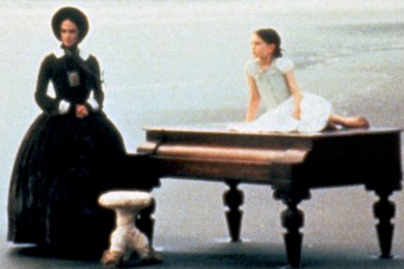


EDITED BY

DAVID

NEUMEYER



≡ The Oxford Handbook of
FILM MUSIC
STUDIES

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

FILM MUSIC
STUDIES

This page intentionally left blank

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

FILM MUSIC
STUDIES

Edited by

DAVID NEUMEYER

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and certain other countries.

Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

© Oxford University Press 2014

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior
permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted by law,
by license, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reproduction rights organization.
Inquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the above should be sent to the
Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The Oxford handbook of film music studies / edited by David Neumeyer.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-532849-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Motion picture music—History and criticism. I. Neumeyer, David, editor of compilation.

ML2075.O93 2014

781.5'42—dc23

2013010582

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

CONTENTS

<i>Contributors</i>	xi
---------------------	----

1. Overview	1
DAVID NEUMEYER	

PART I FILM MUSIC: CENTRAL QUESTIONS

2. Music and the Ontology of the Sound Film: The Classical Hollywood System	17
JAMES BUHLER AND DAVID NEUMEYER	
3. Opera and Film	44
MARCIA J. CITRON	
4. Visual Representation of Film Sound as an Analytical Tool	72
RICK ALTMAN	
5. Film Music from the Perspective of Cognitive Science	96
ANNABEL J. COHEN	
6. Composing for Film: Hanns Eisler's Lifelong Film Music Project	131
PETER SCHWEINHARDT AND JOHANNES C. GALL, TRANSLATED BY OLIVER DAHIN	
7. Ontological, Formal, and Critical Theories of Film Music and Sound	188
JAMES BUHLER	

PART II GENRE AND PLATFORM

8. Drawing a New Narrative for Cartoon Music	229
DANIEL GOLDMARK	

9. Genre Theory and the Film Musical 245
CARI McDONNELL
10. "The Tunes They Are A-changing": Moments of Historical
Rupture and Reconfiguration in the Production and Commerce
of Music in Film 270
JEFF SMITH
11. The Compilation Soundtrack from the 1960s to the Present 291
JULIE HUBBERT
12. The Origins of Musical Style in Video Games, 1977–1983 319
NEIL LERNER

PART III INTERPRETATIVE THEORY AND PRACTICE

13. Classical Music, Virtual Bodies, Narrative Film 351
LAWRENCE KRAMER
14. Gender, Sexuality, and the Soundtrack 366
JAMES BUHLER
15. Psychoanalysis, Apparatus Theory, and Subjectivity 383
JAMES BUHLER
16. Case Studies: Introduction 418
ROBYNN STILWELL
17. The Order of Sanctity: Sound, Sight, and Suasion in *The Ten
Commandments* 424
MITCHELL MORRIS
18. Strange Recognitions and Endless Loops: Music, Media,
and Memory in Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys* 445
JULIE MCQUINN

PART IV CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO ANALYSIS

19. Transformational Theory and the Analysis of Film Music 471
SCOTT MURPHY

-
- | | |
|---|-----|
| 20. Listening in Film: Music/Film Temporality, Materiality,
and Memory | 500 |
| MARIANNE KIELIAN-GILBERT | |
| 21. Auteurship and Agency in Television Music | 526 |
| RONALD RODMAN | |

PART V HISTORICAL ISSUES

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 22. When the Music Surges: Melodrama and the Nineteenth-century
Theatrical Precedents for Film Music Style and Placement | 559 |
| MICHAEL V. PISANI | |
| 23. Audio-visual Palimpsests: Resynchronizing Silent Films with
“Special” Music | 583 |
| JULIE BROWN | |
| 24. Performance Practices and Music in Early Cinema outside
Hollywood | 611 |
| KATHRYN KALINAK | |
| 25. Performing Prestige: American Cinema Orchestras, 1910–1958 | 620 |
| NATHAN PLATTE | |
| <i>Index</i> | 639 |

This page intentionally left blank

CONTRIBUTORS

Rick Altman, Professor of Cinema and Comparative Literature in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, The University of Iowa

Julie Brown, Reader in Music, Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London

James Buhler, Associate Professor of Music Theory, Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music, The University of Texas at Austin

Marcia J. Citron, Martha and Henry Malcolm Lovett Distinguished Service Professor of Musicology, Shepherd School of Music, Rice University

Annabel Cohen, Professor of Psychology, University of Prince Edward Island

Johannes C. Gall, Free University, Berlin, member of the editorial staff of the Hanns Eisler *Complete Edition* (HEGA), published by Breitkopf & Härtel; board member of the International Hanns Eisler Society

Daniel Goldmark, Associate Professor of Musicology, Case Western Reserve University

Julie Hubbert, Associate Professor of Music History in the School of Music, University of South Carolina

Kathryn Kalinak, Margaret Tucker Thorp Professor of English and Film Studies in Rhode Island College

Lawrence Kramer, Distinguished Professor of English and Music, Fordham University

Marianne Kielian-Gilbert, Professor of Music Theory, Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington

Neil Lerner, Professor of Music, Davidson College

Cari McDonnell, PhD candidate in music theory in the Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music, The University of Texas at Austin

Julie McQuinn, Associate Professor of Music, Conservatory of Music, Lawrence University

Mitchell Morris, Associate Professor of Music, Department of Musicology, The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music

Scott Murphy, Associate Professor of Music Theory, School of Music, University of Kansas

David Neumeyer, Marlene and Morton Meyerson Professor of Music and Professor of Music Theory, Sarah and Ernest Butler School of Music, University of Texas at Austin

Michael Pisani, Professor of Music, Vassar College

Nathan Platte, Assistant Professor of Musicology, School of Music, The University of Iowa

Ronald Rodman, Dye Family Professor of Music, Carleton College

Peter Schweinhardt, Instructor of music, politics, history, and ethics in the Babelsberger-Filmgymnasium, Potsdam, Germany; board member of the International Hanns Eisler Society

Jeff Smith, Professor of Film in the Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin, Madison

Robynn Stilwell, Associate Professor of Music, Georgetown University

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

FILM MUSIC
STUDIES

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW

DAVID NEUMEYER

THE Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies charts the current state of, and prospects for, scholarly work focusing on one element of audiovisual aesthetic experience. Music's role over time has by no means been simple or obvious—either to producers or consumers of audiovisual art—and it is both the contested territory and the range of creative, industrial, and critical responses that are the objects of our inquiry here.

FILM STUDIES AND FILM MUSIC STUDIES

From its beginnings more than a century ago, film as a commercial and artistic medium has provoked not only practice-oriented writing but also aesthetic-critical manifestos and technical or technological studies (the last significantly concerned with issues relating to sound recording and reproduction). As a cultural phenomenon, film has long been supported by extensive review and fan literatures, as well, the best of which offered—and still does offer—a great deal of insight and specific scholarship. It was, however, the combination of the influence of the circle of French filmologues surrounding André Bazin (and linked to the journal *Cahiers du Cinema*) and the rapid expansion of colleges and universities in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in the United States, that brought film into literature departments, where feature films as adaptations of stories and novels (and to a lesser extent films on historical topics) lent themselves naturally to pedagogical use. Films also, of course, assisted with language training and gave insight into national cultures. At the same time, American studies programs, established both outside the United States (mainly in Europe) and within the country, contributed to an increasing focus on film, whether directly or indirectly through the critical study of contemporary American culture. From a practice standpoint, the simplification and reduced cost of production materials and processes—first and foremost among them magnetic tape, which became commercially available in the late 1940s, and the portable cameras that magnetic tape made practical—quickly

led to widespread experimental use of film, independent shorts and even features, and before long the establishment of specific radio, television, and film departments in many tertiary educational institutions, a development that dovetailed nicely with then current ideas of technological progress and educational outreach.

On a broader platform still, film—specifically the full-length feature—has been the predominant art form in most of the world's cultures for nearly a century now. Its historical ties to existing arts practices and repertoires vary from country to country but in general are complex and, to a surprising extent, still obscure (see, in this volume, Pisani, Chapter 22, on links to nineteenth-century theater, and Kalinak, Chapter 24, on some international practices). The entire range of film genres, but particularly avant-garde (or experimental) film, filmed performances, and the familiar narrative feature film, have been implicated at one time or another in two central debates of arts cultures in the twentieth century: the high/low (or serious/popular) binary and the status of recorded sound. Thus, in addition to the familiar and deeply entrenched position of film in everyday cultural commerce, there are not only historical but also strong theoretical and ideological dimensions to the study of film.

Music has wound its way in and out of these debates and their literatures almost from the beginning. Periodicals and practical manuals served the professional and semiprofessional musicians who performed for early film exhibition. Serious theoretical issues were pushed to the fore with the coming of sound, in part because of rapid technological changes, in part because an established tradition of film production and exhibition already existed by that time, against which the emerging practices of the sound film could be judged (for more on this, see Buhler and Neumeyer, Chapter 2). Already by the mid-1930s, attention was turning to composer-auteurs (by analogy with the director-auteur), that is, the creative musicians who worked in studio music departments and who fashioned original symphonic underscore to classic-era films in the United States and elsewhere. The status of this underscore came into question only in the early 1960s, as a broader range of musics came to occupy, and often to dominate, both performances and underscore in feature films—sometimes also in the typically hour-long filmed television dramas that derived directly from the feature-film tradition. The introduction of the Dolby noise-reduction system in the early 1970s changed the nature of the soundtrack—and music's position in it—nearly as radically as had the coming of sound more than forty years earlier. The composer-auteur was partially displaced by the sound designer, a soundtrack-auteur who created the subtle and detailed mix of soundtrack elements with which we are all familiar in the present day. When directors acted as their own sound designers, composers might be shut out altogether.

Along with these changes in practice, the gradual incorporation of film studies into the academy after the Second World War led to a new type of discussion of film and the soundtrack. Before that, studies of music and the soundtrack tended to be oriented toward industry professionals in the form of manuals and technical articles and toward general audiences in the form of books and newspaper and magazine articles on general film aesthetics, histories, and stars. Rarely were studies of film music oriented toward methodological or critical concerns that would in turn promote scholarly production.

This situation began to change as film criticism became more sophisticated (as noted earlier), film studies emerged as an academic discipline, and methodological options and priorities became overt (on film theory and criticism in this period, see Buhler, Chapter 7).

In 1977, the year that the premiere of *Star Wars* solidified the Dolby system's position in film exhibition (as theaters realized that screenings with Dolby sound were attracting far larger audiences than those without), Roy Prendergast's textbook/tradebook *Film Music: A Neglected Art* was published, offering a nostalgic but also affronted view of an art done wrong. Although the book's accounts are even-handed in many respects, Prendergast clearly spoke for composers of the traditional symphonic underscore, who felt they deserved respect (that is, their craft was mostly ignored, neglected) but who also feared that the tradition they represented was in danger of disappearing under the combined onslaught of popular music, sound design that took away much of music's traditional role in guiding and supporting narrative, and directors who "composed" underscore by dropping in preexisting recordings (on this last, see Hubbert, Chapter 11). A decade later, Claudia Gorbman's *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (1987) might have appeared to play into this narrative with its initial adjective, but in fact the book is a historical, theoretical, and methodological survey of symphonic underscore in the classical Hollywood system, where "unheard" refers to the conceptual and functional subordination of music to the imagetrack and its primary sound element, speech (or dialogue). Among its distinctive contributions, the book brings together French and American scholarly programs in film and applies them to music (Gorbman began her career as a professor of French literature).

The very titles of Prendergast's tradebook and Gorbman's academic monograph, then, crystalized two long-standing issues of aesthetics and practice. Two words—"neglected" and "unheard"—encapsulate, respectively, the question of film music's status in the world and the question of music's status in the soundtrack; they are now the longest-running tropes in the scholarly literature. The first word has cultural-ideological implications (Neglected by whom? To whose advantage?). The second has philosophical (aesthetic) and practical, creative implications (Unheard in relation to what?), but, equally, implications that are historical, critical, and methodological in a field where the classical model of the narrative feature film is understood by most to hold sway into the present, despite the many changes over the years in production structures, directorial priorities, exhibition venues, and textual (commodity) form.

FILM MUSIC STUDIES AS A DISCIPLINE

The rise of film music studies closely parallels the recent commodity history of feature films. The widespread availability of VHS tapes in the 1980s encouraged some initial steps, as it suddenly became possible to acquire films and play them repeatedly, thereby setting up the most basic necessary conditions for close study of an individual film and

its soundtrack. The ability to record from television with a VCR, along with a gradual ramping-up of commercial releases of both historical and contemporary films, greatly facilitated style studies as well. Gorbman's book appeared at a very opportune moment in this process and is generally understood as the first—and now classic—text of film music studies as an academic area of study. It is, indeed, a treatise so sturdy in its historical and aesthetic arguments that, even in the present, the only real blemishes one might point to are a reliance on a dated psychoanalytic suture theory and the relative obscurity of the films in the chapters devoted to case studies.

Almost immediately thereafter the pace of publication began to pick up, starting with a cluster of monographs published between 1992 and 1994 that moved the field forward quickly: Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia* (1992); Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score* (1992); Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones* (1994); and George Burt, *The Art of Film Music* (1994). Journal articles and books continued to appear sporadically throughout the decade, with the latter especially widening the field of serious inquiry beyond the general questions of description and interpretation that were the focus of the earlier literature. Nicholas Cook's *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (1998) offered a framework for analysis of all manner of music's combinations with other media, including not only the familiar audiovisual media but also song, opera, and dance. Martin Marks, in *Music and the Silent Film* (1997), applied the tools of musicological research to case studies of music in early film. Jeff Smith's *The Sounds of Commerce* (1998) emphasized the interpenetration of industrial, commercial, and aesthetic practices. Anahid Kassabian's *Hearing Film* (2001), concerned with an updated interpretative model for music in relation to questions of gender, identity, and agency, also advanced repertorial breadth by reading music in films of the 1980s and 1990s, where most earlier studies had focused on the classical sound film. By the end of the decade, the literature had advanced to the point where a thorough critical review could be entertained: Robynn Stilwell's "Music in Films" (2002) covers the period 1980–1996. Since the year 2000, as Pool and Wright correctly observe, "writing on film music has exploded" (2011, xv). Kate Daubney initiated a series of single-volume case studies with her study of Max Steiner's music for *Now, Voyager* (2000). Journal articles and anthologies of case studies quickly proliferated. Isolated articles on film music topics appeared in a variety of journals, but since 2000 three academic journals have been established with a focus on film music and closely related subjects (*Music and the Moving Image* [University of Illinois Press, for the Film Music Society]; *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* [University of Liverpool]; and the *Journal of Film Music* [Los Angeles]). Representative essay anthologies include *Music and Cinema* (2000), ed. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer; *Film Music: Critical Approaches* (2001), ed. K. J. Donnelly; *Between Opera and Cinema* (2002), ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa; *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film* (2006), ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell; and, among the more recent entries, *Wagner and Cinema* (2010), ed. Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman. Textbooks followed in short order, including histories by Mervyn Cooke (2008), Laurence MacDonald (1998), Roger Hickman (2006), and James Wierzbicki (2009); three anthologies of source readings edited by Julie Hubbert (2011), Mervyn Cooke (2010), and

James Wierzbicki, Nathan Platte, and Ian Cross (2011); and an introduction to analysis of music in the soundtrack, in the context of a technological history of film sound, by James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer (2010). Julie Brown (2009) has written a thoughtful chapter-length students' introduction to research questions in music for film and television, and very recently, Warren Sherck (2011) and Jeannie Pool and Stephen H. Wright (2011) have published book-length guides to research.

As this brief and selective historical account of the literature suggests, film music studies are now firmly established in the humanities, and I note with satisfaction that the number of scholars, particularly younger scholars, who are devoting time and effort to the field continues to increase. Nevertheless, film music studies do not constitute a distinct and separate discipline. They are, instead, a node between disciplines, principally film studies, language and literature studies, media (communication) studies, and musicology (or music studies). Others include especially philosophy (aesthetics) and psychology (cognitive studies; on this, see Cohen, Chapter 5). The material of that node, of course, is the huge repertoire of the cinema—more than a century's worth now—and its catalogue of musical practices, as augmented after 1950 by television, documentary videotape and films of performances, and, more recently, by computer-enabled formats, notably video games and internet-based digital video, both professional and amateur (on music in television, see Rodman, Chapter 21; on music and digital platforms, see Smith, Chapter 10, and Hubbert, Chapter 11; on music in the early history of video games, see Lerner, Chapter 12).

Of these bodies of audiovisual art, scholars have given by far the greatest attention to feature films, with a disproportionate concentration on commercial American films, to a smaller extent European, Russian, and Japanese films, and only in the past decade or so films from other nations and cultural groups, including the so-called “transnational cinemas,” which consciously adopt the format and methods of American and European film production but with themes and cultural priorities that may well differ. Television has been represented mainly by long-running series, particularly those from the 1980s and later. Internet studies, not surprisingly, have steadily gravitated toward social media and YouTube and its competitors.

Even if they are not—and they are not likely to become—a separate discipline, film music studies do require their experts. For the individual interested in criticism and interpretation, the scholarly literature of film music is, even now, by no means too large to survey in a reasonable amount of time. Pool and Wright do note that the Library of Congress catalog now lists 150 books on the topic of film music history (“85 of them published since 1980”) (2011, xv), but that number is still minuscule compared with the volume of published work in most established disciplines. On the other hand, if one adds, as one should, the scholarly literatures of sound and film studies, extended by the trade-book literature on studios, genres, national cinemas, directors, and stars, then the literature with which the scholar needs to be familiar, even if much of it may often be used opportunistically, is indeed substantial.

Even more demanding than the literature for the historian and for the analyst of style is the size and variety of the repertoire, which does demand a large commitment of time

in itself. Accordingly, a small body of scholars has arisen whose main focus of research is music for film. For those in academic positions, institutional homes are mostly in music studies, with a very few in film studies departments. In music, the positions tend to be slots for American music or twentieth-century music, with a few outliers in other areas, especially in music theory (in part because of that discipline's traditional association with music composition and thus its long-standing interest in recent and contemporary musics, in part because music theorists often carry out style studies based on detailed textual analysis).

For film studies or communication departments, film history has been the typical placement for scholars, but that is changing as a rapidly advancing trajectory toward greater attention to sound studies continues. The great majority of those who have presented and published film music analyses and interpretations to date have had backgrounds and specific expertise in music studies. Film studies scholars have begun to bypass the modes requiring highly specialized musical knowledge and jargon by moving toward sound studies, which take the formal unit of the soundtrack as their object and admit of a wider range of methods for audiovisual analysis. Since music is one element of the film soundtrack, along with human speech (dialogue) and special effects (all sounds other than music and speech), a highly focused study of music in a film can be faulted for skewing attention in ways that do not always or automatically yield the most productive or richest results for interpretation. Furthermore, the focus on music tends to encourage historical narratives that isolate music as a special case, a long-standing problem for music in relation to other arts. In the future, one might well expect that areas, divisions, or even departments will coalesce around groups of practitioners, sound/music theorists, and historians, with an emphasis on cultures of reproduced sound, in particular sound film and contemporary musical and social practices that depend on reproduced sound.

The rapid rise of sound studies and music media studies promises to reconfigure historical narratives of twentieth-century arts and music in ways that were hard to imagine as little as ten years ago. If so, the future trajectory of film music studies may very well be toward a position as a subfield of a broadly construed discipline of sound studies. How such a discipline will fit into—or, better, transform—traditional institutional structures remains to be seen. In the meantime, film music studies are in a charmed moment. For film studies scholars, a substantial and focused literature on music in film is finally available. For music studies scholars, generational change is breaking down barriers to serious study of music outside the traditional classical canon and is rapidly naturalizing pluralism within the music studies community. In this environment, we have a better chance than ever of writing adequate historical narratives of music in the past century, narratives that do not cling to a nostalgic musical textuality based on the written score but acknowledge that recorded sound is the elephant in the room for a proper history, as it has generated the first truly musical texts, which fundamentally changed both music making and concepts about music, and did so from early on in the twentieth century. Sound film is deeply embedded in that change.

THIS *HANDBOOK*

It is through television, video games, and internet-based audiovisual media that film music studies engage with—and by and large pass over to—cultural studies and sociology or anthropology-based media studies. This *Handbook* is not directly concerned with those areas of inquiry; the focus here is on the priorities and interests of history, literature, and performance arts—that is to say, on historical research, analysis and criticism, and the construction of historical narratives. Understood this way, film music studies begin from and always revolve about their repertoire base, whether that foundation is taken narrowly as the dominant form of the feature film or in more inclusive terms as an audiovisual repertoire.

Determining the boundaries of the repertoire is one issue, whether in the context of an ontology (for example, if film is an art, what is required to distinguish this art from ephemera such as home movies?) or of exhibition history. In the sound film, music's questions are subsumed by those relating to the entire text, since the sound strip is a physical part of the film (or, more recently, an integral but still distinct part of the digital file). In the pre-sound-film era, however, the situation was completely different. Not only were films typically shown in programs that included live or recorded musical and stage performances, but the sound that accompanied a film varied widely, according to the status of the program in a theater's weekly schedule, to the status of the theater itself (as a neighborhood theater, a small-town opera house or vaudeville theater, or a big-city picture palace), or to the performance forces at hand (from none at all to an amplified gramophone record, lone pianist, organist, or percussionist, to a vaudeville orchestra of eight to ten players or a symphonic orchestra of anywhere from fifteen to sixty musicians). In other words, the history of production and exhibition, fundamental to the study of film, is no less important for its music.

Given the rapidly changing and globally expanding situation of audiovisual media now, any volume like the present one must appear either conservative—in the sense of describing an established set of interests and practices—or else highly speculative, extrapolating to a variety of possible futures. The former was obviously the better choice for this *Handbook*, not only because it offers greater depth and clarity in treatment but also because scholars' interests and the literature they have generated from their research have now advanced to the place where, for the first time, summaries, surveys, and historical essays on topics broader than case studies are not only desirable, as they have long been, but are also more firmly grounded. From that newly possible moment of grounding, a plausible future for ideas and interpretation can also be more easily and more productively read, and we can leave technology to make its own impact through the whirlwind development it has undergone since the early 1920s, from the moment of the rapid rise of electricity, commercial radio, and shortly thereafter the sound cinema.

PART 1: FILM MUSIC: CENTRAL QUESTIONS

In the introductory Chapter 2, James Buhler and I focus on a crucial moment in the history of cinema—the transition decade (roughly 1925–1935)—and specifically on the move from sound in silent film performance practices to music in the soundtrack of the sound film. We do not reject the traditional narrative emphasizing the break between silent and sound film (the ontology of the sound film is indeed fundamentally different), but we argue that there are continuities in the treatment of music that have important consequences for the integrated soundtrack of the classical Hollywood sound film, which is the benchmark for sound feature films generally.

Marcia Citron's chapter on opera and film, Chapter 3, brings together these two venerable audiovisual forms and shows, first, what happens in the most direct hybrid, the filmed opera or opera-film, and, second, how opera is integrated into and how it can signify in wide-circulation dramatic feature films. Her chapter "Opera and Visual Media" in a companion volume, *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, surveys and describes the issues. "Opera and Film," in the present *Handbook*, focuses on opera's embedding in film narratives.

Rick Altman explores graphical representations of film sequences in Chapter 4. He argues that such visual aids are essential to detailed and accurate analysis; that, in the form of frame enlargements, which became common in the 1980s, they "set a new standard for intellectual discussion and argumentation on cinema issues"; but that they also exacerbated a prior tendency to favor the visual over the aural. Altman discusses several historical examples that combine drawings or screen grabs with musical notation, beginning with a well-known diagram by Sergei Eisenstein (for *Alexander Nevsky*), and somewhat similar examples from Manvell and Huntley 1957 and Gorbman 1987, and moving on to forms that he and his students have developed over the past decade with an aim of expressing a broader range of features of the soundtrack.

Annabel Cohen, like Marcia Citron, has provided a discussion, Chapter 5, that is complementary to others she written for recent volumes in the series: *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology* (2009) and *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Emotion* (2010). Where these reviewed, respectively, psychological studies relevant to the role of music in electronic and live artistic multimedia contexts and music as one of the primary sources of emotion in a film, the current chapter takes a broader view of the psychology of film music. Cohen describes the relevant literature in cognitive science, both theoretical and experimental, that forwards an initiative to explain why music is important to film and also how music functions in film, providing empirical grounding for practices of description and interpretation.

In a wide-ranging essay, Chapter 6, Peter Schweinhardt and Johannes C. Gall examine the life and work of Hanns Eisler, a powerful film, film music, cultural, and political node in himself, and one uniquely important in the history of film music and film music studies. Excepting perhaps the Russians Shostakovich and Prokofiev, Eisler covered more cultural and political ground than any prominent composer in the twentieth

century—from the end of the Austrian Empire to Weimar-era Germany, then to an itinerant life ranging across Europe in support of Communist causes, abruptly to the United States and, through deportation, back to Europe following hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Eisler wrote concert and stage music throughout his career, but the authors emphasize that he also wrote music for films in virtually every year of his adult life (from 1927 on). Still, he is best known among film scholars for the book *Composing for the Films* (1947, coauthored with Theodor Adorno), the “foundational work of critical theory on film music [that] in a very real way prepared the ground for much recent scholarship on film music” (Buhler, Chapter 7 *infra*). The authors contextualize the book through a survey of Eisler’s experience as an early practitioner in sound film, including an experimental Film Music Project that laid much of the ground-work for the book, whose famously convoluted writing and publication history is then unravelled. The final section of the chapter summarizes the motivations and methods associated with what the authors call Eisler’s “lifelong film music project.”

Chapter 7 is the first of three (the others being Chapter 14 and Chapter 15) in which James Buhler surveys the development of film theory and criticism after the Second World War. Here he offers an account of the development of film studies in the period roughly 1950–1990, relying for its frame on Francesco Casetti’s three-stage model (ontological, extra-disciplinary, and disciplinary [or field]). Buhler positions music and sound within each of these paradigms, for the last of them devoting particular attention to the opposed views of formalism and critical theory (including ideology critique).

PART 2: GENRE AND PLATFORM

The first two chapters of Part 2 offer historical-critical accounts of one genre where music has been central to production from nearly the beginning—animated films—as well as another where music must necessarily play a significant role—the musical. After that, we look to establishing contexts for analysis of the feature film by venturing outside, as it were, to questions of the interaction of the film and music industries, the history of the compilation score, and music in the early history of video games.

Daniel Goldmark provides a succinct historical account of animated films and their musics in Chapter 8. Working with shorts and animated features as well as television shows, Goldmark traces a path running from Disney’s *Steamboat Willie* (1928) to *The Fairly Odd Parents* (2001–) and emphasizes the variety of early studio practices, the centrality of production for music, and the effects of technological changes after 1950.

Cari McDonnell discusses the film musical in Chapter 9, centering her discussion on the problem of a long-standing critical bias toward the integrated musical (in which narrative considerations, rather than performance opportunities, are primary). Summaries and critiques of genre theory and conceptions of the integrated musical are followed by

a reversal: a consideration of film genres or subgenres that are not normally considered part of the repertoire of the film musical but which arguably belong there. As a case study, McDonnell looks at singing cowboy films of the 1930s, in particular those starring Gene Autry.

Jeff Smith turns attention to music in film commerce in Chapter 10 by surveying the history of interactions between the film and music industries. He argues that this history shows a pattern of several long-term business cycles, each of which he associates with a specific point in time: 1927, 1958, 1975, and 1999. In each of these years the cycle was prompted to turn by an important change, either in film technology, music technology, industry structures, or in some combination of these.

Julie Hubbert also brings the work into the present in Chapter 11, exploring the phenomenon of the compilation score, a device not unknown in earlier decades (indeed, it closely resembles some characteristic silent-film-era methods) but which emerged as an important practice in the 1960s and has remained so since. Where earlier uses of recorded music were primarily stock library cues, in the 1960s directors drew on commercially available recordings of all types. There were economic reasons (cost, effects of studio reorganization, popular-music tie-ins), production reasons (director control of the soundtrack), and cultural reasons (in the era of the stereo LP, listeners' relationships to music had changed). Hubbert argues that compilation practices were not static; she charts three stages in a process of change, roughly according to decade and—as with the business cycles discussed by Jeff Smith—closely aligned with significant technological changes.

Neil Lerner looks at the early history of video games in Chapter 12, primarily arcade games in the period 1977–1983. The topic may seem far removed from the feature film, but Lerner demonstrates that it is not the tangent it might at first appear to be. He uses familiar methods of description and comparison to get at what he calls “the stylistic distinctiveness that occurs in the history of video game music,” and in so doing he locates a thread that ties early video games to early film music practices, a parallel history that finds video games “adopting many of the same strategies for fitting music to screen action.”

PART 3: INTERPRETATIVE THEORY AND PRACTICE

Part 3, then, turns to issues of interpretation. In Chapter 13, Lawrence Kramer draws connections between music (particularly classical music) and the representation of the human body onscreen. He begins from and explores both implications and limitations of four theses: cinema is about moving images of bodies, those cinematic bodies are “primarily or originally erotic,” classical music is particularly adept in enabling the cinematic embodiment that screen images alone cannot, and, finally, music so enables through a contradiction that it “cultivates without having either the capacity or, for the

most part, the intent to resolve . . . between the body as sensorial and the body as form or figure.”

James Buhler continues his examination of critical theory and interpretation (which began in Chapter 7) with a survey of the literature and arguments around film, sound, and music with respect to gender and sexuality (Chapter 14) and psychoanalysis and subjectivity (Chapter 15).

In Chapter 16, Robynn Stilwell introduces two case studies—characteristically for the field, each focuses on a single film—by arguing for the foundational importance of the practice, its role as a thorough-going way to “recapitulate the experience of encountering a film.” In the first of these studies, Chapter 17, Mitchell Morris traces the connections between a prevailing mode of “authenticity”—a familiarizing naturalism—in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* and the music Elmer Bernstein wrote for the film. In Chapter 18, Julie McQuinn explores ways in which the compilation score for Terry Gilliam’s *12 Monkeys* supports the film’s thorough intermingling of present and past, natural and artificial, sane and insane. As Stilwell puts it in summing up, “[m]usic, one of the most potent cues for memory, [becomes] a pivot point for recollection, nostalgia, and delusion.”

PART 4: CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO ANALYSIS

In Part 4, the focus is on descriptive analysis, but the view offered is deliberately prismatic, three quite different approaches to understanding music in audiovisual media.

Scott Murphy shows, in Chapter 19, how the tools of contemporary music theory can provide a context for sound qualities particularly common in film music since the early 1980s. These harmonic progressions are pairs of chords (in this case, triads) related in ways that are considered “distant” in traditional tonal theory (the model that is intended to cover eighteenth- and most nineteenth-century styles in European concert music). There are forty-eight possible such pairs, which Murphy names “tonal-triadic progression classes” or TTPCs. He demonstrates that the TTPCs can be readily explained and grouped using neo-Riemannian theory, and that these groupings can not only furnish a tool for stylistic analysis (to connect and tally like progressions in different films) but also offer a key to interpreting the narrative and expressive roles of these progressions in specific film sequences.

Marianne Kielian-Gilbert, in Chapter 20, explores some particular and very concrete phenomenal issues with respect to the potential of “vivid listening” for music’s temporal figurations in and of material contexts (music/film, audiovisual). She focuses on “how listening in film becomes a problem for analysis, and how recontextualizing music in

cinematic settings (moving images) interacts with experiences of their (music/filmic) temporal unfolding.”

Ronald Rodman offers a survey of literature and analytical approaches in the study of television music (not only series shows but also commercials) in Chapter 21. He distinguishes between a composer-based “auteurist” model and “agency”-oriented models that focus on communication and audience response, then discusses television as commodity (especially music in television commercials) and the distinctive character of music video, and he assesses the current state and prospects for television music research.

PART 5: HISTORICAL ISSUES

Part 5, even more than many earlier chapters in the *Handbook*, emphasizes the fundamental importance of basic historical research to film music studies. The chapters in this section demonstrate how the work can be done and the kinds of results that can be obtained, but in so doing they also highlight how much work remains to be done in cinematic precedents, production and performance practices, and the history of film and film music criticism—not only for the United States but also for other national cinemas. The essays are arranged roughly chronologically by topic.

Michael Pisani discusses precedents for film music practices in the nineteenth-century theater in Chapter 22. Making liberal use of archival documents, Pisani demonstrates that the soundscape of the theater was considerably richer and more varied than might be suggested by a retrospective history (that is, a narrative that reads backward from silent film to earlier theatrical practices, assuming film’s continuity with the theater). Although there was undeniably a strong strain of continuity, Pisani shows that techniques of the nineteenth-century melodrama also leapt beyond the silent film to influence underscoring practices in the sound film of the 1930s and 1940s.

Julie Brown explores the surprisingly complex set of questions surrounding silent films and their musics in Chapter 23. She emphasizes the ephemeral (that is, performative rather than textual character) of exhibition practices for the silent film. To do this, she focuses on the reconstruction and exhibition of “special scores,” the small minority of musical accompaniments that were composed for individual films.

In Chapter 24, Kathryn Kalinak offers the reader a glimpse of the diversity in international practices during the same period, before the “enforced” standardization that arose with the commodity-text of the sound feature film. Ranging around the globe, from South America to India, Kalinak provides a new sense of what the sound of a cinema was like, offers a broader context in which to consider American practices at the time, and also makes suggestions about how research in these areas can be forwarded.

Nathan Platte (Chapter 25) follows the history of orchestral performance from early silent film (where reactions to orchestral playing could be surprisingly negative) through the picture-palace era and early Vitaphone shorts and features well into the

sound film era. A case study of short films of symphonic performances from the 1950s allows Platte to make observations about the role of the orchestra not only in the cinema but also more broadly in American culture.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful, first and foremost, to the authors for their contributions to this volume—and also for their patience and cooperation throughout the several stages of the writing and editing process. Norm Hirschy initiated the idea for this *Handbook* and overcame my reservations about whether a large essay anthology on this topic was even possible (the present volume, I am pleased to report, has obviously proved me wrong). He has been steadfast in support and prompt with advice and counsel from the first day till now. I am also grateful to others at Oxford University Press, especially Lisbeth Redfield, assistant editor, and Michael Durnin, copyeditor. The production managers at Newgen, Balamurugan and Saranya Rajkumar, worked with us with both courtesy and efficiency. Thanks to my frequent coauthor James Buhler for many conversations about design and priorities; to Margaret Fons for her work regularizing formatting and checking film titles and release years; to Christopher Husted for engraving music examples in two of the chapters; and to several rights holders for permission to reuse material from published work.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brown, Julie. 2009. "Music in Film and Television." In *An Introduction to Music Studies*, edited by J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Jim Samson, 201–218. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, Royal S. 1994. *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Buhler, James, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, eds. 2000. *Music and Cinema*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Buhler, James, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer. 2010. *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burt, George. 1994. *The Art of Film Music: Special Emphasis on Hugo Friedhofer, Alex North, David Raksin, Leonard Rosenman*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Cook, Nicholas. 1998. *Analysing Musical Multimedia*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cooke, Mervyn. 2008. *A History of Film Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. *The Hollywood Film Music Reader*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Daubney, Kate. 2000. *Max Steiner's Now*. Voyager. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Donnelly, K. J., ed. 2001. *Film Music: Critical Approaches*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Eisler, Hanns, and Theodor Adorno. 1947. *Composing for the Films*. New York: Oxford University Press. [On later editions and authorship, see this volume, chapter 6.]

- Flinn, Caryl. 1992. *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gorbman, Claudia. 1987. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hickman, Roger. 2006. *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Hubbert, Julie. 2011. *Celluloid Symphonies: Texts and Contexts in Film Music History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Joe, Jeongwon, and Sander L. Gilman, eds. 2010. *Wagner and Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Joe, Jeongwon, and Rose Theresa, eds. 2002. *Between Opera and Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Kalinak, Kathryn. 1992. *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Kassabian, Anahid. 2001. *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*. New York and London: Routledge.
- MacDonald, Laurence E. 1998. *The Invisible Art of Film Music: A Comprehensive History*. New York: Ardsley House.
- Manvell, Roger, and John Huntley. 1957. *The Technique of Film Music*. New York: Hastings House.
- Marks, Martin Miller. 1997. *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895–1924*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pool, Jeannie, and Stephen H. Wright. 2011. *A Research Guide to Film and Television Music*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.
- Powrie, Phil, and Robynn Stilwell, eds. 2006. *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*. Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Prendergast, Roy. 1977. *Film Music: A Neglected Art: A Critical Study of Music in Films*. New York: W. W. Norton. 2nd ed., 1992.
- Sherk, Warren. 2011. *Film and Television Music: A Guide to Books, Articles, and Composer Interviews*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.
- Smith, Jeff. 1998. *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stilwell, Robynn. 2002. "Music in Films: A Critical Review of Literature, 1980–1996." *Journal of Film Music* 1 no. 1: 19–61.
- Wierzbicki, James. 2009. *Film Music: A History*. New York: Routledge.
- Wierzbicki, James, Nathan Platte, and Colin Roust. 2011. *The Routledge Film Music Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

PART 1

FILM MUSIC: CENTRAL
QUESTIONS

This page intentionally left blank

CHAPTER 2

MUSIC AND THE ONTOLOGY OF THE SOUND FILM: THE CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD SYSTEM

JAMES BUHLER AND DAVID NEUMEYER

THE invention of the phonograph in 1877 and its cultural dissemination in the 1880s and 1890s changed the nature of sound; recording transformed it into a text, a “tangible object,” as Mark Katz puts it (2004, 9). Before that, sound had been conceptually “silent,” a chaos of unique, unrepeatable events. Music in the cinema repeats this history: up to the sound era, music was likewise “silent,” a heterogeneous set of performance practices; in sound film, by contrast, music became tangible, part of a physical object, a “text.” Music began to “sound” as part of the projected film strip.

The historical bifurcation of film music with the introduction of sound film, although broadly true, is nevertheless misleading insofar as it covers over several distinct stages on the historical path. These include music’s essential role *outside* the film in nickelodeon programs (before 1910); the emergence of narrative music (and the concept of “harmony” with the picture) alongside continuity editing around 1910; the attempts at solutions to the problem of “synchronizing” sound and music in the early to mid-1920s and during the transition years (roughly 1927–1933); and the emergence of a sound design anchored in what Michel Chion calls “sync points” (1994, 58–60), which not only enabled dialogue underscoring but also allowed the development of new narrative functions for nondiegetic music and clarified other musical narrative functions inherited from theatrical traditions, including the silent cinema itself.

In what follows, we will trace these stages through the broader history of silent and early sound film, with particular emphasis on music’s passage into—and its role within—the soundtrack. By rethinking music this way, we do not reject the historical narrative of film music that is structured around the dramatic changes inspired by the sound film, the projected film with recorded sound. Not only is the significance of

synchronized sound one area of agreement between film- and music-oriented scholars of film music, but it is also undeniable that sound film markedly transformed nearly every facet of filmmaking. Yet the emphasis on a break between silent and sound practice has incurred some costs, the most obvious being a tendency to downplay real continuities between silent and sound musical styles and scoring practices, a tendency promulgated especially by the first generation of Hollywood composers who needed to establish the importance of their work to increase their leverage in the studio system. The scholarly literature has often simply appropriated this account as the basis of the historiography of this period (Neumeyer 1995, 64), even as it has ignored the many other challenges—economic, technological, cultural, and aesthetic—of negotiating a place for music on the recorded soundtrack.

MUSIC AND SILENT FILM SOUND

Already in the early days of the sound era, Irving Thalberg was telling anyone who would listen that the silent film consisted of more than just images: “There never was a silent film. We’d finish a picture, show it in one of our projection rooms and come out shattered. It would be awful. Then we’d show it in a theatre with a girl pounding away at a piano and there would be all the difference in the world” (quoted in Boller 1985, 99). Music, Thalberg’s story suggests, was a crucial component not just of silent film exhibition but of the industry as a whole. Rick Altman reminds us, however, that this story enchants precisely because it is nostalgic, that Thalberg’s memory was selective (Altman 2004, 193). In fact, the practice of accompanying film was never monolithic in the silent era. Even in the 1920s, when performance practices had become relatively codified, acceptable accompaniment was still extremely varied, ranging from the full orchestra and mighty Wurlitzer organ for the evening show in a deluxe house to a lone pianist, a phonograph, or even silence during an early or dinner show at a small rural theater.

Before 1905, film exhibition was dominated by vaudeville and itinerant showmen.¹ Thus we can say, at least, that musicians were present in most venues where films were screened in those early days, but as Altman points out, we can conclude little about the early practice of accompanying film from the mere presence of musicians (Altman 2004, 195–96). There was nothing particularly remarkable about that presence, since even public lecturers typically hired a pianist to provide music. What musicians played—how they interacted with the film—would have been mediated largely by the institution of the venue in which the screening took place. As part of a vaudeville show, for instance, film would be handled like an act on the bill, at first as a technological marvel, later as a purveyor of news and other important or interesting views, but music would relate to the film as music did for any act: primarily incidental, providing flourishes, representational sounds, march tunes, and dances.

The shift to the storefront theater, or nickelodeon, around 1905 allowed a new mode of accompaniment to appear.² The shows themselves typically oscillated between screening

of films and performances of illustrated songs—popular songs of the day accompanied by lantern slides concluding with an audience sing-along (Altman 2004, 182–94; Abel 2001, 143–55). Besides accompanying the illustrated songs, music served primarily as an adjunct to the film: entrance and exit music for the show and ballyhoo to attract passers-by to the theater. To what extent music was played with the film remains uncertain, but it seems clear that musicians primarily served the theater. The trade papers at the time discuss music as “an added attraction,” noting that music could improve atmosphere, lending the theater an ambience of refinement. Music might add “pep,” as in vaudeville,³ or enhance presentation values for the film, but it remained mostly indifferent to the images. The player played to and for the audience, not to and for the film.

As measured by number of feet of film sold, narrative film took the lead by 1904,⁴ and by 1910, continuity editing had established itself as a specifically cinematic mode of narration, a mode that shifted filmmaking from what James Lastra calls an “ontology of recording” to a “pragmatics of representation” (2000, 65, 82–91). The ontology of recording conceived narrative film as a species of recorded drama. It reduced the filmic (what is depicted on film) to the profilmic (what lies before the camera): the film is conceived simply as a recording of what passed before the camera lens. This conception was useful in stabilizing the ontological status of film, for it construes the camera as a recording device that objectively captures the action that lies before it. That action may represent something fictional, but that fictive status is a property of the action rather than the camera. These films, in other words, were merely recorded theater. Continuity editing challenged this conception by constructing a diegetic world reducible neither to the filmic nor the profilmic. Instead, the action was staged for how it would represent an imaginary diegetic world. The essential tools of continuity editing, framing and edited shots, were turned more and more to the task of constructing this diegetic space, based on the principle of an intelligible displacement of one shot by another in order to structure a series of shots into a narrative sequence.

The sound of the cinema quickly changed in response. Earlier, sound and music had been oriented around decoding the images “topologically,” that is, reading the images for sonic possibilities (Burch 1990, 154). A bird would appear onscreen and the musicians or drummer (that is, the sound effects person) would imitate a birdcall, whether or not the presence of the bird was integral to the film (Bottomore 2001, 133). With the emergence of the diegetic world, however, the accompanying sound evolved by about 1912 to one based primarily on music, because it provided a layer of continuity, a ground against which a series of discrete shots could be constituted as larger units of structure. By contrast, sound effects, although common, remained merely supplementary to the mature silent film: nothing fundamental depended on their presence, even if the spectacle of sound could become a draw in its own right, such as for the famous production of *Wings* (1927), which included recorded effects of airplanes crashing, propellers whirling, and engines roaring midflight (Crafton 1997, 134–35). The oscillation of synchronous and nonsynchronous sound so common in structuring sound film, although it was obviously useful for enhancing dramatic effect in silent film, could not be structural, a determinative element in the film, for the simple reason that the exhibitor rather than

the studio controlled the sound: sound belonged to performance rather than the film *per se*.

Sound in the silent era, in other words, did not articulate the image so much through points of synchronization as through musical continuity. The fundamental function of music in the later silent era was to underscore the underlying narrative structure of the film by establishing a musical unit of structure, the musical cue, that extended across individual shots, binding them together into a larger unit of narration, the sequence. Music then was certainly not indifferent to the images—in the language of the time, music was “fit” to the image—but the prevailing metaphor for guiding the interaction of music and image was harmony rather than redundant identity. Even at this early stage, a familiar priority of music’s functions in narrative film was quickly being established: it was less an issue of mimicking the image than of complementing it, of drawing out narratively pertinent aspects of a sequence of images. George Beynon, writing in 1921 after the system had been fully codified, puts it this way: “The secret of synchrony lies not so much in careful timing of the selections as in the accurate judgment of the musical director.” That judgment consists, not in merely cutting music “to fit the situation,” but instead in a particular mode of musical continuity: “If care be taken in the finishing of phrases, the musical setting becomes cohesive—one complete whole that conveys to the audience that sense of unity so essential to plot portrayal” (Beynon 1921, 102).

Music’s role was to convince the audience that a continuity of thought, a narrative line, existed in the film, and that the audience could also discern this line (Buhler 2010, 34–37). The relation between sound and image might be symbolic in a simple sense of mood and atmosphere. Music might signify a battle, a storm, love—all the standard topics and moods represented in published collections of music for film performance—but the use of such musical symbols was guided instead by the taste and judgment of the musical director with respect to a perceived harmony with the sequence. Music, Beynon said, was most effective when it respected its own integrity, completed its phrases, followed its own logic, without becoming merely indifferent to the images. In other words, this symbolism was not structured primarily by a synchronization conceived as sound film later would, in terms of sync points.

If music substituted for the missing voice of the silent cinema, it did so as allegory rather than symbol: it stood precisely for a failure of the voice to pass the membrane of the screen (Buhler 2010, 38). The shadows that flitted across the screen remained deaf to the sound of the theater and the patrons in the theater likewise remained deaf to the sounds of the screen, and this negative reciprocity established an absolute, unbridgeable distance between the two worlds. Music of the silent film belonged to the world of the audience, the world of live performance, rather than the world of the film. Sound effects, though often “synchronized,” were also performed in the theater; they were understood as representations of screen sound rather than mimetically related to it. Diegetic music, too, although sometimes synchronized, was understood fundamentally as cue music, not as source music in the manner of sound film. In this sense it was not yet “diegetic”: it was a sound effect, and like other sound effects it was not mistaken for part of the apparatus. Its sound belonged to the theater rather than the image. This is one reason why it

was never overly important that sound effects or music closely match the sounds they represent; the most important criterion was harmony with the image—a harmony evaluated externally from the theater—rather than synchronization, a filmic figure that would allow the screened world to appear to sound in itself.

THE CONCEPT OF SYNCHRONIZATION IN SOUND CINEMA

Although it is sometimes represented in these terms, the transition from silent film to sound film did not occur over night. Indeed, the idea of mechanically synchronized sound goes back to the very origins of cinema. As nearly every textbook on the cinema reminds us, Edison's guiding idea in developing the motion picture camera was to do for the eye what the phonograph did for the ear. Edison's main assistant in developing the moving picture camera, W. K. L. Dickson, managed to make a number of synchronized films prior even to the commercial release of the Kinetoscope, which inaugurated the medium of the motion picture.⁵ There were numerous attempts at synchronizing film and phonograph over the years—most successful were Gaumont's Chronophone and Edison's Kinetophone—but none gained more than novelty status, due to difficulties maintaining synchronization and a lack of adequate amplification. It was only with widespread commercial availability of radio tubes after the First World War that an effective means of amplification was developed.⁶ Even when commercially viable sound film did emerge in the late 1920s, silent film did not immediately disappear. *The Jazz Singer* (1927) did not constitute a radical break in the terms of filmmaking.⁷ The production of pure silent film basically stopped in Hollywood by the second half of 1929, but studios continued releasing silent versions of most films through at least 1931 in order to service those theaters, both international and domestic, not yet wired for sound. These silent versions included intertitles and often contained separate footage, different direction, and occasionally even different stars.

During the transitional period, roughly 1926–1932, feature films were made using basically three different approaches to sound, plus one prominent hybrid type (Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer 2010, 295):

1. the “pure” silent film—silent film with live accompaniment;
2. the “talking” or “100% talking” film—sound film with synchronized dialogue and effects;
3. the “synchronized” film—sound film with recorded music and sound effects (but little or no dialogue);
4. the “part-talkie”—hybrids that were essentially synchronized films containing interpolated talking sequences as novelties.

Under this typology, *The Jazz Singer*, though often called the first talking feature film, would have been considered a part-talkie, but *Wild Orchids* (1929) was considered “synchronized,” despite the interpolation of several closely synchronized dance sequences, because none of these involved dialogue.

Sound film, the mechanical linking of recorded images and sound, inevitably won out because it offered huge economic advantages and gave studios better control over the distribution of their products. These changes benefited both producers (in giving them more control over the product) and exhibitors (who could reduce the expense of live performers and musicians). Still, there was nothing on the surface that made it inevitable the *talking* film would become the dominant form. Initially, executives and creative personnel at most studios, including Warner Bros. (which released *The Jazz Singer*), thought that dialogue and synchronized onscreen musical performances would, like color, remain a special effect and that synchronized rather than talking film would become the dominant form of sound film. Hindsight allows us to see that this assessment was radically mistaken because it ignored the structural shift in the relations between image and sound that occurred with the introduction of mechanically synchronized sound, most obviously with dialogue but even more profoundly with music. As Paolo Cherchi Usai reminds us, the aesthetic of silent cinema was based on maintaining “a clear distinction between an apparatus producing images and a sound source in front of or behind the screen” (Usai 1994, 52). Most characteristically, of course, this sound source was an orchestra or an organ. Kurt London noted similarly how absolutely crucial the pit is to the presentation of opera. “The operatic stage keeps its spell only when it is symbolically removed from the audience by the orchestra pit: thus it retains the air of ‘once upon a time,’ the element of the extraordinary” (London 1936, 140). This sort of fantasy space was also open to the silent film with its live music in a way that would be denied the sound film. Indeed, the synchronized film eroded this distinction—music, dialogue, and effects were all emitted from the loudspeaker—making the placement of music and sound uncertain.

This ambiguity of position explains the uncanny effect of synchronized sound and music in a late silent film such as *Wild Orchids* (Figure 2.1), where the realistic sound of the crowd in the opening sequence seems to hover oddly above the film, as though it does not quite belong to the image.⁸ The loose synchronization and the lack of change in the sound with respect to the images—the sound level for the shots on the pier is the same as that for the shots on the ship, for instance, and crowd sounds continue across the intertitles—give the sense that this is a background that is oddly indifferent to the images, despite the presence of several overt sync points. The term “generic sound” is sometimes used to describe this effect (Altman 1992, 250), but such generic sound is not yet an ambience in the sense of a sound that emanates from the diegetic space. This sound is part of the apparatus but has not been fully assimilated into the film. No doubt the sound of this opening was modeled on the deluxe performance tradition; yet the production of the sound effects live within the theater constructs a different relation to the image than does recorded sound. If sound effects in a theater do not seem to emanate from the diegetic space of the film, it is easy to attribute them to the space of the

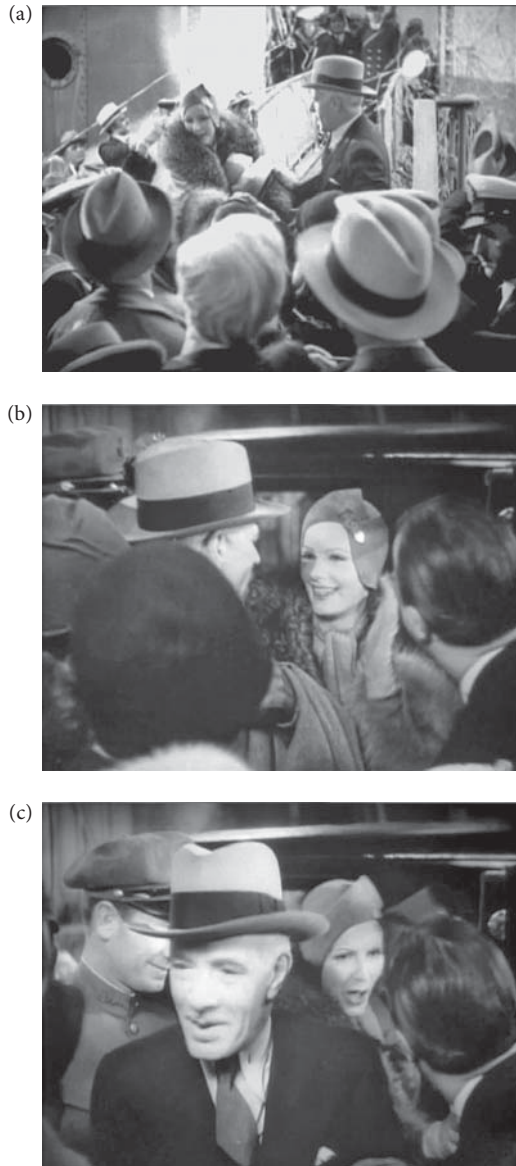


FIGURE 2.1 a–c: *Wild Orchids* (MGM, 1929) uses generic sound of a crowd greeting disembarking ship passengers to set the scene, but the sound seems to float unanchored above the image.

theater—the sound is produced for us, however effective the illusion. When recorded, however, these sounds occupy an uncertain space: they belong neither fully to the diegetic screen world nor to the theater. The “synchronized” film is thus acutely disembodied: it has extracted the performing body from the theater but not yet placed it into the film.

Music that has been “synchronized” to a silent film—recorded and then used as a soundtrack—occupies a position similar to that of generic sound. Displaced to the soundtrack, the music no longer stands on our side of the screen; nor—even more than sound effects—is it part of the diegetic world. Its displacement to the soundtrack has in many respects attenuated its prime function in the silent theater: it no longer registers a visible presence as mediator. Music has become a sign, perhaps, but it stands above all, as with the earlier use of the phonograph in the theater, as a sign of the absent labor of performance.⁹ In this sense, the synchronized musical soundtrack is ideologically problematic, and surely more so for audiences of the time than for audiences today, who have become largely inured to the displacement of living labor by machines. In a context dominated by the practice of silent cinema, the audience would have registered this displacement acutely through the empty orchestra pit yawning between seats and the screen. Only the most callous viewer would not have been sensitive to the plight of performers being pushed out of the theater by the machine, and synchronization in itself could do little to compensate for the loss of live performance in the deluxe houses, which is why it demanded some sort of supplementation to persuade the audience that synchronization could mean something more than a loss of presence. Given the social situation, the mechanical reproduction of sound inevitably required a transformation in the ontological commitments of the cinema.

The lure turned out to be famous performers and news events. In these cases, sound film was not immediately threatening to the practice of the silent feature because it was understood as a replacement for some aspects of the show, in particular the expensive prologues and vaudeville, and as an attractive enhancement to others, such as newsreels. Movietone, for instance, was developed not for feature films but for newsreels, for bringing the sight and sound of important public events to the theater. Political speech was a particular favorite, and what was important here was the spectacle of synchronization: seeing the figure of political speech, hearing the speech of the political figure.

Vitaphone, the other principal method for sound synchronization, was used from the moment of its commercial introduction for synchronizing music and sound effects to the feature, but it was initially developed as a means of recording famous acts to be used as shorts in place of live prologues. The Vitaphone shorts therefore did not in themselves challenge the priorities of the silent feature: they “belong[ed] to a mode of representation significantly different from the norms of classical cinema—one dedicated to the absolutely faithful duplication of real acoustic perceptions” (Lastra 2000, 195). Conceived as recorded vaudeville—itself a throwback to the days when the nickelodeon was sold as “electric vaudeville”—these sound shorts were understood as transcriptions of performances, as “phonograph records with visual accompaniment” (Wolfe 1990, 62). The editing of the images followed the soundtrack, which was inviolate, in order to display the spectacle of synchronization: “What tends to be emphasized through cutting and camera work in all cases is the *source* of the sound within a broader spatial field. The films presume—and structure—an interest in closely viewing the human figure as agent of sound, positioned frontally before a camera and centered within the frame” (62–63). In fact, Michael Slowik argues that concern for the sound source was not always the

overriding factor in these films, especially in slapstick comedy shorts; instead, he says that a more generalized spectacle of synchronization that emphasized the continuity of action and required the ability to perform an elaborate routine in one take was at least as important. Issues of synchronization, he says, “encouraged the selection of material in which the actors could reliably perform everything in one try” (Slowik 2010, 69). For acts focused on dialogue or singing, however, where the spectacle of synchronization consisted in the synchronized talking or singing body—and these constituted a large number of the shorts in the early sound period—editing was secondary to the integrity of the soundtrack; it served to display the source of the sound, to give the illusion that the sound recording was embodied in the image. Consequently it is arguable whether the relatively distant shot scale—early Vitaphone performances rarely used anything closer than a medium shot—was primarily a function of multiple camera shooting (Bordwell 1985, 305) or rather, whether a relatively consistent distance was also required to give the illusion that the sound was embodied in the image. When shot scale shifted markedly, from, say, a long shot to a close-up, sound could either follow the scale of the image or not. If sound followed the image scale, however, it would necessarily draw attention to the cut; but if sound did not follow image scale, the illusion of embodiment would be imperiled. In this sense, the restriction of shots to various positions in the orchestra seats served as a compromise that allowed some degree of editing with a single take audio recording while also preserving the illusion of embodiment, the sense that the sound resided in the image.

As the Vitaphone process was applied to the feature film, little seemed to change on the surface. *Don Juan* (1926), the first feature film Warner Bros. made using Vitaphone, is a silent film with a musical score that simply reproduces mechanically what an audience might have heard from a live orchestra in a big-city deluxe theater. Even *The Jazz Singer* a year later offered less a direct challenge to the aesthetic of silent film than a means of supplementing it. Indeed, many critics at the time wrote of the film as “vita-phonized,” meaning that it merely had Vitaphone sequences dropped into what was otherwise seen as a relatively mundane family melodrama exploring themes of entertainment and assimilation. The fact that *The Jazz Singer* was also released relatively successfully as a silent film testifies to the supplemental status of its Vitaphone sequences, famous though they may be.

SYNCHRONIZATION AND AN ONTOLOGY OF SOUND FILM

Although many of the early difficulties of sound film were technical, the problems of cutting and constructing scenes through editing could not be solved by increasing the fidelity of the recording. Ironically, solving such problems entailed breaking the spell of authenticity, the regression to an ontology of recording wherein sound film was a

faithful recording of the world, to win back its ability to construct its own representation of reality—and, in this, music turned out to be both a sign of the basic problem and an important aspect of the solution. Films that immediately followed *The Jazz Singer* used music, of course. Countless pictures were advertised as “all talking, all dancing, all music,” but these films were, as the slogan implies, musicals. One important conceptual advantage of the musical at the time was that it permitted music to be plausibly motivated consistent with the premise that sound film entailed recording a performance rather than constructing a representation. Music could appear as part of a show, as the films tended to be about actors putting on a show. The films were therefore often bifurcated into stage show and backstage life. The stage was in a sense about the presentation of a fantasy space, a state emphasized by the use of music and (sometimes) color in the “production numbers,” as in the famous “Wedding of the Painted Doll” sequence from *Broadway Melody* (Barrios, 1995, 73, 122–25).¹⁰ Backstage sequences remained in black and white and generally the music that occurred here was confined to rehearsals or gatherings of the actors for some “real world” diversion. Operettas, such as Rudolf Friml’s *The Lottery Bride* (1930), were an exception: taken more or less straight from the stage tradition, they retained dialogue underscoring for lead-ins to the numbers and more general underscoring for melodramatic sequences, the difference being that actors fit their lines and actions around the music, as they would do onstage, rather than the other way around, as mature sound film would do.

By 1931, however, musicals had fallen out of favor, and the weight of studio production shifted to dramatic films, which were, like the musicals and Vitaphone shorts, also at first modeled after theatrical performance, whether as rather literal adaptations of stage plays or as original productions. Essentially film once again was conceived as recorded theater—as early film prior to the codification of continuity editing had been. These constraints were partly due to recording processes that restricted both camera work and editing because of unpredictable sound dropouts on rerecording, but much of it was simply due to the difficulty of conceiving what sound film should be other than a recording of the world (Jacobs 2012).

Writing in 1928, Rudolf Arnheim argued that the talking film was irreducibly mimetic—“The impression that this is not a copy but a living being is completely compelling” (Arnheim 1997, 30)—not the least because of the way synchronization foregrounded whatever was synchronized, vectorized time, and so unbalanced all attempts at nonsynchronous sound. “The unity of sound demands I also keep the picture unchanged” (31). Although Arnheim would later come to recognize the viability of nonsynchronous sound, he thought the mimetic quality of sound film, its literal realism, placed a severe limit on its potential due to the inherent ambiguity of any sounds not firmly anchored in the image. The attraction of the image was sufficiently strong, Arnheim thought, that any nonsynchronous sound was liable to be assumed to be off-screen and in close proximity. Mixing sound and image that represented distinct places (whether physical or conceptual) threatened confusion. In 1934, he could still believe the following caution was warranted: “The danger always exists that the viewer will misunderstand such a montage of image and sound and expect the sound to come from

the scene." Thus, for example, "when the drunkard at the bar hears the warning voice of his far-off wife, the viewer will quite likely look around for the woman in the picture, assuming that since he can hear her, she must be nearby" (51).

If Arnheim here no longer insisted that sound film was inherently committed to strict synchronization, he nevertheless still presumed the image served as its ultimate anchor, that nonsynchronous sound would be understood in the first place as offscreen sound, and that such offscreen sound set up a strong expectation for synchronization. The problem extended to music as well: "In many cases this danger also exists with musical accompaniment that suddenly sets in; the viewer connects it to the scene of action, and, should he even hear the voice of a young girl sitting alone in the forest accompanied by a large orchestra, he quite rightly wonders how such luxury comes to exist in the wilderness" (Arnheim 1997, 51). If synchronized sound appeared redundant to the image in the sound film—all sounds had visual correlates, even dialogue had its moving lips—music without a clear source in the image appeared extraneous, superfluous, and even potentially confusing to the regime of sound film. Since recorded music not synchronized to the image was neither of the theater nor of the world screened, the question arose: where precisely was its place in the film? That is, it was difficult to conceive a place for music not motivated by the diegetic world, a nondiegetic register of sound that belonged neither to the theater nor the world of the image.

In 1931, even Max Steiner, who would soon do much to establish the place of nondiegetic music, expressed deep skepticism over music that came from "some mysterious source." In his role as music director at RKO, Steiner committed the studio to music with "logical" motivation from the image.

When music is found in Radio films, it will be secondary to the plot action and the movement of the story itself. Music will be largely incidental, and often atmospheric. It will not come into a picture from some mysterious source (the orchestra pit?) but by some logical, and, if possible, visual means—such as the turning-on of a radio or a phonograph in a scene, or a glimpse of an orchestra or chorus. (quoted in Wierzbicki 2009, 124)

In a retrospective account of the transition to sound film written in 1937, Steiner told a somewhat different tale, a story recalling Arnheim's situation of the girl in the forest that also pointed to the difficulty music had in earning a place on the soundtrack. "A constant fear prevailed among producers, directors and musicians, that they would be asked: Where does the music come from? Therefore they never used music unless it could be explained by the presence of a source like an orchestra, piano player, phonograph or radio, which was specified in the script" (Steiner 1937, 218).

In fact, some early sound films did feature a large amount of music that could not be easily situated in the image, including *The Lights of New York* (1928), the first feature-length talking film, where the music not only does not have a source in the image but also, judging from the mutual indifference of music and dialogue during many of the scenes, even seems to have been synchronized during postproduction—as the Vitaphone silent films were at the time—using some rudimentary process of

rerecording. Indeed, throughout the transitional era, Warner Bros. deployed music more extensively than did other studios, perhaps because the disc-based Vitaphone system in use there required developing rerecording skills and technology in order to do any sound editing at all (Jacobs 2012, 11). But Steiner no doubt told the story because it captured real anxieties about the early sound period while also setting in relief the artistic superiority of the recently stabilized system that accommodated a substantial place for musical scoring. Yet understood this way, it is clear that the “fear” Steiner spoke about referred less to producers and directors committed to an ideal of fidelity than to musicians who had no way of justifying the presence of music in the face of recorded drama. Steiner deflects these anxieties onto the amusingly absurd figure of the “wandering violinist,” according to his tale a ubiquitous character in early sound film, though in actuality not that common. “They began to add a little music here and there to support love scenes or silent sequences. But they felt it necessary to explain the music pictorially. . . . For instance, a love scene might take place in the woods, and . . . a wandering violinist would be brought in for no reason at all.” Regardless of such precautions, ambiguity of diegetic and nondiegetic arose quickly: “Or, again, a shepherd would be seen herding his sheep and playing his flute, to the accompaniment of a fifty-piece symphony orchestra” (Steiner 1937, 219).

As suggested above, the anxieties here belong not so much to the filmmakers as to the musicians, and Steiner pulls something of a rhetorical sleight of hand, since removing the wandering musician from the scene eliminates the narrative absurdity but also the justification for the music. That Steiner felt it necessary to make this sleight of hand suggests that the newly won consensus still remained somewhat precarious in 1937 and that the conceptualization that made it possible had a less than rigorous intellectual defense. In this respect it is entirely characteristic that, later in the same article, Steiner defended his score for *King Kong* (1933) on the basis of its effect of verisimilitude, that it “made the artificially animated animals more life-like, the battle and pursuit scenes more vivid” (Steiner 1937, 220).

This problem of conceptualizing a place for music basically rested on the underlying ambiguity of offscreen sound: since on an abstract formal level relations between film and soundtrack are essentially oppositional—they may be synchronized or not—nonsynchronous sound tells us only that the source of the sound is not in the image; but a lack of synchronization tells us nothing of a sound’s relation to the narrative world. How was sound to negotiate this inherent ambiguity?

At its most basic level, nonsynchronous sound simply extends the screened world: we hear what we do not see and assume that the world continues beyond the edge of the frame. Sound in this sense operates much as does a cut: it reveals a world beyond any particular image of it. Both offscreen sound and the cut commit film to a version of philosophical realism: the world does not require my viewing for its existence; no representation of the world can be complete; there is more to the world than can be seen. The image can motivate a cut through a match on a look (eyeline match), on action, and so forth, but in such matches our attention is guided outside the image by a subject that in some way transcends the frame. But this transcendence is only ever partial, successive,

with one view displacing another. The frame edge thus remains always as a defined limit of our view, however close or distant that view might be, or indeed however many views we may be given.

Nonsynchronous sound, unlike the cut, is “transparent”: it reveals the world beyond the image to be coterminous with the image. When image and sound are not synchronized, we quickly note the disparity and seek to explain it. This does not mean that sound film was always synchronized—obviously it was not—nor that silent film used only nonsynchronous sound—it did not—but rather that the structure of sound film is governed fundamentally by a relation of image to sound based on the expectation of sync points.¹¹ A sound is emphasized in the absence of the image precisely to create an enigma that the image before us cannot solve. Nonsynchronous sound thus becomes symbolic rather than allegorical: it marks a determinate lack in the image. Under the ontology of sound film, the presence of a sound without a corresponding image is precisely that: it stands for something or someone not present. In the silent film, by contrast, a similar sequence would typically be rendered with a brief close-up shot of the knocking itself, as happens in *Don Juan*, for example. Defining offscreen space through the representation of hearing is not by any means unknown in the silent era (Raynauld 2001), but the sound film gives this space audible definition and thus effects the representation of a diegetic world that exceeds the image.

In sound film, sync points establish pertinence and so also help delineate the soundtrack into hierarchical layers of foreground and background. A good example of this occurs in the opening scene to *Romance* (1930), which features a symphony of street noise. A comparison with the scene from *Wild Orchids* discussed above, where the sound seems to float above the scene, is instructive. In *Romance*, the sync points and use of sound perspective serve to anchor the whole soundscape to the image (Figure 2.2). Although this handling of the soundtrack provides for a neat transition from background to foreground that seems to ground all the sound in the image, it remains consistent with a conception of nonsynchronous sound that presumes an identity between nonsynchronous sound and offscreen diegetic space. To secure music’s place on the soundtrack meant breaking down this identity and dividing nonsynchronous sound into diegetic and nondiegetic registers (Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer 2010, 302).

There was nothing inherent in the nature of sound film that required that filmmakers develop the conceptual distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound in the way they did. As pit music, the presence of music might even have been reconciled with the conception of recorded theater. What seems to have forced the issue, as Steiner astutely noted, was the need to reconcile the love scene with dramatic sound film. Absolutely crucial to Hollywood production since it typically forms either the primary or secondary line of action, romance was not an element that filmmakers could easily dispense with. Yet, according to various publications at the time, love scenes proved exceedingly awkward to depict in early sound films. “Having so much smouldering sexiness,” *Variety* wrote of *The River* (1929), “it is occasionally liable to laughter. . . . Coming from the women mostly there may have been a factor of overflowing tension expressing itself as tittering” (quoted in Crafton 1997, 504). Here is exposed the difference between the



FIGURE 2.2 *Romance* (MGM, 1930) opens with a striking symphony of street sounds that uses coinciding aural and visual close-ups to anchor the sound to the image.

physical distance of the theatrical stage and the intimacy of film: the close-up in particular seemed to force viewers to intrude on the film's diegetic world. They had the uncomfortable sense that they were overhearing intimate conversation. In 1929, *Motion Picture Classic* published a set of readers' responses to the talkies. One writer complained: "Some of the love scenes [in the talkies] aren't so effective when the actors are putting their emotions in words. This is especially true when the hero pleads with the heroine for her love. While she is deciding what the answer will be, we hear nothing but the whispering, coughing audience and the suspense is terrible" (quoted in Crafton 1997, 504).

Besides the issue of intimacy, audience discomfort may also have been the product of the scenes becoming difficult to read without music, which could not, as in the silent era, guide an audience interpretation. In *Behind Office Doors* (1931), for instance, Mary (Mary Astor) and her boss, Jim (James Duneen), return to her apartment after a giddy night of dancing. He makes sexual advances (Figure 2.3), which she declines, apparently reluctantly. Without music underscoring the scene, however, Mary's actions in this sequence are difficult to decipher with confidence, and the result is an intense unease over her response that would likely produce precisely the audience whispering and coughing mentioned above. We might claim that a lack of music allows the audience a richer experience of the scene because, without music suggesting to the audience how Mary feels over the course of the scene, viewers are allowed to decide for themselves



FIGURE 2.3 In *Behind Office Doors* (RKO, 1931), the lack of underscore makes it difficult to determine how Mary feels about Jim's advances.

how to interpret her actions. Without discounting this objection, we should also recognize that, because the audience was open to form its own interpretation, viewers were more likely to have a dawning awareness of their own voyeurism. Though not couched in exactly these terms, the contemporary press indeed found the public display of such private intimacy embarrassing. Writing for *Motion Picture Classics* in 1930, George Kent Shuler noted: "An old observation has it that nothing seems so silly to a man as another man's love-letters. But there is something sillier, it would seem; not only public, but audible, love-making. It appears to be the consensus of opinion that all love scenes should be silent—unless comedy is intended" (quoted in Crafton 1997, 504). The call to return to the silent film for love making is instructive, for in the silent film such scenes were accompanied with a music that seemed to authorize the presence of the audience. In the sound picture, too, the presence of music proved orphic, controlling this laughter, guiding the audience into a "proper" interpretation of the scene, allowing it to indulge once more its fantasy of romance. Thus, it was the love scene in particular that seemed to demand a return to music.

Nondiegetic music was not, of course, the only way to manage audience reaction to love scenes—Greta Garbo was particularly adept at playing emotional scenes without music—and such scenes did not single-handedly win a place for it in the sound film, but nondiegetic music was generally more effective than poorly located diegetic music (such as offscreen radios or phonographs), attempted revivals of stylized silent-film practices,

or continuous, undifferentiated background music (as was tried in *Lights of New York* in 1928 and a few Paramount films in 1931). Love scenes, along with other dialogue scenes that had strong emotional components, thus fostered underscoring, first as an expedient for controlling audience reception, then more broadly, once filmmakers became used to its presence and began to conceptualize it apart from the recording of reality into the representation of a diegetic world.

The invention of nondiegetic music went hand in hand with the separation of the soundtrack into foreground (usually dialogue) and background, where music and effects were both added during postproduction and both served to set off the dialogue as foreground. If music was generally associated with nondiegetic space and effects with diegetic background, music could also cross the boundary depending on whether its function was to represent the appropriate sound of the location (dance music) or underscore the mood or emotion of scene, in a sense registering the *feeling* of the action rather than its *sound*. And the determination as to whether music or sound would serve as background became a function of whether the scene's action was primarily concerned with representing the interior or the exterior. Underscoring is in effect the place where the concept of nondiegetic music was forged, an invention of sound film with certain affinities to such theatrical forms as melodrama, operetta, and silent film, but whose narrative function is not reducible to any of them (Neumeyer 1995). This place for music was really possible only once sound had been fixed on sync points (rather than general synchronization), on markers of a diegetic rather than prophonographic concept of sound use. Only when representation of the diegetic had clearly formed could one distinguish between symbolic modes of offscreen sound: diegetic (foreground/background) and nondiegetic (background only). As a result, dialogue underscoring could appear in a way that would not be confused with offscreen sound, and it could divide the character planes into inner and outer—diegetic the outer, nondiegetic the inner—thus achieving a new kind of musical “synchronization” that registered the flickering interior of the character around the dialogue. Credit for realizing an effective dialogue underscoring technique goes to Max Steiner, in a series of films for RKO during 1932 and 1933.

MAX STEINER AND NONDIEGETIC MUSIC

At the beginning of 1932, Steiner was perfectly positioned to develop quickly a distinctive technique for underscoring dialogue. Although technological improvements in rerecording had made it possible for scenes dominated by speech to be supplemented effectively with music (Jacobs 2012), filmmakers seemed reluctant to take full advantage of it, and soundtrack practices throughout that year remained almost as heterogeneous as in the two previous years. Financial matters were an element—prestige productions tended to have more music (and more complex uses of music) than did B-productions—and policy on music varied extensively by studio, but in principle all films by now could be heavily scored, even if that meant nothing more than inexpensive

stock music. At Paramount, for example, studio policy continued to encourage extensive use of music; one of the most striking results in this year was *Blonde Venus*, a Marlene Dietrich vehicle for which Franke Harling (and three colleagues) produced a complex score that runs the gamut from the main-title overture to quickly shifting thematic music in the silent-film manner (even quoting Mendelssohn) to mood-setting underscoring to Dietrich's extended diegetic song performances. Music covers just over fifty of the film's ninety-three-minute runtime. Harling and his collaborators were by no means afraid to make extensive use of nondiegetic music, including music behind dialogue, but they were unable to resolve the tension between that music and the diegetic world: the music still seems related to but detached from that world, in the manner of the "musical synchronizations" of later silent-film practice. At Warner Bros., which had always used music more extensively than other studios, policy had also changed to substantially increase underscoring. MGM, however, remained committed to restricting music to situations with a strong onscreen motivation, as did RKO (Wierzbicki 2009, 123–24). *Red Dust* (1932), which stars Clark Gable, Jean Harlow, and Mary Astor, is typical of MGM's practice at the time. After the logo, music starts during six seconds of black screen before the main title; at that point, the dramatic allegro turns strongly thematic; it exits very abruptly on a negative stinger thirty-five seconds later. Fully eleven minutes later, Vantine (Harlow) briefly hums a folk melody. After this, the only music appears a few seconds before the end title. Thus music is restricted to the typical formal functions of beginning and ending plus a very brief motivated diegetic performance. Even at MGM, however, actual practice varied by film, and *Grand Hotel* from the same year uses music under dialogue extensively (roughly forty-seven of its 112-minute runtime have music). Sometimes this music is clearly diegetic (as in the bar where the Baron [John Barrymore], Flaemmchen [Joan Crawford], and Kringelein [Lionel Barrymore] meet as a dance band plays), sometimes it is vaguely motivated by location (as in the hotel lobby), but often it lacks a plausible diegetic anchor (as in the soulful music that accompanies Grusinskaya [Greta Garbo] or the comic music that mimics Kringelein's drunkenness in his room).

Thus, although by 1932 the technology was in place to accommodate music and dialogue together on the soundtrack and although a number of Hollywood productions used music more extensively that year, composers and music directors still had difficulty in moving beyond earlier practices. Steiner is the composer who made the decisive contribution. To grasp his accomplishment, it will help to identify a hierarchy of musical synchronization, as follows:

1. very tight synchronization ("mickey-mousing," stingers, naming);
2. close synchronization (Steiner);
3. general "overall" synchronization (mood; "harmony");
4. "unsynchronized" musical number behind dialogue.

In early sound-film practice, individual musical cues tend to serve just one of these functions. The score of *Lights of New York*, for instance, uses three of these types, but

segregates them fairly strictly according to function. Type 1, in fact, appears only as music for dancing in the speakeasy and it never occurs under dialogue. In this film, tight synchronization signifies foregrounded sound linked to onscreen action. When dialogue appears in these scenes, the music either continues into type 4 on the cutaway from the dance floor or the scene shifts to an inner office, which features a sonically impenetrable door (Figure 2.4). Most of the musical cues of the film fall under types 3 and 4. Type 3 is used for emotional or dramatically intense scenes: Eddie asking his mother for money to go to New York; the establishing scene in New York and the murder of the police officer; the love scene between Eddie and Kitty; the murder of Hawk; and the climax. Type 4 is also used for a number of scenes, sometimes, as in the hotel, where it might plausibly be interpreted as lobby music, but other times seeming to provide nothing but a neutral musical backdrop. Generally, the music seems to follow the conventions of silent film, with music chosen on the basis of the overall mood of the scene and little thought given to local sync points: the music does not even take account of the two killing gunshots, although both of those scenes feature heavy music in anticipation of the deaths. The only exception to musical sync points occurs in the office, where opening and closing the door has the inadvertently comic effect of turning on and off the music of the club (Altman, Jones, and Tatroe 2000, 351).

The musical practice that Steiner developed after 1933, on the other hand, tends to move fluidly between these functions at different moments *within* cues, and he was



FIGURE 2.4 A sonically impervious door in *Lights of New York* (Warner Bros., 1928) creates inadvertent musical sync points whenever it opens and closes.

careful to scatter dramatically pertinent sync points throughout to stick his music to the action, whether physical, emotional or dramatic. In essence, this meant that Steiner forged dramatic dialogue underscoring (type 2, close synchronization) by combining two staples of silent film practice: mickey-mousing, that is, stinger chords and comedic gags, and tightly focused naming (type 1, tight synchronization) on the one hand, an empathetic point of view determined by the narrative situation (type 3, general overall synchronization) on the other. In addition, he drew on the theatrical models of melodrama and Wagnerian *parlando* (Neumeyer 1995, 65)¹² to organize the play between these types of synchronization, and all of it had to be worked out in the split timings required for recorded sound. He also incorporated into the system even the “unsynchronized” musical number (type 4) by treating its entry, exit, and temporal duration in terms of high-level sync points through a process of what we have elsewhere termed “structural spotting” (Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer 2010, 328–31). The key to his system of dialogue underscoring, in other words, was recognizing each of the four items in the list above as a layer in a hierarchical system of sync points. (That he understood the distinctiveness of his contribution—and enjoyed the work—is clear from *Gone with the Wind* [1939], whose massive music requirements prompted Steiner to enlist the help of no fewer than five composer colleagues, to whom he gave such plums as the main-title and prologue cues while reserving for himself great patches of dialogue underscoring.)

Steiner might well have developed his methods in any case, but he found positive encouragement in David O. Selznick, who was RKO chief executive from October 1931 until he returned to MGM in early 1933 and who, according to David Thomson, “encouraged Steiner toward large-scale scores. . . . Steiner worked on most of David’s RKO pictures, and with *Symphony of Six Million* [1932], *Bird of Paradise* [1932] and *King Kong* [1933], especially, he established a role for movie scores that has scarcely altered in sixty years” (Thomson 1992, 131). The overstatement in this last claim misleads: what Steiner did was to establish and confirm a central role for music in Selznick’s notion of the “art film” or prestige production. Primary to accomplishing this task was to cover a large part of the film with music, in a manner that evoked the deluxe theater orchestral performances of the 1920s but that also took account of the peculiar requirements of recorded sound. *Symphony of Six Million* is not unique for 1932 in that about half of its ninety-three minutes have music, but it is striking in that almost all of that music is nondiegetic and most of it underscores dialogue. *Bird of Paradise* is an extreme case: virtually the entire film has music. Although these films certainly look ahead to the later 1930s, in films such as *The Garden of Allah* (1936), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), and—most notably—*Gone with the Wind*, for their own time they are exceptions: most of Steiner’s films in 1932 have scores ranging from twenty to thirty minutes, at most (such as *The Conquerors*) and a few have very little music at all, including (inexplicably) *Bill of Divorcement*, in whose production Selznick was personally involved and whose marquee actor (John Barrymore) plays a composer. But the music-laden prestige films were laboratories for underscoring, as the impulse to cover the film with music necessarily involves writing much accompaniment for dialogue. We should point out, however, that the most famous of those early films, *King Kong*, is another exception: although it has a great deal of music, most of that accompanies action rather than dialogue.

Given all this, it is ironic that Steiner's first fully effective examples of dialogue underscoring occur not in music-laden films like *Symphony of Six Million* or *Bird of Paradise*, but in other more modest productions of 1932 and early 1933. A comparison of Steiner's technique in scoring two dialogue scenes, one drawn from *Symphony of Six Million*, the other from *The Conquerors*, is instructive. In a scene about a third of the way into *Symphony of Six Million*, Felix (Ricardo Cortez), who has trained as a doctor but is working in a ghetto clinic, is confronted by his mother (played by Anna Appel); she has been pressured by her other children into telling Felix to move uptown and establish a money-making private clinic. An appropriately sad solo cello melody starts up as she sits alone contemplating her unwelcome task, and the music continues in a slow dance as she and Felix talk (Figure 2.5). A sudden, unmotivated flourish appears about a minute in, followed by an equally unmotivated return to the slow dance. When she becomes visibly upset, a solo violin enters briefly as though in response, but this is undercut immediately. At the end the music rises as she finishes and he responds. Our last view of her alone brings a nice parallel moment in the music, but an abrupt cut to Felix in his room brings an equally abrupt appearance of the main theme (which names him)—this builds appropriately to a climax as he struggles over the decision. When he reaches the window and looks out, the music switches to ethnic ghetto music (from early in the film).

The technique in *The Conquerors* is, by contrast, much more assured. Early in the film, Roger Standish (Richard Dix) and his wife Caroline (Ann Harding) are settlers heading



FIGURE 2.5 Felix and his mother talk in *Symphony of Six Million* (RKO, 1932).

west on the Missouri River. As the scene changes, a fanfare fragment accompanies an insert map of the Great Plains. This cues a shift to a pastoral music for their river journey; as the couple, in good spirits, flirt with each other, a romantic version of the film's main theme plays and comes to a clean cadence, which, along with a shift in camera position, suggests the scene is coming to an end (Figures 2.6, a–c). Instead, bandits fall out of an overhanging tree—a sudden *misterioso/agitato* cue sounds, and music synchronizes

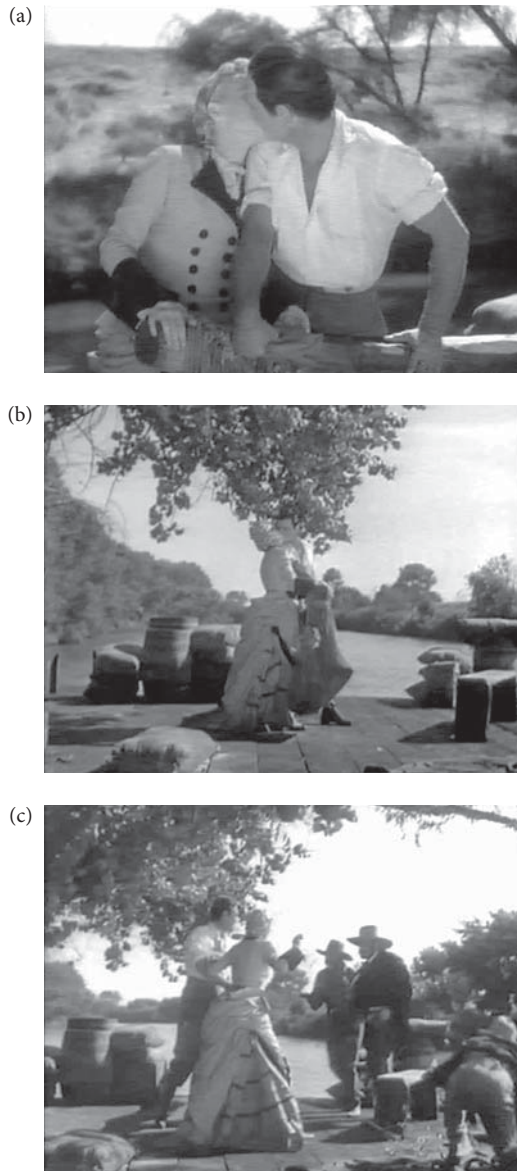


FIGURE 2.6 a–c: Roger and Caroline flirt, then bandits appear in the Missouri River scene from *The Conquerors* (RKO, 1932).

with one of the bandits touching Mrs. Standish, her husband's resistance, a shot, and his fall. Music goes out with the fall.

If the music for the conversation between Felix and his mother still seems uncertain in its methods, the river scene from *The Conquerors* has all the assurance of much later, famous underscoring cues from *Gone with the Wind*, *Casablanca* (1943), and Bette Davis films such as *Dark Victory* (1939) and *Now, Voyager* (1942). Although the scene from *The Conquerors* has the advantage of being partially a montage and partially an action scene, the types of synchronization fluctuate fluidly between type 3 general establishment of mood (as in the pastoral music) and type 1 tight synchronization (in two modalities: the device of naming for the statement of the main theme and mickey-moused sync points with physical action for the robbery and shooting), with quick but fluent musical transitions—not merely cuts—between segments. This skill in transition between types and points of synchronization—which is not a part of silent-film practice and had little value in the early sound musicals—is essential to scoring both dramatic scenes and montages. Montages were very common in early sound film, in both comedy and drama—*The Conquerors* is an extreme case, as it uses seven montage scenes to depict financial boom and bust cycles and passage of time in the family's history. Music for a slow-moving montage (that is, with brief scenes as well as individual shots of action or graphics) can be almost indistinguishable from closely synchronized dialogue underscoring.

That his dialogue underscoring methods have more affinity with type 1 (tight synchronization) than with type 3 (general synchronization) is plain from Steiner's own comment in 1940 that he wrote music intended to "fit the film like a glove" (quoted in Neumeyer 2000, 15). It would be a mistake, however, to claim that any of the four synchronization classes disappeared, even in Steiner's practice. Although composers were rarely responsible for writing music of pure type 4, songs that unfolded indifferently behind the dialogue—a preexisting song from the studio's back catalog or a song writer would be called in—music of a neutral, undistinguished, and uncommitted nature was frequently required, and Aaron Copland at one point even claimed that Steiner was particularly proficient at writing this kind of music. "For certain types of neutral music, a kind of melody-less music is needed. Steiner does not supply mere chords, but superimposes a certain amount of melodic motion, just enough to make the music sound normal, and yet not enough to compel attention" (Copland 1940, 147). There is no question about the influence of Steiner's practices arising from the works discussed above and a string of film scores after 1932, including several Katharine Hepburn vehicles (*Morning Glory*, *Christopher Strong*, and *Little Women* [all 1933]; *The Little Minister* [1934], and others) and culminating in *The Informer* (1935), which won the first Academy Award for a dramatic film score. By that time, all composers in the major studios had assimilated the core of Steiner's methods into the basic technique of film scoring. We should also make note of Steiner's assistant/associate Roy Webb, who was already at RKO when Steiner arrived in 1929. Webb, who continued to write film scores into the late 1950s, quickly adopted Steiner's methods and proved equally adept at dialogue underscoring, as his music for *Topaze* (1933) already shows clearly.

CONCLUSION

David Bordwell argues that film style clearly changed in response to the coming of sound but that the formal system of narrative filmmaking was itself never seriously challenged, that Hollywood's adoption of sound in fact required only adjustments to, not a fundamental shift in, the prevailing paradigm of film production. "Sound cinema," he writes, "was not a radical alternative to silent filmmaking" (Bordwell 1985, 301). The economic foundations of the industry depended on the ability to make films that preserved through editing the underlying systems of narrative coherence (causality, space, and time). "Given the centrality of editing within the classical paradigm, the coming of sound [did] represent . . . a threat. For both economic and stylistic reasons, the option of editing had to be preserved. The task became that of inserting sound into the already existing model of filmmaking" (301). Thus, sound film, even in Hollywood, remained at base a *cinéma du découpage*, and possibilities opened up by mechanical synchronization of sound were immediately circumscribed by this need to preserve the possibility of editing. For example, although "the shot lengthened to accommodate the speaking of lines" (304), its duration remained relatively short, rarely averaging more than eleven seconds for a film. In other words, according to Bordwell, "what is remarkable about the transitional films is not how long the takes are but how relatively short they are; although the technology permitted a shot to be drastically prolonged, Hollywood remained a cinema of cutting" (304). The end result was that, "by 1933, shooting a sound film came to mean shooting a silent film with sound" (306).

For Bordwell, the basic functions of music in sound film remain what they had been in the silent era: underscoring mood and character; providing suitable diegetic sound when required (fanfares, songs, dances, and so forth); and (especially) ensuring continuity. Thus, music, like sound itself, is essentially "pleonastic"—supplemental, merely added, sounding what is already apparent in the image. Bordwell's historiographic emphasis on aesthetic continuity during the transition of sound is an important corrective to self-serving histories that composers constructed at the time and that have been uncritically accepted in the secondary literature. As one of us once cautioned in this spirit, we should take care not to claim "that Steiner 'invented' sound-film underscoring, as if a wholly separate silent-cinema practice died with *The Jazz Singer*, then came a hiatus (roughly 1927–1931), then came Steiner" (Neumeyer 1995, 64). The composer himself may have had reason to promote such a history, but "in fact a very strong continuity obtained between the musical practices of the silent and sound cinemas." An historiography of the cinema can recognize basic continuities, whether in cutting or musical style, at the same time that it emphasizes significant shifts both within and among practices. Bordwell is correct, for instance, that recorded speech did in many respects replace the function of the silent film's dialogue intertitle. But it is less clear what to make of the presence of music in sound film, where its location

is no longer secure once it has been assimilated to the apparatus. The mechanizing of music's functions brings them under the control of production, but more importantly it also changes the place from where music does its work—and so also the work it can do. On the soundtrack, the relation of music to effects and dialogue is always already constituted through mixing: *this* dialogue and *these* sounds and *this* music have been brought together to produce the sound of *this* film. But just as the formal relationship among the elements of the soundtrack is triangulated by the world we see screened, the soundtrack is also more than a recording of that world. Synchronized sounds are of the image, the sounds of the screen; nonsynchronous sounds, by contrast, have no place in the image: their place is offscreen, imaginary; and that imaginary need not be of the world screened. Paradoxically, it is only when sound is conceived not as a recording but as a representation of diegetic space that it becomes possible to think of music as belonging to another register entirely.

We have argued for an important break in the scoring practice of sound film—the invention of nondiegetic space as conceptually distinct from offscreen space and its practical construction through Steiner's development of close dramatic underscoring based on musical sync points and structural spotting—but one with deep roots, especially stylistic, in previous practice. Given that music became a tangible object when it entered the recorded soundtrack and that it lost its ubiquity once dialogue established itself as the dominant element of the soundtrack, music could not simply exist as it did in the silent era. The crisis in the musical practice arose most profoundly, however, not with the coming of synchronized sound but with the commitment that sound film would be understood as fundamentally continuous with silent film, once it became clear, in other words, that sound film would be construed as representation rather than reproduction.

But what kind of representation? Here, Steiner in fact made a decisive intervention. Steiner's technique of close dialogue underscoring tapped into the very structuring principle of sync points that was coming to define the construction of the soundtrack. From the presumption of such sync points were ultimately derived the three basic oppositions of image and sound that would characterize the practice of classic Hollywood sound film: onscreen/offscreen, diegetic/nondiegetic, and foreground/background. Just as sync points guide the layering of foreground and background sound so that the background sounds seem to belong to the image rather than float above it, so too music finds correspondences in voice and bodily movement that allow it to find an analogue in the image without having an image source for the sound. Music in this way becomes symbolic; it "grants insight into what must otherwise remain unseen and unsaid: psychology, mood, motivation" (Buhler 2001, 47). Ironically perhaps, the control permitted by the mechanical soundtrack gave to music a power it had never held before.

NOTES

1. See Musser 1994, 273–76, 303, 444–47; Musser and Nelson 1991; Altman 2004, 95–115.
2. On the nickelodeon, see Bowers 1986; Musser 1994, 449–89; Bowser 1994, 1–20; Altman 2004, 181–226.
3. On the role of the musician in vaudeville, see Christensen 1912, 38–39.
4. See Musser 1984, 24–44, esp. 39; Musser 1994, 338, 375.
5. See Loughney 2001; Musser 1997, 178; Musser 1994, 88.
6. See Altman 2004, 157–78.
7. Indeed, *The Jazz Singer* was not even the most popular film over the course of its New York run. That honor went to *Wings*. See Crafton 1996, 468–72; Crafton 1997, 516–31, esp. 522–23; and Koszarski 1994, 33.
8. Similar generic sound of a crowd can be heard in the Paris café performance in *The Jazz Singer* and in the extended restaurant scene in the second reel of Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929).
9. On the displacement of labor, see Geduld 1975, 252–60; Kraft 1996, passim; Crafton 1997, 218–21; Hubbert 2011, 115–16.
10. On the structure of backstage musicals in general, see Altman 1987.
11. These sorts of gestures, basic to the syntax of classic sound film, also serve as the basis for analyzing the soundtrack in terms of suture theory. See Buhler, Chapter 15, below.
12. See also Neumeyer 2010 for further discussion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abel, Richard. 2001. "The Most American of Attractions, the Illustrated Song." In *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, edited by Richard Abel and Rick Altman, 143–155. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Abel, Richard, and Rick Altman, eds. 2001. *The Sounds of Early Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Altman, Rick. 1987. *The American Film Musical*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . ed. 1992. *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2004. *Silent Film Sound*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Altman, Rick, with McGraw Jones and Sonia Tatroe. 2000. "Inventing the Cinema Soundtrack: Hollywood's Multiplane Sound System." In *Music and Cinema*, edited by James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, 339–359. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Arnheim, Rudolf. 1997. *Film Essays and Criticism*. Translated by Brenda Benthien. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Barrios, Richard. 1995. *A Song in the Dark: The Birth of the Musical Film*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beynon, George W. 1921. *Musical Presentation of Motion Pictures*. New York: G. Schirmer.
- Boller, Paul F. 1985. "The Sounds of the Silents." *American Heritage* 36, no. 5. <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/sound-silents> (accessed May 23, 2012).
- Bordwell, David. 1985. "The Introduction of Sound." In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, edited by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, 298–308. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Bottomore, Stephen. 2001. "The Story of Percy Peashaker: Debates about Sound Effects in the Early Cinema." In *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, edited by Richard Abel and Rick Altman, 129–142. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bowers, Q. David. 1986. *Nickelodeon Theatres and their Music*. Vestal, NY: Vestal Press.
- Bowser, Eileen. 1994. *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907–1915*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Buhler, James. 2001. "Analytical and Interpretive Approaches to Film Music (II): Interpreting Interactions of Music and Film." In *Film Music: Critical Approaches*, edited by K. J. Donnelly, 39–61. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- . 2010. "Wagnerian Motives: Narrative Integration and the Development of Silent Film Accompaniment, 1908–1913." In *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, 27–45. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- , Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, eds. 2000. *Music and Cinema*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- , David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer. 2010. *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burch, Noël. 1990. *Life to Those Shadows*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cherchi Usai, Paolo. 1994. *Burning Passions: An Introduction to the Study of Silent Cinema*. Translated by Emma Sansone Rittle. London: BFI Publishing.
- Chion, Michel. 1994. *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Christensen, Axel W. 1912. *Vaudeville Piano Playing*. Chicago: [n.p.].
- Copland, Aaron. 1940. "Second Thoughts on Hollywood." *Modern Music* 17, no. 3: 141–147.
- Crafton, Donald. 1996. "The Jazz Singer's Reception in the Media and at the Box Office." In *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, edited by David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, 460–480. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- . 1997. *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926–1931*. New York: Scribner.
- Geduld, Harry. 1975. *The Birth of the Talkies: From Edison to Jolson*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hubbert, Julie, ed. 2011. *Celluloid Symphonies: Texts and Contexts in Film Music History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jacobs, Lea. 2012. "The Innovation of Re-Recording in the Hollywood Studios." *Film History* 24, no. 1: 5–34.
- Katz, Mark. 2004. *Capturing Sound: How Technology has Changed Music*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kraft, James P. 1996. *Stage to Studio: Musicians and the Sound Revolution, 1890–1950*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Koszarski, Richard. 1994. *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lastra, James. 2000. *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- London, Kurt. 1936. *Film Music*. Translated by Eric S. Bensinger. London: Faber and Faber.
- Loughney, Patrick. 2001. "Domitor Witnesses the First Complete Public Presentation of the [Dickson Experimental Sound Film] in the Twentieth Century." In *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, edited by Richard Abel and Rick Altman, 215–219. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Musser, Charles. 1984. "Another Look at the 'Chaser Theory.'" *Studies in Visual Communication* 10, no. 4: 24–44.
- . 1994. *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1997. *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890–1900*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- , with Carol Nelson. 1991. *High Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880–1920*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Neumeyer, David. 1995. "Melodrama as a Compositional Resource in Early Hollywood Sound Cinema." *Current Musicology* 57: 61–94.
- . 2000. "Introduction." In *Music and Cinema*, edited by James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer, 1–29. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- . 2010. "The Resonances of Wagnerian Opera and Nineteenth-Century Melodrama in the Film Scores of Max Steiner." In *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Jeongwon Joe and Sander L. Gilman, 152–174. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Raynauld, Isabelle. 2001. "Silent Sound Screenplays: What Actors Really Said." In *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, edited by Richard Abel and Rick Altman, 69–78. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Slowik, Michael. 2010. "'The Plasterers' and Early Sound Cinema Aesthetics." *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 4, no. 1: 55–75.
- Steiner, Max. 1937. "Scoring the Film." In *We Make the Movies*, edited by Nancy Naumberg, 216–238. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Thomson, David. 1992. *Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Wierzbicki, James. 2009. *Film Music: A History*. New York: Routledge.
- Wolfe, Charles. 1990. "Vitaphone Shorts and *The Jazz Singer*." *Wide Angle* 12, no. 3: 58–78.

CHAPTER 3

OPERA AND FILM

MARCIA J. CITRON

OPERA and film have enjoyed a fruitful and fascinating relationship since the beginning of cinema. In the early years opera helped legitimize film by injecting cultural cachet into the mass medium. A legendary *Carmen* of 1915 epitomizes what opera was doing for film at the time. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille, the film stars Geraldine Farrar, a leading light of the Metropolitan Opera. Like most early filmic versions, this is not Bizet's opera but a story based on the opera's source, the novella by Mérimée. The music consists of a loose arrangement of the score, keeps very little singing, and has only cursory connections with the action. It was wildly successful and ensured that other filmic *Carmens* would soon follow. As of this writing, there are more cinematic versions of *Carmen* than of any other opera.

Another landmark of silent film is Robert Wiene's 1926 version of Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, arranged for the screen by the composer himself working along with the opera's librettist Hugo von Hoffmansthal. Following a growing trend over the past decade, orchestras have offered the restored print of this movie in concert halls with the synchronized live performance that Wiene and Strauss assumed. At one such presentation, by the Houston Symphony in 2009, I was struck by the idea that the opera's creators could tailor their work so imaginatively for another medium.

Both *Carmen* and *Der Rosenkavalier* demonstrate the potential richness of the opera/film interaction. The subject is vast, and scholars have approached it in diverse ways. A general discussion of the field appears in my essay "Opera and Visual Media," written for *The Oxford Handbook of Opera* (Citron forthcoming). The present chapter serves as a companion piece to its Handbook cousin and is more targeted in scope, centered on opera's musical functioning in film (since the present volume stresses music). The treatment here will be selective and depend on which elements and films have received attention in the literature. Although the focus is mainly on the contributions of musicologists, many disciplines have produced exciting work on the opera/film encounter. This eclecticism is an important context for understanding the interdisciplinary texture of the research and musicologists' debt to scholars in other fields.

Exploration of opera and film began outside musicology. Jeremy Tambling, a scholar of comparative literature, authored the first serious monograph in 1987. Entitled *Opera, Ideology and Film*, the study is a thinly veiled Marxist critique of opera and its reactionary values (Tambling 1987). Although it skirts engagement with music, *Opera, Ideology and Film* became the seminal study of opera and film and, perhaps unintentionally, established a modest canon of full-length films of opera. Musicology picked up the thread in the 1990s, a move that coincided with disciplinary expansion into film music and popular music. My article on Zeffirelli's *Otello* (1986) is an early musicological study devoted to an opera-film (Citron 1994). A few years later, *Opera on Screen* explored additional opera-films and grapples with the aesthetic challenges of the hybrid encounter (Citron 2000). *Between Opera and Cinema*, a collection edited by Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa, launched a new stage of research (Joe and Theresa 2002). Here the scope expands to opera in film, that is, opera's appearance in ordinary films (mainstream films), not just opera filling an entire film (opera-films). Although organized by musicologists, the volume embraces perspectives from many fields. In the past decade, then, scholars have explored both types of repertoire (opera in film and opera-film), and matters of genre, definition, and ontology have taken a backseat to aesthetics and interpretation. In recent years, however, opera in film has attracted much more attention than opera-film. There is considerably more repertoire to explore, most of the major opera-films having been studied. Beyond practical factors, however, the preference for mainstream film aligns with musicology's intense interest in film music generally. In this way, the study of opera and film does more than tie in with opera research: it figures in the field's attraction to film music in all its forms.

Other important studies include Tambling's edited volume *A Night in at the Opera*, which covers television formats as well as film but unfortunately had limited distribution (Tambling 1994). More recently, Michal Grover-Friedlander homes in on the voice's affinity for absence and death; she shows its centrality to the mutual attraction of opera and film (Grover-Friedlander 2005). My study *When Opera Meets Film* argues that opera can reveal something fundamental about a film, and vice-versa, and applies the concept of intermediality (Werner Wolf's version) to promote an understanding of the relative roles of the media when they combine (Citron 2010). Also published very recently, the one other major publication on opera and film is *Wagner and Cinema*, edited by Jeongwon Joe and Sander Gilman (Joe and Gilman 2010). This essay collection evinces an interesting shift towards media studies clustered around a figure. Wagner is not just any figure, of course, but a composer whose *Gesamtkunstwerk* lays the groundwork for film and for its interaction with opera. Moreover, Wagner is arguably the most influential classical composer on Hollywood film-scoring practices.

This chapter consists of two main sections. The first discusses important opera-films that have attracted scholarly attention. I will treat them individually and explore salient musical issues that help us understand the hybrid encounter. In the second part, opera in mainstream film takes center stage. Here the organization proceeds thematically as individual films illustrate key concepts involved in opera's musical disposition in cinema.

OPERA-FILMS

Scholars have approached the music in opera-films in myriad ways. No one model has emerged, largely because of the variety of the filmic styles and the operas chosen for cinematic treatment. Directors have come to opera-films from different backgrounds. Some, like Franco Zeffirelli and Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, are renowned directors of staged opera; others, including Francesco Rosi, Ingmar Bergman, and Michael Powell, are noted film directors. These differences suggest that a variety of preferences will be brought to the medial combination and when you consider the range of geographical and chronological provenance, it becomes clear that many variables enter into the picture (literally). Nonetheless, a helpful, if obvious, theme emerges across the studied repertoire: the style of the operatic music influences the way it is used in the film, and also the very nature of the film. As we will see, scholars have had an eye fixed on the premise that certain musical styles fit certain filmic treatments. In most cases the filmmakers also seem aware of this issue, and it appears to be a key reason why a given opera was chosen. In a few cases, however, a mismatch has led to unusual results. Although such films have generated controversy, the contested issues have led to productive insights into the glories and pitfalls of opera on film and have advanced the conceptual framework of the field.

Zeffirelli's *Otello*

Zeffirelli's 1986 *Otello* film provides a look at the challenges of adaptation from opera to film. The movie scored a hit with art-house audiences, especially in France, but fared less well with musicians and opera fans. Sensing criticism from professional quarters, the director barred music critics from the film's premiere. He had reason to do this, for the movie does some unconventional things with Verdi's music. In what follows I will present my published views on the musical problems (Citron 1994; 2000, 69–111). Then we will see a very different interpretation, by Grover-Friedlander (2005, 53–80), who proposes a positive rationale for their use.

Zeffirelli makes numerous cuts to Verdi's score. Not only do they involve entire numbers, such as the "Fuoco di gioia" chorus (Act I) and Desdemona's Willow Song (Act IV), but a substantial amount of connective material. Unlike earlier Verdi operas such as *La Traviata*, *Otello* (1887) is linear in its musical construction. The flow is basically continuous, each musical moment leads into the next, and the semideclamatory syntax binds the whole together. *Otello*'s growing jealousy is carefully paced out in the timing and placement of musical events. In the film, Zeffirelli's cuts cause the jealousy to erupt earlier, and this exacerbates the problem of motivation that already inheres in the opera (and Shakespeare's play). These cuts also affect characterization, and the figure of Iago seems more casual than in many productions. Besides the many bits of critical musical dialogue between *Otello* and Iago that are omitted, the start of Act IV undergoes

extensive revision that amounts to recomposition. First is a passage from several pages in, then a jump back to the opening, then a leap forward to something else, and so on. The whimsical cut-and-paste method verges on the cynical—not because of cuts per se, but because they subvert the musico-dramatic spirit of this particular opera.

Zeffirelli had reasons for the cutting and rearranging of the music. One involves the length of the film. He claims that he wanted a commercially viable movie and that meant trimming the opera so that the film came in at two hours. Although this sounds reasonable, it loses some credibility when one considers that Zeffirelli added music to the film, notably the ethnic dances that Verdi provided for the Paris production of 1893 (in the film they are in Act I). The more important reason entails Zeffirelli's aesthetic sensibilities. A designer as well as director, Zeffirelli is known for an emphasis on visuality that approaches excess, not only in filmic ventures such as *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) but in his staged operas. In his *Otello* film, the disposition of the operatic music conforms to the visual needs of his treatment, but at the same time one can argue that the visual excess reduces the success of the filmic opera. The relationship can also be expressed in theoretical terms that apply to cinema. The issue revolves around the compensatory function of one filmic element for another. The underlying premise is that cinema as a medium constitutes a lack—reality does not appear on the screen but a manufactured world that attempts to pass for it. Scored music becomes a way to compensate for that fundamental lack. Yet when the music itself has holes, as in Zeffirelli's film, music arguably is unable to do what it is supposed to do in film. As a result, viewers may be left with an uneasy feeling with respect to the visual component as they watch the movie.

To a great extent the key issue is what sort of opera is suitable for what sort of filmic treatment—or in this particular case, the cinematic implications of continuous opera *versus* number opera. A sense of verticality replaces the linearity of Verdi's continuous score and produces "a luxuriating in the moment: an aesthetic that ties in well with the filmmaker's propensity for the visual" (Citron 2000, 82). Zeffirelli appears to convert Verdi's opera to number opera, and in the process the aesthetic rhythm approaches that of the film musical. Ultimately, as I suggested above, one has to ask if the result is successful. Although I am seduced by the visual beauty, I believe that the director could have expended his luxurious urges more productively on another opera. Actually, he had already done that in his extremely successful film of *La Traviata* (1982), whose score of individual numbers lends itself to Zeffirelli's visual opulence (see Tambling 1987, 176–93).

In contrast, Grover-Friedlander (2005, 53–80) views the *Otello* film in a positive light. In her monograph on voice, loss, and death, a chapter is devoted to Zeffirelli's movie. She characterizes Verdi's opera as "the quest for perfect song" and contends that the film achieves this in some respects and not in others. Addressing the director's cut-and-paste methods, Grover-Friedlander refutes my objections. In her opinion, the cuts and rearranging pose little problem because they are not the essence of "song" that she considers special to the opera. These transitional passages, or "little songs," do not convey essential information, and thus the new connections that result from the changes do not harm the more fully formed sections of song. What is kept in the "little songs" is sufficient to

impart what needs to be conveyed. I am not sure whether this refers to music, plot, or the larger point about the stylistic goal of song. But even if inferred generally, the interpretation glosses over the awkward seams at the junctures and implies that the larger musical moments are what we should focus on. Perhaps Grover-Friedlander is right. In the event, however, the seams loom larger because of the clumsy reconnections, much like a badly compiled film score. Of course, this raises the question of what is attended to in a film of an opera with a continuous score. Much of this may depend on musical knowledge and the extent to which the visual occupies one's attention over the aural.

When Grover-Friedlander turns to the eliminated Willow Song, a defining number in Verdi's work, one that epitomizes "perfect song," and thus a stumbling block to her theory, she reads its omission in technical terms. She argues that although it is cut, some of the aria is present in the snippets inserted elsewhere in the rearranged score at the start of Act IV. This presence acts to confirm the opera's emphasis on interruptions. It also means that "the vocal narrative is sustained by not sounding the singing voice" (Grover-Friedlander 2005, 79). Not coincidentally, the stress on absence is thematic across the volume.

Beyond our divergent views, it is fair to say that the beauty of Zeffirelli's *Otello* renders it an appealing visual experience. But its success as an opera-film is less certain because of the unconventional, and arguably cavalier, treatment of the music.

Syberberg's *Parsifal*

Syberberg's *Parsifal* (1982) is a very different opera-film from *Otello*. Taking aim at Wagner and Wagnerism, it trades in ideology and deploys postmodernist methods to convey its message. In the process, operatic performance and its conventions are subverted in basic ways. It could be argued that the challenge to opera is Syberberg's main goal, but I see it as one of several strategies to deconstruct and critique Wagner. Tambling had it right when he wrote that "the composer is on trial" in the film (Tambling 1987, 196). And since Wagner represents an iconic operatic figure, it makes sense to challenge operatic conventions as part of the critique. I stress music here, but the larger ideological apparatus probably represents the most striking aspect of the film and the one that has attracted the most attention (Tambling 1987, 194–212; Nattiez 1993, 290–91; Joe 1998, 136–87; Citron 2000, 112–19, 141–60). As we will see, however, the musical issues are inseparable from ideology.

Actors fill most of the main roles and lip-sync to the recorded voices of singers. The character Parsifal is depicted by two actors in succession. In the most sensational feature of the film, the second Parsifal is played by a woman, who takes over from the first Parsifal after he spurns Kundry's sexual advances in Act II. Interestingly, the gender of the two Parsifals moves towards an androgynous position in the middle because of the ambiguous definition of the actors: Michael Kutter looks feminine, and Karin Krick masculine—see Figure 3.1. Another intriguing element characterizes these figures. They are not actors, but people Syberberg met at a dinner party. This avoidance



FIGURE 3.1 Syberberg's *Parsifal* (1982), androgyny of the two Parsifals.

of professionals demonstrates the director's remarkably casual attitude towards performance and opera. Amateurs suffice, and the polish of professionals is irrelevant or even dishonest. Syberberg cast amateurs in other films, which are similarly long disquisitions on Germanic guilt. In *Parsifal*, the bodies of the dualistic title role serve as receptacles for the voice. This arrangement illustrates Carolyn Abbate's notion of ventriloquism, a useful concept introduced into musicology to characterize performative relationships that entail a voice whose source is housed in another body or is ambiguous (Abbate 1991). Furthermore, the two Parsifal bodies are tethered to one voice. In contrast to typical Wagnerian practices, a light tenor voice (Reiner Goldberg) sings the role instead of a massive *Heldentenor*, and its androgyny blends with the visual emitters onscreen. Still, viewers are jolted when they hear the male voice "sung" by the female body. Vocal performance is further subverted by horrible lip-syncing—opinions run the gamut on whether it was intentional. As all these features suggest, the film thematizes separation and the fragmentation of performance elements typically found in opera and filmic opera.

In contrast to the amateurs, professional actress Edith Clever portrays Kundry. She gives a sophisticated gestural performance and is very aware of the "listening body" as a separate entity from the emitting voice. Thomas Elsaesser has noted how the slight hesitations between the vocal sound and Clever's lip-syncing make the sometimes animal-like character more believable (cited in Citron 2000, 152–53). Amfortas is depicted

onscreen by the conductor, Armin Jordan, who exhibits the same inexperience with the lip-syncing. In Act III the actor and the conductor combine in the filmic space. During the Good Friday music, Jordan's image appears on the screen as he conducts the moving instrumental passage. This intrusion into the fiction implies that the music requires work for its realization and allows Syberberg to interrupt the hypnotic power of Wagner's art. In this way it contributes to the film's deconstruction of the Wagnerian myth.

Finally, I would like to comment on the astonishing opening sequence on the soundtrack. Consisting entirely of instrumental music, it forms a three-part layering process that moves from chaos to coherence. First come disjunct primal sounds that arise out of nothingness and prefigure Kundry's moans later in the work. Then there are fragments of the orchestra rehearsal, which sound over images of historical destruction as real and imagined ruin appears in photos strewn behind the title credits. In the third stage we get fully formed music. As the glorious Prelude intones, Syberberg enacts a minidrama that shows the prehistory and foretells what is to come. A flashback to Parsifal as a boy has him watching a puppet show of Kundry's seduction of Amfortas and Klingsor's wounding him. Then time flashes forward as a puppet of the grown Parsifal wounds a swan. Besides contributing to visual time, the theatrical events keep Wagner's music grounded and assist in Syberberg's demythification of the composer. Musically, the director's tripartite structure resonates with the Prelude in an important way. Just as the three sections progress from chaos to coherence, so Wagner's Prelude moves from formative musical material to its realization. Syberberg's preview of the process through compiled musical material becomes a creative way to launch his critique of Wagner.

Rosi's *Bizet's Carmen*

Francesco Rosi's movie from 1983, during a decade when many *Carmen* films appeared, is one of the most satisfying opera-films ever made. One reason involves the film's musical treatment, which accords extremely well with the needs of cinema and the style of the film. I discuss this in *Opera on Screen* (Citron 2000, 161–204), but there are other important studies that explore the film (Tambling 1987, 13–40; McClary 1992, 141–46; Leicester 1994). Although ideology draws some attention in my inquiry, the other studies place it at the center and use it as an organizing theme. Like many opera-films by movie directors, such as Syberberg's *Parsifal*, Rosi's movie presents a point of view and uses the opera to express it. Here it is class and society, not the composer or the opera, that is under interrogation. In the process the director celebrates Bizet's music while simultaneously diminishing its status as opera. This may seem contradictory, but no such conflict emerges in the film. *Bizet's Carmen* works magnificently as opera, as cinema, and as opera-film.

The music comes across as film music more than as opera music; *Carmen*'s score is conducive to that sort of treatment. As *opéra comique* it consists of individual numbers that are separated by dialogue. The close connection with spoken drama, especially popular theater, nudges the work toward the dramaturgy of mainstream film. In addition to musical pieces and spoken text, *Carmen* includes idioms that blend the two discourses,

especially melodrama, where dialogue appears over instrumental music. Of course, this refers to Bizet's first version rather than the all-music version made for Vienna in late 1875, although some differences between them are not so clear-cut. The music features a wonderful discursive mobility as it transitions from one idiom to another, and the flexibility suits the cinematic needs very well. Meanwhile, with an abundance of tuneful melodies, regular phrase structure, homophonic accompaniments, and strophic form, the score displays a delightful popular style. In many places it borrows from cabaret and pointedly departs from high-opera style. We need only think of the iconic "Habanera" or "Gypsy Song" to appreciate *Carmen's* roots in rhythm and dance, topoi that have figured in cinema since the start of sound.

These features enable Rosi's film to feel like a film musical much of the time, no doubt a key reason for the movie's success at the box office. Rick Altman's concept of the "audio dissolve," which he sees as a central aspect of film musicals (Altman 1987, 62–73), figures in several places in *Bizet's Carmen*. The audio dissolve describes a situation in which full-blown music is approached or left by a more remote or skeletal musical element, such as a tune on a radio or the rhythm of clapping. This device allows musical numbers to blend into the prevailing discourse of the film, namely speech, and this promotes a sense of realism. In the Rosi, several numbers are approached or left with an audio dissolve. Although many devolve to the discursive mobility of Bizet's score, some numbers feature an added transitional element, for example the clapping of the dancers after the conclusion of the Habanera and the Gypsy Song.

Another way in which the film works well cinematically involves its approach to opera. Basically, *Bizet's Carmen* downplays opera. Important moments in opera-film are typically rendered by camerawork that expresses their operatic significance. Rosi's film, however, disrupts such support in order to blunt the operaticness of opera. For example, in the Love Duet of Act I between Don José and Micaela, at the culminating final cadence the camera remains at an objectified remove and we see a donkey pass in front of the figures. Not only is this an affront to the supposed love between the two, but it implicitly mocks opera's high-minded ideals. Elsewhere, many numbers feature a heavy dose of noise that competes with the music—an effect that H. Marshall Leicester terms "the musicalization of the noise track" (Leicester 1994, 269). In a sense, Altman's audio dissolve is being applied simultaneously to discursive elements, not successively. This arrangement might seem to be a slap to opera, but in fact the opposite is true: opera's "suppression" leads to a brilliantly successful opera-film. One of the reasons is that Rosi recognizes the musico-dramatic implications of Bizet's populist score and fashions an utterly appropriate cinematic treatment around it.

Powell and Pressburger's *The Tales of Hoffmann*

From several decades earlier comes another populist opera-film: Michael Powell's *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), made in collaboration with screenwriter Emeric Pressburger (the team was called the "Archers") (see Babbington and Evans 1994, Citron 2000,

112–41, 158–60, and Stern 2002). *Hoffmann* represents a sequel to the Archers' hit movie *The Red Shoes* (1948), a dance film that influenced blockbuster musicals such as *An American in Paris* (1951) and *The Band Wagon* (1953). *Hoffmann* also foregrounds dance, to the point where opera-film becomes ballet-film. It reprises the leading dancers of *Shoes*, including Moira Shearer, Léonide Massine, and Robert Helpmann, who fill most key roles of the opera, with the exception of Hoffmann and Antonia, portrayed by singers. As in Rosi's movie, *Hoffmann* takes on qualities of mainstream film, but here opera yields to dance and fantasy. Its whimsical visual look shows the influence of the animated classic *Fantasia* (1940) and the surrealist style of 1920s German expressionism. The presentation of *Tales* in English translation also serves to dilute operaticness and heighten the appeal to Anglo-American audiences.

Like *Carmen*, Offenbach's opera is perfectly suited to this type of treatment. *Les Contes de Hoffmann* belongs to a popular genre (here *opéra fantastique*) and represents a blend of dialogue and interspersed numbers that betrays its roots in theater. Although not as light as his operettas that captured the spirit of the *belle époque*, *Contes* sports a musical style that is tuneful and pleasing. The Archers' film conveys this by avoiding heavy voices on the soundtrack. Even Robert Rounseville (Hoffmann), who appeared in musicals onstage and onscreen, produces a sound that is closer to Mario Lanza or Nelson Eddy than to a big-name opera singer—another way that *Tales* situates itself within popular cinema.

As a ballet-film that uses opera, *Tales* places a spotlight on performance. Lesley Stern coins the term “operality” to describe the “histrionic” quality of the film's emphasis on performance (Stern 2002). Stern, a scholar of visual arts, applies operality to many opera-films—she seems to view the genre collectively against the backdrop of cinema—but the Archers' film is decidedly over the top in the way it presents performance. Whereas Syberberg's *Parsifal* gives us actors as receptacles for the detached voice, the dancing bodies of *Tales* take ventriloquism to another level. Not only does the physical movement “compete” with the heard music, but the voice often occupies an ambiguous location in the filmic space because it frequently is not mouthed by the dancing characters. This sort of separation typifies the centrifugal tendencies of *Tales* that made it a postmodernist work *avant la lettre*. The so-called Doll Number, Olympia's aria “Les oiseaux dans la charmille” (“Birds in woodland ways are winging” in this rendition), illustrates the fascinating dynamic between voice and dance (Citron 2000, 131–33). The coloratura piece displays its virtuosity in the choreography as much as in the music, and when Shearer's steps get difficult she stops mouthing the words. At that point a free-floating vocal signifier seems to comment on what she is doing. We could call the effect voiceover, but that term does not account for the proliferation of personas as the voice assumes a distinct narrative position and interacts with dance, dancer, and the character Olympia. The separation also implies that Olympia may hear the voice when she does not mime the words. In fact, at one point Olympia cranes her neck as if she is listening to something. Of course, another element behind the separation is that much of the melismatic music lacks words, and the absence of substantive meaning allows the music to float and hook up with other narrative functions.

Throughout *Tales* the emphasis on movement is akin to mime. In some places, especially Helpmann's depiction of the four villains, movement turns highly stylized and takes on the melodramatic gestures of silent film. Powell had worked in silent movies when he was young, and he likened the soundless environment of shooting an opera-film to the earlier era. Without the need to synchronize sound and image on the set, both idioms afford an expanded range of visual possibilities. In *Tales*, for example, a few places show the sort of accelerated movements seen in silent films. The director summed up his appreciation for the increased freedoms by dubbing *Tales* "the fully composed film" (Citron 2000, 116). The term also acknowledges the convenience of a preexistent sound stream that allows for the visual experimentation. Playback becomes an advantage, not a drawback.

Most of Offenbach's score does appear in *Tales*, but the film omits several numbers and rearranges others to fit the scenario. Many changes appear in the Prologue and Epilogue, which were modified for the new emphasis on dance. Unlike Rosi's film, Powell and Pressburger's movie does not deploy the version of the opera with spoken dialogue. As we have seen, *Tales* depends on other devices to tamp operaticness and create a populist film.

A dazzling explosion of color and effect, the Archers' *Tales of Hoffmann* is arguably one of the most original films of the 1950s in any genre. Martin Scorsese, a big fan of Powell, is effusive in his praise of *Tales* and notes that it made a huge impact on him as an aspiring director (Scorsese 1992). This is a fitting tribute to the exhilarating opera-film, which is now part of the Criterion Collection of classic films.

Ponnelle's Opera-Films

We close this portion of the chapter with a look at the opera-films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle. Made for European television in the 1970s and 1980s, Ponnelle's films rely heavily on music to structure image (Citron 2010, 97–135). Ponnelle was a famous opera director, and as a trained musician he regularly consulted the orchestral score during rehearsal. His most cinematic opera-films—*Madama Butterfly* (1973), *Le nozze di Figaro* (1976), and *Rigoletto* (1983)—show music as a major impetus for visual decisions. For example, cuts between shots often occur at key musical divisions. Sometimes a musical procedure that marks growth, such as a crescendo or an approach to a cadence, is rendered by a zoom or tracking shot; or an important arrival point in the music is articulated by a major change in the visual language. Such effects occur in every opera-film, but what is striking about Ponnelle's practices is how often they appear. The director acknowledged that visual elements of camerawork correspond to specific musical effects and that this sort of thinking guides his visual decisions. Another aspect of his musically centered films involves a multiplication of narrative strands. Much of that entails the use of "interior singing"—heard music on the soundtrack that lacks moving lips of the character associated with it. For example, in the Countess's aria "Dove sono" in *Figaro* or the start of the Love Duet in *Butterfly*, interior singing expands the subjective realm

of the character by showing thinking or some other layer of interiority. Ponnelle makes judicious use of the device and lets musical affect, text, drama, and interpretation guide the decision of when to use it.

On the whole, Ponnelle's emphasis on music takes precedence over other sorts of aims, especially the sort of social criticism and filmic experimentation seen in other opera-films. As a result he has been passed over as an auteur, for the term typically designates an avant-garde figure. Ponnelle's opera-films are revelatory from a musical standpoint and deserve more attention than they have received (Citron 2010, 134–35). That having been said, they are cinematically conservative in comparison with many opera-films and have had little impact on other filmmakers of opera.

OPERA IN FILM

Because opera has been used in so many ways in mainstream film, it is difficult to articulate a theme with broad application to the repertoire. One possible way to theorize opera in film is the extent to which opera reveals something fundamental about the movie. In some films, opera is so integral that it provides access to the very nature and meaning of the film—what Marc A. Weiner perceptively dubs the “interpretive key” (Weiner 2002, 75). In others, opera is more incidental and serves a decorative role. In the following discussions I will organize the material thematically and elaborate with specific films. As we will see, in most of these movies opera plays an integral role and contributes something essential to the tone or identity of the film. Perhaps it is a matter of self-selection that scholars have been drawn to movies in which opera is a critical element. Or perhaps it suggests quality, that better movies use opera with care and purpose, and scholars instinctively recognize this and want to work on thoughtful encounters of the media. Indeed, this became the impetus for the choice of repertoire in *When Opera Meets Film* (Citron 2010), which thematizes the idea that opera can offer access to the core of some films. A few of these movies will be treated here.

The Opera Visit

The opera visit has been a staple of cinema and has provided attractive opportunities for the development of narrative and expression of meaning. It has helped to define character, signify high culture, culminate an operatic element that pervades the film, present a parallel to the movie's plot, furnish a platform for cultural criticism, and supply an emotional climax for the film.

A famous early example is the Marx Brothers' hilarious send-up in *A Night at the Opera* (1935) (Kramer 1994; Grover-Friedlander 2005, 33–51). Verdi's *Il trovatore* undergoes comedic deconstruction in a climactic sequence that creates a happy ending for the Brothers and the romantic couple they help, who are aspiring opera singers. The opera

house becomes a “site of anarchy” (Koch 1986, 25–26) as class and ritual are undermined by the scrappy outsiders. The performance receives a lot of attention. First there are the antics in the pit before the performance. As the orchestra plays the overture, Harpo smacks a line-drive with a violin to “Take Me Out to the Ballgame,” whose score was inserted into the parts at the end of the slow introduction. At that point Groucho dons a vendor’s uniform in the aisle and hawks peanuts to the crowd (a.k.a. audience)—see Figure 3.2. Once the action starts, several numbers are presented, with malice afoot to dent the self-importance of the work and the ritual. Chico and Harpo frolic onstage in gypsy costumes; who can forget Chico’s lusty clank-clank in the Anvil Chorus or Harpo’s stripping the skirt off a female dancer. Whereas these acts comment on the kitsch quality of the number, others subvert performance and operatic seriousness. For example, Harpo’s manipulations of the backdrop confuse performer and audience when a battleship descends during “Di quella pira,” the tenor’s big aria (Figure 3.3), and Harpo literally climbs the scenery and steals the show. In this subversive display music is not criticized, only the elitist artifice behind it. Yet even as opera is mocked in this visit, the film displays a big dash of affection for the art form (Kramer 1994, 257).

Opera serves important dramatic ends in the visit in *The Godfather: Part III* (1990), the final installment of Coppola’s epic of the Corleone family (Citron 2010, 19–57; also Franke 2006, Greene 2000). The scene is perhaps *the* iconic opera visit in film. Parts I and II of Coppola’s trilogy are suffused with an operatic sensibility in tone, pacing, and ritual; Part III actualizes it through performed opera in the climax at the end. Not coincidentally, the work is Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, an opera about Sicilian



FIGURE 3.2 *A Night at the Opera* (1935), Groucho “at the ballpark.”



FIGURE 3.3 *A Night at the Opera* (1935), *Il Trovatore* with battleship scrim.

codes of justice. These codes echo themes in the saga and affirm the Sicilian roots of the Corleones, whose ethnic identity assumes form in the nostalgic tone of the films. The performance venue, the opera house in Palermo, further affirms the significance of Sicily. Opera is intimately linked to the family through son Anthony, who sings the lead role (Turiddu) and is the reason they are there. Opera's exaggerated musical style, especially in the *verismo* aesthetic of Mascagni, captures the grand emotions associated with the fortunes of the family. More specifically, opera affords the needed majesty for the over-the-top sequence in which scores are settled at the highest level. Parts I and II end with blowout scenes of violent carnage intercut with cold normality that seemingly could not topped. But opera accomplishes just that in the finale and demonstrates its ability to resolve cinematic drama on the largest scale.

Several numbers of the opera appear, although not always in sequential order. That is of little consequence, for what matters is the dramatic power of the editing between the stage and other events. These include actual and threatened violence in the hall, public spaces, and locations in Rome, including the Vatican. We do hear Mascagni's music when the stage is shown, but it also often sounds when other places are shown. Meanwhile, events onstage and in the filmic story are connected. For example, after the Pope is found dead we see the parade of penitents onstage; and after the Archbishop is murdered we hear operatic cries that Turiddu has been killed. The most sensational musical effect comes when Nino Rota's scored music is layered atop the opera music. Just as the opera visit actualizes the saga's operatic tone, so this extraordinary combination

affirms the operatic quality of Rota's evocative score, a key factor in the success of Parts I and II.

The real climax of the opera scene and the trilogy occurs on the steps of the theater after the performance. Here, instrumental music and the absence of voice supply the ultimate meaning. The Intermezzo from Mascagni's opera accompanies Michael's devastation (and ours) after daughter Mary is murdered before his eyes. Utterly moving, it reinforces the Romantic idealization of instrumental music as the best vehicle for emotional transcendence. In this way it hearkens back to the "voiceless" operatic style of much of the saga as feeling trumps substantive meaning through words. As the lush music continues, the past also appears in flashbacks to happy times in his life. It is interesting that the instrumental impulse serves to bookend the opera visit, which began with the mystical Prelude that opens Mascagni's work. This suppression of the vocal is expressed in another striking element of the scene: Michael's emitting a forceful silent scream before he can vocalize it. The glorious mix of presence and absence, sound and silence, that shapes the scene testifies to the power of opera to register what is special about a special movie.

Something entirely different happens in the opera visit in *Quantum of Solace* (2008) (Citron 2011). The film presents a performance of Puccini's *Tosca* at a real location, the Bregenz Opera Festival situated at the edge of the Bodensee (Lake Constance) in Austria. It is the scene in which Bond and his foes come together in a public space. This is no ordinary space, but an open-air arena whose stage literally floats on the water. It comes to symbolize the trope of detachment that characterizes the scene. Although most opera visits idealize the genre and convey its idealizing powers, *Quantum's* visit promotes separation and blunts what can be termed operatic subjectivity—the narrative, performative, and communicative elements that characterize the genre. Bond and the other main characters are present in the hall, but no one is watching the performance. Instead, they are engaged in private conversations via earpieces. In the second part of the scene they are in adjacent spaces, and the super-fast montage during a restaurant chase precludes subjective connection with the flashes of performed opera. The production also contributes to the detachment. The backdrop set, which is always enormous at Bregenz given its super-size stage, features a huge eye that signifies Big Brother in a postmodern age (Figure 3.4). It suggests that the usual specular dynamic of opera is reversed, as now the stage watches the audience instead of the other way around. Bond's position atop the set as he scans the audience for the villains and snaps their photo affirms the arrangement; meanwhile, Bond himself is being watched by a monitor at MI6's headquarters in London. Opera almost becomes superfluous.

The disposition of the music adds to the detachment. An introductory section, with repetitive music by the film's composer, David Arnold, gives us a dry sound environment that separates Bond from the reality around him and sets up his subjective isolation during the opera proper (Figure 3.5). Part 1 of the performance, inside the hall, presents the massive concerted Te Deum that ends Act I. At some places the operatic voice disappears to allow the conspirators' conversation to be heard (by us). This rebalancing among sound elements has been a standard feature of film since the start of the sound