

Musical Gesture, Modality, and Dissonance in “L’Estasi dell’Oro” from Il Buono, il Brutto, il Cattivo: Decoding Ennio Morricone’s Micro-Cell Technique

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Much has already been written about Ennio Morricone’s numerous contributions to film music. Many of these writings have been very descriptive in nature, owing to the fact that the vast majority of his film music manuscripts are not available for study at any archive anywhere in the world. The author acknowledges that the composer is understandably protective of his work, while at the same time, the author recognizes the need for a greater awareness of the composer’s innovative techniques.

Musicologist Sergio Miceli briefly mentions Ennio Morricone’s micro-cell technique in his article in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Miceli describes it as “a pseudo-serial approach often incorporating modal and tonal allusions, which, with its extreme reduction of compositional materials, has much in common with his film-music techniques.”¹ The composer has acknowledged that he did in fact use this technique in his music for Sergio Leone’s 1966 film *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo*, but he has politely declined to explain this technique in any detail. Although its role in his compositional process may remain somewhat of a mystery, it is the intention of the current research to describe the resulting characteristics of this technique as evident in the cue “L’Estasi dell’Oro.”²

¹ Miceli, Sergio. “Ennio Morricone.” In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., edited by Stanley Sadie, vol. 17, 146. London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2001.

² For this research, the author was fortunate enough to have access to a rare original manuscript in the composer’s own hand.