

Name

Composition II

Media Analysis

18 August 2017

Media Analysis: The Lion King

Being a musical film, *The Lion King* showcases various musical numbers. A musical number can be described as a scene where characters start singing and dancing, pausing the advancement of the plot. These musical numbers help to enhance the feel of the movie and provide some realism. Five musical numbers have been featured in the Lion King: “*Hakuna Matata*,” “*Circle of Life*,” “*Can You Feel the Love Tonight*,” “*Be Prepared*,” and “*I Just Can’t Wait To Be King*.” Although each of the song’s styles are characterized by African influences, the musical numbers that will be explained are “Be Prepared” and “Circle of Life” because they provide the most outstanding instances of the instrumental, rhythmic, and textural components that Americans usually link with African musical cultures. In the film *The Lion King*, these two songs accentuate The Lion King’s African context in multiple fundamental scenes of the film, by either reimbursing musically for an exclusion of visible African components (Be Prepared) or improving the African elements that are evident (Circle of Life).

Be Prepared is intriguing as it ensures that the audience is immersed in African culture. Although “Circle of Life” possesses several instances of musical Africanisms, “Be Prepared” only contains two distinctive African components: the rhythmic focus and instrumentation. The instruments that are most noticeable in this case are melodic and rhythmic idiophones and membranophones. Instruments used at the beginning of the song that spark any musical curiosity are kettledrums and a church bell with a dark timbre that results in a portentous setting and have the function of being a switch from the total musical silence of the former scene to fast paced rhythm and increased energy of “Be Prepared” (Jordan 28). The immediate rise in intensity can be primarily attributed to the playing of the marimba that is heard immediately after the introduction and permeates the rest of the song.

Even though the conspicuous timbres in “Be Prepared” increasingly resonate with the African culture, the total also required the playing of various Western instruments. For instance, brief, recurrent lines played using a low brass instrument (tuba) complement the first verse of Scar. Although the rumbling and dark timbre of the tuba was most probably preferred to sustain the malevolent ambiance of Scar’s den, it also supports the African inclination towards devising intricate, energetic sounds (Jordan 34). Moreover, synthesized strings and pianos are noticeable throughout the composition. However, just like they are applied in “Circle of Life,” they only enhance the feel of the African instruments. This enhancement aspect, together with the augmented emphasis on various idiophones from the song’s introduction, develops energy and exhilaration in expectation of the song’s riveting end. Through ensuring that the improved version of an African band appear superior and more electrifying than the actual thing, “Be Prepared” is again suggestive of the allegation that the film kindles the longing for fantasy over reality (Jordan 34).

At the beginning of the movie, the music of “Circle of Life” reflects the activities exhibited on the screen: elephants, antelopes, cheetahs, and other several creatures that live on the African plains gradually awake to embrace the new day (Hahn 00:01:39-00:02:00). The drums, which were formerly nearly imperceptible, start to be progressively foregrounded. As the film reaches this scenario, even though the choir has faded from the primary focus, as it is still an essential component, the enduring Zulu chants offer a consistent but elusive aide-mémoire of the music’s Africanism (Jordan 23). Almost a minute into the musical number the core melody approaches, caroled by Carmen Twillie, an African-American musician. Carmen’s voice is a deep alto, combined with a wholesome, warm timbre, aligning with the racial typecasts concerning black voices. Although it is imprecise if Carmen was selected due to her vocal tone, she divulges an added feel of the other aspect of Africanism to the song.

Almost midway through the song is a brief interlude that highlights a choir’s accompanimental chanting and a synthesized flute. The synthesized flute, in this case, provides an example of Hyper-Reality because its unique tone is less indebted to an effort to apply an authentic African instrument than to the need to only appear African (Jordan 25). The interlude supplements a part where the “experienced old man”

character, Rafiki, conducts a secret ceremony with Simba (Hahn 00:52:43-00:53:01). It is easy to feel the natural and earthy tone that is characteristic of the flute used in this part of the song.

All in all, *The Lion King* demonstrates how music can enhance a film production and spark curiosity among its viewers. The movie has been culturally influential and financially successful from its release. It is also an excellent instance of the use of multiple instruments to create a fantasy that everyone desires.

Works Cited

The Lion King. Directed by D Hahn, Walt Disney Pictures, 1994. Film.

Jordan, C. *World Music's Role in the Construction of a Hyper-realistic Africa in Disney's The Lion King*. 2015. Texas Christian University, MA thesis.

repository.tcu.edu/bitstream/handle/116099117/10238/Jordan_tcu_0229M_10650.pdf?sequence=1.