A Tribute to Rebecca Coyle

ISSN 1838-3343 (Print)
ISSN 1838-3351 (Online)
Screen Sound: The Australasian Journal of Soundtrack Studies
Number 4, 2013

Screen Sound is a peer refereed research journal founded by the late A/Prof Rebecca Coyle (Southern Cross University, Australia). The team includes acting co-editors Sarah Keith, Natalie Lewandowski and Alex Mesker (Macquarie University, Sydney).

Editorial Board:
• Giorgio Biancorosso (University of Hong Kong)
• Anne Cranny-Francis (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia)
• Mark Evans (Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia)
• Jon Fitzgerald (Southern Cross University, Australia)
• Michael Hannan (Southern Cross University, Australia)
• Roger Hillman (Australian National University, ACT)
• Henry Johnson (University of Otago, Dunedin, NZ)
• Kyoko Koizumi (Otsuma Women’s University, Tokyo, Japan)
• Theo Van Leeuwen (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia)
• James Wierzbicki (University of Sydney, Australia)
• Nabeel Zuberi (University of Auckland, NZ)

Industry Advisory Board:
• Martin Armiger (AFTRS)
• Matthew Davies (NFSA, ASRA)
• Matthew Hancock (Screen Australia)
• Dr Glenda Keam (Composers Association of NZ)
• Jo Smith (AGSC)
• Mark Ward

ISSN 1838-3343 (Print)
ISSN 1838-3351 (Online)

e-correspondence address: editor@screensoundjournal.org

The opinions expressed in articles in this journal are those of the authors alone.

Copyright for articles published in this journal is held jointly by the authors and Screen Sound and no reproduction of material is permitted without written agreement by all parties.

Screen Sound: The Australasian Journal of Soundtrack Studies was initiated and developed as part of Australia Research Council Discovery Project Grant DP0770026 ‘Music production and technology in Australian film: enabling Australian film to embrace innovation’, funded 2007-2010.

Cover image: Still from The Green Fairy scene in Moulin Rouge! (Lurhmann, 2001)
Preface
Natalie Lewandowski 4

Editorial: Rebecca Coyle, Forever Heard
Mark Evans 5 – 8

Theme Features: A Tribute to Rebecca Coyle

Baz Luhrmann’s Eclectic Musical Signature in the Red Curtain Trilogy
Rebecca Coyle 9 – 30

Integrated and Intersected: Kylie Minogue, Baz Luhrmann and the use
of popular song material in Moulin Rouge!
Philip Hayward 31 – 43

Subtle Idiosyncracy: Sound and Music in the Australian animated
short film The Lost Thing (2010)
Rebecca Coyle, Jon Fitzgerald and Philip Hayward 44 – 57

Popular Songs and Instrumentals in 1930s Australian Feature Films
Michael Hannan 58 – 74

Additional Features

Contributor Profiles 75 – 76
PREFACE

It is with a mixture of excitement and sadness which we release the fourth issue of *Screen Sound* Journal. While this issue does not follow the usual structure of the journal, it has been designed as a tribute to journal founder, Rebecca Coyle. This tribute edition features articles written by Rebecca, as well as those close to her in the world of Australian Screen Sound. Rebecca was a true pioneer when it came to bringing the best minds to the area and this collection of articles is a testament to her innovative and enquiring spirit. We have been fortunate enough to have Rebecca’s long time colleague and respected scholar in the area of screen sound, Mark Evans, write a fitting guest editorial which provides further insight into Rebecca’s contribution to the field, as well as her personality—both of which will never be forgotten.

Many thanks to all the contributors, reviewers and the editorial board for their assistance with this issue and preparing it for release at the 2013 Music and the Moving Image conference at New York University (a conference which Rebecca very much enjoyed).

We do hope you enjoy this issue and look forward to presenting our next issue on *Game Sound*, guest edited by Sarah Keith.

Natalie Lewandowski (Acting Editor)

On behalf of the editorial team; Sarah Keith (Acting Editor) and Alex Mesker (Acting Editor).
EDITORIAL
Rebecca Coyle, Forever Heard

Mark Evans

I first worked with Rebecca Coyle in 1997. She was a lecturer in the Media department at Macquarie University and I was a first time tutor. I was appointed to work for her in a course called ‘Media in the Asia-Pacific Region’. Who would have thought that within a decade Rebecca would be the world-leading authority in one aspect of that regional media studies we were teaching, notably Australian screen sound, and the founder of the journal we now read.

As a first-time tutor working for Rebecca, two things stood out: her generosity and her tools of critique. I believe these two aspects became markers of her entire academic career. To begin with the former, Rebecca was always remarkably generous in all aspects of life. For me professionally that was evident back in 1997. As a new tutor one expected then (and probably still today) to be thrown into the deep end and left to fend, as best you could, for yourself. I doubt such a possibility ever crossed Rebecca’s mind. She produced more materials for me than for the students, and would meet with me every week to go through the course materials (that she had meticulously prepared) I was to deliver that week. She was always busy—every great academic always is—but I was never made to feel an imposition. Every meeting felt like it was the most important thing she had on that week (and imagine how far from the truth that was!) That semester in 1997 remains the most formative moment in my own learning and teaching history. Years later I had the pleasure of working with Rebecca on the course ‘Screen Sound’ and was delighted to see nothing had changed in her approach and generous collegial spirit.

Rebecca’s generous spirit flowed into her research and is evident through much of her corpus of work. For instance, she sought out industry and pursued the voice of the practitioner at a time when the professional/academic divide was worse than it is now. From her earliest forays into screen sound studies she involved herself (actively) in groups such as the Australian Guild of Screen Composers, was a regular at industry forums, and formed genuine relationships with soundtrack personnel. Rebecca knew these voices were important. One of the phrases I remember hearing the most from Rebecca as we discussed research ideas and projects together was, ‘Have you spoken to xyz yet? Let me get you their number’. She treated those voices from outside the academy generously, ensured they were heard, and ensured they fed into critical discourse within the academy. This refrain runs throughout her work, from her PhD dissertation to her scholarship on topics as diverse as the films of Yahoo Serious, and individual features such as Lantana to The Lion King. It is a feature of all her edited volumes, and a strong determinant in the construction of this journal. The structure of Screen Sound Journal itself allowed for different voices to be heard, different forms of academic presentation to occur, as noted on the homepage:
The journal has three sections:

i. Double blind referee section with articles of 4,000–8,000 words.
ii. Single referee edited section with industry reports, edited interview transcripts, feature reviews up to 5,000 words.
iii. Edited, non-refereed section of reviews, reports, responses and reprints of seminal reports, debate items, up to 3,000 words.

http://www.screensoundjournal.org

Such a structure in an era of ERA (Excellence in Research Australia), journal rankings, and a focus on (rather traditional) impact factors shows both courage and integrity. In the very first issue of this journal Rebecca was keen to ensure all audiences were catered for: “This debut issue of an online, open access journal addresses both the global network and the specific interest group of ‘soundies’ situated in a variety of disciplines and locations” (Coyle, 2010: 7).

The other voice Rebecca always generously lauded was that of the early career researcher. Rebecca took a chance on a wide-eyed naïve scholar and helped me publish my first book chapter in 1998. The assistant editors of this journal are a glowing reference for Rebecca’s tutorage and support, as are the many early career academics who have published in Screen Sound in its first few issues.

Rebecca was very rightly proud of Screen Sound, its mission and the success it enjoyed from its first issues. What is perhaps less well-known is that the impetus for the journal flowed directly from Rebecca’s successful ARC Discovery Project grant, DP0770026 ‘Music production and technology in Australian film: enabling Australian film to embrace innovation’ (2007–2010), awarded to Rebecca Coyle, Michael Hannan and Philip Hayward. That such a nationally prestigious research grant should be awarded in the area of film music is also testimony to the dedicated ground work that Rebecca and the rest of the team had put in for years prior. I particularly note Philip Hayward here, Rebecca’s partner and long-term collaborator in so many areas. It is no surprise we find Phil’s partner article to the Red Curtain Trilogy in this issue. Here he is again, bouncing his work off Rebecca’s, blending and melding ideas together, and working in partnership to produce a thoroughly enlightening article. What is surprising is that he could produce such work at such a time as this. Then again, what a fitting tribute to such a glorious partnership.

Standing alongside this generosity of spirit was Rebecca’s determination to be critically engaged in her subject. For her this questioning was comprehensive, considering soundtracks from multiple entry points, with the objective clarity to succinctly point out deficiencies and issues. We see this from Screen Scores, with her piece on the popular Yahoo Serious films (‘Sonic Semaphore’). Unclouded by Serious’s charismatic, comedic ramblings, or the insights from esteemed composer Martin Armiger, Rebecca was able to synthesise many voices, many projections of nationalism and ultimately arrive at the rather jarring conclusion that, “Despite their apparent ‘unaffectedness’, Australian music soundtracks are neither ‘young’ nor ‘reckless’ but increasingly the product of hard-edged industrial determinants—however mediated by authorial vision” (Coyle, 1998: 160).

Rebecca’s critical contextualisation of subjects meant that numerous outcomes were always possible. Whether that be a detailed musicological analysis of a
cartoon which revealed that “cultural ‘grey-out’ and/or blandness do not necessarily result from international collaborations enabled by Hollywood, particularly if... careful attention is paid to the blending and synergy of the distinctive production practices of the collaborating creative agencies” (Coyle and Morris, 2010: 204), or considered ethnographic research that pointed out the “lack of auteurial closure in terms of Lantana’s sound track” (Coyle, 2005: 173); the richness of critique never failed to produce engaging, and sometimes startling, conclusions. How fitting then, that this issue contains Rebecca’s magnificent article on Baz Luhrmann’s Red Curtain Trilogy. Here we read the breadth of Rebecca’s critical contextualisation and her ability to synthesise multiple readings of multiple films into one compelling argument.

It was incredibly, incredibly sad to lose Rebecca when we did. No doubt many of us will struggle with that for a long time. There is some solace, however, in her legacy of generosity and critique. There is the impetus to continue our various research projects with that same generosity to our subjects and our subject matter that Rebecca would have held. There is the imperative to uphold the discourse of critique that made Rebecca’s work so valuable and pioneering. As we saw with Screen Scores, risks need to be taken to advance the academy, but unless they are grounded in deep, considered, contextual critique they will advance nothing.

We honour the work of Rebecca with this issue of her own journal, Screen Sound Journal. We celebrate the future that her work has created. We acknowledge the many careers that have been formed and guided because of her.

And finally, I want to reiterate what a privilege it has been to call Rebecca a colleague, mentor and friend. Vale Rebecca Coyle, 11 November 2012.

Mark Evans, Macquarie University

References


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

---

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. 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.” 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.” 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. 5 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 6 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, 7 Luhrmann began his career: as an actor he appeared opposite Judy Davis in John Duigan’s 1981 Australian feature film Winter of Our Dreams; 8 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. 9

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

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 1.
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.

---

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.”

Luhrmann employs the term ‘red curtain cinema’ for his technique of using theatrical conventions to invigorate films “to dazzling and dizzying heights.”

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location/s + setting</th>
<th>Multicultural Australia (Sydney); California + Mexico; Bohemian Paris; 19th Century</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Storyline</td>
<td>Ballroom dancing star, Paul, wants to introduce new steps, and finds inspiration in flamenco styles introduced by Fran’s family. 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. A young English poet falls in love with a courtesan who performs at the Moulin Rouge but who dreams of being an actor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge faced by lovers</td>
<td>Opposition by ballroom dancing establishment (and Scott’s mother) to introduce steps from other cultures. 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. A major patron of the cabaret competes with Christian for Satine’s affections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Paul and Fran introduce new steps and win over ballroom dancers and the families are culturally reconciled. The lovers kill themselves, resulting in the feuding families resolving their disputes to live in harmony. Satine suffers from consumption (tuberculosis) and dies at the end of her starring performance of Christian’s play. Christian writes about the affair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing tagline</td>
<td>A life lived in fear is a life half lived. My only love sprung from my only hate. The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is to love and be loved in return.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal theme</td>
<td>Overcome fear to achieve dreams. ‘Star-crossed’ lovers. Truth, beauty, freedom but, above all, love.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.”

---

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.

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

Table 2: Key Personnel for the Red Curtain Trilogy Films

---

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,

\begin{itemize}
\item[17] ‘Cinesonic’ is the name of three conferences and subsequent publications from the late 1990s to early 2000s (coordinated by Melbourne filmmaker and critic Philip Brophy) that focused on all component sounds of the cinematic sound/music track, and is a term Brophy frequently employs, although without definition as such (e.g. for a \textit{RealTime} arts magazine column).
\item[18] \url{http://www.craigarmstrongonline.com/biography.htm}
\item[19] Hirschfelder formed a progressive electro jazz-fusion ensemble called Pyramid that performed at the 1983 Montreux Jazz Festival, before joining the Australian rock band The Little River Band as keyboardist from 1983–86. He was musical director for Australian artist John Farnham’s performances, produced the recording of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s \textit{Jesus Christ Superstar} Australian cast show, and worked on modest screen scoring projects before doing the \textit{Strictly Ballroom} film music and soundtrack.
\item[20] Hirschfelder interview conducted by the author in the composer’s studio in Melbourne, 2004.
\item[21] Although some licensed music was used, notably the 1930 Jack Hilton and His Orchestra recording of “Happy Feet,” to which Scott’s father dances as he recalls his previous dancing career.
\item[22] Hirschfelder, 2004, ibid.
\end{itemize}
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

---

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...

---

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”.28

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.

---


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.37

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.38 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.

---

37 Pam Cook, Baz Luhrmann, British Film Institute, 2010, 22–23.

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.

---

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\(^4\), 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.\(^4\)

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.”\(^4\) 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.

---

\(^4\) Jacques Albert migrated to Australia in 1884 and established a music instrument import company with his son Frank, and later 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.


\(^4\) 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

---


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.\(^5\)

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

\(^5\) 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).
Performing 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 54; *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


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, unpagedinated.
aesthetic that is culturally hybrid.”56 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.”57

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.”58 Along with a collaborative core team, Luhrmann’s auterial 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.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Susan Ward for research assistance, and to Philip Hayward for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Research toward this study was assisted by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project (DP0770026) titled ‘Music Production and Technology in Australian Film: Enabling Australian Film to Embrace Innovation,’ funded in 2007–10.

References


56 Cook, Transnational Cinemas, p. 35.


Luhrmann, B (2001) Moulin Rouge!, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation/Bazmark Films.


INTEGRATED AND INTERSECTED
Kylie Minogue, Baz Luhrmann and the use of popular song material in *Moulin Rouge!*

Philip Hayward

Abstract

This article complements Rebecca Coyle’s analysis of Baz Luhrmann’s authorial signature in the ‘Red Curtain’ film trilogy (elsewhere in this issue) by reflecting on the involvement of enduringly popular Australian audio-visual performer Kylie Minogue with Luhrmann’s 2001 feature *Moulin Rouge!* (in which she acted the part of an ‘absinthe fairy’). The article discusses the career trajectory that led Minogue to this role and the manner in which Minogue’s body of work represents a distinct oeuvre that has intersected with Luhrmann’s at various points. Discussion of the ‘absinthe fairy’ scene in *Moulin Rouge!* also engages with the more recent work that Coyle undertook on the use of music in animation cinema and links this into aspects of the audio-visual heritage that generated Minogue’s fleeting presence in Luhrmann’s film. The article’s focus on these aspects stretches the usual parameters of screen soundtrack studies, reflects on the nature of contemporary screen music performance and provides a case study of the deployment of popular song material in a particularly dense, inter-referential media text.

Keywords

Kylie Minogue, Baz Luhrmann, *Moulin Rouge!,* absinthe, music video, animation

Introduction

In the year before her untimely demise in late 2012, *Screen Sound* editor Rebecca Coyle was researching and theorising the use of previously recorded musical material in feature film scores. Two aspects particularly interested her. The first was the manner in which their music and lyrics could be understood to function in both similar and different ways to that of original film scores and/or original song materials featured in scores. The second was the issue of the cohesive integration of these elements with original score and sound design and the issues of creative authorship involved in their inclusion within audio-visual texts. As a researcher concerned with Australian cinema and its relation to global media culture, she had a particular interest in the inter-relation of the two through uses of popular song. Coyle’s work on this area first manifested itself in her doctoral thesis
(2002) which examined notable examples such as the use of Swedish pop band ABBA’s music in Stefan Elliott’s *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* (1994) and, more recently, had addressed the use of music in Baz Luhrmann’s ‘Red Curtain’ trilogy (2013). Another major area of interest to Coyle throughout her research career was animation cinema (most recently manifested in her 2010 anthology *Drawn to Sound*). This essay draws on Coyle’s work to address the nature and the inter-textual context of Minogue’s role in *Moulin Rouge!* and the creative and industrial contexts that facilitated it.

I. Kylie Minogue and *Moulin Rouge!*

*Moulin Rouge!* (2001) was the third, most successful and most spectacular instalment of the so-called ‘Red Curtain’ trilogy directed by Baz Luhrmann (following *Strictly Ballroom* [1992] and *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* [1996]). It was also the most expensive, with production costs of around US $52.5 million, reflecting both the production team’s grand vision for the film and its ability to attract substantial funding after the lower budget successes of its predecessors. The film’s score was assembled in a manner that is now often referred to as a ‘mash-up’, a somewhat vague vernacular term (see Hayward, 2012) that refers either to a collage of edited and processed samples and/or a collage utilising sequences of newly recorded, re-arranged and/or remixed materials. The latter approach predominates in *Moulin Rouge!* and also extends to the incorporation of lines of song lyrics into dialogue. Coyle’s analysis of the trilogy emphasised the manner in which multiple aspects of the auteurial signature attributed to the films’ director (as defined by the detection of “consistent themes, motifs and/or styles across a body of films”), were “as much a product of patterns of texts” produced by creative teams as the product of “an actual individual” (2013: xx). Her analysis also identified the key stylistic aspect of the ‘Red Curtain’ trilogy as its eclectic selection of source material and imaginative manipulation into a stylistically harmonious whole (ibid).

The main musical materials reworked for the film were western pop songs produced from the 1950s to 1990s together with a very modern reworking of Jacques Offenbach’s composition *Infernal Galop* (1858), the iconic musical signifier of the Parisian can-can, closely associated with the Moulin Rouge. The compositions selected for adaptation and incorporation were not chosen on a purely musical basis (in the sense that the sonic essence of music can be regarded as effectively a thing-in-itself). Instead, they were selected on the strength of lyrical and thematic aspects of particular song materials and, in many cases, the audio-visual associations accruing to them through their prior representation in memorable film and/or music video sequences. The musical team then arranged and integrated renditions of the source music texts to support Luhrmann’s overall aesthetic vision for the film and to integrate with the image and choreographic editing.¹

In a manner that has become routine for features produced by Luhrmann’s production company, Bazmark Inq, new sequences and elements were added to and deleted from the film right up until its final cut. Minogue was originally approached to record a new, slower tempo version of Olivia

¹ For a detailed insight into this process see Tom Flint’s 2001 interview with musical director Marius De Vries.
Newton-John’s 1981 hit single *Physical* with a more sultry vocal style. While Minogue’s version of *Physical* was not eventually included in *Moulin Rouge!*, it featured in her live act in the early 2000s (and a live rendition is included on her in-concert DVD—*On a Night Like This Tour* [2001]). Minogue’s reinterpretation of Newton-John’s track is significant, within the project of this essay, for engaging with her most notable predecessor. Newton-John was the first female Australian pop singer to gain significant career traction through a variety of screen media activities. Her career spanned live TV in the early 1970s, music recording, roles in feature films and prominence in the early music video era. *Physical* was released in 1981 at a point in Newton-John’s career when her brand image was in transition and when new media outlets were transforming the role and potential of popular music performers. After establishing herself as a personable but somewhat ‘anodyne’ vocal performer, Newton-John secured a new, more assertive profile through her acclaimed role as Sandy, the female lead in Randal Kleiser’s 1978 film *Grease*. *Physical*’s lyrical scenario represents a couple ending a romantic dinner with the singer reiterating ‘Let’s get physical, physical/ I wanna get physical/ Let’s get into physical/ Let me hear your body talk’. While the raunchiness of these lyrics was offset by the bright uptempo production and trademark ‘chirpiness’ of Newton-John’s vocal delivery; the female vocal protagonist’s desire remained evident and comprised the song’s central lyrical, melodic and thematic hook. The video for *Physical* (directed by Brian Grant), avoided a literal interpretation of the song’s lyrics by setting its lip-synched performance in a gym with Newton-John in (then) fashionable aerobics attire, as a trainer, marshalling overweight middle-aged men and then lusting after svelte, younger ones (who eventually turn out to be gay—implicitly deflating the charged sexual scenario established in the latter half of the video). Released shortly after the music-video channel MTV commenced in the US in September 1981, at a time when the cable service was searching for quality content, *Physical* received frequent airplay that substantially boosted Newton-John’s US profile and sales.

While Minogue’s version of the song was neither released as a single nor subject to visualisation in music video form, its on-stage performance in the elaborately designed and choreographed ‘On a Night Like This’ European and Australian tour (2001) represented a far more explicit visualisation of the song’s chorus and one that operated within the overt (hyper-) erotic parameter for female pop star performance established by Madonna in the early 1990s. Minogue’s 2001 show was directed and choreographed by Luca

---

2 Where she appeared as ‘Lovely Livvy’ in her mid-teens on Melbourne’s HSV station (a Channel 7 company).

3 Fittingly, with regard to their career parallels, both singers were named as ‘Living Treasures’ by the National Trust of Australia in 2012.

4 With international hits such as *Banks of the Ohio* (1971).

5 Sandy transitions from prim teen to coiffured ‘bad-girl’ during the course of the narrative. This performance facilitated a ‘make-over’ from winsome chanteuse to the more assertive and sexualized image she displayed, dressed in leather, on the cover of her first post-Grease album *Totally Hot* (1978).

6 Prior to MTV’s inception, the production of music videos—let alone ambitious high-budget ones—was not a common industry practice. MTV’s success soon changed this situation and led to a far higher number of videos being produced by the mid-1980s.

7 In videos such as the title track of her *Erotica* album (1992), directed by Fabian Baron, and ‘Sex’ (1992), a book featuring erotic photos of her taken by Steven Meisel).
Tommassini (who had previously worked as a dancer on Madonna’s 1993 ‘Girlie Show’ live tour). In contrast to the gym scenario in Newton-John’s original video, Minogue’s live performance featured the singer and skimpily-clad dancers participating in an ensemble pole dance routine. The difference between Newton-John’s 1981 video and Minogue’s stage performance illustrates both the increasing sexualisation of female performers in the two decades between them and, indeed, the increased sexualisation of Minogue between her earliest music videos (Loco-Motion [1987] and I Should be so Lucky [1988]) and her later work.

Minogue’s first two hit singles capitalised on the popularity of her role as Charlene, the youthful ‘tomboy’ mechanic in the hit Australian TV series Neighbours in 1986–88. A series of formulaic and commercially successful pop-dance songs produced by British trio Stock, Aitken and Waterman (SAW) in the late 1980s–early 1990s established her as a high-profile pop performer. After leaving SAW’s stable of artists, Minogue embarked upon a more varied and experimental career phase, signing to UK independent label Deconstruction in 1993. Her first single for the label, entitled Confide in Me, produced by US House music duo Brothers in Rhythm,\(^8\) mixed diverse instrumental textures over a sparse rhythm track and featured a vocal that alternated sprechstimme and sung melodic lines. The song’s video (directed by Paul Boyd) featured Minogue in six different guises inviting members of an interactive audience to dial in and confide in her. Suggestive, rather than overtly sexualised, the video allowed her to assume a number of identities and represented her as a more mature performer than earlier song visualisations (in which her ‘cuteness’ was paramount). Her artistic credibility was further enhanced by her duet with iconic Australian rock vocalist Nick Cave on his original composition Where The Wild Roses Grow (1996), a song specifically written for her. The song and video significantly diversified Minogue’s product image on various levels: through the ‘darkness’ of the song’s lyrical theme (concerning a murdered female lover); the intense, sultry vocal interplay between the performers; and the carefully crafted ‘swamp Gothic’ video (directed by Rocky Schenk), featuring Minogue lying in water like a latter-day version of Ophelia from John Everett Millais’s eponymous painting (1852).

\(^8\) Djs, Steve Anderson and Dave Seamen.
Her 1997 album (released as *Kylie Minogue* in Australia and *Impossible Princess* in the UK) featured eight tracks produced by Brothers in Rhythm and was released with striking visual packaging (i.e., CD artwork, promotional materials, and music videos) designed by photographer Stéphane Sednaoui. This approach was continued in Minogue’s most experimental audio-visual collaboration (to date), her collaboration with former Deee-Lite DJ Towa Tei on *German Bold Italic*, a track from his 1998 album *Sound Museum*. The video, also directed by Sednaoui, featured Minogue as a postmodern geisha in New York and opens with her rotating in a bathtub in a bikini reciting the repeated opening line “Do you like my sense of style?” before she proceeds through various city locations in full geisha outfit while enunciating the song’s lyrics (which describe the attractions of the font identified in the song’s title). If this marked the most extreme audio-visual distance from her persona in *Neighbours* and her early music videos; the video for her 1997 single *Did it again*, directed by Pedro Romani, emphasized the multiplicity of personas she was able to juggle in the late 1990s, featuring four different versions of Minogue—identified in the video as ‘Cute Kylie’, ‘Dance Kylie’, ‘Indie Kylie’ and ‘Sex Kylie’—alternately jostling each other for position as the song’s dominant persona and sharing the screen space with each other. At this stage in her career, she had established herself not simply as a former TV actress with a career as a pop singer but rather as a versatile and multi-faceted singer, dancer, actress, and model who retained a clearly recognizable star persona (i.e., as ‘Kylie’) whatever role she performed.

In terms of international profile, perhaps the biggest career boost for Minogue was her performance at the Closing Ceremony for the Sydney Olympics (2000). Her selection for this event reflected her prominence as an internationally recognized (and recognizable) Australian audio-visual performer capable of communicating to an international audience. She was featured performing two numbers, her then current single *On a Night Like This* and a number specifically recorded for (and lip-synched at) the Ceremony, her version of ABBA’s 1976 hit single *Dancing Queen*. The latter reflected the ‘localisation of identification’ with international repertoire (and ABBA in particular) that Rebecca Coyle explored in her work on *Priscilla: Queen of The Desert* in her 2002 doctoral thesis. As Coyle details, in the introductory essay to her 2005 anthology *Reel Tracks*, the closing ceremony for the 2000 Games featured an ensemble ballroom dancing sequence that adapted Australian singer John Paul Young’s samba-styled version of his earlier hit *Love is in The Air* (as featured in Luhrmann’s *Strictly Ballroom*) before Minogue appeared, in a Las Vegas showgirl style outfit (Figure 2 below), accompanied by a host of purple clad male dancers, lip-synching to an anthemic, uptempo version of the ABBA song. This performance cross-associated Minogue’s own career as a versatile audio-visual performer with a modern tradition of popular Australian cinema that she had, up until that point, not been involved in, despite an association with Luhrmann that dated back to the early 1990s.9

---

9 The emphasis here is on “popular”. While Minogue starred in Chris Thompson’s 1989 Australian film *The Delinquents*, the film was not a box-office success. (See Jarosiewicz [1992] for further discussion).
Luhrmann and Minogue first worked together in 1994 when Luhrmann and his long-time collaborator Catherine Martin and colleague Bill Marron guest-edited an issue of Australian *Vogue* magazine that included photo-shoots of two young Australian female performers who had caught the editorial team’s eye as rising stars, Minogue and actress Nicole Kidman. 

Minogue’s photo spread, designed by Luhrmann and shot by American photographer Bert Stern, featured her in 1950s’ Hollywood glamour mode as the (fictional composite) ‘Judy Lamour’. In 1998, Luhrmann’s company Bazmark entered into an agreement with Fox Studios which the Studios’ press release described as “a far-reaching, multi-faceted deal” with “one of the world’s leading creative forces in theatrical and motion picture productions” which included audio-visual media, music and theatre products. News of this agreement was timed to coincide with the opening of Fox Studios Australia and a gala performance co-ordinated by Bazmark. One of the highlights of the latter was a close recreation of Marilyn Monroe’s classic on-screen performance of the song *Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend* (from Howard Hawks’s 1953 film adaptation of Leo Robin and Julie Stynes’s 1949 Broadway musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*) performed by Minogue and supporting male dancers. 

This performance wove Minogue and Luhrmann into an intertextual string that included Mary Lambert’s video for Madonna’s

---

10 This association sparked Luhrmann’s enduring interest in her star persona—as elaborated in Luhrmann’s foreword to Chris Heath’s volume on Kylie’s costumes and images, published in conjunction with the exhibition of costumes, memorabilia and photographs of her held at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum in 2007.

11 Archived online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV0VecAun-Y. Also see a split channel audio-visual comparison of the original film version and Kylie’s gala performance online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3aDdOnddW0
single *Material Girl* (1985), (which mimicked the choreography and set design of the sequence in Hawks's film), and foreshadowed the rendition of *Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend* (incorporating lines from *Material Girl*) featured in *Moulin Rouge!,* performed by Nicole Kidman (in role as the courtesan Satine).12

**The Absinthe Opportunity**

The visual effects were instrumental in producing an aesthetic for *Moulin Rouge!* that was both nostalgic and ironic, on one hand celebrating the naivety and experimental energy of periods of technological innovation, on the other deconstructing the postmodern desire for perfect simulacra... This aesthetic does not trade in the fake reality that is said to be the essence of the hyper-real... Rather, it points up its own trickery, seducing the audience into an unruly experience. (Cook, 2010: 93)

The Montmartre depicted by Luhrmann and his design team in *Moulin Rouge!* is, as Cook suggests, an “unruly” collision of period-researched verisimilitude, quasi-‘Steampunk’ chic13, pastiche and parody. In a particularly astute review of the film, Levy characterised that Luhrmann constructed his (re-imaginaion of) the Moulin Rouge as:

>a microcosm of Parisian society circa 1900, the epitome of moral and sexual decadence. Visually and thematically, the club is a blend of the cabaret in Josef von Sternberg’s *The Blue Angel* (with Marlene Dietrich), Liza Minnelli’s performance space in Bob Fosse’s *Cabaret*, and precursor of the infamous Studio 54 at the height of its 1970s popularity. (2001: online)

While Studio 54 was infamous as a mecca for cocaine consumption and for the cocaine fuelled revelries that characterised a particular (moneyed) subcultural experience at the time; the iconic drink of fin-de-siècle (ie. end of 19th Century) European bohemianism was absinthe—a green-coloured, high-proof spirit with a distinct flavour provided by anise, fennel and wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*), from which it gained its name. Its high alcoholic content and the presence of small amounts of the chemical thujone led it to be regarded as a potent and potentially hallucinogenic drink that was, nevertheless, avidly consumed. The artists Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Vincent Van Gogh and writers Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine were known to be frequent consumers and absinthe drinking was represented in paintings by artists such as Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet and Pablo Picasso. Reflecting this prominence in the demi-monde of Montmartre, absinthe is foregrounded in the film. In the initial sequence that introduces

---

12 Despite Kidman’s strong association with the song in the film, Minogue subsequently re-asserted her association with it through the inclusion of a new version in her 2007 biographical/concert film *White Diamonds* (directed by William Baker).

13 ‘Steampunk’ is a term that has gained prominence over the last decade. In her discussion of the ‘Top 10 Steampunk Movies’, ‘Squidoo’ characterises these as “films set in a “retro-futurist” society where imaginative fantasy and anachronistic technology go hand in hand” (nd: online). While ‘Squidoo’ doesn’t list *Moulin Rouge!* in her Top Ten, a respondent (‘Atticus’) characterises *Moulin Rouge!* as “the epiteme of steampunk” (ibid).
us to the neighbourhood, for example, we move past ‘The Absinthe Bar’ as a key marker of place.

During the protracted production of *Moulin Rouge!* the creative team considered shooting a sequence where absinthe was represented by a seductive female figure who then metamorphosed into a wicked, satyr-like sprite (in the mode of dark charismatic rock stars such as Ozzy Osbourne or Marilyn Manson\(^{14}\)). This idea, in itself, was an interesting departure from the established association of the drink with female imagery. The personification of absinthe as a female figure derives in substantial part from the drink’s French nickname ‘La Fée Verte’ (literally ‘the Green Fairy’). A notable visual representation of this is provided in Albert Maignan’s 1895 painting ‘La Muse Verte’ (‘The Green Muse’) which shows a (human size) green fairy floating behind an enraptured young man, touching his temples with her fingers (to indicate her powers of inspiration) in a tawdry artist’s garret with a floor strewn with manuscripts. Despite this tradition of female visualisation, the production team went as far as to record Osbourne singing and screaming but eventually decided to keep a single gender for the absinthe fairy. After some consideration, Luhrmann and key collaborator Catherine Martin offered the fairy role to Minogue, recognising her as a charismatic performer who could switch between cute, seductive and more aggressive performance modes.

\(^{14}\) Manson would have been a particularly appropriate choice, given his dedication to the spirit (which has extended as far as his devising and marketing his own version, entitled ‘Mansinthe’). See [http://mansinthe.com.au/](http://mansinthe.com.au/) for product details (and ordering options).
Minogue appeared—in miniaturised form—as a green fairy who enraptures a group of young artists and leads them to the Moulin Rouge. Her representation in the film derives from both the artistic tradition of visualisations of ‘La Fee Verte’ discussed above and is similar to the representation of Tinker Bell in Disney’s 1953 animated version of Peter Pan (directed by Clyde Geronimi and Wilfred Jackson). Unlike the fairy in J.M Barrie’s original stage play (1904), who was represented by optical effects and tinkling bells alone, Disney’s Tinker Bell was an attractive, curvaceous female (often credited as being inspired by Marilyn Monroe but actually modelled on drawings of actress Margaret Kerry) dressed in a skimpy green outfit closely similar to that worn by Minogue’s fairy character in Moulin Rouge!

Minogue appears early in the film (at 10.05 in the DVD version) in a scene where Christian (played by Ewan McGregor) interacts with a group of bohemians (including Toulouse-Lautrec) who are devising a new play, entitled ‘Spectacular Spectacular’. The play is set in the Alps, and is created, in somewhat haphazard fashion, in a room liberally bestrewn with glasses of absinthe. Christian’s first decisive contribution is to resolve a dispute about a line of lyrics from a proposed song by singing a new phrase—“The hills are alive with the sound of music”—that meets with instant acceptance, and then adds a subsequent line “with songs they have sung, for a thousand years”. The lyrics and melody intoned by Christian are the opening lines of the title song of The Sound of Music, made famous by Julie Andrews in her

---

15 See http://s104588189.onlinehome.us/tinktalks/home.htm

16 She appears even earlier in the DVD version where she announces “I’m the Green Fairy”, flies across the screen and holds a bottle of absinthe aloft alongside the initial DVD menu.
performance in Robert Wise’s eponymous 1965 film. The musical, with music and lyrics by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, was based on the (real-life) story of the singing von Trapp family, which fled Nazi-occupied Austria in 1938. The musical opened on Broadway in 1959 (starring Mary Martin, as Mari von Trapp) and became a major success, running for fourteen years and being adapted into a successful film in 1965. Wise’s screen version featured Julie Andrews’ performance of the title song in an Alpine pasture, celebrating her unbridled joy in nature (and showcasing the actress’s melodic precision and emotively expressive soprano) in a visually dramatic scene that remains one of the best-known sequences from the film. Luhrmann has cited musicals such as The Sound of Music as early inspirations for his film work¹⁷ and the ‘Spectacular Spectacular’ creative workshopping sequences and the repetition of the lines of the title song function to inscribe that inspiration and also to identify a creative expression of an idealistic, joyful purity that contrasts to the tawdry glamour of Montmartre.

Acclaimed for his inventive powers as a lyricist, Christian accepts the position of writer of the drama and, flushed with enthusiasm, the group toast Christian’s new role with glasses of absinthe (his first experience of the concoction). The screen image shows the label of the bottle, which features a Green Fairy logo modelled on Minogue. As if liberated by the men drinking the spirit, she becomes animated, introduces herself (“I’m the Green Fairy”) and flies off the bottle, trailing glitter (like Tinker Bell in Disney’s 1953 Peter Pan) before hovering in the air and joyfully singing the line “The hills are alive with the sound of music” in a high, light operatic voice together with the enraptured men. Switching mood, she alights on a shelf where she dances suggestively to an instrumental passage from a version of the T. Rex song Children of the Revolution (1972) (a performance which is far less airy and innocent than her previous intonation of the song lines). This is no incidental detail in the drama; her dance moves enact the opening lines of the original T. Rex song: “Well you can bump and grind/ It’s good for your mind/ Well you can twist and shout/ Let it all hang out”. She then beckons Christian on before flying across the front of the screen ‘sky writing’ the words ‘Freedom, Beauty, Truth” in green glitter, as the young bohemians sing these words in chorus, before rendering the men’s final sung word “Love” in red lettering as “L’amour Fou” (literally, ‘crazy/mad love’). The significant adjectival addition to the translation of the latter term—and its emphasis in red—serves to underline the men’s misperception that absinthe intoxication can deliver freedom, beauty and truth. While this appears as a subtle visual message in a scene of considerable visual impact and complexity, its intentional editorial comment on the drama can be ascertained from consideration of the ‘Green Fairy Previsualisation’ sequence shot for the film (and included in the 2002 bonus DVD edition¹⁸). This sequence (in which Kylie’s role is taken by visual effects assistant Serena Rettenmaier, also in green garb), underlines this aspect by having the fairy

¹⁷ Indeed, Luhrmann has emphasised that one of Bazmark Inq’s “proud moments” was when Robert Wise, director of The Sound of Music (1965) and West Side Story (1961), “the great-great-grandfather of musical cinema” said, “I’ve seen Moulin Rouge! and the musical has been re-invented.” Quoted on IMDB http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0525303/bio.

¹⁸ This sequence is included on Disk 2 of the double DVD pack of Moulin Rouge! included in the special DVD edition of Moulin Rouge! included in the five DVD set Baz Luhrmann’s Red Curtain Trilogy (2002).
indicate two visual captions that inform the (uncaring) young men about the effect of absinthe. The first states, “One glass tells the truth” and the second, “Too much and it lies”.

Returning to the front of the perspectival space after her ‘sky writing’, the fairy then hovers in the air in a cloud of green glitter and repeats the vocal line from The Sound of Music over the male group’s rendition of the chorus from the aforementioned T. Rex song (Children of the Revolution) which immediately follows the previously quoted extract. Here again were have ironic juxtaposition. While the opening line of Rogers and Hammerstein’s song is about innocent joy in nature, in Luhrmann’s film it is sung by fairy who personifies the hallucinatory nature of a powerful form of alcohol. Similarly while Bolan’s lyrics may proclaim that you “can’t fool the Children of the Revolution” (implicitly the young artistic idealists themselves); the young men are clearly intoxicated and clearly enraptured by the spirit of the bottle.19 As if to underline her essence as an hallucination, the image is then multiplied and a chorus-line of eleven Kylie fairies briefly shimmy—foreshadowing the choreographic displays on offer at the Moulin Rouge—before she flies outside, pointing the young men to the venue as Christian declares that “We were off to the Moulin Rouge and I was to perform my poetry for Satine”). The absinthe fairy’s expression switches at the last moment to a more demonic intensity, her eyes flashing red as she emits a malevolent scream,20 signalling the darkness beneath the glamour of the Moulin Rouge and the dangerous nature of absinthe itself.

Minogue’s screen time is a mere 50 seconds but she provides the key transition point to the film, shifting Christian and his colleagues to the Moulin Rouge itself and creating a complex, teasing, intertextually rich persona that complements the film’s overall fantastic a-realism. The essence of her performance is her digital rendition as an animated (rather than simply miniaturised) figure within the hyper-stylised rendition of Montmartre and the Moulin Rouge in the film. As Belinda Bennetts, the film’s visual effects art director, has emphasised:

*The green fairy was always supposed to be a vision, she was a hallucination and it was really important that she had an hallucinogenic quality. And there’s all kinds of ways you can go with that idea but it was also really important that she was located within the image system that Baz had constructed for the film…. You have to have particles if you’re gonna be a fairy… but they needed to be particles that had a handcrafted quality… It was really important that the imagery looked like it had been created with steam age technology rather than digital technology and so we really tried to make things look like they had been made on an optical printer, that they were double exposed, that they had blurry edges.*21

---

19 There is further irony in that Bolan’s lyrics are also playful and ironic, occurring in a song that includes throwaway lines such as “I drive a Rolls Royce ‘cos it’s good for my voice”.

20 The scream was a processed version of one provided by Ozzy Osbourne.

21 Interviewed in a featurette on Disk 2 of the double DVD pack of Moulin Rouge! included in the special DVD edition of Moulin Rouge! included in the five DVD set Baz Luhrmann’s Red Curtain Trilogy (2002).
Minogue's transmogrification into a blurry-edged animated sprite is akin to both the earlier cinematic tradition of modelling classic animations on sketched renditions of actual performers (e.g., Margaret Kerry's modelling for Tinker Bell, as discussed above) and the vocalisation/vocal character interpretation of performers in recent digital animations (such as Angelina Jolie's performance as Grendel's mother in Beowulf—directed by Robert Zemeckis, 2007) in which the animated character is clearly recognisable as the (actual) performer. In this manner, as Minogue enacts the role of the green absinthe fairy, her performance carries with it the (very different) traces of her ‘Dancing Queen’ appearance at the Sydney Olympics Closing Ceremony and the trail of earlier audio-visual performances that comprise her 1990s audio-visual oeuvre.

Conclusion

Rebecca Coyle’s 2013 analysis of Luhrmann’s authorial signature across the ‘Red Curtain’ trilogy, identified an eclecticism that (at its best) “bridges... syncretism in which seemingly inharmonious elements are blended in” (2013: xx). While Coyle’s characterisation refers specifically to the score of the films, it can also be extended to characterise the incorporation and deployment of diverse performers (and their pre-existent personae) in the ‘Red Curtain’ trilogy. In this context, performers such as Minogue are rendered as engramoured signs whose performances are components of the rich, intertextual spectacle key to the ‘Red Curtain’ aesthetic. Rather like the visual design of the film, characterised by Cook in terms of its blend of naïve, nostalgic and experimental elements, crafted from state of the art digital technologies and industrial creativity in order to seduce the audience “into an unruly experience” (2010: 93); Minogue’s persona and career are similarly eclectic and seductive. As Coyle acknowledges in her analysis of the ‘Red Curtain’ trilogy, Luhrmann’s core creative team generate ‘his’ creative signature; similarly, the multiple incarnations of Minogue’s persona generated across a range of songs, photo shoots, videos, films, TV programs and concert performances result from her collaboration with a succession of
other creative personnel. Transformed into an animated fairy that is still recognisably herself; her rendition represented a further phase in the transitions that marked the first fifteen years of her career (and, indeed, continue to distinguish it). In this manner, her performance in *Moulin Rouge!* is just as much part of her oeuvre as an audio-visual performer as it is part of the acclaimed director’s, (re-)emphasising the multiple characterisations and analyses of creative authorship possible within screen media. The uses of popular song materials in *Moulin Rouge!* are, as exemplified in the absinthe fairy scene discussed above, subtle, resonant and complex; illustrating the range of potential deployments available to composers and music supervisors concerned to integrate such materials into core thematic aspects of audio-visual texts.

Thanks to Rebecca Coyle for the discussions that informed this essay, for introducing me to screen sound analysis back in the 1990s and for 25 years of scholarly insight and dialogue.

References


Coyle, Rebecca (ed) (2010) *Drawn to Sound: Animation Film Music and Sonicity*, London: Equinox

Coyle, Rebecca (2013) ‘Baz Luhrmann’s eclectic Musical Signature in the Red Curtain Trilogy’, *Screen Sound Journal* n4: 9–30


SUBTLE IDIOSYNCRACY
Sound and Music in the Australian animated short film *The Lost Thing* (2010)

Rebecca Coyle, Jon Fitzgerald and Philip Hayward

Abstract

Sean Tan and Andrew Ruhemann’s collaborative screen adaptation of Tan’s graphic short story ‘The Lost Thing’ is a highly accomplished work that gained international attention following its 2010 Academy Award for best short animation film. This article provides textual and contextual analyses of and reflections on the particular aesthetics of sound and music employed in the film and identifies the manner in which these represent a distinctly local and idiosyncratic approach to auralising the author’s visual narratives. As individual sections detail, the collaborative and interactive aspects of particular sonic components are also notable for representing a subtle compositional integration of elements—rather than a set of relationships between autonomous elements determined in the final sound mix (as is often the norm for cinematic production).

Keywords

Animation cinema, soundtrack, *The Lost Thing*, Sean Tan

Introduction

Animated film production began in Australia in the pre-synch sound era and continued intermittently through to the late 1950s when television broadcasting commenced and began to offer expanded opportunities for local producers. Australia’s first locally produced animated feature film, Eric Porter’s *Marco Polo and the Red Dragon*, was produced in 1972 but arguably the most significant local venture in this period was the production operation established by Polish producer-director Yoram Gross, who relocated to Sydney from Israel in 1968. In addition to producing short-form material, such as animation sequences for the popular TV music show *Bandstand*, the company went on to produce commercially successful Australian animation features such as *Dot and the Kangaroo* (1977) and *Blinky Bill* (1992), the latter being released in the same year as another internationally successful Australian animation feature film *Fern Gully* (dir:

---

1 This article is an expanded version of an unpublished paper by Rebecca Coyle and Rosa Coyle-Hayward entitled ‘Sounding Out Contemporary Australian Animation’ delivered at the 2012 Society for Animation Studies Conference at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.
Bill Kroyer, 1992). In tandem with these production activities, Australian animation talent was also honed by working with the Disney subsidiary Animation Australia, which operated in Sydney between 1988 and 2006. More recently, a lively independent sector has developed producing short films, music videos and experimental items. This sector has recently come to prominence with the success of animators such as Adam Elliot and Shaun Tan, who, respectively, won Academy Awards (‘Oscars’) for best short animation films in 2004 (for Harvey Crumpet) and in 2011 (for The Lost Thing). One of the significant aspects of Elliott’s and Tan’s work is that they have achieved international recognition for productions whose aesthetics are informed by place and Australian culture—arguably, an element that gives them a sense of freshness and difference from their North American contemporaries. This article analyses the soundtrack of Tan’s The Lost Thing and the manner in which it imparts a particular sense of mood and place that reflects the product’s cultural points of inspiration.

As a number of authors have identified, screen animation provides rich opportunities for sound and music, given that there is no location sound to work with and its audio-visual worlds are thereby entirely created. Animation often calls for much more music than live action, in order to provide continuity and flow, and music and sound are regularly called on to assist in defining objects and characters, giving them scale, scope and specific profiles through their sonic dimensions. Characters are also given expressive range through their sound. In this manner, animation is a demanding medium for sound designers and musicians since music and sound need to work with the contrived motion, location and the interaction of characters with their imagined world. In addition, any abstract concepts that the film conveys or explores also need to be developed using music and sound. Aside from the early work of Hill (1998), Australian animation media soundtracks have been largely overlooked by academics and journalists and this article provides a step towards a more sustained investigative engagement with the form and its local particularities through detailed analysis of one particular production.

I. Context

One element that Elliot and Tan share is a deployment of narrative to explore abstract concepts through a reflective—rather than action-driven—approach. Elliot and Tan also pursue a distinctly urban aesthetic. Their work employs visuals that are highly stylised yet intrinsically realist. Images are often muted in texture and contrast and show untidy and decidedly un-glamorous locales appropriate to their films’ urban locations and themes. The directors’ work also evinces a certain laconic cynicism combined with a sense of nostalgia that might also be argued to represent a distinctly Australian sensibility. Tan’s The Lost Thing typifies this approach and, indeed, his overall oeuvre is suffused by it.

---

2 Contributing to Disney features such as The Return of Jafar (1994, directed by Tad Stones and Alan Zaslove) and Aladdin and the King of Thieves (1996, Tad Stones).

Tan grew up in the northern suburbs of Perth (Western Australia) and began drawing and painting images for science fiction and horror stories in small-press magazines as a teenager. After graduating from the University of Western Australia in 1995 (with a Bachelor of Arts), he moved across the continent and currently works full-time as a freelance artist and author based in Melbourne. Tan has become best known for illustrated books that deal with social, political and historical subjects through surreal, dream-like imagery. Books such as his collaboration with popular Australian young adult fiction writer John Marsden, 'The Rabbits’ (1998), and sole authored and illustrated volumes such as 'The Red Tree' (2002), 'Tales from Outer Suburbia' (2008) and his wordless graphic novel 'The Arrival' (2006), have been widely praised and translated into many languages. Tan has also worked as a theatre designer and as a visual concept artist on the films *Horton Hears a Who* (Jimmy Hayward, 2008) and Pixar’s *WALL-E* (Andrew Stanton, 2008). Tan’s film adaptation of his book ‘The Lost Thing’ was made in collaboration with British producer-director Andrew Ruhemann. Ruhemann began working for Richard Williams’ studio in the late 1980s, contributing to productions such as Robert Zemeckis’ 1988 feature *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* before establishing the company Passion Picture, whose initial work had a similar emphasis on classical 2D character animation and special effects. In recent years Passion Pictures’ range of styles has expanded to include stop frame and computer animation (see, for instance, the first four Gorillaz music videos*).

Tan initially wrote ‘The Lost Thing’ in 1998 and developed it into a 32-page illustrated book that was published in 2000. The work’s narrative involves a boy who discovers a bizarre looking creature while out collecting bottle tops at the beach. Realising that it is lost, he tries to find out who owns it or where it belongs. He is met with indifference—people are either completely oblivious to the creature’s presence, or, at best, they barely notice it. The boy empathises with the creature, and sets out to find a ‘place’ for it. The narrative unfolds in a surreal world that is rather bleak but in a slightly comic way—with the main protagonists wending their way through a treeless, urban environment with odd-looking people and hybrid, machine-like creatures. Fittingly, in this regard, the visual design of Tan’s ‘lost thing’ bears more than passing resemblance to Dadaist/Surrealist painter Max Ernst’s fantastical quasi-mechanical ‘Elephant Celebes’ in his eponymous 1921 painting but without the unsettling, grey, mechanical otherness of the latter’s ‘elephant’ creature. Indeed, one of the most original and striking aspects of Tan’s creation is its appeal. As one reviewer colourfully characterised, referring primarily to the ‘thing’s’ rendition in the film version: “the first thing that struck me... is how fricking adorable it is. It is never revealed what the thing could be—it’s difficult to even lump it into one of the animal, vegetable or mineral categories (steampunk hermit crab squidplant?)—but it’s certainly hella cute” (Camilleri, 2010: online)

After encountering the publication at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair in 2000, Ruhemann approached Tan to collaborate on adapting ‘The Lost Thing’ into an animation film. Storyboarding was completed in 2001 and 2002, adapting the 32-page book into a 15-minute narrative, and the film’s

---

visuals were created in collaboration with CGI artist Tom Bryant and artist Leo Baker.

Tan has elaborated that his adaptation fulfilled his original impression of the project in that:

In re-creating the story from the ground up, we’ve elaborated some aspects of the ‘Lost Thing universe’ which could not be entirely expressed within the confines of the original 32-page book. In fact, I always saw the story in my imagination as a short film or theatrical piece, where the book presents us with a set of stills from some larger production. The key character, a faceless creature, has an inherently animated personality which a painting struggles to convey—and finds its full expression in the medium of film... I'm more accustomed to working with still, silent pictures that allow a viewer plenty of time to contemplate individual compositions. Animation is a very different medium, where questions of time and pace are much more critical, not to mention layers of sound and music. (Tan, 2010: online)

In order to realise and expand Tan’s narrative and thematic vision through sound, Tan and co-director Ruhemann employed an experienced production team to create a distinct soundscape for the film.

II. The Soundscape Team

The soundtrack for The Lost Thing integrates three primary elements—sound design/Foley, spoken narration and original music. The sound design and Foley layers were provided by Melbourne DJ, remixer and sound designer John Kassab and experienced sound recordist and Foley artist Adrian Medhurst (who had previously worked on Peter Jackson’s Lord of the Rings trilogy [2001–2003] and Sarah Watt’s combined live action and animation feature Look Both Ways [2005]). The narration was provided by comedic singer-songwriter and cabaret artist Tim Minchin, a performer known for his droll and laconic vocal delivery. The original score was provided by composer Michael Yezerski (who had previously scored Elissa Down’s 2008 feature The Black Balloon). Yezerski was the only team member with previous experience in engaging with Tan’s work, having collaborated with violinist Richard Tognetti to write a concert piece based around Tan’s novel ‘The Red Tree’ that was performed by a chamber orchestra and the 40 member children’s Gondwa Voices choir along with projected illustrations from Tan’s original book (see Wilson, 2008).

Research conducted by co-authors Coyle and Hayward for their 2007–2011 Australia Research Council funded project on the Australian film music and sound production sector identified a number of aspects of national practice that differed from that of the North American film industry. Whereas the scale and volume of productions in North America has resulted in both a high degree of role specialisation and relatively autonomous creative

5 DP0770026 ‘Music Production and Technology in Australian Film: Enabling Australian Film to Embrace Innovation’, 2007–2011, chief investigators: Rebecca Coyle, Michael Hannan and Philip Hayward.
activities—which are then crafted into the final audio-visual text by sound editors adept at integrating the various sonic elements—the typically low-budget nature of Australian production and the more limited work opportunities on offer has led to a multi-skilled, flexible and adaptable pool of professionals who are comfortable with (and often actively interested in) creative collaboration and dialogue. The production history of *The Lost Thing* exemplifies this aspect of the national sector. The film’s soundtrack was devised over a six-month period, a relatively long gestation for the creation of sound for a short film. Kassab notes that this facilitated an unusually high level of collaboration in combining sound and visual elements (even noting that national tendency identified above):

> working at the same time as animation and assembly gave the sound department collaborative input on the way some of the cuts were made to retain the musical and rhythmic integrity of the sound design. It’s a truly rare thing when a sound designer can ask picture department for a few more or less frames here and there to make the sound work better (in Isaza, 2011: online).

A similarly close level of collaboration was evident within the sound team itself. While Kassab notes that his normal process is to create the internal sounds and vocalisations and provide notes on external sounds for the Foley artist; the closeness of the collaboration on *The Lost Thing* regularly led to a blurring of boundaries. As he has identified “as sound people working with a fun character like this, we couldn’t help ourselves and we both over-stepped those boundaries on every occasion completely merging our roles beyond those of sound designer or Foley artist respectively” (ibid).

Kassab displayed an equally collaborative attitude in relation to his work with composer Michael Yezerski:

> a lot of the discussion surrounded the types of instruments that Michael [Yezerski] was going to use in different scenes, and so I went through and revised a lot of the scenes that we had originally by taking out a lot of the bass frequencies if there were gonna be, like, bass instruments coming through or vica-versa, so that each didn’t clash on the other (Kassab, interview in Coleman, nd: online).

Kassab also acknowledges the input of re-recording mixer Doron Kipen “who refined our work further to fit around the music and voice over” (in Isaza, 2011: online).

Finally, although Tim Minchin cannot be seen as an ongoing member of the sound ‘team’ in the same manner as the personnel discussed above (given that he recorded his narration independently with Tan), the importance of his input should not be underestimated. Tan has identified that Minchin was chosen for the role for his particular persona:

> He’s a very eloquent, articulate person… quite intellectual but in the same sense, laid back and has a certain casualness in his approach… and I think to some extent he might have been able to identify with the character ‘cos we’re both West Australians… there’s something about the world of The Lost Thing that has a
West Australian feel to me, a sense of very long sunburnt childhood... with vast amounts of space and not a lot going on and it creates a certain sense of isolated reflection (‘The Lost Thing Voice Record Session with Tim Minchin’, video, 2010: online).

Appropriately in this regard, Minchin’s voice incorporates characteristic Anglo-Australian speech mannerisms, as well as a laconic delivery that connects with the laid-back ‘Aussie’ stereotype and the unhurried nature of the existential narrative. Since the vocal track has a limited volume, pitch and tonal range, it functions as a relatively constant and predictable element for the sound and music to weave around.

III. The unfolding soundscape of The Lost Thing

In order to illustrate ways in which sound, music and narration are used to enhance narrative, visual and emotional elements in The Lost Thing, the following section of this article provides a detailed scene-by-scene description and musicological and sonological characterisation of the film’s unfolding soundscape⁶ that is subsequently interpreted in Section IV.

As the film credits appear on screen, a soft ‘white noise’ synth sound is joined by a sweet, spacious guitar melody set in the bright-sounding upper register and played over a bed of slowly-changing chords. The guitar melody is very simple (see Example 1), as is the accompanying chord progression (C–Ami7)—the latter also providing an immediate sense of major/minor ambiguity. The instrumental melody is immediately joined by a range of sound effects associated with the on-screen arrival and departure of a train. This provides an early contrast between musical and non-musical sound, and hints that both will play important roles within the ensuing animation. The third important sound element (the narrator’s voice) is introduced at 00.35, completing the set of sound material (i.e. instrumental music, Foley/sound effects, human voice) that is carefully interwoven throughout the fifteen-minute narrative. The sound of the narrator’s voice is notable for its understated, ‘deadpan’ character—with very little contour in terms of volume and pitch range—and the voice is intentionally highlighted through being placed over a minimal background of soft sustained ‘synth’ sounds.

As the narration continues, a variety of sounds is used to underscore changing visual elements, as the main human character (a boy apparently in his teens) walks onto a sandy beach. These delicate and subtle sounds, placed low in the mix, include footsteps, rustling newspaper, seagull cries,

---

⁶ Timing references identified below are taken from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T48d1STzdnM.
rippling water, and bells. As the ‘lost thing’ first comes into view (1.17), a new bright guitar theme makes a sudden, surprising entrance. This theme parallels the opening guitar theme by taking the form of a slow, sustained melodic idea and another two-chord, major to minor progression a third apart (in this case Cadd9–Emi).

Non-musical sounds come into prominence as the boy taps on a door on the side of the ‘lost thing’, which comes to life and moves around in response. Removal of the instrumental music at this point helps to highlight a range of interesting and varied mechanical sound effects associated with the odd, machine-like creature. Mechanical sounds include metallic-sounding creaks, thumps/bangs, roars and groans, and there are more bell sounds. Instrumental music re-enters at 2.31 after the ‘lost thing’ throws a beach ball to the boy and after they begin to play together. This happy-sounding rhythmic idea features a repetitive guitar motif supported by sustained synth strings and percussion. A simple major-key melody highlights the semitone between octave and major seventh scale degree (see Example 2).

A siren sound at 3.00 (indicating the impending closure of the beach/playground) signals a change of direction in the narrative, and an associated change in the sound focus. As the game between the boy and the ‘lost thing’ ceases, instrumental music is again removed to highlight a range of interesting sounds (including loudspeaker noises, closing beach umbrellas, seagulls, creaking wheels); after which the narration is foregrounded. Instrumental music re-enters at 3.18, in the form of slow echoing sounds plus warm, processed guitar sounds. At 3.35 another simple guitar melody enters (see Example 3) and the accompanying chord progression (Emi–Cmaj7) represents a reversal/inversion of previous patterns. At this point music takes the leading role in setting a poignant mood that matches the narration “no denying the unhappy truth—it was lost” and complements images of the ‘lost thing’ wandering around, ignored by all. Music fades out from 4.07, allowing attention to return to the narration, then the Emi–C progression re-enters at 4.35. A section of narration is followed by a brief piece of music, and then the narrator sums up the opening section, saying “Some things are like that; they’re just plain lost.” A very loud train sound and full-screen image of a large moving train provide an emphatic ending to this section of the animation.
The next section begins at 5.06 with the boy deciding to take the ‘lost thing’ home. A lengthy period (over 30 seconds) ensues in which music is entirely absent, leaving narration and sound effects to provide the aural interest as the boy brings the ‘lost thing’ into his lounge room and then takes it to hide in the back shed. By now, the sound of bells (especially those attached to the ‘lost thing’) has begun to assume a leitmotiv role within the animation. As the boy tries to make the ‘lost thing’ feel at home in the back shed, narration ceases, and music again comes into focus to provide support for the emotional content of the film. A variant of the first instrumental melody re-enters at 5.54; then at 6.33 the music becomes rhythmic and much louder in the mix, featuring a series of synth arpeggios and heavy low guitar notes. This section of music (together with a range of varied sound effects) underscores a scene in which the boy and ‘lost thing’ interact in a gentle, mutually-supportive manner, as the ‘lost thing’ carefully sets up a ladder for the boy to climb so that he can ‘feed’ it.

Music is again removed at the beginning of the new section—which begins at 6.55 with the narrator enunciating the boy’s perception, saying “The lost thing seemed happy then, but I sure couldn’t keep it in the shed forever.” Visual attention is first focused on the interior of the boy’s home, with the soundtrack foregrounding an extended section of diegetic sound (in the form of a spoken TV advertisement for the ‘Federal Department of Odds and Ends’). As the boy and ‘lost thing’ make their way into the city on a tram and then enter a large grey building, a variety of sounds (including footsteps, tram sounds, doors slamming) are used to complement related visual images. Inside the building, the dark and eerie visual elements are effectively supported by eerie sounds—such as (soft and loud) white noise and whistling, wind-like sounds. The only ‘music’ at this point consists of a few sustained single electronic-sounding tones, while ubiquitous rattling bell sounds provide a continuing reminder of the presence of the ‘lost thing’.

At 8.38 the impact of the sudden appearance of a spotlight on the boy is accentuated by a jarring, electronic-sounding buzz, and the boy looks up to a distant receptionist and tells her he has a ‘lost thing’. After she instructs him, in a bored monotone voice, to “fill in the form” a rumbling mechanical noise crescendos ominously until the visuals lead to a metal locker that opens to reveal a large pile of forms. The spotlight is suddenly switched off, and the boy and ‘lost thing’ are left alone to grapple with uncaring bureaucracy in the dimly lit, minimally-furnished building. The soundscape at this point is correspondingly minimal, with just an occasional rustling of papers disturbing the silence. Just as everything seems to be going from bad to worse, some hope is revived by the appearance of a small, rat-like, mechanical creature that is sweeping the floor of the building. In whispered undertones, the creature urges the boy not to leave the ‘lost thing’ in this “place for forgetting, leaving behind”. A short sequence of increasingly high-range bell sounds provides a subtle aural hint of hope.

After the narrator says, “It was some kind of sign, I guess” (9.57) another dramatic change in the visuals signals a new section within the film. A brightly lit, full screen image of a collage of city signs (including ‘No Parking’ and ‘No Entry’ signs, and humorous offerings such as ‘Sign Not In Use’) appears suddenly, and the boy ponders the note (with an arrow) that the small creature had handed him just earlier. The ‘lost thing’, seemingly energised by this development, begins to move off as if in search of
something, and music is again called on as to underscore the prevailing emotional tone (in this case happier and more upbeat). The music track begins (at 10.12) with a light, rhythmic counterpoint of tuned percussion instruments, which is subsequently joined by rich sustained synth string chords and some low bass frequencies. The chord progressions (Cmaj7–Emi7; C6/9–Emi7) represent further small variations of the original two-chord, major to minor idea; and the sound of the ‘lost thing’s’ bells merge seamlessly into the overall musical texture. As the narration resumes (at 10.56) the music is gradually faded out, leaving just the narrator’s voice and the sound of the ‘lost thing’s’ bells. Suspense is created by a period of near silence as the boy notices a large door with a key and decides to open it to see what is on the other side. Electronic sounds add to the suspense as a small light shines through an opening in the door, and the door finally opens.

At 11.47 the opening musical theme is suddenly recapped as light streams in on the boy and the ‘lost thing’, providing a brightening of the visual elements as well as offering a symbol of hope. As they enter what appears to be a stadium, they begin to notice some strange machine-creatures. After the relative drabness of the urban scenes, the stadium offers a vibrant scenario of odd and colourful creatures—many of which are sound-producing objects (such as an accordion, large bell, mechanical industrial artifacts, a TV fish, a beating heart, and bird-like flying objects). At first, the soundtrack highlights sound effects linked specifically to some of the individual creatures, but at 12.01 these sounds virtually disappear as the musical track moves emphatically into the foreground. The new musical theme is a bright, rhythmic ‘Chet Atkins’-style guitar pattern, supported at first by percussion sounds and then by synth strings. This theme is developed into the longest piece of continuous music in the film (more than one minute) by expanding the earlier two-chord vocabulary into a repeated four-bar progression (C–Emi/B–Ami–Emi/B), and even taking a temporary excursion into a different key centre (Bb).

After this rhythmic theme ceases (at 13.07), variants of a several earlier musical ideas appear in turn to underscore visuals that depict the ‘lost thing’ deciding to join its new ‘friends’ and say goodbye to the boy. The second theme (see Example 2) is briefly recapped in a lower octave with a warmer guitar sound, while the third idea (see Example 3) appears in a lower register and at a much slower tempo. When the ‘lost thing’ turns it back on the stadium to say its goodbyes to the boy, rhythmic arpeggios are constructed from the C–Emi progression used earlier in the animation. The leitmotiv bell sounds are foregrounded as the boy touches ‘hands/claws’ with the ‘lost thing’ in a gentle parting gesture, and the lengthy stadium scene ends with the closure of the large entrance door and a low, resounding thump.

Music is absent from the entire closing section, leaving narration and various electronic and mechanical sound effects to carry the soundtrack. Train sounds and images provide an aural and visual link to the opening scenes, and the narrator offers some wistful comments about losing the ability to notice lost things. The final credits are accompanied by train sounds and gentle electronic rumbles, and the animation ends with a brief view (and sound) of the rat-like, mechanical floor sweeper—the overall audio-visual effect being a pronounced diminuendo.
IV. Style, Anachronism and Idiosyncracy

Kassab has characterised the manner in which Tan envisaged a world for *The Lost Thing* Tan “powered by steam, clogs and gears”; one which was “futuristic in its rate of expansion and apparent lack of humanity but was still so old-fashioned in the way it operated and the technology it used” (Kassab, in Isaza, 2011: online). While the sound designer does not use the specific term, the description of the brief he was given is closely akin to that of the ‘Steampunk’ aesthetic. This aesthetic, and a subsequent genre embodying it, was first recognised in the work of a number of authors in the 1980s and 1990s (see Robb, 2012 for discussion). While the aesthetic has been most prevalent in literature it has also been represented on-screen in feature films such as Stephen Norrington’s eponymous adaptation of Alan Moore and Kevin O’Neill’s graphic narrative ‘The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen’ (2003) or Barry Sonnenfeld’s eccentric big-budget epic *Wild Wild West* (1999). The genre has also spawned a youth subcultural scene in Western Europe and North America that has developed distinct styles and iconographies based Victorian era technologies extrapolated into an alternative future. One significant element of this scene has been the development of a network of Steampunk musicians and bands. While the Steampunk aspects of these acts has often been primarily evident in their visual appearance and/or lyrics, some observers identified a distinct sonic approach prevalent in the late 2000s based on “sonorous, half-spoken vocals and melancholy melodies influenced by Tom Waits and eastern European Gypsy bands” (Sullivan, 2008: online). More recently however, musician Janus Zarate of Steampunk band Vernian Process, have produced far less prescriptive definitions based on sensibilities rather than sounds:

*The literature provides the substance, and new technologies provide the instruments. Ultimately, the selections hardly comprise a traditional genre, but they make for a satisfying playlist of musicians... How then should we define the music of steampunk, if not by genre? We need only turn to its heritage—not just to the artists of our time, but to their musical and non-musical predecessors... We must bring the spirit of anachronism to the music, forging innovation from the melding of past and present.* (Zarate, 2011: online)

While there is no evidence that any of the film’s production personnel consciously engaged with Steampunk discussions (or precedents), we can see them as negotiating similar issues in addressing their creative brief for the film. Appropriately, with regard to the above discussions, the general brief given to the sound team employed by Tan and Ruhermann was that “this is a mechanical world... and this whole digital thing really doesn’t exist” (Kassab, interview in Coleman, n.d: online). Although *The Lost Thing* employs CG (computer graphics), Tan describes the film as embodying “a unique aesthetic that avoids the artificiality of CG objects; almost every surface is essentially hand-painted using non-digital materials: acrylic paint, pencil, oils and collage” (2010: online). In keeping with this ‘low-tech’ orientation, the soundtrack largely avoids digitally-created sound effects in favour of recorded sound material. As a result, the creation of sounds became an extremely complex and lengthy process. As Kassab has identified:
In this 15 min film, there are 22 locations and 74 characters and all required stylized sounds. As the worlds and characters did not exist in our own world, each needed extensive analysis, conceptualization and experimentation. Even the ‘human’ characters had unfamiliar dimensions and walking styles, requiring unique sound treatments. This lead to the recording of over 1800 sounds and a total of 13 months of work between myself and the wonderfully gifted Foley artist, Adrian Medhurst. (Kassab, n.d: online)

The complexity of the sound creation task reached a peak in the so-called ‘Utopia’ theme (in which the ‘lost thing’ discovers a stadium full of potential new ‘friends’). During this part of the animation, Kassab and Medhurst faced the challenge of creating distinct sounds associated with around forty different mechanical creatures. Kassab recalls the added pressure of feeling “constantly fearful of letting down the fans of the original book” (in Isaza, 2011: online).

The primary functions of non-musical sound are to emphasise aspects of changing environments and environmental ‘atmospheres,’ and to provide characteristic aural signatures for some of the mechanical creatures (that also conform to the innately anachronistic tendency so beloved of Steampunk aficionados, as discussed above). For example, train sounds regularly provide a sense of the urban environment (as well as symbolising the overall ‘journey’ through the narrative). Delicate individual sounds (such as rustling newspaper, seagull cries, and rippling water) provide a strong sense of the beach environment; while the eerie atmosphere inside the dark building is enhanced by the sparse placement of a variety of eerie sound effects (such as whistling ‘wind’ sounds). Sound effects (such as metallic-sounding creaks, rattles, thumps/bangs, and the ubiquitous bells) are especially important in providing the ‘lost thing’ with an aural signature. As sound designer, Kassan also took primary responsibility for the selection, manipulation and placement of subtle sustained sounds that provide subtle atmospheric and character-enhancing effects at various places throughout the film, a process he has described as using “a lot of soft synthesis in the creation of the musical and sub bass sounds” (in Isaza, 2011).

Composer Michael Yezerski created a range of original music that also fitted with the ‘low-tech’ philosophy of the general brief provided to the sound team by using the ‘natural’ sounds of acoustic guitar and (tuned and unt-turned) percussion instruments rather than succumbing to the temptation of using quirky ‘electronic’ sounds to characterize the film’s quirky cityscapes, landscapes and creatures. The accessible and seductive instrumental timbres, appealing melodic ideas and simple harmonies and rhythms have a subtly idiosyncratic aspect that is also consistent with Ruhemann’s desire for Tan’s work to reach an international audience.

Music plays an important role in setting a general tone for the film at the beginning. The sound of the spacious acoustic guitar theme over a bed of slowly-changing chords hints at the laconic, contemplative, happy/sad tone of the film. From then on, the main role of musical sound is to enhance the emotional impact of scenes, especially those involving interaction between the boy and the ‘lost thing’. For example, happy-sounding instrumental music underscores the scene in which the ‘lost thing’ and the boy play ball
together, while music plays the leading role in setting a poignant mood around the time when the boy/narrator says “no denying the unhappy truth—it was lost.” Music is again prominent (along with some varied sound effects) in setting a gentle emotional tone when the ‘lost thing’ helps the boy to feed it. A happier musical tone is used when the boy and the ‘lost thing’ leave the dark building and set off to follow the note provided by the rat-like machine creature. The happiest scene of all—the ‘Utopia’ or stadium scene—is notable for the way in which happy-sounding music comes into the foreground to help set the emotional tone; and music plays the leading role in underscoring the happy/sad emotions surrounding the final goodbyes between the boy and the lost thing. Music also plays a role in inserting aural ‘colours’ that offer some respite from the somewhat bleak environmental sounds associated with many of the urban locales. In the same way that the redness of the ‘lost thing’ stands out from the greys of the urban settings (even at the beach), bright musical timbres (for example, steel-string acoustic guitar, marimbas, xylophone, glockenspiel) contrast with duller and lower-frequency sounds (such as background hums and general traffic noise).

As previously noted, the third sound element—the narrator’s voice—is notable for its laconic, ‘deadpan’ quality. In addition to having very little contour in terms of volume and pitch range, the vocal sound is also notable for its timbral ‘dullness,’ with mid and bass frequencies dominating over high frequencies. The technique of highlighting the narration by employing it on its own, or with a minimal sound and/or music background, serves two functions within the film. As well as bringing important narrative developments (and associated philosophical musings) into clear focus, it allows the vocal timbre to function as a recurring block of relatively colourless sound, against which varied musical and sound-effect colours are contrasted.

Ultimately, one of the most striking things about the use of sound and music in *The Lost Thing* is the way in which the three sound elements—instrumental music, Foley/sound effects, human voice—are so effectively interwoven and contrasted throughout the fifteen-minute narrative. As the earlier scene-by-scene description of the unfolding soundscape indicates, the focus of the soundtrack continually alternates between music, sound, and narration, and there is considerable variation in the way these elements are combined. The meticulous combining of sound elements also plays a important role in creating the conspicuously spacious and uncluttered quality of the soundtrack. As sound designer Kassab notes: “With so much going on in every scene, it was all about weaving all of the elements in and around each other to tell the story of character and place whilst taking care not to overcrowd the track at any one point” (in Isaza, 2011: online). The issue of sonic ‘overcrowding’ was particularly relevant in dealing with the very busy ‘Utopia’ scene with its stadium full of mechanical creatures; and the manner in which the sound team dealt with this challenge offers further insight into the highly collaborative creative atmosphere that characterised the making of the film. Kassab describes how he (and Foley artist Medhurst) painstakingly created individual sounds for each of the machine-creatures in the scene, only to see these sounds abandoned in favour of the prominent music track that allowed the scene to be more emotional and less mechanical (Kassab, in Coleman, n.d.). Even more significantly, this process emphasizes the sound team’s ultimate commitment to serve the vision of the
directors, rather than merely display their individual creative talents: “What we’d hoped is that the audience member would never really be aware of sound versus music but be an audience member who was following the story and the emotional intent of the directors” (Kassab, in Coleman, n.d: online).

Conclusion

As discussed in Section II, Tan has emphasised his film’s roots in what he perceives as a Western Australian sensibility, characterised by spaciousness, stasis and a general sense of remoteness, producing a sense of lackadaisical disengagement from the everyday world. The latter elements are evident in the thematic unfolding and tonal qualities of The Lost Thing’s drama. The slow-moving pace of the film allows viewers time to savour the distinctive narrative, visual and aural elements; and the meticulous placement and blending of music, sound effects, Foley and narration adds considerably to the spacious and uncluttered quality of the film. Our earlier references to surreal aspects of the visual imagination of the film are both general (ie small ‘s’ surreal) and specific (as in the ‘lost thing’s’ previously noted resemblance to Max Ernst’s ‘Elephant Celebes’) and are elements that operate in an urban space characterised by its languidity. While the urban locales and odd technologies depicted in the film are somewhat unsettling, and evoke elements of Steampunk fiction and iconography; any threats they pose are muted and, as in the hall of the Department of Odds and Ends, quaintly Kafkaesque. While the inspirational cultural contexts of works are rarely—if ever—deterministic, Tan’s film and its soundtrack can be interpreted as a distinctly local product and, thereby, as an expression of a particularly idiosyncratic sensibility; one where art historical and sonic references are localised and reinflected to create a novel use of the medium and a highly distinctive animation film text.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Rosa Coyle-Hayward for her contribution to the original conference paper upon which this article is based.7

References


7 See footnote 1 to this article.


Robb, Brian J (2012) Steampunk: An Illustrated History of Fantastical Fiction, Fanciful Film and Other Victorian Visions, Minneapolis: Voyageur Press


POPULAR SONGS AND INSTRUMENTALS IN 1930S AUSTRALIAN FEATURE FILMS

Michael Hannan

Abstract

Seven feature films produced in Australia in the 1930s are analysed to examine professional practices in the use of music. The focus is on the way songs and instrumentals are used diegetically in the films selected for the study, rather than the use of music for underscore. Judgments are made about how diegetic music is employed to enhance the entertainment value of the films, to exploit the versatile talents of the actors, and to reflect the cultural values of the characters. The way that music interacts with film narrative structure is also considered.

Keywords

1930s Australian films, diegetic songs, instrumentals, underscore

This study examines the songs and instrumentals of a selection of feature films made in the 1930s in Australia at the beginning of the sound film era. The songs are all performed diegetically (i.e. as part of the narrative action) on-screen (or occasionally off-screen) and the instrumentals are a mixture of diegetic music performed on-screen or off-screen or used as underscore for titles or action sequences without dialogue. The term ‘instrumentals’ is used here to indicate pieces of music that are usually in the European classical music standard repertoire and thus recognisable to many listeners, for example Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in C sharp minor for solo piano (1892) and Edward Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March No 1 for orchestra (1901), two works that appear in the films being studied. The term “underscore” refers to instrumental music specially composed or adapted which is intended to enhance the mood of the narrative but is not a realistic part of it.

The songs and instrumentals of the following films are discussed in detail in this article: The Squatter’s Daughter (Ken G. Hall, 1933), The Hayseeds (Beaumont Smith, 1933), Uncivilised (Charles Chauvel, 1935), Lovers and Luggers (Ken G. Hall, 1937), The Broken Melody (Ken G. Hall, 1938), Come Up Smiling (William Freshman, 1939) and Gone to the Dogs (Ken G. Hall, 1939).

The methods used in this study include the application of audio-visual theories of how music works in film (Atkins, 1983; Gorbman, 1987; Buhler,
to the analysis of the selected film texts. Theories about how diegetic music works in film are not covered in the literature as well as theories about how non-diegetic dramatic underscoring works. However, some of the same considerations apply to diegetic as they do to non-diegetic music. Gorbman’s “codes of film music” can be applied to both kinds (Gorbman, 1987: 13). Her concept of “pure musical codes” is relevant to diegetic performances where the audience focuses on an “aesthetic mode of contemplating” music, for example, the melodic, structural, textural or timbral aspect of the musical item itself, or the skills of musical performance or of stagecraft of the person or persons performing. The aesthetic appreciation of musical works and of their performers can apply to the audience reception of all of the films under discussion and is arguably one source of the entertainment value of each film. More potent and relevant to the selection of films, however, is Gorbman’s notion of “cultural musical codes”. All musical styles, and indeed specific musical works, have powerful cultural associations, and these will vary according to the cultural literacy and experience of the listener and with the use of particular musical styles or specific work in various performance and audio-visual media. For example Strauss’s The Blue Danube waltz may conjure up specific images of the late 19th Century Viennese courtly ballroom. The contemporary listener may also associate it with some of the many films in which it has been used (e.g. 2001: A Space Odyssey and Strictly Ballroom) or with some of its notable performers (e.g. André Rieu). All these intertextual experiences will modify the cultural interpretation. With the selection of films under discussion an attempt has been made to analyse the cultural coding of each piece of diegetic and non-diegetic music, and to reveal any narrative interplay tied to the cultural codes of the various musical cues.

In discussing the “value” of diegetic music in feature films, Buhler (2001: 43) identifies “a heavy interpretive bias towards the symphonic non-diegetic score”, concluding that “symphonic sound is opposed to the dance band, ‘classical’ music to popular (jazz, or later rock), and, therefore high art and aesthetic values are set against low art and commercial value”. Although symphonic underscore plays a back-seat to diegetic songs and instrumentals in the films under discussion in this article, it will be argued that the same binary oppositions occurs within the diegetic music cues themselves, that popular and classical music diegetic cues are used as oppositional class signifiers.

In the discourse about the function of diegetic music in film, Gorbman (1987: 22–26) outlines a number of issues that have limited pertinence to the films under discussion here. Because of the primitive audio-visual technology available in 1930s Australia, music could not be effectively used under dialogue (Buys, 2004: 28), so Gorbman’s notions of “irony” (p. 23) and “indifference” (p. 24) between dialogue and music were techniques yet to be explored. Likewise the power to create a sense of “depth and space” (p. 25) through subtle changes in the amplitude and audio spectral content of musical cues, was extremely difficult to achieve.

Diegetic music in film is alternatively referred to as “source music” (Atkins, 1983). Atkins’ study explores the use of source music in American cinema, outlining three main categories for its use (p. 21):
1. One or more of the chief protagonists is a musician, a composer, performer, or combination of the two.

2. One of the protagonists is a would-be performer, usually a failure as one.

3. The source music is part of the milieu in which the characters appear, either briefly or throughout the film.

The films under discussion fit into these categories. Atkins (1983: 50) also outlines "three specific types of source music". These are:

...popular songs as performed in the nostalgia film; serious concert music composed for specific motion pictures; and ethnic source music, both ancient and non-Western.

These types of source music are also all represented in the films selected for this study.


To conduct this research, the author was able to access and analyse Australian feature film texts from the 1930s during a period of research at the Australian Film and Sound Archive in January–February, 2008.

Although the selected films for the study are predominantly directed by the most successful film-maker of this decade, Ken G. Hall, they provide a good coverage of the different approaches for the use of music in film in the 1930s period of Australian feature film making. Three of these films, Lovers and Luggers, The Broken Melody and Come Up Smiling have main characters who are professional musicians, thus giving rise to the diegetic introduction of songs and instrumentals that are central to their plots. The Hayseeds, Gone to the Dogs and Uncivilised are films that incorporate significant sequences of music to showcase the musical talents of their leading actors. The Squatter’s Daughter, The Hayseeds and Uncivilised use diegetic music sequences as signifiers of race and class difference.

All of the films being discussed here have at least some underscore as well as diegetic songs and instrumentals. Although underscore may be referred to briefly in parts of the article, it is not its focus. Ironically, however, it was an investigation of underscore in early Australian sound-era films that led to the particular selection chosen here for discussion of diegetic music. Broadly speaking the films initially selected had credits relating to the composition of music (usually songs) or to “musical direction”. Here the term “musical direction" refers to the practice of selecting already composed music from a hire library of scores for use as underscore in a film. The musical director’s role was to ‘illustrate’ the film. This included deciding where music was needed (“spotting”), selecting appropriate repertoire, doing any necessary arranging or adaptation of the chosen scores and conducting the music cues in recording sessions (Buys, 2004: 5–6). This approach to the placement of music in film can be seen to be a carry-over from the silent film era, when music was invariably chosen from existing musical repertoire either found in
specially created anthologies of keyboard music, such as Lang and West (1920), Rapée (1925), and Beynon (1921), or alternatively available in commercial music hire libraries.

Nineteen of the twenty five Australian feature films produced in the years 1930 to 1934 have no music credits. In this period music credits are only given to Barney Cuthbert for *Fellers* (Arthur Higgin and Austin Fay, 1930), to Jack O’Hagen and Ormond Bulmers for *Showgirl’s Luck* (Norman Dawn, 1931), to Alaric Howard and George Wallace for *His Royal Highness* (F.W. Thring, 1931), to Frank Chapple and Tom King for *The Squatter’s Daughter*, to Lionel Hart for *In the Wake of the Bounty* (Charles Chauvel, 1933), to Alf Laurance and Frank Chapple for *The Hayseeds*, to The Early Victorians for *The Secret of the Skies* (A.R. Harwood, 1934) and to Hamilton Webber for *Strike Me Lucky* (Ken G. Hall, 1934). With the exception of Lionel Hart (who was given a “musical director” credit) these are all song-writing credits.

Comparing the approach to music in silent films to that of early sound films, Kalinak (1992: 40) states that the ‘continuous playing and selective reproduction of diegetic sound’ in silent film screening practice was replaced by “intermittent music and faithful reproduction of diegetic sound” in the sound era. The scarcity of music in Australian feature films of the early 1930s reinforces this observation. As indicated above, in the early days of sound it was technically difficult to use underscored music simultaneously with dialogue or sound effects (Buys, 2004: 28). Thus much of the music used was performed onscreen or used under scenes that had no dialogue or sound effects.

By the mid-1930s sound technology for the inclusion of underscored music had improved (Buys, 2004: 8–9). From 1935 to 1939, twenty-one of the twenty-four Australian feature films produced had music credits either for musical direction, composition or song-writing. The most dominant musical figure in this period for film making is Hamilton Webber who provided “musical direction” for all but two of the eleven films made by the most prolific director, Sydney-based Ken G. Hall. Webber was also credited as a composer (of the music for the songs) for Hall’s *Strike me Lucky*, and there is evidence in the form of hand-written cues held by the National Library of Australia that he wrote or arranged substantial underscore for *Lover and Luggers*.

While the role of the musical director was a carry-over into sound film production from silent film exhibition, live musical and variety entertainment was also translated into the making of feature films in the early days of the Australian sound film. Hall’s Melbourne-based rival, Frank W. Thring, developed a story around the war-time entertainment troupe in *Diggers* (1931) and created a “fantasy-operetta” (Shirley and Adams, 1983: 115) to capitalise on the versatile talents of vaudeville performer, George Wallace, in *His Royal Highness* (1932). Later, Ken G. Hall ventured, less successfully, into the vaudeville-based feature film with *Strike Me Lucky*, which featured comedian Roy ‘Mo’ Rene (Shirley and Adams, 1983: 146).

Ken G. Hall (1901–1994) was a pioneer of 1930s Australian feature film making, working for Cinesound Productions Limited. Hall was responsible for the formation of Cinesound when he persuaded his employer, Stuart Doyle (head of Union Theatres), to adopt an optical sound recording system developed by Tasmanian audio technician, Arthur Smith, thereby
circumventing the punishing royalty payments demanded by American companies for the new film sound technologies (Buys, 2004: 8–9). Hall made seventeen feature films for Cinesound, as well as many hundreds of Cinesound Review newsreels and other documentary productions. He won Australia's first Academy Award in 1942 for his documentary, *Kokoda Front Line!* (Ken G. Hall, 1942), and was also an innovator in the fledgling Australian television industry (Buckley, 1994). As a feature film-maker, Hall's focus was on entertainment rather than art (Buckley, 1994), According to Buys (2004: 9), Hall aspired to the Hollywood studio system, where the “financial success of one film was relied on to finance subsequent films”. It was this formula that made Hall the most successful and prolific film-maker in the first decade of Australian feature sound film. Many of Hall’s films had spectacular climactic scenes, for example the bush fire in *The Squatter's Daughter*, the felling of an entire forest by dynamiting in *Tall Timbers* (1937), the elaborately staged operetta in *The Broken Melody* and the bursting dam in *Dad Rudd M.P.* (1940). Entertainment in the form of comedy, song and dance was also a priority in Hall’s approach to making feature films appealing to the masses.

Despite parallels between the sound-era film industries in Australia and the United States and other countries, the Australian industry’s approach to the provision of music lagged behind the trend elsewhere for the composition of new orchestral music to underscore films. In order to avoid paying high mechanical reproduction rights for existing songs to be included in sound films, Hollywood producers developed a set of new business models including buying up music publishing companies, creating their own publishing companies, and commissioning new works as ‘works for hire’ (Wierzbicki, 2009: 114–116). Several dozen Hollywood film studios hired large orchestras and contracted teams of musical specialists such as arrangers, composers and conductors (Wierzbicki, 2009: 113–114). Whereas the background music performed for silent films had been largely adapted by “musical directors” from existing libraries of music, a new practice developed for the creation of original non-diegetic scores. Phillips (2003: 8–9) describes this original music phenomenon:

> The early 1930s saw the rise of the ‘symphonic style’ music score. Noted composers such as Shostakovich, Schoenberg, Holst, Prokofiev, Steiner, Waxman, Korngold, Britten, Rozsa, Copland, Tiomkin, Joubert, to name a few, set the stage for what we now know as the cinematic Hollywood-style movie score and “The Golden Age of Cinema”. Music was influenced by the late nineteenth-century Romantic period composers, such as Puccini, Verdi, Mahler, [Richard] Strauss, Wagner and Brahms.

Here Phillips lists prominent concert composers from the US, Russia, France and England, including European immigrant composers to the US who became specialists in Hollywood film music scoring. In the 1930s Australian context, the lack of infrastructure for orchestral music composition and for synchronisation of music to film as well as the unavailability of experienced composers, meant that this original music orchestral underscore practice for feature film making was effectively delayed by a decade compared to the situation in the US, Russia, England and France. Thus although orchestral underscored cues exists in some Australia feature films in the 1930s, it is largely orchestrated repertoire music from library sources, and the musical
focus of these films is predominantly on diegetic songs and well-known instrumental pieces.

The use of diegetic songs and instrumentals in the films selected for this study is analysed below.

The Squatter’s Daughter

Ken G. Hall’s The Squatter’s Daughter is a film about the rivalry between two sheep stations, Enderby and Waratah, with villains on Waratah trying to destroy Enderby by devious criminal means. According to the film’s credits, Frank Chapple and Tom King provided “musical numbers”, mostly (diegetic) music performed onscreen as part of the narrative. Although music fulfils an important narrative function of articulating class and cultural difference, its placement is intermittent with large time gaps between cues.

At the beginning of the film there is a scrolled patriotic message from the Australian Prime Minister (Joseph Lyons) underscored by a military band fanfare and march. When the credits roll there is a segue to Edward Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March No 1. This famous orchestral work (featured annually in the Last Night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall) in its well-known vocal form (the song setting with lyrics by Arthur C. Benson titled ‘Land of Hope and Glory’) refers to England and specifically to the occasion of the coronation of King Edward VII. The music proceeds ironically to accompany shots of ten thousand sheep in the Australian outback (Hall, 1980: 60). Despite this audio/visual dissonance, it is a good example of the use of a memorable tune and orchestral “grandeur” to support the spectacular images of the vast mob of sheep (Gorbman, 1987: 68). It is fair to say that Australia had no homegrown musical works that could provide the same kind of stirring “projection of Australiana” that Hall was aiming for (Hall, 1980: 58). When instrumentals, such as Pomp and Circumstance March No 1 have words associated with them and we hear them without the lyrics, we can still associate the lyrics with them, thus adding another level of meaning to the cinematic experience. There are other examples of this phenomenon in the films selected for discussion in this article.

The second music segment of the film is a slow romantic ballad ‘The Moon and I Love You’ sung by the squatter’s daughter, Joan Enderby, accompanying herself at a grand piano in the family homestead. She is alone and dressed elegantly for dinner which she is about to have with a mysterious guest, Wayne, who she has taken in after she discovers him injured from a riding accident while she was out riding herself. This musical scene is one of several in the film that reinforce the class of the main characters. The grand piano and competent pianism in Australian historical films are typical signifiers of wealth and (usually female) artistic accomplishment. For example, the Aboriginal orphan in Jedda (Charles Chauvel, 1955) who has been has been shielded from her own race by a grazier and his wife and raised as if she were a European girl, plays a grand piano in a key scene of the story. Other examples of this kind of scene are found in The Hayseeds (Beaumont Smith, 1933), The Broken Melody (Ken G. Hall, 1938), and The Man From Snowy River (George Miller, 1982). The
significance of the piano for Australian pioneering families is well expressed by Covell (1967: 21):

Middle-class values have rarely expressed themselves with more touching gallantry than in the sacrifices and discomforts endured by countless families in order to bring this cumbersome symbol of higher values to their chosen home in small unstable ships and on grinding bullock drays.

As if to provide class contrast through music, the next two cues are a fragment of hillbilly yodelling performed by a female servant, Poppy, and some bagpipe tunes played discordantly for comic effect by one of the farm hands, Scotty.

The centrepiece of music in the film is a diegetic sequence for a lavish party at the Waratah homestead. It involves a jazz dance orchestra, the “first-rate Jim Coates Orchestra” (Napthali, 1999: 333), which provides on-screen background music for the dancing and squattocracy banter. The fact that the host can afford to import a dance orchestra from the city for a homestead party, is another indicator of wealth and privilege. The dance music and dancing are interrupted for a featured performance by an indigenous gumleaf band. The Waratah Station patriarch, Old Ironbark (Barky), tells his visiting English friend, Cartwright, that the players are “his Abo boundary riders”. Painted up and looking decidedly uncomfortable amongst the elegantly attired guests, they play a unison version of a military march, the tune splitting into thirds for the final phrase. Barky sees the group as an exotic and amusing entertainment for his guests (There is an enthusiastic burst of applause at the end of the performance), but his boundary riders look very unamused by their assignment. Napthali (1998: 331–332) reports that Ken G Hall, like his Barky character, had similar attitudes to the musicians: he didn’t pay them anything, and was critical of their attitude and behaviour on the set, and he used them not because he liked the music, but because they were a popular novelty act in Sydney at the time.

The Jim Coates jazz orchestra plays a number of sophisticated contrasting dance pieces for the party scene, the last of which is a jazz waltz version of the song ‘The Moon and I Love You’. Beginning with a tenor singing the lyrics, it becomes an instrumental as background for a conversation where one of the guests looking out the window suggests the moon must be rising. In fact, as Barky surmises, it is a bush fire approaching. The bush fire will eventually feature in the climax of the story.

Another song is introduced immediately after the lavish party scene. Zena, the Afghani girlfriend of Jimmy, Joan’s partly disabled brother, sings a love song to Jimmy accompanying herself on a guitar. Her guitar performance is poorly mimed, as her basic strumming bears no relation to the more complex jazzy textures of the guitar part, performed on the set off-screen by a professional guitarist. It would have been much more effective to keep the guitar part simpler to match the miming, and also to decide on appropriate musical skills that might reasonably be expected of this particular character.

It is not until after the dramatic bushfire fighting/survival scene that for the first time in the film some music is introduced which underscores the action
and also the dialogue between Joan and Jimmy. A very slow sad tune with an accompaniment of repeated string chords is used to support the mood of the aftermath of the bushfire and the tragedy of the death of Jimmy’s heroic dog, Bidgee. This segues to a medley of happy familiar tune fragments, including Mendelssohn’s ‘Spring Song’ (Op. 62 No. 6) and ‘Wedding March’ (from A Midsummer Night’s Dream), used to bring the narrative to an harmonious close as Wayne (now revealed as the heir of Waratah) and Joan are united. This segment is a good example of the typical scoring practice in this era of stringing together well-known tunes with particular cultural associations rather than commissioning original music.

The Hayseeds

Frank Chapple is also credited for the “musical numbers” of The Hayseeds, this time collaborating with Alf Lawrance (incorrectly spelt “Lawrence” in the titles). Although this film is subtitled ‘An Australian Musical Comedy’ it is much more focused on comedy than on music, although, from its outset, a musical scenario is emphasised. Under a shot of a dirt road in a tall forest, we can hear a band approaching accompanied by martial drumming. A choir with quasi-operatic voices is added as we see a band of hikers coming up the road. They are singing a hiking song ‘Back Down the Old Bush Trail’ as they walk, but the instrumentalists are nowhere to be seen. Having arrived at a clearing, one of the hikers, Henry, sings a song titled ‘Let’s Call it a Day’. A cut to the Hayseed family homestead shows their attention drawn to the sound of the singing. Another cut introduces the film’s female lead, Mary Townleigh, one of the hikers. There is a further cut to the Jim Coates jazz band which is providing on-screen live music accompaniment for Henry to sing the song ‘We Will Hike Back Home Again’ in a light operatic style. A group of female hikers does a choreographed soft-shoe shuffle to a more up-tempo section of the music.

Despite the early prominence of music and dance, the singing/dancing/hiking group is always narratively in the background, apart from the characters Mary and Henry. Members of the Hayseed family complain that the music is upsetting their cows, but that is the extent of their interaction with the hikers until the end of the story when the singing is heard again in the distance, and Dad announces: “We’ll go and join them for a jamboree”. This presents an opportunity for Henry to sing ‘Let’s Call It A Day’ and for the female hiker group to perform a Busby Berkeley-style dance routine, filmed from above, to the jazz band music. Tulloch (1982: 13) considers this sequence is a blatant reference to the Hollywood film Gold Diggers of 1933 (Mervyn LeRoy, 1933) and a good example of “the media imperialism thesis” where “a dependent economy within a capitalist world system absorbs the media content and consumerist values of the dominant power”. In support of this thesis, Tulloch notes that by 1925 “Australia was importing over 90 per cent of her films from the United States.” (p. 14). An alternative view is that the Busby Berkeley homage is an example of intertextuality in film.

While this musical entertainment strategy frames the narrative, the romantic plot is also driven by diegetic song. Mary becomes lost in the bush, injures her leg, and is drawn to the sound of the prospector John Manners crooning
a song (‘Night in the Bush’) accompanying himself on guitar at his bush camp site. John then helps the injured Mary back to the Hayseed homestead. Later at the Townleigh family’s home on Sydney Harbour, Mary, accompanying herself on a grand piano, sings John’s song ‘Night in the Bush’, thus signalling her growing romantic obsession with him.

The musical highlight of the film is an impassioned vocal duet ‘I’ve Answered your Call of Love’ between Mary and John at a point in the story where it seems that the relationship may be devastated by the accusation (falsely promulgated by Henry) that John has committed fraud. This was filmed on the balcony of the Townleigh mansion overlooking Sydney Harbour, with a small band of backing musicians performing the accompaniment off-camera.

The only other song used in the film is ‘The Wild Colonial Boy’, sung pitifully by Dad Hayseed and his son Joe as they arrive back at the Townleigh’s home after an afternoon of heavy drinking. The Hayseeds had been invited to stay with the Townleighs in Sydney because of their kindness towards Mary when she had sustained her leg injury.

The source of much of the humour in this film is the contrast between the crude manners of the Hayseed family and the poshness of the Townleigh family. This is musically reflected by the contrast between the Hayseed’s tastes (as typified by the drunken rendition of “The Wild Colonial Boy”) and the Townleigh’s (as represented by Mary’s refined adaptation of ‘Night in the Bush’ at the grand piano). The film also exploits the singing talents of John Moore (Henry) and his entertainment company, Music in the Air, of which Cecil Kellaway (Dad) and Shirley Dale (Mary) were also members.

Uncivilised

This same tactic is used in Uncivilised where Dennis Hoey, an English actor and baritone singer, was cast in the lead role of Mara. Pike and Cooper (1980: 228) give the following summary of the improbable plot of Uncivilised:

A successful high-society authoress, Beatrice Lynn, travels into the wilds of northern Australia to investigate the story of a primitive Aboriginal tribe ruled by a white king, Mara. On the way she is kidnapped by an Afghan trader who takes her into the land where the strange song of the white chieftain echoes through the jungle. Mara buys Beatrice from the Afghan and tries to win her love. After many adventures, including opium smuggling and a battle with an Aboriginal killer, Beatrice grows to love Mara and decides to remain with him in his jungle domain.

To take advantage of Dennis Hoey’s vocal prowess, Mara is assigned three diegetic songs. The first is a mock African-American spiritual (sounding a bit like ‘Ol’ Man River’), performed on Beatrice’s arrival in his village. The third is a love song for Beatrice which ends the film. Both these song are presented diegetically with non-diegetic orchestral accompaniment. The second is a song with lyrics intended to give the impression Mara is singing in an Aboriginal language as part of a corroboree in which he is expected to
participate. The song is accompanied by diegetic drumming and non-diegetic orchestral and choral elements. The lyrics transcribe as:

- Urilee mooicar
- Grickeegar cigaree
- Dickaree jikaree
- Moolicar jikaree
- Grickeegar cigaree
- Lee

Despite this bizarre verbal invention, *Uncivilised* is the first Australian feature film to incorporate a significant amount of indigenous diegetic music. The location of the filming was Palm Island off the north east coast of North Queensland—an extended internment camp for supposedly ‘troublesome’ indigenous individuals from various parts of Queensland, and the indigenous extras were drawn from this community.

Appropriately in this regard, the diegetic music appears to be mixture of Torres Strait Islander and ‘Top End’ indigenous styles. When Beatrice first arrives at Mara’s camp, in the background the tribe are performing a unison chant on a single tone accompanied by clap sticks; after the tribe believes that Mara has found a (white) wife there is a ceremonial dance sequence of regular repeated shouting (the syllable “hee”) with a two-beat clap stick pattern performed between each shout and a tumbling strain vocal melody sung over the groove; to accompany a scene with the tribal witchdoctor, beat-less group wailing is used; a didjeridu and clap stick piece is employed as background for various indoor conversations; and in a ceremonial dance scene a regular beat on a resonant low-pitched drum underpins group unison chanting. From this particular scene (approximately 48 minutes into the film) a strategy to merge indigenous music (or indigenous-sounding music) with Western instrumental and vocal elements is employed. This cue is the start of Mara’s song with quasi-language lyrics as described above.

As the drama intensifies more and more diegetic indigenous musical elements are employed. The regular drum beats give way to more flamboyant often irregular bursts of drumming; and underscoring the battle scene between Mara’s and Moopil’s tribes we hear frenetic drumming and intensely active orchestral textures (at times drowned out by the battle cries).

Lindley Evans, who also scored Charles Chauvel’s *Forty Thousand Horsemen* (1940) and *The Rats of Tobruk* (1944), is credited in *Uncivilised* for “musical arrangement”, but the non-diegetic elements of the score involve considerable compositional invention. The main title uses a variety of themes and motifs that will subsequently surface throughout the film for various underscoring purposes. This is a typical musical strategy used in the overtures of operas and musical theatre works. Evans (1983: 150) reports in a memoir that he later turned several cues for *Uncivilised* (including that of the corroboree scene) into full orchestral works.
Lovers and Luggers

In *Lovers and Luggers* the lead character, Daubenny Carshott, is a concert pianist who tires of concertising and goes looking for adventure as a pearl diver. He is prompted by the demands of the woman he loves, Stella Raff, who tells him she will only marry him if he dives for and finds a pearl for her. At the beginning of the film, set in London, he plays Rachmaninoff’s *Prelude in C sharp minor* in a concert, and soon after the concert we hear him playing for Stella, in her luxury apartment, the last five bars of Liszt’s *Liebestraume* [Notturno III] with exaggerated rubato. When she remarks “Do you always make love by playing other men’s music?” he bangs the keyboard of her grand piano in frustration.

He plays the whole of the famous Liszt work later for his new friends on Thursday Island, in the Torres Strait. His dazzling performance is heard mostly off-screen as his audience is sitting on the host’s verandah in the balmy evening air, listening and talking with amazement of his virtuosity and with nostalgia for the cultural delights of European civilisation; but towards the end of his performance Lorna Quidley (the woman Daubenny eventually falls for after finding out Stella is two-timing), joins him in the living room. There he is seen playing on her upright piano, arguably an instrument symbolising social status on Thursday Island, but none the less lower status than the grand piano in Stella’s apartment. In the ensuing conversation Daubenny reveals cryptically that he is still thinking of his love for Stella. The third *Liebestraume* was originally conceived by Liszt as a song setting of the poem ‘O Lieb’ by Ferdinand Freiligrath with the text of the poem included on the piano score (Liszt, 1972: 44):

> O Love! O love, so long as e’er thou canst, or dost on love believe,  
> The time shall come, when thou by graves shalt stand and grieve.

In this scene the piano piece and associated text can be interpreted as a commentary on the fact that the following day Daubenny will be undertaking his first perilous dive for the pearl to secure Stella’s love and his marriage to her.

In an earlier scene as background to another verandah conversation between Captain Quidley (Lorna’s father) and Daubenny, Lorna plays (off-screen) “a piece which sounds like a piano arrangements of a song by an American musical theatre songwriter such as Cole Porter, rather than a classical piano piece”.

The cultural contrast between the classical and the popular is however best illustrated by a song written by Jim Donlevy, ‘Desire’ (Donlevy, n.d.). This is sung by Lilian Frith in China Tom’s bar on Thursday Island, a venue where all the pearl industry men socialise. She is dressed exotically in bikini top and grass skirt and her performance is decidedly risqué. The song lyrics express a much more basic approach to love than Freiligrath’s:

> I live for Desire, I crave what I want, I want what I crave, Desire,  
> Emotions beyond control mean danger to the soul.
The only other diegetic songs in *Lovers and Luggers* are performed *a cappella*. Daubenny sings a lyrical adaptation of ‘My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean’ on his arrival on Thursday Island, while unpacking his bags; and a variety of sea shanties, such as ‘Drunken Sailor’ and ‘Blow the Man Down’ are sung by a group of carousing locals.

As mentioned above, Hamilton Webber is credited as musical director for this film which has significant underscore (thirteen orchestral cues, some with choir), including a dramatic seventeen-minute cue to accompany the climactic underwater fight scene between two divers (Daubenny and a villain called Quong). However unlike *Uncivilised* there is no attempt to merge diegetic and undiegetic musical elements. As with all the films previously discussed, the diegetic music of *Lovers and Luggers* works to signify cultural and class differences, in this case between the urbane Daubenny and the Thursday Islanders he encounters.

**The Broken Melody**

The same cultural signification device is employed in Ken G. Hall’s next feature, *The Broken Melody*, another film with a classical musician as the lead character. For this film Hall commissioned original music by Alfred Hill, the best-known Australian concert composer from the early part of the twentieth century. Hill had had some previous experience working on the score of a film on a Maori historical subject in New Zealand, a film that was never released and is deemed to be lost (Thomson, 1980: 177–178). For *The Broken Melody*, Hill wrote the diegetic music: a theme for violin and piano, first heard in a nightclub scene, and a section of an operetta based on this theme, both of which are significant in the plot of the film. The theme is also developed in a solo violin busking scene and is elaborated on in the title music.

The main character, John Ainsworth, is a classical music violinist who gets sent down from university for being in a nightclub brawl, is disowned by his rich grazier father for aspiring to a music career rather than to commitment to the farm, falls on hard times and becomes an alcoholic, lives in a cave in a Sydney harbourside park (The Domain), saves a fellow musician (Ann Brady) when she tries to jump into the harbour in despair, is encouraged by Ann to revive his music career through busking, through this activity gets the opportunity to travel overseas, and eventually forges a successful career as a violinist, conductor and composer. He is reunited with Ann (now a trained opera singer) when he returns to Australia to conduct his opera, unexpectedly finding her performing the leading role in the premiere he is conducting (Ann was understudying the role, and is called in at the last moments when the contracted French prima donna pulls out).

Ken G. Hall adapted the screenplay from a novel by F. J. Thwaites by the same title. Hall (1980: 112) describes his approach to tweaking Thwaites’ story:

*His hero was a musician who played the cello, which proves what I’ve been saying. Australian authors never thought of a screen sale. How do you get a musical climax, or any sort of climax, out of a hero*
**who plays the cello? The answer is that you don’t, and almost in a twinkling of an eye Thwaites’ man has lost his cello and found himself a violinist-conductor. Here again I had looked first for the big, spectacular climax and worked back.**

Hall is here cognisant of the late 19th Century and early 20th Century culture of classical music where certain kinds of musicians (conductors such as Arturo Toscanini, violinists such as Fritz Kreisler, sopranos such as Nellie Melba and tenors such as Enrico Caruso) could command heroic public attention. The spectacular climax Hall devised was a lavish theatrical realisation of the operetta that Ainsworth had written and was conducting on his tour of Australia.

Although the narrative of *The Broken Melody* is focused on classical music, there is jazz orchestra music used for certain scenes, initially the nightclub scene where John first encounters Ann singing a popular song with the Maurie Gilman Orchestra. Even though he is impressed by her performance there is a hint of cultural superiority in his comment to a friend: “That crooner, she's good”. Later in the nightclub sequence, someone shouts out to John: “Give us a tune, John”. He borrows a violin from one of the dance band musicians and proceeds to play his violin and piano work (the theme) accompanied by the band’s pianist. Dramatically this scene is flawed: it is unlikely that the pianist would have known the work or would have been able to improvise such an elaborate accompaniment and, according to Naphthali (1998: 326), a serious classical musician in the 1930s would not have been prepared to play his or her music in that kind of venue.

In *The Broken Melody*, Hall clearly sees the entertainment value in playing the tension between high-brow and low-brow music. John represents the high-brow aspirations of the classical music career (even though his wealthy father places no value on it). He meets his “crooning” love interest in a club offering low-brow musical entertainment. They both fall on hard times and are reduced to the lowest-brow act of busking. Separated, they independently work their way up the classical music high-brow ladder, to reunite happily in the final scene.

**Come Up Smiling**

The same kind of approach is found in *Come up Smiling* (also known as *Ants in His Pants*). The lead female character, Pat, is a carnival performer with aspirations to a high-art singing career, but she damages her voice performing popular songs in their carnival act. The plot revolves around her uncle, Barney, winning a boxing contest with rival carnival performer, The Killer, in order to be able to pay for an operation on Pat’s vocal organs. Much of the plot’s humour is musical. Barney for example has a pathological aversion to the sound of bagpipes and goes into a rage, attacking The Killer (and his bagpipes) when he hears him playing the instrument. The Killer, on the other hand, turns from surly to putty whenever he hears Pat sing. While singing the humorous song ‘Ants in Your Pants’, Barney is bitten by bull ants that have been placed on the stage by a mischievous boy, but he manages to finish the song with interjected vocal cries of pain. The bagpipes,
Pat’s singing, and the bull ants all later figure in the strategy for Barney to beat The Killer in the boxing bout.

As with The Hayseeds and Uncivilised, the film-makers took advantage of the versatile talents of their actors in Come Up Smiling. The American actor Will Mahoney playing Barney was a skilled tap dancer. Apart from his comical movements in avoiding the punches of The Killer and his contortions while singing ‘Ants in Your Pants’, Mahoney also features in a tap dance routine that is a send-up of the song ‘My Mammy’, made famous by Al Jolson in The Jazz Singer (Alan Crosland, 1927). Touring along a country road, Barney and his troupe encounter a herd of sheep. One of them steals a lamb, and this is the cue for a song about ‘My lamb-y’. Although a musical parody, this is also an example of the exploitation by Australian film-makers of American popular culture as discussed earlier in relation to The Hayseeds. In order to train for the boxing match, Barney is recommended to a women’s physical education and deportment school. To introduce the location his instructor-to-be, Kitty Katkin, sings a humorous song, “That’s the Way to Handle Your Man”, to her class of young women, as they carry out a group movement routine. The only non-comic song performance in the film is one given by Pat at a swish party where Rudolph Rudolpho, the singing maestro she is trying to impress, is a guest. She performs Johann Strauss II’s virtuoso ‘Frühlingsstimmen’ (‘Voices of Spring’) for orchestra and solo soprano (Op. 410), but her voice fails in the last bar. The performance establishes her talent, but also reveals her vocal injury and the need for the operation.

Henry Krips gets credit for “musical direction”, as the co-composer of the title song, and as co-arranger of “Poor Little Sheep”. This was Krips’ first involvement in music for film. He was engaged as musical director and composer in a number of subsequent projects including the next film under discussion, Gone to the Dogs, as well as Smithy (Ken G. Hall, 1946) and Sons of Matthew (Charles Chauvel, 1948).

Gone to the Dogs

Gone to the Dogs is a greyhound doping comedy starring the multi-talented George Wallace. Although songs take a backseat to the spoken and physical comedy, there is just one long diegetic music sequence around the middle of the film which includes a song written by Wallace (‘We’ll Build a Little Home’) and a spectacular production number ‘Gone to the Dogs’ (lyrics, Harry Allen; music, Henry Krips). The latter is a vehicle for the impressive singing and dancing skills of both Wallace and musical comedy star, Lois Green. It employs an elaborate set, complex staging and choreography, a large off-screen swing band, clever male and female vocal harmonies, a large cast of dancers, a host of young female tennis players in shorts, and twelve paraded greyhounds. There is a comedic bonus at the end of the routine, as described by Hall (1980: 116):

I wanted it to climax with a great herd of dogs of every kind, shape and colour dashing into the scene and breaking it up by causing utter confusion.
Conclusions

In the early years of 1930s Australian feature film production, the technology of film sound precluded the use of music except for diegetic songs and instrumentals. Underscoring was used in places where there were no sound effects or dialogue such as under the titles. Especially composed underscore was not typical in film of this period; and composers such as Hamilton Webber, who were charged with providing underscore, generally relied on adapting already-written music, often well-known musical works available from specialist music hire libraries that had been set up to provide options for live music accompanying silent films. Musicians working on sound films were typically given the title of “musical director”, even if they provided elaborate arrangements of the chosen music or even wrote original music.

Many of the diegetic music scenes in Australian 1930s features were filmed on set with all the musicians on-camera or, alternatively, with singers on-camera and backing musicians off-camera. The live entertainment traditions of vaudeville and variety were incorporated into sound films, and directors such as Ken G. Hall, Beaumont Smith, Charles Chauvel and William Freshman were keen to exploit the versatile performance talents of actors such as George Wallace, John Moore, Dennis Hoey and Will Mahoney, to the extent of adding arguably fortuitous song and/or dance segments to their films. This is especially evident in The Hayseeds, Uncivilised and Gone to the Dogs. Of the seven films selected for examination, three have main characters who are career musicians (Lovers and Luggers, The Broken Melody and Come Up Smiling). This allowed their directors to introduce diegetic music that is central to their narrative structures, rather than being peripheral to the action.

Generally the diegetic songs and instrumentals in these seven films can be seen as signifiers of class, politics, and cultural background, as represented, for example by language (Aboriginal songs in Uncivilised), instrumentation (gum-leaves and bagpipes in The Squatter’s Daughter) and performance style (yodelling in The Squatter’s Daughter). With the exception of Uncivilised and Gone to the Dogs there are contrasting selections of classical and popular music styles that work to reinforce class and cultural differences and aspirations amongst the characters.

The predominant director in the 1930s, Ken G. Hall, had international aspirations and his business strategy was driven by U.S production models. Charles Chauvel was also aiming for the international market in his “action adventure” approach to Uncivilised (Pike and Cooper, 1998: 173). However, the use of music in Australian films in this period is characterised by the predominance of diegetic songs and instrumentals as distinct from the strongly emerging tradition in the U.S. of films being dramatically underscored by composers such as Alfred Newman, Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold who were steeped in the late European romantic orchestral music tradition (Smith, 1998: 6). There are obvious references to American popular musical cinema in the diegetic music and dance presentations in the films considered in this study (for example the Busby Berkeley tribute in The Hayseeds and the elaborate production sequence in Gone to the Dogs), but generally the diegetic songs and instrumentals are
more simply presented and serve the dramatic or comedic requirements of the films.

Acknowledgments

The author was a Research Fellow at the Centre for Scholarly and Archival Research (CSAR), National Film and Sound Archive (Canberra), January–February 2008. The initial analytical work for this article was conducted during that period.

References


Beynon, G (1921) Musical Presentation of Motion Pictures, N.Y. G. Schirmer


Evans, L (1983) Hello Mr Melody Man, Sydney: Angus & Robertson Publishers


CONTRIBUTOR PROFILES

REBECCA COYLE

A/Prof Rebecca Coyle taught in the Media studies program at Southern Cross University, Australia. She published two anthologies on Australian feature film music, and coordinated an Australian Research Council Discovery Project on Australian film music production and innovation. In 2010, her anthology of essays on animation film music, Drawn to Sound: Animation Film Music and Sonicity (Equinox Publishing, UK) was launched. In 2010 she started Screen Sound Journal and remained editor of the journal until late 2012.

MARK EVANS

Mark Evans is the Co-Editor of Perfect Beat: The Pacific Journal of Research into Contemporary Music and Popular Culture and author of the book, Open Up The Doors: Music in the Modern Church (Equinox Publishing, London). He is currently series editor for Genre, Music, Sound (a series of books considering the role of sound in various genres of feature films) and Executive Editor of The International Encyclopedia of Film Music and Sound (Equinox Publishing). Since 2008 he has been the Head of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University.

Email: mark.evans@mq.edu.au

JON FITZGERALD

Jon Fitzgerald is Adjunct Associate Professor in the contemporary music program at Southern Cross University. His doctoral thesis examined the development of popular songwriting in the early 1960s, and he has written numerous publications on aspects of popular music theory and history. He is also an experienced composer and performer.

Email: jon.fitzgerald@scu.edu.au

MICHAEL HANNAN

Professor Michael Hannan established the Contemporary Music program at Southern Cross University, Australia, where he teaches composition and music theory. He authored two books, Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas 1929–1979 (University of Queensland Press, 1982) and The Australian Guide to Careers in Music (UNSW Press, 2003), and was a CI on an ARC Discovery project on Australian feature film music, including cataloguing scores in the Brian May archive. In 2008, he researched Australian feature film scores 1930–61 as a NFSA Scholar in Residence.

Email: michael.hannan@scu.edu.au
PHILIP HAYWARD

Professor Philip Hayward is Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) at Southern Cross University, Australia. He has edited two volumes on screen sound—*Off The Planet: Music, Sound and Science Fiction Cinema* (John Libbey, 2004) and *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema* (Equinox, 2009)—and, as a team of ARC Discovery Project researchers, has investigated uses of music in contemporary Australian cinema. He recently co-edited (with Kevin Donnelly) *Music in Science Fiction Television: Tuned to the Future* (Routledge, 2013).

Email: philip.hayward@scu.edu.au