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Score to *The Red Violin* (1999)**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in
Music from the College of William and Mary in Virginia,

by Michael Glaser

Accepted for Highest Honors

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John Corigliano's score to *The Red Violin* departs from the traditional role of the orchestral film score. Most filmgoers cannot recall more than a few instances where the film's score had a significant effect on their viewing experience, because the score is often subordinate to its corresponding screenplay. However, the score to *The Red Violin* functions on an entirely different level. The screenplay traces the three-hundred year journey of a mysterious seventeenth-century violin, weaving through five independent vignettes, each centered on a character's relationship with the instrument. The Red Violin is very much the film's main character, functioning as visual "glue" that holds together the five vignettes, and the music (both source music and score) breathes life into the inanimate object.

The screenplay to *The Red Violin*, written by Don McKellar and François Girard, and directed by Girard, is somewhat disjointed and thus presents numerous challenges to the film composer. The film is divided into five subplots, each distinct in terms of time and place, and each concerned with a different character's relationship with the instrument. Further, the story does not progress in a continuous chronological manner. Although it unfolds piece by piece, the story is *anchored* by two particular scenes: The first is an auction house in modern-day Montreal (chronologically the most recent of the five vignettes), where the prized instrument is being auctioned off to an audience consisting of people who are in some way connected to the violin's past. The second occurs in seventeenth-century Cremona, Italy, where Anna Bussotti, the pregnant wife of the violin master craftsman, is having her future told by her maidservant. This second anchor, in fact, is the first of the five vignettes that portray the other characters who share an obsession with the instrument. After Cesca, the maidservant, explains what she "sees"

in tarot cards that are placed upon the table, the film flash forwards to each of the following vignettes: eighteenth-century Vienna, nineteenth-century England, China during the Cultural Revolution of the mid-1960s, and finally, contemporary Montreal. Thus, the story is framed by both the auction scene and the tarot card readings.

Generally, we move chronologically from Cremona to Montreal, but this continuum is interrupted by periodic flashbacks and flashforwards to both the auction and to the tarot card scene, where these anchor scenes introduce the upcoming travels of the Red Violin. They also both remind us of the instrument's beginning and foreshadow its "end."

The screenplay's focus on a specific instrument, and particularly the violin, presents an interesting opportunity for a film composer. The very nature of the violin – its construction, sound, and performance technique – has changed little since the seventeenth century. Musical styles, however, have changed markedly, making Corigliano's challenge in the film score multi-layered. The composer had to bridge the various styles of western music that have occurred in the past three centuries – from Baroque to Classical, Romantic to Modern. Further, Corigliano's score had to reflect the stylistic and cultural influences associated with each of its owners; he was also challenged to acknowledge the stylistic differences that distinguish one geographic area from another. Finally, Corigliano had to create a musical thread that would underscore the five vignettes; as he states, the "music was necessary to make [the film] a cohesive whole" (Morgan 259). Corigliano's score demonstrates depth and complexity; it succeeds because it surmounts each of the aforementioned challenges.

Background

John Corigliano (b.1938) was raised in a musical family: his father was concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic from 1943-1966, and his mother was an accomplished pianist (Fleming 511; G. Schirmer, par. 9). After studying music theory and composition at Columbia University (B.A., 1959), Corigliano continued his studies both at the Manhattan School of Music and independently with Paul Creston. He then began a career in radio and television (Cockrell 511). Corigliano's career as a concert composer began in 1964, when his *Sonata for Violin and Piano* won the prize for best chamber music at the Spoleto Festival. After achieving success in nearly all forms of concert music, from chamber ensemble to orchestra (winning the Pulitzer Prize in 2001 for his *Symphony No. 2*), and from choir to opera (Composition of the Year in 1991 for *The Ghost of Versailles*), Corigliano expanded into the area of film music in 1981.

Corigliano has scored a total of three films; *The Red Violin* (1999) is his most recent. His score for the science-fiction film *Altered States* (1981) was nominated for an Academy Award, but lost out to Vangelis' score for *Chariots of Fire*. Four years later, Corigliano scored *Revolution* (1985), a film that critics panned. As a result, the commercial release of the soundtrack was canceled, which Corigliano resented; he also claimed that he did not have enough control over the completed project (Thaxton, par. 2), and as a result, he abandoned film music and returned to the concert realm.¹ After fourteen years as a prolific and very successful composer of art music, Corigliano was presented with the script to *The Red Violin*. Although hesitant to commit to another film score, the composer was impressed with both the script (to which he felt that he could write appropriate music) and with director François Girard, with whom he believed he

¹ Corigliano's score to *Revolution* was masked by the abundance of sound effects.

could have a good working relationship (Adams, pars. 3-4). The collaboration between Corigliano and Girard proved successful. *The Red Violin* received multiple international awards, including an Oscar for Best Original Score in 2000, and both the Canadian Genie Award for Best Film Score and the German Critic's Prize that same year.

Ingredients for Success

Many elements go into the creation of a film score, each of which is partly responsible for the success of the final product. Before delving into the heart of the score, its analysis, and relationship with the screenplay, it is useful to look at three factors that differentiate *The Red Violin* from most other soundtracks. First, Corigliano's background as a concert composer played a significant role in the development of his score. The symbiotic working relationship between Corigliano and Girard also allowed for much freedom in the compositional process. Finally, the screenplay itself falls into a very specific category of film: those drawing attention to a specific instrument or style of music. We are better able to contextualize Corigliano's achievement by comparing and contrasting him with other composers writing for both film and concert hall, other composer-director relationships, and other films that draw significant attention to the score.

Corigliano as a Concert Composer: Corigliano's profession as a concert composer, as opposed to a film composer, plays an important role in his works. Corigliano is one of a handful of composers who have succeeded at both concert music and film scores. Film scoring is just another medium of music, but two key elements separate it from writing for the concert hall – audience and independence. The modern-

day concert hall typically attracts an audience of highly educated, musically literate people. Film, on the contrary, appeals more to a mainstream audience made up of people with varying appreciations for music. Further, the composer faces a significant change in independence when writing for the concert hall or for film. In the former, the composer typically has total control over the final composition. In contrast, when writing for film, the composer must work closely with the film director, music editor, and various other personnel. While Corigliano feels that “symphonic composers have certainly loved the idea of writing for film,” he states that some composers simply are not able to do the work because their ego hinders the collaborative process of film scoring (Adams, par. 24).

This is not to say that few composers have attempted to bridge the gap between film and concert music. Since the inception of music for motion picture, a steady stream of concert composers have successfully made the transition, including Dmitri Shostakovich and Aaron Copland, Virgil Thompson and Bernard Herrmann, and most recently Philip Glass and Tan Dun. In fact, both Copland and Dun won Academy Awards for Best Film Score.²

Drawing parallels between these concert-gone-film composers reveals a different approach for film scoring for those who are more accustomed to the concert hall. The most obvious difference results directly from logistical issues. As Corigliano has said, “What you are doing is realizing someone else’s vision” (Adams, par. 5). Thus, concert composers often face a control problem when scoring for film. Whereas in concert, the composer has control over the final outcome of a piece (giving specific instructions to

² Copland won an Academy Award for his score to *The Heiress* in 1941. Dun won the Oscar for Best Film Score in 2001 for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

instrumentalists and conductor), in film, it is the director who ultimately decides how the film-composer's music will be used. An example of where the composer's music was compromised is found in Leonard Bernstein's score for *On the Waterfront* (1954), in which the "love theme" music was drowned out by Marlon Brando's belch (Adams, par.23). Because the director and composer must both respect and trust each other, their working relationship plays an important role in the success of a score.

A good example of a composer who has found success in both concert and film music is Tan Dun, whose career and compositional style are similar to those of Corigliano. Best known in the cinematic world for his score to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), Dun is the third concert composer to win an Academy Award (Best Film Score in 2001). In particular, Dun's life, accomplishments, and compositional style mirror those of Corigliano to a great degree. Both are highly respected modern concert composers who focus on the symphony, opera, and chamber works. Both have written a small number of film scores and yet have taken home multiple prestigious awards. Most important, the two scores themselves closely parallel each other. Each features a stringed instrument played by a prominent concert artist (*Crouching Tiger* boasts cello passages by Yo-Yo Ma, whereas *The Red Violin* relies heavily on violinist Joshua Bell). Further, both films must attribute some success to the outstanding relationship between director and composer (discussed below). Dun and director Ang Lee – like Corigliano and Girard – worked closely in determining how the music would fit with the screenplay ("Tan Dun," par. 1).

It is also worth noting that both Dun and Corigliano combined various themes from their film scores into a larger piece appropriate for the concert hall. Corigliano

expanded upon *The Red Violin*'s two primary themes – *Anna's Theme* and the *Chaconne* – to create his *Chaconne for Violin and Orchestra*, a seventeen-minute concert piece that quickly found welcoming audiences nationwide. Dun composed his *Crouching Tiger Concerto* in a very similar fashion, incorporating several of the themes that were originally composed for the film.³ In doing so, both not only bridge the gap between concert and film composer, but have successfully established themselves as respectable composers in various musical genres.

Ultimately, Corigliano's experience in writing for the concert hall has had a direct effect on his compositional approach to writing for film. The heart of the score is a *chaconne*, a Baroque dance form from the seventeenth-century that is built on the cyclical repetition of harmonies (Silbiger, par. 1). Corigliano also relies heavily on the technique of thematic development and on the variation of several leitmotifs. In one sense, his score to *The Red Violin* is much like an art music composition (similar to Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*), in that the listener is presented with a particular theme – like Berlioz's *idée fixe* – and thereafter hears a series of variations and developments as the piece progresses.

One final noteworthy approach to film scoring in *The Red Violin* is Corigliano's use of silence. The scarcity of music throughout the violin's two-hour journey is almost reactionary to the grandiose orchestral scores by film composers like John Williams and James Horner that have become popular. Films such as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Braveheart*, and *Glory* boast epic scores that show considerable likeness to the "wall-to-wall" style of film scoring that was characteristic of Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Max

³ Because of logistical reasons, Corigliano composed and premiered the *Chaconne* prior to the film's release. Dun composed and premiered his *Concerto* after *Crouching Tiger* reached theaters.

Steiner during film's Golden Era. Corigliano comments that the decision concerning the amount of music in the film was made by both him and Girard:

François, I think, is of the school that less is more – which I believe too. There have been a lot of films that have wall-to-wall music where it just gets to be like the radio turned on. In a sense [it] defeats the whole purpose of what music can do. There are some dramatic cases where silence is the greatest dramatic thing you can do. (Adams, par. 19)

Corigliano and Girard created the spotting chart for the film together and discussed the most effective use of music throughout. This director-composer relationship sets Girard and Corigliano apart from most others.

Corigliano, Girard, and Bell: It is rare in film history to have a director and composer work so closely together, and one need only to look at the synergetic relationships of Alfred Hitchcock and Bernard Hermann, or Steven Spielberg and John Williams, to see the benefits of such collaboration. Despite the fact that *The Red Violin* was Corigliano and Girard's first project together, their close working relationship, characterized by trust and respect for each other, has proven to be fruitful. This relationship was then enhanced with the addition of violinist Joshua Bell as the "voice" of the Red Violin.

As stated earlier, the screenplay to *The Red Violin* presented a number of difficult elements that Corigliano had to overcome. The music needed to unify the various stories, stand alone as a central character, and adapt to each of the environments through which the Red Violin traveled. In addition to spotting the film, Girard and Corigliano also determined what types of music (source, original, etc.) would be used in each scene.

Corigliano comments that it was mutual respect that allowed him to “always feel a collaborative aspect” with Girard. He continues by saying that this respect allowed him to give Girard “something very special, not a traditional film composer thing but something a bit more unusual” (Morgan 261). In Corigliano’s opinion, the stereotypical role of a film music composer is someone who is often treated as an “accessory to a director who’s creating something” (Thaxton, par. 8). His relationship with Girard was much more than this.

A third influential figure in the creation of *The Red Violin*’s score was violinist Joshua Bell. Bell’s primary role was to be the “voice of the Red Violin” (Blackwelder, par. 10), but he quickly became a technical advisor during the filming process, assisting with such things as violin fingerings and technique (Morgan 265). Bell even made a cameo appearance playing the Frederick Pope character during one of the film’s scenes (“Liner Notes,” par. 2). Finally, he and Corigliano worked closely *prior* to filming, as a great deal of music had to be written for scenes in which characters played the instrument. Bell and Corigliano set out to create music that would appropriately represent each of the violin’s owners. After the diegetic music was composed, the filming commenced, and Corigliano returned home to expand on the material, thus creating the rest of the film score.

It is worth noting briefly that François Girard, who is best known for his *32 Films About Glenn Gould* (1993), is also an avid musician. Girard spent considerable time and money researching the history of the violin and the music that would be relevant for each vignette. Bell contributed to this by sending Girard an extensive number of recordings and much literature about the violin and its history (Thaxton, par. 4). Corigliano

commends Girard's capabilities as a director by stating, "he plays the piano, he reads, he's listened to every violin piece ever written, he's done his homework – and you can talk to him" (Morgan 261). Girard's experiences as a musician, coupled with his extensive research, allowed him to communicate better his desires for the film score. Just as Spielberg's musicality helped him trust and respect Williams' ability to score for film (and also earned him a clarinet part on the soundtrack to *Jaws*), Girard's knowledge of the piano and dedication to research broke down a significant barrier that often exists between director and composer.

Screenplays Featuring a Musical Instrument: It is useful to look briefly at other films in which music or a particular instrument receives considerable attention, as context for our understanding of the film and its score. Such an examination reveals the fact that a film having an instrument as its "subject" does not necessarily have to have a score that differs from the norm. For example, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (2001) suggests by its title that its score might consist of considerable mandolin music. Stephen Warbeck's score, however, is precisely the opposite. It is filled with lush, romantic orchestrations, and even features a nylon-stringed guitar in many of the cues. The score lacks any considerable development of the mandolin, short of a few instances where a brief melody sounds as Corelli enters the scene. Perhaps this was a conscious choice by the composer, but it seems that Warbeck was given an opportunity to feature the title instrument (an instrument that rarely is featured in film scores), and decided not to do so. The result is that the viewer focuses less on the role of the instrument itself, which is contrary to what is suggested by the title of the film, and more on the drama that builds among various

characters involved in a love triangle. The score follows the norm and is subordinate to character development and the corresponding screenplay.

A second film drawing considerable attention to a specific instrument is Scott Hicks' *Shine* (1996), a film that focuses on the Australian classical pianist David Helfgott's struggle with familial abuse and its resulting psychological effects. As one would expect with a screenplay following the life of a pianist, the score consists of a mixture of well known classical piano works and original compositions – in this case, by the Australian film composer, David Hirschfelder. However, *Shine* is a film about a man's attempt to overcome a personal challenge, not a film centering on a specific instrument and its music. Corigliano comments that its score subsequently falls short of playing a primary role in the film:

I mean, *Shine* could be a baseball story. It just happened to be a music story, but it involved a kind of crazy person and could he surmount his craziness? That's what it was about, and the music was just incidental in a sense, it wasn't integral – whereas in *The Red Violin* the music is the story. (Morgan 263)

Hirschfelder's score also lacks the same sense of continuity found in *The Red Violin*. The only recurring material is Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 3 in D Minor*, which returns periodically as Helfgott struggles to master the composition.

One last soundtrack worth mentioning is Zbigniew Preisner's score to Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Le Double Vie de Veronique* (1991). The film depicts the lives of two young women who seem to be mysteriously connected with one another. Its score, revolving around two main themes, differs from the typical film score, in that its music is very much connected to the main characters. The two leitmotifs, one representing the

French Veronique and the other representing the Polish Weronika, connect their separate stories. The *Red Violin*'s score functions in a similar fashion, as music is not only linked to the film's main character (the violin), but also bridges various elements of the screenplay.

Bringing the Inanimate to Life

It is rare in film music to have a score that overcomes its subordinate role of "supporting" the theatrical elements in a screenplay. Instead, we typically find that its function is to intensify the actions and emotions of the characters on screen. Commenting on this point, Corigliano argues that "a lot of people don't notice the [soundtrack], because when music is not being played as the focus, they're usually unaware that it's taking place" ("Bow Ties," par. 2). While this subordinate role is normal and almost *expected* in a film score, *The Red Violin* is atypical because the score *is* the focus of the film. Because the screenplay centers on the life of an instrument – a single violin – the accompanying music, both diegetic and non-diegetic, is thrown to the forefront. The abundance of on-screen playing adds to the spotlight music and nearly forces the listener to pay close attention to the score.

François Girard admits to thinking about the music long before the actual filming commenced, realizing the importance of having a commanding score to complement the musical obsession in the film. In the commentary included with the *The Red Violin* DVD, we learn that the filmmakers' goal was to "give a sense of life to an inanimate object." The score not only succeeds by breathing life into the Red Violin as a character, but it also helps to *define* each of the violin's owners. Girard compares the score's role to

that of a character's costume (Blackwelder, par. 13). A costume can transform an actor into a specific character; similarly, Corigliano's music provides that character (the violin) with a personality. Girard's desire for an "exceptional voice" suggests that the music should (1) define each of the four characters who come in contact with the violin, and (2) reflect on the violin's incredible journey.

Corigliano is thus presented with an interesting situation: Typically, the writer of a screenplay decides which characters are to be developed and to what extent. However, it is the Red Violin itself that functions as the main character in this film. This role is made especially clear when the instrument's longevity is contrasted with the handful of other characters who are briefly featured in each of the vignettes. As Girard states, "Both [Corigliano] and Josh had to define the characters. They had to help me give them a personality" (Blackwelder, par. 13). The two primary characteristics of the Red Violin are its infamous nature (bringing death to many of its owners) and its persistent travel around the world over the course of three centuries. Corigliano brings the inanimate object to life by scoring two main themes from which nearly the entire score arises: *Anna's Theme* and the *Chaconne*. These thematic ideas return periodically throughout the film, and are varied and developed so as to represent the violin and its journey.

Anna's Theme: This seven-note theme is first presented during the opening titles, where it is heard in the celli and contrabass. By the second measure, the *Chaconne* harmonies emerge, and the result is an overture-like cue that brings the viewers into the world of the Red Violin. We are introduced to the two scenes that frame the remainder of the film: the auction house in modern-day Montreal, and a violin workshop in seventeenth-century Cremona. Shortly after the title music fades, the auctioneer begins

to describe the final item of the evening – the “so-called Red Violin.” The next few minutes prove to be integral in the overall unity of the film, as we are taken back to Cremona and are introduced to Anna, the pregnant wife of violin master-craftsman Nicolo Bussotti. Anna, sitting with one hand upon her stomach, sings her hauntingly simple melody. Outlining the D-dorian mode, *Anna's Theme* is characterized by the stepwise motion from the first to the third degrees of the scale, and then a leap to the seventh followed by a downward step to the natural sixth (B-natural). The theme primarily sounds either unaccompanied or over a static D pedal-point.

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme"




(transcribed from soundtrack)

Corigliano presents this theme in its most basic, unaltered state. He will then develop the character of the violin (as a character in the film) by means of developing and varying the music in the theme he has introduced.

Chaconne: Corigliano's *Chaconne* consists of a series of seven harmonies and is used to represent the themes of fate and transition throughout the film. These seven harmonies are organized in the form of a chaconne, a seventeenth-century Baroque dance form characterized by theme and variations upon a cyclical repetition of harmonies. The composer's goal was to portray through music a sense of fate and inevitability – “a giant machine that never can stop” (“Bow Ties,” par. 7). Corigliano chose to use the chaconne

– a repetitive, cyclical form – as the ideal vehicle to mirror the unfolding destiny of the instrument as predicted by the fortuneteller Cesca.

Like *Anna's Theme*, the *Chaconne* has a distinctiveness that allows it to be identified easily throughout the score. The intervals are formed by two counterpoint lines moving in contrary motion. The upper line ascends in stepwise fashion, along the D-minor scale. The chromatic passing tone between the fourth and fifth scale degrees – the G# – functions as the leading tone taken from the secondary dominant, which increases tension before we arrive firmly on the dominant. The lower line acts as a pedal point, beginning on the D, moving to its lower neighbor (C#) when we reach the dominant harmony, and then back to the D again. This harmonic progression becomes a cycle of consecutive I-V harmonies, accentuated by a distinct, rhythmic motive: 

The Red Violin - "Chaconne"



(transcribed from soundtrack)

The contrary motion presents two primary benefits to the composer. First, the structure of the harmonies – two notes that, functioning as intervals, expand outward – allows the composer to fill in notes both in between and outside of the intervals. This allows for a

number of different harmonies that can be created (extended, varied) from the initial two notes. The second benefit is that its contrary motion allows the *Chaconne* to be heard, even in the most subtle cues. The chromatic motion, especially when the upper line moves from the fourth to the *raised* fourth, adds tension and unrest. Contrary motion conveys a sense of ambiguity, in that the listener is unsure when resolution will come. Further, this sense of uncertainty results even if the listener is unaware of the effects of contrary motion. Such characteristics allow Corigliano's *Chaconne* to be identified as it is expanded, varied, and re-harmonized.

Corigliano treats the *Chaconne* in the same way as *Anna's Theme* – subjecting it to similar methods of development and alteration. However, one difference is that the *Chaconne*, unlike *Anna's Theme*, represents two concepts: fate *and* transition. This is important because Corigliano treats these elements differently. When the *Chaconne* represents fate, a single concept that is independent of time (i.e. the sudden deaths of several of the violin's owners), we hear the *Chaconne* in its original form (harmony, orchestration, etc.). This is true for all five vignettes, abandoning any stylistic changes that we would expect to hear throughout time. The second function of the *Chaconne* is to imply transition – the violin's physical travel among various geographic areas that occurs over its 300-year life. Corigliano allows these cues to change stylistically, subjecting the *Chaconne* harmonies to remarkable developments and embellishments.

It is important to understand the relationship, both harmonically and conceptually, between Corigliano's two main themes, because they are often heard in conjunction with one another. Fate, transition, and the Red Violin are all intertwined. Corigliano, therefore, uses the same mode for both themes, and sculpts *Anna's Theme* to fit with the

Chaconne harmonies. Her theme also shares the same stepwise motion found in the upper line of the *Chaconne* harmonies. We hear the first example of this relationship, although we are unaware of its significance, with the main title music. Anna's seven-note leitmotif sounds in the violins, and then continues as the *Chaconne* harmonies are played by the rest of the string section:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" with "Chaconne" harmonies



(transcribed from soundtrack)

There are two final aspects of Corigliano's score that draw attention to the music: the relationship between diegetic and non-diegetic music and Corigliano's use of an all-string orchestra. First, the line between diegesis and non-diegesis is blurred throughout the film. Because the main character of the film is a specific instrument, there is much on-screen (diegetic) performance.⁴ For the remaining scenes that are void of diegetic music, we hear orchestral accompaniment. The blurred distinction between diegesis and non-diegesis arises when the screenplay switches between the two types of music almost

⁴ For simplification purposes, I will use the terms "diegetic" and "source music" interchangeably to represent all music that originates from a source in the film's world.

seamlessly. For example, we are first introduced to *Anna's Theme* as we watch Anna Bussotti sing the melody. The next time it returns is shortly after her death, when her husband begins to varnish the Red Violin. This time, the theme is heard non-diegetically, now played by the solo violin.⁵ The score continues in this manner: frequently, we hear fragments of *Anna's Theme* as performed by one of the violin's owners, and shortly thereafter, we hear a non-diegetic repeat of similar material. This alteration between source and background music draws the viewer closer to the musical material, as he or she is forced to distinguish between what is actually seen and what is simply implied by the accompanying score. As a result, because the score is integral in understanding the screenplay, the viewer is forced to pay extra attention to it, even if it is in his or her subconscious.

Finally, Corigliano's use of an all-string orchestra was a decision that both he and Girard agreed upon early in the filming process. The rationale was that it would be inappropriate to score brass and woodwinds in such a string-obsessive film (Thaxton, par. 5).⁶ Instead, Corigliano limits his tonal palette to a fifty-piece string orchestra, and in a few cues, uses harp, contrabassoon, and tympani. Corigliano explains that the "combination of the unity of sound and the variety of sound that the strings have [makes] it possible to have just a string orchestra" (Thaxton, par. 7). The result is that we hear the orchestra as one huge string section that closely resembles the violin, and therefore serves as a constant reminder of the film's main character.

⁵ In the track listing on the soundtrack, a distinction is made between *Anna's Theme* and *The Red Violin Theme*, depending on whether the theme is sung (*Anna's Theme*), or played by the solo violin (*The Red Violin Theme*). Since they are melodically identical and differ only in instrumentation, I will simplify and use *Anna's Theme* to represent both.

⁶ At the same time, Corigliano composed the *Chaconne for Violin and Orchestra*, which consists of thematic material from the film and was written for a standard orchestra.

Anna's Theme

We are first introduced to Anna's Theme in its simplest form – unaccompanied voice – sung by Anna herself. The complete theme lasts thirty-two measures, and is in an AABA form. The A section, and more specifically *the first seven notes* of the A section, serves as a leitmotif for both Anna and the Red Violin:⁷

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme"



(transcribed from soundtrack)

In Cremona, the first of the five vignettes, we have four statements of *Anna's Theme*, alternately diegetic and non-diegetic. More important, the repeats are unaltered from the original. Corigliano, as a result, establishes the theme firmly in the viewer's ear, thus making it easier for the viewer later to distinguish the theme as it returns in various guises.

The pregnant Anna introduces her theme when she is sitting with one hand upon her swollen belly, and calmly sings the first sixteen measures. Minutes later, Anna returns from having her future read, and Bussotti must calm her with predictions that their child will be a great violinist. Accompanying this, we hear a non-diegetic repeat of her theme in the cello. The theme this time sounds more lyrical and somber. The melody is transposed, altered, and re-harmonized as follows:

⁷ The B section of the theme is only heard in longer cues, such as the main titles, end credits, and in the scene where Bussotti is varnishing the Red Violin.

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" Reharmonized



(transcribed from film)

The melancholy sound that is achieved in this variation foreshadows the misfortune that is destined to come to those associated with the Red Violin.

Time passes and we return to a second shot of Anna singing her theme, which strengthens the bond between the woman and the melody that runs throughout the film. We now perceive a strange relationship between Anna and this unknown melody. Her singing is interrupted when she goes into labor, but due to complications in the delivery process, both she and her child die. Bussotti is left alone, grieving beside her lifeless body, and silence fills both the air and the soundtrack. At this point, the camera cuts to a crane shot of Bussotti's workshop, where we look downward to see the craftsman alone with the unvarnished Red Violin on his workbench, and the strange relationship between Anna and the Red Violin begins to unfold. The musical silence that has prevailed in the film since her death is broken at the moment Bussotti's brush first touches the unvarnished instrument. At that instant, when Corigliano states that we "hear the violin come to life" (Adams, par. 19), we hear one more repeat of *Anna's Theme*, this time overtaken by a solo violin and accompanied by the *Chaconne* harmonies. *Anna's Theme* has transferred from voice to violin, where it will remain for the rest of the film. The scene's climax occurs with a crane shot of Bussotti hanging up the varnished violin. We look down upon the freshly varnished Red Violin, as if we are Anna watching from

heaven. After a final repeat of the theme, the auctioneer's voice emerges as a sound bridge to the next scene – the Montreal auction house.

After being introduced to *Anna's Theme* in both diegetic and non-diegetic forms, we are prepared to follow the thematic transformations that occur to her melody as the violin passes from owner to owner. A century after the Cremona vignette, we journey to an Austrian monastery, where the second of the five stories unfolds. The vignette begins immediately with an establishing shot of a chamber ensemble, consisting entirely of young orphan boys, performing a fast concerto that is clearly reminiscent of the numerous *concerti grossi* that Antonio Vivaldi composed while working at an orphanage (Talbot 32). A horse-drawn cart brings various supplies to the monastery, and among the packages is the Red Violin. The music fades and we watch as the monks inspect the violin and give it to one of the orphans, stressing the importance of taking care of such a fine instrument. When the concerto repeats in the next scene, we have a montage sequence showing the passage of time (a technique used several times by Girard), in which various boys play the concerto version of *Anna's Theme*. The sequence concludes with a child prodigy named Kaspar Weiss playing the Red Violin.⁸ Although the concerto's harmonic progression bears no relation to previous musical material, the boy's melody is a derivation of *Anna's Theme*:

⁸ The child prodigy is plagued with what is later described as a "weak heart." As Kaspar performs, we hear his deep, erratic breathing mixed in with his music. Ironically, Vivaldi suffered from a similar illness, to which historians "variously identified as asthma or angina pectoris" (Talbot 31).

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" in Vivaldi-like Variation



(transcribed from soundtrack)

The melody stems from the first three notes of the theme (the first three notes in a D-minor scale), and then enters a series of runs and sequences that not only fit with the accompanying harmonies but are typical of Baroque compositional style. This is the first example of *Anna's Theme* being incorporated into the music played on the Red Violin.

A clearer variation of *Anna's Theme* is heard later in the same vignette when Kaspar is auditioning for Georges Poussin, a Viennese man who will become Kaspar's teacher. This time, the theme has been transposed to G-minor, and is scored an octave higher.

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" in Kaspar's Audition



Original "Anna's Theme"

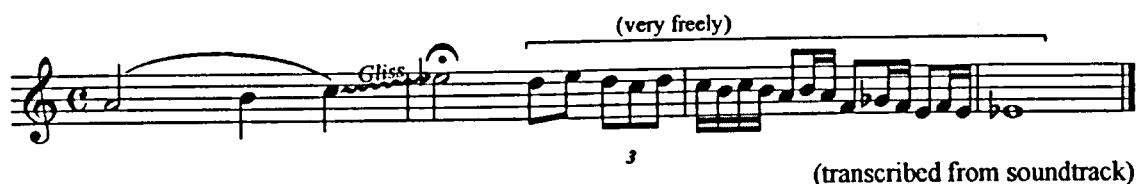


(transcribed from soundtrack)

Leading into the first thematic note, we have an arpeggio outlining the G-minor harmony. Then the first two notes of *Anna's Theme* sound, with an extended pause on the second note adding suspense. After the pause, there is a repeat of the stepwise-motion, followed by a jump to a D-natural, the 5th degree of the scale, before the melody diverges into runs and embellishments. This pattern then sequences upward and repeats several times. Kaspar's playing style is intense, dramatic, and ornamented in late-Baroque fashion. As the cadenza-like piece continues, centered on the stepwise-motion that characterizes *Anna's Theme*, the relationship between the Red Violin and *Anna's Theme* is further strengthened.

Kaspar dies suddenly and a band of Gypsies leads us to vignette three when they steal the Red Violin from his grave, taking it with them on their subsequent voyage to England. Accompanying a shot of his violated grave is a new variation on *Anna's Theme*, this time taking on characteristics of its Gypsy owners. In the Gypsy variation, the stepwise-motion that is characteristic of *Anna's Theme* is retained, but the upward leap to the seventh degree of the scale is altered just as it was when played by Kaspar Weiss: the melody now jumps instead to the diminished fifth (the tri-tone) before it enters a cadenza-like downward melodic line. Even though Corigliano is not using the Gypsy scale (a scale characterized by its flatted 3rd, raised 4th, and flatted 6th degrees), Western listeners hear the tri-tone as being "Gypsy-like." *Anna's Theme*, now transposed to the key of A-minor, is as follows:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" in Gypsy Variation



After a brief, cadenza-like introduction, the music switches from non-diegetic to diegetic music, and we see a shot of a small gypsy ensemble playing various ethnic and non-ethnic instruments (cimbalom, accordion, clarinet, viola, and percussion). The music accompanies a second montage showing the passing of time, in which various Gypsies play the violin. Corigliano's source music has melodic and rhythmic qualities reminiscent of the works of Belá Bartók. Each of the different soloists, performing on the Red Violin, is playing a melody based on the seven-note Gypsy variation of *Anna's Theme* notated above:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" during the Gypsy montage



The main character in the third vignette is Lord Frederick Pope, a fictional nineteenth-century English virtuoso, patterned on Nicolo Paganini.⁹ Pope, who is foreshadowed in Cremona where Cesca overturns the third tarot card and reveals a picture of "*La Diavolo*" (the Devil), is a character filled with passion and sexual energy.

⁹ Pope's character parallels the nineteenth-century Italian double bass virtuoso Luigi Bottesini. Bottesini, who was also nicknamed the "Paganini of the double bass," spent considerable time composing and performing in England (Slatford 91).

He acquires the violin from the Gypsies when they accidentally trespass on his land, and Pope demands it as a form of rent. Pope uses the instrument, along with inspiration from his lover Victoria, to create impromptu compositions. One such composition, demonstrating his virtuosic ability, incorporates fragments of *Anna's Theme* on stage in a large concert hall. After a lavish introduction that precedes the main theme, Pope outlines the first five notes of *Anna's Theme*, buried among 16th-note arpeggios:

The Red Violin – “Anna’s Theme” during Pope’s concert

The musical score is divided into two main sections. The first section, starting at measure 96, is marked 'freely' and features a violin melody with a long, sweeping line. The second section, starting at measure 101, is marked 'Presto, Pesante' and features a dense texture of 16th-note arpeggios. The score includes parts for Violin (Vn.), Viola (Va.), Violoncello (Vc.), Double Bass (Cb.), and Solo Violin (Solo Vn.). Dynamic markings include 'f marc.' (forte marcato) and 'pizz.' (pizzicato). The Solo Vn. parts are numbered 96, 101, 104, and 107, corresponding to the measures shown.

(MM 96-109 of Corigliano’s “Suite”)

Anna's Theme is outlined by the downward stemming eighth-notes circled in the previous example. A reduction outlining this melody looks as follows:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" in Pope's Concert



(reduced from "Suite")

While the piece varies distinctly from the original *Anna's Theme* melody in tempo, vigor, and ornamentation, we hear (and can see in the score above) the stepwise motion followed by an upward leap as a direct allusion to her melody.

A new theme, one that is closely related to *Anna's Theme*, arises during the Frederick Pope vignette. *Coitus Musicalis* – the name referring to *coitus interruptus* – returns throughout the film at key moments to signify the interruption of the Red Violin's music. We first hear the theme played by Pope after Victoria reveals her plans to travel to Russia. *Coitus Musicalis* is a second composition that is "inspired" by her beauty, and because Pope is helpless without the company of his lover, the new theme is a musical foreshadowing of the creative drought Pope will soon experience.

Coitus Musicalis and *Anna's Theme* are closely related, bringing into question whether the new melody is a theme in its own right. In fact, Corigliano fails to mention *Coitus Musicalis* in his discussion of the various themes in the score. However, the

ambiguity that encompasses the differences between *Coitus Musicalis* and *Anna's Theme* is justified by each theme's function. *Coitus Musicalis* is first heard on the Red Violin, and we must remember that fragments of *Anna's Theme* sound each time a character plays this specific instrument. The new theme would therefore encompass fragments of her melody. Still, *Coitus Musicalis* must also stand alone to represent the concept of *interruption*, as it returns throughout the film to symbolize the interruptions of various characters' music-making.

Coitus Musicalis begins with the tail end of *Anna's Theme*, as it leaps upwards from E to C, and then falls a half-step to B-natural. Following that, we return to the minor stepwise motion (A, B, C), and then to an arpeggiated E-major triad:

The Red Violin – “Coitus Musicalis”

The musical score shows the following parts and markings:

- Solo Va.:** Solo Violin part, measures 279-284.
- I:** Violin I part, starting with *tratt. div.* and *uniss.* markings.
- II:** Violin II part, starting with *tratt.* marking.
- Va.:** Viola part, starting with *tratt.* marking.
- Vc.:** Violoncello part, starting with *tratt.* marking.
- Cb.:** Contrabass part, starting with *div.* marking.

(MM 279-284 of Corigliano's "Suite")

Original "Anna's Theme"



(transcribed from soundtrack)

This pattern sequences three times before the whole melody repeats (much like the *Chaconne*). After a non-diegetic repeat of the theme, we witness Victoria's departure, and *Coitus Musicalis* is laced with fragments of the *Anna's Theme*, the *Chaconne*, and the *Death Theme* (the latter two are discussed in the next section). The combination of the four themes reminds the listener of their intertwined nature, both in the ideas each represents and in the mode Corigliano uses. *Coitus Musicalis* represents the interruption of Pope's music-making, and *Anna's Theme* represents the fact that Pope is creating that music on the Red Violin. Next, fragments of the *Chaconne* enter to signify both Pope's fate without Victoria as well as her transition to Russia. Lastly, Pope withers away without his lover, and we are reminded of this as Corigliano layers in fragments of the *Death Theme*.

Frederick Pope commits suicide at the end of the vignette, and subsequently, his manservant returns to his homeland, China, taking the Red Violin with him. During the journey to Shanghai, depicted by a ship crossing surging waters, we hear fragments of *Coitus Musicalis* faintly played in the highest register of the solo violin over low, static harmonies.¹⁰ These fragments represent the interruption of the music that Pope had been creating on the Red Violin. We visually enter Shanghai by means of a crane shot, and

¹⁰ The accompanying harmonies are actually a variation on the *Chaconne*, as it is now re-harmonized and extended almost beyond recognition

Coitus Musicalis repeats in the middle register of the solo violin. The choice here, as opposed to *Anna's Theme*, is interesting because the Shanghai vignette will take place during the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s. This is appropriate because western music, in which the vignette's main character is very interested, has been *interrupted* by the values set forth by the Communist Party. *Coitus Musicalis* continues as a rickshaw transports Pope's former servant to a city pawn shop. As he pulls the Red Violin's case from his luggage, we hear a non-diegetic statement of *Anna's Theme*. Just as the theme took on characteristics when the violin was possessed by the Gypsies, *Anna's Theme* is again slightly varied: it retains the stepwise motion, but the leap to the seventh degree is followed by a downward *whole-step*, instead of the original half-step. As seen in the notation below, the melody passes from the C-natural to a B-flat, instead of the original B-natural.

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" in Chinese Variation

(reduced from "Suite")

Corigliano's choice to keep *Anna's Theme* in D natural minor is surprising, as he could have easily used a Chinese (e.g. pentatonic) scale to reflect the Shanghai culture. Instead, Corigliano is conveying a very subtle message by keeping *Anna's Theme* relatively

unaltered. The music leading up to this statement of *Anna's Theme*, consisting of both *Chaconne* material and the variation on *Coitus Musicalis*, has a distant, uneasy characteristic. These familiar themes have been colored with atonal notes and masked with much reverberation. Corigliano is giving the viewer the sense of being in a foreign land, and further, being outside of western culture. When *Anna's Theme* emerges, it remains in D-natural minor, a scale that is very common in western music. In doing so, Corigliano is commenting on the fact that both the violin and its music are very much part of the western culture, regardless of where the instrument travels. *Anna's Theme* stands out against the atonal harmonies because the Red Violin simply could not fit in with the Chinese culture, especially during a time period where there was a significant movement to abolish all western influence, including music.

The non-diegetic music continues as we watch Pope's former servant exchange the Red Violin for a few coins. The music, a development of the original *Anna's Theme*, parallels the opening scene where Bussotti is putting the mysterious varnish on the Red Violin. In the Cremona scene, the music peaks during the transition from the workshop to the auction house. Its equivalent in Shanghai occurs when the pawn shop owner plucks the jewel from the Red Violin's scroll. Both scenes are strikingly similar and deal with the concept of a primary character being robbed. In Cremona, Bussotti has been robbed of his greatest possession: Anna. He pours his love for Anna, as well as his grief, into the creation of the Red Violin. Particular attention is paid to a shot of Bussotti, looking through a jeweler's magnifying glass, attaching a golden ball to the Red Violin's scroll. In the pawn shop scene, the Red Violin is being robbed of its prized possession: the golden ball. We watch as the clerk uses a similar magnifying glass to remove the

gold from the scroll, salvaging what he can from the ravaged instrument. The scene's accompanying music – with Bell's solo violin in the forefront – has an emotional, sorrowful quality. The decision to give the cue this characteristic, as opposed to a more aggressive sound, was made jointly by Corigliano, Girard, and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen (Adams, par. 22).

A montage that follows this scene depicts the passage of time by showing various customers entering and leaving the store. The sequence ends when a woman purchases the Red Violin for her daughter, Xiang Pei. Pei, who was just a small child, will grow up to be the Shanghai vignette's main character.

After the transition to Shanghai, the score diverges from the previous pattern of quick alterations between diegetic and non-diegetic music. Instead, we have a long span of musical silence (except for a diegetic revolutionary song sung by the Shanghai children's choir) that accompanies a Communist rally and "trial" of the teacher Chou Yan. We learn about the prohibition of studying western music, including any music played on a violin, and witness the punishment for those who break this law. Corigliano's use of silence strengthens the ideals set forth by the Cultural Revolution. He musically depicts (through silence) a world void of any western music, and thus we have a vignette that is primarily void of orchestral accompaniment.

Xiang Pei is a character torn between her love for the Red Violin and her devotion to the Red Party. Because of the prohibition, she keeps the Red Violin beneath the floorboards of her apartment. After Chou Yan's punishment, Pei returns home, contemplating surrendering her instrument. As she removes the violin from its hiding, we have a musical cue that mirrors the moment where Bussotti's brush touches the Red

Violin. The orchestral silence¹¹ that has prevailed since we entered Shanghai is broken at the instant the violin is uncovered. A lyrical, somber *Anna's Theme* sounds:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" Reharmonized in Shanghai

The image shows a musical score for a violin solo and an accompaniment. The top staff is labeled 'Solo Violin' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Acc.'. Both staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music consists of a single melodic line in the violin and a supporting line in the accompaniment. The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, Bb4, and C5, then a half note D5, and finally a quarter note E5. The accompaniment starts with a half note G3, followed by quarter notes A3, Bb3, and C4, then a half note D4, and finally a quarter note E4. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

(transcribed from film score)

The beginning of the theme retains both the stepwise motion and the leap to the seventh scale degree that is found in the original *Anna's Theme*. However, Corigliano harmonizes Anna's melody with an additional line that shares the theme's stepwise motion, only this time at a slower rate.

The non-diegetic *Anna's Theme* is interrupted by the entrance of a small boy, Ming, who has come to call her back to the Communist rally. Caught with the forbidden instrument in her hand, Pei decides to play Ming a tune. She plays a repeat of *Coitus Musicalis*, which is appropriate because her love for music has been interrupted by the rules of the Communist party, and further, her privacy has been interrupted by Ming's arrival. Although she retains Frederick Pope's melody, his passion, intensity, and lyricism is gone. Instead, we hear a very straightforward, plain repeat of the melody.

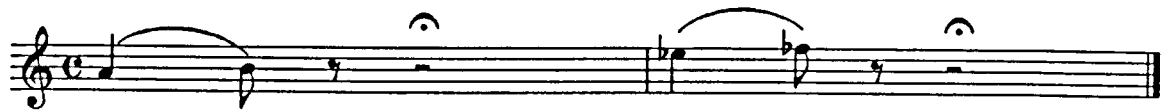
¹¹ I use the term "orchestral silence" because a single cue of source music in this vignette – the song performed by the children's choir – was recorded on location in Shanghai. In an interview, Corigliano commented that he had no control over this music, which diverges from the expected continuation of *Anna's Theme* and the *Chaconne* (Telephone Interview).

This, coupled with the distant look on Pei's face, exemplifies her inner conflict regarding her simultaneous loyalty to a cause and passion for an instrument.

Fearing that she would soon be caught, Pei entrusts the Red Violin to a friend for safekeeping. Time passes, and after various transitions to and from both the auction house and the tarot card scene (the film's anchoring scenes), we learn that the Red Violin has fallen into custody of the Chinese government. We now proceed to present-day Montreal, the last of the five vignettes.

The Montreal segment, unlike the previous vignettes, centers around two equally important plots. As Girard states, "Montreal had to be the story of Charles Morritz, it had to be self resolved, and yet at the same time it had to be the resolution" of all the other stories (Blackwelder, par. 27). In the score, Corigliano must continue the pattern of including Anna's leitmotif (in some form) when the Red Violin is seen, played, or alluded to. We hear these types of musical cues when Morritz first suspects that the mysterious violin is *the* Red Violin, and when the German virtuoso Ruselski auditions the violin prior to the auction. Conversely, Morritz has not yet discovered the instrument's true nature, and Corigliano is sensitive to this idea. The composer, therefore, abstains from making too many bold statements of *Anna's Theme*. Instead, during the various laboratory scenes where Morritz is conducting tests on the Red Violin, we hear only fragments of her theme. As Morritz is piecing together the history behind the violin, Corigliano scores fragments of *Anna's Theme*, such as the half-steps that characterize the theme's first few notes:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" Fragments



(transcribed from film)

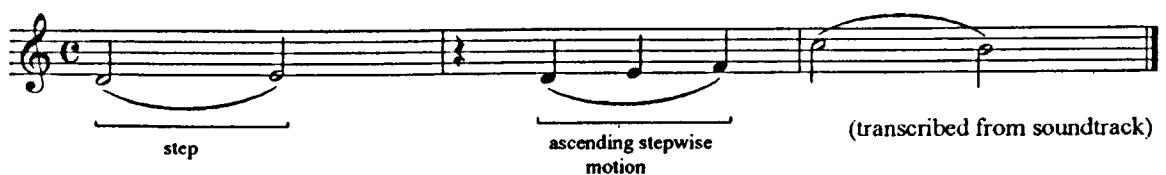
When he is able to confirm that he has indeed found the Red Violin, we hear *Morritz's Theme* – one last variation on *Anna's Theme*.

Morritz's character represents the end of the Red Violin's journey. Just as Bussotti was the master who created the mysterious violin, Girard states that Morritz is the master who uncovers the mystery *behind* the violin (Blackwelder, par. 21).¹² It is therefore appropriate that *Morritz's Theme* bears much resemblance to *Anna's Theme*. When comparison tests between the supposed Red Violin and the only commissioned copy of the famed instrument prove that Morritz has actually found the instrument, we hear a statement of this theme. Morritz softly states, "I guessed I'd never find it," and *Morritz's Theme* emerges:

The Red Violin - "Morritz's Theme"



Original "Anna's Theme"



(transcribed from soundtrack)

¹² It seems more appropriate to deem the Red Violin *itself* as the master, as it enslaves each of its owners.

Visually, one can see the close relationship between the *Morritz's Theme* and *Anna's Theme*. Both themes begin with similar stepwise motives, and are also characterized by leaps that span greater than a fifth. Finally, both themes share the same ascending stepwise motion. Because they are so closely related (both in melody and actual key), Corigliano is able to mix the themes almost seamlessly.

At this point, we realize that this is not the first time that *Morritz's Theme* has been used in the score. In fact, Corigliano has been foreshadowing the theme throughout the film, setting Morritz up as the resolution to the Red Violin's treacherous journey. We hear fragments of *Morritz's Theme* mixed with *Anna's Theme* as early as the Cremona vignette, in the scene where Bussotti comforts Anna by telling her that their child will be a fantastic musician. Underscoring Bussotti's "predictions" are two repeats of *Anna's Theme*, the second of which leads directly into the first six notes of *Morritz's Theme*:

"The Red Violin" - Reharmonized Anna's Theme leads into Morritz's Theme

The image displays two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp). The first staff contains two measures of music, each labeled "Anna's Theme" with a bracket underneath. The second measure of the first staff transitions into the first six notes of the second staff, which is labeled "Morritz's Theme" with a bracket underneath. The second staff begins with a measure number "6" above the first note. The notation includes treble clefs, a common time signature, and various note values and rests. The second staff ends with a double bar line. Below the second staff, the text "(transcribed from film)" is written.

Although the Cremona vignette occurs too early in the film for the viewer to associate *Morritz's Theme* with character Charles Morritz, Corigliano is adding one more element

of unity to the score by foreshadowing *Morritz's Theme*, often in conjunction with *Anna's Theme*, throughout the violin's journey.

Morritz discovers that it was Anna's blood that created the mysterious hue in the Red Violin's varnish, thus reinforcing the strange bond between Anna and the violin, and soon after, we hear a brilliant mixing of themes in the accompanying score. *Morritz's Theme* repeats, this time with the addition of a solo cello playing *Anna's Theme*:

The Red Violin - "Morritz's Theme" layered with "Anna's Theme"

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Morritz's Theme' and features a melody in G-flat major with a 3/4 time signature. The middle staff is labeled 'Anna's Theme' and features a melody in G-flat major with a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is labeled 'Acc.' and features a repetitive eighth-note accompaniment in G-flat major with a 3/4 time signature. The two themes enter in a quasi-canonic style, sharing identical stepwise beginning motives.

This block shows a continuation of the musical score from the previous block. It consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Morritz's Theme' and features a melody in G-flat major with a 3/4 time signature. The middle staff is labeled 'Anna's Theme' and features a melody in G-flat major with a 3/4 time signature. The bottom staff is labeled 'Acc.' and features a repetitive eighth-note accompaniment in G-flat major with a 3/4 time signature. The two themes enter in a quasi-canonic style, sharing identical stepwise beginning motives.

(transcribed from soundtrack)

The two melodies enter in a quasi-canonic style, sharing identical stepwise beginning motives. The rest of the orchestra outlines the B-flat major harmony with a repetitive ostinato. This music accompanies a shot of Morritz, sitting at his research-cluttered desk, framed with a portrait of Anna hanging taped to the hotel window. Girard's decision to

frame Morritz's portrait side by side with that of Anna's visually depicts the idea that Morritz is the end of a journey that initially began with Anna. Corigliano supports this visual juxtaposition by marrying the two themes in the score, and we are brought full circle musically to parallel the newly revealed mystery in the screenplay.

The Chaconne

Corigliano's use of the *Chaconne* unifies the five vignettes even more directly than does *Anna's Theme*. Because of its cyclical nature, the composer is able to reflect musically with the *Chaconne* the idea of fate and inevitability. The *Chaconne*, therefore, becomes an appropriate leitmotif for the fate of some of the violin's owners as well as for the various journeys the violin undertakes. The *Chaconne* is used in two different types of scenes as underscoring: scenes dealing with the misfortune or deaths that accompany the violin, and scenes that are geographically transitional. This distinction becomes important, because Corigliano treats the *Chaconne* and its development differently depending on whether it represents fate or transition.

The *Chaconne* is first heard during the film's opening scene – a shot of Bussotti and his employees at work in the violin workshop. The harmonies repeat three times in succession, before a brief pause that is followed by the main titles on the screen. After the overture-like cue concludes, we then hear the *Chaconne* during one of the two anchoring scenes of the film, where Anna (we think) is having her future read by her maidservant. We see five tarot cards laying face down upon the table, and with Anna's approval, the first card is turned over. At this instant, a moment paralleling the instant

that Bussotti's brush will first touch the unvarnished Red Violin, we hear the first two intervals that make up the *Chaconne*:

The Red Violin - "Chaconne" - Tarot Card Scene



Cesca - "A long life, full and rich..."

"there's... there's travel ahead,
I see a long journey."

Scored in the higher range of the first violins, and abandoning the rhythmic drive –



– the variation contrasts the more foreboding example heard during the title credits. The effect, as the music emerges, is much more subtle than a bold statement of the theme.¹³ There is a brief pause, and then we hear a repetition of the first three *Chaconne* harmonies. Just as we heard during the opening titles, there is an extended pause over the third harmony. This harmony, a tri-tone, is significant because it creates unrest in the listener's mind.

The music ends abruptly as we return to Bussotti's workshop and Anna arrives to tell him of the future that was just revealed to her. We are left in suspense, knowing nothing except that Anna is destined to live "a long life, full and rich." In using the

¹³ Interestingly enough, this particular cue, as well as those for the subsequent tarot card scenes, was a compromise between Girard and Corigliano. The reason behind the seven harmonies in the *Chaconne*, according to Corigliano, was to correspond with the seven "flashback" scenes – one for each of the five tarot cards, plus two additional scenes involving Cesca – where Anna is having her future read (Morgan 259). When asked in a phone interview, Corigliano stated that his initial intention was to have a single chord sustained for the duration of each of the scenes. The first tarot card scene, discussed above, would be underscored by the first chord of the *Chaconne*. In the same fashion, the second through seventh scenes would each have its respective chord. Its effect would be subtle, but if the seven scenes were played in sequence, we would hear one single progression of the *Chaconne*. Thus, we would have one more layer of unity. Corigliano tried this idea, but Girard did not like the result (Telephone Interview). Instead, Corigliano underscores some scenes with the first three *Chaconne* harmonies, and others with silence.

Chaconne as the underscore for the first of many scenes involving the tarot cards, the composer ties this theme to the idea of fate and inevitability.

Shortly thereafter, we are introduced to the *Death Theme*, a leitmotif that is also modally related to the *Chaconne* intervals. Just as *Anna's Theme* and the *Chaconne* return periodically throughout the film, the *Death Theme* is heard each time a vignette's main character dies. Like *Anna's Theme*, it is underscored by the *Chaconne* harmonies and shares similar stepwise motion. We first hear a clear statement of this theme when we learn of Anna's death. Bussotti, having received word that Anna has gone into labor, comes crashing into her bedroom, only to find a group of people mourning over her dead body and that of the dead child. Immediately, we hear the *Death Theme* in its original form (like the other themes, the *Death Theme* will be subject to variation). We also hear the *Chaconne* intervals in the cello and contrabass, tying death to the fate associated with the *Chaconne*:

The Red Violin - "Death Theme"

The first system of musical notation for the "Death Theme" consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. A slur covers the last four notes. The lower staff is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a quarter rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes G2, A2, B2, a quarter note C3, a quarter note B2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note G2, and a quarter note F#2. A slur covers the last four notes.

The second system of musical notation for the "Death Theme" consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. A slur covers the last four notes. The lower staff is in bass clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, a quarter note C3, a quarter note B2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note G2, and a quarter note F#2. A slur covers the last four notes.

(reduced from "Suite")

The *Chaconne* returns in the subsequent scene when Bussotti begins varnishing the Red Violin. *Anna's Theme*, which has now transferred from voice to solo violin, is joined by the *Chaconne* harmonies (but not rhythm) in the fourth measure:

The Red Violin - "Anna's Theme" with "Chaconne" harmonies

(transcribed from soundtrack)

Again, the effect is subtle, but the harmonic relationship between *Anna's Theme* and *The Chaconne* is further established. Because *Anna's Theme*, the *Chaconne*, and the *Death Theme* all share the same mode, and are often scored in the same key, we begin to understand the tightly knit web encompassing the three main themes that are presented thus far. Anna and her melody, the Red Violin, and the death that it brings are all closely related.

From this point, we travel to the Austrian Monastery and are introduced to Kaspar Weiss. In this vignette, the *Chaconne* returns as the underscore that accompanies the journey by Kaspar and his teacher Poussin to Vienna. Poussin describes Vienna as being

an “infuriating, but magnificent” city, and the first of several variations on the *Chaconne* sounds:

The Red Violin - “Chaconne” During Kaspar’s Journey to Vienna

note - Circled notes make up the upper line of the “Chaconne.” The dotted line outlines the chromatic movement in the lower line.

(transcribed from soundtrack)

We notice that the *Chaconne*, since it is accompanying the *transition* from the monastery to Vienna, varies significantly from its original version (which represents fate). This variation seems to reflect the mannerisms of “Empfindsamkeit,” the German musical aesthetic that was popular in the middle of the eighteenth century, distinguished by its intimate, sensitive sound (Hertz 157). Two main characteristics differentiate the new version. First, the *Chaconne* is scored at a slower tempo and is characterized by triplet

arpeggios. The slow, lyrical triplets contrast with the original, more rigid, duple meter. The theme has also been transposed to a new key, E-flat, *and* has changed from beginning on root and 3rd of D-minor to root and 3rd of E-flat major. Because it is common in western tonal practice to perceive a theme played in a major key as sounding “happy” compared to the same theme in a minor key, the switch to E-flat major seems to correspond with the incredible opportunity Poussin has just offered young Kaspar.

Initially, the *Chaconne* is masked by the arpeggiated triplets in the violas. By the third measure, however, we recognize the contrary chromatic motion (characteristic of the *Chaconne*) that is played by the violins, cello, and contrabass. The Viennese *Chaconne* retains the same cyclical motion found in the original *Chaconne*, due to the fact that it can be simplified into a similar movement from the tonic to the dominant (and back). The theme repeats, this time with the addition of countermelodies and additional voices, and Kaspar and Poussin enter Vienna.

After weeks of vigorous practice, Kaspar is ready for an audition for a job that will allow him to accompany a prince on his travels to Russia. Unfortunately, fate interrupts and Kaspar dies of a heart attack just as he begins his audition piece. We return to the monastery for Kaspar’s funeral, and the scene is appropriately underscored by a repeat of the *Death Theme*. This time, the theme is played by the same chamber ensemble (of which Kaspar was an instrumentalist) that had played the Vivaldi-like concerto scenes earlier. As we transfer from the service inside the church to the burial site, there is a corresponding switch from diegetic music to non-diegetic music. A voice-over accompanies the latter portion of this scene: a flashback to Cesca, who overturns the next tarot card, revealing the violin’s upcoming journey to England.

We follow the Red Violin from Vienna to Oxford, and thus have another *transition scene*. This time, we do not hear a repeat of the *Chaconne*, but rather, hear source music played by a small Gypsy ensemble. To show the passage of time and place, Girard utilizes a montage showing the Gypsy band and its various members over the years. As explained in the previous section, each of the Gypsy violinists plays a variation on *Anna's Theme*. Although the choice of source music breaks the pattern of using the *Chaconne* as a transitional element, it is justified by the visual aspects of the montage, including shots of the Gypsies traversing mountains and sailing on what is presumably the English Channel.

In the Oxford vignette, the *Chaconne* returns at key moments to remind the viewer of the misfortune that we now know befalls some of the owners of the Red Violin. Pope, who acquires the violin from the Gypsies, translates his lust for his lover, Victoria, into impromptu compositions. When she decides to travel to Russia without him, Pope is left bereft of both lover and inspiration. In a montage showing the two lovers writing letters to each other (depicted by corresponding voiceovers), we watch as Pope grows ill without Victoria in his life, becoming a listless, depressed, opium addict. The music accompanying this montage is a continuation of the *Coitus Musicalis* theme that had begun when Victoria announced her travel plans. However, the contrary chromatic motion characteristic of the *Chaconne* enters, reminding the reader of the selective fate that is tied to the Red Violin. Fragments of the *Death Theme* are also woven into the score, reinforcing the idea that Pope is dying without Victoria's company.

Pope regains his health, finding inspiration in the Gypsy woman from whom he originally acquired the Red Violin. Shortly afterward, Victoria returns suddenly from her

trip to Russia, catching Pope and the Gypsy woman in *flagrante delicto*. In a fit of rage, Victoria threatens to shoot both Pope and his Gypsy lover, but instead shoots the Red Violin, calling it his “sluttish muse,” and rushes out of the house. The *Death Theme* enters, underscoring Pope’s voiceover announcing his plans for suicide. After a single statement of the *Death Theme*, we return to Montreal, where Nicolas Olsburg, a member of the Pope Foundation, is en route to the auction house.

By this point in the film, the viewer is familiar with the technique of using the Montreal auction house as an anchor from which we flash back to each vignette. After Pope’s death, we return to the auction house briefly before transitioning to the Shanghai vignette. During this transition, Corigliano’s treatment of the *Chaconne* material is particularly noteworthy. The *Chaconne* harmonies emerge, functioning as a sound bridge that leads us from the auction house to an aerial shot of the ocean. The camera appears to rock along with the swelling waves. In a phone interview, Corigliano explained how he used the original *Chaconne* intervals as a framework for the complex, extended harmonies, which he described as “displaced, extended, and variant.” These harmonies are displayed in the following example, an excerpt from Corigliano’s *The Red Violin: Suite for Violin and Orchestra* (1999):

The Red Violin – The “Chaconne” during the journey to Shanghai – page 1

♩ = 60

138

Solo
Vn.

Vn. I
(div.)

Vn. II
(div.)

Va.
(div.)

Vc.
(div.)

Cb.
(div.)

143

Solo
Vn.

Vn. I
(div.)

Vn. II
(div.)

Va.
(div.)

Vc.
(div.)

Cb.
(div.)

(continued on next page)

The Red Violin – The “Chaconne” during the journey to Shanghai – page 2

148

Solo
Vn.
Vn. I
(div.)
Vn. II
(div.)
Va.
(div.)
Vc.
(div.)
Cb.
(div.)

155

Solo
Vn.
Vn. I
(div.)
Vn. II
(div.)
Va.
(div.)
Vc.
(div.)
Cb.
(div.)

(MM 138-161 of Corigliano's "Suite")


Although the contrary motion is more subtle in the new variation of the *Chaconne*, we still feel the sense of unease and uncertainty that results. A reduction of the above score allows us to better see this characteristic of the original *Chaconne*:

The Red Violin - "Chaconne" during the journey to Shanghai

The image displays a musical score for two divisions, Div. 1 and Div. 2, of a piece titled "Chaconne" during the journey to Shanghai. Each division consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The music is characterized by dense, sustained chords and complex textures. Dotted lines are drawn across the staves, indicating expanding chromatic motion. The score is presented in a reduced form from a "Suite".

note- the dotted lines show
expanding chromatic motion

(reduced from "Suite")

Further, the rhythmic motive  that characterizes the *Chaconne* is abandoned. Instead, the extended harmonies slowly fade in and out, alternating between the right and left stereo fields.¹⁴ In doing so, Corigliano is giving a musical representation of the uneasy feeling of journeying on the ocean and its heaving waves.

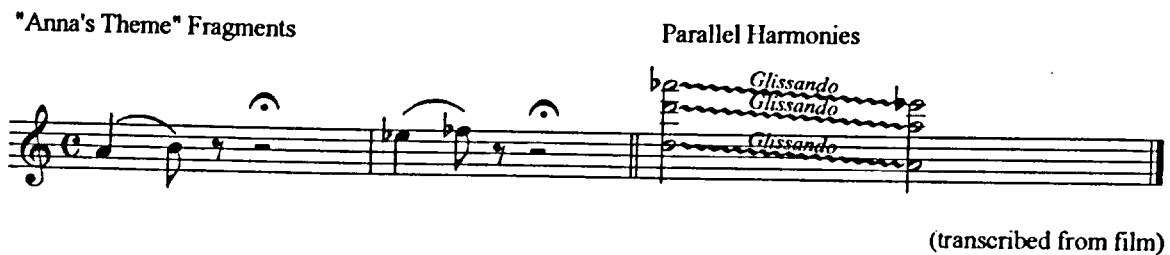
As the transition continues, a variation of *Coitus Musicalis*, signifying the interruption of Pope's music-making, sounds in the high range of the solo violin and we enter Shanghai.

¹⁴ This stereophonic technique was achieved by scoring a crescendo for the right section of the orchestra at the same time as a diminuendo for the left, and then vice-versa. The effect is that we hear the score aurally panning from the left speaker to the right, and so forth.

The *Chaconne* returns only once more during the final scene of the Shanghai vignette. By this point, Xiang Pei, the vignette's main character, has given the Red Violin to her friend, Chou Yan, for safekeeping. After briefly returning to the auction house, where we learn that Pei's friend Ming – now, of course, grown up – is in the audience, we return once more to Shanghai. Cesca's voiceover reveals the next part of the Red Violin's journey, and shots of city skyscrapers and automobiles imply the passage of time. The *Chaconne* returns in its original form (harmonies, rhythm, and orchestration). The non-diegetic music, representing fate, is rightfully accompanied by the siren of an ambulance that arrives at Chou Yan's residence. As Cesca's voiceover continues, revealing that "*[Anna's] journey will end. No question, I see it. One way or another, [Anna's] travels are over,*" we learn that Chou Yan, who has now collected numerous string instruments in addition to the Red Violin, has died. Cesca continues: "*You are not alone. A crowd of faces, friends and family, enemies, lovers. You will attract many admirers fighting to win your hand. And money, lots of money. No, Madame. Don't be afraid. In this card I see... a rebirth.*" We now transition to the last of the five vignettes – present-day Montreal.

By the time we reach Montreal, the *Chaconne* has been extended, developed, and varied beyond recognition. In fact, without confirmation from Corigliano himself (in a phone interview), much of his use of *Chaconne* material would have gone unrecognized. We first hear an example of this distorted *Chaconne* as Morritz enters an airport storage room holding the dozens of instruments, including the Red Violin, that were acquired from the Chinese government. The low, ominous harmonies that sound are very similar to those heard during the violin's journey to Shanghai.

Part of the Montreal vignette focuses on Morritz's research and "gumshoe" work, as he runs numerous tests on the supposed Red Violin, trying to determine its validity. Corigliano uses twentieth-century compositional techniques to underscore these types of scenes (such as when Morritz and his assistant are deciphering the inscription on the inside of the violin). The composer mixes fragments of the stepwise motion characteristic of *Anna's Theme* and *Morritz's Theme* with musical textures such as tone clusters and parallel-moving harmonies.



These fragments of melodies are saturated with reverberation, giving them a mysterious, distant sound that appropriately accompanies the puzzled Morritz.

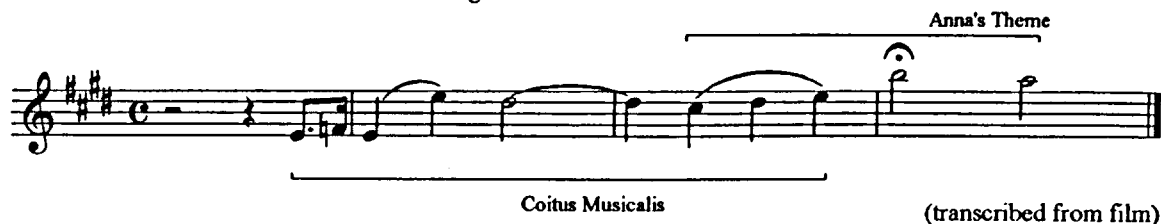
The *Chaconne* returns at two key points in the Montreal vignette. The first instance occurs when Morritz has nearly uncovered the mystery behind the Red Violin's varnish. As he returns to his hotel room, picking up a parcel from the front desk, we hear the first three intervals of the *Chaconne* (in their original state). This cue conveys to the listener a sense that something important is about to happen. Morritz opens the package as he enters the elevator, reading the documents inside it. The *Chaconne* progression is interrupted as the elevator doors open, revealing Morritz's look of astonishment – he has discovered something very important about the instrument. Morritz drops the papers on

the floor, and we have a repeat of the third *Chaconne* interval (the tri-tone), which reinforces the importance of this discovery. From here, we see a flashback to the Cremona scene, and the mystery behind the Red Violin – that it was Anna Bussotti's blood that caused the unexplained color of the instrument – is revealed to the viewer. This entire scene is accompanied by the *Chaconne*.

The *Chaconne* intervals enter first in the cello and contrabass. Their rhythmic drive returns, accented by the addition of tympani, giving a sense of urgency and importance to the scene.¹⁵ We see Bussotti carrying his dead wife to the workshop, where he lays her upon a table. The *Chaconne* harmonies cycle again, this time with the addition of the *Death Theme* in the first violins. As the *Chaconne* repeats, additional voices thicken the sound and build intensity. We pause briefly on the second harmony, and then have several upward glissandi that end on a high A-natural. In the opening titles, this progression led us to a clear statement of *Anna's Theme*. However, because the relationship between Anna and the Red Violin had not yet been created *in the story* (only the viewers are aware of this relationship), we now move deceptively into a new passage. The extended (modernistic) *Chaconne* harmonies that we heard earlier in Montreal return, along with a melody in the first violins that seems to wander aimlessly in the high octaves. Morritz assembles a paintbrush from locks of Anna's hair, and creates a varnish that is colored by her blood. Eventually, the violins play a melody that combines both *Coitus Musicalis* with *Anna's Theme*, signifying the fact that Bussotti's love for Anna was interrupted by her sudden death:

¹⁵ The cue is similar to the Title Music in orchestration.

The Red Violin - "Coitus Musicalis" blending into "Anna's Theme"



As the eerie music continues, we hear fragments of the stepwise motion characteristic of both *Anna's Theme* and *Morritz's Theme*. While this style of composition is undoubtedly atypical of seventeenth-century music, Corigliano is tying Morritz's discovery and the Montreal vignette to Cremona and the creation of the Red Violin. The music ends abruptly when Bussotti finishes varnishing the violin, and we are left in silence as he stares at his completed instrument. The film returns to Montreal, where we see Morritz gazing at the Red Violin, framed by its f-shaped sound hole.

Once Morritz has uncovered the story behind the Red Violin, we progress chronologically, in Montreal, through the days leading up to the auction. Morritz is questioned as to whether the abundance of research and testing on the mysterious violin confirmed that it indeed was the Red Violin, and upon confirmation, a press release summons potential buyers who are in some way attached to the violin's past (i.e. several Austrian monks, a member of the Pope Foundation, and Xiang Pei's friend Ming). We then reach the culminating scene of the movie – the auction scene to which we have returned repeatedly throughout the film.

The auction scene becomes not only the battleground for each of the potential buyers, but also for Morritz's attempt to swap the only true copy of the Red Violin, which he owns, for the famed instrument itself. For two hours, we have been given fragments

of this scene, learning of the various bidders who can trace lineage to the instrument, but not knowing anything of its outcome or even of Morritz's intended larceny. Morritz, enslaved by his obsession for the Red Violin, makes an impromptu visit to the auction house, impulsively stopping en route to the airport for his flight home. The *Chaconne*, representing both the fate of the violin *and* its upcoming transition, returns one final time. The contrabasses and tympani sound a low C#, which becomes the root of the first *Chaconne* interval (now beginning on C# instead of D), as Morritz enters the auction house.¹⁶ The low, ominous, pedal-point suggests that the story is about to take a slight twist. Before the bidding begins for the Red Violin, Morritz makes his way backstage with the fake copy of the instrument. Corigliano slowly builds the extended *Chaconne* harmonies, stacking them higher and higher in terms of pitch and layers, thus adding to the growing tension in the screenplay. This technique becomes the undercurrent for the entire auction/theft scene. Morritz exchanges his copy for the real Red Violin and attempts to leave the auction house before its employees discover his larceny. The *Chaconne* harmonies grow higher, thicker, and cycle faster to accompany the building tension. The composer subdivides the rhythmic pulsing of the *Chaconne* harmonies, beginning first with quarter notes, and progressing slowly to thirty-second notes divisions, to musically depict the state of urgency:

¹⁶ Note – this is one of a few instances where Corigliano uses non-stringed instruments. The attack of the tympani adds to the sense of urgency in the music.

The Red Violin – The “Chaconne” during the theft scene – Page 1

♩ = 60

296

Temp.

Perc. 1 (R.D.)

Vibraphone, mace on (perc.) *f* *lv. dim.*

Perc. 2

Hp. *f*

Chaconne Intervals

♩ = 60

Vn. I (div.)

Vn. II (div.)

Va. (div.)

Vc. (div.)

Viol. *f*

Viola *f*

Chaconne Intervals

Cl. (div.)

not past, play between and including given pitches

change to and

play C3 Appear D, slowly gliss. upward from C3

(continued on next page)

The Red Violin – The “Chaconne” during the theft scene – Page 2

298 *accel.* (♩ = 80) (♩ = 100) ♩ = 60, ♩ = 120

Temp.

Perc. 1 (R.D.)

Perc. 2 (Vib.)
Lv. dim.
(Dr.)

Chaconne Intervals Hp.

accel. (♩ = 80) (♩ = 100) ♩ = 60, ♩ = 120

Vn. I (div.)

Vn. II (div.)

Vc. (div.)

Chaconne Intervals Vc. (div.)

Cb. (div.)

(MM 296-301 of Corigliano's "Suite")

Only when Morritz evades security and arrives safely at his taxi is this tension released. At this point, the story is nearly complete, and we have silence.

The Rebirth

After Morritz is safely en route to the airport, accompanied by the stolen Red Violin, one final scene serves to unify and bring closure to the five vignettes. Morritz, riding in the back seat of the taxi, telephones home to his family. During this conversation, we learn that the Red Violin is to be a gift for his young daughter. With this, Morritz is fulfilling Bussotti's initial intention – to give the violin as a gift to his child. After 300 years, the violin will be at rest. To complement this, we hear one final statement of *Anna's Theme* played by solo violin, in its unaltered form – just as we first heard in the varnishing scene. The theme continues and is joined by the *Chaconne* harmonies. We flash back one last time to Cremona, and the fortunetelling scene concludes. Anna returns to her husband and her maidservant is left alone to collect the tarot cards. The film's final shot is of the five tarot cards, now facing down upon the table to signify the end of the story. As the screen fades to black, the end credits roll and both *Anna's Theme* and the *Chaconne* continue as exit music.

Conclusion

Corigliano's score to *The Red Violin* can be interpreted by people with varying appreciations of music, ranging from average moviegoers to people who critique film and film scores as a profession. Those who are barely musically literate may describe it as lush, "classical" music that evokes the revered works of Beethoven and Mozart. Others,

who are perhaps more experienced in the world of film music, might find the music too generalized and not completely accurate to the time period. While both sides may make valid claims for their arguments (as they have done so in myriads of film scores), the more important point is to analyze *if* and *why* the film score works as an accompaniment to the screenplay.

Corigliano's score *does in fact* succeed because it overcomes numerous obstacles set forth by the screenplay. When attention is focused on the life and travels of the Red Violin, the instrument's music is fore-grounded, and therefore an attentive ear is placed on Corigliano's score. Corigliano's music evolves stylistically through time as we trace the 300-year journey of the instrument, progressing through various western musical style periods. His score acknowledges each of the cultures in which the Red Violin is immersed, such as those associated with the Gypsies and the Chinese, and Corigliano alters melodic lines to reflect the musical coloration associated with these particular cultures. Corigliano's method of scoring also fits appropriately with the idea that the Red Violin is the single unifying force that holds together the film's five subplots. Throughout the two-hour epic, the composer retains a continuous thread of recognizable themes and variations that act as bridges between the numerous characters, cultures, languages, and geographic regions to which we are introduced.

Corigliano's score then succeeds on a much deeper level. While *Anna's Theme* serves as the musical representation of the idea that the violin is the visual glue unifying the stories, themes like *Coitus Musicalis* and the *Chaconne* emerge to support the more subtle ideas of interruption and transition. Corigliano also uses musical foreshadowing in the first vignette to prepare the viewer for the resolution that is brought forth by Charles

Morritz. Finally, the score succeeds because it puts a distinct ending on the story during the film's final scenes. Although the viewer is left questioning if Morritz is simply another victim of the Red Violin's fate, Corigliano offers resolution in the accompanying score. After hearing *Morritz's Theme* mixed with *Anna's Theme* (a musical union of the two characters), and then *Anna's Theme* void of any alteration (which brings the viewer full circle to the film's opening scene), we are reassured that the story has come to an end.

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