LOVE IS A MANY SPLENDORED THING.
LOVE LIFTS US UP WHERE WE BELONG.
ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE.

Baz Luhrmann’s Eclectic Musical Signature in the Red Curtain Trilogy

Rebecca Coyle

Abstract

The following article addresses Baz Luhrmann’s use of musical elements to progress cinematic narrative in a spectacular, and often eclectic, manner. It examines how Luhrmann layers various sonic elements to create a crowded musical extravaganza reminiscent of traditional stage productions (complete with red velvet curtain). A brief historical overview of Luhrmann’s career trajectory and his three Red Curtain Trilogy films is provided, including *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), followed by an analysis of how Luhrmann’s signature style of musical collage was developed. A comparison is then made of the narrative elements within the three films, and how these elements are used to construct a distinct branding strategy, resulting in the formation of the Red Curtain Trilogy. The article recognises the significance of repeated collaboration on the films’ production as an important facilitator of Luhrmann’s cinesonic style. It contributes a detailed discussion of specific musical choices and the reasoning behind them, with links to the use of music in cabaret and Bollywood. The article concludes with an orientation of the Red Curtain Trilogy within the local Australian industry.

Keywords

Baz Luhrmann, *Moulin Rouge!*, *Romeo + Juliet*, *Strictly Ballroom*, The Red Curtain Trilogy, branding, musical, spectacle, cabaret

*A love-it-or-hate-it experience, Moulin Rouge is all style, all giddy, over-the-top spectacle. But it’s also daring in its vision and wildly original.*

Baz Luhrmann’s major feature films to date have achieved remarkable box office success although his approach to music has generated debate and

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1 One of many ambivalent reviews published in response to Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge!* and not unlike other reviews received in relation to the Red Curtain Trilogy. Sourced from: http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1107863-moulin_rouge/
criticism. Yet, in his ‘musical performance’ oeuvre, the music is an integral element of the impact, storylines and marketing of the films. Luhrmann’s eclectic mix of musical elements is driven by an auteurial approach to style, narrative and audience address.

The auteur theory initially developed by critics associated with the French film review periodical Cahiers du Cinéma, and subsequently modified by Anglophone writers and academics, worked by detecting consistent themes, motifs and/or styles across a body of films made by the same director.2 While the identified consistency was routinely ‘mapped’ onto the individual who directed the films, the auteur proposed was as much a product of patterns of texts as s/he was an actual individual. Recognition of this often-overlooked strategy of auteur theory is salient to considering the role of auteurial teams in creating the auteurial signatures frequently attributed to an individual director.

Baz Luhrmann draws on multiple styles and ideas to create his audiovisual texts, and his sonic approach adheres to a practice of eclecticism. The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of ‘eclectic’ includes two significant elements: “borrowed from various sources” and “made up of selections.”3 Luhrmann’s creative ‘vision’ is heard both in the borrowed items he selects and in the ways they operate with the image track. The items themselves are critical components of his audiovisual texts, but, rather than attempt to reconcile the items’ apparently contrary styles, Luhrmann actively intervenes in the texts to create a form of stylistic harmony.

Luhrmann’s style, as evident in the Red Curtain Trilogy, consciously brings together different approaches in a manner that goes beyond mere compilation and demonstrates the imposition of a creative ‘audio-vision.’ In a definition of ‘audio-vision’, Michel Chion refers to sound working with image to supply “at every moment a series of effects, sensations, and meanings”. While often these are “credited to the image and seem to emanate naturally from it,” they nevertheless enhance the image with significant “added value.”4 Regardless of the music’s genre, Luhrmann’s intervention in it generates ‘added value.’ This is what constitutes his approach: the anachronism and nostalgia in his screenplays and production design is interwoven with, and made integral to, the eclectic use of music.

This study of the Red Curtain Trilogy films (Strictly Ballroom, 1992; William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet, 1996; and Moulin Rouge!, 2001) provides an overview of musical components (including original cues, adapted existing music, pre-recorded numbers, sung items) to demonstrate the stylistic approach characteristically employed by Luhrmann, and draws on production information that informs the textual analysis. The music track elements work around the diegesis, often in sequences centred on spectacles, thereby challenging designations of diegetic and non-diegetic film

2 See Andrew Sarris’s “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962”, in Film Culture, No. 27, Winter 1962–63 pp 515–518 as a seminal example, archived online at: http://faculty.uca.edu/josepha/Electronic%20Handouts/Sarris%20515-518.htm
music functions. Luhrmann’s sonic style is identified in terms of his choices of music, the relationships of this music to his narratives, his manner of ‘versioning’ music, and his strategies for marketing music. The elements that comprise his ‘audio-vision’ developed from the upbringing, education, and experience on stage and screen in Luhrmann’s cultural background.

Luhrmann on Stage and Screen

Baz Luhrmann’s background in theatre critically informed his subsequent work and entrée into screen production. Born in 1962 as Mark Anthony Luhrmann, Baz grew up in the small township of Herons Creek in northern New South Wales, Australia; he was raised by his mother, a ballroom dance teacher and dress shop owner, and his father, a farmer who also ran a petrol station and the local cinema. After childhood training in ballroom dancing and high school education in Sydney, Luhrmann began his career: as an actor he appeared opposite Judy Davis in John Duigan’s 1981 Australian feature film Winter of Our Dreams; and as co-director and performer he worked on the 1983 docu-drama Kids of the Cross. Luhrmann attended the prestigious National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney and, in 1985, assisted on Peter Brooks’ production of the epic play The Mahabharata.

The next year Luhrmann devised and staged the original Strictly Ballroom, a thirty-minute play that eventually won awards (for Best Production and Best director) at the World Youth Theater Festival in Bratislava, Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia). Also in 1986, for the New Moon Theatre Company, Luhrmann directed Crocodile Creek, a musical theatre piece set and performed in the Australian outback. Following his graduation from the NIDA, Luhrmann formed and served as artistic director for an independent theatre group called the Six Years Old Company; later he revived Strictly Ballroom for a successful season at Sydney’s Wharf Theatre and a tour to the World Expo in Brisbane.

In between the stage and film incarnations of Strictly Ballroom, Luhrmann and associates mounted several inventive productions of classic and original operas, including an acclaimed 1990 presentation of Puccini’s La Bohème for the Australian Opera. La Bohème was originally set in Paris c. 1830, but Luhrmann placed his version in the 1950s, working with longtime creative partner Catherine Martin to design striking, monochromatic sets, contemporary costumes, and an innovative mobile stage. Luhrmann’s La

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5 See a discussion of this in ‘Introduction’ by Marcia J. Citron in her When Opera Meets Film, Cambridge, 2010, p. 5.

6 This nickname was given to him apparently due to his perceived resemblance to the talking glove puppet character Basil Brush who was popular on British daytime television.

7 While at Narrabeen Sports High School, Luhrmann performed in a school version of Shakespeare’s Henry IV, Part I.

8 Luhrmann also had modest parts in The Dark Room (Paul Harmon, 1982) and 6 episodes of A Country Practice TV series (1981–2).

9 Brooks’ original 9-hour long Indian epic, The Mahabharata, was adapted to the 1989 film version. Along with Britten’s interpretation of Midsummer Night’s Dream, this was influential on the Indian-tinged narrative elements in Moulin Rouge!
Bohème appealed to opera aficionados as well as to a younger generation not so familiar with the medium. It won the annual Australian live entertainment (‘Mo’) Award for Operatic Performance, and in 1994 it was aired in the United States on the Public Broadcasting System’s “Great Performances” series. Luhrmann’s and Martin’s production was restaged in 1993 and 1996, and in 2002 Luhrmann adapted it for a Broadway version simply titled Bohème.

From the late 1980s, Luhrmann served as Artistic Director of another experimental theatre group, the Ra Project for the Australian Opera. Luhrmann collaborated with composer and violinist Felix Meagher to create three music theatre works, including the Australian Opera’s Lake Lost (1988) for which Luhrmann won the Victorian Green Room Award for Best Director. In 1989 he staged Dance Hall for the Sydney Festival, an event that recreated a 1940s dance hall in which participants were invited to relive the night celebrating the end of World War II. Also for the Australian Opera, he staged a fanciful and spectacular production of Benjamin Britten’s operatic version of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream[A Midsummer Night’s Dream], set in colonial India, which won the Critics’ Prize at the 1994 Edinburgh Festival. Luhrmann’s grasp of operatic conventions informs his employment of richly overlaid and intertextual sonic and performative elements, including lyrics, singing and scoring in his Red Curtain Trilogy.

In addition to his film and stage work, Luhrmann directed the music video for John Paul Young’s hit single “Love is in the Air” (which featured in the Strictly Ballroom film’s end credit sequence) and the music video for Ignatius Jones’s version of The Andrews Sisters’ hit song “Beat Me Daddy, Eight to the Bar.” His musical engagement is also evident in the song production partnership with Anton Monsted called BLAM (from the partners’ initials), which has promulgated successful CD releases. Luhrmann has taken writer credit on several soundtrack items in the Red Curtain Trilogy films, including songs in Strictly Ballroom and medleys in Moulin Rouge!. He has also released compilation albums such as the 1998 Baz Luhrmann Presents: Something for Everybody, a collection of remixed and reinterpreted songs from his film, theater, and opera productions. He is credited as writer for the “Everybody’s Free (to Wear Sunscreen)” mix on the soundtrack album for John Swanbeck’s 1999 The Big Kahuna, and he took a credit as composer of additional music for his own 2008 feature film Australia.

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10 The Lake Lost production involved Catherine Martin as designer, and initiated the long-term collaboration with Luhrmann. Well-known Australian comedienne Wendy Harmer was librettist for Lake Lost. Another work on which Luhrmann collaborated with Felix Meagher was a comic opera titled The Pure Merino Fandango that, in 1987, opened at the Port Fairy Folk Festival in the Port Fairy Lecture Hall, which had been especially refurbished for the production. In 2008, owners of the Merino Hotel opened an old-style cinema at the rear of the pub, which they named The Cinema Pure Merino Fandango after Meagher’s and Luhrmann’s opera.

11 Luhrmann produced the premier issue of Australian Vogue fashion magazine, serving as guest editor with longtime friends and artistic collaborators, Catherine Martin and Bill Marron. He also orchestrated the campaign for the 1993 re-election of the Labor Party’s Paul Keating, who ultimately retained his position as Australia’s Prime Minister.
The Red Curtain Trilogy

Marking Luhrmann’s debut as a feature film director, *Strictly Ballroom* premiered at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival, winning the Prix de la Jeunesse and a Special Mention for the Camera D’Or prize. *Strictly Ballroom* won eight Australian Film Institute Awards, three British Academy Awards, and other accolades in Australia, Canada, and the United States. Significantly, the film grossed around six times its (modest) production and marketing budget and assisted in the revitalisation of Australian cinema in the 1990s. Luhrmann collaborated with several members of the same creative team to make William Shakespeare’s *Romeo + Juliet*, released four years after *Strictly Ballroom* and drawing on a budget of US$14.5 million. The success of the two films generated industry recognition that secured a deal with Rupert Murdoch’s Twentieth Century-Fox to co-produce *Moulin Rouge!* (with a budget of US$52.5 million) while allowing a considerable degree of artistic integrity and independence. In the *Moulin Rouge!* packaging, Luhrmann noted his conscious use throughout the Red Curtain Trilogy of devices by which “the audience participates in the telling of a story.”\(^\text{12}\) The device for *Strictly Ballroom* is dance, for *Romeo + Juliet* it is Shakespearean language, and for *Moulin Rouge!* it is song and, specifically, recognisable existing popular songs.

Luhrmann employs the term ‘red curtain cinema’ for his technique of using theatrical conventions to invigorate films “to dazzling and dizzying heights.”\(^\text{13}\) An important characteristic of this technique, he says, is adopting a well-known myth or fable and locating it in a heightened creative context that mobilizes audience participation. *Strictly Ballroom* combines essential elements from the David and Goliath biblical story with The Ugly Duckling’ fairytale and sets them in the excessive world of competitive ballroom dancing. In Luhrmann’s interpretation of *Romeo + Juliet*, the star-crossed lovers are transplanted from Shakespeare’s Verona to modern-day (even futuristic) Mexico and a Miami-like ‘Verona Beach.’ *Moulin Rouge!* takes the myth of Orpheus descending into the underworld in search of love and sets it in nineteenth-century Paris, specifically in the entertainment venue named in the film’s title. The screenplays of Luhrmann’s films all deal with universal themes and, in this sense, are similar to familiar opera plotlines. All three films center on stories in which young lovers are required to overcome considerable challenges; only one of these stories—that of *Strictly Ballroom*—is resolved on a positive note for the lovers, but even in this the couple faces a somewhat uncertain future in terms of cultural acceptance. The narrative features in the films are summarised in Table 1 below.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core lovers</td>
<td>Scott (Paul Mercurio) and Fran (Tara Morice)</td>
<td>Romeo (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Juliet (Claire Danes)</td>
<td>Christian (Ewan McGregor) and Satine (Nicole Kidman)</td>
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\(^\text{12}\) *Behind the Red Curtain* DVD, 2001.

\(^\text{13}\) *ibid.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location/s + setting</th>
<th>Basic Storyline</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Challenge faced by lovers</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Marketing tagline</th>
<th>Universal theme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Australia (Sydney); 1980s</td>
<td>Ballroom dancing star, Paul, wants to introduce new steps, and finds inspiration in flamenco styles introduced by Fran's family</td>
<td>Romantic comedy, influenced by dance films</td>
<td>Opposition by ballroom dancing establishment (and Scott's mother) to introduce steps from other cultures.</td>
<td>Paul and Fran introduce new steps and win over ballroom dancers and the families are culturally reconciled.</td>
<td>A life lived in fear is a life half lived.</td>
<td>Overcome fear to achieve dreams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>California + Mexico; Contemporary and futuristically urban</td>
<td>Teenagers from two opposing families fall in love but are unable to make their relationship public. They are secretly married by Friar Lawrence, who seeks reconciliation between the families.</td>
<td>Melodrama + crime drama, romance</td>
<td>Juliet is set up to marry Count Paris but takes a coma-inducing drug so she appears to be dead. Romeo is exiled after slaying Juliet’s cousin.</td>
<td>The lovers kill themselves, resulting in the feuding families resolving their disputes to live in harmony.</td>
<td>My only love sprung from my only hate.</td>
<td>‘Star-crossed’ lovers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bohemian Paris; 19th Century</td>
<td>A young English poet falls in love with a courtesan who performs at the Moulin Rouge but who dreams of being an actor</td>
<td>Musical influenced by Hollywood and Bollywood conventions, romance drama</td>
<td>A major patron of the cabaret competes with Christian for Satine’s affections.</td>
<td>Satine suffers from consumption (tuberculosis) and dies at the end of her starring performance of Christian’s play. Christian writes about the affair.</td>
<td>The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is to love and be loved in return.</td>
<td>Truth, beauty, freedom but, above all, love.</td>
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Table 1: Summary of Key Narrative Elements in the Red Curtain Trilogy Films

Pam Cook notes the important role of branding in contemporary filmmaking for the sake of marketing and “facilitating tie-in arrangements.”

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Importantly, she observes that branding “can also serve as an indicator of creative ownership by stamping a signature of identity on the work, enabling film-makers to trade on their success in order to attract funding for future projects.” In addition, branding can assist in developing a director’s personal auteurial profile, and Cook identifies ways in which Luhrmann’s astute branding of the Red Curtain Trilogy enabled him “to consolidate his reputation as an artistic innovator.”

The branding of the Red Curtain Trilogy retrospectively identifies Luhrmann’s auteurial style as being in part reliant on a small team of like-minded visionaries. In developing his oeuvre, Luhrmann cultivated strong working relationships with key artistic personnel, including writer Craig Pearce, editor Jill Bilcock, and production designer (and life-partner) Catherine Martin. Table 2 below indicates those collaborators who were critical to the musical aspects of all three films.

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<tr>
<td>Production design</td>
<td>Catherine Martin</td>
<td>Catherine Martin</td>
<td>Catherine Martin</td>
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<td>Writer</td>
<td>Andrew Bovell</td>
<td>Craig Pearce</td>
<td>Baz Luhrmann</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(early screenplay)</td>
<td>Baz Luhrmann</td>
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<td>Baz Luhrmann</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Craig Pearce</td>
<td>Baz Luhrmann</td>
<td>Craig Pearce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Jill Bilcock</td>
<td>Jill Bilcock</td>
<td>Jill Bilcock</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>David Hirschfelder</td>
<td>Nellee Hooper</td>
<td>Craig Armstrong</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(original music)</td>
<td>(original music)</td>
<td>(composer)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Key Music</td>
<td>Ric Formosa</td>
<td>Marius de Vries</td>
<td>Marius De Vries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>(additional orchestrator)</td>
<td>(composer: theme</td>
<td>(music director)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>music; music</td>
<td>Anton Monsted</td>
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<td>programmer)</td>
<td>(musical director)</td>
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<td>Craig Armstrong</td>
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<td>(theme music,</td>
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<td>orchestrator)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choreographer</td>
<td>John ‘Cha Cha’ O’Connell</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>personnel)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sound supervisor/mixer</td>
<td>Roger Savage</td>
<td>Roger Savage</td>
<td>Roger Savage</td>
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Table 2: Key Personnel for the Red Curtain Trilogy Films

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15 ibid.
16 ibid.
These team members contribute to what may be called the ‘cinesonic’ style\textsuperscript{17} that draws on multiple sound components to create the film soundtracks. Luhrmann played a particularly interventionist role in the sonic style of each of the Red Curtain films, and he worked closely with composers and other music personnel to craft the films’ music tracks. Significantly, all of the composers he worked with have demonstrated a willingness to abide by Luhrmann’s overall vision and idiosyncratic working method. Craig Armstrong argues:

\begin{quote}
I don’t subscribe to the ‘Artist as God’ school of thought ... I see musicians just as part of the workforce, no more or less valid than the practitioners of any other trade. Obviously, there’s a spiritual element to music, but then there’s a spiritual element to many things. If you can do it—whatever ‘it’ is—then do it, and try to do it well.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

I: Homogenising Music for the Ballroom

Composer and musical director David Hirschfelder (b. 1960) had a varied popular musical background and experience\textsuperscript{19} before being approached by Luhrmann in late 1990 when the \textit{Strictly Ballroom} film was still in development stage. In 1991 the dance sequences were filmed using temporary (‘temp’) tracks, and Hirschfelder prepared tracks and researched the required musical styles, orchestrations, and arrangements for the film’s source music. He has commented that

\begin{quote}
film is a grand composition and a multimedia composition and music is just one element of it. I am a collaborator... providing a layer of composed material that’s working in sync with another composition .... . The art is to create music that stands on its own but at the same time serves the story.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Hirschfelder argues that the frugality of \textit{Strictly Ballroom}’s budget worked to some extent as an advantage in the film production. There was “no money for gratuitous use of pre-recorded music as score”\textsuperscript{21}; instead, there was only “a clear vision for the music, and that vision was embodied in a continuous sound and was unbroken by too many extraneous tracks.”\textsuperscript{22} Nevertheless,
Hirschfelder’s score, while directly referencing known songs and instrumental numbers, was largely through-composed.

Consistent with the screenplay’s focus on ‘Latin’ and modified Spanish Flamenco dance, the *Strictly Ballroom* score incorporates several musical items that use ‘Latin’ rhythms. These are usually adapted in style and instrumentation to Anglo-Australian or Western musical contexts rather than to Latin American folk style, and as a result the music does not destabilize the film’s Anglo-orientation. This material is tied to the film’s ballroom-‘Latin’ dance scenes, and the rhythms are necessarily mediated through the music’s internationally circulated forms. *Strictly Ballroom*’s score freely moves between European music, ‘Western’ music influenced by ‘Latin’ or ‘Spanish’ elements, and ‘Latin’ tracks. In so doing, it approximates what John Storm Roberts terms ‘Latin tinge’ music.

In the US, Roberts argues, “Tin Pan Alley, stage and film music, jazz, rhythm-and-blues, country music, [and] rock have [all] been affected throughout their development by the idioms of Brazil, Cuba, or Mexico.” Latin American tunes and rhythms in turn have been assimilated into mainstream popular music and circulated globally. It appears that *Strictly Ballroom*’s score incorporates such influences, resulting in three main styles: a ‘Latin Tinged’ style in which a Latin (or Spanish) flavor has been used by the composer; an ‘International Latin’ style in which a significant degree of Latin (or Spanish) elements have been incorporated into the song only to the extent that they offer a non-threatening, internationally-appealing musical result; and a ‘Western’ style that broadly represents Anglo-American popular music and European classical music of the sort produced by the mainstream music industry for consumption by a global market.

Linked with specific characters, the music tracks of *Strictly Ballroom* signify elements of the narrative. The ‘Western’ tracks are used in connection with the conservative ballroom dance establishment; the ‘Latin Tinge’ music suggests departures from this mold (especially by Scott and Fran), and the ‘International Latin’ represents a celebration of difference embodied in the central Spanish characters (Fran’s father Rico and her grandmother Ya Ya). The ‘Western’ tracks all carry a strict dance rhythm but are satirized by Hirschfelder through their arrangements that feature exaggerated rhythmic emphases, disparate timbral combinations, and/or musical ornamentations appropriate to ballroom dancing. Hirschfelder’s sampling of cultural ‘soundbites’ has resulted in a score that oscillates between ‘Western’ and ‘Latin’ elements; it draws upon familiar, iconic music and musical styles to create an effective product that reflects the cultural values and multicultural government policies of early 1990s Australia.

II: Talking to music in Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*

While *Strictly Ballroom* is an Australia-oriented production, *Romeo + Juliet* has a more internationally targeted audience and industry. This is achieved through various means, including basing the screenplay on a canonical

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European text, locating much of the shoot in Mexico, and identifying the conflict between Montagues and Capulets with white North American and Hispanic cultural differences. The film also draws on contemporary cultural references to opera, classical movies, and television news formats. The Shakespearian play has been rewritten for a youthful audience, with segments of the original dialogue worked in with the songs to drive the narrative. Luhrmann has trimmed the text, changed locations of monologues, used a television newsreader as narrator, and exploited screen techniques such as on-screen titles to reinforce key words. Australian film editor and analyst, Cindy Clarkson, observes that:

*From the beginning, the rhythm and flow of Shakespeare’s dialogue was the priority and that dictated the edit. Jump cuts were the norm to keep the energy of the dialogue going rather than letting the actors’ action or camera moves halt the pace of the delivery.*

The songs were woven into this editing regimen; along with dialogue and additional lyrical contributions, they resulted in what Michel Chion would term ‘audio-logo-visual’ situations in which “language transcends the strict spheres of the visual and auditory.” This approach is reflected in the emphasis on choral versions of songs for significant scenes. The Romeo and Juliet marriage ceremony, for example, features a young gospel singer from Texas named Quindon Tarver, and a British choral group called The Metro Voices featured in the anthemic ‘O Verona’ introductory number.

Luhrmann argues that “from the very beginning, we had musical ideas, some of which were actually written in the script.” Three central music personnel (Nellee Hooper, Craig Armstrong, and Marius De Vries) were contracted to compose the film’s original music, direct its musical numbers, and program its licensed music. Their combination of skills and experience provided Luhrmann with the musical knowledge that he needed to deal with such wide-ranging materials as ‘trip hop’ tracks, choral numbers in the cathedral, wild exaggerated-beat techno dance numbers, and “anthemic” orchestral pieces performed by the London Session Orchestra.

Nellee Hooper is the co-creator/co-producer of the band Soul II Soul. He won the 1995 Brit Award for Best Producer for producing/co-writing Massive Attack’s million-selling album *Protection*, Björk’s multi-platinum first album *Debut*, and Madonna’s hit single and several tracks on the “Bedtime Stories” album. For film scores, Hooper has produced such award-winning singles as

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24 An approach that has been criticized by Shakespearian scholars: see Courtney Lehmann, ‘Strictly Shakespeare? Dead Letters, Ghostly Fathers, and the Cultural Pathology of Authorship in Baz Luhrmann’s “William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet”’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 189–221. However the supposed address to the ‘MTV generation’ has been praised by a Rolling Stone author, and has been exploited in Bazmark marketing. On the back sleeve of the ‘Special Edition’ *Romeo + Juliet* DVD (included in the ‘Red Curtain Trilogy’ pack) there appears this statement: “Romeo leads the thug life, Juliet packs a semiautomatic, and the Bard gets a taste of *Pulp Fiction*—it’s pure calculation, and it works.”


26 Chion, p. 468.

27 Quoted in commentary version of *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, Special Edition DVD (with commentary by Luhrmann, Catherine Martin, Don McAlpine and Craig Pearce).
“Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kill Me” (performed by U2 for Joel Schumacher’s 1995 Batman Forever) and “GoldenEye” (written by Bono and The Edge, performed by Tina Turner for Martin Campbell’s same-titled 1995 film).

Scottish rock composer Craig Armstrong studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and won several prizes for composition and musicianship, including the Greater London Arts Association award for Young Jazz Musician of the year. Along with performing with the bands Hipsway, The Big Dish, and Texas, he has composed for films, television, theatre, and commercials, provided orchestral materials for recordings by Madonna, U2, Passengers, The Future Sound of London, Tina Turner, and Suede, and served as musical director/arranger for Luciano Pavarotti, Brian Eno, and the Torino Symphony Orchestra; he is signed to Massive Attack's record label Melankolic and has released both solo and collaborative albums, including one titled The Space Between Us (1998) that includes tracks from his film scores. For Luhrmann’s Romeo + Juliet—and later for Moulin Rouge!—Armstrong used a personal style based on synthesized strings, piano and percussion, one that Luhrmann characterised as “like a movie in itself, but without any pictures”.

Marius De Vries began his musical career at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, where he became head chorister in 1974. He studied English at Cambridge University before joining the pop-soul band, The Blow Monkeys, as keyboardist in the mid-1980s. Since then, he has freelanced as producer and programmer for Annie Lennox, Madonna, Anja Garbarek, U2, Björk, Massive Attack, and many other artists. De Vries has created original music for various English and European television shows and has collaborated with Armstrong on orchestral music for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, some of which was premiered at the Glasgow Mayfest in 1996. This work resulted in De Vries and Armstrong creating the music for Luhrmann’s next feature film production, Moulin Rouge.

III: Mashing up music for the cabaret

Exploiting Luhrmann’s by now recognizably eclectic style even further, the Moulin Rouge! music track ranges from numbers modeled on MGM-style musicals, to hip hop and rock songs, to particularly well-known (even iconic) items from contemporary popular culture. In some cases, the use of familiar music and lyrics is taken to the point of near-parody. For an introductory number, the dance and music address the Can Can in a scene of wild hedonistic abandon. This “Because We Can” number was devised by UK remix producer, Fatboy Slim, as a collage of micro-samples rendered in about 30 different loops. The number is as big, brash and bold as the dancing. While Moulin Rouge! won the Golden Globe for ‘Best Original Score’ and the Anthony Asquith Award for ‘Best Score’ at the British Academy Film Awards, the score and songs were deemed ineligible for an Oscar nomination because they were deemed to contain too little ‘original’ material. Nevertheless, De Vries details the musical work that transpired over two years, including developing ‘break-into-song’ numbers, devising suitable

arrangements, and adapting pre-existing songs for performance by actors not trained in singing. He recalls:

_Sometimes we'd get well into the process and then have to start again because we found we'd put a part out of an actor's range. When you're making a record[ing] with seven or eight principal dramatic performances in it, finding a key that works for everyone is a nightmare. Sometimes you have to put quite challenging key changes in just for that reason._

The production used three ways of creating the vocal recordings to accommodate the ‘musical’ genre, that is, pre-recording a track that the actors perform to; recording the performances with minimal accompaniment, then orchestrating it later; and exploiting the extraordinary flexibility of digital editing tools. Each song develops the story to the point where the narrative seems to be constructed around the choice of songs. To that end, Luhrmann and his musical team exploited juxtaposition and transposition, sometimes ‘versioning’ familiar musical numbers in a techno style. De Vries recalls:

_It was really important that each time we used a famous song we reinvented it in a way that would be unprecedented and startling, so for example ‘Roxanne’ became a tango and ‘Like A Virgin’ became a piece of Hello Dolly-style song-and-dance entertainment._

Taken in isolation, each track is distinct from the others in _Moulin Rouge!_ but it is Luhrmann’s sonic style determining the approach of his film music team that draws together the apparently disparate elements.

One of the most important of these elements is the influence of Bollywood. It affects not just the music but also the screenplay and visual design of _Moulin Rouge!,_ and it is evident in the film’s melodramatic storylines, saturated colours, exuberant performances, and rapid-fire editing style. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti argue that _Moulin Rouge!_ draws on Bollywood’s “affective economy, generic idioms, and performance traditions” and these are used to revivify Hollywood in an appropriation identified with colonial formations. In addition to several design elements that reference India (such as the decorative elephant-styled residence for Satine), the _Moulin Rouge_ show that the film revolves around has a plot about an evil maharajah attempting to woo an Indian courtesan who is in love with a poor sitar player. One of the central musical items in _Moulin Rouge!_ is “Sad Hindi Diamond Song,” based on the 1998 hit song “Chamma Chamma” (by the songwriting team Jatin and Lalit Pandit) that was featured in Rajikumar Santoshi’s _China Gate._

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30 Quoted in Flint (2001).

Stylistic Markers in the Red Curtain Trilogy

It is not insignificant that Luhrmann had some years of experience with opera preceding his first feature film and that he has continued to alternate his cinematic and operatic productions. Following the highly pressurized release of Moulin Rouge! in the United States’ culturally unstable post-9/11 period, he staged Bohème on Broadway, to mixed critical reception.32 Peter Franklin contends that, while early cinema is generally acknowledged as indebted to theater, including vaudeville and music-hall, nevertheless “it is in opera that we find the form of cultural representation in which many of the techniques of ‘classical’ Hollywood cinema were most fully prepared in the context and presence of music—specifically the kind of music that film scores would one day rely on.”33 Luhrmann’s film scores indeed employ specific musical devices often associated with opera and operatic conventions, such as recitative instead of dialogue, leitmotifs, and dramatic stories told predominantly through music. Katherine Larson argues that, to varying degrees, Puccini’s La Bohème thematically and structurally “permeates all three”34 films in the Red Curtain Trilogy. In an article in the Cambridge Opera Journal, Mina Yang observes:

Calling constant attention to the music and having music spill over into the diegesis, Moulin Rouge! tips the scale even further in the direction of an imagined utopia, towards the operatic realm of the fantastic. In the process, the film self-consciously highlights the various functions of music in opera and in the film musical—illuminating music’s ability to express heightened emotions, to engage in dialogue with other texts, to perform identity and to contribute centrally to the pleasure-generating machinery of show biz.35

A notable stylistic marker of Luhrmann’s work is its emphasis on (and enjoyment of) spectacle. Deriving from his background in opera and staged events, Luhrmann’s Red Curtain Trilogy films emphasize performative spectacle that is designed to engage cinema audiences in universal themes in preference to complex characterization. In a discussion of the blockbuster film in contemporary Hollywood, Ervend Lavik refers to the Latin derivation of spectacle (from “specere,” meaning “to look at”), and he argues that “spectacle designates something that is on display, that is eye-catching, out of the ordinary.”36 Each of the films in the Red Curtain Trilogy includes a key sequence that offers a spectacular musical performance. Added to the other

32 Following the bombings in New York and Washington, several stage and screen productions were put on hold or revised to accommodate the US reaction. See Los Angeles Times writer, Christopher Hawthorne, ‘What has Baz Luhrmann done to La Bohème?’, Slate magazine, Oct 31, 2002, http://www.slate.com/id/2073343 (accessed May 15 2010).


elements of spectacle—such as lavish sets and costumes, narrative scenes of violence or intense emotion, and cinematographic focus on the central protagonists—the spectacular musical sequences are designed not so much to progress the narrative as to immerse the viewer in the sensorial and emotional world of the main characters. Rather than the spectacle working against the narrative, they collude to present a cinematic milieu stylistically crafted by Luhrmann.

The music assists this approach by being particularly evident in spectacular sequences. *Strictly Ballroom* culminates in a utopian resolution of differences played out on the ballroom dance-floor, with the central protagonists performing a stylized flamenco-influenced dance and joined by other multicultural representatives to a remixed version of John Paul Young's “Love is in the Air.” In *Romeo + Juliet*, the Capulet’s party that introduces Juliet to Romeo, who has gate-crashed the event, features a wild dance sequence experienced through the eyes of drug-affected Romeo. *Moulin Rouge!* introduces the central protagonists (through the eyes of absinthe-affected Christian) with an extended dance sequence that represents the risqué cabaret venue; it features a can-can number based on a medley of “Lady Marmalade,” “Zidler’s Rap” and “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” then transitions into Satine’s featured “Sparkling Diamonds” performance drawing on the “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend” and “Material Girl” medley. These sequences engross audiences in the emotional themes and the stylistic locale of the film story.

Pam Cook argues that Luhrmann’s work is “grounded in pastiche” and related to theatrical travesty, a device in which a particular style of artwork is mimicked “to render it grotesque or absurd”:

*In both cases, the style or styles in question are transformed through the process of mimicry and new associations, which can be critical, humorous, intellectual, emotional, or a combination of all these, come to the surface. The initial object of pastiche or travesty forms part of a new idea or commentary on its familiar status.*

The spectacular sequences and other aspects of Luhrmann’s approach to music in his films can be likened to techniques used in animation. The excessively literal treatment of lyrics to match on-screen narrative that is evident in *Moulin Rouge!*, for example, is not unlike many of composer Carl Stalling’s techniques in early animation films for Disney and Warner Bros. Stalling’s sonic highlights for comedic moments, his emphasis on improvisation around musical cues, and his exploitation of musical stereotypes all derived from his work as a silent film accompanist. While at Disney, Stalling composed from ‘bar sheets,’ in effect notated blueprints of the music, dialogue, and animation timing that enabled precise synchronization of soundtrack and action. Later, the most significant identifier of his work was the use of contemporary popular songs; while at Warner Bros. (from 1936 to 1958) Stalling was able to exploit the studio’s rich sheet music catalogue.

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Animation techniques are employed in *Romeo + Juliet*, highlighting the street-wise comedy already present in Shakespeare’s original script. The opposing male groups are culturally represented by different cars and clothing, for example, and the music and sound effects are cartoon-like in their referential explicitness. A shootout confrontation between the Capulets and Montagues in a petrol station adopts animation devices of fast editing contrasted with ‘reaching-for-gun’ action in slow motion, accompanied by music reminiscent of Ennio Morricone’s early scores for westerns (for the Capulets) and songs modeled on the Beastie Boys (for the Montagues). Clarkson contends that studio executives and test audiences found the violence in the petrol station scene too confronting and failed to understand the humor. Given that *Romeo + Juliet* was designed for a younger audience, the violence had to be toned down if the film was to achieve an appropriate rating. In order to appease censors, “the existing spaghetti western feel was hyped up by speeding up shots and exaggerating the sound, and by making the scene more slapstick.”

**Luhrmann’s Musical Choices**

Along with their wide range of music and musical styles, an obvious factor in Luhrmann’s Red Curtain films is their juxtaposition of classical instrumental music with popular songs and excerpts from opera. Luhrmann’s sonic style challenges now-defunct notions of high and low culture in a way that matches narrative elements in his filmic texts. In particular, Luhrmann’s treatment of classical music alters its prior associations with class, and especially in *Strictly Ballroom* it provides a focus on contemporary Australia’s multicultural practices.

Early film score analysts such as Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, and Roger Manvell and John Huntley, cautioned against the use of classical music in film scores, arguing that it cannot adequately support a film’s core themes, in large part because it retains its own identity. Nevertheless, classical music “seems to thrive” in today’s cinema, even though its use in contemporary film scores—taken out of context and often ‘matched’ to another period and mode of consumption—can easily “destabilize” the music’s original meaning. Thus the range of classical music’s ‘meaning’ in film is notably broad.

*Strictly Ballroom*—which, significantly, is not a dance performance film *per se*—has a soundtrack that includes an audibly scratchy 78 rpm recording of a 1930 dance track; items in flamenco style; old jazz classics; versions of familiar folk, opera, and waltz numbers; contemporary popular recordings.

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39 Clarkson, online. Additional sound effects assisted this aim, for example, the ‘boing’ as Sampson is hit on the head with a handbag.


and re-mixes of hit songs; and atmospheric contemporary music. In creating his *Strictly Ballroom* score, David Hirschfelder responded to two main influences. One of these was Luhrmann’s desire for the score to have the cartoon-like heightened reality of Stalling’s film cartoon music. The other was Hirschfelder’s research into the Albert Music recordings collection, in the course of which he became fascinated with the style of Xavier Cugat, a bandleader who appeared in Hollywood feature films of the 1930s and 1940s and offered a syncretic style of music incorporating various ‘Latin’ elements.

Hirschfelder also adopted orchestration and arrangements from other recordings of Afro-Cuban music in the Albert Music collection. The production history of *Strictly Ballroom*’s score highlights the way in which musical decisions balanced aesthetics with the pragmatics of Australian film production. Many musical items had been used in the stage production of *Strictly Ballroom*, and Luhrmann’s film version required several other numbers, including Cyndi Lauper’s “Time After Time” and Johann Strauss’s *Blue Danube* waltz, amounting to forty musical items for copyright clearance in the film and soundtrack album.

For *Romeo + Juliet*, Luhrmann eschewed the association of Shakespeare with high art; he opted to use contemporary popular music, arguing that Shakespeare himself was interested in music of the street. Marius de Vries notes that “Baz is very clever with this sort of thing and there’s not one of those song cues... which didn’t very precisely comment on or illuminate the text in some way.” In addition, numerous other arrangements were provided; for example, Craig Armstrong was assigned to devise an overture that he titled ‘O Verona’ (clearly influenced by the ‘O Fortuna’ segment of Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, a piece that Luhrmann was unable to licence).

*Moulin Rouge!* incorporates well-known popular songs mostly drawn from the late twentieth century, including “Chamma Chamma” from the Hindi movie *China Gate* (1998), Queen’s “The Show Must Go On” (arranged in operatic format), David Bowie’s rendition of Nat King Cole’s “Nature Boy,” LaBelle’s “Lady Marmalade,” Madonna’s “Like a Virgin” and “Material Girl,” Elton John’s “Your Song,” the title song from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The Sound of Music*, the Police’s “Roxanne” (in a tango format, composed by Mariano Mores), and Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” an unusual choice for a film soundtrack given its alternating loud and soft dynamics, and distorted vocal sound. The film’s use of licensed popular music is extensive, and it took almost two years to secure all the rights.

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44 Jacques Albert migrated to Australia in 1884 and established a music instrument import company with his son Frank, and a Sydney-based music retail and publishing business that went on to become a major enterprise (Albert Music), part of which was a considerable collection of music and copyright on songwriters such as Irving Berlin and George Gershwin. Edward ‘Ted’ Albert (1937–1990) founded Albert Productions in late 1964 to audition and record contemporary popular artists. He set up the King Street Studio in Sydney in 1973 and, assisted by family interests in Radio 2UW and other stations, produced and promoted many artists who became stars, including AC/DC. In 1988 Albert and Tristram Miall established the M&A Productions film company and, after seeing the stage version of *Strictly Ballroom*, commissioned Luhrmann to write and direct a film adaptation. Albert died of a heart attack during the film’s production and Ted’s wife Antoinette took over as producer.


46 Quoted in De Vries interview in the 2006 documentary titled ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet The Music’ available on the special ‘Music’ version of the film DVD release (credited as a Bazmark Production).
Music, Narrative, and the ‘Musical’ Genre

Hollywood film musicals generally blur the boundaries of musical number and narrative progression. While spectacular production is highlighted in the Red Curtain Trilogy, musical numbers are also woven into the narrative. Two of the films center on performance as part of the narratives, Strictly Ballroom in its ballroom dance and Moulin Rouge! in its cabaret numbers. But musical items also feature in Romeo + Juliet, notably in the choral performances and in the party and fight sequences.

Romeo + Juliet has an operatic form. Luhrmann argues⁴⁷ that the music as well as the film itself are structured around the overture, the introduction of ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ themes, the interweaving of these themes as the characters’ relationship develops, a pause on any new music as the story evolves, a mix of themes toward the final tragedy, and a final choral climax that is constructed with simple but effective musical elements. The closing credit sequence is accompanied by a muted and melancholic track devised by Radiohead’s Thom Yorke.

Any film sound is conditioned and contextualized by the image track, and this is especially so for dance-oriented films. While once dance films were shot to music (as many sequences were for Strictly Ballroom), in the case of Moulin Rouge! the music tracks were continually re-recorded as the image track evolved (a technique typical of film production in the digital era). Craig Armstrong is credited as composer for Moulin Rouge! although he worked with a sizeable team of other music (and sound) personnel for arranging, additional scoring and song production. The origins of every sonic element of the musical numbers are thus hard to identify; ownership cannot be assigned, since each music track is the product of several persons who functioned variously as composer, orchestrator, sound designer, music editor, music supervisor, mixer, etc.

In the case of the Red Curtain Trilogy, the films’ music operates within a matrix that sets film genre against elements of song, dance, and, in the case of Romeo + Juliet, text. Each combination of elements throws out a new reading, and it explains different musical approaches as well as audience responses (and marketing strategies) for the film products.

Popular Music Aesthetic

In general, Australian cinema’s music usage is determined by production factors that differ from those of Hollywood and other international filmmaking contexts; the budgets are small, for example, and there is a tendency to require composers to undertake tasks that elsewhere would be allocated to orchestrator/arrangers, music editors, music supervisors, and other personnel.⁴⁸ Australian film music is also influenced by horizontal integration of parallel media industries whereby film production companies are tied to music companies. This is particularly pertinent to Strictly

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Ballroom, given that the film was co-produced by Ted and Antoinette Albert and draws on the Albert Music collection for much of its music. As Hirschfelder notes:

You become kind of like the DJ of the film as well as the composer. I like that because then you have to—in your mind—sample different soundbites of cultures and faithfully reproduce them but in the context of the overall score, which I think gives a great continuity and clarity to the score.49

While most musicals feature original songs, Luhrmann’s Moulin Rouge! highlights original remixes and medleys, and his access to a larger film budget enabled him to exploit this aesthetic. The medley approach also figures into the screenplay, most overtly and eloquently in the “Elephant Love Medley” during which Christian tries to convince Satine to have a relationship with him:

Christian: Love is a many splendored thing, love lifts us up where we belong, all you need is love!
Satine: Please, don’t start that again.
Christian: All you need is love!
Satine: A girl has got to eat!
Christian: All you need is love!
Satine: She’ll end up on the street!
Christian: All you need is love!
Satine: Love is just a game.
Christian: I was made for loving you, baby, you were made for loving me.
Satine: The only way of loving me, baby, is to pay a lovely fee.
Christian: Just one night, give me just one night.
Satine: There’s no way, ’cause you can’t pay.
Christian: In the name of love! ...

Christian woos her with sung snatches of several love songs, and Satine responds at first with spoken rejections until she is won over and they cement their love with a sung exchange.50

Legal scholars Damien O’Brien and Brian Fitzgerald argue:

We now inhabit a ‘remix culture,’ a culture which is dominated by amateur creators—creators who are no longer willing to be merely passive receptors of content. Instead, they are demanding a much broader right, a right to mashup and remix material—to take on the role of producers—to cut, paste, sample or jam with content, in order to produce something which is distinctive of their own social and creative innovation.51

49 Hirschfelder interview conducted by the author in the composer’s studio in Melbourne, 2004.


The term ‘mash-up’ has been used by reviewers to describe the song treatments for *Moulin Rouge!*, although in fact the music tracks use medleys more than mash-ups. A mash-up is a remix that combines elements of two or more songs to create a new track and, in film scoring, it takes the form of a self-conscious referencing of other works that enables the audience to engage with its intertextuality. A musical medley, in contrast, is an item composed from parts of existing items, played one after another, sometimes overlapping. In its common form in popular music, the medley tends to draw on songs rather than instrumental numbers. Alternatively, mash-ups often take the instrumental material from one song and combine it with the vocals from another. In both cases, it is the juxtaposition of two (or more) numbers that is critical to the work.52

Additionally, the use of pre-existing material is an important part of the screen composer’s method, not just in relation to popular songs, and it is sometimes concluded that there is little that is original or ‘creative’ about the film composer’s work. But the composers’ contributions to the Red Curtain Trilogy take several forms, including contextual manipulations, rearrangements, abbreviations, matching one song to another, adaptations for dance, reinterpretations of song styles, and altering songs for performance by untrained voices. The film teams—including the music and sound personnel—are implicated in the contextual aesthetic directed by Luhrmann. It seems, then, that grasping the unity of any of the films depends on a comprehension of the inter-relation of all these elements, and isolating the treatments of individual songs of necessity distorts the integrity of Luhrmann’s audiovisual text.

Marketing the Red Curtain Trilogy Film Music

Luhrmann has worked with partner Catherine Martin to stylistically brand the Red Curtain Trilogy, and the strategy has effectively used marketing to initiate and maintain audiences for musical products related to the films. Luhrmann sustains the emotional connection between the music and the films’ narratives through additional media such as CD releases and special features in DVD packages, and with other astute marketing ploys. Pam Cook argues that “in some ways he resembles the entrepreneur showmen-narrators of early cinema, who relayed the story to the audience, managing their experience of the sensational new medium.” She writes:

> Through performative activities, such as press and television interviews, celebrity appearances, Q&A sessions, making-of documentaries, video and DVD extra features and dedicated websites, Luhrmann contributes to branding as well as informing and educating viewers about the processes of production. His

52 In a further element that links the film to a popular music sensibility, *Moulin Rouge!* features editing that several critics compared to a music video, involving swirling camera motion, dominating and high-volume music, fast-paced dancing, and frenetic cutting. See, for example, http://www.oocities.org/talentedprotegee/analysisframes.htm, and http://www.metacritic.com/movie/moulin-rouge! (accessed April 3 2011).
performance is vital in establishing and maintaining a coherent body of work in the mind of viewers… 53

Furthermore, these strategies highlight Luhrmann’s personal ‘audio-vision’ approach to the films in relation to their music. Observing the success of the soundtrack for Strictly Ballroom, which in 1992 won a British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award for Best Original Film Score, Luhrmann planned soundtrack releases for his next film as part of the film’s marketing. The first soundtrack album for Romeo + Juliet, a compilation of songs by various artists, came out in 1996; this was followed in 1997 by an album featuring the film’s orchestral score by Hooper, Armstrong and De Vries. Both albums were released on Luhrmann’s own Bazmark label. For Moulin Rouge!, two soundtrack albums were released, with the second coming after the first one’s considerable success. The first volume—Moulin Rouge! Music from Baz Luhrmann’s Film—was released in May 2001 and featured the hit single “Lady Marmalade,” produced by Missy Elliot and performed by Christina Aguilera, Lil’ Kim, Mýa and Pink; Moulin Rouge! Music from Baz Luhrmann’s Film, Vol. 2 followed in February 2002. These musical products all highlight Luhrmann’s integrated ‘audio-vision’.

In addition to CDs related to his films, Luhrmann has exploited the ‘added value’ of special features in the DVD format. In the booklet that accompanies the two-disc release of Moulin Rouge!, he writes: “The DVD experience has reinvigorated my love of movies. The ability to go behind the scenes of a much-loved film … deepens one’s experience of the film.” 55

Conclusion

Some years after the successful production of Moulin Rouge!, Luhrmann released Australia (2008), a story that outlines the cultural concerns of European settlers in Northern Australia, the attempted invasion by the Japanese in World War II, and contemporary issues centering on the rights of Australia’s indigenous peoples. Moving away from the performance aesthetic of the Red Curtain Trilogy, Australia emulates epic dramatic cinematic masterpieces such as Gone With the Wind and directly references the well-known American musical The Wizard of Oz (both directed by Victor Fleming, 1939). Collaborating once again with Australian composer David Hirschfelder, Luhrmann here takes a musical approach that is relatively muted, while still calling on intertextual references that include music by Beethoven and Elgar, the a cappella performance of “[Somewhere] Over the Rainbow,” and extracts from iconic Australian folksong “Waltzing Matilda.”

In her study of Luhrmann and the transnational success of his Red Curtain Trilogy, Pam Cook argues that the films are “characterized by a global

53 Cook, Transnational Cinemas, 2010, p. 34.
54 This single had extensive airplay on radio and as music video, staying on the US Billboard Hot 100 charts for 5 weeks in 2001, as well as becoming a number 1 hit in Australia, and revitalizing the memorable chorus line, “voulez-vous coucher avec moi (ce soir)” that had gained LaBelle media attention in 1975.
55 Quoted in DVD booklet for Moulin Rouge! In the ‘Welcome to a garden of earthly delights’ introduction, unpaginated.
aesthetic that is culturally hybrid.” While *Strictly Ballroom* focuses on local issues but global themes, both *Romeo + Juliet* and *Moulin Rouge!* represent an increasingly global and transnational orientation. The choice of boldly focusing on Australia in the 2008 film suggests Luhrmann’s confidence in his self-proclaimed ability to ‘speak for’ the nation while at the same time leveraging international financial support. The personal tastes of the producers and the scriptwriter/director play a role here, but that taste is inextricably linked to Australian identity and identification. In 1997 Luhrmann had opined that “in Australia more than anywhere else in the world we are able to say that strong disparate bits [of cinematic and theatrical language] making up a whole is what we are all about.”

In a discussion of *Australia*, Brian McFarlane describes the scoring as “utterly eclectic,” but he negatively compares its musical intertextuality to that of *Moulin Rouge!* in which musical eclecticism highlights its drama and fantasy, and argues that, in *Australia*, the music gives the film a “merely distractingly polyglot effect.” Along with a collaborative core team, Luhrmann’s auteurial approach to audio-vision bridges, at its best, syncretism in which seemingly inharmonious elements are blended and, at its worst, literalism that strives to address the broadest of audiences. Love it or hate it, Luhrmann’s sonic style is distinctive. Ultimately, in Western cinematic and musical culture in the transitional millennial period, his Red Curtain Trilogy films are a significant contribution to sonic diversity.

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56 Cook, *Transnational Cinemas*, p. 35.


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