Middle-earth music: The sonic inhabitation of a fantasy world

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Summary:
This article seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the cultural inhabitation of imaginary worlds by examining the role that music and its consumption play in these processes. Focussing largely on Howard Shore's music for Peter Jackson's two film trilogies set in Tolkien's Middle-earth, the article relies on data found through web ethnography and a researcher-designed questionnaire targeted at fans of the franchise. Soundtrack consumption and listening practices are analysed to identify how and why this film music is listened to, as are the ways in which music enables a further sonic level of the inhabitation of Middle-earth. Placing Shore's music alongside other contributions to Tolkien's world poses questions of authority, authenticity and canon, finding that not every person's Middle-earth sounds the same. Results show that, for many, the world built by music functions as an imagined or spiritual *home* to which they are transported and which provides numerous personal and practical benefits.

Keywords: Film music, consumption, listening practices, worldbuilding, *Lord of the Rings,* Howard Shore.

Introduction

> They transport me to this magnificent world I sometimes escape to, and they make me realize things about our actual world and stuff. I feel melancholy and courage and a bizarre sort of inner strength like I could achieve anything on my own. This music helps me in my life, and it inspires me for the things I love to do. I feel really elvish and found a place through it where I can be both in the real world and still live my dreams.

The above statement was made in response to a question about why one might listen to the soundtracks of Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* films, and how they make the listener feel. These few sentences abound with notions of escapism, self-expansion, social awareness, subjective identification, emotional association and dual inhabitation, and highlight the personal importance of such music to this particular respondent. Fans engage with fantasy worlds – and particularly those belonging to film franchises – in a variety of ways, from DVDs, books, soundtracks, toys and videogames to live orchestral concerts, online interactions, conferences and conventions, tourist destinations and theme parks. Although film scores and soundtracks are something of a neglected object of study within fandom scholarship, it is clear from fan responses such as the one above that an investigation of film music and its consumption may shed much light on the inhabitation of fantasy worlds, which is of increasing academic interest, particularly within film scholarship and fandom studies. All the activities listed above form a part of the worldbuilding process, be they individual or collaborative, and this article draws and builds upon notions of worldbuilding in order to bridge the gap in the relevant academic literature between film music and fandom, and to ascertain the various roles that music and its consumption have to play in the inhabitation of imaginary worlds.

Howard Shore's music for Peter Jackson's two trilogies set in Tolkien's Middle-earth (*The Lord of the Rings*, 2001-2003 and *The Hobbit*, 2012-2014) has expanded from the first released soundtracks to include limited edition Complete Recordings, rare archived recordings, symphonic concerts and live cinematic performances, articles, websites, blogs and books, all devoted to the sound of Jackson's Middle-earth. How are these musical materials and experiences consumed by fans and non-fans alike, and how do they feel about *Lord of the Rings* (*LOTR*) inspired music by other composers? What are people's motivations for consuming this music, and how can we understand notions of escapism within these contexts? The Shore soundtracks are owned and consumed by millions worldwide,[1] and the internet survey-based investigation presented in this article which addresses how and why fans are engaging with the music of Middle-earth – examining their listening practices and feelings towards non-canonical contributions – seeks to answer these questions. In particular, the data suggests that for many, the world built by music functions as an imagined or spiritual *home* to which they are transported and which provides numerous personal and practical benefits. These findings require an adjustment, or rather, an expansion, of current understandings of worldbuilding, at the intersections of fantasy film theory and fandom scholarship where 'homebuilding' may be a more accurate term.

Backgrounds and Contexts

Worldbuilding has become a topic of significant research throughout the arts over the last ten years, and even inherited its own organisation - the *World-Building Institute* ('Wbi'), a branch of the Cinematic Arts faculty of USC. Writers such as Mark J.P. Wolf and Michael Saler have each made notable contributions to this field of research. For Wolf, worldbuilding is an innate human activity present from the very early stages of childhood, and one that

never leaves us as he points out: 'the desire for imaginary worlds does not change over time, only the manner in which those worlds are constructed and experienced' (2012:4). Saler identifies worldbuilding as both a corporate act and an individual one, noting that individuals 'spend a great deal of time residing in imaginary worlds, heightening their emotional investment in them by participating in collective exercises of world building' (2012:25). Thus not only can imaginary worlds be 'resided in', they can also be added to and expanded by consumers, co-labourers in building a unified world and making it more coherent, reconciling contradictions and filling in gaps. This process of expanding the authorial input did not appear to concern Tolkien, however. Writing in 1951, four years before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings,* Tolkien appeared to anticipate Saler's observations about worldbuilding in his comments that he had intentionally left gaps in his 'body of more or less connected legend' so that they could be filled in by other contributors: 'I would draw some of the great tales in fullness, and leave many only placed in the scheme, and sketched. The cycles should be linked to a majestic whole, and yet leave scope for other minds and hands, wielding paint and music and drama' (2002:xv). For Tolkien, then, music was a key element through which his mythos could be expanded.

Fan contributions and re-edits pose several questions regarding the authorship and ownership of virtual worlds, as well as challenging concepts of canon, authenticity and authority. In the case of Middle-earth film media specifically, Miguel Ángel Pérez-Gómez has investigated the intricacies of canon construction and double canon between the Jackson trilogy and other *LOTR* fan films, and identified Tolkien's work as the primary text and 'mythic' canon, Jackson's work as the secondary text and 'aesthetic' canon, and fan films as tertiary texts and examples of 'fanon' (Pérez-Gómez, 2015: 37). These filmic contributions generally aim to tell an untold part of the (hi)story of Middle-earth, hence Pérez-Gómez's use of the categorisations of sequel, prequel, midquel, transquel and paraquel (also employed by Mark Wolf) to temporally locate fan film narratives. To reflect this theory onto fan musics, which tend to serve much less narrative purposes than fan films and contribute to the fabric and content of the imaginary world as a whole, notions of canon and fanon must be adapted. Musical fanon here may vary from musical settings of Tolkien's songs and orchestral symphonies inspired by *LOTR* characters, to 'filk' (fantasy or sci-fi folk) adaptations of popular songs with *LOTR* inspired lyrics, and numerous other creations in between, many of which may take different musical styles or forms to Howard Shore's compositions. Thus, to return to the concepts of primary and secondary canon, fan music may be located on a more level playing field than fan films (at least for Pérez-Gómez) – which is not to say that Shore's music as an example of secondary canon is not extremely influential, but rather to say that fan music may not necessarily be seen as a tertiary canon inspired by and subservient to Shore's music, but as further components of a secondary canon alongside Shore's work, all of which draws on Tolkien's mythic primary canonic materials.

When music is isolated or separated from other filmic components through active or passive listening it is able to maintain its role as both a narrative agent and an agent of

worldbuilding through the ways in which it is heard, listened to, accessed and consumed. A fan's motivation for listening to the music from their favourite film franchise could easily be compared to those identified by Sue Beeton among film tourists: 'visitors were coming to film sites to re-live an experience (or even emotion) encountered in the film, reinforce myth, storytelling or fantasies, or for reasons of status (or celebrity)' (2010:2). The re-living of experience and reinforcing of myth as motivations for listening to and aurally inhabiting familiar musical spaces may be figured as deliberate acts of worldbuilding. Notions of worldbuilding – particularly within the fantasy idiom – are closely linked to the concept of 'home' as identified by Richard Selcer, who points out that 'none of these [American cinematic] myths is stronger or more presistent [sic] than the myth of home as the best possible place in the world' (1990:54). Katherine Fowkes identifies the importance of the theme of home within fantasy cinema, pointing out that 'if films must construct their own notion of home […] fantasy may be in a privileged position because home is already an elusive, fantasy-like idea' (2010:11-12). She continues by adapting Rick Altman's concept of constelled communities in film fandom, highlighting Altman's suggestion that such communities can 'function as virtual homes, as viewers locate personal memories in the context of favoured viewing experiences' (ibid). These concepts of (imagined or real) homes and communities provide a key to understanding how filmgoers and fans go about inhabiting franchises in whatever way they can – that is, for fans to want to immerse themselves in a fantasy world, the world must provide a home *desirable* enough to merit inhabitation.

Methodologies

This article relies predominantly on web ethnography, engaging with fans and music consumers via various online fora and through the use of a researcher-designed questionnaire devised to investigate the reception and consumption of *LOTR* soundtracks and other music related to Tolkien's works – his 'legendarium' – and to explore ways in which different fans use the music to furnish their world or escape from it altogether. Trends and patterns are found through the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data to identify common responses and differences among and between more extreme fans and less committed ones. There are a number of issues to take into account in web ethnography, mainly problems of identity and authenticity. Justin Smith argues that because the Internet is not a 'real' place, it does not have 'real' communities (2007: 230). However, bearing in mind a web user's ability and right to tailor their web presence and conduct themselves online however they choose, critical discourse analysis can be used to interpret online discussions and dialogues through the frame in which they are held. To quote Christine Hine, '[t]he Internet is an active process of meaning-making' (2000: 37). Thus, some of the information I have found in web fora has come from previous discussions without my involvement, some have arisen on threads I have begun by asking preliminary questions, and the majority of data used below comes from responses to my own questionnaire. Where this is not the case it will be made clear where the data has been

taken from, and in what way (if any) a quotation may have been stimulated by previous discourse.

Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijs' *Lord of the Rings* international audience research project proved extremely useful in creating and shaping the questionnaire. Even though their questionnaire was not oriented towards music, many of the 24,747 respondents mentioned music in response to questions about their reasons for seeing *The Return of the King* (2003) – in fact, the word 'music' is mentioned 1,339 times among these responses in 14 languages (see **Appendix 1** for full breakdown). The majority of these responses cite the music/scores as one of the primary reasons filmgoers wanted to see the films, or as one of the most memorable elements of the film after having seen it. One British male respondent said 'Howard Shore did a phenomenal job'; an older female participant stated 'the score brings me to tears'; and many others stated their enjoyment of the music's epic qualities. Although little of what arose through the project relates to the *consumption* of music and its role in the inhabitation of imaginary worlds, the kind of language used and the love that many fans have for the music of Jackson's Middle-earth helped shape the direction of my own questionnaire and the kind of questions I could ask. The fact that people mentioned 'the sound of Middle-earth' or made reference to music as 'part of the world' of *LOTR* inspired the second question of my survey: 'give an example of a piece of music that best expresses Middle-earth for you.' I recognised that many fans would already be aware of their favourite musical expression of Middle-earth, and that there would be some variance in their answers.

Once created, the questionnaire was opened on Google Forms and disseminated in various ways. Firstly, respondents were recruited through posts made on several online fan-fora, including those at TheOneRing.net, LordotRings.com, LOTRplaza.com, AgeOfTheRing.com, CouncilofElrond.com and Musicoflotr.com, all of which were found to be particularly active (the post on TheOneRing.net was viewed 487 times while the questionnaire was open). Invitations to participate were also made on various fan groups on Facebook, several Reddit pages devoted to *LOTR,* and the fora on the IMDb (Internet Movie Database) pages for each of the films, which are also reasonably active.[2] Throughout preliminary searches it became apparent that the message board at TheOneRing.net (affectionately known as TORn by users) is by far the most popular, a fact corroborated by Maggie Parke's chapter focusing on this particular community, '*The Lord of the Rings*: One Digital Fandom to Initiate Them All' (2015). Reactions on this board were enthusiastic and numerous.[3] My aim to gain responses from a wide range of fans of differing enthusiasms or commitment levels led me to post invitations to complete the questionnaire via my own personal social media profiles on Facebook and Twitter. These posts were shared and retweeted, disseminating the survey to a wider audience, and Doug Adams (author of *The Music of The Lord of the Rings* and highly regarded as the main authority on Howard Shore's scores for the Jackson films) also aided the propagation of the questionnaire by retweeting my post on Twitter, broadcasting it to his followers and garnering more completions – the retweet was seen 1,841 times, and 18 of these viewers clicked the link to the survey.

Due to the wide range of participants with different levels of fandom, it became necessary for them to self-categorise as part of the questionnaire to enable comparisons between trends of more or less ardent fans, and a question was created to this effect.[4] In answering the first question 'how much of a *Lord of the Rings* fan would you say you are?' participants chose a point on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being labelled 'extreme fan' and 5 'not at all'. Firstly, it was decided to ask about *LOTR* fandom rather than more specifically about the Jackson films, or indeed the films' music, so as not to influence the answers to the subsequent question of which piece of music best expresses Middle-earth. Secondly, although these self-categorisations remain subjective both in variance of interpretation and in how extreme a fan may consider themselves, it was deemed more fitting to keep the question simple rather than to adopt other scales of fandom such as that of Abercrombie and Longhurst (consumer, fan, cultist, enthusiast, petty producer, 1998:141), Tulloch and Jenkins (followers and fans, 1995:23) or Brooker and Brooker (admirers, fans, cult fans, 1996:141). Although variance of subjective expressions of fandom must be taken into account, keeping the self-categorisation as clear and simple as possible allows participants to make a quicker choice, measuring their extremeness of fandom against an imagined scale, which (though variable) will be comparable for the majority. The concept of extremeness is likely to be the source of some variance as there are undoubtedly committed enthusiasts who would not deem themselves 'extreme', but this variance will be accounted for in analysis and interpretation by comparing trends among and between fan sets.

Questions of inhabitation and fandom find analogues in the study of music consumption where Philip Trocchia, Melissa Apps and Sarah McNish (2002) have adapted Douglas Holt's (1995) typology of consumption practices to focus on music consumption, providing a useful framework for locating and understanding consumer motivations. Acts of consuming are categorised as either *object* or *interpersonal* actions (engaging with music or engaging with others) and as either *autotelic* or *instrumental* actions (ends within themselves or means to further ends), and thus arranged into a grid, each quadrant containing three or four specific examples. This framework is extremely useful both in evaluating and interpreting data, and in focusing and informing the questionnaire which follows. Although instances of the two 'interpersonal actions' cited by Trocchia et al (*socializing* and *bonding*) are evident among the constellated communities of *LOTR* fandom, for reasons of size and scope I have chosen to limit this study by focusing on the two individualised motivations, or 'object actions,' referred to as *experiencing* and *goal attainment*. It is telling that one example given of *experiencing* is 'fantasy', a phenomenon which 'allows individuals to use music as a catalyst for escaping from the reality of their lives' (2002:11). By ascertaining how the consumption of fantasy film music helps to build worlds and homes in the minds of its listeners, it will become apparent whether the above concepts of escaping or leaving reality may be understood in such simple terms, or if these activities and impulses are in fact much more complex.

One further important source for this study is Daniel J. Keown's work on film music consumption (2015) which starts to bring the work of Trocchia et al. into the realm of film

music studies, and seeks to identify specific purchasing and consuming attributes unique to film music enthusiasts. My own methodology follows Keown's approach of designing an online survey and inviting people to participate online by posting links on web fora. However, this study differs from that of Keown in two specific ways. Firstly, Keown's study proves useful in providing a methodological model, but his findings focus more on motivation for purchasing and collecting rather than for listening, examining purchasing behaviours and listening preferences and, indeed, ignoring *listening frequency* and *listening context*. I, therefore, have chosen to focus on these two omitted factors to answer the questions of *how* and *how often* consumers choose to listen to *LOTR* music. Secondly, Keown specifically targets fans whom he labels 'film music enthusiasts' (taking Carolyn Stevens' definition), and fortunately 100% of his respondents self-identify as such when questioned. Although I am particularly interested in the world of *LOTR* fandom I have chosen to extend the range and scope of respondents to include less ardent fans and even those who do not self-identify as fans at all. I did this to enable a variety of views and listening practices to be included in my analysis, which can be found in the following section.

Findings

The questionnaire (which can be found in **Appendix 2**) was open for 21 days and received 229 responses. Among these responses 85 self-identified as the most extreme fan category (named F1), 85 as F2, 33 as F3, 15 as F4 and 10 in the 'not at all' category F5. Although skewed towards the stronger fan side of the spectrum there is a reasonable representation of each fan set (which is not to say that this is representative of the Tolkien fandom or audience[s]). These self-classifications are corroborated by other expectable trends, such as the ownership of soundtracks in more extreme fans. Question 7 of the questionnaire asked respondents to tick which of the following they owned: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (*FOTR*) soundtrack, *The Two Towers* (*TTT*) soundtrack, *The Return of the King* (*ROTK*) soundtrack, *FOTR* Complete Recordings, *TTT* Complete Recordings, *ROTK* Complete Recordings, and The Rarities Archive. The results can be seen in **Table 1**. Responses have been categorised from

Table 1: Fan stratification and soundtrack ownership

Fan set (no. respondents)	Extreme ←-----------------------------→ Not at all.				
	F1 (85)	**F2** (85)	**F3** (33)	**F4** (15)	**F5** (10)
FOTR	72	51	6	3	2
TTT	70	45	5	2	2
ROTK	71	40	5	2	2
FOTR-CR	32	16	2	0	1
TTT-CR	30	14	0	0	1
ROTK-CR	33	14	1	0	1
RA	19	3	0	0	0
Average number owned.	*3.85*	*2.15*	*0.58*	*0.47*	*0.9*

F1 to F5, and the trends here clearly show that a) the average number of different LOTR soundtracks owned decreases with fandom, and b) the majority of Complete Recordings are owned by more committed fans, in line with the fact that the limited press of these recordings makes them much rarer and more expensive.

Set F5 represents something of an anomaly and may appear problematic, but it is arguable that the data for this set is less reliable partly due to the small population size of only 10 respondents, and partly as it is possible that some respondents misunderstood the question on fandom and self-categorised as F5 rather than F1. Although a subgroup surely exists where respondents identify as fans of Shore but not Tolkien, this is not likely to be the case here as five out of ten in F5 have read the novel, and some rated the films as 'fantastic' in Question 5 (See **Appendix 2**). Thus it is arguable that some of the responses in F5 have been miscategorised, and due to the small nature of this set it will be omitted from further analysis to avoid potential skew. Tom Phillips (2011) identifies some of the problems that fan self-identification and categorisation can entail, one of them being disparity or variation between how extreme each fan may consider themselves. There may well be a set of people for whom listening to this music does not constitute fandom in any way, but, rather, represents a specialised listening practice; in other words, a purely musical enjoyment of Howard Shore's soundtracks without reference to, or knowledge of, the films or the world. The examination of such cases, though potentially enlightening, lies outside the scope of this study.
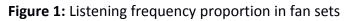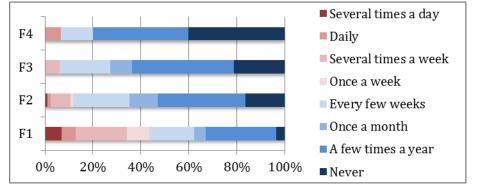
Quantitative Results

Focusing firstly on quantitative data, there are several trends that highlight commonalities within each fan set. Some of the primary indicators of the use of music in the inhabitation of Middle-earth are the frequency of listening, the settings in which soundtracks are consumed and the proclaimed reasons for this – the basic questions of why, where and how often fans choose to listen to Shore's music. Regarding listening frequency, respondents were asked to choose one option from the list shown in **Table 2**, and the proportional distribution of each set is shown in percentages and portrayed visually in **Figure 1**.

Table 2: Listening frequency

	F1	F2	F3	F4
Several times a day	7.1%	1.2%	0%	0%
Daily	5.9%	1.2%	0%	6.7%
Several times a week	21.2%	8.2%	6.1%	0%
Once a week	9.4%	1.2%	0%	0%
Every few weeks	18.8%	23.5%	21.2%	13.3%
Once a month	4.7%	11.8%	9.1%	0%
A few times a year	29.4%	36.5%	42.4%	40%
Never	3.5%	16.5%	21.2%	40%

Figure 1: Listening frequency proportion in fan sets

As can be seen above, over 43% of the most avid fans listen to the *LOTR* soundtracks at least once a week, compared to just under 7% of F4 fans, and the proportions diminish/augment fairly regularly from set to set. The fact that the strongest fans listen to the music so often highlights not only the importance of the soundtracks, but of extending their own music libraries: 38% of F1 fans own their own copies of the Complete Recordings and 22% own the Rarities Archive, which is only available when purchased with Doug Adams's book. Thus there is evidence here of increased listening frequency requiring more material, or more 'complete' musical resources.
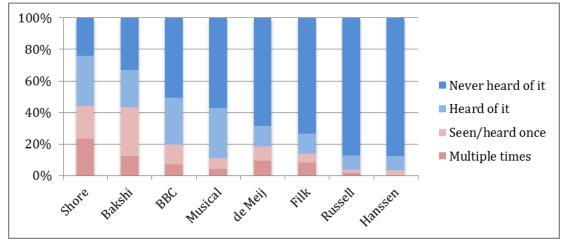
A similar trend can be seen in the responses to a question that listed several non-Shore-soundtrack musical contributions to the world of Middle-earth, and asked respondents to indicate whether they had never heard of them, heard of them, heard/seen them once, or heard/seen them multiple times. These musics are listed below, and the responses for each can be seen in **Figure 2**.

- The Lord of the Rings Musical (Toronto 2006, West End 2007)
- Symphony No. 1 'The Lord of the Rings' - Johan de Meij (1988)
- The Lord of the Rings Symphony - Howard Shore (2011)
- Middle Earth on Rhapsody for Horn and Orchestra - Craig Russell (2003)
- The Lord of the Rings, concept album - Bo Hansson (1970)
- The Lord of the Rings - BBC Radio adaptation (1981)
- The Lord of the Rings, animated film - Ralph Bakshi (1978)
- Any Lord of the Rings 'filk'

When the results are stratified into fan sets a similar trend to listening emerges, in that more extreme fans are not only more aware of non-Shore manifestations of musical Middle-earth, but tend to consume them more than less committed fans. The mean responses for all eight musics were found for each set, and are shown in **Figure 3** which displays this increased awareness and consumption for more ardent fans.

Figure 2: Awareness of non-Shore musics

Regarding listening practices, respondents were simply asked 'where and when do you listen to [the *LOTR* soundtracks]? Give as much detail as you like.' Although each respondent had complete descriptive freedom and was unprompted in their answer, several trends emerged among the most common responses, displayed with a tally of occurrences in **Table 3**. Although many of these responses could be easily identified as some of the most common settings for the consumption of music of whatever kind (such as commuting, studying or relaxing) there are nevertheless important trends to note.
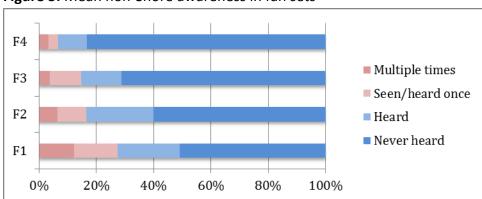
Figure 3: Mean non-Shore awareness in fan sets

One of the more unusual yet recurrent pastimes that people choose to accompany with Middle-earth music is gaming, with video/computer games being mentioned most often. One respondent, a British musical director, described his practice of muting the 'bad music' of whatever game he is playing and listening to *LOTR* music instead, also pointing out that the *LOTR* games either use the film soundtracks or have 'good music' themselves. Gaming has grown to become a significant part of many fantasy franchises and the ways imaginary worlds may be inhabited, providing immersive and interactive experiences in a variety of contexts – either at home on a computer or games console, or on the go with a portable device. It is interesting to note that the music of *LOTR* is being used to accompany fantasy

worlds *other* than Middle-earth, chosen either for its (often referred to as 'epic') musical qualities or for the subjective connection between music and gamer.

Table 3: Common listening practices

Activity / Place / Reason	Number of occurrences.
Travelling/commuting	69
At Home	53
Working / at work	41
Studying / revising	26
Relaxing	26
'When I feel like it'	15
Sleeping / going to sleep	9
Gaming / video-gaming	7
Cooking	5
Playing the music themselves	4

It is perhaps not unusual that so many people mentioned 'home' as the place they choose to listen to this music most often; the home is instrumental in the manifestation of subjectivity as the primary private space. Brian O'Neill locates music listening 'within the material culture of the home and [identifies it] as a cultural practice providing a central element in the constitution of subjectivity for music listeners' (2004:3). However, the private and home-based consumption of the soundtracks of fantasy films bears a deeper level of significance when viewed as a deliberate act of worldbuilding. Katherine Fowkes elaborates on the different roles of fantasy compared to horror and science fiction through the underlying myth of home: '[w]hereas the house becomes the locus of haunting and repressed evil in Gothic horror, in fantasy it more likely serves as the repository of childhood memories and as a site of safety and nostalgia' (2010: 12). Fantasy franchises such as *LOTR* rely more heavily on a concept of home as a lasting comfort or action-driving impetus that exists throughout a grand epic narrative. Fantasy homes like Middle-earth or the Shire thus become inherently familiar and tied to feelings of comfort and nostalgia through their repeatedly idyllic visual *and* musical depiction, and hence it is fitting that it is within such a private space that fans would choose to escape sonically into this alternative home.

If, to quote Michael Walsh, '[m]usical listening is one means by which the self becomes framed – because such practices symbolise the private self within the home' (2010: 306) – then the private consumption of film music may represent, explicitly or implicitly, the *framing* of oneself as a citizen of Middle-earth. This sonically achieved subjective framing is exemplified in many responses such as the following from one British male participant: 'suddenly a recurring motif happens, it hits you like the thought of home when travelling – a feeling of nostalgia. I suppose that's it, they make me feel nostalgic – for home, for the countryside, for a world that doesn't exist but has formed me as a person.' This personal forming, alongside desires expressed by several other participants of wanting

(figuratively or not) 'to be a Hobbit' or 'to live in Middle-earth', is evidence of film music consumption's role in self-framing and enabling a kind of Middle-earth citizenship. As well as being a clear example of Trocchia et al's 'fantasy' motivation for listening (2002:11), this self-framing is also an important aspect of subjective worldbuilding – or more specifically, *home*building.

Qualitative Results

Moving on to look at more qualitative textual data, several commonalities emerge among responses to the open-ended questions. The second question on the survey, 'give an example of a piece of music that best expresses Middle-earth for you,' was asked at the very start of the questionnaire in order to avoid any bias towards Howard Shore. Naturally many responded with particular Shore cues, but others chose from off the beaten track. Sibelius was mentioned four times (*Tapiola* or *Finlandia*), Holst three times (*Mars* or *Jupiter*) and Johan de Meij's 1988 *The Lord of the Rings* symphony five times, with Mozart, Grieg, Vivaldi, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams and Carl Orff also being put forward. Led Zeppelin and their *LOTR*-inspired songs were suggested, as was the artist Enya ('anything by Enya!'). Out of the 183 responses to this question (answers were not required), 26% cited a piece of music outside of the Shore repertory – proof that although the film composer's music is popular, he does not have a monopoly on Middle-earth, and many listeners find their ideal Middle-earth music elsewhere. In terms of canonicity, this strongly reinforces a view of Shore's music as part of a secondary canon alongside the other works listed above, such a canon being necessarily more fluid and subjective, and constructed by fans and consumers themselves. Further avenues for research might include a comparison of the works and composers listed above, perhaps looking to trace any similarities in the 'epic' qualities which they might be seen to hold.

Among participants who *did* choose a Shore piece to 'best express Middle-earth', the most popular cue by far was 'Concerning Hobbits' which was mentioned 30 times (the next popular being the Annie Lennox song 'Into The West' with only six mentions). This particular cue comes from *The Fellowship of the Ring* soundtrack, and consists of various settings of the Shire theme (including both 'Pensive' and 'Rural' settings)[5] on Irish flute and fiddle, occurring near the start of the film as the bucolic setting of the Shire is established and explored. It is not surprising then, that as J.R.R. Tolkien intended for the Shire to represent a 're-enchanted, legitimating mythology for England' (Saler, 2012), fans' favourite musical cues might be the ones depicting the Shire, the very embodiment of home and familiarity in a vast and varied world of foreign races and cultures.[6] Although the choice of this cue points towards worldbuilding in the sense that for so many it 'perfectly captures the feel of the Shire' as an aural expression of Middle-earth, other respondents have adopted cues such as these and built them into their own worlds. One striking example of this active worldbuilding can be found in the following response from an American male:

> I have a mental condition that makes it difficult for me to express what I feel, so I listen to music and play it for other people to do this. For instance, I couldn't have told you how I felt when my dog died, but I could have played you Gandalf's Fall, and you'd have understood. Or how I felt when I held my newborn niece, the very beginning of Concerning Hobbits. I have pieces of music for all my emotional states and experiences, many of which are from the Middle-Earth collection.

Here, the use and consumption of film music no longer represents an act of fantasy or escapism but operates on a social and interpersonal level, such motivations being located on the other side of Trocchia et al's interpretational axis, further highlighting the multiplicity of ways in which this music is employed.

Some of the other cues often suggested to encapsulate Middle-earth were 'The Return of the King' (from *ROTK*, referred to as 'The Fellowship Reunited' on the Complete Recordings), often chosen as its length of over ten minutes includes many of the trilogy's primary themes including those for the Shire, Gondor and Rohan, as well as Viggo Mortensen singing Aragorn's coronation song, 'Elessar's Oath'. Rohan's themes also proved very popular, as did the prologue from *FOTR*, referred to as 'The Prophecy' on the soundtrack and as 'Prologue: One Ring To Rule Them All' on the Complete Recordings. This particular cue, being the very first music heard in the entire franchise, acts to transport the viewer from their subjective surroundings across mythic and spatiotemporal boundaries into the world of the film. Referring to this cue's presence behind the opening credits, James Buhler identifies sound (and more precisely audiovisual dissonance) as one of the main agents of myth creation and liminal transportation, stating that '[s]ound serves to confound issues of authorship, underwriting, and ownership and to place us on the cusp of myth, [...] sound raises the question of origin: where does the film begin? This enigma in turn presses an ontological question: where does the world – indeed being itself – begin?' (2006: 232). Just as this cue and the ethereal voices at its start guide us across the liminal boundary between primary and secondary worlds at the film's first viewing, so they will continue to act, drawing listeners into an imaginary world along a path that becomes increasingly well-travelled. Lastly, the English language songs (the majority of the singing on each of the soundtracks being in invented languages such as Elvish and Dwarvish) feature heavily in response to this question, particularly Enya's 'May It Be' and Annie Lennox's 'Into The West' (from *FOTR* and *ROTK* respectively). These songs are played over the closing credits of the films, and similarly yet conversely to the Prologue, transport a viewer *back* to the world they have come from through the use of English vocal music. These songs also bear a nuanced yet important difference from the rest of the soundtracks in that they enable listeners to engage on another level by learning the words and singing along, drawing them into a collaborative worldbuilding experience which is not possible (or much harder) with the rest of the soundtracks.

Following the question of how often fans listen to the *LOTR* soundtracks, a few more questions invited a variety of responses: 'Why do you choose to listen to them? How do they make you feel?' Again, there are some interesting trends among the responses that point to common reasons and motivations for listening to this music so often. Firstly, the word 'epic' was used to describe the music 30 times, and for many consumers this was all they could muster to describe their experience – both that the music *is* epic, and that it makes them *feel* epic. This concept of 'epicness' is comparable to the sense of 'completeness' identified by Martin Barker among interviewees in the international *LOTR* audience project. As Barker (2006) notes, it is this sense of completeness – both a complete world to inhabit and a complete (audiovisual) experience – that attracts so many to continually return to Middle-earth in whatever way they can, be that through a trip to the cinema as for Barker's interviewees, or through the continued consumption of the music as for my own. Epicness and completeness may also be exemplified by the sheer size and scale of the available musical repertory of Shore's Middle-earth music – the complete runtime for The Hobbit Deluxe Editions, *LOTR* Complete Recordings and the Rarities Archive together amounts to 17 hours and 23 minutes of music. However, I would argue that the form of epicness more often identified by listeners is an affective state imbued in the musical qualities of the score. Claudia Gorbman identifies film music's ability to 'trigger a response of 'epic feeling'' (1987:81), and though there is not room for a full exposition on epicness here, there are surely identifiable musical and sonic qualities (such as wide ranges in pitch or dynamic) that may give rise to this response.

Tying in with responses above about the consumption of music while working/studying, a significant proportion stated increased productivity as a primary reason for choosing the soundtracks as 'work music.' Among the 67 references to listening while working or studying we find motivations such as 'helps me stay focused', 'lack of words means it isn't distracting; epicness spurs work on', 'they can inspire one to productivity', and 'they help me concentrate and really drive me to get work done.' Thus, a pattern can be identified in the highly functional use of Shore's music being employed to accompany mundane tasks such as commuting, studying, working and cleaning and to make them more 'epic', pointing to a desire to escape from the real world into a world of fantasy. However, and perhaps most importantly here, these potentially escapist acts do not lead to a *complete* psychosocial absence from the real world, but rather to a *dual inhabitation* of both worlds, allowing listeners to complete earthly tasks with a heightened sense of energy, urgency and courage that they find in and draw from Middle-earth. This evidence of dual inhabitation is akin to Michael Saler's 'ironic imagination' (2012), and is at odds with Trocchia et al's more simplistic approach to listening as 'fantasy' in that it may be seen as partial-escapism, but certainly not as an attempt to 'leave their present existence behind' (2002:11). Indeed, what we find is a combination of elements from different parts of their typology – elements of fantasy and memory trigger auditory stimulation and inspiration combined in a complex web of interrelated motivations.

Besides the practical reasons of increased energy and productivity, listeners also turn to the *LOTR* soundtracks for personal comfort or emotional solace. Several respondents mentioned choosing to listen to them to put them in a better mood, or to help them deal with their emotions or personal circumstances, as indicated in the following examples:

- 'Uplifting when you're in a bad mood - it has an air of hopefulness',
- 'The themes and motifs […] can become personal to me in reflecting upon certain emotions and moods I might be feeling',
- 'It puts my own problems in perspective (ie. it lets me de-stress and manage any issues im [sic] having)',
- 'It's good as an anti-anger or anti-real-life',
- 'Happy, brave, and ready for any battles we face in life.'

These responses indicate not only a heightened emotional connection with the music, and even with particular themes and cues, but also an emotional dependence on the music and its therapeutic power to uplift, encourage and inspire. The intricate relationship between music and emotion in film music has been well explicated by writers such as Annabel J. Cohen (2011 and 2013), and, following Cohen's findings, it is arguable that the emotional power and weight of film music can be found both within the music itself and within the combination of sound and image – in other words, listeners may find themselves moved both by the music and its emotional qualities, and by the memory of scenes in the films represented and triggered by the music and the emotions and subjective identifications that come with it. One respondent, a British photographer and sociologist, made reference to the music providing a form of emotional catharsis: 'they put into sound what I feel and likewise make me feel', sentiments that are echoed in phrases such as 'they move me', 'they make me feel joyful' and 'help me express my emotions'. Put simply, music listening acts as a bridge between the consumer and the music's emotional content or quality. Thus, a listener is able to deposit personal memories or subjective identifications on the other side of the bridge, to ascribe them to specific musical moments or cues, and subsequently to re-experience or relive them upon future listenings. These liminal exchanges and crossed borders lie at the core of subjective worldbuilding, and many responses to the questionnaire show just how important music can be to fans through these processes.

There are many more examples of identifications or bridges made independently by the viewer/listener between the music and other non-filmic scenarios or emotional stimuli. One English male between 26 and 40 responded thus: 'Frodo's Song to the Fellowship was read at my Dad's funeral a few weeks ago.' Clearly the deeply personal use of Tolkien literature has coloured the world of Middle-earth with strong emotional significance for this respondent, and this is not a unique position. Others made reference to personal links and uses of the music, such as this Irish student: 'certain songs that make me feel kind of sad, after losing my dad and uncle especially […] it was my dad and uncle who got me listening to these', and this American PhD student; 'it's also a movie series that I saw with my dad when

I was 13-16 and I don't have many good memories of him from that time.' There are also examples of more positive associations, such as one respondent who used the cue 'Concerning Hobbits' in their wedding ceremony, and another for whom the music reminds them of a 'happy and carefree period in life.' Thus many people's reasons for listening and re-listening to this music are not only practical or emotional, but also deeply personal and often tied to intensely intimate memories, family relationships or feelings of nostalgia. Middle-earth, for them, is somewhat larger than it may appear to others, and, more importantly, is large enough and accommodating enough to provide a home for their grief or their joy, accessible through the mechanisms of music listening that allow them to travel to this imagined world.

The therapeutic and often habitual consumption of these particular soundtracks has for some become something of a devotional or even religious act. Some respondents struggled to explain or describe their feelings towards the music, such as in the following two examples (both incidentally from the F1 set of extreme fans):

- 'I still listen to parts of this soundtrack daily as it's become a part of me (if you know what I mean)' (British education manager),
- 'I can't describe the spiritual connection. I just acknowledge and honour it. And consider myself blessed for finding it' (American graphic designer).

The use of such religious vocabulary and imagery point to a sincere spiritual relationship felt by some devotees to the music, and signposts to other supernatural senses abound in comments such as 'I always feel a bit magical while listening' and 'I feel enchanted.' Although such sentiments are of course subjective and unique to each fan, the reality of being part of a larger congregation who all love and value the same imaginary world and its multifaceted manifestations is an important and affirmative quality of such fandom, as highlighted in the following quotation from one female respondent aged 61+:

> I got caught up in an ecstasy of Tolkien in the summer of 2002. The movie (*FOTR*) and the books […] and the community I found of other people caught in the throes of Tolkien devotion and the soundtrack … it was all caught up together. It all fit. It was all perfect. It was all transformative.

For this particular fan, as for many, the sense of belonging to what Rick Altman would describe as a 'constellated community' (1999: 161), that is, being joined together via online message boards is an important part of their personal expression of fandom. Indeed, this involvement heightens their experience of the films and the music through the collaborative sharing of knowledge, speculation, debate and discussion that make up the fabric of online fan communities. Viewing such a community through a religious lens, brought together through a shared commitment, love and experience of a particular musical canon, it is not too big a step to take to see Howard Shore as a God-like figure, with

Doug Adams as something of an oracle; a font of knowledge who is greatly respected for his work, insight and access to Shore himself.

Concepts of home, nostalgia, listening practices, emotion and spiritual connection all come together in the following two quotations which sum up the feelings expressed by many of the more committed respondents. The first is from an American religious worker on how the *LOTR* soundtracks make her feel;

> They are like my heart is 'coming home', they evoke such feelings of hope and triumph, joy, peace … Sometimes excitement – nobility … This music has become a part of my heart and soul. I'm sure it will be with me throughout my life and into deep old age... It is a very deep, precious and heartfelt consolation in my life.

The second quote, which likewise illustrates this spiritual connection, is taken from a section of Marilynn Miller's website 'A Magpie's Nest' that draws together her own findings on *LOTR* music (Miller, n.d., emphasis my own):

> I listen to some part of them daily. And I mean daily. I don't always have the opportunity to listen to all three, but I always find a way to listen to at least one of them. I can't tell you how much this music means to me. I am completely satisfied by it emotionally and spiritually. I even used the soundtracks to relax me while I was having [surgery]. I can't tell you how much they helped. *I hear this music and it's like coming home*.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest an adjustment in the way we currently understand worldbuilding – or more specifically, the role that music plays within worldbuilding and to what extent a shared or virtual world exists within each inhabitant's imagination. How do we make an imagined world our own? That is, how do we move into it, access it or find ways to call it home? The fact that for so many this particular musical canon has come to represent or signify *home* in some way is indicative not only of the music's popularity and emotional influence but also of its powerful role in enabling vicarious experiences of Middle-earth, wherever a listener may be and from/in whatever situation they are choosing to escape. One recurring theme throughout the descriptions of people's experience of Middle-earth music is the concept of being *transported* from one world to another. Vocabulary such as 'taken away', 'taken back' and 'carried away' is extremely common throughout responses, as in comments such as 'takes me back to the world of Middle-earth', 'makes me feel as though I'm part of the adventure', 'closing my eyes and allowing the music to carry me away to Middle-Earth is an ethereal experience.' Importantly, this liminal transportation seems to be experienced by fans of all strata (examples of 'takes me back' language can be found in all five sets F1-F5), highlighting this particular musical property as attractive to fans and non-fans alike, who dip in and out of Middle-earth and

use music as a bridge to cross the border. Hence, the uses of this music may range from motivational background music to a sincere effort to become fluent in various forms of Elvish, yet all signify forms of inhabitation and escapism, and in all instances music is used to build a *home* of some form or another, which may be returned to time and again.

Escapism has been referred to several times throughout this article, and it is important that this is not viewed in a negative light. On the nature of escapism I would agree with J.R.R. Tolkien that there is an amount of nomenclatural confusion, and to adopt his terms, a lack of distinction between 'the Escape of the Prisoner' and 'the Flight of the Deserter; […] why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls?' (Tolkien, 2008). As fantasy worlds have proven themselves to be socially, culturally and often politically committed to contemporary society as loci for imagination, speculation and commentary, it seems only fitting that the music of these worlds might play a vital role in the transferral and transportation of minds and imaginations between reality and fantasy. Thus, to extend Tolkien's analogy of the 'Escape of the Prisoner', if a student finds himself a prisoner of boredom or low productivity, he may find in this music focus, motivation and energy.[7] If an artist finds herself a prisoner of discouragement (or writer's block), this music may provide her with determination or creative inspiration. If a person finds themselves a prisoner of loneliness or depression, the musical inhabitation of a fantasy world may indeed help to bring them comfort, emotional stability and even companionship and community. This article and the responses within it go some way to illustrating that the music of fantasy worlds and its consumption, at least in this case, may act as a beneficial and positive force, not taking people away from reality but enabling the simultaneous mental inhabitation of primary and secondary worlds, and positively enhancing many aspects of life. There is, however, much more to be discovered about the socio-cultural inhabitation of imagined worlds and the complex ways in which music bridges the gaps between reality and fantasy.

Although Howard Shore's Middle-earth music (and particularly the scores for *The Lord of the Rings*) has been proven very popular, a quarter of respondents voiced an opinion that *their* Middle-earth sounds like something else. In this way, Shore may more accurately be described, not as a God-like creator, but as a *subcreator*, an example of Anthony Boucher's 'transcriber of the Myth' (Saler: 26), imagining and transcribing Middle-earth music alongside other transcribers whose contributions are equally valid and important parts of the sonic fabric of the secondary world.[8] As noted above, Tolkien's plans for his legendarium were not that he would remain the sole creator or contributor to the world and the narratives within it. The invitation to join with Tolkien in the subcreation of Middle-earth is one that has been taken up by countless writers, filmmakers and composers all building and adding to this virtual world – this virtual *home* – and the vast and varied family of *LOTR* fans have proven highly receptive to such efforts. This open-mindedness is perhaps best summarised in the following response regarding non-Shore Middle-earth musics: '[I] don't listen to these often but Middle-earth is a big place so I'm open to discovering many

aspects of it.' It seems that Middle-earth is indeed a big place, a world of many sounds, and one that continues to grow as more and more hear it calling them home – and in turn find that it can be home to them too.

Biographical note:

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Appendix 1 – Mentioning Music in ROTK World Audience Project

Language	No. occurrences
English, Italian – 'music'(a)	737
Dutch – 'muziek'	300
German, Danish, Norwegian – 'musik'(k)	101
French – 'musiq'(ue)	76
Chinese (simplified) – '音乐'	67
Slovenian – 'glasba'	32
Greek – 'μουσική'	25
Chinese (traditional) - '音樂'	1
Turkish – 'müzik'	0
Spanish – 'música'	0
Russian – 'Музыка'	0
Welsh – 'cerddoriaeth'	0
Total	**1339**

Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

Lord Of The Rings Music Questionnaire
Researching music's role in Tolkien's world.
* Required

1. How much of a Lord of the Rings fan would you say you are? *
     Select a point on the scale: Extreme fan 1 2 3 4 5 Not at all

2. Give an example of a piece of music that best expresses Middle-earth for you.

3. Have you read the novel? * (The Lord of the Rings)
     Yes   No   Partially

4. Have you seen Peter Jackson's LOTR trilogy? * Select the most accurate response:
     Yes, I've seen all the Extended Editions
     Yes,I've seen the cinematic releases
     Yes, but only some of them
     No

5. If so, how do you feel about them?
     I think Jackson's trilogy is: Fantastic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Terrible

6. How do you feel about Howard Shore's music for the films? *
     I love it

I like it
I like some aspects but dislike others
I don't mind it
I don't like it
I hate it
I don't know it

7. Which of the following do you own? * Select all that apply
    The Fellowship of the Ring soundtrack
    The Two Towers soundtrack
    The Return of the King soundtrack
    The Fellowship of the Ring Complete Recordings
    The Two Towers Complete Recordings
    The Return of the King Complete Recordings
    The Rarities Archive
    None of the above

8. How often do you listen to any of the LOTR soundtracks? * Include soundtracks to The Hobbit here.
    Several times a day
    Daily
    Several times a week
    Once a week
    Every few weeks
    Once a month
    A few times a year
    Never

9. Where and when do you listen to them? Give as much detail as you like.

10. Why do you choose to listen to them? How do they make you feel? Give as much detail as you like

11. How many of the below do you know of? * Tick the most appropriate box for each
    (Never heard of it - Heard of it - Seen it / heard it once - Seen it / heard it multiple times).
    The Lord of the Rings Musical (Toronto 2006, West End 2007, World Tour 2015)
    Symphony No. 1 'The Lord of the Rings' - Johan de Meij (1988)
    Middle Earth on Rhapsody for Horn and Orchestra - Craig Russell (2003)
    The Lord of the Rings - BBC Radio adaptation (1981)
    Any Lord of the Rings 'filk'
    The Lord of the Rings Symphony - Howard Shore (2011)
    The Lord of the Rings, concept album - Bo Hansson (1970)
    The Lord of the Rings, animated film - Ralph Bakshi (1978)

12. If you have heard any of the above, how do you feel their music fits/doesn't fit into your idea of Middle-earth? Please give detail about these works and any others not mentioned, including how often you listen to them and why.

13. Lastly, a few questions about you. How old are you? *

    0-18
    19-25
    26-40
    41-60
    61+
    Prefer not to disclose

14. What gender are you? *

15. What is your nationality? *

16. What is your occupation? This question is optional.

If you don't mind being referenced in a journal article, please leave your name below:

If you would like to be notified about the results of this questionnaire, leave your email address below. You will receive one email only, in May 2016.

Notes:

[1] At time of writing, the main theme on the *Fellowship of the Ring* soundtrack 'Concerning Hobbits' had been played 12,204,189 times on the online streaming service Spotify, and Enya's 'May It Be' that features over the end credits had been played 28,798,295 times.

[2] The fora at IMDb for each film may receive an average of two to three posts per day, compared to those at TORn which receive up to ten posts per day; however, both sites sustained continued discussions and regular activity.

[3] TheOneRing.net fora contain discussion boards devoted to each of Jackson's trilogies, Tolkien's works, and even rooms such as 'The Pollantir' where fans propose topics or polls for other members to vote on (a play on the 'Palantír' or 'seeing-stone' from Tolkien's legendarium)

[4] Measuring fandom here serves an analytical purpose in the interpretation of responses, but clearly there are greater questions to be asked regarding extreme levels of fandom and the need to measure and track fan activities and expressions. Further examples of and discussions on measuring fandom can be found in Wakefield and Barnes (1996) and Gierzynki and Eddy (2013).

[5] These theme names are taken from Doug Adams's book, *The Music of The Lord of the Rings* (2010), which provides a rigorous and useful motivic library but differs occasionally from other fans' ideas.

[6] It is worth pointing out the dissonance here between Tolkien's purposefully English mythology and Shore's appropriation of Celtic musics into his 'Shire' culture, and what this may mean in terms of notions of national identity. There is not room here for a full discussion of the intersections of nationalism, fantasy and music consumption, but it is interesting to note that the three main

nationalities to cite 'Concerning Hobbits' or any other Shire music as best expressing Middle-earth were British, American and Norwegian. Further to this, 12% of Norwegians responded with Shire music, compared to 16% of British respondents, and 35% of American participants. Such a large proportion of Americans compared to Europeans may point towards a more romanticised postcolonial view of the Shire (read Britain/England) as an idyllic motherland or locus of heritage, as well as a potentially increased conflation of Celtic and English cultures and traditions.

[7] Indeed, it is no small irony that Howard Shore's music proved a faithful companion during the writing of this article – particularly his music for Rohan, which spurred on many a paragraph to completion.

[8] First coined by J.R.R. Tolkien in his famous lecture and consequent essay 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien rearranges contemporary terminology, proffering the term *subcreation* as a more accurate replacement for the misuse of imagination:

> The mental power of image-making is one thing, or aspect; and it should appropriately be called Imagination. […] The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality', is indeed another thing, or aspect, needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation (Tolkien, 2008).