EDITORIAL
Songs on the Soundtrack

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Abstract

Screen Sound number 3, 2012, includes various approaches to the theme ‘Songs on the Soundtrack’, ranging from textual analyses of specific films, to historical/social analyses of music in popular films, to contributions by musicians and composers about composing for synchronized and non-synchronised films. Additional non-theme articles include a profile of a leading New Zealand documentary composer and an Australian sound designer’s perspective on designing sound environments for screen.

Keywords

Soundtrack, songs, film music, song-scores, songs on screen

Defining Song

While songs have been an important part of the music used to accompany films since cinema’s earliest phase, many scholars have deemed them to be of less significance than original composed film scores. Songs have been used in various forms, including pre-constituted tracks, tracks adapted to complement other musical elements (and/or narrative) and originally composed material. Nevertheless, analysis of songs, their operation and function in the overall soundtrack, their impact on music budgets, and other aspects, has been an important strand in recent scholarly analysis. Indeed this topic was a theme in the most recent annual ‘Music & the Moving Image’ conference (2012) at the Steinhardt Centre at New York University (convened by Ron Sadoff and Gillian Anderson).

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary includes the following in its definition of song: “1. The act (or art) of singing; the result or effect of this, vocal music; that which is sung (in general or collective sense). B. The musical utterance of birds... A sound as of singing” (online). It also includes “a poem, poetry, poetical compositions” and in the contemporary sense (and perhaps contentiously), “3. A metrical composition adapted for singing, esp. one having a regular verse-form, such as composition as actually sung” as well as a “musical setting or composition of the character of or suggestive of a song eg Mendelssohn’s ‘Songs without Words’ 1871” (ibid). The (Australian) Macquarie Dictionary adds “the musical or tuneful sounds produced by certain birds, insects, etc” (2003: 1793) and refers to “the complex series of repeated vocal phrases made by a humpback whale” (ibid), thereby opening out the connection of songs on screen to sound design components. Songs for the screen are crafted in specific ways to suit both the requirements of the film and in many
cases today, marketing requirements, for example, to suit the production of a soundtrack CD.

Songs on screen have certain functions that may dictate how they are composed and performed, for example, theme songs, songs that bridge scene transitions (for example, where characters are traveling, shopping, dressing, and so on). In addition, the work of the personnel involved in the production and/or selection of songs for the screen (notably film) is often designated to a special role, such as the Music Supervisor or sometimes (in the production process) Music Editor.

Some of the most significant scholarly work on the role of song in film focuses on contemporary popular music (due, in part, to the prevalence of this in contemporary cinema). Significant analytical accounts include Jeff Smith’s influential *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (1998). In 2001, Pamela Robertson Wojick and Arthur Knight published their anthology *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (2001). In the UK, back in 1995, Jonathan Romney and Adrian Wooton’s *Celluloid Jukebox: Popular Music and the Movies Since the 1950s* included a preface by Martin Scorsese (an important director in relation to song-scores) and, more recently, Ian Inglis followed this up with the anthology *Popular Music and Film* (2003). Animation film analysis has long recognised the role of songs in film music, as seen in the work of Daniel Goldmark and specific essays in my own anthology *Drawn To Sound* (2010). These and other authors have shown how film today can rarely be analysed without discussion of the songs included in the soundtrack. Notably some Australasian film scores so commonly use popular music tracks and songs that to differentiate the score from songs would mean analyzing a skeletal music track.

Styles of film music dominated by songs have generated various terms, including ‘song scores’ and ‘songs worked into scores’ and the more pejorative term ‘compiled scores’ (suggesting a lack of intervention into the track on the part of the composer). As Martin Marks noted, as early as 1979, film music terminology requires clarification in order to progress the discipline and develop scholarly analysis; a point reinforced by William H Rosar in 2002 and subsequently promoted by a variety of other authors. This issue of *Screen Sound* attempts to add to this literature by focusing on a particular musical element used on screen, and with an orientation to Australasian interpretations.

**Songs on the Soundtrack Issue**

This issue of the journal includes a range of approaches to songs, which also raise issues including narrative uses of song, audience responses to songs in film soundtracks and contemporising early uses of song in non-synchronised (‘silent’) films. Analysing song in film raises the vexed issue of the integration of song to scored cues, and where the song starts and ends and how it continues to resonate through the soundtrack even when it is no longer (actually) heard. Two articles refer to the function of song lyrics and how they work with the dialogue, asking how much we expect audiences to ‘hear’ lyrical content in the context of the overall sound mix. Generic conventions used in films may also play a role in the function of songs. The articles in this issue also indirectly highlight additional aspects that may be the focus of further analyses, such as legal and intellectual property aspects of songs used in screen media and production and budget factors (where songs must be accommodated and costed sometimes at the expense of other music
components). How these aspects function in television and other screen media forms is a useful area for exploration in subsequent research.

In her social/historical examination of song performance in Hindi melodramas, filmmaker and scholar Madhujah Mukherjee examines dominant tendencies of the form and shows how ‘brand Bollywood’ creates new soundscapes for Hindi cinema located in globally dispersed locations, including Australia. Film music genre specialist Philip Hayward analyses the Australian film *The Loved Ones* (2009) in relation to the concept of allusionism, and with particular emphasis on uses of key songs such as Australian country singer Kasey Chambers’ 2001 hit composition ‘Not Pretty Enough’. Eloise Ross focuses on the uses of song by Melbourne film director Ana Kokkinos in two feature films that rely on songs for their narrative engagement.

Two further articles that address the theme of songs are by well-regarded composers and musicians. Martin Armiger, once a songwriter and member of Melbourne band The Dots, has been composing for the screen, radio and theatre since the mid-1970s. His article outlines ten critical observations about uses of songs on screen drawing on the skills that he has acquired through his own practice and as Head of Screen Music at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School. Phillip Johnston is also a teacher (at the Australian Institute of Music) as well as a musician and composer. His most recent work has focused on original ‘polysynchronous’ compositions for silent films, and his article in this issue of *Screen Sound* examines the score that he wrote for use with a libretto by Australian Hilary Bell to accompany performances of Murnau’s 1926 film *Faust* in Melbourne and Sydney in 2008.

This issue also includes two articles that, while not precisely fitting into the issue’s theme, nevertheless refer to aspects raised in the articles outlined above. New Zealand scholar Henry Johnson’s interview with well-regarded New Zealand composer for TV and documentary, Neville Copland, refers to compositional practices that overlap with points raised by other composers. Australian sound designer Damian Candusso gives an industry perspective on issues relating to sound environments by discussing his work on two Australian productions, *Happy Feet* (George Miller, 2006) and *Australia* (Baz Luhrmann, 2008). The article compares the sound design work on a live action film to an animation, and the specific range of sounds and their treatment required for creation of two markedly different locations, that is, Antarctica and Northern Australia.

*Screen Sound* Update

The 2013 issue of *Screen Sound* will include articles addressed to the theme of game sound and music. We welcome ideas and abstracts relevant to this theme, as well as other research articles on Australasian screen sound studies.

I am delighted to welcome a new member to our Editorial team. Sarah Keith achieved a first class Bachelor of Arts with Honours majoring in Contemporary Music and completed a PhD about laptop performance of generative contemporary electronic music in 2010. As part of the PhD project, she designed a laptop improvisation and performance system using Max/MSP. She is a member of the Australasian Computer Music Association (ACMA) and teaches music technology at Macquarie University, Sydney. Amongst other interests, she is researching music
and games, computer-assisted composition and interactive music environments, and has published journal articles in these and other scholarly fields. She will have a key role in developing the 2013 game audio issue of *Screen Sound*.

The *Screen Sound* editorial team and the boards supporting the journal are pleased to receive comments on its articles, direction and scope from researchers in diverse fields relevant to Australasian screen sound.

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