Hearing the Movies, Film Style and the Sound Track (read for 6/20)

Explain the difference between motives leitmotifs and style topics.

Give an example of the use of a style topic in a film you know.

   Can you think of any examples that are used ironically / play against the film?

Give an example of a leitmotif in a film you know.

Theodor W. Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the films* **(read for 6/22)**

read: *The Leitmotif, Illustration, Geography and History*, and *Clichés*

What criticisms do the authors bring toward the use of Leitmotifs and musical topics in Hollywood film music?

(Note: the authors don't use the term *topic*, but they describe music that functions in this way)

In which ways are they in agreement with Eisenstein toward the use of music in films?

Eisenstein, et al., *Statement on Sound* **(read for 6/22)**

Why does Eisenstein stress the importance of non-synchronization of sound and images?

Does this aesthetic position influence the use of sound/music in Alexander Nevsky?   Does Eisenstein abandon this aesthetic for another more "realist" aesthetic?

Alexander Nevsky

Sound and music. How does the music complement and enhance the images? Describe this in terms of rhythm, structure, meaning, etc.

What information about the characters does Prokofiev's music provide? Are certain melodies or types of music linked to specific characers?

Cinematography and formal issues: be aware of camera placement, composition,

and framing. Does the camera ever move? How long do shots last generally? Compare this to scenes from other films of his (such as the machine gun scene from *Oktober 1917*)

The "Battle on the Ice" is a classic battle sequence in film.

Can you recognize elements that later directors/composers copied?

Historical issues: How does the film work as propaganda? How does it represent good and evil? Is there anything about the music that gives you this information?

SUMMARY

Many musical performances, especially those that are carried out onscreen with minimal narrative interruption (from cutaways or panning, with or without superimposed dialogue), are capable of lending the formal properties of the music to the image track, in many cases because the film is in fact edited to the music (this was especially true of performances in film musicals). Although the procedure of editing may be the same and one will normally hear continuous music, the narrative effect of montage or fantasy scenes is quite different: the focus is not so much on the music "as music" as it is on its formal capacities: music is added on top of a diverse, weakly connected collection of images to lend a degree of temporal coherence that the images themselves cannot manage.

Film Style and the Sound Track

Introduction

Narrative conventions for the classical cinema were established by the 1920s and codified in the system of continuity editing that is familiar to all filmgoers today. Similar conventions for sound and music were not established until the late 1930s. Music had already been used in characteristic and predictable ways in silent-film performance practice (after about 1910), especially with respect to dramatic or emotional codes that were themselves inherited from the 19th-century theater, especially melodrama: the hurry for action scenes, the love theme for romantic scenes, the fanfare or overture for the main-title sequence, the "mysterioso" for suspense, etc. In the 1930s, music also became codified with respect to film form—as would be expected, given that music was now composed, recorded for, and closely matched to the film's continuity editing.

In the previous chapters of Part II, we considered this latter topic by exploring music's placement in a film's overall design and its use in characteristic film segments (the establishing and end-credits sequences, performances, and montage fantasy scenes). In this chapter, we look more closely at the way music participates in the characterization of time and place and the representation of individuals through the style topic (conventionally coded types of music) and the recurrent theme (short musical phrases that, through repetition, become linked to important narrative elements, such as individuals, specific locales, and even narrative situations). As we shall see, in many instances the stylistic and thematic properties are combined in a single musical cue.

Neither characterization nor thematic association is entirely new: we have already referred to both categories in previous chapters. In chapter 1, we described the use of stereotyped music for particular characterizations ("Indian"

music in the classical western; military marches or national anthems in war films, etc.), and we have mentioned such uses in many of the discussions of films or film scenes since. The device of the recurrent theme (sometimes called "leitmotif") was also discussed in the context of the ways music provides narrative information (and compares with speech and effects in that task); and, of course, musical cues and themes were involved in the descriptions of music in film design in chapter 5—recurring musical elements necessarily contribute to the articulations and associations of film form (as in Martin Marks's score for *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1925), especially with the opening theme of *The Sacrifice* and Marks's own "fan motive"; or, more simply, in *The Birdcage* (1996), where a strong framing effect is achieved by the two chorus performances of "We Are Family"). As we shall see, the deeply rooted historical conventions of music, derived primarily from stage music, remained essential to the practices of sound film, although changing musical styles over the decades of the 20th century complicated and partly broke down the clichéd topical categories.

Style Topics and the Leitmotif

INTRODUCTION: THEME, MOTIF, AND MOTIVE

The word "theme" in literature is a concise general statement about a story or poem that says what it is about. This could be an extremely brief description of action ("*King Kong* is about a great ape who comes to and devastates New York, but dies in the end") but is usually a characterization of what we understand as its essential idea or focus ("*Romeo and Juliet* is about tragic love" or "*Romeo and Juliet* is about the ways culture can interfere with and damage healthy expressions of human love"). In music—especially in purely instrumental music—this essential idea or focus is taken to be the most clearly defined melodies (or "themes") that are "developed" (or altered and commented on) in the other, more figural or dramatic sections of a composition. This distinction is important to us here, because when instrumental music is moved into the realm of the film sound track, the theme really functions like a motif, that is, the theme is no longer the "idea" of a piece but a significant recurring sound element (a narrative motif is usually defined as a significant recurring element; in film, visual motifs are very common, perhaps the most famous instance being the pervasive bird motif in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)). As we see later, the leitmotifs of Richard Wagner's operas are also sound motifs in this sense.

Unfortunately, the term motive is used in music to mean something entirely different than motif, as we noted at the beginning of chapter 5. A motive is the shortest significant musical idea, usually one to two measures long, and it is one of the constituent elements of a phrase, usually (but by no means

always) the phrase's most important element. (It was this last property that inspired composer Arnold Schoenberg[1] to coin the term "basic idea" to refer to the motive.)

Because "theme" and "motive" are as deeply embedded in musical discourse as are "theme" and "motifs"—with their meanings—in literary and film-narrative discourse, we will not try to resolve the discrepancies (and certainly not by coining any new terms). We will have to leave it to you to be aware of these discrepancies as you read the literature and write about films yourself.

"LOVE" THEMES

Style topics are conventional musical figures that evoke, represent, or signify a particular mood, place, emotion, or some other character trait in the narrative. When we speak of a "love" theme, for instance, we are dealing with a style topic. The music has a certain quality—a "style"—that allows us to recognize it as a love theme even if we have not heard it in a narrative context (such as a film) that would allow us to specify that meaning. The meaning does not reside just in the melody: love themes, for instance, are typically scored for strings with the melody in the violin, and the texture places a strong emphasis on melody with flowing accompaniment. In addition, the tempo is generally on the slow side of moderate (roughly at or just a bit slower than the average resting heartbeat rate). The overall effect is one of a deeply felt lyricism. Love themes are generally very prominent in films that make use of them, and, as might be expected, they are typically associated with the heroine.

Writing in the "picture palace" era, Erno Rapee described the importance of the love theme as follows:

> The choice of the Love Theme is a very important part of the scoring—it is a constantly recurring theme in the average run of pictures and as a rule will impress your audience more than any other theme. Special care should be taken in choosing the Love Theme from various angles. If you have a Western picture dealing with a farmhand and a country girl you should choose a musically simple and sweet ballad. If your Love Theme is to cover a relationship between society people, usually portrayed as sophisticated and blasé, choose a number of the type represented by the compositions of such composers as Victor Herbert or [Cecile] Chaminade.[2]

The "two-part" model for music in the establishing sequence went so far as to allow the audience to become accustomed to the love theme even before the first scene because the "lyrical" melody in the "part two" position was usually also the film's love theme. In *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944), recall that the title song is heard first, but at the turn to the lyrical melody we hear "The Boy Next Door," which Judy Garland's character sings early in the film, thus firmly tying the song not only to her but to her desire for a romantic relationship. (At

this point, it is the desire itself that is significant, however, as we know little to nothing about the neighbor who is its object.)

Despite the ease with which we can identify love themes, their signification is somewhat ambiguous because they generally refer both to the heroine and the romantic relationship between hero and heroine. 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. This is especially the case where the male character has a well-defined theme of his own. The love theme defines the heroine in terms of the relationship. In a sense, the music suggests that she *is* essentially identical to that relationship, whereas the theme for the hero establishes a musical identity for him that cannot be reduced in the same way.

We can see something of this process at work in *Captain Blood* (1935). The melody in Figure 8-1c is the love theme associated with Arabella. This one is a bit unusual for a love theme in being relatively short. Compare this to the themes for Peter Blood (Figures 8-1a, b, and d). One thing to note is that Peter has three themes, each representing a somewhat different character. Knowing just this much, we can be fairly certain that Peter will receive the bulk of the musical treatment. Another distinction is that, unlike Arabella's theme, where the characteristic part of the motive is presented in the example, then repeated, all of Peter's themes have typical continuations that extend beyond the initial gesture. Peter's themes, in other words, are all fully formed in a way that Arabella's is not. Moreover, throughout the film, Arabella's theme never seems to go the same place, its

continuation being much more determined by context (it is in fact often linked to the end of Peter's theme "b"). This musical treatment suggests that Arabella will be a rather ill-defined character except in terms of her relationship to Peter. (See Figure 8-2 for an image of the composer, Erich Korngold, working.)

Figure 8-1. *Captain Blood.* Principal leitmotifs (transcriptions from the sound track).

a
b
c
d

Fig. 8-2. The composer of *Captain Blood*, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, with fellow composer Franz Waxman (standing). *Photo © John W. Waxman Collection. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Used with permission.*

In *Out of Africa,* the complex character of Isak Dinesen has no theme assigned to her; instead, her romantic relationship with Denys Finch Hatton is represented by a gramophone and Mozart, which, it is made clear, equally represents *him* (because he loves classical music and he gives her the gramophone as a gift). The gramophone, recall, is in the first image of Figure 6-4; we shall encounter it again in chapter 9 in the context of a love scene.

In other words, when a style topic becomes so well established by repeated use in films that it becomes a convention, or even a cliché, it can also be exploited by its absence—that is, the signification shifts if we encounter the heroine in a situation where the statement of a love theme in the underscoring would be expected. As an additional example, consider the fact that Lauren Bacall's character, "Slim," in *To Have and Have Not* (1944), is never associated with music outside of her performance of "Am I Blue?" (and one other short performance) with Hoagy Carmichael, and that tune is never repeated in the nondiegetic music. What this confirms for the audience is the suspicion gathered early on that Slim might represent the "love interest" but if so she is certainly an unconventional heroine.

THE LEITMOTIF

As we noted in chapter 1, a theme used to refer consistently to a character, as in the case of the love theme and the heroine, is called a *leitmotif,* a term that derives from the music dramas of 19th-century German composer Richard Wagner, where it designates musical themes or motifs associated with people, objects, and even ideas. The device is used most consistently in *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of the Nibelung*), a cycle of four music dramas (or operas) based on Germanic and Scandinavian myths. The Sword, the Ring, and the Rhine River all have their own themes, as do characters such as Loki, Thor, and Wotan. Some of the principal characters, such as Siegfried, have several. The signification is somewhat more complex than is suggested here, however. For instance, the leitmotif that is generally associated with Wotan also designates his spear, which in turn stands for a contract he is bound to uphold. (This contract is the cause of much tragedy in the drama.) Likewise, some of the leitmotifs refer to rather abstract ideas such as the so-called "Redemption through Love" theme. Throughout the cycle, the leitmotifs undergo variation and transformation that reflect the dramatic situation.

Wagner's influence on music for the theater in the decades after this death in 1883 can hardly be overstated, and therefore it should be no surprise that film composers, also, adopted the technique of the leitmotif, albeit generally in a much simplified form (at its most basic, in fact, it is no different than the use of a recurrent theme). Most telling is just the number: whereas Wagner juggles dozens and dozens of motifs across his music dramas, film composers usually restrict themselves to only a handful. Often, they will use only two or three

themes: the main title for the hero, a love theme for the heroine, and perhaps recurring music for a place, villain, or something or someone else of particular narrative importance. This is the case in *Captain Blood,* whose principal themes were shown in Figure 8-1. Even such sprawling multi-film epics as *Star Wars* (1977–2005) or *Lord of the Rings* (2001–2003), although in many respects quite close to Wagner's complex usage otherwise, do not attempt abstract signification to the same degree. An essential difference is that characters in music dramas sing whereas on screen they talk: far more information can be conveyed more quickly through normal speech than through texts that are sung.

Leitmotifs in films also tend to be much more direct in signification, the theme appearing only when the character does or, occasionally, when the character signified by the motif is clearly referred to in the dialogue. As music scholar Justin London says, "In filmic contexts the introduction of musical leitmotifs is highly conventionalized. Usually this introduction involves the simultaneous presentation of the character and his or her leitmotif, especially when we are given a striking presentation of both early on in the film."[3]

The leitmotif does not just signify its referent, that is, the character, thing, place or idea. It is also modified to reflect its context. This is done through musical variation. Such variations can be subtle—changing the orchestration, adjusting the tempo or dynamics, or the key—but they can also be quite substantial—altering the meter, rhythm, mode (for example, from major to minor), accompaniment, etc.

A simple example may be found in *Casablanca* (1942): the reunion scene that we analyzed in chapter 4. The scene before this one acts in many respects as a prologue to the reunion scene: the evening after their arrival in the city, Ilsa and Laszlo go to Rick's café; after a while Laszlo walks to the bar to talk with a man who has revealed himself as a resistance fighter, and Ilsa tells a waiter to ask Sam to come over to her table; Sam arrives and she asks him to play "As Time Goes By." From this point, we hear that melody four times in a row: sung (hummed) by Ilsa, then played and sung by Sam; then heard twice in the nondiegetic orchestra, first as the slow-motion reaction music in the oboe, and then as a slightly distorted waltz when Ilsa refers to Paris. Each time the tune is different in some way—not only in orchestration but also in its signification. The first appearance of this now-famous melody in the film is through Ilsa's humming and brief wordless singing: instantly it becomes the love theme as it is literally embodied in her while we see her in close up. Sam's repeating it reluctantly but fluently tells us that this melody has a history, something associated with it in Ilsa's—and Sam's—memory. That suggestion is powerfully realized in the "point of view" music that immediately follows the stinger chord, as we "hear" the sudden encounter register in the minds of Rick and Ilsa. Finally, we learn where this history can be localized—in Paris, as Ilsa makes a reference to the city and we hear "As Time Goes By" in waltz form.

Despite such elegant and effective uses as this, there are certainly dangers in the film manner of thematic treatment. The early film music scholar Frederick Sternfeld described them as follows:

> There are obvious conveniences to [the leitmotif] system that employs the same succession of notes whenever the same character or situation appears. For copyright reasons new tunes must be tagged, and the trick of using the X theme every time X appears on the screen is facile and produces quick results. The proof of the pudding lies, of course, in the eating. If the technique is applied sparingly and thoughtfully, it will seem appropriate—even to the critical observer—besides providing the necessary coherence for the entire fabric. But if used slavishly and mechanically, it will convey a feeling of monotony to the uncritical, while the sensitive listener will be both bored and irritated.[4]

Two other films with Max Steiner scores can provide examples. In *Mildred Pierce* (1945), despite building the nondiegetic music in the leitmotivic manner, on multiple recurrences of just a few themes, the composer usually varies the themes and does not often repeat them in overly obvious situations. Even the "Mildred Pierce" motive (the first three notes of the main theme (recall Figure 5-9a)) is reserved for appropriately dramatic moments (the theme is specifically associated with Mildred, but it is not a love theme; rather, in its often blatant and even harsh presentation, it speaks to the difficult, ultimately tragic circumstances of her life). In *The Big Sleep* (1946), on the other hand, although the love theme is used both sparingly and effectively, and Carmen's theme is so short and indistinct (just two held notes, the second lower than the first) that it is often lost in the texture, the whimsical motive for Marlowe is repeated far too often and in situations where it seems to undermine rather than support his character and threatens to turn the detective story into a comedy.

Style Topics

Like love themes, most leitmotifs are also instances of style topics. This is because style topics are an effective means of musical characterization. In Figure 8.1, for instance, Peter Blood's themes a and d both have a brash character consistent with the heroic side of his personality. Theme b, on the other hand, is gentler, more flowing and lyrical, consistent with his personality as a caring doctor. (It is also similar to a love theme, which is one reason it dovetails so easily with Arabella's theme.) Yet we should note that the musical meaning seems much more specific in the case of the heroic side than the caring side. This is because calls and fanfares, especially those scored for trumpets, have a long history of serving military functions (signals, such as calling to arms) as well as heraldic ones (marking the entrance of nobility). Horns have a similar connection with hunting. These associations were easily imported into theater

music—especially opera, operetta, and melodrama—and from there spread to instrumental genres such as program music. In *Captain Blood*, the trumpets give the theme in Figure 8.1a a strong fanfare flavor, despite its somewhat unpredictable rhythmic structure. Played by the horns, Figure 8.1d, by contrast, bears an affinity to hunting calls, perhaps fitting for Peter's new occupation as pirate. "We, the hunted, will now hunt," he declares as he signs the compact with his men (1:03:16). When the bugler plays the theme later in the film, it becomes an explicit call to arms.

Fanfares, military calls, and hunting calls are specific musical topics. Another topic often times associated with these or used in conjunction with them is the march. Being especially linked to the military, marches are ubiquitous as title themes for war films. A good example is *The Great Escape* (1963). The themes to *Star Wars* or *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) are both also marches; as leitmotifs, they serve much the same function of marking the character as heroic as was the case in *Captain Blood*.

The signifying properties of a musical style topic very often affirm our understanding of a scene. Most obviously, national anthems are used in this way. In *Casablanca*, Rick's flashback in the after-hours scene is inaugurated by the opening phrase of the Marseillaise, situating it in Paris. The Germans are likewise characterized through "Deutschland über Alles" in distorted form, which marks them as villains. Songs often work this way as well. "Dixie," for instance, is commonly employed as the musical sign of the Confederacy in Civil War films. It is also used generally for the antebellum South, where it is often coupled with minstrel songs and spirituals; here, music offers a romanticized picture of plantation life, making it seem pastoral and benign. *Gone with the Wind* (1939) is one among many films that draws extensively on such associations. By contrast, the Union in Civil War films is not represented so specifically. Sometimes, "Yankee Doodle" is used or one of the most famous of Civil War songs, "Battle Cry of Freedom," but obviously it would be inappropriate to use songs that represent the entire United States outside the historical period of the Civil War, such as the national anthem or songs like "America" or "Columbia, Gem of the Ocean."

In these cases, the music comes culturally determined, through lyrics and other uses, but signification is similar for other music, even if the meaning will be more difficult to fix than with anthems and other national songs. We have already noted how love and heroic themes have a style that allows us to identify the sort of situations or characters they are associated with. In fact, much film music works this way. For instance, music for battles, storms, deaths, pastoral scenes, and the West—each of these has a relatively distinctive sound that allows us to make a fairly good judgment of the sort of scene a certain type of music will accompany without even seeing the images. The same holds true for mood: mysterious, agitated, grotesque, action—each of these, too, has

a characteristic sound. Of course, it is seldom the case that we can make an exact determination—the same music may well be acceptable for both a battle scene and a storm—but a certain type of music has a limited range of scenes for which it will fit comfortably. It would be highly unlikely to hear soft pastoral music accompanying the height of a battle, or battle music accompanying a quiet pastoral scene. Such music would seem utterly inappropriate—unless it seemed plausible that playing against the situation in this way had a narrative purpose.

> *The Villain ordinarily can easily be represented by any Agitato, of which there are thousands.*
> —Erno Rapee[5]

Occasionally, lyrical, elegiac music will be used over a battle—especially when all other sound drops out—to emphasize the heroic pathos of the moment. This is one way of underscoring "lost causes," such as near the end of the opening scene of *Gladiator* (2000) where Emperor Marcus Aurelius mournfully surveys the battefield as Maximus and the Romans obliterate the barbarian army in the battle of Germania. Here, the fact that the most conventional use is not observed—we do not hear the music we expect—is precisely what suggests that the film at this moment is about something other than the battle—Marcus Aurelius sees the cost of war and, like Maximus, recognizes the humanity of those he is conquering. Yet the very fact that we can identify such a disjunction tells us that music has a definable range of signification.

MUSICAL STYLES

The musical style of diegetic music is almost always an obvious marker of time and place: a marching band, a gamelan, a jazz combo, a symphony orchestra—such music is an effective means of quickly establishing a milieu. When we hear a string quartet playing at the Christmas party near the beginning of *Die Hard* (1988), we are not at all surprised to learn that those attending it are upper management of the company. Class is hardly an accidental part of the story, whose romantic strand involves a tension between John (Bruce Willis) and Holly (Bonnie Bedelia): their marriage is strained to the breaking point because of the difference in their respective social classes. As Robynn Stilwell notes, classical music is also associated with the villain in this film, giving him an aristocratic air that darkens the associations of the music in general.[6] The opposite effect is achieved by the association of music-like Australian aboriginal sounds with Paul Hogan's character in *Crocodile Dundee* (1986): as a result, Dundee acquires qualities of mystery and deep-historical rootedness.

The same applies to nondiegetic music, although it must be remembered that the symphony orchestra is not marked as such, except in the most general sense. Jazz underscoring was frequently used in the 1950s for gritty, urban films such as *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) or *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957). Recordings of popular music frequently began appearing nondiegetically in the 1960s, where it could signify anything from youthful angst, as in *The Graduate* (1967), to social rebellion, as in *Easy Rider* (1969). By the 1980s,

romantic comedies would frequently feature "compilation" scores, where the choice of popular music style was used to delineate character and set the terms of the romantic relationship. *Clueless* (1995) offers particularly good examples of this device, with Cher (Alicia Silverstone) being associated with synthpop and Josh (Paul Rudd) with grunge.

The topical associations of music have changed over the decades as well. Film scholar Jeff Smith describes what happened at one critical juncture, the early 1950s: "The [traditional] romantic idiom continued as an option throughout the fifties, but it no longer wielded as strong an influence as Hollywood composers began to broaden the classical score's range of styles. At one end of the spectrum, polyphonic textures, modal writing, and atonality surfaced more regularly in the works of Miklós Rózsa, Alex North, Bernard Herrmann, and Leonard Rosenman. At the other end of the spectrum, various jazz and pop elements appeared in the scores of David Raksin, Elmer Bernstein, and Johnny Mandel."[7] (It should also be noted that the new popular music style of rock and roll found its way very quickly into films and film musicals aimed at a teenage audience, such as beach movies and Elvis Presley musicals.) Some composers, especially starting in the 1980s, became specialists in combining different styles, effectively creating a new "cross-over" style; as film music critic and scholar Royal S. Brown describes it, "Many scores by composers such as Jerry Fielding, Lalo Schifrin, and David Shire bring together sophisticated facets of both jazz and classical scoring."[8]

LOCATION AND STEREOTYPE

Style topics are a particularly good means of marking locale. In *Captain Blood*, for instance, the arrival in Tortuga is accompanied by music with a distinct Spanish flavor, suggesting an exoticism probably meant to evoke the spirit of the Caribbean port. This conflation of place with ethnicity is common in classical cinema. "Chinese" music—inevitably centered around a pentatonic scale—might be used either for a place or a character. The establishing scene for Hong Kong in *The Painted Veil* (1934) contains an excellent example of music of this sort. Such music was also easily adapted to Japanese and other Asian locales. An excellent later example that makes much more subtle use of the stereotypical "Chinese" elements—but has to work around a clichéd Irving Berlin song in the process—is Franz Waxman's music for *Sayonara* (1952).

"Arabian" music—or, as it was usually called in the silent era, "oriental"—likewise has its distinctive figures, typically flowing, ornamented melodies using scales featuring the augmented second or lowered second scale degree, as well as percussion. (Most of the stereotypical elements are evident in this citation from the middle section of Tchaikovsky's "Arabian Dance" (*The Nutcracker* ballet): Figure 8-3.) Such music could be used for a wide range of locations, including North Africa, Egypt, the Middle East, and some places in southeast

Figure 8-3. Tchaikovsky, ballet *The Nutcracker*, Arabian Dance (middle section).

Asia. *Casablanca* employs music of this sort as the "indigenous" music of the city, most notably in scenes in the *Blue Parrot* café (see Figure 8-4). The same is true for the open fifths or beating tom-toms of the "Indians." *Stagecoach* (1939) rather crudely marks cutaways to the Indians with music of this sort (see Figure 8-5a for the contents list of a silent-film era collection and Figure 8-5b for the opening of its "Indian Music" selection). In a different context, such music could be used to signify the "primitive" in general. Indeed, markers of the exotic and primitive are often quite malleable (reflecting a general cultural conflation of the terms)—see Figure 8-6, which assigns the "oriental" to an aboriginal group in an unspecified place in the eastern Indian Ocean.

As these examples make clear, style topics work by means of stereotypes. *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) features a number of themes that employ the "oriental" topic. The theme for Lawrence (Figure 8-7a) is constructed around two overlapping pentatonic scales, which make prominent use of the augmented second. It is also richly harmonized and lushly scored, producing an exquisite, exotic effect. The theme for the Arabs (Figure 8-7b), on the contrary, is harmonized and scored crudely (often simply monophonic accompanied only with drums) and based on a modal (Phrygian) scale. By contrast, the call to prayer (00:43:32; Figure 8-7c) is rendered by solo voice alone, quasi-diegetic and seemingly "authentic." Here, then, are three distinct registers of the oriental topic. It should be noted that though the last example is an actual Muslim call to prayer, it is no less stereotypical than are the other two in musical function: it serves to make the place exotic. A similar effect is used at the beginning of *Blackhawk Down* (2001), where the use of indigenous sounding music likewise marks the place as exotic and strange, as a place beyond understanding.

Because the style topics familiar from film music at least through the 1970s (and in somewhat altered ways even after that) originated in 19th-century prac-

Figure 8-4. *Casablanca*. Music for the *Blue Parrot* café (transcription from the sound track).

Figure 8-5. (a) An earlier example of music written specifically to accompany silent film. (b) The opening of "Indian Music." Note the contents are organized along the lines of style topics. Note the minor key and stereotypical open fifths in the left hand.

tices, it will be useful to look at some lists from the silent era that reflect and build on those older historical models. In Figure 8-8, we reproduce the sidebar from Rapee's *Motion Picture Moods* (1924), a collection of music meant to serve as a single anthology for a theater pianist's or organist's use. This particular

Figure 8-6. *King Kong.* "First Contact" sequence. The music accompanying this scene uses the style topic of the "primitive." The music is not unlike the "Indian Music" of the Sam Fox collection shown above.

a   **Figure 8-7.** *Lawrence of Arabia.* Three examples of "exotic" style topics: (a) main theme;
b   (b) music associated with the Arab army; (c) Muslim call to prayer (transcriptions from the
c   sound track).

sidebar is reproduced on every page of music in his book to allow the keyboardist to note pages and flip quickly to an appropriate topical category for a new scene or situation. The headings cover the whole range of categories we have discussed in this chapter, from mood or affect indicators (grotesque, happiness, horror, joyfulness, mysterioso, passion, quietude, sadness, sinister, but also neutral) to characteristic music for objects (aëroplane), groups (children, national, oriental, western) or scenic situations (battle, chase, festival, love-themes, parties, race, sea-storm), to musical sound effects (birds, calls, chatter). Dances are listed separately—whereas some would be strongly marked (*mazurkas* for Poland, eastern Europe, Russia, or gypsies; *minuets* for 18th-century high society; *tangos* for Latin American society, but also for strong sensuality), others could serve a variety of purposes (for example, marches, but also waltzes, which in the silent-film era still were markers of a traditional popular music). Recall in this connection that Martin Marks used gavottes in *Lady Windermere's Fan* not for their pastoral or other historical connotations but because they "speak in accents of wit and romance," qualities that fit "comic images of formal behavior and ritualized social interactions, such as constrain the film's aristocratic characters."[9]

Perhaps because of their necessary brevity, the labels in Figure 8-8 do not reflect the conflation of mood and style topic that was central to musicians' planning and performance for feature films in the silent film era. In the *Carl Fischer Analytical Orchestra Guide*, compiled by Julius S. Seredy and published in 1929, we find clearer indications of these combinations in headings such as "Agitatos—for General Use—see also Furioso, Battle, Storm, Hurries"; "Dramatic—for longer dramatic scenes, trials, etc., see also . . . Anger, Argument, Foreboding, Grief, Passion, Pulsating, Regret, Resignation, Tragic"; "Hurries—General Use—see also Agitatos, Excitement, Furiosos, Chase, Dramatic Pursuit, Exotic and Comic Hurries"; "Love Scenes—see also Love Themes and Dramatic Love Scenes for Lighter Courtship Numbers, see Garden Scenes"; and "Mysteriosos for General Use," with its subcategories "Mysteriosos—Comic (Burlesque)—see also Mystic Suspense in Comedy," "Mysteriosos—Grotesque—Spooky—see also Comic Mysteriosos, Exotics," and "Mysteriosos—Heavy Dramatic."[10] The last of these, "heavy dramatic," is an instance of another level of categorization that was very common throughout the silent era and meant to reflect differences in the intensity of mood in a scene. Several years before Seredy's *Guide*, Rapee also published his own catalogue of works for sale, somewhat pretentiously called the *Encyclopedia*

Aëroplane	2
Band	5
Battle	10
Birds	21
Calls	273
Chase	599
Chatter	28
Children	31
Chimes	259
Dances	39
Gavottes	39
Marches	102
Mazurkas	48
Minuets	54
Polkas	61
Tangos	94
Valses lentes	78
Valses	65
Doll	129
Festival	140
Fire-Fighting	151
Funeral	160
Grotesque	165
Gruesome	169
Happiness	202
Horror	173
Humorous	174
Hunting	186
Impatience	194
Joyfulness	202
Love-themes	209
Lullabies	231
Misterioso	242
Monotony	250
Music-box	254
National	261
Neutral	467
Orgies	487
Oriental	496
Parties	523
Passion	571
Pastorale	564
Pulsating	587
Purity	591
Quietude	591
Race	599
Railroad	608
Religioso	616
Sadness	621
Sea-Storm	651
Sinister	663
Wedding	671
Western	865

Figure 8-8. Erno Rapee, *Motion Picture Moods.* This sidebar ran on every page of the book, giving the player a quick index of topic categories.

of Music for Pictures (1925). The excerpt shown in Figure 8-9 highlights the intensity labels: "heavy" for the most serious situations, "light" for those that tend to the comedic, and "medium" (others use the word "neutral") for general accompaniment without a specific emphasis.

Composing
for the Films

THEODOR ADORNO

&

HANNS EISLER

With a new Introduction by
Graham McCann

THE ATHLONE PRESS
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PREJUDICES AND BAD HABITS

THE character of motion-picture music has been determined by everyday practice. It has been an adaptation in part to the immediate needs of the film industry, in part to whatever musical clichés and ideas about music happened to be current. As a result, a number of empirical standards—rules of thumb—were evolved that corresponded to what motion-picture people called common sense. These rules have now been made obsolete by the technical development of the cinema as well as of autonomous music, yet they have persisted as tenaciously as if they had their roots in ancient wisdom rather than in bad habits. They originated in the intellectual milieu of Tin Pan Alley; and because of practical considerations and problems of personnel, they have so entrenched themselves that they, more than anything else, have hindered the progress of motion-picture music. They only seem to make sense as a consequence of standardization within the industry itself, which calls for standard practices everywhere.

Furthermore, these rules of thumb represent a kind of pseudo-tradition harking back to the days of spontaneity and craftsmanship, of medicine shows and covered wagons. And it is precisely this discrepancy between obsolete prac-

tices and scientific production methods that characterizes the whole system. The two aspects are inseparable in principle, and both are subject to criticism. Public realization of the antiquated character of these rules should suffice to break their hold.

Typical examples of these habits, selected at random, will be discussed here in order to show concretely the level on which the problem of motion-picture music is dealt with today.

The Leitmotif

Cinema music is still patched together by means of leitmotifs. The ease with which they are recalled provides definite clues for the listener, and they also are a practical help to the composer in his task of composition under pressure. He can quote where he otherwise would have to invent.

The idea of the leitmotif has been popular since the days of Wagner.[1] His popularity was largely connected with his use of leitmotifs. They function as trademarks, so to speak, by which persons, emotions, and symbols can instantly be identified. They have always been the most elementary means of elucidation, the thread by which the musically inexperienced find their way about. They were drummed into the listener's ear by persistent repetition, often with scarcely any variation, very much as a new song is plugged or as a motion-picture actress is popularized by her hair-do. It was natural to assume that this device, because it is so easy to grasp, would be particularly suitable to motion pictures, which are based on the premise that they must be easily

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[1] A prominent Hollywood composer, in an interview quoted in the newspapers, declared that there is no fundamental difference between his methods of composing and Wagner's. He, too, uses the leitmotif.

understood. However, the truth of this assumption is only illusory.

The reasons for this are first of all technical. The fundamental character of the leitmotif—its salience and brevity—was related to the gigantic dimensions of the Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian music dramas. Just because the leitmotif as such is musically rudimentary, it requires a large musical canvas if it is to take on a structural meaning beyond that of a signpost. The atomization of the musical element is paralleled by the heroic dimensions of the composition as a whole. This relation is entirely absent in the motion picture, which requires continual interruption of one element by another rather than continuity. The constantly changing scenes are characteristic of the structure of the motion picture. Musically, also, shorter forms prevail, and the leitmotif is unsuitable here because of this brevity of forms which must be complete in themselves. Cinema music is so easily understood that it has no need of leitmotifs to serve as signposts, and its limited dimension does not permit of adequate expansion of the leitmotif.

Similar considerations apply with regard to the aesthetic problem. The Wagnerian leitmotif is inseparably connected with the symbolic nature of the music drama. The leitmotif is not supposed merely to characterize persons, emotions, or things, although this is the prevalent conception. Wagner conceived its purpose as the endowment of the dramatic events with metaphysical significance. When in the *Ring* the tubas blare the Valhalla motif, it is not merely to indicate the dwelling place of Wotan. Wagner meant also to connote the sphere of sublimity, the cosmic will, and the primal principle. The leitmotif was invented essentially for this kind of symbolism. There is no place for it in the motion picture, which seeks to depict reality. Here the function of

the leitmotif has been reduced to the level of a musical lackey, who announces his master with an important air even though the eminent personage is clearly recognizable to everyone. The effective technique of the past thus becomes a mere duplication, ineffective and uneconomical. At the same time, since it cannot be developed to its full musical significance in the motion picture, its use leads to extreme poverty of composition.

Melody and Euphony

The demand for melody and euphony is not only assumed to be obvious, but also a matter of public taste, as represented in the consumer. We do not deny that producers and consumers generally agree in regard to this demand. But the concepts of melody and euphony are not so self-evident as is generally believed. Both are to a large extent conventionalized historical categories.

The concept of melody first gained ascendancy in the nineteenth century in connection with the new *Kunstlied,* especially Schubert's. Melody was conceived as the opposite of the 'theme' of the Viennese classicism of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.[2] It denotes a tonal sequence, constituting not so much the point of departure of a composition as a self-contained entity that is easy to listen to, singable, and

[2] As a matter of fact, the modern concept of melody made itself felt as early as within Viennese classicism. Nowhere does the historical character of this apparently natural concept become more manifest than in the famous Mozart critique by Hans Georg Naegeli, the Swiss contemporary of the Viennese classicists, which is now made accessible in a reprint edited by Willi Reich. Musical history generally recognizes as one of the greatest merits of Mozart that he introduced the element of cantability into the sonata form, particularly the complex of the second theme. This innovation, largely responsible for the musical changes that led to the crystallization of the later *Lied* melody, was by no means greeted enthusiastically in all quarters. To Naegeli, who was certainly narrow-minded and dogmatic but had rather articulate philosophical ideas about musical style,

expressive. This notion led to the sort of melodiousness for which the German language has no specific term, but which the English word 'tune' expresses quite accurately. It consists first of all in the uninterrupted flow of a melody in the upper voice, in such a way that the melodic continuity seems natural, because it is almost possible to guess in advance exactly what will follow. The listener zealously insists on his right to this anticipation, and feels cheated if it is denied him. This fetishism in regard to melody, which at certain moments during the latter part of the Romantic period crowded out all the other elements of music, shackled the concept of melody itself.

Today, the conventional concept of melody is based on criteria of the crudest sort. Easy intelligibility is guaranteed by harmonic and rhythmic symmetry, and by the paraphrasing of accepted harmonic procedures; tunefulness is assured by the preponderance of small diatonic intervals. These postulates have taken on the semblance of logic, owing to the rigid institutionalization of prevailing customs, in which these criteria automatically obtain. In Mozart's and Beethoven's day, when the stylistic ideal of filigree composition held sway, the postulate of the predominance of an anticipatable melody in the upper voice would scarcely

Mozart's synthesis of instrumental writing and cantability appeared about as shocking as advanced modern composition would to a popular-music addict of today. He blames Mozart, who is now regarded by the musical public as the utmost representative of stylistic purity, for lack of taste and style. The following passage is characteristic: 'His [Mozart's] genius was great, but its defect, the overuse of contrast, was equally great. This was all the more objectionable in his case because he continuously contrasted the non-instrumental with the instrumental, cantability with the free play of tones. This was inartistic, as it is in all arts. As soon as continuous contrast becomes the main effect, the beautiful proportion of parts is necessarily neglected. This stylistic fault can be discovered in many of Mozart's works.' (Hans Georg Naegeli, *Von Bach zu Beethoven,* Benno Schwabe & Co., Basel, 1946, p. 48-9.)

have been comprehended. 'Natural' melody is a figment of the imagination, an extremely relative phenomenon illegitimately absolutized, neither an obligatory nor an *a priori* constituent of the material, but one procedure among many, singled out for exclusive use.

The conventional demand for melody and euphony is constantly in conflict with the objective requirements of the motion picture. The prerequisite of melody is that the composer be independent, in the sense that his selection and invention relate to situations that supply specific lyric-poetic inspiration. This is out of the question where the motion picture is concerned. All music in the motion picture is under the sign of utility, rather than lyric expressiveness. Aside from the fact that lyric-poetic inspiration cannot be expected of the composer for the cinema, this kind of inspiration would contradict the embellishing and subordinate function that industrial practice still enforces on the composer.

Moreover, the problem of melody as 'poetic' is made insoluble by the conventionality of the popular notion of melody. Visual action in the motion picture has of course a prosaic irregularity and asymmetry. It claims to be photographed life; and as such every motion picture is a documentary. As a result, there is a gap between what is happening on the screen and the symmetrically articulated conventional melody. A photographed kiss cannot actually be synchronized with an eight-bar phrase. The disparity between symmetry and asymmetry becomes particularly striking when music is used to accompany natural phenomena, such as .drifting clouds, sunrises, wind, and rain. These natural phenomena could inspire nineteenth-century poets; however, as photographed, they are essentially irregular and nonrhythmic, thus excluding that element of poetic

8

rhythm with which the motion-picture industry associates them. Verlaine could write a poem about rain in the city, but one cannot hum a tune that accompanies rain reproduced on the screen.

More than anything else the demand for melody at any cost and on every occasion has throttled the development of motion-picture music. The alternative is certainly not to resort to the unmelodic, but to liberate melody from conventional fetters.

Unobtrusiveness

One of the most widespread prejudices in the motion-picture industry is the premise that the spectator should not be conscious of the music. The philosophy behind this belief is a vague notion that music should have a subordinate role in relation to the picture. As a rule, the motion picture represents action with dialogue. Financial considerations and technical interest are concentrated on the actor; anything that might overshadow him is considered disturbing. The musical indications in the scripts are usually sporadic and indefinite. Music thus far has not been treated in accordance with its specific potentialities. It is tolerated as an outsider who is somehow regarded as being indispensable, partly because of a genuine need and partly on account of the fetishistic idea that the existing technical resources must be exploited to the fullest extent.[3]

Despite the often reiterated opinion of the wizards of the movie industry, in which many composers concur, the

[3] In the realm of motion pictures the term 'technique' has a double meaning that can easily lead to confusion. On the one hand, technique is the equivalent of an industrial process for producing goods: e.g. the discovery that picture and sound can be recorded on the same strip is comparable to the invention of the air brake. The other meaning of 'technique' is aesthetic. It designates the methods by which an artistic intention can be

9

thesis that music should be unobtrusive is questionable. There are, doubtless, situations in motion pictures in which the dialogue must be emphasized and in which detailed musical foreground configurations would be disturbing. It may also be granted that these situations sometimes require acoustic supplementation. But precisely when this requirement is taken seriously, the insertion of allegedly unobtrusive music becomes dubious. In such instances, an accompaniment of extra-musical sound would more nearly approximate the realism of the motion picture. If, instead, music is used, music that is supposed to be real music but is not supposed to be noticed, the effect is that described in a German nursery rhyme:

> Ich weiss ein schönes Spiel,
> Ich mal' mir einen Bart,
> Und halt mir einen Fächer vor,
> Dass niemand ihn gewahrt.
>
> [I know a pretty game:
> I deck me with a beard
> And hide behind a fan
> So I won't look too weird.] *

In practice, the requirement of unobtrusiveness is generally met not by an approximation of nonmusical sounds, but by the use of banal music. Accordingly, the music is supposed to be inconspicuous in the same sense as are selections from *La Bohème* played in a restaurant.

Apart from this, unobtrusive music, assumed to be the

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adequately realized. While the technical treatment of music in sound pictures was essentially determined by the industrial factor, there was a need for music from the very beginning, because of certain aesthetic requirements. Thus far no clearcut relation between the factors has been established, neither in theory nor in practice (Cf. ch. 5).

* Translated by N. G.

typical solution of the problem, is only one and certainly the least important of many possible solutions. The insertion of music should be planned along with the writing of the script, and the question whether the spectator should be aware of the music is a matter to be decided in each case according to the dramatic requirements of the script. Interruption of the action by a developed musical episode could be an important artistic device. For example, in an anti-Nazi picture, at the point when the action is dispersed into individual psychological details, an exceptionally serious piece of music occupies the whole perception. Its movement helps the listener to remember the essential incidents and focuses his attention on the situation as a whole. It is true that in this case the music is the very opposite of what it is conventionally supposed to be. It no longer expresses the conflicts of individual characters, nor does it persuade the spectator to identify himself with the hero; but rather it leads him back from the sphere of privacy to the major social issue. In pictures of an inferior type of entertainment—musicals and revues from which every trace of dramatic psychology is eliminated—one finds, more often than elsewhere, rudiments of this device of musical interruption, and the independent use of music in songs, dances, and finales.

Visual Justification

The problem relates less to rules than to tendencies, which are not as important as they were a few years ago, yet must still be taken into account. The fear that the use of music at a point when it would be completely impossible in a real situation will appear naive or childish, or impose upon the listener an effort of imagination that might distract him from the main issue, leads to attempts to jus-

tify this use in a more or less rationalistic way. Thus situations are often contrived in which it is allegedly natural for the main character to stop and sing, or music accompanying a love scene is made plausible by having the hero turn on a radio or a phonograph.

The following is a typical instance. The hero is waiting for his beloved. Not a word is spoken. The director feels the need of filling in the silence. He knows the danger of nonaction, of absence of suspense, and therefore prescribes music. At the same time, however, he lays so much stress in the objective portrayal of psychological continuity that an unmotivated irruption of music strikes him as risky. Thus he resorts to the most artless trick in order to avoid artlessness, and makes the hero turn to the radio. The threadbareness of this artifice is illustrated by those scenes in which the hero accompanies himself 'realistically' on the piano for about eight bars, whereupon he is relieved by a large orchestra and chorus, albeit with no change of scene. In so far as this device, which obtained in the early days of sound pictures, is still applied, it hinders the use of music as a genuine element of contrast. Music becomes a plot accessory, a sort of acoustical stage property.

Illustration

There is a favorite Hollywood gibe: 'Birdie sings, music sings.' Music must follow visual incidents and illustrate them either by directly imitating them or by using clichés that are associated with the mood and content of the picture. The preferred material for imitation is 'nature,' in the most superficial sense of the word, i.e. as the antithesis of the urban—that realm where people are supposed to be able to breathe freely, stimulated by the presence of plants and animals. This is a vulgar and stereotyped version of the con-

12

cept of nature that prevailed in nineteenth-century poetry. Music is concocted to go with meretricious lyrics. Particularly landscape shots without action seem to call for musical accompaniment, which then conforms to the stale programmatic patterns. Mountain peaks invariably invoke string tremolos punctuated by a signal-like horn motif. The ranch to which the virile hero has eloped with the sophisticated heroine is accompanied by forest murmurs and a flute melody. A slow waltz goes along with a moonlit scene in which a boat drifts down a river lined with weeping willows.

What is in question here is not the principle of musical illustration. Certainly musical illustration is only one among many dramaturgic resources, but it is so overworked that it deserves a rest, or at least it should be used with the greatest discrimination. This is what is generally lacking in prevailing practice. Music cut to fit the stereotype 'nature' is reduced to the character of a cheap mood-producing gadget, and the associative patterns are so familiar that there is really no illustration of anything, but only the elicitation of the automatic response: 'Aha, nature!'

Illustrative use of music today results in unfortunate duplication. It is uneconomical, except where quite specific effects are intended, or minute interpretation of the action of the picture. The old operas left a certain amount of elbow room in their scenic arrangements for what is vague and indefinite; this could be filled out with tone painting. The music of the Wagnerian era was actually a means of elucidation. But in the cinema, both picture and dialogue are hyperexplicit. Conventional music can add nothing to the explicitness, but instead may detract from it, since even in the worst pictures standardized musical effects fail to keep up with the concrete elaboration of the screen action. But if the elucidating function is given up as superfluous,

13

music should never attempt to accompany precise occurrences in an imprecise manner. It should stick to its task—even if it is only as questionable a one as that of creating a mood—renouncing that of repeating the obvious. Musical illustration should either be hyperexplicit itself—over-illuminating, so to speak, and thereby interpretive—or should be omitted. There is no excuse for flute melodies that force a bird call into a pattern of full ninth chords.

Geography and History

When the scene is laid in a Dutch town, with its canals, windmills, and wooden shoes, the composer is supposed to send over to the studio library for a Dutch folk song in order to use its theme as a working basis. Since it is not easy to recognize a Dutch folk song for what it is, especially when it has been subjected to the whims of an arranger, this procedure seems a dubious one. Here music is used in much the same way as costumes or sets, but without as strong a characterizing effect. A composer can attain something more convincing by writing a tune of his own on the basis of a village dance for little Dutch girls than he can by clinging to the original. Indeed, the current folk music of all countries—apart from that which is basically outside occidental music—tends toward a certain sameness, in contrast to the differentiated art languages. This is because it is grounded on a limited number of elementary rhythmic formulas associated with festivities, communal dances, and the like. It is as difficult to distinguish between the temperamental characters of Polish and Spanish dances, particularly in the conventionalized form they assumed in the nineteenth century, as it is to discern the difference between hill-billy songs and Upper Bavarian *Schnaderhüpferln*.

Moreover, ordinary cinematic music has an irresistible urge to follow the pattern of 'just folk music.' Specific national characteristics can be captured musically only if the musical counterpart of beflagging the scene with national emblems like an exhibition is not resorted to. Related to this is the practice of investing costume pictures with music of the corresponding historical period. This recalls concerts in which hoop-skirted elderly ladies play tedious pre-Bach harpsichord pieces by candlelight in baroque palaces. The absurdity of such 'applied art' arrangements is glaring in contrast with the technique of the film, which is of necessity modern. If costume pictures must be, they might be better served by the free use of advanced musical resources.

Stock Music

One of the worst practices is the incessant use of a limited number of worn-out musical pieces that are associated with the given screen situations by reason of their actual or traditional titles. Thus, the scene of a moonlight night is accompanied by the first movement of the *Moonlight Sonata*, orchestrated in a manner that completely contradicts its meaning, because the piano melody—suggested by Beethoven with the utmost discretion—is made obtrusive and is richly underscored by the strings. For thunderstorms, the overture to *William Tell* is used; for weddings, the march from *Lohengrin* or Mendelssohn's wedding march. These practices—incidentally, they are on the wane and are retained only in cheap pictures—correspond to the popularity of trademarked pieces in classical music, such as Beethoven's E-flat Concerto, which has attained an almost fatal popularity under the apocryphal title *The Emperor*, or Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. The present vogue of the latter is

to some extent connected with the idea that the composer died before it was finished, whereas he simply laid it aside years before his death. The use of trademarks is a nuisance, though it must be acknowledged that childlike faith in the eternal symbolic force of certain classical wedding or funeral marches occasionally has a redeeming aspect, when these are compared with original scores manufactured to order.

Clichés

All these questions are related to a more general state of affairs. Mass production of motion pictures has led to the elaboration of typical situations, ever-recurring emotional crises, and standardized methods of arousing suspense. They correspond to cliché effects in music. But music is often brought into play at the very point where particularly characteristic effects are sought for the sake of 'atmosphere' or suspense. The powerful effect intended does not come off, because the listener has been made familiar with the stimulus by innumerable analogous passages. Psychologically, the whole phenomenon is ambiguous. If the screen shows a peaceful country house while the music produces familiar sinister sounds, the spectator knows at once that something terrible is about to happen, and thus the musical accompaniment both intensifies the suspense and nullifies it by betraying the sequel.

As in many other aspects of contemporary motion pictures, it is not standardization as such that is objectionable here. Pictures that frankly follow an established pattern, such as 'westerns' or gangster and horror pictures, often are in a certain way superior to pretentious grade-A films. What is objectionable is the standardized character of pictures that claim to be unique; or, conversely, the individual dis-

guise of the standardized pattern. This is exactly what happens in music. Thus, for example, throbbing and torrential string arpeggios—which the guides to Wagner once called the 'agitated motif'—are resorted to without rhyme or reason, and nothing can be more laughable to anyone who recognizes them for what they are.

Such musical conventions are all the more dubious because their material is usually taken from the most recently bygone phase of autonomous music, which still passes as 'modern' in motion pictures. Forty years ago, when musical impressionism and exoticism were at their height, the whole-tone scale was regarded as a particularly stimulating, unfamiliar, and 'colorful' musical device. Today the whole-tone scale is stuffed into the introduction of every popular hit, yet in motion pictures it continues to be used as if it had just seen the light of day. Thus the means employed and the effect achieved are completely disproportionate. Such a disproportion can have a certain charm when, as in animated cartoons, it serves to stress the absurdity of something impossible, for instance, Pluto galloping over the ice to the ride of the Walkyries. But the whole-tone scale so overworked in the amusement industry can no longer cause anyone really to shudder.

The use of clichés also affects instrumentation. The tremolo on the bridge of the violin, which thirty years ago was intended even in serious music to produce a feeling of uncanny suspense and to express an unreal atmosphere, today has become common currency. Generally, all artistic means that were originally conceived for their stimulating effect rather than for their structural significance grow threadbare and obsolete with extraordinary rapidity. Here, as in many other instances, the motion-picture industry is carrying out

a sentence long since pronounced in serious music, and one is justified in ascribing a progressive function to the sound film in so far as it thus has discredited the trashy devices intended merely for effect. These have long since become unbearable both to artists and to the audience, so much so that sooner or later no one will be able to enjoy clichés. When this happens there will be both need and room for other elements of music. The development of *avant-garde* music in the course of the last thirty years has opened up an inexhaustible reservoir of new resources and possibilities that is still practically untouched. There is no objective reason why motion-picture music should not draw upon it.

Standardized Interpretation

The standardization of motion-picture music is particularly apparent in the prevailing style of performance. First of all, there is the element of dynamics, which was at one time limited by the imperfection of the recording and reproduction machinery. Today, this machinery is far better differentiated and affords far greater dynamic possibilities, both as regards the extremes and the transitions; nevertheless, standardization of dynamics still persists. The different degrees of strength are levelled and blurred to a general mezzoforte—incidentally, this practice is quite analogous to the habits of the mixer in radio broadcasting. The main purpose here is the production of a comfortable and polished euphony, which neither startles by its power (fortissimo) nor requires attentive listening because of its weakness (pianissimo). In consequence of this levelling, dynamics as a means of elucidating musical contexts is lost. The lack of a threefold fortissimo and pianissimo reduces the crescendo and decrescendo to too small a range.

In the methods of performance, too, standardization has as its counterpart pseudo-individualization.[4] While everything is more or less adjusted to the mezzoforte ideal, an effort is made, through exaggerated interpretation, to make each musical motif produce the utmost expression, emotion, and suspense. The violins must sob or scintillate, the brasses must crash insolently or bombastically, no moderate expression is tolerated, and the whole method of performance is based on exaggeration. It is characterized by a mania for extremes, such as were reserved in the days of the silent pictures for that type of violinist who led the little movie-house orchestra. The perpetually used espressivo has become completely worn out. Even effective dramatic incidents are made trite by oversweet accompaniment or offensive over-exposition. A 'middle-ground,' objective musical type of interpretation that resorts to the espressivo only where it is really justified could by its economy greatly enhance the effectiveness of motion-picture music.

[4] 'By pseudo-individualization we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself.' (T. W. Adorno, 'On Popular Music,' in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX, 1941, p. 25.)

A Statement
by S. M. Eisenstein, V.I. Pudovkin, G.V. Alexandrov and **Dziga Vertov**

The dream of a sound film has come true. With the invention of a practical sound film, the Americans have placed it on the first step of substantial and rapid realization. Germany is working intensively in the same direction. The whole world is talking about the silent thing that has learned to talk.

We who work in the U.S.S.R. are aware that with our technical potential we shall not move ahead to a practical realization of the sound film in the near future. At the same time we consider it opportune to state a number of principal premises of a theoretical nature, for in the accounts of the invention it appears that this advance in films is being employed in an incorrect direction. Meanwhile, a misconception of the potentialities within this new technical discovery may not only hinder the development and perfection of the cinema as an art but also threaten to destroy all its present formal achievements.

At present, the film, working with visual images, has a powerful effect on a person and has rightfully taken one of the first places among the arts.

It is known that the basic (and only) means that has brought the cinema to such a powerfully effective strength is MONTAGE. The affirmation of montage, as the chief means of effect, has become the indisputable axiom on which the worldwide culture of the cinema has been built.

The success of Soviet films on the world's screens is due, to a significant degree, to those methods of montage which they first revealed and consolidated.

Therefore, for the further development of the cinema, the important moments will be only those that strengthen and broaden the montage methods of affecting the spectator. Examining each new discovery from this viewpoint, it is easy to show the insignificance of the color and the stereoscopic film in comparison with the vast significance of SOUND.

Sound recording is a two-edged invention, and it is most probable that its use will proceed along the line of least resistance, i.e., along the line of satisfying simple curiosity.

In the first place there will be commercial exploitation of the most salable merchandise, TALKING FILMS. Those in which sound recording will proceed on a naturalistic level, exactly corresponding with the movement on the screen, and providing a certain "illusion" of talking people, of audible objects, etc.

A first period of sensations does not injure the development of a new art, but it is the second period that is fearful in this case, a second period that will take the place of the fading virginity and purity of this first perception of new technical possibilities, and will

assert an epoch of its automatic utilization for "highly cultured dramas" and other photographed performances of a theatrical sort.

To use sound in this way will destroy the culture of montage, for every ADHESION of sound to a visual montage piece increases its inertia as a montage piece, and increases the independence of its meaning-and this will undubtedly be to the detriment of montage, operating in the first place not on the montage pieces but on their JUXTAPOSITION.

ONLY A CONTRAPUNTAL USE of sound in relation to the visual montage piece will afford a new potentiality of montage development and perfection.

THE FIRST EXPERIMENTAL WORK WITH SOUND MUST BE DIRECTED ALONG THE LINE OF ITS DISTINCT NONSYNCHRONIZATION WITH THE VISUAL IMAGES. And only such an attack Will give the necessary palpability which will later lead to the creation- of an ORCHESTRAL COUNTERPOINT of visual and aural images.

This new technical discovery is not an accidental moment in film history but an organic way out of a whole series of impasses that have seemed hopeless to the cultured cinematic avant-garde.

The FIRST IMPASSE is the subtitle and all the unavailing attempts to tie it into the montage composition, as a montage piece (such as breaking it up into phrases and even words, increasing and decreasing the size of type used, employing camera movement, animation, and so on).

The SECOND IMPASSE is the EXPLANATORY pieces (for example, certain inserted close-ups) that burden the montage composition and retard the tempo.

The tasks of theme and story grow more complicated every day; attempts to solve these by methods of "visual" montage alone either lead to unsolved problems or force the director to resort to fanciful montage structures, arousing the fearsome eventuality of meaninglessness and reactionary decadence.

Sound, treated as a new montage element (as a factor divorced from the visual image), will inevitably introduce new means of enormous power to the expression and solution of the most complicated tasks that now
oppress us with the impossibility of overcoming them by means of an imperfect film method, working only with visual images.

The CONTRAPUNTAL METHOD of constructing the sound film will not only not weaken the INTERNATIONAL CINEMA but will bring its significance to unprecedented power and cultural height.

Such a method for constructing the sound film will not confine it to a national market, as must happen with the photographing of plays, but will give a greater possibility than ever before for the circulation throughout the world of a filmically expressed idea.