

## THE DIRECTOR-COMPOSER DUO: POLANSKI & KOMEDA'S DECONSTRUCTION OF FILM MUSIC CONVENTIONS IN HORROR CINEMA. *FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* (1967) AND *ROSEMARY'S BABY* (1968)\*

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Shot in the Italian Dolomites, the British-American film by the Polish director opens a new chapter in his life and work. *Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967) is a breakthrough picture not only visually (color), but also musically (an almost complete departure from jazz, which until then had been the most important trademark of Polanski's film soundtracks). Instead, the impact on both layers is conditioned (financial considerations aside) by genre convention, which Polanski had already used to good effect in *Repulsion* (1965) and later in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). And although the director claims that he made his two American films for very different reasons than *Cul-de-Sac* (1966)—it was not about testing the limits of cinema this time but pure fun—it is worth repeating after Stuart Wilson that “Roman's a deep, deep pool who likes to make like he's a shallow pool.”<sup>1</sup>

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\* The text is a translation of an excerpt from the chapter „*Nieustraszeni zabójcy wampirów i Dziecko Rosemary, czyli filmowe wyzwanie dla jazzmana, który przestaje nim być*” [*The Fearless Vampire Killers and Rosemary's Baby, or a film challenge for a soon-to-be ex-jazzman*] in the book *Reżyser na ścieżce dźwiękowej. Funkcje muzyki w twórczości filmowej Romana Polańskiego* [The director on the soundtrack: functions of music in Roman Polański's films] published by Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2018.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in G. Stachówna, *Polański od A do Z*, Znak, Kraków 2002, p. 7.

Horror is one of those film genres that needs music like a fish needs water, no matter if the evil lurks in the form of a vampire (*Fearless Vampire Killers*) or the devil (*Rosemary's Baby*). After all, it is the score that best reflects the dualism of the genre and intensifies the sense of danger evoked by the script. But the category of genre seems insufficient to understand the musical rules that govern horror films. Indeed, Polanski's two films fit into the framework of one of the narrative paradigms observed in horror filmmaking, which, in line with the principle of genre evolution, is accomplished by combining novel solutions with the existing pattern of the genre, and which was dubbed the "invasion narrative" by Andrew Tudor.<sup>2</sup> According to Timothy Scheurer:

[...] this paradigm seemingly grows out of the external vs. internal typology and centers on not only the threats from outer space but those which assume a more internal "invasion" as in the case of *Dracula* or *The Exorcist* (1974). They can be closed, in which the monster is destroyed and stability is restored, or they can be open, where the horror continues.<sup>3</sup>

Both *Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary's Baby* are examples of open-ended invasion narratives, even though the first film is a horror parody. Open endings are, in a way, one of the markers of Polanski's cinematic style, and this open-endedness is manifested in the film's circular structure, which is also conditioned musically. Nevertheless, the things that happen throughout are also extremely important and related, as I mentioned above, not only to the convention of the film genre itself but also its type. In this article I will be interested in the role played by Krzysztof Komeda's music in relation to these problems. To further quote Timothy Scheurer:

The primary reason for mentioning the categories or sub-genres is that they are in some instances reflective of the transformational genre; consequently, we should also expect corresponding shifts in approaches to scoring within the sub-genres, at least in some small details. This, in turn, prompts us to wonder if, as in other genres, there is a corpus of relatively stable musical gestures and topics that function affectively within the conventions of the

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<sup>2</sup> A. Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, Blackwell, Oxford 1989, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> T. Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film. Genre and the Role of the Composer*, McFarland & Company, Jefferson, NC–London 2008, p. 178.

genre and of scoring itself or if generic diversity leads to a corresponding diffusion of motivic ideas. I believe that if we look across the various typologies, we see common threads in the generic conventions, which in turn, force composers into relying upon a conventional body of topics and gestures. For instance, there will always be a monster and the composer will always have to find appropriate musical analogues to underscore its actions. Second, at the heart of the genre’s mythology is the tension between the threat to and the quest for (or perhaps need for is the better expression here) normalcy in everyday life and stability within our social institutions. Whether the stability is threatened and revalidated by filmmaker and composer or threatened and left in a dysfunctional state is a “transformational” issue to be worked out between director and composer.<sup>4</sup>

In *Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary’s Baby* Kameda consistently followed the general principle he had adopted for creating film music:

I distinguish two basic ways of using film music:

- (1) on the basis of a leitmotif, which, when skillfully applied, can “serve” the entire film, such as the trumpet motif in *La Strada*, which performs a number of functions there. Such a melody is most often remembered after leaving the cinema;
- (2) on the principle of giving rich and varied musical material, which will be woven into the whole, sometimes in a very subtle and sophisticated way. Unfortunately, such music is most often not noticed or remembered by the viewer, while the professional will also not always notice all its nuances.<sup>5</sup>

Let us note, however, that the above-quoted statement is from 1961, when Kameda was taking his first steps as a film composer, hence the highly simplified manner of discussing the problem. The “Kameda method” had evolved by the time of the making of *Fearless Vampire Killers*—not without Polanski’s influence—and this part of the article will focus in a large part on the question of how and to what extent this evolution (due to the necessity of composing music for genre films) translated into the evolution of the film genre itself, i.e. the “invasion” variety of horror motion pictures.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> K. Kameda, “Rola muzyki w dziele filmowym” [responses to a questionnaire], *Kwartalnik filmowy*, Vol. 11(2), 1961, p. 38.

Both *Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary's Baby* are filled with melodious musical motifs recurring in various arrangements, but they also have, to paraphrase Krzysztof Komeda, “rich and varied musical material” which—and this seems to be a kind of novelty—is not merely woven into the fabric of the whole film “in a very subtle and sophisticated way” but deeply evocative in character. This is precisely due to the fact that both films are set within the horror film convention, which presupposes this kind of musical evocativeness in relation to the viewer. Music in a horror film must, first and foremost, frighten, which means that it sometimes can even dominate over the image. “We can close our eyes, but not our ears,” as Pierre Schaeffer wrote.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly as in *Cul-de-Sac* and somewhat differently than in *Knife in the Water* (1962), the recurring themes in the two Polanski films under discussion are assigned to specific characters and appear in different arrangements as the plot develops. In *Fearless Vampire Killers* these are the contrasting motifs of Count von Krolock (the monster) and Sarah (the victim), in accordance with the principles of horror film dualism. The ontological status of both of the characters is constituted by their visibility and corporeality (although vampires do not have a mirror reflection), hence the music docks rather than creates them. *Rosemary's Baby* is a different story. Although the last joint project between Polanski and Komeda basically features only one main motif, the composer faced the challenge of writing music that did not have a visual counterpart in the form of a character materialized in the motion picture. Consequently, it had to rely solely on the musical structure. We see neither the devil nor the child in the film, yet feel their presence through the unusual arrangement and accumulation of music. As Wojciech Kilar said decades later about his score for *The Ninth Gate* (1999): “[...] the music is very visible [emphasis added]. It is the ‘Satan’ that we can’t see and don’t see until the end.”<sup>7</sup> The music for *Rosemary's Baby* was pioneering in this regard.

The proportions between leitmotifs and varied musical material are somewhat different in *Fearless Vampire Killers* than in *Rosemary's Baby*. This is due to the fact that in the case of the latter, to use Mariola Jankun’s

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<sup>6</sup> See P. Schaeffer, “Element pozawizualny w filmie,” *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, Vol. 11(2), 1961, p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> K. Komeda, op. cit., p. 38.

words, “[...] the film reality is uniformly grounded in realism,”<sup>8</sup> which, of course, is a departure from the convention on the part of the director. After all, in the film there are practically no characters, places, or onscreen situations typical of classic horror cinematography and underscored by “varied musical material.” Hence, unlike in *Fearless Vampire Killers*, where these conventional solutions are still used, in *Rosemary’s Baby* it is the leitmotif that comes to the fore. Arranged in a variety of ways, this tune reappears as many as seven times in the film—exactly the same number of times as Sarah’s theme in *Fearless Vampire Killers*, but because of the absence of other analogous melodies and the scant volume of “varied musical material,” Rosemary’s lullaby is, unlike Sarah’s theme, duly highlighted and plays the role of one of the film’s main, if invisible, characters.

The quantitative criterion is, of course, not the only one to be considered when discussing music in Polanski’s films, although, as I mentioned above, it is important in the context of the director’s oeuvre because of its neat balancing act between realism and creation. Incidentally, the more realism-less music principle seems to be a simplification in light of the analyzed problem as, to quote Jankun again, “The final genre qualification depends on how we understand Rosemary’s story after removing the label of thriller from it [...]”<sup>9</sup> The paradigm of invasion narrative, into which *Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary’s Baby* fit in my view, required a dose of discipline from the composer, and a double one for that matter, given that he was dealing with Polanski’s film. To put it simply, Komeda had to both conform to the convention and to bend it slightly. To what extent did Komeda, who, after all, had a jazz background (another complication) succeed at this breakneck task? I will try to answer the question this time using qualitative criteria and referring first to *Fearless Vampire Killers*. In the words of Emilia Batura:

This film, a pastiche of horror movies, had an eerie, slightly bizarre atmosphere, which required some unconventional treatment from Komeda. This time the composer used the sound of the harpsichord. He chose twenty

<sup>8</sup> M. Jankun, “Historia Rosemary,” *Kino*, April 1985, p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

musicians (something he could finally afford), including the swinging septet Mike Samme's Singers, and recorded some wonderful music [...].<sup>10</sup>

This “quirky” atmosphere is created primarily by the aforementioned musical themes juxtaposed with poetic images shot by the hand of Douglas Slocombe. This is another situation where one musical theme performs dramaturgical functions while at the same time the music “grows” deeply into the picture, creating the mood of the scene. The two themes are, of course, at two opposite poles, both in terms of tonality (major vs. minor key) and instrumentation (including singing). And although the Count's theme appears in the film much less frequently than Sarah's, it is the vampire motif that we hear both in the film's opening and closing credits, an understandable measure in light of the horror genre convention. However, right at the very beginning, Polanski also smuggles in the information that the film we are about to see will be both a horror (music) and a comedy (image), which is a rather sophisticated idea, as it hooks us on semiotics, to use the concept of coexistence of music and image. Meaning is produced on the ground of perception through clues hidden in the sound and visual structures. As Paul Werner wrote:

When Polanski turns the MGM lion into a vampire immediately after the blood-red opening credits accompanied by a strange song re-composed by Krzysztof Komeda and performed a capella by a female choir, he assures us with a caption that the events, persons, situations and vampires depicted are fictional and any resemblance to living and dead persons or actual events is pure coincidence. We then see the wrinkled surface of the (animated) moon, which is darkened by a passing bat, after which the camera slowly pulls away and a snowy image of the Carpathian Mountains appears in the frame, which is traversed by the Professor and Alfred on a horse-drawn sleigh. Polanski brings the genre from the moon (back) to Earth and demystifies it.<sup>11</sup>

To clarify, it should be added that the piece is performed by a mixed choir and not exactly a capella, as the rhythm section is also heard. The

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<sup>10</sup> E. Batura, *Komeda. Księżycowy Chłopiec. O Krzysztofie Komedzie Trzczańskim*, Rebis, Warszawa 2001, p. 157.

<sup>11</sup> P. Werner, *Polanski. Biografia*, transl. A. Krochmal and R. Kędziński, Rebis, Poznań 2014, p. 80.

conclusion, however, is that the information about the film’s genre affiliation is given already in the film’s opening credits by means of the “soundtrack.” In addition to that, the vampire motif can still be heard in the scene when the Count passes on a sleigh through the snowy Carpathian Mountains—we do not see his face yet, but the musical motif unambiguously suggests through a reference to the opening credits that here comes the “boss of all bosses.” The theme reoccurs when the Count’s arrival is announced during the professor and Alfred’s visit to the castle. The music also builds the atmosphere of the place in this scene. Thus, Polanski never uses a clichéd way of juxtaposing a motif with a character—each time the idea is to create an aura of mystery, yet we can be sure that the motif from the film’s opening credits is the music to be associated with Count von Krolock.

The issue of Sarah’s theme is slightly different. We hear it for the first time when the innkeeper Shagal, the heroine’s father, opens the door of the makeshift bathhouse where his daughter is bathing. The sight of the girl makes quite an impression on Roman Polanski’s Alfred, which is reflected in the music—a delicate melody composed for oboe and harp, and the complete opposite of the Count’s theme. One can, of course, interpret this motif not so much as Sarah’s theme but as a musical analogue of the feelings that the protagonist—who, by the way, does not have his own musical representation—begins to have for the girl. The professor does not have a theme either, despite the fact that both him and Alfred are leading characters. The two are only (!) vampire hunters—they do not strictly represent any value that is established by contextual juxtaposition with their opposite (good–evil, monster–victim, known–unknown). They are not innocent and pure like Sarah<sup>12</sup> because they are hunters, nor are they evil because, at least in theory, they save the world from vampires.

Another important moment when the heroine’s theme can be heard, in an arrangement unprecedented in Komeda’s film scores so far, is the famous scene of the making of a snowman repeatedly quoted in documentaries about Polanski.<sup>13</sup> It is only at this point that the music is performed in a capella style, which is characterized by a choir singing polyphonic pieces without

<sup>12</sup> The fact that Sarah is almost constantly taking a bath is not insignificant in the film.

<sup>13</sup> On the film’s soundtrack album, this version of Sarah’s theme is titled *Snowman*.

the accompaniment of musical instruments.<sup>14</sup> The word choir is a bit of an overstatement here, as we hear only a few vocal lines, one of which (the female one) is a melody sung by several voices in unison, and the other (male) is a rhythmic, slightly swinging, bass backing.<sup>15</sup> Somewhere in the middle of snowy Transylvania, we see Alfred building the titular snowman, followed by a poetic shot depicting Sarah gazing at the hero through a frosted window. This brief cutaway refers the viewer to a very similar scene from the director's graduation film, *When Angels Fall* (1959). Incidentally, in both of them we can admire Polanski's life partners of the time, although, as the director himself recalled, in *Fearless Vampire Killers* the feeling between him and Sharon Tate was just beginning to form, which may be why the characters in the film are so believable.

Sarah's theme returns on several other occasions later in the film, each time in a slightly different instrumental presentation. We hear it, for instance, in the scene at the inn when Shagall notices the disappearance of his daughter, for which Count von Krolock is responsible. At that time, however, the music resounds in a minor key, and is intoned by the low notes of the clarinet—the musical analogue of loss, sadness, and longing for a specific person (in the melody). When Alfred finds the girl in the Count's castle the motif recurs in its original version. At the title ball, the theme is woven into the melody of a polonaise, then returns for the final time in the film's closing scene. Here, the music blends with the Count's theme to create a kind of musical analogue of the battle between good and evil, which is ultimately won by evil, albeit in an originally comedic way. The Count does not appear in this scene: he is no longer needed—Sarah becomes a vampire instead, as the viewer is informed by the music, among other things (the Count's motif does not go silent until the closing credits). The composer and director thus decided to leave the world in a dysfunctional state.

While we can attribute the recurring musical motifs in *Fearless Vampire Killers* to specific characters (in this sense, Komeda and Polanski remain conventional, continuing a tradition of which Max Steiner was an ardent

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<sup>14</sup> This style developed from church music in the 16th century.

<sup>15</sup> One might jokingly add that the song in this arrangement is somewhat reminiscent of Bobby McFerrin's hit song *Don't Worry Be Happy*, which was written many years later.



enthusiast), in the case of *Rosemary's Baby*, this problem requires more discussion. Although the issue of the devil, whom we cannot see but whose presence we feel through the music, seems to raise little objection at first glance, I consider it legitimate (if only because of the different arrangements of the lullaby) to ask with whom or what should this music really be associated. The answer may also be relevant as regards the deliberations on the film's genre.

Consider the opening sequence. William Fraker's camera glides—in one shot—over New York City's landscape (there is no castle and it is daytime) at a pace synchronized with that of Krzysztof Komeda's lullaby, hummed semi-professionally by Mia Farrow, who plays the lead. Thus, a subtle indication that what the viewer is about to watch is a horror film only appears at the beginning of the film in its musical layer in the form of the sombre minor key and the contrast of the instrumental and vocal line. A violin in a high register (imitating the sound of the wind blowing) stands in opposition to the low sung, half whispered, half murmured (to paraphrase Paul Werner) vocalization that forms the main melodic line of the piece.<sup>16</sup> As Timothy Scheurer wrote in the context of the structure of leitmotifs in classical horrors:

[...] a common strategy is to wed an ambiguous tonal center to an equally ambiguous or disorienting thematic structure that deconstructs the anticipated logical structure the audience might expect from a conventional main title. The sense of disorientation, unease and/or fear then is established as the titles roll. However, should the composer choose to go the “tonal” route, relying upon a classically structured theme with a clearly defined tonal center and architectonically structured arrangement of motifs, we find a privileging of marked elements such as minor harmonies and melodies scored for lower strings or brass as well as more rhythmic complexity or combinations of all these elements.<sup>17</sup>

At first glance, Komeda seems to respect these rules, but the musical form itself—a lullaby, whose most essential elements are a simple (sung) melody and an odd meter—introduces the theme of the child (the pink

<sup>16</sup> See P. Werner, op. cit., p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> T. Scheurer, op. cit., p. 181.

lettering used in the opening credits has a similar function). Thus, we have the foreshadowing of an atmosphere of unspecified anxiety on the one hand and musical tropes associated with the theme of the child on the other.

The tune continues in the scene in which we are introduced to the main characters—a young married couple, Guy and Rosemary Woodhouse—before falling silent. The viewer then follows the idyllic doings of the snobbish couple dreaming—as hinted by the lullaby—of a child and a peaceful family life.

The piece reappears—in a happier major key, lighter instrumentation (this time the melody is played by piano, vibraphone, and violin), and a faster tempo—in the scene when the couple decide to renovate their newly rented flat. The generally positive atmosphere of the scene is soured by the return of the familiar melody, which sends the viewer back to the disturbing theme from the film's opening credits.

A soft variant of the motif (undulating piano music, violin expanding the motif with new figures, and glassy vibraphone sounds) can also be heard after Rosemary's disturbing "dream," when she receives a phone call from a doctor who informs her that she is pregnant. One might venture to say that—given the events that have unfolded up to this point—the second occurrence of the lullaby in light instrumentation has an ironic function. In this particular scene, the theme is a musical analogue, as it were, of the blissful state into which the title character is sent by the news of her pregnancy, which Rosemary demonstrates by joyfully rocking the receiver on her shoulder as if she were holding a baby in her arms. However, the viewer still remembers both her nightmare and the dark version of the lullaby from the film's opening credits.

Complications with the pregnancy ensue, and the protagonist's closest friends either behave ambiguously towards her or disappear in mysterious circumstances. Finally, after Rosemary's desperate argument with her husband, the baby in her womb begins to move and the pains subside. More renovation work follows—this time a room is being prepared for the baby. This is another scene in which we hear the lullaby, yet this time its (slower) tempo and (minor) tonality are more reminiscent of the version that accompanied the film's opening credits. The music becomes increasingly demonic.

Batura suggests that, because of the multiplicity of its versions, the plural should be used in the context of Komeda's lullaby for *Rosemary's Baby*: "Komeda wrote a number of lullabies, seven or eight, of which Polanski chose two. One, softer, in lighter instrumentation appears as the child motif. The other, a leitmotif, is also heard at the beginning and end of the film."<sup>18</sup> The version that accompanies the scene I discuss above, however, is something in-between. For the instrumentation is still quite light, but the tonality and tempo allude to the beginning (and ending) of the film. A similar arrangement (although with a slower tempo and undulating piano passages) can be heard in Rosemary's dream scene, which can be interpreted as an attempt to banish the nightmare in which the protagonist was raped by the devil. The young woman dreams that she is holding her infant in her arms, while smiling friends are gathered around her. The music, interacting with the image, contributes to the dreamlike mood of the scene by making it unreal.

There is another lullaby scene in the film, a most bizarre one. The melody arrives after a long pause and accompanies a scene in which Rosemary, trying to save herself and her baby, is once again victimized by her loved ones. This time she is betrayed by the doctor who cared for her during the first weeks of pregnancy and with whom she sought refuge from cult members and her corrupt and manipulative husband. The lullaby's melodic line is now played by a Hammond organ, while a piano, bass and percussion create an intentional sense of dissonance, breaking up the harmony of the piece.

In this scene, the cacophony and rhythmic intensity paint an image of what is going on inside the protagonist's mind, with her perception of reality (as was the case in *Repulsion*) possibly being schizophrenic. The Hammond organ might, in turn, be illustrating (as in *Cul-de-Sac*) the deformation of the world disintegrating in a caricatured manner.

This is only an interpretation, yet a legitimate one, despite the first-person, subjectivized narrative, and one that speaks to the creative shattering of horror conventions by both the director and composer. As Jankun writes:

The uncanny rips apart the sense of events, and established notions of fantasy and realism tend to be inapplicable. Moreover, the viewer has no recourse

<sup>18</sup> E. Batura, op. cit., p. 168.

to the association of the fantastic with suspense established by horror convention [...] Rosemary's consciousness, since she has succumbed to the threat, wanders into dual interpretations based on magical or delusional premises; but the cinematic reality is uniformly grounded in realism. [...] The departure from the conventions of the classic horror film and the aforementioned type of motivation dictate a reflection on the genological qualification of the work.<sup>19</sup>

This problem is also discussed by Iwona Kolasinska, who sees *Rosemary's Baby* as a breakthrough work:

[...] the figure of Satan, first used by Roman Polanski in *Rosemary's Baby*, turns out to be the manifestation and reflection of a profound crisis of human values mediated by horror cinema. Concealed underneath the shell of satanic film is in fact a "claustrophobic horror"—a woman's experience of alienation. The horror that becomes Rosemary's experience is in fact much more earthly than infernal in nature. Its source is the family, headed by a narcissistic husband, compared to whom even the face of Satan in the cradle will prove less repulsive to Rosemary.<sup>20</sup>

The various versions of the lullaby, introduced as leitmotifs, thus serve not only to give the film a "devilish" feel, but also—through elaborate musical procedures—reflect (as they did in *Repulsion*) the protagonist's inner states. For both the positive emotions, associated with furnishing the flat or the joy of motherhood, and the anxious states, including those suggestive of mental illness, are illustrated by Komeda's music.

Interestingly, it is only in the final scene of the film—and the one which Kolasinska writes about—that the full significance of the musical motif that accompanied its opening credits (the same arrangement) is revealed. Rosemary looks at the child with acceptance and begins (in her mind, since we are dealing with inner diegetic music) to hum a lullaby, just like in the opening sequence of the film.

The entire piece is, however, tied together (as it can be heard even before Mia Farrow's vocalisation in the opening and after the closing credits) by the

<sup>19</sup> M. Jankun, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup> I. Kolańska, "Kiedy spojrzenie gorgony budzi upiory. Horror filmowy i jego widz," in: K. Loska (ed.), *Kino gatunków wczoraj i dziś*, Rabid, Kraków 1991, p. 126.

so-called Tristan chord, also known as the Devil’s chord, whose function is to destroy harmony by introducing an intentional dissonance. As in *Fearless Vampire Killers*, the overall message of the invasion narrative is illustrated through the music—the sense of community is halted or, at best, reduced to a state of apparent stability.

Within the context of the climactic scene in *Rosemary’s Baby*, the so-called musical onomatopoeia, whose origins lie in Polanski and Komeda’s first collaborations—most notably *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (1958) and *Mammals* (1962)—is also worth mentioning. The title character walks up to the cradle to look at her baby. What she sees causes her so much horror that she holds her breath. In order to properly express the state in which Rosemary finds herself and her confrontation with the unknown, Komeda used complex musical solutions to create what we could call an inner scream sounding like an authentic human howl—hence the term “onomatopoeia.” This is also an example of the use of varied musical material, not given in a subtle way, of course. The composer also used a similar treatment in *Fearless Vampire Killers*, in the scene when Alfred sees one of the vampires for the first time. However, this is not so much music as a sound effect produced by musical instruments.

But this is not the end of musical connotations in Polanski’s short films in the context of the discussed titles. Let us therefore return for a moment to *Fearless Vampire Killers*. When Professor Abronsius and his student Alfred put on their skis and hurry as fast as they can to the Count’s castle to save Sarah, we hear a cheerful, lively melody played on a flute. Both the scenery and the “means of locomotion” bear a strong resemblance to *Mammals*. The music is also similar as it mimics—although not as much as in the director’s last Polish etude—the clumsy movements of the professor, who wants to stay on his skis at all costs. In a way, the tune also reflects the character of the professor, fitting the stereotype of a funny mad scientist. Another similarity between the two films in the context of this scene is the instrument that intones the melody, although in *Mammals* we only hear it at the moment of the protagonists’ apparent reconciliation, playing a melody composed in the joyful G major key.

An even more obvious reference to the director’s first film attempts can be seen in the scene when the pair of “fearless killers” is imprisoned by Count von Krolock on one of the balconies of his castle. The sounds

of music are already coming from one of the chambers as the vampire ball begins. In the audiosphere we hear a somewhat Baroque-like melody played by Count von Krolock's son on a harpsichord, while in the frame we can see an oil lamp not entirely justified by the onscreen situation. It is not clear what the lamp is doing on the balcony, and the fact that it is lit is absurd. This trick—as it turns out—was used by Polanski the director to free his characters (including Polanski the actor) from their oppression as well as to establish a kind of intertextual game with the faithful viewer of his films. Just like in *The Lamp* (1959), the characteristic prop leads to a fire, the consequence of which in *Fearless Vampire Killers* is a cannon explosion and, as a result, the liberation of the protagonists. What binds the two films together in terms of the soundscape is the harpsichord music that builds the atmosphere of antiquity.

In *Rosemary's Baby*, on the other hand, Polanski alludes through music—this time without the slightest influence from Komeda—to his film segment *La Rivière de diamants* (1964). It is in this film that we hear an adaptation of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Für Elise* for the first time in the work of the maker of *Cul-de-Sac*. It does not play as important a role as Komeda's compositions, but is, nevertheless, the backdrop against which the main character seduces and then takes advantage of a naive admirer in her flat. As Alicja Helman wrote: "There is a distinction between music that is a structural factor in a work and music that is a kind of addition to the finished film, an ornamental setting that embellishes the whole, originating from the practice of silent cinema."<sup>21</sup>

As in Polanski's onscreen Amsterdam, in his New York Beethoven's composition echoes through the interiors of the townhouses and accompanies the dialogue. However, in *Rosemary's Baby*, the piece is heard as many as seven times—exactly the same as the lullaby. And just as Komeda's music seems to be more of a musical analogue of the unknown, Beethoven's piece introduces the atmosphere of the tame. For we hear it in scenes that evoke a world that is extremely mundane in its essence, accompanying equally mundane dialogues—which is one of the ways how Polanski creates the realistic order of his film. However, the further we get into the plot and the

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<sup>21</sup> A. Helman, *Dźwięczący ekran*, WAiF, Warszawa 1968, p. 31.

more alien the world of the main character becomes, the quieter Beethoven's music sounds. In the scene when Rosemary is resting after her alleged miscarriage, the piece is almost inaudible. However, the main character's situation is, once again, explained in such a way as to bring her (and the viewer) back down to earth—the baby died and all the supposedly fantastic events that took place up to that point were just the pregnant woman's delusions. This is not, however, the final scene of the film.

Likewise, *Fearless Vampire Killers* features a piece of music not composed by Komeda but written many years before. As Grażyna Stachówna notes:

[...] Magda (Fina Lewis), a servant at Shagal's inn, hums the melody of Stanislaw Moniuszko's *The Spinner* while working. Naturally, this motif is not indicative of anything in particular. Transylvania is not Poland, in *Fearless Vampire Killers* Transylvania simply means some place in Eastern Europe. However, it may be assumed that Moniuszko's melody was intended by the director only for the potential Polish viewers, it becomes a sign of understanding and it serves to establish a special connection with them beyond the work they are watching. Polanski used the same trick for the second time in his film *Tess* (1979), in which one of the characters plays on a pipe the melody of the Polish folk song *Laura and Filon*.<sup>22</sup>

The use of reworked music in films is, from the point of view of film direction, as difficult as it is auteurist. In a sense, the director then also becomes the film's composer, deciding what music to include and where, relying solely on their own musical sensitivity and erudition. In the context of Polanski's movies and the original music they feature, it is worth noting that the composer was also heavily influenced by the director, as suggested by Krzysztof Komeda himself and confirmed by the analysis conducted above.

The Golden Globe-nominated music for *Rosemary's Baby* is absolutely groundbreaking in the history of film music in general. This is what Paul Werner wrote about Komeda and his work:

The score he created for the film surpassed anything he had composed for Polanski and other directors to date. The title melody, a lullaby, with its bold pauses and Mia Farrow's half-whispered, half-mumbled vocalization,

<sup>22</sup> G. Stachówna, *Roman Polański i jego filmy*, Warszawa–Łódź 1994, pp. 47–48.

feels as if it is about to shift into atonality at any moment, and completely independently of the film's plot, it gave listeners chills and goosebumps. Komedą apparently felt comfortable in Los Angeles, intended to settle there permanently, and wanted to be referred to as "Christopher Komedą" in the credits already. It turned out that this was his last work for Polanski and penultimate film score in general.<sup>23</sup>

The unanswered question is how Polanski's films would have developed as regards their soundscape and perhaps even directing, had it not been for the untimely death of the man who remains the composer with whom Polanski made the most films in the course of his prolific career.

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<sup>23</sup> P. Werner, op. cit., p. 85.



## Abstract

This article looks at the relationship between music and image in the two final films that Roman Polanski made with Krzysztof Komeda. *Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary's Baby* are cinematic examples of a very close collaboration between a director and a composer. The article deals with the function of music in relation to genre films. The most important question is the extent to which Krzysztof Komeda's compositions adhere to or depart from the horror film music convention. A key issue in this context, and one that applies to both of the analyzed films, is the technique of leitmotifs which Polanski and Komeda developed already in their first short films. In *Fearless Vampire Killers* and *Rosemary's Baby*, the jointly developed director-composer method evolved greatly, and Polanski's collaboration with Komeda took on a very distinctive style, which the author of this article attempts to describe and define.

**Keywords:** film music; Roman Polanski; Krzysztof Komeda; horror; film genres

