

Crimson Tide:

Hans Zimmer, Subliminal Harmony, and Submerged Voices

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Crimson Tide (Tony Scott, 1995) is a signal example of Hollywood action-adventure movies of the past forty years and in particular of the “high-concept” movie. The score by Hans Zimmer is a landmark score for the composer and consolidates his reputation for scoring films of that genre. This article addresses the now-famous Zimmerian work process and several stylistic traits, including the use of a male chorus. Choral voices in the film’s context provide both a synecdochic link to the submariners but also function as a commentative chorus. Using Neo-Riemannian theory, the potential contribution of which to film-music studies is still only now beginning to be explored, I examine the deployment of specific harmonic strategies that create a link back to earlier Hollywood film-music practices and show how Zimmer represents less an evolution than a continuation of recognisable styles and idioms.

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Crimson Tide (Tony Scott, 1995) was the second movie made by the Don Simpson/Jerry Bruckheimer production team, noted for its glossy, high-tempo action, action-comedy and drama movies in the 1980s. Their first commercial hit was *Flashdance* (Adrian Lyne, 1983), followed by the action-comedy *Beverly Hills Cop* (Martin Brest, 1984), and the immensely successful *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), *Beverly Hills Cop II* (Tony Scott, 1987), and the less acclaimed *Days of Thunder* (Tony Scott, 1990). These last three were the first of six films made with British director, Tony Scott, who would make a further four films for Bruckheimer (Don Simpson died in 1996).

Crimson Tide is set for the main part on a submarine, the USS *Alabama*, and revolves around a conflict between two senior officers: the captain of the ship, Frank Ramsey (Gene Hackman), and the second-in-command, Executive Officer (XO) Ron Hunter (Denzel Washington). The combat-hardened Ramsey has little time for his more pensive XO and, when the boat is crippled and unable to retrieve a half-transmitted message that may prevent the launch of nuclear missiles, overrides protocol and attempts to arrest his XO. Hunter relieves the captain of command and has him confined to his quarters, whereupon the captain leads a mutiny and wrests control back again, only for Hunter to stage a counter-mutiny. The standoff between the two men is resolved when the



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mangled message is finally received, instructing the crew not to launch a pre-emptive strike. In a coda, the two men are reconciled, with Ramsey retiring and Hunter being promoted to captain of his own boat.

Simpson/Bruckheimer movies were described as “high concept”, films that were sold on a distilled premise that usually invoked two familiar movies. The original pitch for *Crimson Tide*, for example, was *The Hunt for Red October* (John McTiernan, 1990) meets *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), the basis of which was a nuclear sub’s computer attempting to launch a nuclear attack, a story not a million miles away from *Fail Safe* (Sydney Lumet, 1964) and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964) (Lysy 2019). The Navy apparently rejected the outline on the grounds that a computer could not operate independently of human control. The revised pitch and subsequent movie might be described as a cross between *Fail Safe* and *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Lewis Milestone, 1962) or the more recent *The Bounty* (Roger Donaldson, 1984), though the movie has a more obvious direct precedent in the form of *Run Silent, Run Deep* (Robert Wise, 1958) which dramatizes the different approaches of a captain and an XO, played respectively by Clark Gable and Burt Lancaster. In *Crimson Tide*, the conflict between Ramsey and Hunter is dramatically highlighted in a series of stark oppositions: heart/head, simple/complicated, combat-hardened/Harvard-educated, widower/family man, classical music/pop music, old/young, impotent/potent, white/black. These oppositions are given musical form in Hans Zimmer’s score with respective though somewhat similar leitmotifs, more on which later.

Attitudes to Zimmer within film-music scholarship are somewhat ambivalent. His role in transforming film-music practices and adapting to the demands of big-budget filmmaking earns respect, but with that comes none of the slightly breathless admiration conferred upon a composer like John Williams. Part of that hesitation is due to nostalgia; Williams had served his apprenticeship as an orchestrator to such luminaries as Franz Waxman, Alfred Newman, and Bernard Herrmann, and thereby perpetuates a link to the traditions exemplified by Golden Age and Silver Age composers. Williams also exemplifies the old-school film practices, which is to say composing at the piano with pen and ink, and conducting his own music, eschewing SMPTE code prompts and pursuing the more traditional practice of click-track and streamers.¹ The image of the lone composer to which Williams conforms, a creator wrestling only with his imagination, epitomises the myth of the Romantic artist, and that very human image is furthered by an awareness of Williams’s career as a conductor of symphony orchestras.² Though Zimmer regularly uses modern orchestras, he has shown himself partial to synthesized sounds, and his mastery of computers and digital technology is well documented.³ Williams operates very much as an

¹ See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYE-mhJ0m5g> (last accessed November 16, 2024), where Williams’s use of streamers can clearly be seen.

² On Williams’s career as a composer for film see Audissino (2021a), and for his work with the Boston Pops Orchestra see Audissino (2021b).

³ James Buhler and David Neumeyer put Zimmer very much front and centre in their student primer and see him as representative of the new approach. (Buhler and

independent, overseeing his own orchestrations and conducting his own scores, while Zimmer entrusts such tasks to a stable of collaborators and associates. He also owns his own company, something that brings with it unproven rumours of exploitation and corporate hegemony, even though many successful film composers credit him with advancing their careers.

In terms of musical style, Williams's music lends itself to traditional and more elaborate musical analysis in a way that Zimmer's does not. It is "complex-for-its-own-sake" music that frequently displays formal features and structures of classical music (Lehman 2019; 2021, 143). It also employs longer-limbed themes like those of Korngold in contrast to briefer and more focused musical motifs that depend on broader musical gestures and affect (Halfyard 2013). Williams's music therefore gives the music analyst plenty to get their teeth into while Zimmer's scores yield relatively less to careful scrutiny.⁴ That is not to say, however, that Williams himself has adapted to changing musical approaches in the new millennium, as Frank Lehman's detailed survey of William's evolving musical style reveals (Lehman 2021).

Nicholas Reyland has termed the Zimmerian process "corporate classicism" (2015) while Frank Lehman employs a considerably less freighted term: "Media Ventures/Remote Control" style (MV/RCP) (2021).⁵ Reyland's characterisation is fairly light on detail, beyond arguing that Zimmer's and his collaborators' music rely on "'secondary' compositional parameters, such as timbre, texture and rhythm, [to] do the heavy dramatic lifting, with manipulations thereof providing musical nuance and variety" (Reyland 2015, 118–19). Mark Isham offers a terser take on Zimmer's style: "You get the rhythmic drive from a synthesizer and overlay an orchestra on top of it to give you that big Hollywood quality [...Music] has a very utilitarian role. It's just there—it's just churning along. You could write decent music, you could write brilliant music. I don't really know if it would make that big a difference in a film where music is used in that way" (Schelle 1999, 215–16). Isham's final observation is well made; there are moments in both Williams's and Zimmer's films where music is not merely unheard but unhearable. Frequently in *Crimson Tide* it is difficult to discern if music has stopped or has merely been drowned out by shouting and sound effects demanded by the director in post-production.⁶

Neumeyer 2016, 445–55).

4 Zimmer's music is not as simple as it might first appear. See, for example, Lehman's account of chromatic transformation in the scores for the "Da Vinci Code" series in Lehman (2018, 114–18).

5 I detect a touch of damning with faint praise on Lehman's part in comments about Zimmer, though Lehman may well reject my reading of the following: "Part of Zimmer's appeal to filmmakers is specifically that he is not as stylistically chameleonic as, say, John Williams (who can do a convincing Zimmer impression, though I have not yet observed the reverse). Zimmer cannot help but speak in his own, immensely distinctive voice." (Lehman 2016, 33).

6 "Tony wanted to surround the audience with the feeling of being in a metal structure, to increase the feeling of claustrophobia and what it was like to be on a submarine. He likes sounds to be big and aggressive. A director's feel for both the sound and the film is individual and key to the process." (George Watters, Supervising Sound

The lack of a detailed analysis of Zimmer's music and a general conflation of his working practice with the resultant score has led to the impression of an unvarying musical style. That image, however, is not borne out by the very different idioms in which Zimmer has written. He has frequently collaborated with specialist musicians—Pete Haycock for *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991), Lisa Gerrard for *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000)—and has also incorporated ethnic musical traditions—*The Power of One* (John G. Avildsen, 1992), *Beyond Rangoon* (John Boorman, 1995), and *The Lion King* (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994). Zimmer nevertheless stands charged for a certain Terminator tendency: a reliance on computers, synthesisers, and corporate workflow, all of which is antithetical to the image of the creative individual.⁷ The abiding accusation is that Zimmer and his school have reduced film scoring to a set of recognisable, some might say clichéd, formulae. However, as James Buhler points out, Reyland seems to be referring only to the scores Zimmer has written for action movies, though that same focus on action movies elsewhere informs Buhler and David Neumeyer's account of Zimmer's musical style (Buhler and Neumeyer 2016, 447–49; Buhler 2020). In both cases, the corporate classical style is aligned with David Bordwell's notion of modern filmic style as intensified continuity (Bordwell 2002). Different terms have been used for the particularly frantic editorial strategies to which Bordwell is referring, the most visceral of which is chaos cinema, though I note in passing that such a description does not really apply to *Crimson Tide*. Screen direction there is maintained throughout, and the axes of the submarine and its occasional pursuer are consistent, though there is a marked preference for disorientating canted camera angles during moments of high dramatic tension.⁸

The relationship of film style to musical style aside, the role that digital technology has played in Zimmer's scores and those of his collaborators cannot be overstated. It has allowed and encouraged collaboration, a modern solution to the loss of the production-line approach of the old Hollywood studio system, providing composers with access to a library of sampled sounds that enables them to produce more convincing mock-ups of the finished product than any piano demonstration can. Music can be quickly manipulated and alternative versions realised with a few clicks, rather than having to splice in alternative versions or even re-record sections. Zimmer even occasionally writes music in advance, providing directors effectively with his own temp track. Digital audio workstations such as Pro Tools, which have become the industry standard, encourage a more modular design than that of the theme-based scores,

Editor, quoted in Sonnenschein 2001, 177).

7 “Criticisms [of] Zimmer...” seem steeped in the notion that the composer should be the sole creator of the music and in the misconception that Zimmer is nothing but a delegator. Similarly, the material facts of how Zimmer works and how RCP actually functions are often misrepresented or misunderstood. As a result, Zimmer is often treated to a level of hostility rarely seen directed at other composers, a fact no doubt helped by his willingness to discuss these issues.” (Kmet 2018, 1).

8 There is, in fact, one disruption of screen direction in the conversation between Weps and Dougherty. See 01h16'58" to 01h17'16".

facilitating complex cut-and-paste manipulations as a film goes through its various editing stages (Kerins 2015, 138–46). Music is consequently no longer so carefully yoked to onscreen actions but provides a broader sustained accompaniment, “underscoring kinetic poses and the play of affect more than identity or even feeling as an expression of individuated emotion” (Buhler and Durrand 2021, xvi).

The score of *Crimson Tide*, one of which Zimmer himself is proud, stands as something of a landmark in confirming many of the traits of the Zimmerian product.⁹ That, at least, is the way that the press and Zimmer’s fans have seen it:

With Crimson Tide [Zimmer] found the perfect vehicle to launch his new methodology and fundamentally transform film score art in the process. His new modern sound, characterized by powerful, electronica bravado, bold percussion, forceful low register men’s chorus and kinetic, driving string ostinati would revolutionize the cinematic experience and become a dominating force for blockbuster films for almost two decades [...] This score was the catalyst that unleashed the Zimmer revolution, which forever transformed film score art. [...] While Rain Man opened the door to Zimmer’s new methodology, Crimson Tide blew the door off its hinges, ushering in his new sound that would dominate Hollywood blockbuster films for decades (Lysy 2019).

More succinctly: “The masculine, synthetic style of *Crimson Tide* has been so influential in defining the sound of the countless Media Ventures/Remote Control production house scores that have come since that it’s somewhat awkward to realize that all that electronic bravado derives from *Crimson Tide*, the first and greatest score of their kind” (Filmtracks, n.d.). (The phrase “electronic bravado” that these two quotations share seems to be entirely coincidental). And, even more pithily: “*Crimson Tide* was probably the moment that Zimmer took over the world”.¹⁰

Despite such groundbreaking status, the score harks back to antecedents, providing a generic link to earlier submarine films and amplifying the film’s awareness of its heritage. Indeed, *Run Silent, Run Deep* and *The Enemy Below* (Dick Powell, 1957) are archly referenced by the character of Lt Bobby Dougherty (James Gandolfini) who quizzes his colleagues on the casts of submarine movies. The score does much the same by adopting musical strategies from earlier scores, availing itself of a familiar inventory of sounds that mimic specific acoustic features of the world of submarines, notably sonar pings.¹¹

9 “Z: Ironically, despite all the scores I’ve written, there are very few I’m proud of. B: Those are? Z: *A World Apart*, *Driving Miss Daisy*, and a couple of cues in *Crimson Tide*” (Blake 1998).

10 Posting by forum member Other Tallguy on February 23, 2018: <https://www.filmscoremonthly.com/board/posts.cfm?forumID=1&pageID=2&threadID=126000&archive=0> (Last accessed November 16, 2024).

11 For an account of the “acoustemology of submarine life”, see Koldau (2010). However, Koldau only addressed films made after 1980. Mervyn Cooke (2019, 94) traces

Such sounds are not used as obviously as the score for *Das Boot* (Wolfgang Petersen, 1981), where the chugging of diesel engines and sonar pings are used as percussion, but are a significant part of a submarine's claustrophobic sonic cocoon. But there is more telling tie to generic precedents in the particular use of a low male chorus. *Destination Tokyo* (Delmer Daves, 1943), for example, makes use of diegetic onboard carolling and snatches of "The Star-Spangled Banner", and "America the Beautiful" is heard when the sub returns triumphantly to San Francisco; the crew of the U-boat in *The Enemy Below* sing a cappella as they commit the dead body of a colleague to the waves; and *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959) features various male-voice treatments of "Waltzing Matilda", from small-ensemble intimacy to militaristic and drunken. *Crimson Tide's* more recent reference was the choir in Basil Poledouris' score for *The Hunt for Red October* (John McTiernan, 1990).

However, together with synthesized orchestral sounds, "real" instruments, and percussion, here mainly in the form of military side drum, a choir is also a key hallmark of the Zimmerian idiom.¹² Before I consider it in more detail, it is worth addressing the specific genesis of the choral voices in so far as it touches very clearly on Zimmer's emergent work practice.¹³ In advance of composing the music, separate sessions were organised in London for groups of thirty tenors, thirty baritones and thirty basses, where each group sang a range of notes on different vowels and consonants. Those samples were subsequently loaded into Zimmer's synthesisers to be used as a compositional aid.¹⁴ The score was then composed and subsequently the same singers were invited to record the choral parts as the standard part of post-production. Two points stand out here: first, it seems entirely likely that the samples have become part of "the sample libraries at Remote Control Productions, which far exceed anything commercially available, [and] are widely recognized to be far ahead of its closest competitor"; second, Zimmer could easily have saved himself the considerable costs of re-recording by using the samples. (Buhler and Neumeyer 2016, 448). That he returned to the same fixer and musicians says much about what Vasco Hexel has termed Zimmer's *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme*, which he explains as Zimmer's "strong ethical sense to secure fellow musicians' livelihood [...] painstakingly supplant[ing] samples with real instruments where appropriate".¹⁵

the particular use of the sonar ping to *The Cruel Sea* (Charles Frenn, 1953).

12 A "choral ensemble [which] often performs in the lowest depths of the male voices, establish[es] another typical sound for a Media Ventures score" (Filmtracks, n.d.).

13 I note here my role as one of the singers. Given that I made no contemporaneous notes, inevitably I cannot vouch for my memory, though I have spoken with others involved in the sessions to confirm my pertinent recollections. The date of recording of the choral sections of the score itself, if I am understanding my old diary, appears to be April 4 1995. Harry Gregson-Williams, who had been a boy chorister at St John's College, Cambridge, and who clearly understands voices, conducted the choral sessions.

14 Further instances of the choir can be heard in the expanded score available on Expanded Motion Picture Score: *Crimson Tide*, Hollywood Records, BV4489-2521-2 (2002)

15 See Vasco (2016, 141). A footnote explains that *Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme* "was a popular German government subsidy scheme in the 1990s to create jobs in times

To return to the score itself, rather than the stripped-down themes of *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005), an economy that is frequently cited as a Zimmerian trait, *Crimson Tide* features at least one “big theme” and several motifs.¹⁶ That featured in the cue “Roll Tide” is associated not with an individual character but with the USS *Alabama* and, by extension, its crew [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1: Alabama theme

In D minor, to which for the main part the score remains grimly steadfast, the theme is anthemic and militaristic, self-confident save for its minor key orientation. As Lehman has noted, its first two bars are much the same as Siegfried’s theme in Wagner’s operas in line with Zimmer’s fondness for a Teutonic Theme when it comes to action-adventure films. (Lehman 2016, 40)

Hunter’s theme [Fig. 2], likewise in D minor, has similar contours, though the cadence which returns the theme to its original starting point signals a certain wistfulness that receives its most obvious timbral expression when it is first heard played on acoustic guitar as the XO says goodbye to his family.¹⁷



Fig 2: Hunter's theme.

Ramsey’s theme [Fig. 3], such as it is, is pointedly thrusting, and possessed of a sequential logic that suggests it might never quite end.



Fig 3: Mutiny/Ramsey theme.

Elsewhere, the most dominant theme is that described by some as the “War” theme [Fig. 4], stated clearly occasionally, though variants otherwise aimlessly meander around the same pitch class [Fig. 5] later allowing a statement of the Dies Irae theme (heard very clearly on the soundtrack album on the “1sq” cue at 02’11”.

of high unemployment rates”.

16 For references to the minimalist themes of *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005), see Halfyard (2013); Buhler and Neumeyer (2016, 484-86); Hexel (2016).

17 I venture a guess that the original temp track included music from Jerry Goldsmith’s *Under Fire*. Notable here are this iteration of Hunter’s theme, played on acoustic guitar, the sound of which seems to derive directly from Nicaragua (more recently recycled in *Django Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino, 2012) and Pat Metheny’s contribution in cues such as “A New Love and Rafael’s Theme”. Note also, though, the similarity between the Metheny/Goldsmith tune and Zimmer’s own theme for *Bird on a Wire* (1990). Elsewhere, the rhythmic panpipes heard in other cues from *Under Fire* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1983) may well have inspired Zimmer’s use of the same orchestration (ignoring its ethnic inappropriateness) to signal tension.



Fig 4: War theme.



Fig 5: War outline.

The militaristic bent of the music, determined in part by the arpeggiated structure of fanfares, is for the main diatonic but, as with other Zimmer scores, subject to panchromatic inflection. It is here that Neo-Riemannian theory serves as a valuable tool. Developed relatively recently, mainly in the USA by such scholars as David Lewin, Richard Cohn and others, it has been taken up by film-music scholars such as Scott Murphy and also Frank Lehman. Lehman's book (2018) develops a methodology that seeks to account for the most distinctive harmonic topoi found in Hollywood music since the 1930s though more particularly on New Hollywood that explain and to a degree shape spectatorial response. The most useful term here is *leitharmonie*, which immediately expands and develops the oversimplified and somewhat discredited idea of the *leitmotif*. As Lehman shows, emotional states are conditioned and amplified more by harmonic language than guided by leitmotivic identification. While harmonic gestures are semantically mutable, their meanings with a delimited cultural form such as narrative cinema are relatively fixed. Harmonic instances also function as punctuative effects, moments where the soundtrack scream for the spectator's attention just as much as a dynamically contrastive musical moment or a filmic jump cut. And, particularly in the case of action-adventure movies since the 1980s with their dense soundtracks, harmonic shifts are repeatedly used by composers to make their music stand out from the sonic carnage. To take but one example from *Crimson Tide*, a sequence that runs from around 00h41'30" to 00h44'06", during which time the *Alabama* makes contact with the enemy Russian sub, the music ratchets up through a series of octatonically related T_2 and T_3 (i.e. transposition of the chord up a major second and a minor third respectively) from Cm, though $D\flat m$, Em, Gm, $E\flat m$, $F\sharp m$, $F\sharp^{dim}$, Am, A^{dim} and up to Cm by way of firmly stated triadic chords to reflect the rising tension and jeopardy onboard the American submarine.

However, the score's more significant and recurrent shifts are an LP progression from Dm to $B\flat m$ and a PL progression from Dm to $F\sharp m$ ($G\flat m$); and on occasion, two consecutive LP progressions lead from Dm to $B\flat m$ to $G\flat m$. Often that movement will resolve more conventionally via AM, Am or A^{dim} to Dm. The LP/PL progression, a movement by chromatic third, elsewhere designated the Tarnhelm progression from its use in Wagner's Ring (Bribitzer-Stull 2015, 131-56 passim), is for Lehman "perhaps the most stereotypically cinematic of all pantriadic procedures". (Lehman 2018, 68; Lehman prefers not to refer to such procedures as "'chromatic mediants' [...]" which suggests the diatonic functional notion of a mediant chord". [Lehman 2018, 68]). The progression "bear[s] a strong attraction to the affective "dark side" [...] [and is] the tonal calling card of

Darth Vader, Voldemort, Gollum, and many other memorable cinematic villains". (Lehman 2018, 101)

The first instance of Dm to F#m in *Crimson Tide* occurs at 00h01'06" as we cut to a "live" news broadcast from an aircraft carrier from an onscreen post-credit text ("The three most powerful men in the world: The President of the United States...The President of the Russian Republic...and...The Captain of a U.S. nuclear missile submarine"). The clear function of the music here is as dramatic punctuation, signalling the danger that the Russian rebel forces pose. The same harmonic lurch is reprised at 01h04'05" as we cut from an uneasy conversation between Cob (George Dzundza) and Hunter to an exterior shot of the sub. Here, it is the sea itself that stands as the menace.

The shift from Dm to Bbm operates somewhat differently elsewhere: rather than demarcating narrative episodes, it underlines and exaggerates social tension. An early example occurs when the senior crew are having dinner. Ramsey teases Hunter about what Ramsey sees as an unnecessary and inappropriate theorisation of war. As the discussion builds, the music progresses from Dm to Bbm, thence to F#m (Gbm) and AM,⁷ before returning to Dm. This double Tarnhelmic shift points towards the danger that Ramsey, a hard-ass as he is described by Weps (Viggo Mortensen), poses; Ramsey does not examine a problem from multiple angles and is more inclined to follow orders without question, a course of action that does not allow for error or accident. Heard in this cue are two highly significant motivic figures that are concurrently doubled in orchestral parts but primarily borne by the male chorus. The first is an articulation of the Dm/Bbm/F#m (Gbm)/AM figure, a rising triadically based figure with added seconds [Fig. 6] sung by the low bases. It is elsewhere heard when Ramsey wrests back control and orders that Hunter be arrested. For example, from 01h24'06" to 01h24'26".



Fig 6: Menacing figure.

The other similarly outlines the harmonic progression but in the tenor part, a simple melodic oscillation [Fig. 7].



Fig 7: Motivic cell.

The progression from Dm to Bbm to F#m (Gbm), achieved by a movement of the tonic downwards (or upwards) by a major third, lends the score symmetry and organic cohesion, which the Tonnetz diagram demonstrates [Fig. 8].

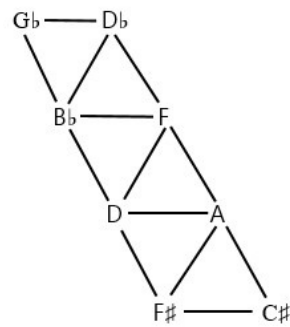


Fig 8: Tonnetz diagram of main harmonic structure: Dm/Bbm/F#m.

Note also that because the G_b/D_b axis being enharmonically identical to the F_#/C_# axis, a 3-D toroidal representation produces a (pleasingly) tubular structure.

The use of low male chorus in the score is of particular interest throughout. It is prominent towards the end of the Ramsey/Hunter debate, clearly cycling on the vowels [eɪ] and [u], and in the later cue, the menacing arpeggiated figure is assigned to the low basses. The chorus is first heard when the senior crew is briefed (the musical cue runs from 00h08'49" to 00h11'22") but is considerably more present when the Alabama prepares to dive. There, we hear the first of two iterations of the hymn "Eternal Father, strong to save" (aka the "Navy Hymn"), which was adopted by the US and British navies and became associated with seafarers more generally. The hymn acts as a benediction on the mission and a prayer for the safety of the crew. Its role as such is confirmed later in the film when the XO gives the order to seal the bilge bay, thereby saving the boat though sacrificing some of the men. (01h12'32" to 01h14'07"). (Strangely, the chorus is replaced at moments by a very obvious choral synth pad, perhaps because time ran out in the recording studio, a fairly common occurrence). Throughout the film, the chorus is metonymically linked to the crew and simultaneously appeals to the spectator's empathy, standing in for the spectator as well. Neither fully diegetic nor entirely nondiegetic, the chorus exists in the space commonly referred to as the fantastical gap. That liminal status is confirmed by the use of words, which, as I have noted elsewhere, are customarily avoided in nondiegetic music where the order of the day is faux languages or nonsense syllables (Greig 2021). In the case of *Crimson Tide*, that particular logic is taken one step further with consonants being entirely absent and different vowels sung by different parts, sometimes homophonically, and occasionally run together, i.e. a -e-i-o-u ([eɪ] [i] [aɪ] [ɒ] [u]). Potential meaning is thus even further mitigated than the standard default setting of random syllables derived from Latin or invented languages.

But the choir is more than merely timbral extension; it is part of an extended strategy of musical humanisation that echoes social dynamics. It is often heard when Hunter, a university-educated, part-time philosopher, is onscreen, such as the discussion in the officers' mess (see above), when he is forced to make his decision about shutting the bilge door, and in the final confrontation with

Hunter as they await the EAM message. Other instances are when Weeps has to decide whether to retrieve the launch codes from the safe or not, where the harmonic sequence of Dm/AM7/C^{dim}/Gm/Dm/Ab^{dim}/AM/Dm accompanied by voices loosely cycles on the vowel sounds [eɪ], [i], [aɪ], [ɒ], and [u] (01h18'44" to 01h19'15"). In both of these cases, the choir underscores moments of self-questioning, expressing human doubt and uncertainty.

However, the more arresting calibration of choral voices with specific filmic elements is the alignment between the choir and exterior shots of the submarine. This happens on several occasions, though not universally. Nevertheless, once noticed, the correspondences are striking. The first instance is a shot at 01h04'55" of the USS *Alabama* and the Russian Akula-class sub that reveals the proximity of the two vessels, this a moment before the crew itself realises. Later, when the *Alabama* is attacked by the Russian sub, the onboard scenes that show and describe the Alabama's attempt to evade enemy torpedoes are supplemented by exterior shots at 01h08'14", 01h08'34", and 01h08'52". Each of these shots prompts an ominous synthesized vocal roar. That same sound accompanies exterior shots of the sub after it has been hit and sinks inexorably to the depths (01h09'28", 01h09'49", 01h10'14", 01h10'38", and 01h11'18"), the last which uses the "real" choir.

What is the reason for this quirky alignment of voices with exterior shots? One explanation would be that they build on empathy for the submariners, signalling that lives are in peril, but jeopardy alone is surely not sufficient here. It explains to the use of the naval hymn when the crew desperately try to save the boat but does not take account of the alignment of voices with exterior shots.¹⁸ As noted, the first instance is the shot at 01h04'55", which provides the viewer with information to which the crew are not at that moment privy. As such, this is a rare case in this film of a shot being pointedly signalled as being from the perspective of the omniscient third-person narrator. Subsequent exterior shots of the sub as it sinks are narratively redundant; the interior shots and the dialogue keep us constantly apprised of the state of the boat. I have argued elsewhere that "the voice is a forceful synecdoche of human agency" (Greig 2021, 39); here, that logic is transferred to narrative agency. The exterior shots reveal the narrative hand and simultaneously evoke and exploit the particular properties of the human voice as actant, aligning music self-consciously at the film's meta-commentative level, much like a chorus in Greek tragedy, stepping outside of the narrative and tying a potent part of the orchestral palette directly to narration itself.

As noted earlier, the film composer of action-adventure films is, particularly in the era of muscular sound systems such Dolby 7:1, Dolby Atmos and the like, has to compete with a meaty cacophony of sound effects, screamed dialogue, and explosions. Music is increasingly required to make its point with economy,

18 The naval hymn begins at 01h12'34" and lasts until 01h14'08". (Note that this is the sequence in which a very obvious synth pad is used for a short while).

and often the overlap between musical timbre and special effects blur, nowhere more so than synthesized sounds produced by composers, a particularly Zimmerian trait. Zimmer has shown himself to be one of this new cinema's most successful exponents but there is musical intelligence at work. Furthermore, the strategies that Zimmer pursues and at which he is so skilled, hark back to the Golden Age of Hollywood and to the musical dramas of Wagner and others upon which that tradition so obviously draws.

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