

# MARNIE

Directed by Alfred Hitchcock  
Distributed by Universal Pictures  
Released in 1964

The uses of music in film are multitudinous. For example, music can anchor a scene, giving it the emotional gravity to pull the viewer in and help him forget about his life outside the theater. Paradoxically, music can also take the scene into another dimension of heightened reality, inner reality, or false reality.

Bernard Herrmann's last work for Hitchcock, his score for *Marnie*, is a lesser triumph than the nihilistic ecstasy and jaded loneliness of *Vertigo* and *Psycho*, respectively, but still functions on a plane few other scores can aspire to. Right with the opening titles, Herrmann's onslaught begins with his aggressive motif that represents Marnie's adverse reaction to red stimuli, her indistinct terror, by giving us a dissonant tremolo in the strings that is repeatedly launched up to the violin's furthest reaches. (This motif of a rapidly ascending minor-major seventh chord is applied throughout the film, usually in a clarinet variation.) But with the title "Marnie," the lyrical, but boxed-in, melody appears, and provides relief. The titles end very sharply, the silent jump from the card "Directed by Alfred Hitchcock" to the abstract shot of a yellow handbag as confrontational as Herrmann's Wagnerian angst.

The music is not always bombastic. With the harp or the flute, Herrmann pares down the orchestra and gives us gentle moments that reflect Marnie's loneliness and isolation. Tremolo strings signify intrigue, particularly relating to Lil's snooping.

It is an orchestral score, similar to the old Hollywood type, but with Herrmann's requisite low woodwinds in cool evidence. Generous repetitions of the film's few melodic motifs keep the music from dominating the action; once the ear catches on to what Herrmann is doing, it can be ignored. The occasional ironic moment still surfaces, however. Mark, having just pressured Marnie into marrying him, sets off with her on a South Seas honeymoon. We cut to a shot of a ship rolling happily along the deep blue waters of the twilight Pacific, and happy, romantic, journeying music plays on the soundtrack. But, inside, these two are far from happy—Mark upset at Marnie's frigidity, Marnie upset with his arrogance, smarting from a proposal tinged with the hint of blackmail.

There are forty-one cues in the movie, if one excludes the opening and closing titles music. Herrmann deftly handles a limited amount of melodic material, turning to short, sequenced 'cells' to fill space before the next musical 'event.' Rarely is this event a 'hit,' per se. For example, when Mark takes Marnie to the farm to meet his father, the music shifts from strings to winds upon their going inside. And a few minutes later in the film, when the camera finds Mark and Marnie kissing in the stables, the music, intense and bumped into a higher register with the cut to their kissing, becomes vaguely discordant once Marnie turns her face towards the camera, the smile suddenly lost (her displeasure hid from Mark). Herrmann plays little on the nose, and many weighty scenes go without music, like Marnie's honeymoon disrobing, the flashback, the killing of Forio, and the Rutland robbery. Of course, there are

exceptions—the cut to Mark when he has tracked down Marnie after the robbery; when Mark knocks on the wall at the Baltimore row house; and, of course, the suffusion motif, used ten times in the film, each time with (generally) increasing intensity. At first the motif always accompanies the red 'bleed' of the screen, but it's also used in the word association sequence and in, tellingly, the zooming shot of the money in the safe after Forio's death.

The Marnie theme (G-F-G-F-G-B $\flat$ -A $\flat$ -F) and its variants are used in all but fifteen of the cues. But Herrmann is not taking it easy. Cues are not reused. Though melodic material is recycled, different tempi and orchestrations abound. And, truly, the score works too well to betray an indifferent composer on the cusp of his notorious split with Hitchcock. Also, Herrmann saves certain melodic material for late in the film. Just when the ear has become familiar with the material and is content making (unconscious) associations between different scenes thanks to their similar music, Herrmann does something different. Good examples of this phenomenon can be found in the gliding tracking shot that shows us Marnie on the job at Rutland's, when Mark is frantically searching the ship for Marnie, and when Marnie spots Strutt at the party. The film's best motif is not developed at all and is used but twice, in contrasting octaves. It appears during the hunt sequence, just after Forio has been critically injured—a falling B-G-F $\sharp$ .

Probably the greatest scoring in the movie is when the window in Mark's office is smashed by the tree, and as Marnie cowers, lost in her own world, Mark looks at the shattered relics of his dead wife and makes the decision to forge ahead. Just before the shot of the cabinet, beginning with Mark grasping Marnie and looking toward the broken window, the music becomes nostalgic and tender, a short melody that climbs and falls, as if from hopelessness, in the strings. By this gesture the fearful Marnie and the dead wife are unified, and we realize that Mark is now turning a page in his life. And soon the melody is pitched up an octave, but falls no more, as Mark gently kisses the helpless, trembling Marnie, so unknowingly desperate for love. It is a knockout scene, and Herrmann's music is a wonder to behold.