MUSIC FOR HORROR FILMS

Horror movies and music have forged an unholy alliance over many decades – even before cinema's demons and scream queens actually had their own voices. The modern horror soundtrack can be traced back to the silent film era. In 1922, FW Murnau's vampire movie Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror premiered with a darkly romantic live orchestral score by Hans Erdmann. Although no original recordings of Erdmann's music survive, Nosferatu's musical spirit lingers on in modern revivals. Meanwhile, in Hollywood, the Universal Monsters – Dracula, Frankenstein, the Mummy et al – were summoning personalised soundtracks as the age of 'the talkies' dawned.

The sound of fear can't be constrained by a single genre or instrument, but at its best, this music is as gripping as the scariest visual, and it is timelessly evocative. Take Bernard Herrmann's Hitchcock soundtracks, especially his sleek, highly-strung score for **Psycho** (1960); its 'stingers' (those slashing violins, designed to shred your nerves each time you hear them) defined a device that has been echoed in countless other films.

The 1970s and '80s, and the rise of the synthesiser, brought fresh blood to the scene; this phase has also fuelled a recent resurgent passion for horror music. Modern hits such as the Netflix series **Stranger Things** pay homage to the era right through to their pulsing electronic sounds. The alluringly eerie original score for the show, created by Michael Stein and Kyle Dixon, also reminds us of pioneers like director/composer John Carpenter who soundtracked many of his own films including 1978's Halloween, and 1987's Prince of Darkness

 Moog swings

"There is a kind of magic happening. In the last decade, this love for horror music has experienced a rebirth – maybe it makes reality sound better!" the composer Frizzi tells BBC Culture.

"Music has always helped horror movies to establish a mood, build tension and atmosphere – but the demand for these soundtracks has been mind-boggling," says Death Waltz label manager Spencer Hickman. "There's a bunch of people that remember these films from their youth, as well as young people looking back to a 'golden age' of soundtracks."

 "A lot of these films had smaller budgets," he says. "Musicians took chances more, and improvised more. The scores still stand out as really strong pieces of work and musicianship."

 "All I did was sit down at a piano and play octaves and went up half a step. That's the Halloween theme," he explained.

Science of fear

 Frizzi explains further: "If you keep up a hard sound from beginning to end, you don't surprise anybody. You have to create something attractive; your experience of fear could actually be a sweet moment. You're also trying to create a melody that summons the entire film in a few notes.

"Each time you score a horror movie, you must become an actor involved in the story. '

"Working on comedy movies is enjoyable," Frizzi says. "But creating horror music feels like a privilege."