WILLIAM JOHNSON

Face the Music

"It is written that Alexander was sometime so fervently stirred with [music], that, in a manner, against his will he was forced to arise from banquets and run to weapon; afterward the musician changing the stroke and his manner of tune, pacified himself again and returned from weapon to banqueting."

—From THE COURTIER, by Baldassare Castiglione, 1516.

"Some of my more practised colleagues assure me that when I have had all their experiences my youthful exuberance will disappear, and I shall look upon film composing not as an art but as a business. At present I still feel a morning blush which has not yet paled into the light of common day. I still believe the film contains potentialities for the combination of all the arts such as Wagner never dreamt of."

—Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1945.

"Let's face the music—and dance."
—From the Astaire-Rogers film
Follow The Fleet, 1936.

Nearly everyone responds to music in some way, even if less wholeheartedly than Alexander. From primitive times down to the present, the affective power of music has been used to reinforce the dance, the drama, and religious, social, political, and military ceremonies. And in the last four decades—the era of the sound film—the dramatic use of music has been brought to a fine pitch of precision. Music can be tailored to fit the film's action—or, in some cases, vice versa—to the nearest twenty-fourth of a second. The dynamic balance between the music and the film's other sounds can be controlled with any desired rigor. And the blending of music and film, once made definitive,

can be repeated unvaryingly time and time again.

There is a good deal less precision in attempts to explain the affective power of music. As far as film music is concerned, attempts are practically nonexistent. For "pure" music, on the other hand, there is a large body of research and theory, much of it conflicting.

For reasons which will be examined later, music accompanying a film does not usually work on the spectator in the same way as "pure" music works on the listener, and so it is not necessary here to sift through all that research and theory. A more direct and empirical approach is possible. The affective elements which do apply with equal force to "pure" and film music are few and relatively clearcut. They operate on the physiological plane—the same plane on which Alexander apparently responded to music.

Music can act on the body in three ways: through its rhythm (speed and emphasis of beat), its dynamics (loudness or softness) and its pitch (high or low).

Of these three, rhythm is probably the most potent. From Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* (1944) I still remember the frenetic jazz drumming of Elisha Cook, Jr., polarizing the film's mood of menace and suspense, even though all other details have gone. Similarly, the only memorable scene in Konwicki's *Salto* (1964) is the salto itself, a group dance to a deliberately paced music which briefly gives shape to an otherwise amorphous film.

The physiological action of a musical beat presumably depends on its relation to certain natural tempi of the body, such as the heartbeat or breathing rate. If faster, it tends to be stimulating; and the greater the speed, the greater the stimulation is likely to be. A pro-



HOUR OF THE WOLF: killing of the boy.

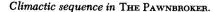
gressively faster tempo, as with William Walton's music for the charge of the French knights in Olivier's Henry V, builds up excitement. The consistently fast tempo of the "Can't Buy Me Love" number in Lester's A Hard Day's Night, accompanying the Beatles as they rush down a fire escape to cavort in a field, is exhilarating: and so is Hanns Eisler's musical theme of rapid triplets with the "Closing the Gap" sequence in Joris Ivens's documentary on the reclaiming of the Zuyderzee, New Earth. The stimulation takes on a more somber aspect in Bergman's The Hour of the Wolf: when Max von Sydow imagines himself killing a boy who stares at him, the rapid monotonous pulsation of beats in Lars Johann Werle's score intensifies the sense of nightmare.

Musical tempi that are slower than the body's natural tempi do not have a positive converse effect. They may be and often are relaxing—like the nostalgic Simon and Garfunkel songs with *The Graduate*—but other musical elements and the dramatic context may combine to give them a different character. The slow melodic phrases with which Maurice Jarre accompanies the climax of Zinnemann's *Behold a Pale Horse* serve to tighten, not relax, the suspense.

Compared to rhythm, dynamics and pitch are extremely limited in the kind of physiological responses they can arouse. Above a certain level of loudness, music can cause pain. Some film composers have deliberately created incidental music loud enough to be physiologically disturbing—Quincy Jones for the anguished ending of Lumet's *The Pawnbroker* and John Barry for the beginning and ending of that fable of racial animosity, *Dutchman*. Here again there is no automatic converse: soft music does not necessarily arouse euphoria or tranquillity. The musical cliché of tremolo strings for suspense is usually played softly.

Both very high and very low notes can be physiologically disturbing, since they are at the threshholds where sound is perceived as a physical rather than an aural sensation. The hanging of Billy Budd in Peter Ustinov's film of that name is accompanied by a piercingly high note on the violins. At the end of Bellochio's Fists in the Pocket, when Julia lets her brother die in an epileptic seizure, a phonograph record sticks eerily on the high note of a soprano. Ominous low notes on the double bassoon—lowest of all orchestral instruments are heard in Bernard Herrmann's score at the beginning of Welles' Citizen Kane, when Kane is dying. In Shohei Imamura's The Pornographer, double bassoon notes accompany the scenes involving a pet carp which a widow believes to be the disapproving reincarnation of her late husband.

From the foregoing miscellany of examples it can be seen that the physiological effects of rhythm, dynamics, and pitch are far from specific. They gain whatever definition they do have from the cinematic context. This is still more true of the other elements of music (harmony, tone color, etc.), whose effects on the

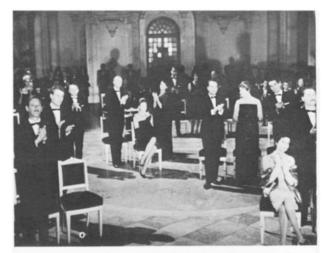




listener do not conform to even the most general pattern.

Acutely dissonant harmony, for example, might seem to be as fundamentally disturbing as loudness or high pitch. But, unlike these, dissonance cannot be measured objectively. Someone familiar with the works of Boulez, Babbitt, and Berio will not have the same concept of dissonance as someone who listens to nothing more modern than Richard Strauss. In film music, dissonance can become even more elastic. Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" sounds much less dissonant on the sound track of Disnev's Fantasia than in the concert hall, not merely because it has been reshuffled and reorchestrated but also because the smoothness of the images and the logic of the story they tell rubs off onto the music itself. In Muriel, by contrast. Resnais sets out to demonstrate the jagged fragmentation of life as lived by his characters, and his deliberately abrupt editing interacts with Hans Werner Henze's discordant musical interjections to enhance and be enhanced by them. Moreover, Resnais's direction even gives a nervous jagged edge to Georges Delerue's nostalgic song "Déjà."

Associations also play an important role in determining the cinematic impact of the more complex elements of music—harmony, tone color, form. To achieve a certain effect, the filmmaker or composer can rely on the spectator's awareness, however vague, of different musical patterns and their usual context. With Resnais's Last Year at Marienbad, for example, Francis Seyrig's music comes in two harmonic styles. At the beginning it is neoclassical, with mild discords resolving into concords in progressions that would have been acceptable 200 years ago; this fits in with the baroque interiors of the chateau and, together with the past tense of the narrator's reminiscences, establishes a sense of reflectiveness and completion. But then, as the camera moves in among the players and spectators of the chateau's theater, the film shifts into the present tense, and at the same time the harmonic pattern of the music slufts to a long chain of discords, still relatively mild but persistently unresolved. While the images



Last Year at Marienbad: Brisk neoclassical music sets the scene (above), slow romantic music accompanies the action (below).



remain formal and baroque, the romantic languor of the new harmony helps to suck the spectator into the flow of unresolved events on the screen.

The difference between the two harmonic styles of Last Year at Marienbad is accentuated not only by tempo and rhythm (rapid 4/4 time against slow 3/4) but also by tone color: the first is scored for string orchestra, the second for solo organ. The rich, fuzzy tones of the organ, partly through their association with the church, seem to lend themselves well to the extraordinary and the ritualistic. Organ music accompanies Buñuel's black comedy The Crim-

inal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz (Ensayo de un Crimen) and Denvs de Daunant's short slowmotion study of bullfighting, La Corrida Interdite; it underscores the credits of Frankenheimer's Seconds; and it occurs in ambient2 form in such somber melodramas as Dark Eyes of London (master criminal Bela Lugosi disguised as a blind musician) and Daughter of Darkness (Siobhan McKenna as a nymphomaniac who kills her consorts and then assuages her guilt by playing the organ). At the opposite pole are the clear tones of the flute, which can have the effect of neutralizing a tendency toward melodrama: this is what happens in Renoir's Boudu Sauvé des Eaux, where the incidental music for solo flute counteracts Michel Simon's roguish playing of Boudu as a "character." The dry, staccato tone of Norman Mc-Laren's artificial music for Neighbours-produced by drawing the sound track directly onto the film—is even more antiseptic, helping to keep the savage fable free of any sentimentality.3

For Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*, composer Brian Easdale uses the tinny, wavering tone of an upright piano to accompany scenes showing the childhood of the voyeur-killer protagonist. The climactic killing of a dancer is accompanied by the ambient recording of a Chico Hamilton fast jazz number in which staccato percussion effects predominate. The nostalgic associations of the former arouse pity

PEEPING TOM: Nostalgic piano music highlights the suffering of the killer (left), percussive jazz the suffering of his victim (right).



for the protagonist, while the dry, unemotional quality of the latter suggests the almost mechanical psychological drive that leads him to kill.

Here again there is more than one difference between the two kinds of music. They are distinguished not only by tone color and tempo but also by form and style—and the listener's response to these musical elements depends almost exclusively on associations. It's a stylistic association that makes one wince in *The Sound of Music* when Julie Andrews walks down the church aisle to be married and the sound track accompanies her with a full orchestral version of the song "Maria." The style of this song, in bouncy 6/8 rhythm, is out of place in the ecclesiastical setting.

While it's easy to tell when a stylistic association is wrong, it can be difficult to tell when such an association is right. There is, for example, a certain style of music—12/8 time, moderately fast, with a sweeping melody, and guitars and woodwind prominent in the orchestration—which invariably accompanies westerns. However, a passage in the same style occurs without sounding at all incongruous in Vaughan Williams' London Symphony. Thus the power of music to set a specific scene cannot be taken for granted, and many screen composers play it safe by simply underlining what the images have already made clear. Open fifths moving in the pentatonic scale reassure one that The Sand Pebbles is set in China; characteristic rhythmic and melodic patterns for voice and guitar endorse the Mexicanness of Viva Zapatal; and the tune of "Waltzing Matilda"



is a continual reminder that On The Beach is set in Australia.

This use of musical stereotypes quickly becomes tiresome. One of the pleasures of Chris Marker's short documentary Sunday in Peking is the incidental score by Pierre Barbaud, which avoids all conventional "Chinese" sounds. But imaginative uses of stereotyped associations are possible, especially when some kind of contrast is involved. In both Ichikawa's The Burmese Harp and Lean's The Bridge on the River Kwai, ambient music emphasizes the clash between Western and Japanese cultures: in the former. the Japanese environment is invaded by British soldiers singing "Home Sweet Home"; in the latter, by British prisoners of war whistling the "Colonel Bogey" march. Incidental music has been put to similar uses. In Tati's Mon Oncle. the scenes in the ultramodern house and factory are accompanied by cool jazz, those in the uncle's vieux Paris neighborhood by a valse musette.

The last example can be construed as a shift in time as well as space, and from this it's a short step to the final sequence in Buñuel's Simon of the Desert, where a "nuclear rock" marks Simon's miraculous transportation to the twentieth century. The use of musical forms and styles to evoke a period may be just as banal as "Chinese" music and the like: a Viennese waltz in the background and one is in a nineteenth-century salon; a snatch of plainchant and one is in the Middle Ages. On the other hand, a film-maker may undermine a scene with anachronistic music, as George Stevens does in The Greatest Story Ever Told when he accompanies the raising of Lazarus with the resolutely eighteenth-century sound of Handel's "Messiah," or as Ulu Grosbard does in The Subject Was Roses when he tacks sixties folk rock onto his forties setting.4 Yet anachronism can be effective in humorous or nonrealistic contexts. In the generally undistinguished Marx Brothers movie Love Happy, when Harpo is forced to empty his pockets, one of the first of the odd items to emerge is a music box; this proceeds to play a tinkling eighteenth-centurystyle composition whose incongruity reinforces

the humor of the entire scene. When Stanley Kubrick, at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*, sets the image of a nuclear explosion to Vera Lynn's singing of "We'll Meet Again" he is accomplishing more than a verbal joke: by superimposing World War II on World War III he is reminding the audience, as they laugh, that the latter will not lend itself to nostalgia so well as the former.

A wide variety of other associations can be triggered by musical forms, from the funeral march at the end of Olivier's Hamlet to the square-dance music accompanying the zany car ride at the beginning of Arthur Penn's Bonnie and Clyde. The potency of such associations can be judged from the fact that it may take only a few seconds of music to fix a particular mood. In Mackendrick's The Man in the White Suit Alec Guinness plays a technician obsessed with developing an indestructible fabric. During his first day's work at a new factory he comes across the research lab, and as he pushes the door aiar to peer inside. Benjamin Frankel's incidental music briefly surges up in the kind of romantic crescendo which usually accompanies a lover's reunion. This is not just an amusing parody but a neat way of making the audience feel the power of Guinness's obsession.

An equally brief association in Asquith's Orders to Kill is too potent. At the end of the film the young British agent visits the family of the Frenchman, erroneously identified as a traitor, whom he had killed during World War II. After leaving, he shakes off his constraint and strides away in what could be a conventional but unexceptionable it's-no-good-crying-over-spilt-milk fadeout. But the music that surges up at this point contains a few bars in the form of a military march, and this suggests a much less acceptable attitude—that the young man sees no further need to feel responsible because he was only following orders.

Music can arouse a rapid and powerful response because it either acts directly on the nervous system or makes contact with associations rooted in the listener's personal experience. The response is nonrational; and this might seem to explain why music can make such a

successful marriage with the screen image, which itself arouses a nonrational response. But music is also the most abstract of arts, with harmonic, rhythmic, and structural patterns that can readily be expressed in mathematical terms. In this, of course, it differs sharply from the dramatic film, which incorporates too much of the randomness and disorder of reality to be reduced to simple numbers. Even the cutting from shot to shot, which can have the metrical regularity of music, is rarely given it in practice, and then only for short periods at a time. The Umbrellas of Cherbourg, for example, as thoroughly steeped in music as it is, contains only one brief sequence cut to a musical beat.

Not only the rhythm but the whole organization of music is different from that of the dramatic film. This difference always plays a part in determining the effectiveness (or otherwise) of a film score, and sometimes its importance may override all details of rhythm, melody, harmony, tone color, and style. There's a simple example in Thorold Dickinson's Gaslight. Anton Walbrook, in his attempt to drive Diana Wynyard insane, slips his watch into her handbag as they are leaving for a concert. Then, during a piano recital, he whispers that she has taken it and must give it back. Her agitation at being accused and then at seeing the watch in her handbag is made all the more agonizing by her unsuccessful struggle not to disturb the music. Here it is the organic nature of music, not any individual qualities of the piece being played, which heightens the tension. While the scene could have been acted out during a play, lecture, or sermon, these do not have the struc-



tured, impersonal flow of music and the tension would have been diminished.

This organic difference between film and music contributes even to films which value a cinematic flow above dramatic action, such as Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. Consider the scene where Keir Dullea is jogging around the Jupiter spacecraft. This is about as continuous as a film scene can be, and yet it's still perceived as a series of discrete events: Dullea is going away from the camera, he's coming toward the camera; now the camera is backing away in front of him; now he's shadow boxing. Meanwhile, accompanying this scene, the Adagio from Khachaturian's "Gayne" ballet suite moves along slowly and plaintively yet with an unmistakable linear flow, suggesting the patient progress of the ship through the immensity of space.

It is because film and music do operate along different lines that the effect of music combined with film can be quite distinct from the effect of music alone. This is seen most clearly in films which borrow their music from the concert hall. A simple and striking example is Arthur Benjamin's "Cloud Cantata" in Hitchcock's 1956 version of The Man Who Knew Too Much. As the cantata is played during the opening credits, the camera cranes slowly forward over the orchestra until the screen is filled with the clashing cymbals which bring the work to a close. This camera movement gives a shape and tension to the music which it would not have for anyone seated in the concert hall: and of course it conditions the spectator to experience even more tension when the cantata is played again at the climax of the film, with an assassin planning to make his gunshot coincide with the cymbal clash.

Usually when concert music is incorporated in a film it is not so much the music's shape as its tone or mood which is modified. The most obvious examples of this are the romantic dramas which use passages of nineteenth-century romantic music (or twentieth-century imitations of it) merely as splashes of sentiment—Chopin with A Song to Remember or

the Warsaw Concerto with Dangerous' Moonlight. But a similar if far less gaudy transformation can be found in films like Hitchcock's Vertigo and Godard's Weekend (both of which use ambient Mozart) and Pasolini's Accattone (incidental J. S. Bach). In Vertigo, when James Stewart is in a sanitarium, broken up by Kim Novak's apparent death, Barbara Bel Geddes visits him and plays a record of some "therapeutic" Mozart chamber music, but he tells her to turn it off because it is making him dizzy, To the audience, the Mozart comes as a small island of clarity and composure amid the heaving orchestral sea of Bernard Herrmann's incidental score, and Stewart's incongruous response helps to show just how deeply his obsession is rooted. The farmyard recital of a Mozart piano sonata in Weekend represents a similar island of calm amid violence, and the yawns with which Godard's "hero" and "heroine" react to it help to show how far they have become addicted to brutality. In Accattone, the calm flow of Bach is superimposed on scenes of violent emotions—such as Accattone's fight with his brother-in-law—and the effect is the reverse of the splashes of music in films like Dangerous Moonlight. Here the music acts as a kind of cooling filter to preserve the somewhat melodramatic incidents from sentimentality.

To a music-loving purist, the use of concert music in Vertigo, Weekend, and Accattone is probably as offensive as in A Song to Remember. The qualities he prizes in music—above all, the formal qualities of balance, of interdependence and contrast of parts, of repetition and variation—are thrust into the background in the movie theater, where the spectator's attention is held primarily by the screen image and the events that it is depicting. In short, whatever the music's complexity in its own right, it is required to serve merely as one voice in the film's contrapuntal texture of sights and sounds. The content as well as the form undergoes the same compression: a piece of music used to accompany a film tends to represent only one mood or association. Just as any of Chopin's more romantic pieces would do to



THE CHRONICLE OF ANNA MAGDALENA BACH

accompany the screen version of his love life, the Bach in Accattone and the Mozart in Vertigo and Weekend blur into something approaching an undifferentiated "Bachness" or "Mozartness," and could be replaced by any of a large number of the composer's other works to the same effect.

An apparent exception to this "shrinkage" of concert music in the cinema is Straub's Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach, in which the featured works are strongly differentiated. But here the music is no longer incidental in any sense of the word; it is central. The film shows how Bach's life is dominated by his music, which flows superbly on over financial worries and even the death of his children. In order to bring the music to the forefront Straub has had to drastically pare down the cinematic texture of his film, leaving only an ascetic minimum of subject movement, camera movement, dialogue, and cutting.

Since concert music can normally be effective in the cinema only with a loss of complexity, it isn't surprising that music which sounds banal to begin with may make an ideal accompaniment for a film. Anton Karas's "Harry Lime" theme is absurdly trivial, but it's doubtful whether the music of Mahler or Schoenberg or any other distinguished Austrian composer could have set the mood of *The Third Man* half so well.

This doesn't mean that banality is automatically desirable in screen music. Both the potency

and the limitations of banal music are demonstrated in Murnau's Sunrise. After the husband's half-hearted attempt to drown his wife, she runs away and jumps onto a streetcar traveling to the city. There is a long and extraordinarily poignant dolly shot taken from inside the streetcar as it weaves its way through sunlit streets and a busy factory district: while the wife sits there still appalled by her husband's action, life goes on unaware outside. The scene is accompanied by a thoroughly sentimental tune that is just right, since the visual texture is so rich that simple, even banal music can help to give it a sense of unity and direction. Later, however, when husband and wife are reconciled and they enter a church to watch a wedding, not only is the music sentimental and banal but the images are, too. Instead of complementing each other the two elements add up to excess—sugar on marshmallow instead of sugar on lemon.

Despite its recorded sound track, Sunrise is a silent film, and its use of music follows the needs and conventions of the silent era. The music of that era—whether produced by a live pianist or orchestra or by some kind of recording—had to perform all the functions of today's multichannel sound track. Not only did it serve indiscriminately as both incidental and ambient music but it also stood in for sound effects and dialogue. Not surprisingly, it was expected to run continuously from the start of the film to the finish.

While live accompanists could produce synchronized effects—for the beating of gongs, ringing of phones, dance scenes, etc.—they did not have the time to devise or rehearse many of these. Normally they would choose a piece of music appropriate to the dominant mood of each sequence and simply play it with any necessary repeats for as long as the sequence lasted. Elaborate cue books were compiled to provide music for a variety of moods. In many cases it was the title rather than any expressive quality of the music that determined the matching ("Light Cavalary Overture," "Hearts and Flowers," "Spring Song," etc.). However, even though the sound of the music might be less

than ideal for the mood, and even though the music might roll on regardless of any changes within the film sequence, the total effect could still be satisfying. This was where the organic nature of music, the sense of continuity mentioned earlier in connection with *Gaslight* and 2001, came into play. Because there was no dialogue or other sound for the music to interfere with, a silent film could benefit from the momentum even of a score which suggested an inappropriate mood.⁶

With the advent of sound it was no longer clear what the role of film music should be. The makers of some early sound films treated music in much the same way as for silent films. and in so doing occasionally achieved novel effects by accident. In Tay Garnett's Her Man (1930), for example, Johnny is the villainous manager of an American bar in Havana and Frankie is a bar girl who falls for a pure-hearted sailor. Not surprisingly, the tune of "Frankie and Johnny" is used liberally on the sound track. At one point, in fact, Johnny plays the tune on the bar piano, and when the scene cuts to a dialogue between Frankie and Johnny in her room, the piano music continues without a break. If the film were silent, it would be routine for the music to bridge the two scenes in this way, but with the music integrated into the film there is an abrupt shift of mode from ambient to incidental. Such a shift has been used deliberately in some recent films (one example is The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, where the singing of "Jerusalem" continues through the capture and beating up of a youth who escaped from the reform school). As a result, what was a carryover from the silent era in Her Man now seems ahead of its time in sophistication.

Most early sound films, however, broke away from silent traditions. There were two main developments, both based on the assumption that audiences over the years had heard enough of pianos and pit orchestras and would now be most likely to pay to hear the human voice:

(1) The all-talking film either dispensed with incidental music altogether or restricted it to the opening and closing credits. Ambient

music, of course, might still occur. I'll have something more to say about this type of film later.

(2) The all-singing, all-dancing film welcomed music on condition that it remained strictly subservient to the human voice and body movements. In effect, all the music in this type of film was ambient, since the instruments playing it were on the scene in reality or by implication. While the musical (together with the film opera and the film chanté of Jacques Demy) is outside the scope of this article, many of the observations made here apply to it as well.

Soon the novelty of all-talking pictures wore off and incidental music began to make a comeback. It was, after all, an added "production value." At first the majority of screen scores were arrangements of existing music; by the mid-thirties, however, scores were being specially composed for the more elaborate "A" features, and during the next decade this practice spread to nearly all films.

It was normal for incidental music of the thirties and forties to occupy between 70 and 100 per cent of the film's running time. But the score was also expected to avoid detracting in any way from the action or dialogue, and two styles of music were developed to show the necessary deference:

Background music consisted of a "wash" of sound devoid of any striking melody, harmony, rhythm, or orchestration, and of any abrupt changes in rhythm or dynamics. While the mood of a background score might vary from sequence to sequence, in some films there was often no perceptible association at all between music and action: the score of Huston's African Queen (1951) is a late example of this. The main purpose of the background score was to keep the audience's ears fully occupied and to strengthen the film's continuity.

Mickeymousing is the pejorative name for the practice of making the score continually echo twists in the action or mood of the film. Because of this follow-my-leader strategy, a mickeymouse score was permitted to be a good deal louder and more idiosyncratic than a back-

ground score. There were degrees of "mickey-mouseness": some scores—Max Steiner's for *The Informer* is a notorious example—followed the action in synchronous detail, while others were content to echo each scene as a whole—tremolo strings for suspense, solo bassoon for drunkenness, and so on.

Neither of these two types of music was satisfactory. The weakness of background music can be seen by comparing two of Carol Reed's films, The Stars Look Down (1938) and The Third Man (1949). The former is directed and edited in a casual, often elliptical style and it seems surprisingly modern today in everything but its music. Hans May's score twitters and mumbles to itself in the background, making no positive contribution to the film at all. The Third Man is cinematically a good deal less adventurous and has dated badly, but Anton Karas's celebrated zither score—simple tunes amplified into the foreground—gives it a modern panache which is still extremely effective.

Background music could even be positively distracting, as if it were coming from a radio in the theater lobby. This was particularly true of the many scores that were conceived and recorded at a "foreground" level and then toned down in the final dubbing of the sound track. But it could happen with any score that had no detectable relevance to the image.

Mickeymousing went to the other extreme: it was distracting because it was too relevant. like a running commentary delivered by a compulsive talker in the audience ("Look, he's going to kiss her Now she's slapping his face . . . "). In Rudolph Maté's dark and frenetic thriller D.O.A., for example, when Edmond O'Brien is eyeing young women in a hotel, Dmitri Tiomkin decides to nudge the audience in the ribs half-a-dozen times with a wolf call on a swanee whistle. Mickeymousing came off best when it stayed close to its origins, accompanying broadly comic action. In Walter Forde's Bulldog Jack, the hero thinks he's eluding the villain by running up a long spiral stairway, while the villain is in fact running down it. As the film cross-cuts from one to the other. the incidental music alternates between a rapidly rising and descending scale, and this heightens the comic suspense. But the limitations of mickeymousing even for humor can be judged from the fact that in one of the most hilarious of all Disney short cartoons, *Band Concert*, the music is independent of the action. Indeed, the humor arises largely out of this independence, as Mickey's band, whirled up into the air by a tornado, continues to play without faltering.

With more serious films, mickeymousing was not worth all the effort involved. Erich Wolfgang Korngold's score for Mervyn LeRoy's Anthony Adverse industriously echoes the moods and tempi of the action, but the one scene in which it fuses with the romantic extravagance of the plot to electrifying effect is precisely the one scene which departs from the mickeymouse technique. Anthony Adverse, in Paris after various adventures, goes to the opera to see a famous singer who is Napoleon's mistress and also, though he doesn't vet know it, the girl he fell in love with years before; she knows that he is in the audience and that her first appearance will be a shock to him. Korngold's music for this crucial moment is ambient (the score of the fictional opera) and simple. There is some recitative by minor characters to prepare for the singer's entrance and then a slow, haunting aria which she begins in the shadow of a doorway (so that Adverse first recognizes her voice), moving downstage into the light for its climax.

It may be argued that this opera music echoes the mood and tempo of the scene just as thoroughly as the rest of the film score. But there's a significant difference. In this scene the music asserts its own shape (that of an operatic excerpt), which happens to fit the dramatic shape of the action. In the rest of the film, the fitting is accomplished at the expense of the music, which is forced to gallop along one minute, turn languorous the next, then pulse with foreboding, and so on. These wrenching changes weaken the music's sense of continuity.

Quite apart from the inherent weaknesses of background music and mickeymousing, there were several circumstances that militated against the creation of good film scores in the thirties and early forties. Most important of all, music was not generally thought of as an integral part of the film, to be planned in advance. It was left to music directors to tack it on after the action and dialogue were set. This also meant that the composing or arranging had to be done in haste, since the studio would want to release the film as soon as possible after it was "in the can."

Another limitation was the level of musical sophistication considered acceptable to the moviegoing public at that time. Though many screen composers would have been at home in a post-Schoenberg or Stravinsky idiom, the popular ear was not ready—or not thought to be ready -for such twentieth-century innovations. Now, in the US at least, a majority of screen composers had been brought up in the tradition of Germanic music-in fact, several were recent refugees from Nazism—and so they turned naturally to the late-nineteenth-century Germanic idiom of Wagner and Richard Strauss. This idiom, with its heavy texture and grandiose structure, could hardly have been worse suited either to the reticence demanded of background music or to the mercurial shifts in mood entailed in mickeymousing. In France and Britain, screen composers such as Maurice Jaubert and William Alwyn could draw on a more restrained tradition of music, with happier results. But it was Hollywood that dominated the film scene.

The state of recording techniques in the thirties also robbed film music of some of its effectiveness. It was impossible to achieve the clarity of sound, the dynamic range, and the separation of different sound track elements that are routine today.

While film music was floundering, some film-makers of the thirties managed to sidestep the problems. They turned their attention to sound effects, treating them as an extension of the film's visual possibilities. In so doing, they created what might be called "underground" film music, often far more sophisticated and effective than anything that screen composers were writing. The most famous example of this is the complex sound that Rouben Mamoulian

devised for the first transformation in *Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde* (1931). This included such ingredients as artificial high and low frequencies; the sound of gongs reversed in time with the impact cut out; and Mamoulian's own heartbeats. It was *musique concrète* a decade before the term was invented—and, more important, its eerie, unidentifiable sound gave the spectator an apt sense of disorientation and unease.

Hitchcock, whose thirties films were accompanied by nondescript arrangements of background music, consistently relied on unusual ambient sounds to reinforce the tension of his images. Here again there are celebrated examples: the scream dissolving into a train whistle in The Thirty-Nine Steps; the organ note sustained by the hand of the murdered organist in Secret Agent; the disjointed drumming by the murderer at the end of Young and Innocent. Most interesting of all is the Swiss folk dance in Secret Agent in which each dancer twirls a coin around inside a bowl, generating a highpitched whine like that of the electronic moon beacon in 2001 and with much the same disturbing effect.

Such uses of sound, developed at a time when incidental music was unreliable and directors had little control over it, have continued to the present day. In several recent films which have no incidental music it turns out that the director has created his own "score" with sound effects. In Bergman's Brink of Life an ambulance siren surges up behind the opening credits, and a climactic sequence is accompanied by Eva Dahlbeck's rhythmic, almost metronomic screams. During the attempted jail break in Jacques Becker's The Night Watch most of the natural sounds have a dramatic charge because they expose the prisoners to the risk of discovery; this is particularly true of the scene in which one prisoner batters his way through the cell floor in what might be described as a fortissimo percussion solo. And in Buñuel's Belle de Jour many of Catherine Deneuve's daydreams are cued in by the jingling of harness or the ringing of doorbells or missal bells.

It's only a step from the musical use of sounds to the use of ambient music, which came into vogue in the thirties and forties. The action of a drama or comedy would shift to a nightclub, for example, where the characters would pause to listen to a torch song. Of course, the main purpose of such ambient music was not usually to add to the expressiveness of the drama or comedy: by introducing a new or familiar song number, producers hoped to cash in on the popularity of screen musicals.

Yet often these musical interpolations did enhance the film. If the mood of the music complemented or contrasted with the mood of the action, and if there was at least some justification for its presence, the music could complete a nexus of associations that would deepen and intensify the audience's dramatic experience. This accounts for the fascination of the nightclub scene in Raoul Walsh's The Roaring Twenties, where racketeers Cagney and Bogart plot darkly at a table while Priscilla Lane gaily sings "I'm Just Wild About Harry." In Howard Hawks's To Have and Have Not, on the other hand, all but one of Hoagy Carmichael's songs cause the drama to flag because they are too obviously inserted for their own sake. "Carry Me Back to San Francisco" is redeemed by its pertinence: it wryly expresses the homesickness which expatriates Bogart and Bacall may feel but are too hardboiled to admit.

The power of this kind of ambient music has attracted film-makers a good deal less concerned than Hollywood producers with box-office success. There's an outstanding example in Delvaux's The Man with the Shaven Head. At a school concert, a shy middle-aged professor goes backstage to watch an attractive girl student sing a romantic song entitled "The Ballad of Real Life." As he moves about, silent and restless, seeking the best vantage point to view her, a transference seems to take place, and the song is pouring forth on his behalf the emotion that he is too inhibited to reveal.

Ambient music in the thirties had a valuable side effect: it broke the stranglehold of background music and mickeymousing on incidental scores. As is shown by the opera in *Anthony Adverse*, ambient music could easily insinuate itself even into a film otherwise dominated by

one of these prevailing types. The next step was for the ambient song or instrumental number to move into the incidental score—and it did this in the form of the theme tune.

Once again the box office was the main spur behind the move. Unlike background or mickeymouse music, a theme tune could be used to promote the film, and it could also be issued separately and profitably as a phonograph recording. But once again it was a move in the right direction. A theme tune could be played softly, but it could not fade anonymously into the background; its orchestration, tempo and even time signature could be varied to suit different scenes, but not to the extent required for outright mickeymousing. Like accompaniments of the silent era, theme-tune scores could assert their presence and, at the same time, deploy the continuous character of music regardless of twists and turns in the screen action.

There were, admittedly, serious weaknesses in the theme-tune score. Following the fashion of the time it was generally long, and its length involved repetitions of the theme that could quickly become tiresome. Moreover, it staked everything on the aptness of its particular theme. Whereas an ambient song (as in *The Roaring Twenties*) was involved in only one scene, the associations of an incidental theme had to complement or contrast with the tone of the entire film. When the theme was right, however, it could triumph over many weaknesses. To take just one group of examples, David Raksin's score for Preminger's Laura (1944), Miklos Rozsa's for Hitchcock's Spellbound

Tokyo Story: Like most Japanese directors, Ozu used occidental music—in both contemporary and historical films.



(1946) and Franz Waxman's for Delmer Daves's *Dark Passage* (1948) are all too long and repetitive and they often intrude on scenes that would be better left silent'. Yet because their themes have a somber romanticism that epitomizes the mood of the three films, the scores are extraordinarily effective.

As with the ambient song, it wasn't only Hollywood that went in for theme-tune scores. The French cinema especially has long had a predilection for them, from Maurice Jaubert's "Valse Grise" for Duvivier's Carnet de Bal (1937) to René Cloerec's heavy nostalgic tune for Autant-Lara's Le Diable au Corps (1949) to Francis Lai's light nostalgic tune for Lelouch's A Man and a Woman (1966). Even so un-Hollywoodish a film-maker as Yasujiro Ozu made good use of theme-tune scores—with thoroughly occidental-sounding themes—in such films as Tokyo Story and Good Morning.

By the fifties further changes had taken or were taking place on the film music scene. It was becoming a common practice to plan the music in advance. Sometimes the composer had a chance to make suggestions about the film as well as the music (even if they were rarely followed), and at worst he had more time to work on his score. Advances in recording techniques were improving the fidelity of the sound track, widening the composer's effective "palette" of sound. At the same time, the frontier of musical style considered acceptable for the moviegoing public was being pushed away from the late nineteenth century. Occasionally it might be pushed backward, as it is for the scene in Yorkin's Divorce American Style where ex-husbands and ex-wives try to sort out whose children are spending Sunday with whom-a scene of confusion that Dave Grusin ironically accompanies with a pastiche of Mozartian clarity. More often, of course, the frontier was pushed forward. Hugo Friedhofer introduced strong dissonance into his music for Wilder's Ace in the Hole (1951), and Benedek's The Wild One (1953) had a jazz-influenced "serious" score; but the most daring scores could be found with thrillers, horror, and science fiction, whose subject matter lent itself most readily to disconcerting

sounds. As suggested earlier, there is an equation between what the eye and ear will accept in the way of stimuli. The visual fantasmagoria of the Star Gate sequence in 2001, for example, matches the bizarre sounds of Gyorgy Ligeti's "Atmospheres" (the most advanced music yet to appear on the track of a major Hollywood feature), and anyone who can enjoy the former is unlikely to complain that the latter is more dissonant than vintage Max Steiner.

All this does not mean that film music has progressed steadily since the forties. Planning, improved recording techniques, and greater musical sophistication have often conspired to produce bigger, louder, and in no way better scores. The irrelevant but reticent background score of the thirties has been amplified into today's irrelevant and brassy "foreground" score. examples of which can be heard with films as diverse as Barbarella and The Bible. At the same time, as theater admissions have dropped and sales of music-from-the-sound-track records have risen, composers have been encouraged to write theme-tune scores in which ostentation and catchiness are more important than relevance. Such scores take the vices of foreground music one stage further, being not only irrelevant and brassy but repetitive as well. Maurice Jarre, who once wrote excellent atmospheric small-orchestra scores for such varied films as Franju's Eyes Without a Face and Zinnemann's Behold a Pale Horse, has become trapped in this kind of composition. Under the pressure of Hollywood, his musical range has shrunk until his theme tunes have become almost interchangeable: The Loves of Isadora echoes Is Paris Burning? which in turn echoes Doctor Zhivago.

Mickeymousing, too, has squeaked into many films of the sixties. Richard Sarafian's Run Wild, Run Free offers a rare example of a recent score that doggedly echoes nearly every vicissitude of the action. Mickeymousing today usually comes in more isolated though no less blatant examples. In John Ford's Cheyenne Autumn, when Interior Secretary Edward G. Robinson consents to help the Cheyenne, a solo violin launches into a sentimental melody that is gro-



Wilder's ACE IN THE HOLE

tesquely out of character. In Peter Glenville's *Becket*, when Henry II hears of Becket's first challenge to his authority, there is a twiddle of strings to convey the king's annoyance—something that Peter O'Toole is well able to convey for himself. In *Tony Rome*, the prevailing jazziness of the score deliquesces into syrupy violin music when Frank Sinatra first kisses Jill St. John. In Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* there is a distracting orchestral surge when the two protagonists first look each other in the face.

Fortunately, some composers have put the technical and other improvements of the past decade or two to better use. It might seem that there is little room to maneuver, since mickeymouse scores are unsatisfactory because they are too relevant while background (or foreground) scores are unsatisfactory because they are too *ir*relevant. Yet with the right balance between continuity (stressing the independent organic shape of the music) and associations





(reinforcing the tone of the film) a score can sail close to both dangers without running aground. Here are some analyses of recent examples, beginning with those that sail closer to mickeymousing.

In Desmond Davis's The Girl with Green Eyes, when Rita Tushingham first ventures for a drive in Peter Finch's car, she starts out being wary but then suddenly relaxes and kisses him. Immediately the scene cuts to the view ahead of the car, a magnificent cloud formation hanging over an open landscape that opens up even more as the camera zooms back to a wider angle; and with this cut John Addison provides a burst of vigorous oboe melody accompanied by strings. While the effect superficially resembles that of Tony Rome and Romeo and Iuliet. it is distinguished from them on several counts: (1) the oboe melody is not an ad hoc creation but a faster version of the main theme of the score (in other words, it is integrated into the music's own continuity); (2) it does not coincide with the kiss, so that there is no gross tautology of action and music; (3) the scene that it does accompany is both a realistic background and a visual metaphor for the characters' sense of liberation after the kiss, and the music reinforces the metaphor while remaining detached from the foreground action, like a theme-tune score echoing only the general tone of the film.

Yet when the foreground action consists of something more complex or less homogeneous than a kiss or love at first sight it can successfully be reinforced by music. In Chabrol's Les Biches, Jean-Louis Trintignant and Stéphane Audran make love while Jacqueline Sassard, who has been sexually involved with both. crouches outside the bedroom door; and Pierre Jansen accompanies this scene with a slow impassioned crescendo of orchestral music. What distinguishes this from the routine emotional churning that so often underscores scenes of love-making and frustration is the equivocal relationship among the characters. In the preceding scenes the three have been shown sitting close together in a circuit of almost absentminded caresses, then embracing as they walk

to the bedroom; and even when Jacqueline Sassard is shut outside, there is a visual link between her fingers touching, almost clutching at the door and Stéphane Audran's fingernails scraping down Trintignant's back. Thus the music, developing without a break as the scene alternates between the inside and outside of the bedroom, helps to bind the characters together again in a perverse and powerfully erotic love scene à trois.

A similar but perhaps less deliberate binding together of characters occurs in Delmer Daves's Jubal. Glenn Ford is given a job and a home by rancher Ernest Borgnine ("the only man who was ever kind to me since my father died"). The rancher's wife makes advances to Ford. which he rejects. After he has visited the ranch house one evening, there is an almost stylized sequence of cross-cuts between the wife gazing from her window toward the building where Ford sleeps and Ford gazing from his window toward the ranch house; David Raksin's accompaniment for this sequence is a high, loud, and passionate rendering of the film's main theme. This music, in a sense, adds realism to the film's action. The script hews to the old Western convention that the hero must be pure of heart, and there is no overt suggestion that Ford is ever tempted by the wife's offer. In the cross-cut sequence, the intention could very well have been for Ford's gaze to imply regret at his awkward situation or sympathy for the rancher, and for the yearning music to refer only to the wife. But since the music flows behind Ford's scenes as well, its implications extend to him and enrich his mythic character with human conflict and desire.

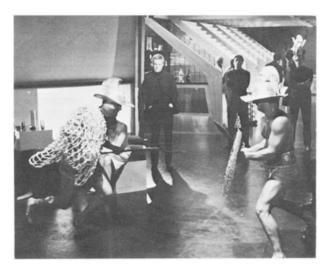
It is even possible for music to reinforce the mood of an entire homogeneous sequence and still avoid tautology. In fact, some of the most impressive uses of music fall into this category. What vindicates them is the unexpectedness of the sequence in question, involving a dramatic reversal of the whole mood of the film. A notable example is in Bergman's *The Magician*, nearly all of which is somber and anguished. Then, just as the magician seems irredeemably plunged into defeat and disgrace, he is sum-

moned to perform before the king. The change is so startling and comes so late in the film that it needs the help of music to establish it firmly, and Erik Nordgren provides that help in the shape of a brisk, bouncy march that continues from the arrival of the royal summons to the final fadeout.

In Jiri Menzel's Closely Watched Trains the Nazi occupation is viewed for the most part only as a backdrop to the everyday concerns of the railroad station staff, and the incidental music shares this perspective by being light or ironic (a triumphal march when young Milos finally overcomes his "premature emission"). In one scene, however, Milos is picked up by an SS train as a suspected saboteur, and the music becomes intensely lyrical. Here the perspective has changed: Milos has now been whisked into the world of the Nazi occupiers, and everyday life is now the distant backdrop—sunlit fields and farmhouses passing by the train. The unexpected lyricism of the music illuminates the shift from Milos's experience of everyday life in all its banality and confusion to his view of it from the outside, a bright panorama of desire.

In the foregoing examples the music reinforces the mood of the action but is distinguished from mickeymousing by its sense of continuity. Other examples of good screen music do the reverse-they assert their own independent shape and continuity but are distinguished from background or foreground music by their protean relevance to every mood of the film. "Relevance" is, of course, a wide-ranging term: it can apply not only to the stately suspense of the organ music that accompanies the stately suspense of the action in Last Year at Marienbad but also to the cheap bouncy streetband music which ironically and effectively accompanies Zbynek Brynych's film about Jewish ghetto under the Nazis, Transport from Paradise.

A theme tune of some kind is the basis of many recent scores whose primary aim is to establish a sense of continuity. Elio Petri's *The Tenth Victim*, set in the twenty-first century, stands or falls on its evocation of a future society, and the bizarre steely buoyancy of Piero



Petri's THE TENTH VICTIM

Piccioni's rock-influenced theme goes a long way toward making it stand. In Albert Finney's Charlie Bubbles and Louis Malle's The Fire Within the themes establish not time or place but the protagonists' state of mind. Just as Charlie Bubbles's success turns sour, so Mischa Donat's jaunty theme ends with a run of sour notes. For The Fire Within Malle uses Erik Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1, and this quiet, elegiac piano music, repeated at intervals throughout the film, embodies the unquenchable melancholy at the heart of Alain Leroy.

In some films both the timing and the tone of the music may at first seem arbitrary. There is a curious similarity between recurring musical passages in Ichikawa's Kagi (Odd Obsession) and Godard's Weekend. Both passages consist of somber chords on the low strings, which in the former occur irregularly as bridges between





sequences and in the latter are superimposed on such scenes as Mireille Darc's description of her involved sexual encounter with a married couple. While the two films do not at first sight appear to have much in common, they could both be summed up as tragedies wearing the mask of comedy. Thus in each case the somber music serves as an unexpected but relevant reminder of the film's tragic side.

With the right kind of film, a score can even have the two main distinguishing marks of background music—a lack of easily identifiable themes and an indefatigable flow—and yet make them a source of strength instead of weakness. Bernard Herrmann's scores for Hitchcock's Vertigo and Marnie and Truffaut's Fahrenheit 451 and The Bride Wore Black are outstanding examples. All four films have a powerful undercurrent of suspense that lends itself to a continuous flow of incidental music. Herrmann's scores do have themes (some even whistleable) but he blends and varies and prolongs them into what may be heard simply as a web of suspenseful sound.

Earlier, referring to the Star Gate sequence in 2001, I said that anyone who enjoys the image is likely to enjoy the music. The negative of this also holds good, and it is especially pertinent to the Hitchcock and Truffaut films just mentioned, which are either strongly liked or strongly disliked. Anyone who dislikes them might argue that Herrmann's scores are as limited in range and as irritating as those of Maurice Jarre which I censured earlier. On the other hand, anyone who likes the films will probably admire Herrmann's music because its chosen range and persistence are exactly right for the suspense.

A screen composer can work only within the tenor of the film. His music may suggest a different mood from the action so long as it is implicit in the film (as in Kagi or Weekend) or throws the dominant mood of the film into relief (as in Transport from Paradise). Except in the special case of the musical, where the music to a great extent determines what appears on the screen, the composer cannot change or improve on a poorly conceived film; the best he

can do is to palliate its badness. In fact, while it is all too easy to create a bad score for a good film, the idea of a good score with a bad film makes no sense. Thus from one point of view the screen composer has an uninspiring task. He is at the mercy of the producer, director, script writer, and editor (among others) not only for the quality of the material he has to work with but also for the leeway in which he can do that work.

Yet everyone involved in the cooperative enterprise of film-making faces similar limits—and in one way the composer's task is more challenging than his collaborators'. He works in a separate dimension with its own vast possibilities of forms and associations, and the effectiveness with which he chooses among them cannot be measured in any way by seconds or decibels. A single note that fits the action or a quiet passage that seems to go its own way can do wonders for a film—and yet there is also a place for the tocsin and the rhapsody. The best screen scores, however simple they may sound, are likely to result from a vertiginous balance between freedom and bondage.

NOTES

1. Even the best books on film music devote surprisingly little space to this crucial topic. The Technique of Film Music, by Roger Manvell and John Huntley, contains an excellent historical survey. quotations from directors and composers, and detailed illustrations (musical passages matched with script excerpts and frame enlargements), but it makes no systematic study of the aesthetic relationship between film and music. Henri Colpi's Défense et Illustration de la Musique au Cinéma, which offers a tremendous wealth of documentation, is even more frustrating: it often seems on the point of revealing exactly what music does for the films but then retreats into mere description and arbitrary appraisal. Hanns Eisler, in Composing for the Films, does devote several pages to esthetic essentials; but he is so concerned to expose the abuses of the time (his book was published in 1947) that perceptive statements are intertwined with others that are no longer valid. My aim here has been to focus on the relationship between film and music, showing how and why music can enhance (or detract from) the spectator's involvement in a film. I have outlined

the history of film music only to the extent that it represents a trial-and-error groping toward a satisfactory aesthetic, and I have cited outstanding examples of film music only to the extent that they throw light on that aesthetic. In describing examples of film music, I have tried to be as specific as possible short of using musical technicalities that would be unfamiliar to the layman.

- 2. "Ambient" is the least ambiguous term I can find to describe music which forms an integral part of the sounds of a scene.
- 3. There is an objective physical basis to this variety, since tone color depends on the particular pattern of harmonics (subsidiary notes higher than the main note) produced by each musical instrument. The organ sounds fuzzy because most of its pipes produce sounds rich in harmonics. The flute, by contrast, has few harmonics, and Mc-Laren's artificial music virtually none. Nevertheless, association is probably more important than acoustics in determining the effect of tone color in film music.
- 4. Stevens's error is in relying on the literary connection between the title and libretto of the oratorio and the content of his film. The association aroused by the sound of "The Messiah"

is likely to be a church rather than the Holy Land of 2,000 years ago. Grosbard's error, I suspect, is more calculating: forties-style music would be a less popular "production value" than folk-rock.

5. It's interesting to note that, in the experimental field, music and film today often exchange their usual characteristics. Many abstract films (such as those of John Whitney) do consist of mathematically generated patterns and rhythms, while aleatory music (such as John Cage's) involves randomness and uncertainty. However, little if any aleatory music has been used with dramatic films, and what follows in this article may explain why.

6. E. Jaques-Dalcroze, writing in the Revue de Genève, December 1925, noted that silent film accompanists had taken to "eliminating all superfluous ornament and picturesque effects and were devoting themselves instead to creating a 'continuous' music whose sole object was to envelop the continuity of the visual action with an aural atmos-

phere of decor."

7. In Hitchcock Selon Truffaut, Hitchcock is reported as complaining that a scene between Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck in Spellbound is spoiled by intrusive violins.