

**AN ADAPTATION OF ADAPTATIONS:
JOHN DEBNEY'S USE OF SOURCE MATERIAL IN THE JUNGLE BOOK**

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Introduction: Part I

Remakes, reboots, and adaptations are taking over the world. It seems there is not a single week that passes that does not give way to a “new” adaptation of someone else’s work. Think of the last 5 movies you have seen. How many of them were truly original ideas? 2017 alone has nearly 43 remakes, reboots, or adaptations scheduled already.¹ It seems certain that these pictographic “covers” have earned themselves a permanent spot on our movie watching agenda. And why not? They are low risk for the studio², and high reward for an audience. The effects, outcomes, and consequences of rehashing old film ideas have been discussed ad nauseum throughout western culture. Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos state that:

...Hollywood will always return to themes of cultural, historical, and mythological importance to Americans links the remake to standard production formulas, from genre pictures to series and sequels, to star vehicles that capitalize on a performer’s established persona, and to imitations of others studios’ successes.³

This idea, that Hollywood will continue to return to rehash old stories, as the proverb goes, “like a dog to its vomit,”⁴ is not explicitly a negative one though. “Hollywood has always had recourse to canned projects that promised to ensure stable audience attendance more than new

¹ Donna Dickens, *2017's Sequels, Reboots, And Remakes: The Complete Guide*, (UP-ROXX. January 05, 2017), <http://uproxx.com/movies/2017-sequels/>.

² Bohnenkampetal, *Remakes*, Marketing Center Münster, http://www.marketingcenter.de/lmm/research/publications/download/Bohnenkampetal_2014_JCE_Remakes.pdf.

³Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos, *Reviewing Remakes*, In *Dead Ringers: The Re-make in Theory and Practice*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002,) <http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/60448.pdf>.

⁴ “BibleGateway,” Proverbs 26:11 - - Bible Gateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs%2B26%3A11>.

and riskier projects.”⁵ And not many can blame them. Milton Friedman controversially states that the purpose of business is to “to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game”⁶ These remakes, reboots, and adaptations may very well not be wrong, or bad for the movie industry, as long as they do stay “within the rules of the game,” but they do leave the entirety of the film industry in something of a conundrum where we must continually work based of the original ideas of another. Is the process of adapting one film to another - and in effect, one score to another - a process which inherently diminishes the quality of the outcome? Can great work be done in the process of reboots, remakes, and re-hashes, or is the film music business destined to reprised old ideas?

Introduction: Part II

One such person to find themselves in this precarious position in recent history is John Debney, composer for the film *The Jungle Book*. *The Jungle Book*, and in turn - John Debney’s work, is the perfect catalyst for a quality discussion about the ins and outs of remaking a previous artistic work, whether that be film, music, photography, etc... This film and Debney’s work is appealing for this task for 3 specific reasons:

⁵ Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos, *Reviewing Remakes*, In *Dead Ringers: The Re-make in Theory and Practice*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002,) <http://www.sunypress.edu/pdf/60448.pdf>.

⁶ Milton Friedman and Rose D. Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

1. It is a quality work: Of course there is no way to state this objectively, but Debney's work on *The Jungle Book* is (subjectively) beautiful, is orchestrated well, uses ideas from the original works idiomatically, and works seamlessly with its subject material.
2. It was made recently: *The Jungle Book* was released on April 15, 2016. A little more than 1 year ago. This indicates that it is relevant to this discussion, as it will shed light on the current state of film-making.
3. It has been remade *several* times: This is beneficial to the discussion, because we can not only analyze the content of the most recent film, and its score in particular, but we can trace elements from the very first adaptation (of the book), to the very last (the 2016 film). This film is unique in its little place in history; It is an adaptation of a book, and a remake of a remade movie.

All of these elements lead to one conclusion, *The Jungle Book* is an excellent film with which to study the nature of works being passed down through time. We will study these effects in two different sections: 1) The original content of Debney's score. 2) The recycled content of John Debney's score. Once these three elements have been digested, the role of recycled music will become much clearer, and we may more easily see how our generation fits into cinematic history.

Original Content: The Secondary Medium

One of the aspects of music in any film that demands to be original, that simply *must* be, is its interplay with the picture. The way that music interacts with picture may not be effective, but it is always original to that film. For many films use popular songs that by any other means

would be considered “normal” or (though artistically excellent) “ordinary”, yet their context within the film connotes a different meaning entirely. There are many excellent examples within film, yet one of my favorites comes from a wonderful little early 90’s flick: *Reservoir Dogs*. The main “antagonist” in this film - I put the word antagonist in quotes, simply because if you see this film, you’ll understand that there is not much of a difference between the good guys, and the bad- is in the midst of torturing an otherwise good character. The antagonist is reveling in the torture, and as he does, Bob Dylan’s *Stuck in the Middle With You* starts to play on the radio. The way the song is functionally used must be experienced, rather than described, but in viewing that sequence one can completely understand that a piece of music is at the mercy of whatever its picture is. It is -in this instance, and in every instance pertaining to film- a secondary medium (but more on that later). To be put simply, music in picture can not be understood apart from picture, as that is what breathes life into it.

To keep with our previous example, Bob Dylan’s *Stuck in the Middle With You*, this piece of music may very well be understood apart from the film *Reservoir Dogs* when listened to apart from any picture, yet it takes on a completely new meaning when in a dominating context. As we will learn from movies in general, context is *everything*. When the context of a film is defined in a certain way, we allow the meaning of a secondary medium to morph, in order to allow those two pieces of conflicting art to co-mingle. It is for this reason that the film in which a piece of music is placed is often of much greater importance than the music having been placed there, because it is rare for a piece of music to dominate the context of the film, yet rather ordinary for

the opposite to happen. This is similar to a great piece of meat or chicken that one might order at a restaurant. Ultimately the piece of meat chosen is more pivotal to the overall quality of the meal, than say, the choice of Rosemary or Basil as an accent. Yet, the choices of those simple little details on an already great piece of food can elevate it to greatness. One more example that may be helpful is the Song *Singing in the Rain*. Quite a lovely tune, correct? Well, once again, context very well should dominate what we think of as lovely. As I bring up *Singing in the Rain*, some may immediately think of the 1952 picture, starring Gene Kelly, which boasts the same name. Some, though, may think of a slightly less pleasant film: *A Clockwork Orange*. This 1971 film, starring Malcolm McDowell features a scene that I am sure caused many an upset stomach. The “protagonist” -which again, in this case, is put into quotation marks because there is nothing *pro* about him- has invaded a strangers house. As he stumbles upon the resident of this house, he proceeds to restrain her and abuse her sexually, all while joyfully serenading her with the sweet tune of Gene Kelly’s 1952 titular theme: *Singing in the Rain*.

Context dominates completely how we feel a piece of music fits in a film. It is for this reason that when music is used in film, I label it a Secondary Medium. A Secondary Medium, a term of my own, is a type of work that supports a purpose beyond itself. It functionally serves the purpose of whatever the primary medium is (this primary medium may or may not be an art form itself). For example, many people have been to church services. Most often, when you walk into a church or temple, you will witness a few things: sights, smells, and sounds. The combination of these usually include pieces of art. These pieces of art could be hymnals, written recently or very

long ago, paintings, which adorn the walls of the cathedral, or the cathedral walls themselves! Regardless, the function of these beautiful pieces of human creation are clear. They serve something besides themselves in isolation. Ultimately they have meaning inasmuch as meaning is given to them by what has enabled them to exist in the first place. Would the nonexistence of the Primary Medium (in this case the church, or God Himself) completely deny their meaning? Of course not. But as it exists, it completely *defines* it. A secondary medium is a piece of art, or even an art form entirely whose ultimate meaning is defined by something other than itself alone. One of the art forms today that is perfectly defined as a secondary medium is film scoring.

John Debney: A Secondary Master

Now, anyone having read that sub-title may think that a “Secondary Master” seems like a rude title to give someone, and to be fair, it might sound like I have deemed John Debney a “junior varsity” master, of sorts. But in reality I believe that it’s one of the highest compliments that I could give. For if we take the principal of a Secondary medium, and apply it to makers of art, we find that there are two kinds of artists. There are artists who create “independent” art. These are films, paintings, albums, or books. One could say, these artists create works that stand alone without the need of outside input to give them meaning. A secondary artist is not an artist that is worse than another (by nature, anyway), but an artist who creates his or her art for another’s work. The amount of skill one can have and be a “Secondary Artist” is considerable, and in many cases could outweigh the skill had by an artist creating work that stands solitarily. The Composer of *The Jungle Book*, John Debney, is -in the words of his own website- “one of

the most prolific and successful composers in Hollywood”⁷ and in this author’s opinion, there are very few who create works in a secondary medium as well as he does. John Debney has worked on some incredibly prolific films throughout the course of his career. These films have included (but definitely have *not* been limited to) *Elf*, *The Passion of the Christ*, *Liar Liar*, *Sin City*, *The Emperors New Groove*, and many more. His IMDB page currently lists him as the composer for 185 credits!⁸ Debney’s career has been riddled with hits, including both large popcorn fare, as well as smaller credits. Directors seem to prefer Debney for his sense of melody, his attention to fictional detail, and his keen ear for emotion, but Debney’s biggest strength seems to lie in his musical courage. Debney says of himself

Whatever age you are, or whatever part of your career you’re in, I think you always need to foster a desire to stay current and to listen to what’s being played now – to not let yourself get stale. Just try to keep your mind open to all of the new styles, which is what I embrace. I think it took me four movies to get my feet underneath the more contemporary electronic work that’s out there. Take my uber-aggressive scores like “The Call” and “Alex Cross.” These were learning experiences for me in how to integrate current music with the orchestral and acoustical elements I’m more familiar.⁹

This attitude has created a path for Debney within the industry to take many projects, regardless of genre, and lend to them very effective scores. Debney’s work is varied, yet sincere, eclectic and skillful, but most importantly it’s always effective.

⁷ “About,” John Debney, <http://johndebney.com/about/>.

⁸ “John Debney,” IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002201/?ref_=nv_sr_1.

⁹ Daniel Schweiger, “Interview with John Debney,” Film Music Magazine RSS, February 24, 2015, <http://www.filmmusicmag.com/?p=14175>.

A composer's first job, and this may surprise you, is not to create good music. Good music often finds its way onto picture because it holds one other unique qualification, but that is not the main goal of film music. John Debney is not only a "good" composer, who writes "good" music (meaning, that he displays skillful artistry within his craft and compositions). John Debney tends to be an *effective* composer. This is what makes him such a skilled secondary artist, and what makes his score for *The Jungle Book* such a delight to research. Debney's original and efficacious work is certainly one of the highlights of his career, and though his compositions show a litany of skill in his craft, they - paired with the pictures he works on - are a master class in the possible efficacy of music in film.

Original content within The Jungle Book

We've learned about both the role of music in film, and the composer of *The Jungle Book*. At this point, we can dive into the film itself. Specifically to ask: how does the industry, and composers themselves respond to borrowed material within a film. There are five steps to how a film score is created, 3 of which will be helpful to our discussion. Those five are: 1) Ideological creation, 2) Composition, 3) Orchestration (or instrumental preparation), 4) Recording, 5) Post Production (editing, mixing, and mastering are all included in this process). It is worthwhile to mention that any two elements of the creation of a score, and most musical works in general, can be combined. Once these 5 steps are completed, the work in its entirety may be handed over to the filmmaker for use in the final product. The three elements which most pertain to our research are ideological creation, composition, and orchestration. These are the

elements of a score that truly dictate its artistic efficacy. Now, you may rightly presume that poor recording and post production have the potential to ruin an otherwise effective score, and you would be absolutely correct, but those elements can not in and of themselves create the score which is heard. They may influence it heavily, but they are secondary to the ideas emanating from the composer, and their composition of the piece. Each of these three distinct, but closely related areas will be dissected for their originality within the context of *The Jungle Book* (2016).

Ideological Creation, the first phase in scoring is a nuanced process for any artist. It is simply having the ideas to launch all of your work from. Every Beatles album and John Williams score originated and emanated from an idea, once upon a time. The strength of those ideas can determine the successfulness of a project. Now, I can not comment on the process of George Bruns, the composer of the original *Jungle Book* (1967)¹⁰ in order to contrast it with John Debney's approach, though I do not think that it is a stretch to assert that every composer will approach even the same work with at least slight differences, if not major ones.

What we can see is that John Debney did not set out to ideologically copy the work of George Bruns, throughout the entirety of his process. Debney stated: "A lot of what I do

¹⁰ "The Jungle Book (1967)," IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0061852/?ref_=nv_sr_3.

happens pretty organically. It's kind of trial and error and then sitting with a director and we try things. You kind of find your way."¹¹ Debney states further that:

Ultimately, my work began listening and then going to my keyboard as I always do, and then trying to write some initial themes. I wrote some initial themes, which turned into maybe eight to ten little themes that I then played for Jon Favreau, after a couple of weeks of ruminating about it. Jon would come over early and he'd guide me as to what sort of sounds he liked, and what themes he was leaning towards...It was very quick that we happened upon two or three themes, new themes, for this movie that I knew I had to come up with right away, one being Mowgli's Theme, which was very, very important. Once I got that and Jon was happy with what became the Mowgli Theme, then it was a matter of creating ancillary things for the other characters.¹²

Debney clarifies his statement even further: "They weren't necessarily themes by the way, they were more feelings, you know. Baloo had to have a sound. The sound of the jungle had to be different, for instance, when we were in Kaa's lair (our snake character)... So there were themes and soundscapes."¹³

From Debney's own words, we can see that the process, while basing itself on the work of *Jungle Book* (1967), was never intended to be a carbon copy. Rather there's an originality within the confines that an artist has. It seems that the ideological creation of these two versions

¹¹ Matt Grobar, "'The Jungle Book' Composer John Debney Discusses Percussive Sound, Fantasound Inspiration And Family's Disney Legacy," Deadline. December 19, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-jungle-book-john-debney-jon-favreau-walt-disney-studios-oscar-1201862822/>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "'The Jungle Book' Composer John Debney on Creating Score for New Disney Classic," YouTube, November 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZnqTqU-qZA>.

are indeed different, and that creativity and originality existed within the process, regardless of the existence and relation of the first work.

Further, there's an ideological element of this score that seems very much to be era related. Lately, the controversy of Hollywood's "whitewashing" has been plastered all over movie lovers Facebook walls. From articles of Marvels recently released *Iron Man* and *Doctor Strange*¹⁴ to constant internet embarrassment over Mickey Rooney's part in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961). In the latter case, the studio admitted that the casting was "a toxic Japanese caricature"¹⁵ The idea of cultural sensitivity in the era of the original *Jungle Book* was not as universally lauded as it is today, as we can see from the unquestioned release of a culturally insensitive *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in the same decade. When John Debney set out to score *The Jungle Book*, it was clear that cultural sensitivity was going to be a part of the process. Debney stated that, "Jon Favreau and I spoke many times, especially early on in the process, that we had to be culturally correct. We had to give the nod to the culture, of course, and be true to it. We talked very often about the type of score...[H]e wanted it to skew more classic Disney with the proper cultural influences, so that's what I basically did. I created a large, orchestral score with influences from India, be they different type of flutes, different type of percussion instruments,

¹⁴ Dave Gonzales, "Marvel's Multi-million Dollar Whitewashing Problem," Geek.com, April 28, 2016, <http://www.geek.com/geek-cetera/marvels-multi-million-dollar-whitewashing-problem-1653499/>.

¹⁵ "Whitewashing, a Long History," The New York Times, April 22, 2016, http://www.ny-times.com/slideshow/2016/04/22/opinion/whitewashing-a-long-history/s/chow-ss-slide-G7KR.html?_r=0.

all kinds of instruments that are true and correct for the culture.” This is one element that will be important to acknowledge throughout this process, in these type of works, there can be no *complete* unoriginality, simply because the cultural backdrop which informs each composers work is so different. We must be influenced by the culture around us, especially within our work, being that our cultural awareness can very often dictate our success. This determines automatically that two scores from two different eras in time *must* sound and react to film differently. Their creation is approached differently in order to be effective to the audience they are engaging within the culture they reside in. The very best art engages with the human experience so flawlessly, that it becomes timeless and ageless, but the cultural lens through which a work is composed or authored cannot be ignored.

John Debney and George Bruns naturally seem to have very different approaches to showing “Jungle”. Below I’ve transcribed a small section of two pieces from both of their works. These pieces will be digested and dissected later in the paper. The pieces and their subsequent sections were chosen because they most appropriately display the composer writing to make the music sound like a jungle, its natural inhabitants, its conditions, or any mix of the three:

Jungle Run

John Debney

♩ = 132

Low Percussion

Accented Percussion

Ethnic Drum Percussion

Piano

3

Perc.

Perc.

Perc.

Pno.

2

6

Perc. Perc. Perc. Pno.

This system contains measures 6, 7, and 8. The percussion part consists of three staves: the top staff has a single note on measure 6, followed by rests; the middle staff has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents; the bottom staff has a continuous sixteenth-note pattern. The piano part has a treble and bass clef, with the bass clef playing a rhythmic accompaniment similar to the middle percussion staff.

9

Perc. Perc. Perc. Pno.

This system contains measures 9 and 10. The percussion part continues with the same three-staff structure as the previous system. The piano part continues with the same melodic and rhythmic lines.

11

Perc. Perc. Perc. Pno.

This system contains measures 11 and 12. The percussion part continues with the same three-staff structure. The piano part continues with the same melodic and rhythmic lines. The system concludes with a double bar line.

Tempo: ♩ = 88

Bass Flute

mp

Piano

mp

6

B. Fl.

Pno.

10

B. Fl.

Pno.

Composition is the second aspect of scoring work for film. This and aspect three (orchestration and instrumentation) are very closely related, and are sometimes indistinguishable, but we will try to distinguish it like this: composition has to do with the creation of the heart or soul of the music, being that which comprises its ideological qualities. While orchestration has more to do with orchestral and instrumental playability. Composition will determine the emotional character of the music, while orchestration determines its emotional impact. It is in this aspect that Debney's work stands out from all the others with his original themes. As Debney stated earlier, "I wrote some initial themes, which turned into maybe eight to ten little themes that I then played for Jon Favreau, after a couple of weeks of ruminating about it."¹⁶ These themes are the compositional element that sets Debney's work apart from the others. Not as better, in this circumstance, but as his own work. One of those themes belongs to Mowgli, the main character in both the 1967 and 2016 *Jungle Book*.

The nostalgic melodic elements within 2016's *The Jungle Book* consisted of the bones of two songs; "Bear Necessities" and "Wan'na Be Like You". Though there are many musical ideas from the 1967 and 1994 versions which do not make it into Debney's score. Most easy to discern of those are songs, rather than musical pieces. The 1967 version included 3 songs (or 4 depending on whether or not you believe reprises count), that are not included in any other

¹⁶ Matt Grobar, "'The Jungle Book' Composer John Debney Discusses Percussive Sound, Fantasound Inspiration And Family's Disney Legacy," Deadline. December 19, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-jungle-book-john-debney-jon-favreau-walt-disney-studios-oscar-1201862822/>.

version. There is little evidence that these elements affected John Debney's composition process in any way through the score itself, but he does say:

I do like to listen to a lot of music when I start getting my feet wet, or when I'm starting a project. I listened to a lot of movie scores, other versions of *The Jungle Book* that have happened years ago. There have been many iterations of it. I was curious and wanted to sort of educate myself a little bit, so I listened to a number of those scores.¹⁷

If any of these elements from the other composers works have influenced Debney, they have only done so by his permission and with his intentionality. Their appearance seems to belong to their productions alone. There are a few aspects though, which Debney retains and amalgamates in order to create his own original style and feel throughout the 2017 production.

Compositionally, John Debney stated that this work was to be an effortless amalgamation of his and George Bruns' ideas. Debney stated "[I]t became my job, honestly, to interpolate [Bruns' pieces] and make them feel organic to the film. In terms of those themes and those songs, that was the job that I was given, to try and incorporate them and make them feel a part of this whole fabric of the film score."¹⁸ This seamless weaving of the two scores together is, in one sense, Debney's true job in scoring *The Jungle Book*. His job was not to be original, but to have originality within the guidelines of adapting another's work to a new time and culture.

Compositionally, this becomes a tricky scenario, because "Music by" is still accredited to John Debney within the features final credits. His role in reality is not so much composer, as opposed to head composing adapter. This is a role he takes on with much skill and originality, but it's

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

clear that he's not fulfilling all of his own ideas. Is this a bad thing? I think not. For instance, there are many covers of Beatles songs that are arguably more popular (and better performed) than the originals. One that stands out is Stevie Wonder's cover of *We Can Work it Out*. When sung by the Beatles, the song feels masterfully put together, as you hear the bones of the pop song coming alive to make an exciting track which gets your foot tapping. Under Stevie, the song takes on a new life, and you ask yourself... "was this not what the song was meant to be in the first place?" A composition not being yours, does not make your work on it unoriginal. And I believe that this holds true to Debney's work within *The Jungle Book*. He skillfully adapts the work not his own, and adds his own to the rest! His work is tasteful and appropriate, and most importantly John Debney's work in *Jungle Book* is extremely effective.

Orchestration, as defined by Leonard Bernstein, is "how a composer goes about arranging his music for an orchestra to play; whether the orchestra has 7 men in it or 17 or 70 or 107."¹⁹ This differentiates itself from composition by the simple means undertaken to complete the task. An orchestrator will take music already written and adapt it for an orchestra, while a composer will actually write that music. One aspect that set Debney's orchestration apart from other adaptations of *The Jungle Book* was his use of culturally appropriate material. As discussed earlier, John Debney and Jon Favreau decided that they were going to make a version of *The*

¹⁹ Leonard Bernstein, "Leonard Bernstein at 100," What Is Orchestration?, <https://leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-orchestration>.

Jungle Book score that “had to be culturally correct.”²⁰ Much of this cultural correctness was intertwined within the orchestration of the piece, rather than the composition itself. Debney describes,

[Jon Favreau] didn’t want it to necessarily be a score that was sort of a cheap facsimile of the real thing. We were very conscious of that. We wanted to, every step of the way, make sure that we were both giving the proper homage to Walt and the legacy of the studio, but also the cultural aspects of it.²¹

Orchestration played a massive role in making sure the score was culturally appropriate, yet sensitive to the legacy of the Disney company. Debney’s approach had to find a unique way to communicate “Jungle Book” without consistently quoting the composers before him. Fred Karlin and Rayburn Write state in *On The Track* that “Changing any compositional element at a dramatic moment in the film can shift the emotional emphasis or affect its intensity.”²² Three elements which lent important moments of emotion were choirs, percussion and ethnic flutes. To comment on the latter, Debney states:

[The flute] was my friend Pedro Eustache—he’s just a wonderful world instrumentalist. We actually created flutes for the film in different keys, and bamboo flutes, didgeridoos, ceramic flutes. All kinds of different flutes of different sizes. I personally feel that Pedro imbued the score with a lot of its emotional and cultural color, in the best way possible.

²⁰ Matt Grobar, “‘The Jungle Book’ Composer John Debney Discusses Percussive Sound, Fantasound Inspiration And Family’s Disney Legacy,” *Deadline*. December 19, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-jungle-book-john-debney-jon-favreau-walt-disney-studios-oscar-1201862822/>.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On the Track: A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring*, (New York: Routledge, 2004)

There's times when he's playing along with the orchestra, and there's sort of a texture that feels exotic, maybe. He really gave it such life.²³

Yet the flute was not the only element that set the score apart from more traditional western tendencies. The style of orchestration with many large percussion pieces was used heavily by Debney, yet was used more sparsely in the 1994 version, scored by Basil Poledouris²⁴ while the 1967 version lacked large percussion completely. The general progression of orchestration throughout *Jungle Book* history seems to be that the further into the future we get, the more percussion we use.

The percussion, in a very definitive sense, is the one element of these scores that truly is changing. The trademark sound of the "original adaptation" of *The Jungle Book* (1967) features brass and woodwinds heavily to set the tone for the jungle, while emotion is punctuated with strings. Percussion is used sparingly, if at all. For the time, though, it was considered a fairly standard orchestra. Then, Basil Poledouris' work on the 1997 production again features a standard orchestra. The brass and woodwind elements are not featured nearly as heavily, at least not to create a jungle like atmosphere. Instead, the atmosphere of the jungle seems to be relatively ignored, and the music focuses primarily on the emotions that the characters are feeling. The emotions themselves are on display in the story, and the jungle is secondary to it. In

²³ Matt Grobar, "'The Jungle Book' Composer John Debney Discusses Percussive Sound, Fantasound Inspiration And Family's Disney Legacy," *Deadline*. December 19, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-jungle-book-john-debney-jon-favreau-walt-disney-studios-oscar-1201862822/>.

²⁴ "Basil Poledouris," *IMDb*, http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0006231/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cr11.

one of the first lines of the film, one of the main character states in a voice over “Mostly, it’s about love.” And the score reflects that. It is slightly cheesy and hammy, and incredibly western for a film that is set in the jungle. The percussion in this instance plays suit. It is not “jungle” like percussion, at least as westerners would know it. Instead it is very orchestral percussion, accentuating down beats and emotional moments. The 2016 production of *The Jungle Book* is absolutely the most percussion heavy. John Debney stated that,

I brought in four great percussionists, just world-renowned session players here in LA, and they’re great artists in their own right. I brought them in and we literally filled up Sony Studios. It was a very big stage, and we filled it up with every kind of percussion instrument you can imagine, from bell-like things and huge taiko drums, and of course some tablas of all sizes. We really just had a huge battery of percussion in the score.²⁵

This heavy use of percussion is quite common in modern film music, having been used in some of Debney’s scores (*Iron Man*, *The Passion*) and in many other composers work (Hans Zimmer, to name one of many). While this bombastic style of percussion is becoming natural to film composers today, to previous generations, it was not. This type of heavy percussion, specifically the blending of many percussion players has been used extensively only for modern film. The best and most recent example is from *Batman V. Superman*. Junkie XL explains his work with Hans Zimmer, “We had two sessions. The first session was ten drummers, and the second session

²⁵ Matt Grobar, “‘The Jungle Book’ Composer John Debney Discusses Percussive Sound, Fantasound Inspiration And Family’s Disney Legacy,” *Deadline*. December 19, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-jungle-book-john-debney-jon-favreau-walt-disney-studios-oscar-1201862822/>.

was twelve drummers: three in every corner. So we had the perfect surrounding drum circle.”²⁶

This type of percussion will be the defining sound of our generation of cinema. Overuse of bombastic percussion behind orchestral music will be to the 2010’s as overuse of purely synthetic music is to the 1980’s and in this aspect, the pieces of music in each *Jungle Book* have far much more in common with their respective times, than they do with each other. John Debney uses this percussive element well within the film though, balancing an eclectic and appropriate mix of drums, and not simply the largest drum sounds that he can find. Where as the 1967 version of *The Jungle Book* derives its signature sound from brass and woodwinds, along with idiomatic musical language, the 2016 version uses what feels like more of a western approach to the composition, and its orchestration, but then fills that in with ancillary instrumentation that is not western.

Finally, Debney utilizes a choir within some of the most emotionally gripping moments in the film. Orchestrally, this is a very effective way to display “jungle” within a score; live human voices. Ironically, Debney’s approach here is not “original” at all, simply because of its abundance of use within the last ten years, but its use is extremely effective, and fun to watch. Debney’s original thoughts dot the landscape of *The Jungle Book* from start to finish with an expertly crafted sense of emotion. This all comes from Debney himself, as his skill is unquestionable. But is his skill alone the only reason the score works?

The Borrowed Elements.

²⁶ WaterTowerWB, "Man Of Steel Soundtrack - Percussion - Hans Zimmer," YouTube. June 24, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTOMIyynBPE>.

In beginning to research the “borrowed” or recycled elements of Debney’s version of *The Jungle Book* it would be most appropriate to approach it in the same way as one would approach his original elements. As discussed previously, the creation of a score consists of five distinct phases. Of those five, three are relevant to our discussion: 1) Ideological Creation, 2) Composition, and 3) Orchestration.

Ideological Creation, the most defining aspect of any piece of work sets the tone for how the entire work will eventually be received. What is borrowed by Debney in an ideological sense for *The Jungle Book*? I would venture to say, not much. The *Jungle Book*’s 1967, 1994, and 2016 do not have similar ideological approaches. The 1967 version is a darkly toned, woodwind heavy, Broadway style fare which nearly always pays musical homage to its location. The 1994 version is almost the exact opposite, a hyper-serious, un-self aware, completely western sounding score meant for children which seems to rarely remember the fact that the story takes place somewhere that is not 19th century England (which does play into the story, but I’ll touch on that later). Debney’s score is a perfect hybrid between the two. A score which pays homage to the Jungle when it suits him, yet immediately drops the ethnic color for a more western style approach with any hint of heartfelt emotion. Ideologically, this matches both other scores quite perfectly.

As previously stated, John Debney and George Bruns approach the sound of the Jungle quite differently. Though the full transcriptions were previously shown, we can now take a look at each composer’s unique harmonic approach. Debney’s harmonic approach looks like this:

Jungle Run

Piano

John Debney

♩ = 132

Musical notation for measures 1-5. The piece is in 4/4 time. Measures 1 and 2 are rests in both staves. Measures 3-5 feature a rhythmic pattern in the bass clef consisting of eighth notes and quarter notes, while the treble clef remains silent.

6

Musical notation for measures 6-8. The treble clef begins with a melodic line of eighth notes starting on a middle C. The bass clef continues with the rhythmic accompaniment from the previous system.

9

Musical notation for measures 9-10. The treble clef continues the melodic line with eighth notes. The bass clef continues the rhythmic accompaniment.

11

Musical notation for measures 11-12. The treble clef continues the melodic line with eighth notes. The bass clef continues the rhythmic accompaniment. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of measure 12.

While Debney’s harmonic approach is unique to himself, it is worth mentioning that Debney’s harmonic approach does not lend as much to the feeling of “jungle” as his rhythm section does.

Here is the rhythmic element to that same passage:

Jungle Run

John Debney

$\text{♩} = 132$

The musical score for 'Jungle Run' is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of 132 beats per minute. It consists of five systems of three staves each, representing different percussion parts. The first system is labeled 'Low Percussion', 'Accented Percussion', and 'Ethnic Drum Percussion'. The second system is labeled 'Perc.' on all three staves. The third system is labeled 'Perc.' on all three staves. The fourth system is labeled 'Perc.' on all three staves. The fifth system is labeled 'Perc.' on all three staves. The score includes various rhythmic patterns such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests, with some notes marked with accents.

Debney's harmonic approach does not particularly call to mind any type of jungle feelings. More simply it's just an ostinato in the key of Am, backed by incredibly intense percussion and a few ethnic flute elements. The use of a sequencer to make this track seems very obvious. While Debney's harmonic approach to showing jungle is not particularly impressive, Bruns' harmonic approach looks something like this:

Jungle Book Overture Flute Solo

Piano

George Bruns

♩ = 88

mp

This system contains measures 1 through 4 of the piano accompaniment. The music is in 4/4 time. The right hand is mostly silent, with rests. The left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes, starting with a half rest followed by eighth notes, then quarter notes. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present at the beginning.

5

This system contains measures 5 through 9. The left hand continues the rhythmic pattern from the previous system, with some changes in the eighth-note groupings.

10

This system contains measures 10 through 13. The left hand continues the rhythmic pattern, with some changes in the eighth-note groupings. The right hand has some chords in measures 11 and 12.

14

This system contains measures 14 through 17. The left hand continues the rhythmic pattern, with some changes in the eighth-note groupings. The right hand has some chords in measure 14. The piece ends with a double bar line in measure 17.

Bruns' approach has a very distinct jungle flavor in both rhythm, melody, and harmony. He utilizes minor 7th chords which move up and down chromatically by thirds, but he does not particularly frame the orchestration in that way. Debney's way of showing the jungle is absolutely unique to himself, but Bruns' shows here to have a much more deft approach.

Each score has its own "jungle" sound. Yet, where they match up ideologically is not in a particular melody, or chord progression, but in the use of the orchestra as a western centered tool. At 1:00:48 in the 1967 version, a string run begins which is very western compared to the rest of the film. The quality of the run sounds western, but more importantly the strings themselves start to lead the charge in the orchestra for the first time in the film. From this point on, until the climax ends at 1:10:00, George Bruns score becomes gradually more and more of a western experience. Heavy brass and strings punctuate emotion for the last 10 minutes of the 1967 film. The fact that the film drops its more ethnic sounding instruments (in this case, a standard set of orchestral woodwinds, played idiomatically for a layman's perception of jungle-like music) is an interesting thing in and of itself, but it is not what needs focus here. Rather, ideologically, John Debney's score does the same thing. It treats a western orchestra as a proponent for real emotion, while treating its ethnic sounds as a tool for setting. What about the 1994 version? Basil Poledouris chooses to focus on the "British control over India" part of the storyline so heavily that little musical allusions to the setting reveal themselves. John Debney and George Bruns' films do, though, even when those elements are dropped in favor of music which in the composers minds, seems to sound most appropriate for the most emotive moments within their

respective films. Ideologically, Debney's score reflects Bruns' and Poledouris' the way that a Thomas Kinkade painting reflects a Van Gogh; they both use paint. They use dark colors to signify certain things, and light colors to signify other things. They are both utilizing a canvas. Ideologically, there are only so many ways that two artists in the same medium can prove to be different. The similarity of Debney and Bruns in eliminating setting within the music in the most emotional moments does not connote a lack of originality on Debney's part, there are simply only so many colors.

Composition is one of the strongest aspects of Debney's work within *The Jungle Book*, but a lot of the compositional content that we hear is not originally his own. Debney's work includes at least two melodies taken directly from the 1967 version of *The Jungle Book*. One of these, the "Bear Necessities" is a song that most know (and love), while the other is the infamous bass flute solo which peppers the first half of the film. The melody of the flute solo as used by both Brun's and Debney in their respective versions has been transcribed below:

Jungle Book Overture Flute Solo

Bass Flute

George Bruns

♩ = 88

mp

5

8

11

14

Jungle Book Overture Flute Solo

George Bruns
John Debney

♩ = 88

Flute

Bass Flute

mp

6

Fl.

B. Fl.

10

Fl.

B. Fl.

mp

15

Fl.

B. Fl.

The use of the bass flute solo is much more sparse in Debney's version and, as far as I can tell, only exists in the first minute or so of screen time. The second, "Bear Necessities" shows up in the film at 00:48:28 in the form of a cover of the song in a New Orleans style jazz number (not too far from the originals style), 00:56:20 as the end of an intense orchestral cue, and at 1:33:28 as the finale number in the film. The one thing to take notice of within the context of these re-makings of the classic 1967 musical pieces is that *The Jungle Book* (2016) does not have many quotable melodies of its own.

The absence of singable melodies in *The Jungle Book* is an odd instance. For it is definitely not that John Debney, composer to the incredibly hummable score to *Elf* (2003), cannot create a score which sticks to the lining of your ears and brains like peanut butter. He has intentionally chosen something a little different. To this point, one of the most interesting moments in the film happens at 56:20 as Mowgli helps a baby elephant out of a pit. The moment is integral to the story because it shows that while Mowgli is a "man cub" he is still helpful to the jungle in his own way. He is accepted by Bagheera for his "tricks" because they are shown to be an integral part of the intricate wilderness community. The moment is poignant and meaningful to the story. The character of Mowgli comes fully into light as he, and we, learn exactly who he is. This is the emotional turning point within a film that a composer dreams about scoring from an early age, filling the audiences eyes with tears as your own heartfelt, homespun theme grasps and soothes the audience in just the right way, yet Mowgli's theme is nowhere to be found in this moment. In what is possibly one of the most integral moments of the film, the musical spotlight

gives way to nostalgia. The moment is incredibly effective, and John Debney's instinct to use this part for an adapted orchestral version of "Bear Necessities" (melody notated contextually below) tugs at your heart strings in all the right ways, yet its use is intriguing. [*Transcription will be added.*]

In William J. Havlena and Susan L. Holak's study on Nostalgia in marketing, entitled Exploring Nostalgia Imagery Through the Use of Consumer Collages, they detect that "cultural nostalgia, while rooted in direct personal experience, is based on shared symbols, so that the resulting feeling of nostalgia reflects the individual's connection to other members of the culture."²⁷ This nostalgia is often played to within the entertainment market. Within the last two years a slew of nostalgia based properties have come out on Netflix alone. These include (but are not limited to) Stranger Things, and Fuller House. By any estimation, both of these series were hits. Dr. Clay Routledge states "Nostalgia's not a silver bullet" in an interview with Variety.²⁸ He states further that "It works best when you celebrate or bring back a sentiment or idea connected to it without stepping on sacred ground." John Debney seems to understand this perfectly as he approaches the scene with Mowgli. The nostalgia element alone in hearing Terry Gilkyson's

²⁷ William J. Havlena and Susan L. Holak, "Exploring Nostalgia Imagery Through the Use of Consumer Collages," (ACR North American Advances. January 01, 1996) <http://www.acrwebsite.org/search/view-conference-proceedings.aspx?Id=7864>.

²⁸ Oriana Schwindt, "'Stranger Things' Tests Limits of Netflix's Nostalgia Strategy." Variety, July 25, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/tv/news/stranger-things-netflix-fuller-house-nostalgia-strategy-1201822075/>.

“Bear Necessities” as played by a Debney-arranged orchestra sent chills through my spine. It was a beautiful moment. But was it actually? A study done by Dr. Clay Routledge shows that

Nostalgia, compared to control conditions, does not increase negative emotions, but it does increase positive emotions. As I mentioned before, nostalgic experiences tend to be characterized as positive and this feature of nostalgia appears to translate into actual mood. When nostalgia is induced in the lab, it puts people in a good mood...Nostalgia, compared to control conditions, increases self-esteem as well as perceptions of meaning in life. By allowing people to revisit cherished life experiences, nostalgia boosts positive self-regard and promotes the feeling that life is full of meaning and purpose. Nostalgia, compared to control conditions, increases perceptions of social connectedness. Again, as previously mentioned, nostalgic experiences tend to be highly social in nature. The consequence of this is that nostalgia makes people feel closer to others. Nostalgia reminds people that they are loved and valued by close others.²⁹

Nostalgia, brought on by any means, has the capacity to take our emotions and turn them sweet.

So then, how do we know if Debney’s score was good? Was it simply the nostalgia that caused feeling in that moment, or the skill of Debney’s hands? I believe the answer can be found in Dr. Routledge’s previous words: “[Nostalgia] works best when you celebrate or bring back a sentiment or idea connected to it without stepping on sacred ground.” It seems that even evoking nostalgia is not a simple thing to do. You have to walk a fine line of skill and respect to even invoke a nostalgic feeling! Frankly, this seems to be one of the main goals of film scoring in general, that is, seeking to establish a sense of nostalgia with sound itself. More specifically, always having the correct sound for the correct moment. For instance, musically, what does a shark coming close to you sound like? What does early morning on a farm sound like? What

²⁹ Routledge, Clay. "The Rehabilitation of an Old Emotion: A New Science of Nostalgia." Scientific American Blog Network. July 10, 2013. Accessed June 24, 2017. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/the-rehabilitation-of-an-old-emotion-a-new-science-of-nostalgia/>.

does a galaxy far away sound like? What does failing to an embarrassing level sound like?

All of these questions could be answered simply, for there is no doubt that there are immediate musical answers which come to mind for all of them. Yet, there are ways of answering these questions correctly without nearing any of the immediate answers, and sometimes the answer is no music! Alfred Hitchcock infamously chose to opt out of music in his 1963 film, *The Birds*. The simplest solution is to say that skill is required for both nostalgia, and the creation of your own melodies. Once you do have a certain amount of skill though, invoking nostalgia seems to be slightly easier than creating your own magic.

The composition element of John Debney's score is the biggest borrowed element of all within the 2016 version. Debney defends his use of these musical quotes by stating:

Then also, we knew going in that we'd have to embrace a couple of the iconic songs from the original. "Bare Necessities" and "Wan'na Be Like You" were always on the table as things that Jon Favreau wanted to explore, and I think rightly so. He's fond of saying, "If you didn't include those songs, there probably would have been a riot in the theater." Then it became my job, honestly, to interpolate those and make them feel organic to the film. In terms of those themes and those songs, that was the job that I was given, to try and incorporate them and make them feel a part of this whole fabric of the film score.³⁰

Debney coolly quotes George Bruns, and Terry Gilkyson in a respectful and original way. Most importantly, the use of preexisting material does not inhibit Debney from creating a score which moves autonomously, not dependent on the composition of others, yet wholly thankful for it, while creating depth and emotion in these new versions of classic characters.

³⁰ Matt Grobar, "The Jungle Book' Composer John Debney Discusses Percussive Sound, Fantasound Inspiration And Family's Disney Legacy," *Deadline*. December 19, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/12/the-jungle-book-john-debney-jon-favreau-walt-disney-studios-oscar-1201862822/>.

Orchestration is one of the biggest similarities and biggest differences between the 1967, 1994, and 2016 versions of *The Jungle Book*. Let me explain: All of the films have a western orchestra. This orchestra is made up of four main groups: strings, brass, woodwinds, and percussion. The three films greatest similarity in orchestration is that they all have these four groups. This is similar to the Van Goh/Thomas Kinkade metaphor stated previously. These gentlemen all begin by using the same colors to paint. And therein ends the similarities. *The Jungle Book* (1967) tends to stick to a very strict diet of orchestral strings, woodwinds and percussion, while allowing some deviations for its songs. The 1994 version also very strictly stays to its western orchestra, only lightly incorporating ethnic flutes and percussion. Here is where Debney seems to have read *The Jungle Book's* secret playbook, take the formula, and put steroids in it. Debney's orchestration payed homage to the orchestration of past versions while retaining his own style. One of the key elements to this was the inclusion of a bass flute, which is a standard orchestral instrument, yet is most often overlooked in favor of the bassoon, contrabassoon, or bass clarinet. Yet, besides that small inclusion, Debney's orchestration does not seem to mimic or borrow from any previous version. He has retained a style all his own. Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright state,

Orchestral color in film is even more important than in concert music because it evokes specific emotional responses, thereby becoming powerfully integrated with the character or texture of the film. Instrumental and choral colors are powerful resources for the composer, and each composer prides himself on his ability to find the right colors for every dramatic situation.³¹

³¹Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On the Track: A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring*, (New York: Routledge, 2004)

Debney seems to be this composer that Karlin and Wright speak of. There is no orchestrator listed on the Internet Movie Database page for *The Jungle Book*, seeming to mean that John Debney himself orchestrated the project. This is significant because many composers choose to hire out orchestrators to translate their music for orchestra for them. Even further, some composers completely eliminate that step from their process, such as Marco Beltrami, who states, “When you have nine days to orchestrate ninety minutes of music, and you’re still making changes and I’m still composing for one of my last sessions comping up, it’s absolutely physically impossible.”³² It seems that not all composers agree with Beltrami, though as Harry Gregson-Williams also states “I do all my own orchestration. I orchestrate as I go, into my sequencer.” Though I could find no evidence unquestionably confirming this, I believe that Debney orchestrates his own work. I have found in my research that Debney is a user of Digital Performer, which is a software that is incredibly useful for turning midi information, into notation. *The Jungle Book* (1967) does have an orchestrator listed on its imdb page, though: Walter Sheets.³³ Karlin and Wright comment on this history of orchestration in film by stating,

Despite the breakup of the studio music staffs in the mid-fifties, this system of sketching [the process by which a composer would write a 2-4 stave version of their intent for the music, and an orchestrator would put that together into a cohesive vision for the orchestra] continued for many composers.... since the prevalence of of MIDI and

³² Fred Karlin and Rayburn Wright, *On the Track: A Guide to Contemporary Film Scoring*, (New York: Routledge, 2004)

³³ “Full Cast & Crew,” IMDb, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0061852/fullcredits?ref_=tt_ov_st_sm.

sequencers, many film composers now use computers to ‘notate’ their scores, sometimes orchestrating in great detail as they compose, and sometimes not.

Ultimately Debney and Bruns' processes seem to be far more inline with the counterparts of their era, than with each other, in regards to orchestration.

Conclusion

Music’s relation to time on these projects is, in so many ways, more important than its relation to its adapted work. While researching this topic, I’ve concluded that John Debney was in no way hindered through the process of adapting another’s work. In fact, the biggest influence on his work in general seems to be the time period that he belongs to, not the subject material he is covering.

In ideological creation Debney wrote original themes which were not based on any preexisting material, crafted the score to be culturally sensitive, which was a new notion in film making, unique to our time, and he wrote the “jungle” to feel unique to his own vision. He does similarly drop the ethnic feel to his music when he wants to convey deep emotion. These emotions are the ones that exist on the most basic human level, such as love or fear. In composition Debney intentionally allowed inspiration from previous works and adaptations of *The Jungle Book*, purposefully amalgamated Bruns’ work from the 1967 version, and most importantly, he utilized nostalgia in an effective and skillful way. Finally, in orchestration Debney includes actual ethnic instruments in an attempt to make the music culturally appropriate for the setting of the film. Finally, Debney crafted his own work for orchestra in the process we

know as orchestration, while Bruns utilized the normal system of the day, and used an orchestrator.

A composer is constantly fighting against the outer impulses, time, tradition, nostalgia, and many others. Their job is to take in these external stimuli and translate them into a cohesive and complete work. Some fail, and some succeed. John Debney, while scoring *The Jungle Book*, has succeeded in the highest regard. Within his work he has proved that an adapted work can be one which respects what has come before, which also forges new ground, in line with a contemporary approach to scoring. Debney's work itself in *The Jungle Book* is proof that adaptation does not make a bad work, bad work creates a bad work, and good work similarly will inspire a work like itself. John Debney takes an adaptation, which has its own unique difficulties and simply uses it as a launching ground for his own good work.

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