Document généré le 25 avr. 2024 13:03

Intersections
Canadian Journal of Music
Revue canadienne de musique

James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer. 2010. *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History*. New York: Oxford University Press. 470 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-532779-3

Mark Richards

Volume 33, numéro 1, fall 2012

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1025558ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1025558ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

ISSN

1911-0146 (imprimé)
1918-512X (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

Richards, M. (2012). Compte rendu de [James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer. 2010. *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History.* New York: Oxford University Press. 470 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-532779-3]. *Intersections*, *33*(1), 103–106. https://doi.org/10.7202/1025558ar

Copyright © Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes, 2014

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

https://www.erudit.org/fr/

BOOK REVIEWS / RECENSIONS

James Buhler, David Neumeyer, and Rob Deemer. 2010. *Hearing the Movies: Music and Sound in Film History.* New York: Oxford University Press. 470 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-532779-3.

In recent years, film music has become a burgeoning area of interest in the academic community, both in teaching and in research.[1] *Hearing the Movies,* a new textbook by James Buhler, David Neumayer, and Rob Deemer, is one of the latest contributions to the literature that will surely have wide appeal. The authors' approach to film music derives much from Michel Chion's well-known *Audio-Vision* (1994) in that it considers the subject not simply in relation to the image and narrative, but in the context of the larger soundtrack, which also includes the dialogue and sound effects. Consequently, discussions attempt to explain the expressive effects of merging not just music, but sounds of all kinds, with image and narrative. In addition, several of Chion's terms such as *added value, anempathetic music,* and *masking* feature prominently in the text. Claudia Gorbman's seminal *Unheard Melodies* (1987) also provides a good deal of support throughout and even acts as bookends to the text with prominent quotations in both the introduction and afterword. One particularly attractive feature of the text is that it has a companion website (www.hearingthemovies.net) that contains several teaching resources such as sample course syllabi, ideas for assignments and quizzes, and a blog by the authors, all of which continue to be regularly updated, keeping the material fresh.[2]

The book falls into three parts, part 1 developing listening and viewing skills, part 2 focusing on typical uses of music in film, and part 3 providing a technologically driven history of music and sound in film. Part 1 introduces a substantial vocabulary of terms (which are conveniently summarized in a glossary) that pertain mostly to film sound in general, so that even familiar musical terms like *monophonic* are recontextualized to include sounds other than musical ones: "In terms of sound, a monologue—even a dialogue—can be considered 'monophonic' if it occurs with no sound effects" (48). Conversely, sound-oriented terms used to describe transitions in films such as *sound advance, sound lag,* and *sound match* are broadened to include music as well. Thus, the authors' adherence to the discussion of film music in the context of film sound is reflected in their terminology right from the start.

---

[1] The success of Hickman (2006), another textbook, is an especially significant signal of the rising popularity of film music courses at the undergraduate level.

[2] At the time of this writing, Buhler, Neumeyer, and Deemer are at work on a second edition of the textbook, likely to be published in 2014.

In part 2, after demonstrating the breakdown of film form into shots, scenes, sequences, and acts (and music's interaction with them), the authors present several chapters that discuss musical tendencies within standard scene types, which include main title and end credit music, performance and montage scenes, love scenes, dialogue scenes, and action scenes. Instructors will find much to admire in this part of the book, since there were (and continue to be) strong conventions surrounding film music within distinct scene types. It is precisely this kind of intuitive analysis that one could easily imagine igniting a lively discussion in the classroom when applied to almost any Hollywood film. These chapters are also among the most innovative in the book and in that sense are a particularly valuable source for further research in film music, for nowhere else are such tendencies given as much deserved prominence or depth of treatment as here. And although the clearest representations of these tendencies occurred with classical Hollywood cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, the authors demonstrate how later instantiations may be viewed as variations of the classical Hollywood model. Main title music, for instance, generally consisted of four sections in classical Hollywood films: (1) a dramatic gesture and a musical theme played with the film's name, (2) a brief transition to a lyrical theme, (3) a longer transition to a dramatic flourish, and (4) a transition that "winds down" to a prologue (166). Together with the first scene, this formed the "establishing sequence" of the film. As the authors point out in *The Sound of Music* (1965), "The typical features are all there, but each has been greatly expanded, and an extra prologue has been inserted before the title and credits sequence" (170).

Similarly insightful commentary accompanies the discussion of performance scenes in film, which the authors distinguish according to their occurrence in either a musical or dramatic film: "In musicals the narrative typically stops for performances … in the dramatic film performances may structure the time of a scene segment but usually are obliged to share the viewer's attention with some kind of narrative-forwarding action" (182). In *The Sound of Music* once again, for example, the Laendler during which Maria (Julie Andrews) and Captain von Trapp (Christopher Plummer) dance is not simply entertainment—as the authors observe, it is during this scene that the two realize they are falling in love with one another.

Regarding love themes in particular, the authors note that they "generally refer to both the heroine and the romantic relationship between hero and heroine, as for instance in Erich Korngold's score for *Captain Blood.* The fact that the love theme doubles the signification in this way reinforces the male-dominated point of view that characterizes most narrative film—at least in classical Hollywood" (198). Certainly this tradition has been carried forth into the modern era with scores like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* by John Williams, in which "Marion's Theme" performs this double duty.[3]

---

3 Kalinak (1992, 184–202) provides an in-depth comparison of Williams' score for *The Empire Strikes Back* with classical Hollywood conventions in one of the surprisingly few essays on the composer.

The authors also delve briefly into music anthologies that were used to accompany silent films, drawing especially from Erno Rapee's widely cited *Motion Picture Moods* and *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures*.[4] Within these latter two anthologies, the music is organized by style topic, which ranges from indicators of mood, to objects, to scenic situations, to musical sound effects. But Rapee's *Encyclopedia* also distinguishes the intensity of pieces with a label of "heavy," "medium," or "light." Rather than simply treating these various categories as curiosities of a bygone age, the authors demonstrate how they may be employed in the analysis of a classical Hollywood film, Franz Waxman's score to Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) serving as a convincing example. Of course, such a methodology will be most pertinent when applied to films of the mature silent era or of classical Hollywood, when musical conventions of the sort found in anthologies were still strongly influential.

With part 3, *Hearing the Movies* turns to the history of film music and sound from a technological perspective. This methodological shift from the theoretical to the historical will effectively mark a dividing point in a course based on this text. While not all instructors may be comfortable with such an arrangement, the authors stress that the text may be treated flexibly and even indicate on the accompanying website that one of the authors, David Neumeyer, taught a course in which twelve weeks were spent on parts 1 and 2, and only three weeks on part 3. Conversely, the authors also suggest how more time may be devoted to part 3 and less to part 2 in order to focus more on the historical aspect of the course, if one so desires. Thus one should not feel compelled to give equal emphasis to each chapter, but to view the text as an adaptable tool to help one achieve one's own pedagogical ends.

Although many of the factual details of the first two chapters of part 3, which deal with the silent era and transition to sound film, will be familiar to the film music scholar, what is refreshingly new here is that the history is richly illustrated with contemporary photographs, posters, still shots from films, and musical examples. These supplementary additions give one a better idea of the sights and sounds not just of films but of the whole experience of going to the movies in the early twentieth century.

Regarding the classical Hollywood era of the 1930s and 1940s, part 3 discusses several key elements of the style of the sound track. For example, the authors distinguish between two basic scoring practices: (1) playing the overall mood of a scene, used primarily for establishing, spectacle, and montage sequences, and (2) playing to the details, used primarily for underscoring dialogue. In this same discussion, the authors raise Sergei Eisenstein's idea of music used in counterpoint with the image rather than in synchronization with it.[5] Considering that this dichotomy resurfaced in the work of Hanns Eisler and Theodor

4 As Larsen (2005, 30) notes, Rapee's *Motion Picture Moods,* published in 1924, is "the most important of the American anthologies [and] contains about 700 pieces of music arranged according to 52 mood categories." By contrast, as Wierzbicki (2009, 57) observes, Rapee's *Encyclopedia,* published only a year later, contains "music for tenfold more categories." Thus, it seems that such anthologies reached their peak in popularity just before the onset of sound film.

5 As elaborated in Eisenstein ([1942] 1975).

Adorno ([1947] 2007), and more recently in that of Nicholas Cook (1998), who essentially considers it a fallacious concept, one wonders what the authors' take on the others' arguments might be.

Particularly engaging is the account of the introduction of Dolby stereo in the late 1970s with *Star Wars* and how the vast majority of theatre owners across North America were finally convinced to purchase and install new sound technology.[6] This widespread change had a decisive impact on Hollywood, which shifted its emphasis toward "high concept" films, that is, films with an easily marketable premise, large budgets, potential for sequels, and a wealth of ancillary products—in essence, the modern blockbuster.

Regardless of whether readers use *Hearing the Movies* as the primary textbook for a course, with so much to offer as a resource for both teaching and research, it is unquestionably an essential part of any film music scholar's personal library.

References

Chion, Michel. 1994. *Audio-Vision.* Edited and translated by Claudia Gorbman. New York: Columbia University Press.

Cook, Nicholas. 1998. *Analysing Musical Multimedia.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Eisenstein, Sergei M. (1942) 1975. *The Film Sense.* Translated and edited by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Eisler, Hanns, and Theodor W. Adorno. (1947) 2007. *Composing for the Films.* London: Continuum.

Gorbman, Claudia. 1987. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hickman, Roger. 2006. *Reel Music: Exploring 100 Years of Film Music.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Kalinak, Kathryn. 1992. *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Larsen, Peter. 2005. *Film Music.* London: Reaktion Books.

Wierzbicki, James. 2009. *Film Music: A History.* New York: Routledge.

Mark Richards

[6] For more on the introduction of Dolby and its impact on theatres and film sound in general, see Wierzbicki (2009, 206–8).