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HC 421
Assignment 8
Get Out

The Bad Kind of Hypnosis

I wrap the blanket a little tighter around myself and slowly retract each limb beneath its safe cocoon. Every cubic inch of empty space in the room becomes bigger and emptier. The walls lean in over me and the darkness behind the door gains a conscience. I'm watching *Get Out* (2017), and Michael Ables' score is slowly hypnotizing me into a state of paranoia.

It is not a constant state though, and it doesn't wear you out. Rather, this hypnosis works by slowly drawing you in, telling you that your going be unnerved, but letting you realize that's what you want. It's what you came here for. Then, just as you've excepted your fate, it grabs you by the leg and drags you straight to terror. The screeching strings saw away at your digestive system while the plucked ones reach in and pump your heart faster. All the while "Sikilliza" echoes around your head, summoning demons to torment your subconscious. Right as you realize it's too much, this isn't what you signed up for, you slip over the edge into a trance, helped along readily by Jordan Peele's engaging directing and haunting story, and the score takes hold of your flight or fight reflex, guiding you where every it wants you to be. But don't worry, everyone has survived...so far.

What makes Ables' score so effective is its originality. Not originality in that the sound or style is new, in fact, most of it sounds like a highlight reel of the best horror/thriller tracks. I mean 'original' in that nothing is ever used twice. As Stephani Zacharek [put it](#) "you never quite know where Peele is going next. This is inventive and lively horror filmmaking". That's a very good thing because when each horror trope is used, both sonically and otherwise, it's used to killer effect. There is one jump scare about a third of the way into the movie and Ables uses the absolute best, maximum impact, spike and ebb jump scare sound. But only once. Then, a little while later we get the danger-running-right-for-you-at-top-speed rising and screeching violins. The best in the business: instantly make your veins run cold, your heart choke on its blood, and your body start to squirm. But again, only once. This originality not only heightens the effect of each distinct way a soundtrack can make you regret being born with ears, it also keeps

you on edge for *how your next going to be put on edge*. You're watching the movie trying to prepare for a jump scare that isn't coming and instead the score is slowly building your dread of psychological entrapment. Then, as your trying to shield yourself against the dread, BOOM, jump scare. It's genius.

But the score isn't all designed to make you turn on every light and sleep with a carving knife on your bedside table, which only adds another layer to its effectiveness. A prime example is the title song, and arguably the one which earned this score the most credit: "Sikilliza". This song captures the mood of the movie perfectly. It opens with strummed guitar and humming, channeling a nice trip to the woods, then layers a hymn like sung melody, foreboding but not depressing, before hitting you with a whispered "Sikilliza Kwa Wehenga", whose sibilance and harsh consonants make it sound like it is meant for performing satanic rituals (its actually a Swahili warning). The whole effect works as one creepy song despite its pieces originating from three different genres, only one of which is kinda scary. The same thing happens in the movie. Only parts of it are really thrilling. Other parts are awkward, as were forced to observe the uncomfortable interactions born out of underhanded racism, and still other parts are downright lighthearted, romantic, and funny. The overall effect is to make the funny parts funnier, as you laugh in relief, and scary parts scarier, like being plunged back into the ice after a warm shower.

It's from this juxtaposition, this gentle rocking between humor and horror (much of which can be credited to the way Ables' score works with Peele's movie), that the hypnosis like effect is born--the effect that prevents viewers from bailing out two-thirds of the way through when things really start to go sideways. Perhaps this is by design, as Ables' noted in an [interview](#) that the entire score was born out of the sample he created for the hypnosis sequence. Perhaps Ables knew that the best way to score this movie was to combine a hypnotic looping from scary to lighthearted (there is a downright sarcastic little trill used throughout) with a relentless creativity in the way he was going to scare you. The overall effect is mesmerizing, brilliant, but also utterly terrify and unpleasant. It was Jordan Peele directing a horror movie y'all, what else did you expect?