

Guest Editor
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A JOURNEY INTO THE REALM OF FILM MUSIC

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Among many forms of contemporary art, film has been interdisciplinary medium from the start. In times of Lumière brothers, it encompassed visual art forms such as photography and theatre; it also heavily leaned on audio-visual theatrical forms, such as opera, musical and operetta. Due to technical constraints, first films were silent, and yet they were still—if not always, but in most cases – accompanied by music. “Music was employed to provide transitions, direct attention to details, establish atmosphere,” wrote Claudia Gorbman by explaining that its presence in the cinematic discourse was justified by historical, pragmatic, aesthetic, psychological and anthropological reasons (1987, 33–41). When film entered theatres, music became the part of luxury, played by orchestras which replaced pianists, organists, and small ensembles. In time, it became unthinkable for film audience to follow film’s narrative without hearing diegetic music from the story’s space and without being guided by non-diegetic music accompaniment.

The role model for the first film music composers was 19th century opera; especially works of Richard Wagner, Giacomo Puccini, Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Strauss offered varieties of solutions how to write dramatically functional music and how to accompany the on-screen events. It is not a coincidence that early composers of film scores leaned on their own operatic experiences, whether as composers and conductors like Max Steiner and Erich Wolfgang Korngold (they both started their careers in a music theatre), whether as performers like Dmitri Tiomkin and Hugo Friedhofer (Tiomkin started as a pianist and Friedhofer as a cellist)—to name just few composers-stars from the Hollywood Golden era. As Roy Prendergast puts it, “the functional similarities between music in opera and music in films are fundamental and indicate a direct link between the two” (1992, 40).

Among operatic composers, Richard Wagner stands out. With his musical dramas, and his concept of leitmotifs which goes hand in hand with taking the orchestra (not singers!) as the main device in expressing the drama, he laid the groundwork for the film music composing. When describing an orchestral prelude to Act III of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, Bryan Magee interpreted the orchestra as giving a portrait of Hans Sachs, whom we are going to see, after curtain goes up, deeply absorbed in the reading. But prior to that, in the prelude, Magee finds that Wagner’s orchestra revealed “man’s inner nature”, that is, the orchestra showed his soul, which made it “the most inward and revealing music

in the opera” (2000, 251). This is just one example of functionality of Wagner’s orchestra, which was, in this specific case, involved in shaping of Sachs’s character.

Although Wagner used term the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, only in two occasions (in his essays “Art and Revolution” and “The Artwork of the Future”), the idea of unifying of all works of art has been expressed in all of his music dramas and has found its staging in Bayreuth theatre’s setting. If we look outside the world of opera, we are going to find examples of total work of art in diverse media, from painting and poetry (Julia Mar-nat specifically referred to Philipp Otto Runge’s paintings and Friedrich Schlegel’s *Universalpoesie*; 2009) to architecture, applied arts, installations, even contemporary anime soundtrack albums. Therefore, it could be argued with a good reason that film represents the 20th and 21st century’s realization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and that film music participates in a contemporary shaping of Wagnerian vision of it.

Nowadays we unfortunately experience slow but more and more evident death of opera and of classical music seen as antique music genres from young audiences in general. When analysing Fellini’s film *E la nave va*, which deals with the death of prima donna as an ultimate moment in an opera, Michal Grover-Friedlander gives an intriguing speculation on film as the reincarnation of opera. At the end of her *Vocal Apparitions*, nevertheless, she concludes: “If, in 1925, *The Phantom of the Opera* exhibited the fear that opera will haunt it and that cinema will never replace opera, in 1983, at the occasion of cinema’s one-hundredth birthday, *E la nave va* exhibits, through its operatic past, the fear of the end of cinema. Through the death of the operatic voice, Fellini envisions the death of the medium of cinema, a death that is, for Fellini, no less than a vision of a world bygone” (2005, 12–13). When writing these words in 2005, Grover-Friedlander couldn’t know how much they will ring true in 2021, in the face of climate changes, pandemic and lockdowns, which caused drastic reduction in the number of movie-goers in cinemas. And this came right after already noticeable decrease in audience in classical music concert halls which happened even before pandemic appeared and went down even more because of it.

In this quite desperate situation for arts and artists, film found its obvious replacement in television shows and television series (mostly shown on Netflix, but also on network televisions like HBO or Fox) with popularity which exceeds the actual popularity of film as—now old but hopefully

not worn out—media. Film also found its replacement in YouTube clips and in videogames; they all together, including film itself embracing digitalization in the meantime, represent today's world of (often competing) new media. In the time of “intensified audiovisual aesthetics” (as Carol Vernallis calls it), which appeared around 1990s and pretty aggressively changed film and other audio-visual media in the beginning of 21st century, soundtrack changed, too. Vernallis noticed that in the contemporary “digital swirl”

the soundtrack in toto has become ‘musicalized’: sound effects and dialogue are now shaped alongside composed music into musical phrases. Sonic features can also adopt leading roles, driving the film; or sound can mediate, enabling individual film parameters to come to the fore. The image acquires a sense of speed and flexibility: the image’s contents can seem as if they had been poured from one shot into the next. Cutting, too, can bestow an almost percussive rhythmic drive (2013, 5).

Digitalization and internetization offered novelties so quickly and profoundly that they were hard to follow. Concerning arts, it has deeply shaken the artist-consumer relationship by enabling common users in audience to participate in a creative process. In audio-visual artistic world it meant that viewer could affect the development of the story (like in videogames), that he/she could be involved in the making of whole films (in the form of YouTube clips, for example), and that he/she could even exercise creating accompanying music of the audio-visual work by himself/herself. Since most of these “prosumers” (the word was coined by Vernallis, who linked concepts of “consumers” and “producers” in one term; 2013, 311) weren’t musically educated, fundamental means of musical expression in contemporary digital media became reduced to basic manipulations with rhythm and dynamics. DJs and non-musicians skilled with music software have become composers, which also influenced the shaping of film’s soundtrack in the direction of usage of ambient sounds, pulse, and repetition, all rooted in one harmony. Among consequences of these procedures stands intensification of combining of diverse musical genres, which was already included in soundtracks from the origins of the film as media. Namely, scores which accompanied silent films (live or from a phonograph recording), included

music of any kind, of all genres—from local folklore and jazz to popular songs and more “serious” music played by marching bands. The contemporary picture of film music shows different, but it still uses (maybe strange and unusual, to some) combinations of symphonic music and hard rock or heavy metal; symphonic music and hip-hop or electronic dance music (EDM); or some other combinations of “old” symphonic orchestra playing and contemporary, often digital, music making. These “mixtures” don’t have to include symphonic orchestras at all – sometimes, they are made of ambient sounds, pre-recorded electronic music and music performed simultaneously by band musicians live. In Croatia, the last combination brings in fore fine musicians experimenting in different kinds of audio-visual performances like JMZM (which is an acronym consisting of names of musicians Josip Maršić and Zoran Medved) from the town of Rijeka; and like Alen and Nenad Sinkauz, known simply as brothers Sinkauz, from the town of Pula, who now hold a record of four prizes, four Golden arenas for film music scoring gained at Croatia’s biggest Film Festival held in Pula.

So, mixing genres and *crossovering* could sound strange on paper, but it could actually be innovative, inventive and functional in concrete situations. The tendency also helped classical musicians, who were—due to digital development of media which allowed anybody to become a composer; and more recently, because of the pandemic which closed concert halls for a long time—in peril to lose their jobs. Namely, the only music which makes concert halls’ and, more often today, open air auditoriums full, is film music. So, although film music in blockbusters made in first decades of 21st century faced obvious stagnation in development caused by production restraints aimed at securing the financial success of the particular film, the things weren’t black-and-white to such an extent. Two years before his unfortunate death, James Horner expressed the outrage at the current situation in (American) film music, but noticed in an interview, that symphonic orchestras still play *Star Wars* music over and over again, regardless of film music’s stagnation (... 2010. “DP/30: The Oral History of Hollywood, Avatar, composer James Horner”. *YouTube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qrcuw9D92_s). That means that broad public and filmgoers are still eager to hear “old” music written for symphonic orchestras in more or less traditional way, filled with leitmotifs and with inventive harmonic progressions. In times of pandemic, people in general became eager to hear music in concert halls,

and to watch films in cinemas, which may influence another change in film music scoring and in film making after pandemic is over.

As the journal which scientifically and professionally represents all forms of contemporary art, *New Theories* of Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek publishes a special issue dedicated to film music. I am honoured to be invited as the guest editor, and as such I followed main directions introduced by editor in chief Krešimir Purgar in the first issue, published in 2019. Therefore, I searched for original scholarly insights into various fields of contemporary film music, including its broader variants delineated above, such as music for television series, commercials, and music for video games. I was happy to accept approaches that showed classical and contemporary film music in a new light, like the one dealing with often-neglected format of film music soundtrack album. Since all authors investigated current state in music written for and presented in media such as film, television, popular music stages, and literature, their point of departure inevitably showed “the perspective of the radically altered realities of new media, digital visualization technologies and techno-imagination”—as the editor asked for in his prologue to the Issue One promisingly named “The Beginning of an Exciting Adventure” (Purgar 2019, 6).

Taking his words as guidelines, especially the notion that “*New Theories* recognized discrepancy between interest in artistic practice and those sometimes critical forms of theoretical reasoning”, I gathered a fine group of film music experts and film music scholars, some of whom come directly from the film music scoring business and are also film music composers. These are: dr. Kristi Brown-Montesano, chair of the music history faculty at the Colburn School Conservatory of Music in Los Angeles; dr. Mladen Milićević, composer and esteemed professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles; Aleksandra Kovač, well known film composer and songwriter, who holds a MsC in Composition for screen and new media from Edinburgh University; and dr. Sebastian Stoppe, media scholar and project manager at Leipzig University Library, whose primary research field—among many others—is film and television studies, especially science fiction, and music for film and television.

I present you here their works which encompass different studies about the current situation in the film music industry. Milićević investigated lack of melody and any harmonic (and other) music development in contemporary American film scores resulting that most of current

scores take forms of soundscapes. In the study “Melody in Contemporary Hollywood Film Scores” he searched for reasons why film scoring today takes form of sound designing. He found explanation in a temp-track usage, in a development of popular and film music devices such as MIDI mockup, in a music made and programmed for video games, as well as in a development of different popular music genres like hip-hop and EDM. Stoppe, on the other hand, analyzed the field of film music albums, which is, one can say, quite known among film music lovers and soundtrack collectors but is also quite neglected when scholarly insights are concerned. In the study “Original Soundtrack. On the Meaning and Significance of Film Music Albums” he posed the basic question, often asked in the history of film music: can music composed for the film stand independently outside the film? Whatever the reasons for this question and answers to it in the past were, the question is important to Stoppe who claims that “film music albums, and thus ultimately film music itself, should be regarded as works in their own right”. With asserting this, Stoppe leads us in the world of film music albums, their history, their types, and differences among them, showing us how little we know about this apparently obvious form of film music preservation.

Article written by Kovač added to Stoppe’s and Milićević’s research field, since she decided to analyze Gustavo Santaolalla’s music for Ang Lee’s 2005 film *Brokeback Mountain*. When writing the case study named “The Power of Silence and Sound in *Brokeback Mountain*”, she explained some contemporary film music procedures which, in its general use, didn’t sit well with Milićević who opted for more melodic and otherwise more musically developed solutions. Kovač brought forth arguments which explained why music composed for *Brokeback Mountain* was full of ambient sounds, of neutrality, and of long periods of silence. They are, clarifies author, in a concordance with film’s beautiful cinematography, and represent repressed emotions two main characters experience during development of their homosexual love affair.

Kristi Brown also wrote a case study, but not on a specific film score, but on the music in popular television series *House M.D.* which she broadened with intertextual comparison to Arthur Conan Doyle’s novels about the famous detective Sherlock Holmes. In her study “Outperforming Sherlock: Musical Imagination and Representation of Genius in *House M.D.*” dr. Brown explained that, among other things, Doctor Gregory House from 21st century Princeton-Plainsboro Teaching Hospital and

detective Holmes from 19th century novels, share musicianship and love for music (Holmes plays violin while House, and his alter ego, actor Hugh Laurie, play piano and guitar). Music helps both geniuses to relax and concentrate, sometimes even to solve the case they are working on. Brown particularly deals with music-centered episodes of *House M.D.*, taking the episode entitled “Half-Wit”, where “singer-songwriter Dave Matthews plays Patrick Obyedkov, a 35-year-old man who suffered serious brain injury in an accident when he was ten-years old”, as a culmination to her analyses.

I am not going to tell you the rest, but it is as interesting and exciting as all of these short insights show. Instead, it is up to you, respectable readers of the *New Theories* journal, to discover what the content of this special issue, dedicated to contemporary film music, offers.

Enjoy!

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