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Abstract:

David Shore, the co-creator of *House M.D.*, openly acknowledged the show's debt to the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle, from the anchoring concept of a case-solving genius who lives for his work to the homonymic pun of the main character's name. Shore and his collaborators also followed Doyle's lead in leveraging musicality as a humanizing element, a mode through which these famously rational characters wind down and "feel". In the case of Sherlock Holmes, his love of music (and the violin in particular) adds Romantic-hero appeal; music evokes the private, dreamy side of Holmes, a man usually so devoted to the rational that his best friend Watson once angrily described him as "an automaton—a calculating-machine!". A similar dialectic exists in the case of Dr. House, whose cynicism, arrogance, and obsession with puzzles makes him difficult to like, even after he pulls a miracle diagnosis out of his brain. In fact, music facilitates many of the rare glimpses into House's tortured, Gordian psyche. Curiously, much of the published literature on *House M.D.*, while admittedly still slim to date, overlooks the central place of music in the doctor's world. My purpose in this

OUTPERFORMING SHERLOCK: MUSICAL IMAGINATION AND REPRESENTATION OF GENIUS IN *HOUSE M.D.*

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study will be to conduct a deeper investigation—a diagnostic differential, so to speak—into the musical Dr. House, identifying intertextual connections to the Sherlock Holmes stories, but also exploring how the audio-visual medium and the considerable musical talents of the show's star, Hugh Laurie, tremendously enhance the dramatic force of the character. The show's creators consistently featured musical references—musicians, instruments, trivia—in scripts, and smoothly incorporated Laurie's musicianship into the storytelling. As a result, House's musicality is not just more believable, but Laurie's onscreen performances offer a compelling mode for understanding the character more deeply. I will explore the revelatory aspects of House's musicking with reference to a variety of scenes throughout the series, but most fully in the final section of this essay with a detailed analysis of the music-themed episode, "Half-Wit".

Keywords: Film music, *House M.D.*, music semiotics, Sherlock Holmes, abductive reasoning

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Sažetak:

David Shore, sukreator TV serije *Dr. House,* otvoreno je priznao koliko serija duguje pričama Arthura Conana Doylea o Sherlocku Holmesu, od temeljnog koncepta genija koji rješava najteže slučajeve i živi za svoj rad do homonimske igre riječi u imenu glavnog lika. Shore i njegovi suradnici bili su na Doyleovu tragu i u korištenju muzikalnosti kao humanizirajućeg elementa, načina pomoću kojih ovi izrazito racionalni likovi postaju bliži čovjeku. U slučaju Sherlocka Holmesa, njegova ljubav prema glazbi (a posebno violini) dodaje na privlačnosti romantičnog heroja; glazba evocira privatnu, sanjivu stranu Holmesa, čovjeka koji je obično toliko odan racionalnom da ga je njegov najbolji prijatelj Watson jednom ljutito opisao kao "automat – računski stroj!". Slična dijalektika postoji u slučaju dr. Housea, čiji ga cinizam, arogancija i opsjednutost zagonetkama čine nesimpatičnim, čak i nakon što iz mozga izvuče čudesnu dijagnozu. Zapravo, glazba nam olakšava da uočimo i Houseovu izmučenu, gordijsku psihu. Zanimljivo je da najveći dio objavljene literature o seriji *House M.D.*, još uvijek malobrojan do danas, zanema-

NADMAŠITI SHERLOCKA: GLAZBENA MAŠTA I REPREZENTACIJA GENIJA U SERIJI *DR. HOUSE*

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ruje središnje mjesto glazbe u medicinskom svijetu. Svrha ove studije bit će provesti dublje istraživanje – svojevrsnu dijagnostičku razliku – muzičkog dr. Housea, identificirajući intertekstualne veze s pričama o Sherlocku Holmesu, ali i istražujući kako audio-vizualni medij i očit glazbeni talent zvijezde serije, Hugha Laurieja, uvelike pojačavaju dramatičnu snagu lika. Kreatori serije dosljedno su uključivali glazbene reference u scenarij – glazbenike, instrumente, trivijalnosti – i uključili Lauriejevo glazbeno umijeće u pripovijedanje. Kao rezultat toga, Houseova muzikalnost ne samo da postaje uvjerljivija, već i Lauriejeve izvedbe na ekranu nude zanimljiv način za dublje razumijevanje lika. Istražit ću najvažnije aspekte Houseovog muziciranja uz osvrt na brojne scene u seriji, ali najpotpunije u završnom dijelu ovog eseja s detaljnom analizom epizode upravo s glazbenom tematikom, "Half-Wit".

Ključne riječi: Filmska glazba, *Dr. House*, semiotika glazbe, Sherlock Holmes, abduktivno zaključivanje

OUTPERFORMING SHERLOCK: MUSICAL IMAGINATION AND REPRESENTATION OF GENIUS IN *HOUSE M.D.*

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Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly, they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine. — Dr. John Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*

When Arthur Conan Doyle killed off his most famous fictional character, Sherlock Holmes, in 1893 (only six years after the first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*), his massive fan base revolted. The campaign against Holmes' demise was so intense that Doyle finally relented, first issuing *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) as an earlier adventure, then coming up with a full "resurrection" scheme for *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905). The popularity of Sherlock Holmes continues today; as of 2017, more than 60 million copies of the collected Holmes stories have sold globally.[1] Even people who have never read a single title in the Holmes "canon"—56 short stories and four novels written by Doyle—or watched

1 Troy Lennon, "Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows sold 11 million copies in 24 hours", *Daily Telegraph* (London), July 20, 2017, https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/harry-potter-and-the-deathly-hallows-sold-11-million-copies-in-24-hours/news-story/f2ddc81496fa2a514041e7048028e036.

one of the many adaptations for film and television, would still at the very least recognize Holmes' significance as *the* genius of logical thought and detection.

The Holmes brand has made a resurgence of late, especially on the screen. Guy Ritchie's steampunk "period" films *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) and two modern adaptations for television, *Sherlock* (2010–2017) and *Elementary* (2012-2019), all came out within the space of a few years. Before any of these productions, however, there was *House M.D.* (2004–2012), a hybrid crime procedural and hospital drama that ran for 177 episodes in eight seasons, collecting numerous awards along the way.[2] Like the original Sherlock Holmes stories, this series achieved enormous popularity in a very short time: data collected in 2009 reported that *House M.D.* was the most-watched television show in the world with "more than 81.8 million viewers in 66 countries, representing a potential 1.6 billion viewers" total.[3] A major key to this success was the lead character, Dr. Gregory House, a middle-aged misanthrope and diagnostic whiz who achieved cult status among watchers of all ages. His image and catchphrases—particularly "Everybody Lies" and "Humanity is overrated"—are still popular on merchandise and internet memes.

David Shore, co-creator of *House M.D.*, has made no secret of the show's debt to Doyle's detective stories, from the anchoring concept of a case-solving genius who lives for his work to specific details like the main character's name—a homonymic pun, House = Holmes.[4] Numerous fan sites compare the two characters, cross-checking their methods and habits, including their love of music. Both Doyle and the writers of *House M.D.* leverage musicality as a humanizing element, a mode through which these famously rational characters wind down and "feel".

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2 *House M.D.* is often identified by the shorter title *House*, but I will use the full title here to distinguish more clearly the series from the lead character.

3 Katherine Thomson, "'House' Becomes World's Most Popular TV Show", the *Huffington Post*, updated May 25, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/house-becomes-worlds-most_n_214704.

4 Numerous character names in *House M.D.* derive from the original Holmes stories: Gregory House (both Holmes and Tobias Gregson, a Scotland Yard investigator); Dr. James Wilson (the same initials as Dr. John Watson); House's first patient Rebecca Adler (there is an Irene Adler in "A Scandal in Bohemia"); and, of course, Jack Moriarty, a former patient who shoots House (Professor Moriarty is Holmes's archenemy, forcing him to the "final solution" of his death). Like Holmes, House also fakes his death.

In the case of Sherlock Holmes, his love of music, and the violin in particular, adds a little Romantic-hero appeal; music evokes the private, dreamy side of Holmes, a man usually so devoted to the rational that his best friend Watson once angrily described him as "an automaton—a calculating-machine!"[5] A similar dialectic exists in the case of Dr. House, whose cynicism, arrogance, and obsession with puzzles makes him difficult to like, even after he pulls a miracle diagnosis out of his brain. House is funnier than Holmes, but also meaner—with none of the Victorian detective's sense of decorum or fair play. Holmes would never say to an annoying client who is also bulimic: "It's a shame. You look cute that thin".[6] Yet later, when this same House sits alone in his dark office, listening to Dave Matthews' "Some Devil" ("I'm broken don't break me / When I hit the ground") while staring at a torn photograph, he too is every bit the Romantic (anti)hero.

In fact, music facilitates many of the rare glimpses into House's tortured, Gordian psyche. Curiously, much of the published literature on *House M.D.*, while admittedly still slim to date, overlooks the central place of music in the doctor's world. In *Chasing Zebras: The Unofficial Guide to* House M.D. (2010), author Barbara S. Barnett—whose interest in Byronic heroes inspired her to write the book—briefly discusses music; she focuses primarily on the rich array of licensed songs, including the "unofficial anthem" of the series, "You Can't Always Get What You Want" by the Rolling Stones.[7] Another trade book, Ian Jackman's *House, M.D.: The Official Guide to the Hit Medical Drama* (2010), limits musical coverage to the skills of the main actors or guest-appearances by actual musicians.[8] Two more specialized studies—*House and Phi-*

5 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Sign of Four", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 135. Kindle edition.

6 *House M.D.*, season 3, episode 15, "Half-Wit", directed by Katie Jacobs, written by David Shore, Lawrence Kaplow and Pam Davis, aired March 6, 2007, on Fox.

7 Barbara S. Barnett, *Chasing Zebras: The Unofficial Guide to* House M.D. (Toronto: ECW Press, 2010), 49-52.

8 Ian Jackman, *House, M.D.: The Official Guide to the Hit Medical Drama* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010). Among the most prominent musical characters are the trumpeter John Henry Giles ("DNR"), the piano prodigy Patrick ("Half Wit") played by musician and actor Dave Matthews, and wannabe rap artist Juan "Alvie" Alvarez, played by Lin-Manuel Miranda ("Broken", parts 1 and 2; "Baggage"); rapper Mos Def also guest starred in a non-musical role. Many regular or recurring cast members have musical backgrounds, including Lisa Edelstein (Cuddy), Jesse Spencer (Chase), Michael Weston, and, of course, Hugh Laurie (House).

losophy: Everybody Lies (2009) and *House and Psychology: Humanity is Overrated* (2011)—examine topics that might reasonably intersect with music, such as the role of happiness in the series or House's experience of creative flow.[9] Yet only one essay from these collections—"The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House" by philosophy professor Jerold J. Abrams—deals substantively with music.[10]

Abrams' main argument concerns the shared claim to fame of the two characters, namely a phenomenal brilliance at solving mysteries. Rejecting the premise that House and Holmes rely purely on logic and deduction, Abrams argues in favor of what philosopher Charles S. Peirce identified as *abduction,* a kind of "reasoning backward", which also involves intelligent hunches.[11] Such "logical guesswork" benefits from what Peirce calls *musement,* a "pre-abductive dream state" that allows the subconscious to engage in free play of the imagination, while the rational, conscious mind takes a break. Abram proposes that both Holmes and House shift between hyperactive reasoning and languorous *musement* while working on a case, with music as a common pre-abductive distraction.[12] As an example, he describes a scene from the *House M.D.* episode "DNR", in which House "enters a Holmesian musement state, gently waving his hand back and forth, drifting in a logical delirium as he listens" to a jazz recording.[13] Abrams sees a direct connection between this scene and an excerpt from Doyle's "The Red-Headed League" in which the narrator, Dr. Watson, describes Holmes listening to a violin concert:

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9 Ted Cascio and Leonard L. Martin, eds., *House and Psychology: Humanity is Overrated* (Nashville: Turner Publishing Co., 2011).
See especially the chapters "The Creative Side of House: It's the Last Muse on the Right" (Lile Jia, and Edward R. Hirt), 37-55 and "House and Happiness: A Differential Diagnosis" (Nancy L. Sin, Katherine M. Jacobs, and Sonja Lyubomirsky), 77-94. See also Henry Jacoby, ed., *House and Philosophy: Everybody Lies* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2009).

10 Jerold J. Abrams, "The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House", in Jacoby, ed., *House and Philosophy*, 55-70.

11 Abrams, "The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House", 60. For the original source, see C.[harles] S.[anders] Peirce, "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God" (London; Boston, 1908), last edited December 30, 2020, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/A_Neglected_Argument_for_the_Reality_of_God.

12 Abrams, "The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House", 63.

13 Abrams, "The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House", 64, quoting from *House M.D.*, season 1, episode 9, "DNR", directed by Frederick King Keller, written by David Shore and David Foster, aired February 1, 2005, on Fox.

> All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes, the sleuthhound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive.[14]

Using these examples to bolster his case for abductive (versus deductive) reasoning, Abrams ultimately reduces music to just one of many tools that Holmes and House utilize in order to solve a case: "Everything is geared toward that end: their academic pursuits, their musical interests, their seeming recreational activities, even their drug habits—all of it is a means to the final end of knowing whodunit".[15]

Not only does this conclusion betray the fundamental spirit of Peirce's *musement* (which must be free and have "no purpose, unless recreation"), but Abrams fails to account for the rich spectrum of musical experiences in which Holmes and House engage, often *before or after* an active case.[16] Moreover, the scenes he presents as direct parallels are nevertheless quite distinct in context, mood, and relevance to the whodunit. In the scene from "DNR", House is alone, lying on his office floor, surrounded by his own vinyl records; the recordings are performances by a former jazz trumpeter, John Henry Giles, who is now a patient at Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital where House is the brilliant Head of Diagnostic Medicine. Having rejected Giles' "do not resuscitate" order, House is barred from the case and must rely on updates from his diagnostic team. This is the moment he chooses to return to his office and listen to Giles' recordings, his exact purpose unclear. The Holmes example, on the other hand, describes a social occasion; the detective is enjoying a public concert—violin virtuoso Pablo Sarasate playing at St. James's Hall—with his friend Dr. Watson. Holmes himself is the one

14 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Red-Headed League", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 263. Kindle edition. Quoted in Abrams, "The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House", 64.
15 Abrams, "The Logic of Guesswork in Sherlock Holmes and House", 57.
16 Peirce, "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God". Peirce is very clear about the freedom of *musement,* its requirement to "adhere to the one ordinance of Play, the law of liberty"; that said, House would undoubtedly mock most of Peirce's philosophical argument, given its explicit philosophical aim in arguing for a deity.

Fig. 1. Hugh Laurie as Dr. Gregory House playing harmonica in FOX TV series *House M.D.* The series aired from 2004 to 2012 (screenshot, fair use)

who insisted that they should take a break mid-case: "And now, Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness and delicacy and harmony, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums".[17]

My purpose in this study will be to conduct a deeper investigation—a diagnostic differential, so to speak—into the musical Dr. House, identifying intertextual connections to the Sherlock Holmes stories, but also exploring how the audio-visual medium and the considerable musical talents of the show's star, Hugh Laurie, tremendously enhance the dramatic force of the character. In his short stories, Conan Doyle could only *describe* Holmes' musical experiences, and rather roughly at that, since the author was not particularly musical.[18] In the case of *House M.D.*, the creators were able to rely on a happy accident: Laurie could play his own onscreen cues on harmonica (Fig. 1), piano (Fig.2), and guitar. In fact, according to executive producer Katie Jacobs, "The character ini-

17 Doyle, "The Red-Headed League", 263.

18 Doyle did have some modest musical experiences, playing the bombardon (a tuba-like instrument) in boarding school (with basically very little training), and much later took up the banjo for a short time, mostly to impress his second wife. See Martin Booth, *The Doctor and the Detective: A Biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Minotaur Books, 2013), 36 and 216. Kindle edition.

Fig. 2. Hugh Laurie as Dr. Gregory House playing piano in FOX TV series *House M.D.* The series aired from 2004 to 2012 (screenshot, fair use)

tially didn't play the piano, but Hugh's piano playing is so exquisite that it was written in".[19] The show's creators consistently featured musical references—musicians, instruments, trivia—in scripts, and smoothly incorporated Laurie's musicianship into the storytelling. As a result, House's musicality is not just more believable, but Laurie's onscreen performances offer a compelling mode for understanding the character more deeply. I will explore the revelatory aspects of House's musicking with reference to a variety of scenes throughout the series, but most fully in the final section of this essay with a detailed analysis of the music-themed episode, "Half-Wit" (3.15).

19 Paul Challen, *The House That Hugh Laurie Built: An Unauthorized Biography and Episode Guide* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2007), Kindle edition. As I will discuss below, a piano is seen in House's apartment in the second episode of the first season ("Paternity"), but House does not play the instrument until the fifth episode ("Damned If You Do"). It is not clear how the early inclusion of set piano fits into the timing of the change Jacob describes, but whatever the case, Laurie's ability to play certainly influenced the development of the character and the storytelling.

The Model: Sherlock Holmes and Music

Preparing the first Sherlock Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), author Arthur Conan Doyle sketched out a description:

> The Laws of Evidence: Reserved—sleepy eyed young man—philosopher—Collector of rare Violins—An Amati—Chemical Laboratory.
> I have four hundred a year—
> I am a Consulting detective—[20]

From the start, then, Doyle connected Sherlock Holmes to music, though initially as a collector of antique instruments. He adjusted this premise slightly for the finished version of *A Study in Scarlet*, making Holmes more of a knowledgeable appraiser than a buyer; in one passage, Watson describes a cab ride with Holmes, who "was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati".[21] Far from being unusual, even eccentric, Holmes' fascination reflects a general vogue in 19th-century Europe and America for "Cremonas"—the colloquial buzzword for string instruments crafted by artisans active around that city from the sixteenth through the early eighteenth century. Violin collecting and appraising sometimes made headlines during Conan Doyle's lifetime, since the money to be made from a genuine "Strad" or Amati encouraged fraud. In 1872, a Stradivarius violin later known as "the Gillott" sold at a Christie's auction for £295, nearly four times the average work-family yearly income.[22] Even experienced collectors and assessors could be duped by counterfeiters poaching on this luxury market.

The story of Holmes' own violin gains added meaning in this historical context. In "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box", Watson remarks that

20 Booth, *The Doctor and the Detective*, 107.
21 Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 9. Kindle edition.
22 David Schoenbaum, *The Violin: A Social History of the World's Most Versatile Instrument* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), p. 139. One of the most prized instruments, the so-called "Messiah" Stradivarius (1716) was valued in 1870 at an already exorbitant 15,000 francs but would sell in 1890 for 50,000 francs; see Benjamin Hebbert, "Record Prices of the Past", *Violins and Violinists* (blog), June 9, 2015, https://violinsandviolinists.com/2015/06/09/record-prices-of-the-past/.

Sherlock Holmes "purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas at a [pawnshop] in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings".[23] What might have been just a colorful detail in Holmes' life becomes proof of his superiority in methods of detection, even in a niche field where experts regularly failed. Moreover, Holmes pays next to nothing for it, roughly equivalent to paying $2.50 for an object worth $525, which explains how he could afford a Stradivarius as a "consulting detective" who needs a roommate to help with rent.

In the next Holmes novel, *The Sign of Four* (1890), Cremona violins are only one of Holmes' many fields of expertise. Watson describes a dinner party during which Holmes "spoke on a quick succession of subjects,—on miracle-plays, on medieval pottery, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the war-ships of the future,—handling each as though he had made a special study of it".[24] Nearly two decades later, in "The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans" (1908), Holmes becomes a freelance musicologist. Waiting for London's infamous "yellow fog", to clear, the detective works patiently for two days "upon a subject which he had recently made his hobby—the music of the Middle Ages"[25]; even during the case, he continues to lose himself "in a monograph which he had undertaken upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus", to which he returns at the end of story "refreshed".[26]

Of course, most references to music in the original Holmes stories focus on his playing and listening to music. Holmes is an enthusiastic concert-goer, mostly attending opera nights and performances of famous violinists such as Wilma Norman-Neruda and Pablo Sarasate; he is apparently knowledgeable enough about violin technique to comment that Norman-Neruda's "attack and bowing are splendid".[27] In fact, the violin lies at the heart of Holmes as musician. When the detective first meets Watson in *A Study in Scarlet,* he asks whether the doctor has any objection to his playing the violin, later treating his new flat mate to "some of

23 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 1252. Kindle edition.
24 Doyle, "The Sign of Four", 197.
25 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans". In *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 1279. Kindle edition.
26 Doyle, "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans", 1300 and 1304. Watson adds that Sherlock's monograph on Lassus "has since been printed for private circulation and is said by experts to be the last word upon the subject".
27 Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet", 42.

Mendelssohn's Lieder, and other favourites".[28] While there is no suggestion that Holmes ever performs in public—or even plays in private with other amateur musicians—he regularly plays his violin at home, often at odd hours of the night.[29]

In his slim monograph *Sherlock Holmes and Music*, Guy Warrack proposes that music functions primarily as an escape for Holmes, citing a passage from "The Retired Colourman" (1926) in which Holmes says to Watson: "Let us escape from this weary workaday world by the side-door of music".[30] However, the retreat to music serves a variety of purposes for Holmes. A "low melancholy wailing of his violin" might indicate that "he was still pondering over the strange problem which he had set himself to unravel"[31]; in other cases, he uses music to settle himself after an unnerving experience: "For an hour he droned away upon his violin, endeavouring to soothe his own ruffled spirits. At last, he flung down the instrument, and plunged into a detailed account of his misadventures".[32] Sometimes playing the violin is an outlet for creative invention, as when Watson describes hearing "some low, dreamy, melodious air—his own, no doubt, for [Holmes] had a remarkable gift for improvisation".[33] Other times, the detective simply turns to music because his work is done: "Draw your chair up and hand me my violin, for the only problem we have still to solve is how to while away these bleak autumnal evenings".[34]

Taken together, these examples argue against any single motive behind Holmes's musical interests and practices. In fact, Holmes's love of music is arguably one of the more flexible and humanizing elements in his character, possibly because he is not the *ne plus ultra* of the field, but

28 Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet", 21.

29 Watson describes, for instance, the "long-suffering" Mrs. Hudson, Holmes' landlady, who had to deal with the detective's "incredible untidiness, his addiction to music at strange hours, his occasional revolver practice within doors, his weird and often malodorous scientific experiments, and the atmosphere of violence and danger which hung around him made him the very worst tenant in London". Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Dying Detective", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 1305. Kindle edition.

30 Guy Warrack, *Sherlock Holmes and Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 10.

31 Doyle, "A Study in Scarlet", 49.

32 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 688. Kindle edition.

33 Doyle, "The Sign of Four", 184.

34 Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor", in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (2021), 421. Kindle edition.

rather an amateur in the purest, etymological sense—a *lover* or *friend* of music, whether playing, listening, composing, collecting, or studying. In fact, more than any details from particular stories, it is Holmes' variegated musicality and its potential for showing different sides of the main character that transfers over to Gregory House in *House M.D.*

Enhanced Update: Gregory House and Music

Like Holmes, Dr. House demonstrates his musical connoisseurship through playing, listening, knowledge, and curated objects. He has a turntable in his office as well as a collection of vintage LPs, which included an original Sun Record 78 Elvis performance before this was chewed up by his best friend's dog. His iPod is loaded with everything from Puccini's "Nessun dorma" to "Who are You?" by The Who to an instrumental version of "Hava Nagila". When House mentions Pete Best (the Beatles' first drummer) and his medical team comes up blank, he responds with withering exasperation, "Don't any of you read a history book?"[35] Asked by his boss, Dean of Medicine Lisa Cuddy, to review potential sperm-donor files, House skewers the guy who says he loves Mozart, reading it as the sure sign of a poser. To test the encyclopedic knowledge of a new team member that Cuddy "thinks is some kind of genius", House includes the question, "Year that Beethoven died?"[36] Such remarks signal that House is broadly knowledgeable about music, but do not reveal much else about the character; like Holmes, he is broadly knowledgeable about a lot of things. We learn much more about House's personality, hints of his unspoken thoughts and feelings, when he is playing or listening to music. Like his fictional ancestor, House prefers to make music at home and, with few exceptions, alone. But the cinematic medium offers viewers special access to this private space. Not only do we see for ourselves his physical movements and facial expressions, but we hear exactly what and *how* he plays. Moreover, when these activities are incorporated into a montage, they become linked dramatically to other events and characters in the episode.

35 *House M.D.*, season 5, episode 3, "Adverse Events", directed by Andrew Bernstein, written by David Shore, Carol Green and Dustin Paddock, aired September 20, 2008, on Fox.
36 *House M.D.*, season 7, episode 6, "Office Politics", directed by Sanford Bookstaver, written by David Shore and Seth Hoffman, aired November 8, 2010, on Fox.

Unlike other recent Sherlock Holmes adaptations set in the present—namely, *Sherlock* (2010–2017) and *Elementary* (2012–2019)—*House M.D.* eliminates Holmes's violin in favor of the piano and guitar, two instruments that are still widely associated today with domestic music-making.[37] Not coincidentally, Laurie is skilled on both of these instruments, and his own leanings towards classic blues and jazz as a performer likely influenced the repertoire of the character.[38] House's baby grand piano, his most "classical" instrument (Fig. 2), is also arguably the one with which he has the strongest and most consistent connection; he plays the piano in ten episodes over the course of eight seasons, twice as many as those featuring him on guitar, and with more extensive excerpts. Even after House comes to own several high-priced vintage guitars, he tells his colleague and best friend, Dr. James Wilson, that the only thing he owns worth protecting from a thief would take a crane to get out of my apartment.[39] The very first images of House's home ("Paternity", 1.2) feature the piano keyboard prominently as a backdrop to House, sitting and watching television.

House plays the piano onscreen for the first time during the final montage of the Christmas-themed "Damned If You Do" (1.5). We hear the musical cue, a piano arrangement of "Silent Night", without seeing the source. The camera tracks left from behind a large dark object—the body of House's piano—beyond which we can see Wilson and House laughing and talking over Chinese take-out. The montage cuts to Dr. Foreman, a member of House's team, dressed as Santa Claus and handing out presents in the children's ward. The camera then returns to House's face, now thoughtful; a dissolve pulls the shot back, revealing that House is the one playing. Wilson has left, and House is closing out the night with

37 That are a number of scenes in *Sherlock* with Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch) "playing" the violin, including music that he composes (a melody for "the Woman", Irene Adler and a waltz for Mary and John Watson's wedding). In "The Reichenbach Fall", Sherlock plays Bach's Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Minor in preparation for Jim Moriarty's visit. In *Elementary,* Holmes (Johnny Lee Miller) seems to hate his violin, which appears only once in the series in "While You Were Sleeping"; at the end of the episode, after Sherlock has made some peace with the violin, which obviously is tied to a traumatic event in the past, we hear him playing Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor for solo violin.

38 Hugh Laurie has released two albums: *Let Them Talk* (2011) featuring classic blues songs and *Didn't It Rain* (2013), which combines blues tracks with jazz, R&B, and tango numbers. He plays piano and guitar on both albums and provides some of the vocals as well.

39 *House M.D.*, season 8, episode 8, "Perils of Paranoia", directed by David Straiton, written by David Shore and Thomas L. Moran, aired November 28, 2011, on Fox.

his Sohmer & Company piano, the top of which is covered with books, an ashtray stuffed with cigars, and a half-empty tumbler of amber-colored liquor. The montage alternates between House at the piano and other characters going about their lives on Christmas. The montage ends with a close-up of House's face, a thoughtful expression with the tiniest upturn of his mouth, as he finishes the carol.

House's agency as musical source destabilizes the usual nondiegetic aural space of such montages. Initially, we hear the music from outside the diegesis (the full sound of the cue, its omniscient connection with the series of images), but then the source is revealed, allowing for the possibility of a meta-diegetic reading: it is even conceivable that House himself is imagining the various scenes of his friends and colleagues while playing. Considered within the context of the full episode, the Christmas montage suggests a primary function of House's music-making: a means for expressing what he refuses to acknowledge in public or put into words at all. The central issues of this episode—celebration and religious faith—set the militantly atheist and antisocial House on edge. Yet Christmas and questions of faith keep coming up throughout his day. Forced into taking one more clinic visit, House opens the treatment room door to find a group of nuns, one of who seems to have stigmata on her palms. Later, when House retreats to the empty chapel to watch TV, a nun finds him there and strikes up a conversation:

> Sister Eucharist: They say you have a gift.
> House: They like to talk.
> Sister Eucharist: You hide behind your intelligence.
> House [*sarcastically*]: Yeah, that's pretty stupid.
> Sister Eucharist: And you make jokes because you're afraid to take anything seriously. Because if you take things seriously, they matter, and if they matter–
> House [*sarcastically*]: And when things go wrong, I get hurt. I'm not tough, I'm vulnerable.
> Sister Eucharist: I barely know you, and I don't know if I'm right. I just hope I am. Because the alternative is, you really are as miserable as you seem to be.[40]

40 *House M.D.*, season 1, episode 5, "Damned If You Do", directed by Greg Yaitanes, written by David Shore and Sara B. Cooper, aired December 14, 2004, on Fox.

Articulating the fundamental question about House's "true" nature, the nun hits on what might be the biggest mystery of the series. At this point (just a few episodes into the first season), the jury is still very much out on the verdict. We are not sure whether House has the capacity for happiness. And yet, for all his anti-Christmas cynicism, he still plays a traditional Christmas carol (not a secular holiday tune) to mark the occasion.

David Shore and his fellow creators continued to leverage the piano as a medium for "voicing" House's unguarded thoughts throughout the series. Some of these moments are relatively uncomplicated, such as when he taps out the incipit of "Happy Birthday" for himself (after having rejected actual well-wishing from colleagues all day) or when he plays a bit of "High Hopes" while treating a Black candidate for the American presidency.[41] Other examples are more like the Christmas montage, allowing for both an "outside" nondiegetic perspective and an "inside" metadiegetic subjectivity from House's point of view. For instance, in "Unfaithful" (5.15), another episode dealing with religious beliefs, House chooses to investigate the case of a young priest who claims to have had a vision of Jesus. What seems like an easy target for ridicule, however, ends up unsettling House's rational skepticism, since ultimately there is no clear proof that it was just a hallucination; what the priest believes is that the experience brought him to the hospital and to House, who might not have been interested otherwise.

Doubling down on his principles, House refuses to attend the Jewish naming ceremony that Cuddy is having for her adopted baby girl that night, reasoning that to participate in "religious hokum" when you do not believe is hypocritical—even for a close friend.[42] The final montage, however, allows once again for some kind of conciliation: the music that House plays strongly evokes Jewish folk melodies and klezmer. Shots of House at the piano alternate with images of Cuddy's celebration, including her slight look of sadness when a guest arrives at the door, and it is

41 The happy birthday moment occurs in *House M.D.*, season 1, episode 6, "The Socratic Method", directed by Peter Medak, written by David Shore and John Mankiewicz, aired December 21, 2004, on Fox. For the "High Hopes" excerpt, see *House M.D.*, season 1, episode 17, "Role Model", directed by Peter O'Fallon, written by David Shore and Matt Witten, aired April 12, 2005, on Fox. Ironically, this episode was created long before Barack Obama's presidential run and the associated "Hope" poster.

42 *House M.D.*, season 5, episode 15, "Unfaithful", directed by Greg Yaitanes, written by David Shore and David Hoselton, aired February 16, 2009, on Fox.

Fig. 3. Hugh Laurie as Dr. Gregory House playing guitar in FOX TV series *House M.D.* The series aired from 2004 to 2012 (screenshot, fair use)

not House. The camera then lingers on House's hands, which transition away from the celebratory music (titled "Cuddy's Serenade" and credited as Laurie's own invention) into a soulful version of the Rolling Stone's "You Can't Always Get What You Want". The first reference to this song, which appears a number of times during the series, goes all the way back to the pilot episode, when Cuddy and House fought a game of verbal one-upmanship, using quotes from the "You Can't Always Get What You Want", with no clear winner.

If the piano evokes House's introspective side, the guitar generally aligns with his more abrasive public persona—rebellious, showy, and often immature (Fig. 3). The first clear image of House's guitars appears in the episode "Skin Deep" (2.13) during a very private and agonizing scene that encapsulates House's struggle with chronic pain and addiction to pain killers. Earlier in the episode, he begged Cuddy to inject morphine directly into his ruined left thigh, permanently damaged after muscle infarction years before. House still walks with the help of a cane, but the pain (we never know how much is physical and how much is psychological) is ongoing. At the beginning of the episode, House wakes up and rubs his thigh, visibly suffering; steeling himself, he takes a step, but falls back on the bed with the agony of putting weight on the leg. The underscore for this scene—Ryan Adams' "Desire"—features a prominent acoustic guitar part; its lyrics also hint at wanting an answer to a burn-

ing need ("all this waiting, for the power / For some answer, to this fire—Desire").[43] Adams' song returns at a crucial moment in the last scene of the episode. House is playing Bach's French Suite No. 5 on his piano, his eyes closed in concentration. The camera changes from a profile perspective, zooming straight towards his face and bringing into focus the prescription bottle that sits on top of piano. Coming to a cadence, House makes a mistake, and his eyes snap open; he rubs his leg, stares at the bottle. The guitar intro of "Desire" fades in just as House picks up the bottle and pours Vicodin pills out on the piano's black surface. He takes one and swallows it. The shot pulls back farther into the room, and we see two guitars hanging on the wall behind House: an acoustic, not illuminated enough to identify, and a Fender Stratocaster, which seems eerily connected to the back of House's shadow.

In fact, the guitar takes center stage during seasons 3–6, as the storyline finds House increasingly facing consequences of his opioid addiction and his need for control in other aspects of his life. In the final scene of "Que será será" (3.6), House plays the opening of Pearl Jam's bluesy "Yellow Ledbetter" (on a different electric guitar, a Gibson Les Paul) after having falsified Wilson's signature on a prescription for Vicodin, attracting the attention of the police. In the third-season finale ("Human Error", 3.24), the guitar epitomizes House's resistance to change, the part of his psyche that is stuck in adolescence. The first time we see House in this episode, he is hiding behind a newspaper in the hospital café, taking furtive peeks at the office goodbye party for one of his team members, Dr. Foreman. He ignores the repeated buzzing of his pager until Wilson arrives, chiding House for making his new patient wait for hours. Wilson tries to talk House into making some effort to get Foreman to stay, but House brushes off the suggestion with characteristic sarcasm. Then Wilson puts his finger on the real issue, "House, you play a guitar you got in the ninth grade, ("Eighth", counters House), "You're living in the same apartment for 15 years, you drive a ten-year-old car. You are not good with change".[44]

43 "Desire", by Ryan Adams, MP3 audio, track 4 on *Demolition*, Lost Highway Records, 2002.
44 *House M.D.*, season 3, episode 24, "Human Error", directed by Katie Jacobs, written by David Shore, Thomas L. Moran and Lawrence Kaplow, aired May 29, 2007, on Fox.

Though generally impermeable to comments about his character, House absorbs this one. Back in his apartment, he stares thoughtfully at the guitar in question: the old acoustic first seen on the wall in season 2, now identifiable as a Gibson "Nick Lucas Grande". Following this scene, House begins to stretch himself in uncharacteristic ways. He pays a rare visit to his patient's hospital room, telling her husband, "She looks great", while they smoke cigars together; House even allows for some conversation about losing his whole original team, admitting that he does not know exactly what he will do now, but that he is okay with that. Arriving home, House sees a large package in the lobby, smiling when he reads the shipping label. It is a new acoustic guitar—a splendidly ornate Gibson "Hummingbird". Taking his old guitar off the wall, he looks between the two instruments, then sets the old Gibson on the couch and sits down to play the Hummingbird. The underscore for this "embracing change" sequence is Josh Ritter's "Good Man", the piano and acoustic guitar accompaniment sounding as a natural extension of House's own musicality. In the context of the episode, the lyrics resonate as bittersweet goodbye to both his team *and* the old Gibson:

> I fell in love with the sound
> Oh, I love to sing along with you
> We got tunes we kicked around some
> We got a bucket that the tunes go through
> Babe we both had dry spells, hard times in bad lands
> I'm a good man for ya, I'm a good man.[45]

The fourth-season premiere, "Alone", continues the theme of difficult change, with the guitar once again at the center of the storyline. Instead of interviewing for new team members, House distracts himself with yet another high-priced vintage guitar, a 1967 Gibson Flying V, which he brings to the office and plugs into an amplifier—one of the few times he plays in public. Ignoring the reverberating noise, Cuddy enters and tries to interest House in a new case, but he rebuffs her with flippant remarks and guitar riffs. Like a mom dealing with an annoying garage-band teenager, Cuddy calmly walks over, unplugs the guitar from the

45 "Good Man", by Josh Ritter, MP3 audio, track 8 on *The Animal Years*, V2 Records, 2006.

amp, and hands the dangling, limp cord (a cheeky visual pun) back to House: "You've spent the last two weeks doing absolutely nothing. Concert over". To which House replies with just the right amount of juvenile whine, "In what twisted universe, does mastering Eddie van Halen's two-handed arpeggio technique count as absolutely nothing?"[46] The rest of the episode is full of hijinks, with Wilson "kidnapping" the Flying V and refusing to return it until House hires a new team.

House's musicking continues to function in revelatory ways in season five, arguably one of the most emotionally charged of the series. The previous season ended with the death of Dr. Amber Volakis, a rejected interviewee for House's team, who later became romantically involved with Wilson. House is implicated in Amber's death (the result of injuries sustained when a car slams into the bus she is riding) because he was too inebriated to drive himself home, and Amber answered his call to Wilson for a ride. Season five begins with the grieving aftermath of this event, which has further strained his relationship with Wilson, leaving an ill-prepared House to manage his own emotional volatility—a problem he "solves" all too often with more Vicodin and/or alcohol.

The fear that lies at the bottom of House's suppressed emotional life is revealed during a musical montage in "The Itch" (5.7). When House's team treats agoraphobic Stewart Nozick, traumatized after witnessing the shooting of his girlfriend during a mugging, House shows little patience or empathy with the patient's resistance to leaving the safety of his home. Yet House himself is struggling with leaving a comfort zone. The night before, in a rare moment of compassion and connection, House kissed Cuddy, who was mourning a failed baby adoption. Waking up the next day, House blames an itchy mosquito bite for his lack of sleep and prickly mood. Talking about the situation with Wilson, House responds with characteristic defensive logic:

> Wilson: You are scared to get involved.
> House: How is that "scared"? It's rational. Emotionally mature people who work together should not date. Guaranteed breakup. Guaranteed ugliness.

46 *House M.D.*, season 4, episode 1, "Alone", directed by Deran Sarafian, written by David Shore and Peter Blake, aired September 25, 2007, on Fox.

> Wilson: Any relationship that doesn't end in a breakup ends in death. Everything falls apart in the end. That's your worldview. The corollary, which you keep forgetting, is that you have to grab any chance for happiness.[47]

The final montage addresses this conflict. House is seen strumming his Hummingbird at home but stops when a mosquito lands on his hand. He starts to slap it, then changes his mind, gently blowing the bug off his hand instead. Grabbing his car keys, he heads to Cuddy's house. His decision coincides with a new music cue, Big Star's "I'm in Love with a Girl", which opens with straightforward strumming on acoustic guitar. What could have been an overly on-the-nose imposition of a licensed song—"I didn't know I could feel this way / Think about her all the time / Always on my mind / I didn't know about love"—is made more meaningful through the connection to House's own playing.[48] Even though the montage includes shots of other couples from his various team members—Cameron and Chase, Taub and his wife—the music seems most organically linked to House: not only could he play the song, but he might in fact be hearing it in his head, guitar part and all. The montage eventually pulls us back to a more omniscient space, however, cutting between Nozick and House, each grappling with the fear of crossing the threshold. Only Nozick succeeds.

Like many of the montages spotlighting House as a musician, the example from "The Itch" demonstrates the kind of flexibility and dynamism that Stilwell describes in her theory of the "fantastical gap" and the overall complexity of soundscape geography in filmed art.[49] Still reminds us that the concept of "fantasy" includes "improvisation, a free play of possibility"—an idea that aligns with Peirce's *musement* and with House's music-making.[50] The blurring of source and scoring, as well as the superimposition of observation and subjective insight, helps us traverse the equally bewildering geography of House's mind outside of solving cases.

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47 *House M.D.*, season 5, episode 7, "The Itch", directed by Greg Yaitanes, written by David Shore and Peter Blake, aired November 11, 2008, on Fox.
48 "I'm in Love with a Girl", by Big Star, MP3 audio, track 12 on *Radio City*, Ardent Records, 1974.
49 Robynn J. Stillwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic", in *Beyond the Soundtrack Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Ira Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer and Richard Leppert (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).
50 Stillwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic", 187.

Mind over Music: The Case of "Half-Wit"

The connection between music and mind is also an anchoring theme in "Half-Wit" (3.15), arguably the most music-centric episode of the series. While a number of episodes of *House M.D.* include musical characters or feature actual musicians as guest stars, only "Half-Wit" (3.15) does both.[51] Singer-songwriter Dave Matthews plays Patrick Obyedkov, a 35-year-old man who suffered serious brain injury in an accident when he was ten years old (Fig. 4). Though his functional age never progressed beyond that of preschooler for most tasks, Patrick became a piano savant after the accident, having never played an instrument before. We first meet him backstage, where he needs his caretaker father to button his shirt but has no trouble identifying the collective murmurs of the crowd as "A-flat". After an impressive opening with Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata, however, Patrick suffers a severe headache and dystonia in the left hand, leaving him unable to finish.

The case comes to the attention of House, who is so eager to investigate that he summons his team at the crack of dawn. When they complain that dystonia is not a life-threatening malady, House reveals his real aim: "You're not intrigued as to how a perfectly healthy 10-year-old boy with no prior musical training, gets into an accident on the way to school, can suddenly play the piano?"[52] In order to understand better Patrick's musicalized brain, House uses music itself as a diagnostic tool in two back-to-back scenes that set the doctor's musical aptitude in direct comparison with Patrick's. The first scene takes place in Patrick's hospital room. Earlier, when Foreman reported that his preliminary examination of Patrick and the neurological tests all checked out fine, House countered, "You're using the wrong equipment". Wheeling the hospital's old spinet upright into patient room, House introduces himself to Patrick and his father, "I'm Dr. House. On the off chance that Dr. Foreman

51 Two other episodes in *House M.D.* feature musical characters as patients, both played by actors who are not themselves professional musicians; as mentioned, "DNR" revolves around a fictional jazz trumpeter John Henry Giles, played by Harry Lennix, and "Games" (4.19) guest stars Jeremy Renner as a punk rocker named Jimmy Quidd (an homage, no doubt, to deceased pop-punk rocker Jimi Quidd). The two episodes with House in a mental hospital ("Broken", parts 1–2) flip this formula, featuring music-theater and freestyle-rap sensation Lin-Manuel Miranda in the role of Alvie, a wannabe rapper suffering from bipolar disorder.
52 *House M.D.*, season 3, episode 15, "Half-Wit", directed by Jacobs.

Fig. 4. Hugh Laurie as Dr. Gregory House playing piano in FOX TV series *House M.D.* This time House is joined by Patrick Obyedkov (played by Dave Matthews) in a four-hand duet, one of the only times during the whole series that House plays with another person. The series aired from 2004 to 2012 (screenshot, fair use).

didn't mention it, I have something of a gift, too". He sits down at the foot of Patrick's bed in front of the piano, leaving the question open as to whether he is talking about a medical or musical "gift".

Inviting Patrick to join him, House plays the intro to "I Don't Like Mondays" by the Boomtown Rats, with its splashy downward glissando and power chords. Turning to Patrick, House says, "Your turn". When Patrick repeats the excerpt perfectly, House shows real delight, even adding some accent hand claps. Testing Patrick's aural skills, House plays a cluster of notes, which his patient identifies easily. After Foreman impatiently remarks, "He's good. Can we let him go?" House answers, still musing at Patrick, "He's great. He's staying". House seems to consider something; after a moment, he begins a new piece, stopping after the first phrase.[53] Patrick plays the phrase back, but this time House joins him in a four-hand duet, one of the only times during the whole series that House plays with another person (Fig. 4).[54] House stops playing at the same place as before, but Patrick continues, improvising original material. House looks surprised, then closes his eyes, pondering something he does not articulate. After Patrick completes the piece, House orders a functional MRI of Patrick's brain. When Foreman objects ("fMRI's not gonna show trauma".), House responds, still looking at Patrick next to him, "I'm not looking for trauma. I wanna see the music".

The scene changes to the MRI room where, House and Foreman are watching images of Patrick's brain activity as he listens to classical music. The very fact that House is in the room for the test is unusual, since he almost always leaves diagnostic procedures to his team members and waits for results in his office. Eager for data on how Patrick's brain responds to musical stimuli, House has the opening of Bizet's Symphony in C blasting from speakers.[55] Frustrated, House says to Foreman,

53 As we learn later in the episode, this is supposed to be an original composition by House (and is likely an original by Laurie); many sources incorrectly credit the fragment to the electronic–music artist Slacker (Shem McCauley) who superimposed words on the music for the track "I Have No Memory" on the album *Start a New Life*.

54 House plays briefly on guitar with Lucas (Michael Weston) the private detective at the piano in "Adverse Events" (5.3) and plays piano with Lydia (Franka Potente) in the double episode, "Broken" (6.1). In a more comical scene, House joins Foreman as a backup singer in a performance of "Midnight Train to Georgia" in "The Choice" (6.20).

55 House's remarks, "Well, that's dull", is about what he is seeing on the MRI, but also (perhaps unintentionally?) works for the piece as well, a fairly generic sounding "classical" symphonic work.

"Somehow, he got rewired as a music specialist. I wanna know how that happens", adding, "His brain's doing nothing. It looks like any jerk listening". Foreman astutely points out that Patrick is "not a savant at listening. He's a savant at playing". Reminded that these are two different neurological processes, House turns off the music and asks Patrick to pretend that his leg is a piano and to play something on it.

As Patrick's fingers begin to "play", we hear two cues simultaneously: 1) a sustained unison on G (strings) as underscore and 2) the final movement of the "Waldstein" sonata, which corresponds to Patrick's fingering and is presumably what he hears in his head. But when the camera leaves Patrick's face and shifts to House (who is carefully watching Patrick), *both* cues continue. Even after House faces the monitor where the image of Patrick's braining is lighting up in rainbow colors, we still hear the "Waldstein". Only when House notices that there is no activity in the limbic system (which deals with emotion and memory) do the piano sounds fade; the underscore intensifies as House moves back into active diagnostic mode.

Was this an editing mistake? Or a bold use of a "fantastical" superimposition? From one perspective, the piano is tied to Patrick's actions and imagination. We sense his pleasure, see him close his eyes, as he re-creates the sensation of playing. Why would we still hear the piano sonata when the camera moves us away from Patrick, focusing instead on the conversation between House and Foreman? One possibility is that House recognized the piece from Patrick's fingering and imagines the sound along with him. More likely, however, is that we as viewers are being uniquely allowed both to see and *hear* the music in Patrick's head. Paradoxically, when House realizes that half of Patrick's brain is not working, he recommends a hemispherectomy to remove the dead right side. He argues that for Patrick to have a chance at an independent life, to have—in House's view—a life worth living, he should sacrifice the music. Talking to his patient's father, House likens Patrick to a "trained monkey" with no agency or self-awareness. After the surgery, Patrick buttons his own shirt and gives a small smile; House looks at him quizzically, remarking, "He seems happy". But the observation feels a little forced. Was Patrick's earlier anticipation when House invited him to the piano, his closed eyes as he imagined playing the "Waldstein" really a lesser brand of happiness? Moreover, far from being just a technical automaton, Patrick demonstrated that he was a *creative* savant, capa-

ble of inventing new music. Which leads to a provocative question: was House's eventual push for a more "rational" left-brained Patrick fed by something other than objective medical considerations?

As with many *House M.D.* episodes, there are parallel narratives at play in "Half-Wit", one involving whether House has brain cancer and the other focused on Patrick's damaged brain. Having learned that House is consulting with a brain oncologist at another hospital, Wilson goes looking for him; House is back in Patrick's hospital room, playing the lyrical piece for which Patrick improvised an ending. "Pretty", says Wilson. "I wrote this when I was in junior high school", House responds, "I could never figure out what came next. Then dimwit came up with this". He then plays back Patrick's improvisation, which speaks to the level of House's own musical memory. "It's good", says Wilson, to which House retorts, wryly, "It's perfect". Wilson, who knows House as well as anyone, picks up on the subtext: "I could set up a tower on the roof during a lightning storm, help you switch brains with your patient. Then you would be the brilliant pianist and he would be the doctor hiding brain cancer from his friend". What Wilson later discovers is that House's consultation with the oncologist is fraudulent; he is just trying to qualify himself for an experimental treatment that would deliver a new drug straight into the pleasure center of his brain.

Wilson points out the sad irony: "Depression in cancer patients is not as common as you think. It's not the dying that gets to people. It's the dying alone. The patients with family, friends, they tend to do okay. … You *fake* the cancer, then push the people who care away". In this and other episodes, House spurns right-brain claims, which he identifies as dependence, intimacy, free play. And, in some sense, he imposes this viewpoint on Patrick's case. His patient will be able button his shirt, possibly think more for himself, be more aware of happiness and misery. But he will likely never play the "Waldstein" perfectly or create a musical composition on the fly ever again. The irony is sharp: House himself refused amputation of his damaged leg, despite the immediate threat to his life from necrotic tissue. His partner, Stacy, pleaded with him, "Don't you think you deserve to live? Don't you think you deserve to be happy?"[56] At one point, House goes into cardiac arrest, is technically

56 *House M.D.*, season 1, episode 21, "Three Stories", directed by Paris Barclay, written by David Shore, aired May, 17, 2005, on Fox.

dead for over a minute. He sees other patients with prosthetic legs, still actively doing what they love. House keeps his wounded leg and lives with constant suffering.

Epilogue: Music's (and House's) Last Bow

In season six, Wilson wakes up to the sound of House playing his guitar and singing George Michael's "Faith" before sunrise. House, who recently checked out of the mental-health and rehabilitation center with a clean bill of health, is living with Wilson while adjusting to his newly sober life. A few episodes later, in "Black Hole" (6.15), House challenges Wilson to make his own decisions for once, starting with picking furniture for their shared apartment. Wilson caves, relying on a decorator; House chastises him and snatches the drop cloth from what he imagines is another generic item. His face registers surprise and muted delight as he takes in a Hammond B-3 organ. Tapping out the incipit of the famous Toccata in D Minor, he quips with a sidelong glance, "Decorator didn't pick this". Settling down on the bench, House improvises a faux-gospel version of the opening of *Phantom of the Opera*, then turns to look at his friend, genuinely pleased ("I like what this says about you, Wilson") before launching into Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale".

These two scenes are House's last joyful musical moments in the series. At the end of season six, he is back on Vicodin; by the end of the seventh, he is heading to jail for driving his car through Cuddy's house. He listens to jazz in his jail cell but there is no playing. Shortly before the final episode of the series, when he is out of jail on probation, House returns to the piano in the episode "Holding On" (8.21). Diagnosed with terminal cancer, Wilson tells House that he has decided against more chemotherapy, opting instead for a higher quality of life even if it means only five months or less. House not only rejects his friend's reasoning, but takes it as a challenge, angrily yelling, "I'm not going to let you just die" as Wilson walks away. House's internal panic about losing his one enduring friend to a terminal condition impels him to behave more recklessly than usual, rebuffing attempts by colleagues to help him deal with his anger and grief. Finally, in frustrated rage, he attacks a patient who tries to kill himself after having just been successfully treated.

Back at home, House starts to take another Vicodin, then hesitates. As the scene cuts to Wilson at home, we hear a single repeating note on the

piano, as though the player is considering what he wants to play. The shot returns House seated at the piano; he launches from the repeated note into a melancholy descending sequence, richly harmonized. The music bridges images of House, Wilson, and the suicidal patient in a collective theme of loss, grief, and the question of what makes life worth living. House stops playing when he hears a knock on his door: Wilson announces that he has decided to start chemo again—for House's sake, telling him "You need me…and I don't think that's a bad thing anymore". House admits that Wilson was right in the first place: "I think it's time I accept that you're just smarter than I am". For once, House bows to someone else's reasoning, maybe the most loving—and humble—thing he has ever done.

The piano improvisation inspired by his feelings about Wilson is the last music we hear from House. The next episode, "Everybody Dies", ends the series proper. After a successful Holmesian scheme to fake his own death (avoiding a return to prison), House leaves with Wilson to enjoy the little time his best friend has left. The last shot shows them on motorcycles, heading down a road in beautiful, hilly country. No guitar hangs on House's back, but maybe he will pick one up again soon, perhaps a classic instrument hanging in a pawnshop that only he recognizes as a treasure.

Finally, a question: Does all this musicking show that House is, deep down, a "good person" or at least worthy of our empathy? Romantic notions of the creative artist as hero and the transcendent power of music have long pushed this narrative. Yet, history and fiction are full of monstrous music lovers—Alex "Delarge", Hannibal Lecter, Gesualdo, and Adolf Hitler come immediately to mind—and recent cases in the United States alone (including James Levine, Placido Domingo, William Preucil, Charlie Walk, and R. Kelly) remind us again that exceptional creativity is neither a corollary to goodness nor, more crucially, an acceptable compensation for abusive and predatory behavior.

Likewise, House's creative side—both medical and musical—cannot make up for his take-no-prisoners narcissism and manipulative cruelty. Still, his musical scenes present a unique aperture into a complicated psychology, revealing clues that would otherwise be hidden—and does so in a way that vastly enriches the Sherlockian duality of machine-like logic vs. humanized musicking. House's moments of *musement* allow us to observe him with his guard down, encouraging us to look beyond the

character's core identity as genius diagnostician driven by logic. Music offers fresh data for the differential diagnosis of House's inner self, but no guarantee of a favorable prognosis.

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