Echoes of Fear
A Comparative Analysis of the *Halloween* Soundtracks, 1978 & 2018
UTSA's Music Theory Club

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Methodology

Our research aims to develop a deeper understanding of the music of film composer John Carpenter and examine how his compositional style has evolved over time. This project serves as an introduction to the soundtrack analysis of *Halloween* (1978) and its direct sequel, *Halloween* (2018). We seek to identify recurring musical elements in Carpenter's work and explore how these patterns might inform predictions about his future compositions.

To conduct this study, members of the UTSA Music Theory Club—including both music majors and non-music majors with varying levels of formal training—analyzed three tracks from *Halloween* (1978) and its 2018 sequel. The selected tracks included the **main theme**, a **motif associated with Michael Myers**, and a **random track unique to each film**. Each member paired with a partner, with each person analyzing two tracks, resulting in a total of six tracks examined.

Each track was assessed based on five key musical features: **timbre, texture, instrumentation, thematic material, and overall sonic characteristics**. Additionally, members documented any noteworthy observations regarding changes in Carpenter's compositional style. Each participant compared their findings across both films.

Once all observations were recorded, we compiled the data into a table, synthesizing individual analyses into a consensus summary (see Figure 1).

Reference List

Carpenter, John. *Halloween*. John Carpenter. Accessed 10 February 2025.
https://open.spotify.com/album/1eA3cq4WvDR4yVKChvZewP?si=wMwqs-4CRXyK0oKzSI99d

Carpenter, John. *Halloween (Original 2018 Motion Picture Soundtrack)*. John Carpenter. Accessed 10 February 2025.
https://open.spotify.com/album/5CKWm3CJVrTSttgNyX90LM?si=dx0x8bG6Sn29SaIhrUDikw

Cundell, Tomasz Adam. "Heyday: 1974-1988" Chap. 2 in *Patterns and Recurring Themes In The Music Of John Carpenter*. Nottingham, UK: University of Nottingham, 2024.

Cundell, Tomasz Adam. "Out Of Retirement: 2015-2022" Chap. 4 in *Patterns and Recurring Themes In The Music Of John Carpenter*. Nottingham, UK: University of Nottingham, 2024.

Spitz. "Halloween - Behind the Score (Featurette)." *YouTube*, February 12, 2025.
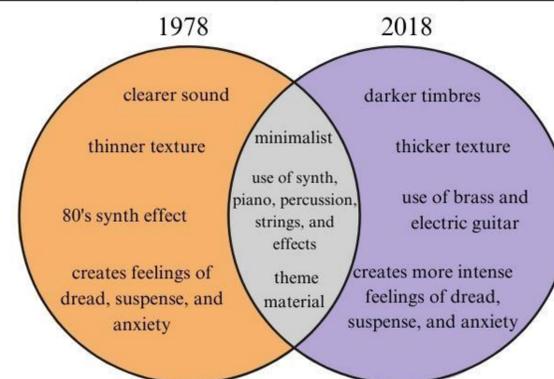https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4D1KzEFV_HI&ab_channel=Spitz.

Abstract

The 2018 film *Halloween* is a direct sequel to John Carpenter's original *Halloween* (1978) and part of a thirteen-film franchise. While the sequel introduces a slightly altered plot, it follows the same characters 40 years later and features a score composed by Carpenter. This study examines the similarities and differences between the original and sequel's scores by analyzing four tracks from the 1978 film and their counterparts in the 2018 sequel. Through this analysis, we identified key differences in **texture, timbre, and form**, revealing broader stylistic shifts in Carpenter's compositional approach over four decades. Our findings highlight trends in his evolving musical language and underscore how his scoring techniques have adapted over time.

	Timbre	Texture	Instrumentation	Themes	Other
***Halloween* (1978)**	Timbres range from clear to dampened and vary in each track.	Textures change in density over time, creating emotional effects like suspense or intensity.	Synths and piano are used, with some tracks using strings, percussion, and effects.	Themes create suspense and are simplistic, utilizing arpeggios and repetition; minimalistic.	Each track creates a sense of dread and suspension, emotionally affecting the listener.
***Halloween* (2018)**	Timbres generally has a more modern and polished sound; clearer timbres.	Contains more layers, but still varies in density.	Adds brass and electric guitar.	Themes, especially in the Main Theme, shares characteristics with original OST.	Tracks achieve a more intense effect.

Venn diagram — 1978: clearer sound, thinner texture, 80's synth effect, creates feelings of dread, suspense, and anxiety. Overlap: minimalist, use of synth, piano, percussion, strings, and effects, theme material. 2018: darker timbres, thicker texture, use of brass and electric guitar, creates more intense feelings of dread, suspense, and anxiety.

Research Notes

Analysis

Our research indicates that while many aspects of the 1978 and 2018 and *Halloween* scores evolved over time, key stylistic elements remained consistent. The primary changes occurred in the **quality and variety of timbres** present in each track, whereas the **musical style, thematic material, and instrumentation**—including synthesizers, piano, percussion, strings, and various effects—remained largely unchanged.

The advancements in **music technology** played a significant role in shaping the 2018 score. As highlighted in a behind-the-scenes featurette on YouTube, the composers—including John Carpenter himself—used the original 1978 music as a foundation, expanding upon it with updated technology and additional sonic elements (Spitz). Similarly, Tomasz's analysis suggests that this kind of continuity is a hallmark of Carpenter's compositional voice across his film scores. His work consistently features **simplicity, synthesizers, and minimalist influences**, reinforcing a distinct musical identity. While the sequel retains the core musical material and instrumentation of the original, it incorporates **enhanced production techniques and expanded timbral layers**, demonstrating how Carpenter's signature style has adapted over four decades (Tomasz 2, 4).

Conclusion

Overall, the soundtracks of the *Halloween* films share the same fundamental foundations: **themes, instrumentation, atmosphere, and emotional impact**. The primary distinction lies in how advancements in music technology have enhanced the **sound quality** of the 2018 sequel and introduced additional instruments not present in the original 1978 score. Despite these sonic evolutions, John Carpenter's **distinct compositional voice remains intact**, characterized by his signature use of **synthesizers and minimalist influences**. Within the *Halloween* franchise, his approach maintains continuity by preserving key themes and musical ideas, reinforcing the connection between films that follow the same storyline and characters.

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