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*Two Shadows in the Moonlight*  
Music in British Film Melodrama of the 1940s

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: John Morris Date: 29 May 2008

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John Morris

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## Abstract

Almost from the beginning of moving pictures, music has played a more or less central role. Early film often displaced the stage melodrama from the music hall bill but retained many of its stylistic elements, notably the music used to enhance the dramatic effect or signify on-screen emotion. The history that music shares with the cinema is rooted in Victorian melodrama, where formal aspects of staging were continued in the new medium, as well as in the content of the film subject matter. The style of music employed in film, however, found its antecedents in the music dramas of Richard Wagner, which were themselves based on Greek Attic drama and which represented the 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral tradition at its most expressive, finding in *Tristan and Isolde* the very apotheosis of the Romantic. Film melodrama took these ideas to their limit and during the 1930s a distinct style of film composing began to be established (especially in Hollywood with the music of Max Steiner) which exemplified these techniques, and drew on particular methods such as the leitmotiv,<sup>1</sup> itself a tool invented by Wagner.

The development of film music in this tradition was largely facilitated by the influx of emigrants from Nazi Germany into the Hollywood studios whose training was rooted in the orchestral styles and the rich vein of highly romantic music of Vienna and “Mittel Europa” of the previous century. But British melodrama seems different from that of Hollywood, especially when it comes to music, in style and intensity. In this thesis I examine the differences between music in the two cinemas. Concentrating on exemplary films from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, I show how the apparent differences are manifested, and by analysing a number of key British films, I illustrate the modes of musical expression used. There are many ways to approach film music. My own interest lies in the connection between music of the romantic period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and what became of it during the 20<sup>th</sup>. “Serious” music from Schoenberg onwards became increasingly dissonant, but the rich melodic tones of romantic music appear to have found a new home in the cinema, and in this thesis I explore how film composers kept the previous traditions alive.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation I use the German form leitmotiv (literally leading-motive), rather than leitmotif, except where I quote directly.

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## Introduction

Theatre melodrama uses an exaggerated style that emphasises emotion. Films which feature serious music are often considered the direct heirs of melodrama, at least films in which music contributes significantly to the overall effect. But when music emphasises the depiction of emotion or dramatic action by other means, it becomes a key sign of film melodrama. Music is usually foregrounded in the film melodrama, though not necessarily all the time, and not always at the most significant moments. While the occasional absence of music is called for, its absence altogether would compromise the narrative. Music in melodrama is even a “character.” Its style is largely drawn from Wagner and, particularly in Hollywood, it uses a stock set of devices, such as unison strings in the higher register, *tremolo*, and techniques such as the leitmotiv.

“The combining of music with drama is a practice extending back at least to ancient Greece, but no other medium excels the expressive range of the cinema,” writes Louis Giannetti,<sup>1</sup> and according to Caryl Flinn the link between film music and Wagner also goes back a long way. In her important volume *Strains of Utopia*, she writes “As early as 1911 the moving picture world was claiming that ‘every man or woman in charge of the motion picture theatre... is a disciple or follower of Richard Wagner’.”<sup>2</sup> By 1920, the use of leitmotiv had been established, and connections were also being made to Wagner’s idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art work) “which would supposedly unite all other arts (lyric poetry, drama, dance, vocal and instrumental music).”<sup>3</sup> The dominant purpose of music in opera “has always been as a medium for the representation and expression of the emotive states of mind of the *dramatis personae*,” writes Peter Kivy, who draws the parallel with film music: “its primary purpose is always expressive: expressive of the dominant emotions of character and scene.”<sup>4</sup> As early as 1929 the problem of expressing romantic love in the new talkies ensured that instead of using the spoken word in place of the earlier convention of intertitles, the suggestion of the romantic note would henceforth be “conveyed by properly pitched

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<sup>1</sup> Giannetti, 2002: 229

<sup>2</sup> Flinn, 1992: 14

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kivy, 1997: 317

music,”<sup>5</sup> the romantic orchestral tradition providing the “in-built force”<sup>6</sup> deemed necessary.

In Britain, composer and author Jan Swynnoe identifies a “golden age” of film music roughly equivalent to the “golden age” of Hollywood.<sup>7</sup> Many of the films of this period, of course, concerned the War, and those that did not were products of their time even if they were wildly escapist, the Gainsborough melodramas providing the obvious example. According to Jeffrey Richards, Gainsborough melodramas “were informed by the extravagant emotionalism and criminality of the Gothic novel and the florid romance, by the sensation scenes and stereotyped characters of the stage melodrama.”<sup>8</sup> British melodrama of the period features a peculiar quality of music which seems to have endured longer than the films themselves. Even if *Brief Encounter* (1945), which used pre-existent music, may be remembered for its iconic *mise-en-scène* and dialogue, it is especially the use of Rachmaninov in that film that makes it memorable, David Lean’s exceptional direction notwithstanding. Other examples abound. Recordings of the *Warsaw Concerto* and the *Cornish Rhapsody* proliferate but attempting to find copies of the movies from which the music comes is much more difficult. No doubt the film melodramas themselves – with obvious exceptions – are technically rather second-rate compared to some of their (later) Hollywood counterparts, but it is the music of these films that continues to stand out and, generations later, still arouses much interest.

British film attracted composers of the highest calibre who considered it a serious art form. Whereas in Hollywood the studio “sound” was hallmarked in movie music, in Britain “an educated musician could be expected to identify a Walton score, or one by Vaughan Williams or Rawsthorne.”<sup>9</sup> This was not always the case in Hollywood. The possible exception from 1941 onwards was Bernard Herrmann whose score for *Citizen Kane* (1941) broke the mould. If for many critics much of Hollywood music was of a poor quality, for Hans Keller, the “greater part” of British film music too remained kitsch.<sup>10</sup> But in his 1950 essay, “An Appeal to Constructive Consciousness,”<sup>11</sup> Keller

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<sup>5</sup> *Variety Review*, Autumn 1929, quoted by Claudia Gorbman (in Dickinson, 2003: 38)

<sup>6</sup> Dickinson, 2003: 4

<sup>7</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: xvii

<sup>8</sup> Richards, 1997: 118

<sup>9</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 22

<sup>10</sup> Keller, 2006: 51

<sup>11</sup> Published in *Music Review* Vol.11 No.4, November 1950

mentions many British composers who had yet to turn to film music who, he implies, might be trusted to take the art of film music forward, rather than backwards. In the meantime he appears content with the British in their awareness of the traps of scoring for the films, quoting Arthur Bliss, who said that film music should be judged for itself: “in the last resort film music should be judged solely as music – that is to say, by the ear alone, and the question of its value depends on whether it can stand up to the test.”<sup>12</sup> Keller was famous for the view that a good film composer is a good composer. If indeed this was the case, he believed that Britain was “in an exceptionally fortunate position” in that “all its leading contemporary composers” had contributed to the sound film.<sup>13</sup> Keller shared Vaughan Williams’ hope for an integrated method for composing film music: “once the film stops calling itself an art and starts to become one, its makers will realise that instead of teaching the musician his business they might learn some of their own from him.”<sup>14</sup> By the late 1940s film critics in France and the US recognised that “British pictures were producing some of the finest scores,”<sup>15</sup> a result of the “close collaboration and understanding” between composers of the very highest calibre, musical directors and filmmakers. Those that teamed up to create some memorable films were Ralph Vaughan Williams and Ernst Irving, and Brian Easdale and Powell and Pressburger.

1947 was the high-water mark for British film melodrama, with Henry Geehl, Brian Easdale, Bretton Byrd, Vaughan Williams and George Auric all contributing fine scores. But as heydays last, this one was to end all too soon. “The post-war boom in film making in this country ended abruptly at the turn of the decade,” writes Swynnoe.<sup>16</sup> This seemed due to “inflationary rises in production costs” and the deliberate attempt by the government to keep the British industry afloat by encouraging US involvement. Sarah Street’s discussion<sup>17</sup> of the US studio system and its relationship with the British film industry after the War illuminates this important factor. Previously, the British government had requisitioned over half the available studio space for the production of Ministry-of-Information-sponsored propaganda films, yet British studios had still managed to produce an average of 60 feature films a year, though only a third of the

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<sup>12</sup> Sir Arthur Bliss, source unknown

<sup>13</sup> Keller, 2006: 53

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>15</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: xvi

<sup>16</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 180

<sup>17</sup> In *British National Cinema*, British Film Institute, 1987

1930s average output and at greater cost, but still of a high, or higher, standard. Popular American films, which were used to provide a healthy supply of film, were supplemented with British films and reissues. But political relations with America also influenced the structure of the film industry, and not all government policy designed to support the film industry worked. A 75% ad valorem duty imposed after August 1947 on American films antagonised Hollywood with a boycott instituted by the Motion Picture Association of America beginning almost immediately. A compromise was found in March 1948, which provided production finance to British films, but as a result British films became increasingly Americanised and the documentary tradition that had so enriched British films with their own style was lost as American influences took hold. A depression in the British economy, with ongoing rationing until 1955 was also a factor and audiences, too, wanted the glamour and colour of American pop culture. From the early 1950s the orchestral tradition on which film music drew gradually became unfashionable. The new genre of Social Realism demanded more modern styles of music, particularly jazz. But Swynnoe points out another reason which was also to have great influence: "Another damaging effect on British films in the 1950s was caused by [the] retreat of the industry from the advances it had made in the portrayal of women in the 1940s... Apart from the more obvious, and perhaps misleading examples of Margaret Lockwood's roles in the Gainsborough melodramas, women were allowed to appear more as independent characters than as adjuncts," a development that did not "survive the next decade."<sup>18</sup> In addition, the morbid preoccupation with sex and sleaze which began to dominate British films (culminating in the "Carry On" series of films in the sixties) elevated the "commonplace" and contributed towards the decline of the British film industry. Under a new Labour government, it was perhaps unfashionable to continue to portray aristocratic characters, which was the norm in melodrama, and British people were no longer content to emulate the preoccupations of the idle rich. It was not long before the depiction of the guileless middle classes also became passé. But during the war, a preoccupation with the upper classes was still prevalent.

Though British film melodramas from the late thirties until the early fifties were not (despite their popularity) generally acclaimed by the critics, a number of films stand out for the standard of music composed as well as the musical techniques used to depict emotional content or other significant moments. The films of Powell and Pressburger

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<sup>18</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 185

are among these films as well as the wildly escapist Gainsborough melodramas. The success of these films owed a great deal to the quality of the music that was written for them (or their use of pre-existing music), with many films now remembered chiefly for their scores and soundtracks, music which is now highly regarded in its own right. Unlike Hollywood, British composers were not tied to a studio system that often demanded a certain style or even sound, but were often highly-regarded composers of “serious” music who were attracted to the films for a variety of reasons. The most celebrated of these composers, Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose own introduction to writing music for the cinema was in answer to his desire to make a contribution to the War effort in a Ministry-of-Information-sponsored film, identified two methods of film composing. He demonstrated his abilities (which were limited to one of these methods) in a number of films made from the early part of the War but in particular in a 1947 melodrama entitled *The Loves of Joanna Godden*. In this film he was not only able to explore a rich tradition of British film-making in the depiction of the English landscape, but also to draw on his own work as a composer of music that is evocative of the English rural idyll. The result is a film which gave the composer prominent billing and which was particularly acclaimed at the time of its release for the quality of its soundtrack. The critically-acclaimed British film composer, Alan Rawsthorne, meanwhile, wrote music for another late melodrama of the period which brings together in a “total art work” the ancient traditions of Greek tragedy, poetry, opera and myth in a film that is crammed full of allusions to music and art. *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* is the vision of one man, Albert Lewin, who as producer, director and screenwriter cast Ava Gardner and James Mason, and with the aid of cinematographer Jack Cardiff, created an extraordinary fantasy which was instantly recognised by the *Cahiers du Cinema* as part of the surrealist canon.

It is worth noting at the outset that one can begin by differentiating between diegetic music, diegetic extant music, pre-existing (or “featured” music as some prefer), and original film score (non-diegetic music written especially), or “background music.” The latter term is problematic but in John Huntley’s opinion it is better than “integral music.”<sup>19</sup> Of course, a combination of the above is usually found. There is also a variety of conventions and roles for film music. It is often “interspersed with the action,” can establish “a general mood,” and can also play a more active role when its rhythm and

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<sup>19</sup> Huntley, 1947: 19

intent are “synchronized to stage movement, much in the synchronized manner common to film animation.”<sup>20</sup> Claudia Gorbman identifies two main roles for background music. It has a semiotic role (by acting as *ancrage*), and a psychological role (as suture or *bonding*). The term *ancrage*, which belongs to Barthes, is the “primarily semiotic functioning of music” as it connects with the photographic caption; “music, like the caption, anchors the image in meaning.”<sup>21</sup>

Gorbman goes on to distinguish between “well-written” scores by the likes of Sergei Prokofiev and Bernard Herrmann, as opposed to “hack” scores, such as those which involve “sweet violins during a romantic scene.”<sup>22</sup> Most film music is “easy-listening” she says, in that it doesn’t really draw attention *to itself*. An exception, it must be said, is the melodrama. “By its very definition, melodrama used music in tandem with stage action from its inception. Indeed one likely proposal is that the form originated in the eighteenth-century practice of commissioning composers to write incidental music to accompany spoken scenes with passages that would underline the emotion – rather as screen musical scores later came to do.”<sup>23</sup> Peter Kivy provides an extremely useful definition of melodrama as opposed to its cousins. “Melodrama is a form of drama in which words are spoken, with musical accompaniment, opera a form of drama where the words are sung and musically accompanied, theatre a form of drama from which music is all but absent, [and] sound cinema a form of drama where the words are spoken with musical accompaniment a good deal of the time.”<sup>24</sup> In fact “music,” he writes, “*is* of the essence of the modern cinema – not merely an inessential accompaniment... if we do not understand music’s filmic function in cinema, we do not understand cinema itself.”

I acknowledge that there is a problem with the definition of melodrama, and there appears to be no single, commonly agreed on meaning. For the purposes of this thesis, Claudia Gorbman’s premise that “fundamentally, the classical Hollywood film is melodrama – a drama with music,”<sup>25</sup> is my guiding principle, though I also acknowledge that melodramas such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *Jamaica Inn* contain little

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<sup>20</sup> Fell, 1970: 32

<sup>21</sup> Gorbman, 2003: 39

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Fell, 1970: 32

<sup>24</sup> Kivy, 1997: 320

<sup>25</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 7

music, even though I do imply that the film is a melodrama with “missing” music! What I have also attempted to convey is that melodrama has meant different things in different times and places. Thomas Elsaesser provides the cue for my attempt at explaining that film melodrama seems to draw on opera, vaudeville and Attic tragedy in one direction, and on 19<sup>th</sup> century music in the other. Peter Brooks, Linda Williams and Claudia Gorbman helped me to formulate this idea and provided much of the background to the later discussions of my chosen films. In the first two chapters I have attempted to provide a summary of the history and background of melodrama and the later developments that came with the advent of cinema

Using Gorbman’s definition, I have explored films that are already indexed as melodrama and I have focused on the musical techniques used to create effects in films that might otherwise be termed “dramas,” depending on one’s definition. My intention is to explore films which have a highly significant musical content. Gorbman has provided the intellectual means for this exploration. The films were chosen not as a means of discussing melodrama *per se*, but because they are indexed as such. Thus *The Loves of Joanna Godden* in particular is discussed largely because Vaughan Williams wrote for it. In other words, in the analysis of the films, my emphasis is on music, rather than on melodrama. However, rather than presenting a musicological analysis of the scores, I am interested in the background and history of the music as well as its effect on and context within the films. In this thesis I explore a wide range of melodramas and present a more detailed analysis of two films. *Joanna Godden* was made in the high-watermark year of 1947. The music by Ralph Vaughan Williams is his only melodrama score and reveals a composer sensitive to the romantic, but who also uses his full range of expressive techniques for other purposes. The Technicolor extravaganza *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951) brings together an extraordinary mix of music (with an original score by Alan Rawsthorne), drama, poetry, myth and philosophy in a rich flight of fancy.

The romantic music of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on which film scoring drew in the 1930s (what Flinn calls “Hollywood’s New Romanticism”) itself looked back to earlier traditions: “For Wagner, ancient Greece provided [the] model [of] Hellenic totality that

Wagner found in his *Gesamtkunstwerk*.”<sup>26</sup> In this thesis I will trace the origins of this revival (via Friedrich Nietzsche and Wagner, back to the Greeks) and the musical style of these films, and I will explore the differences between its British expression and the more familiar Hollywood variety. I set out by examining the 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral roots of music in film melodrama which found continuing expression as late as the early 1950s. I will also consider the famous observation by Vaughan Williams that film offers an artistic potential that even Wagner hadn’t dreamt of, and I will show why Wagner’s ideas are essential if one is to understand music in film melodrama. Hollywood and British film offer a rich catalogue of melodrama in which to explore music and I concentrate on orchestral music in the films of the 1930s and 1940s, a fifteen-year period up to 1951 when the film score began to move away from its 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral roots into more popular forms. The films include the Gainsborough melodramas and those that feature a “Denham Concerto.” Elsewhere these films may be referred to as, simply, “drama” or “romantic drama.” What they do have in common is either a female protagonist, or a prominent actor as the main female lead, serving to identify the film as a “woman’s film,” as well as a generally romantic theme and dramatic setting.

Most of the films of the period are, of course, in black and white. I propose that it is not only leading stars Margaret Lockwood, Ann Todd, Stewart Granger, Patricia Roc, James Mason and Phyllis Calvert who provide the movies with a particular quality, but that it is also the quality and tone of the music that adds colour to this rich legacy of British film.

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<sup>26</sup> Flinn, 1992: 50



## CHAPTER 1 - Nineteenth-century Roots

In his pioneering essay on Hollywood melodrama “Tales of Sound and Fury,” Thomas Elsaesser<sup>1</sup> pursues two directions in his analysis of the genre: the development of the dramatic imagination in European culture, and the structure and stylistic constants in what he calls Hollywood “family” drama between 1940 and 1963, particularly in the films of Douglas Sirk. He starts with the novel and “certain types of ‘entertainment’ drama,” and remarks that melodrama differed from country to country where, for example, in 19<sup>th</sup> century Italy “the opera rather than the novel reached the highest degree of sophistication in the handling of melodramatic situations,” whereas “in England it has mainly been the novel and the literary gothic where melodramatic motifs persistently crop up.”<sup>2</sup> The recent BBC television adaptation by Andrew Davies of *Bleak House* was written in the style of a soap opera, itself a form of melodrama, but a reading of Elsaesser confirms that this is not necessarily out of step with the original work: “Dickens, Collins, and Reade relied heavily on melodramatic plots to sharpen social conflicts and portray an urban environment where chance encounters, coincidences, and the side-by-side existence of extreme social and moral contrasts were the natural products of the very conditions of existence...”<sup>3</sup>

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century stage melodrama called for music to play a number of roles, among them to mark the entry of a character, to provide interludes, “and to give emotional coloring to dramatic climaxes and to scenes with rapid physical action.”<sup>4</sup> The root of film music cliché arises directly from the musical cues which appear in the acting editions of British melodramas from the period. In tracing this history, Claudia Gorbman notes some prevailing practices evident in both stage melodrama and in Hollywood, particularly the musical accompaniment of dialogue scenes. The roots of melodrama itself, meanwhile, lie in the mediaeval morality play and in the oral narrative or drama of fairy tales and folksongs and street ballads (via barrel organs, among other means). Melodrama has thus largely been associated with music in one form or another,

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<sup>1</sup> In this groundbreaking work Elsaesser was among the first academics to “put melos into drama.”

<sup>2</sup> Elsaesser, 1973: 351

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 356

<sup>4</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 34

and it is this aspect that provides the most useful definition: “a dramatic narrative in which musical accompaniment marks the emotional effects.”<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that melodrama is a mode rather than a genre. In her 1998 essay “Melodrama Revised,” Linda Williams provides the useful definition that “the term indicates a form of exciting, sensational, and, above all, moving story that can be further differentiated by specifications of setting or milieu (such as *society melodrama*) or genre (such as *western melodrama*).”<sup>6</sup> In Britain the terms “costume melodrama” and “kitchen sink” drama are used, though the latter term is usually reserved for social realism films of the fifties and early sixties. “As musicologists use the term, [melodrama] refers specifically to the genre of drama that consists in spoken words with musical accompaniment, of which George Benda’s works are the prime (and almost lone) example, and to the technique that survived as a rare occurrence within opera and other sung dramatic works,”<sup>7</sup> writes Peter Kivy. As a separate dramatic form, melodrama had its first and only “master” in Benda, whom Kivy describes as a composer of real talent, if not genius: “Benda’s melodramas *Medea* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*... so impressed Mozart in 1788, that he wrote to his father: ‘I think the most operatic recitatives should be treated this way – and only sung occasionally, when the words can be perfectly expressed by the music.’” Kivy thus illustrates that, “as Mozart immediately perceived, melodrama is accompanied recitative with spoken instead of sung declamation.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, to trace the history of melodrama the “convenient place to begin,” according to Kivy, is the operatic form at the close of the eighteenth century which provides “the full aesthetic arsenal from which film music has drawn its weapons.”<sup>9</sup> The first fusion of the dramatic and musical was found in so-called “number-opera,” such as those by Rossini, Mozart and later, Verdi. Meanwhile melodrama kept music in the pit and speech on the stage. “It was, in other words, spoken drama with musical accompaniment. The idea of film music, then, existed fully fledged, some one hundred years or more before the invention of moving pictures.”<sup>10</sup> There is also a direct connection between 19<sup>th</sup> century melodrama and films of the Second World War but, as we shall see, not in the way one would expect.

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<sup>5</sup> Elsaesser, 1973: 358

<sup>6</sup> Williams, 1998: 51

<sup>7</sup> Kivy, 1997: 309

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 311

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 309

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Relying on the previous century's theatrical melodrama for story, "by 1911, the narrative structure of film had more or less established itself,"<sup>11</sup> writes John Fell, with melodrama effectively surviving in the movies only. The rise of the music hall from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century had also affected melodrama but it was the advent of the motion picture that finally killed it off, he continues: "When motion pictures appeared in the [eighteen] nineties in the same setting, often at the bottom of the bill to clear the house, they displaced their live counterparts."<sup>12</sup>

In Britain, while early film may have displaced melodrama from the East End music hall bill, a brief renaissance can be discerned on the West End stage: "Radical late romantics... revived the melodrama in order to achieve the highpoint in music of verbal intelligibility, for the melodrama, a genre that by definition combines spoken texts with music, conveys language with utmost clarity."<sup>13</sup> Referring to stage melodrama revivals of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Edward Kravitt provides the example of the German composer Engelbert Humperdinck (1854-1921), whose attempts to revive melodrama were based on the belief that "modern opera [he was writing in 1898] is taking a path that must lead to the melodrama. With the dominant endeavours of our time, which no one can avoid, to bring reality to the stage, one must find a form that is suitable to this trend, and in my opinion the melodrama is that form."<sup>14</sup> It was indeed at this time that Puccini was writing *Tosca* (first performed in 1900) which itself was a setting of Sardou's mock-historical melodrama, in which more than in any other of his operas Puccini subjects his heroine "to harrowing scenes of violence, torture and attempted rape"<sup>15</sup> before her suicidal leap from the castle battlements. But Humperdinck, according to Kravitt, also revived the melodrama "to approximate that acme of dramatic perfection, for Wagner no less than for him – Greek drama." In his *Königskinder* of 1897, Humperdinck was attempting to apply Wagnerian principles to the melodrama with a kind of elevated speech used by the Greeks that "scored" the spoken word.<sup>16</sup> This was different to George Benda's style of melodrama which had music playing a supporting role, and which survived in film as "underscoring." The former style has fallen into obscurity,<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Fell, 1970: 24

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kravitt, 1976: 571

<sup>14</sup> The composer quoted in Kravitt, 1976: 572

<sup>15</sup> Angelo Gobbato in the programme notes to the Cape Town opera production of *Tosca*, May 2007

<sup>16</sup> I explore Wagner's legacy in the following chapter.

<sup>17</sup> Kravitt, 1976: 577

possibly because the technique of annunciation was inclined to “glide” into some note sounded by the orchestra, an out-of-tune recitative the result.<sup>18</sup> Peter Kivy explains that the failure of this kind of melodrama, which was an attempt at revival in musical rather than dramatic terms, never became “drama-made-music,”<sup>19</sup> but merely remained drama with a musical texture. The problem lay in reconciling music with drama and melodrama in the high-brow staged melodrama of this type. Though Humperdinck failed to revive staged melodrama in its operatic form, it is significant that he was drawing on Wagner’s work.

In films, on the other hand, an altogether different experience occurs. “Music in the movies was doing the same thing as it was and had been doing in opera and melodrama from at least the eighteenth century, indeed was speaking the same dramatic and expressive ‘language,’” explains Kivy. It remained after the advent of the “talkie” to provide expression and “dramatically appropriate musical fabric.” Music survived because, like spoken drama and opera had for 200 years previously, it functioned to provide certain functions of speech and other expressive sounds. The film melodrama seems to borrow more from 19<sup>th</sup> century vaudeville – the equivalent of Music Hall in Britain – as it is nearly always exaggerated and over-dramatic. Thus we might say that “ordinary” film music is related to 18<sup>th</sup> century melodrama, which Benda introduced, Wagner exemplified and Humperdinck tried to revive, but film melodrama is related to 19<sup>th</sup> century vaudeville, even if the style of music often owes much to Wagnerian orchestration and musical ideas. The more popular form of melodrama, that which was presented on the vaudeville stage, was often written for huge audiences – immigrants to the USA, whose native language was not English – which resulted in the concept of “writing for the eye.” It was also the product of the Licensing Act which presented Gothic dramas as “dumbshows, mimed to music,” and which later survived in film melodrama’s “non-dialogued action scenes.”<sup>20</sup>

Originating, then, at a time of mass migration, it was also a product, like film itself, of the modern age. “Melodrama was the product of an industrial society, the urban working class, and the topical excitements of its period – crime, military adventure,

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<sup>18</sup> Kravitt quotes *Groves Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (1904-10).

<sup>19</sup> Kivy, 1997

<sup>20</sup> Fell, 1970: 25

wilderness exploration.”<sup>21</sup> In Britain, too, “melodrama was, from its inception, tainted by its aroma of the popular,” but as it developed, British melodrama also became increasingly regarded as the domain of the feminine, because it was mainly attended by female audiences.”<sup>22</sup> The heyday of British film melodrama began during the War, when women were enjoying the kind of freedoms not enjoyed since the previous conflagration, though now on an unprecedented scale. Seen in this light, a socio-political element is added to its development. Writing at the end of the “swinging sixties” John Fell equated melodrama, which “allows us to carry emotions to their extremes,” with rock music lyrics, duple rhythm, and blues changes and which “may be doing quite the same thing for young people now.”<sup>23</sup> The wild abandonment of the forties was only possible because the reality of the War demanded escapism, hence the rather risqué plot-lines. It is the same political upheaval that simultaneously provides melodrama with its direct connection to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism of German composers. In 1933, those with foresight, or money (usually both), left Germany when Hitler came to power. During the next few years many musicians, who had been trained in the conservatoires of Leipzig and Berlin, and who were familiar with the music of Richard Wagner, found their way to Hollywood and several went to Britain. That many of these composers became bound to the big studios just when the specially-composed film score was beginning to emerge as the preferred method for underscoring is a highly significant factor in Hollywood and elsewhere.

It may be useful to summarise briefly: film melodrama originates in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with George Benda (whose natural successor is music underscoring in film, as opposed to melodrama specifically), and the musical tradition on which it draws is 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism, though the style of presentation (and often, subject matter) is vaudeville or music hall. I have established opera as a form of melodrama, as well as a pure musical form. Wagner preferred the term “music drama” to “opera,” and in this context he draws opera closer to the stage forms of melodrama and subsequently, as we shall see, to their film equivalent.

The introduction of sound in film came, in Jan Swynnoe’s words, as a shock everywhere. Hollywood’s response was to lull the audience back into the “dreamworld”

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/446129/index.html> (Accessed 1 January 2007)

<sup>23</sup> Fell, 1970: 33

of silent cinema by keeping reality at bay with the use of music,<sup>24</sup> avoiding “the intrusiveness of naturalism.” This led to an unrealistic dialogue style and in film drama, especially that directed towards female audiences, “dialogue verged on the melodramatic.”<sup>25</sup> The result is a high intensity of emotion in the voice that justifies the presence of music, even leading composers to dictate the rhythm and pace of delivery – *using operatic techniques*.<sup>26</sup> There is a tentative connection here between melodrama and opera in the style of delivery, but what strengthens this is the mode of musical expression which purports to express emotion. In his book on the psychology of music Anthony Storr illuminates this by pointing out that with the rise of romantic orchestral music during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, “music itself increasingly incorporated within its own structure the human, emotional meanings which had previously belonged to the words or public occasions which the music accompanied and enhanced.”<sup>27</sup>

Storr is referring to the earlier role played by music in public life as well as on the stage, where mere accompaniment to voice (in oratorio or the cantata) gave way to “absolute” music, that is music that exists in its own right and which united itself with human emotion. Beethoven heralds this new romanticism, and it culminates in the music of Wagner, and explains why 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic music forms the basis of the film score, especially in melodrama, which itself deliberately unites music with human emotion, and accounts for the extravagance or exaggeration we experience. The musical content redoubles the effort of the film form itself. In other words, the overarching romanticism of the music lends itself and adds to the form. But the principle also works in reverse. “Music underlines and emphasises the emotions which drama arouses in the spectator; but its capacity to portray and arouse specific emotions in the absence of drama... is rather limited,”<sup>28</sup> and thus, in melodrama, music and drama actually need each other, though Storr concedes that music goes deeper than pictures, and deeper than words.<sup>29</sup>

Max Steiner, who wrote the score for *Gone With The Wind* (1939), is often regarded as the inventor of movie music, a claim he rejected: “The idea originated with Richard

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<sup>24</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 123

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 124

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine

<sup>27</sup> Storr, 1997: 79

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 143

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 145

Wagner. Listen to the incidental scoring behind the recitatives in his operas. If Wagner had lived in this century, he would have been the number one film composer.”<sup>30</sup> It is the musical techniques of the “total art work” (or *Gesamtkunstwerk*) that creates this effect – a kind of “wall of sound.” British composer Cyril Scott remarks on the “unity and diversity” of Wagner’s music-drama. “In the old-fashioned opera each number – involving a different melody – was separate and apart; but with Wagner on the contrary, although there were a vast array of themes, melodies and *motifs*, they are woven together in such ways as to present one continuous whole.”<sup>31</sup> *The Ring* was the ultimate (fifteen hour) expression of the ideal to create the perfect music drama and it was Wagner’s vision to build an opera house in which to perform it. After several over-ambitious attempts, the *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth was finally opened in 1876. As opposed to the hierarchical horseshoe design of the standard theatre of the time it was built as an amphitheatre, a democratic design the inspiration for which is rooted in Roman and Greek culture. It was the first opera house that forced audiences to focus on the visual spectacle on stage (rather than on each other), as the seats all faced the stage, and the lights were dimmed at the start of the performance:

The orchestra and the conductor are hidden from the view of the audience. When the house lights went down the auditorium was so dark that nobody knew when the music would begin. A darkened auditorium and a lightened stage forced Wagner’s audience to concentrate on the dramatic images. The invisible orchestra provided a soundtrack and Wagner’s concept of this total art form pre-empted the idea of cinema.<sup>32</sup>

Max Steiner, crediting Wagner with the invention of film music, based his own style on that of the composer. His score for *King Kong* (1933) may even be considered a concert with pictures: “The important thing is the symphonic accompaniment and the big spectacle and in that way Wagner really did anticipate the cinema.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Max Steiner, quoted in Thomas, 1973: 122. Tony Thomas revised his useful 1973 volume *Music for the Movies* in 1997. One of the first comprehensive discussions on film music, I rely on this standard text for commentary on Hollywood.

<sup>31</sup> Scott: 1958, 97

<sup>32</sup> BBC-TV, *The Great Composers: Wagner*, NVC Arts, 1997

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The key to understanding Wagner's music is the underlying psychology of human emotion it encapsulates and something of the melodramatic can indeed be detected in the operas. Brian Magee points out that Wagner was publicly analysing the Oedipus myth long before Freud<sup>34</sup> and Storr provides an illuminating example: "Oedipal themes can be discerned in both *Siegfried* and *Parsival*. *Die Walküre* has incest between brother and sister, Siegmund and Sieglinde, as one of its main themes. Siegfried's beloved Brünnhilde was fathered by Wotan, his own grandfather, and is thus his aunt as well as his mistress," and *Tristan und Isolde* presents "the most overtly erotic music ever composed."<sup>35</sup> This is not to say that the operas are at all "sensational," far from it, in fact: "Wagner's motives in composing his magnificent music-dramas were morally impeccable: to forge an art form which combined spiritual and deeply accomplished poetry with a music beautiful and sublime, all for the purposes of spiritually elevating the individual listener and bringing about enlightened social change."<sup>36</sup> Wagner intended his music drama to contain poetry, dancing, music and drama, and he explained his vision for this in his volume *Oper und Drama* (1851).

His contemporary, Friedrich Nietzsche, believed that the highest form of culture man has ever known was that of the ancient Greeks. Combining poetry, music and dance, Nietzsche equated it with Wagnerian music-drama, "the most vital contemporary form of culture."<sup>37</sup> In this scheme, of which Nietzsche wrote in his first published work *The Birth of Tragedy*, the music and words of drama merge together to create a synthesis of the two opposing forces of human life. Tellingly, the full title of the work was *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*. Dedicated to Wagner, the second part of the title was dropped in the second edition published fourteen years later in 1886 after Nietzsche and Wagner had disagreed. But Nietzsche had based his work on what, originally, were Wagner's ideas. "In *Opera and Drama* Wagner had advocated the orchestra's assumption of the role of the chorus in Greek drama," and like the role of music in melodrama, Wagner used the orchestra to convey the "inner significance of what is happening."<sup>38</sup> What the two men shared at this earlier stage of their acquaintance was a particularly high regard for the writings of Schopenhauer, especially for *The World as*

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<sup>34</sup> Magee, 2000: 84

<sup>35</sup> Storr, 1997: 117

<sup>36</sup> Tame, 1984: 77

<sup>37</sup> Geuss (ed.), 1999: x

<sup>38</sup> Magee, 2000: 201



*Will and Redemption*. Schopenhauer “believed that, although the music of an opera was composed with reference to the drama, it was so concerned with the *inner* significance of the events portrayed that it bore little direct relation to those events as particular instances,”<sup>39</sup> and together “the philosopher and the musicologist join hands in thinking that music is concerned with the inner life rather than with external reality.”<sup>40</sup>

Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde* is entirely rooted in Schopenhauer; its opening theme ends on an unresolved chord – unique up until that time, which reflects Schopenhauer’s idea that the sexual impulse can only be purged through death. “The first chord of *Tristan*, known simply as ‘the Tristan Chord’, remains the most famous single chord in the history of music,” writes Brian Magee in his recent book of that name.<sup>41</sup> It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of this moment in musical history. Up until that time, says Magee, it was possible to understand every chord in relation to its tonic key, but the Tristan chord was impossible to analyse and a satisfactory characterisation has eluded musicologists ever since. “It creates within itself not one but two dissonances, thus creating within the listener a double desire, agonizing in its intensity, for resolution.” It is said to be the beginning of “modern” music. Linda Williams’ proposal<sup>42</sup> that melodrama can be likened to the “hurry up and slow down” of 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral music finds its best example here in *Tristan und Isolde*. Williams likens melodrama to a 19<sup>th</sup> century score which, like all music, is written in way that deliberately postpones resolution, but which exaggerates the final musical outcome. In *Tristan*, the musical resolution does not take place until the end of the opera – a period of over four-and-a-half hours. The fulfilment of the lovers’ desire is simultaneously accompanied by their deaths and in this sense, the opera is pure Schopenhauer. Wagner’s later Bacchanal music for *Tannhäuser*, written after *Tristan und Isolde* for the Paris version of the opera, took the orgasmic nature of the *Tristan* music to an extreme.

Nietzsche felt that in Wagner he found the “reincarnation of the genius of Greek tragedy, combined with a deeply felt comprehension of Schopenhauer.”<sup>43</sup> Though *The Birth of Tragedy* “contained favourable references to *Tristan und Isolde*,”<sup>44</sup> he was to

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<sup>39</sup> Storr, 1997: 142

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 144

<sup>41</sup> Magee, 2000: 208

<sup>42</sup> Williams, 1998: 73

<sup>43</sup> Tanner (ed.), 1993: xi

<sup>44</sup> Storr, 1997: 160

revise his views (as well as those on Wagner himself) in the 1886 edition. Wagner's last opera, *Parsival*, shocked Nietzsche for its apparently Christian morality, a "betrayal of the heroic ideal in favour of renunciation and self-sacrifice."<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche's objection to Christianity was based on its renunciation of art: "There is no greater antithesis of the purely aesthetic exegesis and justification of the world," he believed. Christianity which is *only* moral "banishes art, *all* art, to the realm of *lies*, and thus negates, damns and condemns it."<sup>46</sup> In contrast, Nietzsche's conviction that "art is the highest task and the true metaphysical activity of this life" was based on the understanding he formed with Richard Wagner.<sup>47</sup> In *The Birth of Tragedy* he identifies two drives in the world of the Greeks, Apollo and Dionysus which together produced Attic tragedy or the "divine comedy" of life. This supports Wagner's emphasis on Greek "Attic" tragedy as the most important aspect of the highest civilisation mankind had ever known. The Apollo drive, representing the world of the imagination, fantasy and dream, of order and trust, provides a filter for imageless Dionysiac "intoxication," the passionate, irrational, "oceanic"<sup>48</sup> feelings of the erotic, of the aggressive, which is characterised by singing and dancing, and where man is no longer an artist but a work of art. Raymond Geuss says that Wagner's operas "are a first attempt to marry the Dionysiac power of the modern symphony orchestra to Apollonian epic speech and action."<sup>49</sup>

In an early commentary on the music-dramas of Richard Wagner, Cuthbert Hadden points out that there was musical recitation in Attic tragedy, with the choruses sung in unison. "But only a measure or two of this ancient music remains to show what it was like. It is to the age of the Renaissance, with its attempts to revive old-time Greek art, that we owe the first specimens of what we now understand as opera,"<sup>50</sup> and it is from here that Wagner takes his inspiration. Raymond Geuss writes that "People enjoy watching tragedy because they in some sense understand that in watching this ritual self-destruction they are gaining insight into the fundamental human condition."<sup>51</sup> The answer to the question of the pleasure of tragedy had always been given in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, 1999: 9

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>48</sup> Magee, 2001: 298

<sup>49</sup> Geuss, 1999: xxii

<sup>50</sup> Cuthbert Hadden, 1911: 8

<sup>51</sup> Geuss, 1999: xviii

psychological terms, but Nietzsche finds this “quite inadequate for the purpose,”<sup>52</sup> tragedy containing the element of myth, which “re-enacts for us a story we all know, and in tragedy it does it in musical terms.”<sup>53</sup> This tragedy of existence, the understanding of the nature of the real world, can only be responded to by losing oneself in the chorus – the collective – which is tragedy depicted in a musical form: “Fully-formed tragedy has to come into existence when words and stage-action are added to the collective, orgiastic music-making of the chorus.”<sup>54</sup> Thus the music though subjective, must also contain an element of the Universal. Vaughan Williams understood this when expanding music written for *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948) into his *Sinfonia Antartica*, in which he wanted to express not just Captain Scott’s personal tragedy, but Tragedy itself.

Raymond Geuss asks: if the knowledge of reality *is* really so terrible that no-one can tolerate it, how can the audience in a tragedy survive a performance? The answer is that tragedy transmits the basic pessimistic truth about the world and human life while at the same time enveloping it with an illusory appearance which makes it (just barely) tolerable. If one can appreciate Tragedy, “the result is an increase rather than a decrease in one’s ability to live vividly.”<sup>55</sup> The synthesis of words and music (Apollo and Dionysus) in Tragedy “is part of a complex defence against the pessimism and despair which is the natural existential lot of humans... Tragedy consoles us and seduces us to continue to live.”<sup>56</sup> The principal message of *The Birth of Tragedy* is that “Art, at its greatest, tells the truth and makes it possible to bear it” and for Nietzsche at the time he wrote the work, Wagner’s music (“perhaps more than anyone else’s”) “conveys experiences of elemental power and ecstasy.”<sup>57</sup> Anthony Storr provides a useful summing up of the significance of Attic tragedy:

The creation of tragedy is both a response to the horrors of life and a way of mastering them. From tragedy, it is possible to learn to appreciate life as sublime in spite of the suffering which living entails. Nietzsche makes us understand why it is that even tragic masterpieces... are life-enhancing. We have moved beyond mere enjoyment of music to a

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<sup>52</sup> Tanner, 1993, xvi

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., xiv

<sup>54</sup> Geuss, 1999: xx

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., xxvi

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., xi

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 29

condition in which we are saying “yes” to life as it actually is: tragic, ecstatic, painful, and joyful. The essential theme of *The Birth of Tragedy* is Nietzsche’s perception that art makes sense of the world and justifies existence.<sup>58</sup>

To Storr, what is noteworthy about *The Birth of Tragedy* is that in it Nietzsche recognises the ability of music not only to reconcile one to life but to enhance it, that music is “physically and emotionally based” and that it links the two principles of Apollo and Dionysus in the same way as tragedy.”<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche perhaps understood this because he was an accomplished musician himself, and the writers of melodrama understood it, too.

In Act III of *Tristan and Isolde*, the hero dies because of his awareness of the world’s state, acting as a “prism”<sup>60</sup> for us in the process. Thus, Wagnerian cultural pessimism, expressed in music drama, can be traced to the ancient Greeks. The mediaeval equivalents all essentially played the same function, and are rooted in Greek tragedy. “Melodrama,” writes Peter Brooks, “is similar to tragedy in asking us to endure the extremes and melodrama of pain and anguish.”<sup>61</sup> Mediaeval morality plays, “number” opera (what the Italians call *melodramma*), French *mélodrame* of the late eighteenth century,<sup>62</sup> Victorian stage melodrama, film melodrama and indeed modern soap opera all follow on, each in its own way offering a representation of “the human condition.”

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<sup>58</sup> Storr, 1997: 158

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 166

<sup>60</sup> Tanner, 1993: introduction

<sup>61</sup> Brooks, 1976: 35ff

<sup>62</sup> Claudia Gorbman also traces the history of melodrama from the Greeks and this is her example (Gorbman, 1987: 33).

## CHAPTER 2 - Hollywood and Twentieth-century Developments

By 1947, Theodor Adorno and Hans Eisler, in their seminal critique *Composing for the Films*, famously found the condition of music deplorable. Film scores were “ill-considered, clumsy, and backward attempts to pander to the imagined or actual taste of the public,”<sup>1</sup> their criticism reaching fever pitch in claiming that the cinema’s musical ideal is “*schmaltz* in a chrome metal pot.”<sup>2</sup> Wagner seems to be responsible, again: “The person who around 1910 first conceived the repulsive idea of using the Bridal March from *Lohengrin* as an accompaniment is no more of a historical figure than any other second-hand dealer.” Film composers are not spared either. They earn money, “but not a place in history.”<sup>3</sup> A member of the Frankfurt School of Marxist intellectuals, Adorno deplored what he called the culture industry in the United States. His criticisms were not only confined to popular music. The culture industry also affected the kind of music that was being written for the movies. Lamenting the “dumbing down” of musical knowledge, to borrow a contemporary term, Adorno maintained that liking music was “almost the same thing” as recognising it. The phenomenon is preserved in the present-day tendency by the average opera or concert audience to applaud itself rather than the performance! The cinema tended to standardise music, but “standardization sought standard responses,” and this was seen as a fetishising influence on music where only “truncated aspects of composition” could be concentrated upon by the average listener. The result was musical arrangements which “colonized vulgarisation and enchantment,” as Adorno put it. But how did film music, at least in Hollywood, get into such a parlous state? To answer this question it is necessary to trace its development from the beginning, and in this chapter I explore the history of music at the studios and subsequently I investigate what, if any, differences prevailed in Britain.

Before working with Adorno, composer Hans Eisler had already objected to the elitism of the new music and wanted to explore music which depicted the aspirations of the working class and a “Marxist vision of society.” Adorno’s culture industries, the two most important media being motion pictures and radio, were subject to the rules of big

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 45

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 49

business and vulgar materialism which have “fettered the freedom of artistic creation.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the 90-minute movie or the three-minute pop-song were for Adorno the mass-produced output of an artistically compromised society in a capitalist economy. “Instead of assuming that popular culture is mass-produced because many people like it, Adorno argued that people like it because they basically have no choice,” writes David Chidester in his recent book on religion and American popular culture. “As cultural production becomes an industry, artwork is transformed into a commodity that is created and exchanged for profit.”<sup>5</sup> But Chidester balances Adorno’s argument that the so-called “culture industry” produces nothing more than uniformity and utility, with the views of Walter Benjamin, who “looked for therapeutic effects, such as the healing potential of collective laughter” or, “dare we say, shared feelings of horror or communal crying.”<sup>6</sup> For Benjamin, in other words, the cinema provided a legitimate means of enjoying a shared experience. “If it is possible to combine these perspectives,” says Chidester, “we can recognise that popular culture enables human beings to experiment in human possibility, playing with basic classifications of the superhuman and the subhuman, the animal and the machine, but not necessarily under conditions of their own making.”<sup>7</sup> Adorno and Eisler are adamant, however. If film music (and for our purposes, particularly music in melodrama) can be shown to be rooted in Wagner, any attempt to formulate aesthetic laws of Greek tragedy (based on religious rites, the sacrifice, trial, mythology) in film “would be quite puerile.”<sup>8</sup> However, they do recognise attempts, such as those by Sergei Eisenstein, to search for colour equivalents in music and representational elements in film where “music does not accompany the whole picture, and therefore cannot follow its temporal totality,” even if a connection can be made between musical form and a film “sequence.”<sup>9</sup>

The two standard reasons given for the presence of music in “silent” film are that it overcame the lack of the spoken word and drowned out the sound of the projector.<sup>10</sup> In the 1920s Max Winckler (a clerk in a New York publishing house), credited with inventing the film music cue sheet, drew on catalogues of “appropriate” music cribbed

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<sup>4</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 62

<sup>5</sup> Chidester, 2005: 20

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 21

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 220

<sup>8</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 63

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 69

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, 1997: 37

from the likes of Beethoven and Wagner. Film producers paid millions of dollars for the music, which Winckler admitted were cribbed unashamedly, until the producers began to realise that it was “more profitable to hire composers to write original music and to organise their own publishing houses.”<sup>11</sup> By 1930 the scores were beginning to share a number of things in common, much to the chagrin of Adorno and Eisler: “The fully-fledged and quantitatively pretentious scores composed for the last silent pictures were essentially the same as those composed later for sound pictures.”<sup>12</sup> Sam Warner was the first to see the possibility of sound in film, and in his first experiment, carried out in August 1926, he used Wagner’s overture to *Tannhäuser* at a film screening. Though not a success, Warner persevered and bought the rights to *The Jazz Singer* eventually asking Al Jolson to take part in the project. Premiered on 26 October 1927, the film was a mixture of silent film conventions, the musical and melodrama. A huge success, it played to a million people a week. Apart from Al Jolson’s jazz numbers, *The Jazz Singer* also featured the 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral sound to add depth to the emotional content. Not only is the first “talkie” recognised for its musical content, therefore, but it can also be said to herald the first film melodrama in the sense that it included music in its own soundtrack as a signifier of feelings. Jazz clearly features a great deal in these early “talkies,” and *The Jazz Singer* remains a “musical” in the taxonomy of film genre. Early musicals consisted of four major genres. The “revue” was a show of shows, designed to showcase new talent and to experiment with sound; the so-called “campus musical,” operetta, which was very popular because they were full of song (*Desert Song* was the first to appear on celluloid) and the so-called “backstage musical,” versions of which are still made to this day. The latter was the most popular, as it seemed more natural, and has indeed endured. MGM’s *Broadway Melody of 1929* was the best example, and it is the first musical to have a score written specially. Similar films for 1936, 1938 and 1940 followed, but by then the Hays Code restricted much of what had been possible before: “Turn on the Heat,” a number from a similar 1929 production, would have failed to get approval had it been made after 1934.

The Hays Code embodied the attitudes of a conservative element frightened for the morals of the American public. That film music as we know it was first written at the same time can also be seen as a reactionary response to the decadence of jazz, as it was

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas, 1973: 39

<sup>12</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 51

perceived. Music in the Wagnerian mode is diametrically opposed to Jazz in a political sense, drawing heavily as it does on the leitmotiv and other 19<sup>th</sup> century techniques. “Classical Hollywood scoring [thus] remained neither exclusively populist nor entirely “high art,” but a complex mixture of aspirations, muddled cultural pretensions, prejudices and concessions.”<sup>13</sup> Adorno and Eisler believed that this inherent conservatism led to the commoditisation of music, which they called “one of the departments of cultural industry,”<sup>14</sup> with the result that only music already proven to be effective in specific situations was accepted. Just as film music was beginning, the “breach” between the middle-classes and serious music became unbridgeable, and they trace this to the early operas of Richard Strauss of 1900-1910 (*Salome*, *Elektra*) and point out that *Rosenkavalier* was an early attempt to bridge the gap, by turning to a retrospective stylized writing:

A classic example of the failure to adapt to the mechanics of scoring [i.e. acute timing, the mixing of music with sound and dialogue, dubbing, synchronisation] concerns Richard Strauss and a German film version of his opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. Strauss insisted on conducting the score himself... [and] repeatedly missed cues and couldn't follow the time markings on the screen. Confused and irritated, Strauss handed the baton to the studio conductor and walked out.<sup>15</sup>

After *Elektra*, Richard Strauss “toned down the forcefulness of his muse and turned more to melodiousness and the immediately appealing. In the *Rosenkavalier* which followed *Elektra*, he derived much of his inspiration from Mozart, thus reverting to the past.”<sup>16</sup> Adorno and Eisler considered it “no accident that this opera has been made into a moving picture.” Since Strauss, they claimed, all really modern music “has been driven into the esoteric”<sup>17</sup> particularly in America, where public taste is “illiterate, intolerant and uncritical.” Film music thus “ensnares” the consumer, as do other popular forms whose effect is that the “hits” become so trite “in order to be easily remembered

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<sup>13</sup> Dickinson, 2003: 3

<sup>14</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 53

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, 1997: 41

<sup>16</sup> Scott, 1958: 102

<sup>17</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 57



that they can no longer be remembered at all.”<sup>18</sup> Conversely, some respectable composers couldn’t grasp the Hollywood idiom. In 1937, Schoenberg declared that he would write music to which the producer Irving Thalberg could make a film and later, Stravinsky agreed to write music for the 1942 picture *Commandos Strike at Dawn* (about a British Commando raid on Nazi-occupied Norway), completing it only four weeks later. An astonished studio explained that though the music was admirable, it wouldn’t fit the film which had not yet been made. The music survived as a concert piece *The Four Norwegian Moods*.<sup>19</sup>

The Avant Garde style of Serialism preferred by Adorno and Eisler was, however, a long way off: “Though many screen composers would have been at home in a post-Schoenberg or Stravinsky idiom, the popular ear was not ready – or not thought to be ready – for such twentieth-century innovations.”<sup>20</sup> In the US moreover, the majority of screen composers were recent refugees from Nazism. The influx of German and central European immigrants to California in the thirties including “conservatoire-trained” musicians, brought with them the tradition of Germanic music and they turned naturally to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germanic idiom of Wagner and Richard Strauss when writing for the films. This idiom, with its heavy texture and grandiose structure, could “hardly have been worse suited” either to the reticence demanded of background music or to the mercurial shifts in mood entailed in mickeymousing.<sup>21</sup> In France and Britain, on the other hand, screen composers such as Maurice Jaubert and William Alwyn could draw on a more restrained tradition of music, with happier results, “but it was Hollywood that dominated the film scene.”<sup>22</sup>

As Hollywood began to absorb exiled musicians from Germany, meanwhile, there were those who stayed behind, perfectly comfortable with the new regime. Among them was Herbert Windt whose musical score for *Triumph of the Will* was written in 1934. The music that his compatriots took with them to Hollywood is in the same style as that in this controversial film and its opening sequence is particularly noteworthy. Brass and horns accompany the words of the film’s opening titles; they are expectant, Wagnerian.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>19</sup> Thomas, 1997: 42

<sup>20</sup> The first serial score in Britain was not to be heard until 1961 for *The Curse of the Werewolf*

<sup>21</sup> “The pejorative name for the practice of making the score continually echo twists in the action or mood of the film” (Johnson, 1969: 11).

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, 1969: 12

“In September 1934, twenty years after the outbreak of the World War, sixteen years after Germany’s passion, nineteen months after the beginning of the German rebirth, Adolf Hitler again flew to Nuremberg to review the assembly of his faithful followers...” An heroic theme begins in the lower strings, and a bright second theme suggests dawn – an awakening – as Nuremberg appears through the clouds. A third march-like theme is heard as the plane is seen flying over the city, and as it lands, the heroic music is drowned out by the sound of the cries of “Heil!” Another military theme takes up the pace as Hitler’s cavalcade rides into Nuremberg; the music building all the time to a fanfare. Incredibly, we are nine minutes into the film, and not a word has been uttered. It is thus far a chiefly visual and musical experience.

The style and delivery of this music, I believe, goes a long way in explaining Leni Riefenstahl’s divisive film. Meran Barsam provides a useful insight into composer Herbert Windt’s reliance on the “audience’s familiarity with Wagner,” whose musical technique “creates a new heroic score which evokes the Wagnerian world without imitating it.”<sup>23</sup> This is particularly true of the opening scenes which Siegfried Kracauer has compared to Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The content of the opening sequence, said by Kracauer to represent “a reincarnation of All-father Odin [Wotan], whom the ancient Aryans heard raging with his hosts over the virgin forests,”<sup>24</sup> was included for the purpose of reviving an old myth: “To attain their aim, the Nazis endowed their hero, i.e. Nazi Germany, with the traits of the old mythical heroes,”<sup>25</sup> and the romantic, backward-looking nature of Windt’s music supports this idea. The *Ring*’s main character, Wotan, “remains the longest, heaviest and most demanding in the entire operatic repertoire,”<sup>26</sup> writes Brian Magee, but I believe that it is another Wagnerian character that provides a model for the depiction of Hitler’s arrival in Nuremberg. The opening sequence can also be seen as a retelling of the arrival of Lohengrin, a Knight of the Grail, pulled across a lake by a swan in Act I Scene 3 of Wagner’s opera (“Seht! Seht! Welch’ ein seltsam Wunder!”). The music is ecstatic: Elsa von Brabant in particular overjoyed at the miracle, but the equivalent spectacle in *Triumph of the Will* is witnessed from Lohengrin’s point of view rather than that of Elsa of Brabant and the assembly. Here, of course, Leni Riefenstahl (intentionally or not) presents Hitler himself

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<sup>23</sup> Meran Barsam, 1975

<sup>24</sup> Kracauer, 1947: 290

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Magee, 2000: 105

in the role of Lohengrin, the mythical figure who appears at Nürnberg in a plane (rather than with the aid of a swan) to rescue Germany (Elsa). This tableau is similar in tone to the Prelude to Act I of *Lohengrin* and seems to be a kind of music drama, thus providing the unmistakable connection with Wagner. Musical references in the score, however, are neither to Wagner's *Ring* cycle nor to *Lohengrin*, but rather to *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, naturally, given that opera's place in the Nazi mythos.

Like music, the delivery of speeches in *The Triumph of the Will* appealed directly to the emotions. "Hitler's favourite composer is the one most generally recognised to be able to overwhelm people emotionally, for this is what Hitler did with his speeches," writes Anthony Storr, in his important and enlightening book *Music and the Mind*.<sup>27</sup> With the Wagnerian style of music, the film's literal content is relatively unimportant, and the film can be seen as an aesthetic representation of the Party rally (rather than a documentary) which uses the effects of music drama to recreate the impact of the original event which it records. Whether *The Triumph of the Will* can thus be seen as a kind of melodrama is perhaps stretching the analogy but in many respects the exaggerated presentation is an over-dramatised account of German political and social extremities of the time. Here, form (Wagnerian style) and content (the Hitler myth) are combined: "It seems obvious that appreciation of BOTH form AND emotional significance enter into the experience of every listener [and viewer] and cannot be separated."<sup>28</sup>

It is not insignificant that the music is of the romantic kind. "The rise of romantic music inevitably follows the separation of music from verbal and other associations," writes Storr<sup>29</sup> and this is just the required effect in *The Triumph of the Will*. The music is part of the narrative, telling us what emotions are being played out, what is actually happening on screen. Storr's exploration of the listener's ability to appreciate form does not entirely depend on a complex ability to describe music: "An untrained listener who loves music does not simply immerse himself in a sea of treacle, although some 19<sup>th</sup> century music comes close to providing that experience."<sup>30</sup> This is significant because the Wagner pastiche in *Triumph of the Will* is somewhat treacly, it must be admitted.

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<sup>27</sup> Storr, 1997: 47

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 87

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 78

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Some of the criticism of other kinds of film music rests on the same premise, for example the *Warsaw Concerto*, which can be cited as somewhat of a parody of the great romantic piano concerto of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The music in melodrama tended to popularity precisely because it doesn't require *any* prior knowledge of musical form in order to appreciate it, so perhaps the audiences who bought recordings of the *Warsaw Concerto* were indeed immersing themselves in treacle. The characteristics of this type of music – melody-driven, texture rich, dense orchestration and chromatic harmony, and rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – was continued in Hollywood in the work of composers such as Erich Korngold and Max Steiner. As producers and sound technicians were evolving basic practices, musicians were setting standards for composition, says David Neumeyer: “Max Steiner, Alfred Newman and Herbert Stothart were the pioneers in this field. Steiner drew from Wagner and Viennese melodrama while underscoring dialogue in a terse synchronized manner. The main contribution of the 1930s was the integration of the melodramatic with the operatic style.”<sup>31</sup>

Crucially, the Americans took to melodrama in particular, as it appealed to the American temperament. The black-and-white morality of melodrama suited the “strong Puritan ethic.” In addition, the simplification of character and sweeping gestures aided an increasingly immigrant population (who often had limited understanding of English) in understanding what was going on onscreen. The emphatic style of acting was also more suited to larger auditoria but the stuff of melodrama, Jan Swynnoe points out,<sup>32</sup> also appealed to unsophisticated British audiences and it was this audience that also responded to Hollywood melodrama. “Melodrama, by the very elements that separate it from serious drama is particularly suited to the screen,” writes Swynnoe. “The avoidance of character development and complex emotional or psychological nuances in favour of strong, simple passions make it easier to represent a plotline on a visual basis. But Swynnoe argues that British “film” as opposed to American “movies” or “motion pictures” lacked movement and the dramatic visual form so required of melodrama. The BBC tradition of a broadcast play of over ninety minutes in length was unheard of in the US, where soap opera was the norm. However, in the 1930s soap opera as such had not yet been established – it was to come into its own with the advent

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<sup>31</sup> Neumeyer, 1995: 61

<sup>32</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 6

of television – and Swynnoe appears to ignore the literary tradition of the part novel in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that was lapped up in weekly instalments by an eager public whose appreciation for cliff hangers and delayed gratification was developed by none other than Charles Dickens himself. This is also true of early cinema audiences, who according to Jeffrey Richards responded “most fully” to the “sentimentality” and “melodrama” of Dickens: “Silent screen acting with its repertoire of gestures and postures – despair, joy, invocation, anguish, resignation – recalled directly early stage melodrama acting, when speech was forbidden in the minor theatres and stories were told by a combination of music and gesture.”<sup>33</sup>

If Hollywood music “can be epitomised in the experience of just one man,” writes Tony Thomas, “he would have to be Alfred Newman,”<sup>34</sup> the head of MGM music who composed the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox “Searchlight” fanfare. “Newman was a rather reluctant composer... but [had] an unfailing sensitivity to the dramatic meaning of a film scene and the ability to translate that meaning into the language of music.” At the age of twelve he was sponsored by the Polish virtuoso pianist Jan Paderewski<sup>35</sup> for a recital in New York, arrived in Hollywood in 1930 and went on to score for many Goldwyn films including *Wuthering Heights* in 1939: “Any musically inclined person who enjoyed *Wuthering Heights* could hardly have failed to leave the theatre humming the haunting *Cathy* theme. The score of this film helps it to maintain its life as a masterpiece of romantic film making,”<sup>36</sup> and Newman became Hollywood’s most decorated musician, winning nine Oscars in total. His music for *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) was the first to be released as a recording by Decca. Some Hollywood composers did write concert works in their own time, but this was the exception, and Newman devoted himself exclusively to film music. Despite this, “quite a lot of Newman music lived beyond the films and became popular on recordings.”<sup>37</sup> *Bernadette* was also the first of Newman’s scores which was characterised by a strongly religious nature, the inspiration, according to the composer, for the revelation scene coming from none other than Wagner himself (the Grail music from *Parsifal*), and from Schubert’s *Ave Maria*: “Newman’s style of composition was essentially operatic – lyrical, dramatic and expressive” though unlike

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<sup>33</sup> Richards, 1997: 332

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, 1973: 53

<sup>35</sup> Jan Paderewski was to feature in an important British film project in 1937, as we shall see.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, 1973: 55

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 59

Steiner his method of scoring “was predominantly one of mood settings rather than leitmotifs.”<sup>38</sup>

For Tony Thomas, Alfred Newman and Max Steiner were “the two major influences on film scoring in Hollywood in the years between the mid-Thirties and mid-Fifties,”<sup>39</sup> Steiner’s breakthrough coming with *King Kong* (1933). This score has enormous significance for the history of film music, and in Jan Swynnoe’s view “liberated American cinema from the grip of theatrical dialogue.”<sup>40</sup> She suggests that the spoken word “could easily be dispensed with” in film and thus the stage was set for the development of the screen melodrama. Warner’s key melodramas of the era are *Jezebel* (1938), *The Letter* (1940), *Now Voyager* (1942) and *Mildred Pierce* (1945), the accompanying film scores typified by the work of Max Steiner (and, later, Erich Korngold). “From the mid-1930s to the end of the Studio era, both composers created scores very much in the middle-European tradition of romantic composition, using Wagner-like motifs (recurring melodic phrases used to suggest characters or ideas) throughout.”<sup>41</sup> Steiner composed for most of the Bette Davis melodramas, and he was the first composer of film music to receive three Academy Awards – for *The Informer* (1935), *Now Voyager* and *Since You Went Away* (1944). Claudia Gorbman considers Steiner to be one of the most “melodramatic” of the Hollywood composers. Given that he wrote for so many melodramas, this is not a difficult achievement. Gorbman’s summary of his technique, which for her exemplifies classic film scoring, is worth repeating in full:

His pseudo-Wagnerian orchestrations and harmonies draw on a well-established reservoir of emotive signification. A Steiner score explicates, underscores, imitates, emphasises narrative actions and moods wherever possible, it wears its heart on its sleeve, contributes toward the depiction of a dramatic universe whose sole transcendental morality might be that of emotion itself. If I have called upon Steiner’s music to illustrate facets

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>40</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 14

<sup>41</sup> Searle Kochberg, “Cinema as Institution” in Nelmes (ed.), 1999: 15

of the model of classical scoring, it is because, fundamentally, the classical Hollywood film *is* melodrama – a drama with music.<sup>42</sup>

It was Max Steiner's grandfather, Maximillian, who persuaded Johann Strauss II to write for the theatre and it was from this prominent Viennese family that Max Junior launched his career by being persuaded to mount a performance of Franz Lehar's *The Merry Widow* in London 1906. The success of the opera was unprecedented, with audiences the world over reacting with unbridled enthusiasm. *Merry Widow* paraphernalia was mass produced, the sheet music marketed throughout the world in a craze that lasted years. "That was the start of eight years in London for me," said Steiner.<sup>43</sup> By 1939 there was no other composer for producer David O. Selznick, who wrangled with Warner who had Steiner under contract, for *Gone With the Wind*. "Writing the three-hour score of *Gone With the Wind* occupied Steiner for twelve weeks... there are sixteen main themes in the score and almost three hundred separate music segments. Steiner says he managed to live through these twelve weeks only with medical aid, that a doctor came frequently to his home and gave him Benzedrine so that he could maintain a daily work routine of twenty hours at a stretch."<sup>44</sup>

Erich Korngold too wrote the scores for several "historical romances." He wrote for *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939) in which "had the dialogue been sung instead of spoken, each film might have been an opera" for their lavish musical treatment,<sup>45</sup> but it is the love theme in *The Sea Hawk* (1940), the last of these melodramas, which is "about as close as any composer has come to matching Wagner's Liebestod."<sup>46</sup> The preoccupation with Wagner thus continues. In 1954, Korngold himself agreed to provide the music for the Wagner biopic *The Magic Fire* in which he managed to condense the entire fifteen hours of the Ring into a three-minute montage. In *Deception* (1946) Bette Davis plays a pianist caught in a love triangle with a cellist (Paul Henreid) and a composer (Claude Rains). The music for the film was Korngold's last original film score. He was required to provide an eleven-minute 'Cello Concerto which was to be played as part of the drama and was written to support visual cues

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<sup>42</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 7

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, 1973: 112

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 117

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 134

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 136

“such as the cellist’s loving glance up to his beloved as she arrives in the audience.” Korngold extracted the concerto from the score, re-orchestrated it and premiered it in December 1946.

Political upheaval and insecurity benefited the film industry in both Britain and in Hollywood, with American popular culture in particular benefiting from the importation of musical talent in 1930s. Dmitri Tiomkin, for example, who had studied under Glazunov at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire wrote music for Westerns such as *High Noon* (1952), *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957), *Rio Bravo* (1959) and *The Alamo* (1960). “Tiomkin has often endeared himself to the press and the public by making humorous quips about his profession, such as saying he only does it for the money, a charge he denies when interviewed seriously:

It isn’t true that I do it only for the money. Writing film music lets me compose in as fine a style as I am capable of. I’m a classicist by nature and if you examine my scores you will find fugues, rondos and passacaglia(s). I’m no Beethoven but I think if I had devoted myself to concert composition I might have been a Rachmaninov. I’m not in sympathy with the harsh, atonal music of today, it’s enough to lacerate your ears. Perhaps that is why I have done well in films – it was music for the masses.<sup>47</sup>

In speaking thus, he betrays his connection to the late Romantics; indeed at the 1955 Oscars, he famously quipped “I would like to thank Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner,” much to the amusement of the audience. Not everyone approved of his flippancy, however. Franz Waxman, composer of the music for the melodrama *Rebecca* (1940) and a serious composer, was “among the handful of the best composers who have invented truly superior music for the screen,” a composer of the late romantic German school whose style “was textually rich and strongly expressive in melodic lines.”<sup>48</sup> Waxman believed in strong, easily recognisable themes “which can be repeated and varied according to the film’s needs. But the variations must be expressive and not

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 73

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 75



complicated.”<sup>49</sup> He won his first Academy Award in 1950 for another melodrama, *Sunset Boulevard*, in which Waxman conveys Norma Desmond’s state of madness by using a shrill, insistent orchestration of the music around her, the “emphasised violin voice” the explanation of her “pathetic behaviour.”<sup>50</sup>

Hollywood composers, however, were largely at the mercy of the producer and director. The composer of the music for *Carrie* (1951), David Raskin, wrote a piece to carry the visual story in classic melodrama scoring of six-and-a-half minutes in length. The producers decided to cut the scene to forty-six seconds,” and the movie also suffered another major cut that excised a musical “tour de force” in the New York flop-house scene towards the end of the film. Not all composers complied. Bernard Herrmann, whose musical scores revolutionized Hollywood scoring, was “sidelined and ignored by the classical elite.” However, in introducing instruments such as the Theremin, he was able to dispense with the “sentimentality of vibrato violins.”<sup>51</sup> Starting his film scoring career with *Citizen Kane* (1941) (and ending it with *Taxi Driver* in 1975) he also wrote for the melodrama *Hangover Square* (1945), the plot of which concerns the murderous lapses into which a composer falls. “The film is especially interesting on the musical level because the composer is in the process of writing a piano concerto... one of the most interesting virtuoso pieces ever written for a film. Dark and dazzling, it was too cerebral a work to become widely popular.”<sup>52</sup>

The movie concerto, firmly established since *Dangerous Moonlight* (1942), also inspired Miklós Rózsa’s *Spellbound Concerto*, which was extracted from the score to *Spellbound* (1945) and the publisher Chappell commissioned Rózsa to write a new version, to take on the success of the *Warsaw Concerto*. For this new work, Rózsa incorporated a solo piano part, and also featured the Theremin, the instrument which is responsible for the odd sound oscillation that Rózsa considered to be the perfect instrument to depict “the voice of a disturbed psyche.”<sup>53</sup> The score won Rózsa his first Oscar in 1945, though Rózsa had an already established reputation as a serious composer in his native Hungary before the age of 30 with the *Theme, Variations and*

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<sup>49</sup> Waxman, quoted in Thomas, 1973: 75-76

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 79

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/0-9/20thcenturygreats/herrmann.html> [11/08/ 2007]

<sup>52</sup> Thomas, 1973: 144

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 95

*Finale*, Op.13, in 1934. A London performance of his ballet *Hungaria* in 1936, attracted the attention of the French film director, Jacques Feyder who led Rózsa into films,<sup>54</sup> the latter entering into a long-standing and fruitful partnership with fellow-Hungarian, producer Alexander Korda at Denham Studios.

Because Hollywood musicians tended to be tied to the studio and were highly paid, they also tended to work exclusively under contract to the films and did not return to their previous musical environments. This was not the case in Britain, where “a composer might go from the film stages to the theatre stages to the concert halls to the ballet – all within a year,” as the arts tended to be concentrated in London and composers were “far less likely to be tied to long running contracts at enormous salaries”<sup>55</sup> and thus enjoyed a greater level of artistic autonomy.

The film music critic Hans Keller who was based in London<sup>56</sup> admits to a deep respect “for American life and thought” but believed that “Hollywood music happens to contain neither.”<sup>57</sup> Confessing a “long-standing bias” against it, he felt that it was the system itself, rather than individuals which was to blame. Like Adorno and Eisler, he felt that something was “basically wrong with this film industry’s musico-sociological economical set-up.” The effect of what he calls “empty extravagance” is the “typical, stereotyped Hollywood orchestration,”<sup>58</sup> remarkable in its disproportionate top-heavy sound in which “the upper part pesters you almost throughout, predominantly in the form of violin saccharine.” It’s not that Hollywood music is the “root of all evil,” it is that it contains “symptoms of a devastating disease,” in an “unbearable standardisation.” Like his American colleagues, Keller’s criticism reaches fever pitch: “The anti-artistic influence of Hollywood’s music does not merely extend far beyond the cinema, but in all likelihood is the most tenacious musical enemy of culture in the history of our civilization.” He calls it a fight. Writing in 1950, his article perhaps explains, to some extent, why music *did* diverge after this point. It really *was* tired, and the public tired of it. Furthermore, the big studios had enjoyed big budgets and big resident orchestras, and were able to “hire best available talents”<sup>59</sup> but the studio break-up saw everyone

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>56</sup> Keller was an émigré who had been roughed up on Kristallnacht in 1938

<sup>57</sup> “The Dragon Shows its Teeth” in *Music Review* Vol.12 No.3, August 1951, pp.221-5

<sup>58</sup> Keller, 2006: 43

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, 1973: 22

becoming freelancers. And with the advent of LPs, the recording industry was fast becoming a marketing tool for the films themselves and composers had even more pressure on them to popularise and to ensure big record sales. But the break-up of the studio system also had its indirect effect. “By the fifties further changes had taken or were taking place on the film music scene. It was becoming a common practice to plan the music in advance. Sometimes the composer had a chance to make suggestions about the film as well as the music” and “at the same time, the frontier of musical style considered acceptable for the moviegoing public was being pushed away from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century”<sup>60</sup> with the introduction of dissonance from the early fifties onwards.

But criticism of Hollywood film practice must rest with Adorno and Eisler. Claudia Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies* is largely defensive of Max Steiner, and she uses his scores extensively in her analysis of music in narrative cinema, devoting an entire chapter to Adorno and Eisler’s critique. For Gorbman, their preference for Serialism is misplaced for a score such as Steiner’s *Mildred Pierce*, because the twelve-tone method of writing lacks precisely what was required in a melodrama of this nature: “‘Progressive’ music alone will not raise consciousness in the classical Hollywood framework of expectations.”<sup>61</sup> Anthony Storr provides further illumination on this point by reminding us that musical formalists concentrate on technicalities “without reference to any emotions engendered by the music, which they consider irrelevant.”<sup>62</sup> Melodrama, by definition, requires music that is “expressive and capable of causing arousal,” something that Adorno and Eisler neglect in their criticism of film music.

But what was the basis of their criticism? As a means of filling out leisure time, Adorno and Eisler claimed that art had become entertainment, commenting in the introductory essay to their work, “Prejudices and Bad Habits,” on the place of art in the industrial age and the distinctions between “serious” and “popular” forms. In film, they say, the materials of traditional autonomous art – pictures, words, sound, script, acting and photography – are repackaged to form “consumer’s art,” a tendency apparent in Wagner’s music drama, and which can be seen as “the amalgamation of drama, psychological novel, operetta and symphony concert.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed the scale of what

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<sup>60</sup> Johnson, 1969: 14

<sup>61</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 109

<sup>62</sup> Storr, 1997: 77

<sup>63</sup> Adorno & Eisler in Dickinson, 2003: 25

Wagner wanted to accomplish is vast. Vaughan Williams recognised it, implying in 1945 that the movies' version of music drama was still some way off into the future: "film contains potentialities for the combination of the arts such as Wagner never dreamed of."<sup>64</sup> The Hollywood greats, on the other hand, were either unaware of what Wagner was attempting or were being deliberately flippant in claiming succession to Wagner. Bryan Magee explains that Wagner

was transubstantiating myth, in all the detailed universality of its socio-psychological significance, into theatrical works which were themselves a marriage of poetic drama in the conscious traditions of the ancient Greeks and of Shakespeare with symphonic orchestral music in the tradition of Beethoven – all on the largest possible scale, while at the same time paying close attention to detail. One could add that the conscious intelligence that illuminated his work was fuelled by long-term and emotionally committed researches into philosophy, politics, history and literature as well as myth, language, poetry, drama and music.<sup>65</sup>

Given that Hollywood composers based their technique on Wagner, it is ironic that he had differed from other composers by moving away from the chief complaint levelled against Hollywood composers by Adorno and Eisler, the evolving of a string of melodies. His music can even be said to have heralded atonality. Commenting on melody, Adorno and Eisler point out that it was the development of the "tune" from Schubert onwards that became the main feature of later romantic compositions but that this "conventional demand for melody and euphony is constantly in conflict with the objective requirements of the motion picture" where it is included "under the sign of utility rather than lyric expressiveness."<sup>66</sup> The desire for 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism was due to a desire for *melody*; or a good "tune" – a trend which Adorno and Eisler disapproved of: "This fetishism in regard to melody, which at certain moments during the latter part of the Romantic period crowded out all the other elements of music,

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<sup>64</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, quoted in Huntley, 1947

<sup>65</sup> Magee, 2000: 258

<sup>66</sup> Adorno & Eisler in Dickinson, 2003: 28

shackled the concept of melody itself.”<sup>67</sup> They also disliked the extravagance of film music. Because film does not lend itself to the subtleties of pianissimo or fortissimo,

everything is more or less adjusted to the mezzoforte ideal... an effort is made, through exaggerated interpretation, to make each musical motif produce the utmost expression, emotion and suspense. The violins must sob or scintillate, the brass must crash insolently or bombastically, no moderate expression is tolerated, and the whole method of performance is based on exaggeration.<sup>68</sup>

It is worth noting here the difference between volume and expression. One can only guess their attitude toward melodrama, which surely indulges this exaggeration gleefully to its extreme. There is, of course, another obvious connection between Wagner and film. Adorno and Eisler lamented that “cinematic music is still patched together by means of leitmotifs,”<sup>69</sup> which according to Annette Davison, “proved to be a popular means by which film music operated in narrative terms in both the silent and the sound eras.”<sup>70</sup> Their chief complaint about the use of leitmotiv in film, “by which persons, emotions, and symbols can instantly be identified,”<sup>71</sup> is that it never moves beyond its function as a signpost. In Wagner it is provided with the “large musical canvas” that it requires in order to “take on structural meaning beyond that of a signpost,” that is, because the opera by definition is made up of music throughout, but the film requires music only at specific moments without further development and thus “its limited dimension does not permit adequate expansion of the leitmotiv.”<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, Wagner’s use of the leitmotiv goes beyond its role as a means of characterising emotions or representing characters. He also used leitmotiv to endow dramatic events with “metaphysical significance,” the Valhalla motif in *The Ring*, for example, symbolising the “cosmic will” or “primal principle.”<sup>73</sup> Because the motion picture seeks to depict reality, Adorno and Eisler argue, this particular use of the leitmotiv has no place in film. And the use of leitmotiv elsewhere leads to “extreme

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<sup>67</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 7

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Adorno & Eisler in Dickinson, 2003: 27

<sup>70</sup> Davison, 2004: 20

<sup>71</sup> Adorno & Eisler in Dickinson, 2003: 27

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

poverty of composition” because of the inability in the film medium to develop its full musical significance.

Other commentators have had plenty to say about the use of leitmotiv, too. Jan Swynnoe writes: “The appropriation of the leitmotif by Hollywood composers is the only possible excuse for even mentioning Wagner’s name in connection with them,” the typical Hollywood score, characterised by romantic orchestral colour particularly dominated by the upper strings resembling “a cross between Tchaikovsky and early Schoenberg.”<sup>74</sup> Heaping even more scorn on Hollywood melodramas of the period, Swynnoe characterises Max Steiner’s music for *Gone With The Wind* as typically overscored “wall-to-wall” or saturated scoring. This type of illustrative music, she says, simply underscores the visual image and “reduces the cinema to the level of the newsreel or the educational film.”<sup>75</sup> Hans Keller also pours scorn on Rozsa for *Spellbound* and on Max Steiner, whose constant repetition of thematic (rather than melodic) material is the result of a reliance on the leitmotiv technique which “never builds up to anything.” Steiner’s other scores do not escape either: “A good deal of Steiner’s music doesn’t sound normal and therefore compels one’s angry attention,” rants Keller. In *Gone With The Wind* “Steiner drenches the soundtrack in a rather indiscriminate fashion; in places the music has less relation to the visual than the band’s music at Lyon’s Corner House has to your table talk. Formally, the score is a mess, while emotionally it is meretricious; the scoring, too, is cheap. The shoddy title tune, which does not bear a single hearing recurs [...] twenty one times.”

Several critics also point out the problem with quotations. Using Mendelssohn’s Wedding March and themes from national anthems which, because of their associations, can detract from the subtleties of the image, writes Burt, draw attention to themselves, and away from what else there might be to understand in the scene in which they are being used. “Take the case of the Bogart classic *Casablanca* (1942). Max Steiner’s score is sprinkled with fragments of *La Marseillaise*, *Deutschland über Alles*, and *Die Wacht am Rhein*. Steiner, instinctively aware of the pitfalls inherent in their use, avoids extended quotations for the most part and prefers, instead, to use motivic statements of

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<sup>74</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 24

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 25

three or four notes.”<sup>76</sup> For Keller, Steiner’s best score is *Love and Learn* (1947) where his use of the leitmotiv is “well chosen and utilized,” giving a glimpse of what could be achieved if Steiner “availed himself of his talent.”<sup>77</sup> By the time Max Steiner had written the music for the melodrama *Now Voyager*, a formula had been established by custom for the scoring of such pictures. This led actors, in turn, “to develop, consciously or unconsciously, a more leisurely, almost lyrical style of delivery.”<sup>78</sup> The dominant strings, together with occasional woodwind and brass punctuating certain parts of the dialogue, also served to exaggerate the sentimental in preference to the actors’ delivery. This in turn tended to decrease audience identity with real emotional poignancy, in contrast to British film where there was a greater desire for reality.<sup>79</sup>

Royal Brown considers Steiner’s pioneering score for *King Kong* to be “good” music, however, and though Dmitri Tiomkin, Alfred Newman and Steiner “helped create the bad reputation from which film music has still not entirely escaped,” Franz Waxman “managed to escape cheap melodramatics and musical vapidness by extending his post-romantic roots into a distinctive expressionism that allowed him to redefine and thereby de-trivialize some of the cine-musical tropes.”<sup>80</sup> Tiomkin gets the worst criticism for his “thickly orchestrated” scores and, “unlike his similarly harmonically naive colleagues” (Steiner and Newman) “could not even come up with a passable tune” for his score to *Black Beauty* (1946). Brown considers *Gone With the Wind* to be one of the most overrated films with one of the most overrated scores of all time. His idea of a good film score is that which contains music “that can stand well on its own right interacting in a fertile give-and-take and on an equal stature with the other artistic components of the cinema.”<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, Carol Flinn uses Steiner’s score for *Gone With The Wind* as an example of an historical setting, in which “the heavily orchestrated music helps evoke the grandeur of dramatically epic earlier times,” establishing the “grandeur of the antebellum south” in the early pre-war scenes at the same time.<sup>82</sup> Mary Anne Doane considers *Gone With The Wind* a “great love story,” and a fine example of the type of

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<sup>76</sup> Burt, 1996: 58

<sup>77</sup> Keller, 2006: 39

<sup>78</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 125

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 127

<sup>80</sup> Brown, 1995: 62ff

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Flinn, 1982, 108

narrative that is “usually buttressed by the weight of History” but which is also supported by music, whose role it is to represent the “ineffable.” “Desire, emotion – the very content of the love story – are not accessible to a visual discourse but demand the supplementary expenditure of a musical score. Music takes up where the image leaves off,”<sup>83</sup> she writes. Claudia Gorbman has put this another way: “Music enters to satisfy a need to compensate for, fill in, the emotional depth not verbally representable.”<sup>84</sup> Steiner took the illustrative type of scoring found in the leitmotiv method to extremes creating, in Gorbman’s words, a “hodgepodge” of mixed theatrical material, in contrast to Wagner’s far more subtle and metaphysical purposes for the leitmotiv. The result, “a ragbag of motivic shreds tossed about incoherently”<sup>85</sup> each time a character appears, is discussed or is thought of, makes Swynnoe too doubt whether the leitmotiv technique has ever been successfully transferred from music drama. She does concede, however, that the composer Erich Korngold redeems the use of leitmotiv in film but even he was forced to conform to “a stereotypical treatment of music for film.”<sup>86</sup> In Hollywood, composers of his stature were forced to adhere to the rigid departmental code of the studios. But Swynnoe may well be just as irritated with Wagner himself, as well as those who tried to imitate him. Even that composer’s practice was that leitmotifs already used “should be perpetually reused to comment, allude, recall, contrast, foretell, expose, controvert [and] reminisce,”<sup>87</sup> with the last *Ring* opera, *Götterdämmerung* constructed almost entirely of extremely complicated leitmotiv (sometimes several in a bar).

Hans Keller’s admittedly “extreme view”<sup>88</sup> is in agreement with the composer Aaron Copland, who believed that the Hollywood musician composes for the producer rather than the public, hence the stereotype referred to by Swynnoe. This distinguishes British film music from its Hollywood counterpart, according to Keller, because Hollywood doesn’t engage composers “who have distinguished themselves in the field of music per se.”<sup>89</sup> It is the “redundant repetition” that Keller deplores, and of which Franz Waxman and Alfred Newman are also guilty, the former’s music for *The Two Mrs Carrolls*

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<sup>83</sup> Doane, 1987: 97

<sup>84</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 67

<sup>85</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 26

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>87</sup> Magee, 2000: 202

<sup>88</sup> Keller, 2006: 36

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 37



(1947) being the musical equivalent of “Suspense! Sensation!” according to Keller,<sup>90</sup> who heaps personal scorn on composers about whom Adorno and Eisler merely generalized. The generally negative attitude towards film music doesn’t lighten much in any of the writers whose ideas are summarised here. The earlier writers perhaps foresaw the modern Hollywood practice of scoring unison strings, the effect of which is a rather disappointing, “thin” sound, and were feeling depressed. Adorno and Eisler reserve their worst criticisms for “the abominable cult of the average”<sup>91</sup> and their conclusion is that cinema music should not take itself seriously; that when it does it becomes involuntarily comic. To be voluntarily comic, on the other hand (as in the cartoons) is the only acceptable alternative. Hans Keller, too, admitted that, musically speaking, Hollywood tragedy (by which he means melodrama) makes him laugh, while Hollywood humour makes him cry.<sup>92</sup> Clearly, films such as *Dangerous Moonlight* are unlikely to have impressed either, as the music pretends to be something it is not – a piano concerto in this case – and this may well account for the contempt the music has attracted. In short, it is pretentiousness in music. Besides this kind of pastiche, the alternative to programmatic use of the leitmotiv is the use of “atmospheric” music<sup>93</sup> which serves, through the use of orchestral colour, to heighten the drama and tension; enhancing and interpreting an image instead of merely duplicating or reinforcing it. This type of scoring was often the preferred British practice and was exemplified by Vaughan Williams. But before we venture into British practice it would be well to linger at the level of technique for some guiding pointers to how the prevalence of leitmotiv and pastiche came about.

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<sup>90</sup> Keller, 2006: 39

<sup>91</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 124

<sup>92</sup> Keller, 2006: 38

<sup>93</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 28

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## CHAPTER 3 - Musical Techniques in Melodrama

In this chapter I discuss some of the techniques and purposes of music. Linda Williams provides an extremely useful method of understanding melodrama through the analogy of 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral music. I also discuss programme music and the nature of musical significance and musical form, as well as how music is used to indicate human emotion.

### 19<sup>th</sup> century practices

Linda Williams' assertion that melodrama is like the "hurry-up and slow-down" of 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral music provides the inspiration for this study, and it is to her I turn for insight into the musical techniques of melodrama. In "Melodrama Revised," she lists a number of outstanding qualities of film melodrama. First, that "melodrama begins, and wants to end, in a space of innocence."<sup>1</sup> In addition, melodrama focuses on victim heroes and the recognition of their virtue, and involves characters "who embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichean conflicts between good and evil." Though melodrama is by no means characterised by realism, it "appears modern by borrowing from realism." Most significantly, Williams observes the dialectic of "pathos and action" in melodrama, where the tragedy at the heart of the story is based on what she calls a "give and take" of "too late" and "in the nick of time." This is akin to the delaying tactics employed in music of the late Romantic period:

Nineteenth century symphonic music begins in an original key area, a home base (or tonic) out of which the variations and digressions into new keys and rhythms occur. It then returns in the final movement, with much fanfare, and sometimes considerable delay, to the tonic. Melodramatic narrative does much the same. Primed by the beginning tonic of the original theme – the register of the original space of innocence – the narrative wants to return to this point of

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, 1998: 73

origin and teases us throughout all subsequent development with the haunting threat of its loss.<sup>2</sup>

Music's direct appeal to the emotions, to our inner selves, and its effects on us are involuntary. Our response has nothing to do with our knowledge, intellect, or our understanding:

Music, like life, consists of the perpetual creation and spinning out of longings on which we are stretched as on a rack, unable ever to accept where we are as a resting place, until only the complete cessation of everything – the end of the piece as a whole, or the end of the individual's life – brings with it a cessation of unsatisfiable longing.<sup>3</sup>

This effect is achieved by the use of a harmonic device known as “suspension” whereby the resolution into the tonic is interrupted by a new discord, the tension thus prolonged. The suspense created by what Linda Williams calls the “hurry-up and slow-down” thus has a technical definition, and when the device was first introduced it heralded the beginning of modern music. As indicated above, it finds its first and best example in *Tristan and Isolde*, where the dominant seventh is used to create an expectation of resolution with the “natural” appearance of the tonic as resolution, but postponed from the prelude until the opera's conclusion over four hours later.

A similar filmic device appears often in melodrama. In *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), for example, the story is told in hindsight using a series of flashbacks. The device “is as old as Tragedy itself,” writes Magee.<sup>4</sup> Wagner himself “consciously took over from the dramatists of ancient Greece for *Tristan*, as he had in his first conception of *The Ring*, their way of beginning the theatrical presentation of a story not with the beginning of the story but, on the contrary, at a point shortly before its climax; and then recounting, *in flashback* as it were, the events that have led up to this point; and then precipitating the climax.”<sup>5</sup> The strengths

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Magee, 2000: 207

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 213

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine

of the technique too lie in the effect of maintaining suspense or “holding the audience in high tension,” as Magee puts it, though he admits that the method also requires the narration of “back history” – what we would call voiceover – and, like film, the effect can be as boring in opera “unless energy and animation are maintained.”<sup>6</sup> For Anthony Storr there is no distinction between this music and, for example, Hitchcock, whose films “also arouse expectations, heighten suspense, postpone resolution, and finally make all well.” Since the content of melodrama (and not just in its film variety) is concerned with the extremes of the human condition, music and film in this genre are particularly connected at the emotional level. Alfred Hitchcock’s British period includes *The Thirty Nine Steps* (1935), a thriller also billed as a “spy melodrama,” *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), a Gaumont-British picture referenced as a comic thriller (with Margaret Lockwood in the cast, a name synonymous with British melodrama of the period) and *Jamaica Inn*, a “salty melodrama” based on the novel by Daphne du Maurier. It was his last pre-Hollywood film.<sup>7</sup> Made in 1939, *Jamaica Inn*, produced by and starring Charles Laughton as Sir Humphrey Pengallon is set in 1819. An urgent overture (music by Eric Fenby) opens the film and introduces what appear to be leitmotifs as the titles roll. For example, Maureen O’Hara’s name appears as a short violin theme is introduced in the turgid opening music. The subsequent programme music introduces Cornwall and its desolate coastline, the scene set for a tale of pirates, treacherous seas – and a lonely rider, who races to a cliff top with the purpose of obscuring a beacon to cause the wreck of a floundering ship. A full three-and-a-half minutes of music thus opens the film. However, this improbable melodrama of racketeers and cutthroats is played out entirely *without* music, diegetic or otherwise. It has been said that Hitchcock had already departed for Hollywood when *Jamaica Inn* was made and the meagre score marks a film that was completed in haste, the clues contained in the “overture” of what a full score might have sounded like.<sup>8</sup>

Louis Levy’s involvement as musical director of the film *Bank Holiday* (1938), with Carol Reed directing, and released in the same year, however, results in a film of great

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 214

<sup>7</sup> *Rebecca*, another du Maurier novel, followed in 1940. Hitchcock’s first Hollywood outing, it features an accomplished score by Franz Waxman, which is said to be one of his personal favourites (of 144 scores) and was one of the first to be used for movie publicity.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Sullivan calls *Jamaica Inn* Hitchcock’s “grumpy goodbye to the British cinema.” Hitchcock, he writes, distanced himself from the film so fast that we’ll never know what happened to Eric Fenby’s “magnificent score” (Sullivan, 2006: 56).

contrast to Hitchcock's rather half-hearted final British film. Loosely modelled on Hollywood's *Grand Hotel* (1932), Gainsborough's *Bank Holiday* (1938) begins with a fanfare-like theme in the "overture" style and the establishing scene of the approach of a public holiday. The inevitable rush for the coast is spoilt of course by the inevitable rain and, musically, variations on a theme of the Edwardian ditty, "I do like to be beside the seaside" reappear regularly. Down in "Bexborough" (a fictional Brighton), a variety of (diegetic) street music is heard as the holiday mood takes over: pianos, a trumpet and a song, "Two Shadows in the Moonlight," yet another reference to romantic feelings through the lunar association with the emotional.<sup>9</sup> The song is a sort of theme which runs right through the film in many guises – a pub-song by two revellers, given an amusing drunken, and out-of-tune rendition by the gormless Doreen (René Ray), down on the beach in a kind of community singing, with the dance-band taking the tune up at the Grand Hotel. There is a rich variety of music throughout the film, including popular tunes of the day, and the "Bexborough Follies," who perform – to an empty house – a diegetic version of the Edwardian seaside song delivered with gusto. The film is interesting for a glimpse at popular seaside pre-war culture and there are elements of classic melodrama. And the music, when present, underlines all the noble sentiments, as well as tragic ones, though dialogue is not generally underscored.

### Programme music

According to Thomas Elsaesser<sup>10</sup> music in melodrama is both subjective and programmatic. Programme music is that "which interprets a story or picture" known also as illustrative music,<sup>11</sup> a great deal of it is "simply music for which some event, story, sound, or picture has been the trigger."<sup>12</sup> Programme music is also designed specifically to create an emotional effect: but it does contain references to external ideas, too. Its associative properties are particularly strong. "One of the best ways to

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<sup>9</sup> I chose the name of this song as the title to this dissertation, because it sums up the mood of many British melodramas of the era. Recurring references to the moon and to moonlight also feature in many film titles with their astrological associations with the emotional and with the feminine. *Dangerous Moonlight*, *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, *Moonlight Sonata*, and *Ill Met by Moonlight* (Powell and Pressburger, 1957) are the most obvious and many films contain visual references to moonlight, twilight, gaslight and the shadows they cast, appearing constantly throughout these films, imbuing them with a sense of illusion and the imaginative longings of the Romantic.

<sup>10</sup> Elsaesser, 1973: 358

<sup>11</sup> Jacobs, 1977: 325

<sup>12</sup> Storr, 1997: 79

understand the power of music is to study the conventions by which musical affect circulates through a culture. A musical convention harnesses musical affect to specific and concrete meaning through the power of association,”<sup>13</sup> writes Katherine Kalinak. Typical examples are the habanera rhythm used to denote Spain, open fourths and fifths to signify Rome and Greece, and quartal harmony to do the same for the Orient. These familiar conventions were used by composers “to establish geographic place and historical time, and to summon up specific emotional responses predictably and quickly.”<sup>14</sup> Puccini used them freely, particularly in *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*. Thus in the words of Claudia Gorbman, “standard film music efficiently establishes historical and geographical setting and atmosphere, through the high degree of its cultural coding”<sup>15</sup> even if the actual music technique that denotes “freshness in springtime, the seventeenth century [or] menacing evil” is clumsy or inaccurate. Kalinak’s examples are the Waltz theme in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) which suggests grace and the gentility of the family, the habanera in *Vertigo* (1958) denoting sensuality and fiery passion (the music is by Bernard Herrmann in both cases) and Franz Waxman’s sultry and steamy (and even out-of-date) tango in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

These are what Royal Brown calls musical and extramusical tropes which “evoke automatic responses in the listener and which work on the same kind of simplistic, stereotypical level as the battles between good and evil in melodrama.” Major keys evoke happiness or heroism, minor keys sadness or impending doom. Of course this is known to every schoolboy who learns to play the piano. Later he begins to understand that “consonant harmonies suggest order and stability whereas dissonance implies disorder, instability, madness; a march rhythm, or even a simple snare-drum tattoo, brings the military to mind, while love moves to the rhythms of a 6/8 lilt.”<sup>16</sup> “Music can also tell us about gender. In its stylized form it can fix gender (soft romantic score-lines for the woman, harder ones for the male),”<sup>17</sup> the use of vibrato strings to denote a “fluttering” heart or to heighten emotional suspense. In addition then, the classic film score also relies heavily on the standard symphony orchestra, the strings used to express emotion (due to the proximity to the human voice), while the brass section suggests

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<sup>13</sup> Kalinak, 2003: 20

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>15</sup> Gorbman, 2003: 40

<sup>16</sup> Brown, 1995: 62ff

<sup>17</sup> Hayward, 2000: 267

heroism because of the association with pageant, the military and the hunt. Such musical conventions are profuse says Kalinak, and film music, when it taps into the collective association “is appealing to a strong response that can impact spectators whether they are consciously aware of it or not.”<sup>18</sup>

In his 1969 essay “Face the Music,” William Johnson uses the term “ambient” to describe music “which forms an integral part of the sounds of a scene.”<sup>19</sup> “Music,” he writes, “can arouse a rapid and powerful response because it either acts directly on the nervous system or makes contact with associations rooted in the listener’s personal experience. The response is nonrational; and this might seem to explain why music can make such a successful marriage with the screen image, which itself arouses a nonrational response.”<sup>20</sup> The best of the film music that has endured, however, tends to be the music that can stand apart from the images for which it was intended, music that is robust enough, as it were, to exist out of context. This implies “sufficient distance” from the personal and examples can be found in the rhapsody-like compositions that were featured in certain films and which exist as separate compositions in their own right. But this can also apply to certain scores that do not bear a close resemblance to the mawkish sentimentality of late 19<sup>th</sup> century pastiche. When Vaughan Williams was writing the score for *Scott of the Antarctic* in 1947 he felt that the material belonged outside of the restrictions imposed by the film and the personal allusions required. The symphony that resulted is concerned with universality, about as far as one can get from the personal or sentimental. “When the film was being made, Vaughan Williams felt that the epic story had generated in him something deeper than incidental music tied by the short time-lengths of the episodes of a moving picture. That something was the universal significance of mankind pitting itself against implacable nature.”<sup>21</sup> The symphony is programmatic to some degree, however, and to each of its five movements, the composer prefixed a verbal motto – from Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound,” from Psalm 104, “Before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouri” (Coleridge), John Donne (“The Sun Rising”) and from Captain Scott’s own diary. Thus the symphony relates to the film in that it uses words to illuminate the score (the positions are reversed in the film). The

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<sup>18</sup> Kalinak, 2003: 21

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, 1969: 19

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 7

<sup>21</sup> RCA sleeve notes which accompany the 1967 Previn/LSO recording



music is related to Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony,<sup>22</sup> which itself is related to personal victory over despair; but rather than rooted in the personal, it speaks of a universal experience of heroism. Music here "signifies" the atmosphere, represents it, and even creates it.

### Musical significance

Susanne Langer's work on musical "significance" is relevant at this point. "We are inclined to credit works of art with *significance*," she writes.<sup>23</sup> Significance is the real problem of art criticism: content is one thing, but what has the artist achieved in the perfection of form? asks Langer. How is form evaluated? "The most obvious approach to the formal aspect of art would be, of course, through the study of pure design."<sup>24</sup> The problem is that, until recently, in most art forms, design has never really played a major role although it is carried to "considerable heights" in textiles and ceramics. "Music, on the other hand, is pre-eminently non-representative even in its classical productions, its highest attainments" and thus we can approach the question of form because "there is no obvious, literal content in our way. If the meaning of art belongs to the sensuous percept itself apart from what it ostensibly represents, then such purely artistic meaning should be most accessible through musical works."<sup>25</sup> Langer traces the history of the "significance" of music and its aesthetic value, on which "a great deal of philosophical thought" has been bestowed, from Schopenhauer onwards. Kant, for example, believed that in its contribution to an intellectual progress in an age of reason, music ranked lowest in all the arts. But Langer provides an alternative approach: "Another kind of reaction to music, however, is more striking, and seems more significant: that is the *emotional* response it is commonly supposed to evoke," a belief in the physical power of music that goes back to the ancient Greeks and which "has come down to modern times."<sup>26</sup> Turning to Wagner for assistance, Langer considers the development of music as a language of feeling, where the objects of musical representation are "love and longing, hope and fear" and which are "the essence of tragedy and comedy." She

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Langer, 1957: 208

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 209

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 214

considers this “the most persistent, plausible, and interesting doctrine of meaning in music, and has lent itself to considerable development” by no less than Schumann, Liszt and Berlioz, but with Wagner providing “the most explicit rendering of the principle” in his 1841 work:

What music expresses, is eternal, infinite and ideal; it does not express the passion, love, or longing of such-and-such an individual on such-and-such an occasion, but passion, love or longing in itself, and this it presents in that unlimited variety of motivations, which is the exclusive and particular characteristic of music, foreign and inexpressible to any other language.<sup>27</sup>

Here, there might be a clue as to the aesthetic qualities of film music. According to Langer, “this passage states quite clearly that music is not self-expression, but *formulation and representation of* emotions, moods, mental tensions and resolutions – a ‘logical picture’ of sentient, responsive life, a source of insight, not a plea for sympathy,” presented that we may “grasp, realize [and] comprehend” certain feelings, rather than pretending to own them ourselves. Thus music is the logical expression of emotion rather than self-expression. She quotes Busoni who said that the composer must never lose himself in the material, even if his audience is moved, because though we may conceive an emotion contained within a musical symbol we must be able to deal with its meaning. This is all but impossible in the highly charged emotional content of 19<sup>th</sup> century high Romanticism. The Baroque is the least “dangerous” music in this regard. Film composers of the thirties abandoned all reference to this distinction – the distance required between the object and its appeal to one’s own self – and this is perhaps why, musically, we *ought* to contextualise certain aspects of popularised musical expressions in film. “Even in Wagner, who stated explicitly the abstractive, generalizing function of music in depicting feelings, there is plenty of confusion,” she writes, because he, too, presented his own “personal sentiments and upheavals” in his music.<sup>28</sup> This is perhaps part of Wagner’s arrogance, that he attributed universality to his own personal experience.

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<sup>27</sup> Wagner in 1841, quoted by Langer, 1957: 221-2

<sup>28</sup> Langer, 1957: 224

Langer goes on to consider that aspects of musical expression such as *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, *accelerando* and *ritardando* are representatives of characteristics of life itself, expressions of psychological phenomena: “aspects of the so-called ‘inner life’ – physical or mental – which have formal properties similar to those of music – patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfilment, excitement, sudden change etc.”<sup>29</sup> Later, Langer is able to apply this: “Because the forms of human feeling are much more congruent with musical forms than with the forms of language, music can *reveal* the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach.”<sup>30</sup> The emotion conveyed is unnameable, or unspeakable, to use Wagner’s term, and even an attempt to describe the emotional effect of the music will be impossible.

However, the composer needs to be careful not to overstate his case. In his essay on spectator emotion and film criticism, Carl Plantinga notes that the subject of sentimentality “has sparked the most interest among aestheticians, and suffered the heaping scorn of critics.”<sup>31</sup> Melodrama, through its very nature, is likely to fall foul of acceptability in this regard. Plantinga writes: “Underlying this dichotomy is the traditional reason/emotion split, associating masculinity with reason, and femininity with emotion and the irrational.”<sup>32</sup> This dichotomy is equivalent to Nietzsche’s Apollonian and Dionysian opposites that Wagner seeks to reconcile in his revival of Greek tragedy. Sentiment is not to be confused with sentimentality, however. Sentimentality or “false or unearned sentiment” is “mawkish and maudlin, [but] those who find immorality in sentimentality do not necessarily condemn all sentiment.”<sup>33</sup> This is helpful if we are to judge music, film, and film music in melodrama, but Plantinga points out that “sustained consideration of the nature of sentiment and sentimentality” are entirely lacking in the academic study of melodrama.” The presence of sentimentality may be justified if an holistic approach is taken that recognises the ideological concerns of the spectator – so that, for example, the presence of a sentimental musical device is permissible in the context of the “thought, belief and evaluation” by the audience towards the whole film. “Tara’s Theme” in *Gone With The*

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 227

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 235

<sup>31</sup> Plantinga, 2005: 148 ff

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 384

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 385

*Wind* perhaps provides the obvious example, its significance being the highly sentimental association with Scarlett O'Hara's home, one of the persistent messages contained in the film and one which the audience is encouraged to support.

The British composer Arthur Bliss says that music in film "can bring nostalgia to landscape, drama to any hour of day or night; it can express undercurrents of human emotion when actors involved show little of it outwardly."<sup>34</sup> The last comment is revealing in that melodrama relies on music to take up where – in Mary Ann Doane's view – human expression leaves off. Linda Williams too points out that the function of the big sensation scenes in melodrama "was to be able to put forth a moral truth in gesture and to picture what could not be fully spoken in words," the denouement typically the recognition of "virtue prolonged in the frozen tableau whose picture speaks more powerfully than words."<sup>35</sup> According to Peter Brooks, the motive of tableau is to give the spectator "the opportunity to see meanings represented, emotions and moral states rendered in clear visible signs."<sup>36</sup> *Black Narcissus* (1947) is the obvious example, as we shall see. Bliss composed music for a number of films, most notably *Things to Come* (1936) and the Gainsborough picture *Christopher Columbus* (1949), one of that studio's last films before it closed in 1950. In the score, Bliss used Spanish musical idioms in order to convey the atmosphere of the age of Columbus. Thus the style of the music itself is capable of making a symbolic statement about the drama and the characters involved. In general, musical style reflects an aesthetic point of view: classicism, romanticism, expressionism, impressionism and so on. But on a more personal level, a style can be brought into congruence with the nature or disposition of a particular character, and it will speak volumes about that character and his or her role in the film, writes George Burt.<sup>37</sup> And as we have seen, there is a reason for sticking to Romanticism. Impressionism – and with it the twelve-tone approach to music – is not easy for audiences. But it is "considered particularly effective in certain situations, especially those requiring a relatively high level of musical intensity,"<sup>38</sup> neurotic behaviour being one of those occasions. Adorno and Eisler also recognised this: "While traditional music always preserves a certain restraint in the expression of sorrow, grief,

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<sup>34</sup> Huntley, 1947

<sup>35</sup> Williams, 1998: 52

<sup>36</sup> Brooks, 1976:62

<sup>37</sup> Burt, 1994: 42

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 49

and fear, the new style tends to be unrestrained. Sorrow can turn into appalling despair, repose into glassy rigidity, fear into panic.”<sup>39</sup>

Adorno and Eisler remind us that though “musical techniques for arousing suspense have been developed for the most part since the middle of the eighteenth century,” interruption performs a dramatic function, by helping to master indirectly a situation that could not be directly unfolded as the main action,”<sup>40</sup> as well as serving as a “stop gap” for drama in the narrative where, without music, the passage of time, for example, would result in a slackening of suspense. But if their comments and Linda Williams’ reference to 19<sup>th</sup> century symphonic music is a useful cue for the study of film music in melodrama, the analogy she draws for describing these delaying tactics employed by directors of film melodrama is not the only approach available.

### Musical form

Can film music be compared to musical constructs such as sonata form? Linda Williams’ comparison with the delaying tactics of Romantic music prompts the enquiry of whether the strict classical first movement form can be in any way paralleled to a film melodrama. The rise of sonata form encouraged the development of orchestral concerts in which music was entirely unrelated to words. For sonata form provided an equivalent for dramatic action: “a story in sound which had a definable beginning, middle and end comparable with the forms of a saga, novel, or short story.”<sup>41</sup> Anthony Storr’s outline of sonata form explains that the scheme “can be seen as outlining a story” and equates it to archetypal patterns such as the hero myth reflected in everyone’s experience of life. Patterns in music, particularly sonata form, apply similarly to the underlying patterns in novels, he says, quoting from Alex Aronson’s appraisal of *Mrs Dalloway*, *A Passage to India*, *Ulysses* and *Steppenwolf*:<sup>42</sup> “Each one of them in its own way [are] studies in human polarity employing a traditional musical form in order to illustrate opposing layers of consciousness which eluded the writers of fiction in less introspective periods of literary history... The novelist’s increasing awareness of

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<sup>39</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 40

<sup>40</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 30

<sup>41</sup> Storr, 1997: 73; quoting from Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, New York: WW Norton, 1980, p.8

<sup>42</sup> Aronson, 1980: 66-7

polarity in the life of the individual and the social antagonism with which he is faced appeared most forcefully reflected in the sonata form with its play upon contradictory emotional pressures and tensions, its tendency towards introspective self-analysis and its striving for resolution.”<sup>43</sup> There is clearly a connection here between the polarities expressed in film melodrama whereby the themes of right and wrong exist in contrast with each other. The presentation of the “case” in melodrama has a similar musical structure. This is not to say that music typically used in melodrama corresponds to these structures. Film music of any kind is unsuited to the patterns of sonata form and other musical structures, though the narrative itself may be. “Effective oratory conventionally uses an A-B-A form, a simplified exposition, development, and recapitulation. ‘Say what you are going to say, then say it, then tell them what you have said.’”<sup>44</sup>

“The background pattern is conventional,” continues Storr. “What the composer does with it is what counts. The same is true of novels” (and by extrapolation, of other narrative forms, including film melodrama, if not to the music typically employed therein). A distinction must be made between form and content. Indeed, says Storr, “form and content in music, and body and soul in human beings are equally indivisible if either is to live.”<sup>45</sup> How, then, is musical form in film melodrama distinguished from its content? The tendency to use romantic forms (i.e. those based in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century orchestral tradition) certainly provides a self-reflective method of highlighting the dramatic content, even if the music cannot always conform to classical A-B-A like structures, which may apply to the film itself.

But this is not sufficient. As we have seen, we must also turn to other theories and ideas of music such as the use of leitmotiv to be able to examine the role that music plays in melodrama. And not all music is of this kind, asserts Storr. Although any performance of music must, of course, last for a measurable period of time, some music appears to be more concerned with structures which are not sharply contrasted nor resolved in a final union, but which are juxtaposed in ways we perceive as more nearly ‘static’.”<sup>46</sup> Adorno and Eisler recognised that films use short musical forms as opposed to tonal music of the previous two-and-a-half centuries which favoured relatively long, developed forms:

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<sup>43</sup> Storr, 1997: 83

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 88

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 185

“Consciousness of tonal centre can be achieved only by parallel episodes, developments, and repetitions that require a certain amount of time.”<sup>47</sup> But they also recognised that certain principles were emerging such as

the need for short musical forms, corresponding to the short picture sequences. Such sketchy, rhapsodical or aphoristic forms are characteristic of the motion picture in their irregularity, fluidity, and absence of repetitions. The traditional tripartite song form – ABA – with the last part repeating the first, is less suitable than continuous forms, such as preludes, inventions, or toccatas. The method of exposition and connection of several themes and their development seems foreign to the motion picture because such complex musical forms require too much attention to be used in combination with complex visual forms. But even this is not an absolute rule. Large musical forms related not to picture sequences but to continuities of meaning are not inconceivable.<sup>48</sup>

Adorno and Eisler go on to identify two types of composing: the first where the “whole is derived from the details” and where there is an inherent drive and the second, where the details are derived from the whole, the standard method for film composing.

### Human emotion

In a recent survey by the British Film Institute, “The Best Music in Film,”<sup>49</sup> directors and musicians alike confirm that as film music practitioners, their task is to emphasise the functions of emotional amplification and the enhancement of mood. For Caryl Flinn melodrama “has come to be associated with an excessive quality that is usually perceived as an effect of style or *mise-en-scène*, and that, according to recent critics, indicates a deeper ideological surfeit which questions the assumptions of the classical narrative text.”<sup>50</sup> Flinn argues that it has been characterised by the distinction between the narrative themes and diegetic situations, the *melos* (its non-representational, musical

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<sup>47</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 38

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>49</sup> *Sight and Sound*, September 2004

<sup>50</sup> Flinn, 1992: 133

element – or Nietzsche’s Dionysus) functioning as the counterpart to the narrative and representational drama (Apollonian). The *melos* speaks to human consciousness *directly*; it appeals to the emotions. It is the difference between cognisant listening and subconscious hearing.

Adorno and Eisler assert that music’s function – in film or elsewhere – is “to bring out the spontaneous, essentially human element in its listeners,”<sup>51</sup> their particular concern being that music is in danger of being “deliberately misused for ideological purposes.” Surely this applies to other kinds of manipulation, not least in melodrama where it unashamedly manipulates what the audience’s response is to be. Their comments on music, when interpreted in the exaggerated context of melodrama, seem to ring true. They cite a number of examples in film where music has been specifically used to transform a prosaic scene of isolated individuals into something else. Music is also used to create an opposite meaning to what the picture is telling – a fight, for example, set to tender, lyrical strains, suggests that the perpetrators are in fact, victims. The British melodrama *Good Time Girl* (1947) uses a Bach minuet in a fight scene in this way. If in the ordinary film, “the story-telling element required to weld the plot and connect or separate the times and scenes of action... are by music made more fluid and more intense and raised to the level of dramatic expression,”<sup>52</sup> how much more so in melodrama, if “music and sound effects can modify the meanings of words considerably”?<sup>53</sup>

The introduction of music to the moving image can also constitute an *accent*, especially if music has not been present before. Changing music on a cut provides further emphasis and this technique is very expressive when used for the classic shot / reverse shot in a dialogue sequence, and even without dialogue, the music doing the “talking” so to speak. Music also provides the element of surprise: there are many ways of achieving accent, the omission, fading out, or abrupt ending of music often working just as effectively. After the intensely dramatic climax of the bell scene in *Black Narcissus*, for example, the sudden halt of the music emphasises the drama – Sister Ruth plunges to her death and there is a cut to the bamboo below on which she has presumably been impaled. The “moment of reflection” is emphasised by the abrupt ending of the sound

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<sup>51</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 20

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 31

<sup>53</sup> Giannetti, 2002: 238



of the extra-diegetic orchestra for the sound of fluttering birds, disturbed from their nests. Brian Easdale, it must be remembered, was given full control over the sound, and the effect is palpable.

Mary Ann Doane suggests that the disparagement of excessive emotionalism of melodrama (what she terms the love story) is partly why love stories feature an overemphasis on music.<sup>54</sup> By situating major male characters in the role of musician, in which the male lead serves as an object of female desire, men thus avoid the scandal of “feminized masculinity.” Hollywood provides many examples – *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, *Deception*, *Interlude*, *Humoresque* – and British films avoid this pitfall by the same means (*Dangerous Moonlight*, *The Magic Bow*).

The most subtle aspect of movie music, according to Thomas, is to “allude to thoughts that are unspoken and situations that remain unseen. Such music plays upon the minds of the audience. In the hands of clever composers, this is true musical dramaturgy.”<sup>55</sup> Music also helps to provide suture where otherwise the audience’s attention might be drawn to the formality of the filming process (and projector noise!), thus it “lessens awareness of the frame, of discontinuity; it draws the spectator further into the diegetic illusion.”<sup>56</sup> Gorbman asserts that notions about film music such as its direct line to the “soul,” are “taken from aestheticians and scholars”: Levi-Strauss, for example, likens music to myth. Psychological research not only considers musical emotion and pleasure but also depth, inner feeling and dramatic truth which resonate almost on a hypnotic level in film: “Music... lessens the spectator’s degree of wakefulness. Were the subject to be aware (fully conscious) of its presence as part of the film’s discourse, the game would be all over. Just as the subject who resists being hypnotized might find the hypnotist’s soothing language silly or excessive, the detached film spectator will notice the oversweet violin music in a romantic scene. Like the good hypnotic subject, on the other hand, the cinematic subject receptive to the film’s fantasy will tend not to notice the manipulations of the background score.”<sup>57</sup> Of course this must also be dependent upon the music itself and whether it is “fit for purpose.” That, in turn, is dependent upon the audience collectively – in 1939 we may well have accepted certain sonorous effects

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<sup>54</sup> Doane, 1987: 97

<sup>55</sup> Thomas, 1973: 17

<sup>56</sup> Gorbman, 2003: 41

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 45

which in 2007 we can no longer take seriously. Gorbman ends by owning that “narrative cinema’s ‘dispositions of representation’ fluctuate constantly; the contractual terms settling the ratio between identification and spectacle change according to genre, directional style, and a host of historical conditions.”<sup>58</sup> Obviously, melodrama has its own particular set of musical considerations. The most significant of these is the method by which music continues the narrative. Mary Ann Doane continues, “Desire, emotion... are not accessible to a visual discourse but demand the supplementary expenditure of a musical score. Music takes up where the image leaves off.”<sup>59</sup>

Caryl Flinn’s analysis of melodrama does not mention music until, somewhat ironically, she says that “it is extremely odd that [film] criticism has shown so little concern for what Claudia Gorbman called the ‘drama’s melos’ since melodrama generically requires the presence of music in order to exist at all.” To correct this oversight, Flinn goes on to analyse *Penny Serenade* and to demonstrate “how the non-representational, auditory signs of a melodramatic text may work alongside – and not opposed to – visual and narrational ones.”<sup>60</sup> For her, the music serves as a method for drawing the spectator into the idealised past; rather than as a method for narrativizing the story itself (i.e. providing emotional depth to the plot), hence her comments about *Gone With The Wind*, the music of which is an exercise in nostalgia, a way of connecting to a utopian past. Lloyd Whitesell agrees: “To be sure, one of the ways musical Romanticism can be used in film is as a medium for the wishful restoration of lapsed cultural values,” citing *Star Wars* (1977) as the most celebrated example, John Williams’ score emphasising the “timeworn narratives of imperialist fantasy-adventure.”<sup>61</sup>

Flinn ignores the programmatic functions of music and its role as an interpreter or “teller” of human emotion, and it is the narrative function of music that concerns us here. If, as Mary Anne Doane suggests, music indeed takes up where the image leaves off, it in turn can also give way. Music can dissolve into noise, and vice versa. Adorno and Eisler cite the example of a town over which church bells are rung as a symbolic figure of death emerges from a clock mechanism. A coffin duly appears, and a church knell is still audible:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>59</sup> Doane, 1987: 97

<sup>60</sup> Flinn, 1992: 137

<sup>61</sup> Whitesell, 2006: 168

The accompanying music is characterised by monumental coldness, and uses bells as an ingredient. But this is insufficient to produce the density of sound resulting from the full ringing of many bells, which is necessary for dramatic reasons. Such an effect cannot be achieved if the picture and music are recorded simultaneously, for the rhythmic irregularity of the bell sounds cannot be adapted to the conductor's beat.<sup>62</sup>

The effect in this example was achieved by the multi-layered recording of several sound tracks. Of course in *Black Narcissus* there is only one bell; but the same problem exists, and perhaps a greater one, because the successful denouement of the film is dependent upon this scene which leans heavily on the music which accompanies it. Adorno and Eisler believed that the "recording of noises" had "done away with program[me] music,"<sup>63</sup> the recording of a real storm sufficient rather than a musical reproduction. But programme music also expresses emotion and other abstractions, that is, aspects of non-physical reality, and for them this is justified "only if it achieves what Beethoven demanded of it in the *Pastoral* symphony," that is the expression of feelings, rather than painting, "deliberately introducing artificiality, instead of striving for realistic effects."<sup>64</sup> This of course is the case in melodrama, for example with the use of colour and music in *Black Narcissus*. Thus, to describe unseen feelings rather than the visual (the "seen") is acceptable to Adorno and Eisler.

Like Adorno and Eisler, Hans Keller too has his preferences. Musically, the intentionally simple tune is one of his ideal ingredients for film music; the gay tune that has "no highbrow pretensions whatever" that can be used for a variety of purposes – even "tragic ones."<sup>65</sup> Keller points out that, in fact, Romantic composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century often used a "gay tune" to convey tragedy in the remembrance of happier days,<sup>66</sup> suggesting that the deliberately maudlin is not at all a genuine reflection of 19<sup>th</sup> century usage. The overarching sentimentality of Hollywood film scores comes in for

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<sup>62</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 102

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Keller, 2006: 71

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 72

much criticism, as we have seen. Jan Swynnoe sums up the contrasting absence of musical statements of the obvious in British films rather succinctly: “Americans,” she says, “have seldom been subject to the inhibition of embarrassment at their affinity with the obvious!”<sup>67</sup>

It is to the British case that I turn next.

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<sup>67</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 25

## CHAPTER 4 - The British Case

Most of the Hollywood rules for music had not been established when the British picture *Things to Come* was made in 1936. The epic score, written by Arthur Bliss, was encouraged by “the impressive sets created by Vincent Korda, the large number of extras and the long purely visual sequences” as well as “the extraordinary, grand rhetorical style of the actors’ delivery,” which though today strikes the ear as comic, “gives an opportunity for a far more extravagant underscoring that would be possible.”<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I turn to the British cinema, beginning with the analysis of a melodrama made in the following year that was to set the scene for the following decade. A Hollywood remake of a 1940 British production provides a useful comparison and this is followed by an overview of the important wartime melodramas as well as a discussion of a number of films produced in 1947, when a plethora of melodramas can be seen to represent the high water mark of the genre in British cinema.

In contrast to the studio-bound practices of Hollywood, in Britain the use of the leitmotiv was influenced by the literary tradition of theatrical dialogue which lengthened the average scene length in British cinema, and which therefore influenced the nature of the accompanying music, even, in Jan Swynnoe’s words, if the end product wasn’t quite so slick.<sup>2</sup> Muir Mathieson also believed that whilst Hollywood recording techniques were better, the average British score “has more intrinsic musical value.”<sup>3</sup> The music could, in other words, stand up on its own in a concert performance. Composers in Hollywood continued to write from a Wagnerian standpoint, a musical inheritance from the cultural milieu from which many had fled in the 30s, and for them drama meant Wagner. Conversely, in Britain the legacy of Gilbert and Sullivan<sup>4</sup> hardly served “as a mode for musical treatment of another dramatic medium;”<sup>5</sup> rather the literary-bound stage was the dramatic model. The British also varied the use of the

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<sup>1</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: xiii

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>3</sup> Huntley, 1947

<sup>4</sup> The English music revival began with Edward Elgar in the early twentieth century. Before him, Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry were the doyens of the English music scene, but their work is considered to be entirely German in style. Neither was a composer of opera, and the musical stage belonged to Gilbert and Sullivan. Their operettas dominated the London stage in the latter 19th century.

<sup>5</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 40

leitmotiv, which in Hollywood suffered “tortuous manipulation” in attempts to follow slavishly “every intricate twist and turn of a story line”<sup>6</sup> through the standard practice of “mickeymousing.” In Britain, meanwhile, “the generalized, atmospheric use of thematic material for unifying purposes” sufficed and it was the use of leitmotiv that marked the greatest difference between the two systems. Instead of leitmotiv, British composers gave musical themes to individual characters, places, objects, psychological complexes, the distinction being the nature of the theme as well as its treatment. The theme, often a fully developed melody, is not often subverted in dramatic twists and turns, and the music’s integrity is thus maintained throughout (the most obvious example being *Brief Encounter*) whereas the motif (such as the descending three-note chromatic musical symbol for *King Kong*) is often shorter, or not fully developed.<sup>7</sup>

The theme for an early experiment in film melodrama was very well-known indeed. The titles of *Moonlight Sonata* (1937) begin with Chopin’s “Heroic” polonaise, Op.53. Played by the great virtuoso pianist Jan Paderewski (1860-1941), a native of Poland who had been that nation’s Prime Minister, the political nature of the film is thus established at the outset. Considering that the film was made two years before the invasion of Poland which prompted the declaration of War, the relationship between Britain and Poland can be contextualised in a broader cultural milieu of the shared values of democracy and freedom. In the film Paderewski plays himself, veteran stage actress Marie Tempest the baroness on whose Swedish property the story plays out, and a young Eric Portman plays the part of the villain Mario de la Costa. An establishing shot of a concert programme is followed by the interior of a concert hall. The audience is in rapt attention, the as yet unseen maestro at the piano. His first appearance is in mid-shot, the second in close-up through the open lid of the piano and then an overhead shot above his left shoulder gives a view of the keyboard. There is no “acting” as yet, the documentary nature of the sequence belying any underlying plot that may develop. Up to this point the film constitutes a documentary record of a Chopin performance by one of the era’s greatest pianists and is surely the inspiration for *Listen to Britain* (1942), made a few years later and which featured the great Myra Hess in concert at the National Gallery.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41-2

The camera angle, as the Heroic theme returns, offers a sweeping picture of the auditorium, and as the polonaise ends Paderewski is framed from below in classic heroic pose. The audience demands an encore – Liszt's 2<sup>nd</sup> *Hungarian Rhapsody* played in full thus confirming the "filmed concert" scenario. However, the style begins to change as several shots of individual members of the audience are cut into the performance including one of a beaming child. The focus largely remains on the performer until the end of the Liszt, however, when the young girl runs towards the podium during the applause, shaking Paderewski's hand as the enraptured audience demands more. The filmed recital ends with a call for "Moonlight Sonata!" in a heartfelt request for a final encore. We hear just the first few bars. A fade is followed by a cut to a drawing room, after the event for the film's first dialogue (25 minutes into the film). "It really was a glorious concert, I never heard you play more superbly," says one of the group assembled. Paderewski obligingly speaks of his own experience of over 3000 performances, and of the emotions "music is able to arouse," what he calls the miracle of music providing for us some valuable personal reflections on music and human emotion. He explains why he agreed to play the *Moonlight Sonata* as an encore (an unusual choice for an encore in any concert), which is the cue for a cut to a "charming young couple" he met in Sweden five years previously: the couple whose daughter so enthused at the concert.

The significance of Beethoven's music is explained in the rather forgettable melodrama that follows. Mild references to music abound: diegetic jazz from a gramophone, and a pointed line from a song "Who loves you, ask yourself the question?" on cue for a certain doubt that exists between a young couple. Paderewski, playing himself, genially agrees to a performance at a local orphanage – his own composition, the Minuet in G. The efficacious effects of the music on the children are the focus of the sequence. The villain of the piece, an impostor and would-be bigamist who uses the dark art of hypnotism to win the heroine (Ingrid, played by Barbara Greene) away from her intended is a two-dimensional character who tries to cast a spell of "wealth, gardens, jewels, laughing, making love – New York, London and Paris" over the innocent girl thus providing the necessary moral framework in which the melodramatic plot unfolds. The somewhat wooden acting and equally thin dialogue ("I've got you taped, and you know it!") with the occasional visual cue (a statue of cupid in the garden where Ingrid is being tempted away) make for a rather strained denouement as the Baroness (Marie

Tempest) appeals to her granddaughter, “Remember, the doors of this house are never closed,” adding ominously, “not even at night.” Alone, Ingrid breaks down, and seeing the error of her ways (with the aid of a press cutting about the villain de la Costa’s previous marriage), resolves to repent. The great maestro begins to play the *Moonlight Sonata* as she begins descending the staircase to brave the company gathered below. The music’s *adagio sostenuto* pace allows for a long sequence and we are invited to share the hesitation Ingrid feels, the meaning of the music to her (with a reference to her deceased parents, the memory of whom provokes a tear in the baroness’s eye).

Music, especially that with a regular beat, can serve to hold together otherwise uncoordinated images and fragmentation (especially in the case of bad editing or poor acting, as in the case of *Moonlight Sonata*). Music can also help to underline the actor’s “inner rhythm” and to pace the actual pulse of dialogue or monologue, also especially true of Ingrid’s staircase descent in *Moonlight Sonata*. The film is a good place to begin the analysis of music in British melodrama because it provides a springboard for the natural development of some of its ideas, and the way music is used in later films. Here, the music is presented diegetically, is “pre-existent” and almost entirely presented as the composer intended. Clearly there is a lot to be built upon. The editing and narrative elements of the film are very much guided by the music itself. In the final sequence the first movement of the sonata is played in its entirety. The sequence begins with a panning shot of Ingrid as she approaches the top of the stair. At the first step she is bathed in light (symbolic of her change of heart), and she stumbles onto the first step as the music begins. There follows a cut to Paderewski in medium shot at the piano, half way through the second bar of the music. The framing is maintained until bar 9, with a cut to a profile shot of Paderewski, then another to the Baroness, seated with Ingrid’s lover standing behind her in medium long-shot. The baroness looks to her left and as the music modulates at the end of bar 15, a dramatic “question” in the treble, answered in the bass with a cut to Ingrid still at the top of the stairs. She descends for the full passage though only her shadow is shown – in parallel to “shading” in the music itself (bar 19, *una corda*). A cut to an overhead shot of Ingrid halfway down the stairs is followed by another to a long-shot at the final moment before the treble takes up the *Moonlight* theme, that is the *marcato, ma sempre* at the end of bar 23.



Her last few steps are negotiated; Ingrid approaches the closed door behind which Paderewski plays. The minor key of the music – and its tragic tone – coincides with a cut again to the baroness, as she bows her head in sorrow and reaches (cut to medium close-up) for a handkerchief. The piano arpeggios (bar 32) are cue for another cut to Paderewski, the musical highlight requiring him in the frame. The original theme appears again with a cut to Ingrid's lover, his loneliness thus heightened by the tone of the music (*piú marcato del principio*), but he turns towards the terrace when a cut follows, to Ingrid's appearance. Venturing onto the terrace, she is joined by her intended. A cut to her lover, the camera panning as he walks over to where she has stopped, is followed by another to the couple in long shot, and another to medium close-up and then quickly to Ingrid in close up in a classic shot / reverse shot sequence. The music is all that can be heard, but Ingrid's facial expressions say all that needs to be said, Beethoven providing the tone colour. Another shot /reverse shot – hope on his face, joy on hers – and their kiss. The sonata perfectly encapsulates the range of emotions they cannot express verbally. One final cut follows – to Paderewski playing the closing bars of the movement (*sempre legalissimo*).

Thus the final scene – in 17 cuts over five-and-a-half minutes – is couched entirely without dialogue, the music carrying the emotional content as the lovers are reunited and reconciled. That the music is the star of this film there is no doubt. The final shot of Paderewski is well over a minute long and confirms the historical value of the film. This was the first “piano” melodrama. It is succinct and simple, revealing a surprising attention to *mise-en-scène* as well as to the subtleties of the music and its emotional content. The music is, of course, played superbly. The *Sonata quasi una Fantasia* (Op.27 No.2) has long been associated with passion, perhaps of the understated smouldering type. Its use here is *simpatico* and, for its own sake, satisfying, despite the rather improbable plot. Paderewski's technique throughout the film, however, has been far from melodramatic, his performance a faithful interpretation of Beethoven's score. The absence of dialogue in favour of the music heralds the tentative beginning of the cinema's love affair with the piano as a means of expressing emotion. Director Lothar Mendes' intention was to showcase the famous pianist, hence the weak story line, “all

of which is very dull and best forgotten.”<sup>8</sup> The film’s outstanding merit, in Huntley’s words, “is the privilege which it represents of watching and hearing a great genius.”<sup>9</sup>

British studios produced few melodramas during the following two years,<sup>10</sup> but this was to change at the outbreak of war. The initial closure of cinemas was followed by their almost immediate reopening and, more importantly, the subsequent consideration of what to do about films during the war. The government took the subject very seriously and in consequence a number of other beneficial developments followed, not least the production of some very fine films. Denham reopened and made *The Lion Has Wings* in twelve days, featuring the music of Richard Addinsell, whose subsequent project was to be for *Gaslight*. Patrick Hamilton’s thriller *Gaslight*, set in the 1880s, was first staged in 1938. The British film adaptation of the play was so successful that MGM bought the negative, destroyed it and made its own version. The suppression of the British *Gaslight* (1940, directed by Thorold Dickinson) has ensured that the 1944 Hollywood remake with George Cukor as director and starring Ingrid Bergman remains the most well-known version of the play. The international casting of Bergman and Charles Boyer is complemented by Dame May Whitty and Angela Lansbury who provide an English ring to the all-star cast.

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<sup>8</sup> Huntley, 1947: 50

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. The audience shown in the film was 400 strong and each member was paid a guinea (£1 1s.) a day. Eighteen pianos were tried before Paderewski was satisfied and the wooden floorboards of the studio were taken up and replaced with concrete to prevent resonance. In 1943 *Moonlight Sonata* was reissued as *The Charmer* as a vehicle for Eric Portman who by then had become popular (*Moonlight Sonata* had been his first film). The music disappeared from this cut but the original film was reissued in 1946.

<sup>10</sup> *Bank Holiday* (1938) is the obvious exception (see the previous chapter), though a discussion of pre-war melodrama can hardly go by without mentioning the appropriately-named figure of Tod Slaughter (1885-1956) who for many years played the villain in stage melodrama across Britain, and in filmed versions of these classic Victorian plays from the mid-thirties. *The Face at the Window* (1939) was the crowning achievement of this period, and was the highest budgeted film in his series of “Quota Quickies” which were required to fill the local content regulations in force at the time. The early melodrama *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1936), which featured a recurring theme (romantic and melodic, and practically the only incidental music in the film), and *Murder at the Red Barn* (1935) were in effect filmed melodramas from Tod Slaughter’s stage career which were little altered in their cinematic versions. What little music there is in *Sweeney Todd* performs the classic melodramatic role of highlighting emotional aspects of the drama, for example when the heroine’s father realises it is his daughter or his fortune he must give up. Music is not heard again until Sweeney Todd, planning his escape with the swag he has bagged from his victims, sets fire to his shop while our heroine is locked up in a cupboard. The true melodrama comes out in the accompanying music as her lover rescues her, and takes on Sweeney Todd, the latter cackling insanely in a fight to the death in which, of course, he gets his come-uppance as he falls victim to a malfunction of his own trap-door and is engulfed in flames. Because of its exaggeration and over-acting the film is perhaps about as close as we can get to a Victorian stage melodrama. (Stephen Sondheim’s stage musical of the same name appears in a lavish 2007 adaptation for the big screen directed by Tim Burton, with Johnny Depp in the title role. Music dominates the film, which also includes classic underscoring, but the musical numbers do more to alienate the audience from this understandably stacy version of the story.)

A comparison of the two filmed versions of this quintessential<sup>11</sup> melodrama reveals a remarkably similar musical treatment of the material, with few major differences between the two pictures. Guy Barefoot has explored one noteworthy contrast in the films: their *mise-en-scène*.<sup>12</sup> Patrick Hamilton's stage directions specify that the action takes place in the stuffy drawing room of a house in a "gloomy and unfashionable" quarter of London in winter. Act One specifies the hour: the "terrifying darkness of the late afternoon – the zero hour, as it were, before the feeble dawn of gaslight and tea."<sup>13</sup> The atmosphere of the place is one of poverty, wretchedness and age. Whereas the stage directions point to faded wealth and decay, Hollywood's version of the film has Charles Boyer describing the room as "handsome" and the London house in a "fashionable locality." The British version, on the other hand, remains true to those stage directions, the outside of the house evidently in need of a coat of paint, its interior clearly no palace by the standards of the day. Both films take the action beyond the stuffy drawing room setting, with various aspects of the play rehashed in both films, each using aspects of the original plot to tell the story. Musically, the two films are remarkably similar, with one significant difference, as I shall show.

Addinsell was yet to achieve the success of *Dangerous Moonlight* (1942)<sup>14</sup> when he wrote the score for the British *Gaslight* but had already penned the music for a dozen films, including *Fire Over England* (1937). *Gaslight*'s rolling credits are very much in the opera overture mode, and Addinsell's four-and-a-half-minute prelude is scored for full orchestra, *tremolo* strings setting the tone with an establishing shot of a London square. The film contains more specially-composed music than the later version, which does however retain some of the features of the 1940 original, including *tremolo* strings at the outset. *Gaslight* (1944) contains excerpts from *Lucia di Lammermoor* (the Mad Scene), as well as diegetic instances of Chopin and the overture to *Die Fledermaus*.

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<sup>11</sup> The plot involves a female protagonist who is being tormented by her impostor husband as the convincing villain, as well as a murder and the theft of fabulous jewels. Together with the 19<sup>th</sup> century setting, an emphasis on *mise-en-scène* and the inner emotional disturbance signified by music, *Gaslight* is the acme of standard melodrama.

<sup>12</sup> Barefoot, 2001: 135

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, 1939: 1

<sup>14</sup> I discuss *Dangerous Moonlight* in the following chapter.

Original music was written by the relatively unknown but prolific Polish film composer Bronislau Kaper.<sup>15</sup>

Descending piano chords in the minor accompany the camera's pan across Pimlico Square to number 12 in the 1940 version. The camera cuts to an internal scene of the murder of an old lady by strangulation. The apparent objects of the crime are the Barlow Rubies, the subsequent search for which is underscored by an urgent orchestra. The thoroughness of the frenzied hunt, which apparently takes all night, is drawn out by the music. Except for a cry of "Police!" on the discovery of the body by a domestic servant, and a labourer's comment about the un-let house, the film begins with a dramatic six minutes of uninterrupted music. The music does not let up as new residents arrive at the house, but finally its tone changes with a cut to outside the front of the square's church – obligatory Sunday observance accompanied by the sound of the church organ. The set is very reminiscent of the theatre without any sense of the outdoors. This is particularly noticeable in the unnatural *sound* of the set. This technical aspect of the film marks it out from the later Cukor version, and there are other technicalities that are also significant, for example the effect of a London fog in Dickinson's version achieved using a camera lens which remains still as the camera pans.

The waltz dominates (it is the 1880s), and thematic music characterises the underlying effect of each scene. For example we hear a broad, romantic theme as Bella walks in the gardens, and dance music signifying an evening out. An ominous turn to the minor key signifies her husband's treachery, as his evil plot to undermine her takes shape with appropriately sinister music crashing in again with blaring trumpets and rising strings: "Then you are mad, you unhappy creature. And you'll get worse until you die, raving in an asylum!" Fear of madness is signified by her upturned reflection in a music box, its tinny sound signifying her growing insanity. Because the melodrama relies on the question of the character's sanity, Addinsell scores her *fear* of madness. In other words the entire plot hinges on Bella's potential to be driven mad, as well as the resilience she displays until the film's climax, when the tables are turned. This sequence begins without music, but *tutti* orchestra breaks the tension as victim and tormentor finally face

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<sup>15</sup> Kaper was an émigré composer who was resident in the US from 1935, when MGM's Louis B. Mayer, on hearing one of Kaper's songs on holiday in Paris, offered him a contract. Kaper had studied at the Chopin Music School in Warsaw, continuing his musical education in Berlin where he wrote songs for a cabaret, but fled to Paris in 1933, as the Nazis rose to power.

each other, the latter tied up in a chair exposed as a madman, their positions now in reverse. The camera freezes on his deranged countenance, helping to confirm this about-turn, soaring strings signifying Bella's freedom from tyranny. The underscoring, together with Thorold Dickinson's direction, creates a classic tableau shot, "where the characters' attitudes and gestures," according to Peter Brooks "compositionally arranged and frozen for a moment, give[s], like an illustrative painting, a visual summary of the emotional situation."<sup>16</sup>

In the later Hollywood version, Charles Boyer's character, Gregory Anton, is also tied up in a chair with his wife Paula (Ingrid Bergman) insisting on speaking to him alone. The important moment, however, is delayed until after he has been untied. Her ascent up to the attic room is accompanied by music that signifies her hesitation – and fear – and, as in the 1940 version, the music fades as she enters the room. She too looks over him, toying with the knife that would allow him to cut himself free. She repeats the table-turning in a battle for control, but torments him, declaring in irony, "Because I am mad I hate you," and asks for him to be taken away. Dark musical tones return as Anton gets the chance to explain his obsession for the jewels, words spoken to Paula, but in truth addressed to himself. Although he, too, is framed in close up with his eyes wide with madness, the "frozen tableau" present in the earlier version is missing. The music which underscores the rationalisation for his actions remains quiet, with low strings fading to the bass as he is led away. The quieter music and the persisting monologue deprive the scene of the melodramatic peak of the earlier version: the whole sequence is couched in far more restrained tones. The contrast between the two scenes provides a rare example of British excess over Hollywood restraint.

"In the period between the late 1930s and the early 1950s," writes Guy Barefoot, "a series of 'gaslight melodramas' set in the late-Victorian or Edwardian era were produced in the United States and Britain."<sup>17</sup> If the two versions of *Gaslight* are the obvious examples, another well-known British film is *Fanny By Gaslight* (1944), a Gainsborough production made in Britain in the same year as MGM's remake of *Gaslight*. "Made to cash in on the success of *The Man in Grey*,"<sup>18</sup> it starred Phyllis

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<sup>16</sup> Brooks, 1976: 48

<sup>17</sup> Barefoot, 2001: 1

<sup>18</sup> Michael Brooke, Screenonline [<http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/440432/index.html>] accessed 24 August 2007. Analysis of *The Man in Grey* follows.

Calvert, James Mason and Stewart Granger, with Louis Levy again the musical director, and Cedric Mallabey the composer. A standard “overture” establishes the film’s setting – London in the 1870s and 80s. “Cockles and Mussels,” sings a street trader, as the orchestra takes over his plaintive cry. A barrel-organ follows, conjuring the atmosphere of the Victorian soundscape as two children are seen playing. One ventures inside a house of “ill repute.” “Come inside and have a sweetie,” a woman says, darker music providing the notorious context for the prostitution synonymous with the London of the period, a London of fog, gaslight – and Jack the Ripper. Classic underscoring characterizes this sequence. Other musical touches, such as the out-of-tune carol-singing outside the Jolly Bargee, provide a refreshing realism to the film, which seems concerned with manners and social hypocrisy, and class. As for the latter, “In one hundred years from now,” declares Harry Somerville (Stewart Granger) to his incensed aristocrat mother, “there’ll be no such thing.” Jacques Offenbach’s *Can-Can*, played at “The Shades” provides obvious associations of a “below stairs” world. Outside on the street, the music is lighter, but inside, the stage, “sauce” and a shadowy world of Dionysian excess are enjoyed by “drunken bullies,” among them Lord Manderstoke (James Mason), the film’s villain. Offenbach’s ballet music *Gâité Parisienne* (itself a compilation of themes from his operas) is used for the Paris scenes where the film’s denouement takes place. The use of this wide range of pre-existing music provides an authentic ring to the film, each selection contemporaneous with the film’s 1870s setting.

The film also shows how both familiar music can be successfully used together with original scoring. Additional music was provided by Bretton Byrd and Hubert Bath, and the team of musicians provide the film with a near-constant underscoring and soundtrack accompaniment to each scene, as the film’s climax draws nearer, providing plenty of melodramatic scope. John Huntley considers a number of reasons why composers might “go into films”: for the money, for the experience, for the rigid discipline of film scoring or because “they have a leaning towards the dramatic and find it a substitute for the almost dead art of opera.”<sup>19</sup> In his view it is the composer in the last group which is most likely “to find exactly what he has been looking for.”<sup>20</sup> Hubert Bath is chiefly famous for Lissa’s concerto in *Love Story* (1944),<sup>21</sup> but he began his career in 1929 when, in Britain, a brief period of the “theme song” in movies from about

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<sup>19</sup> Huntley, 1947: 19

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of this and other so-called Denham Concertos, see the following chapter.

1928 to 1932 involved the commissioning of a single popular song that was to be featured in a film. Many composers were approached for this purely commercial enterprise (the composer Peter Warlock among them, whose untimely death prevented him from becoming involved in more serious cinematic endeavours). Producer Michael Balcon, who had headed Gainsborough in the 30s and moved to Ealing Studios during the war, discussed with Benjamin Britten a score for a film about brass bands, but he believed that music could not be superimposed, that “it must be integrated with the film script from the outset.” Balcon said he would have liked to put this to the test but his problem was finding a “sufficient period of time on which he had not other commitments.”<sup>22</sup> The deaths of Frederick Delius, Edward Elgar and Gustav Holst in 1934 simultaneously presented a tantalising “what if?” scenario. At about this time movie music “settles down” into a more “satisfactory period” with the work of composer Hubert Bath, director Alexander Korda and in particular Korda’s second musical director Muir Mathieson, “who was destined to become the most important single figure in the history of British film music.”<sup>23</sup> Muir Mathieson is credited with the responsibility for convincing both Ralph Vaughan Williams and Arthur Bliss to write for the cinema. He created such a high standard that the British experience became the envy of Hollywood.

During the War, the public’s appetite for melodrama reached its zenith with Gainsborough’s runaway success, *The Man in Grey* (1943). Margaret Lockwood was one of the four lead actors in this, the first “official” Gainsborough melodrama, which was directed by Leslie Arliss. Margaret Lockwood was the only star, having previously played the female lead in the internationally successful Hitchcock-directed *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) for the same studio, but it was the wartime melodramas that sealed her reputation, beginning with her performance as the wicked Hesther in *The Man in Grey*, “reaching a peak with the even more amoral Lady Barbara Skelton in *The Wicked Lady* (1945)” which was also directed by Leslie Arliss. The highlight of Lockwood’s career, *The Wicked Lady* thrilled audiences with her “shameless pilfering of her best friend’s husband before turning to gambling and highway robbery.”<sup>24</sup> Bored with her privileged

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<sup>22</sup> Balcon, 1969: 147

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>24</sup> Michael Brooke: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/446975/index.html> (Accessed 1 January 2007)

existence as the wife of an upright nobleman whose life is run with Apollonian order, she throws everything over for the excitement and chaos of the life of a highwayman.

*The Man in Grey* begins with the standard overture. Baroque-style music (used to establish the flashback to Regency England, though somewhat anachronistically) accompanies the first meeting between Clarissa Richmond (Phyllis Calvert) and the man in grey (James Mason), at his mother Lady Rohan's ball. A few bars of diegetic music, "The Green Willow," are sung by Margaret Lockwood as Desdemona opposite Stewart Granger's blacked-up Othello. Narrow strings accompany the scene as it plays out with some rare comedy that still amuses, as Hesther (Margaret Lockwood) and Rokesby (Stewart Granger) conduct a private conversation in between delivering their lines. Hesther's scheming is marked by a few bars of the full tragic tone of the melodrama of a Chopin concerto (a style of music at least closer to the Regency setting) and rarely is the score to this film so effusive. Hesther's malevolent plans are usually darkly underscored, and the confrontation between Lord Rohan and Rokesby at Vauxhall Gardens is marked by a fiery, sparring theme. Music also takes over at Rokesby's subsequent sailing for Jamaica as Clarissa watches from the shore (catching a chill in the process). Back at Grosvenor square, music accompanies her return and subsequent collapse. The following sequences are much underscored, brass accompanying Hesther's murderous intentions, *simpatico* strings accompanying Clarissa's faltering words, drama in the high register and tragic tones as Hesther's vigil begins. Pizzicato strings are heard as Hesther's conscience doesn't quite get the better of her – and Clarissa is murdered. Hesther gets her way – marriage. But as Rohan discovers that Clarissa's death is no mere accident, he reminds Hesther that the family motto – "Who Dishonours Us, Dies" – demands her own death. The scene ends the "flashback" of Regency England in suitable melodramatic exaggeration, complete with appropriate music. *The Man in Grey* was a landmark film for Gainsborough Studios which made a series of melodramas on the back of its success. By the end of the War the British public's appetite for melodrama had been firmly established. But it was not until 1945 that British studios began to make films of such a high quality that many from the post-war heyday are still considered to be among the finest ever produced.

The music which accompanies the melodrama *Pink String and Sealing Wax* (1945) by Norman Demuth was his first film score. A standard "overture" accompanies the



opening credits to director Robert Hamer's Ealing studios production, the title of which refers to the method of sealing packages of drugs which in this case are used in a murder in 1880s Brighton. The film includes an improbable audition on the street in which the great Adelina Patti is featured.<sup>25</sup> Starring Googie Withers, "one of the finest dramatic actresses produced by British cinema,"<sup>26</sup> *Pink String and Sealing Wax* is noteworthy as the first of three melodramas made in quick succession with Withers in the starring role in the heyday of British melodrama. There are barely ten minutes of extra-diegetic music in this landmark British melodrama, almost all of it is used to amplify Pearl Bond's state of mind though it includes two-and-a-half minutes of music at the film's close.

Googie Withers also starred in *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947) with John McCallum.<sup>27</sup> The film seems to pre-empt the social realism of the fifties, the grim East End setting still bearing the scars of the Blitz. Simplicity – and the simple tune in particular – seem to be the key for Hans Keller to the success of the score to this film, in which "that distinguished French screen composer, George Auric, offers a simple and eminently suitable rain-motif, announced in the beautifully sad piece at the outset. And in the course of the film this motif is used and utilised with consummate skill."<sup>28</sup> Keller held that although "there are great possibilities in the simple tune... it isn't a simple task to write one."<sup>29</sup> Unsurprisingly, he doesn't have much positive to say about the use of leitmotiv: "There are a few composers whose leitmotifs do not make you think that the 19<sup>th</sup> century is as dead as it is unburied," so his praise for Auric is therefore all the more notable, the rain motif effective in symbolizing the "rainy" emotional significance of the film.<sup>30</sup>

The standard of British film music probably owes its greatest debt of gratitude to Ralph Vaughan Williams, something recognised as early as 1947: "Introducing Vaughan Williams to the cinema undoubtedly ranks as one of Muir Mathieson's major

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<sup>25</sup> Adelina Patti (1843-1919) was one of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century sopranos, considered by Verdi to be the greatest he'd ever heard. She retired to south Wales.

<sup>26</sup> Richards, 1997: 309

<sup>27</sup> I analyse final of the three Googie Withers melodramas in Chapter 6.

<sup>28</sup> Keller, 2006: 73 (*Film Monthly Review*, Vol.6 No.5, February 1948)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 74

achievements as the musical casting director of Denham Studios.”<sup>31</sup> Approaching 70 years old at the time, Vaughan Williams’ foray into film music was really part of his contribution to the war effort, desperate to find some meaningful contribution, though he did once reveal that “he wouldn’t mind a shot at writing for the films.”<sup>32</sup> In 1940 he was given four days to come up with the music for Muir Mathieson’s *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* (Mathieson was the director of music for Alexander Korda’s London Films), which was produced and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger. “Film composing is a splendid discipline,” said Vaughan Williams, “and I recommend a course of it to all composition teachers whose pupils are apt to be dawdling in the ideas, or whose every bar is sacred and must not be cut or altered.”<sup>33</sup> Most of Vaughan Williams’ movie scores were for war-time films, but he continued writing music for the medium for the rest of his life (he died in 1958). The most prominent of these scores is his music for *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948) but he also wrote the score for *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947), a melodrama based on the novel by Sheila Kaye-Smith and adapted by H.E. Bates. It is the only melodrama for which Vaughan Williams wrote, and in chapter six I will analyse *The Loves of Joanna Godden* in full.

1947 must stand out as the greatest year for melodrama and music in British film. One of the most celebrated British films of all time is *Black Narcissus*, an adaptation of the Rumer Godden novel which tells of the attempt and ultimate failure of a group of Anglican nuns to establish a convent in the Himalayas.<sup>34</sup> Jan Swynnoe calls the score to this film a “unique achievement” which is “rich, exotic, yet finely judged and dramatically intelligent.”<sup>35</sup> In a 2002 interview, Jack Cardiff said that the famous musical tableau at the end of the film was “bitty” to shoot,<sup>36</sup> finding it hard to believe that the music was written before filming. The musical score for *Black Narcissus*, in

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<sup>31</sup> Huntley, 1947: 57

<sup>32</sup> Vaughan Williams, quoted in Jameson, 1997: 71

<sup>33</sup> Vaughan Williams, 1996: 160

<sup>34</sup> The film’s cloistered setting was repeated in a later film also featuring Kathleen Byron in a similarly murderous role. In *Madness of the Heart* (1949), which also starred Maxwell Reed (famous only as Joan Collins’ first husband) and Margaret Lockwood, there is much melodramatic scope for a blind nun who survives more than one murder attempt at the Chateau of her husband’s aristocratic family. Kathleen Byron’s character, Verité, is given a parallel stalking role to the deranged Sister Ruth of *Black Narcissus*. The music, by Allan Gray, presented in the standard format of opening and closing credits in between which nineteen separate musical numbers underscore the drama, features the ubiquitous piano as well as the traditional pipe and drums of Provence.

<sup>35</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 179

<sup>36</sup> Bowyer, 2003: 80

Roy Armes' words Powell and Pressburger's "first experiments with the 'composed film,'" was written by Brian Easdale. Together with dialogue and sound effects it was composed "very much in the way that opera" is, some of the music actually composed before filming took place. "By the mid-1940s Powell had reached the conclusion that 'writers were not able to be good writers of cinema, because they would *always* go back to the words'. On the other hand, his experience led him to the conclusion that 'composers and film makers think very much alike.'"<sup>37</sup> *The Red Shoes* followed.

Michael Powell himself says on the commentary to the 2000 Carlton DVD edition of the film that a piano was used to play the music during filming. This helped the actors to pace every action, even a turn of the head. Deborah Kerr, who plays the central character Sister Clodagh, was thus able to understand exactly how long she had before she was required to move forward to the bell tower. "Brian Easdale's music for Powell's films works well to evoke the psychological edge of sexual repression that drives its protagonists... to pathological behaviour," writes Susan Hayward.<sup>38</sup> The famous scene at the end of the film "is presented as melodramatic tableau," writes Priya Jaikumar.<sup>39</sup> Referring to Peter Brooks, Jaikumar notes that this musical score confers "additional legibility" on this dialogue-free tableau and, using a similar device to *Gaslight* (1940), the climax of the melodrama in *Black Narcissus* is captured in frozen horror on Clodagh's face as Sister Ruth plunges to her death.

Brian Easdale worked on nine Powell and/or Pressburger films, starting with *Black Narcissus* (1947) and winning an Oscar for *The Red Shoes* (1948). Michael Powell considered him to be "the ideal musical collaborator," creating a sort of "opera" in which "music, emotion, image and voices all blended together into a new and splendid whole."<sup>40</sup> It is difficult to agree with Hans Keller on these films. He considers Brian Easdale's music to both *Black Narcissus* and *The Red Shoes* to be "overstuffed" (or rather the soundtracks to the films), favouring Easdale's *The Small Back Room* (1948) which for him is "an unprecedented, highly effective feat of restraint: [as] there is no overture."<sup>41</sup> In *Black Narcissus*, the opening credits *are* accompanied by an "overture" effect. As Mr. Dean introduces Mopu, the programmatic music expresses the wonder

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<sup>37</sup> Armes, 1978: 223

<sup>38</sup> Hayward, 2000: 267

<sup>39</sup> Jaikumar, 2001: 68

<sup>40</sup> MacFarlane, 2005: 202

<sup>41</sup> Keller, 2006: 189

and exoticism of the place, but for Keller this represents an “over-generous supply of background music.”<sup>42</sup> Keller is apparently unaware that this is intentional; that as a melodrama, the film requires music to give it meaning. Easdale, who had trained at the Royal College of Music, was recommended to Powell by Carol Reed, who had worked with him on a documentary in India during the War. Easdale also claimed to have met Rumer Godden in India and arranged to see Powell and Pressburger on his return to England (Sarah Street, who recounts these versions of events, appears to consider them mutually exclusive.<sup>43</sup>) However they met,<sup>44</sup> Michael Powell wanted to find a composer who “thought operatically”; one he “could entrust with all the sound effects for the film, as well as the music itself.”<sup>45</sup> According to Powell, the soundtrack should be an “organic whole of dialogue, sound effects, and music, very much in the way that opera is composed.”<sup>46</sup> Sarah Street does not elaborate on the final point, but clearly we can see from this and other comments what Powell and Pressburger meant by their experiment with film music.

The climax is of course couched entirely in music, and uses most of the leitmotifs that have been established during the film. In earlier sequences, voices have been used to signify exoticism and antiquity (establishing Mopu’s extreme age), and drums continually draw attention to the strangeness of the place, its restlessness and “otherness.” Sister Clodagh has failed to impose order, as each member of the convent has succumbed to the forces of chaos and the power of the orchestra to depict the passion and irrationality of the Dionysiac forces that seem to have overwhelmed the convent is now relied upon as this famous sequence begins with a short ominous theme as Clodagh awakens. There is a cut to the outside. The youngster Joseph tells Clodagh the time (5.45 a.m., providing the clue as to the length of the subsequent stalking). “Joseph,” Clodagh replies, “If Sister Briony asks for me, I’ll be in the chapel.” A cut to Clodagh in long shot alerts the audience that she is being watched. A cut to Ruth’s mad eyes confirms this, as do alarming voices in the scoring. Easdale’s characteristic wordless voices are sinister, signifying emotional breakdown, building again from the

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 92

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Easdale, Powell and Pressburger were to team up again with David Farrar in the melodrama *Gone to Earth* (1950). Easdale’s music is dramatic and characteristically scores wordless and sometimes discordant voices. A slow-moving, sophisticated tale of subtlety and beauty, music is only heard on occasion but at the film’s dramatic heart music takes over as dialogue is disposed of.

<sup>45</sup> Street, 2005: 21

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

lower register and moving into the treble to create a continually rising tension. In the chapel, Clodagh becomes aware of being stalked, rising voices signifying her awareness, and fear. She turns from her prayers, her imagination getting the better of her, but she sees no-one, the music suddenly comes to an abrupt halt, only to build up again as she tries to pull herself together. Music here is very much the emotional signifier of her own unease. She rinses her face, pausing to check the time and then proceeds to the bell to ring for Matins at 6 a.m. An early scene in the film, which establishes the nuns' presence at Mopu for the first time, depicts heavy studded doors opening out onto the bell tower, and is accompanied by an expansive musical theme. Now, violins take up the same theme as a deranged Sister Ruth appears at the heavy doors, voices again take over and rise together with the orchestra. She approaches, a *crescendo* accompanying her murderous intent, and as she pushes Clodagh, the ensuing struggle is scored *fortissimo*. A wild drum beat signifies Ruth's breakdown into abandonment, and ends the sequence – a total of well over five minutes of music without dialogue – as the full significance of the horror is registered on Clodagh's face.

*Black Narcissus* was the only film the Archers produced in 1947. Exceptional for its experimental treatment of music, the result is an enduring film that remains a huge landmark in the history of British cinema. Gainsborough, meanwhile, continued in that year with a run of three contrasting films. *Good Time Girl*, though not strictly melodrama contained many of its conventions. It may be regarded as the first of the social realist / crime thrillers that proliferated from the late forties onwards. When Sydney Box was appointed head of production at Gainsborough Pictures in 1946, he resolved to steer the studio away from the glossy, sensationalised melodramas with which it had made its name in the mid-1940s, preferring more realistic dramas exploring contemporary social issues. *Good-Time Girl* was one of the first of these, “but the finished film bore as much resemblance to its melodramatic predecessors as to what Box (who was also co-screenwriter with his sister Muriel and Ted Willis) was presumably aiming for, its attempt at realism further undermined by a wary British Board of Film Censors shortening some of the more violent scenes.”<sup>47</sup> The film indeed

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Brooke, Screenonline, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/440457/index.html> [Accessed 1 January 2007].

begins with the standard “overture,” in sombre tones, by Lambert Williamson.<sup>48</sup> *Good Time Girl* stars Flora Robson (in the same year as she made *Black Narcissus*) in the authority-figure magistrate role with a young Diana Dors making a perfunctory appearance as the potential girl-in-trouble who receives a lecture from Robson, and is by the end of the film convinced of the errors of her ways. The film, which applies the melodramatic convention of “beginning and ending in innocence,” begins simply enough, with a musical suture (the second instance of extra-diegetic music) taking Flora Robson back to the cautionary tale of Gwen Rawlings (Jean Kent), whose sordid family background (a beating by her father, illuminated by the orchestral theme) precipitates the search for new accommodation.

The film uses a number of musical techniques to emphasise the visual. Programme music at its most obvious is used during Gwen’s ascent to the top storey of a boarding house, the theme rising to treble as she climbs the stairs. Later, noirish elements of shadow and light are present as Jimmy, the sinister fellow-boarder forces an entry into her room, with accompanying crescendo. To emphasise a cold, premeditated assault on the nightclub owner (a cynical Herbert Lom), a quiet and reassuring Bach minuet is used to provide sharp contrast to the on-screen violence, another departure from standard practices of music that had gone before in melodrama, where the tone of the music tends to support rather than contrast the image. Lom’s tit-for-tat response, on the other hand, is given the full orchestral build-up in the conventional manner. A John Field nocturne signifies the cultured, gentleman-like nature of Gwen’s new friend Red (Dennis Price), a cultured dance-band player at whose apartment they agree on “one night only” – with Red on the couch. Music is often used a suture into each of Gwen’s subsequent worlds, for example, to her arrival at a reformatory from which, naturally, she wishes to escape – to Brighton – once again the transition accompanied by a musical suture. Her life there as Millie Carstairs is reminiscent of the world created by David Lean in *Brighton Rock*, also made in 1947. Naturally, Gwen gets mixed up in all kinds of sordidness and becomes the good-time girl of the film’s title. There follows an intriguing vignette which displays much of the moralizing about common girls who drink too much. In trouble again, Gwen absconds from her Brighton life and makes for

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<sup>48</sup> Williamson directed George Auric’s music for a much later film *The Good Die Young* (1954) starring Joan Collins. In the crime thriller mode, the film has much in common with the melodrama of *Good Time Girl*, but remains clearly in the new social drama mode.

London. Another suture, this time played in the low strings, marks the transition. Things can only get worse, of course. She is beaten up by her Brighton boyfriend and left for dead on the train. But two GIs, attracted by a pair of glamorous legs (even if they do belong to an unconscious “broad”) rescue her, even if only to provide her with booze enough to satisfy her alcohol habit. Gwen’s amusing drunk act is preamble to a life of banditry. “Here’s lookin’ at’cha,” she says to her new companions-in-crime. “You stick with us, kid,” comes the reply. A vicious mugging spree and descent to notoriety is underscored by the orchestra. In the closing sequence, a bizarre coincidence which sees the return of Gwen’s old friend, Red, is given the full melodramatic treatment – music writ large over the closing violent tableau.

*The Root of All Evil*, made in 1947 by Gainsborough starred Phyllis Calvert in a morality tale of the dangers of putting all one’s faith in money alone. The film’s opening sequences are underscored by a remarkable seven-and-a-half minutes of music, by Bretton Byrd and conducted by Louis Levy. Jeckie (Patricia Roc) tries her hand at a number of money-making schemes, the family-farm sequence resembling that in *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947), which had Googie Withers doing much the same thing.<sup>49</sup> The film features several important musical sequences which mark key plot developments, the second marking the failure of Jeckie’s marriage, and a third, the descent into financial hardship. The central thesis of the film is underscored by the fourth musical sequence – Jeckie’s turning to money: “All my life it’s been heart over head with everything. Now I’m going to turn a somersault. I’m just going to use my head – I’m going to forget my heart.” But despite her father’s warning, she continues: “There’s only one forgivable sin. Poverty. I’m going to think in pounds now. Hundreds, thousands of pounds.” The following musical sequences, sometimes in the dance-band style of the period, and occasionally in the tragic tones of 19<sup>th</sup> century scoring, see Jeckie reject her would-be lover in favour of money-making (she eventually strikes oil). A choreographed fight-scene is scored down to the individual punch but ends with a shared cigarette and “pop goes the weasel,” a popular musical device that has the effect of reducing animosity to mere healthy rivalry. The film ends with high drama as Jeckie’s oil depot goes up in smoke. During the fire engine sequence, there is no dialogue, and the drama plays out with music.

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<sup>49</sup> Chapter 6 provides a full analysis of *Joanna Godden*.

If 1947 was a particularly prolific year for the film melodrama, Gainsborough went a step further by taking full advantage of the possibilities of Technicolor with *Jassy*. The film starred Margaret Lockwood again, by now guaranteed to satisfy the box-office, as well as Dennis Price and Patricia Roc, but it was to be the only Gainsborough experiment in colour, the titles dripping in rich reds and blues, and the Gainsborough portrait beaming for the first time in glorious Technicolor. Henry Geehl, Boosey and Hawkes' house arranger (his piano solo arrangement of *The Warsaw Concerto* was written as early as 1942), was a composer of music for brass bands, and of operetta. He wrote *For You Alone*, said to be the only song sung in English by Caruso. Having written arrangements of Paganini's music for *The Magic Bow* (1946), his music for *Jassy* never moves beyond 19<sup>th</sup> century tonality. Geehl (1881-1961) had studied piano in Vienna, and like many of his Hollywood counterparts, was rooted in the traditions of the Germanic school. *Jassy* is scored by the standard 20-or-so musical numbers, most of which serve to highlight the emotional tension of, among other things, gambling, debt, infidelity and leaving home: "Don't be melodramatic," Patricia Roc's would-be lover tells her (to the latter-day watcher, somewhat ironically, since they are acting out a melodrama) as he breaks the news that they won't be eloping after all. Apart from the colour (and perhaps because of it) there is virtually nothing remarkable about *Jassy*, the story a run-of-the mill series of clichés. *Jassy* was one of only two Technicolor films by Gainsborough (the other was *Christopher Columbus*, music by Arthur Bliss), and it was the last of the melodramas.

1947 also saw the release of a short film featuring a pseudo-classical piano concerto, "The Dream of Olwen" by Charles Williams. The film, *While I Live* continues the musical genre that began with "Portrait of Isla," a musical work written by Jack Beaver for the film *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (1940), produced by Alexander Korda's Denham Studios. For that reason this musical curio became known as the Denham Concerto and in the following chapter I explore a number of films made during the War including those which featured two seminal compositions of the genre, the *Warsaw Concerto* and the *Cornish Rhapsody*.



## CHAPTER 5 - Concerto Films of the Second World War

The presence of Beethoven's music in wartime newsreels, documentaries and in broadcasts by the BBC is testament to the subtlety of British propaganda. Although British music enjoyed something of a renaissance at the turn of the century when, as John Ramsden reminds us, Britain was considered a *Land ohne Musik*,<sup>1</sup> there continued an overriding popularity for German music, even during the War. Dame Myra Hess played Mozart's 17<sup>th</sup> Piano Concerto in Humphrey Jennings' documentary *Listen to Britain* (1942), Beethoven's *Appassionata* sonata in his *Myra Hess* (1945) and, most significantly, the opening theme from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony "became the 'victory anthem', the aural equivalent of Churchill's V sign, when it was noticed that the first four notes were rhythmically the Morse signal for 'V'."<sup>2</sup> The British documentary *Battle for Music* (1943) also featured the finale of Beethoven's fifth in a film that tells the story of how the London Philharmonic Orchestra was rescued by its members after it was abandoned by its founder, Sir Thomas Beecham. The use of German music in this way represents a claim to the civilised values that Britain was trying to preserve in the face of totalitarianism. By claiming Beethoven for themselves, the British musical establishment was able to illustrate that the Nazi regime was an illegitimate cancer which had robbed Germany of its true identity. The "appropriation" of this music for its universal value can also be linked to Adorno and Eisler's criticism of film music, which for them does not bear that universality. It will be remembered that Vaughan Williams' concern when writing the score for *Scott of the Antarctic* was that he wished to avoid the pitfalls of "mickeymousing."

Myra Hess was a major figure in the wartime music scene and it was her lunchtime concerts at the National Gallery which provided a convenient filmic device later in both *Love Story* (1944) and *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) which both begin at one of these concerts. Both these films feature specially-written piano compositions in the style that became known as the Denham Concerto, a kind of pastiche of the romantic piano concerto of the late 19th century, which lent itself to melodrama. Two of these Denham Concertos, including the composition written for the first of these films, are now

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsden, 2006: 38

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 204

considered to be seminal, but there are several other examples. In this chapter I will consider this music in relation to the films for which they were written.

Ivan Raykoff's exhaustive work "Concerto con amore,"<sup>3</sup> explores the use of the concerto in many films, and in particular the melodrama. What is it, asks Raykoff, that makes the piano concerto in particular suited to "melodramatic scenes of desire and struggle?" The juxtaposition of soloist and orchestra can act as either a metaphor for the relationship between two individuals or between a single character and some obstacle or other; the Romantic piano concerto is equivalent to an heroic (sometimes political, sometimes spiritual) struggle for the individual. For example, at the end of *Brief Encounter*, when Laura (Celia Johnson) is roused from her reverie, the struggle in coming to terms with her railway station encounters is matched by Rachmaninov's fortissimo recapitulation of the theme in the 2<sup>nd</sup> concerto, which was first heard when the lovers share their first kiss. Later in this chapter I discuss the use of pre-existent music in *Brief Encounter*.

Following his score for *Gaslight*, Richard Addinsell wrote for the film *Love on the Dole* (1941) which featured Deborah Kerr in her second film role. His next project, however, was to create an entirely unexpected musical phenomenon. In 1941 scriptwriter Terence Young, on duty at his army camp, heard a performance of a piano concerto broadcast on Short Wave from South America. His script called for "a short descriptive work for piano and orchestra... in the recognisable style of a romantic piano composer of serious music."<sup>4</sup> Existing works already had filmic associations for the public and "featuring" pre-existing music ran the risk of producing an effect on the individual "entirely different" to the one required by the director. Over a period of six months, Addinsell worked out a "pastiche" for a piano concerto, strongly resembling Rachmaninov. Known as a "tabloid" concerto (another term for "Denham" concerto), the music became known as *The Warsaw Concerto* only after the film had been screened.

Tales of the origin of the Warsaw Concerto are legion. Rachmaninov [who died in 1943] was supposedly approached with a view to using the second piano concerto [later used in *Brief Encounter*] or to writing

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<sup>3</sup> Published in *Echo*, Vol.2 Issue 1, Spring 2000

<sup>4</sup> Huntley, 1947: 53

something new, as was Mischa Spoliansky, but both turned down the request. Whatever the true story, the task passed to Addinsell, and with the help of Roy Douglas, surrounded by the scores of Rachmaninov's second and third concertos and 'Paganini' Rhapsody, the piece was written and featured prominently in the film. Incidentally, the lyrical second subject was written as a rumba many years before, while Addinsell was an Oxford undergraduate; it was slowed down to form the emotional heart of the work.<sup>5</sup>

The film is, of course, *Dangerous Moonlight*. Its opening use of Chopin's Military Polonaise Op.40 No.1 and casting the Anton Walbrook of as a Polish émigré<sup>6</sup> continues the thread that began with *Moonlight Sonata* in England, and sustained in the Chopin biopic *A Song to Remember* (1945), made in Hollywood.<sup>7</sup> *Dangerous Moonlight* was first shown at the Regal Cinema, Marble Arch. After the film's release, neither a recording nor sheet music were available. Realising the commercial opportunities presented by the unexpected popularity of the music, the studio released a gramophone record of the soundtrack, in which Louis Kentner (not listed on the film credits) on the piano was accompanied by Louis Levy conducting the London Symphony Orchestra. However, the *Warsaw Concerto* and similar works have never been able to shrug off their dubious reputation, based on criticism which suggested that a serious "concerto" implies "an elaborate work for orchestra and solo instrument with a playing time of, perhaps, thirty or forty minutes and consisting of a series of well-defined movements."<sup>8</sup> The work nevertheless became the first film piece "to attract the attention of a very

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<sup>5</sup> Chandos 10046

<sup>6</sup> He was, in fact, an Austrian émigré whom the British took to their hearts.

<sup>7</sup> This line, through piano virtuoso Jan Paderewski and into *Dangerous Moonlight*, is taken up later in the fifties by none other than Liberace, who claimed Polish ancestry on his mother's side.

<sup>8</sup> Huntley, 1947: 55. The sentiment expressed in this pastiche of the romantic piano concerto was in sharp contrast to contemporaneous developments in the maturity of the piano concerto, that is, beyond the constraints of the film industry. The "highbrow tastes" of *Les Six*, for example, was determinedly "anti-romantic." This group of French composers included François Poulenc, Darius Milhaud and George Auric, the latter its youngest member who wrote a piano concerto as well as the scores for several British melodramas, most notably for *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947). *Les Six* were seen as the French equivalent to the Russian "mighty handful" of composers who drew on Russian literature and folk music for their inspiration, in contrast to romantic composers such as Tchaikovsky and Anton Rubinstein, who looked more towards Western Europe. The Russian composer (of German descent) Nikolai Medtner, resident in England from 1936, was himself drawn to early Scriabin and had a high regard for Tchaikovsky, Liszt and Chopin all of whom excelled in the Romantic expression of the piano, but who wrote music that, though often bordering on the atonal, always resolves faithfully into the tonic.

large and enthusiastic audience.”<sup>9</sup> Like *Moonlight Sonata*, *Dangerous Moonlight* is rather an improbable film. As Jan Swynnoe points out, “there is nothing very realistic about a Polish concert-pianist-cum-pilot conducting a conversation with a stranger while playing a grand piano during an air-raid.”<sup>10</sup> But Sue Harper points out that British film melodramas, like their theatrical forebears, “favour spectacle and avoid realism,” forsaking the wider social stage for the intimate familial one, concentrating on the body rather than the body politic.<sup>11</sup> However, the British tendency to make light of adversity influenced the type of scoring written in films, treatment for Jan Swynnoe “far more affecting than the manipulative heart-rending string passage characteristic of American scores.”<sup>12</sup>

I have alluded to the extraordinary output of British films from 1945. Unfortunately, this creative trend was to be curtailed by the intervention of the US. But between the end of the war and the early 50s a rich vein of experimental and outstanding films were produced by British studios. Many of these films are remarkable for their innovative use of music and its use as a signifier of the most intense emotions. Claudia Gorbman argues that this background music aligns with the irrational, the dream and loss of control, as opposed to the logical, everyday reality and control. It is clearly a standard use of music to signify the private (and often hopelessly out-of-touch) emotional world of the female character whose plight we are being allowed to enter into.<sup>13</sup> There are many such uses. A later outstanding Hollywood example that drew on techniques seen in World War II melodrama is Max Ophuls’ *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) in which Joan Fontaine (Lisa) loves Louis Jourdan’s Brandt – the handsome, romantic, tragic hero who struggles at the piano with Liszt and moves about in a glamorous world of possibilities and intrigue. But he has never noticed her. She inhabits a fantasy world of romantic notions, a moonlit world of shadows, false hopes and make-believe. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, though the original novel by Stefan Zweig casts Brandt as a writer, music becomes all-pervasive as he is depicted as a concert pianist. It is his rehearsal of Liszt’s *Un Sospiro* that first attracts Lisa’s attention. Thus music becomes part of the narrative as well as a formal aspect of the film.

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<sup>9</sup> Huntley, 1947: 55

<sup>10</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 149

<sup>11</sup> Sue Harper: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/446129/index.html> (Accessed 1 January 2007)

<sup>12</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 128

<sup>13</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 79-80

There are many British examples of this. *Love Story*, *The Magic Bow*, *While I Live*, *Dangerous Moonlight* and *The Seventh Veil* all revolve around a soloist-protagonist whose music forms a central part of the diegesis as well as the extra-diegetic world.<sup>14</sup> The vast repertoire of large scale concertos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also provided inspiration for the score of *The Common Touch* (1941), which was composed and directed by Kennedy Russell and played by the London Symphony Orchestra. The opening credits are accompanied by a kind of fantasia on the opening theme of Tchaikovsky's Bb minor Piano Concerto, Op.23 which also appears in a series of variations and a "regular Chopin" (his name pronounced phonetically) provides some live (diegetic) entertainment – a piano reduction of the famous concerto.<sup>15</sup> The film's denouement is a further cue for a few closing bars of music in a new arrangement of the Tchaikovsky theme, the use of which is inexplicable apart from its apparent popularity.

Classic underscoring can use pre-existent music as if it were written expressly for the film. Originally, writes Jan Swynnoe, there was little such underscoring this side of the Atlantic: "The scoring of primary dialogue in British films in the 1930s had generally been side-stepped by composers"<sup>16</sup> with film scores relying on diegetic cues and local tone-colour. "In neither of these methods are the emotional contours of the dialogue interpreted or highlighted by the music cues," but as the British film developed, a "slow evolution" began to transform dialogue scoring. In *Dangerous Moonlight* (1942), the theme of what was to become the *Warsaw Concerto* is first used in scenes involving primary dialogue, justified to evoke romance because its inspiration comes to the composer as he watches Carole in the moonlight on the night they met in Warsaw. An identical usage is found in *Love Story* (1944), "where Kit provides the inspiration for the main theme of Lissa's piano concerto – Hubert Bath's *Cornish Rhapsody*."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The protagonist in *The Magic Bow* is of course a violinist, but the others are all pianists. The music in Gainsborough's *The Magic Bow* (1945) about the life of Paganini, was recorded by Yehudi Menuhin. Music by Paganini himself and Beethoven was featured in the film and a special "Romance" based on Paganini's E Minor violin concerto was written by Phil Green. Because Stewart Granger could not play the violin, the director had to ensure a convincing "performance" which included an experiment with dubbing, and a double who provided the necessary movement that would convince the audience that Paganini was depicted with some authenticity.

<sup>15</sup> The film also features Sylvia Meadows (Greta Gynt), a cabaret artist singing a "tricky little number, the king of every rumba," words from "The Cubanata," complete with cinema organ, castanets, sombreros and a troupe of dancing girls in the chorus.

<sup>16</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 149

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 150

But the most obvious inspiration for the concerto is Lissa's programmatic scoring in the early bars of seagulls (signified by a trill in the treble), and of waves crashing against the rocks. The way the concerto arrives in her consciousness is thus through the natural surroundings of the Daphne-du-Maurier-like rural setting of the Cornwall landscape to which she has retreated. A similar inspiration is expressed in particular in *The Loves of Joanna Godden*, which I explore in chapter six. If Lissa in *Love Story* is identified with nature, the inspiration for Anton Walbrook for the *Warsaw Concerto*, on the other hand, seems to be the bombs dropping on a Warsaw under siege. This identification with "masculine" concerns makes his presence acceptable in a "woman's film," a concern that Mary Ann Doane has explored and to which I have alluded in Chapter 3.

*Love Story* and *Dangerous Moonlight* share a parallel theme in the role of their male protagonists in wartime. In the former film, the suggestion is made that Stewart Granger is somehow avoiding his responsibilities by refusing to join up. Anton Walbrook's concern is to play his part in the war effort as an airman, and the two characters thus play similar roles with similar issues. A contrast, however, can be seen in the level of implausibility in the films. Whereas a blind hero falling in love with a dying concert pianist in *Love Story* may seem rather improbable, it is possible to suspend belief for the duration of the film. Stewart Granger's views on *Love Story* ("the biggest load of crap I'd ever read"), are balanced with the emotional impact of the film's melodramatic music: "Margaret Lockwood is dying of some unnamed disease. We meet. I don't tell her I'm going blind. She doesn't tell me she's dying. The audience knows all this but we don't... She is a pianist/composer and writes the 'Cornish Rhapsody' ... It was a smash hit and there wasn't a dry eye in the house."<sup>18</sup> As the second Denham Concerto, the *Cornish Rhapsody*, written by Hubert Bath, has often been compared to the *Warsaw Concerto* and in *Love Story* the music, like that in *Dangerous Moonlight*, was to be "an integral part of the development of the characters themselves."<sup>19</sup> Improbability is taken to further extremes in *Dangerous Moonlight* with the presence of an American (Sally Gray) detracting from the film, (which was a joint UK-US production), in particular when the plot transfers to America, a setting in which the audience would be used to seeing a far more direct and exaggerated emotional style in keeping with Hollywood melodramas of the period. The film seems to "lose" itself in the process, and in

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<sup>18</sup> Stewart Granger quoted by Raykoff at <http://www.echo.ucla.edu/Volume2-Issue1/raykoff/raykoff-article-part4.html>, [accessed 20 February 2007].

<sup>19</sup> Huntley, 1947: 69

hindsight *Love Story* remains the better film, even if *The Warsaw Concerto* of *Dangerous Moonlight* remains the most popular of the films' musical legacies.

The concerto film of the 40s, says Raykoff, is typically classified as melodrama, or "woman's film." "Melodrama's social determinant involves the representation of power relations, particularly (in the woman's film) the relationship of a female protagonist to some manifestation of the patriarchal social order," and its basic narrative formula is present in many films (among them *Love Story*, *The Seventh Veil* and *While I Live*), with a further layer concerned with the "fallen" woman, and an incomplete piano concerto. But it is primarily the romantic associations of the music that are its chief justification. "Usually when concert music is incorporated in a film it is not so much the music's shape as its tone or mood which is modified. The most obvious examples of this are the romantic dramas which use passages of 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic music (or twentieth-century imitations of it) merely as splashes of sentiment [as in] *Dangerous Moonlight*."<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen, the preoccupation with musical depictions in the melodramas that concern pianists gave rise to the term "Denham Concerto," because many of the films that feature this pseudo-classical style of music were made at Alexander Korda's Denham Studios. In the cinema's infancy, the solo piano was often the only musical accompaniment to film, and it was natural that the use of the piano should develop. John Huntley recognises a pseudo-classical concerto in *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (1940) as a milestone, and the work *Portrait of Isla* can be considered the first such Denham Concerto. *The Case of the Frightened Lady* is a melodrama based on the Edgar Wallace story of the same name, and features the first real piano feature in a film, by composer Jack Beaver (1900-1963), who also contributed most of the music to Hitchcock's *The Thirty Nine Steps* (1935). *While I Live* (1947) is a melodrama best remembered for its score, a fact which prompted its re-release in 1950 as *The Dream of Olwen*, the title of the late example of the Denham Concerto which was written for it. This melodrama, starring Tom Walls and Sonia Dresdel was redeemed only by its haunting theme-tune. Another late example is *Piccadilly Incident* (1946), which contained a Denham Concerto by Vivian Ellis, called *Piccadilly 1944*. *Piccadilly*

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson, 1969: 8

*Incident* also included a five-minute ballet devised by Wendy Toye, with Anna Neagle as the star turn. After *The Wicked Lady*, which was released at the end of the previous year, the film was the most successful film of 1946.

The popularity of the concerto film continued unabated after the war. Thorold Dickinson's first completed post-war feature *Men of Two Worlds* (1946), begun as an original scenario worked out with the novelist Joyce Cary,<sup>21</sup> has elements of melodrama and features a fine score by Arthur Bliss. The film opens with one of the most potent symbols of the war years, a performance – at the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square – of a piano concerto by Kisenga (Robert Adams), an African composer and pianist who has been in Europe for ten years but who is returning to his native Tanganyika. The “Denham” concerto was released as the “concert piece” *Baraza* for piano and orchestra by Decca in 1946 conducted by Muir Mathieson. Dame Myra Hess, who, as mentioned above, had organised the noontime concerts during the war, was not so accommodating. “When Dickinson approached Dame Myra about using the actual setting, she refused; she had permitted no black man to play at any of the concerts, she said, and would not permit one to play for the filming, even if it were for the government.”<sup>22</sup> The opinions and wishes of Myra Hess carried considerable weight. In the event, a sound stage was used to create three replicas of the galleries of the National Gallery and filming took place in the studio. Though much of the rest of the score has been lost and the film itself is no longer commercially available, Naxos' recording of what is available reveals a number of important musical elements, particularly the treatment of East African sounds and rhythms in a male chorus which is juxtaposed with the European “discussion in council” in a scene towards the end of the film that depicts an African chief and his tribesmen. In discussing music requirements for the Tanganyika plane journey sequence, Bliss observed that the shot of the snow-capped mountain was “the emotional peg on which the sequence rests.” Kisenga's plane journey to his home in the north of the country is accompanied by Arthur Bliss's rich scoring in the strings as Kilimanjaro can be seen from above.

As we have seen, while the Denham Concerto style allowed composers to write much original scoring, there were plenty of occasions when pre-existing music was preferred.

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<sup>21</sup> Armes, 1978: 230

<sup>22</sup> Foster, 1968: 374



Much has been written about the use of Rachmaninov in *Brief Encounter*. The film, which started filming in January 1945,<sup>23</sup> was completed between VE and VJ Days, and this is yet another reason for the position the film has in the British canon. In her volume on women and cinema in wartime Britain, Antonia Lant devotes considerable attention to the music in the film, pointing out that although its use is “affective through its contrast to the dank surroundings,” its “fabulous richness and high culture status are peculiarly at odds with the film’s wintry, municipal exteriors.”<sup>24</sup> According to Ronald Neame, the choice of the 2nd Rachmaninov concerto was Noel Coward’s.<sup>25</sup> The Rachmaninov is excerpted skilfully providing both underscoring and the musical cues that allow the audience to enter Celia Johnson’s private torment.

Celia Johnson’s voice and the piano share an equal role in *Brief Encounter* and the latter often makes way for the many voiceover sequences as Laura efforts to maintain her composure. The technique signifies Laura’s coming-to-terms, her inner feelings expressed both by the music, with the horn theme from the 1<sup>st</sup> movement heard each time Laura’s private thoughts are spoken in voiceover. In at least one of the voiceovers, the piano solo part is actually back-grounded in favour of Celia Johnson’s voice, the orchestra remaining to accompany her instead. A prime example of Ian Raykoff’s description of the heroic struggle occurs with the foregrounding of Celia Johnson’s voiceover in some instances over the piano solo part. The latter seems to recede into the background, though the orchestral accompaniment remains. In the “silly dreams” sequence, for example, which coincides with the lovers’ second Thursday meeting, Alex has not pitched up. Laura, in the waiting room distracted by the shenanigans of Stanley Holloway and Joyce Carey, is stirred from her reverie by the bell sounding for the Express. As she looks up at the clock, the coda from the concerto’s third movement begins. We hear her voiceover: “As I left the refreshment room, a train was coming in. His train. He wasn’t on the platform and I suddenly felt panic-stricken at the thought of not seeing him again...” The piano solo takes over the “voice” part at this point, and the music climax perfectly underscores the rushed reunion as Alex arrives at his platform

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<sup>23</sup> Fleming, 1991: 139

<sup>24</sup> Lant, 1991: 175

<sup>25</sup> Interview given by Neame in 2000 released with the Carlton DVD edition of the film. Other pre-existing music in the film includes a waltz, which is heard in Laura’s daydreams, in virtually the only non-Rachmaninov extra-diegetic music in the film, and in the restaurant sequence which features the diegetic music is a Mozkovsky string quartet, and the cellist who provides the lovers with so much amusement later appears at the organ in the cinema playing Schubert’s *Marche Militaire*, Op.51 No.1.

and makes a dash for the train. Raykoff has pointed out that “aside from the musical cues which underscore Laura’s private reminiscences and moments of introspection, other excerpts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> movements... are ‘shared’ by Laura and Alex. These passages accompany moments of dialogue – ‘concerto conversations’ – between the two lovers, and they reveal through the musical relationships of their ‘concerto agents’ information about the relationships between the characters they accompany.”<sup>26</sup> They agree to meet the following Thursday and the music stops abruptly, as Laura’s train is announced. The following week, she continues her narrative voiceover as they spend a romantic day together. As they return to catch their trains, their shadows can be seen preceding them on the wall as they use the underpass. Their figures emerge in the dimly lit tunnel which provides the necessary privacy for a stolen kiss as the music – diegetic this time – returns on the radiogram at Laura’s home. She has been daydreaming, but her thoughts – and voiceover – take over once again, again largely replacing the solo piano part, the orchestra remaining in full volume. The music urgently tells of her feelings after their mutual declaration of love: “It was true! I imagined him holding me in his arms. I imagined being with him in all sorts of glamorous circumstances.” Rachmaninov here provides the musical accompaniment as Laura continues: “I saw us in Paris in a box at the opera; the orchestra was tuning up;” [cue the sound of an orchestra] “then we were in Venice drifting along the Grand Canal in a gondola with the sound of mandolins coming to us over the water;” [cue mandolin] “all the places I’ve always longed to go” [Rachmaninov again]. “I saw us leaning on the rail of a ship looking at the sea and the stars. Standing on a tropical beach in the moonlight with the palm trees sighing above us.” Two shadows, indeed, in the moonlight.

In contrast to the use of pre-existent music in *Brief Encounter*, David Lean’s *Passionate Friends* (1948) instead features the original music of Richard Addinsell with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Muir Mathieson. Although adapted from the novel by H.G. Wells, the film appears to rehash elements from *Brief Encounter*. Mary (Ann Todd) and Stephen (Trevor Howard), a couple who rekindle their long-lost romance – more than once – struggle with the consequences of Mary’s potential divorce from an older Howard Justin (Claude Rains). A conventional overture opens the film, which begins at a 1938 New Year’s Eve party, at which Mary and Stephen meet up again after a long period. Later, Mary’s reminiscences about the evening are scored by light strings.

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<sup>26</sup> Raykoff, 2000 (accessed 23 March 2007)

Taken up by the woodwind, the theme sutures into a cut to (and into the sound of) a diegetic gramophone and back again to extra-diegetic violins as Stephen too contemplates their meeting again. This pattern is repeated when each has a moment for solitary reflection, and as they appear to apprehend their feelings for one another. The scoring builds up in a passionate crescendo of emotion until interrupted by the sound of a telephone as Mary rushes to take the call. The would-be lovers agree to meet. Stephen, university lecturer, cook and interior designer has a piano in his flat. "Do you ever play now, Stephen?" Mary asks. "Very quietly and for my own private satisfaction," he replies. Her response is a quote from Galsworthy: "From the music they love you shall know the texture of men's souls," and the romantic view of love is established between them. Mary picks out a tune on the piano, which is taken up by the orchestra as a full extra-diegetic theme takes up dialogue underscoring. As Mary opens the door to a balcony, the volume of the music increases – a device which successfully works to change the ambient sound, now that the action has moved outdoors. This artifice has the effect of realism – as an outside door is opened the increased volume in music signifies the increase in noise that would be expected when encountering the outside world of the street and the city.

The music continues to build, and a violin solo seals their kiss. The montage which follows, all underscored, resembles *Brief Encounter* with Mary's voice-over describing their subsequent affair. Naturally, Mary's husband discovers the truth. Stephen's forced removal from their house is accompanied by a massive tragic theme which fills every space and expresses Stephen's doubt as he looks back. Claude Rains' rather sardonic delivery is reminiscent of his role in *Casablanca* (1942). For him, Mary is not suited to romantic love, which is "the kind that makes big demands, nearness, belonging, fulfilment and priority over everything else," but to Stephen this is "a cold, bloodless, banker's point of view." The choice for Mary is her husband affection and the security he provides and "belonging to yourself" only, or a passionate affair. The lovers manage to meet once more, but as they part, there is no supporting music for Mary's tears or her reminiscences.

Music returns again, only to herald the present. Nine years have passed and a chance meeting in Switzerland is underscored by a light theme, a quiet signal that this is not a passionate reunion and doesn't promise to be one, either. The old friends agree to a

walk in the mountains. A climbing motif accompanies their ascent in the Mont Blanc cable car – higher still as the orchestral tone changes into a question, unresolved chords fading. The couple have a chance to agree they are happy in their respective marriages. Continuing upwards, their rise through the clouds to the upper slopes of the mountain is accompanied by rich programmatic orchestral colour proclaiming the magnificence of the Alps. Quietening again, mysterious light strings accompany Mary's "dreaming nonsense" as she imagines a different outcome for their future. But finally she tells Stephen that she's glad of his happiness and that she hopes the gap between their next meeting will not be as long as nine years.<sup>27</sup>

But Howard's imagination gets the better of him. Tragic *fortissimo* orchestral tones signal his own "passion" as he puts two-and-two together – and makes five. His unexpected arrival at the lakeside hotel is unknown to Mary, whose mistake is to run and wave enthusiastically to Stephen – in full view of her husband, giving the latter a chance to see her truer feelings. With a divorce case under way, back in London, Mary's subsequent voiceover is again reminiscent of *Brief Encounter* and, like that film, she contemplates suicide, this time on the Underground. The denouement is entirely free of music, reappearing only as a finale at the movie's end. Given the distance between a modern viewer and the age of the film, Ann Todd's performance at the moment of crisis is remarkable for its enduring authenticity, sixty years on. *Passionate Friends*, however, never gained the status achieved by *Brief Encounter*, and the film is now largely forgotten.<sup>28</sup> Despite the presence of Richard Addinsell's score, the film cannot recapture the remarkable atmosphere of the earlier film, which despite its rather prosaic plot,

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<sup>27</sup> These dreams of what could be are repeated from *Brief Encounter*. In this case Ann Todd dreams of a possible future with Trevor Howard in Cape Town; the earlier film has him going off to become a doctor in Johannesburg. In *They Were Sisters* (1945), one of the three sisters emigrates to a Karoo farm. It clearly was acceptable in the movies to emigrate to pre-Apartheid South Africa. *They Were Sisters* features music by Hubert Bath, played under the direction of Louis Levy. There are an unusual twenty-eight musical numbers in this melodrama of domestic strife in the lives of three sisters of contrasting character, Phyllis Calvert reprising her virtuous roles – here almost as wise, forgiving and longsuffering as Olivia de Havilland in *Gone With The Wind*. A tea dance early in the film provides the opportunity for ragtime and a tango, which were a popular novelty at the time of the film's setting, which begins in 1919. Gramophone records are also used diegetically for a similar purpose, but there is also much classic underscoring. A 'cello theme between Lucy (Calvert) and her amiable husband-to-be returns again and again throughout the movie, acting as leitmotiv to their love and enduring dependability.

<sup>28</sup> Following *Passionate Friends*, David Lean tried his hand at a costume melodrama set in 1857, also starring Ann Todd, in the title role of *Madeleine* (1950). The film, which achieved even less acclaim, begins with an establishing shot of Glasgow rooftops, accompanied by the music of William Alwyn who provided a standard nineteen numbers required for the film. This fine music accompanies the film's melodramatic narrative throughout the first hour, until the famous forty-minute court sequence, which is presented without any kind of scoring.

succeeds by a large extent through the use of the well-known corresponding emotional content present in Rachmaninov's music, a factor that did not go unnoticed by Celia Johnson. In a letter she wrote to her husband after seeing a rough cut of the film in June 1945, she remarked that "all the music and stuff will make a tremendous difference, especially to you who will be miserable without Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto swishing through it,"<sup>29</sup> a reminder that a successful melodrama requires appropriate music to tell the story.

Appropriate music, as we have seen, may not necessarily be music that is especially written for the picture. "In October 1945 appeared the finest featured film music production so far made in England," writes John Huntley. "*The Seventh Veil* derives its title from the simile of Dr. Larsen, the psychiatrist in the film: 'The human mind is rather like Salome at the beginning of her dance – concealed from the outside world by veil after veil of reserve...'"<sup>30</sup> The film includes Chopin (Prelude Op.28 No.7), Mozart (Sonata in G), Nicolai (Overture to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) Grieg's Piano Concerto, Op.16, Rachmaninov's C Minor Piano Concerto, Beethoven's *Pathétique* piano sonata and the *Seventh Veil Waltz* by Benjamin Frankel. The opening credits are accompanied by a particularly effusive overture – much more in the Hollywood vein – by Ben Frankel. Muir Mathieson conducts the London Symphony Orchestra again. The entire opening sequence – of Francesca (Ann Todd) escaping from a clinic to throw herself into a river – is played out entirely without dialogue over four minutes, music providing the emotional interpretation over the sequence. Later, Francesca's hypnosis (the third musical sequence, in rising, light strains programming her "going under") provides a flashback device to when she was 14 years old. A voiceover helps to set the scene of a young schoolgirl entering the house of a distant cousin, played by a particularly malevolent James Mason.

Francesca has lost her parents and he is to become her guardian, and piano teacher. The piano clearly provides many opportunities for diegetic music – Mozart and Chopin in particular – but a wider range of music is possible because the growing Francesca falls in love with a dance band leader. A musical score of popular songs and various classical styles accompanies their love affair montage. It neatly consists of eight

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<sup>29</sup> Fleming, 1991: 148

<sup>30</sup> Huntley, 1947: 77

separate changes in the space of just one minute, and begins with a self-parodying style of romantic (Hollywood) strings as the couple discuss “the films.” Then comes a dance-band number as they get up to dance, an accordion in a restaurant, flutes next to a lake, the full dance band again, at a concert or ballet, by the lake again (with a Tchaikovsky-like *pizzicato* in the style of *Swan Lake*). The sequence ends with the dance band again. As she returns home after this “whirlwind” romance, her guardian Nicholas (James Mason) has returned. He requests a demonstration of three month’s worth of study at the Royal College of Music (for which he has provided a scholarship), expecting, we assume, some Chopin or late Beethoven. She starts to play a light-hearted pop song, but provokes a cutting interruption:

NICHOLAS: “Are you Mad?”

FRANCESCA: “But you asked me to play!”

NICHOLAS: “I asked you to *play*. If you can’t think of anything better, play a chromatic scale or a five finger exercise. But spare me your suburban shop-girl trash!”

Standard melodrama scoring accompanies Francesca’s attempt to rebel by going off with the dance band leader, which fails as Nicholas whisks her off to Europe. A montage paints a heady seven years of music – diegetic piano practice and exercises, and a repetitive extra-diegetic theme in the strings accentuating the frenetic and relentless training schedule until her concert debut. She is to play the Grieg A Minor concerto, and though she manages to play it through – after the opening bars, a cut to the final climax – her faltering at the keyboard and struggle with the orchestra illustrates the hidden trauma of her upbringing and shaky start. In the end, she triumphs, but faints. Here is a classic example of the piano concerto serving to flesh out the moral and emotional dichotomy, the soloist struggling for supremacy as the orchestra rivals the effort. A musical suture brings us back to the psychiatrist’s couch – *mysterioso* strings underlining the contrast. But the story continues this time at the Royal Albert Hall (with conductor Muir Mathieson playing himself) with the opening of the Rachmaninov C Minor concerto (No.2). A cut again to the closing bars, and this time the performance is indeed a triumph, and Nicholas knows it, the pleasure barely concealed from his usually severe face. But freeing herself from his overweening

influence, she begins a wild goose chase of all the nightclubs she can find for her one-time lover. As she enters, each plays its own music, but after seven years some are clearly not what they once were. The implied derogatory reference to a “black” club puts the film firmly in the racist Forties. Finally, she finds Peter playing his own American-style big band sound. Another potential husband, Max Leyton, a portrait painter commissioned by Nicholas, declares his love for her to ominous music, but their kiss – effectively Francesca’s “submission” – is seen literally with “no strings attached.” The scene, unusually, is curiously stilted for the lack of music. Nicholas demands that she gives Max up. While she plays the slow movement of Beethoven’s *Pathétique* sonata, the change of tone colour is perfectly matched to Nicholas’s threats and ranting: “You belong to me. We must always be together; you know that, don’t you? Promise you’ll stay with me always. Promise!!” – as he beats her hands with his walking stick. (This shocking moment cemented James Mason’s reputation as “the man they loved to hate,” and catapulted both Mason and Ann Todd to stardom.)

Back at the clinic, Francesca is suicidal: “I wish I were dead,” she says. The emotional deadlock is ingeniously breached by her doctor, who suggests that her inability to play should be cured by a recording of the Beethoven. The music is used to dramatise her recovery, and is again cleverly used as underscoring to dialogue as well as for dramatic highlighting. The film’s melodramatic conventions are reinforced by the film’s closing scene, where the audience is in suspense as to which of Francesca’s three would-be husbands will win her love. Artist Max is unsuitable because he was unwilling to marry but prepared to “live in sin” on the continent. Band leader Peter Gay is divorced with children: too complicated. Nicholas, previously unmarried, despite the violence and oppression he imposes, is the only suitable option in terms of contemporary social acceptability. In an interview given just before his death in 1984 and released with the 2007 Network DVD release of *The Man in Grey*, Mason said that the unconventional ending was not really popular with the public, which would have preferred the original intention for Francesca to go off with the dashing American.

Because of the popularity of certain film scores, music that did not necessarily appear in films was often rearranged and released as separate works in their own right. The prime example of this trend was the publication of a concerto equivalent to the “overture” to

*The Glass Mountain* (1950) composed by Nino Rota in the Denham style.<sup>31</sup> Rota of course wrote for many films, and his music for this picture was commercially released in a four-minute rearrangement for piano and orchestra as “The Legend of the Glass Mountain,” which uses all the main tragic themes which appear in the film as the titles roll. Although the film was made after the war, its analysis here is justified not only by composition of the subsequent Denham concerto, but also by its war-time setting and the presence of the kind of composer protagonist featured in *Dangerous Moonlight* and *Love Story*. The film also features a theme song, *The Wayfarer*, composed by Vivian Lambert and Elizabeth Anthony, with the film score proper by Rota. The film’s opera sequences are sung by Elena Rizzieri and Tito Gobbi, the latter also playing himself in a small role in the film. Rizzieri and Gobbi were major opera stars of the day and here they are accompanied by the orchestra of the Fenice Opera House, Venice, conducted by Franco Ferrara.

*The Glass Mountain* tells the story of a struggling opera composer Richard Wilder (Michael Denison) who is trapped in the Dolomites and in the process becomes estranged from his wife Anne (Dulcie Gray), falling for the beautiful Alida Morisini (Valentina Cortese), after his plane crashes during the war. A wounded Richard is left in the care of “fellow musician,” the tenor Tito Gobbi whose talents are showcased as he sings while accompanying himself on the accordion. Joined in the chorus by a company of wounded resistance fighters, the song ends as there is a fade to the exterior. The following sequence concerns the Legend of the Glass Mountain, which provides Richard with his inspiration for an opera, “The Glass Mountain.”

Struggling with its composition back in England after the war, Richard meets with his librettist, Bruce McLeod, explaining to him that the opera’s heroine Maria is like “the eternal woman all men return to,” Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Isolde or Lilith.<sup>32</sup> McLeod gives Richard a better line for what he is looking for; how he wants to present Maria in the aria with which he is struggling:

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<sup>31</sup> A prolific film composer, Rota also wrote for *Roma Città Libera* (1946) which, like *The Glass Mountain*, also starred Valentina Cortese, and for dozens of other pictures, including *Obsession* (Edward Dmytryk, 1949), *La Strada* (1954, directed by Fellini, with whom he is particularly associated), *La Dolce Vita* (1960), *8½* (1963) and *The Godfather* (1972).

<sup>32</sup> The theme of Helen of Troy is repeated in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, a film I analyse extensively in the closing chapter of this dissertation.



And though you sleep, my love  
A captive in her thrall  
Nor hear me in my tomb

And though you stop your ears  
To my insistent call  
I shall not sleep, my love, nor rest  
'Til the day you come

Richard makes it clear that this aria is not about his wife. He immediately reads back these words to the tune he has picked out on the piano. A full orchestral version follows non-diegetically, and Richard wanders outside. It is Alida's face which appears in his reverie. Is his passion for Alida being sublimated in the opera? As *The Wayfarer* signifies the relationship between Richard and his wife, so this generous theme represents Richard's love for Alida. Here the music expresses all the passion that Richard feels for her, its grand Verdi-like tones mirroring the exotic nature of his love – Alida is Richard's Helen of Troy – in contrast to the assured, if somewhat homely – Englishness expressed in *The Wayfarer*. But McLeod warns Richard: "We aren't living in a legend."

Eventually, the opera is staged at La Fenice, and the action returns to Italy. The lovers are reunited but Anne's impending arrival for the premier of the opera is delayed – she has asked the pilot to show her the Glass Mountain. As the orchestra tunes up for the performance, Richard takes his position at the conductors' rostrum. A full neo-Romantic orchestra plays in all its exaggerated fullness and the camera then focuses on Alida's countenance as the musical motif is presented. Anne's seat is empty. The Verdi-like aria sung by Gobbi in the first act tells of a mountain tragedy – one which is being played out in real life as the opera is sung. The stage mountain set is dissolved into the mountain proper as Anne's crashed plane can be seen on its slopes. Meanwhile the opera's second act has begun, its synopsis framed as a voiceover provides the unmistakable parallel with real events:

"In despair Maria climbs the mountain alone and is never seen again..."

“Antonio marries the other girl. During the wedding feast, the voice of Maria’s ghost is heard calling Antonio.”

There follows a cut to a major Wagner-like chorus scene in the opera akin to *Tannhäuser* or *Meistersinger*. The ghostly voice of Maria summons Antonio away from his new bride... with a cut back to the mountain itself. A rescue party proceeds to the wreckage. The third act has begun: “Antonio climbs the mountain following the ghost of Maria, hoping that with each step he will hold Maria in his arms. But he only holds the mist, until there is no more ground beneath his feet and he falls.” The opera’s climax is reached as news is brought to McLeod of Anne’s plane crash. Alida hears it and the closing bars of the opera reflect the on-stage tragedy but for us the audience, it has of course a deeper meaning. The opera is a triumph and Alida rushes backstage to tell Richard that the opera was wonderful. The irony is not lost on her – the opera is also about Anne and Richard cannot take his well-deserved curtain-call as he makes for the mountain. The opera’s overture is again heard as Richard speeds towards the village. Richard and his old rival agree to climb the mountain in order to reach the plane. Their ascent is accompanied by heavy, plodding music. There is no dialogue until the “climbing” motif reaches the high register as they spot the rescue party. Richard calls out Anne’s name and speeds towards the group. The legend says that, when called out over the mountain, the name of your true love will echo back to you. This, then, is the film’s conclusion as Richard, desperate to find Anne, calls out her name. As his voice echoes, a “Pathétique” theme, signifying Richard’s love for Anne, is played in the high-register strings as they agree never to part again, and as the group descends, a reprise of the Glass Mountain theme returns at the film’s end.

Though *The Glass Mountain*’s riveting conclusion contains musical references to Wagnerian music drama, Nino Rota’s fine music is perhaps closer to Italian grand opera in keeping with its Venice staging (this is particularly evident in the opening aria sung by Rizzieri and Gobbi). The staged opera plays a major part in the film’s denouement, its plot mirroring the real-life drama unfolding on the mountain. The melodrama of Anne and Richard’s threatened divorce and the latter’s struggle with his passion for Alida as well as his torment as a struggling composer are both served by the music he himself has composed and the film’s rich score expresses the grand passion Richard

feels, and – as in David Lean’s *Passionate Friends* – the debate between romantic and “real” love.

Films such as *Dangerous Moonlight* and *Love Story* express a struggle through the tension between piano and orchestra in the Denham concertos which they feature, and *The Glass Mountain* achieves the same with opera. The subsequent publication of a concerto arrangement of the film’s music is merely incidental. This is particularly significant because of what melodrama and film music both owe to opera. It is this reference to opera that I turn to in the final chapter of this exploration of British film music. However, before concluding, it would be well to remember that in addition to its dramatic setting on the ski slopes of Italy, the plot of *The Glass Mountain* also relies on the depiction of “home,” signified by *The Wayfarer* and, especially, by the establishing shot of a rural scene which features programmatic music depicting the beauty of the English countryside. It is to this rural idyll that I turn next with a film scored by a composer whose skills in this direction are well known.



## CHAPTER 6 - Vaughan Williams, Joanna Godden and the Rural Idyll

In Vaughan Williams' consideration there are two kinds of film music. The first kind is related to the leitmotiv technique, where "every action, word, gesture or incident is punctuated in sound." The second method is "to ignore the details and to intensify the spirit of the whole situation by a continuous stream of music," a technique which he favoured as he was "incapable of the former." His views go a long way to explaining the major differences between Hollywood and British scoring. Writing in 1945, Vaughan Williams still considered himself a newcomer to film music:

I am only a novice at this art of film music and some of my more practised colleagues assure me that when I have had all of their experience my youthful exuberance will disappear, and I shall look upon film composing not as an art but as a business. At present I still feel a morning blush which has not yet paled into the light of common day. I still believe that the film contains potentialities for the combination of all the arts such as Wagner never dreamt of.<sup>33</sup>

The composer tended to write for the bigger canvas of films like *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* and *Scott of the Antarctic*, rather than for the domestic melodrama. There is one exception, however. Like *It Always Rains on Sunday*, *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947) starred John McCallum and is the central film of the Googie Withers<sup>34</sup> trilogy referred to above. The musical score is particularly noteworthy.

By 1947 John Huntley argued that the standard of music in British films is "as high, if not higher, than in any other country"<sup>35</sup> and whilst acknowledging that American *technique* may be more advanced (by which he means the film itself, and the advantages of technological innovation in creating images and sound), Huntley was adamant that the average British score was of a higher *quality*, though he does also acknowledge the

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<sup>33</sup> Vaughan Williams, 1996: 162

<sup>34</sup> Googie Withers and John McCallum were married in early 1948 and left for Australia, where the couple followed a successful theatre career, Googie Withers' most recent film role being *Shine* (1996).

<sup>35</sup> Huntley, 1947: 183

“brilliant” management of music on Hollywood soundtracks as well as the ability of American composers to write music “with a precise care and appreciation of the dramatic significance of each turn of the story.” He argues that American composers are better “music dramatists.”<sup>36</sup> By way of explanation, Jan Swynnoe points out that right into the cinema era, in the theatre of the US East Coast, British actors tended to dominate and that it was to England that America looked for direction in the theatre. This put the US at an advantage in the early years of the cinema, because “the Americans could not automatically turn to their dramatic heritage as British film makers were to do when faced with the challenge of forging a new dramatic medium.”<sup>37</sup> Further differentiations between Hollywood and British studios included the nature of the industry in the US where every role was reduced to a cog in an enormous production line, including the music department. In Britain, on the other hand, music scoring was assigned to individual composers under separate contract, and the task was treated by the best composers as a serious art form. “By introducing so many serious composers to the medium, [Muir] Mathieson and [Ernest] Irving deliberately led the British film score away from the stereotypes of the classical Hollywood score,”<sup>38</sup> writes Swynnoe.

Thus, while Hollywood films of the forties were, in Huntley’s analysis, of a better quality technically,<sup>39</sup> as far as music is concerned the British examples benefited from the efforts of Muir Mathieson and composers such as Vaughan Williams. The latter also encouraged Bax, Bliss, Walton and others to make film music “worthy of a real composer.”<sup>40</sup> This statement is highly revealing of Vaughan Williams’ approach toward film scoring. The “idea of music held by too many film directors” was to add the music on after filming, which in his view was much like adding “architecture” to an incomplete building. “Surely, the author, director, photographer, and composer should work together *from the beginning*,” he suggests, most of the work being done “*before* the photographs are taken.”<sup>41</sup> Vaughan Williams remained a serious composer, interested in the art of film rather than the box office success of the films for which he wrote. He believed that if the music was written in tandem with the filmmaking process, film music could be worthy of its status as an art form. “Only when this is achieved

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 5

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>39</sup> The remake of *Gaslight* (1940) provides the obvious example

<sup>40</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 35

<sup>41</sup> Vaughan Williams, 1996: 163

[will] the film come into its own as one of the finest of the fine arts,” he wrote.<sup>42</sup> Even more pertinently, he suggests that the actors themselves, before rehearsals, should hear the music. Vaughan Williams looked forward to the day when “a great film will be built up on the basis of music.” To a small extent, Brian Easdale seems to have taken him up on the idea with his scoring of the bell scene in *Black Narcissus*. Though Vaughan Williams acknowledges that what he was suggesting might “sound like the uninstructed grouse of an ignorant tyro,” at the same time he hoped that this was not the case. In the end, even he realised that he was better suited to the symphonic tradition. When writing the music for *Scott of the Antarctic* in 1947, for example, he felt that he was writing something that could be greater than mere incidental music “tied by the short time-lengths of the episodes of a moving picture.”<sup>43</sup> Hans Keller, recognising the quality of this “noble and, in parts, grandiose score” believed that it was “immeasurably better than the present film itself”<sup>44</sup> and film composer Elmer Bernstein once said that one could hardly call Vaughan Williams’ music for *Scott of the Antarctic* limiting<sup>45</sup> – a criticism so often applied to film music – but Vaughan Williams recognised that ultimately, he wanted complete freedom to express some of the ideas in the score, and he set about writing a more serious work in which he could paint a broader canvas that was not tied to the moving image. The resulting symphony was premiered on 14 January 1953, the prelude to the work incorporating the film’s title music, with other themes appearing throughout the symphony, including references to the explorer’s wife and Oates’ death music.

Unusually for melodrama scoring, Vaughan Williams used the “broad canvas” technique to score Charles Frend’s first post-war film, *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947). The film is a romantic melodrama set on turn-of-the-century Romney Marsh, and its depiction of the pastoral English countryside was perfectly reflected in the Vaughan Williams’ score that accompanied it. Fine orchestration provides the audio cue for the idyllic setting (and opening caption) of an English beauty spot: “The world, according to the best geographers, is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Romney Marsh... lonely now but lonelier still in 1905.” Here Romney Marsh is representative of the English countryside as a whole, acting as a kind of ambassador for

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 165

<sup>43</sup> Notes from the 1967 RCA recording of the *Sinfonia Antartica*, conducted by Andre Previn (BMG)

<sup>44</sup> Keller, 2006: 172

<sup>45</sup> Bernstein, quoted in Thomas, 1997: 188

the rest of England. Much as Powell and Pressburger had done in *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), drawing on images of the English countryside during the war as a unifying symbol of what the British were fighting for, director Charles Frend too presents an eternal England, the rural idyll, captured in the timelessness of the English landscape. Music is a key element in this process and no other composer was better qualified to do this justice. “Vaughan Williams’s principal definition of Englishness in his films as elsewhere in his work lay... in the pastoral and in the visionary,” writes Jeffrey Richards, and Vaughan Williams’s great achievement “was to unite the two.”<sup>46</sup> The prime example of the visionary is Vaughan Williams’s music for *Scott of the Antarctic*<sup>47</sup> but it is *The Loves of Joanna Godden* that provides the equivalent for his pastoral expression. Though at the film’s heart there is a strong element of romantic melodrama, it also “seeks to evoke life in Edwardian Romney Marsh” where Frend has been able to recreate the rhythms of farming life, changes of season and, in particular, the haunting beauty of the English landscape, elements that Vaughan Williams “responds to and sees as quintessentially English.”<sup>48</sup> In his first film, *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*, Vaughan Williams was already experimenting with these ideas, which coincided happily with Powell and Pressburger’s preoccupation with landscape. The broad opening theme in that film, which is also reprised at the end, was also written in the tradition of Vaughan Williams’ pastoral: “the documentary nature of the film continues with a brief scenic tour of Canada, depicting mountains, wheat fields, a city, and lakes. Vaughan Williams illustrates their changing scenes in the score, portraying them by high glacial string chords, a calm rustic melody on the oboe, energetic chords in the brass, and a stately melody on upper strings.”<sup>49</sup> Powell and Pressburger repeatedly returned to the pastoral, notably in *Gone to Earth*, as well as in *Black Narcissus*, both films featuring hunting sequences which celebrate the excitement of the chase.

Throughout the war, the Ministry of Information, via the media of both film and music, had sought to encourage the depiction of an eternal unshakeable England, an England worth fighting or even dying for. Since Vaughan Williams was particularly keen at the outset of the war to do his bit, he jumped at the chance to write for the movies and his film scoring was for him one concrete way in which he could contribute to the “war

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<sup>46</sup> Richards, 1997: 289

<sup>47</sup> Considered by Richards (1987: 315) to be the peak of Vaughan Williams’ cinematic achievement.

<sup>48</sup> Richards, 1987: 311

<sup>49</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 93



effort.” A more subtle form of propaganda than Goebbels’ rather clumsy direct approach, the idea was not only to inspire and motivate the native inhabitants of the islands but also to rally assistance and support from the Empire and elsewhere. One such example is the BBC’s commissioning of Julius Harrison’s *Bredon Hill*, a rhapsody for violin and orchestra based on the poem by A.E. Housman from *A Shropshire Lad*. The score is inscribed with the poem’s opening words:

Here of a Sunday morning  
My love and I would lie  
And see the coloured counties  
And hear the larks so high  
About us in the sky.

Julius Harrison’s work was part of the wartime campaign to promote an idealised England and was first performed on the BBC’s Empire Service in August 1941, and rebroadcast on the North American service the following month. Harrison, who was director of music at Malvern College, said that the work grew from the scenes of his life in and around parts of Worcestershire which he called “England at its oldest.” Jan Swynnoe points out that just as this music became a symbol for the enduring spirit of England, “so had music for the film during the war years acknowledged its legacy from those masters who had sought to eternalise that spirit.”<sup>50</sup> In his book on the origins of the English imagination, Peter Ackroyd hints at the connection between landscape and music, the subject which seems to pervade the work of Vaughan Williams in particular, but also preoccupies several of his contemporaries, among them Gustav Holst, Frederick Delius and Arthur Bliss. In particular, writes Ackroyd, Vaughan Williams’ *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* embraces “present and past time,” a reference to T.S. Eliot’s 1935 poem “Burnt Norton,” in a musical expression of English antiquarianism, “a form of alchemy [which] engenders a strange timelessness.”<sup>51</sup> Ian Christie also refers to “Burnt Norton” in his essay on Powell and Pressburger’s *A Canterbury Tale*, made in 1942 when the idea of England preoccupied filmmakers and composers alike. Eliot takes up the same theme, writes Christie, in the last of his *Four Quartets*, “Little Gidding”:

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<sup>50</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 155

<sup>51</sup> Ackroyd, 2002: 440

A people without history  
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern  
Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails  
On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel  
History is now and England.

“Here,” Christie continues, “we are again close to that sense of the past made urgent by the present.”<sup>52</sup> This emphasis on the timelessness of the English pastoral appears again in Eliot’s poem “Defence of the Islands,” published in the catalogue for the 1941 New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition “Britain at War,” produced in collaboration with the British Ministry of Information:

Let the memorials of built stone – music’s  
enduring instrument, of many centuries of  
patient cultivation of the earth, of English  
verse  
be joined with the memory of this defence of  
the islands

Julius Harrison’s similar, deliberate evocation of the past in *Bredon Hill*, written in the same year, is in the full tradition of Vaughan Williams’ 1914 romance *The Lark Ascending* which takes its title and which is similarly inscribed with words from George Meredith’s poem “Joys of the Earth”: “He drops the silver chain of sound, of many links without a break.” This unbroken chain, writes Ackroyd, “is that of English music itself.”<sup>53</sup> The alchemy Peter Ackroyd refers to in English antiquarianism I believe not only engenders timelessness but also stirs the imagination to tacitly “hear” the English landscape and to “see” it in Vaughan Williams’ music in a kind of synaesthesia. This elusive idea begins to emerge in his film music and, as I shall show, becomes explicit in *Joanna Godden*.

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<sup>52</sup> Christie, 2005: 83

<sup>53</sup> Ackroyd, 2000: 440

The film's musical episodes are often very short, what Jeffrey Richards has called "snatches of atmosphere."<sup>54</sup> At the beginning of the film, for example, the opening titles already hint at the atmosphere of the countryside with another brief theme accompanying four travellers inside a carriage driving home from a funeral: three siblings including Joanna (Googie Withers), and her fiancé Arthur (John McCallum), though there is doubt about this impending marriage. Joanna's father, a sheep farmer, has left a will and complications. Joanna is determined to run the farm herself but Arthur is not amused, and leaves her. Looking out onto a broad sweeping scene of the Marsh, we share Joanna's point of view as she is revived by what she sees, a short leitmotiv-like phrase in music helping us to feel her elation.

In celebration of the record sheep-shearing season, a country dance is held, complete with piano and violin. The tune is very much a style with which Vaughan Williams would have been familiar; indeed at the time of the film's setting he had already embarked upon his folk-song project. A brief theme which refers to the romantic possibilities between Arthur and Joanna's younger sister Ellen (Jean Kent) follows. Joanna's plan to cross-breed her pedigree flock fails dismally as the tragedy of a field of dying ewes and dead lambs testify, the scene underscored by the first of several tragic musical episodes. The tone of the flute theme resembles the desolation famously present in the 6<sup>th</sup> symphony, which Vaughan Williams was writing at the same time. But Joanna's fortunes do return and music provides the triumphant expression required to highlight the success of her new project to put pasture under plough. Not all the farming fraternity is pleased, the music's minor key registering their disapproval. Music is at the heart of this important sequence, and provides the film with a kernel of synaesthesia between music and landscape. Joanna's new (and third) love interest, Martin Trevor (Derek Bond) has come to inspect Joanna's successes, but he is distracted. Music draws down to a single violin theme as Martin, a long-time resident of the area and intimately familiar with it, speaks:

MARTIN: I was looking at the light on the marsh.

JOANNA: What light?

MARTIN: Over there; don't you see it? – the light over the sea.

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<sup>54</sup> Richards, 1997: 311

JOANNA: Oh, that! That's just the sky over Dungeness – I've seen it plenty of times.

MARTIN: Have you? You know, it's only on the marsh that you get it. I think it's the most beautiful light in the world.

JOANNA: Don't see much beauty in the marsh. Just a lot of flat fields and a lot of old ditches.

MARTIN: Don't you? That's because you've seen it so often. Try looking at it again, through my eyes; listen to it, too.

There is a cut from Joanna to the open field, a broad canvas of sky and land. The theme changes as the couple looks out and Vaughan Williams' music over the marsh scene now dominates: this is pure programme music – a swan in flight, a view of the sea, of a lone tree, of wheat and haystacks in a synaesthesia of sound and image, woodwind, brass, a clarinet, oboe and violins all taking their turn as the images change. Jeffrey Richards describes the scene: "Director Charles Frend gives us a passage of pure visual beauty, a lone bird skimming through the marsh sky, the waving grain, a solitary tree etched against the horizon, the pebble beach at Dungeness, the light over the sea, and Vaughan Williams responds to this with shimmering music through which a dark haunting melody runs."<sup>55</sup> In this sequence, Peter Ackroyd's alchemy of musical timelessness, together with a rapturous vision of the English landscape inspires Martin to express his feelings for Joanna: "Things look very different when you have someone to share them with," he says, tender strings marking the moment they kiss.

A second brief tragic theme marks the hazards of the lambing season, and in the spring, the banns for Martin and Joanna's marriage are announced. But fate steps in as an outing to Dungeness ends in tragedy. The music again reflects the outdoors, a particularly bleak corner of the coast where the wind is always blowing. Martin takes a swim as Joanna rests and a quiet, tentative theme is introduced which develops into *tremolo* and wordless female voices with the brass signifying her disturbed sleep. Time goes by, with the music slowly building in a minor key. With *tremolo* again, the theme struggles to resolve. Joanna awakens, looking for Martin. "Where are you?" she asks as voices signify her fears. But Martin has drowned – four descending heavy chords marking the tragedy. The following montage reflects that life must continue, and music

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<sup>55</sup> Richards, 1997: 311

accompanies Joanna busy with haymaking, hard work and the passing seasons. The music is *forte* and urgent but reduces to a fade, though once again celebrating the rural imperatives. Joanna's sister Ellen forms a tie with Joanna's former fiancé Arthur – strings of the upper register once again marking their romance – as Joanna is reassured by Martin's father Harry (Henry Mollison) that she wouldn't run the risk of his displeasure if she were ever to marry someone else. "Don't forget what Shakespeare said. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date."<sup>56</sup>

Music heralds Joanna's sudden revival as Arthur passes her – and she is reminded of her would-be father-in-law's words as the music underscores the anticipation she feels for a new life. Arthur's subsequent arrival at the cottage is for the hand of Ellen, however, and Joanna barely manages to conceal her disappointment. Ellen and Arthur agree to marry, but Ellen is quickly bored. A bright musical reference to the land at dawn is followed by a change in tone as the weather closes in and, with it, Ellen's mood as the music underscores her discontent. Repeated short cuts to marsh scenes with a few bars of exuberant strings accompany Ellen out riding with Harry Trevor, the suggestion of a growing attachment between them signified by romantic strings. On her arrival home, Arthur brings news of foot-and-mouth disease and the destruction of his entire flock. The following sequences depicting the painful actions that need to be taken – trenches dug, "keep out" signs erected – are accompanied entirely by Vaughan Williams' ominous music, written in dark, heavy tones where *timpani* is much in evidence. (Of this scene, he remarked that surely no-one had been called upon before to depict foot-and-mouth disease in music.) Meanwhile, Ellen has eloped with Harry Trevor, and while the music provides tone colour for the continuing destruction of the livestock, Joanna and Arthur are reunited as their love for one another – in adversity – triumphs over their misfortunes. A light orchestral theme heralds their reconciliation – and love – as the film draws to a close with a final view of the marsh as the rural theme returns. A "finale" ends the film proper as the titles roll with the music, in a minor key, ending on a triumphant *tierce de Picardie*, an "effect of archaism,"<sup>57</sup> which Vaughan Williams uses to underline the film's final looking back to the rural idyll.

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<sup>56</sup> The words are from one of the most celebrated sonnets, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" Joanna Godden screenwriter H.E. Bates went on to make his own reference to the sonnet in his novel *The Darling Buds of May*, which was published in 1958.

<sup>57</sup> Jacobs, 1976: 313

This is an accomplished film. Music is one of its outstanding features, with continual references to the landscape, often in very brief snatches. H.E. Bates' script also provides the excellent cast with a rich base from which to work and together with Vaughan Williams' music, actors Googie Withers and John McCallum have made what is now a forgotten treasure. *The Loves of Joanna Godden* was made in the same year as the publication of John Huntley's book *British Film Music*, a chapter of which was given to a reworking of Vaughan Williams 1945 broadcast *Composing for the Films*. Given the relatively low number of scores he wrote, his comments on film music provide a useful contemporary viewpoint into the approach he used for *Joanna Godden*. "I believe that film music is capable of becoming, and to a certain extent, already is, a fine art, but it is applied art, and a specialised art at that; it must fit the action and dialogue."<sup>58</sup> His hope for the future is a film "built up on Bach's St Matthew Passion," a concept difficult to imagine. In confessing his "ignorance" in these matters, his wish was that the "wrong system by which the various arts are segregated" could be broken down and instead of being reassembled at the last moment, could be brought together from the beginning.<sup>59</sup>

Vaughan Williams wrote a suite of the music from *Joanna Godden*. The music "has much in common" with the sixth symphony, which was first performed early in 1948, but originally completed by the composer in 1946 and revised during the following year.<sup>60</sup> There is also a theme in the film that is used in the ninth symphony, his final, which was first performed as late as 1958, the year of the composer's death, and the use of a wordless female chorus foreshadows the *Sinfonia Antartica*. Thus the music to *The Loves of Joanna Godden*, which was composed between March and December 1945, can be said to provide a pivot on which many creative projects turned for the composer, ideas which were to occupy him for the rest of his life. The score to *Joanna Godden* consisted of 25 episodes from which Vaughan Williams later authorised the release of a selection of ten episodes on a gramophone recording in 1948. A "characteristic" score, it was written before the film was completed and, testimony to the method used by the composer, reads more like a tone poem rather than a series of musical episodes. The film did, however, provide Vaughan Williams with "the nearest example of a

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<sup>58</sup> Huntley, 1947: 177

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 182

<sup>60</sup> The symphony contains what some have interpreted as a bleak response to a post-Hiroshima world and is in sharp contrast to the rural idyll depicted in the fifth.

straightforward romantic drama that he was to score,” writes Jan Swynnoe, and “in it he demonstrated not only an ability to use themes to good dramatic effect, but also to score primary dialogue.”<sup>61</sup>

Film music is, of course, the ultimate programme music, and it is the synaesthetic qualities of music and landscape which I think provide the most noteworthy aspects of this film. I have discussed above Adorno and Eisler’s views on what passes for “Spanish” or “Japanese” music, but these are leitmotivic examples of musical associations. Association – “public” or private – is also what is happening when, for example, we hear Rachmaninov’s second Piano Concerto and think of *Brief Encounter*, or when we hear a pop tune (where were you and when?), or a piece of music used at a wedding, or on another occasion. “Nothing can prevent our falling back on mental pictures, fantasies, memories,” writes Susanne Langer, “when we cannot directly make subjective sense out of music in playing or hearing it.”<sup>62</sup> Thus we may be forgiven for interpreting music, as uninitiated listeners, in our own poetic way. “Where such interpretation is spontaneous, it is a perfectly legitimate practice, common among musically limited persons, and helpful,” but, warns Langer, “it becomes pernicious when teachers or critics or *even composers* initiate it, for then they make a virtue out of walking with a crutch.”<sup>63</sup> Both association and leitmotiv tend to operate on a conscious level (perhaps the semi-conscious in the case of the leitmotiv), but synaesthesia occurs at a much deeper level, in the subconscious. Synaesthesia technically refers to the merging of colour and individually sounded notes. Applied to music, it can result in a new kind of creativity linking music with vision (or even Vision), such as the central marsh sequence in *Joanna Godden*. Though this is an “abnormal” connection in the medical sense, it can provide a richer experience which allows “sufferers” to create more things that others can’t. For Samir Zeki, a professor of forty years’ standing in the field, the result is an ability to see relationships that most people cannot.<sup>64</sup> Asked for an example, Zeki cites the synaesthesia of experience and desire in the Prelude to *Tristan and Isolde*. Wagner was trying to live in his music what he couldn’t achieve in real life – a source of pain for him alluded to in a letter to his father-in-law Franz Liszt. As I

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<sup>61</sup> Swynnoe, 2002: 175

<sup>62</sup> Langer, 1957: 242

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 243, my emphasis

<sup>64</sup> Semir Zeki’s book *Inner Vision* explores Romantic love and neurophysiology. His examples were presented in a broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on Sunday 10th June 2007.

have explored in Chapter One, the Tristan Chord doesn't resolve for four-and-a-half hours and the resulting ambiguity in this music allows the listener to project his or her own impressions onto it. Similarly, there is a departure of expectation in certain performance styles. Zeki's example here is the total lack of self-censorship (and an impressive talent) in a 1999 recording of Chopin's 2<sup>nd</sup> Piano concerto by Martha Argerich (conducted by Charles Dutoit) in which the pianist lets herself go completely. The unexpected twist in this performance allows an unusual response.

Synaesthesia has also occupied composers – with Russian composer Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) actually writing a part for colour keyboard in some of his later works – as well as film makers. “In many of his writings – and, in particular, his discussions of synaesthesia – [Sergei] Eisenstein reveals how he sees and structures his films musically” writes Kay Dickinson.<sup>65</sup> But as we have seen there is also a synaesthetic connection between music and landscape. The films of Powell and Pressburger are noted for a particular fondness for the English countryside, for example in the Shropshire of *Gone to Earth*, which also uses landscape as an analogy for passion, a technique developed and used most effectively in *Black Narcissus*. This is a Hardy-like quality that Powell's films also share with D.H. Lawrence. As Mark Duguid comments:

One of the distinctive features in the films of Michael Powell is the attention paid to landscape and geography. Powell grew up in rural Kent, and he retained a passionate love of Britain's countryside which flavoured his approach to filmmaking. Powell's expressive use of natural imagery harks back to a romantic literary tradition - whose notable exponents include Thomas Hardy and Emily Brontë - in which nature in its wildness both reflects and determines the emotional life of the protagonists.<sup>66</sup>

In *A Canterbury Tale*, Powell lovingly depicts a different part of the Kent countryside in a film which follows a journey taken by three friends “to rediscover their – and Britain's – lost spiritual heritage.”<sup>67</sup> The depiction of romantic love in nature with the aid of

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<sup>65</sup> Dickinson, 2003: 10

<sup>66</sup> Mark Duguid, at Screenonline: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/591736/index.html>, accessed 1 January 2007

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



sound effects and music, is a recurring feature in the melodramas of Powell and Pressburger and, as we have seen, in *Joanna Godden*.

The representation of the pastoral and landscape provides a useful “analogue” for passion, writes Mark Duguid,<sup>68</sup> and this quality is also present elsewhere in Vaughan Williams’ output. A great deal can be gleaned from the disrespectful remark made by Aaron Copland about Vaughan Williams’ 5<sup>th</sup> Symphony; “Listening to the fifth symphony of Ralph Vaughan Williams is like staring at a cow for forty-five minutes,” said the American. But what gave him this sense? The symphony appears to look back to his earlier style, and has a nostalgic quality, evoking the rural idyll with a particular beauty of composition. Was the composer subconsciously proselytising? As we have seen, propaganda in Britain (in documentary as well as feature films) tended to be indirect and its style was exhortation rather than instruction. Premiered in 1943 at the Proms, the Symphony No.5 is the most pastoral of his nine symphonies, perhaps even more so than the symphony given that name, his 3rd, completed in 1921,<sup>69</sup> and appears to have been written in the same spirit as his musical contributions to films made for the Ministry of Information.<sup>70</sup> Vaughan Williams’ subsequent score to *The Loves of Joanna Godden* makes it clear that “the film’s concentration on landscape has released the music in him.”<sup>71</sup> This music is rooted in a love of English landscape, as well as in the folk music collected by the composer and which is drawn from the simplest interaction with the land itself, its very rhythms and seasons, its essence. Of the score to *The Loves of Joanna Godden*, Denham Studios’ music director Ernest Irving said that he considered it to be “the best music we ever had here,” finding a delicate sensitivity in the brooding theme which depicts Romney Marsh.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The Pastoral symphony actually refers to the French countryside encountered by Vaughan Williams as a private soldier in The Great War, rather than to his native Gloucestershire.

<sup>70</sup> Vaughan Williams also wrote music for films such as the National Trust’s *The People’s Land* (1943).

<sup>71</sup> Accompanying booklet to the 2006 Chandos premiere recording of a suite of the film’s score edited by Stephen Hogger (CHAN10368).



## CHAPTER 7 - The *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*

In sharp contrast to the monochrome synaesthesia of *Joanna Godden's* rural idyll, I end this exploration of music in British melodrama with an analysis of a film of remarkable audacity. A number of attempts to create a filmed *Gesamtkunstwerk* had previously come to nothing. Cinema's first specially-written opera for the screen was Friedrich Feher's *The Robber Symphony* (1936). Not a box-office success, even by 1947 it had "long since disappeared from the screen."<sup>1</sup> Kurt London had warned in his 1935 volume, it must be said, that the attempt to create opera for the screen would create an "insipid, ridiculous and anachronistic" result. It is possible that the War discouraged further experimentation after *Robber*, but John Huntley, writing in 1947, suggested a more convincing reason for the dearth of attempts at creating a cinema opera: "the unreal world of opera and the naturalistic film have nothing whatever in common,"<sup>2</sup> he wrote. The problem concerns the static nature of opera as opposed to the dynamism of the film medium. British film by this time was known for its documentary reality and traditional staged opera had little to do with the realism so preferred by directors such as David Lean and Charles Frend. Huntley's explanation of the 1936 attempt (which was mounted despite Kurt London's warning) was that, before the War, Britain was "still groping in the dark, [and was] trying to find our best medium for a national film industry."<sup>3</sup> He cites similar experiments with big-scale musicals and musical comedy, which also failed, with Hollywood dominating both genres.

Unlike most film music composition of the time, *The Robber Symphony* had been directed to fit the score, but it did not impress the critics at the time of its release, with Graham Greene, who was a film critic at the time, calling it, among other things, "boring" and "cheap."<sup>4</sup> The same technique of making the pictures fit the music was followed later by Powell and Pressburger in their 1951 filmed version of *The Tales of Hoffman*. Naturally, to be faithful to Offenbach's score, it was not possible to film any other way. Both the films, according to Jeffrey Richards in his critique of British national cinema were "way beyond the taste and expectations of the mass film audience" noting that the cinema-going public was only familiar with a use of music that was restricted to the underlining and punctuation

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<sup>1</sup> Huntley, 1947: 45

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richards, 1997: 285

of action and to focus and heighten emotion.<sup>5</sup> Attracted perhaps by the melodramatic qualities of the three stories contained in Offenbach's opera, Powell and Pressburger's 1951 film was their attempt at the totally "composed" film. Effectively a filmed opera, Ian Christie calls it a "vital link in the erotic chain"<sup>6</sup> leading from *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), "with its three versions of the same female ideal; through the tortured, tragic heroines of *Black Narcissus*, *The Red Shoes* and *The Wild Heart*" (the US title for *Gone with the Wind*). Put in that light the film, if not exactly melodrama, is certainly related to it, and it is also connected to melodrama on the purely operatic level. The music (here conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham in his sole film project) is Offenbach at his most lyrical, and at the film's end we are left with "a gorgeous yet disturbing feast for the senses."<sup>7</sup>

We have seen that film music owes a great deal to the German composers who fled the Nazi terror in the 1930s. In her enlightening essay on Wagner and the cinema, Carolyn Abbate reminds us that "no-one should be surprised to hear a connection between a Wagner score and a 1939 film score."<sup>8</sup> She has detected references, for example, to *The Flying Dutchman* in an earlier Michael Powell film, *The Thief of Baghdad* (1939). But these connections can also be made, as we have seen, in the style of composing, particularly in the use of the leitmotiv in Hollywood practice, by composers such as Max Steiner. But there are other links, too. A film with a less direct, though still obvious operatic connection, and one which provides a spectacular answer to John Huntley's concern that the unreal worlds of opera and the naturalistic film had nothing in common, was released in the same year as *The Tales of Hoffman*. *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951) stars a veteran James Mason in one of his last melodrama roles, alongside Ava Gardner in one of her early successes.<sup>9</sup> Unlike *The Thief of Baghdad*, however, there are no musical references to Wagner though "a Wagnerian musical precept nonetheless dictates the film's formal aspects."<sup>10</sup> This precept concerns the replacement of the leitmotiv with an equivalent recurring sequence in which Pandora swims out to the Dutchman Van der Zee's (Mason) yacht, a strategy of repetition which "translates leitmotiv to dramaturgy," the same sequence at the start of the film – "swimming, arrival, even the words spoken by the characters" – repeated in varied form at the film's end.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 286

<sup>6</sup> Accompanying booklet to the 2005 Criterion Collection release of *The Tales of Hoffman*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Abbate, 2005: 598

<sup>9</sup> It was released also in the same year as *Show Boat*, the film that catapulted Gardner to stardom.

<sup>10</sup> Abbate, 2005: 605

The cinematography in this visually dazzling Technicolor film was by Jack Cardiff, with music by Alan Rawsthorne, a composer highly rated by critic Hans Keller and who was, as far as film music was concerned, “the best man for the job.”<sup>11</sup> Though the standard “tragic” overture contains no references to *Der Fliegende Holländer*, according to Keller, it unconsciously uses the minuet from Haydn’s last symphony (No. 104, the “London” Symphony).<sup>12</sup> The story and screenplay, “suggested by the legend of the Flying Dutchman,” was by Albert Lewin, who was also director and co-producer. Lewin had had a number of earlier successes in Hollywood and this, his first British production, was an original text that connects a film melodrama at the end of the period under scrutiny directly with Greek tragedy via a major reference to Wagner, whose opera is the most well-known – and obvious – telling of the legend, which “is as old as Homer, who showed us Ulysses as an unresting traveller, yearning for home and domestic joys.”<sup>13</sup>

The original staged versions of the legend of The Flying Dutchman appear to have been in the form of theatre melodrama of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, all of which set the action at the Cape of Good Hope. With their references to the South African coastline, these productions were a form of colonial melodrama in which music played an important part in a time when government licensing laws stipulated that spoken dialogue in theatres was permitted only when accompanied by music, a move designed to curb political dissent. J.Q. Davies has thrown light on the political aspect of melodrama by pointing out that “its improvisational mix of dance, dumbshow, burlesque, farce, opera, and drama” was “engineered to resist lawful classification”<sup>14</sup> and thus avoid the censor. It is one such melodrama that the German poet Heinrich Heine saw at the Adelphi theatre in London in 1827. *The Flying Dutchman; or, the Phantom Ship* by Edward Ball included a score by George Herbert Rodwell which has now been lost, though this is probably due to the practice of presenting the production, when on tour in the provinces, with a new overture and “melodramatic scoring in the local house style.”<sup>15</sup> The music in this production was designed to “conjure the vast, shifting expanse of the sea,” a programmatic role noted for the “unusual prominence” given to the instruments. The function of the melodramatic orchestra, in the words of J.Q. Davies, was

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<sup>11</sup> Keller, 2006: 154

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 162

<sup>13</sup> Cuthbert Hadden, 1911: 19

<sup>14</sup> Davies, 2005: 504

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 499

“to drench the actors in sound – to wash over and oppress them.”<sup>16</sup> If this music indeed depicted “the Dutchman’s mad raging against the south-easter off Table Bay,”<sup>17</sup> anyone residing in Cape Town will understand the significance.

Davies sees in productions like this a foreshadowing of Wagner, and the presence of Heinrich Heine at that 1827 production provides the link to the opera he was to write. Heine, on whose *Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski* (1831) Wagner based *Der Fliegende Holländer*, introduces the romantic theme of a murder and subsequent redemption and this metaphysical aspect is retained in Lewin’s retelling. The idea of the atonement does not exist in earlier versions of the legend, which concern a ship that went down in a storm off the Cape of Good Hope as early as 1641. Wagner also removes the geographical location of the story from the Cape to the North Sea, understandably, since he and his wife suffered a particularly rough crossing on their journey to London in 1833.<sup>18</sup> Wagner’s opera was an early attempt at the total art work – *Gesamtkunstwerk* – of his imagination, and the tempests he experienced in his three-week crossing would make their presence known in the programme music of his opera, which he came to write in 1843. According to the Hungarian author and director of the musicology department of the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest, György Kroó, the composer, like a director, took personal charge of all the theatrical components necessary for the premiere, coordinating costumes, sets, orchestra, chorus, and casting. Wagner had done the same at the time of the premiere of *Rienzi*, but for *Der Fliegende Holländer* sought the complete unity of music and drama. Kroó also points out that melodrama, in this case music accompanied by gesture in a type of mime, played an important part in the opera:

Wagner was already familiar with the device from Weber’s *Der Freischütz* and Marschner’s *The Vampire*. *La Muette de Portici*, a five-act opera by Aubert, held a particular fascination for Wagner; in the final moments of the opera the heroine – like Senta in *The Flying Dutchman* – hurls herself into the sea from a clifftop. Certain aspects of Wagner’s style, which reached their culmination in *The Valkyrie*, have their origins in the score of *The Flying Dutchman*, namely the symphonic conception of the whole work and the

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 509

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 510

<sup>18</sup> In fact, by 1830, all references to South Africa had been expunged from stage productions of *The Flying Dutchman* by order of the censor, who sought to control public opinion about mass emigration to the Cape, which had been a controversial topic since before the 1820 settlers. See “Melodramatic Possessions” in the *Opera Quarterly*, Summer 2005.

careful musical depiction of every moment and gesture of the drama in order to achieve what Wagner called ‘the most precise correlation of music and action.’ Examples can be found in the recitative of the Dutchman... as he steps ashore; and in the mime that occurs when Daland accompanies the Dutchman to his house and they encounter a Senta deathly pale with shock.<sup>19</sup>

In *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* at the equivalent moment, the Dutchman’s going ashore is marked by an equally noteworthy musical parallel when, having established himself, he approaches Pandora’s home. She is at the piano playing Chopin, the piece a deliberate reference to the twilight dream world. The camera cuts to Van der Zee as Pandora plays the Chopin Etude, Op.25 No.1. Known as the “Aeolian Harp,” this piano study perfectly captures the romantic dream-like atmosphere of the scene. Its “murmuring arpeggios” and pastoral melody have also been known as “The Shepherd Boy,” with authentic stories to support each nickname.<sup>20</sup> Chopin told a pupil, “Imagine a little shepherd who takes refuge in a peaceful grotto from an approaching storm. In the distance rushes the wind and the rain, while the shepherd gently plays a melody on his flute.”<sup>21</sup> The composer Robert Schumann, who heard Chopin play the piece, wrote, “imagine that an Aeolian harp possessed all the musical scales and that the hand of an artist were to cause them to intermingle in all sorts of fantastic embellishments, yet in such a way as to leave everywhere audible a deep fundamental tone and a soft continuously singing upper voice, and you will get an idea of Chopin’s playing. When the etude was ended, we felt as though we had seen a radiant picture in a dream which, half awake, we ached to recall.”<sup>22</sup> The Aeolian harp was a stringed instrument that sounded various harmonics when the wind passed through it. Named after Aeolus, the keeper of the winds in Greek mythology, the allusion here is all the more pertinent because it is heard outside where the wind is gently blowing. As Van der Zee (James Mason) approaches, he stops in the garden, apparently overwhelmed by the music that seems to float from the house, thus capturing its Aeolian qualities. The equivalent character to Wagner’s “Daland” (Geoffrey Fielding, played by Harold Warrender) enters the garden at this point, his voiceover providing his impressions as he observes the Dutchman from a distance: “Something in his manner as he listened to Pandora’s playing arrested my attention. He seemed racked: transported to another world. I

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<sup>19</sup> Kroó, 1999: 768

<sup>20</sup> Program Notes by Frank Cooper for the Garrick Ohlsson piano recital: 20 March 1996 at the Ford Centre For The Performing Arts [<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/3495/etudes.html>] accessed 13 August 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Huneker, 1900: 103

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 134

sensed an almost desperate ecstasy in his enjoyment.” Van der Zee is of course recalling centuries of desperate waiting. The orchestra takes up the Chopin theme as Ava Gardner appears on the steps above the garden, and “Daland” retreats.

The establishing shot of the film is the coast of Spain, “about twenty years ago.”<sup>23</sup> Light underscoring accompanies a group of Catalan fishermen hauling in their nets. The discovery and identity of two bodies is accompanied by a tragic theme; dialogue has been minimal with music providing most of the sound thus far. The fate of the film’s central characters is thus revealed at the outset, the director using the subsequent narrative to unfold the tragedy that has befallen them. Flamenco singers provide some local diegetic colour as the reminiscences of the narrator prompt a full treatment of the flamenco, danced with passion at the full moon. This musical sequence is explained by the presence of Pandora Reynolds (Ava Gardner) and her friends at the *taverna* in which it is being performed. Pandora, a native of Indianapolis, is a cabaret singer on holiday from London. She agrees to sing “Oh, how am I to know” – a dreamy love song to someone she hasn’t yet met, about “a love not yet known.” But it appears she inspires the love of several admirers, the latest Reggie Demarest (Marius Goring, who had played in *The Red Shoes*) kills himself on the spot, unrequited love his reason. It emerges that he has been threatening suicide constantly, though Pandora is clearly no saint in her light-hearted disregard for his attentions and feelings. A deliberate provocation by her in the form of a thrilling and dangerous drive in the racing car with a girlfriend’s beau, Stephen Cameron (Nigel Patrick), is set to wild music. A schooner at anchor in the bay prompts her enquiry about the Flying Dutchman, Stephen giving her a brief synopsis of the legend. Pandora challenges him to prove *his* love by pushing his precious car off the cliff. His doubt and her power, as he does it, are taken up by the orchestra, the music hesitant, pregnant. “The measure of love is what you agree to give up for it,” she says, as they agree to marry. The loss of the car in this manner is itself like a legend: albeit a private one. Another, the Flying Dutchman, comes up again. A lecture by Stephen ends with an exhortation to Pandora: “Never dismiss the legends,” but she has already swum out to the schooner in the harbour. Her approach to the apparently silent ship is underscored by richly “expectant” music. On board the yacht, she discovers that it is empty apart from a solitary figure, who has been painting the Pandora from Greek legend, but in the likeness of Pandora Reynolds.

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<sup>23</sup> The film’s beach shots were actually shot at Tossa de Mar, northeast of Barcelona, with the world land speed record attempt dated by a banner as 1930.



“In this movie,” writes Carolyn Abbate, “we get two myths for the price of one when Pandora and her box meet the Flying Dutchman and his curse, an overloaded narrative plate of spectacular proportions.”<sup>24</sup> The merging of the myth of Pandora and the Flying Dutchman is couched skilfully at this point as the yacht’s owner, Hendrik Van der Zee, speaks of his muse. Pandora, “darling of the gods,” confesses to frivolity and callousness. Van der Zee has painted her likeness, an idealised version of Pandora, whom he calls “the secret goddess whom all men in their hearts desire.” He has been waiting for her. According to Greek legend Pandora, foolish as she is beautiful (“the most beautiful ever created”<sup>25</sup>), opened a jar in which Prometheus “had been at pains to imprison all the Spites that might plague mankind: such as Old Age, Labour, Sickness, Insanity, Vice, and Passion.”<sup>26</sup> During the retelling of the legends – a synthesis of Greek and Teutonic myth – the melodramatic possibilities of the flashbacks to 17<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish Netherlands are somewhat diminished by the presence of a narrative voiceover. Van der Zee is a ghost, permitted to return to the mortal world every seven years to try to break the cycle of death. The marble face referred to at the beginning of the translation of the Flying Dutchman legend is that of his own wife and, of course, Pandora’s. Every seven years he is permitted to go ashore for six months to find the love of a woman willing to die for him. This will be his redemption for the murder of his wife. His curse is brought upon himself in a self-imposed oath:

The evil is done and cannot be undone. This bloody death I still should do and do again ten thousand times before I hang tomorrow. Send me then no priest to shroud me, I beseech no mercy nor plead any justice. Eternal penance be my comfort. Let mortal fools live in a wicked world – faith is a lie and God Himself is chaos! Faith is a lie and heaven a deception! A man might have immortal life and wander for all the generations of man over all the oceans of the world, let him sail to the edge of Doomsday – he will find no woman faithful and fair. If this be folly then, upon me proved, let the Divinity that I reject make what sport He will of my immortal soul!

The return to the village of a celebrated Matador – another of Pandora’s previous lovers, Juan Montalvo (played by Mario Cabré, who was a real bullfighter) – prompts the

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<sup>24</sup> Abbate, 2005: 605

<sup>25</sup> Graves, 1996: 141

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 142

somewhat superfluous use of a Spanish musical motif in the impromptu bullfight, a similar treatment also underscoring a subsequent sequence in Spanish with his mother, who is a card reader and fortune teller. Predictably, the close-up shot of the upturned card – Death – is accompanied by a musical cadence. Following the breaking of the land-speed record by Stephen, a party is thrown. Diegetic jazz is used as a metaphor for the decadence of the “idle rich,” camera angles set to the diagonal to emphasise the degeneracy. Pandora wanders outside and, meeting Van de Zee, their kiss is underscored by the orchestra as the bullfighter Juan looks on. Pandora alludes to the “oceans between them” and that he seems to have loved her in a previous life. Her love for him has changed her, a lack of love the root of her previous destructiveness. Confessing that she would give up her life, he replies that he would give up his salvation.

That the film presents a Greek tragedy, there is no doubt, references to Homer also providing a direct melodramatic treatment of the legend of the Flying Dutchman itself, in addition to Wagner’s later interpretation of the story which first appeared in Homer’s writing. Their declaration of love is framed within rich *mise-en-scène*, on the beach complete with Greek statuary, Doric columns and an epic seascape. Geoffrey has explained that the statuary lying about on the beach was found at the bottom of the ocean at the coast near “Esperanza” on the Costa Brava, “the site of twenty centuries of shipping.” But Van der Zee rejects Pandora – is it a test? This central beach tableau seals the film as a universal “Attic” tragedy, which of course provides the formal model for Wagner’s music drama by way of Nietzsche’s interpretation of the Apollonian and Dionysiac mysteries. In the other direction, the subject matter or content of Greek tragedy also provides the model for stage melodrama and, via opera, to the cinema. Curiously, the soft music in this scene is backgrounded to near-imperceptibility, giving equal prominence to the *mise-en-scène* and serving only to underscore dialogue, in its traditional melodramatic role. Like many scenes, it is filmed *en nuit américaine* (“Day for Night”) which adds to the rather surreal atmosphere.<sup>27</sup> Stephen’s party has spilled onto the beach, the camera angle skewed to suggest Dionysian excess. The popular song “You’re Driving Me Crazy”<sup>28</sup> played by the dance band gives way to silence as Pandora and Van der Zee are left alone. The couple share a love for the sea and he recites the final few lines of Mathew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach,” which seems to sum up his predicament:

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<sup>27</sup> *La Nuit Américaine* (“American Night”) is a term for a technique first used by US filmmakers. Recognised for their poetic effect, the result in these scenes often seems unnatural, particularly where, as in this case, cloud formations and panoramic vistas are filmed (Truffaut, 1975: 111).

<sup>28</sup> A GAS (Great American Songbook) standard by Walter Donaldson.

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

They kiss for the first time, the swelling orchestra playing in the full romantic style, but introducing the tragic note that alludes to the fate that through this love, Pandora is bound to die. Her confession to him is “I’d give up my life for you. That’s the measure of my love.” The narrator sets the scene for the following murder sequence. Van der Zee of course survives the “fatal” stabbing, despite his prayer for death. Music begins to dominate as the film draws to a climax, with Pandora arriving at his villa. Noir tones of shadow and light emphasise the suspense. A public bullfight provides the setting for the denouement as Pandora is led to understand the real identity of van der Zee, music signalling the revelation that she is the reincarnation of Hendrik’s 17<sup>th</sup> century wife. Their eternal reunion is announced by the orchestra in a resolution equivalent to that in *Tristan und Isolde*. In this case, Pandora and Van der Zee’s reunion is all the more poignant as it has been delayed for the best part of four hundred years!

Coming as it does at such a late stage in the tradition of British film melodrama, *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* represents a final flight of fantasy for director Alfred Lewin, who even manages to squeeze in lines from the Rubayyat of Omar Khayam in this dazzling, richly-hewn phantasm of earthly, even heavenly delights. The film is a smorgasbord of music, poetry and surrealist art, the latter a particular obsession with the director who was a keen collector. Its Costa Brava setting connects it to Salvador Dali’s home town of Cadaques. Lewin, who was personally acquainted with the surrealist artist, not only created a romantic melodrama but a mythic tableau. Seen in this light, *Pandora* is very much a total art work – a *Gesamtkunstwerk* – if we can stretch our imagination far enough to see in its cinematographic techniques and effects the descendants of the staged music drama of Wagner’s operas. Indeed it is a melodrama that owes as much to the idea of Wagner’s

*Gesamtkunstwerk* as it does to Victorian stage melodrama. As to the quality of the music, Hans Keller regarded all Rawsthorne's film scores as magnificent. "However intricate and cogent their relation to the visual... [they] would lose absolutely nothing if that relation were lost, the experience of sheer musical substance, of a reality that can't be expressed any other way, would not only remain, but actually emphasise its own irreplaceability far more clearly than it could in the cinema."<sup>29</sup> The music in this film, however, is not foregrounded in the way Rachmaninov is presented in *Brief Encounter*, or in the composed sequence at the end of *Black Narcissus*. It shares its position with the gorgeous cinematography, narration and *mise-en-scène*, never drawing attention to itself in the process. Throughout the film, music is used during the sequences marking the "diseased," tragic elements only, the "sickness" of Van der Zee's dilemma. Whereas in *Der Fliegende Holländer* the heroine is Senta, a girl of German extraction in an opera which draws on Teutonic myth, her identification as Pandora in Lewin's text links the film directly with the Greek tragedies (even if this Pandora hails from Indianapolis). In *Pandora* an hourglass is used as a symbol of the timelessness of the lovers' predicament. Their story is actually happening beyond the confines of time, and at their reunion the hourglass stops flowing. As Pandora and Van der Zee put out to sea, the hourglass cracks and a summer storm, heralded by a musical motif, causes their boat to flounder. The following day, the lovers are found by the fishermen introduced at the beginning of the film.

Carolyn Abbate has pointed out that their deaths replace Wagnerian "transfiguration" in his opera with a dread of the ocean which she says is a throwback to the Flying Dutchman plays of the 1820s and 30s. These melodramas "tapped into cultural anxieties, particularly in England, concerning intruders that come from ungovernable waters beyond European colonial domination" and thus Lewin, while relying on Wagner for the retelling of the legend, is also drawing on the older stage melodrama. But his reference points go back even further with his use of the name Pandora, suggesting the division between mortals and immortals. Pandora is constructed at Zeus' request as a punishment for Prometheus' theft of fire. Pandora, accepted as a gift, pours forth from her jug "all the baneful cares of mankind."<sup>30</sup> In the film, she indeed plays a destructive role – spurning her lovers' advances, driving at least one to suicide – but she is redeemed as much as the Flying Dutchman himself by their mutual love, even if it means her own death.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.musicweb-international.com/film/britlst2.htm> accessed August 9, 2007

<sup>30</sup> Cotterell, 1986: 180

When the film was released, the French critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* hailed it and welcomed it as part of the surrealist canon. This was in fact Lewin's intention but British and American opinion was not so generous and tended to view the film as rather pretentious. The film, however, represents a convenient and poignant place to bring to a close this exploration of British melodrama. 1951 (the year of the Festival of Britain, which showcased British expertise and technological prowess, a distinctly science-oriented event, rather than a showcase for the arts) saw a change in the melodramatic mode of film making – its music relying heavily on the orchestral tradition to which we have become accustomed – and the beginning of social realism, which drew less on these traditions. Henceforth, the preoccupation was not for stories about the independently wealthy upper classes, but for the ordinary man or woman in the street. And because form and content tend to go hand in hand, the music deployed in social realism films also moved away from the “classical” orchestra of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into jazz and even pop scores. Retaining as it does the full range of classic melodrama technique with its references to opera, stage melodrama of the previous century, as well as surrealism, poetry and the obscurities of Greek mythology, *Pandora* is a final flight into fantasy, a phantasmagorical vision of Technicolor and music that is about as far as it is possible to get from realism.



## Conclusions

Since Adorno and Eisler wrote their seminal (and bad-tempered) work on film music at the end of the War, it has been fashionable to lament the dearth of writing on this important aspect of film studies. Though this is no longer the case, recent work focuses almost entirely on Hollywood. A completely separate strand of writing on British film music, and a much older one,<sup>1</sup> exists in the writings of Kurt London, the gifted amateur John Huntley, and the music critic Hans Keller, who was every bit as grumpy about the state of film music as Theodor Adorno. John Huntley's *British Film Music*, published in 1947, which was intended for the lay reader, appeared in the same year as Adorno and Eisler's work. While the latter is still regarded as the cornerstone of writing about music and film, Keller's writing on the subject between 1946 and 1959 presents an equally erudite view of film music in Britain where he found the situation only slightly less deplorable than the Hollywood critics.

The topic which first attracted scholars to Hollywood film music was the orchestral scoring, with the music usually written in the style of the late 19th century. This aspect of cinema represents not only a method for narrative expression but also a range of "indexed" programmatic associations which are encoded in the musical style. One aspect of scholarly work on film music remains, surprisingly, relatively untouched. Curious as it may seem – since, in the words of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, Hollywood group style "seeks effects that owe a good deal to... romantic music or 19th century melodrama"<sup>2</sup> – only two authors have explored the subject of music in film melodrama at any length: Caryl Flinn, in her essential 1992 text *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* and, more recently, Heather Laing, in a new work entitled *The Gendered Score: Music and Gender in 1940s Melodrama and the Woman's Film*,<sup>3</sup> though Claudia Gorbman does provide a short overview in her indispensable *Unheard Melodies*, explaining her choice of Steiner, "surely one of the most melodramatic of Hollywood's great film composers" to exemplify classical film

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<sup>1</sup> The first volume on technical aspects, written by Leonid Sabaneev, was translated from the original Russian and published in 1935.

<sup>2</sup> Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985: 4

<sup>3</sup> Published in November 2007 by Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

scoring “because, fundamentally, the classical Hollywood film *is* melodrama – a drama with music.”<sup>4</sup> And while Flinn and Laing both focus on the gender aspects of film music, it is only the latter that concentrates on the British case. This is doubly curious when one thinks of the rich tradition of music in British film of the era, when the nation’s most prominent composers all contributed in one way or another – Vaughan Williams even considering it as part of his contribution to the war effort – and when Alexander Korda can be said to have invented an entirely new musical genre rooted in the film melodramas that came out of his studio: the “Denham Concerto.”

Though Adorno and Eisler found the standard of composing lacking, Hans Keller offered hope in the British composers whose contributions, he felt, had been more neglected in comparison to their American counterparts. In his introduction to John Huntley's *British Film Music* Muir Mathieson expressed the hope that British film music might one day be accepted into the canon of regularly performed works, citing the example of the 1947 Proms season at which Vaughan Williams presented his music for *The Story of a Flemish Farm* (1943). Sixty years on, almost to the day, organisers of the BBC Proms recognised, to some extent, the validity of his hope and devoted an entire prom to celebrate sixty years of BAFTA to film music. The concert featured Vaughan Williams’ music from *49th Parallel* and Brian Easdale's ballet music from *The Red Shoes*, as well as music by Constant Lambert and William Walton. Benjamin Britten’s music for the documentary *Night Mail* also featured in a later prom in the 2007 season. It is still highly unusual to hear film scores in a programme of concert music, but radio often broadcasts music from the films. Regrettably, many film scores are simply no longer available and though an attempt has been made to “reconstruct” much of the music recently, the circulation of the resulting recordings is very limited, though record labels such as Chandos have done much in this regard. The renewed interest in film music has also resulted in premiere recordings, often featuring a new approach using a modern symphony orchestra and the latest recording techniques to reconstruct film scores.

Writing in 1973, Tony Thomas lamented that film music cannot “overcome its rather dubious reputation,” with most film scores “barely worth discussion. They perform a

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<sup>4</sup> Gorbman, 1987: 7



function and they are forgotten.”<sup>5</sup> Vaughan Williams, it may be remembered, identified two kinds of film music: is one more enduring than the other? Adorno and Eisler (also writing sixty years ago) may well have had the answer. They believed that, though “fundamentally, no motion-picture music can be better than what it accompanies”<sup>6</sup> it was also true that “occasionally skilfully composed music can rebel and disavow the picture that degrades it, either by ruthless opposition or by revealing exaggeration” but these examples would be the “exceptions that prove[d] the rule.”<sup>7</sup> Those exceptions, I believe, are to be found in the work of Vaughan Williams and other composers who wrote music for British films, especially those that were written in the post war heyday of film melodrama. In the words of documentary film-maker Jill Craigie, who wrote the script for *The Story of a Flemish Farm*, “All the composers’ music was much better than the films,” because their concern was for their own musical integrity.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas, 1973: 19

<sup>6</sup> Adorno & Eisler, 1947: 116

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 117

<sup>8</sup> Jill Craigie (1914-1999) in Tony Palmer’s film on the life of Vaughan Williams, *O Thou Transcendent*, Isolde Films, 2007.



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## Filmography

Many pictures of the period are available on new transfers to DVD with a few VHS copies available second hand. Nostalgia Family Video in Baker City, Oregon, provided SP mode videos of several commercially-unavailable titles and Sinister Cinema, also in Oregon, provided a copy of *Men of Two Worlds* (1946). Due to commercial non-availability it has not been possible to analyse several important melodramas, including *Caravan* (1946), *Piccadilly Incident* (1946), *The Magic Bow* (1946), *Hatter's Castle* (1947), *So Evil My Love* (1948), *The Idol of Paris* (1948), and *Svengali* (1951). The following which, to a greater or lesser extent, are referred to in the text together with the above provide a loose grouping of films which may be considered to be melodramas:

*Bank Holiday* (1938), dir. Carol Reed (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*Black Narcissus* (1947), dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (The Archers)  
*Brief Encounter* (1945), dir. David Lean (Cineguild)  
*The Common Touch* (1941), dir. John Baxter (British National Films)  
*Dangerous Moonlight* (1942), dir. Brian Desmond Hurst (RKO Radio British Productions)  
*Fanny by Gaslight* (1944), dir. Anthony Asquith (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*Gaslight* (1940), dir. Thorold Dickinson (British National)  
*Gaslight* (1944), dir. George Cukor (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer)  
*The Glass Mountain* (1950), dir. Edoardo Anton and Henry Cass (Scalera Film)  
*Gone to Earth* (1950), dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (The Archers)  
*Good Time Girl* (1947), dir. David MacDonald (Sydney Box Productions)  
*It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947), dir. Robert Hamer (Ealing Studios)  
*Jamaica Inn* (1938), dir. Alfred Hitchcock (Mayflower Pictures Corporation)  
*Jassy* (1947), dir. Bernard Knowles (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*Love Story* (1944), dir. Leslie Arliss (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947), dir. Charles Frend (Ealing Studios)  
*Madeleine* (1949), dir. David Lean (Cineguild)  
*Madness of the Heart* (1949), dir. Charles Bennett (Two Cities Films)  
*Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1944), dir. Arthur Crabtree (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*The Man in Grey* (1943), dir. Leslie Arliss (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*Men of Two Worlds* (1946), dir. Thorold Dickinson (Two Cities Films)

*Moonlight Sonata* (1937), dir. Lothar Mendes (Pall Mall Productions)  
*Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951), dir. Albert Lewin (Dorkay Productions)  
*The Passionate Friends* (1948), dir. David Lean (Cineguild)  
*Pink String and Sealing Wax* (1945), dir. Robert Hamer (Ealing Studios)  
*The Root of All Evil* (1947), dir. Brock Williams (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*The Seventh Veil* (1945), dir. Compton Bennett (Ortus Films)  
*Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1936), dir. George King (George King Productions)  
*They Were Sisters* (1945), dir. Arthur Crabtree (Gainsborough Pictures)  
*While I Live* (1947), dir. John Harlow (Edward Dryhurst Productions)  
*The Wicked Lady* (1945), dir. Leslie Arliss (Gainsborough Pictures)

In addition to these films, Guy Barefoot also mentions a number of other films which can also be included in the canon: *The Case of Charles Pearce* (1949), *Room to Let* (1950), *So Long at the Fair* (1950), *The Late Edwina Black* (1951), *Hour of Thirteen* (1952), *A Man About the House* (1947), *Uncle Silas* (1947), *Blanche Fury* (1948), *Britannia Mews* (1949), *Crimes at the Dark House* (1945), *Latin Quarter* (1945), and *A Place of One's Own* (1945), the latter a Gainsborough offering with Margaret Lockwood and James Mason. In his work on Gaslight Melodrama, Barefoot's period is from 1939 to 1954, though he only lists two films after 1951, thus corresponding with my start-and-end dates. We can also add Tod Slaughter's *Murder at the Red Barn* (1935) and *The Face at the Window* (1939) to this catalogue.