ABSTRACT

KELLY WHITE. *Jim Jarmusch’s Discography: Redefining a Collection of Films as Albums*
(Under the direction of Professor Franklin Cason.)

Despite only having released twelve features, two feature-length documentaries, and a handful of shorts as of this writing, Jim Jarmusch has established himself as one of the most influential and subtly pervasive American filmmakers of the last forty years. Jarmusch is defiantly unconventional and independent, and has become admired for his postmodern, minimalistic, absurdly humorous, Existential journey films.

Film critics write about him occasionally, but few academics do. Those that do tend to focus on his aesthetics and thematic recurrences, and are often predictable and superficial. This kind of writing results in one key element being ignored. Jarmusch’s filmography is jam-packed with music from all over the world. Writers mention his continuing collaborations with musicians, but few acknowledge the importance of music in creating the signature tone and themes of each film. It can be argued that Jarmusch’s films act as representatives for specific music genres and styles, and that viewing his filmography from a musical perspective allows for a new and exciting form of analysis.

Example: Mystery Train is a surreal comedy set in Memphis, Tennessee. The soundtrack features songs performed by Elvis, Junior Parker, and Otis Redding, among others. All of the songs are either R&B, Country, Soul, or Funk, which are all rooted in Blues music. Paired with narrative themes such as soul searching, mourning, and melancholy nostalgia, Mystery Train is a ‘country & blues record.’

In order to successfully support the argument for this film, as well as his other films, I will first summarize how music has historically been used in film via music theory analysis;
provide historical background on Jarmusch; explore his films’ themes by describing the narrative and music styles; and I will explain historical context and definitions of those music choices. The results will illuminate the importance of music on Jarmusch’s filmography, and will ultimately present the alternate phrasing: Jim Jarmusch’s discography.