»For Bridgerton-inspired Content«: Library Music between Streaming and Online Media

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On the website of French library music company Cézame, a playlist of ›soundalike‹ tracks inspired by popular streaming shows is advertised with: »A true cultural phenomenon, the era of streaming has raised the series to the rank of major cinematographic art.« (Cézame 2022) The industry of library music has undergone significant shifts as it seeks to adapt to both streaming services and online media. Among these changes – which include new licensing models for emerging media formats – we increasingly find library tracks that evoke (and, sometimes, very closely emulate) the score of fiction series such as STRANGER THINGS (Netflix, 2016–2025) and BRIDGERTON (Netflix, 2020–present). These tracks often come to be used in online content that stems from the shows, be it fan-created videos or professionally-produced adverts that market these productions on social media.

Taking this into account, how, then, does streaming media influence library music? Or, to put it differently, how is the trademark sound of certain streaming series worked into library catalogues? And, in addition, how does library music reinforce the sonic imaginary that is associated with these fictional narratives? Departing from these initial questions, this article inquires into library music's role in strengthening the musical identity of specific streaming shows, acting as a sonic bridge between streaming platforms and online media. Rather than viewing streaming-inspired library soundalikes as a mere reflection of a show's popularity, the sections that follow explore how such tracks actively root a series' soundtrack in a shared imaginary, as library music reproduces and reinvents the signature sounds of fictional streaming universes and spreads them beyond the boundaries of streaming platforms. The article also outlines how the paratexts that frame library music – and which increasingly allude to streaming media – are not simply an after-the-fact classification of this music, taking instead an active role in shaping the work of library composers.

Methodology

To explore these questions, I opt for a multi-method design combining qualitative interviews and an examination of library tracks and online audiovisual materials. Regarding the latter, rather than analyzing in great detail how images and library tracks are synchronized together, I sought more broadly to ascertain how streaming-inspired online media strategically uses library music to evoke the distinctive sound of a given show. The analyzed videos therefore share the fundamental trait of explicitly evoking a streaming show and appealing to its fan base with specific visual, textual, and sonic choices. Beyond that, however, the videos span a broad range of practices (and underlying purposes): from music compilations by self-professed fans, to small businesses advertising their products and trailers for streaming-inspired fan films – resembling the alternative trailers where fans, as Deaville states, engage with »practices and traditions of musical signification in re-imagining the source text« (2016, 209).

The interviews were conducted with thirteen library composers and consultants, as well as fifteen videographers and video editors, aged between 23 to 50 years old, and based in the UK, US, France, and Portugal. The interviews took place in person or over video calls between 2019 and 2021, and both interview formats were guided by a semi-structured (but flexible) script. The initial selection of interviewees was based on a purposeful sampling principle, followed by chain referral or snowballing techniques, with the goal of maximizing the variety of interlocutors and obtaining a sample that would be representative of a wide range of practices, experiences, and backgrounds. By interviewing both library practitioners and users, I sought an interdiscursive approach that would enable a comparison of these agents' perspectives on different aspects surrounding soundalikes: for instance, by ascertaining whether the categorization of tracks in libraries, with frequent allusions to streaming media, matches the search habits and expectations of clients.

The ethnographic data collected from interviews therefore allowed for an in-depth understanding of the distinctive production practices behind soundalikes, how these are discussed in the context of the library industry, and how streaming media influences the labelling of tracks in catalogues. Additionally, the interviews were invaluable to explore

specific questions that emerged after analyzing selected catalogues and online media: in particular, their data shed light on whether (and how) streaming-themed categorization in libraries plays any part in influencing composers as they produce library tracks.

Library music and soundalikes

Library music (also known as stock or production music) consists of pre-existing tracks meant to be used in all kinds of media. Today, it is found predominantly in online catalogues, where it is categorized by mood, emotion, genre, instrumentation, among other possible classifications. It is used in a great variety of audiovisual productions, from television and trailers to video games and online videos. Despite the negative reputation that still clings to library music (namely, the reductive notion that it is unoriginal and derivative), it is often a quicker and cheaper alternative to bespoke scores, making it a very significant source of music for a wide range of media, from broadcast television and film trailers to online videos and streaming.

Until recently, there has been a distinct dearth of scholarly research focusing specifically on library music as its main object of inquiry, even if it is frequently mentioned in passing in musicological studies of music in cinema, television, and other audiovisual media (Deaville, Tan, and Rodman 2021). Even publications with subject matters where an examination of library music would be particularly relevant (such as the use of pre-existing music in media) either explicitly or implicitly exclude this musical production from their scope (Godsall 2018). Notable exceptions to this scarcity are the work of Tagg (e.g. 2013) and Nardi (2012), with the former analyzing library music's codes and categories from a semiotic angle, and the latter broaching some of the aesthetic and labor implications of library music's production. Deaville (2017) has explored the use of library tracks in cinematic trailers and news broadcasts, while Wissner (2015), Haworth (2012), Czach (2020), and Roy (2023) have delved into historical questions relating to library music's use in cinema, television, and homemade videos, as well as library music's labor practices in the twentieth century.

Two recent publications have significantly expanded the study of library music: the edited volume *Anonymous Sounds: Library Music and Screen Cultures in the 1960s and 1970s*

(Sexton, Johnston, and Roy 2025), which provides an in-depth study of library music from the 1960s and 1970s (and its subsequent cult status); and a special issue of the journal *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* (Deaville, Durand, Huelin, and Morton 2024), which explores different facets of the production, categorization, and reception of library music in digital media. More recently as well, Huelin (2022) and Durand (2020) have focused in greater detail on specific aspects in the contemporary production and use of this music. Despite this, the use of library music in online contexts remains underexplored, especially given that recent publications touching on musical production and consumption in digital media (Rambarran 2021) have overwhelmingly privileged an examination of popular music, almost entirely disregarding library music – though the latter has become an inescapable sonic presence in a significant number of online formats.

Libraries are fundamentally guided by the goal of offering clients a vast array of musical choices, with a comprehensive selection of genres and styles. As part of their efforts of presenting a catalogue that is well-stocked with any sonority clients might require, libraries also offer so-called ›soundalikes‹. These are tracks that emulate the recognizable sound of pre-existing recordings, be it popular music hits or musical themes from cinema or television shows. There are different possible interpretations of the concept of ›soundalikes‹. The term may be used in a narrower sense, to refer specifically to recordings that closely replicate a pre-existing song or piece in every aspect: its composition, performance style, production, mixing, etc. Although soundalikes in general typically fulfil the role of ›standing in‹ for a musical original that cannot be realistically used in a production, this is especially true in these stricter cases of musical imitation, whose main goal is to evade the licensing fees that would apply if the original recording was used (Bernard and Rabin 2009).

However, I use here a broader definition of soundalikes: I include library tracks that, while closely resembling pre-existing music, are not a direct mock-up. This wider understanding rests on both *emic* and *etic* perspectives: we find it both in scholarly literature and handbooks for media composers, and in the accounts of library producers and clients during interviews, as these agents used the term ›soundalike‹ to refer to library tracks that generally evoked the recognizable sound of a streaming show. More significantly, this

broader definition allows us to encompass a practice in library music that is specific to the possibilities of digital and online catalogues: namely, the ability to change a library track's paratexts over time (with its inclusion in new playlists, for example), thus *retroactively* framing a track as a soundalike of a given film or show – even if it was not initially created with that purpose.

Although soundalikes are a derided low-cost alternative to ›original‹ music (which would most often be inordinately expensive to license for a production), they can nevertheless be very effective to quickly suggest the desired connotations in listeners, instantly evoking the original music that inspired them. Soundalikes are not always advertised with explicit references to the music they emulate: as we will see ahead, the primary reason for this is to avoid accusations of plagiarism and potential legal troubles, which are not unheard of in the library music industry (Cooke 2017). That being said, to ensure they are easily found by clients looking for a given sonority, these soundalikes are often given titles, descriptions, and keywords with relatively overt allusions to the music they emulate.

On this subject, it should be stressed that the categorization of library music is a key aspect that shapes this musical practice, one which is directly tied to its functional purpose of being synchronized with media. Meier (2017, 137) points to this when she briefly broaches the categorization of tracks in royalty-free libraries such as Jingle Punks, quoting the library practitioners who carry out this classification: »The uses to which the music may be put, then, shape how it is listened to and assigned relevance: ›[…] we don't think of music as hit single/not hit single. We think, is this going to end up on a Food Network show or is this going to end up on NBC's *Minute to Win It*‹.« This functional role of library music becomes intrinsically woven into the categories and other paratexts that organize tracks in catalogues, to the point where use-based classifications coexist on the same level with more typical music genres such as ›pop‹ or ›rock‹. Categories that suggest future uses for a track in terms of audiovisual genres are therefore particularly prominent: terms such as ›documentary‹, ›weddings‹ or ›comedy‹ (along with concepts that may allude to certain audiovisual imaginaries, such as ›wizard‹ or ›spy‹) come to operate effectively in these libraries as music genres, and, much like ›pop‹, ›rock‹ or ›jazz‹, denote specific musical characteristics.

The possible uses of a library track are therefore a central consideration for categorizing and tagging this music in catalogues. Most importantly, however, we should never regard the categorization of library music as a mere semiotic exercise in unveiling meanings that are somehow already implicit in a track. This would be an underestimation of the role of the library professionals who carry out this categorization, and who hold a decisive power over the future exploitation of this music (Durand 2020). In other words, as will be explored ahead with the accounts of interviewed composers, the categorization of library music is not merely descriptive, but also highly *prescriptive*, influencing the sonorities and formulas that composers will favor. We can therefore argue that the well-established conventions in the composition and categorization of library music form a feedback loop, with each informing and shaping the other.

For this reason, it is essential to bear in mind that this categorization does not merely order and organize tracks in a catalogue: it can influence the creation of tracks themselves, by prompting composers to privilege typified formulas that may more easily be categorized. To put it differently, since library music must fit into pre-existing categories so as to be easily found by clients, its composers are also encouraged to write tracks that will neatly fit these drawers – something that is quickly evidenced by the briefs sent by libraries. As an example, during an interview with Frank,[1] a British composer taking his first steps in this music industry, he describes how a library briefed him by pointing to the extra-musical categories that his music should fit into (›dramedy‹ and ›magic‹). Frank was also given as a reference the music of the television show DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES (ABC, 2004–2012), and was told to compose »Danny Elfman style« tracks. As Frank explains, these instructions suggested at once specific sonic parameters, particularly regarding timbre and instrumentation. Frank's testimony illustrates how these allusions to pre-existing media, be it television shows or other productions, are a cornerstone of library music creation and use. Even when there is no intention of creating a deliberate soundalike, the various agents who produce or interact with a library track (be they composers, library consultants, or media creators) fundamentally communicate by referring to a shared audiovisual imaginary.

[1] In order to ensure the anonymity of interviewees, their names were replaced by pseudonyms.

In addition to this, the categorization of library music is a crucial commercial strategy for libraries, as it allows them to frame their musical offerings according to clients' preferences. As such, these processes of categorization take into account which genres and styles are in demand at a given moment, and *how* (and with which vocabulary) clients are most likely to search for them. In this sense, if library music is labeled and described with reference to audiovisual productions, it is first and foremost to mirror the search habits of media producers. During interviews conducted with these agents, it soon became clear that they did not browse libraries exclusively (or even primarily) by music style, instrumentation, or other specifically musical traits: their vocabulary tended instead to focus on the end-uses of a track, the mood or emotion they wanted to convey, or the genre of their project. It is especially telling that thirteen out of fifteen interviewed videographers claimed that, when browsing library catalogues, they guided their search by the specific functions that they envisioned for a track to fulfil in a video, and the connotations they wished it to suggest. For this reason, and owing in part to their own perceived inability to use technical musical terms, they relied instead on keywords and categories that alluded to audiovisual genres – and, sometimes, to specific productions.

Indeed, library professionals often stress the challenge of communicating with clients who are not familiar with using music terminology to accurately describe what they are searching for. They therefore frequently point to musical or audiovisual references to indicate the specific sonorities they have in mind. On this subject, in a 2018 podcast available online, a music consultant from French library Cézame mentions precisely this type of communication shortcut between consultants and clients: »It's a creative process to make it easier for people that are not musicians, to look for what they really want. We even have ›fan of‹, so if you type ›fan of Michael Jackson‹, you won't have Michael Jackson, of course, but you will have something that is really, really alike.« (CruHub 2018)

In an in-person interview, Bryan, a French youtuber, described precisely this approach in his search for library tracks: he explained that he browsed royalty-free music websites with the names of science fiction series such as THE X-FILES (Fox, 1993–2002) and FRINGE (Fox, 2008–2013), as he sought to incorporate the iconic sound of these shows into his videos. This practice, however, is shaped by a significant tension between library produc-

ers and users, as some libraries avoid tagging and describing their tracks with explicit references to pre-existing music or media, in order to avoid any accusations of plagiarism. However, the ability to search a library according to what a given track might sound like is often prized by clients.

Bertha, a German wedding videographer, criticizes in a 2021 interview the lack of this feature in the royalty-free library Artlist, stating, »You can't put in the search engine something like, I want a song that sounds like that. Sometimes I know exactly what I want … and I know they have it, and I can't do that.« Paula, a Portuguese freelance videographer, echoes Bertha's search habits in a 2019 interview, claiming that she often browses catalogues by typing into their search engine the titles of streaming shows with the distinctive sound she is seeking, giving as examples the series THE LAST KINGDOM (BBC Two/Netflix, 2015–2022) and DAREDEVIL (Netflix, 2015–2018). However, Paula stresses that this approach does not always yield the results she hopes for, as not all the libraries she uses tag their tracks (whether overtly or covertly) with allusions to streaming media.

On this subject, Kurt, a British composer and founder of a library, points in a 2020 interview to the complex position in which he finds himself regarding this categorization practice. Even as he attempts to avoid overly explicit mentions to the films or series that inspired some tracks in his catalogue, he explains that he regularly receives requests from clients seeking music that »sounds exactly like something else«: »they say, can we just have a copy of Star Wars, and we'll change some bits and pieces, and we'll call it, you know, Sky Wars?«. The perspectives of these interviewees therefore reveal a rift in the ways in which these different agents interact with soundalikes: references to the films or series that inspired a library track (or that it might evoke) may be hidden by library producers out of caution, even as they fundamentally guide the searches of library clients.

»Fan of …«: streaming soundalikes

That being said, libraries increasingly market their tracks with either overt or covert references to high-grossing films or hit television and streaming series, paying close attention to which productions are most popular at a given moment. Interestingly, even when a li-

brary track is not deliberately created as a soundalike of a series, it may well get ›repackaged‹ in a library website: namely, by being included in a themed playlist offering a selection of music that sounds similar to the soundtrack of a series. For instance, in July 2019, ahead of the release of the third season of STRANGER THINGS, royalty-free library Artlist sent their newsletter subscribers an email with the advertisement: »Turn your world upside down with this 80's synth-heavy collection inspired by the upcoming season of *Stranger Things*.« Playlists like these, which are directly tied to popular streaming shows, are becoming more prevalent in library catalogues, often coinciding with the release of a new season – and thus a predictable spike in interest in the program.

We find clear examples of this on the website of the previously mentioned library Cézame, where we encounter several themed playlists titled »Fan of«, such as »Fan of Bridgerton« or »Fan of The Queen's Gambit«, advertised with the following text: »This series of ›sound alike‹ playlists offers selections of titles inspired by the soundtracks of some of the flagship series of recent years: from the great epics of modern heroic fantasy to thrillers, via comedies & teen-series!« (Cézame 2022). Among these, the playlist »Fan of The Queen's Gambit« consists of a mix of '60s pop- and Motown-inspired songs, along with instrumental tracks in a minimalist style, with repetitive strings and piano.[2] The playlist is thus based on the two musical genres that are predominantly heard in the 2020 Netflix series, encompassing both its diegetic and non-diegetic music. To give another example, a playlist entitled »Fan of Emily in Paris« presents a variety of tracks, from lively chanson to '60s-style French pop with Hammond organ and manouche jazz.[3] These tracks already existed in the Cézame catalogue – they were not created for this playlist specifically – but they are grouped here under the pastel pink and blue illustration of Paris that is meant to evoke the Netflix series EMILY IN PARIS (2020–present).

This demonstrates how streaming shows are gaining in importance as a vehicle for libraries to promote their music more strategically and effectively. This is especially relevant when we consider that, as previously discussed, the video editors and other audiovi-

[2] The playlist can be found at https://en.cezamemusic.com/the-queen-s-gambit-fan-of--playlist-142851.html (12.07.2025).

[3] The playlist can be found at www.cezamemusic.com/emily-in-paris-fan-of--playlist-143976.html (12.07.2025).

sual creators who form library music's main client base are very likely to search for music according to visual cues and pop culture references from cinema and television. More recently, original productions for streaming services have rapidly gained in relevance for this shared imaginary. As such, rather than browsing a library with music-specific keywords such as »manouche jazz« or »analog synth«, media producers might instead turn to the numerous STRANGER THINGS or EMILY IN PARIS-themed playlists that were presented in several libraries following the success of these Netflix series.

Turning now to the »Fan of Bridgerton« playlist we also find on Cézame's website, it mainly consists of string quartets or larger string ensembles (almost all of which are questionably described as »neo-classical«), playing arpeggios and other cyclical motifs, and strongly evoking the chamber arrangements of pop songs that were used in the series.[4] The title of this playlist has a direct, overt reference to the BRIDGERTON series; however, in these libraries, tracks can also be covertly tagged with keywords that are not visible to clients browsing a website, but which nevertheless guide the results of their search.

For instance, on the websites of royalty-free libraries Artlist, Soundstripe, Epidemic Sound, and Pond5, using the word »Bridgerton« in the search engine conjures a musical selection that is perfectly aligned with the sound of the series, be it the neo-classical cues composed by Kris Bowers, or the string quartet arrangements of pop songs. Among other examples, in Pond5, we find the track »Vintage Love«, described as »A Bridgerton-style string quartet arrangement. Light and airy with a little bounce«.[5] On the Artlist website, this keyword yields a combination of classical dances (such as gigues and minuets), as well as a significant number of string quartets, along with orchestral, pizzicato-heavy cues with piano.

The same applies to what can be found in the Soundstripe catalogue when it is searched with BRIDGERTON-tagged music: an abundance of lively and brisk string quartets, as well as slower piano and string tracks in a minimalistic style. Equally, the catalogue of Epidemic Sound presents a very similar-sounding offering when it is browsed using the key-

4 The playlist can be found at https://en.cezamemusic.com/la-chronique-des-bridgerton-fan-of--playlist-145776.html (12.07.2025).

5 The track can be found at www.pond5.com/pt/royalty-free-music/item/158813394-vintage-love (20.10.2024).

word »Bridgerton«: for example, the first few tracks in the search results, such as »Manors and Manners« and »Refined Antiquities«,[6] are string-heavy, with cheerful melodic lines in the upper registers, accompanied by driving and insistent motifs.

Looking beyond the categorization of tracks, the soundtracks of hit streaming shows can also influence the composition of library music itself, as we have already gleaned in the previous section with the case of Frank. Library composers have always been advised to study the characteristic sound of popular film and television productions, an advice which increasingly includes streaming media. For example, in an interview, Kurt states that he recommends to composers writing for his library that they pay close attention to the most popular music genres in television and streaming productions, in order to emulate the distinctive sounds that might be highly sought after by editors in a given moment – thus hinting at a feedback loop between library catalogues and streaming platforms.

Uses of streaming-inspired soundalikes in online media

Having described the tracks that we find in these catalogues, it is worth stressing that they do not claim to be historically accurate renditions of the music of early nineteenth century Britain, the setting in which BRIDGERTON takes place (albeit in a very fictionalized take of the Regency era). They instead closely resemble the characteristic style and instrumentation of the underscore and of the string covers of pop songs that are used in the series. On this topic, we can refer to a comment made by a music consultant of library West One Music Group, when promoting a playlist released by the library in 2017 with the theme of MEDICI: MASTERS OF FLORENCE (Rai 1, 2016–2019): »when putting the playlist together I focused more on recreating the mood and tone of the series rather than trying to represent the period through Renaissance instrumentation.« (West One Music Group 2017) Similarly, in these BRIDGERTON-tagged library tracks, we hear music that is closer to the streaming series' signature sound than to actual Regency-era pieces: while the piano and strings found in the playlist are a period-accurate choice of instrumentation, the tracks are

[6] The tracks can be found at www.epidemicsound.com/track/wyQOzIRYr4/ and www.epidemicsound.com/track/8QUxGEjwd1/ (20.10.2024).

characterized by a neo-classical and light-minimalist style that would be anachronistic for the early nineteenth-century.

Yet it is precisely this kind of sonority that we find in some online media that is presented as Regency-themed, and that is produced by fans of the series. YouTube and TikTok, among other social media and video sharing platforms, host an endless variety of fan videos inspired by BRIDGERTON, many of which use library tracks as background music (most of it sourced from more affordable royalty-free catalogues, such as Pond5 or Epidemic Sound). These videos range from short clips on how to host a Regency tea-party to music compilations inspired by a narrative prompt – such as »You're riding fast to stop a duel«.[7] Indeed, in this specific compilation, we hear the same library tracks that are presented in the Epidemic Sound website when it is browsed with the keyword »Bridgerton«.

Although it is unclear whether the tracks examined thus far were *deliberately* created as BRIDGERTON soundalikes, what matters here is that they were labelled in the Epidemic Sound catalogue with keywords and other paratexts that allude to this streaming series – and, therefore, that decisively influence this music's future uses in media, by prompting it to be included in online videos created by fans of the show. In addition, these tracks arguably become part of a wider reimagining of the musical sound of the nineteenth century, with neo-classical and minimalist traits that are distinctly anachronistic, but which, through their prevalence in period dramas, have nevertheless become strongly associated with certain historical eras.

This library music can thus be especially effective in sonically evoking this time period in online media, regardless of its historical accuracy. For instance, we find a clear example of this in a TikTok video advertising Victorian-style jewelry, using the very same BRIDGERTON-tagged tracks licensed from Epidemic Sound.[8] This particular case points us to a phenomenon which, while not entirely in the scope of this article, is worth highlighting: the fact that these library tracks, with their potential to evoke popular streaming shows, are wielded not only by individual creators in fan content, but also by a range of

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7 The videos can be found at www.tiktok.com/@style/video/7172195044169043246 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxBMejNHNtU (20.10.2024).

8 The video can be found at www.tiktok.com/@hoferantikschmuck/video/7251893282840530203 (20.10.2024).

businesses, from small local shops to large companies. Streaming soundalikes can thus be used in similar ways to serve different ends, from strengthening fan engagement with a series to promoting a business by appealing to its fan base. In this sense, we see how fluidly a library soundalike can move between different types of streaming-inspired media – and how it may contribute to distributing and reimagining the sound of a show beyond streaming platforms, whether it is used in fan practices or advertising strategies.

While we have focused so far on library music and media fan practices that revolve specifically around BRIDGERTON, we can of course identify these same phenomena in the case of other streaming series, such as Netflix's THE WITCHER (2019–present). To give but one example of this, a library track from Elysium Audiolabs, specializing in »music for content creators«, is used in a trailer for a fan film set in the WITCHER universe, published on YouTube on August 3, 2021.[9] Described as »dark trailer music«, the track, which begins with an ominous electronic motif and sparse instrumentation, gradually grows into a more intensely percussive and dissonant climax, closely resembling the epic sonority that we hear in trailers and other promotional material for the WITCHER series (relying heavily on bold percussions and darker-sounding electronic dissonances rather than recognizable melodic motifs). In this case, it should of course be noted that we are faced with a clear instance of transmedia storytelling: the WITCHER universe, firstly originating in books, was adapted into successful videogames that predate the Netflix series, and this fan film in particular may very well draw inspiration from all these different media adaptations.

Library-inspired soundalikes? The case of ENOLA HOLMES

As we have seen, an examination of library catalogues reveals how the popularity of certain streaming shows prompts the inclusion of similar-sounding tracks in libraries (or the strategic ›repackaging‹ of tracks that already existed in catalogues). This music, in turn, can reinforce associations in a shared popular imaginary between certain sonorities, ideas, and narratives, even potentially contributing to a wider reimagining of the music of a given time period. Furthermore, the use and reuse of these tracks in fan-produced content

[9] The trailer can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=l586oeoeHYg (03.09.2024).

can foster the spread of the iconic sound of a streaming show beyond the confines of streaming platforms and into social media.

In addition to this, however, although the prevalence of soundalikes might lead us to assume that library music is always relegated to the role of imitating the music of streaming shows and other popular media, this is not always the case – indeed, the reverse can also happen. Media composers often use library music as a training ground, either to try their hand at certain styles or genres they do not yet master (Durand 2023), or simply to experiment with new musical ideas – ideas which they may then recover, years later, for more prestigious media projects. Given this is a fairly common practice, we find at times in library catalogues earlier versions of cues which go on to be reworked and turned into the original themes for film, television or streaming productions.

We can find a telling example of this in Universal Production Music's catalogue. An album titled *Period Punks*, released in UPM's library in 2012, contains several tracks by renowned British media composer Daniel Pemberton, such as the homonymous »Period Punks«. This track, especially in regard to its instrumentation and the distinctive, pulsing rhythmic pattern of the strings, is strongly reminiscent of one of the main themes that Pemberton composed eight years later for the Netflix film ENOLA HOLMES (2020). Indeed, both the album and the track's descriptions (»19th century orchestra meets 21st century attitude; boisterous, irreverent, cocky«, and »A riotous mix of 19th century swagger & attitude«)[10] instantly evoke the rebellious, fourth-wall-breaking character of Enola.

At this stage, given that bespoke scores are typically more highly regarded than library music, it would be tempting to muddle the evaluative waters by asking: is Daniel Pemberton's 2020 bespoke score for ENOLA HOLMES a soundalike of his own 2012 library track? However, to get tangled in such a ›chicken-or-egg‹ dilemma would perhaps be to miss the point. It is no doubt more productive to challenge some of the dichotomies in which library music is recurrently cast, and rarely in a positive light: as a derivative imitation of something supposedly more authentic, or as a formulaic blueprint of an original. These dualities are indissociable from other longstanding »dichotomous oppositions« identified

[10] The track can be found at www.universalproductionmusic.com/en-gb/discover/albums/7902/Period-Punks (20.10.2024).

by Negus and Pickering (2004, 146), such as creativity/commerce, art/craft, and originality/imitation. Though the validity of these contrasting concepts (and their implicit hierarchies) has already been amply challenged by scholars in different fields (Hesmondhalgh 2019), we must take into account that they continue to inform how library music is (de)valued today, and how it is understood in relation to other musical practices.

Concluding remarks

It is indisputable that library music acts as a repository of musical stereotypes from popular media. Library catalogues are filled with formulas that have crystallized into clichés, and that have become synonymous with certain audiovisual worlds and narratives. Crucially, in an online landscape where a streaming show is often accompanied by sneak peek previews, behind-the-scenes, and other audiovisual paraphernalia, media producers are eager to find library tracks that effectively evoke the sound of a series, as evidenced both by the online media analyzed throughout the article and the accounts of interviewed library producers and users. On this subject, it would be rather narrow-sighted to focus solely on professionally-produced trailers and promos, and to disregard the amateur content that plays a vital role in consolidating or transforming the musical identity of a streaming show in online contexts.

However, while streaming media does influence library music, in turn, library music also actively shapes the sound of streaming media – as we could glean from the case of the »Period Punks« library track, as an embryonic version of the ENOLA HOLMES theme. Another good example to illustrate this phenomenon is that of two pages on Universal Production Music's website: one displaying tracks from the library that were featured in the STRANGER THINGS series (Universal Production Music 2024a); and the other presenting a playlist of tracks »inspired by« the music of STRANGER THINGS (Universal Production Music 2024b).

Library tracks can therefore point us to deep-rooted associations between certain music and certain narratives or fictional worlds in the context of streaming media – regardless of whether such tracks were purposely created as soundalikes, or were simply later ›repackaged‹ to strategically call attention to their sonic affinity with the soundtrack of specific

shows. That being said, library music is not a mere reflection of the musical trends of streaming productions: it also contributes to the strengthening of the musical imaginary of these audiovisual narratives. This was evidenced on different fronts by the interviews with library creators and users. During interviews, it became clear that allusions to streaming media frequently permeate every step in the production and categorization of a library track: composers are advised to emulate the characteristic sound of popular productions; tracks are strategically tagged and (re)framed with allusions to certain shows; and library clients may browse catalogues by referencing these productions, as they have become synonymous with specific musical genres and styles. These associations are then strengthened in streaming-themed online media, which, as we have seen, can use library tracks to create a strong sonic coherence with the show or series that inspired it.

In that sense, library music can shape the distinctive sound that is associated with these shows *beyond* the boundaries of streaming platforms, whether in promotional clips for social media or in fan-produced content. Indeed, this quick-to-license music is a valuable resource for fans wishing to engage with the narratives of streaming shows, and to build their own media storytelling based on these fictional worlds. In that sense, library tracks which (deliberately or not) strongly fit the musical style of a series can thus function as a sonic continuation that bridges a streaming show with fan content produced for social media, strengthening the wider musical imaginary of a streaming series.

We therefore find a feedback loop between library catalogues, streaming shows, and streaming-inspired media, as library music users actively seek tracks that evoke or emulate the sound of particular shows. Taking this into account, there are several possible avenues for future research: in particular, while this article examined uses of library tracks in various kinds of online videos, in-depth interviews with the creators of these different types of content would allow for a more nuanced understanding of how soundalikes are specifically wielded in fan videos, advertising, and other kinds of media.

To conclude, these cases of streaming-inspired library tracks (or even of library tracks that go on to inspire the themes of streaming shows) prompt us to challenge the unfavorable reputation of soundalikes, and the lingering romantic tendency to disparage any and all forms of imitation or emulation. Library tracks advertised as soundalikes, far from being

exclusively copies of pre-existing music, can instead reveal a clear grasp of the musical codes and formulas that are characteristic of a streaming series, all while developing distinctive musical ideas. Rather than regarding library music as a mere mirror of popular trends, we should approach it as part of a continuum of evolving music formulas from audiovisual narratives, both feeding from, and into, the musical imaginaries of streaming media.

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