturity to prevent the Indians from once again “fucking” Martha—or rather, her emotional replacement Debbie.

Look, the tragicomic character, stands in opposition to Martha. The circumstance in which she becomes married to Martin—being traded for “lard-type hog” blue ribbons and hats—establishes her as a comic character. Once made aware of the transaction’s significance, Ethan teases Martin by calling Look “Mrs. Pawley.” Her name, itself a joke, is adopted after Martin continually explains the misunderstanding to her, “Hey, Look…” She responds to Martin in her native language, which Ethan interprets: “She says her name is Wild Goose Flying in the Night Sky, but she’ll answer to ‘Look’ if that pleases

146. Ethan is around the ranch house prior to the Civil War and does not return until three years afterwards, for a total of seven years—roughly the age of Debbie. Had Martha conceived Debbie during the pre-war visit, it would explain Ethan’s inability to recognize the child.
149. It is also possible that Ford had directed this information to Wayne in order achieve an appropriate emotion.
150. According to Anthony Oliver Scott, Ethan’s somewhat nefarious character type has its roots in the Western literary tradition: “The solitary, self-sufficient, often morally ambiguous figure—a man of violence with a shadowy background and a haunting look in his eyes—can trace his literary parentage back to Leatherstockings, the peripatetic hero of James Fenimore Cooper’s novels of 18th-century frontier adventure.” See Scott, “The Searchers,” 26.
151. This scene is important in the canon of Ford films in that it continues a trend started in of his cavalry trilogy (Fort Apache, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, and Rio Grande) of showing not only peaceable female Indians, but also male.
you.” In one final gag, Look tries to join Martin in bed, to which he responds by violently kicking her out; Ethan laughs as she rapidly rolls off screen. Yet despite her function as a comic character, Look ultimately represents all the violated women through her tragic demise.

For a film so fueled by acts of brutal savagery, *The Searchers* shows very little violence. This choice requires the audience to envision and become participants in the storytelling. As Curtis Hanson comments, “One of the things you realize is that the violence in the movie is so dark and affecting partly because you don’t see it.” Peter Bogdanovich explains that this allows Ford to tell a much more disturbing story because the images conjured up in one’s mind are worse than anything allowed on screen. For example, after Ethan arrives at the Edwardses’ burning ranch house, he picks up a bloodied dress (presumably Martha’s) and enters the house to discover that Martha was raped and murdered. No bodies are shown, and when Martin tries to enter the house, Ethan prevents even him from viewing the carnage. Likewise, in the end when Martin shoots Scar, Ford shows only a pistol firing; and when Ethan scalps Scar’s lifeless (non-bloodied) body, Ford cuts away just after Ethan pulls out his knife. Only when Ethan and Martin discover Look’s dead body, in a Comanche camp destroyed by the Seventh Cavalry, do we actually see the result of violence.

The scene begins with the pair riding past two dead Indians lying on the ground beside lifeless horses—teepees charred and smoldering in the background. We then see a close-up of a Comanche woman with a cavalry saber protruding form her chest. Ethan

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enters a teepee where he discovers Look, dead and clutching the hat that symbolized her union with Martin. In a rare moment of compassion, Ethan dusts the hat off and gingerly covers her with a blanket. Lehman points out the peculiarity that while neither the bodies of Martha nor Lucy are shown, “here we see him [Ethan] with an Indian woman for whom, until this moment, he has shown no genuine feeling.” In this instant, Ethan recognizes the parallel of Look’s death with the senseless death of Martha, and he experiences an emotional response similar to what he felt after Martha’s death. Ford shows only the violence of white men to prove that they are equally capable of savagery but also to grant the audience a moment of proper mourning for Martha through the aid of Look as her tragic parallel.

Look’s two-part musical theme occurs only four times in guises that match the character’s evolution from comic to tragic (Examples 3.1 and 3.2). For its initial occurrence, part 1 is upbeat and bouncy, accompanied by steady quarter notes in the harp and finger cymbals; part 2 is more comic-sounding thanks to the bassoon and oom-pah accompaniment (finger cymbals and harp now on the off-beats). In its second appearance, only part 2 (the more playful part) is used, featuring dream-like arpeggios as Martin and Ethan discover that Look was sold into marriage. In the third iteration, a now more feminine, lyrical part is featured as she begins assuming her spousal duties. Curiously, the oom-pah pattern of part 2 is now gone and the finger cymbals and harp now maintain the downbeat, diminishing Look’s comic effect as her kind demeanor is revealed. For its fourth occurrence when her body is discovered, a solo flute plays the part 1 melody with

155. Martin also exhibits a change by saying, “What did them those soldiers have to go and kill her for, Ethan? She never done nobody any harm.”


Example 3.3: *The Searchers*, Martha’s theme, “Lorena.”

a lowered second scale-degree, while part 2 contains sorrowful, thinly-scored strings—both at a slower tempo.

Martha’s theme (Example 3.3) goes through similar emotional transformations, musically highlighting her parallel with Look. The first five instances of her theme are in the major mode and occur while Martha is still alive. Once Ethan separates from Martha, the theme is heard four times in the minor mode: to foreshadow her death, comment on Ethan’s emotion, and recall the brutal murder. Conversely, when Debbie is found for the first time, the major mode returns (and remains indefinitely) as she runs down the sand dune toward Ethan and Martin. Its final three occurrences, after she is fully rescued and brought “home,” are also in major.
The similar musical makeup of their themes reinforces Martha and Look as cultural parallels. Each theme relies on dotted rhythmic figures, which are otherwise seldom employed in the score. Martha’s theme uses a long-short pattern, whereas parts 1 and 2 of Look’s use short-long. The melodies likewise show a strikingly similar intervallic structure. “Lorena” contains an ascending leap of a major sixth followed by a descending major third and minor third, while part 1 of Look’s theme leaps up a perfect fifth and descends with a major second and minor third. Temporal spacing, repetition, and scale-degree functions mask these melodic similarities, but when pared down to essentials emphasize the parallel function of the two characters.

Ethan’s compulsion to see Martha in nearly every woman provides her with many substitutes and allows for musical links to be created among the three main female characters. In different ways, Debbie and Look recall elements of Martha that Ethan cannot forget. For his part, Ethan too is matched with an Indian equivalent: Scar. In fact, Ethan provides the film’s most interesting example of cultural duality, not only through his analog (Scar), but also in his progression toward a calloused villainy conventionally reserved for Indians.

Ethan Becoming Scar

Gallagher explains that unlike the Apaches of Stagecoach, “the Comanche are not linked to absolute wilderness but to their own, rival culture.”\textsuperscript{156} In fact, the Comanche culture shares many similar values with the whites such as gender distinctions, honor, and

revenge through violence. Beyond actions, however, the two cultures are distinctly coded through visual means (dress and color palette) and through sound (language and music). Ford thus challenges his audience to recognize the similarities within the differences and weigh the values of character over cosmetics. To press this issue, Ethan possesses a mixture of these visual and aural elements, making his cultural and racial identity difficult to assess.

Scar provides Ethan with a cultural parallel (the most prominent of the film) who represents his subconscious and thereby dismantles a racial exclusivity. Ford establishes this relation through visual and musical means as well as through shared personality traits—the first of which is their transient nature. The lyrics of the title song establish Ethan as a wanderer by accompanying his initial emergence from the landscape and reappearing throughout the film as a symbol of his ceaseless searching:

What makes a man to wander?
What makes a man to roam?
What makes a man leave bed and board,
and turn his back on home?

Kalinak explains that like Ethan, his cultural mirror Scar is a perpetual wanderer, a nomadic Nawyecky Comanche. The two have no designated home to which to return, and therefore once Ethan accomplishes the task of rescuing Debbie, he is seen walking away back into the desert, ultimately wandering until his death.

Beyond his character, Ethan’s appearance exemplifies his duality. Throughout much of the film, he is seen grasping a rifle enclosed in a fringed buckskin sheath (buckskin and fringe being traditionally associated with Native Americans). Lehman

points out that Ethan wears colors coded as both Anglo and Indian: blues, whites, and yellows, signal the former while reds indicate the latter (Lehman makes specific mention of the “unnatural red light” prior to the Edwardsess massacre). For nearly the first half of the film, Ethan wears a red shirt with yellow suspenders, a combination that, for Lehman, “is echoed in Scar’s yellow and red war paint.” Later, Ethan wears a red gingham shirt that not only signals Indian but recalls the cloth young Debbie wears around her neck in the beginning (a detail that foretells her eventual capture and identity with Indians). However, when Ethan is not donning red, he wears blue to stress his contrasting identity. Ford’s many cross-cuts of Ethan and Scare further establish this duality, namely during the first gunfight and his throughout their meeting in Scar’s teepee.

Aurally, Ethan breaks cultural barriers through his ability to speak and understand the Comanche language. In fact, he possesses a seemingly comprehensive knowledge of Native American culture—he identifies a tribe based solely on the style of a lance, he understands their religious beliefs, and often serves as translator between Look and Martin. But from where did Ethan acquire this information? In trying to unravel this mystery, Dagle presents a provocative theory suggesting Ethan’s intimate relationship with an Indian woman. When finally confronting Scar, Ethan observes, “You speak good American for a Comanch’; someone teach ya?” For Dagle, “the accusation is clear: Scar

159. Ibid.
161. In a particularly disturbing scene, Ethan’s search party discovers a dead Comanche. Ethan promptly pulls out his gun and shoots its eyes saying, “ain’t got no eyes, he can’t enter the spirit land. He has to wander forever between the winds.”
learned English from his white (female, sexual) captive, Debbie.”162 As the scene continues, Scar returns the accusation: “You speak good Comanche; someone teach you?” Dagle explains: “given the logic of the text’s ‘rhyming patterns’ and the ‘mirroring’ of Scar and Ethan (and even the unexplained source of Ethan’s knowledge of Comanche culture), the reciprocal nature of the insult is clear and stunning. Scar is accusing Ethan of having learned Comanche through intimacy with a Comanche woman.”163 Before I provide additional examples of aural coding it is worth pausing to further evaluate this proposition, because it fundamentally alters the way in which Ethan has traditionally been understood.

Is it possible for a man with such hatred toward Indians to have had an intimate relationship with one? Ford leaves holes in the Ethan’s backstory that might accommodate such a theory. Providing possible support for Dagle’s allegation is the father-son relationship that develops between Ethan and Martin. If Ethan were read as Martin’s biological father, it would confirm his relationship with an Indian woman, as Martin is part Cherokee. To that end, Aaron points out at the dinner scene that Ethan rescued Martin as a child: “it was Ethan who found you squalling under a sage clump after your folks had been massacred.” Aaron leaves room for Ethan to elaborate, but he responds in a notably cold tone: “it just happened to be me. No need to make more of it.” Later, when Martin calls Ethan “uncle,” he suggestively replies, “I’m not your uncle.”

A blood kinship between Ethan and Martin would explain why he “just happened” to rescue Martin and would also shed further light on Ethan’s well-established

163. Ibid.
hatred of the Comanches. Late in the film Ethan recalls the scene in which Scar proudly displays three scalps. Ethan asks Martin, “you remember that scalp strung on Scar’s lance, long and wavy? It was your mother’s.” Lehman aptly questions, “why, if she had been just a casual acquaintance, does he immediately recognize it after all these years?”

In fact, the first scalp appears to be Lucy’s blonde hair and the second, Martha’s brunette. This leaves the third to be from Martin’s mother with its black color matching the typical hair color of Native Americans. The scalps thus present a visual history of barbarism against the women in Ethan’s life.

There exists, it appears, a cycle of tragedy concerning Ethan and women. Comanches first murder his supposed wife (Martin’s Cherokee mother), then his beloved Martha, and finally his niece Lucy. With this series of losses in mind, Wayne’s crude remark on the violation of Ethan’s “wife” (see note 148), takes on a new significance. A history such as this could harden a man enough to enact a five-year search to prevent the cycle from continuing. Courtney declares, “it is hard not to read Ethan’s ability to recognize a long since dead woman’s scalp as a sign (however unconventional) of remarkable intimacy.”

Ford’s decision to show Ethan’s emotional response to Look’s death, would in turn explain for the scene’s emotional power. This untold relationship between Ethan and Martin’s mother, though not explicitly depicted, becomes the most fascinating example of miscegenation in the film.

Returning once again to Ethan’s Indian associations, elements of Steiner’s score establish his subconscious Other as Scar. In discussions of the music, Ethan has

traditionally been associated with the title song “The Searchers.” Beyond the opening
credits, the song is heard when Aaron discovers Ethan’s “fresh-minted” coins, suggesting
he stole them and is on the run (answering the question “what makes a man to wander?”).
Subsequent iterations of the theme are assigned only to moments of transit when Ethan
trudges on in search of Debbie. Kalinak claims that “The Searchers” is Ethan’s leitmotif,
but its implementation suggests that theme is only symbolic of Ethan’s, and in some
circumstances Martin’s, search. Perhaps the leitmotif belongs to the audience more than
to Ethan, as we are the ones to ask the questions of the song—we want to know the
motives behind Ethan’s quest. Freeing Ethan from this theme allows him to begin the
film unmarked and gain Scar’s theme as he acquires the associated characteristics.

For instances of Ethan’s savagery, he is paired with the three-note motive first
associated with Scar. As Ethan becomes progressively violent, the theme becomes more
dissonant, treating Ethan and Scar as identical characters. In fact, many of Scar’s
transgressions can be linked literally or figuratively to Ethan. Many scholars (Buscombe,
Courtney, Dagle, Eckstein, Henderson, and Lehman, to name a few) agree that Scar is a
manifestation of Ethan’s repressed and unacceptable sexual desire, libido, or Freudian
id. The varied readings accept that what Ethan wants most is to destroy Aaron’s family
and take Martha (and perhaps all women) for himself as Scar has done, but that wish
remains suppressed. As the film progresses, however, I would argue that Ethan’s
resistance breaks down and he begins acting upon his innate desires as when mercilessly

166. See Edward Buscombe, The Searchers (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), 21; Courtney,
“Looking,” 112; Dagle, “Linear Patterns,” 112; Eckstein, “Darkening Ethan,” 3; and Henderson, “The
Searchers,” 14.
shooting at a retreating tribe, killing buffalo to deplete the Indian food supply, and attempting to shoot Debbie to prevent Scar from having her.

By the end of the film, Ethan assumes Scar’s identity, thereby removing the need for a figure to stand in for his repressed desires. He consummates the transformation with the most brutal form of savagery by scalping the already-dead Scar. Eckstein notes that Ford added this scene to the script with severe consequences for Ethan’s nature as hero: “mutilations like this completely contradict the heroic code of behavior.”\(^{167}\) However, scalping Scar is essential for Ethan’s return from madness. Edward Buscombe and Brian Henderson recognize it as an act of self-castration, ridding the world of a sexual threat that he himself represented.\(^{168}\) Only after this threat is removed can Ethan return to normalcy, as evidenced by his decision to save, rather than kill, Debbie. He commits no further crime at this point, and is finally disengaged from Scar’s theme; when his psychological Other is removed, so are the savage associations.

Scar’s theme is comprised of two descending intervals that span either a perfect fourth (P4) or a tritone (TT). It is typically heard at a piercing dynamic with tremolos and a chromatic ornamentation on the third note (Example 3.4 and 3.5). As Kalinak has

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**Example 3.4:** *The Searchers*, the two guises of Scar’s three-note theme.

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**Example 3.5:** *The Searchers*, Scar’s theme with the typical ornamentation.

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documented, the theme is a Steiner trademark for Indians, originating as Crazy Horse’s theme in *They Died with Their Boots On*.\(^{169}\) In *The Searchers* it is first heard foreshadowing of the attack on the Edwards ranch; the landscape is bathed in red light and low strings sustain a pedal while a solo flute plays the TT theme (Table 3.1). It anticipates the family’s demise at the hands of Scar. Upon Ethan’s survey of the damage, the TT theme returns with the full orchestra confirming the reference to Scar. Soon after, however, the theme transfers its representational power to Ethan; we hear a descending two-note TT as Mrs. Jorgensen explains that conducting a search would endanger all involved (including her son Brad, who is eventually killed by the Comanches). Ethan’s unwillingness to listen to reason, the first sign of his savage interior, thus finds expression in the music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVAL</th>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 TT</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Edwardses worry before Scar attacks their ranch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2º TT</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Ethan and Martin see the damage caused by Scar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3º TT</td>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Mrs. Jorgensen pleads with Ethan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 TT</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Close-up of Scar before the first chase scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5* TT</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Chase: Indians cross the river</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 TT</td>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Ethan shoots at retreating Comanche men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 P4 and TT</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Ethan finds Lucy dead, or perhaps he kills her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8* TT</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Laurie reads Martin’s letter aloud, saying: “Scar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 TT (x2)</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Martin says “Scar” to Ethan, then questions Look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 TT (x3)</td>
<td>Both</td>
<td>Ethan and Scar talk in the teepee—scalps present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 P4</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Scar and his men chase Ethan and Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 P4</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>Chase: Comanches charge at Ethan in the cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 TT</td>
<td>Scar</td>
<td>At his camp, Scar throws a rock at a dog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 TT</td>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Ethan scalps the already-dead Scar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15º n/a</td>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>Ethan exits teepee with scalp in hand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.1* Occurrences of Scar’s theme: intervallic span, character with which each is associated, and a brief description of the on-screen action during each instance.

*Special treatment of the theme with additional closing material

º Partial theme, still with a descending trill figure

During the first chase Scar is twice matched with the TT theme, as expected. The next occurrence is reserved for Ethan as he continually shoots at the retreating tribe. We hear the savagely harsh TT version as Ethan’s eyes blaze with unbridled fury and he continues shooting against Reverend Captain Clayton’s orders. The varied readings of the next scene indicate the theme’s referential ambiguity at this stage. Ethan follows a trail into a canyon and returns visibly disturbed as he collapses and begins digging his knife into the sand. Later he admits, “I found Lucy back in the canyon, wrapped her in my coat, [and] buried her with my own hands.” Given Lucy’s sexually maturity and Ethan’s plans for Debbie, one might plausibly read Ethan’s trauma in the canyon as the result of having just found and killed his own niece. Just as Lady Macbeth cannot wash her guilty hands, Ethan persistently digs his knife into the sand as if to clean it (and his consciousness) of Lucy’s blood. Scar’s theme is repeated twice as Ethan rides off into the canyon—first as a P4 and then a TT—suggesting a darkening of Ethan’s character and signaling his murder of Lucy or, at the very least, his discovery of her body.

The next stage of the theme’s musico-dramatic development occurs when Ethan and Martin meet with Scar in his teepee. Ethan takes note of four women in the corner of the teepee and asks, “are all those his wives?” Scar replies, “Two sons killed by white men. For each son, I take many [scalps].” After this he orders one of his wives to bring a lance decorated with scalps as proof. Ethan and Martin look first at the scalps and then at the woman holding the lance only to discover Debbie. Timpani and low brass punctuate the shock as the violins, in unison, play the TT Scar theme three times: first while showing Ethan’s face, second while showing Scar’s, and third while cross-cutting the
pair. Here, both Ethan’s urge to kill Lucy and Scar’s visible brutality are simultaneously expressed by the theme.

Notions of right and wrong are obscured because of the revelation that Scar’s violence stems from a retaliation for his murdered sons. Scar’s image is therefore softened through sympathy. The following two pairings of Scar with his theme respond with the less-dissonant P4. In contrast, the penultimate iteration of the theme accompanying Ethan uses the TT as he scalps Scar. Then, as he rides out of the teepee, only the initial descending m2 of the theme sounds, with a similar orchestration and key. As “savage Ethan” fades and “normal Ethan” returns, the theme seemingly breaks down. We thus complete a transformation in which Scar’s theme becomes less dissonant as he becomes less villainous and Ethan’s theme becomes more dissonant until his symbolic self-castration.

Cultural mirrors are numerous in *The Searchers*, contrasting white society with a fully realized Indian society. On an individual level Ford links characters through parallel storylines and visual aids—Debbie and Martin, Martha and Look, and Ethan and Scar. Steiner’s score supports these mirrored relationships through absence of themes, shared melodic bases, and dual appropriation of themes, respectively. The racial boundaries that Ford began stretching in his earlier films—*Stagecoach* and specifically the sympathetic portrayal of Indians in the cavalry trilogy—are here completely dismantled. In *The Searchers*, distinctions between races are few, leading John Milius to suggest that this is a
film about “tribalism” rather than race. The two tribes may war with one another, but they remain part of a larger whole in which everyone is Indian. In the filmography of Ford, then, *The Searchers* provides an essential pivot between the white male viewpoint of prior Westerns and the reversal of an Indian viewpoint he depicts in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Disassembling Western archetypes enabled Ford to clear his palate for his final two Westerns free of restrictions.

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170. Hanson, “Searchers: An Appreciation.”
Epilogue

Changing Perspective: *Cheyenne Autumn*

The primary argument of this project is that Ford established complex depictions of Native Americans and continued breaking down racial barriers throughout his career. Upon close inspection, his use of music confirms Indian portrayals that challenge Western codes and draw explicit parallels between opposing characters and cultures. As one would expect, Ford’s next and final Western to include Indians, *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), follows this path and continues to stretch common practices of the genre. In this film Ford revives a common narrative practice of silent Westerns like *Ramona* (1910), *The Vanishing American* (1925), and *Redskin* (1929), by telling the story from the Indian’s perspective. Ford states: “There are two sides to every story, but I wanted to show their point of view for a change. Let’s face it, we’ve treated them very badly—it’s a blot on our shield.” Deconstructing the racial boundaries in *The Searchers*, therefore, provided Ford a pivot around which he shifts cultural viewpoint, allowing him to seamlessly traverse the gap between white and Indian perspectives.

With *Cheyenne Autumn*, Ford sought to create a realistic film that accurately represented Native Americans. The story’s tragic account of the government’s maltreatment of a small band Cheyennes was adapted from two well-researched historical novels: *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953) by Mari Sandoz and *The Last Frontier* (1941) by

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Howard Fast.\textsuperscript{172} After receiving inadequate food and supplies, the Cheyennes resolve to journey 1,500 miles from Oklahoma’s Indian Territory to their ancestral homelands in Wyoming, with many dying along the way. Ford’s sympathetic treatment of the Cheyenne people is profoundly different than his prior Westerns: they wear period-appropriate costumes, they speak in a real native language (Navajo), and Ford made a concerted effort to incorporate authentic Cheyenne music.\textsuperscript{173} Danny Borzage and Ken Darby researched and transcribed source music, and when Alex North signed on as the film’s composer, he took over the efforts.\textsuperscript{174} Despite Ford’s insistence, however, North’s final score contains very little authenticity. Kathryn Kalinak notes that, “in a score containing over an hour and a half of music, less than six minutes are comprised of actual Cheyenne chant.”\textsuperscript{175}

When Peter Bogdanovich asked Ford’s opinion of the music, to which he replied:

“I thought it was a bad score and there was too much of it—didn’t need it. Just like in The Searchers: with that music they should have been Cossacks instead of Indians.”\textsuperscript{176} It is no surprise that Ford disliked the score; not only had North cast aside months of research, 


\textsuperscript{173} Because the film was shot in Monument Valley, Ford once again employed his faithful Navajo friends to work as extras. This is the reason why a Navajo language is heard instead of a Cheyenne. Henryk Hoffmann notes that the Navajo actors were actually using inappropriate dialogue, which the production crew only became aware of after the early screenings. See Henryk Hoffmann, \textit{Western Movie References in American Literature} (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012): 32.

\textsuperscript{174} Kalinak, \textit{How the West}, 197–8. Danny Borzage, who often played accordion on the sets of Ford’s films, began the research as early as August 1963 and Ken Darby, a musician working for Warner Bros., aided by adapting “a number of authentic Cheyenne and Cree chants.” On January 29, 1964, two months after signing to the project, Alex North took over the research. Kalinak adds that Ford was still a big name in Hollywood during 1960s and that, “Warner Bros. waited for Ford to authorize North’s hiring personally before they signed him.”

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{176} Bogdanovich, \textit{John Ford}, 104.
but he employed a dense wall-to-wall scoring method that Ford so despised. But whereas in *The Searchers* a similar situation motivated Ford to make sizable cuts to the score, here he was denied the opportunity to make final edits to the film, which also explains its protracted length.\textsuperscript{177} In his review of North’s score Mark Hockley’s attests to these drawbacks: “this is a densely layered score that for all its artistic integrity is rather hard to sit through,” noting particularly the heavy use of dissonant brass as “assaulting [to] the senses.”\textsuperscript{178}

The film was a critical failure and the music was only partially to blame. Lindsay Anderson, in an interview with Harry Carry Jr., claimed that among the film’s major problems was, in fact, “all those Indian characters. It just didn’t work to have Dolores Del Rio and Victor Jory and Sal Mineo dressed up [as Cheyennes].” Carry agreed with the assessment and added, “he [Ford] would never have done that twelve or fifteen years before.”\textsuperscript{179} Carry’s comment is not quite accurate, since Ford commonly filled important roles with non-Indians (e.g. Henry Brandon as Scar in *The Searchers*), but he raises an important point: even though Ford sought a new level of authenticity, he still resorted to traditional casting practices by filling lead Indian roles with actors who were not Native American. This incongruity within his overarching aim for authenticity could be the result of actor preferences, studio contracts, or even a lack of American Indian actors at the time.

\textsuperscript{177} Kalinak, *How the West*, 196. Kalinak notes that Warner Bros. took charge of the final editing without Ford’s knowledge or approval.

\textsuperscript{178} Mark Hockley, “Alex North: *Cheyenne Autumn*,” Film Music on the Web (October, 2000). http://musicweb-international.com/film. It is possible that the dense texture resulted from the work of Harry Brant and Gil Grau, who orchestrated the score (neither are credited). See Kalinak, *How the West*, 198.

Regardless of its artistic and critical shortcomings, *Cheyenne Autumn* was a fitting last step in Ford’s increasingly sympathetic depictions of Indians. To this end, Andrew Sarris indicates that, “even in Ford’s most morbidly obsessive ruminations on the Redman […], he had always scrupulously respected the dignity and honour of the Other in the remorselessly racist dialect of the [Western] genre.”¹⁸⁰ Sarris’s statement emphasizes the challenge Ford undertook in his Westerns. Yet in an inherently racist genre, he consistently represented the Native American’s “very dignified culture,” while bringing awareness our many similarities.¹⁸¹

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