PEARL TALKIES
COMMENCING From 6TH JUNE
GRIHALAXMI
(THE WIFE)
ALL TALKING, SINGING, DANCING
KRISHNATÔNE
IN SIMPLEST HINDUSTANI
WITH RAMPIARY THE SIREN OF THE SCREEN

Rampiyari
Sings

SWEEP AND
MELODIOS
SONGS
WONDERFUL
DANCES

Rampiyari
Sings

A PICTURE
FOR
EVERY WIFE
AND
EVERY HUSBAND

It throbs with human interest
It flames with blazing emotions
It rushes with dramatic conflict
It whirls with breathless actions
It whips with over-whelming force

Songs On The Soundtrack
n3 2012
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Cover image: Grihalaxmi advertisement (from Filmland, v2 n65, June 6, 1931, 14) and screenshot from Salaam Namaste (Siddharth Anand, 2005)
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EDITORIAL
Songs on the Soundtrack

Rebecca Coyle

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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THE ARCHITECTURE OF SONGS AND MUSIC: Soundmarks of Bollywood, a Popular Form and its Emergent Texts

Madhuja Mukherjee

Abstract

This article provides detailed historical context for contemporary Bollywood melodramas, including a handful of feature films shot in Australia. It draws on interactions between technologies and media industries, and popular culture. The first section introduces the uses of music in Hindi films between 1930s and 1960s. Anna Morcom’s (2007) discussions emphasising the ‘eclecticism’ of Hindi film music, dominant tendencies, and modes through which these films deploy certain sounds and songs to produce a recognizable soundtrack are problematised. The second section of this article discusses two major shifts that occur in the patterns of production and consumption of music during the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the formation of ‘brand Bollywood’ in the 1990s. Referring to M. Madhava Prasad’s (1998) formulations, the problem of industrial, and formal ‘mobilisation’ is revisited through screen sound. While Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (2008) study the popularity of Bollywood music, the author presents a more complicated mapping by investigating older musical exchanges. In this section, specific films like Disco Dancer (Babbar Subhash, 1982), as well as films situated in Australia—specifically Dil Chahta Hai (Farhan Akhtar, 2001) and Salaam Namaste (Siddharth Anand, 2005)—are analysed in relation to the musical designs of contemporary Bollywood films. This article locates the soundmarks of a popular form and historicises its new routes. In this context, Bollywood films appear like a productive model that enables us to more generally recognise the function of songs and music in cinema.

Keywords

Bollywood, soundtrack, melodrama, Hindi film music, cinema in Australia

Introduction

This article shows the complex processes through which Indian films deploy disparate types of song and sound patterns to produce a recognizable structure. While the mise-en-scène of Indian melodramas has been debated at length,1 little scholarly analysis has focused on the soundtrack, despite the fact that music is an integral part of the melodramatic mode. In this study, I reconsider popular films and the significance of music in them in an attempt to examine the morphology of

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1 I am particularly referring to the wealth of articles included in the Ravi Vasudevan’s (2002) anthology, and his mammoth work published in 2010, as well as Prasad’s (2001) seminal article.
screen sound. Hindi film music may be taken as a model to understand the function of soundtrack and songs in the larger cinematic contexts insofar as the creative extremes, as well as the uniqueness of the Hindi film soundtrack illustrate the ways in which cinema may use music to narrate the complexities of the plot. In addition, an exhaustive inquiry into the composite structures of Hindi film music facilitates an understanding of how cinema draws upon different forms, and shows its complicated correlation with distinct industries and cultural practices.

Building on this contextualisation, the second section of this article addresses two major shifts that occurred in the patterns of production and consumption of music during 1970s and 1980s as well as later with the formation and global acceptance of ‘brand Bollywood’ after the 1990s. Reconsidering M. Madhava Prasad’s (1998) formulations where he categorises 1970s Hindi films according to the “aesthetic of mobilization”, I re-read this problem of industrial and formal ‘mobilisation’ through the soundtrack to show the network of practices within which a cultural form like cinema is located. Within this framework, on one hand, I comment on the emergent cassette cultures of the period; on the other, I study the deployments of sound and music in Disco Dancer (Babbar Subhash, 1982) to make meaning of new musical transactions. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti’s (2008) anthology on Bollywood music examines its historical significance and its acceptance beyond India. I propose a more elaborate mapping by investigating the customs of musical flows reaching further back into the history of Hindi film music. This context enables a deeper and denser understanding of the changes in Hindi film music and its global communications. This reconstruction of the soundscape of Hindi cinema may be studied through specific texts like Dil Chahta Hai (Farhan Akhtar, 2001) and Salaam Namaste (Siddharth Anand, 2005) in terms of ‘brand Bollywood’ and the structural design of Bollywood films shot in Australia. Ultimately, this article locates the ‘soundmarks’ of a popular form and historicises its new routes. Using this framework and background, the architecture of Bollywood music appears as a productive model that facilitates us to recognise the significance of songs, sounds, and music in cinema in general. The following section discusses melodrama in Hindi cinema arising from other media’s emphasis on songs.

I: The Architecture of a Popular Form: Compositions, Patterns, and Variations

A Short Overview of the Musical Triad in India

One of the significant aspects of early Indian talkies was their connection with the gramophone industry. In the 1920s, gramophone records and film music largely

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2 Singin’ in the Rain (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952—US release) remains a benchmark film that, on the one hand narrates the transformation from the silent era (during which stunt movies were a popular genre) to synchronised sound (when musicals became widely accepted); on the other hand, the film also performs various theatrical influences that are drawn into cinema.

3 All films mentioned here are Indian releases. As well, all films, except those specified otherwise, are in Hindi.

4 With reference to the early influences, it is important to consider an indigenous painting from the 1880s (now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London [ref. no. IS 534-1950/Canto 18]) that depicts Lord Krishna disguised as a woman playing the violin—and not his iconic flute—to entertain his consort Radha.

5 I use ‘soundmarks’ with reference to the Soundscape Vancouver Project (1996) that meticulously recorded (over twenty years) the changes in the environment of the burgeoning city. The physical attribute (‘marks’) ascribed towards understanding abstract ideas like sound and noise of the city becomes a crucial method that makes changes ‘audible’. The notion of ‘soundmarks’ helps to map the variegated sounds and music deployed in Hindi popular cinema.
operated independently of each other. However, at a later stage in the 1930s, with film studios beginning to control the production-distribution-exhibition networks, gramophone companies became involved with film productions. The wide acceptance of both gramophone records and film music in India became momentous in the 1950s post-colonial period with the intervention of radio, which played a crucial role in popularising film songs beyond cinematic boundaries. Gerry Farrell’s (1993) study of gramophone records illustrates their function for urban middle classes and the ways in which musical activities became fashionable in big cities like Bombay and Calcutta via the availability of records (see Fig 1). A new commercial milieu was perceptible as public spaces including the kotha (salon) and the theatre became sites for musical performance. The technological as well as industrial conditions of gramophone recordings opened up new pathways for dynamic exchanges between Indian classical structures and Western instrumentations. By and large, the gramophone industry brought within the public domain new modes of singing, musical patterns and locations of consumption.

With the mass acceptance of the talkies (a popular name for synchronised sound films) it became fairly common to record songs in the His Masters Voice (HMV) studios, and then record them again on the production studio’s disc cutter. Booth observes,

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6 Bombay and Calcutta are same as Mumbai and Kolkata, respectively.

7 While Gerry Farrell’s (1993) article explains this condition, a plethora of narratives (cinematic, literary, and theatrical) depicted the new urban milieu (of decadence), focusing on the kotha as a part of the narratives and presenting the (female) performer as one of the main characters. Films like Devdas (P.C. Barua, 1935), Admi (V. Shantaram, 1939), Pyasa (Guru Dutt, 1957) etc, display such conditions.
Two years after HMV released its first film song recording, the industrial and cultural dynamics among the film and music industries and their audience changed significantly. Those developments led to the gradual emergence during the late 1930s and 1940s of a distinct form: the film song... (2008: 37)

The talkie system popularised a new film form—‘all taking, all singing, all dancing’ films—and completely altered the structures of narrative cinema. Advertisements from the 1930s show the ways in which talkies were promoted as well as their economic and cultural implications. For instance, an advertisement for Alam Ara (“India’s first talkie drama”, 1931), published in Filmland (June 1931, v2 n66: 15) describes it as 100 per cent “talking, singing, dancing”, emphasising the ‘talkie-ness’ of the synchronised sound film (Fig 2). Moreover, the transitional aspect of the period appears to be one of the key elements in these advertisements, as they illustrate the manner in which the talkies were gaining popularity. By the 1940s it was common for films to release songs on gramophone records. With the availability of 78rpm and 45rpm records, the public bought songs as autonomous objects. While HMV maintained a monopoly through this period, nevertheless, in the 1980s, it was through the emergence of cassette-culture and the proliferation of the T-series Company that the mass character of the film soundtrack became evident.8

Initially known as the ‘Indian Broadcasting Company’, All India Radio (AIR) played an important role in this period. After its inception in the 1920s, AIR eventually became a mouthpiece of the British Government. In the post-colonial period one of the major concerns of the Indian Government was to popularise Hindustani classical music through AIR, to produce a form of (highbrow) ‘culture’ and ‘taste’, which resulted in the banning of Hindi film songs that were considered too populist

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8 One Indian film that truly invested in the soundtrack was Sholay (Ramesh Sippy, 1975). Besides its eerie background score, the film’s dialogue became a big hit via the popularity of 78rpm recordings. Also see Booth (2008).
in style and lyrics. The then Information and Broadcasting Minister, in his attempt to ‘cleanse’ the national mass culture, first decreased the airtime for Hindi film songs and then stopped the naming of the films. However, such endeavours failed miserably as Radio Ceylon (of Sri Lanka) began to broadcast Hindi film songs, and one of its programmes—the Binaca Geet Mala presented by Ameen Sahani—became massively popular. Indeed, radio had far greater reach than cinema, especially in the rural and suburban areas of the sub-continent. In time, Hindi film songs became a part of the everyday and left soundmarks on a vast landscape. By 1957, AIR had to reintroduce broadcasts of Hindi film songs, which were aired through the Vividh Bharati (a new channel for popular music). Effectively, it was the radio that produced a larger constituency for Hindi films as well as popularised the notion that spectacular songs and dances could be consumed as independent units. Moreover, by implication, radio also demonstrated that songs were a dominant aspect of popular Hindi cinema. Thus, an overview of the connections between the ‘musical triad’ becomes a practical backdrop against which the popularity of contemporary film music (as well as the mass character of film music that became dominant later) may be studied.  

Music, Songs, and Early Frameworks

The morphology of Hindi melodramas and their uses of music reveal how a popular form consistently borrows from co-existing practices. From its onset, cinema in India (like Hollywood musicals that developed from earlier forms including vaudeville and burlesque) shared boundaries with widely accepted heterogeneous forms like the Parsi Theatre and other popular modes including contemporary theatre, as well as various urban and folk cultures, like Nautanki, Tamasha, Marathi Theatre, and Bengali Jyatra. In short, cinema drew from urban-folk cultures while also changing existing styles of narration and performance. By the late thirties the melodramatic mise-en-scène was marked with prototypes of lighting, movement, as well as overall conventions of studio settings, with ideas of romantic spaces and interiors, acting styles, bodily gestures, etc. Spectacular performance sequences (including songs and dances), extraneous characters not adding to the main plot, comic sequences, rhetorical dialogue, coincidences, non-linear narrative styles, and other kinds of (visual and aural) ‘excesses’ characterised melodrama. Melodrama tackled emotional fervour as well as moral polarities, extreme villainy and resolution of conflict, resulting in the triumph over antagonists by the narrative closure. Ravi Vasudevan discusses how, in melodrama, “a shifting discursive field incorporating philosophical and ethical expressions, emotional excess, comedy, song and dance” (1989: 30) became effective.

Madhava Prasad (1998) states that initially the Hindi film industry adopted a “heterogeneous form of manufacture” (1998: 42) akin to the production of watch

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9 Note that, in the 1980s, every Wednesday, the national TV network would also broadcast a programme of film songs named ‘Chitrahaar’(or ‘a garland/string of images’). Eventually, it played a crucial role in popularising Hindi film music.

10 See Gupta (2005). Note that ‘Nautanki’ and ‘Tamasha’ are contemporary North Indian folk forms with specific styles of performances and uses of ‘loud’ music. ‘Marathi Theatre’ and the ‘Bengali Jyatra’ are regional forms. While ‘Marathi Theatre’ is well-known for its set design, the ‘Bengali Jyatra’s’ forte lies in the exploitation of the stage (with the audience sitting on three sides), and characterisation. All these theatrical forms, which deploy music in defined ways, travel from rural to sub-urban areas, and have been popular across disparate times-spaces. Also see Rajadhyaksha (1987).
making. Building on this, I argue that a ‘heterogeneous form’ of film production in effect produced a ‘composite narrative mode’. To quote Prasad,

Thus, there are an infinite variety of songs, many extremely talented musicians with a tremendous capacity for blending different traditions of music and creating a seemingly endless supply of catchy tunes...

(1998:44)

If we are to suggest that, by the late thirties and early forties a vibrant melodramatic form had become the popular mode of address, then, besides the iconic meaning of images, frontal address and a mixed form of narration, the deployment of music in song form and as background score, along with the uses of some sound effects, became a successful narrative device. Indeed, the song and dance sequences effectively became the most commonly accepted narrative tool. In addition, in the Indian context, the idea of background score and songs often overlapped to produce the distinctive style of popular soundtracks.11

While sound patterns were being produced, experienced musicians were lured away from the professional stage and radio. For instance, before Rai Chand (or R. C.) Boral joined the New Theatres Ltd., he was with the ‘Indian Broadcasting Company’. Boral was trained in North Indian styles of music and worked with classical patterns as well as disparate Bengali folk music and kirtans (Radha-Krishna devotional songs). He introduced the lyrical Ghazal (North Indian) style of singing to the Bengali music scene. Moreover, his handling of string instruments along with the shehnai (Indian ‘oboe’) and the bamboo flute created the unique music of Chandidas (Bengali, Debaki Bose, 1932).12 Biswarup Sen commented,

Raichand Boral brought western instruments such as organ and the piano into the film orchestra and was responsible for introducing new music techniques – his score for the Vidyapati (Bose, 1937) is the very first instance of the use of chords and of western harmonic principles. (2010: 92)

With increasing popularity of the talkies’ ‘singing-dancing’, songs, sound effects, and music were used as score to emphasise the meaning of film storylines. For Indian cinemas, the background music often transformed into song-sequences and, at times, vice-versa. For instance, when in love or while suffering, the heroine (or the hero) would commonly sing a song to enunciate her/his feelings. In such situations, songs would also be performed as the background score, which was a convention in the traditional and popular theatrical forms like Jyatra.13 More importantly in this context, while much of the deployment of songs emerged out of the local theatrical practices, when it came to the uses of background music per se, Indian filmmakers often borrowed Hollywood generic conventions, even though innovations were recurrent and often outstanding. For example, Chandidas applies

11 In his essay on sound, eminent filmmaker Ritwik Kumar Ghatak locates five elements of the sound track, which are incidental noise (ambient), effect sound, dialogue, music, and silence (republished in the [uncredited] Bengali collection [2007] Chalachitra Manush Ebong Aro Kichu [Films, People and Something More’], Calcutta: Dey’s Publishing).

12 Also made in Hindi by the same house in 1934.

13 The Jyatra form employs a particular character prototype referred to as the ‘Bibek’ or ‘conscience’, which enters the stage at crucial junctures and conveys through song the emotional quotient of the moment. In Devdas (P.C. Barua, 1935) the blind singer K.C. Dey functions like ‘Bibek’. In my documentary (2002) titled ‘Jyatra: A journey into the lives of the people’, made for the national TV network, I look into processes through which Jyatra becomes a popular cultural form.
the staccato sound (on a cello) to produce laughter, though at the same time the composer applies kirtan to establish the plot. In this approach, the film exposition is notable. We observe Rami (the female protagonist) busily washing a sari and singing aloud. As Rami looks intently at Chandidas (the male protagonist) and poses in various ways (both to the viewer and to Chandidas who is often outside the frame), Kankanmala (her friend and sister-in-law) enters the scene. Kankanmala voices obvious social concerns about a lower-caste widow being in love with an upper-caste priest. Rami’s responses to this question existing social structures and reduce Kankan’s retreat into a comic gesture. The standard staccato music (regularly used for comic interjections) adds on to this. This uneasy juxtapositioning of the sacred and the profane, or kirtan and genre-music, is also evident towards the end of the film when the song ‘Cholo phire apono ghore’ (‘Let us return to our homes’) in raga malkauns (a serious, meditative raga generally in lower octaves), performed soulfully by the blind singer (K. C. Dey), is followed by ‘concert’ music or a typical musical pattern used in Jyatra. As evident from such examples, R. C. Boral and the director of the film mobilised various cultural signs.

In the early thirties, while at times musical experiments in cinema would mean the complete avoidance of background music, on other occasions, music directors would deploy intricate musical arrangements and orchestrations. They mixed not only Hollywood musical compositions with Hindustani classical ragas (as discussed by Morcom [2007] and others) but also combined indigenous urban as well as folk styles. Thus, the first sequence of Vidypati (Debaki Bose, 1937) depicting Vasant Utsav (Spring Festival) employs an elaborate scheme. It not only demonstrates different musical modes, but meticulously features the different instruments on screen, just as the images are inspired by the medieval miniatures paintings along with the popular Bazaar art to represent poignant moments of love and celebration. Composer R.C. Boral also borrowed the style of the padawalis (ballads) of the medieval poet Vidypati (on whom the film is based), and deployed myths and ballads as he composed for the film, drawing on a large repertoire of music modes as well as instrumentation.

Broadly, comic scenes involving physicality or horrifying moments suggesting fear often incorporated conventions of genre films. Hence staccato and pizzicato were used for comedy, while high-pitched, fast-paced violin and cello were deployed to suggest apprehension. Similarly, while joy was often associated with the sitar (plucked string instrument) and certain set ragas, surprise, or grief would be suggested through a loud sound, randomly struck piano chords or strident cello notes. Besides cinematic references, film music was also making use of another popular style, that is, band music (for instance the Maihar Band) created by distinguished musicians like Alauddin Khan and others. This meant new kinds of sound, as well as a new pool of music, became available for modern urban entertainment. In time, what came to be recognised as ‘Hindi film music’ were exceptional kinds of musical compositions (that may be traced through multiple musical cultures), which both subverted established musical practices as well as exploited elements of it. Thus, an in-depth research of Hindi film music illustrates the ways in which a popular form grew out of contemporary practices of

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14 See Guha-Thakurata (1992) and Davis (ed) (2007) for discussions on popular Bazaar art.


16 I detail this in my 2007 article (see: http://www.jmionline.org/jmi6_3.html)
mechanical reproductions and created new domains for musical interfaces with audiences.

Articles in journals of the thirties and advertisements for records suggest that the public in India (as a colonised country) was familiar with popular Hollywood modes. In the context of colonisation, western classical music was a familiar style, particularly for the English-educated populations in Calcutta and Bombay. By the 1940s, songs were composed in jazz styles, as well as in waltzes, Latin American styles and other popular genres. Music directors were experimenting with western instruments, harmony and orchestration. Popular melodrama used such forms enthusiastically and often employed caricatures of such syncretic forms in a somewhat self-reflexive way. A film like Griha lakshmi (Bengali, Gunamaya Bandyapadhyay, 1944) for instance, includes an elaborate sequence by showing on screen the various instruments that were used (including sitar, shehnai, piano, guitar, tabla [percussion], harmonium, etc.) for the scene as well as highlighting the different musical forms, singing styles and modes of performances. Furthermore, a social-reformist film like Kunku (Marathi, V. Shantaram, 1937) uses ambient sounds as an accompaniment to the songs. The film represents Nira (the female protagonist) as a modern individual who seeks her rights, and enjoys singing along with an entire orchestra that is shown playing on the gramophone record. Developed through a number of sequences, this culminates in her performing with an English song being played on the gramophone. Kunku underscores the complexities of cultural practices during the colonial period as well as the patterns by which filmmakers addressed and negotiated it (Fig 3).

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17 Published in journals like Batayan (Bengali) 1932; Bioscope (Bengali) 1930; Cinema Sansar (Hindi) 1932-33; Chitra Lekha (Bengali) 1930-31; Dipali (Bengali) 1931-1932; Film Land 1931-32; Film World 1934; Kheyali (Bengali) 1932; Nach Ghar (Bengali) 1926-27 and so on, housed in local libraries as well as in NFAI, Pune and BFI, London.

18 Satyajit Ray’s Charulata (Bengali, 1964) is an appropriate example of such transformations during the colonial period. Also see Chatterjee (2002).

19 Note that this is not the same film as shown in Figure 2: ‘Grihalakshmi/Grihalaxmi’ or the ‘goddess like wife’ pitted against a philandering husband was a popular trope in Indian films.

20 Music composed by Himanshu Dutta. The film was also made in Hindi.

21 Also made in Hindi as Duniya na Maane, music by Kesavrao Bhole. See advertisement cited here.
By the late 1940s and early fifties, while the *film-geet* (film song) became an independent spectacular ‘song and dance item’, and functioned in parallel to the story, some elements of the Hindi film orchestration had a cinematic (or specific generic) connections as well. Thus, the exploits of the sound of violin, which dominated classical Hollywood cinemas, became a norm for mainstream Indian films. By and large, in scenes dealing with ‘sad’ moments (presenting for instance death or separation), the melodramatic affect would commonly be produced using violin music. Moreover, by the forties, a recognisable pattern for the Hindi film song was established. It deployed first, *alaap* (prelude), followed by *Gaat and taan* (refrain-verse), along with instrumental interludes. Anna Morcom (2007) after Alison Arnold (1988) analyses the ‘eclectic’ tendency of this pattern. For instance, Morcom discusses particular films including the groundbreaking *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957) in detail. She examines the climax of the film, where Radha (the mother) sings ‘O mere lal a ja’ (‘O my son come to me…’) for her son Birju. The lyrics as well as the visuals demonstrate the intense love of the mother for her fugitive son, and her powerlessness to protect him. The song is a mix of several *ragas* (or what was popularly referred to as mixed-classical). Morcom illustrates how, in the last refrain, the song moves into a ‘coda’ and there is a structural shift in the tone. While this kind of mixing of North Indian classical and Western musical patterns was common in several films (including another landmark film *Mughal-e-Azam* (K. Asif, 1960), Morcom disregards other scenes from *Mother India*.

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22 For instance (as communicated personally by the eminent film historian Ashish Rajadhyaksha), the well-known re-recordist of Hindi cinema, the late Mangesh Desai had said that, “every time a woman says that ‘main ma banne wali hoon’ [I am pregnant] I add eight frames of a sound that goes ‘dhaaanning’.

23 Music by Naushad Ali.
that deploy disparate indigenous musical practices, including the shehnai (often played during marriage) in scenes of separation and desolation.²⁴ Such scenes emphasise the fact that there is not only a mixing of ragas and Hollywood style music, but also the presence of a more complicated deployment of sound influenced by multiple local and international references. Thus, the Holi (festival of colours) sequence in Mother India is elaborate, visually displaying instruments (like dhol/drums) then moving on to the song-dance sequence, which also involves Radha’s memory (thus, a flashback/dream sequence is inscribed). While this song includes diverse singing styles, and draws on semi-classical as well as Radha-Krishna love songs, it also narrates Birju’s story and ends with a fight with sticks.²⁵ Clearly, Hindi film songs serve manifold purposes, which include narration of the plot and the establishment of the mood.

For the background track, chromatic flutes, moving strings, or the romantic sound of the piano, indigenous instruments, accompanied by female-chorus were utilised regularly. Morcom discusses how, around the 1950s, the film song orchestration expanded. As in Hollywood films, the chorus was chiefly used to produce a sense of large scale. In short, a sense of epic grandeur was produced through the music, just as the mise-en-scène of the major films attempted such a style. Nevertheless, a particular sequence of the epic Mughal-e-Azam deploys an extraordinary rendition of the raga Sohini (Sohini generally uses higher octaves, and is associated with sensuality; it is rendered at pre-dawn) by the eminent classical exponent, Bade Gulam Ali Khan, in the scene where Anarkali (the female protagonist) meets Salim (the male protagonist) in his chamber.²⁶ This startlingly languid sequence, devoid of any activity as such, frames striking silhouettes of the character of Mian Tansen (the court musician of Emperor Akbar) singing almost to himself and juxtaposes those with images of the falling petals from the ‘Anarkali’ branches (the pomegranate tree), to evoke a dreamlike sense of love and longing. Thus, the architecture of the Hindi film music, as mapped through certain well-known films, demonstrates the multiple layers of a grand soundscape. Additionally, this varied, mixed, and mutated condition of the early frameworks shows the basis on which the music in the era of transnational flows is fabricated.

The Dominant Structures of Music and Melodrama

Writing about the melodramatic mode and Awaara (Raj Kapoor, 1951), Ravi Vasudevan (2002) examines the iconic function of the female protagonist through the role of (young) Rita’s photograph in the narrative. A film about a young man’s (Raj) claims for his legitimate rights through his illegal modes of operation, Awaara remains a signpost of the social-melodramas and was popular across Europe (see Fig 4). In the critical scene, Rita’s photo hangs as a moral peg in Raj’s shanty room (and also recurs in the final confrontation scene with the father). In this scene, Raj arrives from ‘abroad’ (in reality, jail) and he explains to his mother how he is involved with an ‘export-import’ business. However, he confesses before the image of the young girl, and the iconic framing of Raj looking at Rita’s photo underlines this. Later, as Raj rushes out, his mother is shocked to find a gun in his suitcase.

²⁴ Note that an earlier film like Devdas (P. C. Barua, 1935) uses shehnai to connect disparate scenes of separation and desperation.

²⁵ Also note that, playing and moving in circles with small colourful sticks is a West Indian dance form (garba).

²⁶ Music by Naushad Ali.
The camera tracks from the mother (Leela) to Rita’s photograph to underline the journey from innocence to crime, which then dissolves into a cabaret. Such mixing of codes, generic and emotional elements, make the social films of the 1950s ‘an imaginary space’. However, for the history of popular films, the uses of sounds in this scene become crucial. For instance, the cabaret music precedes the image, and overlaps with the mother’s face to emphasise the theme of criminality as well as Leela’s part in this ‘plot’ of crime and punishment, which comes to light only towards the end of the ‘narrative’. Therefore, music acts as a forceful tool within the narrative and predicts the dénouement right from the outset. Indeed, one of the most significant melodramatic moments of Awaara is the scene where (on a rainy night) heavily pregnant and helpless Leela lies alone in bed. Judge Raghunath (her husband) returns home reeling under the suspicion that the unborn child (Raj) is not his. Later, Leela is thrown out of the house and this is conveyed via a series of (low angle) iconic images shot in high contrast. Added to this, the powerful sound of the strings produces deep a sense of fear and loss. This moment of acute vulnerability and injustice is furthered highlighted when the images of the rain-drenched streets are juxtaposed with the song of the labourers (singing about the plight of mythical Sita from Ramayana). The Ramayana trope in Awaara (as evident in the court-room scenes as well), along with the epic dimension of the mother’s suffering, are effectively explored through the unique deployment of music.

Figure 4: The iconic publicity image of Awaara, cover page, Film India, October, 1950.

An earlier film like Barsaat (Raj Kapoor, 1949) becomes important in this context for three reasons. First, in a self-conscious manner, the film exploits the violin (as opposed to sitar) as the ‘sonic signifier’ of romance and love. Thus, every time the hero plays the violin in an enigmatic style, the heroine is magically drawn towards

27 Music by the Raj Kapoor Films regular, Shankar Jaikishan.
him. In effect, it is the violin that produces the intensity of longing and desire. Second, Kapoor narrativises this design and creates three sequences to make meaning of the music. Consequently, the heroine suffers in love and expresses joy every time the violin is played. Clarifying that it is a violin and not a sitar, Pran (played by Kapoor) admits it is not his tune, but a cluster of notes that he has picked up from a nightclub. Eventually, Kapoor reveals the actual violin player (Joe Menezes, a Goan musician) thereby indicating multiple musical influences. Third, in a poignant moment, Reshma (the female protagonist), after hearing the music, rushes towards Pran and embraces him passionately. This shot attains historical impact because it is the very moment when the well-known RK Films logo or the emblem of Raj Kapoor’s productions is figuratively formed within the film. More important perhaps, post-Barsaat playback singers like Lata Mangeshkar and others, emerged out of anonymity to receive their due recognition and become legends in their own times. In summary, post-Barsaat musical narratives within melodramas and the deployment of sound and music—including songs—were transformed.

In one of the crucial sequences, when Reshma’s marriage is being fixed to someone other than Pran, she pines for him. As she lies on the upper bunk of the bed (with her father sleeping on the lower bunk), the camera tracks in for closer shot, just as the strings (played by Pran from outside) sound more intense. This juxtapositioning of close-ups (shot in high contrast, while the characters are placed in a setting that uses value-laden objects/props) along with the strident string chords produce one of the most memorable scenes of Indian cinema. In this scene, as for previous occasions, upon hearing the tune Reshma rushes out. Pran is seen (in a shot that uses doors to create the sense of frame within frame) playing a variation of a Franz Liszt Hungarian Rhapsody, while the lights reflected back from the waters highlight the unease. Reframed by a series of doorways, Reshma darts in and embraces Pran passionately. A sharp cut to a closer shot is supported by music, which stops abruptly to underscore (through its absence) the unique seductive quality of the composition. This iconic image of Pran, holding the violin in one hand and Reshma on the other, is later taken up and its abstract form eventually became the logo of the company for its later films (Fig 5).

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28 Visit http://www.oup.com/us/behindthecurtain for revelatory interviews with musicians. Note that Goa was a Portuguese colony and became part of India in the early 1960s. Portuguese influences on Goan architecture, food, culture, and music make it somewhat distinct from the English impact in other parts of the country.

29 Note that the iconic RK Films logo is a part of popular cinema-myth, and has been quoted in a film like Saawariya (S. L. Bhansali, 2007). However, this logo does not figure in Barsaat (or earlier); instead it is visually formed within the narrative of the film.

30 The film itself does not give any credit to the singers like Lata Mangeshkar, who did playback singing for the heroine. I have discussed the subject of playback singing in Indian contexts in my 2010 article.

31 In Barsaat only the words ‘R K Films’ appear on the screen, instead of the above discussed symbol.
Further important in this context is Kapoor’s reworking of the Hungarian Rhapsodies in this and in other films. The sequences involving the introduction of love (where Pran explains the tune as well as makes the distinction between a sitar and a violin), and the recognition of desire and its intensity through music, followed by separation as well as mis-recognition (where Reshma confuses the actual violin player, who is playing in the dark, as Pran), demonstrate the significance of music in melodrama. While Kapoor applies the score as a narrative element, Barsaat also illustrates the self-reflexive trope in popular melodramas. Kapoor takes a popular Western composition and treats it within a specific Indian context (as well, describes it to Reshma and consequently to the audience) to underline the function of music in cinema (by presenting Joe Menezes in the climax).

Besides such massively popular films it is essential to consider numerous other important films that utilise sound and songs in engaging ways, though somewhat differently from the normative frameworks. For instance, while the orchestration of Hindi popular cinema often produces a sense of largeness or greatness (as described by Morcom, 2007) there are a host of other instances where there is restraint, as in films like Pyaasa (Guru Dutt, 1957) or Bandini (Bimal Roy, 1963). Bandini, in its climactic (murder) sequence, simply treats ambient (mechanical) noises to create melodrama and emphasise suspense, grief, trauma, and loss. As the suffering female protagonist, Kalyani discovers the truth about her lover, and her silhouette is juxtaposed with the screeching noise of the machine (coming from outside) that becomes dominant (Fig 6). Kalyani encounters a series of doubts before (somewhat unwittingly) deciding to kill the woman who is now her ex-lover’s wife. This point (or the premise of the film) is presented through a dialogue-less

32 Apparently reworked in Mera Naam Joker (1970) and Bobby (1973) as well.
33 ‘Mis-recognition’ is a significant trope of melodrama, and the ‘mis-recognition’ of the tune as well as the character becomes a fundamental intervention of Barsaat.
34 Music for both the films was composed by S. D. Burman.
35 The film has a rather elaborate plot spread out over disparate spaces and times. At this point, Kalyani, eventually arrives to the city after the death of her own father (having awaited for her revolutionary lover’s return to the village for long). While working as a nurse in the city hospital, she discovers that the angry woman she is caring for is in reality her lover’s
sequence and the unprecedented association of silhouettes (close-ups) with noise. In short, despite a set pattern being conventionally deployed to express emotions (such as using song melody in romantic and emotional scenes), there were remarkable variations that defied standard codes. Moreover, complicated instrumentation, inclusion of *tabla* or other drums, bamboo flute and brass instruments, as well as large string arrangements that integrated violins, cellos, *sitar*, *sarod* (string instrument) and guitar, created a complex soundscape of Hindi musicals.

Figure 6: A frame from *Bandini* highlighting Kalyani’s silhouette juxtaposed with mechanically produced sound.

**II: Transformations of the Sonic Paradigm: Technologies and Cultures**

Writing about the modes of representation of the 1950s, Ravi Vasudevan shows how

> [T]he codes of American continuity cinema are also used in the Hindi cinema of the period... In fact, these codes are not absent, but they are unsystematically deployed... (2002: 105-6)

Vasudevan’s analysis of the nine shots of *Andaz* (Mehboob Khan, 1949) demonstrates the mixing of the iconic, tableaux and continuity shots. I wish to use this ‘method of visual analysis’ to study the ‘melodramatic soundtrack’ and the interface between disparate sounds. *Andaz* is regarded as the pivotal film through which the different aspects of Hindi melodrama may be examined. As described by Kishore Valicha (in Willemen, 1993) *Andaz* was one of the early films that negotiated new demands for representation of urban sophistication, including activities like playing the piano, riding horses and playing badminton. While *Andaz* popularised the love-triangle plot, at the centre of its narrative lay the question of family in the post-colonial period.

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wife. Later, she somewhat unconsciously poisons her to death. The film narrates Kalyani’s life in flashback after she has been jailed for her crimes.

36 Music composed by Naushad Ali.
Returning to the shot-by-shot analysis of a particular sequence, it is engaging to read the curious combination of music and sounds in it. For instance, we observe Nina’s (the female protagonist) friend dancing to musical compositions produced by instruments of Central-Asian origin. These shots are iconic and are largely outside the diegetic flow of film. These are then followed by shots and reverse-shots of Dilip (the second lead) playing the piano and singing ‘Tu Kahe Agar’ (‘If you insist’). Curiously, while various string instruments and drums are audible, what remains elusive to the ear is the sound of piano. This structure is evident in other songs as well. Willemen (1993: 59) writes, “Dilip Kumar plays the piano and a whole orchestra can be heard striking upon the soundtrack, but no piano”. The moot point is that the ‘mixing of codes’ and the said discordance are discernible on the soundtrack as well. Additionally, such mixing of sound codes effectively produces the noises and unease of our post-colonial modernity.

Thus in Andaz piano becomes a principal property within the mise-en-scène; moreover, if Andaz is a story of emergent urban cultures, and Dilip is presented as the social climber without any aristocratic background, then piano appears like a significant sign that represents this social (dis)order. Dilip appears to be charming because he plays the piano, and therefore a number of sequences underline this. Yet, oddly in the above-mentioned sequence, while Dilip sings his heart out, and while the sitar, tabla and other instruments, play joyously in the background, the piano returns only in the interludes. While such a musical approach becomes a conspicuous example of uneasiness regarding urban practices, it also becomes a dominant paradigm for other Hindi films, where the piano has a tremendous visual meaning, suggesting modernity, youth, romance, grandeur, elitism and thus is a crucial thing to be seen. Yet it is rarely audible along with the romantic melodies.

![Publicity still from the film Andaz.](image)

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37 For discussion on India politics and its uneven modernity, see Chatterjee (1997).

Intriguingly, the object of desire shifts from piano to the electric guitar in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{39} Thus (the white) piano of Hindi films almost disappears from the mise-en-scène, to be replaced by the string instrument associated with youth.\textsuperscript{40} This certainly is a crucial turn if we consider the images of the enigmatic flute as the ethereal love symbol (used by mythical Krishna), and thereafter the uses of violin in \textit{Barsaat}, followed by deployment of piano as the sign of modernity. Therefore, the exploits of the electric guitar must be seen as a paradigm shift because of the kinds of sounds it produces and the visuals it creates. It came to represent a specific kind of contemporariness that is relevant until today. Furthermore, with the introduction of electronic keyboards, sequencers, and synthesizers, the sound graph of Hindi films, and the processes through which music was produced, was completely transformed. In a later phase too, ‘samplers’ recreated the sound of traditional strings and percussions. To quote accordionist Sumit Mitra,

\textit{Samplers... changed everything. They started using keyboards to cover everything, and acoustic instruments became much less. The violins, cellos, all those things were replaced slowly, slowly.} (cited in Booth, 2008: 250)

While it may be argued that it was R. D. Burman’s music (often borrowing African percussions and Latin American strings) that expressed the “radical new versions of pleasure, sexuality, and desire” of the seventies (Sen, 2010: 95), then the music of \textit{Disco Dancer} (1982) by Bappi Lahiri in reality underscored the “vast network of inflows and outflows” (Sen, 2010: 88) of Indian popular music as well as the growing cassette culture.\textsuperscript{41} Within this framework, one needs to connect issues of musical modes to its industrial aspects and analyse histories of transformations of both the soundscape and modes of consumption. For instance, in \textit{Disco Dancer} the hero fights his rich opponent to become a successful singer and the specific uses of the guitar within the narrative show the mobilisation of the dispossessed. Moreover, perhaps for the first time in the history of popular Indian cinemas, a choreographed and stylised fight sequence was edited to the musical beats, just as a song-less number showcased the new ‘disco’ sounds. Clearly, ‘disco’ became the defining sound of the 1980s, and independent ‘disco’ moments in the film (outside the narrative logic) show the shifts from sweet melodies to abstract (and mechanically) produced sounds. Nevertheless, in the climax of the film, the mother is (accidentally) electrocuted by the new sound machine, indicating apprehensions about emergent sound technologies. Disco music, the lights, the mirror ball, the electric guitar, and Mithun Chakraborty, the dancing star of the film, suggest violent ruptures within existing designs, which seem to be deeply connected to the dystopic (post-emergency) political scenario, as well as to youth, exuberance, anger, and the burgeoning cassette industry.

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\textsuperscript{39} Within the traditional (though disparate) Indian modes of performances, one is supposed to sit and perform (as in \textit{sadhana} or worship). So when singers stood and played the (electric) guitar, it signified a major break within Indian cultures of performance.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Guddi} (Hrishikesh Mukhejee, 1971) provides a scathing critique of the industrial structure as well as such playback singing and non-sync use of music.

\textsuperscript{41} While within the schema of this paper there is no scope to elaborate on R.D. Burman’s music, nevertheless, it must be noted that songs like ‘Dum Maro Dum’ (‘inhale [marijuana]’) in the film \textit{Hare Rama Hare Krishna} (Dev Anand, 1971) were extremely popular and opened up new routes for Hindi film music; just as the image of the female star Zeenat Aman strumming the guitar in the film \textit{Yaadon Ki Baaraat} (Nasir Hussain, 1973), produced its own resonances. Quickly, lengthy musical competitions (as shown in films like \textit{Hum Kissie Kum Naheen} (Nasir Hussain, 1977) as well as in \textit{Karz} (Subhash Ghai, 1980) etc.) became important aspects of Hindi film narratives.
Writing about the ideology of Hindi cinema, Prasad (1998) describes the films of 1970-1980s along the lines of an ‘aesthetic of mobilization’. Part II of the book addresses the progress in the film industry during the period of political turmoil from late-sixties to mid-seventies. While Prasad shows how this led to the formation of middle-class parallel cinemas, he suggests that popular cinema “went through a phase of uncertainty before regrouping around a figure of mobilization, a charismatic political-ideological entity embodied in the star persona of Amitabh Bachchan” (1998: 24). Prasad reads the star identity of Bachchan as an outsider with proletarian traits and leadership qualities. The Bachchan figure, which was identified with a primordial anger, displayed populist leadership qualities.42

This reconstitution of the industry appears to be an interesting backdrop against which a film like Disco Dancer may be read. Note that, in 1982, colour TV was introduced to the Indian public. More important, during the 1980s rapid changes took place as Bachchan became a Member of the Parliament after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination, while his popularity as a star began to decline. After a decade of unprecedented success, his films fared poorly. Moreover, by and large it was a weak decade for popular cinema before it reorganised itself as a global product in the post-liberalisation era in the 1990s. In addition to this, as shown by Peter Manuel (1993) this period was marked by the changes within the music industry with the introduction of cassette tapes, which assisted the mass distribution of music and bolstered the music industry. Manuel writes how the economic policies of the late 1970s led to the phenomenal growth of the cassette industry in India. The Indian consumer-electronics industry burgeoned during this time. Manuel writes that, “Sales of recorded music - almost entirely cassettes by late 1980s - went from [USD] $1.2 million in 1980 to $12million in 1986...” (1993: 62) Indeed, cassette technology enabled the successful reorganisation of the music industry in India. In the early 1980s ‘two-in-ones’ (recorder cum player) were a ‘craze’ just as the album Disco Deewane (1981, music by Biddu—see Fig 8) ensured that what constituted the idea of music in the sub-continent would now be understood differently (as electronically produced sounds). With the arrival of cassettes, ‘music’ became available in the local grocery shops. Thus a film like Dance Dance (Babbar Subhash, 1987) not only used the star value of Chakraborty, but also narrated the super-success of T-series Cassettes Company and its proprietor Gulshan Kumar.43

42 I have discussed elsewhere (2002) the meaning of the star persona of Bachchan.

43 See Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2007) for a critical reading of such industrial shifts.
Figure 8: Poster and cassette cover for Disco Deewane featuring the popular Pakistani singer, the late Nazia Hassan.

Moreover, the sound (as well as cries and noises) of this ‘aesthetic of mobilization’ becomes crucial in this context. The piano used in the films of the 1950s and sixties gives way to electric guitar in the 1970s and eighties, thereby producing new images and re-presenting ‘the dispossessed’ through sound design. It was a period of intense political and ideological shifts beginning from the mid-sixties. Since an authoritarian and populist government oversaw this situation, the reorganisation happened in a somewhat disaggregated form in what Prasad describes as the “moment of desegregation” (through chapter 5). The political system was able to either assimilate or marginalise radical challenges through a populist mobilisation. Such developments, to summarise Prasad (1998), were made possible by a combination of a widespread politicisation of cinema audience.

In effect, Disco Dancer reproduces the ‘plot’ of Bachchan cult film Deewar (Yash Chopra, 1975) by bringing together issues of mass discontent and by contemporising it. Deewar addressed existing topics of social inequity in the context of confusions and disillusionment of the post-Independence era. In Deewar, Vijay (the protagonist) is posited as an archetypal social outsider. Deewar became symptomatic of the nation gearing up for emergency (1975), while the tattooed body of Vijay was an index of the physical as well as psychological distress of the masses. While the wounded body ‘embodied’ the social history of the nation, the film recounted the post-independence frustrations in familial terms. As in Deewar, Jimmy (the protagonist) in Disco Dancer lives with his mother who has been jailed for crimes she has never committed. Jimmy is traumatised by this childhood memory of his mother being misrepresented as a chor (thief) and waits for the opportune moment to take his revenge. Since the offenders of his mother’s honour come to control the music industry, Jimmy’s battle is eventually played out on the musical stage. This appears like the mobilisation of the music aesthetic as well, since the dispossessed returns with vengeance, however, the anger is displaced onto the new musical terrain, and is enacted through the deployment of particular kinds of electronic sounds (such as the sharp sound of electric guitar), as well as the overall restructuring of the mise-en-scène.

There are other plot elements like the ‘absentee father’ along with the presence of a ‘father figure’ that recur in Disco Dancer. As well, the memory trope that haunts Vijay (‘mera baap chor hain’ or ‘my father is a thief’) seems to return to Jimmy with a certain degree of difference (as he imagines the neighbours crying, ‘ma chor, beta chor’ or ‘the mother is a thief, the son is a thief’).
The core question is: how is the plot element, which is narrated through the mise-en-scène in *Deewar*, re-enunciated through music in *Disco Dancer*? First, one needs to consider the fact that, in the eighties, the film industry as a system had become fragile. Second, it was the moment when the circulation of B-Movies increased on the mass scale, and disparate mass cultures represented through television and cassettes became extremely popular.\(^{45}\) Within this changed scenario of reception, *Disco Dancer*’s resources are not invested in more elaborate set designs (like the interiors spaces of *Deewar*) or even character development, memorable dialogue and major stars. Instead, it exploits the new and easily available sounds to make meaning of the political discordance. For example, beginning with the story of the alleged theft of a toy guitar, the film narrates the plot of the swift rise of a street singer/dancer. In its attempt to displace the revenge story onto the musical site, the film introduces new cinematic modes (for example, repeated shots of the feet of the actors/dancers as opposed to the usually dominant close-ups of faces) and innovative editing norms (such as repeatedly cutting along with the musical beats instead of dialogue cues). Thus, in the sequence where Jimmy goes for his first big performance, on his way he is stopped by his rivals. As the goons circle him, they snap their fingers and count the beats (like sixteen, which are then multiplied by two and at the point of spiky tension divided by two or four). Initially Jimmy protests meekly, however, after his guitar is smashed, he rises (underlined through slow motion shots) and starts snapping his fingers. Thereafter, he gradually starts counting the beats (emphasised by echo-effect) and eventually beats up the rogues before he proceeds into the performance. While the entire scene is edited according to the beats, the use of starburst filters (to enhance the lighting) creates the impression of disco on the streets.\(^{46}\)

This choreographed action-sequence mirrors the dance sequence that follows. The film also demonstrates the emergent mass cultures through scenes showing Jimmy’s star-value via related consumer merchandise such as Jimmy ice-cream, tee-shirts, fabric, perfume and so on. Chakraborty’s star persona, labelled ‘poor man’s Bachchan’ by the popular press (and also India’s Michael Jackson because of his dark skin and dancing skills), was like the black singer who was attempting to disrupt the social injustice plot through music.\(^{47}\) Thus the architecture of the soundtrack in *Disco Dancer* and *Dance Dance* become significant examples of the crucial changes within the cultural industries, mass media, broader political agendas, as well as issues of music aesthetics and its many trajectories.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{45}\) Also see Valentina Vitali (2011) for a discussion on B/Horror movies in the 1980s.

\(^{46}\) Another instance of ‘disco’ on the streets comes up in the film *Saaheb* (Anil Ganguly, 1985), in which Bappi Lahiri mixes disco with Bengali folk music to produce a popular number.

\(^{47}\) Considered a trilogy, the third film in the series, *Kasam Paida Karne Wale Ki* (Babbar Subhash, 1984) features a song ‘Jeena Bhi Kya Jeena’ (‘How do I live’) that was apparently modelled on Michael Jackson’s video ‘Thriller’.

\(^{48}\) In recent times, musical elements from Chakraborty’s films, created by Lahiri, have been sampled in popular American music. For instance, in 1988 Devo, a United States musical group, produced the song ‘Disco Dancer’ after being inspired by the song ‘I Am a Disco Dancer’ from the film. A British-Sri Lankan musician has also reworked the song ‘Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy’ in 2007.
The Sound of South: Emergent Codes and Global tracks

Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (2010) introduce their book on the travels of Hindi song and dance by noting how the elements of song and dance in Hindi films are “the single most enduring feature of Hindi cinema…” (ibid: 1). Furthermore,

_Bollywood cinema survives for its viewers as a song or as fragments of a song, so we hear of the guide at the Great Wall who hums a tune from Disco Dancer... or the taxi-driver in Athens who connects with an Indian passenger over the title song of Awaara..._ (2010: 3) 49

While _Bhangra_ beats have travelled over many northern hemisphere countries, in 1990s India, when the popularity of satellite TV soared, it ushered in an era of exceptional re-mixes of Bappi Lahiri songs, accompanied with kitschy videos. It is within such contested contexts that the term 'Bollywood' has been theorized in disparate ways, illustrating Hindi films’ global turn in the era of economic liberalisation. 50 However, the circuits of its songs, which are national, sub-national, as well as trans-national, require further elaboration. The dissemination of Hindi film songs and dances, along with food and clothes, operating according to different aspects of globalization become important in understanding the new forms of Hindi films and global modes of consumption. 51 Certainly, even when the renowned filmmaker Satyajit Ray put it somewhat sarcastically that Hindi film music embraced “classical folk, Negro, Greek, Punjabi, Cha-Cha, or anything...” (1976: 75), this conveys the formal openness of film songs and its possible travels across the globe.

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49 Indeed, my own encounter with a guide (an old lady) at the Blue Mosque, Istanbul in 2008, was as follows. Speaking in Turkish, she inquired about my nationality. Having being told that I was Indian, she started humming ‘Awaara Hoon...’ [I am a vagabond]. When I asked her why they loved _Awaara_ as much, the lady replied, “because it makes us cry”.


51 See Rajadhyaksha (2009).
While the term Bollywood has circulated within the public domain for some time, scholars of Indian cinema study it as a specific shift within the Hindi film industry during post-liberalisation. Thus, Rajadhyaksha’s (2002) description of ‘the Bollywoodization’ of the Indian cinema is in fact the corporatisation of the film industry in its attempts to re-integrate finance, production, and distribution, along with the music industry. Prasad suggests that, “successful commodification of Indian cinema as Bollywood in the International market is based on the idea of an unchanging essence that distinguishes it from Hollywood” (2008: 49). Films like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (Aditya Chopra, 1995) and *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998) have been studied as crucial points through which the trademark Bollywood emerges and presents its global imaginaire. Among other films, it was *Dil Se* (Mani Ratnam, 1998) that appeared on the Top 10 British film list while *Taal* (Subhash Ghai, 1999) was on the US Top 20 chart. Moreover, Daya Kishan Thussu illustrates how Subhash Ghai’s *Yaadein* (2001) was screened at the British Academy of Film and TV in London, and entered the UK Top Ten in “just one weekend” (2008: 103). Films like *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham*’s (Karan Johar, 2001) attracted gross box office income of (UK) £2.50 million, and was released in 41 theatres, while *Veer Zaara* (Yash Chopra, 2004) earned £2.01 million, and was released in 60 theatres across UK.

Bollywood’s international acceptance (and scholarly analysis) is perhaps related to the ways in which it has negotiated the subject of diaspora and larger problems of migration. Indeed, the conditions after the Second World War forced a mass exodus from South Asian countries to the North, which eventually produced new kinds of publics, spaces, and cultures in those countries. Jigna Desai discusses the “flow of capital, cultural productions, and [the ways in which] people cross state borders in mass migration” (2004: 14). Curiously, the beginning of the film *Salaam Namaste* underlines such travels by showing how the hero and heroine as well as other characters (who belong to suburban India) have moved away to perform their ‘global selves’ in Australia.

Clearly, travel is one of the key aspects of such films where a diasporic population returns to India (largely metaphorically) to relocate its hesitant self. Caren Kaplan

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52 Kaarsholam (2002), Kaur and Sinha (2005) as well as Rajadhyaksha (2009) refer to the ‘Indian Summer’ festival in London 2002, as an important point from which Bollywood becomes acceptable globally, and is represented as something that is ‘kitschy and cool’. The ‘Indian Summer’ festival in London 2002 showcased a variety of Hindi popular films, along with Satyajit Ray’s films. It also launched music-composer AR Rahman’s and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical *Bombay Dreams* in London’s upmarket theatres. Similarly, the Victoria and Albert Museum presented Hindi film posters in their exhibition titled *Cinema India: The Art of Bollywood*. As well, it was the ways in which *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001) quoted a popular Hindi film song (‘Chamma, Chamma…’) that gave Bollywood this global appeal beyond ‘curry and sari’ stereotypes. Likewise, *Lagaan*’s (Gowariker, 2001) Oscar nomination relocated Indian popular cinema on the international map. Moreover, the astounding success of *Slumdog Millionaire* (Danny Boyle, 2008) underscores how Bollywood is now big business, and the manner by which certain stereotypical themes (like brothers and lovers being separated, and later being united) and narrative styles (like abrupt song and dance sequences, and ‘Jay Ho’ in the end, or episodic narration) may be appropriated by a pre-eminent canon.

53 As cited by Rajadhyaksha, where he further elaborates how, *Released simultaneously on 44 theatres in North America, Taal has set a record for Bollywood releases abroad by notching the highest first three-day collections… Taal’s initial collections have even surpassed that of Hollywood blockbusters like Haunting, The Blair Witch Project and Eyes Wide Shut [f]. (The Economic Times, 1999) (2002: 94, 95).*

54 Sources Screen Digest, June, 2005 and UK Film Council, 2006. For production details, see Daya Kishan Thussu (2008, 97-113).

55 I have discussed this in detail in (2009) (see: [http://www.jmionline.org/jmi8_5.htm](http://www.jmionline.org/jmi8_5.htm)).
(1996) writes about the significance of diasporic displacements and travels. Return and journey (as a quest for identity) seem like recurring themes in these films. Nevertheless, such movements are not without excitement, surprise, sexual exuberance, permissiveness, transgression, fun, exploration of new places and customs, consumer goods and so on. Within this context, consumption acquires a new dimension and emerges as a way of being. Hence, the recent Bollywood films offer audiences indices of ‘western-style’ glamour, clothes, locations, wealth, and liberty within the structures of its neo-traditional views that overlap with the anxieties of migration. This holds true for a film like *Dil Chahta Hai*, which in the second part transports its lead protagonists to Sydney, Australia, for work and leisure. While Europe has been particularly popularised by filmmakers like Yash Chopra in the recent times, *Dil Chahta Hai* posits itself as the evolving urban culture (as depicted in the song ‘Tujhe Dhundta Hoon...’/‘In search of you’) and self-consciously produces a visual and sonic trajectory to highlight the major shifts within Hindi cinemas. Moreover, it relocates itself within a relatively unexplored territory by showcasing Australia as the new land for consumption. A story of three young men, the first half of *Dil Chahta Hai* is shot in Bombay and in the exotic landscape of Goa, while the second half shows the urban and metallic-dominant built cityscape of Sydney with its flyovers, underground trains, restaurants, cinemas, parks and so on. According to Ranjani Majumdar,

*Air travel, car travel, leisure, art, discos, music, fashion, style, attitude, grace, love, and desire - DCH is a combination of all these, perfected through a play with the interior...* (2007: 142)

After its release, *Dil Chahta Hai* attracted a cult following and prefigured certain fashions attending to notions of leisure, friendship, love, work, living spaces, clothes, hairstyles, and other lifestyle objects. In short, *Dil Chahta Hai* represents a hyper-reality that can only be realised in terms of sounds and images. Consequently, the film introduced specific instrumentation and electronic sounds to the Hindi film soundtrack oeuvre. Moreover, a film like *Dil Chahta Hai* also marked a notable decline in the deployment of several conventional Indian instruments including the *tabla*, *harmonium*, *sitar*, and bamboo flutes. Furthermore, in a particular scene, Shalini (the female protagonist) takes Akash (the male protagonist) to the iconic Sydney Opera House (to an operatic performance of the Troilus and Cressida tragedy). In her attempt to make him understand the meaning of love, she translates the entire performance to the reluctant hero (and audiences). This curious translation of a ‘high’ cultural performance as well as a novel musical form and the assimilation of it as a part of

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56 I investigate the question of travel through *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* in my book chapter in Gera Roy and Beng Chuat (2012).  
57 For further elaboration see my article with Manas Ray (2002).  
58 Popularity of these instruments declined by the 1970s and 1980s, however, a traditional Qawwali would still be heard in the 1980s, but totally disappears from the music scene in 1990s, except where quoted by directors like Farah Khan in her films.  
59 A recent film *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (Zoya Akhtar, 2011), which presents the problems of corporate lives intercepted by luxury travel and tours in Spain, may be read as a sequel to *Dil Chahta Hai* in the sense that it continues with a similar ethos and explores newer terrains, adding fresh sound elements to the oeuvre of Hindi cinema.
Indian (and diasporic) everyday makes *Dil Chahta Hai* a landmark film that effectively signalled the transformation of Hindi cinema as global Bollywood. Shot in Melbourne, *Salaam Namaste* takes a step further by producing an identifiable soundtrack associated with particular locations (like the beach) and thereafter connecting certain kinds of sound with specific images of Australia. For Bollywood films audiences, then, the sound of *Salaam Namaste* would in due course signify the ‘sound of Australia’. Moreover, it produced particular instances of urban fantasies including visits to shopping malls, savouring a particular brand of ice-cream, and enjoying exotic beaches. Through these means, *Salaam Namaste* offered a lifestyle that to an extent was unavailable in India at the time it was produced.

![Salaam Namaste](image)

Figure 10: *Salaam Namaste* (2005), sounding the South.

Interestingly, the sound travels many zones of aspiration in one of the early sequences of *Salaam Namaste*. In this particularly lengthy sequence, Nick (Saif Ali Khan), an engineer and a cook, wakes up to discover that Amber (Preity Zinta), a doctor and radio presenter, is demanding a public apology from him over the radio. The scene cuts to Nick driving a car and explaining the situation to his boss over the mobile phone. This dialogue-scene is then intercepted by a longish introduction

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60 Note that in a particular sequence in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* there is a reference to operatic singing in which the characters ridicule the high-pitched style of the singer, and thereafter, burst into a Hindi song.

61 *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (Nikhil Advani, 2003) acted out by the same pair (Priety Zinta and Saif Ali Khan) is set in New York. In the film, to quote Ravi Vasudevan, the

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\text{sense of the city is more engaged, at a street level, in terms of participation in crowded pedestrian movement and shooting inside buses, railway stations, and inducting iconic features of street life such as food vendors into the mise-en-scène of the sequence. (2010: 380)}
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Similarly, with reference to the mise-en-scène as well as the soundscape of *Salaam Namaste*, one may argue that the sense of Australia is remarkably more engaging here, especially in the songs like ‘My Dil [heart] Goes Mmmm’, where they travel across the city and are involved with the Melbourne street life.
to Nick’s friend (a lawyer), which is followed by Nick (now driving again) calling Amber’s radio station to threaten her. As Nick speaks to Amber’s boss and threatens to sue them, the boss puts the call through to Amber and their conversation is broadcast live. Cut to: we see Amber in a petrol station and as she takes the call, the verbal clash begins. As Amber enters the station shop (fig 10) and hears their own conversation on the radio, her reaction is inter-cut with shots of people listening to their tête-à-tête. As this brawl continues, Amber and Nick drive past each other unknowingly (since they are heading to the same location), and the sprawling Melbourne landscape and attractive beaches are revealed. Salaam Namaste demonstrates the multiple modes through which music may be consumed in contemporary times and its shifting relationship to locations of consumption. In the process the film provides a virtual soundscape of Australia.

In summary, if Dil Chahta Hai introduced the idea of urban leisure to the Indian scene, Salaam Namaste went a step further by showcasing the problems of diasporic life, along with its highs and lows. Thus, to use Rick Altman’s words, what makes this history of music and sound “worthy of our attention” (2007: 6) is not just that it adds to the existing literature on screen sound or on Hindi films. In addition, the “fundamental interdisciplinary nature of sound” (ibid: 7) facilitates us to re-visit our social histories, approaches to history writing, and tools of critical practices. In effect, this becomes a crucial point of departure as we study popular Hindi cinema through its soundtrack, and posits it as an alternative model (as distinct from Hollywood musicals for instance). In a specific way, Bollywood film music enables us to comprehend the meaning of our global (and liminal) everyday, which is marked with disparate sounds, songs and music, cutting across genres as well as diverse film practices. In addition, the sounds, music, and songs map the processes through which the history of Hindi cinema has evolved via several intersecting factors. These include shifts in the economic and political conditions, film production practices, popular culture as well as media convergence and the emergence of new consuming citizens. Indeed, the altered soundscape of Hindi melodramas effectively reflects the ways in which contemporary Bollywood encompasses significant socio-historical factors such as diasporic migration and population movements while also building on a significant history of music, sound, and songs in popular cinema.

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ALL MASHED UP?
Songs, Music and Allusionism in The Loved Ones (2009)

Philip Hayward

Abstract

This article considers Australian director Sean Byrne’s 2009 horror/comedy feature film The Loved Ones with particular regard to its uses of allusionism within a popular genre context. Within this focus, the article explores the various musical components of the soundtrack (including critical use of specific songs), the creative template determined by the director and the creative input and decision making of various members of the production team. In this manner, the article profiles the film’s audio-visual text, the perceptions and motivations of the production team and considers how these relate to the film’s reception and box-office performance.

Keywords

The Loved Ones, allusionism, film songs, soundtrack, Australian film

Allusionism — An Introduction

Back in 1982 the film theorist Noel Carroll considered and, it is not unfair to say, fretted over, the prevalence of allusionism in a range of popular films. Carroll’s critical persona and aesthetic approach drew on two strands: the auteur school of film criticism that attempted to identify distinguished creative authors working within the (supposedly largely undistinguished) mainstream film industry; and a parallel interest in and commitment to the modernism of the western cinematic avant-garde. His anxiety over allusionism in popular cinema arose from a position that considered that, while classic auteur cinema and (successful) modernist works could be identified to have allusionism skillfully woven into the fabric of their texts (and, more broadly, into their author’s aesthetic visions), a range of popular cultural texts seemed increasingly inclined to simply display their allusionism without any deep or thematically significant intent. Carroll’s essay is of particular historical interest as it was published shortly before the rapid rise and proliferation of theories about the Postmodern nature of a range of popular media texts and of their uses of pastiche (so called ‘blank parody’) and bricolage (a ‘grab bag’ of imitation and allusion deemed quite different in tone and purpose from modernist

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1 Given the film’s pronounced musicality, Australian viewers with a knowledge of national popular music history might perceive an allusion in the film’s title to 1960s’ Australian band The Loved Ones and their signature song, The Loved One (1966) – also covered by INXS in 2001. However the director has identified that no connection was intended (interview with the author March 2011).
One of Carroll’s concerns was the lack of any apparent purpose in the allusionism evident in a range of popular films targeted at what he regarded as an (implicitly) banal youthful audience. His concerns were with both the nature of authorial purpose in this (i.e. why [on Earth...] did the directors bother to insert such allusions?) and textual effect (i.e. how did these function?). But however serious they were, Carroll’s questions paled in relevance with the establishment of a Postmodern orthodoxy later in the decade that positively revealed in the ‘free slide of signifiers’ and surface textual properties of *bricolage*.

The hot moment of Postmodernism has long passed, and far fewer critical essays or popular media reviews refer to Postmodernity than in its fashionable heyday. While this is somewhat of a relief, in many ways, it also begs questions about the function of allusionism in popular cultural texts after the hot ‘moment’ of Postmodernism in essentially similar terms to those of Carroll’s original essay. It also continues to point to a somewhat schismatic relationship between textual complexity and allusion, and the genre characteristics necessary to ensure success with target audiences. In short, there are questions concerning the relationships between texts and audiences/reception and, concomitant with that, of the potential misfit between formal critical responses and audience engagement. Terms and discourse have changed in the years since Carroll first expressed his unease. In the contemporary moment, the term ‘mash-up’ is more likely to be deployed than *collage* or *bricolage* but, as discussed below, there are ambiguities to the term/concept; and its use often refers to earlier inter-textual referencing practices as much as anything radically new.

‘Wolf Creek meets Pretty in Pink’

One publicity tag used to promote *The Loved Ones* was ‘Wolf Creek meets Pretty in Pink’. This tag is interesting on several levels. The first reference, to Greg McLean’s internationally successful Australian horror movie (2005), identifies one set of thematic associations that would be accessible to the younger adult audience the film was targeted at. The second is a more nostalgic/film historical reference of less certain relevance for *The Loved Ones*’ target audience, Howard Deutch’s 1986 teen drama, written by John Hughes and starring iconic 1980s actress Molly Ringwald.

The tagline itself has a history, as Byrne explained in a 2010 interview:

*In terms of the Pretty in Pink comparison, I’ve got to give Colin Geddes (Programmer at Toronto International Film Festival) credit for that one. He coined the phrase, “A mash up of Pretty in Pink and Misery”. (in Whale, 2010: online)*

One of the interesting aspects of this characterisation is that it is itself allusionistic rather than accurate. The term ‘mash-up’ is relatively recent and has not been solidly defined by either dictionaries or consistent patterns of use. The term is commonly used to describe a variety of textual practices that combine two or more different texts, most commonly in music, video or web design but also in other media such as cinema. In musical terms, it mostly refers to either the combination of two (or more) musical ‘backing tracks’ underneath a single vocal track or else a

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2 See UK journal *Screen’s* mid-1980s’ address to these media texts and techniques in their special issue on Postmodernism (v28 n2) and Jameson (1991).

3 See Collins’ (1989) address to this.
more complex collage of musical pieces. In audio-visual media, the term often refers to phenomena such as the collaging of images over a single music track or the collaging of musical sources and images to make a new composite. Applied allusionistically to cinema, it usually refers to films that clearly reference elements of previous films rather than actual textual ‘mash-ups’ that use ‘found footage’ as their central material.

Geddes’s original characterisation of *The Loved Ones* as a direct combination of two specific referent texts is tendentious given the film’s affinity with and elements of similarity to *Wolf Creek* (which substituted *Misery* [1990, Rob Reiner] in the film’s final tagline) and a number of US Horror films. As Byrne himself has identified, again using the term ‘mash up’ allusionistically to describe a combination of influences and allusions:

*I did think about John Hughes in terms of the set up and using archetypes in a similar way to The Breakfast Club. There’s the rebel, the stoner, the girl next door, the goth, the wallflower etc. I wanted to make sure we covered a lot of personalities so there would be a good chance different personalities in the audience could see themselves on screen... My filmic influences were a real mash up. Structurally the film is closest to *Misery* but tonally there are shades of *Carrie*, Dazed and Confused, Footloose, The Terminator, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Evil Dead, Portrait of a Serial Killer, David Lynch, Gaspar Noé, Michael Haneke, John Hughes and even Walt Disney, The way Tarantino juxtaposes violence and comedy was a big influence.* (ibid)

Byrne went on to identify his uses of these “set-ups” and models in his creative process in the following manner:

*I wasn’t a slave to these influences as I was developing and making the film. They’re films and filmmakers I really admire. I naturally responded to the work, which then no doubt subconsciously influenced my choices, but when I was writing I really let my mind roam free based on the research I’d done so the characters had a voice of their own... However, conceptually, I must admit to thinking, “What if I took the rituals of the prom – the dress up and the crowning of the King and Queen like in *Carrie* – and moved the prom to a single location like in *Evil Dead*, making the rituals of the Prom the very instrument of torture?”* (ibid)

Returning to my previous discussion of Carroll, Byrne has specifically identified the role and purpose of his allusionism and its limits, stating, “Audiences may recognize some of the influences, which is half the fun, but hopefully the film, as a whole, will be a fresh experience” (ibid).

The film’s narrative is relatively straightforward. Its central storyline involves Brent (Xavier Samuel) a final-year high school student being kidnapped by a female classmate Lola (Robin McLeavy) and her doting psychotic father (John Brumpton) after Brent rejects her offer to accompany him to the end-of-year dance. The main body of the film cuts between Brent’s incarceration and torment at the hands of Lola and her father, and the actions of his girlfriend Holly (Victoria Thaine) and classmates as they prepare for the school function, unaware of his plight. In the

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4 Such as Mike Davies’s *Sex Galaxy* (2010), for instance, which combines scenes from a plethora of vintage Sci-Fi movies to produce a narrative (of sorts) about erotic alien encounters.
final section of the film Brent escapes, and then, with the assistance of Holly, manages to kill Lola.

The scenes at Lola’s remote family house evoke a variety of horror films and particularly The Texas Chain Saw Massacre (Tobe Hooper, 1974) in the representation of a deranged murderous family and, in particular, in the prolonged kitchen scene during which Brent is tormented and tortured. The trials and tribulations of finding a partner and eliciting enjoyment from the end of high school ritual ‘Prom Night’ (or, in its Australian version, ‘Year 12 Formal’) that prompt the narrative action in the film are so ubiquitous in cinema and TV drama that they don’t require any obvious filmic reference. Wolf Creek’s influence is more subtle, and includes its opening road scene and its use of music (discussed below). The final interaction of victim and pursuer on a road is reminiscent of both Wolf Creek and The Texas Chain Saw Massacre. But the chief distinguishing element between these filmic models and Byrne’s film is the director’s deliberate combination of the tongue-in-cheek extremism represented by the Evil Dead series (Sam Raimi, 1981, 1987, 1992) with youth-orientated comedy. As Byrne identifies:

I was asking myself, What’s a fresh take on horror? What’s the next thing? So I thought, Why not take this extreme horror but also make it really, really fun... I wanted something balanced with jet-black comedy... you don’t feel bad as an audience member for going to watch this candy-coloured type of ghost ride. (cited in Gibbs, 2010a: online)

Music

Music features prominently on The Loved Ones’ soundtrack, an aspect signaled in the film’s credit sequence, which opens with four lines from ‘Superstar’, an unaccompanied ballad sung by Sophie Koh, that foreshadow elements of the narrative as perceived by its central female villain:

Back in school you were high class
Didn’t say much to me
Johnny sat on the outside
You were his beauty queen

This track is then interrupted by a burst of static and subsequent brief snatches of music and further static, imitating radio channels being flicked through, before a another track (‘The Lonesome Loser’, discussed below) is settled on to accompany a montage of static shots of a country town in the early morning.

Despite the director’s frequent use of the term ‘mash-up’ to describe his use of previous film works in the development of his scenarios, narrative and themes, the film’s musical soundtrack eschews mash-ups and combines original score, pre-recorded songs (as both score and infra-diegetic\(^5\) score) and a song rendered by a character within the narrative. The original score for the film was written by Ollie Olsen and performed by Olsen and a small ensemble comprising Simon Polinski, Chris Rainer and a vocalist credited as ‘Pookie-Spookie’. Olsen’s original music is predominantly textural/atmospheric, in manner similar to that pursued by

\(^5\) That is, within the story space inhabited by the characters.
Decoder Ring in their score for *Somersault* (Cate Shortland, 2004) and by David Bridie in a number of Australian films and TV programs. Indeed, Olsen’s score largely eschews melodies (or else renders them as short fragments) allowing the timbres of individual sounds and/or the contrast of different timbres to communicate atmosphere and create a pervasive ‘spookiness’.  

Olsen’s music is complemented by, and often blends with, subtle atmospheric sound design by James Harvey and Robert Mackenzie. In terms of the references identified above, Lynch’s films are relevant for the atmospheric use of original score (mainly provided by composer Angelo Badalamenti), and Tarantino’s for his prominent use of pre-recorded popular song. As Byrne has emphasised:

> I’m a big fan of Decoder Ring’s Somersault score and Badalamenti’s work on Lynch’s films. What I love about both those references is it’s not always easy to tell where the score ends and expressionistic sound design begins. And I encouraged that in both Ollie and my sound designers... In The Loved Ones the mind of the hero and the villains get frayed and stretched to snapping point and I wanted the score and sound design to go to that ‘other place’ with them. (interview with the author March 2011)

Byrne’s own musical vision for the film was made evident in the initial ‘temp tracks’ that he selected for screenings of rough edits of the film for key investors, using

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6 Thanks to Jon Fitzgerald for his observations on timbre and (absence of) melody in the score (p.c. June 2011).
material by Fantômas ("for their jet black humour") and Nine Inch Nails ("for their industrial relentlessness") (ibid) and other pre-recorded material by (eventual) score composer Ollie Olsen. His choice of Olsen as composer stemmed from both his previous knowledge and admiration of Olsen’s work with Max Q and Third Eye, and their shared film genre interests:

We met and had exactly the same taste in films and his DVD library was really similar to mine... he had a real love of horror in terms of Lynch and Cronenberg and... a great collection of Japanese horror, so I thought well this guy is not going to just do the traditional kind of horror score, he’s going to do something that is far more interesting and demented but still really disciplined. (ibid)

Byrne has also emphasised the creative autonomy he gave his composer within the ‘template’ suggested by the temp tracks:

Ollie understands darkness in a very sophisticated way and he’s a naturally zany guy, which perfectly covers both ends of The Loved Ones’ spectrum. Find someone like that, whose talent and personality exactly fit the bill then it's wise to let them take the ball and run with it. (ibid)

Whereas prerecorded songs principally provide commentary on aspects of characterisation in the film; original score is used to prefigure and/or enhance unsettling, suspenseful or dramatic elements of the narrative. Examples of this occur throughout, such as around 19:00 (DVD time) when high, wordless vocal melodies and metallic tones are used texturally to accompany the sequence when Lola and her father kidnap Brent and drive him back to their remote house. The extended sequence around 24:00-25:00 where Brent revives in the family's kitchen, tied to a chair at the dinner table around which the family is seated in formal attire, is particularly effective. Deep rumbling tones, reverberated percussion and sound washes signal the dangerous situation Brent finds himself in, with this sonic impression enhanced by the lack of dialogue and the sole diegetic sounds of his gasps and whimpers and his chair's rattle against the floor as he attempts to free himself. Similar sound textures persist as he is subject to a forced injection and made to suck Lola's finger and then to urinate into a glass at the table. The callous brutality of the actions is underscored by the harshness of the sound textures. Further sonic intensity occurs in the climactic horror scene around 53.30 when Lola attempts to lobotomise him with an electric drill. Both the scenario and the combination of score, motor noise, bodily splatter sounds and (choked) human screams closely recall similar sequences in Hooper’s The Texas Chain Saw Massacre and provide vivid sonic reinforcement of the horrific images of mutilation.
Pre-recorded Music

After the credit sequence and as Brent drives with his father, The Little River Band’s ‘Lonesome Loser’ (1979) continues, transitioning to a diegetic track playing on a car radio to which his father sings along before engaging Brent in conversation. The track is vintage Australian pop, recorded by a band that reached its commercial peak in the mid-late 1970s scoring hit singles and albums in both Australia and the USA with a melodic soft-rock style that invited comparison to The Eagles. The song serves as a cue for the men to sketch their close and warm relationship, affectionately bantering about changing musical aesthetics, with the father lamenting a decline in melody in modern music. This discussion is suddenly cut short when a blood-splattered male appears in the middle of the road, causing Brent to skid off the tarmac and into a tree, killing his father and setting the tone for the narrative that follows. In terms of the track’s role, it functions in a manner closely akin to the similar positioning of a comparably iconic 1970s’ Australian song (Daddy Cool’s ‘Eagle Rock’) in Wolf Creek during an early driving scene. Indeed the description of that song’s function given by Wolf Creek’s composer, Francoise Tetaz, and its director, Greg McLean, are as apposite for the use of The Little River Band’s song in The Loved Ones as the specific track Tetaz refers to in production notes for Wolf Creek:

*It is a quintessential Australian song that was a hit in its day and has some international currency. It is closely associated with Australia and is somewhat timeless (for a young audience). It makes the audience feel very comfortable at the beginning of the film and sets a false sense of security.*

(Tetaz, Wolf Creek Production notes: np)

And as McLean has elaborated:

*...there’s something very creepy about having a happy song like that to be in this kind of movie. I think on some level you hear that song and you think it’s some kind of a trick. It’s too good to be true to listen to a pop*
sequence like that. You know something is going to get fucked up. (in Turek, 2005: online)7

In a process common to many feature films, whereby the choice of prerecorded musical material is largely determined by cost of clearances and when compromises and substitutions are common, ‘Lonesome Loser’ was not Byrne’s initial choice:

Before LRB I’d written Neil Diamond’s ‘Cherry, Cherry’ [1966] into the script because I wanted to start the film in a happy, infectious place, so there would be further to travel to get to Hell, meaning a bigger, more dramatic arc. But Neil was, as you’d expect, too expensive for an Australian movie so I started thinking about classic Australian songs that had an international feel and that’s when ‘Lonesome Loser’ sprung to mind. It’s not as high energy as ‘Cherry, Cherry’ but it has an Eagles-esque ease to it, which suited driving along a country road bathed in morning light. Plus the lyrics, ‘Have you heard about the Lonesome Loser’ felt like a foreshadowing of what was to unfold with our lonely, unhinged Princess. (interview with the author March 2011)

While the lyrics, to some extent, might be understood to foreshadow Lola’s personal trajectory in the film, this allusive element is somewhat diffuse as the song initially seems to allude to Brent, who is traumatised (and lost) as a result of his role in the crash (rather than the romantic disappointment that afflicts the protagonist of the LRB song). The song’s lyrics do not thereby function in the same clearly referential and/or ironic manner as the choice of Nan Vernon’s cover of Boudleaux Bryant’s 1960 song ‘Love Hurts’8 used in The Loved Ones’ online trailer, featuring graphic scenes of Lola tormenting Brent (a use which also has its own allusionism, since Vernon’s version previously featured on the soundtrack to Rob Zombie’s 2009 remake of John Carpenter’s Halloween II [1981]).

After this point in the film, various styles of rock music predominate. While this is far from unusual in youth-orientated genre films, there is a clear thematic logic and cohesion to the musical placement within the narrative, which the director explains in the following terms:

Brent listens to metal because it signifies the rage bottled inside him, his best friend Jamie listens to stoner rock because he likes to smoke doobies, and Princess, our villain, listens to ballads on the radio because they convey a yearning. If all these choices illuminate character then the soundtrack hopefully becomes a truthful reflection of the film, rather than feeling like something that’s just been slapped on to appeal to a certain demographic. (ibid)

The rock songs included in the final soundtrack also reflect the previously discussed budgetary constraints and substitutions:

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7 It should also be noted that such uses of popular song material are something of a staple in horror cinema, other significant examples being the use of Tom Petty and The Heartbreakers’ iconic ‘American Girl’ on a car radio shortly before a young woman becomes a victim of Hannibal Lecter in Silence of The Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991); or the use of Lynyrd Skynyrd’s ‘Sweet Home Alabama’ on the radio in a van before the group of youngsters meet the first psychotic crazy in the remake of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus Nispel, 2003).

8 Popularised by the Everly Brothers in 1960 and repopularised in 1975 with successful covers by Nazareth and Jim Capaldi.
I gave our music supervisor Craig Kamber a list of first choices, like Kyuss, Metallica, Carcass etc, which would invariably prove too expensive so he’d have to opt for less high profile artists with a similar feel then I’d pick the replacement tracks that fitted best. I’ve since come to love local metal outfit Parkway Drive, they’re right up there with the best in the world, and Black Like Vengeance, the other metal band used in the film, was a tip from our boom operator, whose brother plays in the band. Brent’s ‘Razor March’, which is our hardcore hero’s theme, is an original composition by Ollie. (ibid)

Along with these rock tracks, the film’s most prominent pre-recorded song is Kasey Chambers’ 2001 Australian hit single ‘Not Pretty Enough’. The choice of Chambers’ single as a signature song for Lola, and as a sonic fulcrum around which her personality and agency in the film revolves, was an astute one that can be understood to appeal to audiences on a number of levels.

An international audience unaware of the song’s performer and context can easily relate to the song by virtue of its direct lyrics, effective melodic structure, the ‘yearning’ tones of the singer’s vocal styling and the dynamics of the vocal delivery, backing and mixing. Chambers’ song conforms to a significant tradition of ‘loser’ love songs in Western popular music that includes such classic examples as Phil Everly’s ‘When Will I Be Loved?’ (1960), William Stevenson and Norman Whitfield’s ‘It Should Have Been Me’ (1968) and Anna McGarrigle’s ‘Heart like a Wheel’ (1975). Country music, as might be expected of a genre prone to sentimentalism, also has a rich lineage of ‘loser’ love songs, including such notable examples as Julie and Buddy Miller’s ‘Does My Ring Burn Your Finger?’ (1999), Bill Anderson, Buddy Cannon and Jamey Johnson’s ‘Give It Away’ (2005), and Sugarland’s ‘Stay’ (2006).

Chambers’ song commences with (what transpires to be) its chorus. Its lyrics seek answers to the vocal protagonist’s inability to attain what she desires:

Am I not pretty enough?
Is my heart too broken?
Do I cry too much?
Am I too outspoken?
Don’t I make you laugh?
Should I try it harder?
Why do you see right through me?

The chorus is catchy and melodically appealing, arching upwards melodically until the end of the fourth line before declining and using large leaps (major sixths and perfect fifths) to emphasise key words (such as “pretty enough”, “heart too broken”, “cry too much”, “too outspoken”), emphasising the intensity of the singer’s frustrations. The emotional fragility and ‘nakedness’ of the lyrical questions and unornamented vocal melody are emphasised by the song’s initially sparse

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9 See Carriage and Hayward (2003) for more discussion of Chambers’ vocal techniques.


11 Thanks to Jon Fitzgerald for his observations on the melody of the song (p.c June 2011).
instrumental accompaniment (picked acoustic guitar lines), and are emphasised by the low-set, almost depressed, rendition of the final chorus line “Why do you see right through me?” (which is later reprised as a repeated lyrical finale to the song).

The verses are more rhythmically driven and are supported by a greater range of accompanying instrumentation (provided by a standard rock band line-up), complementing Chambers’ greater vocal projection and harsher timbre and the more confident and assertive declarations:

> I live, I breathe, I let it rain on me
> I sleep, I wake, I try hard not to break
> I crave, I love, I've waited long enough
> I try as hard as I can

This pattern of gentle melodic chorus alternating with more aggressive up-tempo verses (in a style often associated with 1980s’ US band The Pixies and famously employed by Nirvana in the 1990s) persists throughout the song, signaling the lack of resolution in the vocal protagonist’s plight.

At a local level, an Australian audience can also access layers of prior familiarity with the genre, track and performer, including, in orders of increasingly specialised knowledge:

- a general perception of Australian country music as a signifier of regional/rural Australia
- an awareness of Chambers’ crossover ‘integrity’ within the Australian rock scene
- the social dance images and context of the music video that accompanied her 2001 single release
- awareness of the singer’s personal history/career background (including an isolated family upbringing on the Nullarbor Plain)

The identification of these potential levels of complementary association between the song/singer persona and Lola’s character does not imply (or require) a conscious deployment of them on Byrne’s part, but rather results from the bundle of associations pre-recorded material can provide to audiences able to access them. Byrne has described the song as “ideal” in that it “felt like it could have been written for the film” and has stated that he “chose it for the yearning and insecurity it evokes” (ibid). Less sympathetically, Jake Wilson’s review of the film in *The Age* newspaper identified the film’s use of the track as a deployment of the “maudlin hit” to “parody the self-pitying side of ‘girl culture’” (2010: online).

In terms of associations between the singer and the film, and, in particular, the sequences in which it was used, the coupling of the track with dark, horrific images represents a significant variation to the tone and themes of Chambers’ previous work and, most particularly, from the playful, child-orientated music, music video and book project she undertook with her father in 2010 under the band name Poppa Bill and the Little Hillbillies. Despite this, Byrne’s recontextualisation of Chambers’ song—and, by association, aspects of her professional persona—was approved by her management company who agreed to the use of the track after receiving copies of the script.
The song first occurs in the film at 21:17, when Lola arrives home with the unconscious Brent, with the song’s entry into the soundtrack accompanied by a close-up of an old, dusty cassette-radio on Lola’s bedroom table (as its apparent source). As the song’s opening chorus proceeds, the image track shows a montage of table-top items and Barbie dolls, suggesting youthful innocence before the image accompanying the line “Don’t I make you laugh?”, showing a Ken doll with a bandaged head on top of a pink-clad Barbie, sours the mood. As the song shifts to its more assertive first verse, the image track shows the cover of Lola’s scrapbook as she flicks through initial childish drawings before arriving at montages of male torsos. After cutting to the pin-k-clad Lola at her desk, the image shifts to a photo of Brent from a High School yearbook, which Lola scrawls over with red pen, marking a large red blotch on his forehead before cutting the image out and pasting it into her scrapbook. The track then continues as her father enters the room and presents his delighted daughter with a pink ball gown and pink high-heeled shoes. She then strips down to her pink underwear and tries it on for him, with the refrain “Am I not pretty enough?” accompanying the image of her presenting herself to her father, cuing him to utter the first line of dialogue in the scene, “Pretty as a picture”, eliciting a delighted smile from her. The smile, in turn, cues a musical tone that cuts the song short and allows a brief transition to the outside of the house, before shifting to the kitchen where Brent sits, barely conscious and bound to a chair in formal attire.

The track’s second appearance occurs at 47:45, as Lola stands embracing a (by now) heavily brutalised Brent, whose bound feet are fixed to the floor by a knife, as she sways to the first chorus of song as it plays on her cassette radio. The song and the dialogue it accompanies provide a key insight into Lola’s character and murderous pursuits. In the short instrumental gap between the chorus and first verse she informs Brent that, “When I find my prince this is the song we’re going to dance to at our wedding”. As the first verse commences she resumes swaying and the image shows her father showering glitter over the couple’s heads (as the lyrics declare “I let it rain on me”) before Lola declares, “But you’re not him” and, shifting to sudden anger, adds “You’re just another frog”, before stamping hard on his impaled foot. Leaving him shaking, she takes her father’s hand and asks, “Dance with me daddy?” They then dance slowly together, as Brent tries to escape his bounds, with Lola staring into her father’s eyes and telling him “You’re the prince, that’s why I can’t find one that I like… It’s always been you Daddy, just you and me”. Just as they are about to move into a kiss they are distracted by the noise of Brent slumping to his chair and the scene ends abruptly.

The song’s third outing differs from its predecessors in that it is sung by Lola, around 1:09:00, as she heads off to try find and locate and kill Holly (in revenge for Brent stabbing her father in the neck as he tries to escape for the second time). Walking down the middle of the road, holding a knife and clutching her scrapbook, she sings the song softly. Unlike Chambers’ artful variations of tone and melody, Lola’s version is muted and depressed, matching her facial expression. Hearing a car approach, she breaks off and hides by the side of the road. As Holly’s car (fortuitously) drives by, she flings the scrapbook at it, causing Holly to break and pause and allowing Lola to enter the vehicle and attack her rival, an action that leads to her eventual demise as Brent comes to his girlfriend’s rescue.
Box Office Performance and Reception

Despite SBS TV’s ‘The Movie Show’ awarding the film 4/5 stars\(^{12}\), The Sydney Morning Herald publishing a celebratory interview with lead actress Robin McLeavy (Gibbs, 2010b) and Empire Magazine offering high praise for the movie as an inventive genre piece (Gibbs, 2010a); The Loved Ones performed poorly at the Australian box office, grossing $300,124 (making it the 16\(^{th}\) best performing Australian release of the year in a national ‘pack’ lead by Stuart Beattie’s Tomorrow, When the War Began, which took $3.86 million)\(^{13}\). One possible explanation for its lack of domestic cinema success was a particularly Australian and, specifically, Tasmanian sensibility that may not have appealed to cinema audiences more attuned to the transnational-Hollywood product that continues to dominate Australian screens (comprising 95.5% of domestic gross in 2010\(^{14}\)). Lead actress Robin McLeavy (Lola), for example has identified that:

Sean, the director, and I are both from Tasmania originally... And Tassie’s got some pretty dark history. It’s where they took the first convicts; it was the first convict state. Then there’s the Port Arthur massacre. The film really captures all that. The eerie isolation. It’s not set there – it could be anywhere in Australia – but it’s certainly inspired by all that. (cited in Gibbs, 2010b: 9)\(^{15}\)

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\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Filming locations were actually in Melbourne and Victoria.
But while Byrne supports this perception, he has also argued that his film has a greater appeal, akin to that which contributed to *Wolf Creek*’s success in overseas markets:

> That kind of law exists right around the world – the further you get from the heart of the city, the crazier the things are meant to happen... It's similar to *Wolf Creek*. Isolation is scary... Combine that with a lack of social interaction and that can start to play tricks on one's brain. (ibid)

Box office performance is notoriously difficult to predict and assess. While substantial marketing and multi-screen releases are obviously important, they do not guarantee mass audiences, as a long list of high-budget flops demonstrates. Australian films face particular difficulties in the domestic market in that they are often only released on limited screens and often gain release at the same time as bigger-budget Hollywood features that have been extensively pre-promoted. These factors were identified by several writers who lamented *The Loved Ones*’ poor cinematic performance and what it suggested about support for national cinema by local audiences. Tasmanian filmmaker Briony Kidd, for instance, has identified that:

> When it comes to Australian films there’s a whole extra layer of complexity, with the public’s perception about what an Australian film is, or should be, clouding the issue... it hasn’t helped that the film was released at the tail end of a string of major horror releases, including *Paranormal Activity 2* and *Saw VII*. It was also unlucky enough to open the same weekend as a huge film aimed at a similar demographic, *Jackass 3D*. (Kidd, 2010: online)

Despite the accomplishment and textural integration of the film’s music, its box office performance did not achieve any benefit from radio or TV music video screenings of material from the film, as these were not integrated into the promotional strategies for its release (and no soundtrack CD has subsequently been issued). The lack of boost from the rich and varied musical material featured in the film confirms that popular music is not a reliable commercial asset for films in itself but rather relies on conjunction with other promotional elements and platforms. More troubling for Australian cinema is the failure of a film so positively regarded by critics and so specifically targeted at a mass – rather than ‘art house’ – audience. In this regard, the film’s intricate allusionism is an ornament to a feature film that, yet again, emphasises that Australian national cinema occupies a precarious position on the rim of a global circuit and industry (still mainly) dominated by Hollywood. In this regard, Chambers’ song, and its combination of plaintive inquiry, sense of injustice and residual self-respect, is just as apposite as an anthem for the Australian film industry as it is for Lola in her thwarted quest for love and acceptance.

Cinema is of course only one outlet for feature film production and it is notable that various reviewers identified that the DVD rental/purchase market would be likely to prove a more fertile distribution outlet for such an idiosyncratic genre feature. *In The Mix* reviewer ‘Dave RH’, for instance, contended that, “the DVD format offers a far more lasting and suitable foundation for overlooked local productions and the ideal format for something as wonderfully unconventional as *The Loved Ones*” (2011: online). Similarly, commenting on the film’s likely reception in the North American market, Dennis Harvey commented in *Variety* that its “tale of a kidnapped high schooler in high extremis is probably too small and specialized
for offshore theatrical interest but should win a fanbase through midnight fest slots and DVD release” (2010: online). While accurate DVD sales and rental figures were unavailable at time of writing (February 2012) the producer’s perceptions were that a greater audience base had been accessed through the domestic market and that the possibility of the film attaining an aficionado following is thereby open. Byrne’s feature may, therefore, prove “pretty enough” for eventual ‘cult’ status despite its disappointing cinema box office performance.

Conclusion

As the above discussions outline, music plays a key role in the construction and ‘colouration’ of the narrative, characterisation and settings of *The Loved Ones*. Byrne’s use of the song ‘Not Pretty Enough’, in particular, is pivotal. Its first inclusion serves to establish Lola’s persona; the second provides her with the opportunity to explicitly address her psycho-sexual fixation with her father; and the third comprises her direct enunciation of the lyrics as an expression of her frustration and her desire for revenge against Brent and Holly. This careful, deliberate use of the song complements the choices of other pre-recorded popular music tracks, which are principally used to enhance characterisation, and the film’s atmospheric and dramatic original score, which provides narrative and thematic nuances. These highly integrated uses are the opposite of the superficial allusionism bemoaned by Carroll and embraced by exponents of various Postmodern media practices and/or the proponents of 21st Century mash-ups. Instead they exhibit the highly crafted nature of classic Modernism, whereby quotation is integrated, contextualised and deployed for significant thematic and narrative purposes. In this sense, while the rhetoric and terminology about types of textual allusionism may have changed over the past three decades, classic Modernist paradigms continue to resonate with commercial filmmakers concerned to build upon and work within established genre heritages.

Acknowledgements

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ANA KOKKINOS AND THE AUDITORY SPECTATOR
“I wanna tell you that I’m feeling closer”

Eloise Ross

Abstract

Ana Kokkinos is an acclaimed director of Australian independent films. Her portrayals of contemporary life in Melbourne, and the delicate rendering of diegetic sound interplayed with score music in her films, create rich film worlds in which her characters—and us as spectators—occupy Melbourne. With a multicultural population of over 4 million, Melbourne is Australia’s second largest city and located in the southern, temperate zone of the continent, and it has a significant profile as a locus for Australian culture, couture and cuisine. Two of Kokkinos’ feature films that paint intimate portraits of the city, Head On (1998) and Blessed (2009), present rich soundscapes that encourage identification not only with the characters but also within the space constructed by camera and soundscape. In both works, diegetic and extra-diegetic sonic moments form layered soundscapes that serve as vectors for emotion, enabling us to identify and empathise with the characters. This emotional engagement builds on the spatial and sensate world of the film, with the soundscapes suggestive of the dynamic relationship our bodies have with comfort and discomfort, belonging and dislocation, movement and silence. The integrated diegetic and extra-diegetic sound tracks encourage relationships with these films in ways connected to reality, and to the cinematic world of Melbourne.

Keywords

Melbourne cinema, composed and compiled scores, diegetic sound, spectator, audition

Introduction

As a contemporary Australian filmmaker who has established herself on a local and international scale, with her work featuring abroad at film festivals in the North American and European continents, Ana Kokkinos deserves recognition for her dynamic contribution to the sound of Australian cinema. The sophistication of Kokkinos’ aesthetic and emotional style can be identified in the performances that she draws from her actors, the way relationships and feelings play out on screen, and the sensitive, richly sensual worlds that she creates.1 Concomitant with this

1 This article addresses Ana Kokkinos’ films within something of an auteur framework. However, Blessed and Head On were both made with an ensemble of sound designers—among them Craig Carter and Livia Ruzic in Head On, and in Blessed, John Wilkinson as sound mixer, and Andrew Neil and Glenn Newnham as sound editors—so crediting Kokkinos with her directorial influence will allow the most straightforward analysis.
style, her films invite the audience into a relationship with the visuals that is augmented by a dynamic exploration of spatial and identificatory soundscapes. From early short films\(^2\) to established independent features, *Head On* (1998), *The Book of Revelation* (2006), and *Blessed* (2009), Kokkinos has made a contribution to the Australian filmmaking landscape and allowed Melbourne to be seen and heard—and experienced—in some detail. Melbourne’s presence in Kokkinos’ work is culturally and locationally specific and, at the same time, possesses a welcoming fluidity, as the depth and tangibility projected by her worlds makes them accessible regardless of preconceived familiarity. As spectator-auditors, we are encouraged to identify with characters and are simultaneously affected by the rich integrated soundscapes. Although there is much existing critical appreciation for Kokkinos’ work (including: Hardwick 2009; Bennett 2007; Collins and Davis 2004), this article expands the discussion through an exploration of key scenes and soundscapes that identify intricacies of suburban and metropolitan Melbourne, and their significance to both the text itself and the spectator-auditor.

The concept of the spectatorial body, and how its textures, contours and movements extend beyond presence to become an identificatory body on screen, is an important aspect of film theory. Jean Epstein (1977) mused that the cinema’s essence is movement, and the close-up its soul. While he highlights the close-up, he does not deny that the spectator’s own consciousness is imperative to the experience of the cinema. Outside the relationship between the spectator and the screen there is “no movement, no flux, no life in the mosaics of light and shadow which the screen always presents as fixed” (Epstein 1977: 23). More recently, the complexities of theories of the body have extended to an awareness of the corporeal aspects of film viewing as theories of affect address cinema as it is experienced physically by the cinematic spectator. Michel Chion opens his book *The Voice In Cinema* (1999) with several musings on the re-labeling of silent cinema. He writes,

> Today’s flat cinema dreams of depth; and similarly the so-called mute cinema made spectators imagine the voice, far from denying or mourning its demise. (1999: 7, emphasis in original)

Chion is calling for a redefinition of silent cinema as mute because, by communicating via images and showing mouths moving in lieu of people speaking, the viewer could possibly imagine those words being spoken. Reading the lips of actors and watching them interact with their own reality, spectators might have heard the words and movements in their own heads. In this way silent cinema elicited an imagined soundscape and, by similar logic, spatial sounds could elicit feelings, perspectives and sensations. That today’s cinema “dreams of depth” is an astute observation, but the power of cinema moves beyond simply dreaming; enabled and embodying spectators through the sensorial realm, cinema has depth. This article will analyse the aural scope of Kokkinos’ films, their full spectrum of sound and music, to elucidate ways in which the spectator-auditor is invited into and embraced by such depth.

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\(^2\) Antamosi was filmed on 16mm as part of the Victorian College of the Arts graduate program in 1991, and her following film *Only the Brave* (1994) won the Grand Prix for Best Film at the Melbourne International Film Festival.
The Spectator

Textually, *Head On* and *Blessed* directly confront the subject of listening—and the failure to hear—in the domain of the everyday. The narratives feature characters struggling to be heard, and whose regular pathways of communication with others have been disrupted, obscured or ignored. In these relationships, dishonesty becomes an accepted, almost expected, undertone of communication. Trying desperately to be heard and understood, an entire spectrum of children, teenagers and adults learn that words are simply not expressive enough. Even as characters and narratives are introduced, the audience is being informed that these films are about the importance of listening, of sympathising, and of taking notice. Shifting this textual awareness from the narrative to the filmic construction, and the experience of film viewing, *Head On* and *Blessed* both require a conscious form of listening as well as watching. Kokkinos has herself observed that *Blessed*, at its base, is about the primal relationship of mother and child, of the strength of this relationship and of all the struggles that it presents (Cordaiy, 2009). This is a relationship that all spectators can relate to; whether we presently have a mother or don’t, everybody can relate to the difficulties and pleasures of being somebody’s—or nobody’s—child. As Brian McFarlane observed,

> The film can sometimes be hard to watch; there are moments as excoriating as anything in recent cinema; it is never less than emotionally demanding; there is nowhere to relax in it. (2010: 88)

Sound and music play a large part in the intensities of this activated response, as I will show. In the same way, *Head On* deals with fractured identities, surviving adolescence, and being accepted or rejected for the person you are. At the level of core narrative, and embellished by their nuanced soundscapes, these films are particularly appropriate for the analysis of sensorial affect influenced by emotional resonance.

In his groundbreaking book *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, published in 1960, Siegfried Kracauer writes that, in addition to photography, “film is the only art which leaves its raw material more or less intact” (1965: x). In 1964, Roland Barthes published his essay ‘The Rhetoric of the Image’, calling for a redefinition of film beyond the animation of photographs, suggesting “the having-been-there gives way before a being-there of the thing” (1977: 45). The power of film lies in the projective consciousness of its form, that is, in its ability to project sensations onto its audience. Of course movement is the primary instigator of this, but sound, transmitted via movement as a vibration felt by the ear, creates an illusory but accessible three-dimensional space that we could realistically inhabit. We can pay attention to film, certainly, but we can only truly be affected by cinema that creates a world with dimensions of realism and emotional depth. In Kokkinos’ cinema, the city and the suburbs are presented and explored as real, present places; as Barthes might say, almost-right-there. Spatial sounds are a large part of that immersive depth and can reach the ear/body almost more directly than the

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3 Both films take place more or less over a 24-hour period.

4 These issues are of such core importance that they must be mentioned, although they are not directly relevant here and are explored in more depth in texts mentioned earlier. See Hardwick (2009) for a particularly incisive analysis of Ari’s struggle for acceptance as marred by his desire for rejection.

5 Matthew Saville’s *Noise* (2007) explores Melbourne through the perspective of a police officer whose hearing is affected by tinnitus, captured through a series of nuanced elements in the sonic environment. For a full analysis, see Hadland (2010).
image reaches the eye. Hearing sound does not necessarily require listening, but watching film requires actively looking and, by virtue of our passive reception of sound phenomena, we may be more susceptible to emotional sonic content. Robynn Stilwell declares that, “Music tends to remain a subliminal signal for most audience members” (2001: 169) and by extension sound might remain so too, as often we hear things without consciously recognising them. It is the purpose of this study to explore the sounds we hear while watching films. In the same way that the average spectator-auditor might be emotionally affected by the tone of a film score without distinguishing the exact tune of a song, the diegetic soundscape of a film can build an emotional and sensorial space that encapsulates the spectator-auditor without conscious recognition. Sound, by its very nature and existence, is a physical sensation, able to affect us not only intellectually, but also with an appeal to the corporeal textures of the body.

Philip Brophy asks his readers to step outside of the construct that film sound serves the image and imagine that sounds and images simply coexist (1999). This is the way we experience the phenomena in reality, as the world runs with sound and image simultaneously, one always responding to the other. In film analysis, the richness and depth of the soundscape is worth exploring together with how sound is instrumental in creating film space and character psychology. The cine-consciousness of the spectator should not be taken for granted. We are vulnerable, sensual bodies, and our identification with a film and connection to the space of a film might be tenuous if not for our relation to realistic auditory phenomena. Of course, as serves the medium, many films are modified by extra-diegetic music that is external to the filmic reality, and changes aural amplification within it, and Head On and Blessed both employ these techniques. These two films demonstrate that such post-production modifications can actually enhance the presence and power of the sonorous diegesis, and when sound intertwines with score music, that both are indispensable to the whole.

Hearing Head On

In contrast to the ensemble narrative subjectivities of Blessed, Head On’s individual subjective perspective follows nineteen-year-old Ari (Alex Dimitriades) through a 24-hour period. The diegesis in Kokkinos’ earlier film is filled with the changing soundtrack that shapes Ari’s experiences. The film’s opening is a kinetic audio-visual synthesis, with composer Ollie Olsen’s Greek-inflected rebetiko score overlaying grainy black and white photographs of a past generation of Greek immigrants arriving ashore in Melbourne. This montage of historic photographs cuts to Ari’s face in the present day and the tempo of Olsen’s score music is softened, easing the spectator into an alignment with Ari’s own perspective through auditory identification. The opening score segues into the music playing inside a club, one beat melding into the other as the dominant soundtrack moves directly into the emotional, affective space of the film and the sonorous position of the auditor is aligned with Ari’s own. From inside, the camera and the spectator follow Ari outside and into an inner-suburban backstreet, remaining spatially located in the film space as the music continues to throb in the distance. As he walks further away from the music, the high-pitched rebetiko resonates in Ari’s head; the music from the diegesis has once again shifted perspective, and becomes aligned with Ari’s own auditory perspective.

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6 A filmmaker and composer, Brophy worked with Kokkinos as composer of original score music for Only The Brave.
A somewhat disorienting experience follows to communicate Ari’s drug-stimulated senses: the thunderous sound of a train as it passes by overhead; the textural sound of water as Ari enters a public bathroom; the tear as he unzips his fly; and his anxious breath, heightened in the relative silence of an interior. The film cuts to Ari in bed, masturbating but also remembering and reimagining the night before. The audiotrack signifies this temporal and identificatory dissonance as, even though it is the next morning, the rebetiko that temporally defined the previous night remains. When he gets out of bed, he moves into the kitchen of his brother’s house where Hot Chocolate’s ‘You Sexy Thing’ (1975) is on the stereo, signifying Ari’s now firm presence in the present. As Ari leaves the kitchen, music spills out of headphones hanging around his neck, its compressed sound quality and lack of clarity aligning with Ari’s indifference towards it and, perhaps, his sexual attraction towards his brother’s housemate Sean (Julian Garner). As Ari and Sean walk along Lygon St in the inner-northern suburb of Carlton, a soft guitar rhythm briefly acts as score but, as the camera cuts to Ari alone, his headphones in his ears, the beat and lyrics of British electronic band Lunatic Calm’s ‘Leave You Far Behind’ (1997), featuring the lyrics “I wanna tell you that I’m feeling closer”, penetrate the aural realm. There have been several different stimuli to hear, but one thing is clear: our listening is channeled through the audible realm of the characters, and the way they hear their own world.

Figure 1: A close-up of Ari’s Walkman, as he operates his own soundtrack.

Academic writing about Head On is replete with accounts of Ari’s Walkman and the music he listens to, particularly in relation to how he defines himself as a queer Greek-Australian teenager (Stratton, 2005; Conomos, 2009). While it is informative to note Ari’s song choices in relation to his dislocated identity in both a diasporic and local community, it is important to explore the way in which his own sonic perspective is presented as individual, separate to and stronger than those of other characters. An analysis of these particularities is crucial, as it is with Ari that our identification is clearly aligned, in plot, characterisation, and often point of view. In Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music (2001), Anahid Kassabian delineates two styles of musical construction for a sound track, namely, composed and compiled. Kokkinos’ films—along with many others—blend composed score with recorded songs, so an analytical review of the songs chosen to construct Ari’s identity cannot be the only way to consider the powerful affectiveness of this film. The treatment of music as it is heard by Ari and by the

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7 Many song choices are also signified in Christos Tsiolkas’ source novel Loaded. For a discussion of music in the novel and film, see Stratton (2005).
audience is very powerful in connecting our own auditory experience to Ari’s subjectivity and psychological perspective.

Early dialogue at Ari’s brother’s house reveals that, due to the protective traditions of his Greek parents, his mother and father will be angry at his overnight absence from the family home. He approaches his father in his garden and when his father angrily snatches Ari’s Walkman from him, the tape is stopped and the music cut. After he has predictably argued with his parents for his independence, he retreats into his bedroom and aggressively slams the door. He argues with his mother through the door and, fed up, inserts his headphones in his ears. To parallel his own auditory perspective, the diegetic volume of his Walkman—still playing ‘Leave You Far Behind’—is markedly increased. Ari heads to the industrial side of town to meet friends, walks along Melbourne’s major river, the Yarra, then the music in his headphones changes track into the slow trance of Way Out West’s ‘Ajare’ (1994). As he walks through the bustling Footscray public food market and out into the street, he confronts a barrage of street sounds which, along with the music coming from a nearby busker’s violin, leaks into his ears. With this cacophonous three-way mix of city sounds and music, the spectator is exposed to the same sounds as Ari as though we, too, might be experiencing the world multilayered through headphones.

The dynamic variation of perspective and amplitude continues throughout Head On, with the volume of Ari’s Walkman frequently adjusting according to his proximity to a musical source, be it his headphones, stereo speakers, or live performance. We can hear music as Ari would hear it as he walks through the suburbs and, when he removes his headphones, the amplification of volume is lowered. With the headphones hanging around his shoulders, the music can be heard with muted volume and some distortion. In one early scene, The Saints’ 1978 single ‘Know Your Product’ is blasting loudly from his friend Joe’s (Damien Fotiou) car, and as Ari approaches and Joe turns the stereo down, the volume reduces accordingly. As spectator-auditors who hear as Ari hears, we are aligned with his subjectivity, and at the same time very much located in the film space. In a later scene, Ari is in the bedroom of his friend Johnny (Paul Capsis) with Las Vegas’ ‘Underground Lovers’ on the stereo, the volume fluctuating in accordance with the evident emotional intensity of their conversation. When Ari leaves the room, the song does not cut out but gradually fades, and the characters walk into another part of the house within the audible range of the outdoors—the sounds of birds and children playing is heard inside. Later that night, in the bathroom of a Greek club in the inner city, Ari snorts cocaine with his friend Betty (Elena Mandalis) and fights with Joe but, even through all these isolated dramatic moments, the sonic
continuity very much stabilises our presence in the film space. The steady hum of voices is heard from a distance, a quiet reminder of the current location, within a larger, populated space. As Ari and Joe argue, the musical performance begins again, and as they move into the open space, surrounded by music and an atmosphere that celebrates it (the kind of atmosphere prevalent at a music performance) the volume is loud, vibrations are sensorially surrounding. Once more, the volume is dynamically related to the movement of Ari through the building and, as he leaves once more, it fades down until the string instrument is no longer audible. The volume of the diegesis fluctuates in support of Ari’s movement, and that of the identificatory perspective, through space.

Figure 3: The haBiBis perform live, their music and resonance central to the soundscape.

As illustrated, much of the music in *Head On* is situated in the diegesis, and our perspective is for the most part anchored to Ari’s. As the music of his life is layered with the sounds of metropolitan and inner-city Melbourne, the spectator-auditor is invited into a rich terrain—music is nearly omnipresent in the diegetic soundtrack—so it is worth analysing the film’s penultimate scene to discover how we remain anchored without music.

While dancing in a gay club, Ari and Sean share their first kiss to the pulsating electronic soundtrack. Their bodies filled with adrenaline in response to the music’s fast-paced rhythm, Sean suggests that they leave the club, and, as they do, the music cuts abruptly when the camera cuts to Sean unlocking the door of his house. Having experienced an acoustic frenzy for most of the film, the sudden absence of music, both source and score, is an almost unwelcome shock. Ari is without his Walkman here and, like the spectator-auditor, is forced to confront the present reality of the silent landscape, without refuge of music. They enter Sean’s bedroom, and a siren tears through the relative silence. (Could this be to warn them off pursuing this encounter?) The scene lasts for almost six minutes without music; the score only re-enters for the final scene as Ari walks along the industrial docks of Melbourne as an accompaniment to his acousmatic epilogue. During these six minutes Ari is forced to hear an atmosphere of silence and, as though in a panicked attempt to circumvent this, he increases the intensity and aggression of fellatio with Sean. The camera frames Ari’s face, and the audio communicates that

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8 The song heard here is the 1996 track ‘Tiny Little Engines’, written by Ollie Olsen with Andrew Till and Geoffrey Hales, and performed by The Visitors.
Sean is choking, the visceral sounds eliciting a powerful, recognisable sense of bodily contact. Through the lens we only see Ari’s face and it is aurally that the audience is exposed to this abject discomfort, the raw bodily sound of gagging. Hurt and humiliated, Sean violently rejects him, and as we are left with Ari there is no Walkman or score to mediate our contact with the world. Ari is alone, and so are we, suddenly exposed in the relative silence of this night in the city. The film ends with Ari on the docks of Port Melbourne, the central metropolis in the distance, and Olsen’s ‘End Theme’ on the soundtrack, but this brief reprise of the opening score does not reduce the impact of the previous stark silence. It is little more than an end theme, and the sounds of the city remain beneath the reprise.

The Spatial and the Sensual in Blessed

The sonic layering of Blessed is subtler than in Head On as, without a personal mixtape in a cinematic Walkman to anchor our spectator-auditor subjectivity to the filmic subjectivity, Blessed appeals to the polyphony of the everyday environment. That said, the difference in the construction of the diegesis is noticeable even from a comparison of the two film opening sequences. As illustrated, Head On opens with loud score music that shifts spatial perspective to shape the diegetic space with its first scene. In contrast, the opening of Blessed is a montage of the children whose stories will encompass the narrative, overlaid with Cezary Skubiszewski's score. Also in contrast to Head On, the score here is associated with a chorus of characters (and will later accompany a similar montage featuring the group of mothers) and supports what Kassabian would label an ‘affiliating identification’, or an openness towards the music and text that encourages multiple identifications (2001: 141). The score’s leitmotif is associated with all characters and can accommodate multiple conditions of subjectivity, in contrast with Ari’s dominant subjectivity in Head On, which is further complicated by the inevitable individual experiences and memories of spectator-auditors. As Kassabian writes, “no music can guarantee one or the other kind of identification” (2001: 142), and this accounts for the significance of spatial sounds and sound volume in the anchoring of identification. So while Skubiszewski’s score evokes an emotional connection to the film’s characters, other sounds are equally key to building a soundscape that is suggestive of and sensitive to reality, and these operating elements must be considered in tandem. We are not simply spectators, or auditors, who are engaged in film viewing. Our bodies respond to the centripetal pull of spatial sound drawing us sensually into the film world, and sometimes we hear as though we might be there. Henri Lefebvre, in his essay ‘Seen from the Window,’ observes,

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9 Stratton (2005) and Bennett (2007) interpret this scene using a different framework, discussing it in terms of Ari’s ambivalence about the unsettling confluence of his Greek-Australian identity and his refusal to be loved by Sean, or any Anglo-Celtic figure.

10 As a point of interest, the final track over the credits is Loaded by Primal Scream, released in 1991 on their album, which features an audio sample of Peter Fonda’s call to liberalism and freedom of youth from The Wild Angels (Roger Corman, 1966). This sample finishes the credits—“We wanna get loaded, we’re gonna have a party”—encompassing, arguably, an equally hedonistic perspective to Ari’s.

11 All the children are asleep, in what Kokkinos describes as a “beautiful montage moment” (Cordaiy, 2009: 19).

12 In her 2008 article ‘Image, Music, Film’, Wendy Everett similarly believes that, although music can suggest or identify an emotional significance, it “cannot ‘mean’ directly. It can only connote or infer” (quoted in Hadland, 2010: 37).
Over there, the one walking in the street is immersed into the multiplicity of noises, rumours, rhythms... But from the window noises are distinguishable, fluxes separate themselves, rhythms answer each other. (2000: 220)

This is an intriguing empirical anecdote as it identifies the spectator who is at a remove from their spectacle to be the most privileged in observation. But as spectator-auditors of films with a rich spatial depth produced by a blend of kinetic and sonic stimulus, we are akin to the people “over there”; as if walking in the street (as Barthes might say, being-there), we become immersed, through sound and movement, in the space of the world on film.

Following the opening montage, and a short introduction to Katrina (Sophie Lowe) and her mother Bianca (Miranda Otto), fifteen-year-old Daniel (Harrison Gilbertson) walks in to the kitchen of his home as the score music finally fades out and we are anchored to the diegesis, exposed only to sounds of the everyday that draw us into the space of the film and build our familiarity with its world. As he fights with his mother Tanya (Deborra-Lee Furness), their dialogue is contextualised by the neighbourhood sounds of children playing, birds chirping, and cars passing in the distance. The camera cuts to Katrina and her friend Trisha (Anastasia Baboussouras) at an above-ground train station where a recorded voice announces arrival times, the dinging bell of the railway boom gate signifies an approaching train, and the chirping birds and swell of traffic noises firmly establishes the location as suburban.

13 Introduced to Trisha’s truant brother Roo (Eamon Farron) waking up in a silent house, the suburban sounds continue. Moved to a different part of Melbourne—by the sea, with Orton (Reef Ireland) and his sister Stacey (Eva Lazzaro)—the soundscape changes to incorporate the sounds of ocean waves and seagulls. James (Wayne Blair) is introduced while working, aurally trapped by claustrophobic echoes of an underground electrical system and, above ground, surrounded by the industrial sounds of trucks and machinery that broaden the Melbourne suburbs. We return to Orton and Stacey, this time in a suburban shopping centre where tinny music emanates from invisible speakers, and footsteps define the surrounds. Later they are outdoors in a park—in fact, all of the characters move through the city and suburbs, the acoustics of their locations changing with the scenery. Sounds like these change as the day approaches night, as bird sounds are replaced with a bed of chirping cicadas and crickets that suggests the still warmth of Melbourne summer evenings, traffic is imbued with a greater sense of urgency and force. As the sky becomes darker and the streets and buildings light up, the soundscape follows, amplifying the intensity of the spatial atmosphere and allowing the spectator to experience the full nuanced temporality of the soundscape.

Following this sequence during which the listener is exposed to the sonorous spaces of suburban Melbourne and a brief musical interlude, Daniel breaks into a stranger’s house and, upon entering, the sound of his tense breath is emphasised against all other sounds. A grandfather clock is located in the house, never shown but always heard, its pendulum sounds the slow passing of time, and the tension within Daniel (and the spectator) as he meets the owner of the house, Laurel (Monica Maughan). As Daniel and Laurel move through rooms of the house, the

13 Boom gates, at level crossings (otherwise known as railway crossings), are a common part of the suburban landscape across Australia. Within the inner-city grid of Melbourne the railway transport system is located underground, in a subway-like infrastructure. As soon as the train moves outside the grid, it becomes above ground, and roads are punctuated by such crossings.
ticking pendulum keeps the spectator-auditor tied to the space by its constant resonance for over six minutes, a steady soundscape mirroring the acoustic realm of the characters. Later in the film, when Laurel is alone in the house, the ticking can still be heard, a constant defining element of the space and of its isolated silence.\textsuperscript{14} It is in these closed, restricted spaces that the sensorial phenomena produces anxiety caused by fear and anticipation, and sustained by unrelenting sounds. In a later scene, when Tanya is waiting tensely in the hospital for her son, the hum of his heart monitor drones unremittingly, not only an aural signifier of life but also a reminder of the proximity of death. Like the dreaded ticking of a clock, these sounds signify an unending duration of anticipation, and the unresolvable pain of anxious time.

This interlacing of sound, silence and narrative tension suggests that the whole scope of sound and silence is diagnostically related to spectator-auditor anxiety. When Roo is alone in a warehouse with a pornographer, the environment is, as expected, eerily quiet. There are certain sounds emanating inside from the cityscape on the outside: gentle traffic sounds, children playing joyfully; it sounds like the suburbs. It is the ‘silence’ inside the warehouse that really ignites our fear, our anxiety that Roo is truly alone with the stranger, and that he is trapped. These ambient sounds of the neighbourhood quotidian are important in situating us in the film space. The sounds resonate with a slight echo, with an irresolute awareness of distance and proximity; we hear them as Roo might hear them. As these sounds mark the territory of the neighbourhood, and the relative silence inside the building is penetrated by the threatening voice of the pornographer and the camera’s intrusive sound of surveillance, we become aware how isolated the characters are inside the building. The walls act as a barrier but, rather than keeping danger out, they contain the danger; the contrast of the ambient sounds outside with the threatening noises inside the building works to deterritorialise both Roo and the spectator-auditor from the space. Our anxiety as spectators here is enhanced by the threat to the otherwise familiar and innocuous acoustic realm.

Figure 4: Roo shields himself from exterior sounds.

It is well known that in \textit{Picnic at Hanging Rock} (1975), director Peter Weir added the sound of a slowed-down earthquake to the optical track to encourage an almost

\textsuperscript{14}It is interesting to note that, as soon as the score enters in this scene, even beginning softly, the ticking is immediately removed from the soundscape. In a later scene James returns to the house while a musical cue plays and the ticking is absent but, upon conclusion of the cue, the ticking is more apparent in the mix. While other diegetic sounds remain, the clock may interfere with the musical rhythm, so its absence allows the music to dominate.
oneiric, unspecified but nonetheless terrifying sense of dread in the audience. Weir has said that under optimum exhibition conditions “there is at times a slight vibration in the theater itself, as well as in the viewer’s breastbone” (cited in Bliss and Weir, 1999: 10). This may be achieved by the described sound effect, although Weir seems to be merely reveling in the corporeal affectiveness of sound heard by our bodies; sound by its very nature is already received as a vibration. Yet the sound effect remains remarkable in its construction of the isolating, dangerously enthralling environment of Hanging Rock. When Roo is isolated inside the warehouse, haunted by the sounds of the normative suburban landscape from which he is removed, the spectator-auditor experiences a similarly compelling funereal dread, but it is the threat of the everyday and the invocation of danger and entrapment in a setting isolated from a safe environment, that can generate this aural anxiety. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* successfully utilises an almost otherworldly, ethereal soundscape to induce a certain delirium but, set in the present day city and suburbs, *Blessed* is very much tied to present time and place and the immediacy of the modern city and its suburbs.

On the city streets, police sirens enunciate danger, urgency and emergency, resoundingly paradigmatic of the urban soundscape both in our immediate reality and in the cinematic code. When James receives a telephone call informing him that his mother has passed away, he heads onto the rooftop of his office building and punctuating his exit onto the cement roof, a siren screams in the distance. As a sound of panic it is a siren for someone else who might be in trouble; individual stories like those of *Blessed* and *Head On* populate the entire city. The score is soon reintroduced as the city of Melbourne occupies the background of the frame, continues through another character montage, and then again, Melbourne, seen behind a train heading towards the urban centre. The score fades out, finally, inside a police station and, as James enters the mortuary to identify the body of his mother, another siren punctuates the soundscape. Later in the film, as Gina (Victoria Haralabidou) leaves the same mortuary with her daughter Trisha, the sound of sirens fills the air, travelling across suburban distances as it informs the space and its inhabitants (narrative and spectatorial) of emergency. Throughout *Blessed*, the siren exists to reflect of the trauma of characters’ lives, as an acoustic

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15 While it has similarities to establishing shots of cities in film, this is, rather, a punctuation mark, something of a visual tie to bring all the characters back to the same place. Throughout the film’s montages, a passing train is a regular feature, perhaps more a symbol of the interrelatedness of the ensemble’s stories.
parallel of danger, death and despair. Following the final siren, the score is reintroduced and a montage begins of children and mothers, some together, some alone, and we are at once overwhelmed with inconsolable grief and a bittersweet hope in the tender gulf between mother and child.

Psychologies of Sound

In *Blessed*, moments of emotional tension and cataclysmic anxiety are expressed through changes in diegetic volume, symbolising the physiological response of our own spectator bodies to sound. Such variation of sound volume can be viewed through Rick Altman’s conceptualisation of point-of-audition sound, which draws the listener into the diegetic world “not at the point of enunciation of the sound, but at the point of its audition” (1992: 60). At the moment when Gina argues with Trisha while sewing school uniforms, accidentally scratching her daughter with scissors, music from the radio—already soft in volume—dulls in intensity. This diminuendo mirrors the intensification of the spectator-auditor involvement in the psychology of their relationship. As the two characters become more and more involved in their own dynamic, their perception of external phenomena is dampened. There are several other moments when sound signifies the subjective perspective in this way; in Tanya and Pete’s (William McInnes) kitchen a radio can be heard softly, and it fades as the emotional intensity of their arguing overwhelms them. When Bianca is sitting at a pub filled with poker machines and taking a break from gambling,16 she is overwhelmed when a stranger gives her seven hundred dollars; as her excitement intensifies the artificial chiming of the machines becomes duller, then is accentuated again as she leaves the venue and returns to her present situation. Aligning our position as spectator-auditors with the space of the film, the volume of the soundscape does not remain static or shallow. As observed, volume fluctuates in accordance with, and as an expression of, point of audition and the emotionally sensate position of the characters.

![Figure 6: A radio is sometimes unheard, sometimes an unwelcome intrusion, in Gina’s kitchen.](image)

With three feature films set in Melbourne,17 Kokkinos builds the cinematic identity of the city as a dynamic, nuanced, fear-inducing but also protective space. The work of the sound designers, in building soundscapes that are not necessarily

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16 Poker machines are commonly used gambling machines, also referred to as fruit, slot or pokie machines.

17 *The Book of Revelation* (2006) has a far more extensive use of extra-diegetic score music, also composed by Szubiszewski, and a discussion of its auditory properties may be the subject of analysis elsewhere.
mirrors of reality but maintain a correlative realistic attachment to our senses, demonstrates the integration of a sensorial dynamism in Australian cinema. In another iconic Melbourne film, *Monkey Grip* (Ken Cameron, 1982), the sound layering, and the use of emotional sound, is much more methodical. Bruce Smeaton’s score always accompanies the temporal interludes of Nora’s (Noni Hazlehurst’s) narration, suggesting that the score, along with the acousmatic presence of Nora’s voice, is removed from the sensory experience of Melbourne as a whole. The sounds of the city are heard constantly but with little experiential variation, traffic booming outside of houses as though one was standing on the street, that same barrage heard travelling along in trams, voices and squeals at the swimming pool. Live music, as an essential part of the narrative and of the characters’ lives, also has a significant role to play in the sonic environment, redolent of a particular time and place but removed from the affective realm of the cinema. *Monkey Grip* presents Melbourne as a raw space but it uses the traditional trope of the voice-over to draw together image, narrative and subjectivity, largely privileging the voice in storytelling, and without a developed use of point of audition sound. In contrast, Kokkinos synergises the sounds of the city, the sounds of her characters interacting with the world, and musical score to create an affective space for the viewer.

With the final sequence of *Blessed* the centripetal force of film space intensifies and our spectator identification and sympathies follow. Rhonda (Frances O’Connor) enters the mortuary and must identify the bodies of her two children who, in a horrifying accident, have been burned alive, their bodies fused together as one. Knowing that they would have experienced extreme suffering as they died, Rhonda screams, articulating her shock and despair in the only way possible to articulate such sadness. No thought, nothing within the realm of reason can explain any response to the death of a loved one. Her screams are chilling—the sound of her cries, her tears, and her breath literally brings goosebumps to the surface of the skin. Chion explains that the scream embodies “an absolute, outside of language, time, the conscious subject” (1999: 78). An expression of a state of despair, the scream occurs “where speech is suddenly extinct, a black hole, the exit of being” (Chion, 1999: 79). At this absolute event—the end of life—there are no words left, and screams are piercing reminders of the futility of language and its distance from our bodily experience. All other noise is extinguished when Rhonda screams; it is a song of the dead, not only of human death but the death of all other expression.

Like the siren, the use of the scream as an expression of pain and terror is by no means a unique trope of the cinema. It is relevant nonetheless to consider the presence of the scream in Kokkinos’ cinema, particularly as Kokkinos is a female director; Chion writes only of the scream as directed by a male, as a form of mastery over the female, neither of which apply here. Outside any preconceptions, the scream is a primal human reaction that can rupture, rather than master, both the interpersonal and the acoustic realm. In *Only the Brave* (1994), a troubled teen Vicki (Dora Kaskanis) douses herself in petrol and sets herself alight. Attempting to rescue Vicki, her close friend Alex (Elena Mandalis) struggles, and ultimately fails, to rid her body of flames. She cries, her screams becoming louder and louder, eventually echoing throughout the entire industrial precinct. Amidst this sonic black whole, a desperately cried “no” is the last word we hear. In response to death, the absolute negative of life, that is all we can say. In the hospital, she doesn’t speak, her screams the last sounds of human expression that we hear in the film; the scream as the ultimate vocalisation of pain.
As visually explained through montage, all characters but one are given resolution in *Blessed*, mediated by the bittersweet comfort of the score; whether reunited or alone, their pains and worries are softening, although not necessarily resolved. It is with Rhonda that we stay, our identificatory support strengthened by the density of the aural psychological field. In the film’s denouement, the camera follows Rhonda as she steps out of a police car and walks into a pub, and in turn she follows the music; it grows louder in a correlation to her (and our) spatial presence. ‘Elsie’ (1983)—by 1980s Australian rock band the Divinyls—is playing inside and several poignant lyrics are heard before the song gradually segues into score music. The delicate treatment of music here cannot be categorised as either diegetic or extra-diegetic, as it exists as a complex amalgamation of both spectator-auditor and character psychologies. As the new wave, punk rock nihilism of the diegetic ‘Elsie’ transitions into the affecting score—Skubiszewski’s composition of drums, strings, guitar and synthesiser played legato—there is a strange awareness of the fact that we in the audience can hear while Rhonda, perhaps, cannot hear (also, no one else is dancing to the ‘beat’ of the score music, suggesting its transitional presence). The camera follows Rhonda into the club, then focuses on her face while she dances. The score slows, reduces to the base of strings and cello, the camera stays on her face and the upper part of her dancing body, Rhonda using dance and movement for the only therapeutic consolation she can find. The score approaches a diminuendo until finally all sound, including extra-diegetic music, source music, and situational sound made by people surrounding her, is cut. As a reaction to this silence, we in the audience become silent too; in a physiologically sympathetic human response mediated by visual stimulus, we can hear that her breath, like the breath of her onlooking social worker Gail (Tasma Walton), is strained. Rhonda breathes out, finally, the sound of her breath isolated, all other sounds muted. The soundtrack signifies that Rhonda cannot hear; she is experiencing a catatonic stupor in response to the death of her children. By the time the score finishes, we are engulfed by silence, hearing only the sound of Rhonda’s breath. With no sound left but the restrained quietness of Rhonda’s breath, this suggests that we are right there with her in this moment, and can hear her hearing ‘nothing’.

Conclusion

This close analysis of the interplay of score music and the diegetic soundscape in *Head On* and *Blessed* highlights the value of any type of sound to the spectator’s auditory involvement in film and thus their access to sensorial depth. It is worth noting that in Kokkinos’ debut feature, it was important to the larger scope of the film that the spectator be drawn close to the characters, particularly Ari, as signified textually by the repetition of Lunatic Calm’s song lyrics. *Head On* had an associated soundtrack album released in 1999, with a range of selections from the composed score and compiled songs. *Blessed* did not, and the absence of what might be a marketable soundtrack heightened the importance of the spatial soundscape. Expanding the dimensionality and emotional capacity of film, diegetic sound that builds the reality and space of the film should be considered in a film’s overall acoustic construction. In both *Head On* and *Blessed*, source music and

18 ‘Elsie’ has a significant presence in *Monkey Grip*, too, and is heard twice throughout the film: at the publication studio where Nora works, and at the party in one of the final scenes. In *Blessed*, the song’s presence is given much more prominence, saturating the diegesis rather than supporting it as background music. The version of ‘Elsie’ in *Monkey Grip* appears on the 1982 EP associated with the film, but the track in *Blessed* is a slightly longer version, released on the Divinyls’ 1983 album *Desperate*. 
diegetic sound are closely related, and can be mediated by extra-diegetic score music. Locations, character subjectivities and spectator-auditor psychologies are developed in terms of each of these sonic aspects of the cinema, and the visual works with the acoustic realm to present a wholly sensorial space.

References


Filmography

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*Blessed* (Ana Kokkinos, 2009)
The *Book of Revelation* (Ana Kokkinos, 2004)
*Head On* (Ana Kokkinos, 1998)
*Monkey Grip* (Ken Cameron, 1982)
*Noise* (Matthew Saville, 2007)
*Only the Brave* (Ana Kokkinos, 1994)
*Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975)
THE MOVIE, THE MELODY AND YOU: How Pop Music Connects Film Narrative to its Audience

Martin Armiger

Abstract

In recent years the authority of the composed film score has come under critical scrutiny. Some suggest it carries too much weight, freight and affect. The ‘song score’ has provided an alternative way of scoring film, one in which the emotional content and—crucially—the source and the authority for that emotional content exists somewhere outside the film. There is a body of common knowledge about popular music among cinema and television audiences, a familiarity on which the providers of film scores have long relied. For many years this familiarity was centred on ‘the song’ itself, that is, the composition. More recently, this familiarity has been with ‘the track’, that is, the recording of the song that has most recently achieved fame. But the song score has problems of its own, to do with its inherent form, which may be rhythmically inflexible, and its own subject matter, which may be not quite apposite. In this article, I provide a composer’s perspective on these issues, and look at examples of songs in film, both triumphs and failures, from American and British cinema and from my own work in Australian film and TV.

Keywords

Song score, soundtrack, composer, popular music, Australian cinema

Introduction

The following ten observations look at the ways that popular music connects film narrative to audiences through the ‘song-score’ and ‘song worked into score’ in a variety of film examples and in my own practice as a songwriter and film composer.

1. A Song Connects the Film to the World

There are so many songs on so many films that film almost implies song. Film without song is the anomaly. This has clearly been the case for some time with regard to comedies, romantic comedies and coming-of-age dramas, and is becoming increasingly true for drama generally. But the notion of what a song is, in these contexts, has changed; in fact, it has been changing for a long while.

There is a distinction commonly used in music publishing between the song as a written work and the performance of that song. For the first fifty or so years of
film’s life the song-as-written provided the material for the film to do with as it chose. One of the stars would sing it, creating a new value for it, or the orchestra would play a version of it, adapting tempo and voicings to the action. So if an orchestra (or a tin whistle) played the tune ‘I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles’ (1919), the audience recognised that song, recognised the words that belonged to it, and could be expected if not to share the emotion expressed in the song, at least to have an attitude toward the ‘feeling-state’ that might be supposed to go along with it. The entire body of work that comprises twentieth century popular music history provided for the filmmakers something like what Tyndale’s bible provided for the dramatists of Jacobean England: a canon. Every film that used one of these songs on the soundtrack, from the beginning of the ‘talkies’ and even before that, in the ‘live’ accompaniments to ‘silent’ (non-synchronised films) films—from Charlie Chaplin’s films, through all the early romances, screwball comedies, dramas like Gone with the Wind (Victor Fleming, George Cukor, Sam Wood, 1939) all the way through to the 1960s—depended on the audience recognising a tune, and knowing the words that belong to it, no matter who was playing the tune or what instrumental line-up was being employed. Its recognisability gave the song its value to the film experience. Orchestras, singers, arrangers and musical directors were employed to create new versions of known songs, to make them fresh, or to weave them into the fabric of musical narration that accompanied the particular visual and verbal narrative of the film.

For instance, in Preston Sturges’ The Lady Eve (1941) on board the ship when Eve Harrington (Barbara Stanwyck) meets Charles ‘Hopsy’ Pike (Henry Fonda) for the first time and takes him into her sumptuous cabin, the music in the background is a version of ‘Isn’t It Romantic’ (music by Richard Rogers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, 1932). This song was first made famous by Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald in the film Love Me Tonight (Rouben Mamoulian, 1932). But it was not necessary for the audience to hear Chevalier’s French-accented version for the song to perform its function. The syrupy orchestral version by music director Sigmund Krumgold was enough for Sturges’ purpose. ‘Isn’t It Romantic’ was one of those songs whose melody itself called up to the audiences of the 1930s, 40s, 50s and even into the 60s: a set of words, a mood, and more: an expectation of romantic possibility.

Isn’t it romantic?
Merely to be young on such a night as this?
Isn’t it romantic?
Every note that’s sung is like a lover’s kiss.
Sweet symbols in the moonlight
Do you mean that I will fall in love perchance?
Isn’t it romance?
(Sony/ATV Music Publishing)

Sturges’ use in 1941 of a song written in 1932 shows even then a tendency observed much later by Ian Garwood in relation to Sleepless in Seattle (Nora Ephron, 1993). Garwood discusses a ‘perception that older songs engage more

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1 I mean by this every song written since Irving Berlin’s Fascinating Rhythm (1911), every song written for the purpose of being sold, every song that, through the technology of recording and through the commercial apparatus of the music business, reached a mass audience.

2 See the many handbook guides for film accompanists by Chappell, Warner Bros and other publishers, and, for example, Sabaneyev (1935) and Bazelin (1971).
transparently and expressively with the idea of romance than more modern, and cynical, artistic texts” (2000: 283). This seemed highly plausible in 1993, it was maybe even so in 1941.

Garwood characterises the songs in *Sleepless* (and others like it) as “a kind of counsel”. The romantic resolution, he says, “relies on the leads gaining a sense of self-belief that has been discernible all along in the songs” (ibid: 285). In *Sleepless in Seattle* the songs on the soundtrack are played in their sung versions, the lyrics are therefore foregrounded, and the counselling is overt. In the older films the songs didn’t need to be sung: the melody implied the lyric.

2. When Songs Go Wrong…

In musicals, usually adapted from the stage, some sort of romantic plot (involving scenes in which characters occasionally burst into song or dance) alternated with episodes of wit, humour or farce. (With the Marx Brothers you got all three.) Most musicals showcased the virtuosity of the singer or dancer: Fred Astaire, Julie Garland, Bing Crosby. The songs in these musicals seemed to aspire to the notion that music begins where words leave off. The Marx Brothers didn’t seem interested in all that. In fact I still remember that sinking feeling when watching their movies years ago; the moment the Marx Brothers cease fooling around, leave the stage, clear the set, and make way for the romance to start. Gummo (or maybe Zeppo, or sometimes a ring-in ‘leading man’ like Oscar Shaw) starts to sing. And suddenly, *everything stops!*

I used to wonder why they bothered. Everyone wants to see the Marx Brothers in full flight—the anarchic physical mayhem of Harpo, the determined stupidity of Chico, the relentlessly verbal, slyly philosophical Groucho. That’s what we watch their films for. Not for the romance, surely? Not for the songs. I always loathed those songs. They seemed to ask us, the audience, to buy into the sentimental mush that the rest of the scenario was lampooning.³

Yet, curiously, the original scripts for some of their best films, including *Duck Soup* (Leo McCarey, 1933) and *Animal Crackers* (Victor Heerman, 1930), were written by their songwriters, Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby (see Blount Jnr, 2010). Curious because, typically, the Marx Brothers comedy comes from the *challenge to music* and all its accoutrements. For instance, in the rhumba scene in *A Night in Casablanca* (Archie Mayo, 1946) the dancers on the floor (including Groucho and his *femme fatale*) find the floor itself disappearing, as Chico and Harpo crowd more and more tables onto it so as to get bribe money from patrons. Then when the dancers can hardly move at all, Chico takes over on piano and plays the ‘Beer Barrel Polka’ (aka ‘Roll Out the Barrel’, 1927) with his famous pistol-finger

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³ The *Cocoanuts* (1929) adapted from the Broadway production, directed by Robert Florey and Joseph Santley and written by George Kaufman (the play) and Morrie Ryskind (the screenplay), had songs by Irving Berlin. *Animal Crackers* (1930) included songs by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby that were mostly soppy and sung by the romantic couple. But the most memorable song in that film is ‘Hooray For Captain Spaulding’ in which Groucho agrees to arrive only under certain conditions (‘The men must all be very old, the women hot, the champagne cold…’) and when he does finally arrive his first words are, ‘Hello, I must be going…’ introducing the song which became, in later years, a kind of theme song for Groucho. A more consistently comedic approach to song was in *Duck Soup* (Leo McCarey, 1933; songs and script by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby). Groucho played Rufus T Firefly. The songs were noticeably less soppy, and include ‘Hymn to Freedonia’ and ‘Freedonia is Going To War’. *A Night at The Opera* (Sam Wood, Edmund Goulding, 1935) apart from the dose of Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* has ‘All I do is Dream of You’ (1934, music and lyrics by Herbert Stothart).
technique; and, to the on-screen audience’s delight, reduces the smooth up-market dance band to a rough beer hall mob.

Even though there were some terrific songwriters involved in their films, the only songs that give me any pleasure (I admit) are those that Groucho sings. In the MGM feature *At The Circus* (Edward Buzzell, 1936) for instance, he gives us this one:

\[
\text{Lydia oh! Lydia, say have you met Lydia? Oh! Lydia the tattooed lady,}
\]
\[
\text{She has eyes that folks adore so, And a torso even more so.}
\]
\[
\text{Lydia oh! Lydia that encyclopaedia, oh! Lydia the queen of tattoo.}
\]
\[
\text{On her back is the Battle of Waterloo}
\]
\[
\text{Beside it the Wreck of the Hesperus too,}
\]
\[
\text{And proudly above waves the red, white and blue,}
\]
\[
\text{You can learn a lot from Lydia.}
\]

This ditty, with its vaudeville-style music and its lyrics teetering somewhere between wit and sleaze, comes from a spot close to Groucho's heart. The idea of an education that requires you to examine every inch of a woman’s body—of course! The spirit of the humour is not so far from the lighter moments of Eminem, or De La Soul, or Outkast. This spirit takes a popular musical form and lashes onto it a caustic appraisal of interpersonal relationships, while greedily and unapologetically enjoying the physical attributes of the sexual object. The Marx Bros always assume that any audience will prefer low entertainment to high art, hot dogs to filet mignon, baseball to opera, beer hall to concert hall.

But there’s another factor at work. When Groucho sings, the movie doesn’t ‘stop’ because he is the movie. And into his way of singing a song he takes the same attitude as he takes into all his discourse: on the other hand, when the lovers sing they have to stop doing what they do just to express (rather stiltedly) in song the emotion of the moment—love, regret, whatever it is. But people don’t sing like that in real life! Overcoming that inherent falsity of behaviour is one of the things the musical had to struggle with and (eventually) be defeated by.

The musical’s conceit, this bursting into song, was acceptable for a while, before the recording industry took over from ordinary people the business of singing, in the days when people actually did sing in public, and you could imagine reasons for them singing. In Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* (1934) an entire busload of travellers join together singing ‘That Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze’ (1867). Peter (Clark Gable) joins in with them quite convincingly. (By contrast, in *Trains and Boats and Planes* [John Hughes, 1987] Steve Martin’s attempt to lead the bus travellers in a singalong fails—the song is too precious, too arty. It takes John Candy’s rendition of ‘Meet The Flintstones’ (Hoyt Curtin’s theme song, 1960-1966) to unite the crowd in song.

To people who do actually sing, the performative aspect is important. In Howard Hawks’ *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), Susan (Katherine Hepburn) persuades David (Cary Grant) to join her in singing to the pet leopard, Baby, who is up a tree at the time. She starts the song and the absent-minded professor sings the harmony to the melody “I can’t give you anything but love, Baby...” The harmony-singing goes along easily for the first half of the verse. Then comes the tricky bit:

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4 Music by: Harold Arlen, lyrics by: E.Y. Harburg; published by Leo Feist of NY, USA.
Grant pulls off a quietly spectacular harmony, and, having achieved that, gives himself (and us) a small smile of satisfaction. It’s a moment that speaks to the truth of singing, from a time when people still knew what singing was about.

3. Songs on Film: My Part in the Practice

It’s not that I don’t appreciate good songwriting. I’ve been a composer and musical arranger for film and TV for thirty-odd years, and a songwriter for longer than that. As well as writing songs, I’ve played them and sung them (my own and other people’s) arranged them, adapted them, produced them, structured scores around them, worked with other writers, arrangers, orchestrators, recording engineers, record companies and publishers, singers and players to help make songs work for film and television.

Like most of those who came to Australian filmmaking back in the 1970s and 80s, I came unburdened by theory. What I had was the strong impression that most music for films wasn’t quite hitting the mark when it tried to represent the music of my times. It seemed to me that the best songwriters, singers, musicians and producers, were not getting their music onto film or TV. That’s not simply to express a proprietorial ambition, more an awareness of a disconnect between what filmmakers thought was good music and what the people I knew thought was good music. Neither rock nor jazz musicians, nor the music academics seemed to think much of film music in those days. Conservatorium teachers turned their noses up at film composers (and still do). Ethnographists would complain (and still do) that filmic representations of ethnically specific groups were always off the mark, and their sonic representations even more so. Claudia Gorbman (2010) has written about the laughably reductive and false idea of ‘Indian (Native American) music’ that pervaded Hollywood’s Westerns for fifty years.

Of course, Hollywood distorts everything it looks at. And sometimes we prefer the distorted view. But that distorting process detracts from, undermines, and can even completely destroy the audience’s perception that what they are looking at and listening to has some element of ‘truth’ to it. My feeling was that no one was getting contemporary music on film right. The way films presented rock music was about on a par with the way they did ‘Indian’ music.

In 1975 Bert Deling asked me to ‘do’ the music for Pure Shit, his feature film about heroin users. He had seen the band The Toads (for whom I wrote most of the music and played guitar) playing at the midnight shows at The Pram Factory in the Melbourne inner-city suburb of Carlton. The other band on those evenings was Spo-Dee-O-Dee, a Rhythm and Blues outfit led by the sax player Paul Dixon. All Bert really wanted for his film was the songs: he wanted the soundtrack to the film to be the same as the soundtrack to those nights in Carlton. He booked Armstrong’s Recording Studio in South Melbourne for a day and thought we could get both bands in, one after the other, record about sixteen songs, mix, edit, and

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5 Stanley Cavell (1981) has written at length and illuminatingly on these two last-mentioned films from the 1930s.
6 The Australian feature film industry underwent a major revival dating from the late 1960s.
get out before midnight. I talked to him about maybe writing some music for some of the dramatic bits of the film (I’d been to Flinders University studying film, and had a few ideas about what should happen in a music score) but he wasn’t interested. All the same I did write a few pieces of score and recorded them on the same day. The best of these was for the moment when our protagonists (played by Gary Waddell, John Laurie, Carol Porter and Ann Heatherington) finally obtain some dope and hit up in a kitchen. The scene was shot with brutal realism (close-ups of needles probing veins) but the calm afterwards was the stillness at the centre of the film. I wrote a sort of sombre wordless ballad, part-anthem, part-threnody, with the tenor saxophone leading upwards to a more-or-less triumphant climax; then got Paul Dixon to improvise a solo on the second chorus. We did two takes and I ended up mixing it so that you could hear both takes together. Looking at the picture of these boys and girls shooting up and hearing Dixon’s soaring melodic solo you suddenly felt that all the garbage they put themselves through was worthwhile for just this moment. This was, perhaps, a mistake. I overstated the case. In the final mix of the film they stopped the track just before the sax took off. Seems there was enough trouble already with people saying the film glorified junkies.

4. A Song Solves the Problem of Film Music’s Ontology

Most films expect us, the audience, to take what we see on the screen as if it is really happening. That expectation might sometimes demand a deal of goodwill. We know, we absolutely know, that what is on the screen is not real. But generally filmmakers try to persuade their audiences to negotiate a path through belief and disbelief and just go with it.

In fact, to any given screen narrative there can be many aspects lacking the ring of truth. Yet we are expected to ignore that. It’s part of the contract. Actors speak words of dialogue that have been selected, shaped and edited to sound like authentic speech for that character in that situation. They move about on location or on sets designed to look like actual locations. In short, everything about the film is designed to convince us, the audience, that what we are looking at is real. Once the main titles are over, in most films, everything we see on screen and everything we hear on the soundtrack belongs to the diegesis, the world of the film. Everything, that is, except the music score.

Film music occupies a strange space, conceptually. Specifically, it’s a question of ontology: where does it come from? How did it get to be where it is? The question is most acute when there is a purpose-written score to the film. It’s as if the filmmakers have added a running commentary to the action of the narrative. In fact, with score, that’s just what they’ve done. It’s just that the commentary is not in words but in music. The written score provides a non-verbal commentary, another dimension to the narrative, sometimes taking the point of view of a character, sometimes of the filmmaker, sometimes putting itself into the point of view of the audience, or what the filmmakers hope the audience will want to feel.

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7 For example to suspend the knowledge that we have recently seen this actor playing another character in another film; and yes, we just read something about that actress on twitter. And yes, this on-screen situation is totally unbelievable—one hitman marries another, say, and neither of them know what the other does for a crust.

8 Not ‘where did the idea come from’ in terms of film production practice and history: where, physically, literally, is the music coming from?
The function of the score in a filmed narrative is a large and complex subject, historically and culturally modulated, bound up with production practices as well as audience expectations. There have been times when film has depended utterly on its score. But for various reasons, and to varying degrees in different genres, the status of the written music score, its authority, its conceptual underpinning, has been threatened to the point of terminal damage. What has replaced the score in these genres is the song.

Here’s an early example of the coming shift: For the opening sequence of Orson Welles’ Touch of Evil (1958) Henry Mancini wrote a pulsing, tension-filled, bongo-driven piece to accompany the long tracking shot through the Mexican border town, the traffic jam of cars inching towards the customs barriers, the crowds going in and out of the bars and cafés, the strolling off-duty policeman and his wife (Charlton Heston and Janet Leigh), and all the while we are getting closer to the explosion we know is coming, the ticking of the drum kit propelling us, the music combining a sense of place, time, character, plot and fate.

It’s a bravura piece of filmmaking. I was quite surprised to learn, many years later in Walter Murch’s 1998 essay, that Welles himself was disappointed in the music. “I assume this is temp music...”, he wrote in his notes, the one time he was allowed to see the film. What Welles wanted was more of a montage of music, different songs in differing styles coming out of every bar we pass, creating the mélange of the border town, with all its idiosyncracies and peculiarities. He wanted difference not sameness, seeming randomness rather than seeming artifice. Murch attempted to create what Welles wanted in the re-released version of the film. Is it successful? To me it is less interesting. But perhaps, by using ‘real’ (that is, pre-existing) songs, and so being less obviously structured, it makes the film seem more real. So Murch reveals Welles as more modern than Mancini would have him.

A song exists in its own right. Unlike a score, it exists outside the film. Songs are autonomous, scores parasitic. Songs are not like the movie sets. You can’t live in a set, but the song has a life of its own, which gives it a very privileged existence among film’s elements. Songs solve the problem of film music’s ontology.

5. Song on Film is Not Just a Song but a Performance

In 1958, the Universal Studio bosses rejected Welles’ concerns and stuck with Mancini’s score. And then what happened? On or about July 1964 everything that

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9 One reason is this: the composed score seems to encourage a certain emotional response from the audience; and, if the composer is not very careful, these encouragements are more pointed than directors and audiences want.

10 What he actually said was: “I assume that the music now backing the opening sequence of the picture is temporary. As the camera roves through the streets of the Mexican bordertown, the plan was to feature a succession of different and contrasting Latin American musical numbers—the effect, that is, of our passing one cabaret orchestra after another. In honky-tonk districts on the border, loudspeakers are over the entrance of every joint, large or small, each blasting out its own tune by way of a ‘come-on’ or ‘pitch’ for the tourists. The fact that the streets are invariably loud with this music was planned as a basic device throughout the entire picture. The special use of contrasting ‘mambo-type’ rhythm numbers with rock ‘n’ roll will be developed in some detail at the end of this memo, when I’ll take up details of the ‘beat’ and also specifics of musical color and instrumentation on a scene-by-scene and transition-by-transition basis.” Welles (1956: online).

11 Other similarly privileged elements, of course, are the actors.
had been assumed about songs on film changed. And it happened quite quickly. Suddenly the song, as a work, as a freestanding piece of intellectual property, lost its iconic status.

After the first Beatles, Rolling Stones, Ronettes and Kinks records; after the work of record producers like George Martin, Phil Spector, Tony Visconti, Brian Wilson, and Shel Talmy; after this hyper-development by the recording industry of its teenage market, the song was not enough. It was the performance by that particular recording artist, and only that performance by that recording artist, had value. Everything else was a copy, and, as such, worthless.

In Walter Benjamin’s terms (1936), this is the way that the work of art found its worth in an age of mechanical reproduction. It wasn’t the particular piece of vinyl stamped with these particular grooves—the 45rpm record—that anybody cared about: it was the performance embedded in that piece of vinyl. Therein lies the authority.

A Hard Day’s Night (Richard Lester, 1964) follows in many ways the traditional format for a ‘backstage’ film musical. The camera follows The Beatles around as they prepare for a performance (which will be filmed) and deal with the problems attendant on this new kind of stardom: the prohibitions of various authority figures, the ceaseless intrusive attention of their fans and the consequences of their own japes. Every now and again one of the band pulls out a guitar and starts to play and sing. But a number of things make this film stand out.

Above all is a new relationship between music and picture. Half-an-hour into the film, as the song ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’ (1964) plays on the soundtrack, we see The Beatles without instruments running, jumping, falling down, mug-boxing and generally mucking about on a playing field, filmed from a great height intercut with close-ups; three minutes of fairly pointless activity which is nevertheless and inexplicably amusing. The song legitimizes the vision. The vision doesn’t have to

12 A Hard Day’s Night, the Richard Lester film starring The Beatles, had its first screening on July 6, 1964. The change I’m talking about was maybe a little earlier, like Philip Larkin’s idea that sexuality was invented in 1963/Between the Beatles and Lady Chatterley. Then again, the first James Bond film Dr No—with its song-based score by Monty Norman transformed by John Barry’s arrangement—was released in 1962.

13 George Martin produced all the Beatles records but one (the Let it Be album produced by Phil Spector) as well as songs by many of the artists recording in Britain from the 1960s to the 90s, including Cilla Black, Rolf Harris (Sun Arise and Tie me Kangaroo Down, Sport), America, The Mahavishnu Orchestra, Jeff Beck, etc. Other noteworthy producers include: Bob Ezrin (with Alice Cooper), Jerry Wexler (Aretha Franklin), Roy Thomas Baker (Queen, especially Bohemian Rhapsody), Jimmy Miller (with The Rolling Stones), Tom Dowd (Coltrane, Mingus, Clapton). These producers, along with other producers, artists, musicians and recording engineers, created the new aesthetic, created the thing that replaced ‘the song’ as the key concept in popular music, that is, the ’record,’ the ‘track.’

14 There had been previous discussions about the authority or the aptness of one artist’s interpretations of another artist’s songs. In the mid-1950s Pat Boone made a career out of recording versions of black R&B artists’ songs—Fats Domino’s ‘Ain’t That a Shame’ (1955), Little Richard’s ‘Long Tall Sally’ (1956) and ‘Tutti Frutti’ (1955) among many others. Boone’s versions brought this music to a wide audience, but managed to expunge from it any suggestion of sex or wildness.

15 Listed, for example among Premiere Magazine’s Most Daring Movies Ever Made in October 1998 (online at www.filmsite.org/premiere.html) Among the innovations here are Lester’s appropriation of documentary techniques, the choice of camera angles, the camera movement, the unexpected cutting, the delving into inconsequential sub-plots, and particularly Lester’s creation of a ‘sound world’ quite unprecedented, and developed further in his 1965 film The Knack, And How To Get It.
have anything to do with the content or lyrics of the song. It just has to entertain us while the song plays. It is the birth of the modern video clip.

The repercussions for film were, and are, enormous.

6. Songs Reveal Character

Lawrence Kasdan’s *The Big Chill* (1983, written by Kasdan and Barbara Benedek) begins with the sound of a child being bathed by Harold (Kevin Kline). The child in the bath sings “Jeremiah was a bullfrog” from ‘Joy to the World’ (1970) as his father clicks his fingers in time. Written by Hoyt Axton, and recorded by Three Dog Night and released on their third album, the song reached number one on the Billboard sales charts in 1971, and ended up selling more than one million copies.16

In Axton’s version the lyrics run like this:

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Jeremiah was a bullfrog
Was a good friend of mine
I never understood a single word he said
But I helped him a-drink his wine...
Singin’, Joy to the world
All the boys and girls, now
Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea
Joy to you and me
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It was a silly song when it came out in 1971, silly and naively sweet. But it sold busloads of records to teenagers. And in 1983’s *The Big Chill*, the generational change is already manifest—the pop song of the 70s has become the child’s song of the 80s. And while we hear the toddler’s version of this song in the film in the bathroom, accompanied by the splashing of water and the father’s encouraging murmurs, in the background the phone rings. Glenn Close comes from another room to take a phone call in the hall. She stands still, in the middle distance, hunched, facing away from us. Something makes the boy and his father turn towards her (and towards us, just off the line of their gaze). She stands facing her family in mid-shot. We see her face, stilled and a tear runs down her cheek. She stands staring at her husband. As we look at her face, the opening notes of Marvin Gaye’s version of ‘I Heard It Through the Grapevine’ (1966) sound; electric keyboards and electric guitar on a minor chord, the drums tapping out the time.

Cut to a pair of socks being pulled up a hairy leg. As the trouser is pulled down over the socks, the title: *The Big Chill*. Cut to a hand twirling a coffee cup on a saucer on a table, as Marvin begins to sing:

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Ooh I bet you’re wondering how I knew
About your plans to make me blue
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16 The song shares a title with the hymn written by Isaac Watts (based on the Psalm 98) and first published in 1719, which, with music by Lowell Mason, became a hugely popular Christmas carol in 1839.

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Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King...
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Cut to medium close-up of a woman looking quietly disturbed—she too, we guess, has had the phone call:

*With some other guy you knew before*
*Two of us guys you know I love you more*

Cut to fingers doing up the buttons on a dress shirt, woman’s fingers on a man’s chest:

*It took me by surprise I must say*

Cut to Jeff Goldblum in a woollen jumper, looking distracted, searching for something:

*When I found out yesterday*

Close-up of his desk, coffee cup, papers and pencils:

*Oh I heard it through the grapevine*
*Not much longer would you be mine*

In his exasperation, Goldblum snatches at some paper on his desk, throws it away:

*Oh-oh I heard it on the grapevine*
*And I’m just about to lose my mind.*

In the background his wife, aware of his need for help, moves towards the camera/us, and him, finds the thing he is looking for, comforts him with a hug:

*Honey Honey, yeah*

Cut to a woman’s fingers, red painted nails, doing up a man’s belt, a suggestion of intimacy, of a relationship more sexual than those we have seen so far. On the soundtrack the women on the backing vocals sing:

*Heard it on the grapevine not much longer would you be my baby...*

After another number of brief shots, the film cuts to a wide-open field. A man, looking at the field just as we are, turns to help direct traffic arriving in a parking lot. We’ve arrived at the funeral, somewhere in the American Midwest, towards which all these people, these separate lives have been drawn.

This series of suspended moments, orchestrated by the writer/director through the gathering momentum of the well-known song, has kept us in a thrall of unknowingness for the first three minutes of the film. We are trying to piece together the fragmented film narrative while held in train by the rhythm, the timbres, the soulful voice singing to us the parallel sad (sung) narrative of failed love, of rumour and suspicion, as relayed by networks of information. In the song, the information is about love and betrayal. In the film the network spreads the
story of death. To all the characters we have glimpsed just briefly, the images, minimal snatches of dialogue, and ongoing music bring the new information, which in turn, by the end of the sequence, brings these characters together to confront their own pasts, this bringing-together achieved by news of the truncated life of one of their friends.

After this long, sung, introduction are two spoken funeral orations; by the preacher who didn’t know the dead friend, and by Harold, who did. The scene works in a weird way to show how words without music fail these fraught formal situations, cannot come near the truth of the life lamented, nor to the emotions experienced by the people in the church.

After some minutes of these music-less tributes, one of the other friends is announced as being about to play “one of Alex’s favourite songs”. She goes to the church organ and plays the opening chords of ‘You Can’t Always Get What You Want’ (1968), the Rolling Stones song. Again, the fact that this version of the song played here in the church is not the revered artefact itself, the 1965 version produced by Jimmy Miller, is at first the cause of laughter in the group gathered there—laughter caused by recognition of the song as well as by the absence of authenticity. But when the scattering crowd gets into their cars and the church-organ music gives way to the guitars, drums and voices of the original—the Stones version, the version we all know—that segue gives the sense of release that had been lacking: it is as if this music is home, this is truth, this is where the characters can relax, in their cars with the Stones; and we, the audience can relax, with the real thing playing on the soundtrack.

A few minutes later as the friends (in dressing gowns and tee-shirts) talk late at night, Procol Harum’s ‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’ (1967) plays in the room on the record player. Michael (Goldblum’s character) asks, “Harold, don’t you have any other music, like, er, from this century?”

Harold: There is no other music, not in this house.
Michael: There’s been a lot of terrific music in the last ten years.

Pause

Harold: Like what?

But we, the audience, know, and we knew even then in 1983, that in fact another huge change in music had happened in “the last ten years”. These characters, or most of them, are defined by the music of their pasts. But in the meantime the whole punk movement (with its challenge to the golden age of the baby-boomers), heavy metal, the ‘new wave’, electronic music, disco, had all happened. And it is the filmmaker’s joke with us, the audience, about these people, his characters, through the music they and we are listening to, and through their revealed attitudes to music, including the music we are not listening to, that defines the world of the story.

7. Pop is the New Canon

Procol Harum’s hit song features at the beginning of another noteworthy film of the 1980s, this one from England. Withnail and I (1987) written and directed by Bruce
Robinson and starring Richard E. Grant as Withnail and Paul McGann as I/Marwood, is set in 1969 and in its own 60s way (or rather an 80s memory of the 60s) sets up a tension between classicism and romanticism. That is, if we take classicism to be an art ruled by order, proportion and tradition, and romanticism as the expectation that life (and especially that part of life called art) should be ruled by feeling.

Over the first scenes, on the soundtrack is an alto sax solo from King Curtis’ bluesy version of ‘A Whiter Shade of Pale’ taken from his album *Live at Fillmore West*. Written by Gary Booker and Keith Reid, and (in a decision forced on Booker and Reid after protracted litigation culminating in a House of Lords judgment) by the band’s organ-player Matthew Fisher, this song in itself contains the tension between pop and classic, not least in its combination of a slowly moving ground bass, with wandering Hammond organ, soul-tinged vocals and enigmatic lyrics. The music has been long regarded as based on JS Bach’s ‘Air on the G String’ (1717-23), or perhaps on ‘Sleepers Awake’ (1731) but it has also been suggested that the music borrows an idea from ‘When a Man Loves a Woman’ (1966) by Percy Sledge.

Within the song, there is already a tension—JS Bach meets Percy Sledge. Now put it with the image: a title superimposed, “Camden 1969”, as Marwood smokes a cigarette, seeming alone while a party of some kind goes on around him. He moves in daylight through a cold blue room, then at night in his darkened room in the flat: he is bored, isolated, disenchaned, miserable. As the music fades he bangs on Withnail’s door, asks him, “Do you want a cup of tea?” Withnail groans, “No”. There is an abrupt cut to bacon and eggs in a frying pan in a café, which slams the sound of the music out and into the crackle of cooking, as the camera pans onto newspaper headlines:

Moment of fulfilment for local boy who became a woman
Nude Au Pair’s secret life

Marwood runs back to his flat where Withnail greets him:

Withnail: I’ve some extremely distressing news... We just ran out of wine. What are we going to do about it?
Marwood: I don’t know... I don’t feel good. My thumbs have gone weird... My heart’s beating like a fat clock! I feel dreadful, I feel really dreadful!
Withnail: So do I. So does everybody. Look at my tongue.

This dialogue, with its elevated comedic hysteria, its brusqueness, its lack of care, concern, politeness or courtesy puts us into the real, takes us out of the world of theatrical wit and into the black world where the characters live.

After seventeen minutes of this laughable misery: the escape. A wrecking ball smashes into a dilapidated chimney-stack, tottering in the grey, dilapidated city. We hear the beginning of Jimi Hendrix’s version of Bob Dylan’s ‘All Along The Watchtower’ (1967), the fluidity of the thick chords on his Fender guitar, the round compressed rolling sound of the amplified strings. And like the smashing down and

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*17 The recording was actually released in 1971, two years after the film is supposedly set—an anachronism we will forgive.

rebuilding of old London on screen Hendrix smashes (with electric love) Dylan’s old folkie strains, rebuilding pop music as he goes, just as King Curtis has redefined Procol Harum at the outset of the film.

The words of the Dylan song put us into a scene on the battlements of a castle, and implicit from that height is the point of view of the landed gentry; the song’s argument is between two characters who seem at one with these princes, businessmen and their women but, we know, are in fact not of that class, nor of the servant class. They are the outsiders, these jokers and thieves, outsiders like the actors and musicians and drug-dealers we have been looking at in the film. But they speak the same language, these outsiders, as the princes. Their speech is highly inflected, dense with meaning and significance. Even Danny the Drug Dealer (Ralph Brown) speaks carefully, shaping his odd sentences with the precision of a pedant.

Withnail and Marwood get into a Jaguar in a back street as Jimi starts to sing:

There must be some way out of here said the joker to the thief
Too much confusion, I can’t get no relief.

They make their way through the roads and Withnail yells at some schoolgirls clustered at a street corner, “Scrubbers!” The girls yell back, “Up yours!”

Businessmen they drink my wine
Ploughmen till my earth

Withnail: Little tarts they love it.

None of them along the line
Know what any of it is worth

Withnail: Look at that: Accident black spot.

Guitar break. (This guitar break is itself genre-changing!)

Withnail (shouting): They’re throwing themselves into the road to escape all this hideousness.

No need to get excited, the thief he kindly spoke
There are many here among us who feel that life is just a joke...

Driving past a bystander, Withnail calls, “Throw yourself into the road darling you haven’t got a chance!”

The comfort of the Jaguar car’s interior contrasts with the bleak rainy streets outside.

But you and I have been through that, and this is not our fate
As the car reaches the highway leading out of town:

So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late...

The classic/romantic tension continues up to the last scene. Marwood gets an acting job, cuts his hair, leaves London for the provinces. Withnail, left alone with his unredeemed disaffection, walks in the park, where he recites (perhaps in rehearsal, for an audition of his own, or just because he feels like it) Hamlet’s second act soliloquy:

I have of late, though wherefore I know not,  
Lost all my mirth...

It is a masterful performance. It is as if, through the preceding scenes, through the course of this drama, we are given to see the connection between these strange London youths and Shakespeare’s tormented Danish prince; as if Withnail has placed himself exactly in the position to be able to give the performance of this play that will reveal its truth to his contemporaries. As if the romantic is, in the end, the key to the classical, which the soundtrack has confirmed in its delineation of 1960s pop as the new canon.

8. Song Delights Us

In 1983 I was recommended by a friend for a television show the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) was putting together: a 20-part series written by two musicians, Tim Gooding and Joanna Piggott, about some kids starting a band. The series was to be called Sweet and Sour.

I travelled to Sydney, met Jan Chapman, the producer, and Graham Thorburn and Carolyn James, the music researchers. They were very serious about trying to get the music right. They had already commissioned a few songwriters to come up with some material suitable for the band to play, and they had chosen these writers well: Reg Mombassa and Martin Plaza from Mental As Anything, Dave McComb from The Triffids, Jenny Hunter-Brown, Sharon O’Neal (who wrote and sang the title track), Mark Callaghan (Riptides and, later, Gang Gajang) Don Walker and Steve Prestwich (Cold Chisel) as well as Joanna and Tim, the writers of the show. I was to work with Graham ‘Buzz’ Bidstrup, the drummer from The Angels (and later on with Gang Gajang) in the ABC studios. When it came to the music of our time we knew what we were about, this group. What wasn’t so clear was how to make it work in a drama.

Finding that out took about ten months. Getting used to the idea that a filmed story doesn’t often want a whole song, but would usually much rather have one verse and one chorus was a lesson. The collisions between sensibilities were constant. Buzz and I had enjoyed a bit of success as well as the long slog of small gigs, and were sure that we knew how things ‘really were’ in the world of pop and rock music. But this show was about a group that would not be successful, about a charming failure, a group made up of young musicians, some of whom could hardly play their instruments. Co-incidentally, it was taking place during the years of the first decent-sounding drum machines. So amateurs like our fictitious group, The Takeaways, could conceivably make themselves a solid rhythm track that way.
But still the arguments persisted: how amateurish should they be? How pop? Joanna said the Takeaways were so naïve their songs would not even have a middle-eight. But the writers had given me a gift. One character, Martin (David Reyne) was to be a ‘great’ guitar player. This allowed me to develop a sophisticated guitar voice, even though the other instruments had to be played simply. I play guitar myself but, in the interests of making something better than I could imagine, hired Tommy Emmanuel, a virtuosic axeman, to do the extraordinary things only he could do. Between us we made a convincing ‘Martin’.

In the production of the songs Buzz and I tried to keep our work as true to itself as if there were no TV show, as if we were doing it for a record; ‘for real’. As if we were not part of a national broadcaster’s attempt to connect with youth. The strain shows sometimes. But, by the standards of the time, it was a breakthrough of sorts. The show found a significant audience (the entire series was repeated twice in the same year) and ABC Records sold double-platinum albums. And we did it with new songs, rather than by re-packaging already-existing hits. To that extent we were taking a risk, avoiding rather than exploiting familiarity. We were still in the genre of ‘backstage musical,’ still in the conceptual space of the Beatles’ film. In the next decade the ‘song-score’ would develop much further.

Garwood refers to the “use (in Sleepless in Seattle) of the standard pop song as an alternative, or complement, to the underscore, playing on the soundtrack without a visible onscreen source…” (2000: 282) He goes on to explore “the shaping of pop music into a kind of film music (as underscore), paying attention to its deployment in two familiar roles: as a key to understanding what a character may be feeling at a particular moment; and as a type of ‘guide’, suggesting what the viewer should be feeling in relation to a particular moment.” (ibid: emphases in original)

Two years later In Clueless (1995), directed by Amy Heckerling, the song-based score shows how filmmakers can now assume an audience’s greater familiarity with the songs of its time. The titles start with a cheesy pop-art version of the Paramount logo as we hear the opening song: ‘Kids in America’, written by Ricky Wilde and Marty Wilde, first released by Kim Wilde in 1982 and performed in this version by The Muffs:

Looking out a dirty old window  
Outside the cars in the city go rushing by  
I sit here alone and I wonder why

An overhead shot of a open-top jeep full of kids, then a montage of Alicia Silverstone (Cher) walking out of a store wielding shopping bags, then dancing, then with her group of friends again (improbably good-looking, impossibly rich) fooling around in a mall in Beverly Hills, then in swimming costumes by a fountain, then in the jeep again.

Friday night and everyone’s moving  
I can feel the heat but it’s soothing anyhow…  
I search for the beat in this dirty town.  
Downtown the young ones are going  
We’re the kids in America  
Everybody live for the music-go-round, round, round…

19 Music supervisor Karyn Rachtman; music score by David Kitay.
At 00:56 seconds the music fades and Cher says on voiceover, “Actually I have a way normal life for a teenage girl.” David Bowie’s ‘Fashion’ (1980) starts on the soundtrack. Cher continues: “I mean I get up, I brush my teeth and I pick out my school clothes…” There’s a shot of her choosing outfits on her computer screen, matching cartoon skirts with tops and so on, totally bogus in style, design, relation to reality, but functioning quite acceptably as some kind of low-level comedy. While Bowie sings on the soundtrack:

They do it over there but they don’t do it here
Oh-oh! Fashion...

At 01:25 the song fades out. In 30 seconds, it has established the film’s credentials. Cher tells us in voiceover, “Daddy’s a litigator…” Almost immediately the next track starts. As Cher argues with her dad (he tells her, to her disgust, that her step-brother [Paul Rudd] will be visiting), and the No Doubt song ‘Just a Girl’ (1995), written by Gwen Stefani and Tom Dumont begins, at first softly but gradually fading up.

Don’t you think I know
Exactly where I stand
This world is forcing me
To hold your hand
’Cause I’m just a girl, little ’ol me
Don’t let me out of your sight
I’m just a girl, all pretty and petite
So don’t let me have any rights
Oh...I’ve had it up to here!

There are multiple distances established; the distance between the lyrics of this song, its title, and the band who sings it. As everyone who pays attention to pop culture knows, this band No Doubt are not a quiescent complaisant presence. As established through their videos they have a challenging presence—the Mohawk haircuts and tattoos, the punk-cut jeans and tee shirts of their drummer, the insistent bald head of the guitar player, and above all, in the assertive sassy blonde persona of the singer Gwen Stefani. When she sings, “I’m just a girl, little ol’ me” we may take this statement with some ironical salt. And when we see this irony framed by the visual image of the conservatively-dressed, politically-ignorant, conventionally-attractive Cher of Clueless we are presented with irony on irony. Which serves nevertheless to remind us never to underestimate the power and resources of a teenage girl.

After one minute the song fades out. We’re two and a half minutes into the picture and we’ve had three bits of songs; enough of the songs to tell what the songs are, to identify this group of friends, its time and place, its milieu, and (broadly speaking) its attitudes, and, what’s more, to identify the filmmakers (because the songs on the soundtrack define the authors of the film as well as the characters in it). There follows some forty-five seconds without a song, then, as Dionne’s boyfriend approaches, a snatch of the Salt-n-Pepa song ‘Shoop’ (1993) is heard. Not much of it: simply the riff and the single word “Shoop”. Just nine seconds of this song is enough for the reference to have its effect. The pace of the referencing system is frenetic. Keep up or forget it.
The use of song on this film is a triumph, and the triumph must belong to that much-derided functionary, the Music Supervisor; in this case Karyn Rachtman. Composers tend not to like music supervisors, and often with good reason. The power shift from written music to ‘supervised’ music has been a real and painful blow to the status and authority of the score composer. And there are many so-so music supervisors who are in fact little more than touts for a record label (or music publishers or agents for their own roster of artists). A good music supervisor is worth gold. It is not a case of ‘anyone good at the business of clearances can do this’. Yes, you have to deliver the clearance, that is, the synchronisation licence, but the right music supervisor for a project is expert in the music that that project needs. And that’s who, as a filmmaker, you want choosing, or offering to the director the choice of, the music.

Some directors make their own choices. Quentin Tarantino’s very personal taste in the popular music of the last sixty years has given his films a unique edge. It’s the specificity of his music—The Delltones in Jackie Brown (1997), Dick Dale’s ‘Misirlou’ (1962), Dusty Springfield’s ‘Son of a Preacher Man’ (1968), Chuck Berry’s ‘You Never Can Tell’ (1963) in Pulp Fiction (1994), Steeler’s Wheel’s ‘Stuck in the Middle With You’ (1972) in Reservoir Dogs (1992).

David Lynch has a similarly personal style. Lynch has provided some of the more memorable music moments on film in the last twenty years. Nothing, for me, matches the scene of Rebekah Del Rio in the Club Silencio sequence in Mulholland Drive (2001) singing in Spanish the old Roy Orbison song ‘Crying’ (1962). It’s not just the quality of the performance, both vocal and visual, or the quality of the sound, but the commitment to the song, from both singer and filmmaker, which is obvious. The fact that the film narrative simply suspends itself for these few minutes (with Betty and Rita—Naomi Watts and Laura Elena Harring—squirming in their seats then hammily crying) doesn’t bother me a bit. That song transcends, for me, any reason for it being there or not being there. It’s a moment of pure pleasure.20 And that’s the other reason for having a song, or any music, in film: because we like it. It delights us.

9. The Groove is Not for Everyone

I started songwriting at around 16 years old. I wanted to write songs because I liked what other songwriters were doing: Ray Davies, Pete Townshend, Chuck Berry. Bob Dylan’s work demonstrated that a woman mentioned in a lyric does not have to be the love interest of the singer, that there are many possible relationships between the singer and the subject of the song. And there was Lennon and McCartney, BB King and Bo Diddley, Jimi Hendrix, Brian Wilson, Frank Zappa, and somewhere in the background, Cole Porter and Jerome Kern. I learned by sitting with a guitar and working out as best I could what the songwriters I liked were doing, then trying to do something in similar vein.

The discovery of the 12-bar blues as a template into which you could throw any story, any feeling, was a revelation to me. But even more when I realised that Howlin’ Wolf’s 12-bar blues could in fact be 10 bars or 11 or even 11-and-a-half bars long. The song’s form was whatever he felt like. The form did not rule. The

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20 Discussed at length in Herzog, 2009, in which the writer posits the popular song as inserting a Deleuzian ‘difference’ into the film.
function ruled, and the function was to accompany and give shape to the story, give space for the feeling.

But one of the hardest things to come to grips with when I was starting to write scores was the problem of rhythm. Popular music is based on beats that are more or less constant for the length of a song, whereas orchestral music has a rhythmic flexibility well suited to the ebb and flow of drama. An editor said to me, ‘One reason we don’t like drumkits in a film score is that you’ll end up at the end of the scene exactly where you were at the beginning.’ Gdang! It was like a lightning flash. The rubato of the studio composers, the loosening and tightening of the beat, as well as the accelerandi and decelerandi of the tempo were what made those scores fit so naturally into the rhythms of thought, of action and of feeling. Those old scores felt organic, the new scores that we were doing felt forced, constraining our scenes and our characters into the straightjacket of the groove.

The solution, as I should have seen immediately, is to abandon the grid. Just as John Lee Hooker added half a bar whenever his lyric seemed to need it, so modern film composers add or subtract a beat or two to any bar to make the grid fit the picture. So, for instance, where Miklos Rosza (say) at a critical moment would slow his orchestra down through a four/four bar to make the music seem to expand into the space-time of his character’s thought, we now tend to add a beat at the same tempo, making a five/four bar to fit the moment. It’s an overtly technical solution to the problem but it works.

Though sometimes it is the fixedness of the groove that works. Sometimes the groove is the thing standing outside the story that the characters can retreat to in order to find themselves, or the audience can locate the characters in. Song in film enacts a parallel narrative on the same stage. This second narrative, happening in time but in an invisible space, adds another dimension to the audience’sapperception, another possibility for the filmmaker to add colour, reflection, comment or even critique to the rest of the mise-en-scène.

Richard Dyer discusses this in relation to the film Car Wash (Michael Schultz, 1976):

Car Wash belongs to a tradition of black films that show black people using music, going back to it to pick it up when they need it... It is, however, not just characters who do this, but the narration of the film itself. (2010: 150)

He quotes James A Snead’s contrast of white culture’s linear development, and black culture’s repetition and circularity:

In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is ‘there for you to pick it up when you come back to get it.’(Cited in Dyer, 2010: 147)

Music in films like this, he says, is the thing in people’s heads.21

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21 As it is in Curtis Mayfield’s song-score for Super Fly (1972) and Isaac Hayes’ for Shaft (1971) and many other films based in that culture. See also Howell’s notion that Earth Wind and Fire’s music in Sweet Sweetback’s Badass Song (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971) “does not progress in the sense a melodic line would...there is no end in sight” (cited in Dyer, 2010: 163).
Characters dip in and out of the thing in their ear, as does the narration of the film itself. (ibid: 147)

As white popular culture continues to borrow, appropriate and increasingly rely on black culture, then the tension between the ongoing repetitive groove of young people’s music and the linear development of story, between the fixedness of contemporary music’s rhythms and the ebb and flow of screen characters’ emotions, will surely become ever more tricky to negotiate. Just as the tension between the obvious artificiality of a written score and the desire of the filmmaker to have his/her story-world seem not artificial but authentic will grow more marked.

The future, then, seems to mean less score, and more song. And more films without music at all. This perhaps explains the popularity of Philip Glass. When you don’t really want music for its individual affect you end up with Glass: chameleon-like yet uniquely identifiable, highly developed but utterly predictable, endlessly malleable but formally complete, and seemingly already-existing within itself. It is the answer to the Anglo-European filmmakers’ problems, the ur-music in (white) people’s heads. It’s the ultimate sex-less groove.

10. Songs Make Life Easier for Directors and Producers

To the person watching a film and often to the person writing about a film the director is a creator: godlike in his/her ability to fashion a world out of imagination. To the person working on a film the director is not like that. Once the shooting starts the director is more like the first audience. When a production designer has an idea for a set or an interior s/he shows it to the director and observes the reaction. When an actor in rehearsal or in front of the camera does a little certain something with mouth or fingers s/he is interested first of all in what the director thinks of that little detail of performance. The director stands for the observing world. Yes, s/he may have originated the whole thing, may be the writer-director-demiurge of legend, but on set or in the studio the director is ultimately concerned with what an audience will make of it all, calibrates his/her own feelings through the imagined audience. So it is with music. Most directors don’t write music. They describe what they want and then react to what you’ve done. There’s an awkwardness in that exchange sometimes. That’s another reason why so many of them reach for already existing songs: they already know what they think about them.

Apart from that, it took me a while to recognise that the director often does not want, is not impressed by, the artful weave of a single piece of music into the fabric of story. The director sometimes wants (as Welles preferred to Mancini’s score) the jangled tatters of many different musics; like the shifting moods of a crowded club, pub, café or diner when there’s a different song on the jukebox every three minutes: an effect that is very hard (though not impossible) to achieve with a written score.

I co-wrote with Bill Motzing music for the original version of Young Einstein (Yahoo Serious, 1984). I took care of the contemporary music bits (the guitary, drummy, synthy bits) while Bill did the orchestral bits. We won the Australian Film Institute Award for Best Music that year. But when the film was refinanced, and subsequently reshot (in parts), re-edited and remixed, the filmmakers replaced...
much of my score with pop songs from the Mushroom catalogue, mainly, I think for the twin sakes of variety and recognisability. The pain and annoyance I felt about this lasted quite a while. But now that it confirms my observation on the modern tendency to turn directors into bricoleurs, and cinemas into jukeboxes, I don’t feel so bad.

In 1988, producer John Edwards asked me to do music for his 8-part TV series Stringer. The story followed a pugnacious English journalist in Sydney (Derek O’Connor) digging up stories, getting into trouble, pursuing ludicrous business ventures with a taxi driver (Nick Papademetriou) and the musical conceit was that whenever the stringer was alone he listened to ‘girl-groups’. We decided to put together our own ‘girl-group’ and persuaded two wonderful singers, Kate Ceberano and Wendy Matthews, to be the girls. The songs were a mixture of standards (by Curtis Mayfield, Jerome Kern, and Mickey Newbury), original commissions (from Don Walker and Dave Dobbyn) and a few that I wrote or adapted for the show. It was all recorded beforehand, and that way the songs *already existed*.

There was no doubt in this method about what was the right way to score the scene. The song either worked or it didn’t. Luckily for me it mostly did. The band we put together was one of the best I’ve ever worked with: Ricky Fataar (drums), Joe Creighton (bass), Max Lambert (piano), Kenny Kitching (pedal steel) and Rex Goh (guitars). Michael Stavrou engineered a warm, clean sound in the ABC studios on William Street. Writing these words now I’m conscious of the gap between practice and theory, between the doing of a music score and the critical consideration of it. *Who plays bass?* is probably not of much concern to the theorists of film but, to anyone making the sort of music I do, it’s one of the first questions to ask—along with *where are we mixing?*—because it is the texture of the sound that, to me, is critical in music. The timbre and touch, the weave and sinew, and, added to that, the players, along with sympathetic recording and mixdown engineers, are vital. Production practices, technical specifications, are usually a given. Not many filmmakers want to innovate when it comes to the soundtrack. But within the given the composer will strive to find the new thing. And the new thing, once done, influences everybody else.

In a way it’s odd, this bias against musical innovation on the part of producers and directors, because, as Amy Herzog points out, it is precisely the ‘musical moment’ that allows the film to break with tradition. Music, she says, can ‘rupture’ the sense of spatial and temporal logic that rules narrative, allowing a sense of ‘difference’ to intervene through its repetitions (2009: 8). The problem is, to achieve the transcendental experience that marks out your film as special, you have to surrender your film to the music, to “invert the image-sound hierarchy” (ibid: 7). This can be scary. No wonder only a few ground-breakers (François Ozon, Jean-Luc Godard, David Lynch and their like) take the plunge. And no wonder, when it is done by less adventurous talents, this ‘surrender’ tends to rely on well-known, popular, easily-recognisable songs.

In the song-score there are a few innovators:

Henry Mancini wrote many songs (*Moon River* for *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* [Blake Edwards, 1961] most famously) but it is not his songs that have made him

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22 For Jan Chapman’s ABC mini-series *Come In Spinner* (1989) we had similarly solid narrative-based reasons for much of the music.
essential, more how he used song structure in his scores. Lalo Schifrin (1994) said that when he heard Mancini’s theme for the TV series *Peter Gunn* he thought to himself, “I can do that,” and he immediately left Paris for the United States. And he did ‘do that’ or rather, what he did was adapt that technique to his own, and build on it.

Mancini liked to combine bluesy solo guitar figures over simple repetitive jazzy rhythms punctuated by massed brass chordal stabs and wails; or else cool bass and drum patterns with solo horn. Plas Johnson’s tenor solo on Henry Mancini’s *Pink Panther* theme (Blake Edwards, 1963) for example, created a new fusion of styles that has proven timeless. Schifrin’s development of this tendency was to combine funky electric bass and tight clipped soul drumming with string clusters of crushed chords, the whole reinforced by brass and horn stabs and augmented with soloistic woodwinds. To say Mancini influenced Schifrin does not make Schifrin any less. That’s just how music develops. One thing, once heard, makes another thing possible.

Jack Nitzsche was Phil Spector’s orchestrator (notably for *River Deep Mountain High*, 1966), The Rolling Stones’ piano player (1965-1968), Neil Young’s producer (1968-1970, including *Harvest*), and a record producer through the 1970s, before he became a film composer. He wrote scores for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (Milos Forman, 1979), *The Razor’s Edge* (John Byrum, 1984), *Nine½ Weeks* (Adrian Lyne, 1986), *The Hot Spot* (Dennis Hopper, 1990), *The Indian Runner* (Sean Penn, 1991), *The Crossing Guard* (Sean Penn, 1995) and forty or so others. Don’t worry about the song ‘Up Where We Belong’, which he co-wrote for *An Officer and A Gentleman* (Taylor Hackford, 1982). In Hopper’s *The Hot Spot*, Nitzsche’s combination of Miles Davis and John Lee Hooker sets up a score that draws on the core history of American popular culture while providing a set of possibilities for film music for the next ten or twenty years.

Jon Brion constructed, for Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Magnolia* (1999), a score based on and including the songs of Aimee Mann, and then extended her themes into an original suturing continuous texture that played through and connected the multiple storylines. For Michel Gondry’s *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) he created an extraordinary score made up of many fragmented elements and based around song structures which somehow came together at the end of the film, with Beck singing the 1980 James Warren song ‘Everybody’s Got to Learn Sometime’ (1980) which, in turn, revealed that song, that sentiment, as a generative seed for the whole film.

**Conclusion**

Songs as self-contained works of art have their own authority. They exist in the world whether film exists or not. Film scores—music composed purely to serve the film—exist only dependent on and contingent to the film. There will still be plenty of written scores for horror and thriller genre films, for science fiction and action-adventure movies. But film loves song—because audiences know songs, or at least they remember them for a while. This means that the choice of song can define a film, its characters and its makers. Given the audience familiarity with the canon of popular music, the combination of song and score—especially of song-worked-into score—deployed with the necessary technique and artistry, gives composers and filmmakers an unrivalled tool; a sonic shortcut, an instant connect between their
films and the lives of their audiences. In the dark public room that is cinema, in
the eternal night where filmed stories are told, music triggers memory so that the
viewer becomes listener, and the listener, through the song, has already experienced the feeling-state that the viewer is entering for the first time. These songs, slivers of music, tiny shards of memory, provide gateways from our fictitious constructs, our imperfect analogies of the real, to those myriad unknowable lives—the lives of the audience—that are our subject and our destination.

References


THE POLYSYNCHRONOUS FILM SCORE: Songs for a Contemporary Score for F.W. Murnau’s *Faust* (1926)

Phillip Johnston

Abstract

Contemporary scores for silent film more often than not adhere to traditional assumptions about the relationship between music and image/narrative. This article proposes a ‘polysynchronous’ approach, which it defines as being wider and more investigative/experimental than the traditional dichotomy between synchronous versus asynchronous framed in much discussion of film music. The addition of the element of songs with words gives the composer (and librettist) an even more powerful tool to engage with the narrative. The article looks in detail at Phillip Johnston’s contemporary score for F.W. Murnau’s *Faust* (1926), which he has performed live in sync with the film in Australia, USA and Europe. The author shows how he and his librettist, Australian playwright Hilary Bell, use original songs in combination with instrumental music to further engage with the narrative and significantly reinterpret the ending.

Keywords

silent film, *Faust*, Murnau, songs in film, polysynchronous, libretto

Introduction

Composers in both the silent and sound film eras have done much creative and original work. However, it is only in rare cases that the relationship between music and image/narrative has been questioned at its most basic level. Of film music from the non-synchronised sound (‘silent’) film era, more is known about general practices than about the music itself, as the few notated scores that survive present only a partial record of the music, both notated and non-notated, that would have been performed (Marks, 1997: 26). Furthermore, the vast body of work of *improvised* scores for silent films, performed live by both professionals and inspired amateurs, is lost forever. But since the beginning of the sync-sound era, basic assumptions about the relationship between music and film have largely gone un questioned. It is these assumptions that most contemporary composers who write music for silent films carry into their work when creating original scores for silent films.

This article provides a detailed study of the use of songs, and of my own silent film-scoring aesthetic, as expressed in my collaboration with Australian playwright/librettist Hilary Bell in creating a contemporary score for the silent film
masterpiece Faust (F.W. Murnau, 1926). Songs were combined with instrumental underscore to create a live performance with the film.¹

I propose that the contemporary score for silent film provides unique opportunities for composers to investigate alternative possibilities for the relationship between music and image/narrative in film music, opportunities that have not been widely adopted. In addition, I suggest that the use of songs as part of the score also provides unique opportunities. It gives the composer/librettist the additional tool of lyrics to comment on and interact with the narrative, and it adds a powerful instrument—the human voice—to the instrumentation.

This article begins with some background on the film, and on the composer and librettist. It provides examples of some possibilities for the expansion of the music/film relationship that I describe as the ‘polysynchronous’ film score, a practice that I contextualise with reference to additional work in the field. It then focuses on the score for Faust, most particularly in relation to the use of songs in a contemporary silent film score.

Composer Background

I began my career as a performer and composer of jazz and New Music but from very early on I was drawn to film music. Bernard Herrmann, Nino Rota and Ennio Morricone were some of my earliest influences as a composer and consequently filmmakers began to approach me about writing music for their films. My first feature film score was Committed (Lynne Tillman and Sheila McLaughlin, 1984), and from that time on I practised parallel careers as a jazz musician and film music composer.

In 1993, I was drawn to writing a score for a silent film for several reasons. I was looking for an outlet for some of my ideas for film music that I had not been able to express within the conventional role of film score composer, and I had long been drawn to the beauty and seeming ‘strangeness’ of the world of early films. I approached David Schwartz at The American Museum of the Moving Image in New York about commissioning me to compose a score, and AMMI ended up sponsoring a festival called ‘Silent Movies/Loud Music’ featuring silent film scores by composers associated with New York’s Knitting Factory,² including Don Byron, Amy Denio, Tom Cora, Samm Bennett, Christine Baczewska and myself. This experience was the beginning of my fascination with contemporary scores for silent film that has continued to this day. I perform these scores live, with ensembles of varied instrumentation, which change from film to film (Fig 1.)

¹ The score was commissioned by the New York Film Festival and premiered on 5 October 2002 at the Lincoln Center’s Walter Reade Theater. It has subsequently been performed at the German Film Festival in Sydney in 2007 and at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, as part of the 2008 Melbourne International Festival of the Arts, as well as in the US and Europe.

² New York’s Knitting Factory opened in Manhattan in 1987 originally as an art gallery but evolved into a performance space for experimental music.
It was also the beginning of an ongoing investigation into the relationship between music and image/narrative. One observation I made, not only as a practitioner, but as a listener/viewer of contemporary silent film scores, was that basic assumptions about the relationship between film and score were rarely challenged. Modern instruments (electric guitar/electronics) or modern musical styles (jazz, rock, electronica) might be used, but the way in which they related to the film remained the same. Sad scenes still were supported by slow, lugubrious music; chase scenes were still accompanied by fast and frantic scores. Time tested techniques, such as the use of leitmotifs associated with characters, places or ideas were still commonly used, and most of Claudia Gorbman’s ‘Classic Principles of Film Music’ (1987) were still followed rigorously. The details had changed, but the basic idea remained the same for the majority of narrative silent films.

In my scores I tried to investigate possibilities to see what would happen if these principles were not followed. What if a fast frantic scene was accompanied by slow, melancholy music? What would that feel like to a spectator? What if music were suddenly stopped at an unexpected point in the film, and, rather than using the continuity of the music to sustain the illusion of the film, the sudden lack of it highlighted the artificiality of the viewer’s situation? I continued to experiment with different ideas in my subsequent silent film scores.

It was in The Unknown (Tod Browning, 1927) that I first experimented with using music to alter the interpretation of the narrative of the film, inspired in part by once seeing pianist Joel Forrester play piano for a Laurel and Hardy film and for Nosferatu (F.W. Murnau, 1922). With his accompaniment, Forrester made Laurel and Hardy a horror movie and Nosferatu a comedy.

In The Unknown, Alonzo (Lon Chaney) plays an escaped killer, hiding himself in a circus by pretending to be an armless man who does a knife-throwing act with his feet. The target of this act is the ringmaster’s daughter, the beautiful Nanon (Joan Crawford), who has an obsessive fear of men’s arms. Afraid that she will discover that he has arms, Alonzo blackmails a corrupt surgeon into cutting off his arms. When he returns from a lengthy convalescence, he discovers that she has gotten
over her phobia, and is now planning to marry the circus strongman, Malabar (Norman Kerry). Alonzo goes mad, and while pretending to be pleased for them, he engineers a circus accident in which Malabar’s arms will be torn off by wild horses. But at the last minute Nanon runs in front of the horses to try and save her lover and, in saving her, Alonzo is trampled to death. In the final scene, after the moral is summed up in a last title card, Nanon and Malabar are in each other’s arms, and Alonzo is dead.

Watching The Unknown, I felt (as I often do) that the ostensible villain (Chaney) was not only the most interesting character but the most noble as well. Both Malabar and Nanon are oblivious to Alonzo, blind to both his devotion and his pain. He is willing to make an incredible (if insane) sacrifice for his love, while they have sacrificed nothing. In the end he dies to save his true love, even though it means his own undoing and losing his carefully plotted revenge.

So in my score I decided to make Alonzo the hero, and Nanon and Malabar the villains. At the climax of the film, as Alonzo carefully executes his plot and Malabar comes closer and closer to dismemberment I wrote fast, exciting music, a mad polka that celebrates Alonzo’s triumph. It gains momentum and complexity with virtuoso unison passages over a fast beat as his murderous plot advances toward its completion. But once the plot is foiled and Alonzo dies, that music ends. The last scene of the moral (expressed in a title card), and the lover’s embrace, features the most sinister music in the film: a slow-moving dirge of chromatic counterpoint, ending on an unresolved dissonance. The image and title card say that this is a resolution and a happy ending, but the music is funeral music for Alonzo and does not give its blessing to this undeserving union.

**Faust Commission**

In 2002, I was commissioned by the New York Film Festival to create an original score to accompany the premiere of a new print of *Faust* (F.W. Murnau, 1926). I had tried to make each of my silent film scores different from the preceding ones in some basic way: not just different music, but to engage the relationship between music and image/narrative in a different way. My first silent film score was an homage to classic film music (with some of the basic devices turned inside out), my second a collection of short films, in which each functioned as a study of possible alternative relationships between music and film. My third used group improvisation, but carefully scored to the film by use of synchronized stopwatches, and in combination with composed material.

Murnau’s *Faust* is one of the masterpieces of German silent cinema. However, while much has been written about its “fugues of light” (Eisner, 1964: 165), the script itself, by Hans Kyser, is a mash-up of Christopher Marlowe, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Charles Gounod. Film historian Siegfried Kracauer finds its depiction of the metaphysical conflict between good and evil “thoroughly vulgarized” (1947: 148) and most critical writing about the film focuses on the cinematography, the use of light and shadow, and the painterly imagery, and not on the narrative intent of the storytelling (Fig 2). And while I chose the film for scoring because of its

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3 This was the result of a fruitful relationship we had enjoyed beginning with their premiere of my scores for The Georges Méliès Project (Georges Méliès, 1899-1909) in 1997, and for Page of Madness (Teinosuke Kinugasa, 1927) in 1998.

4 Lotte Eisner barely mentions this aspect of the film in her published works (1964; 1974).
visual imagery and fantastic tableaux, it was the narrative that I chose to engage in a ‘polysynchronous’ way with my score. (Indeed, I deliberately chose not to listen to or source information about original scores or compiled musical accompaniments used in early screenings, as I wished to approach it afresh.) Once again, I wished to tackle a particularly challenging approach.

For Faust, because of the complexity of its themes and its supernatural subject matter (Jan Christopher Horak calls it, “an uncompromising art film made with the massive budget of an international blockbuster”5), I decided to use a new instrumentation: ‘cello, piano-accordion, saxophone, piano, ukulele, and a singer. The resonances in the heightened style of dramatic expression suggested to me that working with a librettist to combine a substantial number of original songs with instrumental underscore would give me a powerful new tool with which to interact with the narrative. As I did with my non-vocal musical instruments, I would strive to use the voice in every possible way: the score includes songs in a number of styles, including classical art song, cabaret, jazz & blues, ballads, and hymns, as well as instrumental underscore. It also includes vocal improvisation (both jazz and New Music), vocals, and a small amount of spoken text.

For my librettist, I chose Australian playwright Hilary Bell. She has an extensive profile as a librettist in a wide variety of forms and we had an effective collaborative relationship. Bell’s work includes musical theatre (Wedding Song, with composer Stephen Rae), song cycle (Talk Show, with composer Elena Katz-Chernin), and opera (Mrs. President, with composer Victoria Bond). Bell often uses songs in her plays, and I had written the music for a number of them, as well as the underscore

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5 From the essay by film historian Jan Christopher Horak accompanying the Kino release.
music (Wolf Lullaby, The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Ruysch, The Falls). For Faust, we worked together to develop a libretto that would create multiple levels of meaning, based on our individual reactions to various narrative elements in the film. From there we chose the topics for songs, and the places to use them, and Bell commenced writing the libretto. As I set her words to music, I began using that thematic material in the instrumental underscore that connected the songs as well.

My research shows that songs with lyrics have rarely been used in contemporary silent film scores. One of the most obvious reasons is the belief that listening to words in a song, while having to read words in the inter-titles, would be confusing for the audience, and that the solution of fitting the songs between the inter-titles is not practical—they occur too often, songs tend to be longer, and it would be an inconvenient structural limitation.

We decided to turn this liability into a strength, and assume a certain amount of sensory overload as part of our conception: from the beginning we decided that the audience would be taking in information on four levels at the same time: the visuals, the music, the lyrics, and the inter-titles. At some times they would have to take an active role in deciding what to ‘pay attention’ to, as opposed to the more usual cinematic approach of being led to the prioritised sound. Most filmmakers decide at all times what the audience should pay attention to, and take care not to confuse the audience. One of the most important parts of the composer’s usual brief is to avoid this conflict by not drawing attention to the music, but rather to use the music to support the image track.

The Polysynchronous Film Score

The ‘synchronous’ film score, which is presently the dominant model in both commercial (Hollywood) and independent films, refers to a relationship between the music and the image/narrative whereby whatever is on the screen is being reinforced or echoed by the music. The Hollywood ‘Golden Age’ scores of Steiner/Newman/Rosza et al, or some of the more popular scores of John Williams exemplify this approach.

It is worth recounting Gorbman’s ‘Classical Film Music: Principles Of Composition, Mixing And Editing’ from her much-cited Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music:

- i) ‘Invisibility’
- ii) ‘Inaudibility’
- iii) Signifier of emotion
- iv) Narrative cueing (referential narrative & connotative)
- v) Continuity

The ‘asynchronous’ model refers to music that appears to be at odds with the image/narrative. Examples include the use of Samuel Barber’s ‘Adagio for Strings’ in the opening of Platoon (Oliver Stone, 1986), or Pietro Mascagni’s ‘Cavalleria Rusticana’ in the final murder scenes of The Godfather, Part III (Francis Ford Coppola, 1990); this technique, too, has become somewhat clichéd.

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6 One significant exception is Richard Einhorn’s transcendent score for Carl Dreyer’s The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928). The score also functions as a stand-alone piece of music: Voices of Light, an oratorio for solo voices, chorus and orchestra.
Further, Gorbman writes her final principle:

* A given film score may violate any of the principles above, providing the violation is at the service of the other principles. (Gorbman, 1981: 73)

The ‘polysynchronous’ film score is one which is not limited to synchronous or asynchronous, but chooses freely between them, and includes a third category. This accommodates, first of all, music that does not clearly express an easily defined point of view (happy or sad, safe or threatening), but is rather more complex and open, invoking “affiliating identifications” (Kassabian, 2001: 141). Second, a polysynchronous film score is free to make more playful juxtapositions between music and image/narrative, including, but not limited to, irony, historical references, puns, asides, parallel narrative and other forms of subtext.

Affiliating identifications track perceivers toward a more loosely defined position that groups, or affiliates, several different narrative positions within the fantasy scenario together... Affiliating identifications open outward. (Kassabian, 2001: 141)

The contemporary silent film score performed live with the film provides a unique opportunity for this kind of free play. Contemporary sound film composers are bound by allegiance to two masters: first, their employer, the director of the film (as well as the producer, the editor, the music editor, and the music supervisor), and second, showing ‘competence’ in speaking a musical language that will communicate the required information/emotions to the audience.

Competence is based on decipherable codes learned through experience. As with language and visual image, we learn through exposure what a given tempo, series of notes, key, time signature, rhythm, volume, and orchestration are meant to signify. (Kassabian, 2001: 23)

But contemporary composers of music for silent film do not need to please director or audience, and are only bound by self-censorship, driven by perceived expectations, and their imaginations.

It is not that ‘polysynchronous’ composing ideas are never used in contemporary film scoring: there are a variety of innovative practitioners who at times create original and thought-provoking juxtapositions of film and music. But they themselves would be the first to admit that, due to a combination of commercial pressures, cultural assumptions, and corporate imperatives that carefully control all aspects of film production (both in Hollywood and beyond), the opportunities for this kind of free play are rare, and, more often than not, are integrated without anyone noticing. Silent films have music more or less throughout the film (although there are exceptions to this), and, because of the absence of a living director and of most commercial pressures, these scores more often tend to be composer-driven ‘art’ projects, at least those that are performed live.  

However, because of the pervasiveness of these unquestioned codes, begun in the pre-sound film era, continued through the ‘Golden Age’ of film music and still adhered to today, one rarely sees most of the basic tenets outlined by Gorbman questioned, at least in mainstream Hollywood feature films. One routinely sees a

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7 Scores composed for DVD releases are bound by a different set of limitations—the producer of the DVD takes on the role of the original director/producer in giving or withholding approval.
chase scene with fast, frantic music (although it may be rock music played on electric instruments), or a scary scene with ‘mysterious’ music (although it may be provided by synths and software samplers). One still sees the ubiquity of the ‘motif’ device, utilized since the silent film era and then codified by Golden Age composers like Max Steiner and Erich Korngold, which was derived from Richard Wagner and Giacomo Puccini’s 19th century practices.

All of these are effective, time-tested and pleasure-giving techniques. However, in the form of live performances of contemporary scores for silent film there are opportunities for some alternatives that are not being exploited. And the use of songs with words, long used in sound films, provides an even more articulate tool for engaging with the heretofore taken-for-granted narrative.

Songs in the Score for *Faust*

Murnau’s *Faust* has, as of 2012, been released on two DVD sets. Initially released by Kino Films (USA), with a score by orchestral composer Timothy Brock, performed by the Olympia Chamber Orchestra, a new two DVD set was released in 2006 by Eureka Video, which contained the original international distribution print, and a newly discovered German release print. The 2006 release contained the Timothy Brock score, plus a new score for solo harp by Stan Ambrose. It has not been scored by as many contemporary composers as some films like *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927), *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) or Murnau’s own *Nosferatu* (1922), but Willem Breuker, Robert Bruce, and the Mont Alto Motion Picture Orchestra, among others, have all done *Faust* scores.

The Australian premiere of our score took place on 10 September 2007 at the Everest Theatre in the Seymour Centre in Sydney as part of the 2007 German Film Festival sponsored by the Goethe Institut (Fig 3). The musicians for all three performances were John Napier on cello, Elizabeth Jones on piano-accordion, myself on soprano saxophone, piano and ukulele, and Lauren Easton singing the very demanding vocal part. My score requires a strong music reader who can sing in a legitimate classical voice (art song), as well as sing jazz, cabaret and folk songs. In addition she must be able to improvise in a jazz style over chord changes (‘scat singing’), improvise freely (improvised music), create sound effects, deliver dialogue, and sing long written vocalise passages. She also has to be able to act and have a sense of humour.

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8 It was subsequently performed on 10 and 11 October 2008 at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image as part of the 2008 Melbourne Festival of the Arts.

9 Singers have a tendency to be style-specific in their training, due to the physical constraints of their instruments. It is rare to find a singer who is as well regarded in both opera and jazz, although there are singers who do both.
I: Approach to Narrative

**Faust** is based on the premise that Mephisto (Satan) claims he can corrupt any man. The Angel of God and Mephisto make a bet: if the Angel can find an incorruptible man, Mephisto can rule the universe. The angel chooses Faust. The Angel wins and Good ultimately triumphs but, as the story plays out, this is not supported in the narrative.

We had two reservations about this ending. First, the bet between the Angel and Mephisto is about whether Mephisto can corrupt Faust or not. Mephisto does corrupt Faust, who behaves badly and only repents when he has lost everything, and then he is redeemed only by Gretchen’s forgiveness. There is no mention of forgiveness or redemption in the bet. Second, the conduct of the townspeople is much worse than Faust’s: Faust has been tricked by Mephisto, but the townspeople, with no prompting from Mephisto, behave indefensibly. Jumping to conclusions about Gretchen’s guilt without investigating the evidence, they exhibit a mob mentality (which leads to a tragic scene of Gretchen’s infant dying in the snow) and they burn her at the stake. Humanist Christian precepts of fairness, compassion and forgiveness are absent. The townspeople commit murder, which neither Gretchen nor Faust has done; Faust’s supposed ‘murder’ of Gretchen’s brother is actually committed by Mephisto.

In our interpretation, Mephisto has both won the bet, and also won the souls of the townspeople as a bonus. The new score supports a parallel narrative to the one expressed by the original film. And here is where our opening song lifts the internal story of Faust into a meta-narrative. Mephisto ruins people’s lives and lets them die horribly; so does God. They are both equally unconcerned about the fate of
individuals in pursuit of their agendas. The Devil takes delight in suffering—God appears to be unconcerned about it.

However, any filmmaker has a similar relationship to his characters. He causes them to live or die, to suffer horribly or escape unscathed, to be saved or damned, all in service of fulfilling his film’s agenda. During the writing, shooting and editing process, characters are killed and brought back to life, or, after all of their trials and tribulations, they may end up on the cutting room floor, and might as well never have existed.

So the very first music in the film, ‘A Shaft of Light’\(^\text{10}\), throws down the gauntlet of the meta-narrative. In a dramatic but melancholy art song, the voice of the singer is established as a one-woman Greek chorus, who is commenting on not only the fates of characters in the diegesis, but also on ours as viewers.

\[ \text{A shaft of light:} \]
\[ \text{From the clouds;} \]
\[ \text{From the projector.} \]

The metaphor of the shaft of light compares the ray of light from the Heavens to the ray of light from the film projector.

\[ \text{The light of creation} \]
\[ \text{Piercing the dark of chaos.} \]

The light of the movie projector shines through the darkened film theatre, illuminating our darkness, as we wait to be entertained by the film. The creativity of the filmmaker lightens our humdrum lives, for which solace we repair to the cinema.

\[ \text{God's eye a viewfinder} \]
\[ \text{Looks coldly upon his creatures.} \]

Here is the analogy of the camera and the eye of God, introducing the idea of the filmmaker’s cool regard:

\[ \text{How to heighten the stakes?} \]
\[ \text{Tighten the screws?} \]
\[ \text{Send a storm.} \]
\[ \text{Kill the child.} \]
\[ \text{Make the hero arrive too late.} \]

The filmmaker is not concerned about the consequences for his characters: all is fair game to present an engaging plot:

\[ \text{And last,} \]
\[ \text{A casual decision:} \]
\[ \text{To end happily, or in tragedy?} \]

\[ \text{---} \]
\[ \text{\(^{10}\) All lyrics by Hilary Bell.} \]
As in a Shakespearean drama, we are invited to participate in a little experiment using God’s eye as a viewfinder, and ours as well. We are invited to behold the state of humanity in the film title card: “the portals of darkness are open and the shadows of the dead hunt over the earth...”.

By immediately establishing the role of the music as meta-narrative, the viewer is prepared for a multi-level experience. The music neither slavishly supports the on-screen narrative, nor merely contradicts or satirises it. It will exist as another element, sometimes supporting and intensifying in a traditional manner (as it does in the scene of Gretchen’s sufferings), sometimes poking fun (as in the scene of the juxtaposed romances of Gretchen and Aunt Marthe), but often bringing in a different perspective, independent of both the characters and the original filmmaker, and thus eschewing the roles of both pure synchronous and asynchronous film scoring.

Thus, the composer and librettist of the contemporary film score also act as imperious gods, imposing their will upon not only the characters, but the original director’s vision as well. They presume to take liberties and re-interpret the film, without his consent or participation, and impose their own narrative on his, sometimes contradicting what is presumed to be his original intent.

A Brecht/Weill-style cabaret tune, titled ‘Despair’, is ostensibly a song that expresses Faust’s growing disillusionment with conventional morality.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pity poor humanity} \\
\text{Life is naught but vanity.}
\end{align*}
\]

But it also returns to the theme of ‘A Shaft of Light’—that God doesn’t care about his subjects, and that they are manipulated for his amusement.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{God looks coldly on his creatures:} \\
\text{Bored with us today,} \\
\text{He turns away.}
\end{align*}
\]

It expresses Faust’s disgust with Judeo-Christian morality and his turning toward the Dark Side. This, in the primary discourse of the film, is setting us up for Faust’s eventual punishment and redemption (which he achieves by turning back to the Light). But the song sets up our parallel narrative: it is the representatives of the hypocritical mainstream morality that are the real villains, and the official line is just a tool of domination for keeping credulous citizens in line.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{The winners are the traitors} \\
\text{The despots and dictators} \\
\text{The Vanderbilts, the Boss Tweeds and the Trumps.} \\
\text{The winners are deceivers} \\
\text{The monsters wielding cleavers,} \\
\text{While all us true believers are chumps.}
\end{align*}
\]

So it switches points of view mid-song, from Faust’s despair and disillusionment, to an indictment of false morality and it draws the connection between this ancient tale of morality and our current times, reminding us that these ‘devils’ are as active as ever.
But the voice, with its myriad possibilities, is not just limited to songs. When Mephisto ‘blows’ the plague that he uses to incubate his experiment with Faust onto the town, the vocalist uses extended vocal techniques to blend with the instrumentalists, invoking the breath of the devil infecting the town. As death overcomes an elderly woman, the singer’s voice becomes the voice of the plague, threatening, wheedling and beckoning the woman toward death. As the happy polka of the heedless townspeople (“Oh sing a song of merriment, and laugh our cares away”) turns from major to minor as the plague approaches, the singer cackles madly in hedonistic abandon.

In addition, the instrumental music functions ‘polysynchronously’, bringing in associations and subtext not connected to the original intent of the film. When Faust decides to reject God and invoke the Devil, he is instructed to go to a crossroads and perform a ritual invocation. As he does, a classic country blues begins (probably one of the few examples of ‘blues ukulele’ on record)—a clear visual pun on the song ‘Crossroads’ (1936) by Robert Johnson. This intertextual reference most often results in a knowing laugh – but there is more to it than a pun. Johnson was said to have made a deal with the Devil in which Satan tuned his guitar and gave him his legendary abilities in exchange for his immortal soul (Wald 2004: 265–276, Palmer 1981: 126–128). There is a tradition of blues songs that invoke the Devil and various business transactions with him.\footnote{Just a few examples include Peetie Wheatstraw’s ‘Devil’s Son-In-Law’ (1931–41), Lonnie Johnson’s ‘Devil’s Got The Blues’ (1938), and most notably Robert Johnson’s own ‘Hellhound On My Trail’ (1937).} It invokes African traditions in which going to the crossroads is associated with the getting of wisdom. Bluesmen are popularly thought to have mysterious powers over women (as Faust does over Gretchen). In addition, the minor key (used in the blues) has been associated in both classical and folk music with the idea of fate.

This is just one example of a polysynchronous association of seemingly disparate film image and music that invites a deeper discourse and parallel narrative. It doesn’t support the image (in a traditional way) and it doesn’t contradict it—it causes ‘affiliating identifications’ in Kassabian’s terminology (2001: 3, 143). Furthermore, by its seeming incongruity, it draws attention to itself (breaking rule two of Gorbman’s ‘classic principles’), which causes a deeper engagement with the film, according to one recent study:

*Simply put, when confronted with modern music during a silent film screening, students contemplate the anachronism, which can inspire a more critical awareness of the film (and its aesthetics, social history etc.) among those who otherwise might be inclined to dismiss it.* (Davis, 2008: 92)

However, at other points in the film, the music functions in a traditional ‘synchronous’ manner, supporting and amplifying the visual and narrative. The heart-wrenching scene in which Gretchen is shunned by the disapproving townspeople and her infant child dies in the snowstorm as she succumbs to delusion is accompanied by a haunting requiem played by solo cello. This tonal music in a classical style is played at an adagio tempo, molto espressivo.
II: ‘For Us Christ Died Upon The Cross’

A faux Protestant Christian hymn begins in a major key, with archetypal church chords. The virtuous townspeople are on their way to church, as Faust rejoices in nostalgia for the innocence of his youth (Mephisto looks on in contempt). The traditional pieties are laid out: “the righteous and deserving will meet their happy fate.” But what of the others, who don’t follow the official Church doctrine? As the harmony turns more chromatic their fate is revealed: “they burn in hell, their screeches for mercy go unheard.”

The song returns to the major key and we see more of the townspeople, as we are promised that, “you will never falter with Jesus as your light”. Mephisto begins his plot to ensnare Faust by engineering his meeting with Gretchen and we see her for the first time, as we hear the words, “we will not stoop to help you if you fall along the way” and the harmony, while still very tonal, reaches its most dissonant. This is a foreshadowing of the future: as Faust and Gretchen look into each other’s eyes, the song warns that, “our Lord… like a loving father, will punish and reward”. This sequence is summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Harmony</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“the righteous and deserving will meet their happy fate”</td>
<td>I ii iii IV iii IV v (v°) V</td>
<td>Major key, diatonic, pious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“they burn in hell, their screeches for mercy go unheard”</td>
<td>bVmaj7 V7 bIV6 VI+ bVII I7sus4 IIm7 V7</td>
<td>Chromatic, beginning on tritone, (the ‘Devil’s interval’), more complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“you will never falter, with Jesus as your light”</td>
<td>iii VI ii V7</td>
<td>Cadence toward original tonic, returning home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We will not stoop to help you…”</td>
<td>ii I ii VI7#11 V7</td>
<td>Diatonic, except for #11 chord, a note of dissonance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Like a loving father, he’ll punish and reward”</td>
<td>vi v I7 ii</td>
<td>Unresolved ending on ii chord, note of uncertainty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Song lyrics matched to harmony and musical description for faux Protestant Christian hymn.

The music then returns to the instrumental and a funereal (slow, minor key) theme that portends the inevitability of fate. This second theme returns a number of times throughout the score.

When Gretchen’s brother has been killed, and Faust is forced to flee, Gretchen returns to the Church to pray, and is repelled. The Hymn returns as she weeps at
her brother’s coffin, but she is shunned by the townspeople and her persecution begins. As we hear the words “You will never falter with Jesus as your light”, we see the corrupt Aunt Marthe snubbing Gretchen and piously following the coffin. Finally as we hear “For us Christ died upon the Cross” we see Gretchen in the stocks being mocked by the townspeople.

This is only one of the ‘alternate readings’ of the film that is developed in the score throughout the film. The other most important ones—that Mephisto has really won the bet, and that the townspeople are the true villains of the story—are expressed in other songs, in both the music and the lyrics. And, as in traditional film scoring, thematic/motivic material is used to draw connections between ideas. As the story comes to an end, we give Mephisto a speech we call ‘Triumph’—one of the only two places in the film where we use spoken instead of sung text. It is underscored by the music from ‘A Shaft of Light’.

III: ‘Faust’s Confession/Chaos’

As the townspeople prepare to burn Gretchen at the stake, we hear the B theme of the hymn. The townspeople have usurped God’s right to punish and reward: they are punishing Gretchen themselves. The hymn accompanies Faust’s return to Gretchen, at which point he sings ‘Faust’s Confession’.

He asks forgiveness and Gretchen gives it, as they are both consumed by flames. This moment is treated synchronously, indicating that, yes, there is virtue; this is the spirit of forgiveness.

However, the townspeople achieve no such change; they do not forgive, nor are they forgiven. They end the film with no idea of what they’ve done, and no desire to know. This is where, in the parallel narrative, Mephisto has won. Over an instrumental reprise of A Shaft of Light, the singer, now as the voice of Mephisto, rants:

Okay, okay  
They’re out of the way  
Now here’s what it’s really been about, my friend.  
You won two souls,  
Redeemed and gone to heaven,  
But I won thousands more!  
A city full of wicked souls  
Corrupt and sanctimonious,  
They drove her to insanity  
Then burned her at the stake.  
Is that not evil?  
They acted in my name!  
Take Faust with my blessings:  
I’ve won countless others.  
The power and the glory of the world  
Are mine!

But the Angel asserts victory, saying that the forgiveness of Gretchen for Faust undoes everything that Mephisto has achieved, invalidating the original parameters of the bet. This is not argued or supported by any reasoning except the power of
God to enforce it. As is so often the case, whoever is more powerful makes the rules.

In the original, the angel denies the bet:

- **Mephisto:** My pact is binding
- **Angel:** One word breaks thy pact.
- **Mephisto:** What word is that?
- **Angel:** The Word that rings joyfully throughout creation. The Word that appeases pain and sorrow; the Word that absolves all guilt, the Eternal Word, dost thou not know it?
- **Mephisto:** What is the word?
- **Angel:** Love!\(^{12}\)

The music that follows ‘A Shaft of Light’ in the opening, which accompanies Mephisto’s initial reign of evil in spreading the plague (‘Chaos’), is played *forte* and is aggressive and dissonant. It is reprised here, under a dramatically spoken monologue, as Mephisto, in the parallel narrative, has the last word:

- Liar!
- Cheat!
- *Use your power, change the rules.*
- *Invent your reasons: ‘Love’?*
- *Curse you!*
- Chaos! Chaos!

**Conclusion**

Over the last 30 years or so, the form of contemporary scores for silent film performed live with the film has grown into a unique art form, performed in many styles and orchestrations throughout the world. Groups such as The Club Foot Orchestra, The Alloy Orchestra, and Melbourne’s Blue Grassy Knoll devote themselves primarily to composing and performing original scores for silent film and touring them widely. Festivals such as the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in Italy (founded in 1981), routinely feature a wide variety of live performances of original scores for silent film, as do contemporary film and arts festivals, such as those in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth.

This wealth of creative outlets makes space for a range of approaches to the relationship between music and film. While the majority of scores hew fairly closely to the traditional role and practices expected for silent film music, there are opportunities here for experimental practitioners to challenge the conventional relationship between music and image/narrative.

In the score discussed above, the composer and librettist have used songs to create a parallel narrative, which has a complex relationship to the original: at times supporting, at times contradicting, at times adding subtext, at times poking fun, at times connecting to other ideas/references. Murnau’s *Faust* is an appropriately complex film; it is moral and moralistic, brutal and horrific, comical and parodic, romantic and suspenseful. Its imagery is expressionist, surreal, medieval and

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\(^{12}\) English inter-titles are by John Stone.
modernist. The Eureka and Kino DVDs contain effective and admirable synchronistic scores by Timothy Brock and Stan Ambrose.

But the ‘polysynchronous’ score aims at something quite different from the traditional film score: the creation of a hybrid of old and new. It rejects the presumption that the primary goal of all film music is to support the director’s vision. The original film ends with the triumph of the angel of God (Good) and the banishment of Mephisto (Evil). The film with the polysynchronous score/libretto ends with a howl of outrage at the lack of justice (the townspeople are not punished for their misdeeds, the Angel cheats at the bet), and the reaffirmation by the indomitable Mephisto of his mission statement: Chaos!

The polysynchronous film score functions as an equal with the film it ‘accompanies’. It creates a new art form that is not a film-with-supporting-score, but a time-travelling, international, inter-generational collaboration, in which film and music function as two parts of a new multimedia piece. The film loses none of the wonder and mystery characteristic of the silent film era oeuvre. But it is also opened up to a new form of collaboration. All film scores ‘interpret’ the films they accompany, and there is no way for a composer to truly know the ‘intention’ of a director of a film from a previous century. There is not even a way to know if the film itself, as it exists without music, realises the director’s original intent. The polysynchronous film score merely embraces this ‘unknowing’, rather than denying or ignoring it, and uses it as a licence to engage the film directly on a different level of interaction.

The addition of songs gives the polysynchronous composer a uniquely powerful tool with which to express alternative interpretations of the original text (the film). The addition of words can be used in myriad ways—song lyrics, poetry, dialogue—to comment on the action, express a parallel narrative, or even articulate the ‘original intent’. The human voice and the power of song have long been used in film (and other art forms) to express heightened emotion, and are particularly compatible with the expressionist and poetic style of silent film. And original songs written expressly for the film (as opposed to the licensed songs often used in contemporary films) facilitate the creation of a completely integrated score in order to serve whatever end the composer (and librettist) intend, be it synchronous, asynchronous or polysynchronous.

References


**Filmography**


FROM ROCK TO REEL
An Interview with Screen Composer Neville Copland

Henry Johnson

Abstract

The Dunedin-based film music composer Neville Copland is interviewed with the aim of identifying his introduction to composing for screen, his compositional techniques and the influences on his compositional style. As one of several Dunedin-based composers who has had a prolific output primarily for documentary production company, Natural History New Zealand, Copland reveals details of his creative life related to screen sound production. From the influences of rock music in his younger years as part of life in rural New Zealand, to his career as a film music composer, Copland’s work shows many traits that offer a greater understanding about screen composition in the south of New Zealand's South Island. Offering a resourceful approach to technology, as well as a support network and collaborators, Copland shows that screen music is produced in many different ways. His particular approach has developed from his own practice rather than a set of conventions or specific training.

Keywords

Documentary film, film music, Neville Copland, New Zealand, Dunedin sound

Introduction

Neville Copland was born in Palmerston North, New Zealand in 1963, before moving as a child to Gore in Southland on the South Island of New Zealand. He spent his early years living on his family’s farm in this rural part of New Zealand, and then moved to Dunedin, just north of Gore, to study at university and then commence his career as a screen composer and performing musician.

Music was a very important part of Copland’s early family life. The youngest member of a large musical family, he started learning the piano at the age of six. By the time he was 13 he was performing with family members in local cabaret bands, then at 15 years old, he had formed his own pop band. In 1981 he became an Associate of the Trinity College of Music, London, gaining their Performer’s Diploma (ATCL) in classical piano.

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Copland moved to Dunedin to take a Bachelor of Music with Honours beginning in 1982 at the University of Otago. At university, he specialized in classical piano performance and composition, studying with pianist Terence Dennis and opera and song-cycle specialist John Drummond. After graduating in 1985, Copland was soon working as a music director for the children’s television program, Play School, which was produced from the Television New Zealand (TVNZ) building in Dunedin (it ran from 1975 to 1990). He had initially enrolled for a PhD in Music, but decided not to continue his postgraduate studies and instead focused on his professional career in music.

As well as having a public profile in music as a live performer (keyboards), especially more recently with the semi-professional Dunedin-based Oxo Cubans (covering many styles of music), Copland’s main employer since 1987 has been Natural History New Zealand (first called Natural History Unit of TVNZ), which is now a global documentary film production company based in Dunedin. It is owned by Fox (Fox International Channels, a subsidiary of the Fox Entertainment Group), and has been making factual television programs since 1978 (after being founded in 1977).

Copland’s compositional career has seen various honours. At an early age, he was runner up in the Westpac School Music contest in 1979 for his song, ‘No Reason At All’. More recently, his talents in composition were recognised in 2007 when he was awarded the Mozart Fellowship at the University of Otago (offering full-time employment as a composer-in-residence for one year). Moreover, Copland has won various national and international awards for his film music compositions. His work has achieved national success in the Aotearoa Film and Television Awards (formerly called New Zealand Film and Television Awards) four times: Best Music for TV in 1994 for Solid Water Liquid Rock (Single, 1993); Best Original Music for TV in 1996 for Sex on the Reef (Hedley and Kelley, 1993); Best Original Music in 1999 for Hillary: View From The Top (in 1998; Carlaw, 1997); and Best Original Music in 1999 for Dolphins of the Shadowland (Hedley, 1998). His most recent large-scale work, The Insatiable Moon (Riddell, 2010), was a finalist in the category Best Music in a Feature Film at these same awards in 2011. Internationally, he received a Gold Medal for Excellent Music at the Prix Leonardo in the Italian Film Festival for Sex on the Reef (1995). His music was used on the Emmy-winning The Crystal Ocean in 2000 (Single, 1999b).

Copland’s film music oeuvre covers three main areas: works for Play School; works for documentary film, especially for the Wild South series; and works for feature films. While his early career saw him employed on Play School, by far his greater volume of works are with documentary film for Natural History New Zealand. The article is based on primary research comprising an interview with Copland conducted in December 2011. Following a discussion with the composer about his music, a semi-structured interview was carried out and recorded. The aim of the interview was to foreground the composer himself; to give focus to this practitioner as a way of allowing him to speak about his work and to voice his own experiences. The interview was transcribed and then edited based on notes made before and during the interview, and following feedback on the article by Copland himself.

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2 On the Oxo Cubans, see their website at www.oxocubans.co.nz.

3 On Natural History New Zealand, see their website at www.nhnz.tv.

4 The research process for this article was undertaken with the approval of the University of Otago Ethics Committee.
This article comprises several parts, based on distinct themes that were the focus of the interview. These are: background; screen composition; compositional techniques and style; equipment; and composer identity. While each is given different emphasis in terms of depth and length, as a whole they reflect a retrospective view of a composer’s oeuvre.

This article extends my previous work in documentary film music composition (Johnson, 2010) and builds on dispersed literature in the field of documentary film music (ranging from Kubik, 1945, and Huntley, 1947: 100-28; to Legard, 1993; Peyrière, 1994; Corner, 2002, and Intellect’s Studies in Documentary Film journal 2007-11, edited by Deane Williams). The aim of this article is to explore Copland’s creative career in screen sound that encompasses a considerable body of work on documentary. More specifically, the article provides an edited interview with Copland that has the intention of identifying his introduction to composing for screen, his compositional techniques and the influences on his compositional style.

Background

Henry Johnson (henceforth HJ): What got you into composing for screen? Could you say something about your background in music?

Neville Copland (henceforth NC): Well, I decided I was going to be a professional musician in some form about the age of six, and I was always told, that’s great for a back up but get a trade. You know, my mum wanted me to be a doctor I think and I said no it’s going to be something to do with music. I started piano at six, but I was fiddling around writing tunes and making my own stuff up, improvising, at least a year before that.

I grew up on a farm [in Gore], but all my brothers were in rock bands. They were farmers during the day and then they’d go out and play Led Zeppelin on Friday and Saturday night because in Gore there were two cultures: you either sat in the centre parks and got drunk on beer, or you joined a band. There wasn’t much else to do. [It was a] lot more fun playing in a band so I grew up surrounded by music - eight kids and seven of us played. I’m the youngest so I was just saturated. But I got pinpointed at an early age as having some sort of musical gift so I didn’t have to do as much farm work as the others, but I did have to work at my piano practice instead.

HJ: What was the name of the pop band you formed as a teenager? Did any of those musicians go on to work with you later on (or with others)?

NC: It was called ‘Peasant’. We felt our audiences of drunken rugby players and so on were largely musical peasants and it was a bit of an in-house joke between us. I remember a drunken fellow asking if we were called “The Pheasants” once. I remember another seeing my Fender Rhodes 73 and thinking we were called “Rhodes” as well. You see now why we made the joke perhaps. None of that band went on to work in the soundtrack field, though my brother’s drummer friend (my brother Steve was our bass player) from a former band, Richard Hodgkinson, went on, along with Murray Burns from Invercargill, to do soundtracks for Beyond International in Sydney, in particular the Beyond 2000 series. They were both members of the band Mi-Sex.
HJ: Do you ever get back down to Gore?

NC: Yeah, I actually just played at the Christmas in the Park event. I filled in for my brother because he was playing keyboards with a band doing Christmas in the Park when he slashed his index finger the other day.

HJ: You don’t have anything to do with the country music down there?

NC: No, not much. I have friends who are involved, but it’s never been a particular interest for me. I appreciate great music in any genre, but my recollections of the Gold Guitar Awards [a country music competition held annually in Gore] in my youth are not of great country music. I’ve heard it’s improved a lot since, and of course the whole country genre is far more diversified now than it was in Gore in the 1970s.

HJ: What type of music do the Oxo Cubans play?

NC: A wide range—jazz, blues, funk, rock and country rock. Fairly mainstream stuff. There’s no overlap with the Oxo Cubans repertoire and my screen work.

Screen Composition

HJ: What got you into composing for screen?

NC: Well, fresh out of varsity in 1986, I then started doing a PhD with John Drummond [Professor of Music at the University of Otago]. I had a scholarship for the year and I was trying to figure out what I should do a PhD on and at first it was going to be Charlie Parker. And then I went off that idea. I realized that I didn’t want to write about other musicians for the next five, ten years. I actually wanted to go out and write music myself. So I bought a Tascam portastudio [four-track cassette recording device] and went knocking on businesses’ doors to pester them about letting me write a jingle for them. Soon after, I set up a studio. A few ‘Dunedin Sound’ bands came through the studio and other people would come in and record their songs there as well. Kevin Lynch [Dunedin-born entertainer] used to record a lot of jingles there, and the few jingles I wrote were my first compositions for payment.

HJ: Were your jingles for radio or television?

NC: Both...firstly for radio, then mainly for TV. But one of the ones I wrote right back then is still playing on the radio today and it’s ‘Hey Diddly Doll, the VW’s up the Pole’. They’ve now been playing it for at least twenty-five years, and I just asked them last week if they would want to think about maybe bringing it a wee bit more up to date, but they don’t want to touch it. They seem to think it’s a bit of an icon around here and they might lose something if I modernized it, so unfortunately there was just the one-off payment for that. If you lived in Auckland of course they would be renewing it every six months to a year, so you would have had thirty jobs off it rather than one, but not so in Dunedin.

The first jingle I wrote was for a friend of mine who had a music shop, and that was pretty bad. My first longer-form commission was for the Phys-Ed Department [at the University of Otago]. They were doing a program for sedentary adults and they needed thirty minutes of exercise music, so I whipped that up in a week or two and
recorded that down at what is now the Music Department Studio in Albany Street, and that was pretty much my first full studio experience recording of my own music (I had played on an album or two before that). That led on to Natural History New Zealand [originally TVNZ’s Natural History Unit], which was just starting up. (I dropped them off a copy as a demo.) During this time, about a year after my studio had been going, my friend Murray Wood from Christchurch (he’d been working on Play School in Christchurch) said Play School is coming to Dunedin, and I should audition. He said it paid really well and it did. There were two positions going, one for each team, and Graeme Perkins and I were chosen. We were paid as Musical Directors because we were the sole musicians on each team; it was part of the union rules at the time. And that was my introduction to TV, and Play School was a learning ground for all sorts of TV people. You had to do it all off the cuff. It was like, okay, we’ve just finished this poem and you need twenty seconds to get to the clock. Okay here we go, what’s the theme? Hmm, trees, okay, trees. So you do something swirlly like wind through the trees, then you would transition into another segment, or maybe into the intro of a new song, for example. And you did all that live, and it was mostly improvisation.

About two years into that, the Wild South (series) was just starting. Andrew Penniket was directing a film and he asked if I wanted to try and put some music to it. It was all in the same building. Wild South was just one floor up from Play School. I got the chance to prove that I could do other stuff (apart from exercise music) with The Tale of the Crayfish (Penniket, 1989). It was a really nice film and on the basis of that I went out and bought a sampler and a couple of synthesizers, and one thing led to another. Play School finished about a year after that, but by that stage Rod Morris (film director and producer) had seen The Tale of the Crayfish, and he was doing his next film and needed music, and then his mate who had seen that was also doing a couple of films. Before long I had half a dozen films under my belt and I was starting to build up a client base of five or six different directors. They would make a film about every two years, so you’d do the film and then halfway through it they’d say, “oh by the way I’ve got another one coming up next year which you might be interested in”. So I never had to advertise because there was constant work there for a good fifteen or sixteen years. In those days we were competing with the BBC and they had these beautiful sound tracks with a real orchestra and so on. But of course they had ten times the budget that we had. The BBC could afford to send a cameraman into the field and have him sit there for three months waiting for the perfect shot, whereas our guys got maybe three days.

The compositional side of Natural History almost moved to Auckland at one stage, but Michael Stedman stopped this. Michael backed the locals including myself, and he said I think we can do all this in Dunedin, and we did. We were competing very well on the world stage with the BBC and other production companies, winning awards alongside them, but on about a tenth of the budget. We were so proud that a bunch of folk from a little town at the bottom of the world was competing with the guys in London or Bristol, and doing pretty damned well.

HJ: Were/Are you an actual ‘production house’ composer for NHNZ or were/are you contracted in for each project?

NC: Formally contracted. But I had my studio in the basement of the NHNZ building during the busiest part of my career, and the directors would drop in on a regular basis since I was on the premises.

HJ: Is there any pressure to produce music with short notice?
NC: Yeah. You got a great joy out of it because you knew the person who had filmed it and edited it, and then you bring it to life with music. They watch it with you and you see their reaction. All of a sudden it's like their baby, but you've brought it to life. It's really satisfying, but also when you get into a situation where you've got to do forty minutes of music in three weeks, you just can't do the same level of detail anymore.

HJ: Do you think the pressure takes away the pleasure?

NC: It does, yeah. It’s a great motivator, the deadline, but it causes a lot of stress as well.

Compositional Techniques and Style

HJ: How do you compose?

NC: First I just look at the pictures, and sometimes I wait until I've got my keyboard on. I'll probably set up a piano sound, maybe just a string patch, and I might watch it once through without playing anything and just try and focus on the mood. What is the mood of this scene? What’s the pace of it? Where does it change? Where does it peak? How’s the cue shaped? Does it start off quietly and then peak there? And then come back down and then change into that scene or is it out of the blocks, bang? You know, first frame we're into something really big. So the first thing you do is just try and gauge the mood and the pace, and then you get maybe a rhythm forming. You might get a rhythm that you're feeling from what they've edited, or maybe it's just very ambient and there’s no rhythm at all, there's just a certain atmosphere. Location is very important. It might be based in Indonesia so I need to give it a gamelan sound. I did a Wild Asia documentary series once and that was quite challenging at times. They didn't want totally pure ethnic music from that region, but they wanted a hint of it so that allowed me to do Western harmonies, putting a melody with a certain type of flute that they have in that area, or certain types of drums, which would just give a hint of the location. A purist would think that's bastardizing that culture, and they may be right, but to me it was just tipping the hat to the culture. It was trying to make that music palatable to that average Western audience. If you do put pure local music to the documentary, the intended audience may well find it a bit much.

Then it's talking to the director and making sure that the pace and the mood that you've got in your head is what he's thinking.

HJ: How do you go about that with the director? What type of negotiations do you have?

NC: You just run through it and say what you are conveying through the track. In the early days I would ask the director where they wanted the music. I stopped asking that after a while because in some cases I felt I became a better judge of where music should be than they were. After all, I could experiment with the options day in, day out, and usually their choices were fairly obvious once you learned how they thought. Most directors don't have the musical vocabulary that a composer has, and as time went on most chose to give less and less direction and let me have more control in that creative input. That trust has to be earned over time for a composer, though.
HJ: How does the music work with the voice-over and location sound?

NC: Preferably seamlessly! Often I only have a script to work with, and a rough one at that, so the chances of extra narration being added, which would conflict with a busy music passage, are high. It pays to have as much info about what's happening sound wise overall as possible, to avoid conflicts. Good planning early on in the post-production stage can minimize these difficulties. If possible I would get a rough narration recorded as early on as possible so as to be able to write around it. To have a final narration to write to is a rare treat, as the final script is usually still being written while you are writing the music.

HJ: Do you have any contact with soundies [ie other sound personnel such as recordists, designers, editors] for the docs?

NC: Absolutely. That's very important for the overall soundtrack process. For example, there may be a huge storm sequence and the soundie may have decided to spend a lot of time on it to make it massive with many tracks of wind sound. If I try to write a big storm cue to it as well, one of us is going to have to turn down in order to hear both. A good pre-planning meeting with the soundie, as well as frequent updates to each other can avoid a lot of potential problems. There's nothing worse than spending days on a huge cue only to find that the soundie would prefer to hear his meticulously recorded wind effects instead; or to find that there's been script added all over it as well, and you are now finding all that work is being left on the cutting room floor, so to speak. Best to work it out beforehand and each player take their moment in the spotlight.

HJ: Do you use any animal noises incorporated into the music? Real or sampled?

NC: I have done, sparingly. The idea sounds nice in theory, but in practice often sounds contrived. I prefer to incorporate musical imitations of animal sounds.

HJ: Regarding New Zealand sound, is your music influenced by any New Zealand natural sounds (for example, bird noises), either as written into melodies or used as samples?

NC: No. But I did have to construct a sound from human renditions of a Tasmanian Tiger once, to give an impression of what the Tasmanian Tiger may have sounded like. There were half a dozen folk who had recorded their renditions of what they say it sounded like. They were all completely different. One sounded like she was choking on a chicken bone. It was the worst audio job I ever remember doing.

HJ: Which 'story' does the music work with (for example, a story about wildlife under threat has a 'sad' or 'danger' theme)?

NC: You work with the story of the scene, rather than the overall story. Even a tragic story will usually have its joyful moments. It's nice to keep a hint of the overall story throughout though, in the form of a certain sound or motif perhaps.

HJ: Can the music convey a different mood or idea to what the voice-over is saying?

NC: Definitely. That's when the music comes into its own. It's a delicate balance though, when you are painting a different background to the script. Go too far and
it feels simply wrong. Get it right and it adds a real depth to the drama that no other element can.

HJ: Do you just deliver the music and it’s used in the soundtrack as is, or is it adjusted or changed in the final editing process?

NC: It’s usually been written to sit in a particular place, but sometimes a director might change a part of it, particularly to sit around dialogue that has been added or moved.

HJ: So why do we need music on a documentary film, a wildlife film?

NC: Have you ever watched one without it? If you go a whole hour without music it can, frankly, get very boring.

HJ: Why do you think that is? Why do you think we need music for a documentary film?

NC: That’s a good question. Music brings it to life because there usually isn’t enough emotion just in the pictures to actually have a fulfilling experience of viewing. We need our emotions to be triggered to tell us how to interpret the image. We certainly have got very used to it. I think when it’s not there we kind of miss it. For an extended period of time, if there’s nothing it feels just too matter of fact. If there’s a bunch of wildlife images with just a narrator saying these geese are going to such and such and now there are fifty million of them doing this and doing that, it just becomes a whole lot of facts and figures and you don’t engage with it emotionally. It draws us in emotionally. What else but sound can do that?

HJ: Do you think you have a compositional style?

NC: Yeah, I do have my signature. People can hear it’s me. We’ve all got our favourite chord progressions, the way we approach the phrasing, the certain attack you put on a note and so on.

HJ: How would you describe your signature, your identity and style?

NC: I love some classical music, but I grew up surrounded by rock music, and the music that most grabbed me as a youngster was progressive rock. My favourite band ever is a Dutch band called Focus, founded [in 1969] by Thijs van Leer [b. 1948]. And they had a great guitarist called Jan Akkerman [b. 1946]. Van Leer played Hammond organ, and they did some stunningly beautiful stuff. They were all classically trained musicians, but they played rock. So I love to bridge that gap between classical and rock to some extent too. All their albums used to sell in Gore and I ran into the guy who used to distribute them for New Zealand, and he said we always had this unusual amount of Focus albums ordered from Gore. It must have been my family and friends buying them all ‘cause we were mad on them. My brothers played all their music. ‘Hocus Pocus’ [1971] was a big hit of theirs, but the lesser known ones like those on the Focus 3 album (1972) are better works. In terms of rock music, they’re very complex pieces.

HJ: So would you say that your compositional style has a rock influence?

NC: Yeah, very much.
HJ: How can we hear that in your music?

NC: The textures that I put together. I’ll have a string line for example, and behind it I’ll have Hammond holding chords. Maybe a big sort of Hans Zimmer [film composer, b. 1957] type orchestral theme, but there will be lead guitars doubling the melody with an oboe or something, and rock drums and bass underneath the orchestra. Another favourite band of mine was Supertramp [UK rock band formed in 1969] and I always loved the track ‘Fool’s Overture’ [1977]. It’s the one that’s got quotes from Winston Churchill speaking in it [from his 4 June 1940 House of Commons speech]. It’s a soundtrack as much as a song. You can hear definite Supertramp influences in some of my music, particularly the sixteenth-feel keyboard style, which you hear in, say, ‘Dreamer’ [1975] or ‘Child of Vision’ [1979].

I was very keen on that whole prog rock thing, simply because I was surrounded by it at home. By the time I was eighteen and came to Dunedin [to study music at university] I had never heard an orchestra play in my life. I had never heard a jazz pianist play in my life, and I was starting a music degree.

HJ: Let’s look more closely at a few of your works. Can you tell me more about the feature film you recently wrote music for, The Insatiable Moon [Rosemary Riddell, 2010]?

NC: Well, that was very sparse and I used just a lot of acoustic piano, although for logistical reasons I went out and bought the best electronic piano sounds I could find, which in the context of the movie sounded fine. Edits are always changing and you could go and write a piece and then you need to change it or re-record it. That’s a hassle in Dunedin as there isn’t a studio with a decent piano in it here. There was a particular piano sound I was after as well, and it’s probably the David Foster [Canadian composer, b. 1949] sound. He’s a big time producer in the States, and probably my favourite producer. He’s written literally hundreds of hits but people here have never heard of him because he’s a man behind the scenes. He wrote many of Chicago’s [formed in Chicago in 1967] hits, for example. He’s been a big influence on me. He’s a perfectionist and he’s very slick so you’ve got to be careful not to get too tinkly or too slick or it loses its organic nature. Down here in good old New Zealand, and particularly in Dunedin, we can’t go that far with trying to do that American sound or you’ll be asked to change it. I love his stuff, but I wouldn’t go as slick as he does because you have to try and retain that organicness in your music or it just gets a bit superficial.

HJ: Is there a highlight for you in The Insatiable Moon?

NC: There are a couple. One of the highlights is the opening theme where I borrowed with permission the opening line of ‘Te Ku Te Whe’ [1994, by Hirini Melbourne and Richard Nunns]; it’s just a beautiful melody. We tried to re-record something very similar but on the day Richard wasn’t feeling well and the long phrases are very physically demanding. We ended up choosing the pre-recorded version, and under that I did some typical Baroque harmonies and Richard mentioned at the time it hadn’t been combined before with his music. And it just worked, really nicely, a beautiful blend, so I’m quite proud of that. And there is the moon theme. It’s simply a D with C bass going to a G minor over a B flat, but I had some added notes in there as well, but its the voicings that I particularly liked. Nothing complex, but it just hit the spot for the moon motif in a special way to me.

HJ: Do you play on these themes throughout the movie?
NC: Yes, the motivic stuff is very important, I think. You can overdo it. You can have little motifs floating around everywhere and it's too much, but for just a few main points or characters it's good to have them to tie it all together or you can end up with a less than unified result.

HJ: What about your compositional style in some of your documentary films?

NC: I've written for *Katabatic* (Single, 1999a), which was about the wind that flows down from the South Pole and it's a journey of that wind. Another one by Michael Single around the same time is *The Crystal Ocean*, which is about icebergs predominantly. He got an Emmy for his cinematography for *The Crystal Ocean*. It's a stunning looking film so it was a joy to write music for it. All of his work is fun to work on and I've been quite blessed that he's stuck with me pretty much through his whole career and has always given me the first option to compose for his work. And it's always inspiring work.

HJ: How would you describe your compositional style in documentary films like that?

NC: It's quite diverse, often it's just very ambient chords and atmospheric. Brian Eno [b. 1948], Vangelis [b. 1943] sort of ambient stuff. I'd often take that approach because anything with rhythm or even a tune would seem too much. Sometimes you have to pin it down to just one chord floating in and out and then repeat it. It has to be so subtle sometimes that anything more than that would seem to upset the balance. Conversely, there are documentary films I've worked on such as *Sex on the Reef* [Hedley and Kelley, 1993] where I got extremely detailed. It was painstaking but very satisfying work. Synchronisation using MIDI sequencing was a huge breakthrough at that time [early 1990s]. When I first started doing docos, I was not synced to the video of the film at all and it was impossible to get frame accuracy, so when the technology suddenly allowed me to trigger musical events on particular frames of the movie I made the most of it. That accuracy took my work to another level and it was very exciting at the time.

HJ: When you play the music back to the director, I guess there's some negotiation going on, is there?

NC: You learn how to sound them out. In the early days when I was greener I would take things in a certain direction without checking with them and think, oh this is marvellous. Then I'd get them in and they'd go, oh it's not really my thing. And you'd be gutted because you'd spent two days writing something that you thought was great, and it did work great, but it just wasn't their thing. So the first thing you have to do is actually take their musical taste into account because even though you think you've written something that's a great piece, if it's not their cup of tea then, sorry bud, do it again.

Equipment

HJ: What equipment do you use nowadays?

NC: I've got a good collection of orchestral libraries, and I'm running an iMac. I used to have a thirty-two channel console. I've now just got a tiny four-channel console I use only for monitoring. So much more is done 'in the box' these days that most composers have downsized accordingly.
HJ: What kind of software do you use?

NC: I’m writing with Logic Pro, and Pro Tools. I’ve got the Complete Composers Collection from EastWest among other libraries.

HJ: Can you give me a bit more info on the sound libraries you draw on, and how that works in terms of composing credits?

NC: I’ve always sought out the best sounds I could find. Spectrasonics (Eric Persing) has always done great stuff. I purchased the Heart of Asia discs for the Wild Asia series. Those sorts of samples with actual phrases that are matched tonally and tuning-wise are invaluable when you have to quickly construct an ethnic sounding cue. Especially in this part of the world where you cannot ring up your local erhu virtuoso like you might be able to in say, LA. In terms of credits, most the libraries only want credits in feature films, they don’t worry about TV and documentaries so much. You have the right to use the sounds in your own compositions without further credit or payment to the library provider.

HJ: What is the Complete Composers Collection from EastWest and why is that an essential tool for you?

NC: It’s a software bundle. About 10 or so different products, one of which is the orchestral library. It was essential to me when I bought it a few years ago as it was state of the art and covered many of the sound palettes I wanted. But one is continuously updating these things, and the libraries all compete with each other to be the latest and greatest.

HJ: What sort of keyboard do you use?

NC: Many. My main work keyboard was a Kurzweil K-2500X for many years. These days I have a Yamaha S90XS and a Korg Kronos. I’ve owned Roland D-70, D-50, Korg M1, Triton, Yamaha DX7 etc. I used to stick with the Kurz as my ‘mother keyboard’ and just trigger racks of synth modules with it. The reps from those companies used to always drop by the studio with the latest stuff, be it Roland, Korg, Emu, Yamaha etc. It was great to have access to the latest sounds on these machines and to buy them at wholesale prices as well. Trouble is they always had some fabulous new sound that every other composer wanted to put in their new
soundtrack as well. Many a time I have heard a track on TV and told my wife the bank and patch # it came from. For example, Soundtrack... D50...# I37. The same thing happened with samples and new libraries. The Peter Gabriel shakuhachi is a particularly famous cliché. I used it on an early doco and have cringed every time I’ve heard it back since. You learn to avoid the real favourites so that didn’t happen to you—either use in conjunction with other sounds, or edit it in some way to customise it.

HJ: Do you work with live instrumentalists much, or mainly with samples?

NC: Samples mainly. Depends on the time allowed. When you have an afternoon to compose and complete a mix of a one-minute piece you don’t have two hours to get a guitar track down. Unless you have musicians who are used to recording the perfect take on the second or third attempt you are going to run out of time trying to get it right and then editing it if its not. I used to use instrumentalists on jingles more, as you had more time to commit to those. And vocalists are quite handy on jingles too! Though I sometimes sang them myself, or got my wife Marjolein to. She is a General Practitioner but does a bit of singing as a hobby.

HJ: Where do you record the instrumentalists? Is there a studio at NHNZ or do you use your own?

NC: When I had my studio at home I used that. I moved and worked in a MIDI studio mainly, and would do a little bit of acoustic recording in the control room on headphones, or would use the NHNZ studio. Once recording without tape was the norm it was very easy to transport files from one system to another. Not so easy if you needed to find a multi-track with compatible tape-size and noise reduction system like in the early days.

HJ: Do you ever use Sibelius?

NC: I’ve never used it. Because I play all the parts in myself as I compose. If I needed to record real orchestra live I would use it then.

HJ: Has anyone ever asked you for a score?

NC: Well, I write out a chord chart if a guitarist is coming in, but usually if they’re in the studio I’d play them the melody. I might write it out, but a lot of them don’t read much anyway. I just play it for them and take it from there really.

Identity

HJ: Do you think there’s any sound of New Zealand in your music? Or even local sounds of Dunedin?

NC: Not really, no. In a lot of New Zealand documentaries there would always be a sequence of Māori artefacts in a museum or something like that. There would often be an historical sequence that needed indigenous music. I’d have a few big long phrases of a nose flute, and that’s probably about as indigenous as I got to be honest.

There might be a certain something in my music that I don’t pinpoint as being New Zealand. Growing up on a farm, I’ve always had some connection with the land.
When I see the old hills I used to muster on I realize there is an emotive connection there, so that might come through [in my music], but I don’t know if it would come through any different in me as it would a guy living in Colorado. He’ll also feel a connection with his land and what’s going to be different about my strings or my chord voicings to his, apart from some indigenous instruments that you can automatically identify as New Zealand? The thing that most identifies New Zealand sound in some ways might be just a sort of a roughness about it, something a bit more organic perhaps.

Conclusion

This article has indicated some of the personal ideas behind the creative screen compositions of Dunedin-based film music composer Neville Copland. Through an extensive interview with the author, Copland has provided much personal information on his musical background, his entry into a career as a documentary and feature film music composer, some of his compositional techniques and style, the equipment and software he uses, and his sense of musical identity.

Copland noted in particular his hometown of Gore as influencing his musical identity. He grew up there, in the south of the South Island of New Zealand, in a musical family. While he learnt classical piano on a formal basis, his everyday musical influences were primarily from progressive rock music that seemed to surround his everyday family life and local context. He plays keyboard and was performing, improvising and composing music from an early age. The farming context of his early years still has much influence on him, and he identifies a ‘roughness’ in his music that draws from rock music and the resourceful and self-initiating attitude of those around him.

A formal university training in music (not specifically screen composition) led Copland to a career in television and documentary film making, where he has been in much demand as a screen composer. He has also moved into film music composition, with his most recent work achieving success nationally.

Even though he works very closely with the filmmakers when composing for film, his early musical influences can be heard within a sometimes ambient mood contrasting with a combination of classical musical sounds and lead guitar. Copland achieves success by adding sonic emotion to the accompanying images. Whether his music shows influences from prog rock or reflects an indigenous affinity with the land, as he notes, Copland uses documentary film music to “bring it all to life”.

References


**Discography**


**Filmography**


AURAL LANDSCAPES:
Designing a sound environment for screen

Damian Candusso

Abstract

Cinematic environments are created through image, dialogue, music and sound, but the craft involved in creating an environmental soundtrack often goes unnoticed by the film viewer. Soundscapes are rarely just background: they are powerful storytelling vehicles in their own right, of equal importance to the visuals. This article examines the process of creating an environmental soundtrack for cinema from the perspective of a sound designer. Particular attention is given to how sound is created and layered to enhance, embellish and produce the film’s narrative.

Using contemporary Australian films, notably Australia (Baz Luhrmann, 2008) and Happy Feet (George Miller, 2006), the article examines the different challenges in creating an environmental soundscape for both an animation and a live action film. The films Avatar (James Cameron, 2009), Little Fish (Rowan Woods, 2005) and The Magician (Scott Ryan, 2005) are also cited to highlight various approaches to environmental representation in film sound. While both Australia and Happy Feet rely on the landscape and environment as integral storytelling components, the approach to creating their respective soundscapes requires not only natural recordings, but also the creation of many previously unheard sounds using synthetic sound design.

Keywords

Sound design, Australian film, soundscape, environmental representation, animation

Introduction

Soundscapes have the ability to transcend the social and cultural barriers that sometimes thwart language and even music. Creating an environmental soundtrack for cinema is as much a technical craft as it is an aesthetic art form. Often overlooked by the audience, the sounds of the environment in many contemporary films are based on the synthetic design and recreation of many settings. Environmental soundscapes are some of the most intricate to create. The combination of image, dialogue, music and sound help create the overall soundtrack, however the film viewer is often unaware of the intricacies and craftwork used in the creation of these aural environments. Furthermore, the
narrative of the film is carefully considered in the creation of these environmental soundtrack elements.

This article examines the process of creating an environmental soundtrack for cinema from the perspective of a sound designer who has worked in the Australian film industry for over 15 years (Fig 1). The article’s focus is on the use of environmental recordings and sound effects to create a landscape, as opposed to the use of dialogue and music in the soundtrack. Using two contemporary Australian films, *Happy Feet* (George Miller, 2006) and *Australia* (Baz Luhrmann, 2008), this article examines the different creative process used for an environmental soundscape for an animation and a live action feature film.

Figure 1: The author at work at Australian Clay Target Association, Wagga Gun Club, Wagga Wagga, Australia. (Photo courtesy of Tony Turner.)

**Soundscape Design**

From earliest societies to contemporary musicians, sound has been an integral communication component to convey messages, express emotion and to tell a story. Communication through the use of sound has been significant to human social evolution. Although spoken language is the predominant form of sonic communication in our society, other oral and aural methods include rhythm, melody, percussion, humming, the mimicking of sounds through vocalisations and, in the modern era, by the recording and creation of music and sounds through the use of technology. As David Sonnenschein states, “[by] giving meaning to noise, sound becomes communication” (2001, p. xix). Through the use of recorded sounds and the creation of new sounds, the art of sound design has become an important approach to screen based storytelling.

Although landscapes appear to be ‘natural’, creative liberty is often given to the aural representation of these settings as required by the film narrative. While both *Happy Feet* and *Australia* rely on the landscape and environment as integral storytelling components, the approach to creating their respective soundscapes
requires not only ‘natural’ recordings, but also synthetic sound design and creation. Whether natural or synthetic, neither approach is less significant than the other. In this paper my definition of ‘natural’ recordings pertains to sounds that are created organically through such elements as winds, ice, land mass, water, animals, vegetation and various other sounds naturally occurring without evidence of human or industrial influence or activity.

Difficulties such as accessibility and noise pollution make our most pristine locations increasingly difficult to capture sonically. Although not always the preferred method, synthetic aural environmental design will continue to develop as a necessary addition to assist in crafting the aural illusion of cinematic environments. Using a recent trip to Mount Kosciusko as an example (Fig 2), I was surprised at the amount of noise pollution tainting the sound recordings within the National Park. Many of these sounds were distant sounds, including small planes and agricultural sprinklers: however they still managed to appear faintly in the background of some of the recordings. When used in the context of a film these edited recordings appear to be ‘natural’ when first listened to by an audience, but they are unaware of the use of equalisation, filtering techniques, frequency band compression and other such technological solutions in eradicating this noise. This processing of the original recordings in turn transforms these ‘natural’ recordings to new artificially designed ‘pseudo natural’ sounding environments.

When the sound designer commences production on a film, they study the environmental landscape, location and the period in which the film is set. This becomes the foundational building block of the soundtrack and determines the approach to creating the overall narrative for the film through sound. In the film medium, sound design purposefully communicates to an audience through recorded and created sounds that augment the onscreen visuals. In contemporary cinema, dialogue is the primary auditory component used to convey a story, however the sound ecology of the landscape and the sound effects are of equal importance. Sound design does not merely replicate what is happening on screen, it is an additional storytelling component. An example of this occurs in Australia.
(Baz Luhrmann, 2008), in the scene where we first learn of the impending attack on Darwin by the Japanese. Here for the first time a soft, almost whispering of wind is heard. The plane approach has no engine sounds, only the sounds of the wings slicing through the air. This was a brief from the director who wanted the first plane to replicate a shark surfacing with only the fin piercing the water surface. It is not until the plane is revealed and peels off to the right of screen that we start to hear the sound of an actual engine, the roar of danger, the sound of an advancing Zero threat. The sound does not give away the shot before we see the plane, in fact it adds to the curiosity. The sound of the wind makes the scene even more menacing and, in this instance, the sound has foreshadowed the action on an emotional level before the visuals have presented it.

In cinema history, advances in sound technology have given filmmakers the opportunity to take advantage of the creativity of sound and allow it to play an equally important role as the visuals in storytelling. As George Lucas has noted, “Sound is 50 percent of the movie going experience” (2004: online). Hollywood has increasingly relied on sound to contribute to the contemporary film viewing experience. Audience expectations of sound place greater emphasis on the craft of sound design.

Approaching the Task of Environmental Sound Creation

With many factors contributing to the use of ‘authentic’ sound recordings (including budget, availability of personnel, deadlines etc.), often sounds need to be fabricated. These sounds may make up the entire soundtrack, or they may only make up elements of the soundtrack that blend with other recordings of actual environmental sound. If the soundtrack is created well, it will not appear to be out of place and the audience will not be aware of any disparities. It is only when the soundtrack jars that the audience is alerted to the sound and may question the legitimacy or integrity of the sound sources. A fictitious alien landscape scene, for example, containing recognisable sounds from our world may elicit a sense of disbelief.

When we see a storm onscreen, we routinely hear thunder; when we see a dog, it often barks; a door usually creaks; a car might skid when stopping; and explosions may shake the room. There are many sound clichés consistently used in the contemporary soundtrack. Through developments in cinema sound technology, many Hollywood film soundtracks are created to deliver what an audience expects to hear, rather than represent the ‘actual sounds’ of the real world. Also sounds are pared back from all of those that might be in a specific setting to emphasise those most relevant to the narrative. With the use of high quality speakers with a wide frequency response, the introduction of the various surround sound formats and powerful computers with an array of software options, technology is allowing for greater creativity and flexibility in the soundtrack.

The sound designer needs to balance between telling the story using the available tools, and delivering a soundtrack that is credible for the story and setting. While the overall soundtrack needs to be treated with careful consideration, so too should the individual sound components that contribute to it. It is not uncommon for the sound designer and editors to research the authenticity of various elements within the film to provide a guide as to the legitimacy of the sounds and the sound sets required. For example, if we see a shot of the Statue of Liberty, New York and, in
place of the sound of pigeons, the only birds we hear are kookaburras, the audience will be distracted from the story, and continuity of the film will be disrupted.

In both *Happy Feet* and *Australia*, extensive research was conducted into the environments and locations of both film settings prior to the editing of any sound. Particular attention was given to the study of the wildlife, especially birds and insects, and the seasons. Other research investigated the locations on a larger scale including the weather of Antarctica—which notably does not develop thunder. Careful sound choice allows the audience to be situated within the depicted environment.

At the commencement of sound post-production, one of the most important preparatory steps is to read the script or to watch an edit of the film in its entirety. Depending on the film, the sound team may have the luxury of reading a script during the film pre-production phase or in other instances a rough edit may be given to the sound team to view almost immediately after shooting has completed. In some instances they may be given both. Providing either a script or an early edit of the film allows for the planning of the dramatic journey of the film, and the mapping of the narrative dynamics through sound. This can be in the form of physically drawing a chart or a graph mapping the drama and dynamics of the film over time. This allows careful designing of sounds to build up to the climactic scenes in the film, and then to use quiet moments to increase dramatic impact. Having a graphic representation of the film allows for the nuanced planning of the soundtrack, which will follow and often assist the onscreen narrative. Depending on the director’s approach to the film, this method can also be helpful for creating juxtaposition between the onscreen drama and the aural drama. Sound has the power to emphasise or soften a story depending on the director’s decisions. *Happy Feet* has a scene depicting a leopard seal chasing the central protagonist, Mumble, underwater. Due to the visual size and menacing teeth of the leopard seal the original sounds edited for the scene had to be re-crafted to suit the targeted audience of children. Many of the original growls were replaced by less aggressive grunts, and more breaths were added to soften the chase and viciousness of the antagonist.

Every film has its own challenges and requires its own approach to the sound design. Some films are created to imitate reality and often contain sounds of ‘actual’ location sound recordings of what the audience is seeing on screen, recorded on set from the filmed locations. In the films *Little Fish* (Rowan Woods, 2005) and *The Magician* (Scott Ryan, 2010) for which I was a sound effects editor, sound designer Sam Petty aimed to recreate the actual ‘real’ sound of the locations in both films. Petty retraced the shots of *The Magician* and recorded the film locations throughout Melbourne. On *Little Fish* I retraced and recorded many of the film location environments including several locations in Cabramatta, Sydney (Fig 3). Both the Cabramatta train station and the featured shopping mall are central to establishing the locations within this film. Having to recreate these locations from either library sounds or unauthentic recordings would have been very time consuming, and still may not provide the desired authenticity.
It is important to note that the shooting schedule does not generally allow enough time for the location sound crew to capture many sounds of locations during filming. The primary concern of the location sound recordist and crew is to capture the dialogue and the actor performances. The audio post-production crew then need to seek permissions to re-record after initial filming, which requires further time and funding that are rarely included in the budget.

In contrast to films like *The Magician* and *Little Fish*, many films require the use of exotic, rare and even previously unheard or fabricated environmental sounds. With the increase in films based around visual effects, films can be located in fictional lands with entirely contrived characters and creatures.

Depending on the context of the film, an audience will have preconceived ideas of what the sounds should be for particular scenes. This is the case even for animated films that are set in entirely contrived locales. James Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) is a well-cited contemporary example. No one has physically experienced this mythical land of *Pandora*, although we have some sense of what we would ‘expect to hear’, for example, by associating the forest with familiar rainforest, or by the appearance of certain creatures. The environmental sounds alone comprise many previously unheard insects, specific and unusual animals, other background animal vocalisations, and types of vegetation.

On occasions such as this it may be necessary to create entirely new sounds for these new worlds. These original sounds may start their incarnation from the recordings of sounds from our own world or they may be completely synthesised. What is important is to keep these new sounds ‘identifiable’ according to our current expectations. Some designing techniques for these new sounds may include the following:

- transforming existing sounds through the use of pitch changing, equalisation, or any number of filtering processes
- using specific recordings of rare or unusual sounds
• pitching or modifying electronics, machinery or vehicles
• pitching and combining various animal vocalisations
• using synthesis to create new sounds, and others.

Although budget constraints will influence the approach to film sound design, so too does the availability and existence of—and access to—required sounds. When creating a sonic environment or landscape for a film, wherever it is set, it is important to consider what is ‘real’ to the location, what seems real, and what sounds the audience expects to hear. In summary, factors determining the approach to the creation of the environments include whether the location exists in the ‘real’ world, whether environmental recordings were made during on-location filming, whether the storyline is located in a contemporary setting, and whether funds and safety allow the recording of the location.

This leads to a discussion of two contemporary feature films from the perspective of a sound effects editor. Produced on relatively big budgets for Australian feature films, both Happy Feet and Australia included a dedicated ‘atmosphere sound editor’ as part of the sound team. This role is often absorbed by the sound effects editor on smaller productions and lower budget projects. In both films, my sound effect creation and editing drove the use of the environment as an integral story component and, as such, I worked very closely with the atmosphere editors. What distinguished my role from that of the atmosphere editor was that my contribution treated the landscape as a character. Working in sound effects, I specifically designed many sounds for both films with integrated and often highlighted story elements associated with the environments.

These films differ quite considerably and provide contrasting examples of sonic environment creation. The films are set in remarkable and distinctive locations; Happy Feet is an animated film set in Antarctica, while Australia is a live action film set in the Northern Territory, Australia. Both films pose varying degrees of complexity in terms of their sonic environmental depictions on screen.

Creating a Sound Environment

As with the visuals, the sound for an animated film differs from live action film. With no actual filming on location, all characters are created, all sets are rendered, and all visuals are designed by animation artists. There is no cinematographer filming actors at an actual geographical location as with a live action film (although voice acting is recorded for the animators). Sound recordings of the film set locations are not captured as there is no filming on location. Therefore all sound environments need to be recorded and/or created from the ground up.

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1 In this article I focus on the environmental sounds, and a consideration of spot effects is a topic for a further study.

2 According to the International Movie Database (IMDB.com) the budget for Happy Feet was $100,000,000 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366548/), and $130,000,000 for Australia (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0455824/).

3 Some scenes were shot in various locations in Northern Territory, northern Queensland and Sydney’s Fox Studios.

4 However some animators, notably Australian Yoram Gross, have used filmed bush background for the drawn characters. See Dot and the Kangaroo (1977) and other work.
**Happy Feet**

Miller’s Academy Award winning *Happy Feet* tells the story of Mumble, an emperor penguin who, instead of being able to sing, tap dances. The characters of the film also included many animated Antarctic animals, primarily penguins. The combination of an animated remote environment (Antarctica) and animated animals meant that every sound for this film had to be created.

Through the use of detailed ‘layers of sound’, sound design is about creating a level of believability. It is not just a matter of placing a single sound into a scene and hoping that the audience believes it. Ambiences in our everyday life are complex, with chaotic and sometimes even choreographed symphonies, with the land, the wind, animals, birds and vegetation all playing their tunes within a given space. In addition to these individual sounds, these acoustic spaces are important in representing the onscreen landscape spaces.

The challenge of creating such an unpolluted, isolated and dangerous atmosphere meant that the sound design had to be precise and untainted by unwanted background noises. As the budget didn’t allow for a sound team to travel and record actual Antarctic locations, climatic conditions and animal activities, we had to rely on pre-existing sound recordings of Antarctica or recordings made in more accessible locations such as Thredbo ski resort in Australia and from some locations in New Zealand’s South Island.

With many shots depicting the rugged landscape of Antarctica, often the detail within the sound design can pass unnoticed. If we look specifically at ‘Lovelace’s Pile’ (Fig 4) the sounds can be unpacked to reveal far more detail than what is initially heard.

![Figure 4: 'Lovelace's Pile' from Happy Feet.](image)

Analysis of the sound design reveals the following landscape sounds (Table 1):
Basic element | Breakdown of sounds
--- | ---
Winds | • Close up winds (flurries of snow)
• Distant winds to give sense of space
• Wind howling through icicles
Snow | • Movements on snow by penguins
• Melting snow
• Snow falling off cliffs in the background
Ice-land Mass (subtle) | • Movements of ice
• Ice cracks and creaks
• Ice thumps
Animals | • Background penguin vocals near and far
• Background penguin movement

Table 1: Landscape sounds in ‘Lovelace’s Pile’ scene in Happy Feet

From this list the sound editor has 11 possible sets of sounds that may be deployed to create the environmental backdrop for this scene. This excludes any character or action related sounds; it is only the ambient background.

Without access to record authentic atmospheres, many of the sounds were recorded or sourced from other locations in order to imitate the film set. These would then be reconstructed as the sounds could vary entirely. We were fortunate that we had some ‘actual’ recordings of Antarctica for the film. During production, supervising sound editor and sound designer, Wayne Pashley, sent a mini-disc recorder to the Antarctic and asked scientists to record sounds whilst doing their field studies. Unfortunately, the recording quality was not always film worthy as the scientists are not trained sound recordists. Happy Feet did contain some actual sounds from Antarctica, although a high percentage of sounds were either non-Antarctic recordings or studio recordings created specifically for the film.

The ‘animal’ recordings from Antarctica were used where possible to create an underlying realistic bed for the film. Some of the successful recorded sounds used included those of elephant seals, adélie penguins, emperor penguins and even skua birds. These beds of animal noises gave the background environment a sense of reality upon which to layer the main characters. The main and featured animals were often recreated using studio recordings and other sources of sound recordings.

Some of the successful Antarctic ‘environmental’ recordings included iceberg movements, ice winds, and slushy icy water. These were also edited and used where possible alongside additional created sounds. Again, these realistic environmental sounds were primarily employed to evoke a believable background ambience. To emphasise the size and weight of several of the large icebergs, controlled recording and studio techniques helped create such large masses. This included close microphone techniques and using ‘dry-ice’ (liquid nitrogen) to freeze large objects that we could then record being dragged across the floor. With the realistic Antarctic recordings serving as our bed, these additional recreated sounds became the embellishments and the dramatic highlights.

As storytellers in our own right, creative liberty allowed for the reappropriation of these sounds. At times these sounds would be used only as a bed and then additional snow, ice and wind elements would be created and embellished to better
represent the onscreen visuals and the unfolding drama. Some of these sounds came from our own original Foley studio recording sessions using props to design sounds to be used to highlight onscreen action. An example of the studio recordings included creating snow for the feet close-ups where the characters dance on the snow. As we did not have access to snow, we recorded crushed ice, salt, cereal, sugar, sand and several other props to mimic the sound of snow.

Recording in a studio allowed us to create our sounds specifically for the particular scene. Throughout the film, the seasons changed over a one-year cycle and we wanted to represent this as best we could through the changing environment sounds. We had allocated recording days where we could record specific sounds in a very clean, precise manner. If we needed more grit in our snow we could just change the elements we were recording, or if we needed the snow to sound more wet we could just mix in some more water when required. We were not dictated by natural resources. The other advantage of having these studio recording days was that we could record sounds specifically for the big screen. What I mean by this is that we could record sounds specifically for the surround sound speakers. Using the close-up of feet on snow as an example, if a character flicked his/her flipper/foot in close-up, we could record different snow elements for the left, centre and right hand side of the flipper and have the debris snow crumbles pan back into the surrounds. This would have been impossible to record with such precision as an actual performance in ‘real’ life. By having control of individual sound elements, we were able to creatively challenge the cinema and screen space to highlight the environmental immersion.

**Australia**

Set during the Second World War, Australia's storyline centres on a cattle drive in the rugged terrain of northern Australia, as an English aristocrat travels across harsh environments with her stock. From the opening moments, even before the first visual images, sound is used to position the audience of Australia. From the initial fade in from black we begin to hear ethereal singing, native birds, insects, winds and the gradual swell of string instruments (Fig 5).
In these opening scenes, the sounds of different winds, animals and insects intertwine with an emotional journey across an environmental backdrop that transforms, as the audience witness the death of Lord Ashley, from above ground and into the muffled and mysterious murky underwater drones and whale song. Playing in slow-motion the images show King George (David Gulpilil) telling Nullah (Brandon Walters) to ‘make yourself invisible’ as the ‘white fellas’ are herding cattle across the river onto the Carney property. Although music is also playing concurrently with the sound effects, the effects design specifically aims to make reference to Aboriginal dreamtime. As Lord Ashley is killed and falls to the water above Nullah with a spear through his chest, the water turns crimson, the sound hints that Lord Ashley has been killed by the people moving the cattle, the same people Nullah is also hiding from. Visually it isn’t until we see the snakeskin boot of Neil Fletcher (David Wenham) that we realise that he is the killer.

Although the sounds chosen for this sequence are simple environmental recordings, what is important is the way in which they have been reappropriated to form part of the narrative. Through transformation, including pitch and other manipulation techniques of the original recordings, these evolve into new, unheard-of sounds that yet seem familiar.

When designing such delicate sounds, much time was spent experimenting with the creation of sounds that morph unnoticeably from one sound into another throughout the opening sequence. Tonal frequencies, recording quality and mixing techniques were constantly balanced and adjusted to create a single fluid flow of environmental sounds. At the same time, although continually transforming, the sounds needed to contain characteristics of the original sound sources, allowing the audience to connect the aural with the visual. Throughout Australia, designed sounds are used very subtly. Overall the film uses actual location and natural sounds to convey the Australian landscape, with the designed sounds being reserved for scenes with Nullah, the death of Daisy and for King George, as these relate to the dreamtime and spirituality.
With vast landscapes of Australia’s Northern Territory depicted through cinematography, natural sounds are needed to convey the impact of the environment. Supervising sound editor and sound designer, Wayne Pashley, retraced many of the original locations in the film during the sound post-production phase. Using a Soundfield ST350 ambisonic microphone, Pashley was able to record in surround sound an entire three-dimensional landscape on location. Until recently, creating film surround sound was only possible during the post-production process, but this particular technology allowed for a pristine, natural recording of the environment. These recordings in surround were then decoded, edited and used as beds for the atmosphere tracks of the film. Pashley observed:

*We also wanted to be true to the landscape of Australia. So often in big productions like this, the sound design guys just reach for ‘Bush Atmosphere Number Three’ [library effect] or whatever, and everything comes out sounding the same. Also, what you hear is usually completely unrelated to the environment you see on the screen. We wanted this to be different. Australia is, I think, the first movie that sounds correct, that gives a true sense of how this country sounds.* (cited in Soundfield, 2008: online)

With many scenes depicting broad vistas, having the atmospheres recorded in surround from the outset allows the sounds to reflect the vastness of the actual locations. In sound editing, the atmosphere tracks are often edited from existing stereo recordings, thus limiting the detail within the acoustic space. In most instances, artificial reverb is introduced to make the sounds appear to be wider within the acoustic space. Recording in surround sound reduces the need for and use of these contrived techniques.

All animal sounds for Australia were purposely recorded for the film. Working remotely and living in regional New South Wales, I was able to record many of the animal vocalisations of cows and horses for the film at locales situated near where I live. The cows were particularly challenging to record as they are often difficult to get close to without them running away. Having the livestock saleyards proved to be a very convenient way to record cows at close proximity. Also having so many cows in such a small space allowed the recording of mass group cows to be used in many of the backgrounds. Situated within a livestock pen meant that the beasts were particularly vocal, which allowed for high quality recording and performance and, later, for flexibility in editing their bellows.

**Conclusion**

Often overshadowed by dialogue and music, the environmental atmospheric sounds of a film are often overlooked by audiences. These aural landscapes comprise either actual recordings or synthetic recordings constructed to acoustically represent the onscreen locations. Both Happy Feet and Australia rely on the aural landscape environment as essential storytelling characters within each film. Based on very distinct locations, the films differed notably in the approaches to their environmental landscape sound design. In a general comparison Happy Feet featured far more ‘inauthentic’ and synthetic environmental sounds as opposed to Australia, which contained many more environmental recordings from accessible locations.
When comparing these approaches to contemporary film sound, neither one is better or worse than the other. Factors such as accessibility, money and time budgets, and the noise pollution of locations through human activity determine the practicality and possibilities for acquiring and recording existing and authentic location ambiences. Through authentic recordings or through synthetic sound design, what remains important is that the sound design and production follow the film narrative and immerse the audience into the onscreen locations.

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CONTRIBUTOR PROFILES

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Martin Armiger has been writing music for film, television, radio and the stage since 1975 and for the last ten years has been teaching as Head of Screen Music at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) in Sydney. Composing credits include Clubland, Cane Toads, Marking Time, Thank God He Met Lizzie, Jane Campion’s Sweetie and Two Friends, Jan Chapman’s 1984 series Sweet and Sour, the long-banned 1975 film Pure Shit, as well as Come In Spinner, Police Rescue and the currently on-air music for ABC TV News. Prior to his focus on screen composition, Armiger played guitar, produced records and wrote songs, and toured and recorded with the Melbourne band, The Sports.

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