Music Research Forum

WHERE NEW ROADS LEAD: COLLABORATION AND THE (IN)DEPENDENCE OF FILM MUSIC

Book Review of *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, edited by Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford.

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"We are not looking for new forms, we are looking for new relationships," said film-maker Jean-Luc Godard in the late 1960s.[1] Much the same can be said of the scholarship found in this volume: its twenty-one chapters cover familiar areas (such as film noir, *Casablanca,* and the Italian western) and some that may be less familiar in North American universities (early British animation, Indian regional films). Scholars, especially graduate students, will benefit from an underlying emphasis on open questions in current scholarship. Some more traditional axioms—such as the stability of conventional genres, the hierarchical relationship between industry and composer, and the subordinate role of music in film—seem to wobble as one moves through the book.

Editors Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford have organized the essays into four parts: "Making Film Music," "Approaching Film Music," "Genre and Idiom," and "Music in World Cinemas." Each part contains about five essays. Part one, "Making Film Music," often points to the communal dimensions of film production. Ben Winters examines the working practices of Erich Korngold in an environment where multiple composers, orchestrators, arrangers, and production staff contributed to a musical product. The essay raises fascinating questions about authorship and the intentionality of film music as an artistic product. Stephen Glynn weighs the perceived economic drives and artistic merits of the British pop-music film. Interestingly, the Spice Girls' *Spice World*—a reflexive parody of the genre—was a successful highpoint. Success in this case would seem to represent a somewhat comical consensus between industry and audience, both agreeing on some usual shortcomings of the genre.

James Buhler and Hannah Lewis highlight the precarious shift from silent to sound film and add nuances to the story. David Cooper proceeds with a technical history for sound on film. The section ends with Mervyn Cooke's interview with the composer George Fenton (known for his work on the film, *Planet Earth*). Fenton refers to collaborative thinking in the film music process, but also speaks of a composer's intuition to create formal and structural unity.

Part two, "Approaching Film Music," raises similar questions from an analytical perspective. Kate Daubney details practical information about working in archives and personal stories of working with living composers. Furthermore, Daubney also notes a small, but growing series of Film Score Guides that deal more comprehensively with specific scores (more on score analysis, below). In *Casablanca,* Peter Franklin

1 Godard, Jean-Luc, *Godard par Godard: Des années Mao aux années 80* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991 [1985]): 83, quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 304.

considers the relationship between music and subjectivity. During intimate flashback scenes, music creates a "shared subjective consciousness" between viewer and character that retreats from the "outwardly polite conversation of the Café Américain."[2] Guido Heldt notes that film-music theory "is like taking a snapshot of an explosion."[3] Heldt illustrates an increasing spectrum of methodologies in the study of film, a fact that is both stimulating and challenging.

Essays by Miguel Mera and Fiona Ford are two of the most thought-provoking in the volume. Mera examines two recent films by Paul Thomas Anderson, *There Will Be Blood* and *The Master*; films that captivate the viewer physically as much as philosophically. The scores by composer Jonny Greenwood (of the band Radiohead) show how the musical use of material sound encourages an "embodied relationship with the audio-viewer."[4] In a different context, Fiona Ford writes about the actual and stated intentions behind *Happy Feet*. The film's use of popular music turns sexual undertones into "sensory wallpaper" and deracializes black music, Ford argues. While marketed for children, the score belies a target audience of "youth-obsessed middle-aged adults."[5]

In part three, "Genre and Idiom," David Butler, Robynn J. Stilwell, and Caryl Flinn emphasize the stylistic diversity present in three respective genres. Butler suggests that film noir subsumes disparate characteristics and is perhaps more an *ethos* than a style. There was no single approach to its music, which might feature dissonant electronica, neo-romantic scoring, or "jazz" (itself a knotty issue). Butler concludes that the *function* of alienation is more consistent across a number of changing musical and filmic indicators. Stilwell provides a chronological approach to the western. Most interesting is the initiatory role of folksong and cowboy songs, performed by singers such as Roy Rogers in early 'B' westerns. The style was later incorporated by melodist composers such as Dimitri Tiomkin and Victor Young. Song performance "shunt[s] the genre identification towards the musical," Stilwell says.[6] Flinn offers the most deconstructive approach in order to shake past stereotypes about the film musical. Flinn argues against a unified concept of "the" musical and downplays the

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2 Peter Franklin, "Returning to *Casablanca,*" in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 134-135.

3 Guido Heldt, "Film-Music Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 113.

4 Miguel Mera, "Materializing Film Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 160.

5 Fiona Ford, "Parental Guidance Advised? Mash-Ups and Mating Penguins in Happy Feet," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 155-156.

6 Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Western," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 220.

centrality of Hollywood, instead pointing to multi-directional "global paths" of influence between Australia, the United States, India, England, and the Soviet Union. Ironically, songs have received less scholarly attention, Flinn tells us. While songs differ both within and between traditions, they are "at the heart of the wobbly category we consider to be a 'musical.'"[7]

The panoptic view provided by these three chapters can help us think creatively about genre. In some ways, their deconstructive tendencies reflect a challenging fact: genre becomes a moving target as scholarship accounts for a greater variety of film instances. Are we to dismiss the idea of genres with some stable identity, as shared by many film enthusiasts? Is genre coherence mainly a fiction propagated by marketing forces, as Flinn suggests for "the" Hollywood musical?[8] How might genres be positively defined, as seen and felt among many well-versed fans? Clearly, the above chapters reinforce conclusions that stylistic features are not sufficient to foster genre identity. And as seen in the case of *Spice World,* perhaps consumers are aware of *play* within genres and are not mere sheep to marketing forces. Thus, we might further develop views of genre as a fluid series of *interactions*: between industry, producers, and audiences, but also between ideas, values, styles, forms, functions, and technologies. A film might belong to a genre because it *participates in a conversation*: this allows both diversity and coherence. With a more integrative approach, genre is better visualized as a 3-D plane of relations rather than a 2-D continuum.

Three other chapters in the section underline how *perceptions* matter as much as stylistic traits. Stan Link demonstrates that music can delineate the related genres of science fiction and horror, conveying either a sense of awe and spectacle, or menacing hostility, respectively. Krin Gabbard grants that movies are troves for jazz history and reception, even though "jazz" on film has stylistic and racial shortcomings. Paul Wells indicates that in early British cartoons, music often functions "not as a consequence of the action, but as its catalyst."[9] Musical functions and reception clearly have a hand in genre identities, even when music varies within genres, or connects between them.

Part four of the volume, entitled "Music in World Cinemas," offers case studies of films from non-English contexts. Readers will find closer engagement with music scores in this section and, gratefully, the inclusion of several musical examples. Mekala Padmanabhan examines the centrality of songs in Indian regional films (outside of Mumbai's "Bollywood"). Danae Stefanou describes Godard as a "materialist sound artist" in recent work, but adds that this approach is "quite divorced from any traditional

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7 Caryl Flinn, "The Music of Screen Musicals," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 246.

8 Caryl Flinn, "Screen Musicals," 245.

9 Paul Wells, "Brittania – The Musical: Scores, Songs and Soundtracks in British Animation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 248.

compositional considerations."[10] The question—is Godard more like a composer or an anti-composer?—remains open.

Timothy Koozin sheds light on the fascinating collaboration between Japanese director Masahiro Shinoda and composer Tōru Takemitsu. Sergio Miceli speaks of large-scale musical trajectories and "pieces" in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. Ennio Morricone's musical voice, which sometimes contradicted the intentions of director Sergio Leone, was important to the character of the Italian revision of the western. Annette Davison, too, writes of an interesting composer collaboration, where Hans Werne Henze insisted on adding a scene to *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum* in order to foster large-scale musical coherence. Music, in these cases, is anything but a post-production appendage, but is rather a protagonist in the collective, creative process.

Film Music is recommended to scholars, graduate students, and film enthusiasts for the way its essays grasp a diverse range of scholarship while setting current questions into relief. Overall, the volume suggests multiple directions and roads for film scholars to pursue. One direction is to move towards the collaborative, communal, and intermedial aspects of film production and reception. Heldt alludes to this, writing that "the idea of film musicology as a separate field may have had its day."[11] Genre, in particular, is one topic that can continue to foster this discussion.

However, another path might move in a different direction. Despite the evidence of the many pivotal roles of music, there is a striking lack of in-depth musical analysis and score usage (in this volume and in film scholarship in general). Heldt's admission that "only recently has music theory approached film musicology with more complex instruments,"[12] and Flinn's observation that musical songs have received little attention both underline that film musicology is a discipline with its origins in film studies rather than musicology or theory. Film music, of course, is not autonomous. But the deep-rooted presence of music in film means that there are multiple roads to travel: music is a valued medium for the collective needs of film. Or, perhaps film is a lively medium for communicating music… Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford have prepared a wonderful volume to help us watch and listen again.

About the author

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10 Danae Stefanou, "Music, Noise and Silence in the Late Cinema of Jean-Luc Godard," in *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music*, ed. Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 296-97.

11 Guido Heldt, "Film-Music Theory," 98.

12 Ibid., 99.