

4-11-2014

Music for Silent Film: Critical Analysis of film scores in Metropolis and The Artist

Kelsey O'Brien

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_13

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: O'Brien, Kelsey, "Music for Silent Film: Critical Analysis of film scores in Metropolis and The Artist" (2014). *13th Annual Celebration for Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance (2014)*. Paper 146.
http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/curcp_13/146
April 11, 2014. Copyright © 2014 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

This Poster is brought to you for free and open access by the Celebration for Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in 13th Annual Celebration for Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance (2014) by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Music for Silent Film:

Critical Analysis of the Musical Scores for *Metropolis* (1927) and *The Artist* (2011)

Kelsey O'Brien - Music 491 - Hope College 2013

Metropolis (1927)

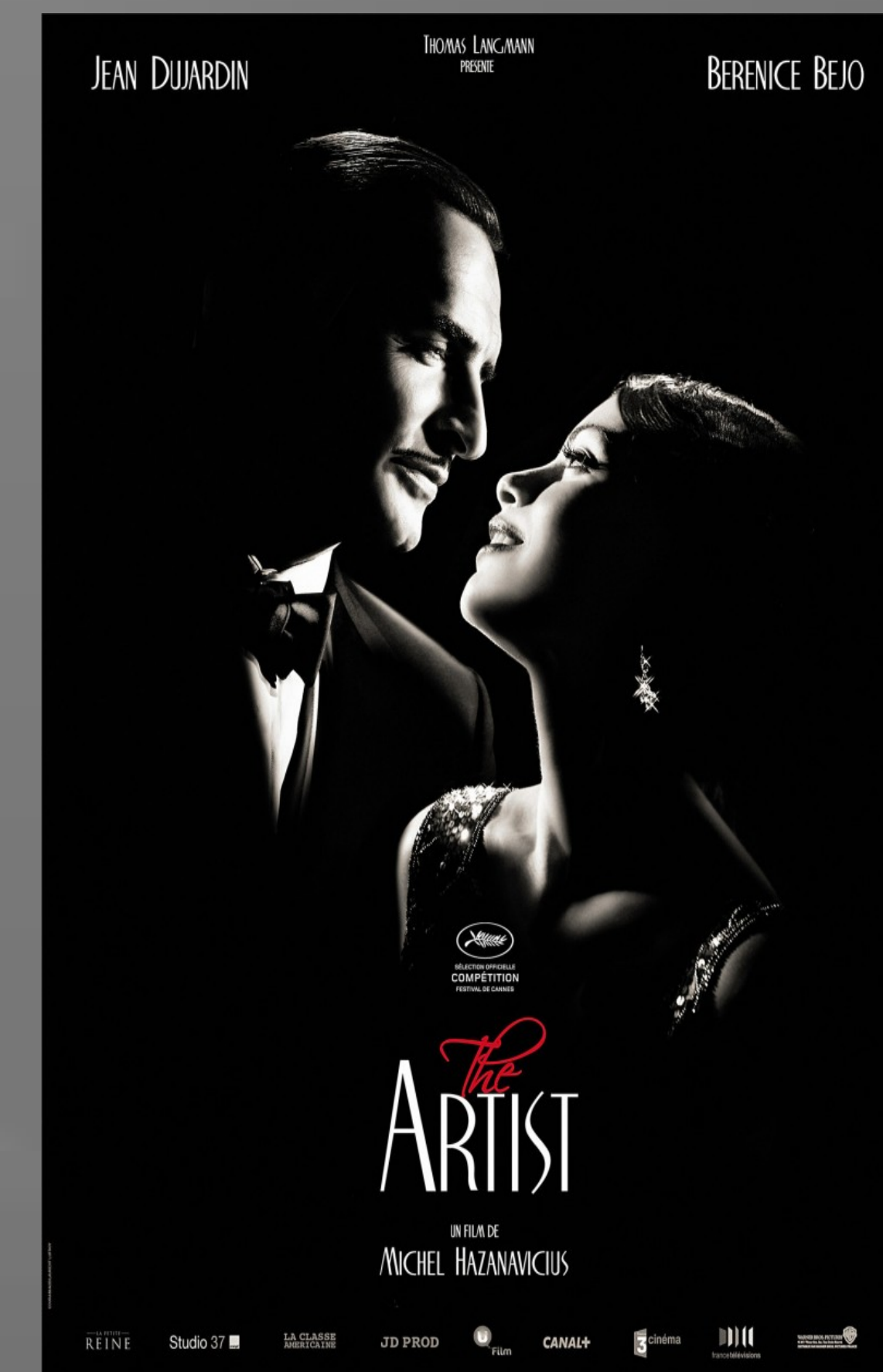


Silent Film : History and Conventions

Abstract

Since the first silent films were made, the partnership with music contributed to the overall success, supplementing the experience by conveying moods, contexts, and themes. Silent films, present roughly during the first thirty years of the 1900's, were a progressive and popular new medium of entertainment and the communication of ideas; to achieve their full impact, however, was not possible without the addition of music to the projections. Whether originating from traditional theatre practices or simply to cover the noise of the projectors, music for silent films consistently added a layer of believability to the action on screen; through the use of musical scores, the audience was able to more easily understand the location, context, and tone of film, becoming more easily immersed in the story. The 1927 film *Metropolis* heavily used the technique of leitmotifs to illustrate distinct characters. The score by Gottfried Huppertz defines the roles of the main characters and conflicting social groups, assisting in the narrative of the story. Similarly, Ludovic Bourque's score to *The Artist* builds upon the idea of assigning melodies to characters; as the film progresses, the themes of the lead characters develop and change along with the characters themselves. The musical themes in *The Artist* track character development through the film, conveying more complex emotions and concerns, and absorbing the audience further into the experiences of the characters. As a whole, music is an essential, foundational aspect of silent film, pushing the films to success and enhancing the overall experience.

The Artist (2011)



Sources: Gorbman, Claudia *Unheard Melodies*; Newlin, Dika *Music for the Flickering Image*; Cooke, Mervyn *A History of Film Music* <http://metropolis1927.com> <http://www.kinolorber.com/metropolis> <http://weinsteinc.com/sites/the-artist/>

Background Information:

- First feature-length sci-fi film
- Example of German expressionism
- Director: Fritz Lang
- Composer: Gottfried Huppertz
- Highly edited - full, intact and viewable version lost for 80 years until rediscovered in 2010
- Version of film restored and score re-recorded

Story:

- Year 2026 - Society split into two unequal halves; son of President (Freder) joins under-city in order to bring equality to dystopian world

Themes:

- Freder: transforms through film; begins as extension of upper-city (romantic, waltzlike strings) - starts to intertwine with the themes of the under city (dissonant, frantic) and Maria (romantic, woodwind solos)
- Maria: clarinet solo; distinct; short; generally consistent except when in peril (echoes character traits)
- Upper city: major; triumphant; waltz-like; strings/woodwinds
- Joh Fredersen: low brass/basses;; businesslike; unwavering
- Under city: repetitive; frantic; high woodwinds; beatlike; becomes dissonant chords

Explanations for use of film music:

- Technical - cover up projector sound
- Historical - pairing theatre w/ music
- Aesthetic - fills space made by silence
- Psychological - assists suspension of reality and allows audience to focus

Roles of Film Music:

- Newlin - used to set a mood (screeching strings v sweeping brass)
- Newlin - used to contrast with action on screen (scary music w/ little girl)
- Newlin - used to set locale
- Gorbman - diegetic music (comes from within the narrative)
- Gorbman - non-diegetic music (outside narrative - film music)

Themes:

- George Valentin: varies with every recurrence; spirited, 6-figure piano melody; variations in speed, mood, tonality, and mode as life changes
- Peppy Miller: emerges and remains perky/spirited high strings; beatlike/pulsing; confidence of character shown in triumphant cadences and complementary solos
- Smaller characters:
 - George's wife: forlorn clarinet solo; heard in times of conflict
 - Producers: slow, low strings in tremolo accompanied by quiet, slow timpani

Background Information:

- Premiere - Cannes Film Festival
- Developed out of enthusiasm for classic silent films and personal crew connections
- Director: Michael Hazanavicius
- Composer: Ludovic Bourque
- Winner of 5 Academy Awards, 3 Golden Globes, and 7 British Academy awards
- One of very few silent films since inception of sound films

Story:

- George Valentin, a popular and successful silent film star, is forced to adjust and evolve with the emergence of "talkies."