

Dr Clive McClelland  
University of Leeds

### **Of Gods and Monsters: Signification in Franz Waxman's film score *Bride of Frankenstein***

James Whale's horror classic *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) is iconic not just because of its enduring images and acting performances, but also because of the high quality of its film score. At a time when the cinema soundtrack was still in its infancy, and often reliant on pre-existing music, Waxman's large-scale through-composed score underpins the action with masterly control and effect.

As a classically-trained composer in the German Romantic tradition, Waxman consciously drew on a musical language long associated with the supernatural, now known as *ombra*. Composers of theatre and even sacred music wanting to generate feelings of awe and horror introduced discontinuous musical elements such as a slow tempo, flat minor keys, tonal uncertainty, unusual harmonies (especially chromatic chords), fragmented or wide-leaping melodic lines, insistent repeated notes, tremolando, syncopated and dotted rhythms, sudden pauses or contrasts in texture or dynamics, and dark timbres with unusual instrumentation, especially trombones.

Waxman would also have been familiar with the cue books for silent film – the so-called *Kinothek* – which included numerous examples of music from the same tradition suitable for accompanying scenes of awe and terror. Another aspect of Waxman's score is his systematic use of reminiscence motifs for different characters and ideas, a practice most commonly associated with Wagner's *leitmotif*, but in fact deriving from much earlier in the nineteenth century.

The combination of these techniques strongly contributed to the success of Waxman's score, and provided a template for composers of horror movie music in subsequent generations.