

## Memories of Green

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The soundtrack in the movie *Blade Runner* strategically uses human elements in a primarily synthesized score. Through the characterization of Rachel, the score develops a style linking humanity and memory. This motif is set apart from the rest of the score through its use of piano, range, tone, and melody. All of which serve to humanize and evoke empathy for Rachel. In the final scene, when Roy saves Deckard's life, just prior to his own death, the same techniques of melody and tempo are used to evoke empathy for Roy, illustrating the humanity in his memories. Therefore, through a number of similar melodies, Vangelis, the composer of *Blade Runner*, uses score to convey the message that memories are what make us human.

As a science fiction film, *Blade Runner's* use of synthesized music is not extraordinary. However, from the start of the film, the movie draws attention to the artificial nature of its instrumentation. The movie begins with extremely low pitches and high beeps that register far off the staff of regular music notation and are rarely present in traditionally orchestrated scores. Through these synthesized effects, Vangelis creates a score containing melody, base, chord progression, and rhythm, which clearly defines it as music. This is appropriate given the context of the beginning of the film, which introduces us to the replicants. Just as the replicants utilize artificial genes and bodies to create the individuation of a human, the score utilizes artificial sounds to create the individuation of music. Rachel's character emphasizes the ambiguity surrounding the humanity of replicants. A replicant convinced of her own humanity, she provides a unique viewpoint, one that highlights the moral ambiguity of Deckard's work, particularly as she becomes close to Deckard. The questioning of Rachel's humanity reaches its climax in the scene where Deckard informs Rachel that her memories were merely implants. As

he recounts her memory of a spider's nest hatching, she joins him in the retelling, and the song, "Memories of Green," begins, faintly, in the background.

The opening of "Memories of Green" (1; 1-19) uses tempo to highlight fragility and empathy as human characteristics, associating those characteristics with childhood memories. The mix of arpeggio and melody without a strong rhythmic background allows the pianist to play in a mix of tempos, which lends human character to the music. This reactive playing also allows the music to empathize with Rachel's lines and respond to their context. For example, as Rachel realizes that Deckard's knowledge must mean she is a replicant, there is a stretch on the arpeggio in bar 8 (33:33), which mirrors her hesitation to accept this reality. It is followed by a return to tempo, as Deckard breaks the silence, and comments, "bad joke." Similarly, in bars 13 and 17 (33:59, 34:16), Rachel's silence and tears are accompanied by retards. This often unnoticed change is distinctly highlighted by the presence of strongly melodic music, which lends itself to a human execution. While any pianist would easily make these changes in tempo, they are notable and uncommon in a highly synthesized score, as is present in *Blade Runner*. By contrasting the empathetic piano and melody with the drone chords and artificial bells that fill much of the soundtrack, the score emphasizes Rachel's humanity as it relates to her memories.

Additionally, by placing the more human melody within the context of the synthesized score, Vangelis illustrates how humanity can be present within artificial creations. The melody in "Memories of Green" begins with four timid notes (1;1-4) that are slowly supported by rolled chords. However, the first note of the melody is not part of the piano score, but rather a synthesized beep that is present in the background noise Vangelis incorporates into his music. By starting one of the most human elements of the score, the hesitant melody, with an artificial tone, Vangelis symbolizes how even the most human creations can come from artificial background.

This is reflected in the scene where Rachel, crying and accused, is the subject of the viewer's empathy.

When we next see Rachel at Deckard's apartment, after she kills Leon, another replicant, she is accompanied by a tribute to "Blade Runner Blues." She sits at the piano and is accompanied by a blues style score, with a chime-based melody on top of the sustained notes and blues melody.

This blues element ties back to the striking blues melody that is present during the death of Zhora (57:53-59:00), a replicant killed by Deckard earlier that evening. The cinematic choice to accompany the gory death with such noticeable and melodic music both creates empathy for Zhora and leaves a bloody memory to accompany the song. The rendition that accompanies Rachel (1:08:08-1:10:12) has a slightly less bright saxophone melody and lacks the characteristic heartbeat effect that presented itself during the death of Zhora. However, it shares the identifying melody in a new light. Therefore, the melody contrasts Rachel's civilized and human position at the piano to the animalistic death of Zhora as she flees Deckard's attack. However, despite the contrast, both scenes evoke empathy for the replicants, and the melody entraps this emotion.

However, when "The Blade Runner Blues" is paired with Rachel, its chimes foreshadow a new melody "Tears in Rain" (1:46:23). Once more connecting memories and humanity, the music both humanizes Rachel and sets the stage for Roy's serene death. Underscored by blues melody, the first 3 chimes (1:10:07-1:10:47) match the melody of "Tears in Rain," and are followed by a similar rolled upward chord and trill. While each melody has its own character, they each return to this stretched 3 notes passage (1:46:35, 1:47:03, 1:10:10, 1:10:23) between their trills and resolves. This parallel structure allows Vangelis to use the same techniques of humanized music flowing with the emotion of the composition and link Roy and Rachel with human emotion despite their replicant identity. In fact, Roy and Rachel, two replicants, are

accompanied by the most human compositions in the score. In contrast, Deckard and Tyrell and accompanied by some of the most grand-sweeping, but synthesized, music. The lack of definite tempo and the lightness of the harmonies in the music accompanying Roy and Rachel may make it less illustrious than that of Deckard or Tyrell, but also defines the characteristic of its venerable human emotion.

Finally, the composition, "Tears in Rain," which accompanies Roy's death, finalizes the connection of memories and humanity. The ending of *Blade Runner* both completes the plot arch but also breaks out of the patterns the movie established. For example, while Roy dies and Deckard returns to Rachel, the conclusion of Roy's death is not violent, despite the pattern of increasingly violent replicant deaths throughout the progression of the movie. Similarly, the score continues to grow increasingly tense, filled with dramatic bells, unresolved minor second suspensions, and mechanical hum (1:44:22-1:44:30), leading up to Roy's death. However, before the expected climax, the melody accompanying the tense operatic sequence of music (1:45:45-1:45:50) pauses, and there is a brief section of only diegetic sound (1:45:57-1:46:27). This immediately follows Roy saving Deckard's life and highlights the uncertainty that follows this unexpected action. Additionally, it highlights the score during the melody's return when it accompanies Roy's final words: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die" (1:46:23-1:47:18). The melody follows the stylistic choices set in "Memories of Green" and builds upon the foreshadowing chimes that accompanied Rachel at the piano. Therefore, rather than a violent death, Roy's death is linked to humanity and memory.

At the moment of his death, Roy has accumulated as much memory as is possible within his lifespan, and it is with this accumulation of memories that he is at his most empathetic. “More human than human” is the Tyrell corporation’s motto, and Roy’s claim to have “seen things you people wouldn’t believe” suggests that the extreme lives of the replicants have accomplished that vision. Their memories exceed that of humans, however, due to their short life spans, all of “those moments will be lost, like tears in rain.” The song’s title, “Tears in Rain,” emphasizes this metaphor, hinting at the composition’s emphasis on the importance of Roy’s final moments of humanity and empathy. The last of the opening four notes form a suspension, and in its final recursion, Vangelis stretches those notes to accompany the slow motion scene of the dove taking flight (1:47:28-1:47:36). The dove accompanied by a free flowing upward glissando, emphasizing a final moment of hope and peace.

However, the scene ends with a resolution of the melody to the tonic, leaving the emotions as complete and ended. This is in stark contrast to the final scene of the film, which ends on an unresolved suspension (1:52:19-1:52:21). While Rachel’s story will continue, Roy’s time is finished and his memories are washed away. This resolution is additionally supported by the high-pitched synthesized melody, which opens the movie in the credits (00:47-01:23). While the audience was originally unaware of the importance of this Leit motif, by positioning it as the very opening sound, and then reaching its final reprise and conclusion at the point of Roy’s death, Vangelis completes the structure of his score before the end of the movie. This begins and concludes the plot arch of the music with the introduction, and death, of the replicants. Contradicting the assumed role of Deckard as the protagonist of the movie, Vangelis’ score instead places the replicants at its center. Therefore, the score of *Blade Runner* tells a second

parallel story to the movie, one of the replicants humanity, both its evolution and its definition in memory.

## Bibliography

Vangelis, *Memories of Green*. EMI Music Publishing, 1981.

*Blade Runner*. Directed by Ridley Scott. Produced by Ridley Scott and Hampton Francher. By Hampton Francher and David Webb Peoples. Performed by Harrison Ford, Rutger Hauer, and Sean Young.