

# Season 1 Episode 1: “Hearing Queer Horror”

**Matthew:** [00:00:00] Hi listeners, welcome to *Everything But the Music*. We're a group of undergraduates and former undergraduates from the UCLA musicology program [here to] talk about, among other things, horror music, the sounds of animals, modern opera, Billie Eilish conspiracy theories, protest anthems, and Disney nostalgia. I'm your, scare quotes, "host" Matthew and I do research on surviving the current global climate apocalypse.

**Liv:** [00:00:23] I'm Liv. I'm a fourth year musicology major and theater minor. I write and direct for HOOLIGAN Theatre Company here at UCLA. I'm pursuing a graduate degree in dramatic writing, and my capstone project this year is the book and lyrics of a musical. I'm the incoming president of the Active Listening Club and the managing editor of MUSE. My academic interests include queer theory, Todd Haynes movies, play theory, science fiction classics, and the cool new scholarship that my friends recommend to me. I like doing flips, cooking, and baking, and turning anything into earrings.

**J.W.:** [00:00:55] I'm J.W. and I'm a fourth year undergrad musicology major, philosophy minor. I'm the editor-in-chief of MUSE, which is our undergrad journal, and my research interests include looking at the intersections of musical practice and discourse with animal studies and particularly as they may relate to linguistic processes that underlie cultural meaning-making.

**Allison:** [00:01:21] Hello, my name is Allison Scott. I am a fourth year music history and industry major at UCLA. In terms of music, my first love was indie, but honestly, what does that even mean anymore? So I would say that my other love would be black music and everything just black culture. So one of my goals is to debunk the myths that older generations have about modern black music. Like, all we do is sample, and hip hop is trash, those kinds of things that I hear from my parents, so yeah, that's my main goal.

**Karen:** [00:01:56] Hi, I'm Karen, just like the meme. I'm the outgoing treasurer of the Active Listening Club and the review editor of MUSE. I just graduated with a BA in musicology. My interests are primarily with music cognition and perception, and when I'm older, I want to have a shih tzu retirement home.

**Torrey:** [00:02:17] Hi, my name is Torrey. I also graduated 2020 this year. I was a musicology major with a music industry minor. I focus on 20th century popular music, specifically The Beach Boys and video game music. I love cooking and eating food, particularly ice cream, and I hope everyone enjoys listening to this podcast.

**Lori:** [00:02:43] Hi folks. My name is Lori. I am a recent alum of the musicology department at UCLA. I am interested in contemporary music, opera, both modern and otherwise, audio-visual aesthetics and postmodern theories. Physically, I am here, but spiritually and mentally, I am in an abandoned shopping mall food court.

**Matthew:** [00:03:06] Today, we'll be having a conversation with Liv about horror music and embodiment. Let's get down to it.

**Liv:** [00:03:14] So today we're going to be talking about horror music using NBC's *Hannibal* as a jumping off point. The show aired from 2013 to 2015, over three seasons. It

was canceled then after those three seasons, but it developed a cult following and is considered one of the best horror TV shows. It was developed by Bryan Fuller, who you may know from *Pushing Daisies*, *Wonderfalls* and/or *American Gods*, and it is based on Thomas Harris's book, *Red Dragon* from 1981, and it builds on and converses with all of these representations of the character, Hannibal Lecter, including Jonathan Demme's *Silence of the Lambs* from 1991 and Michael Mann's *Manhunter* from 1986. So I watched this show starting freshman year of high school when it came out. It's very intense. I couldn't stomach too much of it at once, but I was very into it, and also it was one of those TV shows that kind of made me realize I wasn't straight, which is interesting because it is about a serial killer and specifically a cannibal, but it's also very delicious and beautiful and sexy, and it utilizes near constant music. It's a blend of distorted, diegetic noise and synths and distorted instruments, and so we are going to discuss how this show utilizes music to invite the audience into the characters' psychological turbulence, how we might examine queerness and horror through this music, and sonic depictions of disorientation and insanity, as well as trends in contemporary horror more broadly, and what exactly horror music allows us to feel. So, to start us off, we can just go broadly. What horror scores do you guys like, if any, or what music scares you? What sounds scare you?

**Karen:** [00:05:17] Kidz Bop.

**Liv:** [00:05:18] Why is that?

**Karen:** [00:05:21] I really don't like children singing, and when I think about scary music, my head first goes to kids singing, also in horror movies and not just Kidz Bop. There's something like that, you know, when you hear children's singing, it kind of evokes, like, innocence, but when that's contrasted, like with a scary moment or something, that contrast is really effective and it definitely, it works on me, but also Kidz Bop is just scary in general, but anyway.

**Matthew:** [00:05:57] I was thinking that same thing, not, not Kidz Bop. I mean, I hear you, but I was thinking about how in trailers for scary movies, they always use children's lullabies and kids singing. I don't know why. I don't know why it is scary, but it is frightening, the way they do that.

**Chloe:** [00:06:17] Yeah, it reminded me of the scene in the first season of *American Horror Story* where they play "**Tonight You Belong to Me**" in the background of when they're in that haunted house and I think it just reminds me of ghosts for some reason? Like the gone spirits of like innocent, I don't even know, but I feel like that is often used for ghosts. Children singing.

**Matthew:** [00:06:58] I was thinking almost the opposite. It's like children are, like, almost inhuman in a sense. Maybe that's just me projecting my hatred of children, but like, in the sense that we never know what they're thinking, or like, you can't understand them. They're like, they don't act like people and they're not, like, rational. So they're kind of scary in that sense. Like they're unpredictable. Maybe that's just me though.

**Liv:** [00:07:29] That's definitely interesting about using well-known music in horror, that is like, especially classical music is used a lot in that way, and these days, pop music, especially as pop music is just used more and more, because of all of the different, like, your personal

associations with it and also different cultural meanings that it accesses. But like, since Chloe, you said you just saw *Silence of the Lambs*. So there's "**The Goldberg Variations**" in that, which is also in the TV show *Hannibal*. And that's like, I guess when you're using a piece that everyone knows that can be sort of a juxtaposition between the image of something terrifying with this piece that you recognize as just, *oh, this is, this is nice*, maybe I have associations of hearing this on the radio or hearing someone play it. And it's sort of a, it's more of an entry point into the villain's taste, because you're hearing that sort of thing because they like it, presumably, well, a lot of the time, or just sort of like a disorienting effect that you're dealing with. Invoking those associations that have to do with really popular or well-known music provides a pretty interesting link, I think, between the viewer of the horror film and the music, if it's tied to a specific character.

**Matthew:** [00:09:13] That reminds me too, of the trailer for, I think it was *Us* by Jordan Peele, I don't remember the song, but what's it called? But that's kinda my point, my point like that, if you didn't know that song, then the trailer doesn't mean as much to you when it shifts from like they're singing it in the car and then, and then the kind of creepy version of it. And so that makes me think, like, why did they use children's songs? Well, it's because we all know them. Like everyone is familiar, because everyone hears the same, you know, 10 songs or whatever.

**J.W.:** [00:09:51] Yeah, it plays with proximity like that because it makes what makes it familiar unfamiliar, which is super disconcerting a lot of the time, because when you have such a close connection or you're so familiar with something, and then it's changed in some way, it feels, like, almost intrinsic to you. And so, I think, I mean, well, I think a big part of the appeal of horror is that it makes you feel like you're in the situation. So there's not any distance between, or I guess horror tries to close the distance between audience and fictional world in certain ways. And I think the familiar music being used does that to a degree because it's a more present experience, which just leads to more intense, like emotional investment, I guess.

**Liv:** [00:10:45] Yeah. And it's a simultaneous thing of trying to make sounds that are very strange and uncomfortable and always, even if you're, if you're using whether you're using like distorted synths or instruments that we're not familiar with, or you're using popular music, classical music, the, the purpose is to make it strange to you somehow, but then also simultaneously to completely pull you in and give you this full body experience.

**J.W.:** [00:11:15] Yeah, it's just uncanny valley.

**Matthew:** [00:11:17] I think the scariest, I hate scary movies, so like, this is the worst ever for me, but the scariest movie that I've seen ever is, you're going to laugh, but it's *Insidious*, that dumb movie from a few years ago and the song that they play, you know, that one that's like *\*vocalizes\**, that one? I don't know what it is that's so scary about that. 'Cause it's not scary at all. It's like the silliest stupidest song in the world, but part of what makes it scary, I think in the movie is that you never know like where it's coming from. Like it's not clear if it's diegetic or non-diegetic and so like that is like, *is it part of the movie, like, can the characters hear this or can only I hear this*, like, it's kind of playing with that too. And I think that has a lot to do with distance and pulling you into the movie versus, like, making you more aware that you're watching a movie.

**Liv:** [00:12:17] Absolutely, and one of my, well, one of the reasons why I was like, let's talk about **Hannibal** is because it's all music. Like, in one of the articles I read about it, if each episode is about 43 minutes, there are about 40 minutes on average of music per episode. And so like you were saying, it's part of the uncomfortable, scary effect is the fact that you can't really tell what's diegetic and what's non-diegetic and the sound is always this blend of diegetic noise that is distorted as well as added sound elements. So that's, that's a cool thing about horror music that it's just not really clear. The music can be really dominating and it can be like an over-score rather than an under-score, but you still might not really be sure whether it's diegetic or not.

**Matthew:** [00:13:08] I think that probably also has something to say about, what was the reading? The one about vampires? Case, how she was talking about, or they were talking about?

**Liv:** [00:13:27] I think "she".

**Matthew:** [00:13:29] How she was talking about, kind of the split between living and dead and being kind of, juxtaposing those two things and like being in a binary of like inside, outside, right and wrong, how we kind of set up these things. I think that plays into it too.

**Liv:** [00:13:53] Yeah. And the thing that struck me struck me most from that reading, and this is **Tracking the Vampire** by Sue-Ellen Case in case people are listening, was the mention of these settings in like fog and gloom and how it's blurring the line between, from character and environment and how it's invoking this, she uses the language "palpable, atmospheric touching" where opposing terms aren't very clearly opposed anymore. And then that goes back to the music being diegetic versus non-diegetic as well as like, if you watched clips of **Hannibal**, you probably had to turn your brightness up all the way, because it is so dark and it's difficult to distinguish what's what, and who's who and what's going on, and that visual sensibility reflects in the music as well, and just gives this really unnerving feel, which I thought was interesting.

**Matthew:** [00:14:52] And in a really basic sense, like that's what **Hannibal Lecter** kind of like represents, is like, he is a bad person, but he is ostensibly like helping the good guys, you know, catch criminals and stuff. So it is kind of that blurring and it isn't about, you know, right and wrong. It's like, let's explore that gray area a little more.

**J.W.:** [00:15:11] On the other side of the coin, in terms of the music, being unable to distinguish between diegetic and non-diegetic, another sound that to me is super frightening is just when there's something at the edge of your perception, like your auditory perception when you're already on edge yourself, I guess, because I guess you're just hyper aware and it's really hard to identify specific sources. And I love when like media does this, where the sound design is just super subtle and they're not really giving anything away at all. I think that's the most terrifying too, which is, I think just the opposite. So as, whereas **Hannibal** is very much, at least from what I'm getting, it's like super loud, a lot of the time, even though you can't tell what's diegetic and non-diegetic, I think it just works the same way on the opposite side, or if it's extremely soft, it makes you look for things. And when you already have that kind of hyperaware state, you're kind of, I mean, it's just fraught with tension, I guess, and it's really hard to just distinguish between what is there and what is not.

**Liv:** [00:16:36] I appreciate that you bring that up because this morning when I was listening to a bunch of scores for movies that I've found creepy, that idea really resonates specifically for me with ***Hereditary*** and ***Annihilation***, which both invoke that, visually and sonically, where, for ***Hereditary***, a lot of the scary stuff, it scared me more than anything I've ever seen. I probably talked about that a lot, but it is like, you notice things in the corner of the frame that are really scary and it's the same with the sound design. Most of the time it's very soft. And, what he's doing, this is Colin Stetson, he is using mostly like, strings and voice to evoke the sounds of other instruments, and so using sound sources that we're familiar with to accomplish different ends that we are also familiar with, but since it's different means it comes off as creepy and a little bit uncanny valley. And so it's just this music just very much like underscores the film and it's quiet and suspenseful and, it's pretty like manipulative and claustrophobic, especially with the amount of voice and the amount of breathing in it. And then, 'cause it is sort of like, it takes the form of this like domestic drama and then with ***Annihilation*** it's they were really avoiding synths, same as ***Hereditary***. They were, they were like, *we don't want creepy percussion. We don't want synths. We want to do away with those conventions.* And then representing this like sort of cancerous, constantly mutating, fear of life. It's like alien sphere of life without using any sensor progression, at least until the very end, which if you've seen it, you probably remember when Natalie Portman sees like, then it's just this wall of like synth melody the whole time, which is really intense after a whole movie's worth of not hearing that, but it is like, with when they're in the ecosystem, you, as the viewer constantly noticing these little things that are wrong in the background with the, with the animal life and the plant life. And it's the same thing, sonically just like a gentle soundscape of things that are slightly wrong, and to me, that's just as scary as things that are super overt. So it's cool that it can work both ways.

**Matthew:** [00:19:16] I'm kind of glad you brought up the uncanny valley. 'Cause I think that that's almost like, I mean, it's not like doesn't explain everything, but I think it has a lot to do with exactly what we're talking about, where you, if you can kind of blur the distinction between self and other, it not only like, it, it keeps it, so you can't even define what you're looking at, but you also like lose the ability to define yourself. Cause that's often how we define ourselves, is through looking at everything else. And so that's what that Sue-Ellen Case reading was about with the vampire, right, vampires are there, they're there, it's almost impossible to distinguish them from people and same with like werewolves and zombies and that's what makes them so scary. Or at least that's kind of, I mean, they're not real, but what in theory would make them so scary. But I think that that also comes back to queerness in a weird kind of way. And I don't want to get, like, canceled for saying this, but it's almost like, like, if you are looking at, if you're a straight person and you're, you're kind of creating your uncanny valley, it's like the queer person is the closest thing. It's like, you can't even tell that they're not like you they're, they're exactly the same, except there's this thing that there's this kind of cultural or historical thing that makes it, so they're totally, totally different. And they almost threatened your way of being or, or, you know, that kind of sense of things. Maybe I'm a crazy person.

**Liv:** [00:20:58] No, absolutely. And I mean, that's interesting because to me, sort of the shift in horror of the monsters being more human happens post-Hays Code. And then during the time of the Hays code, it was like, so thirties through sixties, more or less, there's a long tradition of representing queerness as monstrosity, but then it was more over monstrosity

and...I mean, but that, that continues that and then that sort of like reclaimed and in interesting ways, but I absolutely see that connection as well. But even then on the other side of it, I mean, I see it as, I, I'm not sure if this is entirely connected, but I see it as very resonant to overtly evoke queerness through monstrosity. So I, I really like this literary trend queer fabulism, where it's examining sort of the strangeness of having a female body of being queer through fairy tales and monsters and myth. And it's very, it's very clear about all that. It's very like here's a mermaid, here's a retelling of some fantastical story, which is just completely making those bodies strange very visibly. And so I think that, that, I mean, that's just an interesting discussion and representation, like whether it's super clear, whether it's like, *Oh, this person is just like other people*, but not really the secret dark side. I'm not sure if there's a question in there. Anyone has thoughts about, like, overt monstrosity versus covert monstrosity?

**J.W.:** [00:23:02] Yeah. Well, it's like, I mean, it's just an other, it's the other, it's otherness, and all that kind of stuff. Being able to push back and clearly delineate an other is, I mean, it makes it really easy to fall back on the strict, hard lined, delineated personal self. Right. I forget the reading. What was it talking about? There needs to be...straight people need gay people to affirm their straightness. What was that? I think that was the Benshoff dissertation, but it's the same kind of thing. So when you have this kind of queerness, monstrosity approaching a normality, whatever that is, then you get the fear response a lot of the time, because it is kind of a questioning, it becomes a more overt and direct questioning of personal identity, if you think personal identity is very strict, I guess, and you're really invested in a specific personal identity, or means of defining the self. And so I think you can just rope other into all of these different kinds of like, substrata, right? You have queerness. You have like, I mean, again, the horror tradition also talks about like the racial other, or the ethnic other, or, any sort of other that's going along. So I think it's really interesting interplay between monstrosity and others we construct within like our own species. And I think a lot of the quote unquote "coping mechanisms" are similar regardless of the other, I guess.

**Liv:** [00:25:07] Which then, I mean, that to me goes back to Edelman and others who are, who pause at, queer negativity, where it's very much like this, this perspective, this lifestyle, this identity sort of however you want to conceptualize it is a dis-identification. It is a direct counter to the dominant system of politics, and that, I think, is a pretty good reason for queer people claiming horror.

**Chloe:** [00:25:49] In my LGBTQ class this morning we were actually talking about how, like, Disney villains are often coded as androgynous, like Ursula being played in drag in the musical, the live musical. And then I was just thinking back to *Silence of the Lambs* and how the serial killer is a cross-dresser and he's trying to build, like, a human suit out of, like, these women, because he wants to be a woman, right? And I just think that's an interesting play of how, like, monsters are represented. Like it's very a cross between masculine and feminine, which goes back to the, like, ambiguous sounds that you can't necessarily decipher and all the hidden codes. Yeah.

**Matthew:** [00:26:50] I think partially, or to kind of continue that thought, like, I think it's similar in a lot of ways to, I promise this isn't unrelated, like Democrats in Washington, as much as they're like, Oh, we don't agree with the other guys. They, you know, they prefer being in a kind of a dialectic rather than like how, you know, like opening it up to like, *Oh, let's*

*have a multi-party system*, because a binary is really, you know, it's like, *I'd rather fight with these guys than with three other people*, you know, groups that are way worse. And so in that sense, what, I think when you're, when you're saying that Disney villains are often coded as androgynous, I think that that's an important point that it's not an opposite. It's not, you know, like, society is pretty okay with there being masculinity and femininity. But when you're, I think what's important about kind of queerness is that it's a spectrum. And so it's not divided. It's not like this is one and this is the other, and there's only two options. It's like, no, there's, it's, it's kind of on a graded scale. And so, I don't know where I was going with that. Oh, the music that we were talking about earlier, where you're not sure where things kind of end and where things start like in **Hannibal**, where it's really dark. And so you have to kind of really notice things and the music, you're not sure if it's diegetic, non-diegetic, the sound that all of these things are kind of representing that same kind of, like, it's not even opposite to straightness, it's like a refusal to play by the same rules that straightness plays by. It's like, we're not even going to buy into the myth that there are two options and that, you know, you really don't have much choice there.

**J.W.:** [00:28:42] And it makes it all the more interesting cause **Hannibal**, is, instead of the traditional horror being coded queerness from a more or less heteronormative perspective, **Hannibal** is a queer text, yeah?

**Liv:** [00:28:57] Yeah. The TV show? Yes.

**J.W.:** [00:28:59] Yes. That's all I had to say. I'm still thinking about it.

**Liv:** [00:29:05] Yeah. I mean, Chloe, that's so interesting about **Silence of the Lambs**, cause I was kind of looking into that after my family and I were just talking a couple of days ago and we were talking about, like **Ace Ventura: Pet Detective**, and we're like, yeah, it's transphobic, and we still watch it. And just sort of that whole conversation of, okay, it does not hold up ideologically, but we watch it anyway. And so it was, it was just like one throwaway comment. We were like, *yeah, Silence of the Lambs. That's probably homophobic or transphobic, but we watch it anyway.* And then I was looking a little bit more into that and what people had said about it, and it's interesting because Jonathan Demme also did **Philadelphia**, I believe. And people were saying, okay, that's that might actually be about gay people, but **Silence of the Lambs** reflects a queer sensibility more so, and people read **Philadelphia** as like, it's just one of those sort of cringy attempts to show gay people as, essentially as straight people or as just a very sanitized way of living. And that's, yeah, that's just intriguing to me that you could, like, you could read it as a queer text or it you could read it as a homophobic text. Now, **Hannibal**, the TV show is definitely responding to that and to other representations of this character, and it is definitively a queer text by a queer creator, and it just like, it gets progressively gayer, like by season three, like it's just, yeah.

**Matthew:** [00:30:49] It's like full, full gay at that point.

**Liv:** [00:30:52] Yeah. So, yeah. It's like that, you know, monstrosity can either be, I think, I think there is a good argument for taking offense, and for claiming it and being like, yeah, this is, this is a queer text. This represents queer negativity and I want it. But we could talk about music a little more. One of the biggest themes in **Hannibal** is losing your mind, which sort of also goes into losing the boundaries of yourself. Whereas you, you, where you often [see] the

two main characters, Hannibal and Will, sort of becoming each other, the good protagonist FBI character ostensibly and the cannibal serial killer. So, how might we sonically represent what it's like to go crazy and lose your mind and just be completely disoriented?

**Matthew:** [00:31:59] That's a great question, Liv. How can we?

**Liv:** [00:32:04] Or how do we? Like, to think, I guess, think to other movies or what sounds do you associate with that phenomenon?

**Torrey:** [00:32:12] I think music that doesn't sound, like, normal to our ears probably would represent what, quote unquote "crazy music" would sound like. Or, I think about, this is very on-brand, but I think about the movie *Love and Mercy*, which is about Brian Wilson and the way they represent his auditory hallucinations is, like, randomly throughout the movie, but especially during moments of stress for him, sounds come from everywhere. The whole audio is like all the space that you can fill that your home will allow. I luckily have surround sound speakers, but you'll hear sounds coming from every which way. And it's, it's really stressful because you don't quite know where the sound is going to come from next. And it's also a mixture of Beach Boys music, and also, like, just random sounds or words, and I think that kind of confusion, and you don't know where, where something's coming or you don't know what's coming next creates that sense of being unsure and maybe even crazy, I guess.

**J.W.:** [00:33:42] Yeah, for me, I mean, I think of anything, yeah, anything that's against structure, really. So like the basic quality to just make regularity or even like tonal regularity, cause some scores, usually nowadays, it's a little bit different, but if we're talking about more historical films, they're operating within time, it's like post-romantic, like Western idiom kind of thing. So anything that kind of breaks out outside of that in weird ways, well like musique concrète or, like the kind of modernist, postmodernist music. And then also I'm thinking, like, sensory confusion. So like the flash bang, I feel like the like tinnitus sound, like very bright. It's like the go-to for just confusion in general. And then that's layered on a lot of other things.

**Chloe:** [00:34:51] Yeah, I think it was interesting how you said tinnitus, because that's what I would imagine, like a representation of like going insane would just be like the constant, like, sound just repeating and then growing with intensity and more and more elements. But just, I was thinking more like repetition rather than, like, you don't know what's happening next. I feel like that's more to build tension, but rather the process of like losing sanity is like a slow growth.

**Matthew:** [00:35:29] I think there's an interesting contradiction between craziness as repetition and craziness as like, inability to perceive repetition, or like, there is no repetition, because on the one hand, like, there's that really famous definition from Einstein or I think, or something, you know, whatever, some old guy, who said crazy people do the same thing over and over again and expect different results or something like that. So like, that's what craziness is. But I think I was more drawn to J.W.'s definition that there is no discernible pattern and you can't figure it out what's next. There's no regularity at all. And that's crazy because, I don't know, because that's how we define it. I once had a political science professor who like made this huge point. He was like, "watch for who they call, watch for what society calls crazy, because that's the thing that they're most afraid of," is what they say. That's crazy. It's like it's

not even worth listening to because it's just totally incomprehensible, but that what it really is, is just dangerous to whatever society wants to uphold.

**Liv:** [00:36:49] Yeah, I was definitely thinking a lot about repetition, in constructing this episode of [the] podcast, and in *Hannibal*, to me, I think it's more jarring noises and, like, the resonant percussion and synth and trills, and just funky sounds everywhere, but it is pretty much constant, so in a way, you kind of get used to it. It almost feels like you're like clanging around in your own mind. And there are sounds, things that sound like voices. So it makes you think you're maybe hearing voices and it's super layered. So just this constant, like, internal chaos is what's, what's evoked for me. And also sort of like a synthy drone under everything that just unsettles you. And then one of the main things I was comparing it against was *Suspiria* because there's 1977 *Suspiria* and then there's 2018 *Suspiria*. And in the original it's all done by the group Goblin and it's synth, voice, lot of repetition, bells, and just, like, chanting voices, "Witch, witch, witch!", 'cause it's about witches. And then in 2018, the 2018 version is super different, visually and sonically and Thom Yorke did that score and it's about dance, so it is about repetitive movement, and there is a lot of repetition in the score to mimic that. And it's sort of like pulling you in so that you can't get out, through repetition, which is another interesting way. And the characters are trapped in this dance school, in these rooms full of mirrors, and they're spinning around as they're dancing, they're very disoriented and it's all women, which is, at least in the 2018 version, which is intriguing. And you can look at the female body through that, or sort of the experience of inhabiting a female body. And, that is like an example for me of repetition being extremely salient in the experience of losing your mind and just sort of, like, spinning out of control and out of your body, almost.

**Matthew:** [00:39:40] I'm going to try to be, like, succinct, but I feel like I'm already losing my train of thought, but I'm thinking about the way that we've changed, what we're afraid of, right. So like a long time ago, or, you know, in previous generations, people were maybe afraid of chaos. And then with like, Kafka around that time, you start to see people like being afraid of bureaucracy or repetition. It's like Kafka has, like, nightmares about like having to go to the DMV, basically. And like, it's like, you know, red tape, and, like, doing the same thing over and over again becomes really terrifying. And at this point it's like, now that's basically our reality. Like that's what we do every day. We do the same things. Everyone does the same thing. You know, like, labor is alienated and repetitious, you know, like the kind of job that most people have most people have is like a warehouse job where it's like, you're just doing the same thing over and over and over again. And so that becomes like less, that becomes, like, either more scary because it feels like you're losing who you are, because you're just doing the same thing as everyone else. Or it becomes, like, normalized and then you're not afraid of it anymore because it's like, Oh, that's just my life. Like, that's not very scary at all. I'm not sure which is which. I think, I think it's the first one that it's like, when we hear kind of repetitive things, um, like this is what Robert Fink writes about, that, like, we live in a culture of repetition. And so it's kind of scary to point it out and say like, yeah. Like, you're just, like, labor, basically. Like, anyone can repeat the same thing over and over again. Everyone does, you're the same as everyone else. So it is like you're losing yourself and like you're losing the ability to define where yourself ends and where, you know, the other begins.

**Liv:** [00:41:39] I was considering dropping a section of Professor Fink's book. I didn't, but I like where your mind's at.

**Matthew:** [00:41:54] But what's like, what's interesting to me is that repetition or like, that's kind of how you also build your identity is, like, your memory and, and going back and like doing things and getting patterns, like that's kind of historically how we build who we are. It's like, Oh, I do these things and that's who I am. Um, it kind of reminds me of like **Fight Club**. It's like, your job is who you are. And so now we're afraid of that because like our jobs are robbing us of ourselves. I'm going on too long. Someone else, please take the microphone.

**J.W.:** [00:42:28] So in terms of the conventionality, so if we apply that to like, music, what are we afraid of now? I mean, we talked about it before, but like, what are your...in terms of convention? What's that slippage doing on the film music level, in terms of, I'm thinking the conversation about a genre and playing off of perceived audience knowledges about genre and what that sounds like. Does that make sense?

**Liv:** [00:43:06] Yeah. And that's, that's one of my biggest questions. Everything I'm talking about is really recent for that precise reason. The horror genre is very much in a space where people are experimenting a lot. I think the trend now is more towards soundtracks that are scores that sort of bang you over the head. And I think, not specifically horror, but an interesting sample of this sort of experimentation is **Uncut Gems**. Actually, I love **Uncut Gems**. It came out last year and it's so anxiety inducing, but the music is actually very calming and it sounds kind of like mystical and light and has all these prismatic effects. It's mainly synth and sax and flute and a choir. And this juxtaposition of this call music and the really frantic visuals is actually super anxiety inducing. Because of the conflict there. And so I think that might be a way, and we've talked about, there's a lot of synth in contemporary horror scores, which is a callback to Goblin and, and all the people in the seventies and eighties, who were just freaking out on new ways of creating sounds. So it is partially like paying homage to. Previous stylistic conventions. And then, and then you also have the composers, like we've talked about who were really trying to avoid that. But I do think that stuff still works on us. So what do you all think still works today?

**Matthew:** [00:44:53] Well, you bring up, I don't want to go too far off your question, but you brought up an interesting point to me that we're talking about repetition and we're talking about loops, and then also experimenting with different things. But I think it's interesting that it's almost like we're going back to the seventies, like **Suspiria** was remade, you know, the synth sounds in **Stranger Things**, which seems to get brought up in like every discussion that anyone ever has on a podcast.

**Liv:** [00:45:19] **Stranger Things?**

**Matthew:** [00:45:21] Yeah, every podcast I listen to, they mention **Stranger Things**, but like, this idea that like, you know, that it's a symptom of postmodernism that nothing is new and that we're going to be repeating the same kind of cultural material over and over, over again. I just thought that was interesting kind of thing to touch upon briefly, but go back to your question because I thought it was interesting.

**J.W.:** [00:45:46] Well, okay. I need to pull up my notes cause I had a specific thing written down. Oh, okay. So this was in the Tompkins piece about identifying horror genre or horror conventions of horror film music, right? So he says, "undoubtedly, these expectations derive significance from musical traditions outside the cinema, but it is also arguable that the

suppositions people bring to such music achieved the most stable articulation and proximity to the horror film or in putatively frightening sounds take on clear visual mathematic associations and the value of aesthetic norms. As evidenced above these norms operate as part of a codified set of practices that production personnel and or composers bring to bear on horror, film aesthetics," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So I guess my, my question was if a lot of these, I mean, that's, that's what genre or style is. It's just response to previous genre styles and it's just recursive like that. So I don't think that's like necessarily what I was trying to get at, but I was thinking from, like, a cross-cultural standpoint. So if we're forming these conceptions of what's terrifying or scary in regards to film music specifically, but you can extrapolate that out to anything that we're considering scary, other, what have you, so how has there been work done in studying cross-cultural differences in like fear responses in terms of what is employed to invoke or evoke fear, or just in terms of what other cultures perceive as scary because all of the scholarship I've been reading is like super like, Eurocentric, more specifically like Hollywood-centric. So I was just really curious if there has been any work done on like cross-cultural analyses of fear and I'm sure there has I was just wondering if anybody's familiar with that. In terms of, I also was thinking like what makes something horrifying to us is what we talked about, it's our moral codes and conceptions of quote unquote "otherness." And so, but there is some, there is some biological entrainment of fear responses on like a neurological or cognitive level, just with like very basic stimuli. Like it's a really old part of the brain that's working on like fear response. But a lot of the stuff we're seeing in media is more and more drawing on, like, culturally or inculturated, aspects of fear that play in interesting ways with like biological fear response, but are super culturally contingent as well. That was where I was going. I don't know if anybody has any kind of thought about that, but those are kind of my thoughts when reading the Tompkins.

**Matthew:** [00:49:07] My initial response is like, I feel like you have to get to a certain level of leisure in a culture where you're like, Oh, I want to go get scared. Like, if you're like this isn't funny and I'm sorry that I'm laughing, but like, if you're like a child in Yemen, which is going through like a humanitarian crisis, like your everyday life is kind of horrifying or like, it's like, scary on like a really, really deep, a real kind of level. And so you're not going to maybe, I mean, I don't know, I don't want to make assumptions about that, but I think we're living in a culture where we are seeking out like fear because we don't really have it in our daily. I don't know. I haven't read a lot about this, but that's kind of my initial response to your question.

**J.W.:** [00:50:06] That's a good point.

**Matthew:** [00:50:09] So it makes sense that at least to me, that it is kind of Hollywood-centric or, or Eurocentric, not that that's like good, but just that it kind of squares. It also makes me think I don't want to get canceled again. So I'm probably going to cut this part out, but it makes me think about like the trope of like, black people watching horror movies. And responding very differently. It's like, you know, like it's like the joke that like, they yell at the screen and you know, like, *Oh, don't go in there*. And then they're like upset when the white characters are like, you know, so I, there, there is kind of a response to the genre and a response to like, what is scary and what is acceptable? I don't know if that's politically correct, but that's what it made me think about.

**Liv:** [00:50:59] Yeah. I mean, I wish I had an answer for you. Just the, the lines of inquiry that stem from at least like the queer theory and the film theory that I've been reading are very focused around the structures of. Like Western cinema and thought and stuff. So...

**J.W.:** [00:51:37] Yeah, I'm just now reading another quote that I wrote down from Tompkins. "In this sense, the stability of horror, musical conventions, implicates that only certain types of music, but also certain types of listening habits and responses. To the extent these responses impact people's knowledge and expectations of the genre, the horror film might itself be considered a distinctive way of embodying musical experience with the overall effect of sanctioning certain types of listener associations." So, I'm assuming horror is just way more prominent, in...I don't want to say Western culture... just Hollywood-centered entertainment industries in general.

**Liv:** [00:52:21] I wanted to interrogate a little bit the, the claims or the, the criticisms leveled at horror in general of just being this. Well, it is known as the genre of the body and it is thought to evoke these base reactions or desires. And it can be thought that the music does that as well. And it's just like, you know, let's scare you or you're not scared and that's it. It's just like a visceral, just "Ahh!", and that's it. What are your thoughts on these criticisms and the general sort of dismissal, less so in recent years of horror and of horror music, and how does its status as a genre that is so intimately tied to the body affect its music and affect your engagements with it?

**J.W.:** [00:53:32] Okay. I think, I think it's a reliance. Okay. The, the perceived notion of horror as low ball, like low balling, I don't know what term I'm looking for.

**Liv:** [00:53:49] Low brow?

**J.W.:** [00:53:50] Low brow. That's a good one. What makes me think of what, why people categorize horror as low brow generally, or historically is because you're working with, initially at least, at the base conception, you're working with a physical response as the motivation for your work. So you're looking for specific stimuli that are going to, like, coax that response. Generally that's like the basic, I feel like the basic sentiment when people are working with horror as a medium. Right. But then like you get all this like more complex stuff coming out of that. It's...okay. Let me start over. It's really easy, I feel, to trope horror things, because there is like, a very articulated stimuli or stimulus to physical response, a relationship that's somewhat easy to invoke generally, but, and I think the people who are discounting horror are thinking, okay, horror stuff is just basically that response, and so it's a very kind of like practical, like, trade rather than art form. But I mean, that's ignoring all of this, all of these other aspects to horror wherein it's not, it's not just that, like, people do that and it's easy to do so people can do it a lot and people don't have to give as much thought in doing it, but especially now it's becoming, like, interwoven. It's not just this base response. There are all these complex factors going in. It's just like any other genre, right? It's a, it's a mixing and matching of all of these different, uh, compositional principles, I guess, if that makes any sense.

**Matthew:** [00:56:15] I think it's a remnant of the Cartesian split between mind and body, and because it's in a binary and because we know that binary is, automatically, one is given priority over the other, I think the body is seen as the more susceptible part? It's like your mind

can't be killed... your mind can't be killed because you can write, and then it'll last forever. I'm just explaining kind of historically, whereas the body is, you know, you can, you can die, your body can die, but your "soul", or, you know, your intellect will live on. And so, in that sense, the body is relegated to, well, that's just, you know, that's kind of lower, a lower kind of writing or a lower form of literature, literature that involves the body because the body is ephemeral. It's not as built to last, but that's kind of what makes it so visceral is like, we are kind of, innocent, you know, it's like, so we are really afraid of what happens to our body because our body can be killed or our body can be hurt, and that's what makes horror. So especially like, you know, gore, like *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, or like that kind of stuff where it's like, it's not just like scary, it's like, kind of disgusting or like, it has to do with like, maiming things. So I think that that's just, yeah, I think that kind of gets at the heart of your question.

**Liv:** [00:57:53] That's exactly what I was getting at when I posed the question.

**J.W.:** [00:57:57] [unintelligible]...feminine in relation to a patriarchal society. That sort of thing too.

**Matthew:** [00:58:06] Yeah, no, please keep going, then, Liv.

**Liv:** [00:58:09] In terms of horror as a genre of the body, that in part to me is why it's so useful for articulating the queer experience. Just this strangeness of inhabiting this body and finding a new way to negotiate your relationship with your body, and well, even that's, oh, that's not the right way to say that at all! I mean, your relationship as an embodied being with the world around you, with however you want to conceive yourself, is something you have to be that you have to renegotiate when you are labeled as an other. So what I think is really interesting about *Hannibal* is that it blends body horror and psychological horror. And so it is very much engaged in both discourses and in a way, sort of lending some, like, if you are critical of body horror, it may make it seem more legitimate. And all of that is tied up in sex as well. And it's because it's very, there's a lot of desire going on there and with the cannibalism element as well, it's this blending self and other, and just an all-consuming desire and literal consumption of other people, and then this all-consuming soundtrack that brings you in very close proximity with all of these...uncomfortable identifications and uncomfortable experiences. And the music ties you to this unreality, which I think is extremely salient in contemporary horror. And I'm really interested to see what horror composers continue to do with excavating our fears.