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David Neumeyer (with contributions by James Buhler) *Meaning and Interpretation of Music in Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015 Xv + 319pp. £29.99 (pb.)

Meaning and Interpretation of Music in Cinema may be understood as the culmination of David Neumeyer's distinguished career as both a music theorist and an analyst of film sound tracks. This study marks a return to, but also a significant development of Neumeyer's earlier published examination of dialogue underscoring in Hollywood synchronised sound films, in which he demonstrated the limitations of prioritising simplistic dichotomies such as diegetic (or source) music vs. nondiegetic (or background) score (2000). The 'radicalized notion' he proposes here is that all narrative sound film is vococentric (p. 202), a term that originates with Michel Chion (1999), and which describes the primacy of dialogue and voice in the hierarchy of a film's sonic elements. The book explores how this recognition of vococentrism productively impacts the analysis of films' sound tracks. The conception of film sound tracks proposed will be familiar to those who have read *Hearing the Movies* (a textbook co-authored by James Buhler and Neumeyer with Rob Deeming [2010]). For these authors, while the sound track comprises several components — speech and dialogue, sound and music — the sound track as a whole 'has priority over any of its individual elements' (p. 3). The sound track is a construction (and thus not 'natural'), with narrative clarity prioritised over acoustic fidelity. No special status is given to the orchestral underscore, for all music that is used in a film is film music.

Over the last couple of decades, a growing proportion of film music and film sound scholars have developed a conception of the sound track and its components as integrated, as hierarchically organised in a normative sense, but with a recognition that its organisation is dynamic and responsive to different aspects of the image, the narrative, and technology. Neumeyer and Buhler have been instrumental in encouraging this shift, not least through *Hearing the Movies*, already available in a second edition. In *Meaning and Interpretation of Music in Cinema*, Neumeyer and Buhler use vococentrism as the organising principle for an analytical approach that examines the dynamic and sometimes playful internal dialectic of music, sound and dialogue/speech, enabling the generation of more sophisticated interpretation and enhancing our understanding of how cinema works.

In the opening chapters Neumeyer invokes theoretical work by Barthes, Bellour, Bordwell and others, alongside analyses of extracts from films that include *M* (Lang, 1931), *Rebecca* (Hitchcock, 1940), *To Have and To Have Not* (Hawks, 1944), *The Big Sleep* (Hawks, 1946), *Written on the Wind* (Sirk, 1957), as well as more recent ones such as *Holy Smoke* (Campion, 1999). These are used to introduce and illustrate the dynamic character of the internal dialectic of film sound-track components, and how this is used in meaningful ways within a context of vococentrism. Chapter 2, 'Tools for Analysis and Interpretation' includes Greimassian (or, semiotic) squares that assist with Neumeyer's articulation of categories of audiovisual organisation, the relationships between them, and serve to explain why certain audiovisual constructions are experienced as more 'powerful' than others (p. 79). Following Chion, Neumeyer emphasises the importance of first 'itemizing' and 'characterizing' a sound track's textual effects (p. 51), before analysing the relationship between these and the image, via sync points and comparison. Five binary oppositions are identified as the 'functional categories by which sound, image, and narrative in a film are elaborated': clarity/fidelity; foreground/background; diegetic/nondiegetic; synchronisation/counterpoint; empathy and anempathy (p. 95).

The second of the book's three sections (which comprises three of its seven chapters) is co-written with James Buhler, and focuses solely on a small number of scenes from

Casablanca (d. Curtiz, 1942): ‘Music in the Mix’. The authors note that there are some opportunities for understanding the film’s music as semi-autonomous: as music *for* film (as opposed to music *in* film). Indeed, the film’s music ‘treats Rick rather like a hysteric, his interior opened up and scored in the fashion of women in melodrama’, and thus the film resembles ‘a talking cure film without the psychoanalysis’ (p. 103). In this way, the song “As Time Goes By” (hereafter, ‘ATGB’) ‘becomes a signifier’ of the ‘traumatic bad object’ (ibid.): ‘Far from being an unreflective exercise in nostalgia, *Casablanca* becomes through Max Steiner’s underscore the story of mastering and overcoming the debilitating effects of trauma’ (p. 103). Buhler and Neumeyer are thus most interested in music’s existence *within* the sound track. For example, while Rick’s flashback is motivated in part by Sam’s (coerced) diegetic performance of ‘ATGB’ at the piano, as the sequence progresses, the audio-dissolve from piano to an orchestral nondiegetic rendition of the song (as in so many Hollywood musicals) marks the ‘passage from real to ideal’ (p. 104), though here it recounts a past that cannot be recovered, rather than an anticipation of a future that might be. They explain:

If ‘As Time Goes By’ marks the presence of an absence, namely Ilsa, the explosion of ‘La Marseillaise’ bursts Rick’s emotional dam, proclaiming the absence of a presence, Rick’s actual idealism, which has been blocked by the trauma of Paris and shows itself only in inversion, as a deep cynicism. (p. 104)

A little later in the film, German officers begin a rousing performance of ‘Wacht am Rhein’ in Rick’s bar. Here the authors draw attention to Rick’s acquiescence to Lazlo’s (unspoken) request to lead the bar’s patrons in a rousing chorus of ‘La Marseillaise’: ‘Thus, if “La Marseillaise” had at the start of the flashback served to displace “As Time Goes By” as a figure of loss – a negative trace of his idealism – its diegetic presence now begins to reclaim that idealism and ground him in a community.’ (p. 106)

An analysis of *Casablanca*’s sound world reveals paired patterns of whistles, gunshots, and aeroplanes: threats followed by symbols of danger and hope, respectively. Buhler and Neumeyer note how these sonic accents function ‘with the dramatic certainty of tonal cadences’ (p. 116): punctuation that indicates the film’s macro-level audiovisual phrasing. In this way the film’s transition from diegetic performance to nondiegetic scoring might be understood as a ‘massive, middleground audio dissolve in the music [...] with a constant background of dialogue and the large, structuring articulators of sound effects’ (p. 116).

The analysis of the interrelation of music and image in the reunion scene in Rick’s Café emphasises the visual and sonic construction of a space in which only Rick and Ilsa exist, albeit only momentary. Music theory begins to take on a more prominent role with discussion of charged chords that symbolise the strength of the attraction between the pair (Ilsa and Rick) in what the authors call the ‘gaze sonority’, for example (p. 119). Steiner’s adaptations to the harmonic and rhythmic structure of ‘ATGB’ function to articulate shifts in the emotional structure of the reunion scene, and by means of association, connect scenes across the film, too. The analysis is synthesised productively with information concerning the genesis and development of the film, as when it is explained that it was only when the final screenwriter, Casey Robinson, was brought on board to avoid problems with the censors, and to ‘fix’ difficulties with Rick and Ilsa’s relationship, that ‘ATGB’ began to take on a more prominent role in the film. It was Robinson who added that Sam should make a big deal of not wanting to play ‘ATGB’, thereby enabling the character to function as a symbol of their romance.

Neumeyer and Buhler explain that vococentrism ‘allocates to [*Casablanca*’s] underscore primarily the supplementary function of connotation, to inflect a scene to mean something different from what it otherwise would. Its burden, in a general sense, is that its supplementation implies an insufficiency in denotation’ (p. 151), in which characters cannot or will not express themselves fully. This burdening of characters tends to be gendered, at least

in this period of representation in/by Hollywood, and thus aligned with female characters. In *Casablanca*, however, this depiction of ‘a subjective emotional interior buffeted by unmastered emotion’ (p. 151) is associated with Rick.

In the final chapter concerning *Casablanca*, ‘The Reunion Scene’s Contexts’, Neumeyer and Buhler first explore a variety of stinger chords, such as the (previously mentioned) ‘gaze sonority’, interpreting aspects of their character and placement in light of information concerning the genesis of the score, and sound track practice in the years leading up to the film’s production. The latter part of the chapter is devoted to the film’s final moments which the authors suggest ‘are among the most intricate and aesthetically interesting in the studio-era Hollywood film repertoire’ (p. 178). In broad terms, their analysis highlights the gradual build-up of more and more noticeable spot sounds that become louder and more persistent. After the aeroplane’s engines have been started, voice, sounds and music are intricately integrated and intertwined. The diegetic sounds are insistent through the finale, and ‘[assert] the immediate demands of the diegesis’ (p. 179), with music overwhelmed repeatedly until, with the epilogue, there is a shift from diegetic sounds to nondiegetic score. Here the authors refer to Nicholas Reyland’s analysis of *Casablanca* (2012) which draws on Robert Hatten’s concept of expressive genre (1991; 1994): in this way, via orchestration, ‘La Marseillaise’ is transformed from a national anthem to a genre inflected by ‘the religious, moral tone of the style topic of Laszlo’s theme which is used more generally to represent the idealism of the just cause’ (p. 179).

The authors close this section by emphasising that it is the film’s vococentrism that enables it to achieve the effects described. Only when its music and sound are understood in relation to the internal dialectic of the film’s sound track components operating under a system in which voice is prioritised, can a more nuanced analysis of its character be produced. I agree wholeheartedly with Neumeyer and Buhler on this matter: their analysis of the sound track of *Casablanca* is effective, persuasive and astute. Part of the persuasive power of their analysis results from synthesising an interrogation of the internal dialectic of the sound track in terms of its moment-to-moment existence (the synchronic) with a sense of the development of its character across the full duration of the film (the diachronic). Alas, not all film sound tracks are as impressive and revealing as *Casablanca*’s, but a growing number of film music scholars recognise the benefits of such an approach to analysis, and thus demonstrate the impact both Neumeyer and Buhler have had on the development of the field in recent years.

The final section of the book (making up chapters six and seven), takes a rather different approach in its turn towards historicism. By contrast to the focus on a single film and its sound track in the previous chapters, ‘Topics and Tropes: Two Preludes by Bach’ explores the use of the C-Major Prelude from the *Well-Tempered Klavier*, and the Prelude from the G-Major Cello Suite throughout the history of cinema; a shift from synchronic to diachronic. While the development and expansion of the scope can thus be understood as logical, this section does not cohere with the first and second as convincingly as it might. This is not to say that this section, which comprises the book’s final chapters, is any less successful in its own right, however. Here Neumeyer turns to Hatten’s distinction between topics and tropes: where tropes are defined as ‘shifting, creative, or altering’ (p. 184), while topics are more stable. He suggests that — much like the relationship between Gorbman’s cultural musical codes and cinematic musical codes (or topics and tropes, in Hatten’s terminology) — in relation to music cues in a film, these are best considered poles in a continuum. Thus, ‘A troping effect is laid on a topic when it is treated in an expressive rather than neutral fashion, an effect that is cumulative’ (p. 185); the more aspects that are altered, the more likely that the topic may be altered. A topical effect can also be laid atop a trope via repetition, as with motifs that recur.

Neumeyer explores these effects through first (diegetic) onscreen performances of the two preludes, along with Gounod’s ‘Ave Maria’, which uses the C-Major Prelude as its

accompaniment (in chapter six), then the use of the C-Major Prelude in underscoring (in chapter seven). These chapters are the most challenging in terms of their integration of music theory, and significant attention is paid to the composition and publication of these works as well as their historical reception. Neither of the preludes appear in sound cinema to any great extent until the late 1950s, which thus explains the emphasis on more recent films in these chapters, with the exception of *The Girl from the Golden West* (1938), which presents a performance of 'Ave Maria'. The repertoire discussed is also more varied, including films from Australia, France and Germany as well as documentary and more modernist fare; for example, *Die Stille vor Bach* (Portabella, 2007), *Ma saison préférée* (Téchiné, 1993), *The Pianist* (Polanski, 2001), *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (Straub and Huillet, 1968), and *Following Sean* (Arlyck, 2005), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Weir, 1975), *Thirty Two Short Films About Glenn Gould* (Girard, 1993), and *Je vous salue, Marie* (Godard, 1985). Different topics are mobilised and variously troped in the extracts, as a result of the selection, arrangement and placement of the work, its prominence and the types of performance. The music may demand attention, or direct the audioviewer to the agent or performance as the carrier of information.

Neumeyer argues that although the analyses in these later chapters might appear to suggest that vococentrism now holds less sway, this is largely the result of the cumulative effect of producing analyses of multiple references to Bach's preludes in such a concentrated manner. Indeed, in most cases these examples comprise relatively small proportions of the films in question. In this way not only does the shift of focus to more recent cinema provide a balance to the emphasis on studio era in the book's first two sections, it also allows Neumeyer to argue that vococentric cinema is as rich with music as it was in the studio era.

The book is cogently (at times, beautifully) written and is well supported by frame stills, figures, musical examples and analytical sketches. To benefit fully from the analyses the book demands a level of literacy with music theoretic concepts that suggests its audience is primarily music scholars and graduate students, rather than film or media scholars, though readers without musical training could still gain much from it. Although, as mentioned above, the final section ('Topics and Tropes') sits somewhat apart from the rest of the book, considered separately these chapters might also make interesting companion pieces to Ben Winters's recent book (2014), published too close to this one to enable its inclusion, alongside studies of Bach's *other* music that has been performed, listened to, and been used for underscoring onscreen. Thus, rather than a conclusion of what has come before, the book's final section feels like a beginning. Though that is of course not a bad thing... indeed, it could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Annette Davison

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